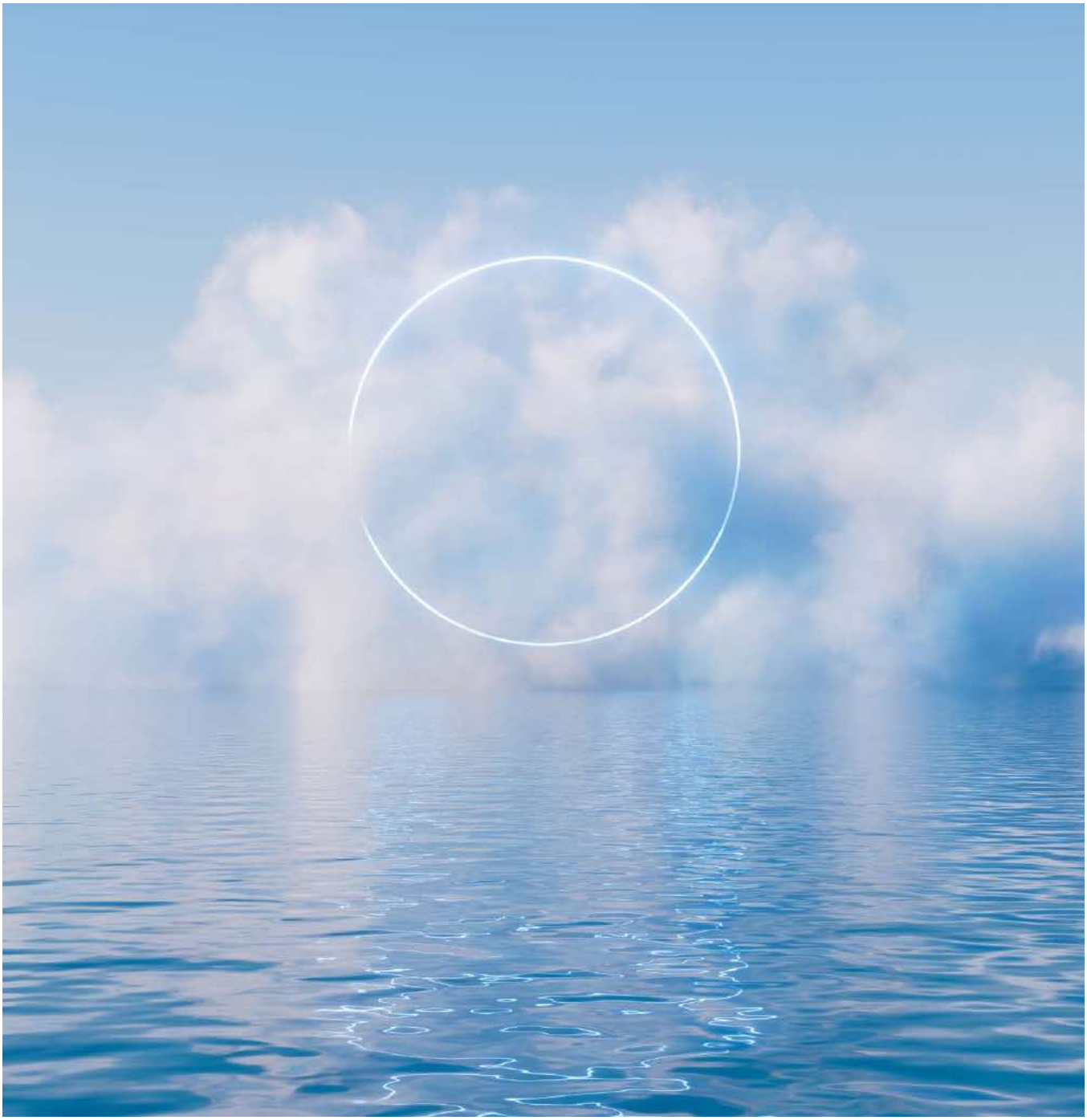
BRANDING FOR FINANCIAL FIRMS: YOUR ANCHOR OF STABILITY

2027 EDITION

By Markus Kramer and Jean-François Hirschel





Welcome to the fourth edition of our article on branding for financial firms. While the core elements of a strong brand remain unchanged (differentiation, simplification, trust, reputation and monetisation), the industry continues to evolve at an unprecedented pace. This update reflects critical shifts shaping the landscape: heightened regulation, technology and AI commoditising products and services, accelerating M&A and mounting pressure in talent markets.

