

MARRTIN

PORTFOLIO

REID

About Martin

I like to think deep and make neat stuff so brands, products and agencies can shine.

I am a brand strategist and writer mainly for tech, finance and consumer brands, working big to small, agency-side to in-house, London to Hong Kong and beyond.



Positioning

Verbal identity

Names

Campaigns

Websites

Products

Longer writing

Positioning

My favourite project is discovering what makes a business competitive and articulating advantage into a clear, powerful idea – bonus points to coin a phrase that pairs nicely with its logo. Below are some faves.

YFLife

Own the future

Logimark

Further forward

Heng An Standard Life

Get more from life

Cyncly

Make it amazing

Shojin

Next level investing

Hong Kong Family Welfare Society

Family matters

KeyTech

Unlock peace of mind

Bombyx

Silk enlightened



Silk Enlightened

Verbal identity

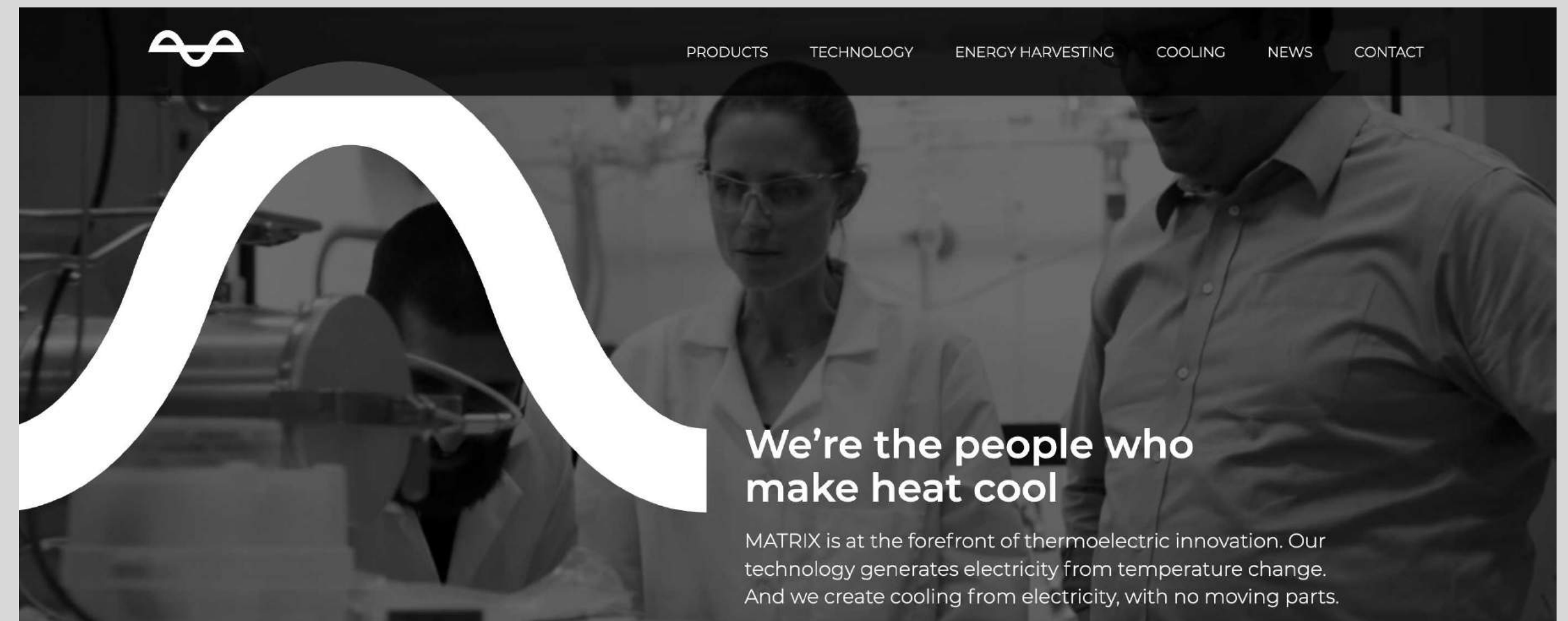
Every brand should have some logic for how to express itself through words: brand pillars, values, messaging frameworks, voice principles, guidelines with examples and other ideas... I like to write and create something helpful for teams use and express their brand carefully and consistently.

MATRIX INDUSTRIES

Matrix is a startup in thermoelectrics, whose tech products harness temperature differences to create or use energy.

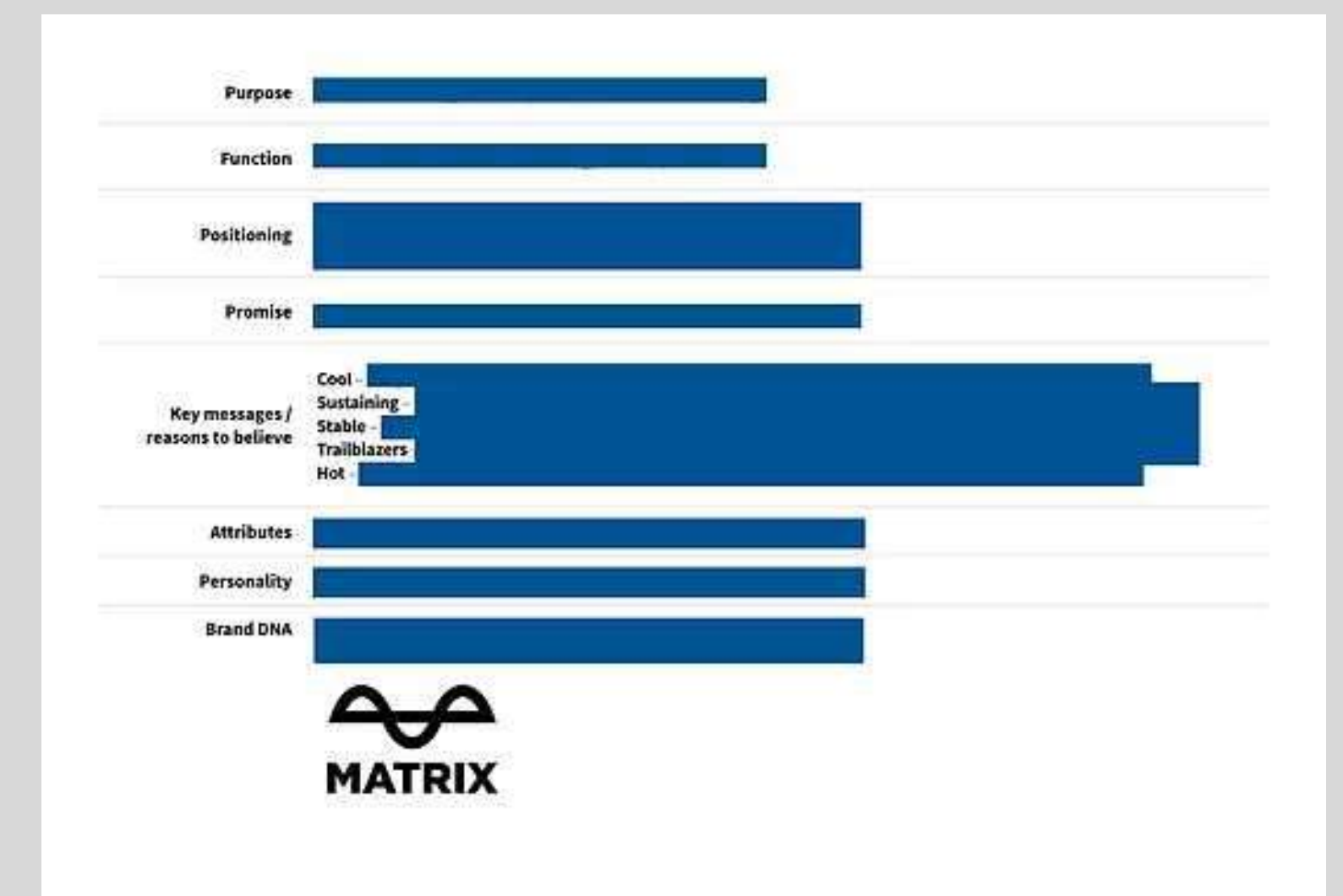
I reflected this as part of a messaging framework to organize the brand, defining brand values that moved in a spectrum from cool to hot.

Outcome: A brand logic that inspired its wavy logo and approach that played with extremes of hot and cold: “We’re the people that make heat cool”.



brand values

cool
sustaining
stable
trailblazers
hot

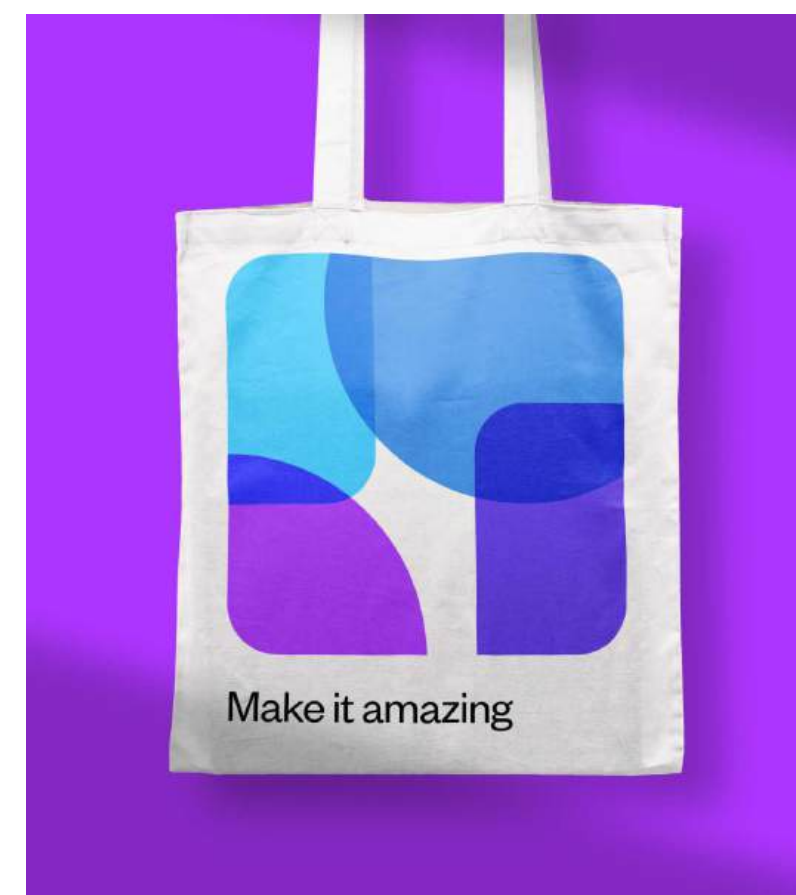
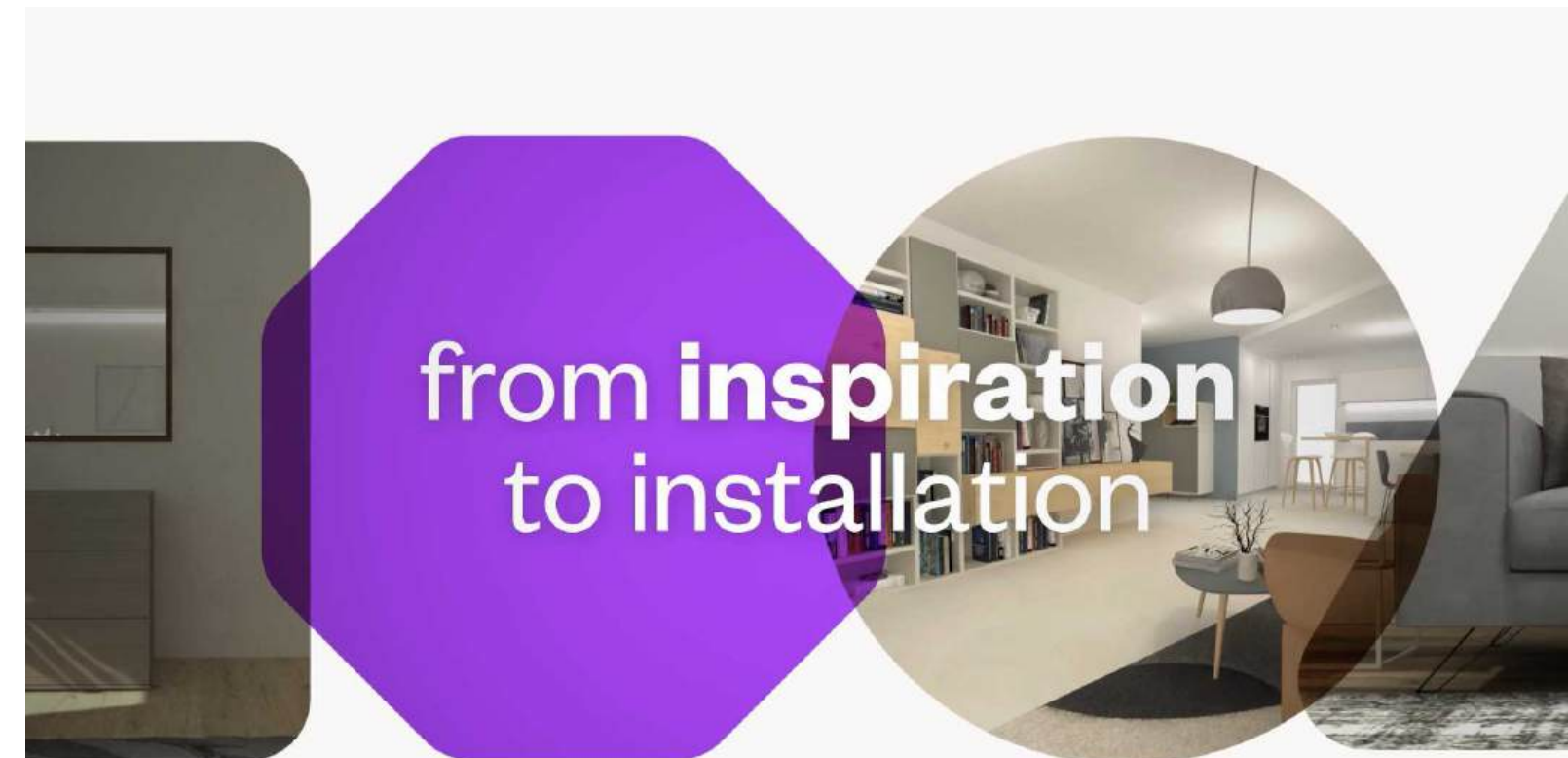


CYNCLY

Cyncly has many pieces in its verbal identity, including alliterative principles to reflect its tagline “Make it amazing”.

It’s easy for verbal identities to get bogged down with too many ideas and rules that harm rather than help a brand. For its voice guidance, rather than listing out more keywords and concepts, I introduced a brand character “Cyril” to epitomize the Cyncly brand and give writers a route to channel a peppy, creative voice.

Outcome: I’m assured the character “went down well” internally, as a clear, flexible approach to voice inspired marketing teams from Brazil to the Philippines.



Create it.
Change it.
Connect it.
Control it.
Cultivate it.
Celebrate it.



Meet Cyril

“Everything our brand stands for is to help you make it amazing. Turn customer vision into reality. Make designers, retailers and manufacturers excel at their jobs. Making products and spaces that wow everyone. The power of creation, the excitement of seeing differently, opening your mind to wonder.

Cyril personifies Cyncly’s brand voice. He celebrates everyone’s capacity to make what they do and what they want to do, amazing. When you write or speak for Cyncly, picture Cyril and channel him in your words.”

ZING by HSBC

Building on the foundations given by a partner growth marketing agency, I evolved Zing's verbal identity into guidelines for writers and other creative partners to use.

The guidelines introduced three voice principles as well as more prescriptive guidance around how to use the Zing name (fine, but avoid overkill) and other writing techniques to shake off sounding like a corporate bank.

Outcome: A source of truth to help countless individuals creating for the brand make material with fewer errors and tighter alignment.

How we write

Keep it simple

Links to: Sharp & Confident

Assume your audience is busy. People like things to be clear and concise – they'll appreciate when we're making things easy. Zing's simplicity may well be why traditional bank customers switch to us.

