

RUSTY MONKEY

It's not what you say, it's how you say it.

Tone of voice is how your business communicates with the world and, most importantly, with your customers. It's vital to establishing your identity, which is what will ultimately sell your products and services. In short, thinking about your tone of voice will be the most important thing you do today.

Why tone of voice matters.

Your tone of voice will determine how your business communicates in every way, from product copy to promotional literature, to emails and phone calls, to how you respond to complaints.

It can impact every aspect of your business. It's not just about the words you write; it may also affect your visual communication, the kind of people you employ, how your office environment feels, even your entire business model.

It matters because it can mean the difference between an average business that does okay, and a remarkable business that dominates the industry. It matters because it can unite your customers under your banner. It matters because communication matters - the words you choose to represent yourself matter.

Because your tone of voice can have huge implications for how you run your business, it is best done early on. You can use your tone of voice as a foundation on which to build the rest of your brand - and if you get it right, that foundation will be very solid.

But that's not to say you can't perform this exercise when you're further down the track. It's never too late to find your voice.

The goal.

Before you start developing your tone of voice, it's a good idea to think about the general goals you're aiming for.

Sound like you. Imagine you took a piece of marketing you've produced. Imagine you removed your logo and replaced all mentions of your company name with ****. Do you think that one of your customers would still be able to recognise you from that piece of marketing? That's the ultimate goal of branding, and tone of voice is a vital part of your brand. Can a customer recognise you from the way you communicate alone?

Make it coherent. Words do not exist in a vacuum. The way words are interpreted depends on context. I'm talking about branding again. Your visual communication and your tone of voice must go together, otherwise your audience will be confused. You'd be saying one thing and showing them another. Your typography, colour palette, graphic devices, copy, slogans, even down to your punctuation - they all have to match up, and they all have to be consistent, to tell one coherent story.

Make a connection. I saw this great quote today. "Web users don't read websites in groups." When a person reads your copy, they are generally doing so alone. Write directly to that person. Refer to them as 'you'. Refer to yourself as 'I'. Make it personal.

How to develop your voice.

There are multiple factors to consider when developing your tone of voice. Your goal is to make your communication authentic and properly representative of you as a business. So you have to go deep to get it right. Warning: This process will make you *think*.

#1 Why?

The first thing to establish is your *why* message. This is a summary of your core reason for existing. This is your cause, your hill to die on.

If you've not encountered this philosophy before, we recommend checking out [this TED talk by Simon Sinek](#) and any of our vlogs/blogs on the topic.

To identify this, ask yourself *why* you think your business exists. Before you say, 'To make money,' that's not the right answer. Profit is a result, but it's not a reason.

Your *why* message might be to help people achieve something in their lives, it might be to change the way your industry operates, it might be to change the way we treat the planet.

This is *really* big picture stuff. When you think you have the answer, keep asking yourself the question. You probably won't get the right answer until you've asked the question 'why' several times.

Understanding your *why* message will get you on the right track to developing the right tone of voice for your business.

#2 Who?

The next thing to think about is your audience. After all, they're the ones you're trying to communicate with.

It's important to identify your ideal audience(s) in detail before you start thinking about tone of voice. In fact, identifying your audience(s) is key to all branding processes.

Step one: Think about the audience you **want**. Bear in mind that this may not necessarily be the audience you **have**.

Step two: Don't focus too much on traditional metrics such as age, job title, gender and income. While these might be important, it is much more useful to think **psychometrically**. What do these people like? What turns them on? What attracts them? What do they need?

Step three: Identify the people who believe what you believe. Remember your **why** message? Your goal should be to target the people who also **believe** in that same thing. This will make it way easier for you to make a connection with them. For example, if your goal is to improve the environmental credentials of your industry, there's no point trying to target the type of people who throw litter out of their car window on the motorway.

Step four: Create profiles that represent each of your audiences, giving them a name and a biography (even a stock photo) so that you can engage with them as a real person.

Step five: Think about how your audience communicates, as this will give you a good foundation on which to build a connection.

#3 How?

Based on all the work you've done, it's time to start thinking about how you want to communicate. You might not get this right immediately, but that's okay.

Here are some great tips for finding a communication style that will work for you.

Be authentic. In today's market, social media makes it basically impossible to run a dishonest business. This goes for your tone of voice too - people won't engage with you if they think you're being disingenuous.

