

ALIGNING YOUR BRAND PROMISE  
WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS'  
BRAND EXPERIENCE

## Introduction

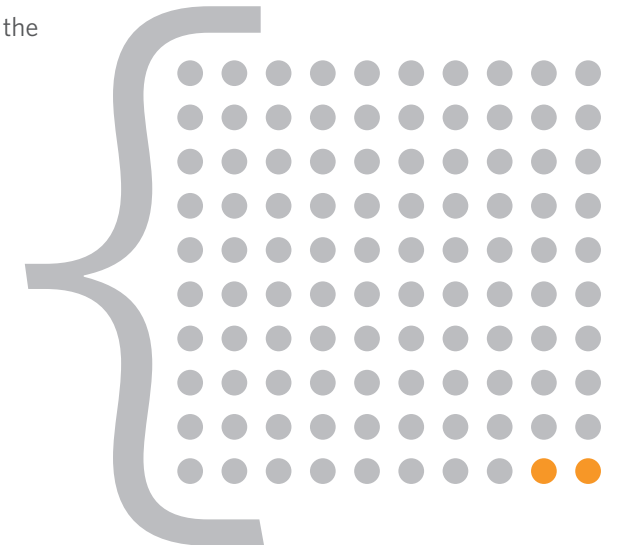
Every customer-facing company has a brand. Your brand is a promise and a customer chooses you based on a number of diverse, often unarticulated expectations.

You might have been through a branding exercise recently and your brand looks fresh. But is your new brand promise delivering against customer 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 organisation, 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 easily be applied to large and small companies leading to more differentiated customer brand experiences.

