

Multiple, Corporate, Personality Disorder (MCPD)

The scourge of modern marketing

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Introduction

Our customer service is outstanding, we're leaders in innovation, our product quality is exceptional, no one cares like we do…blah, blah, blah, blah. We could be talking about any company, in any market, anywhere in the world. It is a given that most businesses would happily list the above and more when describing what makes them special but what does it really say about them? Absolutely nothing. Does it differentiate them? No.

It's time to sit up and smell the coffee and recognise that in an increasingly commoditised world where a fast-paced start-up could replicate your offer and take a chunk of your market before you've even checked the morning news, the only real, permanent differentiator is you.

When we talk about 'you' in relation to a brand or business we're talking about personality.

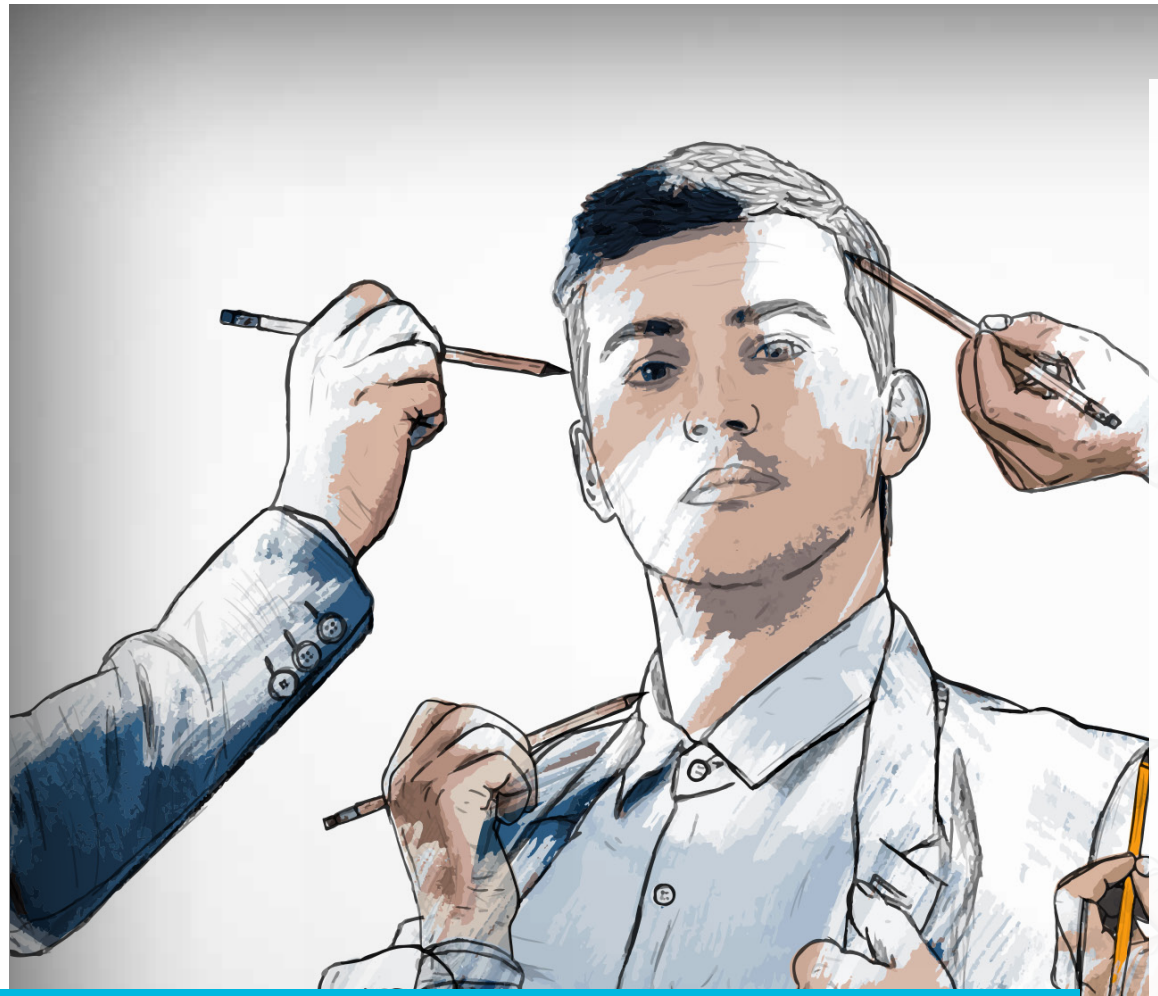
But interestingly, knowing what your personality is and how you bring this to life is a challenge many businesses just can't rise to. You may have determined what your personality is but in every day communication you've been stricken down by Multiple, Corporate, Personality Disorder (MCPD).

