

# THE SCIENCE BEHIND BETTER

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# BRANDING IN SCIENCE

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**A SIMPLE FRAMEWORK**



For science-led organisations and businesses, defining their brand strategy and visual identity can seem a distinctly unscientific practice.

Assessing how the organisation should behave, look and speak can appear to be based on subjective opinion rather than evidence. Consequently, branding in scientific sectors is too often under-valued, undifferentiated and under-utilised.

What follows is a simple framework for how science-led organisations can use learnings from neuroscience and behavioural sciences to aid the development of more effective brand strategies and identities, and to bring their teams with them.

It's based on our experience of working with leading clients in science and technology, including Springer Nature, Wellcome, global research-led universities and Our Future Health.

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The supreme goal of all theory is to make the irreducible basic elements as simple and as few as possible without having to surrender the adequate representation of a single datum of experience.

*Albert Einstein*

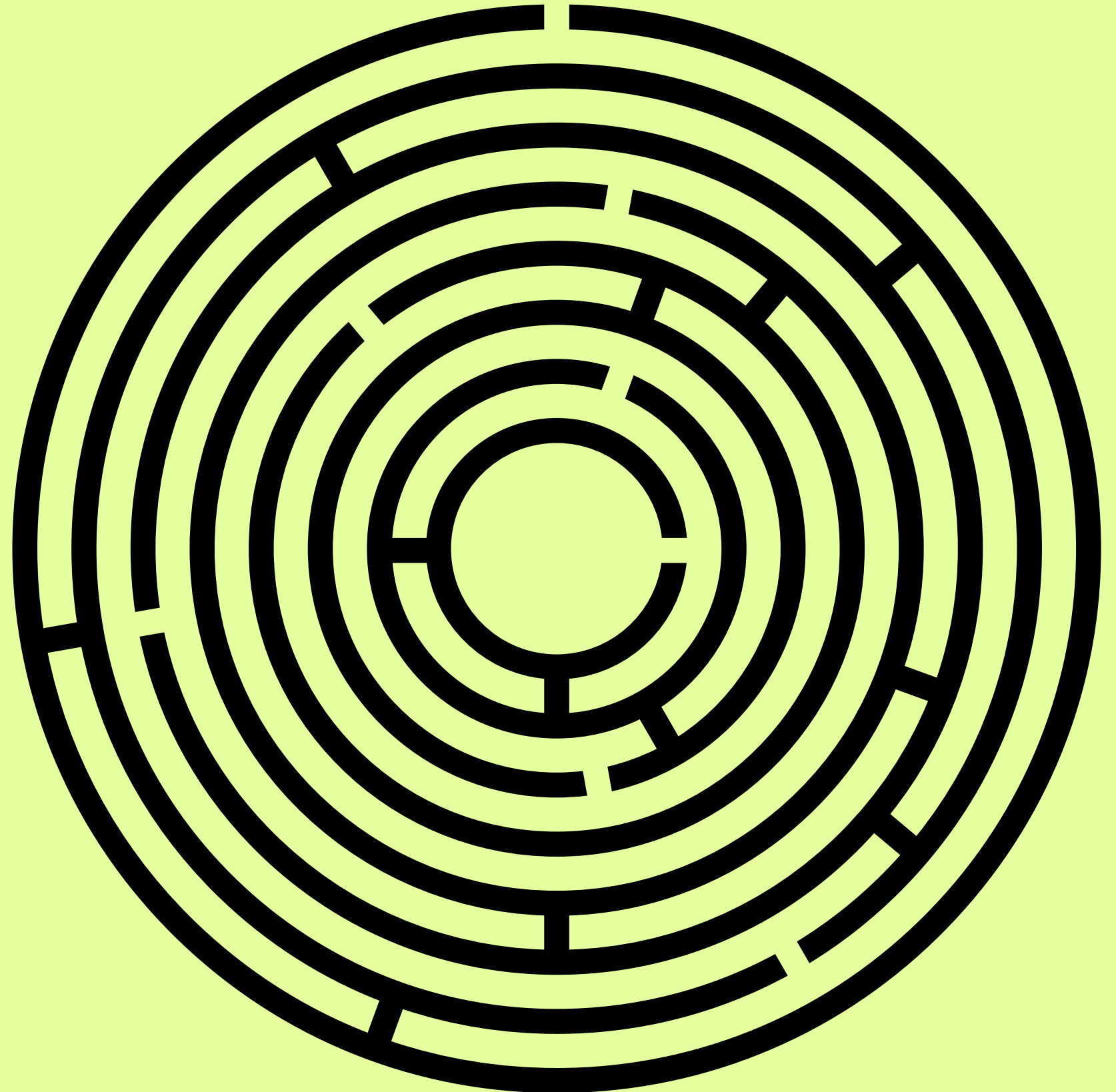
He might as well have been describing the aims of brand strategy.

