2021 BRAND GUIDELINES TEMPLATE

BACKGROUND

WHAT IS IT?

- A brand guide is a collection of specifications that help you present a consistent brand to the world. It is the framework both internally and externally that allows people to understand who your brand is, what you stand for and how you act
- They are a set of shared rules for which any and all brand communications should follow
- There is a good chance your organization is already using many of the brand guideline's individual components. This document helps to bring all of those pieces together into one setting where you can easily spot gaps, inconsistences, or outdated aspects. Serves to ensure you are not missing any, to bring them all into one place and to increase the chances of consistency throughout your organization

TIP: All components, no matter how small or trivial, have the potential to impact your brand's perception, both internally and externally, consciously and subconsciously so do not ignore or overlook any applicable components

WHY YOU *MUST* HAVE ONE?

- It is the precursor or foundation to any solid marketing communication strategy. You cannot build a strategy for communicating with your audience if you have not defined *how* you communicate)
- Gives your employees, contractors, and partners a central place to access important documents, assets and processes to create more consistent and effective content
- Helps build trust both internally and with your external audience
- Increases the likelihood you stay consistent, especially if your brand has gone through multiple changes or has many different stake holders
- Let's you control the definition of who your brand is rather than allow for people to assume their own version
- It provides a living breathing document that can and should evolve over time alongside your brand/organization

MYTHS

- Every brand needs to 100%, have a unique set of guidelines

- Once you finalize your guidelines you never need to revisit or update them
- Brand guidelines are only used internally
- Brand guidelines are only for big companies with big budgets
- Brand guidelines require a high level of technical skill and prior experience
- Your brand being "cool" or "standing out" is the most important result

DEFINE YOUR BRAND

YOUR WHY

- Who are you and why do you do what you do?
- Can you describe this in one succinct sentence (0:15 second elevator pitch)?
- Do you have a longer form version with some supporting details?
- What are your company values?
- How do you communicate those values and concepts?
- What emotions do you want your audience to experience when they interact with or see your brand?

TIP: While your succinct version should be catchier, intriguing, and straight forward, your longer form version can be less pitchy and a little more descriptive. Just be aware of when and where to use each version.

TIP: Try categorizing your information in a way that makes it easier to retain and explain, for example: create 8-12 "principles" that your company can define and list separately

TIP: How you define the brand becomes the foundation for which the rest of the guidelines should flow through and call back to. If parts of the document do not align well with the "definition" than one or the other must be adjusted.

VALUE PROPOSITION (AN INNOVATION, SERVICE, FEATURE OR BENEFIT TO OFFER YOUR AUDIENCE)

- What is the most important value you promise to offer your audience?
- What is the value offer your organization is most proud of? Has provided the longest?
- Do you have different value proposition for different audiences? Is there a common overlap?
- How different is your value proposition than your competitors or similar organizations in your space?
- Do you pay off your value proposition more than speak to it (show instead of tell)?
- Does your value proposition currently align with the direction the organization is headed in? With the direction your audience is headed in?

TIP: Always assess Value Propositions from your audience's perspective. Something you may deem as proving valuable may have little worth to your audience and vice versa. Be true to who you are and what you do, just make sure that still aligns with what your audience values.

DEFINE YOUR IDENTITY

YOUR NAME

- What's the official name of your organization? Are there any nicknames? Shorthand versions? Sub-brands as standalone names?
- How should your name be written? Is it the same font and imagery you use elsewhere or unique?
- Do you have a story or background behind your name? Is your name part of/weaved into your overall brand story?

TIP: If you have an interesting or deliberate reason for your name, define or list it as well. That will not only help internal buy in but becomes a communication tool to increase external buy in as well. With people seeing millions of names every day, sometimes a strong story can help yours stand out from the clutter.

YOUR LOGO

- What is the optimal Logo size and dimensions? Can it work in multiple formats as is or does it require adjustment (other variations)?
- Are there multiple versions (if so, include all and when/how to use each)?
    - Versions could be with a tagline vs without, full color vs black and white, word mark only vs logo mark only, etc.
- Where and when will your logo be placed?
- Do you have a standardized set of rules in place for logo usage?
- Does your logo help you stand out from the competition? Is it easily recognizable?

