

ARTICLE 03

From Blank Page to Bigger Rooms

What building real brands has taught us about strategy, execution and the work that happens after the launch

Alesinloye Olawale

Founder & CEO, Eikon Brand Strategists

October 2026 · 11-minute read

 eikonbrand.com

01

Why we share the mess

Eikon Brand Strategists opened its doors in February 2026, but the firm is the product of a much longer journey. It is the result of what I call the Underground Work: years of refining knowledge in design, print and strategy, and refusing to settle for anything less than uncompromising excellence.

Building it took more than a vision. It took thick skin, a stubborn obsession with quality, mentors and supporters who pushed me to begin, and, I believe, the favour of God at every stage of the planning. We started with a clear ambition. We are not here to participate; we are here to lead. Africa is our immediate canvas, and the world is our stage.

In our first months we have built brands from a blank page and rebuilt brands that had outgrown themselves. We have also made mistakes, found our blind spots and changed how we work as a result.

Most agency case studies show only the finished work: a confident logo reveal, a set of polished mock-ups and a line about the client being delighted. That is understandable. It is also not very useful to a founder trying to decide how to approach their own brand.

So this article does something different. It shares how we diagnose a brand before prescribing anything, walks through two real engagements in some detail, and is honest about the part of brand building that rarely makes it into a portfolio: the execution, the communication and what happens after the handover. That is where brands are actually made or lost.

02

Diagnosis before prescription

Most brands do not have a marketing problem. They have a clarity problem.

Almost every founder we sit across from says some version of the same thing: “We know we need to fix our brand. We’re just not sure what fixing it actually means.”

That confusion is not their fault. It is the industry’s. Agencies sell branding as if it were one thing, with one deliverable, one price and one process. In reality, a startup with no identity and a ten-year-old company with a diluted one are not solving the same problem. Neither is a founder who needs to be seen and a founder who first needs to be understood.

So we built Eikon around five distinct offers. Not five upsells, but five diagnoses for five different stages a brand can be in.

1. Brand Authority Audit: the diagnostic. This is where almost every serious engagement begins. Before we touch a single design element, we look honestly at the gap between what a brand claims and what people actually experience: clients, staff and the wider market. Most

organisations do not know the gap exists until it costs them something, such as a client who quietly walks, an investor who hesitates or a hire who chooses a competitor. The audit finds it while it is still cheap to fix.

2. Complete Brand System: the full architecture. Our flagship and the deepest work we do. Strategy, identity and implementation built as one connected system, rather than three projects handed to three vendors who have never spoken to each other. It suits organisations building from zero, and just as often those whose current brand was never actually designed. It simply accumulated, one decision at a time, until nothing lined up.

3. Brand Identity System: the look and voice. For organisations that already know who they are strategically but do not yet look or sound like it. Logo, colour, typography and tone of voice, every asset built on the strategy underneath rather than picked because it looked nice on a mood board.

4. Brand Stewardship: the ongoing partnership. A brand does not stay consistent by accident, especially once more people start creating in its name: new hires, new agencies, new platforms, new campaigns. This monthly retainer provides creative direction, governance and support that protects what was built, instead of letting it erode one well-meaning but off-brand decision at a time.

5. PR Framework: the visibility layer. Strategy and identity mean little if nobody hears about them. This is how we structure the way a brand shows up in public: press, positioning and, above all, the story other people repeat about you when you are not in the room. That story is either working for you or against you. There is no neutral option.

The point of this structure is simple. The right treatment depends on the right diagnosis, and a client should never pay for the full architecture when what they need is an audit, or settle for a new logo when what they need is a system.

03

Case study: Gemma's Garden

In February, Gemma's Garden did not exist. Today it is a membership-driven lifestyle destination in Abuja: a café, a workspace, a garden and a private lounge in one ecosystem.

The brief. It was never "design us a logo." The real brief was to build a brand for a space where work, leisure and social life share a room without competing with each other. That is a positioning problem before it is a design problem.

