

# How to ensure consistent brand experience

 **B2B Marketing**  
Insight · Development · Training · Events





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# Introduction

## What makes a decision-maker loyal to a brand?

A survey carried out last year found the key factor – more important than a brand’s authenticity, relevance and transparency combined – was brand consistency.

If they enjoyed it, customers will want reassurance they’ll get the same experience every time they interact with your brand.

That’s why, in a separate study carried out by Freeman, more than a quarter of B2B CMOs are setting aside half of their marketing budget for brand experience.

But if delivering a great brand experience in itself is difficult – it’s even harder to do it every single time, when that’s dependent on everyone from the receptionist to the CEO giving the right impression.

This guide will show why brand experience is crucial to B2B, and:

- › What brand experience is – and why it’s not just experiential marketing.
- › The close relationship it has with customer experience.
- › Why it’s important in B2B, and what benefits it can deliver.
- › How to develop brand experience in your organization.
- › Ensure your experience is consistent across touchpoints.
- › How to measure its success.

*“The right brand experiences have the power to evolve brands, build relationships and inspire action.”*

Chris Cavanaugh, CMO, Freeman

# Section 1

## 1.1 What is brand experience?

If brand is much more than just a logo or slogan, then brand experience is so much more than that. The experience encompasses sensations, feelings, thoughts and behavioral responses that are triggered by a brand's design, identity, packaging, communications and environment. The objective of the experience is to create a lasting and meaningful relationship between the brand and the individual.

Experience is closely related to 'brand promise' – the statement of what customers can expect when dealing with your brand. Customers will anticipate the experience will deliver on the promise – and if it doesn't, that's a real problem.

## 1.2 But brand experience is not the same as experiential marketing

If you search online for brand experience, you'll find lots of information about how to deliver spectacular, crowd-pleasing events, pop-ups or exhibitions. While these type of events can certainly form part of a brand experience, this is experiential marketing, and experience isn't limited to these types of activity. In fact, according to Freeman's study, the top three tactics marketers are using to drive experience among customers are:

- › Website (58%)
- › Social media (57%)
- › Email (51%)

## 1.3 What's the difference between brand experience and customer experience?

The two are closely related, and must be aligned, but there is a subtle difference. The brand experience is what the company, most likely the marketers, design to develop the desired brand image. The customer experience is the test of whether you've been successful with that or not. Both have the objective of building relationships to drive value.



*“All brand experiences are inherently customer experiences, and all customer experiences result in a brand experience by default.”*



## 1.4 Why is brand experience important in B2B?

Experience is not just a consumer marketing phenomenon – it's equally as important in B2B.

"B2C is where expectations about experience are being set and B2B is not immune to those expectations," says Kieron McCann, director of marketing and strategy at Cognifide. "If I can have a very personalized experience from a product that billions of people use, as a B2B customer why can I not have that experience from someone I work with at a much smaller scale?"

Research carried out by McKinsey identified B2B customers use an average of six different interaction channels during their purchase decision, and almost two-thirds – 65% – leave frustrated by an inconsistent experience.

Each of these touchpoints the prospect or customer interacts with will contribute to their brand experience. "It's now no longer just about using the product," McCann adds. "It's about how the product is experienced, and the entire journey from beginning to end. Today the experience is the product."

## 1.5 What are the benefits a consistent brand experience brings?

Having a strong, consistent brand experience should lead to:

- › Increased trust and familiarity in the brand.
- › A more consistent message to prospects and customers.
- › Improved differentiation in the marketplace.
- › Better relationships and improved brand advocacy.
- › Ultimately, more sales and increased revenue.

It's also worth considering the potential impact of not acting. As Helen Lancaster, head of marketing NE at Arkadin, says: "If you can't present a unified brand to customers, what does that say about you, your products and your services?"

***"Today the experience is the product"***

Kieron McCann, director of marketing and strategy, Cognifide

# Section 2



## 2.1 Building your brand experience

You can't have a brand experience if you don't first understand what your brand is and what you stand for.

