



BRANDING = WORLD BUILDING

A GUIDE TO AUTHENTIC DIY BRANDING



EMMA ALVAREZ GIBSON



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WWW.CROWHAUS.COM



BUT I DON'T REALLY NEED A BRAND, DO I?

A common misconception is that branding, if needed at all, is the last item to check off the list—something to think about once every other part of the business is in place. Common, and also potentially terrible, like using salt instead of sugar when you're baking a cake. Because branding starts with who you are. Who you are, why your business exists, what your purpose is while you're here on the planet, and what your values are. (If your business isn't in line with your values, I urge you to set this book aside and spend some time examining that disconnect.)

The thing is, ready or not, your brand already exists. It's coming from inside the house! And every client you've worked with can tell you all about it. That holds true whether or not you have a logo or tagline or anything else. So long as you're *doing something*, you've got a brand. Think of someone in your life who is just unstoppable. Maybe they're hilarious, or they seem to be able to talk their way into and out of absolutely anything, or they know more about science than anyone you've ever met. They tend to amaze, or at the very least amuse, everyone they know.

Now think about someone you know who is essentially the opposite of the first person. Someone known for being reserved, shy, quiet. Maybe not particularly interesting. But they're kind, and always there to listen. And everyone knows to expect that from this person.

Those are both, for all intents and purposes, brands.

Branding is how an identity is expressed, how it makes other people feel, and what they know they can expect from you.

That's it. That's the entire deal.

So it's essential that you get it locked in before you get started with your business. But don't worry: Even if you've left that part for last, there's always time to create, refine, and update. In this book I'll take you through the basics, so that you understand the most important components of branding. I'll also provide links to resources I've found helpful in my work. By the end, you may not be an expert, but you'll be confident enough to DIY your branding in a smart, efficient way that presents your offerings to the world in exactly the right light.

Let's do this.

WHAT IT ISN'T, WHAT IT IS

Here's what branding **isn't**:

- Pretty pictures
- A logo
- A tagline
- A brochure, flyer, or other print product
- A website
- Fancy design
- Fundamentally expensive
- Snobby
- Shady
- A nice-to-have non-essential

And here's what it **is**:

- Something that already exists, whether or not you're controlling it
- The sum total of the experience people have when they engage your services:
 - How you make them feel
 - The words you use
 - The sound of your voice
 - Your sense of humor
 - What stresses you out
 - What drives you
 - Your business name, tagline, colors, fonts, design, signage, website, and any other visual they'll encounter when working with you
- Morally neutral
- Something you can shape, refine, evolve over time, and have fun with

So why are so many people instantly put off by the term? Celebrity influencers probably have something to do with that; they tend to make a lot of vocal-fried noise about their personal brand and it's wildly obnoxious. Don't be like them. Talk about your personal brand in private—with me, with your bestie, with someone who loves you unconditionally. Because here's the truth: branding is a bit like shapewear: helpful, smoothing, and not all that uncommon, but still not something the whole world needs to hear about. (Seriously, **talk to me**: I always want to talk about branding.)

BUT HERE'S THE THING!

Branding really *isn't* all that complicated, and it doesn't have to be intimidating. At its core, branding is simply building a tiny, orderly world. Like a tv show, or a magazine or your favorite book. Like a themed party, or a playlist, or all the details that make up someone you love.

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AND YOU'VE BEEN DOING THAT SINCE YOU WERE A KID.



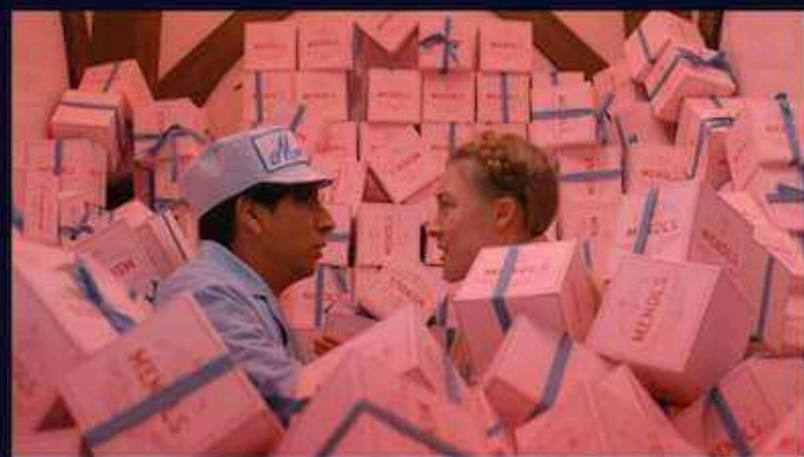
Who lives here? How do they know each other? What's their relationship like? Do they have friends in common? What happens when someone breaks the rules?



