

**HELP TO GROW.**  
MANAGEMENT ALUMNI

**FROM VISIBILITY TO CREDIBILITY:  
BUILDING A BRAND PEOPLE TRUST**

# MEET THE SPEAKERS

**HELP TO GROW.**  
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**Sarah Williams**

Co-founder of Darklight, Visual Consultancy



**Dr Mark Smith**

Founder of Direction™, Brand Strategy  
Lecturer at Nottingham Business School, NTU

Why visibility is easy and credibility is hard

How people judge your brand instantly

We'll leave you with practical actions, not just theory

AI has **increased content** but reduced **quality**

With more noise, it's **harder to stand out**

day in my life

12.4K  
567  
312

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8,106  
234  
120

Home Search Add Post Profile

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# THE SHIFT: WHY BRANDING HAS CHANGED

What does this mean for SMEs?

More **pressure**, more **output**, less **time**...

...budgets are **squeezed**

**TRUST** is now the **differentiator**

# 5 STEPS TO BUILDING BRAND EQUITY



Harvard Business School (2024)

# FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND VISUAL TRUST

- Visuals shape perception before anything else
- Poor visuals damage credibility instantly
- Strong visuals tell your story



NATURAL



VIBRANT



CELEBRATORY



UPLIFTING



FLAVOURFUL



AMBUNDANT



# FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND VISUAL TRUST

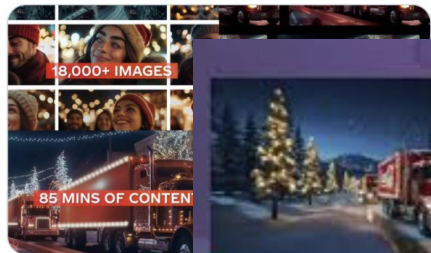
- Generic stock / AI visuals vs real, meaningful imagery
- What builds trust visually:
  - Behind-the-scenes content
  - Product/process storytelling
  - Real people



# COCA-COLA, McDONALD TROLLED OVER AI XMAS

**Reid Southern** @Rahll

Secret Level, one of the studios behind those awful AI Coke ads, released a featurette. They're trying to flex with their numbers, but all it does is show how inefficient and bad their art direction is. 512 images per shot, and 85 minutes of 'content' for a hideous 80 second ad.



**THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER** SUBSCRIBE

## Coca-Cola Is Trying Another AI Holiday Ad. Executives Say This Time Is Different

After a major backlash in 2024, Coke and the L.A. studio it hired have produced a new synthetic spot they believe viewers will like a lot more; "The craftsmanship is ten times better." Will they?

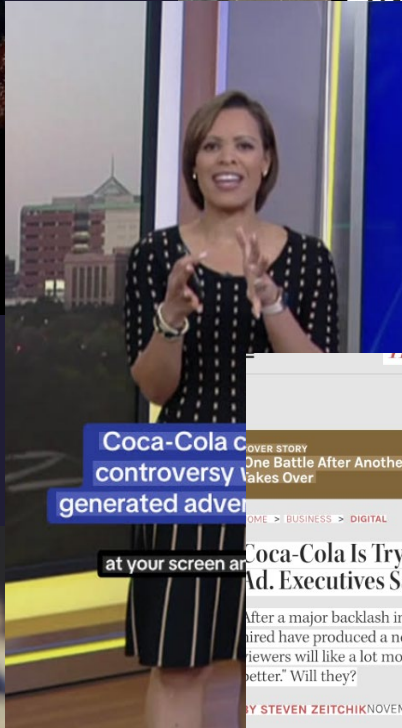
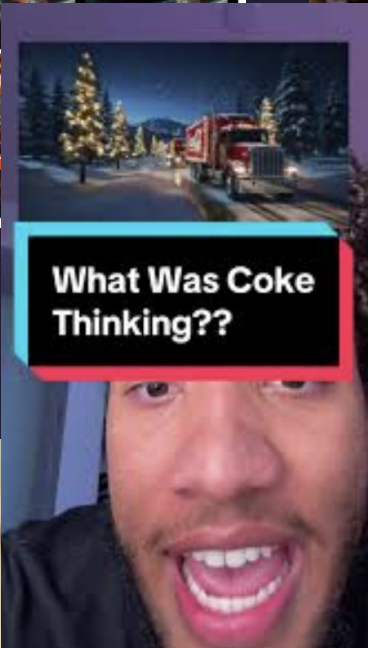
BY STEVEN ZEITCHIK NOVEMBER 3, 2025 5:30AM

