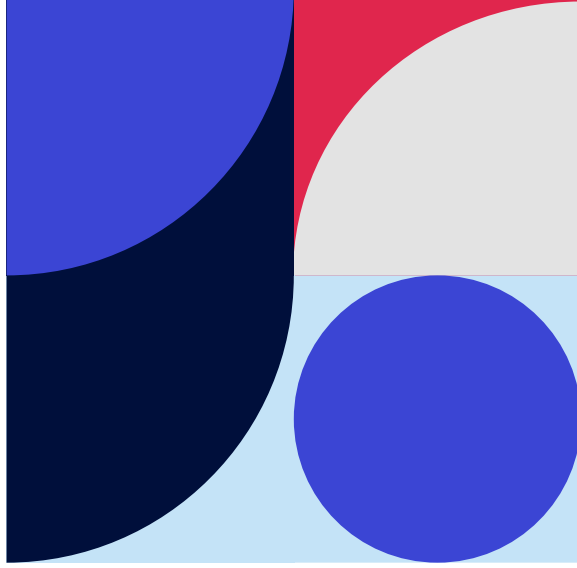


G5 MarTech Series | Part 5

The Human Element of Multifamily Marketing



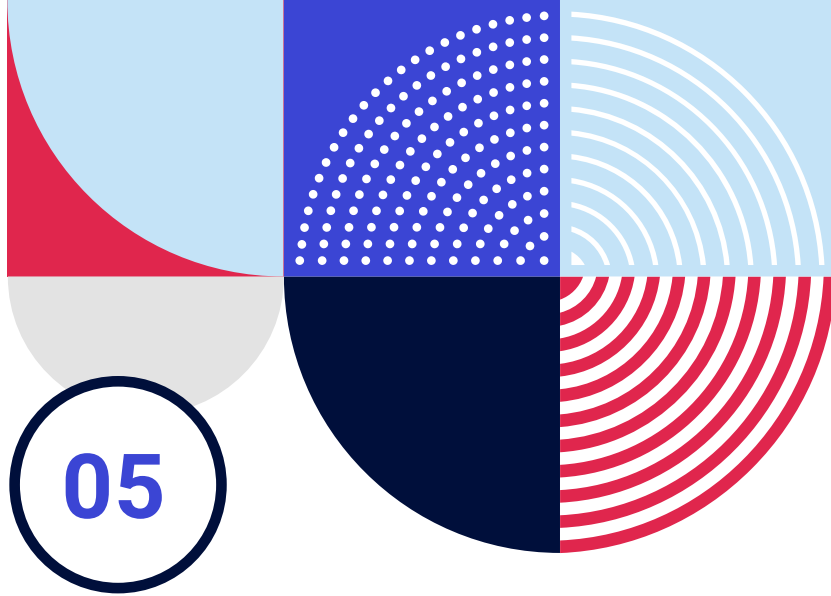


Introduction

Welcome to the final report in the G5 MarTech Series! Throughout the series we've encouraged you to be authentic through your property's online experience, be agile in adopting digital trends, be savvy with best-in-class technology partnerships, be grounded in data science, and now, finally, to be creative with branding and user experience (UX).

Baked into branding and UX is an essential life lesson: make it simple, be genuine, and follow through on what you say you believe in. We know that excellent branding supports intuitive UX and together they make researching renters feel "I want to live there."

Feeling inspired to get more out of this report? [Check out our Brand and User Experience Workbook.](#)



Brand + User Experience

A well-built brand that is elevated by cutting-edge design is not only art, but science, too. Let's unpack how these left and right brain worlds meet by diving into the basics of branding, brand discovery, brand identity, and how this all relates to performance-centric design. Finally, we'll uncover branding's responsibility in humanizing your digital presence.



Branding: The Customer Promise

Branding and design are what connect people to products and services. We are innately drawn to brands that reflect our lifestyle preferences or the lifestyle we want to portray. Without good branding or design, industry competitors are indistinguishable from one another — or worse, unmemorable. In short, your brand conveys everything that sets your property apart from the competition.

Brands are composed of two things. First, visual elements or the things we see, including logos, color palette, graphics, photograph/image style, and typography. Second, the verbal elements or the things we say and

write, including tone, voice, brand lexicon, and overall value proposition. These elements are powerful, but let's clear something up. Your brand elements support your brand identity collectively, but alone they are not your brand.

