

# WHAT IS BRANDING?

*And How Can it Grow  
Your Business?*

Brian Sooy

Exclusively for StoryBrand Guides  
and Business Made Simple Coaches  
October 2022



The Companion to the  
What is Branding? Breakout

The word "Aspire" in a white, cursive-style font, set against a blue square background which is part of a circular graphic element.

Aspire

Your guide to building  
a brand that endures



Many people misunderstand the relationship between branding and marketing.

When you understand how branding interacts with messaging and marketing, you can learn to talk about (and sell) basic brand strategy with clarity, confidence, and competence.

This Brand Clarity breakout teaches a practical model for aligning branding, messaging, and marketing to drive growth and create value for any business, including yours.



# WHAT IS BRANDING?



"Storytelling is just like branding;  
there are a few people doing it  
right, and the rest are just getting  
on the next bus."  
– David C. Baker

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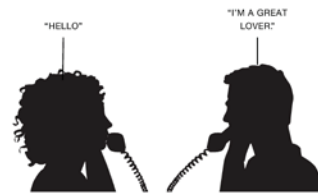
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## BRAND ILLUSTRATED



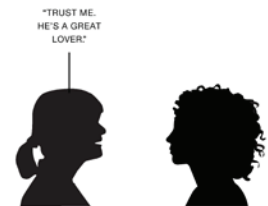
1. MARKETING

## BRAND ILLUSTRATED



2. TELEMARKETING

## BRAND ILLUSTRATED



3. PUBLIC RELATIONS

## BRAND ILLUSTRATED



4. ADVERTISING

## BRAND ILLUSTRATED



5. DESIGN

## BRAND ILLUSTRATED



6. BRANDING

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# Branding **or** Marketing

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# Branding **vs** Marketing

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It all started with a question: “What should we do first, branding or marketing?”

Then it turned into, “Branding vs marketing”

It doesn’t have to be either/or, and there is no competition between branding and marketing.

# WHAT IS BRANDING?



Brand  $\neq$  Branding

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Logo  $\neq$  Brand

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Color  $\neq$  Brand

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Type  $\neq$  Brand

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Product  $\neq$  Brand

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## WHAT IS BRANDING?



Identity  $\neq$  Brand

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Brand  $\neq$  Relationship

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Brand  $\neq$  Promise

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- Your brand is the gut feeling people have about your product, service or organization.
- A brand can be the meaning people attach to a company and what it promises or offers.
- Your brand is not what you say it is. It's what supporters, the community, and customers say it is.

Your brand is the gut feeling people have about your product, service or organization.

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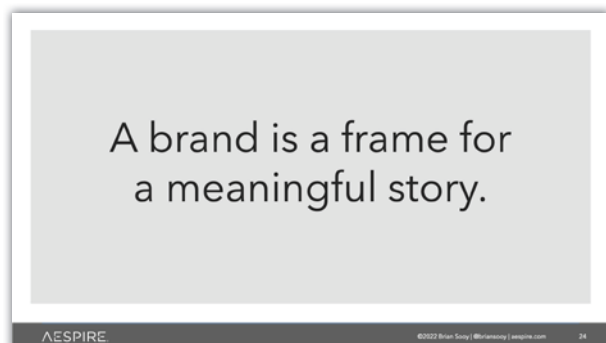
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## WHAT IS BRANDING?



- A brand is a story people tell themselves about your company, product, or service.
- Your customers own your brand. You own the branding.
- Your role is to create the frame for what they need to write a story worth telling.



Storyframing builds a structure that lets people create their narrative.

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- You can understand why StoryBrand is relevant to branding
- Storyframing builds a structure that lets consumers create their own narratives.
- It's what I call the brand story, a phrase that brand managers and business owners understand and buy into
- It lets us practice narrative branding, weaving story with other elements that make a company memorable and meaningful.

- Branding is the continuous process of aligning who they think you are with who you say you are

What **is** Branding?

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- Branding is how a company differentiates itself and its offerings from the inside out

Branding is how a company differentiates itself from the inside out

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# WHAT IS BRANDING?



Branding **and** Marketing

- Branding and marketing always work together.
- Branding is the practice of aligning and nurturing people's impressions of your product, service, or company, so it's relevant, meaningful, and memorable.

Branding **needs** Marketing

Marketing **needs** Branding

Branding **fuels** Marketing

Branding **>** Marketing

Marketing **=** Tactical

Branding **=** Strategic

## WHAT IS BRANDING?



Marketing = Branding

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Branding = Marketing

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Marketing = Push

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Branding = Pull

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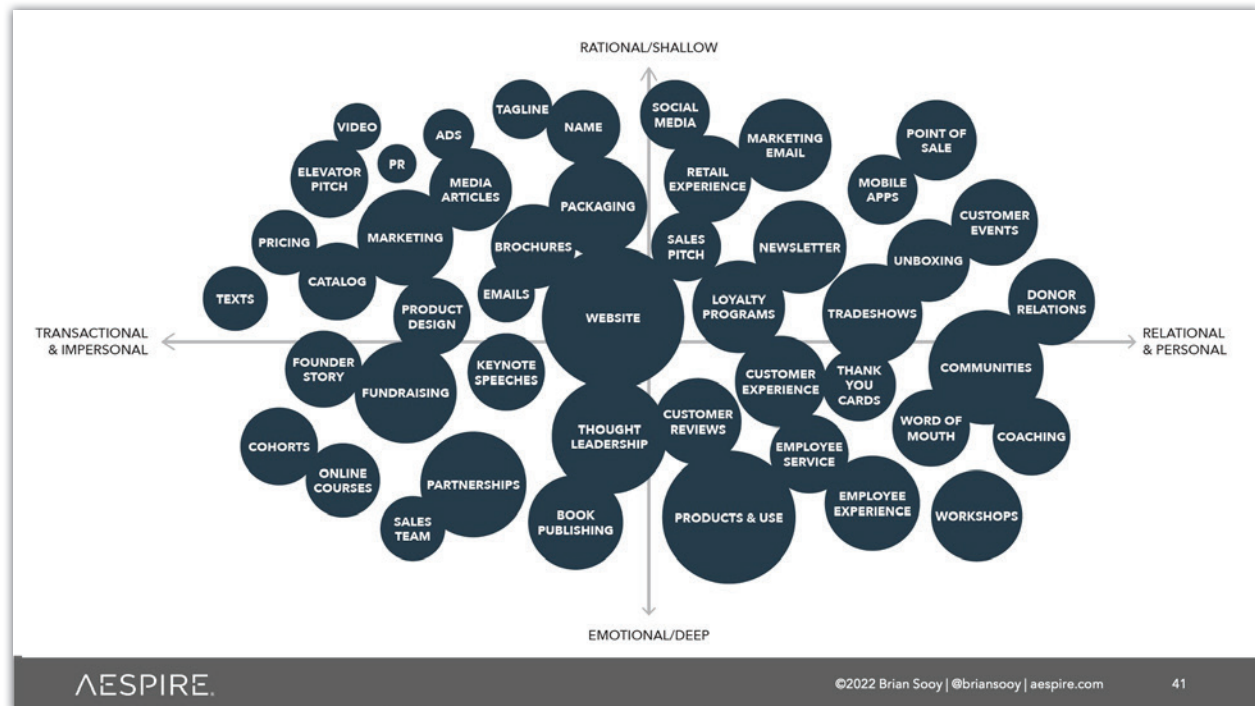
The heart of brand building is in being relational, which goes beyond inviting people into a story, participating in a program, or making a transaction. Brand building is collaborative and complementary, where the brand builder (the company) and the brand owner (the consumer) walk together.

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# WHAT IS BRANDING?



