the book everyone makes opens with a logo in the middle. set aside.



expect
otherwise

every choice we made, next to the one we didn't.

chosen · read from this side. turn the book over for what was set aside.

expected

a foreword by the studio about its passion for design, its values and its team.

why this book exists

This is the book every client of mine gets at the end. This one is my own: I was both the studio and the client.

It shows every choice we made, and next to it the one we set aside. Most studios show the result. This book shows the road, including the turns not taken, so that whoever reads it can explain why the brand looks the way it does, and what must never change.

Two things are in here that books like this usually leave out: the client's own words, as they were said, and what AI did, next to what I did and what the client chose.

Read from the front for what was chosen. Turn the book over for what wasn't.



justin van vaerenbergh · expect otherwise · rotterdam, october 2026

a table of contents: 01 research, 02 strategy, 03 design, 04 implementation.

how to read this book

every double page is one choice. the line sits at one third, as on everything the studio makes.



expected
set aside

chosen
and why

1 read the question at the top.

2 look left: what anyone in the market would have made. it is flat and grey, because it was set aside.

3 look right: what was chosen, and the one reason why.

4 read the client's words, as they were said.

5 at the bottom: who did what. ai, me, and you.

s·12 means page 12 of the other book: turn this one over and read from the back.

a timeline of dots on a line, four phases, evenly spaced.

thirteen questions

in the order they were asked.
each chapter answers one.

01	what does the studio need to exist as a brand?
02	what does the studio stand for, and why would a business owner choose it?
03	what will the studio be called?
04	how does it sound?
05	does the voice hold in a text that goes out?
06	how do you recognise it without the name?
07	which mark stands for us?
08	how do we keep it this way?
09	what is the one sentence?
10	how does the brand behave on a screen?
11	what has to be on the site by law, and how is it protected?
12	is it ready to go live?
13	did it work? (added after launch)

chapter

01

the start

what does the studio need to exist as a brand?

3 options · 1 chosen, with one addition

the middle package: a website at an average level of motion. the safe margin.

what does the studio need?

left: what i proposed first, without asking. you asked why a studio would start with an average site.

the advice, plus one

One thing: the proposal is the first thing a client holds, and the studio wants to be seen where clients look.

Positioning, name, voice, brand direction, mark, guidelines, business card, email signature, quote and invoice, social, and the website. You added the presentation template yourself.

What the studio learned here: the middle is not a neutral choice. It is a safety margin. Since then, the level of a website follows from the direction, not from a package.

ai	i	you
drafted three options from the intake	proposed them, and assumed the middle	chose the advice, added the template, and questioned the middle

chapter

02

the position

what does the studio stand for, and why would a business owner choose it?

51 providers looked at · 3 routes · 1 chosen, and reshaped

“a creative agency that builds brands that work. more than a logo: from strategy to website, under one roof.”

what does the studio stand for?

left: what almost every studio we looked at says.

looked at

51

providers, 31 of them studios and web designers in five cities

first the obvious.
then set it aside.

One thing: a new studio cannot show results yet. here, that objection becomes the argument: you don't have to believe it, you can see it.

You chose route B, “the studio that shows what it set aside”, but not in the form it was proposed. Three of your questions changed it; they are on the next page.

> "Isn't B more along the lines of: we first find out what fits, and then get to work on the opposite?"
>
> translated from Dutch
>
> you, on route B

---

ai
looked at 51 providers in five cities

i
wrote three routes, and the expected one

you
chose B, and reshaped it with three questions

a positioning that promises to be different.

three questions that changed it

your questions translated from dutch. the route as proposed: “the studio that shows what it set aside, and measures what it made.” this is what your questions did to it.

“what has been measured, and does a client care that it was measured?”

The measurements show that the work is technically sound, not that the brand works. Measuring left the core.

“isn't b more along the lines of: we first find out what fits, and then do the opposite?”

That laid the core bare: first make the obvious visible, then set it aside. Only “the opposite” was wrong: the reverse of the expected is just as predictable.