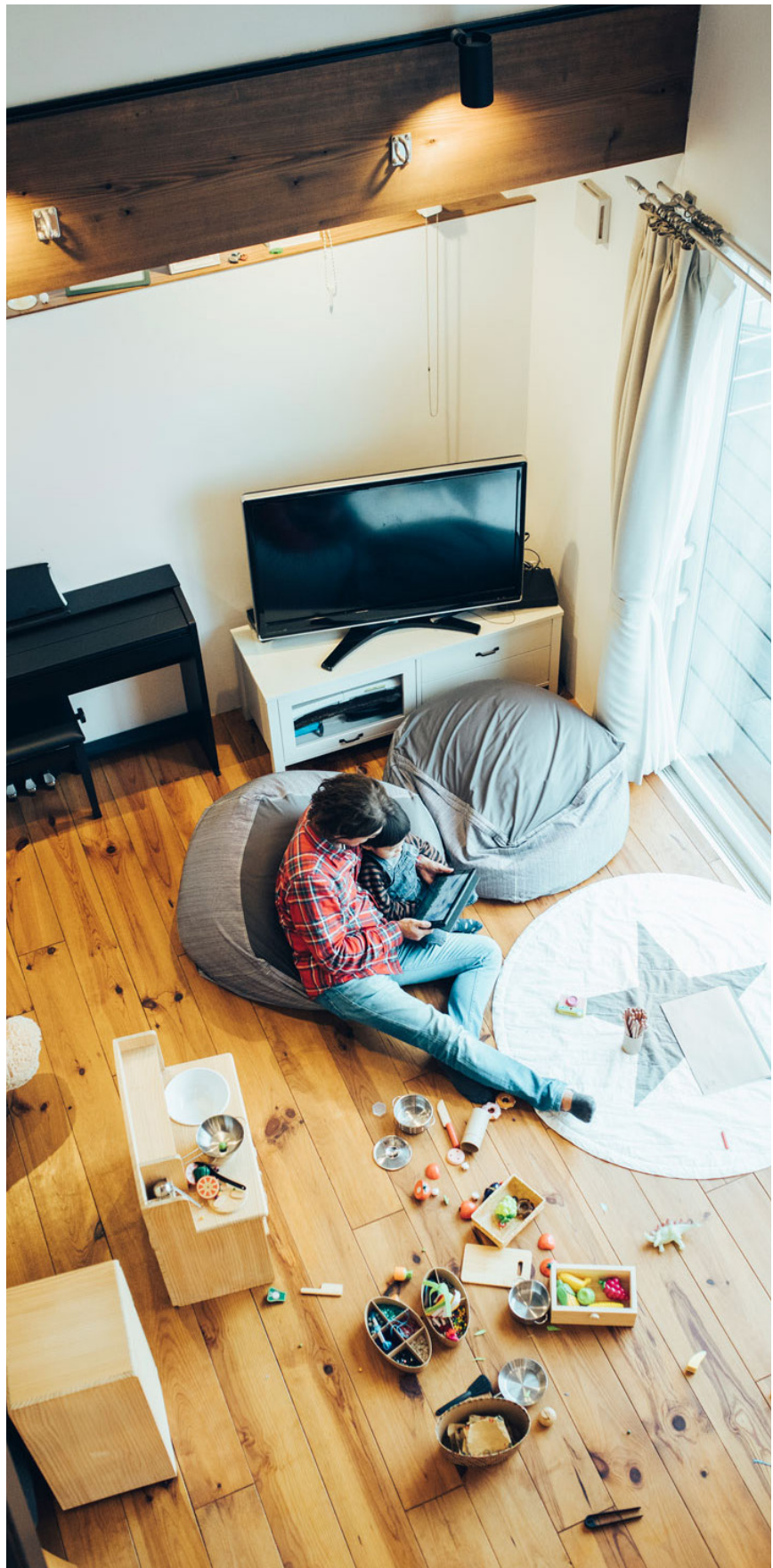
A well-built brand leverages brand elements to set overall expectations for customer experience. Think about it, when you walk into a Starbucks — anywhere in the world — you know what to expect. Everything from the similarly structured menu, the mermaid logo, product flavor, green aprons, how the barista greets you, how you order your latte — “grande” versus

a medium or 16 oz — and the look and feel of the shop decor. There is consistency in the customer experience. The same goes for shopping at Target, eating a Snickers, flying Southwest, or sleeping at a Marriott. This isn't to say branding is only important to national chains — the internet amplifies brand voices of all sizes.

Your brand identity is the promise you make to customers through your values, ethos, and how you communicate about your property. Let's consider Southwest Airlines as an example. They're fun, quirky, and from their can't-select-your-seats-beforehand policy, we know they're

not afraid to be different. Overall, they make many of us think of a relaxed, joy-based flight experience. For real, they even make the security speech fun. When you think of their brand, the first thing you probably think of is the experience, not their logo, their brand elements, or their most recent Twitter post. Do they use a bright, playful color palette, and reinforce their brand identity? Absolutely! Are their posts engaging and playful? You bet. They craft an easy-to-distinguish, authentic brand experience for their customers.

