



 **GRIN**  
GETS REAL

**Podcast Transcript**

**Episode 32 | Re Perez**

# **The Power of Creating an Authentic Brand**



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## The Power of Creating an Authentic Brand

### INTRO | Katya:

Welcome to the GRIN Gets Real Podcast, the show for people who want to maximize their marketing potential. My name is Katya and I'm your host on this exciting journey as we talk to our experts who join us from influencer marketing to ecommerce strategy and everything in between. Each episode will feature industry experts that share their insights and provide actionable tips to help you achieve your marketing goals. So put your AirPods in, turn up the volume, and get ready for our guests today, Re Perez.

**Katya:**

Welcome to the GRIN Gets Real Podcast. Re, I am so excited to have you on to talk about building an authentic brand.

**Re:**

Yeah, Hi, Katya.

**Katya:**

Hi! OK, so let's get started. I'd love for the audience to get to know you a little bit. So share a little bit about yourself, who you are, and really what your expertise and branding is.

**Re:**

Yeah, sure. Thanks. So I'm a former fortune 500 brand consultant, I worked at some of the top global branding firms in New York, and then briefly in Dubai, in the Middle East. And so I'm a former consultant turned entrepreneur, you know, business owner, CEO, of my own branding agency, and an author and a speaker and the full gamut. But my branding agency is called Branding for the People. And that was born out of sort of going through a series of personal life changing events. Just sort of having disinterest in helping the Fortune 500 multinational companies. I really wanted to work with the small to midsize brands that are making some sort of transformational impact or difference in people's lives. And that felt good to me in that stage of my career. It's like, "I love what I do. I just want to do it for brands that are doing something amazing in the world."

I did start out as a design major at NYU. But I realized I don't have a really good design sense, but really my approach, which informs my purview on branding, is my degree in organizational behavior and communication. So I was always fascinated with the psychology and the linguistics and the culture of branding. And so that's how I view branding. I really do believe that branding has the power to influence culture and it's more than just logos and designs and all that sort of stuff. It really can influence the way we live our lives.

**Katya:**

I agree, 100%. And I'm so glad that you said it's more than just logos. Because I always like to make sure that we're all talking in the same talk. So let's get down to the basics. What is branding?

**Re:**

Yeah so let's unpack both of those. And I'm glad you asked that because I usually like to start there whenever I am on a new podcast or doing an interview.

I like to start by defining this word "brand," and how I've been trained and the definition I've been using over the course of my career, is that brand is a desired perception. That's my three-word definition. Technically you don't own your brand, it resides in the minds of the people you are communicating to. Therefore, "branding" is a discipline that is designed to create, shape, and influence that desired perception you want in the marketplace.

**Re:**

It's always funny, like I'll meet someone in an Uber or in a social setting and I'll say I do branding, and they say, "Oh, you do marketing." And it's like, "No, I do branding!"

**Katya:**

It's different! It's 100% different.

**Re:**

That's right. And so I have to reconcile.

So if we build off my definitions — if branding is about the process of creating, shaping, and influencing a desired perception, "marketing" is a tool — one of several tools — designed to create that perception. But so is social media. So is public speaking. So is putting on a live or virtual event. So is a podcast. These are all tools to reinforce, enhance, and create the perception you want, ostensibly with the people you are trying to speak to.

**Katya:**

Would you say it's more the feeling of the brand. It's almost hard to conceptualize. Like, there is nothing hard that I can touch that says, "Oh, this is GRIN. GRIN is this notebook. And I think that's why people struggle with understanding what branding is. So would you say it's more of that feeling that you want people to walk away with when they engage with your brand, when they see your brand?"

**Re:**

Yeah it is definitely that. And there is also a question that you asked that I want to make sure that I don't step over.

Brand is not your logo, not your tagline, not your website, not your name. And these are all important and valid tools to create a brand. But they are just tools. They are not the brand itself. So I talk about it being a "perception." Feeling is sort of an output of that perception, so if you perceive something as X, then ostensibly that should evoke an emotion.

