

Accelerating growth with *perfectly tuned* communications

B2B Executive Guide

An executive's guide to Business-to-Business branding and communications

In today's digital world, perfectly tuned branding and communications can spark extraordinary gains for your organisation. A high zone where sales, growth and profit come more easily.

The purpose of this guide is to ignite a conversation around this critical aspect of business growth and to share a methodology that makes it happen.

Preface

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Conclusion

My journey to clarity p. 1

How clear is your broadcast? p. 5

Tuning your communications p. 9

Static-free impact p. 21

Barriers to best practice p. 23

Your guiding principles p. 29

Be the one p. 33



Preface

My journey to clarity

The natural world is complex in its make-up, but elegantly simple in its expression. I believe good business is the same. No matter how complicated your business, service or product, the outward expression should always be simple.

After almost thirty years in marketing, however, I can tell you that nearly all business leaders struggle to find this simplicity; to clearly understand the true value of their offering, and to find a simple way to communicate that.

My eyes were opened to this challenge while on a business start-up programme in 2002 with 12 other budding entrepreneurs. Everyone struggled to explain their offering, but as the lone marketer in the group, I found I could help others clarify their proposition and craft their pitch. I became the go-to guy for clarity: “Ed,” they would say, “you need to hit this with your simple stick.” Eventually I took on the development of communications for three of those start-ups and the nucleus of Maverick, the marketing company, was born.

As larger, more established companies came to me for help, I saw that they all had the same struggles. Their communications never managed to reflect the true quality and value of their offerings. Convolved, uninspiring

communications were always doing them a disservice and they were failing to connect with their sweet spot prospects.

I really wanted to solve this disconnect; to enable the right connections and to close the gap between company and prospect. To help them create the clear business communications they required, I studied the leading thinkers in business, branding, communications, advertising and philosophy. I opened new offices and cultivated a team of exceptional planners, marketers, designers and engineers. Then together, client-after-client, project-after-project, we tested, challenged and refined our method to ensure it was sound, scientific and repeatable.

Now, for the first time, in this guide, and soon in a book, we’re sharing our methodology, which, as you’d expect, is orderly, simple and clear. Hopefully, you will find it both thought-provoking and useful. We’d love to hear your experiences too – and together, we can further explore how to develop and share a clear and efficient approach to high-performance B2B brand and communications development.



*Edward Field,
Founder & CEO, Maverick*

“Simplicity is the
ultimate sophistication

Leonardo da Vinci



Chapter 1

How clear is your broadcast?

When searching for a station on an analogue radio, there is a precise point on the tuning dial where that station is crystal clear. Outside that sweet-spot, the sound is drowned by static. Are your prospects hearing you clearly or is your message lost in the noise?

Branding and communications in the B2B world is mostly out of tune, with the audience often hearing a message obscured by static. When your branding and communications are unclear, company growth is hindered, often in more ways, and to a deeper level, than you realise because in the digitised marketplace, these effects are amplified.

Today, much of how we research, select, evaluate and engage with providers takes place digitally. In this environment, a lack of clarity can be confusing for your audience. Perfectly tuned communications, however, can help you

cut through and engage with your sweet-spot prospects, anywhere, anytime.

The precisely tuned B2B broadcast is clear, with all parts fully aligned, which means the audience engage and want to hear more. Sales take less effort; conversion rates are higher, and your business has a greater possibility of realising its potential.

So, is your current brand and communications in tune?

Chances are they are more out of tune than you realise. In our work at Maverick, we see that senior executives almost always overestimate the clarity and quality of their branding and communications. During initial engagement with clients, we briefly assess their communications and score it out of ten. Most score less than three. After a few weeks' research, when we understand the company and its audiences more deeply, we

review that score, which almost always drops. Invariably, how the company presents itself does not reflect the true value of its offering. The broadcast is unclear and the audiences are hearing a lot of static.

Having identified this problem, however, there is a way forward. It is possible to re-tune your branding and communications so that you immediately stand out, impress and consistently achieve better results, without wasting time spinning the tuning dial.

Your precisely tuned
B2B broadcast is
crystal clear. It makes
an immediate and
deep connection with
your audience.

“The single biggest
problem in communication
is the illusion that it
has taken place.