“that we don't make what everyone would make is a feeling, not set in stone. is that a problem?”

The promise became an action instead of a judgement. Not “we make something unique”, but “this is your industry, this is what follows from it, we set that aside, this is what we made of it.”

> "[One of my first clients] went for a slightly safer choice in the end, in my view, but because the proposals were so different, they still have something unique."
>
> translated from Dutch
>
> you, about one of your first clients

two limits, your choice: no conversations with (possible) clients, so everything about the audience is an assumption; and the position is reviewed after ten clients.

chapter

03

the name

what will the studio be called?

1,463 names generated · 40 shown · 1 chosen

expected

brand studio rotterdam
mkb branding
freedom marketeers

what will the studio be called?

left: what a studio in this market is called. the third was already ours: the registered trade name.

generated

1,463

in three rounds: 604 · 597 · 262. 1,459 different.

shown to you

40

27 in the presentation, 13 in the second chance

expect otherwise

One thing: it is an instruction to the client, not a description of the studio.

It is the only name that survived both rounds. The name itself was free; the word “Otherwise” was not entirely. More on that two pages on.

> "Expect Otherwise feels familiar. It feels like something the client already feels, and it sounds like an instruction to the client."
>
> translated from Dutch
>
> you, after the presentation

---

ai
generated the names and checked domains and trademark registers

i
chose 40, wrote the reasons, flagged the risk

you
chose, and accepted the risk

expected · set aside before round one

brand studio rotterdam
mkb branding
freedom marketeers
the branding company
brandpro

and the expected way out:
brandly · namify · blck studio · purple fox

two rounds, forty names

in between, a round of tributes, after you told me your other company's name was one. you struck it yourself.

then you sent your own list, and asked to start again.

the presentation · 27 names

acquired taste · and yet · **apart by choice** · **at liberty** · beg to differ · different tastes · double take · **expect otherwise** · freedom & co · freedom identities · freedom marks · margin & wright · offcut · out of uniform · own device · proves the rule · quiet move · scribe & square · seldom & co · set aside · tastes different · tastes vary · tell apart · then again · unexpected · **unexpected company** · unexpected tastes

the second chance · 13 names, built on your reactions

expect otherwise · expect elsewhere · choose apart · discard first · leave granted · by your leave · choice and reason · quite deliberate · cause shown · the choosing company · unbidden company · elector and co · unprompted company

what you said, in green above

at liberty
"feels good, and has a link with Freedom."

apart by choice
"seems to really hit the essence of every project. It feels more like a sentence than a company name."

unexpected company
"sounds professional, but perhaps a little obvious."

… taste
"Anything with Taste or Tastes leans too much towards taste as in food."

translated from Dutch

expect elsewhere

clean in every register we checked. one of twelve names without the stain.

the one risk you took

found in the second round, not the first. the studio now checks straight away for an agency with the name, or with its key word.

“otherwise”

the name	Expect Otherwise: no identical trademark, both domains free.
the word	OTHERWISE is a registered trademark in the United Kingdom and Italy, in the classes for advertising and design (35 and 42).
the agency	A branding and graphic design agency in Chicago already uses the word as its name.
what you did	You saw it, had twelve names without that stain laid next to it, and chose Expect Otherwise.

> "The choice is easy. The absolute winner … survived two rounds and feels absolutely right."
>
> translated from Dutch
>
> you, after the second chance

accepted risks, your choice: no check by a trademark attorney, no check by native speakers. both return in the quality report.

chapter

04

the voice

how does it sound?

3 test voices · 2 combined

“a creative agency with a personal approach … powerful brands … unique and tailor-made.”

and the default voice of ai.

how does it sound?

left: the voice of the industry. “unique” and “powerful” stood on five of six homepages.

hard on the average.
warm to the owner.

One thing: one voice alone was either cold or ordinary. the name itself is built like this: a firm instruction, addressed to the client.

You mixed voice A, the contradiction, with voice C, the proud owner: A leads, C adds. And you chose “I”, not “we”.

