



The State of Brand Ownership

759 Brand-Builders Share
Insights That'll Make You Seriously
Rethink Your Organization's
Brand Management Strategy

So, Why Did We Create This Report?

Healthy brands are co-owned. This report sheds light on the current state of brand ownership, and how we can all improve.

All eyes are on company branding. Consumers are basing their buying decisions on brand values and presentation, and job seekers are selecting their next work environment based on the purpose and vision of the company. As a natural result, businesses are finding they need to invest heavily in their brands to stay in the game.

However, for a brand to be truly impactful, it has to be consistent across all touchpoints. Marketing campaigns, website copy, ad creative, app design, customer service interactions – they all have to reflect your brand identity and tell the same story.

And to do that, everyone in and around your organization must understand your branding and be involved in the brand management work.

Given the critical importance of shared brand ownership, we decided to survey professionals in large enterprise companies to see how co-creative their brand development and management process is. Our survey covers 759 people – primarily brand, marketing, front-end development, UX, design professionals, and C-level leaders – and offers insight into topics like who’s generally responsible for the brand, where branding challenges lie, how operations can improve, and how big industry players plan to get there.

On the surface, 84% of our respondents claimed their brands are strong. But upon digging deeper, we discovered glaring blindspots in their brand management and identified valuable opportunities for these businesses – and others like them – to expand their brand ownership to critical customer-facing teams.

In light of the data we’ve collected, we believe the brands that address these blindspots and expand their brand ownership quickly will be ideally positioned to build a stronger business now and in the future.

Read on to learn more about the state of brand ownership, based on data gathered from hundreds of professionals working in some of the biggest companies around.

Teams Surveyed

Senior Brand, Marketing, Design, UX & Front-End Devs

Company Sizes:

500+

Sample Size:

759 People

Glossary

Brand Ownership:

Where the responsibility for brand development and communications (internally and externally) lies.

Brand Co-Creation:

The concept of an entire organization managing a brand by giving everyone a stake in its evolution – and thus increasing brand buy-in, know-how, and ambassadorship.

Brand Guidelines:

A set of rules and restrictions on how to use your branding across different touchpoints. Visually, written, spoken, and everything in between.

Brand Operations:

The processes of – and people included in – streamlining the growth, development, and spreading of your brand over time.

01

Who Currently Owns the Company Brand?

Overall, 80% of our respondents feel some level of connection with their brands. But in many cases, it isn't enough. And it shows. 69% of the same respondents desire more ownership in the development and management of their brand, and a mind-blowing 67% are making up for it by creating their own set of guidelines.

84% of respondents say their brands are strong, still 67% of people have their own set of guidelines

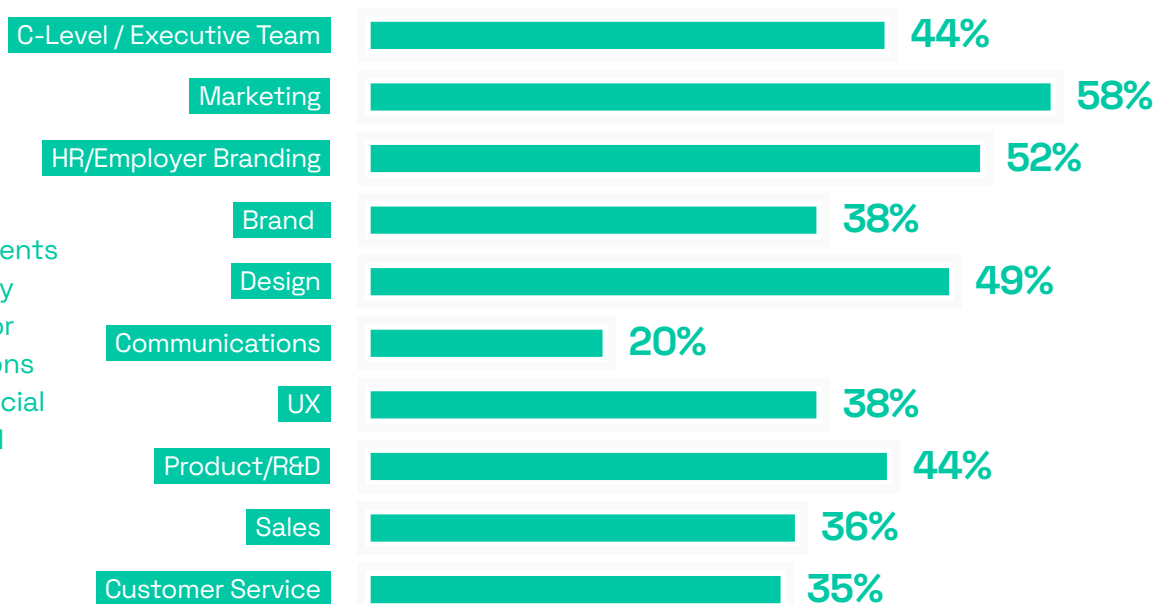
Since branding is something that flows throughout an entire organization and its community, sharing responsibility and communicating clearly is vital.