In order to live up to their customer promise, brands must be genuine and authentic. Customers are savvy. It is a massive mistake for brands to create personas and customer experiences that are not representative of their ethos, products, and services. Your customers might not be able to point their finger to which part of a company's branding isn't quite right — but they'll probably vote with their wallet somewhere that feels trustworthy. These sometimes hard to articulate branding elements work on a subconscious level and when done right are the hallmarks of a well-built brand. Now, let's translate what we learned from coffee, and airlines, to multifamily housing.





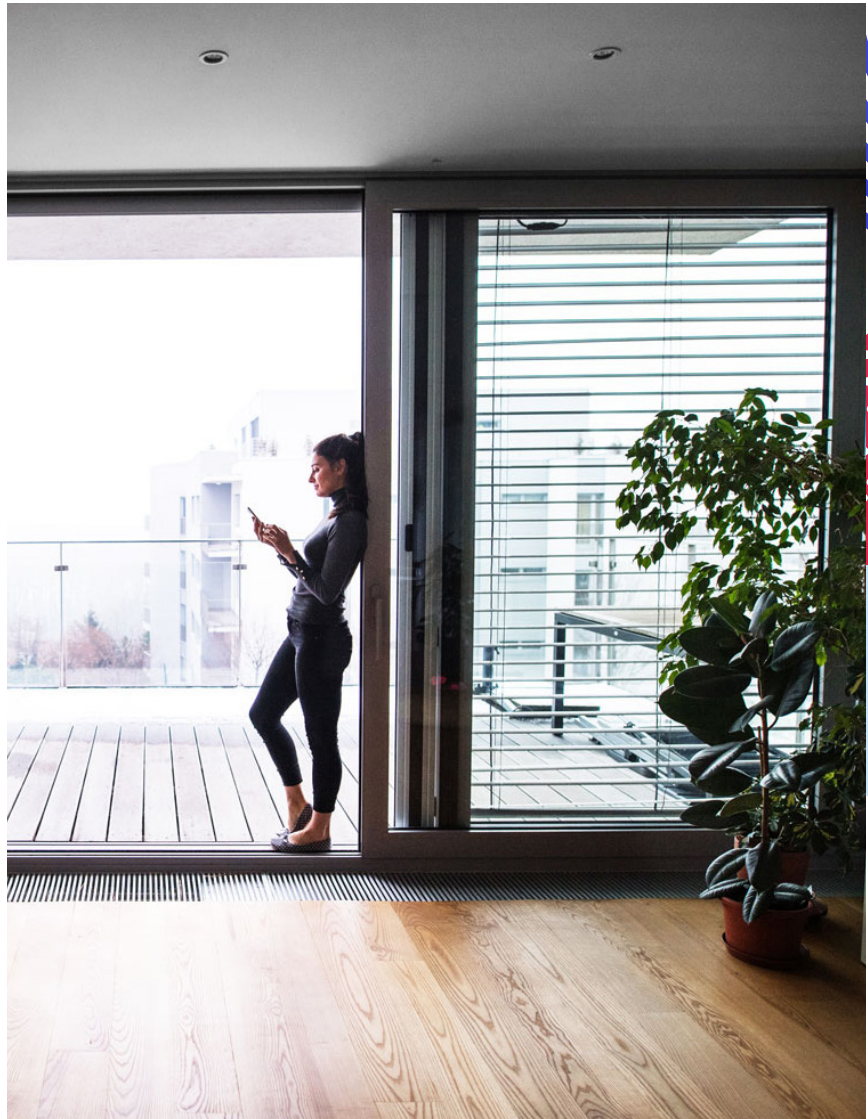
Multifamily Brand Basics

Multifamily brands must strike a balance between visual elements and voice. Of course, property class may change how you approach branding. Class C properties perhaps having a lighter approach to branding, and Class A properties having all of the bells and whistles. This may seem a little obvious, but Class A property renters expect a unique, boutique experience that they can't get anywhere else. A fully developed brand will take into consideration the target renters, their preferred amenities, and craft a compelling narrative which shares what each property brings to the table.

A focus on high-quality, up-to-date photography is essential. Photographs of staged spaces, with trendy decor, are more impactful than empty rooms. It allows renters to envision the life they could be enjoying at your property. Photos are critical as renters prefer to learn about your property online prior to reaching out. Your brand guidelines should include the look and feel for photography treatment. Bright, airy, color-accurate images tend to show off a property best.

PRO TIP

Home is the new office. More people are working from home than ever before, so include a staged work from home area — even in smaller spaces like studios. If your property has reservable work spaces, be sure to showcase high-quality photos of those too. This shows future renters that your property will support their home and professional needs.



