

Demystifying the brand experience building process

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ADMAP

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Details how to structure brand experience building initiatives by demystifying the brand experience building process.

- The Brand Experience Blueprint, based on over 20 years of global branding experience, consists of three stages that are characterised by a sequential yet iterative relationship: brand experience environment, brand experience essentials and brand experience enablers.
- When defining your brand values you need to be mindful of each element of the BX Environment or your values will be defined in a vacuum and irrelevance will follow.
- Rinsing and repeating this process for other brand values and then the other essentials across all elements of the BX Environment will increase the relevance of the brand experiences you build.
- BX Essentials need to be brought to life via the BX Enablers and overlaps between enablers, within reason, as it demonstrates central logic, which will facilitate the delivery of more cohesive and consistent brand experiences as focus and clarity exist.

Winning in the era of brand experience

This article is part of a series of articles on winning in the era of brand experience. [Read more.](#)

Definition

Brand experiences (BX) are carefully sequenced, synchronized and selected touch points that combine to emotionally engage stakeholders as they progress through their entire journey with your brand.^[1]

Where to start

CMOs can have a tough time selling the brand experience business case into the c-suite. It's hard to convince

potentially skeptical CEO's and CFO's there's money to be made by competing through brand experiences. The following points aim to give you a helping hand, brand experiences can:

- **Drive brand performance.** This includes revenue [2], brand awareness and associations [3], advocacy [4], perceived quality [5], reputation [6], satisfaction [7] and loyalty [8].
- **Bring people more enduring happiness than possessions.** Experiential purchases make people happier than material purchases [9] [10] whilst waiting for an experience is more enjoyable than waiting to receive a possession [11].
- **Provide almost unlimited sources of differentiation.** Many moons ago brands tried to differentiate through physical product features. For example, banks focused on interest rates, number of ATMs and credit card design. This strategy is problematic because once you've used all those features you commoditise your offer. And then the only competitive route is price. This contrasts with competing through brand experiences which provide almost unlimited sources of differentiation. Let's develop the banking example further. You walk into a branch and what do you experience? Welcoming staff, relaxed customers sitting on a comfortable sofa, ambient music and open retail format? Just one touch point provides many opportunities to differentiate your brand. Extend this to other retail touch points then add digital, social, telephone and other channels into the brand experience equation. Opportunities to differentiate grow exponentially. TD Bank's Penny Arcades allow customers to deposit coins at branches and win prizes for doing so. The otherwise dull activity of depositing coins at a bank is transformed into a fun, interactive and useful touch point. Bravo.
- **Co-ordinate the brand experience management.** Cast your mind back five years and think about how many traditional and digital channels existed. Now think of the situation today. The number of potential brand touch points is increasing rapidly and this shows no signs of relenting with AR, VR, IoT and so forth on the horizon. Brands that understand how to build brand experiences embrace such change and thrive. They have a clearly defined brand that informs, guides and focuses their decisions when it comes to identifying relevant channels then delivering experiences within or across them. In other word, if built properly, brand experiences drive scale. Your sceptical CEO will like that.
- **Facilitate interaction between people.** Digital is central to building brand experiences but the importance of people should not be overlooked.

'Lasting brand differentiation is realized through your employees. This simple idea has never been more important, as companies rush to deploy new digital ways for customers to engage and transact with them.'

Accenture (2017) [12]

One study [13] found that whilst 78% of financial services consumers said they would welcome computer generated support, nearly two thirds still value interaction with other people, especially to deal with complaints (68%) and advice about complex products (61%). This chimes with social neuroscience research that reveals humans need to connect with other people is even more fundamental than our need for food or shelter [14].

