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# Brand Tactics

Volume I

Written by Alex Smith.  
Illustrated by Anne Becker.

## Instructions

1. Read the **Brand Strategy System** card to help you determine which tactic to use.
2. Read the suggestions at the bottom of your chosen card. You may find there is another tactic that would be good to run beforehand, or afterwards.
3. Follow the steps on the back of the card.

Or check out the 📖 **Recipe** cards to discover ways to string multiple tactics together to make a longer, more in-depth brand workshop.

*Tip: give the deck – or one tactic in particular – to a group so they can self-facilitate.*

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Get help planning and running tactics, and learn from others building products and leading teams.

[pipdecks.com/community](https://pipdecks.com/community)

# Brand Strategy System

Do you understand the dynamics of your market?

No →



Yes



Do you understand the advantages of your business?

No →



Yes



Does your business have a unique strategy?

No →



Yes



Has your strategy been proven to work?

No →



Yes



Do you know how to execute?

No →



Yes



Are you taking it as far as you can?

No →



Yes



**Get to work! But revisit this system often to stay on track.**

## **Context**

All brands are understood in relation to the world around them. Find the gaps and opportunities you could exploit.

## **Introspection**

Every business has hidden advantages and disadvantages. Discover yours so you know what you're working with.

## **Strategy**

Great brands offer something to the world nobody else does. Figure out what that thing is for you.

## **Judgement**

Insights are great, but you've got to make them usable and effective. Transform those raw ideas into clear strategic direction.

## **Execution**

Creative execution is so much more than a logo and some ads. Bring your strategy to life across the whole of your business.

## **Double Down**

Iconic brands keep things fresh by pushing deeper and further every year. Explore just how far you can take it.



# Strategy Super-System

**Rapidly develop a unique and powerful value offering to build your whole brand around.**

The heart of this deck – and the heart of all brands – is a powerful strategic value offering. Know what you offer and how it's different, then bring it to people with style. These tactics are a step-by-step process for generating such a strategy.

## Strategy Super-System

### 1. The True Competitor

Start by getting clear on who you're really up against – both direct and indirect competitors.



### 2. Only Is Better Than Best

Gather a list of ways you are genuinely different to your competitors.



### 3. Value Mining

Translate those differences into consumer value – the essence of your strategic offering.



### 4. Contrarian Value

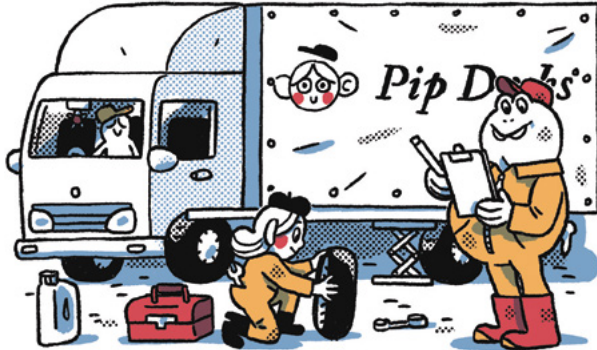
Identify a value that isn't only different to your competitors, but is also *against* them.



### 5. The Challenger Trap

Judge the strategy you've created with a simple-yet-thorough check against your competitors.





# Keep On Truckin'

An annual review to keep your brand fresh, on-strategy and continuously deepening its appeal.

Iconic brands aren't built overnight – they take discipline and inspiration stretched over many years. These tactics are key exercises you can repeat each year to watch your power grow and grow.

Use when you have developed and executed your strategy with

**Execution** ✨ tactics like ✨ *Minimum Viable Strategy*.

## Keep On Truckin'

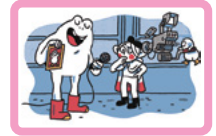
### 1. 📍 The Dolly Score

Analyse your successes and failures to learn how your brand is being received.



### 2. ★ Word On The Street

Review the world's understanding of your brand to ensure it aligns with your own.



### 3. ★ Hamster Wheel

Review major market or cultural changes that may be strategically relevant.



### 4. ★ Brand-Led Growth

Explore potential new products or services arising from your strategy in the current climate.



### 5. ★ Brand Stretch

Have some fun brainstorming the most creative and ambitious ways to bring your brand to life.





# Icon Builder

**Take the extraordinary creative leaps that only the most elite brands attempt – and become immortal.**

Good brands are clear, compelling and consistent – and that's nothing to be sniffed at. But legendary brands? Red Bull, Nike, Patagonia, IKEA, Lego, Harley Davidson, etc.? They take things further. Much further.

These tactics are for when you've mastered the basics and want to accelerate from merely 'solid' to 'stratospheric'.

Use when you're sure you've nailed your  **Power Platform** and  **Minimum Viable Strategy**.

## Icon Builder

### 1. **The Philosopher**

Expand your brand's horizons by identifying a bigger topic it can become associated with.



### 2. **Look At Me!**

Understand what your brand says about the people who use it.



### 3. **The Creative Canvas**

Look across your business to find creative ways of applying the big ideas you've identified.



### 4. **One Stupid Thing**

Search for one bold move you can make that none of your competitors would dare to copy.



### 5. **Brand Stretch**

Embrace pure creative expression – where would you go if there were no limits?





# The True Competitor

**Discover the hidden alternatives to your brand so that you understand what you're really up against.**

You don't compete against brands who look like you or make similar products – you compete against *anything* consumers might choose instead. Learn where you play.

*"The true competitor of a Harley isn't a Yamaha, it's a conservatory."*

Follow with  **Only Is Better Than Best** and  **Value Mining** to find your unique angle against competitors that *do* look like you.

## The True Competitor

Do this alone, or with a group of up to four people.

1. Ask everyone to write down the reasons people might buy from you in the following categories (one per sticky note):

### Jobs you do

Basic practical needs your brand/product solves. For example, for a Harley Davidson: *"I need a motorcycle"* or *"I need a fast way to commute to work"*.

### Emotional needs you fulfil

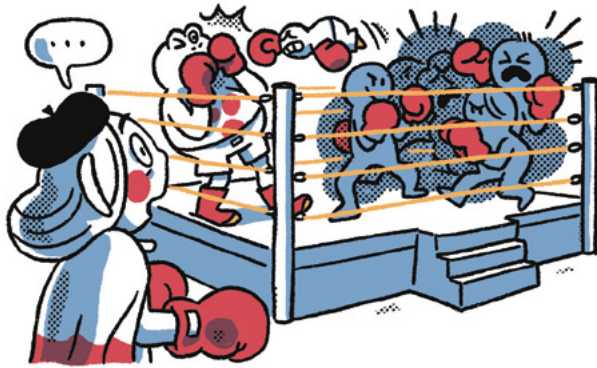
Emotional needs your brand/product might solve. For example, a Harley Davidson *"gives me a feeling of freedom"* or *"fixes my midlife crisis"*.

### The purchase context

The situation in which someone might buy from you. For example, I'll buy a Harley *"when I retire"* or *"when I get promoted"*.

2. Gather your answers for each category. Next to each answer, list the most top-of-mind alternatives you can think of.
3. Shortlist the 4–5 you find the most compelling. These are the alternatives that your brand is *truly* up against.





# Category Clichés

Plot the conventional battlegrounds of your category, so you can fight where there's less competition.

Detergent brands fight over who gets clothes the cleanest. Chocolate brands fight over who tastes best. Airlines fight over who is cheapest. All categories have two or three 'core values' that brands bicker over. Figure out yours, so you can avoid the dogfight. This tactic is crucial if you're in a highly competitive market.

## Category Clichés

1. Select at least five brands from within your category. (Don't have a clear category? @ *Weird Or Normal?* will help you find one.)
2. Gather marketing materials for each brand, especially websites, ads and packaging (if relevant).
3. Review these materials and write down any of the following commonalities that come up:

### Functional promises

*Are there any basic promises that more than one of these brands make (even if phrased differently)?*

### Emotional promises

*Do more than one of the brands try to make the consumer feel the same way (e.g., safe, sexy, etc.)?*

### Style

*Do any of these brands look the same aesthetically? What patterns can you spot?*

4. Any striking features that occur in multiple brands make up the conventional landscape that you must subvert in some way in your strategy (try 🧩 **Contrarian Value**). Refer back to these notes in future to ensure your brand never relies exclusively on any of these commonalities.





# No-Go Zones

**Understand the territories where your competitors excel to avoid fighting them at their own game.**

Let's be real: all of your competitors have strengths that you don't have – and that's good. Let them have that part of the market while you go after something else. This tactic is a secret weapon against bigger, more powerful brands that you just can't beat with brute force alone.

## No-Go Zones

1. Gather three people who are intimately familiar with your brand and your category (e.g., team members).
2. Assign each person a key competitor brand from within your category, and ask them to create a short, high-level 'pitch' for that brand against your brand. It should start with the words:

*"You should buy [competitor] instead of [your brand], and here's why."*

3. Have each person present their pitch back to the group. Ask the people watching to note down where the competitor excels over your brand, one idea per sticky note.
4. Discuss if you agree or disagree with the pitches.

*Tip: the worse the pitch makes your brand look, the more true it is.*

5. Gather and sort the sticky notes. Any recurring territories they use against you are your 'no-go' zones; the areas you must not touch. Or, that you might even attack (see 🗨️ **Contrarian Value**).