Do these guys live in the same universe? Are they aware of one another's titles or are they just friends who happen to be wildly diverse? Can the GI Joe guy ride on top of the Hot Wheel, or nah?

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AND WES ANDERSON'S FILMS ARE GREAT AT IT.

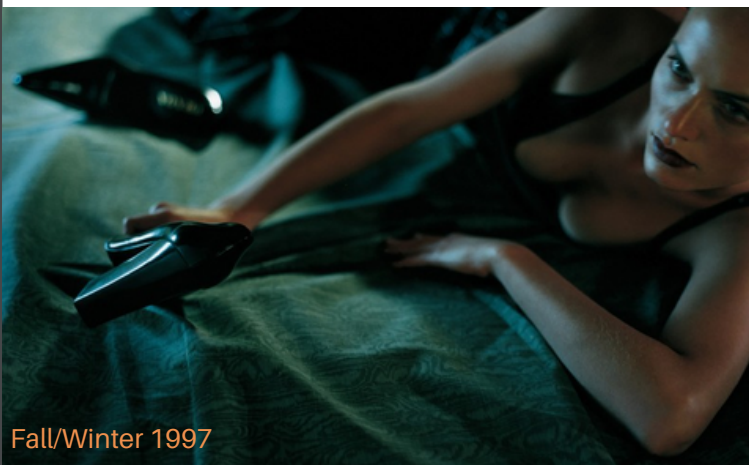


What palette does each film adhere to? How do the characters dress themselves? What do their choices reveal about their dreams, intents, or secrets? What type of clothing seems to be considered standard there? What time period(s) are evoked by the costumes, set, music, language?

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AND EVERY AD IS A CITIZEN OF ITS BRAND'S WORLD.

Really bored and/or disgruntled young beauties. Moody close-ups. Modesty juxtaposed with overt sexuality. Often, a whiff of violence. For better and for worse, Prada's ads never stray far from their time-tested formula.



COLORS

The color palette that you choose for your business should be one you're drawn to. You may choose to pull out specific colors from a photo that inspires you, create a full palette from a photo, or roll up your sleeves and create a color palette from scratch. Keep in mind the common associations that colors have with emotion, too, even just broadly. For instance, reds, oranges, and yellows are thought to stimulate energy and happiness, and blues, greens, and purples are considered soothing and calming. Your mileage, and that of your ideal person, may vary. But it's good to be familiar with conventional views, no matter which way you decide to go.

Here are a few good places where you can do some or all of that, plus pick up some pointers about color theory (which is super fun and surprisingly useful):

- **Colors**
- **Color Hunt**
- **Image Color Picker**
- **Palette Maker**

You'll want to have a main color or two, plus one—or two, at most—accent colors. These tend to be bolder, brighter hues that add the *j'en sais quoi*, completing the look. Use a blend of dark and light colors to create contrast. I recommend starting with five colors, more or less, and if you're going to want something that reads similarly to black and white for text (like charcoal and ecru, or navy and taupe), be sure to include them in your palette as well.

Of course, choosing a palette doesn't mean you can't ever use any other color again. But unless you're making a statement about visual chaos, stick with tones that complement or contrast with your choices in a harmonious way.

I have asked you thrice.

A HANDSHAKE IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

May you rest in a deep and dreamless slumber

**EVERYBODY
LIES.**

WORDS

People tend to use the same specific types of language pretty consistently. How many times have you been able to tell something was wrong with a friend, for example, because the words they were using seemed off, unlike them?

