

## How a consistent tone of voice helped a skincare brand disrupt the market

Verbal Identity's One Voice program anchors and aligns communications for Votary's massively successful launch



**The challenge for any CMO is ensuring their brand's voice is as distinctive and consistent as its visual identity**

It's been reported that the CMO of a mid-sized luxury brand is responsible for more verbal content every day than even the Editor of the Guardian newspaper has to put into print<sup>1</sup>.

There is an ever-growing demand for content, yet apparently less time (and budget) than ever before to create it. Add to this that much of this content needs a consistent and distinctive verbal style, then the challenge for Votary was clear.

Already working 100 hours a week to develop and launch the brand, how would the Founders be able to produce content that had a clear and engaging voice?

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/media-network/media-network-blog/2014/oct/09/memes-and-science-are-key-to-memorable-marketing-language>



## The importance of clear and practical guidelines for your brand writing team

In our experience working with premium and luxury brands (both start-ups and globally famous names) one thing has become obvious: a small, team of writers who have a clear direction and practical guidelines are far more effective than a large, high-reputation team who are unfocussed or untrained.

Clear direction comes from a strategic Vision and a leadership team who are committed to a unifying Story (find more details [in our in-depth case studies](#) covering the successful relaunch of Hunter Boot and the turnaround of a multi-brand watch retailer).

But how can you produce a tone of voice for your brand which is distinctive, engaging, consistent – yet flexible enough to work across multiple channels?

## The CEO's insight: The voice of our Founder is the voice of our brand.

It was clear that although Votary was launching into a highly competitive skincare market, their ability to cut through initially would depend on making their Founder the living embodiment of the brand's values. Verbal Identity needed to capture the most compelling aspect of the Founder's voice.

**The CEO's belief:** The Founders knew that as they approached launch time they would be increasingly absorbed by other projects. To cope, they'd need to parachute in a diverse range of writers and would have little time to train them.

They commissioned Verbal Identity with a very precise brief:

First, discover and define a competitive voice for their brand;

Then, create guidelines that were clear and practical;

Finally, build the metrics that would allow the Founders to make sure the tone of voice was being followed.

## Verbal audit and analysis of the competitive market shows how and where the tone of voice can be used to disrupt.

A unique feature of Verbal Identity is that we see how, in a complex and volatile world, it is essential to mix the rigour of the strategic consultants with the break-through thinking of the creative industries. For Votary, we used a combination of linguistic and creative analysis to produce a thorough survey of the competitive market.

We discovered that the language of skincare brands is dominated by two axes of behaviour: individual Vs. corporate and modern Vs. old-fashioned. When the leading brands' tones of voice were plotted out, it quickly became clear that there was a clear and distinctive space which Votary could own.

## Why every successful brand voice operates on three levels:

Uniquely, Verbal Identity understands how a brand's language works on 3 levels:

- 10,000 feet: your brand's narrative. Be clear about the kind of people you are, the world you believe in and the things you're against.
- 1,000 feet: your brand's tone of voice. Define the personality of your brand, a set of traits that set you apart from other brands.
- Ground level: your syntax. Be consistent on individual words, your message structure, and the sentence length you usually use.

Analysing a voice by its constituent parts allows you to look for inconsistencies. If one level conflicts with another, your customers are likely to be confused about who you are as a brand.

When you get consistency across all three levels, it becomes easier for you to agree what sounds right, give feedback and flex your voice for the right audience, at the right time, on the right channel.

Boutique skincare brands tended to focus on the individual Founders – they write in the first person, use colloquialisms and ask the reader to trust in the Founder. Many other skincare brands focussed on explaining the science behind the product, using colder, third person language to imply there was a high level of expertise in their backstory.

We realised that Votary could claim both these strengths, because Arabella (their public-facing Founder) is both a charming, personable individual and a recognised expert with strong credentials in product development.

This led us to a simple, powerful idea: Votary should feel like a private consultation with Arabella.



## A clear and simple Voice needs clear and simple Guidelines.

Verbal Identity had limited time with Arabella but in two carefully constructed interview sessions we were able to determine the underlying narrative of how she approached developing products for their range, the key personality tones and the words and phrases she felt were/weren't right for Votary.

With launch dates approaching, and a ramped-up demand for written content, we were able to quickly turn this discovery into practical and informative guidelines which covered how the Votary voice should sound in order to remain consistent and engaging – and how it should 'flex' in different channels and on different occasions.

As the brand team launched, we worked side by side with the writing team to help bed in the voice.

## RESULTS

Votary quickly achieved global distribution, following an initial launch online and through Liberty in London.

There's now distribution via international beauty retailers like Sephora, Le Bon Marche and Joyce Beauty.

Three years later, all brand copy – web, social, press releases, packaging, customer service and in-house operational copy – is still created following the guidelines which Verbal Identity produced.

The co-Founder, Charlotte Semler, described her writing team as one of the most efficient in the business.

Arabella said: *"I loved working with the team at Verbal Identity. They gave us a clear strategy for the brand voice, and they came up with inspirational creative ideas. In just a few months, they helped to shape our vision for VOTARY into a unique and beautiful brand. The work they did still continues to give us value every day."*

## The role of One Voice in producing a consistent and engaging, but flexible, tone of voice.

### 1. Clear thinking creates clear writing

The process of developing a voice for your brand shines a light on what your competitors are (and aren't) doing. It also reveals what's most important to communicate to your customers.

### 2. Instructing rather than restricting

The levels method allows your writers to understand the building blocks of your voice and how to adapt it. Guidelines should encourage creative copy while keeping consistency and the brand front of mind.

### 3. Creating a contract between brand leaders and writers

If you're bringing in any kind of outside writer, you need to know they can quickly pick up your voice. Our guidelines are intended to provide a crucial brief and feedback framework that eliminates 'copy-tennis'.

## Speak to us about creating a powerful Voice

We work with national and global brands in the luxury and ultra-luxury sector, helping them connect with their customers using a differentiating, consistent, and engaging voice.

We have developed our own proven methodology which has led to more efficient, effective writing teams without the need for more writers. More than this, it has produced teams who are aligned and committed to their company's guiding Vision.

To learn more, talk to our Senior Partner, [Chris West](#).



Verbal Identity is a strategic consultancy specialising in helping ambitious CEOs and leaders of premium, luxury, and ultra-luxury brands define, align and grow their company.