

ONLINE BRANDING STRATEGIES FOR SMALL-SCALE  
ENTREPRENEURS SPECIALIZED IN DIGITAL  
MANUFACTURING AND/OR HANDMADE PRODUCTION

BY

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## ABSTRACT

The goal of this research is to provide an advice for an independent product designer, on which branding strategies to use for the market launching of a product that he has recently developed. This thesis also gives answer to the research question *“What is the most suitable online product branding strategy for a small-scale entrepreneur specialized in digital manufacturing to launch his product?”*

The increase in entrepreneurship of the last years plays a big role in this thesis. An increase in entrepreneurship means that more people are motivated to start their own business. The down side of this is that they usually lack the knowledge needed to apply in all fields of a startup, branding being one of them.

In order to answer the research question mentioned above, a theory framework has been set-up. Literature from Keller and Franzen & Moriarty are the highlights in this framework. Also, four small-scale entrepreneurs have been interviewed, and three brand study cases have been conducted. Furthermore, a websites analysis has been done, together desktop research to find relevant online sources.

The findings of this research lead to the conclusion that most small-scale entrepreneurs do not properly pay attention to the branding of their startup, usually due to the lack of knowledge. It also shows that once a brand identity is properly developed, it has added value to the business.

The answer to the research question is that the most suitable online branding strategy for any type of small-scale entrepreneur, is a combination of elements such as: a well developed website, social media channels, independent reviews/articles, and consumer engaging campaigns.

Besides the elements mentioned above, the advice also contains points regarding the financial aspect of an entrepreneurial life. Together with an advice to first define corporate, business and marketing objectives, and a strong POD (Point-Of-Differentiation), and the development of a media kit.

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### ***Background and context***

The fabrication of products as we know it has been experiencing an important change during the past couple of years. The costs of manufacturing and machinery dropped drastically a few years ago, making these techniques more accessible. An example is one of the most popular digital manufacturing techniques: 3D printing (The Economist, 2013). A process used in the past to mostly create prototypes, that due to its fast development it is now being used for straightforward production as well. Designers are currently exploring these young tools that many believe are the start of the next production revolution just like industrialization once was. Websites such as [www.shapeways.com](http://www.shapeways.com), [www.threeding.com](http://www.threeding.com), and [www.inventables.com](http://www.inventables.com) show the development of the 3D printing manufacturing process.

Besides this development, there is a second factor of important for this thesis, a significant increase in entrepreneurship that can be seen since the 90s (Finkle & Deeds, 2001). This increase is responsive to factors such as the economical crisis (Hurst, 2012); the availability of cheaper digital manufacturing tools that makes the small-scale production easier (Gilpin, 2014); more competition and unique ideas due to a better educated society (CBS, 2013); a high drive for entrepreneurship is a typical characteristic of the current generation in charge of the rising market. Also called Generation Y or Millennials. (Column Five Media, 2013). Websites such as [www.etsy.com](http://www.etsy.com) and [www.kickstarter.com](http://www.kickstarter.com) are visible results of this development.

The above-mentioned factors are of importance in order to understand the context of the requested advice in thesis. To sum up, the first factor is the development of new manufacturing tools, and the second one is the increase of entrepreneurship.

This thesis has as goal to provide a product branding advise to an independent product designer – the client. The client is a starting young professional in the field of product design, with low financial resources to support the branding and marketing process of his newest and most promising product – made-to-order headphones for the eclectic crowd – a crowd that with today's music streaming services do not restrain their musical taste to any presets, instead they experiment and express themselves, curating their own content, and are proud of how it is a mix of many genres.

The client uses 3D printing and handcrafting techniques to manufacture the product, and is the perfect example of a Generation Y entrepreneur. As a product designer, the client already has certain notion of general branding and marketing techniques. This however, is not his expertise and would therefore like to have a professional advise regarding his needs. Product designers have knowledge in their area, but extra knowledge is needed to succeed in the market (James, 2014). There are many reasons for startup failure, and one of them is ineffective branding (Linkedin, 2014).

Another important aspect that plays a role for the client is a low financial resource. Just like the average startup, gathering funds is a challenge. For this reason this study will focus and researching **digital** branding strategies, that require low financial resource to be executed.

### **Problem statement**

*The problem is that most independent producers, namely entrepreneurs using digital manufacturing, do not know how to use the right communication and branding strategies in their favor in order to add value to their product and start-up their small-scale businesses successfully.* Therefore, the problem statement raises the following policy question: *“How can small-scale entrepreneurs use online branding to start-up their business successfully?”* In order to answer this, exploratory research will be executed. This thesis will focus on one client that represents the target group of digital manufacturers.

### **Research question**

*“What is the most suitable online product branding strategy for a small-scale entrepreneur specialized in digital manufacturing to launch his product?”*

In order to execute this research the following two sub questions are necessary.

### **Sub questions**

- 1 What are the online branding strategies being used?
- 2 What are the challenges faced by start-ups in the initial phase of their business?

The next chapters of this thesis contain the following: A description of the client. A theory framework outlined using theories of Keller and Franzen & Moriarty in the field of

branding. Furthermore the research methodology is described, where techniques such as interviews, desktop research and case studies are applied, together with an explanation of the limitations of this research. Lastly, all findings and conclusions will be outlined and applied in the final advice for the client.

Limitations of this research are related to validity and reliability critics, due to the nature of qualitative research. Also, the sample taken to conduct the open interviews, and the objectivity of online sources may be questioned.





*Picture 1. Preliminary product logo designed by client*

The client is a young product designer who has recently graduated. This young product designer completed his education with a project that he would like to further push into the market – Made-to-order handcrafted headphones for the eclectic crowd. The unique selling point of this project is that these headphones can be customized for each client. Customers will be able to choose from a variation of elements (wooden headband, speakers and colors) in order to create their *own* unique headphone. The idea is to offer a wide range of possibilities for people who cannot satisfy their desires on mainstream products. People who do not want to have the same items as the majority of consumers, people that want to be unique and that would like to have an influence in the production process of their final products. This target group also appreciates handcrafted products, and they certainly get a sense of satisfaction if this factor is applied to what they eventually purchase. The factor of authenticity plays a big role for this crowd.

The client's business plan is made up in a way that the product can be manufactured with low financial resources. The product has the advantage that it will take the same amount of money to fabricate 10 than it would be to fabricate a 100. This however means that for the first 10 products, there will not be any profit for the manufacturer. The first 10 products will be focused on launching and testing whether the market will welcome it.



*Picture 2. The Product*

*In this chapter the literature needed to support this thesis' research will be outlined, described and justified. This theory framework consists of three subchapters: 3.1 Brand Building and Definition; contains literature from three main authors – Keller and Franzen & Moriarty. 3.2 Branding Strategy, with theory from Franzen & Moriarty. 3.3 Additional Theories; contains literature regarding development of branding in the digital age.*

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Before outlining the theory framework, it is necessary to make the following concepts clear: communication, marketing, branding. This thesis' however, as already stated in chapter 1 – Introduction, focuses on branding strategies.

### **Communication**

Regardless of the different types of communication – corporate, internal, external, marketing communication, intercultural, individual, societal, organizational, and so on – they all have the following three elements in common, that can be deducted from what is known as “the mother of all communication models” (Shannon & Weaver, 1948):

- Message: **What** is the message that one desires to communicate?
- Target audience: To **whom** one desires to communicate the message?
- Communication tools: **How** is one planning to communicate the message to the desired target audience?

The communication tools used in a marketing communication mix are: advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, PR, and direct marketing (Kotler & Armstrong, 2014). Communication strategies are indispensable in every business. In the case of start-ups the main goal is usually to inform the desired target audience about the availability of a product.

## Marketing

“The process by which companies create value for customers and build strong customer relationships in order to capture value from customers in return” (Kotler & Armstrong, 2014)

This process consists of a marketing strategy (segmentation, targeting positioning and differentiation) and a marketing mix (the four Ps: products, price, place and promotion). See the figure below:

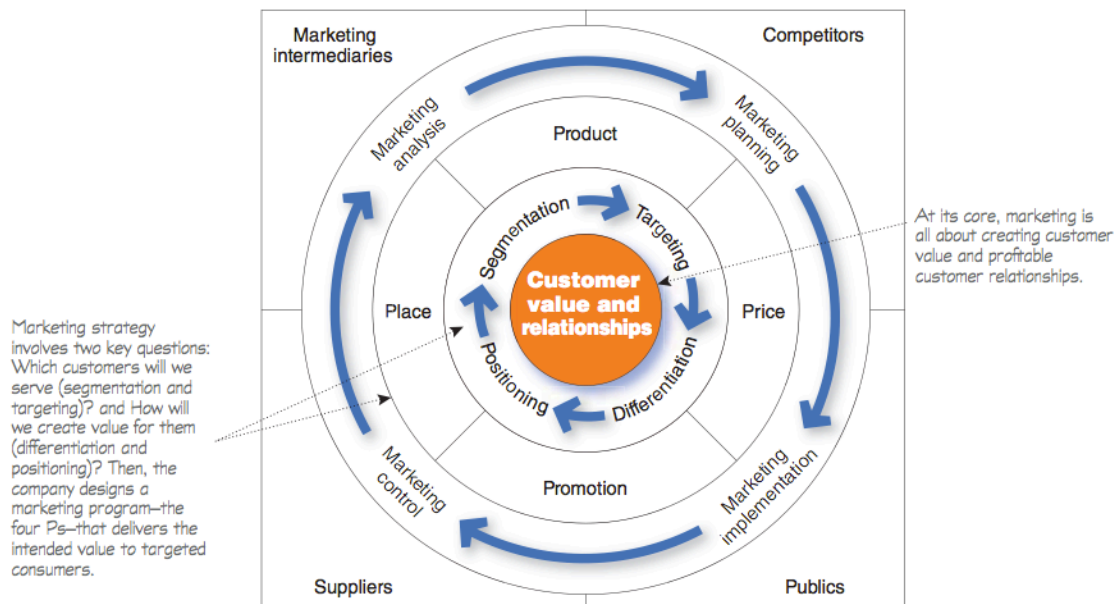


Figure 1. Managing Marketing Strategies and the Marketing Mix  
Source: *Principles of Marketing Global Edition 15<sup>th</sup>*, 2014, page 72.

## Branding

A brand can be defined as “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of seller and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (American Marketing Association). Brands are however “intangible assets” (Kapferer, 2008), it is what resides in the consumer’s mind and feelings towards the brand based on the experiences with the product. Branding goes further than plain identification; it is the process of building perceptions in the desired audience. In other words, a brand is the perceptions that reside in the audience members’ hearts. Which means that a branding strategy is the

promise from a company, product or service and the benefits being delivered (Go East Design, 2012).

