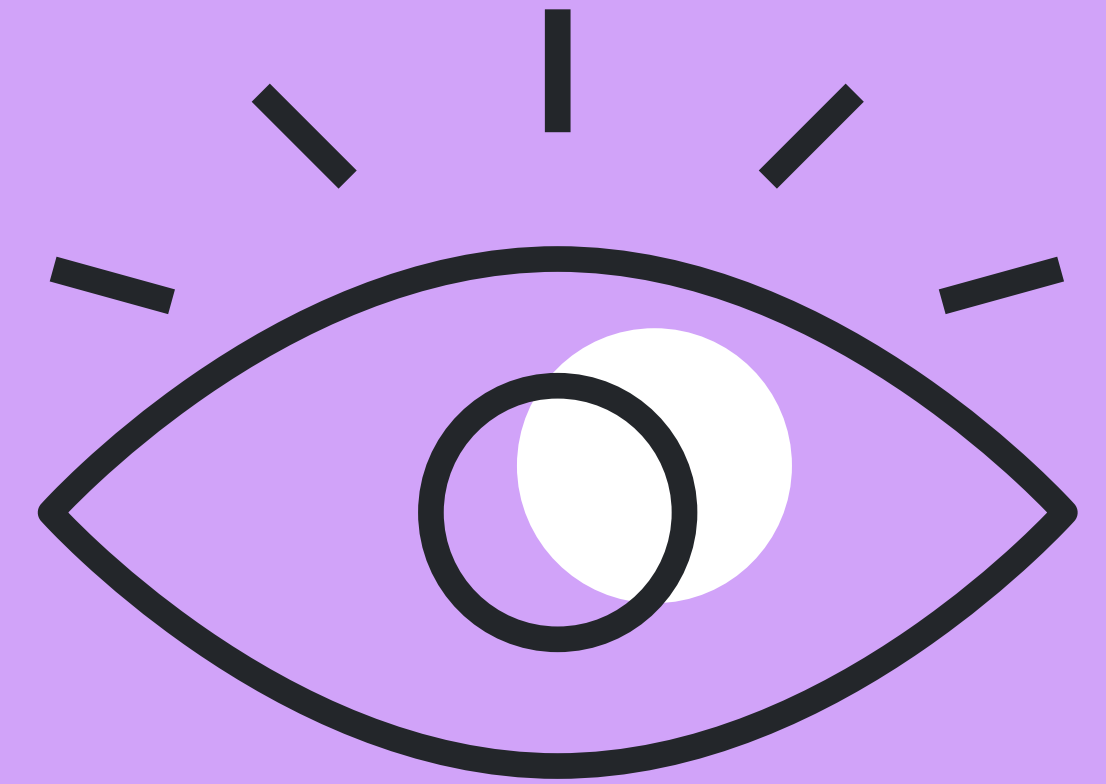


Brand momentum playbook

Seven drivers of sustainable category leadership
that can make a difference in your organization

This playbook is for organizations that are ready to **challenge the status quo to maintain or achieve category dominance.**



Who is this document for?

