MAP OUT how YOUR BRAND’S LANGUAGE fits INTO A wider LANDSCAPE

Whenever we start to work with a new client, we carry out an audit of the sector they operate in.

We get samples of writing from their direct competitors. We may also look at products and services that are related to our client’s work.

So for example, if we were working with a high-end law firm that prided itself on individual service and industry-defining knowledge, we might also consider the ways that organisations like private banks, tax consultancies and investment houses use words.

Typically, we go through web pages, contracts, brochures, packaging, manuals, training materials, tweets – and any other written materials we can get our hands on.
Then we use checklists like this to analyse the language each competitor is using:

- When you hear this brand's words spoken out loud, what kind of person does it sound like?
- Do you want to hear more?
- Are you bored?
- Does the brand speak mostly in the active or passive voice?

- How long are the sentences it uses?
- Does it use mostly verbs or nouns in a sentence?
- Does it use long words or short words?
- Does it use jargon or business speak?

Usually, sectors are characterised by maybe two or three dominant styles. Or sometimes it's more like there's a spectrum between one style and another.

THE FROZEN PIZZA LANDSCAPE

When we began to create the brand language for our pizza brand, one of our first jobs was to go shopping.

We hit the supermarkets to find brands that are already operating in the frozen pizza sector.

We also know that Lil & Jasper's has a farmer's market feel to it. So if we saw products with a similar look and feel, we popped those in our trolley too.

We don't just go to one or two supermarkets.

We know Lil & Jasper's needs to have an up-market feel — so we made sure we visited Waitrose and the Harvey Nichols Food Hall — and any real life farmer's markets we can get to.

Then we bring our haul back to the studio and keep all the packaging.

(The pizza doesn't go to waste either — we're a hungry bunch.)

Then we audit the language that's being used by each brand.

And finally, our notes and scribbles are tidied up into a chart a bit like this one.
## LANGUAGE in the FROZEN PIZZA SECTOR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REAL</th>
<th>PASSIONATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waitrose</td>
<td>Pizza Express</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Oetker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tesco</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asda</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UNCTIONAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>CARICATURE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago Town</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Goodfella's</td>
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When we analysed language in the frozen pizza sector, what we found was a space where brands either sound functional and convenient — or they borrowed heavily from native or second generation Italian speech patterns and stereotypes.

So supermarket own brands and Dr Oetker tend toward the functional end of the spectrum, while Goodfella’s, Chicago Town and Pizza Express talk in fiery, short sentences to convey passion and fast action. On top of that, the first two use a stylised, ba-da-bing language that conveys the kind of Italian-American fast talk that most consumers will have seen in films.

The big question was did Lil & Jasper’s fit into this landscape — or did it want to create its own territory?
**DIFFERENTIATION or "ME TOO"?**

As you’re building or reviewing your brand, you need to ask an important question: Do you want to look and sound the same as everyone else in your sector? Or do you want to stand out and feel different?

Every sector tends to have its own look and feel. They have their own signature styles of language too.

For example, you’d be surprised if you walked into a garage to get your car serviced and it was painted fresh pastel pinks, had a fuchsia logo and gave you a receipt that read: *Your naughty little clutch has cost you £150, but don’t worry, we’ve put a nice sensible one in there for you now.*

We’re surprised, because this isn’t the sort of language we’d expect to get from a garage.

Mapping out how your competitors speak gives you an overview of the norms for your sector.

But you then have to decide – Do you want to play it the same as everyone else – or do something different?

**Me too**

Many brands start off trying to look and sound the same as others in their sector. Then a few years down the line when they’ve become more established, they find they need to make more of an effort to allow their personality to shine through. Because otherwise, it’s very hard to show why they’re different and better than their competitors.

Differentiating from the outset takes guts – and often, a heap of money to invest in brand development and marketing.

**Disrupting the marketplace**

Making the decision to stand out is a brave thing to do – but it can be highly effective and profitable too.

For example, twenty years ago, who would have thought that a new airline would launch with orange livery and a more down-to-earth proposition – and change the way we all travel?

