

KNOW THYSELF GROW THYSELF

How brand archotyping can change the game for
blended-in banks and credit unions.



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VAULT



BANKS AND CREDIT UNIONS HAVE AN IDENTITY CRISIS

Not from lack of spending and effort. Not from lack of goalsetting and planning. But from good old-fashioned lack of awareness about who they are at the core - and how to use that knowledge to consistently and creatively tell a story that attracts more customers and elevates market share.

Jeff Bezos said, “Your brand is what other people say about you when you’re not in the room.”

Love him or hate him – there’s no denying that Jeff Bezos is the architect of one of the most successful brands of all time. Branding is about so much more than colors and logos and font choices. It’s about how you make people feel.

That’s the key. **FEELINGS.**

Most left-brain marketers get squirmy about now. They appreciate the nice, tidy boxes of a “do this not that” brand standards guide – but the murkier waters of emotions and perceptions external to the bank or credit union can be harder to understand and quantify. Fear not! This post is here to help.

Do you want to guess about your brand ... or do you want to know?

It’s a bit of a rhetorical question because of course knowing is the key to growing – but internally, you’re facing an uphill climb. Brand archotyping is the foundation for bringing it all together.

In this article we’ll cover the 12 universal brand archetypes, a 3-step process to discovering yours, and (most importantly) how to apply what you learn to take your FI to the next level.

THE HILL YOU'RE CLIMBING (AND HOW TO CONQUER IT)

Perhaps you've asked yourself questions like these:

- Why doesn't my brand seem to fit, but others do?
- How can I get stakeholders to see we need more personality in our marketing?

You're not alone.

According to Statista June 2022 reports, there are [5,298](#) credit unions and [4,377](#) commercial banks in the US. Not to mention 8,775 fintech startups – and since the COVID-19 pandemic, 73% of Americans view fintech as “the new normal” ([Plaid 2020](#)).

Now take a moment to consider the competition in your region. Are they standing out? Do they look like you and everyone else in the space? Odds are, you're all blending in – and that's because standout FI marketing is hard. It's always been tough to muscle the budgets and the time to do great marketing, but it's even tougher to break through in the historically conservative world of banks and credit unions. (Billboards with smiling banker heads, anyone?)





Now let's talk about a few iconic brands with clear brand messaging:

Nike.

Such amazing messages for over 50 years. Did you know they started as Blue Ribbon Sports in 1961 and rebranded to the Nike swoosh in 1971? Just do it was created in 1987 – and it's still as relevant today. It's genuine and speaks to their core mission.

Harley Davidson.

So iconic. They were facing bankruptcy back in the 80s – their products were linked to visions of crime and violence – their quality was in the tank – and their brand seemingly damaged beyond repair. But today? They're a high-end luxury brand with billions in revenue and premium pricing – and a seemingly untouchable brand ethos. How did they do it? They took ownership of their image – rebellion, style and the road to freedom. They took off the blinders and took a hard look at where they were.

Geico and Apple

Consistently on the Interbrand's list of Top Global Brands. They're beyond a tech company. They're iconic. Their products are great – but it's the underlying brand strategy that causes customers to not just like them – but LOVE them. It's about imagination, design and innovation. Who doesn't want to be part of those things? And how have they kept it going for so long – even after the great Steve Jobs passed away?

Now that we've talked about the pinnacles – let's get back down to earth. Great brands like Nike, Harley and Apple are rare because great branding is really hard. It can also be really expensive. And when you're a marketing director or VP of a bank or credit union, it can feel, well... maybe not as important as running a promotion about that low-rate loan product.

Consider the alternative. Isn't the bigger risk blending in?

Understand that banking is a commodity market. The only way to stand out is through identity and brand experience – except, yikes, EVERYONE says they have great service and people, too. Plus, you must commit to messaging your brand consistently and uniquely for YEARS.

How do some brands get it right? Why do others fall short? How can you set an informed foundation without hiring an entire brand department? While there are no easy-button answers, there is a process to get there.



THE 12 BRAND ARCHETYPES (AND HOW THEY HELP)

Carl Jung has entered the chat.

(Just kidding, he passed away in 1961.)