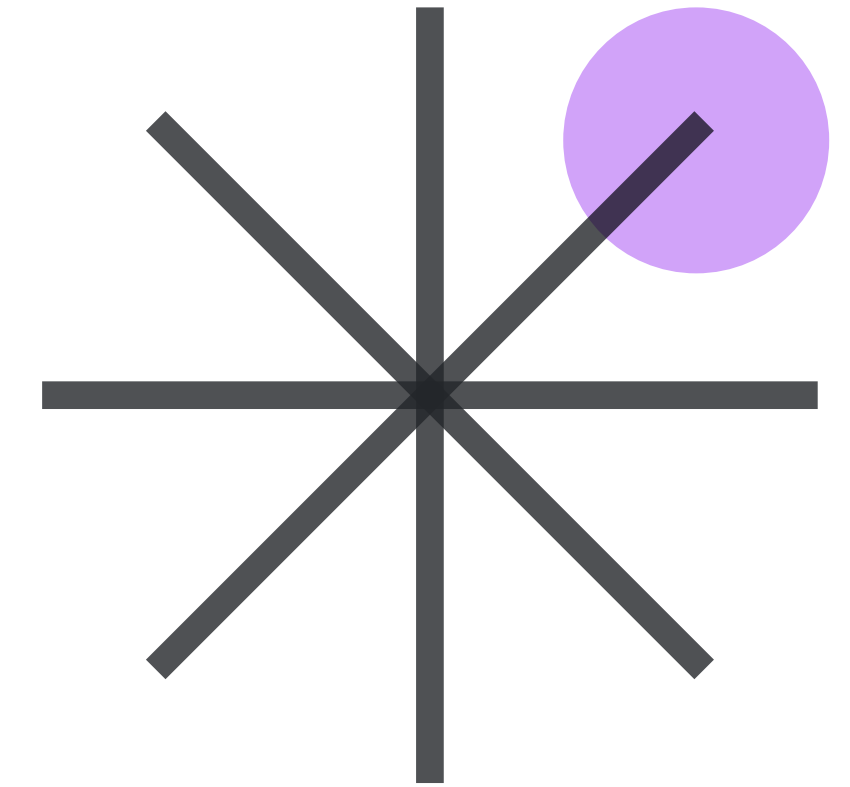
It's for leaders and teams who sense that the market and category buyers shifts we're seeing today are redefining how value is created through the relationship between companies, customers and employees. For 24 years, Liquid's Silicon Valley thinking has helped us solve challenges for companies large and small—emboldening our instincts which have become finely tuned to detect opportunities for rapid change and disruption.

What is this document for?

Think of this playbook as a launching pad, an axis, a catalyst. It won't help you stay the course, reinforce silos or double down on how things have always been done. It also isn't a panacea, a miracle elixir or a secret weapon. But you can use it to ask yourself some key questions, inspire new conversations and put some language to a problem you couldn't quite put your finger on.



We're inspired to create this playbook to **help brands succeed in owning their business category.**



Whether you're an incumbent brand defending your category leadership or a challenger brand seeking to disrupt a weak player, repeating what's brought you success in the past won't help you. Sustainable category leadership requires consistently adapting to evolving market demands and cultivating enthusiastic believers in your brand for the future you are creating.

In other words, this next era is about building brand momentum, a metric that combines a brand's industry ranking within the category with its future purchase intent relative to the other brands within the category. We uncovered this metric in our studies of how verified buyers choose brands across a breadth of consumer and B2B products and services categories. More on this can be found in our Liquid x Avasta Challenger Index reports.

Momentum doesn't happen by accident; it requires strategic planning, consistent execution, and a deep understanding of your market dynamics. Our rapid strategy offering, aptly named Momentum, is how we'll help you create it using the strengths you already have.

We can't predict what the market will bring tomorrow or in five years. No one can. We're used to falling back on our existing experiences as being the key predictors of future success. But we find ourselves in this new era where there's no longer a guide.

