



11 Brand Book Mistakes:

*WHAT CAN WE
LEARN FROM TOP
BRAND BOOKS*

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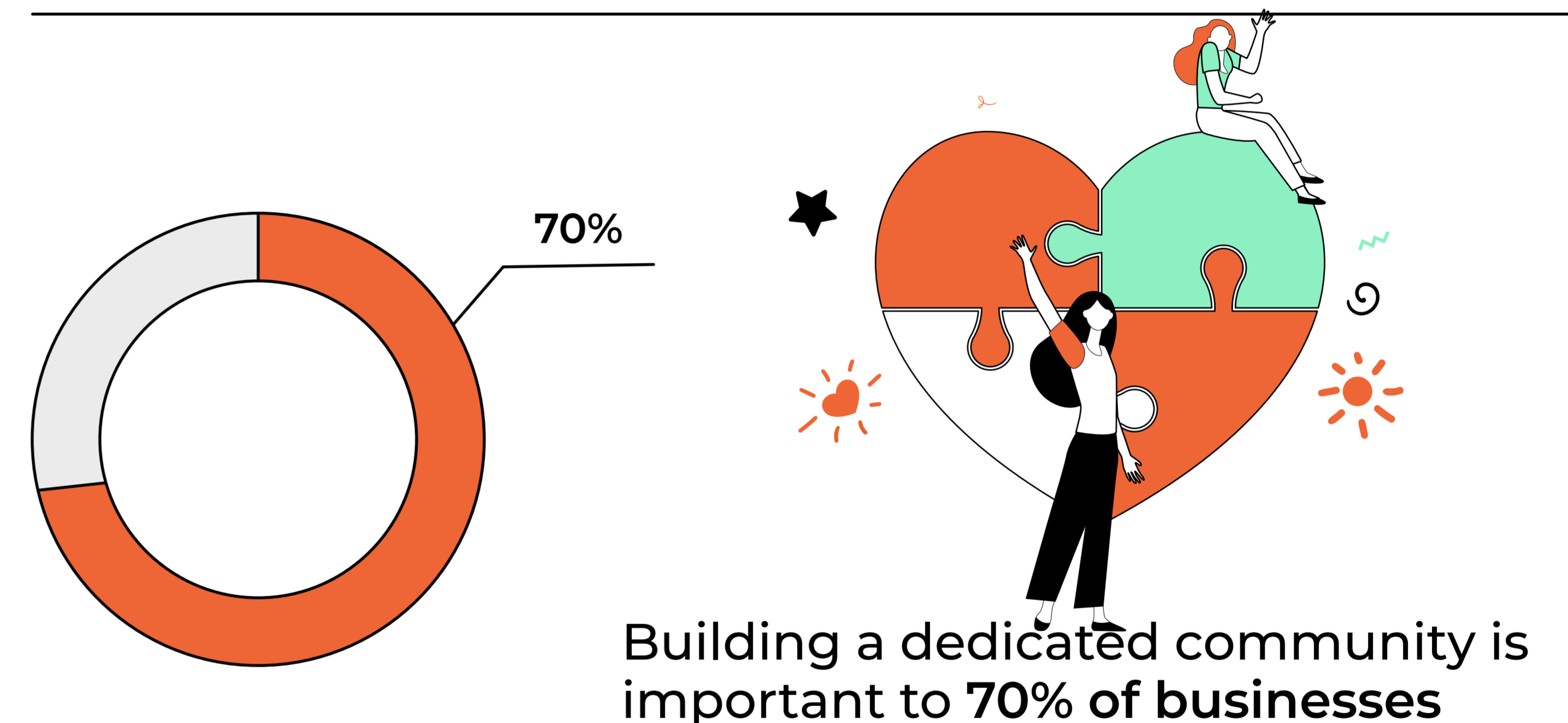
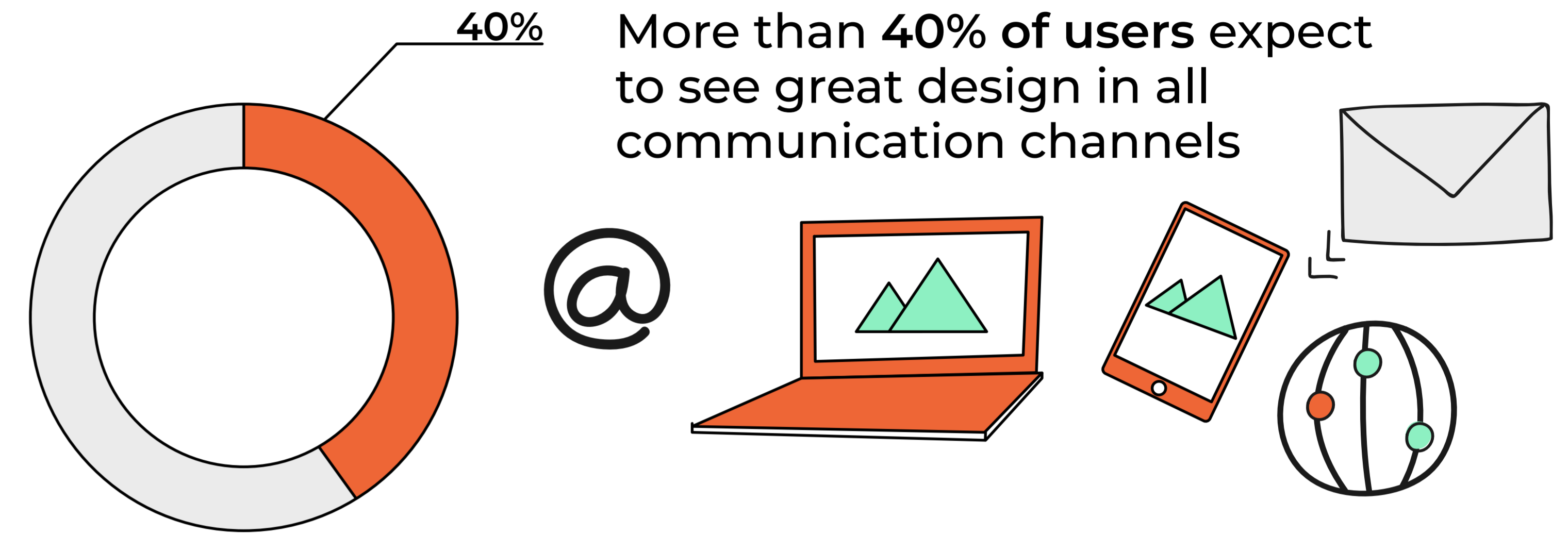
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Consistency and flexibility are highly important for all communication and marketing channels these days. Omnichannel strategies require designers to prepare brands to face different challenges and reach users in native ways. If there's no united style guide, the brand will chaotically rearrange visual elements, eventually losing its unique look and feel.

Having a consistent and throughout branding strategy directly translates into higher sales. It starts with design: a logo that reflects a company's values, consistent use of fonts and color palettes, having a style of images, associated with brands' content. It's hard to keep track of all these elements if you don't have a consistent guideline.

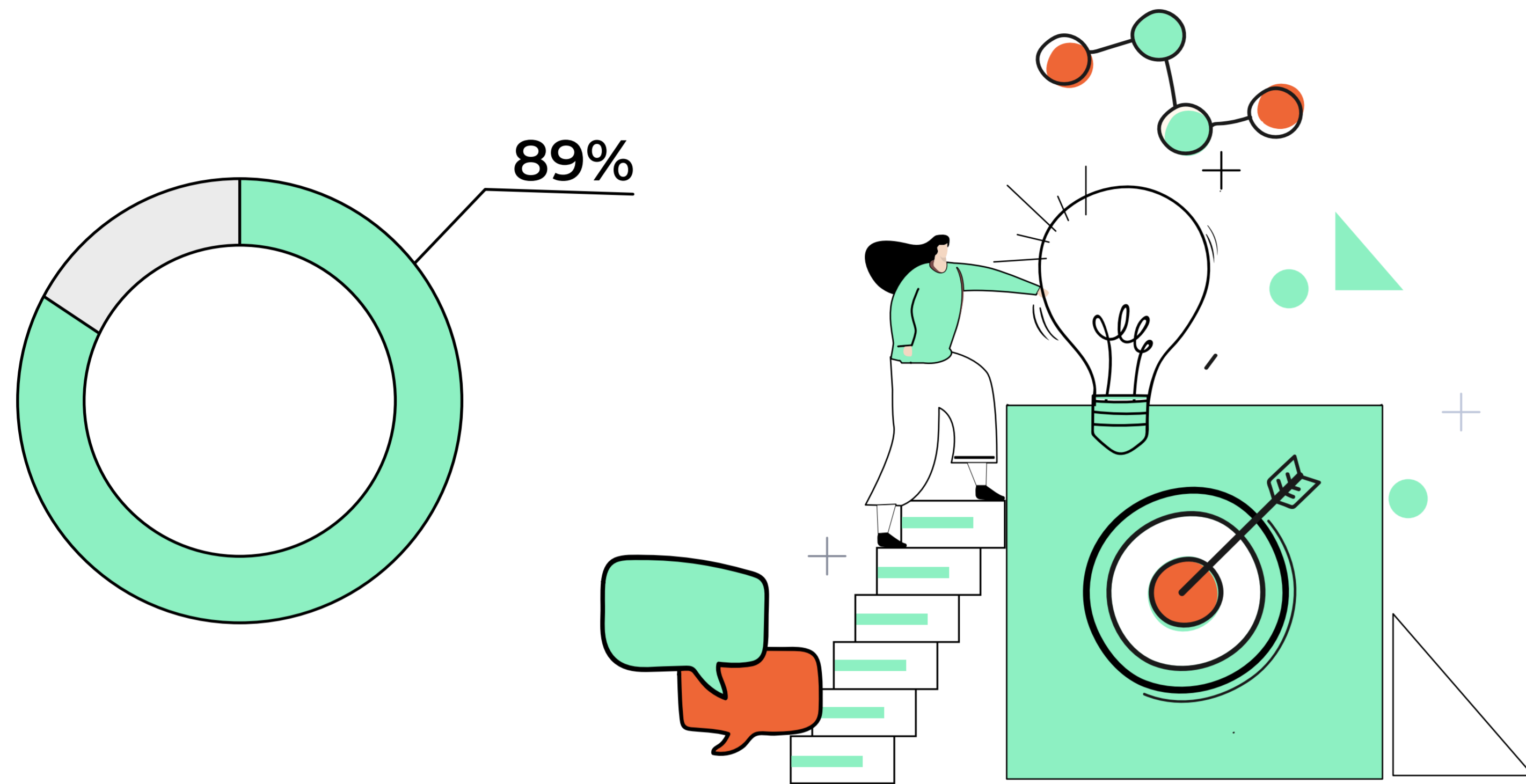


It takes **90 seconds** for an average user to form a consistent impression of the brand

