

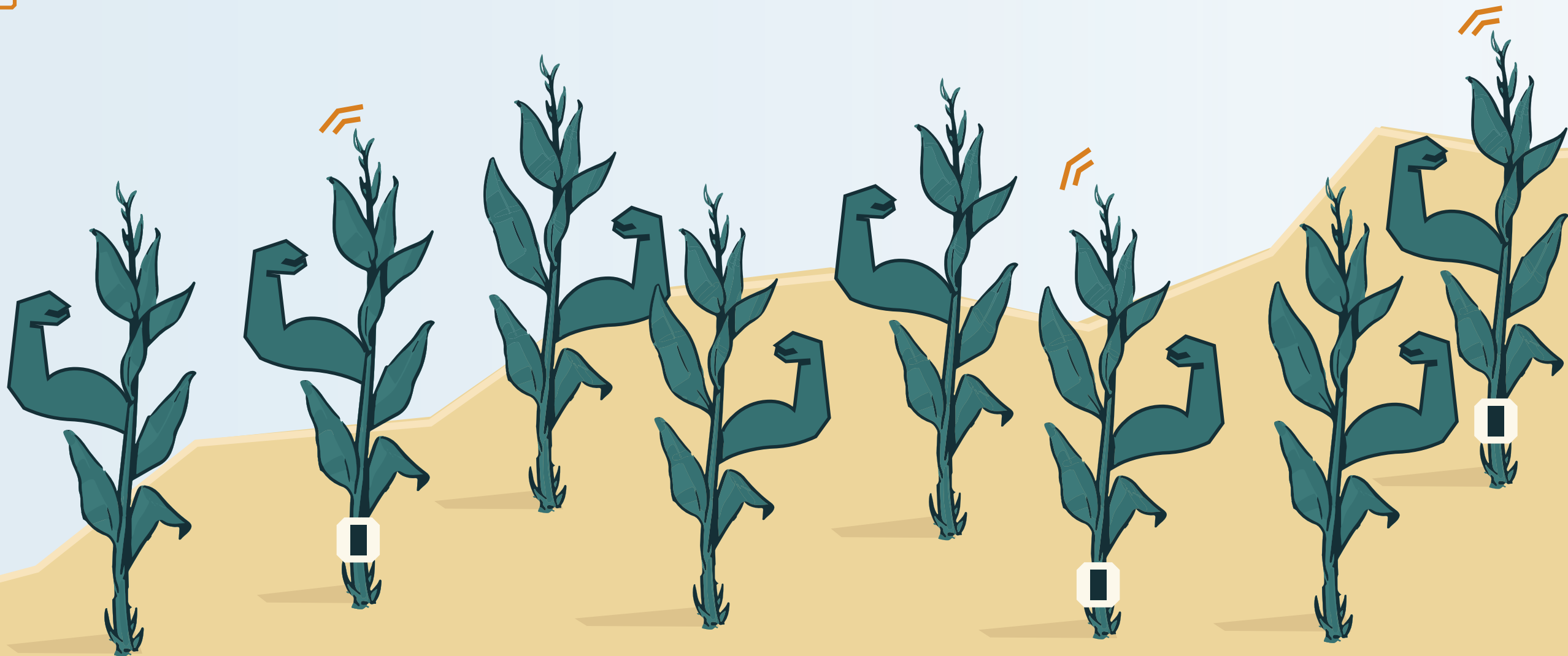
BRAND BUILDING FOR HIGH TECH STARTUPS

A CASE STUDY WITH PLENSE TECHNOLOGIES



Master Thesis
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BRAND BUILDING FOR HIGH TECH STARTUPS



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**A Strategic Product Design
MSc thesis**
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In collaboration with:
Plense Technologies

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

High-tech startups are shaping the world of tomorrow, striving to make it a better place through innovative technologies. Only a fraction of them is however able to succeed, often because they are unable to take direction and build the requisite customer base to transition to the next stage of the company. A brand strategy can support decisions and bring the customer closer to the startups innovation.

This thesis aims to build a brand for Plense, that supports the early-and later stage development of their innovative technology, leading to a successful market introduction.

To understand Plense, their current sensor prototype and idea about the future, a vision workshop was conducted. To explore the startups context, this thesis studies the most promising customer, industry developments, potential collaborations and competition, through desk research and qualitative interviews with customers.

The findings throughout this discovery phase illustrate Plense's unique value proposition; a greenhouse integrated co-pilot that provides actionable plant-based data, towards a strategically important customer; the greenhouse 'business-man', who decides what happens within the greenhouse business, and their growers, who use technology to control the greenhouse. A key insights and distinction of the business-man is their drive to expand and constantly improve the greenhouse business. The grower is central in this business, and since the growers working pressure increases because of the limited labour force and expertise available, Plense's co-pilot could support the grower, to focus on what is most important during and after work and therefore support the business-man to explore new opportunities.

The brand DNA for Plense captures these findings with the brand position statement and brand purpose, while the brand personality; exciting, ambitious and reliable translate the brand DNA to the visual appearance incorporated into the redesigned logo, sensor and other brand touchpoints. The brand promise made for Plense summarizes the brand DNA into one central idea communicated towards the customer: 'your plants in top form'. This promise was evaluated as desired and new towards the business-man and grower and therefore used as basis for the brand building strategy.

To realize this brand promise Plense can only start their brand building strategy when able to communicate their first test results. At that moment targeting the business-man through the personal visits becomes crucial to build the first relationships with the brand and further understand the technology through user tests. Once these user tests show in which way Plense is able to keep plants in top form, Plense is ready to share the brand to the market and all its stakeholders through an interactive horticulture fair stand experience. While bringing the brand and its products to the market, website and newsletters should inform and excite every stakeholder in order to further strengthen the brand image.

This thesis ends with perhaps the most important brand building element for now; internal branding. Making sure the brand which now reflects the outside, the customer, is understood and lived, by making the brand part of the startups daily routine and working together on future brand building activities.

Additional Study: *Exploring the value of minimum viable brand building for high-tech startups. A case study with Plense*

Throughout this thesis project for Plense I tried to understand how other high-tech startups could benefit from my work; brand building a high-tech startup. Because these other startups won't have a Strategic Product Design master student to build a brand strategy for them, a minimum viable brand (MVB) building workshop has been developed and evaluated. Whereas the minimum viable product (MVP) focusses on product development, by evaluating the potential functional benefits of the product, the MVB also takes into account the market and the customers desires, and brings this all together in a broader picture that illustrates how the brand (and its products) could be most valuable, both functionally and emotionally.

To explore the value of minimum viable brand building for high-tech startups the MVB workshop was conducted together with Plense and another high-tech startup. The results of the MVB workshop illustrate the difficulty startups have to define their most promising customer and show improved internal brand alignment between employees, with regard to the vision of the startup. Testing the MVB, by showing it to customers, improved the understanding of the customer that fits the startup most and thus improves startups understanding of the different, most promising customer segments.



FIRST OF ALL

I've always felt attracted to the field of branding and marketing. Watching advertisements with my dad, working on my own clothing brand and following an internship at TBWA has grown my affinity to this part of strategic design. This meant the direction for my graduation project was clear: branding something!

To find something to brand I searched for relatively unbranded startups, ending up at Plense Technologies which is part of accelerator program Yes!Delft. Within the startup environment I knew I would have the freedom to shape my own assignment and bring something that will actually be used. Plense wasn't the only unbranded startup I found, but I choose them because they seemed to be the most promising. Developing a sustainable, AI-related and innovative technology, shaping the future of Horticulture!

I want to thank Plense, co-founders Berend and Thijs for this opportunity, their support throughout the project, their active involvement and interest into both the process and the outcome. I want to thank Plense's team of graduation students and employees for their feedback and input throughout the project. I felt very welcomed, comfortable and grateful to be a part of this ambitious and exciting startup! I hope this project will help them in their journey ahead!



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No time to read..?

These sections sum up the **main take aways** from a chapter

Pages that look like **this** describe a **method**

Or alinea's!

Text marked with this color refer to the brand evaluation **improvements**

APPENDIX

The Appendix of this thesis explains most of the work and approach throughout the report in more detail. For the research phase of this thesis, called 'auditing the brand atmosphere', Appendix 1-4 shows how the research of each brand atmosphere factor: Plense Vision (1), customer analyses (2), trends and developments (3) and competition (4) is set up and what was found, in more detail than the report does.

For the design phase of this thesis Appendix 5-7 mostly explains the design process behind the final design in the report: the design inspiration, different design or strategic directions and criteria on which the final design is chosen. Appendix 8 and 9 illustrates the evaluation results of these designs.

Appendix 10 explains how the MVB workshop is set up. This workshop is shown at the end of the report and is made to explore the value of minimum viable brand building for high-tech startups.

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the project. It introduces the relevance to the client, Plense and their challenge this project aims to tackle. It also introduces the relevance of this project to other high-tech startups. And finally it introduces the overall project approach and how each part is structured throughout this report.

1.1 Context: The future of horticulture

Within the coming forty years we must produce more food than during the entire course of human history to date, while protecting our planet to increasingly environmental stress (Dutia, 2014). In this world, agriculture technology (AgTech) innovations will be absolutely essential. Technology that increases the productivity of agriculture systems while reducing environmental impact.

AgTech startups are emerging everywhere, striving to improve the traditional way of farming (Sharma & Marthur, 2018). One of these startups, born at the TUDelft, is Plense Technologies. They are developing a sensor that maps the inside of a plant, which can be used to optimize horticulture greenhouses climates, leading to better yield and more sustainable energy consumption. However, in this emerging competitive landscape of AgTech startups, few of them are actually able to make it out the startup

phase and scale their valuable innovative technology. Often because they are not able to build the requisite customer base to transition to the next stage of their company (McKinsey, 2023). This is common with most innovative technology (Krishna et al., 2016), but within the agriculture sector even more because most farmers do not like to change their way of working (McKinsey, 2023).

One of the contributions to the successful development and scaling of innovation is a brand strategy (Aaker, 2007); 'making the brand an integral part of a coherent strategy that is actively managed'. Specifically for startups, a brand strategy can overcome diffusion and support adaption (Rus et al., 2018). This project aims to build a brand (strategy) for AgTech startup Plense Technologies, supporting the early-and later stage development of their product, leading to an successful market introduction.

1.2 The client: Plense Technologies

This chapter introduces the startup Plense Technologies and explains why this thesis project of 'brand building for high-tech startups' is relevant and desirable by both the client and other high-tech startups.

1.2.1 About Plense

After graduating the High-Tech Engineering track of ME at the TU Delft in 2022, co-founders Berend de Klerk and Thijs Bieling (figure 2) were asked to take their mentors patent (Dr. Gerard Verbiest and Dr. Satadal Dutta) on ultrasound technology to the market. Both having graduated in relation to this patent, Thijs more technological and Berend more commercial, saw its potential and were happy to take the opportunity to start Plense Technologies!

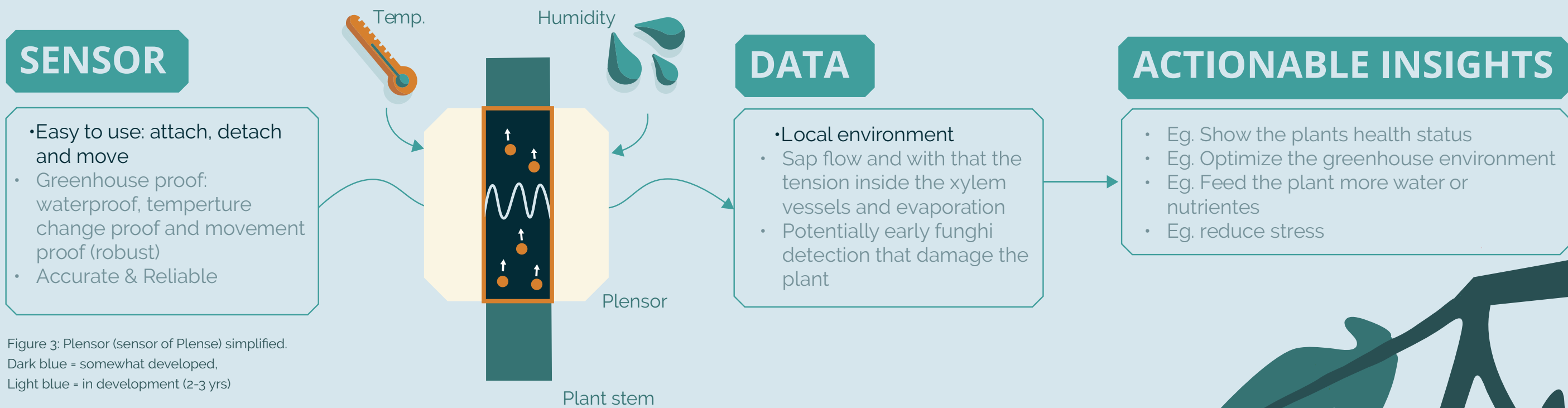
With a good basis-knowledge on the potential customer(s): the greenhouse horticulture sector, the technology itself: a sensor that could potentially listen to plants and an enormous passion to create something that improves the future world, they got accepted into startup incubator Yes!Delft. The past 1.5 year they have been working from the incubators location, further developing their sensor, creating connections within the sector and learning everything needed to run a business. This day Plense's team consists of two data scientist, two work students and three master graduation students (part of which is shown in figure 1).



Figure 1: Team trip to tomato world



Figure 2: Berend & Thijs winning the Phillips Innovation awards (2023)



1.2.2 High-Tech

The possibility to understand the inside of plants is still something quite new in the horticulture sector. The current MVP (minimum viable product), a sensor, is a round clamping mechanism that is put around the stem of a tomato plant, where it sends through a ultrasound signal from one side to the other (figure 3).

The presumption is that changes in this signal will show the plants sap flow and with that tension in the xylem vessels, evaporation and potentially fungi that damage the plant. All of these parameters are valuable information with which the greenhouse grower can optimize the living environments of his greenhouse. To retrieve this valuable information Plense is also working on the sensor's data translation into actionable insights. It is not clear yet whether these insights will be supported by their own software, but what is clear is that they want to make the data retrieved by the sensor very easy to understand and work with for its final customer and user.

1.2.3 Value proposition

Realizing everything marked light blue in figure 3, might take another 2-3 years according to Plense's founders. At this moment Plense is running their first tests to understand what exactly could be measured and turned into actionable insights. Their current MVP sensor seems promising, but the road towards actionable insights is still far ahead. If Plense is able to realize everything in figure 3, they will deliver a completely new product to the greenhouse horticulture market, which means different value propositions to different customers and users. The combination of uncertainty about Plense's final product and its possible, unknown value towards different stakeholders makes their overall value proposition quite broad and vague (Plense, tech, 2024):

'Empowering breeders & growers with data-driven insights directly from their crops' Our aim is to converting crop status into actionable data, for academics, breeders and growers*.*

1.2.4 Main Goal

Plense is trying everything to realize their technology and make their startup into a success. They make great use of their network, by working together with breeders and research institutes to execute the first tests of their technology and hiring graduates to develop and improve their patented sensor. But while they are well on the way to realize their high-tech innovation, they don't exactly know yet what value it adds and to whom? Who will benefit the most and how?

Brand building is the road that a company must travel to define what it wants to be excellent at, for whom and how its offerings differ from competition' (Kotler et al., 2005)

Therefore the first part of this project is to formulate Plense's most promising value proposition by connecting their strengths and vision with that what the most promising customer is desiring, in such a way that is stand out from competition.

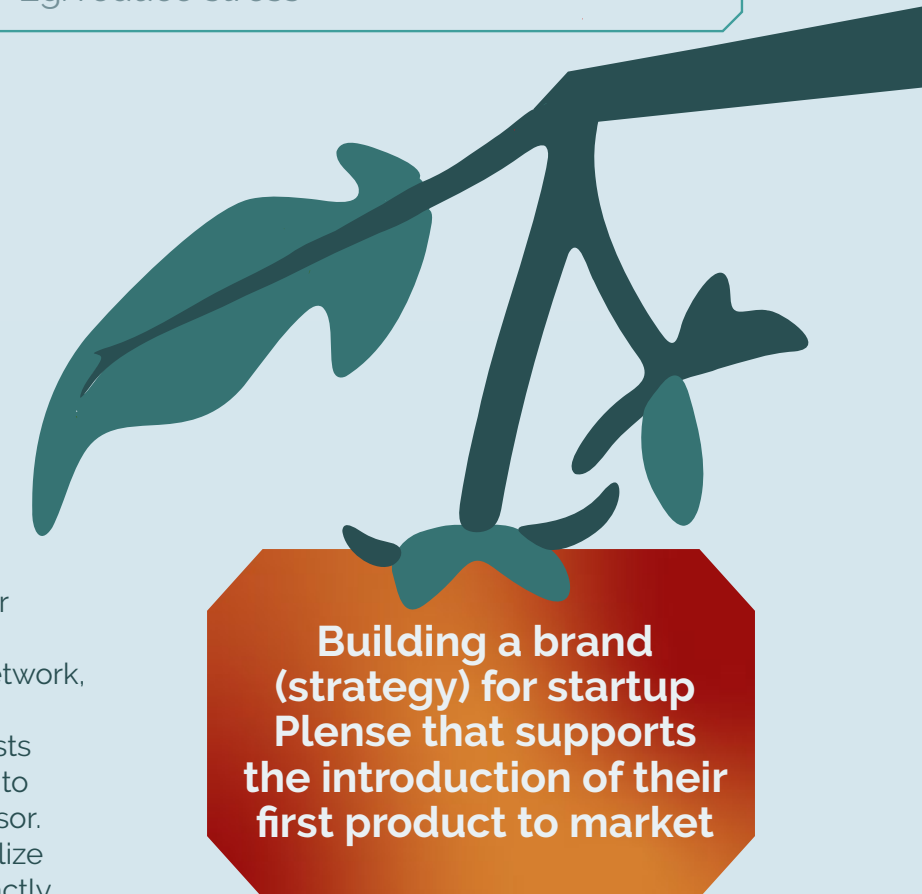


Figure 4: Project Main Goal

To convey Plense's unique value towards the customer and avoid the famous phrase of Prof. Hultink, J. 'good technology doesn't sell itself', the second part of this project aims to show how this value could be communicated towards the customer and get them as close as possible to purchase Plense's product once ready.

Combining these two goals means build a brand for Plense that communicates their unique value towards their most promising customers and supports the introduction of their first product to market. Which leads to the goal inside figure 4.

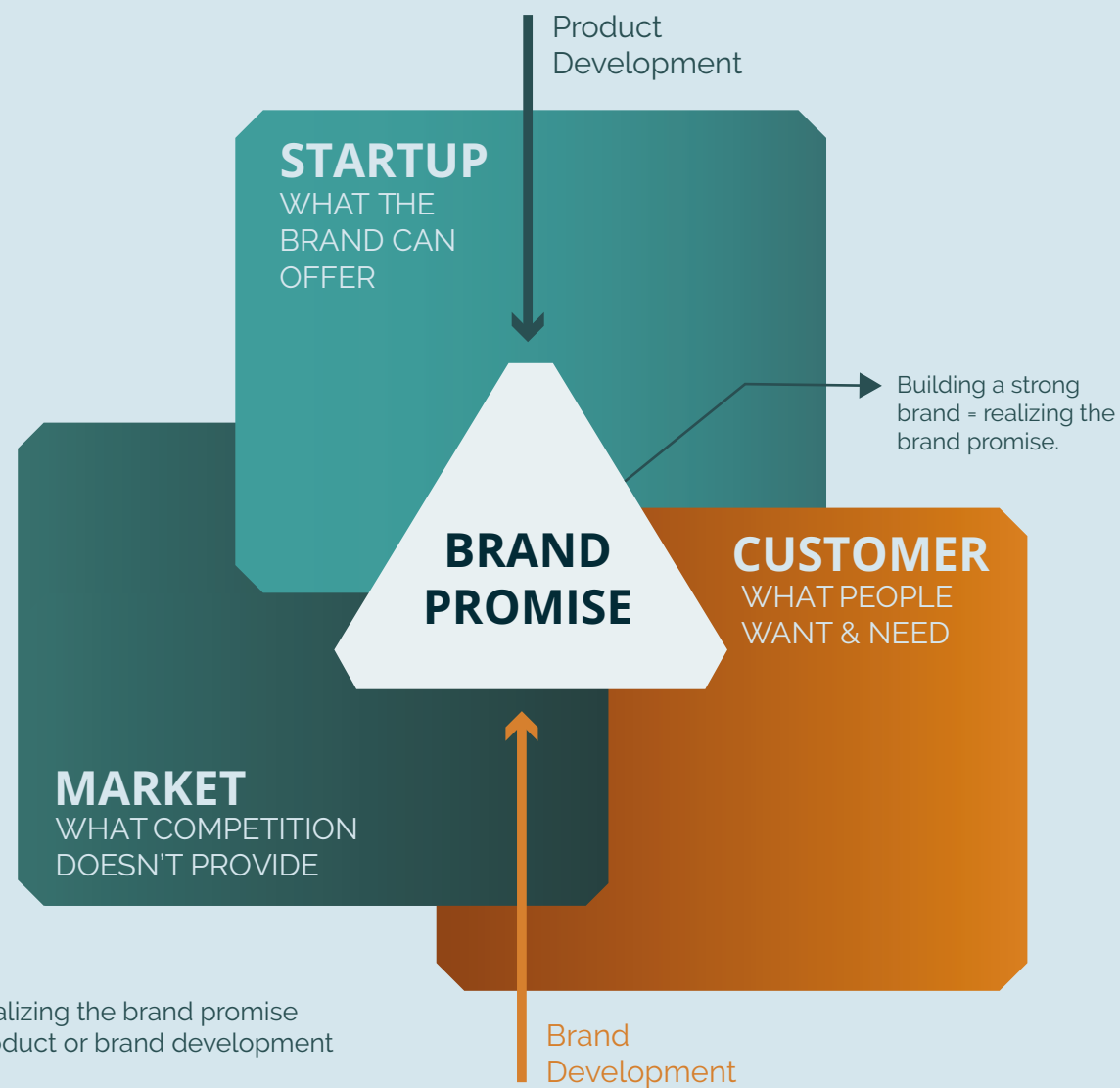


Figure 5: realizing the brand promise through product or brand development

Important to note is that Plense could also test their product (once ready) and learn about its unique value to the customer that way. However, by solely testing the product the unique value that becomes understood remains mostly tied to product features (Lenarduzzi & Taibi, 2016; Järvinen et al., 2014). Brand building also takes into account the market and the customer and tries to understand how the brand and their *potential product* could be from most value, functionally and emotionally, as explained by the brand promise (Chernatony, 2010). This is especially useful when, in the case of Plense, a brand has been built without a finished product.

Figure 5 shows the key strategic components that determine the brand promise and how these are defined through product or brand development

1.2.5 Main Challenge

Building a strong brand means showing the customer the brand is able to deliver their brand promise: the unique value customers can expect when interacting with the brand (de Chernatony, 2010). Therefore every brand touchpoint, should convey the brand's promise. The ultimate brand touchpoint is the brand's product, since that is what customers pay for and expect the brand promise from. For example, when Phillips promises you a confident shaving experience, you expect to purchase a ultra-sharp Phillips razor blade that can be used in any situation and Phillips shaving cream that keeps your skin soft and smooth. The **challenge** of this thesis is that Plense **doesn't have a product (yet)**, which means they can't show how they are able to deliver their brand promise yet.

Referring to Kotler et al. (2005) again, he explains that a brand also influences the product offered by that brand. An example are brand extensions (Beverland, 2021), which explain how brands introduce new product(s), based on the already existing brand. Vacuum cleaner company Dyson for example started selling hair dryers in 2016 that conveyed the same innovative, sleek and high quality image their customers are looking for. Dyson's existing brand determined the new product's look, feel and function, to ensure Dyson's brand promise ('there is always a better way') was conveyed.

The value of this thesis for Plense is that brand building (brand development) might support the development of their product and further support the introduction of their first product to market.

1.3 Relevancy for other high-tech startups

This thesis isn't solely meant for Plense Technologies. While I was looking for a brand building project at the Yes!Delft website I found out Plense isn't the only Yes!Delft startup that could potentially benefit from brand building, but probably comes across the same challenge as Plense when doing so. Therefore I thought it might be interesting to use this brand building project for Plense Technologies as case study to learn more about brand building for Yes!Delft startups and potentially help them create or think about their own brand. This chapter explains how I could help other Yes!Delft startups with this thesis as case study and what brand building adds to startups, besides the obvious advantage of having a brand.

Having an unclear idea about the potential value of your startups, like Plense, isn't particularly unique. Moroni et al. (2015), Ries (2011), Chaudri et al. (2022) and Ruzzier and Ruzzier (2015) all agree that the human institution called a startup, works under extreme conditions of uncertainty when developing their innovative product or service. This uncertainty forms the underlying problem for the lack of clear direction. Especially within the Yes!Delft environment where most startups are born through high-tech innovation breakthroughs, the challenge to find a product-market fit, find direction in specific product application or the right target customers is one of the biggest challenges (Liao & Welsh, 2008; Salamzadeh & Kawamorita 2015).

1.4 Exploring the value of MVB building for high-tech startups

Beneitez (personal communication, April 2024) explains there are 2 type of startups part of Yes!Delft; startups part of the 'validation program' which are validating the potential of their high-tech idea with customers to see whether it is worth taking the startup serious, and startups part of the 'accelerating program' who have validated proof of traction and are refining their high-tech solution to eventually create and validate a product-market fit (Paschen, 2017). The 'accelerating startups' at Yes!Delft have something valuable; a high-tech product or service with potential to become a successful business. But like many other startups, they are faced by uncertainty and a multitude of challenges when trying to learn and develop their unique, high-tech asset. Just like Plense, these startups could benefit from brand building as defined by Kotler et al. (2005).

The problem for these other startups however is that they don't have a SPD graduation student to build a brand for them. They don't have the recourses to build a brand themselves. Therefore, part of this thesis tries to explores the value of (an relatively unknow

term in literature) minimum viable brand (MVB) building for high-tech startups: the least amount of time and effort to create a brand that communicates the startups brand promise. In line with the startups popular lean methodology: testing and learning through the minimum viable product (MVP) (Ries, 2011), the assumption of this study is that startups could test and learn about their customer, competitors and product with an MVB. Similarly to figure 5, but now minimal, see figure 6.

For this study part of the assignment for Plense will be used as case study Because this study isn't part of the assignment for Plense, only the last chapter (10) of this report will further explain how the value of MVB building for high-tech startups has been explored and what was found.

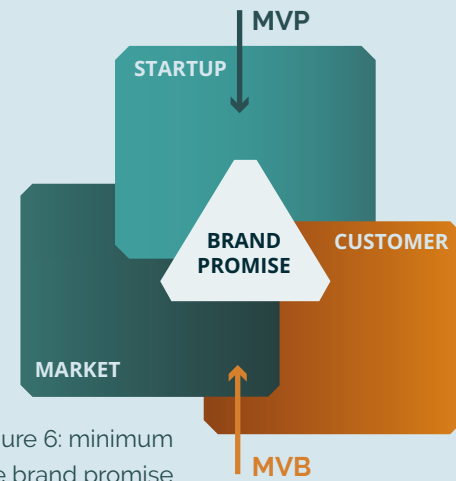


Figure 6: minimum viable brand promise

2. LITERATURE STUDY

This chapter presents the literature study of this thesis and the project approach that was derived from this study. First a literature review on branding, brand building, brand building for startups is explored to determine what is needed to build a brand for Plense. Then the practical side of brand building is studied through with four expert interviews. Finally the overall project approach and important brand building steps are summarized and visualized, forming the basis of this project and thesis report.

To summarize the introduction, this thesis project exists of 2 parts:

MAIN ASSIGNMENT

Building a brand (strategy) for startup Plense Technologies that supports the introduction of their first product to market.

SIDE TRACK

Using the brand building project for Plense as case study to explore the value of minimum viable brand building for high-tech startups (Only chapter 10 will show this study).

- 2.1 Method
- 2.2 Branding
- 2.3 Internal branding
- 2.4 Brand Building
- 2.5 Brand Building for startups
- 2.6 Inside-out Brand Building
- 2.7 B2B Branding
- 2.8 Project approach

2.1 Method

To create an comprehensive understanding of brand building and its value for tech startups, both theoretical and practical understanding is important. A combination of the following 2 methods will be used as foundation to determine approach and focus withing this thesis project.



LITERATURE RESEARCH

A literature research is conducted to provide insight into the current scientific views on branding, perspectives on possible ways of brand building and findings on key brand building activities. To relate these insights to the scope of this thesis, literature research on brand building of startups, tech startups characteristics and B2B brand challenges is conducted.

In addition, literature research on the potential value of brand building processes for tech startups has been conducted by connecting brand building activities to high tech startups activities.

A total of 45 papers and 3 books were sourced in this literature research. These have been selected on amount of citations (minimal 20) and relevancy to this project (by reading the abstract).



EXPERT INTERVIEWS

Besides my personal study goal to practice more with semi-structured interviews, the expert interviews are conducted to create a more nuanced understanding of startups and B2B tech brand building in practice.

Therefore three experts in the following fields have been interviewed:

- B2B brand and marketing (J. Marmeren, central marketer Spirotech)
- Startup and startup incubator marketing (S. Mažeikaitė, marketing specialist Yes!Delft and founder brand agency SolMarketics)
- AG (agriculture) tech brand strategy (H. Brunemann, head marketing ag.Source)

To get a better understanding of the relevancy and possible contribution of this thesis within the Yes!Delft environment, programme maker (P. Benítez) has been interviewed.

2.2 Branding

Over the past 3 decades there have been many attempts at defining brands through the lens of different professionals (Beverland, 2021). Johnson (2018) summarizes these views in 7 brand groups. One of these groups defines branding as a holistic view; *'a delicate dance between intended meanings sent by company and perceived meanings elicited through customer response'* (Franzen & Moriarty, 2015). In the context of Plense and other startups understanding, validating and developing their value in this world, this holistic view and *'delicate brand dancing'* seems most fitting, because it suits the dynamics of most startups, in which continuous cycles of testing with customers often shape the startups product and business (Ries, 2011). Furthermore, this *'dance'* could provide a better understanding of the startups value and their meaning (Keller, 2003).

In line with the holistic system view on branding, Award-winning marketing columnists H. Edwards provides a more practical definition of a brand: *'the combination of product/service + values + associations that creates meaning people can connect with at the level of identity'* (Johnson, 2018). Riezebos and van der Grinten (2011) add more nuance by describing products/service as features or and values as both functional and emotional values. Communicating these values ultimately results in brand building (Chartanory, 2010).

Startup vs Product branding

Brand building can result in a product brand, which captures the product values that differentiate the product from competition (Alizadeh et al., 2014), and a corporate brand, which captures the organisations core, its enduring and distinctive identity that attracts multiple stakeholders (Kaumann et al., 2012). Corporate brands are strategically built for stakeholders outside the organisation (customers, press etc.), and inside the organisation (employees, managers etc.) (Sorensen, 2011).

For Plense both type of brands are very closely related to one another. The startups product is the reason they exist and the reason the product exists is the startup. The focus on literature from here on will be however on corporate branding, since that seems more relevant in the startups day to day business, attracting different stakeholder. Muzellec and Lambkin (2009) thereby argue that the corporate brand can enforce the product brand and the other way around the product can enforce the corporate brand (de Chernatony, 2010). Since the corporate brand in this thesis lays the foundation for Plense's product introduction, corporate branding will be the main focus within this literature study.

