MINDFUL BRAND AUDITING

THE NEW WAY TO EXPLORE **BRAND VALUE**

KURT GASSNER

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BY
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Mindful Brand Auditing
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Impressum
My-mindguide – The publishing trademarke of trendguide Capital GmbH, Klenzestr. 42a, 80469 Munich, Germany.

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Paperback ISBN: 978-3-98793-033-1
Hardback ISBN:978-3-98793-034-8

Introduction and Dedication

I am a serial founder and business angel, garnering four decades' worth of expertise in the global advertising and brand consulting sectors. As a result, I have earned numerous awards in creative directing, direct marketing, and training, becoming a self-made millionaire.

This book is dedicated to my valuable B2B and B2C clients that I had when I worked for over 15 years as a global brand auditor and brand architect. Thank you. It was great working with you and contributing to your brand value. The significant changes we experienced after the Covid-19 crisis made me aware that brand auditing is now a more critical sector than ever before. How can you steer a brand without knowing? This is an incredibly crucial question because there are new challenges we must now consider in this regard. After all, the soft facts are now the hard facts.

Fewer than 50 percent of employees believe in their company's brand idea, and even less are actually equipped to deliver on it.

Jhon F. Marshal
Senior Partner, Global Director of Strategy, Lippincott

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The word *branding* is often thrown around in many contexts. Most entrepreneurs refer to it as a look and personality, including a company's logo, color scheme, "personality," and even business name. However, for a brand auditor, the brand goes beyond these surface-level things, involving the firm's entire appearance, its impression, voice, style, and tone, amongst others. Considering how broad this concept is, there are many reasons to keep the notion at the forefront of all company decisions. This is because branding:

- When done effectively, can boost your company's goodwill.
- Can create a distinct "brand identity" that potential buyers will recognize.
- Ensures consistency across all promotional platforms, including social media, newsletters, print media, and anywhere else you choose to market your product or service.

In a nutshell, branding is more than just a fancy logo; it is how your company is perceived by the public, what it stands for, and how it conducts business, thus emphasizing the importance of brand auditing. Overall, working on branding initiatives is critical to your business success.

1.1 What Is Brand Steering?

Brand steering refers to a set of concepts aimed at achieving optimal results through marketing plans, personality, ambassadors, appearance, tone, and communications, all of which reinforce one another. This garners insight and a distinct brand profile. Brand steering is, in other words, a guide for your brand to follow. Like a sailor has a steering wheel to keep his ship on track, brand experts also have their own steering wheel to adjust all elements of their brand. We can use these principles for all businesses of any size. Typically, there is a predetermined guideline known as the *brand steering wheel*. The brand steering wheel provides information about the brand elements that run through all marketing and communication efforts. It is used as a guideline and can be changed to suit individual goals, situations, or messages. The emphasis is set on the brand by specifically describing these brand elements.

1.2 Components of the Brand Steering Wheel

- **Positioning assertion**

This section discusses who the brand is, what it stands for, and what it hopes to achieve. The positioning statement can express the brand's purpose and promise.

- **The personality of the brand**

This component can be linked to a brand's emotional perception. It describes the brand's personality (as a person) and its crucial values and attributes.

- **Brand benefits**

This component describes the brand's offerings, its motivations for purchasing the brand, and its added value. The advantages stem from the brand's features (the organization, people, or properties of products/services). As a result, the brand properties can be connected to the advantages.

- **Style Guide**

Describes how the brand and its personality are graphically conveyed. A visual style guide explains how to research and attain the brand you want, which is directly related to the brand's overall image.

- **Brand voice and tone**

What you say is your brand voice, and how you say it is your brand tone. Since your style may differ depending on the audience you're addressing, it's a good idea to keep track of the different tones you implement in various scenarios. For example, when announcing a new product, your style won't be the same as it is when reacting to a customer complaint.

- **Brand ambassadors**

A brand ambassador is a person who, by words and deeds, represents and advertises a company, supports its offerings, and functions as the embodiment of the firm's corporate identity. When it comes to communicating about the brand online and

offline, brand ambassadors are professionals. However, the best brand ambassadors are loyal customers. Their word is priceless and can only be attained by reliable brands. There are numerous strategies to encourage customers to become brand ambassadors, such as offering a percentage or dollar amount off an ambassador's next purchase, holding a contest, or even giving away a free product or service.

1.3 Why and when should you apply the guidelines of the brand steering wheel?

- Your logo is out of date.
- The brand charted a new strategic path.
- An organization combined, split, or changed its leadership.
- The company intends to enter new overseas markets.
- New products/services have been introduced.
- The logo and business brand are no longer relevant.
- Your visual identity is not well-suited to digital mediums.

