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AND BRAND
CONSULTANTS

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BRANDING STRATEGY MUST MAKE RIGHT CONNECTIONS

A successful branding project requires a customer-centric approach and clear objectives, says **Ian Brownhill**, a founding director at BergHind Joseph

Before joining BergHind Joseph two years ago, I had worked client-side for a number of organisations. The majority of my previous roles included some arm's length involvement with design agencies and although many were good and successfully delivered on the brief, others, who had sold themselves on being experts in branding, couldn't actually deliver a viable finished product. There were two main reasons for this:

- **Poor strategy.** The organisation and the agency didn't take a customer-centric approach to developing the brand strategy. The company values were developed by a small team of people, generally drawn from the communications functions, who gave little consideration to understanding what people (both internally and externally) were actually saying about the company and its brand. This, in turn, led to internally focused values being developed that looked good on paper but meant little or nothing to the outside world.

For example, how many companies have "innovative, dynamic and approachable" as their values? These values are now so over-used that they will not help companies set themselves apart from their competitors. It would also be a foolhardy company that says it is "stale, apathetic and inaccessible", but this may be exactly what customers and employees are saying about it, so there is a huge disconnect between how the company thinks it is behaving

and what its stakeholders actually experience.

- **Weak execution.** Other agencies were strong on strategy, helping the client's communications director sell in what was often a difficult or misunderstood subject to a sceptical board, but were weak on execution. Once the company's directors had been won over by the agency's presentation, they were then allowed to get on with creating an "exciting" logo, colour palette, bespoke font, image world, tone of voice – the list goes on – without any guidance or challenge from non-communications team members on how these would actually be used on a daily basis by all the other employees in the company.

So what started out as a great strategy ended up being poorly executed because the brand tools were not flexible enough to cater for everyday use. (It is surprising how many branding agencies are unaware of the number of headline weights that might need to be used in an annual report.) Employees didn't understand the new brand and the part they needed to play for it to come to life and no one liked the logo, so the whole project ended up being an expensive damp squib.

So, when considering a branding project, I would recommend that you take the following approach:

- **Question why you want to change or update your company's brand.** Has your marketplace changed? Are you losing out to your competitors? Do you want to move your

Engage with your staff. This is a simple concept, but is often missed as companies focus all their efforts on their external audience. The Tate & Lyle brand refresh and new brand created for the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman are good examples of this approach



Keep an open mind and work out what you want people to say and feel about your brand and make these your brand values

company to the next level? Sit down and think about your ambitions, current challenges and how you want to come across in your marketplace.

- Take a customer-centric approach and research what your customers and employees are really saying about your company. Does this match with your own views, and if not, why not? Keep an open mind and work out what you want people to say and feel about your brand and make these your brand values. Then identify what you need to do differently in order to live these values on a daily basis.
- Once you have done this, consider how changing your brand might help you achieve your goals.
- Remember, it is about either reconnecting with existing stakeholders or attracting new

ones. It is generally not a good idea just to rebrand because your company fancies a change – you may just end up confusing your target audience.

- Don't underestimate the power that social media can have on your brand. If your company is not honest in living its values, then people's experiences are likely to be shared on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. And it won't just be your customers telling the world; your staff will be, too.
- Engage with your staff. This is a simple concept, but is often missed as companies focus all their efforts on their external audience. A brand is so much more than a logo or strapline. If your employees can't or don't engage with the brand, then it's likely to fail. It is your people, from the chairman down, who are the living embodiment of your brand and so anything created has to resonate with them in order for it to be delivered consistently to the outside world on a daily basis. Engaged employees will help promote the brand and protect the company from the threats related to poor product quality or service levels. A survey carried out by the Chartered Institute of

Personnel and Development in 2006 found that 70% of engaged employees indicate that they have a good understanding of how to meet customer needs, while only 17% of non-engaged employees say the same. A Gallup survey conducted in 2003 found that engaged employees advocate their company or organisation – 67%, compared with only 3% of the disengaged. A total of 78% would recommend their company's products or services, against 13% of the disengaged. So engaged employees will help to improve your business's performance.

- Be consistent. It is easy for companies to become bored with their brand because they are dealing with it every day. Avoid the temptation to play around with the logo, add an extra font or colour to the palette or tinker with the strapline. Your customers, who may come into contact with the brand only once or twice a year, may just end up confused or alienated because you are not communicating to them in a consistent way.
- Finally, hire an experienced agency to work with you to develop and execute a successful customer-centric brand. ●



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TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS YIELD BEST RESULTS FOR CLIENTS AND AGENCIES

Do unto others as you would have done unto you is a maxim for marketers, says Blue Marlin group managing director and chief executive **Andrew Eyles**

There is no doubt that marketers have a tough time. For as long as any of us can remember, the marketing discipline has been undervalued and generally misunderstood. Very few marketers make it onto the main board and those who do seldom enjoy the respect and credibility accorded to their peers. Only a few weeks ago, the editor of *Marketing Week*, Mark Choueke, detailed a passionate case for marketers to stand up for themselves.

In short, we in the marketing services sector get it: it's hard, and the past two years have been harder still. We fully understand your issues and we support your cause. But not at any price.

Branding and design businesses are relatively resilient in a recession. When marketing budgets are cut, the allocation for design tends to hold up reasonably well. It is a shame that the same cannot always be said of marketers' treatment of their agencies.

No one can blame marketers for trying to get the best deal from their suppliers – we all do it – but there comes a point when hard-nosed business tips into bullying. And worse.

