

The Surprising Truth About Voice & Tone



Did you ever notice that, in the world of branding, **voice and tone always seem to go together** like a couple wedded at the hip?

These two powerful tools in the branding arsenal wield a powerful influence over your customer's engagement with your company. But how they work to align with your brand is one of the most mysterious and misunderstood aspects of branding.



People often think of voice and tone as instinctive, something that naturally arises from a company's business objectives, purpose, and values.

Because they're so natural, you don't have to work so hard to get them right.

Or maybe it's a matter of vocabulary, so you go thumbing through a thesaurus for just the right word. You think you can just tweak a few phrases here and there, rewrite a paragraph, and you'll get it to sound right—right?

Or maybe your company has developed a standards manual that spells out all the design details of your brand. It's filled with graphics, logos, and colors that are approved for your company to use. **But somehow it doesn't quite nail the special, elusive ingredients of voice and tone.** It's not what makes your company and brand unique. The result: your message comes out flat and uneven.

Know thy audience, know thyself



So how do you figure out your voice and tone? Steven Covey got it right in his mega bestseller, “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.”

Habit #5:
“Seek first to understand,
then to be understood.”

Perhaps the most common mistake companies make in fine-tuning their brands is not taking the time to truly understand the people they want to reach—their customers. It’s shortsighted to think you can expect the world to understand you before you understand them. Too much depends on how the words and images are interpreted and received (or not). There’s too much room for misinterpretation.

To really understand your audience, you need to go step-by-step through the listening process, systematically and rigorously finding out everything there is to know about the people you want to reach. What are their assumptions about the world, their buying preferences, their personality traits?

And then, **turn your focus inward**. What are your company’s products, services, and values? What do you have to offer? How do you talk to your customers? What do you think about your brand? Delve into your brain and listen to your voice.

Multiple personality disorder



Do you remember the hit movie “Sybil,” about the woman with multiple personalities, each wildly different from one another in behavior, language, and emotional tenor? One minute she was a shy schoolteacher, the next a hysterical nine-year-old.

That’s how a lot of businesses come across when they express themselves across various marketing and communications channels in different voices and tonalities. A company’s website might be buttoned-up and conservative in tone, while a direct mail piece sounds playful and provocative. They’re using the same logo, color, and design elements, but the language and tone are different.

But what if all those personalities reflect your brand?

What if your company is trustworthy and playful at the same time? Functional and luxurious?

That’s perfectly understandable—most of us are a mix of qualities. But **you must pull them all together into a cohesive brand personality**, and then share that personality with the world.

Few companies allow themselves to express their real personalities to their customers. When they do, it’s through voice and tone—the words, phrases, nuances, and subtleties that make them distinct.

Nailing voice and tone



Maybe it sounds paradoxical, but voice and tone are both natural and carefully constructed aspects of your brand personality. Yes, language is part of it, as are font, logo, typeface, graphics, and all the other elements in a design manual.

But it's a lot more than that.

**Tone is the overall attitude
that you embrace and express.**

It listens to your audience and adapts to their mentality, but dares to be freely self-expressive. It's uniquely you.

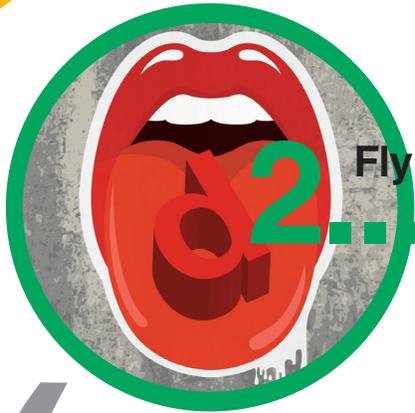
Your brand's voice and tone are your most precious assets. You can't fake them.
When you get them right, you truly own your identity.



3 Ways Voice & Tone Make a Difference



In tune with the times. Whether you're a timeless household staple or a trendsetter, your brand has to be hooked into the cultural landscape to be fresh and relevant. Voice and tone are potent tools—use them to let the world know you're up to date and down with it.



Fly your freak flag. Don't hide your company's idiosyncrasies under a carpet of corporate blandness.

**Be yourself. Be different.
Be nuanced.**

That's the way to claim a unique place in the market.
Jimi Hendrix got it. Shrek got it. So can you.



Chatter matters. Blogs, discussion boards, tweets, print, digital, broadcast—the number of places where your brand could be mentioned is astronomical. It's a gold mine of information on what's working and what's not, down to the nth degree. Pay attention and you'll know when you need to tweak.

About D Custom

D Custom is an integrated content marketing agency located in Dallas, Texas. We work with B2B and B2C clients around the globe to help them drive sales through content. Brand journalists at heart, we develop your message and deploy it across channels to connect you to your audience online, in print, and beyond.

We don't want to replace your marketing team—we want to refresh, illuminate, enhance, and amplify what they're doing by filling the gaps and adding depth and dimension to your marketing plan. D Custom has a history of success working side by side with brand marketers to translate their messages into compelling, engaging content using a variety of media.

Our story is our clients' story. Let us help you tell yours.

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