

Digital presence: why culture and branding are critical to your online success

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Contents

1 > Introduction	03.
2 > What do we mean by brand, culture and digital presence?	04.
3 > The advantages of having a brand and a digital presence	10.
4 > Activities to build a successful brand and digital presence	12.
5 > Methodology	17.
6 > How to change or reorient our digital branding?	18.
7 > Conclusions	20.
8 > References	21.

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1. Introduction

Every company generates a perception on the part of those who know and interact with it, and the **brand** is that which is built to achieve that perception in a certain way and that benefits the business. This is achieved through everything that surrounds the business, both online and offline, but in the digitalised world in which we live, the **brand or digital identity** is gaining ground. Internet presence is, after all, essential for every business, and it is also a way for SMEs, freelancers and entrepreneurs to reach their target audience in an agile way, as well as a wider audience in general, thus increasing their promotion.

How do the 3 concepts of brand, culture and digital presence therefore interrelate?

To have a **digital brand or identity**, the first thing is to have a **digital presence** of the business in different online channels, i.e. digital content on websites, social networks, applications, etc., and, previously, to have a **digital culture**. For this, it is necessary to have the will to be present in this environment and to look for the latest trends, which constitutes the digital brand.

In this monograph we will first define these concepts, focusing on digital branding because of its relevance. Then, we will highlight the advantages of good branding and, finally, we will explain how to create a powerful and effective brand that helps SMEs to position themselves, either by creating it from scratch or by reinventing themselves.



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2. What do we mean by brand, culture and digital presence?

Digital branding

Before explaining what a brand or digital branding is, it is essential to remember and reflect on what a brand itself is.

Brand and identity is one of the intangible components of a company. A brand or identity is what defines your business and what differentiates you from the rest, it has to reflect the company's own identity and the value it provides. **It is very important not to make the mistake of confusing brand with "logo",** which is just another component of the brand and a much more global concept. **A company's brand has to be demonstrated in everything, consistently and coherently.** It is ultimately about how others perceive your company and business.

Digital branding refers to the representation of our brand in the digital environment, including its presence on the web and social media, the way it communicates and how it is perceived by the digital public.

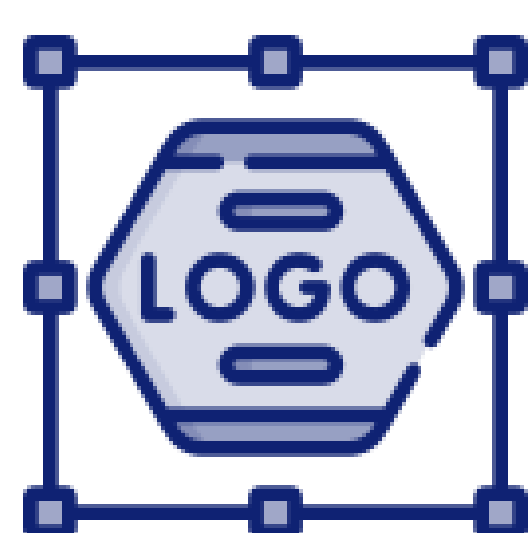
It seeks to maintain consistency in the brand image, not only in its visual representation, which includes the logo, but also in elements such as colours, typography and images used. In addition, it is essential to maintain consistency in the values and messages conveyed through the content.

In short, the brand image is embodied through **components** such as:

Name



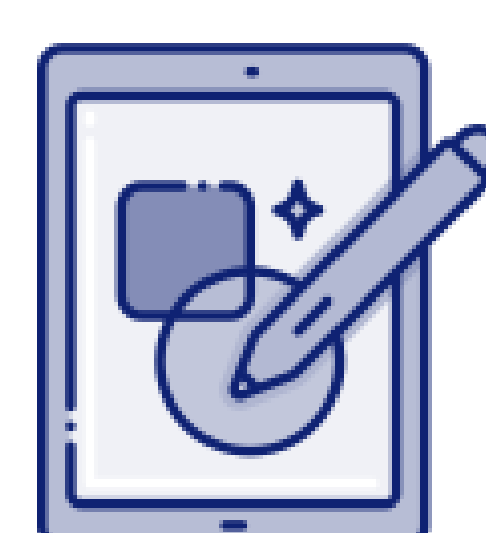
Logo



Corporate colour



Design



Contents it generates



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The definition and application of digital branding is key to the development of a consistent, coherent and impactful digital marketing strategy. It is through a well-defined brand or digital identity that an effective presence can be achieved in every digital sphere, from online positioning to social media management. Furthermore, it is important to note that digital branding and digital marketing and communication actions feed back into each other. In other words, the brand benefits from the positioning achieved through digital marketing actions and, in turn, these actions further position the brand in the digital environment. In short, digital identity is a key factor that must be applied in every aspect and communication of the company in the digital environment. **A precise definition and its correct application are fundamental to the success of the digital marketing strategy.**

