THE FOUNDATION BENEATH EVERY BRAND DECISION

BrandLens™

Four filters that each do a job on their own, and together bring a brand into focus

Most brands have four partial answers to who they are, and no single one. This is the process that stacks them into a north star, and hands every team a building block it can use.

A framework by Graham A. R. Phillips

"Going beyond basic truths and innovating around the unexpected."

THE THESIS

BrandLens™ is a stack of four foundational filters: who a brand is for, what it does, how it does it, and, most important, why it does it. Individually, each filter is a working tool. Stacked, they bring the brand into focus, and the BrandLens statement (the positioning north star) is illuminated at their intersection.

Every company answers these four questions every day, usually in different rooms. Sales answers who. Product answers what. Customer success delivers how. Leadership answers why, on stage and in the strategy deck. Each answer may be true. Answered separately, they add up to a brand that sounds like four companies.

BrandLens puts the four answers in the same room. The discipline pays twice. On their own, the filters are the building blocks for the work marketing does every week: Who for go-to-market, What for product marketing and sales, How for voice and experience, Why for thought leadership and culture. Together, they produce the one statement every one of those teams can steer by.

This paper sets out the method: what each filter asks, what each one powers on its own, how stacking them produces the north star, and the process and tools that get a team there, in a three-week Core version or an 8-to-12-week Extended one. A closing note shows how the same four filters become the genome that parametric branding requires, for readers ready for that step.

THE CORE IDEA

Each filter is a building block. Stacked, they are the brand.

23–33%

revenue lift associated with presenting a brand consistently across touchpoints.

Lucidpress / Marq, 2016 & 2019

58%

of consumers say generative AI tools have replaced traditional search as their go-to for product and service recommendations.

Capgemini, 2025

87%

of marketers now use generative AI in at least one recurring workflow: more content, from more hands, faster.

Salesforce, 2026

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IN BRIEF

BrandLens is GARPco's process for finding a brand's positioning through four filters: who, what, how, and why. Each filter stands on its own as a foundation for a discipline, from go-to-market to thought leadership. Stacked, they illuminate the BrandLens statement, the north star every team steers by. A closing note connects the method to parametric branding.

WHY BRANDS BLUR

01 Four partial answers, and no single one

No company lacks answers to who, what, how, and why. The sales deck has a view on who the customer is. The product page has a view on what the company does. The customer success team has a view on how it feels to work together. Leadership has a view on why any of it matters. The trouble is that these answers were written by different people, at different times, for different rooms, and nobody has ever held them up to each other.

The result is familiar. A prospect meets one company in an ad, another in a sales call, and a third in onboarding. Every piece of work is defensible on its own terms, and the brand still blurs, because there is no shared north star for any of it to steer by.

That problem is accelerating. Generative tools let more people produce more content in less time, and answer engines (AI assistants such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity that reply with one synthesized answer instead of a list of links) now describe brands to buyers before the brand gets a word in. Both repeat whatever is clear and consistent. Where the brand is neither, they fill the gap with the category average.

1

The fragments

Every team holds a partial answer, written for its own room and its own moment.

2

The drift

Without a shared north star, each piece of work pulls the brand in a slightly different direction.

3

The acceleration

More content, from more hands and more machines, multiplies the drift instead of fixing it.

> **Most brands do not have a positioning problem. They have four partial answers that have never been put in the same room.**

02

THE FOUR FILTERS

Who, what, how, why

The BrandLens is a stack of four foundational filters. Individually, they are literally the who, what, how, and why of a brand or offering. They succinctly illuminate who you are for, what you do, how you do it, and, most important, why you do it.



Who

Who are you for? The unexpected truth(s) about your audience(s).

What

What do you do? What you make or offer that sets you apart.

How

How do you do it? Your code for behavior. Your unique approach.

Why

Why do you do it? Your value system, and your ethos or mission.

BrandLens™

The brand positioning statement that is the north star.

TWELVE QUESTIONS, THREE PER FILTER

Who

Who are you doing this for?

