

The five pillars of successful brand consistency

How modern marketers can get on track and
stay on track in a multi-channel world

Why brand consistency is so important (and so difficult)

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It's relentless and it's getting worse.

With so much noise, many customers struggle to even recognise brands when they see marketing for them (let alone assign them meaning). Blink and they're gone, replaced by yet another brand and another message.

Fundamentally, we live in a world of too much noise and too little signal. And it's harming your brand's effectiveness.

The consistency dividend

What's clear is that delivering a strong, distinctive brand consistently across media, context and geographies has never been more important. It makes you easier to notice, recognise and remember in crowded markets. And it builds the right associations – the visual shorthand your customers use to decide who to buy from when the amount of choice is overwhelming.

A strong, consistent brand represents the direct route to amplifying your message, gaining greater awareness, and achieving long-term, top-of-mind associations with your customers. More than this, it supports higher sales, greater profit and helps defend against competitive pressures.

But, as anyone involved in managing a brand knows, this is tough. Not only do you need to deal with an ever-increasing number of channels, but you also have to factor in the people challenge.

The shortest route from A to B

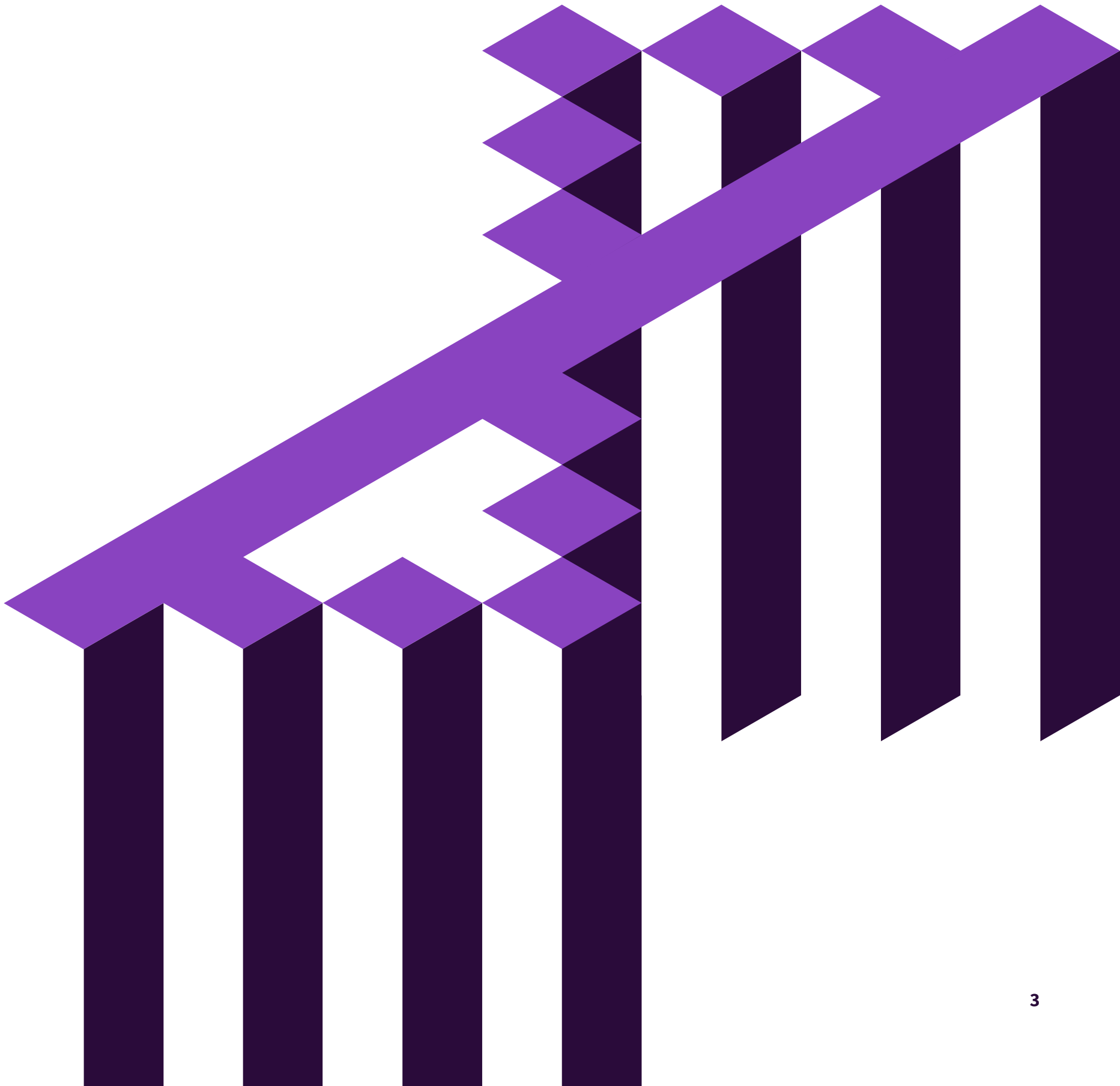
From your wider team to your partner agencies to your internal creatives, most people, when faced with tight deadlines, will take the path of least resistance. This can lead to shortcuts – and shortcuts can quickly lead to inconsistent communications finding their way to market.

