

# B2B + Branding

Creative  
Supply

— *An essential read for business owners, trade professionals and creatives looking to understand the latest developments in B2B Branding.*





**A handy guide to understanding how B2B branding is evolving in Switzerland, how it affects businesses, and why a good brand can help your company grow.**

# Credits

## Report Author

Youri Sawerschel, Chief Creative Officer

## Report Design and Illustrations

Nelly Damas, Art Director

## Executive Interviewees

Chris Tanner, CEO at **Adnovum**

Christian Wengi, Head of Marketing at **Holcim Switzerland & Italy**

Christof Bircher, Director of Business Development and Communication at **BUCHI Corporation**

David Bruno, Head Company Builder at **SIX Group**

Frédéric Dreyer-Gonzales, Director at **OPI Office de Promotion des Industries et Technologies**

Frédéric Gouverd, CEO at **BOUCLEDOR**

Hichem Essaafi, Head of Client and Digital Innovations at **SIG**

Isabel Cerliani, Managing Founder at **Unfold**

Jerôme Vial, Country Manager at **CCH Tagetik Switzerland**

Johanna Gardin, Marketing Manager at **Abionic**

Marc Häusermann, Partner at **Amstein + Walthert**

Martin Hedman, Founder & Shareholder of **Meili Technology**

Martin Witzig, CEO at **Witzig The Office Company**

Philippe Menoud, General Manager at **IEM SA**

Stefan Hoher, Head of Marketing & Communications at **GF Machining Solutions**

Stève Cattin, Growth Hacker at **FELFEL**

Tillman Fuchs, VP Global Branding at **Credit Suisse**

Timur Tekyeli, Head Branding at **SIX Group**

Yann Duscher, Head of Sales & Marketing at **Crevoisier**

## Special Thanks

Tilo Peters, Executive Director at **EPFL EMBA**

Caecilie Anker Nielsen, Marketing Growth Manager at **Legartis**

Creative Supply GmbH  
Regensbergstrasse 89  
8050 Zurich

Creative  
Supply

[creativesupply.com](https://creativesupply.com)  
[hello@creativesupply.com](mailto:hello@creativesupply.com)

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# Foreword

**B**randing specialists often provide insight to clients. Yet as most of them will tell you, their clients are in fact their greatest source of inspiration. This was certainly the case in the run-up to writing this report. In the spring of 2019, the Creative Supply team was hired to help a client develop an exciting new brand ahead of an upcoming product launch. But this time the product wasn't a perfume or a hotel; it was a highly technical software package for researchers and companies. This was the latest in a series of challenging projects working with B2B clients across Switzerland, and yet in the course of our research, we found there was little material dedicated to B2B branding, let alone with a Swiss focus. With the encouragement of our clients and the support of the Executive MBA programme of the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), we decided it was time to put some of our own learnings on paper.

Switzerland has long provided ideal conditions for B2B companies. A highly skilled workforce, low levels of bureaucracy and a central location with excellent connexions to other powerful

European economies are just some of the advantages cultivated over the last century. A very Swiss reputation for precision, craftsmanship and punctuality also helps, even though the Swiss brand comes with its own set of limitations, some of which we will address in this report. All in all, however, B2B companies have had it pretty good in Switzerland, with companies like Glencore, ABB or LafargeHolcim ranking among the largest in the country, and the world.

But this environment is changing. Globalisation isn't happening, it has already happened. Digitisation is already entering a third wave of automation, following connectivity in the 90s and mobility in the 00s. Internally these companies are changing too, with millennial generations now taking up management positions and bringing their own perspectives and expectations to the table. In this context, B2B companies can no longer rely on geographical or reputational advantages to stay competitive. They have to leverage their own brands. In order to continue to grow, good branding will have to become an

integral part of their overall business strategy, following a cultural shift already well under way in the B2C world. The question is: how do they do it?

In this report, we go beyond the hype and jargon to look at how best to integrate branding in a B2B context. We share some of the insight and practical tips we've learned from working with leading B2B companies. Designed for business leaders from startups to established organisations, our report features exclusive insights from nearly 20 executives at leading Swiss companies. The first part of the report looks at the

trends shaping the conversation around branding in Switzerland and how Swiss companies, both large and small, have found ways to adapt and evolve their brand strategies. In the second part, we present a five-step approach to help you build a leading B2B brand.

I hope this report will serve as a basis for discussion. I wish you a pleasant and informative read. ■



*Youri Sawerschel*  
Youri Sawerschel  
Founder, Creative Supply

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1 Automated production of Geberit installation elements. Photo credit: Geberit AG.



# Part 1 Evolution in B2B Branding



Photo credit: Büchi.

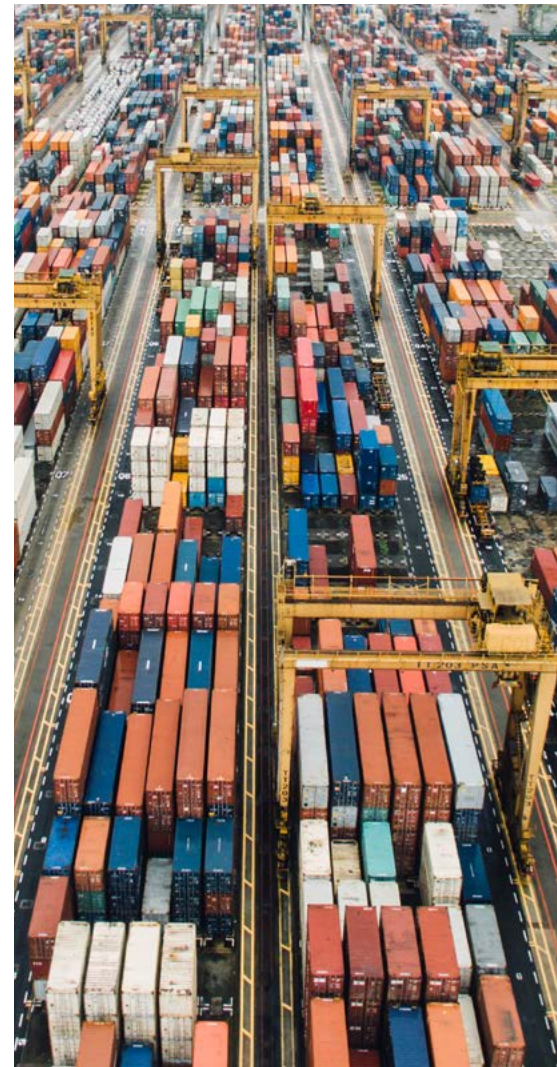


Photo credit: FELFEL.

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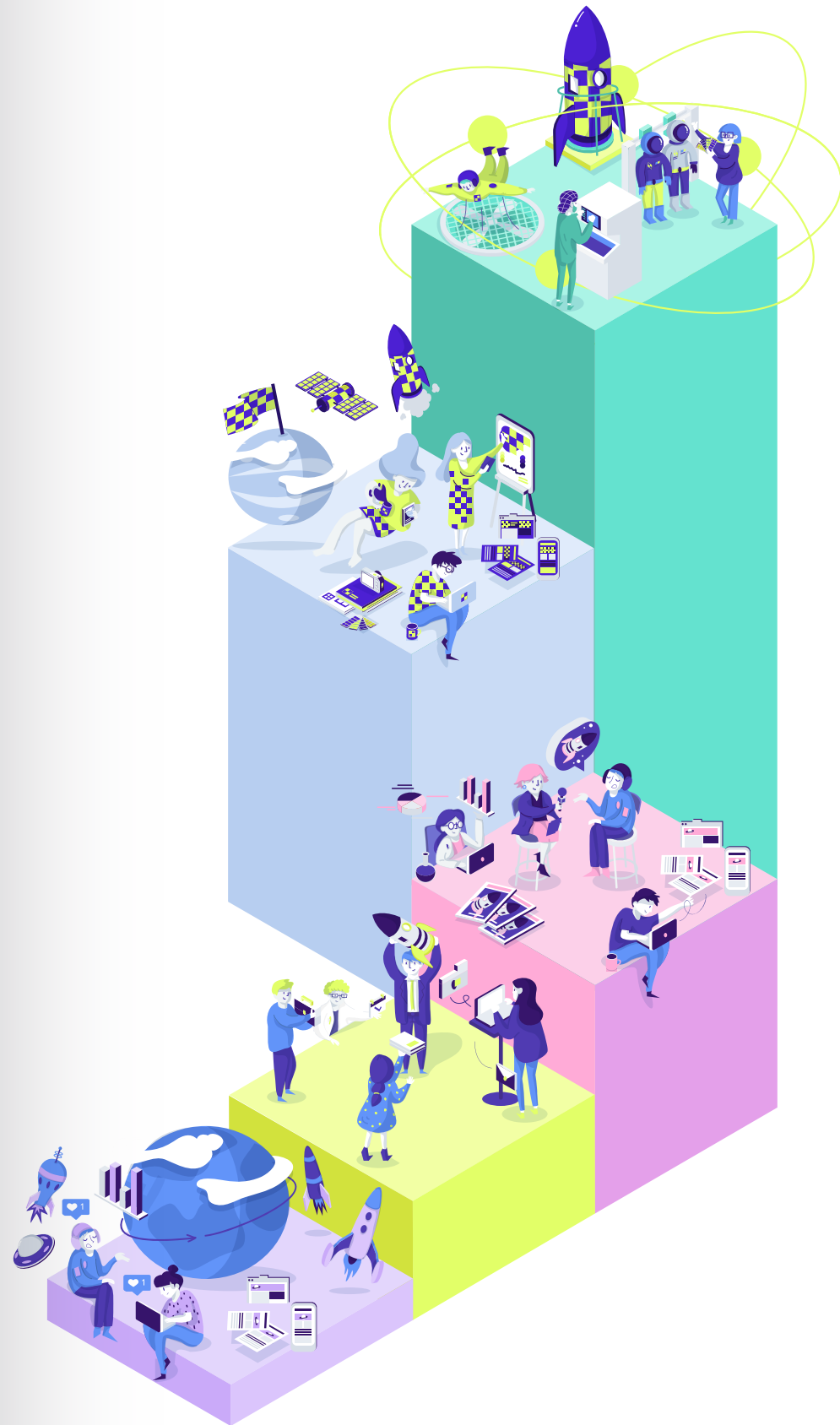
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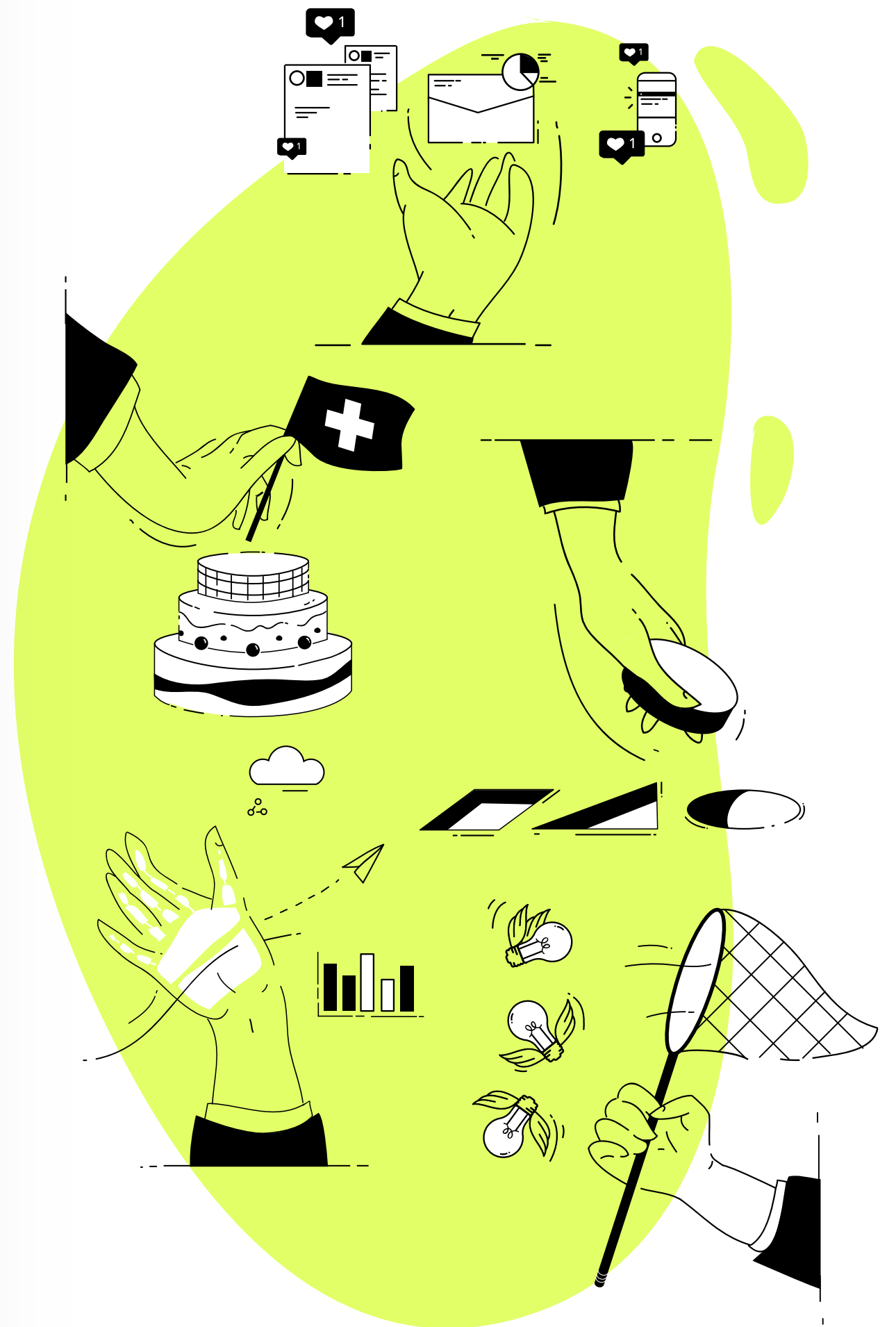
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# Part 1 Evolution in B2B Branding

This first part presents an in-depth foray into six major branding trends affecting B2B businesses. It features insights gleaned from nearly 20 executive interviews, desktop research, as well as our own consulting experience.

From the challenges posed by globalisation and digitisation to the hurdles of recruitment and country branding, each trend is presented to help B2B leaders gain a thorough understanding of B2B branding.







## Balancing Facts and Emotions

Brand Communication is the medium through which we first encounter a brand. And just like in real life, first impressions do matter.