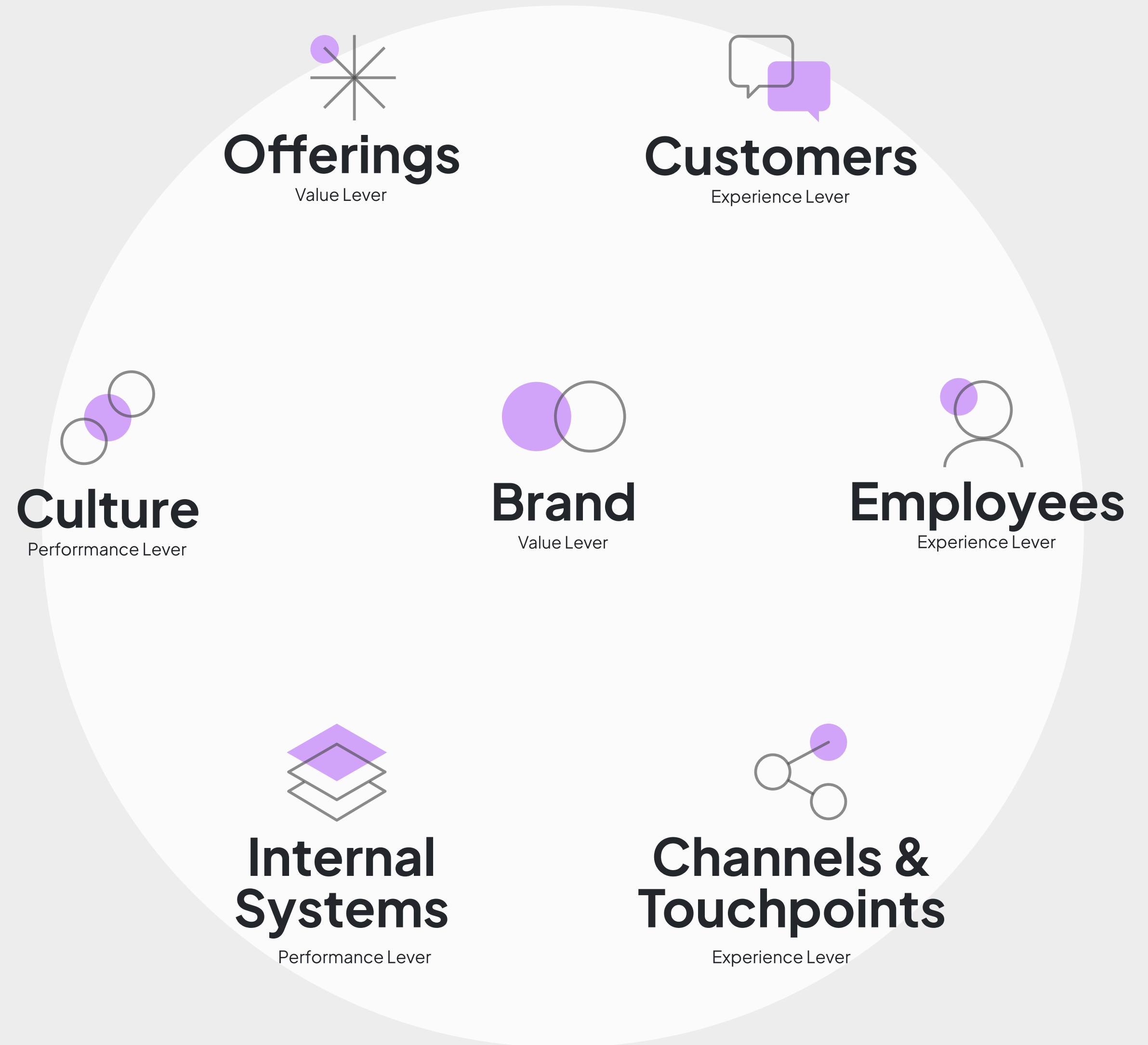
Now, one of our most important capabilities to maintain brand momentum is the ability to pull levers to shift quickly when the world around us inevitably shifts. When these levers are available, sustained growth and differentiation from competition are within reach.



Seven drivers of sustainable category leadership

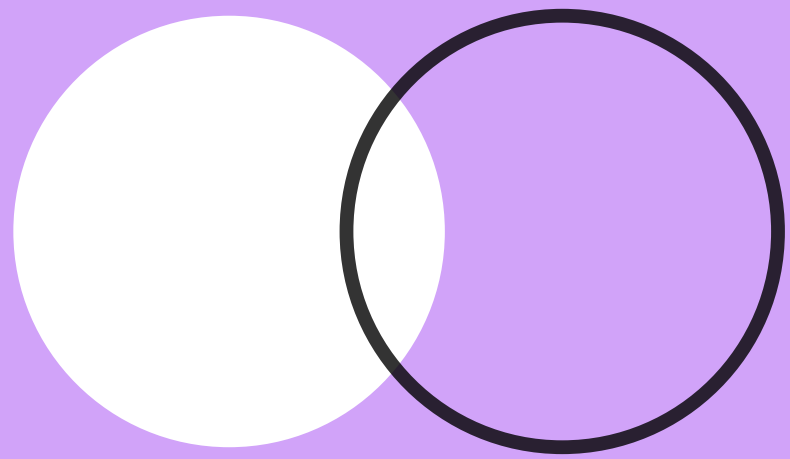
Over the course of these few pages, we've identified, analyzed and distilled seven drivers that form the basis of brand momentum. With each driver you'll find a challenging question, symptoms to be aware of, and some opportunities to look for. These drivers have been grouped into three levers that are the lifeblood of any organization. Read through them and pay attention to what triggers a thought or a reaction to your situation.