It can feel like trying to herd cats.

So what’s the answer?

While there are lots of ways to sharpen your processes, the real place to start is with the fundamentals. These provide the foundations for achieving long term brand consistency.

In this guide, we’re going to cover the five key pillars we’d advise our clients to focus on.



01 Start from a position of strength

Start from a position of strength

Job one is to create a strongly differentiated brand in the first place (if you haven't got this already). Let's face it, if your brand is weak, greater consistency will simply show more people in more places that you lack meaningful differentiation.

To be clear: Brandworkz is not a branding agency, we're a brand management software company. But we can't start a conversation about brand consistency without emphasising the importance of getting a strong core in place.

Building the right foundations

There are, of course, many ways to explore what makes an effective brand (Amazon lists over 30,000 books on the subject). It starts with the core of who you are and what that means to customers, stakeholders, employees etc. From here, it's about the key elements that bring the brand to life in the real world (from logo to palette to imagery to design to the tone of voice).

Ultimately, you need to have a clear brand proposition which is differentiated from your competition and that you can deliver on. One which resonates with your target market. And one for which you have developed a coherent, consistent image and visual styling.

A case in point: **Dr. Martens**

Take our client, Dr. Martens for example, probably one of the world's most distinctive brands. Everything they do, every element of their communications and every employee supports their iconic position as the choice of rebellious youth the world over.

With over 40 years of consistent brand building, Dr. Martens has maintained this position by changing fashions and new generations. From the AirWair soles to their bold black and yellow palette to the way they live the brand in every customer interaction, everything blends seamlessly to deliver an intensely meaningful brand for their target market.