We also want to be a friendly voice to all. To make sure everyone feels welcome, our language should be easy to understand, no matter who you are. We use words that are simple and straightforward.

Imagine you're speaking to family or friends who struggle with mobile banking. How could you explain your point to them?

For more information on simplifying your writing:
Try the Hemingway app: <https://hemingwayapp.com/>

Less of this

- Use big words when short ones will do (check out our guidance on swapping formal for normal)
- Be too rigid. Use the occasional longer sentence if you think it works
- Use too many exclamation marks, save them for short, celebratory moments.

More of this

- Keep sentences short and paragraphs smaller
- Use headings, subheadings and summaries
- Enjoy your writing – the audience can tell when you're having fun

Voice Principles

Voice

Our voice principles give us the foundation for our brand voice:
Sharp, Inspiring, Confident

Use these characteristics to guide your writing. Depending on what you're writing, you may want to focus on expressing just one characteristic rather than all three.

Sharp
Inspiring
Confident

How we write

To Zing or not to Zing?

Links to: Sharp, Inspiring, Confident

Lively, energetic, fun. We want to use having such a vibrant brand name.

How? We want to embrace Zing wordplay, but we do need some guardrails. If we start Zinging here, there and everywhere, it can affect our reputation and make us seem like we are trying too hard.

We also have to think about our audience. How we use Zing on social media won't be the same way we use it in a customer support reply.

Not sure you're using Zing correctly? Check with the copy team.

Don't do this

- Replace any '-ing' with 'Zing'. Shopzing, Spendzing.
- Capitalise 'Z' within a word. AmaZing.

Let's do this

- Use Zing to name features, products and campaigns: e.g. Surprizing Rewards
- Use words ending in '-zing' that make sense: Trailblazing, socializing, localizing. Words like that.
- Stick to 'do your thing', instead of 'do your Zing'. Exception is used as our tagline: Do your Zing
- It's now OK to use Zing as a verb: Zing money abroad. Let me Zing that over.
- Expand Zing: Zingers, Zingy, Zinged.

Names

Even though they can be one of the most roller coaster parts of branding, naming projects are also the most rewarding. I've led and supported many naming projects, but the ones here are where my own idea or articulation have ended up in the final output.



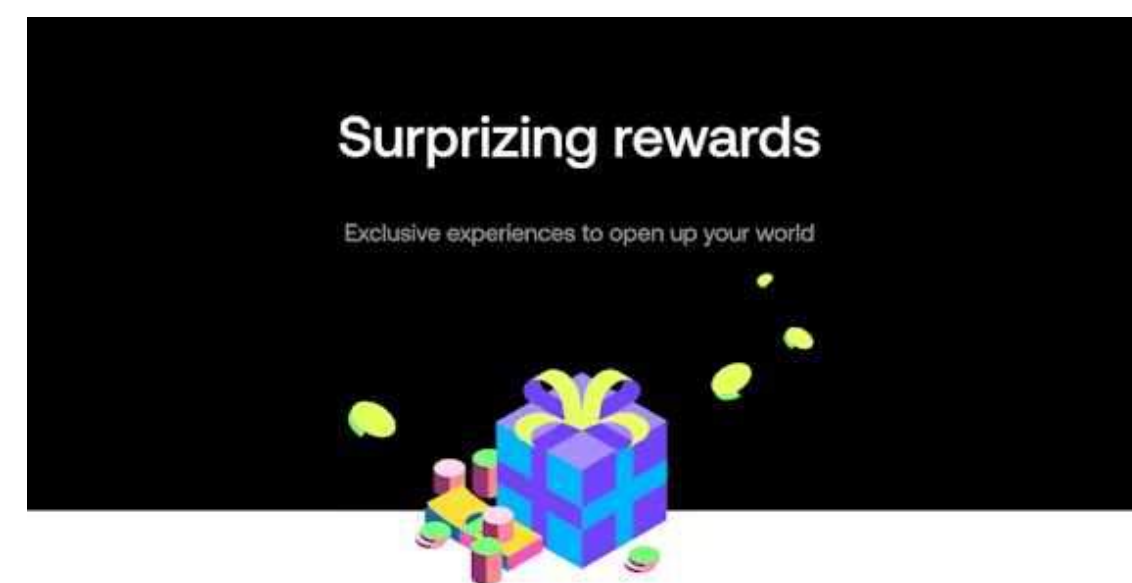
LOGIMARK

A freight forwarding firm enlisted our agency's help after a trademarking body rejected their original. We got to the right name by exploring prefix and suffix combos alongside diligent domain and trademark availability checks.



CYNCLY

A variation of this name somehow ended up a favourite by Cyncly's board (and private equity partner), but had too many red flags around trademarks, domains and sense. Keeping the same sound, I steered opinions to support a preferable, less problematic spelling (goodbye, Qs!)



SURPRIZING REWARDS

One of the identity rules of Zing was the encouragement to play with words ending in 'zing'. For a recurring prize draw campaign, I coined this new name, making the "s" in "surprising" a "z".

Campaigns

I like writing for campaigns that use new channels, touchpoints or creative concepts. This is a snapshot of what I think are some of the more interesting ones.

STRUCTURE XMAS CAMPAIGN

I was briefed to write a straight-faced fake branding case study about the agency helping Santa. Instead, I made the whole thing a Christmas poem and included a pretend project in the narrative. We ended up making that project for real, a “Love to give” microsite with suggestions for how to give crafty, penny-pinching gifts. Only the poem survives.

Outcome: An opportunity to stay top of mind with clients and demonstrate creativity of the agency.



'Twas the brief before Christmas...

when Santa & Co came back to see Structure to help its brand grow.
For the spirit of Christmas had strayed far from giving,
As people worldwide cope with high costs of living.
With belts getting tighter and giving less care-free,
This Christmas could crumble – a prospect quite scary.
With thinking hats on (which jingled and jangled),
Team Structure and Kris Kringle worked up an angle.
A new proposition to cut through the noise,
to position Christmas and fill hearts with joy:

'Love to Give'

became the central idea,
to show the world Christmas has still got its cheer.
To back up this claim and to bring it to life,
Team Structure whipped up a fun microsite,
Which prompted the reader with suggestions merry,
To help them to give without pinching the pennies.
Unleashed to the world, the campaign made ripples.
The KPIs show that gift-giving has tripled.
The client and leader of Santa & Co
Had this to say as its esteemed CEO:

*“By jingle, you did it!
It's Christmas made right!”*

*Thank you team Structure,
and to all a good night!”*

BLUESCAPE MEETING ROOM MAGIC

I conceived the idea and execution of this digital campaign, using the metaphor of an office to speak to the different features of this company's collaboration software.

Site visitors were taken to a bustling animation, which when clicked on, zoomed into a segment of the office and made the case for why their tool is similar but better than the old world.

Outcome: In combination with other activities, such as a long page and blog series, this digital tool supported marketing activity for two quarters in 2021.



Reclaim that meeting room magic

The best parts of work come from collaboration:

Hearing out everyone's craziest ideas in a spontaneous brainstorm.

That eureka moment when your team cracks a challenging problem together.

And getting shoulder-to-shoulder with your favorite colleagues to tackle your gnarliest problems.

These moments spark the innovation that moves your business onwards and upwards.

But you can't always get everyone in the same room. It takes more than an online whiteboard or Zoom meeting to keep the magic alive.

You need a versatile digital workspace that makes distributed collaboration easy and rewarding.

With the right workspace, your teams can do their best work – even if they're all over the world.

Dive in – we'll help you get those great moments back...

LET ME IN



Why Bluescape Solutions Partners Resources Company [Request a Demo](#)

Great brainstorming in the meeting room...

Your creative teams come together to spitball, bounce thoughts around, and step up with your bravest ideas.

But in the room, you're often limited to an easel of scribbles. And when it's all over, it's a lot of effort to compile, organize, sense-check, rewrite, and reshare everything you talked about.

This transition means you lose those gems and nuances in the process – not to mention wasting precious time and resources distilling greatness into meeting minutes...

...Greater brainstorming with Bluescape

With Bluescape, you more effectively present, discuss, and preserve your content for collaboration – and keep the momentum all the way.

Compared with other brainstorm tools, you can bring any type of content to your workspace – and it's easy to draw, write, and add sticky notes to build and refine ideas.

Plus there's always a record of your brainstorm to come back to. Capture lightning in a bottle and preserve shared understanding after it's all over.

Explore more of this moment

[LEARN MORE](#) →

ZING PUSH MESSAGES


Out of the mountain of micro campaigns and projects Zing did across its channels, I really liked supporting CRM efforts with weekly push messages that drove members to to use the app.


They were always light, topical and experimental, to help teams learn what features, offers or subjects appeal to different kinds of users.


Outcome: These messages helped nudge more users to spend or send money where they might not have otherwise, ultimately driving revenue to the business.


 🦁 **Lions land in Europe** 🍀 now
Summer's ending – a new season begins. Don't forget it's easy to convert GBP to EUR at great rates, wherever your travels take you.


 **No fees? 😊 Yes please!** 😊 now
Sending or spending abroad soon? You've still got some of this month's £500 of no conversion fees to use up. Ends 30th Dec 2024. T&Cs apply.


 🌴 **Half-term holiday soon?** 💰 now
Less sun doesn't mean less fun. Before your next escape abroad, make the most of our real-time, competitive exchange rates.


 ✈️ **It's Tourism Day!** 🗺️ now
What better way to celebrate than to book that trip. Remember the local currency can be cheaper to pay in, so check rates with Zing first!

 🌐 **Your money in one place** 💰 now
Now balance from all wallets is on the homepage. Low on a currency? Remember we convert from other wallets automatically for card payments.

 🎯 **Fun FX fact** now
The Swiss Franc 🇨🇭 Bahraini Dinar 🇧🇭 and Kuwaiti Dinar 🇰🇼 are a few of the strongest currencies around (and we help you send these too).

 🎉 **Zing brings the party** 🍷 now
Vibing at Carnival or left on red at Spain's La Tomatina? Bring Zing to send, spend and hold money worry-free, home or abroad.

 ⚽ **It's Cup Finals weekend!** now
Watching with friends? Get £20 per friend that joins Zing (and spends £5+ by card) and they'll get £20 too. The perfect one-two. Tap to refer.

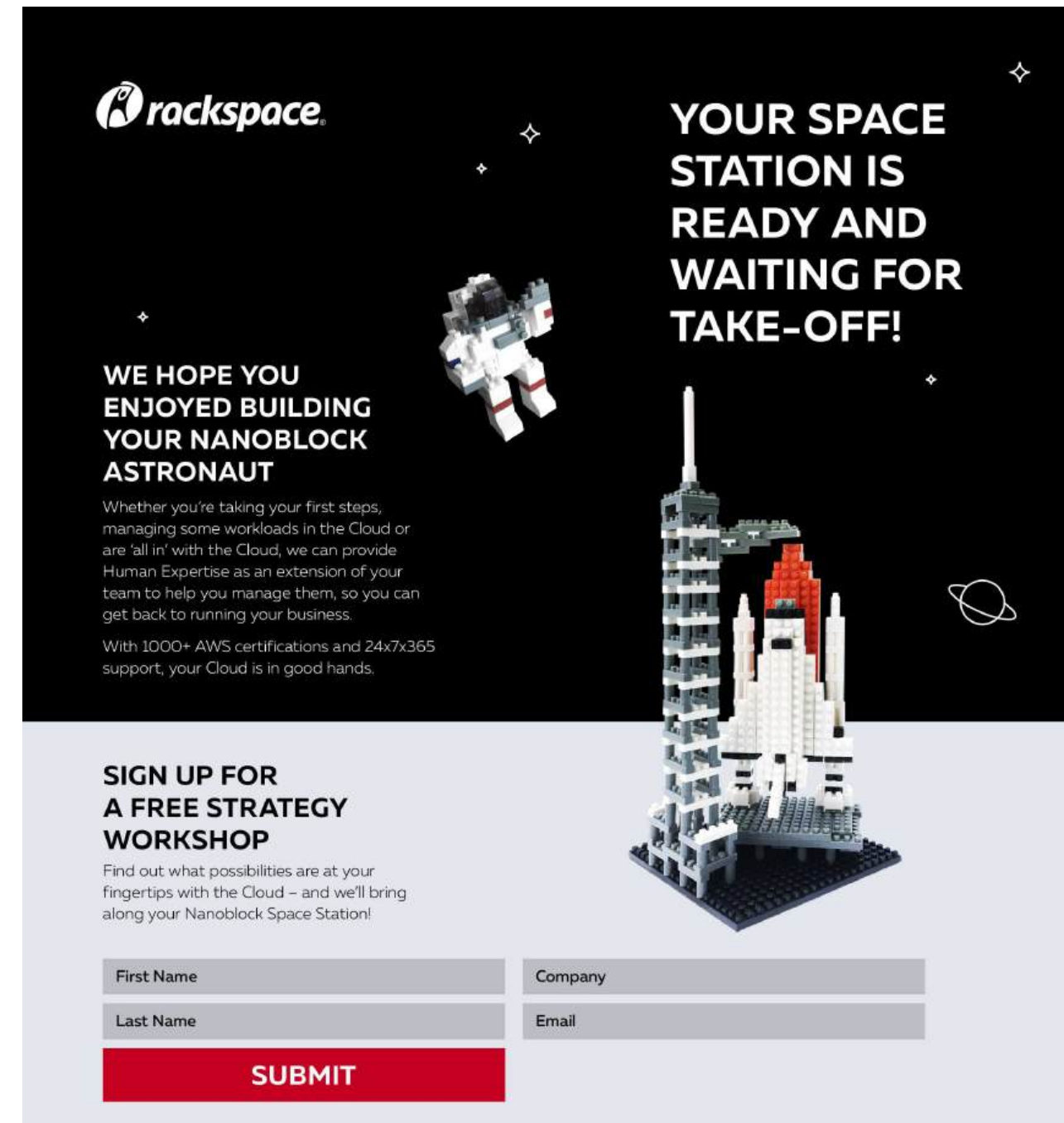
 🌟 **Brighten someone's day** now
Thinking of sending money to family or friends? Less on fees means more to them. Check our great rates and go show someone you care.

 ☀️ **Summer stays sorted** now
In the warm months of 2023, 50m+ living in the UK went abroad. Let's beat that for 2024. Get up to 10% off select Booking.com stays abroad.

RACKSPACE DEMAND CAMPAIGN

This data storage provider sent toys out to a special list of prospects to try and convert them. I wrote the comms around it, such as the letter and microsite.

Outcome: The campaign did well enough that they repeated the concept sending other prospects a toy on a different theme.



rackspace

YOUR SPACE STATION IS READY AND WAITING FOR TAKE-OFF!

WE HOPE YOU ENJOYED BUILDING YOUR NANOBLOCK ASTRONAUT

Whether you're taking your first steps, managing some workloads in the Cloud or are 'all in' with the Cloud, we can provide Human Expertise as an extension of your team to help you manage them, so you can get back to running your business.

With 1000+ AWS certifications and 24x7x365 support, your Cloud is in good hands.