1.4 The Brand Steering Wheel: What Can You Do With It?
Following the guidelines of the brand steering wheel, it's incredibly important that all stakeholders gain a clear understanding of the brand character and brand personality. Communication is an element used to achieve proper brand steering. Clear communication paves the way for future communication through all critical channels. This strategy should be summarized in a *brand direction*, which serves as the foundation for all brand communications. As a result, everyone speaks the same language regarding the brand and its properties:

- What is the result?
- A brand guidebook can serve as a guide for the entire organization.

- Based on this document, you may make informed decisions about your marketing communication efforts.
- The paper serves as an identity definition for the internal structure.
- Making an annual plan becomes more accessible and will be a foundation for building your content strategy.

More so, while brand communication across all company tiers is essential, it is merely a tool to achieve brand steering, rather than a representation of the brand and how it should flow. This perception is primarily carved out by advertising agencies, who have reduced the term *brand* to just communication and logo. Take note that this is incorrect. When you think of a loaded brand like Coca-Cola, a lot more comes to mind than just a logo, including joy, refreshment, life, good company, and so on. That is the power a given brand can possess.

1.5 Brand personality

Brand personality is an essential component when guiding your brand. How your company is perceived will determine how long it survives in its industry. Anyone considering purchasing your brand will first assess the company's attributes. This aspect of brand steering focuses on brand equity, which emphasizes seven crucial dimensions: awareness, reputation, differentiation, energy, relevance, loyalty, and adaptability. Some of these are easier to construct (or destroy) than others. However, each contributes to the total value of the brand, and an assessment of these many factors can help you identify the areas requiring your marketing efforts.

1. Awareness

What percentage of your target audience or industry is aware of your brand? Are your company's logo, name, and brand identity well-known to customers and potential customers? If so, are they as well-known as the Starbucks mermaid or the Target bullseye? Aside from knowing you exist, do they understand all the things you offer?

2. Reputation

Just because people are aware of your brand does not guarantee they have a favorable impression of it. What do those who are familiar with your company think of your brand? Is your product regarded as high-end, or are you a low-cost brand? Do you offer high-quality products but poor service, or vice versa?

3. Differentiation

Your brand's capacity to stand out from the crowd contributes to its worth. Even if your brand has minimal visibility, you may still have potential equity if it has a unique personality or the ability to distinguish itself from the crowd.

4. Energy

Another reason marketers want you to think they're innovative is that it gives the brand a sense of energy and movement. If you're constantly inventing the wheel rather than resting on your laurels, you will always have something new to say to your clients. And updates are energizing.

5. Relevance

You can have a fantastic product and a great brand, but if it isn't helpful or vital to your clients (anymore or yet), it won't do you

any good. Is there another audience or business that would be interested in your brand that differs from the audience you're currently aiming your marketing efforts toward?

6. Loyalty

It's also critical to investigate why your customers are loyal (if they are). What would it take to entice your customers to abandon your brand? Would your customers stick with your brand even if you were to break unpleasant news to them?

7. Flexibility

If your brand is well-defined, it may be tough to use it for anything else in the future. Could you put it under the same brand if you created a similar product? Or might the association of another product or service with your brand be more detrimental than beneficial?

Many sales and marketing choices, like acquisition, expansion, rebranding, and even simple annual planning, require a brand evaluation. Knowing your shortcomings allows you to focus your efforts in those areas.

1.6 Mindfulness in marketing

Mindfulness. When you say the word, you usually get two reactions: people either love it, or they roll their eyes. Many people commonly associate mindfulness with yoga pants and sitting for eight hours in an ashram in India. It might also include shaving heads and donating all your worldly goods. However, that is not correct. Mindfulness is a state of active attention to the present moment and the ability to notice thoughts without judging them as good or harmful.

The American Psychological Association (APA) defines mindfulness as "a moment-to-moment awareness of one's experience without judgment." Most of us spend our time in the past or future, and we spend very little time in the present moment. And, with many devices, screens, marketing, and advertising vying for our attention, the bulk of us spend our days in a haze of to-do lists and odd thoughts, never truly living.

MINDFUL BRAND AUDITING

Now that we've discussed mindfulness and gotten a grasp of brand auditing, it is key to introduce a new term in the field of brand steering, known as *mindful brand auditing*. Mindful brand auditing simply involves concentrating on qualitative facts, exploring the unconscious mind of stakeholders, and discovering the truth about what's really stored in their mind in terms of opinions and thoughts regarding your brand. Whether it's a global brand, a fast-growing and well-heeled startup, a middle-sized company on a growth trajectory, a company involved in a merger or acquisition, or a large company with a broad brand acquisition, mindful brand auditing is crucial, especially in a post-Covid world.

