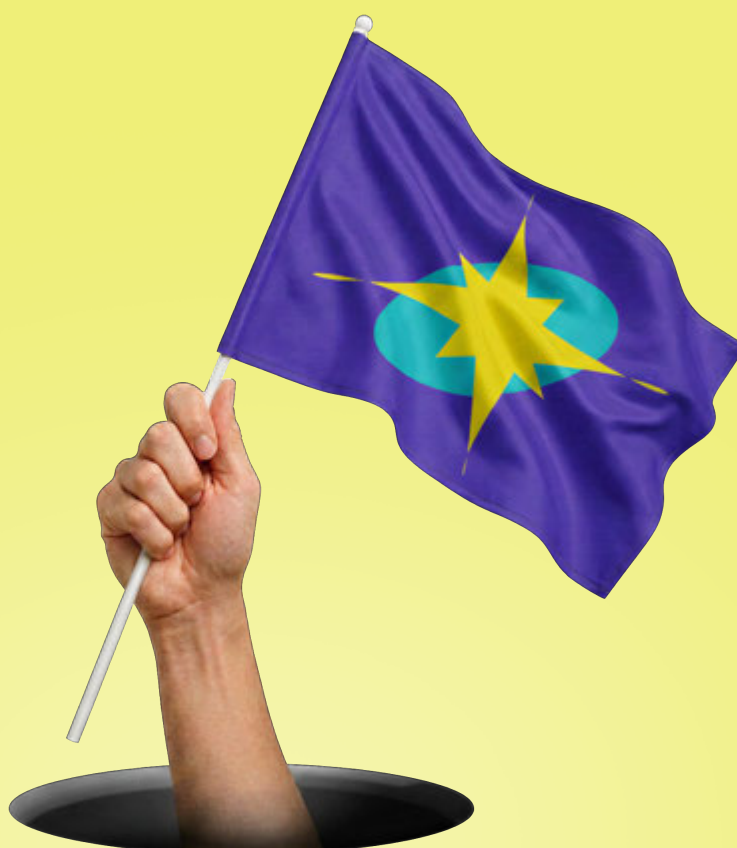


STRATEGIQ®

CULTURAL CAPITAL

Building a brand that people can belong to.



Written by

Ashleigh Gibson | Emily Sotudeh



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Making A Mark.

**A brand is, at its root, a mark –
a signal of origin, quality and
meaning. What kind of mark does
your brand make? On culture.
On people. On the world.
And is that mark intentional or
accidental, enduring or temporary,
yours or borrowed?**

PROBLEM.

You've got the logos, taglines, tone of voice documents and brand guidelines. But what do you stand for? And how does it show up in everything you do?

In a market where AI systems are increasingly forming first impressions before a human does, this gap has never been more exposed. Every inconsistency, every unclear position, every brand promise abandoned at the first negative review – it all ladders up to your brand being misrepresented or completely ignored.

SOLUTION.

The brands that escape their category and become part of the culture do so by knowing exactly what they're trying to say. And then saying it the same way, everywhere, for long enough that it becomes unmistakably theirs.

That's cultural capital. Not visibility or noise. The rare, compounding asset that comes from creative consistency, genuine purpose and the courage to have a point of view, built from the inside out.

HOW. → → →

This publication is built around the frameworks, conversations and real brand examples that show what this looks like in practice. We strip brand back to first principles using the Four Cs – Company, Consumer, Competitor and Culture. We explore why verbal identity matters as much as visual identity, and why the language a brand uses shapes the rules of its entire category. We hold up a mirror to a brand's true identity, using the Kapferer Brand Identity Prism. And we examine what all of this means in a world where AI is forming opinions about your brand before a human ever does.

Along the way, we hear from voices inside StrategiQ and beyond, on what it takes to build a brand people don't just buy into, but belong to.

CULTURAL CAPITAL.

The rarest thing in marketing is a brand that escapes its category and becomes part of the culture. What separates a brand that people buy from a brand that people belong to? We think it's the intersection of creative consistency, genuine purpose and the courage to have a point of view.

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STRIPPING IT BACK: WHAT REALLY MAKES A BRAND?

When people think about brands, they often think about logos, products, websites or physical spaces. But strip all of that away for a moment. If your business had no products to sell, no shops to visit and no marketing assets to see, what would be left? The answer is your brand.

A brand isn't what you say about yourself. It's what people think, feel and say about you when you're not in the room. It's the sum of perceptions and experiences that exist in the minds of your audience. At its core, a brand is founded on belief systems, reputation and trust.

“When you start dating someone new, you want to know everything about them. Who they are, their background and how they got to where they are today, their ambitions, aspirations and goals for the future. You ask your friends what they think; what is the person’s reputation? It’s the same when you do the discovery process for a brand.”

LOUISE GOODTHORP Head of Creative & Brand, StrategiQ



That's why effective brand strategy starts by stripping everything back. Before deciding how a brand should look, sound or behave, we need to understand what it stands for – and how that aligns with the realities of the market.

This is where the **Four Cs** become invaluable at StrategiQ.

As part of our discovery process, we explore four critical perspectives:

Company
Consumer
Competitor
Culture

Together, they help us uncover what's true, relevant and valuable.

COMPANY.

We capture the ambitions, expertise and perspective of everyone who is close to the business. Through stakeholder conversations, we gain a deep understanding of where the organisation has come from and where it wants to go.

Talking points typically cover:

Who is the business at its core?

What does it value?

What conversations should it be part of?

Where does it have permission to speak?

What conversations should it avoid?

Where doesn't it?

“These conversations can be internal, external - and include everybody from the most senior to the most junior at the company,” says Louise. “I’ll ask: What is day-to-day life like? What is the behaviour? The principles? The personality? What are the honest and open challenges about how the business operates and how do they feel the brand manifests in the world?”

CONSUMER.

Great strategy can't rely on internal perspectives alone.

The Consumer lens helps us understand what audiences actually need, want and care about. This goes far beyond demographic data. Through social listening, community forums, reviews and platforms like Reddit, we uncover real conversations, frustrations and unmet needs. These insights reveal not only how consumers behave, but why they behave that way.