- EVERY touchpoint contributes to branding
- People are the most important touchpoint
- Where are the relevant touchpoints?
  - People
  - Program
  - Products
  - Platforms
  - Experience

Words = Branding

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Naming = Branding

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# WHAT IS BRANDING?



Messaging = Branding

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Marketing = Branding

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Experience = Branding

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Design = Branding

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Marketing **creates** Revenue

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Branding **creates** Value

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Branding ❤️ Marketing

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Business ❤️ Branding

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Customers don't care  
about brands or marketing.

Customers care about themselves.

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- After all that, we have to remember one thing:
- Customers don't care about brands or marketing.
- Customers care about themselves and their goals and challenges.
- A category is where the customer is looking for the solution to their problem
- What does a business look like without the elements that help people distinguish one company from another in a category?

"Successful businesses figure  
out how to align their goals with  
the customers they serve."  
– Seth Godin

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- Most companies think branding is about visual consistency
- Branding is about radical differentiation
- Differentiation is how companies establish a unique market position
- Why is branding a core business component?

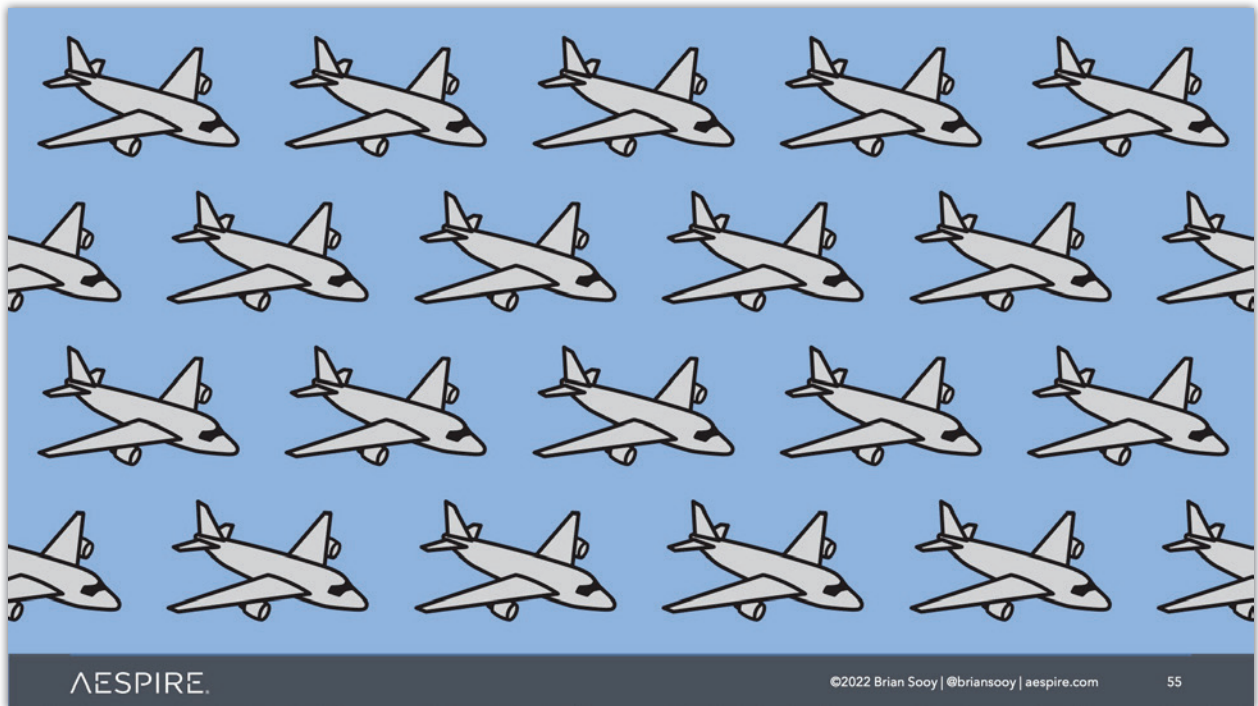
Differentiation

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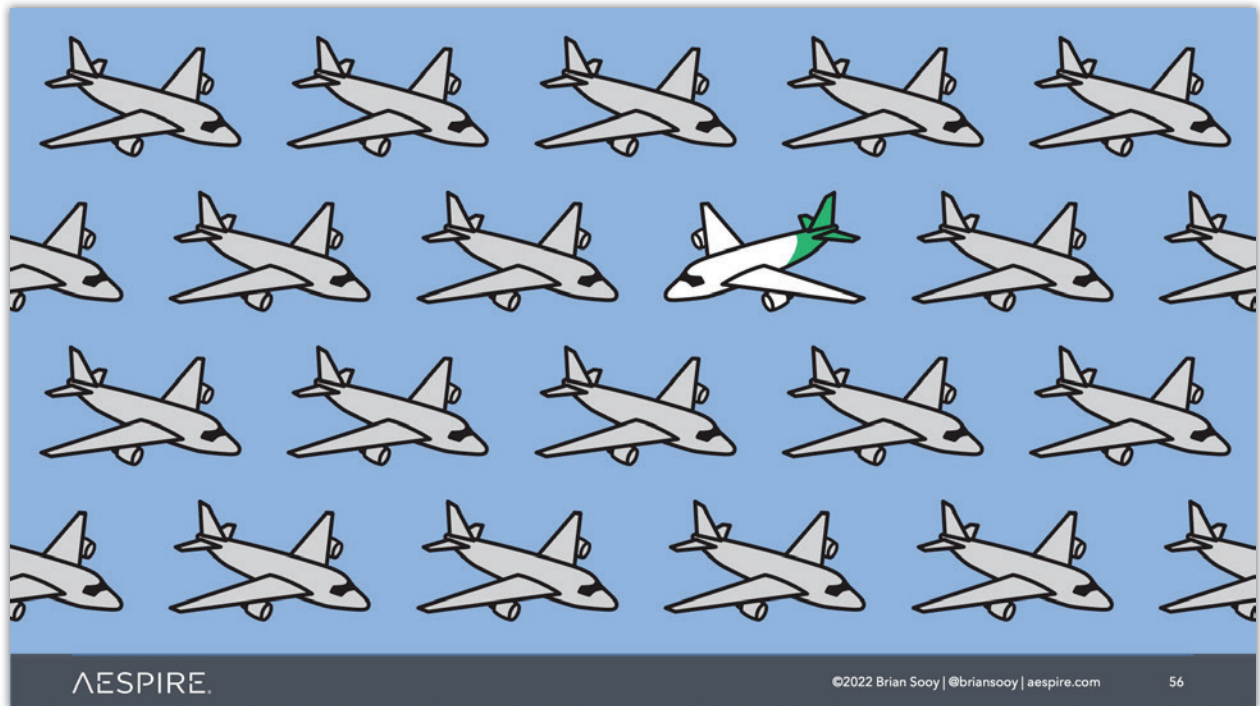
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## WHAT IS BRANDING?