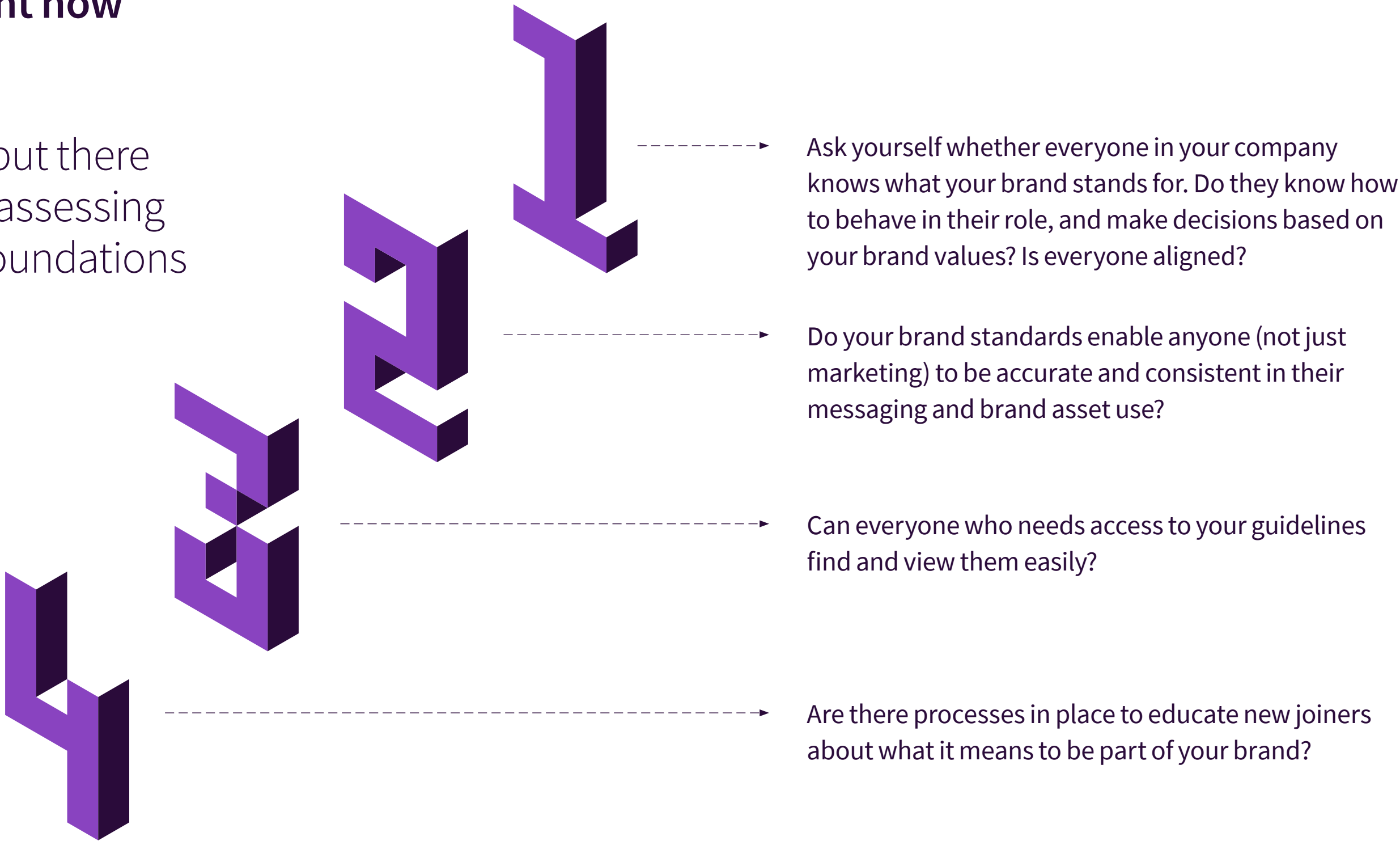
Today, the Dr. Martens brand is arguably its most valuable asset. That's why the business is so focused on delivering a consistently distinctive experience, whether in-store, online, in advertising or anywhere else it appears. Nothing is left to chance, it is simply too important to risk.

While you may only aspire to the level of brand love and loyalty Dr. Martens engenders, the lesson is clear: strong brands are built on strong foundations.



Four steps you can take right now

Individual approaches vary, but there tend to be four key stages in assessing whether you have the right foundations in place:



02 Think people first, content second

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This may sound strange from a specialist in brand management software, but achieving brand consistency doesn't simply start with your brand assets (the 15 variations of your logo, your extensive photo library, your beautiful colour palette etc).

It starts with your people.

Assets don't kill brand consistency, people do

Think about a traditional set of brand standards. (If you're in a medium or large organisation, you'll probably already have these.)

Your guidelines will be sent to new agency partners when needed. And they'll be given to recruits to help 'get them up to speed' on the brand.

But here's the thing: Chances are, these guidelines haven't been reviewed in some time unless you've recently rebranded.

Chances are even higher that your people and agencies seldom look at them as your guidelines don't provide the tools to create what they need in the time available.

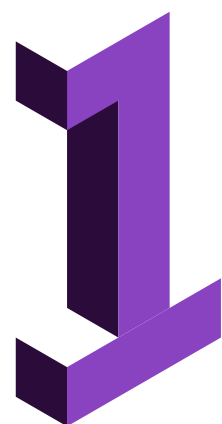
Your guidelines probably spend more time collecting digital dust than they do delivering value for your brand.

Engaging hearts and minds

What's needed is a more active, more human approach. You need people to understand what underpins your brand (not just which colour or font to use). They need to know why your brand exists, what makes it different, the principles behind the positioning, and all the elements that make your brand one of your business's most valuable assets.

Then, they need a way to quickly and easily develop or deploy marketing material that makes your brand more distinctive and which reinforces its messaging and positioning over time.

Three things to do right now



Look at your brand guidelines

Make sure they communicate what makes your brand different, not just which colours, fonts and imagery to use. Details like why you exist, the brand story, attitude, values and differentiation are as important as how the brand looks.



Bring your guidelines to life

Consider how you can make your brand standards available as a living resource right where your people and partners access your assets.



Think beyond traditional guidelines

Can you offer your teams easy access to inspirational, up-to-date examples of what good looks like, and the tools to implement those themselves? It's one thing to tell people that your communications should demonstrate authentic passion, it's quite another (and far more powerful) to show what that means in the real world of your markets, channels and customers. This is what will excite your people, inspire your agencies and, ultimately, deliver standout value in your markets.