The brand can be seen as a personality that must be present in both the physical and digital world. This is reflected not only in the visual aspect, but also in its discourse, which is closely linked to the brand narrative.

A successful brand must be attractive and have a number of key attributes to attract and retain its target audience. It is important to remember that customers' purchasing and loyalty decisions are not only rational, but are largely influenced by emotions. Therefore, brand personality must be designed to capture the interest of and connect emotionally with the target audience. In the study of advertising and marketing, this is referred to as the importance of resonance **[REF-01]** and the need to establish a coherent and engaging brand narrative.

The brand serves above all to connect with this **emotional association**, and the virtual world makes possible a series of elements that allow these connections to be strengthened (direct messages, personalised communications, use of videos and images, etc.).

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It is about creating the so-called **"brand experience"**, what in the physical world might be going to a shop, in the virtual world encompasses the whole experience that puts you in contact with that brand, how you get to know it, how you interact, how you buy its products or services. As Jim Mullen, founder of one of the most important advertising agencies in the world (Mullenlowe U.S.) points out, "A brand is not created through advertising, but through experiences". In other words, a customer doesn't just buy a specific product or service, he or she buys the whole experience involved in acquiring it.

Thus, the brand is closely linked to two other concepts which are the digital culture and the digital presence of the company, as they are the reflection of the brand through its way of conceiving the digital world and through its digital actions. **[REF-02]**



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Digital culture

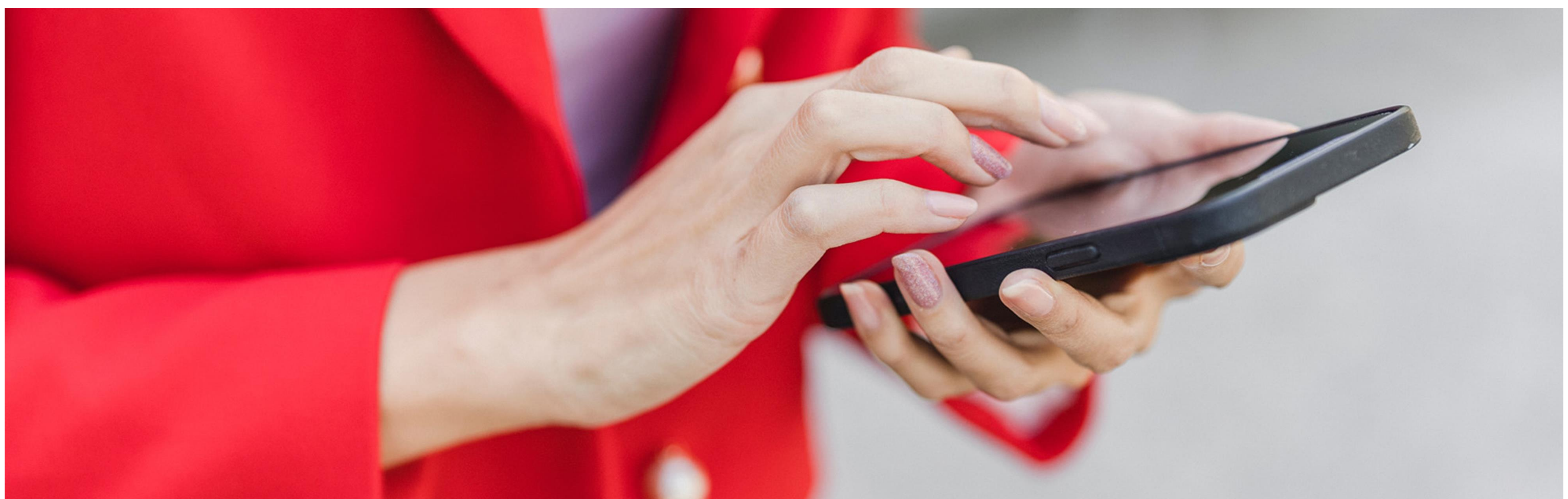
When we talk about digital culture, we refer to the set of practices and values that a company has regarding the **use of digital technology** in its operation. That is, how the company uses technology in its day-to-day operations, how it **relates to its customers and employees** through digital channels, and what **principles** guide its presence and activity in the digital universe.

