BUSINESS PLAN · INDIA

# Branding & Design Studio

*Judgment you can defend, on a process that ends*

AGENCIES & MARKETING-SERVICES FIRMS

AISEVAK.IN · BY ABL DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

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## 1. Executive Summary

This plan sets out a **Branding & Design Studio** in India — brand strategy, naming and positioning; visual identity and design systems; packaging and collateral; implementation and rollout support; and brand guidelines and asset governance.

> **The three marketing plans before this one argued about which number to trust — attribution, return on ad spend, rankings. This plan has no number to argue about.** A logo cannot be tested against the counterfactual in which it was never made. Brand equity moves over years and is confounded by pricing, product, distribution and luck. **There is no experiment that isolates the contribution of an identity, and there never will be.** This makes branding **simultaneously the most respected and the least defensible service in the category**, and it has one unavoidable commercial consequence: **the studio is selling judgment and the client is buying confidence, so price is set by reputation and conviction rather than by demonstrable return — which is why the same work is worth ₹3 lakh from one studio and ₹40 lakh from another, and why neither price is wrong.**

> **When the outcome cannot be measured, the honest response is to measure the process instead — and this plan does exactly that, because the process failures in design work are specific, well known and almost never tracked.** Was the strategy agreed and signed before design began? Was the final approver identified by name? Did new stakeholders appear halfway through? How many revision rounds did it actually take? **None of these prove the brand worked. All of them predict whether the project will finish on budget, and they are the only things in this business a client can hold a studio to.** Projects with a signed strategy platform before any design work rise from 34% to 89%, and **average revision rounds fall from 5.8 to 2.9 — which is the single most important number in the plan, because in a purely subjective purchase the margin is not lost in pricing, it is lost in round four.**

> **The real skill in this business is not designing. It is running an approval process that terminates.** Design is the most subjective purchase in the vertical and **"I don't like it" is an unanswerable objection**, so the controls are contractual rather than creative: fixed rounds, a named decision-maker, and strategy signed before aesthetics are discussed. **The most expensive sentence in this industry is "let me just show it to a few people" — every additional opinion introduced into a review is a fresh veto attached to no accountability for the timeline or the budget**, and this plan tracks it as a metric in its own right: **projects where a new stakeholder entered after design began falls from 47% to 16%.**

> **Two structural pressures shape what this studio should sell. First, AI has collapsed the price floor for execution while leaving strategy untouched — a competent logo is now generatable in seconds, but no model can decide what a company should stand for, resolve a disagreement between two founders, or defend a decision to a board.** That splits the category and **strands the mid-market studio whose proposition was "we make nice things"**; this plan responds by moving upward, with **strategy, naming and positioning revenue overtaking identity revenue by Year 3 (₹92 lakh against ₹78 lakh). Second, the demand curve has a hole in the middle: the client who most needs branding can least afford it, and the client who can afford it usually already has one.** That is why studios chase rebrands — and rebrands are the riskiest work in the category, because **a rebrand can destroy recognition the client spent a decade paying for, and the studio recommending it is never the party that bears the loss.**

This plan models a studio requiring **₹36 lakh** (₹21 lakh promoter + ₹7 lakh investor + ₹8 lakh working-capital finance), moving from **₹1.24 crore revenue and a ₹5 lakh loss** in Year 1 to **₹2.8 crore revenue and ₹28 lakh profit** by Year 3. *(Project-based creative services business — figures illustrative.)*

## 2. Business Description, Vision & Legal Structure

**Concept:** A studio organised around the two things that actually determine whether design work succeeds commercially — a strategy agreed before anyone opens a design file, and an approval process that ends.

**Vision:** To be the studio whose projects finish.

**Mission:** Write the strategy down and get it signed; name the approver before we start; screen a trademark before we present; recommend a refresh when a refresh is what is needed; and stay for the rollout, because the brand is what gets produced afterwards.

### Legal structure options

- **Private Limited** — recommended: IP assignment, enterprise contracting, team scale.
- **LLP** — natural for a partner-led creative practice.
- **Proprietorship** — common for solo designers; weak on IP warranties and enterprise contracting.

> **Regulatory anchor:** lighter than elsewhere in the vertical but with two genuinely serious exposures. **Trademark is the first: an identity that cannot be registered is worthless, and the screening must happen BEFORE concepts are presented rather than after selection** — because **presenting an unscreened concept means the client falls in love with something they may not be able to own, and the studio then has to take it away from them.** The second is **originality**: design plagiarism is trivially detectable, permanently visible and reputationally terminal for both parties, and **AI-generated imagery adds a live question about derivative work and training provenance that a studio delivering commercial identity assets cannot simply ignore.** Alongside these: clean IP assignment on delivery including freelance-contributed work; **font and type licensing, routinely breached and increasingly enforced**; stock and image rights; and packaging design obligations, where **statutory declarations under Legal Metrology packaged-commodity rules and FSSAI label requirements are a design constraint, not a printing afterthought.**

## 3. Promoter & Ownership

Led by a promoter with design, brand-strategy or creative-direction background. Three competences decide outcomes: *strategic articulation*, since the work that survives AI is the reasoning rather than the artefact; *process discipline*, because the difference between a profitable and unprofitable studio is entirely visible in revision counts; and *the ability to say no to a rebrand*, which is where the category's integrity actually lives. Ownership, equity & investor terms are editable inputs.

## 4. Market Analysis — India

Demand comes from D2C launches, funded startups, legacy businesses modernising, packaged goods, and category entrants needing to look credible before they are. The market is fragmented, reputation-led and increasingly polarised between strategy consultancies above and template platforms below.

### Demand drivers

- **D2C and consumer-brand launches**, where identity and packaging are the product's first surface.
- **Funded startups**, buying credibility ahead of traction.
- **Legacy businesses modernising**, often the highest-value and most political work.
- **Packaging-led categories** — food, beauty, wellness — where design directly affects shelf performance.
- **Brand architecture problems** in businesses that grew into a portfolio without planning one.

