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"The Matrix" and Your Brand Avatar
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Podcast Transcript

Welcome to Brand + Design Scoop, where I share practical, relatable tips on branding, design, and building a business for people-centric entrepreneurs

I'm Kelly, a brand strategist and Squarespace website designer and founder of AKS Design Studio.

I hope you've seen at least the original movie "The Matrix" from 1999, because I'm going to be referring to it throughout today's podcast. I watched the most recent film: "Matrix: Resurrections" when it came out a couple of weeks ago. But, don't worry, I won't give any spoilers!

Today I'm going to be talking about creating a brand avatar. First, most of the time, when you hear about a brand avatar, it usually means creating a visual, emoticon-type image that represents your brand. I'm not going to use the phrase in that way. I'm going to use it in the same way we use the phrase "client avatar."

Last month I discussed how to identify and attract your ideal client. Link in the show notes. In that podcast, I talked about creating a client persona. Some people call this a client avatar. For the sake of this podcast theme and consistency, I'll call it a client avatar today.

A client avatar is a short description of your ideal client, in the form of a short paragraph. You give your client avatar a name and an age or age range. You describe their problem, what they're looking for, where they go for information, and where they are looking for you.

Here is my client avatar:

"Monica is a 55-year-old woman making a midlife career change to freelancing. She wants a business website that is simple, beautiful, and designed to attract her ideal clients. She is interested in Squarespace because she wants to be able to make updates easily on her own, but she doesn't want to design it from scratch. She wants to spend more time on the work she loves and not on building a website. She is planning on starting a blog. She gets her information and inspiration from YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, and Facebook and is looking for designers on Google, UpWork, and word of mouth."

So, you see, I can clearly envision Monica. I can imagine her as an actual person out there looking for me. When I designed my website, I had her in mind. When I write my newsletter emails, I think of her. When I share to social media, I think of her. When I write my blog posts or do these podcasts, I think of her. Though, since she's not wanting to create her own website, I know that most of my content won't be interesting to her since most of my content is how-to information.

So, as an aside, why do I create this content for Monica? I do it because it builds my credibility and helps search engines find me. When Monica arrives at my website, she sees that I've got articles and podcasts

about website design and website how-tos. This shows her that I know what I'm doing. It builds trust between us and makes her more likely to hire me.

Now, I also share this content because I just like helping people! There are plenty of do-it-yourselfers out there who will consume my content and not consider hiring me. And that's fine. The content is still there to build trust between Monica and me.

In other blog posts and podcasts, I've written and talked about the importance of being very clear about your brand: Who you are, what you do (the problem and your solution), and whom you work with. But now let's talk about this one aspect of creating your brand: Your brand avatar.

Creating your brand is a multi-step process. I can do a blog or podcast about that another day. Creating a brand avatar takes pieces from your full brand to create a snapshot of your brand.

Let's bring in "The Matrix."

In the first film, when Neo has come into the physical world, he looks totally different from who he was in the Matrix. Morpheus explains to him that he has never used his eyes before. His muscles have atrophied from never really been used. He has no hair or eyebrows.

But then Morpheus takes Neo into the staging ground of the Matrix—where they can load up on outfits, equipment, and weapons. Suddenly, Neo looks different. He's got hair and muscles. He's wearing clothes that look more like his personality. Morpheus calls this Neo's avatar. This is Neo's mental concept of himself.

When Morpheus, Neo, and Trinity go into the Matrix, they are always dressed according to their avatars, their mental concepts of themselves. Morpheus is often in a suit. Neo is in a long, black coat. Trinity is in tight, black patent leather. And they're all wearing sunglasses at night! (Sorry for the ear worm!)

If these outfits were available in the physical world, they would likely dress like this or similarly. This is how they see themselves. But their physical exteriors can't reflect their mental concepts of themselves in the physical world because the clothes and equipment just aren't available in their post-apocalyptic world.

We're lucky in that we tend not to have those limitations. We have both digital and physical ways to express our mental concepts of ourselves: Our brand avatars.

So, what does your brand avatar consist of?

It consists of:

• Who you are (your name),
• Your brand personality and brand voice,
• Your brand mission (that includes the problem and your solution),
• Your brand vision (the ultimate result you want for your clients),
• And a few personal interests, hobbies, or things that help define you.

Back on December 17, 2021 (wow, last year already!), I interviewed personal-image consultant Julie Shields on branding, color, and style. Link in the show notes. She said that branding is a matter of

"bringing the inside out." That's what you're doing with your brand avatar. You're taking what you see and feel on the inside and bringing it physically (and digitally) into the world for your ideal clients to see.

Once you have all the components of your brand avatar, just like with your client avatar, you're going to write your brand avatar in the form of a short paragraph.

For a fun example, I wrote one for Neo.

"I'm Neo. I'm The One. I'm serious, quirky, humble, and yet intimidating. My mission is to wake up humankind to the reality of The Matrix. My vision is that all humans be free from enslavement by the machines. I'm good at Kung Fu, flying, and dodging bullets. I love Trinity. I'm totally loyal to Morpheus. And I'd give my life for both of them."

Obviously, Neo doesn't need to write out his avatar! He lives it. And he's not trying to make money through his brand avatar. But you are! So, you need to create and write down yours.

I'll give you mine as another example. Mine is not nearly as short as Neo's!

"I'm Kelly. I'm a Squarespace website designer. I'm creative, strategic, welcoming, fun, and funky. My mission is to create beautiful, strategically-designed websites that attract and convert ideal clients for people-centric entrepreneurs who normally do everything themselves so they can focus on the work they love. My vision is that entrepreneurs get more time back to do the work they love and not have to worry about a website that attracts and converts their ideal clients. My ultimate goal in life is to help people blaze their own trail and choose their own adventure. I'm a cat person, a Radiohead fan, and a visual artist. And I can't go to another country without learning enough of that language to get along."