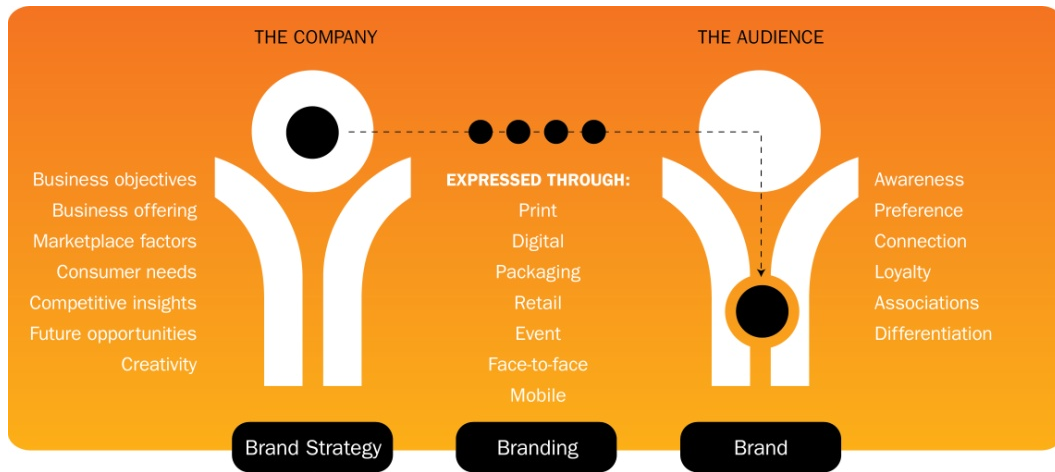


Figure 2. Difference between Brand Strategy, Branding and Brand

Source: Taken from goeastdesign.com on May 5, 2014.

The author of this thesis has made the following figure to better understand the differences and interrelationships between these terms.

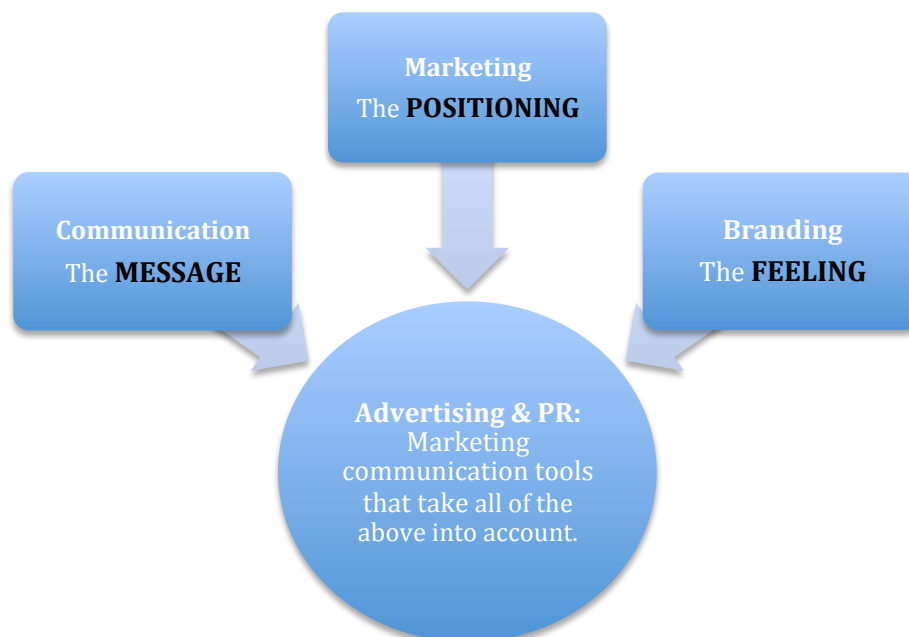


Figure 3. Difference and interrelationship between Communication-, Marketing- and Branding strategies

## 3.1 Brand Building and Definition Theories

### 3.1.1 Keller

#### ***Keller's Book – Strategic Brand Management: Building, Measuring, and Managing Brand Equity***

According to Keller, there are three models to provide micro and macro perspectives in brand building: Brand positioning model, brand resonance model, and brand value chain model. Positioning a brand means setting it up competitively in the market, with its points-of-parity (POP) and points-of-difference (POD). Resonance refers to the activation of these competitive advantages in order to create intense, active loyalty relationships between the costumers and the brand. The value chain explains the value gained by the product during its creation, in order to understand the financial aspect of marketing activities and investments to create loyal costumers and strong brands (Keller, Strategic Brand Management: Building, Measuring, and Managing Brand Equity, 2013).

One of the main concepts that Keller presents is the importance of brand knowledge, which is created by the associations that the consumer makes to the brand. Brand knowledge consists of two components: Brand awareness and Brand image. These two in their turn consist of more aspects, forming the dimensions of brand knowledge tree. This tree will be illustrated in the following source description.

Furthermore Keller presents the Brand Resonance Pyramid, which consists of the sub-dimensions of the brand building blocks and guides us through the four steps of brand building. Look at Figure 3 for the aspects of brand resonance; starting from below with *salience* referring to the aspects of brand awareness, in other words what is in at the top of the consumer's mind. Followed by the *performance* or how the product fits a person's needs. The *imagery* has to do with philosophical and social aspects. *Judgment* refers to the personal opinion and evaluation of the brand, and *feelings* to the emotional responses of the brand. Finally, on top of the pyramid there is *resonance*, which sums all of the aspects up into the nature of the relationship between the consumer and the brand (Keller, 2013).

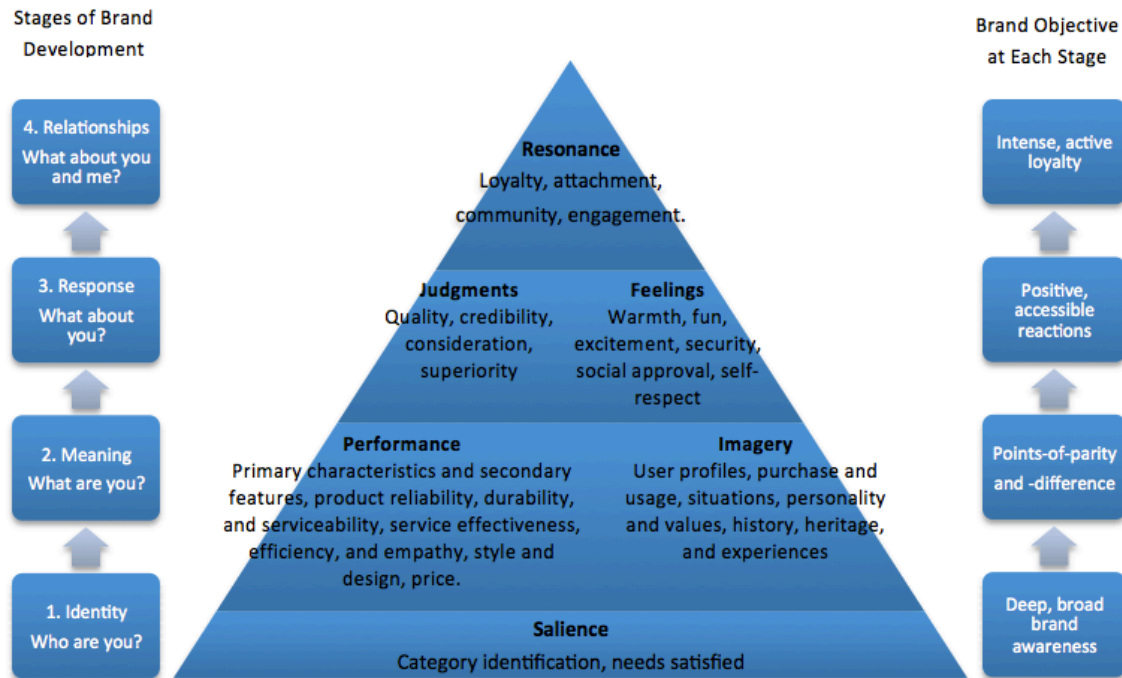


Figure 4. Brand Resonance Pyramid and the sub-dimensions of Brand Building Blocks  
Source: Keller, 2013 - *Strategic Brand Management: Building, Measuring, and Managing Brand Equity*.

**Justification.** Chapter 2 and 3 (Part II) of Keller's *Strategic Brand Management* book contains relevant theories on how to develop a brand strategy, which has to do with the main question in this thesis. This literature will therefore serve as a support when giving advice on the most basic branding elements. It will also help evaluate the current branding strategies that will be studied later on this thesis through open interviews and case studies.

### **Keller's Article – Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity**

This article is a shorter version of the above-mentioned source. It contains the same relevant aspects, in a more compact way. The following figure gives an overview of the dimensions of brand knowledge (Keller, 1993).

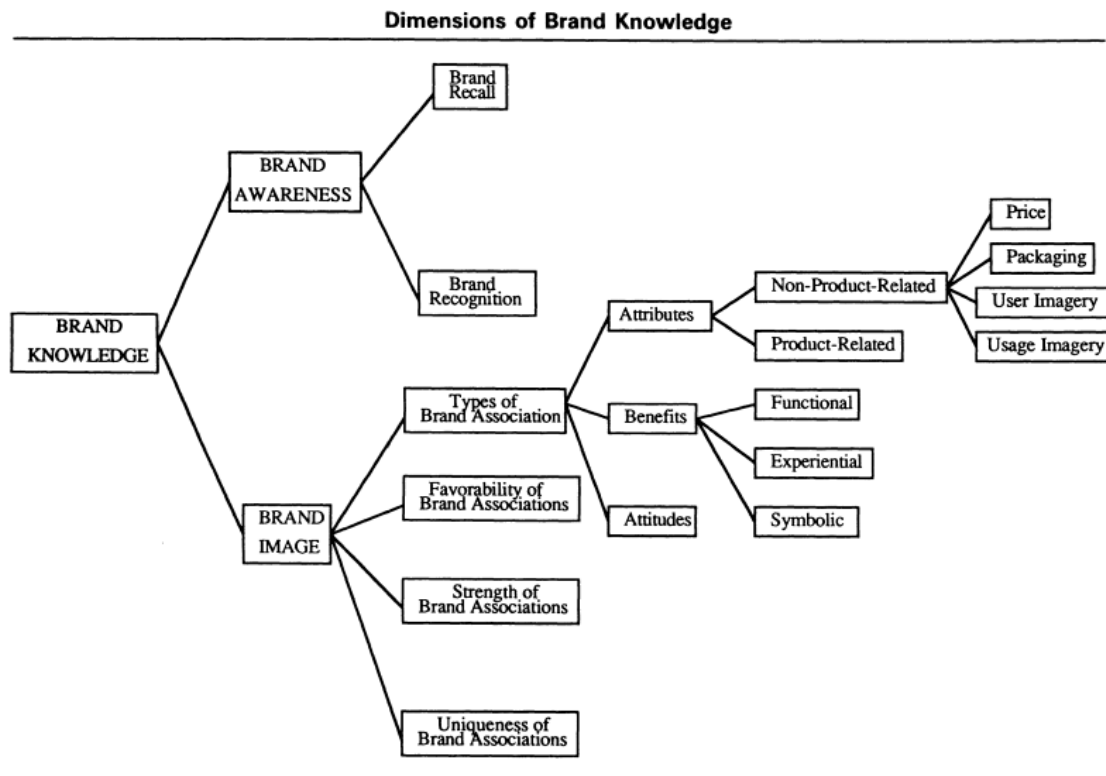


Figure 5. Dimensions of Brand Knowledge

Source: Keller, 1993 - *Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity*

**Justification.** This article is relevant for exactly the same reason as the previous literature. The only difference is that it is compacter and easier for an overview of the elements. This article contains all dimensions needed to create brand knowledge. The previous literature however, gives a more extended explanation of the elements.

### 3.1.2 Franzen & Moriarty

Giep Franzen and Sandra Moriarty (The Science and Art of Branding, 2009) describe a brand as “a complex, interrelated system of management decisions and consumer reactions that identifies a product (good, services or ideas), builds awareness of it, and creates meaning for it”. It is explained how the branding process is often seen as a linear process based on the SMR-model (source/message/receiver), and how this view should rather be seen as a system where all agents are interrelated and influence each other. Based on the system theory, ‘The Brand System Cube’ has been developed (figure 1), in which each platform of the cube represents a different agent that influences the brand

system. These agents are: business management decisions, brand components, marketing components, information, stakeholders, and context.