and after getting absolutely dragged last year for making a completely AI

Executives eluded them

stuffaboutadvertising 2025-11-4

Coca-Cola remade their iconic holiday commercial more

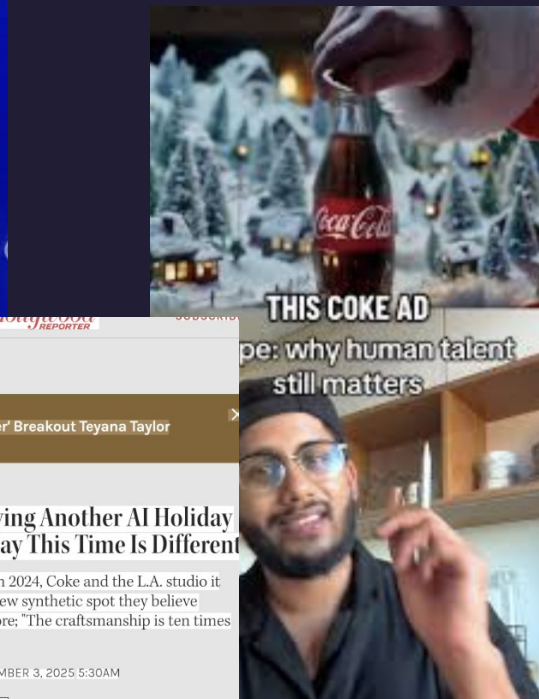


**THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER**

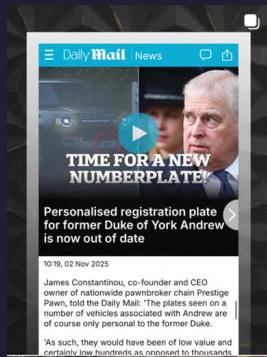
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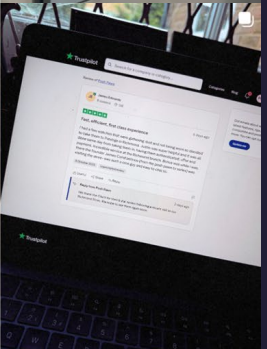
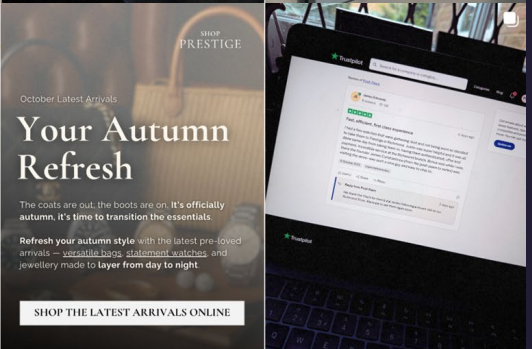






# HELP TO GROW

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# CONSISTENCY: THE FOUNDATION OF CREDIBILITY

- Consistency builds trust over time
- Inconsistency confuses and weakens brands
- A lot of inconsistency comes from internal decisions



**aesop**  ...

Aesop


1,791 posts 1.3M followers 113 following

Founded 1987.  
Vegan and Cruelty-Free formulations.  
Certified B Corporation.

[Ink.bio/aesop](#) and 2 more



Followed by [tiffany\\_baron\\_](#), [camilla\\_greenwell](#) + 30 more

Following 

Message



Festive



Discover



Geranium Le...



Lucent Refin...