*“ We understand that it is no longer just about selling a product, but also about selling the story behind it. ”*

YANN DUSCHER  
Head of Sales & Marketing  
at **Crevoisier**

**B**2B communication is not renowned for being particularly original or exciting. Focusing heavily on product features, it tends to be overly technical and fact-based. This is in stark contrast to B2C companies, where creativity and emotional messaging are the standard triggers to drive customer engagement. The reasons for this vary from sector to sector, but we can single out three: lack of a dedicated communication budget, lack of media experience, and the notion that a “serious” company shouldn’t engage in “frivolous” communication efforts.

The problem with the third argument is that purchasing decisions are made by people – not companies or machines. And according to a 2013 marketing report by Google, B2B buyers are more emotionally connected to the brands they purchase than the average B2C consumer. Simply put, the stakes are higher for B2B buyers since their purchases affect not only the wellbeing of their company,

but also their own standing – and possibly job – within. This is why, according to Hichem Essaafi, the Head of Client and Digital Innovation for utility company SIG Group, “in a B2B context, approaches based purely on product promotion work less and less.” This view was shared by many of the executives we interviewed. Several of them also highlighted the importance of creativity as a tool to attract and convert customers.

*“ Storytelling is becoming more important – we must give people content. ”*

TIMUR TEKYELI  
Head Branding  
at **SIX Group**

## From Boring to Brilliant

In the realm of brand communication, advertising is step one: the spark that sets a potential purchase into motion. The objective – get buyers’ attention. Since buyers are usually category experts, research generally follows or precedes the ad phase. Too many companies try to squeeze product information onto advertisements, making for a murky and dull first impression. Conversely, an engaging, creative advert will stand

out to buyers. For instance, take the incredibly successful 2013 video campaign “[The Epic Split](#)” by Volvo Trucks. In it, we see action star Jean-Claude Van Damme gradually lowering himself into the splits atop two trucks driving parallel one another. The video both fuels and subverts the macho aesthetic associated with the trucking community, while offering a genuinely captivating show. At the same time, the video visually highlights the

excellent manoeuvrability and stability of Volvo trucks, without the need for a full product spec sheet. Another example is Swiss laboratory technology expert BÜCHI, who uses bold and unexpected image combinations to attract attention on social media. Christof Bircher, Business Development & Communication Director at BÜCHI told us that: “*getting the attention of our customers is a huge challenge. They are swamped with content, so you absolutely*

*have to stand out.*” Büchi recently used a cheetah/chameleon-combo visual to convey the idea of speed and flexibility, promoting their “wild” range of extraction tests. Whether it is with humour or quirky visuals, these examples highlight how a powerful image or symbol can engage and even entertain the viewer without reducing the perceived value of a product or brand.



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2 In the 2013 video campaign “[The Epic Split](#)” by Volvo Trucks. In it, we see action star Jean-Claude Van Damme gradually lowering himself into a split atop two trucks driving parallel to each other. Photo credit: Volvo.



More recently, the marketing software company Hubspot has been finding inspiration in pop culture references—like their “Mean Tweets” series of videos—and creating viral content to boost their service. This approach resonates well with their “digital native” audience, which is then led on to other product-based videos thanks to the YouTube algorithm. All these examples show how B2B companies can balance quirky, emotional or even humorous content with serious underlying credentials. A mix specific to the B2B sector, and tailored to an audience of buyers desperate for real engagement. The number of B2B companies daring to be different is currently on the rise, showing the world that industrial equipment and heavy machinery can be just as exciting as cars or watches. ■

*“The most creative campaigns are the ones driving the biggest leads, and fostering the most engagement.”*

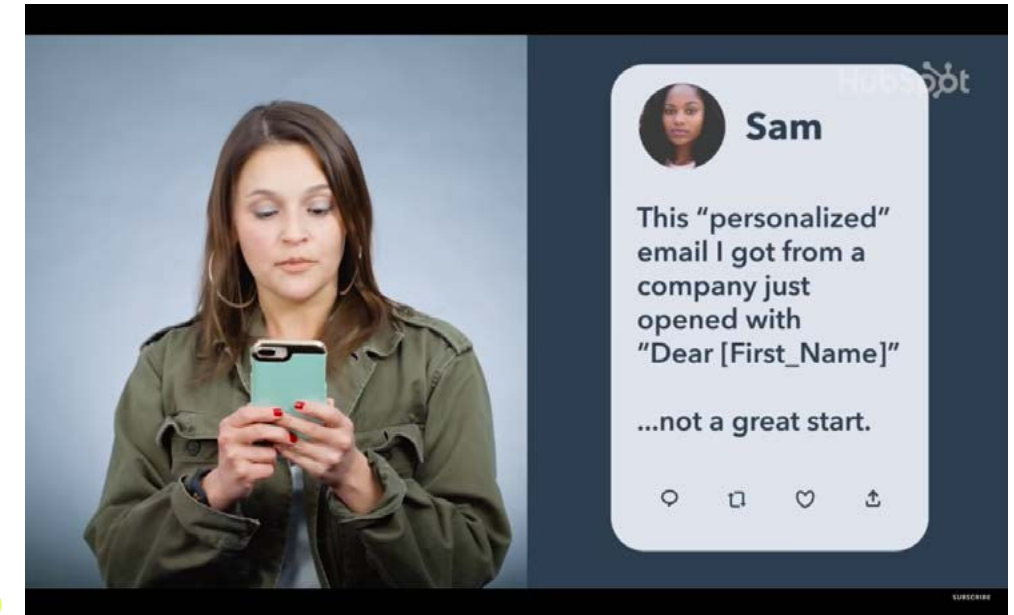
CHRISTOF BIRCHER  
 Director of Business Development and Communication  
 at **BUCHI Corporation**

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3 Swiss laboratory technology expert Büchi used a cheetah/chameleon visual to convey the idea of speed and flexibility, promoting their “wild” range of extraction tests. Image credit: Büchi.

4 Marketing experts read—and react—to “mean tweets” detailing bad marketing practices, showcasing their expertise while subverting a popular YouTube and TV concept. Video credit: Hubspot.



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*“In a B2B context, approaches based purely on product promotion work less and less.”*

HICHEM ESSAAFI  
 Head of Client and Digital Innovation at **SIG Group**



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5 Services are often as important as products when it comes to B2B solutions. Photo credit: SIG.



# Rethinking Swissness

Far from the clichés, Switzerland is a leader in many cutting-edge B2B sectors. But while companies should build on “Swissness,” they mustn’t depend on it.

**S** Switzerland is a small country with a big reputation. Historical exports like luxury watches, chocolate or banking services have become synonyms of the country. However, beneath these stereotypes are underlying qualities like precision, craftsmanship and discretion, which are beneficial for many companies but have also created somewhat of an image problem for the country. A 2018 study conducted by EY found that Swiss companies are some of the biggest spenders in Research & Innovation worldwide, yet Switzerland does not enjoy the same innovative image as California or South Korea. Swiss companies shine in a myriad of sectors from pharma to cosmetics to industry and software development, and the majority of executives we talked to recognise the

value of the Swiss brand. But rather than clinging to old stereotypes, companies should instead be championing the values that underpin the Switzerland of today.

Another difficulty in positively leveraging Swissness as a company is that everyone does it the same way. When most competitors share the same advantage, it no longer qualifies as an advantage. Worse, some companies with questionable Swiss heritage and even more questionable production processes have been abusing the Swiss brand for their own benefit, negatively impacting the “swiss-made” reputation in the process. This has led to a number of high-profile scandals, including in the prestigious Swiss watchmaking sector. In 2017, for example, it was revealed that hundreds

of watch brands—some of which household names—using the “Swiss made” label for their products, were actually sourcing most of their components from Asia and merely assembling the final product in the country. New rules passed the same year have failed to eradicate the problem, undermining Swiss suppliers and causing market unrest at a time where the industry was already reeling from the rise of smartwatches and lifestyle upstarts like Daniel Wellington or Briston. Examples

such as this underline the difficult situation faced by B2B companies that have relied exclusively on their Swissness to sell their products abroad without investing in their own brand equity. This is the double-edged sword of being dependent on country branding. Whatever benefits are gained from Swissness must be balanced against the loss of control over your own brand. If the Swiss brand takes a hit, companies that depend on it will be the first to suffer.







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## The Fondue Pot Theory

Harnessing the values tied to “Swissness” is definitely an opportunity for B2B brands. The benefits are too good to be ignored. “*Good brand values can bring people together, both within and outside a company,*” says Frédéric Dreyer-Gonzales, Director at the Office for the Promotion of Industries and Technologies, and Switzerland certainly doesn’t lack positive brand values. But at the end of the day, it is just one tasty ingredient in any good

brand strategy recipe, like Gruyère cheese – necessary but not sufficient to make a great Swiss fondue. When you look at ABB, Swiss-Swedish leader in the energy market, Switzerland is not an obvious part of its brand messaging and story. However, the brand is inevitably associated with high quality and performance both through its core industry and new ventures (e.g. partnership with Formula E). Through consistent brand management, ABB has

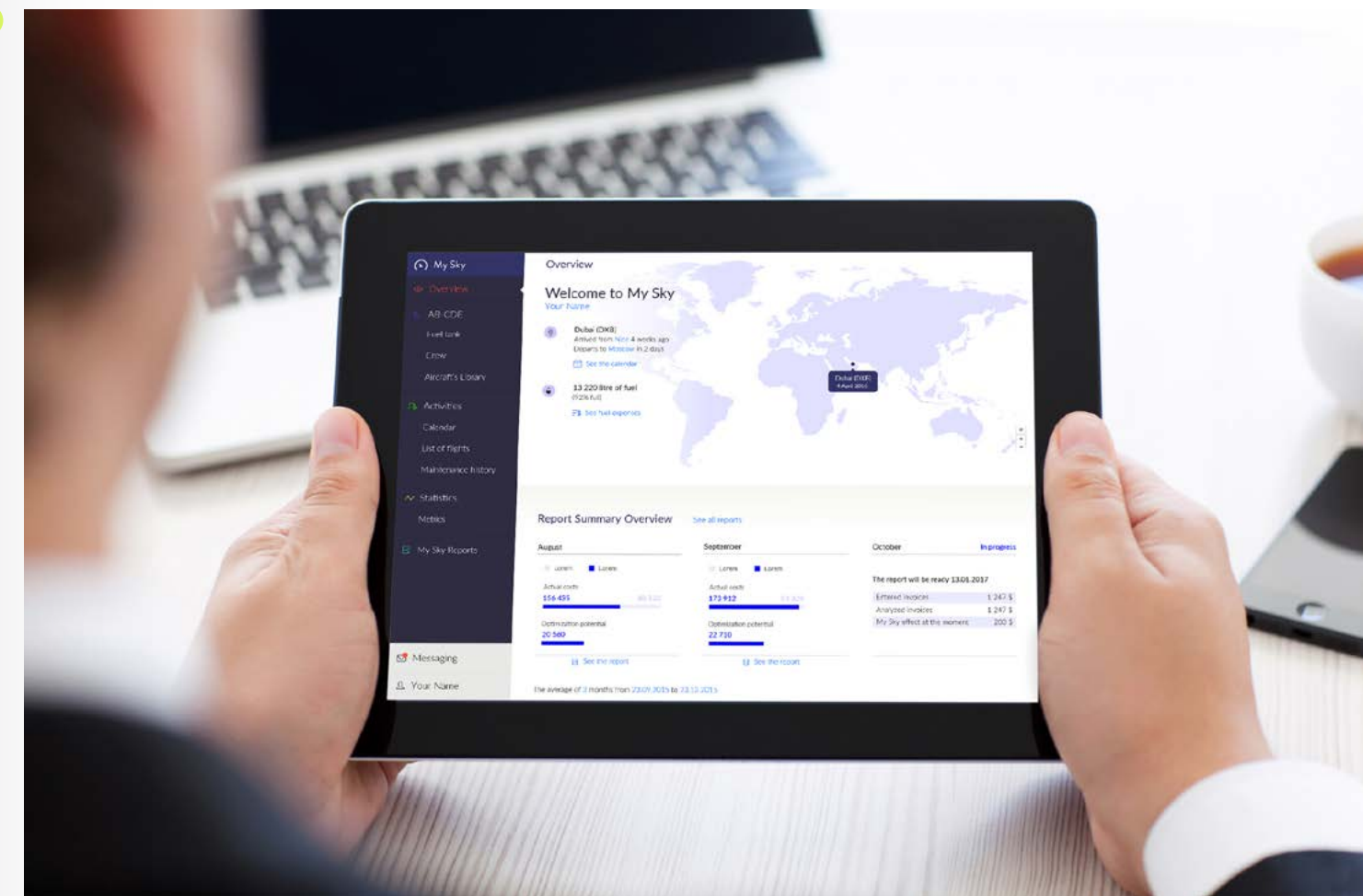
subtly and successfully combined the Swiss values with a message focused on innovation and technological development.

More broadly, companies wanting to steer clear of genericism should refrain from promoting all aspects of Swissness. Picking the one value or the one strong symbol that resonates with a company’s identity is a good way to avoid looking like everyone else, while reinforcing one’s own brand. Take the example of our client My Sky, a Swiss-based jet software provider. They leverage the neutrality of their home country (Switzerland) to reinforce their positioning as a neutral and independent player within the jet industry. In doing so, My Sky builds a strong competitive advantage against its global competitors ■

“*Good brand values can bring people together, both within and outside a company.*”

FRÉDÉRIC DREYER-GONZALES  
Director at the **Office for the Promotion of Industries and Technologie**

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6 Despite its origins, ABB doesn’t use traditional Swiss clichés in its brand communication but associates itself with progressive ventures such as Formula E. Photo credit: ABB.

7 My Sky, a Swiss-based jet software provider, leverages the legendary neutrality of its home country to reinforce its own image as an independent player within the jet industry.





# Attracting Talent

Employer branding is not just about nifty amenities and flexible workday schedules. When it's done right, it can rejuvenate a workforce - and help win the global talent war.

Swiss B2B companies have no choice but to take part in the global fight for talent. While many Swiss companies still carry a lot of weight on a CV, it can be hard for small and medium enterprises to match the allure of giants like Richemont or Novartis, or the excitement of the Swiss startup scene. The imbalance is even stronger abroad, where traditionally low-profile Swiss companies struggle to spark interest against more established local companies or large global brands.

Adding to the challenge of name recognition is location. Many B2B companies are located in industrial or agricultural areas, far from the urban centres where talent, and especially young graduate talent, is concentrated. When considering how mobile the workforce has

become and how employee expectations have evolved over the past decade, getting people to stay in rural or industrial areas, let alone attract top talent from elsewhere, is a challenge not to be taken lightly.



8 Going beyond traditional corporate training programs, we worked with SIG to create a life-size game concept to engage over 1,300 employees with their brand values.