Alternately, how many times have you thought about a loved one saying a word or a phrase that's just so exactly, perfectly them that you had to laugh? So it needs to be with your business.

You want your ideal people to be able to tell right away when your business is speaking to them. The easiest way to do this is to create a word bank that you can always pull from, and to use these words liberally and consistently. And it's just as important to identify words you'll never use. (Terms like "crush it" and "leverage your maximized assets" are most decidedly anathema at Crow Haus.)

Consider the following:

- How do you want to feel about your business when you're talking about it?
- How do you want your clients (prospective and current alike) to feel about it?
- What cultural references do you and your ideal people have in common?
- What expressions instantly push buttons in you? In them?
- How do your clients talk about the things they love? About their problems?

With that in mind, create a page of the words, expressions, and phrases that will make up your company's recognizable vernacular.

Fold
in the
cheese.

THE WORK IS MYSTERIOUS AND IMPORTANT

Ew,
David!

DEFIANT JAZZ

BÉBÉ

CHOREOGRAPHY AND MERRIMENT

I WANT TO BELIEVE

Have you ever seen anything so full of splendor?



IMAGERY

Real people? Shapes? Cute baby animals? Moody digital collages? Landscapes? Abstract art? Your choices are practically limitless. So how do you decide?

Consider:

- The kind of imagery your ideal person will be familiar with and will respond to
- The color scheme you've chosen
- How you want your ideal person to feel when they interact with your brand: Like they can finally relax? Like they're about to become the best version of themselves possible? Like something absolutely luscious is imminent?

Regardless of what you choose, your imagery should be inextricably tied to the services or products you offer. If there's no story that your imagery is telling, regardless of how subtle it is, your brand won't come together as organically as it could. So even if you're not expecting anyone to show up and demand the back story, make sure it all connects.

FONTS

Generally speaking, serif fonts convey a more formal style and position your business as more conservative or reserved, while sans serifs are well suited to a more casual or creative business. Font pairing is an way to balance the scales, making for a more interesting look and feel. There are tons of great resources for font pairings out there, and often the fonts themselves are free as well. Here are just a few:

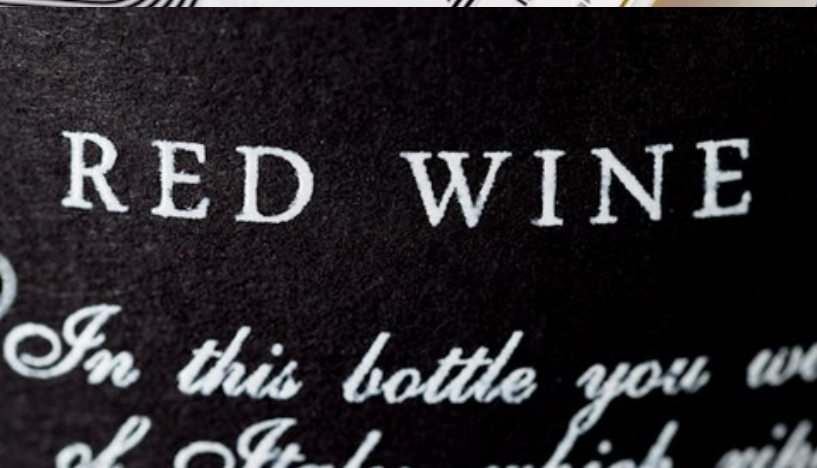
- **fontpair**
- **Fontshare**
- **Mixfont**
- **Monotype**

Depending on the type of business you have, and (naturally) on its personality and yours, you might look into display fonts. These are used for the star attraction of a print piece: the name of a company, the title of an article, etc. They're not practical for anything much longer than that, but they can really do a lot of the work in stepping up your visual brand.



