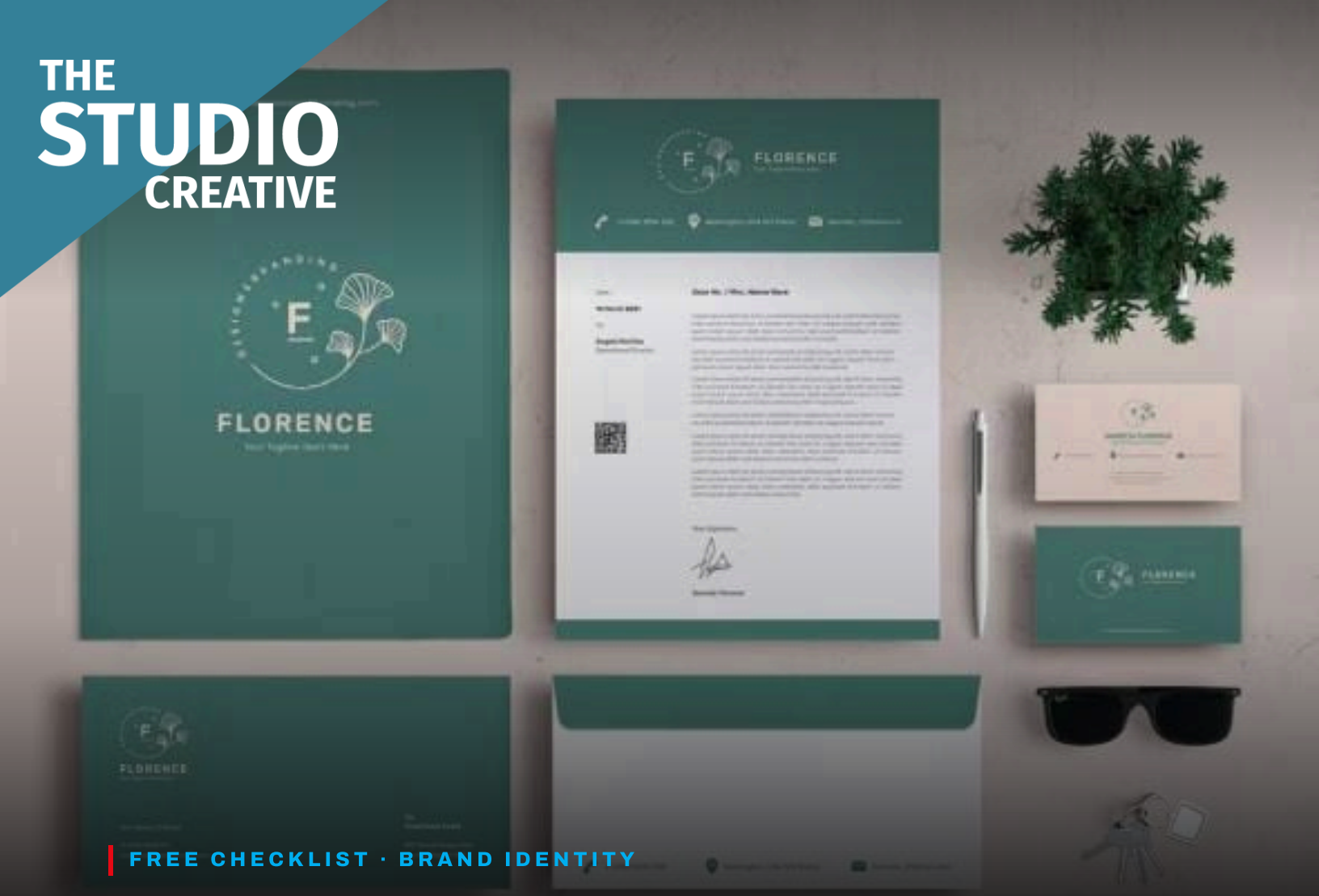
THE STUDIO CREATIVE



FREE CHECKLIST · BRAND IDENTITY

The Brand Identity Checklist

Everything a company needs in place to look like one company: the strategy, the logo system, the colors and type, the voice, the guidelines and every place the brand has to show up. With a printable scorecard.

By Jeff Schniers, founder of The Studio Creative. The same ten questions as the free brand check at thestudiocreative.com/brand-identity, with the detail behind each one.

How to use this checklist

Buyers decide how established a company is in the first few seconds, long before they read a word. This checklist is every piece that decision is made on, in the order a brand is usually built. Tick what you have. What is left is your project.