But securing talent alone is not enough. An employer brand should resonate with all its employees. A brand they feel connected to gives them more purpose and drive, resulting in higher employee engagement and retention. The executives we interviewed also stressed the importance of employees actually bringing life to the brand: some even acting as brand ambassadors both inside and outside the company. Some companies, such as financial infrastructure provider SIX group, have begun to tackle the matter. According to their Head of Branding, Timur Tekyeli, *“our challenge is that our employees don’t always realise they carry the SIX brand in everything they do [...] the prouder our employees are of the SIX brand, the better it is [for] our brand awareness outside the company.”* So how do you get employees to learn about and internalise company brand values? This question was posed to us by the Industrial Services of Geneva (SIG), a public-private partnership that manages a number of utilities for



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the Geneva region. The answer we came up with was perhaps unexpected: a life-size board game for employees. The tiles mixed scenes and actions mirroring the everyday life of employees with questions and facts surrounding SIG brand values. As employees moved around a familiar board, they were able to pick out the commonalities between their work and the brand values, forging a lasting connection between the two. Following a successful pilot, the game was rolled out and over 1,300 employees were able to take part in the creative and entertaining experiment.

*“ Our challenges is that our employees don’t always realise that they carry the SIX brand in everything they do. ”*

TIMUR TEKYELI  
Head Branding at **SIX Group**



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## A Talent(ed) Brand

*“Our vision and goals play a big role in bringing talents in the company.”*

MARC HÄUSERMANN  
Partner at **Amstein+Walthert**

So how can B2B companies use their brand to attract and engage talent? Strong brand presence, good media coverage and a modern brand identity can all help small and medium companies compensate for lesser size. Much like how companies are always adapting to changing customer expectations, they must also learn to consider employee expectations. From opening an urban hub to house city-loving professionals, to offering language classes for international employees struggling with schwyzerdütsch, Swiss companies



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must learn to cultivate – and communicate around – these initiatives as they would a new product or service.

Many larger Swiss B2B companies are now defining an “employer brand” that works in tandem with their “corporate brand.” AdNovum CEO Chris Tanner confirms that “*Employer branding is becoming more important*” for attracting talent. The software development company has built part of its strategy with future employees in mind, complementing the usual Silicon Valley-like perks like gourmet cafeterias with more impactful measures. These include choosing to locate its offices near public transport hubs, and facilitating flexible work arrangements to offer its employees the best possible work environment.

Meanwhile, consulting giant Deloitte has created a dedicated employer branding unit in each of its key markets, boosting their local appeal and helping them connect and cement relationships with both passive and active job seekers. Another

inspiring example comes from Geberit, a market leader in sanitary solutions. Since 2012, the company has invested in its employer brand, developing a specific visual appearance, producing employee-testimonial videos and increasing its presence at job fairs. Doing so has helped position Geberit as a progressive employer with an open corporate culture and international development opportunities.

From tweaking LinkedIn ads to be more appealing, to a full-fledged office redesign complete with sleep pods and a yoga studio, the possibilities for shaping your employer brand are endless. However it’s important to note that not all of them require enormous amounts of resources. A good brand strategy that is well conveyed will naturally boost an employer’s profile. Conversely, spending money on lavish facilities might resonate badly with staff if their main preoccupation is salary or training. That’s why it’s important to establish recruitment goals and a budget beforehand, expressing your creativity within the limits of reason. ■

11 Since 2012, Geberit has heavily invested in its employer brand. Photo credit: Geberit AG.

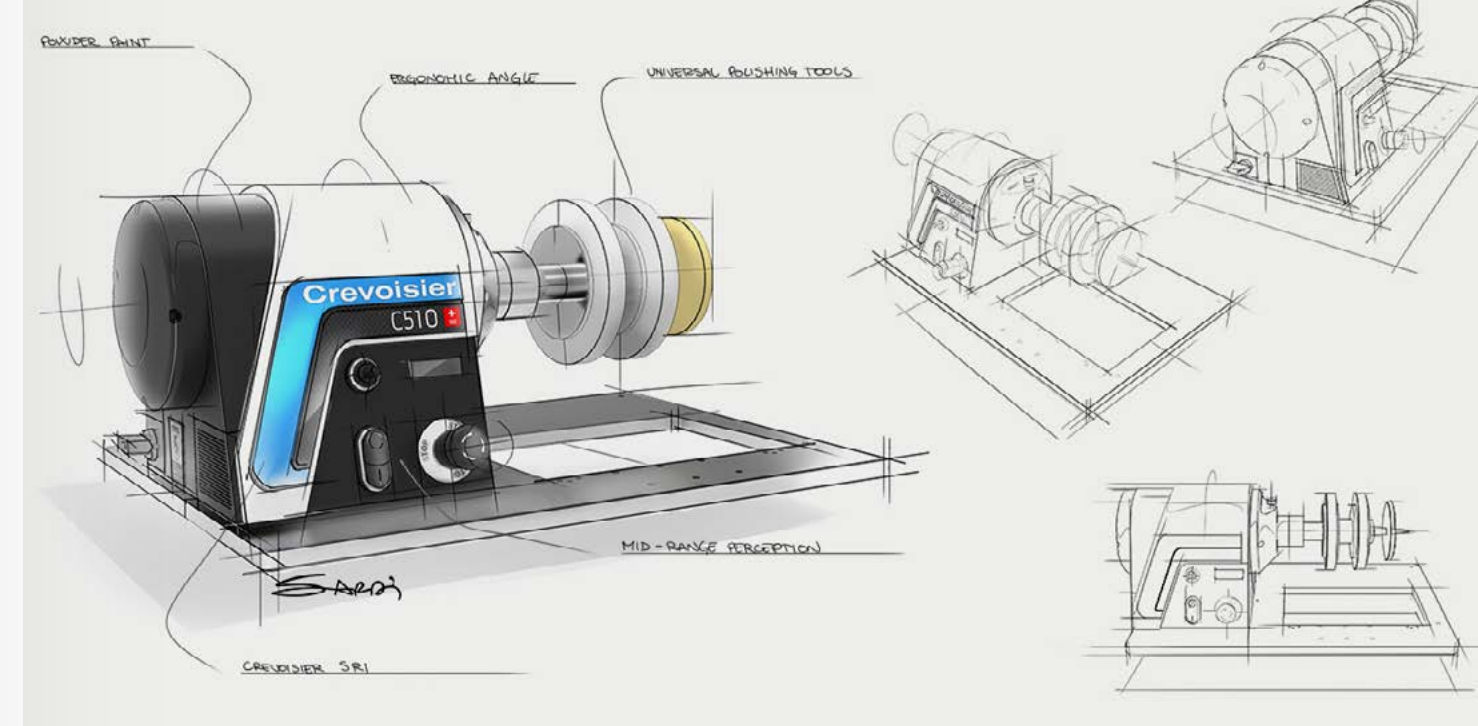
12 AdNovum, a Swiss software development company, has built its brand strategy with future employees in mind. Photo credit: AdNovum AG.





# Embracing Transparency

A mix of social, political and environmental changes are pressuring companies to be more open about their business. When armed with a proper brand strategy, this could be a good thing.



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**D**igitisation has given us all access to a huge amount of information regarding the products we use in our everyday lives. This is also true about B2B products and services. B2B buyers now have access to third party sources—from trade publications to specialised forums—to better research and review what they buy. “B2B clients are similar to B2C customers in the way that they want more information access – and they don’t want to have to wait for it” says Isabel Cerliani, Managing Founder of growth consultancy Unfold. Having to deal with increasingly knowledgeable customers is a trend identified by all B2B executives we spoke to. End-consumers too are increasingly investigating a product’s entire supply chain, tracking components back to their original manufacturer. For example, more and more watch enthusiasts are being invited to tour the production ateliers of their favourite brands. As a result, industry suppliers like

machine manufacturer Crevoisier have been asked by their watchmaking clients to create more personalised designs for their machines in a bid to elevate the overall customer experience (and boost the watch brand’s appeal).

Buyers being able to access more company information means more due diligence in the B2B purchasing process, as firms become aware of the impact even indirect association with a disreputable supplier can have on their own reputation. On top of that, increased information transparency is giving B2B customers more authority, thus calling into question the power and credibility of conventional one-way vendor communication. A sentiment shared by Martin Hedman, Director at engineering group Meili Technology: “20 years ago, I wasn’t so critical when I looked at another company’s branding. Companies today have to make more efforts to maintain their credibility in the face of increased scrutiny.”

**13** Crevoisier, an industrial machine manufacturer, mandated global design company SARDI to improve the design functionality and esthetic of its machines. Image credit: Sardi Group.



## & Demonstrate & Communicate

Empowered customers, reputation risk and increased scrutiny force B2B brands to be both visible and credible at every touchpoint of the customer journey, from review websites to social media to trade fairs. This means reviewing all elements in the company value chain, checking every level to see what information is available, how recent or up to date it is, and making sure it is consistent with both facts and messaging guidelines.

Being transparent also means being available for contact or comment, and being able to defuse a potential crisis situation by being forthcoming. Trust is the unofficial currency of the business world, and when it is broken, even giants can fall. Take former Japanese airbag manufacturer Takata Corporation, which was broken apart and sold for scraps following multiple hushed-up security scandals that affected large car manufacturers like Ford, GM or BMW. Even when companies survive, as was the case with Volkswagen group following the

CO<sub>2</sub> emissions scandal of 2015, the costs associated with rebuilding a trustworthy brand image far outweigh the initial investment in transparency.

Indeed, some brands have actually found a way to benefit from this new constraint: by adopting transparency as a key brand message. Take Syngenta, for example, a company that supplies agricultural products and solutions. Transparency forms a key pillar of their brand messaging. By providing free access to their research and environmental data, Syngenta is able to offer proof-points to strengthen its claims on sustainable farming and demonstrate honesty in an industry dominated by controversial companies.

On the whole, it often pays to be proactive when it comes to changing societal trends. A company that is more transparent than its peers will be seen as more trustworthy. Stefan Hoher, Head of Marketing & Communications at piping

15 Creating and sharing content helps B2B companies cultivate a culture of transparency and openness. Photo credit: Georg Fischer Ltd.

16 Placing transparency at the core of their brand, Syngenta makes research and environmental data available to the public. Photo credit: Syngenta AG.

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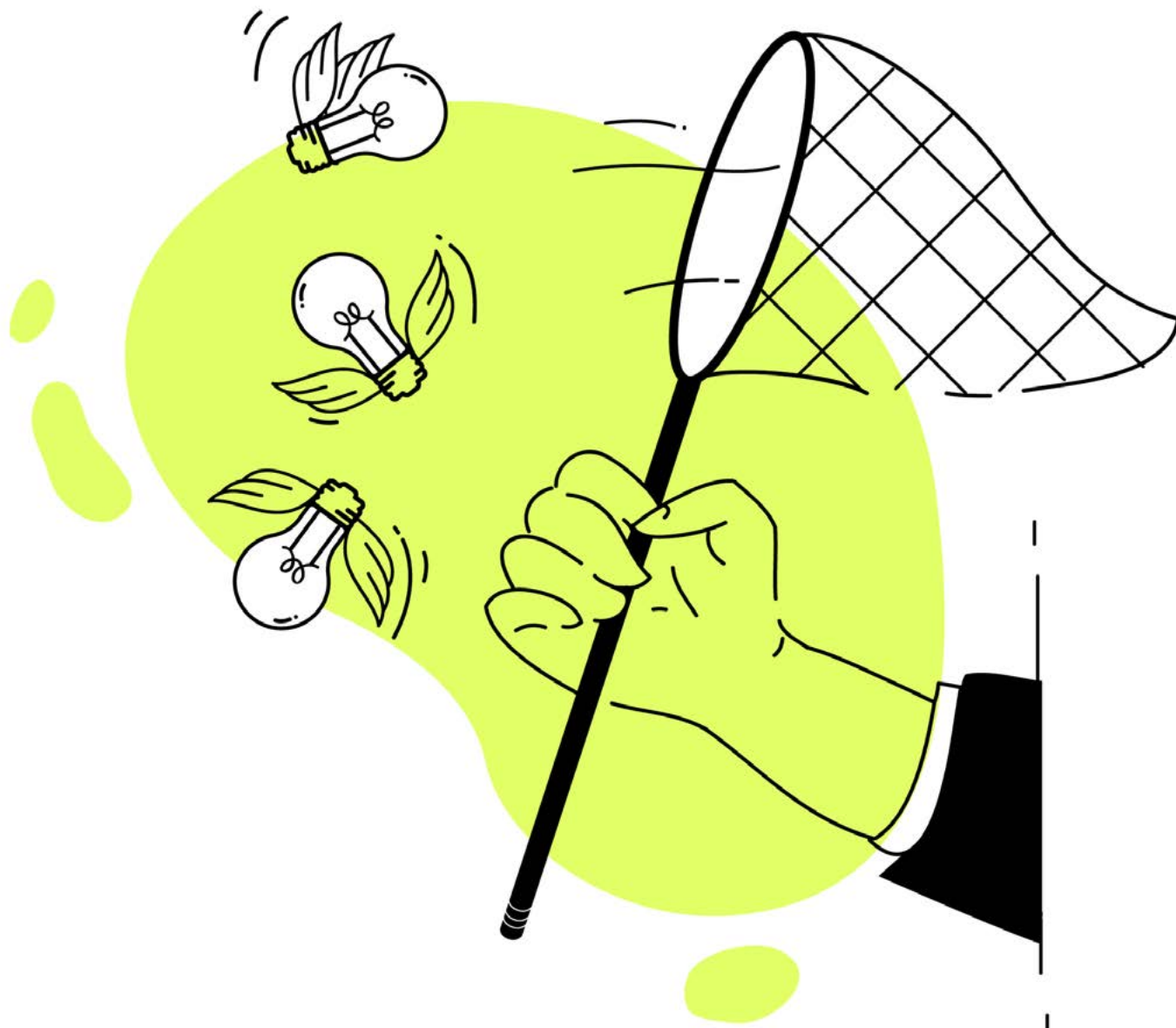


solutions specialist GF explained how establishing GF as a transparency leader was a rewarding but challenging task: “ [Our] biggest challenge is content. Written, precise and relevant content [...] technological advances make it easier to access [this] relevant content, which reinforces its importance.” In other words, as access to information is made easier, the companies pushing the most relevant content can be seen as more trustworthy and engaging. Conversely, not doing so can damage your brand and, ultimately, your business. ■



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# Resisting Commoditisation

Swiss B2B companies cannot rely solely on their product to fend off global competition.