Unfortunately, it isn't often the case that brand ownership is shared equally across the organization. C-level executives are generally the most involved in the development of the ongoing brand strategy. Second behind them is the Marketing team, followed by HR, and the Brand team. Unfortunately, but maybe not surprisingly,

Sales and Customer Service are ranked last – even though they're arguably one of the most important parts of building a brand-based customer experience.

Strategy isn't the only aspect of branding owned by C-levels, though. According to our survey, these executives are also the ones responsible for the management of the company brand. This is true even in companies that have a dedicated brand team, which presumably means the

Which departments in your company contribute to, or own sub-sections within, your official company brand guidelines?



Rank the top 5 departments in your company who have the most brand ownership

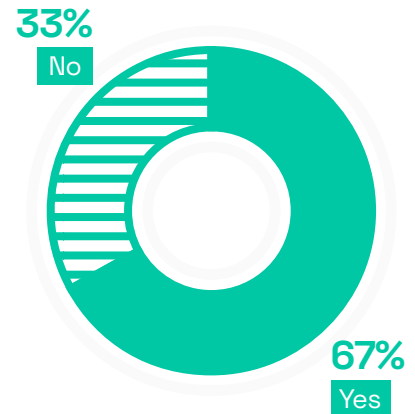
- #1 C-Level / Executive Team
- #2 Marketing
HR/Employer Branding
- #3 Brand
- #4 Design
- #5 Communications
UX
Product/R&D
- #6 Sales
Customer Service

brand manager’s role would be a primarily implementation/ tactician one; not a best practice setup for successful brand management.

This unbalanced brand ownership has had a significant impact on employees. Not only do 1 in 5 respondents feel disconnected from the brand, but 69% desire greater ownership in the development and management of the brand. As a result, 67% of employees create and use their own set of brand guidelines (likely viewed within that specific team as actual company guidelines) when working on projects.

With the smallest ownership of company brand guidelines by far (almost a third the Marketing team’s ownership and less than half the ownership of C-levels) 73% of UX teams admit to designing and using their own guidelines, separate from the company brand guidelines. Closely behind are the 69% of Human Resources professionals who also create separate sets of

Do you use any specific brand/creation guidelines within your team, that aren’t included in your company’s official brand guidelines?



brand guidelines to inform their employer branding campaigns.

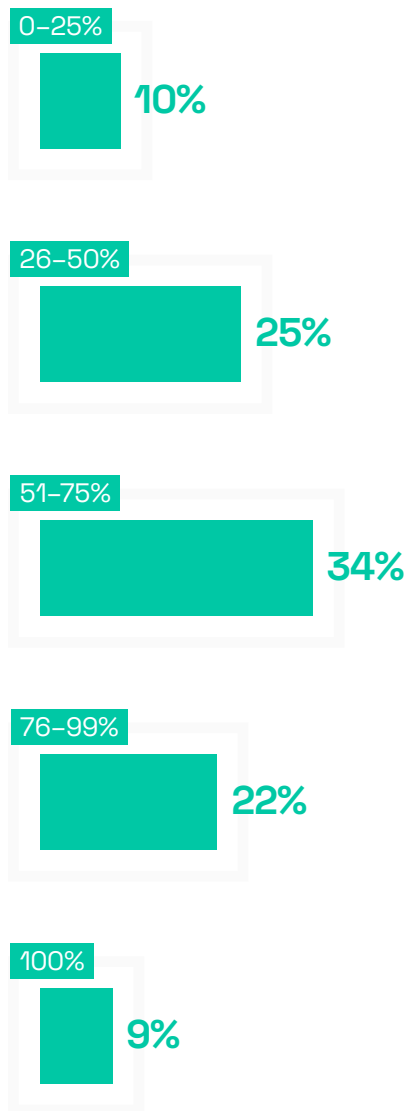
Surprisingly, 88% of C-levels also admit to swapping out the official brand guidelines in favor of their own. But since C-levels feel heavily involved with their brand, this likely isn't due to a lack of perceived ownership. Our assumption is that when brand guidelines don't match their visionary expectations, they change them.