A company's digital strategy is closely linked to its digital culture and the digital transformation processes it implements. A well-established digital culture means that the company will find it easier to strategically exploit the possibilities offered by digital media.

It is about applying digital tools in the various areas of the company (finance, human resources, communication and advertising, sales, etc.).

Building a strong brand is an excellent opportunity to attract the best talent. Employer Branding is the strategy that is developed based on the brand's value proposition so that talent feels a predilection for that corporation and aspires to develop professionally in it. In the case of more specialised profiles, a good perception of the 'employer brand' is essential for the company to grow solidly.

If there is a strong digital culture, digital transformation is easier, as there will be less resistance to change. Moreover, considering that it is a continuous change, where innovation and following the latest trends are key, having a solid digital culture allows for easier and more agile adaptation.



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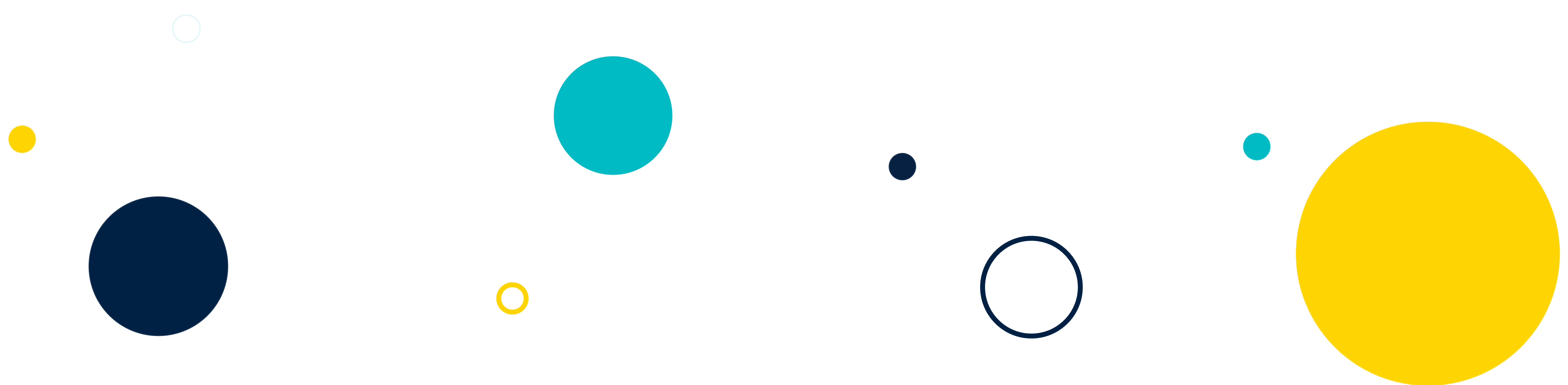


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The main elements of a company's digital culture are:

- 1. Disruption:** Disruption is something that starts before innovation. In a saturated market, disruptive ideas (business models, value propositions...) are the ones that succeed.
- 2. Innovation:** the ability to implement new technologies and digital solutions to improve efficiency and grow the business.
- 3. Agility:** the way a company is aware of and adapts to the latest digital changes and opportunities.
- 4. Digital communication:** the ability to share key information digitally, both internally and externally.
- 5. Customer-centricity:** the way a business adapts to what its customers and potential customers need, orienting the digital brand to meet their key demands, especially with customisable experiences.
- 6. Continuous improvement:** the ability of the company to learn and improve continuously, using technological tools, especially data analytics and forecasting.

In conclusion, it is about how the company relates to today's digital world and its ability to make the most of it to improve its business.



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Digital presence

The digital presence is the representation of the company or brand in the digital universe, all the information and content that is reflected in it. Through this presence, a vision of that company and that brand is generated, and therefore the digital brand is built by taking care of that digital presence.

To have a brand or digital identity, the first thing you need is to have a digital presence, and in turn, any presence in the digital world is an intrinsic part of the brand, everything speaks of us.

