

Build the Feeling First — Workbook

The brief and the sheets, ready to fill in

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Assembled from a decade of brand work — and from the shelf of people who got there first.

Working draft · v0.1 · August 5, 2026

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THE WORKBOOK

Build your own brand

*The brief and the signature exercises, ready to fill
in.*

The workbook

The book teaches; the workbook is where the reader builds their own brand. Everything here is fillable and reused verbatim in the workshop.

(Listed in book order — each sheet names the chapter it came from.)

Sheet	What it does	From
brand-creation-brief.md	The core 12-section foundation, filled a piece at a time	all chapters
compressed-brief.md	Run the brief against a deadline — a month, a week, a day — cutting by reversibility	ch. 5
jargon-to-outcome.md	Translate every spec you lead with into what the client actually buys	ch. 7
personality-and-behaviors.md	Four traits, four anti-traits, and the five behaviors that define them	ch. 8
name-in-use-stress-test.md	Does a name survive real use? Score across 5 dimensions	ch. 10 · Set and Signal
voice-in-five-messages.md	Find the voice by writing the brand doing five real jobs	ch. 11
brand-world-map.md	Map the world a name generates; test its range	ch. 10, 14 · Set and Signal
experience-map.md	Before / during / after — find the leaks, plant one signature detail per stage	ch. 15

How to work it: build the Brand Creation Brief as you read — each section pairs with a chapter. The standalone sheets go deeper on the sections that deserve their own afternoon; run each one when you reach its chapter, or whenever that part of the brand starts causing friction. Draft fast; refine on a second pass.

Every sheet ends the same way the method does: **a kill-or-keep date**. Put it on a real calendar before you're emotionally invested, and judge honestly when it arrives.

The workbook

Still to pull out of the brief as their chapters get written: a visual territory sheet (ch. 13) and a belonging/ritual sheet (ch. 14).

The Brand Creation Brief

The core tool of the whole system. Fill it in a section at a time as you read — each section pairs with a chapter — and it becomes the foundation that guides naming, voice, design, marketing, and experience. It's also the central workshop deliverable. Draft fast; a brief you finished beats a brief you perfected.

. . .

1. Business Context • *ch. 5*

- **Working brand name:** *(if one exists)*
- **What is being created?** *(business / product / service / event / program)*
- **Why does it need to exist?** *(the business reason and the human reason)*
- **What stage is it in?** ☐ Idea ☐ Naming ☐ Launch ☐ Growth ☐ Rebrand ☐ Expansion

2. Audience • *ch. 2, 6*

Who is this intentionally for? Be specific enough to make real choices.

- What are they trying to accomplish? _____
- What are they tired of? _____
- What are they worried about? _____
- What do they wish existed? _____
- Practical need: _____
- Emotional need underneath it: _____

We are building this for people who _____, but are tired of _____. They want to feel _____.

3. Emotional Direction • *ch. 1, 3*

- The audience should feel: 1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____
- The audience should never feel: 1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____

After interacting with this brand, people should feel _____.

4. Productive Tension • *ch. 4*

The brand should be _____, but never _____.

- Primary tension: _____ (*e.g. premium but approachable*)
- Supporting tension: _____
- Supporting tension: _____

5. Position and Promise • *ch. 7, 9*

- Category/role the brand occupies: _____
- Meaningful difference it provides: _____
- Why anyone should believe it (reason to believe): _____

For _____, this brand is the _____ that _____, because _____.

We help _____ experience _____ without _____.

6. Personality • *ch. 8*

- Four defining traits: 1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ 4) _____
- Four anti-traits: 1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ 4) _____
- If the brand walked into a room, how would it behave? _____
- How would it make other people feel? _____

7. Voice • ch. 11, 12

The brand sounds like a _____ who _____. (e.g. a knowledgeable host who has considered every detail but never makes the guest feel out of place.)