Conclusion

While every team should have a stake in their company brand guidelines, they should act as a single source of truth where everyone can find what they need. Since most teams evidently have their own set of brand guidelines – siloed away from the company guidelines – collaboration and shared understanding are hard. But the consequences of this decision are much greater than internal collaboration difficulties. As confusion spreads between teams and across the organization, brand integrity weakens.

A Universal Need for Co-Ownership

What percentage of your company needs to use or create on-brand company materials on a weekly basis, such as presentations, documents, designs or logos?

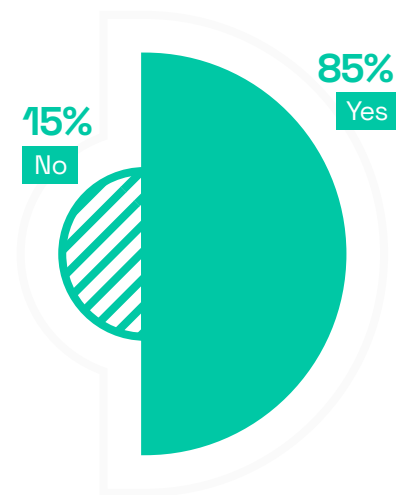


Our survey shows that 7 out of 10 employees need brand guidelines and assets to create campaigns, products, and collateral. But since few employees have access to official brand guidelines, many create and use their own. However, 80% of our respondents argue that their brand would be much better off if everyone used the same set of brand guidelines.

85% of all people surveyed believe the company brand would be stronger if the official brand guidelines were shared across the organization.

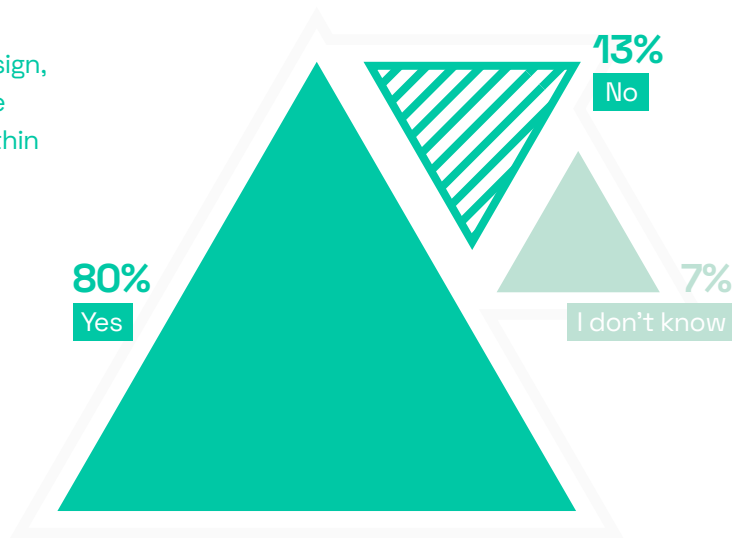
In fact, 85% of everyone asked – and 96% of C-levels – agreed that having one central set of brand guidelines would benefit the company.

Would your company benefit from having all separate brand/creation guidelines in one place?



And they're not wrong. Since 70% of employees in our study said they need access to brand material weekly to complete their marketing, design, and development projects, the efficacy of the brand is constantly at stake. Too much deviation from the core brand colors, typography, brand voice, general brand behavior, or logo sizing (even slight deviation) and the brand identity can quickly begin to diverge across channels and look unprofessional.

Would your company's brand be stronger if your creative teams (Brand, Marketing, Design, UX, Front End Devs) had more defined brand ownership within their respective areas?



Sharing brand ownership with employees doesn't just keep brands from going off the rails, though. It actually holds a lot of promise for a more powerful brand experience at every customer, employee, and job applicant touchpoint.

And actually 80% of employees agree that their company brand would be much stronger if ownership and responsibilities

were clearly defined. New content and ad creative, HR campaigns, and product development – they would all align with the existing product and website branding more easily. And teams would be free to innovate and explore new trends that customers are interested in without veering away from core brand guidelines.