Who is your ideal customer? How are they currently underserved?

What tension are you hoping to resolve?

What unresolved dissonance exists in your audience's lives?

Who will be your most avid advocates?

Who would love your product most, and why?

What

What is unique about what you offer?

What do you have or do that no one else does?

How do you see your offering evolving?

What is to come, and how does it affect what you say today?

What does the audience get out of it?

What tangible value do you offer? How do you resolve their tension?

How

What is your unique approach?

What processes do you employ that set you apart?

What about how you act sets you apart?

What is your code for behavior? Why is engaging with you better?

What is your "experience"?

What does it feel like to be your customer?

Why

What is your relevant history?

What about who you have been is relevant to who you want to become?

What is your purpose?

What are you here to fix? What do you care about, and why?

What is the vision?

What do you want people to say about you in 5, 10, and 20 years?

> The Who filter starts with an **unexpected truth**: an insight into the tension or dissonance the audience is living with. Every other filter answers to it.

EACH FILTER ON ITS OWN

03 Four building blocks, each ready to use

This is what makes BrandLens more than a positioning exercise. A team does not have to wait for the final statement to get value. Each filter, once answered well, is the foundation for a discipline, and the people who own that discipline can pick it up and put it to work right away.

WHO

AUDIENCE

Go-to-market

The unexpected audience truth becomes the insight behind segmentation, the ICP (ideal customer profile), ABM (account-based marketing) target lists, channel choices, and persona messaging.

First to use it: demand generation, sales development, media

WHAT

OFFERING

Product marketing and sales

The unique offer and the value it delivers become the messaging architecture, value propositions, sales narrative, competitive positioning, and even naming. The "evolving" question keeps today's claims honest about tomorrow's roadmap.

First to use it: product marketing, sales enablement

HOW

APPROACH

Voice and experience

The code for behavior becomes brand personality, tone of voice, and values, and the "experience" question becomes customer experience principles and creative direction.

First to use it: creative, content, customer success

WHY

ETHOS

Thought leadership and culture

Relevant history, purpose, and vision become the point of view: the leadership narrative, editorial themes, the investor and stakeholder story, and the reasons people join and stay.

First to use it: leadership comms, content, recruiting

Each filter is a tool. Stacked, they are the brand.

STACKED INTO FOCUS

04 The north star is found where the filters overlap

Each filter on its own can be true and still generic. Plenty of companies serve the same audience, and plenty make a similar product. The distinctiveness lives in the combination: this audience, with this tension, served by this offer, in this way, for this reason. That is why the lens is a stack, and why the BrandLens statement is illuminated only at the intersection of all four.



Stacking also does something quieter. It makes the filters check each other. A Who that the What cannot serve gets exposed. A How that contradicts the Why gets exposed. The answers that survive the stack are the ones the whole company can stand behind.

> THE TEST
>
> **For [who], [Brand] is [what], by [how], because [why].** If any clause could describe a competitor, the filter behind it is not finished.

A

The statement

One positioning north star, signed off by leadership, that every brief, deck, and campaign can point to.

B

The narratives

An individual narrative statement for each of the Who, What, How, and Why, the building blocks each team takes away.

C

Values and personality

Core values and "we are / we are not" statements, drawn from the same material so the behavior matches the words.

IN PRACTICE A data platform selling to two audiences stacked its filters and found its Who had quietly narrowed: one audience was the core, and the other was the demand that core created. The positioning refocused on the first while keeping the messaging two-sided. The filters did not invent that truth. Stacking them made it impossible to ignore.

WHY IT PAYS

A clear brand gets repeated. A blurry one gets averaged.

Consistency has always paid. Presenting a brand consistently across touchpoints is associated with a **revenue lift of 23 to 33%** (Lucidpress / Marq, self-reported and directional). But consistency cannot be enforced from a style guide alone. Teams stay consistent when they share the same answers to the same four questions, which is exactly what a BrandLens gives them.

