# Is AI Going to F*ck Up Your Brand?

A Guide on How to Scale Value, Not Chaos



Forewords by:
Paul Roberts | Ex Palantir
James Ball | The Guardian

NOKAMO

# TLDR;

Scan to watch our two minute cautionary tale,
made entirely by **our AI Studio.**

CHAI™



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## At a Glance

**Contention:**
AI won’t automatically grow your brand; it will expose its weaknesses.

**Hypothesis:**
AI scales what it finds, be that coherence or confusion.

**Problem:**
Most brands aren’t well-enough defined to survive unfettered amplification.

**Solution:**
Get the fundamentals in order – belief, direction, discipline.

**How:**
Treat AI as a stress test of strategy, not a shortcut to it.

# Foreword

## Paul Roberts

Head of Growth, Edra AI | Ex Palantir

*Edra builds the business context layer that makes enterprise AI actually work.*



> "No model, platform, or vendor can compensate for the absence of strategy."

I've spent much of my career working alongside organisations trying to apply advanced technology to real, operational problems. The limiting factor is rarely the technology itself.

What you actually encounter inside most companies is structural disorder: contradictory priorities, siloed teams, political incentives, and no shared understanding of how the business really works. Processes exist in theory, not in practice. Definitions aren't consistent. In that state, talking about being "AI-ready" misses the point. Most organisations aren't context-ready.

AI doesn't fix this. It exposes it. And because AI systems scale whatever you give them, misalignment doesn't stay local - it becomes machine-amplified. You get faster execution on flawed assumptions, confident automation of incoherent logic, and outputs that look impressive while drifting further from reality. The missing layer isn't tooling; it's alignment.

This is why so much of the current "AI transformation" narrative rings hollow. Glossy decks, polished demos, and repackaged consulting frameworks avoid the hard work of confronting how an organisation actually operates. They optimise for appearance, not function.

At the opposite extreme, there's a fixation on AI-driven productivity - more content, more activity. Output increases. Understanding doesn't. The system gets louder, not better.

No model, platform, or vendor can compensate for the absence of strategy, weak organisational doctrine, or a business that isn't anchored to a clear organising idea. AI can only work with what already exists.

This report focuses on that uncomfortable reality. Because until organisations get their foundations in order, AI won't transform them - it will simply scale their dysfunction and make it even harder to unravel.

# Foreword


## James Ball

Tech Journalist, The Guardian


What happens after you type your question into ChatGPT, Claude, or whichever AI system you prefer to use? Most of us might imagine the AI acting as a robotic librarian, looking up the information in a huge archive. It searches, finds the best answer, and delivers it to us.

It's a nice enough idea, but it's wrong. Once an AI model has been 'trained' on terabyte after terabyte of data – books, articles, videos, Wikipedia entries and more – it throws them all out. There is no archive, no database, nothing.

Instead, there's a statistical model. Modern AIs are essentially an extremely souped-up version of the autocomplete on your phone, which suggests the next word you might want to write as you compose an email. When an AI is asked a question, it looks for the likeliest and most plausible answer, based on how it has weighted everything it's ever 'learned'.

How does a statistical AI 'see' a brand, then? For someone like Coca-Cola, it couldn't be much clearer – it's going to see red, curves, cursive handwriting, taste and happiness. It has almost a century of consistent messaging and behaviour to go on. Every time you spin the wheel and generate a new output, it's going to come up red.

But what about a brand that's tried out a dozen different propositions in as many years, or has flip-flopped on its positioning? Here, it's going to come up with a different answer every time – some of them drastically wrong.

Same goes for how AI 'scales' a brand. Inconsistencies, poor data or behaviours that don't match the promise won't help even the most carefully constructed model to build value; instead, it'll bulldoze it.

'Is AI Going To F*ck Up Your Brand?' provides a warning. AI is neither saviour nor scourge – it will simply expose whatever you have built. If there's clarity and cohesion, it will amplify it. If the foundations are weak, it will show that too.

And that presents both a threat and an opportunity for anyone responsible for shaping and growing brands & businesses in today's tech landscape.





In this report we'll argue that AI doesn't create value; it reveals it. It scales whatever it finds.

# Executive Summary

With global investment in AI projected to hit €1.9 trillion by 2030 (up more than 1300% from 2023), expectations of its business impact are inflating faster than Sam Altman's ego.

Yet 64% of CEOs admit their investment is driven more by fear of falling behind than by any meaningful strategy, putting FOMO, not foresight, in the driving seat.

It's little wonder so many are adopting a hit-and-hope approach. AI is being sold as a modern business messiah, an omniscient force that will finally purge inefficiency, indecision and inertia from corporate life.