# WHAT BRANDING AND SCIENCE SHARE

Brands work best when they are as focussed as possible. Brands in science and technology have the challenge of how to present complex, nuanced ideas in a simple enough way to engage, without sacrificing integrity or accuracy.

To grow your organisation for impact or for profit, you have to convince new audiences of the value of what you do. Even professionals in related fields cannot always be expected to understand the details of your offer well enough to easily see how it differs from alternatives. And dumbing down helps no one. To attract and retain talent you also need those who understand your subject back-to-front to be proud of how your organisation presents itself.

Getting the balance right for your organisation starts with understanding not just *what* people think and feel, but *how*.



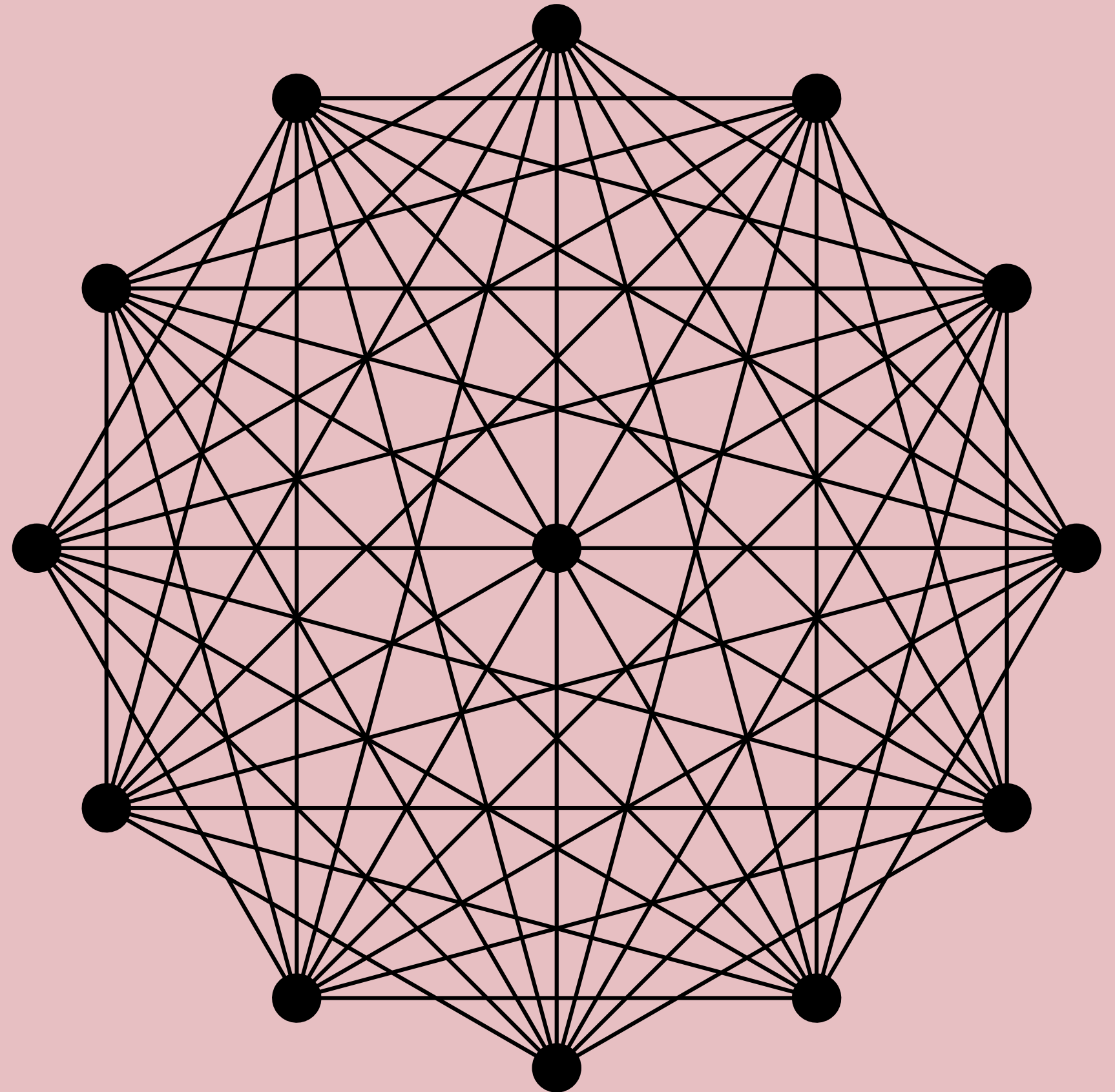
# HOW BRANDS WORK IN THE BRAIN

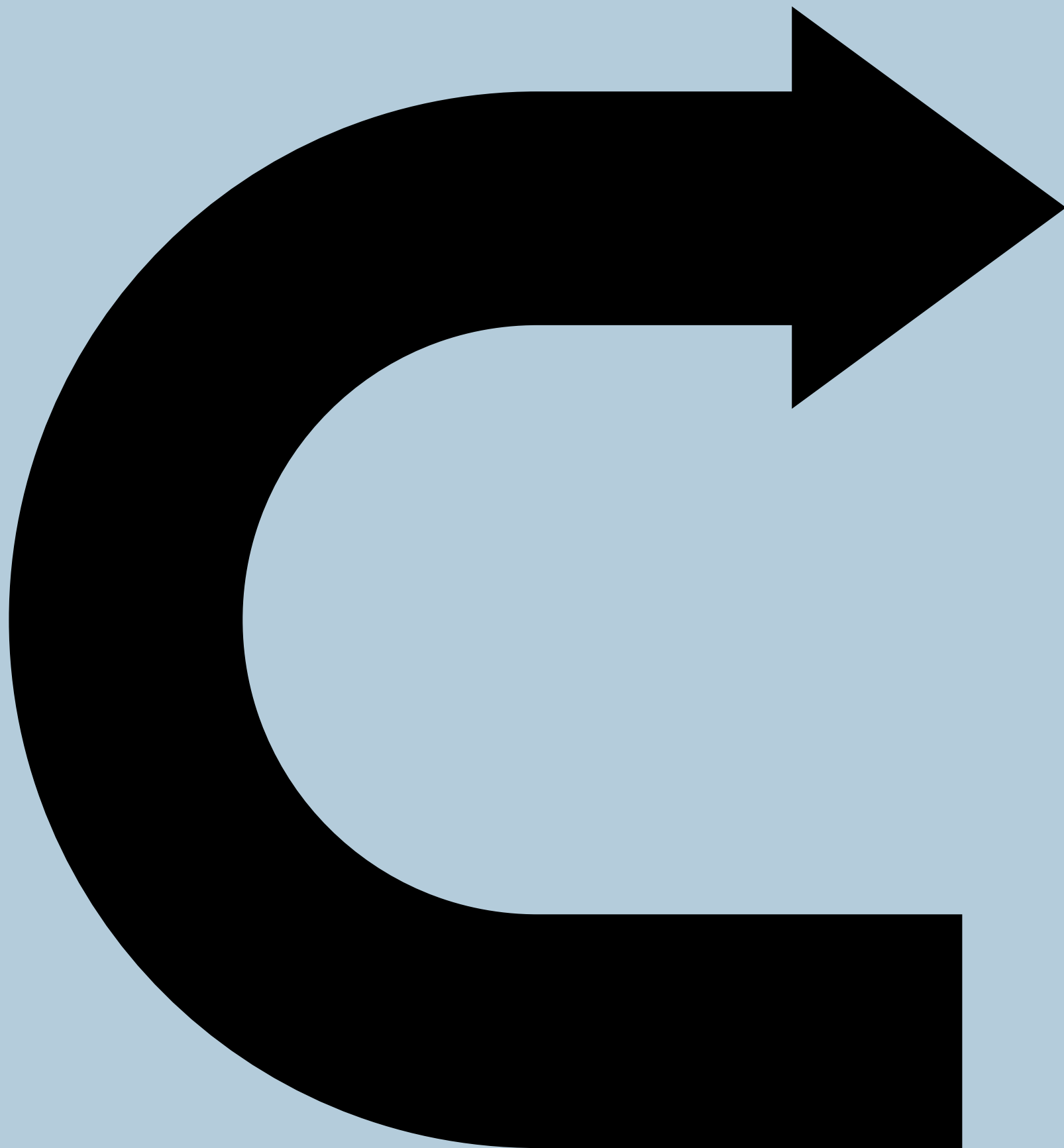
If branding can seem subjective, that's because it is. A brand is loose a set of ideas relating to an organisation or product which someone has in their mind and which they can recall.

The purpose of all brand strategy, visual identity and communications is to create, corral, evoke and provoke the ideas that people have about the organisation in a way which enables the organisation to motivate action.

The most important first step is to engage with your audiences to understand their needs and behaviours in relation to what you offer. However, most decisions we make are first processed subconsciously or unconsciously. So it is critical when defining your brand to consider how ideas are most effectively evoked, connected and recalled.

Studies in neuroscience and behavioural sciences can provide a more objective framework for assessing the potential effectiveness of your brand strategy, and can help scientifically-minded colleagues engage with brand development.





## **THREE PRINCIPLES FOR BUILDING BETTER BRANDS**

Effective branding relies on recall during decision making. A brand is easier to recall the more positive ideas you have related to it, the stronger the connections between those ideas are, and the more connected they are to other ideas that matter to you.

The easier a brand and its associated ideas are to recall, the more pre-disposed one will be to pay attention to it, to believe it, to consider it and to choose it. Ease of recall alone does not generate preference, but it makes it much more likely.

Despite our best efforts, we are not rational decision makers. Usually, we are influenced most strongly by what feels right, because that requires less effort from our brains. In our personal and professional lives we seek things which meet our emotional needs, even if we post-rationalise our choices to ourselves and others.