Together, these drivers form the foundation of how a business forms, orchestrates and activates its value.



01. Reorient your brand to drive momentum.

What if we viewed the role of brand in a bigger way, a way that could ignite the imagination for new possibilities that drive your business?



What is?

For many leaders, “brand” is still seen as something that marketing owns. However, marketing’s contribution to brand equity alone is less than 18%. In reality, the majority of a brand’s meaning and value is driven by the enterprise.

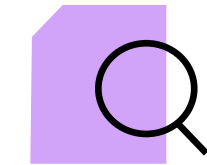
Therefore, brands have powerful equities embedded in their meaning that shape expectations from customers and employees. And those expectations translate into permissions that audiences give your brand to provide new capabilities. Most business leaders don’t always think to explore these equities in pursuit of developing new business strategies. Rather than just creating new offerings and selling them to customers, how might you tap into what customers already expect from your brand and imagine new possibilities that would take your organization to new heights?

Starbucks’ “Back to Starbucks” initiative represents a strategic return to its European coffeehouse roots by deeply leveraging intrinsic brand equity. Rather than pushing new products, Starbucks recognizes the strength in customer expectations of a premium, communal, and authentic café experience.

By reintroducing ceramic mugs, simplifying the menu, and bringing back personalized touches like handwritten names, Starbucks reconnects with the emotional and experiential dimensions that originally set it apart. This approach acknowledges brand significance beyond marketing, aligning operational decisions with desired customer experiences. Starbucks leverages its established equity—centered around community and connection—to strengthen loyalty and attract consumers craving authenticity in a convenience-driven market. This strategic shift allows Starbucks to proactively reshape customer expectations, reinforcing brand loyalty and mitigating commoditization. This reorientation of brand strategy not only elevates perceived value but positions Starbucks for sustained growth, rooted firmly in powerful and distinct brand equity.

Not sure where to start?

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Problem Lens

Your core business model is at risk, and your brand reputation is holding you back from quickly moving into a new space.

Your new offerings are slow to be adopted because you don’t have a strong pulse on what your customers expect your brand to deliver.

If your brand suddenly disappears tomorrow and your customers easily move to another option, then your brand may be commoditized.

Opportunity Lens

How might you leverage the equity in your brand to push into new categories that would be embraced by your customers?

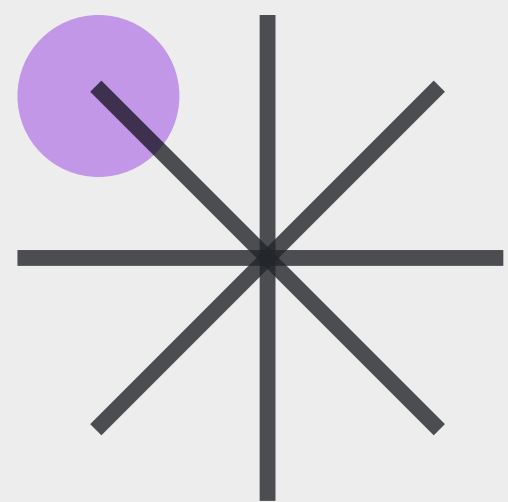
What would happen if instead of “selling” your brand to customers, you were to design a brand believer profile—a power muse to evangelize your brand?