### Market sizing (illustrative framing)

| Layer | Definition | Indicative scale |
|---|---|---|
| TAM | Indian branding & design services | Large; extremely fragmented |
| SAM | Projects at the ticket sizes served | Category- and value-bounded |
| SOM (Yr 1–3) | **Projects × average value × repeat share** | 34 → 74 projects a year |

> **The demand curve in this category has a hole in the middle, and it explains almost everything about how studios behave.** The businesses that would benefit most from good branding are early-stage and undifferentiated — **and they have no money, because the same constraint that makes them need differentiation is the one that prevents them buying it.** The businesses that can comfortably afford a serious engagement generally already have an identity that works, and need only periodic refreshment. **The result is that studios compete hardest for the narrow band in between, and drift toward rebrands, because a rebrand is the only way to sell a large project to a client who already has a brand.** This is where the category's most uncomfortable conflict lives. **A rebrand is the single riskiest thing a studio can recommend: it can destroy recognition the client spent a decade and a great deal of money accumulating, the damage is not visible for a year or more, and the studio that recommended it has been paid and moved on long before anyone can attribute the loss.** This plan tracks the opposite behaviour explicitly — **engagements where the studio recommended a REFRESH rather than the full rebrand the client arrived asking for rises from 3 to 16** — and states plainly that **recommending a rebrand where a refresh would do is this industry's version of unnecessary surgery: profitable, defensible in the moment, and harmful in a way the patient will never be able to prove.**

### Target segments

- **D2C and consumer launches** needing identity plus packaging.
- **Funded startups** at Series A and beyond, where budgets and decision-making both exist.
- **Established businesses** needing refresh, architecture or sub-brand work.
- **Packaged goods**, where design is measurable at least indirectly through shelf performance.
- **Institutions and B2B**, underserved and less price-sensitive than assumed.

## 5. Competition & Competitive Advantage

**Landscape:** independent designers and freelancers, mid-size studios, full-service agencies with design arms, global consultancies at the top, and **an entirely new floor made of template marketplaces and AI generators that produce a competent logo for the price of a coffee.**

### The business's edge

- **Strategy signed before design begins** — the only defence against endless subjectivity.
- **A named approver and fixed rounds**, contractually.
- **Trademark screening before presentation**, not after selection.
- **Paid rollout and implementation**, where identities usually fail.
- **A stated willingness to recommend less work than the client asked for.**

> **AI has changed this category in a way that is often described loosely, so it is worth being precise about what it did and did not do. What collapsed is EXECUTION: mark generation, layout variation, mockups, iterations,**

> **stock imagery — the visible craft that clients historically believed they were paying for.** What is entirely untouched is **the reasoning: deciding what a business should stand for in a crowded category, resolving a genuine disagreement between two founders about who the customer is, choosing what to sacrifice, and defending that choice to a board that will interrogate it. A model can generate a thousand marks; it cannot tell you which one this company can credibly own, and it cannot be in the room when the CEO's spouse says they prefer the blue one.** The commercial consequence is a split — high-value strategy above, commodity execution below — **and the studio being eliminated is the one in the middle whose proposition was that it makes nice things, because making nice things is exactly what stopped being scarce.** This plan moves deliberately upward: **strategy, naming and positioning grows from 24% of revenue to 33%, and in absolute terms overtakes identity work entirely by Year 3.**

## 6. Services, Pricing & the Revision Problem

| Line | Model | Basis |
|---|---|---:|
| Brand identity & visual systems | Fixed project fee | **39% → 28% of revenue** |
| **Brand strategy, naming & positioning** | Fixed fee / phased | **24% → 33% — overtakes identity** |
| Packaging & collateral design | Per project / per SKU | Most directly commercial |
| **Implementation & rollout support** | Retained through launch | **Where brands actually fail** |
| Guidelines, asset systems & governance | Per project / annual | Highest margin per hour |
| **Unpaid speculative creative (spec pitching)** | **NIL — by policy** | **Loses pitches; stated openly** |
| **Concepts presented without a trademark screen** | **NIL — by policy** | **Screen before, never after** |

> **Free creative pitching is the industry's most damaging norm, and refusing it is expensive enough that most studios cannot.** A client invites four studios to present concepts unpaid; each spends real senior time; one wins. **The other three have funded the client's exploration and, worse, have given away the only thing they actually sell — the thinking — while retaining nothing. Spec work is not marketing; it is unpaid delivery with a lottery ticket attached**, and the studios that can refuse it are the ones with enough reputation not to need it, which is precisely the circularity that keeps everyone else doing it. This plan holds **unpaid speculative creative at NIL** and replaces it with **paid discovery: a small, real, chargeable strategy engagement that produces something the client keeps whether or not the larger project follows.** It converts fewer prospects, and it converts them into projects that start with a signed strategy — **which is the same thing this plan is trying to achieve everywhere else, arrived at through the pitch process instead of the contract.**

## 7. Go-to-Market — Selling Judgment

### Acquisition

- **Portfolio and published work**, which in this category is the entire proof.
- **Paid discovery engagements** as the entry product in place of spec pitches.
- **Category specialisation**, particularly packaging-led categories where craft is verifiable.
- **Referral** — 67% of new work by Year 3, because reputation is the pricing mechanism.

### Retention

- **Rollout involvement**, which converts a one-off project into a continuing relationship.
- **Guidelines and asset governance**, annuity work with the highest margin per hour.
- **Sub-brand and extension work** as the client's portfolio grows.
- **Refusing unnecessary rebrands**, which is what earns the call five years later.

### Sales approach

Paid discovery → signed strategy platform → named approver and fixed rounds → trademark-screened concepts → rollout and governance. **The pricing conversation in this category is unlike any other in the vertical, because there is no return calculation to appeal to and both parties know it.** What replaces it is scope and consequence: **the number of applications, the number of SKUs, the number of markets, the depth of the system, and whether the studio stays through implementation.** That gives a client something concrete to evaluate **without requiring either side to pretend that a return on investment can be computed for a logo** — and in the author's view the pretence is more damaging than the uncertainty, because **a studio that invents an ROI number has just introduced the one falsifiable claim in an otherwise unfalsifiable engagement, and it will be held to it.**

## 8. Operations Plan (discover, agree, design, screen, roll out)

- **Paid discovery:** stakeholder interviews, category audit, positioning options — **chargeable, and delivered whether or not the project proceeds.**
- **Strategy platform:** written, presented and **signed before any design file is opened.**
- **Approval architecture: final approver named in the contract; review group fixed; rounds fixed and priced.**
- **Design:** concept development against the signed platform, presented as reasoning rather than as options to be liked.
- **Trademark: screening completed before presentation, never after selection.**
- **Production:** artwork, adaptation, pre-press and packaging compliance including statutory label requirements.
- **Rollout:** paid implementation across signage, packaging, digital and internal collateral.
- **Governance:** guidelines, asset systems, and periodic audits of what is actually being produced.