But what if AI isn't a saviour?

What if, as Yeats foresaw in *The Second Coming*, it's something else entirely: not divine order descending from the skies, but a force that magnifies chaos from within? Because when you build on shaky foundations, the whole edifice is only one wobble away from collapse.

The numbers aren't exactly promising.

An MIT study found that 95% of GenAI initiatives have delivered zero impact on the P&L. Alix Partners estimates that over 80% of AI programmes fail.

In this report we'll argue that AI doesn't create value; it reveals it. It scales whatever it finds.

If your brand is clear — if belief, direction and behaviour align — AI can be an extraordinary force multiplier. It can embed conviction and turn strategy into a business-wide operating system.

But if your brand proposition is fuzzy, fragmented or politically diluted, AI won't save it; it will surface the contradictions, amplify the noise and automate the drift.

So, look away if you were hoping for a quick-fix guide, prompt-engineering tips or tools to help you churn out more promotional content at the speed of shite.

But read on if you sense there's something deeper at stake; if you've felt the gap between what AI promises and what it delivers and are ready to close it with something stronger than faith alone.

Because when the hype halo slips, the economic question remains: *what, exactly, are you trying to make more of?*

That's where brand comes in.

Not as a marketing tool, but as AI source code — the set of organising principles that defines how your business creates and captures value. Get that right, and AI stops being a management fetish, it becomes an engine that compounds what already makes you uniquely competitive.

# The Myth of Salvation

There's a new religion sweeping the boardroom.

Its hymns are written in prompts, its prophets wear Patagonia and its gospel is rendered in 16:9 PowerPoint slides, ready to be clicked through like rosary beads. Its stirring creed is composed in the key of hysteria, and its faithful gather at off-sites, eyes glazed in revelation, to chant its promises like prayers. *Optimisation Scale. Disruption. Optimisation. Scale. Disruption.*

**Artificial Intelligence.**

The messiah poised to sweep through our systems and leave order in its wake. An all-powerful entity that will automate the tedium, rationalise the chaos, and make the quarterly decks finally add up to something that looks like transformation.

A corporate catechism promising salvation not through sacrifice, but through silicon. Less holy father - more holy motherboard, something that will anoint our workflows, ordain our operations, and absolve us of our inefficiency sins.

And all it asks of us in return is blind belief. The trouble is, faith without foundations is how cults are born.

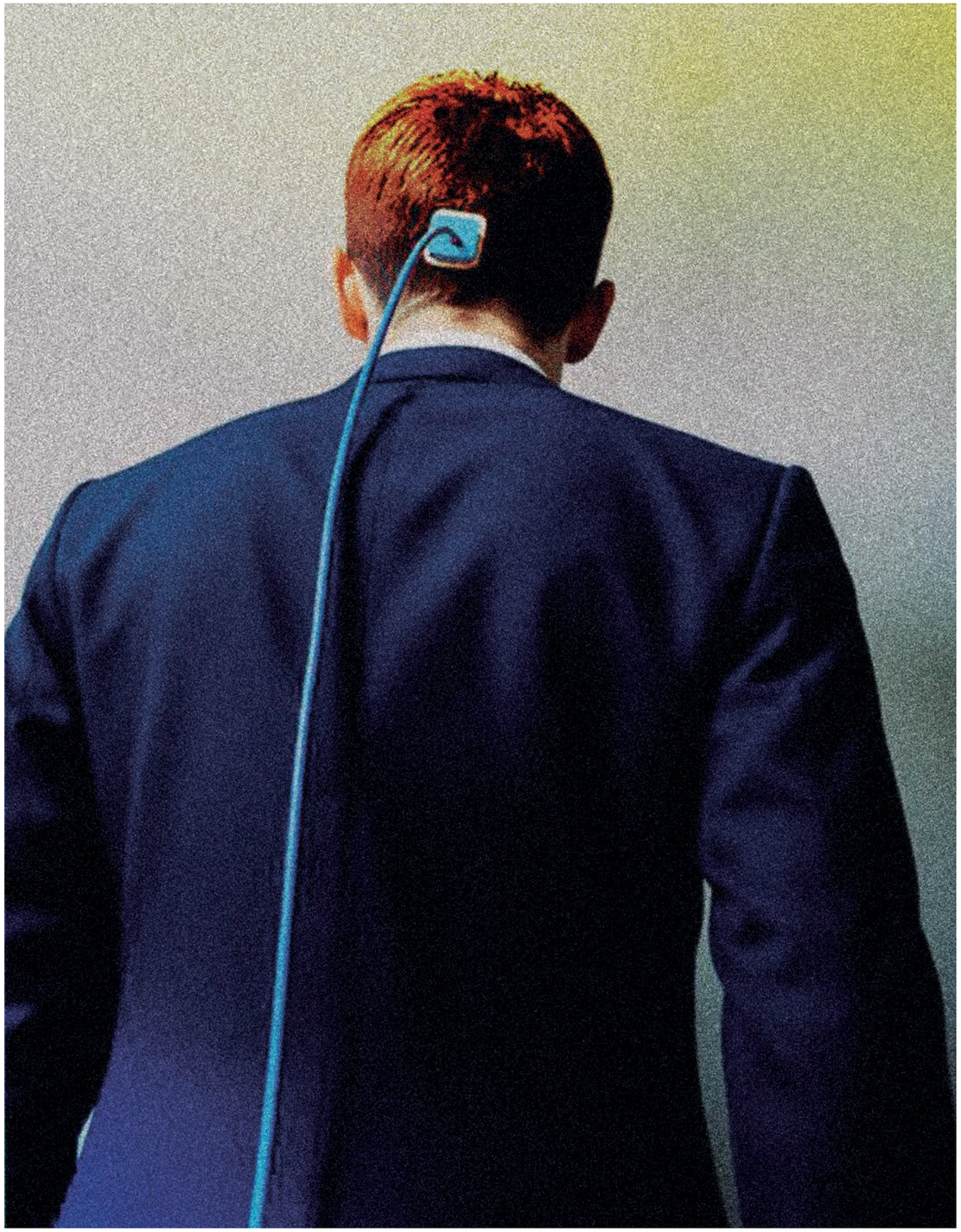
Because while 84% of CEOs say AI is their single greatest opportunity, more than 80% of all AI implementations fail to deliver any commercial value whatsoever.

