

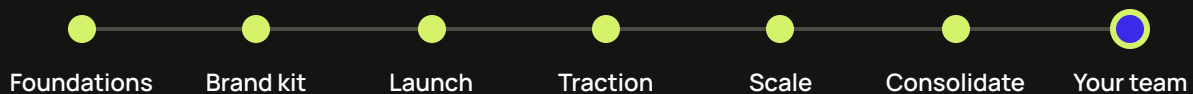
FROM LAUNCH TO SCALE

The Founder's Design Playbook

How to build a brand that grows with your startup — what to design, when, and who should do it.

7 stages. 1 checklist.

Jump to the stage you're in



Your brand is already talking.

Every startup has a brand from day one. The landing page, the pitch deck, the first LinkedIn post and the receipt email all tell people who you are. The only question is whether they say what you mean.

Most founders push design to "later." Later is when it costs more: inconsistent visuals make a young company look smaller, and generic ads cost more per click.

THE RULE BEHIND EVERY CHAPTER

Consistency beats brilliance.

A simple brand used the same way everywhere outperforms a beautiful brand used differently every week.

INSIDE THIS PLAYBOOK

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01



Get clear before you get pretty.

Four questions to answer before anyone opens Figma.

Who it's for

What to be known for

How you sound



Foundations



Brand kit



Launch



Traction



Scale



Consolidate



Your team

Get clear before you get pretty.

The biggest design mistakes happen before anyone opens Figma. Answer four questions first and write the answers down. They become the brief for everything else.

01

Who exactly is it for?

"Small businesses" isn't an audience. "Ops managers at 20–100 person logistics companies still dispatching on spreadsheets" is. The sharper the picture, the easier every design call.

02

What do you want to be known for?

Pick one word to lead: fast, simple, premium, friendly, technical or bold. That word decides your fonts, your spacing and how your copy sounds.

03

Who are you up against?

Put your five closest competitors' homepages side by side. You'll see the same blue, the same gradient, the same stock photos. That pattern is your opening.

04

How do you sound?

Write three voice rules, like "say it plainly" and "confident, not cocky." Then rewrite your homepage headline using them.

A NOTE ON NAMING

Before you fall for a name, check the domain, the social handles and a USPTO trademark search. Renaming after launch is one of the most expensive design projects there is.

- **Founder tip:** keep all of this on one page. You'll hand it to every designer, writer and agency you ever work with, and it saves hours of re-explaining.

02



The minimum viable brand.

The small kit you need to launch, and nothing you don't.

Logo, color, type

Imagery direction

A one-page brand guide



The minimum viable brand.

You don't need a 60-page brand book to launch. You need a small kit that works everywhere, and the discipline to actually use it.

Logo: simple wins

Design for the smallest use first: a 32px favicon, a round profile picture. Make horizontal, stacked and icon versions, and test them in black and white.

Color: fewer than you think

One primary, one or two neutrals, one accent. Write down exact HEX (and CMYK for print). Check contrast on a phone, outdoors.

Type: two fonts, max

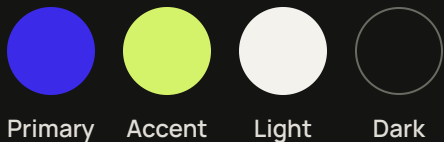
One for headlines, one for body, or one family in several weights. Confirm they're licensed for web and commercial use.

Imagery: decide now

Photos, illustration, 3D or product screenshots: pick one direction. Mixing styles is the fastest way to look unfinished.

Your one-page brand guide

Example: Odot's own kit



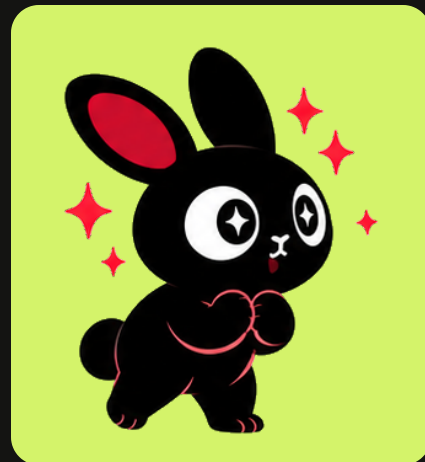
Aa

Archivo Black
for headlines
Manrope for body

Put on one page: logo versions and where to use them, color codes, fonts, image style and your three voice rules. Share it as a link, not an attachment, so there's always one current version.

- **Common mistake:** asking ten friends to vote on logos. You get the least objectionable option, not the right one. Judge every option against your one word from Chapter 1.

03



Three assets do the heavy lifting.

Where first impressions are won or lost.

Website

Pitch deck

Launch kit

Foundations

Brand kit

Launch

Traction

Scale

Consolidate

Your team

Three assets do the heavy lifting.

At launch, your website, pitch deck and launch kit carry most first impressions. Get these right and almost everything else can wait.