Digital presence is essential nowadays, marketing and advertising strategies are increasingly focused on the online part and it is an easier way of visibility for SMEs, entrepreneurs and freelancers than the costly traditional media. **[REF-03]:**

Specifically, the brand's digital presence is materialised in the following **spaces**:

1. Official website
2. Social media accounts (Instagram, Facebook, Youtube, TikTok, LinkedIn, Twitter, Pinterest, Snapchat, etc.) **[REF-04]**.
3. Online business directories
4. Presence in listings as Company profile
5. Reviews on websites such as Tripadvisor or Google
6. Digital advertising campaigns
7. Mentions in digital media
8. Blogs and newsletters
9. Podcast
10. Emalings

[REF-05]

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3. The advantages of having a brand and a digital presence

1. **Greater expansion:** digital brands make it possible to reach a larger audience than a traditional brand, due to the characteristics of the Internet (accessible from all over the world, at any time).
2. **Greater interaction with potential and real customers:** advertising and presence on the Internet allows a more direct interaction than traditional advertising, especially with the use of social networks, email or chatbots.
3. **Personalisation:** in addition, this interaction with customers can be personalised at different levels, either because a market analysis is carried out and personalised for a target audience, or because the responses to each user are personalised to generate a better brand experience and therefore greater brand loyalty.
4. **Cost savings:** the cost of generating online advertising is much lower than traditional advertising.

5. **Data analysis:** there are many applications that allow tracking online interaction, obtaining data to analyse customer behaviour, which helps to know what is working and what is not of that brand and digital presence of the company.
6. **Adaptability and flexibility:** a brand or digital identity can adapt faster to market needs and the latest trends, with agile responsiveness. This is also because the investment is lower and the autonomy of action greater (for example, it is not the same to create an account on a social network as to invest in a new traditional advertising campaign).
7. **Proximity of digital communication channels:** digital channels allow for direct conversations with audiences. They are more immediate channels and promote active communication.



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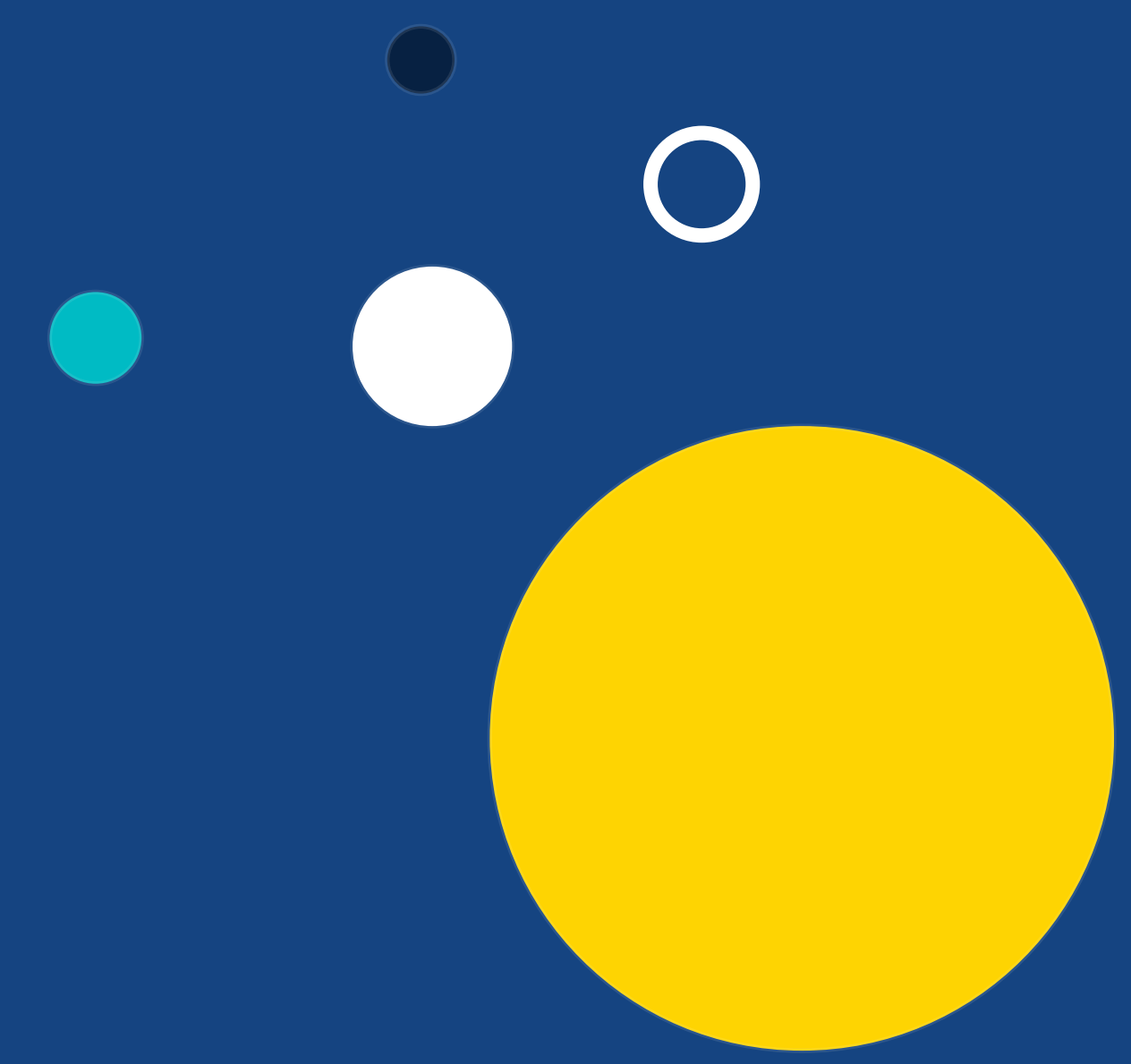
4. Activities to build a successful brand and digital presence

