FREE STARTER KIT · FIVE WORKSHEETS

The Brand Code Starter Kit.

Five pages that make your brand easier to choose, and easier to *price*.

INSIDE

Five fill-in worksheets, each with a worked example

TIME

About two hours, one worksheet at a time

BY

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How to use this.

One worksheet, one sitting, one *decision*.

What this is

Five worksheets from The Brand Code, the system I use with founders. Together they settle the three things that decide whether a business is chosen: what you are known for, what you charge and what you say. Most businesses that think they have a marketing problem have a clarity problem. These pages are where the clarity gets written down.

What you need

A pen, your last three proposals, and thirty to forty-five quiet minutes for each worksheet. For the pricing worksheet you need one number from a client: what the outcome is worth to them.

How to work through it

01 **Start with the Positioning Statement.** Everything else rests on it.

02 **Then score your niche,** so you know who the statement is for.

03 **Price the outcome** with the Value Pricing Worksheet.

04 **Fix what you say** on the Messaging Framework page.

05 **Plan what you publish** with the 95:5 Content Plan.

06 **Run the test** in each "What to do next" box before you use what you wrote.

Four rules

- **Your buyer's words, not your industry's.** If a competitor could write the same line, it is not finished.
- **Evidence only.** Use results you can trace to a source. A score is a hypothesis until you test it.
- **The examples are hypothetical.** They show the level of detail. They are not clients, and they are not the answer.
- **Test before you use it.** Every worksheet ends with a test. A page nobody has tested is a draft.

Inside

The worksheets

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ABOUT

Mike Bruce is a Brand Growth Architect and Consultant, founder of Mike Bruce Design. This starter kit is free. Share the link, not the file.

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Positioning Statement.

One sentence everyone can *repeat*.

WHY IT MATTERS

If a buyer cannot repeat what you do in one sentence, they compare you on price, because price is the only difference they can see. A positioning statement is one internal sentence that says who you serve, what you are, how you differ from the alternative and why buyers should believe it.

A positioning statement guides decisions. It is not a tagline and it does not go on the website word for word. Its job is to make every later choice easier: what to say, what to charge and which clients to decline.

HOW TO FILL IT IN

Answer the seven prompts in order, in your buyer's words, not your industry's. Write the full sentence out. Then score it against six checks. Ask whether your closest competitor could sign it. If they could, it is not finished.

Watch for four words: quality, service, innovation and experience. Every competitor in every category claims them, so they carry no difference and give buyers nothing to remember you by. Name one buyer in one situation, one difference, one real alternative and a structural reason to believe it.

01 The seven parts

01 · For (the specific buyer)

02 · Who (their situation or need)

03 · Brand

04 · Is the (frame of reference)

05 · That (the key difference)

06 · Unlike (the real alternative)

07 · Because (the proof)

02 Your statement, written out in full

For [specific buyer] who [situation or need], [brand] is the [frame of reference] that [key difference], unlike [the alternative], because [proof].

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03 Score it out of 6

- [ ] A stranger could name the buyer
- [ ] The difference is specific, with no vague category words
- [ ] It names a real alternative
- [ ] The proof is a fact, not an aspiration
- [ ] Your closest competitor could not sign it (your call)
- [ ] It would help you decline a bad-fit client (your call)

One point for each box you can tick honestly. Score: _____ / 6. Under 5, rewrite the part that failed.

FIVE COMMON MISTAKES

- Everyone as the buyer. "Businesses of all sizes" means no business feels it was written for them.
- Category words as the difference. "Quality", "service", "innovation" and "experience" are claimed by everyone.
- A list instead of a choice. Five differences equal no difference.
- No alternative named. Without it, you cannot tell whether your difference is different.
- Aspiration as proof. "We aim to be the best" proves nothing.

EXAMPLE

Two statements. Neither business is a client.

FROM THE PROMPTS

For founders of B2B software companies preparing for a Series A who need to justify a higher price to investors and buyers, [your company] is the brand growth consultancy that settles positioning before any design work begins, unlike design agencies that start with the logo, because every engagement starts with a scored baseline audit.

A SPECIALIST ACCOUNTANCY FIRM

For founders of creative agencies with 10 to 50 staff who want to know which clients actually make them money, Ledgerline is the finance partner that reports profit by client and project every month, unlike general accountancy firms that report only at year end, because our system was built on agency time-tracking data from day one.