> "To surprise them, and make them even prouder of their own business (perhaps one still to be started)."
>
> translated from Dutch
>
> you, on what the voice should do

> "We have to be honest, and then talking about “we” isn't right. So we go for “I”. Perhaps we'll change that in the future."
>
> translated from Dutch
>
> you, on i or we

---

ai
measured six homepages, wrote three test voices

i
pointed out that the chosen words are sharper than how you write

you
combined two voices, chose “I”

expected

“we are a team of passionate creatives who build unique brands.”

does the voice hold in a real text?

the about text for the studio's company page, read by two ai readers in three rounds before anyone else saw it.

three rounds, two readers

One thing: a voice only exists once it survives a reader who doesn't believe it.

Round 1: “unique” was in, as a quote from the competition. Out. The warmth for the owner was missing. In.

Round 2: the opening needed the turn of the voice, not the warm sentence. The defence “more studios do this” went.

Round 3: the sceptic asked what happens if it disappoints. The included second chance went in.

> "to make texts as pleasant to read as possible, and so human. We are completely open about using AI."
>
> translated from Dutch
>
> you, on the goal

ai	i	you
gemini tested the voice, grok read as the sceptic	wrote and rewrote, rejected what was too literal	set the goal: human, and open about ai

chapter

06

the look

how do you recognise it without the name?

12 studios counted · the expected and 3 directions · 1 chosen, with 3d

a large sans-serif heading, a neutral ground with one button colour (violet, orange-red or blue), rounded case images, a small wordmark.

how do you recognise it without the name?

left: what twelve brand studios have in common.



the expected lies flat. the choice stands.

One thing: the comparison itself is the brand: small and grey on the left, what anyone would make; large on the right, what was chosen. with a line in between.

> "Option A feels best, but with 3D work."
>
> translated from Dutch
>
> you, choosing the direction

---

ai
counted twelve studios, generated test images for direction c

i
proposed three directions and advised a

you
chose a, and added depth

expected

a logo that fades in and slides up.

how does the brand move?

your idea, not the studio's. it became the movement on the homepage: a hand of cards, two fall away, one stands.





1 · the expected lies



2 · three directions



3 · two fall away



4 · one stands

The cards show the studio's own path: 0 the expected, A, B and C the three directions. The chosen one stands and becomes the mark. Gold, because gold is the number-one choice.

> "Step 1 is the design everyone gets. That card stands, but falls over. Step 2, a fan of cards (maybe 3 cards) to the right of the lying card. Step 3, 2 of the 3 cards drop out."
>
> translated from Dutch
>
> you, describing the movement

---

ai
video models tried it, and morphed the cards; the final version is rendered in blender

i
built it to end exactly on the mark

you
had the idea, and asked for gold

chapter

07

the mark

which mark stands for us?

60 sketches · 3 concepts and your own idea · 1 chosen

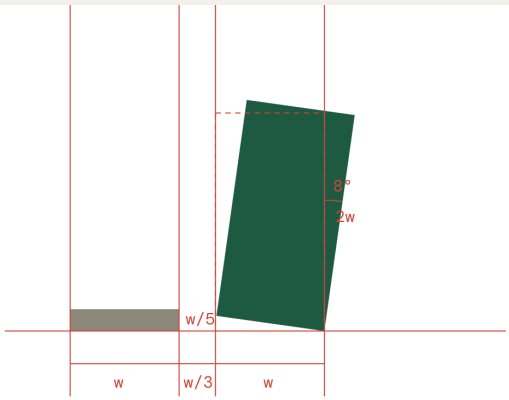
expected

e + o

the two initials, merged into one sign. your own first thought, and taken along as an equal candidate.

which mark stands for us?

the studio advised concept 2, the loose spine. you chose 1. the choice is the client's.



CONSTRUCTIE

w = kaartbreedte

liggend: w × w/5

staand: w × 2w (1 : 2)

ruimte: w/3

kanteling: 8° om de rechteronderhoek

klein teken (16–24 px): liggend w × 0,3w, 6°

vrije ruimte rondom: w

tafel = basislijn

one card lies, one stands

One thing: it is the idea of the studio as an object.