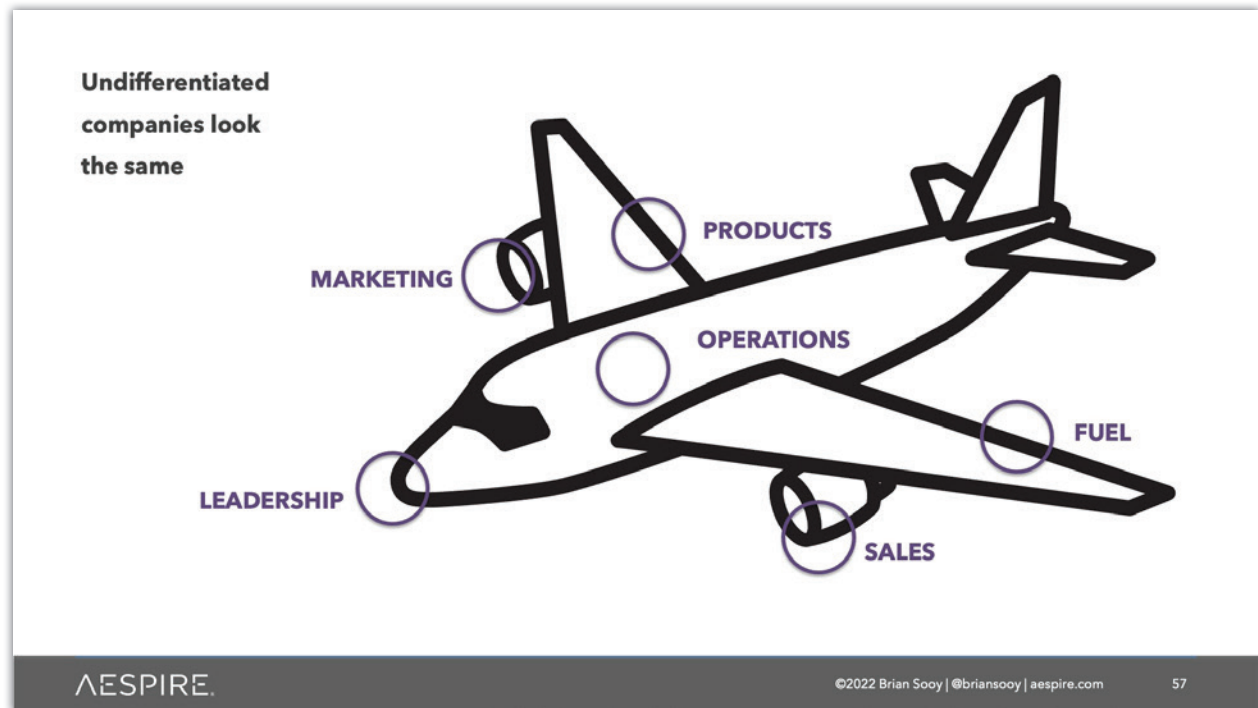
- This is what people see when they look at the marketplace
- The problem is that the world is a noisy place. It's hard for consumers to distinguish one company, product, or solution from another because they're trying to survive.
- If you can't communicate your brand's relevance or value to customers, people won't understand how it will make their lives different when they buy.

## WHAT IS BRANDING?



- We understand from StoryBrand: People are always looking for information that helps them simplify life, make more money, meet new friends, and do what increases their standing in the world.
- They find what they need by looking for what's different.
- People are always looking for something that breaks the pattern.
- We're hardwired to see what's different.
- Differentiation disrupts patterns.

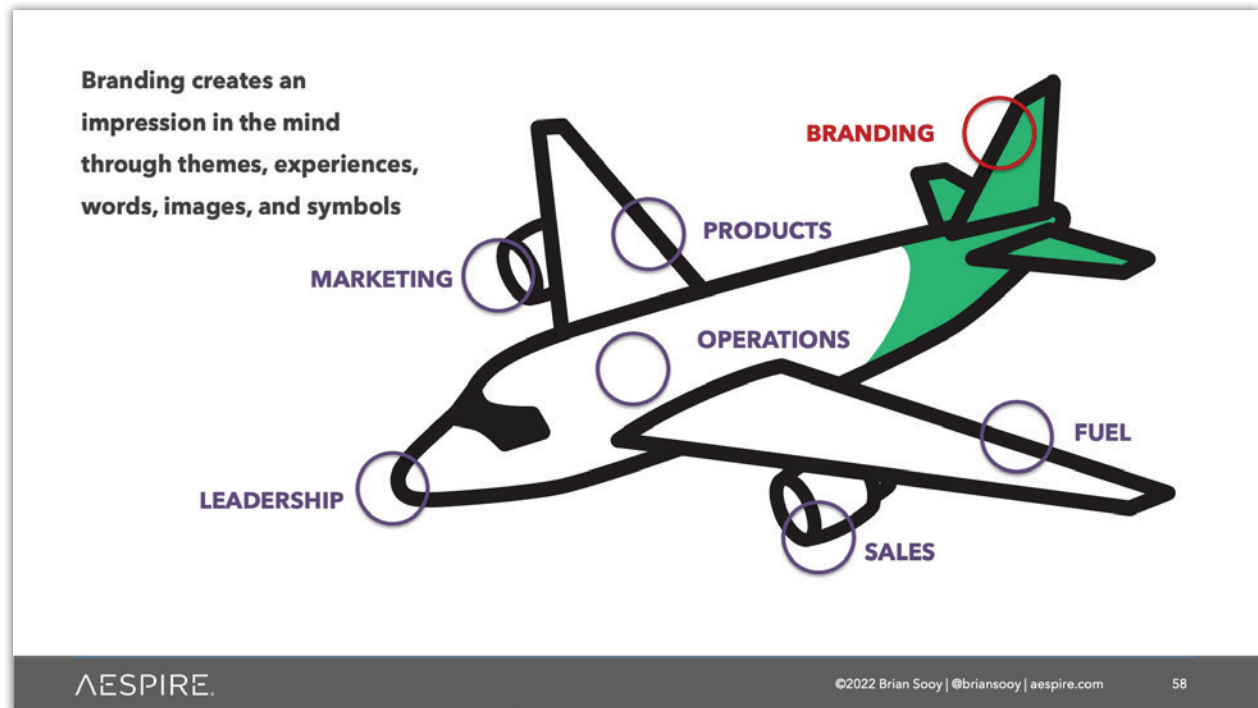
## WHAT IS BRANDING?



- I'm sure you all recognize the business model
- There's a problem with the critical controls.
- To the public, many businesses look the same.
- Without branding, companies are undifferentiated.
- They fly from point A to B.
- People see them fly overhead and go about their day.
- There are no dull companies, only dull brands.



# WHAT IS BRANDING?



- Branding is the rudder of the plane. It provides direction, stability, and balance.
- The rudder helps compensate for crosswinds and keeps the plane aligned from where it is to where it's going.
- Branding is the strategy that makes businesses radically different.

Branding gives people themes, words, experiences, and symbols to create value, manage meaning, and tell stories.

- Branding is the continuous process of aligning who you say you are with who they think you are

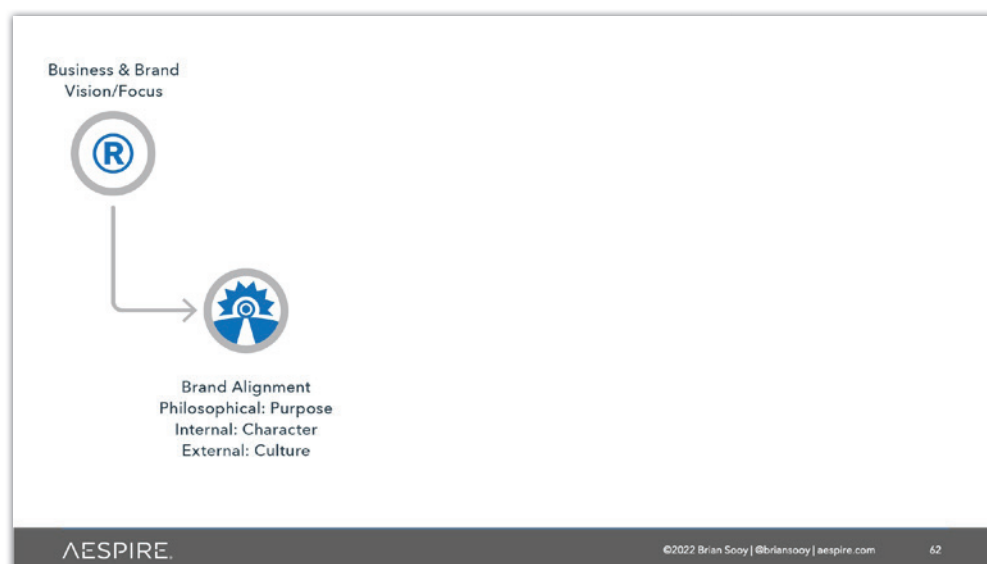
- Branding creates alignment between a company, its employees, products, and services, and customer expectations.
- As StoryBrand Guides and BMS coaches, it's important to understand how brand strategy is a critical component of business operations and customer interaction.
- Let's look at a familiar model to understand how business, branding, tribes, and marketing work together.

