Real Branding.

How to build a brand people choose, remember and stand up for.

2026 edition

iklipse

This book is free, and you can share it with anyone who is building something.

Real Branding was first published in 2023 as a short introduction. This 2026 edition is a full rewrite by the iklipse team: longer chapters, real case studies from our own work, exercises you can run with your team this week, and an honest chapter on what AI changes.

iklipse is a hybrid creative studio working across the GCC, Egypt and North Africa, the US and Europe. We build brands, websites, campaigns and AI-infused production.

Every iklipse case study in this book describes real work, and you can read each one in full at iklipseworld.com/works. Outside examples are listed with their sources at the back.

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This book is for people who have to build a brand while running a business.

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Your brand is a promise you keep every day.

This book is for people who have to build a brand while running a business.

You have payroll on Thursday, a supplier who is late and a logo you are still unsure about. This book is written for that week. It explains what a brand is, how to build one on purpose, and what to do about it this month.

Most brands get built at eleven at night.

Picture a founder in Cairo, or Riyadh, or Austin. The kids are asleep. The laptop is open on the kitchen table, next to a cold cup of tea. There are three logo options in a WhatsApp group with two cousins and a friend from university. One cousin likes the blue one. The friend says the green one looks "more premium." Nobody can say why.

Tomorrow there is a sales call, an invoice to chase and an Instagram post that was due last week. The brand gets decided in the gaps between those things, by whoever is awake and has an opinion.

We have sat at a lot of those kitchen tables. At iklipse we make brands, films and campaigns for companies across the Gulf, Egypt, North Africa and the US. Some are household names. Many are a founder with a good product and a name they picked in an afternoon. The questions are almost always the same. What should we stand for? Why does our stuff look like everyone else's? Do we need a rebrand, or a better week? What do we say in Arabic, and does it have to match the English?

This book tries to answer those questions in plain words, with real examples, and with exercises you can do before your next team meeting.

A lot has changed since the first edition.

We published "An Introduction to Real Branding" in 2023. It was short and general. Since then, the ground under brands has moved in four ways, and this edition is rebuilt around them.

AI arrived in every studio. ChatGPT came out at the end of November 2022. Within two years, image and video tools had become part of daily production in many studios, ours included. Today you can make a hundred versions of a poster before lunch. That makes taste and judgment more valuable, because someone still has to pick the right one and throw away the ninety-nine. Chapter 9 is an honest, practical look at what AI is good for in branding and where it lets you down.

Search started answering for you. In May 2024 Google began showing AI Overviews at the top of results in the US, and by the end of that October they had spread to more than 100 countries. Many people now ask a machine "what's the best clinic near me" or "which

delivery app is cheapest" and get one paragraph back. If your brand is vague, that paragraph will be vague about you, or it will leave you out. Clear positioning used to help you win a customer's memory. Now it also helps you win the summary.

Short video became the front door. For many brands, the first contact is a vertical clip of nine seconds, seen with the sound off, between two other clips. That changes how a brand needs to look and sound. It has to be recognizable in a fraction of a second and still make sense when someone stops scrolling.

The region's brands grew up. In January 2020 Uber completed its $3.1 billion purchase of Careem and kept the Careem name. In December 2024 Talabat listed on the Dubai Financial Market in the largest IPO in the GCC that year. Founders here now build with the expectation that a local brand can become a very large one. Customers expect it too. What "looks local" and what "looks serious" used to be two different things. They have moved much closer together.

Talabat grew from a students' idea into the biggest listing in the Gulf in 2024.

Talabat started in Kuwait in 2004. Its name is the Arabic word for "orders," which tells you what it does in one word that every customer in the region already knows.

In December 2024 it listed on the Dubai Financial Market. It raised about $2 billion, sold 20 percent of the company and was the largest IPO in the GCC that year.

For a smaller business, the useful lesson sits in the name. A brand that people can say, understand and recommend in one breath has a head start that keeps paying back for years.

You can read this book in order or out of order.

The chapters follow the order we use with clients. First, what a brand is (Chapter 1). Then who you want to win and what you claim (Chapter 2), and the strategy that turns that into repeatable decisions (Chapter 3). Then the name (Chapter 4), the identity (Chapter 5) and the voice (Chapter 6). After that come experience, culture, AI and measurement, and finally rebrands and working with a studio.

If you are short on time, read Chapters 1 and 2 first. Most brand problems we see are positioning problems wearing a design costume.

Every chapter has the same parts. A story to start. A few sections that each make one point. At least one case, either from our own work or from a well-known brand we could check. An exercise you can do this week. A short list to remember at the end.

Where we mention our own work, we only say what we did and what we made. Where we mention other brands, we checked the facts against public sources and listed them at the back. If we could not check something, we left it out.

Most brand problems we see are positioning problems wearing a design costume.

Write down the brand you have today before you read any further.

This takes twenty minutes and gives you something to compare against when you finish the book.

1. Write one sentence that says what your business does and who it is for.
2. Ask three customers to describe you to a friend in one sentence. Write down their exact words.
3. Put your logo, your website home page and your last five social posts on one screen. Write three words that describe what you see.
4. Compare the three lists. Circle any word that appears in all of them.
5. Keep the page. You will need it in Chapter 2.

What to remember from this chapter.

- A brand gets built whether or not you plan it, so it is better to plan it.
- AI makes options cheap, which makes good judgment more valuable.
- Clear positioning now helps you show up in AI answers as well as in people's memory.
- Brands from this region now compete at the very top, and customers notice.
- Start with Chapters 1 and 2 if you only have an evening.

01

A brand is what people say about you when you leave the room.

Your brand is the sentence someone uses to describe you to a friend. You can shape that sentence, and you can make it easier to say, though you never get to write it alone. This chapter explains what a brand is, how it differs from your logo and your marketing, and why it is worth the effort.

The real test of a brand happens at someone else's dinner table.

It is a Thursday night in Amman. A family dinner, twelve people, too much food. Someone's aunt brought a tray of knafeh, and it is gone in four minutes. A cousin asks where it came from.

The aunt says the name of the shop, and then one sentence: "It's the place near the roundabout, the one that only makes knafeh, they sell out by eight."

That sentence is the brand. Three facts and a feeling. It tells the cousin where to go, what to expect and that he should go early. Nobody at the shop wrote it, and it does more selling than anything they paid for.

Every business has a sentence like that, whether or not the owner knows what it is. Sometimes it is flattering. Sometimes it is "they're fine, a bit expensive." Sometimes there is no sentence at all, because nobody remembers enough to say anything. That last one is the most common, and the most expensive.

A brand lives in other people's heads.

There is a line about branding that gets passed around on LinkedIn and conference slides: "Your brand is what other people say about you when you're not in the room." It is usually credited to Jeff Bezos. Nobody has ever found the interview, letter or speech where he said it. The line has stuck to him anyway, because people keep repeating it with his name attached. That is a decent demonstration of the idea itself.

Here is a definition we find useful in practice. **A brand is the set of memories, feelings and expectations that people attach to your name.** Those memories decide three things:

Whether people **notice** you when they are ready to buy. Whether they **trust** you enough to try. Whether they **choose** you again, and tell someone else.

So when we say "brand," we mean three practical things at once. Reputation is what people believe about you. Memory is how easily you come to mind. Choice is what they do when your name sits next to a competitor's on a shelf or a screen.

You can influence all three. You can't control any of them. The work of branding is to make the right memories easy to form and the right sentence easy to say.

Your brand is the sentence someone uses to describe you to a friend.

Brand, identity and marketing are three different jobs.

Most confusion about branding comes from using one word for three things. Founders say “we need branding” and mean a logo. Agencies say “brand” and mean a campaign. Investors say “brand” and mean the reason customers stay. All three are real. They are different jobs.

Think of a person you know well.

Their **identity** is what you can see and hear: their face, their clothes, their handwriting, the way they sign off a message. For a business, identity is the visible system: name, logo, colors, type, photography, tone of voice. Chapters 4 to 6 cover it.

Their **marketing** is how they show up: the parties they go to, who they talk to, what they post. For a business, marketing is the work of putting your identity and your offer in front of the right people, at the right time, often enough to be remembered.

Their **brand** is what people say about them after they have left the party. It is the result of the other two, plus everything they actually did while they were there. Did they keep their promises? Were they kind to the waiter? Did they talk only about themselves?

This matters because each job fails in its own way. A beautiful identity with no marketing is a secret. Loud marketing with a weak identity gets you noticed and then forgotten, because people can’t tell your ad from a competitor’s. And both can be excellent while the brand still suffers, because the product, the service or the delivery driver tells a different story.

The brand is the sum. You build it with design and media, and you keep it with behavior.

Brands started as marks of trust and became shortcuts for choice.

For most of history, a brand was a promise of origin. A maker put a mark on a pot, a barrel or a bolt of cloth so a buyer far away knew who made it and who to blame. The mark carried the maker’s reputation to places the maker would never visit.

Modern trademark law grew out of that need. When Britain opened its trademark register on 1 January 1876, the first mark entered was the red triangle of Bass, a brewery in Burton upon Trent. Bass pale ale was shipped a long way from home, and the triangle told a drinker far away that this was the real thing. The same company took mark number two as well, a red diamond for its other ales.

The next shift came with mass production and mass media. In 1931 a young advertising manager at Procter & Gamble called Neil McElroy wrote a three-page memo. His soap, Camay, was competing with Lever and Palmolive and also with Ivory, P&G's own bigger soap. He argued that each brand should have its own dedicated team, thinking about every part of how it was sold. The idea became "brand management," and many consumer goods companies still work that way. Brands were now competing for attention in newspapers, on the radio and later on television, and the owner of the most memorable story usually won.

Then came the feed. Today much of what people know about your brand comes from people you have never met: reviews, comments, a creator's video, a screenshot of your customer service chat, an AI assistant's two-line summary. You still control your own channels. You no longer control the conversation. That makes the old idea more important: the brand is what people say, and now they say it in public, at scale, forever.

The thread through all of it is the same. A brand helps a buyer make a decision faster and with less risk. The mark on the barrel, the soap on the shelf and the name in the search box all do the same job. They make choosing easier.

A strong brand pays you back in four ways.

Branding often gets treated as a cost you pay after the "real" business is working. In our experience a strong brand is an asset, and it pays you back in four ways.

It lets you charge a fair price without a fight. When people trust a name, they compare less. They are buying the product and also the reduced risk of a bad surprise. That gives you room to price for quality, which pays for better quality, which keeps the reputation going.

It makes trust faster. A new customer who has heard of you needs fewer reasons to say yes. A sales call starts warmer. A marketplace listing gets clicked. A bank or a landlord takes your call. The work you did to be known does some of the selling for you, every day, for free.

It helps you hire. Good people want to work somewhere they can explain at a dinner party. A clear brand tells candidates what you stand for before the interview, and filters out people who would be unhappy there.

It protects you in a bad week. Every business has one. A late delivery, a bad review that goes viral, a product that fails. A brand with goodwill in the bank gets the benefit of the doubt. A brand with no story gets defined by its worst day.

There is one more payoff, and it is the clearest proof that a brand is an asset: people own a piece of it. In April 1985 Coca-Cola changed its formula and launched "New Coke." Blind taste tests had liked the new recipe. The public did not. People felt something they loved had been taken from them, and the company was flooded with angry calls and letters. On 11 July, 79 days after the launch, the original came back as "Coca-Cola Classic." The formula belonged to the company. The memories belonged to the customers, and they wanted them back.

Uber paid $3.1 billion for Careem and kept the Careem name.

Careem started in 2012 in the Middle East, founded by Mudassir Sheikha and Magnus Olsson. The name comes from the Arabic word for generous, and the founders have talked about generosity as the way they wanted the company to treat people.

In March 2019 Uber agreed to buy Careem, and in January 2020 the $3.1 billion deal closed. Uber had its own app, its own brand and its own drivers in many of the same cities. It could have switched Careem off and moved everyone across.

It didn't. Careem became a wholly owned subsidiary that kept its brand, kept its co-founder as CEO and kept running its own services alongside Uber's. In a market where people had built habits and loyalty around a local name, the name itself was part of what Uber was paying for.

Most businesses will never be bought for billions. The principle still applies at every size: the memories people attach to your name are worth something, and they take years to build and very little to lose.

You build a brand by deciding, designing and behaving.

If a brand is what people say about you, the question becomes: how do you influence what they say? There are three levers, and this book is organized around them.

Decide. Choose who you want to win, what you want to be known for and what you will never do. That is positioning and strategy (Chapters 2 and 3). Without it, everything else is decoration.

Design. Make those decisions visible and audible in a name, an identity and a voice that people can recognize in a second and remember tomorrow (Chapters 4 to 6).

Behave. Keep the promise at every point where a customer meets you: the product, the service, the delivery, the refund, the reply to the angry comment (Chapter 7). This is where most brands are actually made or broken, and it costs nothing to start.

Most businesses work these in reverse. They design first, because a logo feels like progress. Then they try to decide what the logo means. Then they find out that behavior was the thing customers cared about all along. Doing it in order saves money and a lot of arguments.

If you work with a studio on this, a good one will insist on the order too. Our Brand Experiences work (iklipseworld.com/services/brand-experiences) always starts with the deciding, even when the client arrives asking for a logo.

Find out what people say about you when you leave the room.

Do this over one week. You need a phone, a notes app and some patience.

1. Ask five customers: "If a friend asked you about us, what would you say?" Write down their exact words. Don't correct them.
2. Ask two people who stopped buying from you the same question, and add: "What made you stop?"
3. Read your last 30 reviews and comments. Copy every adjective into one list.
4. Ask two AI assistants, "What is [your business] known for?" Note what they say and what they miss.
5. Put everything on one page. Underline the words that come up more than once. That is your current brand.
6. Next to it, write the one sentence you wish people said. The gap between the two pages is your brand work for the next year.

What to remember from this chapter.

- A brand is the set of memories, feelings and expectations people attach to your name.
- Identity is what people see, marketing is how they find you, and the brand is what they conclude.
- Brands began as marks of trust, and they still do the same job: they make choosing easier.
- A strong brand helps you price fairly, win trust faster, hire better and survive a bad week.
- People own their memories of you, as Coca-Cola learned in 1985.
- Decide first, then design, then behave, and keep behaving.

02

Positioning starts by choosing who you want to win.

Positioning is the decision about which customers you are for, which problem you solve for them and why you are the obvious choice. It is the most useful page in your brand, and the one most businesses skip. This chapter shows you how to write it and how to test it.

A menu with sixty items tells customers you haven't decided.

A bakery opens on a busy street in Heliopolis. The owner is talented and generous. On day one the menu has croissants, Egyptian feteer, cupcakes, sourdough, shawarma wraps, protein bowls and a coffee list with twenty-two drinks. The idea is simple: there is something for everyone, so everyone will come.

Six months later, the street has an opinion about the bakery. The opinion is "it's fine." Nobody crosses the city for it. Nobody posts about it. When a friend asks "where should I get a birthday cake," nobody says its name, because nobody knows what it is best at. The owner doesn't know either.

Two streets away, a smaller shop sells one thing: feteer, made in front of you, with six fillings. On Friday morning there is a queue on the pavement. People bring visitors from abroad. The sentence is easy to say: "Go to the feteer place, it's the best in Heliopolis, get the one with honey."

The second shop has made a decision. That decision is called positioning, and it shapes everything that comes after it: the name, the look, the menu, the price, the voice, the hiring and the sentence people say about you.

Choose the customer you most want to win.

Most founders describe their audience in census language. "Women 25 to 45, middle and upper income, urban." That description fits millions of people who have nothing in common except their passport and their bank balance. It gives you nothing to design for.

A better description starts with a situation. Who is this person when they need you? What just happened? What are they trying to get done, and what is in their way?

Compare these two:

"Small business owners in the UAE."

"A vet who runs her own clinic in Dubai. She is very good at her job. Her booking system is a notebook and a WhatsApp group, and she loses an hour every evening answering the same five questions."

The second one tells you what to build, what to say, where to find her and what she will pay for. It also tells you who you are leaving out, and that is the part that makes founders nervous.

Here is the thing about leaving people out. Choosing a core customer doesn't stop anyone else from buying. The feteer shop happily sells to tourists, office workers and the man who only wants a coffee. It just doesn't design the shop around them. You choose a customer so you know who to design for. Everyone else is welcome to come along.

A useful question: if you could only win one type of customer this year, and lose all the others, which one would you keep? Start there.

You choose a customer so you know who to design for.

Your real competitor is whatever people do today instead of buying from you.

When we ask clients who they compete with, they usually name two or three businesses that look like them. That list is too short. Your real competition is every other way your customer could solve the same problem, including doing nothing.

For a meal kit, the alternatives include a supermarket, a delivery app, the mother-in-law's cooking and a bowl of cereal. For an accounting firm, the alternatives include a spreadsheet, a nephew who is "good with numbers" and ignoring the problem until the tax deadline. For a gym, the competition is the sofa.

Write down every alternative your customer has. Then, for each one, write down what is good about it from the customer's side. The sofa is free, warm and very close. You need to understand why people choose it before you can argue against it.

This list is where your positioning comes from. Your claim has to beat the alternatives your customer actually considers, on something they actually care about.

Kardo was positioned against everywhere Kurdish viewers already watched.

Kardo is a Kurdish-first streaming service. It opens with an archive of the dramas, documentaries and programs made for Kurdish television. It is built for young Kurds, above all those growing up abroad, who already stream everything else they watch.

The case starts from what those viewers had before Kardo: Kurdish content as one channel among dozens, a few titles in someone else's catalog, or a blurred upload on a site full of pop-ups. Those were the real alternatives.

So we built Kardo to look like the rest of its viewers' screen, the same screen where they already stream everything else. The tagline puts the whole position in three words: "Kurdish, full screen."

Read the full case at iklipseworld.com/work/kardo

The best claim is one only you can make and your customer cares about.

Once you know your customer and their alternatives, you need a claim: the one reason to choose you. A good claim sits where three things overlap. It matters to your customer. You can prove it. Your competitors can't say it, or won't.