03

Make it quick and easy to do the right things

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The bane of most brand guardians' lives is people going off-piste and using wrong or outdated materials, or else creating new off-brand content from scratch. Why can't they just do the right thing? Is that too much to ask?

The reason most people make the wrong choices about your brand is that making the right one (and acting on it) is simply too difficult or too time-consuming. They have a crazy deadline imposed on them. They may have little or no budget. They need to get stuff done.

So it's easier to grab a logo from a Google search than contacting someone in marketing or trawl through different folders for the correct version.

Or it's faster to use that out-of-licence photo that's on their desktop than track down the new one.

And it's simpler to get the small studio around the corner to knock-up something new than go through central marketing.

Just people being people

Let's face it, this is completely understandable and simply human nature. Sadly, it's also one of the biggest threats to brand consistency (and to your customers' experience of your brand).

Of course, you can simply go into battle over every infraction of the rules. You can become the 'brand police' and lay down the law. But there's precious little fun to be had there and you will be fighting a losing battle.

Instead, you need to make doing the right thing, the fastest, easiest thing.

Fast, easy and painless

Bringing your people and partners back on track means making everyday tasks elegantly simple. Core to success is your ability to centralise your brand assets, marketing content, most-used templates and brand guidelines in the cloud. And then to give your people and partners additional tools to quickly get on-brand and stay consistent.

A case in point: The asset centralisation advantage

Let's take an example from our client, car brand Mitsubishi Motors.

With the right approach and software tools in place, a local Mitsubishi dealership can securely access brand assets that are specifically relevant to them from a central online repository, Mitsubishi's brand hub.

The local dealer is also able to localise pre-created, brand-approved templates for marketing materials and advertising layouts on-the-fly to run a local promotion – all faster than downloading an off-brand image from Google or commissioning a local design shop.

Some questions to ask:

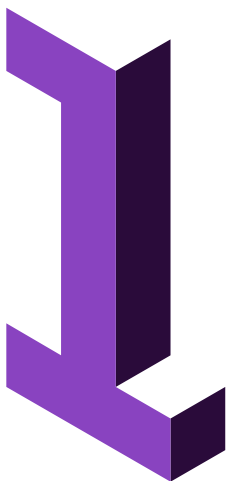
- Think about where your images, artwork, logos, videos, campaigns and so on are currently kept. Are there multiple versions stored in multiple places around the business?
- Is it a nightmare controlling consistency because when they get updated they aren't all replaced?
- How do decentralised marketing managers produce localised versions of core marketing materials?
- Are salespeople able to brief in new sales slides and case studies?
- What is your process for reviewing and approving new marcoms material?

Ultimately, when doing the right thing becomes so much easier than going off-piste, you'll see brand consistency radically increase (and gain happier users as a welcome by-product).



Four priorities to focus on

Armed with the answers to our questions, you should be aiming to:



Ensure there is only one version of any specific asset in circulation and that it's super-easy to find.



Enable your teams to customise or localise the materials they need quickly, efficiently and consistently without having to use an agency.



Streamline the approval of marketing artworks by the right people at the right time.



Understand who is using what and report on which content or artwork is being used most, and where.

04

Find the best practice for you

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In reality, there is no single ‘best practice’ that delivers optimum results for all brands in all markets everywhere on the planet. To be clear, however, there are better and worse ways of trying to achieve brand consistency. The challenge is to find the best one for your brand, your team and your partners.

Fundamentally, it’s a trade-off.

You can, of course, try to specify every facet of how you will deploy your brand across different channels and contexts. You can create beautiful colour-coded flow charts, in-depth spreadsheets, step-by step guides etc. But you’ll run the risk of producing something so bureaucratic that people will do anything to go round it just to get things done.

Alternatively, you could just create some basic guidelines, let everyone run with them and hope for the best (spoiler alert: this will end badly).

Getting the balance right

The answer will, of course, be somewhere in the middle. It will mean having the living guidelines and real-world examples we’ve already mentioned. It will mean storing all your brand assets and marketing content in an easily accessible central online location. But it will also mean establishing an agile yet robust workflow for creating and deploying new assets.



Your way or the highway

What's key is that the process you end up using doesn't force you to adopt an ill-fitting 'best practice' at the expense of what works for you, your team and your market. This kind of friction will harm brand consistency as, again, people will simply work around it.