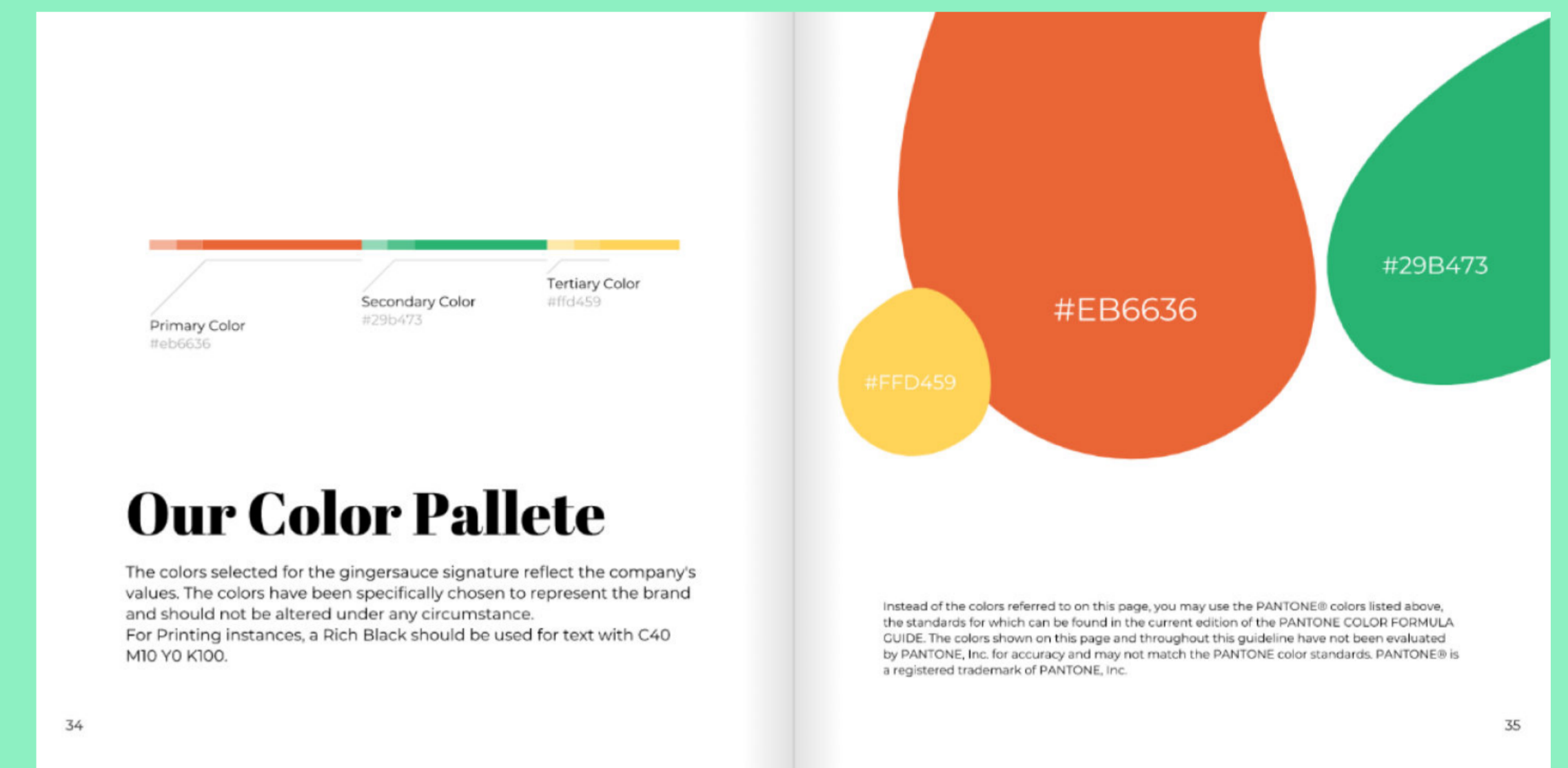
90 seconds



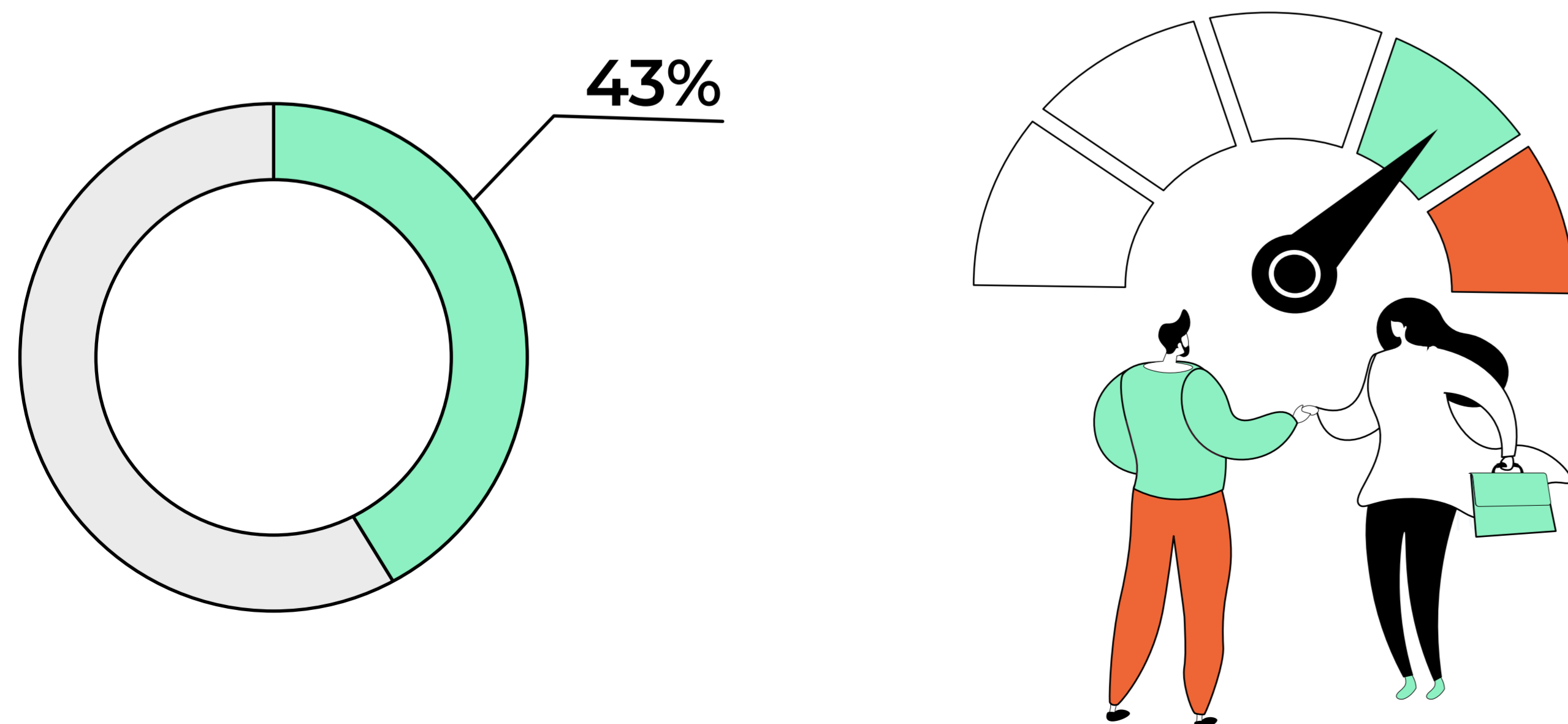
89% of customers are loyal to brands who have the same values



A BRAND BOOK IS YOUR MAIN BRANDING GUIDELINE



43% of customers spend more on brands that they are loyal to



A brand book is a document that collects all the information about business style and main design instruments. The basic structure includes mission, values, logo, variations, color palette, fonts, the style of other visual elements (cons, banners, etc).

The use of a brand book allows brands to explain their vision to stakeholders and team members. Once all involved team members have a direct vision of their brand identity, they can communicate it to the audience efficiently.

All successful brands have brand books — and it's not a coincidence

When you think about companies with a distinct visual style, who's on your mind first? Apple is one of the first thoughts — being a design-driven company, Apple created a very recognizable style, from the iconic logo to the entire “feeling” around the company. It's not a coincidence that Apple has one of the best brand books on the market. Having such clear guidelines of their visual identity is a key to the company's success.

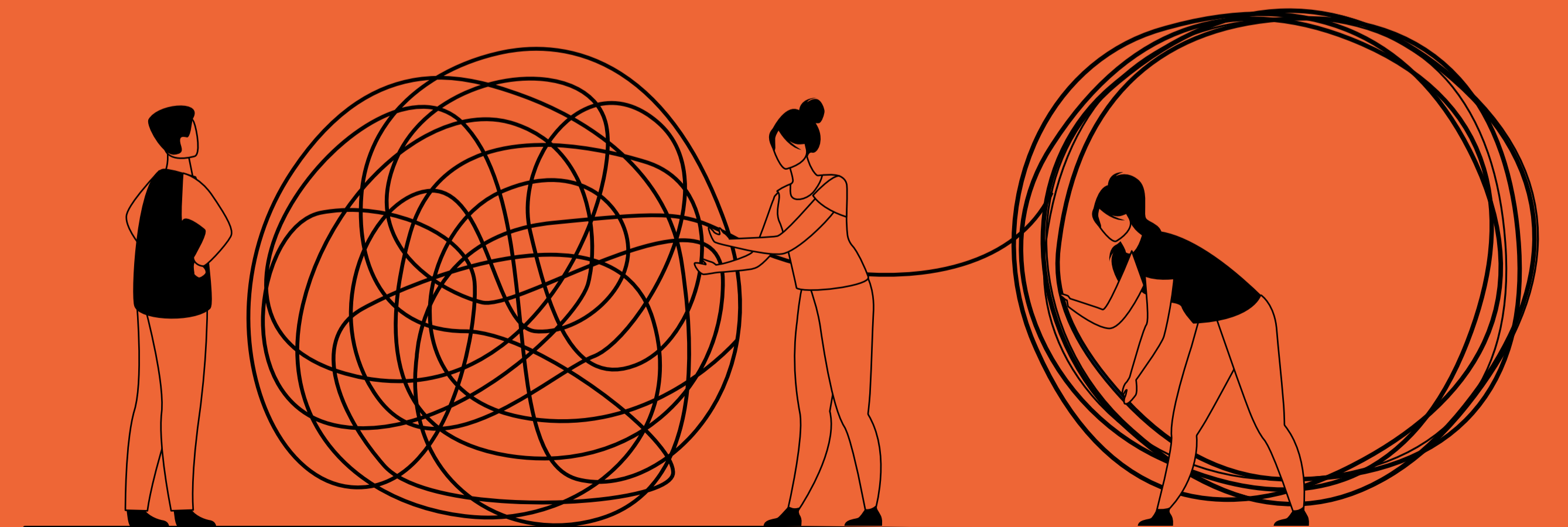


Another example — this time a younger one — is Slack. The platform became successful in a huge part due to its look and feel. Vivid colors, gamification elements, simple graphics — that's what most users imagine, hearing the brand name. Obviously, this wasn't an accidental development — the company has a 51-page brand book where they describe their visual style in the slightest detail.

Any brand book is not a solution

Any brand book and an efficient brand book aren't necessarily the same thing. Simply attempting to create a visual guideline in a unified document isn't enough. There are established formats, understood by design professionals, and tried-and-proven rules to follow. Experience of successful and failed brand book implementations show recurring patterns.

The structure of successful brand books is surprisingly uniform, but so many businesses have no clue to what it is





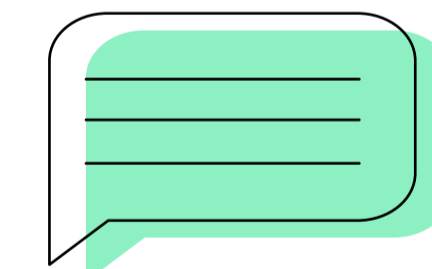
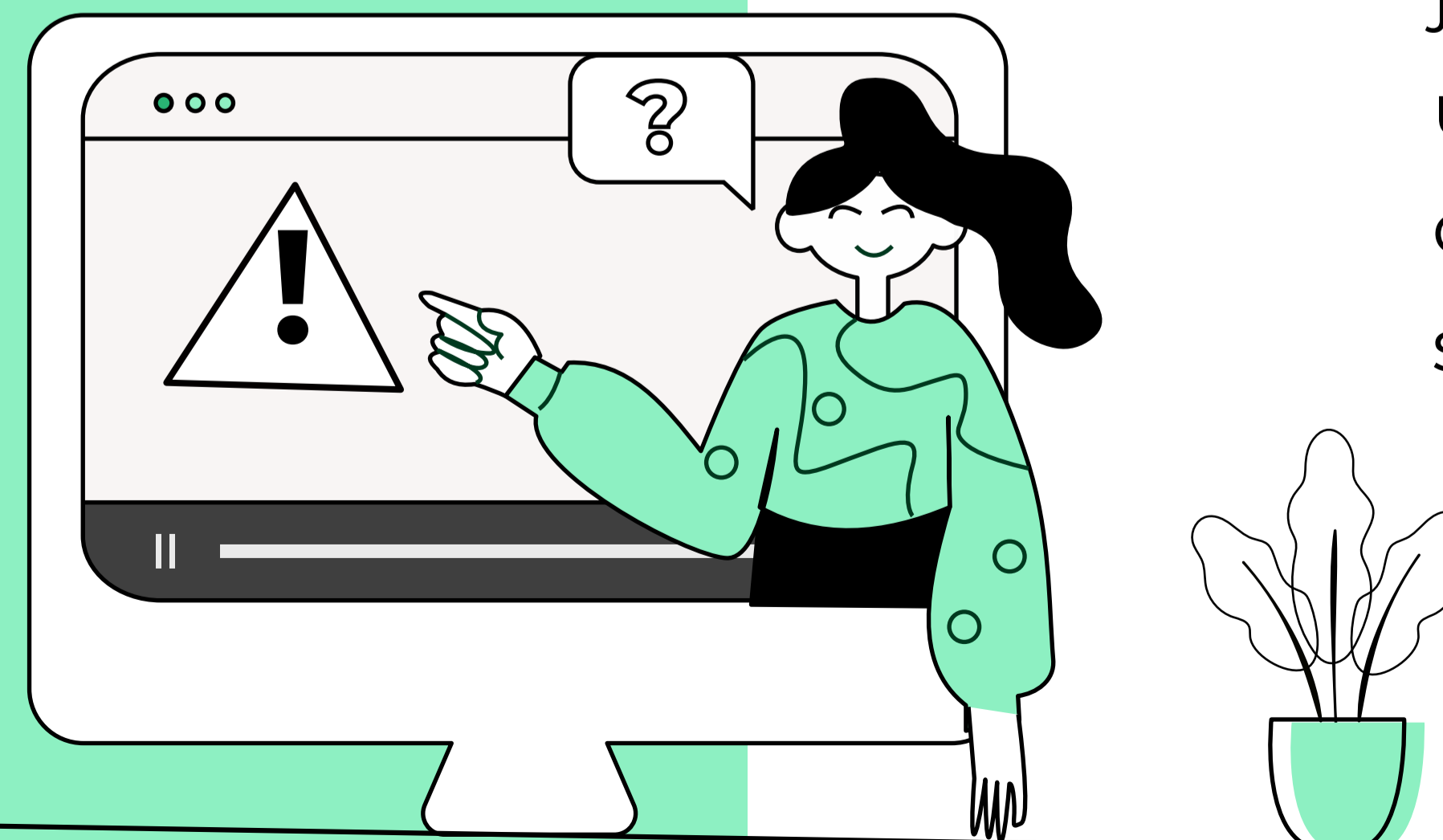
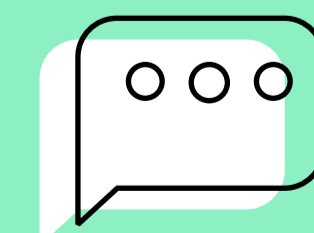
MISTAKE

The most common brand book mistakes

Throughout our experience in creative studios, hubs, and large companies, we understood that some brand books' mistakes are made more often than others.

Even experienced professionals sometimes fall into a trap of using conservative approaches to creating a brand guideline, failing to pay attention either to the creative or rational aspects of the task. It's an easy mistake to make - especially if you don't have a clear idea of the efficient structure, working rules, and only an approximate understanding of the purpose of the document.

In this e-book, we analyze 11 common brand book mistakes and give working fixes and real-life examples.



MISTAKE 1: Starting with no concept

Designers are taught to think visually. The process is often intuitive and hard to explain in a rational step by step. As a creative professional, you are always influenced by other creators' tendencies and solutions. How to define if your vision of the brand's logos and identity derives from its needs rather than from your personal preferences?

A good design is explained well, there's research, logic, and concept behind it. Most importantly, there's a vision. The story behind the logo is just as important, if not more (we can use examples of successful companies and their branding strategies).

Elements of a brand concept in a brand book

- **Mission and vision:** the brand defines its views in 1-2 sentences. A motto of the brand will be then repurposed in communication.
- **Brand values:** the guideline should describe what the company and the team believe in. Statistics have shown that customers resonate with brands that share their values.
- **What brand is and isn't:** the designer should describe visual strategies and tone of voice that are not in the brand's character — just like writers do.
- **Answers to key questions.** Amazon Prime answers things like — Who are we, and what's our brand strategy? Why the change? They include guidelines as part of the strategy and explain why they needed a redesign in the first place.



Guidelines should describe what the brand is and what it isn't. Here's how Slack put it:

“We don't use cheap words that recall the failures of those companies who have gone before us, and we don't use Silicon Valley cliches and jargon. We would only describe

people as Ninjas or Rockstars if they were actually those things for a living. We don't lean on pop culture references or things that feel exclusionary. “

Who are we, and what's our brand strategy?

We've used many brands to communicate aspects of our service over the years, which resulted in customer confusion of who we are and how our offerings work. As part of the recent rebrand effort, we consolidated to one global brand, Prime Video, to represent our service and content. So that it populates when customers search for the term "Amazon," our official app name within app store directories is "Amazon Prime Video." For press (PR, editorial, etc.), use "Amazon Prime Video" for first mention, and "Prime Video" for every instance thereafter. For legal use when dynamic to territory, use "Prime Video" in the US, UK, and DE, and "Amazon Prime Video" for all other markets, including France, Italy, Spain, India, and Japan. If reference is not dynamic to territory, default to "Amazon Prime Video" (generally used in Terms of Use and other related legal terms).

What is the name of our Original content?

Original series (TV shows) are "Prime Originals," and movies are "An Amazon Original movie." 1st-run licensed content from third-party studios (e.g. Mr. Robot in the EU) are labeled "Prime Exclusive."

Why the change?

