

Brand Voice Spectrum Decision Tree

A Framework by Tameka Bazile

How to Use This Decision Tree

This tool helps you identify where your brand currently sits on the Brand Voice Spectrum and whether you should shift positions. Work through each dimension honestly—this isn't about where you want to be, it's about where you can realistically operate given your current resources, governance, and audience expectations.

For each dimension, answer the questions and note your position. At the end, you'll have a clear picture of where your brand belongs and what needs to change before you can move.

DIMENSION 1: Business Goals & Priorities

What are you optimizing for right now?

- Trust and credibility above all else**
→ Corporate or Conservative Relational
- Emotional connection with our community**
→ Conservative Relational or Conversational
- Engagement and content retention**
→ Conversational
- Brand differentiation in a crowded market**
→ Charismatic
- Cultural relevance and virality**
→ Chaotic/Unhinged

Follow-up questions:

- Is this goal documented and agreed upon by leadership?
- Do your current KPIs align with this goal?
- Would your team describe the same priority if asked?

Current Position: _____

DIMENSION 2: Audience Permission & Expectations

Why does your audience follow you today?

- For industry insights, data, and expertise**
→ Corporate
- For inspiring stories and values-driven content**
→ Conservative Relational
- For helpful, relatable advice from a peer**
→ Conversational
- For bold takes and cultural commentary**
→ Charismatic
- For entertainment and meme culture**
→ Chaotic/Unhinged

Follow-up questions:

- What happens when you post outside your usual tone? Do people engage more, less, or disengage entirely?
- Have you surveyed or interviewed your audience about what they expect from you?
- Do your top-performing posts align with a specific voice position?

Current Position: _____

DIMENSION 3: Governance & Decision-Making

How many approvals does a typical social post require?

- 4+ approvals, takes 3+ days**
→ Structurally capped at Corporate or Conservative Relational
- 2-3 approvals, takes 1-2 days**
→ Can operate at Conservative Relational or Conversational
- 1 approval or final review, published same day**
→ Can reach Conversational or Charismatic

- Social team owns final decisions, publishes in real-time**
→ Can operate at Charismatic or Chaotic/Unhinged

Follow-up questions:

- Who has veto power over content decisions?
- Can your team respond to trending moments within hours?
- Has leadership approved "Voice Zones" rather than individual posts?

Current Position: _____

DIMENSION 4: Risk Tolerance

How does leadership respond when content underperforms or receives pushback?

- Immediately pulls back and adds more review layers**
→ Stay at Corporate or Conservative Relational
- Discusses what went wrong but doesn't overreact**
→ Can operate at Conservative Relational or Conversational
- Views it as a learning opportunity, adjusts and continues**
→ Can reach Conversational or Charismatic
- Expects some misses as part of taking creative risks**
→ Can operate at Charismatic or Chaotic/Unhinged

Follow-up questions:

- Has your brand ever faced social media backlash? How did leadership respond?
- Is there budget allocated for experimental content that might not perform?
- Would leadership support a controversial but on-brand post?

Current Position: _____

DIMENSION 5: Cultural Fluency & Team Capability

Can your social team explain why something works culturally?

- Team focuses on data and industry trends, not internet culture**
→ Corporate or Conservative Relational
- Team understands platform norms but doesn't lead cultural conversations**
→ Conservative Relational or Conversational
- Team actively participates in platform culture and can spot opportunities**
→ Conversational or Charismatic
- Team lives online, creates trends, and has native creator fluency**
→ Charismatic or Chaotic/Unhinged

Follow-up questions:

- Can your team distinguish between irony and sincerity in online discourse?
- Do they understand the difference between a trend and a moment?
- Can they explain the origin and context of memes before using them?

Current Position: _____

DIMENSION 6: Brand Infrastructure & Resources

What does your current setup support?

- Rigid brand guidelines, legal review required, stock imagery only**
→ Corporate
- Established guidelines with some flexibility, mix of branded and human content**
→ Conservative Relational or Conversational
- Guidelines exist but team can adapt them, creator-style content is approved**
→ Conversational or Charismatic
- Minimal guidelines, mascot-driven, team has full creative control**
→ Charismatic or Chaotic/Unhinged

Follow-up questions:

- Can you create platform-native content without going through brand compliance?

- Do you have budget for real-time content creation and trend participation?
- Can you produce and publish video content within 24 hours?

Current Position: _____

YOUR BRAND VOICE SPECTRUM ASSESSMENT

Review your answers across all six dimensions. Your brand voice should align with your MOST RESTRICTIVE dimension—not your most ambitious one.

If your answers span multiple categories:

- Note where you have the LEAST flexibility
- That's your ceiling until you address the constraint
- Don't move up the spectrum until you can confidently answer at that level across ALL dimensions

My brand is currently positioned at:

- Corporate
- Conservative Relational
- Conversational
- Charismatic
- Chaotic/Unhinged

SHOULD YOU SHIFT POSITIONS?

Only consider moving if you can answer YES to all of the following:

- Our business goals clearly require a different voice position
- Our audience has given signals they're ready for this shift
- Our governance structure can support faster decision-making
- Leadership is aligned on the change and its implications
- Our team has the cultural fluency to operate at the new level
- We have the resources and infrastructure to sustain this consistently

If you answered NO to any of the above, address that constraint before shifting.

YOUR NEXT STEPS

Based on your assessment, choose ONE action to take in the next 30 days:

If staying at your current position:

- Document your current voice with clear examples
- Create a "Never Say This" list to clarify boundaries
- Build a content library of approved tone variations
- Train new hires and agency partners on your position

If moving one level up the spectrum:

- Get executive sign-off on "Voice Zones" instead of individual posts
- Reduce approval layers by one level
- Test the new voice with 3-5 pieces of content
- Document what worked and what didn't
- Update brand guidelines with new examples

If addressing constraints before you can shift:

- Audit your governance process and identify bottlenecks
- Build a business case for reducing approval layers
- Invest in cultural fluency training for your team
- Survey your audience about their expectations
- Clarify and document your business goals with leadership

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

1. Jumping more than one level at a time

Your audience needs time to adjust. Your team needs time to build competency. Move gradually.

2. Letting governance lag behind creative ambition

You can have the most creative team in the world, but if every post takes four days to approve, you're structurally capped.

3. Copying what works for other brands

Duolingo's chaos works for Duolingo. Your brand has different goals, different audiences, and different constraints.

4. Treating this as a one-time decision

Voice strategy should be revisited quarterly. Business goals shift, teams change, platforms evolve.

5. Ignoring the signs your audience isn't ready

If your more casual posts consistently underperform, your audience is telling you something. Listen.