Most claims fail the third test. "Quality, service and value" is something every business says, so it means nothing. "Passionate team" is something every business believes about itself. The useful claims are specific, and they often feel slightly uncomfortable to say out loud.

Avis said it was second. In the early 1960s Avis was a distant second to Hertz in American car rental. Its agency, Doyle Dane Bernbach, built the campaign on that fact. Avis was only No. 2, so it had to try harder: washed cars, clean ashtrays, heaters that worked. The line "We try harder" turned a weakness into a reason to choose them, and the company kept it as its motto for decades. It worked because it was true, specific and something Hertz could never say.

Volvo chose safety and then behaved like it. Volvo engineer Nils Bohlin perfected the three-point seatbelt in 1959, and it became standard in Volvo cars. Then Volvo gave the patent to the rest of the industry for free. That decision is still the best piece of proof

behind the brand's long positioning around safety. A claim is only as strong as the evidence behind it, and Volvo built evidence that the whole industry now wears across its chest.

Liquid Death sold water to people who didn't want to look like water drinkers. Mike Cessario, a designer, has said the idea came at a Vans Warped Tour in 2009, watching people drink out of Monster energy cans. He wanted to sell water the way Monster sold energy drinks. The company launched in 2019 with mountain water in tallboy cans, the format people usually associate with beer, and a tagline that says "murder your thirst." The product is water. The positioning is for people at a gig or a party who want something in their hand that fits the room.

Each of these claims picks a customer, beats a specific alternative and gives people a reason they can repeat.

A positioning statement is a tool for saying no.

Write your positioning down in one paragraph. There is a classic template, popularized by Geoffrey Moore in his book "Crossing the Chasm," which goes roughly like this:

For **[the customer you chose]**, who **[the situation or need]**, **[your brand]** is the **[category]** that **[the one claim]**. Unlike **[the main alternative]**, we **[the proof]**.

Here is an example for an imaginary business:

For **owners of small clinics in the Gulf** who **lose hours every week to bookings and repeat questions**, **ClinicDesk** is the **front-desk assistant** that **answers patients and fills the calendar while the doctor works**. Unlike **a receptionist plus a notebook**, it **works at 2 a.m., in Arabic and English, and never forgets a follow-up**.

This paragraph is for internal use. You will never put it on a billboard. Its job is to help you make decisions, and most of those decisions are a polite no. Should we add a cheaper plan for students? Should we sponsor this marathon? Should the website lead with the AI features? You check the paragraph, and the answer usually becomes obvious.

Test your statement against these six questions.

Is it true today? A claim you will earn next year is a plan, and customers can tell the difference.

Would your best customer recognize themselves in it? Read it to one. Watch their face.

Could a competitor copy it word for word? If they could, it is too vague.

Can you prove it with something a customer can see, touch or check?

Does it help you say no? Try it on three real decisions from last month.

Would an AI assistant repeat it? When someone asks a chatbot about your category, the answer is built from what is written about you in many places. A sharp, consistent claim gets picked up. A cloud of nice adjectives gets ignored.

If your statement passes, share it with the team and put it somewhere they will see it. If it fails, that's useful too. It means you have found the decision you were avoiding.

One Click Away was positioned around the hour saved.

One Click Away builds websites, automations and AI employees for small and family-run businesses in the UAE, and keeps them running after launch. Its clients are a vet, an interior designer, a restaurant owner: people who are very good at their own trade and have no time to learn the technology.

The identity we built follows that customer. The brand's voice talks about the hour the customer gets back. The tagline is "Skip the tutorial," and the brand guide keeps the same rule: its last chapter holds every file a designer needs, from logos for every background to the colors as CSS and JSON.

The positioning is narrow on purpose. It tells a busy vet in the UAE, in three words, that this company is for her.

Read the full case at iklipseworld.com/work/oca

Your positioning should be narrow enough to be remembered.

The fear behind every vague positioning is the same: if we say who we are for, we lose everyone else. In practice the opposite happens. A narrow claim is easy to repeat, so it travels further. The people outside your core group hear it too, and many of them decide they want what your core customer has.

You can widen later. Most strong brands start with one customer and one claim, earn a reputation, and then move into the next group with that reputation as a passport. Starting wide and trying to narrow later is much harder, because by then the market has already decided you are “fine.”

If you want to work through this with your team, the Founder Brand Sprint is our DIY workshop built for it: two half-days, a printed workbook and a positioning statement at the end. You can also do it with a whiteboard and the exercise below.

Write a positioning statement your team can use by Friday.

Block two hours, invite the people who talk to customers most, and switch off notifications.

1. Describe your best customer in a situation, in three or four sentences. Use a real person you have served as the model.
2. List every alternative that customer has today, including doing nothing. Next to each one, write what is good about it.
3. Write ten possible claims. Cross out any that a competitor could also say.
4. For each claim left, write the proof a customer could check. Cross out any without proof.
5. Fill in the template with the strongest claim that survives.
6. Test it on three decisions from last month. If it makes those decisions clearer, you are done. If it doesn’t, go back to step 3.

What to remember from this chapter.

- Positioning is the choice of who you are for, what problem you solve and why you are the obvious choice.
- Describe your customer in a situation, using a real person you have served.
- Your competition includes every alternative your customer has, including doing nothing.
- A good claim matters to the customer, can be proved and can't be copied.
- A positioning statement is an internal tool, and its main job is to help you say no.
- A narrow, clear claim travels further and helps AI assistants describe you correctly.

03

Strategy turns a feeling into decisions you can repeat.

Most companies know how they want to be seen and have no way to make that happen every day. A brand strategy is a short set of decisions that lets anyone on the team act like the brand without asking you first. This chapter shows you what goes on that page and how to keep it alive.

A list of values is useless until it tells someone what to do.

Sara has just joined a food company in Riyadh as marketing manager. In her first week she is asked to brief an agency for the Ramadan campaign. She opens the shared drive and finds the brand folder.

Inside there are 41 logo files, a font nobody has a license for and a PDF from 2019. Page three says the brand values are Integrity, Excellence, Passion and Teamwork.

She reads it twice. It doesn't help. Every company she has ever worked for had the same four words. None of them tells her whether the campaign should be funny or emotional, whether the founder should appear, whether the Arabic should be formal or dialect, or whether it is fine to show a family that isn't Saudi.

So she does what most people in her position do. She briefs the agency with "something warm and premium," gets three routes that could belong to any food brand in the Gulf, and picks the one her boss likes.

There was a brand in her company's head. There was no strategy on paper. **A strategy is the part that turns the feeling into decisions someone like Sara can make on her own, on day three, without guessing.**

Purpose, promise and proof answer three different questions.

Most brand strategy documents mix these up. Keep them separate and each one gets much easier to write.

Purpose answers "why do we exist, apart from making money?" It is the reason the founder started, written so that a new hire believes it. A good purpose is specific enough to guide a hard choice. "To make people happy" can't guide anything. "To help Arab musicians work on their own terms" can. It tells you which partnerships to sign, which artists to back and which deals to walk away from.

Promise answers "what can a customer count on, every single time?" This is the purpose made practical. It should be something a customer can check. A courier's promise might be "you will always know where your parcel is." A clinic's might be "you will be seen within fifteen minutes of your appointment, or we'll tell you why." A promise you can't measure tends to become a slogan, and slogans don't change behavior.

Proof answers "how will anyone believe us?" Proof is what you do, own or show that makes the promise credible: a policy, a feature, a habit, a guarantee, a number you publish. It is the most neglected part of most strategies, and the most persuasive. When a customer doubts a promise, the proof is what changes their mind.

A quick way to test the three together: read your promise, then ask "says who?" If the answer is a list of things you actually do, you have proof. If the answer is "says us," you have a wish.

Read your promise, then ask "says who?"

Personality decides how the brand behaves when the rules run out.

No brand guide can cover every situation. A customer posts an angry video at midnight. A competitor makes a joke about you. A football team you sponsor loses 5 to 0. Someone on the team has to respond, quickly, and there is no rule for it.

Personality is what fills that gap. It is a short description of the brand as if it were a person, so the team can ask "what would they do here?"

The trap is to pick adjectives that sound good and mean nothing: friendly, professional, dynamic. Every brand claims those. A useful personality has three or four traits, and each trait comes with two lines: what it looks like when you get it right, and what it looks like when you push it too far.

Here is an example for an imaginary delivery app:

Quick. We answer in short sentences and get to the point. Too far: we sound cold, or we skip the apology.

Cheeky. We notice the funny side of hunger, traffic and Monday. Too far: we joke about a late order the customer is still waiting for.

Local. We talk like people from this city talk, and we know the neighborhoods by name. Too far: we use slang that excludes the people who just moved here.

With that, the midnight video gets a quick, human apology with a real fix, and no joke. The sponsored team's 5 to 0 loss gets one gentle line of support and no clever pun. The personality didn't need a rule for either situation. It gave the team a character to imitate.

Chapter 6 goes deeper into voice, which is how this personality sounds in words, in Arabic and English.

Brand architecture decides how your names relate to each other.

The moment a business has more than one product, service or location, it has an architecture decision to make. Will they all carry the same name? Will each one have its own? Will the parent appear in small print? This is brand architecture, and getting it wrong is expensive to undo.

There are three common models, plus endless mixes.

One master brand. Everything carries the parent name, and the parent does the heavy lifting. Careem is a good regional example. It runs rides, food delivery, grocery delivery and payments inside one app, and services like Careem Food and Careem Pay all wear the same name. Each new service borrows the trust already built by the rides business, and customers don't need to learn anything new. The risk is that one bad service can dent the whole name.

A house of brands. The parent company stays in the background and each brand stands on its own. Procter & Gamble sells Tide, Pampers, Gillette and Oral-B. Each one has its own name, its own look and its own customer, and the company name stays in the background. That lets a razor brand and a diaper brand speak to very different people without confusing anyone. Almarai does a version of this with bread and baked goods: its bread sells as L'usine, and its croissants and cakes sell as 7DAYS. The cost is that every brand needs its own budget to be known.

Endorsed brands. Each brand has its own name, and the parent appears as a stamp of approval. Marriott runs Fairfield by Marriott alongside hotels like The Ritz-Carlton, which carries no Marriott name on the door. The "by Marriott" tells a traveler what level of reliability to expect at a budget price, while the luxury brand keeps its own world. The endorsement lends trust without forcing every brand to look the same.

How do you choose? Ask three questions.

Does the new offer serve the same customer as the old one? If yes, a master brand usually works. If no, think about a separate or endorsed brand.

Would a failure in the new offer damage the main business? If yes, give it some distance.

Can you afford to build a second name from scratch? Most small businesses can't. If you can't fund it, the master brand is the realistic choice, even if a separate brand would be neater on paper.

For most founders reading this, the answer for the next three years is one strong master brand, with descriptive names for products underneath it. It is the cheapest model to run and the easiest for customers to remember. Add new brand names only when you have a clear reason and the money to back them.

Consistency builds memory, and room to adapt keeps it alive.

Every brand is pulled in two directions. The marketing team wants consistency, because people only remember what they see again and again. The content team wants freedom, because the same post every week gets ignored. Both are right.

The answer is to decide, in writing, what is fixed and what can flex.

Fixed is the core that makes you recognizable in a second: the logo and its clear space, the main colors, the main typeface, the tone of voice, the promise. These change only in a rebrand.

Flexible is everything that keeps the brand fresh: the photography subjects, the layouts, the seasonal colors, the jokes, the formats, the campaign lines. These change all the time, inside the fixed frame.

Google is the famous example of a fixed core with planned flexibility. On 30 August 1998, before the company was even incorporated, Larry Page and Sergey Brin put the Burning Man figure behind the second "o" of the logo as an out-of-office note. That doodle became a habit, and later a whole program of playful logos for holidays and anniversaries. The name, the letters and the colors stay. The drawing around them changes. People look forward to the change because the core never wobbles.

You can apply the same logic at any size. A café can keep its logo, colors and cups fixed and let the chalkboard, the seasonal menu and the playlist change every month.

Taraddod's identity fixes its roots and leaves room for the artists.

Taraddod supports Arab musicians with tools and creative direction. Its goal is to help them work on their own terms while keeping up with how music and culture move.

The identity we built for Taraddod works on two levels. The fixed part is the brand's own: a logo system that echoes the motion of sound and vinyl, clean design, purposeful typography and rooted colors, with green from the Saudi flag grounding it in its culture.

The flexible part belongs to the artists. The rest of the system leaves space for them to make it their own. For a brand whose purpose is helping musicians work on their own terms, that is the strategy showing up in the design: the frame is Taraddod's, and the picture inside it is the artist's.

Read the full case at iklipseworld.com/work/taraddod

Your whole strategy should fit on one page.

If a strategy needs forty slides, nobody will use it. The test is whether a new hire can read it in five minutes and make a good decision the same afternoon. Here is what goes on the page.

Positioning statement. The paragraph from Chapter 2: customer, need, category, claim, proof, main alternative.

Purpose. One sentence on why you exist, specific enough to guide a hard choice.

Promise. One sentence a customer can check.

Three proofs. Things you do, own or publish that make the promise believable.

Personality. Three or four traits, each with "looks like" and "too far."

Architecture. One line on how your names relate: master brand, house of brands or endorsed, and the rule for naming new products.

Fixed and flexible. Two short lists.

Never. Three things the brand will never do, even if it would sell more this quarter. This line saves more arguments than any other.

Once the page exists, put it where people work. In our experience a PDF in a shared drive gets opened twice and then forgotten. A brand guide built as a simple website, with the strategy on the first page and the downloads one click away, gets used every week. That's the idea behind our Living Brand Guide Template, though a shared doc with a pinned link will do the job too.

Review the page every six months. Change the flexible list freely. Change the fixed list and the promise only when something real has changed in the business.

Write your one-page brand strategy this week.

You need your positioning statement from Chapter 2, two hours and one honest colleague.

1. Write your purpose in one sentence. Test it: does it help you make one decision you are facing right now? If it doesn't, make it more specific.
2. Write one promise a customer could check. Then ask "says who?" and list three proofs. If you can't find three, you have found your first project.
3. Choose three personality traits. For each, write one line for "looks like" and one for "too far."
4. Decide your architecture in one line, and write the rule for naming the next product you launch.
5. List five fixed elements and five flexible ones, then add three things you will never do.
6. Give the page to someone who joined in the last year and ask them to plan one social post with it. Watch where they get stuck, and fix that line.

What to remember from this chapter.

- A strategy is a short set of decisions that lets the team act like the brand without asking you.
- Purpose explains why you exist, the promise says what customers can count on, and proof makes it believable.
- Personality traits need a “looks like” line and a “too far” line to be useful.
- Most small businesses should build one strong master brand before adding new names.
- Decide in writing what is fixed and what can flex, so the brand stays recognizable and fresh.
- The whole strategy should fit on one page that a new hire can use the same day.

04

A good name works in every language your customers speak.

Your name is the part of your brand that people say out loud, type into a search bar and pass on to a friend. In this region it usually has to do that in Arabic and English at once, and sometimes in French, Urdu or Kurdish too. This chapter covers the kinds of names, how to test them and how to make sure the one you love can be protected and found.

The name that wins at midnight often loses at breakfast.

Two founders sit in a café in Dubai Marina a little after midnight. Between them is a phone with a note called “NAMES FINAL v6.” It has 214 entries. They have been at it for three weeks, and tonight they have a winner. It is short, it sounds modern, and the logo is already half-drawn in one of their heads.

At breakfast, things go less well. The .com belongs to a company in Ohio. The Instagram handle belongs to a dormant account with nine posts from 2016. One founder sends the name to his mother in Cairo, and she replies with a laughing emoji and a voice note. In Egyptian slang, it sounds very close to a word you would never print on packaging.

This happens all the time. A name is the one part of a brand that has to survive language, law, search and other people’s mouths before it can do any work. Most naming problems come from falling in love before checking those things.

The good news is that checking is cheap. You can do most of it in a week, and it is much cheaper than renaming a business in year three.

Names come in a few types, and each type asks for different work.

Almost every brand name fits one of six types. Each one gives you something and costs you something.

Descriptive names say what you do. Talabat is the Arabic word for “orders,” and it tells every customer in the region what the app is for. Descriptive names are easy to understand on day one. They are harder to protect, because other businesses can claim the same ordinary words, and harder to stretch if you move into a new category.

Invented names are made from scratch. George Eastman invented “Kodak” in the 1880s. He later explained that the letter K had always been a favorite of his because it seemed “strong” and “incisive,” and he tried combinations until he found a word that began and ended with it. Reuben Mattus did the same with Häagen-Dazs in the Bronx: the name means nothing in any language, and he chose letters and an umlaut that would suggest Denmark. Invented names are easier to trademark and to own in search. The cost is that they start empty, and you have to pay to fill them with meaning.

Evocative names borrow a real word that carries a feeling. Careem comes from the Arabic word for generous. It hints at how the company wants to treat people without describing the service. Evocative names are memorable and give you room to grow, though the best words are often taken.

Founder names use a person: Ford, Chanel, many family businesses in the Gulf. They carry a sense of accountability and heritage. They are harder to sell later, and harder to manage if the founder becomes the story for the wrong reasons.

Acronyms compress a long name into letters. They are common in banking and government and they can work once a brand is famous. For a new business they are hard to remember, because three letters carry no picture.

Compound and phrase names join words to make something new: One Click Away is an example from our own work. They can tell a small story and give a designer a lot to work with, as you will see in the case below. They can also get long, and people shorten them in ways you don't control.

A simple way to choose: if your budget is small and your category is new, lean descriptive or evocative, so the name does some explaining for you. If you plan to spend a lot on marketing for years, an invented or evocative name will usually serve you better, because it can become entirely yours.

A name has to sound right before it looks right.

Most names get judged on a screen, in a nice font, next to a mock logo. Most names get used in the air: on the phone, in a voice note, shouted across a café, spoken to a voice assistant, said by a delivery driver at the gate. Test the sound first.

