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Thinking About Rebranding? Start with a Brand Audit.

Brand + Design Scoop ep. 017

Podcast Transcript

Welcome to Brand + Design Scoop, where I share practical, relatable tips on branding, design, and building a business for freelancers and do-it-yourselfers who want to stop doing everything themselves.

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

Today I'm going to discuss rebranding your business, when you should do it, and how to get started. Whenever I mention other articles or my blog posts or podcasts, I will always put links in the show notes. So, I won't mention that every time I refer to those things.

First of all, what does it mean to rebrand your business? Is it just creating a new logo and website?

Well, that's part of it. But it actually involves much more than that.

Rebranding your business is the process of changing how your business is perceived by your audience. Those changes usually include a new logo and website. They may also include a new name, tagline, colors, fonts, visual assets, messaging, copy, and possibly even new services.

Why might you need to rebrand your business?

Strong brands attract more ideal clients and make more sales. Strong brands build more trust with their audience. Strong brands boost their reputation and client loyalty.

So, how do you know if you have a strong brand?

Before you rebrand you should look at how your brand—that is, your business—is performing.

Look at your business and marketing goals. Are you making as many sales as you want? Are you getting word-of-mouth clients? Are you consistently getting as many social media followers as you want? Are you getting as many website visits as you want?

If the answers to these questions are “no,” then your brand may be underperforming.

Now, if you have a new business and new brand, you need to give your brand time to meet your goals. It can take months or up to a year to see results from search engine optimization when you're a new business or after doing a rebrand. Check out two of my podcasts on search engine optimization: [“How to Improve Your SEO with Ling Wong”](#) and [“What is SEO and How to Set It Up”](#) for detailed information on how SEO works and what you can expect from it. And, if your website is in Squarespace, check out my blog post called [“How to Set Up SEO in Squarespace”](#) for a walkthrough on getting your SEO up and running.

Okay, let's look at some signs that indicate when it's time to rebrand.

1. You're embarrassed of your brand
2. You've outgrown your brand
3. Your brand isn't really different from your competition
4. Your brand name no longer feels like an accurate reflection of your brand vision or mission
5. You want to attract different ideal clients
6. You're having a hard time raising your prices
7. Your brand is confusing
8. Your brand has a negative perception

1. Let's start with you're embarrassed of your brand.

If you've been in business long enough, you've probably been in situations when you've hated to hand out your business card or send people to your website. You've found yourself saying, “Oh, these are old” or “I'm updating my website”—even if you haven't actually gotten to that point

yet. You're apologizing for your brand without knowing what to do about it. You're hoping that people will just overlook it and still feel good about hiring you.

But people have a hard time overlooking a weak or confused brand, especially if you apologize for it ahead of time. When you apologize for it before they even interact with it, they go in feeling a lack of confidence in your brand and in your business.

I've definitely been in this position. I tried not to apologize for my brand, but there were times when I told people that I was updating my website. Sometimes it was true. Other times I was still going through the rebranding process. I was always sort of surprised when someone hired me during this phase.

So, if you're embarrassed of your brand, this is a sign that it may be time to rebrand.

2. Maybe you've outgrown your brand.

When you started your business and created your brand, you had a particular vision and mission for your brand. You had certain services that fit your brand. You had a pricing structure that worked then. You had an ideal client that you were interested in.

But all of that can change over time, especially as you become more successful and your business and brand grow.

Before I started AKS Design Studio, I was doing business under my name as Angela Kelly Smith. And that was my URL—which I still have, and it redirects to AKS Design Studio dot com. But I also own Angela Kelly Smith dot art for my artist website. When you google Angela Kelly Smith, both sites come up.

Angela Kelly Smith gives no indication of what I do in this business. When I moved out of pure branding strategy into website design with branding strategy as just a piece of that, I needed a new business name, one that would reflect the focus of my business. I didn't have to have "website design" in my business name. That's all over my website and in my SEO. I also still wanted something of my name in there. So, I came up with AKS Design Studio. It's got my initials, "design" to reflect what I do, and I like studio to reflect my artistic nature.

Facebook, Inc. recently changed its name to Meta. That's the name of the parent company of the Facebook social-media platform. The parent company had grown beyond just Facebook as they own the Facebook platform, Instagram, WhatsApp, Messenger, Oculus, and others.