> "My first reaction, my feeling, is concept 1. Concept 2 I understand, but it seems to miss the letter “O”, while Otherwise is exactly what matters in the name."
>
> translated from Dutch
>
> you, choosing the mark

---

ai
drew 60 sketches in code and measured contrast

i
chose three, advised a different one

you
chose concept 1

a page of logo rules: clear space, minimum size, don'ts in red crosses.

the mark as a recipe

0° reads as a bar chart. 11° falls over. 8° stands.

1. take two identical cards, width w.
2. lay one flat: w × w/5. it is grey.
3. stand the other: w × 2w, tilted 8° on its bottom right corner. it is green.
4. keep w/3 between them.
5. the name sits on the line of the lying card, in dm mono, in lowercase.



expect otherwise

> "expect otherwise is an instruction to the client"
>
> translated from Dutch
>
> you, on lowercase

> "less unique, but a better fit for the industry"
>
> translated from Dutch
>
> you, on bottle green over olive

---

ai
checked contrast: the grey of the mark was darkened until it could be seen

i
set the angle, the spacing and the weight

you
chose the letter and the colour

chapter

08

the rules

how do we keep it this way?

5 things that never change · 3 test carriers · 2 tests without prior knowledge

a hundred-page brand manual nobody opens.

what never changes

five things. everything else is in the toolbox, and may move.

1 the split 1 : 2 with the ink line, on everything.

2 left flat and grey, right green or light. never depth in the small field.

3 dm mono for the name and headings, in lowercase.

4 the avatar is the mark, flat.

5 3d work only in the large field, never on its own without the split.

constant and variable

fixed	the split and the line · the mark · bottle green and the two greys · dm mono · grey is always the expected, green always the choice
by the rule	landscape or portrait · what goes in the small field · what goes in the large field · the size of the heading
free	what the large field shows · photos of client work · length of texts · order on a page

> "I want to keep to the guidelines, and not overrule them with my choice."
>
> translated from Dutch
>
> you, when a template broke the rules

guidelines approved on screen, never tried on a real carrier.

do the rules hold?

two sessions without any prior knowledge each made something new with only the toolbox. every guess they had to make became a rule.

guesses, test 1

19

an instagram post

guesses, test 2

21

a printed thank-you card



front



back

the business card

The back: a qr code in the grey field, to the card everyone else would make. The mark in relief: the lying card blind-embossed, flat; the standing card debossed, with depth.

> "the back is not very creative"
>
> translated from Dutch
>
> you, on the first version

---

ai
two sessions without prior knowledge made a post and a card

i
turned 40 guesses into rules

you
asked for a better back

expected

a passport photo, social icons, contact icons, a “book a call” button, lots of colour.

how does an email end?

left: what 58 signatures from generators and template markets have. a photo on 43 of them.

measured

58

signatures

expect otherwise,

One thing: the name becomes the greeting. on five fixed moments, the sentence everyone uses is crossed out first.

~~please find attached the proposal as discussed.~~
here it is. it starts with what i won't make.

> "C is the creativity I expect from you."
> translated from Dutch
> you, choosing the signature

ai	i	you
collected and counted 58 signatures	made a first version, which you rejected, then three directions	asked to measure first; chose b daily and c for five moments

“we create brands that grow your business.”

what is the one sentence?

left: what 78 homepage headings say, worldwide. the category 59 times, “we create” 29 times, growth or impact 34 times. “i”: never.

i design what everyone in your industry would make. then i set it aside.

One thing: it says something the reader can check, not a promise that it will be different.

The studio got this wrong twice. It started from the sentence it already had, not from a blank page; you saw it. Then the winning sentence used “average”, a word a competitor owns; the studio missed it. After that, a writer who had never seen the old sentence started over, and two readers judged blind.

The sentence stays in English, also for Dutch clients.

