



How to build a consistent digital brand experience

by
Activate Media

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Introduction

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Where do your customers go to find out about your service? Perhaps it's from a Google search, a review site, social media, a magazine, their friends, etc. The answer to this will vary from brand to brand, but the point is that today's consumers now have a multitude of ways to interact with your brand that isn't limited to traditional or even digital media. With the smartphone and tablet boom – your brand now has the opportunity to interact with consumers on the go, across multiple channels.

The main challenge for marketers is how to build a strong brand that crosses over to digital in this multi-channel environment?

Consistency is the essence of branding and users expect to recognise and absorb a brand's identity, values and purpose immediately. If they can't, well, there's the danger of losing your audience quicker than the time it took to build that same audience.


Building a consistent brand online and doing it well requires somebody that can ensure the same brand values are delivered across all channels.





For branding consistency, a brand advocate
should manage your message.

For digital projects, it makes sense that
the project manager is a digital specialist.



Jim Prior, CEO of The Partners, a WPP branding agency

5 Key elements of branding on the web

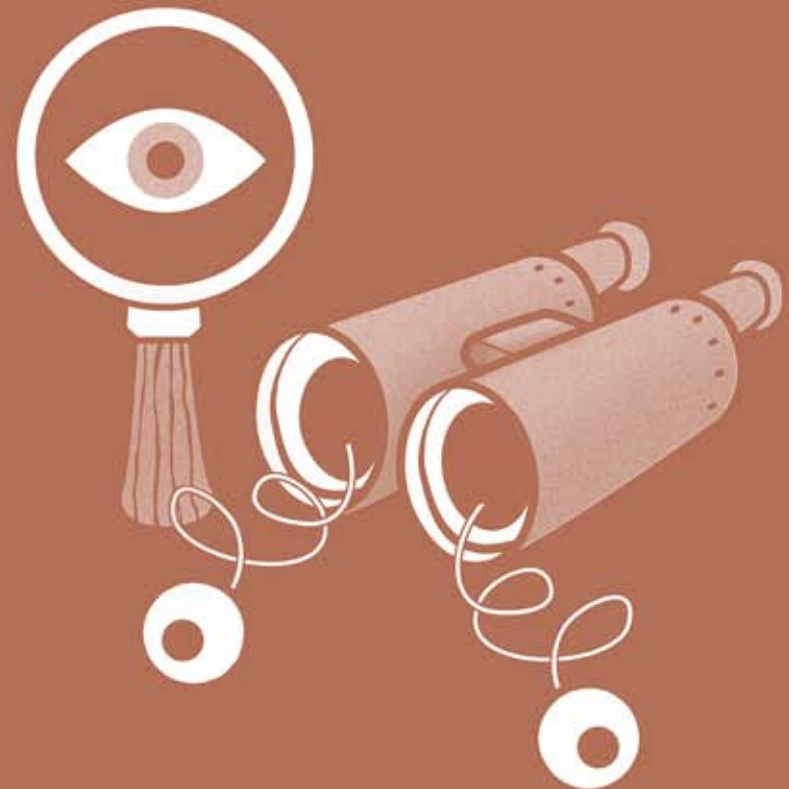
There are five key elements to branding on the web. Get these right and you'll be much more likely to deliver online success for your clients.

1. Analyse your brand's online presence

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A brand should be consistent in the way it makes people feel, as it is consistent in how it looks. On every page of your website, in every email, every ad and every text, your brand's personality should come across consistently, wherever your customers encounter it.

Consider how your brand is perceived online and see whether it matches your offline branding and your goals. So, how do you go about measuring your brand's online presence and see whether it needs to evolve to engage an online audience?



1. Analyse your brand's online presence

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Talk to your people about your brand, get their feedback. Don't take our word for it. Survey your customers and prospects on both your online and offline presence as you're developing it. It's an effective way to find out what's working and what's not.

Here are some excellent tips from [London Fusion](#) on how to pick users for design research, which you can easily use for getting feedback on your brand.