The audience for those answers has also grown. **58% of consumers** now say generative AI tools have replaced traditional search as their go-to for product and service recommendations (Capgemini), so a model is often the first to describe a brand to a buyer. Inside the building, **87% of marketers** use generative AI in a recurring workflow (Salesforce). People and machines alike repeat what is clear, and average out what is not.

ONE LENS, TWO READERS

BrandLens™
FOUR ANSWERS, ONE NORTH STAR

INSIDE · YOUR TEAMS

23–33% revenue lift associated with presenting a brand consistently across every touchpoint.

Lucidpress / Marq, 2016 & 2019

WHAT THE LENS GIVES THEM

The same four answers for sales, product, creative, and service, so every touchpoint tells the same story.

OUTSIDE · ANSWER ENGINES

58% of consumers now turn to generative AI tools, not search, for product and service recommendations.

Capgemini, 2025

WHAT THE LENS GIVES THEM

A clear, consistent story to repeat when buyers ask, instead of the category average.

> **If you do not say clearly who you are, the market will average you into your category.**

05

THE PROCESS

Five steps, one lens

BrandLens runs in five steps, in two versions: Core, in about three weeks, and Extended, in 8 to 12. It starts by listening to the market, then asks the people closest to each filter to do their homework, works through the answers in the room, and ends with the north star. Hearing what the market already thinks helps the room decide what the brand should stand for.

1

Discover

Listen at scale before anyone opens a workshop. How do answer engines describe the brand and its competitors today? What do reviews, forums, and search behavior say the audience wants and does not get? The aim is an unexpected truth: the insight the room would not have guessed. The Extended version goes deeper here (see next page).

2

Homework

The workshop is broken into four sections, one per filter. Each section is led by one stakeholder, matched to expertise. Before the workshop, each lead captures no more than five bullets for each of the filter's three questions. It takes about three to five hours of cumulative effort and ensures a focused discussion on the day.

3

Workshop THREE SESSIONS

Session 1: pre-work share-out and ideation. Session 2: draft narratives, share-out, and wordsmithing. Session 3: final narratives and the positioning statement.

4

Filters

Each filter is written up as its own narrative statement and signed off. This is the moment the building blocks leave the room: each narrative goes to the team whose discipline it powers.

5

BrandLens

The four narratives are stacked and the BrandLens statement is written at their intersection, with brand values and personality drawn from the same material. The north star becomes the foundation for everything that follows: messaging, website, content, visual identity, and sales enablement.

WHAT COMES OUT

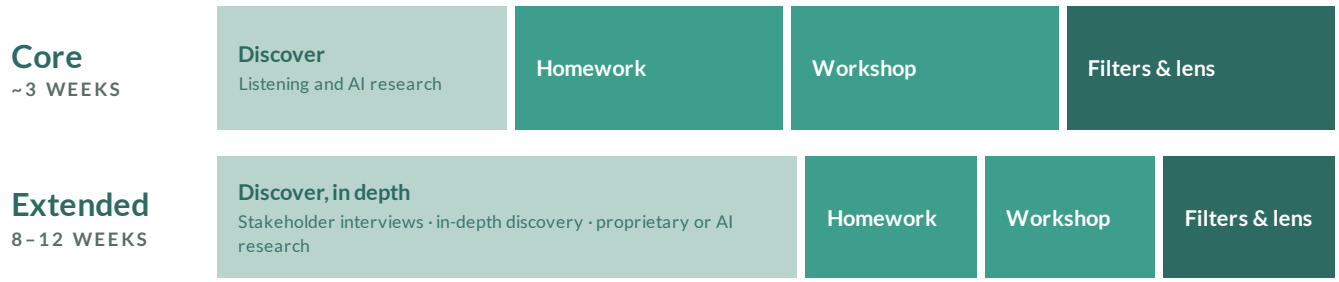
Four filter narratives · the BrandLens statement · brand values and personality · a clear owner for putting each filter to work.

THE PROCESS, TWO WAYS

Core and Extended

The method is the same in both versions: the same four filters, the same twelve questions, the same workshops, and the same north star at the end. What changes is how much the team learns before anyone opens the workshop.

