



ALIGNING YOUR BRAND PROMISE  
WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS'  
BRAND EXPERIENCE

James 



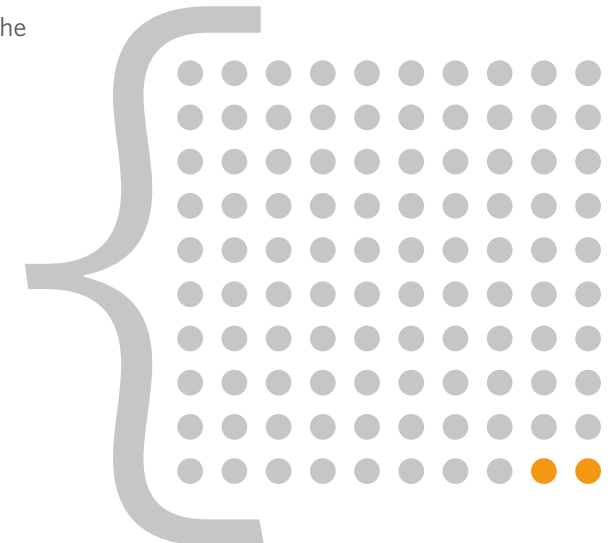
## Introduction

Every customer facing company has a brand. Your brand is a promise and a customer selects you based on a number of diverse, often unarticulated expectations. You might have been through a branding exercise recently and your brand looks fresh. But is your new brand promise delivering against customers' expectations? Is it aligned with your customers' brand experience?

Perhaps surprisingly the majority of brand managers are still in the early stages of brand experience maturity according to Forrester research<sup>1</sup>. The study concludes that only 2% of companies have best practices and consistent branding that extends beyond the marketing/branding team to other business functions.

Often people think of brand as the visible part of an organization, the name, logo and ads. However, the branded culture and foundation that lies beneath is probably the part that matters most. To quote David Aaker<sup>2</sup>: "Every time a product, employee or solution gets to 'touch' a customer or a customer gets to touch the brand, the company gets the opportunity to either reinforce our brand promise or totally denigrate it."

Only 2% of Companies  
practice branding  
efficiently to business  
functions





There is an opportunity for companies to start inspiring innovative brand led thinking across the entire operation without complex approaches. Our three-step model suggests a simple approach that can be easily applied to large and small companies leading to more differentiated customer brand experiences.