*Tip: use real consumer feedback for this tactic if you can. It helps you overcome the natural temptation to criticise your competitors or overestimate your abilities.*



# Find The Fear

Uncover the hidden fear and anxiety that drives your category – then provide the antidote.

The happier you are, the less you buy. All great brands are built on people's anxieties, fears and sense of lacking. It sounds tough, but these are your foundations. Do this exercise to arm yourself with the deepest and most hidden purchase drivers of your category – which your competitors probably aren't even thinking about.

## Find The Fear

1. Read the following basic human fears and the brands that 'treat' them. Match one or two with your category.

- a. **Fear of risk**

This is the root of brands that inspire action (e.g., Nike).

- b. **Fear of criticism**

This is the root of brands that 'make you smart' (e.g., The Economist).

- c. **Fear of illness**

This is the root of brands that offer vitality (e.g., Patagonia).

- d. **Fear of social isolation**


This is the root of brands that bring people together (e.g., Facebook).

- e. **Fear of ageing**

This is the root of brands that make people feel 'wild and free' (e.g., Ray Ban).

- f. **Fear of death**

This is the root of brands that help people create things, and so leave a legacy (e.g., Apple).


2. Use this knowledge to increase your brand's emotional intensity during execution (e.g.,  *The Philosopher*).



# Invisible Rules

**Shine a light on the unspoken assumptions that shape your category, and uncover hidden stupidity ripe for attack.**

Even David Bowie brushed his teeth. Even Kubrick made movies with a start, middle and end. Most things we do are totally conventional – and for good reason. But sometimes, we follow conventions for no reason but that everyone else does – this is true for brands too. Find out if there's any mindless groupthink in your category.


Try  **Category Clichés** before or after to reveal the key values brands in your category care about.

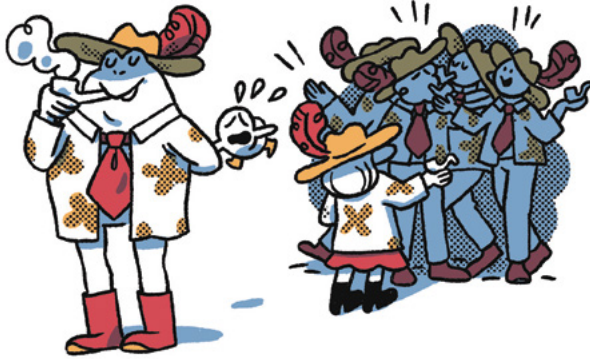
## Invisible Rules

This tactic reveals the similarities between brands that people hold subconsciously.

1. As a group, select three competitor brands to compare.
2. Inspect their product or service offerings in your category. Make a list of the similarities that they all share – even the painfully obvious ones (one per sticky note). For example:
  - Physical features, packaging composition, etc.
  - Service elements, consumer journey steps, etc.
  - Aesthetic similarities, visual codes, etc.
  - Distribution similarities, where they're sold, etc.
3. For each similarity, discuss:

*“How essential is this really – could this brand give value to consumers if this thing was different or absent? What would happen without it?”*

4. Take note of any similarities that aren't truly essential. Explore the possibilities that would open up if you ditch them or twist them (for example, with  **Cultivate A Weakness**).



# So You Think You're Special?



See how real people compare you to your competitors to find out just how different (or not) you really are.

Most brands kid themselves about how different they are from their rivals. If you believe you've got a strong offer or a unique angle, test it before putting it into action.

Take the core idea of this activity and make it as formal or informal as you like (or have the resources for).

## So You Think You're Special?

For this, you need some disinterested 'outsiders' – ideally consumers, but you can use friends or family members if you're careful about it.

1. On your own, write down what you believe your company's unique offer is – the thing you'd like to build your brand around. Use neutral words and do not reveal the brand itself. (E.g., *Tesla might say 'bringing luxury and performance to electric vehicles'.*)
2. Select your top three competitor brands.
3. Approach your 'outsiders', individually, and ask them whether they believe this offer could reasonably apply to those three brands. If the answer is anything other than a resounding 'no', this is a weak offer!
4. Park any offer that applies to multiple brands and restart your thinking. Start by making sure you aren't guilty of  **Category Clichés**.
5. If the offer seems unique, begin refining it with  **Strategy Story**.



# Weird Or Normal?

**Decide if your brand's job is to be 'dangerous' or 'safe' to know what tone you need to strike.**

Not all brands work the same way. Most thrive by standing out and emphasising their difference from competitors. But some must do the opposite and blend in. Before developing a strategy, understand which applies to you – as it will shape all your future decisions.

## Weird Or Normal?

1. Familiarise yourself with these two concepts:

1.  
*Weirding the Normal*

↓  
*Brands who make a 'normal' product that everyone understands (e.g., socks, cereal, cars, legal services, etc.)*

2.  
*Normalising the Weird*

↓  
*Brands who make a 'weird' product that most of your market don't really understand (e.g., new tech concepts, innovations, etc.)*

2. Work out which box you fit in to discover which of the following strategies will work best for you:

- Brands in the first category must differentiate their offering from similar ones and feel 'exciting'.
- Brands in the second category must link their weird product to something consumers are familiar with, so they can be understood and feel 'safe'.

*Tip: in both cases your goal is to create an offering that is familiar, but different.*

3. Use this understanding to decide if you should break away from category norms (try 🏔️ **Category Cliches** or @ **Only Is Better Than Best**), or lean into them (try 🏔️ **The True Competitor**).



# Only Is Better Than Best

**Tease out your true competitive advantage by stating what only you do.**

You can't build a great brand by being 'the best' – that's just another way of saying you're 'the same', just a little bit 'more'. Identify how you're unique, rather than better, to avoid losing out to brands that are 'worse' but have more money or fame. This is where you'll find the root of your brand.

## Only Is Better Than Best

1. Select the competitors you wish to compare yourself to. These may be direct competitors, or indirect ones you identified in 🏔️ **The True Competitor**. (If you're a 'weirding the normal' brand, they will always be indirect; see @ **Weird Or Normal?**)
2. Take the competitors one by one and list the factual differences between your business and theirs.

*Tip: these differences must be hard facts – no subjectivity whatsoever.*

Good example: Our ketchup is in glass bottles, theirs is in plastic.

Bad example: Our ketchup tastes good, their ketchup tastes bad.

Remember to consider:

- Difference in geography
- Difference in customer
- 'Under the hood' differences (e.g., manufacturing, company structure, range organisation, etc.).

3. These differences are potential advantages. Feed them into a 🪄 **Value Mining** session to see which has the most potential.



# We Suck!

**Reveal opportunities to bring something new to the market by embracing your weaknesses.**

Look, nobody can be good at everything – not even you. Far from being a problem, this is a massive opportunity – weakness in one area unlocks strength in another. Discover where your true advantage lies by identifying your disadvantages, then dig out the potential you didn't even know you had.

People get a bit weird when asked to 'bite the hand that feeds them', so play this one carefully...

## We Suck!

1. Set up an anonymous reporting system that will enable people to give their opinions without revealing their identity. This could be an online survey tool, or simply a sealed box for dropping notes into.
2. Ask your team to submit their honest criticisms of the business. Prompt them with these questions:
  - What do you think we suck at?
  - Which kind of customer do you think we are least suited to?
  - If you were a customer, what would turn you off about the business?
  - In what ways do you think our competitors are superior?
3. Review the responses, look for patterns and select the most prominent two or three weaknesses that come up.

*Tip: these must be objective and specific, not vague statements like 'weak brand'.*

4. As a group, discuss the advantages of these weaknesses (try 🛠️ **Value Mining** if this doesn't come naturally to you). Combine with 🌱 **Cultivate A Weakness** to dig even deeper.





# Superfan Secrets

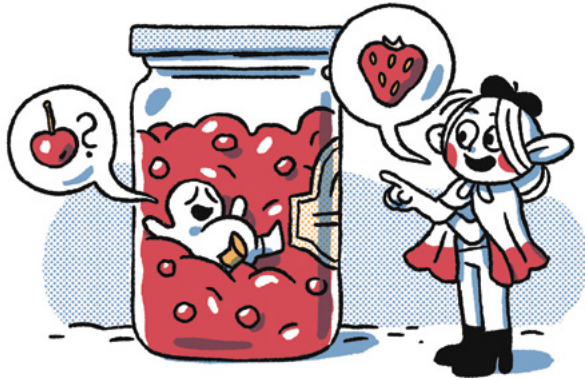
**Identify what it is about your brand that really gets your fans' hearts racing – so you can amplify it.**

There are lots of reasons people might buy what you do, but most of them will be pretty generic. You might even overlook them as 'boring'. Discover the surprising 'sticky' parts of your brand by speaking to the obsessives – the customers who love you and you alone.

For this tactic, you need access to 3–4 of your most heavy-duty customers. Make sure you choose extreme outliers!

## Superfan Secrets

1. Reach out to 3–4 of your brand's superfans; how you do this will vary by business type. For some, you'll just pick up the phone, while others will need formal market research techniques.
2. Speak to your superfans individually (a phone call or video call is fine). Ask them the following questions:
  - “Can you explain to us in detail *how* it is you use our product? In what circumstances? In what manner?”
  - “Why do you like our product?”
  - “Why do you like it *really*?” (The use of ‘really’ provokes a more thoughtful response.)
  - “If you had to use ( insert competitor ) instead, what problems would that cause you?”
3. Sift through the answers for things you didn't expect, or that don't fit how you thought about yourself. These are big clues for your strategic focus; interrogate them further with 🧰 **Value Mining**.



