

What flavour is your authentic brand?

Hi, Tim Gray here. This is a quick exercise to help you home in on the impressions of the real you to use as the basis for how you show up through communication channels like your website and documents.



Authentic messages for meaningful work

I'm assuming that you're on your own or in a small group, doing work that matters to you and that does some good – maybe personal development, or spreading ideas, or ethical products or services... You have some sort of big **message** there, and getting that across depends on making a connection with an audience.

It has to be authentic, not fake, so that you can live happily in it and the relationships you build are durable. And it has to be effective too. As communication, it's all about what goes on in people's heads (and hearts). You make that connection through smaller messages and giving out the right signals.

I make a distinction between foreground and background messages. **Foreground messages** are what you think you're telling people about yourself in your text, like: 'I help stressed career women lose weight through yoga pottery classes.'

Background messages are what people pick up on their own – from the way you write and the visuals you use to present it, like your colour scheme and layout. These impressions are often processed subconsciously, quickly and powerfully, to give a sense of you that can make your audience want more – or drive them away so they never see what you wanted to say. It's important to give attention to these. You can easily be giving out wrong or contradictory impressions without realising it.

The starting point is to spend a little time thinking about what's distinctive about who you are and your approach to the work you do. If people engage with you, what will they get? Once you have that, you can set up your website, downloads, business card, etc to really represent you and act as a welcome mat.

Instructions

This is a really simple exercise, but it's useful to have the framework to guide you in thinking this through. You can either print the following two pages and scribble on them, or work on screen and make notes.

1. Go through the list of words and terms on the next pages, and mark or note any that apply to you. Do it quickly and don't think about it too hard. Look for the ones that 'click' rather than getting hung up on a 'maybe' or 'ought to'. However, don't sell yourself short. There may be qualities that others see in you but you tend to overlook: if you've had that sort of feedback, take it into account. If you get to the end of the list and feel there are important terms not included, you can add them.
2. From the terms you chose, shortlist five that are most important and get to the core of who you are. (You might have to go through a bit of a process to whittle down that far. Do whatever scribbling and pondering makes this work for you!)
3. As an optional extra step, from your shortlist, can you construct a sentence talking about yourself that covers the impressions in a way that hangs together? You might want to just include the three most important, and/or extend it to two sentences (but it must be concise!). How would you feel about saying this to people or writing it on your website?

Notes. When you have the shortlist, you may find that there are strands in it, where some of the items go together naturally as related aspects, while others are distinct aspects. (Don't use precious shortlist picks to say the same thing repeatedly; but do use them if it's important to round something out.) And you're not trying capture everything about yourself in one shortlist! Just to home in on what's important for people to see in this context.

If you'd like help with the process, or to explore further, or to look at the practical side of tuning words and design to fit your small and big messages, do get in touch through the website at timgray.online.

Impressions list

Values	Self-reliance	Problem-solving
Family	Beauty	Fun
Nature	Approach and talents	Networking
Technology		Organised
Progress	Proper	Imagination
Outdoor	Relaxed	Responsible
A cause	Safe	Calm
Fairness	Reliable	Flexible
Integrity	Partnership	Teamwork
Personal growth	Leadership	Initiative
Service	Humour	Performer
Success	Understanding	Fixer
Knowledge	Flair	Questioner
Helping people	Diplomatic	Methodical
Challenge	Outspoken	High flier
Learning	Thoughtful	Down to earth
Spirituality	Intuitive	Efficient
Social conscience	Passionate	Spiritual
Well-being	Practical	Stability
Ideas	Sensitive	Enthusiastic
Connecting people	Analytical	Logical

Optimistic	Judgement	Coordinator
Cautious	Attention to detail	Entertaining
Prestige	Big picture	Community builder
Innovative	Wholesome	System builder
Conservative	Sophisticated	Explorer
Traditional	Exclusive	Energetic
Persuasive	Affordable	Centred
Eccentric	Kind	Knowledgeable
Corporate	Neat	Wise
Academic	Stylish	Inspiring
Wizardry	Theorist	+ <i>any others to add?</i>
Caring	Active	
Clarity	Ethical	
Drive	Social	
Common sense	Empowering	
Well-informed	Influencing	