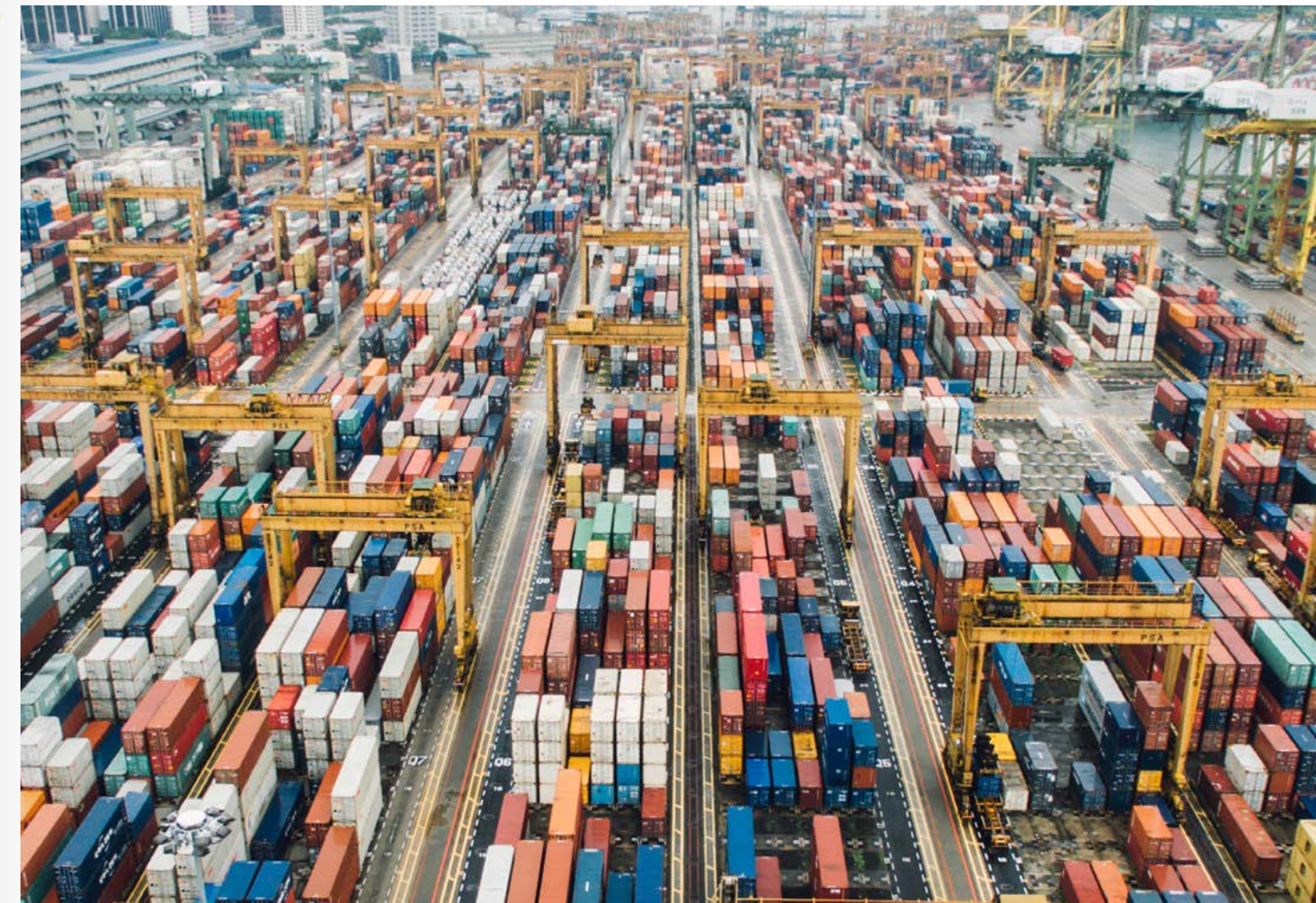
17 In a globalised world, Swiss companies must now fight to survive against a growing number of cheaper, qualitatively comparable international rivals.

U p until the 1970s, being a respected Swiss manufacturing or engineering firm meant relatively straightforward access to customers in France, Germany and farther abroad. High quality and the lack of specialised competition ensured Swiss tools, products or machines could travel as far as China to be sold. In a globalised world, Swiss companies must now fight to survive against a growing number of cheaper, qualitatively comparable international rivals. No industry is immune. Developing countries, especially in Asia, have closed the technological and quality gap in many sectors. Qualitative alternatives to Swiss products at lower cost decreases their perceived value. And it doesn't take long for a product to become a commodity.

But international trade is not the only thing driving the commoditisation wagon.

Automation and open source technologies are making it harder for companies to stay competitive. Supply chain politics further complicate matters, with end-of-the-line assemblers now holding disproportionate power in the value chain. Even in the watchmaking industry, commoditisation creates a risk of consolidation. According to Frédéric Gouverd, CEO of luxury clasp manufacturer Boucledor, “*consolidation in the watchmaking sector is similar to what happened in the auto industry in the 80s and 90s, where large car manufacturing groups could force price squeezes out of – and take over – small parts suppliers. To counter this, we must not only innovate, but also learn how to better publicise our innovations.*” Otherwise stated, B2B companies unable to generate awareness beyond their immediate circle of customers and stakeholders are doomed to a slow death.

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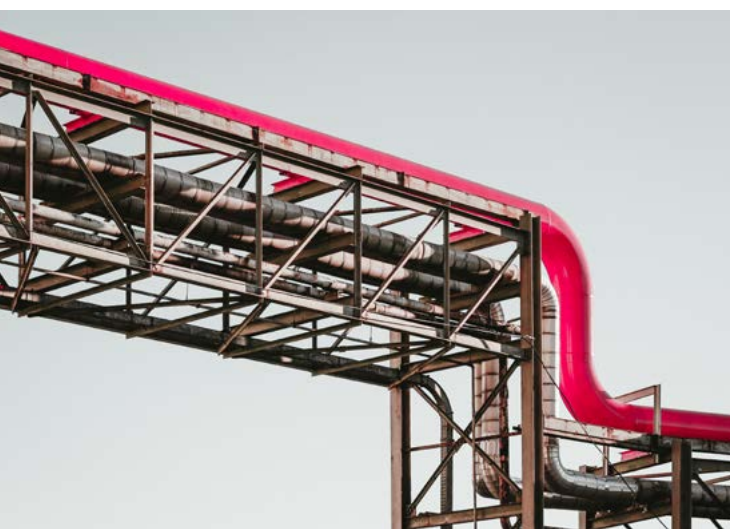




*“ We need to  
decommoditise  
our offering.”*

HICHEM ESSAAFI  
Head of Client and Digital  
Innovation, **SIG Group**

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18 Even highly commoditised products or services  
can stand out with great branding.

## Rethinking the Value Proposition

Commoditisation is a major threat for Swiss B2B companies, especially those who were previously sheltered from it through location or past good business strategies. In the making of this report, most executives we talked to had something to say on the subject. Fortunately, they also had some ideas for solutions. One key way B2B companies can escape commoditisation is by forming closer relationships with their customers. By forming an active ecosystem and providing unique services, insight or even education to these companies, the relationship evolves from purely transactional to one based on trust, authority, and reliance. Even technologically-advanced companies like corporate software solutions provider AdNovum need to undergo this transition, as confirmed by its CEO, Chris Tanner: *“Even software development is now becoming more of a commodity. AdNovum needs to position itself as more than a software engineering group, [becoming] a technological partner that can help customers master their digital potential.”*

*“ Even software development  
is now becoming more of a  
commodity. AdNovum needs  
to position itself as more than  
a software engineering group,  
as a technological partner that  
can help customers master their  
digital potential”*

CHRIS TANNER  
CEO Adnovum



***“The old business models are dying, partly due to commoditisation. We must figure out new ways to extract value other than the product.”***

DAVID BRUNO  
Head Company Builder  
SIX Group

In order to achieve this, however, companies must first convince customers and stakeholders of their expertise, which means building up intellectual property, hosting seminars and more broadly integrating this scheme within their overall brand strategy.

There are different ways to add value to a commoditised product. Moving from products to solutions that include some level of service or customer care is one way to do so. Another is good product branding, which can help highlight unique product characteristics (such as patents, rarity, unique provenance, etc.) or make that product more appealing to customers (with packaging, machine design, naming, etc.). Still not convinced? Neither were rival cement manufacturers when Holcim introduced branded names for its products.

According to Christian Wengi, Holcim’s Head of Marketing for Switzerland and Italy, here’s what happened next: *“When we introduced brand names for our cement products in Switzerland, everyone laughed at us because we were the first to do it. But after a few months, even our competitors’ customers started using our brand names when talking about cement types.”* Thanks to their smart naming initiative, Holcim was able to effectively own the discourse within a category that is often considered the ultimate commodity. Commoditisation is a challenge, for sure. However, it is not insurmountable, and B2B companies are often better armed to face it than they think. ■



# Managing Resources

Good branding is not dependent on budget, but on good strategy.

**N**ot all companies have the coffers of a GE or an Airbus with regards to their branding budgets. Even large and profitable companies are always looking for a positive return on investment – a measurement that can be hard to calculate when it comes to branding investment. For B2B companies, this budget headache all too often leaves marketing departments with scraps. And that's when companies actually have a dedicated marketing department.

*“In Switzerland, we have this habit of mixing up marketing and sales,”* says Martin Hedman, Director at engineering firm Meili Technology. This creates confusion over roles, resource allocation and KPIs – a concern shared by many of the executives we interviewed.

As for brand strategy, many of our interviewees confirmed the discipline is not yet fully understood by many non-

marketing executives. The marketing community is partly to blame for this, too often indulging in jargon, or using references or examples from the B2C world that don't resonate with the specific challenges B2B companies have to face. The prevalence of product-based marketing also hinders the development of branding, as investing in the brand can be seen as a frivolous pursuit in comparison to the established practices and metrics of product advertising.

Finally, there is a long-held myth that the cost of branding is too high for many B2B SMEs. Whether it's budget or internal resources, branding is too often perceived as a luxury, a “nice to have” extra. *“We don't always have the internal resources to make the brand live,”* says Yann Duscher of industrial machine manufacturer Crevoisier SA, a sentiment echoed by many executives we talked to. This impression



can be explained by the fact that brand building takes time, yet rarely contributes to short-term sales. Branding does, however, drive long-term benefits such as brand awareness, brand loyalty and price premiums. The known catchphrase “Nobody ever got fired for buying IBM”

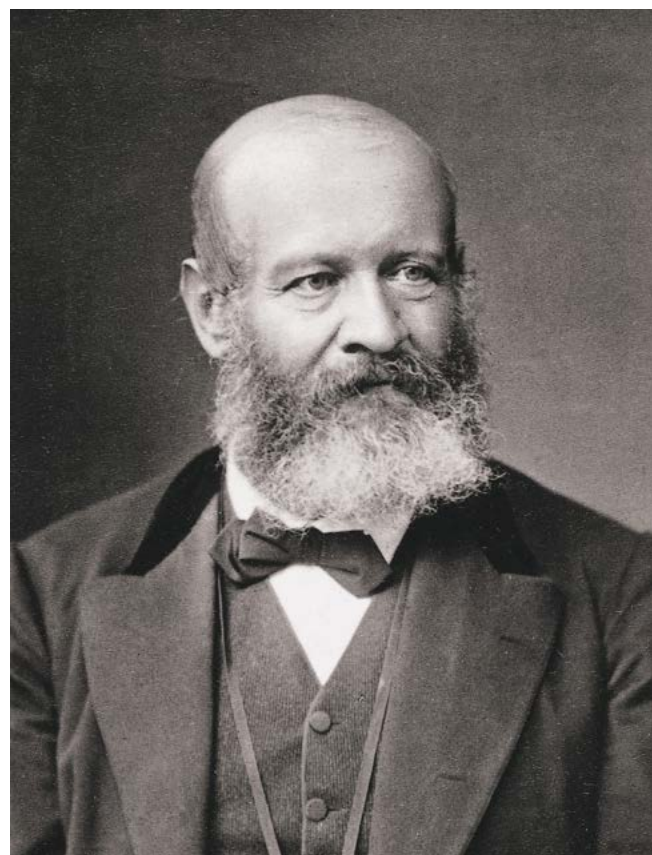
is a good demonstration that B2B companies can build strong brand equity. Leaders who understand that branding is a long-term investment that impacts their company inside and out can build a lasting competitive advantage. One that cannot be copied by advertising or promotions.



# An Appreciating Asset

At Creative Supply, we believe a good brand is an asset that brings visibility, authority and desirability to a company. Provided it is used strategically, a brand is an asset that appreciates with time. This vision is shared by Isabel Cerliani, Managing Founder at consultancy Unfold: *“Today, branding is becoming more and more like a strategic tool that can help guide a company.”* Indeed, a brand affects all products of a company and remains constant even as product lines change. As new product development cycles get shorter and copy-cats get faster, a brand acts as the “north star” of a company. It shows the future ahead, while remaining timeless in essence.

More and more companies are now seeing their brand not just as an inherited name and logo, but as a reflection of who they are as a business – a projection that can help attract customers, motivate internal stakeholders, and adapt to changing times and market disruptions. Recognising the importance of strategic-level branding, banking giant Credit Suisse recently moved to revamp its Marketing & Communications department. Tillman Fuchs, VP of Global Branding at Credit Suisse, explained to us how Credit Suisse devised a single, global brand strategy for all their divisions, centred around the idea of entrepreneurship. By streamlining their messaging, Credit Suisse was able to better manage their resources and



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strengthen their communication around a positive message: if Credit Suisse is the entrepreneurs’ bank, then all of their customers, even those who are not entrepreneurs, can partake in the entrepreneurial “spirit,” with all its positive connotations.

Looking at brand performance measurement, it is possible to assess and control your branding spend, using both financials (ROI, sales growth, etc.) and “non-financials” (brand recognition, number of followers on social media, etc.). Crucially, the success of a brand strategy



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is not measured by its output (quantity of content produced), but rather by its impact. In the B2B world, it’s better to create one very good brand video than a set of mediocre shorts. Overall, it is recommended to proceed incrementally, starting with institutional content that can be internalised by staff and customers alike, and gradually branch out as circumstances and budget allow. In the words of Steve Cattin, Growth Hacker at smart office fridge startup FELFEL: *“Build a strong base for your brand platform, and try to anticipate future growth. That way, when it happens, you’ll be ready to expand without losing yourself.”* ■

20 Credit Suisse draws on its history (here Alfred Escher who founded their bank) to strengthen its communication and be recognised as the «bank for entrepreneurs». Photo credit: Credit Suisse AG.

21 Rather than overinvesting in branding, FELFEL, an intelligent fridge provider for companies, has grown its brand organically – making sure it always sticks to its core values. Photo credit: FELFEL.



# Part 2

# Building

# a Winning

# B2B Brand

This second part of our report is about putting our learnings into practice. Building on the previously reported trends and drawing from the experience of our consulting projects, we have identified five actionable steps you can use to develop a successful B2B brand. The five steps presented below are designed to tackle specific branding challenges, from auditing your brand to working on your visual identity and building your brand ecosystem. While they can be looked at independently, together they represent a coherent outline for you to build upon.