In the following, we will explore best practices on how to develop a digital brand, either by creating it for the first time or by changing and re-branding it. It is important to consider that, although the brand or digital identity needs to be consistent, **branding is an ongoing process that extends to all actions of the company**. It is necessary to adapt and continually revise the strategy to achieve the desired success.

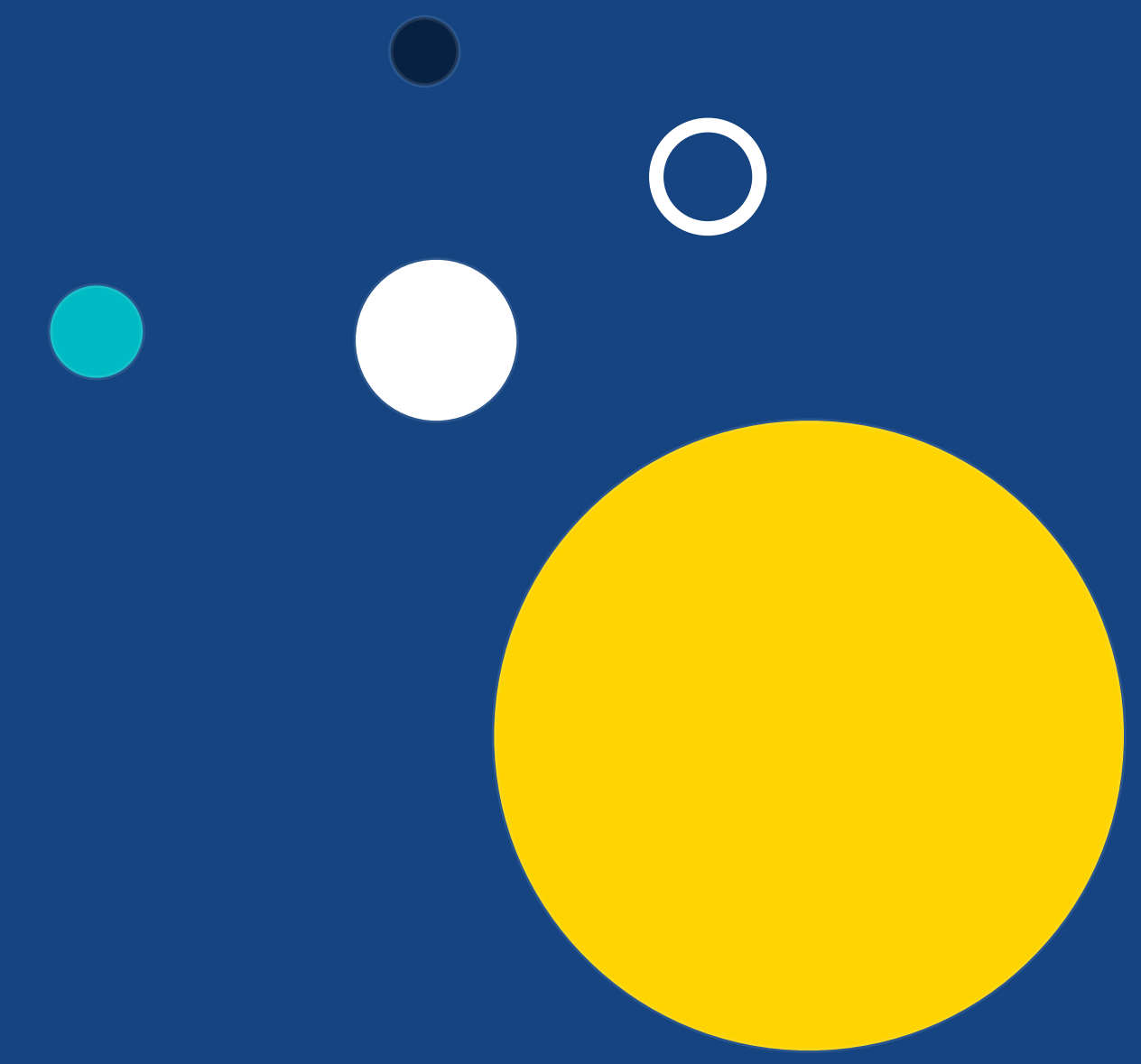
How to create a digital brand from scratch? How to position yourself online?

