



# The Brand Foundation Workbook



# 1 Build your website on something solid

From Blue Penguin Digital – No templates. No shortcuts. Just proper websites.

## 1.1 What this is

A workbook that walks you through the same discovery process we use with every client. It's the light version of our brand book methodology – the framework we apply before anyone writes a line of code or picks a colour.

It has five parts:

1. **Discovery** – the five questions that define your business online
2. **Competitive Context** – who you're up against and where you fit
3. **Brand Definition** – how you sound and what you stand for
4. **Practical Details** – content, pages, budget, timeline
5. **The Pre-Mortem** – what could go wrong, before it does

## 1.2 What this isn't

A sales document. There's no catch, no email gate, no "book a discovery call" at the end. If you fill this in and take it to another developer, good. You'll get a better result than walking in cold.

If you fill it in and bring it to us, even better. But that's your call.

## 1.3 How to use it

Work through the parts in order. They build on each other – Discovery feeds Competitive Context, which feeds Brand Definition, which grounds the Practical Details. Skip ahead and the logic breaks.

Be honest. Be specific. "I don't know" is a better answer than vagueness – it tells a developer what needs figuring out together.

Write in this document directly, or print it out. Share it with whoever signs off on decisions.

Misalignment between the owner, the marketing person, and the operations manager causes more project delays than bad code ever does.



## 2 Part 1: Discovery — The Five Questions

Every brand book starts here. These five questions define how your business talks about itself online. If you skip them, your website will sound like every other website in your industry.

### 2.1 WHO is your customer?

Not a demographic segment. A named person, with a real situation.

Describe them as if you're introducing them to someone:

**Example:** *"Sarah runs a small accounting practice in Harrogate. She has three staff and about 200 clients, mostly local tradespeople and small limited companies. She currently finds new clients through word of mouth and the local Chamber of Commerce. Her website is ten years old and she's embarrassed to give people the URL."*

Who is your customer?

**Why this matters:** If you can't describe a real person, your website talks to nobody. "Small business owners" is not a customer. "Sarah, who runs a 3-person accountancy practice in Harrogate and is embarrassed by her website" — that's a customer.



## 2.2 WHAT problem do they have?

What's the pain that makes them act? What triggers them to search for someone like you?

Three parts to this:	Your answer
<b>The surface problem</b> (what they'd tell a friend)	
<b>The trigger event</b> (what made today the day they act)	
<b>The cost of doing nothing</b> (what happens if they don't fix it)	

**Example (plumber):** *Surface: "My boiler's making a weird noise." Trigger: "It's November. I've got two kids. I can't risk it dying mid-winter." Cost of inaction: "It breaks on Christmas Eve and I'm paying emergency rates or my family's freezing."*

What problem do they have?

**Why this matters:** People don't buy websites. They buy solutions to problems. If you don't understand the problem, you can't write a homepage that addresses it.



## 2.3 HOW do you solve it differently?

What's your actual mechanism? Not "we provide excellent service" – what specifically do you do that's different?

The test: could a competitor copy and paste your answer onto their website and have it be true? If yes, try again.

**Example (bad):** *"We provide high-quality web design with outstanding customer service."* → 10,000 agencies could say this.

**Example (good):** *"We build every site from scratch – no templates, no page builders. Before we touch any code, we write a full brand book that governs every word and every design decision. Every site passes a 12-point build audit and a design review before it ships."* → Specific, testable, hard to fake.

How do you solve it differently?

**Why this matters:** Your differentiator is not your tagline. It's the structural reason someone should pick you over the next Google result. If you can't articulate it, your website won't either.



## 2.4 WHY you?

Push past “we care about our customers.” What’s the reason someone chooses you and not the alternative?

The test: could a competitor say the same thing? If yes, you haven’t found it yet.

**Example (accountant):** *“Unlike most accountants who communicate in HMRC-speak and charge by the minute, we explain things in plain English and charge a fixed monthly fee. You know exactly what you’re paying and you understand what you’re getting.”*

Why you?

**If you’re stuck:** Ask your last three customers why they picked you. Their words, not yours. What did they say that surprised you?



## 2.5 SO WHAT changes after they work with you?

What is measurably or noticeably better? After they've bought from you, hired you, used your service – what's different?

Don't think features. Think outcomes.

Before (the problem state)	After (the transformed state)

**Example (web developer):** *Before: "Embarrassed by the URL, losing business to competitors who look more professional." After: "Proud to share the site, getting enquiries through it, competitors asking who built it."*

So what changes after they work with you?

**Why this matters:** Features get you considered. Outcomes get you hired. Your homepage should describe the after-state, not list your services.

**Discovery checkpoint:** Before moving on, read your five answers out loud. Do they sound like your business? Could they sound like anyone else's? If they're too generic, go back. Get specific.



### 3 Part 2: Competitive Context

Most people skip this. They assume they know their competitors. But competitive positioning isn't about knowing names – it's about understanding where you fit.

#### 3.1 Who are you actually competing with?

List 2-3 real competitors. Not "every web design agency in Yorkshire." Specific businesses with specific websites.

