

How and why to conduct a digital audit By Jori Shampo

Turn on any HGTV show and find scrupulous home buyers agonizing over their wants, needs and deal breakers, all set to dramatic music and scripted storylines. We can't guarantee that a brand audit is as thrilling as finding a home or an episode of *House Hunters*, for that matter, but the process requires getting comfortable with your likes and dislikes first—just as home buying does.

Since the process is extensive, involving a deep dive into your internal processes and external customer surveys, we're here to help with our recommendations on how to begin your brand audit.

What is a Brand Audit?

A brand audit happens when a company examines its identity, how it portrays itself and how it's perceived in the marketplace. Big or small, every beauty company will benefit from conducting an audit.

Conducting a periodic brand assessment ensures that your brand's voice, tone and messaging are meeting the needs of your customers and attracting your targeted customers. If not, it's time to make some adjustments. Think of this as the Marie Kondo method of deciding what brings your customers joy and what doesn't.

Brand audits can be conducted by an internal team or an outside agency. With most of our clients, iBeAuthentic conducts these evaluations as the first step in your company's onboarding process. Then, we use the findings as a playbook or template when reassessing the year-over-year strategy.

Why you need a brand audit

Understanding your company is critical to designing a website or having a strong social voice. Many brands aren't self-aware, simply

because they have too many people involved or they don't have enough time to study their brand in depth. A brand audit can often unify large companies and teams and save extra work and time in the process.

Ask yourself these questions. Is your customer retention rate increasing or decreasing? Have your sales soared or dipped in the past year? A brand audit will give you the answers.

When brands have a review structure in place, they will usually achieve:

- Consistency between visuals and copy
- Change according to strategy
- A broad target audience with a plan to cater to each demographic
- A focus on sales with awareness tactics to drive customer consideration
- Saying yes and no, according to strategy

To explore ideas for inspiration, start with what captures you as a consumer. Get inspired by what's around you—take cues from the magazines you read and the websites you view. Explore why the messaging, illustrations or the mood that a certain brand communicates speaks to you. Use different elements from your inspiration to create something new.

Next come your brand pillars. When brands choose a few key focuses, it gives us a language to assess current messaging and marketing materials. The outward appearance of your brand must be in sync with the pillars. On the reverse side, if customers aren't responding to certain aspects of your values, then you might need to reevaluate your pillars.

Determining your customer persona will help you evaluate what customers are looking for in your brand. By understanding your customer persona, you can see which of your pillars are of interest to a certain consumer or demographic and how they align with your company's messaging.

Some questions to ask:
1. What is your brand's current tone of voice? Is your tone professional or accessible

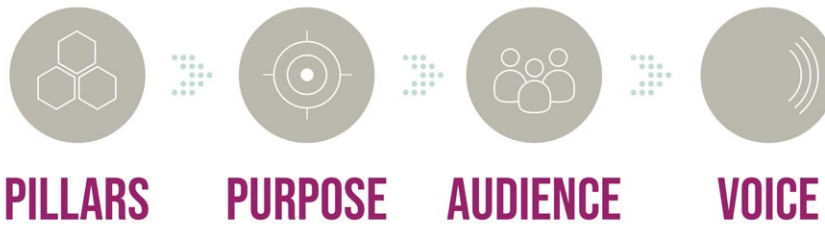
or affordable?

2. If your brand were a celebrity or a well-known figure, who would it be?

3. What makes your brand different from comparable or competitive brands?

When should you conduct a brand audit?

Brand audits are an especially useful tool when your company is rebranding. We recommend that brands launch a new look (whether that's a revamped website or logo) and new messaging at the same time. Often, we see a new website, but the social media marketing will lack the same rebranding and vice versa. Launching a new look and a new voice simultaneously communicates a new era of



Brands benefit from defining key focuses to develop their purpose, audience and voice. The pillars give brands a foundation to assess their current messaging and pivot, if necessary, to realign the marketing materials and audience demand with the company's goals.

