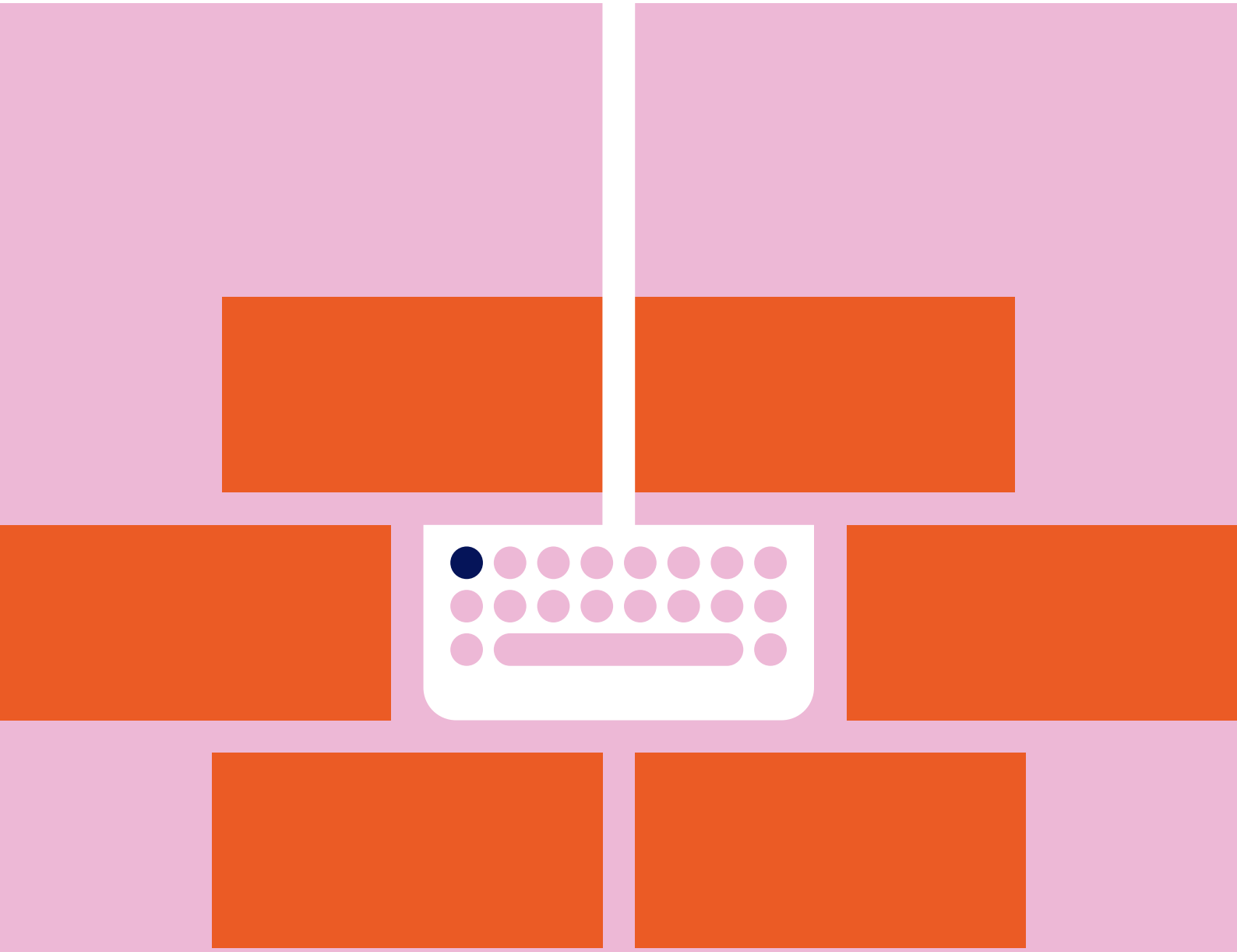
LBD Studio
An award-winning creative practice.

The new rules of brand building



Think Tank™

001

Let's cut to the chase. This isn't a flat-footed beginner's guide on how to build a brand.

You've probably done a lot of the early, foundational work on the 'tangibles' — your logo, visual identity, design system, etc.

But, your true brand power is more than visuals and a good-looking website. It's rooted in the *intangible* elements — your purpose, culture, point of difference, partnerships and more.