# The Interesting Stranger

**Your brand isn't what you think it is, it's what *they* think it is. Get some outside perspective to uncover what people really think you're all about.**

They say “you can't read the label from inside the jar” – it's time to speak to someone on the outside. Someone you know will give you a thoughtful or provocative perspective (which most people won't). Use this tactic to get a better idea of how you really come across.

Can't find enough complete ‘strangers’ to your brand? Try ★ **Word On The Street** instead.

## *The Interesting Stranger*

1. Make a list of interesting people you or your team know who don't have any connection with your brand or industry. Choose people who are capable of giving an interesting point of view on any topic put in front of them, such as:

- *Artists*
- *Authors*
- *Academics*
- *Creatives*
- *CEOs*
- *General know-it-alls*

2. Prepare a ‘brand intro package’ for them to review. Include all the things a consumer would see, plus any additional context. For example:

- *Websites and ads*
- *The product*
- *Press coverage*
- *Competitor sites*

3. Send them the package and give them some time to review (say, two days), then invite them for a casual video call or chat in a coffee shop. Ask them what jumped out at them. Interrogate their answers. Ask lots of ‘whys’.

4. Compare their perspective to the way you think about yourself. Does it match? Where are the gaps? Do they see something you don't? Add your findings to your list of potential strategic directions, or try feeding them into 🛠️ **The Real Product**.



# The Dolly Score

**Analyse your successes and failures to determine what the market really wants from you.**

The greatest strategic guru in history? Dolly Parton. She said “find out who you are, and do it on purpose”, and that’s exactly what this tactic is for. Figure out how your business really works, so you can start doing it on purpose – and build a brand around it.

Use this tactic as an essential companion to all the tactics in the

**Strategy** category.

## The Dolly Score

1. List the following about your business from the past five years, including successes and failures:
  - Products/services
  - Product variants
  - Sales channels
  - Customer segments
  - Geographical markets
  - Expansion attempts
2. You should now have a rough list of ‘moves’ the business has attempted in the market. Give each one a score from 1–10 based on how successful you think it was (10 = major success; 1 = major failure).
3. Now give each one another score between 1 and 10, this time based on much effort you had to put into it (1 = ‘barely tried’; 10 = ‘Herculean effort’).
4. Work out your Dolly Score:

$$\text{Success Score} - \text{Effort Score} = \text{Dolly Score}$$

Negative numbers indicate high effort, low reward. These are areas where the market is resisting something from you – back away.

Positive numbers indicate effortless success – where you saw results perhaps without even trying. These suggest what the market wants from you – double down.



# The Strategic Hierarchy

**Summarise your business in a simple framework that reveals if you even have a strategy – or not!**

You've got a lot of information. You've got some hypotheses. But do you have a strategy? Find out by putting your thinking into a framework that any great strategy should sit within. If it fits – you're onto something. If it doesn't? Keep on thinking.

Try  **The Real Product**,  **Contrarian Value** and  **Value Mining** to prepare. After, use this with every idea you develop using other tactics.

## The Strategic Hierarchy

1. Look at the model below. These elements make up the *entirety* of a coherent and powerful brand. They must all be present, and all work together.

### a. Strategy

The unique value offering which only you deliver.

*Apple: making computers simple, user friendly and accessible to all.*

### b. Product

The unique way you deliver that value through your product or services.

*Apple: the original colourful iMac.*


### c. Branding

The way you communicate that value creatively and clearly to consumers.

*Apple: "Think Different".*

*Tip: remember that product and branding must fall out of strategy.*

2. Use your understanding of what your brand is all about to fill in the examples in for your own brand.

Does it work? Does it fit? Is it clear? Is it unique? What can you change or add to make it coherent? Try expanding on this with  **Ditch The Deck**.



# The Real Product

**Interrogate what people are really buying from you to change your perspective from product to value.**

People don't buy what you do, they buy what you do *for them* – and that means the value you provide. Great brands communicate the value, not their product.

Figure out the value you provide to see yourself in a value-centric light, paving the way to dig deeper into what you offer.

## *The Real Product*

1. Divide your team into four groups of 1–3 people.
2. Assign each group one of the following categories that represent all the broad ways a business can give value:

**a. Serve a particular group of people**

You do something fairly generic, but it's tailored to a particular audience.

**b. Serve a particular need**

You answer a particular need that's felt by a wide variety of different people.

**c. Strip things back**

You offer 'less than' other options to people who are 'over-served' by the status quo (e.g., budget airlines).

**d. Pump things up**

You offer 'more than' other options to people who are 'under-served' by the status quo (e.g., luxury).

3. Ask each group to identify the ways your brand offers value in their category, before sharing with the group.
4. Discuss and determine which value offerings are:

*The most true* | *The most unique* | *The most exciting*

5. Stress-test these with  *The Challenger Trap*, or plug them into  *Strategic Hierarchy*.





# Value Mining

Compare your brand directly to a variety of competitors to discover big hidden advantages.

Your brand doesn't exist in a vacuum. The value it offers is always *relative* to the other options consumers have. The best place to go looking for that value is in the gap that exists between *you* and *them*. This crucial tactic will help you uncover your edge against various competitors.


## Value Mining

1. Compile a list of competitors. These can be your most obvious and direct competitors, or you can use  **The True Competitor** to assemble a more abstract list.
2. Create a second list of the main *factual* differences between you and each competitor. (Use  **Only Is Better Than Best** to do this step in more detail.)
3. Brainstorm what *value* might be created for a consumer based on each difference. For example:

*Fact: the Nintendo Switch is less powerful than the PlayStation or Xbox.*

*Value: this means it can be smaller and therefore portable, opening up new ways of gaming.*

*Tip: remember that seemingly negative differences are just as likely to create value as positive ones.*

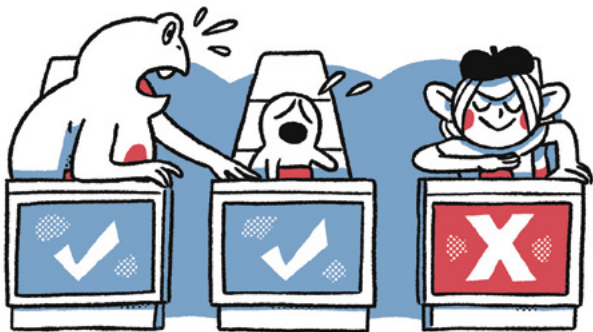
4. As a group, discuss these 'value fragments' and answer the following questions to extract potential value offerings to analyse with a **Judgement**  tactic.

*Do any value fragments come up frequently?*

*Can you bundle multiple fragments into an offering?*

*Are there any themes?*







# Contrarian Value

**Choose a divine line that all other brands in the category refuse to cross... and cross it.**

Great brands aren't only built on strategies that are different from their competitors – they're built on strategies that actively *disagree* with their competitors. Why? Because when you go against something they value, they won't be able to copy you without undermining themselves. It's the ultimate chess move...

Use  **Category Cliches** or  **No-Go Zones** beforehand to uncover what your competitors truly believe.

## Contrarian Value

1. Gather information about what your competitors believe and care about. Try  **Category Cliches** or  **No-Go Zones**, or simply asking:

- What do they talk passionately about?
- What beliefs do they state on their website?
- What do their priorities reveal about them?

*Tip: it doesn't matter whether you agree with them or value these things too.*

2. Now you have a handful of beliefs your competitors hold dear, ask the following question:

*“What other forms of value would we unlock if we stop doing (or attack) this thing?”*

*When the Savannah Bananas stopped caring about winning baseball games, they released the budget to go all-out on the fan experience – in a way that no other team could compete with.*


Think about this in terms of arguing against your competitors' positions. This is how you build up a punchy underpinning for your future brand.






# Cultivate A Weakness

**Surrender something you already suck at and free yourself to do something new.**

Newsflash: you ain't good at everything. In fact, you're probably pretty average at many things. And if people aren't choosing you for a particular reason – why not ditch it together? Try this alternative way of arriving at  **Contrarian Value** by starting with yourself, rather than your competitors.

## Cultivate A Weakness

1. Make a list of your brand's weaknesses. (You can use  **We Suck!** for this.)

*Tip: these weaknesses are relative to the competition – you might think you're 'good' in these areas, but what matters is if others are obviously better.*

These weaknesses are things that currently give you no strategic leverage. In other words, people are *not* choosing you based on these attributes.

2. Sort each weakness into one of two categories:

**Necessities:** things you might not be the best at, but that you absolutely must do to keep the business functional.

**Luxuries:** things that the business could – theoretically, at least – function without.

Be honest. Many 'necessities' are actually luxuries when you dig deep enough.

3. Ask “*What other forms of value could we unlock if we stopped doing this thing, or made it even worse?*”

This is your ‘trade-off’ that unlocks new opportunities.



