

PARLOR EXCHANGE GLOBAL

BRAND IT.

Business Branding Guide

What your business needs to look like, sound like, and feel like — so that everywhere someone finds you, they recognize you and trust what they see.

- **Section 1 — What Branding Actually Is (And What It Isn't)**
- **Section 2 — Your Brand Foundation**
- **Section 3 — Visual Identity: What You Actually Need**
- **Section 4 — Your Brand Voice & Messaging**
- **Section 5 — Where Your Brand Shows Up**
- **Section 6 — Bonus: Things to Consider When You're Ready**

Part of the Parlor Exchange Global Build It • Protect It • Grow It Methodology

How to Use This Guide

This guide is not a branding course. It is not a design manual. It will not teach you to become a brand strategist — and it doesn't need to. What it will do is walk you through every decision a business owner needs to make about their brand before they spend a dollar on marketing, before they build their website, before they print a single business card.

Branding is the foundation that everything else sits on. A business with a clear brand runs more efficiently, attracts better clients, charges higher prices, and builds faster — because every decision has a reference point. A business without a clear brand wastes money on marketing that doesn't land, attracts the wrong people, and constantly feels like it's starting over.

Start with Section 2. Section 1 resets your definition of branding. Sections 3 through 5 build on the foundation Section 2 creates. Section 6 is the bonus — things worth knowing that belong on the horizon, not on today's list.

SECTION	TOPIC	OUTCOME
1	What Branding Is	Reset the definition so you build the right things
2	Brand Foundation	3 questions, positioning, voice, ideal client
3	Visual Identity	Logo, color, fonts, files, tools
4	Voice & Messaging	Tagline, pitch, story, key messages
5	Where Your Brand Shows Up	Every touchpoint you must control from day one
6	Bonus Section	What to build next when the foundation is solid

SECTION 1 — WHAT BRANDING ACTUALLY IS (AND WHAT IT ISN'T)

The Definition Most People Get Wrong

Most people think branding is a logo. Some think it's a color palette or a font choice. A few think it's a vibe. None of those definitions are wrong — they're just incomplete. Branding is the total impression your business makes every time someone encounters it. Visually, verbally, and experientially.

Your logo is one piece of your brand. Your colors are one piece. The way you answer your phone is a piece. The way your invoices look is a piece. The words on your website, the tone of your emails, the experience of working with you — all of it adds up to what people think and feel when they think about your business.

BRANDING IS	BRANDING IS NOT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A logo, colors, and fonts • A consistent visual system • How your business sounds and speaks • The experience of working with you • What you stand for and won't compromise on • The feeling someone gets every time they interact with you 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just a logo • A tagline that sounds good but means nothing • A color palette with no consistency • A website that looks different from your business cards • Whatever feels right that day • Something only big companies need

Branding vs. Marketing — They're Not the Same Thing

This distinction matters because people spend money on the wrong one first.

	BRANDING	MARKETING
What it is	Who you are and what you stand for	How you get people to find out about you
When it happens	Before you spend a dollar promoting anything	After your brand is established
What it affects	How people feel about you once they find you	How many people find you
The question it answers	Why should I trust this business?	How do I reach my audience?
The mistake	Skipping it and going straight to marketing	Doing it before the brand is clear — wasted spend

The One Thing Branding Actually Requires

Not perfection. Not a big budget. Not a design degree. The one thing branding requires is consistency. A simple, clear brand that shows up the same way every time builds more trust faster than an expensive, complex brand that looks different across every platform.

The consistency test.

Pull up your business's Instagram profile, your website, your most recent invoice, and your email signature. Put them side by side. Do they look like they belong to the same business? Do they use the same colors, the same fonts, the same tone? If someone saw all four without your business name on them, would they recognize they're from the same place? If the answer is no — that's where branding work starts. Not with a new logo. With consistency.