We are all consumers of brands whether we realize it or not. Brands create an emotional connection with their target audiences, and if we happen to not be the target audience, it should create an emotional connection of "I don't connect with this brand" or "I do (connect with this brand)."

At the end of the day, I don't care if you are a multinational b2b brand, a b2c brand or personal brand, we all buy based on emotion. And then we validate our emotional buys through logic and reason.

**Katya:**

I love that. And I would imagine just the branding process in general, for any company, is difficult, because how do you explain to your customers like, "Hey, guys, we're trying to evoke a feeling." I would imagine that's a bit of an uphill battle, because tangible is so needed for understanding certain things.

**Re:**

Yeah, definitely. I mean, there's a little bit of education, which is why I love doing these types of interviews, which is why I wrote a book, there's a little bit of education. Because most people who haven't been exposed to branding, they think it is like logos and colors and all that pretty stuff, right? But when you really expand people's awareness and understanding really what's possible about what big companies do around branding, it is designed to create that emotional feeling.

OK, so a classic example I like to use is Harley Davidson. So they're in the business of motorcycles. But their brand is "freedom on the open road." That's the emotional field that we want to convey. Now, the logic and reason that supplements or helps to support that emotional buying decision is, all right, well, these motorcycles better be good quality, it should be in the budget, like all those economic reasons. So if you just rest on emotional buying without backing it up with having good features, and the right price point, then there's a high and then there's a drop. But if you can sustain that emotional buy and live up to it, if not even exceed the perception that you've created, then you're likely to create raving fans, not just a one time customer. So I'm a big advocate of creating a loyal base of raving fans, rather than just trying to acquire one customer sale.

**Katya:**

Katya: Well, it's a business of people, right? And that plays into branding, or really everything that you even do from a marketing perspective, as well.

Now you mentioned your book. So that's a really good segway because I, of course, did read it. And for all you listeners, you have to purchase it. This

is a shameless plug for him, because it was such a really great read with just awesome examples in general. Because this episode is really about building an authentic brand, I really wanted to bring it up because you've got a title that brings people in. So the title of your book is *Your Brand Should Be Gay, Even if You're Not*, I would love to hear you unpack that thought process. You do talk about it, obviously, in the intro of the book that I was like, "I have to get him to like, tell the story," because I think that it speaks really, really well into building an authentic brand.

**Re:**

If you think about it, if you are listening in on this interview and you heard that book title, think about the emotional response that you might have got when you heard that title. The responses I get fall into these broad categories: "Oh, I love the title. Oh, that's genius, that's brilliant. Oh, I'm curious, I'm interested."

I don't get too much of this, but I have to believe there's got to be a fraction of people that might be offended. But here's the thing: That's OK. I'm really teaching — through the power of this book title — what a brand should do. It should pique your curiosity and it should evoke an emotion. It should also polarize, meaning attracting raving fans and also repelling your not-so-ideal audiences.

The last thing I'll say really points to what this book is about, and it's personal for me. I could be using the word "gay" in terms of being happy, but it's real open to interpretation. And it just so happens to be that I identify as a gay man, but ironically, for people who don't know me, oftentimes people don't know that I am. So there's a real power for me to be able to be so daring and bold in putting myself out there knowing that even in today's time, there might be people who might not want to ever hire my agency because that's one of the identifiers that I fall under. But that's the real power, whether it's that or any other identifiers. When you own authentically who you are and who you are not, and you are OK with that, there is so much power and freedom and fulfillment around that, rather than trying to be something that you are not.

**Katya:**

Yeah, I love the word freedom when it comes to that, because that's exactly what it invokes. I don't have to worry about whether this was right or this was wrong. This is truly who I am as a brand, as a person. And I feel good about putting that out there.