'Companies that are *brand innovators* are growing their top-line 4% faster than less-innovative businesses.'

Source: McKinsey

Peel back the layers on businesses with loyal customers and client experience awards, and you'll find they've invested in their brand.

They know that strong visuals will only get them so far. This thinking pays. According to McKinsey, companies that are 'brand innovators' are growing their top-line 4% faster than less innovative businesses.

Even the strongest brands can benefit from fresh, creative, engaging storytelling and top-down brand guardianship.

So, stick with us if:

- [ ] Brand building feels like toothache
- [ ] You're losing relevance in a tough market
- [ ] Marketing has become hard work
- [ ] Your team is pulling in different directions
- [ ] There's confusion on *why* your brand exists (beyond making profit)
- [ ] There are inconsistencies in your communications + PR
- [ ] You're under pressure to do more with less
- [ ] You're looking for a stronger ROI

Let’s start at the beginning.

The core principles of creating a stand-out brand — one that wins hearts and minds — apply to all businesses. No matter the size.

You may lack the reach of businesses with heritage, exposure or deep pockets. But that’s no reason to throw in the towel. To succeed, you’ll need to think and act differently by interpreting the new rules of brand building in your own way.

What does that mean?!

In 2023, Monzo broke into Kantar’s BrandZ Most Valuable UK Brands ranking for the first time with its unique offering.

As Kantar explains — strong brands have three essential qualities:

1. **Meaningful** — they meet functional AND emotional needs
2. **Different** — using a unique offering to lead their way in their category
3. **Salient** — being front of mind at key decision making moments

Monzo’s sense of difference includes a highly distinctive visual identity and there’s no doubt that its rule-breaking coral pink bank card has increased brand awareness. But the challenger bank also understands that vibrant branding and being visually distinctive isn’t enough on its own to win over customers. Monzo supports its difference is many ways and has invested in the complete brand package to build positive perceptions quickly. Kantar found that brands meaningfully different to more people command 5X market penetration today.

Monzo’s key brand strengths

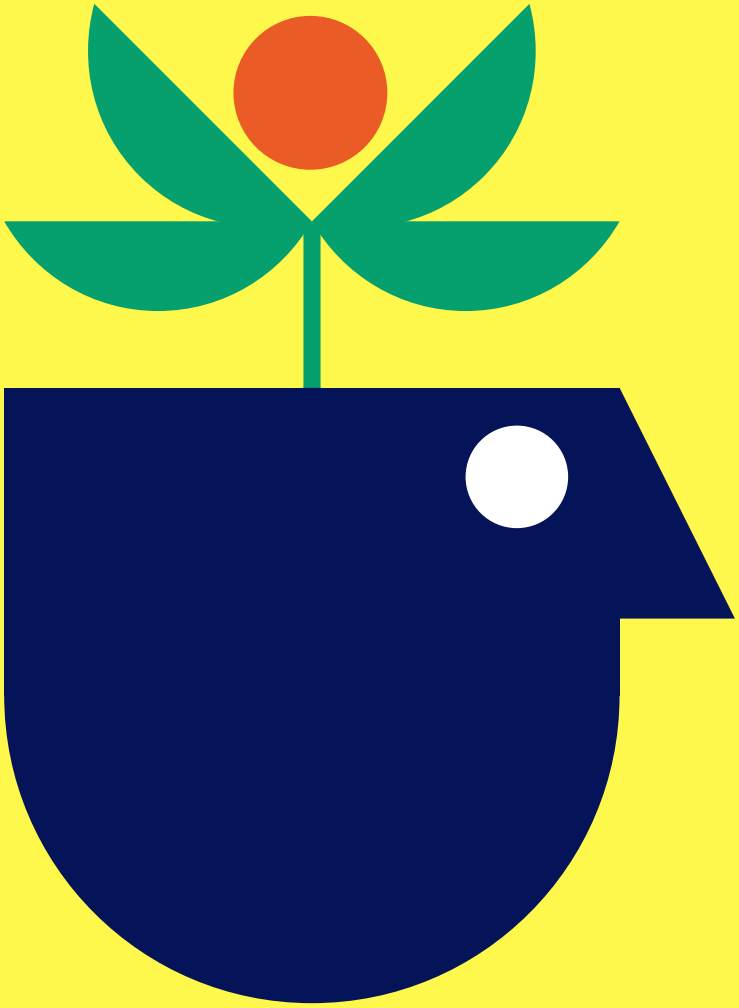
Source: Kantar BrandZ UK Banking 2023. Average brand score = 100.

