

Creative intelligence for
startups and scaleups

A photograph of a woman with a shaved head and glasses, wearing a dark top, pointing her right hand towards a large screen in a modern office. Other people are visible in the background, some sitting at desks with laptops. The image has a warm, orange-red color overlay.

Brave branding for startups

Stand up. Stand out

SIM7
Creative Agency

Branding 101 for startups

What do you want for your fledgling brand? No, don't tell us, let us hazard a guess.

You're thinking you want to be different. You're desperate to stand apart from the competition, to create a buzz and to capture the attention of prospective customers or clients. Are we right?

Because you see, that's what most business owners tell us. Whether they are at the start of their brand's journey, or they're preparing for a new phase of growth.

Brand
/Insight
/Advice
/Inspiration
/Identity
/Strategy
Ignition

What's more surprising is that those words are seldom backed by a commitment to the cause. When it comes to, say, selecting a new brand identity from three different creative routes, many business owners tend to opt for the slightly safer option. Can we blame them? Not really. Being different in your marketplace can be lonely. It's uncomfortable and edgy and it takes sustained effort and confidence to pull off.

It's why fruit juice labels look the same, why every perfume ad reeks of unoriginality and why tech companies all look and sound like... well...tech companies.

Scratch that. Not 'all'. Almost all.

Want to rocket your startup into superstardom?

**Make. Brave.
Branding. Decisions.**

Breakthrough brands

Which brands can you think of that seem at odds with their industry? They are the ones that look, sound or feel different to the norm. Not so out there that you can't trust them, but just left enough of centre that they make you look twice. When Innocent launched their range of smoothies and juices, they could have easily opted for an illustration of sun-drenched (yet dewy) citrus fruit. They didn't!

Similarly, humour was out of bounds for estate agents before Purple Bricks came along and changed the goalposts. And when Tyrrells started out, crisp packet design was all about the ingredients and not, *definitely not*, quirky vintage photography. So, what did they do?

You can bet that the bosses of all these companies were put on the back foot by these concepts when they were first floated by their creative teams.

“So let me get this straight: we aren't going to have a picture of a salt cellar on our bags of salted crisps, but we are going to have three Victorian women cartwheeling on a beach?!”

As we say, different is not necessarily a comfortable place to be. But the audacity and bravery of this single branding decision helped create a company that was sold 14 years later for £300 million.

Whew!

Stratospheric success

Of course, Tyrrells' rapid rise through the annals of crisp history (crisptory?) wasn't solely down to their penchant for putting peculiar portraits on their packets. But that is almost certainly what got them noticed.

That sort of stratospheric success is what most startups (and established businesses come to that) crave. After all, market leadership is where it's at. But to achieve it takes brave, bold, creative branding. Right from the get-go if you've got it in you.

As you'll have almost certainly recognised by now, brands need to work harder than ever before if they are to even stand still. It should be no surprise then that middle-of-the-road marketing = middle-of-the-road results.

Cutting through the chaos

Today's consumers are bombarded with messaging, marketing and conversations. They've developed an ability to filter out brain-jolting amounts of information from any and every channel. You know we're right because you do it too. To make it through the day with a semblance of sanity intact we focus purely on the search results we're interested in, or the specific information we're looking for. Everything else becomes white noise. Why should your brand be any different?

To reach these audiences takes verve and creativity – and that goes for both B2B and B2C markets. After all, the people making the buying decisions in both sectors are ultimately... people. And while these 'people' enjoy the comfort of the familiar, they respond much more keenly to the quirky or creative. Something that goes against the grain, that surprises the brain, and shocks it out of its information stupor.

Growing against the grain

Are we advocating that Mr Widget Maker throws out his marketing playbook and replaces his widget-based logo for one featuring a flamingo on a burning tyre? Of course not. But there are plenty of areas where startups can push back against convention to get better results from their marketing. Even small steps can make a big difference. Here's some food for thought:

- Accountants don't have to be blue. Fast food restaurants don't have to be red. You get the idea. What colour would they expect you to be?
- Would your business grind to a halt if you replaced the team portrait photographs on your website with, say, a 360 degree, zoomable shot of your last team away day? No. In fact, your customers would probably engage with it a lot more. Or could you possibly play with the convention of how a case study 'should' be laid out? (Hint: yes.)
- Your business does not need to use business-speak. (This doesn't mean you need to sound like Innocent smoothies, BTW.) Make connections with your audience with more approachable language. In short, think about the way you want to sound and embrace it across all channels.
- If you can say what you need to say on your website homepage in 200 words, there's absolutely no need to stretch it out to 500. Your readers will thank you.
- You know what a premium food brand should look like, right? Probably something like Tesco Finest? Sumptuous photography, black background, serif font? Hmm. Why should they look like that, exactly?



The beauty of being a startup is that you get to make the rules. Forget breaking the mould, you get to design and build it in the first place. Embrace your flexibility and create a bold brand that your customers can get behind.

Of course it won't stay the same for ever, these things will evolve and mature alongside you. But what better start point could there be from which to make that stratospheric rise.

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