Because it all starts with Prime, your home for everything you want to watch, Prime membership includes thousands of titles available to watch at no extra cost, including exclusives and award-winning Originals. Members can also add premium and specialty channels, like HBO, STARZ and SHOWTIME. Customers can find everything else they love with movies and TV shows available to rent or buy from Prime Video, with exclusive deals for Prime members.

What does the brand change mean for our rent/buy partners and customers?

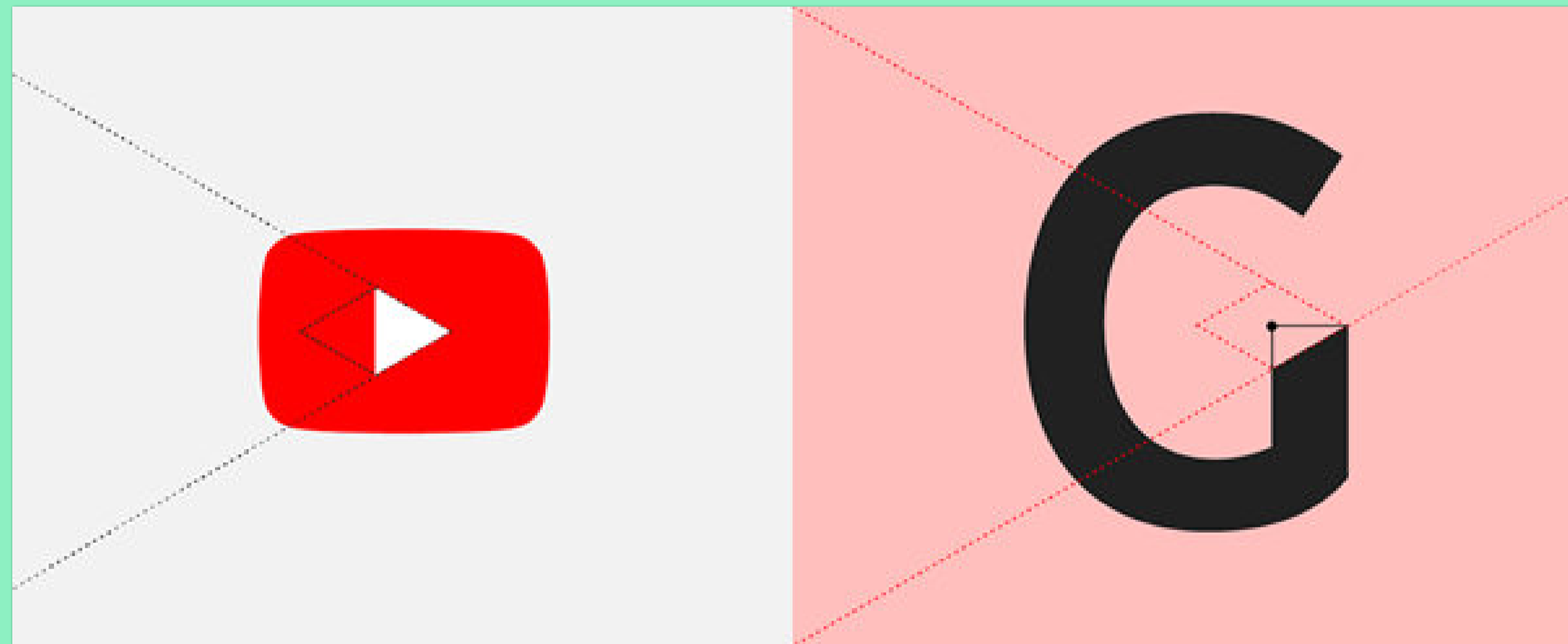
Under the new Prime Video brand, availability of movies and TV shows for purchase are positioned as a unique offering unmatched by other video subscription services. We lean into our vast collection of titles available to rent or buy from Prime Video, taking advantage of any opportunity to clarify the distinction between what is included with Prime membership and what is available at additional cost. This new brand vision aims to showcase the unparalleled value Prime Video offers, which is the freedom and flexibility to enjoy videos from one centralized service but in a variety of ways: either included with Prime, available to rent or buy, or by adding premium and specialty channels.



MISTAKE

How the knowledge of the target audience helped Youtube to create a font?

The company had a clear vision of its users' values and ambitions. When designers created a font and logo, they didn't rely simply on personal preferences, but on the priorities of the audience.



“We ruled out Swiss-type because we wanted it to feel more human; it had to be imperfect, unpredictable, and strong yet rough around the edges; more than a brand ambassador, it also had to be reflective of the community of creators who call our platform home. We called it YouTube Sans.”

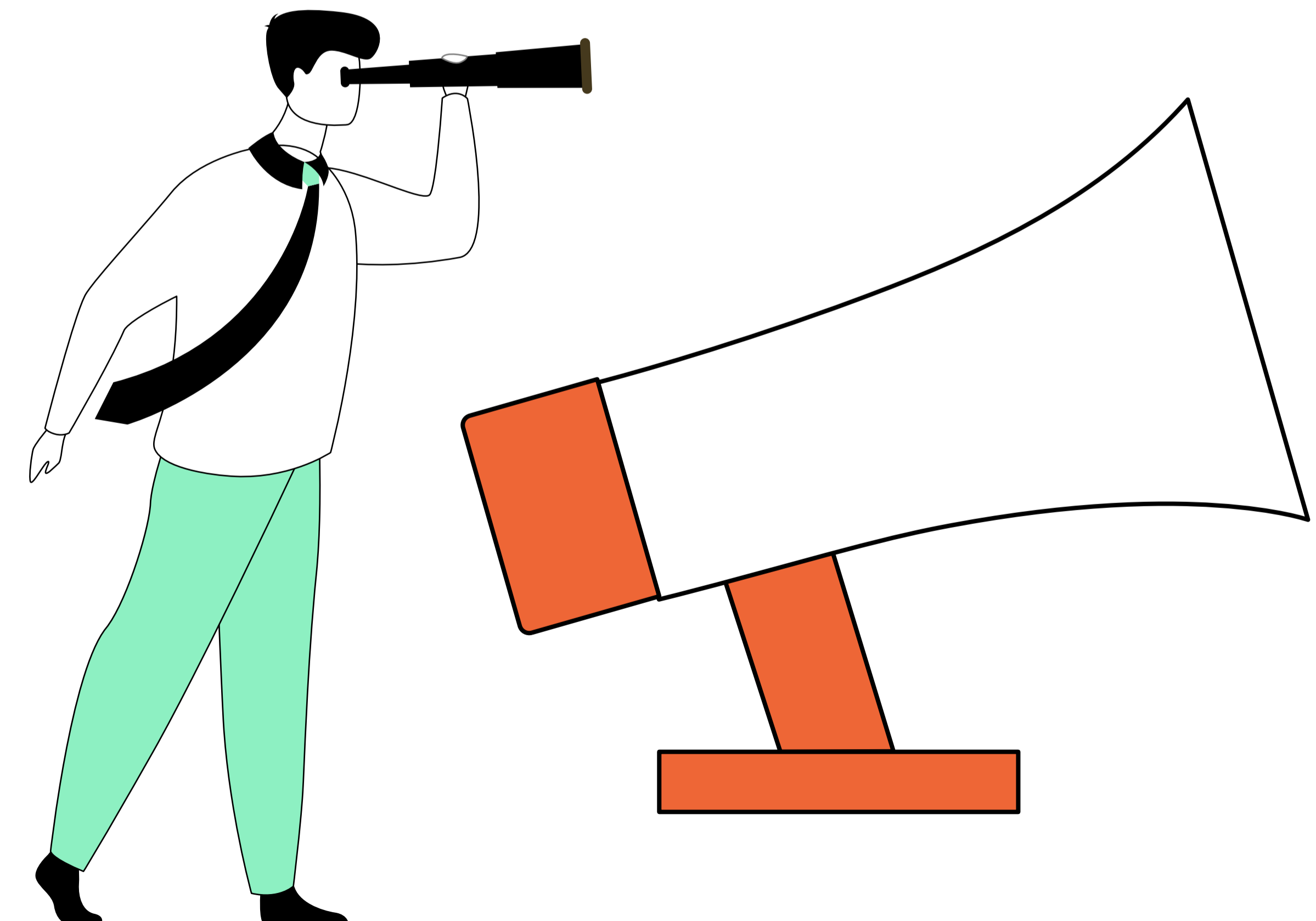
Youtube Sans: The Making Of A TypeFace

EXAMPLES



Guideline target audience

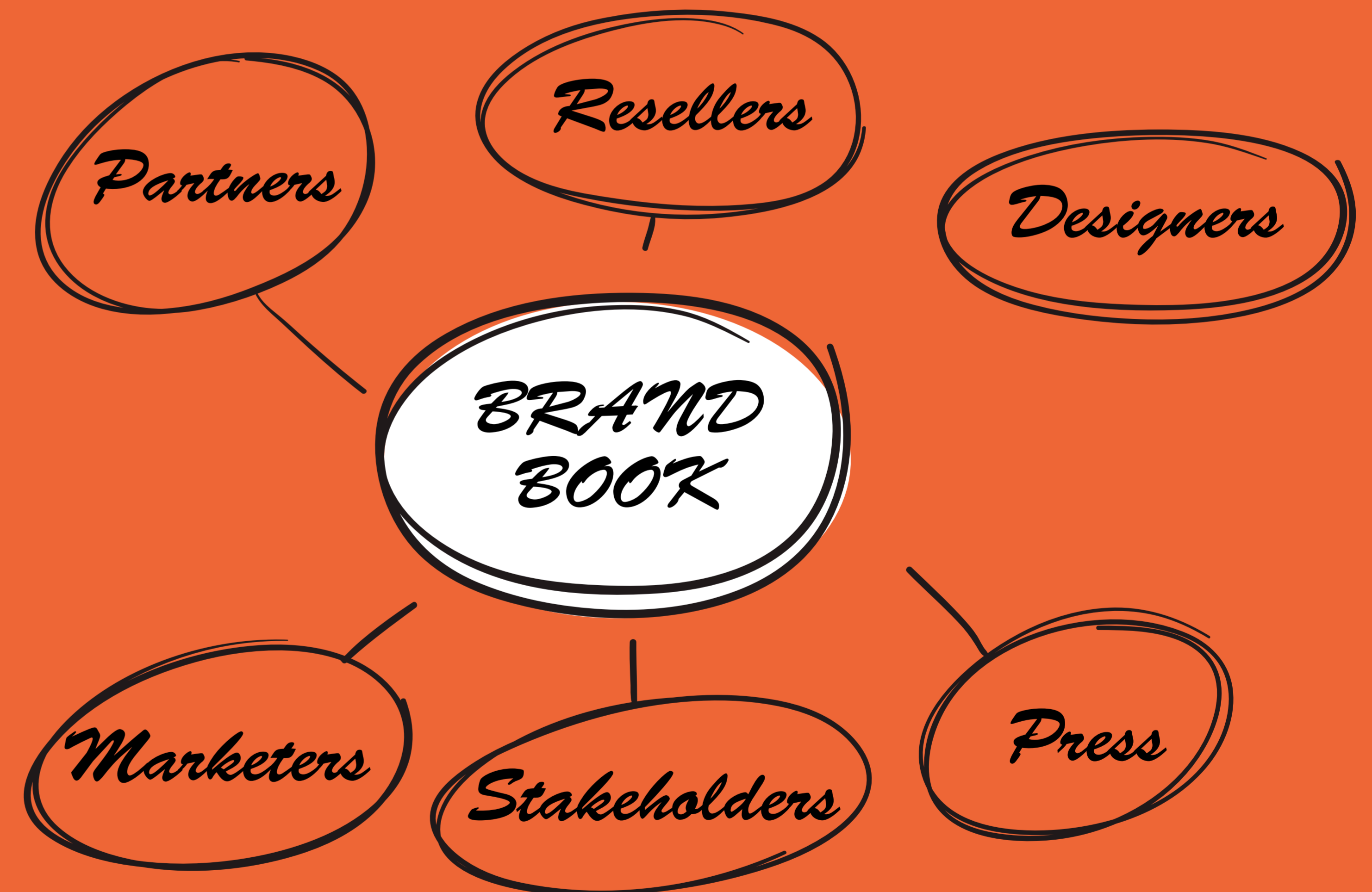
A slim percentage of end customers will ever download the brand book itself, although they will definitely experience indirect consequences. However, it's important to understand who are the primary readers of the document, solve their needs, and resolve concerns.



Who works with a brand book?

- **Partners:** companies who will display your logo, identity, feature your brand in their ads and offers;
- **Resellers:** companies that will act in your name to provide a better service should use the style that's consistent with your brand book.
- **Designers:** people who create visual content for the brand need to have documentation that will guide them for years to come;
- **Marketers:** campaigns and promotional messages should be coherent with values and style in the brand book. For instance, if a Slack campaign would suddenly call their users “ninjas”, that would be a direct contradiction with the brand's style.
- **Press:** journalists that feature information about the company also need guidance on how and when a company's visual can be used.
- **Stakeholders:** investors, partners, and involved vendors need to understand the specifics of the brand's communication, design, and marketing approach. It can help attract funding and partners — if the values of a stakeholder end up corresponding to the brand's vision.

WHO WORKS WITH A BRAND BOOK?