1. Set a goal for the feedback exercise
2. Select a sample size that's manageable enough to go deeper with your questions. But make sure you pick a cross-section of people, in terms of age, gender, preference, etc
3. Test your feedback exercise on colleagues and friends outside of your company
4. Various ways of getting participants; word of mouth, local contacts and organisations, web forums, find people who are interested in the types of services you provide, adverts on notice boards
5. Keep an open mind – even consider feedback from people who do not engage with your topic. The extremes will give you perspectives that you might not have had before
6. Design your questions, making sure you ask clear questions, avoid jargon, listen more than you talk, and avoid ambiguity and leading questions

1. Analyse your brand's online presence

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Measure Branding Reach

There are tools to help you figure out the best way to promote your brand online. Many of them are free, and anyone can use them. Use these tools with a well thought out brand strategy.

For sentiment analysis: [Social Mention](#).

This tool can find mentions of your brand and attitudes towards it so you can gauge how it's being judged online.

To measure SEO: [SEO Toolbar](#).

Set up some quick SEO measurements to see how your website ranks for certain search terms and which words are associated with your brand.

These are just some of the many excellent (and often free) online tools to help you manage your brand online when

used alongside a well defined brand strategy. By doing a Google search for “free brand measurement tools”, or “best free marketing tools”, etc can produce some more suggested online tools. If you would like some more of our recommendations just [email](#) or [send us a tweet](#).

2. Adapt your brand guidelines

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Brand guidelines written before 2007 are most likely to be out of date.

Why? Because back then they could not have considered smartphones and tablets because they simply didn't exist. But that has changed. The growth of smartphones and tablets and their widespread use has changed how people interact with brands. Have you reviewed your brand in light of this multi-channel environment that now includes smartphones and tablets?



2. Adapt your brand guidelines

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Understand the multi-channel user

The BBC is an example of a strong and established brand that has successfully crossed over to digital by creating branding guidelines across their multiple channels of communication. Most of their brand guidelines is available for public view here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/gel> and you will see how they have created separate sections for web, mobile, tablet and TV.

You can follow the BBC's example and adapt their approach to your brand.

1. Recognise the main touch points people have with your brand – internet, phone, email, face to face, post, etc

2. Identify the devices people use to connect with your brand online
3. Understand the way they use each device to connect with your brand and adapt the content accordingly

3. Get the correct technical specifications

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Standard brand guidelines don't always translate easily for online use. Fonts may not be compatible with some browsers, images may need to be modified and logos may not look as effective on digital screens as they do on print. A successful online brand presence joins all the dots and

makes sure everything is consistent from the get-go. Successful integration starts with a style sheet, which needs to include strict guidelines on type and use of fonts, spacing, paragraphs, colours, graphics and more.



3. Get the correct technical specifications

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Here is a non-exhaustive list of things to consider when moving your brand online:

Fonts and typefaces

Apart from deciding which fonts and typefaces to use online, you should be aware that your existing fonts may not be compatible with some browsers. You won't know this without testing, which can take time. Also, make sure they fit correctly on different devices.

Multimedia

How will images and video be sourced, when will they be used, and what size should they be? Remember that for online, pictures and videos may need to be modified to help your site display quickly and consistently.

Logo

A standard logo doesn't always look as effective on a small screen as it does on stationery or posters and may need to be adapted to fit different online platforms – e.g. social media platforms and mobile. In defining different uses of your logo, include examples of its correct and incorrect use.

Mobile

Is your brand experience consistent across the different platforms that visitors use to access your website? Will your customers get as good an experience by viewing your site on mobile as on desktop? If not, they should.

3. Get the correct technical specifications

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Social media

Make sure the style of your social media pages are consistent with how your brand looks in other mediums. Although these networks allow you to adapt your page, there are restrictions on how this can be done. Digital agencies will help you navigate around the restrictions that each social media platform imposes. Here's a useful [social media sizing cheat sheet](#) covering the size and picture dimensions for all the major networks.

Colours

Apart from deciding on your colour palette, for colour consistency make sure you use the correct Hex format for websites. These differ from the CMYK format used in print media.