WHAT EACH DOES

One buyer in one situation, one difference, one alternative and a structural reason to believe it.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

The one-sentence test. Ask a colleague and a recent customer, separately, to finish: "[Company] helps [who] to [do what], unlike [the alternative], because [reason]." If their sentence matches yours, you have a position. If it does not, the gap is the work.

Niche Scorecard.

Score it before you *commit*.

WHY IT MATTERS

"Niche down or stay broad?" is the wrong question. The choice is about your position, not your services. Buyers need a narrow reason to pick you. You decide how much work sits behind it.

A niche is a hypothesis about where you will be chosen fastest. Most founders pick one by instinct, commit the website to it and find out a year later that the buyers could not pay, or could not be reached. Ten minutes of honest scoring is cheaper.

HOW TO FILL IT IN

Name up to three niche options, each as a buyer in a situation. Score each from 1 (weak) to 5 (strong) on six criteria, using only evidence you could defend. Add up each column out of 30, then look hardest at the lowest score.

The six criteria are pain, ability to pay, reach, proof, desire and clear space. A score is a guess until you test it, so write down the evidence behind each number. Then narrow the front door first: change the message before you change the services, and keep serving the clients you have.

○ A score is a hypothesis, not a verdict. Use only evidence you could defend, and test the winner for ninety days.

01 Name up to three niche options

Option 1

Option 2

Option 3

02 Score each option from 1 (weak) to 5 (strong)

	OPTION 1	OPTION 2	OPTION 3
Pain How urgent and costly is the problem?			
Ability to pay Can they pay your price, and do they have the authority?			
Reach Can you reach them without a big ad budget?			
Proof Could you show two relevant results today?			
Desire Would you be glad if every enquiry came from here?			
Clear space Is the position open, or do others own the message?			
Total	/ 30	/ 30	/ 30

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HOW TO READ IT

- 25 to 30: strong, test it for 90 days.
- 19 to 24: promising, fix the weakest score first.
- 13 to 18: doubtful, rethink the buyer or the problem.
- Under 13: drop it.
- Look at the weakest score for each option, even when the total is high.
- A 1 on ability to pay or on proof can sink an option that looks good on paper.

NEXT STEP

- Choose one option to test for 90 days.
- Record enquiries that match, the close rate and the average fee, and replace these guesses with the numbers.

EXAMPLE

Hypothetical. Not a client.

OPTION 1: Seed-stage SaaS founders raising a Series A
Pain 4 · Ability to pay 4 · Reach 3 · Proof 2 · Desire 4 · Clear space 3
Total: 20 of 30
OPTION 2: Owner-run architecture firms
Pain 4 · Ability to pay 3 · Reach 4 · Proof 4 · Desire 5 · Clear space 4
Total: 24 of 30
OPTION 3: Private clinics opening a second site
Pain 3 · Ability to pay 4 · Reach 2 · Proof 1 · Desire 3 · Clear space 4
Total: 17 of 30

WHAT TO DO NEXT

Test the weakest score. For your top option, take the lowest criterion and spend one week finding evidence: name the buyer who signs off, find fifty real companies, or write down two results you could show today. Rescore it.

Value Pricing Worksheet.

Price the outcome, not the *hours*.

WHY IT MATTERS

Hourly pricing caps your income at your time, and it tells the buyer to compare you by the hour. A value-based fee starts from what the outcome is worth to the client. The fee is a share of that value, checked against your costs and the client's best alternative.

Value comes in four forms: revenue gained, cost removed, risk reduced and speed. If the client cannot put a number on it, offer a range and ask them to correct it. People correct a number more easily than they invent one.

HOW TO FILL IT IN

Enter seven numbers, work through steps A to G, then read the five checks. Use one currency throughout. Present two options, never one number.

The share is a judgement. I would start between 10% and 30% of the incremental value, depending on how directly your work causes the result, how much proof you hold and how much risk you carry. Direct, provable, high-risk work sits at the top of that range. Advisory work with many other contributors sits at the bottom.

> Fee = (annual value of the outcome − cost the client would bear anyway) × your share
>
> Then check it against your floor (your cost of delivery) and the ceiling (the client's best alternative).

01 Your numbers

Currency: _____ Ask the client: "If this works, what is it worth to you over the next twelve months?" Write the number down in their words.

