Strategic brand identity development methodology: increased synergy between brand and business strategies

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This paper introduces a comprehensive brand identity development methodology that combines branding and business frameworks to create a strategically aligned, coherent and distinct brand identity. Traditionally, brand and business strategies have been treated separately, with frameworks addressing either the business side or the brand side. This methodology bridges this gap by incorporating both branding- and business-focused frameworks, ensuring the developed brand identity is strategically aligned with the brand's strategic positioning and the company's business model and objectives. The methodology is particularly suited for rebranding and repositioning within commoditised business-to-business markets, where product differentiation is limited and a distinct brand identity is crucial for the success of the company.

Brand identity, brand and business strategy, development methodology

1. Introduction

A brand identity defines what the organisation wants its brand to mean and consists of intangible and tangible elements [1]. The intangible elements establish the core substance of the brand, providing direction for its strategic positioning, while the tangible elements shape the visual identity of the brand, guiding the design of brand assets, such as products. These brand elements should be memorable, meaningful, likeable, transferable (between products and markets), adaptable (over time), and protectable (legally and competitively) to build and maintain brand equity [2]. Brand equity is the value that a brand adds to a product or service beyond its functional benefits, driven by consumers' brand knowledge. This brand knowledge stems from the consumer's brand awareness (brand recognition and recall) and brand image (brand associations) formed by previous interactions with the brand identity. The brand identity affects how the consumer will respond to the marketing of the brand, thereby shaping both brand and business strategies.

A brand strategy refers to how a brand is built, communicated, and managed, including strategies about the brand's market positioning, architecture, identity, and marketing methods (Keller, 2013). In contrast, a business strategy outlines how to achieve overall business success through the management of company resources, processes, and people, including strategies about the business market and product developments, sales tactics, operations, partnerships, and financial goals [3]. Although both are closely related, they are often treated separately in literature. Most strategic frameworks either address the business side, such as Osterwalder Business Model Canvas [4] outlining the business operations, resources, and revenue strategies, or the brand side, such as Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism [5] outlining the external and internal brand communication dimensions. However, Aaker [6]. Uggla [3, 7], and Osler [8] argue that the brand and business strategies should be integrated as a brand strategy translates the business strategy for the marketplace [8] and can thus be seen as a tool for growing the business [5].

This paper introduces a brand identity development methodology that integrates brand and business frameworks to develop a strategic, coherent, and distinctive brand identity. It aims to bridge the literature gap between brand and business strategies. The methodology was initially developed to illustrate the rebranding and repositioning process of two closely related subsidiary business-to-business companies with an established brand identity that failed to be competitively distinct and reflect the company structure and values resulting in negative turnovers. Therefore, the companies decided to perform a rebranding aiming to develop a coherent and distinct brand identity that enhances brand awareness, creates a positive brand image, and generates customer loyalty [5].

The paper will discuss the phases, the steps, and the different frameworks separately and outline how each step provides input for the next.

2. Brand Identity Development Methodology

Figure 1 displays the brand identity development methodology, it outlines four main phases of the development process: *analysis, brand & business strategy, brand identity,* and *brand guidelines*. The steps and the applied frameworks form literature from each phase will be separately explained.

2.1. Phase 1 - Analysis

The analysis phase provides an elaborate understanding of the company's current problems outlining the justification and scope of the rebranding and repositioning assignment. It consists of a *company, market,* and *brand architecture [9] analysis*.

The *company analysis* consists of the business analysis, analysing the company structure and its products, and the brand identity analysis, analysing how the brand is portrayed to the market (external) and internally perceived by employees and customers. Information is gathered by conducting interviews with company owners, employees, partners, and customers and analysing brand assets, such as the brand website. It addresses topics like the company structure (history, brand architecture, employees,

Company Analysis — *Who are they, what do they sell, how does it create value, how do they sell it, to whom do they sell it?*

External   Internal   VS

Business Analysis
This analysis helps to define the company structure, including their history, brand architecture, employees, facilities, and working method, and its products, including the product inventory, values, features, target industry, production, and configuration.

This information is gathered through interviews with employees and partners, and wireframe tools can be used to visualise conclusions.

Brand Identity Analysis
The internal (employee and customer interviews) and external brand identity (website analysis) of the businesses are analysed and compared to define any misalignments.

