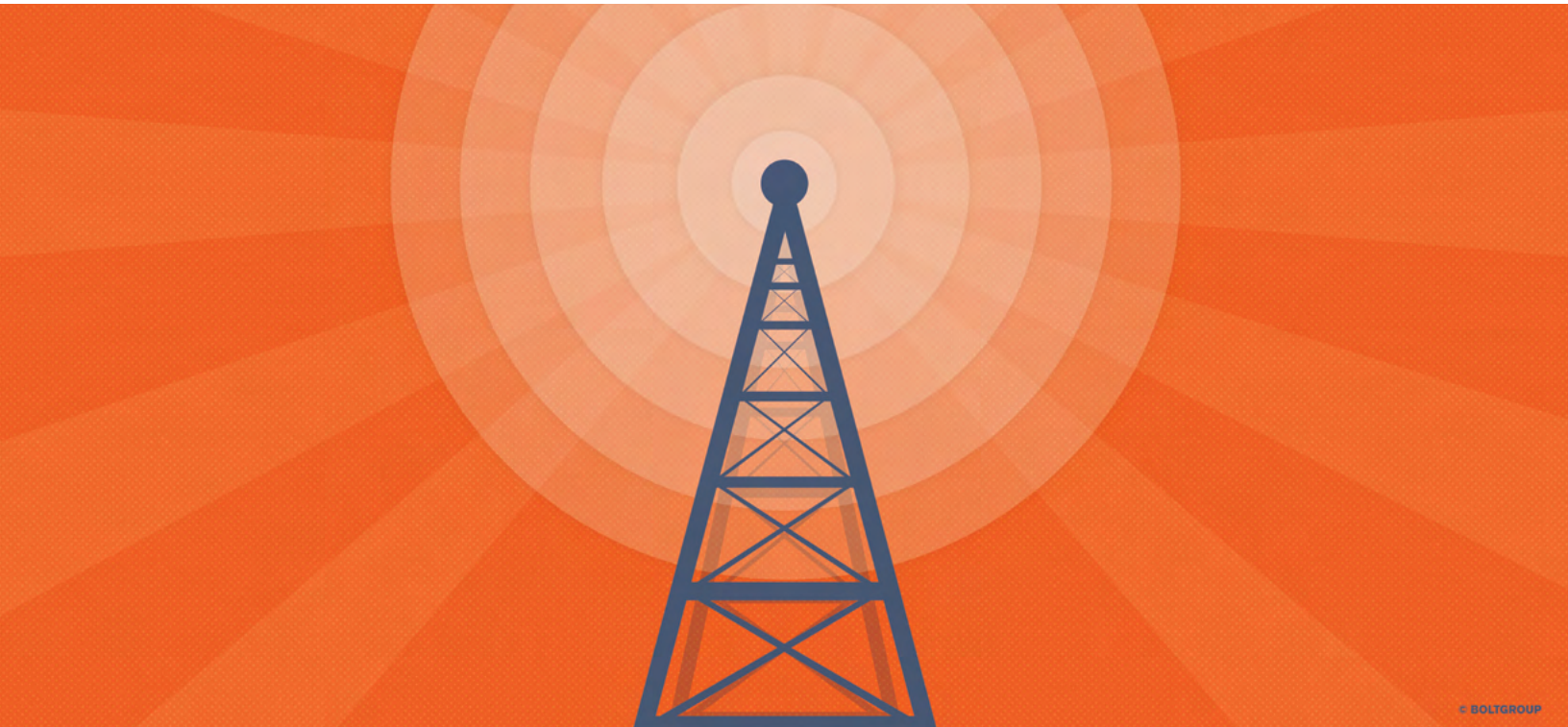


WHITE PAPER

# Verbal Brand Standards— Think Before You Speak

by **Jenny Rollyson**



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Every person has a certain way of speaking—the tone, manner, and content particular to one's personality is unique and recognizable. Brand is no different. It has a voice. Your brand voice should also be consistent and memorable. The verbal elements that are uniquely and recognizably **you** deliver your brand message and connect with your audience.

Most organizations have visual brand standards to ensure consistency—a single document that identifies your brand color palette, typography, illustration, photography styles, etc. This visual system creates a consistent and memorable experience of your brand. There's great value in establishing your own verbal brand standards as well—parameters used by everyone who speaks for your brand.

**An audit of your brand language could be just what you need to make sure what you say is just as on-brand as how you look.**

Students of language and literature understand that style and nuance make dramatic differences in the meaning conveyed. They study and analyze words and texts in detail, examining things like syntax (word arrangement), lexicon (word choice), and semantics (word meaning). These elements combine to create the power of the message or story, and its effect on the audience.

Effective writers and speakers craft language the way industrial designers conceptualize products or graphic

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designers create logos—with an intentional process through concepts, prototypes, tests, evaluations, and refinements. The goal is to arrive at a final version that communicates certain characteristics, qualities, or a point of view. If you recognize that language is capable of evoking emotion, you can harness that ability and elicit feelings from those with whom you communicate.

### **Four Key Elements of Verbal Brand Communication:**

When assessing how your brand communicates, there are four key elements to consider. They interrelate and work together, and can be used to create meaningful connections. Attention to these can have a significant impact on your message and how it's received (or not received) by your audience.

#### **1. Brand Personality**

Just like people, brands have personalities—maybe casual and friendly, like the barista at your local coffee shop, or stern and serious, like that guy in accounting who never cracks a smile.

