

Brand Compass

Value creation through brand focus

A guide for brand owners.

A de-mystification of what 'brand' really means.

Direction for long-term commercial success.



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Aim

The goal of businesses the world over is to nurture satisfied, long-term, repeat-purchasing and repeat-advocating customers.

'Brand' is at the centre of this goal and **Brand Compass** is an approach to guide you to this destination.

Case studies are to be found when you see this orange font

Introduction

This Guide exists to:

- Provide clarity and a refreshed understanding of what 'brand' means
- Introduce a tool or organising framework called the Brand Compass. This is to focus management's thinking, planning and decision-making in such a way as to meaningfully connect the many activities of a business (i.e. the creation and delivery of products and services at profit) to customer needs and priorities
- Get *brand* into the heads and hearts of all employees and into the concrete reality of business operations

A central principle of the Brand Compass model is to keep customer needs always in view. It is unashamedly a customer or market-led approach to management thinking. It builds an indelible connection between what you do and who you serve: *the customer*.

My hope is that the Brand Compass will help you pinpoint, map and prioritise customer needs and translate them into your brand-defining initiatives and activities. It is a road that can lead to building a business that is worth much more than the sum of its parts.

Brand Compass imagines an enlightened organisation where all staff are willing brand ambassadors and are cognisant of their contributions in delivering brand value. This guide and the ideas and processes within it will naturally suit brand owners who are motivated by innovation, are open to new ideas and have the imagination to see possibilities.

In summary, the objective is to inspire and support Managing Directors, CEOs and Marketing Professionals to:

- 1 Organise their businesses and their marketing in a way that creates a genuinely brand-led enterprise.
- 2 Provide an accessible and understandable model and framework to help them achieve this.
- 3 Create outcomes that will:
 - Instil belief and pride in all the staff of an organisation
 - Attract the best talent
 - Pull the heartstrings of the target audience
 - Override purchasing indecision
 - Command interest and respect in their markets
 - Have the power to command higher profit margins

Chapter 1 Making Sense of Branding

I have been a professional marketer for nearly 30 years now and much of that time has been devoted to 2 specific areas: Branding and research. Much of my research work has been focused specifically on generating insights to develop new brands and evolve existing brands including the communications and the propositions that underpin them.

In many of the brand creation, evolution and management assignments I have been involved in, it has struck me that a clear understanding of what a brand is *or could be* and therefore why it is worth investing in, remains hazy. This is the case even amongst senior marketing people and especially amongst those to whom it should matter most - those I call *Brand Owners* (CEOs, MDs, Marketing Directors and Founders of organisations of any size).

This is understandable. Running a business involves a lot of practical tasks: organising time, managing costs and cashflow, managing people, doing administration and paperwork, meeting deadlines and delivering projects.

Marketing is typically an on-going round of campaigns, events, doing and delivering. Again, there is little time to focus on brand matters. Consequently, branding often takes a back seat.

As can be seen from the above, concepts and ideas like 'brand' are in danger of being obliterated or sidelined in the cut and thrust and pressure of managing the day-to-day. This is why 'brand strategy' is typically an infrequent subject for discussion.

At best, it becomes a topic of conversation and action when discussing the clearly tangible manifestations of branding - the logo, visual identity etc. On occasion, it may be the focus of a team away-day brainstorm around company or brand values - usually soon forgotten when everyday 'doing' starts again.

BUT brands are important - we all know and recognise this. However vague definitions and understandings may be between different people, most would broadly agree that there are such things as '**strong brands**': brands that stand out in the marketplace and which command more interest, passion and enthusiasm.

I want to convince brand owners that it is possible and desirable to view the totality of a business or organisation as a 'brand', to turn received business wisdom on its head and **think of the business serving the brand rather than the brand serving the business**. This is a mode of thinking that puts the brand at the centre of everything.

Let's go a bit deeper and draw out some of the defining features of what I call 'Strong brands'.

Making Sense of Branding: Defining ‘strong brands’

Striving to bring a company to ‘strong brand’ status is the mission behind Brand Compass, the approach I have developed through many brand development assignments. There are 3 types of brand: strong brands, non-brands and big brands.

‘Non-brands’ are little more than ‘companies with a badge’. ‘Big brands’ are household names that don’t resonate with us personally. ‘Strong brands’ can be large or small companies and may be known by millions or just amongst their target audiences. So, what defines a ‘strong brand’?

They influence our feelings and emotional responses

Strong brands pull our heartstrings. All of us can reference brands with which we have an emotional connection. Obvious candidates would be football clubs and fashion brands.

There are even brands out there we may never actually own, touch, or see, that occupy a place in our hearts and our minds. The merest mention of a particular name or glimpse of a logo can trigger a change in brain activity, a release of hormones and a perceptual response. For some, the brand Ferrari might be this kind of strong brand.

If you think of the emotions that a national flag can arouse, then you get an idea of what I am talking about. Strong brands make a promise that extends beyond rational and functional benefits.

They conjure up associations and emotional responses or memories. Interestingly, some of these responses may have nothing to do with the actual product or service. These responses ‘place’ or ‘position’ the product or service under review in a way that has appeal or aspiration or some kind of positive connotation. This phenomenon is examined closely in Chapter 2, *The Deep Structure of a Brand Promise*.

Strong brands carry meaning

They carry semantic currency that translates into consumer or buyer preference. Strong brands have more vivid meanings than weak brands. Those that are unknown or have vague or non-existent meaning cannot be called brands. They are just names or labels.

Strong brands influence behaviours

Consumer or buyer preference translates into purchase. Strong brands short-circuit time consuming and energy-sapping purchase decisions. For low involvement purchases, they make a decision easy and instantaneous. Strong brands can override reason and logic and overcome rational objections to purchase.

Another key facet of strong brands is that they usually command higher prices and therefore have the potential to deliver bigger profit margins. Some strong brands are often notably more expensive, even with known functional shortfalls. I include examples of this in Chapter 4, *Brands Distilled*.

Making Sense of Branding: Defining 'strong brands' cont...

Strong brands do not belong to marketing departments

All the employees of a brand have an important role to play in creating a strong brand. Whether it is people in IT, customer service, accounts, manufacturing, they are ALL defining the brand in some way. Employee experience and engagement is a vital part of the evolution of a brand.

Every small decision, fresh initiative and bright idea which can make a positive difference is adding value to the brand as a whole.

Brands exist in peoples' heads and hearts. They are outcomes of our experience:

- We *hear* about them
- We *see* them advertised
- We *see other people* buying and using them
- We *trial* them and *read* about them in reviews and in the news.

When we buy or trial, we build a deeper experience of the brand and form an impression that we may decide to share with other people.

Each time this happens, the meaning of this brand changes in some small way. Brands are never static. They are in a constant state of flux or change.

These final points perhaps help us understand why the subject of brands and branding is not adequately explained or understood in many marketing courses or guides or even by practitioners. Indeed, there are many more tangible and concrete aspects to marketing that are easier to grasp and to 'action': for example the next campaign or the next promotion.

But the source of your brand's real strength may not be within the remit of the marketing department. If, for example, the truly brand-defining factor of your business is at the end of a telephone line and in the hands of a customer service agent then this is where we need to focus our attention and resources.

In this case, the role of the marketing department is then to encode this insight into and feature this brand strength in brand-defining communications. The UK consumer bank, First Direct illustrates this point well and features as a case study (see Chapter 2, *Brand Experience*).

Brand Compass provides a route map for brand owners to take more control of this complex and multi-faceted process and starts the journey of creating, owning and reaping the benefits of truly strong brands.

This journey typically requires investment in terms of applied thinking, reflection and research. This process is broken down and explained in Chapter 3, *Brand Connection Points*.

Chapter 2 Navigating the Brand Compass

The Brand Compass model has one purpose: to guide brand-owners into prioritising *brand-building initiatives*. These are identified and plotted onto the Brand Compass. This process is covered in Chapter 3.

Like a magnetic compass, the Brand Compass has 4 cardinal points and four quadrants. As you read the degrees on a magnetic compass in a clockwise direction, so the Brand Compass is read clockwise.

A 360 degree journey around the Brand Compass represents a 4-stage customer journey.

Each quadrant signifies a 'territory' of activity that you can either control and/or influence.

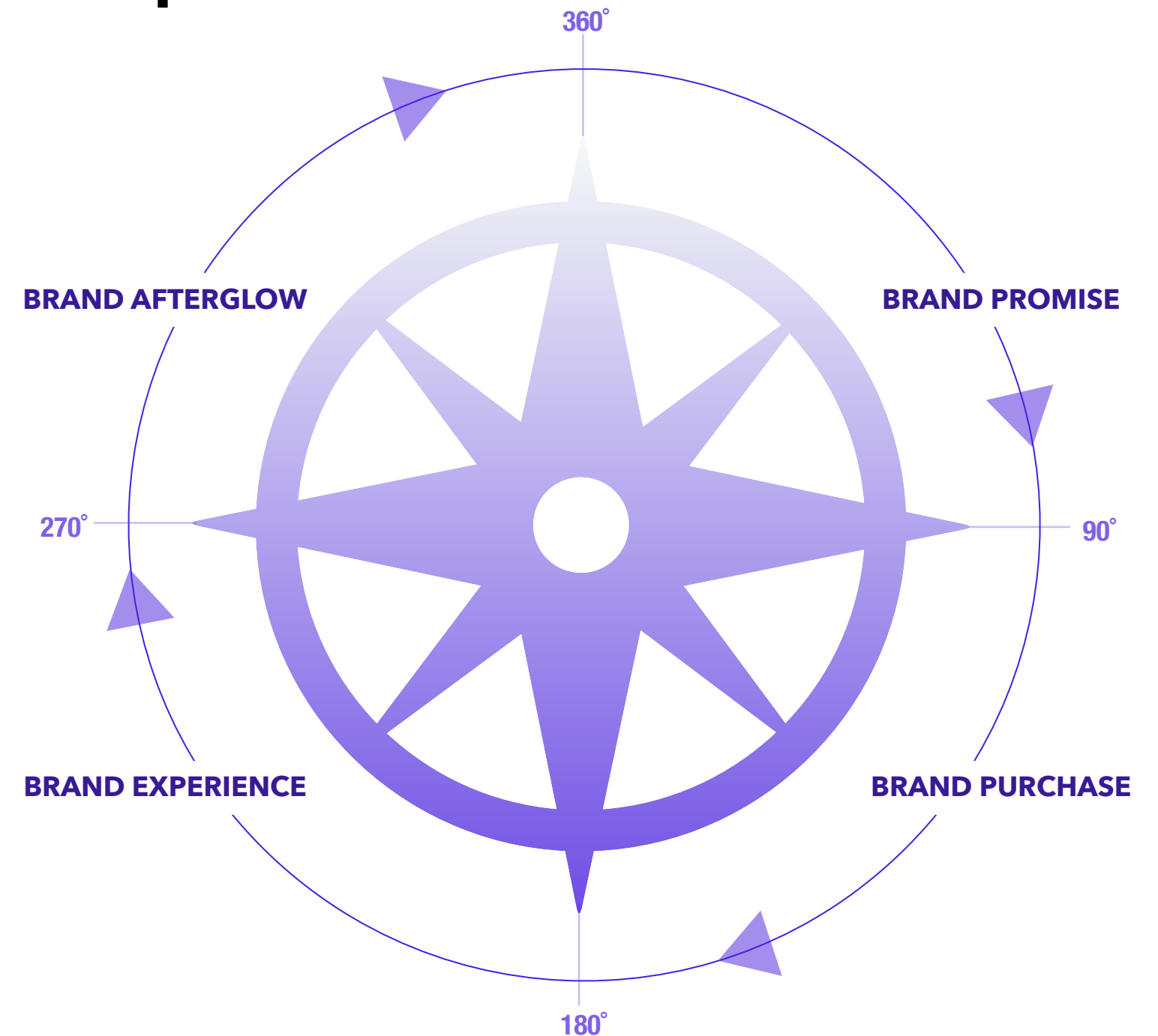
Let's break it down:

0-90° BRAND PROMISE

90-180° BRAND PURCHASE

180-270° BRAND EXPERIENCE

270-360° BRAND AFTERGLOW



Stage 1: 0-90° Brand Promise

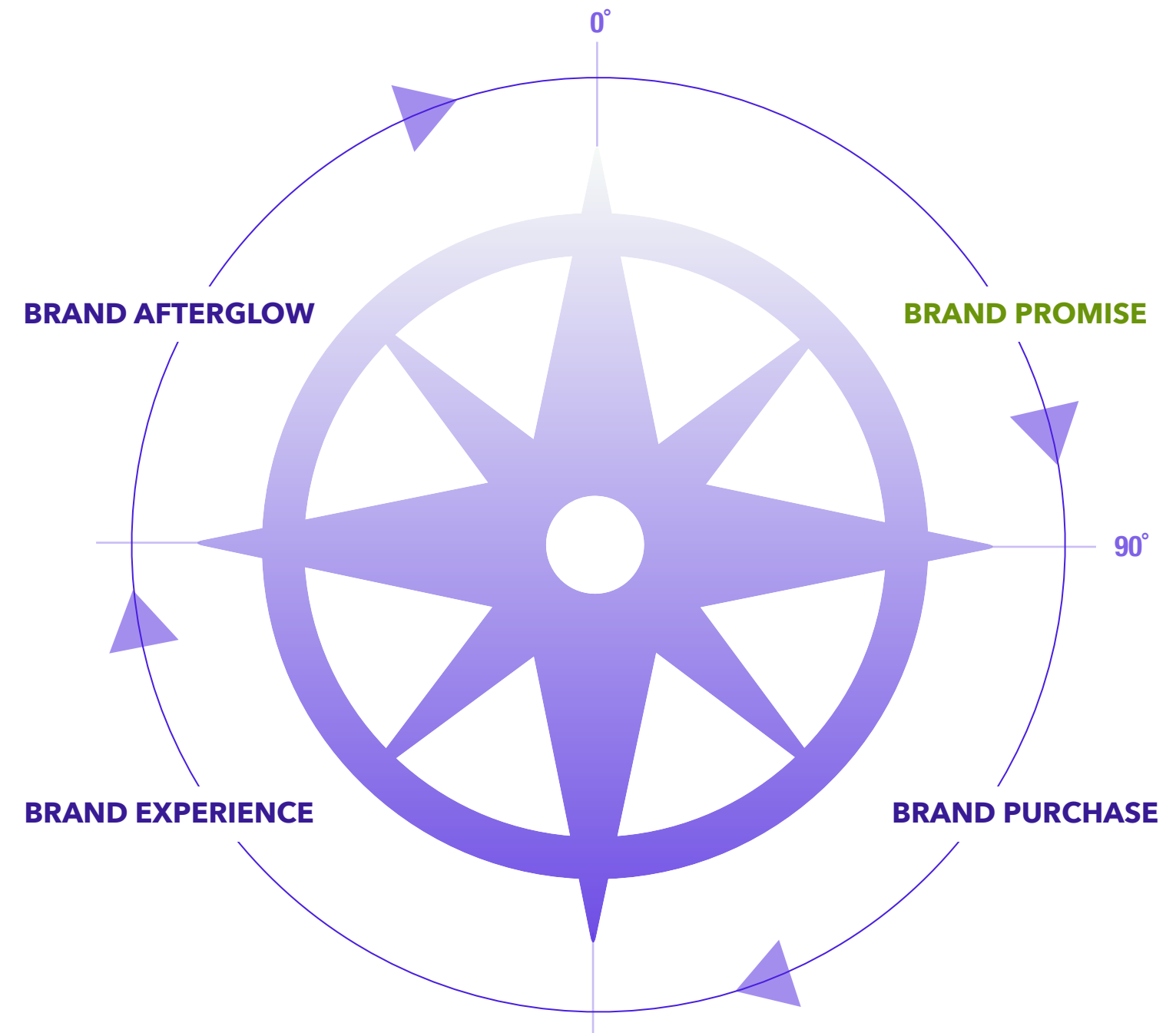
All brands make a promise to their intended audience. It may be nuanced and complex or a direct functional benefit or both. A brand promises to add value in some way, to provide a benefit or make an improvement. The 'name' attached to any given product or service may be a single product brand (e.g. Kit Kat, Rolex) or be associated with a range of products or services (e.g. Dyson, Virgin).

When exposed to a brand via advertising, promotions, recommendation or reviews, a person is generally in one of 3 states:

- (A) Not thinking of purchasing this brand (the majority)
- (B) In the 'decision-window' of consciously or actively considering purchase or searching for a product or service that this brand could satisfy
- (C) A user/customer or ex-customer of this brand

- State (A) can stimulate awareness or interest
- State (B) can trigger trial and evaluation
- State (C) can reinforce a previous purchase decision or provoke a re-evaluation of such a decision

These moments of engagement are fleeting and therefore precious. As illustrated above, brand messaging has a role to play throughout the customer journey and the messaging needs to be tailored to resonate appropriately at different stages of the purchase cycle. However, It is vital that the core **Brand Promise remains absolutely consistent** and that all the employees delivering the branded product or service understand this.



The Deep Structure of a Brand Promise

Meaning and Feeling

A company cannot claim to be a brand until its products and services have generated *meaning*; meaning that resonates through the target audience and customer base and through all the employees of that company.

Meaning triggers feelings. If people *feel* strongly about a company and its products and services, then it has the makings of a strong brand regardless of whether it is a niche product or service or a mass market product or service. The size of the business or customer base or audience does not matter.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, some brands provoke associations and emotional responses way beyond their actual target audiences. Well-known luxury brands like Rolex and Ferrari are such brands even though they sell to niche markets.

However, simply referencing *meaning* and *feeling* as a definition of a strong brand is not adequate for the purposes of this Guide. They are good identifiers of strong brands, but we need a more precise and useful model to help us make sense of what we mean by 'Brand Promise', and therefore to be able to plan for building our brands. I break the deep structure of a Brand Promise down into 3 levels described below and portrayed in a schematic on page 12.

Level 1 of a Brand Promise

A Brand Promise at level 1 consists of all the tangible components of what is presented to the marketplace. These include:

- Physical products and the physical evidence of your products and services e.g. packaging, brochures, websites etc.. These are vital for less tangible offerings such as software or services.
- Graphical manifestations of a brand identity (logo, typeface, iconography, colours etc.).

Because these are the obvious, 'concrete' manifestations, it is often where conversations around brands and branding begin and end.

Apple is a good example of this. Its products and services are distinctive. You know an Apple product when you see it, touch it or use it. There is a consistent design philosophy or 'DNA' that runs through everything they present to the marketplace. This DNA is a core component not just of their brand identity, but also a commitment to quality and an approach to design excellence. This extends to their packaging which is designed and built with the same philosophy.

For less tangible *services*, insurance services for example, the attention to quality and consistency in website design, online applications, client documentation, corporate identity and the quality of communications are manifestations of the Brand Promise at Level 1. Standards and expectations are set even *before* purchase and consumption of the brand.

The Deep Structure of a Brand Promise cont...

Level 2 of a Brand Promise

Level 2 comprises all the marketing communications: advertising, promotions, product performance claims, service differentiators, pricing offers and so on. It is typically the territory managed by the marketing department and their agencies.

These are the variables that are constantly being worked on, developed and renewed. Marketing messages encode the brand message. It is where marketers consciously create propositions and attempt to position a product or brand in a competitive context.

The combination of your level 1 and level 2 activities tell the 'story' of your brand and build an impression. The consistency of the messaging around this story is vital across your outbound communications. Unlike other sections of the Brand Compass, the brand story is in the brand owners' control. Not surprisingly, this is where much of the thinking and planning effort has to go prior to the launch, or re-launch, of a brand.

Deciding what story to tell is where Brand Compass can be exceptionally helpful. Knowing which aspects of your brand offer resonate strongly with your audience can direct your communications and positioning and proposition. The way to go about this, or a suggested methodology, is explored in Chapter 3, *Brand Connection Points*.

Level 3 of a Brand Promise

Level 3 meanings are perhaps the most difficult to comprehend. This is where the practical, logical world of business strays into the uncertain waters of cultural meaning and deeper, more oblique association. This is not the place to introduce the more esoteric or academic concepts of semiotics, Jungian archetypes or psychology but further reading in these areas may be illuminating.

If we take the soft drinks brand RedBull as an example, we can readily see that although it is simply an energy drink, it also carries very strong intangible associations. Red Bull is a brilliantly marketed strong brand. It is as much about its values (level 3) as it is about the product, an energy soft drink (level 1).

RedBull is a good example of a brand that works at all 3 levels of the Brand Promise:

- Level 1: A strong and distinctive logo and brand strap-line (RedBull gives you wings)
- Level 2: Global and prominent sponsorship of adrenaline sports and feats of human endeavour
- Level 3: Emotional appeal and connection to an audience switched on to a lifestyle and image encapsulated by the Level 3 associations.

The Deep Structure of a Brand Promise cont...

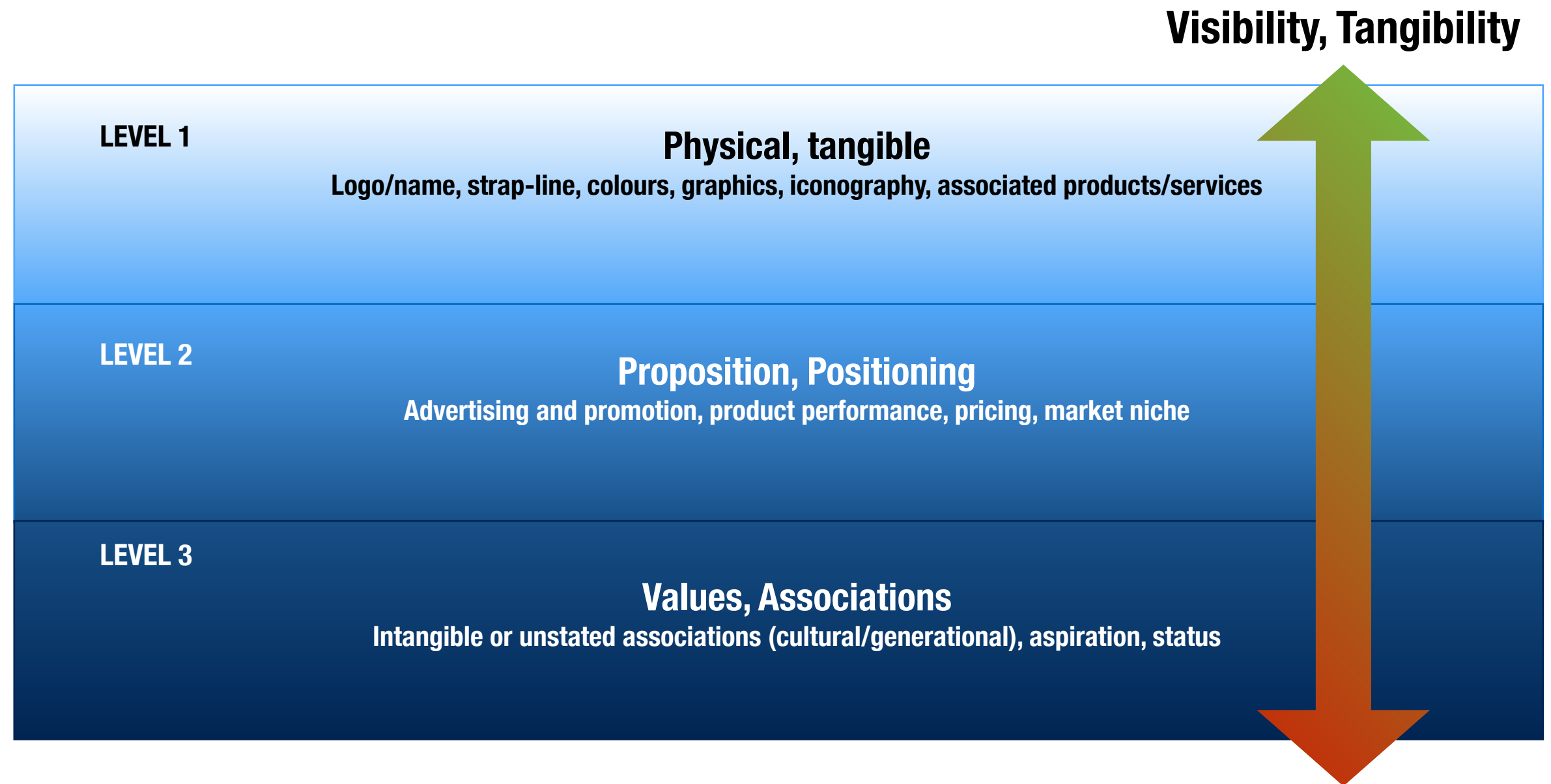


Gives you wings



Extreme sports

Excitement, adrenaline, danger
Youth, energy
Beyond normal boundaries



Brand Promise - Personality and Purpose

In my experience, many businesses do not seem to have a clear understanding of their own Brand Promise. This is understandable. As described in the last few slides, the additional effort and commitment required to go beyond the obvious and tangible and to explore where the deeper **Value Connection Points** lie is sometimes overlooked.