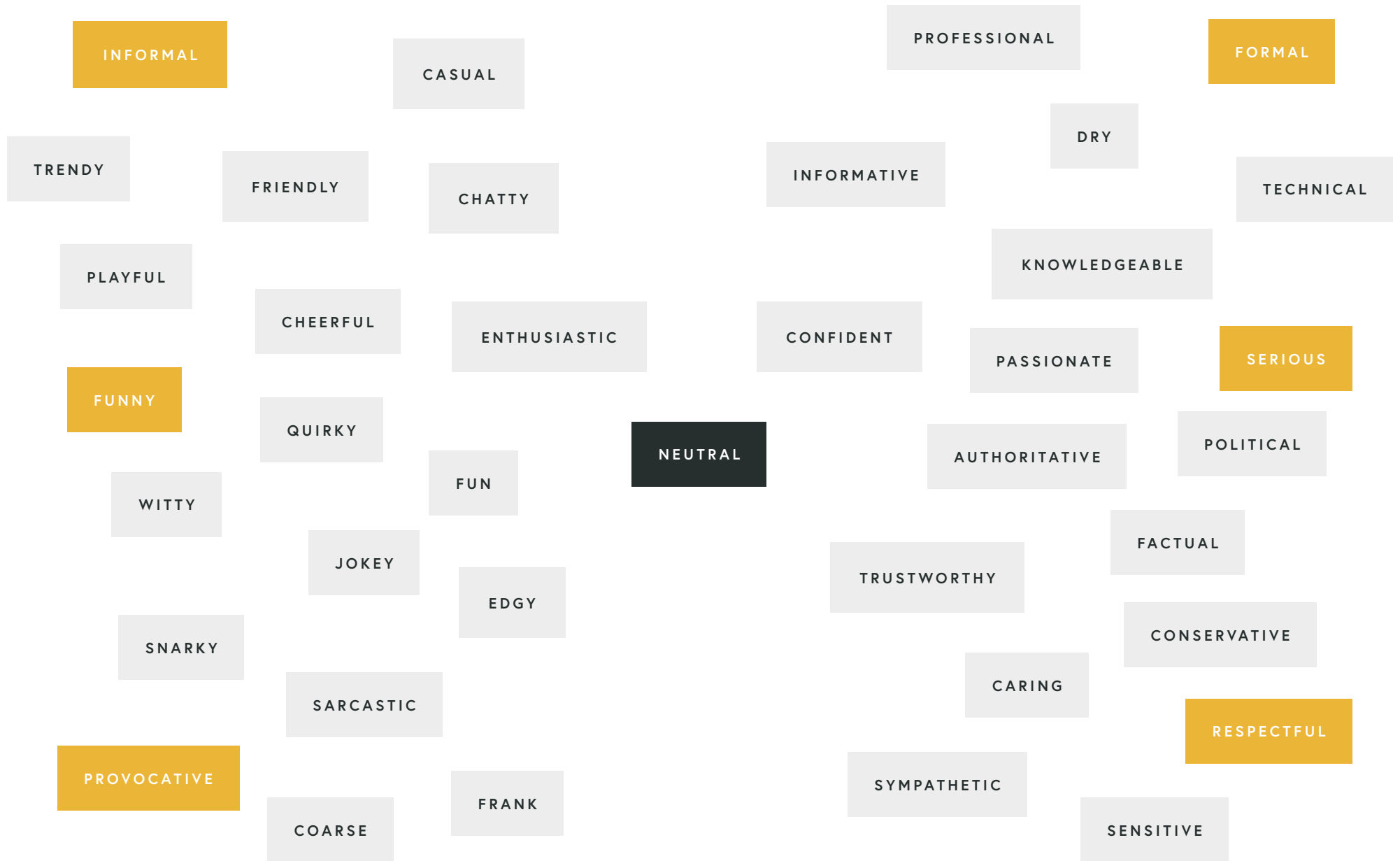
Have some personality. A lot of businesses communicate in really boring, bland and impersonal ways. This means that if you show a little personality, you'll stand out. Tell your story, tell a joke.

Don't follow the herd. If everyone else in your industry communicates in a certain way, do the opposite. Zig when everyone else is zagging.

Mimic your audience. People respond to familiarity - they are drawn to those who talk like they do. You can use language to build a tribe of like-minded individuals - and that's brand loyalty.

Don't try to appeal to everyone, or you will end up appealing to no-one. Choose your audience, make them niche, talk directly to them. Who cares about everyone else? They're not the audience you want.

Take a look at the word map on the next page. Try to identify 4-5 words that describe how you want to communicate (we recommend avoiding 'neutral').



This is part of your brand.

Your tone of voice is just as vital a part of your brand as your colour palette, your image style and your typography. I'd argue that it's way **more** important than your logo.

As you develop your tone of voice, create a section for this in your brand guidelines document. Include the word map, with your chosen descriptors circled.

As you begin to create assets using your tone of voice, add examples to your brand guidelines.

Develop rules for how you write top-level marketing copy, how you write product copy, how you write technical copy, how you write on social media.

The goal is to ensure that your communication is consistent across every asset you produce. You should be able to hand your brand guidelines to any copywriter and have them produce some verbal that's bang on.

Some kickass examples.

We've found some real world businesses who are nailing their tone of voice.

Who are **DeadHappy** and why should I buy your life insurance?