Creating a successful brand can be a challenge, especially for smaller companies and freelancers who must define their ultimate goal and differential value. To achieve this, a series of activities are necessary, which are detailed below:

1. **Brand definition:** the first step before having an online presence and creating content is to have done a process of defining the brand identity and brand personality. To do this, it is important to ask the right questions in a process where exploration and creativity take precedence: who is the company, what defines it, if the business were a person, what would it be like, what can make it different from competitors, what are the fundamental values that guide it, what market do I want to target, what need in that market am I meeting? For a good brand creation, it is always necessary to think about the target audience and public, what they need, what they expect, what they are like. In addition, it is important to encourage creativity and think about how to reflect the values that you want to transmit and differentiate yourself from the competition. In other words, look for originality and not a copy of another brand.



2. **Creation of quality content:** within the content strategy, it is important to establish values or communication territories that you want to associate with the brand. These values can be related to product or service quality, innovation, sustainability or social responsibility, for example. Likewise, the definition of communication territories helps to establish topics and areas of interest on which the brand wants to focus, so that the content generated is in line with this vision and reinforces the brand's values and narrative. In this sense, the creation of quality content not only implies that it is attractive and interesting, but also that it fits the brand's content strategy and reinforces the previously established values and communication territories. In this way, coherence and unity in communication is achieved, which helps to strengthen the brand's image in the market.
3. **Choice of appropriate formats:** among the existing digital formats, you can create posts in social networks, videos, reels, infographics, blogs, tutorials... The important thing is to adapt the format to the type of message you want to launch, being able to make combinations according to the specific need to be transmitted.
4. **Optimization of the website:** have a good web design with a simple interaction for the user, personalized and attractive (for this point it is important to follow the principles of "UX / user experience" which focuses on the interaction of a person with the web and "UI / user interface" which focuses on areas of purely visual design), ensure that the speed of the web is adequate, and have a "responsive design", ie, that adapts to be displayed correctly from any device (computer, mobile ...).