How could you exploit your brand’s strengths to reposition your competitors and create more brand momentum?



02. Evolve your offerings to be a living ecosystem.

What if you viewed your company's product and/or service offerings as an interconnected system, where if one part of your offering was suddenly impacted, the organism would provide stability?



What is?

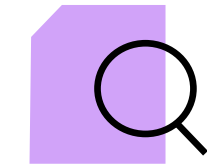
Many organizations are defined by a single core offering. If that offering is ever threatened, the entire organization is at risk. When a single product or service is so successful it comes to stand for everything else, leaders often feel compelled to defend its position—at whatever cost. But this can lead to a culture of protecting the core and under-investing in diversification.

For example, Salesforce has evolved beyond its original CRM product into a comprehensive ecosystem of cloud-based solutions across sales, service, marketing, and analytics. This diversification ensures that if one area faces challenges, the rest of the ecosystem can sustain and drive growth. By investing in platforms like Salesforce Customer 360 and AI tools like Einstein, Salesforce has created a resilient, adaptable system. This interconnected approach reinforces organizational stability and provides customers with a cohesive experience, ensuring Salesforce's value comes from its entire ecosystem, not just a single product.

For this driver, think of your core offering as not a single thing but, instead, a distributed ecosystem. This strategy gives your brand permission to lead and/or challenge across multiple categories, boxing out single offering competitors.

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Problem Lens

Customers are finding it difficult to navigate and choose among your many offerings.

Customers are expecting greater value from your offerings and you can't meet, much less exceed, their expectations.

Internal teams don't have the capability or tools to efficiently respond in an adequate and timely manner to customer needs.

Opportunity Lens

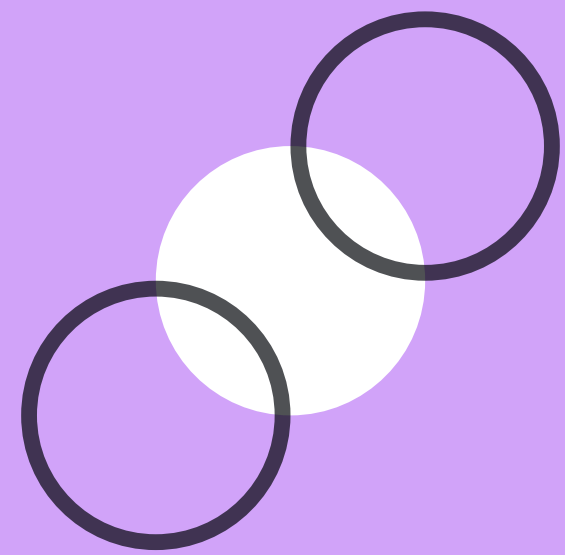
How might you switch from a product orientation to a set of well-articulated solutions? (Think of shifting from a flute to an orchestra.)

How might your business run if one or more of your offerings were suddenly unavailable?



03. Transform your workplace culture to be the accelerator for your brand.

What if you viewed your organization's workplace culture as a purpose-led accelerator to power your brand forward, both through challenging and good times?



What is?

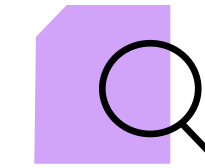
All organizations have workplace cultures. But without an intentional construct to guide the culture and unite its employees in action, the organization will struggle to execute its vision. Brands need to have a clear and authentic purpose in order to focus their employees' efforts in an aligned direction. Bringing purpose to the everyday builds employee engagement and a workplace culture that will be resilient, even in times of disruption. Purpose has many flavors. But no matter its focus, it serves as a rallying cry to unify around something larger. It serves as a way to build meaning for what employees are in service to every day.

For example, Microsoft transformed its culture so it could accelerate. When Satya Nadella took the helm of Microsoft, he described the company: "Innovation was being replaced by bureaucracy. Teamwork was being replaced by internal politics. We were falling behind." Nadella knew Microsoft needed new skills to transform itself. By driving a "growth mindset" within Microsoft, the company started to encourage employees to learn, try and fail. This empowered employees to tackle areas outside their comfort zones in order to build products and services that consumers actually wanted. Nadella was able to change its cutthroat culture and turn Microsoft into a company valued at \$2.96 trillion.