"You must embrace tech and digital but you can't let it lead you, you have to take the lead. Humans still want human exchanges and I still feel that's the best way to connect on a deeper level. Human interactions are still the primary and core driver of loyalty, and that's where we're putting a lot of our energy." [15]

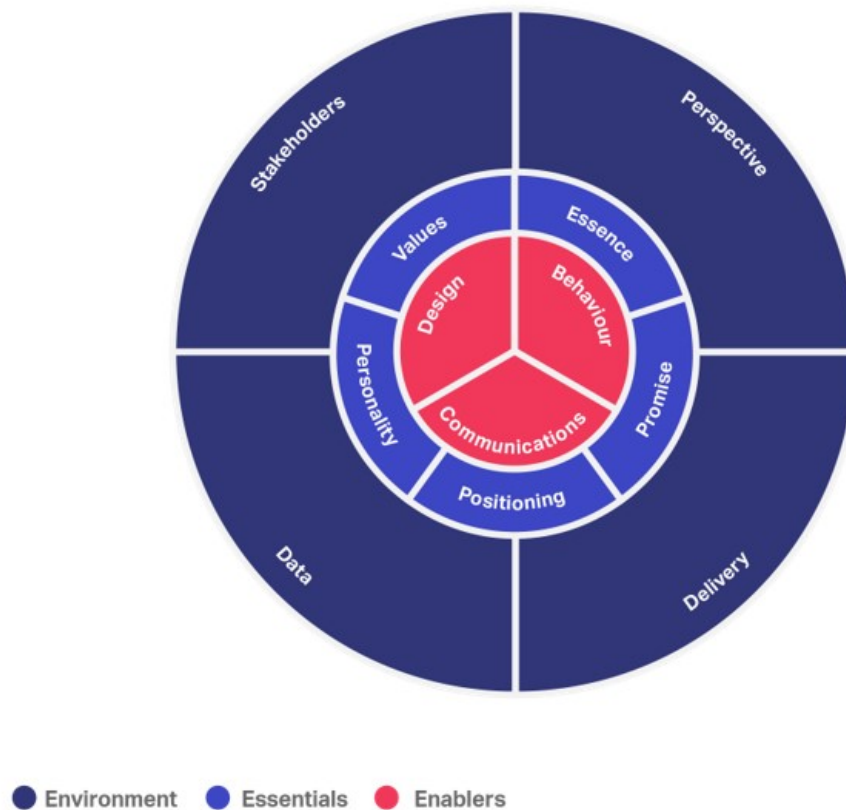
Becky Brock, Marketing Director, John Lewis

Being able to sell the BX business case into the c-suite is a good first step. But knowing where to start and how to structure brand experience building initiatives is a different ball game altogether. The next part of this article solves that problem by demystifying the brand experience building process.

Essentials

The Brand Experience Blueprint (Figure 1) is a simple, practical and intuitive three-stage management tool that helps senior executives lead BX building initiatives with greater confidence and conviction.

Figure 1: The Brand Experience Blueprint: A practical management tool



The Brand Experience Blueprint is based on over 20 years of global branding experience and has been validated through extensive application in client organisations around the globe. Underpinned by robust commercial and academic research, the Blueprint consists of three stages that are characterised by a sequential yet iterative relationship:

1. **Brand Experience Environment:** The context you need to be mindful of when developing and defining your BX Essentials
2. **Brand Experience Essentials:** Intangible brand assets you need to develop and define in the context of the BX Environment
3. **Brand Experience Enablers:** Tools you can use to bring your BX Essentials to life

The Blueprint isn't a rigid checklist where every element influences every BX Essential in equal measure. Similarly, not every BX Enabler will hold equal sway over every BX Essential. It may be that you can't think of a way to convey your brand essence through behaviour. Whilst this is unlikely, don't worry. You should be able to compensate for this by using design or communications. Think of the Blueprint as a suit that you tailor so it's a good fit for you, rather than vice versa. The aim is to provide you with a practical tool that helps structure and guide your thinking. It's not a prescriptive panacea.

Let's take a look at the Blueprint in more detail.

1. The Brand Experience Environment

The BX Environment represents context you need to be mindful of when developing and defining your BX Essentials. It includes four elements:

- Understanding stakeholders
- Fine-tuning your perspective
- Considering the mechanics of delivery
- Adopting a data-driven approach

Each element of the BX Environment contains more granular topics you need to consider when you start building brand experiences. To spark your imagination the chart below provides some detail associated with fine-tuning your perspective and why doing this is important.

Table 1: Fine-tuning your perspective

Fine-tuning your perspective entails...	This is important because you need to...
Embracing transparency	Accept there is nowhere for brands to hide in today's digital world.
Adopting a holistic mindset	Realise that delivering relevant brand experiences is everyone's responsibility at your organisation.
Competing primarily through a brand's value not price	Appreciate that the majority of stakeholders make decisions based on value, not just price.
Having patience	Remember that it can take time to build a brand and associated experiences.
Accepting a loss of control	Acknowledge brands can no longer completely control how they are perceived.