# The Outsider

**Bring popular offerings from other categories into yours to generate new value.**

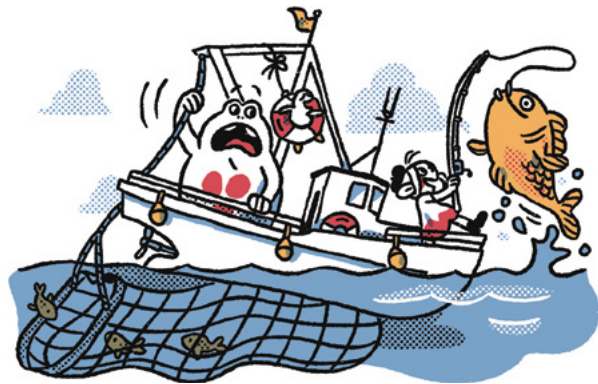
It can be hard to come up with new value offerings off the cuff. This is because we've been trained to see categories a certain way and to expect predictable things from them. Luckily, we can use this training to our advantage. With this tactic you'll lean into the clichés of other categories and see if you can fit them with yours.

## The Outsider

1. With your team, come up with a list of 10 random categories or products that have nothing to do with yours (e.g., restaurants, dry cleaners, funeral services).
2. Allocate each person one or two of these categories.
3. Ask them to come up with as many expected value offers as possible from within those categories. For example, for airlines:
  - *Punctuality*
  - *Speed*
  - *Safety*
  - *Range of classes*
  - *Etc.*
4. Bundle all these value offerings together into a mega-list (there should be a lot).
5. Explore what it would look like to bring each item into your category and evaluate which might work with your brand.

*“What if we brought a range of classes into our gym membership model?”*


*Tip: many will be nonsensical, but think hard. With a bit of imagination, you'll be surprised what might fit.*



# The Targeting Paradox

**Trigger desire by tailoring your offering to the tiniest audience possible.**

People don't *only* buy from brands that are targeted at them. Why? Because most people are normal, and normal is boring. Targeting them produces a boring brand. Niche brands can generate the broadest appeal, precisely because this makes them more interesting. So narrow your target and widen your appeal.

Try using  **The True Competitor** to understand the full range of uses your brand might have for different audiences.

## The Targeting Paradox


1. Sketch out all the different potential target consumers for your brand. This could be:
  - a particular *type* of person
  - a person in a particular *situation*

*Tip: don't limit yourself to who you'd 'like' to target, or who you have been targeting – explore hypothetical and unattractive possibilities, too. (E.g., healthy snacks might be bought for unwilling kids, as well as healthy adults!)*

2. Come up with the most *extreme* or *unusual* version of each potential target audience as possible. For example:

*Red Bull might have had a broad target of people who need a jolt to help them perform in a task. The most 'out there' version of this would be extreme sports athletes about to throw themselves off a cliff (i.e., their narrow target).*

*Tip: think not only of the most extreme examples of this group, but also the stereotypes and caricatures of it.*

3. Explore how you could change things to prioritise each group at the expense of everyone else. The answers should make you more distinctive and exciting – now use them with  **The Philosopher**.



# The Silent Market

**Massively expand your potential market by attracting people who aren't shopping for what you're selling (yet...).**

Most brands simply try to answer a consumer need. “Oh, you need X? We have that!”. Great brands, on the other hand? They don't answer a need, they *create* it. They focus on attracting people into their category, rather than serving those already in it. Find out if this can work for you – if so, it's the quickest way to cut out the competition altogether.

## The Silent Market

1. Write down the different ‘need states’ that consumers in your category have by asking:

- What are they looking for?
- What problem do they have?
- What situation are they in?
- What *triggers* their decision to shop your category?

This should give you all the ‘normal’ needs that you and your competitors are answering.

2. Find ‘the need before the need’ for each example. What precedes the decision to enter your category? Gather as many as you can.

Trigger for the need → Need that makes people shop the category → Shop the category

*Want to bring a group of people together* → *Need easy food for a dinner party* → *Shop for pasta*

3. These territories represent ways you can attract non-shoppers into your category and grab them before they're even aware of your competitors. What would you have to do to ‘trigger’ them? Which are creatively exciting?



# Clear The Pipes

**Generate surprising new insights and angles for your strategy by writing a letter to yourself.**

Ed Sheeran, that strategic maestro, said that when you turn on the creative tap, brown water is going to splutter out first before the clear starts flowing. Your goal is to clear out that sludge to see what insights might follow it. Use this tactic when you have a vague hypothesis – to test it and uncover new angles all by yourself.

Try this after **Introspection** @ tactics like @ **We Suck!**, @ **The Interesting Stranger** and @ **The Dolly Score**.

## Clear The Pipes

1. Start with a pen, a pad and paper, and a hypothesis for testing. This might be:
  - your current strategic offering
  - a potential strategic offering you've uncovered with another tactic
2. Begin by writing the hypothesis, then explaining it and defending it, all in longhand prose.
3. *Don't stop.* Keep on writing. Expand on your argument, find new rationalisations for it. Don't pause, don't hesitate. It doesn't matter if you're talking gibberish – let the sludge flow. Keep going until you've filled three A4 pages (minimum!).
4. Repeat the exercise, but *against* your hypothesis. Play the devil's advocate. What's wrong with it? Fill three more A4 pages without hesitation.
5. Now that the juices are flowing, do three final pages. Reflect on the idea and give your honest opinions on it. How do you feel about it? Does it stack up? What have you learned? See how your position has evolved.

*Tip: you can also use this tactic to simulate the presence of other people in order to try a different tactic on your own.*




# Between You & Me

**Get the juices flowing by taking things off the record, allowing you to interrogate your strategic thoughts without holding back.**


Most brands like to figure things out with workshops, meetings, brainstorms and various other formal methods – but these are simply corporate pastiches of something much more powerful: the chat. Chat *informally* with someone and you might find that you make more progress than in a formal setting.

Try combining with concepts from  **We Suck!**,  **So You Think You're Special?** and  **The True Competitor**.

## Between You & Me

1. Find your chatting partner. This might be a colleague, or even an  **Interesting Stranger** who can bring true curiosity to the conversation.
2. Meet in a neutral, informal location and share your true feelings about the project with each other:
  - What do you *really* think about the current direction?
  - What do you *really* think about the proposed direction?
  - Where do you disagree with the conversations that have been had on the topic of brand so far?

Be candid, gossipy and all the things you *wouldn't* be if this was a formal meeting. Don't be afraid of going totally off-topic; that's part of the process. And don't set a 'goal' for the chat beyond discussion – you are only aiming to shine a light on the unspoken.

3. During the chat, some previously unspoken opinions and insights will come up. When they do, interrogate them more deeply. And then capture them on paper afterwards, to add to your thinking.
4. Take these new insights into  **The Real Product** to help you generate more powerful value offerings.





# First Goal Of Strategy

**Know instantly if your strategy is viable by asking if it forces you to change from what you're doing now.**

The second goal of strategy is to become different to your competitors. The first is to become different to yourself. Different to how you were yesterday. Your results will only change when you do. Test if your strategy demands such change from you.

## First Goal Of Strategy

1. Write down your strategy. Remember, an effective brand strategy is simply:

*The unique value your brand is going to deliver to customers, which they can't get elsewhere.*

*Tip: if you're struggling with the concept of 'value', try 🛠️ **The Real Product**.*

2. Either alone or with a group, answer the question:

*"Are we already delivering this value adequately?"*

This includes delivery on a product level *and* communicating the idea with branding.

3. How did you answer?

No. This is good. Start to discuss what you need to add/change to deliver it – try 🛠️ **Minimum Viable Strategy**.

Yes. This is a big red flag. Your strategy is either too vague and doesn't ask enough of you, or it's too timid and doesn't demand sufficient change. Examine it further with 🎯 **Subjectivity Test**.





# The Toilet Paper Rule

**Match your offering to your product's place in consumers' lives.**

It's just easier to be an interesting brand in some categories. Energy drinks? Interesting. Bleach? Boring. Fashion? Interesting. Toilet paper? Boring. Identify the inherent 'interestingness' of your category and, if it's low, learn how to condense your offer to fit into your customers' limited attention span.


## The Toilet Paper Rule

1. Identify if you're in a low-interest category. If you're honest with yourself, you should know – but if you're not sure, a good rule of thumb is:

*Do people engage with your category as a hobby or leisure activity?*

Yes? You're interesting. You can stop reading here!

No? Ensure your value offering is simple enough to be communicated in less than two seconds.

2. Write out your value offering. (Try  **Ditch The Deck.**)
3. Condense it down to one (or maximum two) words. Do not include value judgements like 'best' or 'fastest'.
4. List any visual mental shortcuts for those words.

Brand	Value	Visual
<i>Andrex</i>	<i>Softness</i>	<i>Puppies</i>

You don't have to use this information in your branding, but you must be able to do the exercise. Otherwise, you are dealing in something too complex for your category's inherent level of interest.





# Simple. Easy. Fun.

**Judge an idea with your gut – rather than your brain – to get a deeper read on its suitability.**

In business, we often prize rational analysis over intuitive gut feel. Sometimes this is sensible, but we ignore our instincts at our peril. Evaluate your hypothesis in a more emotional manner to reveal truths you couldn't unearth with logical thought alone.

## *Simple. Easy. Fun.*

1. Choose one or more ideas to evaluate, for example
  - A strategy (i.e., unique value offering)
  - An action arising from your strategy
  - A branding angle for the strategy
2. Gather the team that is most responsible for executing the idea(s) you're discussing.
3. As a group, score each idea out of 30 based on the following criteria:
  - How simple is it? (0 = complex; 10 = super simple.)
  - How easy is it? (0 = difficult; 10 = super easy.)
  - How fun is it? (0 = boring; 10 = super fun.)
4. Look for the highest scoring idea. High scores for each element reveal something:
  - Simple: it is easily understood and aligned with your competencies.
  - Easy: there isn't too much competition in this area.
  - Fun: it's interesting and aligned with your values and culture.