Google's parent company changed its name to Alphabet. Alphabet owns several subsidiaries, such as the Google search engine, DeepMind artificial intelligence, and Intrinsic robotics software.

And Dunkin' Donuts shortened their name to Dunkin' when they wanted to show that they are more than just donuts. They wanted people to associate them with other food and drink offerings.

3. Let's move on to your brand isn't really different from your competition.

You know that the best brands stand out as different from the competition. I mean, if you aren't different from the competition, do you really have a brand? How will your ideal client find you if you look and sound like everyone else? Why would your ideal client choose *you* if there's nothing different about you?

Taco Bell is just one of many fast-food options. Their main point of differentiation was that they serve Mexican-ish food, as opposed to hamburgers. During a rebrand, they positioned themselves as being one of the healthiest fast-food chains in America.

For information on identifying and attracting your ideal client, check out my blog post called "[Why Is It Important to Identify Your Ideal Client?](#)" and my podcast called "[How to Identify and Attract Your Ideal Client.](#)" There's also my podcast called "[How to Pick a Niche for Your Business.](#)" This one is particularly helpful for differentiating yourself from your competition.

4. Next is your brand name no longer feels like an accurate reflection of your brand vision or mission.

So, when I changed my business and brand name, it was partially because my personal mission is different from my business mission. Well, my personal mission *does* fit in with my business mission: To help people blaze their own trails. But this mission isn't an official part of my

business mission. It's just a part of everything I do. I mean, when I create websites for people, it's to help them promote their business, which is indeed to help them blaze their trail.

But my business mission is: "Through website design services and tutorials, to help freelancers focus on the work they really love doing and to inspire do-it-yourselfers to create websites more quickly and more easily."

The name Angela Kelly Smith didn't reflect that mission as well as I wanted.

Nike was originally called Blue Ribbon Sports. The real reason they changed the name was they wanted something shorter, and the name Nike contains an "exotic" letter—that is, a Z, X, or K—which can make a name easier to remember.

I think that the name Nike is a better reflection of the brand's mission: "Bring innovation and inspiration to every athlete* in the world. *If you have a body, you are an athlete." Nike is the Greek goddess of victory. While Nike the brand doesn't necessarily promote victory over the competition, it does promote victory within yourself, within the heart of every athlete. We see this in their "Just Do It" tagline and in their advertising.

5. The next way to tell that it may be time to rebrand is if you want to attract different ideal clients

When I was still using Angela Kelly Smith as my brand name, I was attracting branding-strategy clients, and some residual clients from when I was a life coach. I absolutely did not want any more life-coaching clients. And I really didn't want any more pure branding-strategy clients. I wanted to focus on web design and do branding strategy as part of web design. So, rebranding and changing my brand name made sense.

If your current brand name is attracting clients you no longer want to work with, it may be time for *you* to rebrand. That doesn't always mean changing your brand name. But it is possible.

Target is a brand that did a rebrand without changing its name. Originally, Target was just another big-box discount store. It attracted people who were only looking for low prices and didn't care about branding. But Target was losing clients to other discount stores, such as Wal-Mart.

So, in the rebrand, they became sort of more “upscale.” I was living in Houston at that time, in the 1990s. They built a store on the edge of this very wealthy neighborhood called River Oaks. Lots of us were shocked. River Oaks residents were *not* their clients. But, with Target’s rebrand, the store became wildly popular and successful.

Over the years, Target has begun offering Target-exclusive brand names, such as Missoni—not known for being discount brands. Target is also known among some circles as being culturally progressive. When other stores were asking breastfeeding women to cover up or leave the store, Target made a statement that breastfeeding women were welcome in any part of the Target stores and were allowed to use a fitting room to nurse their babies. Target has also made their fitting rooms welcoming for all genders, being a positive space for the trans and gender-non-conforming community.

6. Next is you may be having a hard time raising your prices

If you’re trying to raise your prices, but you’re not getting any or as many new clients as you’d like, it may be time to rebrand.

Pricing your services is really difficult. And raising them can be even tougher. When I was taking a finance course in business school, the professor taught us that you want to start out pricing your products on the high end. He said that you can always lower your price but that it’s really hard to raise your price.

