

BRANDDIY

The Thinking Book

- MARC STOIBER



HI, I'M MARC

WELCOME TO BRANDDIY.

I've spent my entire career – more than 25 years –building brands.

I did it in Hong Kong, Europe, the US and Canada. I did it for global brands, scrappy startups, and everything in between.

I love doing it, because every brand I build is different. Every brand has magic. And when you do it right, the owner of the brand walks a little taller because they rediscover what's so damn special about what they do.

Oh, and great brands make money. Consumers gravitate to them. They guide operations, so less silly internal mistakes and diversions happen. Efficiency, effectiveness, you name it – arrows go in the right direction on all sorts of charts.

Now, I've gathered up all the stuff I know, all the tricks of the trade I've used, and I'm giving them to you. Hey, you're welcome.

I'm doing it because the world needs more good brands. And the world needs more successful entrepreneurs.

I hope you enjoy working with this book as much as I enjoyed creating it.

TWO, TWO, TWO BOOKS IN ONE!

This 'Thinking' book provides the instruction you need to build your brand. There's also a 'Doing' book – a handy word doc that contains all the questions you need to answer.

You can type directly into the 'Doing' book, keeping your thoughts organized, so you don't miss any vital information.

WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?

You may be launching a new brand, or you're dissatisfied with your brand's anemic performance, or you've forgotten what the &%%\$# your brand even stands for anymore.

Don't worry, you aren't alone.

Seven out of ten North American companies are:

- Going to market - the most cluttered market in history - with flabby positioning, gutless claims and milquetoast communication.
- Throwing billions out the window because they simply don't know what part of their brand message works, and what doesn't. So they make superficial changes, or the wrong changes.

For most of us, our brand is our #1 wasted asset. The purpose of the BrandDIY Thinking and Doing books is to help you create a brand that stops the waste. The same sort of brand I helped create for icons like Mr. Clean, Bud Light and McDonalds.

I'm going to walk you through the same steps I take when I build brands – whether those brands are global, or fresh out of the garage.

When you're finished, you'll have a toned, tight, powerful brand.

HOW LONG WILL THIS TAKE?

While this **entire** exercise can be done in a few hours, I recommend taking your time. There's creativity and reflection involved - stuff that can't be rushed. I would recommend stretching out the process over four weeks, with an hour of thinking / doing each day.

- **Week one:** Research.
- **Week two:** Nailing your unique selling proposition.
- **Week three:** Naming your speciality; creating your tagline, key visual and brand story; aligning your operations to reflect your brand.
- **Week four:** Tweaking and tuning.

Throughout, I recommend healthy doses of feedback: putting your work out in the real world to see if customers love it as much as you do.

Ready?

RESEARCH

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Want my **deepest, darkest secret?**

I've never actually created a brand for a client. They do all the work themselves.

No, they don't mail in sketches and taglines. I just chat with their customers, their team, and their stakeholders. I ask them pointed questions. They answer. We explore. Nuggets of pure gold appear. Those nuggets become the brand.

It's all very common sense.

Unfortunately, common sense isn't common practice. Marketers still create brands without consulting consumers or stakeholders. The results are, well, 97% of the terrible brands out there.

Let's fix that problem.

1. START BY OPENING YOUR EYES (AND THEN, GOOGLE)

I'm always surprised by clients who don't do the most basic research into their market. They don't know their competitors, what those competitors do best, how much of the market competitors 'own' - simple stuff.

I attribute this to the **power of wishing**. If you love your idea more than anything, you'll try your best to wish away any bad news. Unfortunately, wishing doesn't work.

So spend some time on Google. Dig deep into **competitor websites**. Find out their **strengths and weaknesses**. Write down their **claims**, (the advantages they claim to offer that nobody else can match), and see if there are any **unclaimed attributes you can own**.

Let's say your company makes baby strollers for jogging. With a bit of online research, you might discover that most competitors talk about how their jogger strollers are tougher, or collapsible, or feature lots of extra pockets. However, nobody talks about the ergonomic design of their stroller – which helps baby rest easier, and helps you push the stroller with less back strain. As it so happens, you actually considered that in your design. Conclusion? One unstaked claim you can make is **'The most ergonomically researched stroller for your comfort'**.

**OPEN YOUR 'DOING' BOOK
TO UNSTAKED CLAIMS NOW**

2. THE QUESTIONNAIRES

Now, it's time to gather intel on what makes your brand special.

When you're done reading this section, you'll start interviewing both stakeholders and consumers.

When it comes to **stakeholders**, I recommend you **interview at least five people**. Find someone from customer service, one from sales, one from operations, a founder, and the poor bugger who always ends up fixing everything.

If you're a **one-person operation**, do your best to answer the questions yourself, and **interview someone who has come along for the ride** (your long-suffering spouse or best friend, for example).