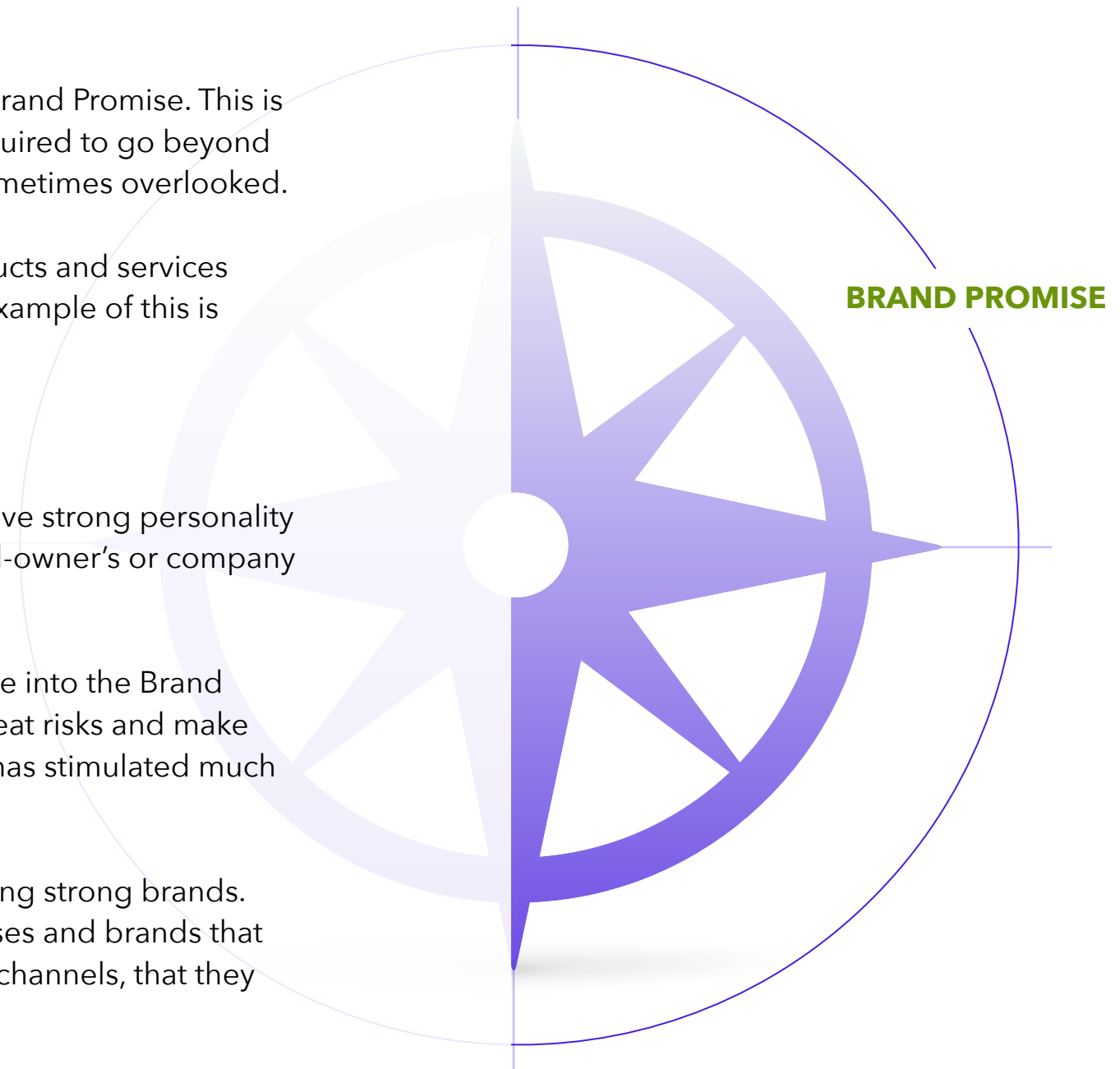
Commonly, many businesses are overly 'product-led'. Their attention is focused on their products and services without really knowing where or how they are distinguishable from the competition. A clear example of this is outlined in the case study, '*Unearthing Precious Treasures*' on page 15.

Brand Personality and Purpose

Brands are like people. We remember people with strong personalities, and strong brands have strong personality traits. It is no coincidence that successful and strong brands are often a reflection of the brand-owner's or company founder's actual personality (e.g. Virgin and Richard Branson).

Likewise, the values and motivations for creating a business may contain rich material to weave into the Brand Promise. James Dyson is an example of a founder driven to innovate and prepared to take great risks and make sacrifices to reach his goal. Simon Sinek speaks compellingly on these matters and famously has stimulated much debate around finding your 'purpose' as a business and a brand.

People like 'personalities' and compelling back-stories, but these are not necessities for creating strong brands. The insight here is that we connect to people and human stories. We also connect to businesses and brands that demonstrate, through tangible action and evidence reported on social or mainstream media channels, that they commit to their customers and their staff.



Putting People into the Brand Promise

Most businesses do not have charismatic leaders or founders, nor do most have some over-arching motivation or purpose, but there are many successful brands that engage their audiences through their policies, values and everyday actions.

Typically, many such successful brands have owners who engage with their staff. They have a reputation for recognising, rewarding and caring for their staff. These behaviours become known and are shared and become part of the fabric of the company's reputation as an employer. Iceland frozen foods, for example, is known as an excellent employer.

Consequently, such businesses become strong employer brands and stronger brands as a whole. Of course, strong employer brands attract and retain the best employees which adds to the virtuous cycle of improvement and growth. I explore this through my own experience discovering the brand 'Lush' in the case study, '*The overwhelming smell of success*', in the Brand Purchase section.

Brand strength can come from many different places, and it is fair to say most strong brands deliver excellence or differential advantage in some part of their product or service offering. However, some are purpose-driven and have an over-arching motivation; witness the outdoor clothes brand, Patagonia, which has built a powerful brand reputation on the basis of its commitment to the environment. Patagonia has become synonymous with this.

The challenge for the business or brand-owner is to identify what aspects connect and resonate with customers or to recognise which aspect could resonate more, given more marketing support. This challenge is within any brand-owner's remit. Again, the case study overleaf demonstrates this.

The logo for Iceland, featuring the word "Iceland" in a bold, red, sans-serif font.The logo for LUSH, featuring the word "LUSH" in a bold, black, sans-serif font.The logo for Patagonia, featuring a black silhouette of a mountain range above the word "patagonia" in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font.

Brand Promise - It's in there somewhere...

Unearthing precious treasures



ESiT created a CRM platform specifically for charities/3rd sector organisations. They approached me in 2010 to help them with their marketing.

I immediately went in search of what I used to call their 'golden nuggets'. I now call such nuggets Brand Connection Points (BCPs).

On digging, I discovered their 'engine' was called 'thankQ'. On further digging (staff and management interviews, product interrogation and customer interviews), it became evident this small East Midlands company, powered by thankQ, was a brilliant piece of digital engineering and as good as the market leader. I was excited.

In addition, their customer-facing support team were dedicated, attentive, motivated and made a habit of delighting their customers with the customer service and support they provided. They had no idea at all just how good they actually were.

The MD, originally a developer himself, confessed to not understanding a jot of the brand and marketing 'gobbledegook' coming out of my mouth, but to his credit he trusted in me and in the process.

To realise the true potential of this product and team, I urged him to radically change their branding and focus completely on the treasures they already, unwittingly, held in their hands.

In just a few months we built a new brand and foregrounded the Brand Promise on their approach to customer service: friendly, approachable, responsive, attentive. This suggested a brand personality which we translated into a new corporate identity.

Their audience and user base were non-IT people, committed to education or charitable fundraising. Buying, learning to use and operating CRM systems was challenging for them. What they wanted more than anything else was *support*. The fact the product itself was brilliant was an incredible bonus!

We renamed and re-branded the business 'thankQ', creating a strong personality that reflected their greatest market strength. Sales grew quickly and within 2 years they were acquired by the Access Group.



Brand Promise - Summary

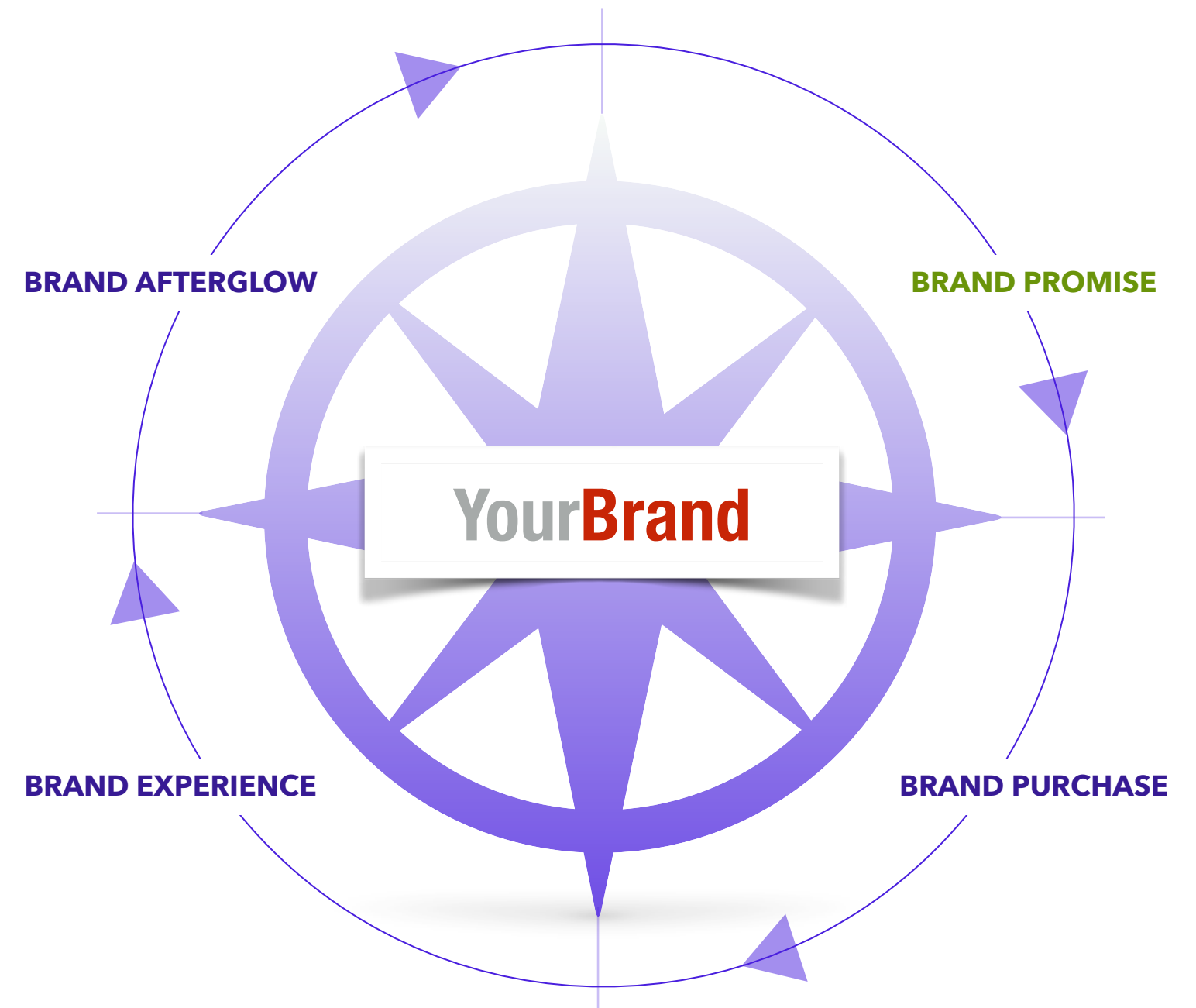
Your crafted Brand Promise is the equivalent of magnetic north on a real compass. It is the guiding anchor-point or benchmark by which you set your direction and by which your audience will judge you.

For your colleagues, staff and wider stakeholders, your Brand Promise also sets the standards to which you hold yourselves accountable.

Like magnetic north, it is not true north. It will never be the unchanging, fixed definition of who you are because the true definition of your brand exists only in the heads and hearts of your audiences and so is subject to many influences beyond your control.

You may never be in complete control of the changing meanings associated with your brand, but **the clearer and more compelling your Brand Promise is to your audience, and the more you reinforce it, the more people will understand, accept and embrace it.**

Additionally, in doing this, you will 'place' or 'position' the brand in a way that has appeal, aspiration or some kind of positive connotation.