The phone test. Call a friend and say the name once, with no spelling. Ask them to text it back to you. If they get it wrong, so will your customers, and so will the search engine they type it into.

The noise test. Say it in a loud room. Short names with clear consonants survive noise. Names that rely on soft sounds or on an exact vowel get lost.

The pass-it-on test. Tell someone the name and ask them to tell a third person tomorrow. What arrives tomorrow is the name the market will actually use.

The mouth test. Ask speakers of each of your markets' languages to say it. Some sounds are easy in English and awkward in Arabic, and the reverse. Standard Arabic has no native "p" or "v" sound, so in borrowed words they often become "b" and "f." Some Arabic letters,

like ع and ج, have no English equivalent at all.

Eastman's reasoning about the letter K was a sound decision as much as a visual one. A strong first sound and a clear rhythm help a name stick. Two or three syllables are usually enough.

A name has to survive language, law, search and other people's mouths before it can do any work.

Arabic and English pull a name in different directions.

For most brands in the GCC, Egypt and North Africa, the name will live in two scripts. That creates choices that a brand in a single-language market never has to make.

Transliteration has no single right answer. An Arabic word can be written in Latin letters many ways. Careem spells an Arabic word with a C. Other companies might have chosen "Kareem" or "Karim," and customers will type all three. Pick one spelling, use it everywhere, and buy or redirect the obvious variants where you can.

Arabizi is how many customers type. Across the region, people often write Arabic with Latin letters and numbers, in what is called Arabizi or Franco-Arabic. The number 3 stands for ع, and 7 stands for ج, because of how the shapes look. There is no official standard, so the same word gets written several ways. If your name contains those sounds, search for it the way a 19-year-old would type it in a WhatsApp group, and see what comes back.

Meaning changes between dialects. A word that is neutral in Riyadh can be a joke in Cairo and an insult in Casablanca. Formal Arabic will not warn you about slang. Before you commit, ask at least one speaker from each market you plan to sell in, and ask about the word on its own and in common phrases.

Accidental meanings are real, and so are the myths. Mitsubishi's off-roader is called the Pajero in many markets. In Spanish, "pajero" is a crude insult, so Mitsubishi sold the same car as the Montero in North America, Spain and Latin America, and as the Shogun in the UK. On the other hand, the famous story that the Chevrolet Nova flopped in Latin America because "no va" means "doesn't go" in Spanish is a myth. Fact-checkers at Snopes found the car sold well in Mexico and Venezuela, and Spanish speakers hear "nova" and "no va" as different things. The lesson works both ways: check real meanings carefully, and don't throw away a good name because of a story someone heard on a podcast.

The two versions need to look like one brand. If your name has an Arabic and a Latin version, they need to share weight, rhythm and character on the page. That is a type design problem as much as a naming one, and Chapter 5 covers it. When you test names, always set them in both scripts side by side. Some names look strong in Latin and collapse in Arabic, or the reverse.

Our Bilingual Brand Kit was built for this stage. It includes a name test you can run with friends and customers across dialects, and a guide to pairing Arabic and Latin typefaces so the two versions of your name belong together.

Kardo's identity gives Sorani Kurdish the same care as English.

Kardo is a Kurdish-first streaming service for young Kurds, above all those growing up abroad. Its brand has to set Sorani Kurdish and Latin type side by side, on the same screens where its viewers stream everything else.

So the identity gives Kurdish equal standing. Clash Grotesk and Switzer carry the Latin side, and Vazirmatn carries every Sorani line. The brand guide includes a Sorani type ladder of its own, so a Kurdish line is set as carefully as an English one. The emblem rebuilds traditional motifs as screen pixels, where each cell holds a film.

The tagline names the promise in three words: "Kurdish, full screen." Every logo, color, font and motion file is in the guide, ready to download.

Read the full case at iklipseworld.com/work/kardo

A name is only yours once you can protect it and be found by it.

You can love a name, test it and spell it perfectly, and still lose it. Before you print anything, check four things.

Trademarks. A trademark protects your name for specific types of goods and services, grouped into classes. Search the official register in each country you plan to sell in. The World Intellectual Property Organization runs a free Global Brand Database that searches international registrations under the Madrid System along with many national registers at

once. It is a good first filter. It won't replace a local trademark lawyer, who can tell you whether a similar name in a related class is a real risk. Budget for that conversation. It is much cheaper than a dispute.

Domains. What you need is a domain people can guess. The .com is nice to have. If your exact name is taken, a short, natural addition (the city, the category, "get" or "hello") usually works better than a strange spelling.

Handles. Check every platform where your customers spend time: Instagram, TikTok, X, LinkedIn, YouTube, Snapchat in the Gulf. Try to get the same handle everywhere. If you can't, keep the same pattern everywhere, so people can guess it.

Search and AI answers. Search your name in Google, Google Maps and the app stores, in both scripts. Then ask two AI assistants "what is [name]?" If the answer describes another company, you will spend years correcting that. If the answer is empty, that's fine. It means the space is yours to fill.

If a name fails any of these checks badly, let it go. There will be another good name. There won't be another first launch.

One Click Away's identity was built from the three words in its name.

One Click Away builds websites, automations and AI employees for small and family-run businesses in the UAE. Its name is a phrase, and the phrase gave us the whole visual system.

"One" becomes a circle. "Click" becomes a cursor. "Away" becomes an arch. The three shapes are cut from one circle, so the name and the logo come from the same source. Neue Montreal sets the brand in both Latin and Arabic, and five colors sit around the shapes in fixed shares.

The guide runs to 13 chapters and lives on the web, and its logo, color, icon and motion pages are built to be played with. The tagline is "Skip the tutorial."

Read the full case at iklipseworld.com/work/oca

Run a full name test in one week.

Start with your shortlist of five names. If you don't have five, brainstorm until you have twenty, then cut.

1. Do the phone test and the pass-it-on test for each name with at least five people. Cross out any name that comes back misspelled more than once.
2. Send each name to a speaker in every market you plan to sell in, including at least one Gulf, one Egyptian and one Levantine or Maghrebi speaker. Ask what it means, what it sounds like and whether it is used in slang.
3. Write each name in Arabic and Latin script, and in Arabizi the way a young customer would type it. Search all versions.
4. Search the WIPO Global Brand Database and your local trademark register for each name in your class of goods or services.
5. Check the domain and the handles on every platform your customers use. Ask two AI assistants what each name is.
6. Keep the names that pass every step, take the top two to a trademark lawyer, and decide.

What to remember from this chapter.

- Every name type has a trade-off: descriptive names explain more, invented names are easier to own.
- Test how a name sounds on the phone and in a noisy room before you judge how it looks.
- Choose one Latin spelling of an Arabic name and use it everywhere.
- Check slang meanings with real speakers from each market, and ignore myths you can't verify.
- Search trademarks, domains, handles and AI answers before you print anything.
- A strong name gives your designer a starting point, as One Click Away's did.

05

Identity is a system, and the logo is its signature.

Most businesses own a logo file and call it an identity. The identity is everything around the logo that tells people it is you, from the green on your bag to the way your photos are lit. This chapter shows you how to build that system, how to make it work in Arabic and English, and how to keep it alive after the designer leaves.

The trouble starts the first time someone has to guess.

Picture a print shop in Heliopolis on a Tuesday afternoon. A founder is standing at the counter with a USB stick. On it is the logo for her new skincare line, one PNG file, exported by a freelancer two years ago.

The printer looks at it and asks three questions. Which green is this, exactly? What font do you use for the product names? Can I put the logo on a dark background, or do you have a white version?

She doesn't know. Nobody ever told her. So the printer guesses, the way her social media freelancer guessed last month, the way the packaging supplier guessed before that. Each guess is reasonable. Put them side by side and they look like four different companies.

This is the most common identity problem we see, and it has nothing to do with taste. The logo is fine. What is missing is the system around it: the agreed answers to the questions every supplier, freelancer and new hire will ask.

An identity is a set of decisions that lets other people make your brand without you in the room. The logo is one of those decisions. It is the most visible one, the way a signature is the most visible part of a letter. But you recognize a friend's letter long before you reach the signature. You know the handwriting, the paper, the way they open.

You recognize a friend's letter long before you reach the signature.

A strong identity survives with the logo covered.

In 1915, the Coca-Cola bottlers' association asked glass companies for a new bottle. The brief, as the company tells it today, asked for a bottle so distinct that you would recognize it by feel in the dark or lying broken on the ground. The Root Glass Company of Terre Haute, Indiana, won with the contour bottle that still carries the drink.

That brief is the best identity test ever written, and you can borrow it. Cover your logo. Is the thing still yours?

Mastercard ran a version of this test at scale. In January 2019, the company announced it would drop the word “Mastercard” from its mark in some places and let the two overlapping circles stand alone. Its chief marketing officer said research showed more than 80 percent of people recognized the circles without the name. A company only gets to do that after decades of using the same two circles, in the same two colors, everywhere.

Tiffany & Co. went further and made a color into property. Its blue is protected as a trademark in the United States, and Pantone mixes it as a private shade numbered 1837, after the year the company was founded. When you see that box across a room, you don’t need to read anything.

You won’t have Mastercard’s budget or Tiffany’s history. You don’t need them. A café in Jeddah with one strong color, one typeface and one rule for its photos can pass the covered-logo test inside a year, as long as it sticks to the rules every single time.

Every part of the system has a job you can name.

An identity has six working parts. Each one should answer a question a supplier will ask you.

The logo answers “who signed this?” Most brands need a small family of versions: a full logo, a short version or symbol for tight spaces like app icons and profile pictures, and versions for light and dark backgrounds. Decide the smallest size it can be printed, and how much empty space it needs around it. Those two rules prevent most of the damage.

Color answers “what does this feel like from across the street?” Pick one lead color and give it most of the work. Add two or three supporting colors and a neutral for text. Then write down the shares. A brand that uses its lead color on 60 percent of a page and its accent on 5 percent will look like itself. A brand that uses all five colors equally will look like a children’s party.

Type answers “what does this sound like when read?” Two families are usually enough: one with character for headlines, one plain and easy for body text. If you sell in Arabic, you need the Arabic partners for both, chosen at the same time. More on that below.

Imagery answers “what does our world look like?” Write rules for light, color, distance and people. Warm daylight or hard studio flash? Faces or hands? Real customers or models? A photographer who reads three lines of rules will shoot closer to your brand than one who gets a mood board with forty images.

Motion answers "how do we move?" Today most people meet your brand on a phone, in a video, in a story that lasts six seconds. Decide how your logo appears, how text comes in, how fast things move. Fast and snappy says one thing. Slow and smooth says another.

Layout answers "where do things go?" A simple grid, fixed margins, a set place for the logo, a rule for how much text a post can hold. Layout is invisible when it works. It is the reason a brand looks calm.

Airbnb's 2014 rebrand is a good reminder that a mark can carry an idea people want to take part in. The London studio DesignStudio built the symbol, called the Bélo, around the line "belong anywhere." The team said they wanted a mark anyone could draw. The shape reads as a person with arms raised, a location pin, a heart and the letter A. Airbnb even let hosts make their own versions. A mark that people can draw from memory is a mark that sticks.

Closer to home, Expo 2020 Dubai built its logo on an ancient gold ring dug up at Saruq Al Hadid, an archaeological site in the desert south of the city. The organizers said the ring's circular shape stood for connection, which fit the event's theme, Connecting Minds, Creating the Future. One small object gave the identity a story that belonged to that place and no other.

Bilingual type is where most regional identities break.

If you sell in the GCC, Egypt or North Africa, your identity has to work in two scripts. This is where we see the most expensive mistakes, because they show up late, usually when the Arabic menu or the Arabic billboard arrives and someone realizes nobody designed it.

Arabic and Latin letters are built differently. Latin letters sit on a line and mostly fit inside a box of the same height. Arabic letters connect, flow right to left, and reach further above and below the line. If you set an Arabic headline at the same point size and line spacing as the English one, it will usually look either cramped or tiny next to it.

A few rules save a lot of pain.

Choose both typefaces at the same time. Pick the Arabic and Latin families as a pair, and judge them side by side, at the same visual weight. A heavy, geometric English headline next to a light, calligraphic Arabic one looks like two brands sharing a wall.

Give Arabic more room. Arabic usually needs more line spacing. Set it so both scripts look equally comfortable, and accept that the point sizes may differ.

Decide your numbers. Will prices use Western digits (1, 2, 3) or Arabic-Indic digits (١، ٢، ٣)? Different markets expect different things. Pick a rule per market and write it down.

Mirror the layout, and check what should stay put. Right-to-left pages flip, and arrows, progress bars and back buttons usually flip with them. Logos, phone numbers and video play buttons usually don't.

Test with real copy. Fill every Arabic layout with real Arabic text from your actual product. Dummy text hides the problems you are trying to find.

Lock up the logo in both scripts. If your name exists in Arabic, design the Arabic version as carefully as the Latin one, and decide how the two sit together: side by side, stacked, or used separately.

If you want a structured way through this, our Bilingual Brand Kit walks you through a name test and an Arabic and Latin type pairing exercise you can do with your team.

Kardo built its emblem out of screen pixels.

Kardo is a Kurdish-first streaming service. It opens with an archive of the dramas, documentaries and shows made for Kurdish television, and it is built for young Kurds, especially those growing up abroad, who already stream everything else they watch.

Before Kardo, Kurdish shows reached that audience as one channel among dozens, a few titles in someone else's catalog, or a blurred upload on a site full of pop-ups. So we built Kardo to look like the rest of its viewers' screen. The emblem rebuilds traditional motifs as screen pixels. Each cell holds a film, and the films grow until they fill the frame.

Four colors carry the system, named Night, Shade, Play and Sun. Clash Grotesk and Switzer set the Latin lines, and Vazirmatn sets every Sorani line. The guide gives Sorani its own type scale, so a Kurdish line is set as carefully as an English one. The tagline says the whole idea in three words: "Kurdish, full screen."

Read the full case at iklipseworld.com/work/kardo

A guide works when people find the answer in ten seconds.

For years, brand guidelines lived in a PDF. Someone made a beautiful 80-page document, sent it once by email, and it disappeared into a downloads folder. Six months later the new social media manager had never seen it, and the version she did find was out of date.

A guide only works if the person who needs an answer can find it fast. That person is usually busy, often outside your company, and probably on a phone. So the best guides today are small websites.

A guide as a website has three advantages. There is one link, and it is always the latest version. Every file sits next to the rule that explains it, so the designer downloads the white logo from the same page that tells her when to use it. And you can show things a PDF can't, like how your logo animates or what your colors look like on a real screen.

Kardo's guide works this way. Every logo, color, font and motion file is ready to download from the page that explains it. For One Click Away, a UAE company that builds websites and automations for small businesses, we wrote a guide that runs to 13 chapters, live on the web. Its logo, color, icon and motion pages are built to be played with, because people remember rules they have tried with their own hands.

What should a guide hold? Start small. Logo versions and their rules. The color values for print and screen. The typefaces and where to get them. Five to ten photos that show your imagery rules. A page of good and bad examples. A downloads page. You can add the rest when people start asking.

If you would like a head start, our Living Brand Guide Template gives you the structure of a guide as a website, ready to fill with your own rules and files.

QR8Ed needed an identity that parents and teachers could trust.

QR8Ed is an education platform that uses AI to help primary school teachers choose trusted learning content and share it with students and parents through QR codes. It was created as a safe alternative to open video platforms for young learners.

For a brand like this, the identity carries a heavy load. Parents need to believe the platform is safe before they scan anything. Teachers need it to feel serious enough for a classroom. Regulators are watching the whole category.

Our work focused on presenting QR8Ed as a credible education platform built for a fast-changing set of rules. The system balances clarity and trust with a sense of forward thinking, so it reads as a tool for structured learning first.

Read the full case at iklipseworld.com/work/qr8ed

Consistency is a habit, and someone has to own it.

A system only works if someone protects it. In a small company, that is usually the founder or the marketing manager. Give the job a name and a little time each week.

The owner does three things. They answer questions fast, so nobody guesses. They review new work before it goes out, at least for the first few months. And they update the guide when a new situation appears, like the first Arabic billboard, the first event booth or the first TikTok series.

There is a fear that strict rules make a brand boring. In practice the opposite happens. When the basics are fixed, people stop arguing about the green and start spending their energy on the idea. The best campaigns we have seen were made inside tight systems.

Leave room on purpose. Decide which parts are fixed and which parts can flex. Your logo, lead color and typefaces are usually fixed. Your illustration style, your campaign colors and your photography subjects can move with the season. Write down both lists, so people know where they can play.

Run the covered-logo test this week.

Gather what your customers actually see, then check whether your brand survives without its name.

1. Collect ten recent pieces customers have seen: posts, an invoice, the menu or price list, packaging, your website homepage, a WhatsApp reply.
2. Cover the logo and the brand name on each one with a sticky note or a quick edit.
3. Show them to someone outside the company, mixed in with a few pieces from competitors, and ask which ones belong together.
4. For every piece they recognize, write down what gave it away: the color, the type, the photo style, the layout.
5. Pick the weakest piece and write one rule that would have fixed it. Add that rule to your guide today.

What to remember from this chapter.

- Your logo is your signature, and your identity is the handwriting around it.
- A strong identity is still recognizable with the logo covered.
- Each part of the system answers a question a supplier will ask you, so write the answers down.
- Choose your Arabic and Latin typefaces as a pair, and test them with real copy.
- A brand guide works best as a small website with the files next to the rules.
- Give one person the job of protecting the system, and decide where people are free to play.

06

Voice is how your brand sounds when nobody is checking.

Your voice lives in the reply to a complaint at midnight, the text on a receipt and the caption someone writes in a hurry. This chapter shows you how to decide what your brand sounds like, write it down on one page, and keep it steady across Arabic and English.

Three people answering one inbox can sound like three companies.

Picture a home bakery in Riyadh that has grown into a real business. Orders come in through Instagram and WhatsApp, and three people take turns answering them.

