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# Why ideas are your best bet. And big ones are better than small ones.

**In branding, as in so many aspects of business (and life), fortune favours the brave. Which is why we are such a firm believer in the power and potential of the 'big idea'. When creating a brand – the articulation of an organisation's narrative and personality – the question that doesn't get asked nearly often enough is: "what's our 'big idea'?" Or to put it another way, is there an idea that we could make "ours"?**

Great brand ideas don't need to be visible from space. They shouldn't be complicated. They absolutely don't have to be expensive. But they must be capable of telling the story of what your business does in a compelling, distinctive, succinct way. If you can surprise and delight your audience with a 'big' idea, they will see themselves in your brand. And your brand becomes part of what makes them who they are.

On the face of it, creating a brand ought to be simple. Graphic design solutions in particular have never looked smarter, slicker, or faster than they do right now. From big to small, start-up to mega Corp, every company is radically empowered in how it presents themselves. There are off-the-shelf guidelines and templates, virtual designers who work by the hour, proactive programs, and the biggie – AI. Even your phone can take a photograph that's good enough to hold a homepage or put on a poster.

But the core challenge remains the same: "How do we engage with the audiences we want to appeal to, and build our business?" If you aren't careful, canny, and focused, you're simply shouting into a space where the din is already deafening. Which is where the big idea comes in.

## Some food for (big) thought...

### How do you know if you have a big idea?

You know you're on to something if you can explain it quickly and simply – and the explanation stands on its own.

### Brands that lead with great ideas.

- **Rolls-Royce** with its Spirit of Ecstasy. No geometric abstract minimalism for the most enduring of luxury motor marques.
- **The Tate Gallery**. With its blurry, brilliant, intriguing logo that hints at the infinite possibilities of what might happen next.
- **Paul Smith**. The logo is his signature. It's a promise to the customer – and a challenge to the business.

## Attitude vs idea... They're not the same thing.

Attitude is a bit like an idea. It can be intriguing, timely and briefly attention-grabbing – but rarely ownable. Things like using unlikely people to model clothes, or an unexpected celebrity popping up to try and persuade you that you need a new thing. Attitude is for campaigns; ideas are for brands.

## Selling an idea can be tricky.

Often clients aren't in the mood, over-intellectualise things, or lack conviction in their instincts. A couple of years ago, as part of a pitch to rebrand a sizeable financial institution, we suggested that a leaping salmon could be the logotype. It related to their name, was on-brief (they wanted to be seen as disruptors who saw things differently) and was very different to competitors in their dark blue and bronze sector.

In the end they went for a lowercase version of their name, with three traffic-light coloured circles animating around the first letter, relating to the three divisions of their business. We bumped into one of their judging team over a year later and he told us he had favoured our idea, but it was deemed too bold.

You can say "sour grapes" all you want, but they did make the wrong choice. The website already looks tired, the traffic-light device is boring, inward-looking, and dated. It does the opposite of what they hoped because it's all sugar and fat – no protein, no idea.

If they had gone with a leaping salmon they would have so many more options on how they could tell their story their way – and would have avoided the faddy, style-led solution they were seduced by.

## An ideas-led solution that has lasted the test of time.

Nearly 20 years ago we helped launch a start-up called MediaSense. They are experts in the world of monitoring media performance, work with leading companies across many sectors, and have grown into a very successful business.

Companies with no tangible product can be a challenge to promote, so the focus was on a logotype that communicated what MediaSense do in an analogous way – but it needed to be a "giant killer", that could look credible when seen alongside the world's largest brands.

The solution we devised is a series of coloured (and animated) bars that suggest the variety and dynamic nature of what they do. The proof of the pudding is that they have never changed the logo in any way, despite numerous reviews over the years. It is because it is rooted in a big idea that always positively supports who they are and what they offer. It has grown with them and, importantly, it also looks good.

## Five key things to consider when reviewing your brand:

- Do you know what your values are?
- How do you want to be perceived within your sector?
- Who are your key audiences?
- What do you want them to know about you?
- How can you be brave and search for a big idea that will help you stand out?

*And remember: think big!*