Now, my mission and vision are very similar and use some of the same phrases. But the mission is more focused on the problem and solution. And the vision is focused on the end result for my clients.

Coming up with the brand personality and voice, the mission, and the vision are all exercises you do when you go through the whole branding process. Again, I'll do a blog or podcast on that in the future.

You can take those steps for the sake of creating your brand avatar. Or, if you've already gone through the full branding process, just pull these elements from your branding book.

So, you've got your brand avatar. Now what do you do with it?

First, you could paste it directly onto your homepage as your short bio! Mine is a bit long for that. I edited mine, left out the personality and personal stuff, and focused it just on clients. If I need to give a short bio to someone else to use about me on their website, for a guest blog post, or as a guest on their podcast, I would combine the mission and vision and get rid of the personality part. So, to be prepared for that, go ahead and edit your brand avatar to have it ready for those potential circumstances.

Second, you're going to keep your brand avatar in mind when designing your website and marketing assets, such as your newsletter, business cards, and social media accounts. Remember that your brand has to be crystal clear to your visitors. So, using your brand avatar will be a guide for you as your design.

Third, you're going to keep your brand avatar in mind when you create content and share content to social media. Everything you do is part of your brand. Your brand isn't just your logo, your name, or your

brand personality. It's all of that PLUS every action you take on behalf of your brand. It all has to be aligned.

Fourth, if YOU are the face of your business, you're going to physically manifest your brand avatar in public. Just like Neo, Trinity, and Morpheus do inside the Matrix, you're going to dress in the form of the mental concept of yourself. Julie talked a bit about this is our interview. It's not a matter of playing a part. It's a matter of expressing your true self, of bringing the inside out.

For me, when I got my tattoos, I didn't want to hide them. So, I got them on my arms where they'd be visible when I wear short-sleeve t-shirts. Even though I'm 5-foot 11, I wear boots with chunky heels. I tend to wear black and some charcoal grey. I like wearing bold pink lipstick even when I'm not wearing other makeup. I wear my shaggy hair in a mussy, surfy kind of way. (It's different now from the photos on my website. I need to get those updated!) And I often wear a vegan leather moto jacket with embroidered flowers on it. I don't do muted. I don't do flats. And I don't do sedate—no matter what situation I'm in. I found my style, and I stick with it.

Since I'm the face of my business's brand, I live it. I'm always representing my business's brand. That doesn't mean that I'm always talking about or pushing my business. But I'm ready to share about it if the situation arises.

So, figure out your style, stick with it, live it, and be ready to represent your business whenever the situation arises.

Okay. So, in addition to your brand avatar, you've also got that client avatar. So, how does it fit in? The first three things I just told you: Using your brand avatar on your homepage, keeping it in mind when designing your marketing assets, and keeping it in mind when creating and sharing content—it's the same for using your client avatar.

"Oh, lord! How do I do that for both avatars?!"

It's all about your marketing message. Your marketing message includes:

Who you are (that's the brand avatar)
What you do (both the problem and the solution)
And whom you do it for (that's the client avatar)

So, you see, it's really not difficult to bring in both avatars. You're already doing it with your marketing message.

On your homepage, when you share an edited version of your brand avatar, you can even share a version of your client avatar. I don't share what I shared with y'all here. I have something completely different written out at the top of the homepage. It's three lines, each of which starts with "you" so that visitors can easily identify themselves—or not—as an ideal client.

The second section of my homepage reads:

"You're a people-centric entrepreneur who's trying to leave the world a little better than how you found it.

"You're a do-it-yourself-er who's ready to spend more time doing what you love instead of managing all parts of your business on your own.

"You're a kick-ass business owner who needs a new or updated, strategically-designed website that will attract more of your ideal clients, make a great first impression, engage them with fabulous content, and convert them into paying clients."

When visitors read that, they will resonate with it—or they won't. They'll be able to self-select as an ideal client or not. That way, they'll start to know if we're the right fit to work together.

Let me give a caveat about your brand avatar. Your brand avatar is not something that you pull out of thin air. It's not something that you simply decide you want. Your brand avatar comes from a place a total authenticity. It's who you or your business really is. So, the process of uncovering it is pretty sacred. If your brand avatar isn't authentic, you won't feel aligned with it. And potential ideal clients will end up being repelled by it. You definitely don't want that.

Neo was The One, not because he decided he wanted to be The One, but because he recognized The Truth within himself. He expressed that truth, felt aligned with it, and became more powerful as a result. Remember: "There is no spoon." Ha ha.

Let me actually say something about that. What is the truth for us behind "There is no spoon"?

It means don't limit yourself to some preconceived notions of who you are or who your business is. While your brand must be authentic, you don't want to limit it to what other people tell you it should be—or to what you think it should be based on the competition.

If your competition is doing one thing, but your brand personality is something else entirely different, don't hold back! That's your point of differentiation. Don't hide it. Use it to your advantage to set yourself apart.

That's it for today. I'll be back next week with more branding, design, and business tips.

See you next time on Brand + Design Scoop!
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Links mentioned in the episode:

"Branding, Color, and Style: An Interview with Personal-Image Consultant Julie Shields"

"How to Identify and Attract Your Ideal Client"

Link to this episode on the website

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Angela Kelly Smith provides custom Squarespace websites, branding strategy, and marketing instruction so freelancers and entrepreneurs can run a successful business while spending more time focusing on the work they really love doing. Check out her website design + marketing strategy services.