Discovery

We aren't talking about the channel that shows orcas leaping from ultra-marine blue waters, or penguins shuffling along ice shelves, but something a little closer to how lawyers prepare before a case goes to trial. Discovery in a legal context is a fact-finding mission involving research, interviews, events, and facts to craft a narrative.

Brand discovery is similar, in the sense that it's a process that requires information and context intersecting to provide direction. Along the brand discovery journey, companies ask themselves who they are, who they serve, and what value they offer customers. While some of these soul searching questions could be summer-camp-esque fun: "If your brand was a car, what would it be and why?" Some may be more serious: "What unique value do you provide your customers?" Of course, most brands have given significant thought to their unique value proposition, and some of this information can seem so ingrained that it doesn't rise to the surface as important. But, thoughtful questioning can bring some of these key foundational "brand truths" to the surface.

Then, just like lawyers, brands choose how to position their narrative. This process builds brand authenticity, which is essential to building trust with renters. Who we say we are via our branding, design, and communications must ring true. Violating brand authenticity, or presenting your brand as something it is not, dimin-

ishes the trust you've fought so hard to gain. Positioning allows brands to take a stake within their industry on who they are, and why that matters. From there, they can dig into developing their voice, tone, and style to communicate in a way that captures both the essence of their brand and their renters' attention.



BRAND DISCOVERY

At G5, we take the time to make sure your online presence reflects your on-the-ground reality. During the brand discovery process, we ask straightforward questions like, "What is your unique value proposition?" But, we also turn these well-known notions upside-down and look at them through another lens, by asking things like, "Why do your renters say they selected your property over a competitor?" Or, "If your property was a car what kind of car would it be?" Over the course of a few dozen questions, we uncover the key ways to position your brand and messaging.





Brand Purpose

UX and branding have moved beyond the days of simply making something beautiful, to making it helpful to our customers' lives. Certainly, it's hard to split brand discovery and brand purpose into separate sections as they're deeply intertwined. However, for the purpose of exploring what makes branding and UX a powerful team, this kind of nuanced discussion is essential.

Brand discovery ensures your brand is built from the ground up to be genuine and authentic. Brand purpose is the reason your brand and business exist beyond making money (yes, of course we know, businesses need money!). Determining your "why" can help your property stand out, and align with renters' needs to deliver a top-notch experience.

Your property is providing a basic human need for your renters. They want to be assured that they'll be able to answer all caps "YES!!!" to questions like, "Will I be happy there? Will I feel safe there? Does living there align with the lifestyle and quality of life I'm seeking?"

By aligning your brand's purpose with the ultimate non-budget and monetary-based pieces of your renters' decision-making process, you ensure you connect with the needs of your customers.

Brand purpose can, of course, go farther. Millennials and Gen Z expect brands to be built on company ethos. Consider starting at the local level. Perhaps your business can donate to local charities, or your staff

members can volunteer at non-profits within your community. Larger scale companies like REI and Patagonia put their money where their branding-mouths are: REI turned away from the biggest traditional shopping day of the year, and instead encouraged their consumers to #optoutside. Patagonia's eco-friendly focus on creating sustainable products extends to buying property, in Patagonia, to establish protected parklands. Moves like these tell consumers where your brand stands. While it's great to look toward large companies to see the potential of a brand's purpose and the impacts, efforts like these can start small as long as they're tied to and grounded in your property's values.

User Experience + Performance-Centric Design

Conversion-focused UX is central to a performance-centric design ethos. Consumers are spending more time online and if your online presence doesn't put your brand's best foot forward, you can be sure another brand is on their A-game online.

Performance-centric design is grounded in researched and tested best practices. In addition to visually-appealing websites, they must be proven-to-convert tools that connect with renter needs to move your business forward.

When design and UX intersect with ease, website users follow a well crafted proven-to-convert, single call-to-action (CTA) pathway. Creating a clear path for your users, balances what they want (pricing) with what you want (conversion). A single call-to-action pathway removes decision paralysis and creates frictionless UX. For example, we know on multi-family websites the floor plan page is the most highly-trafficked page after the home page. When your audience lands on your home page — as they are prone to do with all your great SEO and digital advertising efforts — your website should

75%

**of consumers judge your credibility
based on website aesthetics.**

— Entrepreneur

38%

**of website visitors leave if the website
content doesn't look appealing.**

— 99 Firms



guide them to the information they need to make a decision. Then, once their need is met, welcome them to convert with a single, clear CTA. Based on website data, we know this information should be the first CTA, on a CTA pathway that is both streamlined and intuitive.

By rewarding the prospective renters with the content they are seeking — high-quality visuals of the floor plan types — you create an intuitive user experience. Photo galleries, features, and amenities are the next most highly sought out information. An easy-to-navigate path between these pages is likely to engage searchers longer, and increase lead quality by allowing them to self-qualify.