For some reason your website, Twitter, LinkedIn, online ads and DM look and sound great but they could belong to a number of different companies and you're not sure which one of them is you. And every time you launch a new marketing campaign with an award-winning creative proposition 'you' lose yourself a little more as deep down you're not sure how it fits with the bigger picture.

In an age when authenticity, trust and, ultimately, loyalty are priceless, clarity on what 'you' means is essential.

This whitepaper explores how you determine your distinctive and enduring personality, avoid MCPD and bring to life who 'you' really are to deliver communications that means something to your audiences.





Why does personality count?

Personality is defined as 'the combination of characteristics or qualities that form an individual's distinctive character'. Relationships with brands today, more than ever, are People to People orientated and rightly so. What are brands and businesses if not collectives of people?

We're programmed to interact with and respond to human beings so let's get back to being human, to focusing on transparency and authenticity and looking and assessing corporate personality in the same way we would an individual's character.

Ask yourself the question, if your business was a person what type of person would they be? What are the characteristics and qualities that would define you? What is it you would like about them? What is it your customers and staff would like about them?

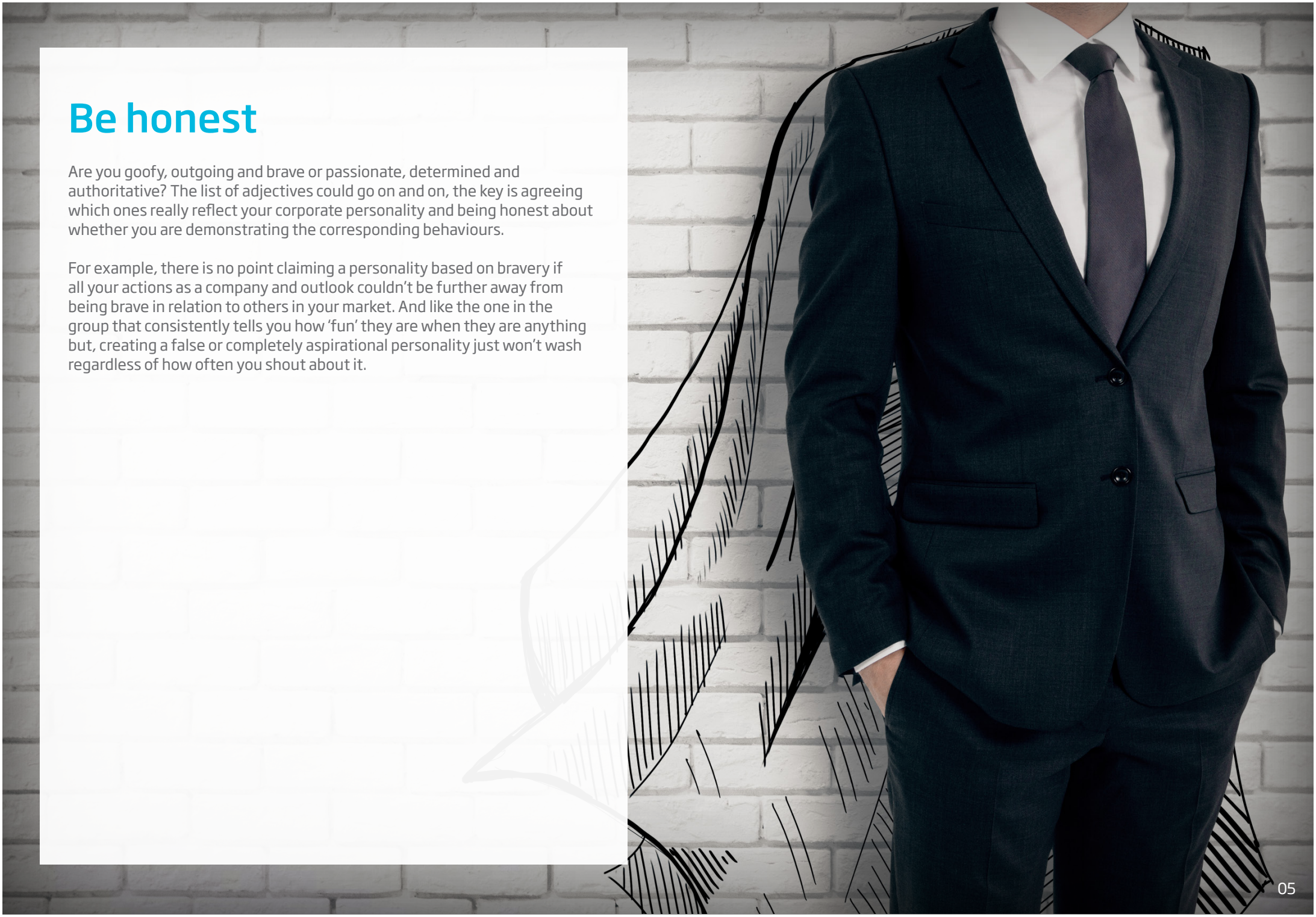
"People don't do business with logos, colours, Twitter or Facebook...they do business with PEOPLE."