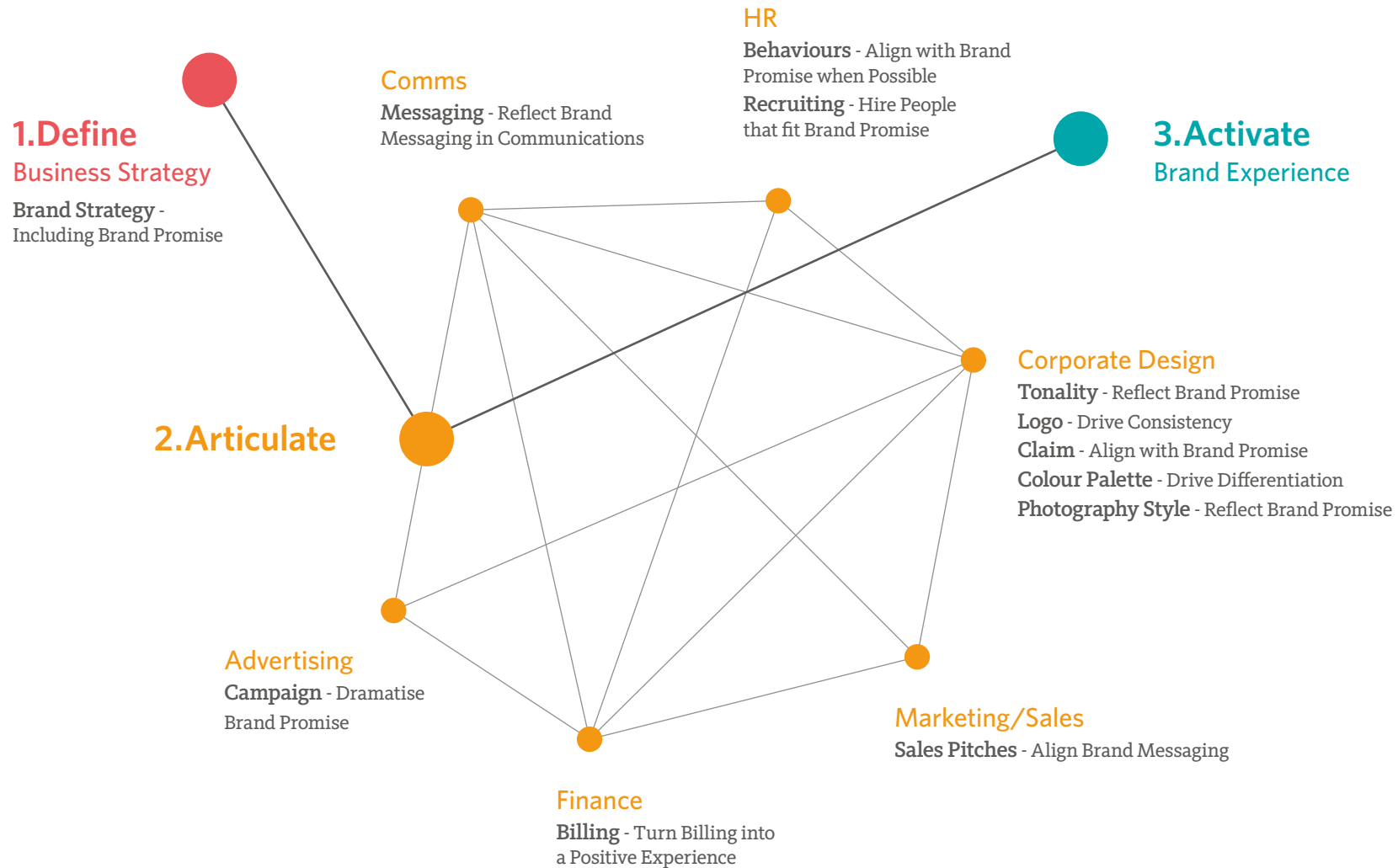


Figure 1: James' three-step brand alignment model

# Step 1

## Define what the brand should stand for

Brand strategy should serve business strategy. The plan for the development of a successful brand needs to be closely guided by our business strategy and should define what the brand should stand for in the future including a brand promise, which should be relevant, credible, differentiating and aspirational. Ultimately, it should also inspire the organisation internally to rethink how to interact with customers. Geico's brand promise of "15 minutes or less can save you 15% or more on car insurance" has become the basis of their entire marketing strategy, leading them to the top of the auto-insurance industry.

**15 minutes could save you  
15% or more on car insurance.**

**GEICO**<sup>®</sup>



## Step 2

### Articulate the brand

When it comes to articulating our brand there is a wide range of opportunities. By taking a functional view we should be able to inspire brand led thinking across the organisation. The examples here are not exhaustive but provide a starting point.



**The Ultimate  
Driving Machine**

A white BMW car driving on a road, viewed from the front. The car is in motion, with a blurred background. The license plate reads 'M RM 2455'.

**DESIGNED FOR  
DRIVING PLEASURE.**





## Corporate design

Step

2



Thinking about the brand's visual and verbal manifestations there is a wide array of opportunities beyond the logo to bring the brand promise to life. Perhaps the most underleveraged tools are photography and tonality. By finding our own imagery and tone of voice there will be great potential to be distinct and accessible. Often there are more opportunities beyond the logo to develop a fresh and forward-looking corporate design.

FIFTY ONE EAST

Qatar's Favourite Department Store





## Communications

### Step 2

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In many organisations communications can easily be misaligned with the brand promise. Communications should be informed and sometimes guided by key brand messages. For more complex organisations this requires a messaging architecture that breaks a main message down into the different company divisions. Companies should always check if their communications reflects their brand promise in the best possible way.