EXAMPLES

ESSENTIAL

Voice and tone

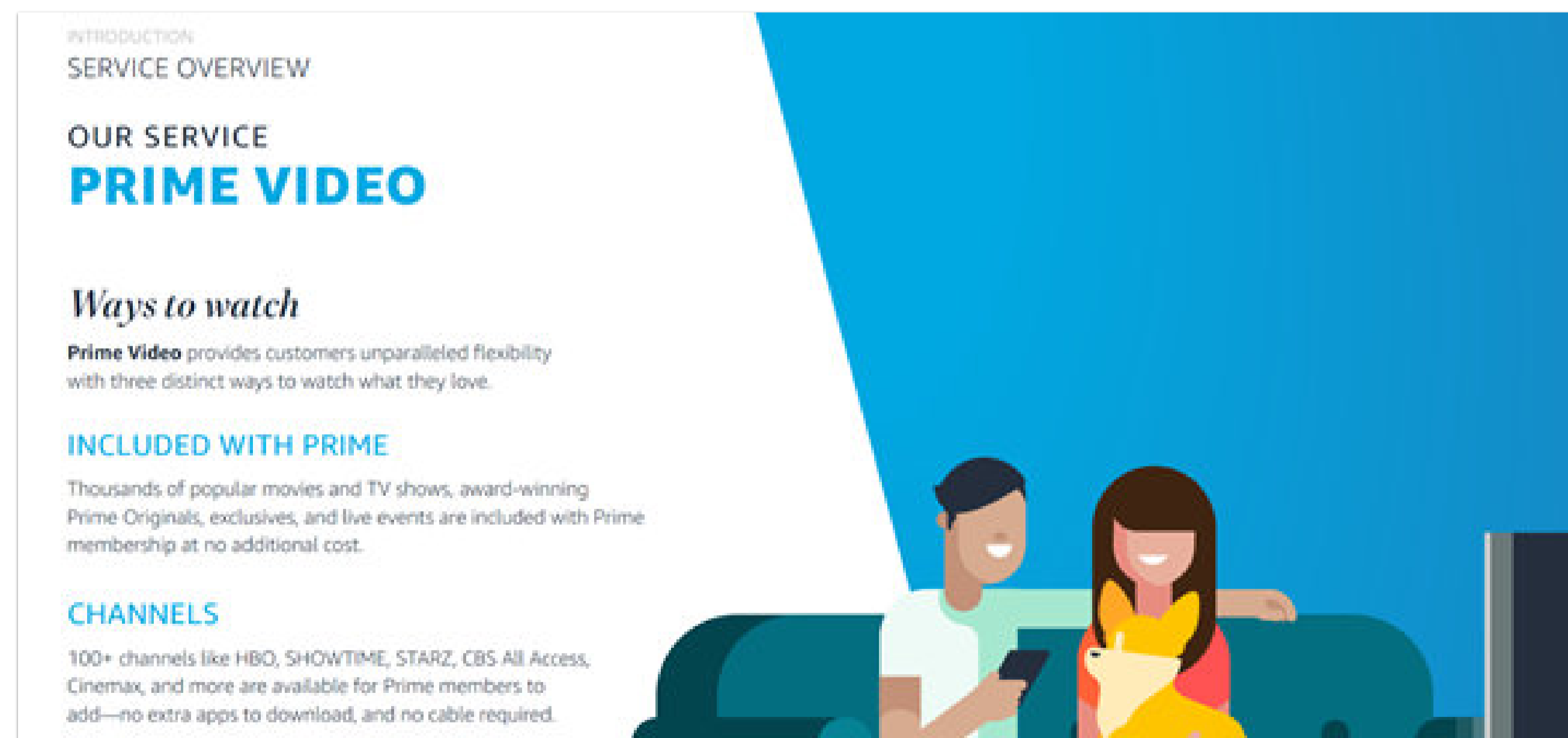
The key to sounding like Slack is to speak directly to the user, in a voice that they can hear and recognize.

We are humans, speaking to humans. We distinguish ourselves from other business communication software through the way we use design and language to make communication feel simpler and more pleasant. By being deliberate and thoughtful with the way we use language, we encourage people to feel a deeper connection with Slack — and how they use it with their coworkers.

While we intend to have a more conversational, human tone in the main; that doesn't mean that we're overly informal. Our tone will vary depending on the audience, the context, and the information we need to get across.

Our voice isn't just an intrinsic part of the product, it's an external representation of the people behind it. And because of that, we aren't necessarily making hard rules about what to say or what not to say. But some of them are a little firm.

NOT ESSENTIAL



MISTAKE

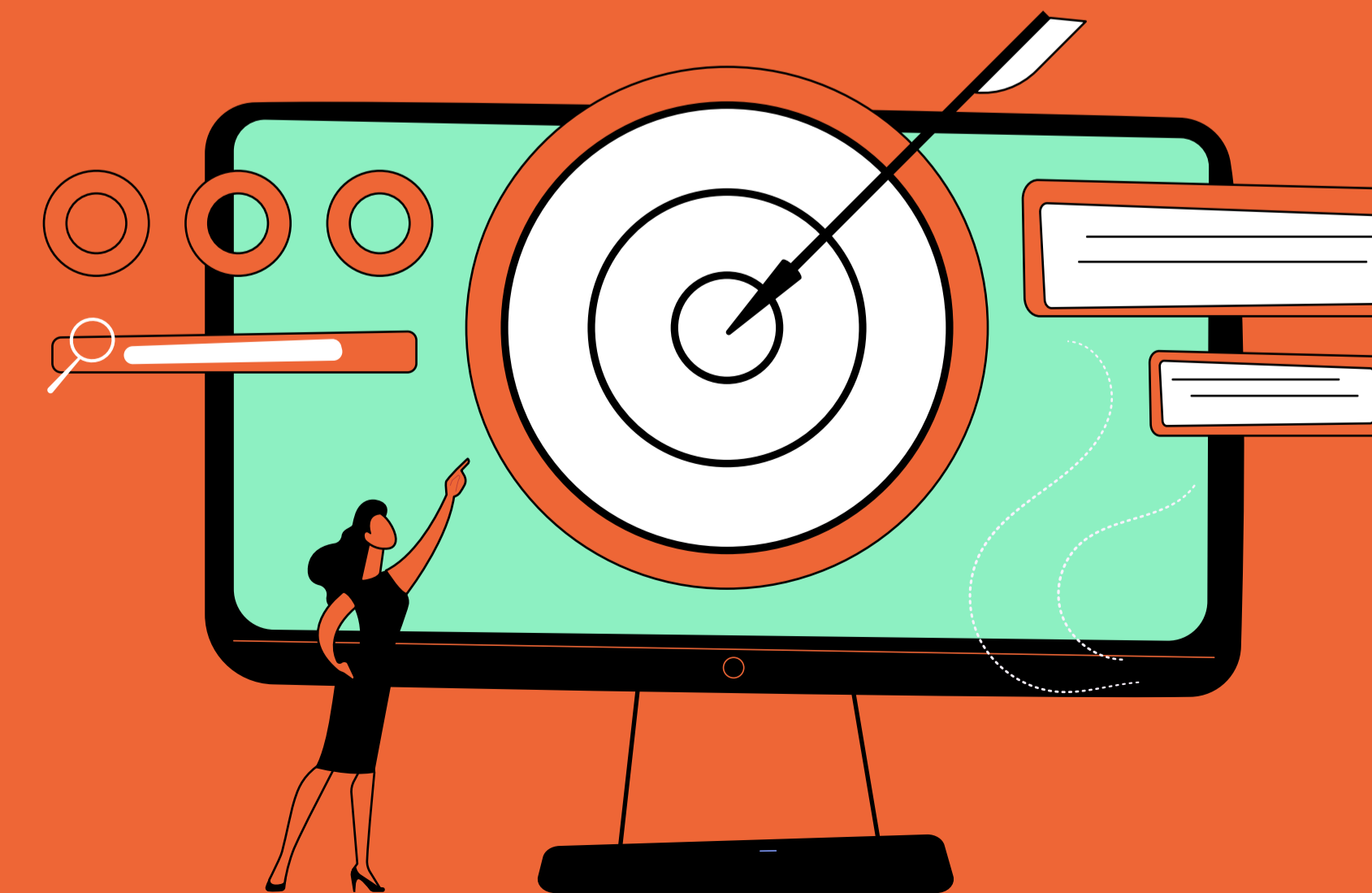


MISTAKE 2: No target audience for the brand book

Designers should take several target audiences into account when they are working on a brand guideline.

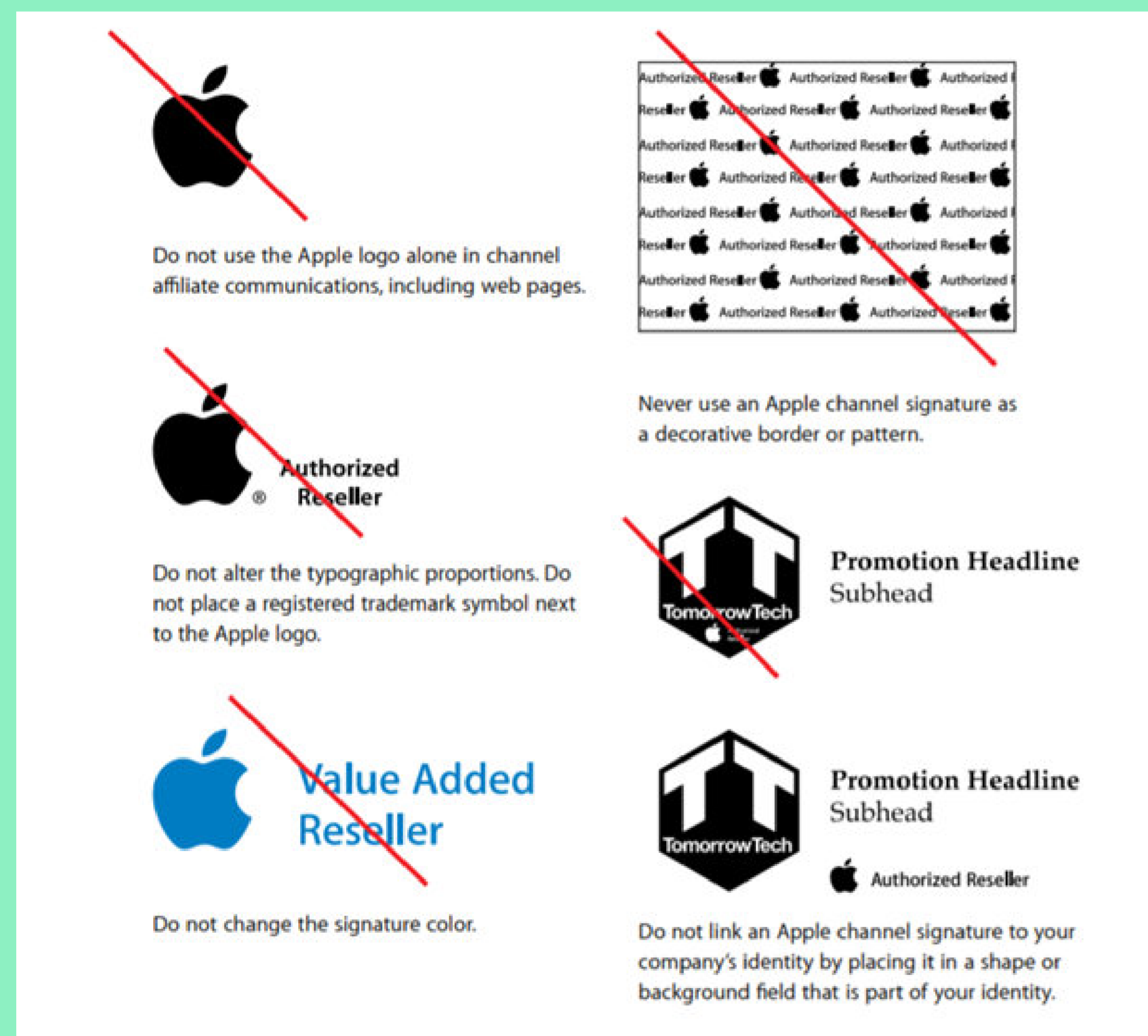
Brand target audience

The creative team should know who is the ideal customer (or several of them), what tone of conversation they prefer, and find natural. Slack, for instance, started building its product with a reference to software developers. Their brand book clearly displays the values of an innovative progressive user, the one who values transparency and creativity over overused stamps.



How Apple documents its identity for resellers?

Apple has official representatives that make the products of the company accessible all over the world, also providing repair and support. These companies act like Apple's representatives and are an important part of maintaining brand identity. This is why Apple has identity guidelines for affiliates and certified partners.



MISTAKE 3: Logo with no context

The increasing usage of automated logo makers makes logo designers reasonably worried about their expertise. Even if the professional can tell the difference between a custom-designed font and graphics, clients might not. If before designers competed with other experts in the field, now they need to take automated solutions into account.

The problem here is that designers struggle with presenting their work in a marketable way. Often, they send the logo in the email.

*Hello,
I hope you are doing well. I finished the logo. Take a look at the final mockup.*

MISTAKE

Automated solutions are already ahead, because they also present logo on the page, merch, notebooks, cups — anywhere. Even though designers put a lot more thought into their results, the final result doesn't reflect it.

The solution is creating a brand book, even if your client didn't ask for a brand book per se. Presenting logos with their usage guidelines, variations, and history is standard practice for high-paid professional designers.



The advantages of such an approach are obvious. Having a guideline has practical benefits for your client. They will be able to start using your logo right away on multiple images. Additional aspects like mission, vision, and inspiration will help their marketing department to understand promotional selling point. **You aren't selling a logo anymore, you are building a brand — and that's a much more valuable service.**

MISTAKE

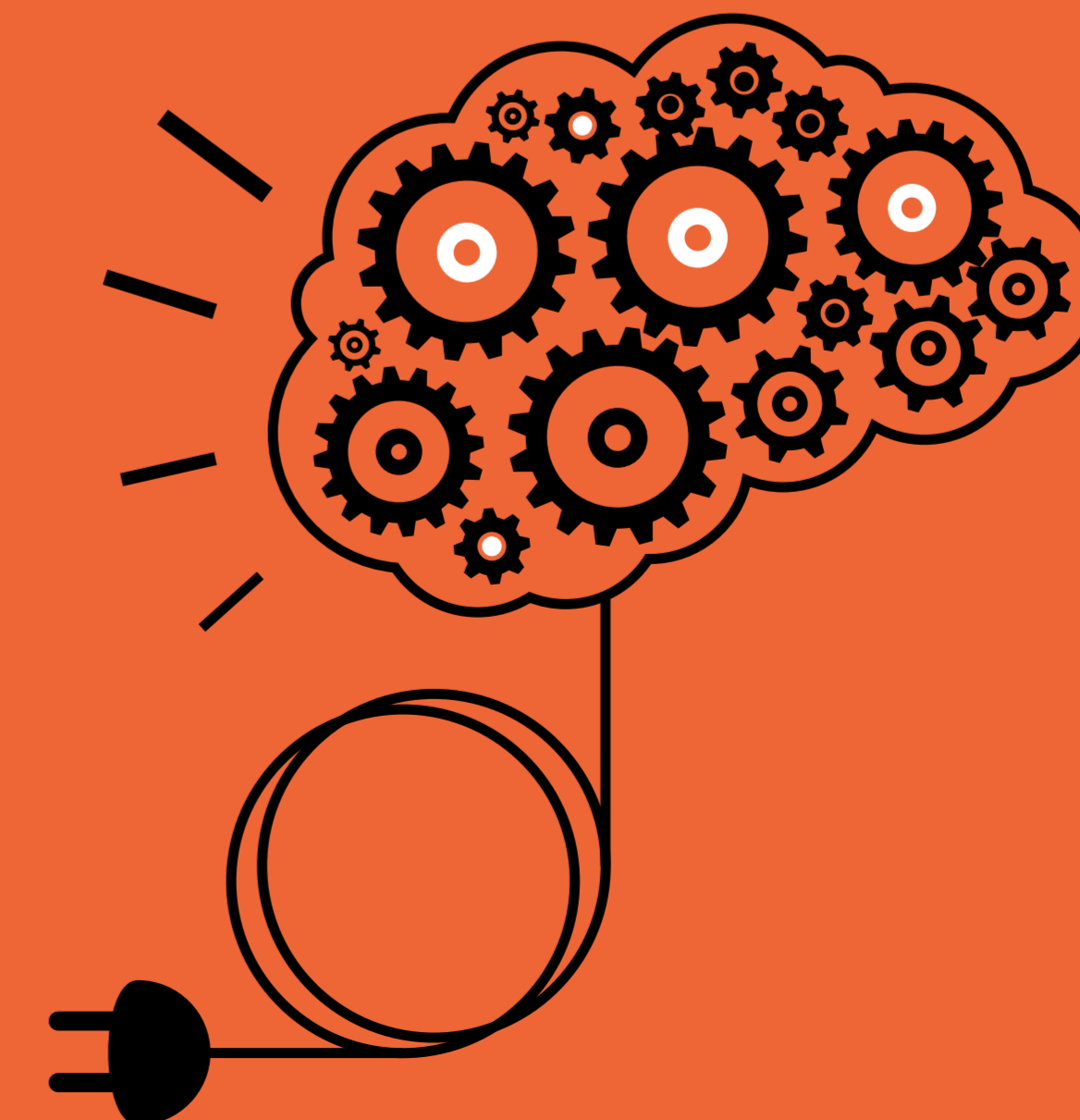


MISTAKE 4: Relying only on creativity

We spend our entire professional lives trying to be creative and think visually. We love looking at inspiration boards, creating mood boards, and finally finding the perfect combination.

