THE FOUR FORCES OF EXPERIENCE DESIGN

XDFources™

Four forces that turn a brand into experiences people see, talk about, believe, and act on

Most campaigns plan what a brand will say. XDFources plans what people will see, say, think, and do at each moment of their journey, and how to know whether each one is working.

A framework by Graham A. R. Phillips

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

THE THESIS

XDFources™ is a model for planning campaigns and brand experiences around four forces, what audiences See, Say, Think, and Do, rather than around what the brand wants to tell them. It activates with audiences, not at them.

Each force carries one guiding question. In what context do we want the brand to be seen? What conversations do we want to start or join? What perceptions and feelings do we want to establish or shift? What explicit actions do we want to encourage? Answer all four and a plan stops being a media schedule and becomes a set of experiences people choose to take part in.

The model was first built for a world where people trusted each other more than they trusted ads. That has not changed: people still trust recommendations from people they know above any other channel. What has changed is who is talking. Answer engines (AI assistants that reply with one synthesized answer) now join the conversation about every brand, and they repeat what the market is already saying.

This paper sets out the four forces and the questions behind each one, shows how the leading force changes from moment to moment across a journey, how each is briefed from a brand's BrandLens™, proposes a scoreboard for each, and names the ways activation plans most often go wrong.

THE CORE IDEA

Don't plan a message. Plan what people will see, say, think, and do.

88%

of people trust recommendations from people they know more than any other channel, which is why Say matters.

Nielsen, 2021

60:40

brand building to sales activation was the most effective balance across 996 campaigns.

Binet & Field, IPA, 2013

58%

of consumers say generative AI tools have replaced search as their go-to for recommendations, so machines now shape the Say too.

Capgemini, 2025

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IN BRIEF

XDFources™ is GARPco's model for campaign and omnichannel experience planning. It maps how audiences See, Say, Think, and Do at each moment of the customer journey, briefs each force from the brand's BrandLens, and gives each its own measure of success, so a plan builds the brand and drives action at the same time.

01

BEYOND THE MESSAGE

Plan what people do, not just what you say

Most campaign planning starts with the brand: a message, a budget, and a set of channels to push it through. The audience appears at the end, as a target. That model made sense when media was scarce and attention was plentiful. Neither is true now.

People do not experience channels. They experience moments: an event they attend, a conversation in their feed, an article that changes their mind, a product they finally try. The brands they remember are the ones that showed up in those moments with something of value, and gave them a reason to join in.

XDFources was built for that shift. Instead of asking what the brand wants to tell people, it asks what the brand wants people to see, say, think, and do, and then plans the experiences that get them there. The audience is not the destination of the plan. The audience is a participant in it.

1

From at to with

Audiences are not targets to hit. They are participants who carry the brand further than any media budget.

2

From channels to moments

Plan for the contexts people are already in, and add value there, instead of buying space to interrupt them.

3

From message to behavior

Success is what people see, say, think, and do, not how many times the message ran.

> **Get personal. The work is not to reach an audience. It is to give people something worth seeing, saying, thinking, and doing.**

FOUR VERBS

02 See, Say, Think, Do

XDFources names four forces, one verb each: See, Say, Think, and Do. It maps them across the customer journey, and gives each one guiding question for the planning team to answer.

See

CONTEXT

In what context do we want the brand to be seen?

Say

CONVERSATION

What organic conversations do we want to start and/or join?

Think

PERCEPTION

What perceptions or feelings do we want to establish or shift?

Do

ACTION

What explicit actions do we want to encourage or incite?



EACH VERB FEEDS THE OTHERS

Read left to right, the verbs trace a familiar path from noticing a brand to acting on it. In practice they work as a set. A great event (See) starts conversations (Say). A surprising piece of data (Think) gives people something to share (Say). A product trial (Do) becomes the story they tell their friends, and the next person Sees the brand through them.