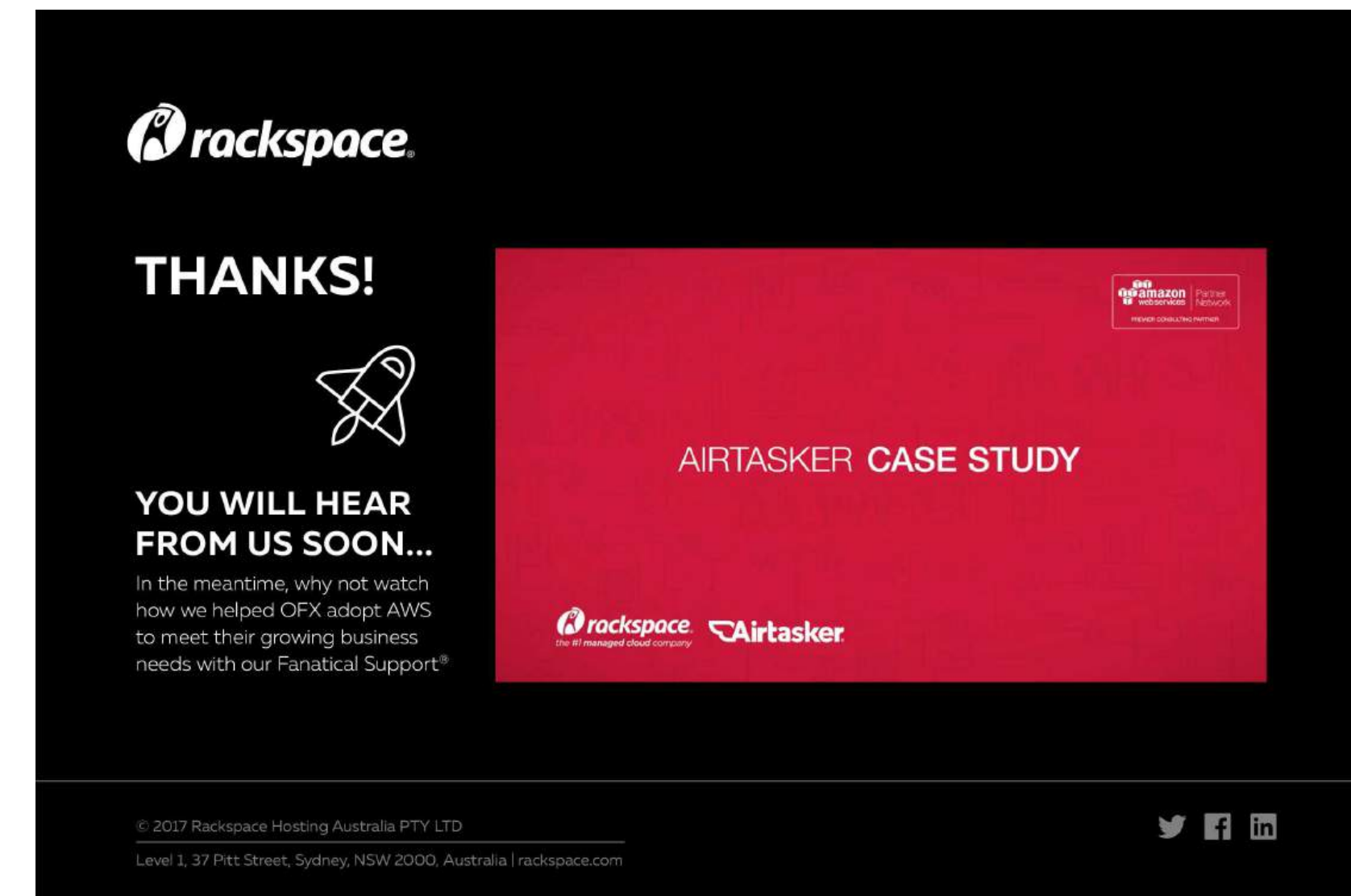
SIGN UP FOR A FREE STRATEGY WORKSHOP

Find out what possibilities are at your fingertips with the Cloud - and we'll bring along your Nanoblock Space Station!

First Name Company

Last Name Email

SUBMIT



rackspace

THANKS!

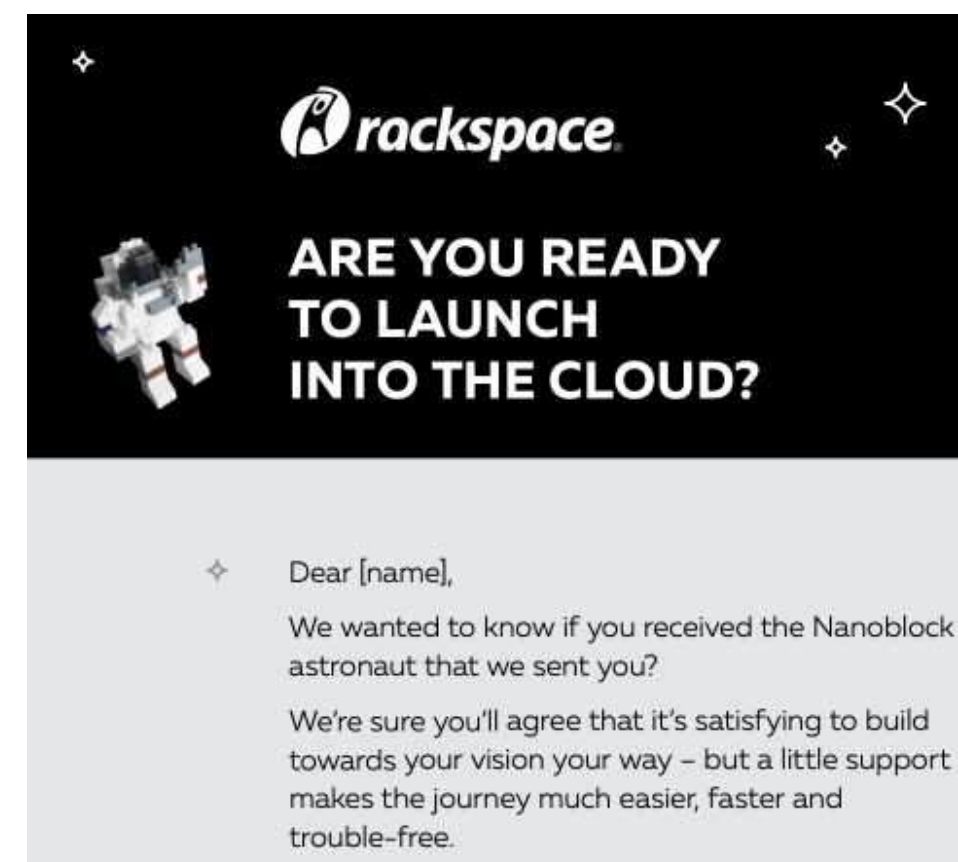
YOU WILL HEAR FROM US SOON...

In the meantime, why not watch how we helped OFX adopt AWS to meet their growing business needs with our Fanatical Support®

AIRTASKER CASE STUDY

rackspace **Airtasker**

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rackspace

ARE YOU READY TO LAUNCH INTO THE CLOUD?

Dear [name],

We wanted to know if you received the Nanoblock astronaut that we sent you?

We're sure you'll agree that it's satisfying to build towards your vision your way - but a little support makes the journey much easier, faster and trouble-free.

Migrating to the AWS cloud should be the same. With 1000+ AWS certifications in our team and 24x7x365 support, we'll manage your IT infrastructure so you can focus on the more important things.

Here's what you get from our Fanatical Support@...

- IT infrastructure**
We'll design and maintain your architecture to scale smoothly using the full AWS portfolio
- Security**
Our certified experts, tools and technologies will secure access to your computing assets
- Migration**
We'll guide the process of migrating your business to AWS so it's as easy and rewarding as possible
- Operation**
Our smart automation and certified engineers will handle your AWS environment 24/7
- Optimisation**
We continually optimise your AWS needs for cost, performance and scalability

If you're interested in how Rackspace can support your AWS cloud journey, [schedule a call](#) with one of our Rackers when it suits you or get in touch directly by replying to this email - you'll also receive a Nanoblock Space Station to go with your astronaut.

Best regards,

Angus Dorney
Senior Director & General Manager
Rackspace ANZ
+61 2 9276 3808

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UBIQUITY B2B CAMPAIGN

Writing a “long page” and digital ads to push users to an ebook to help convert prospects to outsource their customer support teams.

Some fun lines came out of this one, where there was an appetite for wordplay.

Outcome: Uplift in ebook downloads that lead to more sales conversations.

:ubiquity
CX transformation begins with ~~BPO~~ RBO
Try the people-first outsourcing approach
Discover how

:ubiquity
COMPLEX
Cut out the hassle of doing CX alone
Discover how

:ubiquity
Customer ~~Experience~~ Expedience
Committed CX never cuts corners
Discover how

:ubiquity
customer.
Start with the
Try the outsourcers that put people first
Get to know us

04.

CX sells, but where's the love?

There's a lot that innovation brings to make customer experience (or CX) faster, easier, smoother ... and more automated. Now you can ...

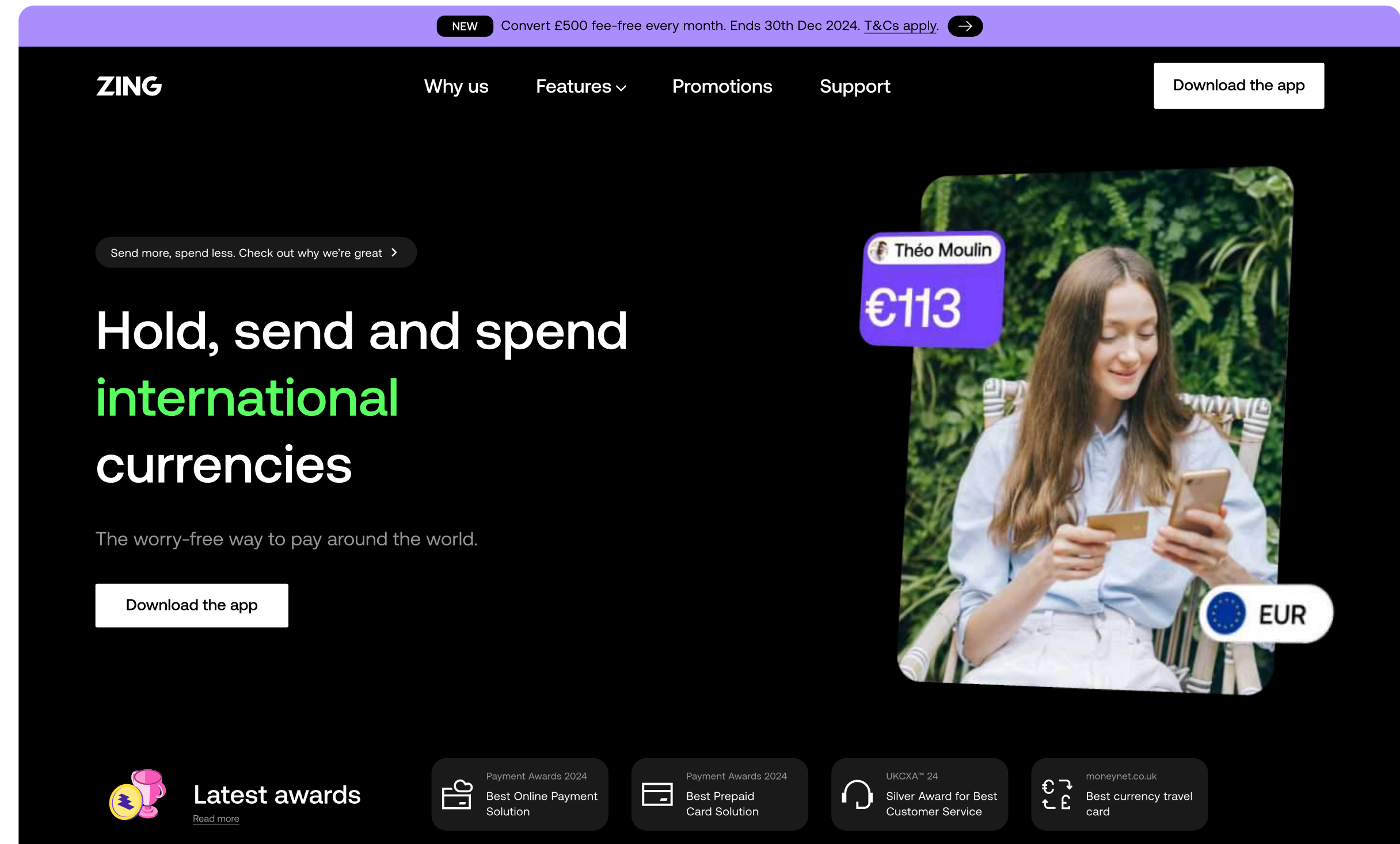
Websites

A website tends to be a brand's most effective touchpoint because they can express their story the most freely. I've led and supported many website projects, from defining sitemaps and info architecture through to writing all the copy.

ZING

Zing's website and homepage changed a lot for testing purposes, including different articulations of Zing's value proposition around "worry-free money" as well as monitoring use of currency calculators and sign-ups.


Outcome: Constantly optimizing the website and testing proposition articulations helped determine the best way to drive conversions to the app from the website.



20+ Currencies to hold in wallets

30+ Currencies to send globally

200+ Countries/territories to use your Zing card

Great 

★★★★☆

4.1 out of 5 based on 298 reviews

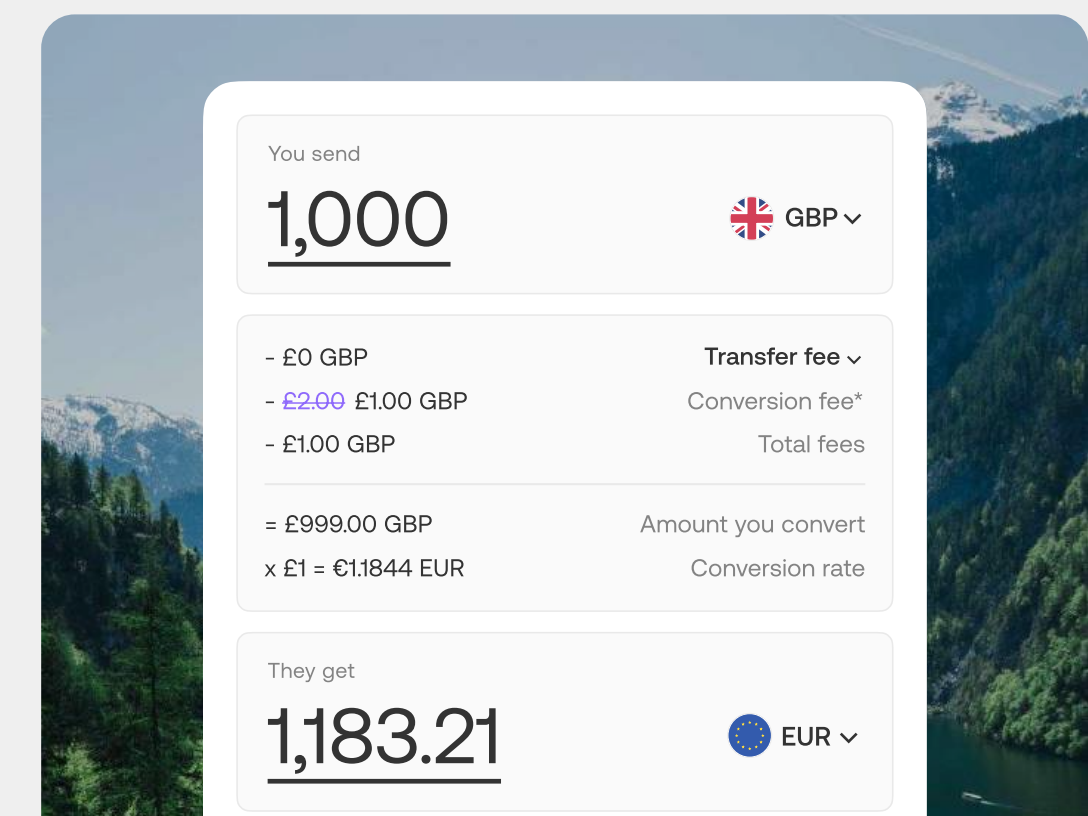
Check out our competitive rates

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.

- Send
- Spend
- Convert
- Hold

Pay anyone, anywhere.

Pay anyone, easily. Pay others in just a few taps. Make informed choices for sending your money internationally.



| | | |
|--------------------|-----------|--------------------|
| You send | 1,000 | GBP |
| - £0 GBP | | |
| - £2.00 | £1.00 GBP | Transfer fee |
| - £1.00 GBP | | Conversion fee* |
| | | Total fees |
| = £999.00 GBP | | Amount you convert |
| x £1 = €1.1844 EUR | | Conversion rate |
| They get | 1,183.21 | EUR |

GENIE-S

A neat little project for a holding company that manufactures portable fragrance dispensers.