### Project control points

| Stage | Activity | Control point |
|---|---|---:|
| **Agree** | **Written strategy platform signed pre-design** | **34% → 89% of projects** |
| **Name** | **Final approver identified in the contract** | **41% → 92%** |
| Design | Concepts as reasoning, not a menu | Revision rounds 5.8 → 2.9 |
| **Contain** | **Review group fixed at the outset** | **Late stakeholders 47% → 16%** |
| Screen | Trademark before presentation | Unscreened concepts NIL |
| **Roll out** | **Paid implementation phase** | **28% → 68% of projects** |

> **Brands do not fail in the studio; they fail in implementation, and the studio is usually not there to see it.** An identity is delivered as a guidelines document and then executed by twenty other people the studio has never met — **the signage fabricator who substitutes a font, the packaging printer who cannot hold the colour, the web developer who rebuilds the type scale from scratch, and the intern making a sales deck at midnight with**

> **whatever was on the shared drive. A brand is not what the studio designed. It is what those twenty people produce afterwards**, and a beautifully argued identity implemented badly is indistinguishable, to a customer, from a bad identity. This is why **rollout is treated as a paid phase rather than a courtesy** in this plan, rising from 28% to 68% of projects. It is better work commercially — **it extends the engagement, it produces the case study the studio actually wants, and it is the only point at which anyone verifies that what was designed is what exists in the world.** The alternative — **delivering a PDF and hoping — is how studios end up with portfolios full of work that never looked like that outside the presentation.**

## 9. IP, Trademark & Design Compliance (India)

- **Trademark screening before concepts are presented — an identity that cannot be registered is worthless, and presenting an unscreened concept means the client falls in love with something they may not be able to own.**
- **Originality** — design plagiarism is trivially detectable, permanently visible and reputationally terminal for both parties.
- **AI-generated assets** raising live questions of derivative work and training provenance in commercially delivered identity.
- **Clean IP assignment** on delivery, including work contributed by freelancers and specialists.
- **Font and type licensing — routinely breached across this industry and increasingly enforced**, including licences for the client's own downstream use.
- **Stock, illustration and photography rights**, with usage scope documented.
- **Packaging compliance — Legal Metrology packaged-commodity declarations and FSSAI label requirements are design constraints, not printing afterthoughts.**
- GST on services; milestone-based revenue recognition on fixed-fee projects.

## 10. Organisation & Manpower Plan

| Role | Yr 1 | Yr 2 | Yr 3 |
|---|---:|---:|---:|
| Promoter / creative director | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| **Designers (identity, graphic, packaging)** | **10** | **15** | **22** |
| **Brand strategists & writers** | **4** | **7** | **11** |
| Production & artwork | 3 | 5 | 8 |
| Account & project management | 3 | 5 | 7 |
| Motion & digital design | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| Business development | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Operations & admin | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| **Total** | **26** | **41** | **62** |

**Strategists grow faster than designers** — from 4 to 11 against 10 to 22 — which is the headcount expression of the plan's central bet: **the reasoning is what survives when execution stops being scarce.**

## 11. Implementation Timeline & Milestones

| Phase | Timeline | Milestone |
|---|---|---|
| Setup | Month 0–3 | Team, studio, licensing, contract templates with named-approver clauses |
| Launch | Month 3–12 | 34 projects; ₹1.24cr revenue, ₹5L loss; revision rounds baselined at 5.8 |
| Build | Year 2 | Signed platforms 68%, rounds down to 3.9, rollout on 48%; ₹1.92cr, ₹10L profit |
| Scale | Year 3 | 74 projects; ₹2.8cr, ₹28L profit; **strategy revenue overtakes identity revenue** |

## 12. Financial Plan (Illustrative)

*All figures are illustrative model assumptions for an Indian context, shown so the promoter can replace them with live rates.* ***Revision rounds and utilisation are the levers; in a purely subjective purchase, margin is not lost in pricing but in round four.***

### 12.1 Project cost & means of finance

| Capital requirement | ₹ |
|---|---:|
| **Working capital (salaries against project milestones)** | **13,00,000** |
| Team recruitment & senior design hires | 9,00,000 |
| Studio setup, workstations & deposits | 6,00,000 |
| Software, type licensing & production tools | 4,00,000 |
| Business development & portfolio | 3,00,000 |
| Legal, trademark screening & registrations | 1,00,000 |
| **Total project cost** | **36,00,000** |
| Promoter contribution | 21,00,000 |
| Investor funding | 7,00,000 |
| Working-capital finance | 8,00,000 |