Post-Click Experience

Websites are in a unique position. They have already courted your prospect and won the first post-click moment. What you do from there determines the ultimate outcome: winning or losing the renter.

Digital marketing revolves around UX. Of course there are best practices to follow, but there are also tradeoffs. Let's consider website speed through the context of everyone's favorite deal-sleuthing space, Craigslist. If you need to buy anything — from used tires, to a kayak — Craigslist has your back. Craigslist is a stripped-down,





barebones website hyper-focused on speed. Is it fast? Absolutely. Is it beautiful...ehhh. Do we love it? Yes. According to [Business Insider, Craigslist is one of the top 20 websites in the United States](#), generating over \$1 billion in revenue. Clearly they do an excellent job of meeting the needs and expectations of their customers.

While Craigslist is great, your renters are probably looking for a different experience. For larger decisions, like where you're going to live, renters accept an extra second of page load time here and there to see high-quality images, check out property amenities, and envision their life at your property (admittedly, how they'd arrange their furniture). Essentially, accessing the information on your website adds value and increases conversion metrics, including phone calls and form fills. This is a customer satisfying sandwich of branding, performance-first design, and user experience.

But keep in mind, renters' attention isn't free. They expect a return on their time investment. To keep renters' interest, your brand must answer their actual questions, visually share your brand's story, emotionally connect, and make it easy for them to get in touch with you via website form submission or phone call. Bottom line, you need to make them feel and think, "I want to live there!" to earn their next moment.

PERFORMANCE-CENTRIC DESIGN

The cornerstone of G5 brand development is performance-centric design — meaning we build brands with the ultimate goal in mind: conversion. Our creative is grounded in data-driven metrics. We don't build boring brands that won't differentiate you from the competition. Your brand allows your property to attract and retain attention — which is a big deal in today's digitally-distracted culture. Portfolio-minded design demands a unique set of tools and capabilities specific to your business, like multi-location driven SEO strategies, portfolio-wide asset management, multi-user CMS permissions, and expert domain strategies. G5 is shaking this area up, with best-in-class approaches to showcase nearby properties dynamically using proximity, cross-selling sister properties within the portfolio using dynamic maps, and visually highlighting key neighborhood aspects to support the decision-making process.



Website Accessibility

The dance between branding, design, and technology isn't as easy as it sounds. Websites also need to meet basic accessibility requirements — and branding allows us to do it with memorable experiences and pizzazz. The best resource, and most widely accepted standards for website accessibility are the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1](#). These standards provide structure for developing websites that accommodate users who rely on assistive devices, adding a layer of usability to your website and improving the experience for all users. This attention to user experience makes your website stand out from the competition, and shows renters you care. As an added bonus, you'll reach a wider audience as nearly 20% of the population has a disability.

Not to mention that the risk of website accessibility lawsuits is increasing. In 2020 alone, there were 3,500 digital accessibility lawsuits filed in the U.S. Even more worrisome is that an estimated 250,000 legal demand letters were sent to businesses last year requiring that companies comply with WCAG standards or pay “settlements” to certain law firms. The next version of WCAG is expected to arrive this year, and this new version will likely spark another increase in the quantity of lawsuits hitting multifamily



WCAG

At G5 we've been launching WCAG compliant websites since 2019, and all websites now launch at WCAG 2.1. We know compliance is a moving target, which is why we believe in on-going website compliance audits to meet up-to-date accessibility standards.



Visual Brand Expression

Performance centric-design, user experience and a high-converting online experience are grounded in design fundamentals. We know we said we were focusing on performance-centric design, so you might be wondering how “pretty brand elements” impact the bottom line. Simply put, we are visually dominant. Designers hold the power to use typography, photography, and color to grab attention and guide the audience on the path to conversion. In essence, positive brand and user experiences lead to positive business results. Your brand must be deserving of your future renters’ most finite resources: time and undivided attention.

Typography

Did you ever write coded letters to your elementary school BFF in the Wingdings font? Asking for a friend...While a coded font might work well for top-secret-fourth-grade communications, it’s a poor way to engage with your customers. Many brands choose two or three fonts to give them some variety, while also allowing for consistency. Here are a few things you need to know about what the four basic groups of font choices say about your brand and business.

01 Serif

A serif is the small stroke found at the end of the tops and bottoms of letters. Serifs have been touted to improve readability for large blocks of text when printed, which is why they are popular with newspapers and books. Serif typefaces are perceived as classic and traditional due to their association with printed texts. If you want to give your brand a high-end, editorial feel, they can be a great option. Times Roman, Palatino, and Bodoni are a few examples of popular serif fonts.

