

HOW I DESIGN BRANDS THAT MAKE MONEY



If your company has a rebrand in its future here's a little reality check.

Rebrands are notorious money pits for startups.

And yet a great rebrand is like rocket fuel - if it has the proper foundation.

So if you don't want to lose your shirt you need to think before you spend all that cash.

I mean, I like pretty pictures as much as the next designer, but you know what's way better?

Our clients' undying love and future recommendations because the brand actually grew their business.

So to design
brands that
actually make
money, I keep four
things in mind:

#1

CATEGORY FIRST, BRAND SECOND



When we go to buy something, we think category first, brand second.

First "Ketchup" then "Heinz."

If a company wanted to unseat Heinz as the leader in ketchup, they'd have to somehow redefine ketchup itself.

That's a very good moat.

Tech categories change a lot more than ketchup.

The electric car category was one thing before Tesla, and something completely different after.

This is not a coincidence. Tesla's knew that leading their category was the only path to success.

Because in tech, #1's win over 72% of the profits in a category.

So skip the fluffy brand strategy.

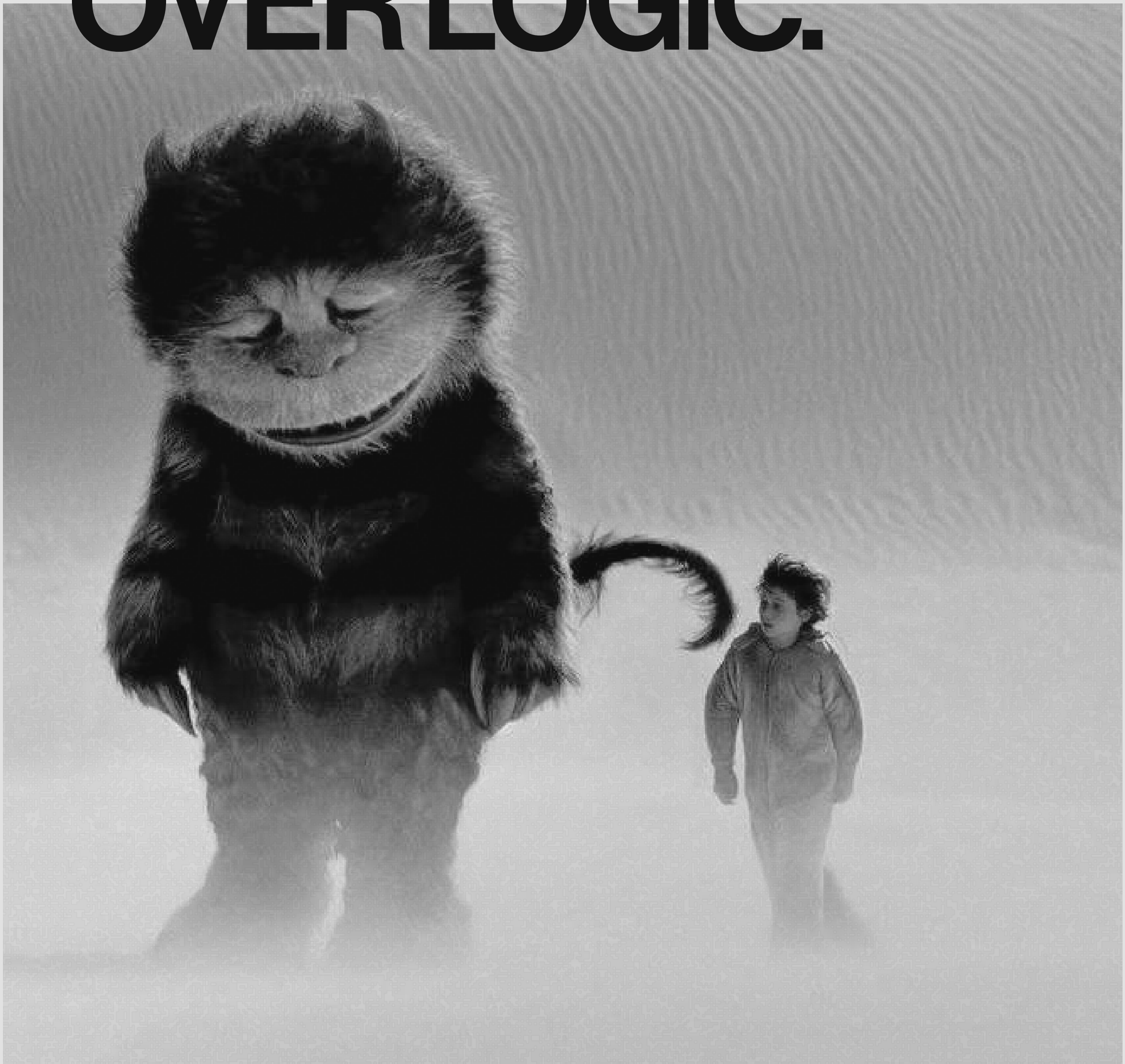
Category strategy was designed to answer the one question that truly matters in tech: “How will we dominate a market?”

And your designers will absolutely love you for it.

Because the best brief you can give them is a compelling story about the customer, a big problem they face, and a category of product that solves their problem beautifully.

#2

PUT FEELING OVER LOGIC.



The most profitable brands make their customers feel something. So I never judge a logo or visual identity using logic alone. Or even mostly logic.