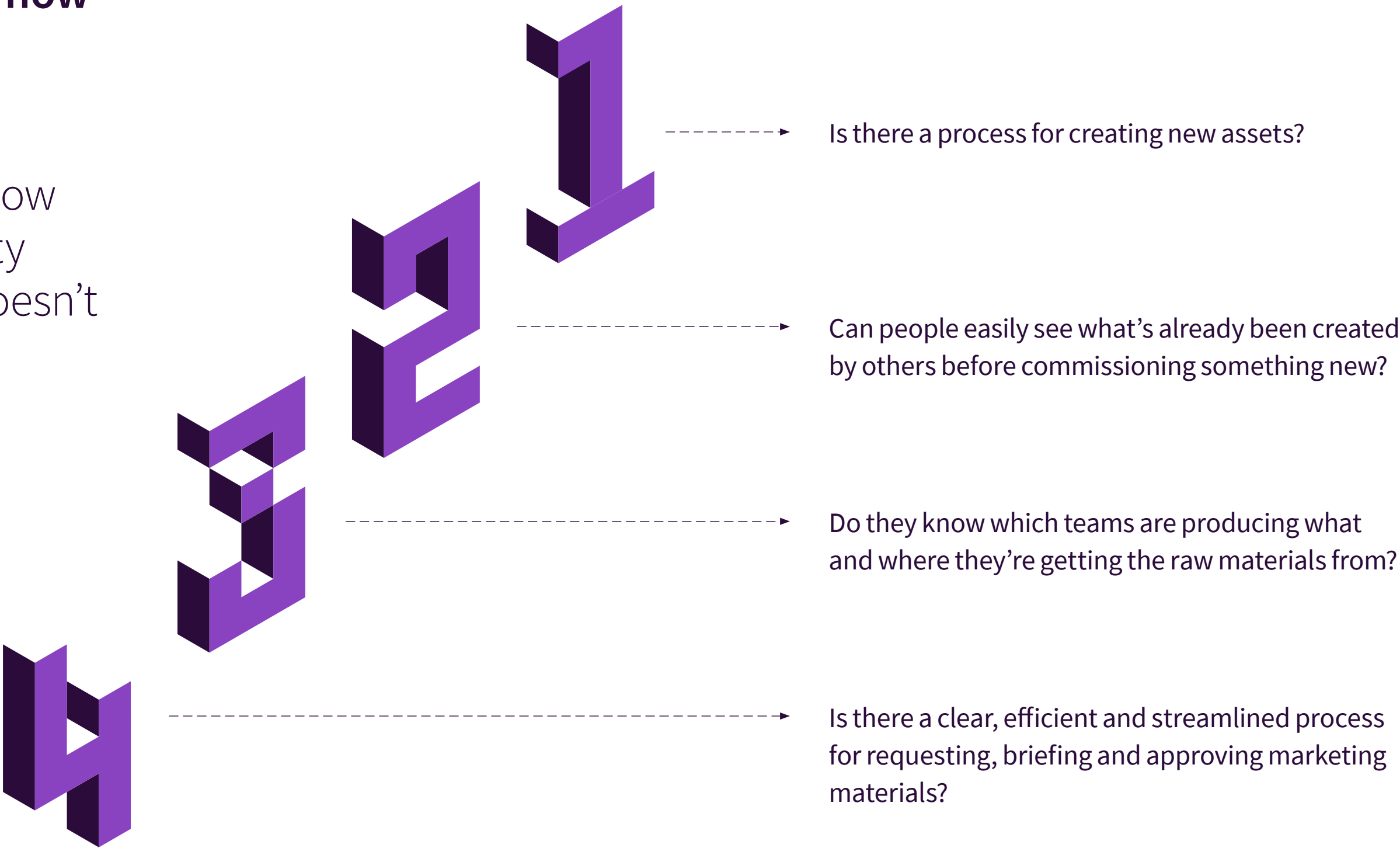
Ultimately, you must have the flexibility to make your process your own, operating in a way that works for you, but which also allows you to ensure that your best practice is followed.

The outcome is that you'll be able to control who uses what while also giving people autonomy to create their own materials and content.

Everybody wins.

Four questions to ask right now

Determining your ideal marketing production workflow will be rooted in getting clarity over what works and what doesn't currently. This means asking some core questions:



05 Don't be an island

Don't be an island

Today, managing a brand is the responsibility of everyone in the business, not just those with 'brand' or 'marketing' in their job title. Fundamentally, everyone can influence brand consistency and, by doing so, improve customer experience.