“I’ll even speak to lapsed customers to find out what went wrong,” says Louise. “What were their frustrations? Their challenges?”

COMPETITOR.

We put the market under the microscope and look at:

How others are positioned

Where opportunities exist

Where category conventions are limiting differentiation

We root out the strategic gaps for brands. But we also make sure we're not just placing them in a gap for the sake of it. Because that doesn't work. The positioning must be built around what is genuine and ownable about your brand, nobody else's.

CULTURE.

Lastly, comes the Culture check.

Every brand is shaped by broader forces that influence behaviour, expectations and demand. From new technologies and shifting social attitudes to economic pressures and changing consumer habits, culture provides the context in which brands are understood.

In other words, a brand can chart its own course. But it's still moved by currents, tides and external forces.

Looking at culture helps us understand not just where a market is today, but where it's heading.

PANNING FOR GOLD.

The power of the Four Cs lies in validation. They allow us to test what we've heard internally against evidence from the outside world. They help us separate perception from reality and instinct from insight. They lead us down unexpected avenues, to both broader and more niche insights.

“When you speak to different people within a business, you can look at how and why their perspectives are the same...and completely different,” says Louise. “During Discovery, you might get a totally left-field comment that nobody has uncovered or grown or developed yet. I’ve seen this a few times – where a little bit of gold ends up transpiring into something massive and beautiful for the brand.”

What to do next, with the rich and diverse data you capture, is to land buckets of information around:

- What is the brand?
- What does it stand for?
- Where is the opportunity?

This is how we start to capture distinct personality and character traits. We can start to stitch together similarities and differentiators that will ultimately ladder up to the core brand proposition.

The (deceptively) difficult task at this point is arriving at ‘set pieces’ – a brand mission, story, goal, mantra, set of values, direction, etc. – that encompass your brand. These describers, definers and one-liners must carry a lot of meaning in small packages. Distilling it down and effectively ‘bottling’ liquid brand gold is harder than it looks. The devil is in the details – what can you omit and what’s so intrinsic to the business it has to stay?



STARBUCKS®:

*Committed
to connection.*

THE FOUNDATIONAL BRAND STORY:

It happens millions of times each week – a customer receives a drink from a Starbucks® barista – but each interaction is unique. It’s just a moment in time – just one hand reaching over the counter to present a cup to another outstretched hand. But it’s a connection. We make sure everything we do honours that connection – from our commitment to the finest quality coffee, to the way we engage with our customers and communities to do business responsibly.

THE MISSION:

To be the premier purveyor of the finest coffee in the world, inspiring and nurturing the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighbourhood at a time.



STRATEGIQ:*It's always strategy.***WHO WE ARE:**

An award-winning independent agency. A team of thinkers, strategists, creatives, marketers and technical experts.

OUR MISSION:

For EVERYONE to own client strategy with curiosity and commitment.

OUR VISION:

To be a destination agency for clients and talent.

OUR BELIEF:

It's always strategy.

OUR MANTRA:

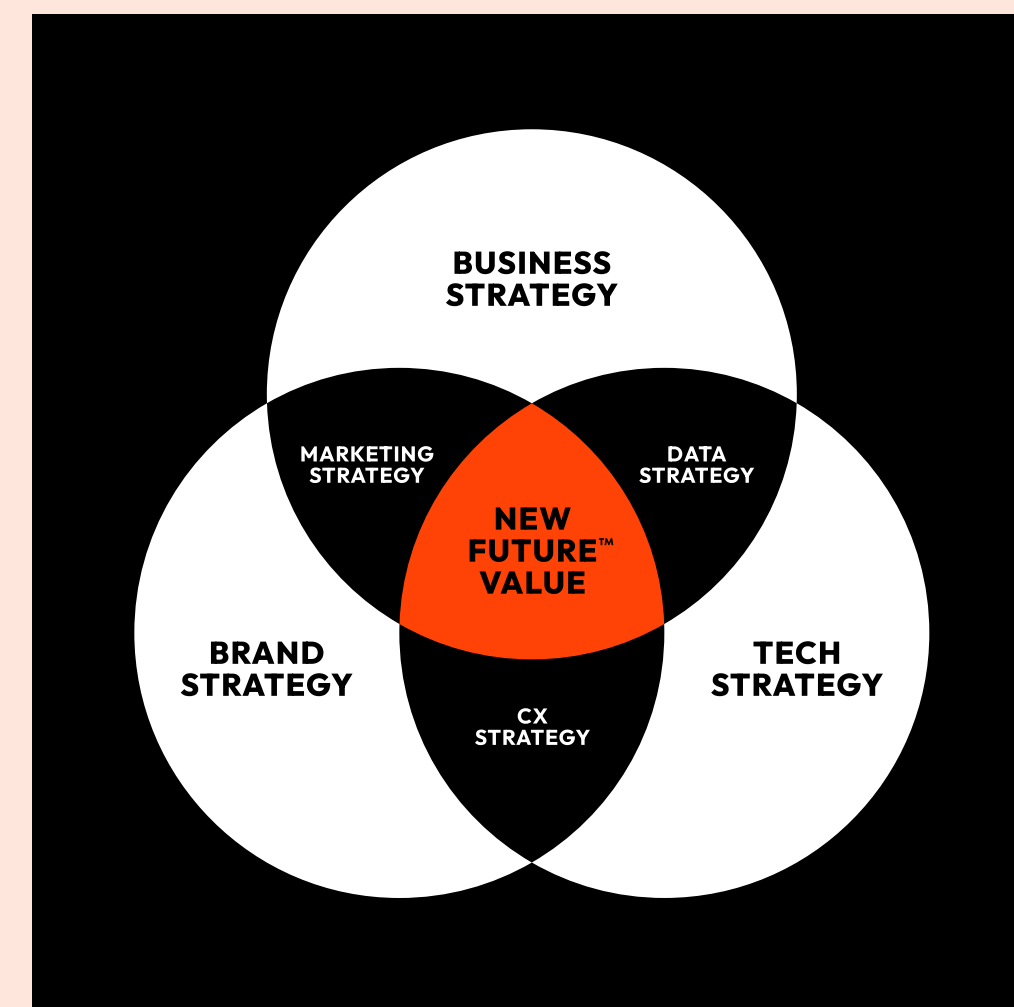
Attitude is everything.