When you’re just starting your business and pricing your services at a level where you know you’ll want to increase them one day, you may want to indicate that those fees are an introductory offer. Let people know that these prices are good for only X amount of time or just since you’re a new business.

If you’re going to raise your fees without going through a rebrand, you’ll want to offer more value for the service. You can add in something that wasn’t there before, give a little more of your time, or offer some exclusive download or gift.

Even better, you’ll find a way to illustrate how your service is different from the competition. This can come out of a rebrand or be something that you do separately from a rebrand. If you can show how your service stands apart from the competition, your ideal client will be willing to pay more for it. Now, that doesn’t necessarily mean that you’re charging more than your

competitors charge. Though you could charge a premium. It ultimately means that you're charging more than what you were charging before.

It's really important to communicate your price changes when you have a service for repeat clients or when clients may refer you to other people.

In the case of repeat clients, are you going to raise their prices, or are you going to keep them on the old fee structure?

In the case of referrals, old clients will likely tell their referrals what they paid you. When you ask clients to refer you to other people, you could request that they not reveal what they paid you. But they still might. What will you do if a potential client asks for the same fee that you charged the person who referred them? Have a plan in place for that.

So, while rebranding can be a difficult process, when you want to raise your prices, it may be a good time to rebrand. You may still run into the issue of referrals wanting the same old prices. But you'll have a more legitimate reason to give them for why you can't give them those prices. You're essentially a new business now. And there's more value that you're giving with these new prices.

7. Another time to rebrand is if your brand becomes confusing.

Using myself as an example again, Angela Kelly Smith gets confused with my artist website. When people do search my full name, AKS Design Studio *and* my artist website show up at the top of page 1. But now with AKS Design Studio, people can clearly tell which one is the website-design business. If I used Angela Kelly Smith as the business name and URL for both of them, it *would* be too confusing.

Google was originally called BackRub. What did this even mean? Can you imagine saying, "I'm going BackRub that"? Just doesn't work!

Instagram was originally called Burbn. That's spelled B-U-R-B-N—after the founder's favorite drink. They changed the name to Instagram as a combination of instant and telegram, because it sounds more related to photography.

Both of these names give more clarity to the brands and what they do. Not that Google tells you what the brand does. But BackRub sends entirely the wrong message! What is that—a massage salon? An automated massage chair? Who knows?!

8. Finally, it may be time to rebrand if your brand has a negative perception associated with it.

Hopefully you're never in this position. But eventually you might make a misstep on social media. Or your industry might do something wrong, and your business might become "guilty by association." Think about all those yoga studios that were associated with Bikram Yoga. They all had to end up changing their names after the Bikram sex-abuse and emotional-abuse cases came to light.

The consulting company Accenture is a rebranding from Andersen Consulting. Andersen used to be *the* premiere consulting firm for business-school grads. Well, along with McKinsey. Andersen Consulting did Enron's accounting. Remember Enron? Yeah. Andersen became guilty by association. So, they went through a complete rebrand and emerged as Accenture.

The parent company of Philip Morris—the tobacco company—rebranded itself as Altria in order to distance itself from the negative association with cigarettes. When you hear Philip Morris, you immediately think cigarettes. When you hear Altria, unless you're in the business, you don't think anything.

So, before we get into how to do a brand audit, let's discuss a few of the cons of rebranding your business.

1. Reestablishing your brand

After a rebrand, particularly with a name change, it can be tough to reestablish your brand, especially if you were already an authority in your industry. To help with this, you'll want to keep references to your old name on your new website. This will enable people to find you when they search by your old name. This leads into...

2. Search Engine Optimization

When you rebrand, especially with a new name and a new website URL, you lose all of your old SEO. You're going to be starting from scratch. Refer again to my blogs and podcasts on search engine optimization for help here. And remember that it can take months or up to a year to see significant results from your SEO efforts.

Here are a few things you'll want to do:

- Keep ownership of your old domain name
- Redirect your old URL to your new website
- Make reference to your old name on your new website (not indefinitely—but for several months or until you see significant improvement in your SEO)
- Consider mentioning your old name in your website description. This will make it easier for search engines to find your new site when people Google your old name. Do this only if your old brand did not have a negative perception associated with it.