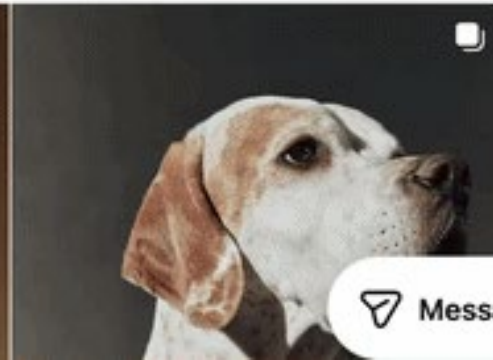
Eleos



Sustainability



Salone 2025



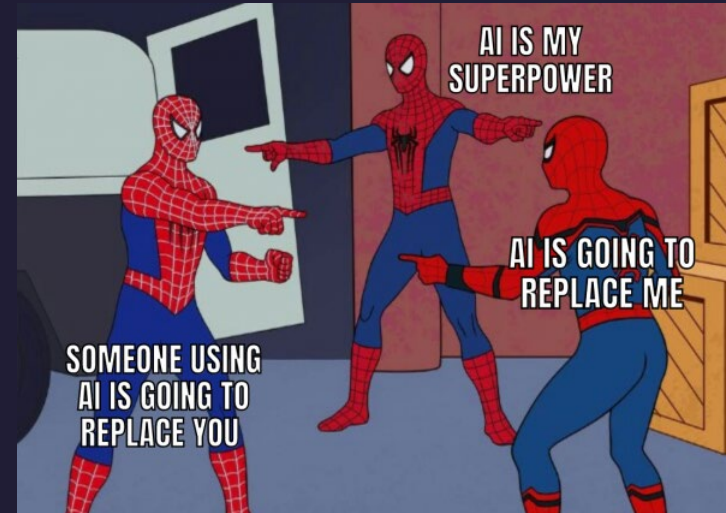
 Messages

# AI: DON'T LET IT DILUTE YOUR BRAND

- AI is a **tool**, not a **strategy**
- Overuse leads to **generic, low-impact** content
- Human thinking is your **competitive advantage**
- Use AI to **create time for thinking**, not replace it

# AI: DON'T LET IT DILUTE YOUR BRAND

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## Use AI for:

- Efficiency
- Drafting
- Admin
- Collating lots of data

## Avoid using AI for:

- Core messaging
- Brand voice
- Strategic thinking
- Replacing human insight

# STORYTELLING AND AUTHENTICITY

- People **trust stories**, not statements
- **Authenticity builds credibility** faster than perfection
- **Your journey** is part of your brand



# STORYTELLING AND AUTHENTICITY

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What builds trust:

- Founder stories
- Customer outcomes
- Real experiences

Why it works:

- Human connection
- Relatability
- Practical

# YOUR BRAND COMMUNITY

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What does  
building a  
brand  
community  
really look like?

# YOUR BRAND COMMUNITY



What does  
building a  
brand  
community  
really look like?

# KNOW WHEN TO GET SUPPORT

- You don't need to do everything yourself
- Time is best spent on your strengths
- External support can accelerate growth

# KNOW WHEN TO GET SUPPORT

Reality of SMEs: founders wear too many hats

Risk: spending time on low-value tasks

Options:

- o AI tools
- o Agencies / specialists

# KNOW WHEN TO GET SUPPORT

In a study of SME leaders:

- 65% state outsourcing helps them **focus on core functions**
- 63% identify **cost reduction** as a key benefit of outsourcing
- the modern market offers more than 8,000 different MarTech solutions - **specialists help navigate** these *(and this was two years ago!)*
- most expect agency **costs to be lower** compared with building an internal marketing department

European Journal of Management Issues (2024)

In a study of SME using marketing outsourcing:

- used due to **lack of expertise** in their own business
- belief in significant **underuse of website**
- 53% wanted **additional analytics** capabilities

Australasian Marketing Journal (2025)

# KNOW WHEN TO GET SUPPORT

Opportunity costs....

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# KNOW WHEN TO GET SUPPORT



The screenshot shows a tweet by Christoffer Bjelke (@chribjel) from 4 days ago. The tweet text is: "We hired a junior developer to write the simple code, so we don't have to spend a ton of money on tokens for those basic/primitive tasks". It has 239 replies, 583 retweets, 12.5K likes, and 989K views. Below the tweet is a reply by Sameer goel (@sameer\_goel) with a "Follow" button. The reply text is: "Great, so now we're optimizing LLM costs by inventing employees again. Full circle innovation." The reply was posted at 9:45 AM on April 26 and has 50.8K views.