But this renowned Swiss psychiatrist pioneered the personality of brand management, as defined by 12 core desires that we all have – and their associated brand archetypes. Think of them as building blocks. What makes your brand your brand, subconsciously. They're the feelings you get without maybe any awareness to them at all. The trick is defining your primary archetype – and getting internal stakeholders on board - so you can start to craft a powerful brand strategy built upon consistency and truth.

This is also a good time to point out that one person's personality should NEVER become your brand. That can be an easy thing to do if you have some strong personalities who are driving a position. Think back to Steve Jobs. In that case, it worked. But after he passed away the brand has continued. They have a strong brand manager who is keeping an eye on tone and style to maintain that brand roadmap.

No pressure, right? Here's what I often tell left-brain marketers at this stage:

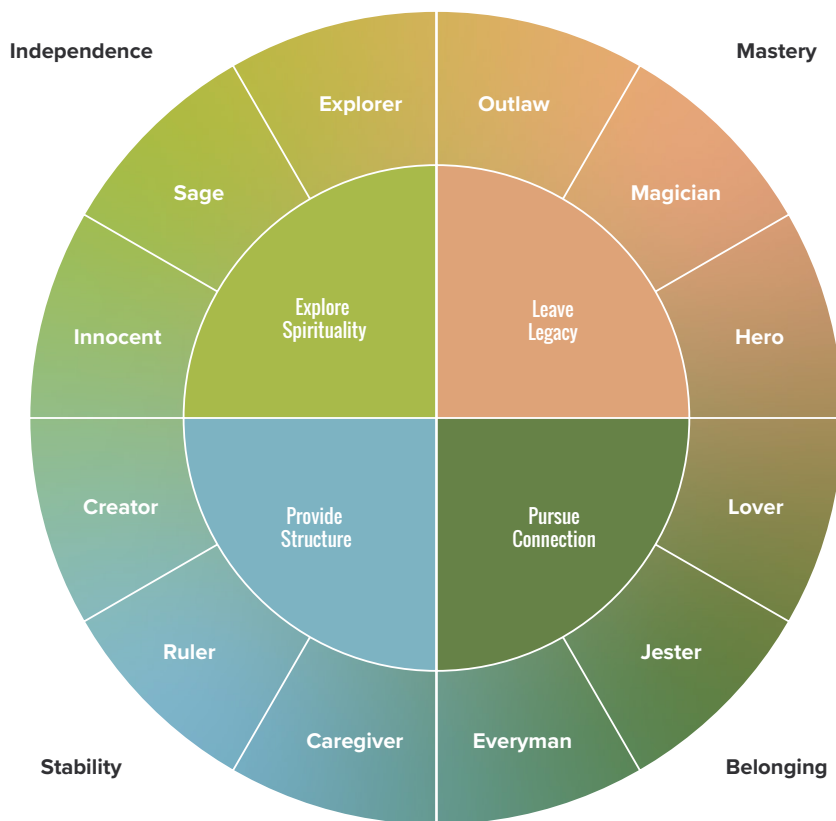
When it comes to developing a personality for your brand, you can go about it two ways.

Way #1:

Identify a handful of aspirational characteristics and shoot them in the general direction of your audience.

Way #2:

Use scientific archetype framework to identify the personality type of the audience and the most likely personality type they're attracted to.



To begin with, you'll want to ask yourself a few harder-than-they-sound questions:

- Who are we?
- What do we provide?
- And why is that important to us?

But before we get to the process and how-tos, let's get to know the 12 core desires and their associated archetype:

Liberation	The Outlaw
Power	The Magician
Mastery	The Hero
Intimacy	The Lover
Enjoyment	The Jester
Belonging	The Everyman
Service	The Caregiver
Control	The Ruler
Innovation	The Creator
Safety	The Innocent
Understanding	The Sage
Freedom	The Explorer



OUTLAW

The Outlaw brand archetype is an interesting way to kick off our FI archetype list – but make no mistake, this archetype could just be yours. These brands are unapologetically authentic. They're disruptive, thrilling and transparent. Best of all, they're action-oriented and bring fresh perspectives and new outlooks to the table.

