



LIQUID STUDIO

7 BRAND QUESTIONS ALL STARTUPS NEED TO ANSWER

(If you want to deliver on your business goals).

**YOU CAN'T
HAVE ANSWERS
WITHOUT
QUESTIONS**



As a collection of fiercely creative people, our instinct is to dive in and start designing as soon as a branding brief comes through the door. We can't help ourselves!

Often we share this sense of impulsiveness with entrepreneurs, who are understandably keen to see their product or service brought to life as quickly as possible.

However, over the last 15 years we've learned (sometimes the hard way) that jumping straight to the design phase very rarely ends in success.

Getting design right is obviously crucial (we would say that, we're designers), but it's just one part of the brand jigsaw, the part that people can see. Real, authentic brand is about so much more than that. It's just as much about the part that people can feel; where it comes from, where it's going, why it exists, what its story is. This stuff matters deeply when a brand is trying to connect and engage with an audience, and ultimately it's they who will dictate whether a brand delivers on business goals.

Embarking on brand design without proper initial strategic thinking is like setting off on a journey without knowing where you're going. Ultimately, it will lead nowhere and potentially waste a lot of precious budget.

Startups often feel they can't afford to invest in strategy-led design. Our experience tells us they can't afford not to.

Whenever we kick off a project with early stage business owners, we start with a period of Discovery. We ask a heap of questions, and through answering them we tease out key insights that will help us create a brand that connects from launch and beyond.

This guide gives a little taste of some of those key questions and the reasons we ask them.

“Your brand
is the single
most important
investment you
can make in your
business.”

Steve Forbes
Editor-in-Chief of Forbes Magazine



**WHERE
ARE YOU
COMING
FROM?**



A strong, authentic brand always has a clear core vision, purpose and set of values. Customers won't invest in a brand that isn't sure about itself.

Before you can lead others, you need to have a crystal clear idea of who you are, where you've come from, where you're going, how you're going to get there and what impact you intend to have.

It's like putting a stake in the ground and holding up a compass towards the future.

A brand that aligns its mission and values with its customer engagement will be perceived as authentic and earn loyalty.

Consumers these days are too tuned-in to be fooled by branding as insincere window-dressing. If a promise isn't delivered on they won't come back for more or become your champions.

Great branding starts on the inside and works its way out. It starts with understanding what's special about your business, then elevating it into a story that will give your branding emotional resonance.

Taking this to its deepest level requires answering the trickiest question of all: What is the core reason your company exists (beyond making money). Why do you do what you do?

Clarifying this core purpose and consistently behaving in a way that embodies it can become a powerful driver in a brand's success.

“People don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it.”

Simon Sinek



**WHAT'S
YOUR
AUDIENCE'S
PROBLEM?**



Spoiler alert. A brand is not a logo, or a beautiful piece of packaging, or a set of guidelines, or some cool social posts.

A brand is a customer's gut instinct about what your company, product or service represents. It's a collection of perceptions, associations and memories. You can influence this reputation (through strategic branding and marketing), but you can't directly control it.

Given that customers dictate the perceived strength of a brand, it's no surprise that successful brands always put them at the very heart of their story.

Before you can create effective branding you need to get to know the people who are most likely to care about it. Those most likely to be first adopters, ambassadors and influencers.

Demographics are a logical (if limited) starting point, and you'll also learn a lot from identifying their attitudes and behaviours.

You need to know what they need. What is their problem that you are going to solve? What is missing from their lives?

On the surface there will be a functional problem that needs solving. But dig a little deeper and you'll uncover how these problems impact their emotions. How does it make them feel?