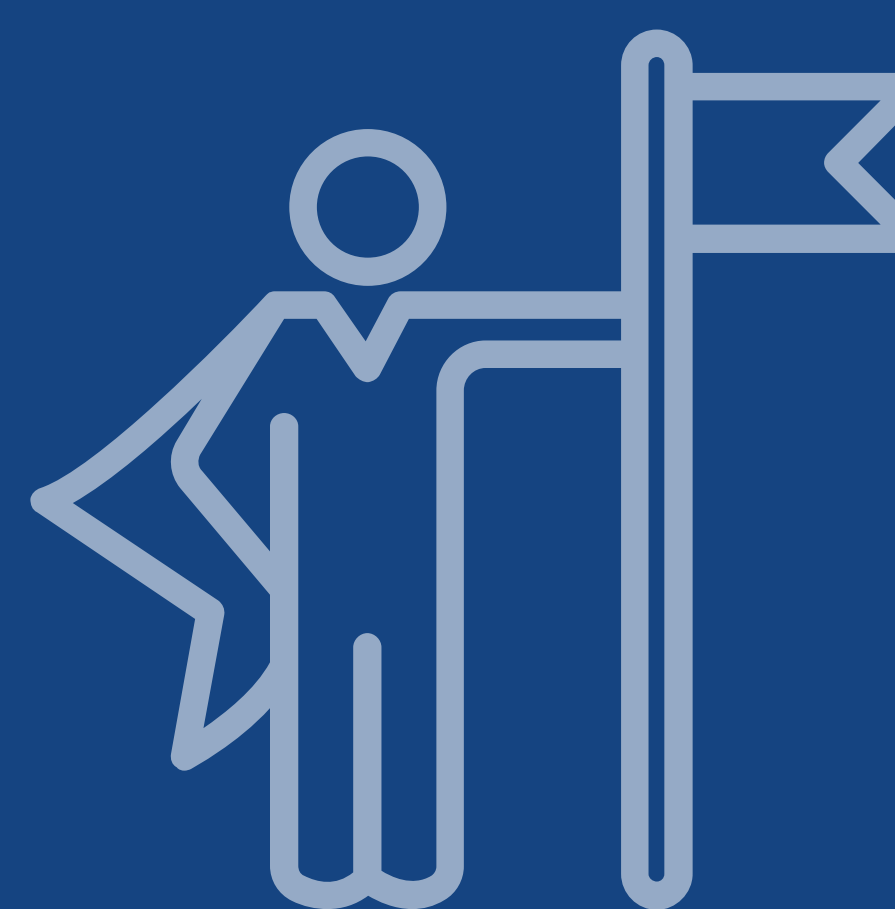
5. **SEO positioning strategies (Search Engine Optimization):** which consists of strategies to increase visits to the website, so that it appears in the first results of search engines. For this, the use of relevant "keywords" and tags in the content generated are essential (especially in the titles). In addition, it is also possible to invest in search ads. [REF-05]
6. **Use of social networks:** there are a multitude of social networks, and it is necessary to analyze and identify those of greatest interest for the target audience and for the type of business, since there are, for example, social networks more focused on the restaurant industry, others more used in fashion, etc. It is also advisable to be aware of the latest trends and adapt to them. That is to say, do not create a profile in only one social network and do not update to the new ones that are gaining ground, because if for example in 2023 the most popular social network among the teenage population is Tik Tok, in 5 years it may be a different one. In addition, content of interest and quality should be published actively and regularly. Finally, the "success" of the publications can be measured to know what works best. This information provides the keys to generate the following content based on what audiences are most interested in.
7. **Collaborations:** within the use of social networks, it is common to collaborate with "influencers" who are relevant to the market niche. These people have fame and a large number of followers in a social network, which allows the message to reach more people, particularly the target audience. However, it is important to note that the proper selection of the "influencer" is crucial for the brand, as they become brand ambassadors. Therefore, it is essential that these "influencers" are aligned with the brand and the values you want to convey to ensure an authentic and effective collaboration.

8. **Digital advertising:** consists of the use of digital advertising tools, such as mainly:
- a. Ads on social networks (social ads, either in video format or only with images and text).
 - b. Ads in search engines (or SEM)
 - c. Display or banner ads (these are ads that are seen as boxes from other websites, in the form of visual advertising that allows redirecting to the brand's website).
 - d. Sponsored content from other digital spaces (for example, a blog or magazine).
 - e. Choosing the mix of paid media in which digital advertising actions will be carried out is a critical decision for any brand. It is necessary to take into account the target audience and brand alignment, as online advertising is an essential content of the brand.
9. **Long-term perspective:** it is important to have a medium-long term strategy, not to rush but to have a vision of where the company is going and to ensure that the brand can be consistent.



Also, the following is a list of things to avoid [REF-06]:

1. **Excessive changes:** the brand can be updated and adapted to changes, but as mentioned above, coherence and consistency are essential to create a defined identity and a recognizable brand. Therefore, continuous changes in logos, slogans or recognizable images should be avoided. It should be taken into account that it can take years to have a recognizable brand.
2. **Confusing logo and brand:** it is important to bear in mind that the brand is not limited to a name and a logo, but encompasses everything that the company represents, it is reflected in all its actions and therefore it must maintain a thread and coherence.
3. **False expectation:** it is important to avoid false expectations. Do not exaggerate or make false promises about a product or service because it can generate bad reputation and negative comments from customers. It is important to remember that digital branding is influenced by customer opinions and expectations should be realistic. The long-term perspective is also critical.