When it comes to **consumers**, I recommend you **interview at least ten people**. Make sure these are consumers who would be most likely to purchase your product, not just random strangers.

NO CONSUMERS YET?

If you're a start-up in product development, you won't be able to interview consumers. There aren't any yet. That's why I've included a **bonus template** designed for pre-market validation. It will help you paint a picture of what your product **could** be for consumers, so you can ask **potential** consumers for their feedback.

INTERVIEW = REAL CONVERSATION

Interviews aren't checklists. They're conversations.

If you've ever been 'interviewed' by a slack-jawed student with a clipboard in a shopping mall, you'll know how **not to** do an interview. This isn't about checking boxes and getting yes / no answers.

I recommend you allot at least **30 minutes for each consumer interview**, and **an hour for each stakeholder interview**. I also recommend you enlist the five wise men – **who, what, where, when, how, and why** – as much as possible. If you don't get to each question, that's OK. As long as you dig, dig, dig when you feel you're getting close to a nugget.

Do these interviews face-to-face, or via videoconference. If there's no other option, phone is OK but not ideal. The key is to **interact with** your interviewee – their body language will tell you as much as their words.

NERVOUS?

If you believe this is an imposition on the person you're interviewing (aka you're bugging them / they're doing you an enormous favour) then you'll feel nervous and sheepish.

If you want to get over this nervousness, simply remember that you're having a chat. Imagine you're talking sports, or weather, or what the world is coming to now with these kids and their rock 'n roll.

If you don't get all the questions asked, don't worry. As long as you get some nuggets. The main thing is, you get folks talking in an unguarded, casual way.

Chat. Chat. Chat.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Ask at least five key stakeholders (people connected to your product) these questions.

1. What area of specialty can we claim as **our greatest strength**?
2. Where are we **currently ranked** in this area? First, second, third?
3. Why does the world **need us**? Countless other companies already do what we do.
4. What do we **do for our customers** that they think is really, really important and valuable?
5. What would these customers **tell their friends**? What would be the one thing they remember about us?
6. What are **our competitors** famous for?
7. If we went head to head with them, where would **we win, or lose**?
8. How would we **personify our company**? Bigger than, smaller than, more personal than, harder working than...?
9. What are you **most proud of** in our company? What needs the most work?

**OPEN YOUR 'DOING' BOOK TO
STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

CONSUMER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Ask at least ten consumers, or potential consumers these questions.

1. **Why do you use** our product?
2. What's the **biggest problem it solves** for you?
3. Have you tried the **competition**? Why did you switch?
4. What's the single thing **you like the best** about our product?
5. What **needs some work**?
6. Describe the **feel** of the company. Do you get any sense of the people making this product and what their values are? Are they any different than the people making other, competitor products?

**OPEN YOUR 'DOING' BOOK
TO CONSUMER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

NO CONSUMERS YET? ASK OUTSIDERS!

This is the **bonus section** I mentioned.

Ask at least **five outsiders** – anyone from competitors to retailers, potential consumers, regulators, or even investors active in your industry – these questions.

1. Are you clear about **what our product does**?
2. Does it remind you of **another product**?
3. What do customers **want most** from products like ours?
4. List our competitors? Are any of them **famous for anything**?
5. Is there any unaddressed pain point in the market that this product could claim? Is it a **big pain point**?

**OPEN YOUR 'DOING' BOOK
TO OUTSIDER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

NOW WHAT?

Congratulations. You've just completed a **heroic** task.

Now, look at the answers you got, and highlight bits you find inspiring. I usually wind up with three or four **yellow highlights** per interview.

Are there **consistencies**? Do people tend to say the **same positive things** about you? The **same negatives**? Are there sparks? Sentences that sound like they **could work as a tagline**? **Clues about what your name should be**? Ways of **describing what you do** that sounds better than your own description?

Is there exciting stuff? I hope so.

FINALLY (I PROMISE)... WRITE DOWN THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

Read through all the highlighted bits from your interviews. In your Doing book, write the absolute best five or six positive bits you heard under the positive header. Do the same for the negatives, under the negative header. If you're getting swept up in the excitement, perhaps show a few folks who are close your business. Are you missing any great positive or negative bits? Are there some stinkers in there that need to be cut?

There. Now you have a very simple, low tech list of what could be killer insights into your business.

**OPEN YOUR 'DOING' BOOK
TO POSITIVES / NEGATIVES**

YOUR UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION

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Your Unique Selling Proposition is a simple statement of what you do better than anyone else in the world.

It needs to be:

1. True
2. Believable
3. **Relevant to what your customer wants**

I want to highlight the last point because it's **truly the most important**. You can make the tallest hat in the world, and show pictures to prove it's true...but if buyers aren't looking for tall hats, it won't sell.