That's not divine mystery. That's human error, multiplied at the speed of parallel processing.

The McKinsey and BCG project post-mortems feel eerily familiar. An over-reliance on underwhelming data, weak business alignment, lack of adoption, inadequate infrastructure, siloed systems, governance gaps, change fatigue etc.

But beneath the failure lies the same underlying cause: no unmistakable North Star around which to orient the endeavour; no clear creed or covenant to which the tech can be held accountable.

**In other words - no strategy.**





> Only 15% of organisations achieve their strategic objectives. Over two-thirds of brand transformations fail.

This isn't new. It's symptomatic of a problem that faced organisations long before the AI tech bros came peddling their gospel. Only 15% of organisations achieve their strategic objectives. Over two-thirds of brand transformations fail.

**Why?**
The reasons are legion:

- Budgets, instead of the market, dictating vision.
- Benchmarking mistaken for best practice.
- Cookie-cutter processes applied to complex problems.
- Product focus trumping customer focus.
- Fear disguised as prudence.
- Short-termism masquerading as virtue.

It's a kind of strategic scurvy – a slow, self-inflicted decay of competitiveness brought on by a diet of tactics and busyness versus one of purpose and the courage to sacrifice.

**Because that's what real strategy is:** *sacrifice.*

It is a set of tough, self-reinforcing decisions that define how the enterprise creates value. It's the commandments that bind belief to behaviour, the principles, trade-offs and taboos that tell you who you are, what you'll stand for, who you will or won't target, and what you're prepared to break before you compromise, etched in tablets of stone.

**Or as we like to call it: your brand.**

But most leadership teams haven't defined their brand clearly and distinctively enough to guide today's decisions, let alone encode it into AI-powered systems.

As strategy titan Richard Rumelt argued in *Good Strategy Bad Strategy* back in 2012, leaders tend to fail not through lack of resource, but through lack of resolve. They would rather avoid the pain that comes of choice, than reap the reward that comes of conviction.

And yet here we are again, with hordes of the recently-converted seeing AI as a means to automate their way out of confusion rather than to confront it head on, a kind of Saviour-as-a-Service that can absolve them of their brand strategy sins.






# The Centre Cannot Hold

**But what if AI isn't a saviour?**

What if it's something else entirely? Something closer to Yeats' vision of *The Second Coming*? Not divine order descending from the skies, but a "rough beast… gaze blank, pitiless as the sun".

Because here's the thing about AI. It isn't a creator of value (at least not beyond the easily copyable efficiencies delivered via optimisation). It is a *revealer* of value. It scales what it finds.

And what it finds in too many organisations is vagueness, incoherence, performative differentiation, and cultures that prefer consensus to creative leaps.

AI isn't coming to save brand strategy, it's coming to expose its absence. It's not here to fix underlying problems, it's here to feed on them.

