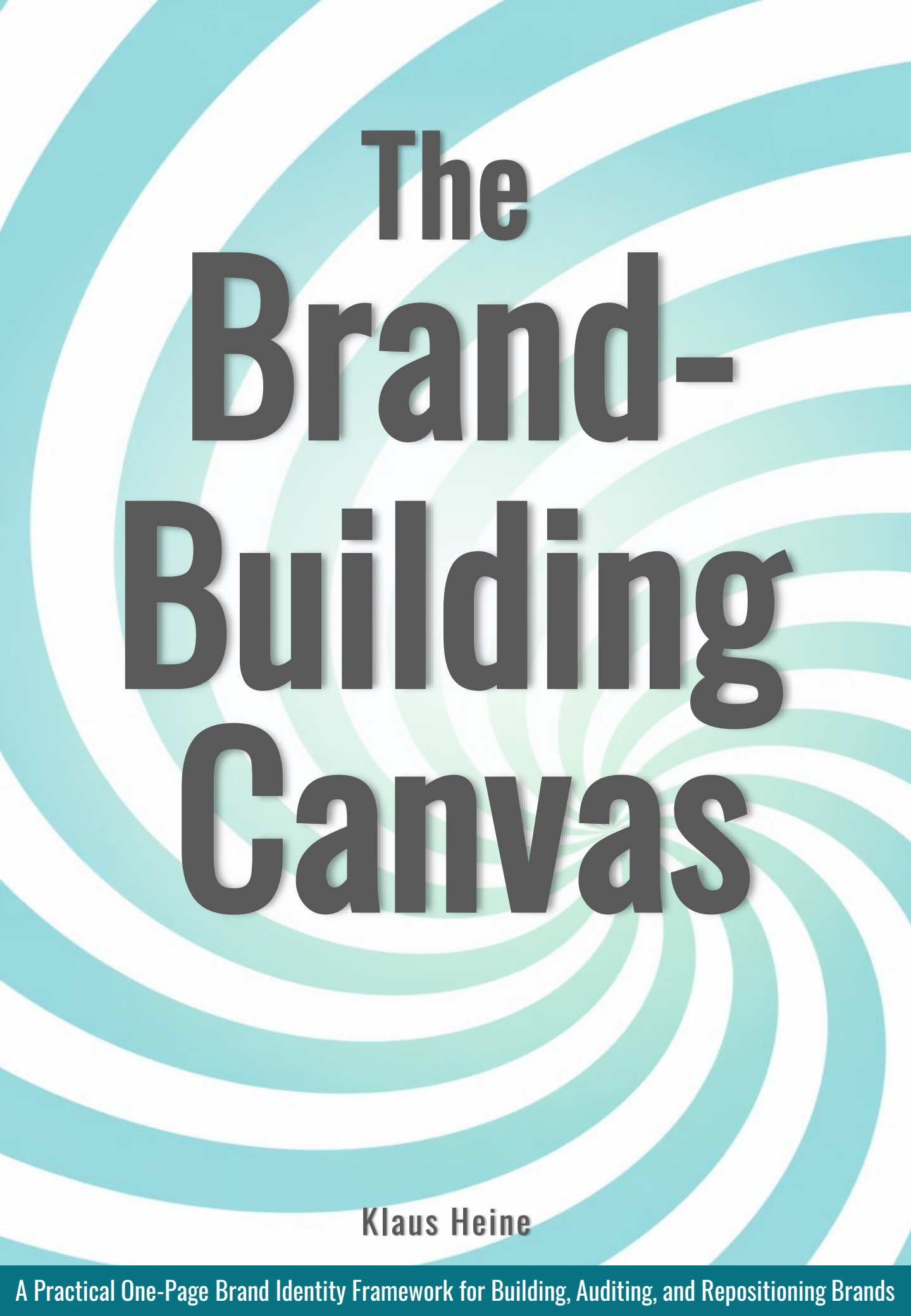




The Brand- Building Canvas

Klaus Heine

A Practical One-Page Brand Identity Framework for Building, Auditing, and Repositioning Brands

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Title: The Brand-Building Canvas

Subtitle: A Practical One-Page Brand Identity Framework for Building, Auditing, and
Repositioning Brands

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First version published: 5 August 2026

Version: 1.0

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21811673

Publisher: Upmarkit Ltd., Sepapaja 6, 15551 Tallinn, Estonia



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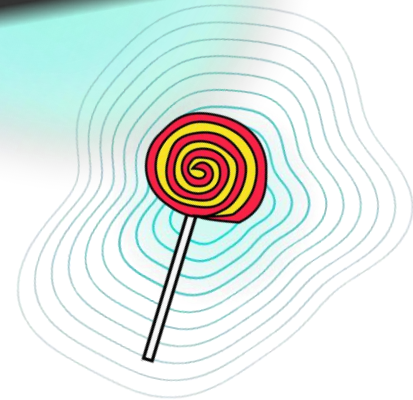
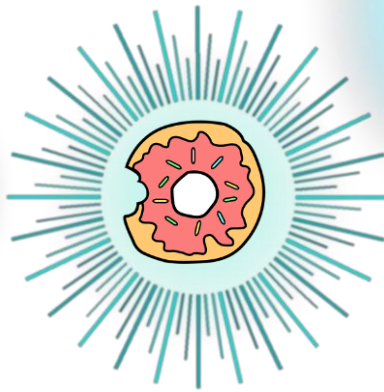
For adaptations or specialized versions of the Brand-Building Canvas, the following naming convention is suggested:

Brand-Building Canvas: [Topic] Edition, e.g. Brand-Building Canvas: Hospitality Edition.

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Some brands and products are bought not only for what they do, but for what they mean – almost as if they radiated an aura.



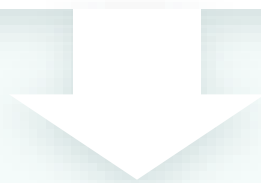
Brand identity captures and shapes this meaning & aura around them.

Brand identity is a detailed blueprint of brand meaning that determines precisely (1.) what managers want their brand to stand for and (2.) how they would like it to be perceived by customers and other internal and external stakeholders. It covers all kinds of thoughts and associations that may influence people's opinions about a brand (see also Aaker, 2010; Heine, 2018; Kapferer, 2012). It encapsulates who you are, why you exist, what you believe, what you do, and how you communicate. Brand identity planning helps to create your brand's unique fingerprint to give it an aura and soul, and a personality all of its own (Upshaw, 1995).

Aaker, D. A. (2010) Building Strong Brands. Simon & Schuster: London; Heine, K., (2018) Identity-driven Luxury Brand Management. In: Berghaus, B., Müller-Stewens, G. & Reinecke, S. (2018) The Management of Luxury. Kogan Page: London; Kapferer, J.-N. (2012) The New Strategic Brand Management. 4th ed., Kogan Page: London; Upshaw, L. B. (1995) Building Brand Identity. New York: Wiley; Image source: Collage based on images by Pixabay: Jozefm84, OpenClipart-Vectors & Rinaushakova.

Building a strong Brand Identity requires a Framework that systematically guides Brand Teams through the Key Identity Decisions.

Brand managers can use a brand identity planning model to determine what they want their brand to stand for (Upshaw, 1995). A model provides an overview of the major brand identity elements and how they are linked to each other. In addition, it helps structure and guide brand managers through the brand-building process.