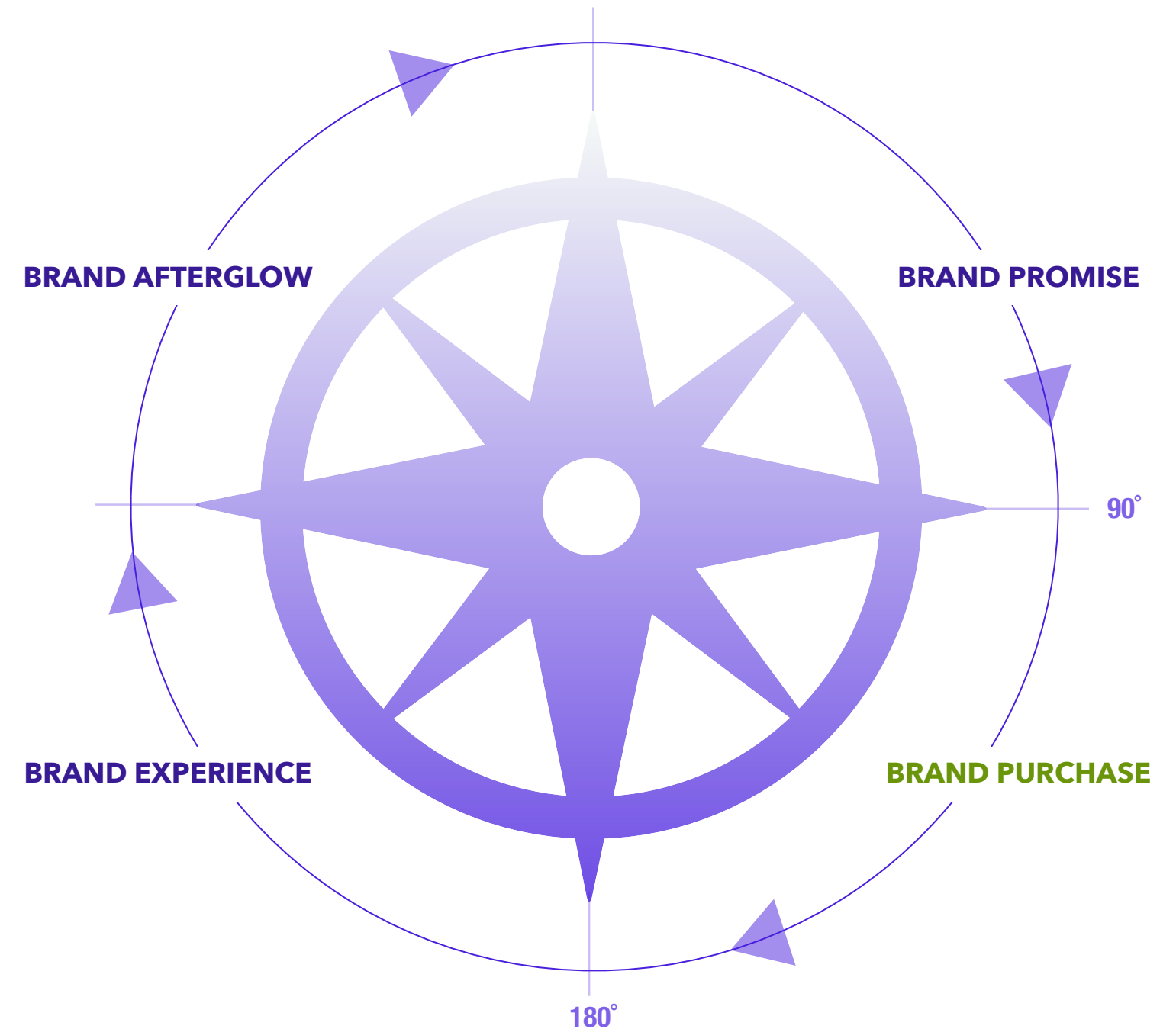
Stage 2: 90°-180° Brand Purchase

Let's assume a linear journey where the prospective buyer has been exposed to an ad, a social post or review for a product or service. It has caught their attention and pricked their interest. It just so happens they are looking for such a product. They have entered the *purchase decision window*.

At this point in the journey, if it is a high-ticket item or high-involvement purchase decision, the prospect will spend more time and energy researching and weighing up the pros and cons. The potential buyer engages the analytical, logical, critical brain. At the same time the emotional brain will be trying to convince them of the joys of owning this product. It will be projecting fantasies and stories of an imagined future living with, benefitting from and enjoying this shiny new thing.

If the purchase takes place in a store, the brand owner has certain levers, such as the classic marketing skills of merchandising, sales promotion and other factors which may influence the vendor, such as commission payments to the store sales person and distribution margin.

It is just as likely the sale may occur remotely as an online order through an intermediary (e.g. Amazon). In this scenario, AI filters come into play and your brand promise takes a back seat. Either way, filters of many kinds will influence and affect the purchase decision and the 'moment of truth': *The purchase transaction*.



Consequently, a brand's ability to tell its story can be in jeopardy at this vital point in the journey. It is perhaps the most perilous part of the brand journey and the stage where the Brand Promise has to do its hardest work.

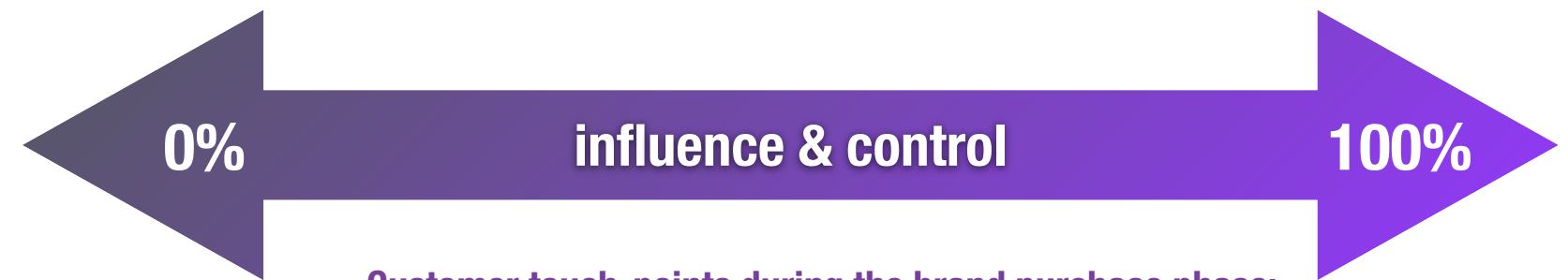
Brand Purchase: Overcoming obstacles

Strong brands will usually overcome competitors and purchaser indecision because the Brand Promise overcomes obstacles in the Brand Purchase phase. But only up to a point.

The job of the brand owner at this stage of the journey is to do all in their power to control, support or influence the touch-points in this Brand Purchase stage.

Key questions for a brand owner to ask:

- How much control do you have at the purchase stage of the customer journey?
- How much influence can you exert?
- Can you identify obstacles that may jeopardise a purchase transaction?
- What support can you provide to help precipitate a purchase transaction?



Customer touch-points during the brand purchase phase:

Sales people

Training, quality, recruitment

Point-of-Purchase

Merchandising, visibility

Find-ability, User-journeys

SEO, UX

Promotion

Information, pricing, packaging, communication

For your company, which of the above are enablers, activators or obstacles in the purchase process?

Brand Purchase Destroyers



Sales Scenario 1 : The Fitted Kitchen. 3rd party sales distribution

Imagine you are the founder and managing director of a respected, high-end fitted kitchens manufacturing business, *Belvedere Kitchens*. Your product is sold via a chain of 3rd party retailers with their own salesforce.

In the showroom, the sale of your kitchen is entrusted to the sales agent, Wayne, who you depend on to translate and reinforce your brand story and the salient product features and benefits. Wayne is also entrusted to do the same thing for 5 other brands, and you are not responsible for, nor do you have any influence over, his recruitment or training.

Nevertheless, you are confident in your product and your brand. Indeed, the prospective customer who enters the showroom may well have researched your brand, read glowing reviews, been impressed by the environmental philosophy of your company and your manufacturing standards.

Unfortunately, at some point in the conversation, Wayne lies and tells the prospect, "*Actually, the truth is, these brands are all made in the same factory so there's not a lot of difference between them...*" (keen to draw the prospect in and guide them to a sale that provides the greatest commission payment). Doubts and worries arise in the prospective purchaser's mind. Their intention to purchase your brand is suddenly in tatters. Hoping for affirmation of their brand choice from the sales agent, the prospect's purchase journey has now been derailed.

Wayne scuppers a Belvedere sale



Brand Purchase Destroyers



Belvedere scuppers its own sale



Sales Scenario 2 : The Fitted Kitchen. Direct-to-consumer sales distribution

The sale of your kitchens is entrusted to your own in-house sales agents. You are in control of their recruitment and training and you have invested in this. The Prospect calls your remote store to discuss options. They have researched your brand, read glowing reviews, been impressed by the environmental philosophy of your company and your manufacturing standards.

What could possibly go wrong?

Unfortunately, your sales agent has not been given the freedom or flexibility to provide the finish and colour choices that this prospect is seeking. Unlike other high quality fitted kitchen suppliers, your brand does not offer the range of finish and colour choices that other brands do. A chasm has opened up between the hard work done by the Brand Promise and the price/package proposal. This chasm is too wide for the prospect to traverse. The colour options trump the brand promises that initially impressed the prospect. Doubts, worries and irritation arise in the prospective purchaser's mind. Their intention to purchase your brand is suddenly in tatters. Their purchase journey has now been derailed.

A lack of internal dialogue between the marketing department, manufacturing and sales have left your product critically uncompetitive. The careful investment in building a compelling brand promise and thoughtful attention to recruitment and training have all been wasted in this 'moment of truth'.

Brand Purchase: Owning the distribution channel

The overwhelming smell of success

Owning your own retail or distribution channel puts the brand in control of the purchase process and provides an opportunity to create a powerful and memorable brand experience.

Next time you are walking through the central shopping mall reflect on what is going on in the Apple store or the Lush store in comparison to other branded outlets.

Note (1) how many people are in the shop; (2) the energy and buzz (3) the distinctive design and ambience. These are shops people really want to be in. These are products they really want to own. These are brands that want to present their products to the public in their very best light and in a way that is wholly eloquent of the brand.

Lush

For years, Lush only meant one thing to me: an overwhelming sweet and fruity odour filling the street as I passed by the store entrance, an odour so strong I would take a wide arc to try and avoid it.

Then, a friend's daughter got a job in the store and started to tell me about the company and her work experience there. She told me about their commitment to animals and animal welfare and about their philosophy towards staff wellbeing. She also conveyed how well she was treated as an employee.

She then gave me a sample of packaging-free shampoo. It turned out to be a great product and with the added appeal of 'no plastic'. I became a convert.

The philosophy behind the store experience is to have well-trained, well-informed staff usually of the same demographic as the target audience (young, female) who share *their* enthusiasm for the brand and the products. I was never the target audience but now I'm a believer.