Erika Napoletano

Be honest

Are you goofy, outgoing and brave or passionate, determined and authoritative? The list of adjectives could go on and on, the key is agreeing which ones really reflect your corporate personality and being honest about whether you are demonstrating the corresponding behaviours.

For example, there is no point claiming a personality based on bravery if all your actions as a company and outlook couldn't be further away from being brave in relation to others in your market. And like the one in the group that consistently tells you how 'fun' they are when they are anything but, creating a false or completely aspirational personality just won't wash regardless of how often you shout about it.



The ‘why’ of what you do

A big part of the exploration and defining of personality is the ‘why’ of what you do. Yes you are in business to make money, aren’t we all? But there is, and should be, a bigger purpose and this is massively important for engaged employees (now and in the future), customers and stakeholders. What is your core ‘reason for being’ as a business’?

Research has shown that purposeful organisations outperform their Competitors. As George Serafeim, Associate Professor of Business at Harvard Business School, states “Purpose can be a motivator for employees, a way to differentiate yourself from competitors, and a strategic asset. But only when it’s authentic.”

In short, personality is not just who you are but how you behave and what you believe in. It is intuitively you and sets the framework for the behaviour and language you, and everyone in your company, adopts to tell the story about yourself.



“People want to do well and do good. They want to understand how they’re making a difference in the world. Things change all the time, but your organisation’s purpose transcends any individual product or service.”

Mark Weinberger, EY



Defining your corporate personality

In an owner-managed business or one that has the founder involved day-to-day, corporate personality will be a mixture of their own personality plus what they think the company personality should be. This is powerful stuff and it's not so tough to make that personality shine through in everything you do, especially external comms.

But as the company grows, the leadership team expands, acquisitions unfold, propositions evolve and markets change, personality can get watered down. And as much as you will do your best to instil the corporate personality, philosophies and messages, it is often the case that the marketing falls foul. It's easy to see why personality can get lost along the way by brands and businesses that should know better.

An enduring road map

To my knowledge, the role of Director of Personality is a rare beast (please email me if you have this role, I'd love to hear from you) so more often than not it falls to marketing to define, encourage and police corporate personality. But how do you define your corporate personality to end up with a definition that works beyond paper? A definition that people can embrace and live daily and serves as a powerful relationship device, inside and outside the business. Here's a starter for ten to help you on this journey:

- List the things that you do now that you believe are an expression of your corporate personality
- Compile a list of conflicting adjectives – brave and safe; edgy and straight; rigid and flexible – and select those that you think reflect your corporate personality from these pairings
- I am sure you have done this many times before but it works: change the context. If you were a celebrity who would you be? If you were a restaurant, what would be special about you and why would people have a great dining experience? Sport, drink, animal…the possibilities for context change are endless but it will tell you a lot about your perceived personality traits
- Ask yourself not just who you are now but also who you need/want to be? Identifying aspirational personality traits can provide direction and help to set goals for positive behaviour change in the business, but be realistic'
- Don't forget to reference your values – how do you feel about these in relation to the outcomes of the above exercises? Are people living them? If you get stuck your values may just not be right for the business you are today compared to when they were set

You should now have a pretty clear idea of who you are and who you are not, what you will do and what you won't do, what you will always be and what you will never be. Defining this will ensure everyone has a clear framework of your organisation's personality, an enduring road map for how you speak and act regardless of the changing world around you.