The Brand-Building Canvas can be used to capture and shape the identity of brands.

The model is particularly comprehensive and covers a broad range of symbolic brand meanings. It includes the identity elements found in earlier models and adds further elements that reflect developments in marketing and consumer behavior, such as an overarching Brand Theme and the public face of the brand, referred to as the Brand Face (Heine et al., 2026).

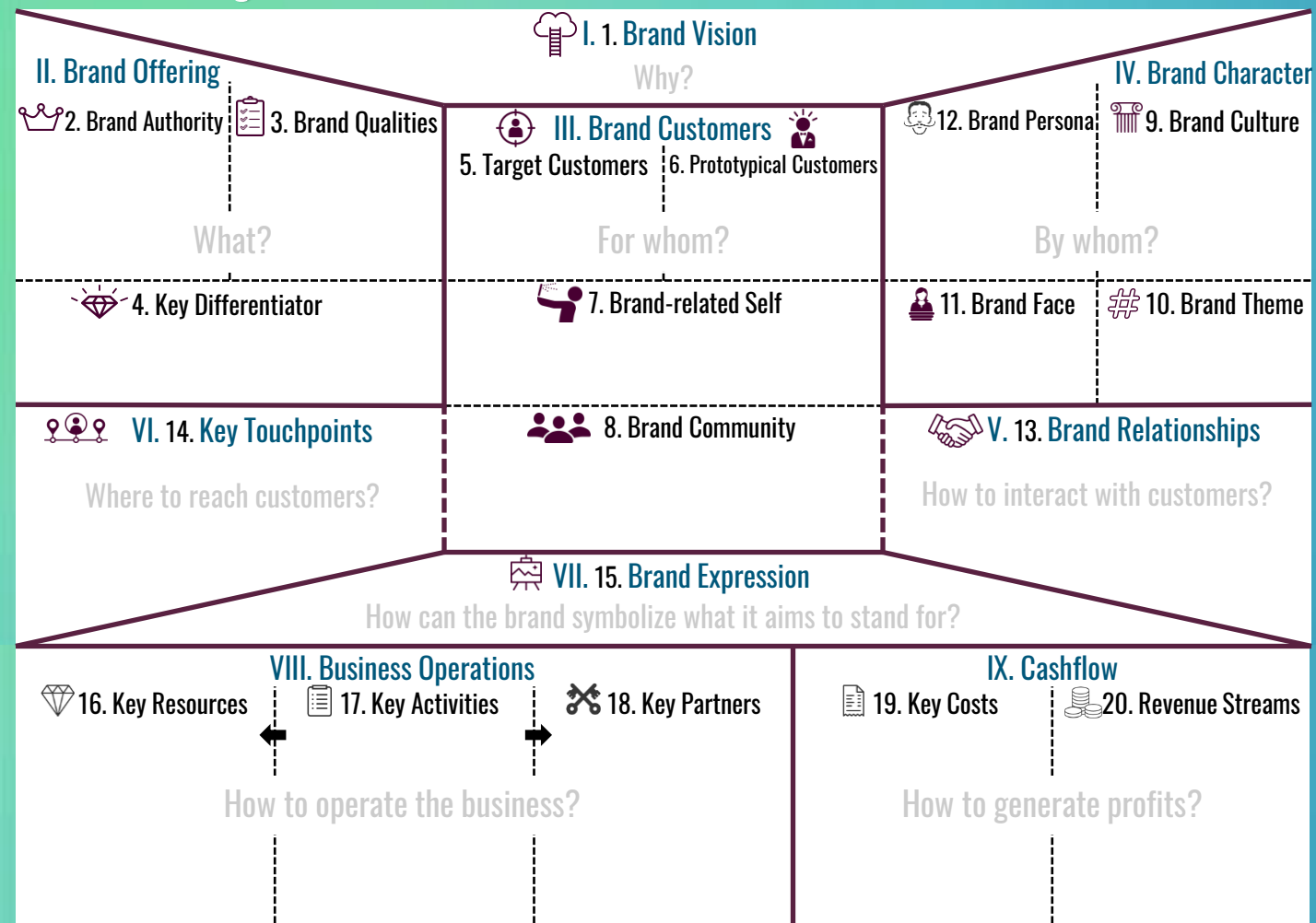
Part I

Getting to Know the Canvas

Brand-Building Canvas

Brand:

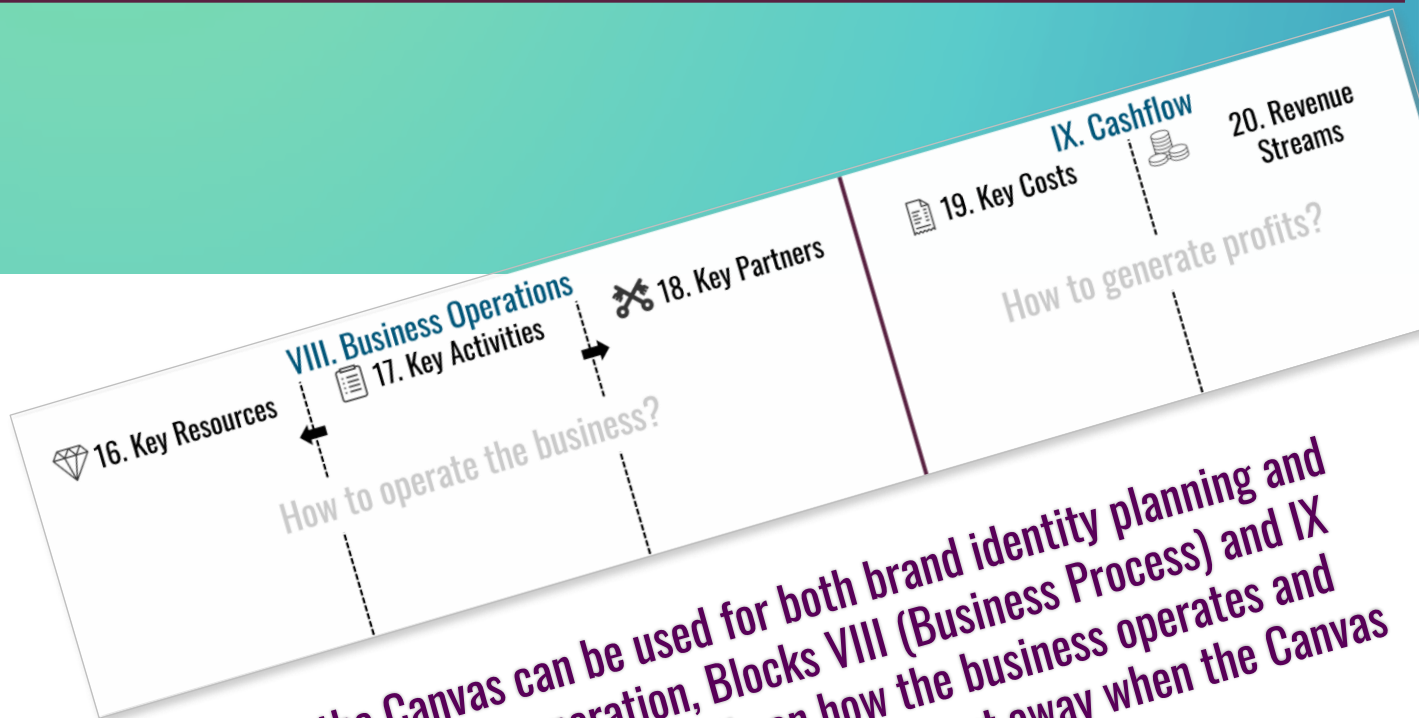
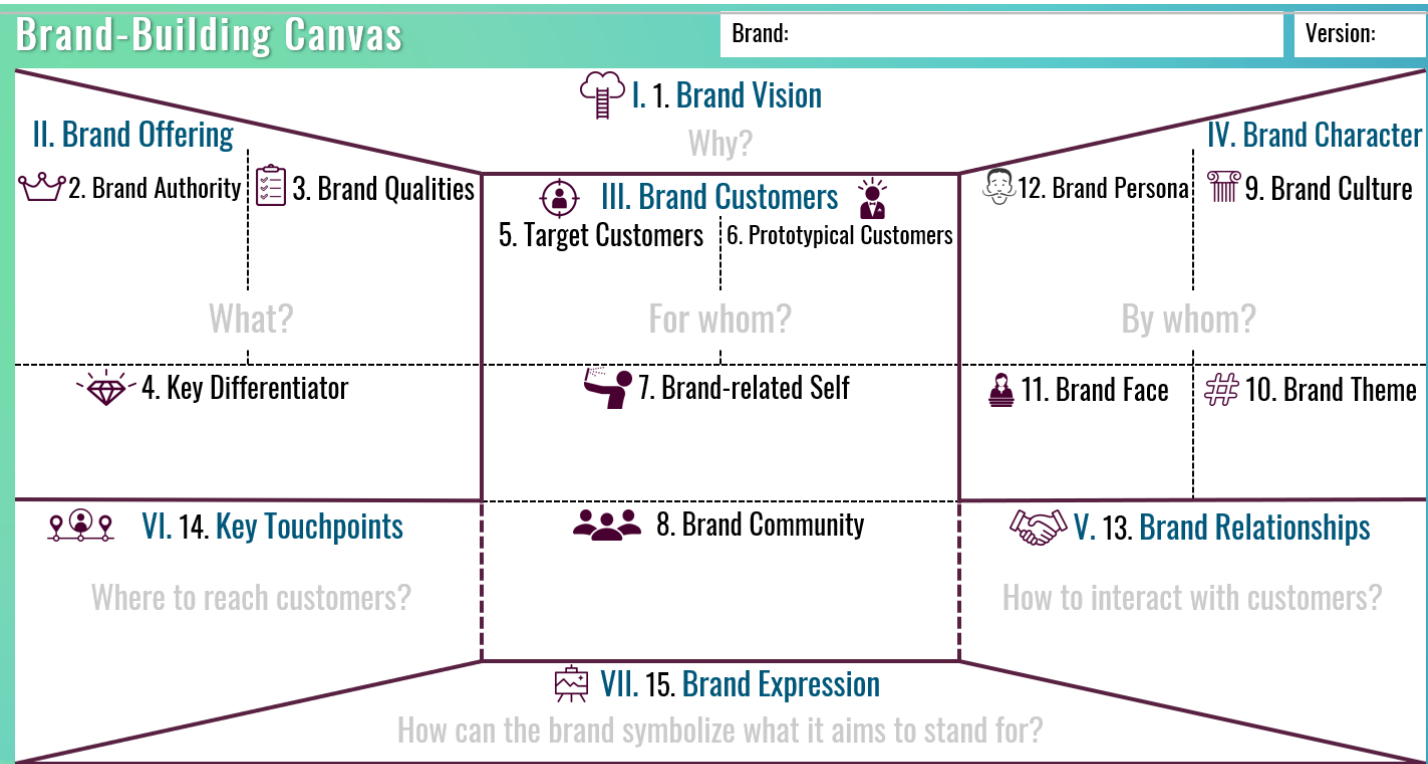
Version:



The Brand-Building Canvas consists of nine building blocks and 20 elements.

You can download the PowerPoint slides here:

<https://upmarkit.com/en/brand-building-canvas/downloads>

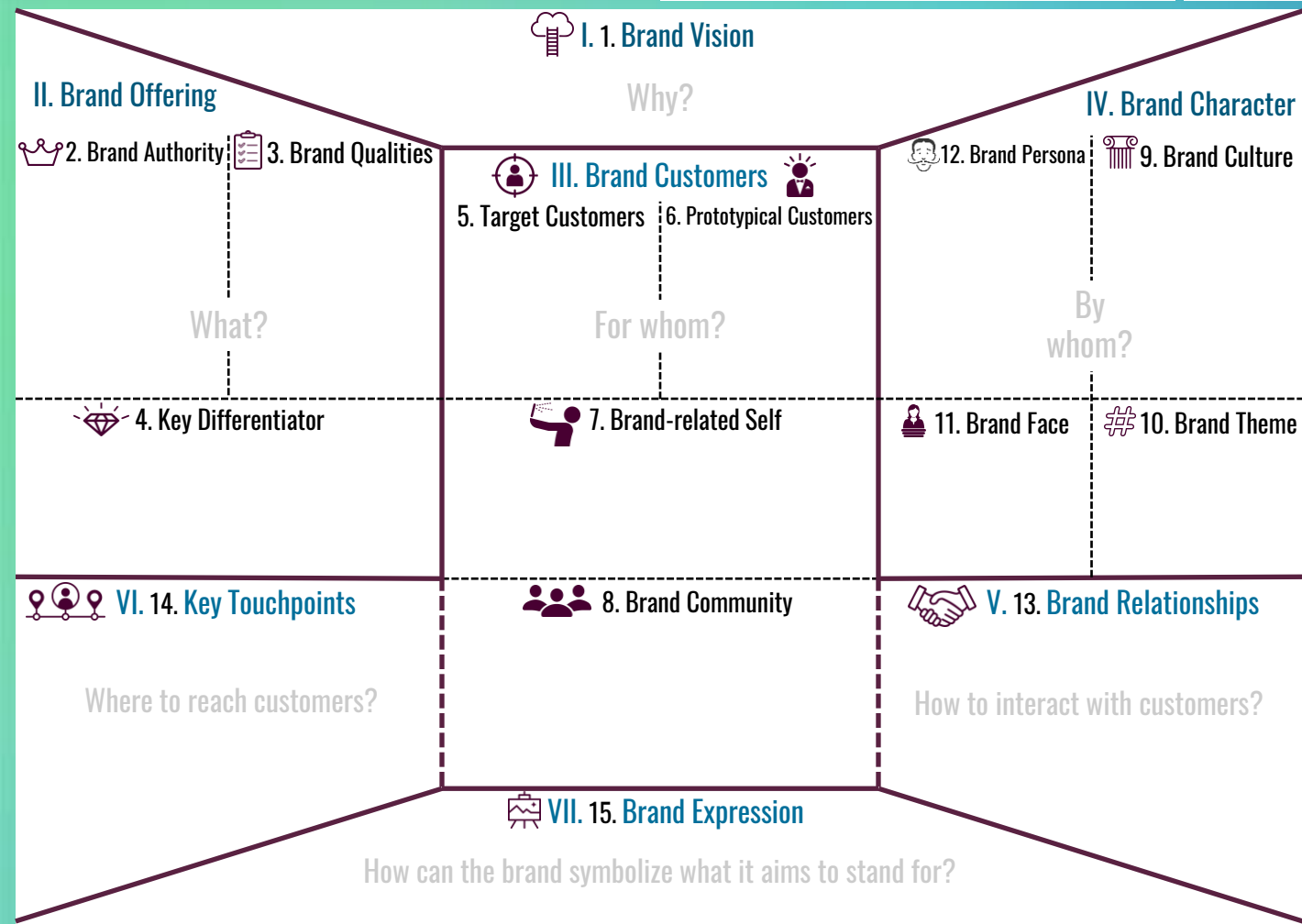


While the Canvas can be used for both brand identity planning and business model generation, Blocks VIII (Business Process) and IX (Cash Flow) focus specifically on how the business operates and generates revenue. They can therefore be cut away when the Canvas is used solely for identity planning.