A brand has to work in tandem with hard-wired biases and heuristics that we sub-consciously rely on day-to-day. Sometimes a brand has to disrupt those biases to provoke deeper thinking or force reappraisal.

Peer-reviewed research in consumer psychology and neuroscience suggests there are three essential aspects a brand needs to be effective. Whilst good creative professionals know these instinctively, *why* they are important is often not explained. It helps everyone involved in the process of branding your organisation to understand more about how these aspects work, and how to embed them in your brand strategy and identity.

These aren't rules, they're guides based on research studies. Used together, they improve effectiveness and lead to more surprising and effective creative ideas.

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*[Link to references](#)*

# DISTINCTIVE RELEVANCE

The more clearly a brand is associated with ideas which are of personal importance to the audience, the more likely it is to be preferred. However, to most effectively link your brand with those ideas, to be the first to come to mind, you also need to be as distinctive as possible from your peers.

The more distinctive something is from those things around it, the more recall it benefits from, the more attention it warrants and the more significant or exciting it will feel by contrast.

Relevance without distinctiveness may simply help build the case for your category and your competitors, not you. Relevance gets you considered, but distinctiveness gets attention, and creates affinity and preference.

There needs to be some aspects to your brand which make it always, distinctively you. If there aren't, you need to start building or refining them.

## How can you use this in brand development?

Define the branding and communications rules of the category you are in, then purposefully break at least one. Don't just bend it, set out to shatter it.

How do your competitors and sector press look and sound? Consider every aspect – propositions and key messages, tone of voice, colourways, photography styles, iconography, everything. Comparing how other categories differ sometimes reveals the rules in your own category more starkly.

These are the clichés, the ways which companies have come to rely on to tick the box of what is important in the category. Often its showing the

people behind the science to make it seem 'more human', or claiming to 'transform lives through X, Y or Z', or being 'dedicated to innovation' (now one of the most overused terms in any category). Unless you're the runaway category leader, and even then, you need to disrupt some of those rules.

Choosing which rule to break requires a good understanding of how they work and which offers greatest potential for generating relevant interest. By breaking one or two you can generate greater distinctiveness, without undermining trust in your competence in that category.



# COHERENCY OVER TIME

The more often that specific associations with your brand are triggered during the process of someone thinking about the category, the more likely it is that your brand will be preferred and chosen. The more you are able to communicate the same idea, in different ways and at different times, the stronger those associations become.

In brand management, too much emphasis is placed on consistency when its coherency which is more effective and practical when working across organisations and across different media.

Any and every interaction someone has with your organisation is contributing to building your brand. For greatest effectiveness, every part of your organisation must be able to intelligently interpret and express the brand through their own area of work – in explicit or implicit ways.

Striving for absolute consistency hinders colleagues from using their expertise to deliver in their area.

Coherency creates much stronger advocates throughout the organisation. And it generates new product, service and process ideas which feedback into expressing the brand.

Managing a brand in this way is more an act of choreography than direct control and requires more dynamic tools than traditional brand guidelines.

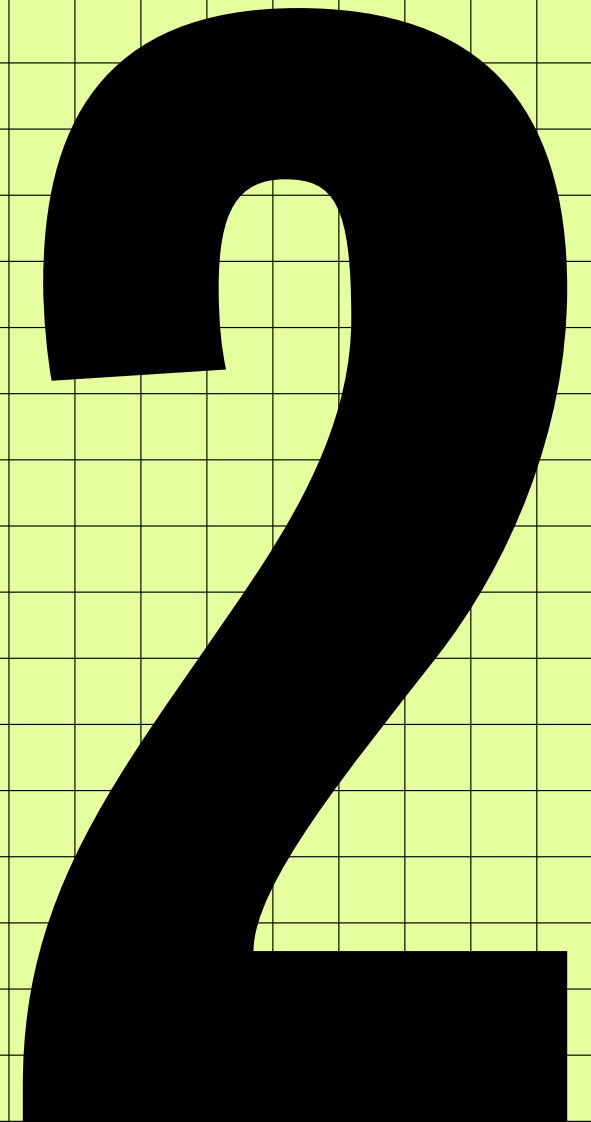
## How can you use this in brand development?

