

The Founder Brand Sprint.

Run it with your team in two half-days. Walk out with a one-page brand brief that any studio can price.

Facilitator guide. Version 1.0, October 2026. Made by iklipse.

By the end of day two, you will have one page that explains your brand.

Most founders hire a designer too early. They ask for a logo while the big question is still open: who is this for, and why would they pick us? This sprint answers that question with the people who know the business best.

The brief covers these six things.

- The one customer you serve first.
- Their problem, in their own words.
- What they would choose if you did not exist.
- A one-line position that passes three tests.
- How the brand sounds, with real before and after lines.
- A visual direction built from references, with three anchor images.

Run it if this sounds like you.

- You are a founder with a team of two to six people.
- You plan to hire a designer or a studio in the next few months.
- Your product exists, or will exist soon.
- Your team describes the business in different ways, and it shows.

Skip it if this sounds like you.

- Your whole team can already repeat your position, word for word.
- You have no customers yet and no one to ask. Talk to ten people first, then come back.

This sprint goes further than iklipse's free guide, An Introduction to Real Branding (Brandscape), and the $10 Brand Workshop Template. You do not need either one to run it.

The sprint has two sessions and eight exercises.

Each session takes three and a half hours, breaks included. Run them on two different days, no more than a week apart. The gap gives people time to build a moodboard and to sleep on the positioning line.

Session one
3.5 hours

35 min	30 min	35 min	15	35 min	35 min
1 Audience	**2 Problem**	**3 Alternatives**	**Break**	**4 Only-you claims**	**5 Position**

Session two
3.5 hours

60 min	25 min	15	70 min	25 min
6 Personality and voice	**7 Name check**	**Break**	**8 Visual direction**	**The brief**

Openings and closings take the remaining minutes. The full minute-by-minute plans are on pages 8 and 15.

Session one finds the strategy.

Who you serve, what hurts, who you compete with and what only you can say. It ends with one line your whole team can repeat.

Session two gives it a voice and a look.

How you sound, whether the name holds up, and what the brand should look like. It ends with the brief, signed off by the founder.

Every exercise has a worksheet in worksheets.pdf, a frame on the board template, and a short video. Start each exercise with its video if your team has not seen it.

Start preparing one week before the first session.

One week before.

- [ ] Choose a facilitator. Ideally someone other than the founder. If the founder has to do it, read page 6 twice.
- [ ] Book two slots of three and a half hours. Add 30 minutes of buffer to each.
- [ ] Invite two to six people. Mix them: the founder, someone who talks to customers every day, someone who builds the product, and someone fairly new who still sees the business from outside.
- [ ] Send the pre-work (right).
- [ ] Import the board template into Miro or FigJam. See board/IMPORT.md.
- [ ] Print one set of worksheets per person.

The pre-work, for everyone.

- [ ] Bring three real things customers have said. Copy them from emails, reviews, WhatsApp chats, support tickets or sales calls. Exact words only.
- [ ] Write down every competitor you can think of, including the ones you think are bad.
- [ ] Open a free Pinterest account if you do not have one.

The day before.

- [ ] Open the board link on a second device to check access.
- [ ] Put a big timer on a screen everyone can see.
- [ ] Read the scripts in this guide out loud once. They sound better the second time.
- [ ] Collect the customer quotes people sent. Paste them on the board in exercise 2's frame.

Set up the room and the tools before anyone arrives.

In a room.

- A wall or a big screen. People think better standing up.
- Sticky notes in two colors and thick markers. Thick pens make people write fewer, sharper words.
- Printed worksheets and a few spare pens.
- A visible timer. Phones go face down during exercises.
- Coffee, water and something to eat at the break. Hungry teams agree too fast.

Online.

- The board template in Miro or FigJam, with edit access for everyone.
- Cameras on. Shared timer on screen.
- Mute everyone during silent writing.
- One shared document for the scribe, in case the board link fails.
- Shorter breaks, more often: take 5 minutes every 50 minutes.

Have these files open.

File	What it is for
facilitator-guide.pdf	This guide. The facilitator keeps it open the whole time.
worksheets.pdf	Ten printable worksheets, plus a filled example set for Dune & Dew, a made-up company.
board/	The board template for Miro or FigJam, with one frame per exercise.
brand-brief-template	The one-page brief you fill in at the end of session two.
The videos	Eight short videos, one per exercise. Play each one before its exercise.

Give everyone in the room one job.

The facilitator runs the clock and the questions.

They keep time, read the scripts and push for specific answers. They never argue for their own answer. If the founder facilitates, they speak last in every exercise.