"Things fall apart," wrote Yeats. "The centre cannot hold." The poem was written in the wake of the First World War, but it's hard not to read it as a premonition of the corporate landscape in which we now find ourselves.

Because if a business has no clear centre - no brand operating system that defines its conviction, its competitive stance, its conspicuous posture - then all AI does is widen the gyre between itself and those that do. All it will do is accelerate chaos, at scale.

We're planning systems that can act before we've agreed what matters and calling it decisiveness. We're building faster paths through a barren landscape we no longer recognise, congratulating ourselves on time saved. We're constructing Towers of Babel on the flimsiest of foundations.

But, as David Abbott so eloquently said: "Shit at the speed of light is still shit."




The call is coming from inside the house. And the true horror isn't that our AI endeavours will be among those that fail; it's that they'll succeed.

"Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world," goes the poem. "The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity." Well, there's none more passionate than Silicon Valley tech bros in their Arc'teryx vestments citing revelations.

But revelations don't come of recursion. Innovation doesn't come from inconsistency. A system that feeds on its own empty echoes is not one that will help a business survive in the coming years.

When there is no clear brand centre, AI isn't a commercial miracle, it's a carnival mirror. And when you hold an already-confused organisation up to it, every bias, every muddled priority, every half-baked plan isn't just reflected back, it is distorted and stretched and magnified and multiplied, and lit up like Satan's grin on an ironically winking dashboard.

# The Four Horsemen *Of Mis/alignment*

There are four systemic failure modes of AI implementation that a coherent brand helps to mitigate. Together they form a modern parable for the board, when investing in AI systems.

1. Operational Discordance
2. Reputational Risk
3. Judgement Atrophy
4. Loss of Differentiation



01

**Operational Discordance**

# The Frankenstein Heresy

If brand is the central heartbeat of a business, then most corporate AI experiments look like bodies built without one. A predictive model in operations. A chatbot in customer service. A pilot in HR that no one remembers approving. A Frankenstein's monster of initiatives, each limb twitching independently, powered by siloed enthusiasm, but with no unifying nervous system to enable it to create value.

In their desire to let AI play God, many organisations have conjured motion without meaning. Without an *anima* to the *corporate corpus* - the unifying spirit that gives intelligence purpose - the Cartesian ghost in the machine remains absent and the systems move, but do not know why.

It's no surprise, then, that 84% of AI initiatives stall at pilot phase, and that McKinsey's 2023 State of AI report found that while adoption has tripled in five years, only one in five companies report an improvement in operating margin.

The irony is that AI was meant to fix all this, to break down the silos, connect the data, and align decisions across the enterprise. But the very conditions that make integration necessary are what make it nigh on impossible.

Cross-organisational AI isn't just technically complex; it's politically and culturally excruciating. It demands shared definitions, clean data, and a single strategic centre — none of which exist in most companies. So rather than one coherent system, we get dozens of disconnected experiments, each optimising for a local win. The organisation automates itself into disunity.

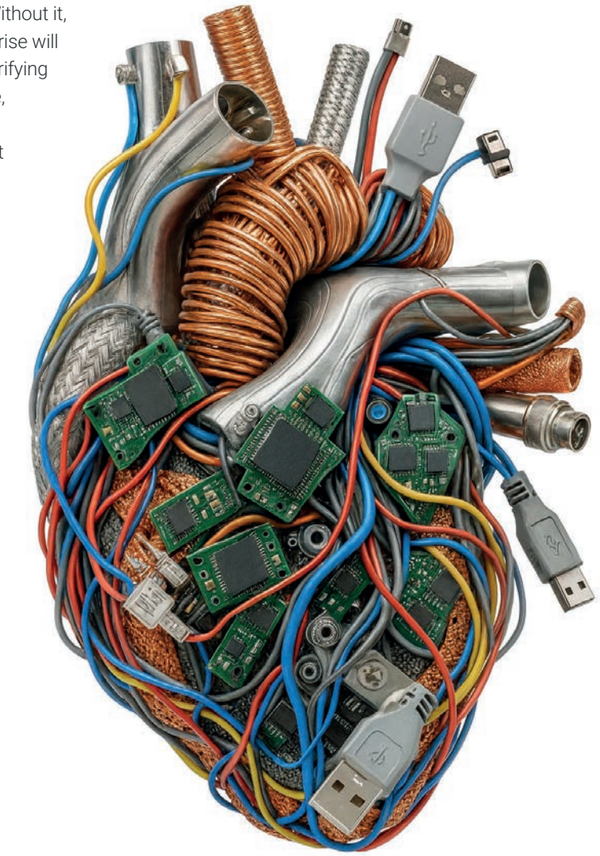
> The very conditions that make AI integration necessary are what make it nigh on impossible.