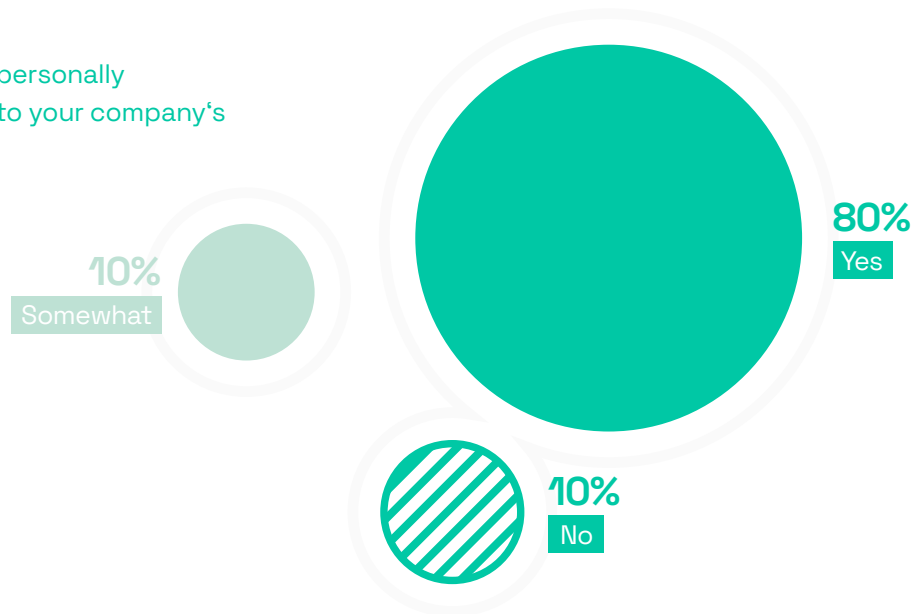
Conclusion

While there are several conclusions that can be drawn from this data, one of the most important is that a co-creative approach to branding is vital. Since all team projects influence the brand to one degree or another, employees need access to guidelines to maintain the brand integrity.

Restricting brand ownership to a select few can force employees to build their own set of rules and guidelines to feel closer to the desired branding – which ultimately creates a false sense of ownership and results in confusion, misalignment, and inconsistencies.

Plug & Play Opportunity

Do you feel personally connected to your company's brand?



The level of connection employees have with their brand varies from team to team. And the differences are stark. Nearly 9 out of 10 C-levels feel deeply connected to their brand, but only about half of all UX professionals feel the same way. This has a major impact on the company, as efficiency and deliverable quality rise and fall along with brand connectedness.

68% of people said that with a bigger contribution to company brand guidelines, they could scale work better and be more efficient.

For a brand to be as powerful as it can be, you need all the people who work on it to feel a deep connection with it. The reason being: it helps each co-creator keep your company on-brand, and it motivates them to be an advocate for your brand in both their internal and external communications.

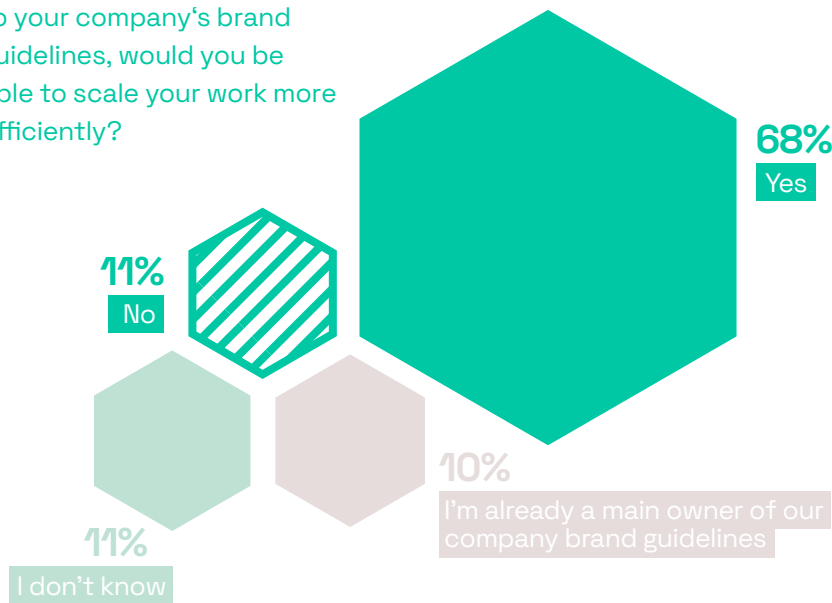
In our survey, we found that a solid four out of every five people feel connected to their brand. But while 90% of all C-levels fall into that category, only 55% of UX professionals feel like they have a solid connection to their brand.