A good friend and former employee of mine saw his business almost go bust and prevented it doing so only by letting go three-quarters of his workforce. Why? Because his biggest client screwed his margins down to almost nothing, then held off payment for four months. It wasn't that big a deal for the client, but £140,000 can

be the difference between sinking and swimming for a small agency.

This simple act of withholding payment put at risk a longstanding relationship that involved an in-depth understanding of a brand and its history. That kind of knowledge and experience is surely worth more than a few grand.

The bigger agencies are lucky in that they have a stronger financial footing and are better able to manage risk, cash flow and liquidity, but that doesn't justify some of the client behaviour we have come across since global credit got crunched.

For instance, an international telecommunications company recently approached Blue Marlin and 19 other agencies to pitch for a seven-figure piece of business. Overlooking the fact that 20 is a very long longlist, the first pitch document to arrive ran to 189 pages. The second was almost 300 pages long. By the time the third arrived, we were all but giving up the will to live.

It took a day just to read the documentation and even longer to understand it because so much of it was contradictory. Instead of defining the brief, the client threw documents at it and expected the agencies approached to make sense of it themselves.

Then came the punchline: each agency was expected to invest \$150,000 to participate. No, really. What is more, we were all expected to sign off IP (intellectual property) for all work generated in the process of the pitch, including

all verbal exchanges. Isn't there something slightly outrageous about collecting \$3m-worth of strategic work for a gig worth \$1m to the winner? Naturally, we declined to participate.

We accept that there is less money to go round and less cash in the capital system, so in this era of austerity, what we all need is partnership. The agency/client relationship is much like marriage. Loyalty is the cornerstone, trust is vital and commitment is key. Promiscuity erodes the foundation of a good relationship, but, increasingly, clients are shopping around for the best price rather than looking for the greatest value.

The crazy pitch I mentioned earlier may be an extreme example, but it is almost as if some marketers are exploiting the recession to coerce agencies into free creative pitching (something Design Business Association members are committed against), to giving away valuable insight and advice and to undercutting each other to dangerous levels.

Clients need agencies to be profitable for security of trading, stability, continuity of brand strategy, brand guardianship and design integrity management, and to be able to pay good wages to attract and keep the best consultants and designers.

Cards on the table – agencies work hardest for their most profitable clients. Those clients tend to become the most loyal because the creativity and service they receive is outstanding. Agencies then work twice as hard

Long-term client partnerships result in great work, whether an entirely new brand, such as Shell Deli2Go (below), or a one-off limited edition for Tango (right)



The agency/client relationship is much like marriage. Loyalty is the cornerstone, trust is vital and commitment is key. Promiscuity erodes the foundation of a good relationship

because not only are those clients profitable, therefore the foundation of a good business, but they are also loyal, which provides the foundation of good business planning. Designers and brand consultants develop a greater sense of ownership and involvement and are ever more willing to go that extra mile. Everyone wins.

We count ourselves lucky. We have some very special relationships with key client partners. We have worked with some for well over a decade. Our place on their roster genuinely means something and they don't make us jump through hoops every time a new project comes up. We have grown to understand each other's ways of working and there are occasions when we have needed to give each other the benefit of the doubt. We've got them out of tight spots; they've given us the opportunity to improve when something has been less than perfect.

Trust and transparency go hand in hand. We are privy to their development plans. They share with us their short- and long-term goals. They ask

only for what they need based on thorough, properly thought-through briefs. They save money by working smart, not screwing with margin. They respect the amount of time it takes to produce great work and only very occasionally ask for six impossible things before breakfast. They give cohesive, coherent feedback.

And, at the risk of stating the painfully bleeding obvious, they pay for what they get.

I cannot stress the importance of prompt payment enough. Transparency on fees, clarity on deliverables, agreed timing of activity and fair payment terms are fundamental to stable and productive business partnerships. The all-too-common practice of imposing a 90-day payment cycle is unethical and in breach of nearly all agency and client service contracts and terms and conditions. Top-20 agencies won't go to the wall over late payment, but it makes our lives unnecessarily hard.

Treat your agency as you would want to be treated. After all, we are on your side. ●

TOP TEN GREAT CLIENT BEHAVIOURS:

- 1 Brief properly
- 2 Feedback coherently
- 3 Set realistic timelines
- 4 Give excellence recognition
- 5 Reward loyalty
- 6 Respect expertise
- 7 Value creativity
- 8 Be open-minded
- 9 Commit to partnership
- 10 Pay promptly



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BRANDS MUST STRIP DOWN TO ACHIEVE IMPACT IN AN ULTRA-CONNECTED, HYPER-COMPETITIVE WORLD

How design, packaging and new product development should respond to the 'Twitterisation' of culture. By **Vicky Bullen**, chief executive at Coley Porter Bell

A recent experiment in 32 countries revealed that pedestrians all over the world are walking 10% faster than they did a decade ago.

Another study found that there are 50% more brands in the average supermarket than 20 years ago. Also, the number of UK television channels has exploded in 20 years.

It will come as no great revelation that the world is increasing in speed and complexity. Information, products and experiences are becoming smaller, faster and more disposable. As a result, we now consume culture in the same way we consume chocolate and crisps: we graze, constantly snacking in conveniently bite-size nuggets.

Much has been made of the implications of this shift to "bite-sizing" on lifestyles, media and content. We eat on the move, we communicate in 140 characters and we prefer edited highlights to the full experience. We think in headlines, not stories, we buy music by the song rather than by the album, and reduce coverage of cricket to wickets and boundaries.