	INPUT	YOUR NUMBER
01	**Annual value of the outcome to the client**	
02	**Cost the client would bear anyway**	
03	**Your share of the incremental value (%)**	
04	**Your cost of delivery per day**	
05	**Days the work will take**	
06	**Client's best alternative (what it would cost them)**	
07	**Extra scope for the fuller option (%)**	

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02 Work it out

	RESULT	HOW	YOUR NUMBER
A	**Incremental value**	01 − 02	
B	**Your fee**	A × 03 ÷ 100	
C	**Day-rate equivalent**	B ÷ 05	
D	**Your cost floor**	04 × 05	
E	**Margin over floor, as % of the fee**	(B − D) ÷ B × 100	
F	**Gap to the client's best alternative**	06 − B	
G	**Fuller option**	B × (1 + 07 ÷ 100)	

03 Read the result

- [ ] B is above D. If the fee is below your cost floor, do not take the project at this price.
- [ ] B is below 06. If the fee is at or above the client's best alternative, make the extra value visible or present a lighter option.
- [ ] 03 is between 10 and 30. Outside that range, know why. The range is my own working rule, not a published benchmark.
- [ ] A is above zero. If it is not, a value-based fee does not apply. Use a project fee based on the cost of the alternative and the risk you remove.
- [ ] You will present B and G together, so the client chooses how to say yes.

EXAMPLE

The figures are invented to show the method. They are not a client result.

THE INPUTS

A founder-led software firm expects the work to lift new-customer revenue by £300,000 in the next twelve months (01). It would have spent £60,000 on an extra sales hire anyway (02). Share: 15% (03). Cost: £500 a day (04) for 20 days (05). Best alternative: the £60,000 hire (06). Fuller option: 30% more scope (07).

THE WORKING

A. Incremental value: 300,000 – 60,000 = £240,000

B. Fee: 240,000 × 15% = £36,000

C. Day-rate equivalent: 36,000 ÷ 20 = £1,800

D. Cost floor: 500 × 20 = £10,000

E. Margin over floor: 26,000 ÷ 36,000 = 72% of the fee

F. Gap to the alternative: 60,000 – 36,000 = £24,000 below it (40%)

G. Fuller option: 36,000 × 1.3 = £46,800

THE READING

The fee is above the floor and below the alternative, and the share sits inside the 10% to 30% range. Present the core option at £36,000 and the fuller option at £46,800.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

Say it plainly. Present two options at different scopes, state the fee and the reason in one sentence, and stop talking. The worksheet gives you the number. Proof, specificity and confidence are what make a client accept it.

Brand Messaging Framework.

Fill the page *once*.

WHY IT MATTERS

Most businesses that think they have a marketing problem have a clarity problem. The website says one thing, the sales call another and the person introducing you at an event a third. A messaging framework is one page that fixes what you say, to whom, and why they should believe it.

Positioning is the decision about where you sit in the market and why. The messaging framework turns that decision into language and proof. A tagline is one small public piece of that language, and it is the last thing you write.

HOW TO FILL IT IN

Work down the page in order. Start with the audience, then the positioning statement, because everything else rests on it. Write one promise, three messages each with a proof, and the words you will and will not use. Use your buyer's words, not your industry's.

Keep it to one page. If it runs longer, the thinking is not finished. Watch for the words every competitor uses: quality, solutions, innovative, tailored, trusted. They carry no difference, so they give buyers nothing to remember you by. If you have no proof yet, lead with method. A named, repeatable process is a proof point.

○ Write in your buyer's words, not your industry's.

01 Audience

Who is this for, and what situation are they in?

02 Positioning statement

For (the specific buyer)

Who (their situation or need)

Brand

Is the (frame of reference)

That (the key difference)

Unlike (the real alternative)

Because (the proof)

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03 Core promise

One outcome you stand behind, in one sentence

04 Three supporting messages, each with proof

Message A

Proof for A (a fact, method, result or reference)

Message B

Proof for B

Message C

Proof for C

05 Vocabulary

Five words we use

Five words we never use

EXAMPLE

Hypothetical. Not a client.

AUDIENCE

Finance directors at mid-sized logistics companies replacing an ageing reporting system

POSITIONING STATEMENT

For finance directors at mid-sized logistics firms who need to close the month faster, Calder Reporting is the reporting platform that closes the month in two days, unlike spreadsheet-based processes, because every number traces back to its source record.