One of the things that you said that I would love to just kind of double click on because it evoked an emotion for me was when you said it was "polarizing." What do you mean by polarizing? Is there another brand example that comes to mind when you're thinking of that, because it feels like, I don't want to say negative, but it definitely invoked something in me when you said it, I was like, "Oh, I didn't think about it!"

**Re:**

I like to think in terms of a bell curve. There's the 20-60-20 rule. What the 20-60-20 rule suggests is that 20% of the people are going to be raving fans. On the opposite side of that, there are 20% of people who are going to be naysayers. No matter what you do, they are not going to say anything positive about your brand. Then there are 60% who are sort of "the followers." They can swing either way. But if you focus enough on the raving fans, that 20% can really help to pull people from that 60%.

So speak to the 20% of people who are going to be raving fans, and speak so loudly and so unapologetically about who you are that your naysayers are going to be very prominent, as well. And with that you are going to pull people toward your brand because you have a strong point of view and a strong position.

The classic example that most people will resonate with is Apple versus PC. Remember those ad campaigns where they said, "I'm an Apple. And I'm a PC'?" They have personified their brand through a certain avatar and ostensibly you want to be like, "Yes, I identify with that type of person," and "No, I'm definitely not this type of person." That's a classic example of creating some polarization.

**Katya:**

That's a great example. Immediately I was like, "Oh, now I totally get it."

So what would you say then goes into building that authentic brand? What should I keep in mind? Should I get an agency? What kind of homework do I have to do as a brand to truly live authentically as a brand?

**Re:**

There are two parts in response to your question.

Whether you are a small business or a midsize business, there is a question of whether you should hire an agency or do it yourself. It really depends on what stage you are in. Which is also why I wrote the book, just to give people the tools to do it themselves. And there comes a point in time when some businesses evolve to where they don't really know if they can do it themselves even though they have the knowingness, or they would want some sort of validation from some experts to be able to help and support them in their growth. So either way there is no right or wrong answer. It just depends on where you are in your business.

The other part is, "What does it take?" There are a series of steps and processes that I definitely talk about in my book but the one thing I want to offer up on this question is a framework.

Think of a venn diagram. Consultants love venn diagrams, right?

The first domain is that your brand should be credible, meaning it's got to be something that you can credibly and reliably own. For a lot of business owners that I work with and teach, this probably means they have some credentials, experience, expertise, certification, wisdom, or life story where you say, 'Hey, I can credibly deliver on this type of product or service.

The second domain is the competitive landscape. So let's say you are in a particular industry or vertical, you look at who are your top three competitors that are attempting to solve the same problem you are trying to solve to your target audience. They might have a distinct angle or a very similar approach, but you try to find what is unique in the competitive landscape.

The third domain is where you want to do a deep-dive into your target customers or clients. What is relevant to them? What is it they care about? So the intersection of what you can credibly own, what is unique in the category, and what is relevant to your target audience is where you want to best position your brand, while also being authentic.



**Katya:**

It sounds like a lot of work. But also a lot of soul searching for a brand, right? Because I think that if you want to evoke those emotions you have to be able to personify yourself. And that means you have to dig deep. Like, what truly is unique about my brand? Any brand that's listening, it's very easy to be like, "No, I'm the only one that does this." But let's say I'm selling t-shirts. I'm definitely not the only one that sells t-shirts. But there's got to be a reason there's got to be something that's really special for me, right? Maybe I'm the queen of sarcastic t-shirts. I love to use that example. I don't know why, I think I probably just have a propensity to buy sarcastic t-shirts. But it is very much so that this is why I should buy from this brand. Maybe it's the story that a brand would want to tell. Like maybe my t-shirts are very eco friendly. There are just so many ways that you can really pivot and highlight that uniqueness.

Now walk me through a little bit more of the branding process. And what I mean by that is, if I am a brand, and I'm working with your agency, what can I expect as part of the process of rebranding? Do we start with brand identity, then we go to brand marketing? What can we expect in this branding process?