The Brand-Self-Seven

Brand:

Version:



The Brand-Self-Seven: The Seven Blocks of Brand Identity

If you are focused on brand-building, you will only need to consider the first seven blocks of the Brand-Building Canvas. This part is referred to as the Brand-Self-Seven because it helps develop a brand's self-concept (identity) by moving through seven major brand-building blocks: Brand Vision, Brand Offering, Customers, Brand Character, Relationships, Touchpoints, and Brand Expression. Those blocks represent seven questions every brand should answer. This brand identity planning model is designed to build identity-driven brands, especially in the high-end, cultural, and creative industries.

The Brand-Self-Seven

Brand:

Version:

Brand Essence:



I. 1. Vision Framework

What is the brand's Purpose & Vision?



II. Offering

What is the brand's Product Strategy? What is the brand really good at and what should it be known for?



IV. Brand Character

Who is behind the brand? What is the Brand Culture and Brand Philosophy? How to imagine the Brand Personality?



III. Customers

Who are the brand's customers? Is there a brand community? How does the brand want customers to feel while experiencing the brand?



VI. Touchpoints

What are the channels the brand uses to reach the target customers? (social media, advertising, etc.)
What are the distribution channels? (flagship stores, e-commerce, etc.)



V. Relationships

How does the brand interact with the customers? How does the brand speak to them (formal or casual, etc.)? What is the brand's tone of voice?



VII. Brand Expression

How does the brand symbolize what it wants to represent? What is the Brand Design / Brand Communication and Brand Behaviour?

The arrangement of brand-building blocks follows a logical and intuitive flow:

The Brand Vision is positioned at the top (Block I); the Brand Offering marks the starting point on the left (Block II); the Customers are placed at the center of attention (Block III); to the right follows the Brand Character (Block IV). Brand Relationships (Block V) define the mode of conduct between the brand (Block IV) and the customers (Block III), while the Brand Touchpoints (Block VI) connect the products (Block II) with the customers (Block III). All of this is symbolized through Brand Expression, placed at the bottom of the model (Block VII).

The Brand-Building Canvas: Used to Build a Business and a Brand in One Go

Entrepreneurs never just create a business – they always need to create a brand at the same time. Even more today, the symbolic meaning, the brand's purpose and story are not just a nice add-on, but in many cases the central idea of a new business. They are closely intertwined: building a business also means building a brand. And building a brand is about developing brand identity. The Brand-Building Canvas therefore brings together all aspects of business modelling frameworks (e.g. the Business Model Canvas by Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2014) and the major brand identity planning models – and can be used both to analyze and to plan a business model and a brand's identity.

What the Brand-Building Canvas can be used for

- **Brand Auditing:** Conduct a diagnosis of the brand's current identity, including its strengths, weaknesses, and inconsistencies.
- **Defining the Core Brand Identity:** Clarify what the brand stands for and define its core DNA and essence.
- **Strengthening Brand Differentiation:** Identify and sharpen what makes the brand distinctive and difficult to copy.
- **Competitor Identity Benchmarking:** Map competing brands on the same Canvas to compare their identities and identify overlaps and opportunities.
- **New Brand Creation:** Use the Canvas as a blueprint when creating a new brand, business, or product line.
- **Identity-Led Product and Service Innovation:** Develop new products and services that reinforce the brand identity rather than dilute it.
- **Brand Platform Development and Creative Briefing:** Translate the brand identity into a clear brand handbook / platform that provides the foundation for agency and creative briefings.
- **Brand Repositioning and Rebranding:** Guide the repositioning process by uncovering weaknesses, outdated elements, and untapped opportunities for symbolic value.

Part II

Getting to Know Each Canvas Element



BLOCK I

01 Brand Vision

What should the brand ultimately achieve for its customers, society, and the business itself?

This category captures the overarching goals of a brand: the North Star that guides it and the picture of the future it wants to create. Brand Vision gives the brand a shared direction, aligns employees, investors, agencies, and business partners, and helps ensure that major strategic decisions support the same desired future.

Brand Vision is used as an **umbrella term for four different types of goals**, which differ mainly in who benefits from them and the time horizon they address. **Brand Mission** focuses on what the brand wants to achieve for its customers and how it aims to improve their lives. For instance, Warby Parker's original Brand Mission could be described as offering fashion-conscious youngsters stylish designer eyewear at a revolutionary price by cutting out the middleman and selling directly to consumers.

Brand Purpose explains the higher-order reason why the brand exists beyond making money and how it aims to help create a better world. It shows how the brand aims to contribute to a better future for society, a subculture, the environment, or the industry in which it operates. For instance, the Brand Purpose of Biossance is to improve animal welfare and especially to save sharks.

Mission and Purpose focus mainly on benefits beyond the company, while the two remaining goal types relate to the company's own future development. The term **"Brand Vision," in a narrower business sense**, traditionally refers to the brand's long-term goals for the business, such as its envisioned company size or strategic market position. **Brand Ambitions**, by contrast, describe the brand's shorter-term business goals for the coming months or years.



Brand Offering

CANVAS BLOCK · ELEMENTS 2 – 4

The Brand Offering block answers why the brand should be chosen. It captures the more product-related and functional value proposition of the brand by clarifying: the field in which the brand can claim authority, what qualities and standards customers can consistently expect, and the strongest reasons to choose it over competitors. Because customers evaluate different categories according to different criteria, the Brand Offering may need to be defined separately for the brand's major product categories or service areas, especially if the brand has several different offers.



Brand
Authority



Brand
Qualities



Key
Differentiator

II. BRAND OFFERING

02 Brand Authority



In what area should the brand be seen as especially strong and competent – a product category, a skill, a usage occasion, or a customer problem it solves better than others?

If consumers are interested in a product category, they usually have some idea of which brands they consider best in class. And when they think about a particular brand, they often ask themselves: What is this brand really good at?

Brand Authority defines the field in which a brand wants to be seen as especially strong and competent. It helps explain why customers can trust the brand to deliver its promise. This authority may come from the brand's product focus, its specific uses, or the competencies for which the brand wants to be known.

Brand Authority **can be product-focused** when the brand is especially good at a specific product category, material, technique, or craft. For instance, a brand may be an expert in umbrellas, skincare formulas, or personalized travel planning.

Brand Authority **can also be benefit-focused** when the brand is especially good at solving a specific customer problem or creating a specific customer benefit. For instance, a brand may be an expert in helping people stay dry in an elegant way, calming sensitive skin, making travel effortless, improving sleep, or making small spaces feel beautiful.