OUR PURPOSE:

To transform lives beyond the day job

WHAT WE DO:

We create **New Future Value™** for businesses, by operating at the intersection of Business, Brand and Tech.



THE BRAND IS THE BRIEF.

Many organisations obsess over what they're going to say and where they'll say it – the platforms, the media mix.

THEIR MISTAKE?

They don't spend enough time defining what they stand for first.

Campaigns become the focus. Channels become the strategy. Execution gets mistaken for identity.

But if the brand is the brief, then every campaign, product launch, piece of content and customer interaction is a means of expressing something deeper. The strongest brands aren't searching for the next thing to say. They're simply finding new ways to express the same truth.

And that truth is often rooted in one question:

WHAT'S THE THING ONLY YOU CAN OWN?

Not the thing you want to be known for. Not the thing your competitors are already claiming. The message or space that's authentically yours.

The intersection between what your audience values, what your business can consistently deliver... and what nobody else can credibly say.

Strategy Means

**UNPICKING THAT NICHE,
STITCH BY STITCH.
WHAT YOU'LL FIND MIGHT
SURPRISE YOU.**

As Creative Futurist David 'Shingy' Shing points out, the biggest and most successful brands often become known for something their founders never originally intended.

Audiences adopt products, services and ideas in unexpected ways. The smartest organisations pay attention. Rather than trying to force perception, they evolve around the truths their audiences reveal to them.

Social media giants Instagram and Youtube are examples of this.

In 2005, **YouTube** launched as a dating platform for users to upload video profiles to attract potential partners. It even used the slogan:

Tune in. Hook up.

[Read more](#)

Instagram came to being as a location-sharing and check-in app called Burbn in 2010, where its users could make plans, earn points and check into locations.

[Read more](#)



Each platform started off as something unrecognisable to what they are today, then pivoted based on what their users liked about them. They listened to what was the most useful and engaging about their models. They ran with it.

Brand strategy isn't about deciding who you want to be. It's about understanding who you already are at your best.

Dolly Parton got it spot on:

Find out who you are and then do it on purpose.



A CLEAR BRAND PROPOSITION CREATES FREEDOM.

In fact, the brands that take the biggest creative risks are often the ones with the strongest strategic anchors – because they've earned the right to play by showing up consistently.

“

Only when a brand truly understands its audience's needs, motivations and challenges does it earn the right to say more about who it is.”

STEPHEN HOURAGHAN Brand Strategist & host of the Brand Master podcast

When everyone understands what a brand stands for, experimentation becomes easier. It's what leads to unexpected surprises from brands that are already known and respected.

Shingy points to Levi's as a brand that's remained culturally relevant by staying true to its role in people's lives.



“Levi's stand for people who actually need to wear clothes to get things done, whether that started out as a farmer back in the day, or is a musician standing on stage working for 12 hours in the same outfit.”

DAVID SHING

THE AUDIENCE HAS EVOLVED, AND SO HAS THE CULTURE AND THE CHANNELS.

But the fundamental truth of the brand has endured. Levi's continues to represent people who do things, create things and build things. Their brand is the brief, and every facet of their marketing feels like it belongs to the same story.

From the iconic **'Laundrette' TV advert in 1985** – in which women in a 1950s laundrette watched model Nick Kamen strip off and wash only his Levi's and a black T-shirt – to the 2026 World Cup controversy surrounding Levi's Stadium in San Francisco, the brand has remained true to its roots.

That's what great brands get right. Different eras, different opportunities. But a relevant, fresh response every time based on who their brand is.



WHAT HAPPENED AT THE 2026 WORLD CUP?

Levi's was not an official sponsor of the FIFA tournament, so it was asked to cover its own logo in its own stadium. Levi's complied. They covered their stadium logo with a white tarp. But the tarp preserved the exact silhouette of Levi's iconic 'batwing' logo, making it instantly recognisable. Everyone knew exactly which brand was underneath, and the move generated more attention for Levi's than it did for any of the tournament's official sponsors.

CREATIVE

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| BRAND IDENTITY | VIDEOGRAPHY |
| WEB DESIGN & UI/UX | CAMPAIGNS |
| CONTENT CREATION | OOH ADVERTISING |
| PHOTOGRAPHY | |

MARKETING

- | | |
|------------|--------------|
| CONTENT | PAID MEDIA |
| SOCIAL | EMAIL & CRM |
| PR & COMMS | MEDIA BUYING |
| SEARCH | WEBSITES |

DATA

- | | |
|------------------|------------------------|
| PERFORMANCE | DATA VISUALISATION |
| OPTIMISATION | CRM ANALYSIS |
| ATTRIBUTION | TEST & EXPERIMENTATION |
| CUSTOMER JOURNEY | |

THE STRATEGIQ THREAD.

At Strategiq, we call it:

The orange thread

The single, connecting idea that runs through everything we do for a client. From the first conversation to the last line of code. From the brief to the campaign. From the data to the creative. From the boardroom to the consumer.

The Thread is how we make sure nothing gets lost in translation as your brief moves through the agency - through strategy, brand, performance, technology. It's the through-line.

The organising idea. The thing that keeps every decision connected to the one before it.

We believe marketing works best when your brief is woven into every creative idea, every line of code, every data point and everyone it touches across the agency.



LOUD AND CLEAR VERBAL IDENTITY MATTERS.

A brand's verbal identity combines **its messaging (what it says)** and **its voice (how it says it)**.

Get either the message or the voice wrong and brands risk losing their distinct impact.

This challenge shows up plenty in B2B marketing. Visit three company websites and there's a good chance you'll find variations of the same promises.

Think: **“innovative solutions”** that are **“customer-centric”** and **“industry-leading”**. Sound familiar? The language is polished, yet interchangeable.

Brands become so focused on sounding professional that they forget to sound distinctive... or human.

Consumer brands can fall into a different trap. In an effort to come across as contemporary, many chase the same witty headline or jump on a trend for the sake of it.

Neither of these approaches pays enough attention to crafting a unique verbal identity – and sticking to it.