Brands have always needed to understand the culture they exist in. But now, to stay relevant and in business, brands – and that includes retail brands – need to understand our culture and its accelerating rate of change more than ever before.

The question for marketers and retailers is: how should they respond to these trends when it comes to designing brands, logos, shops,

ranges, packaging and new products? This, after all, is what marketing is about, just as much as communication.

Marketers with the most sensitive antennae are beginning to recognise that in this bite-size world, where visual noise is abundant and attention spans are not, they can create impact only by returning to simplicity. They are shedding complexity and stripping down to their very design basics in order to achieve immediate impact and cut-through – on-shelf, in-store, online and offline.

The tools they use to do this are symbols, icons and heavily honed language, which reveal their meaning instantly. No clearing the throat, no curlicues. Just clear messages delivered with minimum fuss.

That's why leading brands have been busy stripping back packaging design to the core of their identity. Late last year, Cadbury's Dairy Milk launched a heavily pared-down pack design and Guinness simplified its labels to play up the role of the harp, its most important design equity. Coca-Cola, too, redesigned its Classic can. It banished background textures, keylines, drop-in shadows, flashes and special promotions, stripping the design to its core.

Earlier this year, an American designer provided a fascinating glimpse of just how far this process might go. He came up with a "naked" Coke can using no paints or dyes at all. Instead of being printed, the design will be stamped onto the silver aluminium of the can

itself. Although it is not an "official" Coke can and is unlikely ever to see commercial production, the designer understood that he could create impact and reinforce Coke's iconic status by making the can as simple as humanly possible.

Language, in particular, has become a key battleground in the fight to get noticed. With little time to get the message across and even less to build relationships with consumers, we are generally seeing fewer words in marketing communications. Instead, messages are increasingly hammered home through the use of a hybrid of illustration and typography or "illography", as we call it. Remember the recent BA campaign for attractive prices using illustrated numbers?

And where words are used, they are being brutally edited and abbreviated. Take a recent press ad for Volkswagen Bluemotion technology. An already succinct 32 words were savagely cut back to just four – Bluemotion saves you money.

That explains the growing phenomenon of brand abbreviations that strip down brand names – which were previously thought to be inviolable – to their bare essentials. So PlayStation 3 has become PS3, Mountain Dew became MTN DEW, and trainer brand Reebok has become RBK.

This is closely related to the phenomenon of text-speak. Even as venerable a brand as KitKat now uses it to communicate. A recent poster

Back to basics: A recent BA campaign for attractive air fares simply used a series of illustrated numbers



read: "OMG. My KitKat Just Got Funky". Then it signed off with a smiley emoticon.

This is hardly surprising when you consider that we now seem to have the attention span of an unfocused gnat. According to Nielsen, the average time spent visiting a website in March 2009 was just 56 seconds.

That explains the phenomenon of the "pop-up store" in which brands such as Uniqlo, Prada and even Marmite create short-lived outlets as a way of creating intense, newsworthy experiences.

You may not welcome this acceleration of culture. You might find it alarming and intimidating. But the fact is that there is no prospect of society slowing down. Quite the opposite. As today's multitasking, media-saturated kids grow up, the pace of life today will look quaintly sedate to consumers in ten years' time.

US brand owners understand this change and have started co-operating with retailers to reduce choice and increase sales. Walmart has slashed the number of SKUs (stock keeping units) it carries by 10-15%, even more in some categories. And Kroger, the second largest grocer in the US, has reduced cereal SKUs by one-third. The aim was to make stores and aisles easier to navigate by reducing the amount of information customers have to deal with.

Meanwhile, at a corporate level, the Ford Motor Company has been divesting itself of its Aston Martin, Jaguar and Volvo brands. Why?

Because it realises that, in the world of global branding, less usually means more.

In a world of increasing speed and complexity, there can only be one possible response: keep things as simple as possible when it comes to marketing, whether it concerns communications, product development or portfolio management, and develop clear, single-minded visual properties. These will be expressed in lots of little engagements over time, rather than the old

approach that involved a few monolithic set-piece initiatives.

But beware. Simplicity is about a lot more than just "editing". That's just giving consumers smaller portions. The challenge of bite-size thinking is that if people are going to snack on your marketing, you have to make every mouthful, every bite, as flavourful and meaningful as possible. You have to concentrate the goodness and make things really tasty, really delicious. Really sweet. ●



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DESIGNERS MUST NOT LOSE TOUCH WITH THEIR CREATIVE ROOTS

Successful products come when design's increasingly strategic position is balanced with its origins in craftsmanship, says DCA Design director **Nick Mival**

As a young industrial designer in the early Nineties, I spent late nights sitting in a factory with moulders fine-tuning a product before it went into production. I felt like a craftsman. I was working closely with materials and process. Not design process, but manufacturing process. I was obsessive about the details of the final product. I wanted the object to be special, even though it was just another simple piece of high-volume plastic. We succeeded: it was beautiful, it won a design award. But it bombed in market. The object was sensational, but it was the wrong object.

Design's strategic role

Over the two decades since, I have watched and participated in the rise of design from the drawing board to the boardroom of global corporations. Design has been adopted by business as if it had never been questioned. But in its adoption, design and designers have had to change. To avoid beautiful products bombing because of a lack of relevance to the user, design has had to become more informed.