This thus means that br project refers to the startups brand, no product brand, although these ar indifferent at this momen

2.3 Internal branding

Another part in branding literature is so called 'internal branding'; making sure employees share the same values and purpose as the brand they work for (de Chernatony, 2010). To enforce the internal brand, organisations hire people that fit the brand (internalisation), set up events to bond with each other (identification) and stimulate manager's brand leadership (Burman & Zeplin, 2003). At a startup like Plense, internal branding is less relevant since the team is small and very well connected. They all work in 1 office and regularly share each other's work and private life. What might need to be needed at the end of this brand building project, is to increase brand compliance, which is alignment between the brands intended communication and the actual communication of employees, since I will be building a brand that also attracts to stakeholders outside of Plense.

2.4 Brand Building

The ultimate goal of brand building is to create brand equity, the overall worth (financial, social value, competitive advantage) of a brand perceived by its customer (Aaker, 2009; Ailawadi et al., 2003). Keller's (2003) brand equity model explains how organizations can develop a strong brand, defined as brand resonance, a deep psychological bond with the customers. To reach this bond organisations use marketing and communication strategies that enhance positive brand judgements and feelings; brand meaning (Keller, 2003). These communications and marketing efforts, like an Nike advertisement on tv or a children party in the McDonald's play an important role in conveying the organisations brand meaning, which when perceived by the customer forms a brand image (Wijaya, 2013). In strong brands the brand image that is perceived by customers, is congruent with the brand identity that is created by the organisation (Nandan, 2005). Brand Identity is the distinctive or central idea of an organisations brand and the foundation for communication towards stakeholders (Shirazi et al., 2013; Nandan, 2005; Chernatony, 2010).

According to Harris and Chernatony (2001) the brand identity is made up out of the following components: brand vision, brand culture, positioning, personality, relationships and presentations. Jongerius and Berghuis (2023) summarized these components to a total three, forming the so called brand DNA, the strategic essence of a brand (Maltus et al., 2023). They have removed the internal

brand component (relationships) and the communication component (presentation) leaving only those that are strategically essential as brand identity foundation:

- **Purpose:** the brand's belief 'why' The purpose should be clear all around the organisation and could be defined by its employees, managers and CEO (Collins & Porras, 1996). Or, with startups by its founders (making the analyses a lot simpler).
- **Personality:** the set of human characteristics associated with a brand, defined by the brands positioning (Aaker, 1997).
- **Positioning:** what the brand offers to whom (Rossiter and Percy, 1997).

The brand positioning, a summary of the strategic direction of a brand, is the most important component of the brand DNA and can be defined through analysing the brand atmosphere (Chernatony, 2010). The brand atmosphere analyses is the foundation every brand is built on. It is an researched overview of every factor that could influence the brand distinctiveness, success and relevance (Beverland, 2021). Hultink (2023) explains the following factors to be analysed for (new) brands:

Company, Competition, Context, Customer and Collaboration

These factors seems to be important for every brand positioning. What's different and influences the brand position is the approach. Urde and Koch (2014) illustrate there's a range between two between synergistic positioning approaches; market and brand oriented. A

market oriented brand approach is taking an outside-in perspective, satisfying the needs and wants of consumers first and foremost, while a brand oriented approach is inside-out,

satisfying the customers' needs and want within the limits of the brand core identity (Urde et al., 2013).

Market-oriented positioning focusses on identifying and exploiting unmet customer needs, while brand-oriented positioning comes from within the organisation, selecting market positions based on its purpose and capabilities Urde and Koch (2014). De Chernatony (2010), Kapferer (2012) and Riezebos and van der Grinten (2011) explain how to build brands in line with the inside-out approach of brand positioning, called inside-out brand building.

2.5 Brand Building for startups

One of the few studies on brand building for startups proposes the same inside-out building approach. Ruzzier & Ruzzier (2015) conducted 45 interviews with different startup CEO's and based on that proposed a startup branding funnel that consist of 4 phases and eleven building blocks. Starting with the vision, approached from an internal perspective asking the question, 'who are we'? Further research explains the inside-out branding approach for startups brings 2 important benefits:

Bresciani & Eppler (2010) and Salamzadeh & Kawamorita (2015) describe that the **limited financial and human resources**, are often one of the biggest constrains for startups to start brand building practices. Building a brand from the inside-out means building withing your own capabilities and with yourself as starting point, which reduces these financial and time limitations (Konecnik & Ruzzier, 2015).

Rode & Vallaster (2005) and Whickham (2001) explain how crucial the startups founders are when it comes to startup branding. The brand identity and communication has to be aligned with the core values of the founders in order to make the brand both internally as externally successful and consistent. The inside-out brand building approach starts exactly with that, defining the values and vision of the founders (liow et al., 2019) regularly share each other's work and private life. What might need be needed at the end of this brand building project, is to increase brand compliance, which is alignment between the brands intended communication and the actual communication of employees, since I will be building a brand that also attracts to stakeholders outside of Plense.

2.6 Inside-out Brand Building

What makes inside-out branding unique is the greater emphasis on the organizations mission, vision and core value. The brand is an *'strategic interplay with the target group and thus is not limited to being an unconditional response to what at any moment is demanded by customers'* (Urde 1999).

De Chernatony (2010), Kapferer (2012) and Riezebos and van der Grinten (2011), have written different books about similar inside-out brand building approach. They all share the same brand building blocks. Thereby they all share a great emphasizes on internal branding; as an foundation for inside-out brand building, about the importance in larger organizations and the execution internal brand building and translate it to the outside (Beverland, 2021) The book of De Chernatony (2010) is most interesting for this project as it combines both other books and explains more practically how inside-out brands are build. Therefore this book called *'From Brand Vision to Brand Evaluation – The Strategic Process of Growing and Strengthening Brands'* formed the foundation of this thesis building a brand for Plense and will be referred to often throughout this report. The overall brand building approach described in De Chernatony's book, together with the other literature is summarised in figure 7.

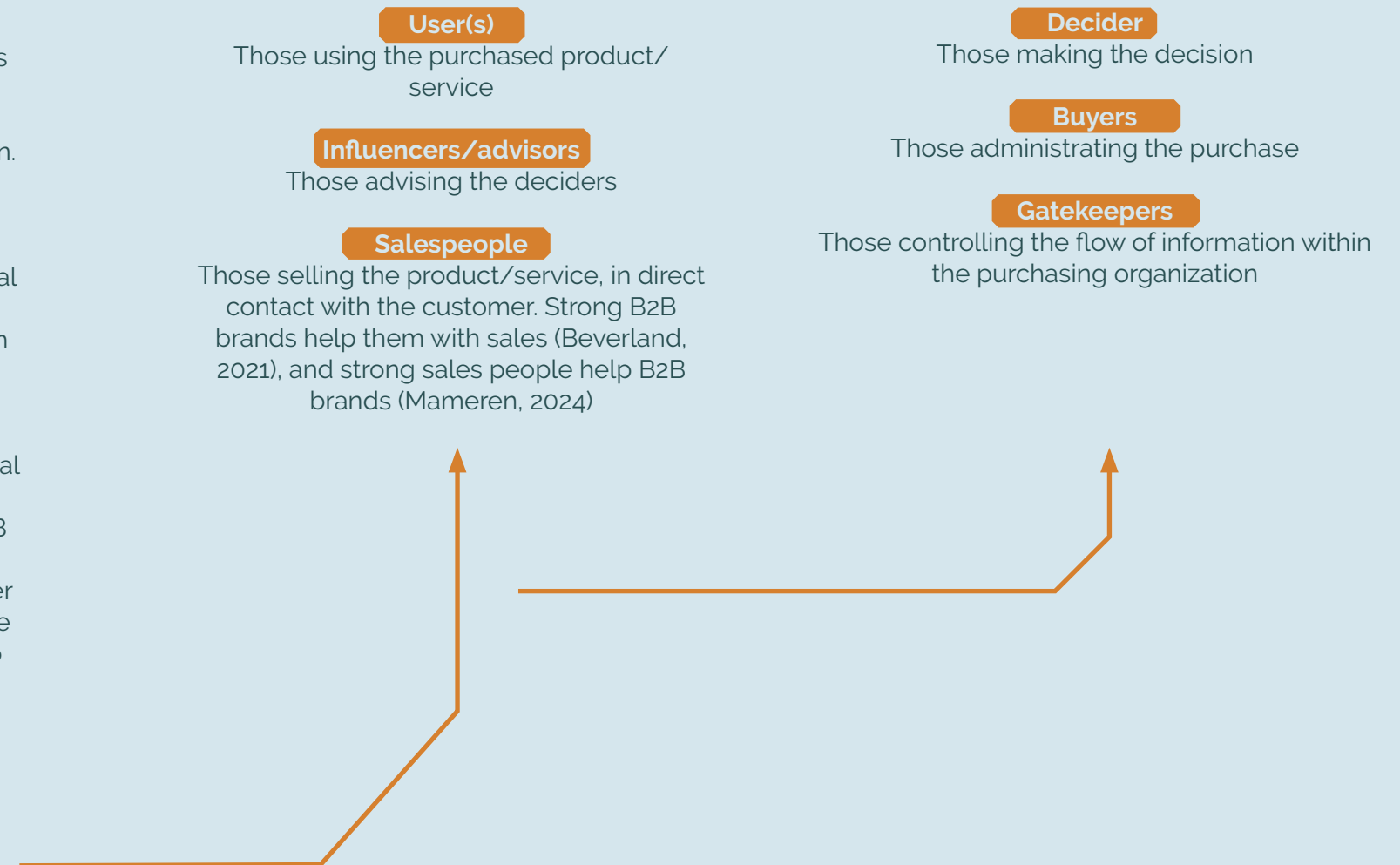
2.7 B2B Branding

As for now the literature research on brand building has mainly been focussed on customer focussed marketing, B2C brand building. Since Plense is going to sell B2B, this chapter will summarize a literature study and 2 expert interviews on B2B brand building; its different characteristics and points of attention.

Branding in B2B markets is just as important as branding in B2C markets (Beverland 2021; De Chernatony; 2010). Especially the emotional side of branding because of the bigger risks and responsibilities in B2B purchases (Graham et al., 2015). B2B brand choices are therefore mainly made based on risk mitigation, rather than maximize utility (B2C) (Derbaix, 1983). These risks include performance risks, financial risks, social and psychological risks. The potential risk in decision making between B2B brands often leads to long-term relationships between businesses and people, much longer than B2C relationships (Beverland, 2021). Once a business identifies a good brand they like to stick with it to avoid risk.

Another aspect that makes B2B branding different from B2C branding is the so called 'decision-making unit' (DMU) (Chernatony, 2010; Mameren, personal communication, 2024). Brand selection processes in B2B context involve different roles:

DECISION MAKING UNIT



2.8 PROJECT APPROACH

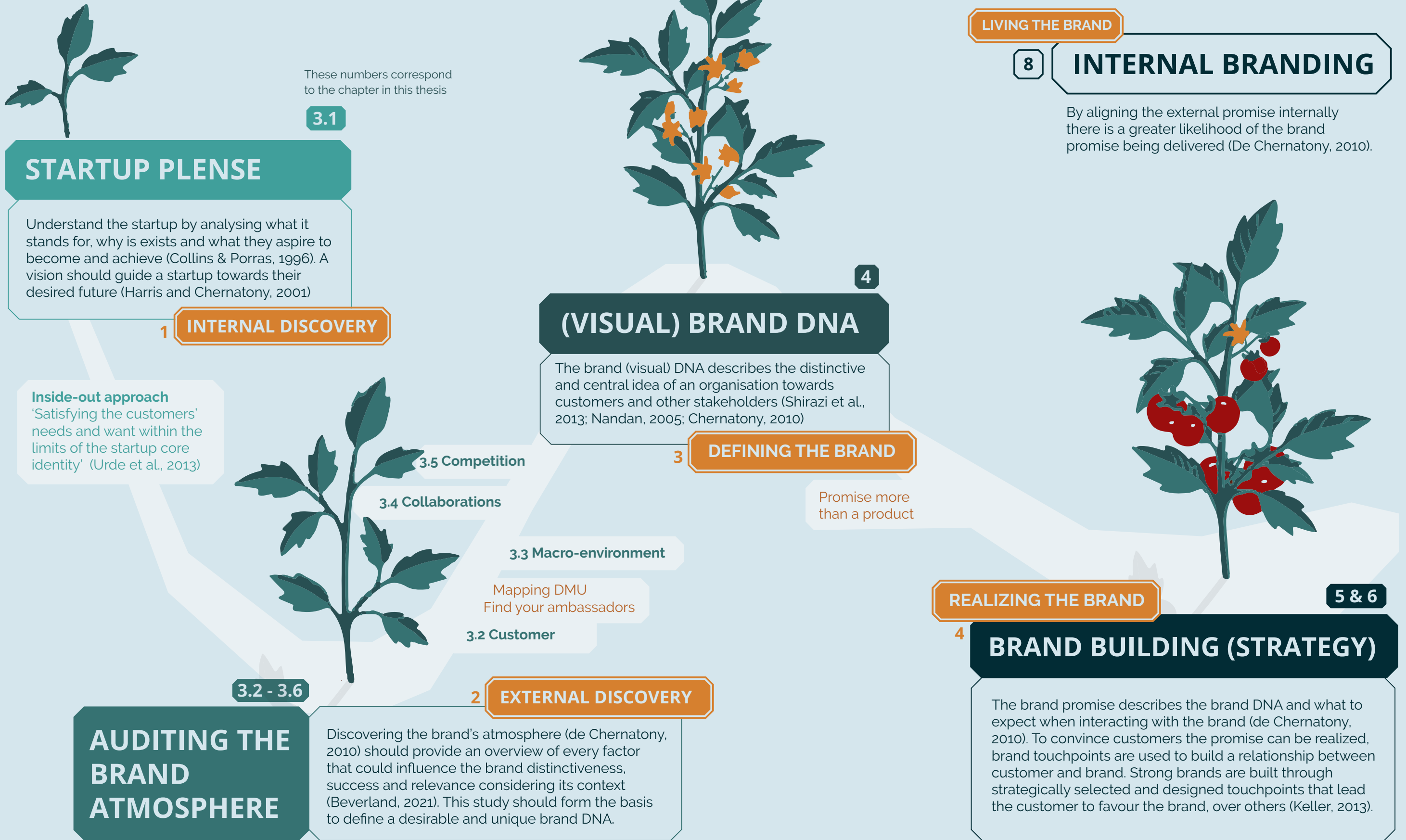
The overall approach of this projects is based on the Double Diamond framework, which offers an universal approach to every type of design project (Design Council, 2019). The first 2 phases exists of **discovering** everything (1) **internally** and (2) **externally** with regard to Plense. The second phase summarizes the discovery phase by defining Plense's (3) **brand DNA**, after which the brand DNA is used to create a (4) **brand strategy** and **brand touchpoints** that creates a strong brand

which support the introduction of Plense's first product to market. Finally these touchpoints are **evaluated** and the brand is **internalized**.

Figure 7 illustrates this approach with the growth journey of a tomato plant! Each step is building a brand for Plense is briefly explained and refers to the corresponding chapter.

STAGES OF BRAND BUILDING

Figure 7: stages of brand building based on theory + key points of attention from practice



3. AUDITING THE BRAND'S ATMOSPHERE

This chapter explains the brand atmosphere analysis which forms the strategic foundation for every brand (de Chernatony, 2010). It should provide an overview of every factor that could influence the brand distinctiveness, success and relevance (Beverland, 2021), supporting a strategically crafted brand positioning. The goal therefore is to create a nuanced understanding of the brand atmosphere, by analyzing the following brand atmosphere factors (Hultink, 2023):

BRAND ATMOSPHERE FACTORS

3.1 Startup Plense: The vision of the startup, what it aims to achieve and what it stands for. The vision is built by the startups key recourse(s) and most valuable asset(s), the distinctive capabilities and core competencies (Chertanory, 2010).

3.2 Customer: In-depth interviews (Jamshed, 2014) provide a detailed understanding of the customer and their 'jobs to be done' (Christensen et al., 2016) which are summarized through persona(s), to empathize with the customer (Klapwijk & van Doorn, 2015).

3.3 Context: A macro-environment analyses (de Chernatony, 2010) explains the context and the most important trends and developments influencing (positively or negatively) the startup/brand.

3.4 Collaboration: was added during the brand atmosphere analyses. This chapter shows the potential of working together with competition.

3.5 Competition: The level of competition (Hultink, 2023) and the customers perspective on the (key) competitors (Kohli & Leuthesser, 1993) explain the competitive landscape.

The **MVB workshop** that is mentioned in figure 8 refers to the side project 'exploring the value of minimum viable brand building for high tech startups' with Plense as case study. This workshop provided the first understanding of the brand atmosphere analyses, as it captured Plense's co-founders (pre) knowledge about brand atmosphere factor.

APPROACH

The overall approach for the customer and competition research and analyses is based on the theoretical sampling method. Therefore the researcher collects data, analyses data and decides what data to collect next based on his findings (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). This is why these 2 factors of the brand atmosphere were studied simultaneously.

In line with the inside out- approach of brand building (Urde, 2016) Plense will be analysed first. This helps to determine the key competitors and most promising customers later on the brand atmosphere analyses (figure 8).

The customer analyses is the most important factor of the brand atmosphere. To get to know the customer as best as possible the context analyses and a part of the competition analyses are conducted through desk research, before the customer analyses. This way I was able to aske more specific questions about competition or greenhouse horticulture context.



Figure 8: brand atmosphere analyses in chornological order

3.1 PLENSE

This chapter further elaborates on the introduction of the client Plense, explaining the vision of the founders and the startups key competencies and weaknesses that will influence the realization of their vision.

3.1.2 Vision

The vision of a company, or in this case startups, is built of three components: the vision should explain what the startup stands for (core values), why it exists (purpose) and what they aspire to become and achieve (mission) within 10-30 years from now (Collins & Porras, 1996). A vision should guide a startup towards their desired future and in the case of larger companies create coherence and alignment among employees. The vision helps to determine what is and isn't important for the startup.

Vision Workshop

To understand the vision of Plense and its founder Berend and Thijs a workshop was made based on the the paper of Collins and Porras (1996), who describe practices that capture the vision of company directors and executives:

- Core values were explored by showing Berend and Thijs a list of different values (Collins & Porras, 1996) and let them discuss which of these values fit them and the startup the most.
- The core purpose was defined by letting Berend and Thijs think about the following question: *'We are making X product or we deliver X service, then ask yourself: why is that important?'* After which they had to answer 'why is that important' 4 more times to get a deeper sense of their purpose and motivation behind the startup.
- Lastly Berend and Thijs were asked to define their mission and make a vivid description of how it would look like achieving this mission.

This workshop was conducted in 2 separate sessions of both 1.5 hrs long within a week, in order to keep the workshop efficient and create time for personal reflection. To learn more about Plense's vision and the workshop used to understand this Vision, see Appendix 1.



Figure 10: Plense's ambitious team!

Vision of Plense

The core purpose of what Thijs & Berend want to achieve with Plense captures the overall vision of their startup very well:

'Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day, teach a man how to fish and he can eat for a lifetime.'

It summarizes the startups ultimate mission: improving horticulture all over the world by learning and working with the plant itself. Plense wants to empower growers with new insights and tools to feed the ever-expanding population, enhancing all growers understanding of their plants to improve their greenhouse productivity and quality (figure 9).

Key in their vision is the drive to help every grower everywhere and all the time, by making their technology accessible: easy to

understand, easy to implement and easy to learn from. This explains for example their core value: *Collective growth by learning.*

While many AgTech startups are trying to automate certain processes in greenhouses (giving a fish), Plense understands it is the grower that makes a difference and the relation between people and plants that delivers the best product. In their vision the grower and people within the greenhouse are central, thus enhancing their work most valuable (teaching how to fish). This relates to another of their core values: *Responsible societal advancement.*

Not just the customer is central in Plense's vision, their employees are too. Plense believes trust is one of the most important values to create an equal and fair working environment. They want to grow forwards by working together inside and outside the startup and build *connection through trust.*



Figure 9: Vision of Plense, visualized (by Plense!)

3.1.2 Key Competencies

The vision of a company, or in this case startups, is built of three components: the vision should explain what the startup stands for (core values), why it exists (purpose) and what they aspire to become and achieve (mission) within 10-30 years from now (Collins & Porras, 1996). A vision should guide a startup towards their desired future and in the case of larger companies create coherence and alignment among employees. The vision helps to determine what is and isn't important for the startup.

REAL TIME PLANT BASED DATA

The advantage of Plense's plant-based data from is that this data is from within the plant and thus real-time, whereas the outside of the plant (observations) only show what has happened inside the plant the week before. Just how like people start to show pimples after a week of bad nutrition.

Plant-based data right now mainly exists of the observation of the grower, written down on paper/digitally or on basis of plant environment measurements, like climate and irrigation metrics. Both can be used to determine the plant status, but only as an estimation and always 'after the plant starts complaining'.

'Paprika plants always complain afterwards, just like my ...' (2)*



What makes this technology extra promising, within horticulture, is the affordability and reliability of the ultrasound technology. Instead of measuring one plant, Plense might be able to provide real-time data about the whole greenhouse.

Labour force & expertise

The second important asset is their connection to a broad network of highly educated professors, consultants and students from the TUDelft and WUR (Wageningen University). Especially the close connection to the TUDelft has attracted motivated and talented employees (figure 10) and graduation students.

Weakness

Plense's weakness is their limited understanding of horticulture greenhouse and practices. They do have connection to industry experts, but within the team itself there is limited understanding of the complexity of the plants grown in greenhouses. This weakness could become a threat to the success of the startup, since their ultimate goal is to provide actionable insights to the customer. To provide actionable insights means knowing what actions match which insights. An important weakness to keep in mind for both Plense's product and brand building.

Numbers in this chapter, like: (3), refer to the customer interviews.

3.2 CUSTOMER

This chapter explains the second and most important part of the brand atmosphere analyses; the customer analysis. Therefore an theoretical sampling approach has been applied. The chapter describes:

- The research direction: the targeted customer.
- The research set-up: semi-structured interviews (n=10).
- The result analysis: coding and clustering.
- The insights: brand/product requirements and persona(s).

The aim of the customer analysis is to understand the growers **'job to be done'** (Christensen et al., 2016): what are their goals are, what their pain points are with current products (Creusen 2023) and how new startups, like Plense could help them achieve their **goals** and reduce their **pain points**. Next to that the customer analysis tries to understand who is which part of the **DMU** (decision making unit), what characterizes their role in the DMU, what motivates them and how do they look towards the future?

3.2.1 Method

First of all, existing data and earlier contact with the customer is analysed.

- A greenhouse visit
- MVB workshop
- Interviews transcripts conducted by Plense (2 years ago)

Appendix 2.2 summarizes these insights and assumptions which form the starting point of the first customer interviews. Next to that, the initial information identified the customer segment with the most potential for branding Plense: **the horticulture greenhouse businesses**.

Not just because this customer segment would be most interested in Plense their technology, but mainly because the whole horticulture greenhouse sector is built around this customer. Breeders develop seeds for these businesses, software companies help these businesses manage their crops etc. Everything comes down to the horticulture greenhouse businesses and more specifically their growers. Ultimately they are the ones producing our crops, whether that is with new tech and seeds or not.

IN DEPTH INTERVIEWS

The grower interviews are **qualitative interviews**, meant to collect in-depth information from the customer, detailed information about their perceptions, feelings, thoughts and experiences (Edmonds, & Kennedy, 2016). The interview guide built on basis of the know your customers 'job to be done' (Christensen et al., 2016). A first round with 2 customers tested whether the interview delivered new, in-depth data and whether the interviewees were part of targeted customer segment. For the second round (n=8) more specific interviewees have been selected and questions have been improved. Interviews were conducted either online (n=4) or on location (n=6). Main topics in the interview, following this order, were:

- **Growing as passion:** A general introduction to the interviewee's background and easy start to talk about the thing they love working on; greenhouse horticulture.
- **Greenhouse Entrepreneurship:** Further explanation of the interviewees role within his horticulture greenhouse business and their relation towards other employees in the greenhouse business to get a better understanding of the DMU.

- **Greenhouse Innovation:** How the interviewee looks for new technologies, what they expect from new technologies and what they look for in new greenhouse technologies. This part took about half the time of every interview.
- **(Plense) Greenhouse competition:** Throughout talking about greenhouse innovations, past experiences with Plense's competitors were asked for to get a better understanding of the customer's perspective on competition and understand what jobs these competitors were or weren't able to get done.
- **Future of horticulture:** To get an understanding of the challenges and potential solutions the interviewee is expecting within the coming years.
- **Personal questions:** A few personal questions were asked to get a better understanding of the interviewees life outside of greenhouse horticulture.

Appendix 2.4 explains the interview guide more elaborately, showing how the interview guide was build and used.

Analysing the results

All interview data is capture by hand-notes, during and after the interviews. Although this is seen as relatively unreliable way of capturing interviewee data (Jamshed, 2014), it seemed like the most appropriate approach to have the interviewee completely open up. Recording conversations in this relatively closed and unknown sector may have felt intrusive for the interviewee. 5/10 interviews were conducted with a colleague, which meant I was able to completely focus on the interview while someone else was taking notes. The other 5/10 interviews took place alone, online, which made is more easy to take notes while keeping track of interview. References to each interviewed are numbered 1-10 to keep the interviewee anonymous. The same reference numbers will be used throughout the remainder of this report.

The interviews brought a lot of qualitative data. In order to distil this data towards insights, a coding process is executed. Therefore all interviews notes were written out digitally, after which highlights were placed on the most interesting notes. These were grouped and linked in order to find patterns and meaningful connections (Wicks, 2017) (see appendix 2.5). Ultimately this led to the following insights.

3.2.1 General customer insights

Throughout all interviews a few returning themes were found, important for every horticulture business. These themes are mostly related to the introduction of new technologies like the Plensor and its data. Some themes more about the type of brand/startup that is introducing these new technologies.



RELIABLE

- **Physically** aspect of new technology. In case of a new sensor this means it cannot fall off and has to be installed/moved a maximum of 2 times a year.
I want to touch the sensor maximum 1-2 times a year and that's it! (9)
- **Sensor systems** needs to cover the whole greenhouse, not just 1 plant.
2grow only covered 1 plant, which is useless if we want to know what to change within the greenhouse (4)
- New data needs to be able to be compatible with other greenhouse data and needs to be consistent.
Data needs to be Robust, otherwise you can't learn from it. Thereby it needs to be open-data (8)



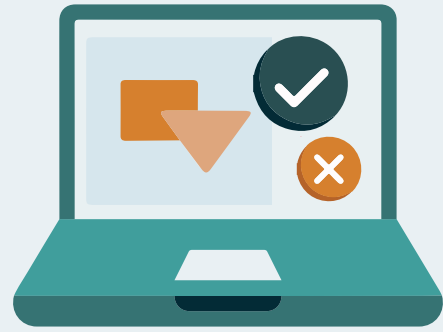
WE LOVE GREENHOUSE DATA, BUT DON'T LIKE SENSORS

In general new data is very welcoming. Growing plants is a very nuanced process, which takes into account many factors. Data can help to make this process more controllable.

We would ideally have all available data, from seeds – sales in one overview, real-time all the time (9)

The customer knows data comes from sensors, but trying to sell a sensor won't work in Plense's advantage. Once they think they're being sold a sensor they become uninterested, because they get so many inquiries from sensor companies. The customer is looking for data that provides action, not a sensor that provides data.

Again a sensor company... (6,7,9)

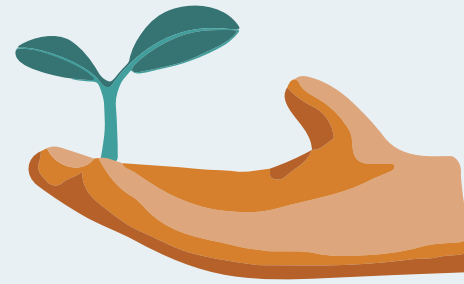


UNDERSTANDABLE & INSIGHTFUL

Data needs to be easy to understand and part of 1 simple overview. This is most relevant for the business-man leading the horticulture greenhouse, less for the grower who needs to have nuanced overview to make the greenhouse go from 95-98%.

Nice thing about source is having everything, easy to understand, into one tablet overview (1)

Easy to understand means that both the grower and the people leading the horticulture business are able to create connect new data to both their feeling walking through the greenhouse and all other existing greenhouse data. They take about 1-2 years to create these 'manual' connections before they can trust the new data and understand what this new data means.



GREEN FINGERS

Is not necessary for all horticulture business, but showing affinity and affection could really make a difference. It is important because many technical startups don't really show this, which sometimes makes it often difficult for growers to trust these startups.

I love to see people become involved in horticulture, especially when they have a different background (10)

The green fingers also show your dedication towards the sector, which is very much appreciated by most horticulture workers. They all know they can't make it on their own, especially with the challenges that the sector is facing these days.



CAPTURING AND SHARING KNOWLEDGE

All horticulture businesses address the lack of growing expertise and available employees as one of their biggest challenges.

Making learning within the greenhouse easier is from great importance (9). It is difficult to teach new employees, for example about the importance and characteristic of viruses and plague (2).

The influence of this challenge however changes for different customer segments, as do some of the other general trends.

3.2.3 Customer Persona's

This chapter summarizes the different, most important customers within the horticulture sector. First of all, there is a clear distinction between the those owning or leading the greenhouse business; the decision makers, those taking care of the greenhouse and its plants; the growers, the users.

DECISION MAKER = GREENHOUSE BUSINESS OWNER



Decision Makers: are the greenhouse business owners or CEO's, who grew up around the families greenhouse (10), but for example went to business school to take-over the operational side of the family business. The business owner is barely within the greenhouses themselves, but knows enough to understand what is happening. Although they aren't in contact with the plants, they do decide, *together or without the grower (user) what and when to implement new technology.*

USER = GROWER



Users: are the growers (5), They are checking their climate system at least 20x a day, always up-to-date with what is happening inside and outside the greenhouse. The green-hands use new technology to steer and control the greenhouse as precise as possible. (5) wants to have a *nuanced overview of his greenhouse and know everything that's happening inside and outside.* He works based on feeling and technology to support his decision when he isn't certain.

3.2.3 Customer Persona's (continued)

After the first 2 interviews I understood:

The greenhouse business owners will be Plense's customer

Since they are making the final decisions in the DMU (decision making unit). The growers are the users of whatever product or service Plense has to offer. In addition the younger technology enthusiast has been added, whose role is often supportive to the greenhouse business owners or growers. They don't have much power in the DMU, but they are often in contact with new technologies because of their interest or through college, which sometimes leads to the greenhouse business owner deciding to test out the recommendation of the enthusiast (4).

From a total of 10 interviews I identified 3 different type of greenhouse customer segments with the grower as user. These are summarized in figure 11 and explained in more detail with the persona's in next chapter and Appendix 2.6. The customers are mapped from left (most promising) to right (less promising) to Plense at this moment in time. **Imitators** only purchases new tech after seeing other horticulture greenhouse businesses succeed, thus a far reach for Plense at this moment. The **Chameleon** innovates only when they know they have no other choice, like becoming climate neutral in the 2040. Ultimately these customer segments should be targeted, but for the coming years, building up a strong brand the business-man seems to be the most important customer to target (figure 12).