Brands that craft and maintain a strong verbal identity do something else. They understand that it's not a layer you apply after developing a strategy.

*It's strategy expressed
through language.*

And every headline, social post, product description and customer interaction is an opportunity to reinforce what the brand stands for.

Going even more granular – punctuation wields power, too. It's how you make your verbal mark. Done well, it breathes life and personality into a brand.



From global events and branded merchandise to cinematic social content and long-form media, Red Bull shows how a brand can exist as a continuous experience across both physical environments and digital platforms.

ONE BRAND VOICE, **MANY** **TOUCHPOINTS.**

Brands today communicate with consumers across hundreds of channels and touchpoints.

Websites, email, product pages, social media, chatbot interactions, podcasts. At the same time, physical touchpoints such as merchandise, signage and storefronts bring brands to life in the real world.



Each touchpoint demands its own approach, types of message and a variation of the brand voice. For instance, think about the difference between a response to a complaint email and a playful TikTok video. These warrant a different tone, a different word count. But the underlying character of the brand should stay consistent. And it should always be there.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

A name is one of a brand's most valuable assets – and one of the hardest things to change successfully.

While there are practical reasons for renaming a business, brands should be cautious about doing so. Especially if they are driven by a trend or a new competitor.

Research into brand name changes consistently shows that how people react to it is influenced as much by their attachment to the old name as by their opinion of the new one. When customers have built a strong emotional connection to an existing brand, replacing it can feel like losing part of that relationship. In those situations, there may be no perfect replacement.

For Rob, the ideal scenario is simple:

Never have to change the name at all.



“Any brand name change needs a clear strategic rationale and, crucially, a compelling explanation for customers.”

ROB MEYERSON

Brand consultant and author of *Brand Naming: The Complete Guide to Creating a Name for Your Company, Product, or Service*

Even successful renaming projects often create short-term friction. Customers forget the new name, use the old one by habit or struggle to understand why the change happened in the first place.

Sometimes a shorter or more practical name can improve memorability. Sometimes a strategic shift genuinely demands a new identity. But wherever possible, brands should protect the equity they've already built.

A name may not be perfect, but if customers know it, trust it and feel connected to it, that familiarity can be worth far more than novelty.

It's worth understanding how and in what ways your customers say your brand name.

Shingy experienced how the brand ultimately doesn't control this when working with Huffington Post.



“We wanted to continue maintaining the name of Huffington Post. But it's not what people call it. They call it HuffPost, or they call it HuffPo. So the harsh reality is that's that brand. Why push on the pull door?”

HOLDING UP A MIRROR: WHO ARE YOU WHEN NO ONE'S LOOKING?

You can't make a brand promise that doesn't match the way your business fundamentally operates every day.

The true heart of an organisation – **who you are** – always reveals itself in the customer experience.

Branding isn't a shiny, separate coating applied over a business. It's the outward expression of what already exists beneath the surface.

It's why the most trusted brands feel aligned. What they say matches what they do, and it earns them positive reviews and word-of-mouth recommendations. Their external identity reflects their internal reality.

For Chris West, author of **Strong Language**, the best brands begin at a much higher level than logos, campaigns or even messaging.

Viewed from 10,000 feet, every great brand is trying to create a particular vision of the world.

"A better world, where..."

The sentence is rarely stated explicitly, but it sits behind everything, and it forms the belief system at the core of the brand. What does the brand exist to do and to make more true?

From there comes the language. The grammar, phrases, humour and cultural references that shape how the brand speaks. Then comes the design system: the colours, typography, imagery and visual cues that make the brand recognisable. Finally, come the countless executions and touchpoints where customers encounter the brand.

Each level should reinforce the others.

Get the higher levels right and the lower levels become easier. The copy develops a distinct personality. The visuals feel coherent. Decisions about sponsorships, partnerships, campaigns and the overall direction become more obvious because they all stem from the same underlying belief.

10,000 ft

Our worldview

What's the world we want to create?
What do we stand for?
What do we stand against?



1,000 ft

Our personality

3 tonal values

VISUALS ATTRACT ATTENTION. LANGUAGE IS WHAT HOLDS IT.

Think about visiting an art gallery. A striking painting might stop you in your tracks, but the next thing most people do is step closer to read the accompanying plaque. They want context. Meaning. A story. The visual draws you in; the words deepen the connection. The same is true for brands.

In 1996, Jean-Noël Kapferer developed the Brand Identity Prism to help explain this relationship between internal reality and external perception. His model identifies six interconnected elements:

1.

Physique: The physical elements of a brand – including the visual cues that help consumers easily identify the brand.

Apple’s minimalistic white packaging and sleek, modern devices, for example.

2.

Personality: Essentially, ‘who the brand is’ – its character.

To test this, ask: if your brand was a person – how would it behave?

3.

Culture: The values underpinning the brand and the dominant culture it pulls from.

Think Ferrari and its luxury Italian heritage or Patagonia’s passion for the environment.

4.

Relationship: The connection between brand and audience.

How does the brand ‘show up’ for its audience – and with what ‘attitude’ and ‘tone’? Is it serious or playful? What services are offered?

5.