The best way to enable coherency is to articulate your brand strategy in terms which speak to one or more fundamental human motivations:

- *Security (i.e. certainty, trust, support),*
- *Excitement (i.e. risk, stimulation, vitality),*
- *Autonomy (i.e. pride, success, recognition),*
- *Belonging (i.e. identity, social, knowledge),*
- *Order (i.e. precision, logic, discipline),*
- *Creativity (i.e. curiosity, play, transformation)*

This doesn't mean you have to use these terms externally. But by starting from a more elevated, more empathetic view of what your organisation actually does for people, it helps all parts of the organisation to apply the brand idea in more relevant ways in their own area. It sets principles to use, rather than a script to follow.

And by articulating your brand strategy in this way, you provide guidance and more freedom to communicate in ways relevant to different platforms or different touchpoints, building a more coherent and richer brand.





# CREATIVE RICHNESS

The more connections and associations the brand has with other ideas influencing the process of choosing, the more likely it is to be considered favourably. Those could be images, people, sounds, experiences... anything that evokes positive associations which influence their decision.

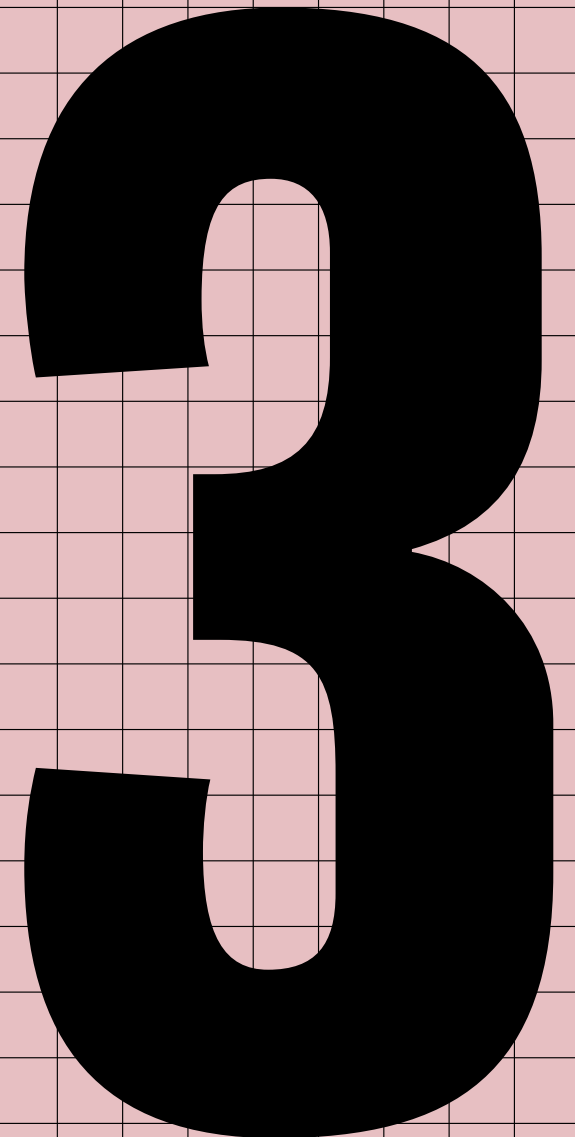
The key is to ensure there is sufficient depth to your brand identity – enough assets to play with, enough flexibility and variety to iterate with. So that every touchpoint with an audience can be as richly engaging and efficient as possible. Whether through evoking curiosity, generating emotion or making a simple transaction echo the rest of the brand. Everything should reinforce the promise you're making.

## **How can you use this in brand development?**

Start with plotting the typical journey your customers may undertake when researching, choosing, buying and using products from your category. Define their needs at each stage, both emotional and rational, and the key messages you need to communicate.