External Brand Identity
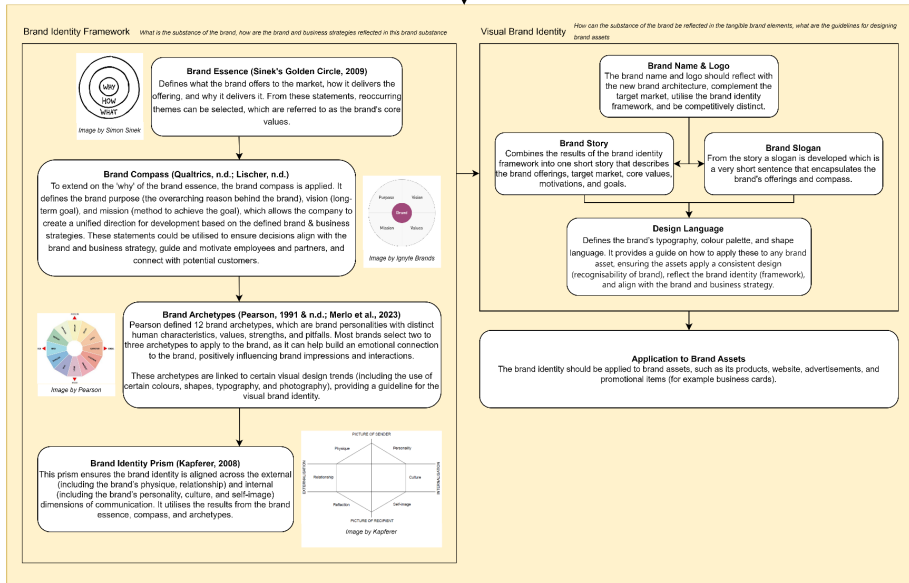describes how the brand is portrayed to the market through its brand assets, such as the products, website, and social media.

Internal Brand Identity
describes how the brand is internally perceived by customers and employees. It addresses product and service characteristics, brand associations, and the brand's positioning in the market.

Market Analysis — *What is the positioning of the brand(s) in the market, what is our core product and target group, where could the brand(s) still extend to, how does this compare to competitors?*

Costumer Analysis
The sales of the company are analysed using information sheets, which provide insight into the companies target groups (industries and characteristics), core product (types, target group, quantity sold, and generated revenue) and market spread (location of customers).

Competitor Analysis
The competitors with similar products (and market positioning) as the company are analysed, and their attributes are compared to the company attributes (Points of Difference and Parity). This analysis is based on internal and external sources, and identifies the biggest competitors of the company, which have a similar market positioning value.

Internal Threat Assessment
The insider knowledge of the employees is used to assess the level of threat of a competitor. Most often the employees know better in which target groups they compete with a certain competitor and why a customer could opt for the competitor instead.

External Threat Assessment
The external information about the competitor's facilities (size and locations), history (experience), target groups (industries), product inventory, and brand identity (including the brand identity framework, such as their brand values, and the visual brand identity, such as their website colours) are gathered through available resources, for example their website.

Brand Architecture Analysis — *What is the value of the current brand names and logo's, how could different brand architectures benefit the brands of the company*

Brand Name & Logo Analysis
The brand names and logo of the company are assessed on their legal protection (using a trademark register and reverse image search) descriptive associations (using a dictionary and colour theory). It identifies whether the brand name or logo should remain unchanged or not.

Brand Architecture Models (Aaker et al., 2000)
Different brand architecture models are considered, as defined by literature, which define different structure of the brands of the company influencing how they are related to each other.
For each model the changes, disadvantages, and advantages are defined.

Problem Definition
Provides the justification (based on the insights from the brand identity, competitor, and brand name & logo analysis) and scope (based on the insights from the business, customer analysis, and brand architecture anlysis) for the rebranding.

Establishing New Brand Architecture
A new brand architecture is defined based on the analysis insights, it defines the new product inventory and relationship of the brands of the company. This new brand architecture is the foundation on which the new brand & business strategy is developed.

New Brand Architecture

Value Proposition Model (Osterwalder et al., 2015)
Outlining the target group's needs and how the product and service create value (key features and objectives).

What markets should be developed? What market trends should be followed? How does the brand stand out from competitors? What aspects of the company should be emphasised and which should be improved upon?

Image by B2B International

SWOT Analysis (Helms et al., 2010)
Identifies the company's strengths and weaknesses, and the market opportunities and threats as input for business strategies.