2. Brand Experience Essentials

BX Essentials represent the second stage of building brand experiences. They are intangible brand assets and

include your:

- Brand values
- Brand essence
- Brand promise
- Brand positioning
- Brand personality

BX Essentials need to be developed and defined in the context of the BX Environment. Doing this provides the foundation for building relevant brand experiences.

To illustrate this point, the chart below provides some detail associated with fine-tuning your perspective and why doing this is important as part of the BXe Environment.

Table 2: Questions to ask yourself when defining brand values in the context of fine-tuning your perspective

Connecting your brand values with the Brand Experience Environment: Focusing on fine-tuning your perspective	
Embracing transparency	To what extent will our values stand up to public scrutiny?
Adopting a holistic mindset	How relevant do we think our values are to all our employees?
Competing primarily through a brand's value not price	In what ways do our values deliver relevant stakeholder value?
Having patience	Which of our core values will stand the test of time?
Accepting a loss of control	How do our values direct but not dictate the experiences we build?

If your heart sinks when you ask yourself these questions now is probably a good time to rethink your brand values and other BX Essentials before moving onto your BX Enablers. This is because BX Essentials inform how you build brand experiences through the BX Enablers.

3. Brand Experience Enablers

The Enablers are three tools you can use to bring your BX Essentials to life:

- Employee behaviour
- Communications
- Design

Table 3: Detailing the Brand Experience Enablers

Enabler	Scope
Behaviour	Human resource processes including recruitment, induction, training, appraisal, reward and exit interviews.
Communications	Traditional media and public relations e.g.: TV, radio and print; internal communications; social media content, conversations and communities; mobile; stories and gamification.
Design	<p>Multisensory design: using all the senses to build brand experiences i.e. sight, taste, touch, sound and smell.</p> <p>Service design: customer personas, customer empathy maps, customer journey maps, use case scenarios, service/experience prototyping, mood boards, storyboards and stories.</p>

Bringing it all together

To show how the Blueprint plays out in practice let's start with brand values. When defining your brand values you need to be mindful of each element of the BX Environment or your values will be defined in a vacuum. Irrelevance will follow. Bad times beckon.

Rinse and repeat this process for other brand values then the other Essentials across all elements of the BX Environment. Doing this will increase the relevance of the brand experiences you build because they will be built on the Essentials grounded in the BX Environment.

Next, you need to bring your BX Essentials to life via the BX Enablers. Table 4 provides an example of how an amusement park with an eco theme could connect BX Essentials and the Enablers with the former being defined as:

- **Brand values:** intrepid, insightful, family-orientated and conscientious (the example focuses on being intrepid but you should complete the same exercise for the other values).
- **Brand promise:** helping kids get closer to nature, learn how to respect nature, enhance their knowledge of nature, build confidence to explore nature independently, educate those around them about nature and learn how to become more resourceful, e.g. recycle rainwater (the example focuses on helping kids get closer to nature).
- **Brand essence:** natural, educational adventures.
- **Brand positioning:** adventure-loving/eco-friendly community.
- **Brand personality:** an intrepid adventurer with an inquisitive mind who loves the natural world.

Table 4: Connecting Brand Experience Essentials and Enablers: place brand example

