



Developing a Brand Standards Manual:

By John Shubat

The Next Brand Frontier

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You've completed your focus groups and customer research. You've developed your key messages and identified your corporate value proposition. With your strategy in place, you know your brand is one of your most important assets. How do you implement your strategy, communicate your value proposition to your constituency, and protect your brand?

If you've read the brand compliance research conducted by GBC and the Business Marketing Association, you know that developing a brand standards manual is a great place to start.

A brand standards manual is an essential part of a branding strategy and helps ensure your company's brand is used consistently across your entire marketing platform, from print and electronic communications to events, websites, campaigns, and programs and even e-mail signatures and voice mail messages. What's more, a

brand standards manual helps provide guidance to users in terms of the image, emotion, and message they should experience when they think of your company or brand.

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Despite the important role a brand standards manual plays, according to research conducted by GBC and the Business Marketing Association earlier this year, only 60 percent of the respondents reported that they have a brand standards manual for their employees to follow when producing marketing materials.

Before you dive into creating your own manual, it is important to determine what your needs are and which type of brand standards manual best fits your company's culture and structure. In my experience as the head of

GBC's design team, there are three types of manuals:

Logo style guide—Provides concrete examples of how to use your logo in different situations. This might be effective for smaller companies that just need a basic guide to get started with.

Identity style guide—Provides guidance on logo use and also details on how to apply the brand concepts and the rationale behind them. As your company grows and becomes more sophisticated or spread out across the country, you may need an identity style guide.

Brand standards manual—Includes information on logo usage and application of brand concepts, but also more complete corporate value prop and key messaging details. This is the culmination of brand compliance tools that provides comprehensive guidance to all constituencies on how to use your brand effectively in a myriad of platforms and applications.

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Brand Standards Manual

Continued from previous page.

After you decide which type of manual is appropriate, you'll need to determine how to produce and make it available for your employees and partners. Examine your company's structure. Is it a small company in which all employees work in the same location or do you have a number of satellite offices with hundreds of employees? For the former, a hard copy manual may be sufficient. While in the latter case, you may consider publishing your manual on

the company intranet. Still other applications include a compact disk format that you can mail to your employees and partners.

Finally, you'll need to let people know the manual exists and teach them how to use it and apply it. Examples of this might include a brief seminar for interested employees with a promise of one-on-one consultation with them should they have any specific questions.

Building a brand standards manual begins with a focus on your core brand values and an understanding that the life of your brand is strengthened by how you present it. Once you have accomplished this, a brand standards manual is an ideal way to help your employees and partners use your brand appropriately and maintain a consistent brand image to your audience. ■

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