That is why the model plans all four together. The strongest ideas move more than one verb at once, and the weakest plans pour everything into one verb and wonder why the others stall.

> **FOUR VERBS, NOT ONE FUNNEL**
>
> A funnel counts how many people fall out at each stage. The four verbs describe what people are actually doing when they engage with a brand, which is what a planner can design for.

SEE AND SAY

03 Context and conversation

The first two forces are about you: where the brand shows up, and what people say about it once it does.

See

CONTEXT

In what context do we want the brand to be seen?

- What can your brand or product become a marker of?
- How can we add unique value to the moments and events our audience values?
- How can we have a significant OOH (out-of-home: billboards, transit, and other outdoor media) presence in the places our audience frequents?
- How can we create environments, physical and augmented, that enable our promise and capture information?

MEASURE IT Reach and attention in the contexts that matter, and what those environments capture: sign-ups, first-party data, repeat visits.

Say

CONVERSATION

What organic conversations do we want to start and/or join?

- How can we spur new conversations around key messaging themes?
- How can we inspire interest and buzz for our products in social, digital, and analogue spaces?
- Can we incentivize celebrities and key influencers in these communities and leverage their value?
- Can we build a value-based community, or add value to an existing one, that celebrates the people who enjoy our products?

The conversation now includes machines: what AI assistants say about a brand is part of the Say.

MEASURE IT Share of conversation against competitors, sentiment, community participation, and how often answer engines mention the brand.

04

THINK AND DO

Perception, feeling, action

The second two forces are about them: what people come to believe and feel about the brand, and what they do about it.

Think

PERCEPTION

What perceptions and feelings do we want to establish or shift?

- How can we become a valuable thought leader in our space?
- How do we want people to feel at each moment, and what content will change or accentuate the way they think?
- What data does the brand have that will surprise and delight its customers?
- How can PR and endorsements change perceptions of who we are and what we do?

MEASURE IT Movement on the attributes that matter in brand-lift and tracking studies, consideration, and pickup of the brand's ideas and data by press and peers.

Do

ACTION

What explicit actions do we want to encourage or incite?

- How can we create more opportunities to experience the product?
- How do we drive traffic, and frequency of traffic, to the brand's key properties and sites?
- Can we offer something more in exchange for evangelism or sharing behavior?
- What social actions and behaviors do we want to lean into and prioritize?

MEASURE IT Trials, visits and their frequency, conversion, repeat behavior, and referrals: the actions the plan set out to incite.

ONE JOURNEY, MANY MOMENTS

The leading force changes at every step

A campaign has one message. A journey has many moments, and each carries its own blend of emotion: the curiosity of discovering a brand is not the impatience of waiting for it to arrive. So XDFources is not applied once per campaign. It is applied step by step, and the force that leads changes as the journey moves. Map the feeling at each moment first, then choose the force that answers it.

01	02	03	04	05	06
Discover	**Compare**	**Decide**	**Buy**	**Wait**	**Return**
Feels: curiosity	*Feels: doubt*	*Feels: hesitation*	*Feels: impatience*	*Feels: uncertainty*	*Feels: loyalty*
LEADING FORCE **See**	LEADING FORCE **Think**	LEADING FORCE **Say**	LEADING FORCE **Do**	LEADING FORCE **Think**	LEADING FORCE **Do**
Show up in the moments people already value.	Give them proof that changes their mind.	Let other customers do the reassuring.	Make acting fast, easy, and worth it.	Tell them what is happening before they ask.	Offer something more for coming back.

Illustrative journey for a direct-to-consumer brand. The feelings shown are examples; in practice they are measured.

WHERE TO PUSH HARDEST

Not every moment needs the same effort. Listen to what people say about each step of the journey when no one is asking. The moments where feeling turns most negative, and reaches the most people, are where the brand is needed most. Those moments get the strongest forces first.

1

Map the moments

Break the journey into the steps people actually take, online and off, not the ones on the org chart.