Given the data we've previously discussed, those numbers make perfect sense, though. Besides being the team that

feels least connected to the brand, UX professionals also have the least influence on brand development and guidelines. And the two go hand in hand. With less responsibility for brand management and limited knowledge about brand goals and guidelines, teams naturally feel more disconnected from their brands.

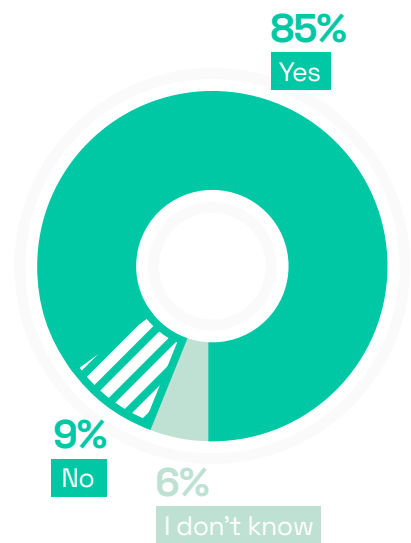
However, most teams want to be included and represented in brand management – especially those that have a customer-facing role or create customer-facing collateral and products. In fact, 67% of our respondents and 73% of UX teams surveyed admitted to creating their own set of brand guidelines to compensate for a lack of real connection with their brand.

If you had a bigger contribution to your company's brand guidelines, would you be able to scale your work more efficiently?



But notably, 91% of UX respondents also acknowledged that, were their lack of ownership and connection resolved (thus eliminating their need for a separate set of brand guidelines), their teams would be stronger and more impactful overall.

This opinion isn't isolated to UX professionals, either. The sentiment is shared by 68% of people who say that with a better understanding of – and bigger contribution to – company brand guidelines, they could effectively scale their work and be more efficient. At the same time, 85% of respondents argue that the customer experience would improve if all creative teams (like marketing, brand, design, and UX) were simply better connected to the brand.



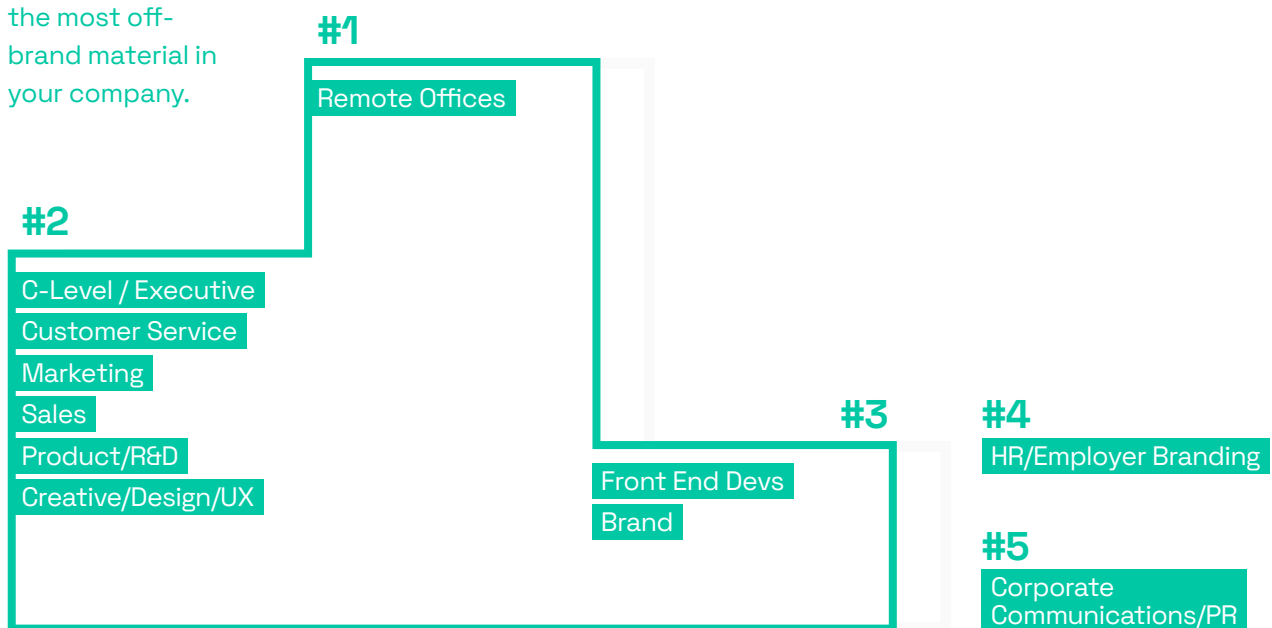
Would your company's customer experience be stronger if your brand creation teams (Brand, Marketing, Design, UX, Devs) were better connected?