On Sunday, a customer asks if the date cake is available for Thursday. The first person replies in careful formal Arabic, with a full greeting and a closing prayer. On Monday, the same customer asks about delivery. The second person answers in quick Saudi dialect with four emojis. On Tuesday, she asks about allergens. The third person pastes a paragraph in English from the website.

Each reply is polite. Each one is correct. But the customer has now met three different bakeries, and she isn't sure which one she is ordering from.

This happens in companies of every size. The logo is consistent, the colors are right, and then the words go off in every direction, because nobody ever decided how the brand should sound. Words are the cheapest part of your brand to fix, and often the part people meet most.

Voice is the personality your brand keeps in every sentence. It is who you are when you write. Get it right and customers start to recognize you from a caption with no logo on it.

Words are the cheapest part of your brand to fix, and often the part people meet most.

Voice stays steady, and tone moves with the moment.

Mailchimp, the email marketing company, published one of the clearest public guides on this. Its content style guide puts it in one line: "You have the same voice all the time, but your tone changes."

Think of a good doctor. She is the same person with every patient: calm, clear, kind. But she speaks one way to a nervous child, another way to a colleague, and another way when she has bad news. Her voice stays the same. Her tone moves with the room.

Your brand works the same way. Your voice might be warm, direct and a little funny. On a launch post, you can turn the humor up. In a reply to a customer whose order went missing, you turn the humor off and keep the warmth and the directness.

Duolingo, the language app, shows how far a voice can stretch when the tone is managed. Its social media, built around Duo the green owl, is famous for being chaotic and strange. The company's communications head has described the approach as "wholesome unhinged." In February 2025, Duolingo announced that Duo had died. Posts showed him hit by a Tesla Cybertruck, and the company asked users to earn 50 billion experience points through lessons to bring him back. He returned on February 24. A Duolingo spokesperson told NPR the campaign was meant to remind fans to keep up with their lessons.

That last part matters. The joke always pointed back at the product. The tone was wild, and the voice underneath stayed the same: the owl who wants you to do your Spanish today.

Liquid Death is another useful example, because its product is the most ordinary thing there is. It sells water in a can. Its founder, Mike Cessario, is a designer, and the brand was first pitched at fans of heavy metal and punk rock, with packaging and jokes to match. The tagline is "Murder your thirst." Strip the voice away and you have a can of water. Keep it and you have a brand with a point of view.

Plenty of strong voices are calm. What matters is that you choose one on purpose.

A voice guide fits on one page when you write it as choices.

Most voice guides fail because they are lists of nice words. "We are friendly, professional and passionate." Every company on earth would sign that. It gives a writer nothing to work with.

A useful voice guide is a page of decisions. Here is a shape that works.

Three or four traits, each with a limit. For each trait, write what it sounds like and where it stops. "We are direct. We say the price in the first line. We never sound cold or short with someone who is upset." The limit is what makes it a choice.

Words we use and words we avoid. Write two short lists. A clinic might use "appointment" and avoid "booking slot." A fintech app might use "money" and avoid "funds." A restaurant might say "kitchen" and avoid "culinary team." These small choices

add up quickly.

How we address people. First name or title? "You" or "we"? In Arabic, formal or familiar forms of address? Decide once.

Before and after lines. This is the most useful part of any voice guide. Take real sentences your brand has written and show the rewrite. Writers learn more from three good rewrites than from three pages of theory.

Here are some rewrites to show you what we mean.

A delivery delay. Before: "We apologize for any inconvenience caused by the delay in your order." After: "Your order is running 20 minutes late. That's on us, and the driver is on his way now."

A bank app error. Before: "Transaction failed. Error code 4021." After: "That payment didn't go through. Your money is still in your account. Try again, or call us on the number below."

A clinic reminder. Before: "This is a reminder of your scheduled appointment." After: "See you tomorrow at 4 pm, Ahmed. Please bring your insurance card."

Notice what the rewrites do. They name the specific thing. They say what happens next. They sound like one person talking to another.

One Click Away writes about the hour its customers get back.

One Click Away, OCA for short, builds websites, automations and AI employees for small and family-run businesses in the UAE, and keeps them running after launch. Its clients are a vet, an interior designer, a restaurant owner: people very good at their own trade, with no time to learn the technology.

When we built OCA's identity, the voice rule became one of its strongest parts: talk about the hour the customer gets back. What the customer cares about is that a site visit got booked for Thursday at 9 am while she was busy with another client.

So the brand speaks in outcomes. Its imagery shows a lock screen reading "Booked," a salon's day with "11 clients today," a gift card that says the first tea is on us. The tagline is three words long and says the whole promise: "Skip the tutorial."

Read the full case at iklipseworld.com/work/oca

Arabic and English need two voices that are siblings.

For brands in this region, the voice question has a second layer. You are writing two voices, and they have to feel like they come from the same family.

The first mistake is translation. A line written in English and then translated into Arabic almost always sounds like a translation. The rhythm is wrong, the jokes fall flat, and the formality lands in the wrong place. The fix is to write in both languages from the start. Give the Arabic writer the brief, the voice guide and the idea, and let them write the line in Arabic. The industry calls this transcreation. We call it writing.

The second decision is which Arabic. Modern Standard Arabic travels across every market and feels formal. Dialect feels close and alive, and it changes by country. Egyptian, Saudi, Emirati, Levantine and Moroccan Arabic sound different, use different words and carry different jokes. A line that works in Cairo can sound odd in Riyadh.

Most brands end up with a mix. Formal Arabic for legal pages, contracts and serious announcements. Dialect for social media, ads and customer replies in a single market. Decide the mix and write it into your guide, market by market.

Then there is Arabizi, Arabic written in Latin letters and numbers, like “7abibi” or “ya3ni.” Many young people text this way, and it can make a brand feel close in a chat. It can also look cheap on a billboard. Use it where your customers use it, and nowhere else.

A few rules help both voices stay siblings.

Share the traits, adjust the words. If your English voice is warm and direct, your Arabic voice should be warm and direct too, in the way an Arabic speaker would express those things.

Read every line out loud. If it sounds stiff in your mouth, it will sound stiff to the customer.

Give each language a native owner. One person who checks every Arabic line, one who checks every English line. A tool can help with a first draft. A native speaker has to approve it.

Watch the forms of address. Many Arabic dialects have more formal and more familiar ways to say “you.” An Egyptian brand might choose “hadritak” for a bank and “enta” for a burger shop. Make the choice once.

If your name and your lines need to work in both languages, our Bilingual Brand Kit includes a name test you can run with real people in each market before you commit.

Burger King Kuwait turned an offer into a karaoke song.

If I Were You is a karaoke number for Burger King Kuwait from 2023, sung from behind the till. A crew member in a Burger King cap sings it at the counter. The title glows in bubble letters beside him, and the words run along the bottom of the frame so viewers can sing along.

The idea is all voice. The brand hands a cashier a song, and he uses it to give the customer some friendly advice. The campaign's award entry finishes the line: "If I were you, I'd get free food."

The treatment and the song came from &That French Guy, iklipse's creative arm. M+C Saatchi Middle East was the agency, Good People produced it, and Major Tom did the music and sound.

Read the full case at iklipseworld.com/work/burger-king-if-i-were-you

Your voice shows up in the boring places first.

Ad campaigns get written carefully. They have a brief, a copywriter and a review. The rest of your words get written in a hurry, by whoever is free, and they reach more people than any campaign.

Look at these places first.

Error messages and empty states. What does your app say when search finds nothing? What does your website say on a broken page?

Order updates. Confirmation, delay, out of stock, refund. These are the moments customers read every word.

Invoices and receipts. A line at the bottom of a receipt is read by every single customer.

Replies to complaints. This is where the voice is tested hardest, because the writer is under pressure and the reader is upset.

Job ads. Future staff read them closely, and they decide who walks in the door.

The out-of-office email. Small, and read by people you want to impress.

Pick the five messages your customers see most often. Rewrite them in your voice. You will probably do more for your brand this way in one afternoon than a month of new posts would.

There is one more test worth running. Take any sentence your brand has published and swap in a competitor's name. If it still works, the sentence has no voice. "We are committed to quality and customer satisfaction" works for every company in the world. "Your order is running 20 minutes late, and that's on us" sounds like somebody.

Voice has to be taught, or it fades.

A voice guide in a drawer changes nothing. The voice spreads when people practice it.

Run a short session when someone new joins. Show them the one-page guide and the before and after lines. Then give them five real messages to rewrite, and talk through their versions. It takes an hour.

Keep a shared folder of good examples: replies that customers loved, captions that worked, a refund message that turned an angry customer into a fan. People copy what they see praised.

If you use AI tools to draft captions and replies, feed them your voice guide and your best examples every time. A tool with no guide will write in the flat, polished voice of the internet, which is the voice of nobody. Read everything before it goes out.

Write your voice on one page this week.

You need about two hours and one colleague who writes for the brand.

1. Collect 20 real sentences your brand has written recently: captions, replies, emails, website lines, receipts.
2. Circle the five you like best and the five you like least, and write down why.
3. From those notes, write three or four voice traits, each with one line on what it sounds like and one line on where it stops.
4. Write two short lists: ten words you use, ten words you avoid.
5. Rewrite the five weakest sentences and put the before and after versions on the page.
6. Share the page with everyone who writes for the brand, in both languages, and ask them to use it for one week.

What to remember from this chapter.

- Voice is your brand's personality in words, and tone is how it adjusts to the moment.
- A voice guide is a page of choices, with limits for each trait.
- Before and after rewrites teach writers more than any list of adjectives.
- Write Arabic and English as two sibling voices, each with a native owner.
- Fix the boring messages first, because customers read them most.
- If a competitor could sign your sentence, rewrite it.

07

Experience is where the brand promise gets tested.

Your ads make a promise, and every visit, delivery, reply and receipt either keeps it or breaks it a little. This chapter shows you how to find the moments that matter most, design them on purpose, and give your team the power to fix things on the spot.

The ad was beautiful, and then she called the helpline.

Picture a woman in Dubai switching to a new mobile plan. She chose this company because of its ads. They were warm and funny, full of families and good music, and they promised that life would be easier.

The SIM card arrives on time. Good. Then the data doesn't work. She calls the helpline. A recorded voice asks for her number. Then asks again. Then puts her on hold with a loop of music for 25 minutes. When a person finally answers, he asks for her number a third time.

The ad cost a fortune to make. The hold music cost almost nothing. Guess which one she remembers.

This is the gap at the heart of most brands. Marketing makes a promise. Operations delivers something else. Customers believe what happens to them, and they tell their friends about that, too.

Brand experience is every moment a customer spends with you, and the feeling those moments leave behind. It includes the obvious parts, like your store and your app, and the parts nobody designs, like the hold queue, the invoice and the refund form. To your customers, it is all one brand.

The ad cost a fortune to make, and the hold music cost almost nothing. Guess which one she remembers.

Every touchpoint keeps the promise or breaks it a little.

A touchpoint is any place a customer meets your brand. Most businesses have more than they think. It helps to sort them into three stages.

Before they buy. An ad, a search result, a review, a friend's story, your website, your Instagram profile, the way someone answers their first question on WhatsApp.

While they buy and use. The store, the app, the checkout, the delivery, the packaging, the product itself, the event, the call with your salesperson.

After they buy. The receipt, the follow-up message, the support line, the return, the renewal, the cancellation.

Most brands pour their energy into the first stage. That is where the creative work lives and where the agencies are. The second and third stages get handed to operations, finance and customer service, and nobody checks whether they sound or feel like the brand.

Start by writing your promise in one plain sentence. Then walk through every touchpoint and ask one question: does this moment prove the promise, or does it argue against it?

A clinic that promises calm care and makes patients wait 50 minutes in a loud room with no updates is arguing against itself. A delivery app that promises speed and hides the delivery time until checkout is arguing against itself. A luxury brand that sends its invoice as a blurry photo on WhatsApp is arguing against itself.

Small signals carry a lot of weight. Careem, the Dubai-based ride-hailing company, calls its drivers "Captains." The company has described the title as a term of respect for the people who keep its cities moving. It costs nothing, and it shapes how riders and drivers see each other in every trip. One word in the app turns a service into a relationship between two people.

People remember the peak and the ending.

In 1993, the psychologist Daniel Kahneman and his colleagues published a study in the journal Psychological Science called "When More Pain Is Preferred to Less: Adding a Better End." Volunteers put a hand in cold water, at 14 degrees Celsius, for 60 seconds. In another trial, they kept a hand in the same cold water for 60 seconds and then 30 seconds more, while the water warmed slightly, to about 15 degrees.

The second trial was longer and included all the pain of the first. Yet when asked which one they would rather repeat, most people chose the longer one. They remembered how it ended.

This is called the peak-end rule. People tend to judge an experience by its most intense moment and by its ending, and they pay surprisingly little attention to how long it lasted.

For a brand, this is practical news. That leaves you three jobs.

Find your worst moment and fix it. Every experience has a low point: the long wait, the confusing form, the surprise fee at checkout. That moment can become the peak people remember for the wrong reason. Fix it first.

Design one high point on purpose. A handwritten note in the box. A barista who remembers your order. A free dessert on a birthday. Pick one moment and make it memorable.

Take care of the ending. The last minute of a visit, the last message after a delivery, the way you handle a cancellation. Endings are where most brands stop paying attention, and where memory is written.

The Ritz-Carlton hotel group is often cited for one rule about worst moments. Its staff have long been allowed to spend up to $2,000 to solve a guest's problem without asking a manager first. Horst Schulze, one of the company's founders, has explained it as a cold economic decision: a loyal guest is worth far more over the years than the cost of fixing one bad moment. The point is that the person standing in front of the upset guest has the power to fix things right away.

The amount can be much smaller. A café can let any barista replace a drink with no questions. A shop can let staff give a voucher after a delayed delivery. Decide the amount, write it down, and tell your team they are trusted to use it.

Events and spaces let people walk inside the brand.

Most of the time, a brand lives on a screen. An event or a space is the rare chance to let people step inside it, touch it, and take part.

This is where the identity work from the previous chapters gets its hardest test. A color that looks right on a phone has to hold up on a 10-meter wall. A tagline has to work on a floor sticker. A tone of voice has to become the way staff greet people at the door.

We find three questions useful when designing any brand space.

What do people do with their hands? Standing and looking gets boring in two minutes. Give people something to play, build, try or win.

What do they take home? A prize, a photo, a sample, a story. Something that keeps the brand in their life after they leave.

Where is the photo? Every space now has a second audience: the friends who see it on a phone that night. Design the moment people will want to capture.

Visa brought the FIFA World Cup 26 to Dubai before a ball was kicked.

As FIFA Worldwide Partner, Visa wanted fans in Dubai to feel the FIFA World Cup 26 early. It built a fan space around the Winners' Trophy and the two faces of its campaign, Lamine Yamal and Pep Guardiola. The brief was to let fans feel the tournament before it started.

Playground, the branding arm of iklipse, led the creative and art direction, the experiential design and the event branding. The space put a pitch inside a football cage, where fans scored to win a shirt signed by one of the two icons. A merch wall let them collect their prize, a play zone had match screens, and a trophy moment let fans stand next to the Winners' Trophy itself.

One look tied everything together: a torn-paper collage style in Visa blue and gold. It ran across the booth, the key visual with Lamine and Pep, the spend-to-win ticket campaign and the social rollout, so a fan who saw the post and then visited the booth stepped into the same world.

Read the full case at iklipseworld.com/work/visa-fifa-world-cup-26

Notice how the Visa space answers all three questions. Fans used their feet in the cage. They took home a prize. And the trophy was the photo.

Doers Summit needed its energy to travel beyond the venue.

Doers Summit is a large gathering in Limassol, Cyprus, bringing together more than 10,000 founders, operators and investors. Most of the people who care about an event like this are somewhere else while it happens.

We produced the event's official key video and a series of social media reels, using AI-driven production to carry the summit's energy to people who weren't in the room. The content showed the scale of the gathering, its matchmaking culture and the atmosphere of the Doers community.

This is the other half of any event experience. The people in the hall get the real thing. Everyone else gets the film, and for them, the film is the event.

Read the full case at iklipseworld.com/work/doers

Digital products and after-sales are where most brands go silent.

For many businesses today, the app or the website is the store. It is open all night, it serves every customer, and nobody from marketing has looked at the checkout page in a year.

Walk through your digital product as a stranger. Sign up. Search. Buy. Track the order. Try to change something. Try to cancel.

Watch for the moments where the brand disappears. The welcome email that sounds like a legal notice. The password reset page with a different logo. The order tracking screen that says "Processing" for three days. The cancellation flow with six screens designed to make you give up.

That last one deserves attention. Making it hard to leave might keep a few customers for an extra month. It also guarantees that the last feeling they have about you is anger, and the peak-end rule says that is what they will remember and repeat. A clean, kind exit leaves the door open, and gives people a reason to return one day.

After-sales is the same story. The product arrives, the customer is happy, and then the brand goes silent. Or worse, it only speaks when it wants more money. A short message a week later to check that everything works, a simple guide to get more from the product, a quick fix when something breaks: these are cheap, and they turn buyers into people who recommend you.

Your team is the experience, so give them the brand too.

In most businesses, the people who shape the experience most are the people who were told least about the brand. The delivery driver, the receptionist, the call center agent, the part-time staff at the event. They meet more customers in a week than the marketing team does in a year.

Bring them in. Show them the promise in one sentence. Show them the voice guide from the last chapter. Tell them what a great moment looks like, and give them the freedom to create one. Then listen to them, because they know exactly where the experience breaks. They hear the complaints every day.

A brand that is only understood by its marketing department is a campaign. A brand that the receptionist can explain is a business.

Walk your own customer path this week.

Set aside half a day and go through your business as a customer would.