“Instead of trying to present a Teflon smooth surface project a three-dimensional personality, inconsistencies and all. Brands can afford to be inconsistent as long as they don’t abandon their defining attributes.”

Marty Neumeier, The Brand Gap

Avoiding MCPD

There isn't just one way of presenting your personality to the outside world, there are thousands. And when it comes to marketing channels the list is almost as long. You will have done your due diligence to know which channels are right for your audiences; the key is ensuring you're not sending mixed messages but staying true to your distinctive personality and at the same time respectful of the channel selected.

For example, the online world offers an endless opportunity to let your personality shine because you shouldn't ABS (Always Be Selling). The important factor is recognising it's a two-way conversation and being selective based on the resource this takes up. In a recent survey, 83% of consumers said they wanted brands to provide feedback*, so you need to be part of the conversation not just monitoring it. Be dynamic, reactive, responsive and engaging, live your personality not just in what you say but how you say it through word, video, animation, infographics and brilliant photography. The more engaging or shareable the better.

MCPD is remedied when everyone is behind a single corporate story with a defined personality at its heart. And this cannot be done without the leadership team who need to work with marketing to ensure consistency and demonstrate commitment by showing behaviours that reflect your corporate personality. You are what you do, not what you say you'll do. If the leadership aren't on board, MCPD will be rife regardless of the commitment from the rest of the business.

* Sprout Social Index, Q2 2017

"Let your originality – your specialness, your brand personality – come through in your online content."

Anne Handley and CC Chapman, Authors of Content Rules



“The majority of consumers want brands to be honest, helpful and friendly but half would unfollow a brand that annoyed them on social and nearly a quarter would walk away vowing to never buy from them again.”

Sprout Social Index Q2 2017



Structure is everything

It is likely you will have different people, agencies or teams managing your different channels either now or in the future. This is where your definition of your corporate personality is invaluable. I am a massive believer in creative freedom. You pay people to do a job in marketing so don't restrict their skills, thinking or creativity; however, providing structure will ensure style, tone, voice, attitude and approach are consistent regardless of the channel. And don't go for the cheapest, if you are using external resource go for a company that will invest time getting to know 'you' and understanding your personality. This will ensure your presence online and offline is authentic, consistent and undeniably you.

Some may say the MCPD could be a good thing – different personalities for different channels – but here comes the rub, we don't live in a one channel world. Say your customer is on your website, then checks out your Twitter feeds, drops into Facebook and due to smart connected advertising sees a PPC ad pop up, if the personality isn't aligned it is likely they'll walk away indifferent at best and confused at worst.

Visual uniformity should also not be underestimated. Consumers are bombarded daily by a mass of images but by ensuring brand familiarity through colours and images recognition will be improved and hence engagement. Ensuring your brand reflects and works with your definition of corporate personality is a must.

Summary

If you invested time in defining your distinctive and enduring corporate personality and have been honest about the inherent attributes that will not only help you compete but be critical for differentiation, you can craft a corporate story that will act as the foundation for all internal and external comms.

This corporate story is essential in an increasingly complex world of marketing where more channels are very likely to mean more specialists, sub-contractors and external resource.

It needn't be chapter and verse outlining every aspects of what you do and why but succinct, engaging and most importantly usable. Try and capture:

- A summary of your personality
- 'Why' you are in business
- The value you bring to your customers
- Behaviours that reflect who you are and examples of success as a result
- The cultural tone and voice of your business

If you do this right it can be woven into everything – sales pitches, internal comms, marketing as well as support frontline conversations.

So, how do you know when it's working? When it's not the leadership or marketing team that challenges the business when personality is not coming through or you've gone off track but the newest recruit, your external agency or even your customer who says hang on, that's just not the us/you we love.



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