

KILL THEM WITH LOGIC

How to create messaging that
wins every argument

→ Your guide to turning stakeholder chaos into
strategic alignment



FOREWORD



Benedict Buckland
Managing Director, alan.



Compelling messaging is rich in metaphor, steeped in rhetorical techniques. Carefully crafted to evoke feeling and stimulate thought.

Such creative flair is of course vital – whether brand, product or divisional – but messaging is not a creative task. Not one to palm off to the content guy with the instruction to ‘translate the USPs into customer-facing language that fits our ToV’. Whilst this caricature is slightly facetious, it is representative of a problem that I witness in B2B marketing. Too often messaging is seen as a copywriting exercise rather than a critical strategic initiative.

The consequence of this misconception is that messaging becomes too inward facing, indulging the desires and biases of the brand rather than finding the space in the market to cut through and resonate with the target audience. This need to find space and resonate is exactly why messaging is strategic.

In this guide, we will set out how the priorities and essence of the brand must be reconciled with market dynamics, competitor positioning and the intellectual and emotional needs of the target audience. Through this prism of understanding, it becomes possible to develop messaging that is authentic, differentiated and relevant. The holy trinity of brand communication and the fundamentals of effective strategy.

While this framework will equip marketers with a tool to find audience-centric whitespace where their brand has licence to play, methodology alone will not deliver messaging that has the necessary transformative impact.

As Professor Michael Porter of Harvard Business School says ‘strategy is choosing what not to do’. Inherent in this notion is the need to say no. No to preconceived ideas, vested interests and individual priorities.

In every messaging project I’ve worked on, I have experienced the push from product teams to stick dogmatically to technical features, talk up the rational benefits, the heat from sales to counter competitor activity with mirror-image messaging and nerves about seeming ‘expensive’.

Responding to these pressures requires strong marketing leadership and the confidence to make difficult decisions. Force of personality and status in the organisation (no disrespect to the ‘content guy’) is part of the equation. However, more importantly, marketers need to be able to make a coherent, objective argument – based on empirical evidence, not internal politics – to justify their decisions and hush the naysayers.

Our messaging framework can’t guarantee aura and authority but will give you the toolkit to *kill them with logic*.

THE ALAN. MESSAGING FRAMEWORK



Chris Illman
Chief Strategy Officer, alan.

Messaging is not just what you say – it is how you frame value in the minds of your audience. Done well, it becomes your competitive edge: capturing attention, conveying meaning and driving relevance.

Too often, though, messaging collapses into a jumble of disconnected claims or internal priorities dressed up as audience insight. Avoiding that takes more than wordsmithing – it takes a process.

This guide sets out a proven three-step framework that connects audience needs, competitor dynamics and brand strengths. The aim is to help you cut through with messaging that is relevant, credible and distinctive.

Three steps to irrefutable messaging:

01

Discovery

Map your audience's needs, analyse competitor positioning and assess your brand's authority.

02

Strategy

Distil these insights into a unifying strategic territory and brand pillars.

03

Messaging

Translate that strategy into a structured framework with lead messages, supporting proof points and narratives that teams can actually use.

DISCOVERY

AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY

→ The most effective messaging lives at the intersection of:

01 Audience need – what people are really trying to solve or achieve

02 Competitor context – where others are conspicuously silent (or loud)

03 Brand truth – what you can uniquely offer

To bring clarity, we look at the challenge through these three lenses **(ACB)**. We start with the audience need, we then examine how competitors are responding (or failing to respond) and finally assess where the brand has the authority to lead. When all three align, you've found messaging territory that's relevant, credible and differentiated.

This structured approach makes it easier to identify the white space your brand can credibly and distinctively own.



PHASE ONE

AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

STEP 1

MAP THE AUDIENCE NEEDS



Map your audience's key needs – the recurring challenges, barriers or ambitions that shape their choices and behaviour.

A strong need is one that is:

Pressing

It causes friction or risk if not addressed.

Recognisable

The audience would agree this describes their world.

Actionable

It's something a brand can credibly respond to.

Tip

Weak needs are often too vague ('improved digital transformation') or too narrow ('a faster dashboard refresh rate'). Strong needs balance breadth with specificity, ('seamless, real-time data integration across multiple platforms').

Capture each need with a short descriptor (see example p.7). Keep them broad enough to cover the main themes, but specific enough to feel tangible and differentiated. Stay disciplined – no more than 10 priority needs.