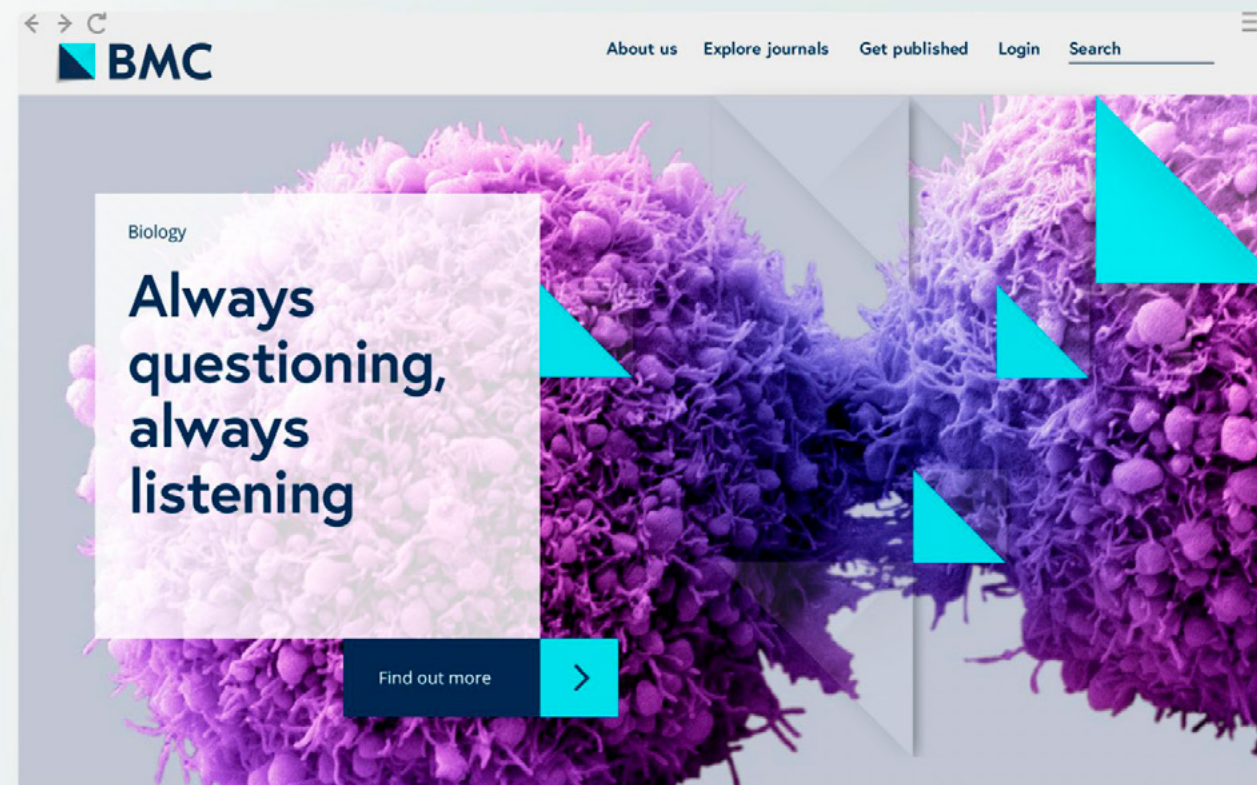
Then try to identify what sensory stimulus – sights, textures, sounds, tastes, smells etc. – would help place the customer in the right frame of mind to be as receptive as possible to your message at each stage.

This isn't a plea to add scratch-n-sniff to your marketing mix. But by describing what the experience should feel like in every sense, it helps articulate a much richer brief for what your communications should feel like at each stage. It helps to expose where the brand identity may not have sufficient assets and can generate surprising ideas for bringing the brand to life.

A large, bold, black number 3 is positioned on the right side of the page. It is set against a light pink background that features a subtle grid pattern. The number 3 is the central focus of this section, which is part of a larger layout that includes a dark pink sidebar on the left and a dark pink header at the top.

# FROM THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Here are some examples that demonstrate the principles we've outlined in practice. Some are identities created by True North, and some by other designers whose work we admire.



## Latest tweets

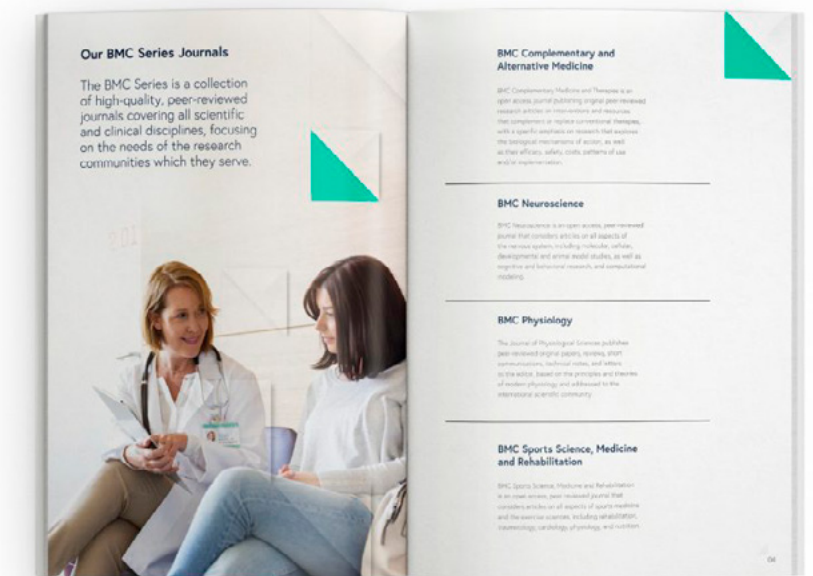
BMC Psychology's Highlights of 2016, including their results-free #PeerReview