TOWS Matrix (Aslan et al., 2012)
Defines business strategies to leverage market opportunities, showcase company strengths, address company weaknesses, and mitigate market threats.

Image by Wikipedia   *Image by Digital Leadership*

How should the products be marketed (target, message, channel, price)? What are the costs and income streams of the company? What are important business partners, activities, and resources?

(Simplified) Sales Strategy
Defines the target group, marketing message, and pricing strategy per product and service.

Business Model Canvas (Osterwalder et al., 2015)
Describes how the business creates, delivers, and captures value, outlining the business's operations, resources, and revenue strategies.

Image by The Wisdom Academy

Brand Identity Framework — *What is the substance of the brand, how are the brand and business strategies reflected in this brand substance*

Visual Brand Identity — *How can the substance of the brand be reflected in the tangible brand elements, what are the guidelines for designing brand assets*

Brand Essence (Sinek's Golden Circle, 2009)
Defines what the brand offers to the market, how it delivers the offering, and why it delivers it. From these statements, reoccurring themes can be selected, which are referred to as the brand's core values.

Image by Simon Sinek

Brand Compass (Qualtrics, n.d.; Lischer, n.d.)
To extend on the 'why' of the brand essence, the brand compass is applied. It defines the brand purpose (the overarching reason behind the brand), vision (long-term goal), and mission (method to achieve the goal), which allows the company to create a unified direction for development based on the defined brand & business strategies. These statements could be utilised to ensure decisions align with the brand and business strategy, guide and motivate employees and partners, and connect with potential customers.

Image by Ignyte Brands

Brand Archetypes (Pearson, 1991 & n.d.; Merlo et al., 2023)
Pearson defined 12 brand archetypes, which are brand personalities with distinct human characteristics, values, strengths, and pitfalls. Most brands select two to three archetypes to apply to the brand, as it can help build an emotional connection to the brand, positively influencing brand impressions and interactions.

These archetypes are linked to certain visual design trends (including the use of certain colours, shapes, typography, and photography), providing a guideline for the visual brand identity.

Image by Pearson

Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer, 2008)
This prism ensures the brand identity is aligned across the external (including the brand's physique, relationship) and internal (including the brand's personality, culture, and self-image) dimensions of communication. It utilises the results from the brand essence, compass, and archetypes.

Image by Kapferer

Brand Name & Logo
The brand name and logo should reflect with the new brand architecture, complement the target market, utilise the brand identity framework, and be competitively distinct.

Brand Story
Combines the results of the brand identity framework into one short story that describes the brand offerings, target market, core values, motivations, and goals.

Brand Slogan
From the story a slogan is developed which is a very short sentence that encapsulates the brand's offerings and compass.

Design Language
Defines the brand's typography, colour palette, and shape language. It provides a guide on how to apply these to any brand asset, ensuring the assets apply a consistent design (recognisability of brand), reflect the brand identity (framework), and align with the brand and business strategy.

Application to Brand Assets
The brand identity should be applied to brand assets, such as its products, website, advertisements, and promotional items (for example business cards).

Positioning Strategy
A text document that summarises the brand & business strategy, including the brand management, marketing, and development strategies. Discussing the brand architecture, customers, market, product, pricing, partnerships, resources, employees, advertising, and much more.

Brand Book
A branded book that summarises the brand identity, it includes information about the company (shortly discussing the brand architecture, products, history), brand strategy (product strategy and brand identity framework), logo, colours, typography, shape language, imagery, and examples of brand assets that apply the visual brand identity.

Brand Assets Downloads
Downloadable files of the brand assets, such as typography fonts, icons, product renders, website prototype file or code, video and image advertisements, and promotional files (for example business cards).

Rationale (optional)
This is the document that outlines all the steps, results, and conclusions from the brand identity development process, from the analysis to the design of the brand identity

Icons from Freepik

Figure 1.; *Brand Identity Development Framework*

facilities, and working methods), product and service types and characteristics (features, production, configuration, target markets, innovation projects, pricing strategy), market environment (target market, competitors, developments, trends), and brand associations (brand values, goals, personality). The company analysis identifies the misalignments between the internal and external brand identity, evaluating whether what the company say the brand represents is reflected in the assets that communicate the brand. Additionally, it identifies operational issues that need to be addressed in the business strategy.