Your brand is underpinned by three components, which put together form the **brand vision**. The vision sets out a clear direction for the brand.

- › **Brand values:** The shared values the company adheres to that sit behind the brand.
- › **Brand future:** There needs to be a vision about what will happen to the brand in its future.
- › **Brand purpose:** What is the brand's ambition and what does it stand for?

Having set out the vision for your brand, there are three more vital elements to come up with. Can you answer the following questions?

**What's your unique offering, and who is it for?** This is your 'brand promise', the statement of what customers can expect from dealing with your brand.

**How will you deliver your brand promise?** This is the brand performance, the execution element.

**How will you communicate the brand promise?** This is the brand positioning, the element that differentiates your brand from the competition in the marketplace.

A mission statement, which defines the company's goals for owners, employees and its customers. A good test of a mission statement is does it differentiate your business from the competition?

With all these in place, you should have a good idea of your brand personality. There are five main types: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. Understanding this personality will influence the form your brand experience will take.

Few B2B organizations are brand-led – the majority are product or service-focused – so trying to build a brand experience from a standing start may be a significant challenge.

Developing a 'brand charter' – which sets out this vision, and what it means for everyone in the organization – can be an effective way of getting the message across and developing a shared sense of purpose. The charter should include all of the above information, and detail how all these elements interact with each part of the business.

## 2.2 Identify your customer touchpoints

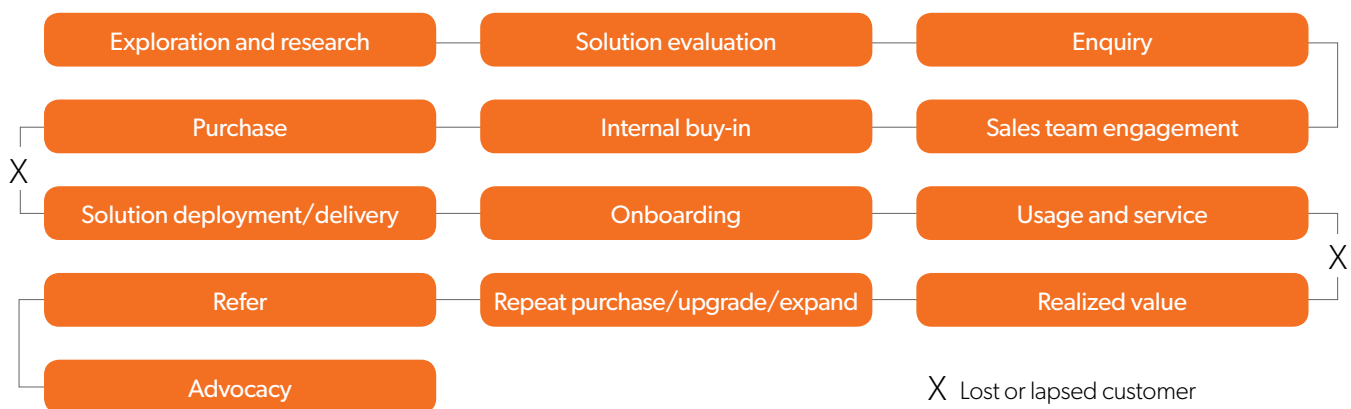
The customer journey is the route by which an individual finds your brand/ product/service, engages with you, chooses you, enters into business with you, and interacts with you as a customer.

These journeys may differ by customer segment, and you may have more than one customer journey to identify. Ideally, you'll be focusing on your key customer segments, those with the highest:

- › Spend
- › Lifetime value (LTV)
- › Retention rate.

At each stage of the customer journey, there will be interaction with the brand which will have an impact on the brand experience. Mapping the customer journey will highlight where brand interactions have the most impact – and where the brand experience is most likely to fall down.

Map out each customer journey, stage-by-stage, for each of your key customer segments, identifying each pivotal point. The basis of the journey is likely to look something like this template (see the diagram below).