### 12.2 Projected Profit & Loss (3 years)

| Particulars | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 |
|---|---:|---:|---:|
| Brand identity & visual systems | 48,00,000 | 60,00,000 | 78,00,000 |
| **Brand strategy, naming & positioning** | **30,00,000** | **58,00,000** | **92,00,000** |
| Packaging & collateral design | 22,00,000 | 32,00,000 | 44,00,000 |
| **Implementation & rollout support** | **14,00,000** | **26,00,000** | **42,00,000** |
| Guidelines, asset systems & governance | 10,00,000 | 16,00,000 | 24,00,000 |
| **Unpaid speculative creative (spec pitching)** | **NIL** | **NIL** | **NIL** |
| **Total revenue** | **1,24,00,000** | **1,92,00,000** | **2,80,00,000** |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Salaries (design, strategy, production, account, admin) | 76,00,000 | 1,12,00,000 | 1,58,00,000 |
| **Unbilled revision rounds & absorbed scope** | **14,00,000** | **15,00,000** | **16,00,000** |
| Freelance & specialist production costs | 10,00,000 | 15,00,000 | 22,00,000 |
| Business development, pitching & portfolio | 9,00,000 | 13,00,000 | 19,00,000 |
| Studio, overheads & admin | 8,00,000 | 11,00,000 | 15,00,000 |
| Software, type licensing & tools | 7,00,000 | 9,00,000 | 12,00,000 |
| Training & development | 2,00,000 | 3,00,000 | 5,00,000 |
| Depreciation, interest & other | 3,00,000 | 4,00,000 | 5,00,000 |
| **Total expenses** | **1,29,00,000** | **1,82,00,000** | **2,52,00,000** |
| **Net profit / (loss) before tax** | **(5,00,000)** | **10,00,000** | **28,00,000** |
| Net margin | (4.0%) | 5.2% | 10.0% |
| **AVERAGE REVISION ROUNDS PER IDENTITY PROJECT** | **5.8** | **3.9** | **2.9** |
| **Unbilled revisions as % of revenue** | **11.3%** | **7.8%** | **5.7%** |
| **Projects with a written, signed strategy platform before design began** | **34%** | **68%** | **89%** |
| **Projects where the final approver was named before work began** | **41%** | **74%** | **92%** |
| **Projects where a new stakeholder entered after design began** | **47%** | **29%** | **16%** |
| **Identity concepts presented without a prior trademark screen** | **NIL** | **NIL** | **NIL** |
| **ENGAGEMENTS WHERE A REFRESH WAS RECOMMENDED INSTEAD OF THE REBRAND ASKED FOR** | **3** | **9** | **16** |
| **Strategy, naming & positioning as share of revenue** | **24%** | **30%** | **33%** |
| **Projects including a paid implementation / rollout phase** | **28%** | **48%** | **68%** |
| Repeat & referral share of new work | 38% | 54% | 67% |
| Billable utilisation / Client concentration | 57% / 21% | 66% / 14% | 74% / 10% |
| Projects completed / Average project value (₹) | 34 / 3,65,000 | 52 / 3,69,000 | 74 / 3,78,000 |

### 12.3 Unit economics & break-even

- **Revision rounds are the entire margin story, and the P&L shows it in a single line:** unbilled revisions barely move in absolute terms (₹14 to ₹16 lakh) while revenue more than doubles — **falling from 11.3% of revenue to 5.7%. That 5.6-point swing is larger than the entire Year-3 net margin.**
- **The controls that produce it are contractual, not creative** — signed strategy, named approver, fixed review group, fixed rounds. **None of them require a better designer.**
- **Utilisation is the second lever**, and it is structurally lower here than in retainer businesses because project work arrives unevenly and senior time is consumed by pitching.
- **Rollout work improves both**: it is well-defined, less subjective, and extends an engagement the studio has already paid to win.

- **Break-even:** Year 2, reaching a 10% margin by Year 3 — **the best in the vertical so far, because project work at fixed fees converts process discipline into margin more directly than any retainer model can.**

### 12.4 Projected Cash Flow — Year 1 (quarterly, illustrative)

| Particulars (₹) | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Opening balance | 15,00,000 | 9,00,000 | 6,00,000 | 4,00,000 |
| Collections | 26,00,000 | 29,00,000 | 31,00,000 | 32,00,000 |
| Salaries, freelance, business development, studio & overheads | 32,00,000 | 32,00,000 | 33,00,000 | 32,00,000 |
| **Closing balance** | **9,00,000** | **6,00,000** | **4,00,000** | **4,00,000** |

> **The cash risk in a project studio is not the credit period; it is the stalled project, and it is peculiar to subjective work.** A fixed-fee engagement is billed at milestones, and the milestone that matters — approval — **is entirely within the client's control and frequently drifts for reasons that have nothing to do with the studio: a founder travelling, a board meeting postponed, a CEO who has quietly gone off the direction and will not say so.** The studio has spent the senior hours, cannot bill, and cannot reallocate the team because the project is not finished. **A studio with four stalled projects has a full team, no invoiceable output and a payroll date that does not move.** Three defences: **milestones tied to DELIVERY and PRESENTATION rather than to approval**, so the studio bills when it has done the work rather than when the client has made up their mind; **a stated project-pause clause with a re-mobilisation charge**, which sounds aggressive and is simply an accurate description of the cost; and **advance on commencement as standard**, universal in this category and easily defended.

### 12.5 Key Performance Indicators to Monitor

- **Process discipline: revision rounds; signed strategy platforms; named approvers; late-stakeholder incidence**; unbilled revision cost as a share of revenue.
- **Integrity: refresh-instead-of-rebrand recommendations; unscreened concepts (nil); spec work (nil)**; type and stock licence compliance.
- **Mix: strategy share of revenue; rollout attachment rate**; guidelines and governance annuity.
- **Commercials:** utilisation; average project value; repeat and referral share; concentration; **stalled-project count and days stalled.**

## 13. Funding Requirement & Bankability

Total ask: **₹7 lakh investor funding plus ₹8 lakh working-capital finance** against ₹21 lakh promoter contribution. Four points. **First, there is no measurable outcome to underwrite and a lender should not pretend otherwise — what is underwritable here is process discipline and repeat business, not brand impact. Second, revision rounds are the single most informative number in a design studio's accounts**, and they are almost never reported: **a studio averaging six rounds is running at a loss on projects it believes are profitable, because the overrun sits in salaries rather than in a cost line anyone examines. Third, ask about stalled projects — a studio's receivables can look healthy while a third of its capacity sits inside engagements that have not been approved for eleven weeks and cannot be billed. Fourth, the category-specific integrity question is the rebrand ratio**: **a studio that has never once talked a client out of a rebrand is either extraordinarily unlucky in its enquiries or is selling the largest project available every time, and the difference matters because the client cannot tell which it was until years later, if ever.**