WHAT NOBODY TELLS YOU

Most business owners overbrand before they're ready — spending thousands on logos and brand identity packages before they've validated what they're selling and who they're selling it to. A \$5,000 brand identity on a business that hasn't found its footing yet is money you'll spend again when you figure out what the business actually is. Get the foundation right first. The logo can follow.

SECTION 2 — YOUR BRAND FOUNDATION

This is the work that happens before anything visual. Every design decision, every word choice, every platform strategy should trace back to what you establish here. If you skip this section and go straight to logos and colors, you'll spend money on things you'll eventually redo.

The Three Questions Every Brand Must Answer

Before you design a single thing or write a single word of copy, your brand needs clear answers to these three questions. Write them down. Everything else gets built on these answers.

01 WHO ARE YOU?

Not your business name. Not your title. What does your business actually do and what does it stand for? What makes it different from the other businesses doing similar things? This is your identity — the core of what the brand communicates.

YOUR ANSWER PROMPT

Write one clear sentence: 'We are a [type of business] that [what you do] by [how you do it differently].' If you can't write that sentence, the brand foundation isn't ready yet.

02 WHO DO YOU SERVE?

Not 'everyone.' The more specific your answer, the stronger your brand. A brand that tries to speak to everyone speaks clearly to no one. Your ideal client is a specific person with specific problems, specific aspirations, and a specific reason they need what you offer.

YOUR ANSWER PROMPT

Describe your ideal client in three sentences: who they are, what problem they have, and what they've already tried before they found you. That description is your brand's compass for every decision.

03 WHY DOES IT MATTER?

What is different about how you solve the problem? What does your client's life or business look like after working with you that it didn't before? This is your brand's reason for existing — not your mission statement, the actual real-world difference you make.

YOUR ANSWER PROMPT

Finish this sentence: 'Before working with us, clients [problem/situation]. After working with us, they [result/transformation].' That gap is your brand's value proposition.

Your Brand Positioning Statement

A positioning statement is one sentence that combines your three answers into a single clear declaration of what your business is and who it's for. It is not a tagline — it's an internal compass. Every marketing decision, every piece of content, every client interaction should be consistent with this statement.

The positioning statement formula.

For [specific ideal client], [your business name] is the [category] that [key benefit or differentiator] because [reason to believe]. Example: For first-generation entrepreneurs building their first business, Parlor Exchange Global is the membership and consulting platform that provides curated resources, vetted expert access, and community — because clarity is only useful when it comes with the tools to act on it. Your positioning statement doesn't go on your website word-for-word. It goes in your head — and shapes everything that does.

Your Core Values — Not for the Wall, for Decisions

Brand values are not the words you put on your About page. They are the principles that determine what your business will and won't do. What clients you'll take and which ones you'll turn down. What you'll charge and what you won't compromise on. What partnerships make sense and which ones don't.

How to identify your actual values:

- What made you start this business — and what were you reacting against?
- What do you refuse to do even if it would make you more money?
- What do you want clients to say about the experience of working with you?
- When you've lost a client or deal you didn't want to lose — what value were you protecting?

Aim for 3–5 values. Any more than that and they stop being values — they become a list of nice-sounding words. Each one should be specific enough that it could eliminate a client, a partnership, or a business decision.

Your Brand Voice — How Your Business Sounds

Brand voice is the consistent personality your business communicates through every word it puts out — website copy, social media captions, emails, proposals, invoices, and spoken conversation. If your brand were a person, how would it talk?

The four most common brand voice profiles:

AUTHORITATIVE

Direct, confident, expert. Leads with knowledge. Minimal hedging. Does not over-explain or apologize. Clients come to this brand because they trust it knows what it's talking about.

SOUNDS LIKE

Sounds like: 'Here's what you need to do. Here's why. Here's how.'

WARM & APPROACHABLE

Conversational, encouraging, human. Makes clients feel seen and supported. Uses accessible language over industry jargon. Clients come to this brand because it feels safe and relatable.