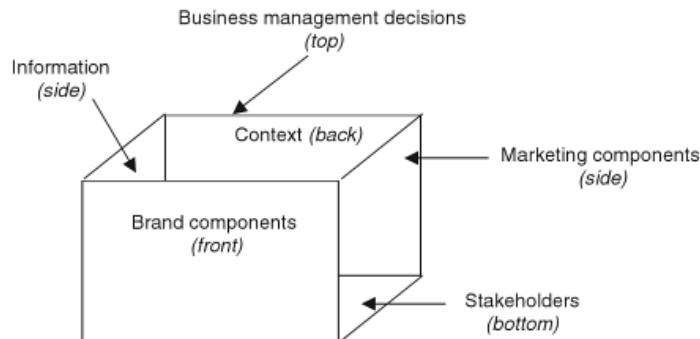


Figure 6. The Brand System Cube

Source: Franzen & Moriarty, 2009 - *The Science and Art of Branding*

Another important principle that these authors state, is the importance of knowing that managers do not own the brand as they usually think; the brand is the perception that lives in the consumer's mind. Managers are the corporate factor of a brand conversation that lays parallel to its other factor, which are consumers. Consumers have a perception function in this conversation formed by messages and experiences, an impression that cannot be controlled by the company. "The company, through the strategic decisions of its brand management, can only influence or cue these brand perceptions: it cannot control them" (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). Which brings us to the second factor in the brand conversation, the corporate factor. This factor has the strategic function, which is fulfilled by aspects such as marketing research, brand identity decisions, presentation product development, and marketing strategy support (marketing mix). This last factor is of great importance for this thesis, since it contains the pieces needed to focus on a brand's strategy.

According to Franzen & Moriarty (2009), brand strategy development consists of two aspects: the external brand reality and the internal brand perception. "The external brand reality is perceived, interpreted, and evaluated by consumers, crating an internal brand perception" (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). Furthermore, they (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009)



explain the brand system as “a holistic system of meaning that consists of physical, mental and sociocultural components”.

### 3.2 Brand Strategy Theory

Franzen & Moriarty (2009) also explain that brands are part of a young phenomenon, for which theoreticians have not yet crystalized concepts or mental models. This has made it challenging to develop actual brand theories. Instead, they (2009) focus on making the main theoretical concepts clear, that they believe are always present in brand strategies. These are outlined in the table below:

**Main Theoretical Concepts in Brand Strategies**

Company perspective	Brand reality	Customers/consumers perspective
• Vision/mission (core goal + values)	• Brand core concept	• Consumer expectations (brand functions)
• Strategic positioning	• Physical brand identity	• Brand representation + perceptual positioning
• Brand equity investments	• Market-brand equity	• Consumer brand equity

*Table 1. Main Theoretical Concepts in Brand Strategies*

*Source: Franzen & Moriarty, 2009 - The Science and Art of Branding*

Identifying key brand strategy concepts is of great importance to understand how branding works. Franzen & Moriarty (2009) explain how the same branding concepts are often being used for two different meanings or vice versa, causing confusion in this field. They have gathered information from the sources by the many of the major authors in this area such as Aaker, Kapferer, Keller, and so on. Based on this they came up with an organizational structure for the brand strategy concepts:

- Nature or deep structure: core concept, essence, soul, character, and core vision.
- Strategy (intention): identity, function, mission, focus, segmentation, differentiation, position, promise, and culture.
- Meaning (perception): awareness, function, image, association, personality, position, charisma, picture, values, culture.
- Relationship: reputation, covenant, promise, contract.
- Structure: architecture, physique, extensions, portfolio, brand width, brand sphere.

- Power or leadership: strength, saliency, equity, and loyalty.

To sum up their view on a brand as a system, Franzen & Moriarty (2009) have developed the following (figure 2) that illustrates how branding works. This recognizes both the corporate and consumer's view of a brand. It also recognizes the role of brand cues, making it the point of interplay between the intended- and the perceived meaning of a brand.

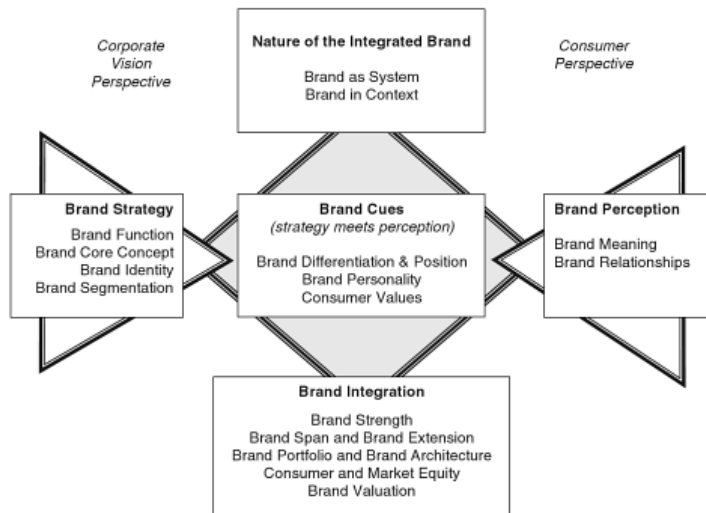


Figure 7. How branding works – Franzen & Moriarty

Source: Franzen & Moriarty, 2009 - *The Science and Art of Branding*

As one can read from the figure, Brand Strategy plays a big role in the interrelation of a brand's factors. That is why Franzen & Moriarty (2009) first focus on explaining what is the actual meaning of a strategy. "A set of decisions framed as a plan that leads to desired goals". These brand strategy decisions can include: target audiences, competitive advantage, brand position and selling proposition. They (2009) also illustrate in a table how there are different levels and components in brand strategy management. Brand strategy is just the fourth level, which means that before getting there the corporate level has to first be developed, followed by the strategic business unit management, and marketing management strategy. In short, the corporate identity and goals, business objectives and management mix has to first be developed so that the branding strategy can follow. After developing the branding strategy, the communication and media strategies follow.

Under a the level of brand strategy, there are the following strategic brand decisions:

- Consumer insight
- Setting brand objectives
- Brand concept planning
- Brand positioning planning
- Brand communication planning
- Brand architecture planning (endorsement and sub-brands)
- Evaluation of brand strategies

(Franzen & Moriarty, 2009)

**Justification.** *This literature will be used as supporting theory for the definition of a brand, and how the entire brand system should be seen. It explains branding and takes into account all agents and elements that influence a brand. Also, it specifies what is meant with a branding strategy and what is needed to develop this.*

### 3.3 Additional Literature

Besides the general branding concepts treated in 3.1 and 3.2; there is some literature that specializes in branding branches.

Such as Daniel Rowles (Digital Branding: A complete step-by-step guide to strategy, tactics and measurement, 2014) presents a focus on *digital* branding. He explains that every experience that the audience has with the brand online, matters. People do not just rely on what the brand is telling them directly, they rather search for further information on blogs and reviews online. Also, he explains how social media is an important tool, but that many companies do not know how to use it properly. After all, it's about the engagement with your target audience, and the feeling that all these brand experiences combined give them. In short, "digital branding is about the sum of all experiences we have of something – and the impact this has".

Joeri Van den Berg and Mattias Behrer (How cool brands stay hot: Branding to Generation Y, 2013), focus on branding directed to Generation Y as consumers. Relevant points brought forward in this book are the importance of product and brand

design when developing your brand. Also, using the factors of authenticity and connectivity as the key to brand survival over generations. The authors (2013) emphasize how your target audience plays a big role in your success, and how important it is to have them clearly defined and to ask yourself what can you do for them. This quote summarizes “...Generation Y knows when something is just a marketing construction. In a way, you could state that the most useful marketing today is not seen as marketing at all. Just being the brand that you really are, only talking to people that are happy to hear from you and letting your reputation do the rest.” (Van der Berg & Behrer, 2013). This book explains the five key attributes of successful youth brands: CRUSH (Coolness, Realness, Uniqueness, Self-identification with the brands, Happiness).

He also highlights relevant facts about Generation Y, for brand builders:

- Gen Yers look for individual empowerment (control) in the hot brands they choose.
- Technology is indispensable for Gen Yers.
- Hot brands continuously bring cool content.
- Friends are the relevant filters through which Gen Yers process brand messages.
- Hot brands don't just offer products; they are the supporters of Gen Yers' lifestyle.
- Brand affection and self-identification with the brand is built during adolescence as a result of brain development.
- This consumer generation is searching for anchor brands that provide them with stability, harmony and authenticity. Brands need to have a well-defined, transparent and consistent meaning and a clear vision.

Roger Ball wrote a book especially for starting designer professionals who want to create their own microbrand. His argument is that the Internet can allow a designer to create a new brand from scratch, with limited financial resource.

A big part of this book focuses on design. And the other gives you the basic knowledge on how to create your own microbrand, as a designer. This way he encourages designers to be their own boss and gives them tips on how to put their products on the market.

In chapter 5 he gives a brief history of branding, and illustrated how branded products are more successful than the unbranded ones. And mentions how studies have tested powerful branding and the effects it has on the human brain. He also explains the history

and importance of packaging (and labels) in branding. Besides that he explains in a clear and simple way the concept of brand recognition, and how the more often the public is exposed to the message, the faster they know who the brand is. Furthermore he introduces the concept of brand equity, making it clear that good branding will add up much more to your company. “A brand is not just a logo and a catch phrase, but an attitude that should inform every aspect of the business.” (Ball & Overhill, 2012)

One of the brand strategies he explains is the assessment and appreciation of your brand size. He recommends thinking and starting small, in niche markets. He also mentions the example of customization – “Focus is powerful. The narrower the focus, the more powerful the brand. This is the era in which specialist thrive and generalists do not.” Furthermore:

- “Our new brands must also participate in contemporary culture”
- “The brands need a signature; since these products cannot compete on prices, they must find something else like material or process, to set them apart.”
- Focus on early adopters for your micro brand.

***The purpose of this study is to examine which are the best digital branding strategies to launch the clients' product. This chapter will include: A description of the research methodology (sample selection, data collection and analysis), and a description of the research's quality and limitations.***

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The research methodology that will be used for this study is exploratory research with a new angle on the topic. Exploratory research consists of two types, a new topic, or a new angle (Educational Portal - Kowalczyk, Devin, 2003-2014). For this study a 'new angle' will be applied, since literature and research on the field of branding already exists, but information on digital branding is limited. The new angle comprises the elements of *digital* branding, and the focus on start-ups with low financial resources.

The nature of this study is qualitative because the main objective is to explore the digital branding strategies that are currently being used by starting entrepreneurs, and about finding explanatory information about their plans and tactics. Also, about finding out whether these strategies have been successful so far. This study concerns real situations and experiences, and it is about underlying insights.

Furthermore, the type of research being done is applied research. The research results are meant to help finding solutions for practical application. The main objective is to solve the client's "problem" and advise him on the best online branding strategies to use in his case.

## 4.1 Data collection techniques

The four data collection methods used to conduct this research are: Literature research, desktop research, interviews, and case studies.

### 4.1.1 Literature research

Refer to Chapter 3 for the theory framework of this study. This method has been applied to gather literature already available in the field of research and to define the research margins of this study. (Verhoeven, Doing Research: The Hows and Whys of Applied Research, 2011).