II. BRAND OFFERING

03 Brand Qualities



Which three to five product-related qualities should give customers good reasons to choose the brand?

If consumers consider buying from a brand, they usually evaluate whether the brand has the qualities they are looking for in the category. They may ask themselves: Is this brand high-quality, reliable, innovative, good value for money, friendly, or easy to use?

Brand Qualities define the characteristics that customers should associate with a brand within a category. They shape how customers evaluate the brand and play a key role in purchase decisions. These qualities guide what the brand must deliver consistently in its products, services, and customer touchpoints.

These qualities can include functional attributes and benefits, such as durability, comfort, performance, or convenience. They can also be emotional or experiential, such as elegance, exclusivity, creativity, simplicity, warmth, or trustworthiness.

To decide which product-related associations should be linked to a brand, it is important to consider: (1) that they should reflect the criteria target customers use to evaluate products in the category, often around three to five key factors, and (2) the product characteristics of competing brands. In this way, Brand Qualities provide the basis for brand positioning.



II. BRAND OFFERING

04 Key Differentiator



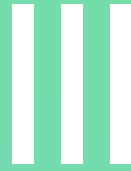
What should be the strongest reason for customers to choose the brand over competitors?

While Brand Qualities describe the set of qualities the brand wants to be associated with, the Key Differentiator captures the **most important quality** that makes the brand stand out from competitors. It is the main reason why customers should choose this brand over others.

The Key Differentiator can also be based on a **specific combination of qualities**. For example, an umbrella brand may want to be known for being durable, elegant, compact, and easy to repair. Its Key Differentiator could combine being durable and elegant as the main reason to choose the brand: storm-resistant umbrellas that still look refined for formal city life.

The Key Differentiator can also include **the way a quality is delivered or made accessible**. For example, if convenience is the leading quality, the Key Differentiator could be: skincare consultation from home, without visiting a clinic. In this case, the brand defines a specific form of convenience that matters to customers.





Brand Customers

CANVAS BLOCK · ELEMENTS 5 – 8

The Brand Customers block answers for whom the brand is designed and what role it should play in customers' lives. It combines four different perspectives: the customers whose needs and preferences should guide the brand, the typical users people should associate with it, how customers should feel or see themselves through the brand, and the community they should feel part of. Together, these elements clarify not only whom the brand wants to attract, but also how it should contribute to customers' personal and social identities.



Target
Customers



Prototypical
User



Brand-related
Self



Brand
Community



III. BRAND CUSTOMERS

05 Target Customers

Which specific customer group should the brand primarily aim to attract?

This brand identity element refers to the people the brand primarily wants to attract. It describes whose needs, preferences, purchase criteria, and life situation the brand must understand.

An important success factor is to focus on a clearly defined customer segment or niche. One useful shortcut is to **start with established consumer archetypes** or well-known lifestyle types, such as LOHAS consumers, cultural creatives, slow-living consumers, or digital nomads. Alternatively, the brand can define its own **brand-specific niche**, such as solo female travelers or health-conscious food lovers. Rather than addressing a vague and faceless audience, it is advisable to build the brand with a concrete customer persona in mind.

This does not mean that only these people can buy the brand. It means that the brand is designed with this group especially clearly in mind. Defining the Target Customer helps the brand make better decisions about its product offering, communication, sales channels, and customer experience.





III. BRAND CUSTOMERS

06 Prototypical User

What kind of person should customers imagine as the brand's typical user?

When people are asked what they think about a brand, they usually describe what they know about its products and story, but often also describe the kind of customer they think buys it. Ask consumers familiar with a brand, "Who do you think buys it?", and they often have a vivid idea in mind. What they describe is the brand's Prototypical User image: consumers' perception of the typical people the brand seems to attract or address.

Before buying from a brand, consumers often consciously or unconsciously ask themselves this question and **consider whether they identify with the user image**. The answer can strongly influence purchase decisions. If the image feels attractive or aspirational, it can make the brand more desirable; if it feels wrong or unattractive, it can become a barrier to purchase. This is why brand managers care about shaping this perception.

Accordingly, as a brand identity element, the Prototypical User describes the typical users that brand managers want customers to imagine when they think of the brand. In reality, a brand's actual customers are often not the same as the typical users the brand wants people to imagine. Regardless of who buys their products, many fashion brands seek to be associated with young and stylish consumers.

Brand managers therefore try to **shape this image through brand communication**. Porsche, for example, often portrays young, dynamic, and attractive drivers in its advertising, although many of its actual customers are much older. This portrayed user image is not simply a mirror of the actual customer base. It represents the ideal social self of the brand's core target customers: the kind of person they aspire to be, thereby making the brand more desirable.



III. BRAND CUSTOMERS

07 Brand-related Self

When using the brand, how should customers feel and who should they believe they are or can become?

When people put on Adidas clothes at the gym, they may already feel more sporty. When doing yoga, however, Adidas may not feel quite right. Wearing Lululemon, by contrast, may feel more aligned with being a real yogi and closer to a more spiritual lifestyle.

Accordingly, the Brand-related Self describes what the brand wants customers to feel and believe they can become when using the brand or its products. Brands can **evoke specific emotions**, such as BMW making drivers experience driving pleasure or Magnum ice cream making customers feel indulged. Brands can also **define how they want people to see themselves through the brand**, such as Dove wanting customers to feel more beautiful and self-confident when using its products.

This element is closely **related to consumers' identity and self-expression**. When designing the Brand-related Self, brands also consider the self-image that their customers want to confirm, build, or express. When a brand is connected to its customers' life goals and desired self, customers can use the brand as a means to achieve a larger personal goal, feel that they are living their desired lifestyle, or move closer to the person they want to be. In this way, the Brand-related Self can help a brand play a meaningful role in customers' lives and build closer relationships with them.



III. BRAND CUSTOMERS

08 Brand Community

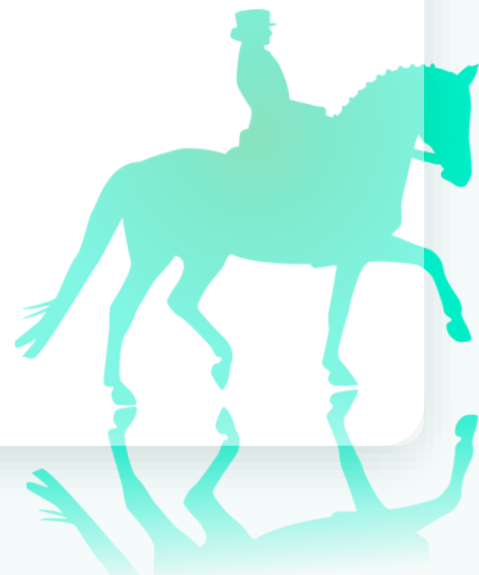
Which group of people should customers feel they belong to through the brand?

This element defines the social world the brand wants to create around itself: “What group, scene, or movement should customers feel connected to through the brand?” A Brand Community is the social group a brand seeks to build around itself, or an existing group it seeks to join. It helps customers feel they are not simply buying a product, but **becoming part of a group of like-minded people** who share similar worldviews, interests, activities, or aspirations.

Some brand communities are highly social. The Harley Owners Group is a typical example: members ride together, build one-to-one relationships, and are connected by freedom, rebellion, road culture, and shared rituals.

Other brand communities are more mental or imagined. Many Apple users, especially in the company’s early days, had only loose social interaction with one another, but still felt part of a wider community of cool, creative people who thought differently. This type of mental community can still give customers a sense of belonging and make them feel part of something larger, almost like a movement.

At the same time, this opens the door for almost any brand to build or join at least a mental community. In this way, community helps the brand become socially meaningful and gives customers another reason to engage with the brand: the desire to feel connected with others.



IV

Brand Character

CANVAS BLOCK · ELEMENTS 9 – 12

The Brand Character block answers who the brand is. While Brand Offering asks what the brand brings to the market, Brand Character asks what kind of cultural and human actor stands behind that offering. It combines four different sources of character: the cultural world from which the brand draws meaning, the themes it continually explores, its imagined human persona, and the real people who represent it.

A strong offering without character may remain competent but generic. A vivid character without a credible offering may provide only surface-level appeal and too little substantive value. Together, the two blocks give the brand both substance and meaning: a convincing reason to choose it and a strong identity that make it distinctive.



Brand Culture



Brand Theme



Brand Persona



Brand Face

IV. BRAND CHARACTER

09 Brand Culture

What cultural roots should shape the brand and give it meaning?

Brand Culture describes the cultural foundations that a brand draws from. It moves the brand beyond mere functional benefits and gives it symbolic meaning by connecting it to specific cultural facets – such as a country, region, city, social class, subculture, tradition, or way of thinking. These cultural references can inspire the brand, give it depth, and become an important source of its identity and differentiation.

People define themselves not only as individuals, but also through the groups and cultures to which they belong or aspire to belong. These cultural worlds carry particular values and lifestyles from which brands can draw meaning. By **connecting themselves to particular cultural groups**, brands can take on some of their meaning and appeal to customers who feel that the brand fits who they are or who they would like to become. For example, WeSC is rooted in skateboarding culture. Ralph Lauren is not rooted only in broad American culture; what makes the brand more specific is that it draws particularly from the lifestyle and aesthetics of Boston high society. The idea is to connect the brand to a specific cultural facet that gives it a richer and more distinctive meaning.

Another important part of Brand Culture is **the brand's value system**. This may consist of around three to five core brand values. Beyond listing core values, brands should consider whether they can draw from a deeper philosophy, spiritual tradition, or artistic movement that shapes the brand's values and how it sees the world. For instance, Shamballa Jewelry combines Nordic mythology with Buddhism in its brand philosophy, which is reflected in the symbols used in its jewelry design and communication. This shows how combining different cultural sources can become a **form of cultural innovation** that helps create a unique brand.



IV. BRAND CHARACTER

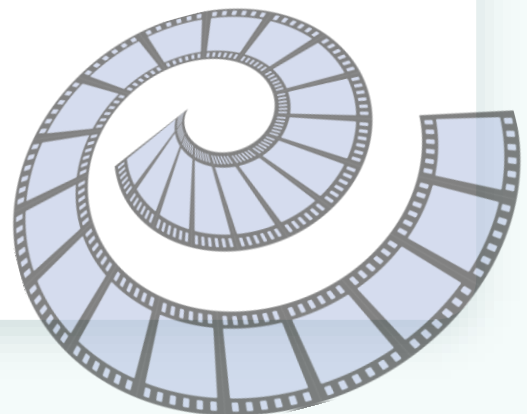
10 Brand Theme

What overarching theme should guide what the brand keeps talking about, showing, or teaching beyond its products?

Content is king: brands constantly need relevant content for their digital channels. However, this content should not be limited to new products or store openings. Such news alone rarely attracts strong attention. Customers engage with a brand not only because of its products, but also because the brand has something interesting to say. When content offers value in its own right, it can attract customers first and support product sales later.

The Brand Theme refers to the **overarching thematic idea** that gives the brand's content, expression, and touchpoints a coherent direction over time. A strong Brand Theme helps the brand avoid random content and create repeatable formats. It answers the question: What should the brand keep talking about, showing, or teaching beyond its products? This can include editorial themes, such as beauty education at Lancôme, fashion guidance at Oscar de la Renta, or how to create better action videos at GoPro.

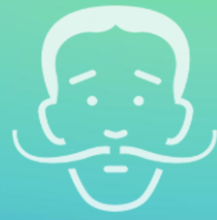
Some brands define **broad narrative themes**, such as travel at Louis Vuitton, love at Tiffany, or cabaret at Christian Louboutin. They can then translate these into **more specific editorial themes**. For Louis Vuitton, for example, a possible editorial translation of the broader "travel" theme could be: "How to experience new places through the eyes of creative insiders." Both types of themes can also inspire the design of marketing-mix instruments such as websites, advertisements, events, and stores.



IV. BRAND CHARACTER

11 Brand Persona

What imagined human character should guide how the brand looks, speaks, and behaves?



A large part of brand meaning can come from the human characteristics associated with a brand. The brand can be understood as having its own “self”: a mental picture of what kind of person it would be if it were human. It can have a strong impact on purchase decisions, because consumers compare this brand self with their own ideal self: the closer the match, the more desirable the brand becomes. For this reason, Brand Personality is another major source of brand meaning and differentiation. At the same time, it helps humanize the brand and can raise brand-customer relationships to another, more personal level.

Brand Persona covers the human characteristics of the brand. **In its basic form, it includes a few personality traits**, such as decent, cheerful, or honest. In a more detailed and metaphorical form, it creates a vivid picture of the brand as if it were a person. Thinking of the brand as a real person can help guide all kinds of branding decisions, such as the design of a website, store, or advertisement. A useful question for developing a Brand Persona is: How should people imagine the brand as a person?

The Brand Persona should be described in enough detail to **create a vivid mental picture** of the kind of person the brand is meant to represent. This may include not only personality traits, but also demographic characteristics or lifestyle preferences. Another good starting point is to ask what role models inspire the brand, such as an artist, philosopher, or a person the brand team personally knows.

For example, Coco Chanel still lives on as a kind of guiding spirit within the company. When designing a new product or store, the brand team would typically ask: How would Coco Chanel do it today? Other brands use one or several role models as sources of inspiration for the Brand Persona. For instance, the Swedish fashion label House of Dagmar, founded by three sisters, draws much of its inspiration from their grandmother, after whom the brand was named.

IV. BRAND CHARACTER

12 Brand Face



Which real person or group inside the company should represent the brand – and what kind of people should customers know stand behind it?

The people behind a brand often matter to consumers. When asked what they know about a brand, consumers often mention people-related aspects, such as the brand's founders, owners, managers, designers, or other company representatives. Accordingly, Brand Face is about the real people who represent a brand, especially from within the company.

Giving a brand a face is not new. It reflects a **basic human desire to know who to interact with**, which is why brands were already doing this more than a hundred years ago. Thierry Hermès, for example, became renowned among European royalty for his horse harnesses and vouched for the quality of his products with his own name. In this way, giving a brand a face turns it into a more human-like relationship partner. It can help build trust, customer goodwill, and a sense of closeness.

Today, this approach remains effective. **Typical Brand Faces** include founders, CEOs, artistic directors, and, increasingly, human-like fictional characters. Entrepreneurs such as Brunello Cucinelli, fashion designers such as Jacquemus, and star chefs like Alain Ducasse show how visible individuals can become the face of a business and develop into personal brands. Even brands that are not naturally built around a key individual should consider who inside the company could become a credible human face for the brand, and cultivate at least one strong personal brand.

For many consumers, it also makes a difference **who owns or runs a business**. Beyond specific individuals, Brand Face can therefore also include what kind of people stand behind the brand, for example whether it is family-run, founder-led, women-owned, or minority-owned. This can add meaning and value because, for many consumers, knowing who is behind a brand can make a real difference.



BLOCK V

13

Brand Relationships

What role should the brand play in customers' lives – as an expert, host, coach, curator, or companion – and in what tone should it address them?

The Brand Relationship block describes the type of relationship a brand wants to build with its customers and the role it wants to play in their lives. It helps guide the tone of voice and shapes the way a brand behaves, delivers services, and communicates with customers.

This can include **defining a relationship role**, for example as an expert, host, coach, companion, curator, guardian, or gatekeeper. It can also consider **human relationship analogues** that brands want consumers to experience with them, such as casual friendships, committed partnerships, flings, or secret affairs. In addition, these roles can be translated into **interaction dyads**, such as expert-student, host-guest, coach-trainee, doctor-patient, gatekeeper-insider.

The interesting part is not only to describe the relationship, but also to **innovate and create a new form of relationship in the industry** that helps differentiate the brand. For instance, companies such as Uber have created competitive advantages by disrupting their industry through a shift in established relational roles. Instead of a traditional, more anonymous taxi driver-passenger relationship, Uber reframed the service as a more informal platform relationship between flexible micro-entrepreneurs and riders who feel more like supportive acquaintances than anonymous passengers.

BLOCK VI

14 Key Touchpoints



Which few communication, distribution, or service touchpoints should the brand become especially known for?

When people think about a brand, they think not only about its products, but also about the characteristic places, channels, and interactions through which they encounter it. These touchpoints can therefore influence how the brand is perceived, making them relevant to brand identity planning.

Key Touchpoints are the most important communication, distribution, and service encounters through which customers should experience the brand and for which the brand wants to become known. The word “key” emphasizes that this block should not contain a complete list of communication and distribution channels or a detailed customer journey map. Touchpoints are **only key when they are identity-bearing**, meaning that they have the potential to play an important role in bringing the brand’s identity to life, and when they represent a longer-term brand-building choice. When strategically selected and designed, they can embody and communicate the brand’s identity so strongly that they become recognizable brand signatures.

For instance, a brand that aims to become an internationally renowned luxury house will usually need distinctive flagship stores on prestigious shopping streets such as Avenue Montaigne in Paris. Other typical brand touchpoints that can become recognizable brand signatures include an expert consultation format, a community platform, or a characteristic digital interface. In many businesses, a **touchpoint is part of the offering itself**, making the interaction through which the offering is delivered so characteristic that it becomes part of the brand’s identity. For example, a luxury skincare consultation or the booking interface of a travel platform can be an essential part of what customers experience and value.





BLOCK VII

15 Brand Expression

Which few recurring signature elements should express what the brand stands for and make it recognizable, even without its name?

Once a brand is clear about what it wants to stand for, the next step is to decide how this meaning should be expressed to its target groups. This is the purpose of the Brand Expression block. It asks: What is distinctive about how the brand looks, sounds, feels, and acts – so distinctive that it becomes recognizable even from a distance? For instance, Louis Vuitton uses its Monogram Canvas pattern to express the brand's rich heritage and elegance while making its products immediately recognizable.

A strong Brand Expression system achieves two things. First, it communicates meaning by showing people what the brand stands for. Second, it creates recognition by helping people identify the brand, sometimes even when its name or logo is absent. Many brands can look elegant, but only a few develop an elegant expression that is recognizably their own.

There are **three main ways to express brand meaning**. First, Brand Design – the broad field covering the brand's logo, layout, colors, typography, and iconic products. It also extends to Five-Senses Brand Expression through sound, scent, taste, and touch. Second, Brand Communications – everything that conveys brand identity in words, including the brand name, tagline, and brand story. Third, Brand Behavior – how the brand acts, including its policies, business practices, and brand rituals.

Across all three, the task is not to use every possible element, but to **develop a small number of recurring signature codes** that express the brand's essence and DNA: a particular color, a symbol, a sound, a character or mascot. The central question: Which elements could become so characteristic that people recognize the brand without seeing its name?

Many companies still ask an agency to design their website before they have clearly defined their brand identity. Yet **brand identity planning is itself a creative process** that provides clear and inspiring direction for brand design. A meaningful, inspiring, and consistent brand expression is the visible result of the thought and effort invested in the conceptual groundwork.

Part III

Putting the Canvas into Practice

THE QUESTION SET

The Right Questions for Every Brand-Building Situation

Five Question Types for Building, Auditing, and Repositioning Brands

Each of the fifteen Canvas elements is addressed through five question types. The universal question captures the element's core meaning, while the others adapt it to building, auditing, or repositioning a brand. The customer-perspective question turns the Canvas outwards. Comparing it with the existing-brand question reveals the gap between intended identity and customer perception, which is a central finding of any brand audit.

Universal

Captures the core meaning of the brand element, regardless of the situation.

New brand

Helps define how the element should be designed for a new brand.

Existing brand

Examines how the element is currently intended and expressed by an existing brand.

Repositioning

Helps decide what should be retained, changed, or strengthened in the future.

Customer perspective

Examines how customers actually perceive the brand element today, rather than what the brand intends.

Example customer probe

Translates the customer-perspective question into simple, natural language that can be asked directly in customer interviews.

Comparing Intended Identity with Customer Perception

Existing-brand question

What the brand intends to stand for.
Answered inside the company by people responsible for strategy, communication and design.



Customer-perspective question

What customers actually perceive.
Answered through customer interviews, reviews, social listening, and insights from sales people.

The Right Questions for Every Brand-Building Situation

01

Brand Vision

I. BRAND VISION

Universal

What should the brand ultimately achieve for its customers, society, and the business itself?

New brand

What should the new brand aim to achieve for its customers, society, and the business itself?

Existing brand

What does the brand currently aim to achieve for its customers, society, and the business itself?

Repositioning

Which of the brand's goals for customers, society, and the business should remain, and what should change?

Customer perspective

What do customers believe the brand is trying to achieve beyond selling its products or services?

Probe

"Apart from making money, what do you think this brand is trying to achieve?"

02

Brand Authority

II. BRAND OFFERING

Universal

In what area should the brand be seen as especially strong and competent – a product category, a skill, a usage occasion, or a customer problem it solves better than others?

New brand

What could the new brand credibly become known for – a product category, a skill, a usage occasion, or a customer problem it solves best?

Existing brand

In what area does the brand currently want to be seen as especially strong and competent?

Repositioning

What should the brand continue to be known for, and where should it build new authority?

Customer perspective

What do customers think the brand is especially good at?

Probe

"What is this brand really good at?"

The Right Questions for Every Brand-Building Situation

03 Brand Qualities

II. BRAND OFFERING

Universal

Which three to five product-related qualities should give customers good reasons to choose the brand?

New brand

Which purchase criteria matter most in the category, and which three to five should the new brand prioritise?

Existing brand

Which three to five qualities does the brand currently present as reasons to choose it – and does it deliver them consistently?

Repositioning

Which of the brand's current qualities should be kept or strengthened, and which should be replaced by ones that matter more to customers?

Customer perspective

Which product- or service-related qualities do customers associate with the brand, and how do they rate it against competitors on them?

Probe

"How would you describe this brand's products or service? Where is it better or weaker than competitors?"

04 Key Differentiator

II. BRAND OFFERING

Universal

What should be the strongest reason for customers to choose the brand over competitors?

New brand

Which unmet need or underdelivered benefit could set the new brand apart?

Existing brand

What does the brand currently present as the strongest reason to choose it over competitors?

Repositioning

Is the brand's current main advantage still strong enough – or which other key quality could give customers a better reason to choose it?

Customer perspective

What do customers see as the strongest reason to choose the brand over competing alternatives?

Probe

"What is the main reason you would buy this brand rather than from competitors?"

The Right Questions for Every Brand-Building Situation

05 Target Customers

III. BRAND CUSTOMERS

Universal

Which specific customer group should the brand primarily aim to attract?

New brand

Which specific customer group should the new brand be built around?

Existing brand

Which customer group is the brand mainly designed for today?

Repositioning

Which specific customer group should the brand prioritize in the future, and how does this differ from its current focus?

Customer perspective

Do customers feel the brand is meant for people like them – and who feels excluded?

Probe

"Does this brand feel like it's made for someone like you? Why, or why not?"

06 Prototypical User

III. BRAND CUSTOMERS

Universal

What kind of person should customers imagine as the brand's typical user?

New brand

What kind of user image would make the new brand most attractive to its Target Customers?

Existing brand

Who does the brand currently want customers to imagine as its typical user?

Repositioning

How should the brand's user image change to become more attractive to its future target customers?

Customer perspective

What kind of person do customers picture as the brand's typical user?

Probe

"What kind of person do you imagine typically using this brand? And would you like to be seen as that kind of person?"

The Right Questions for Every Brand-Building Situation

07

Brand-related Self

III. BRAND CUSTOMERS

Universal

When using the brand, how should customers feel and who should they believe they are or can become?

New brand

How should the new brand make customers feel, and who should it help them to become?

Existing brand

How does the brand currently aim to make customers feel when using it, and who does it suggest they can become?

Repositioning

What should customers feel when using the brand in future that they do not feel today?

Customer perspective

How does the brand make customers feel, and how does using it influence the way they see themselves?

Probe

"How does using this brand make you feel? Does it change how you see yourself in any way?"

08

Brand Community

III. BRAND CUSTOMERS

Universal

Which group of people should customers feel they belong to through the brand?

New brand

What group, scene, or movement should customers feel connected to through the new brand?

Existing brand

What group, scene, or movement does the brand currently want customers to feel connected to?

Repositioning

Which group, scene, or movement should customers feel part of in the future, and how does this differ from today?

Customer perspective

Do customers feel connected to other people through the brand, and what group do they feel part of?

Probe

"Do you feel connected to other people who use this brand? What do you feel you have in common with them?"

The Right Questions for Every Brand-Building Situation

09 Brand Culture

IV. BRAND CHARACTER

Universal

What cultural roots should shape the brand and give it meaning?

New brand

Which cultural roots could give the new brand a distinctive meaning?

Existing brand

Which cultural influences does the brand currently draw from?

Repositioning

Which cultural roots should the brand keep or reinterpret, and which new ones could it add?

Customer perspective

Which cultural roots do customers associate with the brand?

Probe

"What culture, place, tradition, or way of thinking does this brand seem to draw from? What values does it seem to stand for?"

10 Brand Theme

IV. BRAND CHARACTER

Universal

What overarching theme should guide what the brand keeps talking about, showing, or teaching beyond its products?

New brand

What overarching theme could give the new brand a lasting source of relevant content?

Existing brand

What does the brand currently talk about, show, or teach beyond its products?

Repositioning

Which overarching theme could the brand own more strongly in future – and what should it stop talking about?

Customer perspective

What themes do customers associate with the brand beyond its products, and do they find its content worth following?

Probe

"What does this brand talk about beyond its products – if anything? And how interesting is that to you?"

The Right Questions for Every Brand-Building Situation

11

Brand Persona

IV. BRAND CHARACTER

Universal

What imagined human character should guide how the brand looks, speaks, and behaves?

New brand

What kind of person should the new brand be if it were human – and how would this person speak, behave, dress, and live?

Existing brand

What kind of person is the brand currently designed to resemble?

Repositioning

Which parts of the brand's current character should stay, and what kind of person should it become?

Customer perspective

If customers imagined the brand as a person, what kind of person would it be?

Probe

"If this brand were a person, what kind of person would it be? How would this person speak, dress, and behave?"

12

Brand Face

IV. BRAND CHARACTER

Universal

Which real person or group inside the company should represent the brand – and what kind of people should customers know stand behind it?

New brand

Who behind the new brand could credibly become its visible representative?

Existing brand

Which real person or group does the brand currently present as its face?

Repositioning

Who should become the brand's face in the future, and how visible should they be?

Customer perspective

Which real people do customers associate with the brand, what impression do these people create, and what kind of people do customers believe stand behind it?

Probe

"Which people, if any, do you associate with this brand? What impression do they make on you? Do you have a sense of what kind of people run it?"

The Right Questions for Every Brand-Building Situation

13 Brand Relationships

V. BRAND RELATIONSHIPS

Universal

What role should the brand play in customers' lives – as an expert, host, coach, curator, or companion – and in what tone should it address them?

New brand

What kind of relationship could make the new brand particularly valuable to customers in its category?

Existing brand

What kind of relationship does the brand currently aim to build with customers?

Repositioning

Which conventional brand-customer relationship in the category could the brand improve or disrupt – and what about its current relationship should stay?

Customer perspective

What kind of relationship do customers feel they have with the brand, what role does it play in their lives, and in what tone do they feel it addresses them?

Probe

"How would you describe your relationship with this brand, and what role does it play in your life? How does it talk to you – formally, warmly, distantly?"

14 Key Touchpoints

VI. BRAND TOUCHPOINTS

Universal

Which few communication, distribution, or service touchpoints should the brand become especially known for?

New brand

Which few touchpoints should the new brand develop into memorable brand signatures?

Existing brand

Which communication, distribution, or service touchpoints currently play the strongest role in expressing the brand's identity?

Repositioning

Which of the brand's current touchpoints should be strengthened into signature touchpoints, and which new ones should be added?

Customer perspective

Which encounters with the brand do customers remember most, and which shape their impression most strongly?

Probe

"Think about the places, channels, or interactions through which you experience this brand. Which stand out most, and why?"

The Right Questions for Every Brand-Building Situation

15

Brand Expression

VII. BRAND EXPRESSION

Universal

Which few recurring signature elements should express what the brand stands for and make it recognisable, even without its name?

New brand

Which few recurring signature elements should the new brand develop to express its meaning and make it recognizable?

Existing brand

What are the main signature elements the brand currently uses to express what it stands for?

Repositioning

Which of the brand's current signature elements should stay, which should change, and what new ones could be added?

Customer perspective

Which signature elements help customers recognise the brand even without its name, and what do those elements say to them about it?

Probe

"What would help you recognise this brand without seeing its name or logo? And what does that say about the brand to you?"



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