

4 Tips to Build an Impactful Brand Toolkit

Your toolkit matters and is much different than you might think



- A brand toolkit is MUCH more than the logo, font and colors.
 - There tends to be a lot of confusion and mis-execution when it comes to a brand toolkit. You have heard us say before that we often ask clients if they have a brand and they say YES! and then we come to find out they have a logo and maybe a few fonts and colors. The same tends to be true of the toolkit. A brand toolkit consists of MUCH more than the logo, font and colors.
 - So what is a brand toolkit? It is all of the visual and verbal assets that bring your brand to life. This includes brand story, character, TOV and all of the visual assets - logo, fonts, colors, photography treatments, textures, iconography, macro and micro visual elements, and usage of all of these items inclusive of executions. We are big fans of before and after examples, but it doesn't have to be this. It can be totally new executions.
 - The point of the toolkit is to build a consistent and authentic brand experience. All of these items TOGETHER do this. It is unfair and unreasonable to think that you can have the logo, font and colors and be able to do it all - especially with so many options for marketing and advertising today.
- The brand toolkit MUST include both visual AND verbal elements.
 - A brand's toolkit MUST have both visual and verbal elements. A lot of those historic brand guidelines documents we talked about are also missing the verbal strategy. And while we know (and have seen) that the visual elements are so much more - fill in the blank - exciting, sexy, stimulating, etc. than a bunch of words on the page, both sets of elements must work together.
 - You do the verbal elements FIRST in all cases before you ever get to visual execution, and that means that all of the visual elements should be based on the strategic elements - the story, character, TOV (and sometimes there are additional ones - mission, vision, values, etc.)
 - When we see a lot of "brands" (aka logo, fonts, colors) fall flat it is because they don't have the full toolkit. If you fell into the trap of having someone create your logo, colors and fonts, we want you to stop right here, press pause, and go listen to our other episodes on how to build the strategic elements. It is imperative. Otherwise, you are wasting your money creating visual assets. You might end up with something that "looks pretty", but it will mean nothing.
- Sample executions go a long way to building consistency.
 - This is the most-missed item in the toolkit. The common misconception is that if you have all of the elements we outlined previously you should be off to the races! Unfortunately, that is too often not the case. And that is because the vision that the designer(s) has in their head has to be brought to life in application so that others can follow along and so that the toolkit can be not only useful but can actually build an authentically consistent experience.
 - Before and after are the most intuitive of the options, because it uses applications that people are familiar with. Meaning, if you take a PPT template or FB post template or letterhead, that has been used for a long time in the organization and you revise that application to be inclusive of the new elements (this means both visually how it looks and how the tone of the copy/content of the copy changes) then people can see the transformation before their eyes.
 - There are also times when things are really broken and a complete overhaul is needed. Or the elements were just never applied in a way that makes any sense. This is okay too. The most important thing is that you take the user down the path from strategy to conceptual to execution. And in this way, anyone should really be able to come in, access the toolkit, and use it effectively. Which is the ultimate goal. (If it is unusable why do it at all? You are then wasting valuable time, money and resources.)
- The toolkit does NOT have to mean that you overhaul what exists currently.
 - When we tell our clients that they need a brand toolkit, this is the biggest pushback that we get - I already spent "X" time, money, resources to get us to where we are. We like our logo just as it is. There is legacy tied to what we have...and all of this is justified and totally okay with us. We are in the business of "making things better and more strategic". We are not one of those agencies that come in and tell you that everything is wrong and you have to start over.
 - Side note: if a company comes in and says you have to do it over, you should get a second opinion. Don't sign up for a redo without checking. You might need it, but I would guess that 90% of the time you don't.
 - You DO have to be flexible if you want to work this way. You owe it to your team to utilize their expertise and respect their opinion. So if they come in and tell you for example that the way your logo file was done is so completely broken that it needs to be rebuilt, listen. If they tell you that the blue you love so much is actually used inconsistently and is actually 8 different blues, listen - take their reco and pick one. Or if they tell you that you should really think about replacing that font because it will wreak havoc on your digital applications, listen. Teams that are willing to work with you in this way will provide advice that you can trust.