The *market analysis* analyses the customers and competitors of the company, defining the current positioning of the company in the market compared to competitors and identifying market opportunities and threats. The customer analysis is performed based on the available sales data of the company's Customer Relationship Management (with information about the customer, such as the location, size, customer relationship, and industry) and Enterprise Resource Planning (with information about the purchase order, such as the product category, type, quantity, and revenue) systems. The competitor analysis identifies the most important competitors and their differences in facilities, market

reach, product inventory, brand values, marketing methods, and visual brand identity. This information could be gathered from external sources, such as the competitor's brand assets (such as a website), and internal sources, such as the knowledge of employees.

The result of the market analysis can be used to develop business development strategies, by answering questions such as in which industries should the company expand its customers (based on the number of customers, the profitability of each industry, and the competitor density), which products are sold the most to which industry (identifying the product benefits per industry and the company's core product), and in which areas would it be beneficial to set up business facilities (based on the location of the customers and the competitor facilities). Additionally, the results can be used to define brand strategies, by answering questions such as which brand values are considered important for the market (based on the competitor's brand values, goals, and marketing methods and customer interviews), what is a unique quality of the company that is not seen in competitors (based on the competitor's positioning and brand identity, as well as customer interview responses), and what visual brand identity elements should be avoided to remain distinct in the market (based on the competitor's visual elements).

The *brand architecture analysis* evaluates the organisational structure of the company that defines the roles, and relationships between multiple brands under a firm [9]. This analysis includes an analysis of current brand names and logos and an exploration of different brand architecture models [9] that could potentially improve the current brand structure.

The brand names and logos analysis assesses the value of the current brand name and logo by evaluating their legal protection (based on trademark registrations and reverse image search of similar brand names or logos) and associations (including brand name word association based on dictionary descriptions and logo colour association based on colour theory). Accordingly, it can be decided whether a brand name and/or logo change would be beneficial.

The brand architecture model exploration applies the different brand architecture models as defined by Aaker et al. [9], including the house of brands (brand operates independently from parent company), endorsed brands (brand is supported by a link to the parent company), subbrands (brand leverages parent brand name but maintains own brand identity), and branded house (parent brand applies a unified brand strategy over all its brands). It lists the changes, disadvantages, and advantages of applying a certain model.

Based on the company, market, and brand architecture analysis a new brand architecture is established which supports the company structure (business analysis), product and service inventory (business analysis), internal brand identity (the internal brand relation), market positioning (customer and competitor analysis), and the current brand equity (brand name and logo analysis). This brand architecture is the first step in defining the brand & business strategy, as it defines the product and service inventory and general market positioning of the brand.

2.2. Phase 2 - Brand & Business Strategy

Based on insights from the analysis phase, new sales, marketing, product, operation, and resource development and management strategies are developed that align with the new brand architecture. Several frameworks are applied to formulate these strategies, including the *Value Proposition Canvas [4], SWOT analysis [10], TOWS matrix [11], sales strategy [12],* and *Business Model Canvas [13]*. These frameworks and their relation to each other will be discussed below.

The *Value Proposition Canvas* [4] ensures the company's products and services are aligned with their customer's needs by mapping the customer's jobs, pains, and gains against the company's products and services, and their gain creators, and pain relievers. This provides a foundation for designing products and services that resonate with the target market. Additionally, it could be used to guide marketing strategies, as it identifies the brand's target markets and how the brand creates value for them.

A *SWOT analysis* [10] provides a clear understanding of the current market positioning of the brand by identifying the company's internal strengths (S) and weaknesses (W), and external market opportunities (O) and threats (T). The *TOWS matrix* [11] expands upon the SWOT analysis, by addressing the relations between the internal and external factors to define development strategies that align with internal company capabilities and external market conditions. These strategies leverage the company's strengths to capitalise on market opportunities (S-O strategies) and illuminate market threats (S-T strategies). Additionally, strategies are developed that leverage market opportunities to illuminate company weaknesses (W-O strategies), and strategies that are aimed to tackle both the market threats and the company weaknesses (W-T strategies).

A *sales strategy* typically outlines sales objectives, strategies, budgets, timelines, and processes [12]. However, in the context of rebranding, this sales strategy has been simplified to focus on defining the target market for each product and service (based on the market analysis), along with the associated marketing strategy (based on the value proposition canvas) and cost strategy. The simplified sales strategy can be used to guide sales and marketing efforts ensuring their alignment with the company's development strategies and financial goals.