1. Write your brand promise in one sentence and keep it in front of you.
2. Buy something from yourself as a stranger would: find you online, ask a question, order, receive, then ask for help with a small problem. Take a screenshot or a note at every step.
3. Mark each step green if it proves the promise, yellow if it is neutral, red if it argues against it.
4. Circle the single worst moment and fix it this month.
5. Choose one high point to design on purpose, and rewrite your ending: the last message, the receipt or the goodbye.
6. Set a small amount your front-line staff can spend to fix a problem without asking, and tell them about it in person.

What to remember from this chapter.

- Customers believe what happens to them, and that is the story they repeat.
- Map your touchpoints before, during and after the sale, and check each one against your promise.
- People remember the peak and the ending, so fix the worst moment and design a good last one.
- Brand spaces work when people can play, take something home and take a photo.
- A kind, simple exit leaves a better memory than a hard one.
- Your front-line staff are the experience, so trust them with the brand and the power to fix things.

08

Culture gives a brand its meaning in this region.

In the GCC, Egypt and North Africa, people live by a shared calendar of Ramadan nights, football matches, national days and family gatherings. Brands that understand that calendar get invited in. This chapter shows how to join those moments with respect, with real examples, and how to avoid the mistakes that turn a celebration into an apology.

Twenty minutes before iftar, a whole city goes quiet.

Picture a street in Cairo in the middle of Ramadan, about twenty minutes before the sunset call to prayer. The traffic has thinned to almost nothing. The shops are pulling down their shutters. A boy on a bicycle races home with a bag of bread. In thousands of flats, tables are being set for the same meal at the same minute.

Later that night, the television goes on. Families watch the new series together, and between episodes come the ads. By the second week, children are quoting the funny ones at the table. By the end of the month, a good ad has become part of how that family remembers that Ramadan.

That is what culture does for a brand. It gives you a moment people already care about, with an audience already gathered, in a mood already set. Nobody has to be convinced that Ramadan matters, or that Al Ahly's next match matters, or that National Day matters. The meaning is there before you arrive.

The question is what you bring to it. Brands that bring something real, like a laugh, a feeling of being seen or a small act of generosity, get remembered as part of the moment. Brands that show up with a logo and a crescent moon get scrolled past.

Culture is the shared life your customers already live, and a brand earns its place there by playing a real role.

Nobody has to be convinced that Ramadan matters. The meaning is there before you arrive.

Ramadan rewards brands that understand its rhythm.

Ramadan has a shape, and the best Ramadan work follows it. There is the fast and the hunger of late afternoon. There is the iftar, often loud and crowded with family. There is the long evening of visits, sweets, television and street tournaments. There is suhoor before dawn. There is the generosity, the charity and the forgiveness. And there is the real, slightly comic exhaustion of being invited to everything by everyone.

Each of those moments offers a different role for a brand. A food brand can belong to the iftar table. A telecom can belong to the long calls with family abroad. A bank can belong to the charity. A chocolate brand can belong to the sweets that come out after the meal.

The trap is to make a Ramadan ad that could belong to any brand: lanterns, a family at a table, a warm voice-over about togetherness. That ad might be pleasant, and it will usually be forgotten by Eid.

The ads that last tend to find one specific truth about the month and build on it. A truth that people recognize from their own homes, ideally with a smile.

KitKat turned Ramadan's invitation overload into a casting call.

In 2018, KitKat Arabia released three Ramadan films built around a problem every young person in the region knows. One young man has been invited to a hundred iftars, a hundred Ramadan tournaments and every friend's Eid trip. He can't go to all of them. So he holds auditions for lookalikes to go in his place.

None of them look much like him. Up come a balding man in a tie, a self-declared water polo champion and a lad in a diving mask making a pun about the sea. A panel judges them over a pack of KitKat Mini Moments Desserts.

Each film lands on the same point: Ramadan is full of choices, and with the desserts you can have them all, five flavors in one pack. The joke comes from the culture, and the product solves it. &That French Guy, iklipse's creative arm, led the creative and wrote the treatments for all three films.

Read the full case at iklipseworld.com/work/kitkat-ramadan

Football gives brands a crowd that already knows the words.

In much of this region, football is a family inheritance. People inherit their club from a father or an uncle. They know the chants by heart. They plan their week around the match.

For a brand, that loyalty is both an opportunity and a test. Fans can tell in a second whether a sponsor understands their club or has just bought a logo on the shirt. The best football work puts the fans at the center and lets the brand stand at the side, the way a

good friend stands at the side of a wedding photo.

Shell and Al Ahly told the story of one chant sung by many people.

One Voice United follows Al Ahly's fans one at a time, each in a corner of their own life, all singing the same chant. A tailor irons a pile of red shirts. A hand sketches the club's eagle. A cook spins dough. A driver watches a floodlit pitch through his windscreen. A crew paints a giant banner on a rooftop.

By the end, the flags are out of the car windows and the flares are lit. The scattered voices have become one crowd.

Shell Helix Ultra sits in the corner of every frame. The brand stays present in that corner while the fans do what fans do. The script and treatment came from &That French Guy, iklipse's creative arm.

Read the full case at iklipseworld.com/work/shell-x-al-ahly-one-voice-united

FABMISR showed that everyone at Al Ahly is a baller.

In FABMISR's Ramadan 2023 film, every athlete at Al Ahly turns out to have football skills, whatever their sport. A table tennis player heads a ball over the table. The water polo team kick one about by the pool. A gymnast flicks one up out of a handstand. A basketball player heads his own ball like a footballer.

The closing card gives the bank's line: partner of Al Ahly's success in every sport. The film makes a sponsorship point with a joke that any Al Ahly fan would enjoy, and it does it during Ramadan, when families are watching together.

The treatment came from &That French Guy, iklipse's creative arm. KAIRO was the agency.

Read the full case at iklipseworld.com/work/fab-x-al-ahly-ballers-in-every-sport

Look at what these two films share. Both are about the club's people, from the fans in their shops to the athletes by the pool. Both treat the club with affection. And in both, the brand shows up as a supporter, which is exactly what fans want from a sponsor.

National days ask brands to celebrate the country first.

National days carry a different kind of feeling. Pride, gratitude, memory, hope for the future. They also come with more rules, written and unwritten, about how the flag, the leaders and national symbols can be used. Learn those rules before you start, and check the current advertising guidelines in each country.

The calendar keeps changing, too. In January 2022, Saudi Arabia's King Salman issued a royal order making February 22 an annual holiday called Founding Day. It marks the start of the first Saudi state in 1727, under Imam Muhammad bin Saud. Saudi National Day, on September 23, marks the unification of the kingdom in 1932. Two days, two different stories. A brand that mixes them up tells Saudi customers it wasn't paying attention.

The strongest national day work celebrates the country through its people, often through its children. It looks forward as much as back. And it keeps the brand modest.

Toyota celebrated Saudi National Day through the eyes of children.

For Saudi National Day and Abdul Latif Jameel's 80th anniversary, Toyota wanted a film that celebrates the Kingdom through the eyes of its children. Produced with NaF+, the story starts in a classroom, where a group of students build a model of the desert, and follows their imagination into the worlds they dream up.

We led the AI production of those imagined worlds and the transitions that carry the children in and out of them: a soft clay seaside, a trip into space, balloons lifting over Riyadh, and a sand wave that drops the class into the desert beside a Toyota Hilux.

Each world has its own art style, yet the same children stay recognizable from one to the next. The transitions were designed to match-cut from the live action, and every frame was delivered in line with Toyota, ALJ and Saudi advertising guidelines. The car appears inside the children's dream, waiting for them in the desert.

Read the full case at iklipseworld.com/work/toyota-abdul-latif-jameel

Culture also means the passions people choose for themselves.

Culture is bigger than the calendar. It is also the music people play in the car, the games they stay up for, the books, the food, the slang, the jokes that only make sense in one city.

These passions are often where younger audiences live. And they offer brands a way in that feels personal, because nobody is assigned their favorite band. They pick it.

Sharjah Book Authority found books inside every other passion.

The Sharjah Book Authority set out to prove that "no matter what you're into, you're into books." So its film moves from one passion to the next, including a basketball with PASSIN' chalked across it.

The campaign puts the idea plainly. Nobody is born with a book in their hands, but find one that means something to you and you're hooked. The film meets people where their interests already are and shows them a book waiting there.

&That French Guy, iklipse's creative arm, wrote the treatment and the script. Good People shot this international version in nine locations, with Maged Nassar directing for the creative agency Elephant. National Network Communications was the advertising agency.

Read the full case at iklipseworld.com/work/sharjah-book-authority-if-youre-into-something

Borrowing culture needs knowledge, permission and a real role.

Culture belongs to the people who live it. When a brand uses it, the brand is a guest. Guests who behave badly get remembered for a long time.

Two famous examples from outside the region show how fast it goes wrong.

In April 2017, Pepsi released an ad in which the model Kendall Jenner leaves a photo shoot, joins a street protest and hands a police officer a can of Pepsi. Critics said it made light of real protests for social justice. Pepsi pulled the ad the day after it launched and said in a statement, "Clearly we missed the mark, and we apologize."

In November 2018, Dolce & Gabbana posted videos in China showing a Chinese model trying to eat pizza and cannoli with chopsticks, with a narrator talking down to her. The backlash was immediate. Celebrities and models pulled out of the brand's big Shanghai show, which was cancelled, and its products were removed from major Chinese shopping sites.

Both brands apologized. Both had used a culture they hadn't understood, in a way that made its people feel like props.

Here are the rules we work by.

Have people from the culture in the room, with real authority. Someone who can say "this is wrong" and be listened to, early, before the budget is spent.

Know the specifics. Which dialect, which city, which club, which day. "Arab" is a lazy brief. A joke that lands in Jeddah may fall flat in Casablanca.

Skip the clichés. Camels, dunes, lanterns and a man in a white thobe looking at the sunset. If the image could come from a stock library, it probably did, and your audience has seen it a thousand times.

Be careful with faith. Religious moments, words and symbols carry deep meaning. Treat them with care, keep the product at a respectful distance, and get advice when in doubt.

Give the brand a real role. Ask what your brand actually does in this moment. If the honest answer is "nothing," either find a genuine role or stay out and post a simple, sincere greeting.

Look at the full year. Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, national days, back to school, summer, the big tournaments. Plan them in one calendar, months ahead, so you aren't designing a Ramadan campaign in the second week of Ramadan.

If you are planning a bilingual campaign for a cultural moment, test your key lines with real people in each market first. Our Bilingual Brand Kit includes a simple way to do that.

Build your culture calendar this week.

Spend an hour with your team and map the moments that matter to your customers for the next twelve months.

1. List every date your customers care about: religious occasions, national days, school terms, big matches and tournaments, local festivals, and the seasons that change how they live.
2. For each one, write one sentence about what your customers are feeling and doing in that moment.
3. Next to each, write the role your brand could honestly play. Leave it blank if there isn't one.
4. Choose the two or three moments where your role is strongest, and drop the rest.
5. Name one person from that culture who will review the work for each moment before it goes out.
6. Put the planning dates in your calendar, at least eight weeks before each moment.

What to remember from this chapter.

- Cultural moments come with an audience and a mood already in place, so your job is to bring something real.
- The best Ramadan work starts from one specific truth that families recognize from their own homes.
- In football, put the fans at the center and let the brand stand at the side.
- National days celebrate the country and its people first, and each day has its own story.
- When you borrow culture, you are a guest, so bring people from that culture into the room.
- Plan the full cultural year in advance, and skip the moments where you have no real role.

09

AI changes how brands are made, and taste still decides how they look.

AI tools can now give you a hundred images before your coffee gets cold. This chapter is about what to do with that power: where it helps a brand, where it hurts one, how to keep it consistent, and how to stay honest with the people who see the work.

A hundred good images can still add up to no brand at all.

Picture a marketing manager at a juice company in Jeddah, two weeks before a summer campaign. Her agency is busy, so she opens an image tool and types “fresh orange juice, summer, sunlight, happy family.” By lunch she has 140 images. They are sharp, bright and well lit. Several are lovely.

She lays her favorite twelve on one slide and calls her manager over. He looks for a while and asks a simple question: “Which one of these is us?”

She cannot answer. The family in image three looks Scandinavian. The kitchen in image seven belongs in a California suburb. The bottle in image nine has a label with letters that spell nothing. Two images could be ads for a competitor. Every picture is good, and together they say nothing about her brand.

This is the most common AI problem we see in branding. The tools are very good at making things look finished, and they have no idea who you are. Your positioning, your voice, your customer in Jeddah or Cairo or Casablanca: the machine knows none of it unless you tell it, and then you still have to check its work.

Our position is simple. AI is a production tool, and a very strong one. Taste, judgment and truth stay with people.

AI is good at three jobs in branding.

We use these tools every day on client work, and their strengths fall into three buckets.

Exploration. Early in a project, AI is a fast sketchbook. You can test what a café brand looks like in warm clay tones, then in black and brass, then in hand-drawn line, in one afternoon. A team that used to argue over three mood boards can now look at thirty directions and kill twenty-seven of them quickly. The value here is speed of elimination. You find out what you do not want while it is still cheap.

Production. Once a direction is chosen, AI can produce finished visuals that used to need a location, a crew and a week. We see this most in product imagery, campaign key visuals and film. For Cleansy, a cleaning and hospitality service in Orlando, we generated more than one hundred distinct images for their new website, built to hold one premium look across every page.

Variation. A campaign today needs the same idea in vertical, square and horizontal, in Arabic and English, for six platforms and three audiences. AI handles this kind of multiplication well, as long as the original idea is strong and someone checks every version. When we worked with BPG on Bank of Muscat's campaign, the visuals were made for both vertical and horizontal formats, in English and Arabic.

AI is bad at the parts of branding that need a point of view.

The weaknesses are just as clear, and they are the reason studios still exist.

AI averages. These models learn from enormous piles of existing images and text, and they tend to give you something close to the middle of that pile. Ask for "luxury" and you get marble, gold and a woman in a silk dress, because that is what luxury usually looks like online. A brand needs to be recognizable, and the middle of the pile is where nobody is recognizable.

AI has no local truth unless you give it one. It will put the wrong clothes on people, the wrong plugs on walls, the wrong script on shop signs. It does not know that a family scene for an Iraqi audience calls for different choices from one for a Lebanese audience.

AI is careless with facts. Generated text can invent product features. Generated images can invent buildings, labels and logos that look plausible and are wrong. For a brand, a beautiful wrong image is worse than no image, because a customer may believe it.

AI has no judgment. It cannot tell you which of the 140 juice images to use, or whether any of them should run. It cannot tell you that an idea is a little off for Ramadan, or that a joke will land badly in Egypt this month. That decision is still a person's job, and it is most of the job.

The tools are very good at making things look finished, and they have no idea who you are.

Consistency comes from references you lock before you generate.

The difference between AI work that looks like a brand and AI work that looks like a slot machine is preparation. Before anything gets generated, the team should agree on a small set of locked references and refuse to drift from them.

Here is what that pack usually holds.

Approved images of the real thing. Real product photos, real renders, real interiors, real packaging from every angle. The model should copy your real bottle, down to the cap.

Character sheets. If people appear more than once, each one needs a sheet: face from several angles, body, clothes, expressions. When Toyota and Abdul Latif Jameel made a Saudi National Day film with NaF+, we led the AI production of the imagined worlds the children travel into: a clay seaside, a trip into space, balloons over Riyadh, a sand wave into the desert beside a Toyota Hilux. Each world had its own art style, yet the same children stayed recognizable from one world to the next. That only works if the children are locked before the worlds are built.

A grade and a light. Pick one color grade and one quality of light and keep them across every frame. A single grade does more for consistency than any prompt.

A list of things that never appear. Wrong flags, wrong script, competitor colors, certain gestures, alcohol for some brands, uncovered shoulders for some audiences. Write it down. Check against it.

A human review at every step. Someone who knows the brand looks at each output and asks: is this true, is this us, would our customer recognize their own world in it?

A map of where AI is allowed. Many brands use it freely for backgrounds, mood boards and variations, carefully for people, and never for the product's actual performance. Founders' faces, real customers and signature campaigns usually deserve a camera and a crew.

None of this is new. Good photographers and animators have always worked from references. AI makes the discipline more important, because the machine drifts the moment you stop holding it.

ORA built a film of its real villas without inventing a single room.

ORA Developers Iraq was relaunching the Al Waha Plus villas at Madinat Al Ward, its new city in Baghdad. The brief was a premium relaunch film for decision makers, one that sells the homes the way a buyer experiences them: the architecture, the materials and the light moving through each room.

We produced the commercial fully with AI, working from the client's scene brief and the development's own renders, so every facade, finish and floor plan stayed true to the real villas. Each scene was built from locked character sheets and a single cinematic grade. The film moves from sunlit exteriors and still pool water to warm interiors, quiet family moments and a night arrival at the front door.

Casting, wardrobe and every human moment were directed with the local audience in mind, so the film feels premium, modest and at home in Iraq. The lesson for any brand selling something real: let AI build the scene around the truth, and keep the product exactly as it is.

Read the full case at iklipseworld.com/work/ora-madinat-al-ward

Honesty is part of the brand, and the rules are getting stricter.

Every brand using AI has to answer two questions. Will we tell people? And is anything in this image a promise we cannot keep?

The second question matters most. If an AI image shows a villa with a bigger pool than the real one, a burger fatter than the one in the box, or a skin result your cream cannot deliver, you have made a promise you will break. Customers notice. Regulators notice too. Our rule of thumb is short: AI may build the world around your product, and it may never improve the product itself.

The first question, disclosure, is changing fast. In the European Union, Article 50 of the AI Act applies from 2 August 2026. It says that people who use AI to generate or manipulate image, audio or video content that counts as a "deep fake" must disclose that the content is artificially generated or manipulated. For work that is clearly artistic, creative, satirical or

fictional, the duty is lighter: you disclose that generated content exists, in a way that does not spoil the work. If you advertise in Europe, this is now law. Elsewhere, it is a good guide to where expectations are heading.