The founder makes the final call.

When the room is split after a vote, the founder decides. The founder also gets one veto per session. Used once, it is gone.

The timekeeper calls the warnings.

Five minutes left, then one minute left. Give this job to the person most likely to run over.

The scribe writes down what was decided.

They move each final answer onto the board as you go, so the brief almost writes itself at the end.

Agree on four rules at the start.

- **Write first, talk second.** Every exercise starts with silent writing. It stops the first speaker from setting the answer.
- **Real words beat opinions.** A customer quote wins over "I think customers feel".
- **Park it.** Good ideas for later go in the parking lot frame, with a name on them.
- **Decide in the room.** Nothing is "to be discussed later" except what goes in the parking lot.

Open the first session with this script.

Read it as it is, or put it in your own words. Takes about three minutes. Then do the warm-up.

> **Say this:** "Thank you for giving up two half-days. Here is why we are doing this. Before we pay anyone to design a logo or a website, we need to agree on what we are. Today we answer four questions: who we serve first, what problem we fix for them, who else they could pick, and what only we can claim. By the end of today we will have one sentence that describes our position. It has to pass three tests, and I will be strict about them."
>
> "A few rules. We write before we talk, so the loudest idea does not win by being first. When we can, we use real customer words. If something is a good idea for later, it goes in the parking lot with your name on it. And when the room is split, [founder's name] makes the call. That is their job today. Mine is to keep time and keep asking 'what exactly do you mean?'"
>
> "There are no wrong answers in the first ten minutes of any exercise. There are plenty of vague ones, and we will fix those together."

Warm up for five minutes.

Ask each person to finish this sentence on a sticky note, without talking: **"A customer once told me..."** Go round the room and read them out. No discussion yet. You will use these in exercise 2, and everyone has now spoken once, which makes the next three hours easier.

Before you move on. Roles are set, the four rules are on the board, and everyone has spoken once.

Session one runs for three and a half hours.

Start	Length	What happens	What you leave with
0:00	15 min	Opening script, roles, rules, warm-up	Everyone has spoken once
0:15	35 min	**1 Name the one person you serve first.**	One primary audience in a sentence
0:50	30 min	**2 Write the problem in your customer's words.**	One problem sentence, the moment it hurts, what it costs
1:20	35 min	**3 List everything they could choose instead of you.**	Top five alternatives and a two-axis map
1:55	15 min	Break	
2:10	35 min	**4 Find the claims only you can make.**	Up to three claims, each with proof
2:45	35 min	**5 Write one line and make it pass three tests.**	A positioning line that passes
3:20	10 min	Close: read the line aloud, hand out homework	Moodboard homework, name decision
3:30		End	

If you run late.

Cut time from exercise 3 first. The map is useful, the long debate about it is less useful. Never cut exercise 5: it is the reason for the whole session.

If you run early.

Spend the spare minutes on the stranger test in exercise 5. Call two people outside the company instead of one.

1 Name the one person you serve first.

A brand built for everyone sounds like no one. Pick the customer you would build for if you could only keep one. The others still matter. They come second.

Run it like this. 35 minutes, worksheet 1.

`5 min`	Silent writing. Each person writes every type of customer you have or want, one per sticky note. Describe people, not markets: "office managers at clinics with 3 to 10 staff" beats "healthcare".
`10 min`	Put the notes on the wall and group the ones that describe the same person. Give each group a plain name.
`10 min`	Dot vote, three dots each. Vote on three questions: who has this problem most often, who can pay for a fix, and who can we reach this month.
`10 min`	Fill in worksheet 1 together for the winning group: what they are trying to get done, where they look for help, what they say when they are annoyed, and what would make them switch.

> **Say this:** "If we closed tomorrow, who would be most upset? Not who would be polite about it. Who would actually have a problem on Monday morning?"

Watch for "everyone".

If the answer is "anyone who needs X", ask for a name. A real customer, with a real job title and a city.

Watch for the dream customer.

The big brand you hope to land one day is a target. The audience is who pays you now, or soon.

Done when the scribe can write the audience in one sentence on the board, and nobody objects.

2 Write the problem in your customer's words.

Customers do not buy categories. They buy a way out of a bad Tuesday. Your job here is to describe that Tuesday the way they would.

Run it like this. 30 minutes, worksheet 2.

