

PRACTICAL INSIGHTS

Why You Need a Brand Bible, According to a Historic Video Game Launch

Lessons from Bethesda and AKQA's release of Starfield



The historic release of Starfield would not have been possible without an intricately wrought “brand bible.” Bethesda



By Paul Barbagallo
DECEMBER 11, 2023



Turn raw social media metrics into strategies that drive impact. Learn how at [Social Media Week](#), this April 9–11 in NYC. [Register today to save 35% on your pass.](#)

On Sept. 6, the video game Starfield was officially released on Xbox and PC. It was the first new intellectual property developed by Bethesda Game Studios in 25 years.

Because the ambitious and lavishly produced role-playing game came from the mind of Todd Howard—the Bethesda game director and executive producer who led the creation of Fallout 3 and The Elder Scrolls series—there was feverish anticipation for it among diehard fans of his RPGs.

By Sept. 7, Starfield had exceeded 6 million players. It was Bethesda's biggest video game launch of all time.

wrought "brand bible."

As Bethesda and **AKQA** discovered, when companies conceive and launch new products from scratch, a well-articulated brand bible can help marketers and their partners make better decisions and stay aligned. Whether referred to as a bible or a "brand book," "brand compendium" or "brand guide," such a document can provide helpful guidance for how relevant stakeholders should interact with, talk about and ultimately activate your product in the market.

An effective brand bible isn't simply a style guide in Google Docs or a PowerPoint of acceptable fonts and color palates. Among other things, a brand bible must convey the product or brand's unique selling proposition, a detailed imagining of how customers will experience the product and brand and, most importantly, your company's "why" (i.e., why does this brand or product exist?).

What is **most** important to include in a 'brand bible' or internal guidance document?

- The elements that differentiate the brand or product from its competitors, peers and other industry members
- The company's strategic objective for introducing the brand or product
- The acceptable fonts, logos, colors to use when presenting the new brand or product to the market
- Principles to guide day-to-day activities across the business, from R&D to customer support to partner agencies
- An explanation of the customer or user experience that new brand or product aims to create

In an interview with Adweek, the teams at Bethesda Softworks, the publishing operations at Bethesda Game Studios, and Bethesda's long-time creative partner AKQA talk about the Starfield launch and the importance of their brand bible. What follows are their observations.





HOW GAMING MARKETERS INNOVATE TO REACH A CHANGING AUDIENCE

Ed Davis, AKQA's director of client services: We had to help people imagine what the game is like—this big open experience where players can do all these different things in space. So, some of what we included in the brand book was about the inspiration from the studio, and some was helping people see what the world is going to be like and look like. We created some animated shorts to help people see a slice of what it might be like in Starfield—whether you're going to go out and be a heroic space pilot, an explorer or a space criminal. You have to help people imagine this because you can't just say the game is an “open adventure in space.”

Matthew Clinkscales, senior director of brand marketing at Bethesda Softworks: We needed a brand bible because Starfield was such a new brand. With Skyrim, everyone knew what that game was—it's yourself versus a dragon. It was a pretty clean concept. With Starfield being a new IP and a gargantuan project, we wanted to understand, “what's the base-level elevator pitch for this game? What's the easiest way to tell someone about Starfield?”

Starfield – Official Live Action Trailer



ED: When a consumer sees any part of the brand marketing for Starfield—from the first trailer to when they boot up the game—we want it all to feel completely cohesive and connected. We wanted nothing to feel jarring or out of place.

MC: We had our brand bible for maybe two years before we put any public stuff out there. We all asked ourselves, “How do customers need to feel about the game? What does the game need to represent? How do we represent this publicly?” This was stuff we discussed a lot. I mean, maybe too much. But we wanted to lay the foundation and do it right.

ED: There are many people who touch these campaigns—lots of partners and lots of people inside the company. How do we make sure they're not just following a rule that says, “here's the padding around the logo,” but understanding the reason and philosophy that we've chosen these colors and this logo.

their own, which also stays true to the game itself because, in Starfield, you get to be what you want and do what you want to do. So, we wanted to leave a little bit for people to interpret for themselves, but with solid foundation.

What is ***most*** important to include in a 'brand bible' or internal guidance document?