3. Costs of rebranding

There are real monetary costs, as well as time costs, associated with rebranding. As a freelancer, you can do most of it yourself. But, unless you have strong design skills, you'll want to hire someone to create a new logo for you. And you may want to hire someone to build a new website for you.

Don't rush through the rebranding process and try to get it done in a day or even a week. Once you rebrand, you want the new brand to last for years. So, spend lots of time with it—even though I know you're anxious to hurry up and get it done.

For logo design, you can use [Adobe Creative Cloud Express](#). I adore all things Adobe. Creative Cloud Express is an alternative to Canva—a superior one, in my opinion. And the paid service costs less than Canva, \$9.99/month or \$99.99 for a year, compared to Canva's \$12.99/month or \$119.99 for a year. Check them both out. They can both help you create logos, other visual assets, and social-media posts.

For websites, you know that all I'm going to recommend is [Squarespace](#)! Of course, there *are* other what-you-see-is-what-you-get website platforms out there. Look around my website—particularly my homepage, my website-design service page, and my blog post called "[Design and](#)

Business Resources for Freelancers and Do-It-Yourselfers” — for lots of information on why I love Squarespace.

BRAND AUDIT

Okay, so, if you’ve decided that it’s time for a rebrand and you’re ready to do it, the first thing you need to do is a brand audit.

What is a brand audit?

A brand audit is an exercise that gives you a snapshot of the state of your current brand. The brand audit will help you figure out what exactly needs to be changed during your rebrand.

Not necessarily everything will need to be changed. While Target rebranded to appeal to a different audience, they didn’t change their name. While Google changed its name from BackRub, they didn’t change their target audience. Maybe your name, vision, and mission will stay the same, but you’ll need a new logo, colors, fonts, and website. Maybe you’ll need new messaging, a new website and new copy. Or maybe you’ll just need to overhaul your old website to reflect the new branding. A brand audit will help you figure out all of that.

Since branding is all about differentiating yourself from the competition, you’re going to be looking at three categories within two groups of brands—one of those being your brand. The other group is your competition.

The three categories are: Core identity, verbal identity, and visual identity.

It sounds really simple. And it is. Though there are lots of specifics to analyze here. So, let’s start with...

1. Your current brand

The first brand that you’re going to analyze is your own. You’re going to see who your brand is and where your brand is now in order to get a better idea of who your brand needs to be and where your brand needs to go in the future.

First, you're going to look at your brand's core identity.

Your core identity includes:

- Your brand goals
- Your brand values
- Your brand vision and mission statements
- Your ideal client
- Your brand name

If you've already created a brand identity or gone through my podcast called "[How to Create a Brand Identity](#)," then you've already done this work. You can refer to your brand identity document [here](#).

If you never created goals, values, or vision and mission statements, then imagine what they might have been. Look at your website to consider what vision and mission you're implying to your audience. Write down a sentence or two for each. Don't spend too much time on this for your current brand since you may be coming up with new ones for your new brand.

So, how do your original goals fit with your current goals? Have your goals expanded? Have you met your old goals? Do you need to set new, bigger goals? If your old and new goals don't match, then write down your new goals.

How about your brand values? Are those still your top values? Are those values coming across on your website and in your messaging?

How about your vision and mission statements? Do they still hold up? Have you achieved your vision? Is your mission still relevant? Does it need to be honed, refined, or completely rewritten?

Has your ideal client changed? Do you still enjoy working with them? Do you get enough sales from them? Would a different audience bring in more sales? Is another audience naturally gravitating toward you?

How does your current name fit with all of these other features of your core identity? Does your name reflect your values, your vision, and your mission? Do you think your name resonates with

your ideal client? Would a different name resonate more? Does your name portray what your business does? Is your name at all confusing?

So, based solely on your core identity, what have you identified so far that needs to be changed? Make note of this, and let's move on.

Next you're going to look at your verbal identity.

Your verbal identity consists of:

- Your tagline
- Your unique selling proposition
- Your key messaging
- Your brand voice

Do you have a tagline? Freelancers don't necessarily need one. But it can be really helpful to sum up the core of who your brand is, what your brand values, or the benefit your brand provides. When you have a tagline, you don't always have to use it prominently on your website. You can use it in your copy, as opposed to at the top of your homepage. Mine is "Do what matters most" because, when I create websites for freelancers, I'm helping them to get back to the work they really love doing, the essential work of their business. Plus, the work that I do for them, applying brand strategy to website design, is what matters most in attracting their ideal client online.