# 01 Brand Audit: Know where you Stand

You cannot build a stable house without foundations. The brand audit is a necessary first step to designing a successful brand strategy.

**W**hen developing your brand strategy, it helps to know where you stand before deciding where to go. What are your brand's current strengths and weaknesses? What is the relationship between your employees and your brand? How is it perceived by your customers?

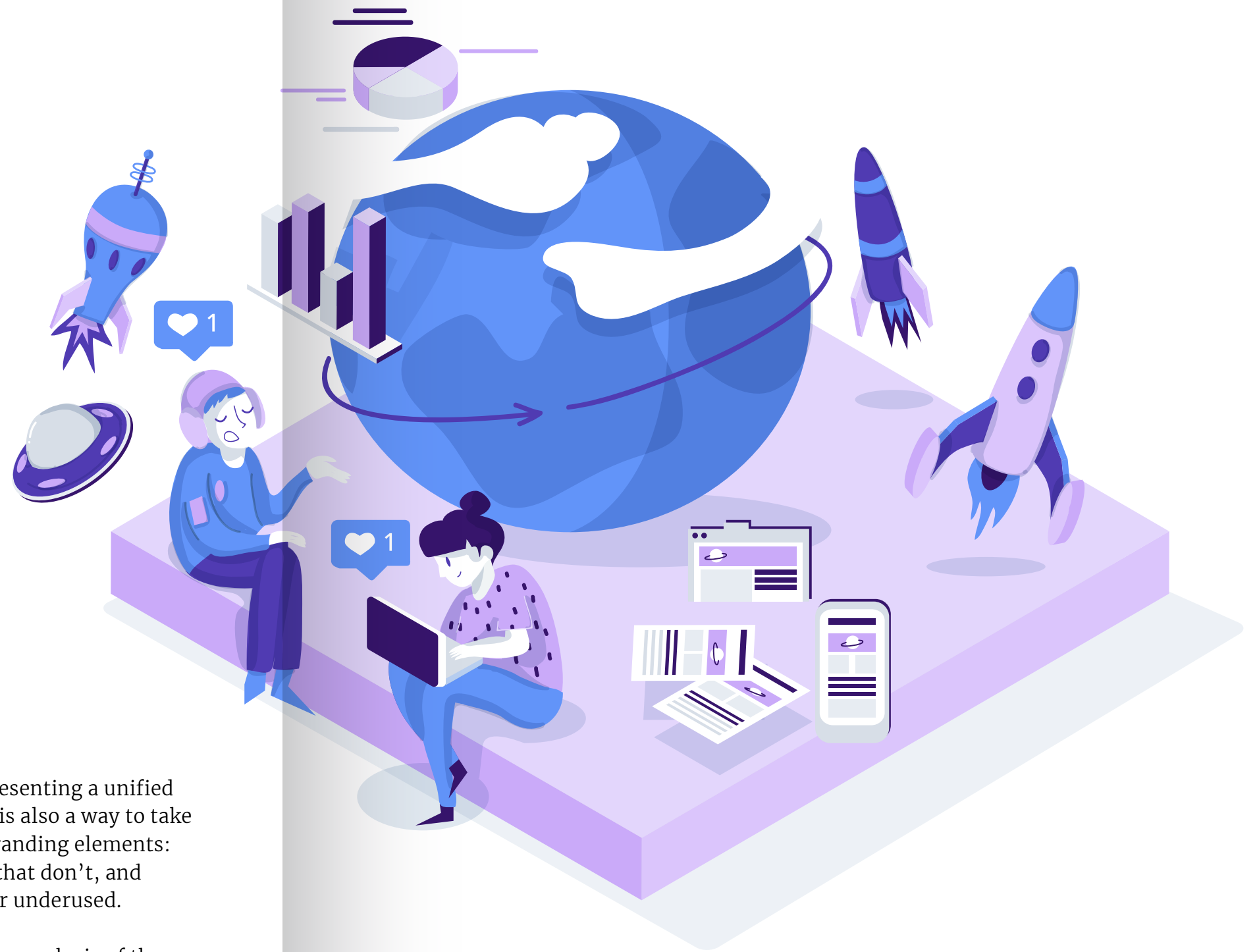
A brand audit is essentially an internal and external review of your brand. Internally, it allows you to understand how your brand is perceived and used by your employees. It helps uncover any contradictions, resistances and other limitations

preventing you from presenting a unified vision of your brand. It is also a way to take stock of your current branding elements: those that work, those that don't, and those that are lacking or underused.

The external review is an analysis of the competitive and wider industry landscapes. It looks at trends impacting your industry as a whole, and can extend to both related and unrelated industries. Lateral thinking is important here, as seemingly unrelated industries can provide inspiration and insights into your own sector. The same is true geographically, as different areas

of the world may be at different maturity stages when it comes to branding. When Spark Works, the leading Swiss strategic innovation company, asked us to help them map out their list of competitors, we realised most were actually foreign

competitors operating in Switzerland. Looking into how these companies' brands were performing in their home countries was a prerequisite to figuring out how we could use Spark Work's home-grown status to better win over Swiss customers.





# The Low-Hanging Fruits of Information

A successful brand audit is essentially information that has been synthesised and structured into a coherent analysis of the brand. When looking for data, you should look for company and customer information, as well as industry and competitor data. And while it may be necessary to commission market research or purchase industry reports, we have found time and time again that company materials and publicly available data offer considerable amounts of often unused or underused data.

Companies are veritable treasure troves of information. Detailed insight into a brand, company and even customer and industry data can be obtained from existing internal documents and interactions with employees. While conducting a brand audit for neogem, a premium sub-brand of construction giant Cemex, we discovered we could not find readily usable external data to match the brand's reach. neogem was present in different sectors, from landscaping to agriculture and sports, and across more than a dozen geographical markets. Through extended interviews with local teams, we were able to obtain data about the brand, its performance,



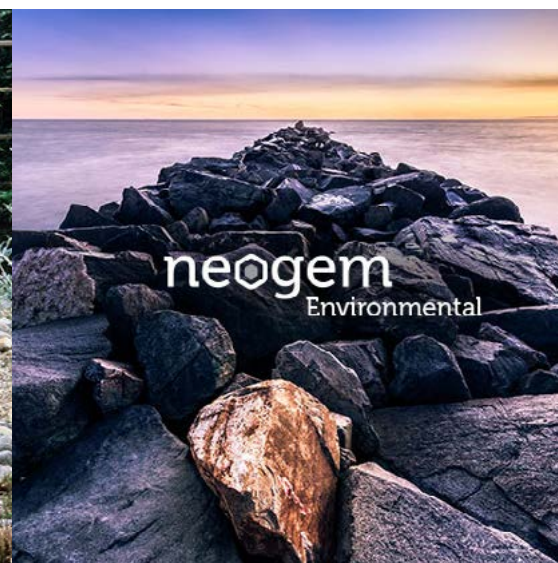
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customer information and even local and regional trends. And although they were not exhaustive, these interviews helped us paint a detailed picture of the business context.

Moving one degree outwards, the next place to look for information is through the customers themselves. In a B2B context, customer relationships are often more personal, human-based. This makes it considerably easier for you or a third party to obtain valuable information. For instance, as part of a brand audit we did for DLCM, an offshoot of the University of Geneva that provides data management solutions for researchers and companies, we spoke to representatives from over a dozen universities. The conversations helped us better understand the market as a whole as well as customer needs and expectations. Additionally, we were able to obtain valuable feedback on the DLCM brand and even information about competitors. Involving customers early on in the auditing phase can thus save you precious time, and may well strengthen your working relationships.

The last component of a brand audit is industry and competitor analysis. The industry review is about understanding the trends likely to affect your brand, from technological changes to shifting design aesthetics. Competitor analysis is an essential step in defining the territory your brand can occupy. By observing how competitor brands behave, you can avoid overused messages and symbols, and at the same time ensure you remain within the range of customer expectations. For example, if all your competitors list a variant of "tradition meets innovation" in their brand story, consider changing yours to reflect slightly different values such as "human-powered innovation" or "modern craftsmanship".

Once the data has been synthesised and structured, set up a workshop to meet with the people involved in the branding or rebranding process to present, comment and agree on the implications of your audit. When at last all the ingredients are in the bowl and everyone agrees on the recipe, only then can you start cooking. ■



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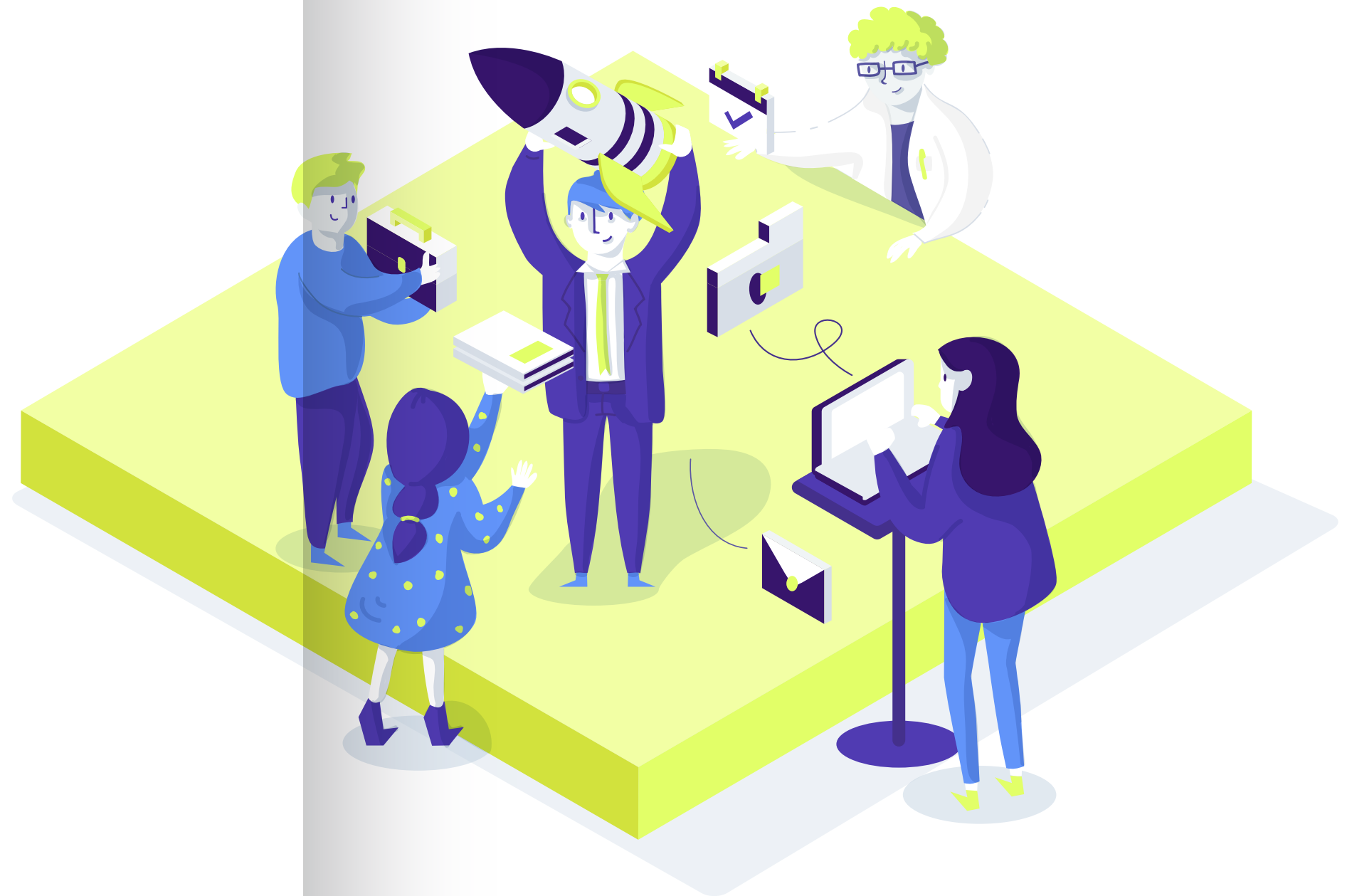
22 Companies are veritable treasure troves of information.

23 Because neogem, a premium sub-brand of Cemex, is present in different sectors and geographical markets. There is no readily usable external data to match the brand's reach. Photo credit: Cemex Research Group AG.



## 02 Brand Story: Get a Sense of Purpose

The products you sell are only pages in your story. Building a compelling narrative ensures coherence, cohesion, and continuity in your brand story.



**W**hile the purpose of the brand audit is to present the information needed to start working on new branding elements, the purpose of the brand story is to organise the information in order to create a coherent narrative that will carry the brand. It explains the context around the brand's origin and the trigger pushing it to challenge the status quo. It communicates an organisation's vision, benefits and values in a memorable and emotional way. It helps establish the role of a brand amidst its competition, the market and the world at large.

The valuable advantage of a brand story is this: it cannot be copied. In the context of product commoditisation, ever-shorter product development cycles and patent infringement, a brand story offers B2B companies a resilient way to assert their individuality.

Digitalisation, globalisation and commoditisation are just a few of the trends prompting companies to adapt their narrative so their clients and business partners understand what they stand for and where they are going. In this sense, the brand story also acts as a “stable

agent” in periods of organisational transition. Take Lift, for example, a Geneva-based organisation we helped update its brand narrative to better reflect its role and ambitions. Originally billed as a yearly tech conference, Lift has since grown to become a major player in the field of open innovation. The story we developed frames Lift as *an international organisation promoting open-innovation as a positive change driver for business and society* rather than as an events organiser. This change in narrative has contributed to Lift being increasingly seen as a thought-leader in the industry.