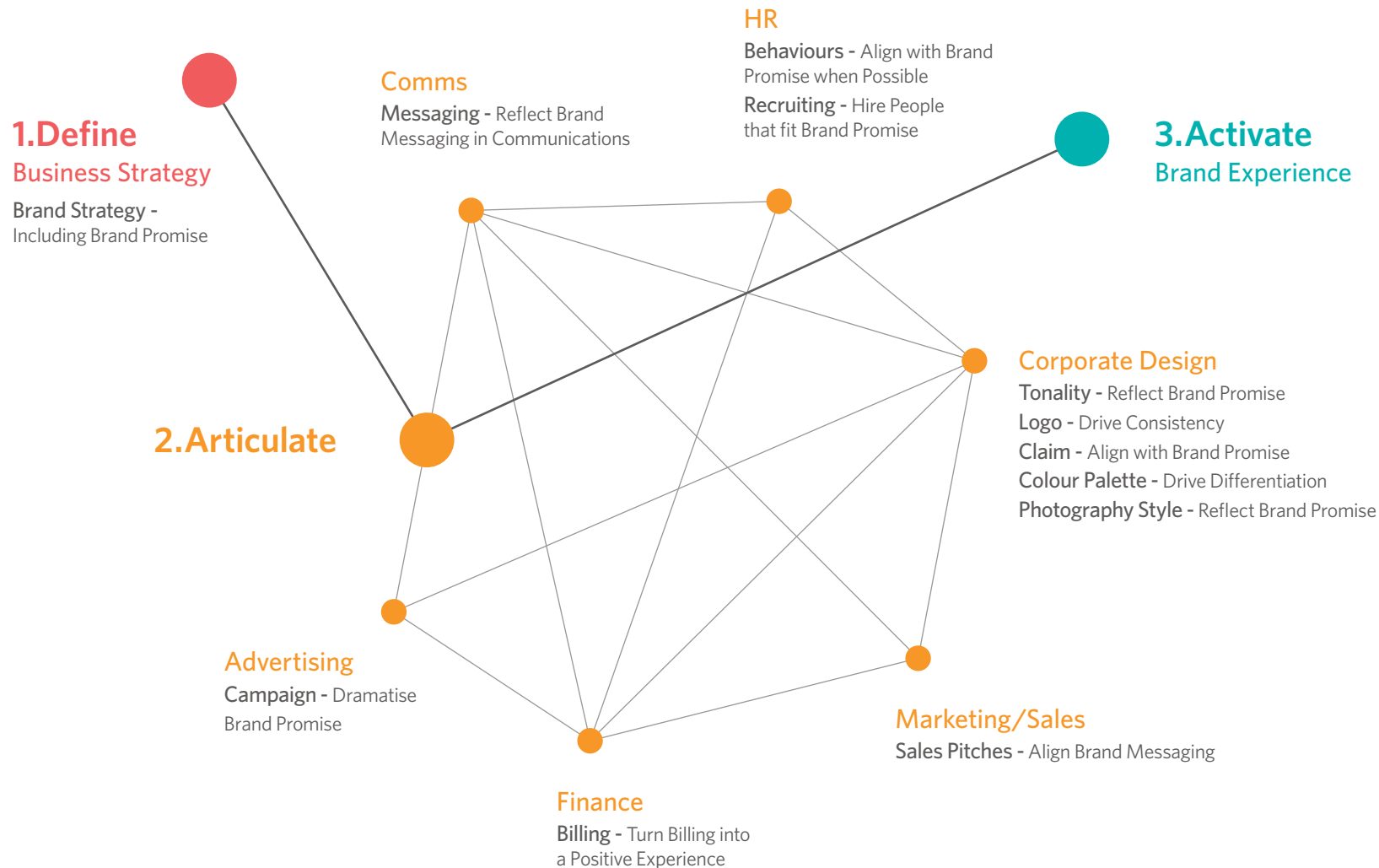


Figure 1: James' three-step brand alignment model

# Step 1

## Define what the brand stands for

Brand strategy should serve business strategy. Developing a successful brand should be closely guided by the business strategy and should define what the brand stands for in the future including a brand promise, which should be relevant, credible, differentiating and aspirational. Ultimately, it should 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.

**GEICO**<sup>®</sup>

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



## Step 2

### Articulate the brand

When it comes to articulating your 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 driving on a road, viewed from the front. The car is in motion, with a blurred background suggesting speed. The license plate reads 'D M RM 2455'.

**DESIGNED FOR  
DRIVING PLEASURE.**



## Step 2

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### Corporate design



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 your 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





# Step 2

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## Communications

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 matrix that breaks a main message down into the different company divisions. Companies should always check if their communications reflect 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.

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to tax-free  
savings

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Tax-free  
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outside  
Virgin Easy Access  
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BE MOVED?

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



Tax-free.  
Catch-free.



# HELLO EAST COAST MEET VIRGIN TRAINS



## Step 2



### Advertising

Advertising serves different objectives but should always align with the brand promise. For some organisations campaigns are still the most impactful way of articulating and dramatising 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