01

Your website

Make the right person think "this is for me."

- A headline that says what you do and for whom. Clear beats clever.
- One main call to action, repeated down the page.
- Proof early: logos, a number, a short quote.
- A real product screenshot beats an abstract illustration.
- Check every page on your phone before you call it done.

02

Your pitch deck

Don't make investors work harder to believe you.

- One idea per slide, with a headline that states the point.
- Brand colors and fonts on every slide, charts included.
- Big numbers, few labels, readable from the back of a room.
- Two versions: a lean one to present, a detailed one to send.

03

Your launch kit

Ready before launch day starts.

- Announcement graphics for LinkedIn, X and Instagram.
- A short launch email for your waitlist and network.
- Updated profile pictures and banners on every channel.
- Two or three ad variations, in case you boost it.
- A media kit: logo files, screenshots, founder photos.

- **Founder tip:** send your team, investors and early fans the graphics plus a suggested post. Most people want to help; they just won't design something themselves.

04



Design that pulls its weight.

When design stops being a project and becomes a weekly need.

[Ad creative](#)[Social and email](#)[Sales materials](#)

Design that pulls its weight.

After launch, design becomes a weekly need. This is when most startups start to look inconsistent, because everything is made in a hurry by whoever is free.

PAID

Ad creative

- Test 3–5 variations at once; keep what works.
- Refresh creative every few weeks; ads wear out.
- One benefit, one visual, one call to action.
- Design for sound off: key line on screen.

ORGANIC

Social media

- Five to eight templates on rotation.
- Carousels to teach: a B2B favorite.
- Give founder posts a consistent visual frame.
- Plan a month ahead, not the night before.

OWNED

Email

- Templates for newsletter, launches and plain personal sends.
- Mobile first: many emails open on a phone.
- One main button per email.
- No key text inside images.

SALES

Sales materials

- A sales deck built on your master template.
- One-pagers and case studies.
- Proposal templates.
- It's what your buyer forwards to their boss.

- **Watch out for "Canva drift":** five people making graphics from five templates, each slightly off-brand. One shared template library fixes most of it.

05



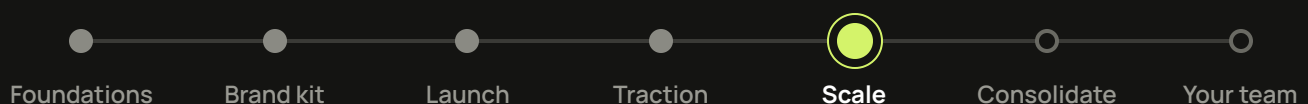
Consistency when more people make things.

Moving the brand out of the founder's head.

A shared toolkit

Brand ownership

Better briefs



Consistency when more people make things.

At five people, the brand lived in the founder's head. At twenty or fifty, it has to live somewhere everyone can reach it.

Turn your guide into a toolkit

Rules tell people what to do. Ready-made assets make it easy.

- Every logo file, clearly named
- Slide masters: sales, investor, internal
- Editable social and ad templates
- Email templates in your email tool
- An icon set and image-style examples
- Proposal and case study templates

Give someone ownership

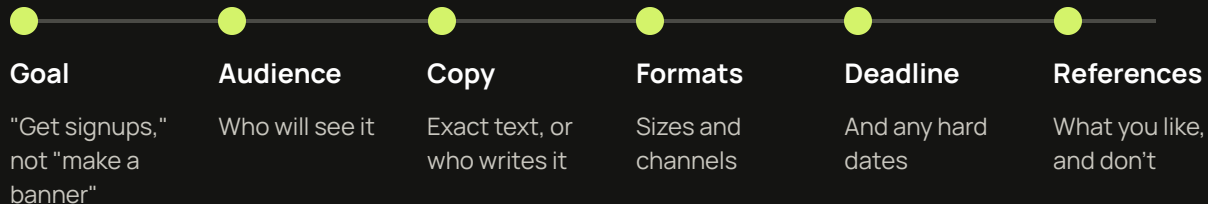
Someone approves new assets, updates templates and says no when things drift. Often a marketing lead with a design partner.

Keep one request flow

Requests by Slack, email and hallway get lost. Use one place to ask for design, with a short brief every time.

Write a better brief

Saves more time than a fast designer



- **Founder tip:** once a quarter, put your last 20 ads, posts and emails side by side. If they don't look like one company, fix the templates, not just the assets.

06



Refresh, rebrand or leave it alone.

Knowing which move your brand actually needs.

Three options

Signs to refresh

Measuring brand



Refresh, rebrand or leave it alone.

Maybe you moved upmarket or changed what the product does. Before redoing everything, figure out which of three moves you actually need.

Leave it alone

WHAT CHANGES

Nothing. You just apply it better.

WHEN

The brand is fine; the problem is inconsistent use.