02 Sans Serif

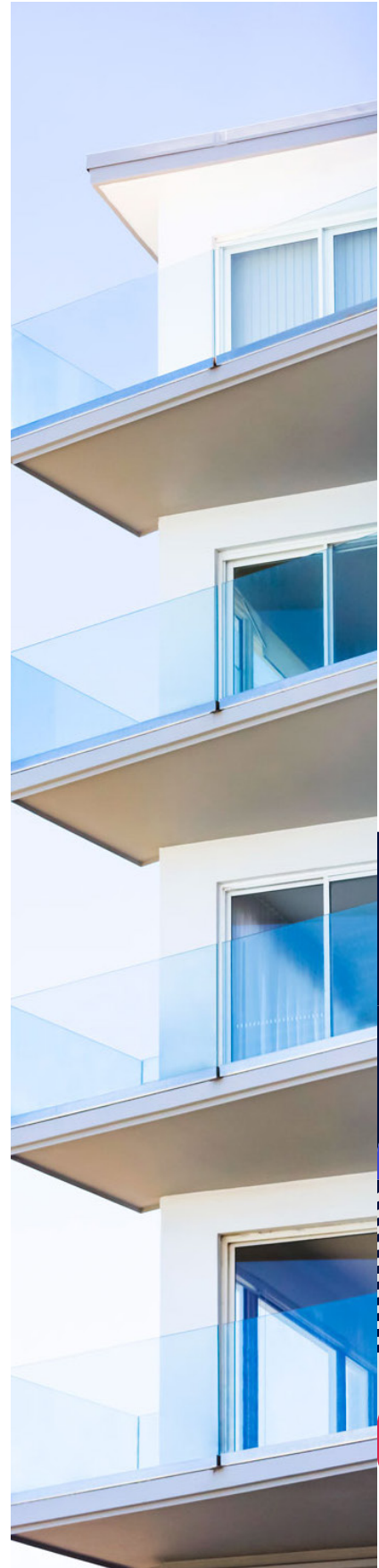
Sans comes from French and means without, so a sans serif typeface is a font without serifs (aka the little hats and shoes that fonts like Times Roman wear on the tops and bottoms of letters). Sans serif fonts are more minimalistic, and have become quite popular to use on computer screens, or lower-resolution displays. These sleek typefaces are a great choice for businesses that are forward-thinking, innovative, and creative. Helvetica, Arial, and Roboto are all popular sans serif fonts.

03 Scripts

Script typefaces are meant to mimic handwriting. They are fluid letterforms that join letters together like cursive. Script typefaces are more nuanced when it comes to branding. There are several styles, ranging from more formal to artistic. More traditional script typefaces are often used for invitations and denote luxury or elegance. Casual looking script typefaces are often whimsical, as if recently painted with a wet brush, garnering a more informal and artistic feel. Script fonts have become more popular lately and used appropriately — like the Instagram or Pinterest logos — can be a modern branding element, too. Lucida Script, Pacifico, and Allura are all examples of script typography.

04 Decorative

As the name suggests, decorative fonts are used for decorative purposes. Think of fonts you may see around Halloween which appear to be oozing, or a winter-inspired font using snowflakes to dot the i's. These fonts should be used sparingly, and aren't a good option for body text. Decorative fonts are often perceived as stylized, distinctive, and dramatic. Paint Drops and Confetti are examples of decorative typography.





Photography

Branded photography speaks volumes. As they say, a photo is worth a thousand words. But, did you know when people read or hear information, they generally only remember about 10% of that information three days later? But, [if a relevant image is paired with the same information, people retain about 65%](#) of the information three days later. Our eyes are a bossy sense, and ensuring that your branded photography is edited with a similar look and feel is essential for brand cohesion. In fact, consistent brand presentation across all platforms [increases revenue by up to 23%](#). Here are three photography style options and a few things to think about when deciding if they are right for your brand:

01 Black and White

Some of the most influential, iconic, and historically-significant photographs were shot on black and white 35mm film. It brings photography back to the basics and speaks in a classic and timeless visual voice. Black and white photographs look best when they have the full value range from deep shadows to white highlights.

PRO TIP

To get the most from black and white photography, it isn't enough to turn a color photo into black and white, be sure to adjust the contrast slider to make the image pop.

