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Building a brand: A guide for builders

A marketing how-to for small
and medium-sized businesses
in the construction industry

EXPLORE WHAT YOUR COMPANY DOES BEST



Hawksmoor Construction Ltd

You'll already know that marketing your business is essential if you want to bring in new clients. But knowing where to start can be daunting, and marketing can often take a back seat while you get on with the day-to-day business of running a construction company.

In this guide, we set out the building blocks you need to make marketing easy and achievable. Whether you invest in the services of a marketing professional, or go it alone, you'll need to set some guidelines for your brand.

Why do builders need a brand?

Here's why having a brand identity is a useful tool for your business:

- + It creates an emotional connection with your clients;
- + It nurtures brand loyalty and encourages repeat business;
- + It helps you stand out against competitors;
- + It communicates what you can do for your clients; and
- + It allows you to promote your business effectively.

Getting started

Marketers will be able to help you develop a whole suite of branding elements, from carefully crafted messaging down to the colour of your website buttons. But if you're just starting out, building a brand is still achievable without investing in a marketing agency or freelancer. The principles come down to this:

- + Know what you do.
- + Understand your values.
- + Be ready to explain the benefits of your business in simple, engaging terms.
- + Define how your business should look and sound.

It helps to have these written down as a set of brand guidelines. They don't have to be very detailed to begin with (you can always build on them) but once you have a clear idea what your business stands for and how you want your brand to look, you can use the guidelines to inform the design of your website or social media pages.

The idea is that you will be able to hand your brand guidelines to a designer to create your media ads and communicate your brand values in a way that is clear and consistent in style.

Here's how to write your brand guidelines:



Jot down a few sentences about what your company does best and where you want it to go in the next few years. Down the line, you may want to build on this to produce a larger set of guidelines, but it's not essential.

Take inspiration from big brands, from both the construction industry and the wider world – some companies spend thousands on distilling the essence of their brand into carefully crafted vision and mission statements. You can learn from that. Here are some examples of mission statements from other organisations:

- + **Wilmott Dixon Holdings:** Our purpose is to deliver brilliant buildings, transform lives, strengthen communities and enhance the environment so our world is fit for future generations.
- + **Kier:** To sustainably deliver infrastructure which is vital to the UK.
- + **Tesla:** To accelerate the world's transition to renewable energy.

Example for a small or medium-sized (SME) building company based in Bradford: We build beautiful, energy efficient extensions that work for busy lives. It's our three-year goal to be the go-to builder for extensions and renovations in Bradford.



Set your brand values

Choose 4-6 words that define what your business stands for. These values should run through everything you do and embody the spirit of your brand. You should only use these words within your company or with people who do work for you (they wouldn't be emblazoned across your advertising, for example) but their meaning permeates all of your communications with clients – from your posts on social media to your brand's visual identity.

Examples:

- + **Balfour Beatty PLC:**
Integrity, Teamwork, Excellence, Respect
- + **ISG UK:**
Dream smart, Speak frankly,
Always care, Never stop learning
- + **Manchester United:**
United, Non-discriminatory, Innovative,
Team-orientated, Excelling, Determined

Get a logo and brand assets

There's a school of thought that says a logo shouldn't show what you do. Nike or Apple's logos aren't an iPhone or a pair of trainers, for example. However, the look of your brand should tell a story in an instant.

Your logo comes out of all the difficult conversations you've just had with yourself about what your business is all about. Unless you have logo design experience, it's worth getting a professional to do this for you. Commissioning a local designer means you'll be able to speak to them directly. Other options include paying a designer online. Be wary of cheaper options on websites like Fiverr – there will be limited contact with the designer and ultimately, you can't be sure the elements of your logo are unique to you.

Walk your designer through the brand elements you already have in place such as your vision and mission to help them gain an understanding of what you're all about. As a guide, here's what to ask for:

- + **Main logo and at least one alternative** – For example if your logo is long and thin (such as a landscape logo), do you have an alternative portrait version to use where space is tight. You should ask for two main file types of these:
 - + **Vector images** – in EPS or AI format. This will be infinitely scalable and won't pixelate if you re-size it. These file formats can be shared with designers or printers.
 - + **JPEG or PNG on a transparent background** – in high resolution sizes so they can be re-sized without too much pixelation.
- + **Colour palette** – Limiting the colours you use builds your visual identity and ensures your brand isn't too confusing or cluttered. Aim for 2-5 colours maximum and ensure the colours complement each other. Your designer will be able to suggest any restrictions for their use too – like where to use them. For example, are your website buttons all orange for instance, are blue and yellow only used on documents for developer clients? Your designer may also give you the percentage tints and shades to use if you want a paler or darker version of your brand colours in any designs.
- + **Fonts** – It's usual to have one or two font styles to use in any designs you might produce for your business. This can include font variations such as a lighter or bolder version in the same family of font, and an alternative font to use when your main one isn't available (for example, on your website or in emails).

