

A QUARTERLY BRIEFING ON BRAND, WEB & DIGITAL DESIGN

The Reveal

ISSUE 01

What's shaping brands, websites and design this quarter, explained without the jargon.

THE REVEAL · PRESTO QUARTERLY · ISSUE 01



INTRO NOTE

No jargon. No homework. Just the good bits.

Design doesn't stand still, but you shouldn't have to keep up with all of it. Every quarter, we pull together what's actually changing in brand, web and digital design and translate it into what it means for your business, not just what it looks like on a mood board.

This issue: why "clarity" is having a moment, what a £4bn UK bank did with an orange hat, why AI is quietly rewriting the rules of search, and a few things worth checking on your own site this quarter.

No jargon. No homework. Just the good bits.

The Presto team

The pendulum has swung, from AI-polish to human warmth

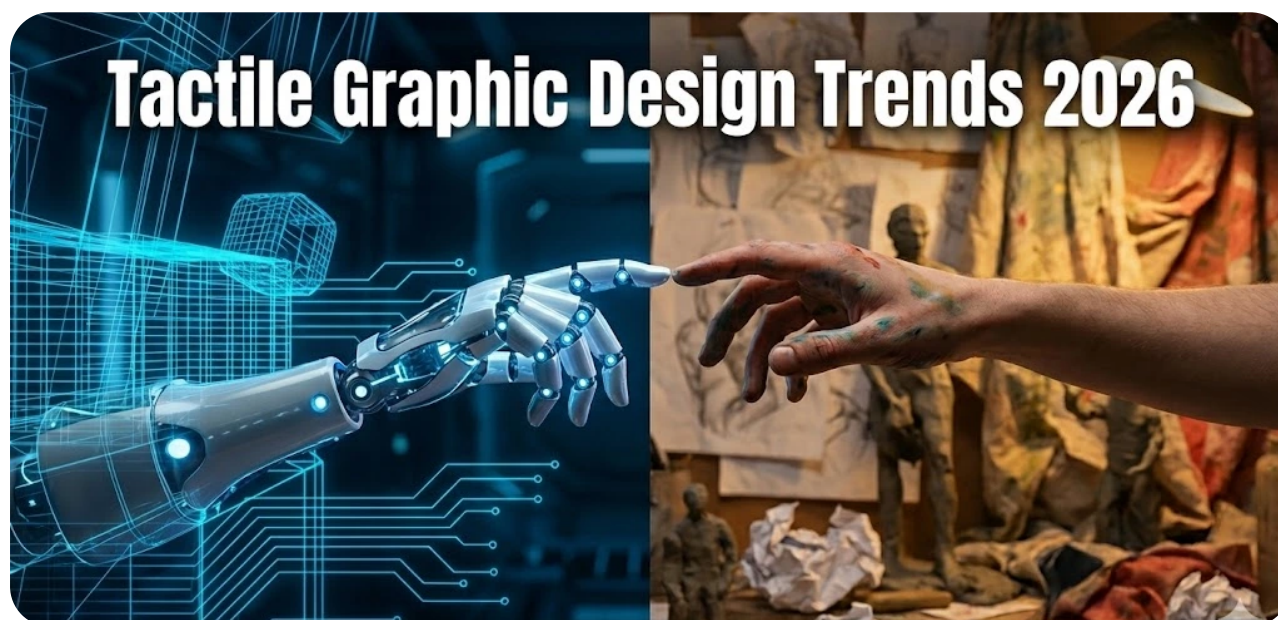
Two forces are pulling at every brand and website right now, and they're pulling in opposite directions.

Shift one: "Perfect" is starting to look suspicious.

After several years of AI-smoothed visuals, hyper-clean interfaces and templated "safe" branding, there's a visible swing back towards things that feel handmade, imperfect and human: hand-drawn touches, candid photography, tactile textures, slightly irregular spacing. It's a reaction to sameness. When everything can look polished for free, polish stops being a point of difference. Design in 2026 is drifting toward something slower and warmer, leaning on heritage and personality rather than gloss. For client-facing brands, the takeaway isn't "make it messy," it's "make it recognisably yours," even if that means a few deliberate imperfections.

Shift two: being findable now means being findable by AI, not just Google.

The bigger structural shift this quarter is happening behind the scenes, in how people actually find businesses. A growing share of buyers now get their answer directly from ChatGPT, Google's AI Overviews, Perplexity or Gemini, without ever clicking through to a website. Search volume for non-AI search is forecast to fall 25% in 2026, and there's no guarantee a business optimised for traditional Google rankings will get a mention in AI-generated answers. Arguably the biggest opportunity, and the biggest risk, for small and mid-sized businesses this year.



AI-polish and human craft, meeting in the middle.