In business and marketing, personality expresses your brand and what it stands for—its purpose, pillars, and positioning. A brand's personality drives the voice and tone of the brand and conjures up its attitude. Personality is a look into the true nature of the brand. It makes your brand easier to relate to. If your audience likes who your brand is and identifies with what it stands for, they'll be drawn to engage with it.

#### **2. Brand Language**

Language is one of the primary vehicles of brand expression. It encompasses the entire body of words, phrases, and terms that a brand uses to describe everything from its purpose to its products. A brand's language should be distinctive, recognizable, and unique because, in essence, it's an expression of the people behind the brand.

#### **3. Brand Voice**

Through language, your brand's voice is conveyed. Voice and tone are not *what* you say, but *how* you say it. The words you choose, their order, rhythm, cadence, and attitude. Brand voice is the nuance that embodies and expresses the brand. Its standard applies to all written statements, including website copy, social media content, packaging, and even internal communications. Voice is the distinctive way you phrase any statement related to the brand.

#### **4. Brand Lexicon**

Even the specific words you choose, the order in which you place them, and the way you deliver them can affect how your brand is perceived. A lexicon is the vocabulary of a person, or here, the vocabulary of your brand. Carefully chosen words can be what persuades or influences your audience.

### **Is it Really That Important?**

Effective brand communication matters because it humanizes your brand and lets you take part in conversations.

Purposefully developing your verbal brand standards will dictate how the brand is represented at every touchpoint and in all channels. With your verbal communications defined, you can develop content that accurately reflects your brand and engages target audiences—even adjusting your aspect slightly depending on which audience you're talking to.

Used thoughtfully and strategically, the purposeful and consistent expression of your brand can engage and motivate. People don't just buy products, they buy into their aspirations. You've probably heard the saying, "People do business with people they like". Another truth is that people buy with their hearts and justify with their heads. So always use these tools to speak to the heart first. A well-developed set of verbal brand standards allows people to identify with your brand—and by extension—your product or service.

### **Establishing a Verbal Brand Standard**

Start with a strong foundation. That means **the 5 Ps of Brand**—Purpose, Pillars, Position, Personality, and Value Propositions. These form the basis upon which everything else is built. Make sure it is solid. And once you have defined your brand foundation—funny, friendly, fierce, sophisticated, or whatever is authentic and accurate—be ready to commit to it.

For example, the Minneapolis-based furniture brand **Blu Dot** says that it is recognized for its "inventive use of materials,

playful sensibility, and fabrication strategies determined by an economy of means". Right in line with those brand traits is their accessible, playful, and succinct website and catalog language. "Modern Designs For Home Or Office. We Design It, We Hope You Dig It."

### Three Tips for Crafting Your Own Verbal Brand Standards:

#### 1. Be Thoughtful

What characteristics do you want to come through in your voice and tone? Is there a writing style you can employ to best communicate your message? What words are best suited to your brand's personality? How can you use word order and grammar for intended effect?

Do you want to be informal and convey friendliness, or formal and impart an air of professionalism? The use of "you" or "your" speaks directly to your audience and shows you care about them. Be aware that corporate writing that's understood internally, may be dry and flat when directed toward consumers.

#### 2. Be Authentic

Your brand language must ring true for people who will use it and hear it. Cultivate an authentic voice that connects with your customers, and they will embrace your brand and

talk about it. This brand sharing by customers with other prospective audiences carries your brand's message for you.

#### 3. Be Consistent

Consistency is vital in order to reach and resonate with your target audiences. If your language is consistent, your writing becomes familiar to the customer and builds trust.

### The Payoff—Tell Your Brand Story

One of the great rewards in establishing a foundation and verbal brand standard is that you have compiled the components of your brand story. In short, a brand story tells why your brand exists. It supports the purpose and promise and brings your brand to an emotional level with your audiences. Each component of your brand language supports and expresses your brand story.

Your brand story goes beyond the "About" section of your website or the "History" page of a brochure. It is experiential for the audience. To read a story is to feel an experience and to identify with the subject of the story. Research tells us that a meaningful connection is made when this happens. Humans have been using stories to pass on knowledge since cave drawings.

Every brand has an origin that's uniquely its own. Tell the early days of how your brand came to be—the reasons,



passions, and dreams that led to its launch. Describe the journey to the present, and then provide a behind-the-scenes look at how the brand functions today. Introduce the real people behind the brand. If you make your brand personal and connect it to the needs of your audience, you'll strengthen your relationships.

Storytelling is deeply engrained in our socialization and culture. Your brand story gives people an inside look at your company's purpose and motivations. Beyond being informative, your story can be captivating, entertaining, and inspiring. It has the ability to connect your brand and audience in meaningful and lasting ways. People are naturally drawn to stories—to the lessons they teach, the voyages they share, and the opportunities they give us to imagine. All this makes your brand story one of the most powerful tools you own.

## Time to Talk the Talk

Breathe life into your brand by giving it a voice. Let it interact with your audience. People want connection, so create verbal brand standards, and use your voice to engage, entertain, tell stories, and persuade. Use it at every point of contact from phone calls to the front desk to social media to the company retreat. If the language you create is authentically you, it will come naturally. Your brand will communicate in a way that resonates with your audience and wins you fans who will become loyal and happily grow your brand for you.



### MEET JENNY

*Jenny has years of experience building relationships and harnessing creativity to help businesses improve and clients succeed. She is on a mission to create a positive and lasting impact for our clients (both personally and professionally), and loves helping to move inspired ideas toward an end result that is both satisfying and also betters the world in some way— big or small.*