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BRAND EXPANDER

I'm a brand strategist, partnerships curator, and creative director with over ten years empowering growth-stage and category-defining brands — guided by my method, **Anchor. Align. Expand.**

I was the fourth employee at Thrive Market, where I helped build the ambassador and partner community through relationships and storytelling that organically reached the right people — growing to 4 million members before any paid spend. Since then I've supported brands like Ritual, Our Place, Viome, and Heritage Store, scaled Ozlo Sleepbuds to 0M in revenue through community momentum and brand storytelling, and worked alongside the Summit partnerships team sourcing strategic sponsors and curating premium brand collaborations.

Today I partner with founders, leaders, and mission-driven brands to expand their community, impact, and reach

- **Let go, let go, and then let go some more:** Expansion requires creating space for what wants to emerge next. That often begins with letting go of what no longer fits. Outdated strategies, misaligned partnerships, or ways of operating that kept the brand (or you) safe and now keep it small. It might also highlight some of your own limiting beliefs and areas you tend to get stuck. Welcome it all.
- **Trust the process:** As one of my mentors, Mara Hoffman says, “You will die a million little deaths in the journey of rebirth.” That’s what growth is, another rebirth. If we want to always be evolving, we need to settle into this practice. Letting go is not always comfortable. That’s okay. LET IT BREAK. Feel the fear that comes through that opening, breathe. Keep breathing. Let yourself dance with unseen flow. There is a force beyond what the eyes can see driving this thing and if you keep meeting it in the middle, trusting its guidance, listening deeply to its direction, taking the inspired action it suggests, and surrendering the exact outcome and timing, things will land in a place you love. Keep going. You got this!
- **Look at everything you don’t want to see:** Back to shining the light on the places we keep ourselves limited. The patterns, the wounds, the belief systems - it will all be revealed to you. Sometimes that feels like ICK. Like, sooooo much ick. It’s fine. All good, just part of the process. Keep going, you got this! The further you grow, the deeper you go. Here is where we can take full responsibility for our own expansion and it is in this choice that unlocks new opportunities and lifts everyone connected to you up with you. A.K.A = REAL LEADERSHIP.
- **Check in with your core story:** Expansion starts with clarity. Revisit the deeper purpose behind your brand: why you exist, who you serve, and the impact you’re here to create. When your intention is clear and emotionally resonant, AND you are a living, breathing reflection of it, that gravitational center attracts the right aligned opportunities, partners, and community.
- **Take note of your current ecosystem:** Look at the people, partners, and platforms surrounding your brand. Which relationships expand your energy, audience, and vision? Which ones drain it, feel misaligned or stagnant? Expansion accelerates when your ecosystem reflects the future you’re stepping into.
- **Create an ideal partner wish list:** Make a short list of brands, creators, communities, or organizations whose audiences and values naturally intersect with yours. That you look up to and believe would be fun and exciting to collaborate with. The goal isn’t just exposure, it's mutual expansion. The right collaboration should elevate both brands and create new value for both communities.
- **Commit:** To yourself…to doing the real work, to having your own back, to trusting the process, to honoring your intuition, to prioritizing joy, to letting go of the noise, to staying present. And, as the Queen of wanting everything yesterday, I say this as I literally am reminding myself right now to “Release the rush, don’t jump 20 steps ahead.” You’re already on the path, you’re exactly where you need to be, it’s already done. Allow the flow to flow on the way to getting there and have fun along the way, PLAY is important!

Alright, let’s get into it.

The Brand Expansion Framework

Alignment: connecting with the right partners and communities begins within

Ecosystem: building community beyond your owned audience with trusted voices

Storytelling: sharing compelling stories that reveal the heart of the brand & offer value

Activation: designing moments, campaigns, and experiences together for collective growth

Allowing: creating the space to integrate tools for long-term growth

The Undeniable Growth Edge

When companies or individuals are ready for the next stage of growth there can be a feeling of uncomfortable stagnation. You know what I'm talking about, it can feel like hitting the same wall over and over. This is a good thing! Discomfort is the doorway. It's the opportunity to make the active choice to step up and do what it takes to access and expand into the next level.