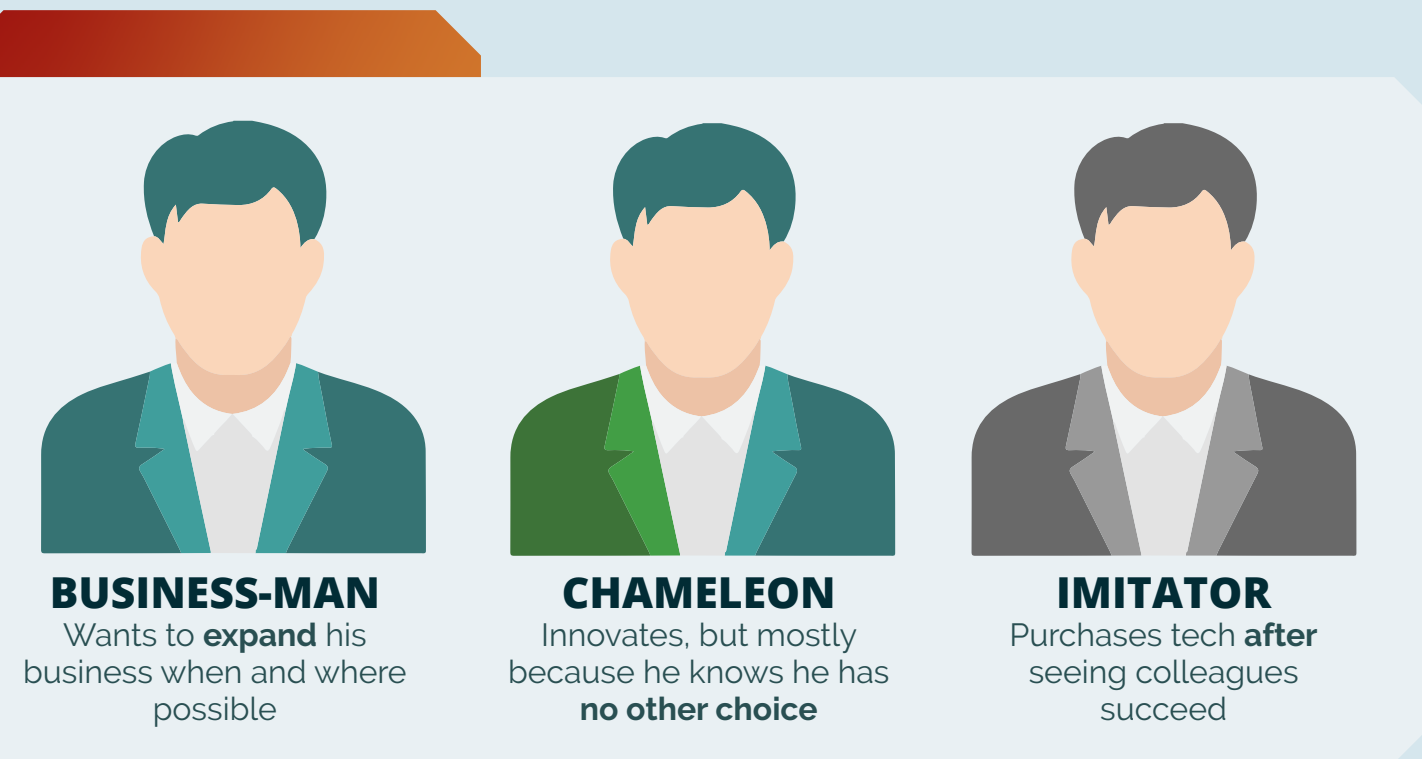


Figure 11: Overview of all customer and user segment, green represents 'green-hands' which refers to growers, while blue represents 'blue-hands' which refers to the greenhouse business owner

3.2.4 The Grower

MORE ABOUT THE GROWER

The grower will become Plense's most important user. The grower is central in the horticulture sector, for both the greenhouse business owners as many other stakeholders throughout the sector. Ultimately, the grower is responsible for growing the plants and the fruits we all eat! As a person the grower is grown and raised around horticulture, often the 3rd generation growers in the family. Although they don't come outside of the greenhouse that often, they love to talk about their plants and their growing strategy. The grower works hard. Growing requires constant attention to sudden changes in and around the greenhouse climate, because one small mistake can ruin a whole year of yield. Besides growing they are family man who like to be around home and the area they grew up. They like to cycle (common with horticulture people) drink a beer with friends here and there and be around nature. The **younger generation growers** loves the greenhouse as much as the older generation, but they also love to go out more and experience life outside of horticulture. They want the best of both worlds.



'Get the Most of out my plants and life at the same time'

Plense's Most Promising Customer

To make Plense's brand strategy as effective as possible they should aim to target the most promising customer segment (Dib & Simkin, 1991); the business-man, because of the following reasons:

- They will shape the **future** of horticulture and be its biggest shareholder.
- They are part of the first 10% of the innovation curve (Rogers, 1962), **more interested** in testing and purchasing **innovation**.
- **Other horticulture businesses owners will follow once they see the business-man succeed.** They are often respected

throughout the sector that is very much connected, people hear and learn from each other. Meaning, targeting this customer and communicating for example successful user cases, would most likely convince the other customer segments to start testing/working with Plense too! **Once the business-man is convinced Plense is valuable, it will strengthen the brand that much that other customer segments will follow.**

- They **are willing to take risk** if it has potential of improving their business and they have more budget to try out innovative technologies.

3.2.5 The Business-Man

The business-man is the owner or CEO of the greenhouse horticulture business, they are looking for every opportunity to become better and bigger, real entrepreneurs! That is also how they look at new technology and data; a way to expand and improve the business. An interesting example from (1) is how he looks for technology that somewhat predicts the future, because when he is able to predict his future yield, he has a better bargaining power position with regard to the supermarkets buying his products.

We need innovative technologies, to function as co-pilot, improving our work.

The business-man doesn't care that much about the sensor or data itself, what it exactly measures and how it should best be used. They care most about their employees who are the foundation of their business. Especially the growers, who are central in the greenhouses. The business-man wants to know how a startup like Plense could make his growers and other employees better, save them time or make them happier. The business-man's mindset and drive will make them the future of horticulture.

Brand Building conclusion

For the remainder of this thesis project, **Plense's brand will be built to target the business-man**, as this would be their most promising customer when **introducing their product to market**. Building a brand towards the business-man will thereby support the growth of a brand throughout the whole horticulture greenhouse sector.

Most important for the business-man (and the whole greenhouse horticulture sector) is Plense's user, **the grower**. They greatly influence those making the decisions as they are the heart of every greenhouse.

Business-man Persona

The persona in figure 12 summarizes the most important information about the average greenhouse business-man. The jobs to be done (Christensen et al., 2016) captures the paragraph above. The pain points summarize some of the following business-man quotes:

- We have to **teach new (immigrant) employees everything** which some time, especially because they don't all work here for a long time (1).
- Ideally we would have all greenhouse information in one overview (9).
- New greenhouse technologies should **make the most important data more approachable** for the grower (2).

Motivations to try out new technologies are based on the general customer insights (3.2.2) with price and convenience added as 2 important factors when making purchase decisions. The business-man is mostly driven by the possibility to know and learn more, to become better and bigger as horticulture business.

Personality: The business-man is a real entrepreneur, chasing every opportunity that might benefit the business and his employees. Since they often started as grower their personality shares some if the growers, that are more introverted and work based on intuition.



ABOUT HANS

Hans is born and raised in the Westlands, in and round the greenhouses. He took over his family business 10 years ago and became the 3rd generation de Groot growers. Since then he isn't much working with his hands anymore, but has grown the now merged business by two, which he is very proud of. Hans loves his work and the people around him. When he sees his employees learn and develop new skills it gives him an enormous boost of energy. Hans embraces innovation as it is the only way to know and ultimately grow, more.

Hans de Groot

AGE 50
 FAMILY Married, 2 children
 JOB General Manager
 SIZE 50 Ha.
 ARCHETYPE 'Hero' & 'Explorer'

"We need innovative technologies, to function as co-pilot, improving our work"

MOTIVATIONS

to purchase new tech



JOBS TO BE DONE

- Expanding the greenhouse horticulture business
- Make work for their growers as easy and efficient as possible
- Improve working conditions for next generation of growers (less intense working hours)
- Know as much as possible about the greenhouse, always.
- Keep up with customers demand

OPPERTUNIST

PRACTICAL

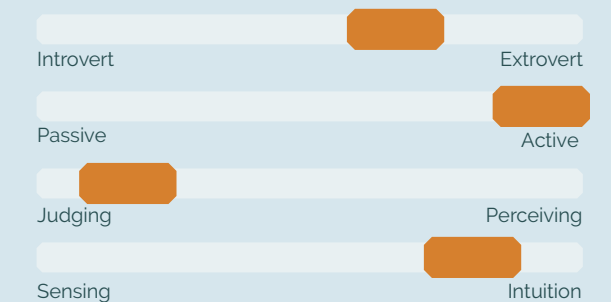
GO-GETTER

ENTREPRENEUR

Green-Hands

Blue-Hands

PERSONALITY



PAIN POINTS

- Decrease of available expert growers and trained employees
- Produce more with less (increasing taxes on CO2)
- Data is spread around different (digital) places
- Busy with day-to-day running the business
- Distance from greenhouse
- Fewer time to expand



3.3 CONTEXT

This chapter helps to identify much wider opportunities and threats influencing the brand atmosphere. This so-called 'macro-environment' (de Chernatony, 2010) analyses exists of 5 factors:

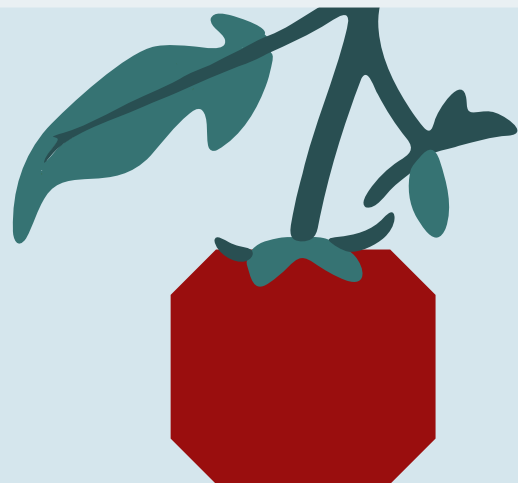
- Political
- Economical
- Social
- Technological
- Environmental

As part of the MVB workshop, both co-founders of Plense have already identified the most important trends and developments. This chapter will add to the outcome of that workshop, explain the most relevant trends and developments in more detail. Concluding whether the context factors are helping or impeding forces on the brand and business success.

• Blue = opportunity

• Red = threat

• Empty could be both an opportunity and threat



Method

Trends and developments information is retrieved by googling through news articles, through papers on google scholar and through an interview with a greenhouse horticulture innovation expert (Klapwijk, personal communication Apr. 2024). Dutch greenhouse news articles and papers from the WUR (Wageningen university) have been especially useful, reporting findings and opinions directly from the sector itself.

3.3.1 Opportunities and Threats

This chapter summarizes the most important trends and developments shaping the macro-environment, the future brand atmosphere of Plense within the coming 20 years. For more information and sources, Appendix 3 describes the full analyses in detail.

Climate Neutral greenhouse horticulture in 2040 (*Omroepwest.nl, March 2024; Gas Erop, documentary 2024; WUR, 2023*).

- Plense's innovative technology and the founders intrinsic motivation are both contributing to positive climate change.
- Plense is not the only one that aims to help greenhouses become closer to climate neutral. A lot of current innovation, sensors, heat pump installations, sunshields etc. is being developed to help greenhouses become climate neutral.

Friction between horticulture sector and politics (*Telegraaf, April 2024; Nieuwe Oogst, Apr. 2024; Klapwijk, personal communication, Apr. 2024*).

- Sudden changes that make growers prioritize other things over testing and introducing new technologies. The uncertainty about the future, that is part of this friction, holds most horticulture business back. Why invest in something new if you don't know what investment would fit the new policies and regulations best?

Increasingly limited Dutch land available (*Groentennieuws, Nov. 2023; WOS.nl, Jan. 2024*).

- Horticulture entrepreneurs are forced to look outside the Netherlands to expand their business. Plense could profit from this trend since their technology is easy scalable and more approachable for unexperienced employees and greenhouses abroad.

Eat or get eaten; the entrepreneur grower taking over the family grower (*Telegraaf, Jun. 2022; Klapwijk, personal communication, Apr. 2024*).

- The bigger and more innovative horticulture businesses are taking over the smaller family business. These businesses are more actively looking for technology that could help them optimize their bigger scale greenhouses. The market for innovative technology thus is growing, especially for those technologies that simplify work for expanding horticulture businesses.

Growers their knowledge and labour force are disappearing (*Mena, March 2023; Klapwijk, personal communication, Apr. 2024; Rabobank, Feb. 2024*).

- Plense's technology could be able to capture (a part of) growers knowledge and translate this to objective data matching the data of plants. With that possibly adding to the need for more and better grower education.
- The obvious opportunity here is that Plense's sensors enhance horticulture labour force or 'green hands', and save them time by directly communicating plant status instead of checking plants by hand.
- Threat to take into account!: Plense doesn't have any grower knowledge nor close relations with experts; a disadvantages compared to most competition, especially when this knowledge and expertise is becoming more rare. This could however be resolved with the right collaboration(s) (see next chapter!).

Data, AI and robots are the future of greenhouses (Completely autonomous farms are +20 years ahead) (*Horti Heroes, 2024; WOS.nl, Oct. 2023; Groentennieuws, Dec. 2023; WUR, 2020*).

- Opportunity: Plense's sensor brings greenhouses one step closer to autonomous farms, embracing data and AI.

- Threat: Complete autonomous farms are too far in the future for now, the sensor is not replacing, but serving the grower.

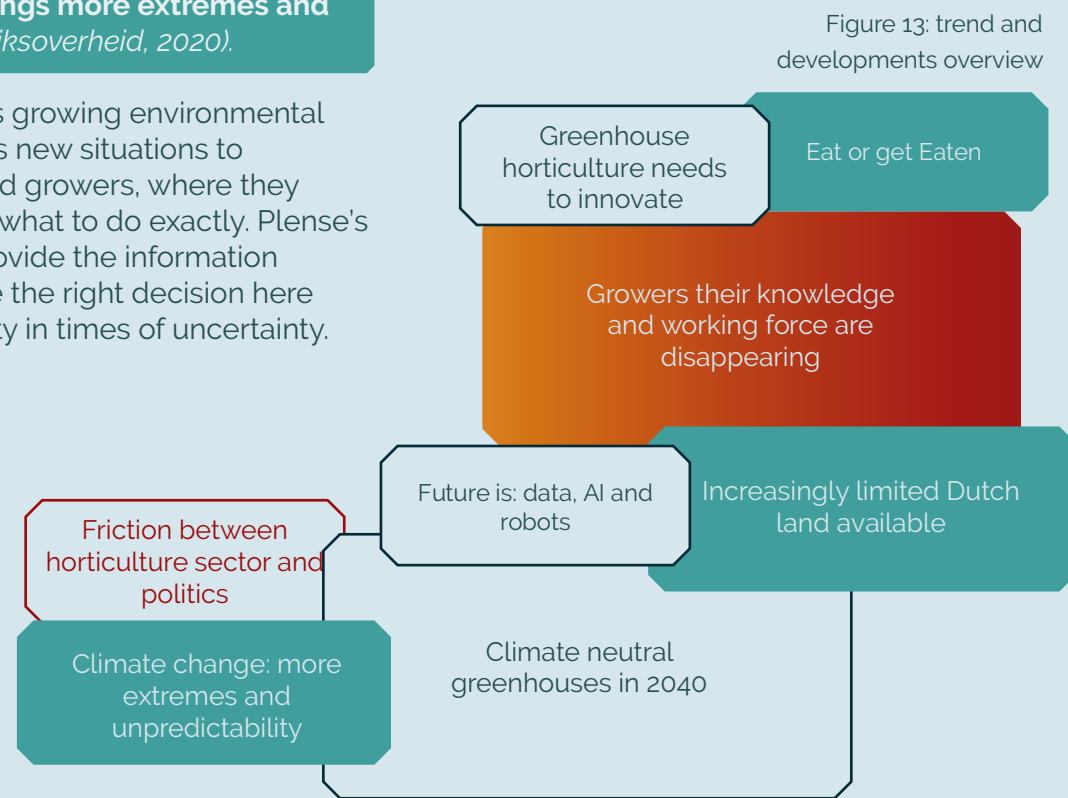
Greenhouse horticulture needs to innovate
(Westland Ambition 2040, 2023).

- Opportunity: growers are becoming more open towards startups that try to bring innovation into horticulture.
- Threat: need for innovation leads to a growing amount of competition. Other startup and scale-ups are trying to capture a part of the growing AgTech market.

Climate change brings more extremes and unpredictability
(Rijksoverheid, 2020).

- Opportunity: this growing environmental challenge brings new situations to greenhouses and growers, where they might not know what to do exactly. Plense's sensor could provide the information needed to make the right decision here and add certainty in times of uncertainty.

Figure 13 shows the importance of each trend and development for the business-man (targeted customer) in proportion of their relevance. Blue coloured means an opportunity for Plense, red coloured a threat and no colour (blue lining) both a threat as opportunity for Plense, as explained throughout this chapter. The proportions of each trend and development are based on interviews with the business-man and their relevance with regards to the future of his greenhouse business.



Brand Building conclusion

For Plense the most interesting development is the **increasingly limited workforce and knowledge in the sector**, also described to be one of the business-man pain points (figure 12). When Plense is able to turn plant based data into actionable insights that would potentially function as 'co-pilot' (1,7,9) and teach less experienced growers something about the status of their plants, they could become a key player in the future of horticulture.

The threat described here explains how the horticultures sector distance to Dutch politics increases the uncertainty about the future, which holds horticulture business back in trying new technologies. This trend makes it even more important to target the business-man, since they are more willingly to take risks, with the aim to grow further while others are hold back.

Failing to choose the right partner could be "a potentially fatal obstacle to the success of leach party's brand" (Cambell et al., 2010)

3.4 COLLABORATION

The whole greenhouse horticulture sector is moving towards working with 1 system, all integrated, shared data, nicely illustrated on 1 platform/app overview. Especially desired by the business-man (targeted customer of Plense). Therefore, different product and software providers need to work together. For Plense this means their product and data needs to be compatible with every greenhouse network. Another reason that makes collaboration crucial, is Plense's limited intern knowledge about greenhouse practices, like growing plants.

This chapter and figure 14 provides an overview of the (current) technology, operations and collaborations that are part of most Dutch greenhouses networks. Note that the grower here is central! As explained in chapter 3.2.1. the grower is the heart of the greenhouse business and the business-man outside of the greenhouse (who often is an ex-grower) would do anything the improve the growers work and satisfaction of working for him. If Plense wants to develop a certain collaboration, they themselves should have the grower central, even though their brand is more directed towards the business-man.

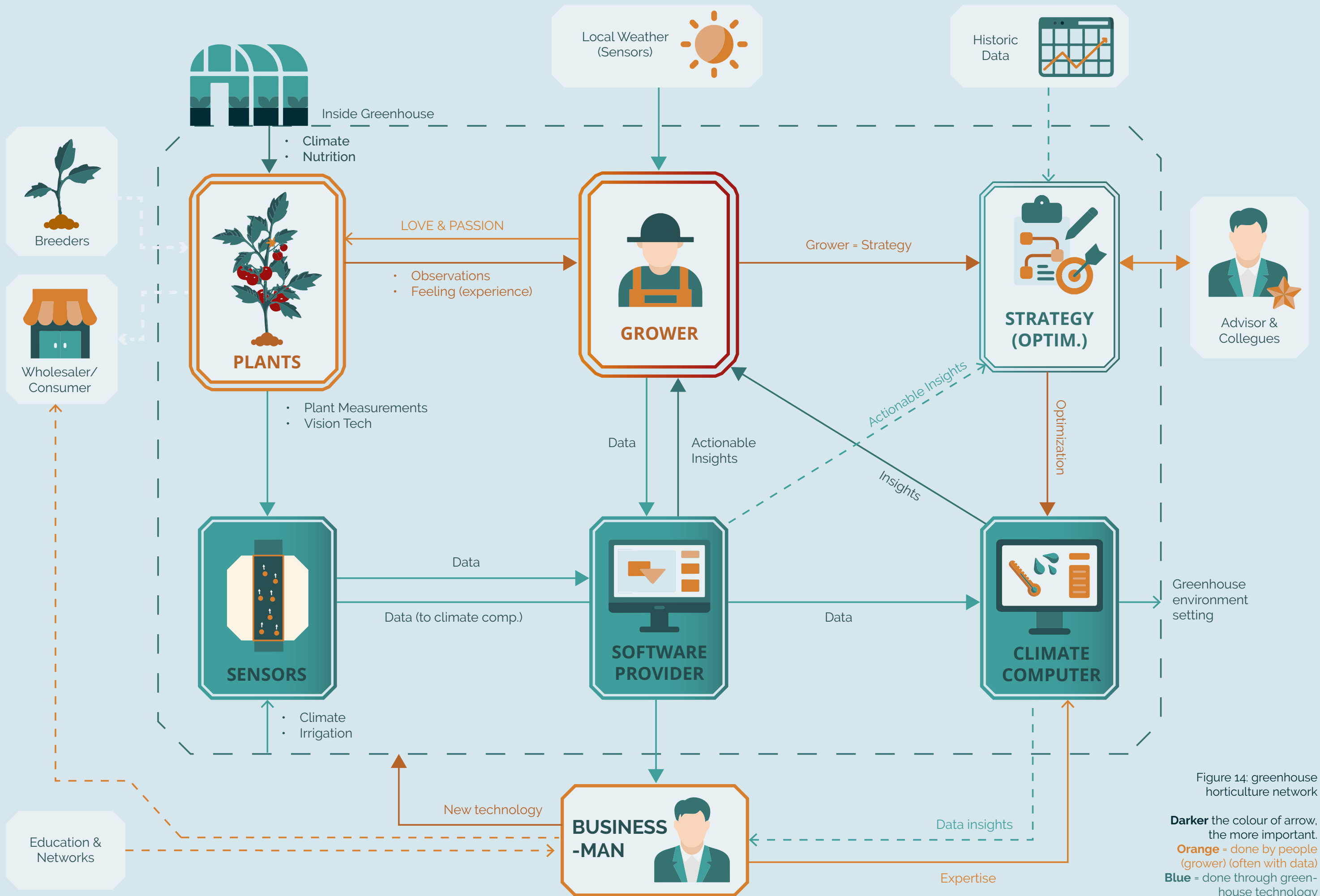


Figure 14: greenhouse horticulture network

Plense's place within the horticulture sector

Plense's contribution to this network is additional data, very much welcomed by all growers illustrated in chapter 3.2. The data Plense is adding to this overview is plant-based, data that explains the state of the plant. This data could be compared to a human observation, maybe even as an expert eye. The question now is, which horticulture tech do something with this data/sensor and how could these companies work together with Plense?

Horticulture technology providers

There are 3 type of companies possibly interested in Plense their sensor/tech:

- **Sensor companies:** those selling one (like Plense) or multiple different sensors. Some are able to deliver the complete package that measures every variable inside the greenhouse.
- **Climate system providers:** those offering the complete package of sensors, climate computers and software to steer the greenhouse climate based on the growers growth strategy.
- **Software providers:** those collecting all data and process this to an comprehensive overview for growers. These companies are super interesting, most of them are quite young, innovative and looking for additions and improvements of their software programs.

Next to these companies there are also educational and networking organisations like:

- **Educational:** Universities and research: TU Delft & the WUR, Research: Delphy, Higher education faculties: Hogeschool Inholland, College: MBO westland, Professional education: HortiHeroes.
- **Networking:** Industry accosiations, Events, Media, Innovation centres.

3.4.1 Potential collaborators

Plense should be compatible with other sensor and climate systems to become part of the greenhouse ecosystem, but not necessarily collaborative, as these won't add much to Plense's brand, product and value proposition. In terms of horti culture technology partners Plense has to work together with software companies. These companies bring every technology within the greenhouse together into one platform which is exactly what most business-man and growers are looking for. They are thereby able to connect data from Plense to other data within the greenhouse, which is crucial to make use of Plense's data.

Luckely, these software companies would like to include Plensors data, in order to further develop their platform services. They are all actively looking for new partners that could enhance their greenhouse tech service. The following overview summarizes the pro's and con's of working together with one of these software providers (figure 15).



In total 4 college's within the Netherlands educate the next generation of agriculture experts, some of them will end up within the horticulture greenhouse sector. The reason these 'hoogenscholenen' as are interesting as potential collaborators is that they are testing and learning to work with new technologies, like sensors (3.4). For one 'greenhouse enthusiast' this even led to testing an automatic harvest robot in the greenhouse of the family, after getting in touch with the technology at the HAS Hogeschool. Thereby it shows that Plense is actually investing in the future of horticulture, which is much appreciated by growers.



- **Ease of use** (with respect to the future of horticulture).
- Large investments & team.
- Plays in very well to the **future** of horticulture.
- **Struggle to deliver their brand promise**
- **Not able to steer greenhouses yet. Just data insight and data sharing.**



- **Ahead of competition: AI** to translate greenhouse data into action.
- **More personalised advice than a remote Co-Pilot. Like a growth consultant.**



- **Most experienced** software company.
- **Most used software.**
- **Most growers interviewed stopped using Letsgrow, since it doesn't seem to be as future oriented as the others.**

Figure 15: Pro's and Con's software providers

Brand Building conclusion

Plense needs to collaborate with software providers to become part of the future

greenhouse network. Ideally they would work together with all software providers to cover as much greenhouse as possible, but because that would be too much work at once, might not be possible because of IP rights or might even damage the brand, collaboration with only one of the software providers first would suit better.

The question with which software providers however cannot be answered at this moment. On the one hand, Source seems most fitting as brand; young smart people trying to shape the future of horticulture and make the sector smarter and simpler, just like Plense's vision. This is also why they are most used by the horticulture business-man. However, they aren't yet able to deliver what they've been promising the past 2 years. On the other hand software provider Letsgrow seems to loose position, especially with the business-man, but has shown they are ready to compete and put their years of experience to use again. It depends on both the software proviers position in the market over 2-3 years,

when Plense is able to collaborate. Choose letsgrow if they showed they are also able to innovate and source if they are able to deliver their promise. In case both providers are or aren't able to reduce their weaknesses, **Source** vision aligns most with Plense's vision and would thus be a better brand fit.

Blue radix is less interesting since they are more focussed on providing tailored, personal advice then building a platform that brings the greenhouse network together. They might translate Plense's data to the best advice, but more like a 'distant advisor' then a 'co-pilot that is always with you', which most business-man are looking for.

Collaboration with colleges like the HAS Hogeschool is very much recommended since this will create awareness for Plense and appreciated by the customer, which would definitely strengthen the brand.

3.5 COMPETITION

The following chapter describes the competitive landscape around Plense. Pretty much anything their customer (as business) spends money on is competition, more specifically for Plense it is every technology that supports the customer's work inside and around his greenhouse(s). The competitor analyses starts off with some pre-knowledge, after which an basic explanation of every direct – indirect competitor is given. After that the customers view on the competition is used to create perceptual maps and determine Plense's place into the competitive landscape. Lastly another visit to horticulture fair 'Green Tech' to validate some (desk research) findings on the competition.

Method

First of all, existing data and earlier contact with the customer is analysed.

- Talking to industry experts at Horticonact (horticulture fair)
- MVB workshop

Based on these insights (see Appendix 4.1) and additional desk research; studying the competitors online by looking at their website and promotion/communication video's, a first basic competition landscape is created. With this overview competition questions were created for the semi-structured customer interviews. Customer and competitor analyses have been executed simultaneously to sharpen up questions and the total understanding of the competition through the eyes of the customer.

3.5.2 Plense's level of competition

The first conclusion after interviewing the Plensor customer is that they are quite open to test and use new sensors. As long as the sensor is able to provide new data or (if cheap and very easy to use) check other sensors, they are welcomed.

However, as shown from the competition analyses so far, Plense is not the only start/scale up that tries to develop and implements these plant-based sensors. Those start-and scale-ups, promising similar plant-based data are Plense's direct competitors.

The same category competition consists of other greenhouse sensors and data providers. These competitors mostly deliver climate data or other data that describes the plants environment. Related competition are companies that provide control over the greenhouse's climate ; climate computers and those that visualize and advice based on greenhouse data; greenhouse software companies. Figure 16 illustrates the level of competition Matrix (Hultink, 2023; Bogner & Thomas, 1993).

Analysing the results

For every direct (same product), semi-direct (same category) and indirect (related competition) (Hultink, 2023; Bogner & Thomas, 1993), based on the physiques, there will be looked at the following competitor characteristics:

- **Key strength and weaknesses:** where does the real competitor brand strength reside and where is each competitor brand notably vulnerable (De Chernatony, 2010)
- Analysing these helps to identify the **points of difference** (Beverland, 2021). The point of difference described below are from the perspective of the competitor. For example, some competitors emphasize the expertise (in communication) of their product/service and team, which makes them different from other competitors.

- **Value proposition communication:** how is the value (benefits) that the key strengths bring communicated towards the customer? (Riezebos & van der Grinten, 2011)
- Company size
- **Customers perspective on the competition,** based on the customer interviews (see chapter 3.2.1)

A full overview can be found in Appendix 4.

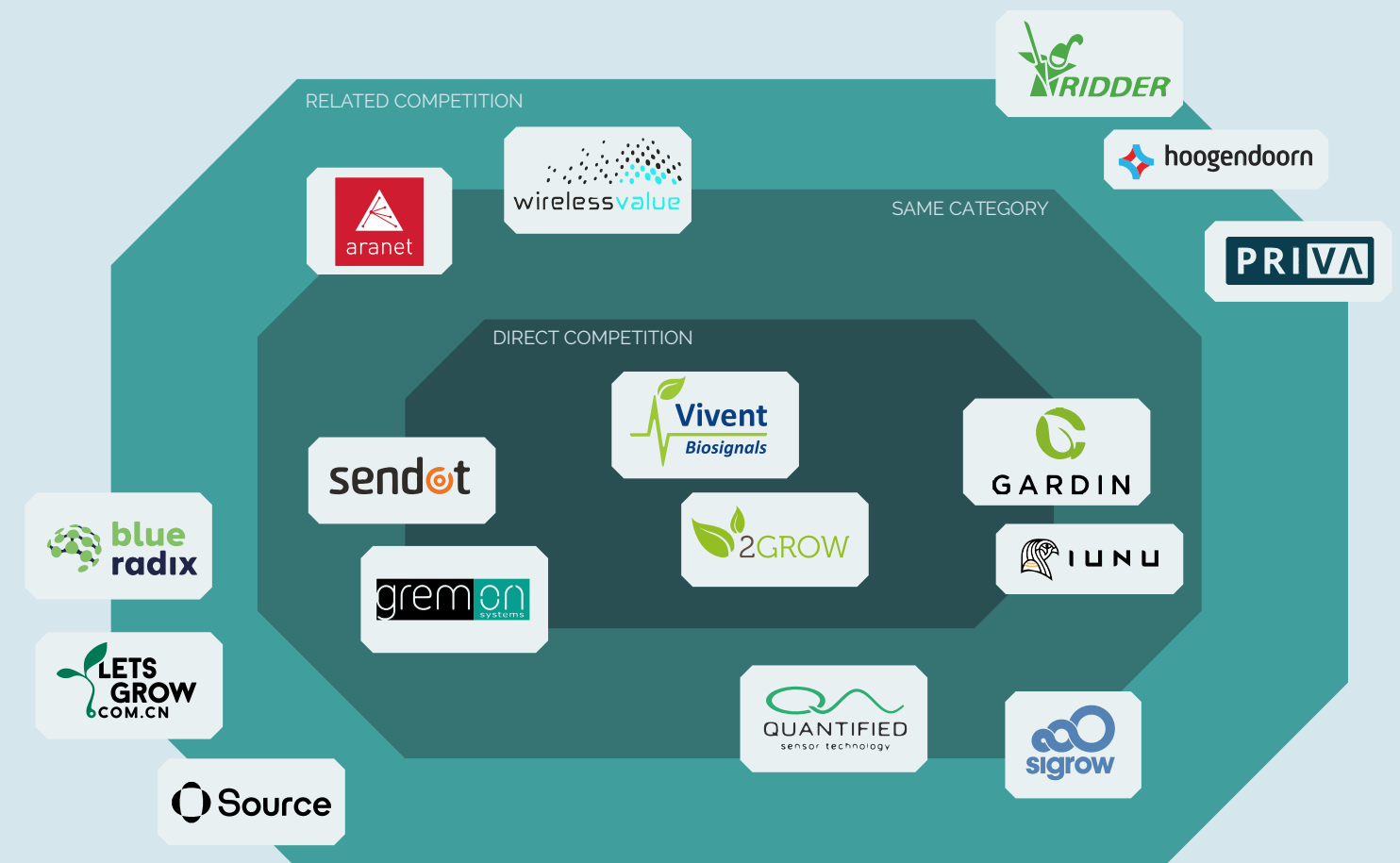


Figure 16: levels of competition matrix with all horticulture technology providers

KEY (KNOWN) COMPETITORS



REJECTED BRANDS



CONSIDERED BRANDS



Figure 17: levels of competition matrix

3.5.3 Key competitors: plant-based data

As explained in chapter 3.1 Plense's main contribution to the greenhouse horticulture sector is real time plant-based data. At the moment of writing this thesis there are 3 types of plant-based data technologies emerging.