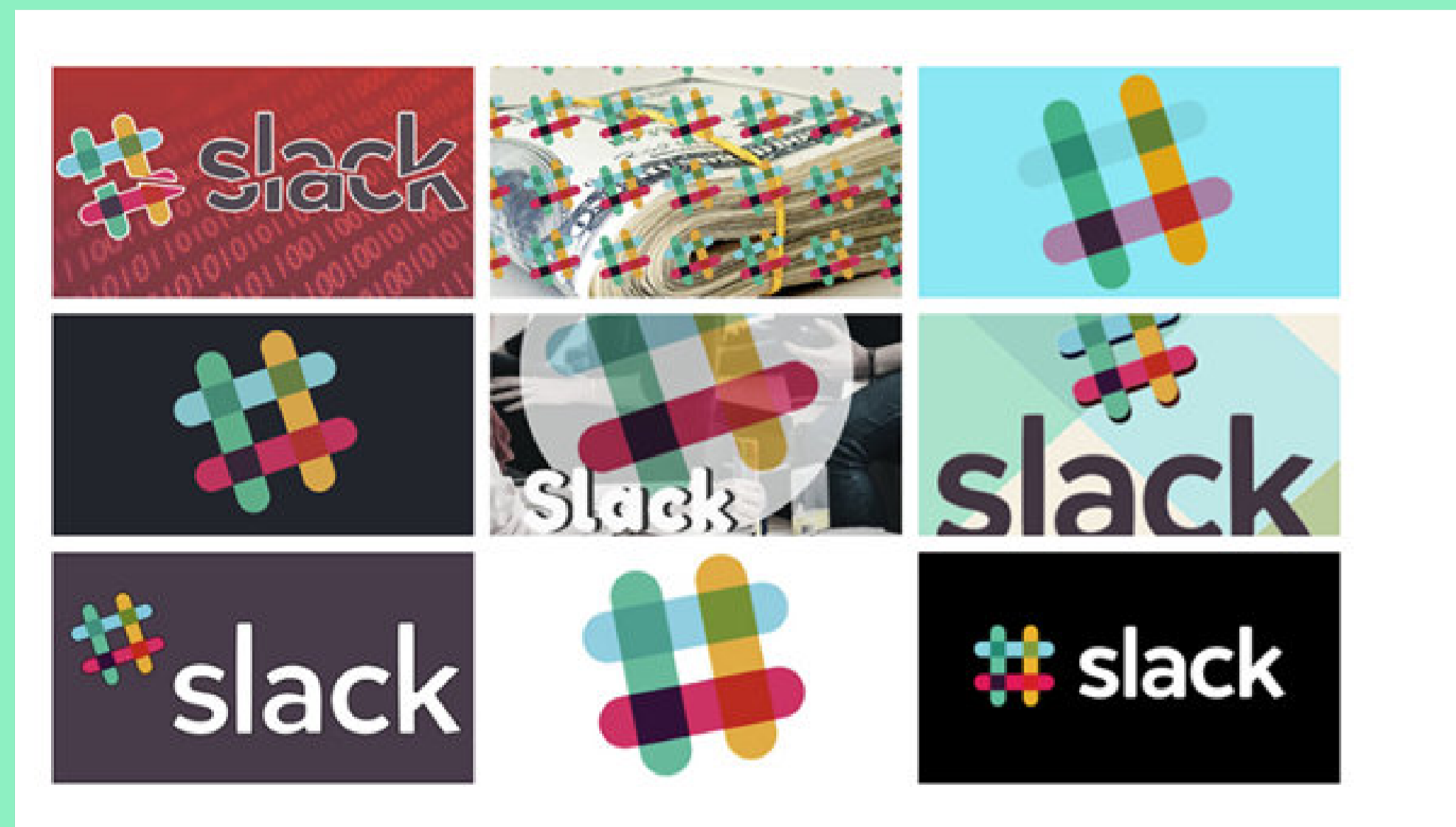
However, the clients of designers (business owners) aren't wired in the same way. When they see a logo, they want to understand how to use it in various contexts, what it reflects about their advantages, and why it's better than what their competitors offer.

When designers redesigned a logo for Slack, they didn't just slap a new mockup in the email. Instead, there's an entire explanation of why the old logo doesn't work



MISTAKE

It was also extremely easy to get wrong. It was 11 different colors — and if placed on any color other than white, or at the wrong angle (instead of the precisely prescribed 18° rotation), or with the colors tweaked wrong, it looked terrible. It pained us. Just look:



This demonstration is rational and logical, and most importantly, easy to understand for anyone beyond the design field.

MISTAKE



SOLUTION



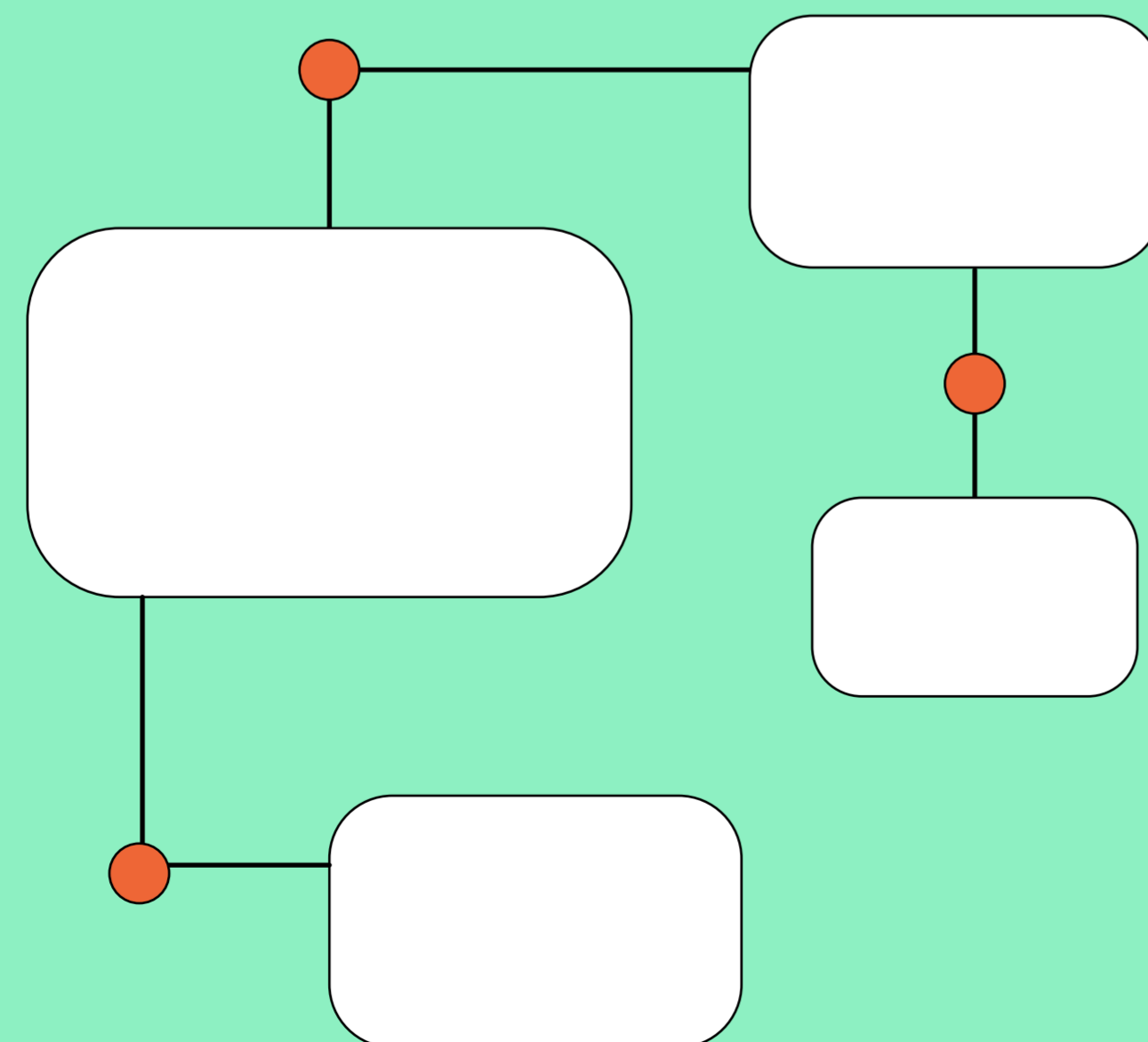
This problem-solution approach is clear to clients and shows the rational side of the designer's thinking.

Make sure that your client understands how much creative and critical thought lies behind your work. Illustrate it with guidelines, examples, and before-after images.

MISTAKE 5: Assets are not organized

Brand identity isn't composed merely by logo and fonts. It's an aspect that's easy to miss for designers that don't have much branding experience. They are focused on their side of the task and don't consider ways in which they could help the entire team.

Your logos, fonts, and guidelines won't just be used by designers. More often than not, they will be applied by people who have only a basic understanding of Photoshop and composition, if any. If there's no organization of all these elements, your work won't be used at its full potential.



- **Think about your work from** a brand owner's perspective. A business owner wants to have ready-to-use assets that can be pushed into the workflow and bring results.
- **Think about colleagues.** Your work on visual elements of the brand is done when it can bring value without your involvement. If other people can apply your guidelines, logos, fonts without your control, you succeeded.
- **Think about stakeholders.** Resellers, partners, investors will work a lot with the fruits of your work. Make sure it's fast and easy for them.

So, you might want to pick a presentation of your work that's easy-to-share, navigate, and re-use.

Ultimate option is choosing a platform that allows you to organize your assets both in the online library and a brand book. An online version will be used for collaboration and sharing, whereas a PDF document creates a more presentable and easy to read framework.

Options of organizing visual elements

Online only	PDF only
Asset management software where designers can organize their logos, fonts, images, and share them with clients and collaborators.	A ready to use and share brand book where all branding assets can be downloaded and used offline. The result is a document, supported by any device.
Advantages: No need to download Easy to create	Advantages A document has a custom design and looks presentable Can be easily exchanged in emails Can be used as a demonstration during presentations Supported on all devices
Who needs Business owners Designers Marketers	Who needs Business owners Designers Team members Stakeholders Marketers



MISTAKE 6: Not enough variations

Even if you created a well-described and explained logo, it's not enough on its own. You need to present clients with options. Design is highly subjective, and the first version will hardly be the ultimate one.

The different options will be utilized for the different applications and usage of the logo. There are endless places and formats on which the logo will need to be. Our job is to think as wide as possible and to give our solution for all anticipated formats.

Similarly, our visuals should be prepared for different contexts - be it in social media, website, printed materials, wide format printing for large-scale graphics or signage, etc.

Overall, providing multiple options shows dedication to the brand and elevates the designer's reputation.

How to style and structure logo and font variations?

Dedicate a separate section to logo variations in your guidelines. Designers and the company's teams can decide how many variations they need, but in our experience, you should include at least five essential types.

1. Primary logo

This is the logo that represents the essence of the branding message. It comprises the main font and visual elements. Also, you can refer to it as the full version of the logo.



2. Stacked logo

A smaller version of the logo that will fit in smaller promotional materials, fields. Instagram regiments the way in which both secondary and essential logos are used on their online brand guidelines.



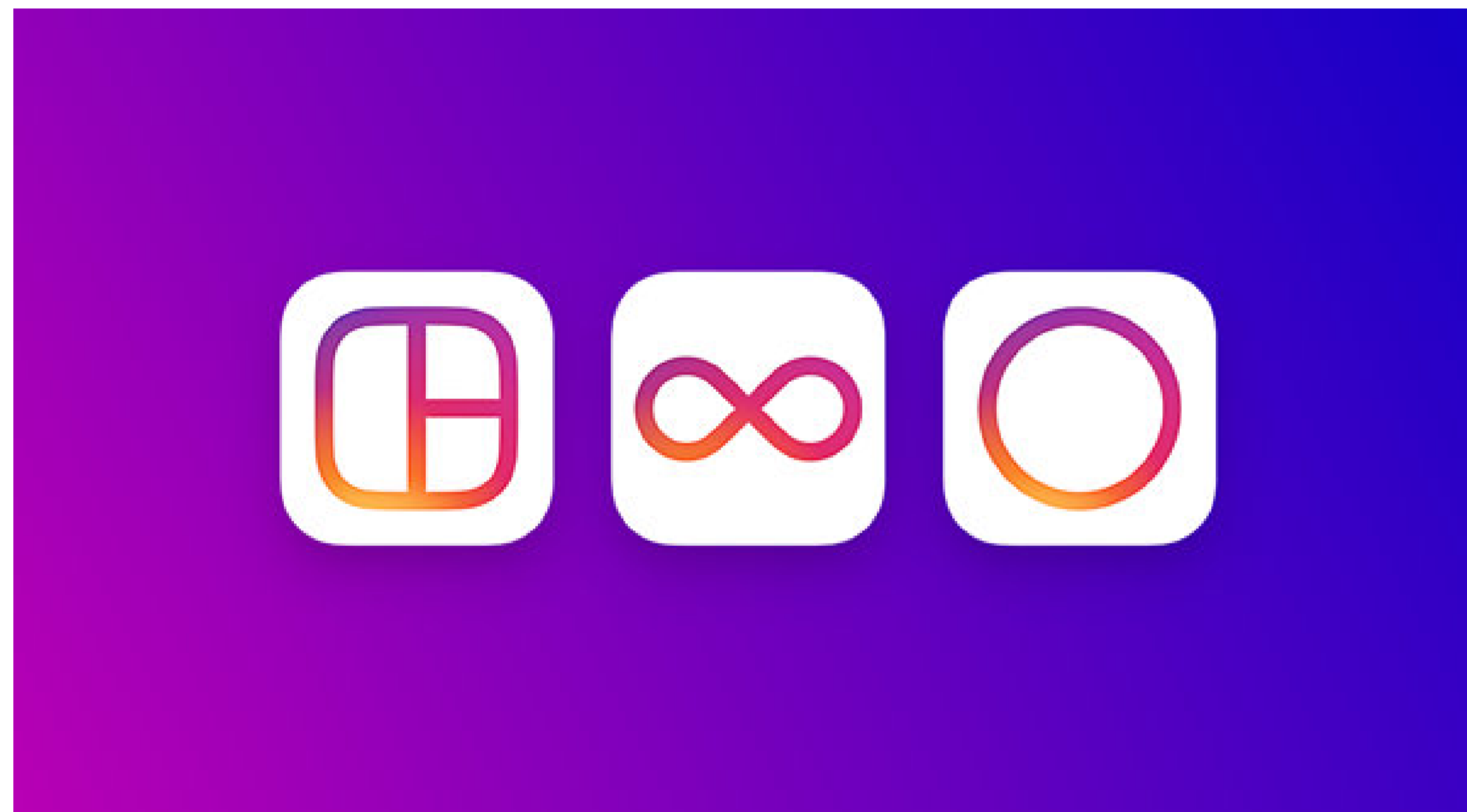
3. Submarks

It's a graphically simplified logo that places the emphasis on the brand name instead. It features the logo in a reduced size, sometimes quality.