**Christoffer Bjelke** @chribjel · 4d  
We hired a junior developer to write the simple code, so we don't have to spend a ton of money on tokens for those basic/primitive tasks

239 583 12.5K 989K

**Sameer goel** @sameer\_goel  
Following

Replying to @chribjel

Great, so now we're optimizing LLM costs by inventing employees again. Full circle innovation.

9:45 AM · 21 Apr 26 · 50.8K Views

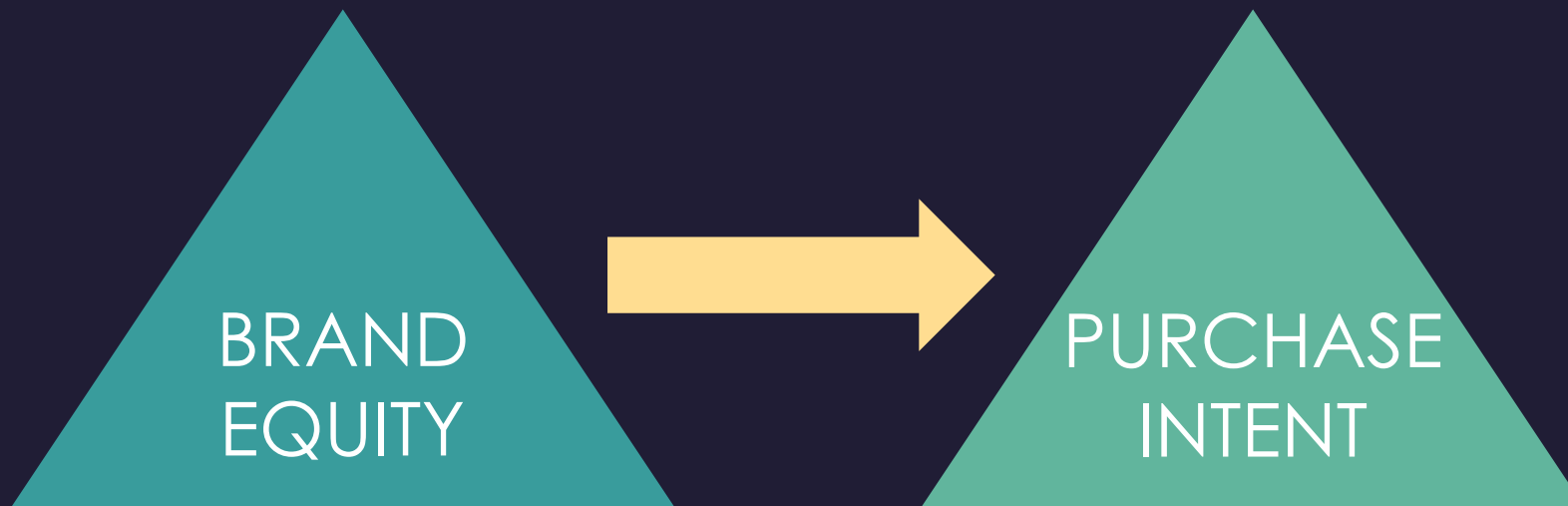
- Assess **your** needs
- Don't just **follow** the herd
- Match the **resource** to the **requirement**
- Beware buzzwords and fads that don't **add value** to your business!

X platform (2026)

# SETTING YOU UP FOR SUCCESS

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How will you understand the impact your decisions have on your customers?