- Always sounds: _____
 - May sometimes sound: _____
 - Never sounds: _____
 - Words/phrases that belong in the world: _____
 - Words/phrases that don't: _____
-

8. Naming Territory • ch. 10, 14

- What should the name evoke? _____
 - What should it avoid? _____
 - Direct, suggestive, invented, personal, geographic, or playful? _____
 - Future language the name should be able to generate: memberships _____ · product lines _____ · rewards _____ · events _____ · calls to action _____ · community _____ · editorial _____
-

9. Visual Territory • ch. 13

- The visual identity should feel: _____
 - Typography direction: _____
 - Palette logic: _____
 - Photography / image style: _____
 - Graphic motif: _____
 - Material / texture references: _____
 - One memorable visual move: _____
 - Category conventions to avoid: _____
-

10. Experience • ch. 15

- How should people discover the brand? _____

- How should they be welcomed? _____
 - What should they notice during? _____
 - What should they remember after? _____
 - What role does the customer play? _____
 - Signature detail / ritual / object that could become recognizable: _____
-

11. Practical Constraints

- Required elements: _____
 - Budget / production limits: _____
 - Existing equity to retain: _____
 - Legal / naming / geographic / category considerations: _____
 - Future services, products, or locations the system must support: _____
-

12. Success

- Strategically successful means: _____
- Emotionally successful means: _____
- Creatively successful means: _____
- What someone should say after experiencing it: _____

• • •

One-page foundation (fill last): who it's for · the feeling it creates · its productive tension · its promise · its signature experience.

The Compressed Brief — a month, a week, a day

*Brand Creation Brief, run against a deadline. **Time:** thirty minutes to plan the compression; then whatever you've got*

You don't have a month. Use this sheet to decide **what to cut**, before you start cutting by accident.

The rule: compress by **reversibility**, not by importance. Everything in the brief is important — that's why it's in there, and sorting by importance gives you no cuts at all. Sort by what's expensive to undo.

Step 1 — Name the real deadline

We open / launch / announce on: _____

What's already committed and can't move (*signage, wrap, print run, paperwork, a lease, an event*):

Anything on that list has already made a decision for you. Find out what it decided before you spend a day deciding it again.

Step 2 — Sort by cost-to-reverse

For each piece, answer the one question: **if this turns out wrong, what does it cost to change it in six months?**

Decision	Cost to change in 6 months	Do now / placeholder
Emotional promise (§3)		
Productive tension (§4)		

The Compressed Brief — a month, a week, a day

Decision	Cost to change in 6 months	Do now / placeholder
Name (§8)		
Position / plain sentence (§5)		
Audience (§2)		
Personality + anti-traits (§6)		
Voice rules (§7)		
Wordmark / logo		
Color		
Typeface		
Photography direction		
Signature experience details (§10)		

The name, the promise and the tension almost always land in “do now.” A color you regret costs you an afternoon. A name you regret costs you every introduction, invoice and referral for as long as you keep it.

Step 3 — Pick your tier

- ☐ **A month.** Full brief. Name tested in real sentences with real people, the world it generates mapped, one signature detail per stage of the experience.
- ☐ **A week.** Sections 1–7 only. One naming territory, not five. Stress-test two candidates, not ten. One visual move, not a system.
- ☐ **A day.** Three decisions and nothing else:

After dealing with us, people should feel _____ and never _____.

We are _____, but never _____.

The name: _____ — said out loud twenty times, and it survived.

Then: one typeface _____, one color _____, one sentence
_____, and open the doors.

Step 4 — Write the placeholder list

This is the step that makes compression safe. Every deferred decision goes here, **labelled as deferred**, so nobody six months from now finds it and assumes it was chosen on purpose.

Placeholder	What it is right now	Decide by

☐ This list lives somewhere the whole team can see it — not in my head.

Step 5 — The contradiction check

A compressed brand isn't a lesser brand, it's a **smaller** one: three real decisions and the rest deferred on purpose. That only holds if nothing you shipped contradicts the three.

- ☐ The name doesn't fight the promise.
- ☐ The one visual move doesn't fight the tension.
- ☐ The one sentence would still be true after the full brief is finished.

The Compressed Brief — a month, a week, a day

If any of those fails, fix it now. A contradiction shipped on day one is the one thing that gets more expensive every week you leave it.

. . .

Kill-or-keep date: _____

On that date, open the placeholder list. Anything still sitting there untouched has quietly become a decision — either promote it deliberately or finish the section of the brief that resolves it.