Then add a fourth column: the alternative that isn't a competitor at all – the DIY option, the cheap template, the do-nothing choice.

	You	Competitor A	Competitor B	The alternative
<b>Name</b>				
<b>Best for</b>				
<b>Approach</b>				
<b>Trade-off</b> (what the customer sacrifices)				
<b>They win when</b>				

#### How to fill it in:

- **Best for:** Who is their ideal customer? Be specific. Not "businesses" – "sole traders in Wakefield who need a first website."
- **Approach:** How do they work? Templates or custom? Local or remote? High-volume or selective?
- **Trade-off:** Every approach has a downside. Cheap means less custom. Fast means less thorough. What do their customers give up?
- **They win when:** Be honest. When does this competitor beat you? (If you can't think of any scenario where a competitor wins, you're not being honest.)



### 3.2 What are they all saying?

Visit your competitors' websites. Read the words. What phrases keep coming up?

Industry cliché	Who uses it
"We're passionate about..."	
"Tailored solutions"	
"Your trusted partner"	

**Why this matters:** If everyone says the same thing, nobody stands out. The words you *don't* use are as important as the ones you do. Your brand book will have a banned words list. Start thinking about yours now.

### 3.3 What are you stealing and what are you avoiding?

Look at competitors' sites again. This time with intention.

What I'd Use	Why it works	What I'd avoid	Why it doesn't

**Competitive checkpoint:** If you can't honestly say when a competitor beats you, your positioning isn't real yet. Go back and fill in "They win when" properly. Your positioning lives in the gap between what they do well and what they leave on the table.



## 4 Part 3: Brand Definition

Now we get to the voice. This is where most businesses skip straight to colours and fonts. Don't. Voice first. Visual second.

### 4.1 What's your energy?

Pick one. Not a blend – one.

Energy	Sounds like	Fits businesses that are...
<b>Calm authority</b>	Confident, restrained, knowledgeable	Professional services, finance, medical
<b>Warm and direct</b>	Friendly, plain-spoken, human	Trades, local services, hospitality
<b>High enthusiasm</b>	Energetic, bold, fast-moving	Startups, creative, fitness, events

### 4.2 How do you sound?

Based on your energy, define how you talk online. Be specific. Vague rules (“be friendly”) don't help anyone.

Rule	Your answer
<b>Sentence length</b>	Short and punchy? Longer and more considered? Varied?
<b>Contractions</b>	“We're” and “you'll” – always, never, or naturally?
<b>Technical depth</b>	Assume knowledge or explain everything?
<b>Humour</b>	Yes, no, or sparingly?



### 4.3 What words are banned?

Every brand book has a banned words list. These are the phrases your industry overuses into meaninglessness. Words that make you sound like everyone else.

**Common offenders:** passionate, tailored, bespoke (unless you're a tailor), cutting-edge, leverage, seamless, robust, innovative, solutions, trusted partner, next level, synergies, best-in-class, world-class

*Your banned words:*

### 4.4 What words do you actually use?

Not words you *want* to use. Words your customers use. Words your team uses. The language that sounds like you when you're not overthinking it.

Listen to how your customers describe you. Read your own emails. Check your Google reviews. The voice is already there – you're just documenting it.

*Phrases that sound like us:*



## 4.5 Your positioning statement

Pull it all together. Fill in this template:

**For** [your specific customer – from Part 1, Q1]

**who** [has this problem – from Part 1, Q2], **[Your business]** is a **[category]** that **[key benefit]**.

**Unlike** [named real alternatives – from Part 2],

**we** [key differentiator – from Part 1, Q3].

**Example:** *“For Sarah who runs a small accounting practice and is embarrassed by her website, SRJ Accounting is an accountancy firm that speaks plain English. Unlike high-street chains that charge by the minute and communicate in HMRC-speak, we offer fixed monthly fees and explain everything in words you understand.”*

*Your positioning statement:*

## 4.6 The 5-Check Test

Run your positioning statement through these five checks. If any fail, revise.

- Specific** – names a clear customer, not “businesses”
- Differentiated** – says something competitors cannot truthfully claim
- Credible** – believable based on what you actually do
- Meaningful** – addresses a problem someone would pay to fix
- Memorable** – easy to repeat without reading it back

**If you’re stuck on Differentiated:** Read your positioning statement aloud. Now imagine a competitor doing the same. Is theirs identical? If yes, you’ve described the category, not your business. Go deeper.



#### 4.7 The Inversion Test (optional, but revealing)

Take your positioning statement and flip it completely:

**For** [opposite customer] **who** [opposite problem], [**Your business**] is a [**wrong category**] that [**opposite benefit**]. **Unlike** [us], **competitors** [opposite differentiator].

If the inverted version sounds appealing to *anyone*, your positioning is too generic. Revise until the inversion is clearly unappealing.

*[Optional – your inverted version, if you want to test it:]*



## 5 Part 4: Practical Details

Brand foundations are the hard part. This section is the practical stuff – what you have, what you need, how much and how long.

### 5.1 What content already exists?

Check what's actually available. Don't assume.