SOUNDS LIKE

Sounds like: 'We get it — this part is hard. Here's how we walk through it together.'

BOLD & DIRECT

Calls things what they are. Not aggressive but unapologetically honest. Does not soften truths to avoid discomfort. Clients come to this brand because they're tired of being handled.

SOUNDS LIKE

Sounds like: 'Most people won't tell you this. We will. Here's the truth.'

EDUCATIONAL & CLEAR

Breaks complex things down into plain language. Prioritizes understanding over impression. Jargon-free. Step-by-step. Clients come to this brand because it makes the complicated simple.

SOUNDS LIKE

Sounds like: 'Let's break this down. Here's what it is, here's why it matters, here's exactly what to do.'

Most brands are a blend of two voices. Pick your primary voice and let the secondary one support it. Write it down. Share it with anyone who creates content for your business — including yourself on days when you're not sure how something should be phrased.

Your Ideal Client — Specific, Not Demographic

Demographics tell you age range and income bracket. Your ideal client profile tells you what keeps them up at night, what they've already tried, what they're afraid of, and what they're hoping for when they find you. The

second set of information is what builds a brand that resonates.

Build your ideal client profile by answering:

- What is the specific problem they have when they find you?
- What have they already tried that didn't work?
- What does success look like to them — specifically?
- What are they afraid of getting wrong?
- What language do they use to describe their own problem? (This becomes your copy)
- Where do they spend time online and in person?
- What would make them trust a business enough to pay for it?

WHAT NOBODY TELLS YOU

Most business owners describe their ideal client in terms of who they want to pay them — 'small business owners with \$10K to spend.' That's a budget, not a person. The brands that attract the right clients consistently are the ones that know exactly who that person is, what they're carrying, and what they need to hear. The more specific your ideal client definition, the more specific — and effective — everything your brand says and does becomes.

SECTION 3 — VISUAL IDENTITY: WHAT YOU ACTUALLY NEED

This section covers the visual elements your business needs to look like a real, consistent brand. Not everything a branding agency would build — what you actually need to operate professionally from day one.

Your Logo

Your logo is the most recognized visual element of your brand. It appears on everything — your website, social profiles, business cards, proposals, invoices, packaging, signage, and email signature. It does not need to be complicated. The most recognizable logos in the world are simple. What it needs to do is be clear, scalable, and consistent.

What makes a logo work:

- It's readable at any size — from a business card to a billboard
- It works in black and white, not just in color (test this)
- It doesn't depend on a trend that will look dated in 3 years
- It is distinctive enough to be recognized without the business name next to it (over time)
- It comes in multiple formats: horizontal, stacked, and icon-only versions

Logo versions you need:

- Primary logo — full name and mark together, horizontal layout
- Stacked version — name and mark together, vertical layout for tight spaces
- Icon / mark only — for profile photos, favicons, and small applications

Where to get your logo:

Canva (canva.com)

Free tier has logo templates. Pro plan (~\$15/month) unlocks more assets and brand kit features. Best for: founders who want full control over the design process and have a strong aesthetic sense. Limitation: Canva logos are template-based — you may see similar logos from other businesses.

Looka (looka.com)

AI-powered logo generator. Input your business name, industry, and style preferences and it generates multiple logo options instantly. Pay only for what you use. Logo packages start around \$20. Good for: founders who need something professional quickly without design experience.

Adobe Express (express.adobe.com)

Free AI-powered logo maker from Adobe. Similar to Looka with a cleaner interface. Free tier available. Integrates with Adobe's broader creative suite if you're already in that ecosystem.

99designs (99designs.com)

Connect with professional designers. Contest-based (multiple designers submit concepts, you pick the winner) or direct hire. Logo contests start around \$299. Best for: founders who want professional quality and

can articulate their brand direction clearly.

Fiverr (fiverr.com)

Freelance marketplace with logo designers at every price point (\$20–\$500+). Quality varies significantly — review portfolios carefully, read reviews, and request concepts before committing. Best for: founders with a clear brief who want affordable professional design.