Branding **creates** alignment

# WHAT IS BRANDING?

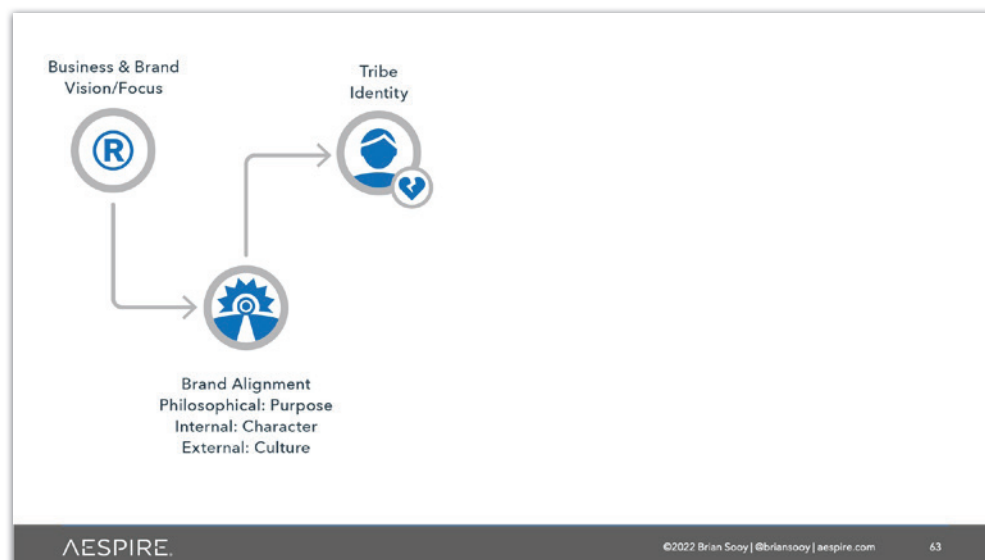


- The company is the character.
- The goal of aligning business and brand is to create the most customers and sell more products.
- The business strategy focuses on the company.
- The brand strategy focuses on the customer.

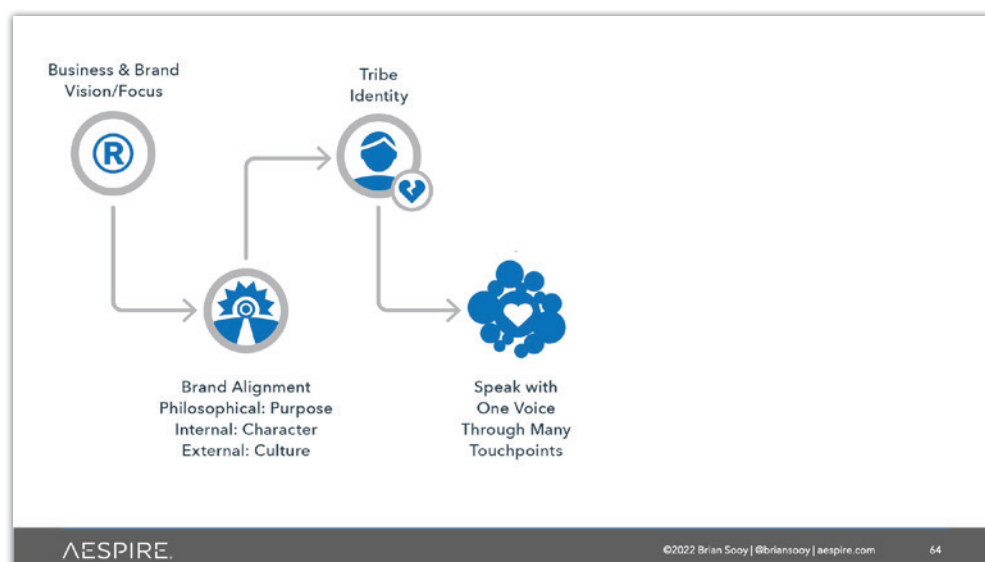


- Brand alignment guides a company to focus its purpose, character, and culture with the customers it serves
- Brand Strategy complements business strategy to align how a company (leadership and employees) shows up in the marketplace (with who they are, what they do, and why it matters) to create value for who they show up for (customer/heroes).

## WHAT IS BRANDING?

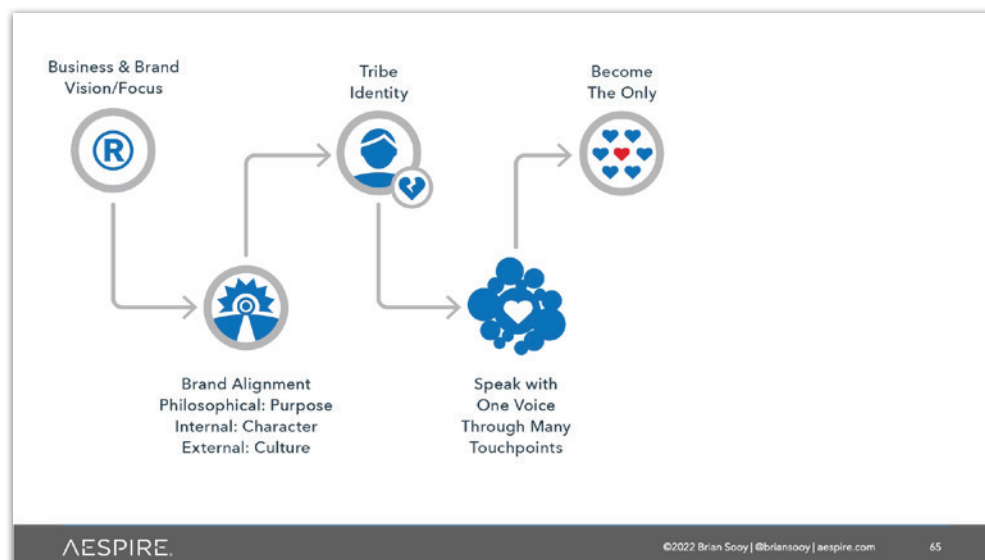


- No brand is meaningful without customers.
- The brand exists to serve the tribe.
- Individuals within the tribe have identity.

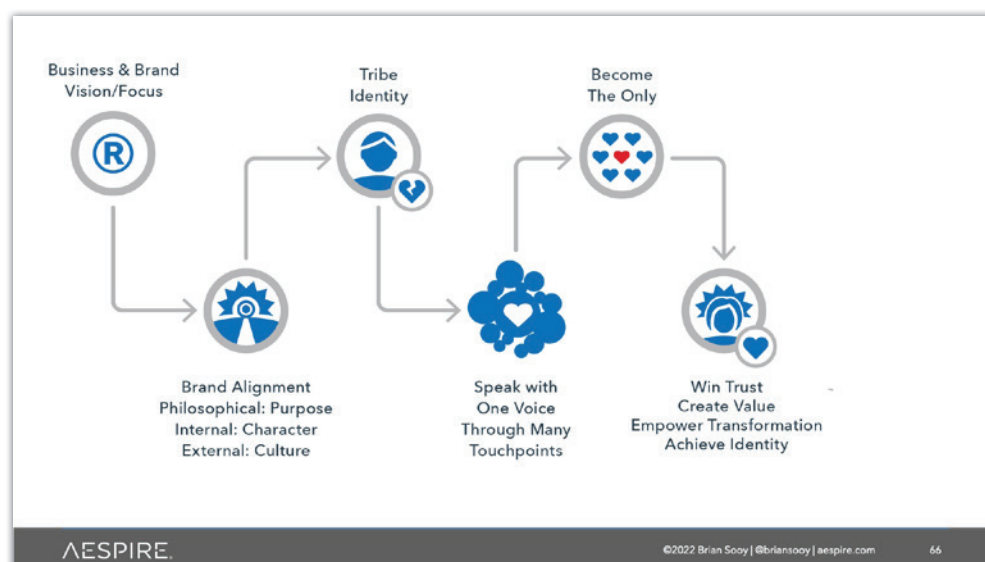


- To reach the tribe and its customer segments, a company must speak their language with one voice through many touchpoints.