If feeling blocked isn't the clarity you need, here are some other common signs:

- customer acquisition costs rising
- marketing feels repetitive, paid not really working
- a desire to expand impact, and fatigue/burnout simultaneously
- untapped potential, there are so many possibilities you don't even know where to start

Enter, the only effective solution: **alignment**. Connecting the right partners and communities around shared values and win-win opportunities so that everyone grows together is what's up. Aligned partnership is the name of the game. Find your people, dive all the way in, and then rock on. This clarity, certainty, and unwavering commitment to community momentum is rocketship fuel.

The thing is, you can't get there without being there from within first. If you want your partners, your team, and your opportunities to flow to you and meet you where you are to sync up and blast off from there, you need to become one within yourself first. If you're already there, hell yeah! Continuous refinement = ongoing expansion.

Key focus areas to strengthen total alignment:

- **Inner union:** A harmonious inner being is steady, balanced, unshakable. Not running away or avoiding anything, not overreaching, grasping or gripping for anything either. It is at peace, full from being alive and able to meet anything (good, bad, ugly) at any time

and in fact that strong center doesn't even label things good, bad or ugly it receives all of life as part of the process sent from that aforementioned unseen force and trusts it all. There are many ways to support this wholeness from movement, to mindfulness, to supplements, to nutrition, to breathwork and EFT, herbology, flower essences, journaling, IFS, sounds & music, and beyond - there is a boundless list of options. Find what works for you, design your toolkit, lean on whatever you need in the moment and keep moving forward. Pro tip: making everything cute and positive even if that charming critical voice rears loudly is a very fast way to dissolve any hurdle that pops up.

- **Company core union:** To always be evolving in alignment, everyone needs to be on the same page. Of course you might not always see eye to eye and you may need to engage in loving, honest communication to get to the bottom of something and shift it as a team. But your beliefs, values, where you want to go, why, the life you want to live - all of this should be similar. If it's not, I like to call this leaky energy and it keeps you at a plateau or below. You can't keep expanding if there are holes in the vessel.
- **Magnetic attraction:** No holes in the vessel is a whole unit, a solid container. Solid containers are the foundation for scale and that structure actually creates more flow with a place for it to land securely. Now, from the inside out everyone and everything is in sync and rowing in the same direction, in unison. This is a real connection. Here, you're the radiant magnet and draw in who and what is truly a match in partners, experiences, opportunities, new revenue, community and beyond.

The Ecosystem Advantage

Brands grow faster through ecosystems because you're instantly expanding reach beyond your owned audience through trusted voices, into like-minded communities where it's likely you'll instantly unlock entirely new connections that are mutually exciting. Alignment attracts alignment.

Some of the most influential brands in the world have grown through intentional collaboration. Companies like Nike and Airbnb have consistently expanded their cultural relevance and reach by partnering with aligned creators, communities, and organizations. Rather than trying to capture attention alone, they build moments with others who share overlapping audiences and values. Whether through thoughtful partnerships, cultural collaborations, or curated experiences. These partnerships do more than generate visibility; they create stories people want to participate in and share. When brands expand through collaboration, they tap into trust, community, and creativity that already exists, propelling growth in a way traditional marketing rarely can.

Things to consider when designing ecosystems for community-led growth:

- **Audience alignment:** Yes, you want to reach new people and the way you know you'll connect with the right ones is if there are some people already in both communities. This is how you gauge probable fit, shared interests, mutual compatibility.