Like it or not — your ‘brand’ is whatever customers think and say about you.

If you’ve parked the intangibles or have lost your way, you’ve weakened your ability to influence or change consumer perceptions — the thoughts and feelings associated with your business.

Perception is what people believe your brand represents, rather than what you say it represents. It’s the money shot. It influences loyalty, willingness to recommend and refer and buying decisions. Be across how your brand shows up — everywhere, all at once, and consistently communicate who your brand is, why you exist and what value you can offer.

Okay, that’s enough theory. Let’s get stuck into some real-world tips.



Tip 1

Get outside your walls.

If you're customer-centric, every decision is made with the customer in mind.

Most businesses are not there yet. Research by cxpartners, commissioned by Google, found that only 36% of organisations are truly customer-centric. Even those businesses that are part of the elusive 36% are constantly gathering the evidence they need on their customers' behaviour and motivations, needs, and wants to stay relevant and get ahead of competitors.

Building your evidence

If you're building a brand from scratch, in development, rebranding or completing a merger, the process requires time, effort, money, and lots of empathetic customer research. We'll get to your competitors in a moment. There's no way around it. You could rely on guesswork or hunches, but that won't get you far.

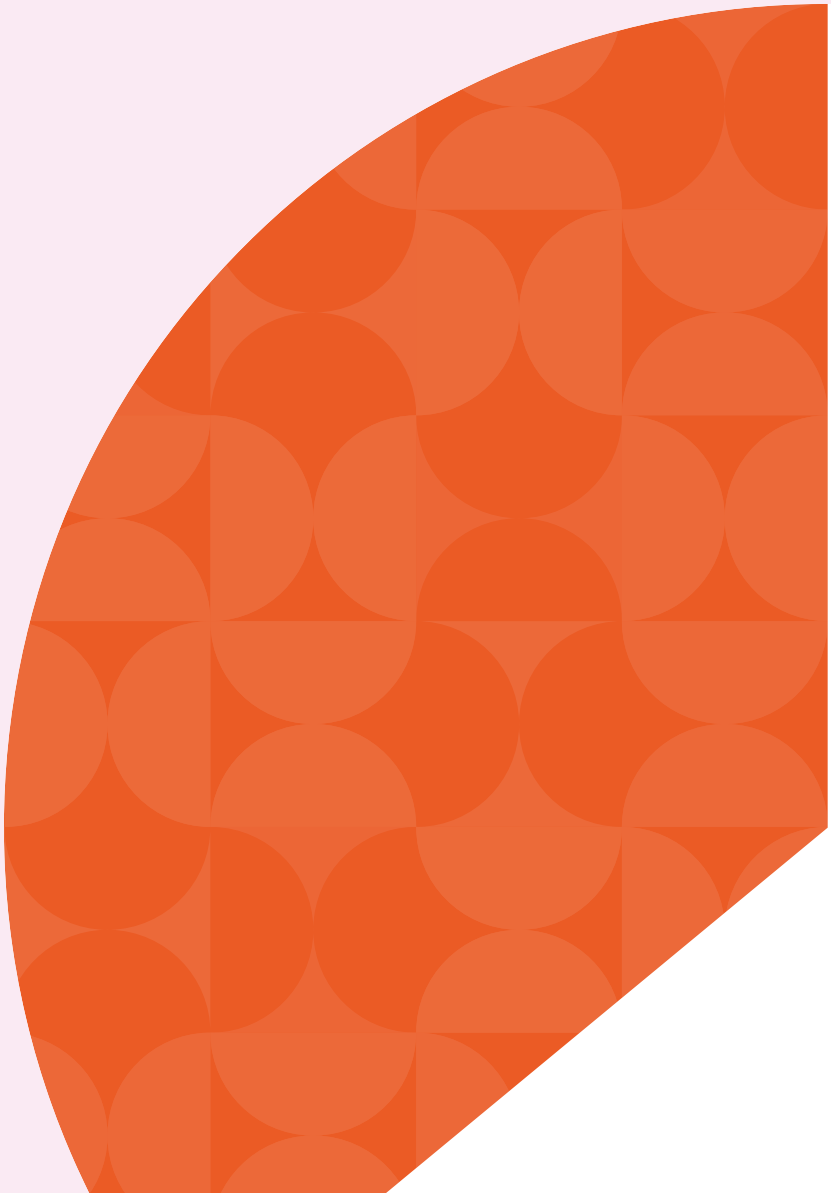
Get outside your internal walls and usual sounding boards for the insights you need on who your customers are now and what they need and want. Run a survey, ask for feedback and mine the data you already collect.

