

THE CATEGORY KING PLAYBOOK

Category Design + Strategic Narrative + Brand Archetypes

1. The Three Frameworks Used:

CATEGORY DESIGN	STRATEGIC NARRATIVE	BRAND ARCHETYPES
Instead of fighting for a share of an existing market, you create and name a new one — and become the brand that defines it.	A story about how the world is changing, which makes your new category feel inevitable rather than optional.	A consistent personality (rebel, sage, ruler) that makes the story emotionally memorable, not just logical.

How the Three Connect (Fusion Logic)

Category Design gives you a new space to own. The Strategic Narrative explains why that space must exist. The Archetype gives the story a face and a feeling. Fused, you don't win a market — you build one and crown yourself in it.

2. Application: SALESFORCE (USA)

Background — What Happened and Why

- In 1999, business software was sold as expensive licensed packages installed on a company's own servers.
- Installation took months, cost a fortune, and required IT teams to maintain it.
- A new entrant fighting on features alone would simply be compared to giants like Siebel and lose.
- Salesforce needed a way to make the comparison itself irrelevant.

What They Did

- Named and championed a new category — software delivered over the internet, on subscription.
- Built the narrative around a villain: the old, painful, on-premise software model.
- Adopted the 'rebel' personality with the famous 'No Software' logo and street theatre protests outside rivals' events.
- Made the story simple enough that buyers could repeat it internally to justify switching.

Applying the Fusion — Step by Step

1

Base the story on a real outside change

The internet now let software run without being installed. Given that, buying software on CDs looked outdated. The enemy was the old way of doing things, not one rival.

2

Name the new category

Salesforce championed 'software over the internet' as a new category and made itself its first and leading name, so press and analysts used its language.

3

Play one clear personality

Salesforce acted like a rebel with a cause — the famous 'No Software' logo and street stunts made a young company feel like a movement.

4

Turn the story into how the product works

The story shaped everything: no installs, subscription pricing, one shared system for all customers. The product itself was proof of the story.

The Result

Salesforce didn't take share in an existing market — it defined the cloud software category and became its king. Owning the category meant every competitor was measured against Salesforce's terms.

3. Key Takeaways

- Great categories start with a change in the world, not a product pitch.
- The company that names the shift gets presumed leadership of it.
- An archetype keeps years of storytelling coherent through hundreds of moments.
- Use when you're small, different, and the incumbents own the current category's rules.