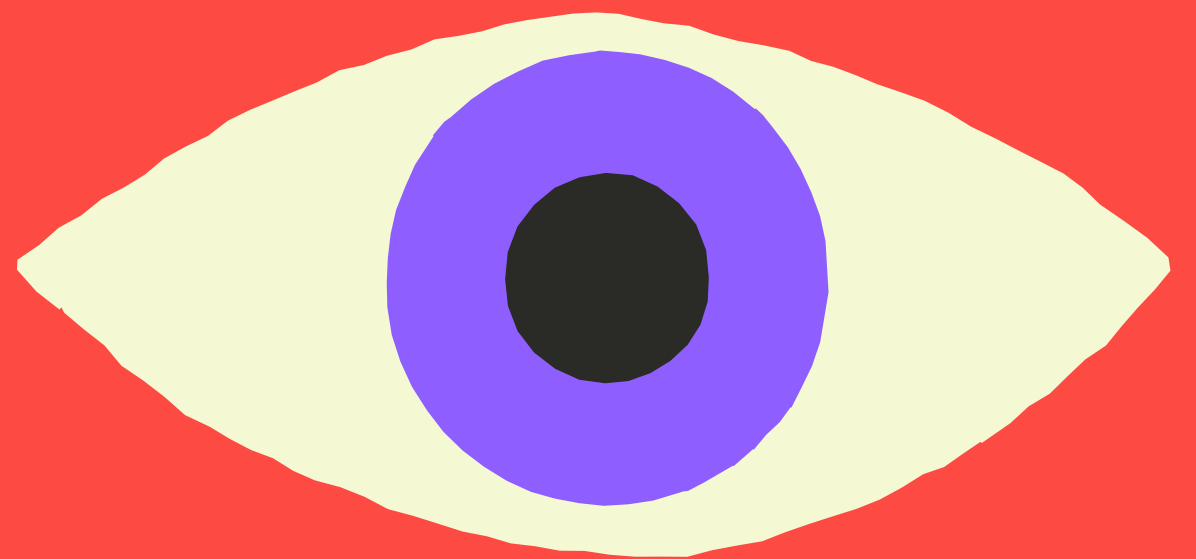
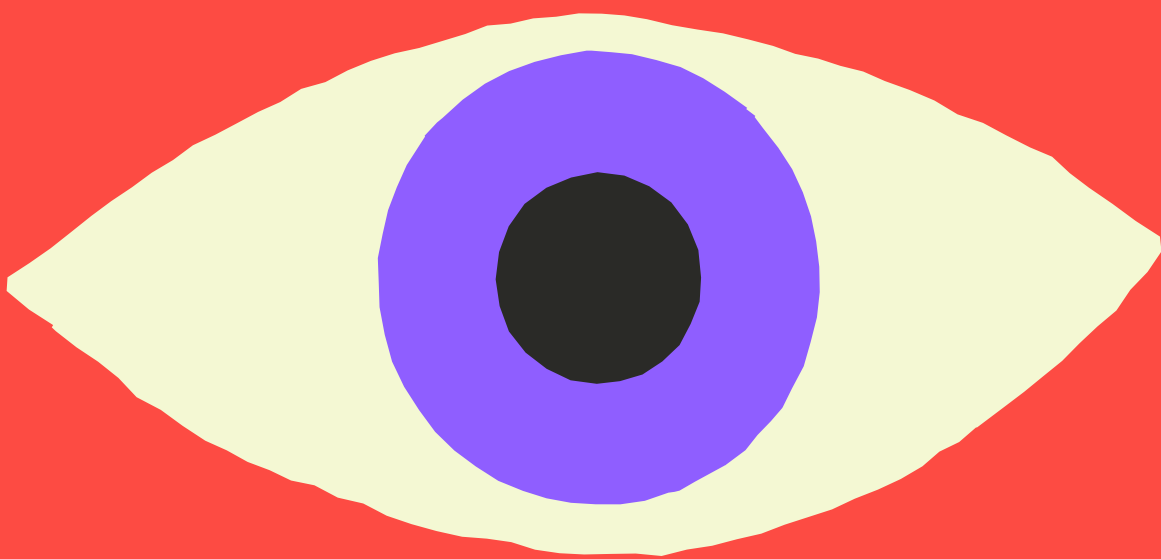
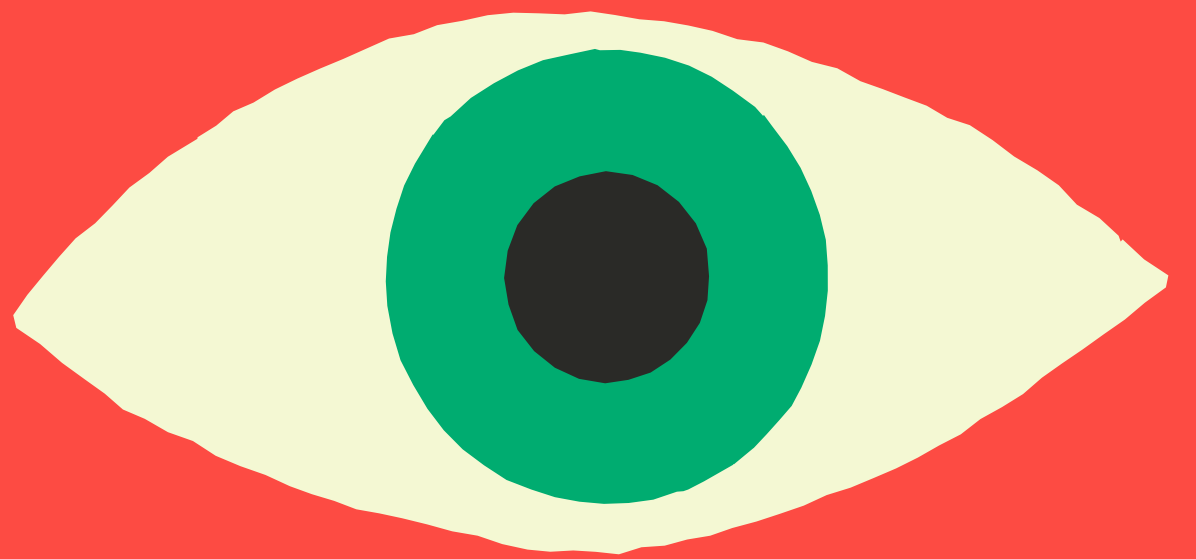
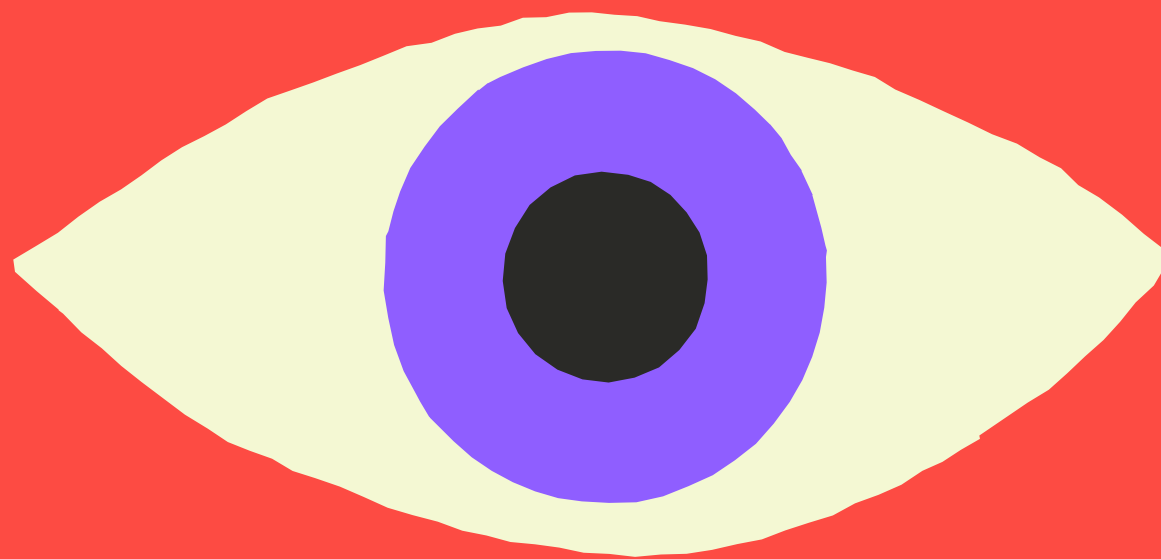