### 4.1.2 Desktop research

Desktop research includes online sources, blogs and platforms. This type of data collection was done on the Internet using Google and Google Scholar as the main browsers. By typing key words relevant to the research topic, and combination of them, the best results show up.

#### ***Entrepreneur.com***

“Marking its 14-year anniversary in 2010, Entrepreneur.com has evolved into the most widely used website by entrepreneurs and leaders in business worldwide. As the leading small business website, Entrepreneur.com serves its visitors' needs by creating the most satisfying experience with relevant content, logical information management and ease of access.” (Entrepreneur.com, 2014). This website is relevant for this thesis because it contains many articles that have to do with entrepreneurship. The client is an entrepreneur, which means that conclusions and mostly recommendations can be supported using this website.

#### ***Branzai.com***

“Branzai is the first platform for branders in Spain, about brands and branding, with the goal of making and informing about the best practices in the creation and management of brands” (Branzai.com). Branzai does not only offers articles on brand innovation, strategy, creation inspiration, but it also has an academy that offers courses, workshops, and insights for future branders.

***Branding-journal.com***

Branding Journal is a brand identity gallery, that collects and portrays brand designs from all over the world. “Branding Journal features beautiful & fresh brandings. We carefully picked high quality brand identities. The showcases featuring works of designers and design studios from all over the world.” (Branding-journal.com) This website serves as inspiration for brand future development and gives an overview of the elements needed for visual brand identity.

***Thebrandingjournal.com***

Another branding journal type of website. The difference between this website and the one above is that it is about case studies on how the brands applied certain strategies, such as marketing strategies, brand behavior, consumer engagement, re-branding, co-branding, and so on. “The Branding Journal is an independent online journal that publishes worldwide news and case studies about brand strategies. The website reports on the importance of branding within marketing strategies and how it empowers companies and their consumers around the world.” (The Branding Journal, 2014)

***Radianbrands.com***

‘Radiant Brands’ is an independent brand-building agency that creates on-target branding that performs. “We are committed to discovering the power of our clients’ brands and developing effective strategies to express their unique value through branding, strategic design, the Web and integrated marketing campaigns. We power this goal through dynamic and exciting creative work that reaches out to your customers.” (Radiant Brands, 2014). Radiant Brands is well aware of the importance of the digital world in the field of branding and have released an article called ‘Building an Online Brand Strategy’, which will be analyzed.

**4.1.3 Interviews**

The third method used to conduct this study is open interviews. Open interviews are flexible and useful to obtain in-depth information. The interest lies on investigating underlying motives that these respondents may have (Verhoeven, Doing Research: The Hows and Whys of Applied Research, 2011). The interviews were designed in the form of open questions, in order to have a list of the relevant subjects. Other than that it was crucial to keep the responses very flexible, and as elaborate as possible.



Another reason for using open interviews is the size of population, which will be a small group. Open interviews take a lot of time to process, but for a small group of interviewees they are a good option. Also, this thesis' topic is quite new, so open interviews will also serve as an orientation in the subject.

The interview consists of 11 open questions that explore the background of the interviewees, researches the branding strategy aspect, and stimulates them to provide recommendations for other entrepreneurs. Please refer to the appendix 1 for a complete version of the interview design.

Four strategies were used to find relevant interviewees: Visit concept stores, peer consultation, and Internet browsing (Google search). Refer to appendix 2 for a detailed overview.

The sample is a representative made of participants with the same characteristics as the client:

- Starting entrepreneur
- With limited financial resources
- Manufacturing handcrafted product
- Using digital manufacturing techniques
- Producing low-scale quantities
- Selling their product worldwide but with a focus on their local market

People that meet these characteristics were found through websites such as etsy.com. And through the SPRING stores – a concept store where entrepreneurs rent a 'plank' for a very reasonable price to display their products. Often these entrepreneurs also sell their products through etsy.com. A total of 30 people were found at the SPRING stores, from which 10 were chosen depending on their products. Only two agreed on an interview. Besides that, two other interviewees were found using another strategy.

All interviewees were first contacted by phone with the question if they would be willing to participate in this study. This first step is to introduce the idea and to ensure that they are familiar with it once they actually receive the interview. This increases the chances of a quick and high response rate. Some interviewees asked for additional information

before agreeing on an interview; in this case a short description of the thesis together with the open questions are sent to the interviewee by email. An appointment is then made to conduct the interviews. Also, the website of the interviewees were analyzed in prior to the interviews.

A total of four interviews were conducted in the period of one week. Each interview took between 30 to 60 minutes, and they were conducted either face-to-face or by Skype call, and are recorded. Interviewees talked about their experiences as entrepreneurs with low resources, and about the (digital) branding strategies they have used so far and their effectiveness.

#### 4.1.4 Case studies

Besides desktop research and open interviews, also case studies were conducted: a type of qualitative research that uses a range of data collection methods. In this case, data collection was done through the Internet, analyzing the information available about the organizations in subject. Case studies are conducted by mainly analyzing the companies' websites and social media channels. Also, relevant articles and blogs mentioning, describing and rating the product or organizations as a whole, are be taken into account.

These organizations or companies have been chosen due to the similarity in either the client's product or the techniques being used to manufacture these. Besides fitting the profile, they also succeeded in what they do. The main factor that has been studied is the way in which these companies apply digital branding. Also, to which extend and how they use their manufacturing methods (digital manufacturing 3D printing technique, and/or handcrafting) into their branding strategies. The following companies were chosen for case studies:

##### ***NORMAL earphones***

Uses 3D printing technology to manufacture each pair of earphone. With their tagline "One size fits none" their goal is to be the best earphones company that they can be, personalizing each and every earphone to the exact shape of the client. They developed a free mobile app, easy to use, for anyone to take a picture of their ears so that the earphones can be made exactly in their shape. Website: <http://nrml.com/>

**GRADO Labs**

Handmade headphones from Brooklyn, New York. It's a family owned business that has stayed in the same small building since 1953. They do not do any traditional advertising, and are not planning to change any of that. Grado Labs focuses a lot on the sound of their headphones, but also on the looks. Each and every headphone is assembled by hand with lots of care. They make high-fidelity headphones, appreciated worldwide by serious music lovers and professionals.

Website: <http://www.gradolabs.com/>

**LSTN Headphones**

"We now travel the world growing our small company. LSTN is a for-purpose company that connects individuals, families and communities through sound. For every pair of headphones we sell, we help restore hearing to a person in need through [Starkey Hearing Foundation](#)." (Hilton, 2014). Each pair of headphone is made with sustainable wood; not one pair is the same because of the wood's print.

Website: <http://www.lstnheadphones.com/>

**4.1.5 Website analysis**

Another method used is website analysis. The interviewees' websites and websites from the case study companies were observed and analyzed. For the interviewees' this was done prior to the interviews, and for the case studies this is done throughout the entire case study analysis because their website is a main source of information.

Factors that are looked at when analyzing the websites are: Quality of imagery, usability, navigation ease, organization and arrangement of topics and images, color scheme, and how the brand is portrayed.

**4.2 Limitations**

The main limitation to this research is exactly the nature of it. Qualitative research is much criticized when it comes to its reliability and validity. Many will argue that these factors are non-existent in qualitative research, simply because this type of research

uses an open approach that makes it hard (if not impossible) to replicate and obtain the same results. According to N. Golafshani (2003), some authors (Stenbacka, 2001, and Strauss & Gordon, 1999) argue whether the notions “reliability” and “validity” are applicable to a qualitative research at all, or as Mishler argues (Golafshani, 2003) that the possible qualification could only be: the research is good/ bad, based on the grade of trustworthiness. This applies to both interviews and literature research.

Furthermore, the generalizability (or population validity) is also questioned, since it often uses small groups of people that are specifically selected instead of randomly. Also the construct validity is difficult to truly measure, because the research goes more into the perception of the respondents rather than numbers. Critics however, tend to forget that one is dealing with qualitative research, which means that these factors should be applied in a different way than in quantitative research.

In order to make the validity and reliability of this research as high as possible, the following steps have been applied. This is if Mishler’s (2000) view on trustworthiness is accepted, then the validity is guaranteed as much as it is possible by:

- Choosing some of the world’s most accepted theories in branding, such as those of Keller (2013) and Franzen & Moriarty (2009).
- Relaying on the accountable sources described at the beginning of this chapter.
- Relaying on the interviews with people with insight in the circumstances of this particular topic.
- Recording all interviews. So that this material will remain intact in case one desires to analyze it again. All conclusions are therefore made based on what has actually been said and are kept objective.

As far as for validity, what needs to be taken into account is that generalizability is simply not the main objective of qualitative research. Besides that, the information gathered is not quantitative. It is rather a very specific case and situation that has been described in detail. In this case it is simply necessary to probe and look for the deeper meaning and reasons to the answers and data collected. Furthermore, the initial question will be answered properly, without any unbiased conclusions. In other words, a link between the question and conclusions will be proven.

Another limitation of this research had to do with the sample for the open interviews. The ideal would be to find a person with the exact same traits as the client. This however is not possible, not all criteria could be found in just one interviewee or case. All relevant cases are either big companies with a lot of experience or start-ups with good financial resources. This means that the relevance of interviewees and case studies remains questionable.

Lastly, desktop research also had its limitations. Despite the fact that the online sources that have been chosen for this research, are all created by people with experience/knowledge in the field, the reliability of these sources still remains questionable. The online sources listed in 4.1.2 were all chosen looking at their relevance and content; they are all created by professionals and are expected to be reliable. And even though these authors may review their content and do their best to remain objective when analyzing case studies, there is still a risk that their opinion may influence the content.

***This chapter contains the findings from the interviews and research analysis. Only the essence of results and relevant information will be outlined. Any further information can be found in the appendix.***

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## **5.1 Interviews**

The interviews' results have been categorized to have a better overview of the answers. Each category contains answers from all interviewees. The categories are based on similarities in the answers to the topics that have been discussed during the interviews. For a detailed description on the interviews' answers please refer to the appendix.

### ***Brand identity development***

The majority of interviewees said that they do not properly pay attention to their branding. One interviewee never really put thought on the target audience; and two other did but unconsciously. One brand element that they had was a name and some had a logo. One interviewee – ORK – actually developed a visual identity for his brand, and understands the importance of choosing specific factors (which in his case are: high quality, handcrafting, and packaging) to constantly communicate his brand message to his target audience. Another interviewee – Evelyn from 'Beleef Je Verbeelding' – tries to maintain one specific style in all products regardless of their differences. She also rejects any opportunities if they do not fit her concept; and always tries to keep the same style in all her pictures. Her company name was chosen because people knew her by that name from a previous company, but has nothing to do with her current company. Also, she burns the name on all products, but does not have nor considers this a logo. Despite of all this, she never stood still on these aspect as part of a branding strategy. Juan David – the starting industrial designer – gathered some branding knowledge in an extra course he followed. Until now he has focused on the development of one logo for the first product of his startup. In this logo he considers the target audience and tried to make it appealing to them, and at the same time communicating messages to them that are 'hidden' in the logo.

### ***Website vs. Offline shops***

The interviewee from ORK also thinks that an online store is enough to sell his products internationally, and does not think an offline store is necessary. The other interviewees

however, do prefer offline stores and are active in lifestyle markets, and pop-up stores as well.

### ***Social media channels***

Almost all interviewees are using social media to promote their products. Only one is not at the moment but is planning to do so eventually. Facebook is being used by three of the interviewees, and only one has a profile in Etsy.com. One interviewee (ORK) relies mainly on social media to do their promotion. What he thinks is “it is not only free, but also the social aspect plays a big role”. ORK understands how a friend’s recommendation about a product has a much higher value than a recommendation coming from the brand itself.