At their best, Outlaw brands are brave, adaptable and free-spirited and they will position themselves as an alternative to the mainstream, making an effort to stand out. Successful brands in this space attract people who have lost faith in traditional choices and are attracted by the Outlaw's energy. Know any other banks for credit unions who seem to project this tone? Maybe that's the point.

Brand Voice:
Disruptive
Rebellious
Independence
Revolutionary

Famous Outlaw Brands:
Virgin
Harley-Davidson
DIESEL

MAGICIAN

Who doesn't love a great story? Magician brands have it in spades ... with a little dose of transformative experiences underscored by motivational opportunity. Magician brand archetypes focus on empowering individuals to transform their experiences and trust their own instincts.

Money isn't magic, but magician brands in the FI space seek to understand how things work, and as a result, change lives for the better. It's not all about mystical experiences. Sometimes this archetype is called the visionary. If you sense an undercurrent within your culture of driven, charismatic people with a desire to help make dreams come to life ... your brand might just be a magician.

Brand Voice:

Charming
Driven
Moving
Charismatic

Famous Magician Brands:

Coca-Cola
Dyson
Disney
Absolut Vodka





HERO

It is possible your bank or credit union is a Hero brand beneath it all? Absolutely. The Hero's main motivation is to take care of others by proving their worth. They're determined to leave a mark on the world – most notably through impressive quality and superior service.

Where there's a will, there's a way. If that's an undercurrent at your organization, you just might be sitting on a Hero brand. The worst thing that could happen to a Hero business would be for a competitor to be rated higher or be proven to be better quality. Heroes need to be wary of coming off as too aggressive or arrogant.

Brand Voice:

Honest
Candid
Brave

Famous Hero Brands:

Adidas
FedEx
Snickers
Nike

LOVER

Well, look – no one wants to get into a deep relationship with their FI. But that doesn't mean your brand can't be, at its core, about creating relationships and evoking emotions. That's what the Lover brand archetype is all about. These brands make people feel special, because they see the world from the other's perspective.

The Lover is passionate about people, work, experiences, and surroundings that bring happiness and joy. Does that sound like a potential “our FI is all about the people and service” framework? It just might be. Messaging for this brand archetype is all about creating and celebrating connections that last.

Brand Voice:

Sensual
Empathetic
Soothing

Famous Lover Brands:

Chanel
Godiva
Victoria's Secret
Haagen-Dazs
Hallmark





JESTER

Money rhymes with funny... but is your FI all about enjoyment to the core? Then you just might be a Jester brand. The Jester lives in the moment and just enjoys life. They fear boredom above everything. A Jester brand archetype tends to give out the impression that they live on the wild side and often use outrageous imagery.

“What’s in your wallet?” by Capital One is a great example of The Jester in action. They motivate people to see the value of play and by allowing people to connect with their fun inner child — lighthearted and unrestrained, not afraid to bend rules, not afraid to stand out, and comfortable in their own skin.

Brand Voice:

Fun-Loving
Carefree
Optimistic

Famous Jester Brands:

M&Ms
Old Spice
Dollar Shave Club
Geico
Capital One

EVERYMAN

Wholesome and genuine – and genuinely likeable – financial brands built up on the Everyman archetype aim to be everyone’s favorite neighbor. This archetype’s trademark unpretentiousness and humbleness often surfaces as the archetype for altruistic credit unions and community banks.

The Everyman archetype eschews luxury and status for common sense and authenticity. For this brand archetype, it’s all about presenting a realistic perspective of the world - while getting the job done well. For inspiration, look at a Life Takes VISA campaign.

Brand Voice:

Friendly
Humble
Authentic

Famous Everyman Brands:

Target
IKEA
Volkswagen
VISA
Levi’s
Wal-Mart





CAREGIVER

Helping people manage their money and finance their dreams is no small calling. If your FI puts altruism ahead of profits then this archetype may just be your archetype. The Caregiver is driven by the welfare of others. They exist to protect and assist their customers.

The Caregiver brand is nearly the opposite of the general public's perception of bankers. Maybe that's the point? This archetype has a chance to truly stand out from the competition with creative expressions that break the mold AND fulfill their missions for financial education, financial wellness and financial freedom. Credit unions may realize their not-for-profit mission is built upon an archetype like the Caregiver.