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The four layers of a brand identity

1. **Strategy**
   Who you serve, what you stand for and what sets you apart. Everything else is built to say this.
2. **The visual system**
   The logo and its versions, the colors, the typefaces, the imagery and the layout rules.
3. **Voice and messaging**
   The positioning line, the tagline, the boilerplate paragraph and how the company sounds.
4. **Guidelines and application**
   The rules written down, and the brand carried onto every card, page, sign, post and video.

A LOGO IS NOT A BRAND IDENTITY

A logo is one mark. An identity is the system around it. Most companies that feel inconsistent do not have a bad logo; they have a logo with no system, so every supplier, new hire and social post invents its own version.

Starting from nothing
Work the pages in order. Strategy first, then the logo, then everything the logo goes on.

Refreshing a logo
Pages 4 and 8 are the test: does the mark survive small sizes and one color, and do you hold the files?

Auditing what you have
Print page 9 and score every item. The gaps are the project.

Strategy: what the brand has to say

Nothing on the pages after this one can be judged until these are written down. A logo cannot be "right" for a company that has not said what it is.

Settle these first

- [ ] WHO WE SERVE: the customer, in one sentence, specific enough to exclude someone
- [ ] WHAT THEY GET: the outcome a customer buys, in their words, not ours
- [ ] WHAT SETS US APART: the one thing a competitor cannot honestly say
- [ ] HOW WE WANT TO BE SEEN: three words, and three words we never want to be
- [ ] WHERE WE ARE GOING: what the company sells in five years, so the brand does not box it in
- [ ] THE NAME: still right for all of the above, or part of the project

Then test them

Read the sentences to three customers and three staff. If any of them says "that is not what you do", the strategy is not finished. If all six nod, the designer has something to design.

Look at the competition on one page

Put every competitor's logo, website header and social profile on one page, side by side, with yours among them. Two things become obvious at once: the colors and shapes everyone shares, and the gap nobody is standing in. The identity should take the gap.

> **WRITE THE POSITIONING LINE NOW**
> One sentence: For [who], [company] is the [category] that [difference]. It is not a tagline and it is never published. It is the sentence every concept is judged against, which is why it comes before the sketching.

Bring to the first meeting

- [ ] Every version of the current logo in use
- [ ] The three pieces of marketing you are proudest of, and the three you hide
- [ ] Your best customer's name, and why they chose you
- [ ] Where the brand has to show up in the next year (page 7)

The logo system

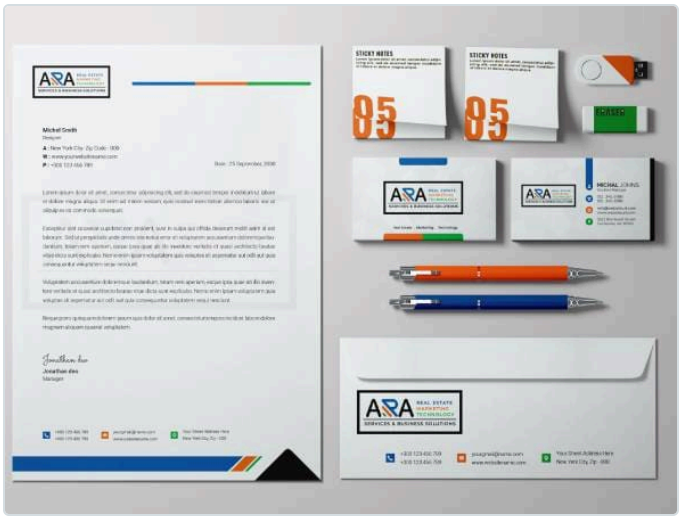
A finished logo is a family of versions, each with a job, delivered in files a printer, a sign maker and a web designer can use without asking.

The versions you need

VERSION	WHERE IT GOES
Primary	The horizontal lockup, used wherever there is room.
Stacked	Symbol over name, for square spaces and narrow columns.
Icon	The symbol alone: app icons, favicons, social avatars.
One color	Embroidery, engraving, one-color print, faxes and forms.
Reversed	Light on dark: signage, video, dark screens.

The four tests

- [ ] THE SMALL TEST: still readable at 16 pixels and on a pen
- [ ] THE ONE-COLOR TEST: still itself with the color removed
- [ ] THE DISTANCE TEST: recognizable from across a trade show hall
- [ ] THE SQUINT TEST: a distinct shape, not a grey smudge, with your eyes half closed



The ARA Real Estate identity we designed, carried across letterhead, business cards, an envelope and pens. One logo, one palette, every piece.