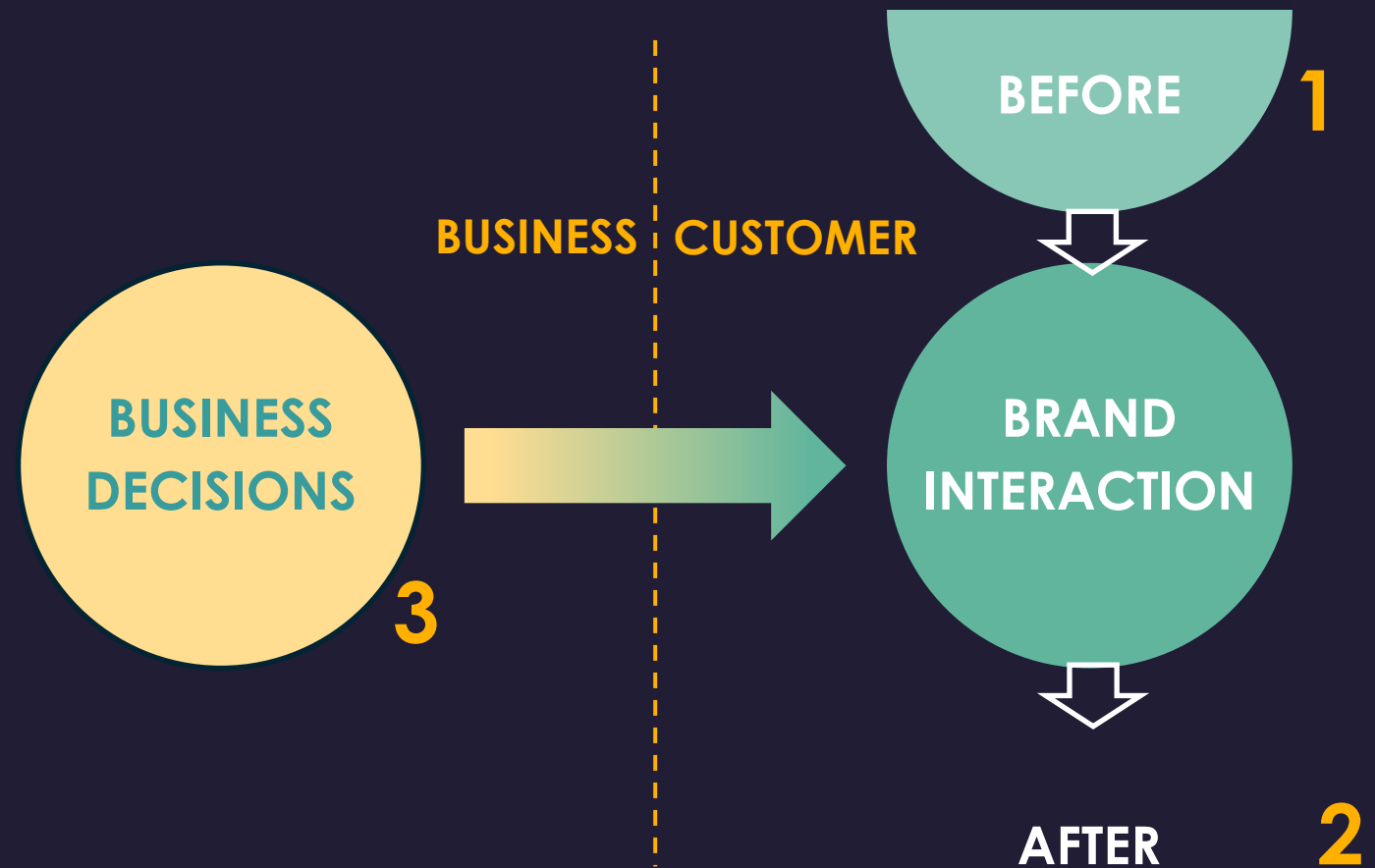
# SETTING YOU UP FOR SUCCESS

## Assess decision making / impact in:

- Positive Emotion
- Engagement
- Relationship
- Meaning
- Accomplishment

## Is there a transformation?

What's the impact of future purchase intent for your customer?



*Compare the customer impact before (1) and after (2) interacting with the brand, and with the decision-making process (3) inside the business.*

# KNOW WHEN TO GET SUPPORT

Believe in what your brand strategy says not always in what big tech says...!

Remember your brand building basics

# KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Small changes can have immediate impact
- Focus on quality, clarity and consistency
- Trust is built through deliberate action
- Remember the brand building basics
- Consider the consequences of your choices



# PRACTICAL ACTIONS

- 1) Audit your visuals – do they build trust?
- 2) Check consistency across all channels
- 3) Rewrite one message to focus on customer problems
- 4) Review how you're using AI
- 5) Consider how internal decision-making process impacts customer transformation?
- 6) Add one real story to your brand this month

# GET IN TOUCH

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Join our next webinar...

**THE LEADERSHIP SHIFT: EVOLVING  
FROM SME FOUNDER TO LEADER**

**FRI JUNE 12<sup>TH</sup> 2026**