That is, your proposition needs to be **UNIQUE**, and it needs to **SELL**. So take a look at all the research you just did. Then try to fill in these sentences.

1. **My product is the better than any other at this one thing - (my product's winning attribute).**
2. **My product does this better because it (reason), (reason) and (reason).**
3. **This is important to my consumers because (reason consumers care).**

From these simple statements you can craft your Unique Selling Proposition, the foundation of your brand.

Can you formulate a sentence like one of the ones below?

- **Volvo is the world's safest car because all the tests and research prove it.**
- **Coors is the crispest cleanest beer because it's brewed with Rocky Mountain spring water.**
- **Apple is built to unleash your creativity because it was designed by people who are artists, not accountants.**
- **Rolex is the champion's watch because it is worn by more athletes, explorers and adventurers than any other.**

Each of these statements is true, totally believable coming from the companies, and important to their consumers. By hammering this point in all their communications, the companies have carved out ownership of the claim.

In fact, I would go one step further. The claim has also helped guide each company's product innovation. Volvo knows it has to keep making incredibly safe cars – or risk undermining the claim.

So let's try a few on for size...

**OPEN YOUR 'DOING' BOOK
TO UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION**

MARKET VALIDATION

Remember all those consumers and stakeholders you interviewed. It's time to call a few back and **try out** the three Unique Selling Propositions above on them. If they like it, you're probably on your way. If not, ask why. Incorporate their feedback. Rinse and repeat.

EXPRESSING YOUR USP: YOUR STORY

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Your Unique Selling Proposition is the foundation of your brand.

So what do we build on it first? Your story. You know why?

Because **people crave stories**. They **remember stories**. If it's a good story, they'll **retell** it.

The bible, and every other sacred text, began as a series of stories. Aesop's Fables are stories from ancient Greece. Even 'modern' stories like Cinderella date back to 1697.

Let me say this again. If it's a good story, people will retell it. If your brand has that sort of story, it will be enthusiastically shared. That's called free advertising.

Nice, eh?

There are plenty of ways you can share your brand story. It can appear in the 'About' tab on your website. You can use it to open new business meetings or investment pitches. You can tell it at trade shows, in airport lounges while you're waiting for a flight, everywhere. Not because you're selling. But because **people love to hear a good story**.

The beautiful thing is, your story only needs a few simple elements to be great:

1. **What was the world like for consumers before you existed?**
2. **Why didn't anyone succeed in creating a product like yours before?**
3. **What did you do to create this amazing product?**
4. **How have the lives of consumers changed (for the better) now that your product is in their lives?**
5. **How do you expect to keep making their lives better, even after they purchase your product?**

A LIVING DOCUMENT

Great stories are great because people make them their own. Every person tweaks the story a bit. It's been that way since we dropped from the trees, and it will be that way long after you and I are gone.

So don't stress if your story continues to evolve over time. In fact, celebrate the fact that people are tweaking it, owning it, retelling it. Incorporate the changes into your website and presentations, and keep telling and selling!

STORY SAMPLE

This is the story I wrote for one of my clients, a South African e-fatbike manufacturer. **(If you aren't familiar with the term, e-fatbikes are electric bikes with big, cushy tires)**

Taking over the world, one custom fattie at a time.

Let's face it. The world doesn't need another bike. There are billions of different bike models out there to choose from.

Ditto for electric bikes. There are already hundreds of different e-bikes on the market.

But that's kinda missing the point. You like stuff that not everybody has. Stuff you can make your own. When it comes to bikes, personal statements are in short supply.

Why? Probably because 'custom' and 'mass produced' don't fit together. That's why we turned the market upside down and, instead of feeding you fake custom, asked you to do the customizing for us.

At Chilled Squirrel, we start with the best e-fatties on the market. Then we hand them over to our fans, and things get weird.

They drop them, chop them, grind them and spray them. They turn them into statements of individual coolness.

Far from being horrified, we encourage the makers among us. In fact, when they come up with a particularly cool modification, we document it so everyone can try it themselves.

Of course, if you aren't into metal shop, you can mod your bike with our carefully curated accessories. They're made by South African artisans for an effect that is part Easy Rider, part Mad Max, all original.

And if you just want to hang with the maker tribe, we have Chilled Squirrel dens where you can try out our bikes, grab one of our shirts or hats, have a coffee and maybe catch a band or cult movie.

So where's it all going? Global domination is definitely in the cards. One custom bike at a time.

OPEN YOUR 'DOING' BOOK TO YOUR STORY

**YOUR NAME
& DESCRIPTOR**

YOUR NAME & DESCRIPTOR

Who would you buy your weekend wear from - Ralphie Lipschitz, or Ralph Lauren?

Same guy.

Consumers usually get their first exposure to a brand through its name. And they draw their first blink conclusion. So, if you're feeling a bit Lipschitz about your product's name, let's turn that frown upside down.