The audience matters as much as the law. In November 2024 Coca-Cola released an AI-made version of its classic “Holidays Are Coming” truck ad. Many viewers hated it and said so loudly, calling it soulless and uncanny. The brand defended the work as a mix of human creativity and technology. AI had been used on a film people felt attached to, and many felt something precious had been swapped for something cheaper. Use AI where it adds something people want, and be careful with the work people love.

How you talk about AI inside the company is part of the brand too. In April 2025, Duolingo’s chief executive sent a memo calling the company “AI-first,” including a line about gradually stopping the use of contractors for work AI can handle. The backlash online was strong enough that Duolingo took down its TikTok and Instagram posts for a while, and the chief executive later said the memo had not given enough context. People judge a brand by how it treats people, including the ones who make its work.

If you want a quick way to decide whether an AI image or video in your ad can run as it is, needs a label or needs rework, our free AI Honesty Check walks you through about eight yes-or-no questions and gives you label wording in English and Arabic.

Eve and Nova are AI-generated influencers, and we say so.

In 2024 we created Eve and Nova, two proprietary AI-generated influencers. Each was built around one clear idea. Nova channels the energy of the sun: radiant, bright, a presence that feels lit by nature. Eve is the night: mysterious and elegant.

Our own case page calls them what they are: AI-generated influencers. That matters. An AI character can be a strong creative asset for a brand, with a personality you design and a look you control. It becomes a problem the day an audience thinks she is a real person and feels fooled.

A recurring character is also the hardest consistency test there is. A single campaign image can be a one-off. A character people follow has to look like herself in every post, which is why the character sheet comes before anything else.

Read the full case at iklipseworld.com/work/eve-nova

Rights decide what you can own, so keep a record of human work.

A logo, a mascot or a key visual is only an asset if you can protect it.

In the United States, the Copyright Office published a report in January 2025 on whether AI outputs can be copyrighted. Its conclusion: prompts alone do not give a person enough control to count as the author of what the machine produces. Human work can still be protected where a person's own expression is perceptible in the result, or where a person creatively selects, arranges or modifies the output. Separately, in Thaler v. Perlmutter, a federal appeals court ruled in March 2025 that a work must be authored by a human to be registered, and the Supreme Court declined to hear the case in March 2026.

Laws differ by country, and this is not legal advice. The practical habits are the same everywhere.

- Have people design the core marks of your brand, your logo, symbol and wordmark, and keep the sketches and working files.
- Treat AI outputs as raw material that people edit, combine and finish, and keep a record of that human work.
- Read the terms of every tool you use, especially on commercial use and who owns the output.
- Never prompt with a real person's face or name without written permission, and avoid naming living artists to copy their style.
- Check generated logos, characters and packaging against existing trademarks before you fall in love with them.

Freyusion sells AI imagery, and it still needed a clear brand of its own.

Freyusion builds AI models trained for specific industries, so companies can create photo and video content without relying on traditional shoots. In other words, its whole product is AI.

We handled everything from the logo and identity to the website and video editing. The direction balanced creative vision with technical precision, and the result is a minimal, distinctive identity that works everywhere and reflects the product's sharp focus.

Even a company that sells AI imagery needs a brand people can recognize, trust and remember. The tools make the pictures. The brand tells you whose pictures they are.

Read the full case at iklipseworld.com/work/freyusion

Build an AI reference pack for your brand this week.

Before anyone on your team generates another image, put these in one shared folder.

1. Collect 10 to 20 approved photos of your real products, spaces and packaging, from several angles, in good light.
2. Write a one-page brief: who the customer is, three words for the brand's personality, the color palette with codes, and one sentence on the feeling every image should leave.
3. Make a never-do list of at least ten items, covering culture, competitors, product claims and anything your legal team worries about.
4. If people will appear more than once, create a character sheet for each one before you make any campaign images.
5. Generate 20 test images using the pack, then ask three people outside the team to pick which ones look like your brand. Keep the rules that produced the winners.
6. Run any image you plan to publish through a disclosure check, and decide in writing whether it needs a label.

What to remember from this chapter.

- AI is a strong production tool for exploring, producing and multiplying work, and taste and judgment still belong to people.
- Generated work drifts toward the average, so lock your references before you generate anything.
- AI may build the world around your product, and it should never improve the product itself.
- Disclosure rules are tightening, and in the EU deep fake content must be labeled from 2 August 2026.
- Prompts alone usually do not make you the owner of an image, so have people make your core marks and keep records of human work.
- Customers judge the result and the respect behind it, so use AI where it adds something and protect the work people love.

10

You can measure a brand once you decide what to count.

“Brand” sounds like the one part of a business you cannot put a number on. You can, and most of the numbers are cheap. This chapter shows you which ones matter, how to collect them without a research agency, and how often to look.

Followers are a number, and they rarely answer the question.

Picture a quarterly board meeting at a skincare company in Dubai. The marketing lead has a deck of 30 slides. Followers are up 18 percent. Reach is up. A reel about sunscreen got 400,000 views. Everyone nods.

Then the chairman, a quiet man who built a logistics business, asks one question: “If our ads stopped tomorrow, would people still ask for us by name?”

Nobody in the room knows. The deck counted posts, views and followers. The chairman was asking about memory.

That question is the heart of brand measurement. A brand is the set of memories and feelings that make people choose you, pay a little more for you, come back and speak up for you. Each of those things leaves a trace you can count. The work is deciding which traces to watch, and then watching them on a fixed rhythm, long enough to see a trend.

You will not need a research budget for most of this. You need a spreadsheet, a few free tools and the discipline to look at the same numbers in the same way every month.

Start from the choice you want, then count the steps before it.

Every brand wants people to do something: buy, book, subscribe, visit, recommend. Work backward from that action and you get a ladder. Each rung can be measured.

Awareness. Have people heard of you? You measure this by asking. Show a list of brand names in your category and ask which ones people recognize. This is called prompted awareness.

Recall. Do people think of you without help? Ask: “When you think of food delivery apps, which names come to mind?” and write down every name in the order given. This is unprompted recall, and it is much harder to win. The first name mentioned matters most, because that brand is usually the one people reach for first.

Consideration. Would people choose you? Ask which brands they would seriously think about the next time they buy in your category.

Preference and choice. Which one would they pick if all were the same price? And which did they actually buy last time?

Repeat and advocacy. Did they buy again? Would they recommend you? Did they leave a review?

You can run a simple version of this survey yourself. Ten questions, 200 people from your real target audience, once or twice a year. Use a survey tool, and recruit through a panel provider or your own customer list, keeping in mind that your own customers will rate you higher than strangers will. Keep the questions identical each time. A brand survey is only useful when you can compare it with the last one.

In markets where customers move between Arabic and English, run the survey in both languages and record which one each person chose. You will sometimes find that your brand is well known in one language and almost invisible in the other.

Share of search is the cheapest brand tracker you already have.

Every day, people type brand names into search engines. They do it when they have heard of you, are curious about you or are getting ready to buy. That behavior is a running record of how much space your brand takes up in people's heads, and it is free to read.

The measure is called share of search: your brand's searches divided by the total searches for all the brands in your category. If people search for your brand 3,000 times a month and for the whole category's brands 20,000 times, your share of search is 15 percent.

Google Trends gives you the raw material. Type in your brand and up to four competitors, choose your country, set the period to five years, and you will see each brand's relative search interest over time. Add up the values and work out each brand's share for each month.

Two warnings from our part of the world. First, people search for brands in more than one script. A customer in Cairo might type a brand in Arabic letters, in English letters or in Arabizi, the Arabic-in-Latin-letters style many people use when texting. Add the spellings together before you calculate a share. Second, if your brand name is also a common word, searches for that word will pollute your number. Use the brand name plus a category word, and be consistent.

Les Binet showed that share of search moves before market share.

In October 2020, at the IPA's EffWorks Global conference, the effectiveness researcher Les Binet presented share of search as a brand metric. He tested it in three categories: cars, gas and electricity, and mobile phone handsets.

According to the IPA's summary, share of search correlated with market share in all three. Even more useful, it tended to move first. The lead time could be substantial, up to a year for cars. Binet also found that advertising gives search share a large short-term lift and a smaller, longer-lasting one.

He was careful to add that it is no silver bullet. Price changes affect how searches turn into sales, and some searches happen for bad reasons, such as a product recall. Still, for a founder with no research budget, a measure that is free, weekly, goes back years and tends to lead sales is a gift.

Price, repeat and reviews show what people do with their money.

Surveys tell you what people say. Behavior tells you what they do. Three behavioral numbers say a lot about the strength of a brand.

Price premium. How much more do people pay for you than for the average product in your category, and how often do you have to discount to sell? A strong brand can hold its price. A weak brand lives on promotions. Track your average selling price against the category, and the share of your sales that happen on discount. If that share keeps rising, your brand is getting weaker, whatever the follower count says.

Repeat rate. Of the people who bought from you for the first time three months ago, how many have bought again? For subscription and app businesses, look at how many customers are still active after one, three and six months. Advertising can buy you a first purchase. A second purchase has to be earned by the product and the experience.

Reviews. Count them and average them, and then read them. The text tells you which words people use about you, which is a direct read on your positioning. If your brand claims to be fast and the reviews keep praising how friendly the staff are, you have

learned something. Maybe your real strength is different from the one you advertise. Collect the ten words that come up most often every quarter and compare them with the three words in your brand strategy.

AI answers are a new shelf, and you can check your place on it.

More and more people get their first answer from an AI assistant or an AI summary at the top of a search page, before they ever see a list of links. In July 2025 Pew Research Center published an analysis of the browsing of 900 American adults. When a Google search page showed an AI summary, people clicked a traditional result link in 8 percent of visits. Without a summary, they clicked one in 15 percent. Clicks on the sources cited inside the summary happened in about 1 percent of visits.

For a brand, that means the summary is becoming the shelf. If the answer leaves you out, many people will never see your website at all.

You can track this by hand. Write down the ten questions a customer might ask before choosing a brand like yours: “best family dentist in Sharjah,” “which date brand is good for gifts,” “cheapest way to send money to Egypt.” Once a month, ask those questions in the two or three assistants your customers use most, in each language they use. Record three things for each answer: whether your brand appears, what is said about you, and which websites are cited.

The fixes are mostly old-fashioned. These answers draw heavily on what is written about you across the web, so make sure your basic facts are clear and identical everywhere: what you do, where, for whom, at what price level. Keep your website plain enough for a machine to read, with real text on the page. Earn mentions in places your category trusts, from local press to industry directories to honest reviews. A clear position is easier for a person to remember, and it is easier for a machine to summarize too.

A clear position is easier for a person to remember, and it is easier for a machine to summarize too.

A simple cadence beats a perfect dashboard.

The biggest mistake in brand measurement is looking too often at too many numbers. Brands move slowly. Weekly brand numbers mostly show noise, and noise makes people change things that were working.

Here is a rhythm that works for most growing companies.

Every month: share of search against your three or four main competitors, average selling price and discount share, new reviews and their average rating, and the AI-answer check.

Every quarter: repeat rate by customer group, the ten most common review words, and a look at what competitors have changed.

Every six or twelve months: the brand survey, covering awareness, recall, consideration and preference, in every language your customers use.

Put all of it on one page. Write one sentence under each number explaining what changed and why you think it changed. That sentence is more valuable than the chart.

Be patient with what you find. In their 2013 report for the IPA, The Long and the Short of It, Les Binet and Peter Field studied the IPA's database of effectiveness award entries and found that brand building and sales activation work on different clocks. Sales activation gives quick spikes. Brand building gives slower, longer gains. Their often-quoted rule of thumb was to spend roughly 60 percent of budget on brand building and 40 percent on activation. Later work, including the authors' own, has adjusted the split by category and situation, so treat it as an average. The direction is what to keep: if you only measure this week's sales, you will always underinvest in the thing that makes next year's sales easier.

Brand valuation tells boards what a brand is worth, and you can borrow its logic.

Large companies sometimes put a dollar figure on their brand. Two rankings dominate the headlines.

Interbrand's Best Global Brands looks at three things: the brand's financial performance, measured as economic profit; the role of brand, meaning the part of the purchase decision that the brand itself drives; and brand strength, scored across ten factors that indicate how well the brand can build loyalty and keep demand going. Kantar BrandZ starts from the parent company's earnings, works out the share that belongs to the brand, and multiplies it by a brand contribution figure taken from very large consumer surveys. Those surveys score whether a brand is meaningful, different and salient. The two

methods give different answers. In 2025 both ranked Apple first. Kantar valued the Apple brand at about $1.29 trillion, and Interbrand put a much smaller number on the same brand, which shows how much the method shapes the answer.

You will probably never commission a valuation. The logic is still worth borrowing. Both methods ask how much of the decision to buy comes from the brand itself. Price, location and convenience explain the rest. You can ask the same question in your own survey: “Why did you choose us last time?” Count how many answers point to trust, reputation or how people feel about you, and how many point to price or proximity. Over time, you want the first group to grow.

Set up a one-page brand tracker this week.

You can build the first version in an afternoon and keep it running in 30 minutes a month.

1. Pick your three or four closest competitors and list every spelling people use for each brand name, in Arabic, Latin letters and Arabizi.
2. Pull five years of Google Trends data for your country, add the spellings together and calculate your monthly share of search.
3. Write the ten questions a customer asks before choosing a brand like yours, ask them in your customers’ favorite AI assistants, and record whether you appear and what is said.
4. Add three behavioral numbers from your own data: average selling price, the share of sales made on discount and the repeat rate of last quarter’s new customers.
5. Read your last 50 reviews and write down the ten words that appear most often.
6. Put everything on one page with a one-sentence note under each number, and book the same 30 minutes in your calendar for the same day every month.

What to remember from this chapter.

- A brand is measured by what people remember, choose, pay and say, and follower counts rarely capture any of that.
- Unprompted recall is the hardest rung of the ladder to win and the most valuable to track.
- Share of search is free, goes back years and tends to move before market share.
- Price premium, repeat rate and review language show what customers actually do.
- AI answers are a new shelf, so check monthly whether you appear and keep your facts identical everywhere.
- Look at brand numbers on a steady monthly and yearly rhythm, and write down what you think each change means.

11

A rebrand works when it fixes a real problem.

Rebrands are expensive, slow and public, and many of them start for the wrong reason. This chapter helps you tell a real brand problem from a case of boredom, choose between a refresh and a full rebrand, and roll out a change without throwing away what your customers already know.

Boredom is the most common reason for a rebrand, and the worst one.

Picture a founder in Amman. Her bakery chain is seven years old, with five branches and a loyal crowd on Friday mornings. Her logo is a hand-drawn wheat stalk in dark green, painted on every shopfront, printed on every box and stitched on every apron.

She is sick of it. She has seen that wheat stalk on her desk, her phone and her receipts every day for seven years. A new competitor opened down the street with a sleek black wordmark, and suddenly her green feels old. She calls a designer and says, "I want something fresh."

Here is the problem. Her customers do not see the logo every day. They see it on Friday mornings, half awake, looking for the place with the good bread. For them, that green wheat stalk is a signpost. It took seven years of Fridays to build that signpost, and a "fresh" new look could knock it down in a week.

Founders and marketing teams live inside their brand. They get tired of it long before customers even fully notice it. Your customers see your brand far less often than you do, so they need it to change far less than you think. The first job of anyone considering a rebrand is to separate their own fatigue from a real business problem.

A real problem usually shows up in the business before it shows up in the logo.

These are the signs we take seriously when a client asks about a rebrand.

You have changed what you sell or who you sell to. A company that started as a catering service and now mainly runs corporate canteens has a brand that describes its past.

The name causes trouble. It is too close to a competitor, it cannot be trademarked in a key market, or it means something embarrassing in a language your new customers speak.

Two companies have become one. After a merger or acquisition, you have two brands, two sets of promises and two customer bases, and somebody has to decide what survives.

Your reputation needs a new start. Sometimes a brand carries a story people no longer believe. Be careful here. A new look on an unchanged business will be seen through quickly. The business has to change first.

The identity does not work where your customers are. It falls apart at the size of an app icon, has no Arabic version, cannot move on screen or is unreadable on a phone in sunlight.

Your brand is a mess. Ten versions of the logo, four greens, three slogans and no guide. This is common in companies that grew fast, and it often needs a tidy-up more than a new identity.

And these are the reasons we push back on: the founder is bored, a new marketing director wants to make a mark, a competitor just rebranded, or someone saw a trend on a design blog.

Most companies need a refresh, and only some need a rebrand.

Brand changes sit on a scale. It helps to name the step you are taking, because each one carries a different cost and risk.

A tidy-up. Same logo, same colors, same name. You fix the mess: one master logo file, a clear palette with exact codes, type rules and a simple guide. Customers will barely notice. Your team will notice a lot.

A refresh. The same brand, redrawn for today. The logo is cleaned up, the colors adjusted, a typeface replaced, an Arabic version designed properly, and motion and digital rules added. People still recognize you at a glance.

A rebrand. A new identity built on a new or sharper strategy. The logo, colors, type and voice may all change. You keep your name and, ideally, one or two signals people already link to you.

A rename. The biggest step. A new name, usually with a new identity around it. You lose the memory attached to the old name, so you only do it when the old name is truly holding you back.

The bakery in Amman needs a refresh at most: the same wheat stalk drawn more cleanly, a matching Arabic wordmark, a type family for menus, and maybe one new accent color for the takeaway boxes. The Friday crowd keeps its signpost.

Your customers see your brand far less often than you do, so they need it to change far less than you think.

Protect the parts of the brand that people already know.

Over the years, every brand collects a few signals people link to it: a color, a shape, a character, a jingle, a pack design, a way of speaking. Researchers often call these distinctive assets. They are the most valuable things you own, and they are easy to destroy by accident.

Before any change, run an audit. Take your brand's assets one by one, remove the name, and show them to customers. Ask: "Which brand is this?" The assets that people link to you without the name are the ones to keep. The ones nobody recognizes are free to change.

Two famous cases show what happens when a brand skips this step, and one shows what happens when it goes back.