### 13.1 Funding utilisation

| Use of funds | ₹ | % of total |
|---|---|---|
| Working capital (salaries against project milestones) | 13,00,000 | 36.1% |
| Team recruitment & senior design hires | 9,00,000 | 25.0% |
| Studio setup, workstations & deposits | 6,00,000 | 16.7% |
| Software, type licensing & production tools | 4,00,000 | 11.1% |
| Business development & portfolio | 3,00,000 | 8.3% |
| Legal, trademark screening & registrations | 1,00,000 | 2.8% |
| **Total** | **36,00,000** | **100%** |

## 14. Risk Analysis & Mitigation

| Risk | Mitigation |
|---|---|
| **The deliverable cannot be measured AT ALL** | The three preceding marketing plans argued about WHICH number to trust; **this one has NO number — a logo cannot be tested against the counterfactual in which it was never made, brand equity moves over years and is confounded by pricing, product, distribution and luck, and NO EXPERIMENT ISOLATES THE CONTRIBUTION OF AN IDENTITY.** Consequence: **THE STUDIO SELLS JUDGMENT AND THE CLIENT BUYS CONFIDENCE, SO PRICE IS SET BY REPUTATION AND CONVICTION RATHER THAN DEMONSTRABLE RETURN — THE SAME WORK IS WORTH ₹3 LAKH FROM ONE STUDIO AND ₹40 LAKH FROM ANOTHER, AND NEITHER PRICE IS WRONG.** Answer: **measure the PROCESS instead — none of it proves the brand worked, all of it predicts whether the project finishes on budget, and it is the only thing a client can hold a studio to** |
| **Revisions are the margin killer** | **Design is the most subjective purchase in the vertical and "I don't like it" is an unanswerable objection, so THE REAL SKILL IS NOT DESIGNING BUT RUNNING AN APPROVAL PROCESS THAT TERMINATES.** Controls are contractual, not creative: strategy signed pre-design (34%→89%), **final approver NAMED in the contract (41%→92%)**, review group fixed, rounds fixed and priced → **rounds 5.8→3.9→2.9 and unbilled revisions falling 11.3%→5.7% OF REVENUE, A 5.6-POINT SWING LARGER THAN THE ENTIRE YEAR-3 NET MARGIN** |
| **"Let me just show it to a few people"** | **The most expensive sentence in this industry — EVERY ADDITIONAL OPINION INTRODUCED INTO A REVIEW IS A FRESH VETO ATTACHED TO NO ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE TIMELINE OR THE BUDGET.** Tracked as a metric in its own right: **projects where a new stakeholder entered AFTER design began, 47%→29%→16%** |
| **AI collapsed execution, not reasoning** | **What collapsed is EXECUTION — mark generation, layout variation, mockups, iterations, stock — the visible craft clients historically believed they were paying for. What is UNTOUCHED is deciding what a business should stand for in a crowded category, resolving a genuine disagreement between two founders about who the customer is, choosing what to SACRIFICE, and defending that choice to a board that will interrogate it: A MODEL CAN GENERATE A THOUSAND MARKS BUT CANNOT TELL YOU WHICH ONE THIS COMPANY CAN CREDIBLY OWN, AND CANNOT BE IN THE ROOM WHEN THE CEO'S SPOUSE SAYS THEY PREFER THE BLUE ONE. THE STUDIO BEING ELIMINATED IS THE ONE IN THE MIDDLE WHOSE PROPOSITION WAS THAT IT MAKES NICE THINGS — BECAUSE MAKING NICE THINGS IS EXACTLY WHAT STOPPED BEING SCARCE** → strategy 24%→33% and overtaking identity in absolute terms by Y3; strategists grow 4→11 against designers 10→22 |

| | |
|---|---|
| **A demand curve with a hole in the middle** | **The businesses that would benefit MOST are early-stage and undifferentiated AND HAVE NO MONEY — the same constraint that makes them need differentiation prevents them buying it — while those who can afford it already have an identity that works. SO STUDIOS DRIFT TOWARD REBRANDS, BECAUSE A REBRAND IS THE ONLY WAY TO SELL A LARGE PROJECT TO A CLIENT WHO ALREADY HAS A BRAND** |
| **The unnecessary rebrand** | **The single riskiest thing a studio can recommend: IT CAN DESTROY RECOGNITION THE CLIENT SPENT A DECADE AND A GREAT DEAL OF MONEY ACCUMULATING, THE DAMAGE IS NOT VISIBLE FOR A YEAR OR MORE, AND THE STUDIO THAT RECOMMENDED IT HAS BEEN PAID AND MOVED ON LONG BEFORE ANYONE CAN ATTRIBUTE THE LOSS. RECOMMENDING A REBRAND WHERE A REFRESH WOULD DO IS THIS INDUSTRY'S VERSION OF UNNECESSARY SURGERY: PROFITABLE, DEFENSIBLE IN THE MOMENT, AND HARMFUL IN A WAY THE PATIENT WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO PROVE.** Tracked: refresh-instead-of-rebrand 3→9→16 |
| **Brands fail in implementation** | **An identity is delivered as a PDF and then executed by twenty people the studio never met — the signage fabricator who substitutes a font, the printer who cannot hold the colour, the developer who rebuilds the type scale, the intern making a deck at midnight from the shared drive. A BRAND IS NOT WHAT THE STUDIO DESIGNED; IT IS WHAT THOSE TWENTY PEOPLE PRODUCE AFTERWARDS, and a beautifully argued identity implemented badly is INDISTINGUISHABLE TO A CUSTOMER from a bad identity.** Rollout as a PAID phase (28%→68%): extends the engagement, produces the case study, **and is the only point at which anyone verifies that what was designed is what exists in the world** |
| **Spec pitching** | Four studios present unpaid, one wins — **the other three funded the client's exploration and GAVE AWAY THE ONLY THING THEY SELL, THE THINKING, WHILE RETAINING NOTHING. SPEC WORK IS NOT MARKETING; IT IS UNPAID DELIVERY WITH A LOTTERY TICKET ATTACHED**, and the studios able to refuse it are those with enough reputation not to need it — **the circularity that keeps everyone else doing it.** NIL, replaced by **PAID DISCOVERY: a small, real, chargeable strategy engagement producing something the client keeps whether or not the project follows** — converts fewer prospects, into projects that start with a signed strategy |
| **Trademark & originality** | **An identity that cannot be registered is worthless, and presenting an unscreened concept means the client falls in love with something they may not be able to own — and the studio then has to take it away from them.** Screening BEFORE presentation, never after selection (unscreened concepts NIL). Plus **design plagiarism (trivially detectable, permanently visible, reputationally terminal for both parties)**, AI-asset provenance and derivative-work questions, **type licensing (routinely breached, increasingly enforced)**, and **Legal Metrology and FSSAI label requirements as DESIGN constraints rather than printing afterthoughts** |
| **The stalled project** | **The cash risk is not the credit period but the stalled project, peculiar to subjective work: the milestone that matters — APPROVAL — is ENTIRELY WITHIN THE CLIENT'S CONTROL and drifts for reasons unrelated to the studio (a founder travelling, a board meeting postponed, A CEO WHO HAS QUIETLY GONE OFF THE DIRECTION AND WILL NOT SAY SO). A STUDIO WITH FOUR STALLED PROJECTS HAS A FULL TEAM, NO INVOICEABLE OUTPUT AND A PAYROLL DATE THAT DOES NOT MOVE.** Milestones tied to **DELIVERY AND PRESENTATION rather than APPROVAL**; a pause clause with re-mobilisation charge (**sounds aggressive, is simply an accurate description of the cost**); advance on commencement |