*"To the airport.  
And  
make  
it swanky."*

On the joys of the seamless Upper Class journey. Picked up in an exclusive limo and whisked off to Heathrow. Check-in? Do it from the comfort of the car with our effortless Drive Thru service. Then, and this is the best bit, whizz through our Private Security Channel to our award-winning Clubhouse in less than 10 minutes. Put your foot down, it's the only way to fly. virginatlantic.com

UPPER CLASS



Say hello to tax-free savings

2.85%  
Virgin Easy Access  
Cash ISA



ARE YOU  
READY TO  
BE MOVED?

UP TO 200Mbps OPTICAL FIBRE.  
VIVID™ IS HERE.



Tax-free.  
Catch-free.



# HELLO EAST COAST MEET VIRGIN TRAINS







## Advertising

### Step 2



Advertising has to serve different objectives but should align with the brand promise where possible. For some organisations campaigns are still the most impactful way of articulating and dramatizing the brand promise as well as setting customer expectations. However, in future many companies need to move beyond campaigns and think more holistically about the brand experience.



GE imagination at work





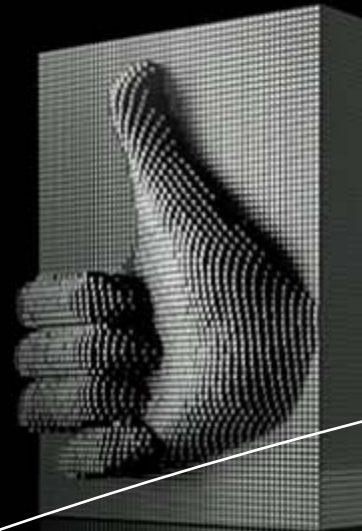


## Human Resources

### Step 2

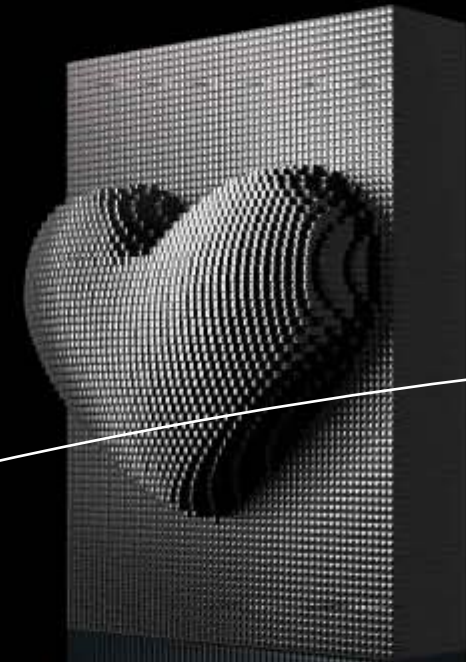
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HR is perhaps the most unexplored area for brand building. Behaviours should align with the brand promise. This requires close collaboration between HR and brand managers to jointly develop a set of behaviours and standards that are on brand. Further, recruiting plays a vital role. For example, in the UK the bank "first direct" prefers to recruit customer focused people and teaches them banking instead of the other way around.