Audience needs mapping



Here's how needs might map for a senior technology leader in financial services.

Each need is written as a tangible challenge, paired with a descriptor framing the strategic implication.



Throughout this guide, we'll illustrate each step using an example: the development of a proposition and messaging framework for a fictional global audit firm's tax compliance offering.

Audience need	Description
Advanced tech [AI]	Leveraging AI, automation and data insight to increase accuracy, reduce manual effort and stay ahead of regulatory change.
Global expertise and capabilities	Navigating complex, multi-jurisdictional compliance environments with confidence and consistency.
Client orientated	Expecting partners who understand business context, not just technical requirements and who shape solutions around it.
Responsiveness	Requiring rapid, informed support to meet deadlines, manage change, and address emerging risks.
Price	Demanding clear, predictable pricing that reflects value delivered and eliminates uncertainty.
Speed	Seeking faster delivery of accurate outputs to meet reporting deadlines and support agile decision-making.
Value added service	Looking for insight beyond execution – proactive guidance that identifies risks and opportunities early.
Dedication to GC&R excellence	Expecting precision, rigour and reliability in every element of compliance and reporting.
Integrated approach	Wanting seamless coordination across systems, jurisdictions and teams to reduce duplication and friction.

Research is the difference



Mapping should be underpinned by research. Without it, you're guessing – and guesswork kills credibility.

Strong insights rarely come from a single source. They emerge from layering perspectives, spotting patterns and probing beneath the obvious.

Robust, multi-sourced insight is what wins arguments. It's the difference between messaging that resonates and messaging that falls flat.

To build this evidence base, combine inputs such as:

Stakeholder
interviews



internal perspectives on the customer and market

Customer
interviews



open, tangential conversations that reveal underlying drivers

Analyst reports /
industry commentary



placing insights in a broader market context

Surveys /
research data



validating and quantifying themes

STEP 2

MAP AND SCORE NEEDS IN 3D

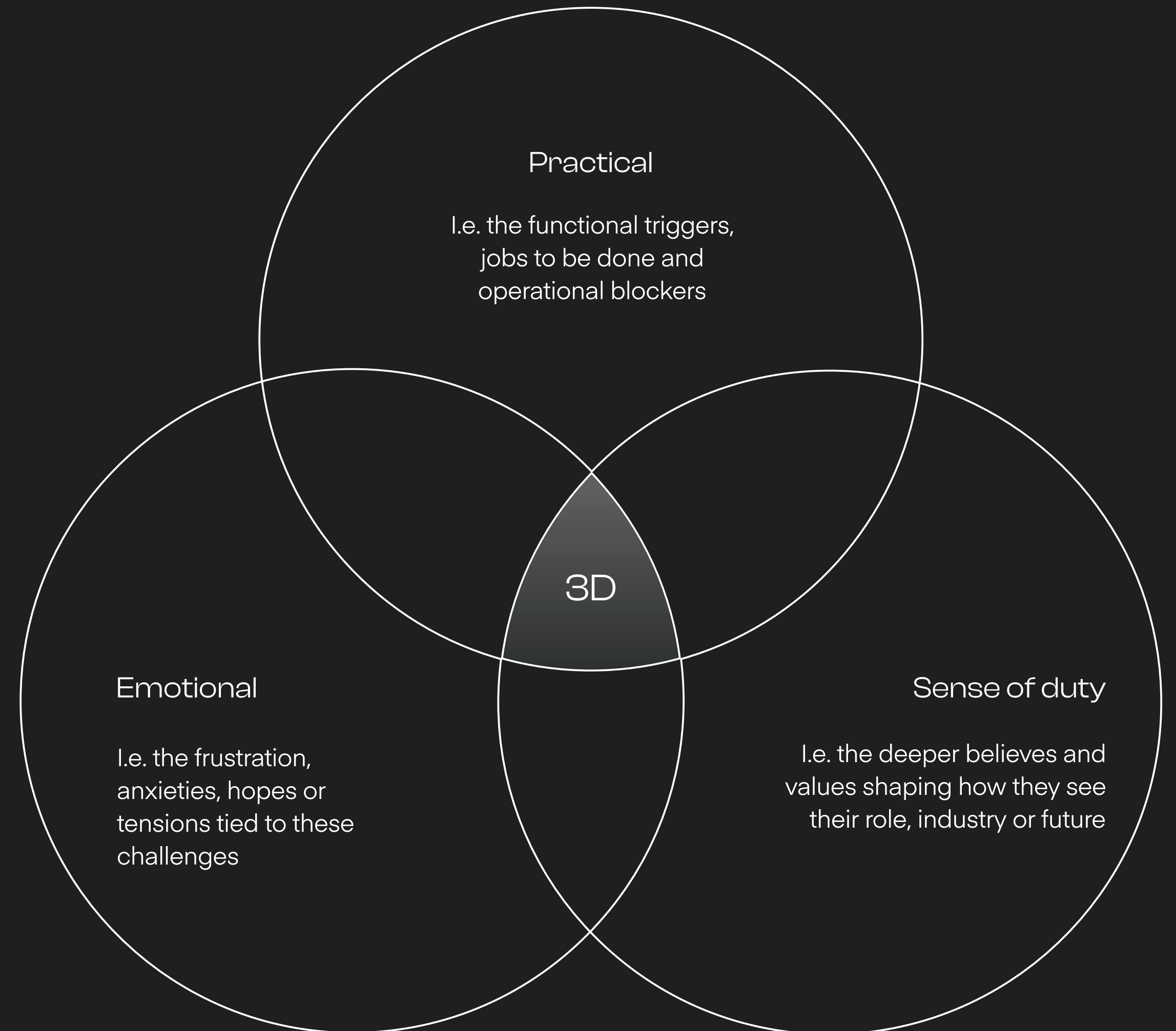
Most audience models stop at rational or emotional drivers – oversimplifying how people really behave. Decisions aren't made on reason or feeling alone; they're shaped by the interplay of function, emotion and values.