Think about filling any data gaps you may have. Have a conversation. Ask for feedback. Find out how your business solves their problems.

Keep an eye on your competitors to see what works and what doesn't and find opportunities. But don't be swayed or try to emulate what they do without doing your homework first.

Only 36% of companies are seen as ‘customer-centric’.

Source: cxpartners



Tip 2
Be yourself. Everyone else is taken.

Most customers are staring at the magnolia colour chart when trying to differentiate a business.

To stand out, you'll need a distinctive brand identity and value proposition that is salient to your ideal customer. You can't be all things to all people.

Follow the pack and you'll end up stuck in a sea of sameness. The term was coined by Piers Schmidt, while guiding the brand-led transformation of Naiade Resorts into LUX* Resorts & Hotels. Schmidt used it to describe the more or less generic offerings by resorts at the time.

There's still work to do to break out of the generic bubble.

As Forbes reported, research at the start of last year found that only 5% of brands are seen as unique by customers. Ouch.

Different (but really the same)

The differentiators that most businesses rely on aren't differentiators at all. They're usually a given and something other businesses already use. This gets worse in sectors like professional services where products and fees are superficially similar (more on this in a moment).

Ask someone who works for an architect firm what makes them unique and the answers might sound familiar. 'We're experts in our field'. 'We deliver transformational change'. 'We're a Chartered practice'. 'We design bespoke solutions'. 'We're a team of thinkers and doers'.

Scan their websites and they might have a nice logo and well-designed site but you'll probably find similar origin stories and a focus on people, process and partnerships. Different, but really the same.

Find your position of greatest strength and make a plan to move there.

You'll need a clear and unbiased view of your position in your before identifying potential strategies. This can open up new opportunities, partnerships, audience groups, products, services and more.

1. **What's the one thing you want to be known for?**
2. **Are you accepting generic positioning with no cut-through?**
3. **What's in it for customers?**

Talk to your colleagues in other parts of the business. Give people a say and don't shy away from tough conversations.

Avoid the commodity trap

Businesses without a unique offering risk becoming a commodity and end up competing on price or fees. Commoditisation strips you of your brand identity and your products and services become interchangeable with similar offerings. The result? Smaller businesses who can't cut prices get squeezed out.