Local or referred designer (your network)

A designer who comes recommended by someone whose work you've seen is almost always a better investment than a random online search. Ask in your network before you browse platforms. Expect to pay \$300–\$1,500+ for a professional logo package from an experienced designer.

WHAT NOBODY TELLS YOU

Do not pay thousands of dollars for a logo before you have paying clients. A clean, well-executed logo from Looka or Canva Pro will serve you well in the early stages. The investment in premium brand identity makes sense when you have revenue, a clear direction, and a client base worth presenting a polished brand to. Start functional. Upgrade when it's earned.

Your Color Palette

Color communicates before words do. People form impressions of a brand in seconds based on color — before they read a single word. Your color palette doesn't need to be elaborate. It needs to be intentional and consistent.

What your color palette needs:

- 1 primary color — your brand's dominant color; appears on everything
- 1–2 secondary colors — support the primary; used for accents, backgrounds, buttons
- 1 neutral — an off-white, cream, or light gray for backgrounds and breathing room
- That's it. 3–4 colors total. More than that creates visual noise, not richness.

What colors generally communicate:

COLOR	COMMUNICATES	COMMON IN
Deep Green	Trust, stability, growth, wealth	Finance, wellness, sustainability
Navy Blue	Authority, confidence, reliability	Legal, corporate, professional services
Burnt Orange / Tan	Energy, warmth, creativity, approachability	Food, lifestyle, creative brands
Black	Luxury, sophistication, power	Fashion, tech, premium brands
White / Off-White	Clarity, simplicity, cleanliness	Healthcare, tech, minimalist brands

Gold / Warm Yellow	Premium, optimism, success	Luxury, financial, celebratory
Sage / Muted Green	Calm, natural, grounded	Wellness, lifestyle, personal brands
Deep Red / Burgundy	Passion, confidence, urgency	Food, entertainment, bold brands

Once you choose your colors, record their HEX codes (the 6-character code like #023A2C). Every platform — Canva, your website builder, your email tool — accepts HEX codes. Using HEX codes means your colors are always exactly right, every time.

BONUS — CONSIDER THIS WHEN YOU'RE READY

If you're not sure where to start with color, try Colors (colors.co) — a free color palette generator. You can lock a color you love and it generates harmonious palettes around it. Adobe Color (color.adobe.com) does the same with more control. Both are free.

Typography — The Two-Font Rule

Typography is the fonts your brand uses. Like color, fonts communicate personality before words convey meaning. A script font says something different than a bold sans-serif. Your font choices should match your brand voice.

You need two fonts:

- Display / Heading font — used for headlines, titles, and large text. This is your brand's most expressive font. Can have more personality.
- Body font — used for paragraphs, descriptions, and small text. Must be highly readable. Simpler and cleaner than your display font.

Font pairings that work:

HEADING FONT	BODY FONT	COMMUNICATES
Fraunces (serif)	Plus Jakarta Sans	Sophisticated, grounded, authoritative
Playfair Display	Lato	Elegant, premium, editorial
Montserrat Bold	Open Sans	Modern, clean, professional
Bebas Neue	Roboto	Bold, strong, direct
Cormorant Garamond	Raleway	Refined, luxury, heritage

DM Serif Display	DM Sans	Contemporary, thoughtful, design-forward
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All fonts listed above are available free on Google Fonts (fonts.google.com). Download them, install them on your computer, and use them in Canva, Google Docs, and your website builder. Consistency means using only these two fonts across everything your brand produces.

WHAT NOBODY TELLS YOU

Using five different fonts across your website, social media, and documents is one of the fastest ways to look unprofessional — even when everything else is well-designed. Pick two. Use them everywhere. Discipline in typography is what separates brands that look put-together from brands that look like they're still figuring it out.

File Formats — The Three You Need

When your logo is designed — whether by you or a professional — you need it saved in the right formats. Using the wrong file format in the wrong place is why logos look blurry on websites or pixelated on printed materials.