## The fight against Alzheimer's

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is a



# BMC



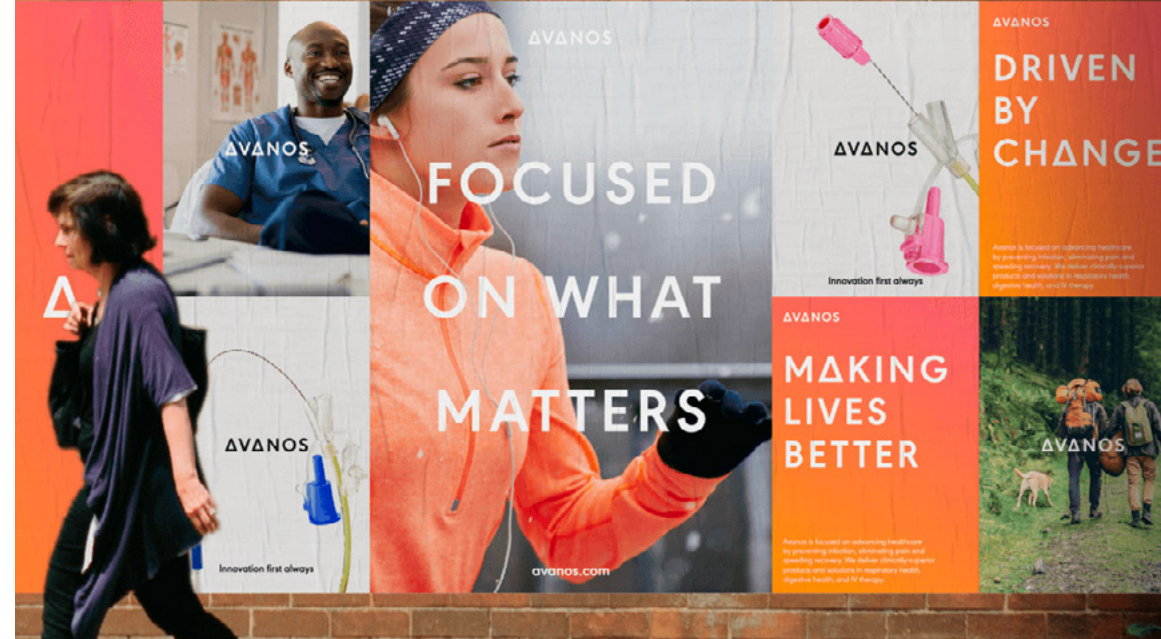
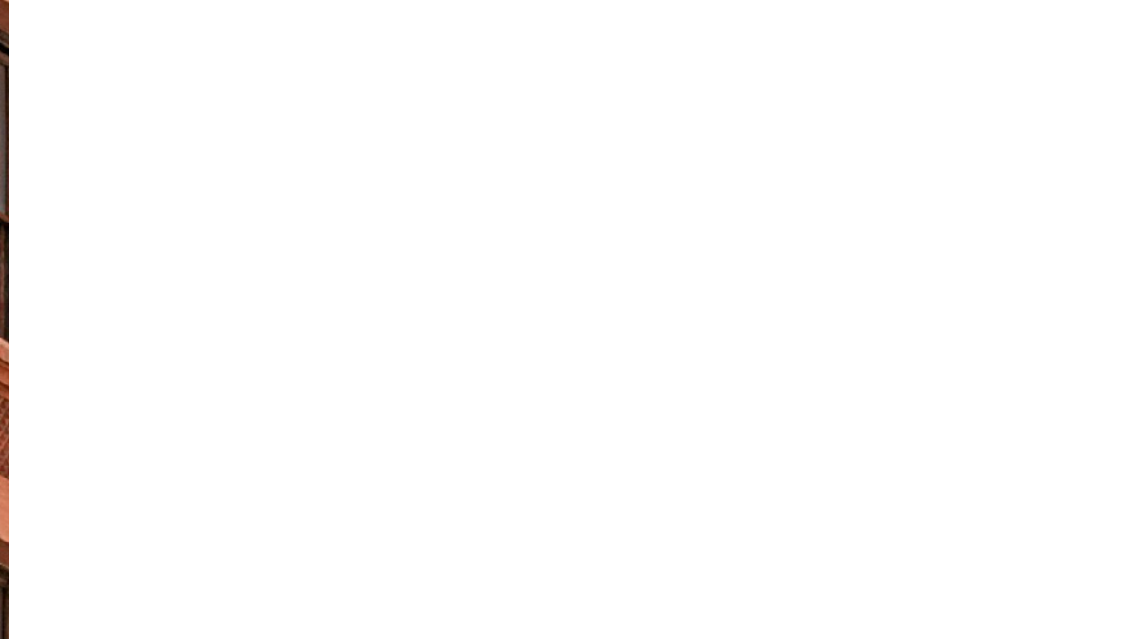




