STRETCHLEARN · WORKBOOK

Branding for Startups — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into a minimum viable brand for one real startup. You will write a one-page brand brief, audit competitors and claim an open visual territory, generate and stress-test a name through a real availability gauntlet, set a type and colour direction, design a logo and its lockups, assemble an MVP brand kit, and price and present the work to founders. Work through one section per module and finish with a brand you could actually launch on, plus a founder-ready strategy deck and a clean handover.

Strategy Before Visuals

Capture the positioning, audience and personality in a one-page brief, and map competitors to find open visual territory.

Worksheet: One-Page Brand Brief

Fill this for the one startup you will brand in this workbook. Keep every field tight enough to fit on a single page, and base the personality adjectives on words a rival would not also claim.

Company / working name

Positioning statement (we are the [category] for [audience] who [need], unlike [alternative], because [reason])

Primary audience (role, context, before-state, after-state)

Personality (3 to 5 we are / we are not pairs)

Competitive frame (3 to 5 rivals and how we differ)

Brand promise and proof (the one guarantee and the evidence)

Constraints (budget, deadline, must-keep assets, first surface)

Exercise: Positioning Sentence Drill

Force clarity before any visuals by writing the positioning in a strict template and pressure-testing it against the so-what test.

• Complete Geoffrey Moore's template: For [target] who [need], our [product] is a [category] that [benefit], unlike [competitor].

• Now write the same idea as Marty Neumeier's one-liner: we are the only [category] that [unique benefit].

• Run the so-what test: does a stranger understand what you do and who it is for in one read? Cut any word that fails.

• Check the personality adjectives: cross out any (friendly, innovative, trustworthy) that three competitors could also claim, and replace them.

Worksheet: Competitive Audit and Perceptual Map

Capture how rivals look and sound, then plot them to find the empty quadrant your brand can own. Record one row per competitor and name your two map axes.

Competitor name

Logo type (wordmark / lettermark / symbol / combination)

Primary colour (and is there a category default?)

Typeface feel (geometric / humanist / serif; modern or classic)

Imagery style (photo / illustration / 3D / abstract)

Voice (one-line read: corporate / witty / plain / technical)

Map axis 1 (e.g. playful — serious)

Map axis 2 (e.g. budget — premium)

Empty quadrant / territory we will own

Checklist: Strategy Readiness

[ ] I have a one-page brief signed off by all founders before any design
[ ] The positioning passes the so-what test in a single read
[ ] Personality is captured as we are / we are not pairs a rival would not claim
[ ] I have audited five to ten competitors for logo, colour, type, imagery and voice
[ ] I have plotted competitors on a two-axis map and identified the empty quadrant
[ ] The territory the brand will own is written into the competitive-frame line of the brief

Naming and the Verbal Brand

Generate a name, run it through a real trademark, domain and handle gauntlet, and build a one-page verbal kit.

Exercise: Name Generation Sprint

Generate a long list across name types before judging anything, using roots pulled straight from the brand brief. Resist editing while you generate.

• Set a timer and produce 50 to 100 candidates across the types: descriptive, suggestive, invented, real-word-out-of-context, compound, and founder or place.

• Pull roots from the brief: the core benefit, the audience, the feeling, relevant metaphors, and word fragments.

• Use a thesaurus, Latin or Greek roots, and an AI tool (Namelix or Squadhelp) to push past your first ten

ideas.

• Only after the list is long, shortlist the names that feel sayable, spellable, short and distinct, and carry them forward.

Worksheet: Availability Gauntlet Tracker

Run your top five to eight names through the checks before you let any founder fall in love with one. Record one row per candidate; leave the verdict blank until you have done every check.

Candidate name

Trademark conflict in our class? (USPTO TESS / EUIPO / web search) — notes

.com available? (registrar) and viable alternative (brand-plus-word .com, .io, .ai, .co)

Social handles available? (Namechk / Namecheckr) — which platforms

App Store / Google Play clear? (if an app is planned)

Slang / language check clear in target markets?

Overall verdict (keep / drop) — leave blank until all checks done

Worksheet: One-Page Verbal Kit

Document how the brand sounds so the founder can write a consistent homepage and email. Keep it to one page and make voice concrete with rewrites.

One-line value proposition (homepage hero, plain words)

Tagline (optional: benefit or attitude)

Voice trait 1 (we are / we are not)

Voice trait 2 (we are / we are not)

Voice trait 3 (we are / we are not)

Before / after rewrite 1 (jargon sentence then on-brand sentence)

Before / after rewrite 2

Preferred terms, words to avoid, and house style (case, Oxford comma, numerals)

Checklist: Naming and Verbal Readiness

[ ] I generated a long list across name types before judging any of them
[ ] My shortlist names are sayable, spellable, short and distinct from competitors
[ ] I checked the top names against USPTO TESS (or my region) and the open web for conflicts in my class
[ ] I checked .com and viable alternatives, social handles, and app stores where relevant
[ ] I ran a slang and language check for embarrassing meanings in target markets
[ ] I have a one-line value proposition and a one-page voice kit with before-and-after rewrites
[ ] I will recommend a trademark attorney confirm the final pick before filing or launch

The Minimum Viable Visual Identity

Set a type and colour direction, design a scalable logo and its lockups, and assemble an MVP brand kit a founder can run with.

Worksheet: Type and Colour Direction Sheet

Lock the two decisions that do the daily work before you draw the logo. Specify colours in HEX and RGB at minimum, and test every text pairing for WCAG AA contrast.