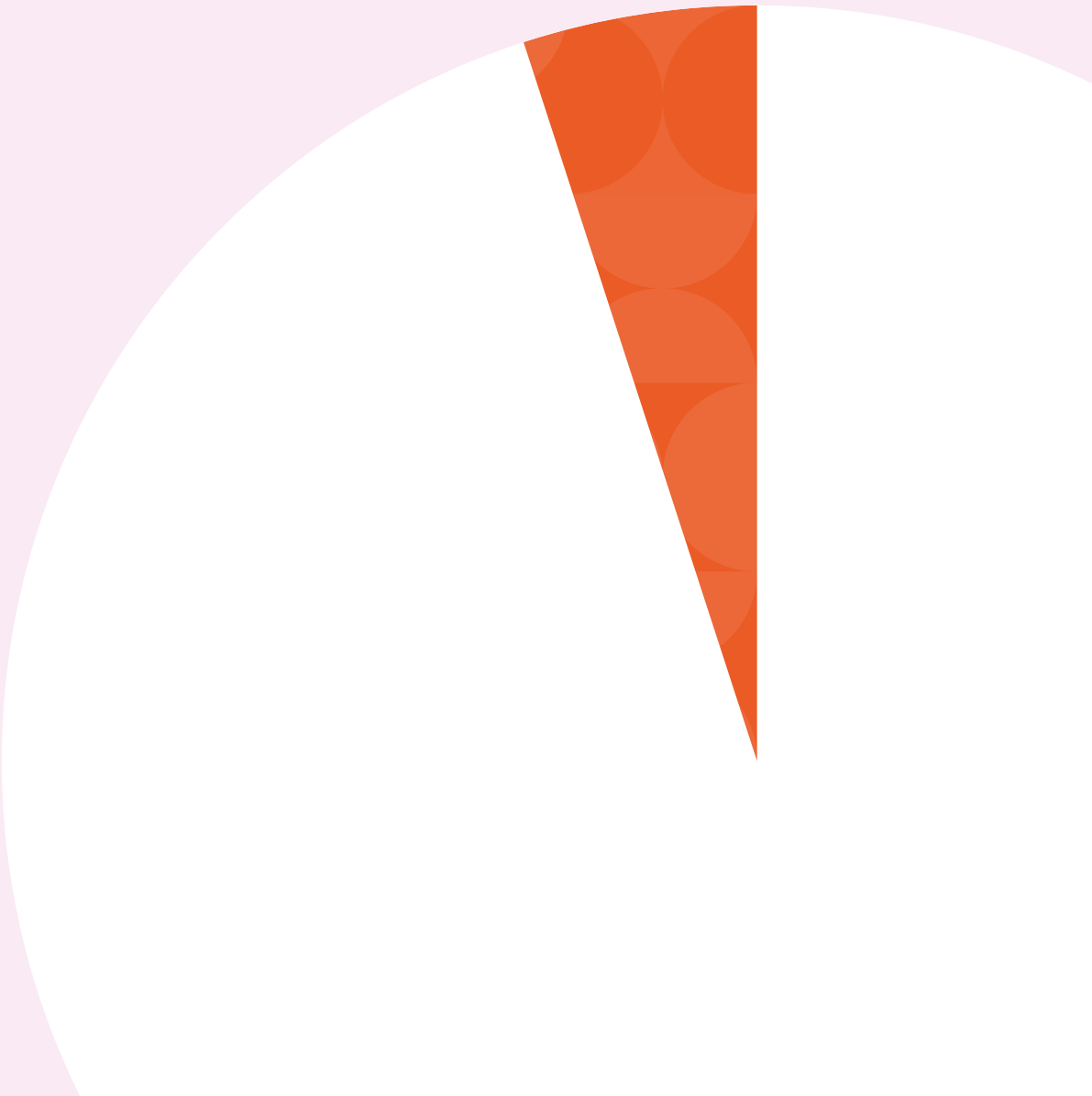
Now we've got that out of the way. It's time to think about vision, mission, purpose and values.

It's easy to tangled up in these terms. Here's an easy way to think about things. Vision is where you're going, mission is the roadmap and purpose is why you are doing the work you're doing.

Your values are the foundational beliefs your business stands for. Our focus here is on purpose and building emotional connections.

Only 5% of brands are considered to be unique.

Source: Forbes



Tip 3
Be realistic when defining your purpose.

Your purpose is the ‘why’ you exist. The difference you make to people’s lives.

It’s the change you make for the better. To find this, you’ll need to look past the products or services you sell. Your purpose is how you connect with customers on a deeper emotional level because you are making a meaningful difference in their lives / they are also emotionally invested in doing the right thing.

Brands should play an active role in addressing the climate crisis. Society rightly expects businesses to act sustainably and ethically and brands are built for this purpose. But, your purpose can also be rooted in how you solve problems or simply make lives easier / better. It’s not your literal purpose though — a lawyer’s purpose here isn’t to practice law.

1. **What’s the higher goal?**
2. **How can you make a difference?**
3. **What problem are you solving?**

The answers will tell you that you may sell a specific product or service but your goal puts you in the business of something entirely different.

Brand purpose vs brand positioning

Your purpose

- **Focuses on a goal beyond making money**
- **Answers the question — why do we exist**
- **Aligns with your values and resonates with your ideal customer**

Your position

- **Defines how you want to be perceived in relation to your competitors**
- **Highlights your value**

Now you have a story to tell!

Emotionally engaging content can lift sales by up to 23%.

Source: Nielsen

Tip 4

Leave your cape at the door.

Make your customer the main character.