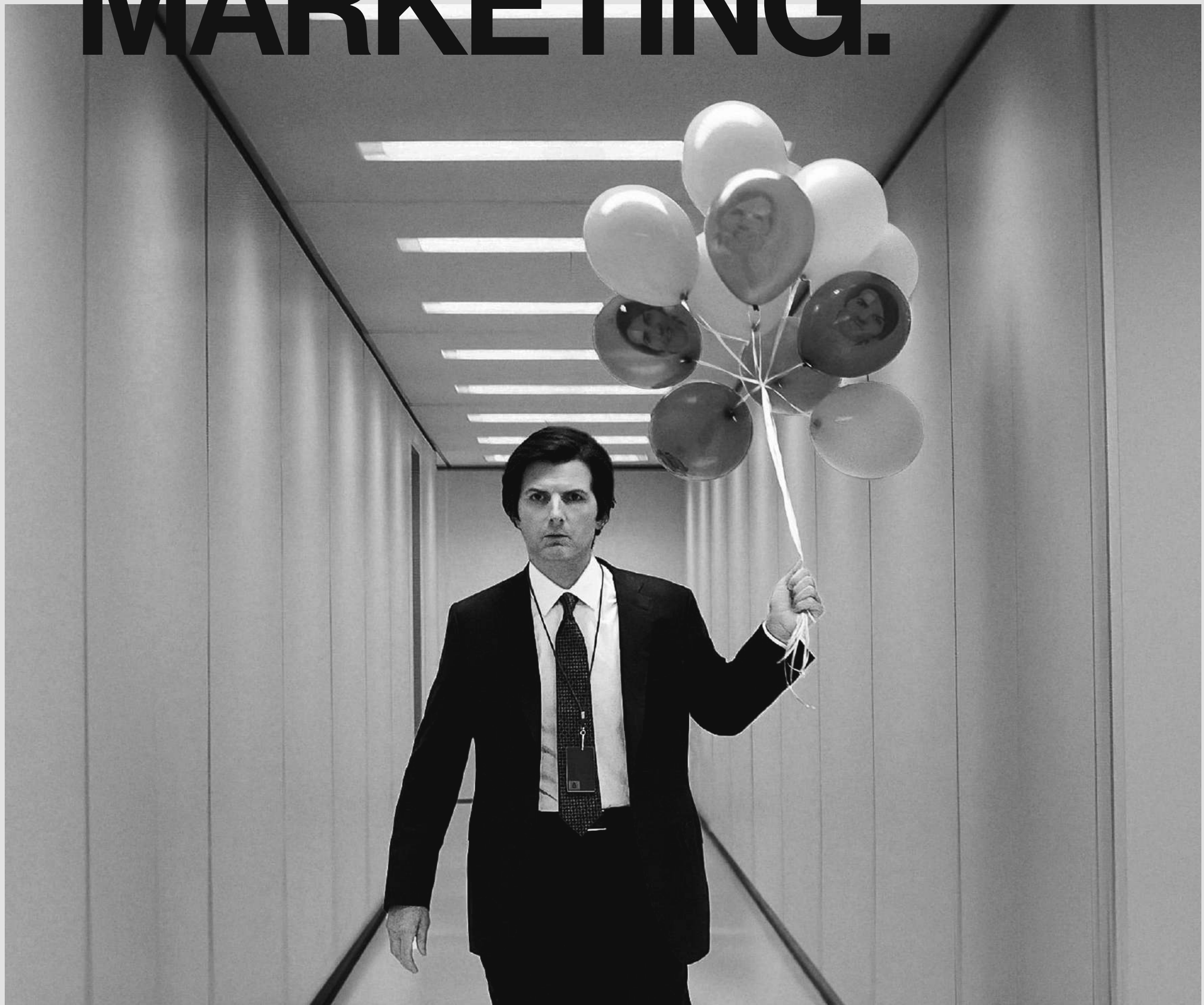
Because the only way to get customers to feel something, is to feel it yourself. If you're designing a brand and it doesn't fill you with excitement about where this company is headed, you're definitely not there yet.

Plus, designing a brand that connects with your audience emotionally – not fake emotion, but actual emotion – is a powerful differentiator.

Unemotional brands fight for scraps, so make sure you're on the right side of this equation.

#3

PLAY IN CULTURE, NOT MARKETING.



Poor brands think of themselves as marketing. They try to check all the marketing boxes. Profitable brands play in broader culture. They don't try to be interesting in the world of marketing, they are interesting, period.

It's not artsy - it's good business. Being culturally relevant does something very important in the mind of the customer. It brings their defenses down so they can ultimately buy from you.

Because as long as you're giving off marketing vibes, they'll think of you as low status.

Yes, playing in culture is a higher bar. That's why it pays you back more – in customer love and profits.

#4

GET CUSTOMERS OFF THEIR BUTTS.



The most successful brands move us forward. Nike, Gong, Patagonia, Figma, Notion, Dove. They all incite their own version of revolution.

They change minds and show us a new way to relate to ourselves, get our work done, and chase our dreams.

And most importantly, they inspire customers to get off their butts and make something happen for themselves.

Because deep down, that's what we all want.

More energy, more agency,
more “fuck it, let’s go.”

If you help them get there, they'll gladly pay a premium for the thing you are selling.

It's why “Just do it” is the most money-making three words in the English language.

So that's it. Four simple rules for profitable brands.

1. Category first. Brand second.
2. Feeling > logic
3. Culture > marketing
4. Challenge and inspire the customer

There's a reason these techniques work.

They're all built on first principles of the mind.

That makes them far more effective than clever tips and tricks.

Godspeed.

I'm Josh.

I work with tech CEOs
and CMOs to create
new market categories.

And I share lessons
here on creativity and
entrepreneurship.

#strategy
#category
#brand