The strategy. One idea drove everything: designed belonging, not just experience. Gemma's Garden was never going to win by being the best café, the best co-working space or the best private club in the city. Its opportunity was the space between all three. Every audience we mapped valued depth over display, and that finding decided how loud the brand was allowed to be. The answer was: not very.

The logo. The mark is a water droplet on a leaf, forming the letter G. A droplet holds its shape through internal cohesion, the same tension that holds a community together while it moves. The point where drop meets leaf is life-giving contact, which is exactly what the space offers its members. Most guests will never consciously notice any of this. That is the point. The meaning works quietly, the way the space itself is meant to.

The system. We built typography, an earthy palette and a voice framework, and went further than most identity projects go, defining a scent and a sound for the space. Language mattered as much as visuals. A line like "Enjoy the best luxury lifestyle experience in Abuja" was crossed out because it could have belonged to any venue in the city. "Designed for focus. Built for living." made the cut because it could only belong to this one. Branding here became what you feel in the space, not just what you see on the sign.

The sub-brand. Inside Gemma's Garden sits CheChe's Cave, a private men's lounge with its own identity. We designed it as a narrative continuation of the main brand rather than a separate product, so that it feels distinct without feeling disconnected.

Gemma's Garden is now open in Abuja, built from a blank page through every late night it took to get there. The finished identity is what people see. The more useful lessons for any founder come from how it was built, which we return to below.

04

Case study: Barnksforte, when the mission outgrows the mark

Gemma's Garden was a brand built from nothing. Barnksforte Technologies Limited was the opposite challenge: a company whose work had grown far beyond the brand that represented it.

When the scale of your mission outgrows the boundary of your brand, evolution is not an option. It is an imperative.

The gap. Barnksforte came to us with an identity that positioned them as a standard software vendor. The reality on the ground was very different. The company manages critical digital identity infrastructure that it describes as powering more than 500 million users across Africa, supporting governments, securing citizen data and building trust at national scale. Their existing mark, a generic "BT" badge in cyan and charcoal with a heavy slab serif, looked like a local IT supplier. The mission had completely outgrown the mark.

The strategic shift. Before any design work, we redefined what the brand was for. Barnksforte was not in the business of selling tools. It was in the business of building trust at national scale. That moved the company's position from software vendor to sovereign infrastructure partner, and every visual decision that followed had to serve that position.

The visual engineering. We constructed a unified, shield-inspired monogram that merges the B with a hidden T in the negative space, symbolising security, structural resilience and national-grade data protection. The rigid slab type gave way to the cleaner Funnel Display, and the palette moved to an authoritative spectrum of cobalt and deep blue, colours chosen to reflect sovereignty and corporate governance.

Built for bigger rooms. A brand strategy has to do more than look good on paper. It has to scale across every operational touchpoint. We developed the identity for enterprise collateral, digital screens, secure badge systems, executive merchandise and the corporate fleet. Just as importantly, we designed the framework to travel, so it can carry Barnksforte from domestic government agencies to international, cross-border institutions without needing to be reinvented.

Same name. Bigger promise.

The result is a brand engineered to stand beside the leading governance and technology institutions on the continent. The new logo is the visible proof of the change. The real value sits in the strategy, the systemic alignment and the narrative underneath it.

05

The part most case studies skip

Here is something we learned building Gemma's Garden that no mock-up will ever show you: strategy is the easy 20%. The other 80% is where a brand is built or lost.

That 80% is execution. It is meetings, approvals, revisions, deadlines, handovers and the hundred small decisions made after the agency has left the room. It is also where we made our most useful mistakes.

Momentum is real, and so are slow stretches. Our first real breakthrough on Gemma's Garden came at 1am, on an impromptu call, because the momentum was too good to sleep on. Not every delay was that romantic. There were stretches when the pace dropped and we had to call ourselves out internally. More than once we turned up for a scheduled session and simply waited, because presence still counts when timing does not. Showing up, even when it is inconvenient, is part of how a client learns they can rely on you.