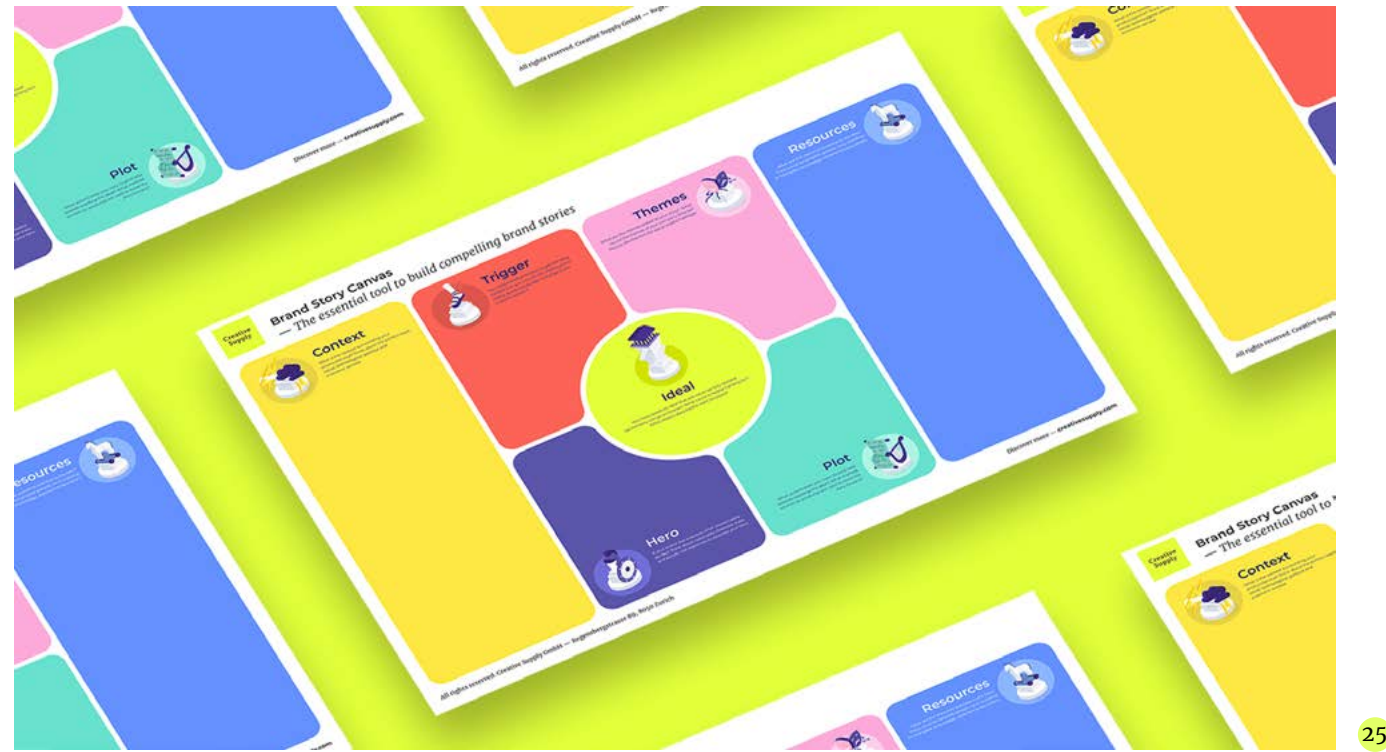
**24** A radical frame of reference shift helped LIFT reinvent its company purpose and fuel the growth of its consulting arm.

24

**A global independent organization headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.**

Lift





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## Crafting the Narrative

A good brand story acts as a bridge between a brand and its audience. Note that brand storytelling is often confused with advertising. They are not the same. To use a metaphor, advertising is to a brand story as an episode is to a series. There are multiple ways to build a good brand story. To get started, you can use our Brand Story Canvas™, a visual map of the seven elements that make up a brand story, from context to plot to hero (or heroine).

First, understanding the role of the brand (brand ideal) in the story is absolutely paramount. Take the IEM Group, leader in parking solutions. They aim to stand for “Innovative Parking Solutions for Smart Cities”. Every word of this phrase has been given careful thought: “innovative parking solutions” points to something more complex and profound

than a plain parking meter, and also means that IEM can help their “smart city” clients find a “solution” to their problem. “Smart cities”, in this context, serves simultaneously as a compliment to the customer, an aspiration for the future, and an aspiration for the company “to make cities smarter”. The reasoning behind the company’s brand strategy is simple, as Director Philippe Menoud explains: “If we help cities understand how our parking management platform can help ease their mobility issues, we are more likely to be able to sell our products to them.”

To build a strong following, brands must tell stories their audience can adhere to – in the most enduring way possible. You want your customers to feel engaged, all the time, without having to reinvent the wheel every year. IBM is a good

25 Developed by Creative Supply, the Brand Story Canvas is a powerful tool to build compelling brand stories.

26 Created by Ogilvy & Mather, the “smarter cities” campaign of IBM builds on the never-ending story of “building a smarter planet”.

27 IEM, a parking solutions provider, wants to be recognised as an important actor of smart cities development. Photo credit: IEM.



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example of this. The tech company has been centring its story around the idea of *building a smarter planet* for years. And since the planet can always get smarter, the story will never end. Once you have a good hold on your company’s narrative, it becomes the foundation for all your branding assets and sets the tone for future communications. Now you can start building content on top. ■



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# 03 Brand Content: Versatility is Key

B2B companies keep producing content, but struggle to deliver it to their audience. It's time to change that.

If the brand story is the source, content is the river. Content brings your brand story to life for your audience, in a relevant and interesting manner. Credit Suisse, for example, runs a campaign to educate children on entrepreneurial thinking, a collaboration with CNN on a series about entrepreneurial achievers, and hosts thought leadership events about entrepreneurial influence at the World Economic Forum.

These segments help the Swiss Bank communicate and strengthen its positioning as the bank for entrepreneurs. As a brand, you want to promote content to ultimately “own” certain communication themes. Take Kuka, a Chinese-owned robot manufacturer. Kuka communicates heavily

on the themes of cobots (robots that work alongside humans) and smart factories – both are connected to their brand story to *make automation intelligent*.

Brand communication themes need to follow three main rules in order to be effective. One, they must be aligned with your brand story, to avoid any contradictions or dilution. Two, they must be tied to your product or service offering, but not too closely, to avoid it being perceived as self-promotion. And three, your themes must resonate with your audience. Pick topics that are broad enough to interest a diverse audience, yet specific enough that you can bring something interesting to the conversation without investing too many resources.



Doing so will help your company stand out from the crowd and engage both existing and potential customers in a non-commercial way—at first. Boucledor CEO Frédéric Gouverd, for instance, is regularly invited to speak about “ethical gold”. The topic itself is not directly tied to Boucledor’s business, but it is close enough that Mr Gouverd can assert his expertise on the subject without appearing to engage in self-promotion. Most importantly, it resonates with Boucledor customers and

other industry stakeholders keen to better oversee their supply chain.

Whether it’s industry conferences, white papers on a new trend, educational videos or a new corporate presentation, content can help you strengthen your brand positioning, improve your reputation, increase the perceived value of your products or services and, ultimately, raise your price in the process.

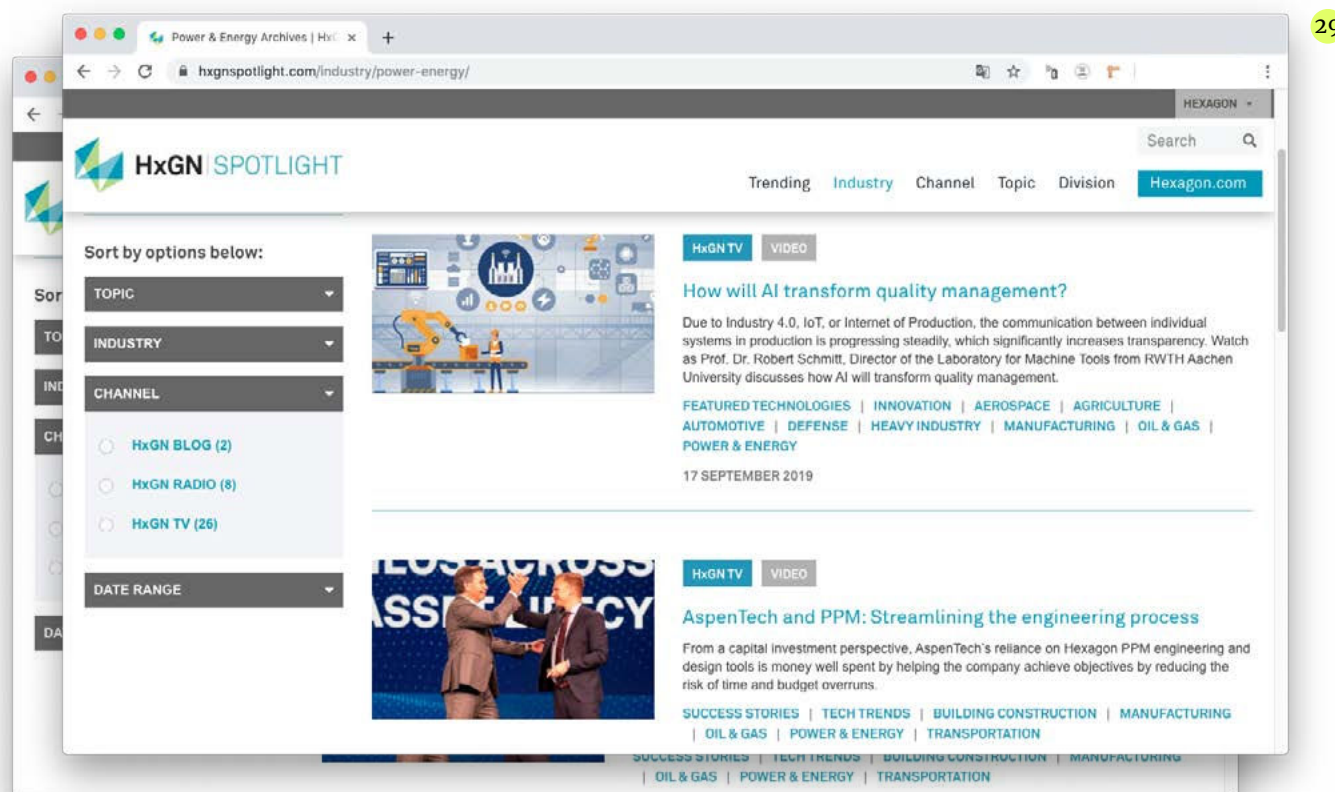


# Be Smart About Content

Once you have chosen your brand communication themes, it is time to think about form and fit. A company presentation and a scientific research paper appeal to vastly different audiences. Understanding the differences, commonalities and priorities between these will help streamline your content production pipeline. Leading laboratory technology provider Büchi boasts a wide range of publications for scientists, customers and external stakeholders alike. Though the format, tone of voice and style all differ, the publications are all connected to Büchi products or expertise. Some companies, such as tech



company Hexagon, even go so far as creating their own content distribution platform to push specific types of content. The HxGN SPOTLIGHT platform pushes multimedia content that can easily be used and shared by both employees and



customers. This strategy is particularly useful when you operate in high-tech or niche industries with few relevant or independent information sources.

Adapting your content to match your audience also means it can be repurposed, reframed and reused. Many companies fail to realise they are sitting on stores of unused content that could be adapted for external use. An in-house study of a new market can be turned into an article or an infographic. The latest developments from the R&D lab can be teased to an audience of experts to create excitement leading up to the launch of a new product – a strategy often used by consumer electronics brands like Apple and Google.

The final step in managing your branded content is content lifecycle management. Even in our world of constant information and planned obsolescence, certain types of content can prove to be incredibly resilient. Features of the brand's history, iconic products or innovations and glossaries of industry terms are virtually evergreen and can be used whenever, wherever, at little to no cost – just make sure to pair them with newer, more dynamic content. Many heritage brands in the B2C sector use this type of strategy, including watchmaking houses Patek Philippe and Breguet. In fact, even more time-sensitive content can be reused. When UBS releases its Art Market report to dealers and

28 This case study video, produced in collaboration with Ford, helps Kuka strengthen its association with the theme of cobots. Photo credit: Kuka AG.

29 HxGN Spotlight is Hexagon's content platform that offers original videos, blogs, articles and podcast episodes. Image credit: Hexagon AG.

trade professionals every year before Art Basel, not all the content inside is new. The company builds on models and data from previous years, updating trends and making sure the report is up-to-date. The overall cost of this “update” is certainly lesser than that of an entirely new report. As long as the content is in line with your story and brand themes, you have everything to gain by sharing it, repackaging it for all your different audiences, and getting as much “mileage” out of your content as you can. But for the repackaging to work, we need to talk about brand identity. ■

## The Art Market 2019

An Art Basel & UBS Report

Prepared by Dr. Clare McAndrew  
Founder of Arts Economics

Art Basel | UBS

30 In its Art Market report, UBS cleverly mixes evergreen and brand new content. Image credit: UBS AG.

# 04 Brand Identity: Dress to Impress

In a field still dominated by lacklustre brands, standing out can be a win for B2B companies.

**T**he versatility and benefits of good brand design cannot be overstated. A sleek, elegant product packaging might increase the perceived value of the brand. A bold, radical logo design might in turn convey an image of modernity or disruption. And a stately, traditional typeface might give a young company a sense of credibility and establishment. Yet, all too often, B2B companies have to make do with low-quality, low-impact visual identities. When asked why, many B2B CEOs point to good brand design being perceived as frivolous spending, an unnecessary expense that could be put toward sales or R&D investment. They say customers often react poorly to new design, interpreting

it as a sign of arrogance or inflated prices. These concerns are certainly legitimate, but they highlight an enduring misconception of what good brand design can – and should – be.

A company's brand identity should reflect what the company does, what it stands for, and to whom it sells its products or services – as laid out in your brand story. At its best, a good brand identity will highlight your strengths and downplay your weaknesses, carefully shifting the perception of your brand from current (what you are today) to aspirational (where you want to be tomorrow). Furthermore, there is a real window of opportunity for B2B companies to modernise their brand



identity. It is still very easy to stand out amidst a crowd of unremarkable brands, meaning even a little effort could yield tangible benefits. And the growing awareness around the importance of good brand design, spearheaded by innovative B2B companies – especially in the tech sector with names like Mailchimp or 3D Hubs – is successfully challenging the industry status quo.



**31** 3d Hubs, a network of manufacturing services, stands out with its minimalist visual identity and sleek renderings. Image credit: 3D Hubs.