1.7 Steering Brands Through Covid-19 and the recent Ukraine crisis

The Covid-19 pandemic is unprecedented. There has never been a simultaneous disruption in daily life for so many people worldwide. The Coronavirus pandemic's ripple effects are more akin to tidal waves, one of which has significantly hit the business world, prompting many large and small enterprises to duck beneath the surface and temporarily close

their doors. However, the wave will pass eventually—hopefully sooner rather than later, but most critically, with as many lives preserved as possible.

The Covid-19 pandemic may be remembered as the defining event of our time, irreversibly altering many important, critical facets of our lives. We've witnessed a much-needed surge in remote working and video conferencing; movie studios have pushed theatrical releases out for home purchase, and musicians have streamed live concerts right into the palms of fans around the world. Some changes in behavior that occurred as a result of the pandemic may fade, but others may persist.

It's a perplexing time for brands. Consumers are worried about macro issues, but they still also need essentials. How do you set the tone for this situation? How do you avoid coming across as exploitative? How do you deal with the shift to online work across your entire business, while potentially balancing the interests of all your stakeholders?

For conflicts like the one occurring between Russia and Ukraine (circa 2022), news about yourself and your company can be postponed amid the pressing political atmosphere. This is the approach many businesses should assume in the coming weeks. Be sensitive, helpful, and empathetic. Inclusively, you should:

1. Make decisions as if everyone on the planet is watching. Regardless of your company's size, assume that millions of people worldwide will see your content. Anything can spread like wildfire. Don't be a flawed role model for others.
2. Empathy is an excellent place to start. Remember that everyone has their struggles, difficulties, and joys. Their

families, coworkers, and employees may have an impact on them. Consider them, first and foremost, as people, then as customers or clients. First, empathize, then offer help.

3. Marketers should adhere to the 80/20 rule, in which 80% of your content should be helpful, informative, and educational. The other 20% should educate your audience on your brand, what it stands for, why it exists, how you can help them, and what you do. Pivot your messaging and pause some of your posts to align with the news.

4. Make good use of your social media channels. Share valuable resources and heartwarming stories. Inform your followers that you are concerned about what is going on in the world, and ensure that your concern comes from a genuine and informed place.

5. Don't just set it and forget it when it comes to marketing. The problem with tools that allow you to pre-schedule blog posts, social media posts, and email marketing is that when tragedy strikes, the content created at a different time may be inappropriate. Check that no unnecessary or tone-deaf posts are being sent you, and that all posts consider what is happening on a larger scale at a given moment.

Crises are difficult to handle, but they may be an opportunity for companies to show their purpose, values, and commitments, while also displaying agility, inventiveness, and passion. It's a period when a brand's strength pays off. It's not the time for brands to venture too far outside their comfort zone, but there is a potential to meet specific customer needs that a brand

might not usually meet. It is essential for a brand to establish a connection between the brand's purpose and an issue to which they can credibly respond. Unilever, for example, declared a promise to supply free soap, sanitizer, bleach, and food wherever required. Netflix reportedly announced a $100 million fund for creatives who could not work because of Covid-19 shutdowns, while Chipotle sponsored virtual meals with celebrities while handing out free burritos.

Many of the endeavors companies will undertake in the following months may appear to be temporary measures. But what if this offers a chance for brands to establish who they are and whom they will remain for the duration of their journey? It's an opportunity for businesses to make substantial changes by shifting their mission from words to deeds, viewing competitors as potential partners, and leveraging their power for effect rather than profit. Brands have an opportunity to do the right thing. And doing so will help them in this complex and challenging time, while also positioning them for long-term success in what may be a very different world on the other side of the pandemic.

Besides the everyday conflicts for market share, being heard above the din, or racing to fill a void, we're now confronting a battle of a different type. It's safe to conclude that most enterprises, regardless of industry, have been impacted by Covid-19 in some manner, and are experiencing significant economic consequences—only time will tell how severe these consequences are. While we are all doing our best to keep afloat during these trying times, we must not retreat to primordial instincts, rather, we must behave with a higher consciousness. A human answer is the most suitable marketing response to a

cultural moment that alters as dramatically as it has in the face of Covid-19. You must navigate your brand through the eye of the storm with even more empathy, subtlety, and thoughtful messaging.