In that period, I went looking for answers to see how I could increase the probability of an innovative product succeeding through a genuine resonance with the end user's life. This journey exposed designers like me to methods such as focus groups, ethnography, personas and segmentation, co-creation and trend tracking, which we integrated under the title

"design research". This "user-centred" approach to design applied consumer insights to inform and inspire the design of new products. It now seems obvious, and is regarded globally as best practice to produce relevant products that people value and buy.

Bringing these methods to the fore gave business what it wanted – a designer who could explain why something looked a certain way and a less fuzzy design process that was more open and accessible. It enabled designers to talk strategically about their work in a language that everyone could understand. Most of all, it gave business the potential for sustainable success when developing new products.

As design got closer to senior business management, the designer's more implicit skills, processes and methods gained exposure. Business began to see how designers were natural translators, communicators and facilitators. These skills, combined with a positive, iterative approach to early idea exploration and failure through prototyping, started to be used to solve business challenges.

Business was asking designers new questions – no longer "Can you design a toaster?", but "How can we recruit youth to our brand?", "What is the future of our category?" and, more recently, "How can we change behaviour through design?" And with these new questions came new subject matter and deliverables for the designer. Where once a series of sketches was presented and the "best" one picked, now

Mamas & Papas and Apple illustrate how high-quality design results from the continuous involvement of design through a strategic role to the crafting of new manufacturing processes



sketch concepts were just part of a framework of macro trends, strategic initiatives, technology roadmaps, intellectual property, consumer insights, visual brand language, value hierarchies and user experience maps.

In the past five years, it has been great to see design reach a maturity with an appreciation at the highest level of commerce and government, connecting with business and society's needs. But as governments start to look to designers to solve social challenges, there are also murmurings that business is investing less in design's original values.

Intuition, craftsmanship and vision

In the early Noughties, I presented a piece of strategic design work to the board of a personal care company. I framed the work in a business context, provided a consumer insight narrative and a value hierarchy. After the meeting, the design director told me: "I liked your presentation, but be careful not to forget your own (design) vocabulary and intuition." At the time, I dismissed the comment as coming from someone who had not moved forward with design's new position in business strategy. But the comment has always stuck with me.

With all this research, insight, evidence and strategic thinking, designers have started to become disconnected from their original core skills of intuition, craftsmanship and vision.

At a conference I attended last year, Roberto Verganti, professor of innovation management

at Milan Polytechnic and the author of *Design Driven Innovation*, gave a fascinating lecture on how user-centred design does not drive radical innovation. "Apple does not listen to us – we listen to Apple," he said. He went on to explain how designers had started to lose their vision and that intuition was disappearing after a decade of listening to users.

Great designers like Charles and Ray Eames were visionaries who worked intuitively and spent as much time designing manufacturing processes as they did designing products. They experimented and developed new materials and processes to achieve elegant, original solutions. Their work always showed care, consideration and high levels of craftsmanship.

Design craftsmanship is alive and well in some areas of mass production. Apologies for being yet another designer to mention Apple and, specifically, Jonathan Ive, its senior VP for industrial design, but he is so far the master craftsman for this century. In Gary Hustwit's documentary *Objectified*, it is no coincidence that Ive was interviewed in a workshop in front of a CNC (computer numerical control) milling machine. He is seen enthusing over the machined frame of the current iMac, which any designer or engineer will tell you is one of the bravest, most exquisite mass-produced components of all time. Apple invests heavily in the design craftsmanship and design quality of its products. And the profits follow.

Western designers can become detached

from manufacturing because of our new strategic roles and manufacturing relocating to the Far East. With this detachment, the best strategic thinking, ideas and conceptual work can be let down by average design quality and craftsmanship in implementation.

At DCA, when we are helping create a new product, such as Mamas & Papas' new travel system, Mylo, we define the appropriate level of innovation versus risk, then make sure our design team has the right balance of traditional right-brain design skills of intuition, craftsmanship and vision with left-brain strategy, evidence, analysis and rigour. We have a bustling workshop full of CNC machines, designers, engineers and technicians who ensure that the strategic visions of our insight teams are delivered with a high level of design craftsmanship and quality.

This article is not a call for designers to go back to basics or for business to seek designers with intuition, vision and craftsmanship. It is a nudge to make sure that as the value of design is realised in boardrooms and by governments, design – and designers – must be enabled to keep one foot in the innovative delivery of new experiences and products. While investing in design in a strategic role is helping make sure the product is the right one, this investment must continue at the implementation stage. This will increase design craftsmanship and quality to ensure the right product is also a sensational product, with which the end user connects on a deep emotional level. The profit will come. ●



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DESIGN THAT GOES DEEPER TO ADD MEANING AND BUILD COHERENCE

Brand coherence can be built through using a deeper language of design, says **Hugh Roberts**, London strategy director at Design Bridge

Consciously or unconsciously, we are looking deeper into the brands that we buy. In search of a compelling story, a distinctive personality and a coherent behaviour, we look beneath the shiny surfaces to uncover what lies beneath. To deliver on this, and to reap the benefits of a stronger relationship with their customers, brands need to build a deeper language of behaviour and design, based on powerful ideas.

Every day, we make choices based on deep, intuitive feelings about brands. We choose one chocolate bar over another not because it tastes any different, but because it connects with our mood at a certain time of the day. We buy into a whole range of personal care products not because of their superior moisturising qualities, but because of their campaigning approach within the beauty industry. We find ourselves attracted to an expensive lager because it feels authentically Italian and comes in a particularly elegant glass. We are impelled to buy into a mobile phone network because of the way it defines us as a progressive optimist.