FORMAT	WHAT IT IS	USE IT FOR	DO NOT USE FOR
PNG	Image with transparent background	Social media, websites, digital documents, email signatures	Large print materials — it will pixelate if scaled up too much
SVG	Scalable vector — scales to any size without losing quality	Websites, large print, any application where size varies	Older software that doesn't support vector files
PDF	Print-ready, universally openable	Business cards, print materials, any file going to a printer	Social media profile photos
JPG	Compressed image, no transparency	Photos and images that don't need a transparent background	Logos — JPG adds a white background and compresses quality

Minimum you need: PNG (transparent background), SVG, and PDF. If you use Canva, you can export in all three formats. If a designer created your logo, request all three formats before you close out the project.

SECTION 4 — YOUR BRAND VOICE & MESSAGING

If Section 3 is how your brand looks, Section 4 is how it talks. Your messaging is what your business says — consistently — across every platform, every conversation, and every document. Get this right and your marketing writes itself. Get it wrong and your marketing sounds like everyone else's.

Your Tagline

A tagline is a short phrase — typically 3–8 words — that captures what your brand stands for. It lives under your logo, at the top of your website, and anywhere you need a quick snapshot of what you're about. It is not a slogan. It is not a mission statement. It is the single most memorable thing someone takes away from seeing your brand.

WHAT A STRONG TAGLINE DOES

- Says something specific — not 'excellence in service' or 'your success is our mission'
- Communicates a benefit or a position, not just a description
- Is memorable enough to repeat without looking at it
- Works without the business name next to it and still means something

TAGLINE FORMULAS THAT WORK

- The outcome: 'Build More. Worry Less.' — leads with what they get
- The position: 'The Business Education They Didn't Teach You.' — calls out the gap
- The promise: 'Clarity Before the Cost.' — names the value before the transaction
- The difference: 'For the Ones Who Do It For Real.' — speaks directly to who it's for

WHAT NOBODY TELLS YOU

A tagline should take time to develop — it's the most compressed version of everything your brand stands for. Write 20 bad ones before you find the right one. The first five will be generic. The next ten will get closer. The one that sticks will feel obvious once you land on it.

Your Elevator Pitch

Your elevator pitch is the 30-second spoken version of what your business does, who it's for, and why it matters. It's what you say when someone asks 'so what do you do?' at an event, a meeting, or a family dinner. Most people answer that question with their job title — which tells people what you are, not why they should care.

THE FORMULA

- I work with [specific type of person/business]
- Who are dealing with [specific problem or situation]
- I help them [specific outcome or result]
- So that [deeper benefit — what changes in their life or business]

EXAMPLE

- 'I work with first-generation entrepreneurs who are trying to build a business without a roadmap. I help them get legally set up, financially structured, and connected to the right resources — so they stop guessing and start building with real direction.'

WHAT NOBODY TELLS YOU

Practice saying your elevator pitch out loud until it doesn't sound rehearsed. The goal is not to memorize it word-for-word — the goal is to internalize the structure so you can deliver it naturally in any context.

Your Origin Story

Your origin story is why you started this business. Not the polished version — the real one. What problem did you personally face? What did you see that was missing? What made you decide this needed to exist? People connect with stories. They buy from people they trust. Your story is one of the fastest ways to build that trust.

WHAT YOUR ORIGIN STORY MUST DO

- Be honest — not a highlight reel; the struggle is what's relatable
- Connect your personal experience to the problem your client is having right now
- Explain why you — specifically — are positioned to solve it
- End with what you built and who it's for

WHERE YOUR ORIGIN STORY LIVES

- Your About page — the full version
- Your social media bio — the compressed version (2–3 sentences)
- Your pitch deck or proposal — as context for why this business exists
- Networking conversations — as the answer to 'how did you get into this?'

