

How to build a brand by answering 5 simple questions

Q1 Why does your brand exist?

The answer should touch something deep inside everyone who hears it and get them excited. It's not "to make money"; that's a business objective. The brand objective should be human-centric. Often, this is called your mission or purpose. It's the idea that everyone who works for you and interacts with you also believes deeply. In many ways, this is the idea that gets your employees, whether you have 10 or 10,000, out of bed each morning. It could be "To make the life of small business owners less terrifying," "To create an easy and actionable path to home ownership," "To give men everywhere the confidence to take ownership of their sexual health," or "To give every pet owner the tools they need to care for their pet as much as their pet cares for them." When you hear it, a little voice in your head says, "Fuck, yeah."

Q2 In one sentence, what makes your product/service uniquely interesting?

This is the hardest question. It's incredibly tempting to list off all the fantastic features of your product, and maybe even some fictional ones, but your customer isn't trying to buy a list. So resist the word "and," which subtracts potency and believability while adding confusion. "And" kills brands. Instead, think of your sentence as the sum of all your reasons for believing.

Q3 Who exactly is your brand for?

Here's where you want to get specific. Sometimes, it's called "nicheing down." You want to go four or even five levels deep, if you can. For example, is the answer "women" in general? That's extremely vague. It's half the planet. What about career-oriented women? Eh...still kinda foggy. Career-oriented women who struggle with sleeping? Career-oriented women aged 35–45 who struggle with sleeping and are interested in organic supplements? How about career-oriented women aged 35–45 who make over 100K a year, struggle with sleeping, are interested in organic supplements, and are looking for the energy they need to kick butt every day? Get the idea? Now we're getting somewhere.

Q4 Why does the world need this?

You might call it consumer insight, brand positioning, or a value proposition. Whatever you choose to call it, you must articulate the fundamental reason why your brand offers value. The answer to this question will conjure a sort of inevitability. Think of it this way: Well, of course, this brand exists; the world needs it. The thing we used to have kind of sucked. Or maybe we were all struggling to do what this brand can help us do. Perhaps nothing like it ever existed, and it's unlocked a new and better way of living.

Q5 What are the 4–5 unbreakable values of your brand

Values are nonnegotiable. They are your identity and source of truth. Without them, your brand fails to exhibit its most important feature: integrity. In his excellent book *Vivid Vision*, Cameron Herold suggests that not adhering to the values of your brand is a fireable offense. You want your values to be declarative, authentic, and short (3–5 words at most), such as "Loyalty over money," "Innovation fuels everything," or "Customer service is everything." Through these examples, you can really start to see how values shape a brand.