- **Vision technology:** which are camera's around the greenhouse. NOTE: these are way more expensive than the direct-plant sensors like those of Plense. And only tell something about the outside of a plant.
- **Direct to plant technology:** different sensors to measure the inside of the plant, most similar to Plense. These sensors provide real-time plant based data.
- **Plant data systems:** different sensors together that provide plant-based data.

An first overview of these key competitors is based on the customers view about brands (Shiffman and Kanuk, 1987), see figure 17. The top layer visually summarizes the competitors product, the other layers illustrate the brands size in employees active (LinkedIn, 2024). All 7 key competitors are known by the customer. Those that are known the most; 2grow and sendot (30MHZ) have been purchased and tested, but rejected after 1-3 years. Gearbox and Gremon are considered to be tested, both by only 1 interviewee. Gearbox has already been tested by one interviewee, but without clear result yet; 'the vision sensor doesn't see everything, like what's happening below the top layer of leaves.'

3.5.4 Rejected brands

Sendot, direct competitor, was only tested by 2 interviewees. The reason they stopped using the sensor was because it didn't attach well to plants. Slight movement made the sensor fall off or move from the right measurement place.

2grow has the same problem, but less serious. Their main problem was the value of their data, which wasn't clear for 3 interviewees and thus removed the sensor within a year. The business-man wanted something tangible and useful from the data, but that wasn't there from the beginning, so they had to find this out themselves. For 2 other interviewee the sensors did provide data they were able to understand, after about 2 years. But because the data was only based on 1 plant, they were not able to use this data to steer the greenhouse. Recently 2grow introduced a network of their sensors, but the interviewees didn't think it would be worth their money, mainly because the 2grow sensor didn't bring that much new data. Even more interesting was one business-man that used the 2grow sensor for 2 years, found out that he had to open his sunscreen a little bit later on the day, after which he thought he had learned enough and removed the sensor from his greenhouse.

3.5.5 Brand positioning

Perceptual Mapping is often used by managers to **support** product or **brand positioning decisions** (Kohli & Leuthesser, 1993). These maps are a visual representation of the competitive landscape through the eyes of the customer.

The metrics of every perceptual map (x-and y-axis) are based on what the customer is looking for (chapter 3.2):

- X: Ease of use & Y: Robustness
- X: Insightful vs Raw data & Y: Prescriptive vs Insights
- X: Grower vs Performance oriented & Y: Real-time vs Predictive data
- X: Easy to understand vs Expert focussed & Y: Replacing vs Supportive
- X: Providing data vs Learning from data & Y: Inexperienced vs Experienced grower
- X: Insights vs Co-pilot & Y: Separately vs Integrated

For more information about the these axis see Appendix 4.5. The axis are made in such a way that the **top right corner of every map** represents the brands/products the **business-man will be looking for**, marked with a blue circle. Because the grower, the user, is central in every greenhouse and greatly influences the business-man decision, they are represented by the green circle in every perceptual map. Together these circles also represent the other greenhouse businesses owner segments as explained in chapter 3.2.3.

Plense is placed based on their own strengths and vision as explained in chapter 3.1 which is in line with the inside-out brand positioning approach (de Chernatony, 2010). This is important to note because normally perceptual mapping aims to identify empty spaces with opportunity, which takes an outside-in approach of brand positioning (Urde & Koch, 2014). Competitors are placed based on the competition analyses so far, a combination of customers perspective on competitors and desk + field research on competition.

Most promising brand position

A total of 6 perceptual maps + an example of the position statement as design direction have been created (see appendix 4.5). Perceptual map 'Plense's value to the future of horticulture' however was most promising to form the foundation of Plense their brand positioning. This conclusion was based on a combination of the following criteria (see appendix 4.5.1 for the selection overview):

- **Match with Plense's vision:** the extent to which this position would fit with Plense's vision. (discussed together with the founders of Plense).
- **Feasibility:** the extent to which this position would be achievable by Plense.
- **Desirability:** The desirability of this position by the customer and user. Thus the potential value this position would bring to the customer.
- **A clear distinctive position** for Plense.

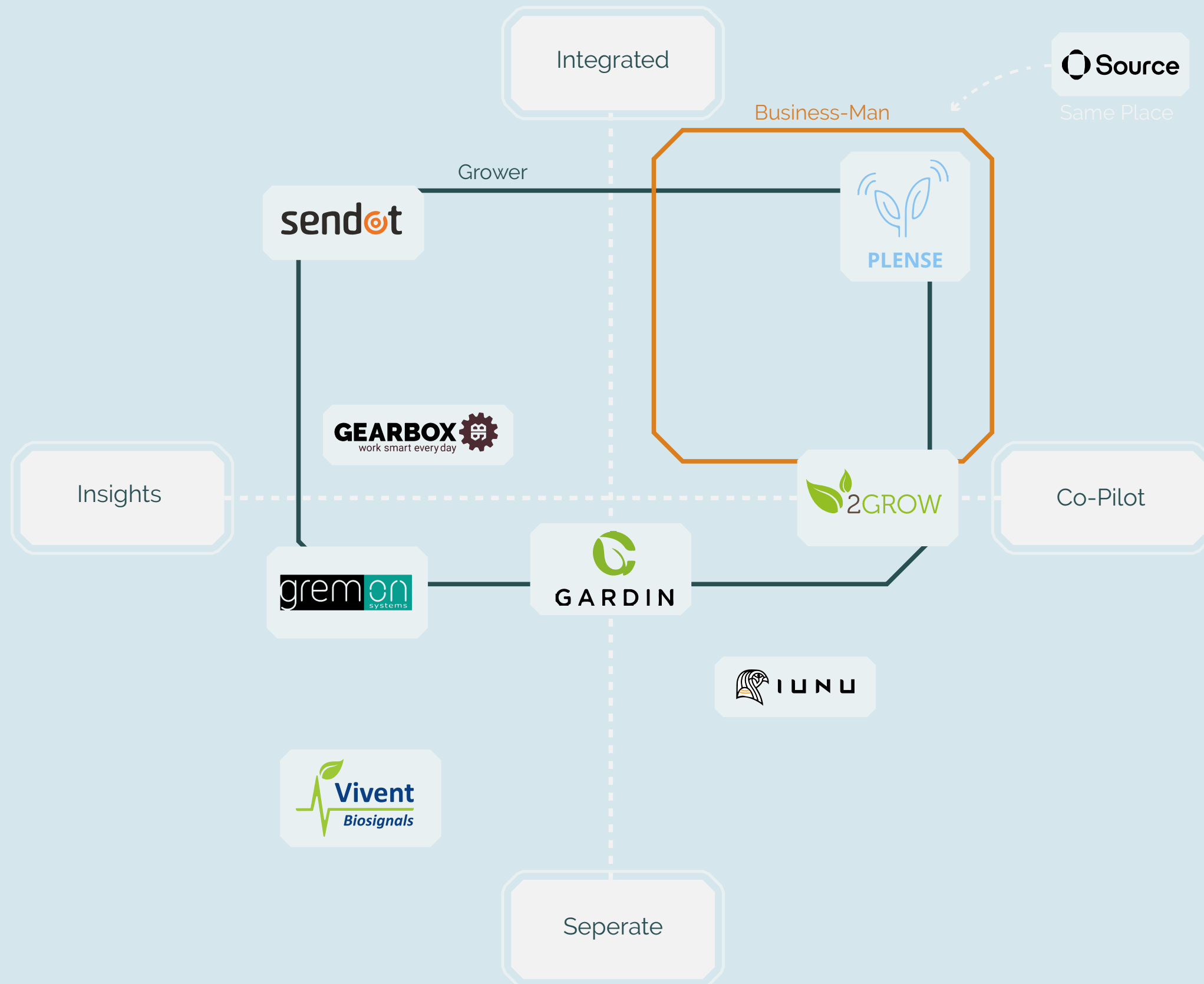


Figure 18: Plense's value to horticulture perceptual map

Brand Building conclusion

The perceptual map in figure 18 represents the two most important horticulture business-man jobs to be done, while solving an important pain point, when looking for innovative horticulture tech (figure 12).

- Separate vs Integrated:** As of now most plant-based sensors deliver their data through their own platform, website or personal messages. The business-man however is dreaming of one overview that shows all important greenhouse metrics. Therefore all technology should be compatible with each other and integrated into a greater whole. A **complete overview** saves the grower time and directs his attention to what is most important.

- Insights vs Co-Pilot:** The increasing shortage of expert growers in combination with the aim to grow the horticulture business creates the business-man desire for more helpful and supportive technology. (1*) described this desire as 'a **co-pilot to improve our work**'. Something that keeps track of the growers strategy and gives him the opportunity to 'enjoy the weekend, while being connected to the warehouse' (especially important for the next generation of growers according to 6*)

None of the current plant-based data companies are developing, nor communicating something that could be placed in the top-right corner. **This perceptual map clearly shows an opportunity**, there where Plense could further develop its strengths.

Note that same category competitor Source is communicating itself quite similar to a co-pilot, with their innovative software that integrates all horticulture technologies into one easy to use platform. **Offering a co-pilot thus shouldn't be Plense's main point of communication, they should improve the co-pilot like Source** (see how this is brand promise in chapter 5).

3.6 CONCLUDING THE BRAND ATMOSPHERE



3.1 Plense

Plense vision is to improve and simplify horticulture practices all over the world, by working together with the plant and with each other. They aim to realize this vision with their strong network of students, researchers, experts and their technology that makes real time plant-based data more accessible and actions more understandable.



3.3 Context

The need of this co-pilot is only increasing over the years to come, since there is an growing shortage of horticulture employees and grower expertise.



3.4 Collaboration

In order to become part of this future context Plense needs to collaborate with software providers, who are becoming the centre of all greenhouse technology. Only then they are to deliver their unique value to the business-man.



3.2 Customer

The customer that values this vision and technology the most is the horticulture greenhouse business-man. They are the face of the sector's future, constantly looking for new opportunities to expand their business and keep their employees happy, ambitious entrepreneurs. Central in their business is the grower, Plense's user, who takes care of the plants throughout the greenhouse. Ultimately both the business-man and grower would like to have one integrated platform that provides a clear overview and works together. For the business-man, new technologies like that of Plense should therefore ease the growers work and get the most out of them.



3.5 Competition

The greenhouse technology is booming with the challenge of feeding the ever expanding world with limited ground and thus expertise. Although there are other direct competitors delivering real time plant based data, none of them are integrated throughout the whole greenhouse and its network. Only few of these competitors function as co-pilot, but as personal advisors instead of integrated co-pilots that are always present.

This is an opportunity for Plense in which they can brand themselves in a unique and desirable way that fits the future of the greenhouse horticulture! This opportunity will be further defined, explored and evaluated within the chapters to come.

4. PLENSE BRAND DNA

The brand DNA, also referred to as Brand Identity in literature, is the distinctive and central idea of an organisations brand and the foundation of communication towards stakeholders (Shirazi et al., 2013; Nandan, 2005; Chernatony, 2010). This idea is based on the brand atmosphere and should thus be strategically crafted, meaning (Keller, 2013):

- **Favourable** towards customers; desirable
- **Unique** from competition
- Consistent and **clear**

In order to attract the targeted customer and built an strong brand over time (Aaker, 2007). These 'criteria' will be used throughout the whole design phase of this thesis and return in the chapters to come.

There are different ways to define a brand DNA. Harris and Chernatony (2001), Kapferer (2012) and Aaker (2007) all made their own set of crucial

components to describe the brand identity. What they all share in common is the inclusion of organisational values, capabilities and behaviour (Burmamann & Zeplin, 2005). Similarly Jongerius and Berghuis (2023) composition of their so called brand DNA exists of 3 components:

- **Purpose:** the organisational values and reason of existence. Important for internal brand alignment.
- **Position statement:** capturing the brand atmosphere analysis by illustrating the desirability and uniqueness of the startup, thus explaining the brand promise (figure 5).
- **Brand Personality:** communicates what can be expected (generally), while ensuring the brand is communicated clear & consistent towards its target audience.

These three brand DNA core components (figure 19) will be further explained in this chapter.



Figure 19: brand DNA core components

4.1 PURPOSE

The purpose is the brand's belief, the 'why', the reason of its existence. The purpose should be clear all around the organisation, shared by its employees, managers and CEO (Collins & Porras, 1996).

Plense's Purpose

'Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day, teach a man how to fish and he can eat for a lifetime.' (Chapter 3.1) This mindset is recognizable in everything they do and want to achieve. From its core values to their ultimate goal: teaching the best way of horticulture all around the world by learning from the plant itself. To make this purpose fit the overall brand DNA and strategic direction, I have rephrased the sentence as follows (with approval from Berend & Thijs):

To convey new ways of horticulture.
Innovate and collaborate towards smart and simple horticulture.

Interestingly, this purpose is very close to what the customer is looking for. Especially the business-man is continuously looking for new ways to improve and expand his business and employees work. Collaboration is one of the main reasons the Dutch Horticulture is as big and progressive as it is today. The alignment between the values of Plense and their customer is good news as it makes inside-out branding *'satisfying the customers' needs and want within the limits of the brand core identity'* (Urde et al., 2013) a lot more natural and believable. Internal and external alignment of the brands purpose and value is thereby key to building a strong brand (de Chernatony, 2010).

4.2 POSITION STATEMENT

The brand positioning statement captures the brand atmosphere analysis. According to Aaker (2012) the definition of the positioning statement is: *"The part of the brand identity and value proposition that is to be actively communicated to the target audience and that demonstrates an advantage over competing brands."* Based on the work of Rossiter and Percy (1997), Jongerius and Berghuis (2023) have proposed a helpful structure to create a good brand positioning statement:

For (target audience), (brand) offers (product category) that is/has (product attributes), that (functional benefits) and gives people the (emotional benefits) to (self-expressive benefits).

Based on the brand atmosphere analyses in chapter 3 (summary 3.6), the position statement of Plense is as follows:

For greenhouse business-man, Plense offers objective plant-based data that is connected to all other greenhouse technology, that actively supports greenhouse navigation and gives growers the freedom to explore new plants and lands.



Figure 20: relation between business-man and grower

RATIONALE

Greenhouse Business Man

The person making the final decision when it comes to purchasing and testing new greenhouse technology is the greenhouse business owner, the CEO of the horticulture business. The most interesting CEO for Plense is the 'business-man' as explained chapter 3.2.3. The business-man looks for products/ services that improve and expand his business. This means for example technology that improves the growers work (figure 20). Plense's technology is used by the grower, but it's value should mostly be communicated towards the business-man who makes the final decision.

Objective plant-based data

The Plensor retrieves objective plant-based data that is translated to plant status and plant actions through Plense's AI software. The unique advantage of this data is that it comes directly from the plant and might replace the (changing subjective) measurements from the grower and other employees. What exactly Plense will be able to tell about the plant is yet to be determined.

Connected to all other greenhouse technology

This part is referring to the 'integrated' axe in the perceptual map from figure 18. An important product attribute for both business-man and grower.

Actively supports greenhouse navigation

This part describes the function of the Plensor as co-pilot, which is what the customer is looking for in new horticulture technology, to improve and ease the work of the grower. Actively means it is always on, always there when you need it. Support means Plense doesn't just provide the customer data and insights, they provide actions, like a co-pilot in a plane helps to fly the plane. Greenhouse navigation refers to one of the most important jobs of the grower: steering the greenhouse's as best as possible (figure 20).

Freedom

This emotional benefit is important because it supports the self-expressive benefit. This benefit is meant for the grower, as already explained, ensures better results for the greenhouse business-man. 'Freeing' the grower from for example manually checking the plants status means he has more time to focus on what most important: optimizing his strategy. Freedom also refers the next generation of growers, that wishes to have less working pressure, free weekends and vacation next to their work as grower, one of the business-man jobs to be done.

Explore new plants and lands

This self-expressive benefit is referring to multiple things and goes hand-in hand with the emotional benefit:

- Exploring new *plants* refers to trying to find the edge of a growing strategy. Finding this edge could mean a 2% improvement in yield, which is an enormous profit given the fact that horticulture margins are around the 2-5%.
- Exploring new *lands* refers to the generation of growers. If the Plensor is proven to bring useful plant-based data and to act as co-pilot, they will be able to deliver this self-expressive benefit.
- Exploring new *lands* also refers to the wish of the business-man to expand his business, build new greenhouses on more land.

4.3 BRAND PERSONALITY

The brand personality is a shortcut that quickly illustrate what could be expected from the brand. People and Business often choose brands based on a set of 'brand personalities' that fit their own personality, or the type of person and values they wish to be associated with. *Just like why my dad buys Nespresso, because he loves the successful and playful personality of George Clooney.* Aaker (1997) explains the concept of brand personality as "a set of (3-5) human characteristics associated with a brand".

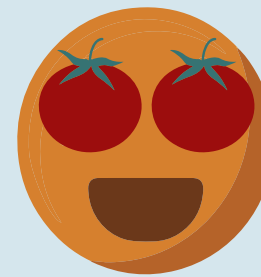
While brand positioning focuses on what the brand can do for the customer, brand personality concentrates on what the brand says about the customer and how they feel being associated with it. (de Chernatony, 2010)

For Plense, the following set of human characteristics forms a brand personality that fits both Plense as startup and the target customer(s). The human characteristics are selected from the work from Aaker (1997), who identified 42 different brand characteristics that could be present in any brand.



AMBITIOUS

This personality is somewhat related to the exciting part of Plense and the startups phase they are in. Plense is ambitious, working hard every day, to deliver something that can actually help horticulture and bring the sector forwards. The businessman himself is ambitious too, eager to expand and improve his horticulture business. They love to see others, like innovative startups, put the same effort and passion into what they and their growers love: horticulture.



EXCITING

Plense is a young team with people full of energy, ideas and a drive to make a positive change. They are working on something new, something never made before and that is exciting! One of the reasons I had the chance to interview 9 busy horticulture business owners (some owning over 50 ha!) is because they love to see new smart people coming in the sector to make positive change. They want to see exciting innovation that can change their business forever and a startup like Plense might just bring that.



RELIABLE / RUGGED

Every horticulture technology must be reliable! If you cannot give that impression as horticulture tech company, it is very hard to convince the customer your technology is worth their investment. For example direct competitor Vivent that also measures the inside of plants is often questioned to be reliable, because their sensor needs to be installed with 2 tiny needles that send and measure electrical shocks through the plant. First of all, doesn't this hurt my plant? And second, do the fragile looking tiny needles stick well enough to deliver reliable data?

To become Reliable within the horticulture B2B business it is key to convey ruggedness. The brand and its touchpoints needs to look, feel and be rugged. Once placed within the greenhouse technology, especially sensors, should do their job without interference. Data needs to be understood and comparable with other greenhouse data. And recommended actions need to be consistent.

RUGGED

EXCITING

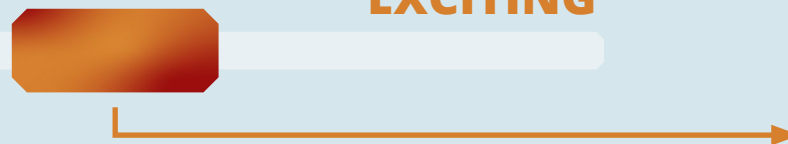


Figure 21: Brand Personality balance

Plense's brand personality is both rugged and exciting, but a bit more on the exciting side because that fits the startup itself better (figure 21). Like a *Jeep* that enables reliable new adventures! This would fit the 'explorer' brand archetype as explained by Pearson & Margaret (2002). These brands are brave and eager to discover the unknown.

4.4 Visual DNA

The brand DNA forms the strategic essence of a brand (Maltus et al., 2023). To translate this essence to the outside world companies use strategically designed brand touchpoints, to ensure intended brand aligns the brand image perceived by customers. To form a coherent whole for these touchpoints brands have a visual identity, a visual DNA. This is the basic visual appearance of the brand. When well-designed the visual DNA should be (Baker-WU, 2023):

- **Personality coherent:** reflecting the brand personality (Karjalainen & Snelders, 2010; Keller, 1993).
- **Original:** According to the Most Advanced Yet Acceptable principle (Hekkert et al., 2003), an optimal level of originality is needed to stand out and attract customers.
- **Visually coherent:** Higher coherence among various elements helps customers to form their impressions more easily and contribute to positive customer response towards the brand (Phillips et al., 2014; Rompay et al., 2009).

Visual Appearance Approach

The visual appearance of Plense is based on its brand personality and distinctiveness from competitors, after which the total of various elements has been made coherent (figure 22) Appendix 5 therefore shows the inspiration behind colour, font and form from brands in other fields sharing the same brand personality. Appendix 5.2 shows how the final visual appearance is different from competition, original and outstanding by placing the redesigned logo (figure 23) and the redesigned Plensor, both reflecting the visual DNA, (figure 24) next to those of competitors. Multiple versions with slight changes in colour and form have been made (Appendix 5.1), after which the final version has been selected based on the overall impression and attractiveness, together with the founders and another IDE student graduating at Plense.

TITEL HERE IN CAPS

SAMPLE TEXT

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat

SAMPLE TEXT 2

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat

Figure 22: basis visual appearance Plense
(Used throughout this report too)

RATIONALE

Brand Personality

- **Colours:** The light blue conveys a bright future in combination with the darker blue/green a more stronger, more reliable future. The orange details, the colour itself and the contrast with the blue adds excitement. These colours are selected based on other brands sharing the same brand personality and the work of Labrecque & Milne, (2012) who studied the meaning of brand colours towards customers.
- **Font:** Is inspired by brands from other fields that are identified as explorer brand archetypes (Pearson & Margaret, 2002). The title font is strong and robust with its thick sharp lines, while the main text font is more playful and energetic with more rounding and space.
- **Form:** The visual appearance has been designed simultaneously with the redesign of the Plensor, one of the brand touchpoint customers will be most in contact with as they will become part of their working environment (once the product is realized). To create visual coherence the inspiration and design for the Plensor also formed the basis of the shapes in the visual appearance. Additionally magazines that show dynamic and contrast formed inspiration, which adds to the excitement part of the visual appearance (Orth & Malkewitz, 2008).

Originality

Originality has been taken into account by ensuring the visual appearance reflected in the logo, product and use of colour is unique from competition (see Appendix 5.2 & 5.3).

Coherency

By using the same cut corners, similar tones blue and robust lines and shapes. Both the logo and Plensor have been redesigned simultaneously with the visual appearance, in order to make sure these fundamental visual brand elements are aligned.

4.5 LOGO REDESIGN

At the same time of designing the visual appearance, the logo has been redesigned. A logo is the distinctive symbol of a company, object, publication, person, service or idea (Adams et al., 2006). The logo should represent what this company, object etc. stands for, their attitude and values (Adir et al., 2014). This is important because the logo is communicated towards all stakeholders like students, investors, breeders etc. The idea and visualization of the logo should thus mostly convey that what makes Plense, Plense. A study on logo's by Adir et al., (2014) shows that a well-designed logo should be: Simple, Relevant, Distinctive and Memorable. The current logo of Plense somewhat aligns with these design requirements, but doesn't fit the overall visual appearance of the brand and the DNA it tries to convey.

Logo Redesign Approach

For the redesign of Plense's logo 3 different design directions were chosen and explored, to create a wide range of possible logo's for Plense to choose from. Because Plense's founders will represent and carry the brand logo everywhere they go, **their input determining the final logo is most important.**

1. **Upgrade current logo:** The first direction is redesigning the current logo of Plense into something that fits the visual brand appearance shown in last chapter. Their current logo reflects what makes Plense Plense (at this moment), ultrasound technology combined with horticulture. It quickly shows what they're good at and stand for.
2. **Always connected:** This redesign direction comes from the tagline 'always connected' which captures both

Plense's value: collaborative learning and one of their unique benefits to horticulture: direct connection to your plants always and everywhere.

3. **Your plants in top form:** This direction is mostly directed to the customer, because I thought it could lead to unique and memorable logo's and wanted to try out what Plense's founders thought about it. Your plants in top form captures Plense position statement. 'Knowing your plants are in top form, because Plense offers active greenhouse navigation support gives the grower and businessman the freedom to explore new plants and lands

Appendix 5.2 shows different logo's for each of these design directions. The final logo is illustrated in figure 23 below.

RATIONALE

Brand Purpose:

After discussing the logo's the founders of Plense where most enthusiastic about the upgrade of their current logo, which shows what makes them Plense. This is in line with Adir et al. (2014) who explains the logo should represent what the company stands for to all stakeholders.

Brand Personality

The logo on the left and Plense spelled in the logo on the right both have strong thick shapes with cut off corners to convey the ruggedness and thus reliability of the brand. The font of PLENSE is based on gym fonts, to reflect more energy and excitement .

Position statement

The logo represents the shape of a greenhouse, in which the plants are connected to the outside world, bringing your plants to you wherever you are. The logo now also looks somewhat like an smart object you could put into your pocket, like a co-pilot that is always with you.

Old logo



Figure 23: Redesigned and old logo Plense

4.6 PLENSOR REDESIGNR

While developing the visual appearance for Plense, the team was just about to print their first batch of sensors, to tests in different breeder and university facilities. At that moment their sensor was solely designed to fulfil its function. Since different stakeholders were involved in these tests it was a good moment to redesign the Plensor and align it with the overall visual DNA of Plense. Thereby I can use the redesign of the sensor throughout the brand touchpoints (like a website) later on this project.

Plensor Redesign Approach

It has been some time that I've had the opportunity to design a physical product, especially its shape, look and feel! This assignment is very similar to the TUDelft IDE BSc course 'form and experience' (özcan, 2017), thus a similar approach has been applied to (re)design the casing of the Plensor (see appendix 5.3 for more detail):

1. Define design requirements:
 - Brand personality should be visual present, the ambitiousness, ruggedness and exciting characteristics.
 - Plensor is easy to use
 - The redesign takes about the same time and resources to produce as the current design.
2. Collect Inspiration: From rugged shaped in nature and exciting product (details) from other 'explorer' brands (Pearson & Margaret, 2002)
3. Ideation: Try out different shapes and ideas.
4. Select and combine based on requirements
5. Communicate final design



Figure 24: redesigned Plensor in context. Note that the paprika and plant here are central, because Plense is acting as support.

RATIONALE

The Plensor redesign is based on Plense's personality characteristics. This way the look and feeling of the Plensor should evoke those associations of the product most appreciated by the customer (De Chernatony, 2008).

Reliable

In terms of shape, reliable means rugged for growers. The round form with edges shaped towards the trunk of the plant make the Plensor look like it is part of the plant and won't fall off or hurt the plant that easily. The diamond/ Tesla cybertruck shape makes the plensor look strong. The Plensor won't break *when* it falls of (it is always possible an employee throws their body against the sensor).

Exciting & Ambitious

The orange detail and dynamic edges of the Plensor add to the excitement of the redesign. The shape is somewhat based on a rocket, with the 2 sides sticking out to form a triangle shape going upwards. This shape should enhance the ambitious characteristic of the redesign. The combination of light blue and **orange is something new within the greenhouse** that might add to its excitement as well. Ideally there would be orange lines running over the product (illustrated with the added lines, figure 25) as this would add more dynamic and contrast. This would however be too complicated for the current 3D printing production method, but could be used as inspiration when Plense starts to produce the sensor in bulk with injection moulding. The most exciting part of the Plensor is how easily it is attached to plants, especially compared to key competition. The sensor is easy to hold, open and close with the average grower hands thanks to its redesigned size and edges sticking out.

Producible

Because Plense doesn't have the time or resources to change their current sensor production method, no changes have been made that influence the production of the sensor. The Plensor is designed to fit the technology inside, designed to be 3D printed, easy to be assembled, disassembled and designed to remain similar to its current production costs.

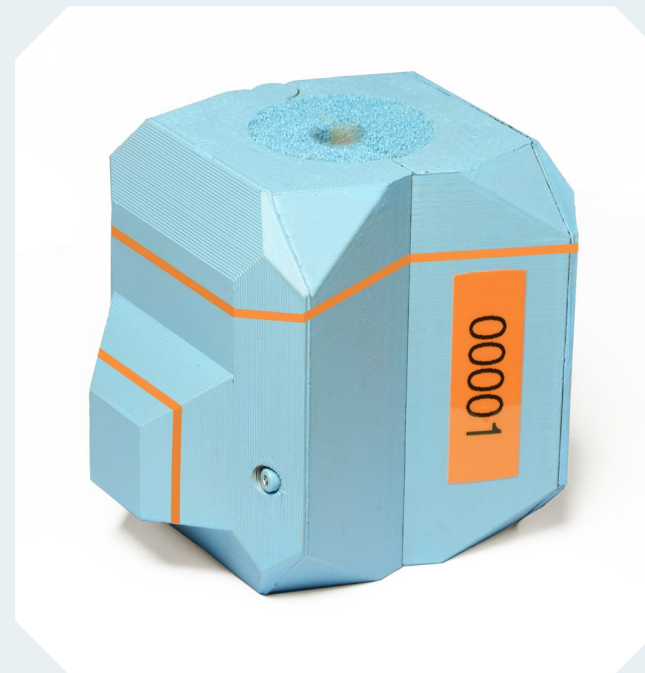


Figure 25: Redesigned and old Plensor (8cm high)

PURPOSE

To convey new ways of horticulture.
Innovate and collaborate towards smart and simple horticulture.



POSITION STATEMENT

For **greenhouse business-man**, Plense offers **objective plant-based data** that is **connected to all other greenhouse technology**, that **actively supports greenhouse navigation** and gives growers the **freedom to explore new plants and lands**.

PERSONALITY

'The Explorer'
Reliable - Ambitious - Exciting

Figure 26: Plense brand DNA - defined

Brand Building conclusion

Chapter 4 has illustrated and explained the strategic and visual DNA of plense's brand, based on their purpose, their position statement and the brand personality. This DNA will be the basis for the strategic brand touchpoints in the chapter to follow. Ultimately building a strong brand for Plense. (figure 26).

5. BRAND BUILDING STRATEGY

The ultimate goal of brand building is to create brand equity, the overall value (financial, social, competitive advantage) of a brand, perceived by its customer (Aaker, 2009; Ailawadi et al., 2003). To build brand equity, companies design brand touchpoints: every interaction people have with a brand. The goal of brand touchpoints is to ensure the strategically intended **brand promise is aligned** with the **brand image**, which explains how brands are perceived by customers (Wijaya, 2013).

This chapter explains how the brand promise of Plense captures the brand DNA explained throughout last chapter and how Plense can realize building a brand that conveys this promise, with strategically selected brand touchpoints.