Clear space and minimum size

The guide should name the margin nothing else may enter, measured off the mark itself (the height of the symbol is a common unit), and the smallest size each version may be used at. Those two rules prevent most of the damage a logo suffers in other people's hands.

The files

- [ ] Vector files (SVG, EPS or PDF) for every version: these scale to any size
- [ ] PNG with transparent backgrounds for web and documents
- [ ] Color, one-color black and one-color white of each
- [ ] The source file, and the name of every typeface used in the mark

Colors and typography

Color and type do more of the recognizing than the logo does: a customer sees the palette on a sign before they can read the mark. They also break most often, because every tool picks its own values.

The color checklist

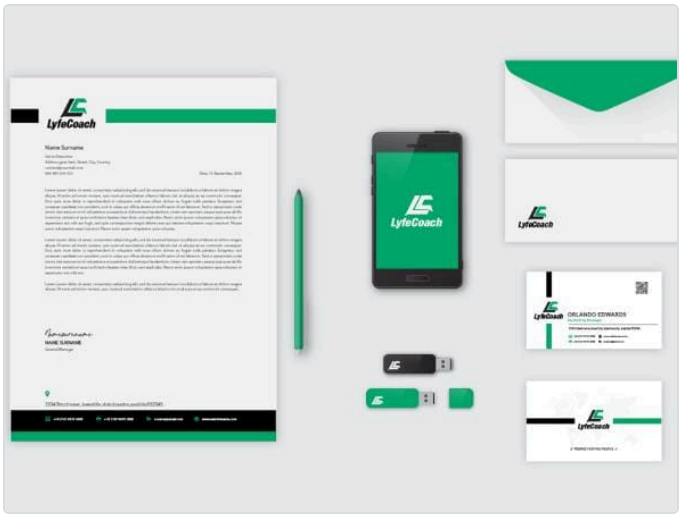
- [ ] One or two primary colors, with the job of each written down
- [ ] Two or three supporting colors, and a rule for how much of the page they may take
- [ ] Every color in print values (CMYK, and a Pantone reference if you print often) and screen values (HEX and RGB)
- [ ] A dark and a light neutral for text and backgrounds
- [ ] Text and background pairs checked for contrast, so the brand stays readable for everyone
- [ ] What NOT to do: no gradients where there are none, no new tints invented per post

WHY THE VALUES MATTER

The same blue typed by eye in five tools is five blues. Named values are the only reason a business card, a van and a website ever match.

The typography checklist

- [ ] One typeface for headlines and one for body text, or one family that does both
- [ ] Weights and sizes for headline, subhead, body and small print, so documents look like one set
- [ ] Licenses that cover print, web and desktop use for everyone who will use them
- [ ] A fallback system font for email and documents that cannot carry a custom face
- [ ] Rules for case: whether headlines are Title Case, sentence case or capitals



The LyfeCoach identity on letterhead, business cards, a phone and envelopes: one green, one typeface, one voice, every piece recognizably the same company.

Voice and messaging

The brand is read as often as it is seen. A company with a beautiful logo and five people writing in five voices still sounds like five companies.

Write these down once

- [ ] THE POSITIONING LINE from page 3, kept internal
- [ ] A TAGLINE, if you want one: short, true, and something the company can live up to
- [ ] A BOILERPLATE PARAGRAPH: who you are and what you do, in 50 to 80 words, used in press, bios and proposals word for word
- [ ] A ONE-LINE DESCRIPTION for social profiles and directory listings
- [ ] THREE TONE WORDS, each with a sentence showing what it sounds like
- [ ] A SHORT LIST OF WORDS YOU USE, and the words you avoid (jargon, hype, the competitor's terms)

Sound like the same company everywhere

PLACE	THE TEST
Website	Read the home page aloud. Does it sound like your best salesperson, or like a brochure?
Proposals	Does the opening paragraph match the website, or did it start as someone else's template?
Social	Could a reader tell your posts from a competitor's with the logo hidden?
Email	Do signatures, replies and newsletters share the same name for the company and the same sign-off?
On camera	Does the person in the video say what the website says, in the same words?

LEAD WITH WHAT THEY GET

Customers rarely care what you do or how you do it. They are interested in what they get. Test every headline: is this telling them what we do, or what they will get?

Where the brand has to show up

An identity is only finished when it has been carried onto the things people actually see. List yours, then decide the order: what customers meet first is built first.