# From the Outside In

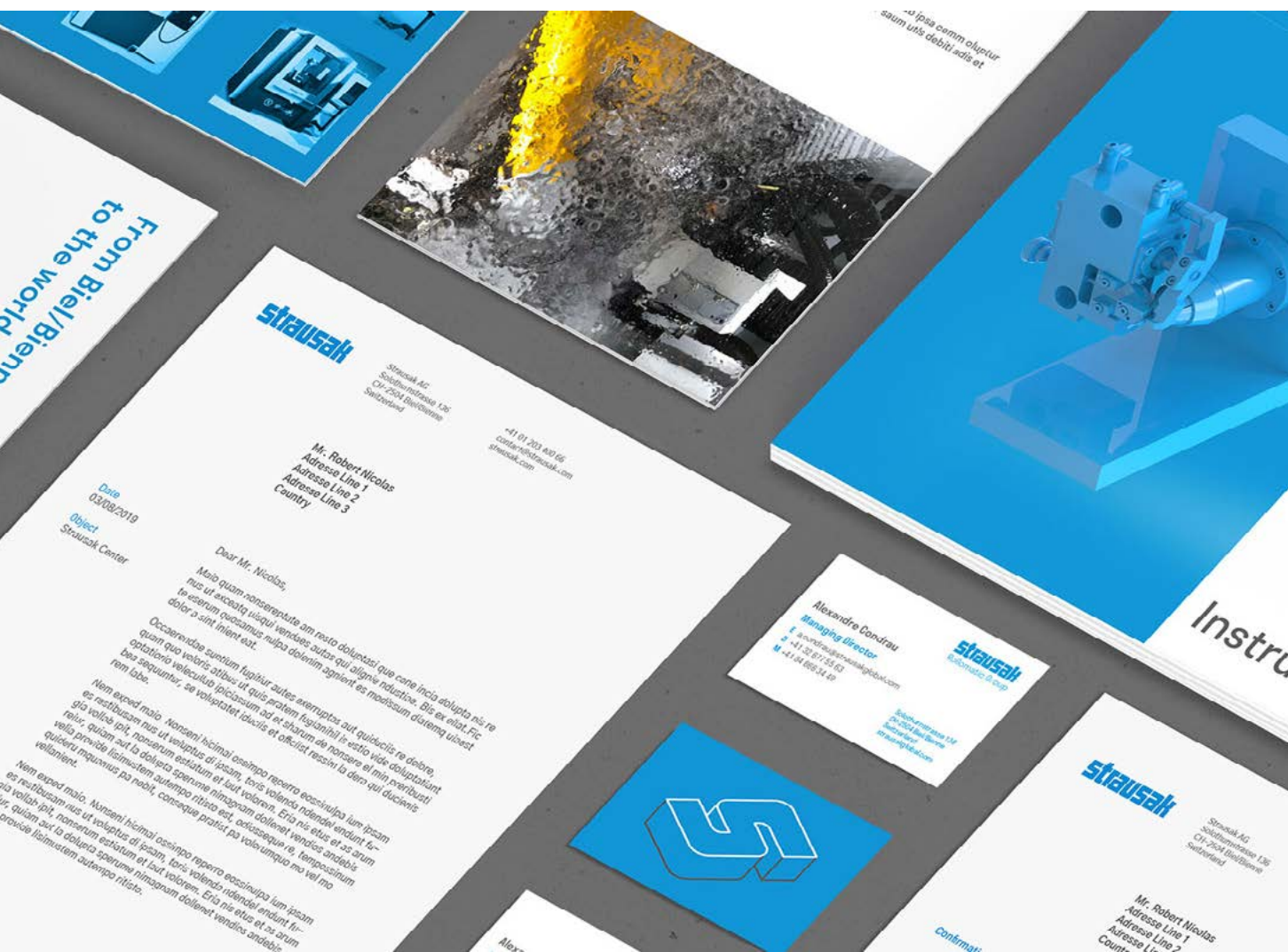
When designing new brand identities, a common mistake companies make is to look solely to their own industry for inspiration. Creativity comes from confronting the new and unexpected, and finding surprising connections and similarities between seemingly unrelated environments. Companies must unlearn what they know about their brand and their industry, and start looking for inspiration outside of their comfort zone. Take the example of Strausak, a Swiss company specialised in the manufacture of grinding equipment with over 100 years of history. When Strausak contacted us to work on their brand identity, what we found looking through their industry was that most of their peers had similar visual identities, from their iconography

(product-based, with lots of close-ups on grinding mechanisms and technical drawings) to their texts and even machine designs. Dealing with such a homogenous environment, it is best to look elsewhere for inspiration. Information from the brand audit can be used to identify recurring words and symbols from conversations with employees and customers. You can then scan across other industries to see where they appear. In the case of Strausak, we found a strong attachment to elements like the respect for the tools built by Strausak machines, the choreography of the machining process, and the importance of human knowledge and know-how. Given that many of these words are also found in the branding of luxury goods makers, we chose

a design aesthetic reminiscent of a luxury product and adapted it to fit customer expectations.

In the end, brand design is a refining and tempering process. Your creativity is constantly straining against the limits set by your own brand requirements, as well as customer expectations and industry culture. Within this small space, it is nonetheless possible to create something new. But to do so, you must be able to look beyond the illusive walls of preconceptions, so-called industry best practices and passing fads in order to access a brand's essence. Only then will you be able to create a unique brand identity that both matches with your brand story, and resonates with your audience. ■

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32 The brand identity we developed for Strausak includes all the brand's touchpoints.

33 The tone-on-tone visual treatment of Strausak machine pieces is inspired by luxury product starification.

34 The modular brand identity created for Strausak allowed to apply it across a myriad of supports, from t-shirts to industrial tape.



# 05 Brand Ecosystem: Going Beyond Networking

What's better than one great B2B brand?  
Multiple great B2B brands working together!

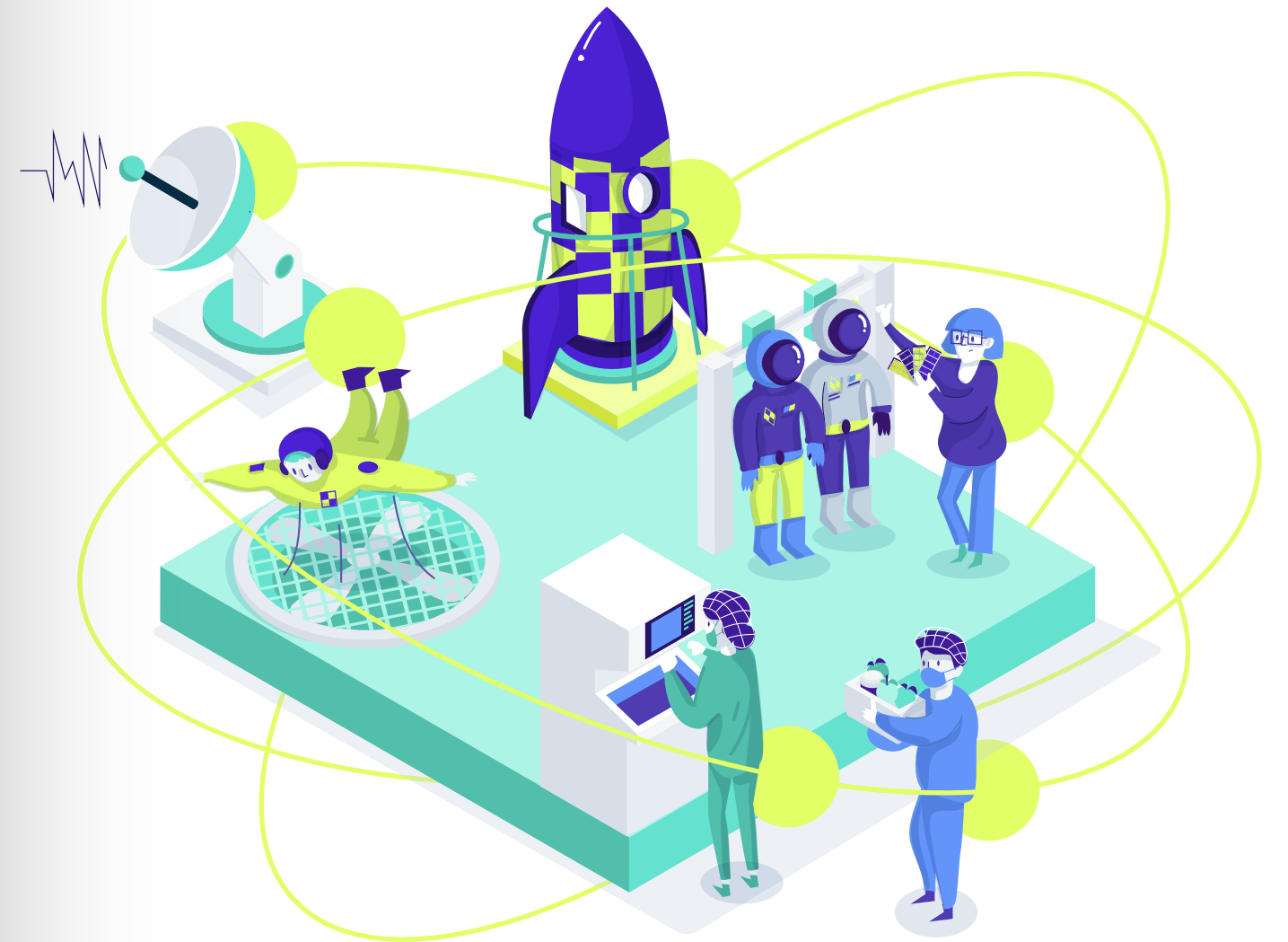
**A**s demonstrated in previous chapters, a well crafted brand strategy can have a positive impact all throughout a company, from human resources to sales, marketing and communications. In this final step, we will be zeroing in on how each component of the brand strategy can be leveraged to foster strong connections with other companies.

Business networks have become a necessity in the B2B world. As projects become more complex and competition, more global, many companies decide to pool resources, share knowledge and take on larger projects together. This is especially true for technology companies, as confirmed by AdNovum CEO, Chris Tanner: *"Building*

*a strong partner ecosystem is going to be a major goal in the future, as the digital needs of one customer become more complex and diverse and companies have to concentrate on their core competencies to fulfill these needs."* A brand ecosystem is a network that goes beyond standard project or client-based cooperation, where members choose to build on each other's brand equity and awareness to raise their individual profiles.

In order to build or join an existing brand ecosystem, companies must possess an attractive brand themselves. Their brand story must be well-defined and – crucially – be compatible with those of other members. Finally, they must be able to bring brand content to the table in order to

**35** *The Henokiens is an association of bi-centenary family-run B2B and B2C companies from around the globe. Photo credit: The Henokien.*



boost the community's collective profile. An interesting example of such a brand ecosystem is the Henokiens, an association of family-run B2B and B2C companies from around the globe. To join, a company must be over two hundred years old, and must still be owned and managed by the founding family. Henokiens members include Banque Pictet SA, Italian textile manufacturer Vitale Barberis Canonico

and 1300-year-old Japanese inn Hoshi. Building on their complementary brand stories, member companies engage in joint activities, ranging from academic research to the awarding of the Leonardo Da Vinci prize for innovative family businesses. While not all brand ecosystems are as formal as the Henokiens, all of them can use similar mechanisms to achieve further growth and awareness.

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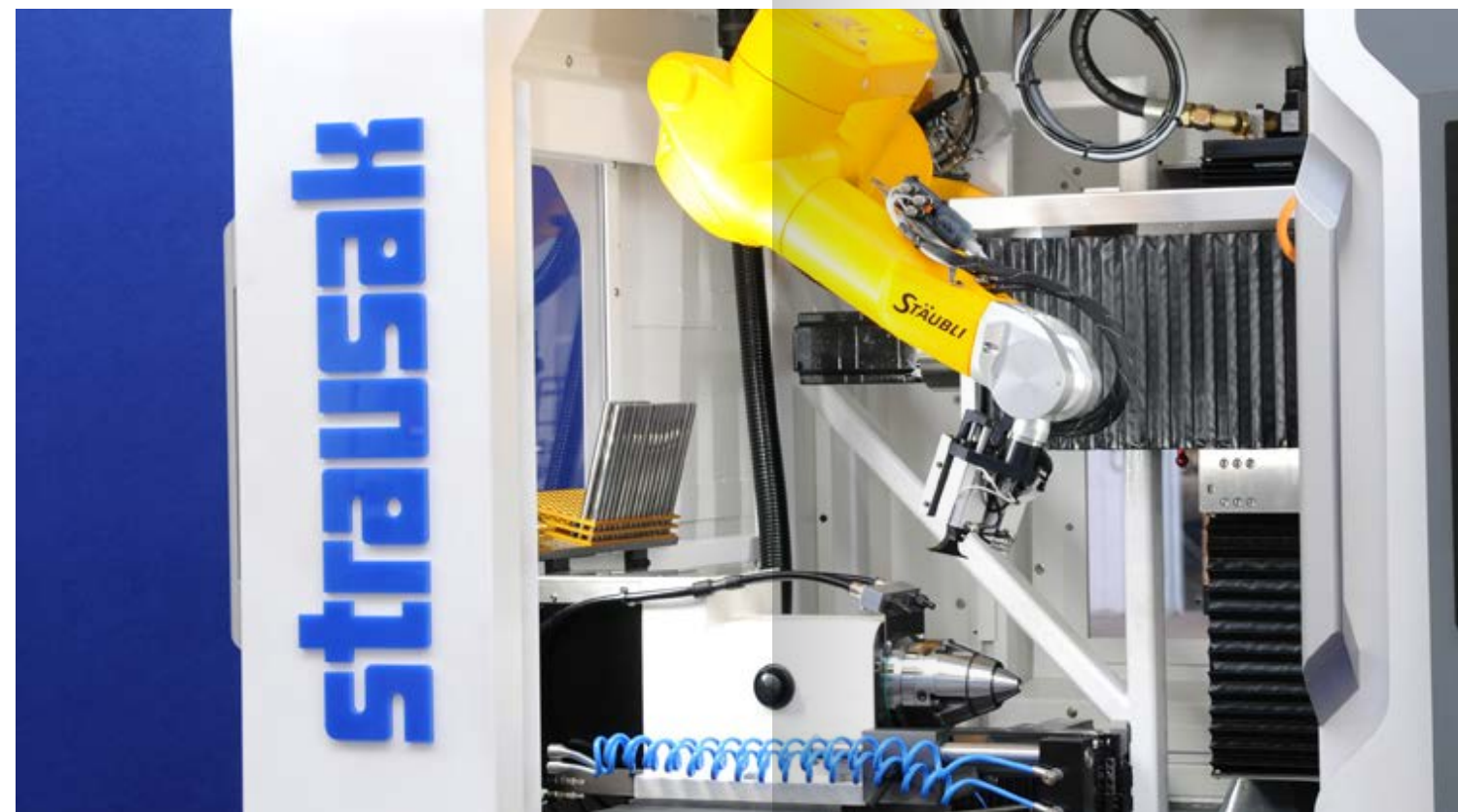
# All Together Now

There are countless ways to activate a brand ecosystem, depending on the industry, size of member companies and partnership goals. Here we look at three ways any B2B company can leverage their brand ecosystem, with a focus on activations that promote multilateral exchanges.

Branded projects allow for two or more companies to join forces around a specific project to pool resources and boost awareness. Particularly useful for small companies partnering up with larger organisations, branded projects can also allow firms to test out a new activity or a brand extension in a controlled environment. This was the approach chosen by AdNovum when co-developing the Car Dossier, an initiative for storing a car's entire lifecycle on a blockchain-based digital dossier. Partnering with companies like AXA and Mobility, as well as Zurich University and the government of the Canton of Aargau, AdNovum was able to leverage their knowledge (brand content) and visibility (brand identity) around a project in tune with their strategic priorities (brand story).