> "you didn't start the research blank, but from the sentence we had already come up with."
>
> translated from Dutch
>
> you, to the studio

ai	i	you
wrote 60 sentences without knowing the old one; gemini and grok judged blind	missed that it wasn't blank, and missed the word	caught it, and followed the readers

chapter

10

the screen

how does the brand behave on a screen?

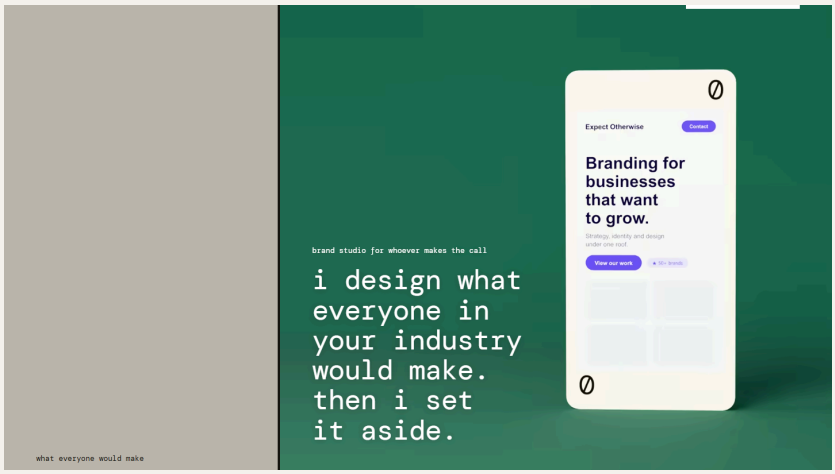
78 homepages measured · 2 expected and 3 directions · 1 chosen

the guidelines as a coat of paint over the standard site.

or the other expected: full-screen 3d with smooth scrolling.

how does the brand behave on screen?

the studio advised b, an instrument that rebuilds your industry's average. you chose a.



a hand of cards

One thing: you scroll, and the expected falls away, card by card, until one stands.

> "A immediately feels the very best … I am really pleased with how different the three directions are."
>
> translated from Dutch
>
> you, choosing the direction

---

ai
refreshed the trend data from award sites; the cards are rendered in blender

i
proposed three directions, advised b

you
chose a

work, services, a manifesto.

what goes on the homepage?

left: what 78 homepages show. work 68 times, services 41, a manifesto 40. prices: twice.

the proof first, and ai in the way of working

One thing: a visitor can see what was set aside before reading what the studio claims.

Published prices, with an upper limit. A book that opens. A booking button that is never more than one click away. And the audience, in the end: “brand studio for whoever makes the call”, after five blind rounds with three readers.

> "As a client, I don't know what else could go on it, for example, and why we wouldn't put that on."
>
> translated from Dutch
>
> you, asking to measure instead of guess

> "design first, then measure … downgrading without knowing whether it's needed is absolutely not the idea"
>
> translated from Dutch
>
> you, on motion and speed

---

ai
measured 78 homepages; three readers tested the audience word blind

i
proposed three builds

you
chose the proof first, and kept the motion

expected

a cookie wall with a green “accept” button and a grey “reject” link.

what does the law ask,
and is it safe?

checked against the law texts themselves, article by article, and against what the built site actually stores.

nothing loads until you answer

One thing: two equal buttons. nothing is stored and nothing from google loads before the visitor has chosen.

The card table remembers which pages you read; the law counts that as storage, so the visitor is told. You kept it. All rights to the final work go to the client. Accessibility: wcag 2.2 aa, agreed, not required. A strict security policy allows only the site itself and Google Analytics.

> "no weakening of the card table"
>
> translated from Dutch
>
> you, when storage meant a notice

accepted risk, your choice: no review by a lawyer yet. the studio drafts and builds; it does not give legal advice.

---

ai
compared the rules with the law texts; measured storage and traffic on 24 pages

i
built the notice and the security headers

you
kept the card table, chose analytics with consent

expected

“go”, because the date was set.

is it ready to go live?

the gate says go or no-go. the first time, it said no-go, as planned. the second time, with this book on the site: go.

faithfulness test

18/18

core mechanisms and fixed rules present

accessibility

0

violations found

no-go, then go

One thing: first the real book. the dummy book on the site was too heavy for the agreed speed.