## WHAT IS BRANDING?



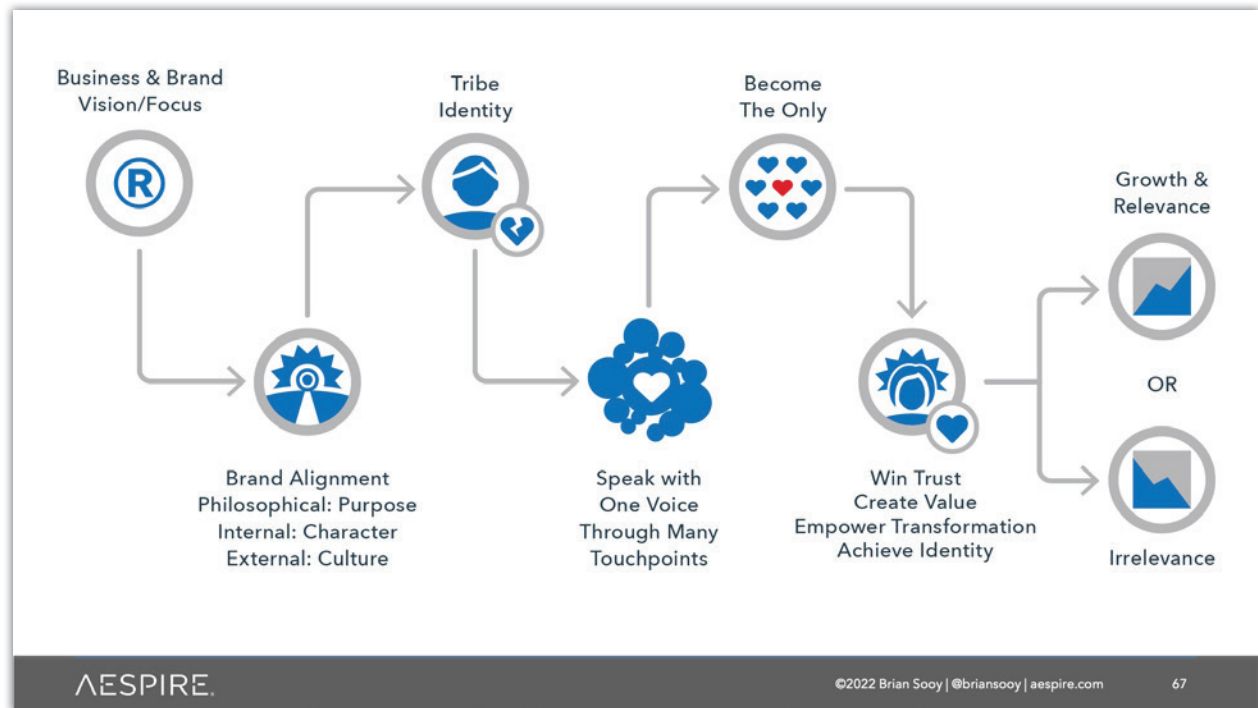
- The goal of brand alignment is to become the only choice for customers.



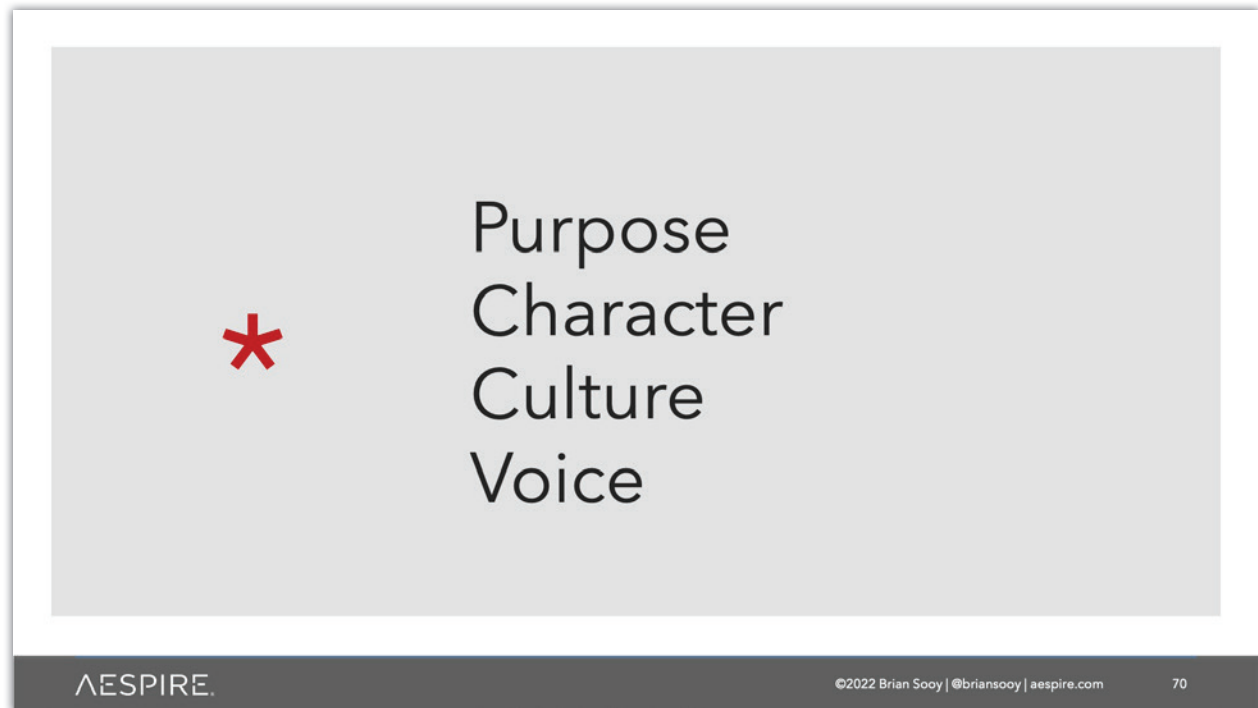
- Your brand must focus on your customer's goals.
- The more your company grows, the more challenging it is to sustain this strategy. That's why you need to keep it simple:
  - Identify and connect with your ideal customer.
  - Do everything you can to win and earn trust.
  - Don't do anything to break that trust.



# WHAT IS BRANDING?



- Brands that focus on the tribe attain growth and relevance.
- Brands that fail to focus on the tribe become irrelevant.



- These four elements form personality that makes a brand likable.
- Personality is the sum of all parts: purpose, character traits, how a brand shows up, and how a brand expresses these traits.
- Character is defined by shared values and guiding principles
- Culture demonstrates those values in action internally and externally
- It expresses itself through a unique voice that is recognizable, after time, to those who have heard it before.