SAME METHOD, DIFFERENT DEPTH



Schematic, not to scale

	CORE	EXTENDED
Discover	Desk and AI-assisted listening: how the market and answer engines describe the brand and its competitors	All of Core, plus in-depth stakeholder interviews and proprietary or AI research before the homework begins
Stakeholders	The leadership team, with one lead per filter	Leadership plus a much broader set of interviews across the business and beyond it
Homework and workshops	Four filter leads, three workshop sessions	The same, informed by a far deeper evidence base
Timeline	About three weeks	8 to 12 weeks, depending on the depth of research
Best for	A focused business, a refresh, or leadership that is largely aligned	Complex or multi-business organizations, a repositioning, or leadership that is not yet aligned

THE SAME DESTINATION

Both versions end in the same place: four filter narratives, one BrandLens statement, and a clear owner for putting each filter to work. Extended simply gives the room more to work with.

06

THE TOOLKIT

Tools any team can use today

BrandLens is tool-agnostic. Nothing below is proprietary, and none of it replaces the workshop. These are publicly available examples, current as of September 2026, of tools that can help with each step.

STEP	THE JOB	PUBLICLY AVAILABLE TOOLS
Discover	**How AI describes the brand and its competitors**	Run a fixed prompt set across ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, and Perplexity. Track it over time with AI visibility tools such as Semrush's AI Visibility Toolkit or Peec AI.
Discover	**What the audience says, unprompted**	Social listening such as Brand24 or Brandwatch. Exported reviews, forum threads, and support tickets summarized with Claude or ChatGPT.
Discover	**Where the audience is and what it searches for**	Audience research with SparkToro. Demand patterns and seasonality with Google Trends.
Homework	**Collect and compare the pre-work**	A shared Google Doc or Notion page per filter, one owner each. NotebookLM, or a Claude or ChatGPT project, to find overlaps and gaps across the four sections.
Workshop	**Keep the room grounded and moving**	Miro or FigJam for live boards. The same AI project loaded with the homework and Discover findings, for quick drafts during wordsmithing.
Filters & lens	**Put each filter to work after sign-off**	A Claude Project or custom GPT holding the four narratives and the statement, so every team's first draft starts from the lens, not from a blank page.

A NOTE ON TOOLS

Tools inform the filters; they do not fill them. Listening tools report what the market already says, which is exactly the average a brand is trying to rise above. Use them to find the tension, then let the people who own the brand decide what it means.

07

WHERE IT GOES WRONG

Four ways to lose focus

A process that promises clarity can produce the opposite. Four failure modes recur, and each has a structural fix rather than a promise to be careful.

01

The committee average

Workshops can converge on what nobody objects to, which is what nobody remembers. The fix: one owner per filter, one writer for the narratives, and one test for every draft: does it contain a truth the room did not expect?

02

Skipping the why

Why feels soft next to who and what, so it is the filter most often rushed. It is also the most important: thought leadership, culture, and every hard trade-off depend on it. Assign it to the CEO, and give it the time it deserves.

03

Listening to the average

AI listening reports what is already said about a category. Treated as the answer, it produces a brand that sounds like its competitors. Treated as a map of the tension, it points to the gap the brand can own.

04

A lens on a shelf

A BrandLens that lives only in a slide deck changes nothing. Each filter needs an owner who puts it to work, and the statement needs to show up in the brief template, the sales deck, and the content plan. If it is not in the work, it is not in the brand.

THE BALANCE

None of this argues against the workshop. It argues for running it with discipline: owned, specific, grounded in an unexpected truth, and put to work the week it is signed off.

WHAT COMES NEXT

08 Brought into focus. Put to work.

Picture a company that has done this work. Its purpose is one sentence everyone can say. Each of its teams works from its own filter, and all four filters point the same way.

ONE FILTER AT A TIME

Demand generation targets the audience the Who filter found. Sales tells the story the What filter wrote. Creative sounds like the How. The CEO's keynote and the next hire's offer letter both carry the Why. No team waits on another to start.