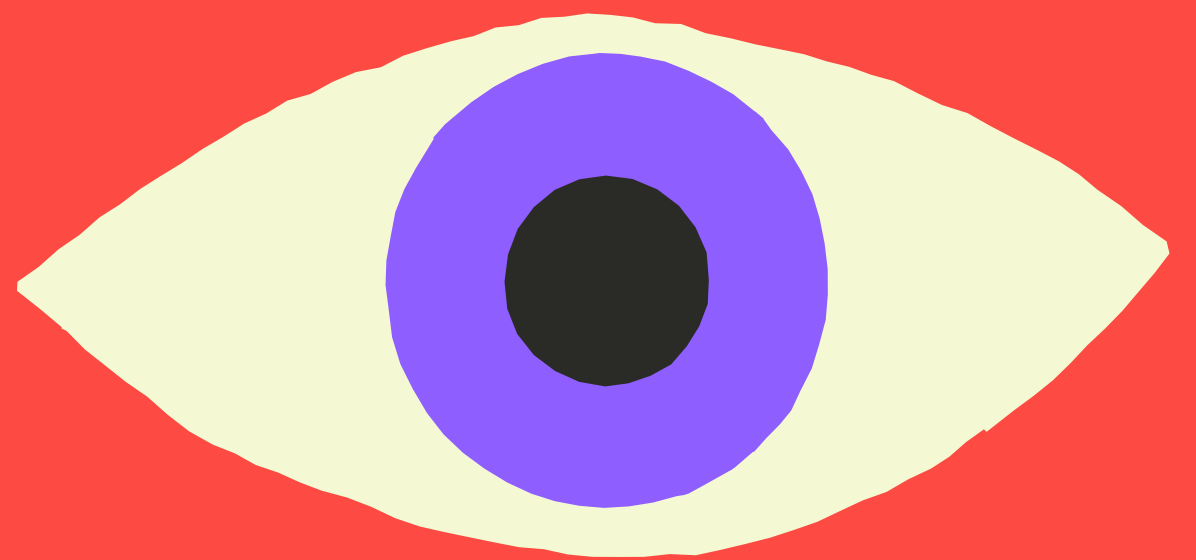
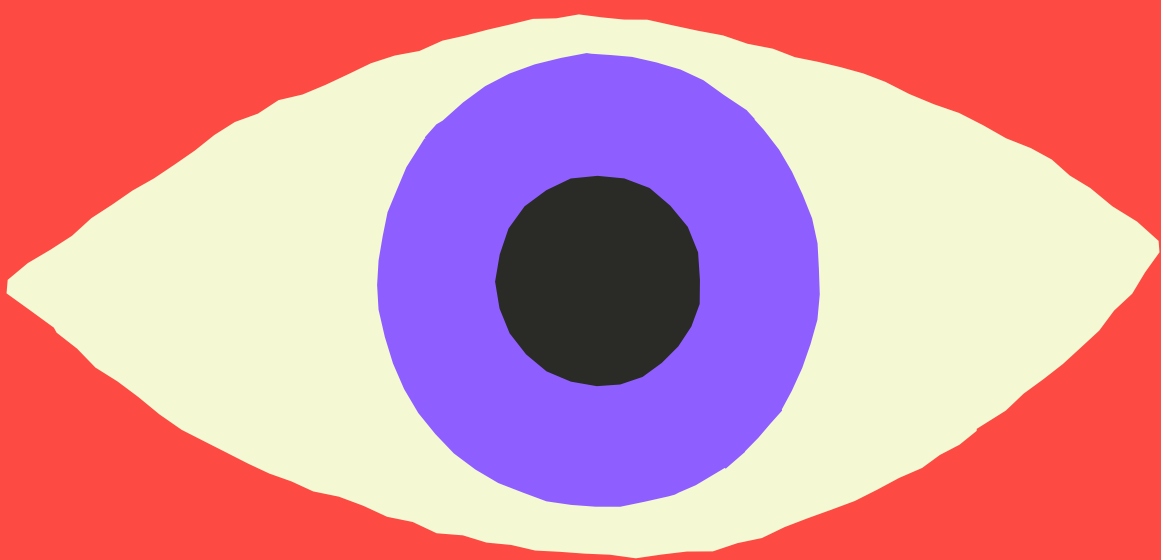
By constantly asking 'why' you can define the need behind the need. And if you can demonstrate an understanding of those deeper needs (in the branding you deliver) you can start to build a genuine connection. If you show you care, they will care back – a huge win for any startup.