- The elements that differentiate the brand or product from its competitors, peers and other industry members
- The company's strategic objective for introducing the brand or product
- The acceptable fonts, logos, colors to use when presenting the new brand or product to the market
- Principles to guide day-to-day activities across the business, from R&D to customer support to partner agencies
- An explanation of the customer or user experience that new brand or product aims to create

Erin Losi, vice president of global marketing and communications at Bethesda Softworks: A lot of what's in the [brand bible] is also, "how do we want people to feel when they consume the marketing material?" There are other agencies and partners that touch this product. This book helps us to go back to and check that we're still meeting the objectives of what we're creating. An important question we ask is, "Are we allowing people to feel what they want to feel, based on those initial guidelines we set out?"

ED: Our goal is to inspire the next generation of explorers—and that can be people literally going into space and people writing the next science fiction novel. With this brand book, we also want to inspire any marketer, designer, product manager or salesperson to say, "I feel like I've got the tone ... and I've got some guardrails to help me activate on that."





With their brand bible, Bethesda and AKQA wanted to inspire marketers the same way the game inspires users. Bethesda Softworks

AT: The important thing is that sometimes you just have to be done. You have to complete it and then release it so that it's not ever-changing stuff.

ED: The team got to have a lot of fun finding words like “great-hearted” to describe the brand attributes of Starfield. Another is “unapologetically optimistic.” It was so important that everything we were doing—from trailers, key art, concepts—had these ideas woven through it.



THE CULTURAL EVOLUTION OF GAMING

Brand bibles are more than touchy-feely mission and vision statements. They are practical guides for on-the-fly decision-making, they articulate the why and what’s at stake, and they help bring a brand and product to life. As marketers face myriad challenges, from budget constraints to staff turnover, those who can create and follow a brand bible will be better equipped to handle any problem or opportunity that might arise.





PAUL BARBAGALLO

Paul Barbagallo is Adweek's svp, executive editor of thought leadership and practical journalism.

RECOMMENDED ARTICLES



Brands Come in First at F1 Las Vegas Grand Prix

READ MORE



RELATED ARTICLES





GAMING NEWS

**Microsoft's Activision Blizzard Deal
Will Be a New Lure for Brands** 🔒

By [Stephen Lepitak](#)



ADS OF THE DAY

**Xbox Releases Epic Ad for Its New
Consoles as High-Stakes Holiday
Shopping Season Nears** 🔒

By [Sara Spary](#)





GAMING NEWS

The Sims Is More Relevant Than Ever as It Helps a New Generation Come of Age 🔒

By [Brittaney Kiefer](#)



C-SUITE

How Great CMOs Collaborate 🔒

By [Paul Barbagallo](#), [Jackie Cutrone](#)



RESOURCE LIBRARY

[View All](#)



**Do You Have the Insights to Identify
Customer Context?**

By [QUID](#)



**What Makes Premium Content
Premium?**

By [Effectv](#)





Why You're Struggling to Get Demand Gen Right

By [Convertr](#)



Better Align Your Channel Mix for Ecommerce Success

By [Bazaarvoice](#)

YOU MIGHT LIKE





Identity Is the Key to Marketing Magic
By [Tyler McDaniel, VP of Product Management, Epsilon](#)



CTV Is the Key to Rapid Growth for Small Businesses
By [Imani Clark, Director of Platform Experience, MNTN](#)



The Future of the Open Web Relies on Addressability.

By [Chris Feo](#), SVP, Sales & Partnerships, Experian



Make Your Customer Data More Accessible, Actionable and Addressable

By [Adam Soroca](#), Chief Product Officer, Magnite



RECOMMENDED FOR YOU



**Layoff Speculation Hits Paramount
Following CEO Memo**

By [Bill Bradley](#)