Brand Experience Enablers	Behaviour	Communications	Design
Brand Experience Essentials			
Value Intrepid	Train employees so they have the skills and confidence to encourage guests to explore and learn about nature for themselves	Use stories to show how other families have had a real adventure while discovering the natural wonders of the park	Branded environments that activate your senses eg: inspiring picture of a vast wilderness, touch certain leaves, smell wild flowers, taste wild food grown at the park. It should feel like an adventure: a voyage of discovery. Locate discrete multimedia kiosks designed with families in mind that provide information which encourages exploration and discovery in the park
Essence Natural educational adventures	Recruit knowledgeable employees who can explain complex elements of nature in a simple yet engaging way, eg: use metaphors or non-complex language	Informative, and encouraging language / tone of voice	Play music at the visitor centre that encourages / inspires people to explore (almost like Indiana Jones) Map out various customer journeys based on use cases. Eg: young family, school visits etc, that aim to deliver natural educational adventures
Promise Get closer to nature	During the induction stress the importance of showing kids how to observe animals so as not to cause distress	YouTube / Instagram content which shows guests getting up close to animals and plants so they can learn about them	Audio / video outlining how to observe animals so you can learn more about how they interact with each other Storyboard showing the evolution of various species you are interacting with in their natural habitat to provide context and additional insights
Positioning Adventure loving / Eco friendly Community	Recruit people who can demonstrate a genuine love of adventure and the natural world	Connect with guests on social media and invite them to be part of your community and share news and views on adventure / eco topics	Connect with guests on social media and invite them to be part of your community and share news and views on adventure / eco topics
Personality An intrepid adventurer with an inquisitive mind who has a love of the natural world	Reward employees who behave in ways that support the brand personality. Eg: keen to show kids / their parents his latest discoveries in the park to inspire them to explore further	The park mascot walks around the park and encourages kids to explore nature for themselves: "Why not go and take a look with your Mum and Dad? It's awesome. You'll love it!"	Dress the brand mascot as an intrepid traveller who loves nature and adventure eg: boots; water flask; back pack over their shoulder etc. A GPS-based mobile application where a virtual brand mascot escorts you around the park prompting to discover then answer questions as part of an interactive quiz

As you work through this process you may notice some overlap between BX Enablers. For instance in Table 4, a GPS-enabled app straddles communications and design. Staff encouraging guests to explore the park relates to behaviour and communications. This overlap, within reason, is a good thing. It demonstrates your thinking converges on a central logic. This will facilitate the delivery of more cohesive and consistent brand experiences as focus and clarity exist.

Case studies

Virgin Atlantic^[1]

Virgin Atlantic translates their brand via the experiences they build in playful ways. Take Wilbur and Orville, Virgin's on-board salt and pepper shakers that are shaped like planes, as an example. No business case in the world could have been built to support the introduction of these loveable characters but Virgin introduced them because they were fun and conveyed the Virgin Masterbrand value of 'Delightfully Surprising' in a tangible and highly relevant way.

As a services brand the behavioural part of the Virgin Atlantic brand experience is particularly important. Recruitment at Virgin Atlantic is guided by their three core personality traits: to be Inclusive, Optimistic and Adventurous. This plays out via employee behavior that feels on brand but not scripted or staid. Virgin's brand personality also guides their brand communications and overall tone of voice. For example, the Virgin Atlantic website refers to destinations in the context of 'Your adventure starts here'. An otherwise non-descript touch point brings the brand to life in a way that dovetails with the broader experience being delivered.

UK Sepsis Trust

In just a few years, the UK Sepsis Trust has grown into an established national charity with high profile government, professional and celebrity support.

Articulating then translating their values via the experiences they build has been central to their success. The UK Sepsis Trust brand values are: influential, approachable, expert, but to differentiate themselves they wanted to be fresh and edgy.

Employees are recruited with these values in mind. Every new output is tested against these five values. This could be new creative work, activations, a fundraising event, celebrities or thought leaders the brand partner with, communications or how they respond to a given issue. Their values provide a guiding principle which keeps the brand on track.

The results:

- The Secretary of State for Health and the Medical Director of the NHS are united in their announcements that 'sepsis is a condition whose time has come'
- Public Health England has distributed 1.6 million of leaflets
- At least 25 million more people are now aware of sepsis – with an advertising budget of zero
- The chance of surviving sepsis has increased from 60% to 80%

which means we are saving thousands of lives every year.

Conclusion

Shrewd senior executives understand that brand experiences provide a route to retaining relevance. But knowing where to start and how to structure brand experience building programmes is difficult. The Brand Experience Blueprint aims to solve this problem and provide a helping hand by breaking the process of building brand experiences into three digestible chunks.

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[i] The content for this case study is based on the Foreword Claire Cronin, CMO of Virgin Atlantic wrote for *Building Brand Experiences: A Practical Guide to Retaining Brand Relevance*

About the author

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Wavelength specialises in helping services brands retain relevance through the brand experiences they build.

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