“A brand is no longer what we tell the consumer it is – it is what consumers tell each other it is.”

Scott Cook,
Founder of Intuit



**HOW CAN
YOU ALONE
SOLVE
THEIR
PROBLEM?**



The real competition for start up and scale up brands is market clutter. A typical large supermarket can list over 40,000 products. Consumers are constantly being bombarded with competing messages both instore and online.

The average consumer in modern-day Britain is exposed to well in excess of 5,000 such messages on a daily basis!

Only the most engaging, impactful and nourishing messages connect.

That's where differentiation comes in. The brain is hardwired to notice things that are NEW or different.

So defining what makes you different – and then amplifying it – is an indispensable part of creating a brand. It gives you the best chance of not being lost in the clutter.

Remember we always have to start with our audience and more specifically the problem they need to solve. So your key difference must always be relevant and meaningful to them.

“How can you alone solve their problem?”

“What are you offering that your competitors aren’t?”.

The answer may simply be a unique functional benefit of the product, or it may have a more emotional appeal.

Being able to articulate what makes you different is a first crucial step towards creating a brand that will connect.

Baking this difference into every expression of that brand – from identity and packaging through to narrative and messaging – will help set you apart from your competitors. It will give you a better chance to engage, convert and ultimately grow your audience.

“In order to be
irreplaceable one
must always be
different.”

Coco Chanel



**WHY
SHOULD
THEY
BELIEVE
YOU?**



People value trust very highly. When we meet someone for the first time, we have to establish trust before we consider getting to know them better. First impressions really count.

It's no different with brands. As brand-owners you have no chance of getting consumers to change established buying habits if you don't first earn their trust.

One powerful tool you can employ is to establish a sense of empathy. If you've identified the problem that made a consumer consider your brand in the first place, you can communicate that sense of empathy. Let them know you care. Talk on their level – customers actively look for brands they feel they have something in common with. **Commonality is a very powerful marketing tool.**

Back this up by also establishing a sense of authority. This doesn't mean a whole load of preaching, bragging and talking-down, it really means demonstrating competence. In short, customers trust somebody who knows what they're doing.

By surfacing credentials, evidence, endorsements and awards you can win the respect of your customers, so they may start to see you as the answer to their problem.

“Trust is the
ultimate shortcut to
a buying decision
and the bedrock of
modern branding”

Marty Neumeier



**HOW DO
YOU GET
PEOPLE TO
RELATE TO
YOU?**



Emotion plays a much larger part in purchase decisions than most people think. Neuroscience has proved that effective decision making is not possible without the motivation and meaning provided by emotional input.

In other words, a purchase is not purely a rational decision based on a list of features and benefits. So how do you tap into this more instinctive part of the brain? How do you connect with your customer on an emotional level?

One way is to continue the analogy of seeing a brand in the same way we see a person. Humanise the brand by associating personality traits and characteristics to it. Allow this personality to 'shine through' whenever and wherever it expresses itself.

In this way it becomes more tangible, more familiar and more relatable to your intended audience – especially if some traits are shared with (or complimentary to) their own.

Of course a brand's personality has to be rooted in authenticity for it to ring true. It has to align with the brand's core values and purpose (see Q1), be as genuine, sincere and 'real' as possible. **Consumers pick and choose brands based on trust and instinct. They sniff 'fakes' a mile off.**

Personality will ultimately be reflected in the visual identity and packaging. It'll also need to guide how you communicate – what you say and how you say it. We call it a 'Tone of Voice' guide.

Today's consumer expects a constant dialogue where the brand responds and delivers with a coherent voice across everything from packaging to socials, point of sale to experiences.

That voice needs to reflect the brand's distinctive qualities and personality. By mirroring the same characteristics, language and values of your audience you can build more meaningful connections.

“Connection is the energy that is created by people when they feel seen, heard and valued.”

