Brand Is an Operating System

Moving from ad hoc marketing to a consistent, chosen position

POSITION Consultants
Perspective Paper

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ABSTRACT

Many organizations treat brand as a visual layer — a logo, a palette, a tagline. In practice, brand is the set of decisions and habits that determine how an organization is seen, remembered and chosen. When those decisions are unmade or unenforced, marketing becomes a series of one-off efforts.

This paper describes how to move from ad hoc marketing to a deliberate practice in four steps: **position, say it, show it, run it.** It also covers executive thought leadership, which can turn leaders' expertise into a durable market asset.

Keywords: Positioning; Messaging; Thought leadership; Marketing operations; Brand consistency

KEY POINTS

1. Brand professionals widely say consistency matters, yet few report presenting their brand very consistently — the gap between belief and behavior is the opportunity.
2. Position, say it, show it, run it: decide how you want to be seen, put it into language people can repeat, make expertise visible through leaders, and run it as an operating practice.
3. Consistency is mostly an operations question — approvals, templates, planning and measures — which is why it can be built deliberately.

1 The cost of inconsistency

The evidence on brand consistency is largely survey-based, so we present it with care.

In a 2016 benchmark by Demand Metric and Lucidpress, fewer than 10% of participants said their brand presentation was very consistent, while almost 90% agreed that consistency is important [1]. The most commonly reported consequence of inconsistency, cited by 71%, was confusion in the market.

ABOUT THIS EVIDENCE

These are survey respondents' own reports and opinions. The sample was self-selected and may not represent every sector.

Lucidpress (now Marq) later surveyed more than 200 organizations [2] for its 2019 State of Brand Consistency report and reported that consistent branding "can increase revenue" by 33%, up from 23% in its 2016 research.

ABOUT THIS EVIDENCE

These revenue figures are estimates reported by survey respondents, not measured revenue effects, and the publisher sells brand-management software. The 2016 and 2019 figures come from the same research series rather than independent studies. They are not a forecast of what any organization will gain.

POSITION'S VIEW

The more useful finding is about practice: most respondents believe consistency matters, yet few achieve it. That gap between belief and behavior is where deliberate work pays off.

2 Four steps from ad hoc to deliberate

Position, say it, show it, run it is a practical sequence for brand work, from the first choice to daily operations.

2.1 Step 1 — Position: decide how you want to be seen

Positioning is a choice about who you serve, what you do better than alternatives, and what you want to be known for. It requires saying no to some audiences and claims. Without it, every later decision becomes a matter of taste.

2.2 Step 2 — Say it: messaging that people can repeat

A message platform translates positioning into language: a short statement of what you do and for whom, proof points, and a story. The test is whether employees, not just marketers, can say it consistently.

2.3 Step 3 — Show it: visibility through leadership

Executive thought leadership makes an organization's expertise visible. The approach that lasts is capability-building: teach the leader and the internal team to identify topics,

develop a point of view, plan content and measure results, rather than outsourcing every post. That way the practice continues after any outside support ends.

2.4 Step 4 — Run it: marketing operations

Consistency is largely an operations problem. It depends on who approves what, where templates and approved assets live, how campaigns are planned, and what gets measured. Marketing operations organizes the people, processes and resources that put the strategy into daily practice.

3 A brand reflection tool

REFLECTION TOOL

Use these eight dimensions in a facilitated conversation. For each, gather examples of what you can actually observe, then discuss where the evidence is strong and where it is thin. It is not a scored maturity assessment: there are no bands or thresholds, and no total.

Table 1. Eight dimensions and the evidence to look for

Dimension	What you might observe when it's working	Prompt for discussion
Brand identity and positioning	Clear differentiators, used consistently across materials	Could three colleagues name the same differentiators?
Brand story and messaging	A narrative that staff and clients repeat in similar words	When did a client last describe us in our own words?
Website experience and search visibility	Clear navigation, strong calls to action, discoverable content	What would a first-time visitor understand in ten seconds?
Social presence and engagement	Regular, purposeful activity that supports positioning	Which recent posts reinforced our position, and which didn't?
Thought leadership and media visibility	Leaders recognized for a defined point of view	On what topic are our leaders known, and by whom?

Dimension	What you might observe when it's working	Prompt for discussion
Marketing strategy and channel use	A written plan with priorities, audiences and measures	Is our plan written down, and does it say what we won't do?
Content creation and consistency	A repeatable process and calendar	What happens to content when the busiest person is away?
Growth and scale readiness	Systems that would still work if volume doubled	Which step would break first if demand doubled?

FROM CONSULTING PRACTICE

A pattern we often see in brand work: identity is clear internally, but content is uneven in the market. Treat that as a question to test in your own organization, not a typical result.

4 A 90-day starting sequence

The sequence below is illustrative. Timing depends on scope, decision-making and the materials already in place.

Table 2. An illustrative 90-day starting sequence

Days	Focus	Outputs
1–30	Review and decide	Brand reflection review, audience and competitor review, positioning choices
31–60	Articulate	Message platform, proof points, executive point of view, usage guidelines
61–90	Operationalize	Content calendar, approval workflow, template library, measures, first thought-leadership pieces

5 Implications for leaders

- **Make the positioning choice explicitly.** Decide who you serve and what you won't claim before investing in visuals or campaigns.
- **Test whether people can repeat it.** If employees can't describe what you do in similar words, the message isn't finished.
- **Build visibility as a capability.** Help leaders develop and share a point of view rather than outsourcing every post.
- **Run brand like an operation.** Give approvals, templates, planning and measures clear owners.

6 Limitations

- The brand-consistency evidence comes from surveys with self-selected samples, published by a vendor of brand-management software.
- The revenue figures are respondents' estimates, not measured revenue effects, and the 2016 and 2019 figures come from the same research series.
- The eight-dimension reflection tool has not been validated and has no scoring bands.
- The 90-day sequence is illustrative; timing depends on scope and decision-making.

7 Questions for discussion

For a leadership team conversation. There are no right answers or scores.

1. Can three different employees describe what we do in the same way?
2. Which audiences are we trying to reach, and which are we choosing to ignore?
3. Whose expertise is visible in our market, and on what topic?
4. Who approves brand and marketing materials, and how long does it take?
5. What do we measure to know whether our brand work is working?

References

[1] Demand Metric and Lucidpress (2016). Demand Metric and Lucidpress Release Benchmark Research on Brand Consistency. *PRWeb*.
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[2] Lucidpress (2019). Study Finds Companies with Consistent Branding Can See Up to 33% Increase in Revenue. *PR Newswire*.
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