### ***Financial***

All interviewees had challenges regarding the financial aspect, as it was already expected since they are all small-scale entrepreneurs and startups. These are challenges such as: a balanced price calculation that would not be too expensive, but that could cover all hours that a handcrafted product requires. Setting priorities on the best way to spend the money. Another challenge was to find good suppliers, or the amount of waiting time that supplies take to arrive. In order to manage these financial challenges, some interviewees use a strategy that came forward twice during the interviews. This was that of service exchange, in which payment is done in the form of ‘natura’. For example, ORK got its visual identity developed by a friend in the field, and he paid him with his product as an exchange of services. Another example is how interviewee 4 searches for stores that may be interested in his products and offers to promote them in his packaging, in exchange of a good deal in supplies.

### ***Extra***

Some interviewees also give the following advice, “keep it simple”. Some recommend to focus on just one product, and to make only a few of them to first see how it gets accepted in the market. As a small-scale business, it is essential to only develop what can actually be managed. Besides this, all interviewees say that it is necessary to truly enjoy and get satisfaction out of the startup in order to succeed.

## 5.2 Case studies

As described in chapter 4, three brands have been chosen for case studies. The brands are: GRADO Labs, LSTN Headphones, and NORMAL earphones. A compilation of the most relevant findings is described below. For detailed findings please refer to the appendix.

The aspect that stood out the most from the case studies is that each company that was analyzed had a clear focus on their branding. Even though all three offer the same products and have similar manufacturing techniques, they are still all very different. Which means that they all have different target audiences, and interests to fulfill. LSTN focuses on the charity and sustainable wood factor. GRADO focuses on the family business factor, which in combination with handmade production and a conscious choice of not using traditional advertising gives the brand a feeling of “secrecy” – a special product that not everyone knows about, but if you do then you are amongst the special ones. NORMAL focuses on the factor of customization, to the point that it can only fit your ears and no one else’s; not to mention that they developed a very simple procedure to make this happen, something that until now was only possible through very complicated and time-consuming processes.

Another finding is the stage in which companies launched their brands. NORMAL was very decisive on having all branding material, app and location 100% developed before launching. So that the audience can experience the brand as a whole, making a greater impact on them. GRADO however, started as a small family business brand, and branding wise they do much less than NORMAL. Also LSTN started small, they still do not have a designated office, and hire interns to help with the business.

The social aspects that these brands have are also very noticeable. They all have very well developed websites – except for GRADO that could be modernized. Also, they all have social media channels: Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, even LinkedIn. Each brand makes an impact in their own way depending on their target audience, by sharing interesting and engaging content. Examples are: images or videos of how to use the product in the daily life, including fashion/styling tips; or reminders of product features in terms of looks, quality and functionality; or the social advantages that the product has when its purchased. Furthermore, reviews from other blogs and



websites play a big role for these companies, as it influences the audience's view on their branding. The companies took positive reviews of their products and put it on their website, so that it makes a positive impact on the viewer. Examples of these websites are: shapeways.com, thenextweb.com, gizmag.com, venturebeat.com, uncrate.com, coolhunting.com, forbes.com, digitaltrends.com, arstechnica.com, mashable.com, gizmodo.com, techcrunch.com, betterlivingthroughdesign.com, gearculture.com. Some of these companies also have a press kit, which is a compilation of who they are that can be easily downloaded for further press and media use. Another had a link to an online server full of images, for the same purpose.

Also one finding that emerged from analyzing their social media channels, is that LSTN occasionally takes part in pop-up stores.

### **5.3 Online sources (desktop research)**

Five online sources have been explored as part of desktop research: entrepreneur.com, branzai.com, branding-journal.com, thebrandingjournal.com and radiantbrands.com. The findings per website are listed below.

#### ***Entrepreneur.com***

No article was found with relevant data that could be useful to answer the research question. This website serves mostly as an inspirational and motivational website for entrepreneurs. Articles are mostly about tips and experiences by all types of entrepreneurs around the world.

#### ***Branzai.com***

Two relevant articles were found on branzai.com, which link the Maslow pyramid with branding. The first one is about how companies should choose one of the pyramid's traits and incorporate it in their product, branding and marketing, in order to fulfill their target audience's needs (Branzai.com). "It's important to understand that we are trying to connect Brands with People, and if we do not know how they work from a psychological or biological perspective, then we will not be able to create useful tools to fulfill this purpose." In another article, the authors of Branzai bring a point forward, that humans evolve, but most of all, the environment evolves as well. They make a bold statement by saying that

Maslow's pyramid should have an extra level - Auto expression. This, according to them (Branzai.com) is the impact that environment-changers like social media and all digital communication have on humans (branzai.com).

### ***Branding-journal.com***

This website has a blog that contains visual references for brand identity development. Examples of such references are websites for mobile app development, like bootstrapuikit.com and alterplay.com that focus on a youthful, modern and user-friendly design. Also woodlake.de a brand design studio, where all brand designs are modern and polished, and their messages communicated intelligently.

### ***Thebrandingjournal.com***

This website shows through case studies, how important consumer engagement is in order to create a stronger consumer-bond with the brand. Examples are given such as, Volkswagen magazine ad that offers Wi-Fi, or Nivea's creative protection bracelet that leads to their mobile app. Big brands that implement cross media strategies, combining off- and online methods to engage consumers.

### ***Radianbrands.com***

An online article from radianbrands.com 'Building an Online Brand Strategy' (Donaldson & Zinke, 2010) summarizes three main steps that are necessary for online brand building strategies: search results, publishing and social networking.

Optimization of search results is achievable by using the right key words and monitoring the website's traffic to optimize the search; this is called a SEO (search engine optimization) plan. Also by paid search positioning in the sidebars of browsers, and by using paid or free directory listing. It all comes down to helping customers find you, especially in the case of product-focused companies. Blogs, articles and forums are key in order to raise awareness about a product. They also serve as 'hooks' that will lead to the companies website. Radiant Brands writes about social networking sites and listing. Where they emphasize that for this tool it is important to know the target audience very well, and analyze whether they will be using social networking sites to find the product. This tool will therefore be more useful to consumer-focused business rather than B2B businesses.

Besides these elements, Radiant Brands also stresses on the importance of a branding fundamental: differentiation. They emphasize how essential it is to be unique, but mostly how the way to build a strong brand presence online is by being consistent with this specific attribute/value that attracts your target audience.



Figure 8. An Online Brand Strategy – Radiant Brands  
Source: taken from radiantbrands.com on May 10, 2014.

## 5.4 Website analysis

The majority of the interviewees had poorly developed websites, in terms of imagery, color scheme, navigation and branding in general. Branding elements were not strong enough, there is no sense of strong identification when one enters the website. They are also confusing to navigate; the user has to search his way through instead of being led by the website's layout and elements. Only one interviewee managed to do all of the above right; this is the same interviewee that thought about developing a clear visual identity for his brand in advance.

All websites from the study cases were well developed. They all reflected the brand strongly. Especially NORMAL's and LSTN's websites had very modern layouts, colors, and fonts. Also the imagery and media use was of high quality. On the other hand, GRADO's website has a bit more of an old-school impression to it. This was not a surprise; keeping in mind that GRADO is a family owned business and that does not use any traditional advertising.

*This chapter consists of conclusions based on the findings listed in chapter 5, and the answer to the sub- and research question.*

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## 6.1 Conclusions

First the most relevant conclusions will be compared and put together in one overview. Then the conclusions will be classified according to data collection technique.

### 6.1.1 Overall conclusion and comparison

After conducting the interviews and case studies, two extremes have been found regarding the channels used for product promotion and brand awareness. Most interviewees focus mostly on lifestyle fairs, concept stores and pop-up stores and use online channels as a support tool. On the other hand, the brands analyzed in the case studies, use online channels as their main tool for brand awareness. A well developed website and social media channels, can be considered as standard tools or must-haves in their cases. Also reviews, articles and blogs are widely used by these brands.

Also, when comparing most interviews with the case studies, a big gap is noticeable when it comes to the quality of branding elements. And the big difference between the channels used to communicate these, as mentioned above. One specific interviewee (ORK) however, proves that by using the same techniques used by the brands analyzed in the case studies, a small-scale entrepreneur can be more successful. This interviewee who actually applies branding consciously, has a more polished and professional feeling to its product than the other interviewees. This is something that all companies from the study cases do. It shows that no matter how big or small the company is, it is necessary to apply proper branding actions in order to give an extra dimension of value to the product. This is also explained by Keller, (Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity, 1993) when he describes how to create brand equity.

Furthermore, case studies showed that all these brands have a very strong POD (Point of Difference), which is one of Keller's (2013) essential branding elements. These brands however, also had more financial resources to invest in their branding and business in general. On the other hand, interview results show a way of gathering and managing limited financial resources; a strategy is product-service exchange.

Another important aspect that makes a big difference when the interviews and case studies are compared, are their websites. Brands from the case studies clearly have a more professional website, with a very clear branding that reflect in their colors, imagery, and overall content. They are also easier to navigate and have a higher level of user friendliness. Only one interviewee – ORK – executed these elements right as well. The rest of the interviewees had websites that looked amateurish, with poor readability and poor branding. Having a poor website actually works against to their brand image, and lowers the audience's expectations on the product if they happen to see it online for the first time.

### 6.1.2 Interviews

The interviews have shown that most small-scale entrepreneurs do not pay proper attention to brand identity developments. Most of them do not have the required knowledge for this either. Some of the interviewees apply elements of branding theories unconsciously. But there is one interviewee who actually paid full attention on the development of a visual identity for his brand. This same interviewee actually had some background in the branding field, and knows the value that a well-developed visual identity adds to a product. The difference between the products with and without a proper branding strategy is evident. In both Keller (2013) and Franzen & Moriarty's (2009) literature, brand image is addressed as a basic branding element. This is indispensable for brand strategy development.

Furthermore, the interviewees promote their product using their own websites, Facebook, Etsy.com, lifestyle markets, and service exchange. There is a clear division in preference between online and offline shops. Most interviewees prefer offline shops and see online channels as a support for their business. However, it is proven by one interviewee that it is possible to create international brand awareness just by using online channels.

The interviews also show that all small-scale start-ups find it challenging to cope with financial resources, which in all cases are limited. A strategy used to manage this is the exchange of services with relevant people that can provide the necessary skill or products needed.

### 6.1.3 Case studies

A specific aspect that stands out in the case studies analysis is the fact that even though all three brands offer the same product, they all have different branding strategies that helps the consumer identify (with) them. The way they achieve this is by developing a clear Point Of Difference (POD) like Keller (2013) explains in his literature.

Social media channels and reviews are also indispensable for brands nowadays; and this too is executed by these brands. Like Daniel Rowles (Digital Branding: A complete step-by-step guide to strategy, tactics and measurement, 2014) says, online branding is not just about the logo and name, it is about the experience that the audience has with the brand online. This also includes what others say about the brand and product. The more people talk about a brand, the more reliable it becomes. This also reflects in Keller's (2013) Brand Resonance Pyramid, where he points out 'Judgment' as a key element to achieve customer engagement and loyalty. Under 'Judgment' he mentions factors such as quality, credibility, consideration and superiority. The same aspect also shows how different parties influence a brand, just as explained in Franzen & Moriarty's Brand System Cube theory (The Science and Art of Branding, 2009).