**Yasushi Kasume, brand leader at Electrolux, Philips and Ikea, on three key actions to create a brand experience.**

1. **Orchestrate the message.** Keep repeating the message of your brand – consistently and frequently – to minimize cognitive strain. Make it so familiar to audiences that they recognize it immediately.
2. **Select and apply the most effective touchpoints.** Find the best approach for your targeted audience, one that will deliver your message in the most cost-effective manner.
3. **Create a meaningful, relevant and distinctive touchpoint execution.** Make the most of every product's concept, appearance and user-interaction to grab the audience's attention and fully communicate the message of your brand.



## 2.3 Ensuring internal alignment

The most crucial aspect of delivering a consistent brand experience is making sure everyone in the organization is aligned to the brand vision and promise. Each employee needs to become an advocate for the brand.

Even if your organization isn't brand-led, the importance of delivering a consistent brand experience needs to be driven from the top of the business. Without senior management support, any attempt to drive a consistent brand experience will fall flat on its face. Brand consistency is as much driven by culture as it is by policy and process.

Getting the remainder of the organization on board is equally as important, as they'll be delivering much of the brand experience on a daily basis. Like any corporate initiative, marketing will need to make the following expectations and guidelines as straightforward as possible to engender maximum compliance.

*“The place to start is that everyone associated with the business understands the fundamental brand mission and values of the company. This shouldn't just be treated as corporate bullshit. Every single member of staff, not just sales and marketing – is a brand ambassador”*

Jens Lundgaard, founder and CEO, Brandworkz

**Chris King, global marketing director at Transitions Optical, three tips to drive consistency.**

1. **Educate** every individual, colleague and third-party so they are aligned to the brand. When you give people the tools, you enable them to deliver the same brand consistently.
2. **Enable** your partners and employees to become your best brand ambassadors. Continuously give them a compelling reason to engage with your brand.
3. **Enforce** compliance across your communications. It is possible to do so, without making it cumbersome. Make it easy for the right people to use the right resources and they'll use them at the right time.



## 2.4 Driving consistency internally

There are three crucial areas that drive brand consistency from an internal perspective:

- › **Look/feel**
- › **Language**
- › **Behavior.**

Look and feel, and language can be outlined in a set of brand guidelines – a formal document that covers the different elements (see section x.x).

Behavior could be covered by employee standards documents or dress codes, for example, but ultimately is a cultural issue. Driving employees to be brand advocates requires them to be bought into a brand they believe in.

### 2.4.1 What should be included in your brand guidelines?

A brand guidelines document should act as a bible for your employees to quickly be able to consult and use the right choice. But remember, brand guidelines will be pointless if they're not underpinned by a supportive culture.

#### Brand story

This will include your brand vision, mission statement, brand promise, performance and positioning (see section x.x).

#### Brand personality and core values

What adjectives would you use to describe your brand?

Sophisticated? Quirky? Traditional? Try to explain the personality traits of your brand. Your core values are what your brand stands for. What's the differentiation in the marketplace?

#### Tone of voice

Your tone of voice is how you intend to speak to your audience, and should be informed by their expectations. How do they talk, and how do they like to be spoken to? If your brand personality had a voice, what would it sound like? A house style guide, explaining this sort of language can also be an advantage if your organization has one.

#### Visual identity

Your brand's visual identity is made up of the logo, colors and typography.

Use of the logo should include format, sizes, clear space/exclusions zones, positioning, and where to use variations (if any).

Colors should explain the different palettes used, including CMYK, RGB and Hex codes, alongside when they should be used.

Typography should explain the different fonts, along with their appropriate weights.

In addition to including examples of the right way to use all these elements, it's equally important to include examples of the wrong use. To visualize these mistakes is a more powerful and effective way to reinforce your message.

You may decide you want your brand guidelines to go further, with examples of business cards, email signatures, letterheads, etc. But this should be balanced.