TIP: Having some flexibility/options for different logos can be immensely helpful in "putting the best version forward" based on the audience, channel, etc. However, that variation must be subtle as multiple logos that appear to differently will end up hurting your brand much more than helping.

TIP: At the very least it helps to have a secondary logo which is a much more simplified and universally accessible logo (i.e., black and white) that can be used if needed in almost any situation.

YOUR COLORS

- What are your Primary, Secondary and Tertiary (optional) brand color palettes?
- Do you have their HEX, CMYK, RGB and PMS numbers?
- How should each color be used and when?
- Are you using the colors to communicate specific things (strategically)?
- Do your offline colors match your online/digital colors?
- Are there acceptable shades or gradients you have defined within your color set?
- How do you refer to the specific colors internally? With external partners?
- Do your colors evoke the proper emotional response (i.e., red for healthcare or blue for technology)?

TIP: Every brand should have a Primary color palette which usually consists of 3-5 colors that work well together and effectively represent your brand. You could also use 1-2 Primary colors and leave room for more secondary or alternate options.

TIP: Do not mix colors into one scheme/pallet that are not optimal when combined. Instead choose the strongest to build your Primary set around and then save the other options to form a Secondary or Alt palette scheme.

TIP: Using multiple color schemes or having the option to use Alt Colors can help your brand stay fresh and provide additional flexibility. Just be sure to almost always anchor back to your core colors no matter how much the alt versions deviate since brand consistency is equally important as staying fresh.

TIP: Feel free to name your brand colors something you can use in internal and/or external language to add a little more personality and stand out better just make sure the actual color name and associated codes are easily accessible for when it actually needs to be used by someone internally (i.e., CJP Purple can work superficially but the actual RGB for their purple must be well documented and easy to find)

TIP: Not every color will show up the same way across all mediums and should be tested first to identify any inconsistencies (i.e., the same green used on a website may appear slightly different when used in Print materials)

DEFINE YOUR STYLE

FONTS

- What fonts do we use? When do we use them specifically (if multiple)?
- Are the fonts easily repeated (standard across platforms and programs)?
- Is the font style, size, weight and any embellishments defined? Do we use them consistently or sporadically?
- Are they legible across all sizes and placements?
- Do they help your brand stand out or add a little personality?
- Do you use different fonts for different components of your copy (i.e., for headlines vs sub copy)?
- Do you have a defined spacing approach for letters? For sentences? For paragraphs?
- Do you use your brand colors in your fonts? Do you have a neutral color to use in place of your brand colors? Is there a 3rd color option outside of your brand palette or standard/neutral colors?

TIP: Font is one of the most overlooked brand components but is often the thing we spend the most time looking at both internally and externally. So, make sure it reflects who your brand is, and is also something you or the audience will not get "sick of".

TIP: Each brand should use about 3-5 different font variations. These variations don't have to be separate font families and could simply be variations within a font set (i.e., bold or italic)

ICONS

- Do you currently use icons in your communication materials?
- When do you use icons? When not to use icons?
- Do you have a consistent set of icons to use?
- Do the icons accurately reflect your brand personality/tone?
- Do you have a defined visual style (i.e., line art vs filled in or one color vs multi color)?
- Do you have set colors and sizes for the icons?

TIP: You can create your own icons from scratch or use standard icons found within programs (i.e., Word) or from the internet. How you use them, which kinds you use, etc. is more important to the brand then if they are 100% original or not.