- **Values alignment:** Do you care about the same things? Even if you're new on the scene and have an opportunity to hook up with a longstanding, huge, iconic brand, if it's not totally aligned it could cause leaks. For example, if you're a super clean beauty brand and would never dream of standing within a 10 foot radius of a BPA molecule, I wouldn't partner with any unnatural energy drink in aluminum cans. SORRY - don't kill the messenger. Same goes for choosing creators, targeting value-aligned ambassadors whose audiences already want what you're offering is the most authentic path for sustainable growth.
- **Energy alignment:** Do you vibe naturally? Do you feel the depth of connection and the frequency click? You know when this is a yes, and when it's a no. Let's all make a vow together to stop doubting ourselves, or trying to force something that's even a little bit off. Trust your gut, your intuition always knows. It's safe AND beneficial to always listen even if it disappoints people or pokes at fomo. Trust, trust, and more trust!
- **Long-term potential:** Can you see it going somewhere? For the long haul? Ideally when entering into a partnership of any kind you believe in the possibility of creating something win-win and longterm so you're always growing together. Otherwise, what's the point? One off stuff isn't worth it to me. Building together is the most delicious for all.

Storytelling That Transforms Brands Into Must-Haves

Partnerships alone don't create impact. Without potent storytelling, they fall flat. The brands that become household names resonate culturally, spark emotional connection, and communicate meaningful brand purpose. People don't just buy products; they fall in love with stories behind the brand that come from the heart. They connect to the energy of the message. They buy into the why driving the mission and want to be a part of it. They want to understand functions, uses, and benefits and understand how to easily integrate this value into their everyday life. They purchase because they trust you to solve a problem, enhance their life, and support their day-to-day wellbeing. Don't just market your brand - that's boring. Vulnerably and authentically share who you are and why you exist. Drill in, pull every possible content bucket apart into mini and micro topics and let every one be an opportunity to lift the hood and let people all the way in to see and feel who you are.

Compelling storytelling 101:

- **Color outside the lines:** Go beyond the obvious. Tell the story that serves. A story line that always resonated with Ozlo Sleep was how the device itself was relationship therapy. Being able to sleep in bed with any sound next to you supports partnership. Another brand I love, Chikka Chikka markets themselves as a digestive snack. That's great. For me, even better is that I can pop a few anytime outside energy or food slides my extremely sensitive system off center. It instantly realigns me. It's amazing to have a tool I can keep in my bag and rely on for an instant shift. The founder of Marak, my favorite candle line, is one of 5 siblings. Marak stands for the first letter of each of their names. Each candle fragrance is developed to represent the archetype of each sibling

and each cause you to feel a different experiential sensation based on that. Doesn't reading that alone cause you to connect with and love the brand already?!

- **Think, creative diversity:** Especially for paid, you need a bajillion different messages, positioning, visuals, and styles to see real results and understanding what connects with audiences and why gives you insight to better understand your community and thus always be giving real value. Also, it gives you so much opportunity to share stories from the heart, offer education, provide value-add takeaways and create content that's produced for connection over promos. I get why people believe in doing promos and discounts and all the things I just feel like when you are transactional you're not being fully authentic and you're coming from a needy place… it's true. Think about it, if you're *pushing* a promotion it's because you think you 'need' to hit a number for some reason that is performance based and if you're *trying* to perform you're not being fully authentic. Presence over performance all-day, everyday. At the same time it's always about balance, everything in moderation including moderation. My point is, I reco you prioritize the intention to develop real connection and you can do this through creative storytelling that's authentic and relatable.
- **Evoke a feeling -** I love feelings! Feelings are the portal to consciousness, presence, awareness, inspiration, aspiration, transformation, expansion, and more…you want your community to FEEL things when they connect with your content. Every single thing you put out there should be an opportunity to deepen connection with your audience between you and them, between them and you, between them and themselves, because themselves and whoever they feel called to share it with…and this doesn't have to be fancy or overproduced, just real. This creates sprinkles of positivity that ripple out from your point of origin and we LOVE how this impacts the world.

The Power Of Partnership

I live by the mantra, "Build a longer table not a taller fence." Community, events, connection - designing experiences for this generates new ideas, empowered relationships and accelerates collective growth. Unity strengthens all.

An aligned partnership feels like divine union. You're in it together, you have each other's backs, you are in it to support each other and you're willing to do whatever it takes to show up fully for that, as a team. It also amplifies energy. It solves problems without words. It creates positive shifts beneath the surface.