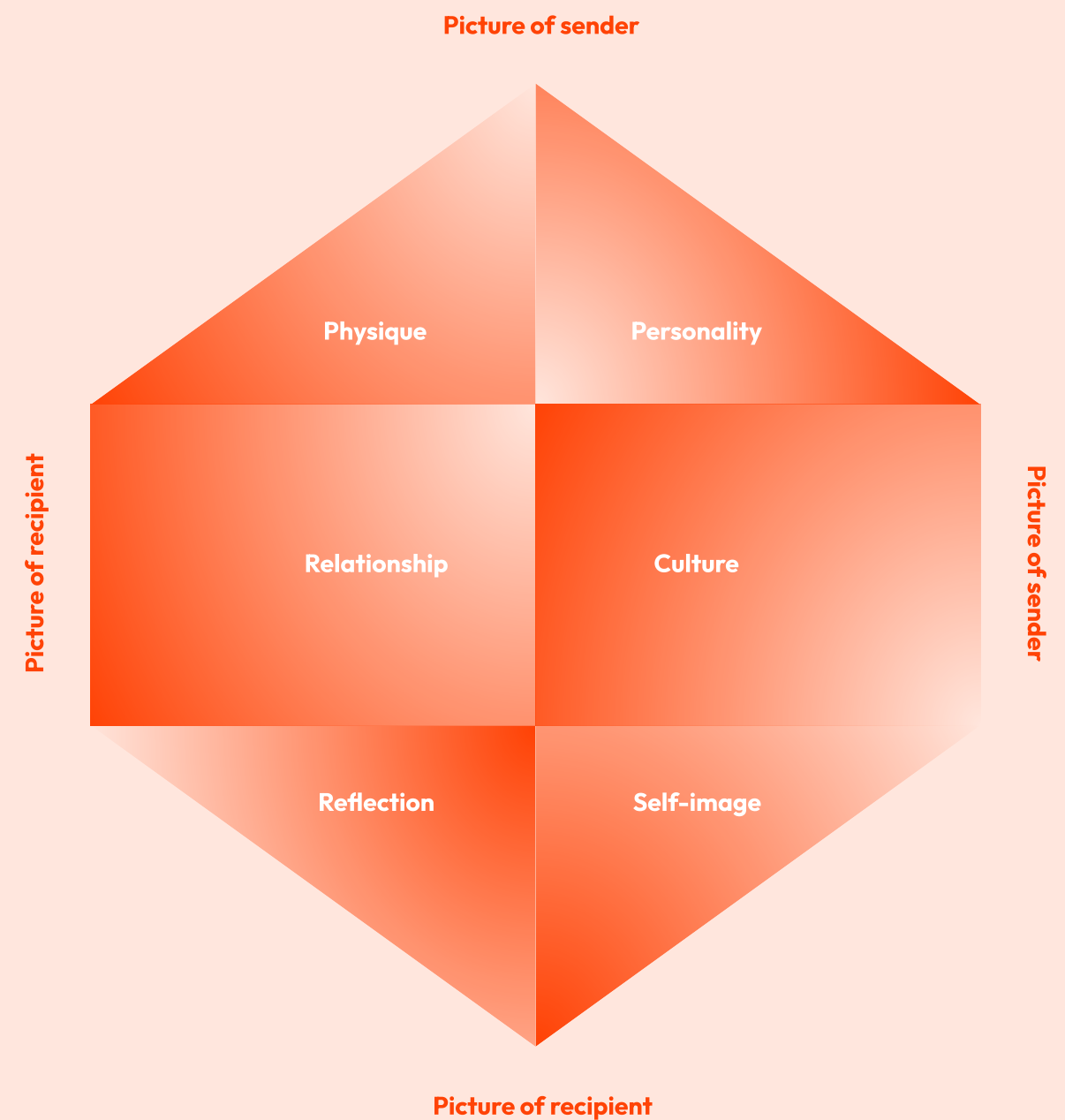
Reflection: This is how a brand portrays its target audience – aka the set of beliefs, values or attributes it thinks its consumers hold.

To gauge this, look at how a brand’s customers are shown in its ads and other communication.

6.

Self-image: The way customers see themselves and their desired identities reflected back by a brand.

People choose brands that they think give them their desired self-image. Ralph Lauren, for example, lets their customers feel upscale and outdoorsy.



These together shape how a brand is understood. Some of the elements a brand can control, others it can’t.

SEE HOW OUR STRATEGIQ ELEMENTS WORK TOGETHER.

OUR BELIEF & WHY WE EXIST

IT'S ALWAYS STRATEGY. WE FLEX, BUT NEVER COMPROMISE.

LOGOS

STRATEGIQ®



COLOUR

#FF4306

TYPOGRAPHY

ABCDEFGHIJK
LMNOPQRSTQ
UVWXYZ.

HOW WE DO IT

WE CREATE

**New
Future
Value.**

BY ALIGNING

**Business.
Brand.
Tech.**

VIA

**70.
20.
10.**

ORANGE THREAD



FRED



What the framework offers is the insight that **strong brands are not built from isolated assets. They are built when every element works together as a coherent whole.**

The real test is whether the identity a company sees in itself is the same identity reflected back by its customers.

If not, brands need to think about why the gap exists in the first place – a key part of strategy.

KEEPING UP AND GOING THE DISTANCE.

In an age where AI can generate endless streams of competent content, competence alone is no longer sufficient. More and more, distinctiveness comes from the subtle human details: a point of view, a rhythm of speech, a sense of humour. These are the signals that transform a brand from something people recognise into something they remember.

Chris West agrees, seeing this as a noticeable shift in consumer behaviour.

“Society has changed so much that consumers are asking brands – what is your view on ‘x’? And if a brand can’t answer or doesn’t have a voice, it’s called out for it. So the need for a differentiated, unique brand voice is critical. This is the environment brands live in today.”

CHRIS WEST Author of Strong Language

GWl data shows that nearly a quarter:

24.6%

of people surveyed have sought out information to verify claims about a brand, while **15.8%** have stopped buying from one because of its views or actions.

GWl: ‘Influence of Brands Views on Purchasing Decisions’ 2026 Research

Chris also notes that much of the collateral that’s expected in branding today (brand guidelines, tone of voice documents) didn’t exist back in – say – the 1990s.

“Whoever wrote your copy well, you asked for ‘more like that’. Later, the tone of voice might get described as four adjectives. Likely: human, friendly, warm, approachable. Usually, it was those same adjectives.”

Today, that wouldn’t cut it. Personality is a key part of the puzzle.

“Recently, there was a trend where the CEO of McDonald’s took a bite of a burger. Then Wendy’s responded. Then Burger King joined in. Suddenly, you had a bunch of CEOs biting into their own products.

Most people looked at the burger. I wasn’t interested in the burger.

What interested me was the underlying idea: I’d like to see a CEO do...

I’d like to see the CEO of IKEA build their own furniture. I’d like to see the CEO of an airline sit in the middle seat on a cross-country flight.

I’d like to see the CEO of a scissors company try to open their own packaging without a pair of scissors.

That’s the real cultural insight.