I have this written verbatim on my main service page. And I have variations of it throughout my site, including in the footer of my site.

What is your unique selling proposition? That is, what unique value do your clients get from your services? Hint: This should not be a discount! It could be years of experience. It could be a really specific niche that you work in. It could be access to exclusive articles, audio, or video that they won't find anywhere else.

What is your key messaging? That is, what are your main selling points? Are you talking about your pricing? Are you focusing on how fast you deliver your service? Are you selling the superior quality of your work?

What is your brand voice? That is, what adjectives would you use to describe your brand voice? Is it sophisticated, quirky, casual, playful, professional, welcoming... you get the idea.

Now look at what feels out of alignment with where you think your brand should be. Make note of any of these items that you think should be changed.

Next you're going to look at your visual identity.

Your visual identity includes:

- Your logo
- Your website
- Your color palette
- Your typography
- Your visual assets, such as photos on your website and your business cards

Do you like your logo? Are you embarrassed by it? Do you think it still reflects the core identity of your brand? Did it ever?

How about your website? Does it still excite you? Do you apologize for it when you send people there? Is it strategically designed? Is it getting enough visitors every week and every month? Is the number of visitors increasing week over week, month over month? What don't you like about your website? Would these issues require little tweaks, a refresh, or a whole new website?

How does your color palette feel? Was it trendy and now feels outdated? Do you still like the colors? Do your colors reflect your brand personality? How do those colors resonate with your ideal client? How do those colors fit within your industry? You want them to stand out, but you don't want them to be shocking to the point of repelling your ideal client.

What about your typography? Do your fonts reflect your brand personality? Is your brand personality sophisticated but you're using a playful font? Or vice versa?

Do your visual assets reflect the core of your brand identity? Do you value diversity, but you keep using images of the same type of person over and over? Are your stock images too professional-looking when you have a more quirky brand personality? Are your images not professional enough?

So, what parts of your visual identity need to be changed? Would these changes be minor updates or a major overhaul? Is it the vision that needs to change, or both the vision and the logo that need to change?

Now that you're done analyzing your current brand, let's move on to...

2. Your competition

You're going to do the same thing with your competition that you did for your current brand. That is, you're going to analyze their core identity, verbal identity, and visual identity. And you're going to do this for more than just one competitor.

Make a list of 3 to 5 brands in your field. Ideally one or two of them will be around the same level as you—that is, around the same domain authority. Then you'll pick a few others that can be at a significantly high level domain-authority-wise. Domain authority is where you rank in search-engine results pages. One is lowest score, and 100 is the highest score. Nike has a score of 95.

To find out your domain authority and that of your competitors, or for any website at all, you can use a platform called [GrowthBar SEO](#). This is a fabulous service for monitoring your search engine optimization. Not only does it show you your domain authority ranking and that of any other website you type in, it will show you the difficulty in ranking for your desired keywords, and it will give you suggestions for other keywords.

The purpose of including your competition in your brand audit is that you need to find what makes you unique. And, if you don't already have at least one point of differentiation, then you're going to use this analysis to figure that out.

You'll find trends in your field when you look at several competitors. That's why you're going to analyze more than one. Your brand will be a lot like them. This is normal since you're all in the same field. And this is when you'll want to go through the niching process to help you find a way to be unique and stand out. Branding helps you do that, and picking a very specific niche also helps you do that. As I mentioned early, refer to my post called "[How to Pick a Niche for Your Business](#)" to help you with the niching process.

With a rebrand, having all this information on your competitors in one spot is a really helpful way to identify opportunities for your brand to stand out.

First, you'll look at all the commonalities amongst your competitors. Again, you're going to share a lot or most of those. And that's fine.