Now you can proceed with confidence to  **Power Platform** or  **Copy Playbook**.



# Subjectivity Test

**Write your strategy with no subjective language and see what's left – so you can be sure it's not just hot air.**

Your value offering must be unique, not merely 'better than' something else. Find out if you're disguising a weak strategy with fancy words, then transform it into something that is practical and powerful.

Try  **Only Is Better Than Best** first to create a value offering that's unique, instead of just a 'better' version of something else.

## Subjectivity Test

1. Write out your strategy as a sentence. The content should be:

*The unique value your brand is going to deliver to customers, which they can't get elsewhere.*


2. Delete every subjective word – meaning any word that contains a judgement. For example:

- Value words: best, brilliant, exceptional.
- Superlatives (words indicating the highest or lowest possible level): fastest, smallest, cheapest.

If you were a hotel offering 'impeccable service', you would now be offering just... 'service'.

3. You should now be left with a value offering that is a statement of fact. Simply: what you do, without 'puffing it up'. What is left?

- Does it still work?
- Is it still unique?
- Is there anything left at all?!

If your strategy 'collapses' under this test, then it was never really a strategy. But if it stands up, congratulations! You now have clear and practical statement of intent – try it with  **Ditch The Deck**.




# The Challenger Trap

Test your offering against your competitors' to see if it's truly unique.



Strive to be unique; avoid copying your competitors. This is tough! The big dogs in your category set the blueprint for what 'success' looks like; as challengers, we want a piece of that and are subconsciously drawn to copy them. Make sure you don't fall into that trap.

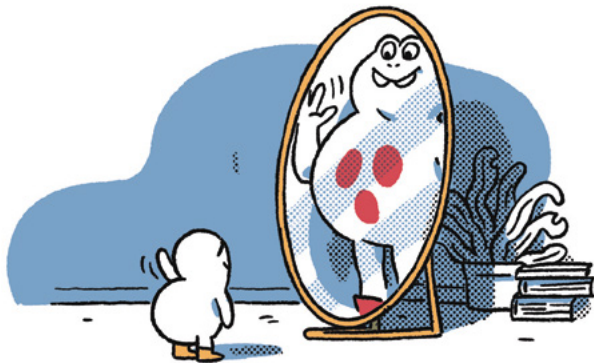
## The Challenger Trap

1. Create a grid. Down the side, list your direct competitors (those in your natural category, not  **The True Competitors** from other categories).
2. Along the top write out the following elements of your strategy (see energy drink examples):
  - your unique value offering (e.g., *extreme energy!*)
  - the consumer need you serve (e.g., *'work hard, play hard'*)
  - the audience you serve (e.g., *busy young men*)
  - whether you are premium, mid-market, or low cost
3. For each competitor, put a tick or cross in the relevant boxes to show if they fulfil the same criteria. Be brutally honest.

*Tip: pretend the competitor is in the room with you. Would they claim to match this characteristic?*

4. Count up the ticks for each competitor. Most will share at least one part of your offering. If none share all parts, success!

If any do 'tick all the boxes', ask yourself: "*Are they a leader, or a challenger?*". If they're a leader, steer clear. But if they're a challenger too, beat them at the game with  **The Creative Canvas** or  **One Stupid Thing**.



# Opposites Game


**Reverse your strategy to see if the opposite also makes sense – if it doesn't, then neither does yours.**

If your strategic direction is good, then the opposite of it will be good too. If it's stupid? Then your strategy is probably stupid too. This tactic is a powerful way to reveal hidden weaknesses in value offerings that seem great on the surface, but are rotten underneath.

*"What's the opposite of a good idea? Another good idea."* – Rory Sutherland

This is a great follow-up to  **Subjectivity Test**. Use it to hold your strategy to an even higher standard.

## Opposites Game

1. Write out your unique value offering. Be as explicit as you can – use  **Ditch The Deck** to do this in detail.
2. Write out the *opposite* of that value offering.


For example:

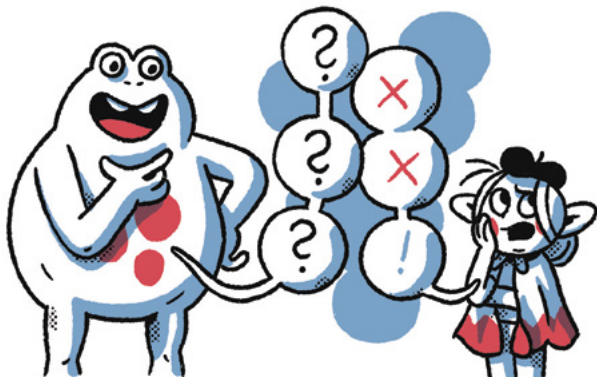
*Premium chocolate* → *Budget chocolate*

*Tasty chocolate* → *Disgusting chocolate*

3. Could you imagine the opposite of your offering being an effective strategy under the right circumstances?

In the (very basic) examples above, 'budget chocolate' is an entirely legitimate offering. 'Disgusting chocolate' is not. This indicates that 'premium chocolate' is a sound offering, but 'tasty chocolate' isn't.

4. Try to identify any existing competitors that could be said to represent the 'opposite strategy' that you've come up with. Use those competitors as an 'enemy' to push back against with  **Power Platform**.



# How Cascade

**Distinguish between a goal and a strategy by asking ‘how?’ until you hit a solution.**

The hallmark of a terrible strategy is that it leaves you with more questions than answers. For example: “our strategy is to revolutionise the toenail clipper industry”. Okay... but how?

Make your strategy a solution, not a challenge, so that anyone can make a success of it.

Before, craft your strategy using **Strategy**  tactics like  **Value Mining**,  **The Real Product** and  **Contrarian Value**.

## How Cascade

1. Set up a meeting with someone (on your team, or a closely related team) who has not been involved in creating your proposed strategy. It must be new to them.

2. Show them the strategy and ask “*How might we do this?*”.

You are looking for them to spontaneously come up with two or three ideas that can deliver the offering.

3. If they are able to do this, then you have a functional strategy. If they’re not sure, you don’t. Keep asking ‘How?’, for example:

*“We want to double our turnover. How might we do this?”*

Answer not immediately apparent – not a strategy.

*“By becoming the number one dog food for pensioners who own pets. How?”*

Answer still not apparent – still not a strategy.

*“By specialising in lap dogs, where pensioners over-index.”*  
– easy to generate ideas for spontaneously. Nailed it.

4. Now you can start to explore a strategy for execution. Try  **Minimum Viable Strategy**.



# Pub Language

**Explain your strategy to someone who knows nothing about your business to ensure it makes sense to everyone who uses it.**

It's easy for organisations to believe their own hype and lose sight of how things appear to the outside world. But that's precisely what matters when it comes to brand. Use this tactic to reveal the most simple, un-hyped version of your strategy – the one that will really stick.


## Pub Language

1. Find someone with no knowledge of your business, and no interest in it either. This could be a friend, family member, or even a random person in the pub.
2. Arrange to have a recorded conversation with them. Explain your strategy: what your value offering is, why you think this will give you leverage in the category, and why it makes you different from your competitors.

*Tip: do this off the top of your head. No notes or visual aids.*

3. Invite questions, and answer them until your partner has a clear understanding.
4. Transcribe the conversation and edit it down so you have your core argument, in the language you used in the conversation. Capture the key turns of phrase that *really* made the penny drop for your partner.

This is your maximally clear and accessible version of your strategy – free from the jargon and padding your internal version likely had.

Take this, learn it by heart and use it to  ***Ditch The Deck.***





# Ditch The Deck

**Write your strategy as a mini essay to expose muddled thinking.**

It's easy to hide bad thinking in slide decks, brand onions and corporate shorthand – that's why those things are so popular. But with long-form prose, there's nowhere to hide.

Confident in your strategy? Use this tactic to lay it out in its final form, ready to stand on its own two feet and be shared with ease.


## *Ditch The Deck*

1. Write out your strategy in full sentences (not on slides!). Pitch it at 'the person on the street', not industry peers. Use the following sections:

### a. Background

Explain the status quo of your business and the market it sits in.

### b. Strategy argument

Make your case. Explain the gap you've identified in the market, why it exists, why others aren't filling it and what you intend to do about it. If you want to spice it up, try  **Strategy Story**.


### c. Strategy summary

This is the punchline: "...and therefore our strategy is to offer X". This single unambiguous sentence lays out your unique value offering.

*Tip: you can give the strategy a short and snappy name here for ease of discussion/repetition.*

### d. Delivery

Bring it all to life by noting down the key actions you're going to take to deliver the strategy.

2. Now try  **Minimum Viable Strategy** to suss out what's needed for delivery.




# What's The Gist?

**Ask people to describe something in their own words to find out if they really do 'get it'.**


Great brands are understood by consumers intuitively and deeply. Anyone can explain Nike, Patagonia or Red Bull. That level of obviousness is your goal – both with your team and the outside world. Use this tactic to confirm if your direction is obvious enough by inviting others to take ownership of it and add their own spin.