George Bernard Shaw



Chapter 2

Tuning your communications

Creating clear, compelling and consistent branding and communications requires rigorous planning and efficient execution. Here we outline the nine distinct stages of brand and communications development we follow.

Stage 1: Prepare the ground

Stage 2: Establish the foundations

Stage 3: Develop a plan

Stage 4: Rethink brand identity and style

Stage 5: Create and collate the ingredients

Stage 6: Build a customer-centric website

Stage 7: Develop compelling sales supports

Stage 8: On-board and go-live

Stage 9: Nurture and evolve

1. Prepare the ground

Ensure business strategy is clear. The clearer the strategy, the easier it is to produce on-message, on-brand, effective communications. Whether for a single brand, a distinct company division or the entire organisation, the roadmap needs to be clear.

Audit current communications. A brief, independent, expert assessment can help convince others to come on-board with a communications redevelopment project.

Understand your audience's perceptions, needs and buying behaviours. Research all three thoroughly as this awareness underpins everything. The most valuable research we do for clients is to speak with their customers. Informal phone interviews reveal golden insights. You need to know how your audience perceives your company.

Examine best-in-class. Take inspiration from the best communicators in your space or in related sectors. What can you learn from them at a macro

and a micro level? Taking dozens of screenshots and categorising them provides a reference bank to return to throughout the project.

Establish key requirements and objectives.

Be clear on the key aspects of your brand and communications. Draft these at the outset and refine them during the project. Return to this one-page, top-level touchstone periodically to ensure you are on-track.

2. Establish the foundations

Clarify the facts. Pinpoint what you do, for whom, how, how it's different, and what value it provides. It seems simple, but these initial foundations are a struggle for many. Before you work on *how to say it*, be sure you're crystal clear on *what to say*. Forget about the words initially, just get the facts straight; crafting the language will come later.

Define your brand personality. Re-examine and re-define your brand personality, which needs to be true to the company and resonate with your audiences. It can be tuned for different markets, but this personality definition will steer the development of your visual style, tone of voice and images.

Define your purpose. People first engage with *why* you do what you do, not *what* or *how*. A purposeful brand is therefore a more powerful one. If your organisation has not already embraced *purposefulness*, seek out the works of Simon Sinek. A clear purpose underpins the development of more powerful communications.

Define positioning. Your prospect's mind is busy. You can only own a little of it. What's the lead attribute you want to be known for? Once identified, deliver sustained messaging and stories that connect your brand with this position to burn that connection into the mind of your audience.

For a short, succinct lesson about the power of positioning, read '*Positioning*' by Al Ries & Jack Trout.

Craft a succinct value proposition. Write a statement that explains what benefit you provide or what problem you solve, for whom, and how you do it uniquely well. It should explain why you're distinct from the alternatives in your niche. The value proposition is a distillation of all the key facts you have clarified and is aligned with your purpose.

Shape a clear construct. How does your audience navigate through your material to get what

they need? Websites force the development of simple, clear constructs. For large organisations with many divisions and services it can be a challenge to develop an intuitive, sustainable, customer-centric construct.

Tuning Tip

People first engage with 'why' you do what you do, not 'what' or 'how.'





3. Develop a plan

Create a development plan. Draw up a succinct, top-level plan for your brand and communications development. With the foundations established, you can define what is to be produced, who will undertake those tasks, the roadmap, timeline, and investment required. Outline your plans for a new website, and for image and copy development.

4. Rethink brand identity and style

Address brand identity. Is your current brand identity in line with your newly defined brand personality? If it isn't, a revised brand identity is needed. Sometimes just a minor re-fresh is sufficient, but often a more radical change is necessary.

Consider visual style. Develop a distinctive, well-worked visual style which aligns with your brand personality. Develop visual details, such as motifs and patterns to enhance the impact of the brand. Create a clear set of brand rules for all to follow.

Brand materials and applications. List all required applications and work through the production of each.

Managing brand roll-out. Assess whether it is possible to roll out immediately, or if it would be wiser to wait for a new website and sales supports.

5. Create and collate the ingredients

Craft clear, compelling copy. Write for the website first, then re-purpose that content for other needs. Create copy that's clear, relevant, true, human and digestible. Start by generating lead messaging and copy for key aspects such as the main pitch, client stories, or 'why us' sections, as well as copy for services and products. Then craft supporting copy for elements such as partners and 'contact us.'