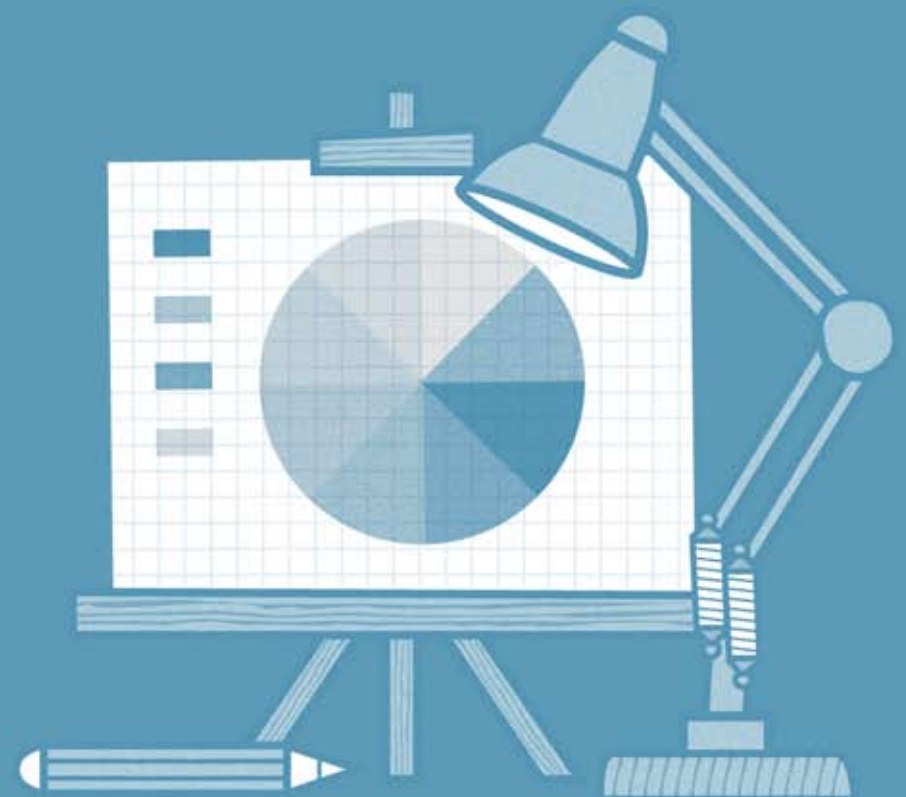
4. Plan your guidelines for social media

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As you're aware, social media has greatly influenced today's consumer behaviour, so it makes sense to include a section on social media in your brand guidelines on how your brand will approach social media.

Most brands now recognise that social media should be used as a way to interact with the public rather than a broadcast tool.

Today's consumers expect to be able to have a two-way conversation with brands, and social media makes it possible for anyone (brands and consumers) to communicate with a large audience quickly, easily, and for free. Brands arguably have more to lose when they get this wrong than consumers. It's therefore important to have a well thought out social media section in your brand guidelines.



4. Plan your guidelines for social media

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Depending on your business, the social media section of your brand guidelines might address all or some of the following:

- Purpose of social media presence
- Relevant topics
- Tone of voice
- Staff behaviour guidelines – includes how to use technology, response times to queries, etc
- Crisis management procedure

Don't spread yourself thinly

Not all social media platforms are suitable for all brands; banks may find limited interest on Pinterest, for instance, but most brands can benefit from exposure on a selection of social networks catering for their target audience. Do your homework and join the social networks that your

target audience uses the most – from the mainstream ones like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, to more niche ones, perhaps targeted at a particular industry.

See which of the main social networks will deliver the most impact: [The Social Media Landscape](#) tool by CMO.