Brene Brown



**HOW
WILL YOU
EXPRESS
YOURSELF?**



With all the strategic thinking done, it's finally time to get stuck into the creative phase. It's the bit we live for.

With a clear strategic roadmap to guide the process, your brand design will have a laser focus. Rather than mimicking, following convention or chasing trends we know we'll be creating a distinctive and authentic brand from the inside out that works.

But we can keep asking questions to measure it against our initial strategic thinking:

Does the brand design embody the values and purpose of the business? Does it display the characteristics of your brand personality? Will it connect and resonate with the consumer whose problem you are trying to solve? Is it distinctive? Is it different enough to cut through clutter? Is it memorable? Does it feel coherent across different touchpoints?

Establishing a strong verbal identity is also a key part of a brand's expression. Crafting a distinct tone of voice and curating the language it uses will help amplify its personality, making it more relatable to your audience.

Today's successful brands bring words, messages, design and name together to create a balanced brand story. **Distilling what makes you special is a highly effective way to forge a more emotional connection with your customers.**

For startups, telling such a coherent brand story from the word go, is a great way to make the business idea feel more tangible and compelling in the eyes of investors and retailers.

“Design is
intelligence
made visible”

Lou Danziger
Legendary American graphic designer



**HOW
CAN YOU
MAXIMISE
YOUR
IMPACT?**



As a startup you need to spread the word about your new brand – and fast! Your branding will have to be deployed across a range of touchpoints (the places where customers will come into contact with your brand) so they can hear your story and hopefully become loyal champions.

Where do you put your limited resources to get the highest return? Most early stage businesses can't hope to 'out-shout' larger brands. So 'picking your moment' is the smartest policy.

Start by mapping your customer's journey from non-awareness to full enrolment. Walk in their shoes and make sure every single interaction with your consumer counts – however small. Define the touchpoints where you can engage them most meaningfully with your distinctive story. **Only compete at touch points where you know you can win.**

Your brand story has been designed to amplify what makes you different. So if you stick to the script you will cut through the noise of competing brands. The story should be able to flex and adapt to suit the context, but it should never fundamentally change, or you will lose integrity in your audience's mind.

Don't be afraid to be disruptive in the way you talk or behave. As long as it aligns with your story and doesn't alienate customers, a bit of selective rule-breaking will help you stand out. **Throw in some unexpected moments of magic, be different, joyful, provocative. It's moments like these that will help lodge you in the memory of your audience.**

“I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

Maya Angelou

For fifteen years
we've been
asking (the right)
questions to help
our clients create
brands that people
love.

Things like...



HOW DO YOU CREATE A BRAND THAT REDEFINES A CATEGORY?

Read the Ancient & Brave
case study





HOW CAN YOU GIVE A STARTUP BREWERY TOTEMIC IMPACT FROM DAY ONE?

Read the Gun Brewery
case study





HOW CAN YOU HUMANISE AND BROADEN THE APPEAL OF A BRAND?

Read the Gym Kitchen case study



THE GYM KITCHEN
FOOD TO FUEL

CHICKEN PAELLA

Paella rice with vegetables, topped with chicken breast in a spiced tomato sauce

HIGH IN PROTEIN
21g
PROTEIN

348
CALORIES
PER SERVING

OF YOUR 5 A DAY
1

Per (microwaved) pack

Energy
1475 kJ
348 kcal
18%

Fat
2.1g
3%

Saturates
0.5g
3%

Sugars
4.5g
5%

Salt
1.6g
27%

% of adult's reference intake.
Typical values per 100g:
Energy 501kJ / 118kcal

MILD

300g e

KEEP REFRIGERATED
USE BY:



HOW DO YOU REPRESENT A REAL PERSONALITY IN A BRAND?

Read the Olly Smith case study

OLLY SMITH



Asking pertinent questions is always the first step towards creating a charismatic brand that will connect successfully with its audience. You can't have answers without questions.

Our hugely experienced team loves nothing more than collaborating with brave startups; helping them get to the right answers so they can deliver on their business goals.

Get in touch and book in your free Mini-Discovery session today!

“Think left and
think right and
think low and think
high. Oh, the thinks
you can think up if
only you try!”

Dr Seuss

THANK YOU