Develop an image bank. Build a bank of photographs to illuminate all you need to communicate. Ensure you have a clear and comprehensive plan for every photoshoot. The more service orientated your offering, the more important your image bank. Use high-quality stock images to support where required. You may also need to develop a bank of key icons, explainer graphics and illustrations. Ensure all graphic designers have a clear understanding of what you want to communicate with each piece.

Build a video library. Quality video is a powerful medium. It's excellent for telling client stories, demonstrating how your solution works and sharing your technical knowledge to educate prospects. Determine the value of each piece and invest accordingly. Again, ensure you have a clear, well developed plan for each video before anyone lifts a camera.



6. Build a customer-centric website

Plan your website. Fully define a plan for every page, panel and feature on the website, with documents kept together for each section or page, including the copy and plan for that piece. Add all copy to the wireframes, as well as detailed design and technical notes and use this information to communicate your vision for every aspect of the website. Keep reworking and revising all wireframes and copy documents until everything is complete. You might, for example, want to wait until the website is fully planned before commissioning new photos, as you'll have greater clarity on the specific images required. Don't proceed beyond this stage until all stakeholders are on board.

Design the website. Each webpage template is designed following the defined visual style and wireframes and working with the image bank. A simple site might need 6 to 10 templates, a larger site might require 10 to 30. All templates are reviewed and polished until every aspect is on-brand, perfectly illuminating each element of the communications. The design team will define

how pages and elements are to load, move and interact. As copy and wireframes have already been approved, requests for amendments at this stage should be minor.

Building the website. With the website templates, design and technical specifications in place, the web development team can build the website. If everything is fully defined and prepared before hand over, then little interaction is required until the website is fully built. A complete, as planned, fully tested, responsive website should emerge in 4 to 10 weeks, depending on the scale of the site and the size of the development team.

7. Develop compelling sales supports

Create sales decks. You now have all the thinking, direction and material to quickly create effective sales materials. Create a clear plan for each piece. Re-purpose what you developed for the website to quickly produce impressive materials, all on-brand and all consistent. A master sales presentation is a key asset, providing sales people with the materials they need to quickly prepare persuasive presentations. Liaise with the Sales





Director to plan the overall flow and key segments of the presentation. Next, plan each slide, develop the on-slide copy, add presenter notes, and define the design approach. The key here is to fully define and plan before the design team begin their work.

Produce proposal templates. If your proposal documentation has a significant bearing on your prospects decision making, it then merits planning, writing and designing a comprehensive, compelling master proposal template document.

Redesign physical supports. Redevelop any other physical sales supports your organisation needs, such as print materials or trade show stands and banners.

8. On-board and go-live

Bring everyone on-board. Stage 2 of this programme established some key fundamentals: what you do, for whom, why you do it, and how you do it uniquely well. A unique brand personality has been defined and a new visual

Tuning Tip

Bring everyone on-board with the thinking, tone, style and message.

style developed. It's vital to now bring everyone on-board with this thinking, tone, style and message, especially management, sales, and service. Plan and execute your on-boarding programme and remember to on-board third parties including any sales, service or marketing partners.

Go-live. Decide on, and prepare for, the day where all the old disappears and all the new appears. Avoid carrying out changes piecemeal and ensure every detail of the new is fully implemented. The website will have the longest timeline, so wherever possible, wait until this is ready to go-live.

9. Nurture and evolve

Avoid inconsistency. Ensure all experiences, touch points, messaging, people and materials stay on-brand. Inconsistency damages trust, both consciously and sub-consciously. Appoint someone to the role of Brand Guardian.

Address website performance and security. It's increasingly important to appoint a technical team with responsibility for monitoring and managing website performance and security. Regular technical checks and updates greatly reduce the risk of serious performance or security issues.

Ongoing tuning. The 9-stage approach outlined here should deliver a brand identity, visual style and website that should not require major overhaul for at least 5 years, although this may be less for early stage companies. Should you need to refine fundamentals, such as your positioning, value proposition or construct in that period, minor communications re-tuning should be sufficient.