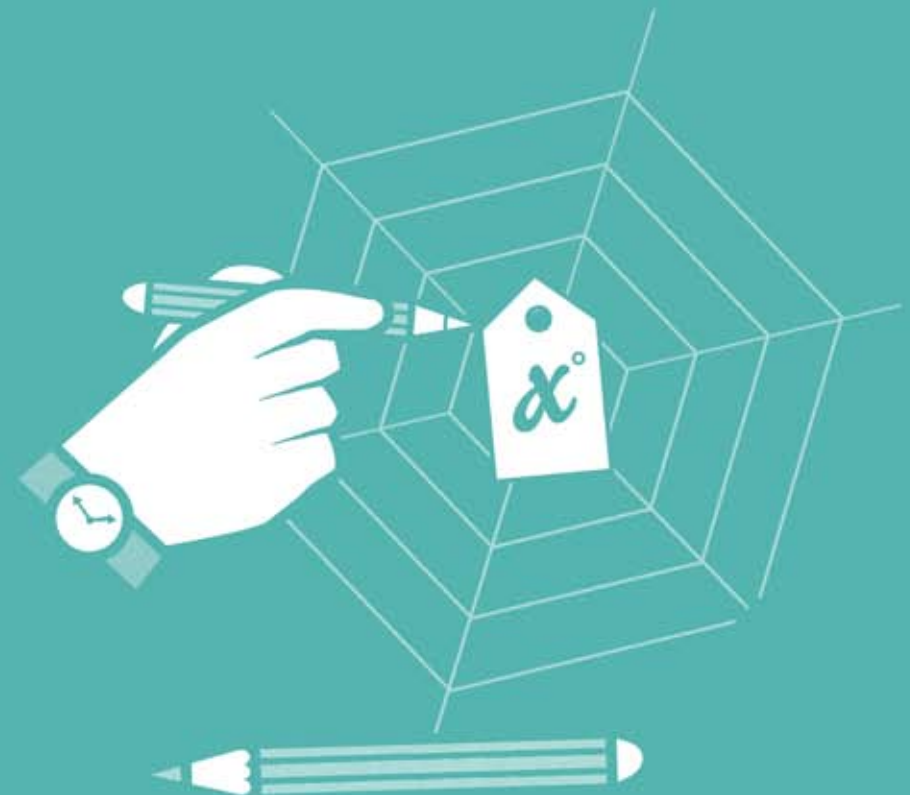
5. Design for the device

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As a general rule, shorter is better online. People are used to scanning rather than reading in depth, and the ease with which they can click away means you have to fight for their attention on all fronts.

Establishing a hierarchy of content is essential, with short, fundamental messages on initial landing pages, funnelling through to more in-depth content if required. An experienced web architect can add great value here.

Content may also need to be optimised for mobile, making it easy to access and read whatever the size of the screen. You'll also need to consider the different behaviours and likely needs of mobile, tablet and laptop users – the size of screen and locations where it's likely to be accessed may also dictate different hierarchies of content.



5. Design for the device

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Design considerations for mobile websites

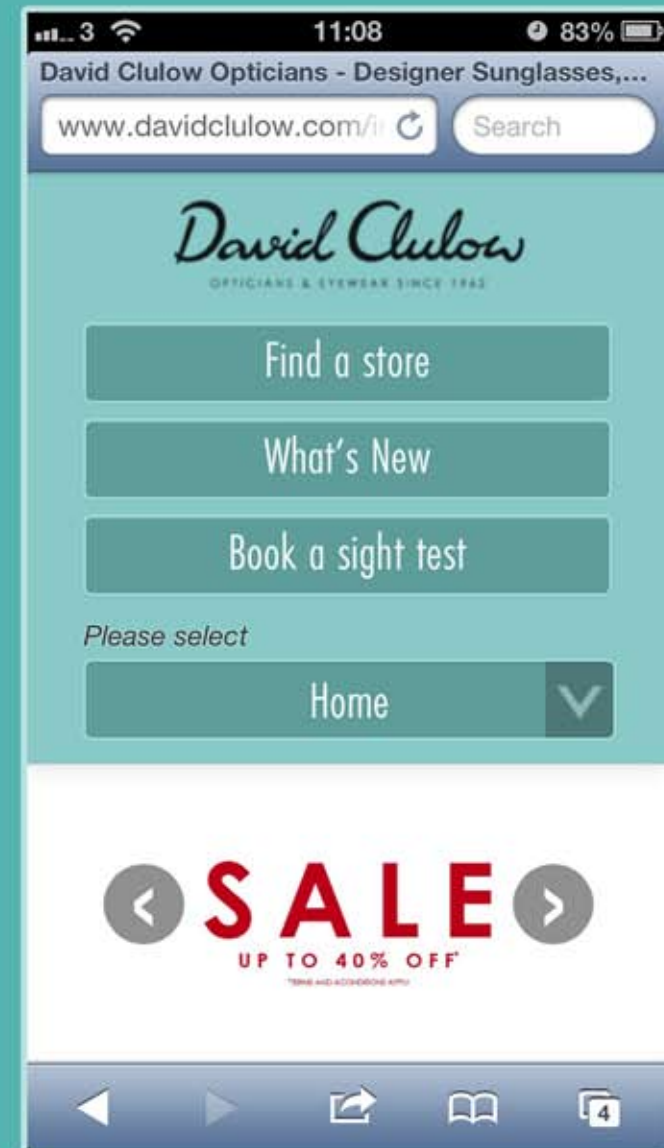
Here are some things to consider if you want to build a customer-centric mobile website.

