

What has to be decided, and the order it has to be decided in.

Most of what gets rebuilt in a business's first three years was not built badly. It was built in the wrong order, before the decision it depended on had been made. This is that order.

01

Positioning

Nothing below this line can be decided without it. A name, a mark or a website chosen before positioning is a guess that will be paid for twice.

DECIDE

- Who it is for, specifically enough to exclude someone
- Why they choose you over the alternative they already have
- What you will not do, and will not sell
- The category you are asking to be judged in

TEST IT AGAINST

- Can a stranger repeat it back after one hearing
- Would a competitor claim the opposite, or the same
- Does it survive a price objection

02

Naming

A name is cheap to change now and expensive to change later. Every check below happens before anything is filed, bought or printed.

DECIDE

- The name itself
- The descriptor that says what the business is, plainly
- How it is written: spacing, capitals, punctuation

CHECK, BEFORE FILING

- Entity name available in your state
- Trademark conflicts in your class, not just any class
- The domain, and what you would accept instead
- Handles on every platform you will actually use
- Nobody in your category already close to it
- Said out loud on a phone call, and spelled once

03

Verbal identity

What the business sounds like, settled before anything is designed, because the words decide how much room the design needs.

DECIDE

- The one sentence that explains the business
- The three things you say every time, in order
- Tone: what you sound like, and what you never sound like

CHECK

- Does it read the same in an email as on a sign
- Can somebody who does not work for you write in it

04

Visual identity

Only now. An identity drawn before the three decisions above is decoration that will be redrawn.

DECIDE

- Wordmark, and whether a symbol is needed at all
- Palette, with a value tested at the size it will be read at
- Typefaces, and what each one is for
- The rules that hold once other people use it

CHECK

- Legible at 16 pixels and in one colour
- Every text pairing clears 4.5:1
- Works on the worst surface it will ever be printed on

05

Everything that carries it

Packaging, the website and store, the mailboxes, the analytics, the launch. This is the part that takes the longest and the part most often started first.

The rule that makes the rest of it work: arrows only run downward. Every time a decision on this page is made out of order, the work below it gets done twice, and the second time is the one you pay full price for.