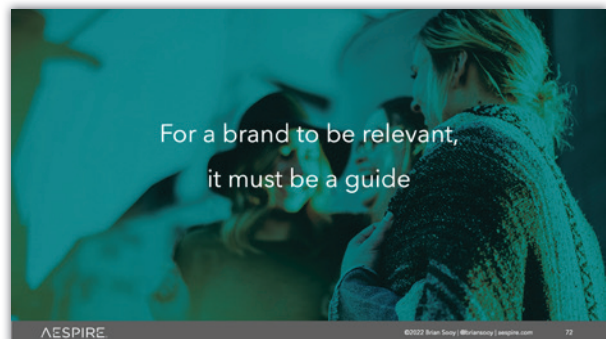
**Purpose** gives  
your brand a  
reason to exist

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- **Philosophical:** Purpose makes a brand meaningful to people
- Purpose helps a company guide customers from where they are to where they want to be
- For a brand to be relevant, the brand must be a guide and invite people into a story of transformation
- Marketing is always about the transformation
- The brand is not the hero!



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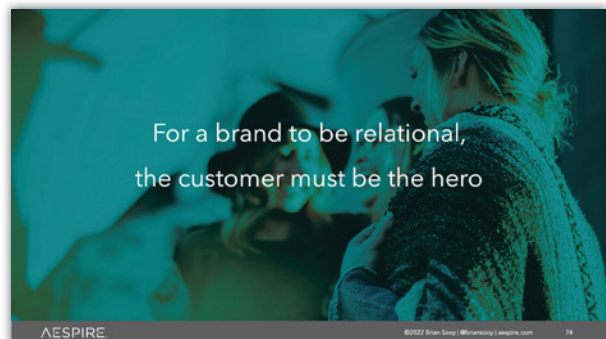
**Character** gives people a reason to trust a brand and guides its behavior

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- Character — **relational qualities** that inform interactions and flavor the culture
- Character gives people a reason to trust a brand and guides its behavior
- True character is revealed through your words and actions, and people are always watching and listening.
- Character is shared values and guiding principles in action that keep people moving in the same direction
- For a brand to be relational, the customer must be the hero







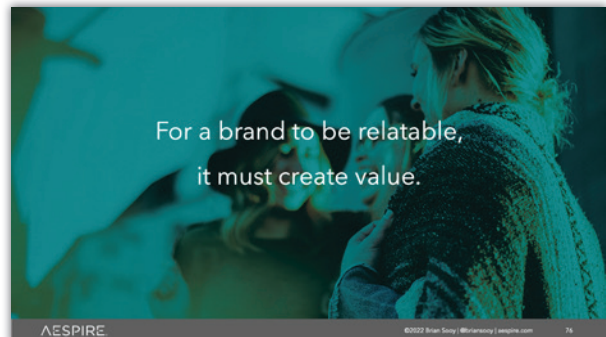
**Culture** is how a brand does things and treats people

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- Culture is **behaviorial** — how we do things and treat people.
- Culture — critical actions that accomplish the purpose
- Culture is how a brand shows up and what people experience when you do show up
- We now have three core elements:
  - purpose (the philosophical)
  - character (the relational)
  - culture (the behavioral)
- If a brand is not relatable and relational to the tribe, it's not relevant
- We need one more core element to complete brand personality, a way to connect with people





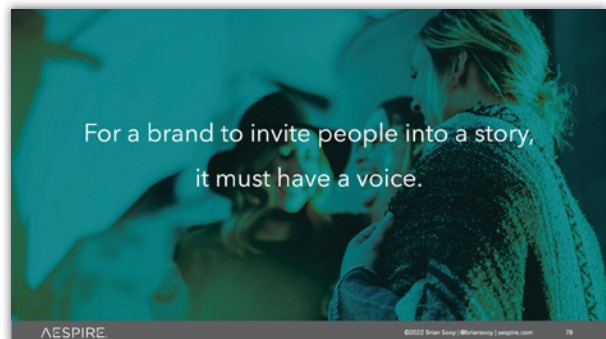
**Voice** is how your brand becomes familiar and likable

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- Voice — the unique identity and stories that compel people to follow and act
- They turn to brands for meaning and identity
- Brand becomes a community for a tribe
- People join brands
- Voice is how your brand becomes familiar and likable
- For a brand to invite people into a story, it must have a voice
- For a brand to be likable, it must have personality
- For a brand to be human, it must be relatable.



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People choose to support brands  
whose purpose, character,  
culture, and voice align with their  
values, interests, and needs.

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- Because branding is about forming an impression, we know people choose to support brands whose purpose, character, culture, and impact align with their values and interests.
- Engagement and money follow people's values
- People choose to support brands whose purpose, character, culture, and voice align with their values, interests, and needs.

# Five Questions

*Strategy addresses the critical questions of purpose, character, customer, category, positioning, and culture.*

### The 5 Qs of Brand Strategy

Brands align around five essential questions

1. Why do we exist beyond making money? (Purpose)
2. Who do we exist to serve? (Tribe)
3. Where should we compete? (Category)
4. How will we win? (Onlyness)
5. How will we grow? (Relevance)

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Brands align around five essential questions

- Why do we exist beyond making money? (Purpose)
- Who do we exist to serve? (Tribe)
- Where should we compete? (Category)
- How will we win? (Onlyness)
- How will we grow? (Relevance)





Key **focus** questions to answer:

- Who are you?
- What do you do?
- Why does it matter?
- What is your aspirational identity?

Focus Framework

- What are our goals?
- Use “Now, Future, Next” to think through what’s next:
- Where are you now?
- Where do you want to be in the future?
- What must be true (or must you do next) to get there?
- Who is your Tribe?
- Who is your Tribe? (A group of people with similar wants, needs, and beliefs)
- What is your tribe’s aspirational identity?
- Do their mores align with your values?
- Why would they choose us?

Differentiation

- What category do you own?
- In what category do you compete?
- What are the brand’s key differentiators & invisible/visible attributes?
- How will you differentiate?
- What is the difference you people help you make?



# Focus in Action 2

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Key **focus** questions to answer:

- Who is your Tribe?
- Who is your Tribe? (A group of people with similar wants, needs, and beliefs)
- What is your tribe's aspirational identity?
- Do their mores align with your values?
- Why would they choose us?

What Does Your Tribe Want?

- Understand your tribe on a deeper level through research and dialog
- Know what they want to accomplish
- What are your tribe's functional goals?
- What are your tribe's higher-order goals?
- What motivates our tribe?
- Know what they care about
- Why should they care?
- The journey — how does an individual get from where they are now (curious, engaged, enlightened, committed) to where they want to be?

Your Tribe's MindMap

- Their functional goals
- The tribe's high-order goals
- Their motivations (Success, independence, connection, mastery, control, fulfillment, respect, appreciation, safety)
- The triggers that influence their decision-making.



Key **purpose** questions to answer:

- Why do we do what we do?
- What do you stand for?
- Who is it for?
- What is it for?
- What is your mission and/or vision?
- What are your deeply-held beliefs?
- What is our higher calling?
- What's our reason for being other than making money?
- What are your guiding principles? (value in action)
- How does your brand make a difference in people's lives?
- How do people grow by joining your brand?