Silence looks exactly like absence. Then came the moment every service brand dreads. We were told it felt as though we had gone quiet and left the client alone. We had not. We were heads-down, producing. But from the outside, silence and absence look identical. The lesson was simple and it changed how we work: we now show visible progress before anyone has to ask for it. Work in progress shared early builds more trust than a perfect delivery that arrives after days of quiet.

A brand book is only as strong as the person running it. The trickiest lesson came after handover. We delivered a full collateral suite, zipped and clearly labelled. Weeks later, under

pressure to move faster, some materials were adjusted outside the brand system just to keep things moving. Nobody did anything wrong; they were solving the problem in front of them. But the brand began to drift. We stepped back in to realign it, and in doing so learned that a brand book is only as strong as someone's daily capacity to apply it.

That is why ongoing support is now built into every engagement we scope. For clients who want that support formalised, it is exactly what Brand Stewardship provides. Handing over files is not the same as handing over a brand. A brand needs an owner, every day, long after the launch.

06

Two ratios, one truth

People who follow our work sometimes ask how two of our ideas fit together. We say the visual is 5% of a brand and the strategy is 95%. We also say strategy is the easy 20% and execution is the other 80%. Which is it?

Both, because they measure different things.

The 95/5 principle is about where value comes from. The visual identity is the small, visible part that attracts attention. The strategy, systems and narrative underneath are what create equity, set price and earn loyalty.

The 20/80 reality is about where effort and risk sit inside that 95%. Thinking a strategy through and writing it down is demanding, but it is the more controllable part of the job. Living it, across every meeting, deadline, new hire and rushed decision, is where most of the effort goes and where most brands quietly fail.

Put together, the picture looks like this:

- **The visual 5%** earns attention. It must be excellent, because it is the first promise people see.
- **Strategy on paper** gives the brand its direction. It is essential, and it is the part you can finish.
- **Execution and stewardship** turn direction into reputation. This is the largest and least visible share of the work, and it never really ends.

The practical takeaway: do not judge an agency, or your own team, by the beauty of the launch deck. Judge them by what the brand looks like six months later, when the pressure is on and nobody from the agency is watching.

07

What we would tell any founder

If you are about to brief an agency, or take your own brand in hand, here is what our first engagements have taught us, condensed.

1. **Diagnose before you design.** Know which problem you actually have: no brand, a diluted brand, a strategy without an identity, or an identity without visibility. Each needs a different treatment.
2. **Strategy before design, or you are decorating a guess.** A logo chosen before the position is clear is a gamble, however good it looks.
3. **Your logo should carry a story you can defend in one sentence.** If you cannot explain why it looks the way it does, neither can your customers.
4. **Write your voice rules down.** "Sounds like us" is not a system. The words you use, the words you never use and examples of each are.
5. **Watch for the gap between brand and mission.** Growth keeps reopening it. When your work outgrows your mark, as Barnksforte's did, evolve deliberately rather than patching.
6. **Ask for visible progress.** From your agency and from your own team. In a creative process, silence is expensive.
7. **Plan for the day after handover.** A brand book is a start, but without daily ownership it drifts. Decide now who owns the brand and what support they will have.

Brands are not made at the launch event. They are made on the ordinary Tuesday afterwards, when someone under pressure decides whether to follow the system or work around it.

That is the work we exist to do. Not only to make brands that look good on the day they are revealed, but to build brands that are still standing, still coherent and still growing in the bigger rooms they were designed for.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alesinloye Olawale is the Founder and CEO of Eikon Brand Strategists, a full-service branding and strategy firm based in Abuja, Nigeria. Eikon helps organisations move from market players to market makers through strategy, identity and long-term brand stewardship. Start a conversation at eikonbrand.com.

Authority Is Not Given. It's Engineered.