Continue to deepen and evolve. Establish a communication development roadmap. Keep adding more detail and more proof, especially stories and video. Keep adding to your image bank and use this material to refresh your website and other key sales supports. Finally, work hand-in-hand with sales and marketing teams to ensure the brand and communications are delivering all they need.

Tuning your brand and communications using the stages described above is not a quick fix. It requires commitment and determination to work through each stage in a logical, orderly process, and it can take time to see your initial plan come together.

However, once your perfectly tuned branding and communications strategy rolls-out, you can expect immediate results. It may seem unlikely, but with the same business strategy, the same products and services, and the same people, you can achieve significantly better results.

“Simple can be harder than complex: You have to work hard to get your thinking clean, to make it simple. But it’s worth it in the end because once you get there, you can move mountains.

Steve Jobs



Chapter 3

Static-free impact

When you resolve tuning challenges, all parts of your branding and communications will be working in harmony to produce a crystal clear B2B broadcast. With zero static, the opportunity to engage right-fit prospects and move them to action is considerably higher.

A key output from the 9-stage process is a website which works hard as a dynamic, 24/7 business development engine. Tuned to produce the following effects:

1-Second Impact

When a sweet spot prospect who has never heard of your brand lands on your website, there will be an immediate, less-than-one-second, positive first impression, made consciously and subconsciously. You instantly build trust and spark interest, leaving them ready to explore more.

60-Second Engagement

As the prospect navigates further, all is perfectly tuned to their perceptions, needs and concerns.

Trust is building further, and they will be excited that you have exactly what they need.

Educated, Warm Prospects

As prospects go deeper, they will see exactly how you can meet their specific needs. Belief in your abilities grows because claims are backed with ample proof and illuminating stories. All questions are comprehensively answered, enabling them to take the next step. You can expect prospects to take a specific measurable action such as getting in touch, requesting a demonstration, registering for a webinar or requesting a quotation.

Seeing the results that perfectly tuned communications can deliver in the digitised world, it's difficult to believe that more companies haven't embraced this opportunity. So, what's holding them back?

Tuning Tip

Prospects are busy. You might only have a moment to make a positive first impression. Keep it simple.



Chapter 4

Barriers to best practice

Ensuring that all parts of your branding and communications are in tune can be difficult. It's hard to align all the talents and resources required, but it can be done. Many business leaders are aware that they need to harness the power of marketing communications, so why aren't they making this leap?

From what we have observed, these are the most common factors holding organisations back from best practice communications:

Looking for a quick fix

Often, work on the brand, messaging and website isn't instigated until there is a big event or pitch, however, a quick fix will never provide the right solution. To build truly powerful communications, you must discover the soul of the company and layer up from there by examining and clarifying fundamentals such as purpose, positioning, personality and construct. Without strong foundations, your communications are built on sand and won't deliver. In fact, haphazard developments can do more harm, so you need to go deep, give it time, and layer up.

Underestimating the cost of weak communications

It's impossible to calculate the true cost of a poor first impression, a fuzzy pitch or a weak website and consequently, communications are often overlooked as an essential component of growth. We recently helped a manufacturer of industrial machines to re-think its brand and marketing communications, including its website. Initially, the CEO was slow to buy-in because he underestimated the negative impact of the company's weak branding and communications, but once the changes were in place, he quickly saw the value:

"There has been an immediate impact on every audience and every conversation we are having. Overnight we've changed the perception of our organisation and our products – in a very positive way. We've shifted from selling a commodity to selling a brand. I was unsure of the value of this exercise, but now, just two weeks after roll-out, all the signals are telling me that we absolutely did the right thing."

Underestimating your audiences' desire to help themselves

Today's buyer expects to find everything they need to know about your offering from your website. Although a sales person might still convert the lead to a sale, if you fail to fully serve your prospects online you might not get that opportunity. Our work with a university to re-vamp communications for an online masters programme demonstrates this perfectly; after the roll-out of a very clear and comprehensive website for the programme, the time spent by the university's faculty answering queries from prospective students reduced by more than 80%, while enrolment increased by 300% over the following two years.