Asset	Got it?	Who has it?
Logo (vector – .svg, .eps, .ai)	Yes / No / Not sure	
Brand colours (hex codes or guidelines)	Yes / No / Not sure	
Photos (premises, team, work, products)	Yes / No / Not sure	
Written copy (current site, brochures, etc.)	Yes / No / Not sure	
Testimonials / reviews / case studies	Yes / No / Not sure	
Staff profiles / bios / headshots	Yes / No / Not sure	
Domain name	Yes / No / Not sure	
Hosting login	Yes / No / Not sure	

*Anything else you already have:*

**Reality check:** Content is the biggest variable in any website project. A build with ready-to-go copy and images takes weeks. The same build where content trickles in over months takes months. The code doesn't change – the content does.



## 5.2 What pages do you actually need?

Not what a template includes. What your business needs.

Tick what you need. Cross what you don't. Add what's missing.

Page	Need it?	Notes
Homepage		Everyone needs one
About / Our story		Who you are, why you exist
Services overview		What you do, at a glance
Individual service pages		One per service, if distinct enough
Portfolio / case studies		Proof you can do the job
Testimonials / reviews		Social proof
Contact		Phone, email, form, address, map
Blog / articles / resources		For SEO and demonstrating expertise
FAQ		Answer recurring questions once
Pricing		If you're brave enough (you should be)
Team / people		Faces build trust
Privacy policy		Legal requirement – most developers include this

*Your page list (priority order):*



### 5.3 How will people find your site?

Channel	Importance (High / Med / Low / None)
Google search (people searching for what you do)	
Google Maps / local search	
Social media	
Word of mouth / referral	
Existing customers (they already know you)	
Print / signage / vehicles	
Trade directories / listings	

**Why this matters:** A site built for Google traffic needs to convince from cold – the visitor doesn't know you. A site built for word-of-mouth referrals can assume warmth – the visitor is checking you're legit. Different starting points, different content strategies.

### 5.4 What's your budget?

A real number. Not "whatever it costs." Not "as cheap as possible." A figure you're comfortable with.

Site type	Typical range	What you get
Single landing page	£500 – £1,000	One page, fast, contact form
Brochure site (1-5 pages)	£1,200 – £2,500	Home, about, services, contact – custom
Business site (5-15 pages)	£2,500 – £6,000	Blog, case studies, SEO foundations
Complex site (15+ pages)	£5,000 – £12,000+	Custom functionality, integrations
Web application	£5,000 – £25,000+	Portals, booking systems, dashboards

These are industry ranges, not quotes. The point: if your budget is £500 and you need a 20-page booking platform, something has to give – usually quality.

*My budget: £*

*Fixed limit or rough range?*



## 5.5 What's your timeline?

Timeline	Your answer
When do you need it live?	
Why that date?	
When can you realistically start?	
Content ready?	Yes / No / Partly
Who signs off?	

## 6 Part 5: The Pre-Mortem

This is the most important part of the workbook, and the one almost nobody does.

A pre-mortem imagines the project has already failed, then works backwards to figure out why. Name the fears before they happen and you can design around them.

### 6.1 What would make this project a failure?

Common fears	This one?	How to prevent it
Going over budget with no end in sight		Fixed-price quote, no variable scope
The site looking amateur or "template-y"		Custom build, brand book governs design
Losing Google rankings the old site had		Mapped redirects, preserved URL structure
Never being able to update it myself		CMS or flat-file system, you hold the keys
The developer disappearing after launch		Clear handover, documentation, you own the code
Getting locked into a platform		Open-source tools, no proprietary lock-in
The site not bringing in any business		Clear CTAs, conversion-focused structure
It taking forever to launch		Agreed timeline, content ready before build starts
Paying for things I don't need		Defined scope, no "bundled services" upsell

*My biggest worry:*



## 6.2 If this project failed, why did it fail?

Write the post-mortem in advance. Be honest. Nobody else will read this.

*"The website project failed because..."*

**Why this matters:** If your developer doesn't know what keeps you up at night, they can't design around it. The problems you name upfront are the ones that don't happen.

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## 7 You're done

If you've worked through all five parts – honestly, specifically – you've done more thinking than 95% of businesses do before they build a website. You have:

- A clear picture of your customer and their problem
- An honest view of your competitive position
- A defined voice and a positioning statement that passes the 5-Check Test
- A realistic inventory of what you have and what you need
- A clear-eyed awareness of what could go wrong

That's a brand foundation. It's what we'd produce in a full brand book – just lighter. Take this to whoever builds your site. If they skip past it and jump straight to a quote, be suspicious. A good developer will want to understand your answers before they talk numbers.

## 8 About Blue Penguin Digital

We build proper websites for UK businesses. No templates. No page builders. No marketing fluff. Before anyone writes a line of code, we produce a full brand book using the methodology this workbook is based on.

We're in Wakefield, West Yorkshire. We work with businesses across the UK – sole traders to established firms, brochure sites to custom web applications.

If you've filled this workbook in and want to talk to us, we'll use your answers as the starting point – not a sales script.

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No pressure. No waffle. Just proper websites.

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