In his recent book, Marc Benioff writes, "Innovation can't move in a positive direction unless it's founded on sincere and ongoing attempts to build up all humanity."

While each brand is unique, we are confronted with the same reality: the only way out of this crisis is through. Whatever that journey looks like for your brand, bring with you the highest regard and care for the surrounding planet. While we're all working hard to remain afloat, put out critical fires, make hard decisions, and prepare our businesses for the coming storm, we can't overlook the one thing that will rescue us all**:** our clients.

Don't let the struggle to survive impair your capacity to service your consumer because if there is one thing that will help you weather this storm, it is your devoted consumers who have enabled your success and will hopefully continue to do so after the storm clears.

1.8 Post-Covid and Global Crisis Mindfulness

The year 2020 was one-of-a-kind. It required a different type of leader who could steer even in times of uncertainty, all while providing enough empathy and motivation to keep their people hopeful. And it was at this point that mindfulness came to their aid.

Suppose the pandemic year has taught us anything. If that's the case, the value associated with mindfulness practice creates foundational emotional and mental strength, and also opens

the door to confident actions and deliberate decision-making. Leaders who practice mindfulness can achieve steadiness even in turbulent circumstances, leading to greater clarity of thought.

Mindfulness is more critical than ever for employee well-being. Many employees are unfamiliar with the concept of working from home. The prospect of not commuting to work immediately enthralled many, who began working from home for the first time ever. They realized, after a few weeks, that being productive while not at the office might be incredibly difficult. The routine that they had built, which involved physically working outside their home, no longer existed. This required employees to shift their mentality, adjusting to a new routine that had been chosen for them. Employees suffered from worry, stress, rage, sadness, and other negative states of mind when this structure was removed. Now, employees face a new set of issues. People who are quarantined at home are forced to interact with others who are not from the office during workdays for longer than they are accustomed to. For instance, many parents had to adjust to being surrounded by their children, as many schools also shifted students to online learning. As much as parents adore their children, youngsters get bored fairly easily, which may rapidly erode any feeling of patience and tolerance that most parents possess.

That is why, in the aftermath of Covid-19, corporations must embrace mindfulness and encourage their employees to practice it, as well. According to a study on the topic, mindfulness promotes long-term resilience, mental agility, creativity, and a focused and creative mind. Can you feel your shoulders relaxing? You can try saying to yourself, "There is

no stress at this moment," which is a favorite mindfulness approach that is both easy and effective. Simply say it slowly.

Following the events in Ukraine, and the economic sanctions that have been imposed on Russia, the world is seeing a sharp rise in energy prices with great impact on households and businesses. Now, companies are wondering what they should and should not post on social media or send via email in terms of marketing. Here are some suggestions for dealing with these kinds of global issues. Several social media posts and email campaigns may need to be placed on pause for you and your clients. It may not seem appropriate or necessary to post them at this time, especially given how safe and protected they are compared to the people of Ukraine.

It's fairly acceptable to use the pause button. As we discussed before, tone deafness isn't a good thing. So, while the conflict in Ukraine rages on, it's vital not to be insensitive in your marketing, especially if your firm has offices in Ukraine, Russia, or Eastern Europe. Brands must pivot, adapt, and put people first, just like they did during the Covid-19 pandemic. Here are some other strategies that you or your company can use to go from being distracted to mindful:

- Organizations must incorporate mindfulness-based stress reduction programs into their learning curriculum, sending a clear message of support and recognition to their employees that this topic is essential, it's okay to need it, and they recognize people may need to learn how to be mindful. This considerably improves if the organization establishes communities of practice where colleagues can gather for discussions, enabling people to exchange, learn, and help one another.

- Many employees enjoy a good challenge, so, why not have a month-long mindfulness challenge, with the winner being the individual who logs the most mindful minutes? Many skeptics have been attracted to the new world of mindfulness and its advantages.

- Finally, as part of a multi-experience approach that works so well, firms will benefit from making one of the many mindfulness apps available. The well-known Headspace software is excellent for children and teenagers, indirectly relaxing the psyche of a stressed employee-parent who is homeschooling their children.

Mindfulness promotes mental agility and the development of a focused, inquiring, and creative mind. It is beneficial to investigate strategies to take micro-steps toward developing a sound mind that is durable, less prone to interruption, and maintains attention. Organizations will gain from investing in and encouraging strong mental health practices and concentrating on a holistic approach to attaining KPIs at work. People are "mindfully" motivated to be their best and bring their best and complete selves to work.