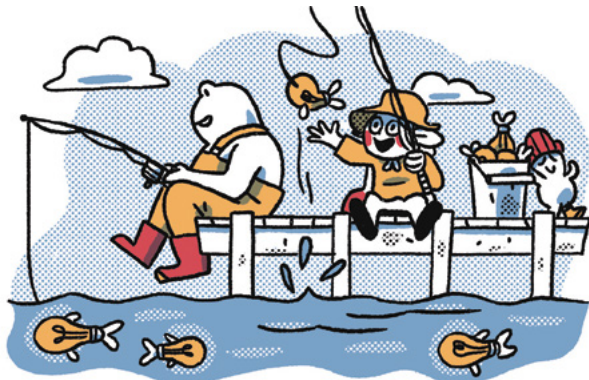
## *What's The Gist?*

1. Gather a test audience – a handful of people (team members or external) who have not been involved in brand and strategy discussions.
2. Individually, explain your strategy to them – either verbally, or using your  ***Ditch The Deck*** output.

Include your rationale for the offering: why you think it will work and how it will give you leverage.

3. Ask them to explain it back to you. Record what they say and how they articulate it. Ask yourself:
  - Did they understand it?
  - Were they able to accurately explain it?
  - Were there any misconceptions?
4. Allow 48 hours to pass, then ask them to explain it again, as they remember it, then repeat your analysis.
5. A clear and compelling offering should, more or less, survive intact. If so, analyse the recordings to see if they explain it better than you did (often, they will).

If not, spice things up with  ***Strategy Story***.







# Idea Fishing

**Ask random people to pull ideas out of your strategy to test its creative potential.**

The job of your value offering isn't just to separate you from your competitors – it's to generate exciting creative ideas. For example, quirky things the brand can do and say that will draw attention to it and build distinctiveness and charisma. Test if your value offering has the creative potential to provoke exciting ideas.

## Idea Fishing

1. Gather a test audience of six people (team members or external) who have not been involved in brand and strategy discussions. Divide into pairs.
2. Explain your strategy to them, either verbally or using your  **Ditch The Deck** output and assign each pair a category:
  - Product: tweaks to the existing product, or new products or divisions to deliver on the strategy.
  - Ads: ideas to creatively communicate the value offering to consumers (e.g., *posters, TV ads, stunts, etc.*).
  - Branding: ideas to 'dress' the business in a way that accentuates the offering (e.g., *taglines, aesthetics, packaging, etc.*).
3. Ask each pair to brainstorm ideas for their category, inspired by the strategy you shared. The task isn't to come up with great ideas (though that might happen) – you are testing to see if ideas come *easily*. Ask them to present back to the group and evaluate how easy they found this exercise.

If it's too hard, refine the explanation using  **Pub Language** or make sure there's real substance to your strategy using  **Subjectivity Test**. Too easy? Try  **The Creative Canvas**.



# Strategy Story

Lay out your strategy using this format for maximum clarity and excitement.



Great brands aren't simply built on 'sensible', 'smart' or 'right' offerings. That stuff's necessary, but it's not sufficient.

Great brands are also built on passion; it's your job as a leader to use your strategy to inspire that passion. Lay it out as a thrilling story – one that gets the blood pumping – and your team will be proud to be a part of it.

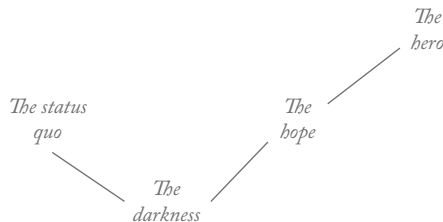
Once you've nailed this, dive straight into  **Minimum Viable Strategy**.

## Strategy Story

1. Lay out your full strategy: the unique value offering, and the rationale for why you think it will work and give you leverage in your market.

Tip: try using  **Pub Language** or your first draft of  **Ditch The Deck** for this.

2. Identify the elements that match these 'plot points':



- The status quo: the boring, complacent market/consumer situation.
- The darkness: the horrible gap or lack in this situation and why it's terrible for everyone.
- The hope: the insight that gives a glimmer of hope; the 'what if?' that can change everything.
- The hero: you and your strategy, which is the triumphant answer to the darkness.

3. Craft a classic tale where your brand saves the day, then use it, with your team, as a central strategy.



# Chief Value Officer

**Structure your team in a way that ensures the strategy won't be forgotten.**

Most brands aren't anything special – traditional business structures don't encourage the kind of big-picture thinking that drives greatness. To break out of mediocrity, you've got to do things differently – and that means empowering someone to make value their number-one priority.

## *Chief Value Officer*

The only step here: assign someone within the organisation the title of Chief Value Officer (CVO).

This may take up to 20% of their time; the most logical candidates are you, the CEO or the Marketing Director.

### **Key responsibility**

Ensure the business delivers the value laid out in its strategy as completely and powerfully as possible across:

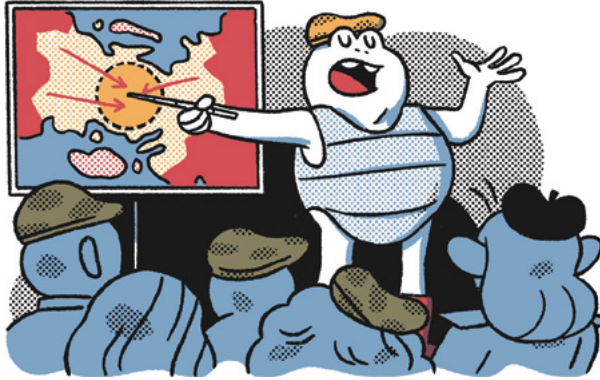
- Product
- Branding
- Advertising
- Sales and distribution

This CVO should involve themselves in these parts of the business in an advisory capacity, with only one focus: *"How can we best deliver our value offering here?"*.

At the end of each year, they should be able to point to at least one key change to each area that has resulted in the value being delivered more powerfully.

*They are ultimately responsible for making 'brand' a whole-company endeavour, not just a marketing one.*

They can put **Double Down** ★ tactics like ★ **Hamster Wheel** and ★ **Brand Stretch** into practice.





# The ‘Why’

**Motivate the troops by underpinning the strategy with a bigger mission.**

Many people think a brand’s ‘why’ is the same as its value offering – it is not. Your ‘why’ is the reason it would be a good thing for your business to succeed in its offering. How would the world benefit from this? What would change? Why does that matter?

Tie your value offering to a compelling ‘why’ to motivate your team (and possibly your consumers) to join you.

## The ‘Why’

1. Gather a diverse cross-section of people from your organisation, divide them into three teams and present your strategy to them in a motivating manner (try  **Strategy Story**).
2. Ask them to come up with as many reasons as possible why this plan is a good or important thing. Assign each team one of the following categories:
  - **Customer benefit ‘why’**  
Why is it a good thing for your customers? How will it make their lives better? (Not all strategies need a very compelling customer benefit ‘why’.)
  - **Category change ‘why’**  
How will you change the shape of your category by your actions? Are you going to revolutionise it? Why is this inspiring or meaningful?
  - **Social good ‘why’**  
Will it have a positive social or environmental effect? Is that why it’s exciting? (Social good ‘whys’ are powerful, but only if they are true.)
3. Get each team to present their ‘whys’ back to the group and have everyone vote on which they find the most exciting and motivating. This is your why. (Now try feeding it into  **The Philosopher**.)





# Minimum Viable Strategy

**Get the ball rolling by identifying the minimum actions your strategy needs to exist.**

You can bring a brilliant value offering to life in so many ways: in your product, your branding, your sales, etc. But first, nail the most important actions: the ones that will make the difference between delivering and not delivering your value. Prioritize your actions to build your brand on a strong foundation.

Before, nail down your  **Strategy Story**. After, use  **Kill List** to focus your energies on only things that contribute to your success.

## Minimum Viable Strategy

1. Assemble the six people most responsible for your brand and divide them into pairs. (*You can do this with a smaller team, or even alone at a pinch.*)
2. Give each pair one of the following categories and ask them to review the brand strategy and come up with things the business *must* do because of it (not what it *would be nice* to do).
  - **Product**  
What must the product do if the brand is to deliver this value. Does it do it? Does it need tweaking? Do you need an additional product to build out the offering?
  - **Branding**  
What must the branding communicate if people are to understand this value? Does the current branding do so unambiguously? If not, what's it saying instead?
  - **Distribution**  
Where must the brand be present if it's to reliably answer the need the strategy dictates? Is it there now? Where do you need to take it?
3. Review the findings as a group and identify the truly essential actions. Commit to at least two of them.



# Kill List

**Root out the things you need to stop doing so you don't blunt your brand by contradicting yourself.**


A brand is only as strong as it is *coherent*. Everything it does must be aligned with its value offering – nothing must go against it, or confuse it. Everything you do that isn't explicitly about delivering the value makes you weaker.

Use this tactic to root those things out, then kill them.

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Do this in conjunction with  **Minimum Viable Strategy** to pull your whole brand into powerful alignment.

## Kill List

1. On your own or with a partner, make a list of all the elements and activities of your business that can be observed from the outside. This will differ from business to business; try the following prompts:
  - *Logo*
  - *Tagline*
  - *Packaging*
  - *Key messages*
  - *Product features*
  - *Product range*
  - *Stockists*
  - *Social media posts*
  - *Loyalty schemes*
  - *Promotions*
  - *Website*
  - *Marketing activities*
  - *Customer service*
  - *Etc.*
2. Refer back to your value offering; go through each element on the list and assign it a label:
  - Positive: it directly contributes to the value offering. (Can you accentuate it further?)
  - Neutral: it neither contributes nor contradicts the value offering. (Can you make it contribute?)
  - Negative: it contradicts the value offering, undermining it. (These items must be killed).
3. Set a plan in motion to make sure there are no negatives on your list and use  **Paper Boss** to ensure incoherence never creeps back in.