Screen resolution

Screen resolutions differ from mobile to mobile. It isn't practical to recreate a page for every mobile resolution out there, so you will need to check your data to see the most popular mobile screen size from which your users access your website.

Simple navigation

Decide on the main features to include in your mobile site, and use these as the main navigation categories. Think of how to display this navigation to best serve your users. In the image on the right, we helped David Clulow select the key navigation content for their start page, which we displayed as text within big padded buttons.



5. Design for the device

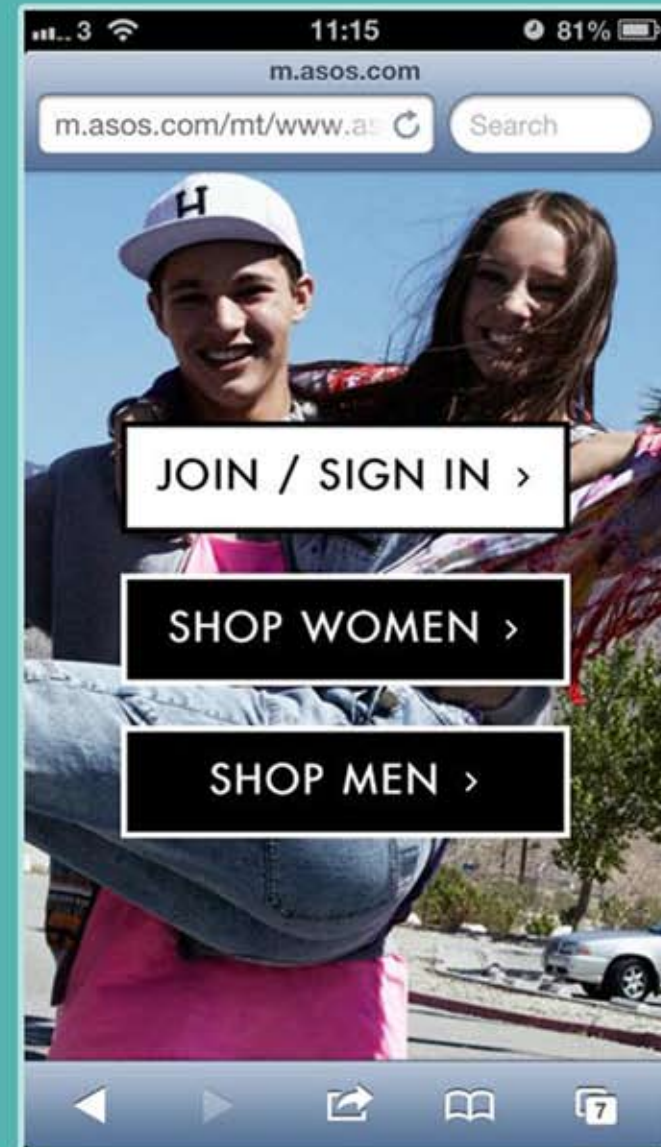
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In the image on the right, fashion brand ASOS opted for a large image backdrop with three large padded boxes with text showing the main priorities of their mobile website – to increase signups, and to sell online.