The burger was just the vehicle. The deeper story was people’s desire to see leaders experience the realities of their own products.

That’s where the longevity lives.”

DAVID ‘SHINGY’ SHING



'CHEEKY UPSTARTS' COMPETE ON LANGUAGE.

Smaller challenger brands often face a simple problem: they cannot outspend the category leaders. Instead, they have to outwit them.

One way they do this is through language.

Take Dollar Shave Club. Before its arrival, the razor category was dominated by serious, masculine messaging. Adverts featured highly engineered blades gliding across impossibly smooth faces accompanied by language around 'precision', 'performance' and 'technological superiority'.

Razors were positioned as elite products. The category took itself very seriously.

Enter: Dollar Shave Club.

Rather than competing on technical specifications, it used humour. Instead of speaking with authority, it chose irreverence. It didn't just subvert the established conventions of the category – it mocked them.



The hilarious marketing video they put on Youtube went viral – leading Dollar Shave Club to sell out of subscriptions in six hours and their website to crash. One video led to more videos, which led to a television campaign, which led to Unilever buying the business for about a billion dollars in 2016.

Dollar Shave Club's approach is what Chris West refers to as the **'cheeky upstart'** strategy. The challenger can use language in ways that established brands can't. Large incumbents (Gillette, Wilkinson Sword/Schick) have spent decades building brand equity around a particular identity and set of expectations. That legacy is a strength, but it can also become a constraint.

Language shapes the boundaries of a category more than we realise. It establishes what's important, what claims are acceptable and even what tone of voice feels right. Over time, competitors tend to reinforce one another, creating a centre of gravity that pulls the category towards a common way of speaking.

Challenger brands get to ignore those rules. By introducing a different tone, a different perspective or a fresh sense of humour, they can expand what's considered acceptable in the category. They can re-shape the norms and the behaviours.

Dollar Shave Club effectively created space for a new kind of brand to succeed.

The lesson is that language is never neutral. It helps define the rules of the market in which that brand operates.



'Should've gone to Specsavers' is one of the most valuable brand assets in British advertising. The fact that it's been running for 22 years is part of the reason it works.

In October 2024, Specsavers won gold at the IPA Effectiveness Awards for its 'I don't go' campaign, which subverted its longstanding 'Should've gone' tagline to highlight its home visits proposition, delivering an estimated £19.8 million in incremental profit. The new platform is an expansion of the classic line, using its equity to carry a broader service proposition.



KitKat has been telling us to **'Have a break'** since 1957, continually finding new ways to bring its core idea to life. And that consistency is part of the lesson. Originally, it reflected a very specific moment in British daily life: the 11am tea break – elevenies – common in factories across the UK. But as the campaign evolved, so did the meaning.

But strip it all back, and its success comes down to something simple. We've always been busy. And so, the idea of taking a break has never really gone out of date. That's what KitKat understood early on, and why 'Have a break' has endured for so long. It taps into something constant in human behaviour.

THE AUTHENTICITY AUDIT IN THE AI AGE.



OLIVIA PHILIPS StrategiQ Creative Strategist,
poses a good question:

“Only when a brand truly understands its audience's needs, motivations and challenges does it earn the right to say more about who it is.”

The answer is: perhaps. If enough brands allow that to happen. If enough marketers and communications professionals outsource creativity to AI.

But that isn't the goal. In fact, AI's creative ceiling plays directly to the strengths of tuned-in creatives and sharp, independent thinkers.



Creativity means coming up with original ideas, seeing things differently and solving problems that have previously proved intractable. Whenever you do any of these, you are making – or creating – something that didn't exist before. But only a human can come up with a truly original solution, for the simple reason that no one else has thought of it before.”

ROB ASHTON Founder of Emphasis Creative Writing

AI AS AN ACCELERATOR.

AI – and before it, photo enhancement and automation tools – have been around for a long time. Think of magazine retouching in Photoshop. What's changed is accessibility.

The technology used to be gatekept. Specialist designers, developers and technical experts had access to powerful tools. Today, these are available to everyone, and large language models (LLMs) are reshaping not only how marketers work, but what it means to be a marketer in the first place.

For Shingy, the conversation shouldn't be:

“WHAT TOOLS ARE YOU USING?”

It should be:

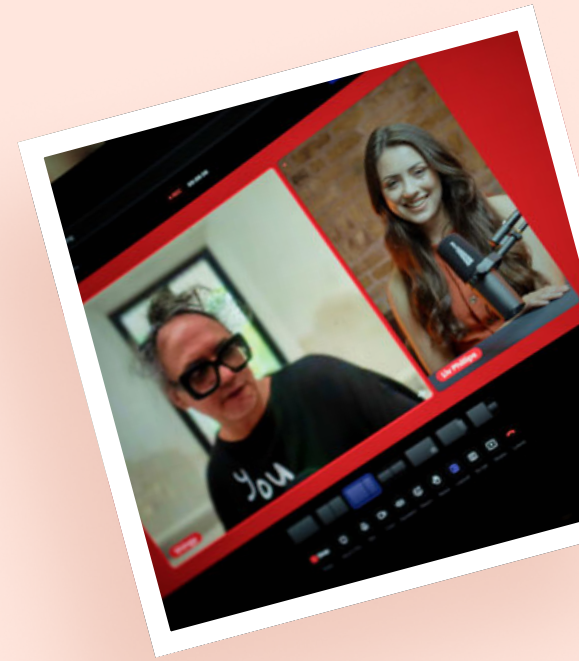
“What problems are you solving?”

It comes back to strategy. Every tool, AI included, needs a meaningful use case. The technology itself is rarely the differentiator; how you apply it is.

“

Personally, I love AI as a creative tool. It helps people dream. It helps creatives explore ideas. I find it compelling when AI is used to create things that couldn't exist otherwise – when it feels dreamlike rather than deceptive.”

DAVID ‘SHINGY’ SHING



SEARCH IS CHANGING.

The rise of AI-powered search is changing how brands are discovered online.

Unlike traditional search engines, LLMs prioritise context, intent and relevance. They're designed to understand what someone is really asking and surface the most useful answer, rather than simply matching keywords.

That means brands need to think beyond search volume and rankings.