I introduced a nifty concept around being “more than **able** to please”, following up with benefits around being wear**able**, refill**able**, sustain**able**, etc.

Outcome: A clean, clear website that remains unchanged for the last eight years.



It started with a **spray**...

Beginning with its first patent in 2004, Genie-S breathed magic into the global fragrance market by pioneering scent accessories.

Innovations Our brands About us Contact



perfume pod

Match the look with the mood

Accessible stylish vials in a range of compelling colors and designs.

Launched in 2018, Perfume Pod collections combine practical product performance with simple design. Perfect for adventurers, party-goers and self-confessed style swappers.

perfume-pod.com

Bottle your brand

Opportunities await. Leading brands and retailers already use Genie-S to sell their own bespoke bottles.

As an original equipment manufacturer, Genie-S can make bottles that fit the requirements of our clients and appeal to their conscientious customers. From luxury and fashion to even health, wellness and eco-friendly product brands, any atomizable liquid can complement Genie-S.

BOSS Christian Dior LALIQUE

PENHALIGON'S SEPHORA Van Cleef & Arpels

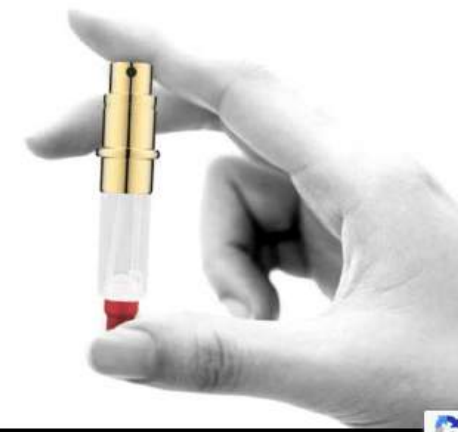
Sense an opportunity?
Get in touch with our [contact form](#).



Innovations Our brands About us Contact

Smart bottle magic

Genie-S makes it easy to carry, refill and spray fragrance and other atomizable liquids on the go.



More than **able** to please

The innovative Genie-S brings many benefits for the carry of small liquid dispensers.



Portable

Take your favourite fragrance anywhere thanks to a discreet, lightweight, durable, spray bottle that fits right in your hand.

Refillable

Decant and swap out fragrances using our innovative Genie-S bottle technologies. Mess-free and no fiddly tools required.



Wearable

Apply fragrance as a fine atomized spray. Enjoy customizability both inside and out for the ultimate smart scent accessory.



Sustainable

Spray, refill and repeat. Replace single-use plastics and disposable containers with a durable, long-lasting liquid carrier.



MATRIX INDUSTRIES / POWERWATCH2

The thermoelectrics startup launched a crowdfunding site to promote the next phase of its heat-powered smartwatch.

Some nice lines in there, including a silly FAQ about how to introduce the watch to friends.

Outcome: The company reached its fundraising goal within 24 hours.

SMARTER, TOUGHER, MORE
POWERFUL THAN EVER

Here comes PowerWatch 2. Back with more features and more energy.

BACK TO OUR INDIEGOGO

FIT TO SURVIVE

NEVER NEEDS CHARGING

Your body heat keeps MATRIX PowerWatch 2 running

Take it off and it saves your data in memory and sleeps. Track the energy you produce with its power meter.

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING...

"MATRIX Industries' latest fitness watch looks like the closest anyone's ever come to making [self-charging] happen"

"One of the biggest complaints with modern smartwatches is battery life... MATRIX is well on its way to fixing that headache"

"[With other smartwatches] we'd worry about whether the watch will last the full day. But MATRIX has made sure to account for this by adding solar cell technology"

c|net

ANDROID AUTHORITY

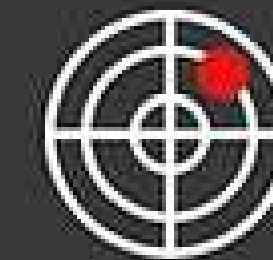
DIGITAL TRENDS

MATRIX

POWERWATCH

Powered by you.

Introducing the world's first smartwatch you never have to recharge.



BLAZE NEW TRAILS

Link your cardio efforts to every run

What's the best way to show the PowerWatch to my friends?

Here's our favourite way to do it...

- Remove the PowerWatch and wait for the Real Time Display to show zero bars. This could take a minute or two. Shorten the time by setting the PowerWatch down on a cool surface
- Ask your good buddy to hold out their wrist
- Set the PowerWatch against their wrist and show them the Real Time Display bars suddenly increasing
- Say the magic words: "Thank you, your body heat just charged my battery!"
- Repeat this with several friends. Why not start a battle royale to see whose warm-hearted soul generates the most power?

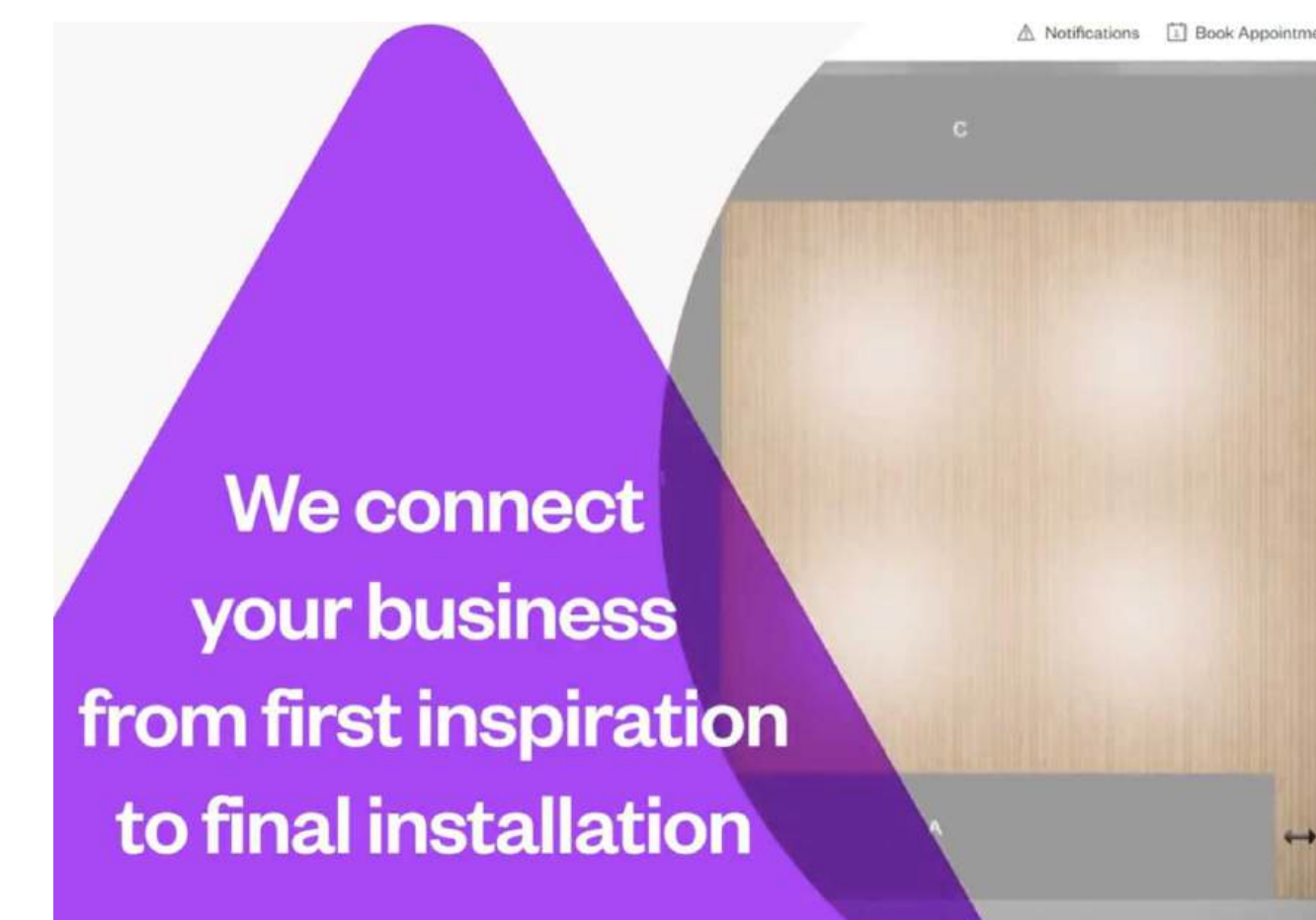
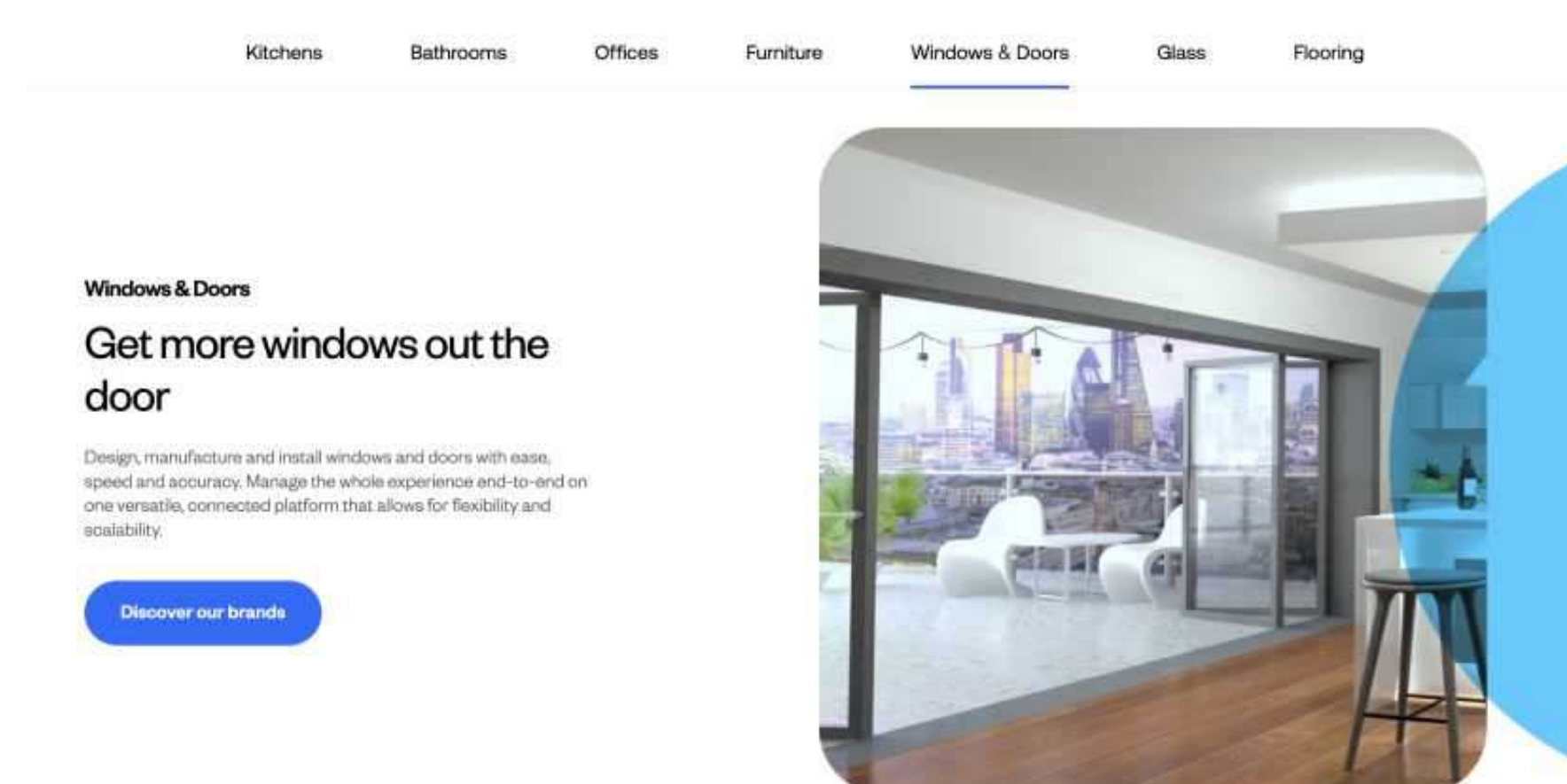
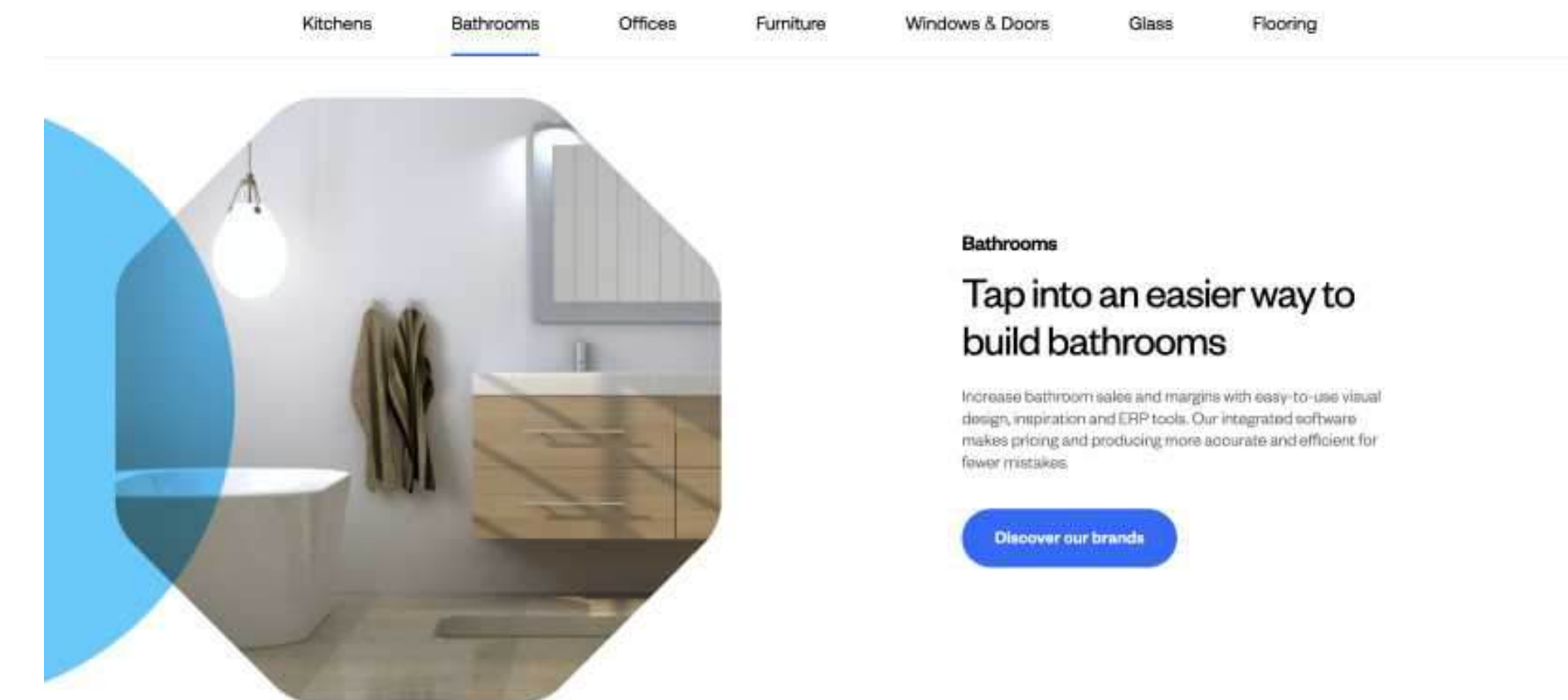
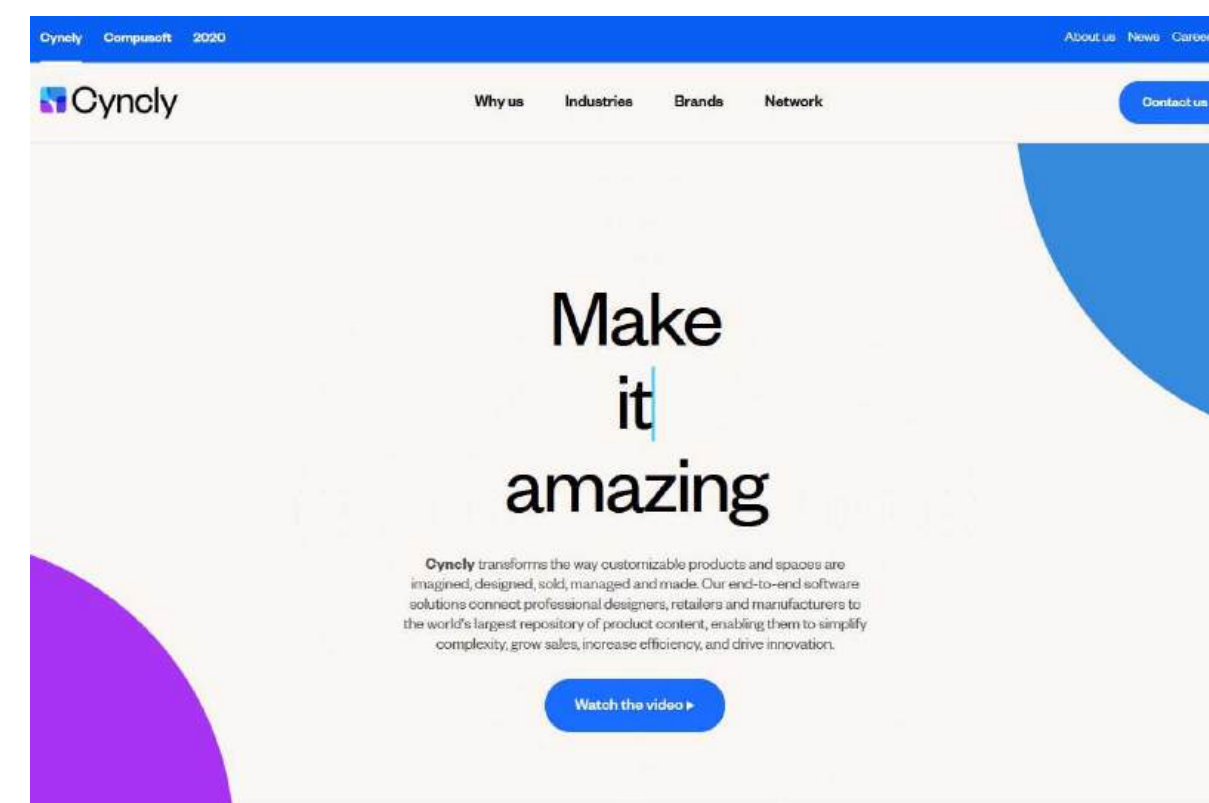
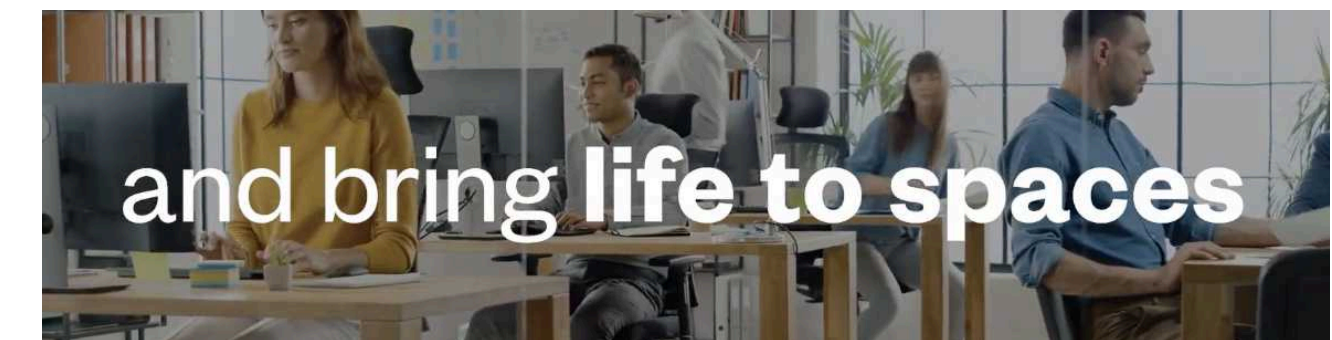
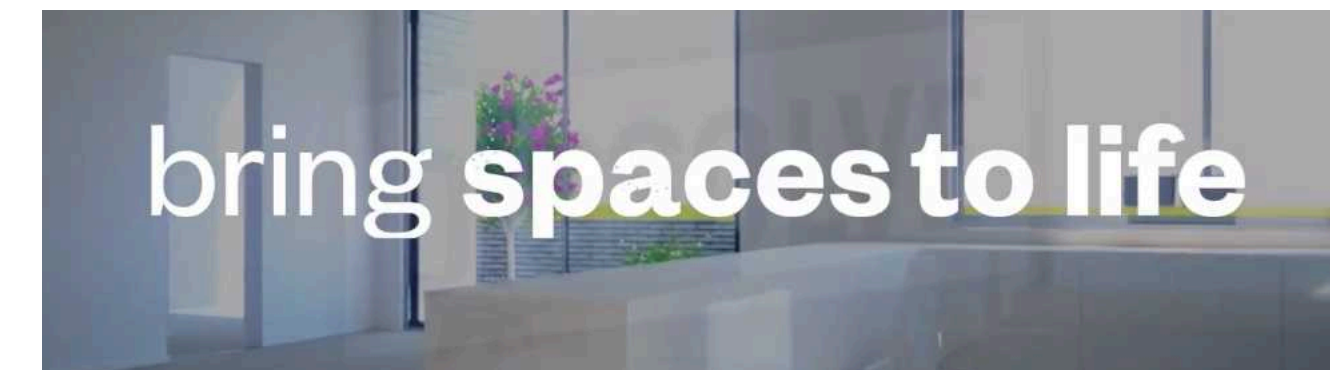
CYNCLY

