

Brand Strategy Is Dead. Long Live Brand Experience Strategy.



Remember the days when you were the one who decided what your brand represented?

You developed products and services. You told prospects how great their lives would be if they bought these things from you. Some of them believed you and became customers. Others kept you in mind for next time.

It was all so simple. You had total control over your message, and it was up to your audience to accept or reject it.

Times have changed.

You're no longer the one who completely controls your brand proposition.

Your audience is doing much of it for you. They now formulate their impression of your business based on the experiences they actually have with your brand - and across more channels than we can all count.

Think of all the different ways customers interact with your business when they're researching products and services: Print. Web. Social. Email. Search.

And now think beyond marketing: Retail. eCommerce. Customer support. Billing. The call center. Each experience a customer has with you contributes to their overall brand impression. The sum of all these moments of experiences becomes your brand. They add up to tell your brand story—the real story.

It's not always fair. But it's reality. And for CMOs, the current reality requires a shift in mindset—and toolsets.

It's no longer enough to craft a good message and distribute it through our various marketing channels. Every interaction customers have with your company becomes a part of your brand—from initial inquiry to post-purchase support calls and beyond.

If you're thinking, "Yeah, I know—I have the biggest, broadest job and I don't even control the message or the resources!" you're right.

Now, broaden your view a bit more. What do you see? **Countless new competitors.**

You're already seeing your niche disrupted by a swarm of high-tech startups. They're slick. Dynamic. Fast-moving. Attention-grabbing. And they're bringing uncertainty and danger to your marketplace. Even worse, just the fact that they're shiny new objects attracts the attention of consumers who are loaded with choices and opinions.

The new players can grab mindshare just by not being you. And because they're brand new, startups have no prior mistakes to live down.

Of course, that's all a matter of perception. **But startups have many tangible advantages, too.**

While you and your peers were learning by managing your successful legacy organizations, the stubbly-bearded twentysomething brains behind these nimble startups had the freedom to learn by watching you and other highly successful brands. They took note of the challenges you were experiencing in the form of fragmented customer touchpoints, and they figured out that it's the overall customer experience—not just the well-worded brand statement—that really matters.



Now they're putting these lessons into practice in the form of better features, lower prices, and faster service. With no legacy processes to tear down and replace, they're designing and delivering a better, more integrated experience across key customer touchpoints—and they're doing it with surprising speed.

That's why you're fighting to maintain your margins and customer retention rates.

What's that you say? There are no startups in your industry?

It doesn't matter. Your customers are now inundated by offers from your secondary and tertiary competitors—offers that are setting the bar for what customers should expect from you. They all expect “consumer grade” experiences.

The pressure is on.

What's a CMO to do? Our advice is this:

Stop thinking in brand and messaging terms, and start thinking about customer experience. The customer experience is now your brand.

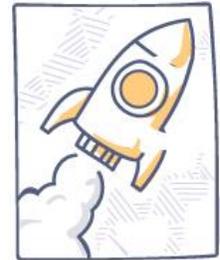
The collection of experience moments our prospects and customers have with us add up to the brand story they internalize and share with their friends, families and colleagues. At every customer or prospect touchpoint, you have a new opportunity to provide an outstanding brand experience. To make this happen, you'll need to think about each moment of engagement as an experience moment rather than a messaging moment. How did we make a person feel? What value did we provide in this moment of experience? And *how* did we do it? And you'll need to work more closely than ever with your fellow executives and colleagues from other departments.

Here are three steps for getting started:

1. **Shift your mindset.** Get your mind off your messaging and positioning framework and onto the collective customer experience you provide. It's not enough to decide what kind of company you want to be—you must resolve to make that vision come to life in the real world. Think, “What's my customer experience strategy at key moments of engagement? What do I want them to feel about us? To say about us?”



2. **Determine which specific customer experiences contribute most to your brand story.** What does the customer journey look like? Feel like? Taste like? How are your customers really experiencing your company right now? Remember that you're not just identifying the best of what you have to offer—you're also sniffing out the negative experiences your customers may be having. And you won't get honest, unbiased feedback from your own marketing team—you **have to ask your customers.** Are there specific sales events they look forward to each year? Are you frustrating them by blasting them email offers for services they already use? What could you do that would delight them when they least expect it?



3. **Prioritize your enhancement of these experiences.** In step 1, you thought about ways to make your brand vision come to life as real-life experiences for your customers. In step 2, you took the time to listen carefully and look for the differences between the story you're telling and the story customers are experiencing. Now you'll determine which are the most intense customer pain points, find your biggest opportunities to wow your audience, and put forward clear ROIs on how improving these key brand experience moments will drive sales and margin improvements.



The results of this type of exercise may surprise you. By performing an assessment of how people are experiencing you'll uncover interesting and exciting ways to inspire, connect and deeply engage your customers. You may discover that you can—and indeed, should—reduce your email communications by 50 percent. Or, you could decide that by emphasizing and charging a premium for one particular service, you can not only increase your profits, but also set your brand apart from all the competitors that don't offer it. You'll very likely identify many small things that add up to big impressions being made on the customer. And uncover new imaginative ideas to deliver very real value and earn their love.

Think of the implications here. Various functions within your company that traditionally haven't worked together could all soon be influenced and directed by the same brand focused leader: you. That makes this an exciting—if somewhat overwhelming—time to be a CMO.

How to Turn Great Brand Strategies into Great Brand Experiences

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So our advice is to stop focusing on brand strategy and positioning, and start focusing on designing positive brand experiences at every customer (or prospect) touchpoint.

This doesn't mean we'll throw traditional brand strategy out the window and focus solely on execution. But it does mean we need a different kind of strategy—one that enables and guides the process of identifying how we should behave and make people feel at key moments of engagement. **We call this Brand Experience Strategy.**



Brand Experience Strategy is the process of building a vision for a brand and then creating a set of specialized tools that allow the business to bring that vision to life through key moments of customer experience.

It doesn't just stop at brand values and emotional benefits—it translates your brand's promises into action. The tools you develop are also designed to help you reach far outside your marketing organization. They give you what you need to help your other business leaders understand their role in brand building and how you'll work together.

Suppose you've decided your brand is "daring." That's all well and good, but—what would a "daring" customer experience look like? Sound like? Feel like? Is your marketing staff prepared to write "daring" tweets and Facebook posts? Do your call center staff and retail personnel know how to be "daring" in conversations with customers—without coming off abrasive, insensitive, or even reckless?

You get the idea. Your individual employees and functional team leaders need to know how to make the everyday choices in your business that will produce the kind of customer experience you aspire to, at a level of quality that will enable you to stand out from your competition.

How?

To do brand experience strategy right, you need to be thinking about design while you develop your strategy:

- Because the experience is the brand, strategies to create effective brands require an innate understanding of the design of experiences.
- Strategy and design must be symbiotic, yielding an experience-based strategy to guide creation of compelling brand experiences in real time.
- Design thinking applied to business is powerful stuff.

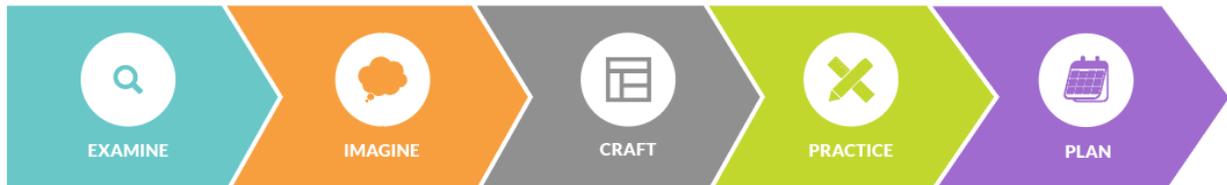


To that end, here's the new and improved brand experience strategy approach we use at Cibo:

First, we ground our insights and point of view in the realities of the customer's experience. We talk to actual customers to examine how well their needs are being met and learn how they feel about the interactions they've had with you. We form a comprehensive view of the brand experience across all channels and look for the most powerful touchpoints to impact the customer throughout the entire customer lifecycle.