“

It's no longer purely about keyword targeting. It's about understanding audience pain points and creating content that genuinely answers the questions people have. The brands that can demonstrate expertise and relevance across those topics will be best positioned for both traditional search and AI-driven discovery.”

NATHAN HEIGHT Head of SEO at StrategiQ

SEO teams have been evolving in this direction for some time, using audience research, journey mapping and persona development to understand not only what people search for, but why they search for it.

YOUR BRAND THROUGH THE AI LENS.

A useful exercise for any marketing team is to ask:

*What does our brand look
like from the outside?*

To a customer who has never heard of us. To a journalist researching a story. To an AI model forming a first impression based on thousands of pieces of information across the web.

The answers may not be the same.

AI systems increasingly act as intermediaries between brands and consumers. They pull together reviews, articles, social conversations, forum discussions, company content and third-party commentary to build a picture of who you are and what you stand for.

That means every narrative matters.

“

Every channel is converging under AI at the same time, and these systems are becoming a new kind of brand ambassador – one that pulls information from an entire ecosystem rather than a carefully controlled marketing message.”

CHARLES AUBERT Lead Customer AI Engineer, Bluefish

In this environment, being visible doesn't automatically mean being favoured.

Historically, success in Search often meant appearing among the top results. You were visible and that was what counted. In Generative Search, it's different. LLMs first decide whether to include your brand, then they decide how to talk about it.

The brands that perform best are often those that consistently demonstrate authority across the topics AI models associate with their category.

CONSISTENCY CREATES CREDIBILITY.

One of the strongest signals brands can build is consistency.

AI models pull information from multiple sources and look for patterns. When reviews, media coverage, thought leadership, website content and customer experiences all reinforce the same story, the model gains confidence in that narrative.

This is where brand building and AI performance begin to overlap.

Consistency in messaging, positioning and customer experience doesn't just strengthen reputation with people. It strengthens the signals AI systems use to understand and describe your business.

Importantly, different models may draw from different source ecosystems. Some rely more heavily on editorial content, others on forums, reviews, community discussions or knowledge databases.

The sources that matter most will vary by industry, audience and category. For example, Bluefish researched the different mix of sources across Credit cards, Pharma and Telecom.

For Pharma,
'News and Publishing' made:

51%

of the AI source mix.

Whereas for Telecom 'Brand-owned' sources were the type it drew the most from (42%).

LLMs also highlight different products and have different sentiments towards brands depending on the audience.

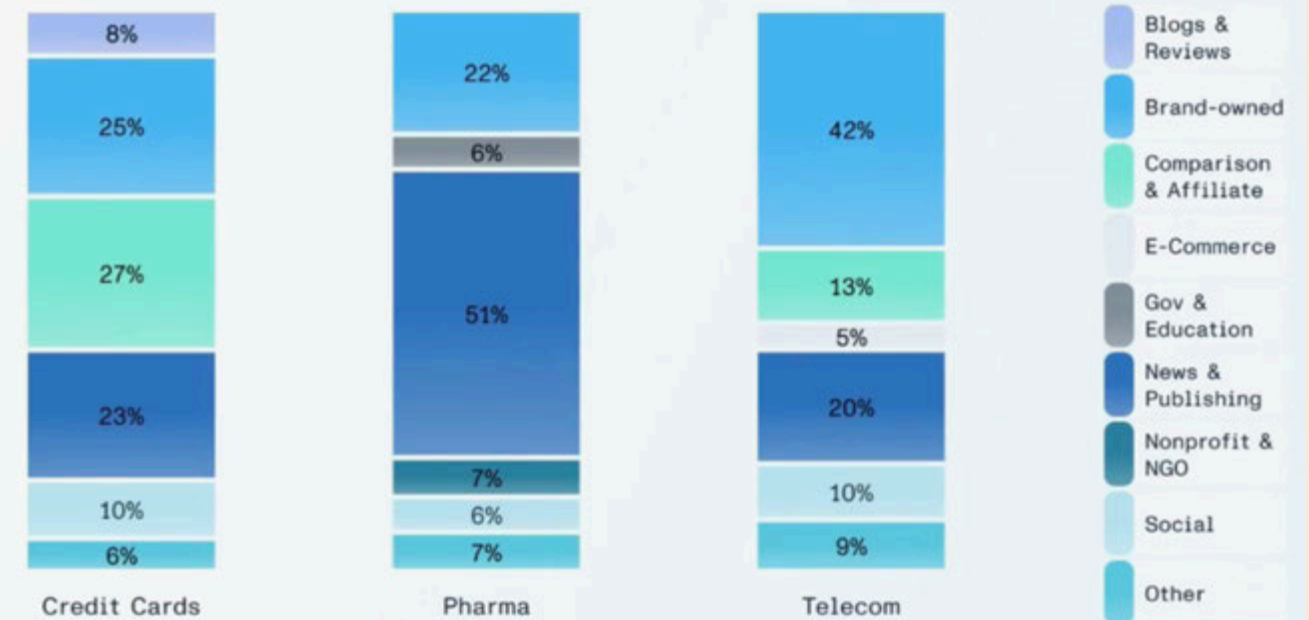
As an example, Bluefish found that Costco performed significantly better in the AI-generated answers against suburban family shoppers than trend seekers.

LLMs try to match what it knows about what an audience values to what it serves them. With this in mind, brands need to get curious about how the model speaks to each key segment - and look at where it pulls content from. That will be where they need to target their efforts.

For these reasons, AI optimisation is not a standalone discipline. It requires collaboration across SEO, content, PR, social media, paid media, customer experience and brand teams.

*Everyone contributes to
the picture being built.*

The mix of sources AI cites varies widely by vertical



BLUEFISH RESEARCH

AI VISIBILITY BY AUDIENCE PROFILE, COSTCO



Figure 2. AI Presence across audience profiles. The same brand is surfaced to varying degrees depending on who is prompting.

BLUEFISH RESEARCH

BIG IDEAS FROM PEOPLE WHO *Care.*

The best creative work doesn't come from the biggest agencies or the biggest budgets. It comes from people who genuinely care. We celebrate the creative work that exists because someone gave a damn: the briefs that broke the rules, the campaigns that changed conversations.