So why are we delving deeper? One of the main drivers is the increasingly emotional nature of our relationships with brands. As tangible differences between competing products and services reduce, we find ourselves assessing choices on an emotional or philosophical level. When buying a new car, it's not so easy to make

choices based on performance. Instead, we expect the brand to offer us a really immersive experience throughout the buying journey, which will allow our unconscious or emotional side to make the decisions. The car showroom is not a showcase of automotive engineering but a mirror held up to our aspirational self-image. With so few tangible differences and such emotional relationships, the brands we choose have become like the clothes we wear – a complex set of signals to define our personal identity.

Meanwhile, we are becoming increasingly conscious about the choices we have – and their consequences. The sharp shock of the recession made us re-examine our unthinking purchases. We wondered whether we could “do without”, or get better value elsewhere. And a growing body of active, networked and informed consumers is increasingly capable of judging this for themselves. In response, brands have embraced the ideal of transparency, and have used all means at their disposal to build a dialogue with their consumers. Unilever's decision to take a much more visible role across all its product brands demonstrates the new ultra-transparent reality.

The difficulty faced by brands is in building and sustaining this depth. Every layer of a brand's expression has to hang together, delivering a coherent and rewarding experience, and building a unified and distinctive image. As the layers of experience

The Beefeater 24 brand design hints at hidden depths behind the idea of 'daring London glamour'



and channels of communication multiply, the task of brand design and management becomes increasingly complex and demanding. Take a jar of instant coffee. Every dimension of the pack is considered a precious source of value and distinctiveness. Everything, from the feel of the materials and structure, to the performance of the opening mechanisms, the look of the graphics on pack, the tonality of the copy and the clarity of the back of pack information needs to be leveraged as a brand equity. The release of aroma from the jar, even the sound made when the fresh foil is torn, all are part of the total experience that can be so vital to adding "depth" for consumers.

And, of course, the pack is only the start. The ideas and emotions delivered by the pack need to be consistent with those driven by advertising, with the experience of the website, the social media activation, PR activities, flagship environments and sponsorship activities. And the most active – and influential – consumers will dig beyond this into the beliefs and behaviours of the parent company and the other products it makes.

With such complexity, the opportunities for incoherence are multiplied. A particular risk of slip-ups emanates from digital channels, which demand a constant stream of fresh and contagious content, interesting enough to be blogged, tweeted and retweeted. Apparently unscripted behaviour – traditionally anathema to brands – is practically compulsory

in certain parts of the online world.

So what is the way around this complexity? How can brands successfully build and maintain coherent depth? As so often in brand design, the answer lies in ideas. Brand ideas are the bedrock of coherence in such a complex and diverse environment. The idea that forms the essence of a brand needs to be born directly from a real insight into the benefits it offers and the truths that set it apart from its competitors.

With a powerful idea at its heart, a real point of view on its role within the consumer's world, the brand has the opportunity to create real depth. With a genuinely held self-belief, a brand has the confidence and agility to adapt to a complex environment, to ad-lib, to stretch and diversify, while retaining its integrity. Uncovering this foundational idea (or set of ideas) lies at the heart of creative brand strategy.

In our experience, it is useful to derive a set of creative guiding principles from this essence. This helps to build depth, a real and detailed philosophy of behaviour and expression, rather than a catchy, but superficial, mantra. These principles need to drive every aspect of the brand's behaviour and language. The idea at the heart of the Beefeater 24 brand, a new premium cocktail gin, was "daring London glamour". The design would reconnect the brand with its strong London roots, rich history and unique distillation process of the blend. Like London itself, the bottle design is a unique blend of the traditional, modern, eccentric and

eclectic, always revealing new secrets to those who look deeper.

Brands that get it right enjoy enormous rewards. Deeper and more emotional relationships with their consumers give brands permission to premiumise and to stretch. The result is a focused investment in fewer, more powerful brands that live by their principles, grow and lead the market. ●



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THE CEO AS EMBODIMENT OF THE BRAND CAN BE A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

A high-profile CEO can do wonders for a brand but can also cause problems, says **James Beveridge**, creative director and managing partner at Further

How often have you read in the press about a new chief executive who will turn a failing business around? All on their own? Or seen the same press vilify a CEO for a business failing?

It goes with the territory, you may say. And considering what they are paid, what would you expect? But the complete identification of a CEO with their brand, the cult of personality and the embodiment of a brand in one person – such as celebrity endorsement – is a double-edged sword. Mutually supportive when it works; mutually destructive when it doesn't.

Founders and entrepreneurs are often the perfect embodiment of their businesses. Where the CEOs are entrepreneurial business builders, they are usually charismatic characters and great communicators. They are leaders and visionaries. Not surprisingly, they tend to be the embodiment of the business they have built.

Airlines seem to generate such high-profile bosses. Step forward Sir Richard Branson. Who can forget his take on the high-flying, iconoclastic David versus the faceless BA giant? Branson's presence is everywhere: he's always up for a stunt or headline-grabbing adventure, but always on brand for Virgin – the hip, young pretender.

And although he may not have founded it, what better embodiment of Ryanair is there than Michael O'Leary? A curious mixture of "Irish" charm, wrapped in a pugnaciously slight and informal frame that could start a fight in an empty room, tilting at every rival, but

never wavering from a calculated presentation of his airline's brand proposition.