- + **Brand assets** – Think about whether you need a supporting suite of illustrations or icons to use on your website and marketing materials.
- + **Social media assets** – Don't forget to think about whether you'll need cover images for the top of your Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn profiles, and whether you might need any additional assets like Post or Story templates for your social media posts.
- + **Favicon** – The little image that appears in browser tabs on your website.

Find your reasons to believe

Now you know a bit more about your company, how are you going to sell it to your clients? Your 'reasons to believe' are simply the benefits of using your company. They are how you deliver on your brand values and why your clients should choose you over your competitors.

These might include an award you have received, a star rating for a particular service, your promise on quality, or the seal of approval from a respected trade organisation (like membership of the Federation of Master Builders). Keep it to just a handful – it will create a more compelling story for your brand.

Here's are some examples for a fictional SME builder based in Cardiff:

-  Award winning extensions
-  Rated 9/10 by Cardiff's Best Trades website
-  Member of the Federation of Master Builders
-  10 All work guaranteed for 10 years

Feature these messages prominently on your website, in all forms of advertising and on print collateral, like leaflets.

Think about your tone of voice

How you talk to your clients is important and consistency is key. So set a tone of voice for your brand. What's your brand personality? Think about the services you offer, and what type of customer you are trying to attract. You probably already have a good feel for what sounds right for your company – so document those thoughts in your brand guidelines. Here are some pointers:

- + Think about how your brand would sound in conversation. For example, is it chatty, friendly, playful, can-do, cool, aspirational?
- + Do you refer to yourselves in the first person ('We're a team of loft conversion specialists') or third person ('MyBrand Ltd are a team of loft conversion specialists')?
- + Do you use technical language, or explain things in laypersons terms? This may depend on your client base.
- + It sometimes helps to define what you are not. E.g: 'We're plain-speaking and never stuffy' or 'We're open and helpful but never over-familiar'.

You will use this tone of voice across all communications, including (but not limited to) advertising, social media, all customer communications and your website.



HELP CLIENTS VISUALISE LIVING IN THEIR FINISHED SPACE



Decide what type of images to use

Including photos of your work on your company's website, social media or advertising can help potential clients to get a better feel for your business. Create a coherent look and be choosy about the type of images you want to use, as well as which types you want to avoid. Image ideas to consider:

- + **Case studies of your projects** – the finished rooms and exteriors, 'before and after' shots etc.
- + **Close-ups** of interesting features or 'lifestyle magazine' style shots.
- + **Video** – shot on smartphone for use on social media or professionally filmed for your website.
- + **Group shots of your team** – posed shots, working on site or consulting with clients.
- + **Headshots of your management team** – for use in company bios on your website or for PR.

Whatever you choose, focus on good quality images. If you're working with a limited budget, you can still achieve good results with your mobile phone if you're confident with your phone settings and composition. These can lend authenticity – which can be great for use on social media. However, if you can set aside budget for a professional photographer to take photos of completed projects, it can give your website or advertising a more polished and professional look.

Using stock images from royalty-free online libraries like **Pexels** or **Unsplash** can be useful if you need to find a generic photo of some architectural plans, for instance. However, photos of finished projects should be avoided – as it could be misleading to show work that isn't your own. Also be aware that over-use of stock imagery can come across as inauthentic (for example, avoid using them on social media where user-generated content is key). If you do use them, remember to check whether they're OK for commercial use.

How to use your brand guidelines

Whether they're stored in a Word document or a professionally designed PDF, you should have a useful document to pass on to anyone who helps to market your company. Be that a designer, a social media manager, a marketing expert, or the people who produce your branded workwear.

It's also a useful resource to be shared within your company too. If you have employees, take time to walk them through the thinking behind your new branding. They're likely to be interested in where you're taking the company and hopefully, they'll be inspired to live and breathe your brand values when they're at work – in how they conduct themselves and communicate with clients.

Get support for your business

With a clearly defined brand, you're now ready to fully establish your company's presence in the construction industry. For guidance on how to market your brand effectively, take a look at our guides to social media and building a website.

Don't forget, if you're a member of the Federation of Master Builders, you can access other useful resources to promote your business, including TrustMark registration, FMB marketing materials and special offers on a range of useful products and resources like website and PR agencies. You can also save time and money by accessing expert business advice, helplines, contract templates and online learning.

If you're not already a member of the FMB, call us on **0330 333 7777** to apply today, or visit **www.fmb.org.uk** to find out more.



About the FMB

The Federation of Master Builders (FMB) is the largest trade association in the UK construction industry representing thousands of firms in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Established in 1941 to protect the interests of small and medium-sized (SME) construction firms, the FMB is independent and nonprofit making, lobbying for members' interests at both the local and national level.

The FMB is a source of knowledge, professional advice and support for its members, providing a range of modern and relevant services to help them succeed. The FMB is committed to raising quality in the construction industry and offers a free service to consumers called 'Find a Builder'.

For further information about the FMB, visit www.fmb.org.uk

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