For this driver, think about whether your company is aligning its employees around a shared understanding of your brand's meaning to make an impact on the business. Do you see consistent decision-making in support of the work? Do your employees intuitively know where the organization should go if the CEO isn't there to remind them? Do they have the tools to get there? Do teams have clarity on the behaviors and ways of working needed to get to the destination?

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Problem Lens

The business strategy is evolving, but employees aren't clear on what's changing and what they need to do to deliver on the brand's promise.

Leadership doesn't understand why employees aren't being proactive in finding new ways to move the business forward or tackle thorny problems.

There is an urgent need to change how people work within the organization to stay relevant.

Opportunity Lens

How might you revisit your core beliefs to ensure your organization is using them effectively, even in an uncertain market scenario?

What if you were to abandon behaviors that don't work anymore? What new ones would you activate?

How do you build a culture that is able to build resilience and intentional action when everything is constantly changing?



04. Refocus your internal systems to drive customer and employee experience.

What if your internal systems and processes met your employees' consumer-grade expectations and improved your customers' experiences with your brand?



What is?

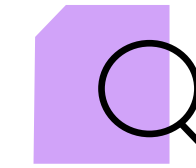
Internal systems are often seen as an unmovable legacy and/or unimportant to elevating the experience for customers. But today, employees' expectations of the modern workplace have increased dramatically as they've become accustomed to consumer-grade experiences that improve their daily lives. More and more, people are choosing employers who provide better experiences and make their lives easier. Additionally, better systems and processes help employees deliver improved customer experiences—especially as the internal and external worlds become more integrated.

For example, Best Buy outlined a multi-year initiative to increase customer satisfaction by investing in its employees. The idea was that “it shouldn't be hard to work or shop in a Best Buy store.” One of the key findings was that employees are more productive and take less training if the software and hardware they use in store are similar to what they use in real life. In the past, Best Buy invested in software and hardware solutions that weren't natural to employees, such as devices that looked like bricks rather than tablets. But because Best Buy invested in new technology and hardware, employees now have more time to work with their customers to support Best Buy's purpose: to enrich lives with technology.

For this driver, think about the different systems and processes your organization uses on a daily basis. Do they measure up to what consumers enjoy today? Do they reflect your brand's promise? How do they enable your employees to deliver consistent and seamless brand experiences to customers?

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Problem Lens

Outdated systems reduce productivity and fail to meet employee expectations, leading to inefficiency and frustration.

Companies with outdated tools may struggle to attract and retain talent as employees seek better workplace experiences.

Inefficient internal systems hinder employees' ability to deliver consistent, high-quality customer experiences, affecting acquisition and retention.

Opportunity Lens

How might you develop a complete map of the customer journey that includes all the employee-facing systems and processes that are a part of it?

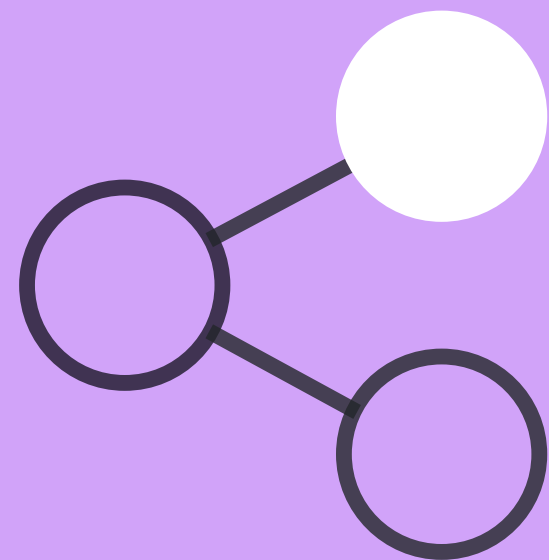
How might you assess the tools your employees use to do their jobs against your brand's promise and ideal workplace culture?