Cross-channel integration

The logic behind cross channel integration is to keep your message consistent, convenient, connected and contextual across time. So how does this affect your mobile website? Maintain continuity – by signing in on the Tesco mobile website, I can view and manage my shopping cart and book my delivery, just as I can on the full site.

When I read a book on my iPhone, I can continue from where I left off on my iPad. Even educational establishments can get in on the fun – for example by scanning a QR code at a museum with my phone, I'll get access to further information about the exhibitions.



5. Design for the device

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Option to enter the full site

While the simplified mobile version might suit most mobile visitors, for whatever reason, sometimes a mobile user might need access to your full site, so it's good practice to make that version easily accessible to them.

Kill pop-ups

Intrusive pop-ups are annoying at the best of times on larger screens, so imagine how painfully irritating they would be on mobile devices. Your users have less patience on mobile and will need to access the content they need quickly and easily, so remove the pop-ups.

Minimise the need to scroll

Recognise that if you can't get away from adding a scroll function, make sure it is vertical, as this is the most common direction.

Replace text entry with tick-boxes

Using your fingers on touchscreen can be fiddly, so you should try and improve your mobile user experience by replacing the need to manually enter text where possible with tick-box options.

Geo-location

Take advantage of the ability to deliver relevant, contextual information to your users based on their location in real-time. This is especially helpful if you have a bricks and mortar business. For example, if you're an opticians, you can help your visitors locate how far your store is from where they are. You can also offer incentives for visitors checking into your premises.

5. Design for the device

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Font size

As a general rule, shorter is better online. People are used to scanning rather than reading in depth, and the ease with which they can click away means you have to fight for their attention on all fronts.

Establishing a hierarchy of content is essential, with short, fundamental messages on initial landing pages, funnelling through to more in-depth content if required. An experienced web architect can add great value here.

Keep it simple

Try and minimise the effort required for users to get from point A to point B on your mobile site. Create a content hierarchy and prioritise the functions your users most want when accessing your mobile site, reduce categories, and use shorter forms. Also remember to design for portrait and landscape viewing.

Short URLs

Keep URLs short for easier viewing and to avoid excessive keypad use.

Images

Strive for a balance with your image sizes – get your images as big and bold as you can get them without slowing down the site's load time.

Case studies showing the 5 Key elements of branding

We at Activate Media have implemented 5 elements of branding on the web, and adapted them where needs be, for many of our client websites over the years, ranging from relatively small local traders to international organisations.

5 Key elements of branding on the web

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Seven Dials - Online branding consistency

www.sevendials.co.uk

When the group responsible for central London shopping village Seven Dials wanted to transfer their new identity online, we worked with them to first establish exactly what material was required by online users, and adapted the group's branding for use online. Even seemingly small details can be important.

Seven Dials' font did not work online (it appeared differently in different browsers and on different screens), and had to be swapped for something similar which would be consistent wherever it was viewed – essential for maintaining a consistently professional approach like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, to more niche ones, perhaps targeted at a particular industry.



5 Key elements of branding on the web

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Mills Ltd – Ecommerce, simplifying search

www.millsltd.com

Selling online is an increasingly sophisticated business, it's important to maintain a consistent brand experience across the platforms.

London-based cabling supplier Mills had an extensive range of products that it initially placed online in a fashion similar to the company's printed catalogue. It didn't work, as it didn't echo the simplicity of buying from the catalogue, a feature which customers loved. The challenge was to develop a site that would replicate, and even enhance the catalogue shopping experience while retaining Mills's brand values.

We established that most users didn't browse the site, so streamlined the search and categorisation functions for a more efficient search process.

The revised site is proving to be superior to the catalogue, making it easier to search for specific products. Mills' customers can even search when they're working on-site via their mobile phone or tablet.



5 Key elements of branding on the web

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David Clulow - Branding on mobile devices

www.davidclulow.com

With mobile access to the internet expected to surge by 66% each year over the next five years¹, and with up to 61% of internet users saying that if a website on mobile doesn't make it easy for them to buy, they'll simply switch to another site², it's essential that websites look every bit as good on smartphones and tablets as they do on desktops and laptops.