You just have to decide – do you find a place to snuggle in amongst your competitors, or do you stake out completely new territory?

So what should Lil & Jasper’s do? The landscape for our healthy frozen pizza brand is dominated by language that’s either functional and convenient – which just doesn’t feel high-end enough for Lil & Jasper’s. Or it’s passionate and Italian. And that isn’t right for Lil & Jasper’s either. This is a brand that came out of a deli in Portland, Oregon.

So the answer to the question for Lil & Jasper’s has to be differentiation.

To get a better idea of how different, we analysed the language used across related foodie and nutritionally-conscious brands.
**1950s STYLE GUSTO**

(language sounds like it's straight from the pages of an Enid Blyton story)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Naive</th>
<th>Sophisticated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dorset Cereals</td>
<td>Kettle Crisps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottle Green</td>
<td>Briana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nakd</td>
<td>(American sauces &amp; dressings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bear</td>
<td>(Snack bars)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groovy Food</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**DIFFERENTIATION or “ME TOO”?**

And this is where things got interesting. Communications in foodie land were largely conveyed in an innocent, child-like style – or in a very earnest head girl style that sounded like it had been written by Enid Blyton. We found the sector to be full of fun and friendly childish or nostalgic voices.

Which left an interesting and unoccupied space for Lil & Jasper’s. It’s the one that’s still blank on the chart – the quadrant between modern and sophisticated. Which coincides very nicely with the grown-up, simple and relevant food choice that Lil & Jasper’s wants to be.
MAP OUT YOUR TERRITORY - EXERCISES

1. Go shopping
Make a list of your competitors and get samples of the way they use words.

If your brand is a consumable like a frozen pizza, this can be as simple as jumping in the car and visiting supermarkets.

If your brand is a specialist service, hit Google to find out who your competitors are. Then sign up for their newsletters and send off for their brochures.

If you want to open a café, go exploring in your neighbourhood. Visit other cafés and take their napkins and paper cups, take photos of their interiors if you can, make a note of how they phrase their menus and customer communications both on site and online.

Let your friends, relatives and colleagues know that you need examples of packaging, brochures, tender documents... whatever you can get your hands on.

2. Analyse
Take your samples and make detailed notes about the kinds of language your competitors and related brands are using.

If you close your eyes and hear this brand's words spoken out loud, what kind of person does it sound like? If a real person springs to mind, use a photo of them too.

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Does it tell you stories?</td>
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Use a checklist like this >>>
MAP OUT YOUR TERRITORY - EXERCISES

When we're doing this, we use separate sheets of A4 white paper, which allows us to doodle, and also to sketch the results out across our workshop table.

We might even attach a photo of a person the writing style reminds us of. We thought the voice of Goodfellas pizza sounded like Robert De Niro in The Untouchables, so we clipped a picture of him to the Goodfellas audit.

3. Categorise
You tend to find that there are maybe two, three or four styles in each sector.

Your job now is to give each of the styles you find a name. In the frozen pizza category, there were two styles:

Functional and Italian

And within those two, there was a feeling that some styles were more manufactured than others. That's why we ended up with the quadrants going from left to right, functional through to passionate. Then from top to bottom, real and caricature.

In the related brands, the styles were different - ranging from naïve and whimsical through to sophisticated. The vertical axis marked a range in styles from modern, through to lashings of ginger beer-style 1950s language.

4. Map out the language styles of your competitors on a chart
Group the different styles you've found into categories and plot them out on a chart.

Turn over for chart >>

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MAP OUT YOUR TERRITORY - EXERCISES

When you’ve identified the types of language that are being used in your sector, jot them down on the graph. Then place all your competitors on it, depending on the type of language they use.

In our experience, this shape of graph works well for many sectors, but it might not be quite right for yours. So do feel free to adapt it.

5. Decide if you’re going to differentiate Is your language going to be like others in your sector? Or are you going to do something completely different?

You can use your chart to decide where you need to be.

If you want to differentiate, look for clear space. That means looking for an area of the chart that no-one else is occupying.

Once you decide where your brand fits, you can then begin to define its personality.