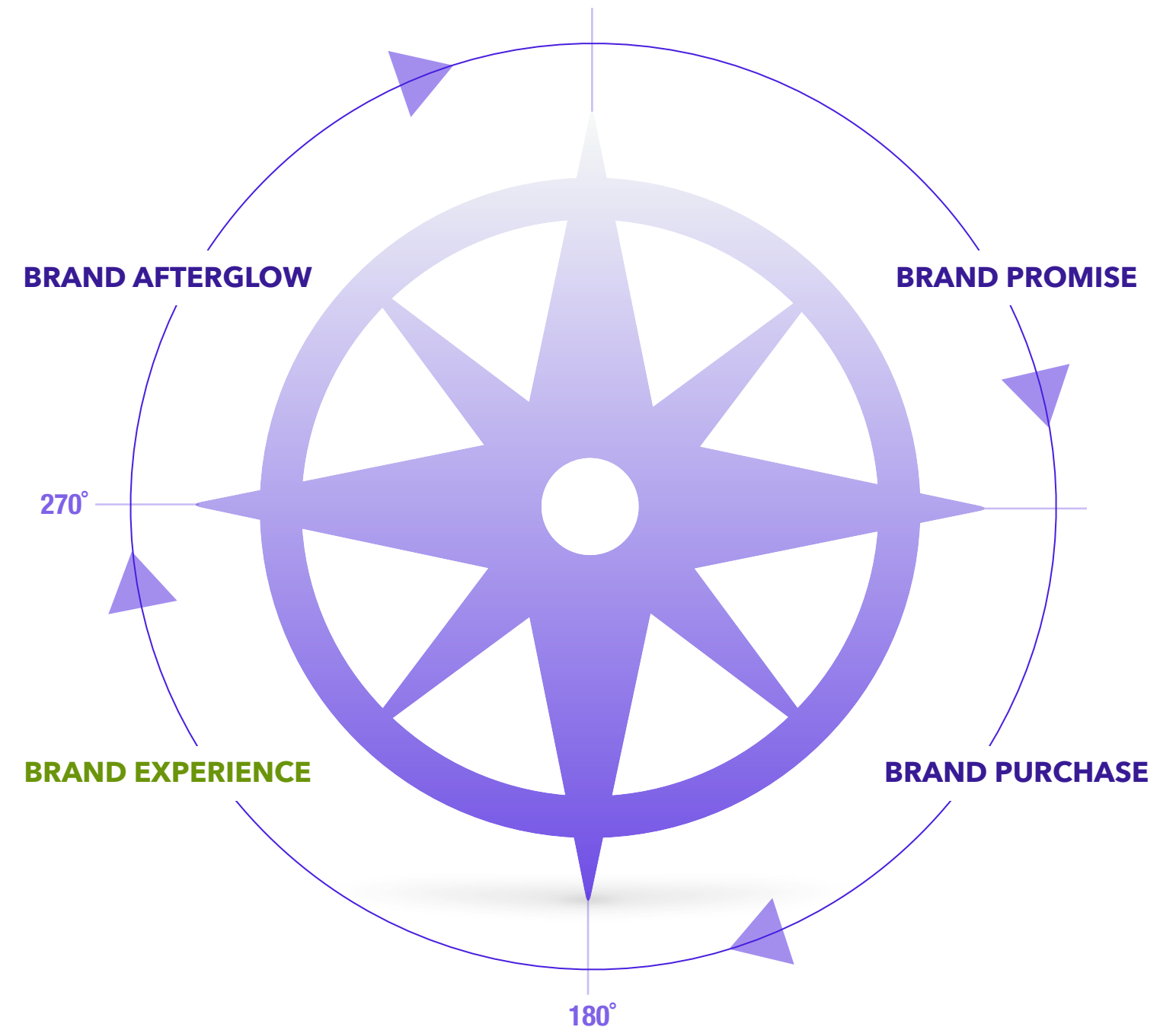
Stage 3: 180°-270° Brand Experience

This guide is about how to build long-standing brand relationships. Brand relationships, just like human relationships, deepen and mature with experience. Trust in brands is earned and the reputation of a brand is vital to its survival.

This stage of the Brand Compass refers to the experience of using, consuming or trialling a product or service.

Experiencing a brand pre- or post- purchase is not just an opportunity to convert a prospect into a customer, but it also offers an opportunity for the brand owner to engender trust in the products and services that carry the brand.

A Brand Experience that lives up to or exceeds the Brand Promise is the foundation for repeat-purchasing and repeat-advocating customers, the backbone of any successful business. These kinds of customers will be your most powerful marketing asset as well as delivering the greatest 'lifetime value' (LTV) to your business.



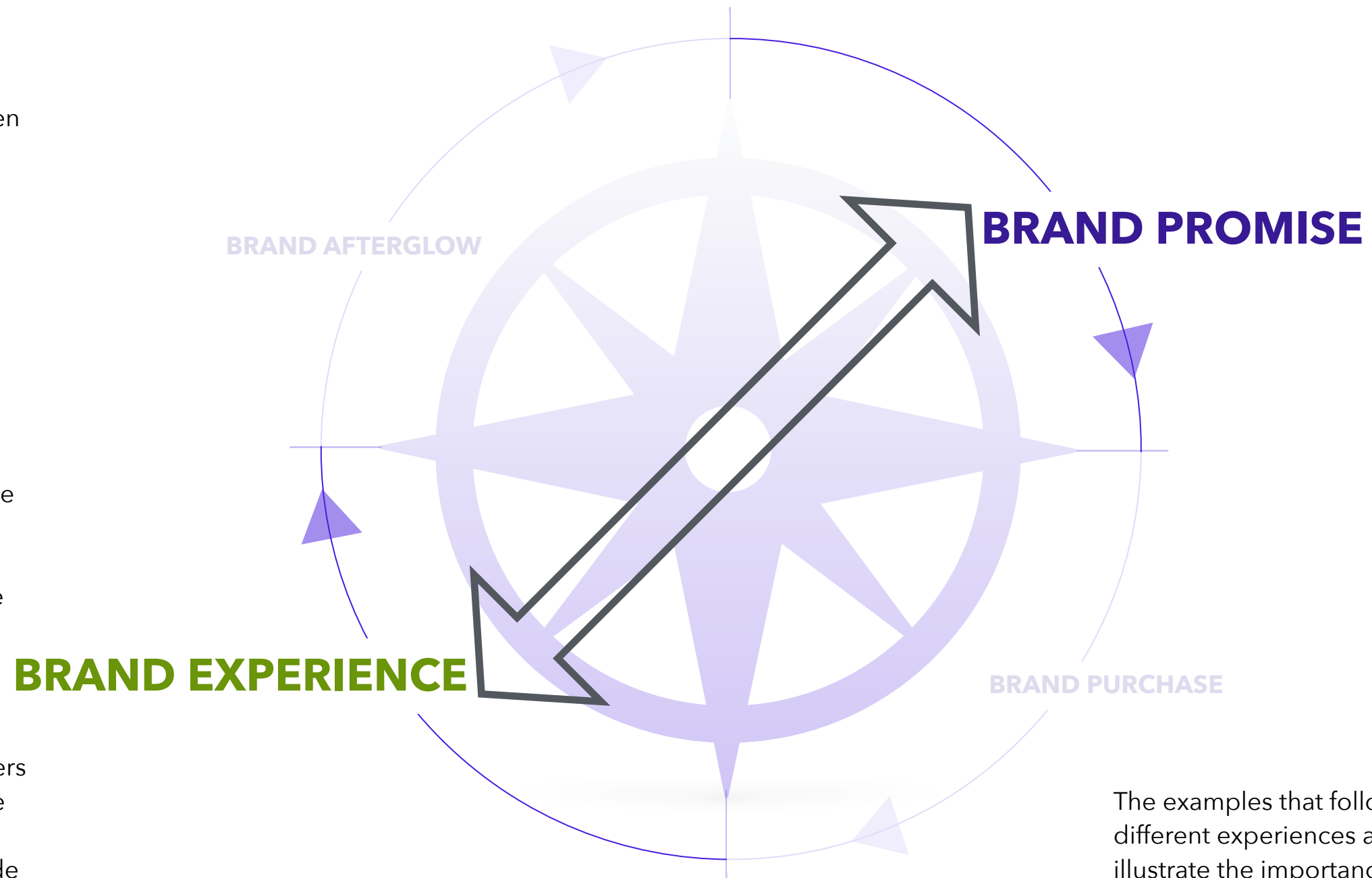
Brand Experience: Delivering against the Brand Promise

The consonance or dissonance between the 'promise' and the 'experience' is a pivotal point where brand reputations are made or destroyed.

Both quadrants are areas that are generally in the **control** of the brand owner.

It is therefore the responsibility of the brand owner to deliver a brand experience that matches or exceeds the brand promise.

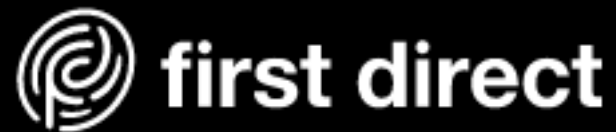
Taking control of the Brand Experience means giving diligent and focused attention to all the meaningful touch-points your customers have with your products and services. This means engaging closely with all those members of staff responsible for delivering these 'touch-points'. These 'brand owners', in this sense, are often spread far and wide through an organisation.



The examples that follow draw on different experiences and case studies to illustrate the importance of the Brand Experience.

Brand Experience: A bank to believe in

Probably the best banking experience in the world



First Direct was launched in 1989 by Midland Bank. It opened for business in October in 1989 and has never closed: 24/365 personal banking.

I remember, in the early 1990s, spending a whole lunch hour in a queue in a bank branch simply trying to deal with a card matter. I had no choice. Banks only opened during working hours. That was a tipping point. I'd had enough. Later that day, I opened a new account at First Direct. Nearly 30 years on, I remain a loyal and satisfied brand advocate.

For me, First Direct stands apart as a brand to believe in. Only once in all this time have they irritated me. That is a pretty remarkable achievement for any brand and frankly astonishing for the financial sector.

Their success is down to one simple idea. They do not behave like 'high street' banks. First Direct are open all the time and they treat their customers with respect, friendliness and professional efficiency.

For most people - even now - the idea that you can receive great service remotely by phone and you never speak to the same person twice is counter-intuitive. Peter Simpson, the pioneering founder of First Direct, had a policy of recruiting staff for their interpersonal skills. His view was that this is what mattered above all. The technical, banking skills could be learnt. Warm, articulate and friendly personality traits could not.

Technically, First Direct have been innovators from the outset. They were early users of SMS (texting), internet banking and mobile banking. First Direct are facing a barrage of new competitors with the new digital, mobile-based brands entering the market. We all do most of our banking and transacting without recourse to human intervention these days but when you need advice or need something sorted out, First Direct will always have their brilliantly trained staff at hand. The new kids on the block will never have that.

In 1989 they opened with a clear promise to be different and to deliver a banking experience that others did not. They have stuck to this promise and delivered it consistently ever since. First Direct continue to win awards and top the polls in customer services surveys.



Brand Experience: Waterstones

Waterstones was a loss-making company for years. In 2015 it was making a loss of £4.5m. James Daunt had been brought in (2011) to turn the business around. The runes were not good for bookshops. It seemed physical books were doomed due to online book sales and the surge in sales of Kindle and e-books.

Mr Daunt had other ideas. He passionately believed in books and through steady, focused leadership and absolute clarity in creating a brand that people wanted to *experience*, he turned Waterstones around. In 2016 he turned that loss into a pre-tax profit of £9.8m. It continues to be a healthy, profit-making retail chain that is opening new stores and is now expanding internationally.

I have never met James Daunt but from my reading, he appears to be the apotheosis of what I mean when I talk about 'brand owners'. His modus operandi was to spend only 2 days a week at head office and the remaining 3 days travelling the country, visiting his bookstores. He understood the brand existed for customers *in the store experience* and he was on a mission to ensure that Waterstones stores delivered an experience that would tempt people in and keep them there, browsing, reading and buying.

He also changed the business model with regard to publishers. Instead of taking their coin to promote the titles they wanted to push, he decided Waterstones would promote the titles *it* believed in. This has worked, and the company has consequently created great successes for many new authors and small publishers.

A re-engineered customer experience that reversed insolvency

They have become the masters of book retailing, knowing exactly how to display and promote books in the physical environment. They have introduced their own in-store cafes and other product lines such as puzzles, games, stationery and gifts. More reasons to visit, stay and purchase.

My experience of Waterstones is also one of literate, passionate, very well-informed staff. Mr Daunt has re-asserted the brand values that originally underpinned the brand on its birth in 1982.

Profits after tax to April 2021 were £20.8m. Even accounting for a slump due to the closures in the pandemic, this is a remarkable turnaround.



Brand Experience: The stupid smart hotel

In 2018, I was working on an assignment in London. As I live in Bristol I typically stay over in hotels local to wherever I may be working. In this case I had selected a new hotel which promised clean, modern design and, intriguingly, integrated, 'smart' tech. I had read about the billions being invested in smart cities and wanted to taste a little of what this might be like.

Checking in was a bit confusing, but I got over that hurdle. The trouble started once in my room. Everything was controlled via an App. I had to download the app which took ages to install. I then had to work out how all the basic operations of the room worked, which was not easy or intuitive. I could not even turn on the TV.

I gave up and went to sleep. In the dark hours of the night, I woke up and fumbled around, searching for a light switch. There wasn't one.

Thankfully, my mobile supplied me with torchlight but my patience was wearing thin. Had I missed something or was I being dense with technology? Still sleepy, the thought went through my mind that perhaps there was a master switch somewhere that I had failed to activate. I fumbled around the walls to no avail. Perhaps there was something outside the door? I stepped into the corridor, searching for something on the wall which might have some bearing. The room door clicked shut.

In praise of the humble light switch

I was locked out, in the dark, in my pyjamas in the middle of the night. There followed the embarrassing walk of shame to the lobby, where - thankfully - there was an actual human being. I was re-admitted to my room, but the staff member could not work out the lights either (and frankly did not try too hard).

On my next visit I booked into a pleasingly old-fashioned Best Western offering quaint retro touches like physical light switches. I found myself self-consciously flicking the switch up and down a couple of times. So reassuring.

The brand moral of the story? A case of where the Brand Experience dismally failed to live up to the Brand Promise.



