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We recently hosted a workshop where our portfolio founders had an opportunity to spend time refining their brands with @jbosborne and Marni Kane (https://t.co/chIjEnevR6) from legendary creative firm @redantler. Here are some of the insights we gleaned from the session:

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■ Showcase your flying baby!

“Branding is an exercise in prioritization” was the most common piece of feedback shared with our portfolio. The Red Antler team fashioned a great heuristic to aid in this process – “If your baby can fly, lead with that!”

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The point is to focus on what you do better than anyone else.

The one thing that your customers would *love* about your product.

In short, a single differentiated message is better than half a dozen banal brand promises.

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“Focus” sounds like incredibly simple advice, but it’s easy for founders (or VCs) to get attached to the many benefits they want to highlight and not focus on the single problem they are solving for customers. Ruthlessly simplify your story until it resonates with buyers.
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■ You sell to customers, not companies

B2B and B2C sales shouldn’t be all that different – at the end of the day, you are still selling to a human who is moved by aesthetics and branding. (Sadly, they likely just have lower expectations in their professional context.)

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■ No one designs for robots

Startups tend to highlight brand promises that have been commoditized. “Ease-of-use” and “trust” are taken for granted by customers. Likewise, claiming your app features “human-centered design” is a waste of time – no one designs for robots.

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These attributes are important, critical even. They just shouldn’t be part of the explicit sales pitch. It is much better to embody these values via visual design, your copy’s tone, and other brand touchpoints.

Show don’t tell.

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❤■ Think of your brand as a person

Your brand should be well-rounded and be able to engage people in moments of levity and in times of grave importance. Your brand’s visuals and tone should accommodate all aspects of the user’s journey, from the serious to the silly.

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Some people have a great sense of humor, but there are times when they need to keep it in check – funerals, contract negotiations, etc. Conversely, there are times when even stern personalities need to turn on the charm. The same is true for your brand.

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Some of the best advice the Red Antler team provided was about how to work with a design agency. Engaging a creative firm is a significant investment, and doing it right can mean the difference between increased sales and scrapped work.

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■ What feeling are you trying to evoke?

Brand building is hard, and it’s helpful to have a way to ensure everyone is moving in the same direction. The Red Antler team suggests choosing a “feeling” that you want your brand to evoke and use it as your point of reference.

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Often, more technical founders feel out of their depth in evaluating subjective and aesthetic projects. The benefit of choosing a “feeling” as an organizing principle is that it gives you a heuristic against which to make decisions.

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Does bright yellow make sense as a brand color? If you want to stand out in a conservative industry, it might, even if you don’t “like” it personally. Taste is important, and there is no escaping subjectivity, but clarity about goals helps smooth

decision-making.

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✍■ Put in the work

Figuring out a catchy, comprehensive summation of your startup that drives conversion isn't easy. Many expect the right solution to present itself in a flash of brilliance. Red Antler cautioned against this and encouraged voluminous brainstorming.
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A good exercise is to try and write 100 variations of a tagline or critical call-to-action to explore the possibilities. A word of warning, make sure you can say all of your one-liners without taking a breath. It needs to be speakable, not just readable!

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■ Don't forget the small stuff

In the process of crafting an overarching strategy, it's pretty easy to lose track of some of the fundamental aspects of running a business. For example:

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■ If you sell a product, make sure the photographs of it are world-class.

■ Your CTA buttons should be crystal clear.

■ Have a pricing page that won't confuse a BigCo. finance department.

Don't let a fascination with the big picture lead you to ignore the essentials!
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■ Everyone hates change

If you are an established brand contemplating a change, know that your users will complain about it for a week, and then they will move on. Overcommunicate the benefits of the transition to your customer, and don't look back.

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■■ Repeat until they repeat

A brilliant way to know you've found the right messaging is when customers, media, and others in the ecosystem start speaking your lines back to you, almost verbatim. This is harder to measure than CPC spend but infinitely more valuable!

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This thread is a grab bag of insights taken from a dozen different consultations – not a playbook.

Fortunately, one of the Red Antler founders has produced a book that lays out their approach comprehensively. Read it!

https://t.co/o9YiMX04du

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And if you're a startup in need of creative consultation, I highly recommend Red Antler. We introduced them to a wide range of startups – B2B and B2C, Hardware, software, and CPG, and they had well-tailored advice for each. /End