Jargon to Outcome — the translation pass

Brand Creation Brief §5, pulled out to stand alone. **Time:** one sitting

Peers care how it's made. Clients care what it does for them. This sheet finds every place you're still talking to peers on a page meant for clients.

Step 1 — Dump the jargon

List every spec, acronym, technique, model number, brand name, or piece of craft vocabulary you'd instinctively lead with. Go through your homepage, your services page, your last three proposals, and your elevator answer. Twelve lines is a good target — most people find more than they expect.

#	What I say	What the client actually buys
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		

Filling the right column. For each one, finish this sentence out loud: “...*which means you get* _____. ” If you can’t finish it, either the spec doesn’t matter to the client or you haven’t worked out why it does. Both are worth knowing.

Worked example: *HDR* → **photos that look bright and airy**. *Drone* → **shots from above that make the property feel like an estate**. Nobody woke up wanting HDR.

Step 2 — Rank the outcomes

Circle the three outcomes in the right column that a client would care about most. Not the three you’re proudest of — the three *they’d* pick.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Step 3 — Rewrite the position

Structured version. For _____, this brand is the _____ that _____, because _____.

Plain version. We help _____ experience _____ without _____.

Keep the plain one. Read it aloud and cut any word you wouldn’t say to a friend.

Step 4 — Demote the specs

The left column doesn’t get deleted — it gets moved. Specs are your **reasons to believe** (ch. 9), and they belong underneath the claim, not in front of it.

Write the three you’re keeping and where each one now lives:

Spec	Now appears	As proof of

Spec	Now appears	As proof of

Step 5 — The stranger test

- ☐ Someone outside my trade read the plain version and could say back what I do and why it matters — without a follow-up question.
- ☐ It could **not** be pasted onto a competitor's site unnoticed.
- ☐ No sentence leads with a spec.

. . .

Kill-or-keep date: _____

On that date, check whether the plain version actually made it onto the site, the proposal, and your mouth. A translation that lives only on this sheet changed nothing.

Personality and Anti-Personality

Brand Creation Brief §6, pulled out to stand alone. **Time:** one sitting

Adjectives don't settle arguments. Behavior does. This sheet turns four traits and four anti-traits into five sentences somebody new could execute on their first day.

Step 1 — Four traits

What this brand *is*. Adjectives are allowed here — they're headings for the behavior you'll write in Step 3, not the answer.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Step 2 — Four anti-traits

What it must resist becoming. **The embarrassment test:** each one should name something you could plausibly slide into — ideally something you've nearly done — not something absurd. One of these should be the nearest cliché in your category, because that's the direction drift actually goes.

#	Anti-trait	A real moment I nearly did it
1		
2		
3		
4		

If you can't fill the right-hand column for one of them, it's a decoy. Replace it with something that costs you a little to admit.

Step 3 — The five behaviors

Write how *this* brand does each one, in the words you'd actually use. One or two sentences. Where a trait and an anti-trait collide, that sentence is the most valuable one on this page — mark it with a star.

Welcoming someone. (*Warmth, competence, or efficiency — you can't lead with all three.*)

Explaining a price. (*Apologize, justify, or simply state it?*)

Announcing good news. (*Celebrate loudly, or mention it and move on?*)

Handling a problem. (*Own it fast, explain the cause, or fix it quietly?*)

Asking for action. (*Invite, instruct, or make the case?*)

Step 4 — Check it against the tension

Your anti-traits should read as the failure modes of your productive tension (ch. 4). Write the tension here and see whether they match:

We are _____, but never _____.

- ☐ The anti-traits are recognizably the failure modes of that tension.
- ☐ If they aren't, I've marked which one I'm going to change.

Step 5 — The handoff test

Give this page to someone who doesn't work with you. Ask them to write your next price email using only what's on it.

- ☐ They could do it.
- ☐ They couldn't — so I wrote adjectives, not a personality. Rewrite Step 3.

. . .

Kill-or-keep date: _____

On that date, pull the last month of your actual output — captions, emails, replies — and mark every place an anti-trait won. If the same one keeps winning, it isn't an anti-trait yet; it's what the brand is. Either enforce it or admit it.

The Name-in-Use Stress Test

Signature exercise · born from the Set and Signal case.