Brand Voice:
Caring
Warm
Reassuring

Famous Caregiver Brands:
UNICEF
World Wildlife Fund
Tom's
Johnson & Johnson
Campbell's

RULER

There it is ... the stereotypical “Big Bank” archetype stereotype. The Ruler is driven by power and control. These brands are known for speaking authoritatively and often spreading the idea that they are the leaders in their field. They are infused with a sense of wealth and success.

Is everything about your FI high-end, polished, confident and professional? Would you never deign to be funny or even conversational about the services you provide? Then you just might be a Ruler brand. At best, your brand expression should project leadership and expertise. Just be careful about becoming overly hierarchical, elitist or unapproachable.

Brand Voice:

Commanding
Refind
Articulate

Famous Ruler Brands:

Yves St.Laurent
Mercedes Benz
Rolex
Microsoft
British Airways
American Express





CREATOR

Remember when we talked about Steve Jobs? This is the quintessential archetype for visionary, non-conformist brand. Internally, your team longs to break out of the mold and craft something meaningful and special for people who have come to expect ordinary and uninteresting from FIs. The Creator archetype makes it happen.

Customers love any brand built upon imaginative, expressive and innovative cultures. They align how they see themselves with who you are, and boom – you’ve made a right-fit customer (hopefully) for life. The trick for FI brands who discover they are a Creator archetype is to pay off the tried-and-true products with imaginative brand design and product campaigns that tell your story in fresh, new ways.

Brand Voice:

Inspirational
Daring
Provocative

Famous Creator Brands:

Apple
Lego
Crayola
Adobe
Pinterest
YouTube

INNOCENT

What's that sense of tranquility that just came over you? Why, it might just be the Innocent brand archetype at work. These type of FI brands are all about keeping it simple with a happy vibe. They are often successful at ignoring and moving through barriers that would sometimes stop others, as they have the core talents of being optimistic and hopeful.

If this is your FI, you'll sense an undercurrent of honesty and helpfulness – no hidden agendas or double meanings. It is a place where life can be easy for your coworkers and customers/members. The Innocent archetype tends to see the good in every situation, keeping faith and hope in their ideals and aiming to motivate others to believe in themselves. Who wouldn't want an FI partner who did that?

Brand Voice:

Optimistic
Honest
Happy
Wholesome

Famous Creator Brands:

Nintendo
Dove
Aveeno
Whole Foods





SAGE

Welcome to the smartest brand archetype in the room. If your FI brand is the Sage, then your culture revolves around knowledge and truth. Sage brands will promise learning and teaching knowledge and therefore will often project messages about expertise, wisdom and longevity.

Do you love to mention how long your bank or CU has been a part of the community? Do you often stand on traditions, projecting your brand as a pillar of the community? Be mindful of coming off as self-absorbed or cold to some – and focus instead on projecting like a favorite professor with an open-door policy.

Brand Voice:
Knowledgeable
Assured
Guiding

Famous Sage Brands:
BBC
Google
National Geographic
Oprah Winfrey
Harvard University
Mayo Clinic

EXPLORER

The Explorer brand archetype craves adventure and wants to discover the world for themselves. They are independent, ambitious and even spiritual. This brand archetype can be the right fit for FIs that pride themselves on inspiring people to not just grow their money, but to use it to live richly.

Did anyone catch that old campaign reference for Citi? In the early 2000s, the Live Richly campaign helped elevate Citibank and give them an edge they still enjoy today. That was an Explorer brand archetype move, as the Explorer stays current with trends and encourages individual initiative to help people grow. Adventure is a means of enlightenment, and explorers are focused on self-discovery and self-sufficiency.

Brand Voice:

Exciting
Fearless
Daring

Famous Explorer Brands:

The North Face
Jeep
Starbucks
Red Bull
REI





THAT'S GREAT... BUT WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

Now that you know about the 12 different types of archetypes, it's time to start thinking about how to find yours.