WHAT NOBODY TELLS YOU

Your origin story is not about you — it's about them. The moment your story becomes a brag or a resume, it loses the connection. The most powerful origin stories make the person listening think: 'That's exactly what I'm going through.' That recognition is what builds trust faster than any credential.

Your Key Messages

Key messages are the 3–5 core things your brand consistently communicates across every platform and every audience. They are not slogans — they are the ideas you return to again and again in your content, your conversations, and your marketing.

HOW TO IDENTIFY YOUR KEY MESSAGES

- What do you want people to know about your business that most businesses in your category don't say?
- What does your ideal client need to hear to trust you enough to buy?
- What common misconceptions do you want to correct about your industry?
- What belief would someone need to hold to see the value in what you offer?

EXAMPLE KEY MESSAGES

- You don't need a massive budget to build a legitimate business
- The information that determines your success has always been available — it's just been scattered
- Clarity isn't a luxury — it's the foundation that everything else is built on
- The gap isn't talent or work ethic — it's access to the right information at the right time

WHAT NOBODY TELLS YOU

Key messages become your content strategy. Every social media post, every email, every blog post, every video is a variation of one of your key messages. If you have 5 key messages and post 5 days a week, you have a content strategy — one message per day, infinite ways to say it.

Your Brand Vocabulary

Brand vocabulary is the list of words your business consistently uses and the words it deliberately avoids. It sounds small. It isn't. The words you use communicate your values and your positioning even when no one is consciously paying attention.

BUILD YOUR LIST IN TWO COLUMNS

- Column 1 — Words you use: write down 10–15 words that reflect your brand's voice and values
- Column 2 — Words you avoid: write down 5–10 words or phrases that feel off-brand, generic, or dishonest
- Share this list with anyone who writes for your brand — including AI tools when you use them for content

EXAMPLES

- USE: direct, grounded, real, clarity, structure, build, honest, access, foundation
- AVOID: synergy, journey, empowerment, hustle, crush it, game-changer, authentic (overused), passion

WHAT NOBODY TELLS YOU

If a word or phrase makes you cringe when you hear another business use it, it's probably on your avoid list. Your brand vocabulary is a filter — it keeps everything your business says sounding like it came from the same place.

SECTION 5 — WHERE YOUR BRAND SHOWS UP

Your brand is only as strong as its weakest touchpoint. Every place a potential client or customer encounters your business is an opportunity to reinforce the brand — or to undermine it. These are the touchpoints you must control from day one.

Your Website

Your brand's permanent home base. Everything else directs people here. Your website must reflect your visual brand (colors, fonts, logo), your voice (consistent tone from page to page), and your messaging (positioning statement, tagline, and key messages visible within the first screen).

WHAT IT NEEDS

- Your logo — visible in the header on every page
- Your primary color palette — dominant throughout
- Your tagline or brand statement — on the homepage, above the fold
- Your brand voice — consistent across every page; no generic filler copy
- A professional photo of you (for personal brands and service businesses) — people buy from people; a real photo builds trust faster than stock imagery
- A clear call to action — what do you want someone to do when they land here?

Social Media Profiles

Every social media profile is a brand touchpoint that may be seen before your website. Consistency across platforms is what makes the brand feel established.

WHAT IT NEEDS

- Profile photo: your logo (for business accounts) or a professional headshot (for personal brands) — the same one across all platforms
- Cover image / banner: branded with your colors, tagline, or a clear statement of what you do
- Bio / description: who you help, what you do, and one clear call to action (link in bio)
- Username: as close to your business name as possible — and the same across platforms
- Pinned post or highlight: your best content, an offer, or your origin story

WHAT NOBODY TELLS YOU

An inconsistent social media presence — different profile photos, different usernames, different tones — signals a business that isn't organized. Spend 30 minutes auditing every platform you're on and make them match.

Your Email

Every email your business sends is a brand touchpoint. Most business owners treat email as an afterthought — which means they're sending dozens of unbranded impressions every week.