## Develop Character

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- Relational brands understand that meaningful relationships are nurtured by gratefulness and trust, with authenticity and transparency.
- Culture – this is how we do things around here.
- We operate in a manner that aligns with our core values and tribe's expectations
- People-focused brands are human-like brands
- The brands that inspire people focus on people
- Don't forget to position the customer so we know who we are engaging with (what place do they hold in your brand's worldview)

### Example: Guiding Principles

Perceptual and measured values and characteristics, framed as guiding principles:

- We will **be insightful**, understanding the needs of the community and members
  - **Insightful**
    - Objective
    - Factual (3)
    - Analytical (3)
    - Pragmatic
    - Efficient (2)
    - Effective (2)
- We will **be resourceful**, influencing others with data and integrity
  - **Resourceful** (2)
    - Improvement (2)
    - Mission-Driven (2)
    - Principled (3) (Don't steer from Mission (focus))
- We will **be visionary**, anticipating and addressing current issues.
  - **Visionary**
    - Futurist
    - Aspiration
    - Positive
    - Enthusiastic

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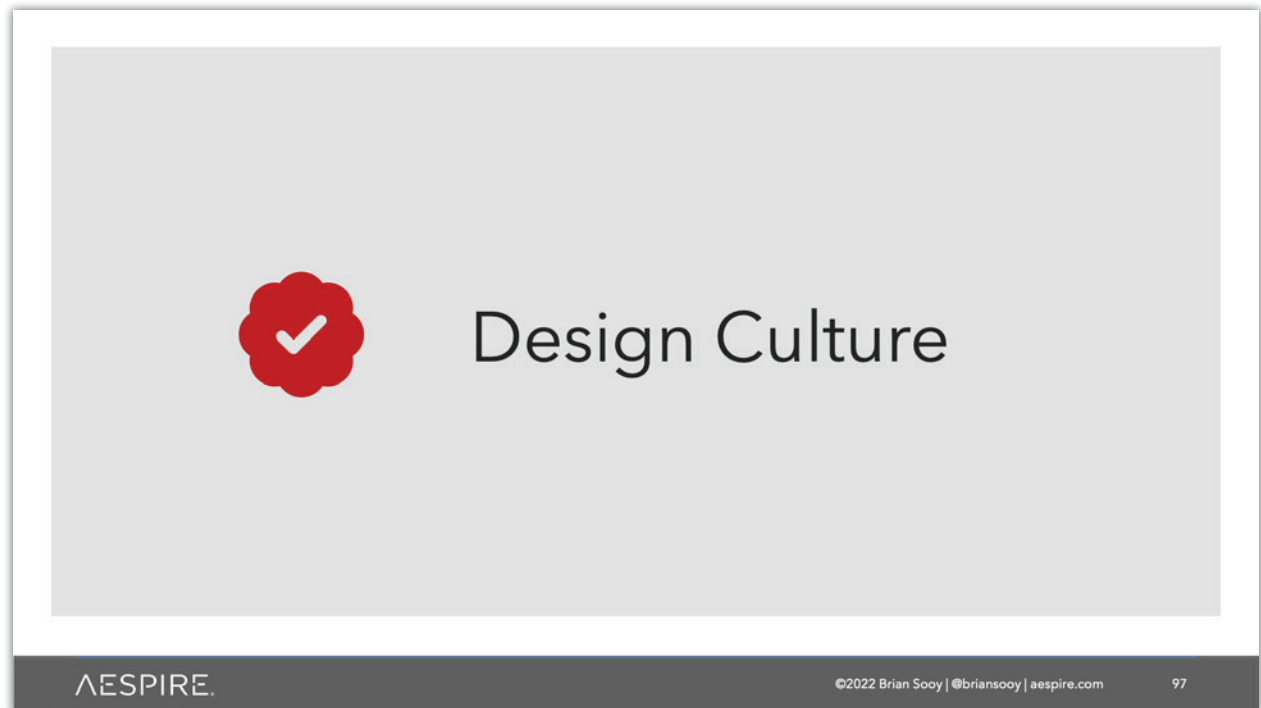
- What are your guiding principles? (Values in action)
- What are your shared values — the values the tribe shares with your brand? (Must align with the purpose and goals of the brand)
- What is your brand's aspirational identity?
- What is your onlyness? (The unique position you hold in consumer's minds)
- Goal: Become Likable & Memorable

OUR offering

IS THE **ONLY** category

THAT benefit .

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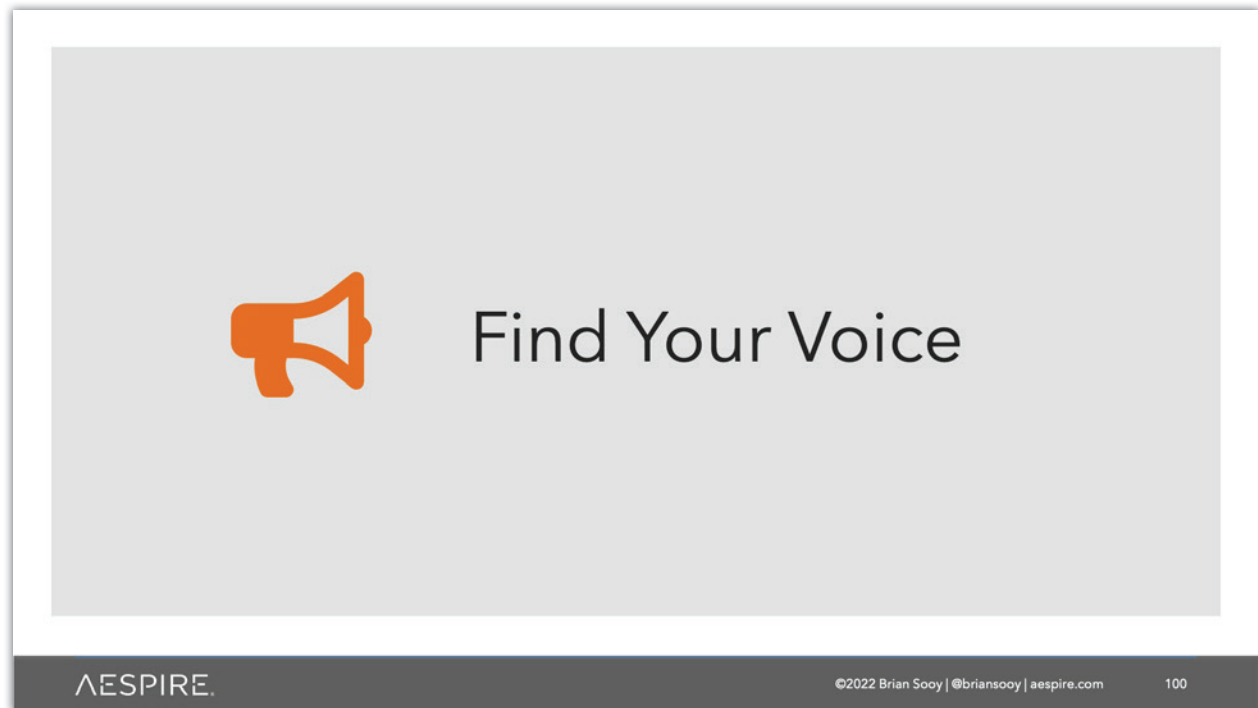


Key **culture** questions to answer:

- Develop a culture of trust, generosity, and reciprocity
- How you behave
- How you operate
- How people interact
- What should people experience?
- How do we show up?

Close the culture gap by defining words and actions that align with customer expectations

- How do people feel about the brand today?
- How do we want them to feel in the future?
- Why should people care about the brand?
- What do we want people to remember about our brand?