## 15. SWOT Analysis

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|---|---|
| **Strengths**<br>**Process discipline converting directly into margin — revisions 5.8 to 2.9**; strategy-led positioning aligned with what AI cannot replace; trademark screening before presentation; **paid rollout where competitors deliver a PDF and leave**; high repeat and referral share; low capital intensity. | **Weaknesses**<br>**No measurable outcome to sell against, so pricing rests entirely on reputation**; project-based revenue with no annuity floor; **refusing spec work loses pitches**; utilisation structurally low; **senior time consumed by pitching and stalled approvals.** |
| **Opportunities**<br>D2C and packaging-led categories where craft is verifiable; **brand architecture work in businesses that grew into portfolios without planning one**; guidelines and governance as annuity; institutions and B2B, underserved and less price-sensitive than assumed; refresh work as a durable relationship. | **Threats**<br>**Template platforms and AI generators setting a near-zero price floor for execution**; global consultancies compressing from above; freelancers on price; **clients whose budgets vanish with funding cycles**; reputational damage from a single plagiarism or trademark failure. |

## 16. Recommended AiSevak Tools for This Business

This branding & design studio would use AiSevak's Marketing vertical tools in operations:

- **Process control: revision-round counter per project**, signed-strategy-platform register, **named-approver and review-group record**, late-stakeholder incident log.
- **Integrity: trademark-screen checklist gating presentation**, refresh-versus-rebrand recommendation log, type and stock licence register, originality check record.
- **Commercials:** milestone billing tied to delivery not approval, **stalled-project tracker with days-stalled and re-mobilisation triggers**, utilisation and average project value.
- **Mix & growth:** strategy-share tracking, **rollout attachment rate**, guidelines and governance annuity, repeat and referral share.
- **Delivery:** asset and guideline distribution, packaging-compliance checklist (Legal Metrology, FSSAI), rollout audit against what is actually produced.

## 17. Key Assumptions & Notes

- Branding & design studio: brand strategy, naming and positioning; visual identity and design systems; packaging and collateral; implementation and rollout; guidelines and asset governance.
- **⚠ THE THREE MARKETING PLANS BEFORE THIS ONE ARGUED ABOUT WHICH NUMBER TO TRUST — ATTRIBUTION, ROAS, RANKINGS. THIS PLAN HAS NO NUMBER TO ARGUE ABOUT: A LOGO CANNOT BE TESTED AGAINST THE COUNTERFACTUAL IN WHICH IT WAS NEVER MADE, BRAND EQUITY MOVES OVER YEARS AND IS CONFOUNDED BY PRICING, PRODUCT, DISTRIBUTION AND LUCK, AND THERE IS NO EXPERIMENT THAT ISOLATES THE CONTRIBUTION OF AN IDENTITY — AND THERE NEVER WILL BE. THIS MAKES BRANDING SIMULTANEOUSLY THE MOST RESPECTED AND THE LEAST DEFENSIBLE SERVICE IN THE CATEGORY, WITH ONE UNAVOIDABLE COMMERCIAL CONSEQUENCE: THE STUDIO IS SELLING JUDGMENT AND THE CLIENT IS BUYING CONFIDENCE, SO PRICE IS SET BY REPUTATION AND CONVICTION RATHER THAN BY DEMONSTRABLE RETURN — WHICH IS WHY THE SAME WORK IS WORTH ₹3 LAKH FROM ONE STUDIO AND ₹40 LAKH FROM ANOTHER, AND WHY NEITHER PRICE IS WRONG.** Honest response: **WHEN THE OUTCOME CANNOT BE MEASURED, MEASURE THE PROCESS — was the strategy signed before design began, was the**

**final approver named, did new stakeholders appear halfway, how many rounds did it actually take: NONE OF THESE PROVE THE BRAND WORKED, ALL OF THEM PREDICT WHETHER THE PROJECT FINISHES ON BUDGET, AND THEY ARE THE ONLY THINGS IN THIS BUSINESS A CLIENT CAN HOLD A STUDIO TO** (signed platforms 34%→68%→89%).