Your brand needs to feel more human at the same time as your website needs to be more machine-readable. Not a contradiction exactly, just design and technical structure having to work harder together than they used to.

Confident clarity: the return of white space

Pantone's 2026 Colour of the Year is white. Pantone describes PANTONE 11-4201 Cloud Dancer as a calm, spacious white, essentially a nudge toward simplicity in an overstimulated world. It's a notable pick partly because it's the first time in the award's history Pantone has chosen a shade of white. It's landed as a divisive choice: some designers see it as a genuinely useful structural colour that lets everything else shine, others see it as a safe non-choice. Either way, expect more brands leaning into breathing room, restraint and one strong accent colour rather than crowded, maximalist palettes.



PANTONE 11-4201 Cloud Dancer, the first white ever named Colour of the Year.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU

If your brand or website feels visually noisy, this is a low-cost, high-impact quarter to simplify. More white space, one confident accent colour, less competing for attention.

Human texture, tactile craft

As AI-generated visuals become instantly available to everyone, designers are pulling back toward things AI still struggles to fake well: embroidery and stitching effects, fabric-like 3D textures, paper cutouts and glued-edge effects that create depth, patchwork-style layering. It's turning up everywhere from packaging to social content to website hero sections.



Tactile, physical textures designers are reaching for as AI visuals flatten everything else.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU

A touch of texture or hand-made detail in your brand assets (packaging, social templates, print) signals “made by people.” That’s becoming a real point of difference, not just a stylistic flourish.

Motion as a core brand element, not a nice-to-have

Logos and brand systems are increasingly designed to move, not just sit still. Even minimal animation gives a brand more presence in interactions that mostly happen on a screen rather than a printed page. This isn't about flashy animation for its own sake. It's brands designing for the fact that most people meet them scrolling, not reading.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU

If your logo or brand system was built for print-only use, it's worth checking how it behaves in motion. A subtle animated version for your website header or social intros can go a long way.

Brand equity over reinvention

The most talked-about rebrands of the year so far haven't been dramatic reinventions. They've been brands rediscovering something they already owned and finally using it properly. The best brand moves of 2026 haven't started with a blank page. They've gone digging for what already existed (a colour, a name, a feeling) and used it properly, sometimes for the first time.

Warburtons, for example, didn't invent a new visual identity for its 150th anniversary. Taxi Studio rebuilt the packaging system around the orange the brand already owned but had never applied consistently enough to make a real impact on shelf.



Warburtons' 150th-anniversary livery: the same orange, applied properly.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU

Before assuming your brand needs a full overhaul, it's worth auditing what you already have that customers already associate with you (a colour, a phrase, a shape) and asking whether you're actually using it consistently.

Five things that happened this quarter

- 01 Pantone names its first-ever white Colour of the Year.** Cloud Dancer (PANTONE 11-4201) sparked debate for being “too safe,” but is already shaping palettes across packaging, product and web design.
 - 02 Allica Bank’s orange bowler hat rebrand keeps paying off.** The UK SME challenger bank replaced its shield logo with a bright orange bowler hat as part of a push for 10% of the established SME banking market within five years. More in this issue’s Spotlight.
 - 03 AI is rewriting how brands get discovered.** Gartner forecasts non-AI search volume will drop 25% in 2026, and a wave of “Generative Engine Optimization” (GEO) activity has followed. More in Practical Takeaways.
 - 04 Figma’s 2026 designer survey shows AI is now mainstream in workflows.** 72% of designers use generative AI day to day, and 91% say it improves their output, not just their speed.
 - 05 Tech rebrands are leaning into authenticity.** From Tripadvisor to Metricool, SaaS and tech brands are refocusing on human-centred identities rather than polished, algorithm-first visuals.
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How a £4bn challenger bank rebranded around a hat



Allica Bank's rebrand, in market.

Allica Bank serves UK small and medium businesses that big banks have quietly stopped paying attention to. In 2025 it dropped its shield logo for something much simpler: a bright orange bowler hat.

