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STEP 12 - Business Identity

Now you've identified your target market and/or your preferred type of potential purchaser it's time to create your business identity - your 'image'.

This is not, as many people seem to think, about how you like to see yourself or how you like to see your business.

It's not about how you see yourself 'in the mirror' when you look at yourself or your business because that image, the image that you see in the mirror, is the 'wrong way round'!

The reason why many people don't like photos or videos of themselves is that the 'person' they see in the photo isn't 'them' - it's different from what they see in the mirror - but it IS how others see them.

!! This step is CRITICAL to your business !!

If you get it 'wrong' you are unlikely to succeed in your ambitions.

How others will see you is what you need to consider when you start to create your business 'image'.

Your business identity needs to 'resonate' with your target market - but what is your 'identity'?

There are a number of elements which determine your 'image' these are:

- Your Business Name or trading name
- Your Brand names if you have different products or services within your business
- Your 'logo' or 'brand image'
- The colours that you use in your image
- How you identify yourself - your business 'image'

This topic is discussed in detail in Chapter 3 of "**How To Set Up Your Own Personal Business**". If you have not yet read this, you should do so now.

NAMES

One of the first things you'll think about when you start your Personal Business is what you are going to call it and there are several options to consider.

- Use your own name or a name based on it - such as *Ford* or *Tesco*
- Use a 'meaningless' name - such as *Apple* or *Next*
- Use a descriptive name - such as *Carphone Warehouse* or *Pizza Express*

Your choice of name should relate to your target market.

If your target market is a specific, specialised niche then use a descriptive name because this will keep away the people you don't want.

If you offer professional or personal services, then use your own name (or an appropriate pseudonym) because people will initially be dealing with you personally.

If you don't really want to 'disqualify' anyone then use a 'meaningless' name that doesn't actually describe what your business does or what benefit you provide.

If in doubt we would always recommend that you use your own name - and just your name, don't add a description of what you do because people then focus on that, and not on you.

My naming ideas are:

If you need help here, book a **PBCS Helpline Call** at <https://BenCoker.as.me> to discuss the matter. We have over 40 years of marketing experience, especially with small businesses, and can give you expert advice.

Think carefully about your name - it has to be something that appeals to your market, that doesn't 'turn them off'. Don't just pick something that 'you like'.

BRANDING

The 'brand' you give your business or the products or services you provide is critical. It must appeal to the people you are expecting to purchase from you and unless you personally have training in graphic design and branding you should consult an expert.

This is an investment you must make - without it you'll end up spending money you don't need to spend and may even have to go through the costly process of re-branding if you get it 'wrong'.

The Brand is made up of several elements including a 'logo' or 'badge' that you give your business, the colours that you use and any words other than your business name that you use to attract the people you want.

Before you consult a graphic designer or branding expert however, you need to have a **clear** idea of how you want to present yourself. The designer will ask for a 'brief' on what you want him or her to do.

Take a few minutes to consider this and make some notes here that you can discuss with the designer.

My branding ideas and requirements are:



You will be tempted to put something together yourself to avoid spending money on this but be warned - **it's a false economy**.

If you go down the 'DIY' route you will end up spending more money than you should - unless of course you are yourself a trained and qualified graphic designer, but even then, it's a good idea to get someone else to have a look at it - they will see your business from the outside rather than your view from the inside.

Graphic designer contacted, and work agreed

☐ **Done**

Trademarks

You may wish to register your company or brand name and logo as an official 'Trademark' We will deal with this in the next step once you have your business formally set up.

IMAGE

This is where many, many people get it all wrong and throw all the good work done so far out of the window!

Your business image is how you appear to people beyond your Name and your Branding. It's about 'little' things -

- Your domain name
- Your email address
- Your business card
- Your social media presence
- Your stationery (including how you structure your emails)
- Your website
- Your signage (on buildings or vehicles)
- Your workwear and personal appearance

All of these have far more impact than you might think because, beyond your Name and Brand, *they* are the things that create the 'first impressions' people have of you.