Figure 29: logo redesign + brand promise



Yes, we skipped figure number 27 & 28... My apologies!

5.1 BRAND PROMISE

Brand equity is created by realizing the position statement of the brand DNA (figure 24) (de Chernatony, 2010): the brand promise. This means the brand promise should explain the brand value to the targeted audience in a way unique from competition. Plense doesn't have a well-defined and unique brand promise yet, which was clearly shown during customer interviews who had been in contact with Plense before. These customers could only recall Berend and Thijs and something about ultrasound sensors, but nothing about the unique value they were trying to bring this customer. The brand promise could elevate these customers association to Plense. After trying different brand promises (see appendix 6) I have selecting one brand promise that conveys the most promising unique value of Plense towards their customer and user. This brand promise is: 'your plants in top form'.

RATIONALE

This brand promise is **distinctive** from competitors that use more direct, functional explanations of the value they are bringing into horticulture (**which was also noticed by customers evaluating this brand promise, see chapter 7.3**). Like 'optimize your cultivation' (2grow) 'empowering growers through AI' (source) or 'plants are talking we listen along' (vivent). Instead of referring to the direct benefit of Plense, this brand promise refers to the emotional benefit of Plense, the freedom to explore new plants and lands. The targeted audience (grower & business-man) knows what it means to have their plants in top form, which is why they even refer to their plants that way (1*)!. Especially growers, who's work mainly exists of getting their plants in the best form possible. So if there is someone or something that can help them with that work, it means more freedom to improve the growing strategy or take the weekend of. Thereby, improving the growers work doesn't only target the business-man and grower, but is important to everyone within the horticulture sector. Making the brand promise **relevant for most stakeholders**. Referring to the purpose of Plense 'conveying new ways of horticulture' this brand promise also brings forwards what's internally important at Plense, as growing based on the objective status of the plant is something new for the sector as of now.

Another important aspect of this promise is that it offers Plense a wide range of innovative directions, which will all make sense with this promise. Plense could for example work on detecting early plant fungi, work on detecting plant stress or work on water intake, all which will support the grower to keep their 'plants in top form'. **Whatever actionable insights Plense will be able to provide the grower, it will be related to this brand promise.**

Another important part of this brand promise is that it defines Plense as something **unreplaceable**. When Plense is able to deliver their promise, you cannot throw it away, because the grower always wants to know whether their plants are indeed in top form? This is a lesson learned from direct competitor 2grow, who delivered plant based with the promise to 'optimize your cultivation', but when the customers learned how to optimize, they didn't need 2grow anymore.

Communicating the Brand promise

To make the brand promise and its story tangible I looked for an analogy, as these allow designers to explain more complex and new ideas (Dam & Siang, 2022). This analogy became the 'smart-watch of horticulture' which fits the analogy of growers and business-man who describe their plants as 'top sporters'. This analogy shows Plense's affinity and interest into greenhouse horticulture and explains Plense's position statement (figure 26):

Objective plant based data

what a smartwatch provides to people about their body, something observations or feelings can't explain.

Connected to all other greenhouse metrics

how a smartwatch is connected to the ecosystem of other mobile devices

Supports greenhouse navigation

smartwatches can support people with their daily activities, by showing for example how they've slept, how fit they are and provide actionable insights like personalized breathing sessions when it notices the user is stressed (fitbit, 2024). More interestingly, the smartwatch is able to predict, heart attacks (Harvard Health, 2023), and Parkinson (Radboud UMC, 2022) which is the ultimate support when it comes to health navigation. The smartwatch works as a co-pilot for people their fitness, just like Plense would do for the growers plants.

With these product attributes and functionalities the **smartwatch brings freedom to explore new plants and lands**, like pushing your physical health without becoming overtrained. The balance between training and rest, which is very important when growing plants (5, refers to interview done in chapter 3.2).

What makes the smartwatch analogy **most interesting** is that it illustrates Plense as something completely new and, as explained to be important, unreplaceable. Just like the smartwatch is able to offer its user new insights in their life and becomes an addition to their existing smart device ecosystem, Plense will deliver the same for plants and the greenhouse ecosystem!



5.2 TESTING THE BRAND PROMISE

5.2.1 Your plants in top form

The overall message of the smart-watch analogy is that Plense delivers a co-pilot that supports having 'your plants in top form'. The whole analogy concept story is shown in Appendix 6.1. The following is a summary:

1. The concept story is introduced with the analogy between the greenhouse and a team of top-sporters. How greenhouse business owners and growers use this analogy to explain their job to outsiders. Do you recognise yourself as top-sport coach of the greenhouse?
2. Top-sport coaches like athletic coaches' most important job is to draft up the most effective trainings schedule to get his athletes in the best shape as possible, without overtraining them (NOS, 2024)
3. What can help the coach with determining the fitness of his athletes, is objective data that shows often invisible metrics. Therefore the coach can use the smart-watch. The smart watch supports the coach to make decisions about his players and act as co-pilot (and off course the athlete) providing for example training advice.
4. Similarly, we (Plense) are developing the horticulture smartwatch! Our Sensor is, just like the smartwatch, attached around the stem of a plant and measures the inside. Sapflow (heartrate), movement (steps) and activity (sleep) etc. During this part of the interview I showed the Sensor redesign (to get an impression on the visual appearance) and my smartwatch (figure 30) with a picture of a notification about the plants fitness.
5. *With the greenhouse smartwatch you are always up-to-date on your plants fitness. Where-ever you are, you are able to keep the plants throughout your whole greenhouse in top form.*

Before designing every brand touchpoint, I needed to confirm whether the core idea behind them, the brand promise, would spark interest and positive associations towards Plense. Therefore I set up a customer interaction test, to answer whether the brand promise is well-designed: desirable, unique and clear (Keller, 2013). Is the brand promise valued by the target customer and user? And do they think the promise is credible (Creusen, 2023)?

To test the brands promise a concept story has been made, which is often used to get early user/customer feedback (Creussen, 2023). This concept story has been tested by myself, with one user; the grower (in-person) and one customer; greenhouse innovation consultant (online). The story was told during a semi-structured interview. After the story questions were asked related to the stories desirability, uniqueness and credibility (see Appendix 6.1).



Figure 30: the physical attributes I showed during the interaction. These were shown as pictures during the online test.

5.2.2 Results & Improvements

Desirability

One of the more interesting findings was how the interviewed grower reacted to 'being connected to your greenhouse fitness always and anywhere', he suddenly realized, 'yes that would be really nice!' and described that the growers day in May actually starts at 5pm. *When the night is coming, unpredictable winds start to come up, influencing temperatures significantly.* While the actual working hours are almost over the growers attention is most needed.

'These days it would be really nice to get a notification (watching to his wrist pretending he's wearing a smartwatch), at any moment my plants suddenly experience stress'. 'Like when I am drinking a beer on the beach, being notified directly when my attention is needed (looking at his wrist again), so I can improve the greenhouse climate.'

The grower thinks that knowing the fitness of your plants would 'Probably adds 1-2% extra cultivation yield', because 'The plant might tell me something different than I expected, it might be less fit than I thought'. The greenhouse innovation expert added 'the fitness of the **whole greenhouse** isn't really measured accurately as of now, but desired by most horticulture business'.

Memorable

Perhaps the most important finding of the smartwatch and top-sport analogy is that it sticks and speaks to the imagination. Exactly what you want for the first customer interaction. When my colleague (who was also present at the interview) asked the grower another question related to her research, he began referring to the Eredivisie (top-sport) when explaining he wants to have the most yield at the end of the year and end on top of the greenhouse association's leaderboard. Similarly with the smartwatch analogy, the grower looked at his wrist while explaining how Plense's brand promise could let him drink a beer at the beach, while being closely connected to his plants.

Credibility

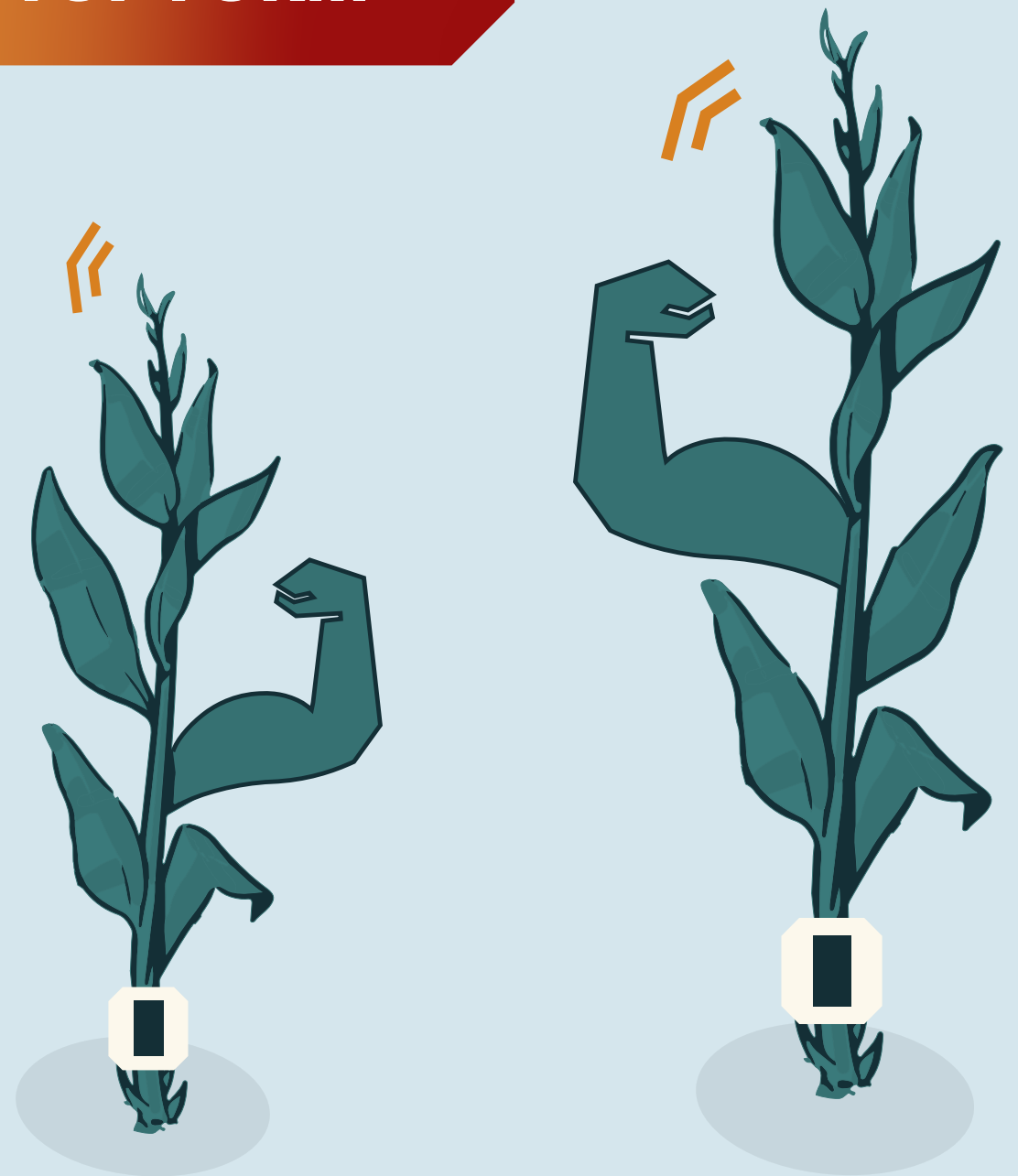
Both grower and greenhouse innovation expert think the smartwatch of the horticulture that functions as co-pilot to make the greenhouse as fit as possible will become reality. Like every other horticulture person, they emphasize the importance of results and proof: 'These things need to be tested over a whole season (50 weeks) and probably multiple years (grower interviewee).'

Improvements

The brand promise introduction (step 1-3) took too long and was a little bit too random. The analogy can also be explained and understood (since growers refer to their plants like top sporters already) in just 1 or 2 sentences. The introduction was too much one-way communicating from my side, while the growers love to talk about their work.

The physical attributes didn't add anything to this specific interaction because it was set-up as an interview. When presenting Plense at for example an horticulture fair stand these attributes will make more sense because customers come specifically to listen to what Plense has to tell. The smartwatch and sensor would therefore be a great addition to make the experience more interactive and memorable.

YOUR PLANTS IN TOP FORM



5.2.3 Your plants in top form 2.0

Based on the lessons learned above the following text shows an improved brand promise story. This script summarizes the most important parts of that brand promise, and forms a guideline for customer interaction throughout the touchpoints in next chapter.

This brand promise has been evaluated as desired by the business-man too! A small change has been made, by removing the word sensor (2x) throughout the script, because this word made participants think about Plense as yet 'another sensor startup...', which is a negative association for the targeted customer and isn't true for Plense.

Introducing the brand promise

Bring up a conversation about some of the challenges recognized by business-man and growers. Let them share their story, they love to talk about their work!

Greenhouse horticulture companies are facing the challenge of doing more and more with less. We need maximum yield, while we have to watch our emissions. We grow larger and larger areas but it is increasingly difficult to find enough (experienced) staff. More, especially younger growers, also want to enjoy their free time and life outside of cultivation, while keeping the standard as high as possible.

The brand Promise

Then introduce what Plense is doing, stimulating imagination with the 'top form' and smartwatch analogy:

That's why Plense develops a co-pilot that helps to keep your plants in top form anytime, anywhere. Just as a smartwatch tracks the condition of athletes by measuring the inside of their wrist, Plense detects the condition of your plants by scanning the internal structure of the stem.

Reason to believe the brand promise

Referring back to chapter 2.1 and the difference between startup and product branding this part tries to enforce the brand promise by explaining how Plense's product features support the realization of the brand promise (De Chernatony, 2010)

Make the promise more credible by explaining how Plense works and what makes their product unique in horticulture. Explain what this means to the customer and how it might solve those pain points talked earlier:

This is possible thanks to Plense's (patented) ultrasound technology, which is expected to determine water intake, stress and recovery, among other things. With the real-time status of your plant, your cultivation boundary can be more accurately identified and your strategy can be improved. Finding the perfect balance between training and resting your plant.

Plense's physical product that measures the inside of your plant is affordable (thanks to developments in ultrasonic technology in other sectors) and quick in use (thanks to the magnetic closure), so you can easily monitor the status of multiple. Because you can measure multiple plants and because Plense is compatible with software and climate providers, we can help you to control your entire greenhouse.

Make the brand promise memorable

Try to finish the contact with something catchy, that explains the benefit of Plense's brand promise again:

Plense monitors the status of your plants day and night, and is always present at the moment your plants need your attention. So when you are working on your own top form (exploring new lands), Plense supports the top form of your plants!

5.3 CUSTOMER JOURNEY

This chapter explains how Plense could build a brand that conveys their desired brand promise.

Ultimately, all touchpoints together should enable the brand to make a unique and welcomed promise. (De Chernatony, 2010)

The brand promise is built through every brand touchpoint, every interaction people have with the brand. These interactions are strategically chosen and designed by organizations to develop a strong brand, defined as brand resonance, a deep psychological bond between brand and customers Keller's (2003). To reach this bond, that often leads to loyalty, advocacy (very important in horticulture) and repeat purchases, customers undergo an customer journey (Batra & Keller, 2016). Simplified, every customer (for every brand) goes through the following phases:

- 1. Awareness:** customer becomes aware of the brand, their value (promise) and the needs/wants the brand's products/services will fulfil
- 2. Consideration:** customer evaluates the brand and its value, learns and considers interacting with the brand (the company and people behind the brand)
- 3. Intent:** the customer engages with the brand to evaluate whether they really like/trust the brand and whether the brands products will be worth their time and money.
- 4. Purchase:** the customer buys the brands product/service, consumers it and if satisfied:
- 5. Loyalty/Advocacy:** the customer comes back again to purchase more, shares the brand with others and keeps interacting with the brand.

For this thesis, the customer journey won't go any further then the intent/early purchase (customer test) phase, since this is the most important and achievable customer phase for Plense within the foreseeable future. The purchase and loyalty phase that follow are too abstract for now, as Plense still has to develop their purchasable product within the coming 2-3 years.

The goal for the customer journey in this report will thus be to create intent and get customers to test Plense's first product, which can be turned into purchase at the moment Plense is able to deliver a completed product.

CUSTOMER JOURNEY

The survey results (chapter 7.2.) emphasized the importance of:

- **Test results** in order to start visiting the business-man. Without test results from for example the WUR, there won't be enough intent for the business-man to start testing Plense's product(s)
- **User cases** in order to start reaching the whole greenhouse horticulture sector which includes the other customers segments that need practical proof of other greenhouse business working with Plense, before considering Plense. These user cases will be built by testing Plense's first product(s) with the business-man and be shared on the horticulture event stand where the whole sector comes together.

The customer journey is therefore split in 2 separate journeys, based on Plense's different customer segments (figure 10). An indication of time throughout the customer journey is provided in the tactical roadmap explained in figure 42.

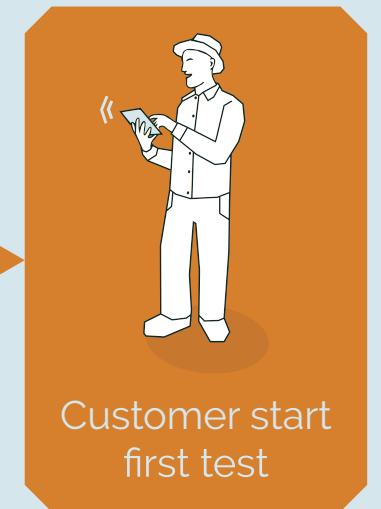
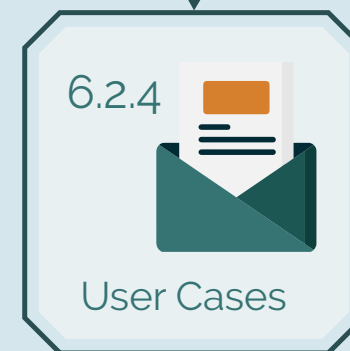
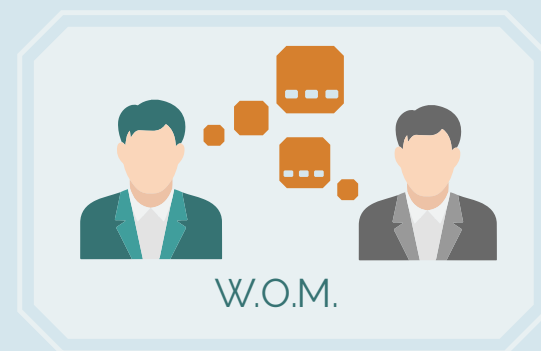
Figure 31: Plense Customer Journey, purple = awareness, red = consideration, yellow = inten

6.1 FIRST TEST RESULTS

Targeting the Business-man

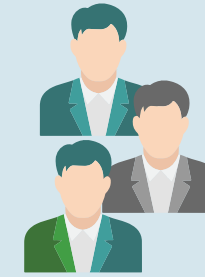


6.1.3 Digital Reminder: An icon of a hand holding a plant, representing a digital reminder.



6.2 USER CASE(S)

Reaching the greenhouse horticulture sector



6.2.3 Digital Reminder

6.2

= AWARENESS

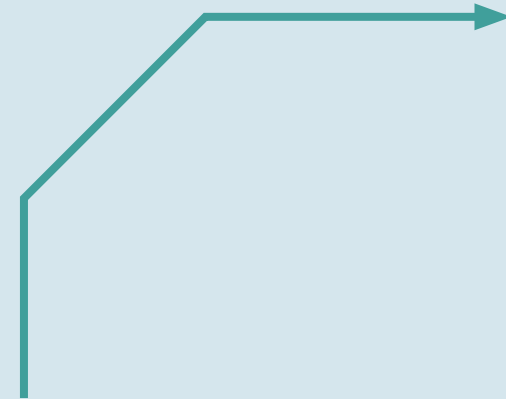
= CONSIDERATION

= INTENT

= CHAPTER

5.3.1 Plense customer Journey

To achieve intent and get the customer as close as possible to testing Plense's first product, a customer journey is made (figure 31). This journey is made by selecting the most effective and feasible brand touchpoints based on my knowledge about the customer and the capabilities of Plense (chapter 3.1 and 3.2). The aim of this customer journey is to understand how Plense could build a strong brand in the greenhouse horticulture sector, towards the strategically important business-man first and the whole sector after.



Awareness

The greenhouse horticulture sector is quite closed, driven by personal and business relationships. The only way to enter this sector, especially as startup with few resources, is through customer interaction; reaching out and **visiting the customer** directly or by having a stand on a **Dutch horticulture fair**. For both interactions it is crucial to:

1. Leave a good and lasting impression that shows how Plense is taking their first steps in realizing their brand promise.
2. Come over as 'interested in horticulture', while not trying to sell anything. People working in the greenhouse horticulture sector love to talk and learn you something about their work, but they don't like to be sold anything (7').

Customer visit

The first touchpoint that creates awareness is reaching out to customers, setting up a meeting and finally visiting them to explain about Plense and how they could benefit by working together with Plense. When reaching out to customers it is key to find the right customer (also shown in the evaluation results chapter 7.3): the business-man (12). This customer is more willing to test out new technology, has bigger budgets and has a good reputation with his colleagues from other

greenhouses. The goal here is to make this customer aware of Plense, get them interested and **remember** the brand promise, preferably directly stimulating the customer to **stay in contact with Plense**.

Horticulture fair stand

The (Dutch) **horticulture fairs** take place twice every year. The fair attracts every stakeholder in the sector (7') and is a good opportunity for Plense to show they exist and why by booking a stand. Here again, it is key to get the customer interested in Plense and **remember** the brand promise, preferably directly stimulating the customer to **stay in contact with Plense**.

W.O.M. awareness

Since the greenhouse horticulture sector is quite closed towards outsiders, a lot of news and developments spread around the inside, through 'word of mouth' (W.O.M.) communication.

To stimulate W.O.M. the unique brand promise helps (see chapter 7.3), but in addition 'digital reminders' that sum up the most important part of the interaction with Plense could be shared after each interaction with a potential customer. These then could be shared within or between greenhouse businesses.

1

Consideration

When awareness creation succeeds, the customer might want to find more information about Plense, show Plense to colleagues or get updates on future developments. A **website** brings all this information in one accessible place together (Batra & Keller, 2016) and is therefore central in the consideration phase, especially for those customers that heard about plants through W.O.M.

A key element in the website is to get customers closer to intent. Visitors of the website have heard about Plense before and are interested in what Plense does and perhaps in what Plense has to offer them. These visitors are considering Plense in some way and thus should be further convinced to **'get to action'** (call to action): get in contact with Plense. Therefore the website should show the benefits of working with Plense, enforce Plense their credibility and show what can be expected within the coming months/years. This way the customer gets excited to either follow the newsletter or get directly in contact with Plense.

- Note that the awareness and consideration phase are closely linked in the customer journey of Plense. This is because the customer visit and horticulture fair stand both aim to make the customer sign up to follow Plense, which leads them into the intent phase. Especially at the customer visit, since the business-man has already positively considered Plense here, which is why Plense got invited for a visit.

2

Intent

Intent can be stimulated to those customers that got in contact with Plense directly and/or signed up to the newsletter. By showing updates of the startups work, the team, the product/service and their passion for horticulture, Plense could further enhance trust and likability with these customers (Batra & Keller, 2016). Especially in B2B markets were customers barely make spontaneous purchase decisions (de Chernatony, 2010) **building a relationship that convinces the customer to make their first test purchase** (Marmeren, personal communication, 2024) is very important.

The next chapter will further explain the brand touchpoint designs that are part of the customer journey. The customer journey and brand strategy now come alive!

3

6. TOUCHPOINT DESIGN

The goal of brand touchpoints is to get people through the customer journey, while the strategically intended brand promise is conveyed. An example of a brand touchpoint is a Nike advertisement that aims to boost customers confidence (Nike's emotional benefit) by illustrating how 80 year old Mike is able to run a marathon in Nike running shoes. No matter your age, just do it. The advertisement makes people aware of Nikes confidence boost, which might lead them to Nike's website and check out more of the brand and its running shoes.

When designed well, every brand touchpoint should convey the brands DNA and form a coherent, strong whole that fosters competitive advantage and positive consumer response (Kotler & Rath, 1984). The touchpoints should reflect the brands (Keller, 2013):

DESIRABLE

UNIQUE

CLEAR

PERSONALITY
COHERENT

VISUAL
COHERENT

ORIGINAL

The visual appearance should align with the overall brands appearance (Baker-Wu, 2023).

To make the advertising 'stick better', Berghuis (2023) explains unexpectedness; deviation from audience members' expectation and emotionality; tap into (positive) feelings are important criteria to make the brand touchpoints more memorable.

STICKY

MAIN COMMUNICATIVE ELEMENT

Present in every touchpoint are the following icons (figure 32), that summarize how Plense is realising their brand promise; 'your plants in top form. Plense isn't just a sensor and data company, they (aim to) deliver insights and corresponding actions. It is crucial to communicate Plense's action and insight and how these are delivered through their sensor and data translation, as learned from the failure startup '2grow', who only build their brand around the sensor and its data.

These icons should ultimately be replaced with real life images! When the first test results are available, these icons used throughout almost every brand touchpoint, should be replaced with real life pictures to enhance the credibility and uniqueness of Plense. This should only be done when Plense is able to show the insights their technology can provide the customer. The sensor could be shown already, but only emphasize that Plense is making sensors, which isn't true and scares away most customers.

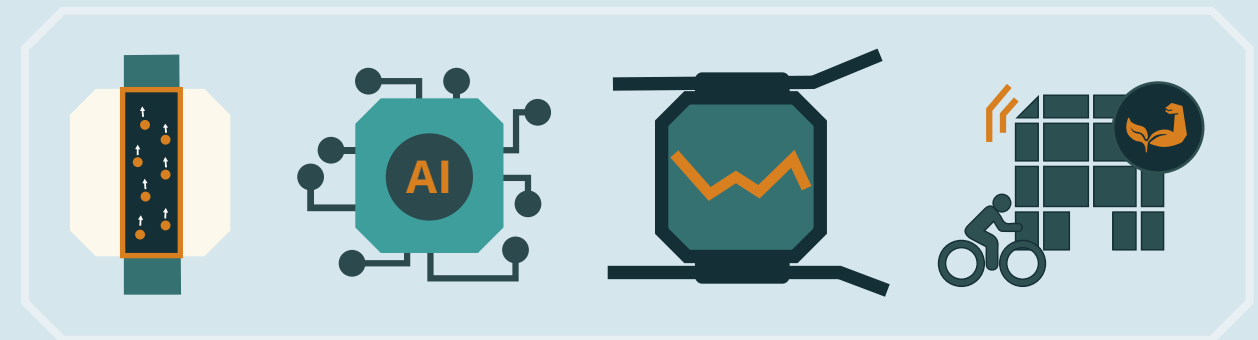


Figure 32: Main brand communication icons covering everything Plense's

6.1 TARGETING THE BUSINESS-MAN

The goal of targeting the business-man is to get them aware about Plense, consider working together Plense, follow Plense their journey and share their first experience with Plense to colleagues.

This touchpoint starts with Plense actively reaching out to the business-man, followed by an in-person visit to the customer and ending with an 'digital reminder' that summarizes the first contact with Plense and stimulates W.O.M. The story of 'Your plants in top form 2.0' is central throughout this touchpoint, backed up by Plense's first test results which the survey has shown to be from great importance.

6.1.1 Finding the business-man

Since this touchpoint is targeted only towards the business-man, it is important to start of identify this customer. Because I have been looking for this customer throughout the 'customer' phase of this project I know easiest way to find them:

- 1 First find horticulture **cooperatives** (online) like *Harvest House* or *Growers United*. The business-man is always part of these cooperatives, because they wants to work and learn together in a bigger network of greenhouse businesses.

- 2 These horticulture cooperative websites always show which greenhouse businesses are part of their network and link the website of their business on these pages. To identify the business-man, look at their horticulture greenhouse website and try to find key words like: *'Innovation and technology'*, *'We want more, we want to progress'*, *'merging of multiple greenhouses'*, 10Ha+ greenhouse space and *'putting our people central'*. Very often the owner of the greenhouse, the technical advisor and a contact email is mentioned on these websites. What might help is to ask whether someone in Plense's network is familiar with this greenhouse business, so they have a direct referral when getting in contact.

6.1.2 Reaching & visiting the business-man

Setting up the customer visit means sending an email (most used format) with the aim to get **an response**. Therefore three things are important when setting up an when reaching out to customers:

- **MUST** communicate test results and explanation of what these test results could bring the business-man. The survey results also showed how important these test results are to get the customer to take Plense more serious and thus answer the email.
 - **DO** make the business-man feel like they are one of the first to work together with Plense, since the business-man is looking for technology to get ahead of the other greenhouse businesses. The email will further excite the customer and make them feel special, which further motivates to answer back.
 - **DON'T** try to sell anything, nor specifically mention that Plense is making sensors (also shown by the survey testing the brand promise). They get more emails from sensor or horticulture device companies trying to sell them their product and they don't really like it (7).
- Overall the email should introduce Plense too (as an promising and exiting startup), since there's a big chance the customer hasn't heard about the startup yet. The email should be in Dutch, since the greenhouse horticulture sector is mostly Dutch. An English introduction would feel too far outside the already closed sector. An example is attached in Appendix 7.1.

Visiting the business-man

After an reply on the email and planning to visit the business-man, Plense should prepare for the customer interaction. The overall story Plense should tell here remains the same as the brand promise (chapter 5.2.3). The main topic of interaction, however, are the test results, of which the email only summarized the most important insight. Plense should bring all their test results more detailed and printed on paper (a PowerPoint presentation would feel more like a sales pitch), so that the customer can explore the results himself while Plense is explaining what they are looking at. Plense should also have an idea (based on experts interpretation) about the potential functional benefits these test results reveal the customer.

Plense needs the collaboration with the business-man to validate and explore what their technology actually means for the grower (like having 'your plants in top form').

The interaction between Plense and the customers should be natural, like how they would explain Plense to anyone anywhere. The interaction and interest should come from both ways to benefit the relationship between the customer and Plense.

6.1.3 Digital Reminder

Originally a physical reminder; a branded cycle bidon (see appendix 7.2) was designed to enhances the memorability of Plense and stimulate customers W.O.M. The survey results however showed the business-man wasn't interested in such a gift. Way more important is the communicating of test results throughout and after the first interaction. Therefore a new brand touchpoint has been designed: a 'digital reminder'.

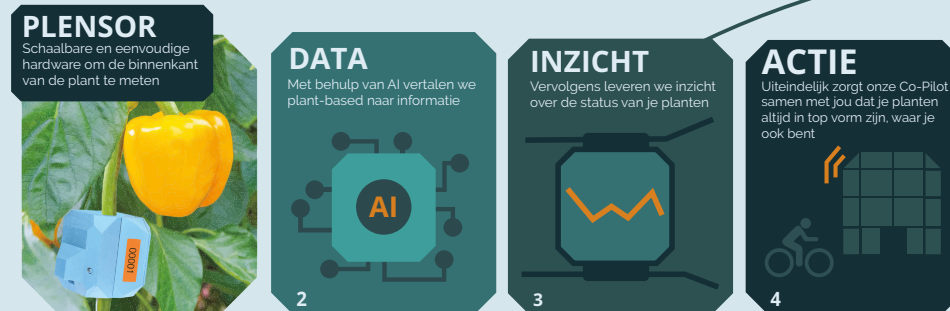
1-pager summary

The 'digital reminder' is sent by mail after the customer visit, while thanking the customer for their time. The reminder aims to make sharing Plense to colleagues and employees internally and externally easier (then for example an physical flyer or business card), which is important to stimulate W.O.M. but also because the business-man will ask colleagues and grower employees their opinion before taking further actions. The physical reminder is made in the form of a 1-pager (figure 33) that explains both Plense, their test results and what can be expected when following Plense for future updates. The business-man will automatically be included in updates, but interested growers or other colleagues can follow Plense's updates as well by clicking on the link added at the end of the 1-pager.