WHAT IT NEEDS

- Professional email address — yourname@yourdomain.com, not a personal Gmail
- Email signature: your name, title, business name, phone number, website, and logo or brand color accent
- Consistent sign-off: match your brand voice — 'Best,' 'Warmly,' or simply your name works; 'Sent from my iPhone' does not
- Subject lines: if you send regular emails or newsletters, your subject line style should be consistent with your brand voice

Proposals & Invoices

Proposals and invoices are handled documents — they sit in client inboxes, get forwarded to decision makers, and are referenced throughout a project. A branded proposal signals professionalism before the client reads a word.

WHAT IT NEEDS

- Your logo and brand colors on the header and footer
- Consistent font matching your brand typography
- Professional layout — not a plain Word document or generic form
- Your tagline or positioning statement in the footer
- Contact information and website URL

WHAT NOBODY TELLS YOU

A branded proposal closes at a higher rate than a plain document. Not because it's prettier — because it signals that the business is organized, takes itself seriously, and will show up that way for the client too.

Business Cards

Physical business cards still matter in face-to-face networking, trade shows, events, and community settings. Your card is a physical representation of your brand that someone holds in their hand.

WHAT IT NEEDS

- Front: your logo, name, title, and contact information
- Back: your tagline, website, or a QR code linking to your booking page or website

- Paper quality matters — a flimsy card communicates a flimsy brand
- Colors and fonts must match your brand system exactly
- Where to print: Moo.com (premium), Vistaprint (affordable), Canva Print (easy)

Packaging (Product Businesses)

For product businesses, packaging is part of the product experience. It's what the customer photographs. It's what gets shared. It's the physical manifestation of your brand.

WHAT IT NEEDS

- Outer packaging: your logo and brand colors visible
- Insert card: a branded thank-you, instructions, or a next-step prompt
- Labels: if your product has a label, it should match your brand system exactly
- Tape, tissue, ribbon: even your packing materials can be branded
- An unboxing experience doesn't require a big budget — a branded insert card costs pennies

In Person

For service businesses with client meetings, events, or physical locations — how you and your team show up in person is a brand touchpoint.

WHAT IT NEEDS

- Your personal presentation should be consistent with the brand's positioning — a premium brand requires a premium presence
- If you have a physical space: signage, decor, and materials should reflect your brand system
- Branded materials at events: tablecloths, backdrops, display materials, and handouts
- Your team's communication style should match your brand voice — train anyone who represents your brand on how to speak about the business

SECTION 6 — BONUS: THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN YOU'RE READY

Everything in Sections 2–5 is your foundation — the work that must happen before any of this makes sense. This section covers what comes next when the foundation is solid, the brand is consistent, and you're ready to invest in elevating it.

Brand Photography

Stock photos eventually hurt your brand. They signal that your business doesn't have its own identity — it's borrowing someone else's. When you're ready, a professional brand photography session gives you original images that reflect your actual brand: your face, your space, your product, your team.

WHAT TO KNOW

- Plan your session around your brand: colors, settings, and styling that match your visual identity
- Get horizontal and vertical versions of every key shot for different platform formats
- Aim for 30–50 usable images from one session — enough to use consistently for 6–12 months
- Cost: \$300–\$1,500+ depending on photographer and session length
- Find photographers: local referrals, Instagram, or Thumbtack ([thumbtack.com](https://www.thumbtack.com))

BONUS — CONSIDER THIS WHEN YOU'RE READY

A professional headshot alone — even from a single-hour session — changes the perception of a personal brand more than almost any other single investment. If budget is tight, start there.

Brand Video

A 60–90 second founder video on your homepage and social media changes how people experience your brand. Watching someone speak is the fastest way to build trust — faster than any written copy.