**Re:**

Branding is both a linear and a nonlinear process. But oftentimes when we walk people through that process, we start in a nonlinear fashion. It is important to look at branding as creating an organism, or looking at your brand within an ecosystem. So the starting point for us is really doing a deep dive into who or what this brand is.

Think of it in terms of phases.

The first phase is what we call brand strategy. In my mind when it comes to strategies for a business, the proper sequence is having a business strategy, then a brand strategy, then a marketing strategy. I go in that sequence because first you need to understand what you are trying to accomplish as a business. Once you understand your business strategy, then you apply a brand strategy to help support your business strategy and business goals. Then your brand strategy informs and directs, and even curtails, what you actually do marketing-wise.

I do want to stay there for one second because oftentimes some people will start with a marketing agency. And if I were a marketing agency and all I did were Facebook ads, or YouTube advertising, or Clubhouse, or LinkedIn, of course that's what I'm going to sell you because that's the world in which I live. But as a brand strategist first, we are agnostic to the tools. It really goes back to what is right for this business and what is right for this brand and then you deploy the right marketing strategies.

So what does brand strategy mean? There are a couple things we look at: We look at why this brand exists; what its promise is; who the target audience is, and what problems you are trying to solve for them; what the proof points are that make you a credible person; what are the messages you want to convey that speak to the emotional, functional, economical reasons why people buy. Think of all these layers. Then the output is, 'This is who my brand is and who it's not,' and it's written in a language that can be replicable and then transferred over to the people who are going to implement that strategy.

The next phase is brand identity. There are two broad parts — the visual identity and the verbal identity.

The visual identity is the usual suspects like what the logo looks like. But think broader. What is the color palette? What is the look and feel? What is the tone? What's the style of photography or even the fonts that we use? It takes the subjectivity of creating the look and feel of the brand and makes it a little more strategic and less subjective because now it's predicated on the brand strategy.

The verbal identity is everything besides the visual. It's the language and tone. Like Starbucks — they don't say small, medium, large, they say tall, vente, grande. Big brands really create and carve out their vocabulary.

**Katya:**

The last piece is the brand marketing, and that usually entails the marketing tools like your brand website or your landing pages. It includes social media, whether it's paid or organic. What are all the marketing tools that now you want to express and implement into

your brand? And the reason I say it's nonlinear is because I think there is a feedback loop where you always want to make sure that what you are doing in marketing is consistent in strategy. Does it reinforce our message, or does it take away from that? That's where you want to have a constant interaction and dialogue to make sure that every decision you're making really comes through the lens of is this "on brand" or "off brand."

**Katya:**

Yes. Ah, I love all of these things, partly because I'm very process oriented. The other part is because I'm the director of content so I'm always honing in on the brands. And to your point, it is the words that you choose, right like we say "grinners" and "grinfluencers" because that's part of our name. It's part of identity. So I like that you've broken it down to brand strategy, brand identity, and brand marketing. Because when you remove the brand strategy, it's almost like you're removing homebase. It feels like everything feeds back to that. Here's my logo. Does it fit into my brand strategy? Is this what I'm trying to achieve with this logo? You have so many really great examples in your book on even the logo selection. There was one particular company that I was really impressed with the example it had to do with the flame. I believe that there was a flame in one. And the CEO was very adamant. He's like, "I want this flame, I want this flame!" So being able to redirect back to a brand strategy I think is so key. And really having an effective brand, that to your point, is authentic and evokes that emotion that you want to say,

**Re:**

I love that example.

**Katya:**

I do, I do! I'm like, "Yeah, we've been on that." Yeah, we've had that conversation before, right? Like, is this the hill I'm gonna die on? I don't know.

Now, the pandemic has caused a lot of brick and mortar brands to start looking and rethinking about their digital presence. Now more than ever, more people are making sure that they have a DTC and ecommerce strategy in general. Now, what advice would you give to a brand who wants to translate the experiential with the digital? Do you have to rebrand for something like that? What should you keep in mind if you're looking at transitioning from experiential to digital? and not a full transition, it's just making it part of your strategy.