The *Business Model Canvas* "describes the rationale of how an organisation creates, delivers, and captures value" [13, p. 14]. It synthesises the previously discussed frameworks ensuring all elements of the business model, including business assets, strategies, relationships, and operations, work in harmony to support the development strategies. The model is composed of nine building blocks: customer segments (defines the customer groups the company aims to serve), value proposition (describes the unique value the company's products and services offer to each customer segment), channels (specifies the communication and distribution methods used to deliver the value proposition and interact with customers), customer relationships (outlines how the company maintains relationships with its customers), revenue streams (identifies how the company generates income), key resources (lists the essential assets required to create and deliver the value proposition), key activities (describes how the resources are utilised to ensure the functioning of the business model), key partnerships (describes the external partners that the company collaborates with), and cost structure (details the costs involved in running the business) [13, 14]

2.3. Phase 3 - Brand Identity

The brand identity phase translates the strategic foundation into both intangible elements (*brand identity framework*) and tangible elements (*visual brand identity*). The brand identity framework describes the substance of the brand, by utilising the *brand essence* [15], *brand compass* [16, 17], *brand archetype* [18, 19, 20], and b*rand identity prism* [5] frameworks. This brand identity framework provides the basis for designing the visual brand identity, including the new brand name, logo, story, slogan, and design language.

2.3.1 Brand Identity Framework

The *brand identity framework* first defines the *brand essence* [15], by stating what the brand offers to the market, how the brand delivers it, and why the brand offers it. From these statements, the brand core values can be defined, which are recurring themes within the brand essence that represents what the company views as the central importance of its organisation, for example, innovation [16, 17]

To extend upon the 'why' of the brand essence the *brand compass* is applied outlining the brand's purpose (the overarching reason behind the brand), vision (long-term goal), and mission (method to achieve the goal) [16, 17].

The formulation format of the brand essence and brand compass is displayed in Figure 2. The statements utilise developed brand & business strategies to provide a short explanation of the substance and goal of the brand. These statements can be used to ensure developments are aligned with the brand & business strategies, to guide and motivate employees and partners, and to connect with customers [15, 16, 17].

Brand Essence	Brand Compass
What	**Purpose**
"Brand X offers [product/service] that [key benefit or function] to help [target customers/industries] achieve [goal or benefit]."	"Brand X aims to revolutionize [industry] by offering [products/services] that [key benefit/action], contributing to [broader impact]"
How	**Vision**
Brand X ensures [product/service quality] through [method or process], leveraging [resources/brand commitments or expertise] to deliver [specific benefit or value to customers]."	"Brand X's goal is to be [aspirational outcome/position] by offering [key product/service elements], which contribute to [desired impact in the industry or for customers]"
Why	**Mission**
"Brand X aims to [higher purpose or impact] by providing [product/service] that helps customers [achieve goal], ultimately contributing to [broader positive impact]."	"Brand X aims to [higher purpose or impact] by providing [product/service] that helps customers [achieve goal], ultimately contributing to [broader positive impact]."

Figure 2.; *Brand Essence and Brand Compass Formulation [15, 16, 17]*

Based on the analysis, brand & business strategies, brand essence, and brand compass two to three brand archetypes are selected. *Brand archetypes* are brand personalities that can be applied to a brand to connect with its customers on an emotional level as it associates the brand with human motivations, values, and behaviours [18, 19, 20]. Pearson [19] defined 12 brand archetypes each with distinct characteristics, values, strengths, and pitfalls. The selected brand archetypes should be distinct from competitors, emphasise the brand's unique selling point, align with the brand & business strategies, and align with the company's history, culture, working method, and core values (company analysis). They provide an initial direction of the visual brand identity, as they are often associated with specific design characteristics, including a selection of colours, shapes, typography, words, and photography.

The brand essence, brand compass, and brand archetypes are combined in Kapferer's *Brand Identity Prism* [5], which ensures the developed brand identity is consistent throughout all the external and internal brand dimensions. The model consists of three external brand dimensions, including the brand's physique (tangible and visual attributes), relationship (customer-brand relationship), and reflection (consumer characteristics the brand portrays), and three internal brand dimensions, including the brand's personality (brand archetypes), culture (brand values and principles), and self-image (customer perception when using the brand).