Two of our young creatives, **Olivia & Marco**, represented the UK in the Young Lions Digital competition recently, with well over 50 countries represented.

“

Making efficiencies to maximise shareholder value is fun and all, but the creatives winning awards on that stage will go through it all for you, your brand, and your brief. That's who I want in my corner.”

OLIVIA PHILLIPS Creative Strategist

CANNES LIONS



STOKE PARK

EVOLVING *A timeless luxury* HERITAGE BRAND.

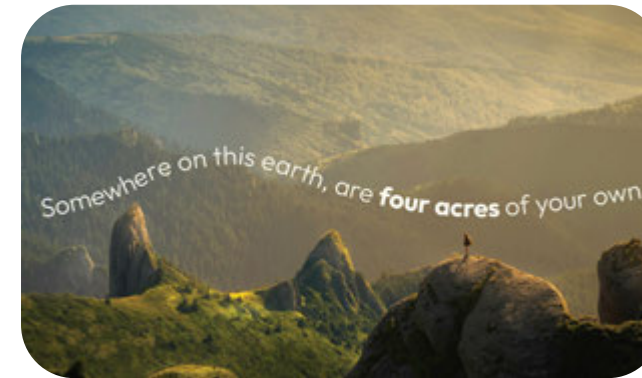
SECTOR
Travel & Leisure

SERVICES
Branding
Website
Content
Marketing
Video & Film

With a rich heritage and bold plans for the future, Stoke Park set out to redefine luxury for a new era. To bring their ambitious vision to life, they partnered with us to evolve their brand, connect with contemporary audiences and create a digital experience worthy of their legacy.

We evolved the brand identity, built a new digital presence and created a brand film that captures the estate's tranquillity, architecture and atmosphere in a way no brochure ever could. The brand film was shortlisted for the 2026 Brand Film Awards.

LAUNCHING A *global* SUSTAINABILITY MOVEMENT FROM TIME SQUARE.



FOUR  ACRES



SECTOR
Sustainability

SERVICES
Creative
Video
Branding
Websites

Four Acres is a ground-breaking sustainability start-up designed to connect people with the earth and their environmental responsibility. The proposition: if you divided the entire surface of Earth equally among all the people alive today, every person would be responsible for roughly four acres of the planet.

Our role as the creative partner was to bring the brand to life through a new visual identity, launch film and website that debuted in Times Square on Earth Day. Our ongoing partnership will help build and promote the brand to drive environmental awareness and action globally.



BROMPTON

THE BRAND PURPOSE BEHIND ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST *iconic* BIKE.

SECTOR
Retail

SERVICES
Creative
Strategy

We took Brompton's leadership team on a three-day off-site purpose quest. The outcome: "We create urban freedom for happier lives" - a purpose they still work to today. We helped embed it across their team and gave the business a glimpse of where it could lead.

Years later, Brompton called us back. This time to design a 40-page global store playbook - translating that same purpose into every detail of their retail experience, from lighting and flow to vision and values. Purpose-led from day one.

OPTIMISE ^{70.}

ACCELERATE

INNOVATE

OPTIMISATION IDEAS.

Sharpening what already exists.

1. Run a Four Cs audit before your next brand review.

Before changing anything visual or verbal, map what you already know across Company, Consumer, Competitor and Culture. Pressure-test your assumptions - internally and externally - to find the gap between what you believe and what's actually true.

2. Pin down your verbal identity, not just your visual one.

If three competitors could plausibly have written your last five pieces of content, your verbal identity isn't working hard enough. Audit your existing copy - website, social, email - and ask whether it sounds like a specific, distinctive brand or like a polished version of everyone else.

3. Audit how your brand promise survives contact with reality.

Pick one real customer interaction - a complaint, a cancellation, a delayed order - and trace exactly what happened against what your brand claims to stand for. The gap you find there is more revealing than any brand workshop.

OPTIMIZE

ACCELERATE ^{20.}

INNOVATE

ACCELERATION IDEAS.

Unlocking new opportunities for growth.

1. Identify the one thing only you can credibly own.

Map the intersection between what your audience values, what your business can consistently deliver and what no competitor can credibly claim. It's usually the thing you're already best positioned to own, often hiding in plain sight.

2. Build consistency into your AI visibility, not just your SEO.

Generative search rewards consistent, corroborated authority across the sources it trusts for your category. Map where your category's AI models pull information from, and make sure your owned content, press coverage and customer sentiment all tell the same story.

3. Find your cultural moment and commit to it for the long term.

Coca-Cola didn't invent Christmas. KitKat didn't invent the tea break. Identify the cultural territory your brand has a genuine, ownable connection to - then commit to it. Consistency is what turns association into ownership.

OPTIMIZE

ACCELERATE

INNOVATE 10.

INNOVATION IDEAS.

Challenging conventions to unlock new value.

1. Use language to break your category's unwritten rules.

Every category has a centre of gravity – the tone, claims and vocabulary that competitors unconsciously reinforce. Identify what your category currently sounds like, then ask what would happen if you refused to sound like that. Dollar Shave Club didn't out-engineer Gillette. It out-talked them.

2. Let AI be a creative accelerator, not a creative shortcut.

The brands getting the most value from AI aren't using it to replace thinking but to multiply it. Use AI to handle the work that buries strategic thinking (reporting, audits, first-draft admin), and protect human judgement for the work that requires an original point of view.

3. Ask what your brand would be if you started today.

YouTube began as a dating platform. Instagram began as a location check-in app. Both pivoted toward what users actually valued in them. Ask your own brand: if we launched today, knowing what we know about how people actually use and talk about us, would we describe ourselves the same way? The answer often reveals an opportunity hiding inside your existing brand.

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ABOUT STRATEGIQ.

Big agency experience. Independent agency attitude. Strategiq finds the thread that connects your business, brand and technology - to help you build a lasting legacy. 60+ strong. Based in London. Driven by strategy.



It's always strategy.

If you'd like to explore what we could do for your business please email enquiries@strategiq.co or call us on +44 020 4574 6531.

GOALS
STRATEGIES



NEW
FUTURE
VALUE™

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