Found and fixed in the first round: a link that didn't open in a new tab, contact details that weren't clickable, a share image in the wrong size. What you are reading is the reason for the no-go.

Round two, with this book: the book page went from 73.5 to 97 on a phone. Every agreed norm was met. Going live without a lawyer's review: your choice, and an accepted risk.

---

ai
ran every test: speed, accessibility, security, faithfulness

i
said no-go, then go

you
chose the book before the launch, and to go live without a lawyer

a screenshot of one green score.

how fast, and for whom?

every result next to what was agreed beforehand. “no norm” means it was measured, but nothing was agreed. round two, on the test address; again at launch and after fourteen days.

measured against what was agreed

what	result	agreed	verdict
speed, homepage, phone	97.5	≥ 80	met
speed, homepage, computer	100	≥ 90	met
speed, /book/, phone (round 1, dummy: 73.5)	97	≥ 80	met
speed, /book/, computer (round 1: 86)	100	≥ 90	met
largest image on screen, phone	2.19 s	good: ≤ 2.5 s	no norm
layout shift	0	good: ≤ 0.1	no norm
accessibility violations, 16 pages × 2 screens	0	WCAG 2.2 AA	met
lowest text contrast, also over images	4.57 : 1	≥ 4.5 : 1	met
keyboard only, visible focus	yes	WCAG 2.2 AA	met
what a screen reader receives (by script)	0 errors	WCAG 2.2 AA	met
horizontal scroll, 24 pages × 4 widths	0	–	no norm
console errors · broken links	0 · 0	–	no norm

speed: lighthouse, median of three runs. accessibility: axe-core; contrast over images measured under the letters; the screen reader check was done by script, not with a screen reader.

“a sustainable website”, without a number.

how heavy,
and how safe?

co2: sustainable web design model v4, the method website carbon uses, with its classes a+ to f. green hosting: green web foundation.

the cards have a weight

what	result	agreed	verdict
hosting on green energy	yes	–	no norm
co2 per visit, service page	0.027 g · A+	–	no norm
co2 per visit, homepage, phone	0.298 g · E	–	no norm
co2 per visit, homepage, computer	0.436 g · F	–	no norm
co2 per visit, this book online, read to the end	0.115 g · B	–	no norm
page weight, homepage, after scrolling	2.4–3.5 MB	–	no norm
nothing loads before consent	13 / 13	required	met
security policy breaches	0	–	no norm
known vulnerabilities in packages	0	–	no norm
faithful to the chosen direction	18 / 18	18 / 18	met
words from the never-list	0	0	met
languages linked both ways	yes	yes	met

The service pages reach the highest class, A+. The homepage does not: 205 images of the hand of cards. That is the price of the chosen movement. It does not slow the site down: 97.5 and 100 for speed. So it stays.

> "If the weight only gives a poor carbon rating, but has no effect on speed, then I want no changes."
>
> translated from Dutch
>
> you, on the weight of the homepage

13

chapter · added after launch

did it work?

The launch, and the quality report at day one and after fourteen days: what was measured, against what was agreed. This chapter is added once it can be measured.

a usb stick in the back cover.

what you
have now

the brand	Positioning, name, voice, brand direction, guidelines and toolbox, in one repository.
the mark	Twelve versions in svg, pdf, eps and png, the favicon and the construction.
carriers	Business card, signature, quote and invoice, presentation template, social.
the site	The source, in English and Dutch, with every test script.
not in this book	Passwords, keys, contracts and amounts. They are in a separate file, not on paper.



expect
otherwise

Written and designed by Expect Otherwise.

Typefaces: DM Mono and Public Sans, both under the SIL Open Font License.

Built in code: html and css, set as pdf. No layout program.

AI used: Claude (writing, code, research, sketches), Gemini and Grok (readers), image and video models for tests. Rendered in Blender.

The client's words are quoted as they were said; in English, translated from Dutch.

Rotterdam, October 2026.