In January 2009, PepsiCo put Tropicana Pure Premium orange juice into a new carton. The well-known picture of an orange with a straw in it was gone, replaced by a glass of juice. Customers wrote, emailed and phoned to complain, some saying the new box looked like a generic store brand. On 23 February 2009 the company announced it would bring the old design back. Ad Age, citing Information Resources Inc. data, reported that unit sales fell 20 percent between 1 January and 22 February. A company executive told The New York Times he had underestimated the deep emotional bond some customers had with the original packaging. The orange with the straw was a distinctive asset. The redesign threw it away.

In February 2023, Burberry went the other way. Under its new chief creative officer, Daniel Lee, it brought back the Equestrian Knight, a symbol that started life as the winning entry in a public design competition around 1901, along with a serif wordmark. Both replaced the plain sans-serif identity introduced in 2018. A brand with a long history had found that its oldest symbol was still one of its strongest.

Gap changed its logo and changed it back about a week later.

In October 2010 Gap put a new logo on its US website. The familiar white letters inside a blue box were gone. In their place: the name in black Helvetica, with a small blue square at the top right corner of the p.

The reaction was fast and fierce. More than 2,000 people commented on Gap's Facebook page, many asking for the old logo back. Gap then suggested that people send in their own designs, which made it look as if the company did not believe in its own new logo. About a week after the launch, Gap said it would return to the blue box. Marka Hansen, president of Gap North America, said in a statement that the company "did not go about this in the right way."

The lesson is simple. Gap's blue box was a distinctive asset with years of memory behind it. The company replaced it with something many people found generic, explained the change poorly and then wavered in public. Each of those three mistakes is avoidable.

Roll out a rebrand from the inside, in a planned order.

A good rebrand can still fail in the rollout. A few rules help.

Start inside. Your team should hear about the change, and understand why it is happening, before customers do. Staff who are surprised by a new logo on Instagram will not defend it to a customer who asks.

Tell a short, true reason. Customers do not need a 40-page strategy. They need one sentence: "We have grown from one bakery to five, and we wanted our bread boxes to say so." If you cannot write that sentence, you may not need a rebrand.

Change touchpoints in order of how often people see them. App icon, website, social profiles and delivery app listings first, then packaging and uniforms, then signs and vehicles. Make a full list of every place the brand appears before you begin. It is always longer than you think.

Set a cutoff date for the old identity. A few months of old and new side by side is normal. Two years of both looks like confusion.

Expect a noisy first week. People dislike change to things they are used to, and the internet amplifies the first reactions. When Airbnb introduced its Bélo symbol in July 2014, designed with DesignStudio, it was mocked widely online, and one well-known type designer pointed out its likeness to another company's logo. Airbnb kept the Bélo. Ten years later, a Creative Review retrospective noted how familiar it had become on phone screens and in ads. The difference with Gap is that Airbnb had a clear reason for the change and stood by it.

Measure what people do, as well as what they say. Watch share of search, sales and repeat rate for three to six months after launch, as described in the previous chapter. Comments in the first week are loud. Sales over the first quarter tell the truth.

Sometimes the fix is in the execution, and the logo can stay.

Many brands that feel tired have a perfectly good identity and an execution problem. The posts are generic, the stories are thin, the media buying is lazy. Changing the logo would not fix any of that.

Elmenus re-entered the market by renewing how the brand shows up every day.

Elmenus is an Egyptian food discovery and ordering platform, founded in 2011 to help people explore restaurants and order with ease. After a leadership transition in late July 2025, the brand entered a new phase focused on momentum, relevance and growth.

We joined during this re-entry chapter to overhaul Elmenus's digital execution across social media, content, strategy and media buying. The work centers on rebuilding affinity through local, high-energy storytelling that shows the breadth of the restaurant network, supported by performance-driven acquisition campaigns designed for efficiency and scale.

For anyone weighing a rebrand, the shape of this work is the lesson. A brand that wants a new chapter can start with the things customers meet every day, such as its stories, its content and its media, and with a strategy that ties them together.

Read the full case at iklipseworld.com/work/elmenus

If you are not sure which kind of problem you have, write down the business problem first, in one sentence, without using the words logo, look or fresh. If the sentence is about who you serve, what you offer or what people believe about you, you may need a rebrand. If it is about how often people see you and how good the work is, start with execution. And if the sentence is "we are bored," close the laptop and go bake some bread.

Run a distinctive asset audit before you change anything.

This takes about a week and costs almost nothing.

1. List every element of your brand people might recognize: logo, symbol, colors, typeface, packaging shape, character, sound, slogan, a way of speaking.
2. Make a simple card for each one, with the brand name removed or covered.
3. Show the cards to at least 30 people in your target audience, in person or through a quick online survey, and ask: "Which brand is this?"
4. Score each asset by the share of people who named you correctly, and sort them from strongest to weakest.
5. Mark the top two or three as protected, meaning any refresh or rebrand must keep them or evolve them gently.
6. Write your one-sentence business problem underneath the list, and decide whether you need a tidy-up, a refresh, a rebrand or a rename.

What to remember from this chapter.

- A rebrand should solve a business problem you can write in one sentence, and boredom is never that problem.
- Most companies need a tidy-up or a refresh, and only a few need a new identity or a new name.
- Distinctive assets such as a color, a symbol or a pack design hold years of memory, so test them before you touch them.
- Tropicana and Gap both lost signals their customers loved and reversed within weeks.
- Roll out from the inside first, change the most-seen touchpoints first and set a cutoff date for the old look.
- Judge a rebrand by what people do over months, and expect a noisy first week.

12

Building a brand with a studio goes faster when you arrive prepared.

Hiring a studio can be the best money you spend on your brand, or a long and expensive argument. Most of the difference is decided before the first meeting. This chapter covers when to do it yourself, when to hire, how to brief, how projects are usually shaped, and what to watch for.

The worst brief we ever get is three words long.

It usually arrives as a WhatsApp message on a Sunday night. “Need a logo. Budget?”

Behind those words there is often a serious business. Maybe a clinic group with four branches, or a coffee roaster about to open in Riyadh, or a fintech app in Cairo that has just closed its first funding round. The founder is busy, the launch date is close, and the logo feels like the last missing piece.

So we ask questions. Who are your customers? Why would they choose you over the place next door? What do you want people to feel when they see you? Who else will approve the work? Often the founder has never been asked these things out loud, and the answers start a long conversation inside the company.

There is nothing wrong with that conversation. It is the most important part of the project. The trouble is when it happens in week five, after three rounds of logos, because the team only discovered then that they disagree about who the brand is for. That is the expensive way to do it.

This chapter is about having that conversation first.

Do it yourself until the brand starts carrying real weight.

Not every company needs a studio on day one. Here is a rough guide.

Do it yourself when you are still testing whether people want what you sell. In that stage, a clean wordmark in a good typeface, one or two colors and a consistent tone of voice are enough. Spend your money on the product and on talking to customers. Write down your positioning anyway, because you will need it later.

Get light help when you have found customers and you are about to spend real money on things that carry the brand: signage, packaging, a website, a first campaign. A freelancer or a small studio can give you a proper logo, a type and color system, and basic templates.

Hire a studio for a full brand project when the brand starts carrying serious weight. That might be raising a large round, opening many branches, entering a new country, launching in a second language, preparing for a sale or a listing, or competing with

established names. At this stage a weak brand costs you money every day, in discounts, in harder hiring and in customers who forget you.

One test helps. Add up what you will spend in the next two years on things the brand appears on: signs, packaging, uniforms, ads, website, vehicles. If that number is large, the brand underneath it deserves serious investment, because every one of those things will either build your brand or blur it.

A good brief answers the questions a good studio will ask anyway.

A brief is the document you give a studio before work starts. It does not need to be long. A good one fits on two pages and covers these points.

The business. What you sell, to whom, where, and how you make money. Include numbers you are comfortable sharing: branches, customers, growth.

The reason for the project. What has changed, or is about to? A launch, an expansion, a merger, a new language, a messy identity? Write the problem in one sentence.

The customer. Who you want to win, described as real people. A 34-year-old mother in Sharjah who orders groceries on her phone at 10 p.m. says more than "women 25 to 45."

The competition. Name three to five competitors and say what you think of each one. Attach screenshots.

Your position. Why people should pick you. If you have done the positioning work from Chapter 2, include it. If you have not, say so honestly.

What must stay. Your name, a color customers love, a symbol with history. Anything the studio must not touch.

Languages and places. Arabic and English? French? Which markets? Where will the brand appear most: phone screens, shopfronts, trucks, packaging?

Decision makers. Who approves the work, and who has a veto. If your father, your investor or your business partner will see the logo at the end and has the power to kill it, they need to be in the first meeting.

Budget range and timing. Give a range and a real deadline. A studio can design the right project for your budget only if it knows the budget.

Yes, this takes time. A brief that takes you a week to write will save you a month of revisions.

If writing this feels hard, that is a sign the strategy work has not been done yet. Our Founder Brand Sprint was built for exactly this moment. It is a do-it-yourself workshop, two half-days for a team of two to six, with a facilitator guide and worksheets. You finish with a one-page brand brief that any studio can price.

A brief that takes you a week to write will save you a month of revisions.

Most brand projects follow the same five phases.

Studios use different names, and the details change from project to project. The shape is usually the same.

Discovery. The studio learns your business. Interviews with the founders and team, sometimes with customers, a look at competitors and at everything your brand has produced so far. This phase feels slow. It is where the good ideas come from.

Strategy. Positioning, personality, voice and the main idea the identity has to express. You should receive this in writing and agree to it before any design starts. Arguing about logos is much easier when you have already agreed what the logo has to say.

Identity design. Usually two or three directions, each showing a logo, type, colors and the way the system works on real things such as a shopfront, an app screen, a box or a post. Judge them against the strategy you agreed in the previous phase.

Refinement and system. The chosen direction gets developed in full: logo versions for every size and background, Arabic and Latin versions that work together, color codes for print and screen, type rules, imagery style, motion, icons and templates.

Guidelines and handover. Everything is documented and delivered. More and more studios, ours included, build the guide as a website, so it is easy to share and easy to update.

The price of a project depends mostly on scope: how many phases you need, how many languages, how many touchpoints get designed, and how much research is done. Two quotes that look very different are often quoting two different projects. Ask each studio to

list exactly what is included, phase by phase, and compare the lists before you compare the totals.

A note on value. In 1971 a Portland State design student named Carolyn Davidson billed Phil Knight $35 for the mark that became the Nike Swoosh. Knight's first reaction, by Nike's own account, was that he did not love it and hoped it would grow on him. The Swoosh did not become valuable because of the design fee. It became valuable through decades of products, athletes and advertising that filled it with meaning. Keep both halves of that story in mind. A good mark matters. What you do with it every day matters more, and the first reaction in the meeting room tells you little about either.

A few red flags are worth walking away from.

Most studios are honest and work hard. Some are not, and the warning signs are easy to spot once you know them.

No questions. A studio that quotes and starts work without asking about your customers, your competitors and your goals is guessing.

A logo in two days, any brief. Fast is possible for small jobs. A full identity system for a growing company is not a two-day job.

Twenty logo options. A studio that shows you twenty logos is asking you to do the thinking. Two or three well-argued directions are a sign of a team that made decisions.

Unclear ownership. The contract should say clearly that you own the final logo and identity once you have paid, and that you receive the source files.

Unlicensed fonts. Typefaces are software with licenses. If your guide uses a font, you need the right license for print, web and app use, in your company's name.

Hidden AI. Using AI in a studio is normal. Hiding it is a problem, especially for your logo and core marks, because AI-generated elements can raise ownership and trademark questions. Ask how AI is used, and get the answer in writing.

A portfolio that all looks the same. If every project in a studio's portfolio has the same style, you will get that style too, whether or not it suits your business.

You should leave the project with everything you need to run the brand.

When the project ends, you should be able to brief a new designer, an agency or a printer without calling the studio back. That means a clear guide, every master file and the rights to use them.

One Click Away left its project with a live guide and every file a designer needs.

One Click Away builds websites, automations and AI employees for small and family-run businesses in the UAE, and keeps them running after launch. Its clients are people very good at their own trade, with no time to learn the technology.

We built the identity from the name: One becomes a circle, Click becomes a cursor and Away becomes an arch, three shapes cut from one circle. Around them sit five colors in fixed shares, Neue Montreal in Latin and Arabic, and a voice that talks about the hour the customer gets back.

The guide runs to 13 chapters, live on the web, and its logo, color, icon and motion pages are built to be played with. The last chapter holds every file a designer needs: the logos for every background, the colors as CSS and JSON, the fonts, and the guide itself as a PDF. Months later, anyone new to the brand can open one link and start working.

Read the full case at iklipseworld.com/work/oca

When we run a full brand project through Brand Experiences, covering strategy, identity and web, this is the standard we hold ourselves to. You can read how it works at iklipseworld.com/services/brand-experiences.

Your part of the project matters as much as the studio's.

Studios do their best work for clients who make decisions on time and give clear feedback. A few habits help a lot.

Give feedback as problems, and leave the solutions to the studio. "Our older customers may find this hard to read" is useful. "Make it bigger and blue" usually is not.

Collect feedback in one place, from one person. Five people sending five sets of comments by WhatsApp creates five directions at once.

Test the work on real things. Print the logo on a box, put it on your phone's home screen, look at the shopfront mockup from across the street.

Sleep on big decisions. First reactions to new identities are often negative, because new feels strange. Look again the next morning and judge it against the strategy.

Prepare for your first studio meeting with this checklist.

Work through these before you contact any studio, and send the result ahead of the first call.

1. Write your business problem in one sentence, without the words logo, look or fresh.
2. Describe your main customer as one real person, with an age, a city and a moment when they need you.
3. List three to five competitors with a screenshot and one honest sentence about each.
4. Write down what must stay, the languages you need and the places your brand will appear most.
5. Name every person who can approve or block the work, and invite them to the first meeting.
6. Set a budget range and a deadline, then ask each studio for a phase-by-phase list of what its price includes, including source files, font licenses and ownership.

What to remember from this chapter.

- Do it yourself while you are testing the market, and hire a studio when the brand starts carrying real weight.
- A two-page brief that covers the business, the customer, the competition and the decision makers saves weeks of revisions.
- Most projects move through discovery, strategy, identity, system and handover, and the price follows the scope.
- Walk away from studios that ask no questions, show twenty options or are unclear about ownership.
- You should leave with a clear guide, every master file, licensed fonts and full ownership of the identity.
- Give feedback as problems, from one person, and judge the work against the strategy.

Your brand is a promise you keep every day.

You have read about positioning, names, identity, voice, experience, culture, AI, measurement, rebrands and studios. All of it comes down to one idea. A brand is a promise, and people believe it only when you keep it, again and again, on ordinary days.

The brand lives in small moments nobody plans.

Picture a delivery rider in Cairo at nine on a Thursday night. It is raining, which almost never happens, and the order is twenty minutes late. He calls the customer, apologizes, and when he arrives he hands over the bag with a paper towel wrapped around the drink so it does not slip.

Nobody in the head office will ever know about that paper towel. The customer will remember it. Next week, when she chooses between two apps with the same restaurants and the same prices, she will pick the one whose rider was kind in the rain.

That is how brands get built. The strategy, the name, the logo and the campaign all matter, and we have spent eleven chapters on them. In the end they set up a promise. The promise gets kept, or broken, in thousands of small moments: a reply to an angry review, a receipt that spells the customer's name right, an Arabic caption written by someone who cares about Arabic, a refund that arrives without a fight.

You cannot design every one of those moments. You can make sure everyone in your company knows what the promise is, believes it and has the freedom to keep it.

A short brand that everyone remembers beats a long one nobody reads.

If you take one practical thing from this book, make it this: write your brand down in a form short enough that every person in your company can remember it.

Who you are for. What you promise them. Why they should believe you. How you sound. What you never do.

That fits on one page. Print it. Put it on the wall in the kitchen, pin it in the team chat, read it aloud at the start of the year. A brand strategy that lives in a 60-page PDF on one person's laptop is a brand strategy nobody uses.

A brand is a promise, and people believe it only when you keep it, again and again, on ordinary days.

Kardo's promise fits in three words, and its guide was built to keep it.

Kardo is a Kurdish-first streaming service, built for young Kurds, above all those growing up abroad, who already stream everything else they watch. It opens with an archive of the dramas, documentaries and shows made for Kurdish television.

Its tagline is three words: "Kurdish, full screen." The guide we built is there to keep that promise. It has a Sorani type ladder of its own, so a Kurdish line is set as carefully as an English one, and every logo, color, font and motion file is ready to download. A short promise and a practical guide that helps people keep it: that is the whole method of this book in one project.

Read the full case at iklipseworld.com/work/kardo

Start small, start this month, and keep going.

Branding has a reputation as a big, slow, expensive project. Parts of it are. Most of the progress, though, comes from small decisions made well and repeated for a long time.

You do not need to fix everything at once. Pick the one thing that is most broken, and fix it this month. Next month, pick the next one. In a year, you will have a different brand, built from twelve good decisions. That is a lot more than most companies manage.

Some things to keep in mind as you go.

Be patient with your own brand. You will get bored of your colors, your logo and your tagline long before your customers notice them. Consistency feels repetitive from the inside. From the outside, it feels like trust.

Stay honest. With AI, with claims, with photos, with prices. Every exaggeration is a small loan against your reputation, and the interest is high.

Respect the culture you work in. In this region, Ramadan, football, family and national days carry deep meaning. Join those moments when you have something real to add, and with care for what they mean to people.

Count what matters. Look at recall, share of search, price, repeat and reviews on a steady rhythm. Ignore most of the daily noise.

Ask for help when the brand starts carrying real weight. And arrive prepared, with a brief that tells the truth about your business.

Do these five things on Monday morning.

Block two hours and work through this list with one or two people who care about the brand as much as you do.