Conclusion

Since connectedness seems to have an impact on productivity, customer experience, and employee mindset, brand owners need to find ways to extend brand ownership to everyone in the organization. Besides minimizing confusion and boosting brand integrity, this action has the ability to create more enthusiastic brand advocates.

04 Building Bridges Between Teams

Rank the top 5 teams creating the most off-brand material in your company.



Employees aren't involved in brand development to the degree they should be, and they're not communicating clearly. In some cases, they're physically separated by location, too. As a result, teams lack understanding of each other's goals, project briefs, and creation processes – which makes cross-functional collaboration near impossible.

Successful brand operations require collaboration and co-creation. Without one or both, brand inconsistencies can run rampant, harming the brand identity and creating frustration and confusion between teams. Unfortunately, this is common within sales, customer service, and remote office environments, where communication, buy-in, and brand ownership are lacking the most.

The biggest challenge in brand collaboration is a lack of understanding of each other's goals and roles.

In asking respondents what their biggest roadblocks to brand collaboration are, we found that all collaboration issues likely stem from poor communication and team connectedness. And oftentimes these issues pop up as the result of the bad processes businesses have in place.

Specifically, the biggest brand collaboration challenges are:

- Lack of understanding of each other's goals and roles
- Project briefs being unclear
- Creation processes lacking definition (particularly in regard to design work)

Luckily, the solutions are straightforward. According to the people surveyed, an increased focus on these topics would improve alignment and collaboration the most:

1. Collaboration for approvals and commenting on the go
2. One central set of brand guidelines for everyone
3. Centralized digital brand asset libraries

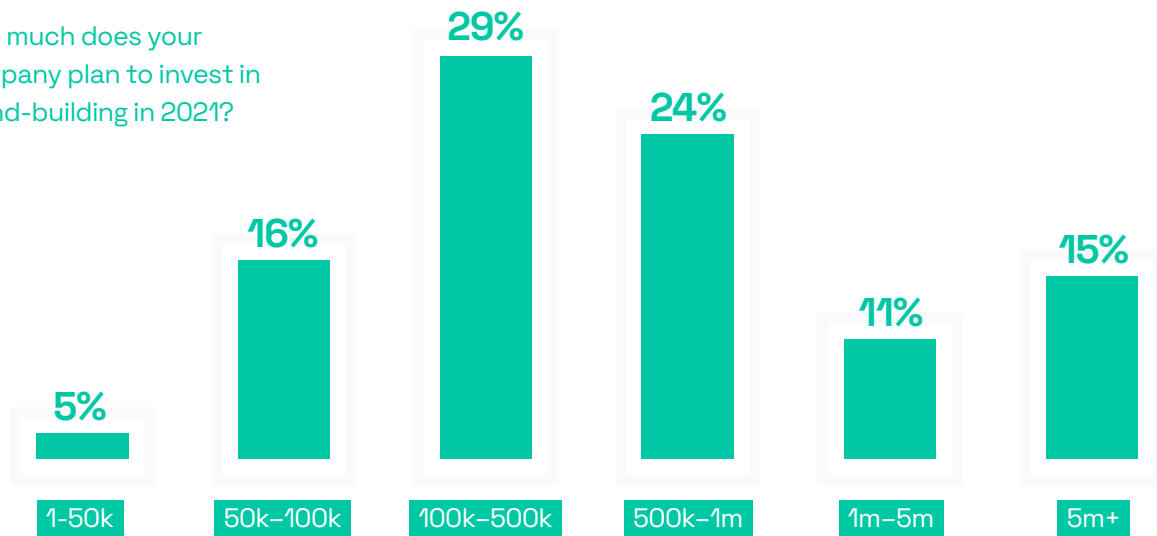


Conclusion

Unfortunately, the solution many have chosen for the interim – i.e., building their own guidelines and processes – has only increased the divide between teams. Moving forward, businesses must embrace centralization, improve internal communications, and prioritize shared brand guidelines and assets to overcome this challenge.