**Give your audience
all they need,
empower them, and
they will reward you.**

A lack of objectivity

Even for larger B2B organisations with in-house marketing, design and technical teams, embracing best-practice can be difficult. In-house attempts to revise the fundamentals soak massive resources, take an inordinately long time to deliver and in most instances, fall short of the mark. The primary reason for failing, despite having the talent and the resources, is objectivity. It's not possible to look from the inside out and see the way. The lead party needs to be looking from the outside in. The lead party also needs to have completed such an exercise many times before, so they are able to quickly and clearly see the truth and see the way.

We're known. We're fine.

Established companies operating in long established markets can manage with weak branding and communications. While there is an opportunity cost, the pain isn't deep enough for them to take notice. It is only when expanding into new markets, that the pain becomes acute. We recently worked with an established building materials company that had marched into a new market, only to realise that its image, sales materials and website were not fit for purpose.



The weakness wasn't obvious in its established markets but was quickly exposed in a sector where the company was unknown, and where its website and sales presentation were crucial to making the right impression with influencers and decision-makers. With a revised approach, the doors opened, and major projects started rolling in. The management team were amazed at the impact of changing their communications. The same offering, product and pricing, but a hugely different result.

Insufficient investment

Unlike their B2C counterparts, few B2Bs invest sufficiently in their branding, communications and marketing, with many investing less than 0.25% of turnover.

It's useful to remember, that investment in transforming your branding and communications

should have at least a 5-year lifetime and therefore needs to be treated as capital expenditure, rather than an operational expense.

Once your website operates as a 24/7, supercharged, business development engine, it's worth measuring the total cost of operating your sales team per annum and comparing this to your total annual investment in communications development. €300,000 invested in your brand, communications and website over 5 years, versus €300,000 invested in one sales person. Which do you think might produce a better return?

As these examples highlight, there will be barriers to overcome, but your organisation can be a leader, embrace best practice and stand out from the crowd.

“
Doing the right thing
isn't always easy - in fact,
sometimes it's real hard - but
just remember that doing the
right thing is always right.

David Cottrell



Chapter 5

Your guiding principles

Once you make the decision to re-tune your branding and communications, you will embark on a journey towards best practice that will be both challenging and rewarding. To help keep your efforts on track, we have compiled some guiding principles. Keep them with you and regularly remind yourself of them; they will help to keep you on the right path.

Tuning Tip:

Connections are made when the message encapsulates the true value of the offering and touches on the real need of the prospect.

Truth Persuades

Truth cuts through, engages and moves people. Connections are made when the message encapsulates the true value of the offering and touches on the real need of the prospect.

Purpose is Powerful

People first engage with *why* you do what you do, not *what* or *how*. A clear purpose for an organisation or brand underpins the development of effective communications.

Simplicity Wins

People are busy. You might only have a moment to be noticed, a few seconds to make a positive first impression, and a few minutes to inspire action. Keep it simple.

Empower to Engage

Your prospects will qualify themselves if you provide the material. Give them all they need: provide answers to frequently asked

questions; give explanations to allay common concerns; and share stories to show what's possible. Share your knowledge, ideas, insights and guidance. They will come to you when they're ready.

Consistency Builds Trust

Inconsistency undermines trust, both consciously and sub-consciously. Ensure all experiences, touch points, messaging, people, and materials are on-brand. Consistency builds trust, trust builds brands.


There is a Way

Successful marketing is governed by established principles and follows proven paths. Follow the way to reduce waste and risk, provide the space for innovation and creativity, and achieve the greatest possible results.

With these guiding principles and the 9-stage plan on hand, you now have the compass to guide you towards perfectly tuning your branding and communications.

“Like in nature, I like things which are based on a few simple principles, even though their manifestation can be very rich.”

Fabiola Gianotti



Conclusion

Be the one.

Most likely, there is a mass of prospects in your current, and in your potential markets, who really need what you offer. The challenge is to create the communications that enables them to instantly see, and believe, that you have what they need. We hope this guide enlightens your journey and helps you get to that hard-won simplicity, which is, as Steve Jobs said, “worth it in the end, because once you get there, you can move mountains.”

Your prospects are crying out for a clear voice to cut through the static and connect with their need.

Be the one.

“By persisting in your path, though you forfeit the little, you gain the great.

Ralph Waldo Emerson



Executive Guide: B2B Branding & Communications

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