Primary typeface and source (favour free Google Fonts for an MVP)

Secondary / body typeface (if any)

Why this type fits the brief's personality and the open quadrant

Primary brand colour — name, HEX, RGB

Accent colour(s) — name, HEX, RGB

Neutral range (greys, black, white) — HEX values

60-30-10 split (which colour is dominant / secondary / accent)

Contrast check result (body text and large text pass AA? tool used)

Exercise: Logo and Lockup Build

Design a simple, scalable logo from the chosen direction and produce the lockup set a startup actually needs to launch. Build it in editable vectors (Figma is fine).

• Set the company name in the chosen typeface and refine spacing, weight, and any custom letterforms.

• Decide whether a simple, reducible symbol earns its place beside the wordmark, and test it at 16px favicon size.

• Check the mark on a dark background and as an app icon before committing to it.

• Produce the core lockups (primary, horizontal, stacked, mono black, mono white, reversed, symbol) and export each as SVG and PNG.

Worksheet: MVP Brand Kit Inventory

Assemble the small set of reusable elements that turn a logo into a system a non-designer can use. Tick or fill each item and note where it lives (Figma file, Canva Brand Kit).

Logo files collected (all lockups SVG + PNG, favicon, app icon)

Colour tokens written as named, copyable HEX values

Type scale recorded (level, size, weight, line height)

Core components built (primary + secondary button, card, form fields with states)

Spacing scale and grid set (e.g. 4 or 8px grid)

Social templates + one slide master created

Icon library chosen and named (Phosphor / Feather / Lucide)

Home of the kit (Figma file link; Canva Brand Kit if used)

Checklist: Visual Identity Readiness

[ ] Type and colour direction are locked before the logo, and match the brief and the open quadrant
[ ] Every text-on-colour pairing passes WCAG AA (4.5 to 1 body, 3 to 1 large) or is restricted
[ ] The logo is simple and tested at favicon size, app-icon size, and on a dark background
[ ] The core lockups exist and are exported as SVG and PNG, not screenshots
[ ] A clear-space rule and a minimum size are defined for the logo
[ ] The MVP kit has buttons, a card, form fields, a spacing scale, templates and a named icon set
[ ] A non-designer could make a correct slide and social post from the kit without asking me

Pricing, Presenting and Handover

Price the work in honest tiers, present the strategy so it earns a yes, and hand over a system the startup can run and grow.

Worksheet: Scope and Pricing Sheet

Turn the work into a defined, priced scope so the founder's yes commits to something specific. Choose a tier and fix the revision limits in writing.

Founder budget and deadline

Tier chosen (Starter / Standard / Growth) and why

Deliverables included (list every item and file format)

Where the budget is concentrated (strategy / name / type and colour)

Where you economise (early applications and polish)

Concept directions offered (e.g. 2 to 3) and revision rounds (e.g. 2)

Out of scope (named explicitly)

Milestones and payment schedule (deposit / midpoint / final)

Exercise: Founder Presentation Rehearsal

Build and rehearse the short deck so the logo arrives as the answer to an agreed problem, not a taste test. Strategy first, decision last.

• Draft slides in order: brief recap, competitive map, type and colour direction, logo in context, system applications, recommendation.

• Mock the logo into real contexts at real sizes (phone, sign, card, dark background, favicon) rather than a bare mark on white.

• Write the one-line justification from the brief for each major choice (because the brief said X).

• Decide the single decision you will ask for at the end, and frame the feedback question as does this fit who we agreed we are, not do you like it.

Worksheet: Handover and Growth Plan

Capture what you will hand over and how the brand grows, so the startup can run it without you and knows when to invest more.

Asset folder structure and file formats (logos, favicon, fonts/licences, swatches)

Living guide platform (Figma / Notion) and what it covers

One-page brand-at-a-glance produced? (Y/N)

Editable source files handed over? (Figma kit, templates)

Walkthrough done? (call or recorded Loom)

Triggers for investing more (a round, a pivot, a marketing hire, a new market)

Contact and recommended cheap next steps

Checklist: Delivery Readiness

[ ] The scope fixes the deliverables, concept directions and revision rounds in writing
[ ] The budget is concentrated on strategy, name, and type and colour, not early polish
[ ] The presentation opens with strategy so the logo arrives as an answer, not a surprise
[ ] The logo is shown in real contexts at real sizes, and each choice is justified from the brief
[ ] I bring one recommended direction and at most one alternative, and ask for a clear decision

[ ] Handover includes organised assets, a light living guide, a one-page summary and source files
[ ] I have explained the brand will grow, named the triggers to invest, and stressed consistency over tweaking

Your Action Plan

1. Run a founder kickoff and write a one-page brand brief, then get explicit sign-off before designing
2. Audit five to ten competitors, plot them on a two-axis map, and claim the empty visual territory
3. Generate 50 to 100 name candidates across types, then shortlist the sayable, spellable, distinct ones
4. Run the shortlist through the trademark, domain, handle and language gauntlet and rank the survivors
5. Write a one-line value proposition and a one-page voice kit with before-and-after rewrites
6. Set a type and colour direction from the brief and test every text pairing for WCAG AA contrast
7. Design a simple, scalable logo and export the core lockups as SVG and PNG with clear-space rules
8. Assemble an MVP brand kit (tokens, buttons, card, templates, icon set) in Figma plus a one-page summary
9. Scope and price the work in honest tiers with fixed concept directions and revision rounds
10. Present strategy-first to founders for a decision, then hand over an organised, runnable system and a growth plan