In some ways, O'Leary and Ryanair have turned classic brand dogma on its head. Brands are meant to be loved and trusted. Ryanair doesn't buy that; it just wants to be known for offering the cheapest seats and being on time. It may have a reputation for poor customer relations, but plays the game its way – book in online, bring the right-size hand luggage and be at the gate on time and you will get to your destination as promised.

But the acid test of a high-profile brand ambassador CEO comes in times of crisis. O'Leary hasn't had to deal with a crash and hopefully never will, but other CEOs in transport, infrastructure or hazardous industries have had to face this ultimate test.

Received wisdom is for the CEO to be speedily at the scene of an accident, to be the face of the organisation's response, to be sympathetic, reassuring and effective, and to be open and accountable. Sir Michael Bishop is still remembered well for turning up and taking direct responsibility for a British Midland plane crash on the M1 which killed 47 passengers in 1989. Both Virgin Rail's Branson and Network Rail's John Armitt got it right in their responses to the Grayrigg train crash in 2007.

But taking personal responsibility cuts both ways. Tony Hayward became the embodiment of everything BP got wrong in the Deep Water Horizon blow-out, the deaths of 11 men, and the

efforts to cap the well and halt the catastrophe. His high-profile but poor response cost him his job; the disaster cost BP billions of dollars; and the Gulf of Mexico is facing major environmental damage. And longer-term damage may have been done to BP's brand.

There is a difference in the cult of personality and celebrity engendered by fashion, image, the media and publishing, and the increasing personification of businesses and other brands in the form of their CEOs.

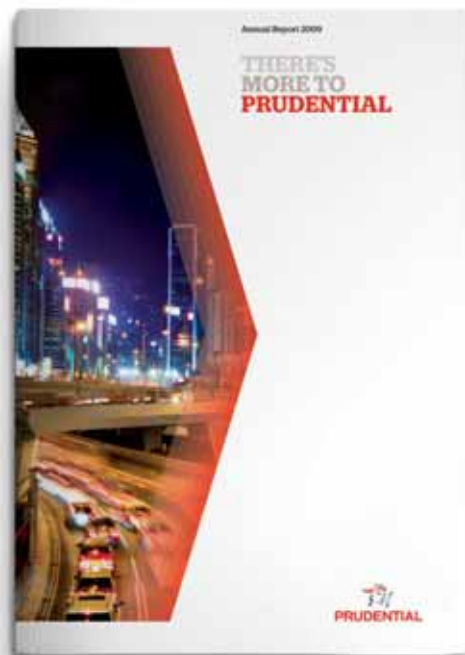
The media needs a spokesman, a talking head it can use to bring businesses and business stories to life. Investors and backers want to talk to the main man (or woman), the decision-maker who calls the shots, sets the strategy and runs the business. So the natural inclination for communicators, brand builders and the PRs is to put the CEO in front of the microphones.

But most modern FTSE CEOs are either accountants or ex-management consultants – MBAs, largely. (With one or two notable exceptions, they are men, and on average 50 years old.) They are bright and able, they have ticked the boxes of the corporate ladder.

They aren't dummies, but are they natural communicators, great brand ambassadors for often large, complex corporations? And in an era of short-termism, where the average tenure of a FTSE CEO is about four-and-a-half years, do they have the time to do more than personify and lead a short to medium-term strategy?

I believe the answer is no, and perhaps that is

Prudential annual report
designed by Further



as it should be. But it does present issues to those of us involved in designing and bringing corporate brands to life.

There are many examples of good CEO embodiments of brands and, in particular, of turnaround programmes, engaging staff and leading from the front. Short-term brand engagement, setting the tone and short- to medium-term targets. It fits the timescales and scope of most of their remits.

In the UK, there are some great examples from the famous Asda training ground of Archie Norman and Allan Leighton. All of them are focused on the customer, and every member of staff focused on the customer offer.

Take Justin King's leadership of Sainsbury's and his personification of the Making Sainsbury's Great Again programme. Some would say his smooth, articulate, friendly style ("Just call me Justin") was ideal for the brand. Look at the way he was deployed throughout Sainsbury's in online and offline communications.

But there are other models. Peter Marks is transforming and reinvigorating the UK's biggest mutual business, the Co-operative Group. You can point to the attractions of a mutual business in a post-banking crisis age where unregulated capitalism is seen as unacceptable, but the Co-operative Group is a large – some would say sprawling – set of businesses. It is the UK's fifth largest supermarket, third largest pharmacist, largest farmer and Europe's biggest funeral service. And that's

not to mention its financial services arm.

Marks is not your average FTSE CEO. At 60, he's ten years older than average. He is Yorkshire-born, a career Co-operative executive, blunt and terrier-like. But with a burning ambition to make his mark and prove the mutual model is right for the 21st century. The perfect fit. But beyond the PR profile pieces, he would never put himself before the brand.

Given the timescales, it is much more difficult to fit the leader to the brand when you are looking at long-term strategies, or are the CEO of a long-established company.

There are some fine examples of CEOs who have embodied their own longer-term strategic visions and come to represent the corporate brand. Some have been quiet successes – Sir Terry Leahy's steady, focused expansion of Tesco at home and abroad springs to mind.

But there have been as many horror stories. Look no further than the Royal Bank of Scotland under Sir Fred "The Shred" Goodwin. His first seven years as CEO (to 2007) saw the bank's assets quadruple in a sustained strategy of acquisition. By 2008, it was the fifth largest bank in the world by capitalisation. But unfettered power and ambition, culminating in the ill-fated ABN-Amro deal and the liquidity crisis of 2008, almost destroyed this 300-year-old institution.