- **Introduction Plense:** After the business-man shares the document, the reader of the 1-pager probably doesn't know about Plense, so an introduction of Plense is required.
- **Test results:** Test results should be shown to emphasize the credibility of Plense and what could be expected when testing their first product.
- (possible) **Value of test results:** A list of possible 'insights' and 'actions' that could benefit the grower, (possible, because Plense isn't sure yet how exactly the grower will benefit).
- **Future expectations:** that keep the customer and grower interested, in the case the test results shown before aren't convincing enough and the further build a relationship and intent with the customer (that won't directly test a brand after seeing it for the first time)



TU Delft startup Plense ontwikkelt een glastuinbouw co-pilot die helpt je planten altijd en overal in topvorm te houden. Net zoals een smartwatch de conditie van atleten monitort door de binnenkant van hun pols te meten, monitort Plense de conditie van je planten door de interne structuur van de plant's stengel in kaart te brengen. Vervolgens vertalen we deze plant-based data naar inzichten en kas gerichte acties, waarvoor deze pagina je de eerste testresultaten presenteert!



WAT BETEKENT DIT VOOR JOU?

Volgens de teelt experts bij de WUR kan dit jou teelt supporten door:
X
X
Waarmee de eerste stap naar je plant top vorm wordt gezet.
Nu moeten we dit verder in de praktijk ontwikkelen, waarvoor we jullie specifiek benaderd hebben.

ONS TEST RESULTAAT

In samenwerking met de WUR zijn we het afgelopen jaar tot de conclusie gekomen dat:

- X
- X
- X

RESULTATEN VISUEEL

MEER RESULTAAT

In samenwerking met de WUR zullen we aankomende 3 maanden verder testen of:

- 1. X
- 2. X
- 3. X

Volg nieuwe test updates door je aan te melden op de nieuwsbrief via www.plensetech.com/news

Figure 33: 1-pager first interaction with Plense (digital reminder) – business-man visit

6.1.4 Building Business-man Intent

To further strengthen the relationship with the business-man after the first contact, and to further convince the business-man about Plense credibility with regard to their brand promise, Plense should regularly send **'test result updates'** (or other progressive news about Plense) in the form of an email newsletter (Batra & Keller, 2016).

To further strengthen Plense's band, these emails should convey the brand DNA (figure 26). Figure 34 shows an example of such an **newsletter**; an exciting title, introduction emphasizing the 'ambition' brand personality and visualization of both Plense and the new results.

Since Plense will be creating the update emails themselves it is important that they are willing and able to make the email fit the brand DNA.

Chapter 8: 'internal branding' therefore explains how the new brand DNA designed throughout this thesis is becoming a central part within Plense's communication. Through a 'test result update' co-creation workshop Plense's team created their own update email (figure 35)!

The workshop and available tools in chapter 8 should enable Plense to create their own newsletter emails from now on. (With a small improvement to create a more exciting title!)



WE CAN SHOW YOUR PLANTS' WEAKNESSES

After days of hard work, analysing our test data at the WUR, we can now show you how plants!

Figure 34: Newsletter test results example: Title, Image and Introduction.



Figure 35: Newsletter 'test results' made by Plense!



More disease-resistant corn varieties through accurate plant measurements

After a successful pilot with an undisclosed breeding company Plense succeeded in delivering more detailed information on corn crops Fusarium resistance.

Through more accurate information about the plants health status, we were able to improve the cycle time by 50%!

Are you interested in early warnings of a Fusarium infection in your crops? Contact us now and keep your plants in top form!

6.2 REACHING THE GREENHOUSE HORTICULTURE SECTOR

The horticulture fair stand is the most effective touchpoint to reach as much customers as possible (create awareness) within the horticulture greenhouse sector.

The goal of the stand is similar to targeting the business-man; make the customer aware of Plense, make them consider working together Plense, follow Plense their journey and stimulate sharing their first experience with Plense.

As explained in chapter 3.2 and shown by the survey, it is crucial to have user cases (functional benefits) of the business-man at this stand, in order to target all customer segments visiting these fairs and make the most out of the time and resources put into this more extensive touchpoint.



Figure 36: Horticulture fair stand Plense: all key elements to make a lasting first experience

6.2.1 Horticulture fair stand

There are 2 major Dutch horticulture business fairs where Plense could book a stand. One in Amsterdam which is more international and one in Gorichem which is more national. In the Gorichem fair Plense could more easily have their own stand, while at the Amsterdam fair they will become part of the startup area, which is cheaper and smaller. For both stands

the goal is the same and therefore the stand design similar to figure 36. All touchpoint in the horticulture fair stand are English, since these fairs attract stakeholders all over the world, even the more national fair in Gorichem. The following chapters explain the horticulture fair stand step by step.

Stand visitor = potential customer visiting Plense's stand and interacting with Plense's owners or employees.

Hans = fictional business-man that has tested plense and is used as user case

6.2.2 Standing out

Creating awareness is supported by standing out (Berghuis, 2023), especially on a horticulture fair where there are multiple unique promises from different companies and startups. One way to stand out is visually. Although Plense visual appearance wasn't considered unique, their visual appearance does differ from competitors (and stand out in the horticulture environment, which is grey, see figure 36 & Appendix 4.1) as can be seen in Appendix 5.2 & 5.2.

Another way to stand out is through text; what is the first thing stand visitors read? As shown by the survey Plense's brand promise summary, 'your plants in top form', is something that stands out and therefore most prominent as text, on the poster (figure 38) (1) and stand (1.1). To really stand out from anything in the horticulture business fair there are smartwatches placed on centre table (1). There were other horticulture fair stands either presented graphs on a screen or their physical products. Plense also presents something, unseen before!

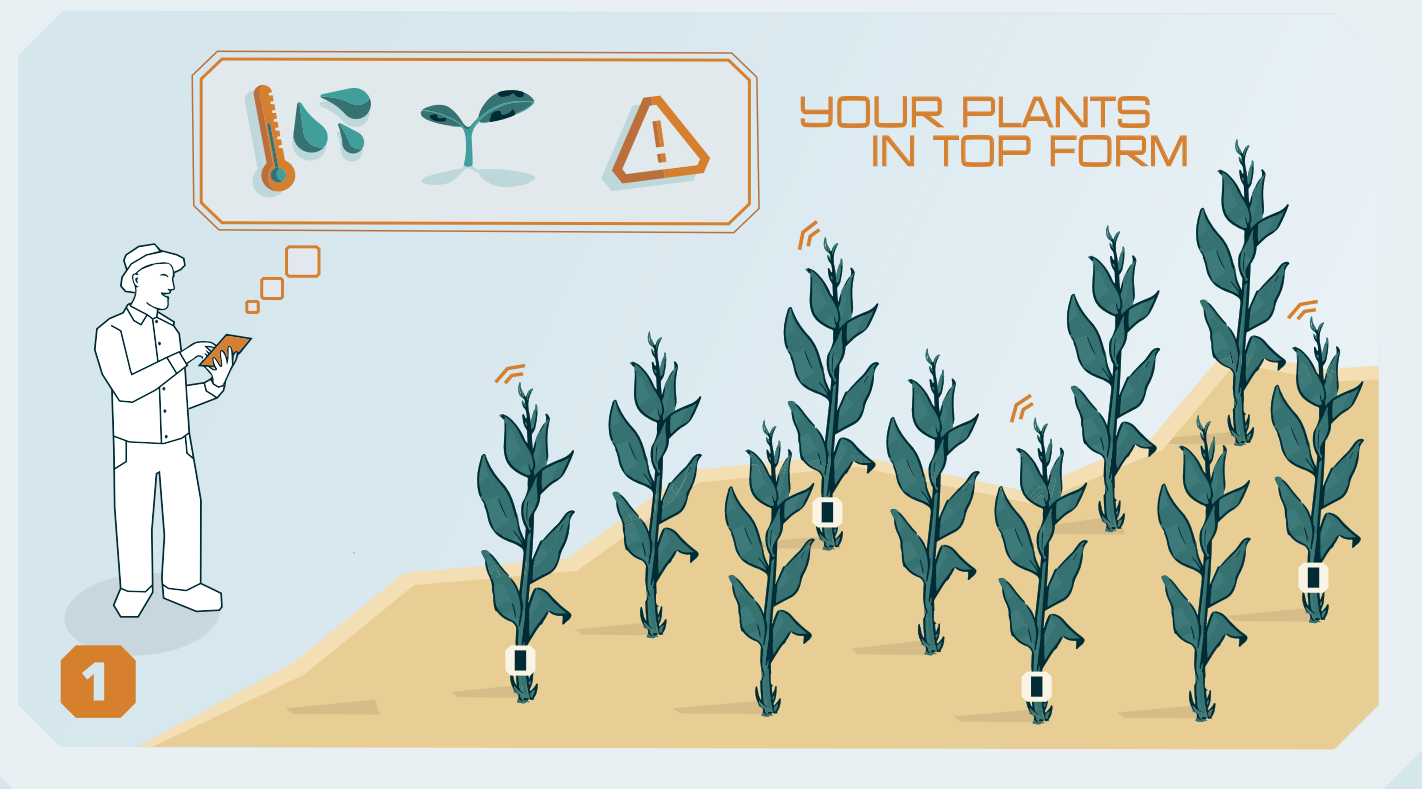


Figure 38: 'your plants in top form' display at fair

6.2.3 Interactive

The 'outstanding' stand should attract different customers to start their first conversation with Plense. Now it is the founders/employees time to shine; tell their exciting brand promise and most importantly how the different Plense users (the business-man and his growers) have been able to realize (a part of) this promise already. Therefore the following touchpoints build an engaging interaction, that makes these user cases come alive.

1.1

The interaction begins with the smartwatch (on the counter), similar to how I presented Plense during the brand promise (analogy) test in chapter 5.1. Since this test showed how the grower and potential customer open up their imagination about the potential value Plense could offer them, it is a great way to open the interaction at the horticulture stand. The idea is that Plense offers the stand visitor to **wear the smartwatch**, after which they send an example notification about the status of (fictional) plants. This notification is based on actual insights and actions with which Hans (one of the first user cases) was able to improve his growth strategy during his first test with Plense.



2

The stand visitor is then guided to the screen at step 2, where Plense describes the notification of the smartwatch in more detail, still with the user case example of Hans. The graphical insights here explain how Hans's plants reacted to his changes inside the greenhouse and how Hans was able to use these insights to, for example (depending on the user case results), grow his plants one meter higher. The stand visitor can **interact with the graphs**, which preferably are presented through the interface of one of the greenhouse horticulture software developers (chapter 3.4), to show Plense is part of the greenhouse network.



3

Finally Plense shows how they get to these insights and actions. In step 3 they illustrate how simple the sensor is attached and how robust the physical product is (functional benefits of the sensor), by letting the stand visitor **use the sensor** on the plant.



4

At the end of this interaction, Plense shows the banner where the customer can scan the QR code to **sign up to the newsletter!** Throughout the interaction the stand visitor has been wearing the smartwatch and thus been in connection with their plants. Plense might end the interaction asking how the stand visitor felt (hypothetically) to be in contact with their plants and knowing they are in good shape. The answer could provide Plense useful information about the perceived and expected value from their potential future customer.

- The banner here also informs customers about Plense's, in case Plense doesn't have the capacity to help every visitor at that moment. This information is similar to the website (p. 102) but now also includes a summary of the case explained throughout the stand.



Altogether this horticulture fair interaction should stimulate consideration because of its unique engagement and desirable user case example (Keller, 2013). The surprising and sticky elements (Berghuis, 2023), like the smartwatch and the brand promise of 'your plants in top form' should then **further stimulate W.O.M.**

Throughout the interaction Plense should be themselves, similar when visiting the business-man explained in last chapter. Berend, Thijs, and other employees are dressed in Plense merch while remaining: **Enthusiastic entrepreneurs** that want to bring positive change into the horticulture sector. Doing everything they can to bring the sector forwards by inventing a new way of horticulture practice: supporting growers to keep their 'plants in top form'.

6.2.4 Digital Reminder & Intent

Similar to the digital reminder explained in chapter 6.1.4. the stand visitor will receive a 1-pager summarizing the interaction with Plense, to stimulate further W.O.M with colleagues internally or externally. This 1-pager will be emailed once they signed up to the mailing list presented through the QR-code on the banner. Instead of presenting Plense's test results, this 1-pager presents the case study explained during horticulture fair interaction (Appendix 7.1).

Newsletter focus change!

After the horticulture fair the newsletters change from test results to user cases, to target every customer segment. An example, similar to the one in figure 39 is made below. To make the newsletter, Plense could use the same co-creation workshop used for the test results and explained in chapter 8.2.



Figure 39: Newsletter 'user case' made by Plense!

6.3 Website

Throughout the 2 customer journeys, the website is always live. Plense's website visitors will only exist of people that either got in contact with Plense through for example the horticulture fair stand, or heard about Plense through word of mouth (W.O.M). For the W.O.M visitors the website is most important as it centralises all information about Plense in one easy to access platform.

1. The first goal of the website is thus to **inform customers**. While informing customers the website should also excite, because that is part of Plense's brand DNA and because that should stimulate the visitors to get in contact.
2. That is the second goal, the **'call to action'** stimulating visitors to follow Plense in their journey realizing their brand promise.

Website Design Approach

The target audience of the website could be anyone within the (greenhouse) horticulture sector, investors or students interested in Plense, as they won't look or find the website without having heard about Plense first. The website visitors also include international stakeholders, which means the website should be made in English. A 'translation button' for the Dutch speaking customer, who's English isn't always that good, should be added.

As explained in chapter 3.2, the person that is valued most by horticulture stakeholders, especially the business-man, is the grower.

- Therefore the **grower** should be central throughout this touchpoint.
- Since the aim of the website is the call-to-action, the website needs to be convincing Plense is able to deliver something valuable towards the visitor. Therefore the website should emphasize Plense's **unique benefits** and **credibility** (Creusen, 2023).

- Since the viewer is coming with the expectation to learn something new about an **exciting** startup, the website should emphasize this part of the brand DNA too.

With these goals in mind, competitors and modern horticulture business websites have been studied, listed in Appendix 7.3. Interactive elements, visuals and layouts have been used as inspiration for Plense's website. Since the website is quite extensive only one version has been made and iteratively improved over time.

Website content

The visual appearance of the website alligns with the visual appearance made for Plense in (chapter 4.4). Part of the content is based on the brand promise (chapter 5.1). To strengthen this promise, the website adds elements that make the brand more credible, like partners and achievements. A early stage prototype using a wireframe (Garett et al., 2016) was made to get feedback on the rough schematic and content direction. The wireframe (Appendix 7.3) explains why each part is relevant for the website. After feedback from Plense, a relatively simple and straightforward website that strengthens the brand promise was made.

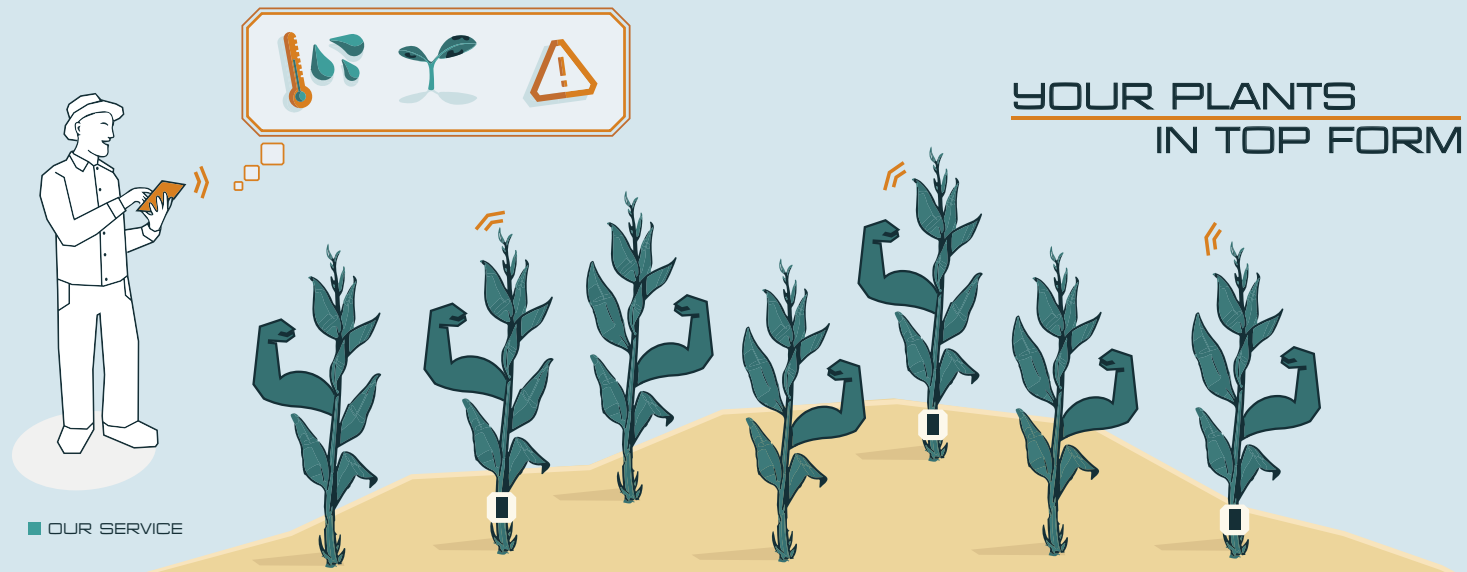
Website design

Pages 102-113 show the final design of the website, **text on the right explains** some of its design features and textual content. Most visual elements are added to enhance the website's excitement, while content focusses more on enhancing Plense's benefits and credibility.

This website acts as the basic idea, visually and content wise to be further realized and build on. **Notes marked in this color** were added based on the evaluation of Plense brand promise and visual appearance

At the moment this thesis is being finished and hand-in, I am collaborating with an external party to realize the website, based on the design and content illustrated before. This party will use the same content, but give their own twist on the visual appearance as they have more experience with building 'good looking' websites. The **visual DNA**; the light blue and orange colour, the cut corners and fonts will remain the same, as they **convey Plense's brand personality**. The following elements and pages will be added, based on the survey improvements in chapter 7.3:

- Increase contrast: layout, one more contrasting colour and hover elements that switch colour, to add more dynamic and enhance excitement.
- A ready to use 'test results' and 'user cases' page, with the newest test results or user case linked on the homepage.



**YOUR PLANTS
IN TOP FORM**

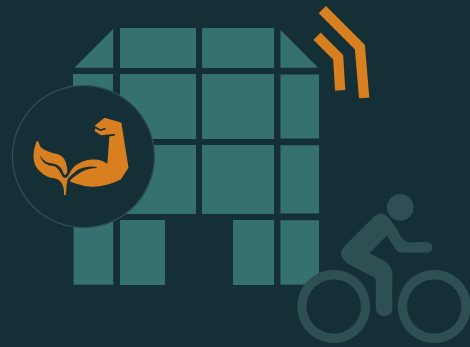
OUR SERVICE

PLANT-BASED ACTION

Plants are like top sporters and as trainers we should keep them in topform. Therefore Plense develops a co-pilot that monitors the condition of your plants anywhere, anytime.

Our plant-based insights will be connected to all other greenhouse metrics, which means you can steer your greenhouse and take action based on objective plants-based measurements.

When you want to work on your own top form, we are supporting the top form of your plants! See our story below to find out how we achieve this!



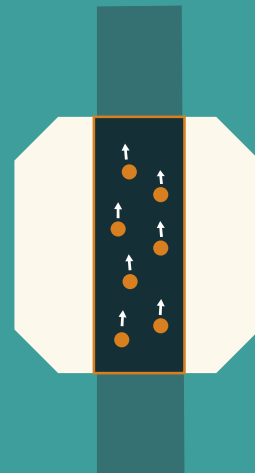
[Learn more](#)

HARDWARE

Our Plensor uses a speaker, to vibrate the internal structure of the plant, with which we can measure stress and recovery of the plant based on the internal resonance.

Next, we measure the transmission using a microphone. Our innovative technology is practical, safe and non-invasive; you can compare it with echoes used in hospitals.

Our robust casing can be placed around the plants stem in one simple move and does not need to be moved during the year as no botrytis forms on the stem.

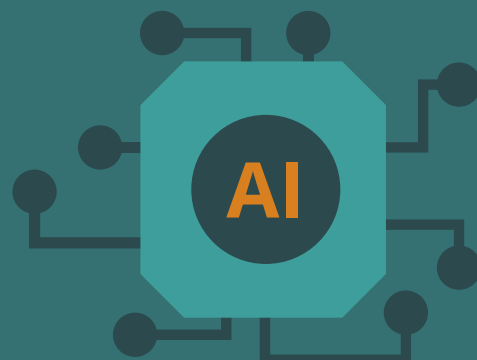


[Learn more](#)

PLANT DATA

With our advanced algorithms, we translate data into information. Although we use machine learning (AI) technologies, we believe in understanding what your signals mean and represent. That is why we conduct thorough research in relevant greenhouse environments about the interpretation and scientific principles that support our signals.

Always monitoring the fitness of your plant.



[Learn more](#)

REMARKS

First image here is **more explanatory** and puts the grower central directly. It illustrates Plense in **context**

Visualizing the text with icons, to make the message more memorable. Plense **should replace these icons** with real life pictures once they have fully developed each phase

Biking outside, while knowing your plants are in top form!

Hardware instead of sensor at title

The text on the left is made in line with the brand promise + more technical explanation to add credibility.

Learn more tab will redirect to another page once Plense can show what it actually means.

HOME PAGE

On this page you can scroll down and get a general overview of everything part of the website. This is very common since it informs the viewer about everything in a few scrolls.

OUR TEAM

JOURNEY

CONTACT

YOUR PLANTS IN TOP FORM

The first thing you see entering the website is what should have stuck the last time you interacted or heard about Plense, meaning you are in the right place here! But how did they get my Plense in top form again?

EXPLAIN WHAT PLENSE DEVELOPS

Here is step by step explained what Plense does, not just making a sensor, but mutliple things to deliver valuable actions. Aha yes I get it, but what can Plense do for me?

BENEFITS

Explaining what Plense can mean to you.

PARTNERS & TEAM

Showing with who Plense works to add credibility to its metioned benefits.

Showing these partners in combination with the team also adds to the credibility of the team.
Want to become our next partner?!

JOURNEY PLENSE

Finish the main page with what is coming to invite the viewer to subscribe for updates and follow Plense's developments.

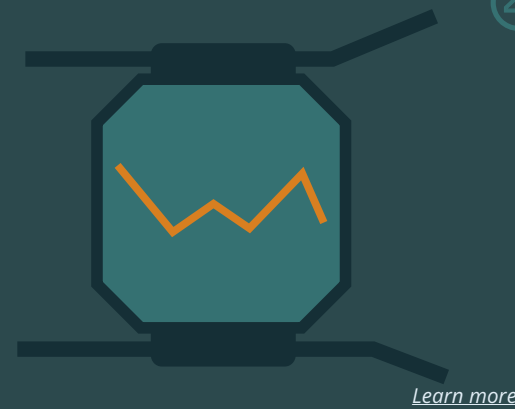
why work with us?

what to expect from us?

INSIGHTS

Similar to the personal health status smartwatches provide (by measuring inside people), our plant based data shows the health status of you crops. Get you plants in top form by finding the perfect balance and understanding:

- Are my plants ready to work more, or do they need rest? Based on the plants water uptake.
- Do you plants experience any stress?
- How much did the stem grow?
- Is there any early stage fusarium?



UNIQUE BENEFITS OF PLENSE

What makes Plense Unique?

New horticulture technologies should improve the growers work and support them making decisions throughout the day. We are developing a plant-based co-pilot that brings your plants just a fingertip away, while we support you to ensure they are always in top form.



Push your growing boundary

Learn how your plants react to your strategy, in real-time.

Part of your greenhouse network

Our data will be compatible with every climate computer and horticulture software provider.

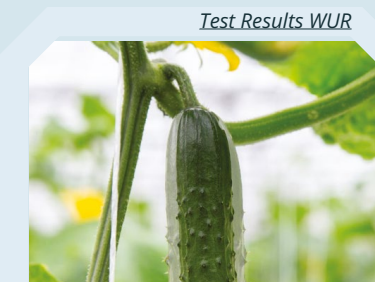


Collaboration Source.AG



Team spirit

Understand your whole greenhouse needs based on multiple plant measurements.



Always Connected

Know how and when sudden (climate) changes influences your plants fitness.



REMARKS

These are the main benefits Plense is able to promise. These align with what the customer is looking for

(expected) **Unique benefits** that only highlight Plense's points of difference!

When these are known Plense should specifically mention how these are different from other plant-based data companies

Showing different fruits and multiple settings of the Plense to show their versatility

Real pictures are used to make the benefits more believable.



Case Study Peter, Peter Parika

Predictive

Just like a smartwatch is able to predict your optimal training schedule, we expect to do the same for your plants. Ultimately predicting when your plants are ready to be harvested or when viruses are interfering with their form.



How Can We Support Your Growth Strategy?

Detecting Root Problems
 Water Regulation
 Insight to Plant Stress Levels
 Effect of Sudden Climate Changes

Water Regulation
 Real-time Reaction of Plants

■ PARTNERS & TEAM

Driving Innovation Together

We believe that people and teamwork make the difference. Expertise, ambition and passion bring our sector forwards and we are proud to contribute in collaboration with growers, universities, cooperatives, seed companies

BECOME OUR NEXT PARTNER!

OUR TEAM

Interested in working with us?

[CONTACT](#)

REMARKS

Let us know your problem page to stimulate more contact.

Click to see next team member

Inviting to get in contact and be Plense's next. **Lets do it!**

New pictures with casual outfits in a greenhouse setting. Like they come here every day.

Thanks David for helping me out with making these pictures!

All contact and follow buttons are **animated** like this when hovering over them with your cursor. Adding some **excitement**.

What's to come

Our recent developments and goals for the coming year.

IN ACTION

First 60 'plensors' deployed with researchers and customers (which only took an hour!)



MAY. 2025

HAS green academy

HAS collaboration

From May on, 20 students from in the HAS Horticulture & Business Management program will study how much they can improve cucumber yield with Plense's early stress detection.

FOLLOW OUR JOURNEY

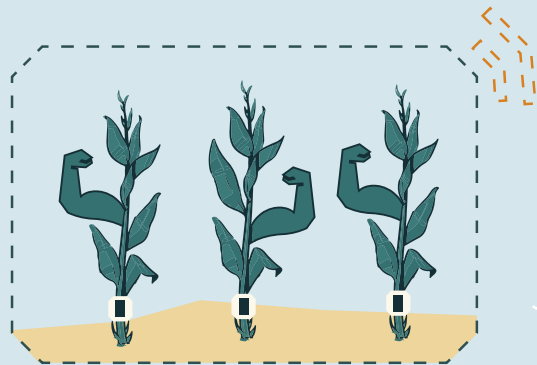
REMARKS

Journey is illustrated like a plant growing bigger and bigger

Journey from the future

is added to get website visitors **excited** and follow what's to come. Also showing Plense's **ambition**.

Illustrating the **emotional benefit** of Plense; having yours plants in top form *while on the beach* (8)



YOUR PLANTS IN TOP FORM
ALWAYS AND ANYWHERE



OUR TEAM!

PLENSE SALAD

We are making something never made before. Therefore we need a team of smart and motivated people with different backgrounds. Everyone at Plense wants to make a positive impact: on our planet, its people and within the team. With our technical background and passion for horticulture this will only be a matter of time!



Personality veggie: **Tomato**.
Honest, open, ambitious and all-round

BEREND DE KLERK
co-founder



Personality fruit: **Passion fruit**.
A common look with a lot of passion inside



Personality fruit: **Kiwi**. A balanced mix of creativity and technicality with a lot of small ideas! Simple but tropical on the outside and a complex, flavorful interior.



Personality fruit: **Orange**.
A whole of 'parties', interested in a diverse range of subjects. Mostly sweet, but sometimes a little bit tangy and with 'pit'!

OUR VALUES



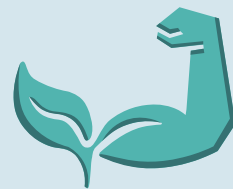
Collective growth by learning

We are always eager to learn more and share our lessons. That is why we continuously look for students and graduates to learn more together!



Responsible societal advancement

We want to contribute to something bigger than ourselves and Plense. That is why we are developing something that saves our planet's resources, while producing more food.



Connection through trust

We believe that trust is most important in creating an equal and fair working environment, which brings out the best in everyone we work with!

REMARKS

Description as a fruit or veggie to show some humour, creativity and excitement. Also to attract students/employees. *These guys (and girls) do it differently!*

Values are added to show potential employees or work students what to expect from Plense's team.

Nice way to get to meet new employees! (and see the effort they put into applying)

JOIN OUR TEAM

Would you like to become part of the future of horticulture? Fill in the form below!

Briefly explain what makes you interested

SEND

Your personality describes as fruit or vegetable

Email

First & Last Name

Phone

TEAM PAGE

This page shows the team and what they stand for summarized in 'our values'. Next to informing the customer about the team, this page also tries to target new students and employees to work together with Plense.

MAIN PAGE

JOURNEY

CONTACT

INTRODUCING THE TEAM

Showing the young team, full of energy and creative, new, smart ideas. A welcoming place to work with and at!

OUR VALUES

This is what Plense stands for. These values should inspire other entrepreneurial students/graduates to join!

FOLLOW OUR JOURNY

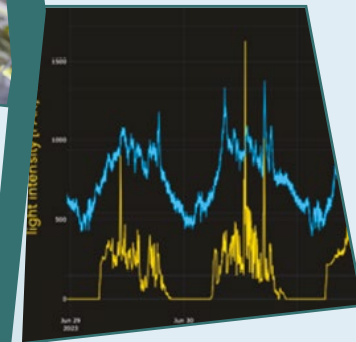
IN ACTION

First 60 'plensors' deployed with researchers and customers (which only took an hour!)

JULY. 2024



NOV. 2023



Successful PoC at NPEC

Plense's Mission that **aligns very well with their targeted customer**, the business-man

INNOVATION AWARDS

Winner of the Phillips Innovation Award, our most proud pitch award so far!

MAY 2023



NOV. 2022



HORTICULTURE INTERNSHIP

Before Berend & Thijs founded Plense they followed a horticulture internship to learn more about the world they were about to enter. There is still much to learn and much to offer this welcoming and innovative sector



HAS collaboration

From May on, 20 students from in the HAS Horticulture & Business Management program will study how much they can improve cucumber yield with Plense's early stress detection.

REMARKS

Extensive Journey overview to **add credibility** to the journey ahead

JOURNEY PAGE

This page shows the past and present Journey of and the mission fueling this Journey Plense.

MAIN PAGE

OUR TEAM

CONTACT

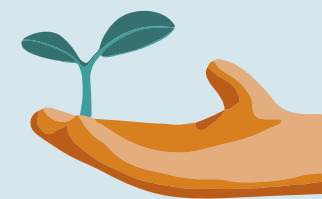
OUR JOURNEY

Shows again what to expect from Plense, but also where they come from: what prizes they have won (credibility), how they've growing as a team and what they have done for horticulture so far

OUR MISSION

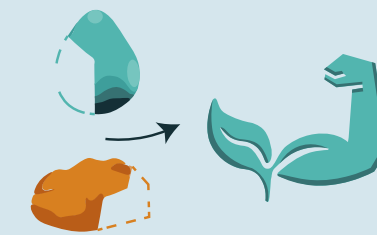
This journey is drive by their mission, which combines Plense's purpose with that of the customer.