Activating this looks like co-creating co-branded campaign assets, sharing everything at the same time in a coordinated rhythm, echoing your message across all platforms together. This enables targeting audiences who are already interested in what you offer, creating an instant connection and credibility. Every collaboration reflects the same principles, so the story feels authentic and resonates deeply with value-aligned communities.

Extra tips on producing activations for collective growth:

- **Start with the shared story:** Co-create the narrative connecting both brands. The activation should be an organic integration of that shared story, not just two logos placed next to each other.
- **Design for participation and value:** Invite people in. Think experiences, rituals, challenges, conversations, or moments your community can actively engage with. Ignite their desire to participate naturally because it's cool and fun, not forced or gimmicky. At the same time give the audience something meaningful: insight, experience, connection, education, or delight. When people feel enriched by the brand the connection deepens.
- **Play to each partner's strengths:** One brand might lead storytelling, another might lead product experience, another might host community. Lean into what each partner does best and support each other to shine in those areas.
- **Create a series of touchpoints:** Instead of a single announcement, think about how the collaboration unfolds over time through teasers, launch moments, behind-the-scenes content, community engagement, and follow-ups.
- **Leave room for magic:** Create the container with some open space for creativity and unexpected moments to move through. By the way, this is a good tool for growth in general. Nobody loves a "container" like I do. Structure is sexy. It can also be limiting and is beneficial for us to have a lot of space to flow authentically (and what that means for everyone is totally unique) within that loose structure. Know where the edges are and be unafraid to let them shift. Again, balance baby.

A Note To Founders on Allowing

Often the impulse is to run the engine. Pour gas on the fire. LIGHT IT UP. Even coming from someone who has a lot of fire in her chart and lives high on life, the truth is sometimes doing less is more. Sometimes, what expansion is really calling for, is a big beautiful pause. Full stop. Want to? Just don't instead! Let go and allow the space for creativity to do its thing.

Let's be honest, if you're reading this, we're likely all on the same journey of releasing control and probably share a highly energetic system that can lean towards doing way too much sometimes. It's okay, we're all cute little psychos and we're in it together. Since alignment and expansion require death and rebirth, we have to let things go to expand. Throw your hands up and enjoy the ride.

Release the pressures you put on yourself to be perfect and do everything. It's safe to let yourself be supported, and if there's a voice that says no one else can do it the way you do, look it dead in the face and choose to see the underlying limiting beliefs and opportunities to get out of your own way. Grab your journal, go deep, and rejigger all that junk that stands between you and your company's growth.

Your real job is to be a visionary. This means you do whatever it takes to keep yourself open, free and clear so you can be in and lead from the flow state. This doesn't mean you take it all on

and do everything yourself. Actually, more often than not this will lead you to connecting with the right trusted people who can do it with you.

Integration tools for allowing space:

- **Embrace the waves:** expansion happens in cycles. Give yourself time to reflect, process and land as you go.
- **Stillness is major:** The most valuable breakthroughs often arrive in between action.
- **Prioritize your creative bandwidth:** Your clarity as a founder is one of the company's most valuable resources. Devote time for your own thinking, exploring, and seeing what needs to be seen.
- **Delegate:** Your role is vision and direction. Surround yourself with people who can bring ideas to life so you can stay focused on where the brand is going next.
- **Build lifestyle systems:** Have a toolkit of different modalities handy so you can reach for whatever you need at any moment to support you.
- **Honor your intuition:** Not every next step comes from strategy. Some of the most powerful shifts begin with a quiet knowing that doesn't always make sense. In the unspoken we trust :)
- **Trust the timing:** OOOOH this is my life's lesson. Impatience and rush have been adorable little friends of mine that can block the way. There is a bigger plan. We are always being guided. It's time when it's time and until then you dance with the rhythm of letting go and moving forward. Relax, kick back, and ENJOY.

Now What?

Thank you again for investing energy in this.

If you have quick tactical questions on anything as you implement this yourself feel free to send me a message!

If you want to go deeper together there are a few ways to do that. The first next step is to have a call to talk through desires, intentions and budgets.

From there, I can suggest the right collaboration for where you are.

Looking forward to staying connected!

Lots of love,
Stef