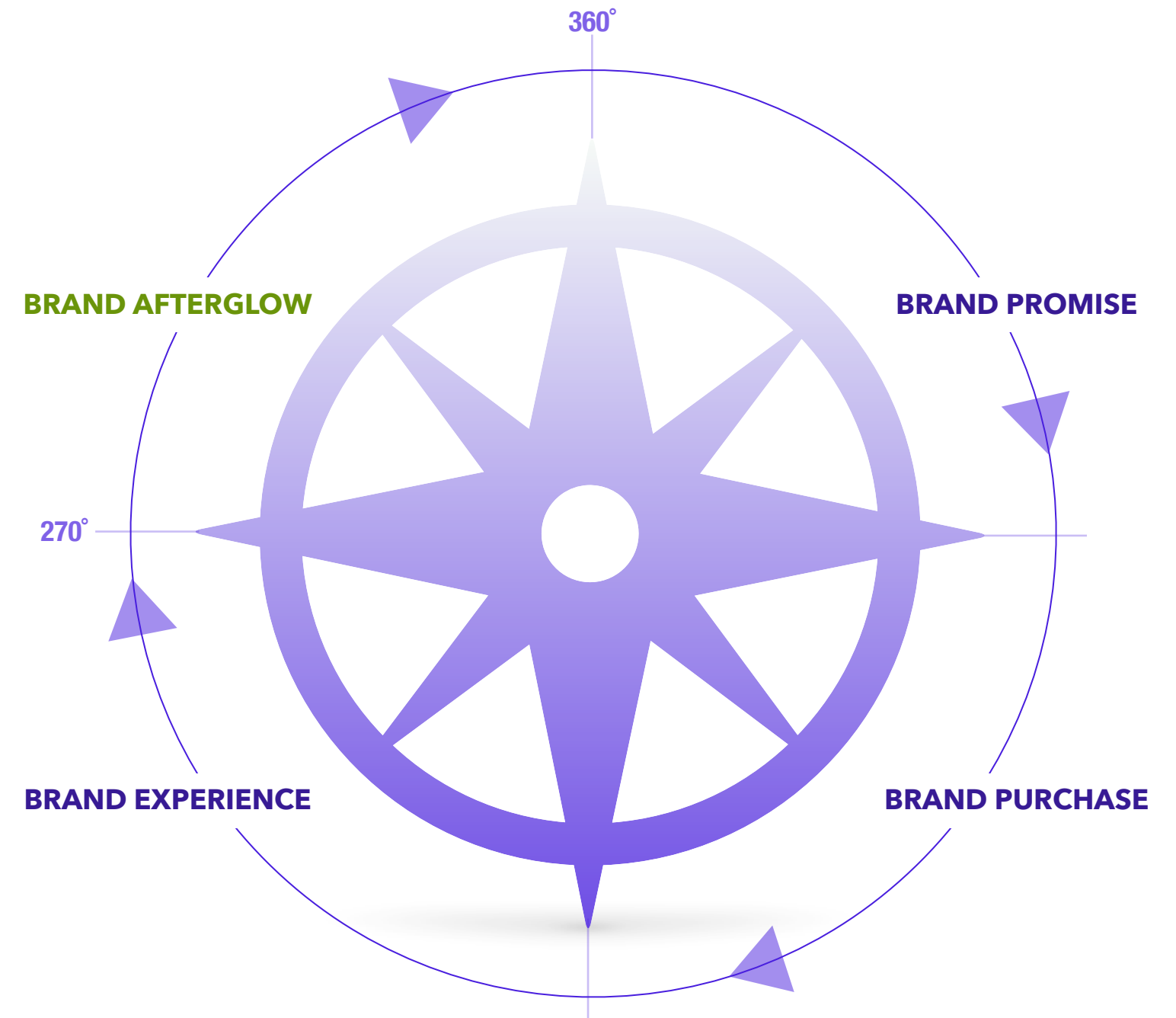
Stage 4: 270°-360° Brand Afterglow

Afterglow refers to the 'mood music' around a brand. This manifests itself in many forms: reviews, PR (Press), online reviews, blogposts, social media commentary and of course, word-of-mouth recommendation. It is a vital component of a brand's market presence and needs monitoring and managing.

As a brand owner, you can never control the afterglow but you can **influence** it and try to manage it.

Positive Brand Afterglow is powerful stuff for brands. It reinforces and may even enhance your Brand Promise and all other connection points with your products and services. Small businesses with small marketing budgets can benefit hugely from this power and can keep winning new and repeat business through 'Afterglow'.

You do not want to try and control commentary and recommendation. Any intimation that a brand is wilfully trying to manipulate the free opinion of customers and commentators is a complete no-no. Active monitoring of what people are posting about you is imperative. Of course, customer reviews can be a double-edged sword. The Brand Afterglow for many businesses, especially smaller ones, may be their most influential form of promotion. However, when things go wrong you have to act. The warm glow may turn into a nasty burn.



Brand Afterglow: Warming glow or nasty burn?

Human beings love drama, controversy, even conflict. Popular journalism feeds off it and negative afterglow can literally burn your reputation, killing your brand.

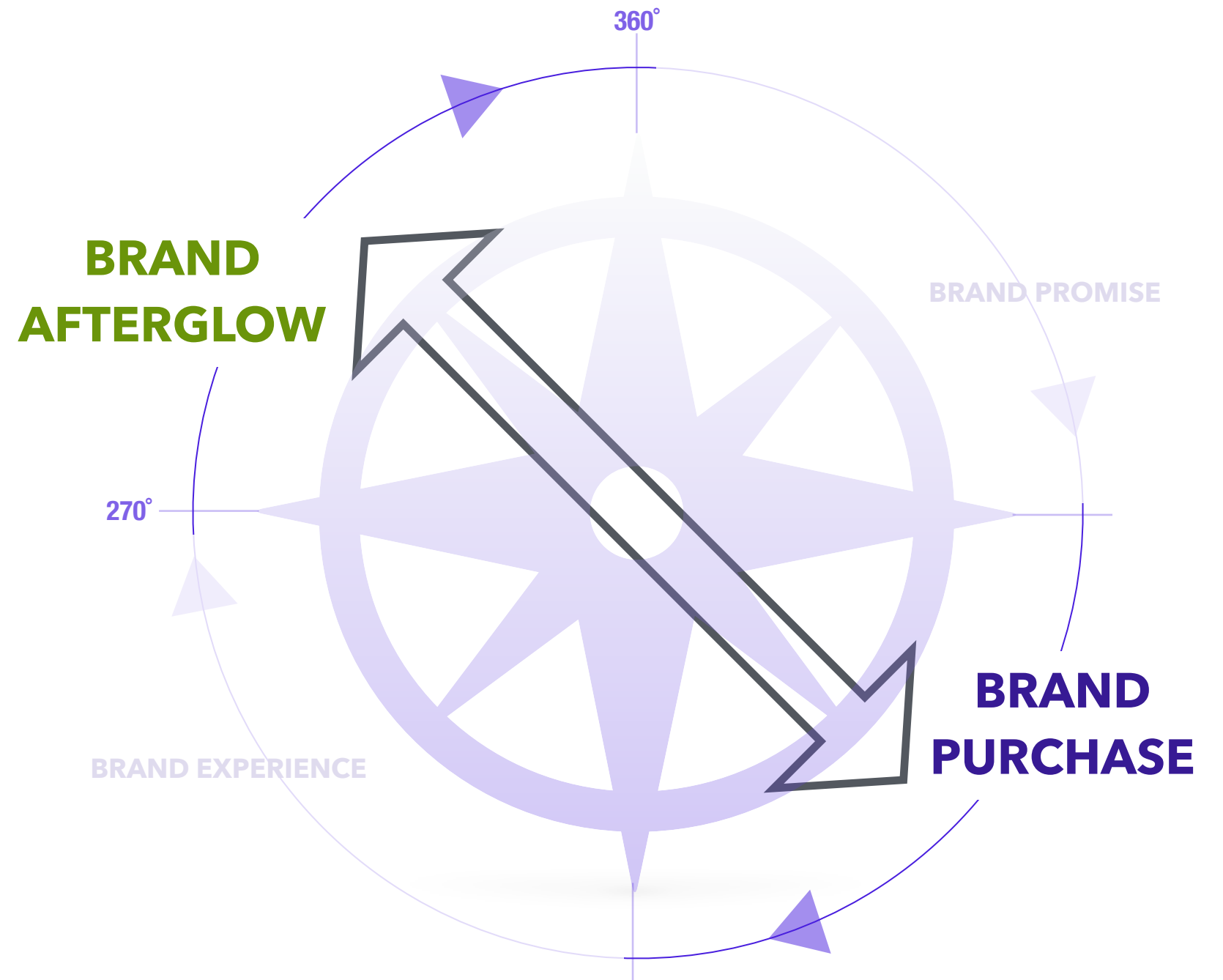
The brand owner will do well to nurture a relationship with brand advocates, reinforcing endorsements and evidencing recommendations as a buffer against erroneous or ill-informed afterglow.

When negative afterglow flares up, and it will, there is only one course of action available to the brand owner:

- Be honest
- Be transparent
- Respond respectfully, quickly and positively.

Most situations can be turned-around. Think of the many times we have all re-told a woeful experience of poor service or failed products. We share these tales with friends, family and colleagues. We also remember when the vendor steps in and sorts it out, exceeding our expectations with a full refund or response that nullifies the discontent. Negativity turns to positivity. Moreover, it becomes a 'narrative', something that is memorable.

As there is an axis between 'Promise' and 'Experience', so there is an axis between 'Purchase' and 'Afterglow'. It is fair to say a very large % of purchases (B2C and B2B) are made after reading product, service and brand reviews or other forms of afterglow. It influences purchasing behaviours.



'Social Proof' comes in many forms

Customer reviews are a crucial part of the consumer landscape. We all are influenced by them, use them and refer to them. They will inevitably play a part in shaping your brand reputation whether you like it or not

We can now share these stories globally and potentially to millions through social reviewing.

Psychologically, in reading such reviews, we are simply seeking reassurance in advance of spending our money and making a purchase decision. Sometimes referred to as the 'wisdom of the crowd', we feel more confident when others (and preferably many others) reinforce positive feedback on a specific product or service or brand.

Another psychological phenomenon is the 'fear of missing out' or 'FOMO'. This is a powerful influencer in terms of brand choice. If we see many people opting for a particular brand, then we may feel compelled to join in. Celebrity 'social influencers' can hold the key to unlocking extraordinary upturns in sales through their power over fans and followers.

Success can also be achieved through 'micro-influencers': by providing free products to active social media users in exchange for social posts.

Friends, family, colleague word-of mouth recommendation

User testimonials you post or publish

High scoring or ranking customer reviews

Positive, upbeat 3rd party posts

Positive press coverage

Number of shares

Celebrity endorsement

Authority/Expert endorsement



Reviews: Expected and ubiquitous

'Social Review' platforms are a complete category and phenomenon in their own right. They exist in many market categories. Trustpilot is well-established, well-respected and freely available. It enables us to assess many thousands of products and services across many categories.

The extraordinary rise of the 'aggregator' brands (e.g. Booking.com; Just Eat; Uber) in the last 10 years have not only disrupted and empowered many businesses but firmly established the 'customer review'. Every aggregator brand features accumulated reviews.

The verbatim reportage of the customer is trusted as the authentic voice of customer experience. If your business operates through an aggregator then you cannot ignore this.



China Capital

Chinese • Thai

★★★★★☆ [View 2546 reviews](#)

24 Ashton Road, Bristol, BS3 2EA

Delivering now	<u>I want to collect</u>
£2.50 delivery fee	£10 min. order



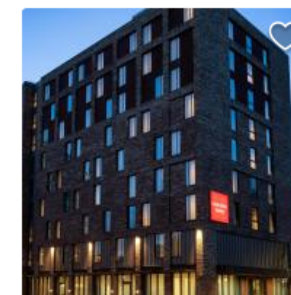
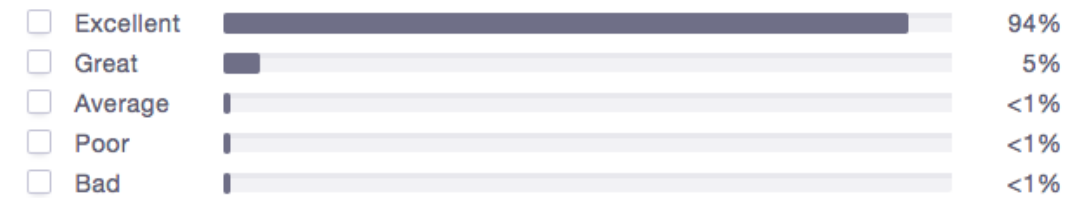
Be heard

Trustpilot is free and open to every company and consumer everywhere. Sharing your experiences helps others make better choices and companies up their game.

[What we do](#)

Reviews **4,489**

Filter by: [Rating](#) [English](#)



Leonardo Hotel Bristol Glassfields ★★★★★

Old Market, Bristol • [Show on map](#) • 0.5 miles from centre

Fabulous **8.8**
1,337 reviews

Double or Twin Room
2 beds (1 single, 1 double)

2 nights, 2 adults

£254

FREE cancellation • No prepayment needed
You can cancel later, so lock in this great price today.

