

Easy Brand Hack That Will Make Your Small Business Stand Out



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Whiskers finally understood what Spot was doing all those years...

As a small business owner or solopreneur, I know you've spent hours poring over your website (as well as your competitors') analyzing every word, photo, and button placement. Unfortunately, when we assess our own business, we tend to (unintentionally) examine it through a very different lens than when we're a real-life customer looking to make a purchase. This may be one reason why so many small businesses end up building brands that look and sound like everyone else in their industry.

Companies often try to emulate what they *think* their product, website, or brand is supposed to look and sound like. That's normal, especially for a small business starting out. We see a competitor or a brand we think is doing well and think, "I should mimic them to come off as real, legitimate, and trustworthy."

If you want your brand to stand out, this approach will get you nowhere. In fact, it's [downright damaging to your business](#). Here, I'll show you how a brand hack that will give you a change in perspective will bring your brand to the forefront in the crowd of look-alikes.

You Can't Be Different When You Don't Know What's Out There

We first learned about the [importance of originality](#) in our company's infant stage – we were spending a lot of time mining Craigslist for clients, and we answered every gig posting with a standard, professional email. Something along the lines of:

Subject line: "RE: *their posting headline*"

Email Intro: "To Whom It May Concern, I saw your posting for a website designer and I would love to show you my work. Please check out our previous designs here: worstofalldesign.com. I would love to work on this project and look forward to hearing from you."

Boring, right? And it didn't work—we only heard back now and then.

To figure out what we were doing wrong, we put up a fake job posting for a graphic designer to see what our competition looked like. Within the first few minutes, our inbox flooded with messages and within the first hour, we had over 100 responses.

It was overwhelming... and guess what? Most of them wrote the same, if not exact same, email as we did. Yes, some were longer or more eloquent, but for the most part, I felt like I was reading an identical message over and over and over again. It was obvious that even if *our work* was in fact the best in the bunch, the potential client may never even see it—it would be lost in the email onslaught and what I like to call the "sea of sameness".

This was our a-ha moment. The moment when we knew we had to shake ourselves loose from the crowd, and at the very least, stand out from the other emails. So what did we do? We changed our subject line and got rid of unnecessary information in the email body.

Our original super-short cover letter was almost entirely made up of redundant info—*of course* we saw the gig, and *of course* we do graphic design and of course we would be excited to work on the project. So, we changed it to this:

Subject Line: "The WORST Graphic Designer"

Email: "worstofalldesign.com"

*(with my contact info in the footer)

With just some small changes based on our brand personality, and less rather than more, we were able to stand out from all the other emails. Our emails were getting opened, and not only were clients finally seeing our work; we got more calls, interviews and, most importantly, paying gigs and projects because of it. We still had a long way to go to becoming the standout brand that we are now, but this small, yet bold change started us on the path to success.

Go Behind The Scenes

I recently worked with a wedding photographer—Sarah of [Clique Photography](#)—who was dealing with this very problem. Sarah’s specialty was highlighting the honest, candid moments in unique, non-traditional weddings. Originally, she came to me with a site that looked like every other photography site: no clear message, lots of general photography copy, an insane number of photos (a cardinal sin committed by most photographers, and other commercial artists, with their website portfolios), no pricing, and way too many clichés. I encouraged her to [step away from the jargon](#)—because phrases that are overused become meaningless in marketing—and to stand out by owning her voice and being herself. While she loved this idea, she was understandably still tentative about going all in, or even making a small change like simply putting prices on her site.

That is, until she went behind the scenes.

This photographer decided to get a new perspective. She put herself in the shoes of her desired clients, pretended to be a bride and began searching online for a photographer in order to experience the process herself. As she looked through competitors’ websites, she grew increasingly frustrated with not being able to locate the most important information she needed as a potential bride and customer.

She was overwhelmed by the pages of endless photos and annoyed that she couldn’t ever find out how much any of their services costs. She also found it difficult to tell the difference between all the photographers—they all blended together. Even when she filled out contact forms, when she would go back through the websites she couldn’t even remember which were the ones she had contacted.

When she looked at her website with this same perspective, she realized—to her horror—that she was doing THE SAME THING. This was *her* a-ha moment. This was

when she decided to double down on owning who she is and was ready to start showing it off and standing out.

So she owned her own voice, her own niche, and [put prices on her site](#). She made it easy to contact her by including a variety of methods, like an option to schedule a phone call using a scheduling app—[Schedule Once](#) (which I highly recommend).

What happened? She started booking the right clients. These first clients confirmed what she now knew—because she had a personal message that resonated with them, they could see her prices and compare with their budget, and they were able to easily contact her via phone, they usually committed to a plan by the end of their first chat! (If you want a few more tips on how to make a website that sell, [download the checklist here](#).)

A Method For Standing Out

If you want to stand out to potential clients and get noticed, remembered and shared, here's what I recommend: put yourself in their shoes. But not just by *thinking* about how they feel, but by going through their literal steps in real life. Think about what you're looking for, what your biggest concerns are, what problems you're trying to solve. Then, go look at your competitors' websites with that mentality. Look specifically for the information you said you needed, and note what you find frustrating or confusing. Write down what stands out and what's forgettable.

I don't recommend anything I haven't seen work for my clients or for myself. I've done this research in my own industry, with other branding companies, and have found that while many of them are cool and well-designed, MOST are totally forgettable because they don't say anything memorable. It's just a list of services, a crowded portfolio, and a run-of-the-mill contact me page. Or worse—a fill-out-this-form page where *the customer* tells *the agency or designer* their budget. (If you're committing any of these branding sins, take my [online training](#) and get out of the rut of looking like the competition.)

If I was looking at these pretty websites *without* the client's mentality, I'd probably conclude that my site should do as they do—have a list of services plus a giant portfolio, and ask for a client's budget in a form. But when I look at these pretty websites as a potential customer... well, now I can see that none of them are really offering anything special. It makes me want to readjust and find someone who will.

*Pia is the author of [Bada** Your Brand: The Impatient Entrepreneur's Guide to Turning Expertise into Profit](#) (start [reading it here](#)). [Sign up](#) for these weekly articles in your inbox.*