- **THE REAL SKILL IS NOT DESIGNING BUT RUNNING AN APPROVAL PROCESS THAT TERMINATES — DESIGN IS THE MOST SUBJECTIVE PURCHASE IN THE VERTICAL AND "I DON'T LIKE IT" IS AN UNANSWERABLE OBJECTION, SO THE CONTROLS ARE CONTRACTUAL RATHER THAN CREATIVE: FIXED ROUNDS, A NAMED DECISION-MAKER, AND STRATEGY SIGNED BEFORE AESTHETICS ARE DISCUSSED. THE MOST EXPENSIVE SENTENCE IN THIS INDUSTRY IS "LET ME JUST SHOW IT TO A FEW PEOPLE" — EVERY ADDITIONAL OPINION INTRODUCED INTO A REVIEW IS A FRESH VETO ATTACHED TO NO ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE TIMELINE OR THE BUDGET** (late stakeholders 47%→29%→16%; named approver 41%→74%→92%) → **REVISION ROUNDS 5.8→3.9→2.9, THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT NUMBER IN THE PLAN, BECAUSE IN A PURELY SUBJECTIVE PURCHASE THE MARGIN IS NOT LOST IN PRICING, IT IS LOST IN ROUND FOUR** — visible in the P&L as **UNBILLED REVISIONS BARELY MOVING IN ABSOLUTE TERMS (₹14→₹16L) WHILE REVENUE MORE THAN DOUBLES, FALLING 11.3%→7.8%→5.7% OF REVENUE: A 5.6-POINT SWING LARGER THAN THE ENTIRE YEAR-3 NET MARGIN, AND NONE OF IT REQUIRES A BETTER DESIGNER.**
- **AI CHANGED THIS CATEGORY PRECISELY, AND THE PRECISION MATTERS: WHAT COLLAPSED IS EXECUTION — MARK GENERATION, LAYOUT VARIATION, MOCKUPS, ITERATIONS, STOCK IMAGERY, THE VISIBLE CRAFT CLIENTS HISTORICALLY BELIEVED THEY WERE PAYING FOR. WHAT IS ENTIRELY UNTOUCHED IS THE REASONING: DECIDING WHAT A BUSINESS SHOULD STAND FOR IN A CROWDED CATEGORY, RESOLVING A GENUINE DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN TWO FOUNDERS ABOUT WHO THE CUSTOMER IS, CHOOSING WHAT TO SACRIFICE, AND DEFENDING THAT CHOICE TO A BOARD THAT WILL INTERROGATE IT. A MODEL CAN GENERATE A THOUSAND MARKS; IT CANNOT TELL YOU WHICH ONE THIS COMPANY CAN CREDIBLY OWN, AND IT CANNOT BE IN THE ROOM WHEN THE CEO'S SPOUSE SAYS THEY PREFER THE BLUE ONE. THE COMMERCIAL CONSEQUENCE IS A SPLIT — HIGH-VALUE STRATEGY ABOVE, COMMODITY EXECUTION BELOW — AND THE STUDIO BEING ELIMINATED IS THE ONE IN THE MIDDLE WHOSE PROPOSITION WAS THAT IT MAKES NICE THINGS, BECAUSE MAKING NICE THINGS IS EXACTLY WHAT STOPPED BEING SCARCE** → strategy/naming/positioning 24%→30%→33% of revenue and **OVERTAKING IDENTITY IN ABSOLUTE TERMS BY YEAR 3 (₹92L vs ₹78L)**; strategists grow 4→11 against designers 10→22, **the headcount expression of the bet that THE REASONING IS WHAT SURVIVES WHEN EXECUTION STOPS BEING SCARCE.**
- **THE DEMAND CURVE HAS A HOLE IN THE MIDDLE AND IT EXPLAINS ALMOST EVERYTHING ABOUT HOW STUDIOS BEHAVE: THE BUSINESSES THAT WOULD BENEFIT MOST ARE EARLY-STAGE AND UNDIFFERENTIATED AND HAVE NO MONEY — THE SAME CONSTRAINT THAT MAKES THEM NEED DIFFERENTIATION PREVENTS THEM BUYING IT — WHILE THOSE WHO CAN COMFORTABLY AFFORD A SERIOUS ENGAGEMENT GENERALLY ALREADY HAVE AN IDENTITY THAT WORKS AND NEED ONLY PERIODIC REFRESHMENT; SO STUDIOS COMPETE HARDEST FOR THE NARROW BAND BETWEEN AND DRIFT TOWARD REBRANDS, BECAUSE A REBRAND IS THE ONLY WAY TO SELL A LARGE PROJECT TO A CLIENT WHO ALREADY HAS A BRAND** → which is where the category's most uncomfortable conflict lives: **A REBRAND IS THE SINGLE RISKIEST THING A STUDIO CAN RECOMMEND — IT CAN DESTROY RECOGNITION THE CLIENT SPENT A DECADE AND A GREAT DEAL OF MONEY ACCUMULATING, THE DAMAGE IS NOT VISIBLE FOR A YEAR OR MORE, AND THE STUDIO THAT RECOMMENDED IT HAS BEEN PAID AND MOVED ON LONG BEFORE ANYONE CAN ATTRIBUTE THE LOSS; RECOMMENDING A REBRAND WHERE A REFRESH WOULD DO IS THIS INDUSTRY'S VERSION OF UNNECESSARY SURGERY: PROFITABLE, DEFENSIBLE IN THE MOMENT, AND HARMFUL IN A WAY THE PATIENT WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO PROVE** → refresh-instead-of-rebrand 3→9→16, the honesty metric that costs money (same shape as sports-physiotherapy's discharge rate and the certification body's pass rate).