`5 min`	Read out the real customer quotes from the pre-work and the warm-up. The scribe puts them all in the frame.
`10 min`	Each person writes the problem as the customer would say it, starting with "I". For example: "I spend Sunday night chasing invoices on WhatsApp."
`10 min`	Pick the strongest one. Then answer three questions on the worksheet: when does it hurt most, what does it cost them (time, money, or face in front of their boss), and what have they already tried?
`5 min`	Cut the final sentence to 20 words or fewer. Read it aloud. It should sound like a person, not a pitch deck.

> **Say this:** "Pretend you are the customer, telling a friend about this problem over dinner. What would you actually say? Keep the swear words out, keep everything else."

Watch for the solution in disguise.

"They need an app" is your answer, dressed up as their problem. Ask: what were they doing before apps existed?

Watch for big abstract words.

"Efficiency" and "convenience" hide the real story. Ask: what exactly happens, and when?

Done when you have one problem sentence in customer language, the moment it hurts most, and what it costs them.

3 List everything your customer could choose instead of you.

Your real competition is wider than the three companies you watch on Instagram. It includes a spreadsheet, a cousin who "does design", and doing nothing at all.

Run it like this. 35 minutes, worksheet 3.

`10 min`	Four columns on the board: direct competitors, other kinds of solutions, doing it themselves, and doing nothing. Everyone adds notes in silence.
`10 min`	Pick the top five. For each, write the honest reason a customer picks it. "They are cheaper" and "they were already there" are allowed.
`10 min`	Choose two axes that matter to the customer from exercise 1, for example cheap to premium, or do it yourself to done for you. Place the five alternatives and yourselves on the map.
`5 min`	Circle any empty corner that the customer would care about. An empty corner nobody wants is just empty.

> **Say this:** "Be fair to the competition. If they are as bad as we think, why do people keep paying them? Write down the real reason."

Watch for the long map debate.

If people argue about axes for more than five minutes, the founder picks two and you move on. You can redraw it later.

Watch for "we have no competitors".

Every customer is doing something about this problem today. That something is your competitor.

Done when you have five alternatives, one honest reason for each, and a map you can explain in a minute.

4 Find the claims only you can make.

"Great quality and friendly service" is on every website in your category. A claim only counts if a competitor could not copy it onto their homepage tomorrow.

Run it like this. 35 minutes, worksheet 4.

`10 min`	Everyone writes every good thing you could say about the business, one per note. Go fast and do not filter.
`15 min`	Sort every note into three columns: everyone says this, some can say this, only we can say this. Be strict. If a competitor's website already says it, it goes in the first column.
`10 min`	For each note in the last column, write the proof: a fact, a number you can show, a process, a person, a place, or a piece of history. A claim with no proof moves one column to the left.

> **Say this:** "Open your top competitor's website on your phone. If our claim is already on their homepage, it goes in the first column. No arguing."

Watch for value words.

Passion, quality, trust and care belong in the first column. Customers expect them. They are the price of entry.

Watch for the empty last column.

It happens. Look at how you work, where you are from, who started it and why. Specific history is hard to copy.

Done when you have up to three only-you claims, and each one has proof you could show a stranger.

5 Write one line and make it pass three tests.

> Brand name helps the audience from exercise 1 fix the problem from exercise 2, because the claim from exercise 4.

You can add "unlike the main alternative from exercise 3" if it makes the line sharper.

Run it like this. 35 minutes, worksheet 5.

`10 min`	Each person writes two versions alone.
`5 min`	Read them all out. No comments yet. The scribe puts the three most popular on the board.
`15 min`	Run all three tests on each of the three lines. Edit as you go.
`5 min`	The founder picks the winner. Keep the runner-up on the board too.

1 **The swap test.**
Put your top competitor's name in place of yours. If the line is still true, it fails. Go back to exercise 4.

2 **The proof test.**
For every word in the line, could you show evidence to a stranger tomorrow? Underline any word you could not prove. Cut or fix it.

3 **The stranger test.**
Read the line once, out loud, to someone who was not in the room. Call a friend if you have to. Ask them who it is for and why they would pick you. If they cannot say it back, it fails.

Done when one line passes all three tests and the founder has said yes.

Close session one and set the homework.

> **Say this:** "Before we go, [founder's name] will read our line out loud. If it makes you wince a little, good. Sleep on it. If you still hate it tomorrow, tell me why in one sentence, and we will look at it first thing in session two."

Everyone builds a Pinterest board before session two.