Where do we start?

Start your brand audit by determining the likes and dislikes of the current strategy. At iBeAuthentic, positives and negatives are equally important.

You'll also want to create a list of like-minded brands that you aspire to be, even if you're in a different industry, to upgrade the thought leadership and the place you hold in your own sphere of influence. That way, you have content to reference when it comes to upgrading and enhancing your overall strategy.

We recommend organizing web layouts, emails, launch campaigns, new product releases, video assets and overall messaging in a collaborative digital space.



iBeAuthentic's timeline for a launch strategy varies, depending on when a brand joins us. We have clients at all stages, meaning those who want a complete overhaul of their site and those who want us to maintain their branding and promotional strategies.

the brand in a lasting, impactful way.

Content like blogs or marketing materials can have a delayed rollout. We also don't expect the packaging to change immediately to meet the new branding, but you will want to write it into your plan and timeline.

Aside from rebranding, an audit is useful when it's conducted quarterly for reporting purposes. A quarterly audit helps to keep consistency between your goals for the brand and the marketing efforts that will get it there. Dedicating team members to maintaining a consistent review schedule will keep the brand on track.

Keep audits consistent over each quarter, so it's easier to compare month to month and evaluate if the brand is reaching its goals. That means keeping track of the same marketing platforms—social, web, email—during every review, and also making sure that key performance indicators and methods of measuring success are the same.

A brand audit is also helpful before meeting with investment groups or higher-ups in management, as well as before company-wide meetings. When everyone is gathered in one room, it's easier to communicate consistent messaging and new goals while you have people's attention.

Additional times to conduct an audit are prior to new product campaigns, launches, company changes or when new employees join. In fact, it might be beneficial to have new employees participate in the audit or produce an analysis of their own. It could spark new ideas and bring a fresh perspective on how your brand compares competitively with

other companies. This also gives insight into how customers see you.

How iBeAuthentic begins your brand audit

When we start auditing a company, we like to go in with nothing, like a general consumer. That way, our comments or suggestions can mirror that of the customer. We research your competitors and map out strengths and weaknesses, as well as comparisons between competitors and your company. A thorough digital evaluation also allows us to determine what values and pillars come through, before discussing your actual pillars with you.

During our initial audits, our most common recommendations include:

- Move your services and "About Us" messaging on your website to your home page for Search Engine Optimization purposes.
- Your website, products and print pieces must have consistent messaging to reinforce brand values.
- Your brand's strategies must involve more customer feedback and analytics.

After the blind audit, we meet with the client to discuss findings and map out a framework. Creating a visual framework allows us to determine the relationship between the website, email marketing, social media marketing, paid advertising, video and more. The other framework we create is less visual and more along the lines of a brand brochure, spelling out values and tone of voice—it's used as an internal reference guide.

Of course, that's month one. As we move through the process with our clients, we

strategize, create a marketing plan, mobilize product manufacturing processes, create the content and media mix, organize promotional strategies and, ultimately, launch brand.

A brand audit ultimately helps us develop trust with our clients. They're able to understand how we see their company and we're able to see it from their perspective, as well. We're almost a realtor of sorts, showing our prospective homebuyers different options and guiding them along the process.

Just as each homeowner has different tastes, every customer is different. At iBeAuthentic, we employ industry experts, salon professionals and an experienced marketing team to provide personalized, customized solutions for a 360° approach.

What are your thoughts on brand audits?



How frequently do you conduct them? Who is part of your brand audit team?

To learn more about best practices and how iBeAuthentic can help, contact Jori Shampo

(jshampo@ibeauthentic.com), brand strategist and project manager, or Erin Noha (enoha@ibeauthentic.com), digital media supervisor, who co-authored this article in partnership with iBeAuthentic and Beauty Industry Report. For more information and to schedule a discovery call with the iBeAuthentic team, visit www.ibeauthentic.com.