A name can be emotionally compelling and strategically interesting and still fail the only test that matters: **does it survive use?** It has to work repeatedly, in ordinary situations, often with no one there to explain it. This exercise puts a name (existing or proposed) into real language and grades how it behaves.

Step 1 — Drop the name into real sentences

Write your candidate name into every blank. Say each one out loud.

- Welcome to _____ .
- I'm the founder of _____ .
- _____ presents...
- A project by _____ .
- In partnership with _____ .
- Join the _____ community.
- The _____ method.
- The _____ team.
- Book a _____ session.
- Attend a _____ event.
- Subscribe to _____ .
- A new offering from _____ .
- _____'s approach to...
- I heard about _____ from...
- We worked with _____ on...
- This experience is part of _____ .
- The next chapter of _____ is...
- _____ helps people...
- The people who participate are called _____ .
- The different parts of the business are called _____ .

Step 2 — Score across five dimensions

Dimension	Question	1–5
Clarity	Does the name make the sentence easier or harder to understand?	
Speech	Is it easy and natural to say, repeatedly?	
Expansion	Can it support offerings, programs, content, events, partnerships?	
Vocabulary	Does it generate meaningful language, or does every extension feel forced?	
Organization	Does it help people understand how the parts of the business relate?	

Step 3 — The debrief question

Are you solving a communication problem, or has the communication problem exposed a business problem?

This is the question the whole Set and Signal case turns on. If the name fails mostly on **Speech/Clarity**, you may have a communication problem. If it fails on **Expansion/Vocabulary/Organization**, the name is likely exposing an unresolved *business* question — and a new name alone won't fix it.

Compare candidates

Run two or three names through the same sentences and score side by side. The winner is usually not the one that sounds best in isolation — it's the one that survives the twenty sentences and generates the most usable language.

	Name A	Name B	Name C
Clarity			

The Name-in-Use Stress Test

	Name A	Name B	Name C
Speech			
Expansion			
Vocabulary			
Organization			
Total			

Voice in Five Messages

Brand Creation Brief §7, pulled out to stand alone. **Time:** an afternoon

You can't find a voice by choosing adjectives for it. You find it by writing the brand doing real jobs and reading them back to back. Write these at full length, as if you're sending them today — not as taglines.

The three everyone writes

1. The welcome. A stranger has just arrived and knows nothing about you.

2. The offer. You are asking someone for money.

3. The apology. You got something wrong and they noticed.

The two nobody writes

These expose more about a voice than the first three combined, because they're the ones people default to corporate language for.

4. The no. You're declining a request, or holding your price.

5. The hard question. The thing customers are afraid to ask you — answered before they have to.

The question: _____

Read all five out loud, back to back

Mark where the register jumps — the apology suddenly formal, the offer suddenly apologetic, the no suddenly stiff. Those seams are where the voice isn't real yet.

Message	Sounds like the same person?	Where it slipped
Welcome		
Offer		
Apology		
No		
Hard question		

Extract the rules from what you wrote

Not from adjectives — from the sentences above.

Always true

- _____
- _____
- _____

Sometimes true (*and when*)

- _____
- _____

Never true

- _____
- _____
- _____

Check each rule against the promise

A voice rule that doesn't serve the emotional promise (ch. 3) is a personal preference wearing a lanyard.

- ☐ Every rule above traces to the promise or the tension.
- ☐ The ones that don't are crossed out or rewritten.

The handoff test

Give the rules — not the five messages — to someone else. Ask them to write a sixth message: a reminder, a follow-up, a thank-you.

- ☐ It came back sounding like **you**. The voice is documented.
- ☐ It came back sounding like **a brand**. Go back and extract again.

. . .

Kill-or-keep date: _____

On that date, pull five real messages you actually sent since. Run the same read-aloud. If the seams are in the same places, the rules aren't being used — put them where messages get written, not where documents get stored.

