

BRANDING FOR ASSET AND WEALTH MANAGERS: **YOUR ANCHOR OF STABILITY**

2025 EDITION





Welcome to the third edition of our article on branding for asset and wealth managers. While the core elements of a strong brand remain unchanged – differentiation, simplification, trust, reputation, and monetization – the industry continues to evolve at an unprecedented pace. This update reflects critical shifts shaping the landscape: heightened regulation, AI’s growing role in investment and client engagement, ESG’s evolving significance, accelerating M&A activity, and mounting pressure in talent markets.

Five years since its initial publication and two years after our first update, asset and wealth managers face mounting pressure to achieve greater operational efficiency amid these transformative changes. Yet within this dynamic environment lies an opportunity: your brand, built upon your culture and history, can serve as your anchor of stability.

As we navigate the years ahead, investors will increasingly seek reliable constants in an ever-changing market. Your brand’s authentic identity could be that crucial element of continuity they’re searching for. There’s never been a more opportune moment to pause and reflect on what truly defines your organization.

This article will explore how a well-defined brand can benefit asset and wealth managers, followed by strategies for identifying and articulating your brand’s unique power. But first, let’s establish our fundamental understanding of what constitutes a brand.

LIKE EVERY PERSON, EVERY COMPANY IS UNIQUE



Just as every individual has their own distinct identity, each company possesses a unique character that sets it apart. This uniqueness is the foundation of a brand's power.

As Markus Kramer defines it: “A brand differentiates something or someone from the competition and inspires trust, simplifies choice by reducing risk, stimulates demand and creates pricing power and – if all goes well – builds loyalty and creates value over time.”¹

Your organisation's identity today is the culmination of countless decisions, actions, and experiences woven together over time. What truly distinguishes a company isn't simply its products or services – it's the deep-rooted cultural DNA that shapes everything you do: your fundamental values, core beliefs, and most importantly, your reason for being.

“Profit for a company is like oxygen for a person. If you don't have enough of it, you're out of the game. But if you think your life is about breathing, you're really missing something.”

PETER DRUCKER,
MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT, EDUCATOR AND AUTHOR

BRAND: A TREASURE ASSET AND WEALTH MANAGERS STILL NEED TO FIND



The financial industry still lags in embracing the power of brand. This becomes strikingly clear in the sixth edition of the Responsible Investment Brand Index (RIBI™), which analysed over 600 asset managers worldwide. The findings reveal that only about half of these firms articulate their purpose – that vital heartbeat that defines their reason for being.²

Furthermore, when we assessed the quality of purpose statements using our objective methodology, the results were revealing: the same panel of asset managers scored an average of just 2.4 on a scale from 0 (mediocre) to 5 (excellent). This points to significant room for improvement across the industry.

The financial sector's hesitancy around brand building is perhaps understandable – it's an industry that naturally gravitates toward facts and figures for decision-making, often keeping emotions at arm's length. Yet this creates a fundamental disconnect. Customers ultimately make their buying decisions based on feelings and emotions. As the saying goes: "No emotion. No decision."³

Decades of neurobiological research have revealed a fundamental truth about human decision-making: while we use facts and figures to justify our choices, it's emotion that ultimately triggers the decision to buy. This insight has profound

implications for asset and wealth managers – but what specific benefits can you expect from a clearly defined and powerfully articulated brand?

A brand helps to differentiate – a critical advantage in today’s crowded marketplace. Consider the asset management landscape in Europe alone: approximately 4,500 managers compete for the same clients, offering nearly 70,000 different funds. In this sea of choices, a distinctive brand serves as your beacon.⁴

It builds trust. Trust stands as the bedrock of client relationships in asset and wealth management – perhaps more so than in any other industry. Even the most accomplished managers face periods of underperformance, and it’s trust that keeps clients committed during these challenging times. This loyalty is particularly critical given the substantial costs of acquiring new clients. The trust imperative has taken on new dimensions with the rise of responsible investing. Asset managers now face unprecedented scrutiny of their ESG commitments from all sides – clients, the public, media, and their own employees. The stakes are high: doubts about sincerity can quickly escalate into accusations of greenwashing. For firms genuinely committed to responsible investment, their brand becomes their shield. By embedding authentic ESG beliefs into their brand identity, they create a natural defence against misplaced scepticism while reinforcing their true commitment to responsible practices.

It simplifies choice. A clear and inspiring identity simplifies client decisions. Consider Google’s purpose: they don’t simply ‘build a search engine’ – they ‘help organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful.’ Similarly, an asset manager who focuses on ‘creating peace of mind for people and society’ resonates more deeply than one merely ‘generating long-term returns.’ This isn’t to diminish the importance of the ‘what’ – how you create and deliver value remains essential. Rather, it’s about combining technical excellence with emotional resonance. When firms successfully blend both elements in their brand identity, they become memorable, distinctive, and admired. This powerful combination attracts and retains not just clients and prospects, but also the exceptional talents needed to drive continued success.

It creates pricing power: Pricing power through brand strength has become a critical advantage as the industry grapples with squeezed margins from rising operational costs and intense fee competition. Look beyond financial services to brands that have mastered this challenge: Apple, BMW, Nespresso, and Evian. These companies consistently command premium pricing through distinctive positioning and flawless brand activation, both internally and externally in their organisations.

It protects your reputation: In today’s world, an ill-intentioned person can post a message that bad-mouths you. The moment this happens, you have a big problem to solve, even if what is being said is completely false. You are much stronger in such a situation if your brand is solid, well expressed and properly activated (i.e. visible to your target audience). This will allow you to make your case with confidence. Without a strong brand to back you up, you are reduced to playing defence – a much weaker strategy.