That's why we evaluate each need across three dimensions:

- 01 Practical** – the functional triggers, jobs to be done and operational blockers.
- 02 Emotional** – the frustrations, anxieties, hopes, or tensions tied to these challenges.
- 03 Sense of Duty** – the deeper beliefs and values shaping how they see their role, industry or future.

This builds on established behavioural thinking: rational drivers explain what people do, emotional drivers explain why they feel compelled, and value-based drivers explain why it matters. Together, they reveal the full context behind an audience need – making insights more robust and messaging far more resonant.

Your customer's
needs come in 3D...



3D mapping scoring

For each need, assign a score across three dimensions (1–10). Then average them to create an audience care-about score.

This 3D tool moves beyond surface-level issues to reveal the deeper human truths your messaging should revolve around – and shows which needs have the strongest narrative potential or may need reframing.

3D mapping scoring

Dimension	What we learned	Score [/10]
Practical	Clients expect advisors to understand their business context and pressures, not just deliver technical outputs. While many firms claim to be client-focused, execution often falls short – making genuine commercial empathy a differentiator.	7
Emotional	There’s a deep emotional driver around feeling understood and prioritised. Decision-makers want partners who make their lives easier, anticipate needs and remove friction – not add to their workload.	10
Sense of duty	Clients feel a professional obligation to choose partners who share their values of trust, transparency and accountability. Being client oriented isn’t just good service – it reflects the integrity expected in governance and compliance.	8



Illustrative example for a fictional global audit firm’s tax compliance offering

Culmination of audience analysis

By now, you've mapped your audience's needs across three dimensions – practical, emotional and sense of duty – to calculate an audience care-about score.

This score ranks which needs matter most, combining rational pressures with deeper motivations. The result is a clear, evidence-based hierarchy to guide competitor and brand analysis.

Audience needs mapping

Audience need	Practical	Emotional	Sense of duty	Care about score
Speed	9	10	8	9
Price	9	7	10	8.7
Global expertise and capabilities	8	7	10	8.3
Client orientated	7	10	8	8.3
Responsiveness	8	9	7	8
Dedication to GC&R excellence	9	6	9	8
Advanced tech	9	7	8	8
Value added service	7	8	7	7.3
Integrated approach	7	7	5	6.3



Illustrative example for a fictional global audit firm’s tax compliance offering



PHASE TWO

COMPETITOR ANALYSIS

MAPPING THE MARKET

The next step is to see how those needs show up in the market – and how competitors are, or aren't, meeting them. That's where the heatmap comes in.

Mapping competitor activity against audience needs creates an evidence-based view of differentiation. It shows not only where competitors are strong, but where they're absent, fragmented or failing to resonate. Those gaps are the spaces your brand can credibly claim.