Top Branding Trends to Capitalize On Now

How much does your company plan to invest in brand-building in 2021?



While branding trends are often bold and flashy, many opportunities available to businesses right now are more evergreen than trendy. In fact, some of the best investments businesses can make revolve around democratizing brand management and development. From establishing a singular, shared set of guidelines, to involving different teams in the co-creation process, internal branding operations are chock full of options for businesses to capitalize on.

The push to be more brand-driven will start internally.

Luckily, there are several simple adjustments businesses can make immediately to dramatically improve the reach and integrity of their brand. According to our survey, businesses become more brand-driven by investing in:

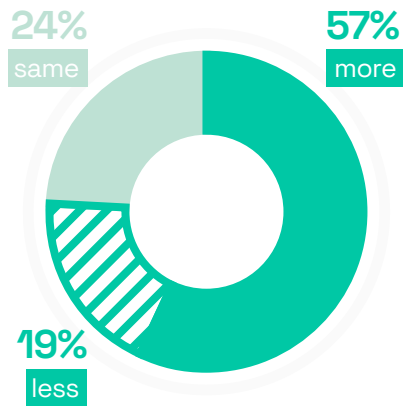
- Centrally communicated brand information
- Brand training for employees
- More accessible brand material

In essence, the biggest improvements can be made internally – by making the brand more accessible to employees and making processes for brand management more transparent.

However, these aren't the only brand-related activities that businesses are planning to work on this year. When asked what brand projects their company is prioritizing in 2021, respondents put strategy and planning, technology, and research at the top of the list. This falls right in line with what businesses seem to need right now, given the answers to our other survey questions.

Surprisingly, even though businesses are prioritizing research, zero percent of respondents listed brand ROI tracking as an important task in 2021. It seems that there are more pressing matters at hand now, but we expect the buzz

Do you or your company plan to invest more or less on brand-building in 2021?



around brand ROI to grow in the coming year.

Regardless of what branding tasks each company prioritizes this year, we'll likely see massive increases in brand spending, as 80% of businesses plan to spend the same or more on their brand, with 75% of companies planning to spend up to \$1M on their branding yearly. The primary exception is small businesses, which as a group are planning to spend less on brand building than they did in 2020 (likely because of recent events that have tightened their budgets and halted their branding efforts).

This brand growth will be most obvious in two industries. Leading this charge, the Arts, Entertainment & Media

industry, whose companies plan to allocate the largest amount of money toward branding activities. Close behind, the Business & Finance industry, where 71% of companies plan to increase their spending by a significantly larger margin than any other industry.

No matter how you slice it, branding is only going to grow in importance going forward. Now, more than ever before, people in every industry are investing heavily in their brands by implementing new strategies, adopting new technology, and discussing important brand-related topics. To keep up, you'll need to prioritize and find room in the budget for important branding activities within your own organization.

Examples of What Companies Will Focus On This Year

- The introduction of new technology to enhance the delivery of their brands and keep up with the dynamics of changing trends.
- Improving the consistency of the end-user experience across all applications.
- Keeping a pulse on the competition while making sure their own brand standards are consistent.
- Reaching a global audience with a consistent message that translates into different countries/cultures.
- More specific guidelines and opportunities for more consistency.
- Better communication across all roles of the company.
- More collaboration within the different teams and access to more files to help with future projects.
- More community-centric opportunities, including public outreach and intentional connection with various communities.

06

What's Next?

The future is bright for organizations that invest in their brand. But that investment doesn't have to be massive to yield a positive ROI. By giving brand ownership to more stakeholders, creating shared guidelines, and involving different teams in the strategy and development process, you can successfully future-proof your brand and set it up for long-term growth.

At Frontify, we understand the business value of your brand. That's why we created a platform for overcoming branding challenges. With 410K users, including professionals from brands like Lufthansa, we're here to help you get your brand where you want (and need) it to be. Check out our [platform](#) today, or book a live [demo](#) to get a walkthrough of our solutions.