How might you revisit your company's policies to remove blockers to innovation or servicing customers?



05. Shift from customer interaction to customer understanding.

When was the last time you looked beyond what your customers are buying from you, to why they are buying from you?



What is?

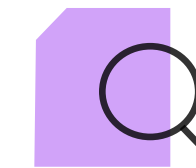
As marketers, we have grown accustomed to segmenting our customers based on the unique needs they have and developing personas that bring these segments to life. But personas can only go so far. While they're important for supporting the needs of unique audiences, they only show you demographic- and goal-based characteristics. They typically don't give you a psychographic understanding of what motivates your customers to choose your brand based on how they self-identify.

Spotify has been listening. After upending the music industry by allowing millions of people around the world to freely share and connect with music content, the company shifted based on customer feedback and preferences, evolving from a music platform to an audio platform. In just a few months, Spotify built the largest library of third-party podcasts and even started producing their own. They accurately sensed the rising demand for content and the increasing need for meaning and connection, so they provided a better space for customers to connect around shared interests and for content producers to more easily find audiences to engage with. Spotify is becoming an integrated content streaming platform because they are keenly aware of their customers' sentiment and motivations.

For this driver, think about your customer segments all sharing a single mindset. Then, imagine gaining a deeper understanding of the beliefs they have in common, rather than focusing on what makes them different. How might you leverage these common beliefs? What models can you develop to help your believers build and assert their own identity through your brand? Nothing is more powerful for a brand than to have customers who are engaged because of personal meaning. Companies who back up what they say and make critical business decisions to honor the shared beliefs they have with their communities are the ones who will build brand momentum and be here for the long haul.

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Problem Lens

The organization doesn't know who the macro customer is for their brand or what motivates them to engage.

There is misalignment between customers' beliefs and how the brand is delivering value.

Online ratings and reviews, or other customer feedback, don't impact product and service development or roadmaps.

Opportunity Lens

How might you create a single resource for everything you know about your customers—a one-stop shop for anyone across the organization to come to if they have customer-related questions?

How might you empower a team or teams to be customer advocates—people with a specific mandate to understand the customer and then socialize that knowledge across the organization?

How might you invest in creating sustainable ways to keep up with the changing needs of customers, like regular research or customer involvement in product development?



06. Upgrade from working remotely to belonging remotely.

How can your company foster belonging with employees who feel disconnected?



What is?

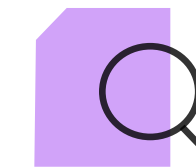
Now that we're shifting back to a hybrid work environment, with many employees continuing to work remotely or across different regions, companies need to find new ways to connect, engage, and support their employees. Merely reaffirming the organization's cultural tenets isn't enough. To drive meaning and engagement, it's crucial that both remote and hybrid teams see their company actively supporting connection by developing new systems, rituals, and cues that help employees navigate collaboration, regardless of their working location.

Dropbox continues to thrive as a "virtual-first" company, where remote work is the norm. To foster connection and belonging, Dropbox transformed its global properties into collaboration studios for team-building and creative sessions. The company refined its nonlinear workday approach, allowing teams to collaborate during core hours while enabling individuals to customize their schedules. Advanced AI-driven tools now facilitate seamless collaboration across time zones, including virtual reality meeting spaces and AI assistants for managing workloads. Dropbox has also expanded wellness programs with remote retreats and virtual mental health resources, and launched a global mentorship program, connecting employees across regions to foster community and professional growth. This holistic approach ensures Dropbox employees remain engaged and supported in a remote-first environment.

For this driver, think about what can bind your team together. Think about the repetitive yet meaningful rituals that could be developed to build habits and behaviors. Think about objects that communicate care or promote a desired mindset. And finally, think about the systems that people can rely on to build psychological safety and get their work done as seamlessly as possible.

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Problem Lens

Your organization/team is having a hard time working together as a team since they are not in the same physical space.

Teams are operating more on mandates rather than on a unified purpose.