A PAGE OF ATTRIBUTES

Your name should be as descriptive as possible.

Sure, you can say IBM doesn't describe anything. But they built their business over 100 years, with billions of marketing dollars. Oh, and they started out as International Business Machines... the **uber descriptive** name. So there.

Think **Compaq**. Tell me what made their laptops special? Think **Acer**. What does that name say about their product? Think **Apple**. Ummmm, bad example.

So what makes your product special?

1. Go back to your interviews, and write down words you see that describe what your product does better, what makes it unique, what makes you stand out.
2. Now add more descriptive words of your own. Look up synonyms, check dictionary definitions, Google favorite words to see how many variations there might be.
3. Fill a page.
4. When you're out of ideas, take a break and let your brain change gears. Then try again. Repeat this exercise a few times.
5. Take a look at your work. Highlight any words that pop off the page.
6. Let these words bounce around your head a few days. Write down permutations of them as they pop up. Fill a page.
7. Highlight the ones that pop off the page.
8. Take a few you love to your stakeholders and customers to see what they think. If they have fresh suggestions, write those down.

I know, I know, a lot of steps. Almost there.

9. When you feel you have a few you like, check which are available online (I use GoDaddy for my name searches. It's very easy to use.)
10. Buy the domains of the top 3, and continue to try them on for size until, like a gladiator, one rises above all.

YOUR WINNING NAME

You may have a winning name at this point. Then again, you may not. Here's how to find out.

Start calling your product your winning name. Is it easy to say?

Does it describe what you do? Even better, does it describe what your consumer will get? (My company Your Ultimate Speech did pretty well in that regard)

Is it easy to spell? (You don't have to tell people to spell it with an 'e', or put in an 'i' instead of a 'y'.)

Are the reactions more good than bad? Is there no way in the world you can turn it into a joke or something derogatory?

Congratulations. You have your name.

THE LINE THAT SEALS THE DEAL

Spoiler alert. Most of us are already stuck with names that aren't great.

But most names can be **made great** with the addition of a good descriptor line – a line that describes your speciality.

Think of it.

1. Boeing (boring). Boeing Jumbo Jet (Great name, thanks to descriptor)
2. Mattel (boring). Mattel Hot Wheels (Great name, thanks to descriptor)
3. Bartles & James (horrible name). Bartles & James Spritzer (Great name, thanks to descriptor)

You get the point.

So add a few words that describe exactly what your product is, and what sets it apart (Spritzer is a product...but it also describes what sets the product apart).

Try that combo with your stakeholders. See more smiling faces?

Thought so.

YOUR KEY VISUAL

YOUR KEY VISUAL

Exhausted? Thrilled? Ready to get out there and do some serious brand domination?

One last thing. Your key visual is **not** your logo. In fact, I'd argue that it is about 97% more important than a logo.

That's because your key visual expresses what makes your product special...without words.

See that little icon on my website? The guy throwing his head in the garbage can? That was originally the cover of my book [Didn't See It Coming](#), a book about how great brands can die overnight as the world changes. The hacked 'Trash Goes Here' icon – a universal symbol gone horribly wrong – summed up the book perfectly. So perfectly that I turned it into my key visual.

Some others?

1. The Vicks Vapour Action going up someone's nose
2. The gorilla trying to break the Samsonite suitcase
3. The Marlboro cowboy
4. Ronald McDonald
5. The baby in the Michelin tire

And the list goes on.

I believe your key visual is possibly the most important part of your brand. Nothing works faster, or is remembered longer, if done properly.

If. Done. Properly.

Key visuals are devilishly hard to get right. I can't give you a step-by-step on how to get one. I've had many projects where we couldn't get one!

What I can tell you is to listen hard to people when they describe your brand. **Are there any visuals in those words?**

"Your paper towels can pick up a lake of spilled juice!"

"Your battery would start a car in the junkyard!"

"This stuff could grow hair on a cue ball!"

Listen. Listen. And listen some more. Do enough listening, and one day soon, your key visual will simply show up and slap you in the face.

When it does, you'll slap yourself again (for good measure) because it seems so **obvious!**

FINALLY...

Congratulations. If you followed all these steps, you will be the proud owner of a very effective brand. Now get out there and put it to work.

Always remember, though, a great brand is like a great story. Expect it to morph and change. If you want to keep it fresh, schedule the exercise you just went through every year. You'll be richly rewarded.

MARC STOIBER

Marc Stoiber has been building effective brands for 25 years.

Today, he is a brand consultant, entrepreneur (launching two start-ups at the moment), marketing prof at Royal Roads University, writer and speaker.

In his spare time, he's a family man who also plays guitar, surfs, and skateboards in pools (yes, they're empty).

Connect with Marc on your favorite social media platform, for continued daily tips and advice:

