

# Founder Brand

Turn Your Story Into Your Competitive Advantage

by **Dave Gerhardt**



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## THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

There are several different avenues in which businesses can market their products, services, and talent. From social media to blogging, the options are endless on how businesses can reach clients – past, present, and future. In his book, *Founder Brand: Turn Your Story Into Your Competitive Advantage*, Dave Gerhardt discusses the impact that founders have on their businesses and their marketing.

Through the framework he creates, founders can discover how to become a storyteller, publisher, and master of the feedback loop. The strategies held within these pages are there to help build a founder's brand, how and why they work, and how any one in a founder role can assess the impact they have on their business. Instead of simply adding chapters to his book, Gerhardt uses the importance of levels to dictate that each level is more challenging than the one that came before. While not all founders are in a position to take on additionally demanding roles within their company, Gerhardt's book was written to those who are ready to ascend to the next level.

## IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The strategies necessary to build your founder brand and why they work.
- The secret to becoming an expert and guide in that niche.
- How to master the art of storytelling.
- How to become the publisher of your story.
- How to master the feedback loop.

## Introduction

The goal of marketing is to make sales easier. A good marketing strategy will build awareness, trust, and credibility. When you possess all three, it is easier to sell products and services to the customers looking for them. With many different methods of marketing available today, the possibilities are endless for founders.

One aspect of marketing that is often completely overlooked is the founder's branding. When the founder isn't branding it leaves a deficit within the company – but across three strategically framed levels, any founder can find their brand and begin marketing with potential. With the plans used for marketing Drift's founder, David Cancel, the overall success can be translated into any business.

## Level 1

### Chapter 1: Become a Storyteller

In the case of Drift, the product wasn't ready to be presented to the world and focus was shifted onto marketing branding for the founder – David Cancel. By letting him tell his story and the interest behind his brand, it sold the product itself with popularity that was unfounded.

For millennia, people have been telling story – even before written language, these stories were told word-of-mouth and passed down over thousands of years. The use of stories creates synaptic connections in our brains that bring emotion and cognition together. While stories can be fictional or factual, they have the purpose of teaching, entertaining, or inspiring us. The same can be true for brand storytelling. Think about the stories told about how Steve Jobs co-founded Apple. His story was so engaging and gripping that it was adapted into books and movies. When launching a business, there is a story to be told and should be shared in an exciting way.

The key to using storytelling in your brand is to know how to tell your story and target the delivery of the story to the correct audience, to the niche that wants the product or service that the business provides. The framework for efficient founder branding:

- What is the backstory of the founder?
- What is the problem that the founder's business exists to solve?
- Who is the villain faced by the customers?
- What is the solution that the business offers?

- What are the benefits of using the product?
- What was life like before and after using the product?

Using these simple questions, the foundation of the founder's story can be adapted so that the benefits are clear. These are the ingredients to begin creating a compelling story for the founder.

### Chapter 2: Find Your Niche and Define Your Enemy

There are two key things you must do in order to get your story to cut through the noise and attract customers – first, focus on a specific niche and second, define your enemy. In terms of a niche, it is a specialized segment of the market for a particular kind of product or service. “The riches are in the niches.” Meaning, that when you have a niche, you have a clear and focused intent on your target customers now. The best way to pick a niche is to look at your offering today and work backward to determine the ideal customer.

There is always a villain to every story (at least the good ones) and determining who the villain of your story is has to be in your line of sight. Although not every story has a villain, you create an advantage in your marketing when you create one. The goal is that your brand exists to free the customer from the struggle they face due to the villain. The villain serves a clear purpose in creating the founder brand and shows your customer you are on their side.

### Chapter 3: Now You Need an Explainer

Now that you have decided on a niche and determined the villain of your story, you have to turn it into something you can use. In this chapter, you learn how to take all of what you learned in chapter two and boil it down into a short, memorable statement – an explainer. The explainer can be used in actual conversations, not just in a PDF that never sees the light of day. The goal of the explainer is to get the attention of the audience you are trying to reach. The “first line, second line” lesson of copywriting comes into play when drafting your explainer. The “first line, second line” rule is when you write your first line to drive someone to read your second line. Your explainer should keep your audience wanting to read on to learn more.

### Chapter 4: Find Your Role Models, Mentors, and Anti-Role Models

Stealing is not about blindly copying, it is about figuring out what is worth stealing and developing it into your own

version – as it applies to your founder brand. Keep in mind that there is very little in this world that is completely original, and that history has a way of repeating itself. There are three types of role models you need to consider when building a founder brand:

- **Role Model** – someone you look up to professionally and has achieved what you wish to achieve
- **Mentor** – someone in a similar industry (or the same industry) but is a step or two ahead of where you are now
- **Anti-Role Model** – the person you learn about to make sure you don't replicate their process by accident

A founder must be fully committed to learning, which includes making lists of role models, mentors, and anti-role models to learn more about where you are headed and where you are not.

## Level 2

### Chapter 5: Become a Publisher and Get On Social Media

A founder posting on social media can now be considered a publisher. You control what, when, where, and why you publish. What you publish on social media when you focus on the niche can be powerful. Instead of just updating a website and hoping that new customers come and see what you are about, when you publish – you bring the audience to your doorstep.

Publishing on social media allows founders the ability to reach anyone globally without having to pay a cent for it (other than internet and paid ads). Now that you have your story, your explainer, and are a publisher, you can use social media to reach your dream customers online. There are three keys to being a publisher as a founder:

- Founders should be active and posting at least three to five times a week on social media platforms
- Founders should start a podcast that focuses on their niche
- Founders should make speaking in public a priority, even if they don't like it

Even though most founders (without a framework) stink at posting on social media, there is plenty to be learned by watching others to see what you can learn from how they post their brand.

### Chapter 6: Twitter and LinkedIn

While social media platforms are not in short supply, two of particular interest to founders should be Twitter and LinkedIn. These are two platforms that allow the highest possible opportunity to succeed with the lowest use of resources. These two platforms build audience based on the clarity of thoughts, which can be done from your laptop, tablet, or phone. Most founders have an opportunity to do well on these social networks.

In addition to the ease of posting, there is an ease to connections as well. They make it easy to listen, follow, connect, and share – providing instant feedback. These are also the two platforms that seem to have the most authority and influence in niche networks. Profiles on social media (especially Twitter and LinkedIn) need to be visually engaging, contain interesting content (including an interesting headline on LinkedIn), show accomplishments, plainly state who you are, and turn into a public curator for what you do online. To be truly effective, the use of social media rules apply – posting frequency and hashtags matter!

### Chapter 7: Start a Podcast

After social media, podcasts are the single best channel to build a brand as a founder today. When you have a podcast, it is like being the producer of your own radio station in your niche – without the headaches associated with starting your own radio station. PodcastHosting.com reported that at the end of 2020, more than 50% of households in the US reported listening to podcasts. Most of these are listened to on smart phones through Apple Podcasts and Spotify.

A podcast can be used in almost unlimited ways. For example, written snippets can be used as tweets on Twitter and longer transcripts posted on LinkedIn. Each time you share things like this, the audience reacts and it builds content for the next episode. Using one podcast as material for social media has the potential to give you enough content for a week's worth of posts.

Before launching a podcast it is important to consider the format, who will be talking, how you will do it, the platform you will use, the episode length, and so on. These are all foundational and must be planned prior to your first podcast.

### Chapter 8: Hit the Road

One motto that you must embody for business success is Ted Turner's "Early to bed, early to rise, work like hell, and advertise." You cannot assume that people will come to you if you want to be successful. It isn't enough to be a storyteller.

er, you must be proactive about getting out there and telling the story you want the world to hear. You should start small by picking a few podcasts and a few public speaking events to start hitting the road. Even starting small can turn into more followers and larger audiences.

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### Level 3

#### Chapter 9: Become a Master of the Feedback Loop

You are the founder – your story and explainer are captivating. As your podcast gains followers and your social media accounts attract followers – you have taken your show on the road. Here is where you take level two to three – the feedback loop. The feedback loop is powerful in business, it provides your company the ability to get feedback directly from the customers without spending any money to earn their attention. When you learn how to master the feedback loop, you unlock the entire game – content, social media, and podcasting.

Also included with the feedback loop is engagement. These metrics are what you look at on your social media presence. The number of followers don't really matter if they aren't picking up what you are putting down. Although there are no simple metrics across LinkedIn and Twitter, but you can monitor the shares and number of impressions per post. Understanding your metrics can help you succeed in marketing your founder brand just as much as your story.

### Conclusion

This book is not a guide to marketing or how to sell your product or service. This book is a guide on how to use what are considered to be the most effective marketing tool – the founder's brand. The ultimate goal is to advise how to become a better storyteller, start a podcast, become a publisher on social media, and use the feedback loop that building an audience can relate.

Although many founders will read this book, few will actually take the advice and put it into play. The steps are simple – develop your story, determine the niche, find the villain, clarify your explainer, and develop the one-liner that will become the catchphrase you are identified by.

Your founder brand can be an amazing tool to use to build your business. Once reading this book it is time to put plans in action and hit the road to marketing your founder brand.



One of the top marketing minds in the country, **Dave Gerhardt** helps businesses with brand building and marketing strategy. Dave is the founder of DGMG, his marketing consulting firm, and was Chief Marketing Officer at Privy and Chief Brand Officer at Drift. A guest lecturer at Harvard Business School, Dave has traveled the world speaking and coaching marketing teams and startup founders. He lives with his family in Burlington, Vermont. Learn more about working with Dave at [davegerhardt.com](http://davegerhardt.com).

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