The heatmap plots each need (across the X-axis) against how competitors are messaging against them – whether they're treating it as a primary message, a secondary one, or ignoring it altogether.

This gives you a clear, visual snapshot of:

- where competitors are already fighting for attention
- where the messaging space is crowded or saturated
- where the whitespace is – the territory your brand could own and build on



 Illustrative example for a fictional global audit firm's tax compliance offering



PHASE THREE

BRAND ANALYSIS

ASSESSING YOUR STRENGTH AND AUTHORITY VS THE NEEDS

The next step is to assess your brand's authority to credibly speak to and deliver against each need – balanced with your strategic and commercial priorities.

This is not only about aspiration, but evidence. For every identified need, you evaluate your brand’s competencies, track record and reputation, asking:

- do we have the authority and proof to lead here?
- does this align with where the business is going commercially and strategically?
- will owning this need reinforce the brand we want to be known for?

Brand strength scoring

Responsiveness	10	Brand is consistently recognised for its accessibility and fast turnaround. Clients cite direct access to senior partners and a culture of responsiveness that differentiates it from larger, slower competitors.
Client orientated	9	The firm’s mid-market focus and relationship-led approach mean client intimacy is a core strength. Teams are known for adapting to each client’s specific context rather than applying templated solutions.
Speed	8	Leaner structures and empowered decision-making enable faster delivery than larger networks. However, speed is sometimes limited by resource constraints or coordination across jurisdictions.
Global expertise and capabilities	7	The firm’s global network gives it reach in key markets, with consistent tax compliance methodologies. Still, brand perception lags behind market leaders when it comes to large-scale, complex global programmes.
Price	7	The firm’s pricing is viewed as transparent and competitive. Its fixed-fee and guarantee models reinforce confidence, though price strength is tied more to perceived value than to low cost.
Dedication to GC&R excellence	6	Technical credibility in tax compliance is strong at a partner level, but awareness of this specialism is not always front of mind for external audiences. The expertise exists, but the brand signal could be stronger.
Value added service	6	Clients acknowledge practical insights and support beyond compliance, but the firm is less associated with delivering strategic transformation compared to larger consultancies.
Advanced tech	4	While the firm employs solid tools and platforms, it is not yet perceived as a tech innovator. The brand leads with human expertise rather than technology-first differentiation.
Integrated approach	4	While the firm employs solid tools and platforms, it is not yet perceived as a tech innovator. The brand leads with human expertise rather than technology-first differentiation.