We wrote Cyncly's first website to support its merger transition.

This meant a lot of emphasis on story and brand, including a video that explained the new brand and the five stages of inspiration through to installation.

I like writing headlines that balance function with fun. Some punnier headlines still survive even though the site and company proposition have evolved.

Outcome: A meaningful way to express a new brand and help users understand that the brands they once knew were being phased out. The website became a foundation for the brand to own it themselves and modify pages as they acquired more businesses and technologies.

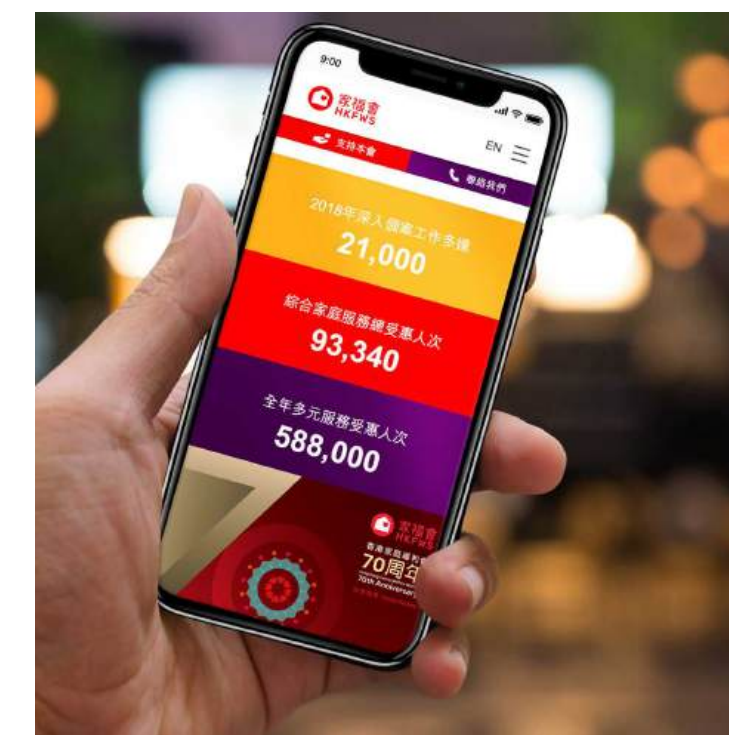


Hong Kong Family Welfare Society
Sitemap and homepage, including a new section offering advice to help promote authority and solve enquiries.
Outcome: Big leap in providing 21st century servicing of modern families

Basis Technologies
Supporting a large website overhaul rewriting case studies, product pages and process pages that help tell the brand story of SAP change intelligence.
Outcome: consistent brand and platform to make own changes

Avrios
I wrote a new verbal identity, sitemap, IA and wrote all the copy (including project management) for this startup.
Outcome: Mature brand and later acquisition

CryptoQuantique
Quantum physics-powered security architecture never sounded so sexy. I wrote the first site to make it friendly for both investors and engineers.
Outcome: long-lasting proposition



DELIVER SAP CHANGE AT THE PACE YOUR BUSINESS NEEDS

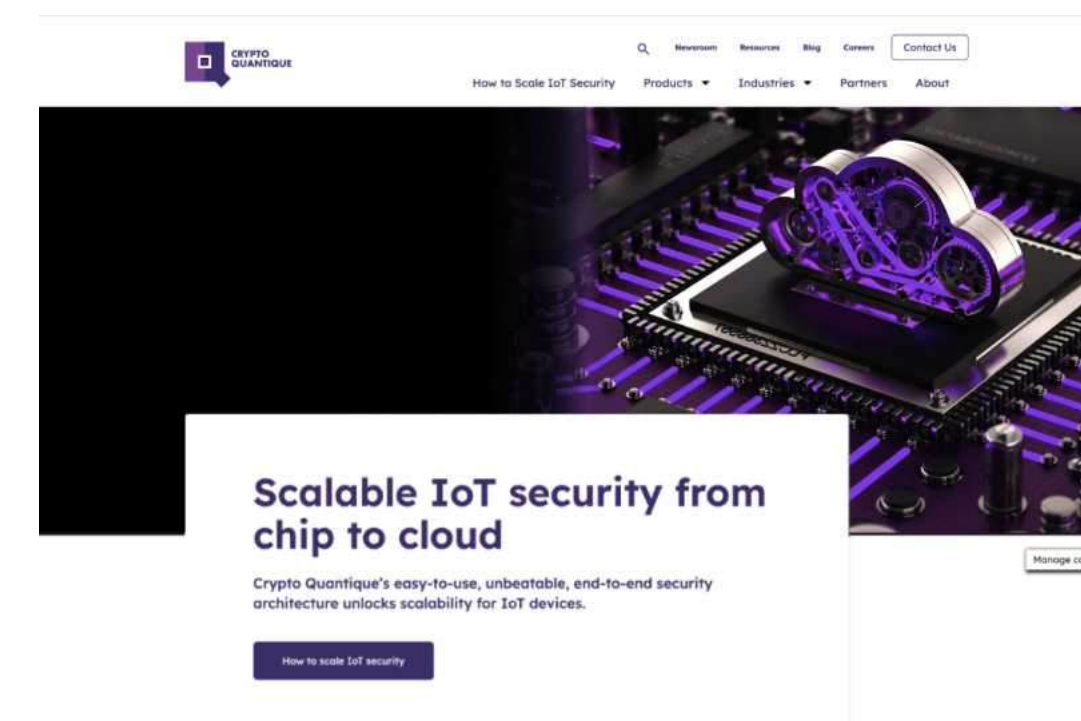
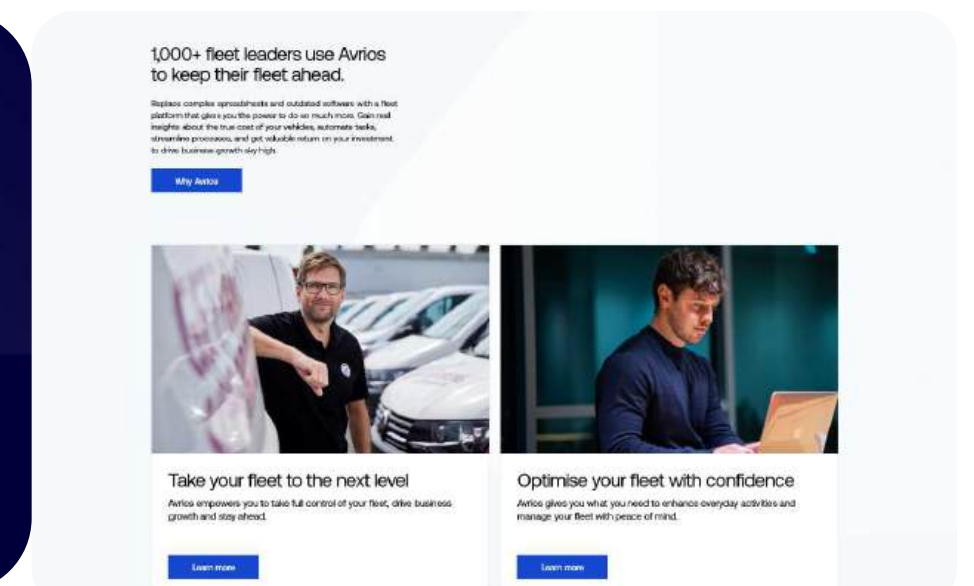
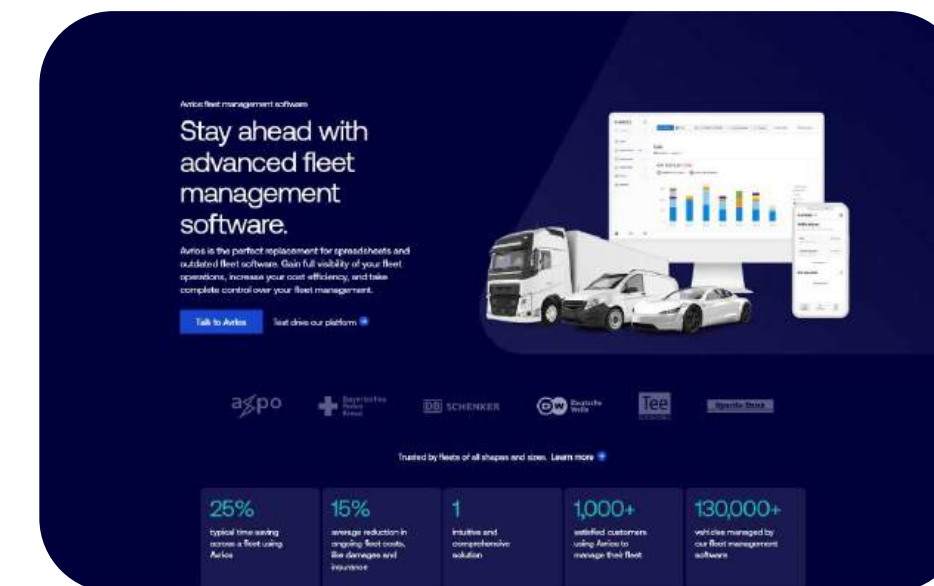
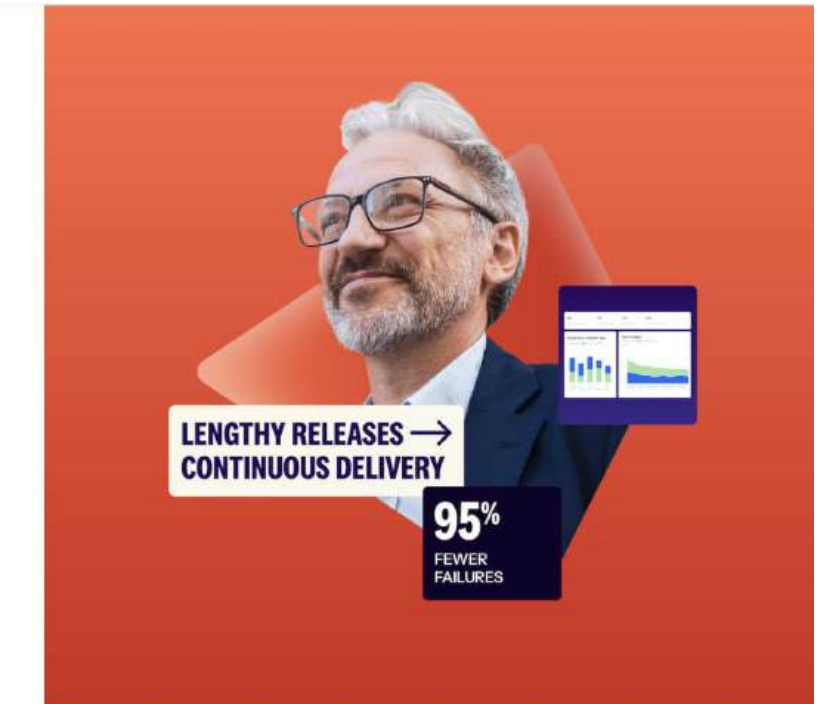
Our intelligent software helps SAP teams design, assess, and execute change – from business ask to live in production – faster and with full control.