Now 'first impressions' are not cast in stone. If you make a good first impression you can quite easily destroy it later, or if you make a bad first impression, you can quite easily recover it later - although it's easier to destroy than recover!

Let's start with your **internet presence** - your domain name, email and website will be covered in more detail later and you can set it all up when you get there along with your social media presence, but **there are a few things you should do now**.

Once you have decided on your business and brand names one of the first things you should do is register them as internet **domain names**.

To do this you should go to **IONOS** - www.ionos.co.uk and search for a domain name which is as close as possible to the name you've chosen - you may need to do some creative lateral thinking in some cases!

HINT: Do your best to keep the name to less than 20 characters before the ending. People don't like having to type in long names. Also avoid underscores _ as they often 'get lost'.

Now sometimes this requires some 'lateral thinking' so if you're not sure how it works or can't find a suitable name book a **PBCS Helpline Call** at <https://BenCoker.as.me> to discuss the matter. I'll take you through the process of getting it set up.

Alongside your business names, and when you can (if the name is 'available' **always register a domain in your own name**). Most people's .com names are already taken but try out '.net', '.me', '.uk', and so on. There are also some specialist endings available such as '.plumber'.

This serves two purposes - it stops someone you share your name with coming along and registering it, and it gives you extra credibility.

Now - register your domain names.

Domain names registered:

Now you've secured your domains you can set up your email addresses later when we show you how to do that.

WARNING:

DO NOT set up email addresses that look like 'yourbusinessname@gmail.com' or hotmail.com or me.com or any proprietary ISP name like sky.com!

This is one of the best ways of destroying your business credibility - it may seem a good idea but it makes you look like a complete amateur who doesn't know what they are doing!

SOCIAL MEDIA

We will cover how you set up on social media - LinkedIn, Facebook and 'X' and possibly Instagram - later but for now there is one thing that you need to do.

Get a professional headshot

Whatever your business does, at this stage it's YOU who people will be dealing with so if you want to make a credible impact for your business, and for you on social media it is really important to do this properly.

Sure, you can give it a go with your smartphone - but the lighting will be wrong, the background will be wrong, and your whole image will be wrong - especially if you try to do it as a 'selfie'!

When you set up a LinkedIn profile, or a business page on Facebook **never ever** -

- Use your company logo
- Include other people or pets in the picture
- Have anything other than a plain or blurred background
- Use 'party' or 'holiday' shots

- Use a picture that is out of date
- Use a picture that isn't actually 'you'
- Use cartoons or graphic of yourself

What you have to do with your headshot is to create an image of a person your target market members 'take to' and would like to deal with.

You must appear to be open and honest - and you must never leave your picture 'blank' - people will assume you are 'hiding something'.

Find a professional photographer who is experienced in this sort of work. Someone who just does weddings or wildlife may not be right for this. Find someone who is recommended for doing this work by other local businesses.

They should provide you with a few different photographs to use in different contexts.

Photographer contacted, and headshots booked

☐ **Done**

STATIONERY

This includes your business card and any paperwork such as letterheads and forms your customers need to complete. It also includes any advertising material, which we'll come back to later.

When you talk to your graphic designer it's a good idea to get them to recommend a local printer who they are used to working with. Alternatively, you can use on-line printers like Vistaprint or Hello Print although we have no real recommendations to make here.

At this stage you should work with your graphic designer to create your business cards and basic letterheads. The designs can be done now, and you can add the details required later before you are ready to launch your business

Your Business Cards are key.

There is nothing worse than having someone start a conversation with you about what you do and you not having a card to give them. The impression they'll get is that you're an amateur, or not really serious about your business.

I've seen thousands of business cards in my time and I've seen thousand of 'mistakes' with them.

Your business card is NOT an advertising flyer

It does not need to describe the benefits of what you do - people don't want to be 'sold to' on a business card!

What they want is a reminder of who you are and how to contact you - and quite often they want to write something on your card to help with this - so don't use paper stock which is

impossible to write on or have your cards with a dark background on both sides - it may 'look good' (to you) but it's not what people want.

All it needs is your company identity, your name, email address, direct phone number and possibly your web address - and maybe your headshot photo to help people remember. That's all.