OUR MISSION



Support the next generation growers

The next generation growers desires **work-life balance**, while performing at their best. We aim to bring plants closer to the grower and support them **whenever** and **wherever** they are.



Empowering new ways of growing

More people then ever need to be feed, while we are obliged to grow with less. Our mission is to ensure all plants are in **top form**, while using **minimal resources**.



Growing together

Horticulture expertise is one of Netherlands most valuable knowlegde. We aim to make this knowlegde more tangible to learn and grow with each other.

7. BRAND EVALUATION

This chapter describes the evaluation of the brand DNA made in this thesis, by letting customers assess the designed brand touchpoints. The goal of these customers assessments is to find out whether the communicated brand promise, reflecting the brand DNA, is indeed valued by the targeted customer. Furthermore, the visual DNA that brings forward the brand DNA is tested to find out whether the brand DNA is recognized as intended and thus aligns with the brand promise. These tests should thus answer the following research questions:

Does the brand promise enable Plense to build a strong brand?

Is the visual appearance of the brand DNA recognized as intended through the brand touchpoints?

7.1 Method

In order to evaluate Plense's brand DNA through their brand touchpoints, a cross-sectional study (Wang & Zeng, 2020) was set up in the form of a survey. To answer the first research question Plense's brand promise was shown in (Dutch) text, translated from chapter 6.1.4. This question tries to evaluate if Plense should indeed convey this brand promise in their brand touchpoints and the communication of the service they are developing. A strong brand here refers to the design requirements used throughout this thesis: favourable towards customers, unique from competition and clear (Keller, 2013). Since the brand promise was strengthened with reasons to believe, the credibility factor of the promise was also assessed (Creusen, 2023).

BRAND PROMISE

To answer the **first research** questions participants were asked to assess the brand promise based on the factors that make up a strong brand. 5-point Likert scale questions therefore provided a statement, after which participants were asked to rate whether they: 1. strongly disagree, 2. disagree, 3. neutral, 4. agree or 5. strongly agree (Fowler & Cosenza 2009). Space for explanation asked participants to explain why they rated higher or lower to collect feedback. The following statements were rated:

The story of Plense is clear

- Story refers to the brand promise. Calling this a brand promise would be too abstract for the participants that aren't aware of its meaning.

I would like to be updated on the developments of Plense

- Assessing the **desirability** and the interest in the brand promise after both the customer interaction and website touchpoint

What Plense is adding to horticulture is **relevant** for me

- Assessing the **desirability** again
- What Plense promising sounds **credible**

The story of Plense is **unique** compared to other horticulture (tech) companies

VISUAL APPEARANCE

To answer the **second research question** Plense's visual appearance was shown in an overview summarizing the content of the website into something more comprehensible (figure 37). This overview includes Plense logo, their physical product and the visual explanation of how Plense aims to achieve their brand promise. These 3 touchpoints should all reflect the intended brand DNA, which means their visual appearance should be: personality coherent, original = unique (throughout the survey) and visually coherent (Baker-Wu, 2023). Therefore the following statements were rated and assessed with the same 5-point Likert scale as the first part of the survey:

The visual appearance of Plense (the image below) is and (should be)

- **Sincere:** Friendly & Honest (neutral)
- **Exciting:** Cool & Exciting (most present) = brand personality exciting
- **Competence:** Ambitious & Intelligent (present) = brand personality ambitious
- **Sophistication:** Charming & Prestigious (not present)
- **Ruggedness:** Rugged & Tough (most present) = strengthens brand personality reliable

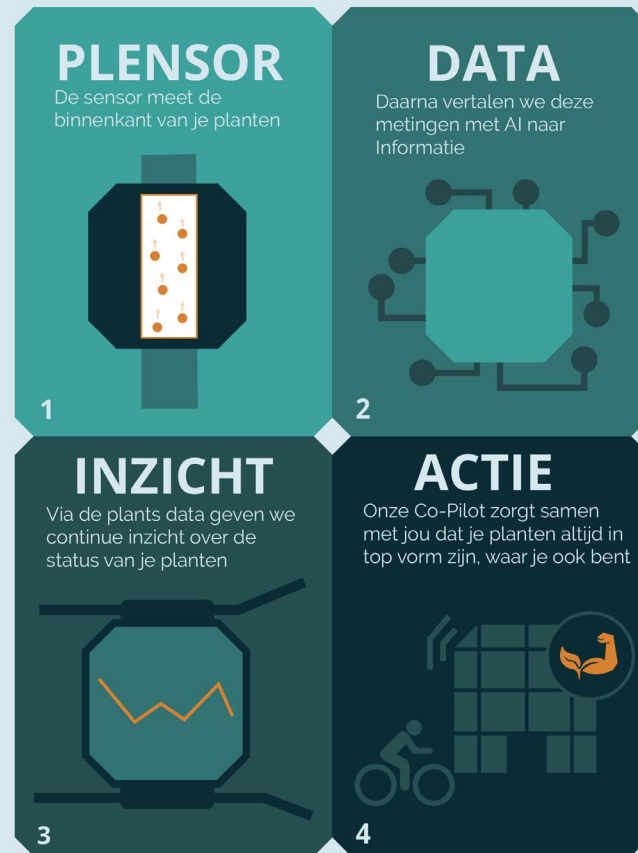


Figure 40: Plense's visual appearance summarized

Survey set-up

The whole survey was made in Dutch to make the Dutch participants feel more comfortable. The survey was sent online to all customer segments (figure 11): the 3 different types of greenhouse business owners, which I have spoken with or been in contact with at the start of this thesis project. To identify what customer segment responded, the last question asked about the participants interested in greenhouse innovation. They did not have any prior knowledge about the brand promise or visual appearance. In their prior contact with me, I only briefly explained what Plense was trying to develop, mostly product oriented. The participants prior knowledge would thus be similar as introduction of Plense through email (customer visit) or by hearing about Plense from a colleague (W.O.M). To verify this, the last question in the survey asks if the participant had any prior contact with Plense. Responses have been made anonymous.

Before sending the survey to the target audience I tested it with my IPD colleague at Plense and some friends from the TU Delft, to see whether the questionnaire was clear or not.

The 5 different brand personality dimensions (explained on last page) summarize all 42 human characteristics present in brands around the world (Aaker, 1997). By showing all five brand dimensions, the results of this test show whether the intended brand personality for Plense: mostly Cool & Exciting, Rugged & Tough and a little bit of Reliable & intelligent is conveyed more than the other dimensions. Making the participant rate all 42 human characteristics would take too much time, which is why the 5 brand dimensions with 2 explanatory human characteristics were used for this survey.

Other questions regarding the visual appearance were:

The visual appearance of Plense is Unique compared to other greenhouse (tech) companies

- Testing the **originality**

The visual appearance of Plense is **attractive** (which, looking back, should have been

coherent as attractive wasn't one of the criteria that should have been tested here).

To find out whether the visual appearance **enforced the brand promise** the following questions were asked:

I would tell about Plense to colleagues and/or friends (after hearing and seeing more about Plense)

- Evaluating whether the website would **stimulate W.O.M.**

I would **like to test Plense's** first product when possible

- Evaluating whether the visual appearance would further stimulate customers to keep in contact with Plense

The last question refers to the '**physical reminder**' (in Appendix 7.2), where the participants were asked whether they would like to receive a Plense bidon as reward for participating in the survey, so they could stay in top form too!

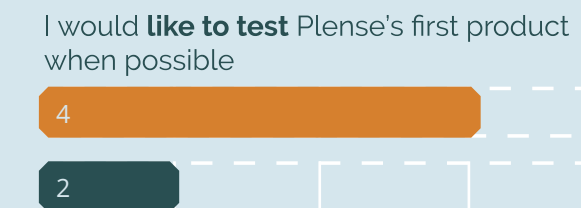
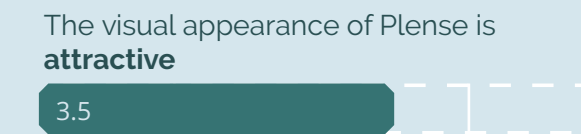
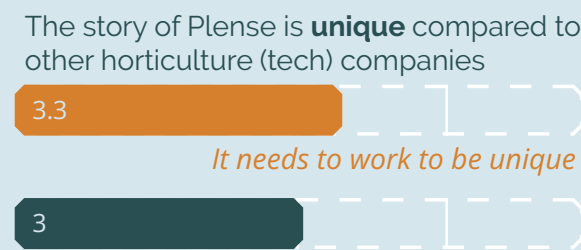
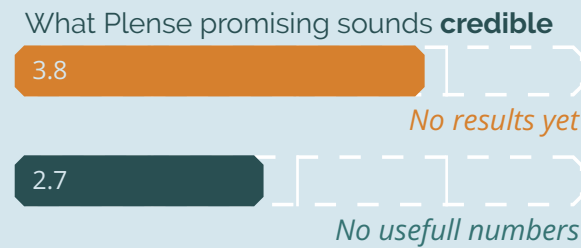
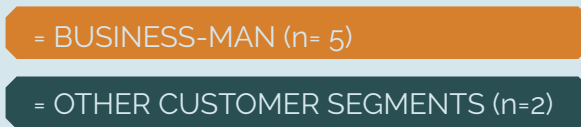
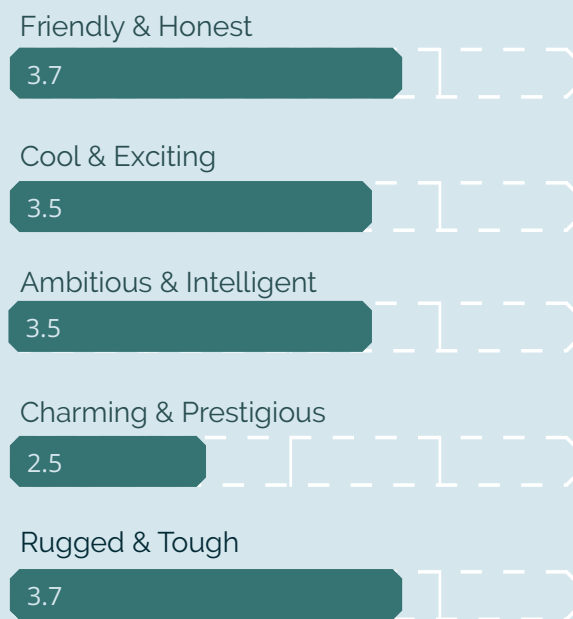
7.2 RESULTS

A total of 7 greenhouse business owners responded to the survey, 4 of which are identified as the targeted customer; the business-man. Although the survey was anonymized, 6 participants emailed me to show they filled in the survey. Therefore I was able to tell what answers came from which specific customer segment: the Business-man, Chameleon or Imitator. Since the results were significantly different between the business-man and the other 2 customer segments, these are illustrated separately in figure 41.

Ratings explained in this chapter refer to the 5-point Linkert scale filled in by the participants: **1/5 (minimum) means strongly disagree, 3/5 means neutral and 5/5 (maximum) means strongly agree.**

For the figure 41 this means 1 = empty bar and 5 = full bar, as that makes a neutral rating of 3 full up half of the bar (thus visually easy to interpret).

The full overview of results can be found in Appendix 8.



Brand promise results

These results show every rating and *open question explanation* for the 5 questions asked about the brand promise. Distiction has been made between the business-man and other customer segments.

Visual appearance results

For the visual appearance no distinction was made between business-man and other customer segments, as the visual appearance should convey the same brand personality, uniqueness and attractiveness towards every customer segment.

7.3 CONCLUSION & IMPROVEMENTS

7.3.1 Brand Promise

Overall the brand promise survey results show three strategic and communicative improvements for the customer journey, brand touchpoints and tactical roadmap of Plense.

The importance of targeting the business-man (first)

Chapter 3.2.3.2 concluded that the business-man is the most promising customer for Plense's. The results of the survey strengthen this conclusion, especially for the early phase of brand building Plense.

First of all, **there is a clear, positive, desirability of the business-man towards Plense**, compared to that of the other customer segments. The business-man is very likely to test Plense compared to a somewhat likely Chameleon/Imitator that *'wants to see practical proof first'*. Second, the brand promise is rated more relevant by the business-owner compared to the other customer segments. This is probably because the business-man has a better understanding of the value that Plense might be able to deliver them, like *'doing more with less'* and *'functioning as an additional pair of eyes'*. Whereas the other customer segments need to see more proof (e.g. numbers) to understand the true meaning of the brand promise. The higher desirability of the brand promise by the business-man can also be explained by the focus on the business-man in Plense's brand promise, since this brand promise is specifically created for this customer segment.

Altogether this shows again, as explained in chapter 3.2.3.2, the importance of targeting the business-man first, as they are more likely to be one of the first to test Plense and convince the other customer segments by doing so. This will save Plense valuable time and resources (Bresciani & Eppler 2010) and build their brand strategically.

Communicating test results

As explained in the introduction of this project (chapter 1.2.5.), a strong brand is built by **realizing** a unique and desirable brand promise (de Chernatony, 2010). The survey shows the brand promise from Plense is desired, especially with the specific targeted customer, but it is only somewhat credible and unique. Mainly because Plense doesn't have a product that realizes the brand promise (yet). *'I miss theory', 'I first want to see more proof'* The brand promise itself hasn't much been heard of before and does convey something desirable, but **to convince the business-man** the brand touchpoints that convey the brand promise could use a greater emphasizes on Plense's credibility and uniqueness. Most importantly by **communicating desirable test results** from for example current test collaborations between Plense and universities. This conclusion can also be made by comparing the average rating of business-man interest in *'being updated on Plense developments'* (4.8/5) and their *'willingness to start testing Plense at this moment'* (4/5).

Figure 41: brand evaluation results

Brand Promise continued

Therefore test results could get a more prominent place in Plense's brand touchpoints, like the first contact with the customer (chapter 6.1) and their website (chapter 6.3).

In addition, to convince the other customer segments (Imitator and Chameleon) the survey shows the importance of practical **'user cases'** to convince them that Plense is able to realize their brand promise. These cases should be included in the horticulture fair stand (chapter 6.1.1) and the website (chapter 6.3).

BRAND PROMISE Brand Building Conclusion

Referring back to the main research question, the **brand promise does enable Plense to build a strong brand**, but only if they actively show how this brand promise is realized. This means no changes need to be made to the brand promise explained in chapter 5.2.4.

What this survey very strongly showed is the **importance of communicating test results** towards the business-man and communicating **user cases** towards the other customer segments of Plense, in order to convince these customers of the brand promise.

The focus on test results and user cases has been added to the customer journey (chapter 5) and brand touchpoints (chapter 6) and are **marked like this**. These improvements will further support Plense to strategically build a strong brand.

7.3.2 Visual Appearance

For the visual appearance of Plense two main design conclusions and improvements can be made based on the survey results.

Brand Personality

The survey showed that **4 out of 5 brand dimensions defined by Aaker (1997), were somewhat conveyed/neutral** through the visual appearance of Plense, with only a small difference between them and only sophistication as exception. This means part of the visual appearance is okay designed, as cool & exciting (exciting dimension), tough & rugged (ruggedness dimension) and ambitious & intelligent (competence dimension) (scoring above 3.5/5) where intended to be conveyed. The small differences can be explained by the aim to convey multiple brand personalities in one visual appearance. There isn't one brand personality that needs to be much more present than the others, which led to an average rating that shows all intended brand dimensions are conveyed just well enough.

The exciting brand dimension was rated a 3.5/5 and should be at least as present (see figure 40) as the rugged dimension scoring a 3.7/5. This could be improved **by adding more contrast throughout the brand touchpoints**, as contrast adds to more dynamic and thus excitement (Orth & Malkewitz, 2008). I recommend adding more focus on the exciting characteristic of the brand, not only because it should be conveyed to fit the brand DNA, but also because it makes the personality of the brand more clear, instead of conveying every characteristic a little bit. This could make it easier for customers to recognize the brand and get attracted (Aaker, 1997).

The 3.5/5 rated sincere brand dimension fits Plense quite well, especially when thinking about a friendly and honest co-pilot that helps to keep you plants in top form. Since its presence doesn't dominate

the other brand dimensions and their brand personalities this won't influence the brand DNA and its visual appearance negatively.

Visual Uniqueness

Although the visual appearance was designed with the aim to be different from competition, this didn't seem to make the visual appearance unique in the eyes of the customer. Part of this result could be explained by the paprika plant (see figure 40), which took about 1/3th of the visual appearance and is part of many competitors visual communication (Appendix 4). Another reason might be the icons that show a plant, data, graphs and a greenhouse which is often part of competitors communication too. Instead of communicating content I should have only communicated shapes and colour, because only those were selected and designed to make Plense unique within the competitive landscape, in a subtle yet different way.

Another reason might be the lower rated uniqueness of Plense's promise (because of the lack of results), influencing the uniqueness of the visual appearance. What could improve Plense's (visual) uniqueness is to specifically mention their uniqueness throughout the touchpoints. Therefore the website could for example **specifically mention Plense points of difference** compared to direct competitors (Beverland, 2021).

Another recommendation to improve Plense's uniqueness would be to **change the icons into images** once Plense is able to show how their insights and actions look like. Participants of the survey remarked the promise hasn't been heard of much, but to call it unique is difficult without any visual proof of test results or user cases.

VISUAL APPEARANCE Brand Building Conclusion

Answering the second research question: the brand touchpoints do convey the brand DNA and its brand personality a little bit but should be strengthened by adding more contrast and dynamic and with that excitement. The visual appearance isn't unique. To improve uniqueness, brand touchpoints should specifically mention Plense's points of difference and show more real life images that illustrate the realization of the brand promise.

The **visual appearance** made within this project doesn't need to (and shouldn't) be copied one to one. It should form **a basis for Plense** to further experiment with and build on, eventually leading to Plense's own version they feel confident with. What is important is to **keep the same light blue and orange colour, the cut corners and the thick and strong looking shapes and logo** as these are crucial to convey the brand personality and because there are different from competitors visual appearance. **Emphasize the difference** to make sure the customer understands Plense is developing something different and new, and **is not 'another sensor startup'**.

7.3.3 Communication details

For all brand touchpoints, the following do's and don'ts will strengthen the brands communication, based on the open questions of the survey:

DO: keep the first communication simple, like the brand promise, but include the opportunity to gain more in-depth technical explanation about their product (on for ex ample the website). The business-man *'likes the simple explanation of Plense and their contribution to greenhouse horticulture'* but also want to be able to *'get a better understanding of what their brand promise means in numbers'*.

DO: emphasize the uniqueness of Plense more, ultimately backed up by (test) results. The brand promise doesn't emphasize Plense's uniqueness enough as seen in the results of the survey. **DO:** communicate the opportunity to test with Plense, once Plense is able to show their own test results

DON'T: mention too much about sensors in first contact, with all customer segments.

Even though the brand promise in the survey only mentions 'sensor' twice, participants concluded that Plense is *'yet another sensor brand...!!'* which isn't a positive association. Say the word sensor as few as possible!

DON'T: provide an 'physical reminder' as the customer doesn't necessarily appreciate it.

All improvements mentioned in this chapter are already implemented in the associated customer journey (chapter 5) and brand touchpoint designs (chapter 6). **They are coloured/marked like this text**, to make the distinction between before and after survey design The following chapter brings the survey conclusions, the customer journey and the brand touchpoints together in a tactical roadmap that explains how Plense could build a strong brand over the coming years.

7.4 TACTICAL ROADMAP

The tactical roadmap illustrates the strategic road towards the realization of Plense's brand promise. The structure of the roadmap is based on work of Kim et al., (2020) and brings the customer journey (chapter 5), the different touchpoint designs (chapter 6) and the evaluation results (chapter 7) together. The tactical roadmap is made for Plense, internally, and thus explains what is needed from Plense in order to build a strong brand over the years to come.

The most important axes in the tactical roadmap (figure 42) is the desired value Plense will be able to deliver their customer over three consecutive horizons. 'Insights' in the top axis show where these values come from, while the axis below; 'touchpoints' and 'Plense' show how these values should be realized and enforced

NEXT 2 PAGES

Figure 42: Tactical Roadmap Plense: building a strong brand by realising the brand promise

HORIZON 1

2025

HORIZON 2

2026/2027

HORIZON 3

2028/2029

FUTURE

INSIGHTS

Customer likes to see new, smart people with affinity to horticulture



BUSINESS-MAN

Customer doesn't like to be sold 'new sensors'

Customer needs proof of what new technology is able to measure

Customer has to produce more with less



BUSINESS-MAN

Customer wants new technology that covers the whole greenhouse, not just one plant

Customer needs new data to be compatible with current system

Business-man wants to expand his business when and where possible.



CHAMELEON

Customer want to make work for their growers as easy and efficient as possible

Imitator want to see proof of case studies

Customer want to know as much as possible about their greenhouse

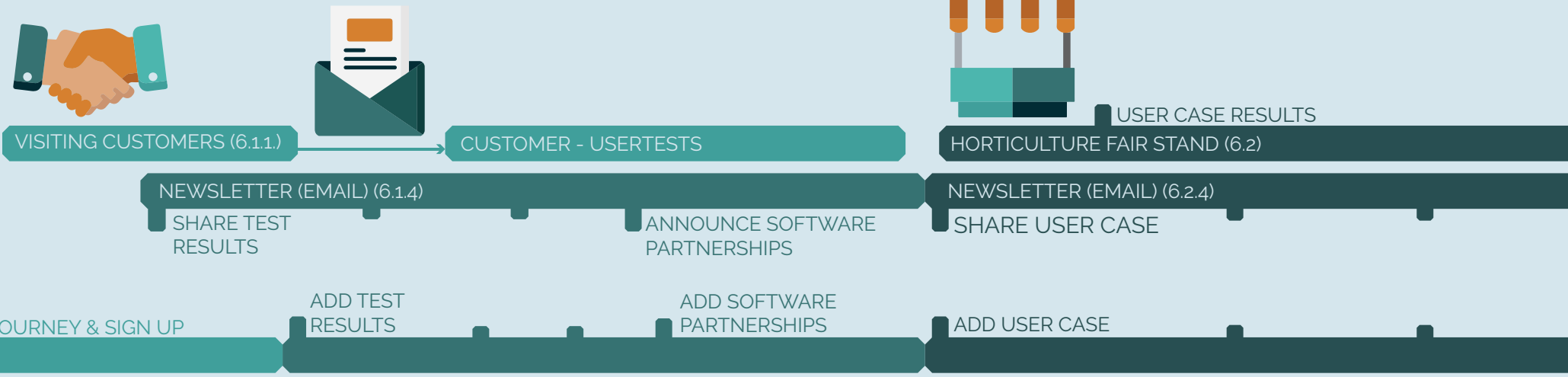
Excitement: Discover a new way of growing, through real-time feedback from your plants

Confidence: Improve your growth strategy, based on objective plant-based data

Freedom: Know how to get your plants in top form, always and everywhere

VALUE

TOUCHPOINTS



PLENSE

(constantly) Update Plense future Journey

Active tests, validating new plant-based measurements

Publish test results page (6.3)

Collaboration with software providers (3.4)

Publish user case page(s) (6.3)

Actively communicate all user tests and perhaps first purchases, in order to improve trust in the Co-pilot

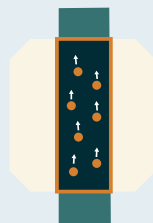
Collaboration with the HAS

User Case results showing greenhouse improvement in numbers

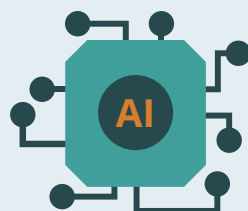
Explanation of Plense data and (graphical) insights

Actively support growth strategy, based on Plense's plant based data

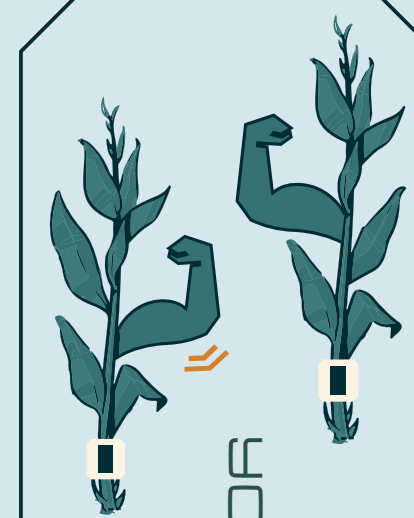
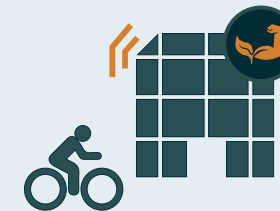
Working system of sensor



New plant-based data, compared to greenhouse environment measurements



Understanding of insights in relation to growth strategy



YOUR PLANTS IN TOP FORM ALWAYS AND ANYWHERE



Plense as Co-pilot

Horizon 1

The first Horizon's main goal is to excite the business man about Plense's potential value to their greenhouse business. Plense can start to reach this goal only after they have an idea about what they can measure, based on the first test results which are expected next year. At that point Plense can start reaching out to visit this customer, explain their test results and build the first relationships. To increase excitement towards the business-man, Plense should ensure the business-man are the only customers (exclusively) to be involved and know about their test results, as the business-man likes to be a step ahead of the sector. This means that the test results should be shared and published online after the business-man has seen and thought about them.

In the meantime the website is live to share information to all stakeholders interested in Plense. Collaboration with the HAS or other greenhouse colleges will further strengthen the brand DNA by showing Plense affinity to the sectors future.

Horizon 2

The second Horizon's main goal is to convince the business-man to start testing Plense in their greenhouse. Therefore the customer needs to feel confident that Plense is able realize their brand promise. To further strengthen the relationship and brand with the customer, Plense should regularly send newsletter updates about new test results explaining what their plant-based insights could tell the business-man about their plants. To start these user tests Plense needs a platform that enables the customers (and their growers) to work with Plense's their data. To further enhance the customers confidence in Plense, and to provide this platform, Plense should start their first collaboration(s) with software providers who are open for collaborations (chapter 3.4). Plense now becomes an 'official' part of the greenhouse.

2...

This horizon will probably take about 2 years, depending on Plense's test results. First they have to convince the business-man, after that Plense has to build their first user cases (for horizon 3), which would take at least a year, as Plense is developing the sensor towards tomato and paprika cultivation (which is 80% of Dutch vegetable greenhouse Ha., according to cbs, 2017) who have a 1-year growth cycle.

Horizon 3

The third Horizon's goal is to show (the whole sector) that Plense is indeed able to support 'your plants in top form' and is well on its way to bring customers and users (growers) the freedom to explore new plants (growth strategies) and lands (life outside of the greenhouse). Therefore user cases of the business-man in horizon 2 are crucial. Specifically the measurable improvements (functional benefits) Plense has brought their first users; numbers that reflect what Plense's top form means, for example higher yields or saving energy. Reaching new customers through these cases could best be done at the horticulture business fair, as these bring the whole sector together and offer the opportunity to build new relationships and strengthen those already established (Marmeren, personal communication, April 2024). This horizon starts directly after horizon 2, in 2028 and after another year merges into the future.

Future

With a growing customer base and partners, Plense should continue communicating how their customers are able to keep their plants in top form and add how the Plense's Co-Pilot is able to make the users and customers work simpler and smarter (emotional benefits). Your plants in top form can now be lived by both Plense and the customer.

8 INTERNAL BRAND BUILDING

By aligning the external promise internally there is a greater likelihood of the brand promise being delivered. (De Chernatony, 2010)

Although de Chernatony (2010) and other literature on internal branding is often referring to bigger organisations, who face the challenge to align hundreds of employees and their different values and different personalities with the brand of the organisations they work for, some part of it is also true for startup Plense and will be explained throughout this chapter

Burmann & Zeplin (2003) explain how internal brand commitment is created through brand centred HR activities; ensuring new employees share the same values as the company, brand communication; like intern activities and events called 'lateral' interactions, and brand leadership ensuring managers share the same brand values internally as communicated externally. Burmann & Zeplin (2003) distinguish three drivers to internal brand commitment:

- **Identification:** the sense of belonging to the organisation. At Plense this driver is very strong, as everyone works together in one office and regularly shares their work and personal life.
- **Internalisation:** sharing the same core values throughout the organisation. Since Berend and Thijs (who convey the brand purpose and its vision) hire all new employees based on whether they would like to work with them, the core values within the team are well aligned. Plense is thereby quite a niche company, a startup within horticulture, meaning you would share the same interest in entrepreneurship and horticulture when applying for a job at Plense in the first place.
- **Compliance:** aligning individual behaviour with that that of the aspired brand promise. This part needs work, since the brand promise and brand touchpoints made within this thesis are (somewhat) new for the startup. These bring Plense and the most promising customer closer to one another and should be well understood and lived internally.

8.1 BUILDING BRAND COMPLIANCE

In terms of brand compliance the visual appearance I made is already part of Plense and their office. The redesigned Plensor has been in production for over a week, graduation student Laura is developing an app with the same visual appearance, Berend made a flyer for a fair stand at the WUR (with the 'brand communication guide' explained in this chapter) and through weekly updates I have been able to show my visual work. As explained in the brand touchpoint evaluation the visual appearance doesn't have to be copied one to one, but forms a strategic basis to experiment with.

To further boost the presence of the new visual DNA internally, I have made a table tennis racket (figure 43). The racket has become part of Plense's daily table tennis routine, and shows Plense doesn't just keep 'your plants in top form', but also themselves!

What should be improved and be integrated at the moment I leave Plense is their belief in and understanding of the brand promise. Especially with Berend and Thijs who have to communicated this promise towards customers. The brand DNA behind this promise has been built in collaboration with them, like the brand purpose and part of the brand positioning (chapter 3.4.5.1). The story around 'your plants in top form' is however fairly new and slightly different from what they have been communicating till now. Although the positive survey results with regard to the brand promise definitely help to convince the value of this brand promise, an internal brand building workshop would further enhance the internalisation of the brand building strategy made in this thesis.



Figure 43: internal brand touchpoints made for Plense! (I have beaten Berend with it)

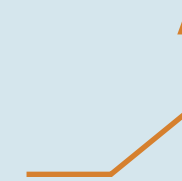
8.2.1 Internal brand building workshop

The idea of this workshop is that the team collectively thinks about the brand DNA and its promise through hands-on works on its communication. By thinking and working on the brand the team will get closer to its meaning. Therefore I have prepared a small workshop in which the team will make their first test result and user case newsletter email (chapter 5.1.2) that conveys the brand DNA.

The set-up of the workshop (+- 30 min.) is as follows:

1. Explain the brand DNA and targeted customer by introducing the brand compass to Plense (5 min.) (see figure 44).
2. Showcase the visual brand DNA to Plense (5 min.). Therefore I made a PowerPoint 'brand communication guide' that includes every visual element (icons and images from all touchpoints) made throughout this thesis, the brand compass that explains what these elements should convey and the communication DO's and DON'T's (p. 97)
3. Plense: Design 2 brand touchpoints that convey the brand DNA and brand promise.

- I. Collective Brainstorm session: What do horticulture business-man like to hear? (5 min.). Clearing the ground to start individual ideation with the same inspiration Akhilesh (2017).
- II. Individual Ideation: Write an newsletter email about new test results (we would like to share) and an newsletter email about new user cases. The newsletter conveys Plense's brand personalities and Promise! Use visual elements to strengthen the message. (10 min.)
- III. Creating together: Discuss the newsletters made and make one final newsletter together. Keep the outcome of this workshop as inspiration! (5 min.)