## 2.4.2 Examples for inspiration

When developing and designing your brand guidelines, you may wish to take inspiration from other organizations. Many brands make their guidelines available online (to share with employees, partners or third-parties), so here is a selection.

### **Cisco Interactive Brand Book**

[https://www.cisco.com/c/m/en\\_us/about/brand-center/copyright-use/copyright-material-guidelines/interactive-brand-book.html#5](https://www.cisco.com/c/m/en_us/about/brand-center/copyright-use/copyright-material-guidelines/interactive-brand-book.html#5)

### **LinkedIn Brand Resources**

<https://brand.linkedin.com/>

### **Skype Brand Book**

[https://download.skype.com/share/blogskin/press/skype\\_brandbook.pdf](https://download.skype.com/share/blogskin/press/skype_brandbook.pdf)

### **MailChimp Content Style Guide**

<https://styleguide.mailchimp.com/>

**British Rail Corporate Identity Manual** (first published in 1969, demonstrating brand experience is not a new phenomenon!)

<http://www.doublearrow.co.uk/manual.htm>

**Santa Claus** (UK agency Quiet Room published this brand guideline spoof in 2013 – just remember: “Don’t use the over-familiar and paternalistic ‘Father Christmas’, if only because it anagrams to ‘the rich Mr Fat-Ass’.”) [http://www.quietroom.co.uk/santa\\_brandbook/](http://www.quietroom.co.uk/santa_brandbook/)

### 2.4.3 Assets and resources

Giving employees and partners quick and easy access to the appropriate assets and resources they need is a key factor in ensuring consistency. If they can't find the up-to-date logo or specific image, they're more likely to 'improvise' and go off brand.

One solution to this is to establish an online hub, as Transitions Optical has done. Internal teams, and agencies, as well as its supplier and downstream customers can access not only the up-to-date branding, but guidelines and best practice, and even product knowledge sales skills. Since launching it has created 14 customized hubs for its partners, which also contain co-branded content they can access.

### 2.4.4 Brand management and digital asset management technology

If you don't have the internal resources to develop your own brand hub, there are many providers of brand management or digital asset management software that can provide a similar function.

Digital asset management (DAM) software has been around since businesses started scanning photos and needed somewhere to store them. As digital imagery boomed, so did the need to manage these assets in a central location. When once these were stored on site, they now mostly exist in the cloud. Traditionally DAMs couldn't store audio and video, but most major systems do now offer this facility – along with brand guidelines and other assets – and many that started off as DAMs are now described as brand management software.

### Digital asset management leaders

According to tech peer-review website G2 Crowd, leaders in the DAM tech sphere include:



For a full rundown of providers in this space, visit <https://www.g2crowd.com/categories/digital-asset-management?segment=all>



## 2.5 Measuring brand experience

We've already referred to the benefits of a consistently delivered brand experience, with greater sales and revenue the ultimate measure of success.

As with any project, KPIs based on objectives should have been established up front.

These could include:

- › Customer acquisition
- › Retention
- › Improved conversion rate
- › Shorter time-to-sale
- › Higher sales.

As ever, setting out what you intend to measure at the start of the initiative, rather than trying to bolt it on after, is vital.

You'll need to measure the variables of the work you've done to identify the touchpoints on the customer journey and their contribution to the overall brand experience. One of the primary measures of brand experience is to analyze the customer journey, to discover where (and why) people are dropping out of the process.

Some CX metrics can also help you measure brand experience. Tools such as sentiment analysis or traditional engagement metrics will help you track whether your efforts to drive consistency are working effectively.

### Experience squared

Andy Frawley, author of *Igniting customer connections*, believes business should be measuring what he terms 'ROE<sup>2</sup>' – that is 'Return on experience x engagement'. His belief is the experience of the customer drives the engagement.

**"There's a point at which a customer's positive or negative experience is so strong that it can transcend the rational aspects of a brand (e.g. quality, price, service)," he says. "That's why creating and guiding the experience is so important. Experience creates emotion, emotion fuels engagement and both together impact brand and business outcomes."**

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