It's not me, it's you

When customers complain that a brand hasn't lived up to their expectations, it's normally the result of several experiences they've had over time in multiple contexts. The result is a gradual falling out of love.

This is precisely why no company should leave brand experience to marketing alone. Everyone, no matter their job role, needs to be aligned and on-brand. Accounts, legal, HR, everyone can positively influence brand consistency. But they need to be given the tools to do so. This demands control and collaboration in equal measure so that content and campaigns can be shared effectively.

The result is the ability to deliver the right brand assets to the right channels at

the right time – and do so with a single, consistent voice.

Experience wins Ultimately, brand experience can deliver a greater positive effect than even the best ads or celebrity endorsements.

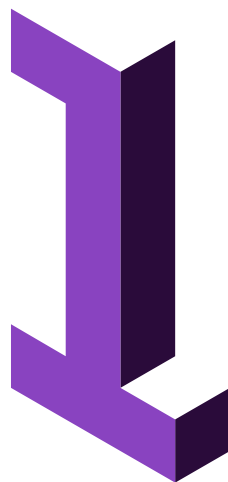
As Laura Ramos at Forrester Research says, "Exceptional experiences are now your best competitive advantage."

But as customer experience expert Kerry Bodine points out, sometimes "the people who are responsible for making promises to customers aren't collaborating with the people who are responsible for keeping those promises."

It's clear: Getting everyone on the same page is critical to success.

Getting marketing aligned with the wider business – and beyond

So how can you align marketing (who are making the promises) with everyone else inside and outside your business (who you rely on to keep them)? Three things to start:



Consider how you can delight customers consistently with great experiences in every channel and at every touchpoint. After all, the alternative is to risk losing them to competitors.



Make it clear to everyone internally in your business and every external sales partner or agency that consistency and good customer experience are their responsibility too. It doesn't just live with marketing.



Explore marketing software platforms that can help align internal teams, centralise and make accessible marketing content, empower people to create on-brand materials and streamline processes.

With the right foundations, processes and software tools in place, achieving brand consistency is not only possible, but it's also easier than some would have you believe.

Accelerate your Return on Brand

If you're in brand marketing today, you know that developing a strong, consistent brand is a direct route to wider business success. It is fundamental to gaining head-space with today's busy, distracted buyers. And it's a key indicator of top-performing businesses.

Need further proof?

Every year, Millward Brown's BrandZ™ research examines the buying behaviour of over 3 million consumers worldwide (not an inconsiderable sample). They found the strongest brands outperformed the MCSI world stock index by some 90 percentage points. They also found that brand is a key factor for 86% of buyers when they make a purchase. What's more, brands that are clearly different sustain premium prices in the face of their competition.

Taming the chaos

As we've outlined in this guide, the challenge for marketers is to grow their brands in the real world of fragmented channels and limited attention, demonstrating how they are different and better.

There are no quick fixes. Ultimately, this means delivering on your brand promise across every touchpoint in every market, every single day. It's about consistency.

While this may appear daunting, it doesn't have to be. Begin by focusing on the five pillars in this guide to gain a route map for how to accelerate the return you get for your efforts. This will help you get your arms around the problem.

From there, you can build additional processes and capabilities, and implement software tools, to make brand consistency the default for your business, no matter where or when your brand appears.

To learn more and get some practical pointers on how to implement the Five Pillars, download our next guide in this series: *The business case for a brand management platform* or email neil.monahan@brandworkz.com to receive a copy.



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About Brandworkz

Brandworkz is the award-winning cloud-based brand management platform that is specifically designed for marketers to help them maximise the value of their brand by delivering a strong, consistent brand everywhere.

Here at Brandworkz, we believe that the ultimate goal of every company should be to unite their whole workforce behind their brand promise. When brands achieve unity behind the brand promise, they can connect that promise to the customers and build true brand loyalty and value.

But this is a challenge for every company, no matter the size. There is often a disconnect in communication between internal teams, and as a result, sometimes

the brand promise does not get to the consumer. This results in inconsistent brand experiences that can damage the brand.

Brandworkz gives you the power to centralise and control the brand and its elements to improve brand consistency, increase brand value and ultimately grow the overall business value.

To find out more about how Brandworkz can help you, your marketing team and your brand please call Steve McGowan on 0207 288 9704, or drop him an email to steve.mcgowan@brandworkz.com.