- **BRANDS DO NOT FAIL IN THE STUDIO; THEY FAIL IN IMPLEMENTATION, AND THE STUDIO IS USUALLY NOT THERE TO SEE IT: AN IDENTITY IS DELIVERED AS A GUIDELINES DOCUMENT AND THEN EXECUTED BY TWENTY OTHER PEOPLE THE STUDIO HAS NEVER MET — THE SIGNAGE FABRICATOR WHO SUBSTITUTES A FONT, THE PACKAGING PRINTER WHO CANNOT HOLD THE COLOUR, THE WEB DEVELOPER WHO REBUILDS THE TYPE SCALE FROM SCRATCH, AND THE INTERN MAKING A SALES DECK AT MIDNIGHT WITH WHATEVER WAS ON THE SHARED DRIVE. A BRAND IS NOT WHAT THE STUDIO DESIGNED; IT IS WHAT THOSE TWENTY PEOPLE PRODUCE AFTERWARDS — AND A BEAUTIFULLY ARGUED IDENTITY IMPLEMENTED BADLY IS INDISTINGUISHABLE, TO A CUSTOMER, FROM A BAD IDENTITY** → rollout as a PAID phase (28%→48%→68%): better commercially, extends the engagement, produces the case study the studio actually wants, **AND IS THE ONLY POINT AT WHICH ANYONE VERIFIES THAT WHAT WAS DESIGNED IS WHAT EXISTS IN THE WORLD — the alternative, DELIVERING A PDF AND HOPING, IS HOW STUDIOS END UP WITH PORTFOLIOS FULL OF WORK THAT NEVER LOOKED LIKE THAT OUTSIDE THE PRESENTATION.** On pitching: **SPEC WORK IS NOT MARKETING; IT IS UNPAID DELIVERY WITH A LOTTERY TICKET ATTACHED — FOUR STUDIOS PRESENT, ONE WINS, AND THE OTHER THREE HAVE FUNDED THE CLIENT'S EXPLORATION AND GIVEN AWAY THE ONLY THING THEY SELL (THE THINKING) WHILE RETAINING NOTHING; THE STUDIOS ABLE TO REFUSE IT ARE THOSE WITH ENOUGH REPUTATION NOT TO NEED IT, WHICH IS PRECISELY THE CIRCULARITY THAT KEEPS EVERYONE ELSE DOING IT** → NIL, replaced by PAID DISCOVERY.
- Cash — **THE RISK IS NOT THE CREDIT PERIOD BUT THE STALLED PROJECT, AND IT IS PECULIAR TO SUBJECTIVE WORK: A FIXED-FEE ENGAGEMENT IS BILLED AT MILESTONES AND THE MILESTONE THAT MATTERS — APPROVAL — IS ENTIRELY WITHIN THE CLIENT'S CONTROL, DRIFTING FOR REASONS THAT HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH THE STUDIO: A FOUNDER TRAVELLING, A BOARD MEETING POSTPONED, A CEO WHO HAS QUIETLY GONE OFF THE DIRECTION AND WILL NOT SAY SO. THE STUDIO HAS SPENT THE SENIOR HOURS, CANNOT BILL, AND CANNOT REALLOCATE THE TEAM BECAUSE THE PROJECT IS NOT FINISHED — A STUDIO WITH FOUR STALLED PROJECTS HAS A FULL TEAM, NO INVOICEABLE OUTPUT AND A PAYROLL DATE THAT DOES NOT MOVE → milestones tied to DELIVERY AND PRESENTATION rather than to APPROVAL (bill when the work is done, not when the client has made up their mind); a PROJECT-PAUSE CLAUSE WITH RE-MOBILISATION CHARGE, WHICH SOUNDS AGGRESSIVE AND IS SIMPLY AN ACCURATE DESCRIPTION OF THE COST; and advance on commencement**. Pricing note: scope and consequence replace ROI (applications, SKUs, markets, system depth, rollout inclusion), **because A STUDIO THAT INVENTS AN ROI NUMBER HAS JUST INTRODUCED THE ONE FALSIFIABLE CLAIM IN AN OTHERWISE UNFALSIFIABLE ENGAGEMENT, AND IT WILL BE HELD TO IT.** Regulatory: **TRADEMARK SCREENING BEFORE CONCEPTS ARE PRESENTED, NEVER AFTER SELECTION — AN IDENTITY THAT CANNOT BE REGISTERED IS WORTHLESS, AND PRESENTING AN UNSCREENED CONCEPT MEANS THE CLIENT FALLS IN LOVE WITH SOMETHING THEY MAY NOT BE ABLE TO OWN AND THE STUDIO THEN HAS TO TAKE IT AWAY FROM THEM** (unscreened concepts NIL); originality (**design plagiarism is trivially detectable, permanently visible and reputationally terminal for BOTH parties**); **AI-generated assets raising live derivative-work and training-provenance questions in commercially delivered identity**; clean IP assignment incl. freelance contributions; **font and type licensing, routinely breached across this industry and increasingly enforced, including the client's downstream use**; stock rights; and **LEGAL METROLOGY PACKAGED-COMMODITY DECLARATIONS AND FSSAI LABEL REQUIREMENTS AS DESIGN CONSTRAINTS, NOT PRINTING AFTERTHOUGHTS**. Break-even Y2, **10% Y3 margin — the best in the vertical so far, because PROJECT WORK AT FIXED FEES CONVERTS PROCESS DISCIPLINE INTO MARGIN MORE DIRECTLY THAN ANY RETAINER MODEL CAN**. Lender note: **THERE IS NO MEASURABLE OUTCOME TO UNDERWRITE AND A LENDER SHOULD NOT PRETEND OTHERWISE — WHAT IS UNDERWRITABLE IS PROCESS DISCIPLINE AND REPEAT BUSINESS, NOT BRAND IMPACT**; **REVISION ROUNDS ARE THE SINGLE MOST INFORMATIVE NUMBER IN A DESIGN STUDIO'S ACCOUNTS AND ARE ALMOST NEVER REPORTED — A STUDIO AVERAGING SIX ROUNDS IS RUNNING AT A LOSS ON PROJECTS IT BELIEVES ARE PROFITABLE, BECAUSE THE OVERRUN SITS**

**IN SALARIES RATHER THAN IN A COST LINE ANYONE EXAMINES**; **ASK ABOUT STALLED PROJECTS — RECEIVABLES CAN LOOK HEALTHY WHILE A THIRD OF CAPACITY SITS INSIDE ENGAGEMENTS UNAPPROVED FOR ELEVEN WEEKS AND UNBILLABLE**; and the integrity question is **THE REBRAND RATIO: A STUDIO THAT HAS NEVER ONCE TALKED A CLIENT OUT OF A REBRAND IS EITHER EXTRAORDINARILY UNLUCKY IN ITS ENQUIRIES OR IS SELLING THE LARGEST PROJECT AVAILABLE EVERY TIME — AND THE DIFFERENCE MATTERS BECAUSE THE CLIENT CANNOT TELL WHICH IT WAS UNTIL YEARS LATER, IF EVER.** ₹36L, 34→74 projects, 26→62 staff, rev 1.24→2.8cr, Y1 −₹5L → Y3 ₹28L. Figures illustrative, exclude GST.

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