Seven years after our first edition, financial firms 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 organisation. In an era where technology is commoditising many of your unique selling points and tighter regulations are leading to standardisation, your identity may be the only thing that sets you apart in the market.

This article will explore how a well-defined brand can benefit financial firms, 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.



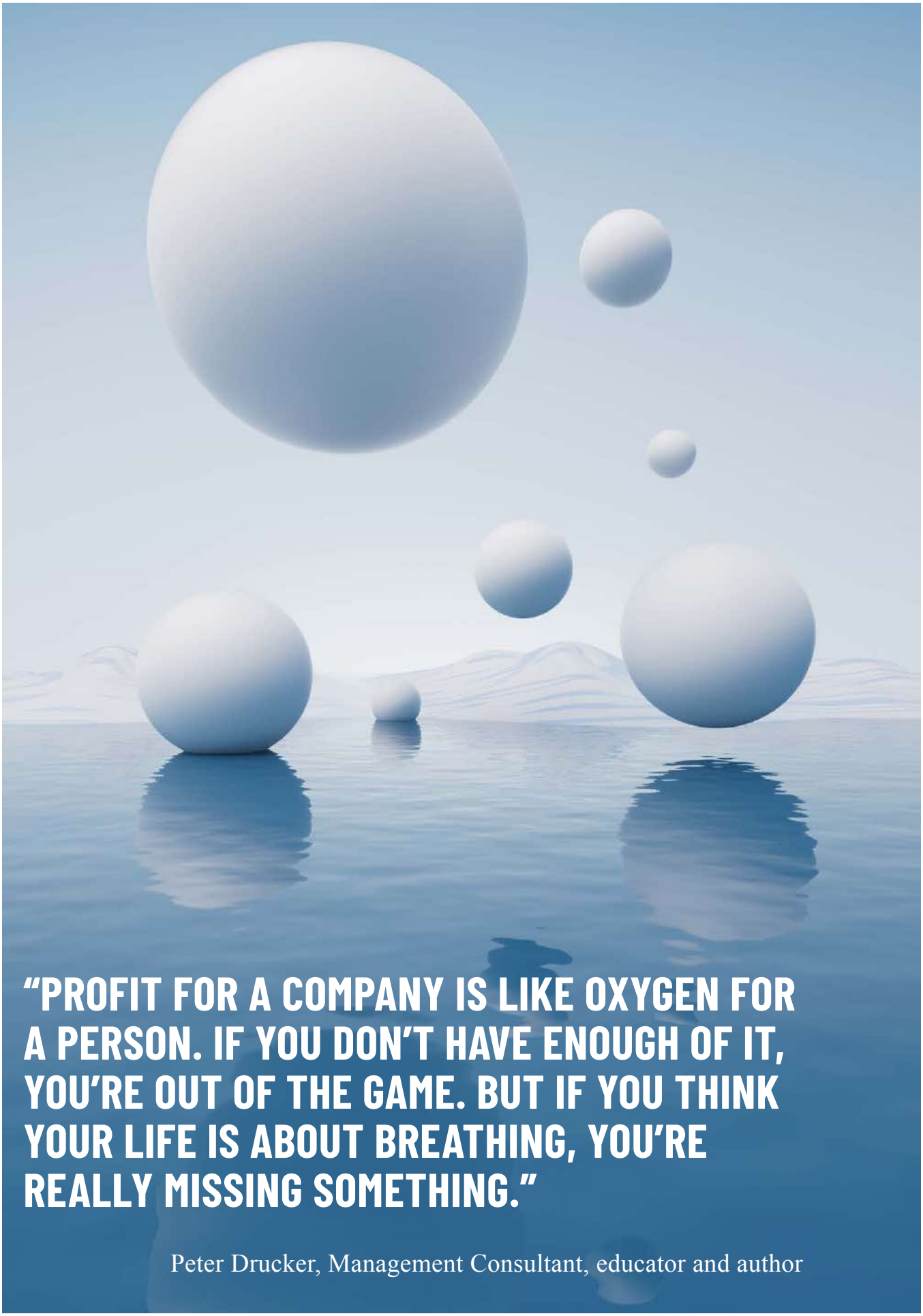
LIKE EVERY PERSON, EVERY COMPANY IS UNIQUE

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 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.