the
messenger

LOS ANGELES
EST 2023



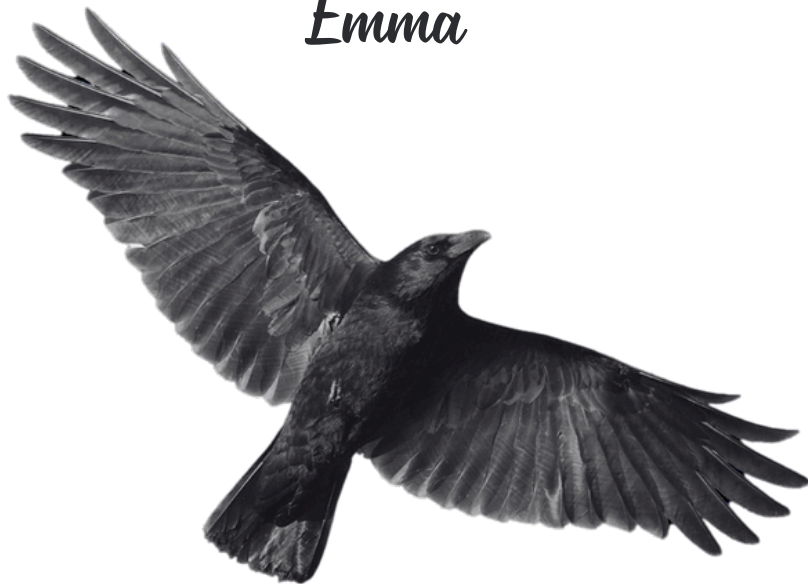
OH LOOK, YOU'RE ALL SET.

Is there more to do? Sure. But once you've completed these basic steps, you're ready to start connecting with the clients who are looking for exactly what you have to offer.

Remember, you are the only person who can bring what you have to the world. And the clearer and more consistent you can be about sharing that, the more your ideal person will hear you loud and clear and be drawn to you and your business.

I love to see (and help!) good people with good businesses soar. Want more support with building the brand of your dreams? Drop a line at info@crowhaus.com

Emma



ABOUT ME

My clients tend to be amazed by my ability to read them and know exactly how they (and their services and products) need to be positioned. Sometimes they straight-up call it spooky. What it really is: a finely-honed eye for pattern recognition, plus a lifelong obsession with world-building. The combination makes me very good at what I do.



With more than 20 years of creative marketing experience, I've made my mark on global corporations and bespoke advisories alike. In both English and Spanish, I have energized and streamlined messaging across sectors, including retail, libraries, higher education, health and wellness, manufacturing, automotive, and publishing. My work is rooted in culture-shaping, innovation, and clarity.

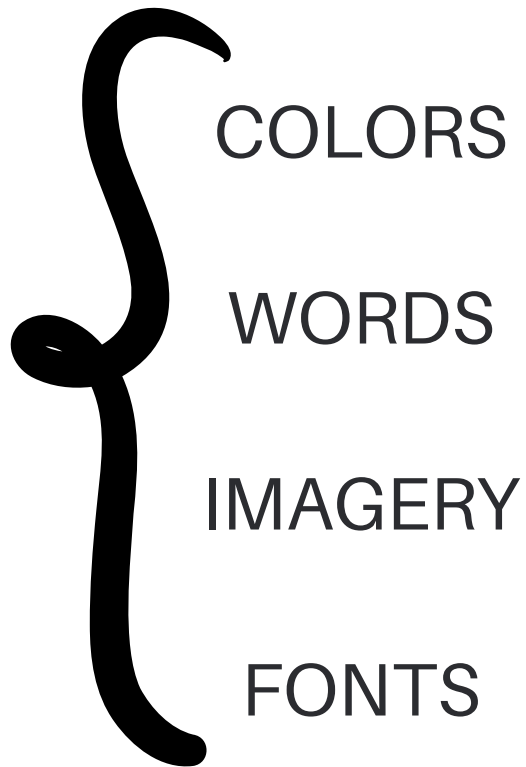
A Los Angeles native, I have considered other places but can't seem to do without the sunshine and the Pacific Ocean. I live with my husband, our teenager, and three troublesome dogs. A massive language nerd, I learned English and Spanish simultaneously, studied Italian in college, and have an on-again, off-again relationship with language apps (German! French! Irish! Diné!). In my spare time I'm writing a novel and dabbling in needle arts.

Find me at **Crow Haus**, on **my personal website**, on **Instagram**, and on **Pinterest**.

Thanks for reading!

STAY TUNED...

STEP 1:



STEP 2:

INSTINCT



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