Reduce change cycle times by 30-50%.

See how to move faster

Book a meeting

Trusted by enterprises with complex SAP estates. [See our customers.](#)



Discover the quantum-driven architecture for easy-to-use, end-to-end IoT security

By harnessing quantum tunnelling and cryptographic techniques, we've developed Q-Architecture™, our patented security architecture made up of two components.

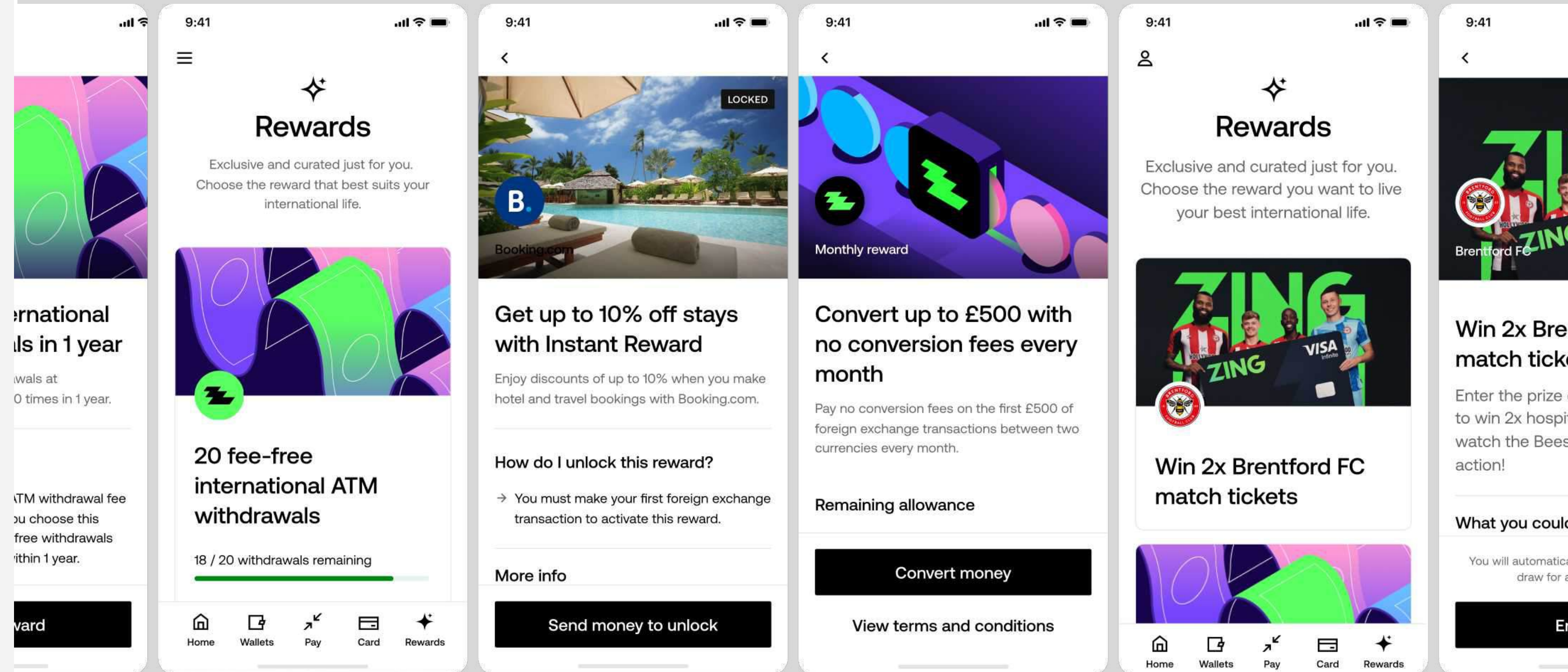
- **QDID™** – a quantum-driven hardware root-of-trust that generates unique, unforgeable identities and cryptographic keys on demand.
- **QuarkLink™** – a universal IoT security platform that lets device owners manage their IoT ecosystem security with ease.

Discover our products

Products

Similar but different to writing for websites and other digital experiences. Zing by HSBC was my first foray into proper content design and UX writing. I (or my writing team) wrote all the copy in the Zing app and beyond.

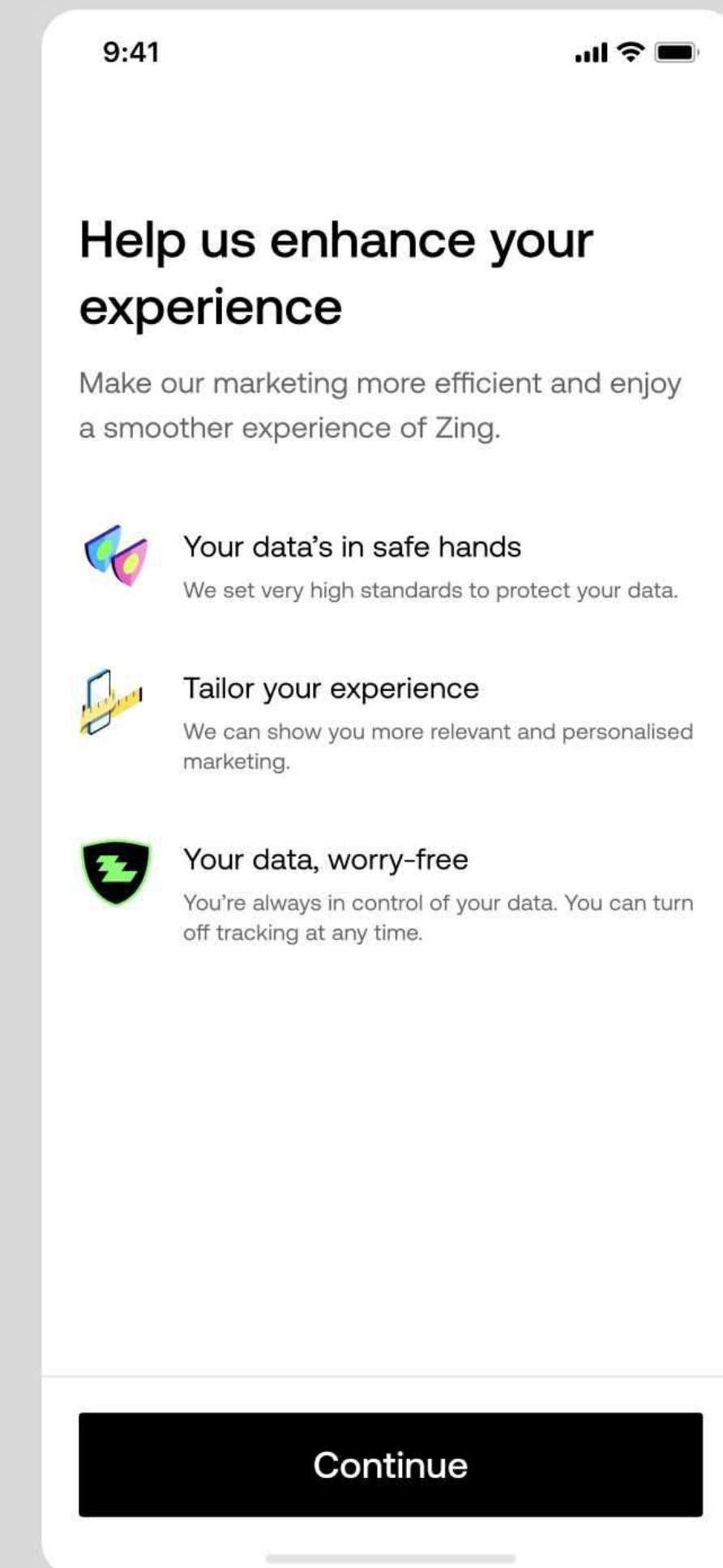
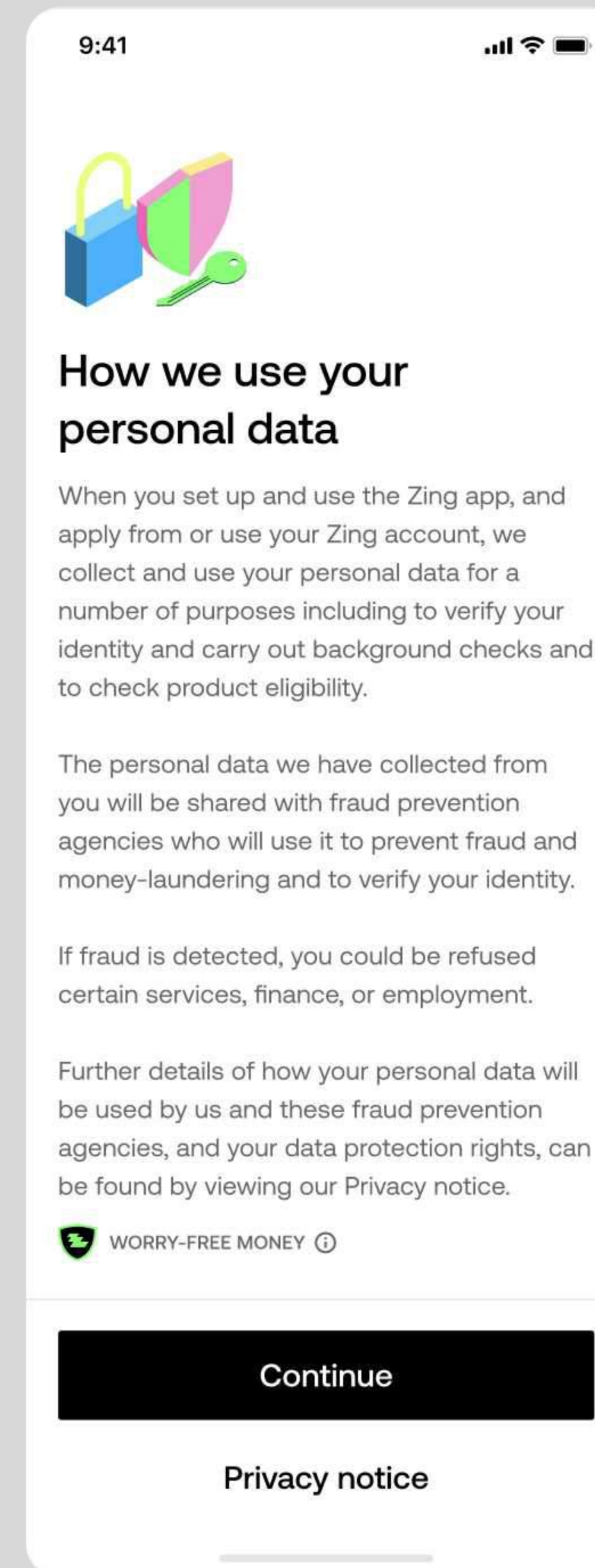
Our teams won a “Best Onboarding” award in UX at 11:FS, by streamlining the sign-up journey into an industry-leading 3m 30secs.



CONVERSION OPTIMIZATION

Zing members were opting out of tracking when signing up, undermining efforts to deliver relevant, targeted growth marketing campaigns based on user data. We modified the onboarding journey to better frame the advantages of tracking, appealing to HSBC's brand equity, reassurance of data privacy and promise of improved marketing to build trust.

Outcome: Opt-ins were previously at 17%. By creating a clean screen framing the benefits, opting in jumped to 38% after a few months, surpassing the industry benchmark of 25-30%.



CARD PACKAGING

New members that ordered a card got some cool packaging. However, the messaging and experience was a bit tired, which had some biases of an early prototype.

For the new batch of packaging, we looked to enhance the experience and messaging, making it more on-brand and helpful to get users ready to set up their card with the app.

Outcome: Significantly shorter time-to-activate stat for new cardholders following packaging rollout

Before

Line that sounds nice but is disconnected from brand voice.

Where will your card take you?

ZING

Icon style discontinued as brand language evolved.



Proposition line aged quickly.

Do your Zing.

Colour palette since darkened after a key competitor's rebrand in 2023.

Soon-dated, unspecific location to see PIN.

View your PIN
In the 'Account' section of the Zing app.

Weird continuation of sentence across type hierarchy.

Enable contactless
by making your first chip and PIN transaction.

After

Tonal heading to more clearly frame instructions

Let's do this!

Spunkier tone optimized ("go" instead of "enable"; "see" instead of "view")

See your PIN
The 'Card' section of the Zing app shows your PIN and card details.

Go contactless
Make a chip and PIN transaction by card to activate contactless.

QR code to bring users straight to app's card page instead of a manual search-around



Version A:
Appeal to activate contactless

Let's do this!

Open your Zing app
Scan the QR code or open the 'Card' section of your Zing app.

Activate your card
Tap 'Activate card' and follow the instructions.



Version B:
Appeal to continue in app

Die-cut shape simplified. Brand logo as first thing seen before pulling card packet.

ZING

Card's resting place to house new functional message of sustainability credentials.

ZING



FSC® certified paper used.
Please recycle.

'Calling out hospitality clones'

Brands must be brave and look beyond the generic, says **Martin Reid**

Martin Reid is
founder
partner at G&P
Creative Marketing



"Brands need to find a balance between giving customers what they want, while still finding ways to keep things interesting"

Two letters of our year-end survey found brands. It's a matter of how often a brand's brand identity is reinforced through all of its touchpoints. Many brands are not doing this well. Brands need to be consistent across all touchpoints. This is not to say that brands should be identical across all touchpoints. Brands need to be consistent across all touchpoints. Brands need to be consistent across all touchpoints.

Brands that are successful in the long run are those that are able to create a strong brand identity that is consistent across all touchpoints. Brands that are successful in the long run are those that are able to create a strong brand identity that is consistent across all touchpoints.

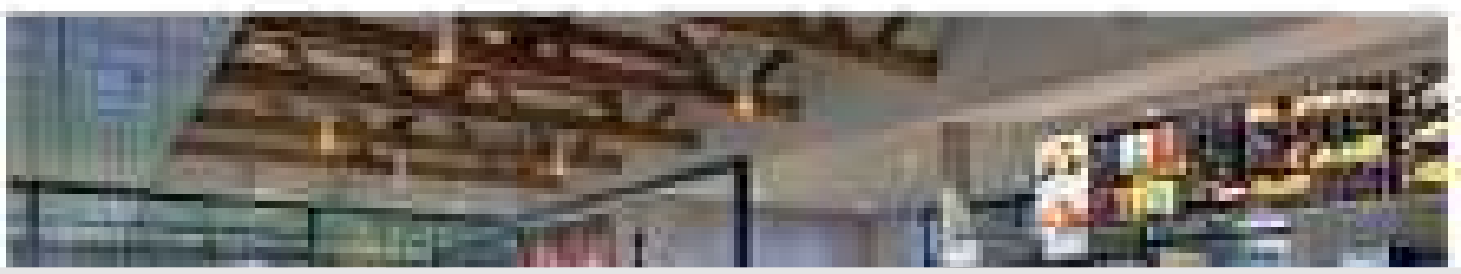
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Right side right hand page. Photo that has been taken. Photo that has been taken. Photo that has been taken.

Offering authenticity

One of the reasons of brands needs to offer an authentic experience is that they need to stand out. Brands need to stand out. Brands need to stand out.



Brands that are successful in the long run are those that are able to create a strong brand identity that is consistent across all touchpoints. Brands that are successful in the long run are those that are able to create a strong brand identity that is consistent across all touchpoints.

