



05. YOUR BRAND **LAUNCH**

HOW TO GAIN SWIFT STAKEHOLDER BUY-IN DURING THE EARLY STAGES
OF YOUR BRAND CREATION

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WHY IT MATTERS

Just as “no man is an island,” no entrepreneur or CMO exists in a vacuum. We naturally seek the advice of our coworkers, friends, family, and mentors. Validation and constructive criticism are crucial in developing a brand. However, one can easily upset this delicate balance either by ignoring the counsel of others or seeking the opinion of everyone. This step in the process is a rather slippery slope, but we have devised some tips and tricks to save you time, money, and sanity.

An important issue that gets overlooked too often by entrepreneurs and CMOs is getting buy-in at the right times and from the right people. Appropriate timing and knowing whom to involve are key differentiators between smooth sailing with a set destination and being adrift with no land in sight (as it pertains to your launch).

STEP 1: IDENTIFY THE POWERS TO BE

You might think of this as an easy task, but most of the time the resistance comes from sources that were not properly (or ever) identified. Here is a breakdown, splitting brand launchers into two categories: (1) the startup entrepreneur and (2) the CMO launching a new product or service within an existing brand.

SCENARIO A - YOU ARE A STARTUP LAUNCHING YOUR BRAND

1. Partners

Clearly, you will not make decisions without them, but ensure that if you have a project manager (or even an assistant) collecting feedback, all of your partners are involved in the discussion at all times. Of course you or your delegated project manager will voice that feedback to the agency working with you on the brand creation effort only after you have vetted and approved it.

2. Significant Other

Strange as it may sound, projects often fail or get postponed because someone client-side decided not to get “buy-in” at home. Clearly, this should not be the deciding factor because your significant other knows only a little about the strategy, insights gained, and vision determined for the new brand. Your significant other may not have influence on the project, but (s)he has influence on you. Too often, input from a significant other causes cold feet about a decision that has already been made—usually at the eleventh hour—thus derailing the launch. Don’t be that person. It brings down team morale, lowers your ego, and can lead to significant timeline delays.

3. Shareholders / Investors

As obvious as it seems, most often this is not taken seriously enough; the final brand identity is just quickly shown to an investor, mainly because you are proud of it (and maybe because you just happen to have lunch with that person). But spontaneous show and tell is the wrong tactic to truly gain shareholder buy-in. You have to include your shareholders at predefined points within the process. They need to be given the opportunity to voice their opinion. Depending on the size of your group, there is usually an even split of those willing to get involved versus those who would rather let the team make the decisions. But be prepared: One or two shareholders may get overly involved and bombard you with opinionated voices and try to dominate meetings. That's OK—but only in certain meetings, and only at designated times. As the project progresses, these voices will slowly begin to feel heard and will eventually turn into approval. And that's the payoff: they will be doing so with the same enthusiasm and raised voice. Needless to say, it is crucial to have a seasoned and talented individual who is leading these meetings on the agency side.

4. Your Employees

With good reason, we place your employees last. Partly because you may not have a lot of staff at this stage of your startup, but even if you do, this is your brand. Your professional and financial investment is greater than the initial investment of your employees. At the end of the day, you take primary responsibility for directing your startup toward a successful launch.

Be sure the startup atmosphere of pizza nights and the "we are all in this together" sense of democracy does not spill into the strategy of your branding. Bringing everyone into the trenches can derail the project and create chatter and a feeling of unease among your staff. Remember, your employees look at you to be a leader. Leaders make tough and important decisions for their employees. Be that leader. In the end, you do them a favor by not asking them their thoughts every ten minutes. If that scares you, know that you already gained insights via the opinions from the powers above (individuals listed in items numbered 1–3). The best way to include your employees is to present them with the key thought processes and strategies behind your branding decisions once they are finalized. This will inspire confidence and allow your staff to align with your brand's new name, identity design, and website structure and design.

SCENARIO B - YOU ARE AN EXISTING COMPANY LAUNCHING A NEW BRAND

You are likely a CMO or VP of Marketing and are being tasked with the launch of a new brand within an existing flagship. Some of the key decision makers on your project team may include: a creative director, a superior (president of marketing or someone similar), a senior copywriter (if applicable), and a project manager (if you are lucky enough—which we sure hope you are). They are all briefed regularly and play active roles in the decision-making process on a daily basis.

The person who is usually forgotten in the early buy-in stage is the CEO and his or her immediate "entourage." It is difficult to clearly define entourage, but it usually includes some blend of the top two or three shareholders, CEOs of partner companies, and even handpicked VPs of various departments within the firm whom you may have never thought (or wished) to include. When it comes to the CEO, let the CEO decide how his/her opinion is formed and whom (s)he wishes to include in buy-in meetings. But ensure that all is done within a clearly outlined agenda and timeframe—which brings us to the process of gaining your easy buy-in.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY WHEN THE POWERS THAT BE SHALL BE BROUGHT INTO THE PROCESS

Not long ago at our consultancy, chaos erupted when different stakeholders voiced very different opinions about a project, hence compromising our project timeline. Our key client contact, an Academy Award®-winning screenwriter who shall remain anonymous, wrote these wise words in an email:

“ | *Opinions are like @#*holes—everybody has one.*

It made everyone's day, but more importantly, it got us back on track by reminding us to prioritize and manage feedback. Opinions were noted, and we moved forward by focusing on feedback offered by key client contacts paired with our recommendations instead of getting sidetracked.

It is important to define who should be brought into the buy-in process and have a clear outline for when and when not to let opinions be heard. Establish these boundaries at the start of your project, and you will see easy and early buy-in. You will feel empowered to steer the ship while being greeted with constructive support and ongoing enthusiasm from everyone involved, even at the highest levels within your company. Without enforcing healthy boundaries, the project timeline may derail, morale may go down, and your new brand launch may be on the line.

Refer to the timeline recommendations on when to include key stakeholders during your brand creation process.

Keep this document on-hand when you plan your (next) brand launch and share it with your project team when planning your brand's vision and purpose.

Please share your opinion or own findings with me via fgeyrhalter@finien.com or engage with us to take you there safe and sound. I look forward to hearing from you!



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Need swift, personalized brand advice? Schedule a brief call with me using Clarity. I would love to connect: Clarity.fm/FabianGeyrhalter

Establish your brand platform through my online course: eresonaid.com

To work with me and/or my consultancy, FINIEN, on your brand strategy, name, or brand identity design or to book me for a workshop, panel, or speaking engagement, please email me directly at fgeyrhalter@finien.com

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