There are seven basic plot types says Christopher Booker.

1. **Overcoming the monster**
2. **Rags to riches**
3. **The quest**
4. **Voyage and return**
5. **Rebirth**
6. **Comedy**
7. **Tragedy**

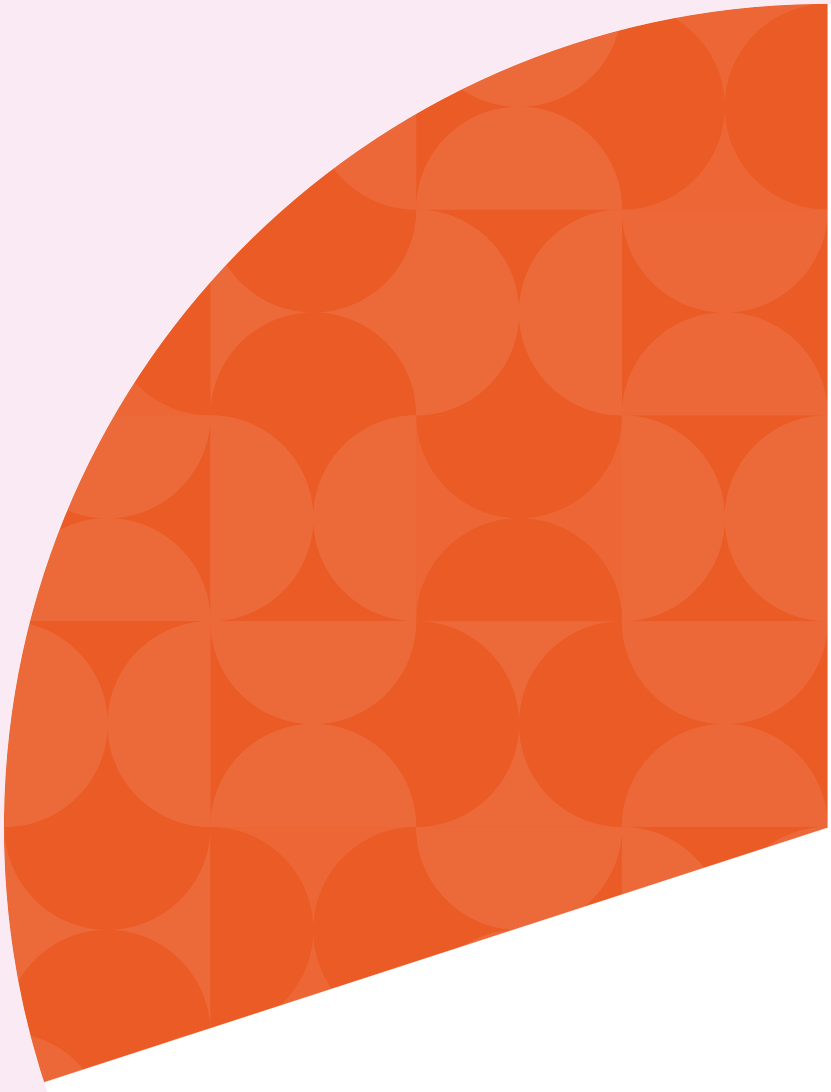
Experienced storytellers will build a story around those plot types. This is how brand and creative teams tap into the same emotions that filmmakers etc do. These stories are a powerful way to share your company's history, mission, purpose, and values. But you'll need to leave your cape at the door and make your customer the main character.

It sounds counter-intuitive, doesn't it? But it works.

Be clear on who your hero is, what they need and want, the pain they experience, how you solve their problems and what the outcome looks like. These insights help craft content that reflects what customers go through and places them at the centre of the story.

Storytelling can boost conversions by 30%.

Source: Search Engine Watch



Tip 5

Bring your people with you.