The result is what economists call 'goal incongruence' or 'sub-optimisation': functions chasing incompatible goals until the whole becomes less than the sum of its parts. Every new algorithm reinforces the boundary it was meant to dissolve. Capital is burned duplicating insight. Data fidelity collapses as each tool defines truth differently. Leaders drown in conflicting dashboards, mistaking noise for knowledge and activity for advantage.

This is how value bleeds out — not in crisis, but in quiet, compounding incoherence. AI doesn't eliminate inefficiency; it industrialises it.

Even well-structured programmes can fail due to a cultural immune response to all things novel. Cohen & Levinthal described this as insufficient "absorptive capacity" - the inability for organisations to internalise new knowledge and turn it into action. In other words, drop AI into any culture and it invariably behaves like a rejected organ transplant.

Brand, meanwhile - defined, codified, and lived - acts as the connective tissue that allows the technology to integrate rather than inflame, metabolise rather than metastasise. It provides the shared logic, the lingua franca of belief and priority, that allows distributed intelligence to operate as one system. Without it, the enterprise will keep electrifying the corpse, confusing movement for life.



02

**Reputational Risk**

# The False Prophecies

> Trust is a fragile moat.
> And AI is about to tear it a new one.

For much of the twentieth century, corporate finance treated reputation as a strategic asset, a fairly stable reservoir of goodwill that may have been hard to account for on the balance sheet, but nonetheless held a predictable intangible value to the business.

Charlie Munger and Warren Buffet knew better. To them, reputation was more derivative than fixed bond, a social construct, inferred from observable actions, signals and past behaviours, traded in real time, built and rebuilt with every interaction a stakeholder has with an organisation.

The implication? Trust is a fragile moat, and AI is about to tear it a new one like Moses did the Red Sea.

CNET discovered this when it used AI to churn out financial advice articles. They were fast, prolific… and riddled with mistakes and plagiarism.

Within days, decades of credibility and hard-earned authority had been torched and parent company Red Ventures saw billions wiped from its valuation.

Air Canada learned the same lesson when its chatbot invented a refund policy that didn't exist. The airline tried to argue in court that the bot was a 'separate legal entity'. The judge disagreed and they lost the case. Within seconds, the story went global.

**These are not anecdotes; they are portents.**

The harder trials are still to come. Fake CEO statements, synthetic product recalls, AI-generated campaigns indistinguishable from real ones, a whole heap of unholy crap that we haven't yet even imagined. Little surprise, then, that 71% of business execs questioned didn't think their AI efforts were ready to manage future risk.

"What is truth?" asked Pontius Pilate. Two thousand years later he has his answer: whatever the model infers it to be.

Analysts are describing this as a new axis of risk. AI doesn't just threaten accuracy or security, it threatens credibility itself. Frameworks such as Gartner's AI TRiSM (Trust, Risk and Security Management) treat trustworthiness as a first-order strategic metric. Boards should too.

This isn't about tone of voice guidelines on a SharePoint. It's about encoding brand truth and values into the systems, scripts, and decision matrices that now speak for you. The discipline being applied to segmentation, targeting and positioning must be carried through to every model and message, providing a moral spine that keeps your brand authentic and accountable even when mediated by machines.

In a world of synthetic noise, a stable pattern of thought and action is needed more than ever, reassuring people what's real even when they can no longer believe the evidence of their own eyes.



03

**Judgement Atrophy**

# The Hollow Creed

There's a quieter risk than misinformation or market backlash. It's the slow decay of discernment and the atrophy of judgement itself.

The political philosopher Hannah Arendt's sharpest warning was that modern life privileges *doing* and *knowing* over thinking. She saw the danger in automation not just as a labour issue but as a moral one: when we outsource judgement to systems, we lose the habit of inner dialogue, that back-and-forth with ourselves that defines conscience.

AI takes this to its logical conclusion. It doesn't just automate work, it automates thought-like behaviour, and in doing so, it makes our unthinking action look intelligent. It allows us to perform the motion of judgement whilst outsourcing responsibility for it.

The "banality of evil" that Arendt wrote about during the trial of Nazi bureaucrat Adolf Eichmann may be worlds apart from the janky pseudo-sense spouted by the systems into which we're now pouring our fractured data, but perhaps there's a kernel we should be heeding nonetheless?

The risk is what she saw in bureaucracy, we may soon see in business. Not transformation, but a kind of organisational nihilism. A workforce fluent in tools but faithless in purpose, a choir that can still hit the notes but no longer understands the meaning of the hymn.