Keeping with the theme of brand consistency was a challenge presented to us by David Clulow, a national optician chain with a well respected brand that has been praised by 'Queen of Shops' Mary Portas³. Activate's task was to adapt the layout of their content rich main website to format correctly on smaller screens while retaining the

essence of the brand, including glamorous photos and a sense of space.

In achieving this we used the brand's web analytics and customer feedback to find out which elements were most important for users accessing their site on mobile phones. What resulted was a mobile website whose main focus was a sophisticated mapping and branch finder feature. We resized the images to make them mobile compatible, and adapted the use of text and whitespace.



Conclusion

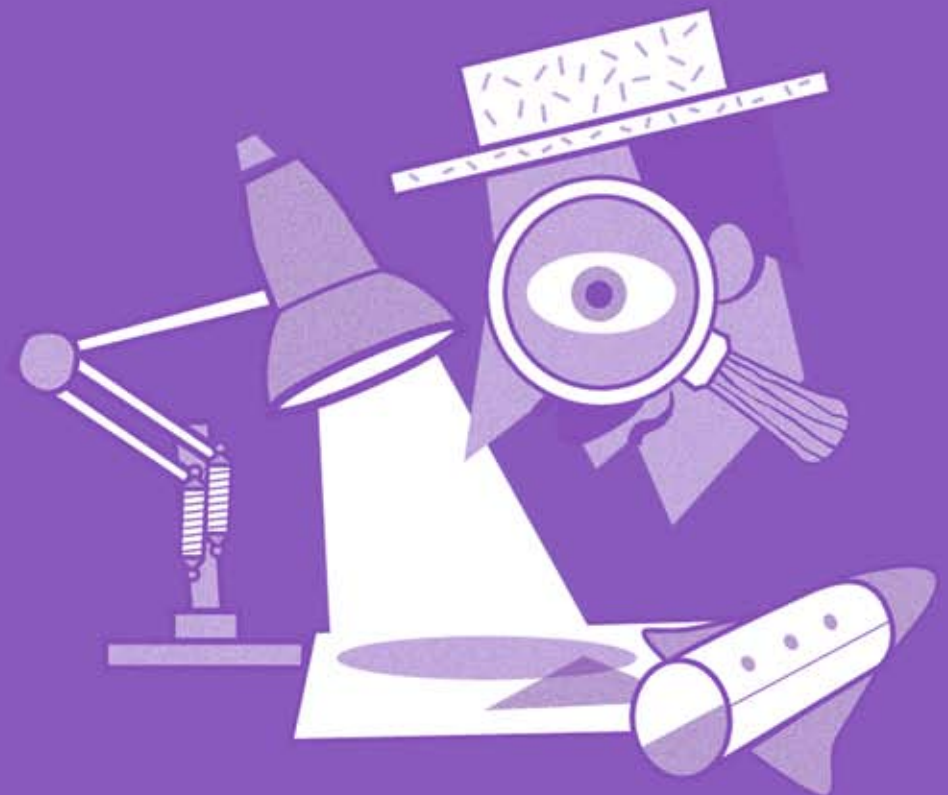
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Moving a brand online is an increasingly sophisticated affair that requires more than a mock-up of static pages and deciding where logos will be placed. There are nuances to digital branding, which require technical skills that only development professionals are equipped to handle, like how to translate brand guidelines to digital, allowing for the interactivity of online, while keeping the consistency of the brand.

Found this ebook useful? Share this [ebook on Twitter](#)

How consistant is your digital brand?

Request a free 2-hour digital review and learn how to provide a consistent online brand experience within your business.



About Activate Media

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Activate Media is a digital agency in London, dedicated to strategy, design and development for web, mobile and social media. We have been guiding clients, from agencies, to local businesses, and international brands through the pitfalls and hazards of digital branding since 1995.

¹ Source: Cisco Systems report, Feb 2013

² Source: Google report, Sep 2012

³ Source: Daily Telegraph Oct 2012

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