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5. Methodology

Inspired by some of the fundamental guidelines of the *design thinking* methodology (tools for innovation), the best way to create a brand is by following these steps:

1. **Define a strategy:** The first step is to define a strategy, which is essential to ensure that the brand is properly positioned in the market and connects effectively with its target audience.
2. **Creating the brand:** after previously analyzing all relevant information, it is recommended to use tools that stimulate imagination and collaboration, in order to gather as many valuable insights and opinions as possible. For example, group work sessions can be held to gather different ideas and perspectives to shape the brand.
3. **Create prototypes of the digital brand:** for example, of the logo, the type of colors, calligraphy, style and key messages, and the general design of the website.
4. **Test and validate** they have to be tested on part of the brand's target audience to know their perceptions and sensations. This step can be done at many levels,.
5. **Design of the identity and its visual ecosystem:** the final brand and digital presence must be created based on the previous information gathered.
6. **Measure performance:** through the use of advanced analytics, you can track the interaction of the public with social networks, the website, the purchase of the product or service, etc., and it is very important to make this assessment to know what aspects need to be reformed.
7. **Continuous improvement:** linked to the previous point, the brand must be consistently reviewed and measured to ensure its success. This includes taking into account the results of measurements

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6. How to change or reorient our digital branding?

After establishing an online presence and digital identity, a company may decide to redefine its digital identity to **gain more market share or improve areas that are not working**, following the concept of "continuous improvement".

It is common for small businesses to launch their online presence without a thorough analysis of their digital identity. However, they may subsequently become aware of the **need to improve their digital presence and identity**, and to do so, we explain how to renew it.

The steps to follow to carry out this process are as follows:

1. **Self-evaluation:** the first thing to do is to analyze what the current brand is like. How it is perceived, what it transmits, how is its visual style and tone of its communications. In other words, it is necessary to know what works and where changes are needed. To do this, different opinions should be gathered, preferably as close as possible to the target audience.
2. **Definition:** it is a matter of re-analyzing what you want to convey, and thus see what aspects need to be modified to adapt to the brand identity you are looking for. More details on this definition can be found in the section on creating a new brand or digital identity.

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3. **Updating the website:** after analysing the definition, the necessary changes required for the website can be specified, such as the design, type of content and tone.
4. **Updating social media profiles:** it is necessary to update both the profiles and to analyse whether a digital presence is required in other new social networks that do not already exist. This may include changes to descriptions and images/videos and messages.
5. **Communicating the change:** a good strategy is to be open with this rebranding and announce it in the different spaces where you have a digital presence, including email communications explaining the change or rebranding.
6. **Measuring performance:** it is important to monitor the change through analysis tools on social networks, on the web (to measure visitor traffic), and to evaluate whether the change is on track.

In other words, a plan for adaptation and consistency of change is required for any existing digital presence of the brand.



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7. Conclusions

Every business that has a digital presence (presence on a website, on social networks, etc.) generates a **brand or digital identity**, the difference is whether or not it is a powerful, original, well-defined brand, with an **attractive design**, with **consistent messages**, that **manages to distinguish itself from competitors**, that **attracts the target audience** and makes the business grow.

It is difficult to achieve a strong brand, but it is essential to seek it. The digital brand represents what the company is, and how it has been seen. It is not a logo, it is everything the company does and is reflected in every digital action and communication. Sometimes it is even as much what is done as what is not done. Thinking about **what the brand should look like**, having a **plan for creating the brand or digital identity**, and carrying out the specific activities for its **embodiment** are fundamental aspects of any business. Furthermore, in line with a digital company culture, it is important to keep up to date with the digital world and to be aware of the latest trends.

In conclusion, digitisation of SMEs is an **opportunity** and a **necessary investment** to grow as a business. In this process of **increasing the company's digital presence**, the importance of **digital branding** must be taken into account, so as not to go digital without a strategy and a clear vision of the brand and what it intends to convey. In addition, **many businesses that have a fully digital culture start directly online**, and to achieve their differentiation, **investment in digital presence and branding strategies** also become a decisive tool for success.

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