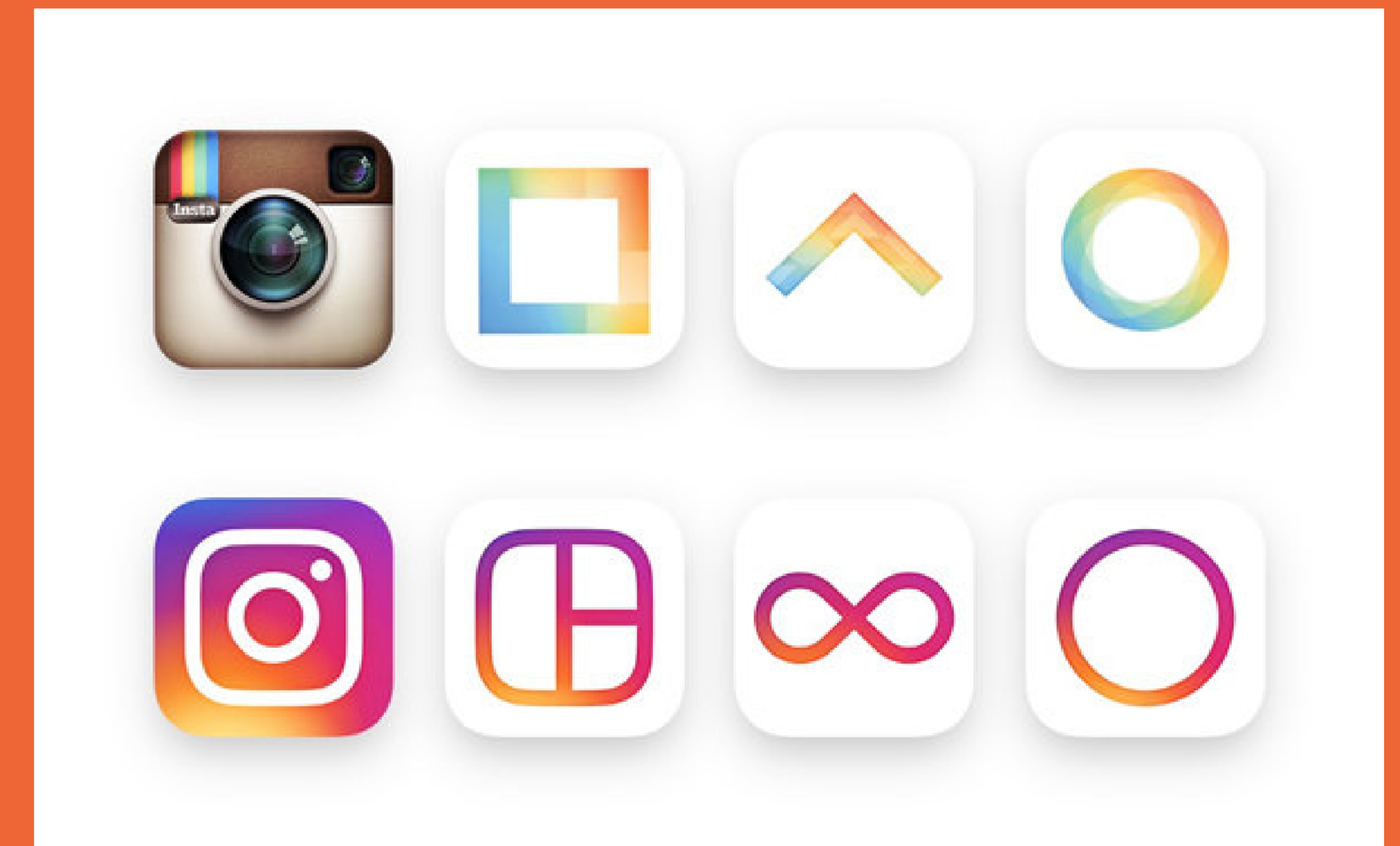
4. Icons

Your clients will use these logos in all the situations where a regular logo doesn't fit. It can be an icon for a web tab, promotional content, branding element, merch decoration. Icons can be performed in different colors, normally within the main palette. They are minimalistic and small.



5. Miscellaneous Logos

These are logos that feature additional elements and are used on special occasions. Some businesses don't have them altogether, but it's better to create one for your client. It might be useful for special promotional activities, business presentations, or creative communication campaigns.



MISTAKE 7: Inconsistency

The goal of a professional designer is to create visuals that follow a specific theme but are still flexible. When you create logo variations, you adapt them to different mediums and occasions. When you are doing that, a priority should also be on keeping the same style across all elements.

By sticking to a unified style throughout all the materials, designers show respect to their brand and end customers.



95% of companies
have formal brand
guidelines



Only 25% of brands
actually stick to their
brand guidelines

It's a sign of professionalism: you demonstrate your ability to create a long-lasting impression with the same tools.



Here's how to keep your work on brand identity consistent:

- **Define main fonts and color palette and stick to them in your work.** Even if a client doesn't ask you about a palette or font profile, it goes without saying that a professional designer delivers those anyway. A logo without a consistent text and color style isn't worth much.
- **Make sure the chosen style is coherent with the brand style.** Do your research, ask clients about their advantages, target audience, competitors.
- **Create a client persona.** A successful brand designer should think far beyond responding to the requirements of a direct client (business owner). The end aim is always the brand's clients. Make sure to have a good understanding of them before proceeding.
- **Explain to your clients what consistency means.** The work of a designer doesn't stop on delivering visual assets. As professionals, we also care about making a long-term impact on our work. Supply clients with all the details of your branding materials and be open to asking questions.

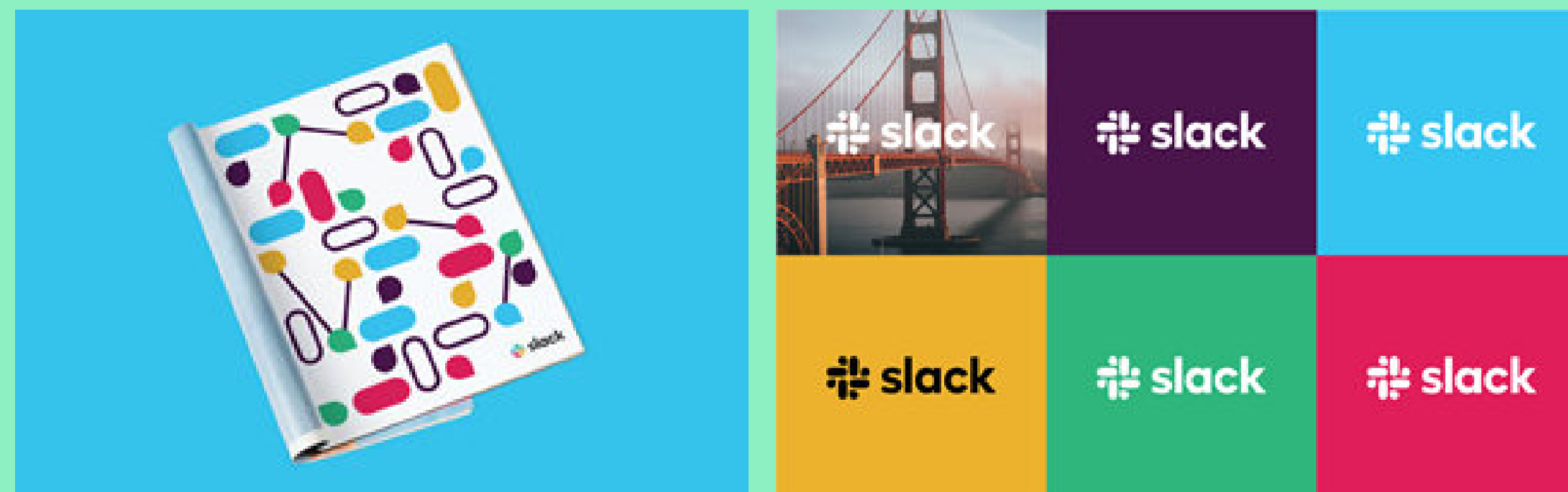
MISTAKE

Most importantly, pick references that will guide your creative process. Having brand identities that inspire you and set the standards for your work is a stepping stone to branding success.

INCONSISTENT



CONSISTENT



Instead of offering customers a bunch of versatile images and icons, boil your visuals down to a single motif, and create variations to it, just like in music. You can organize the results in a brand book — it's the most intuitive and easy-to-use presentation method.

MISTAKE



MISTAKE 8: Not enough use cases

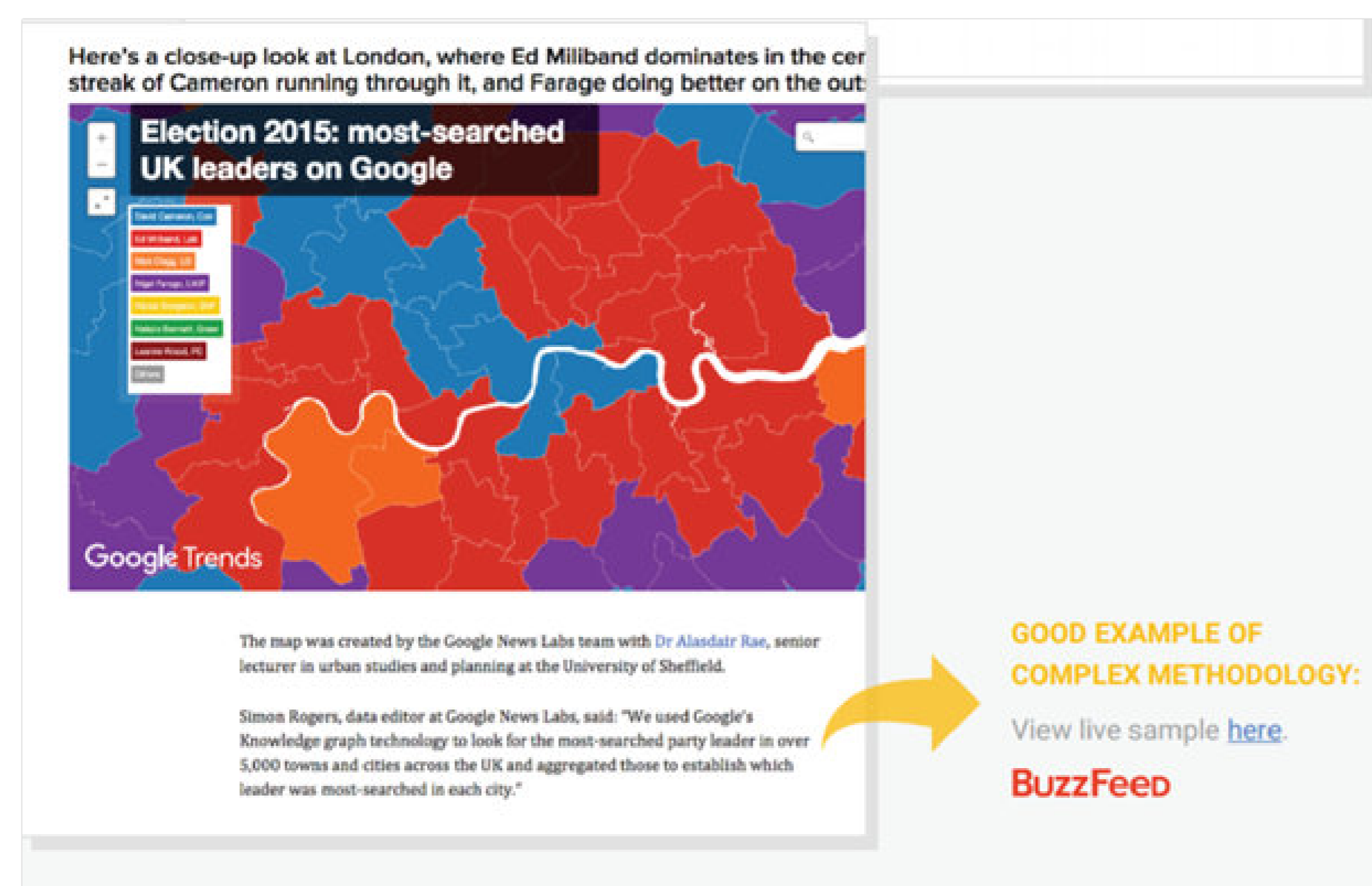
Obviously, designers alone can account for all the circumstances under which their work will be used. It depends on the promotional mix, chosen by the brand, its communication strategy, and resources. Still, it's not an excuse to fully refrain from providing the content.

Logo, brand books, fonts, branding visuals aren't static products. They are dynamically-evolving projects that need context. If you showcase your work in different realistic situations, your clients will perceive your work as something *that already works for their brand*.



MISTAKE

- **Fit logos, fonts, icons, and other branding elements** on different mediums: pages of different formats, screenshots, merchandise, interface.
- **Think about formal and informal communication.** Social media is a friendlier medium where you can allow room for more variation. It's drastically different from official letters, commercial offers, and documentation. Documents of both styles feature visual elements, but they must fit the occasion.
- **Show real examples.** The presentation of the branding material should be similar to the real-life context.