2

Read the feeling

Listen to what people say, unprompted, about each step, and note where feeling turns most negative.

3

Assign the force

Give each of those moments a leading force, briefed from the lens, that counteracts what people feel there.

> **Every moment has a feeling. Every feeling has a force that answers it.**

05

START FROM THE LENS

Every force needs a brief

XDFources decides how a brand shows up. It does not decide who the brand is. That job belongs to the BrandLens™, GARPco's four-filter process for finding a brand's positioning. When a team plans activation without it, ideas get judged on novelty alone, and the brand ends up in a hundred clever places saying a hundred different things.

With a BrandLens in hand, each force has a brief waiting for it. The mapping is not one-to-one in every case, but each filter has a natural home.

HOW	→	**SEE**	The code for behavior and the brand experience decide where the brand shows up, in physical and augmented spaces, and how it behaves when it gets there.
WHO	→	**SAY**	Who the audience is, where they gather, and what they already talk about decide which conversations and communities the brand should start or join.
WHY	→	**THINK**	Purpose and vision are the perceptions worth shifting. This is where thought leadership comes from.
WHAT	→	**DO**	The offer and its value define the action worth inciting, and the product experience people are invited to try.

THE TEST

Every idea should trace back to a filter. **If it cannot, it is a stunt, not a brand experience.**

RUNNING THE SESSION

06 From lens to plan in five steps

1 **Bring the lens and the journey**

Start from the BrandLens statement and its four filter narratives, or a working draft, plus the moments of the customer journey, so every idea has a brief and a place before it has a budget.

2 **Answer the forces**

Give each force an owner. Before the session, each owner works through its questions moment by moment, and brings up to five ideas per question.

3 **Find the multipliers**

In the room, map every idea against all four verbs. Ideas that move two or more verbs at once earn priority, because they do more with the same spend.

4 **Give each idea a scoreboard**

Assign the leading signal and the outcome measure for the idea's primary verb (see section 07), before anything launches.

5 **Sequence and learn**

Launch in an order that lets each verb feed the next, read the signals, and move effort toward what is working.

ILLUSTRATION

A regional running-shoe brand plans a launch. **See:** pop-up gait analysis at the city's biggest races. **Say:** a runners' club that celebrates everyday finishers, not elites. **Think:** anonymized data on how local runners really train. **Do:** a 30-day trial pair in exchange for a review and a friend referral. The pop-up touches all four verbs, so it leads the plan.

07

A SCOREBOARD PER VERB

Measure each verb on its own terms

The most common way to kill an activation plan is to judge every part of it by the last verb. See and Think build memory and preference over months; Do pays back in weeks. Binet and Field's analysis of 996 IPA effectiveness cases found the most effective balance was roughly 60% brand building to 40% sales activation. Give each verb its own scoreboard, with a leading signal to read early and an outcome to judge it by.

VERB	LEADING SIGNALS	OUTCOME MEASURES	EXAMPLE TOOLS
See	Reach and attention in target contexts; event and OOH footprint; sign-ups captured on site	Branded search lift; aided and unaided awareness	Google Trends; brand-lift studies from media partners; event and venue data
Say	Mentions, sentiment, share of conversation; creator engagement; community participation	Share of voice against competitors; referral traffic from social and AI answers	Brand24 or Brandwatch; AI visibility tools such as Peec AI or Semrush
Think	Content engagement and downloads; press and peer pickup of the brand's data	Movement on key attributes; consideration in tracking studies	Brand trackers such as YouGov BrandIndex; surveys in Qualtrics
Do	Trials, visits and frequency; shares and referrals	Conversion; repeat behavior; referral rate; customer lifetime value	Google Analytics 4; a CRM (customer relationship management system) such as HubSpot

THE RULE

Read leading signals weekly and outcomes quarterly. Never cut a See or Think idea for failing a Do metric it was never designed to move.