- Make a private Pinterest board (Pinterest used to call them secret boards) called "[Brand] feels like".
- Pin 20 to 30 images that feel like the brand you described today. Any subject works: interiors, packaging, streets, people, film stills, shop signs.
- Pin five images that feel wrong. Name each pin "wrong".
- Look for light, color and mood. Skip pictures of your own product category. A coffee brand does not need 30 pictures of coffee.
- Move or save your pins to the shared group board at least 24 hours before session two, so the facilitator can look through them.

The founder makes one decision.

Do we need a name check? Say yes if you are naming the company, a product or a new line, or if anyone in the room flinched at the current name today. Say no if the name is settled and trademarked. Then exercise 7 time goes to the visual direction.

The facilitator does three things the same evening.

- [ ] Tidy the board. Move final answers to the top of each frame.
- [ ] Run the stranger test once more with someone new, if you did not finish it.
- [ ] Collect three real lines for exercise 6: one from your website, one from your app or menu, one WhatsApp reply to a customer.

Session two also runs for three and a half hours.

Start	Length	What happens	What you leave with
0:00	10 min	Opening, read the line again, any one-sentence objections	The line stands or gets one edit
0:10	60 min	**6 Describe how the brand sounds.**	Six sliders, words to use and avoid, three before and after lines
1:10	25 min	**7 Check the name before you fall for it.**	Pass, worry or fail on six checks
1:35	15 min	Break	
1:50	70 min	**8 Turn the moodboard into a visual direction.**	A sorted reference framework and three anchor images
3:00	25 min	Fill in the brand brief together	The finished one-page brief
3:25	5 min	Close: the founder signs the brief	Next steps and owners
3:30		End	

> **Say this:** "Last time we decided what we are. Today we decide how we sound and how we look. Before that, here is our line again. Did anyone wake up hating it? You get one sentence each." (Allow five minutes. If an objection is strong, run the swap test on it. If the line survives, move on.)

No name check needed? Add those 25 minutes to exercise 8, where most teams want more time.

6 Describe how the brand sounds.

Your voice is the way the brand would talk if it walked into the room. You will set it with sliders, word lists and three real lines rewritten.

Part A. Set the sliders. 20 minutes, worksheet 6A.

Six sliders, each with ten steps: formal to casual, serious to playful, calm to loud, classic to new, expert to friend, local to global. Everyone marks their own position in silence. Reveal together. Talk only about the sliders where people are more than three steps apart. The founder settles each one.

Part B. Choose words to use and words to avoid. 15 minutes, worksheet 6B.

Each person writes ten words the brand would use and ten it would never use. Keep the ones that show up more than once. If you sell in Arabic too, do this for both languages. A word that works in English can feel cold or odd in Arabic, and the other way round.

Part C. Rewrite three real lines. 25 minutes, worksheet 6B.

Take the three lines you collected: one from the website, one from the app or menu, one WhatsApp reply. Each person rewrites all three in the new voice. Read them out. Keep the best version of each.

> **Say this:** "Read all three new lines in a row. Do they sound like the same person wrote them? If one sounds like a bank and one sounds like your cousin, we are not there yet."

Done when you have six slider positions, three personality words, ten words to use, ten to avoid, and three before and after pairs.

7 Check the name before you fall in love with it.

Use this for a company name, a product name or a new line. Score each check pass, worry or fail. Two worries count as one fail.

Run it like this. 25 minutes, worksheet 7.

3 min	**Say it.** Say the name once on a phone call to someone outside. Can they say it back?
3 min	**Spell it.** Ask the same person to type it after hearing it once. Did they get it right?
5 min	**Search it.** Search the name on Google, the App Store, Google Play, Instagram and TikTok. What comes up first?
4 min	**Claim it.** Is the domain you want available, and the handles on the platforms you use?
5 min	**Translate it.** What does it mean, or sound like, in every language your customers speak? Ask a native speaker under 25 about slang.
5 min	**Check the register.** Run a quick search in the WIPO Global Brand Database and in the trademark office of each country you sell in.

This is a first screen only. These checks find obvious problems fast. They do not clear a name. Before you print, register or launch anything, ask a trademark lawyer in each market to run a full search.

Watch for falling in love.

The longer a team argues for a name, the harder it gets to let it go. Score first, then debate.

Watch for Arabic and English drift.

Check how the name is written in Arabic script too. Two spellings in the market is a worry.

8 Turn the moodboard into a visual direction.

A designer cannot price "modern and clean". They can price three anchor images and a list of what to keep and what to avoid.

Run it like this. 70 minutes, worksheets 8A and 8B.