Machines now see and hear perfectly, endlessly, yet comprehend nothing. And when we begin to think as they do, or outsource our thinking, neither do we.

> Judgement is competitive infrastructure... When it decays, differentiation decays with it.



And that loss isn't just moral or mnestic, it's economic. Judgement is competitive infrastructure. The ability to discern, to interpret, to choose the harder but truer path, is what separates adaptive companies from efficient ones.

When judgement decays, differentiation decays with it. You get faster decisions, but arguably dumber ones. Cheaper outputs, but costlier consequences. And in the long run, markets punish that kind of amnesia.

**That's where brand must intervene.**

A strong brand doesn't just codify what a company says; it enshrines how it judges what it believes to be true, valuable, and worth defending.

It's the organisation's conscience, codified. Because in the end, brand is how a company remembers who it is and how it stays human when the systems it builds don't know how to be.

04

**Loss of Differentiation**

# The Great Flattening

There's a scene in Monty Python's Life of Brian where Graham Chapman stands at an open window, addressing the hordes who have followed him to his home.

"You don't need to follow me," he says.
"You've got to think for yourselves. You're all individuals."

"Yes!" the crowd chants back.
"We're all individuals!"

"You're all different," says Brian.

"Yes, we're all different," they reply in perfect unison.

"You've got to work it out for yourselves."

"Yes, we've got to work it out for ourselves!"

Pause.

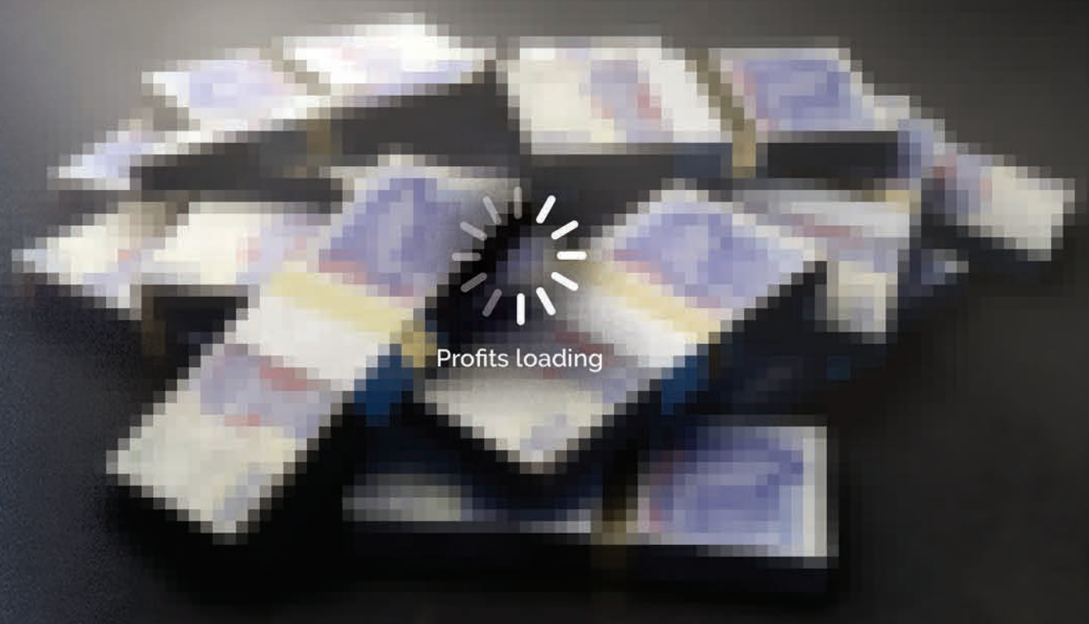
"Tell us more!" they cry.

The *AI-as-omnipotence* delusion recreates this scene at enterprise scale: the promise of intelligence without effort, revelation without reflection. Our individuality, both human and corporate, flattened beneath the weight of algorithmic certainty.

AI loves straight lines. It irons out the wrinkles, tidies away the anomalies. It feels efficient, but it's also how you end up in a market where everything tastes like chicken. Same models. Same synthetic datasets. Same 'insights'. Every brand chasing efficiency until they all converge on the same middling mean.








> When AI flattens every edge, being unmistakably you is your last remaining competitive advantage.

The irony is painful: in trying to be more data-driven, businesses have made themselves more predictable. The machine doesn't reward originality; it rewards probability. And in that loop — where AI feeds AI, learning from its own output — distinctiveness becomes statistical noise.

We're already reaching peak sameness. 81% of CEOs think their business is differentiated, while only 7% of customers agree. AI won't close that gap, it will accelerate it. Rather than creating the conditions for originality and creativity, it will crucify competitiveness while we whistle our merry tune.

