INDEPENDENT BRAND STRATEGY PROJECT

Brand Evolution and Legacy Building

Conan Gray

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Role: Brand strategy, creative direction

SUMMARY

Introduction & goal. Build a long term brand identity for Conan Gray that honors his indie roots while evolving him into a legacy artist, without losing the fanbase that got him there.

Process & experience. Most artists ditch their old aesthetic when they level up. I wanted to see what would happen if one brought it with them. I anchored the rebrand in a red, blue, and yellow palette pulled from his earlier albums. The real engine is the inside jokes: the Grinch, Vecna, carrot cake, the Dan Nigro universe, the TikTok burner account, Heather Day. They are not just funny moments. They are cultural currency. People want to be on the inside. So every release gets layered with Easter eggs that reward loyal fans. A rebrand does not have to be a goodbye. Weave the old into the new and OGs feel seen while new fans have a story to catch up on.

The outcome. Full brand strategy and four year timeline (2026 to 2030) covering visual identity, fashion direction, inside joke content engine, and phased rollout. Designed to turn a successful artist into a legacy icon without leaving fans behind.

Credits & your role. Independent brand strategy project. Role: Brand strategy, creative direction.

1. Objective

Build a long term brand identity for Conan Gray that supports his indie roots while evolving him into a high level artist, without losing the fanbase that got him there.

2. Approach

Most artists ditch their old aesthetic when they grows in popularity. I wanted to see what happened if one brought it with them. I anchored the entire rebrand in a Red, Blue, and Yellow palette pulled directly from his earlier albums. It is not about erasing old Conan. It is about showing that those eras are still part of the foundation. The visual identity is built around what I call “CD Chic” — modern 80s with a flowy silhouette. The rule is simple. One piece loose, one

piece tight. A flowy shirt with fitted pants. A structured top with wide leg trousers. Never all baggy like a hippie. Never all tight like you are typecasting him as something he is not. Pattern shirts, artistic downplay, bold jewelry, expressive makeup. Polished but not stiff. The tone is “hopefully this works out, but I do not care anyway.” Fancy A list sass. Funny. Relatable. That is who Conan is.

But the real engine is the inside jokes. Conan’s biggest asset is the intimate bond with his fans, and that bond is built on shared lore. His ex being the Grinch. His ex being Vecna from Stranger Things. Carrot cake. The Dan Nigro cinematic universe where he, Olivia Rodrigo, and Chappell Roan are Dan’s three children. The Wishbone lore with Corey Fogelmanis playing Wilson and Brando. The secret TikTok burner account @user6141013131857 that fans found and renamed to Wilson. The “Fuck the Grinch hard” interview moment that spiraled into a full fake relationship timeline. The Governors Ball kiss with Role Model. The Heather Day tradition on December 3. These are not just funny moments. They are cultural currency. People want to be on the inside. They want to feel like they are part of something other people are not. So I built the entire digital strategy around that. Every music video, every social post, every merch drop gets layered with callbacks and Easter eggs that reward the people who have been paying attention. The Grinch shows up in a Halloween special. Vecna gets a blink and you miss it cameo in a new music video. Carrot cake appears in everything from tour visuals to limited edition merch to backstage content. The Wilson and Brando lore gets a quiet nod in the background of a photoshoot. And I am hiring a small team of interns whose only job is to scour the internet for new viral inside jokes as they emerge, so the brand never stops feeding the loop. It is not just fan service. It is a profit engine. People buy in because they want to stay in the know.

3. Key Insight

> *A rebrand does not have to be a goodbye. If you weave the old aesthetic and the old jokes into the new visual language, the OGs feel seen and the new audience has a story to catch up on. You are not chasing an album cycle. You are building a legacy.*

4. Timeline

4.1 Fall 2026 — The Bait Drop

Coming off his world tour, the fanbase is active and alive. On the surface, this is a final goodbye merch drop for his early projects. A thank you. A farewell. A closing of the chapter. But every single piece has a planted Easter egg that does not belong. Mix the name of the Stranger Things

town (Hawkins) with the actual town where Conan grew up or where something meaningful happened. Put it in the fine print. Put it on the inside of the tag. Put it in the tracking email. Put it in a photo that gets posted once and deleted. The tags are cut out like the old albums, but the ones that remain have coordinates instead of sizes. The Grinch design is there but it is cropped in a way that hides something in the negative space. Carrot cake shows up on a napkin in a behind the scenes video that no one was supposed to see. Nothing is explained. Nothing is confirmed. The fans have to dig. This drop is not the goodbye. It is the first clue that the goodbye is a lie. It is preparation for what is coming next.

4.2 August 22, 2028 — Perspective Shift

On the 12 year anniversary of “The Other Side” (his very first song, released August 22, 2016), release a companion project where early songs are reworked and recorded from the other perspective. Maybe Conan talking to his younger self. Maybe the songs written from the ex’s point of view. Alongside it, produce a short film. Something funky and unhinged. Conan Gray meets a funny tarot card reader who might be inspired by the Grinch or Vecna or Kit Connor or all of them combined, and he goes through a full spiral. Edgy, emotional, but still funny. It is important to incorporate Conan’s actual thoughts and feelings. This is not a goodbye. It is a “let us see what we do next.” It reconnects older fans while gearing up for the rebrand.

4.3 December 3, 2028 — The Aesthetic Bridge

December 3 is Heather Day. The date from the song “Heather” that fans have turned into a holiday where you give someone your sweater. It is already baked into the lore. On this date, drop a full out exclusive inside joke merch collection that very clearly nods to the past while incorporating the new CD Chic brand. The Grinch. Vecna. Carrot cake. The wishbone. Idle Town. The Dan Nigro cinematic universe. Wilson and Brando. The secret TikTok account. All of it. Hire fans to help put this together. Let them design, let them model, let them spread the word. This is the bridge between eras.

4.4 March 20, 2030 — New Album

March 20 is the anniversary of Kid Krow (released March 20, 2020). 10 years exactly. Full rebrand in effect. The visual identity, the palette, the tone, the fashion, the inside joke engine — all locked in and ready for a new era. Come out with a bang on the same day the whole thing started.

5. Outcome

A full brand strategy and timeline covering visual identity, color palette, fashion direction, digital engagement strategy, inside joke content engine, and a phased rollout across four years. Designed to turn a successful artist into a legacy level icon without leaving the fans behind.