# Power Platform

**Translate your strategy into a consumer-facing text that explains your brand in the most exciting way possible.**

This is the ‘branding’ side of brand strategy – not what your business does, but the creative way it presents itself to the outside world.





Use this tactic to talk about your raw offering to consumers in a way that really gets their blood pumping – thus creating your brand platform.

You need a strong, unique value offer before you start this tactic.

Try  **Value Mining** and  **Contrarian Value**.

## Power Platform

Before you start, compare Apple’s (dull) direct offer and their (exciting) brand platform:

- Direct offer: ‘Computers that are simple and user friendly’
  - Brand platform: ‘Think Different’/‘Here’s to the crazy ones...’
1. Gather your team and share your value offering (crafted with  **Ditch The Deck** or  **Strategy Story**).
  2. Ask everyone to come up with different ways to communicate the offering using these prompts:
    - The Contrarian: what does your offering disagree with – who is your enemy? Can you communicate your offering by attacking something else?
    - The Why: don’t talk about what you do – talk about why it’s so good. How will the world change because of it? (Try  **The Why**.)
    - The Pain: what pain are you solving for your customers? Make it very specific (e.g., Nike owns *struggle* and Airbnb owns *belonging*).
  3. Discuss the findings to establish which angle feels the most true, unique and motivating, then take it into formal copywriting (try  **Copy Playbook**).




# The Philosopher

**Extract a bigger philosophical belief from your strategy, allowing your brand to talk creatively and movingly about a wide variety of topics.**

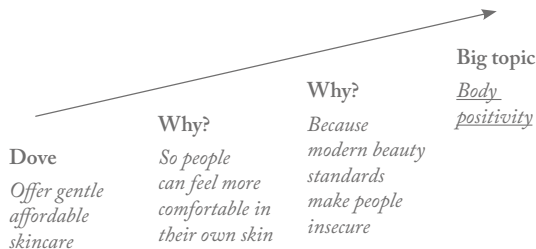
It's totally legitimate to be a brand that only talks about things in its category, but some of the greats have a brand platform that gives them licence to talk about something bigger. They claim a wider part of the human experience, of which their brand is only a small facet. Use this tactic to discover if this powerful technique is open to you.


Before you start, find out if you're in a low-interest category with


 **Toilet Paper Rule.**

## The Philosopher

1. Establish whether your value offering contributes to a subject of general interest. Use a chain of 'why' questions, starting with your offering. Keep asking why until you reach a 'big topic', like this:



2. Record your key opinions on this topic. Write at least 10 statements that start with "We believe...". You can source these from your team, too.
3. Boil this down to the 3–5 beliefs that connect most directly to your value offering. These can then be used as the core of your brand platform in  **Copy Playbook.**

*Tip: if you're in a low-interest category (see  **The Toilet Paper Rule**), proceed with caution. This tactic could make you sound too big for your boots!*

*For example, when Hellmann's mayonnaise ambitiously claimed to be all about fighting food waste, it provoked an investor revolt – some things just go a little too far.*



# Copy Playbook

**Create a suite of copy you can use to present your brand again and again, so you don't have to keep rewriting it.**


Great brands are built on relentless consistency. Sure, you can establish a 'tone of voice'... but it's much easier to simply create a bank of copy that your team can use for almost any occasion. Fill out the blanks and you'll never be lost for words again.

Use  **Power Platform** and  **The Philosopher** first to figure out your brand platform.

## Copy Playbook

1. Write down your preferred wording for each item:

**a. Manifesto**

A motivating call to arms! State what you believe – your 'brand platform' (see  **The Philosopher**) – and how that ties into your value offering. Imagine it as a voiceover for a major TV campaign.

**b. Endline**

This is your '*Just Do It*', '*Think Different*' or '*Belong Anywhere*'. A very short summary of your belief, that fits as a natural punchline to your manifesto.

**c. Descriptor**

This simply says what you are and what your value offering is – your standard elevator pitch: "*We are X and we do Y*".

**d. Creative lines**

Ten creative lines (adapted from your manifesto) that deliver your brand platform.

**e. Value lines**

Ten lines directly about your value offering.

2. Now share this document with everyone that brings your brand to life with words.



# The Creative Canvas


**Turn your business into a living ad by mapping all the opportunities you have for creative expression.**

Great brands weave their creative thinking through the whole of their company – seeing everything as a potential ad. This tactic will help you uncover the unexpected parts of your business that could be twisted in a unique and compelling way.

 **Minimum Viable Strategy** helps you deliver your value offering.

Try this tactic, followed by  **Brand Stretch**, to *over* deliver!

## The Creative Canvas

1. In a group, list all consumer touchpoints – that is, elements of your business that a consumer might see or interact with. (Exclude traditional marketing media such as ads, website and social channels.) For example, a gym chain might have:
  - *The space/building*
  - *Equipment*
  - *Staff profile*
  - *Staff behaviour*
  - *Vending machines*
  - *Locker rooms*
  - *Membership cards*
  - *Etc.*
2. Break each one down to a granular level and mark it as either:
  - Branded: your version is idiosyncratic; done in a way that's unique to your business.
  - Unbranded: done in a generic way, just like any other brand in your space.
3. Transform three 'unbranded' elements into 'branded' ones using your brand platform (see  **The Philosopher**) and value offering as guides. Ask: “How can you express the brand through a currently generic element?”.

*For example, Amsterdam hair salon Bubblekid got rid of their mirrors to emphasise trust in their stylists.*





# Cross-Category Copying

**Find creative inspiration in categories far from your own, then exploit their hard work to make yourself better understood.**

Generally, great brands subvert norms rather than embracing them – especially the norms of their own category. But copying norms outside of your category can be a great shortcut to communicate your value offering.


## Cross-Category Copying

1. Assemble 4–8 people in a room, divided into two teams, and familiarise them with your value offering.
2. Ask each team to identify other territories (unrelated to your category) that deal in the same, or similar, value offerings. One team should focus brand examples and one on non-brand examples. For example:

Domino's Pizza's value offering: *speedy delivery*.  
Branded non-competitors with similar offering: *FedEx, UPS*.

Lush cosmetics' value offering: *freshness*.  
Non-branded, non-competitors with similar offering: *fruit and veg stalls*.

3. When three examples of each have been gathered, discuss any standard visual or verbal cues widely associated with them (colours, styles, phrases, etc.).
4. Ask everyone to write down whether these could be woven into your brand platform or visual identity. For example, the way the Domino's logo mimics delivery company branding and Lush stores mimic fruit market stalls.

Feed these ideas into your  **Power Platform**.



# Look At Me!


**Help your customers tell stories about themselves using your brand.**

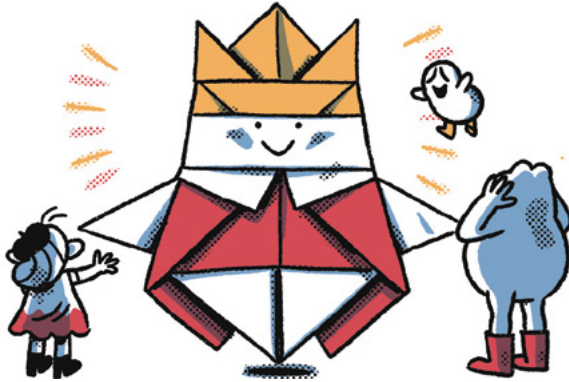
People don't just buy a brand because they like it – they buy a brand because they think it will make other people like *them*. Brands are signals that consumers use to tell stories about themselves. Drinking a Corona? “I’m a laid back kinda guy.” Wearing a Rolex? “I’m rich.” Driving a Land Rover? “I’m adventurous.” Could your brand work as a signal too? Let’s find out.

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This tactic works well for visible brands that people see the consumer using – less so for brands consumed in private!

## Look At Me!

1. Gather your team. Start with your value offering and brainstorm as many relevant target consumers for it as you can imagine. This could mean:
  - a particular *type* of person
  - a person in a particular *situation*
2. Transform each of these target consumers into a stereotype persona. For example, if Corona is for people who want to drink a beer on a hot day, we might stereotype that as a ‘beach bum’.
3. Share these stereotypes with your team and invite them to anonymously feed back what they personally would think about such a person.
  - Do they feel positively or negatively?
  - Is there anything to admire about them?
  - Is there anything to disdain about them?
  - What are their overall impressions?
4. These answers represent the signals for each of these consumer types, and thus the potential signals for your brand. If any seem powerful, weave that persona into your brand platform (see  **Power Platform** for more on brand platforms).



# Paper Boss

Judge ongoing ideas on whether they are brand positive, negative or neutral.

In weak brands, the CEO is the boss. They make the decisions based on whatever they think is right or wrong at that moment in time. But in *great* brands, the brand itself is the boss. Decisions are made by asking “Does the brand tell us to do this, or not do it?”. Set yourself up for brand-led decisions that compound to create an intensely rich, focussed and layered brand that can never be copied.