MISTAKE

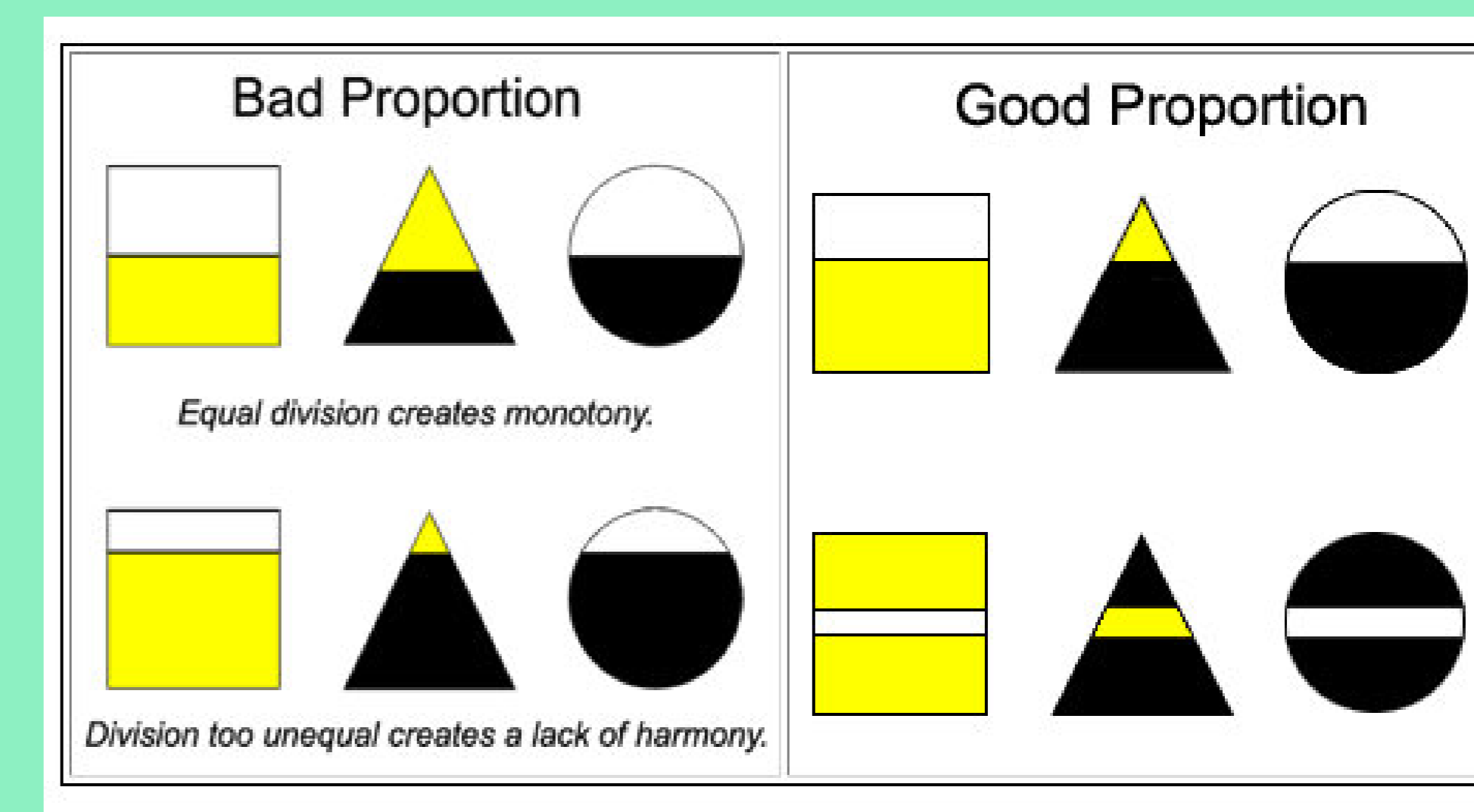


MISTAKE 9: Wrong proportions

When your branding materials will be actually used, clients' team members will have to go beyond images, proposed in the assets. They need to know how to resize the image without distorting the original look. This is where proportions and exact geometry come in.

Proportions are objective parameters behind the look and feel of the visual. It's a way to predict how an image will be perceived.

Most designers are familiar with the laws of composition and rules of good proportion. The image shouldn't be monotonous or imbalanced. Something too orderly is perceived as boring, whereas a chaotic visual is hard to process.

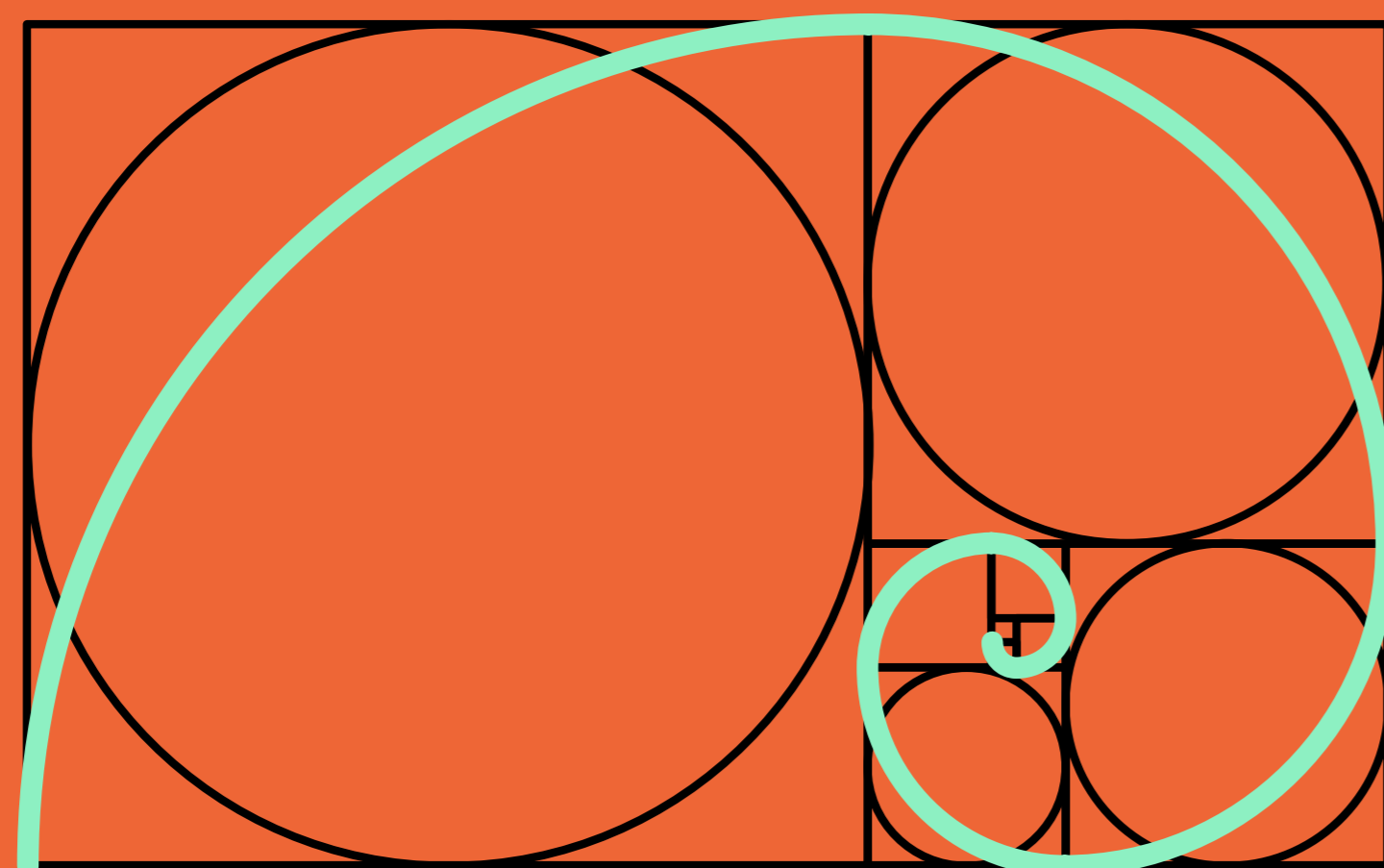


MISTAKE

When you create a brand identity, this criteria is especially relevant. You need to take into account the measurement of each individual element, their its geometry, and figure out the way to apply it to the content.

The geometry of a branding element should be analyzed both standalone and together with other components. For this scope, we recommend using automated assistance. It was hard to find a favorite one on the market, so we built a smart proportion calculator on Gingersauce.

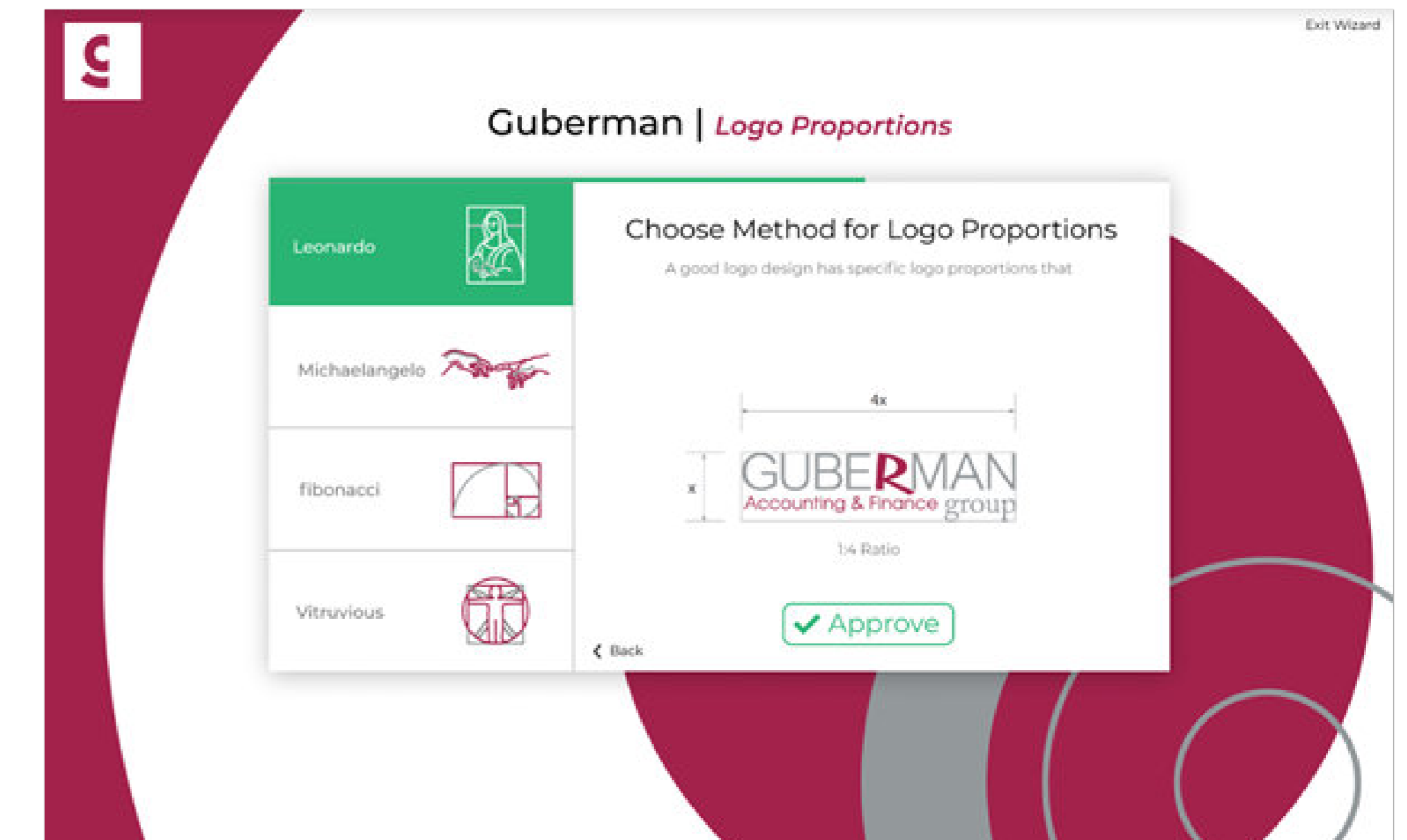
Using smart solutions allows you to rely on algorithms to define the optimal combination of elements and space between them. You can tweak the end layout from your perspective, but it will be based on precise calculations — not just on subjective aesthetics.



MISTAKE



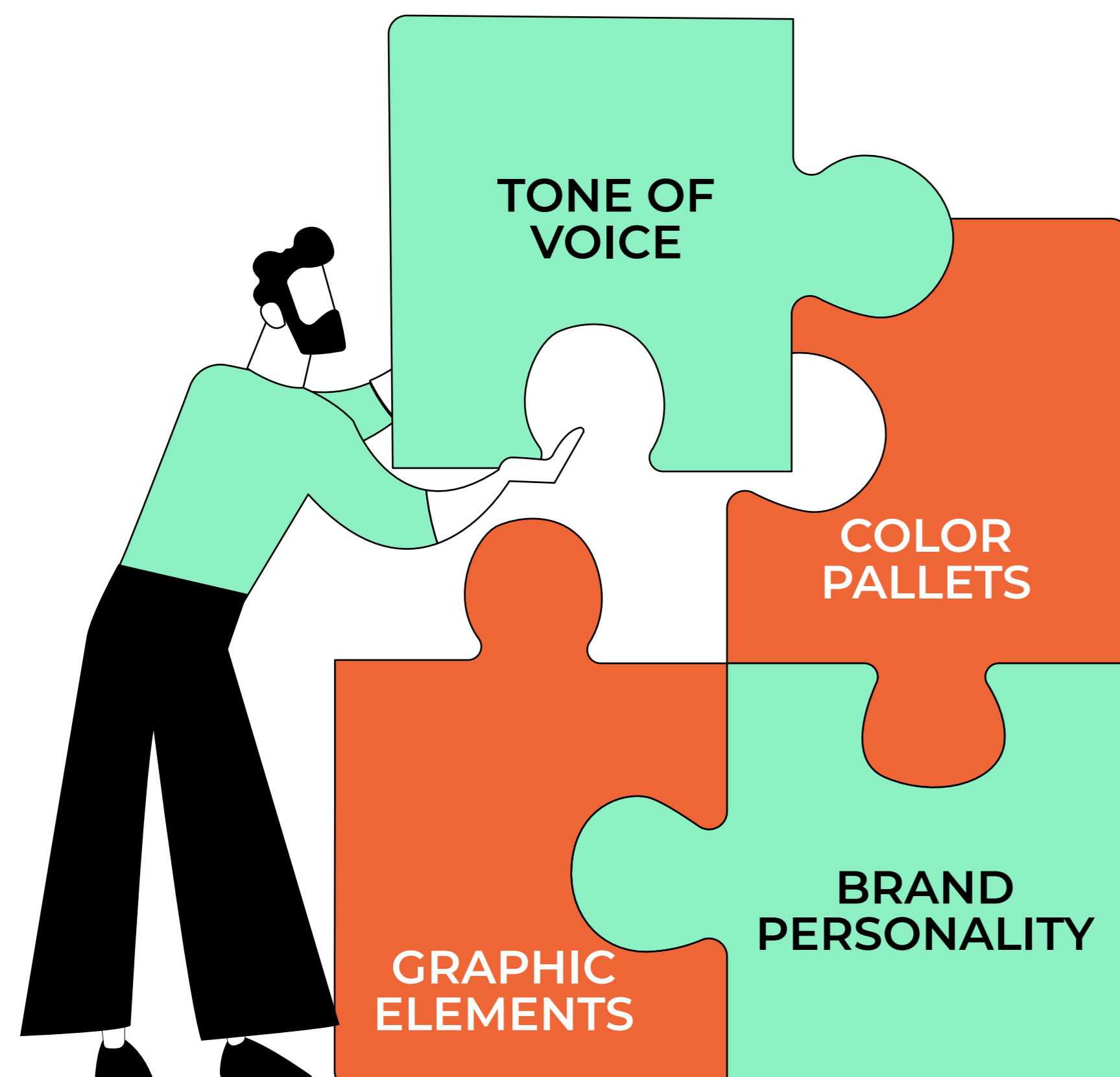
In our Ginger Sauce proportions calculator, you can try on different styles of dividing your logo. You can try Leonardo, Michelangelo, Fibonacci, and Vitruvius. each one is calculated differently. The Fibonacci has an added characteristic. When uploading a logo with specific proportions of: 1:1.618 (golden rule), 2:3, 3:5, 1:3, 1:5, or 5:8 you will get an added description.