### 6.1.4 Online sources (desktop research)

#### ***Entrepreneur.com***

This website is practical as a side source of information for entrepreneurs to keep themselves up-to-date and motivated. But no useful information or conclusions could be drawn from this website.

#### ***Branding-journal.com***

This website has a very handy blog that can be recommended to the client for future reference when developing a visual brand identity. Useful websites found on this blog are: bootstrapuikit.com, alterplay.com and woodlake.de

### ***Radianbrands.com***

An online article from [radianbrands.com](http://radianbrands.com) 'Building an Online Brand Strategy' (Donaldson & Zinke, 2010) supports all findings listed in the case studies. It also summarizes them into three main steps: search results, publishing and social networking.

#### **6.1.5 Website analysis**

A big difference was obvious in the visual quality of the interviewees website, compared to those of the case study brands. The same interviewee that considers an online shop to be enough for his business, had the best website of all interviewees. The website was visually nice, pictures and layout of high quality, and it did not seem of amateur quality like the other interviewees' websites. This shows that a website is not only a communication tool, but also forms part/has a big influence on a brand and product image. A website can either add to a business positively, like in the case of "ORK" where the brand is very well portrait, even through a great production video. Or it can influence the consumer's perception negatively, like in the case of "Beleef je Verbeelding" where the website actually lowers the audience's expectations on the products because it has been poorly executed – once one sees the products offline, it is evident that its quality very high, but unfortunately the website does not do a proper job portraying this. Instead it affects the brand and product image negatively.

## **6.2 Answer to sub question**

The results and conclusions of this research (see chapter 5 and 6) have made it possible to answer the sub questions.

### **1. What are the online branding strategies being used?**

There are no online branding strategies being used. Instead, a combination of elements or tools is being implemented. These tools are:

- a. A website.
- b. Social media channels.
- c. Reviews and publications from independent parties.
- d. The development and implementation of creative campaigns that involve users both offline and online. Engaging campaigns that stimulate consumers to take action, share information, eventually creating a higher brand loyalty.

- e. Showing how the product can be used in the daily life, combining it with outfits, images, videos.

## **2. What are the challenges faced by start-ups in the initial phase of their business?**

- a. Financial: gathering and managing resources.
- b. Material: finding the right suppliers.

### **6.3 Answer to research question**

The results, conclusions (see chapter 5 and 6) and answer to the sub questions have made it possible to answer this thesis' research question. Furthermore, this research has confirmed the problem stated in the introduction of this thesis. As drawn from the findings and conclusions, most entrepreneurs, especially those in the field of digital manufacturing, do not know how to properly use branding strategies to add value to their start-up. The main reason of why this happens is the lack of knowledge in the field.

Before answering the research questions, it is important to keep in mind the following definition of a strategy, as stated in the literature by Franzen & Moriarty (2009). "A strategy is a set of actions that will lead to a desired goal". Also, as shown by Keller (2013), basic branding elements should first be developed in any branding strategy: a strong, consistent and well-defined brand identity, with a strong Point-of-Difference (POD)

#### **What is the most suitable online product branding strategy for a small-scale entrepreneur specialized in digital manufacturing to launch his product?**

This research has shown that the most suitable online branding strategy is a combination of elements that can be used to position a brand, regardless of the message or product. These elements are: a well executed website that reflects the desired brand image, consumer engaging campaigns, social media channels, and the use of online reviews/publications by independent parties. These elements form the most suitable online product branding strategy for any small-scale entrepreneur, regardless of their specialization. They are also suitable for entrepreneurs with low financial resources as mentioned in the introduction.



***The following advice contains elements needed to develop the most suitable branding strategy for the client's product. Additionally, recommendations on actions that fall outside the initial question but that are relevant for proper product branding will be provided.***

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## 7.1 Advise

It is advised to consider the following elements in order to create the most suitable branding strategy:

1. ***Define corporate, business and marketing objectives first.*** As literature has shown, branding strategies are the fourth level of brand strategy management. Therefore, it is advisable to first define the corporate goals, business objectives and develop a marketing mix. Based on this, a branding strategy can be developed that will fit the bigger picture of the startup. The current goal of “push the product into the market” needs to be developed further.
2. ***Define brand identity with a strong Point-Of-Differentiation (POD).*** Furthermore, it is important to have a clear definition of the brand identity, both visual and the message to be communicated. A brand's identity needs to be consistent in all of its elements (name, logo, vision, mission, positioning), and in the tools that are being used to tell everyone who is the brand (packaging, website, imagery, videos, product itself). Refer to the following website for inspiration: [branding-journal.com](http://branding-journal.com), [woodlake.de](http://woodlake.de), [bootstrapuikit.com](http://bootstrapuikit.com), and [alterplay.com](http://alterplay.com). When developing a brand identity, it is crucial to have a POD, an element that differentiates the product from all other similar ones. This element will define the product, and it strongly depends on the audience being targeted. Currently, Prismatk has a couple of elements that makes it different: it is a made-to-order headphone, partly handcrafted, partly 3D printed, it combines traditional and modern materials, and it can be personalized. These however, cannot be summarized into one single element or feeling that would summarize the product's identity. The POD needs to be stronger and better defined. An aspect that is helpful when developing the POD is considering the target audience's needs, and offer them what they want. Also, by linking the branding strategies to

one of Maslow's Pyramids levels, and promoting in a subtle way how your product fulfills these needs.

3. **Develop digital branding strategy.** Once a strong brand identity has been clearly defined, then the digital brand awareness processes can start. A polished website is essential, and so is the use of social media channels, and independent reviews/publications. It is important to understand that what needs to be created is a relationship with the consumer. Every experience the consumer has with the brand – in this case online – will add to his/her opinion and view on the brand. That is why positive reviews from independent parties will increase the audience's trust on the brand. All content shared and the behavior of the brand on social media channels will influence the audience perspective, which is ultimately how a brand image is formed.
4. **Website.** Developing a website is a must. It is advised that once a website is developed, to do this once all branding decisions have been made. The website should be a reflection of the brand, contributing positively to the brand image instead of lowering the expectations of the audience. All images on the website should be of high quality, and they should also fit the message that the brand wants to communicate. So just because an image looks good, it does not always mean it fits the overall picture and is suitable for website material. Also the website colors should be consistent and reflect the brand image. Likewise the content, and the voice (way) it is written in. The website should be user-friendly; the elements should guide the user on where to look. It should be easy to navigate and have high degree of readability.
5. **Social Media Channels.** The use of social media channels is essential. Amongst the most used are: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, and LinkedIn. It is advised to share content that is interesting for the target audience, and that also reflects the brand message. An example is by showing how the product can be used in the daily life, combining it with outfits, images and videos.

6. **Independent reviews and publications.** Approach blogs or online magazines that have to do with design, 3D print, handcrafting, and electronics. Some examples are: shapeways.com, thenextweb.com, gizmag.com, venturebeat.com, uncrate.com, coolhunting.com, forbes.com, digitaltrends.com, arstechnica.com, mashable.com, gizmodo.com, techcrunch.com, betterlivingthroughdesign.com, gearculture.com.
7. **Media Kit.** It is advised to create a media kit (a short compilation of text and images, explaining who the brand is) that can be downloaded from the website. The media kit can be used by external parties when writing reviews and publishing articles about the product. This way it is easier to keep the brand identity consistent regardless of where it is being published. The media kit should be made in a language targeted to the public, simple but complete.
8. **Be consistent.** In every aspect of the brand, always communicated the same message. The brand visuals and communication needs to be consistent everywhere in every tool or channel. Also, in independent articles written by third parties.
9. **Consumer engaging campaigns.** Also by engaging the consumer into online activities that involve the brand, a stronger association, bond and preference can be created. An online campaign can be developed for example, in which consumers are motivated to upload a picture of the combination they would like for their Prismatk, together with a playlist that describes their style. And the person that gets most likes will get their Prismatk manufactured for free. Refer to the following source for inspiration: thebrandingjournal.com.

## 7.2 Recommendations

1. **Financial.** Regarding the financial limitations, there are some recommendations that can be applied in order to gather more financial resources. Application for programs such as Startup Chile or Startup Brazil, is a highly recommended option. Crowd funding programs like Kickstarter. Also, partnering with people that can provide a service or discount in exchange of products, is something to consider. Besides these, there are also websites available in which a free online store or selling profile can be made: [tictail.com](http://tictail.com), [etsy.com](http://etsy.com), [notonthehighstreet.com](http://notonthehighstreet.com).
2. **Sound check.** Another recommendation is to get opinions about the product from professionals in the field of sounds and electronics. Even if this product is focused more on looks and personalization, it is useful to know where the product stands in terms of sound quality.
3. **Keep it simple.** It is recommended to start small and focus on just one product first, which is usually what can be managed. Also test how the product gets accepted first, before investing and producing too much.
4. **Stay motivated and inspired.** Interviews and online sources have shown that as an entrepreneur it is considered a necessity to truly get satisfaction out of the startup and work being done, in order to succeed. Refer to the following source for more stories: [Entrepreneur.com](http://Entrepreneur.com).

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## Appendix 1

### Interview

#### **Study on online branding strategies used by starting entrepreneurs with limited financial resources.**

Interview nr:

Interviewees name:

Company:

Date:

You have been carefully chosen to participate in this interview in order to conduct a study on the current *online* branding strategies that are being used by entrepreneurs like you, and to examine to which extend they have been effective. Please answer the questions bellow as fully as possible, with sentences and stories rather than just single words.

Thank you!

1. Tell me about you and your background.
  - a. Study/career.
  - b. Motivation for your business.
  - c. Motivation to become an entrepreneur.
  - d. How did you start and how long ago.
  - e. How is it going at the moment?

*Question 1 will serve to get some background information about the participants. To understand better who they are, and why they made certain choices in their career path.*

2. Do you consider yourself to be (or were at some point) a starting entrepreneur with limited financial resources? Please elaborate.

*The intension of question 2 is to re-examine whether the respondent is the right candidate for this study.*

3. If you had/have limited financial resources, what were/are your strategies to manage



the resources properly?

*Question 3 serves as a probe for question 2, in order to get insights about any relevant strategies to manage financial resources.*

4. Have you used any type of digital manufacturing processes to manufacture your product or part of it? If yes, which process(s) and why these?

*Question 4 is to examine to which degree the participants are aware of digital manufacturing, and to which degree these processes are being used.*

5. What are the branding strategies\* used for your product/business?
6. What are the online/digital branding strategies used for your product/business?
7. Specify why you are using the above-mentioned branding strategies.
8. Do you consider them to be effective? Please specify and explain why.
9. Do you have any preference between 'general' or digital branding strategies? Please specify and explain why.

*Question 5 to 9 are all meant to study the branding strategies used by these entrepreneurs, and to which extend they are effective.*

10. What were the challenges that you faced at the beginning of your business/entrepreneurship?
11. Are there any recommendations you would like to give to rising start-ups?

*Question 10 and 11 are intended as a closing for the interview, to gather any final comments or recommendations that may have been missed in the previous questions.*

\*Branding Strategies: Long-term marketing support for a brand, based on the definition of the characteristics of the target consumers. It includes understanding of their preferences, and expectations from the brand.