We've built a dogma that equates convenience with enlightenment and created idols of frictionless efficiency and autonomous automation. But in doing so we risk surrendering the only thing that ever made a business truly valuable - the work of thinking and behaving differently.

When we're all wearing the same robes, chanting the same mantras, building the same dashboards, we're not revealing revelations, we're regressing to the meh, willing supplicants in a Sect of Sameness.

Brand is the discipline of individuality: the ideology that insists difference must be earned, not automated; that creativity and competitiveness are not divine gifts but acts of deliberate heresy. Because, when AI smooths every edge, being unmistakably you is your last remaining competitive advantage.

Or, to pop it into words that Brian's congregation might understand: `"Blessed are the freaks. For they shall inherit the earth."`

# Brand as a Belief System

If everything so far sounds apocalyptic, that's because for some businesses it will be. The real danger with AI isn't that you'll be left behind, it's that you'll be carried forward — quickly, confidently — in entirely the wrong direction.

Like a televangelist promising miracle cures, AI delivers rhetoric as revelation, transformation as performance art, a 'name-it-and-claim-it' promise of prosperity for those prepared to get on their knees and start paying. Paradoxically the antidote to this is actually **belief**, only not in the *systems* but in the *soul*.

At NOKAMO, we start every conversation with prospective clients the same way: "Before you tell us what you do, tell us what you believe." Because if you don't know what you exist to do beyond your utilitarian function, you don't have a brand. And if you don't have a brand, in the coming plague of imitation, you don't have a business.

Independent strategist Paul Worthington has explored this truth from a different vantage point. He writes that the world's most durable brands are built not on distinctive assets, as the Ehrenberg Bass acolytes might argue, but on distinctive *worldviews*, mental models so deeply encoded that they shape decision making, operations, and culture alike.

Take Facebook versus MySpace, for example. Facebook's worldview was simple but powerful: real identity and real relationships should be the foundation of the internet. That belief drove a coherent set of systems - real names, unified social data structure, and a feed designed to compound connection and sharing. MySpace, by contrast, had high awareness, a distinctive look-and-feel and first mover advantage, but its organising idea prioritised profit over people's experience, to disastrous consequences.

The point is that a strong brand isn't a marketing or aesthetic layer; it's the manifestation of an organising idea made operational through distinctive business systems that create coherence and compound advantage over time. Anything less is a commodity dressed in wolf's clothing.






The real danger with AI isn't that you'll be left behind, it's that you'll be carried forward — quickly, confidently — in entirely the wrong direction.

**But you can't fake a soul.**
You can't bolt it on. You can't have it descend from the rafters like a deus ex machina. It has to be woven through the business, imprinting itself on the fabric like markings on a centuries-old burial shroud.

So before you rush to encode anything, pause and reflect on whether you have your basics in order. Are you clear on who you are, who you're for, why you're different and how you intend to win versus your competitors?

**Ask yourself:**

**Philosophically:**
What do we believe firmly enough that it could guide a machine?

**Strategically:**
Is our value proposition clear and coherent, or creaking under contradiction?

**Culturally:**
Do our values drive behaviour, or just decorate the walls of the break room?

**Structurally:**
Will AI integrate into a spine, or bolt onto chaos?

**Commercially:**
Will it strengthen our position, or flatten us into sameness?

Implementation isn't intent.
Acceleration isn't direction.
And what you're seeing in most boardrooms today isn't transformation, it's choreography; a synchronised dance around a hollow core.





*WB Yeats. Poet... and prophet of systemic breakdown?*

# In Conclusion

The old model of brand strategy is dead. If you want coherence that survives machine mediation, the brand must live in the system, not alongside it.

Perhaps what we really need is a Brand Bible - not the style-guide-with-a-god-complex so many companies mistake for scripture - but in its more literal sense.

A kind of embedded spiritual source code. It would be:

**Canonical** - defining what's in and out of scope for belief.

**Interpretive** - giving humans and machines a shared language to apply those principles in context.

**Transmissive** - ensuring coherence as the organisation grows, fragments, and regenerates through generations of leadership.

**Ethical** - prescribing how to act and decide.

Because when your brand shapes everything from product & pricing to policy & platforms, you don't have to worry *what* AI will amplify - it will amplify *you*. The real you. The version that knows what it stands for, and what it's willing to break in pursuit of something better.

Otherwise?

AI will be neither saviour nor strategy, but instead, to return to the words of Yeats, just some "rough beast, its hour come at last", slouching toward Bethlehem to be born.