The email address should be **your personal business email address**. Please NOT info@ or even worse sales@! Likewise, the phone number should be where they can reach **you**, not your PA or a call handling centre.

Although it's tempting not to go to the expense of having cards printed and use instead one of the services which put your 'card' on your phone or just use a QR code sending people to your website there is one big problem. These methods are essentially transient whereas a physical card is permanent. Yes, people may lose your physical card but they're far more likely to lose the contact details you've transmitted by phone – they may still have them but won't know where to find them quickly. I've tried this and it just doesn't work.

Other stationery

It is a legal requirement for your business letterhead (and your website) to show the following details.

- The full name(s) or the proprietor(s) or director(s)
- The place of business or registered office in full
- The Limited Company number and VAT number if registered

Many businesses don't do this and hardly any ever get prosecuted, but technically, without declaring this information you are breaking the law. It applies to Sole Traders as well as Limited Companies which remember, do not have the same protection as consumers under the GDPR.

Once you have the design for your letter head you can either have a supply printed or print them yourself using a desktop inkjet or laser printer but do use good quality paper for this - at least 90gsm, preferably 100gsm or 120gsm.

Other forms and such like can be printed on lower weights of paper, but your letter head is 'important' and should appear so.

Business Cards and other key stationery design in progress

☐ Done

Read the notes on the Government website about how you must display your company name - <https://www.gov.uk/running-a-limited-company/signs-stationery-and-promotional-material>

I understand the rules about displaying my Company Name and information**Yes / No****WHAT YOU WEAR**

Rule No. 1 - Just because you're running a business you do NOT have to wear a 'suit'!

Except of course if you are in a 'professional' sector working with 'professional' or 'corporate' clients who expect it.

Match what you wear to what you preferred target market clients wear. Appear to be what they expect you to be.

It's a good idea to adopt some type of 'uniform' such as branded shirts or T-shirts which identify who you are by carrying your company branding. It shows professionalism and commitment to your business.

In some cases, depending on what you do you can adopt 'smart casual'

This is all part of your marketing effort so if you're unsure what to wear book a **PBCS Helpline Call** at <https://BenCoker.as.me> to discuss the matter.

I have considered this and decided that I will wear:**I will order appropriate clothing (if applicable) by**

Make a note in your diary to do this.

SIGNAGE

If you work from home, it is advisable not to install any signage on your property - it leads to all sorts of 'complications'!

If you work from business premises sometimes signage is essential but sometimes not, it just depends on what you do.

If you are going to put up new signs there are two things to do.

First you will have to get planning permission - even if it is to replace an existing sign on a building. This is normally a formality and comes from the first tier of local government which is the local Parish or Town Council.

Depending on where you are the application may first have to go through a Borough or County Council, but it always gets referred to the first tier. It's a good idea to contact the local Parish or Town Clerk to let them know of your intentions and 'get them on your side' as the formal application goes through.

This applies both to signs fixed to buildings and to portable signs such as A Boards you may want to put on the pavement - some places have bye laws that prohibit this so be aware.

I have explored the regulations concerning signage and contacted the local council

Done / Not applicable

You may decide that you want to use signage on a vehicle. There are advantages and disadvantages to this and people often make the same mistake they do with business cards.

Your vehicle is not a mobile advertising hoarding.

Very few people actually read what's on the side or back of a vehicle when they are either driving or walking along the street.

All you need on your vehicle is the information on your business card with possibly a very brief description of one or two of the benefits you offer. You'll never 'sell' anything off the side or the back of a van!

Needless to say, your graphic designer should be involved with making sure that both your street signage and your vehicle signage are consistent with your brand image - don't get a different designer to do your signs instead of the one who did your branding - it just won't match.

One other issue with vehicle signage.

You **must** declare to your insurance company that your vehicle has been 'modified'.

They classify signs and 'stickers' and even magnetic temporary signs as a 'modification' and will not pay out in the event of an accident, if this has not been declared.

I have decided to apply vehicle signage and informed my insurance company accordingly

Done / Not Applicable