Or perhaps look at a work in progress. Will the ex-McKinsey Tidjane Thiam's vision of a transformed, essentially Far Eastern, Prudential succeed? It is certainly a bold and far-sighted

strategy that continues Prudential's journey from staid UK insurance institution to 21st century international financial services powerhouse. Something Prudential has been communicating consistently in its "There's more to..." themed corporate communications for the last three years.

The strategy, brand positioning and design realisation was there before Thiam became high-profile CEO. It pre-dated the very public failure to buy AIG's Far Eastern business. And it should help Thiam transform the brand, even without AIG.

When charismatic, powerful CEOs run riot, the natural reaction is to review checks and balances. All the corporate governance trends of the past two decades have addressed these issues. Is the board big, bright, experienced and independent enough to question and validate a powerful CEO's strategy and delivery?

But history teaches us one thing. The more powerful the CEO, the more lauded in the media, the more identified with the corporate brand, then the more difficult it is for a chairman or board to exercise due governance.

Star CEOs can drive amazing growth and transformation, bringing corporate brands to investor and consumer life. But they can also be misguided. Getting the balance right, getting the visual and verbal tone of voice right, reflecting a true balance between the corporate and personal brand – this is part of every brief for today's corporate designer. ●



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GENUINE TRANSFORMATION MUST MEAN A THOROUGH AND DRAMATIC CHANGE IN CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Agencies' claims of 'transformational' brand design are often far from the truth, says **Andrew Welch**, executive director at Landor Associates

One of my biggest bugbears is how agencies talk so glibly about transformation. Any changed state in a brand's design is often hailed as transformational. It becomes a moot point whether that change is peripheral or central, whether the business improvement is immediate or eventual, and whether the impact is measured or not.

Transformation is defined in the dictionary as "a thorough or dramatic change in form or appearance or character". The purist in me believes this carries two simple imperatives:

1. If it is not "thorough", it probably won't have the power to transform.

In other words, if it's not well-informed, thoughtfully conceived and spectacularly executed, it may point to a changed state, but not necessarily to one that is perceptibly transformed. The sum of the parts may well remain inferior to the whole. And "thorough" should not necessarily be interpreted as scale. Small things, when thoroughly considered and executed, are capable of transformative impact. Think wheels on luggage or Google AdWords or possibly even Google Instant.

2. If it's not "dramatic", it probably won't have the power to transform.

A brand is unlikely to shift our behaviour or warrant extended consideration if it doesn't stop us in our tracks and force us to reconsider

old habits or excite us with new possibilities. And "dramatic" is as uncompromising as it is absolute – either it is or it isn't.

Dyson's ability to master a "thorough and dramatic change in form or appearance" is both uncompromising and remarkable. Transformation is at the heart of this brand. I was reminded of this when admiring what Dyson has done to the common desk fan.

There are many things about the Dyson Air Multiplier that qualify as transformational. First, the attempt to redefine the lexicon as "Air Multiplier" and not "fan" signals a mindset that is bent on breaking convention. You don't transform by name alone, but it's a "small big" point: think MP3 and then think iPod, or parcel delivery and then FedEx.

Second, the thoroughness. The technology accelerates air through a 1.3mm aperture over an airfoil-shaped ramp, so the surrounding air is drawn into the airflow. This effect makes the fan 15 times more efficient than a normal desk fan. There is no doubt that the most meticulous and exhaustive thinking has gone into its creation.

Dyson has reinvented the commonplace by doing away with blades that cause buffeting and noise, not to mention safety issues. And here's another masterstroke; the Air Multiplier's speed control is designed like a volume dimmer so you can set the air speed to suit you, unlike the preset speed notches of other fans. Can you imagine for one minute listening to your music on preset volume notches? So why

Shape shifting: China's Tangram hotel concept offers guests 'on and off' options in all aspects of their stay. Below: The Dyson Air Multiplier qualifies as a truly transformational brand



should a fan's airflow be any different?

Third, it is a thing of exquisite design and beauty that takes central place in your home or office and instantly relegates traditional fans to the dustbin. What was once a utilitarian commodity has become elegant, beautiful and special.

And the impact? This summer, The Telegraph reported that Air Multiplier supplies had run out at the company's warehouse and Dyson had to double volumes at its Malaysian factory. Further, more than one-third of the thousands of fans sold by John Lewis in June 2010 were Dyson Air Multiplier models. Marks & Spencer said its sales had jumped fourfold. And all this despite it being more than ten times the price of an average desk fan. Now that's transformational.

Tangram is another example of outstanding transformation. The business traveller in China has a polarised choice when it comes to hotel accommodation: prohibitively expensive five-star hotels or downright depressing two-stars. Tangram's story is compelling for its ability to fill the three-star market gap, but even more so for the insight that transforms the guest experience.

Landor discovered that what business travellers in China value most in their hotel stay is modularity – between leisure and work, living at speed and taking time, staying connected and disconnecting altogether. The name Tangram is a Chinese geometric puzzle whose modular and multiple configurations have stimulated and challenged the most brilliant of minds.

The guest's entire hotel experience has been thoroughly reconceived, from booking through to check-out. Everything is governed by the idea of being "on and off". So the check-in offers fully automated fast-track options or, in the same lobby, guests can instead choose a personalised greeting and relaxed registration process.

Each room can be configured to suit personal needs, despite measuring just 20 square metres. Guests can choose to transform it into a relaxing, plush environment or, through its inspired furniture design and space management, a fully functioning office. The bed-desk is a masterstroke in dramatic adaptability. Intended as the hotel's signature element, this bespoke piece of furniture was designed and manufactured uniquely for Tangram.