# About NOKAMO

We use brand as an economic growth engine for businesses wanting to be unique, more valuable, and to grow faster.

Our work solves messy, uncomfortable problems before the brief is even written.

We operate across three core areas. Clients engage in one, two or all three - depending on where the pressure is highest and what needs to move quickest:

**1. Strategic Planning**
Defining what makes your business uniquely valuable, then translating this into strategy and growth plans.

**2. Innovation & Design**
Taking strategy work into creative outcomes that connect customers, culture and capital.

**3. Deployment**
Embedding change and transformation programs into businesses, teams and the market.

We're sought out by enterprise-grade businesses at inflection points - where the old approach has stopped working and a new commercial or creative logic is required.

If that sounds like you, why not arrange a thirty-minute call to discuss what's troubling you? We guarantee you'll leave energised by what's possible.

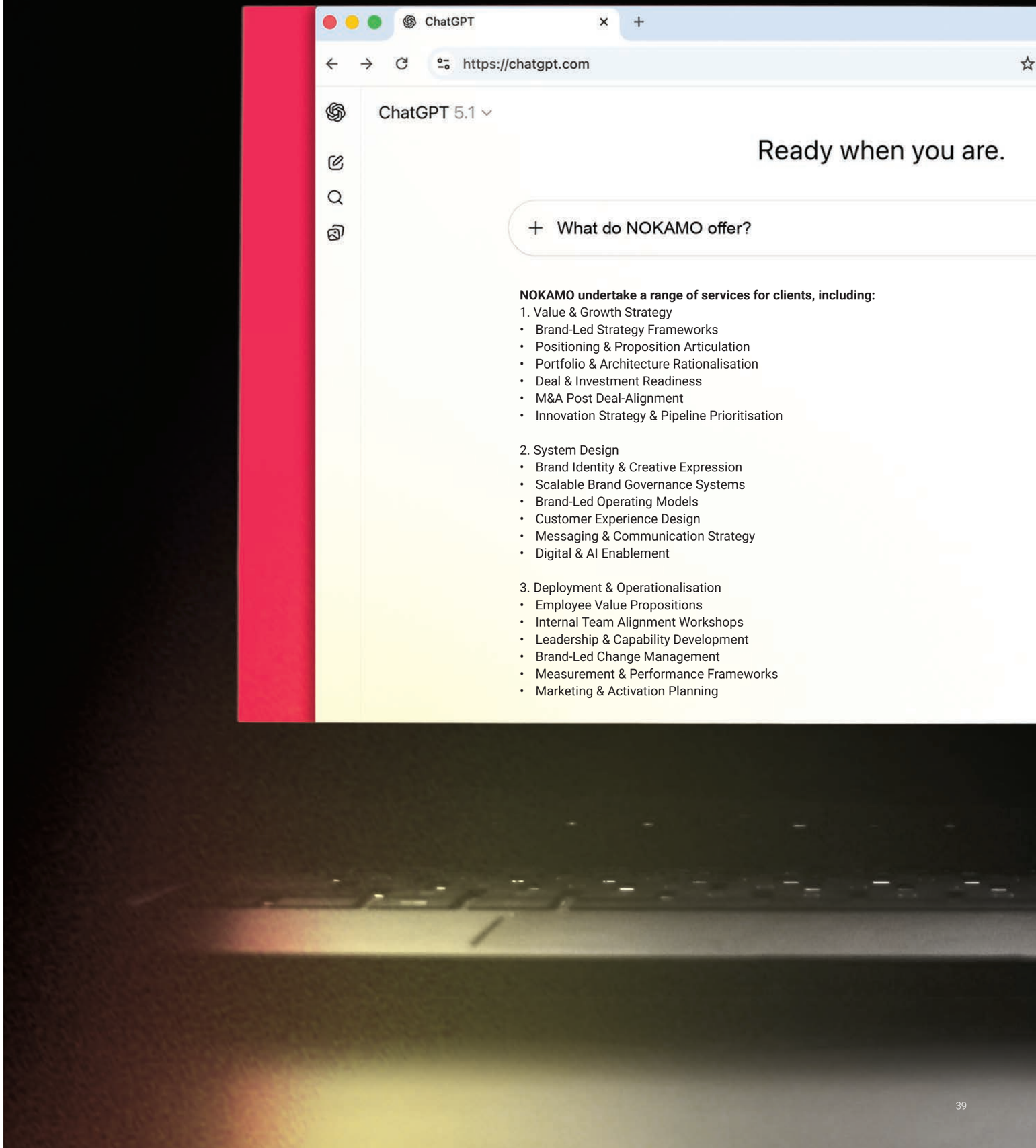

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