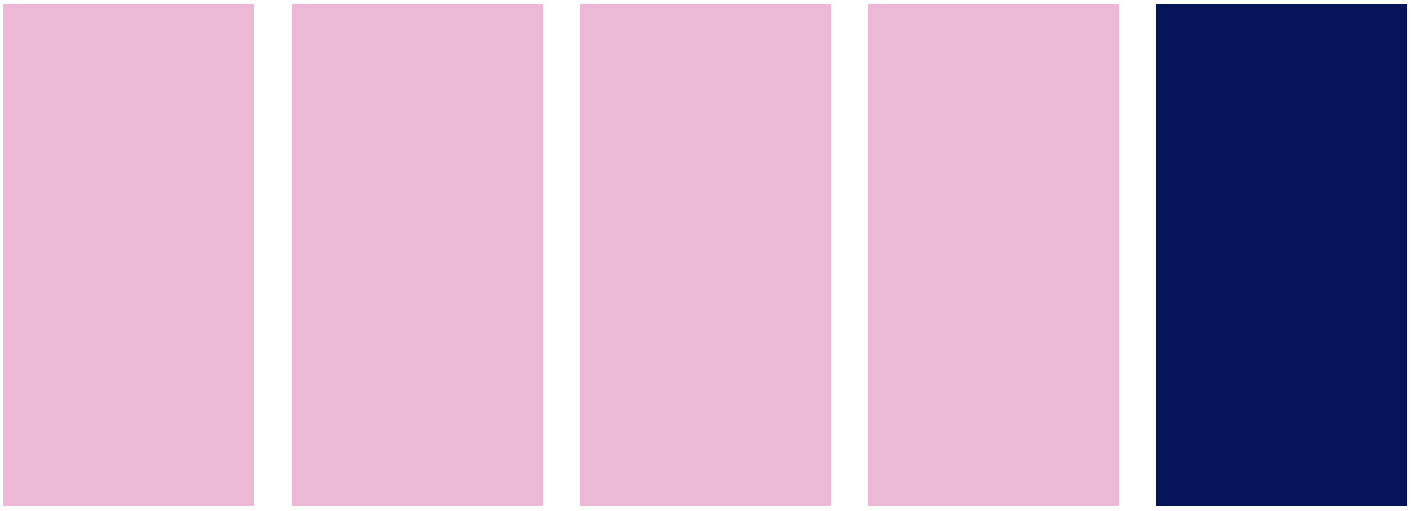
Your people breathe life into your brand.

Culture is one of the most overlooked areas of brand development. Your people breathe life into your brand and give meaning to your values. They have to have passion and belief in what you do and why you do it. What happens on the inside, reflects your brand on the outside.

Your team are the gatekeepers of what your customers experience.

A strong brand and culture bring your team together and keep them engaged and motivated. Your brand power is diluted if everybody is pulling in a different direction.

Build a coalition and get the right people around the table. Internal alignment gives everyone a clear understanding of how you stand out, what you stand for and the part they play.



So... where do you go from here?