Includes taxes and charges

[See availability](#)

Brand Compass as a Whole: Summary



A brand is the outcome of the many touchpoints across the Brand Compass which create a collectively acknowledged reputation. It is what people say to themselves and to others about a brand which builds a brand's meaning.

Although the Brand Compass suggests a linear, anti-clockwise customer journey from 'Brand Promise' to 'Brand Afterglow', people will encounter your brand (and its meaning) at any point. For example, their first exposure to your brand may be via a social review on Trustpilot.

Consequently, the brand owner has to address and commit to the whole cycle as illustrated in the Brand Compass schematic (see left). Weakness or neglect in certain areas will undermine the goal of creating a truly strong brand.

Strong brands emerge when a Brand Promise is:

- Clear and compelling
- Met or exceeded in the Brand Experience
- Reflected and reinforced during the 'Purchase' phase, the ownership 'Experience' and in the commentary or 'Afterglow' generated.

Brand Compass as a Whole: Summary cont...



The job of the brand owner(s) is to control and influence the many touchpoints an audience has with the brand throughout a customer journey.

For most organisations it is probably true that:

- You Control = BRAND PROMISE & BRAND EXPERIENCE
- You Influence = BRAND PURCHASE & BRAND AFTERGLOW

Examination of, and reflection on, any truly strong brand demonstrates that it excels in areas around the Brand Compass which are important for its audience. Many of the brands I feature in this Guide, in my blogs and in the 'Brands Distilled Gallery' exemplify this point.

This is not the same thing as being excellent in *all* areas or stages of the customer journey. The job to be done is to understand and deliver a Brand Promise that really resonates and matters to the target audience. This Brand Promise is brought to life through **Brand Connection Points** throughout the stages of the customer journey.

Chapter 3 explores what I mean by Brand Connection Points and outlines the process and methods to help you find them.

Chapter 3 Value Creation Points

Commentators and writers on the subject of branding and communications often refer to 'emotional connection' or 'emotional drivers'. This is commonly set alongside or in opposition to 'logical connection' or 'logical drivers'. A 3-dimensional brand relationship, built from direct experience (Brand Experience), 3rd party commentary (Brand Afterglow) and the promises made by the brand owner (Brand Promise) will almost invariably have a blend of emotional and rational connection points or drivers.

So far, I have referred to 'moments of truth' and 'brand touch points'. All of these references denote the memorable, brand-related moments which the buyer (or prospect) will recall and add to their mental stock of associations relating to the brand in question.

Emotional vs Rational

These are useful labels and commonly help us distinguish between different kinds of messaging i.e. communications that pull at our heartstrings vs communications that appeal to our rational, logical or reasoning mind.

Received wisdom in the world of marketing elevates emotionally charged drivers or messages as being more impactful and more successful. My own view is that rational and emotional drivers can operate simultaneously alongside one another, and that strong brands can benefit from both. I try and bring this to life in my reflections on my own computer (*'The proof is in the (Apple) pudding'*) on the next page.

The science behind our emotional responses

In terms of emotions, we experience and remember things vividly when something resonates strongly with our values system, either positively or negatively, and we experience an emotional reaction (e.g. joy or sadness; feelings of self-worth; sympathy or empathy).

These responses are associated with our endocrine system which releases chemicals and activates neuro-receptors which in turn induce mood / emotional and physiological responses.

Excitement - adrenalin
Self-worth - serotonin
Empathy, love - oxytocin
Need, craving - dopamine

The key for brand owners is to find ways of recognising and providing emotional and / or rational connection points.. The Brand Compass model consolidates these emotional and rational connection points as Brand Connection Points (BCPs).

Brand Connection: Reason and emotion

The proof is in the (Apple) pudding



I am writing this guide on my 10 year old iMac computer which I love.

- It's still cool in my eyes - crisp design, graphics, look and feel
- It helps me achieve things I have never been able to in the past such as high quality video and music production with Apple apps
- It has been 100% reliable from the day I took it out of the box

If asked to explain my loyalty to the Apple brand, these are the points I would make and the *Afterglow* I would share.

I am conscious that my loyalty to Apple is based on a blend of rational and emotional factors. The fact that my iMac has been 100% reliable is factual, but it is equally "emotional" inasmuch as I have belief and faith in the brand that created it. No-one I know who uses PCs seems to experience trouble-free computer ownership like I do. I have *feelings* towards Apple that simply do not exist towards PCs and Microsoft.

Knowing the frustration, annoyance and expense Apple is saving me, over the lifetime of ownership, is a powerful sensation. It is not a dry, logical thought. Reason and emotion both play their parts in my connection with the Apple brand.

When my computer eventually dies or can no longer support security updates I will, without hesitation, replace it with another new iMac.

Using Brand Compass: Where brand and operational reality link up

The job of the Brand Compass is to guide the brand owner to a clear understanding of those factors which, in a competitive marketplace, will be to the best advantage of vendor and customer.

Value Creation Points (VCPs) are factors that bring the Brand Promise to life and stimulate a memorable, relatable response. They are the source of 'strong brand status' and the path to higher profits and sustainable income.

This is where the Brand Compass becomes a strategic business planning tool. It connects what customers want from you to the operational reality of the business. When you know what your customers want from you, then you can focus your operational efforts to deliver on precisely that.

When this connection is made, your business lives and breathes the brand as the many activities and operations that make up a company can be linked to the delivery of the Value Creation Points. In other words, you create an indelible link between what your business *does* and your Brand Promise.



The Brand Burger

To help us understand this view of 'brand' as a force that simultaneously reaches deep into an organisation and resonates out in the marketplace, think of a business as a burger. The top half of the burger bun represents the marketplace (prospects, customers, external stakeholders). The bottom half of the burger is the business itself: The people, the machines, the operations, the processes...all the 'moving parts' if you like.

The burger sits in the middle and connects the two halves together. This is like our concept of 'brand'. It is the bit that has nutrition and flavour, is inspiring and sets the mouth watering.

Those factors or elements ('ingredients') that give YOUR burger the competitive edge are what we call Value Creation Points (VCPs). Their flavour seeps deeply into the bottom half of the burger (into all the moving parts of a business).

The glorious aroma emanating from the burger infuses the top half of the burger (attracting and converting audiences into happy customers).



The Brand Burger and VCPs

This chapter is a guide on how to understand and identify 'Customer VCPs':
Customer Value Connection Points.

I used to refer to these as 'Brand Connection Points' or 'Emotional Connection Points' but it makes more sense to use the word 'Value' because these are important factors which create commercial value for a business.

Re-orienting a business to think about and deliver authentic VCPs may or may not require investment. It may be just a change of focus or it may require more significant changes in behaviours and operations. Either way, it makes sense to measure, monitor and track the numbers as change begins.

The main reason that 'brand' is NOT understood or even taken seriously is that it is not typically measured. This is because it is not easy to measure.

A deeper analysis of the numbers behind the business, particularly in relation to VCPs, will start the process of making brand investment accountable. Re-prioritised expenditure and de-investment in activities that have no brand-building outcomes starts the process.

This activity can include forecasting, forensic analysis to identify savings, reduce costs, even find 'hidden money'.

The next edition of Brand Compass will explore this further.

Customer Value Connection Points.

Know your customers



Company Value Connection Points.

Know your numbers

Using Brand Compass: Plotting Value Creation Points (VCPs)



Brand owners need to think:

For your brand, where and what are:

- The **brand-defining 'moments of truth'** that will build emotional and rational connections between you and your customer?
- The factors that will be **sources of brand power** and the **focal point for activity, energy and investment?**

The following pages will help to answer these questions.

Identifying and Plotting Customer VCPs (Value Creation Points)

Plotting VCPs

The customer VCPs of your organisation may be clustered in one of the Brand Compass quadrants, or they may be scattered across different stages of the customer journey.

The first challenge is to identify your VCPs, and it can be challenging to be objective and clear-headed about these.

It is highly likely you and your colleagues will have strong opinions about what and where your VCPs are. If there is clear data or good research to back this up, then all well and good. If there is not, I strongly recommend using some independent research to help you identify and clarify your BCPs.

In my professional experience, the ability of incisive qualitative research to uncover and pinpoint BCPs has been proven time and time again. It will definitely save you time and money in the long run.

Identifying VCPs

There are 3 levels of VCPs:

- 1 Category VCPs
- 2 Brand specific VCPs
- 3 Priority VCPs

1. Category VCPs

Category generic VCPs are the 'table stakes' or 'hygiene factors'. These are minimum thresholds of performance, features and benefits that are required in the markets in which you operate. They are only Brand Connection Points inasmuch as, if they were missing, they would definitely generate a reaction, most likely negative. For example, to launch a new car model without air conditioning or SatNav would fail to meet most buyers expectations of 'standard equipment'.

The process of researching and evaluating the category will also be a helpful benchmark in understanding the competitive landscape and relative brand positioning of the players in your territory. It is also the place to identify your competitor's VCPs

At a 'features and benefits' level of analysis, this can be successfully completed as a desk-based research project in most cases. It may also be helpful to do some 'mystery shopping' if your products/services are more easily assessed/accessed at point of purchase.

Bearing in mind a brand's appeal may be operating at 'Level 3' (see 'Deep Structure of a Brand Promise') and have nothing to do with product features or benefits, it may be necessary to work with marketing specialists who are skilled at identifying the more subtle or less obvious brand meanings and associations.

Identifying and Plotting Value Creation Points cont...

2. Brand-Specific VCPs

These are the factors you are confident are unique to your brand or you know resonate positively with your audiences. Replicate the same audit and analysis for your competitors and use this process to identify 'brand-destroyers'. I once heard a Marketing Director refer to these factors as '*the pointy bits*'...which I like as a description! Brand-specific VCPs must 'stand out'. They may be factors that are regularly commented on or are patently superior in some way to competitor offerings. To help you identify them, ask yourselves the following questions:

- Where do we compete well? (Do we know? Do we know enough?)
- Where do we not compete well? (Do we know? Do we know enough?)
- In which areas do we want to compete?
- What are we *known* for? What are we *loved* for?
- What are background nuances, semantics, cultural factors that resonate around our brand, our products and our category?
- What do we want to be known for to give us the best opportunities to attract the target audience and to deliver the business plan?

As mentioned, good qualitative research may be a vital contributor here. Done well, it will decipher the semantics of your category and be able to test and pinpoint the things that really matter and resonate with your audience. It will also provide an objective, external voice. Customers or prospects have an uncanny ability to cut to the chase and 'tell it how it is'.

3. Priority VCPs

These are the factors you and your team agree to take forward. Inspired by the processes outlined in stages 1 and 2, these BCPs will be brand-defining. There may be only one, or they may be peppered across the Brand Compass.

They may be factors you already own and have simply not understood or identified as Priority VCPs. This situation is illustrated in the case study relating to Esit/ThankQ, '*Unearthing precious treasure*' (Page 15). They may be VCPs that you currently do not have but have agreed are needed to build up a stronger brand. This will guide your innovation and NPD programmes.

Strong, world-class brands push hard to realise their Priority VCPs. Often, the founding principle of a business is their VCP. First Direct is a very good example of this with its unwavering commitment to remote banking and excellent people-led customer service.

Businesses that stick to their founding Brand Promise and deliver their Brand Connection Point(s) in service of this Promise, intelligently evolving and adapting through time are typically the brands that we know as strong brands. There are many examples where strong brands forget their VCPs, usually due to changes of ownership. Very rapidly, they lose the brand connection with their audience. Waterstones is a good example of a brand that forgot and then re-found its brand connection points, resurrecting itself, reasserting its brand strength and commercial success. See the case study on page 25.

Identifying and Plotting Value Creation Points: Process Summary

Do not underestimate the process

Identifying your specific VCPs will form the foundation of your brand strategy. It will:

- Inform your Brand Promise
- Guide how you allocate future budgets
- Focus the efforts of management and staff
- Provide direction for training and recruitment
- Help define your communications.

It will be your *compass*

There is no App or quick-fix solution to give you the answers here. Having said that, the process can usually be achieved in weeks.

STAGE 1

Category VCPs

The minimum thresholds to gain entry into the market in which you operate. The 'hygiene factors'

Use: Internal task force; Desk research; Mystery shop

STAGE 2

Your brand-specific VCPs

Identifiable factors in your whole brand offer that give you market stand-out

Use: Internal task force; Expert, external input; Primary research

STAGE 3

Your priority VCPs

The strongest factors from stage 2 (plus potential new factors factors) that will be YOUR sources of competitive advantage

Use: Internal task force; Expert, external input; Primary research

Next step? Plot onto the Brand Compass

VCP Case Studies

BCPs brought to life

The following two case studies feature BCPs plotted across the Brand Compass. It is likely any Priority BCP will need to harness the passion, skills and energy of people from different parts of the business.