Next, we explore what your culture and beliefs are made of and determine the implications for your customer experience. We analyze the marketplace of experiences for gaps that you can fill and build your brand story around.

We then begin to apply design thinking as we imagine a brand experience “moment map” that translates into an innovative—and powerfully differentiating—customer (or prospect) experience. We begin to envision future possibilities for your brand, such as how it might act and behave in offline and online spaces to best deliver on your promise. This “moment mapping” is when we help you envision your brand’s future and plan how you’ll engage customers in meaningful ways.



Having imagined the possibilities for your brand, we then do the meticulous work needed to craft the tools and guidelines you’ll need to practice your strategy. We define the motivating beliefs of your brand that will drive action and engagement. We write manifestos that will inspire both your internal teams and your customers. We define Experiential Tenets of your brand that will guide experience design across the customer lifecycle. And finally, the methodology delivers a plan for achieving your ambition. We build a roadmap to focus your priorities and guide the experience design work needed to bring your brand’s story to life through the experiences your customers and prospects will have with your company.



Established category leaders such as Tesla, Whole Foods, and Salesforce—as well as disrupters and upstarts such as Daqri, Anki, and Generation Tux—have all used this approach to become the leading brands they are today.

Let’s take a closer look at brand experience strategy at work through the story of Generation Tux. Its founder, George Zimmer, is both an established player as the founder of Men’s Wearhouse and an upstart as the founder of this highly anticipated online formal wear rental brand.

After leaving the company he founded and ran for more than 40 years, George decided he wanted to tackle the tuxedo rental business with a completely new and modern online offering. In other words, he wanted to disrupt the very establishment he had created. This involved creating a brand and a company from scratch—a task that came with the usual challenges, which were only amplified by George’s ambition to take a big bite out of the tuxedo rental market as quickly as possible.

George Zimmer on Generation Tux and being customer-centered:

George understood viscerally the key notion that the experience is the brand. Like all great brand builders, he used his obsession with customers to guide the design and buildup of his previous company over more than 30 years. Now, with the launch of Generation Tux, he knew that it's how customers feel about a company that establishes its brand story. Generation Tux would deliver its brand promise through customer experience.

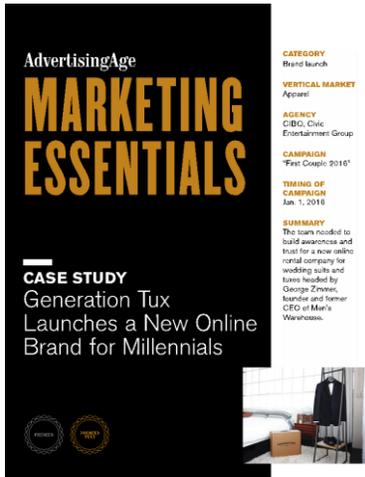
Generation Tux has been a hugely successful endeavor—a brand and business designed and successfully launched at scale in less than 30 months.



Generation Tux managed to achieve the following results within the first nine months of operation:

- More than 500,000 visitors to the website.
- More than 10,000 events, or multi-party rental occasions, created by website visitors.
- Site conversion rates of more than four times the industry average.

Revenue and rentals far exceeded projections for the first year. And now, for the first time ever, a bride or groom can outfit their entire wedding party with a single online transaction.



George and Generation Tux were recently featured in AdvertisingAge. Check out the following link for an additional point of view on the success of this brand launch. [AdvertisingAge Case Study](#).

George Zimmer worked with Cibo to build a new brand fundamentally grounded in outstanding customer experience. In so doing, he disrupted the very industry he had helped build—and achieved results beyond even his own lofty expectations.

That's what Brand Experience Strategy success looks like. What could it look like for your business?

Let us rapidly evaluate your business with our Brand Experience Assessment or schedule a free 30-minute consultation to discuss your business needs with Cibo's Chief Experience Officer, Alder Yarrow. Contact us today. We look forward to hearing from you. Thanks again for your time.

GET IN TOUCH

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