We thought life insurance was a bit shit so we decided to shake things up a bit. We've created a whole new life insurance product, because traditional life insurance policies just aren't good enough any more

We've also created a way to help folks plan for what happens when they shuffle off this mortal coil. We call these deathwishes. We've made it really easy to buy it and really affordable. No long boring forms, irritating phone calls or shady pricing



LIFE INSURANCE

A cash payout when you die. Often used to cover a mortgage or cover the kids university fees - but it's entirely up to you how much and what it's used for

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DEATHWISHES

So, what do you want to happen when you die? Do you want Rick Astley to sing at your funeral, a bronze statue of yourself for the garden or perhaps send your mates on holiday? Your call

[LET'S GET CREATIVE](#)



NEAR DEATH INSURANCE

Similar to Life Insurance, but will also pay out if you get diagnosed with some form of nasty illness. You could be offered this option if you're accepted for Life Insurance

[MORE INFO](#)

DeadHappy

Who are they?

A life insurance company

Why does it work?

- **It's different.** Life insurance companies are typically formal, boring, even a bit depressing. Remember the ads you'd see on telly with aging national treasures showing off their free Parker pen? Well, this is zigging if ever I've seen it.
- **It's targeting a specific audience.** Life insurance customers are usually old. DeadHappy intentionally targets a much younger audience because, let's face it, you can drop dead at any time. Its offerings and its language are designed to appeal to a youthful audience.
- **It's honest.** Death is a touchy subject. Most people want to pussyfoot around it, or pretend it's not going to happen. Most life insurance companies do this. But DeadHappy stares death in the face and doesn't flinch. It's challenging, yes, but it's also strangely comforting.
- **It's provocative.** Their copy is swear-y, controversial and in-your-face. They're trying to get your attention, start a conversation, maybe even offend some people. And it works.
- **The whole brand is coherent.** They've specifically chosen a colour palette and image style that works with their copy.

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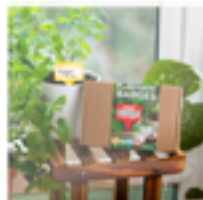


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REVIEWS

Anonymous ★★★★★

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Posted 1 day ago

Leah ★★★★★

I love my product. Didn't know what to expect with the personalized fleece blanket, but Firebox got this down to a T. Quality and feel of the fabric is great. Genuinely so happy with it...

Posted 2 days ago

Firebox

Who are they?

An online gift shop

Why does it work?

- **Great product copy.** Product copy is usually a pretty boring and functional description of what the product is and does. But why can't product copy be entertaining? Firebox product copy is funny and irreverent. It's actually fun to read.
- **#notforeveryone.** That's something they say about their own newsletter. They have an audience in mind and they talk directly to them. They don't care if they alienate huge swathes of people in doing so, because that's not their audience.

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Old Spice



BRUSH UP ON YOUR
SWAGGER

SHOP NOW



THE GROOMING AND
OTHER THINGS GUIDE

Old Spice
MANBOOK

READ THE MANBOOK

GET READY FOR SERIOUS
BEARDNESS

SHOP BEARD



Old Spice

Who are they?

Purveyors of male fragrances

Why does it work?

- **It's fresh.** Old Spice underwent a huge rebrand and marketing campaign a few years ago, transforming them from an old-fashioned, pretty fusty-looking business into a brand that's now considered cool. They didn't just update their visuals, they also completely transformed their tone of voice. It's one of the most successful and radical rebrands we've ever seen.
- **It has personality,** and that personality is likeable. It's quirky, friendly and funny. There are puns. There are made-up words. It's fun to read.
- **It targets its audience well.** It's manly without being aggressive. It's confident, smooth and charismatic.
- **It sounds like Old Spice.** The business had a famous viral video campaign a while ago, and I find myself reading the copy on their website in that actor's voice. There's a coherent voice and it's instantly recognisable.

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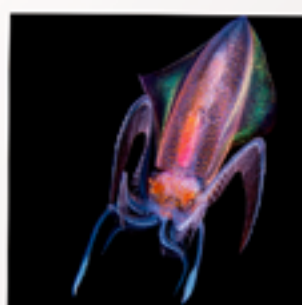


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Hiut Denim

Who are they?

A clothing manufacturer

Why does it work?

- **They're telling a story.** The only thing Hiut Denim needed to do to become a global name in the jeans industry was to create a great product and tell the story behind it. Their tone of voice has authority and gravitas because it's built on this incredible history. People respect them, and so want to buy from them.
- **It's brief.** The above example is from one of their newsletters. There's hardly any copy on it. They know that people don't have a lot of free time these days, and so they keep their content short, interesting and to-the-point.
- **They don't try to sell me anything.** The monthly Hiut Denim newsletter is one of the best things I get in my inbox. Why? Because it never tries to sell me anything. 90% of their content is about stuff they find interesting, people they admire, bits of philosophy that inspires them. Only 10% of their newsletter is actually about jeans.
- **It's a community.** Their story is all about the community and place where their factory is based. Even if you live on the other side of the world, when you engage with their brand, you feel like you're part of that community. That's a special thing.

[VISIT THE WEBSITE](#) / [WATCH THE STORY](#)

Tell us your story.

We want to hear from you if you've done some tone of voice work in your company. How did it go? How successful do you think it was? What problems did you run into?

Or maybe you're just starting out on your tone of voice journey. Looking for a travelling companion? We'd love to hop on board.

GET IN TOUCH

THANKS FOR READING