PHASE FOUR

MAPPING

MAPPING YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO OWN

STEP 1

Build and plot the matrix

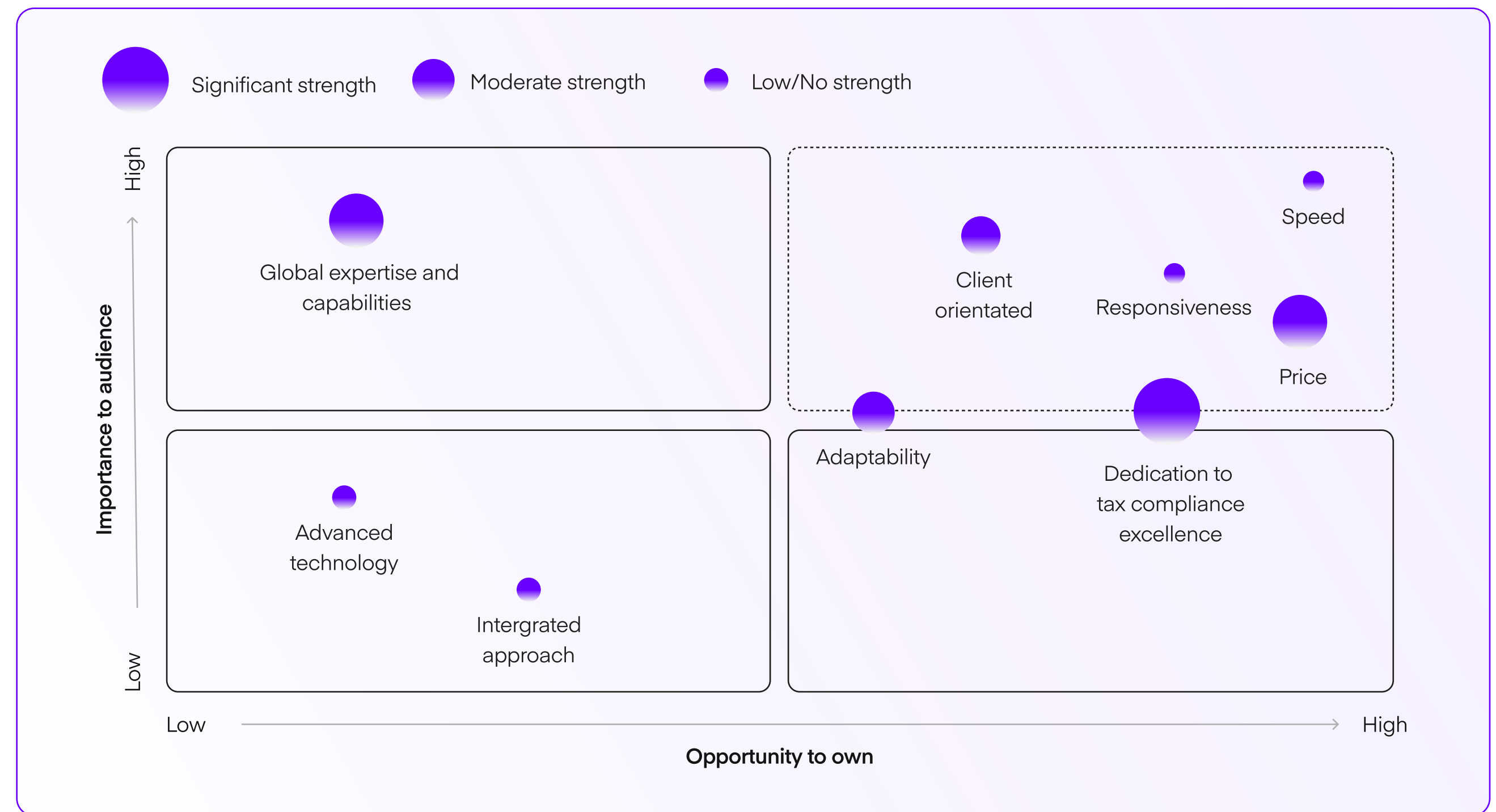
Create a matrix with two axes:

- **X-axis:** Importance to the audience – informed by 3D 'care-about scoring'
- **Y-axis:** Opportunity to own – an aggregated measure of both:
 - competitor activity (how crowded or quiet the space is)
 - brand authority (your credibility and right to lead)

Plot each need as a circle on the matrix. Use circle size to reflect your brand's relative strength in that space. This gives you a visual view of:

- where to lead (high importance, high opportunity)
- where to differentiate (high importance but constrained by competition)
- where to deprioritise (low importance or limited opportunity)

At this stage, bring the three lenses together - **Audience, Competitor and Brand (ACB)** - to decide where your messaging should focus. The tool for this is the **Opportunity to Own** matrix.





STEP 2

Now, stress test the view

The matrix isn't a top-down verdict from marketing. Treat it as a collaborative tool. Run a live session or workshop where key stakeholders debate, move the dots and resize the circles to reflect consensus.

The exercise is as valuable as the output – it builds alignment and ownership of the final view.



Through this process, you'll build a shared perspective on which needs your brand can most credibly own. Those agreed territories become the backbone of your messaging system.

This isn't an exact science, so don't chase perfection. The aim is collective clarity. Building the matrix together generates alignment and buy-in – the reason your messaging strategy will stick.

STRATEGY

WHAT WE SAY



The first step in strategic development is defining your Strategic Territory – the unifying idea that connects your audience needs with your brand strengths. It's not copy; it's direction. A north star for how the brand should show up and the springboard for all messaging.

Without a clear Strategic Territory, messaging fragments into a list of disconnected claims.

With one, everything aligns:

- all your story strands ladder up to a single story
- messaging feels consistent and resonant across every touchpoint
- internal teams know what the brand *stands* for, not just what it *sells*



PHASE ONE

STRATEGIC TERRITORY AND BRAND PILLARS

DEVELOP YOUR STRATEGIC TERRITORY AND BRAND PILLARS



Your Strategic Territory is the unifying idea that sits at the centre of your messaging. It emerges from your **Opportunity to Own** analysis by focusing on the needs that:

Matter most to your audience

Are least crowded by competitors

Align most strongly with your brand's authority

From here, distil those needs into a single organising idea – the clearest expression of the value your brand delivers against real customer priorities.