WHERE IT GOES WRONG

08 Four ways activation stalls

The model asks a brand to give before it gets. Most failures come from forgetting that, one verb at a time.

01

Judging every verb by Do

Last-click reporting (crediting a sale only to the final touchpoint) makes See and Think look like waste, so budgets drift toward activation until the brand stops being chosen. Give each verb its own scoreboard, and protect the ones that build memory.

02

Buzz with nothing to say

A conversation needs a reason to exist. Stunts can spike mentions without moving anything else. Every Say idea should carry a theme from the brand's lens, so the talk adds up to something.

03

Opinion without proof

Thought leadership built on opinion alone sounds like everyone else's. The Think questions ask what data the brand has that will surprise people. Lead with that unexpected truth.

04

Asking without giving

Asking people to share, review, or refer without a real value exchange reads as extraction. Offer something more in exchange for evangelism, and make the experience worth talking about first.

> **THE BALANCE**
>
> The model is only as strong as the value each verb gives back to the audience. Activate with people, not at them, and they do the work of spreading the brand for you.

WHAT COMES NEXT

09 Seen. Said. Thought. Done.

Picture a brand that plans this way. It shows up where its audience already is, with something useful. People talk about it because they were part of it. They think differently about the category because the brand showed them something new. And they act, because acting was easy and worth it.

A BRAND PEOPLE JOIN

The audience stops being the end of the plan and becomes its engine. Every experience is designed to be seen, shared, remembered, and acted on, so each one carries the brand further than the budget alone could.

A PLAN THAT LEARNS

With a scoreboard for each verb, the team can see which ones are working and which are stalled, and move effort accordingly, without sacrificing the long-term brand building that makes short-term action possible.

IN CONCLUSION

BrandLens decides who a brand is. XDFources decides how it shows up in people's lives. Four forces, each with its own question and its own scoreboard, turn a positioning into experiences that build the brand and drive action at the same time. **The brands that plan what people will see, say, think, and do stop broadcasting at their audiences, and start activating with them.**

FROM ACTIVATION TO ADAPTATION

XDFources plans the experiences a brand creates. The companion paper, **Parametric Branding**, takes the next step: an identity that adapts to the context, moment, and person each experience reaches, while the core its BrandLens defines holds still.

Sources

1 **Nielsen, Trust in Advertising Study (2021).**

88% of global respondents trust recommendations from people they know more than any other channel.

nielsen.com/insights/2021/beyond-martech-building-trust-with-consumers-and-engaging-where-sentiment-is-high

2 **Les Binet and Peter Field, The Long and the Short of It (IPA, 2013).**

Analysis of 996 campaigns from the IPA Effectiveness Databank (1980 to 2010); the optimum balance between brand building and sales activation is around 60:40.

ipa.co.uk (summary: alexmurrell.co.uk/summaries/les-binet-and-peter-field-the-long-and-the-short-of-it)

3 **Capgemini Research Institute, "What Matters to Today's Consumer" (4th edition, January 2025).**

58% of consumers have replaced traditional search engines with generative AI tools as their go-to for product and service recommendations. Survey of 12,000 consumers in 12 countries.

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

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 60:40 balance is a general guideline from historical effectiveness cases and varies by category and brand maturity. Tools are named as publicly available examples as of September 2026, not endorsements. The running-shoe and journey examples are hypothetical.

BACKGROUND & LINEAGE

XDFources™ was created by Graham Phillips, has shaped work for a range of clients, and is now GARPco's model for campaign and omnichannel experience planning. Its four forces are named by the verbs See, Say, Think, and Do. It is designed to follow BrandLens™ (GARPco, September 2026), which defines the brand the model activates. Together with *Parametric Branding* (GARPco, July 2026), the three papers form a series: define the brand, activate it, and let it adapt.

Don’t tell people what to think. Give them something to see, say, and do, and they will get there themselves.

THE GARPCO SERIES

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

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

YOU ARE HERE

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

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