So, here's our three-step process to defining your brand archetype and putting it to work:

1. Start with internal brand perception – this is who you are.
2. Follow up with external brand perception – this is how others see you.
3. Layer in a competitive review – this is where your opportunity lies.

Let's get into it in more detail.

DOING THE WORK INTERNALLY

So, let's get to it ... first up is to get your teams together. The framework we like to use is a one-hour SWOT review – you get a chance to talk strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats with your team while asking open-ended questions that can reveal more about how they see the brand.

What you don't want to do here is say “Hey, what do you think about our brand!” That will get you more tactical feedback related to creative choices right now, and you're after the tone and feeling behind what they think is the your organization's biggest selling points.

I like to kick these off with a few ice-breaker exercises for brand tone and style, too. Whatever works to get your team in tune.

X MARKS THE SPOT

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Spontaneous, high energy	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Thoughtful, careful planner
Modern, high tech	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Classic, traditional
Cutting edge	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Established
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Leader	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Underdog
Outspoken	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Reserved
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Here's what those can look like. The first is an X Marks the Spot exercise is a bit more straightforward. It gets to how you see yourselves on a spectrum.

This is fun – but it's also qualitative research. You use what you find here to begin to reveal your archetype but also understand operationally what needs to happen to give it better clarity and focus.





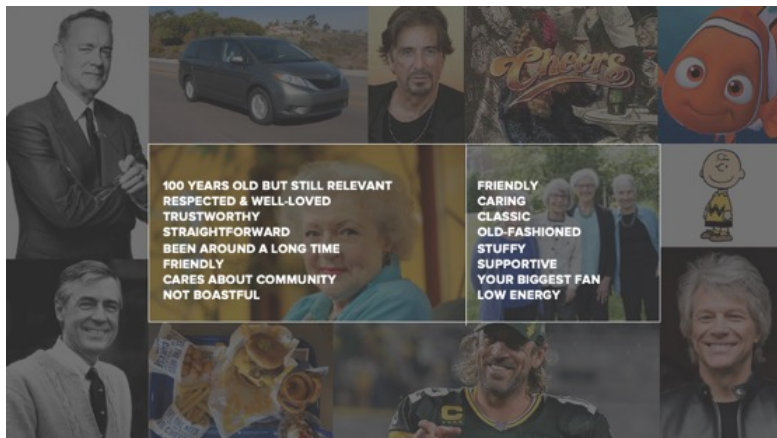
What Celebrity & Why?

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The next icebreaker is asking them if the credit union/ bank was a celebrity – who would that be and why. This can be an interesting way to get a sense of brand personality based on top responses. The “why” is what we care about most.



This is a look at a matrix for What Celebrity and Why we did for a bank in Wisconsin. As you can see, sometimes you just get things like burgers and minivans. A clear personality shines through here. When these come back, yes it's subjective. But trends rise to the top.



For example, take a look at the attributes listed above. You'll want to give context at this point.

What are those "why's" that came with the celebrity example? That's your gold mine - and even if it's not ideal, it's a lighthearted way to show your stakeholders what is happening with internal perceptions.

This is where we got to show them that the majority of responses were Betty White and grandmothers. If their internal team saw them as a grandmother, how did their potential customers feel?



DOING THE WORK EXTERNALLY

Customer Focus Groups + Perception Surveys

This is when you take your research out to see the other side of the coin. How do your customers and (if budget allows) your non-customers see your FI? A great way to do this is through focus groups and brand perception surveys. This is essential to layer what they think versus what your internal teams think.

Now you find out if who YOU think you are is who THEY think you are.

If there is a broad gap – you have work to do to move your brand perception in the right direction. If there is alignment – then you're ready to unleash the power of your archetype.

COMPETITIVE REVIEW

Brand archotyping is all about knowing and owning your personality – and paying it off with every member contact. Every radio spot. Every billboard. Every website visit.

But you shouldn't make those decisions without also taking a look at what your competition is doing, and making sure your brand archetype is positioned for growth and differentiation.

You don't need to hire a private investigator – but take some time to do the legwork. Our process is to review your top 5-6 competitive FIs as if we're new to your market. That means Google searches, website visits, social media scrolls, YouTube video watch parties – even rankings on WalletHub, etc.