MISTAKE 10: Not including additional graphic assets

Even after you are done with creating a brand identity, you can't stop there yet. Technically, you can, but there's another efficient and simple way of improving the look and feel of your visuals.

It's a simple lifehack: always include "supporting" visuals into your logobook, brand guidelines, or visual presentation.



Supporting visuals are the ones that:

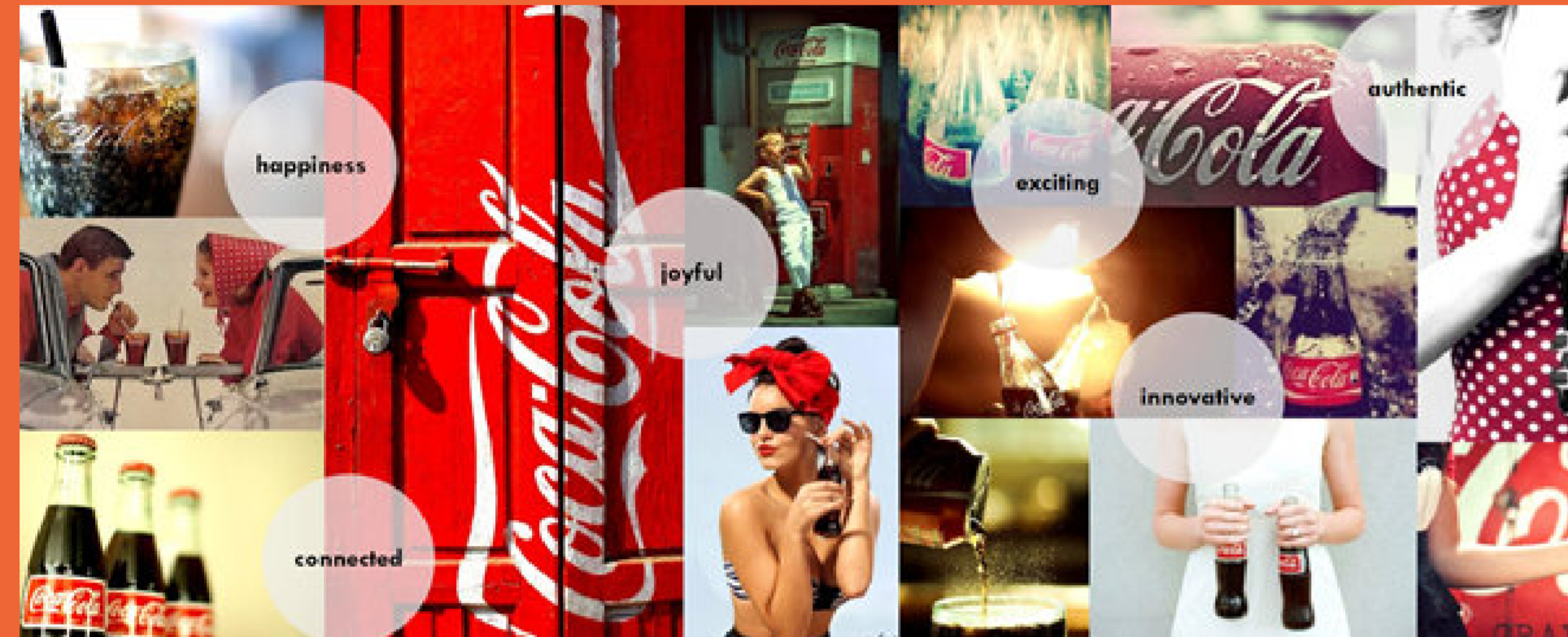
- Reflect brand's personality and tone of voice: use particular colors, symbols, elements
- Showcase brand's values in a creative way;
- Demonstrate the key themes from brands' moodboard;
- Can be used directly in communication and promotional materials
- Are easy to understand even for people with no design background.

Deciding if a logo or font, or even the entire identity work is challenging even for professionals. To make the discussion more productive, add a new level of presentation, that's much easier to understand. A ready image provides a full picture of the feel that a designer is going for.

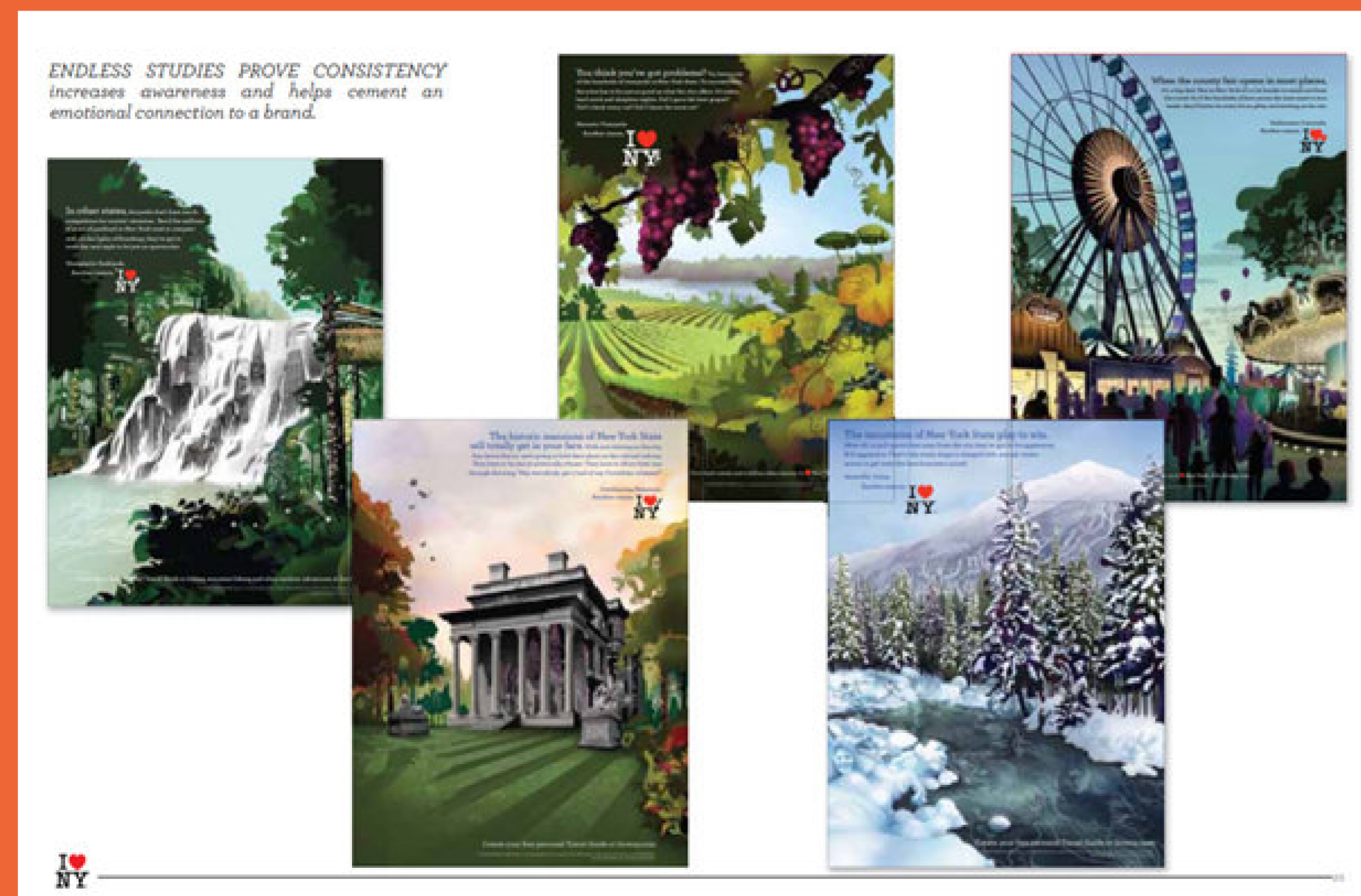
MISTAKE

EXAMPLES:

Supporting images in CocaCola's brand book



Supporting images in I Love NY brand book



MISTAKE



Supporting images in Skype's brand book



This section takes so little time to create but makes a world of a difference in perspective. Taking those extra steps that make the most impact is one of the key abilities of a design professional.

A personalized approach is what sets apart a professional designer from a beginner, let alone an amateur tool.

At Ginger Sauce, we are all about spicing up your design work. So in our brand books, we dedicated entire slides to these supporting images.

MISTAKE 11: No design automation

One thing to remember for designers who want to stay at the top level long-term is: be mindful of burning out. We need to be highly creative - this is the main requirement of this field. If you keep spending your energy on repetitive manual tasks, you are setting yourself up for creative stagnation.

The more complex are the tasks, the easier it is to get lost in mundane processes. This is why so many designers who got to the top level start losing passion for their work.

Automation is an easy and accessible way of solving it. You don't have to use amateur tools that don't suit your needs. There are plenty of professional instruments — like Gingersauce, an expert brand book builder, built by designers and for designers.



Criteria for choosing a professional design tool:

- **Pick software, oriented towards designers.** The market is saturated with instruments that are tailored to business owners. They offer limiting templates that you either have to edit from scratch or can't change at all. There's no middle ground. Instead, go for tools that deliver frameworks, not ready products. You still should be in charge of the process — the tool is merely an assistant.
- **The more you use the software, the more efficient you become.** When you automate something, doing something for the 5th time should be a lot faster than for the first one. If the software doesn't let you build up momentum, it's not sustainable.
- **The tool should offer a ready result.** There are plenty of platforms that are focused on providing storage for assets. While it's useful for organization, such a method doesn't help with delivering a better impression to your clients. Instead, choose a tool that allows you to export your work — preferably in PDF because it's highly accessible.



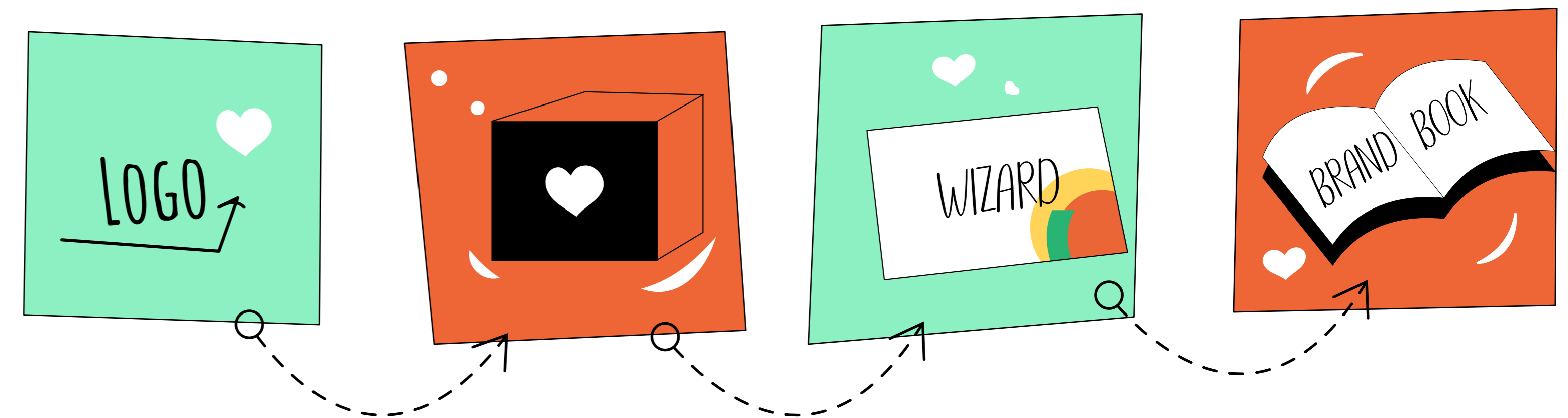
- **Following professional standards.** Mass-use tools offer simple templates that can be used well by non-profits, small businesses, and students. However, they don't have professional templates that could be used on the enterprise level. This limits your growth ability.
- **An active community.** Design software isn't limited to its functionality. A great platform should have a transparent support team, dedicated following, and plenty of educational resources.

Most importantly, it's better to avoid general-purpose platforms. One big platform cannot deliver all services of the same quality. Niche tools that do one task but accomplish it perfectly are a better fit for professionals.

Gingersauce is a professional tool for designers who create brand identities, brand books, guidelines, logos, and fonts. If you work with brands, Gingersauce will help you present your visual in a compelling brand book. The templates are based on enterprise-level brand guidelines — like the ones you've seen all over this e-book. We are inspired by the leaders in design and creative thought. Individual designers should look up to expert teams and brands — and this is exactly our purpose.

Gingersauce — an automated tool for brand book building

Gingersauce is a smart assistant that allows you to add spice to your work. You can generate a professional brand book from just a logo. A wizard will assemble your visuals, help you choose a unified style, and come up with a framework for a professional brand book.



- Upload a logo and wait for the wizard to offer you professional fonts and color palette;
- Insert your assets in an intuitive template and watch them transform into a PDF;
- Create a professional brand book from templates, inspired by design-driven brands;
- Share your personalized PDF with clients;
- Send your work with a full description, precise proportions, multiple use cases, mission, vision, and supporting images;
- Spice up visuals by creating a context for them: Ginger Sauce helps designers tell a story around their creative work.

Creating a brand book on Gingersauce is free. All you need to get started is a logo. The end result is a professional brand book, ready to be demonstrated to the world.