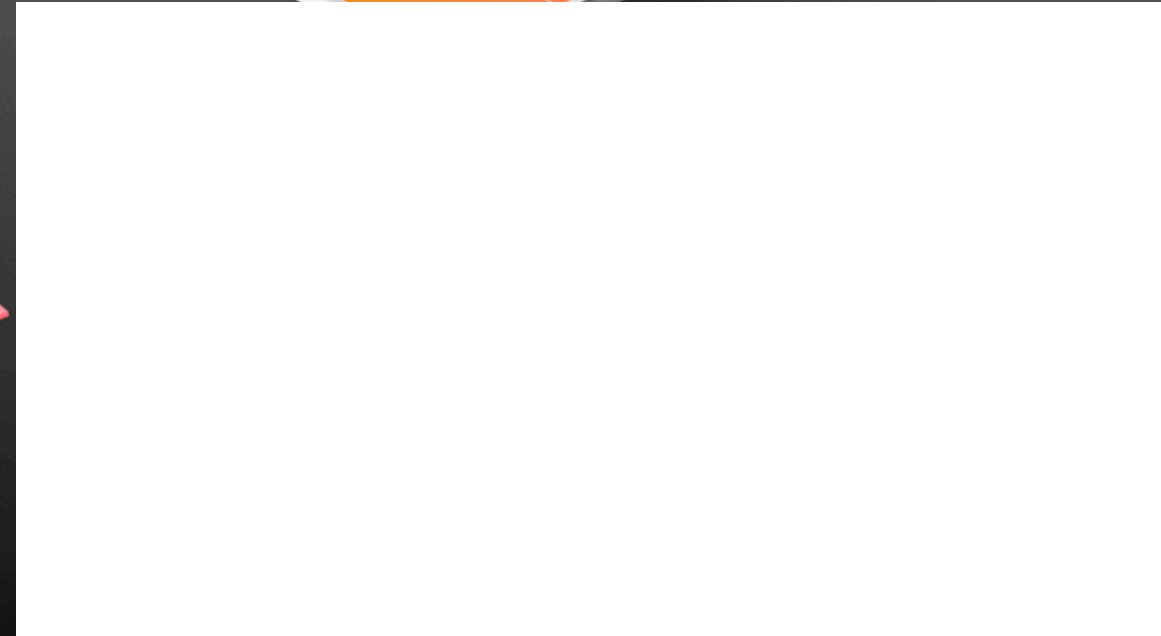




Tweag by Brand Brothers



Avanos by Merchant Cantos

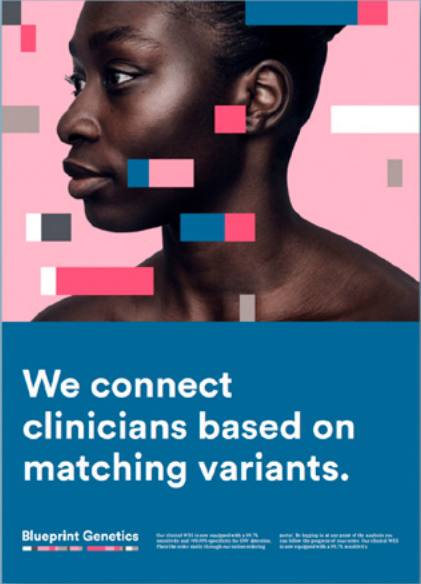
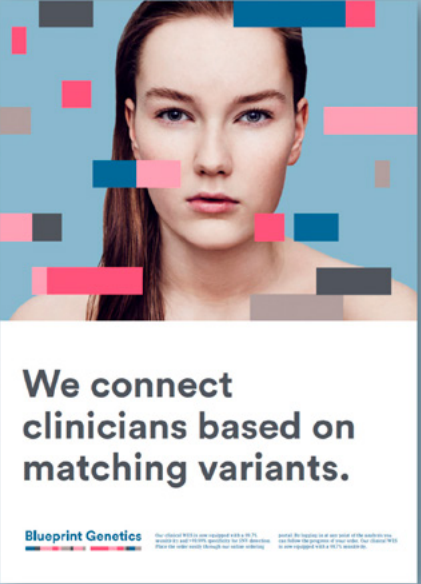




Blueprint Genetics by Kokoro & Moi



Provital by Mucho



## **IS YOUR BRAND BUILDING ON THE THREE PRINCIPLES?**

**1**

**DISTINCTIVE  
RELEVANCE**

The riskiest thing you can do is to act the same as everyone else.

**2**

**COHERENCY  
OVER TIME**

Experiencing the same idea from different angles is more convincing than hearing it perfectly repeated.

**3**

**CREATIVE  
RICHNESS**

If you don't invest enough care in how you express yourself, why should anyone care enough to listen?

If your organisation could benefit from generating greater value in your brand, we'd love to find out more about your challenges.

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