We'll end up with a top-level yet holistic view of what makes your competition tick – and how they're presenting themselves in the market. This is an invaluable step for cluing in your internal team, especially leadership and stakeholders, as to what's at stake.

Are you blending in? Be honest with yourself and them. Are you standing out well already? That's important to note, too. It's important to have a neutral third party complete this exercise to avoid any unintended internal biases that may exist and skew your strategies.





Competitive Analysis Deliverables

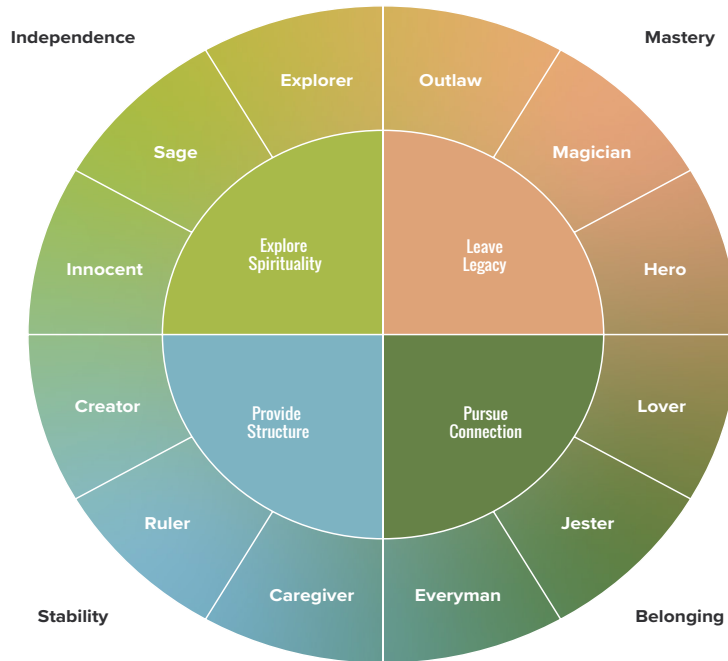
We'll plot your competition on an X-Y axis to show where the opportunities for messaging are in your market, and make recommendations for how your FI brand can reposition (based on your archetype) for maximum success.

When this exercise is finished you will have:

1. A well-informed perspective on how people within your organization view the brand, and how they view the tone and style of what you're doing right now.
2. Valuable brand perception feedback from customers and (potentially) the market at large.
3. A broader picture of the competitive landscape and where your biggest messaging opportunities are.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Welcome back to the wheel! Armed with all your new information, you'll have everything you need to identify your brand archetype.



You'll want to avoid a few pitfalls – which is to combine multiple archetypes into a stew – or to make your brand a reflection of someone on your team, maybe a leader, with a strong personality.

What you pick should feel true and make sense to everyone at your organization. This is where you'll want to make a presentation to your internal team. It will be informed by what you learned in the research.

Once your stakeholders are feeling good about the direction, you can move on to the fun part – putting your creative team to work expressing your brand archetype.





KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Knowing who you are and what you stand for is powerful. Especially in a commodity situation with more and more competition from brick and mortar or online FIs everyday.

The end goal for any brand strategy is growth. What seeds growth? Differentiation. You need to consistently and uniquely show members and potential members who you are. That starts with a solid brand platform built upon your core brand archetype. Ready to get started? We at Epicosity are always happy to help.

Didn't get a chance to participate
in our LIVE webinar?

Download it here.



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Katie Levitt

Katie Levitt is Insights Director for Epicosity, an award-winning creative and strategic powerhouse focused on growing FI brands of all sizes. With over 25 years as a creative director, writer and brand strategist, she's driven to differentiate – more than a little obsessed with the powerful science/magic of brand stories – and downright evangelistic about how discovering your brand personality can be the key that unlocks extraordinary growth. Katie's work includes branding campaigns and positioning strategy for banks and credit unions across the country, as well as Gateway Computers, Kubota Tractor Corporation, Betty Cocker, Aquasport Boats, Marvin Windows and WldBlue Internet (now Viasat). She can be reached at **katie.levitt@epicosity.com**.