They need to:

- understand them
- recognise them as being key to business and brand success
- embrace their role and responsibilities in this mission

VCPs: Case study 1

Orange: A fully-formed Brand Promise from birth

Background

I had the good fortune to be on the small marketing team that created and launched the Orange brand in the mid-90s. Marketing director Chris Moss had the foresight to push hard for a brand that would resonate strongly with the target audience and not only shake up the mobile telecoms market, but the marketing industry also. He and the people working with him broke the rules of the category and in the process made up some new brand rules.

Category VCPs

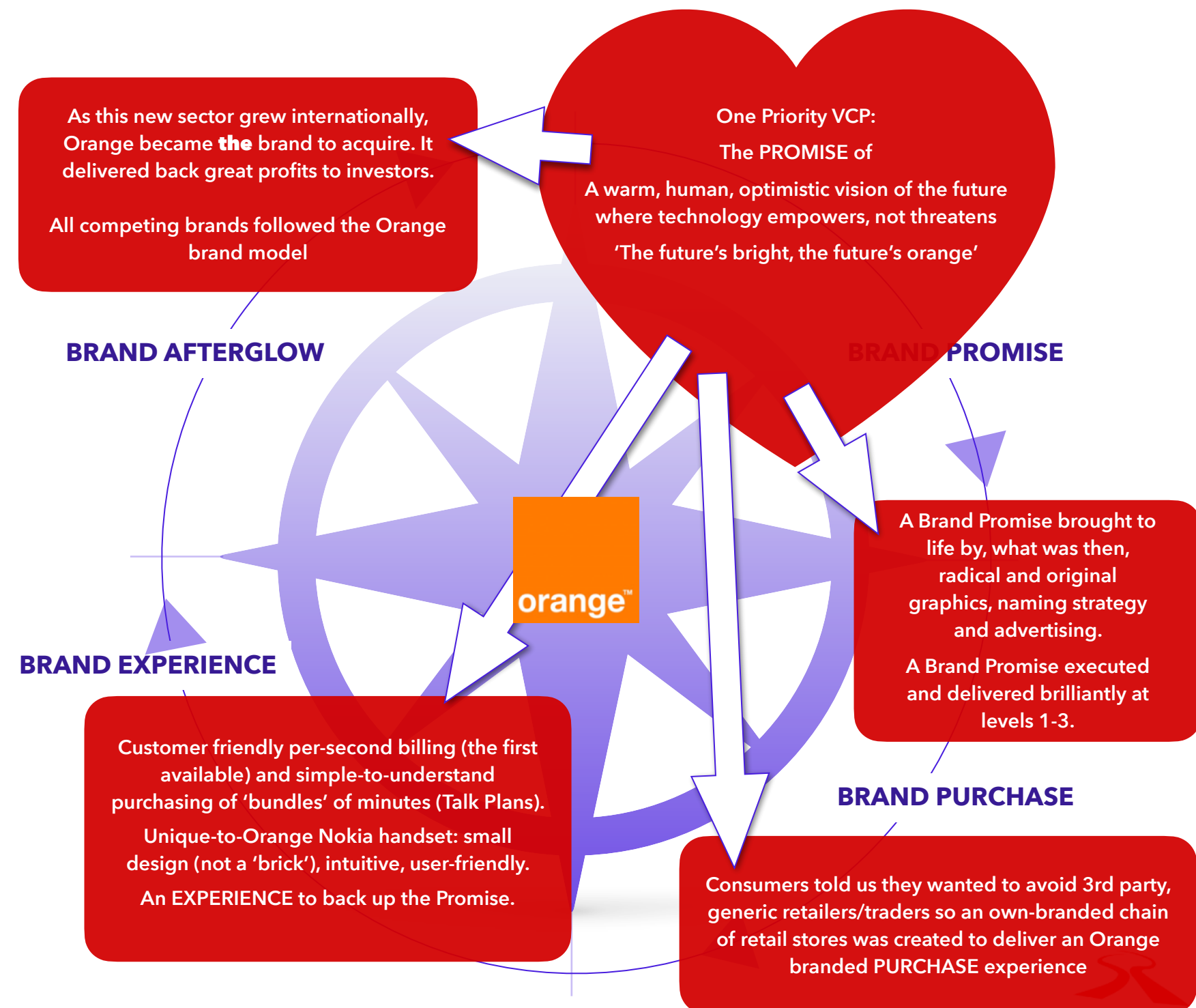
- Usage of mobile phones limited to business people/rich people
- User image tarnished (brash, salespeople, loud-mouths, city traders etc.)
- Expensive, out of reach
- Uncertain perception of 'need' ("I might keep one in the glovebox")
- Technology - threatening, complex and confusing at that time

The Business and Brand Challenge

- Overcome the category challenges as outlined above
- Create a completely new, mass consumer market for mobile phones
- Build a significant consumer user-base deliver shareholder/investor profit

The Approach

Management listened to the market through research, acknowledged and understood the challenges and set about building a Brand Promise to overcome these significant obstacles.



BCPs: Case study 2

Monkton Combe: Bringing the EXPERIENCE to life

Background

In 2012 I was asked to review the branding for a small, very old, independent school tucked away in a valley near Bath.

Category VCPs

- Private or independent schools consistently claim to offer the same benefits to prospective parents and pupils: a great, high-quality education, smaller class sizes, excellent sport and cultural activities and facilities). In short, they all sound similar

The Business and Brand Challenge

- To differentiate and distinguish this school that did not have the same level of extrinsic strengths such as name/reputation or visibly impressive assets (i.e. buildings, grounds etc.) as other schools

The Approach and the Insights

I spent two weeks observing the school, interviewing staff, parents and pupils. The school has an extraordinary culture unique to itself and a sense of belonging and community I had never imagined possible. This translated into a very special daily school experience for pupils, and a level of enthusiasm from the pupils for the school that set it apart. In addition, there was a culture in the school that put great store on developing 'character' (resilience, self-esteem, humility etc.).



Chapter 4 Strong Brands Distilled

In as few words and images as is possible, the following gallery attempts to distil the essence of how these strong brands connect with their audience and the 'meaning' they have for their customers. Each featured brand section ends with a summarised backstory to provide context.



Helps people like this...



Feel more like this...





- Completely dominant 40% market share in its home market (US)
- Unparalleled customer loyalty
- Despite underperforming in all established measures of motorcycle performance (speed, handling, comfort), their products command a significant price premium
- Technology upgrades typically happen years after other brands
- Styling has not changed much in its 118 year history
- The Harley-Davidson brand promise overrides any reasonable or logical analysis. It offers a timeless style, sound and association with freedom, lawlessness, rebelliousness. The Brand Promise and the Brand Experience seem to outweigh any poor Afterglow.

Harley Davidson enjoys powerful brand connection with a Brand Promise that resonates strongly at LEVEL 3 (see page 12)

This brand promises everyone



...a little bit of this





- x3 the price of quality alternatives
- Afterglow on social reviews by professional painters and decorators suggests this paint requires time and effort to apply successfully
- Many commentators suggest it is not durable - will scuff and and mark
- But F&B promises *class*
- The connection with social class is not flummery. An old paint company which previously supplied industrial paints to Ford cars and Raleigh cycles was acquired in the 1990s by a city banker and an expert interior design advisor to the National Trust
- Re-launched and re-positioned upmarket, it became the watchword for tasteful colours and interior design
- In 2014 F&B was floated and sold for £275m. In 2021 F&B was sold again for £500m



Delivers a great night's sleep (...and peace of mind)





- Every room in a Premier Inn features a luxury, kingsize Hypnos bed
- The promise of a “good night’s sleep” is backed up with this single-minded, concrete Brand Promise
- Guests can not only look forward to a good night’s sleep, they can book with confidence (‘Rest easy’). You can even buy a Hypnos bed direct from the Premier Inn website!
- In a competitive and crowded market of city centre, budget hotels for short-stays, this brand really stands out
- Between 2011 and 2021, Premier Inn has increased its share of hotel rooms from 6% to 11%, which roughly equates to the longevity of this brand promise (Source: Statista)
- Premier Inn has the highest awareness ratings of any hotel in the UK and the highest ‘popularity’ rating by far: 70% vs. nearest rival Travelodge - 52% (Source: YouGov)
- Backed-up with a long-standing advertising campaign featuring Lenny Henry, this brand delivers a confident Brand Promise and delivers a Brand Experience that lives up to the promise.

This brand...



...taught this brand



...that innovation wins





- The brand simultaneously comprises the personality of a man, hugely distinctive products, a global commercial success, an inspiring story of determination and, of course, a household and now commercial appliance brand (notably with hand dryers)
- The genius of Dyson is the way the logical and the emotional propositions lead in equal measure as the underpinnings for this strong brand
- The bagless vacuum/no loss of suction message (logic-driver, functional superiority) is foregrounded not just in messaging, but overtly in the product itself (the clear bin, present on all cleaning models, showing the dust collected)
- This 'better by design' theme is all-pervasive in the visual brand both in corporate identity (graphic) terms and in all aspects of product design. The oft-quoted herculean efforts of the dogged entrepreneurial founder undergoing numerous trials and rejections also provides a compelling backstory
- This all adds up to changing the the entire household status of the vacuum cleaner. Suddenly, with Dyson, the humble vacuum cleaner became a desirable object. Indeed, an aspirational object perhaps to be kept on show rather than hidden in the under-stairs cupboard (emotional-driver)
- Powerful societal and psychological mores relating to dirt and cleanliness may also have a part to play. Putting up with an impotent old Hoover may reflect poorly on the values and status of the proud homeowner (L3 Brand Promise)
- In a very short time, Dyson cleaned up the vacuum market, taking dominant market share within 10 years of launch (now 50% in the UK)

Final Thoughts

I hope this guide has been a stimulating and thought-provoking read. Perhaps the idea that your business could be brand-led is now a more meaningful idea.

Strong brands are not built using an off-the-shelf formula. Likewise, there is no clever app out there to do the job for you! However, my intention in this guide is to illustrate there are clear patterns and reasons behind the creation and building of strong brands.

The commitment to a central resonating idea or *Promise* is paramount. Without the commitment to deliver on this Promise, the full scope of commercial success your business may be capable of will not be realised. The examples used in this guide I hope bring this point to life.

This level of commitment requires strong management. In my experience and in the brand examples I use, it tends to be the founders, MDs or CEOs who hold firm to their founding Promise and see them through, inspiring those around them and turning employees and staff into brand owners.

I refer to Orange in this guide because it is a remarkable case history and an instructive one. The passion and belief in bringing 'wire-free' communications to all was a vision held by all those who worked on setting up the company and the brand. From the clever engineers and IT people, to the receptionists to the marketing team and their agencies, it was a unified team. In a very short period, this focused energy created a market-beating mass-market brand.

The founding values and principles started to dissipate as the name was bought and sold across different European markets. It culminated in France Telecom taking the name Orange and its visual identity and completely rebranding itself. On a commercial level the the power of the founding brand vision has been a huge success. The brand still operates in numerous countries, although whether it has retained the original vision and values is questionable.

On a much smaller scale, a similar fate was in store for ThankQ, a small business with a market-leading product and service approach.

This is in contrast to brands who have remained true to their founding Brand Promise, adapting and evolving appropriately with changing times and market pressures and yet losing nothing of the strength of their brands, which continue to resonate. First Direct, Farrow & Ball, Premier Inn, Dyson and Apple are all great examples.

Perhaps even more so is the story of Waterstones bookstores which lost its way and, under the passionate leadership of new management, then resurrected its founding vision and re-found success in what seemed to be a marketplace in terminal decline.

I wish you well with your own brand-building endeavours and I hope Brand Compass can help steer you to success.

About the Author

Stewart Redpath graduated in 1988 with a degree in English and Linguistics. After a year playing guitar in a band, he then completed a post-graduate degree in Marketing Management.

Specialising in market research, he was in the right place at the right time to get taken on as Research Manager in the small marketing team that created and launched Orange (Telecoms). This was the learning ground that triggered the interest and passion in brands and brand strategy. After 5 years he joined the client team that brought together Lloyds Bank and TSB.

Following nearly 10 years in the Lloyds Banking Group (then Lloyds TSB) in research and brand management roles, he became a freelance consultant. Since 2006 he has worked with a broad variety of businesses and organisations, helping them through brand and marketing transformations.

These years have refined the thinking and processes that have led to Brand Compass.

Alongside his brand assignments, Stewart has been nurturing his own brand 'MindHarp'.



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Brand Compass

Clear direction for building strong brands

A guide for brand owners.

A de-mystification of what 'brand' really means.

Brand direction for long-term commercial success.

