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Guiding successful brand implementation

Best practices for brand standards

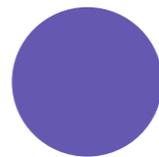
Why have brand standards

You're smart. You've done a great job of building your brand. Now you're ready for everyone else to take it and run with it. The problem? All that knowledge is in your head. That means every question about brand implementation or usage is going to come to you. Or worse--your designers, agency partners, etc. may start making executive decisions about brand execution. This can lead to inconsistency, which certainly does not help build your brand to its potential.

Brand standards provide the guidance necessary to help others implement your brand strategy and assets. These standards can take many forms, such as a multi-chapter book, website or a single-page document. The important thing is that brand guidance is transferred from brains to copy. As a tool, brand standards offer examples of brand implementation and can live on long after you plan to hold your position. Consider them your brand legacy!

Every brand is unique, as are the needs of every organization. There is no “one size fits all” solution for brand guidance. There are, however, best practices that should be followed when creating your brand standards.

Read on to learn more.



Consider the target audience.

Who will be using the brand standards? What is their relationship to the brand, and how do they feel about it? Should there be different guidance by geography? These considerations may impact the language, level of detail and even type of content that you provide—as well as the format in which you provide it.

Be empathetic to your audience. Brand standards should make both of your jobs easier! Think about the types of examples you include in the guidelines to make them most useful in relevant situations and communications.

Include background that explains why.

Providing reasoning behind the guidance will help people understand the brand strategy. Start at the top with your purpose and mission. If the brand is changing, explain why. If everyone understands the bigger picture it not only provides rationale for the specific guidelines provided, but also helps them make choices for those situations that are not specifically covered.



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Create principles for implementation.

You can't cover every single use case, so high-level principles are better at providing direction. Keep the principles as broad as possible, perhaps including the end goal, so that others can make the best decision when it is in their hands.

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Include exhibits of the most common use cases.

A picture can be worth more than 1,000 words here. Show versus tell may also resonate better with designers. Even for messaging or strategy, a sample block of copy with do's and don'ts spelled out can help get the point across quickly and avoid common pitfalls.



Future-proof your guidance.

Brands change with time. You'll want your standards to apply to new brand use cases as they come up--without the need for continuous updates. Although you may not be able to predict what the next brand application will be, consider creating decision trees that guide your team in accurately applying brand principles in new situations. For instance, a decision tree can guide where a product falls within the architecture of a portfolio, whether or not a new product or business unit gets a brand name, what colors within the color palette are used in corporate versus product communications--the list goes on. The standards will need to be updated eventually (i.e., with new design execution examples). By crafting guidelines with modular content and local or no page numbers, you can minimize the impact of the updates on the overall standards (and on your team's time!).

Review with legal.

Even if you are not including comprehensive legal guidance on name or trademark usage, you'll want to review your standards with your legal team to align on implementation before publishing. Something as simple as how large or where trademark symbols appear can be important to designers. You may be able to drop TM symbols or product descriptors after first use, which can shorten copy and help readability. What can you do in really small spaces? Someone is going to ask, so consider providing an email contact within legal as a resource.





Make this the best example of your brand in action.

Don't skimp on the details, as this document should be the most ideal example of your brand. Be exactly on brand with your tone and language as well as your look and feel. Follow your own guidance and be your own best advocate!



Make implementation easy.

Determine the best distribution method so there are no excuses for improper brand implementation. With a large amount of content, a website with a search function may be necessary. This also facilitates instant updates, preventing legacy documents. Websites do require access control if you want to share your content with vendors or anyone else outside of your firewall. For shorter documents, or where you have fewer constituents, a document (like a PDF) that can be downloaded or emailed is a fine approach. Finally, if you are looking to make a statement or establish a new brand, a printed brand book can sit on the desk within easy reach. Whichever distribution method you determine is best for your brand standards, it should be at the fingertips of those executing branded work.

What is included in your brand standards is specific to each company. Here is a sample table of contents for a comprehensive set of brand standards.



1. Brand definition

- Target audience
- Background
- Purpose
- Mission statement



2. Brand positioning

- Brand promise
- Brand positioning statement
- Brand character
- Brand story



3. Verbal branding

- Brand messaging grid
- Key messages
- Lexicon
- Tagline usage



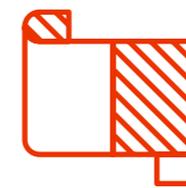
4. Visual branding

- Logo guidelines
- Clear space and minimum size
- Reverse treatment
- Improper use
- Color palette
- Typography
- Collateral



5. Brand architecture

- Brand architecture strategy
- Brand architecture decision tree



6. Portfolio nomenclature

- Nomenclature strategy
- Nomenclature decision tree

Need help setting your standards?

addisonwhitney.com

1.833.BRAND11

As an agency that has developed global brands for more than 28 years, Addison Whitney helps clients consistently execute their brands through brand standards. Every project has different needs and challenges to solve, so contact us today to discuss how we could customize brand guidance for your situation.

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