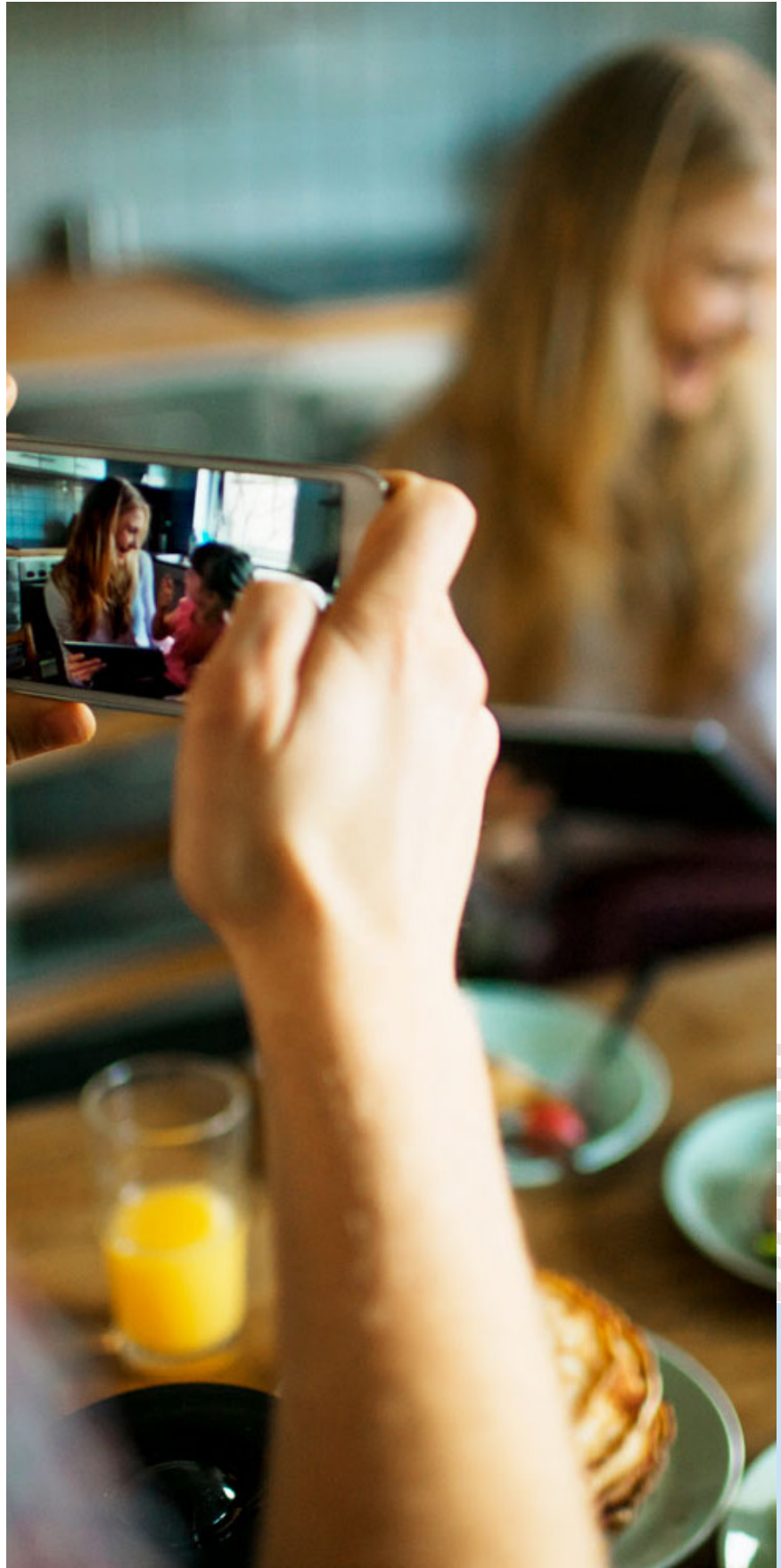


02 Desaturated Tones

From Instagram filters to branded content, faded, vintage, warm-toned images are trendy. We would argue that these images will look dated sooner rather than later. (Hello photoshopped black and white photos with a pop of bold color from the early 2000's.) Your property's photography selection all depends on the longevity of your photography needs. If you usually shake things up and create new branded images each year, then it's not a big deal. If you tend to repurpose images for a few years, this might not be the best photo-style for your property. A desaturated tone isn't the best choice to show things where color accuracy matters, but if used properly they can create a calm feeling.

03 Clean

Clean photos are light, bright, airy, natural photographs edited in a color-accurate fashion. These may be photographed using natural lighting — or strobes set to imitate natural light — but shouldn't feel clinical or like a studio. These images are the most popular, and tend to be the most dynamic. Their color-accuracy ensures your prospects know exactly what the property looks like inside and out. This style will age well, and tends to feel active and expressive.



Color Theory Basics

According to color researchers, when users leave a website — to never return — it's due to poor color choices and bad design choices [52% of the time](#). Our understanding and reaction to color is influenced in two main ways. It's part natural association — the grass is green, and the sky is blue — and part psychology or cultural association — think about how pink and blue are gendered, particularly with young children.

Color can often be overlooked, but it has the power to [increase brand recognition by 80%](#). So, let's consider each color and what it can mean to consumers in North America.