Refresh MOST COMMON

WHAT CHANGES

Polished logo, updated colors and fonts, new templates.

WHEN

You've grown up, but the story and audience are the same.

Rebrand

WHAT CHANGES

New name or identity, new positioning.

WHEN

You changed market, product or audience, or the name is a real liability.

Rebrand when the business has changed, not when the team is bored of the logo.

Signs it's time to refresh

- Your brand looks smaller than your company.
- Assets fail in new places: app icons, dark mode.
- Every new hire makes things look a bit different.
- Competitors now look just like you.

Measure brand on no budget

- **Branded search:** people searching your name
- **Direct traffic:** visitors who type your URL
- **Ad CTR:** on-brand vs. one-off creative
- **Recognition:** ask "how did you hear about us?"

- **Rolling out a change:** list every place the brand appears, update the most visible ones first, and set a date when old assets are gone. A half-finished refresh looks worse than either version.

07



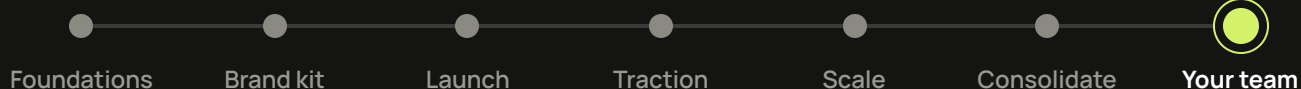
Who should be doing all this?

Freelancer, agency, in-house hire or subscription.

Costs compared

How to decide

Questions to ask



Who should be doing all this?

The right setup depends on how much design you need and how predictable that need is. Four common options, with typical US costs:

OPTION	TYPICAL COST	GOOD FOR	WATCH OUT FOR
Freelancer	\$150+ per design (senior, US)	One-off projects, a specific style	Availability, missed deadlines, re-briefing
Agency	Retainers, often thousands a month	Big projects: a rebrand, a campaign launch	Scoping calls and change orders for small asks
In-house hire	\$10K–12K+ a month, all-in	Large, constant volume and deep product work	Months to recruit; one person can't cover every skill
Design subscription	From about \$899 a month, flat	A steady flow of ads, social, email and decks	Built for ongoing work, not one huge project

In-house cost includes salary, benefits, taxes, equipment, recruiting and management time.

A simple way to decide

- **One big thing?** A freelancer or agency for that project.
- **A steady stream of everyday assets?** A subscription usually gives the best cost per design and the most consistency.
- **Design is core to the product?** Hire in-house, and take marketing work off their plate.

Ask any design partner

- 1 Same people on my brand every month?
- 2 How fast is a first draft? How many revisions?
- 3 What can I request, and what costs extra?
- 4 Who owns the final files?
- 5 Can I pause or cancel if needs change?
- 6 Work for companies at my stage?

The founder's brand checklist.



Tick what you have. Whatever's left in your current stage is your next design priority.

01 Before launch

- ☐ One-sentence description
- ☐ A specific picture of your buyer
- ☐ The one word you want to own
- ☐ Competitor homepages compared
- ☐ Three voice rules written down
- ☐ Name, domain and trademark checked

02 Brand kit

- ☐ Horizontal, stacked and icon logos
- ☐ Logo tested small and in black/white
- ☐ Palette with exact HEX codes
- ☐ Two licensed fonts
- ☐ Image style chosen
- ☐ One-page guide shared as a link

03 Launch

- ☐ Clear headline, one call to action
- ☐ Site checked on mobile
- ☐ Pitch deck on a master template
- ☐ Launch graphics for every channel
- ☐ Launch email and media kit ready

04 Traction

- ☐ Ads tested in batches, refreshed often
- ☐ Five to eight social templates
- ☐ Email templates set up
- ☐ Sales deck, one-pager, case study

05 Scale

- ☐ Shared toolkit of files and templates
- ☐ One owner for the brand
- ☐ One request flow, one brief format
- ☐ Quarterly side-by-side review

06 Consolidation

- ☐ Branded search tracked monthly
- ☐ Decided: leave, refresh or rebrand
- ☐ Rollout plan with a cut-off date

More momentum. Less managing.

Odot is an embedded design partner for growing companies and lean teams. We learn your brand once and become part of your team's rhythm: ads, social, email, decks and branded materials, with in-house familiarity and external flexibility.

- **Same team every month.** No re-briefing.
- **Flat monthly plans.** No quotes, no change orders.
- **Drafts in as little as 24–48h**, revised until it's right.
- **Brand packages too:** strategy, identity, guidelines, launch kits.

STARTER

\$899/mo

Consistent design support for small teams.

GROWTH

POPULAR

\$1,650/mo

For brands with steady content needs.

ELITE

\$2,500/mo

Your on-demand creative team, plus a monthly strategy call.

No contracts. Pause or cancel anytime.

Book a free 30-minute call.

We'll look at your brand together and map what your next stage needs.

Book a call →