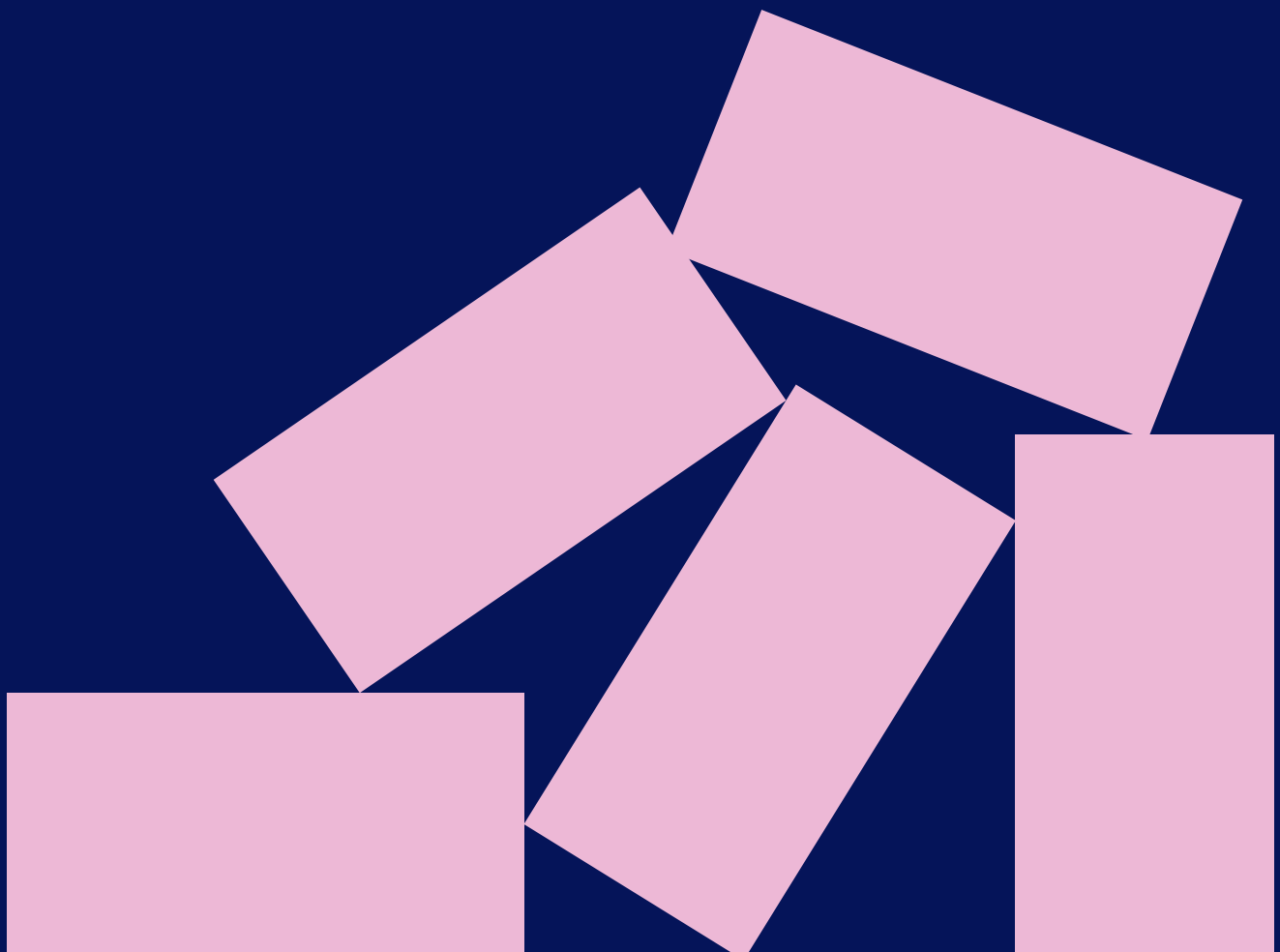
Brand building can be a painful process without proper advice and guidance. And it's very hard to find good people that really 'get it'.

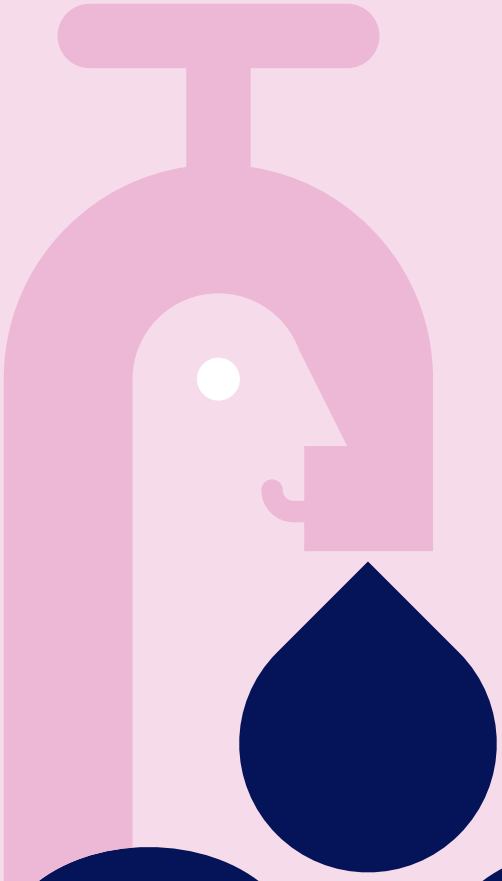
We do. We built LBD Studio to do things differently.

No cookie-cutter creative that your customers or clients barely notice. We work with marketing and comms leads to build brands and experiences that are creatively unique, strategically sound and technically robust.

We could carry on and tell you how brilliant we are. But we're on your journey. Not ours. Let's schedule some time together.

Let's get building!





LBD Studio

We are an award-winning design agency based in Edinburgh, UK. Our work connects business strategy with award-winning creative storytelling to build confidence throughout your brand.

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