Next, you're going to look for holes in those commonalities. For example, most website designers promote themselves to small-business owners and entrepreneurs. Those are their ideal clients. I saw an opportunity to promote myself to freelancers and do-it-yourselfers. Yes, freelancers are also small-business owners. But they don't always see themselves that way. They may be googling information specifically for freelancers. So, I use the term "freelancer," as well as "do-it-yourselfer," throughout my website. I do also mention "entrepreneur" and "small-business owner" in a few places. But my real ideal clients are freelancers and do-it-yourselfers—usually one-in-the-same person.

When I use GrowthBar to check potential keywords—that is, to see if this is a real opportunity for me—GrowthBar indicates that "website design for freelancers" and "Squarespace web design for freelancers" are both attainable keywords for domain-authority ranking. There are enough monthly searches for these keywords without many domain authorities already there.

You'll find all of these opportunities to stand out by looking at your competitors' core identity and verbal identity.

Be sure to look closely at their visual identity, too. You'll want to look at their logos, colors, fonts, and general look and feel of their websites. To identify their fonts—if you find some that you love and may want to use yourself—you can use the [What Font](#) Chrome extension. When you activate it, it will show you the font anywhere you hover your cursor.

To identify colors that you like, you can use the [ColorZilla](#) Chrome extension. When you activate the extension, select "color picker," then click on any color on the webpage. ColorZilla saves the code to your clipboard. Now go paste that code to your notes or document. You can use it in Adobe Creative Cloud Express, Squarespace, and most other design software.

You'll probably notice a lot of similarities in their visual identities, too. Most spas use earthy tones, right, because those colors represent relaxation and calm. Most financial-service businesses use deep blue or deep green because those colors can represent trust and reliability.

I notice a lot of freelance website-design businesses using neutrals or earth tones. I'm thinking this is because they want their clients' websites to stand out instead of their own. But what jumps out at me are the few that use some other color that's not neutral—something bold.

I use a deep blue, not to look more professional like a bank, but to represent my brand personality: Sophisticated, creative, inspiring, and authentic. Deep blue can symbolize all of these things.

Look at your competitors' websites to get an idea of website design—their layouts and the strategy behind them. Do their designs seem to work? Go through their websites as if you were a potential client. Can you find everything you're looking for quickly and easily? How are their calls-to-action? Is their layout more fancy than functional? Is it too functional with no glitz at all? Are there any unique features, design-wise, that really jump out at you as being particularly good or bad?

So, after conducting your brand audit on your competition, aggregate your data to identify trends in core identity, verbal identity, and visual identity. Then look for your opportunities to be different. And it's okay if you find things that you want to emulate. That's why I gave you those Chrome extensions. You absolutely do not want to look, feel, and sound like everyone else or even like *one* someone else. You must be uniquely you. But it's fine to get ideas from the competition to adapt to your brand.

To recap...

It may be time to rebrand when:

1. You're embarrassed of your brand
2. You've outgrown your brand
3. Your brand isn't really different from your competition
4. Your brand name no longer feels like an accurate reflection of your brand vision or mission
5. You want to attract different ideal clients
6. You're having a hard time raising your prices
7. Your brand is confusing
8. Your brand has a negative perception

The downsides of rebranding include:

1. Having to reestablish your brand
2. Taking a ding to your search engine optimization
3. The monetary and time costs of rebranding

Finally, the steps to conducting a brand audit are:

You're going to look at the core identity, the verbal identity, and the visual identity of both your current brand and the brands of 3 to 5 of your competitors. Then you're going to look at trends amongst your competitors to find opportunities to differentiate your brand from the pack.

So, that's it for today.

I'd love to read your thoughts on this episode. You can leave comments on this episode's post on my website. Link in the show notes.

I'll be back next week with more branding, design, and business tips.

See you next time on Brand + Design Scoop!

Links mentioned in the episode:

[Adobe Creative Cloud Express](#).

[ColorZilla](#) Chrome extension

["Design and Business Resources for Freelancers and Do-It-Yourselfers"](#)

[GrowthBar](#) (20% off link)

["How to Create a Brand Identity"](#)

["How to Identify and Attract Your Ideal Client"](#)

“How to Improve Your SEO with Ling Wong”

“How to Pick a Niche for Your Business”

“How to Set Up SEO in Squarespace”

Squarespace

What Font Chrome extension

“What is SEO and How to Set It Up”

“Why Is It Important to Identify Your Ideal Client?”

Link to this episode



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](#).