**Re:**

Think about the brand experience or the customer journey along three broad phases or categories.

The first category is pre-purchase. The second category is moment of purchase, and the third category is post-purchase. This is a common framework that big companies use.

If you are acquiring customers or clients, whether it's brick and mortar or online, there are a certain set of brand touchpoints in the prepurchase phase just to create awareness that your brand exists. You want to populate or even prioritize your top 3-5 or 5-7 brand touchpoints. Then decide which ones you want to either reinforce or really dial in or brand when it comes to the moment of purchase. That could be an email they get, or a landing page when they click on purchase, or something that gets mailed to them. And then post-purchase is how you continue to engage.

The point here is that the line of thinking is the same when it comes to creating a brand experience, it's just a matter of changing the touchpoints. If you go from a brick and mortar to a completely online business, you have to shift those touchpoints and pay a little more attention to your Facebook or Instagram page, or maybe do some paid advertising. So it's not just the "walk-bys" anymore.

**Katya:**

Yeah, like how many people came into your store and all of that good stuff. And what I'm hearing you say is, when it comes to the touch points, to me, it sounds like it's translating your brand to digital, right? So it's not changing, it's translating it into the digital format. And then what's going to be key in that translation too is having that brand strategy, which is why it sounds like that's key. Because when you're shifting or translating like that, you can always go back to the brand strategy and say, like, Alright, this is what I'm like if I have to double down on Facebook, if I have to make a more robust website, or if I have to do Instagram Lives. Whatever strategy that you want to take when it comes to the digital format. So I think it really hinges on brand strategy, and that's why you gotta start there. You gotta start with a brand strategy.

So this is prediction time for you. What do you see changing over the course of maybe the next year or two when it comes to the world of branding?

**Re:**

Re: I think we are in a season of people craving authenticity, as self serving as it may sound. People are craving genuineness and realness. People are craving wanting to buy from and support brands that share the same ethos and share the same belief systems – maybe even support the same causes. We are not going to turn this into a political conversation, but I do feel there are some brands that are going to lean more to one ideology over another and in a way it is sort of representative of how we have been socialized individually. You just want to be clear that you are not going to appeal to everyone, you are going to appeal to people who share that same ethos.

So, one, I think more importantly than ever before is authenticity in branding. Secondly, having an ethos, stand, or point of view is going to be important in branding. And three, I think there has to be a dialogue. I think what is really going to be key for brands to not only survive but to thrive, is to have a feedback loop where they are constantly engaging with their customers. What's important to them? What do they care about? What's not working for their brand and what can they do better? And it's those brands that are going to iterate and make their branding and marketing better to improve the results that they want. But also, more importantly, to enhance the relationship and impact they are having with their audience.

**Katya:**

That's a great prediction. I think that when it comes down to it, we've all gone through the same thing together with this pandemic, for sure. And just seeing the shift in general. So, authenticity: I think that we've always been on that road. But now it's like in hyperdrive almost where it's like OK just be real with me, let me know that you're wearing the yoga pants, right? Like I'm just up together, like from the face up together, slippers on the feet.

So, Re, I appreciate you coming on sharing your wisdom. Thank you so much again for joining me today.

**Re:** I enjoyed it. Thanks so much. And we'll speak with you soon.

## **OUTRO| Katya:**

**I had such a great conversation with Re on building an authentic brand. Is it a buzzword or to be something that all brands have to keep in mind when building out their sales and marketing strategies? During the episode, he took us through the branding process framework, brand strategy, brand identity and brand marketing, as he clearly defined what goes into each step of that process with relevant examples and advice for each. We also dug into some great nuggets about building an authentic brand from his book, *Your Brand Should Be Gay, Even if You're Not*. A brand should evoke emotion first then be followed up with logic. Essentially, what makes you, as a brand, unique?**

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