**Snickers' Latest Rookie Mistakes AR
Experience Celebrates the Super
Bowl**

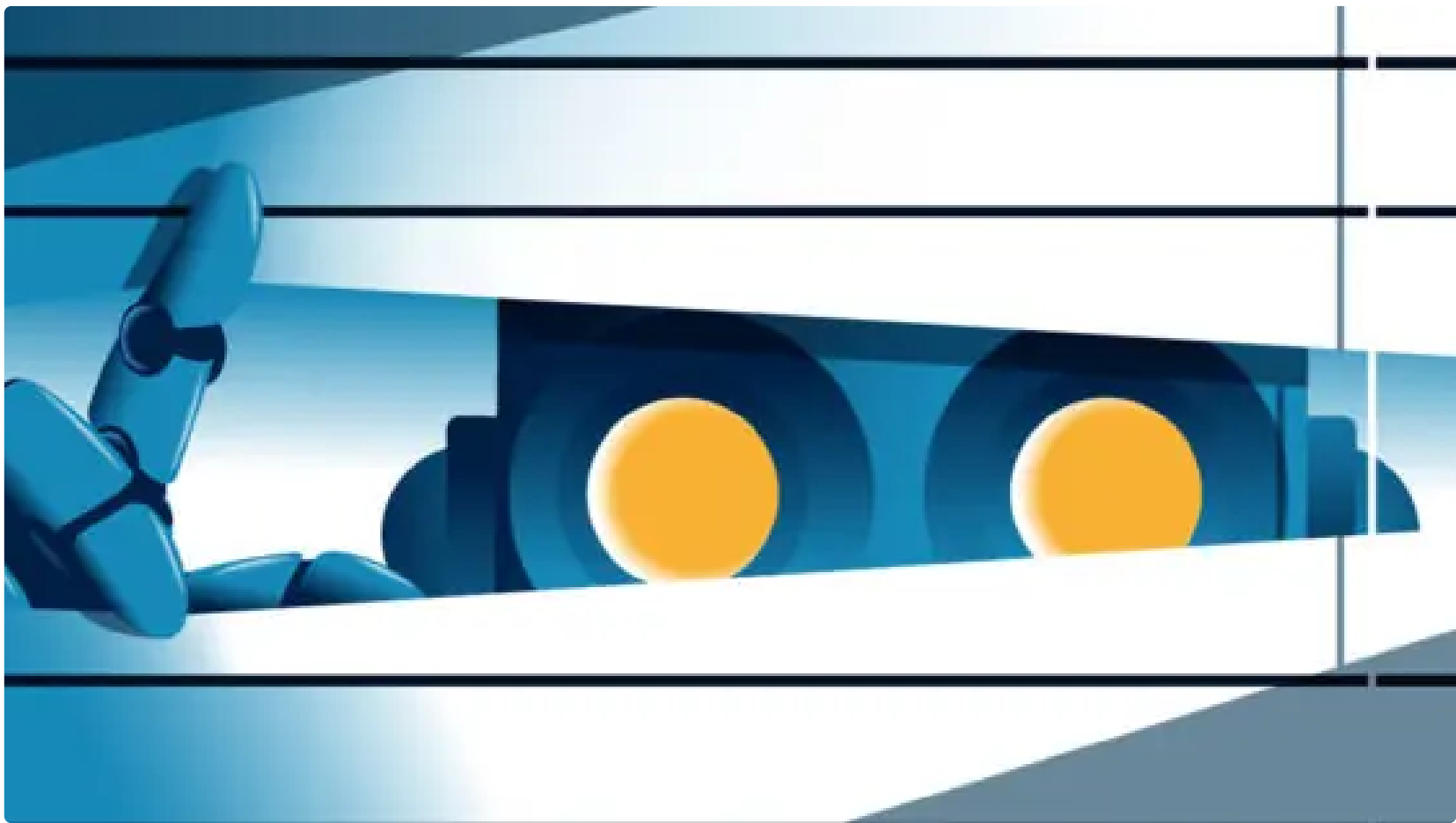
By [Brandy Shaul](#)





**Paramount Denies Any Nickelodeon
Super Bowl Ad Sales Struggle**

By [Mollie Cahillane](#)



**Marketers, Beware of Using ‘Digital
Focus Groups’ for Human Insights**

By [Brian Sheehan](#)



Adweek is the leading source of news and insight serving the brand marketing ecosystem.

ABOUT

- About Us
- Contact Us
- Media Kit
- Editorial Calendar
- Event Calendar
- Sponsor Content
- Jobs at Adweek

SUBSCRIPTIONS

- Subscription Options
- Digital App
- FAQs
- Newsletters
- Customer Service

EVENTS

- Awards
- Adweek Events
- Webinars
- On-Demand Webinars
- Trophies / Awards / Seals
- On-Demand Event Videos

PUBLICATIONS

- Adweek Blog Network
- Adweek Podcast Network
- RSS
- Back Issues
- Reprints / E-Prints

Do not sell my personal information Terms of Use Privacy Policy