1 Markus Kramer and Tofig Husein-Zadeh, The Guiding Purpose Strategy, extended edition, 2020.



“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 THE FINANCIAL INDUSTRY STILL NEEDS TO FIND

The financial industry still lags in embracing the power of brand. This becomes strikingly clear in our family of brand identity indices: RIBI™ for asset managers worldwide, SPBIx™ for Swiss private banks and SEAMIx™ for Swiss external asset managers. Together, they cover more than 900 financial firms. RIBI findings reveal that only about half of asset managers 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 average RIBI purpose score is around 2.5 on a scale from 0 (mediocre) to 5 (excellent). This points to significant room for improvement across the industry.

2 Responsible Investment Brand Index (RIBI™) 2026, eighth edition, www.ri-brandindex.org. Of the 632 asset managers in scope, 52% express a purpose; their purpose statements score 2.5 out of 5 on average. RIBI 2026 rates 654 asset managers, SPBIx™ 59 Swiss private banks and SEAMIx™ 220 Swiss external asset managers, 933 firms in total.

There are some common patterns we find across these three indices and across the more than 900 financial firms they cover:

- Lack of distinctiveness, with organisations often referring to widely used values like ethics, independence and transparency. How will investors choose you rather than a competitor if everyone looks the same?
- The human side is underrepresented. Presentations focus on technique and jargon, yet behind assets under management are millions of retirees, and behind wealth are lifetimes of hard work and the question of what will be left to the family.
- A focus on how things are done rather than what they do and why. The financial industry shows the recipe, rather than the delicious cake.

The financial sector's hesitancy around brand building is perhaps understandable. It's an industry that naturally gravitates towards 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 financial firms. 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: more than 4,600 managers compete for the same clients, offering nearly 70,000 different funds.[4] Switzerland has 230 banks and more than 1,400 FINMA-licensed independent asset managers.[5] In this sea of choices, a distinctive brand serves as your beacon.
- **It survives commoditisation.** Technology is turning yesterday's differentiators into standard features. AI, passive products and robo-advice now replicate much of what used to set firms apart: research, portfolio construction, reporting and onboarding. When everyone can buy the same engine, clients choose on the badge and the driver. Your identity, built on your culture and history, is the one thing no algorithm can copy.
- **It builds trust.** Trust stands as the bedrock of client relationships in financial services, 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 takes on new weight as technology takes over the transaction. When an app executes, a robo-adviser allocates and AI writes the market commentary, clients still need someone to believe in. Trust moves from the process to the institution, and the brand is how it travels.

3 Neuromarketing – Understanding the « Buy Buttons » in Your Customer's Brain – Patrick Renvoisé, Christophe Morin, Thomas Nelson, 2007.
4 European Fund and Asset Management Association (EFAMA), Our industry in numbers, www.efama.org.
5 Swiss National Bank, banking statistics, number of banks at the end of 2024; Swiss Association of Asset Managers (ASAM), Yearbook 2025, FINMA-licensed asset managers as at 30 April 2026.

- **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 investment organisation that 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 talent 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. AI-generated content and deepfakes mean false claims now spread faster and look more credible. 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 organisation. 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. With consolidation reshaping Swiss banking, this is far from theoretical. 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 organisational cultures is just as vital as analysing financial statements and strategic fit.

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



THE MAGIC IS IN THE METHODOLOGY

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 organisation, ensuring everyone understands not just who you are, but how to communicate it authentically at every touchpoint.

- **Simple.** The financial 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 you end up with a precisely defined message that resonates.
- **Efficient.** A branding project, by its cross-functional nature, involves multiple stakeholders across your organisation. While broad participation is essential, time is valuable: the sooner you complete the process, the sooner you can harvest its benefits. Your organisation'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.



FINDING THE PERFECT BALANCE

When selecting a branding partner, organisations 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 financial services 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 organisation is real. The ideal partner combines both fresh thinking and deep industry knowledge, allowing you to move directly into meaningful brand development.



TUNE YOUR BRAND FOR SUCCESS!

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 talent, 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

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