

DESIGN TEMPLATE

Brand Guidelines Starter

A short brand book a small team will actually follow, covering the decisions people get wrong rather than the ones nobody asks about.

Most brand guidelines are 60 pages, produced once, and opened twice. This one is built around the questions people actually ask: which blue, which logo file, how much space, what do we call ourselves, and what does the tone sound like in an angry support reply. Fill it in an afternoon and put it where the work happens.

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How to use this template

A guideline nobody opens is worse than none, because it creates the impression that the question was settled.

- 1 **Answer questions people actually ask.** Which logo file, which blue, how much space, what do we call the product. Skip the brand-essence poetry.
- 2 **Show the wrong version.** People learn misuse faster from an example than from a rule.
- 3 **Pair colours, do not just list them.** A palette without approved text and background pairings gets used in illegal combinations within a week.
- 4 **Write voice as before-and-after.** Adjectives like 'confident' and 'human' mean nothing without a rewritten sentence beside them.
- 5 **Put it where the work is.** A PDF in a drive nobody opens loses to a one-page summary pinned in the team channel.

SHORT AND FOLLOWED BEATS COMPLETE AND IGNORED

If this runs past about ten pages for a small team, you are documenting decisions nobody is going to face. Cut it back to the ones that come up.

The brand in one page

QUESTION	ANSWER
What we do, in one sentence	
Who it is for	
What we are not	
What we want people to feel	
Three words we are	
Three words we are not	

Naming

THING	CORRECT	NEVER
Company name		
Product name		
Abbreviation		
Possessive and plural form		
Capitalisation in running text		

THE NAMING TABLE PREVENTS THE MOST FREQUENT ERROR

Inconsistent capitalisation of your own name across a site, a deck, and an invoice is the single most common brand failure in small companies, and the cheapest to prevent.

Logo and clear space

VERSION	USE WHEN	FILE TO USE
Primary lockup	Default, on light backgrounds	
Reversed	On dark or photographic backgrounds	
Mark only	Avatars, favicons, tight spaces	
Single colour	Print, embroidery, fax-grade output	

Rules

MINIMUM SIZE, SCREEN

In pixels, width of the mark

CLEAR SPACE

Usually the height of one letterform, all sides

MINIMUM SIZE, PRINT

PREFERRED FILE FORMAT BY CONTEXT

Never do this

- ☐ Stretch or squash the proportions
- ☐ Add effects, shadows, or outlines
- ☐ Place it on a busy photo without the reversed version
- ☐ Crop the mark
- ☐ Recolour outside the approved versions
- ☐ Rotate it
- ☐ Rebuild the wordmark in a different typeface
- ☐ Put it inside another shape

Colour, with accessible pairings

ROLE	NAME	HEX	USE FOR
Primary			Buttons, links, active state
Ink			Headings
Body			Body text
Surface			Cards and panels
Background			Page ground
Border			Hairlines and dividers
Success			Confirmations only
Warning			Errors and destructive actions

Approved pairings

TEXT COLOUR	ON BACKGROUND	CONTRAST RATIO	APPROVED FOR

MEASURE THE PAIRINGS, DO NOT ASSUME THEM

Body text needs 4.5:1 against its actual background, and large text 3:1. Brand colours frequently fail against their own tints, which is exactly where designers reach for them. Check each pairing and record the number, so nobody has to guess later.

Type scale

ROLE	FAMILY	WEIGHT	SIZE	LINE HEIGHT
Display				
H1				
H2				
H3				
Body				
Small and caption				
Interface and buttons				

Rules

- Never set a weight below 400. Light weights fail on low-quality screens and in print.
- Body text no smaller than 16px on screen.
- Line length between 45 and 80 characters.
- Licensed fonts: state where the licence lives and what it covers, including web use.
- Name the fallback stack, because someone will build an email or a document without the brand font available.

FONT LICENCE HOLDER AND SCOPE

FALLBACK STACK

SECTION 5

Voice, with worked examples

Adjectives are useless on their own. Rewrites are not.

SITUATION	OFF-BRAND	ON-BRAND
Homepage headline		
Feature description		
Error message		
Price increase notice		
Support reply to an angry customer		
Social post		

Words we use and avoid

USE	AVOID	BECAUSE

THE ANGRY-CUSTOMER ROW IS THE USEFUL ONE

Any brand can sound good in a headline. The voice that matters is the one under pressure, which is also the one most likely to be written by someone who has never read these guidelines.

Photography and imagery

We use

Describe: real people, real workspaces, natural light, product in context

We avoid

Describe: staged handshakes, isolated stock models, unrelated abstract imagery

Treatment

Crop, colour grade, overlay rules, corner radius

Illustration

Style, stroke weight, palette, when to use over photography

Practical rules

- ☐ Every image has meaningful alt text, decorative images empty
- ☐ Licence and attribution recorded for anything not shot in-house
- ☐ Faces of real staff or clients used only with written permission
- ☐ Screenshots taken at consistent width and device frame
- ☐ AI-generated imagery disclosed internally, and never used to depict real people or events

RECORD THE LICENCE AT THE POINT OF USE

The moment nobody can remember where an image came from, it becomes a liability. One column in the asset index costs nothing and settles the question years later.

Applications and file index

Where the brand appears

SURFACE	OWNER	TEMPLATE EXISTS	LAST REVIEWED
Website			
Email signature			
Proposal and invoice			
Slide deck			
Social profiles and avatars			
Print and merchandise			

File index

ASSET	FORMAT	WHERE IT LIVES

Handover

- ☐ Source files delivered, not just exports
- ☐ Font licences transferred or their scope confirmed in writing
- ☐ Colour values given in hex, RGB, and CMYK where print is involved
- ☐ A one-page summary pinned where the team actually works
- ☐ A named owner for keeping this document current
- ☐ A review date set

ONE PAGE BEATS SIXTY

Make a single page with the logo files, the palette with its approved pairings, the type scale, and the naming rules. That page is what gets used.

We build the systems behind the paperwork

Gatilab is an independent WordPress and search agency. We build sites, rank them, and stay long enough to prove the work moved something.

2014 Founded	850+ Clients served	2,000+ Projects completed	10,000+ Plugin installs
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What we do

WordPress engineering

Custom themes, blocks, plugins, and migrations built to stay fast and maintainable after handoff.

SEO strategy

Technical fixes, topical coverage, and search visibility work measured against clicks, not scores.

Content marketing

Research-led articles and editorial systems your team can keep publishing without us.

Conversion design

Landing pages, service pages, and forms designed around the decision the reader is actually making.

Need this handled instead of templated?

Send the problem, not a brief. We will tell you whether it is worth building, what it depends on, and what we would deliberately skip. If the honest answer is that you do not need us, you will get that too.

[Start a project](#)

gatilab.com/connect

USE IT FREELY

Free to use, edit, and adapt for your own business and your own clients. No attribution required, no sign-up. The one thing we ask: do not resell it as your own product.