IMAGERY

- Do you use a combination of photography and illustrations? When do you use each?
- What style of photography do you use? Do you have an ongoing archive to pull from? Do you consistently use the same camera or camera settings? Do you have them defined for future replication? (settings are things like filters, lenses or pre-sets)
    - Do you have the composition approach, color schemes, styles and technical specs defined?
- What is your go to illustration style? What is the tone? When do you typically use illustration over photo?
    - Do you have the composition approach, color schemes, styles and technical specs defined?
- Is there an opportunity for your photographs and illustrations to work together?
- Do you have a running list of photos or illustrations you can use as inspiration (internally or with an external partner)?
- Do you allow use of stock photos? When do you use them? How often? Is there a consistency to the ones you use? Paid only? Free only? Combination?
- Do you use certain imagery with specific channels or audiences?
- How often do you update your imagery (photo or illustration)?

TIP: Illustrations, especially hand draw, have been increasing in usage (trendy) but typically requires some outside expertise/resources to develop. If that opportunity present itself, be sure to have them create their own guidelines for those illustrations so any future work can remain aligned regardless of who executes it.

TIP: Certain imagery is best suited for specific channels, the payoff of increased relevance to a channel vs loss of "consistency" across channels should be considered.

- Ex. Instagram is 100% mobile and any imagery used there should be optimized for Mobile and audiences using the channel also tend to gravitate towards real photography over other image types (i.e. IG = Mobile, Photography)

TIP: Inspiration boards can sometimes help communicate a brands tone or style without limiting it to just one strict approach. Select multiple images that can convey different things but have a common theme or overlap to bring them all together.

TONE/VOICE

- What does you brand sound like?
- Do you sound different when communicating on different channels? To different audiences? Is there a common overlap?
- Are there any tones your brand should always avoid?
- Do you have a go to list of Dos and Don'ts for things like grammar, punctuation, spelling, vocabulary, naming and tone?
- Are you using consistent vocabulary and naming conventions internally and externally? Across all channels and audiences?
- Does your brand use any unique terminology? If so, do you define it clearly for internal and external audiences?

TIP: Your brand should have a recognizable, consistent, and unique voice, but can be slightly tweaked to better relate to a specific channel or audience where you will be communicating

- Example: If using Instagram your tone should be more lighthearted and casual than salesy or "rigid professional".

TIP: Once you settle on a direction do not feel the need to force it overnight. As long as you begin to weave it into your activity and consistently revisit it as a compass, you will eventually be practicing what you preach.

TIP: Your brand voice should serve to equally align your organization internally and align with your audience externally. You must be confident and proud with your voice, but if it does not resonate or relate well to the audience, it still won't be effective.

TIP: If there are common misspellings and vocabular confusion specific to your brand or space, then it will be even more important that you define the Dos and Don'ts and stick to them

TIP: Create a word map of the types of adjectives you would want your audience and employees to use when describing your brand. Find some of the strongest and some of the overlaps and use that as a foundation for selecting your overall tone.

ADDITIONAL CRITERIA (OPTIONAL)

BUSINESS INFO

- Do you use official letterhead? When do you use it vs not? Is there more than one option?
- Do you have business cards? Are they consistent throughout the organization? Do they match your brands look and tone?
- Does your organizations signage match its digital presence (i.e., offline signage and "online" signage)?

PRESENTATIONS

- Do you have an approved PowerPoint (or equivalent) template? More than one? Does everyone have access to it (and consistently use it)?
- What other formats do you present info in? Do they have templates?

WEBSITE

- Does your website design match your font, color logo and imagery guidelines?
- Does your website have a consistent look and feel across each section? Each page?
- Is your logo prominent enough (without being intrusive)?
- Are any documents being hosted? Do they align with your templates and offline documents in terms of branding?

TOOLS & EXAMPLES

TOOL: https://venngage.com/

- Vennage has 100s of prepopulated templates to cover an entire brand guideline or specific components
- There is a free version that will allow you to customize your on from one of their templates but how often and how many may be limited
- There is a basic and business edition starting at $20/month (cancel anytime) that allows you to fully customize as many documents as you need and easily download them for internal use.

- There may be other helpful tools out there, but this is one of the best bangs for your buck in terms of being easy to use/customize and getting a good end result

EXAMPLES

(SEE ACCOMPANYING FILE FOLDER LABLED "BRAND GUIDELINE EXAMPLES")