Start with 🗝️ *Value Mining* to be clear on your unique value offering, and ✂️ *Power Platform* to solidify your brand platform.

## Paper Boss

- Write out and fill in the blanks in the following sentences using your value offering and brand platform (developed with ✂️ *Power Platform*) to guide you:
  - Everything we do is aimed at giving our customers ( insert unique value offering ).  
(See 🌱 *Strategy Story*.)
  - We are driven by our belief that ( insert succinct summary of your brand platform ).  
(See ✂️ *The Philosopher*.)
  - This means that we ( insert 3–4 behaviours the business adopts as a result of the platform ).  
For example, Nike say “We’re on offense. All the time.” as a result of the overarching ‘Just Do It’ platform.
  - And it also means that we never ( insert 3–4 common behaviours or habits the business will never fall into because of the platform ).  
For example, Nike are against bureaucracy.
- Once this hangs together nicely, print it. Disseminate it. Paint it on the wall. Put it on merch. This is the new boss; it determines which decisions are right and which are wrong. Make sure everyone, from this day forwards, defers to it more than they defer to you.



# Brand-Led Growth

**Use your strategy to create new products that grow your brand – and your bottom line.**

The conventional way to develop new products is simply to match what your competitors are doing. They launch X, you launch X. They launch Y, you launch Y. A recipe, of course, for commodification. Move away from the crowd by letting your brand lead, not your competitors.

## *Brand-Led Growth*

1. Gather 3-10 people. Write your value offering on a board, with an arrow leading from it to your product, like so:

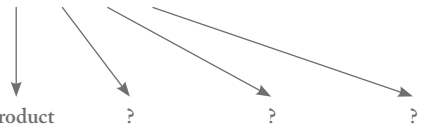
Unique value offering



Product

2. Explain to the group that your product is nothing more than a tool to deliver this value to people. Now draw some additional lines, like this:

Unique value offering



3. The question marks represent potential future products. Challenge the group to forget your core product – to even forget what category you are in – and ask them: *“What other things might deliver this value?”*.

This forces people to think ‘value first’ rather than product first and generates unpredictable product ideas that will increase both the focus and uniqueness of your business.



# One Stupid Thing

**Make sure nobody can copy you ever again by using your strategy to do something nobody else would dare.**

The main thing that separates world-class, hyper-profitable brands from merely good ones? It's when you identify *one* decision arising from your value offering that your competitors would *never, ever* make. A decision that would be good for you, but idiotic for anyone else. It's an advanced move, but if you pull it off... you'll be untouchable.

You can also identify your 'stupid thing' with 🕒 **Only Is Better Than Best** – use this tactic to test ideas (as well as generate them).

## One Stupid Thing

1. List your key competitors and what you believe their unique value offering is (try 🏔️ **Category Cliches** or 🏔️ **No-Go Zones**).
2. Beneath each of these value offerings, make a list of the things these brands *need* to do in order to deliver them. What features? What behaviours?

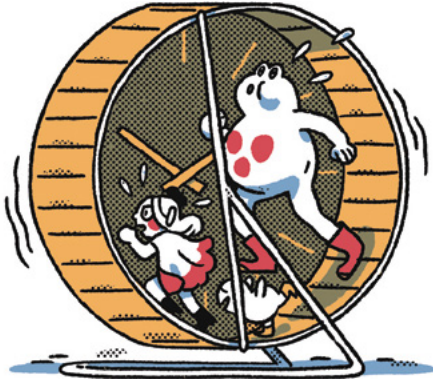
For example, Hertz' unique value is *convenient and flexible car rental*.

To deliver this, they need: *high-footfall locations, a range of vehicles and high-touch customer services*.

3. You should now have a long list of *needs* that your competitors have. Cross reference them with your value offering and ask: "*Do we need these things too?*"

Those that you don't need represent an opportunity to do something different in that space, and make a divergent decision your competitors can't follow without undermining their own needs.

*Enterprise Rent-a-Car chose to set up their depots in inconvenient city-centre locations to service people who want to rent a car in their own town. Those people don't need to drive to airports, so Enterprise can operate from cheaper locations than their tourist-serving competitors.*




# Hamster Wheel

**Protect your brand's position by re-evaluating your strategy in a changing world.**

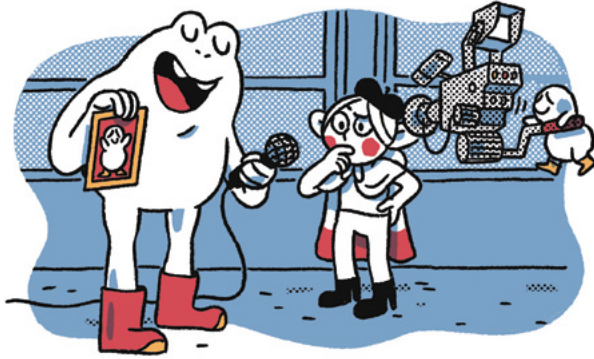
Your goal should be to occupy the same market space, the same brand territory, forever. To become synonymous with it. But culture and market conditions are always changing. What represented that space yesterday may not represent it tomorrow, so you need to review things constantly just to stay put.

Do this annually, starting as soon as you establish your value offering with  **Value Mining** and brand platform with  **Power Platform**.

## *Hamster Wheel*

1. In advance, ask two of your team to record any new trends/developments/news from the past year that are relevant to your value offering and brand platform. Each should choose a different focus:
  - Category: has anything changed or emerged in the category that shifts what it means to deliver our value offering? (E.g., if you are 'healthy', have standards of what that means moved?)
  - Culture: have there been any big news stories/moments in the past year that pertain to our brand platform? (E.g., Nike adopted the social justice struggles of their athletes.)
2. Gather your executive team in an informal location. Ask your two researchers to present their findings.
3. As a group, discuss and label each topic the researchers raise in one of the following two ways:
  - Threat: a fundamental change of landscape that we must respond to in order not to lose ground.
  - Opportunity: a new idea that's taken hold that we can incorporate into our activities in order to stay current.
4. Use  **Ditch The Deck** to rewrite your strategy to incorporate these new findings.





# Word On The Street

**Hold yourself to account by seeing if outsiders are able to understand your brand intuitively.**

The only proof that your strategy is working is that the outside world sees your brand the same way you do. After you've executed your strategy and unleashed your brand platform, use this card every year to measure how well your brand is understood.

Alternatively, use @ *The Interesting Stranger* to hear from people who have no prior knowledge of your brand.

## Word On The Street

1. Contact three different kinds of external observer:

- Five 'friends' of the brand (e.g., non-execs, family, etc.).
- Five consumers of the brand.
- Five non-consumers of the brand.

*Tip: they must all be familiar with the brand, but do not allow them to study it in advance.*

2. Ask each of them the following questions:

- "What do you understand this brand to be all about?"
- "What benefit do you think consumers get from this brand?"
- "What do you think makes this brand different from its competitors?"

3. Label each answer as either 'aligned' or 'non-aligned' with your intentions. Give yourself 1 point for every friend who is aligned, 2 points for every consumer and 5 points for every non-consumer. Sum up your score and use it as your benchmark going forward.

0-5	6-15	16-30	30-40
No brand	Weak brand	Solid brand	Outstanding brand



# Brand Stretch

**Prove you really mean what you say by exploring the wider potential of your brand offering away from your core business operations.**

What do you get for the brand that has it all? You're clear. You're sexy. You're differentiated. You're doing everything right. There's only one thing left: brand stretch. The ultimate flex.

Think Red Bull inventing new sports, or Lego producing The Lego Movie, or the GoPro awards for the most awe-inspiring photography. This is where you go beyond business and become a cultural icon.

## Brand Stretch

1. Gather your team in an informal off-site location. Share with them:
  - your value offering (🏠 *Value Mining*)
  - your brand platform (🔗 *Power Platform*)
  - your 'Why' (🔗 *The 'Why'*)
  - what you 'believe' (🔗 *The Philosopher*)
2. As a group, discuss potential manifestations of the brand in each of the following categories in turn:
  - Events: concerts, sports tournaments, festivals, communities – what could your brand host?
  - Contests: what battles or challenges would it make sense for your brand to sponsor/organise?
  - Platforms/communities: could you create a space for people to connect and collaborate under your shared interests and values?
  - Cause campaigns: what relevant social or environmental causes could you spearhead?
  - Content/entertainment: documentaries, podcasts, books, full-blown movies – could you stretch to this?
3. Use these ideas for marketing or as profit centres in their own right. They prove you are serious about what you offer.

## *About the author, Alex Smith*

Alex is a strategy consultant.

His work focusses on inspiring brands to make big, crazy moves that escape the competition – and have fun doing it.



Unlike many writers on ‘brand’, he sees it as a whole-business endeavour, which will be clear as you work through these tactics. These are the very techniques he’s used to build some of the hottest new consumer brands on the market.

If you want to dig deeper into these ideas:

1. Subscribe to his weekly newsletter, *The Hidden Path*, where he shares techniques that help founders, CEOs and marketers to see things in a way that others don’t.

 **[basicarts.org/newsletter](https://basicarts.org/newsletter)**

2. Check out his book *No Bullsh\*t Strategy*.
3. Search for ‘Alex M H Smith’ on LinkedIn and have a chat about this stuff directly.

Away from pontificating about brand and strategy, Alex and his family split their time between London and the English countryside, where he reads, gardens, writes and golfs.



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