To make this tangible, group related needs into three or four **Brand Pillars**. Each pillar represents a major theme at the intersection of:

A macro audience
pain point

(from your 3D mapping)

A macro brand
strength or offer

(from your authority analysis)

Together, your **Strategic Territory** and **Brand Pillars** form both the big organising idea and the structural foundations of your messaging. These are then pulled through and expanded later in the Messaging Framework.

How to identify your 'strategic territory'



Your strategic territory comes from connecting the dots – spotting natural clusters or 'constellations' between related needs, then distilling the unifying idea that runs through them.

For example, quicker decision-making, streamlined operations, and easier access to data might all cluster together around a single theme: speed and agility. That bigger idea is what elevates the territory above individual claims, making it strategic, memorable and direction-setting.

The steps are simple:

01

Group needs into constellations

Look for themes or patterns across your priority needs. Which ones reinforce each other?

02

Name the unifying idea

Translate the cluster into a clear, north-star concept e.g. 'Trust at scale', 'Seamless growth' or 'Everything flowing faster'

03

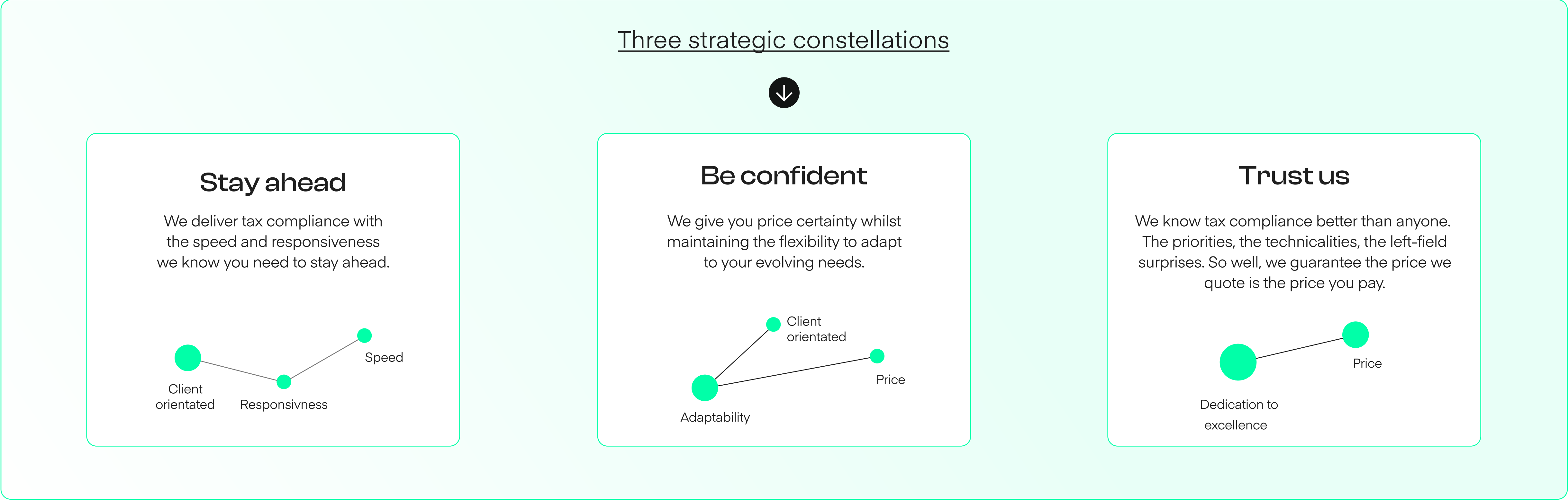
Test for resonance

Ask: does this idea capture your brand's ultimate value in the context of the customer? Can it flex across different audiences and messages?

→ The outcome should be a clear, strategic expression that frames how your brand shows up – not a piece of external copy, but the foundation for your Value Proposition, Brand Promise and Messaging Pillars.

See example clusters of themes below – visually mapped into ‘constellations’ that make the logic easy for stakeholders to see at a glance.

 Illustrative example for a fictional global audit firm’s tax compliance offering



What a Strategic Territory should look like

A Strategic Territory is a working model of your brand's organising idea – expressed in a way that stakeholders can quickly grasp and build from.

(See example: clusters of themes can be visually mapped into "constellations" that make the logic easy for stakeholders to see at a glance.)