**77%** of what's said  
about us online is positive

Source: Millward Brown Precise. Updated 12 Jan 2010



**77%** of our customers would  
be happy to recommend us

Why not see the impression we've made on our  
customers at

**firstdirect.com/live**

**first direct**

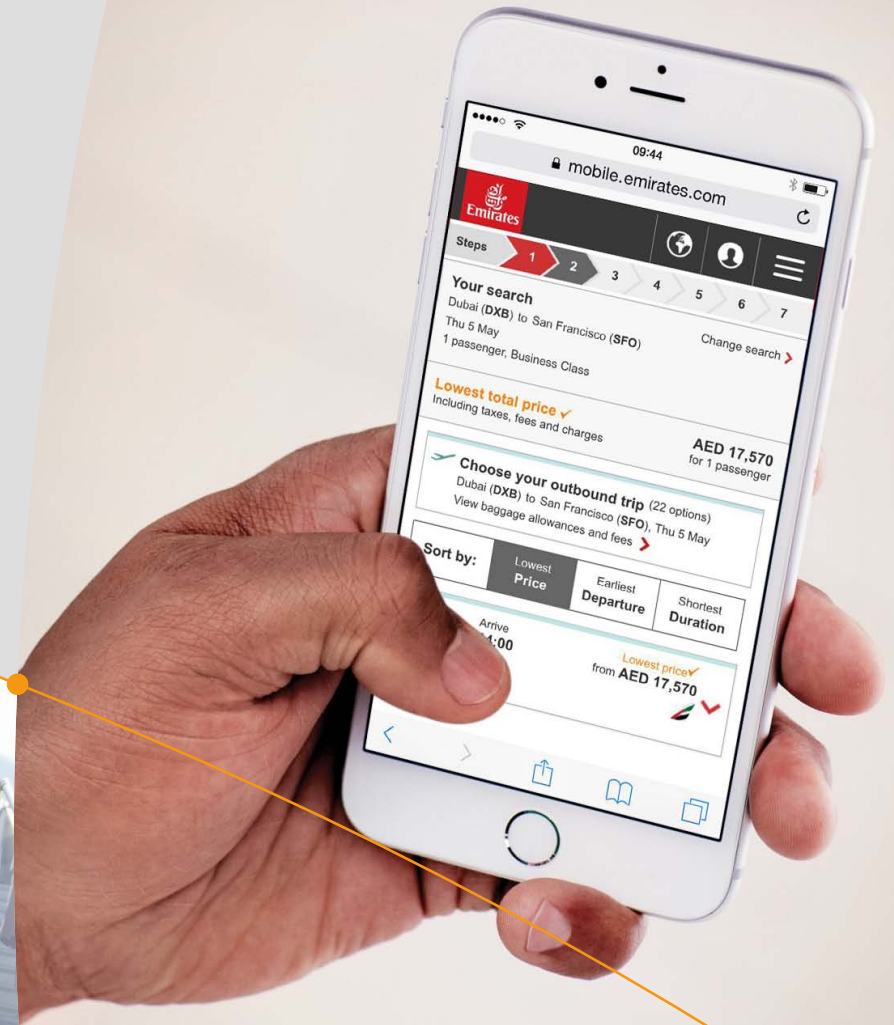


## Finance

### Step 2



The brand promise crucially extends to more transactional areas, such as billing. Does it reflect the brand promise? Is it aligned with the brand values? Brand managers should open a dialogue with finance and jointly develop activation ideas. This could be as simple as putting a contact number on invoices so that customers can pick up the phone easily if any questions arise.







## Marketing / Sales

Step

2



It is often challenging to align the brand promise with sales as they are more tactical. However, there are ways to make a sales brochure more compelling for example with a brand led headline on the cover before diving into technical details. Again, this requires intense discussions between brand managers and sales but the effort is worth it.

EXPLORE THE PRISTINE  
EARTHLY PARADISE  
OF BORA BORA



FOUR SEASONS  
*Hotels and Resorts*



For the first time, the exceptional attention to detail and warm, friendly service you expect from Four Seasons takes to the air.



IT'S SAID THEY NEVER FORGET.  
NEITHER WILL YOU.

  
FOUR SEASONS  
*Hotels and Resorts*





Shell  
**Eco-marathon**  
ASIA 2016

# Step 3

## Activate the brand

In the third step companies need to implement the ideas from step 2. Little changes can already make a big difference. Also companies should evaluate the brand experience with a small set of relevant metrics and constantly challenges themselves to improve.

# #SEM20





## Conclusion

Thinking through the three steps in our model will help to align brand promise and brand experience over time. The whole organization plays a part in articulating and activating the brand. It is a truly collaborative effort and needs strong leadership commitment. Ultimately, it forms part of the customer journey and will help to gain trust of customers.

We believe that there is a great opportunity now to advance brands to the next stage of their development and to use brand as a platform to create more differentiated branded customer experiences. Brand managers must focus on what they can change and that's more than they think.

## References

1. Forrester research: Engage the enterprise to reach brand experience maturity; 2015 Mar 9
2. Davis, S. M., Dunn, M. and Aaker, D. A. (2002) Building the brand-driven business: Operationalize your brand to drive profitable growth. 1<sup>st</sup> edn. United States: Jossey-Bass Inc., U.S.



If you would like to find out more about James and how we help make the difference to your organization, please contact us for a discussion.



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