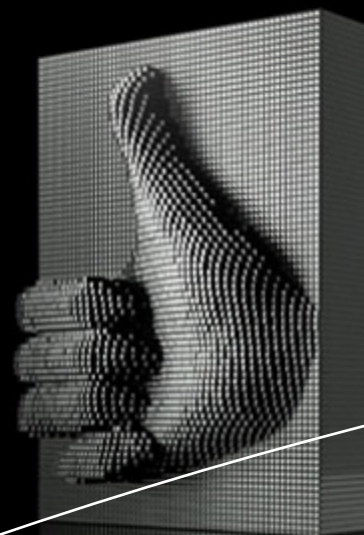


## Step 2



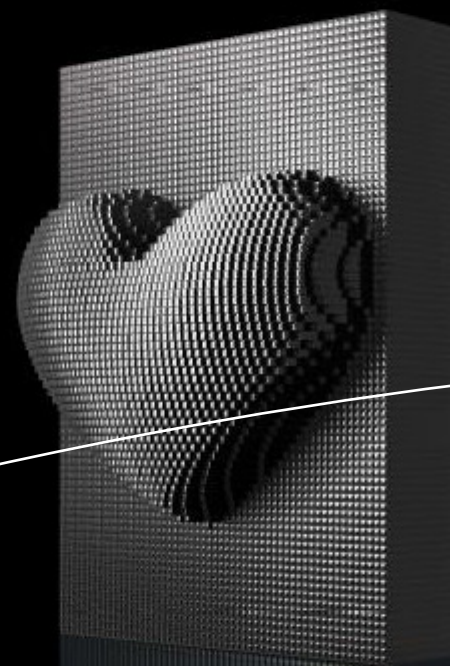
### Human Resources

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 instance, "first direct", a prominent bank in the UK recruits people who have natural people skills over strong banking skills as they consider banking a teachable skill in comparison to peoples skills.



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

Source: Millward Brown Precs. 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](http://firstdirect.com/live)**

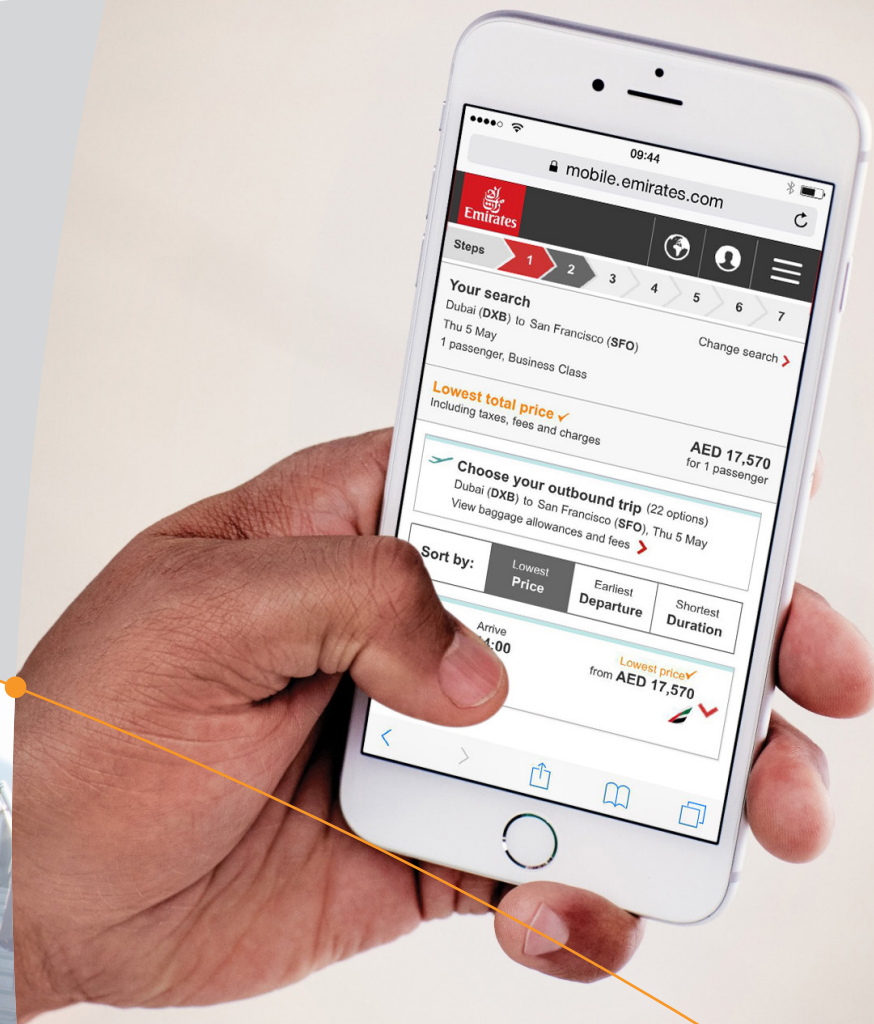
**first direct**

# Step 2



## Finance

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.





# Step 2



## Marketing and Sales

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*



# 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



Shell  
**Eco-marathon**  
ASIA 2016



## Conclusion

Thinking through the three steps in our model will help to align brand promise and brand experience over time. The whole organisation 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.



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