Teams and individuals don't really feel as if they belong to the organization.

Opportunity Lens

How might you cultivate organizational resilience through new rituals and cues?

How might you evolve your current rituals and cues to reflect a new workplace environment?

How might you build employee experiences that allow people—and therefore brands—to show up at their best?



07. Reposition your channels and touchpoints to be a customer relationship builder.

When was the last time you looked beyond what your customers are buying from you, to why they are buying from you?



What is?

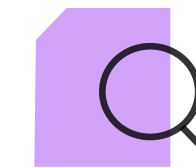
A company's channels and touchpoints are the parts and pieces that create the space for a brand to express itself and for customers to interact with it. But for many organizations, touchpoints are seen as a means to getting the sale or servicing unsatisfied customers. Often, a brand's touchpoints are developed and managed through internal silos, each with unique goals and incentives. This creates a disjointed experience for your customers and missed opportunities to invest in nurturing relationships that lead to a deeper bond with your brand.

For example, HubSpot has effectively repositioned its touchpoints to focus on building long-term relationships with its customers by providing value beyond its CRM and marketing software. Through the HubSpot Academy, the company offers free, comprehensive courses and certifications that help users master the platform and grow their skills in marketing, sales, and customer service. This educational approach not only empowers customers to get the most out of HubSpot's tools but also fosters a sense of community and loyalty. By investing in the success of its users, HubSpot transforms each interaction into an opportunity to deepen customer engagement, making it more than just a software provider but a trusted partner in their business growth.

For this driver, think about how each touchpoint across the customer journey contributes to investing in the overall relationship with your customer. As with any relationship, there are bound to be ups and downs. So put yourself in your customers' shoes to understand what they might be feeling and anticipate what they might need at that moment. Remember, the customer's value to your organization extends well beyond the first sale. Customer satisfaction isn't the end goal—it's a table stake. By taking a relationship-first mentality, you build sustainable reliance and strong connections in good times and bad.

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Problem Lens

Internal silos create inconsistent customer experiences, missing opportunities to nurture deeper relationships across touchpoints.

Focusing touchpoints on relationship building enhances customer retention, encouraging repeat business and long-term engagement.

Measuring the effectiveness of relationship-focused strategies requires new metrics beyond traditional sales and satisfaction KPIs.

Opportunity Lens

How might you understand the ripple effect your touchpoints have on each other or on your customer?

How might you look beyond point interactions to think about lifetime relationships?

How might you focus on the broader end-to-end experience your customers have, rather than tracking the performance of discrete touchpoints?



Ready to start building momentum?

Quickly identify ways to build
your brand's category relevance
for the long-term.

Our world-class thinkers and makers will engage your team through a series of sprints based on **Silicon Valley Thinking**™ to meet you wherever you are in your journey, from identifying opportunities to planning initiatives that make them come to life.

Start building brand momentum and explore more at:

www.liquidagency.com

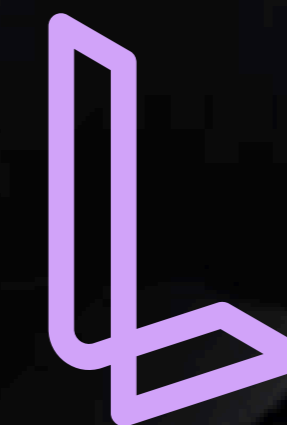


We build **category leading brands**

Liquid Agency is a brand consulting and activation company that **empowers ambitious organizations to achieve and maintain category leadership.**

For over 24 years, Liquid Agency has partnered with leading Consumer and B2B brands such as GE, Hitachi, HP, Intel, Nike, Nordstrom, and Walmart to build momentum through belief-driven alignment of brand, customer, and employee experiences.

Rooted in Silicon Valley Thinking™, modern tools, and expert insights, our approach helps organizations instill confidence in their customers and employees, positioning them as future leaders in their categories. By creating lasting bonds and driving performance, we enable brands to attract and retain like-minded customers and employees, ultimately fueling sustained growth and market leadership.



LIQUID