Exceptions to the rule

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Photo that has been taken. Photo that has been taken. Photo that has been taken.

Meaningful experiences

Brands that are successful in the long run are those that are able to create a strong brand identity that is consistent across all touchpoints. Brands that are successful in the long run are those that are able to create a strong brand identity that is consistent across all touchpoints.



"If brands want to deliver truly meaningful experiences they should do something that challenges, rather than cater to, customer expectations"

Brands that are successful in the long run are those that are able to create a strong brand identity that is consistent across all touchpoints. Brands that are successful in the long run are those that are able to create a strong brand identity that is consistent across all touchpoints.

'Polarising approaches'

Brands that try to please everyone make an enemy of themselves, says **Martin Reid**

16

Martin Reid is an innovation researcher at GDR Creative Intelligence



Before the age of social media and incendiary clickbait headlines, public shaming was handled by the law and settled with shackles and rotten fruit. Nowadays, anyone can single-handedly dismantle the reputation of their fellow man or multinational retailer with one well-timed tweet. But, thanks to the culture of bilateral reviews, where staff and companies can answer back and say what they really think of their disrespectful regulars and messy hotel guests, the power that customers have over influencing a brand's reputation is slowly waning.

"We're creating a culture where people feel constantly surveilled, where people are afraid to be themselves," says Jon Ronson in his book, *So You've Been Publicly Shamed*. "As soon as the victim steps out of the pact by refusing to feel ashamed ... the whole thing crumbles."

Some brands are starting to follow this lead and are refusing to bend over backwards to appease every demanding customer for fear of a public blowout. Beyond witty retorts on social media, some brands are standing their ground and are prioritising

"Having a group of consumers who hate your brand can be a good thing"

Professor Xueming Luo of Temple University

their own interests to the chagrin of defected complainers. In the same way that customers get to choose where their loyalties lie, brands are following suit and are being more selective in how they treat their customers, nurturing their favourites and sparing no time on dubious prospects and detractors. This polarising approach is redefining the treatment that customers expect and challenges what it means to be a brand staying true to its values.

Divide and conquer

KFC's mischievous Instagram campaign (covered in GIR 56) is testament to how a brand turning against a group that doesn't share its values can reinforce engagement from its own target demographic. KFC started a social media war against the #richkidsofinstagram trend by encouraging its own thrifty young customers to make fun of these rich kids' decadent photos. The campaign went viral, earning KFC Romania a 21% sales increase and credit as the brand's most successful campaign since 2009.

Marginalising a few undesirables to inspire advocacy from a brand's long-term customers seems to be worth the risk. After all, Forrester's research indicates it costs five times more money to acquire a customer than to maintain a relationship with one.

A brand has to accept that not every customer can be included in its vision if it wants to stay true to its values. Rather than putting off customers, a brand proving its ethos can bolster a customer's sense of belonging. Take adidas' #allin campaign last year, that would delete fans from its CRM system if they wouldn't commit to following all of the brand's social channels. Adidas gained 5.8 million followers, as inspired fans demonstrated their allegiance.

As brands are reclaiming their authority, they can afford to decide who can be their customers and who can't. Stefan's Head lets certain customers shop with them only if they are "cool" enough, with the criteria decided by the brand itself. While there is equal opportunity for customers to try and get in with the brand, there is not always an equal result.

Likewise, Ralph Lauren risks upsetting customers with its Milan concept store. Previously open to anyone, the branch now only caters to VIP customers. Too bad for the casual shopper but great for the elite customers the brand wants to cultivate.

These tactics of confrontation and aspiration may alienate the few but it motivates more customers to believe in the brand. As they forge tighter relationships with their customers, brands are justifying being brazen in how they treat others.



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Pick Your Battles

Professor Xueming Luo of Temple University believes in a "brand dispersion" scale that illustrates how passionately customers love or hate a particular brand. He offers three strategies for approaching polarisation amongst customers: placating haters, provoking haters and amplifying what makes a brand so polarising in people's minds. "Managers need to realise that having a group of consumers who hate your brand can be a good thing," he tells the *Harvard Business Review*.

Arguably this year's most divisive campaign was Protein World's "Are you beach body ready" posters, which ignited an uproar about media attitudes to body image. Inciting protests, petitions and poster defacements, the brand never backed down or apologised for its message, even aggressively fighting back against its haters on social media.

"What Protein World has done is become one of the first high-profile brands ever to show genuine integrity, and it is reaping the rewards," Alex Smith,

planning director at creative agency Sense, told *Marketing Magazine*.

As controversial and vilified as the campaign was, its notoriety was technically a marketing success, generating a fourfold revenue from its quarter million pound advertising spend, enabling the same campaign to incense commuters in New York.

But no sane brand wants to be majorly despised. Polarising customers therefore comes with a caveat. Brands should also know when to back down. After all, Abercrombie & Fitch recently relinquished one of its familiar brand identifiers, its employment of exclusively shirtless Adonis-like staff, after receiving constant criticism and recognising attitudinal shifts.

It's up to brands to weigh up the risks of standing by their values to foster loyalty against the reception of the status quo. The challenge is knowing when to ease off the accelerator in, as Jon Ronson laments, "a world where the smartest way to survive is to be bland." **GDR**

1 Stefan's Head screens its customers before agreeing to sell them its apparel

2 KFC vilified rich kids to delight its core customers

3 Adidas deleted fans from its CRM if they refused to follow all of the brands channels

4 Protein World's controversial advert produced a successful campaign because the brand refused to back down

'Future-leading innovation'

Brands must adapt to confront the Fourth Industrial Revolution, says **Martin Reid**

18

Martin Reid is an innovation researcher at GDR Creative Intelligence



Every January, a circle of the world's top business leaders, politicians, intellectuals and other influential decision-makers gets together in the Swiss mountains of Davos to discuss how to make the world a better place at the World Economic Forum. The WEF chairman, Klaus Schwab, released what he describes as a "crowdsourced book" prior to 2016's annual rendezvous, positing that mankind is in the nascent stage of a new wave of industrialisation that will transform retail and hospitality as we know it today.

Schwab has coined this paradigm shift and the title of this manifesto as "The Fourth Industrial Revolution", which he predicts will change how we work, live, create and consume as both corporations and customers.

Let's put the fourth industrial revolution in context: the prior three revolutions are epitomised by key inventions that transformed the industries of their times. First came the steam engine's enormous influence on manufacturing; then came the discovery of electricity and the invention of electrical devices; finally, the third revolution of digitalisation combined

"Brands and retailers have to innovate strategically and anticipate how technology will shape their future"

the use of electronics and computing to automate production processes, service channels, delivery of goods and many other things we take for granted today.

Schwab predicts that as our electronic devices and computing systems become more sophisticated and smarter – and become better connected to each other and ourselves – industrial models will shift to allow greater end-consumer involvement in research, production and delivery. Combined with the advent of a range of new technologies, such as VR, AR and artificial intelligence – and even the more future-thinking innovations such as self-driving cars, experimental 3D printing, and biotechnology verging on cyborgism – the Fourth Industrial Revolution has the potential to "lift humanity into a new collective and moral consciousness based on a shared sense of destiny".

"Let us together shape a future that works for all by putting people first, empowering them and constantly reminding ourselves that all of these new technologies are first and foremost tools made by people for people," says Schwab.

Evolution or revolution?

But let's come back down to earth first. Many of Schwab's long-term predictions are reflected in innovations captured in this quarter's trend Borrowing the new economy, namely how business structures are looking to emulate the flexibility of disruptive startups, and how consumers' perceptions of value are expressed in terms of experience, sharing and accessibility.

GDR recognises that both the technological advancement this revolution promises, along with its social and commercial implications, will give customers more control and input over how goods and services are managed. This means that competitive differentiators for production – such as price, quality and customisability – will no longer have as great an impact as that of experience and service. If enhanced digital connectivity will level the playing field for production and logistical systems, we believe brands and retailers will have to rely on better brand experiences and stronger service propositions in order to justify their existence.

Our online webinar on the Fourth Industrial Revolution (which is available on the GDR digital platform) covers this train of thought in more detail, focusing particularly on the current technologies that offer the most potential. But what's clear is that it's not enough to play catch up as change is unavoidable. Brands and retailers always have to



innovate strategically and anticipate how technology and customer behaviour will shape their future in this impending revolution.

"The question for all industries and companies, without exception, is no longer 'Am I going to be disrupted?' but 'When is disruption coming, what form will it take and how will it affect me and my organisation?'" warns Schwab.

A shared sense of destiny

The narrative of innovation is dampened by popular apocalyptic scenarios. For example, machines replacing human labour, digital devices devaluing genuine human connection, and even the uprising of killer robots. With the future unwritten, it's easy to be cynical and ignorant about how technological change can spiral into disastrous territory.

"In all moments of major technological change, people, companies, and institutions feel the depth of the change, but they are often overwhelmed by it, out of sheer ignorance of its effects", says sociologist Manuel Castells, professor of communication technology and society at the University of Southern California. It's important to look ahead and lay the groundwork now, so that companies can adapt in the face of inevitable disruption.

The bigger picture Schwab promotes is one in support of the common good, rather than individualistic gain. Therefore, decision-makers of companies need to recognise that all their endeavours must lead to loftier goals beyond just profit or survival. Innovating is future-shaping rather than future-proofing. **GDR**



AlpStories' theatrical in-store lab and the Tally robot are two examples of the way that brands are experimenting with the potential of new technologies

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Facing the Fourth Industrial Revolution

- 1 Break out of insularity and partner with businesses and organisations from varied sectors. Large organisations can survive by exchanging their advantage of scale with the flexibility of smaller startups and SMEs
- 2 Have the freedom to be allowed to experiment in innovation and embrace change. Decision-makers given the flexibility to test and fail are more creative and resilient in the face of disruption
- 3 Innovation serves the common good, not individual self-interest. As industry becomes more connected and visible to consumers, transparency and the reputation economy will highlight companies that aren't to be trusted
- 4 The more relevant qualitative and quantitative data you can gather and interpret, the better armed you are to cope with the unforeseeable future
- 5 Customers no longer value product ownership or put up with poor treatment. They crave experiences and services that suit the immediate context of their lives. You must lead the way in order to survive, rather than play catch up

Odd couples make for successful teams



In the [first post](#) of our Wholehearted Brand Building series, we touched on the difficulty of building an effective branding team. And in a world that's getting more complex by the day, a team is essential to produce successful results.

If the thought of putting together and participating in a creative team fills you with dread then we sympathise. Collaboration can be a match made in heaven or a living hell. Putting together the right team is easier said than done.

But from our many years collaborating to build strong brands, we've observed that great teamwork comes from its members recognising their own strengths and weaknesses, as well as that of their teammates. Striking the right balance in attitude helps your brand building team to stay creative, productive and focused on achieving objectives.

Opposites attract

Bert and Ernie. Woody and Buzz. Rush Hour. Buddy cop films... There are many cases of odd couples who work well together despite their extreme differences. The same applies for branding teams.



Your team will need to carefully balance and amplify a range of such oppositional skills and talents.

A cohesive branding team need core traits such as organisation, attention to



A cohesive branding team need core traits such as organisation, attention to detail and enthusiasm. It also needs opposing qualities like risk-taking, resilience and an unfaltering vision for how to meet the demands of a brief.

A wholehearted approach amplifies one another's skills, leading to effective branding that delivers on business objectives.

Even the odds

Think about your own strengths and weaknesses. Do you revel or revolt in chaos? Do you prefer taking risks or maintaining the familiar? Do you get energy from chasing your own ideas or being around other people?

It takes discipline for any individual to reconcile extremes within themselves and apply it to their own role. Rather than managing oppositions alone, we recognise that this reconciliation, when spread across groups of people, generates the healthy creative friction necessary to grind and polish a rough branding idea to its shiny end-state.

When assembling your brand building team, consider how opposition in character and competence can hit that sweet spot. Pair organised managers with chaotic-minded designers. Match to-the-point copywriters with emotionally charged art directors. Even plucky interns ought to exchange ideas with sagely CEOs.

Finding creative balance

When teamwork is balanced in this way, it's reflected in the output. The work is more robust because it has been challenged, adapted and strengthened to cover more dimensions. The strongest brands are born from deliberate conflict.

Most companies will instinctively assemble teams of homogeneous specialists with similar backgrounds, thinking and approach. Not so in branding. A respect for the diversity of competence and personality of individuals, the free-flow of communication, and the variety of ideas generated all fuse together to create wholehearted teamwork that builds effective brands.

The strongest brands are born from deliberate conflict.

Key takeaway: Branding harmony emerges from healthy team conflict

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Could your branding benefit from teaming with us? Drop us a note and share your needs.

Get in touch

How to create a great creative brief

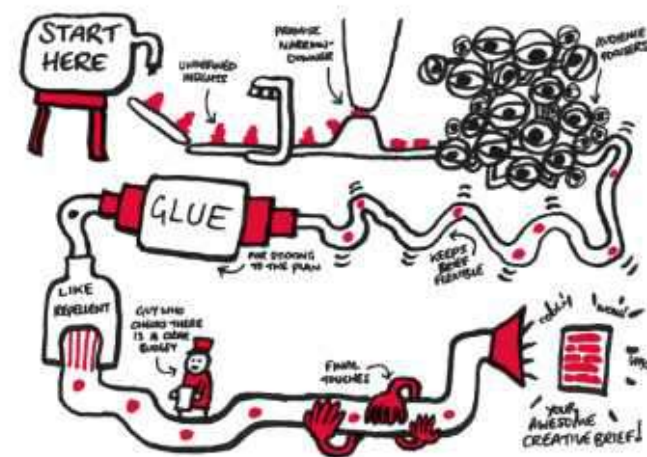


Brands are built on ideas. But the creative process is messy. People of artistic temperament struggle to balance chaos and control, reason and emotion. To contain, direct and focus the powerful forces of imagination, the brand builder deploys a creative brief.

Developing an effective creative brief is an art in itself.

[Try the Stepworks Creative Brief Engine](#) and guide your team to better branding.

Successful brands are supported by creative teams of designers, artists, writers and engineers. Often these busy professionals are absent from the debates preceding the brand building initiative. To work effectively, they need to clearly understand your leadership team's decisions and objectives.



Searching for gold

An ambitious creative professional will see your creative brief as a treasure map. The treasure they seek is a strong, relevant idea that will get noticed and achieve your stated objectives.

Strong, relevant ideas illuminate the sharply focused messages and thoughtful designs that signpost a rewarding customer journey.

But strong ideas can be risky. And weak ideas miss objectives. The challenge is striking an effective balance. Creative professionals who can reliably produce strong, relevant ideas advance in their careers because they deliver measurable value – such as increased enquiry, trial or sales.

Some paths lead to danger

Creative professionals learn from experience that not every map leads to treasure. Strong ideas are less likely to get approved if the creative brief is unfocused, too complex or asks too much.

Weak creative briefs result in weak work because no-one ever knows if an idea is really relevant. Vague directions produce a weak response. Strong ideas are easily rejected as not being quite right.

It actually takes a lot of effort to produce strong, original creative solutions that get real results. Repeated failure to produce effective work that is acceptable to management discourages the creative professional. They stop making an effort and offer tired, weak ideas that may get approved, but fail to make an impact.

The wasted resources and missed opportunities can be avoided with a clearer plan.

The Stepworks Brief Engine powers stronger ideas

Weak creative briefs result in weak work because no-one ever knows if an idea is really relevant.

An ambitious creative professional will see your creative brief as a treasure map.

The Stepworks Brief Engine powers stronger ideas

We have developed a tool to help creative teams get better briefs, and brand owners build more valuable brands.

Wholehearted Brand Building encourages teamwork between people from different backgrounds. Our Creative Brief Engine is designed to align the understanding of your objectives and business context across brand owners, leaders and their creative teams so that they work together more effectively.

[Try the Creative Brief Engine here](#). Just sign in and follow the directions. If you have an issue, suggestion or concern, click the Feedback button. And remember these tips:

✓ Invest more time on your promise

The most important and most challenging line in a creative brief is the Promise. Also known as the “the key proposition” or “unique selling point”.