1.9 Why it works

Mindfulness converts cannot praise its virtues enough. Hundreds of scientific research articles have shown the usefulness of mindfulness, including benefits such as reduced stress, reduced harmful ruminating, improved general health, and protection against anxiety. According to the APA, mindfulness also increases working memory, attention, cognitive flexibility, and problem-solving abilities. However, in a world of tight timelines

and dwindling customer attention, what does this mean to and for marketers?

Marketers who practice mindfulness report being more focused and increasingly able to distance themselves from stressors and negative thoughts, thus making them more creative problem solvers, and providing them with better clarity and efficiency in their business. According to the Institute of Mindful Leadership research, mindfulness training assisted 93% of executives polled in creating room for creativity. It improved their ability to listen to themselves and others by 89%, and helped them think more strategically, increasing the percentage of strategic thinking by 70%.

Craig Davis, co-founder of Sendle and mindfulness lover, states that most of us are tremendously distracted, noting that it's part of the human condition to dwell on the future or the past. We contribute to this further by distracting ourselves with technology and devices and, as a result, not paying attention to much of what is going on around us. When this is the case, our ability to contribute and make decisions suffers.

In today's society, everyone is multitasking, yet doing nothing particularly well. It has been demonstrated that multitasking quickly reduces your IQ by 12 points, which is equivalent to losing an entire night's sleep. We're simply dumbing ourselves down. It is acceptable to take a break. We are human beings, and working for eight hours straight is ineffective. And as a result, we have happier people who are more engaged and capable of being themselves at work. Our minds wander about 47% of the time. The obvious consequence is that people aren't always focused on what they're doing. People are unaware that they have control over their thoughts and can shift their attention

as needed. Note that you can select what it is you choose to focus on, and doing so will make you more efficient and more present.

1.10 How to achieve it

To get there, you don't have to shave your head or live in a cave. It's as simple as putting your electronics away and off your desk. Remove all distractions, and focus on your breath. Focus on the way your chest rises and falls as you inhale and exhale. Relax your body with every inhale. And, while you take your first breath in, ask yourself, "What is important right now?"

Mindfulness can manifest itself in a variety of ways. We examine the current state of play (what we know) before moving onto future state ideation, where we experiment with big ideas and thoughts. We then discuss the significance of these concepts and follow the discussion with an action plan outlining how we will get there. True mindfulness arises from our ability to let future ideation flow without acting on the temptation to solve everything right away. For many people, this is not a natural state. But when it succeeds, incredible and unexpected things happen.

Anne Miles, managing director and founder of Suits&Sneakers, defines mindfulness for creatives as the ability to tune out the noise and reconnect with the wellspring of creation: "Normally, creatives have to go into this zone while sitting at their desk in a crowded room with people on their back, waiting for the job to meet a deadline, which is difficult." The most successful method is to direct their attention to a dot on the wall on the upper right of their graphic eyeliner—the visual quarter of their brain. Two minutes of steady staring at

this dot is enough to enter the creative zone. That's accelerated mindfulness.

Since introducing mindfulness, productivity has increased, allowing for employee collaboration in novel ways. We demand a lot from others; therefore, managing our minds is critical. While we can't halt the request, we can provide a toolkit to help people manage their well-being. However, it must become habitual. To do this, your company can hold weekly meditation sessions and wellness days, during which teams spend 30 minutes on related educational topics. This shows employees that you care about them, improves business performance, and promotes retention and productivity, all while attract and maintaining the best staff.

Allowing people to move at their own pace is critical. Things should not be forced or required; they must originate from a genuine place. A few minutes of guided meditation will reset people, so they can be more productive and react rather than respond. People are more conscious of what is going on in a given moment. When they enter a room, they ground themselves by touching a chair and focusing on breathing. They conduct a self-check. And this is all free.

Mindfulness is a strategy to deal with the continuously changing landscape in the marketing world. New technology and data-driven tactics have not only created a substantial skills gap, but have also left marketers straining to meet their new responsibilities. When you are mindful, you are not clouded by past experiences or future fears. You let go of your subjective thoughts and perceive the world objectively, essential for creating out-of-the-box creative ideas. Second, when you practice mindfulness, you become more empathetic.

You can understand other people's perspectives and relate to their needs more efficiently, which is helpful when changing behavior. Finally, practicing mindfulness teaches you coping strategies for dealing with stress.

1.11 Takeaway

As a leader, you can significantly impact your workplace culture, employee satisfaction rate, and productivity by supporting mindfulness. Branding your firm as one that eases the tension of the marketing process will distinguish your organization and likely attract personnel and clients.

Jeff Bezos, CEO Amazon

Your brand is what people say about you when you are not in the room.

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