THE WHOLE LENS

When the filters are stacked, the brand holds its shape wherever it appears: in an ad, a sales call, an onboarding email, or an AI assistant's answer. The statement becomes the tiebreaker for every decision the filters alone cannot settle.

IN CONCLUSION

Every company already answers who, what, how, and why. BrandLens makes sure it answers them once, together, and well. Individually, the filters are the building blocks for go-to-market, product marketing, voice, and thought leadership. Stacked, they illuminate the north star. **The brands that do this work stop sounding like four companies, and start sounding like one.**

FROM DEFINITION TO ACTIVATION

BrandLens decides who a brand is. The companion paper, **XDFources™**, sets out how the brand shows up in people's lives, and each filter briefs one of its four forces: Who briefs Say, What briefs Do, How briefs See, and Why briefs Think.

The lens is the genome

The companion paper, *Parametric Branding*, argues that brand identity is becoming a governed system (a fixed core, a fluid edge, and a closed loop) that adapts by context, moment, and person. That model depends on a genome: the core that never moves. BrandLens is where that genome comes from. The same four filters that power go-to-market and thought leadership become the brand's DNA, each mapped to a layer of the system.

WHO SIGNALS	Decides what the identity responds to: context, moment, and, with permission, the person.
WHAT ANCHORED	The offer is fixed; which proof point leads can shift by audience and moment.
HOW FLUID EDGE	Voice, pacing, imagery, and format flex within limits; the code for behavior does not.
WHY FIXED	Purpose and promise never flex. They make every variation recognizably the same brand.

For brands ready for that step, two stages follow the lens. **Encode** writes the filters in a form systems can hold: the fixed core as versioned documents, what may flex as design tokens (brand elements such as color, type, and tone stored as named, adjustable variables), and voice rules as model instructions. **Validate** tests generated expressions against the lens and feeds every gap back into it. Tools such as Figma variables, Tokens Studio, and Style Dictionary handle the first; the Discover prompt set, re-run on a schedule, handles the second.

Who steers. What anchors. How flexes. Why holds.

Sources

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capgemini.com/news/press-releases/71-of-consumers-want-generative-ai-integrated-into-their-shopping-experiences

3 **Salesforce, State of Marketing (10th Edition, 2026).**
87% of marketers use generative AI in at least one recurring workflow, up from 51% two years earlier.
salesforce.com/news/stories/state-of-marketing-2026

A NOTE ON THE FIGURES AND TOOLS

This paper sets out a proprietary GARPco framework; figures are drawn from published research and used illustratively. The brand-consistency figures are self-reported marketer surveys and should be read as directional; the Capgemini figure is self-reported consumer behavior. Tools are named as publicly available examples as of September 2026, not endorsements, and the method does not depend on any one of them. The "in practice" example is an anonymized composite of real engagement patterns.

BACKGROUND & LINEAGE

BrandLens™ was developed across Graham Phillips's agency and consulting work and is the foundation of every GARPco brand engagement, alongside Altitudes™ (messaging architecture) and the Triple A Playbook (Audit, Assessment, Activation). The filter definitions and twelve questions follow the GARPco BrandLens Work Session Primer. Its activation companion is *XDFources™* (GARPco, September 2026). The genome, fluid edge, and loop referenced in the closing note come from the companion paper, *Parametric Branding* (GARPco, July 2026).

Every brand decision answers a who, a what, a how, or a why. The BrandLens makes sure they all point the same way.

THE GARPCO SERIES

01 · DEFINE THE BRAND
BrandLens™
Four filters and one north star.
YOU ARE HERE

02 · ACTIVATE IT
XDFources™
Four forces: see, say, think, and do.

03 · LET IT ADAPT
Parametric Branding
An identity that flexes by context, moment, and person.

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Graham A. R. Phillips is a brand and growth leader with 25 years of experience across agencies and growth-stage companies, putting AI to work on real marketing problems since 2017. He writes on how AI is reshaping brand strategy, customer acquisition, and the operating models behind them.

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