Every day

- [ ] Website: header, favicon, buttons, headings and images on the system
- [ ] Social profiles: the icon version as the avatar, the same cover art, the one-line description
- [ ] Email signatures, one template for everyone
- [ ] Business cards, letterhead and envelopes
- [ ] Proposal, invoice and presentation templates
- [ ] Forms, quotes and the documents customers sign

In print and in the world

- [ ] Signage on the building, and the sign a customer sees first
- [ ] Vehicle graphics
- [ ] Trade show displays, banners and badges
- [ ] Packaging, labels and shipping materials
- [ ] Uniforms and workwear (the one-color version earns its keep here)

On screen and on stage

- [ ] An animated logo for the start and end of videos
- [ ] Lower thirds (name and title graphics) and title cards in the brand type
- [ ] Thumbnail and social video templates
- [ ] Live stream graphics: the bug in the corner, the holding screen, the sponsor slots
- [ ] Presentation slides, with the real typefaces installed on the machine that presents
- [ ] A branded mic flag, so the logo is in every interview, panel and podcast frame



A mic flag we designed and 3D printed for the Worldwide Podcast Network. The one piece of branding that lands in the frame every time someone is handed a microphone.

Guidelines, files and what you should own

The brand guide is the identity written down so it survives the people who built it. Short beats thorough: a guide nobody opens protects nothing.

A brand guide that gets used

- [ ] The positioning line and the three tone words, on page one
- [ ] Every logo version, with where each goes, clear space and minimum size
- [ ] Logo misuse: six or eight pictures of what not to do
- [ ] Colors with print and screen values
- [ ] Typefaces, weights and sizes
- [ ] Imagery: the kind of photography and illustration the brand uses, with examples
- [ ] Voice: the boilerplate, the tagline, the words used and avoided
- [ ] Where the master files live, and who approves anything new

Rolling it out

Name one owner. Replace what customers see first (website, signage, cards, social) in one move rather than over a year, retire every old file you can find, and brief suppliers with the guide rather than a logo attachment.

Questions to ask any designer or agency

- [ ] How many concepts will we see, and how many rounds of changes are included?
- [ ] Will the concepts be shown in real use, on a sign, a site, a card and a video frame?
- [ ] Which versions and file formats are delivered, and is the source file included?
- [ ] Do we own the final logo and files outright once we have paid?
- [ ] Are the typefaces licensed for us, and for which uses?
- [ ] Who will carry the identity onto the website, the video and the signage, and will it match?

What you should own

Once paid, the final logo and brand files should be yours outright, with the source files and a record of every typeface. Fonts, stock photography and illustration carry their own licenses: ask what is covered before anything is printed.

> **NOT LEGAL ADVICE**
> Ownership and licensing terms differ by agreement. Read yours, and ask a professional about trademark registration, which is separate from owning the artwork.



Fruta social campaign posts we designed, on a phone and laid out together: one brand, many posts, no drift.

The brand audit scorecard

Print this page. Score each line Yes, Partly or No, honestly, for the company as it is today. Every Partly and No is a line on the project brief.

ITEM	YES	PARTLY	NO
We can say who we serve and what sets us apart in one sentence			
Our positioning line is written down and the team has read it			
We have one master set of logo files (vector plus web versions) that everyone uses			
Our logo exists in primary, stacked, icon, one-color and reversed versions			
Our logo passes the small-size and the one-color tests			
Our logo looks the same on our website, social profiles, signage and documents			
Our brand colors are named, with exact values for print and for screen			
We use the same one or two typefaces everywhere, and they are licensed			
Our tagline and boilerplate paragraph are written down and reused word for word			
Three tone words describe how we sound, with examples			
Proposals, presentations and email signatures come from shared templates			
Our website header, favicon and social avatars use the right logo versions			
Signage, vehicles and trade show displays carry the current identity			
Our videos, ads and live streams carry the same logo, colors and type as our print			
We have an animated logo and lower thirds in the brand type			
There is a short brand guide a new hire or a supplier could follow			
Every old logo file we can find has been retired			
One person approves anything new before it goes out			
We own the final logo and brand files outright, with the source files			
We know every place the brand has to show up in the next twelve months			

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Want the gaps closed?

Tell us what you have today and where the brand has to show up. We reply with an approach, a timeline and one fixed quote for the identity, and the same studio puts it on your website, your video and your microphones.

thestudiocreative.com/brand-identity · (248) 243-9070

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