STEP ONE

Define the Strategic Territory

The strategic territory is a concept and positioning statement – a sentence or two that captures your brand's ultimate value in the context of customer need.

It's not external-facing copy but a clear internal articulation of the idea that defines all messaging.

'Certain'

The complete confidence that
everything is going to plan



Illustrative example for a fictional global audit firm's tax compliance offering

STEP TWO

Define the Brand Pillars

Beneath the territory sit your Brand Pillars: three or four major themes that show how your brand delivers on the territory. Each pillar represents the intersection of a macro customer need and a core brand strength.

STEP THREE

Create the Model

Bring it together in a simple narrative flow that makes the logic obvious at a glance:

- Challenge** – the market reality
- Need** – what decision-makers want
- Barrier** – what stands in their way
- Solution** – your brand’s role in resolving it

Within the *solution* you articulate both your Strategic Territory (the big organising idea) and the Brand Pillars (the foundations that underpin it). This model turns the territory from an abstract idea into a structured, practical tool teams can align around. From this foundation, you build the key elements of your brand system.

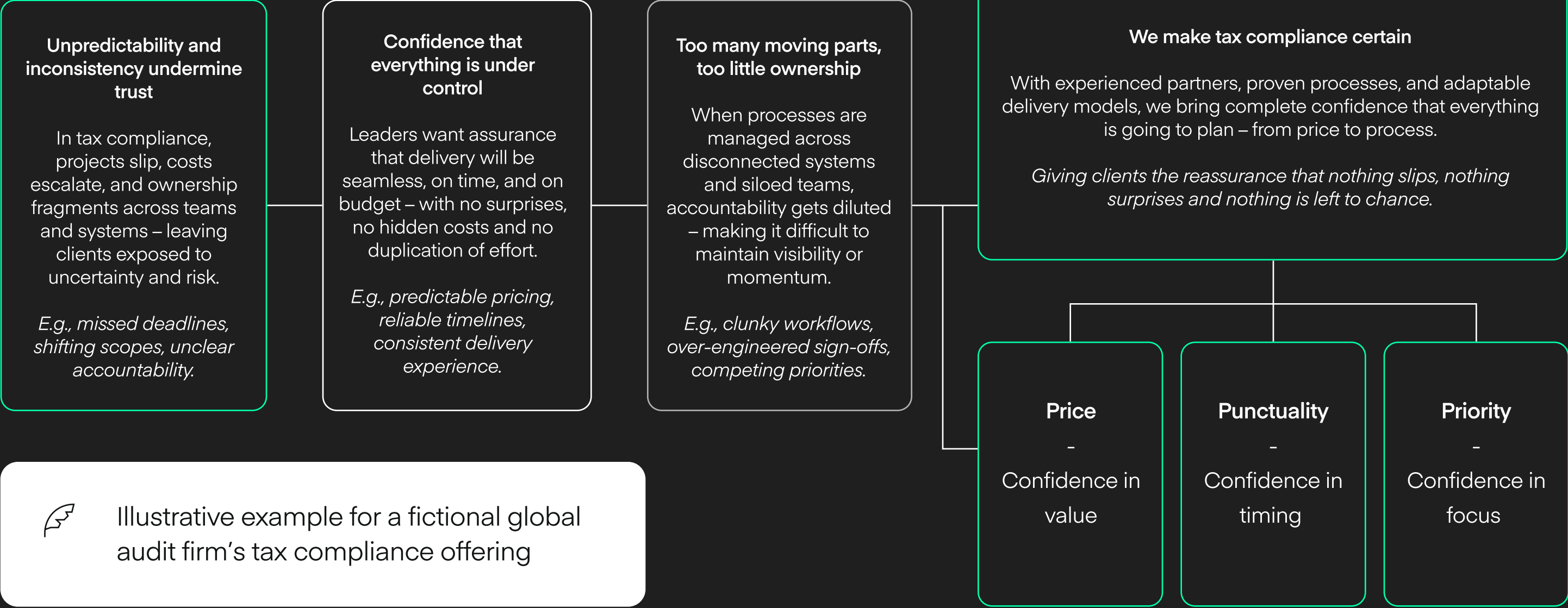
Territory 1: ‘Certain’ The key elements we’re communicating

The challenge
The market reality

The need
What C-suite decision makers want

The barrier
What’s standing in their way

The solution
What is your brand’s role?





PHASE TWO

VALUE PROPOSITION

VALUE PROPOSITION



Your Value Proposition is the functional, high-level articulation of the value you deliver.