### Key **voice** considerations:

- People don't want to be told or sold to.
- People want to tell their own story and be introduced to opportunities to interact on their own terms

### Design a Brand Guidebook that includes

- Storyframing & Brand Narrative
- Brand Messaging
- Design Touchpoints
- Customer Experience
- Engagement Continuum
- Style: Visual Look and Feel

### Create Brand Personality

- Design how you communicate and interact with people — SB7
- Sales scripts, customer service, customer experience
- Highlight intangible social proofs Empathy + Authority = Credibility & Trust
- Tone of voice (How you say and when you say it)
- Style: Visual Look and Feel



# WHAT IS BRANDING?



**One Page Brand Alignment and Impact**

**Why/Purpose**  
Why does our brand matter?

**Differentiators**

- Onlyness
- Outcome
- Impact

**Influencer/Paths:**

- Influencer 1
- Influencer 2
- Influencer 3

**Where do you compete?**

- Category

**What should customers expect?**

- Expectation 1
- Expectation 2
- Expectation 3

**Shared Values**

- Values we put into action that our tribe shares with us
- Guiding Principle / Shared Value in action
- Guiding Principle / Shared Value in action
- Guiding Principle / Shared Value in action
- Guiding Principle / Shared Value in action

Tribes(s) & Influencers	Primary Influencer: Character		Secondary Influencer: Character	
Primary Motivation	Tribes Segment Specific Motivation / 1 of 9	Tribes Segment Specific Motivation	Tribes Segment Specific Motivation	Tribes Segment Specific Motivation
<b>Primary Themes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focused on what motivates and reassures the audience</li> <li>• Perception we want reflected back to us.</li> </ul>	How does the company or brand activate what the character wants?	How does the company or brand activate what the character wants?	How does the company or brand activate what the character wants?	How does the company or brand activate what the character wants?
Transformation »	Character Transformation	Character Transformation	Character Transformation	Character Transformation
<b>Define Impact</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call-to-Action themes</li> <li>• Inspirational themes</li> </ul>	How does the brand fulfill what the character wants?	How does the brand fulfill what the character wants?	How does the brand fulfill what the character wants?	How does the brand fulfill what the character wants?
<b>Distinguish Impact</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mythbusting Themes</li> <li>• The journey/path/plan</li> <li>• Reframing misperceptions</li> <li>• How does our brand nurture transformation?</li> </ul>	What can we say that frames expectations, shows empathy, and establishes credibility?	What can we say that frames expectations, shows empathy, and establishes credibility?	What can we say that frames expectations, shows empathy, and establishes credibility?	What can we say that frames expectations, shows empathy, and establishes credibility?
<b>Demonstrate Impact</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does our brand do for this audience?</li> <li>• Why will they choose us?</li> </ul>	[Brand /Company ] is the only [category] that gives/creates/helps/ equips [tribe-sector] [to] achieve [impact/success].	[Brand /Company ] is the only [category] that gives/creates/helps/ equips [tribe-sector] [to] achieve [impact/success].	[Brand /Company ] is the only [category] that gives/creates/helps/ equips [tribe-sector] [to] achieve [impact/success].	[Brand /Company ] is the only [category] that gives/creates/helps/ equips [tribe-sector] [to] achieve [impact/success].
How do we help and empower? What do we promise?	We're your partner / guide	We're your partner / guide	We're your partner / guide	We're your partner / guide

**Two Word Mission. Two Word Impact.**

Mission Impact

#InspiringHashtag #InspiringHashtag

Our identity represents

- Attribute 1
- Attribute 2
- Attribute 3

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**AESPIRE**  
Strategic Impact Framework

**Why**  
Biblical values matter. It's why ODCS is different, and it's what we're about.

**Differentiators**  
We serve on campus as one school with three distinct campuses:

- Preschool - Elementary
- Middle School
- Upper School

**Recruiting Paths:**

- Family
- Friends
- Church

**What is Christian Education?**  
Education based on shared Biblical values

**What should you expect?**

- That ODCS will serve the Christian family in all things education
- Empower you to parent well
- Prepare your student well
- ODCS is attainable

**Shared Values**

- Created to live in Relationship
- Called to Relationship w Christ
- Each Uniquely Gifted
- Biblical Worldview
- Family & Church are Vital
- Live to Serve
- Exemplary Education

Audience(s) & Influencer	Primary Influencer: Mother/Grandmother		Retention Influencer: Student	
Primary Concern:	Preschool (3 & 4 yrs) Is my student safe?	Elementary (K-4) Will my student thrive?	Middle School (5-8) Will my student fit in with others?	Upper School (9-12) Will my student be prepared?
<b>Primary Themes:</b> Focused on what motivates and reassures the audience. Perception we want reflected back to us.	ODCS is a safe and nurturing environment.	ODCS is an environment where your student will thrive and make friends as they begin to know Christ and are eager to learn.	ODCS is an environment where your student will continue to grow in Christ. They will learn to socialize and live in relationship with peers as they begin to explore their unique giftedness, understand the Biblical worldview, and other shared values as their community expands.	ODCS is an environment where your student will be prepared spiritually and academically to follow Christ, excel in college and life, and redeem our culture.
	Dependence	Absorbing Truth and Knowledge	Challenging/Exploring/Expanding	Owning faith and beliefs
<b>Define Impact</b> Call-to-Action Themes: Defining the ODCS Experience	ODCS preschool is a safe and nurturing Christian environment that you can trust.	Your student will thrive as ODCS prepares their hearts with the foundation for absorbing truth and knowledge.	Your student will grow in confidence as they challenge, expand, and explore what it means to live in Christ-centered relationship with a community of believers.	The world needs disciples. Our culture needs Patriots. You are who the world needs. The heart and mind are formed in Christ.
<b>Distinguish Impact</b> Mythbusting Themes The journey Reframing misperceptions	ODCS Preschool is the first choice for parents who want their student to experience learning in a loving, safe, and trusted Christian education environment.	Spiritual formation begins with a student's identity: knowing themselves and knowing Christ. ODCS Elementary is the first choice for parents who want their student to continue to thrive in a loving, safe, and trusted Christian education community.	ODCS Middle School is the environment where the foundation is laid to prepare the student's heart for service, discipleship, and relationship.	ODCS Upper School is the gateway of the path to college on the journey of life.  It takes time to prepare a heart. In-County post-grad tuition not available if OCP student.
<b>Demonstrate Impact</b> What does ODCS do for this audience?	The only Christian preschool that integrates shared values with a full Preschool through K-12 experience.	Your student's identity begins to form through the experience of a diverse community of friends who share Christian faith and a foundation of biblical values.	From athletics to academics, Middle School students learn to embrace the cause of Christ, form the heart of a disciple, and the essential beliefs that strengthen their faith.	- 95% of ODCS graduates attend college. - 5% enter military or mission field. - \$10,000 average scholarships
How do we help and empower?	We're your partner as you seek to shepherd your student's heart.	We're your partner as your student discovers their identity in Christ.	We're your partner as your student develops their faith.	We're your partner as your student discovers their calling.

**Equipping Disciples. Redeeming Culture.**

Mission Impact

#BeAPatriot #HeartofAPatriot

The ODCS identity represents

- The cause of Christ,
- The heart of a disciple, and
- The beliefs that form the shield of our faith.

**OPEN DOOR CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS**

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Stop building your brand.  
Start growing your tribe.  
Invite your tribe to be the hero of your story.  
The tribe will grow your brand.  
Your brand will sustain your company.

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Here are your five takeaways for branding:

- Stop building your brand.
- Start growing your tribe.
- Invite your tribe to be the hero of your story.
- The tribe will grow your brand.
- Your brand will sustain your company.

### Bonus Resources



Get the goodies:  
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### BOOKS

- *Raise Your Voice: A Cause Manifesto* (Sooy, 2014; nonprofit brand strategy; endorsed by Marty Neumeier)  
<https://amzn.to/3nj1lTc>
- *The Gift of Small Potatoes: How a Culture of Generosity Empowers Mission-Driven Brands to Win Trust, Earn Loyalty, and Unlock Abundance* (Sooy, 2021) <https://amzn.to/3plFnSh>
- *The Brand Gap* (Neumeier) <https://amzn.to/30J2Gep>
- *Zag* (Neumeier) <https://amzn.to/3Ed938r>
- *The Brand Flip* (Neumeier) <https://amzn.to/3C7VnLk>

### Bonus Resources

- Get the goodies: [go.aespire.com/madesimple](https://go.aespire.com/madesimple)
- Join the Society of Extraordinary Strategists: [extraordinarystrategist.substack.com](https://extraordinarystrategist.substack.com)
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