WHAT TO KNOW

- A simple founder video: who you are, who you serve, why you started this, what you offer
- Does not need to be produced at film quality — good lighting, clear audio, and confident delivery matter more than production value
- Tools for DIY: a smartphone on a tripod, a ring light (\$30–\$60), and a clean background
- When to invest in professional video: when your revenue can support it and you're ready to use it consistently

BONUS — CONSIDER THIS WHEN YOU'RE READY

More people will watch a 90-second video than will read 900 words of copy about the same topic. If you're comfortable on camera, a brand video is one of the highest-ROI brand investments available. If you're not — start with a Loom walkthrough of your services and build from there.

Brand Guidelines Document

A brand guidelines document (sometimes called a brand style guide) is a reference document that captures every brand decision in one place: logo usage, color codes, fonts, voice examples, and dos and don'ts. It exists so that anyone creating content for your brand — a designer, a social media manager, a VA, an AI tool — can match your brand without asking you.

WHAT TO KNOW

- What it includes: logo files and usage rules, HEX color codes, font names and download links, voice examples ('we say this, not that'), and key messages
- Length: 1–5 pages is sufficient for most small businesses; it doesn't need to be a 40-page PDF
- Tools: Canva has a Brand Kit feature (Pro plan) that stores your logo, colors, and fonts in one place — this is the simplest version of a brand guideline
- When you need it: the moment someone else starts creating content for your brand

Trademarking Your Brand Elements

Once your brand is established — you have paying clients, a consistent identity, and a name worth protecting — consider trademarking your business name, logo, and tagline.

WHAT TO KNOW

- A trademark gives you exclusive federal rights to your brand elements in your industry category
- Filing at USPTO.gov costs \$250–\$350 per class; the process takes 8–12 months
- Trademark protects you from someone else legally using your name in your market
- Do the full name check (Section 1 of the Business Foundation Guide) before trademarking — if someone else already has a confusingly similar trademark, your application will be rejected
- Consider a trademark attorney for anything complex — flat-fee trademark filings start around \$500–\$800 including filing fees

Rebranding — When It Makes Sense vs. When It Doesn't

Rebranding is tempting when business is slow, when you're bored with your look, or when you feel like a change will fix something that isn't really a visual problem.

WHAT TO KNOW

- Rebrand makes sense when: your business has meaningfully pivoted, your target audience has shifted, your name no longer reflects what you do, or your visual identity was built before the brand was clear
- Rebrand does NOT make sense when: you just need more clients, you're bored, a competitor's brand looks better than yours, or you want to feel productive without doing sales work
- The cost of rebranding goes beyond the design fee — updating every platform, document, file, and printed material is significant; calculate the real cost before committing
- If existing clients recognize and trust your current brand, that equity has value — don't spend it without a compelling reason

BONUS — CONSIDER THIS WHEN YOU'RE READY

Rebranding is the most common way founders spend money on the wrong problem. If your brand isn't working, ask whether the brand is actually the issue — or whether the brand is fine and what's missing is sales activity and client acquisition. Most of the time, it's the second one.

Working with a Brand Strategist

A brand strategist is a professional who helps you define and articulate your brand at the strategic level — positioning, messaging, audience, voice — before any design work begins. They are different from a graphic designer, who executes the visual.

WHAT TO KNOW

- What a brand strategist does: facilitates brand foundation work, writes positioning statements, develops messaging frameworks, defines voice and tone, and creates the brief that a designer works from
- When you need one: when your business has real revenue and you want to scale it, when you've done the foundation work yourself and feel like something is still off, or when you're about to invest significantly in marketing and want the strategy right first
- What to expect to pay: \$1,500–\$10,000+ depending on scope and the strategist's experience
- What to look for: case studies from businesses similar to yours, a clear process, and someone who asks more questions than they answer in the first conversation

BONUS — CONSIDER THIS WHEN YOU'RE READY

A brand strategist is not a day-one investment. Do the work in this guide first. You will get more value from a brand strategist when you've already built the foundation, know your ideal client, and have enough client experience to know what's working and what isn't. Until then, this guide gives you everything you need to build a brand that works.

Ready to go deeper?

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