It should be clear, differentiated, and anchored in the needs uncovered in your ACB analysis, and critically, the strategic territory and brand pillars.

Think of it as answering four questions:

01 Who do we help?

(your priority audience or market segment)

02 What problem do we solve?

(the pressing need or barrier)

03 How do we uniquely solve it?

(your distinct strength, approach, or model)

04 What outcome does this enable?

(the aspiration your audience cares about most)

The formula

We help **audience** solve **core problem**
by **what we do uniquely**, so they can
achieve desired outcome.

Tips for crafting:

- Keep it functional, not flowery. This is not a strapline.
- Test for credibility: could a competitor say this? If yes, sharpen.
- Ensure it ladders back to the Strategic Territory – your territory gives the ‘frame’, the Value Proposition is the precise articulation within it.

MESSAGING

HOW WE SAY IT



The Messaging Framework is the system that brings together your Strategic Territory, Brand Pillars and Value Proposition into a usable structure / framework. It helps you make messaging resonant and repeatable – built around the core audience problems you solve and expressed through the unique value your brand delivers.

Principles to follow:

- Start every message with the audience problem – their macro pain point.
- Make the connection clear between the problem and the brand value that resolves it.
- Ensure every message ladders back to the Strategic Territory for consistency and coherence.

STRUCTURE OF THE FRAMEWORK



PILLARS –
The 3–4 key macro themes that align brand strength with audience need. Each pillar should be anchored in a major, validated pain point.

LEAD MESSAGES –
Sharp expressions of each pillar. These articulate what you want to say at the highest level.

SUPPORTING MESSAGES –
More detailed expressions of the pillar. These flex across verticals, use cases and buying stages.

PROOF POINTS –
The evidence that turns belief into trust: stats, case studies, endorsements and product capabilities.



How to develop the framework

01

Take your Strategic Territory and brand pillars

Start with the Strategic Territory and the 3–4 pillars already defined in your model from Part 2. These are the anchor points for all messaging.

02

Frame through the audience lens

For each pillar, revisit the macro pain points identified in your 3D audience mapping. Make sure each pillar connects directly to those audience tensions.

03

Craft lead messages

Write sharp, high-level statements for each pillar. These should capture the essence of what you want to say at a headline level.

04

Develop supporting messages

Build out more detailed expressions that show how the pillar applies across sectors, use cases or buying stages.

05

Add proof points [‘reasons to believe’]

Layer in evidence – case studies, data, product strengths, or endorsements – that demonstrate credibility.

06

Check for consistency

Ensure every message ladders back to the Strategic Territory, is rooted in brand strength and directly addresses an audience need.

The output



A layered, logic-driven messaging system that is:

Audience-led → grounded in real pain points

Brand-authentic → rooted in what you can credibly deliver

Market-aware → distinct from competitor claims

Usable → structured so teams can apply it across campaigns, sales and content

SO WHAT NEXT?

Once you've defined what you want to say – culminating in your Strategic Territory, Brand Pillars and Messaging Framework – the next stage is to decide how you say it.

- ➔ **This is where creative development comes in: adding the 'fairy dust' that translates logic into emotionally resonant brand expression. It's about exploring how your story comes to life externally, across campaigns, channels and experiences.**

But that's a whole other framework!

DOWNLOAD THE FULL FRAMEWORK



Inside you'll learn how to:

- Understand what really drives your audience
- Map competitor narratives and find your whitespace
- Turn strategy into a scalable messaging system
- Build messaging that's grounded in evidence and designed to perform

Download the 32-page framework.
Make your messaging unarguable.

Kill them with logic. Win with messaging.



Messaging isn't a copywriting exercise. It's a strategic discipline – the place where brand priorities, market dynamics and audience needs meet.

Too often, that balance is lost to internal bias, technical features or 'me-too' competitor claims. This framework is designed to change that: giving you a clear, logic-led way to build messaging that resonates with your audience, exposes competitor weakness and earns you essential credibility in the boardroom.

At alan., we help marketers make those tough calls with confidence. We bring the rigour to ground decisions in evidence, the clarity to cut through competing voices and the creativity to shape messages that stick. The outcome is messaging your teams will adopt, your buyers will believe and your leadership will back.

Need help building a framework that stands up, or turning your messaging into visceral campaigns and thought leadership?

Get in touch.



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Provoke change