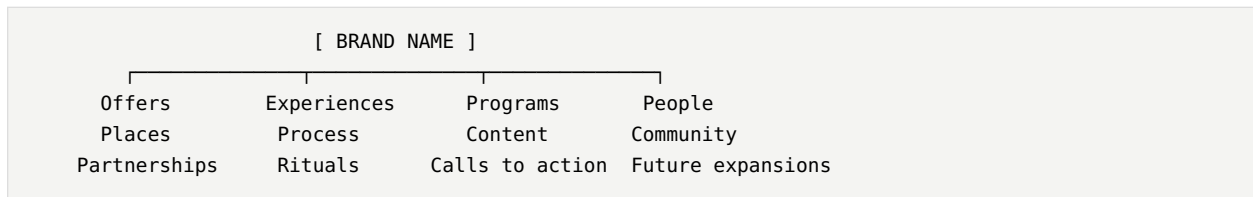
The Brand World Map

Signature exercise · born from the Set and Signal case.

A strong name doesn't just identify a business — it generates a *world*. This exercise maps that world outward from the name and tests whether the name actually helps you build it. Set and Signal is the example: a stronger central concept created a stronger surrounding vocabulary.

Step 1 — Put the name in the center, build outward

For the brand at the center, name each branch of the world:



Step 2 — For each branch, answer

Branch	What is it called?	Does the name help us name it?	Related without being repetitive?
Offers			
Experiences			
Programs			
People (clients/ participants)			
Places / environment			
Process / method			
Content / editorial			
Community			
Partnerships			

The Brand World Map

Branch	What is it called?	Does the name help us name it?	Related without being repetitive?
Rituals			
Calls to action			
Future expansions			

Step 3 — Judge the system

- Can someone understand the **hierarchy** — how the parts relate?
- Does the terminology **reinforce the desired feeling**?
- Is the system **flexible enough to grow** without forcing every new thing into an awkward name?
- Where does the language start to feel **forced**? That branch is telling you something — either the name has a limit, or that part of the business isn't defined yet.

For expansion (more than one brand)

Run the map once for the parent and once for each child. Then ask: does the parent's language help name the children, or does each child need its own world? (*Where and how to split brands is the subject of the separate architecture book — keep the two separate.*)

The Experience Map — before, during, after

Brand Creation Brief §10, pulled out to stand alone. **Time:** an afternoon

The brand isn't the logo or the copy. It's what it actually feels like to deal with you. Every touchpoint either adds to the promised feeling or leaks against it. This sheet finds the leaks and plants one signature detail per stage.

Write your emotional promise at the top, because everything here gets graded against it:

After dealing with us, people should feel _____ — and never _____.

Step 1 — List the touchpoints

Every real moment of contact, in order. Include the unglamorous ones: the voicemail greeting, the invoice, the confirmation email, the second follow-up, the parking situation, the silence after the job ends.

Before (*they've found you; they haven't paid you*)

Touchpoint	Adds / Leaks	Why

During (*they're paying you; the work is happening*)

Touchpoint	Adds / Leaks	Why

The Experience Map — before, during, after

Touchpoint	Adds / Leaks	Why

After (*the work is done*)

Touchpoint	Adds / Leaks	Why

Most brands are strongest **before** and silent **after**. If your after section is the shortest one on this page, you've found the cheapest improvement available to you.

Step 2 — One signature detail per stage

Not three. One — memorable, repeatable, and unmistakably yours.

Stage	The signature detail	What it proves about the promise
Before		
During		
After		

Step 3 — The worst-week test

The whole value of a signature detail is that it happens **every time**. A thing that only happens when you're rested and ahead of schedule isn't part of the brand; it's a good mood.

For each detail, answer honestly:

Detail	Survives a bad week?	What would have to be true
Before		
During		
After		

If one doesn't survive, make it smaller until it does. A small thing done every time beats a big thing done once — and beats a big thing done inconsistently by a wide margin, because inconsistency reads as *unreliable*, which is worse than plain.

Step 4 — Find the contradiction

Go back through every touchpoint marked **Leaks**. Circle the single worst one — the one that most directly contradicts the promise at the top of this page.

The contradiction: _____

What I'm changing about it: _____

One contradiction undoes several confirmations. Fix that one before you add anything new.

. . .

Kill-or-keep date: _____

On that date, walk your own before / during / after as a customer would — not from memory, actually walk it. Mark whether all three signature details happened. If one didn't, it was never repeatable; replace it with a smaller one.