Develop a simple, single-minded promise that engages your audience and motivates them to act. Aim for under 10 words. Only promise one thing. Spend time on this, it's worth it.

✓ Identify a distinct audience

Don't waste your promise on people unlikely to respond. Approach a high net worth investor differently to a new mother – even though they could be the same person. It's much easier to appeal to people when we know who we are talking to.

✓ Be flexible and inclusive

Your creative brief is a starting point. Your creative team should respond with questions, suggestions, and maybe even a counter-proposal. This is all good. Comments from everyone involved should be welcomed.



✓ Stick to the plan

Once you agree on a creative brief, be as objective as possible about the work that emerges from it. Challenge it, question it, test it. Ask for stronger work even. Try to base your comments on the success of the work at fulfilling the original objectives.

✓ Beware of like

It's easy to dismiss work that you don't immediately like. Again, be objective. Add references to what you like as part of the creative brief if personal expressions of taste are important.

✓ Disclose your investment

You can't make a movie like *Titanic* with a rowboat budget. If the creative team don't know your production budget they could come up with unaffordable ideas.

You can't make a movie like *Titanic* with a rowboat budget.

Key takeaway: Effective brand building begins with effective briefing

Brand positioning basics

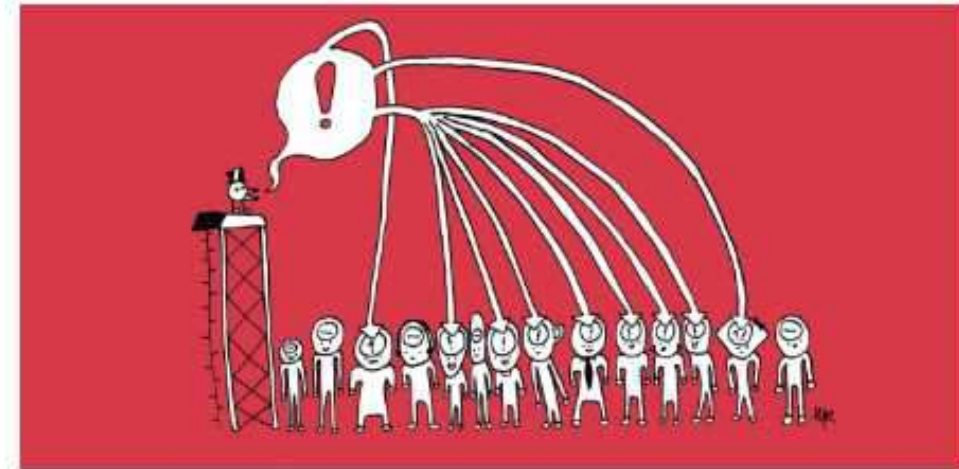


Brand positioning is valuable for understanding what makes you distinctive from others to gain competitive advantage.

Brand positioning is perception in the minds of audiences. Your perceptions of Apple, Disney and Toyota are the result of decades of careful positioning.

Perceptions of your brand already exist too. It's to your advantage to make those perceptions accurate and favourable.

Actively building and maintaining a position for your brand helps you influence what people think of it.



1. The point of reference

This is the context for how audiences think about and encounter your brand. It's usually expressed by its fit in a restricted category or defined against its set of competitors. The point of reference encompasses how audiences make choices that fulfil their goals.

The point of reference can even include named competitors you aspire to equal or exceed.

What categories or sectors is your brand in? Who are your biggest competitors? In what other scenarios would your brand qualify as something to be chosen? What other brand could serve as a benchmark?

2. The point of parity

This covers the features shared by all members within the point of reference. These features can be directly or indirectly competitive, and apply even if you don't know the names of all your competitors.

Parity is often overlooked in favour of emphasising difference. Yet parity helps establish the must-haves for you to even be considered relevant competition. For your difference to be effective, you need strong parity.

List all the things your brand has in common against other members within the point of reference. Size? Quality? Convenience? Price? Product benefits?

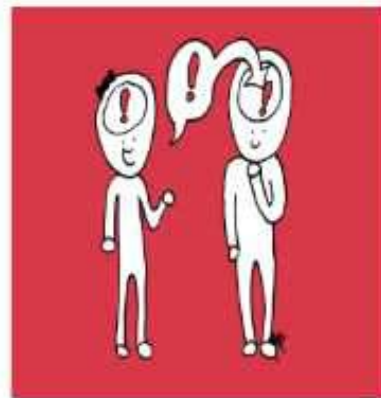
3. The point of difference

This is what distinguishes your brand and makes it uniquely relevant and desirable to your audience.

The point of difference can be a tangible quality or an emotional association. Either way, leveraging a potent enough difference gives your brand competitive advantage.

What's distinctive about your brand offering that is superior to others? How does your personality, attitude, history or service approach differ?

From these three points, you can identify



...it's important to treat brand positioning as an ongoing strategy for staying relevant rather than as a one-off exercise.

Our view is that strategic differentiation and its creative execution should strive to be one and the same

The most valuable words you can own

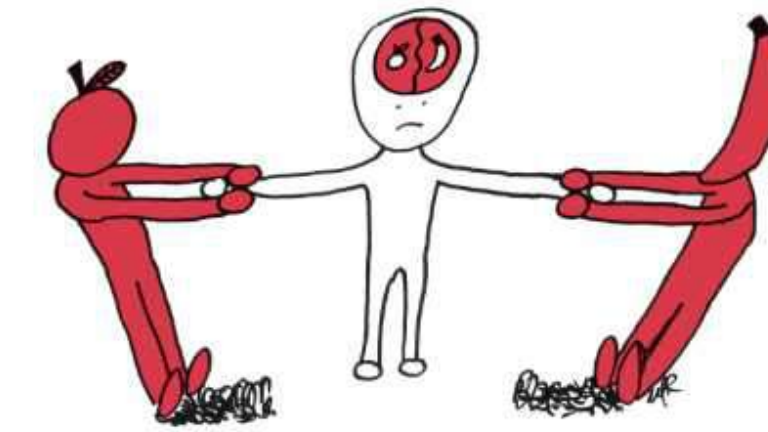
Most brands have a lead message that they express to their audiences. You probably call it a slogan or a tagline. But these terms undermine the lead message's true worth. Wholehearted brand builders call these crucial words the positioning phrase.

The positioning phrase is a single, meaningful expression that's distilled from the brand and made visible to audiences. For your brand, these are the most valuable words people will see, remember and find meaningful.

Just do it is Nike's positioning phrase. It supports the brand's perception as being active, inspiring, limitless. McDonald's uses *I'm lovin' it* to reinforce its positioning globally. The words help the brand be perceived as down-to-earth, easy, comforting and pleasurable to its audiences.

Our view is that strategic differentiation and its creative execution should strive to be one and the same. Crafting the most appropriate positioning phrase is a balance of science and art – it must be true, emotional, powerful and relevant for a long time.

In the battle for people's minds, simple ideas imaginatively and consistently expressed are the most memorable and meaningful, and therefore the most valuable.



Approaching positioning

Brand builders gather relevant insights – preferences, pain points, demographics, foibles – about their audiences to inform the creative work. They typically take two routes to develop the positioning – the workshop approach and the studio approach.

The workshop approach – The creative team unites with C-suite brand gatekeepers. Together, they exchange ideas and agree on a creative solution. The workshop approach facilitates communication and saves time. Yet the quality of outcome varies. Those closer to the brand tend to be biased. Creative decisions are favoured through committee rather than conjuring or embracing braver, considerations with greater appeal to outsiders.

The studio approach – The creative team develops ideas separately, with management guiding and critiquing them to a solution. This approach lets bold ideas flourish without agenda or clouded thinking. Wholehearted brand builders recognise the value of an outsider's perspective and respects that creativity requires focus to hone an effective solution.

Brand positioning is a paradox. A brand should be unique against competition – yet relate closely to a common point of reference to be recognised at all. Your brand's ideal positioning comes from balancing the common against the unique.

Key takeaway: Effective brand positioning balances common and unique



home

what we do

semiotics explained

who we are

contact us

thought store

in the press

what we're tweeting

My Tweets

Hipchips & the premiumisation of everyday British food

16 December 2016 | By Sign Salad

111

Amid London's plethora of Vietnamese pho houses, Turkish coffee dens and Hawaiian poke bars, one recent restaurant opening seems to be upsetting the apple cart – or rather the potato cart.

Hipchips is a new restaurant that serves only high-end British potato crisps with a selection of exotic premium dips, such as baba ganoush, beetroot and lemongrass marmalade sprinkled with nuoc mau (salted caramel) and, for the sweeter toothed, cheesecake or campfire S'mores varieties.

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A restaurant that only serves chip 'n' dip immediately springs to mind other predictably hipster dining concepts such as London's first cereal cafe. For many, the Cereal Killers Café is a harmless indulgence of stylised gimmickry and childish nostalgia, but for some Londoners, championing children's cereal and charging upwards of £2.60 a bowl represents everything wrong with gentrification.

In this vein, it's easy to write off Hipchips as a restaurant profiting from Millennial hipsters by offering differentiation through self-conscious novelty and obscurity. But the brand is also tapping into hugely relevant shifts in the culture of food in the UK.

For better or worse, many basic, traditional foodstuffs have been replaced with more exotic alternatives. Breakfast bacon rolls and milky cups of tea compete with avocado on rye toast and flat whites. Greasy-spoon cafes and working class watering holes are losing ground to gastropubs serving superfood salads and bahn mi baguettes. Though these changes seem motivated by complexity and sophistication, they also communicate simplicity in terms of the easy assembly and unprocessed wholesomeness of food as opposed to comfortable convention.

This shift is accelerated by a combination of new legislation and taxes on sugar, fats and other chemical quantities, and an increasingly health-conscious and experience-driven consumer base. To stay relevant, many brands are either changing products to meet nutrition criteria or amplifying their credentials of localism, heritage, experiential pleasure and other codes of authenticity and excess to appeal to a more selective audience.

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Hipchips is no exception. It emphasises British origins by elevating its home-grown, diverse breeds of potatoes as simple and robust enough to be paired with global flavours. Its tongue-in-cheek labels on paper napkins ("serviettes") and wooden spoons ("silver spoons") add casual approachability by subverting the language of traditional British class-based formality. Its many touchpoints, including its pack and venue, are designed to encourage communal sharing of the product, solidifying playful enjoyment and simple pleasures over serious conventional exclusivity.

Rather than aligning the simplicity of its product (the humble potato) with conventional basic-ness, Hipchips flirts with the cues of premium quality and experiential consumption to communicate a no-frills wholesomeness highly valued amongst subscribers of avocado toast and single-origin coffee. Whether this promotes or challenges the role of the potato as a democratically accessible British foodstuff remains to be seen...

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Taking sides: should brands get political?

2 December 2016 | By Sign Salad



Last month, the leader of the French far-right party Le Front National, Marine Le Pen, revealed that it had appropriated a Banksy mural as the inspiration for its 2017 campaign logo.

The mural in question is one of Banksy's most famous: a young man wearing a baseball cap and hiding his face with a kerchief prepares to throw a bouquet of flowers like a grenade, in order to communicate the artist's agitated cry for peace. Le Front National has replicated the mural and tintured the bouquet with blue to match the colour of its party. Despite the party's protestations about what meaning it sees within the mural, it is well known that Banksy's artworks implicitly critique the mistreatment of migrants, and is therefore at odds with the intention of Le Front National's usage.

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The appropriation of signs and symbols for political gain is a process that its originators often have no control over. Not even brands are exempt from this. When consumer brands take on newfound political meanings, it can make matters very sticky indeed.

An expression of support towards president-elect Donald Trump by the Vice President of New Balance on Twitter spurred division amongst the brand's customers. Through social media, the event snowballed as a Neo-Nazi blogger declared New Balance trainers the "official shoes for white people", while other customers voiced their rejection of the brand by burning their own NB trainers. Since then, New Balance has had to vociferously reassure customers that this political point of view was out of context and did not represent its entire company, and that the implication of hate and bigotry were against its brand values.

In similarly compromising predicaments, Tic Tac and Skittles both had to publicly dissociate their brand with political allegiance when during Trump's election campaign, the candidate and his son referred to their brand products in dubious contexts.

It is usual practice for a brand to refrain from proclaiming political allegiance, but is it ever strategic for a brand to embrace a politically motivated point of view, or does it always risk alienating customers?

Ben & Jerry's is an interesting case study for political communication. Already known for launching its own "Empower Mint" flavoured ice cream to raise awareness of the difficulties affecting low income and minority voters, the brand released an advert after the election result depicting Trump supporters as bitter lemons. Other brands, such as the Mexican beer brand Tecate which built its own wall at the US-Mexico border, countered campaign rhetoric to promote broader values of inclusivity and anti-xenophobia.

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As younger consumers increasingly choose their loyalties based on a brand's social and environmental values, there is little reason why it couldn't extend to the political realm. After all, Generation Z is often credited as more politically engaged than their millennial counterparts. And as brand activities are becoming increasingly transparent, a brand's consumers – and by extension their employees – will be able to see exactly how it operates and aligns itself on political issues.

Going forward, brands will have to interrogate their own values and decide whether to engage politically with their consumers or remain totally neutral. If consumers continue to perceive political meaning and therefore support in a brand, it might be within the brand's interest to tread softly and go with the flow rather than fight against it.

It's worth mentioning that in response to New Balance's imbroglio, Reebok took advantage of the chaos by offering free pairs of trainers to angry fans that disposed of their NB shoes. Perhaps this indirect route could be the best of both worlds: engaging in a relevant, political moment without explicitly taking a side.

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Authentic imitation: the new semiotics of alternative protein

5 January 2017 | By Sign Salad



The alternative protein sector is steadily expanding in response to rising health and environmental concerns of meat production, and accelerated by scientific breakthroughs in substitutes becoming more like real meat. According to Lux Research, alternative proteins will claim a third of the meat market by 2054, and new brands are clamouring to innovate within the expanding space.

Not everyone is aware or comfortable with consuming alternative protein. To reassure and educate consumers, brands have had to take nuanced approaches in expressing their brand identities and their products' value.

One of the leading brands in this category is Beyond Meat. Having finally cracked how to produce burgers and filets that taste and bleed just like real meat, its launch in May 2016 ensured that its product would not be overlooked. Rather than relegation to the frozen veg section of US supermarkets, Beyond Meat defiantly launched its products to be displayed in the meat aisle, alongside real beef, chicken and pork. This was to illustrate that the plant-based product had the same value as real meat and should not be perceived as something lesser or any different.

To further reassure customers of the benefits of alternative meat, Beyond Meat hired creative agency Bulletproof to revamp its packaging. Its sachets of filets, burgers and other products appropriate many of the same semiotic cues often found in the real deal: warm and earthy colours, stylised close-ups of stir fries and subway sandwiches, and pouch format common in the ready-meal category that code alternate meat as an authentic substitute that is no different from real meat.



Other alternative protein brands – such as Gold&Green and its Pulled Oats, as well as legacy brands like Quorn and Tofurkey – take similar approaches in giving their products a voice in an emerging market.

However, the Chilean start-up The Not Company stands out in this space by rejecting the dominant narrative of disguising or relating protein substitutes to animal-based products.

The Not Company champions a scientific algorithm (named Giuseppe) as its key to analysing the molecular structure of animal-based protein sources. Giuseppe helps create new products to replace these animal products with extra nutritious, plant-based alternatives. As such, The Not Company celebrates its scientific origins through the branding of its supercharged protein products: NotYogurt, NotMilk and NotCheese.



Implicit in these products' names, the word "not" connotes opposition and negativity. In doing so, its brand proposition uses the semiotics of cold, hard science to stand out against other products. This brand attitude is supported by its brand's clinical white/black and neon colour scheme and a confrontational X displayed on its packaging to communicate its extraordinary contents.

In this emergent category, there are two polar approaches happening: brands are either using the existing semiotics of real meat to communicate their offerings, or they are embracing new visual cues to disrupt dominant expressions of provenance and authenticity. Understanding which approach is more culturally relevant and meaningful will be crucial for these brands to stand out in an increasingly populated category.

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THANK

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