INTERNAL BENEFITS: CULTURE, TALENT, AND M&A



A strong, well-articulated brand delivers benefits both inside and outside your organization. Internally, it creates a unifying culture, aligning your teams around shared ambitions and goals. Your brand's strength is directly proportional to how consistently and enthusiastically your people – your first ambassadors – project it into the marketplace.

This cultural dimension has become increasingly crucial for talent acquisition. Today's professionals seek more than just compensation; they're searching for meaning and purpose. Your brand identity and culture can be the deciding factor in whether top talent chooses to join your firm...or not.

The importance of a clearly defined culture becomes even more critical during mergers and acquisitions. In an industry built on human capital and expertise, even the most financially sound deals can unravel due to cultural incompatibility. This underscores why understanding and aligning organizational cultures is just as vital as analysing financial statements and strategic fit.

So how does one go about identifying and articulating a strong brand?



Your brand's true essence already exists within your organisation – you know it better than anyone else. Any branding partner should recognise this fundamental truth with humility: their role is to help you uncover and articulate your brand, not to invent it from scratch.

A successful branding initiative requires a robust methodology that delivers results that are uniquely yours, forward-looking, and concrete. Here are the essential elements it must address:

Genuine. In today's transparent world, there's nowhere to hide – and no reason to. True brand power flows from absolute integrity. You cannot – and should not – pretend to be something you're not. Your external brand must be an authentic reflection of your internal reality, and vice versa. What you project to the world must mirror who you truly are at your core. This is what we mean by integrity from the inside out.

Shared. We've seen it too often: a brand project concludes with loose agreement on the story, only to fragment like a scattered flock of birds. Team members drift off in different directions, each telling their own version – some abbreviated, some embellished, some completely off-course. This fragmentation undermines the very foundation of brand building: consistency in how your unique position, proposition, and story are conveyed both internally and externally. Your brand's strength is directly proportional to the consistency of its expression. That's why your methodology must forge perfect alignment throughout the organization, ensuring everyone understands not just who you are, but how to communicate it authentically at every touchpoint.

Simple. The wealth and asset management industry often hides behind a wall of technical jargon. But selecting the wrong language and tone for your brand carries significant risks. Your organisation may be authentic at its core, but this authenticity loses impact if it's buried under complex terminology that outsiders struggle to understand and connect with. Jargon rarely stirs emotions – and emotions drive decisions. When your brand speaks with clarity and resonance, it does more than communicate; it inspires. This human connection helps drive decisions and strengthens loyalty among both customers and talent. A professional branding methodology ensures end up with a precisely defined message that resonates.

Efficient. A branding project, by its cross-functional nature, involves multiple stakeholders across your organization. While broad participation is essential, time is valuable – the sooner you complete the process, the sooner you can harvest its benefits. Your organization's complexity doesn't have to dictate the complexity of your branding journey. A sound methodology leverages proven frameworks that work efficiently at any scale.



When selecting a branding partner, organizations often feel drawn to agencies from outside the financial sector, attracted by their fresh perspective and experience from industries with more advanced branding practices. While this outside viewpoint has merit, industry expertise remains crucial.

Working with partners who understand wealth and asset management significantly reduces the learning curve and demonstrates immediate grasp of your context and audience. It eliminates the frustration of lengthy ‘education sessions’ that can turn intended branding workshops into basic industry primers – an experience that often leaves senior executives feeling their time has been wasted.

Even if well-intentioned agencies absorb these learning costs, the opportunity cost to your organization is real. The ideal partner combines both fresh thinking and deep industry knowledge, allowing you to move directly into meaningful brand development.



In today's dynamic environment, identifying and communicating your core values has never been more critical - they're your foundation for projecting stability, confidence, and forward momentum.

While product excellence and operational efficiency matter, your brand holds the real power to differentiate, attract and retain both clients and top talents, and ultimately protect your margins in an increasingly competitive landscape.

A well-structured branding initiative does more than just define your identity - it becomes a catalyst for strategic transformation, aligning stakeholders and driving meaningful organisational change.

The question isn't whether to start – it's why wait?



JEAN-FRANÇOIS HIRSCHEL

Jean-François Hirschel is the founder and CEO of H IDEAS, a company which aims at reestablishing trust in the financial world. His professional expertise lies in strategically positioning financial services companies at brand and product level. Hirschel has held senior leadership positions at Société Générale and Unigestion. He holds a MSc from EPFL Lausanne, Switzerland, and has profound knowledge and experience in Institutional, Private and Retail Banking and Asset Management.

Jean-François Hirschel
CEO and Founder
H-Ideas S.A.
Rue de la Cité, 1
1204 Geneva, Switzerland
tel: +41 22 561 8412
jf@h-ideas.ch
www.h-ideas.ch



MARKUS KRAMER

Markus Kramer is managing partner at Brand Affairs, a specialist consultancy with expertise in strategic positioning and brand building. Kramer has held global executive roles in Brand Management across numerous industries. He holds an MBA from the University of Oxford and is a visiting Senior Fellow in Strategic Brand Management at Bayes Business School London. Kramer is author of The Guiding Purpose Strategy, A Navigational Code for Brand Growth.

Markus Kramer
Managing Partner
Brand Affairs AG
Mühlebachstrasse 8
8008 Zurich, Switzerland
tel: +41 44 254 80 00
markus.kramer@brandaffairs.ch
www.brandaffairs.ch