1. Write your brand on one page: who you are for, what you promise, why people should believe you, how you sound and what you never do.
2. Ask three customers, this week, why they chose you, and write down their exact words.
3. Look at your last ten pieces of content and mark each one as "clearly us" or "could be anyone." Stop making the second kind.
4. Pick the one touchpoint that most breaks your promise, whether that is a slow reply, a messy menu or an awkward Arabic translation, and fix it before Friday.
5. Put a 30-minute brand check in your calendar for the same day every month, and protect it.

Thank you for reading.

We wrote this book because we keep meeting founders, marketing managers and creators who care deeply about their brands and have never had the time to learn how they work. We hope it gave you some language for things you already felt, a few tools you can use this week and the confidence to make decisions on your own.

Brands in our region have grown up fast. A café in Riyadh, a fintech in Cairo, a skincare line in Casablanca or a clinic in Dubai can now build a brand that stands next to any global name, in two languages, with its own voice. Many of the best ones are being built right now, by people with very little time and a lot of conviction.

We would love to hear what you build. If you want help along the way, with a sprint, a full identity, a film or just a second opinion on a name, you know where to find us.

What to remember from this chapter.

- A brand is a promise, and it is kept or broken in small daily moments.
- Write your brand on one page so everyone in the company can remember it and act on it.
- Fix the most broken thing first, one decision a month, and keep going.
- Consistency feels repetitive from the inside and feels like trust from the outside.
- Honesty, respect for culture and steady measurement protect everything else you build.

Made by iklipse, a creative studio for brands across the Gulf, Egypt, North Africa and the US. Come and say hello at iklipseworld.com.

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00 intro

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02 Positioning

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03 Strategy

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- Almarai sells bread under L'usine and croissants and cakes under 7DAYS.
  https://www.almarai.com/llms.txt
  https://annualreport.almarai.com/overview/about-almarai
- Marriott's portfolio includes Fairfield by Marriott and The Ritz-Carlton; endorsed brand architecture explanation.
  https://www.marriott.com/brands.mi
  https://www.marriott.com/rewards/terms/default
  https://www.qualtrics.com/en-gb/articles/strategy-research/brand-architecture/
- The first Google Doodle appeared on 30 August 1998, a Burning Man figure behind the second "o," as an out-of-office note from Larry Page and Sergey Brin, less than a week before Google was incorporated.
  https://doodles.google/doodle/burning-man-festival/
  https://doodles.google/about/

04 Naming

- Talabat is the Arabic word for "orders." (See 00.
  https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talabat
- George Eastman invented the name Kodak; in a 1920 interview he said K was a favorite letter, "strong" and "incisive"; he wanted a word that began and ended with K; trademark registered 4 September 1888.
  https://jackmillercenter.org/event/on-this-day-in-1888-george-eastman-received-a-patent-for-the-first-roll-film-camera-the-kodak/
  https://www.thisdayinquotes.com/?p=268
  https://mcnygenealogy.com/book/kodak/kodak-name.pdf
- Reuben Mattus invented Häagen-Dazs in the Bronx; it means nothing in any language; he chose letters and an umlaut to suggest Denmark.
  https://www.chowhound.com/1981583/haagen-dazs-ice-cream-name-origin

https://www.tastingtable.com/2256851/haagen-dazs-origins-not-german-dutch/
https://www.timesofisrael.com/the-jewish-history-of-americas-most-famous-ice-creams/

- Ford Motor Company was founded by Henry Ford; Chanel was founded by Coco Chanel.
  https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Ford
  https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chanel
- Standard Arabic has no native /p/ or /v/; in loanwords they usually become /b/ and /f/.
  https://webcf.waybackmachine.org/web/20220402171422/http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA/Arabic
  https://ojs.uomosul.edu.iq/index.php/radab/article/view/1595
- Arabizi (Franco-Arabic) uses 3 for ع and 7 for ح; there is no fixed standard.
  https://arabic-for-nerds.com/tools/arabizi-arabic-chat-alphabet/
  https://natakallam.com/blog/arabizi/
- Mitsubishi sold the Pajero as the Montero in North America, Spain and Latin America because "pajero" is a derogatory term in Spanish, and as the Shogun in the UK.
  https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitsubishi_Pajero
- The Chevy Nova "no va" story is a myth: the car sold well in Mexico and Venezuela, and "nova" and "no va" are pronounced differently.
  https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/dont-go-here/
  https://www.npr.org/transcripts/141473384
- WIPO's Global Brand Database is free and searches Madrid System international trademarks plus participating national and regional collections.
  https://www.wipo.int/en/web/global-brand-database/index
  https://www.wipo.int/en/web/global-brand-database/faqs_branddb

05 Identity

- In 1915 the Coca-Cola bottlers asked glass companies for a bottle you would recognize by feel in the dark or lying broken on the ground; the Root Glass Company of Terre Haute, Indiana, won with the contour bottle.
  https://www.coca-colacompany.com/about-us/history/the-history-of-the-coca-cola-contour-bottle
- In January 2019 (announced at CES) Mastercard dropped its name from its mark in some contexts; its CMO said more than 80 percent of people recognized the circles without the name.
  https://www.dezeen.com/2019/01/10/mastercard-rebrand-pentagram-design/
  https://www.mastercard.com/au/en/news-and-trends/press/2019/january/mastercard-evolves-its-brand-mark-by-dropping-its-name.html
  https://www.fortune.com/2019/01/07/mastercard-drops-its-name-from-company-logo-post-text-future-target-nike-apple/
- Tiffany Blue is protected as a trademark in the United States, and Pantone produces it as a private custom color numbered 1837, after the year Tiffany was founded.
  https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiffany_Blue
  https://fashionlawjournal.com/the-story-of-the-iconic-tiffanys-blue-color/
- Airbnb's 2014 rebrand by London studio DesignStudio created the Bélo symbol around "belong anywhere"; the team wanted a mark anyone could draw; it reads as a person with arms raised, a location pin, a heart and the letter A; hosts could make their own versions.
  https://www.dezeen.com/2014/07/16/airbnb-rebrand-designstudio/
  https://www.designweek.co.uk/issues/july-2014/designstudio-creates-symbol-of-belonging-for-airbnb-rebrand/
- The Expo 2020 Dubai logo was inspired by an ancient gold ring found at the Saruq Al Hadid archaeological site in the Dubai desert; organizers said its circular shape stands for connectivity; the event theme was Connecting Minds, Creating the Future.
  https://gulfnews.com/expo-2020/expo-2020-dubai-logo-inspired-by-golden-ring-1.1699030
  https://gulfnews.com/expo-2020/experience-the-uae/expo-2020s-logo-was-inspired-from-a-ring-in-the-sands-of-dubais-saruq-al-hadid-1.1620133847240
  https://bie-paris.org/site/en/news-announcements/bie-activity/expo-2020-dubai-unveils-new-logo

06 Voice

- Mailchimp's Content Style Guide says "You have the same voice all the time, but your tone changes."
  https://styleguide.mailchimp.com/voice-and-tone/

- Duolingo's communications head describes its social approach as "wholesome unhinged."
  https://www.campaignasia.com/article/duolingo-comms-head-sam-dalsimer-leads-wholesome-unhinged-strategy/501419
- In February 2025 Duolingo announced Duo had died (posts showed him hit by a Tesla Cybertruck), set users a goal of 50 billion XP through lessons, and brought him back on February 24; a spokesperson said the campaign was meant to remind fans to keep up with their lessons.
  https://www.wusf.org/2025-02-26/duolingos-owl-mascot-is-alive-after-all-what-did-it-gain-from-faking-his-death
  https://npr.org/2025/02/26/nx-s1-5309785/duolingo-owl-mascot-lives
- Liquid Death sells canned water, its tagline is "Murder your thirst," founder Mike Cessario is a designer, and the brand was first marketed to fans of heavy metal and punk rock.
  https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liquid_Death
  https://thetakeout.com/liquid-death-water-straight-edge-punk-funding-1834610245

07 Experience

- Careem, the Dubai-based ride-hailing company, calls its drivers "Captains" and has described the title as a term of respect for their role in keeping cities moving.
  https://propakistani.pk/2018/09/03/careems-global-network-of-captains-hits-one-million/
  https://herald.dawn.com/news/1153900
  https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2019/3/26/uber-buys-middle-east-rival-careem-for-3-1bn
- Kahneman, Fredrickson, Schreiber and Redelmeier (1993), "When More Pain Is Preferred to Less: Adding a Better End," Psychological Science: 60 seconds in 14 °C water versus the same plus 30 seconds while the water warmed to about 15 °C; most participants chose to repeat the longer trial (the peak-end rule).
  https://ius.uzh.ch/dam/jcr:5ae9adc9-61ec-4174-b37c-4b752f36c23b/Kahnemann%20et%20al.%20-%20When%20More%20Pain%20is%20Preferred%20to%20Less%20(1993
  https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peak%E2%80%93end_rule
- Ritz-Carlton staff are allowed to spend up to $2,000 to solve a guest's problem without a manager's approval; co-founder Horst Schulze has described it as a cold economic decision tied to a loyal guest's lifetime value.
  https://www.hospitalitynet.org/opinion/4130204/the-soul-of-service-a-timely-lesson-in-luxury-hospitality-leadership
  https://www.jlconline.com/remodeling/owning-the-complaint/

08 Culture

- In January 2022 King Salman issued a royal order making February 22 an annual holiday called Founding Day, marking the start of the first Saudi state in 1727 under Imam Muhammad bin Saud; Saudi National Day on September 23 marks the 1932 unification.
  https://arabnews.com/node/2013241
  https://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/saudi/saudi-arabia-to-commemorate-february-22-as-founding-day-1.85252870
  https://www.mofa.gov.sa/en/ksa/Pages/foundingday.aspx
- In April 2017 Pepsi pulled its Kendall Jenner protest ad the day after release, saying "Clearly we missed the mark, and we apologize."
  https://beveragedaily.com/Article/2017/04/06/Pepsi-pulls-Kendall-Jenner-ad-admitting-it-missed-the-mark
  https://www.cbc.ca/lite/story/1.4056850
- In November 2018 Dolce & Gabbana posted videos in China of a Chinese model eating Italian food with chopsticks with a condescending narrator; celebrities and models pulled out, the Shanghai show was cancelled, products were removed from major Chinese shopping sites, and the designers apologized.
  https://thechinaproject.com/2018/11/21/dolce-gabbana-cancels-shanghai-show-after-chopstick-video-controversy/
  https://time.com/5462653/dolce-gabbana-apology-insensitive-china-ads/

09: AI

- In November 2024 Coca-Cola released an AI-made version of its "Holidays Are Coming" truck ad; viewers called it soulless and uncanny; the company framed it as human creativity plus technology.
  https://www.nbcnews.com/news/amp/rcna180665
  https://www.campaignasia.com/video/coca-cola-faces-backlash-for-ugly-ai-generated-christmas-spot/499379
  https://www.ajc.com/news/business/not-so-real-thing-coca-colas-ai-holiday-ad-gets-mixed-reviews/KTWVDPPESFGPHIZGJT2YOJJJEU/
- In April 2025 Duolingo's CEO sent an "AI-first" memo including gradually stopping the use of contractors for work AI can handle; the company temporarily took down its TikTok and Instagram posts after backlash; the CEO later said the

memo did not give enough context.
https://www.techrepublic.com/article/news-duolingo-ai-strategy-backlash/
https://www.entrepreneur.com/business-news/duolingo-ceo-clarifies-ai-stance-after-backlash-read-memo/492141
https://fortune.com/2025/08/18/duolingo-ceo-admits-controversial-ai-memo-did-not-give-enough-context-insists-company-never-laid-off-full-time-employees

- EU AI Act Article 50 applies from 2 August 2026; deployers of deep fake image, audio or video must disclose that it is artificially generated or manipulated; for evidently artistic, creative, satirical or fictional work the duty is limited to disclosing that such content exists, without hampering the work.
  https://artificialintelligenceact.eu/article/50/
  https://www.gibsondunn.com/eu-ai-act-omnibus-agreement-postponed-high-risk-deadlines-and-other-key-changes/
- The US Copyright Office's January 2025 report (Copyright and Artificial Intelligence, Part 2: Copyrightability) concluded that prompts alone do not provide sufficient human control to make the user the author; human expression perceptible in the output, and creative selection, arrangement or modification, can be protected.
  https://copyright.gov/newsnet/2025/1060.html
  https://copyrightalliance.org/ai-report-part-2-copyrightability/
- Thaler v. Perlmutter, the D.C. Circuit held in March 2025 (18 March) that a work must be authored by a human to be registered; the Supreme Court denied certiorari in March 2026 (2 March).
  https://www.skadden.com/-/media/files/publications/2025/03/appellate_court_affirms_human_authorship_requirement_for_copyrighting_aigenerated_works.pdf
  https://www.scotusblog.com/cases/thaler-v-perlmutter/

10: Measuring

- Les Binet presented share of search at the IPA's EffWorks Global 2020 (14 October 2020); share of organic searches for a brand divided by all brands in the category; data from Google Trends, free, weekly, goes back to 2004; tested in cars, gas and electricity, and mobile handsets; correlated with market share in all three; lead time up to a year for cars; advertising gives a large short-term and smaller long-term effect; "by no means a silver bullet," price and negative searches are caveats.
  https://ipa.co.uk/news/binet-presents-fast-cheap-predictive-share-of-search-metric/
  https://www.warc.com/content/article/event-reports/les-binet-outlines-why-share-of-search-is-a-powerful-predictive-marketing-metric/134539
  https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/les-binet-urges-marketers-measure-google-searches-predict-brand-health/1697288
- Pew Research Center, July 2025: browsing data from 900 US adults (March 2025); users clicked a traditional result in 8% of visits to Google pages with an AI summary versus 15% without; clicks on sources inside the summary about 1% of visits.
  https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/07/22/google-users-are-less-likely-to-click-on-links-when-an-ai-summary-appears-in-the-results/
- Binet and Field, The Long and the Short of It (IPA, 2013): brand building and activation work on different time scales; rule-of-thumb split about 60:40 brand to activation; later work by the authors adjusted it (for example 62:38) and by category.
  https://ipa.co.uk/knowledge/ipa-blog/the-next-chapter-for-the-long-and-the-short-of-it/
  https://www.alexmurrell.co.uk/summaries/les-binet-and-peter-field-the-long-and-the-short-of-it
  https://www.marketingweek.com/ritson-brand-building-boost-short-term-sales/
- Interbrand's Best Global Brands valuation rests on financial performance (economic profit), role of brand (share of the purchase decision driven by the brand) and brand strength (ten factors on loyalty and sustained demand).
  https://interbrand.com/?p=38146
  https://thebrandingjournal.com/?p=157417
  https://www.designweek.co.uk/interbrands-brand-valuation-method-receives-certification/
- Kantar BrandZ starts from the parent company's earnings (S&P Capital IQ), isolates the brand's share of financial value, and multiplies it by Brand Contribution from consumer research scored on Meaningful, Different and Salient.
  https://www.kantar.com/campaigns/brandz/methodology
- In 2025 both rankings put Apple first; Kantar BrandZ valued the Apple brand at about $1.29 trillion and Interbrand at about $470.9 billion.
  https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/kantar-apple-is-the-worlds-most-valuable-brand-at-107-trillion/
  https://www.mediapost.com/research/1235/apple-retains-no-1-spot-as-global-brand-value-hits-36-trillion-interbrand-says/
  https://www.mactrast.com/2025/10/apple-worlds-most-valuable-brand-for-13th-consecutive-year/amp/

11: Rebrands

- Gap introduced a new logo (black Helvetica, small blue square at the corner of the p) on its US website in early October 2010 (6 October); more than 2,000 Facebook comments; Gap invited people to submit designs; about a week later (announced late Monday 11 October, reported 12 October) it returned to the blue box; Marka Hansen, president of Gap North America: "did not go about this in the right way."
  https://www.thedrum.com/news/gap-scraps-new-logo-after-online-furore
  https://money.cnn.com/2010/10/12/news/companies/gap_logo/index.htm
  https://techcrunch.com/2010/10/11/gap-logo-redesign/
- Tropicana Pure Premium's new carton (January 2009) dropped the orange with a straw for a glass of juice; customers complained it looked like a store brand; PepsiCo announced on 23 February 2009 the old design would return; Ad Age, citing IRI data, reported unit sales fell 20% between 1 January and 22 February; an executive told The New York Times he underestimated the emotional bond with the old packaging.
  https://www.wvia.org/business/2009-02-23/consumers-reject-new-tropicana-carton
  https://www.npr.org/transcripts/101024317
  https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2009-04-02/tropicana-fiasco-from-arnell-is-gift-that-keeps-giving
- In February 2023 Burberry, under new chief creative officer Daniel Lee, brought back the Equestrian Knight (from a public design competition around 1901) and a serif wordmark, replacing the 2018 sans-serif identity.
  https://www.designweek.co.uk/issues/6-february-10-february-2023/burberry-new-logo-daniel-lee/
  https://www.dezeen.com/2023/02/07/burberry-daniel-lee-logo-equestrian-knight-design/
- Airbnb's Bélo, launched July 2014 and designed with DesignStudio, was mocked online; Erik Spiekermann pointed out its similarity to Automation Anywhere's logo; Airbnb kept it; a Creative Review retrospective ten years on describes it as familiar on phone screens and in ads.
  https://www.dezeen.com/2014/07/16/airbnb-rebrand-designstudio/
  https://www.dezeen.com/2014/07/17/new-airbnb-logo-comparisons-automotive-anywhere-habitat-genitalia/
  https://www.creativereview.co.uk/the-airbnb-rebrand-10-years-on/

12: Working with a studio

- In 1971 Portland State design student Carolyn Davidson billed Phil Knight $35 for the mark that became the Swoosh; Knight said he did not love it and that it would grow on him.
  https://about.nike.com/en/magazine/nike-swoosh-logo-history
  https://www.businessinsider.in/Nike-Bought-Its-Iconic-Swoosh-Logo-Design-For-A-Measly-35-In-1971/articleshow/39000295.cms



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