Read more: <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/brand-strategy.html#ixzz3DVRRGS1S>

## Appendix 2

### Strategies to find relevant interviewees and case studies

#### Search strategy 1

1. Go to a concept store, where handcrafted and unique design products are made.
2. Found a wide range of contacts. Around 30.
3. Judged them based on their products, and decided that the following were relevant:
  - Beleef Je Verbeelding (handmade leather bags)
  - Hebbering
  - Woodstylz
  - HannaMaakt
  - MarianDessing
  - LoveLifeBag
  - Studio BIG
  - Belle ReDesign
  - Tante Taat
  - Bijzondere Tassen by Marike Monique
4. Contacted them through phone, only the following were willing to give an interview:
  - Beleef Je Verbeelding (handmade leather bags)  
[www.beleefjeverbeelding.com](http://www.beleefjeverbeelding.com)
  - Hebbering <http://www.hebbering.nl/>

#### Search strategy 2

1. Peer consultation from fellow students or designers.
2. Got the following recommendations.
  - NORMAL earphones <http://nrml.com/>
  - ORK Organic Knives <http://www.organicknives.com/>
  - John Neeman Tools <http://www.neemantools.com/>
  - The Rogue and the Wolf <http://therogueandthewolf.com/>
  - UCreate3D <http://www.ucreate3d.com/>

- Starting Product Designer –Juan David
- 3. Contacted them by skype, email, and phone. Only the following replied back/agreed on an interview.
  - ORK Organic Knives
  - Starting Product Designer –Juan David

#### Search strategy 3

1. Google search: Handcrafted headphones
2. Findings: Websites of handcrafted stands, amplifiers, and:
  - LSTN Headphones <http://www.lstnheadphones.com/>
  - Grado Labs Headphones <http://www.gradolabs.com/>
  - Meze Headphones <http://www.mezeheadphones.com/>
  - Ultrasone Signature PRO handcrafted headphones  
<http://www.ubergizmo.com/2012/01/ultrasone-signature-pro-handcrafted-headphones-will-cost-you-1299/> (targeted to the “discerning music lover” and “professional user”)
  - Hifi MANUFAKTUR headphones  
<http://north-america.beyerdynamic.com/shop/mf/manufaktur/hifi-manufaktur.html>

#### Search strategy 4

1. Google search: 3D printed headphones
2. Findings:
  - NORMAL earphones <http://nrml.com/>
  - OwnPhones – Kickstarter project  
<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/ownphones/ownphones-the-worlds-first-custom-fit-3d-printed-e>

## Appendix 3

Interview nr: 1

Interviewees name: Lonneke

Company: Hebbering

Date: 16-09-2014

1. "I studied sports with a psychology background. I am currently a sports teacher at TBS where I give classes to physically disabled people and behaviorism issues. Hebbering is a side business I have had for about two years now. It started as a hobby after I tried doing some art (something that I never thought I could do). I then started going to markets to get familiar with the scene; I kept on seeing things that were nice, but could be done better. And that's how I decided to try doing it myself. I made some for family members, and then friends started asking for them too. And that is how Hebbering was born.  
It is going good right now! My products are being sold in five cities in The Netherlands, in shops such as clothing stores, spring stores, concept stores."
2. "Yes, I don't have any extra investments made in Hebbering. I started with nothing, without a budget. And by selling some and adding some of my own money for the basic things, I built what I have now. All resources come from my own income that I get from my fulltime job. So I have to puzzle financially to make it happen."
3. "My main strategy to deal with limited financial resources is to make priorities with the "little" money I have to invest in it. One day I might choose to pay stand at the market, another to invest in new material."
4. "No, everything is made by hand. I buy some pre-made elements, and I fold the rings "wires" and assemble them myself."
5. "I haven't really thought about it. I just started doing something and it worked. Now, I know a little better what type of people buy my products, but I am not really sure. In the markets it is more visible for me, but in the stores I don't know. But I think that they are all people who like handmade products, and that are not too expensive."
6. "Only website and Facebook."

7. "My name was born after all my friends were saying "hebbe hebbe hebbe!" which means "I want I want I want!"> Hebbe+ring.  
I try to keep my selling price low, but it is hard because you have to buy the material, pay taxes, take the store commission in account, and get some profit. The way I do this is by not counting my hours in the price, otherwise they would become unaffordable and it wouldn't work.  
My website and Facebook are supporting tools. People can see that you're a real business, and they stay up-to-date with the new products I make, and see in which markets I will be next."
8. ...
9. "I prefer shops. I get more people that buy my products at the stores rather than online. People want to smell, touch and feel the product. You need to go offline. Online is just a support.  
There are so many people selling online that it is hard to find you."
10. Challenges:
  - Puzzle financially
  - Calculating the selling price in a way to get profits but that it is still not expensive.
  - Long term planning (I don't know where I'll be a year from now)
  - Delivery time of premade elements (count on 1 month)
11. Recommendations: Enjoy the journey and surprises, love what you do and get satisfaction out of it.

### **Summary/Relevant information Interview 1**

- Supports the problem statement: she did not think about her branding strategy at all. Only after some experience she started analyzing her target audience a bit.
- The way to deal with limited financial resources is to make priorities, depending on what it is needed at the moment in the business.
- She prefers to sell her products in offline stores, and considers website and Facebook as supporting tools. She thinks people often want to see, feel and smell the product. For this reason, digital branding (or branding in general) does not play a big role.
- Challenges:
  - Puzzle financially

- Calculating the selling price in a way to get profits but that it is still not expensive.
- Long term planning (doesn't know where it'll be a year from now)
- Delivery time of premade elements (count on 1 month)
- Recommendations: Enjoy the journey and surprises, love what you do and get satisfaction out of it.

## Appendix 4

Interview nr: 2

Interviewees name: Daniel

Company: ORK Organic Knives

Date: 21-09-2014

1. "Graduated in product Design in 2010 Minas Gerais, Brazil. Then I worked in a couple of design studios, then I got experience and learned how to make my own brand. They thought me all the techniques, and their projects always had to do with environmental and sustainable issues. And I realized that there are some tools that can last forever or for a long time, such as knives. It was very important to me. While I was working at the design studio, I started not liking it so much so I thought that this was the time to make my own thing. I started making some knives just for fun, for me. Then I showed some friends and everyone immediately liked them a lot. So I spontaneously started getting orders from my friends. They became more and more, and that's when I thought that I could do this full-time. I really like working with it. So when I started I thought that I really need an identity, a branding theme. And I prepared all that with the help of a friend, and it all started there. I started about 2 years ago, and it's going very good. I now have a waiting list of about 2 months; each knife takes a lot of time. I realized that there are very few people doing that and there's a lot of ask for the product. I now receive orders from all over the world, I have shipped to 8 different countries. Although most of them are from Brazil."
2. "Yes."
3. "I had help from my dad because he already had a lot of these machines available, that he used for his hobby just for fun. But I needed to add and buy some more complex and heavy tools. The most interesting thing when it comes to limited financial resources was the help of friends. They would help me with the business by for example developing a visual identity, and I would pay them with a knife. Exchanges like that helped me to not spend a lot of money. The material is not too expensive, watch costs the most is the time that I spend making it."

4. "No, it's all handmade. Of course I do use some electrical tools. I do use some software like Solid Works to make the shapes. But for production I don't use anything digital."
5. ...
6. "I have a website, I use social media and pay attention to the packaging. I think that the packaging is very important to communicate the value of the product. The entire identity needs to be strong and the same everywhere. I don't know if the following is a branding strategy, but I think that the high quality and the handmade factor add a lot to it. So I always make sure that people know that my products are completely handmade. These factors really trigger the emotional senses of the target audience"  
 "It's only digital, and people contact me by email. It's very simple. It was very good to make a simple business model because the company is just me, so I concluded that it's best to be minimalistic to manage better"  
 "The best way to promote my products was word of mouth. And this with social media was enough for my branding. Now I am just focusing on the production."  
 "I also use partnership with chefs as a branding strategy. These chefs cook for a lot of people and use my knives, and have my logo on their clothes. They came to me naturally, and I did notice people buying my product because of them"
7. "There are for free, and I realized that social media makes a lot of impact. The first time that I put just one picture of a knife, a lot of people reacted, shared, liked and ended up placing orders. But then when I made the website, it was like an illusion, then things really started happening. And also, when a friend shares your product on Facebook; his friends will immediately trust the source, since it comes from their friend and not the brand itself."
8. ...
9. "I prefer online. I am not thinking of a shop right now because it has a high cost. Also through the Internet I can reach much more people. If I ever open a shop it would be just my workshop, with a glass in front so that they can see the knives being produced and see some ready. It is an experience for them, but maybe for the future."
10. "The biggest challenge was to find good suppliers, because in Brazil it's harder to find good materials. But it did work out. Also some machines broke down and I had to replace them, with the limited financial resources I had."



11. “Start simple, minimalist; especially if the company is just you. I’ve seen that some companies want to start so big, with so many products, and they invest so much but they still can’t make it happen. It’s important to focus on your product, and not expand too much. Understand your target, be specific; it will grow little by little. Start small, and see what works and what doesn’t and watch out for opportunities. And like/be passionate in what you’re doing to the point that your forget it’s work.”

### **Summary/Relevant information Interview 2**

- Sustainability and durability of product is important.
- Also promoting and delivering high quality and a handcrafted product as a main part of his branding.
- Considers packaging also as an important tool to communicate his branding strategy.
- Thinks that visual identity needs to be strong, constant and the same everywhere.
- Partnered with cooking chefs that get his products in exchange of promotion.
- Uses networking and exchanges his products for a service to help his business, such as trading a visual identity development in exchange for a few knives.
- Thinks an online business is more than enough for now, because he can reach a broader audience than offline. Already shipped to eight different countries, and has a waiting list of 2 months.
- Social media and word-of-mouth are his biggest and most effective promotion tools. They are also free.
- Main challenges were: finding good local suppliers. And managing the money.
- Recommendation: Keep things simple, and start small. See what works first before investing a lot in it, and only do what you can manage.

## Appendix 5

Interview nr: 3

Interviewees name: Evelyne

Company: Beleef Je Verbeelding

Date: 19-09-2014

1. "I did fashion academy and finished my final collection on a theater theme. So I'm actually a theater costumes designer. I always had a fascination about turning flat things into 3dimensional things. So I liked that about making bags. So I started working for myself, and was a freelancer doing theater costumes and bags. The I got my hands on the leather machine, which I bought second hand from an old man that use to work at a big shoe making factory.

Back then it was hard to be a designer, it was something unusual. It was all about being a big company and going to other countries and producing at low costs, but not locally. So it became hard to go on, and I quit for about 5 years.

After someone asked me to make something for here and I realized again how much I loved it. So I restarted, with a clearer idea of what I want, and didn't just go along like before.

Now it's different, and now we value local products. Now it is about the smaller companies, it's more personal. So times are with me now."

2. "Yes, at some point I just dropped my full-time job and went for it."
3. "I got very lucky to get a great machine for such low price. The man who sold it to me also gave me lots of material with it, that I still have around. The machine is from the 30s, but it's of great quality.

The second time that I started I was more driven, this also had to do with the fact that I had kids to take care of and bills to pay. Also, in order to change something you really need to want it, and you'll make it happen. I think the life you're living should fit the budget you have, so making choices is very important part of surviving financially in your own business. I also used my "back up" money that I had saved, to start the business again. And A lot of what I ear with the business I re-invest it on it."

4. "No. But if a 3D printer would spit out letter I would definitely consider it! But what I do use sometimes is laser printing to print my logo on bags."