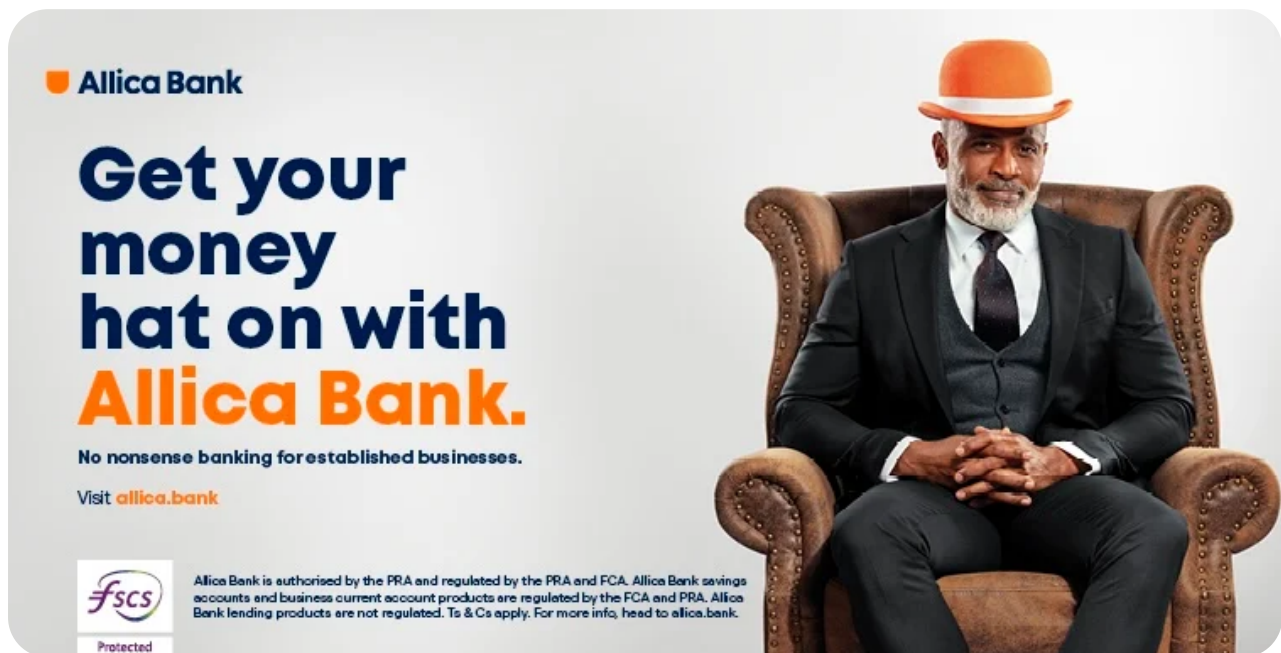


THE THINKING

The bowler hat is tied to UK banking culture (traditionally the head covering of the “City of London” banker, most famously seen on Captain Mainwaring in Dad’s Army), and Allica used it as a symbol that’s already widely understood in a banking context. But instead of navy or corporate blue, they chose orange: a colour almost no other UK bank uses, which helped them stand out immediately.

THE RESULT

In Allica's own account, the rebrand was rolled out and tested at every stage and, unusually for a rebrand, got no negative feedback at all. The bank had already doubled its brand awareness the year before the relaunch, and the new identity has kept building through 2026 as part of a wider growth push.



What we'd take from this

- 01 One strong idea beats a complicated brand system.** A hat and a colour did more work than a shield ever could.
- 02 Test before you commit.** Allica trialled the bowler hat in a marketing campaign for two years before making it the permanent logo.
- 03 Distinct doesn't have to mean disruptive.** The rebrand didn't try to look more "fintech." It leaned into something recognisably British and banking-related, just used in an unexpected way.

This quarter's checklist

Things you can actually action.

- ☐ **Check your Google Business Profile is complete and current.** Your GBP is now one of the primary data sources AI uses to answer local search queries, so hours, services, photos and description all need to be accurate and kept up to date.
- ☐ **Ask ChatGPT, Perplexity or Gemini about your own business.** It's the fastest way to see how AI currently "sees" you, and whether what it says is accurate, outdated or just wrong.
- ☐ **Structure your website content around real customer questions.** Clear content structure, FAQ sections and schema markup typically show meaningful AI visibility improvement within 60 to 90 days.
- ☐ **Make sure your business details are identical everywhere online.** Inconsistent company descriptions, addresses or services create confusion for both search engines and AI systems.
- ☐ **Audit your brand for consistency, not novelty.** Before commissioning a big rebrand, check whether you're already sitting on a colour, phrase or symbol customers associate with you, and whether it's actually being used consistently (see this issue's Trend 4 and Spotlight).
- ☐ **Look at your site with fresh eyes for visual noise.** Could it breathe more? Where could one strong accent colour replace three competing ones?

Four threads we're pulling on for Issue 02

Whether "Generative Engine Optimisation" becomes a standard line item in marketing budgets, or stays a buzzword.

The next wave of UK/AU rebrands responding to the "brand equity over reinvention" trend.

Whether Pantone's white pick actually shows up in real branding work, or gets quietly ignored.

Continued fallout from brands experimenting with AI-generated versus human-made visuals.

Next issue, we'll be tracking whether any of this quarter's predictions actually held up, and what's replaced them.

Let's build something amazing. Together.

The Reveal is published quarterly by Presto. If something in this issue sparked a question about your own brand or website, we'd love to hear it.

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