CORE PROMISE

You close the month in two days, and every number can be traced

SUPPORTING MESSAGES AND PROOF

A. Fast close

Proof: A documented close process with timings for each step

B. Traceable numbers

Proof: Every figure links to its source record, shown in a demo

C. Painless switch

Proof: A named onboarding method and a fixed migration timeline

VOCABULARY

We use: close, trace, source, evidence, month-end

We never use: seamless, robust, best-in-class, solutions, innovative

WHAT TO DO NEXT

Test it before you use it. Give the finished page to someone who doesn't work with you and ask them to write a two-line introduction email from it. Compare it with the one you would have written. Then swap in a competitor's name: if the page still makes sense, it isn't specific enough.

95:5 Content Plan.

Two audiences. One *page*.

WHY IT MATTERS

At any moment most of your buyers are not buying. They will be, at some point, and when they are they will choose from the brands they already know. Most B2B marketing talks only to the few who are ready today.

The 95:5 figure is a modelled estimate: up to 95% of business buyers are out of the market at any one time (John Dawes, Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for the LinkedIn B2B Institute, 2021). Your own proportion will vary by category and buying cycle. The point is to serve both groups on purpose.

HOW TO FILL IT IN

Name the one idea you want buyers to link to your name. Choose three things you will build for buyers who are not buying yet, and three things that make it easy for ready buyers to say yes. Set a rhythm you could keep on your worst week, and three signals to watch.

Build content is useful, repeated and recognisable, and it asks for nothing. Capture content is specific, easy and fast. My starting point for the split, which is judgement and not a published benchmark, is closer to half and half than the heavily capture-weighted mix most budgets show. If you only have time for one thing, fix the one idea and say it the same way everywhere.

01 The one idea

The sentence we want buyers to associate with our name

02 Build (the buyers who are not buying yet): useful, repeated, recognisable, no ask

A question we will answer, completely

A tool or template we will give away

A point of view we will argue

03 Capture (the buyers who are ready): specific, easy, fast

The page that says who we serve and what we do

The proof a ready buyer needs

A next step that costs the buyer nothing

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04 Rhythm (one you can keep on your worst week)

Weekly: one build action

Monthly: one capture improvement

Quarterly: one bigger restatement

05 How we will know

Signal 1

Signal 2

Signal 3

EXAMPLE

Hypothetical. Not a client.

THE ONE IDEA

We prove your new price before you announce it

BUILD (THE BUYERS WHO ARE NOT BUYING YET)

A. Question we will answer: How many customers can I lose before a price rise stops paying?

B. Tool or template we will give away: A break-even calculator

C. Point of view we will argue: A discount is a tax on an unclear brand

CAPTURE (THE BUYERS WHO ARE READY)

A. Page: A one-screen 'who we work with' page

B. Proof: The method, step by step; results added with permission

C. Next step: A 20-minute pricing diagnostic

RHYTHM

Weekly: Publish one complete answer

Monthly: Tighten one page; add one proof point

Quarterly: A talk, a guide or a study on the one idea

HOW WE WILL KNOW

1. New leads who say they have seen our content
2. Branded search or direct visits
3. Share of enquiries that match our target buyer

WHAT TO DO NEXT

Check the balance. Look at the last ten things you published or sent. Mark each as speaking to buyers who are ready now, or to everyone else. If nine out of ten speak only to the ready buyers, your market has no way to learn about you before it needs you.

WHAT COMES NEXT

What the full Playbook adds.

The Starter Kit settles the first five decisions. The Brand Code Playbook is the whole system on paper: every worksheet and calculator I publish, with the method behind them, in the order I use with founders.

In the Playbook

- A method guide in six parts: position, price, message, be found, grow by referral, enter a market.
- Thirty-nine worksheets, calculators and checklists, each with a worked example.
- The Price Rise Calculator on paper, with look-up tables, and the price increase letter and script.
- The AI Visibility Check, a monthly tracker and a 30-day action list.
- Editable versions of every worksheet.

What to do this week

- Finish the positioning statement and ask whether a competitor could sign it.
- Read it to one client. Change what they get wrong.
- Put the fee from the pricing worksheet into your next proposal, as two options.

NEXT STEP

Book a Brand Clarity Call

mikebrucedesign.com/contact/

Thirty minutes. Bring your five pages. We will find the weakest phase of your brand system and say what to fix first. Mike Bruce is a Brand Growth Architect and Consultant, founder of Mike Bruce Design.

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