● Red

Red is the color of firetrucks and alarms. It's an attention-grabbing, high-energy, power color. Positive connotations with red include: power, courage, and excitement. While some negative connotations include anger or danger. What emotion red triggers generally depends on the context it's included within. When paired with black, it can appear moody versus when paired with white it can seem more 1950's classic — think Coca-Cola.

● Yellow

Yellow is the color of daffodils, sunshine, and rubber ducks. It is a warm, youthful color that is often used to grab attention. Positive associations with yellow include: optimism, confidence, self-esteem, and friendliness. Negative associations with yellow include: jaundice, fear, and cowardice. In general, the tone of the yellow tends to swap the negative or positive connotations with brighter yellows leaning more toward positive.



● Orange

Orange is a mix of red's power and yellow's playfulness creating something that is warm and motivating. It's a standout color that can bridge between different color themes and can even border on a warm brown-tone. It can conjure up thoughts of seasonality, warmth, vitality, humor, and youthfulness.

● Blue

Blue is one of the most popular colors among consumers. It's the color of fresh air, water, and often is attached to a notion of health and vitality, which is why so many health corporations use soft blue tones as a branded color. Blue can suggest feelings of trust, dependability, intelligence, serenity, and calm.

● Pink

Pink is a tint of red and often soothes rather than stimulates. It's a caring color which can be used to show happiness, warmth, or love. Pink can also be hopeful, consider the pink breast cancer ribbons. However, including too much pink, can be seen as exclusively-female or depending on usage and tone, childlike.

● Green

Green is the most common color in nature and is often associated with growth, both in plants and in financial wealth. As such, it's often in the branded materials of both eco-friendly companies as well as financial institutions. Green can be associated with health, money, wealth, renewal, and harmony.

● Purple

Purple once only a color for royalty, is often used to indicate luxury, loyalty, mystery, and magic. Purple is more commonly used as a secondary, or accent, color in many brand palettes.

● Black

Black is the color of night and denotes luxury, glamor, elegance, and sophistication. Black is a serious, reserved color, and is best used to show contrast with lighter colors. Too much black can cause it to be taken negatively and be associated with mourning.





○ White

White is the color of lab coats, freshly fallen snow, and traditional wedding dresses. It can be seen as a color of cleanliness, minimalism, and simplicity. Taken too far, white can make branded elements seem sterile. We often hear the term “white space.” In the art world the term for this is negative space, which is just a fancy way of saying blank space void of design elements. It’s important to note that white space doesn’t necessarily need to be white. Often white space could be a lighter color, the key term to keep in mind here is space, and not white. Giving our designs room to breathe on a page is important to their visual appeal.

● Brown

Brown is a serious earth tone. Brown is considered a pretty safe, and sometimes boring color. Brown does a great job of grounding or supporting other branded colors. It can connote warmth, reliability, and nature. While brown is a nice, warm-toned neutral color, it is worth noting that sometimes brown can conjure up an impression of dirtiness — which is appropriate for a park — but maybe not for a newly-renovated property.

Color Accessibility

Selecting the appropriate colors for your business is a complex decision. When doing so it’s important to remember that [8% of men and .5% of women are affected by color vision deficiency](#), sometimes called color blindness, and 99% of those impacted are affected by red-green color blindness. A fully saturated red-green palette, in addition to looking like holiday decor, will be difficult for them to see. Therefore, consider making one of the colors either darker or lighter to increase visibility and make sure your branded materials are accessible to all.

Be Creative to Be Competitive

In a competitive market, your marketing needs to rise to the challenge, connect with decision-ready renters and differentiate your property from your competitors. Historically, your property would be competing against other properties. Seems straightforward, what changed? As all of our lives are increasingly online, and increasingly digitally distracted, your property isn't just competing to stand out against other properties. Now you're competing for their attention against everything else: Instagram Reels, live-stream workouts, endless Zoom meetings...anything else in your internet browsing history. Consumers are strapped for time, which means your marketing needs to be creative, to reward researching renters for their attention investment.



Be Human:

Multifamily Brand + User Experience



User experience isn't a new concept in 2021, but UX demands a little more empathy today to cut through the virtual-world noise. So, think of it this way: human-focused design.

The mix of people turning to the internet — for answers, solutions, entertainment, social interactions, work, and school — has expanded in unprecedented ways. Not only is there more diversity in what we're doing online, but there is more diversity in who is online. Individuals of all ages and all levels of tech-savviness are getting a crash course on being their own at-home IT department.

Pre-pandemic it was easier to put off website or branding refreshes because a business could rely more on in-person exchanges. And, as we've all learned, you don't need to be in-person to add a personal touch. Branding and UX build the bridge for future renters and ensure that your property is as welcoming digitally, as it would be in-person.

Companies have a responsibility to craft easy, intuitive online experiences. To be blunt: The bar for branding, design, and UX just got a little higher, and we're here to help you clear it.

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