8.2.2 Internal Branding Outcome

Overall the workshop worked well to give Plense an overall impression and of what I will leave behind and how they could use this to convey the 'new' brand towards their future customers. The visual elements and the brand compass content can be found back into their final results shown in 34, figure 39. and Appendix 9 which shows the outcome of every newsletter made.

Improvement

What was interesting to see is the difference between the newsletters from Berend and the employees at Plense.

Because Berend does the commercial side of the startup and has been involved with my thesis more, he was better in writing what the customer would like to hear, instead of what Plense could tell the customer. The brand compass thus doesn't explain in enough detail who the customer is. Therefore the persona made in figure 12 would be a good addition to the 'brands communication guide', especially when new or current employees will support Berend with the commercial development. A better understanding of the customer should also help to create more exciting titles, based on what the customer would like to hear!

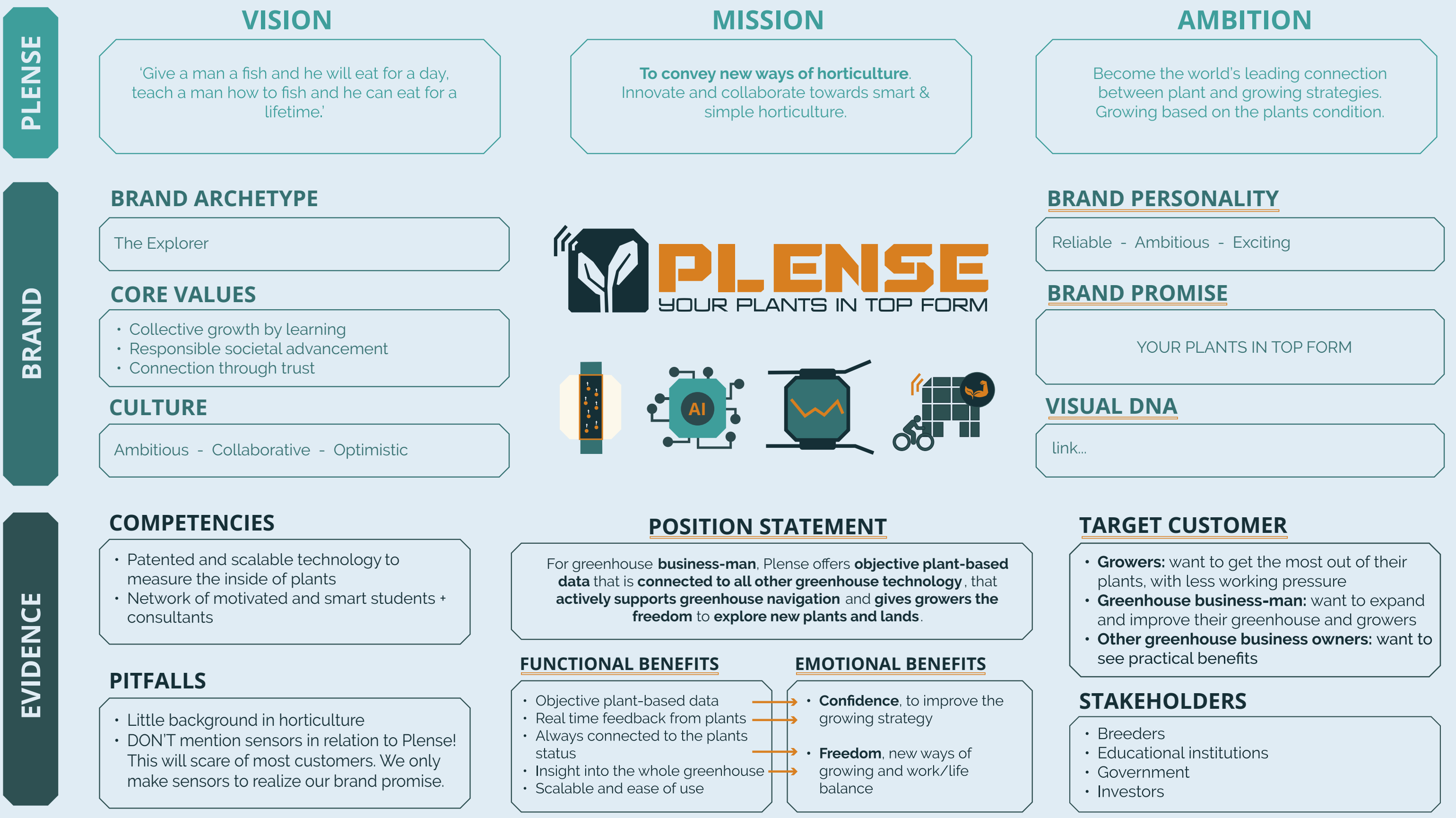


Figure 44: Plense brand Compass

8.2 Plense Brand Compass

To support the creation of new touchpoints, like the newsletter email (chapter 6.1.4) Van Cauwenberge, R. (2015) provides an tool that communicates the brand DNA internally, called the brand compass. The brand compass (figure 44) can be used to check whether the organisations (new) communication matches the brand DNA.

The content in this compass is based on my work throughout this thesis. The 'Identity' row summarizes the vision workshop together with the founders of Plense. The 'Brand' row summarizes the brand DNA internally and externally. The 'Evidence' row summarizes the companies uniqueness and how they need to communicate this uniqueness towards their customer and stakeholders.

9. DISCUSSION

CUSTOMER FIXATION Limitation

This project focusses for a large part on one specific customer segment, the business-man, in order to strategically build a brand for Plense. There are two limitations by focussing on this customer:

Although the most important person in greenhouse horticulture; the grower, is put central in Plense's brand DNA and brand promise, the overall aim was to targeted the business-man. As seen in the survey (chapter 7), the brand promise towards the targeted business-man works very well, but is less effective towards the other customer segments (Chameleon and Imitator) who want to see practical proof, user cases, first. The question however is if the combination of user cases and the brand promise does convey a unique and desired brand towards these other customer segments? Maybe the brand promise doesn't attract these other customer segments at all, or maybe they only care about the user cases and their functional benefits. Similarly, the brand personality made for Plense which should convey excitement towards the business-man, might be less effective towards the other customer segments who want to see more of the 'reliable' and 'rugged' side of Plense (figure 21).

Another limitation of targeting the business-man might be their popularity within the sector. They have bigger greenhouses, more connections and more respect, especially the high-tech tomato and paprika business-man. Their high popularity could explain why they don't like to see 'another sensor company', because they get way more sensor offers than other greenhouse businesses. The chance to start building a strong brand with the business-man is higher, but the competition rate is probably higher too.

Recommendation

My first recommendation to Plense is to evaluate the brand promise (including user cases) with the imitator, before they start creating awareness through the horticulture fair stand. Similar to how this project evaluated the brand promise to find out whether the brand is desirable for the business-man.

Since Plense should be working together with software providers at this moment, they could ask this partner which customers have recently been starting to use their software product, as these customers would probably be the imitators (10*).

The second recommendation to Plense would be to (also) reach out to business-man in other, less common Dutch greenhouses, like those growing cucumbers or flowers (cbs, 2017). The competition rate towards these business-man might be lower. Although these crops grow different from tomatoes and Paprika (Williams, 2004), another advantage is that they

BRANDING PLENSE AS STARTUP

Limitation

Part of Plense's brand DNA is based on how the startup behaves and what they prioritizes at this moment. Berend & Thijs for example define 'collective growth through learning' as one of their core values. The excitement part of the brand DNA is based on the young and eager smart graduates which is what the business-man likes to see. The current brand DNA and brand building strategy for Plense are based on who they are and what they can offer within the coming years, and how this aligns with their most promising customers. In line with the assignment of this thesis, I created a brand building strategy to support the introduction of Plense's first product to market.

This however means that the outcome of this thesis project for Plense is bound to time, so when Plense becomes a scale-up and finally a full grown company, they might lose their startup identity, which could weaken the brand DNA as it is defined in this thesis.

Recommendation

Staying true to the core values and the brand compass (figure 44) could overcome brand diffusion. As could hiring new employees that share the same values and vision as the brand. A brand is however a changing entity (Beverland, 2021) and change doesn't have to hurt the brand. More important is alignment between the internal and external brand (de Chernatony, 2010). When Plense's internal brand DNA changes, they should implement these changes towards the outside too. It is therefore important to regularly check how the brand is lived within the startup and understand how changes over time influence the brand communicated towards the customer and other stakeholders. The brand compass (figure 44) would be a great tool to do these checks and updates when necessary.



VISUAL APPEARANCE APPROACH

Limitation

Altogether the visual brand appearance isn't as strong as the brand promise, as shown by the brand touchpoint evaluation (chapter 7). This could be caused by the customer interviews throughout the discovery phase of this project. These interviews were focussed on the customers 'jobs to be done' (Christensen et al., 2016) and retrieved more information about the customers pains and gains, product oriented, then the customers view on other brands. What could have enriched the visual appearance for Plense would have been to ask the customers opinion on competitors brands; their appearance and communication. Asking about these other brands would have created a better understanding of the customers view on brands and with that potentially improved the visual appearance for Plense's.

In addition, knowing to what extend software provider Source's strong visual appearance contributed to the customers preferability to purchase from this brand, would have shown the importance of visual appearance in the sector in the first place. With that show Plense whether further investment into their own visual appearance would be worth their time and resources.

Recommendation

Plense could test the importance of visual appearance in the greenhouse horticulture sector by showing, for example, images of all three software providers websites (without brand logo to overcome bias) explain they all offer the same software and ask if the customer would prefer one over the other and why.

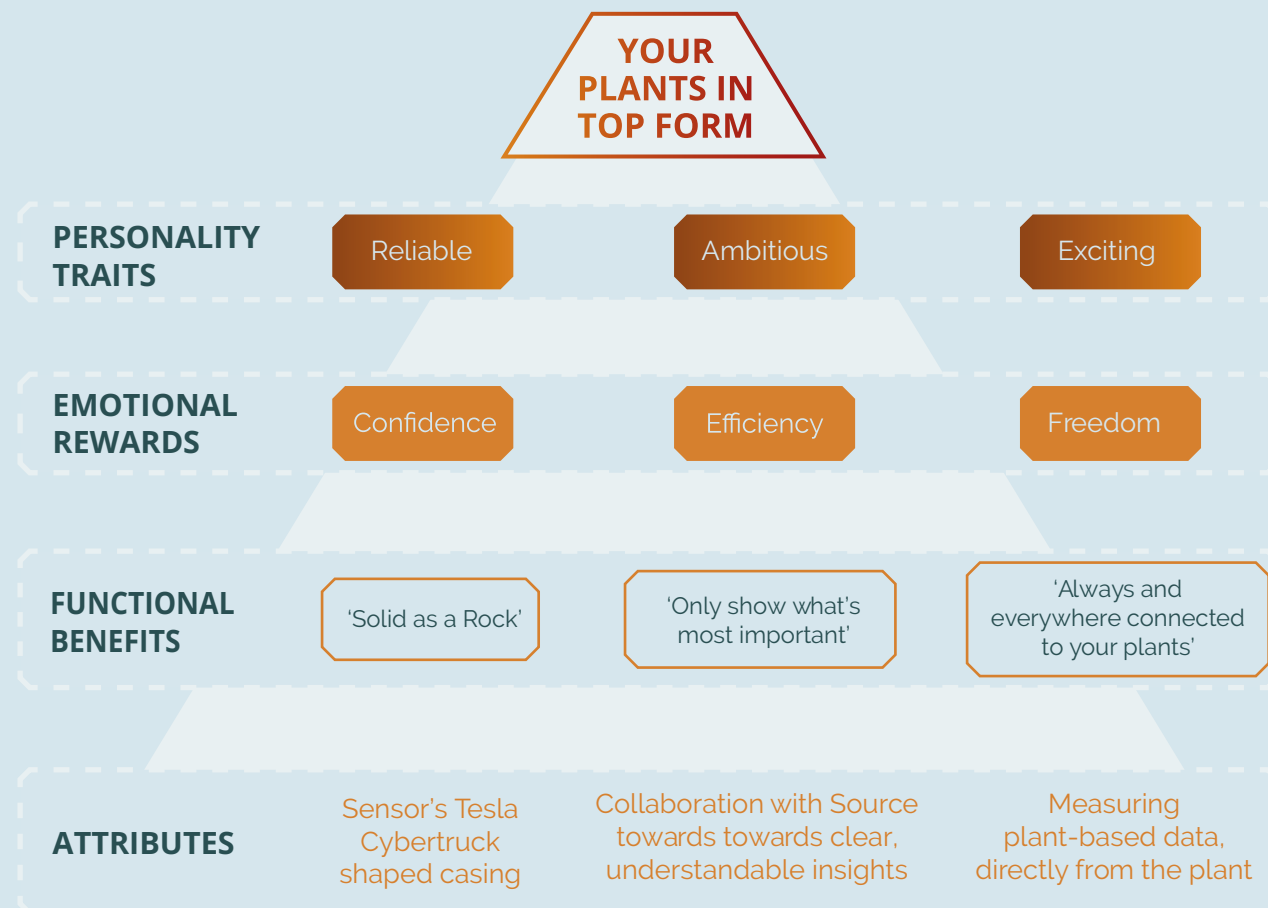


Figure 45: Example, brand building pyramid Plense

BUILDING A STRONG BRAND WITHOUT 'PROOF'

Limitation

The 'brand pyramid' from De Chernatony (2010) explains how product attributes lead to functional benefits, which leads to emotional rewards (benefits), which finally lead to the brand personality and the brand promise (see figure 45). A strong and clear brand pyramid leads to building strong and clear brands (de Chernatony, 2010).

This thesis has explained which brand personalities the targeted customer is looking for and how Plense's *objective plant-based data (product attribute) connected to all other greenhouse technology and (functional benefit) actively supports greenhouse navigation, gives growers the (emotional benefit) freedom to explore new plants and lands*. Which is mostly exciting and can only be realized through reliability and Plense's ambition (brand personalities). The limitation within this thesis is however that there was no product attribute to evaluate the brand pyramid for Plense (figure 45), except from maybe the look of the sensor. Although the brand promise for Plense is desirable, this thesis couldn't evaluate whether the product attributes indeed lead to the top of this pyramid to strengthen the desired brand.

Whats might even be the biggest limitation of this thesis with regard to building a strong brand is that there is a chance Plense won't be able to realize the defined brand promise. Although the promise 'your plants in top form' is made to be able to refer to a wide range of possible plant-based measurements and future developments of the brand; from detecting diseases, optimizing the water intake or predicting plant stress, there is a chance that Plense won't be able to tell anything about the plants form. In that case the brand build throughout this thesis would need to be reconsidered, for which the brand atmosphere analyses (chapter 3) in this thesis would be a good starting point.

This brand pyramid shows an example of the product attributes Plense would need in order to realize the brand promise and emotional benefits defined throughout this thesis.

The brand pyramid for example shows how the Tesla Cybertruck shaped casing could lead to improved customer confidence working with Plense (over competitors more fragile sensors) and therefore strengthens the reliable personality. Similarly efficiency is important to strengthen the business-man ambition and excitement can be strengthened by providing both business-man and the grower the freedom to explore new plants and lands.

Recommendation

For Plense it is important to think about the relation between the physical product(s) and services they will develop and how these build towards the brand promise. Referring back to the introduction of this thesis and figure 46 the top of the pyramid in figure 46 can be better understood through brand building, starting with customer needs, while the bottom of the pyramid could be better understood through (MVP) product testing. During the first tests with the business-man Plense should thus keep track of their product attributes and functional benefits and relate these with the other elements in the pyramid in order to keep the brand strong and clear.

First customer test recommendation

This recommendation is added after an conversation with the founders of Plense who asked me what I would recommend when setting up the first user tests with the business-man. Plense can benefit just as much as the business-man from this collaboration, while the grower carries most of the workload, trying to make sense of Plense plant-based insights. So should they ask the business-man to pay for these tests?

To add to Plense's credibility and make the customer take the test more serious, the answer is yes. The rewards of being one of the first to put Plense into practice should excite the business-man and can be further rewarded with a discount on future purchase. Plense should thereby guarantee the business-man that they will be the first to receive upgrades and news on developments, to enforce this exciting part of Plense's brand.

9.2 IMPLICATION

Branding building a high-tech startup without a finished product does support a better understanding of the most promising customer, how to target this customer and what to promise this customer in order to build a strong brand. The fundament of building a strong brand however, especially in the B2B market of Plense, requires a product and (test) results: proof to believe the brand promise can be realized.

It won't be worth the startups limited time and resources to build and extensive brand like done in this thesis, before they have a clear idea about their product is

able to bring their customer. The concept of building and testing a minimum viable brand (MVB) however is much more approachable and still valuable as can be seen in chapter 10. This solution to brand building for startups is fairly new and unknown within the brand building literature.

Although a strong brand for Plense cannot be built yet, this thesis explains how Plense could build a strong; desirable and unique brand, once they are able show 'proof of brand promise' (see 'final word' 9.4).

9.3 PERSONAL REFLECTION

This thesis marks my first strategic brand building project, executed on my own and for a client! What made this brand building project different from the SPD course 'brand and product commercialisation' and working on my own clothing company (fackupclohtes) was the challenge to build a brand around something that doesn't really exists yet, defined as the main challenge at the begin of this project. The difficulty this brought me was mainly present throughout the 'developing' phase of this project where I had to design brand touchpoints that should convince the targeted customer of Plense's value, but without anything to convince them with. I think I solved this challenge quite well by developing and testing the brand promise that will most likely be realized by Plense and, as shown by the brand evaluation, is desired by the customer. A valuable lesson for me and insight for Plense.

I am also proud that I have been able to accomplish my learning objectives formulated at the begin of this project. I have been able to conduct 10 customer interviews, 4 expert interviews and multiple tests with customers, in a sector that is barely known or approached by students. It was very inspiring to hear and see how these greenhouse horticulture business owners were running their business with so much passion for their product and people around them. Another learning objective I am proud of is that I have been able to deliver Yes!Delft a minimum viable brand workshop which could help other high-tech startups build and test their own minimum viable brand.

Because this project was in collaboration with a startup, I have tried to make my work as finished as possible, so Plense could use all of it once the project was finished. This meant extensive customer research, detailing visuals and perfecting communication. This did take quite some extra time and made the total project size bigger than expected. I think that my focus on delivering something practical for the client might have limited the depth of this thesis, exploring different methods and tools and adding scientific relevance.

The somewhat unexpected (bigger) size of the project has also led me to focus on finishing my work, which at the end of the project left fewer space for the client to think along and have more input on my work. The lesson learned is to set-up clearer project boundaries and take more time to define what is most important, instead of trying to solve and make everything.

9.4 FINAL WORD

This thesis set out to build a brand strategy for high-tech startup Plense Technologies. The startup is in the middle of understanding their technology and its potential value towards the greenhouse horticulture market. While they are well on the way to realize their high-tech innovation, they didn't exactly know what their potential value could mean to which customer. The first half of this thesis therefore discovered Plense's most promising customer and the unique value Plense could bring this customer. The second half this thesis brings Plense and the customer together with the brand DNA, visual appearance and the brand promise. Finally, this thesis proposes a strategic brand building strategy which can be realized through different brand touchpoints, designed to build a strong brand that supports the introduction of Plense's first product to market.

My hopes are that the insights gained throughout this thesis will help Plense get a better understanding of the startup's and product's unique value towards the customer. I hope that the strategy, brand DNA and visual elements form a good basis that makes them feel confident to build a strong brand. Finally I hope I get included into their mailing list, because I cannot wait to see how far they come within the years to follow!

10. MINIMUM VIABLE BRAND BUILDING

In chapter 1.3. Relevance for other startups, I mentioned that this brand building project for high-tech startup Plense could be used as case-study to explore the value of minimum viable brand (MVB) building for other high-tech startups. In this chapter I further explain why this study is relevant and what value could be expected. After that the method applied, the results, conclusion and discussion explain how this study explored the value of brand building for high-tech startups.

10.1 High Tech startups

A very famous tool advised by many startup incubators and used by many startups to test the product's value to the customer is the Minimum Viable Product (MVP) approach (Mansoori et al., 2019). The MVP is the most basic version of a product a startup can realize to receive feedback on (Otsen, 2015). The MVP is part of Ries's (2011) popular lean startup method, which explains iterative learning (by for example testing the MVP with customers) as key activity in developing a successful product.

Within the Yes!Delft programme the same lean method is often recommended and applied (Beneitez, personal communication, 2024). The main reason is because innovation in Yes!Delft is technology pushed; startups have found or already developed an innovative technology for which they need to match a customer need (Isoherranen & Kess, 2011). Following the lean startup leads to a better understanding of the potential customer and how the startups technology can help the customers job to be done (Christensen et al., 2016). However, by solely testing an MVP these pains and gains remain mostly tied to product features (Lenarduzzi & Taibi, 2016; Järvinen et al., 2014). The focus on technology, its

functions, performance and physical benefits is very common within startup incubators like Yes!Delft (Mansoori et al., 2019; Beneitez, personal communication, 2024).

As shown in chapter 2, brand building practices try to understand the deeper, emotional benefits (feelings) of these product features and translate them to the brand/product promise (De Chernatony, 2010) (see figure 45). A great example of technological innovation that became successful because the company understood its emotional value was Nintendo Wii. Their value proposition and communication was not related to quality and realism of the game, but to the fun and playability of its experience (Norman & Verganti, 2014). Even though technology push innovations like facebook can become successful too, Verganti (2009) emphasizes the importance of understanding the added emotional value and experiences of innovations to customers/users and communicating these.

MVB Building

Because startups don't have the time and resources to develop a complete brand this study uses the same concept as the MVP, named an MVB, minimum viable brand: the least amount of time and effort to create a brand that communicates the brand promise of the startup. Brand building within the limitations of a startup (Bresciani & Eppler 2010); Salamzadeh & Kawamorita, 2015). Similar to an MVP that provides feedback and lessons for further development, the MVB should do the same. But whereas the MVP mainly tests a products functional values, the MVB test the emotional values and promised experience of the startup and its products which is uncommon for high tech startups like Plense (Mansoori et al., 2019; Beneitez, personal communication, 2024). Building an MVB and testing its outcome thus could leads to new lessons, similar to what a building and testing a MVP brings startups. But whereas the value of the MVP has been proven, the value of building and testing an MVB hasn't been explored yet. Therefore the question of this study becomes:

What are the benefits of MVB brand building for high-tech startups?

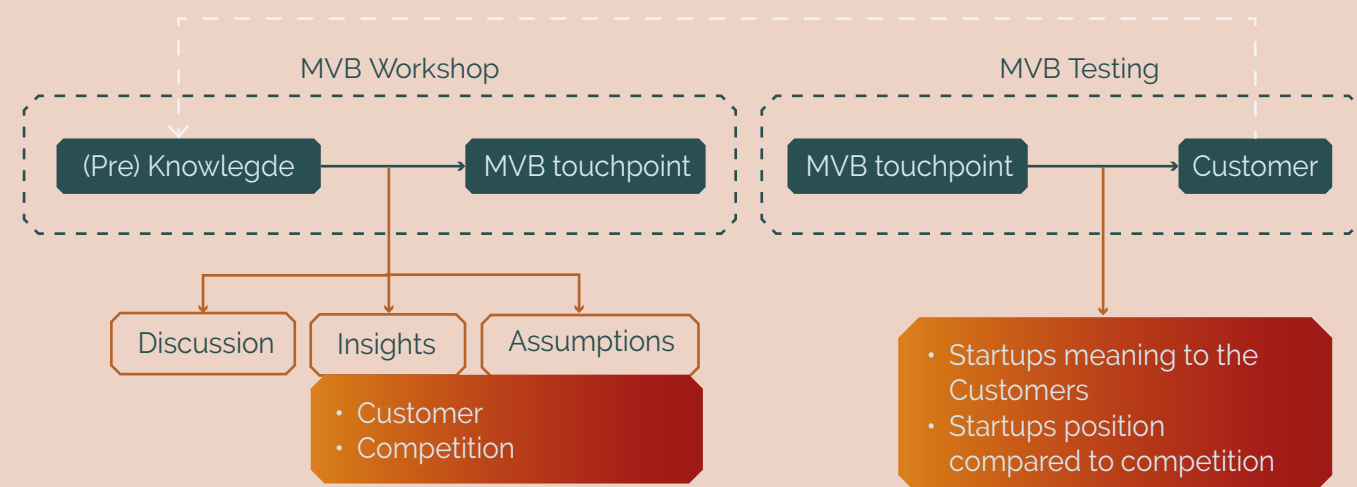


Figure 45: MVB building & testing value assumption

Assumptions

The assumption is that the MVB building process brings fruitful discussion, new insights and new assumptions, that would lead to that what makes brand building unique from product development:

- **Deeper understanding of the startups value towards their customer (Keller, 2003).**
- **Better image of the startups position in the market (Beverland, 2021).**

Testing the MVB should lead to, just like testing a MVP (Ries, 2011), new information and ideally (again) towards a deeper understanding of the unique value of the startup towards the customers (see figure 46). Do customers feel attracted to the story about the startup, or do they think it doesn't make any sense? Does the customer know any competitors communicating the same brand promise? Figure 45 visualizes the assumed values derived during MVB building and MVB testing.

10.2 MVB building for high-tech startups

To explore the benefits of the minimum viable brand building for high tech startups an MVB workshop for startups was created. The goal of this workshop is to create a tangible MVB touchpoint, which can be tested within the startups context and with the startups customer, just like a MVP (Ries, 2011). The workshop uses an inside-out brand building approach (de Chernatony, 2010), similar to how I build the brand for Plense. Minimal here means building the brand with the existing knowledge of the participants and within limited time. The following steps were part of the **MVB workshop**:

1. **Define the startups vision:** the core values, core purpose and mission described with a vivid description of how it looks like achieving this mission (Collins & Porras, 1996).
2. **Audit the brand atmosphere** by describing:
 - The startups key competencies
 - The customer: First participants are asked to provide a 1-2 insights about the different customer segments, then they have to define the most promising customer and translated into an simple persona and last they have to explain what emotional benefits the key competencies of the startup bring this customer.
 - Competition: first the competitive landscape of direct and indirect competition and after that the competition mapped into an perceptual matrix and the position of the startup in that matrix.
3. **Define the startups position statement** based on the work in step 1 & 2.
4. Make this statement into an **MVB touchpoint:** a business cards with the brand promise based on the position statement and an image based on the emotional and self-expressive benefits of the startup towards the targeted customer.

The **workshop** was conducted with 2 Yes!Delft startups, separately. Plense Technologies (both founders) and their neighbours, Renset (the founder + a colleague). To identify whether the workshop was valuable, notes were taken by the facilitator (me) when the participants came to new insights, assumptions and discussions throughout the workshop. Participants were also asked to evaluate the workshop afterwards. Both workshops took about 2.5 hours.

To explore whether testing the MVB outcome, a minimum viable brand touchpoint, was valuable, I **tested** (showed) Plense's MVB touchpoint to potential customers (n=10), after which I asked them to share their thoughts (see Appendix 10). These thoughts then were shared with Plense who could determine whether this was new, valuable information. The most important question asked while testing the MVB was: *'How do you recognise yourself story or picture?'*

10.2.1 MVB brand building results

The overall outcome of the MVB workshops conducted with the founders of Plense and Renset shows that MVB building leads to discussion, new insights and assumptions about the customer. It does not lead to new insights and assumptions about competition.

Internal brand definition through discussion

Both startup participants showed internal discussions that led to a shared definition of what their brand stands for. Interestingly, with Renset this discussion improved the employees connection to the startup, since this was the first time she really heard the story behind the startup and the founders (her boss) vision.

Defining the target customer

While defining the target customer Plense came to the conclusion they didn't really know who they should target when designing the position statement. They assumed it should be the grower, but they didn't know whether they should position themselves to this customer directly, or through another party? Thereby they couldn't say with certainty what promised experience (also referred to as self-expressive benefit), the potential customer was looking for. More control to feel secure or more control to feel like the greenhouse master?

Similarly, Renset had a hard time defining the DMU (decision making unit). They didn't exactly know who was going to purchasing their portable batteries and how those in control of purchases relate to those using the batteries. This unclarity was clearly visible on their website as well, where they try to mention every possible functional benefit of their product in order to be interesting to everyone in the construction industry. The workshop showed both participants that, in order to communicate their product benefits and values to the potential customer, they should define and learn more about their potential customer.

Understanding the competitive landscape

Both participants were very much aware of the competitors and the functional values they deliver compared to their own product. MVB building didn't lead to new assumptions or insights with regard to the competition.

10.2.2 MVB testing results

Showing and talking about the MVB touchpoint, that conveyed the startups position statement to its customers, delivers new information about both the customer and the competition. Figure 48 shows the MVB touchpoint made by the founders of Plense. Because they had a hard time defining the targeted customer and thus defining the position statement and tagline that are based on the targeted customer, we decided to take the inside-out approach of branding and make their MVB touchpoint based on their vision, in which knowing is growing is central. By doing so I was able to get the following insights by showing this MVB touchpoint to the target customer.

Market placement

The MVB touchpoint somewhat helped to show Plense's story in relation to other greenhouse technology companies, direct and indirect competition. Not much more than 'quite similar to Source' (W. O. & T. Z.) was mentioned however.

Most promising customers

The MVB touchpoint helped to show what type of customer would be more or less attracted by the startups brand and (in the case of Plense) the future vision:

- *'Everything on one screen, a co-pilot serving the grower is exactly how I see the future too' (1).*
- *'Looks like a dreamworld' (7).*

Showing the brand touchpoint to the targeted customer gave insight into the potential relevance of the brand promise (tagline) and how their customer interpreters this message.

- *Growing is Knowing is KEY' 'It isn't wrong if you make the wrong decision, as long as you can explain it' (4).*
- When Berend was present at one of the interviews, he was surprised by the reaction of the grower (9) on how important growing is knowing is and how this will shape the future of horticulture. At M.Z's company growers are always trying to learn from and with each other, exactly what the MVB touchpoint and inside identity of Plense is about.

Realising that your core value matches that of your targeted customer might be the most valuable insight gained from testing the MVB touchpoint. It means that the startups internal identity resonates with the customer and can be used for future communication towards these customers.



Figure 46: MVB touchpoint made by founders Plense. The image shows what value Plense brings to the targeted customer and the tagline shows the brand promise.

10.3 Conclusion & Discussion

Through a minimum viable brand workshop, startup founders were able to align internal ideas about the brand and identify their lack of customer understanding. Both of these findings were to be expected. Many branding experts have written about the importance of internal brand alignment and written dozens of papers on how to achieve this (de Chernatony, 2010). The lack of customer understanding is not surprising too, since this is one of the main reasons high-tech startups fail to deliver and market desirable innovation (Liao & Welsh, 2008; Salamzadeh & Kawamorita 2015).

By testing the workshops' MVB outcome, the MVB touchpoint, Plense was able to identify its most promising customer and the relevance of their startups core message and purpose to their future market (figure 48). This result aligns with the often used lean startup method (Ries, 2011) and the idea that testing minimum viable variations of an idea provide quick customer feedback.

The reason that new competitor insights and assumptions were not retrieved during the MVB brand building workshop might be because of the participants limited understanding of the customer, often the basis of interesting competitive insights (Christensen et al., 2016). Insights on competition were only based on product functions, which were already known by the participants.

Although not generalizable because of its small sample size (Saunders et al., 2012), this study identified that there is value in MVB building for startups. The quality of this value has not been studied, so it remains unknown whether startups are better off spending their time on brand building or for example emphatic design practices that specifically aim to understand the customer (Leonard and Rayport, 1997), if that is the main goal a startup is trying to achieve. **What makes minimum viable brand building most valuable is the improved understanding of the most promising customers and how the startup fits these customers**, which ultimately can be translated back into the startups product development and market placement.



Figure 47: understanding the customer and startup through the MVB

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