

UNSERIOUS

# Upshots Cheat Sheet

BRANDING YOUR STARTUP

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"A brand is the sum total of everything you do, everything you make, everything you say, everything you put out into the world. And it takes a while to shape that." - John Cantwell

## The Upshot

### WHO IS THIS FOR?

- Anyone that's recently launched a company or is thinking of launching one.
  - a. Launch moment: You want to come out of the gates with a consistent identity and narrative. You may not have achieved product-market fit yet. So this will not be your forever brand, but it will remove a lot of day-to-day complexity and will give you a solid starting point for testing messaging.
  - b. Transition moment: Your company is becoming something new. Transition moments can be very powerful for launching a brand. They can energize the team, break old habits, and breathe new meaning into your communications.
- Creatives who want to work with early-stage companies.

### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- We're at this really interesting inflection point in technology. Everything is AI now and very few people know what that means. People are tuning out and/or actually resentful of this new wave of startups. All the noise does a disservice to new companies working to build great services. Branding is a hugely important tool for helping you stand out.
- Sometimes branding gets a bad rap. It can be expensive and when you're an early company the odds are that your branding will change over time. But it's an important strategic exercise that, when done properly, can clarify much about your business and help drive immediate results:
  1. Increased awareness/recognition among clients and prospects
  2. Improved perception among job seekers
  3. Increased pride/morale among employees

## HOW TO DO IT?

1. Ask a series of strategic questions to get a brain dump from the founders, leaders, and marketers of the company that live it every day.
  - a. How would you define your mission?
  - b. How would you define your offering?
  - c. How would you define your competitors?
  - d. What is the outside point of view?
2. Move quickly to a V1 draft of mission, vision, brand positioning, brand promise statement, etc. These won't be perfect but they start to tease out what you are and what you aren't - as well as voice and tone.
3. Get feedback from the right stakeholders to understand what level of confidence we are that this is the right direction.
4. Start making things! The first version of the website, careers page, etc. Jumping very quickly into these things, even if the brand foundation isn't totally hammered out, will help you know if these ideas are working or not.
5. Take one last pass at the brand guide and work out what worked and didn't work.

## PITFALLS AND PRO-TIPS

- ✔ Manage your expectations: Don't expect to be a globally recognized brand overnight. Don't expect that you will only do this work once.
- ✔ Choose a brand you really like: Sometimes founders will allow themselves to be talked into work they don't like. But if you and the team don't like the brand, you won't use it.
- ✘ Don't navel-gaze. It's better to go fast, get it out into the world, and learn what works. Do your very best to get it right, but give yourself permission to get things wrong.
- ✘ Have some humility: No one in the world cares about this company more than you. Don't be shy about what makes you great -- but don't expect that everyone will care right away.

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