Co-branding activities demonstrate a higher level of commitment when compared to branded projects. Usually established between two or more companies of similar standing and with complementary offerings, co-brandings involve either co-creating or co-designing a product or service, then labeling it with the brand identifiers (logo, proprietary

colours or typefaces) of all parties. A noteworthy example of co-branding is Intel's decades-old relationship with computer manufacturers, who add the Intel Inside™ logo on their machines. Co-branding partnerships are especially potent when one of the collaborators is highly specialised, which is true for grinding machine manufacturer Strausak. The company uses a specialised robotic arm manufactured by mechatronics expert Stäubli for one of its flagship machines. The arm's distinct yellow colour and the Stäubli logo are clearly visible, creating an overall display that succeeds in strengthening both brands.



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Finally, branded events are an essential tool in maintaining and activating an ecosystem. They create a high-visibility opportunity for the organising party (or parties) to emphasise a brand communication theme that is important to them, share information, showcase their company expertise and make new connections. The importance of branded events was highlighted by many of the executives we interviewed, including Jérôme Vial, Country Manager at CCH Tagetik, a business software developer: *“We need to see and be seen, but even more importantly to be understood by market influencers so that they can speak about us and our value proposition in a professional (and if necessary technical) way.”* Other

companies, such as office equipment designer Witzig, organise regular events based around workplace transformations as a means to showcase their expertise and engage their ecosystem without indulging in self-promotion.

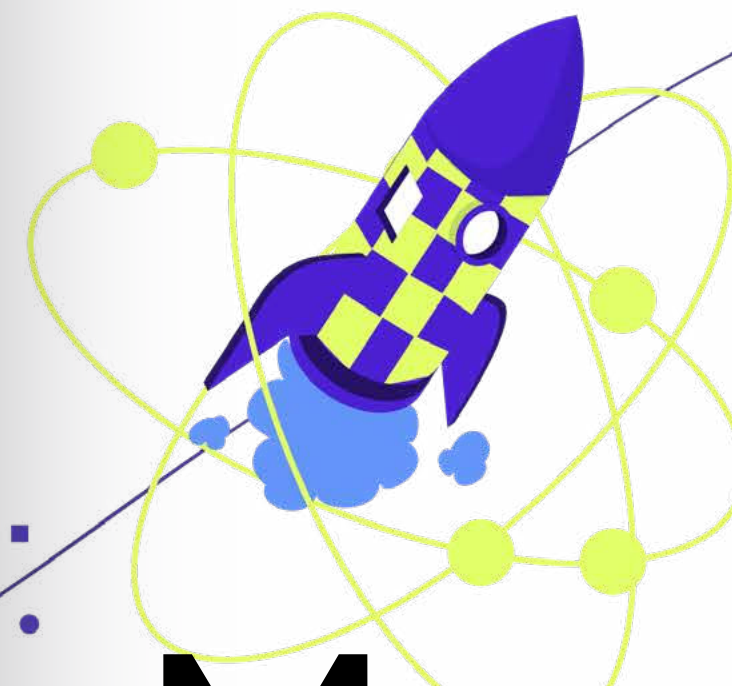
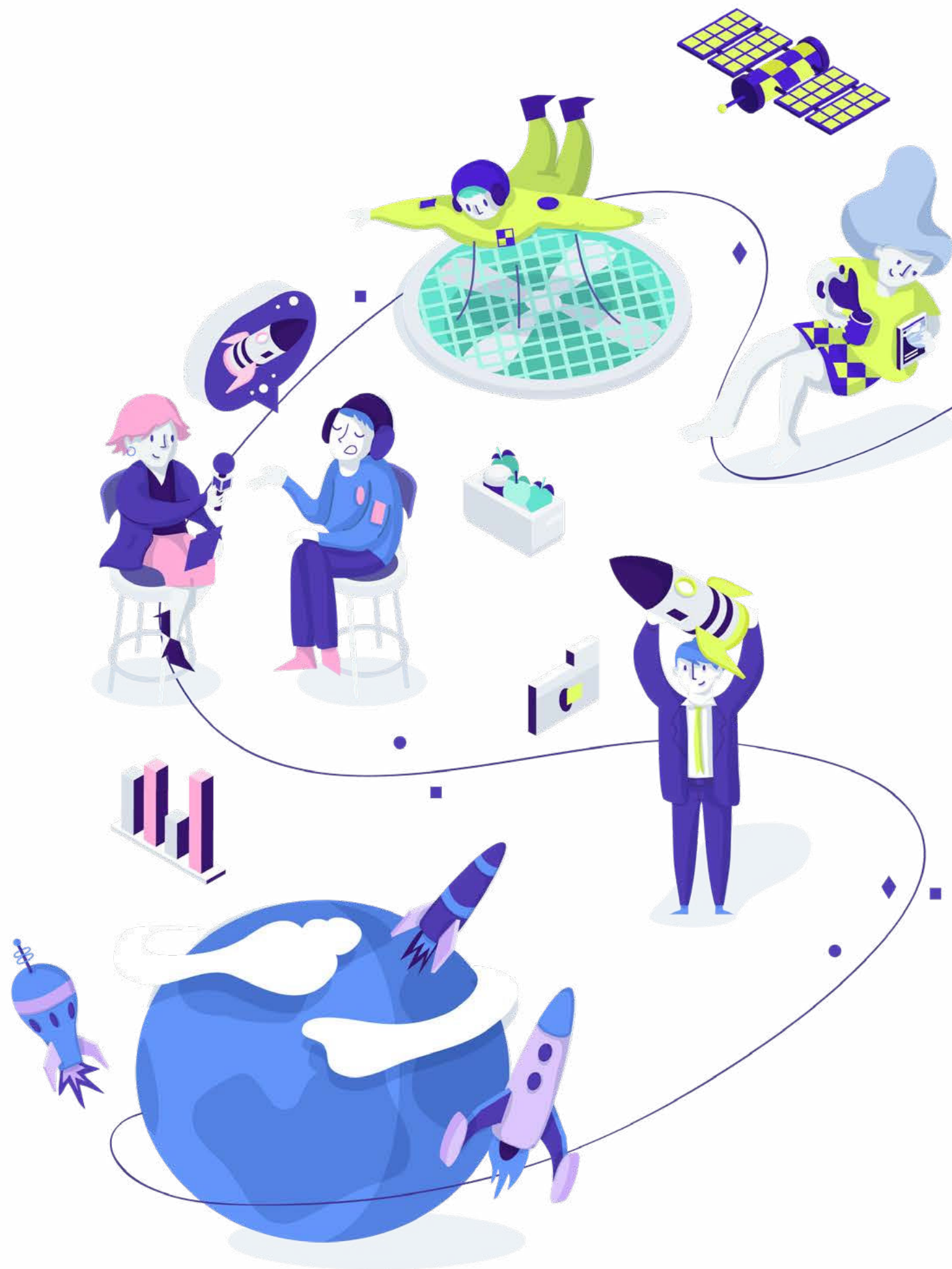
What's interesting about brand ecosystems is that they can serve as a multiplier for your brand strategy. They connect different companies through different touchpoints, building bonds that are not transactional but aspirational. This report is in fact the result of us activating our own brand ecosystem, sharing our experiences and resources for the benefit of a shared belief: B2B companies can become winning brands. ■

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36 A machine from Strausak uses a yellow Stäubli robot arm. The collaboration strengthens both brands by giving them authority and visibility. Photo credit: Strausak AG.

37 The Car Dossier brings together important actors of the mobility sector around a shared branded project: engrave the entire lifecycle of a vehicle in a blockchain-enabled virtual dossier. Image credit: Car Dossier.

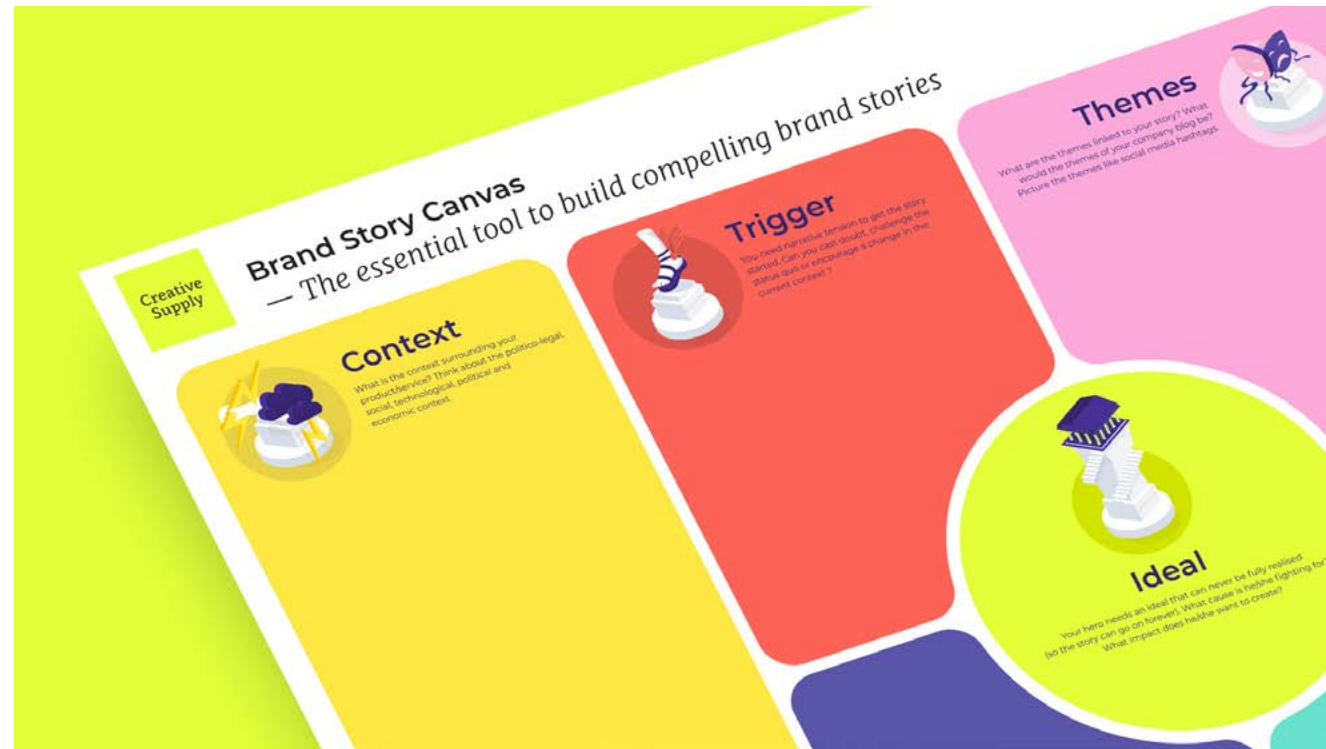


# Moving Forward

**D**esigning a brand strategy for a B2B company is an exciting prospect. And this report is our contribution to help make it a successful one. If you decide to embark on this journey, we'd love to hear from you! Please share with us your experience, the challenges you faced, and the results you've obtained. We will publish the best B2B branding or rebranding stories for the benefit of the B2B community. Need help getting started? Drop us a line to discuss your B2B brand strategy.

Until then, don't hesitate to share this report across your own brand ecosystem: we cannot wait to see more B2B companies reinvent themselves into winning brands, in Switzerland and beyond.





## About Creative Supply

Creative Supply is a Zurich-based company specialised in brand strategy. Blending creativity with business strategy, Creative Supply helps people and organisations transform their brand in order to reach their goals. Its diverse list of consulting clients covers industries ranging from manufacturing to hospitality and

education, and includes household names such as ABB, Kempinski and Lancôme. The Creative Supply Academy also offers thousands of people the opportunity to expand their knowledge—from mastering the art of storytelling to building their personal brand.

## Get in touch

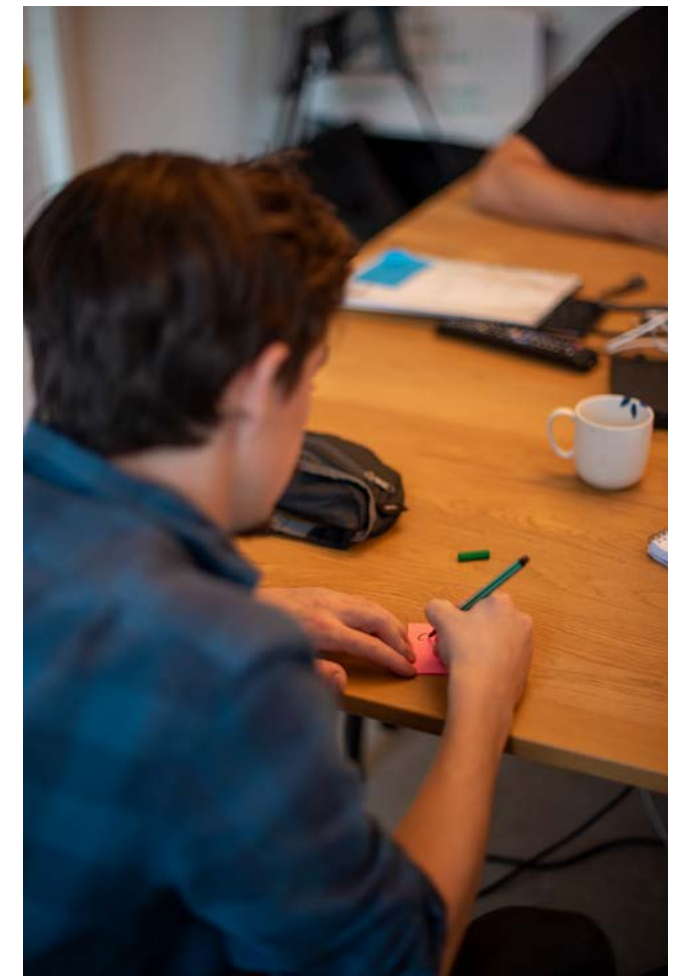
If you enjoyed this report, and would like to learn more about our other projects and publications, please visit our [website](#) and follow us on [LinkedIn](#).

If you have comments regarding the report, or would like to get in touch with the Creative Supply Team, please drop us a line at [hello@creativesupply.com](mailto:hello@creativesupply.com)

Creative  
Supply

Creative Supply GmbH  
Regensbergstrasse 89  
8050 Zurich

[creativesupply.com](http://creativesupply.com)  
[hello@creativesupply.com](mailto:hello@creativesupply.com)



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The *B2B branding* report is the first ever to offer both a focus on B2B companies as well as trends and insights relevant to a Swiss audience. Created in collaboration with the EPFL EMBA programme, the report is a must read for company leaders, trade professionals, and anyone wishing to understand the latest developments in B2B branding.