15 min	Scroll the shared Pinterest board together on the big screen. Each person stars five images they love and flags three that feel wrong. Log them on worksheet 8A.
30 min	Sort the starred images into the six rows of the reference framework on worksheet 8B: light, color, framing, texture and material, people and casting, type and graphic marks. For each row, write what you keep and what you avoid, in plain words. "Hard noon light with real shadows." "No white studio backgrounds."
15 min	Pick three anchor images: the ones a designer should see first. Then pick one "never this" image from the wrong pile.
10 min	Write the visual direction in three sentences. Read it aloud next to the positioning line. They should feel like the same company.

> **Say this:** "Ignore what is in the picture. Look at the light, the color, how close the camera is. A picture of a car can be the right reference for a bakery."

If you have iklipse's free Image Reference Framework, use it for the sort. It goes into more detail on each row.

Watch for literal picks.

"We sell dates, so we need palm trees." Point the team back to light, color and framing.

Watch for logo design in the room.

Sketching logos now is a trap. The brief tells a designer where to look. Leave the drawing to them.

Fill in the brief together in the last 25 minutes.

If the scribe kept up, most of this is copy and paste from the board. Use brand-brief-template.pdf or the .md version.

10 min	The scribe copies the final answers from each frame into the brief. Everyone else checks the board and fixes typos.
10 min	Fill in the practical part as a group: what you need a studio to make, where it will be used, the deadline, a budget range and who signs off. Studios need these to quote.
5 min	The founder reads the whole brief out loud, top to bottom. Fix anything that sounds wrong when spoken. Then the founder signs it.

> **Say this:** "Write a budget range, even if it feels awkward. A studio that sees no budget will guess, and the guess will be wrong in one direction or the other."

Close the session with three questions.

- [ ] Who sends the brief to studios, and by when?
- [ ] Who owns the parking lot items?
- [ ] When do we read this brief again? Put a date in the calendar three months from today.

Handle the loudest person in the room early and kindly.

Every team has one. Often it is the founder. Loud people usually care a lot, so treat their energy as useful and give it a shape.

Use the structure first.

- Keep silent writing at the start of every exercise. It is your best tool, so never skip it to save time.
- Go round the room in a fixed order, and put the loudest person last.
- Give everyone 60 seconds to share. The timekeeper calls time out loud, for everyone, every time.
- Give the loud person a job, such as timekeeper. It keeps them busy and makes them the guardian of other people's time.

Then use your words.

> **Say this:** "That is a strong point. Hold it for a minute. I want to hear from two people who have not spoken yet, then we come back to you."

> **Say this at the break, in private:** "You know this business better than most people here, and they know it. When you speak first, they stop writing. Can you go last for the next two exercises? I will make sure your point gets heard."

Hold the founder back when they want to skip ahead.

Founders love the fun parts. In session one you will hear "what about the logo?" and "I already know the colors". Agree on this before you start: the founder waits, like everyone else.

Three moves that work.

- **The parking lot, with their name on it.** Write the idea down in front of them. It shows the idea is safe and it will come back.
- **The cost argument.** A studio prices the brief. A vague brief means more rounds of design, and more rounds cost more money and more weeks.
- **The veto reminder.** The founder has one veto per session. If they want to spend it on skipping an exercise, they can. Few do.

> **Say this:** "That is a good idea for session two, so I am putting it in the parking lot with your name on it. Right now we need your help on something only you can answer: who is the one customer we would never want to lose?"

When the room gets stuck, try this order.

Two minutes of silent writing. Then a dot vote. Then the founder decides. Do not let any single question run more than ten minutes past its slot.

This is what done looks like.

- [ ] One audience, written in one sentence.
- [ ] One problem sentence, in customer words.
- [ ] Five alternatives, each with one honest reason.
- [ ] Up to three only-you claims, each with proof.
- [ ] One positioning line that passed all three tests.
- [ ] Six slider positions and three personality words.
- [ ] Ten words to use, ten to avoid, three before and after lines.
- [ ] A name result: pass, or a list of next steps.
- [ ] A sorted reference framework and three anchor images.
- [ ] A brief that the founder has read aloud and signed.

Empty boxes? Book one 60-minute follow-up within a week, with the same people. Do not send the brief out until every box is ticked.

Send the same brief to two or three studios.

Ask each one to price the work in stages, so you can compare like with like. A good studio will reply with questions. That is a good sign. A studio that quotes in five minutes, with no questions, has not read it.

Want iklipse to be one of those studios? Send the brief through iklipseworld.com/contact and the team will reply with questions first.

iklipse turns briefs like this one into brand identities, websites and launch campaigns.

See how we work on brand experiences at iklipseworld.com/services/brand-experiences.

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