2.3.2 Visual Brand Identity

While the brand identity framework defines the brand in words, the visual brand identity aims to translate these words into a design. First, a new brand name and logo are developed that reflect the new brand architecture, complement the target market and product inventory, align with the brand identity framework, and are competitively distinct.

When a name and logo are decided upon, a brand story can be developed which is a short story based on the brand identity framework and the brand & business strategies [2]. It describes the brand history, offerings, target market, facilities, working culture, core values, motivations, and goals. Simultaneously, a brand slogan is produced, which is a short sentence (or a couple of words) that encapsulates the brand's offerings and/or positioning strategy.

Lastly, the brand name, logo, slogan, and story and the brand identity framework are utilised to develop a design language guide. This includes designs for logos, typography, colour palettes, icons, tone of voice, and photography, and guidelines on how to apply and combine these design elements to brand assets.

2.4 Phase 4 - Brand Guidelines

The brand guidelines phase serves as the final deliverable to the company, outlining the strategic conclusions and design outcomes from the brand identity development process. It includes a positioning strategy document that summarises the brand and business strategies, detailing how to manage, market, and develop the brand. Additionally, it features a brand book that provides an overview of the brand identity, including a brief introduction to the company and its products, the brand strategy, visual brand identity, and examples of brand assets. Furthermore, downloadable brand asset files are provided, including fonts, icons, images, videos, documents, and renders. Lastly, a rationale document can also be included, which outlines the steps, results, and conclusions of the entire brand identity development process.

3. Discussion and Future Studies

The brand identity development methodology proposed in this paper bridges the gap between brand and business strategies by integrating various branding and business frameworks from literature into a cohesive process. This approach outlines a step-by-step plan for developing a brand identity that aligns with both the brand's positioning strategy and the company's business model and objectives developed based on the analysis insights.

The analysis phase identifies issues with the company's current branding, positioning, structure and management which define the justification and scope of the rebranding. Additionally, the analysis provides insights into the company (the business and the brand) and its market, serving as the foundation for developing brand & business strategies that align with the company's strengths, customer needs, and opportunities and threats in the market.

These strategies define the brand architecture and guide how to effectively manage, market, and develop both the brand and the business. The brand identity phase translates these strategies into intangible elements (brand identity framework), which outline the substance of the brand, and tangible elements (visual brand identity), capturing the design language of the brand.

The methodology was specifically designed to illustrate the rebranding and repositioning process for companies with established brands that have failed to be competitively distinct and reflect the company's culture and values. Future research could explore whether this methodology can also be used to create entirely new brands or identify opportunities for brand

extensions, such as launching new products under an existing brand.

While the methodology is primarily aimed at business-to-business companies with highly functional products, it could be expanded for use in business-to-consumer markets, where a product's appearance is less dependent on its functions and thus offers greater potential for visual branding. To adapt this methodology to business-to-consumer companies, additional steps could be introduced to analyse current product branding and guide the translation of brand identity into product design. Frameworks such as the *Design Format Analysis* [21] and the *Brand Translation Prism* [22] could be incorporated to support this process.

Currently, the methodology does not address how to evaluate the success of the brand identity after implementation. This exclusion is intentional, as measuring brand equity is a long-term process that can only be assessed after a brand identity has been implemented for a significant period. Keller [2] recommends conducting brand audits to identify sources of brand equity, designing brand tracking studies that collect quantitative measures of key brand performance dimensions, and establishing brand equity measurement systems that document and measure consumer engagement (e.g., views, clicks, etc.). Brand equity outcomes can also be assessed through comparative methods, such as surveys and experiments that measure consumer attitudes and behaviours toward the brand, or holistic methods that estimate brand equity in terms of utility or financial value.

4. Conclusion

This paper presents a comprehensive brand identity development methodology that combines branding and business frameworks to create a strategically aligned, coherent and distinct brand identity. The methodology is particularly effective in business-to-business environments with highly functional and commoditised products, where brand identity plays a critical role in differentiating the company from competitors.

The extensive analysis of the company, market, and brand architecture provides the justification and scope of the rebranding process as it identifies misalignments between internal and external brand perceptions and other company issues. Additionally, it provides valuable insights for the development of a new brand architecture and the brand & business strategies. Based on these strategies the brand identity is developed, which ensures the brand's identity is not only visually compelling but also strategically aligned with the brand's strategic positioning and the company's business model and objectives.

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