5. I don't use them consciously. I just them a bit I think, I think a lot of small businesses are like that. My goal is to produce here in the Netherlands, and I think that when you buy a leather bag, the leather is what makes the bag so there needs to be a lot of room and attention for the leather, so that's how design the bags. By for example taking care that the leather is really visible and not putting pockets on the outsides or anything. I want to see as much leather as possible. I also focus on the way people carry their bags and incorporate that in my design to bring them comfort. I have models for every type of people; the bag should suit the one that is carrying it. There are different kind of carriers. Also every piece of leather has a story, all the scars made on it during time are supposed to be there. So I make my choices on those three points. On the long run I want to keep: -the nice scared leather. -The different ways of carrying. -And I want to keep producing here in the Netherlands. The functions of the bags are different, but they all have the same style. About the name: I had it for my costume business, and it fitting really well. People got to know me by that name so I just kept it for this too. It was more of an accident. It was mostly for the recognition. But there's also haters... some people just don't like it. And some say that it is not really a good name for a bag brand, which is true. But it's ok like this for me. I don't really have a logo. I just put the name as a burn mark on all products. I also like to keep my pictures with a certain style. Some organizations would ask me to make pictures of my product on a white background. But I don't think that defines my brand. I like to have rough materials as background. Even though it is known that products on white background sells more." "I have my atelier to work, and keep it open in case people want to pass by and see. But I am not bound to working hours. I also sell in ... different stores around the country. I also sell on the internet, and on lifestyle markets."
6. "I have a website, and Etsy account. If you want to go into the market of handmade you're competing with a giant like Etsy, so it's best to join it than fight it. It also has a social part that makes you seen and noticed. Also there are others now who instead of making the brand a star, they focus on the maker like Markita.nl or Dawanda.com.

There are also concept stores and pop-up stores. So many more ways to sell for this type of market, and I'm joining all of them.

If someone comes along with an idea that doesn't fit the bigger picture, I won't do it anymore.

Since the crisis started I think that there was a shift. People don't want to buy 5 cheap bags, but rather invest in one that's very good and that will last forever.

Hearing the story behind the product matters, and the fact that it's handmade with love and not just in a big factory.

7. Also when you start a business there are always people telling you what to do. But it's usually based on no experience, or on mainstream examples, or the people that never do it themselves. SO I just started ignoring them, because it's my business and it should suit my personality so I can go on with it. I think the main thing about a small business is that it should come from your heart, because it is just you. Otherwise there would be no difference between this and something that comes from a factory.
8. Yes, it works. Feeling what you're doing is the most important thing.  
Also, when you're on lifestyle markets the communication line with the public is short, and you get all sorts of feedback from them. It's a good way to find your public, and to see what works and what doesn't and to analyze the target audience when you see them walk by and how they behave.
9. If I have to choose I would only sell in shops, because it's the leather, you need to feel it see it smell it. On the other side online everything spreads so fast and far, people from all over the world can see it, and their friends as well. While in the stores is only the people from around it will see it, and I would have to have a lot of stores if I want to reach more. So I rather not choose. Usually I use stores as a hook; I put just some samples for them to see the product in real life, and then hope that it will be enough for the audience to check my website for more variety.
10. -Biggest challenge is to stay true to yourself, and keep the focus.  
-Do not get demotivated when the business is slowing down, because it is usually a period depending on external factors such as seasons, and it will eventually peak again.  
-Try and trust
11. -Work hard, and stay true to yourself.

-Do not get distracted by great opportunities that do not fit your brand.

### **Summary/Relevant information Interview 3**

- Unconscious branding: Design for leather lovers, showing and valuing the leather. Providing what the audience wants, a specific bag for everyone that provides them comfort in the specific way they carry it.
- Uses her company name due to recognition and not because it matches the product.
- Claims that staying true to yourself is the most important thing for small-scale business.
- Does not get distracted by opportunities if it does not fit the branding picture.
- Has a website and accounts on websites such as Etsy.com, Markita.nl or Dawanda.com. Says that these websites instead of making the brand a star, they focus on the maker.

## Appendix 6

Interview nr: 4

Interviewees name: Juan David

Company: In the developing process.

Date: 19-09-14

1. "I studied industrial product design. What motivates me is just a feeling, the drive that I need to start my own business. Maybe because I'm stubborn, and I always want things my way and always think I can do it better. I think it's cool to be an entrepreneur, to make your own stuff and bring your own ideas to the market and share them with people. It carries a status with it, people get impressed every time someone tells them the things they've achieved by themselves as an entrepreneurs, and I like that. I started in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of my design study; I did 'entrepreneurship' as a minor. During that time together with a fellow student we developed an idea to help elderly people, by making a shop with products especially for them. I learned that it's important that the team members match, and you'll always need people around with other skills too. At the moment I have lots of highs and lows, and I'm learning a lot everyday. And considering that I like I like certainty, starting my own business can be difficult at times. For my business I'm constantly looking for making someone's life better, in the sense of making their value of life better. But at the same time by helping myself too. I like that adrenaline rush that I get when something goes good, but I like to see that in my clients as well. That's why I like designing things for people with disabilities, because I get a satisfaction out of helping them. And that's why I decided to do design as well. I don't have one specific product, I'm always in the look for market opportunities and try to combine them, and with 3D printing I can make that happen. So what I have right now is a couple of ideas that I want to put together to help people."
2. Yes. Right now.
3. I believe that in life you need to have more than one source of income, to always have a back up in case something goes wrong.

At the moment I always make priorities, and parties are never there. I have a chart where I put all my goals, and follow that.

I try to take some money, put it aside and see what I need it for, for in the business, like to buy filaments for example.

Instead of going to the barbershop for example, I cut my own hair and use that money to buy work material. But, with the certainty that I'll get it back soon, and at least duplicated. So you can say that I'm doing short-term investments.

I put all costs in an excel sheet to predict what I will earn with my projects.

I create stepping-stones with every project. My current project (A meditation pyramid) is a very low budget project, and if it goes well I'll be able to use that money for the next project. So it's like a growing cash cow.

4. Yes. 3D printing is great, because it give everyone the opportunity for everyone to develop their own things, if you have the technical background to understand how it works.
5. It's very hard, I just started. But I know a few things that I learned at an extra course I followed called "brand design". What I learned there is that it all starts with your logo, since it is like your face. So I invested a lot of time on the logo for the current product. There are many hidden messages in my logo. I try to make the costumer understand right away what it is about, but I try to read his unconscious as well by playing with colors and formats. And it has to be a logo that is right for everyone in your target audience, despite of their differences.

I also have flyers, that I design myself.

I will also participate in a fair.

The best is to use mouth-to-mouth communication. I currently call people and tell them about my product and tell them that I believe we can work together. If they give me one of their flyers for me to put in my product's package so it reaches the target audience they want too. And that way I try to reach a bigger market, and build relationships with relevant stakeholders.

6. I want to invest in a website, but after I know how people react to my product, after the fair. Before I spend a lot of money on it. Also of course I plan on having a Facebook page, it's one of the best tools. And a linked in page.
7. It's cheaper for now. Also to get people to know me.
8. Yes, they are effective. But you need to know when to talk and the right people to talk with. Be careful to share ideas, but take that step and talk to people.

9. I don't think people should choose, but use both. I want to go to shops and see if they are interested to showcase the product. This will give people the opportunity to feel the product, that's very important. And create the website as well.  
But if I would be forced to choose I would choose websites. Or fairs where I know my target group is coming.  
Starting with my own shop right now is not a good strategy, many shops close after six months nowadays.
10. The biggest ones are always money and time. But also, I do not have the business knowledge and experience that is required to sell the product.  
Dealing with uncertainties, it takes courage to take risks and start your own business.  
It's hard to make business without a tax-exempt number, so I need to register my company soon.
11. It will sound cheesy, but go for it! Not every project will be the same. Try to get people around you who know things, ask them for help. Networking is important.  
Don't be afraid to fail, just go for it and try.  
Also get books to enrich the knowledge that you're missing.

#### **Summary/Relevant information Interview 4**

- Is using projects as stepping-stones to build his business, also financially, and to see what works and what doesn't.
- Have business cards and flyers, and will soon participate in a fair to test his product.
- Makes calls to people that might be interested to work with him.
- Offers people to include their flyer in his product package in exchange of a better deal.
- Challenges: Lack of money, time, business knowledge and experience. It is also hard to deal with uncertainties.

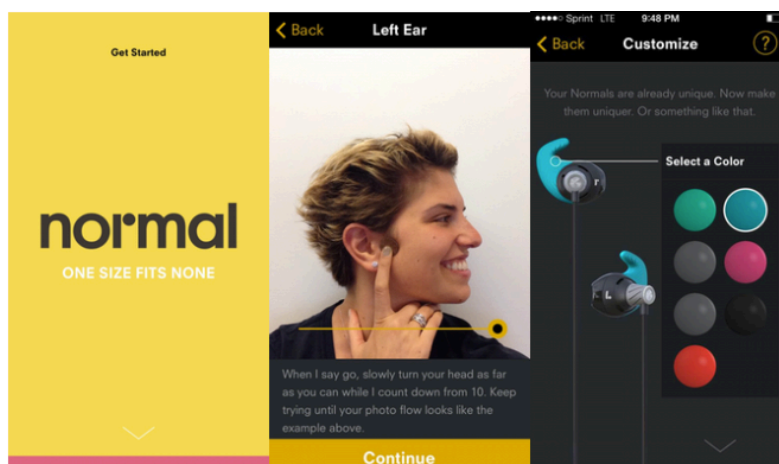


## Appendix 7

### Case studies' findings

#### NORMAL Headphones

- A mobile app makes the process of customizing earphones easy. An app that anyone with a smartphone can download for free, equipped with very simple instructions to gathered the information needed for the customization of an earphone.
- NORMAL does not mentions “ears” or “headphone/earphone” in their name or tagline, intentionally.
- NORMAL developed their company and branding strategy completely, before launching. This had a stronger impact on the audience, allowing them to fully experience the brand. (Clifford, 2014)
- Their promo video is quirky and “weird”. NORMAL makes everything “weird” seem normal. “After all everyone is different, and that is pretty normal” – This is their main identity element.
- Social media channels: LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram.
- Featured in: <http://www.shapeways.com/>, <http://thenextweb.com/>, <http://www.gizmag.com/>, <http://techcrunch.com/>, <http://venturebeat.com/>, <http://uncrate.com/>, <http://www.coolhunting.com/>, <http://www.forbes.com/>, <http://www.digitaltrends.com/>, and more.



### GRADO Labs Headphones

- Family owned.
- Does not use advertising nor celebrity endorsement, and it's just starting to get used to social media. (Johnston, 2014)
- Social media channels: YouTube, Pinterest, Twitter, Facebook, Websta Instagram. Yelp.
- Featured on blogs/articles websites: <http://arstechnica.com/>, <http://mashable.com/>, <http://gizmodo.com/>, <http://techcrunch.com/>,
- Materials are important: wood from actual whiskey barrels, and leather.
- The handmade factor is important, but the focus relies on the high quality sound.
- Offers different models of headphones.



GRADO

### LSTN Headphones

- For every pair of headphones they sell, they help restore hearing to a person in need through [Starkey Hearing Foundation](#).
- Each pair of headphone is made with sustainable wood; not one pair is the same because of the wood's print.
- Offers different models of headphones, also earphones.
- They combine music, sustainable wood (environment factor) and charity.
- Their identity turns mainly around charity and the Starkey Hearing Foundation.
- Social media channels: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram.
- Reviews in: about.com, birchbox, bltd, cosmopolitan, gizmag, gearculture, GQ, Mashable, Mtv, The Washington Post, and more. (LSTN Headphones, 2014)
- Takes part in pop-up stores.



**LSTD**  
HEADPHONES