Then there's Shop, the hotel boutique that

rents out Xboxes, iPods and laptops to guests. It also sells many of the hotel's unique interior furnishings, shipping them to guests' homes at no extra cost.

Everything about Tangram has been designed to transform the business traveller's hotel experience forever. The first hotel opens in Beijing in early 2011 and construction is under way for 20 more hotels to be rolled out in China over the next five years.

Both the Air Multiplier and Tangram point to a desire to re-imagine how things could be, not just to tinker with how things already are. Transforming an experience by giving people something they didn't even know they wanted is no small order, and being "thorough" and "dramatic" are key. So, too, is the courage of agencies and brand owners to defy convention and create the opportunity to stand out from the crowd, or better still, to lead it. ●



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APPEARING EFFORTLESS CALLS FOR A LOT OF HARD WORK ON THE ESSENTIAL QUALITIES OF A BRAND

Brands can be seen to be trying too hard, while the understated approach is often the real secret of success, says **Lisa Tse**, creative founder of Lisa Tse Ltd

Creativity can often lead us in a direction that provokes change. As such, we can be determined to showcase evolution, progression and dramatic new perspectives at the risk of compromising the very essence that can allow a brand to excel. There was a time when making a big noise and stating the obvious were the critical components of communication. But putting a large amount of effort into achieving a certain image can get to the point where it appears contrived. Brands can be seen to be trying too hard.

Bearing in mind that empty vessels make the most noise, there is value to be gained from an intelligent and understated approach. Creative intelligence should be harnessed and applied to any strategic brand communication in a highly focused way that produces seemingly effortless results. But it can take a lot of effort to make things look easy. A return to the purist view of outlining a clear proposition of the brand, and nothing more, provides an undiluted platform from which to present a clear vision. It is important to continually reflect and evaluate the needs and goals of a brand strategy, which need to be carefully aligned with a long-term view if they are to deliver consistently.

This process can also identify opportunities for product development whereby you are not just aiming to be a market leader, but a market creator.

Recent trends have shown a return to values

and vision. Combined with a strong message to create affinity with their audience, brands are elevating what they really stand for. Promises have been made around sustainability, added value and giving something back to the world. Having a vision isn't just reserved for those saving the planet, but extends to all brands striving to mark out their territory as being outstandingly brilliant at what they do.

Be the real thing

The understated approach is possibly more significant in the luxury goods sector, having emerged from a difficult year combating the perceived frivolity associated with excess and indulgence. A new luxury brand, which launched this year, was so discreet that even its client base only heard about it through the grapevine. ONE Authentic Properties is one of the world's most exclusive private portfolios of luxury rental properties. It has a range of hand-picked villas and chalets in France, including St Tropez and Cap Ferrat, where high-net-worth individuals can select from 13 properties with a portfolio value of about €250m.

What is distinctive about ONE is that a single collector privately owns the portfolio – a successful British entrepreneur whose dedication lies in collecting individual sites and passionately developing each property into a unique, crafted work of art that is understated and pure. There are no signs of gold taps or fur-lined cabinets – just pure craftsmanship.

It was critical in the company's approach that the ONE brand embodied the authentic values of the properties. There was a complete absence of flashy accessories and, instead, a reserved abundance of quality, details and effortless value.

Establishing connection

The understated approach is not restricted to the luxury market. Much can be said of applying discretion, subtlety and meaning to a wider market. Integrity and humility are not words you would often associate with the language of business and brands.

The Sorority, a newly launched members' club for inspiring professional women, presents an alternative vision of women and work. Passion and integrity form the backbone of the brand's essence, which seeks to inspire and empower women around the world. The club launched in June with a warm message that resonated with women. The vision behind the brand represents the very best of modern-day women and has the support of inspiring founding members, including BBC presenter Katie Derham, Bend It Like Beckham director Gurinder Chadha, shoe designer Beatrix Ong and celebrity chef Ching-He Huang.

This approach has had an overwhelming response from women, capturing the trust and inspiration generated by the vision The Sorority brand represents. Applications for membership were not only received in droves, but each



Founding members of The Sorority, a members' club for inspiring professional women, include BBC presenter Katie Derham (left) and celebrity chef Ching-He Huang (below)



It can be viewed as a paradoxical balance to achieve the effortless brand. To be seen to be trying too hard has never been cool, yet it takes hard work to make anything look effortless

applicant volunteered revealing details about their personal lives and aspirations, despite not being requested. The vision had inspired women to connect with the club in an unguarded manner. Along with the applications, the club has received personal letters from women who have been inspired to change, have been empowered, or who wanted to drop what they were doing just to get involved. The power of this connection is a result of the understated and sincere approach The Sorority adopted to communicate with its audience. Addressing an

audience with sincerity cultivates trust.

When you speak softly, people listen harder. As the consumer landscape continues to evolve, it is brand substance that will stand the test of time. It can be viewed as something of a paradoxical balance to achieve the effortless brand. To be seen to be trying too hard has never been cool, and yet it takes hard work to make anything look effortless. The key lies in the focused approach of knowing precisely where to apply the effort. You will know you have got it right when it looks easy. ●

THE EFFORTLESS GUIDELINES
Is your brand working too hard?

Efficiency

Harness simple brand physics for the ratio of work done to the effort put in and make your investments work for you. Verbosity is redundant. Be clear on what the message is and engineer a strategy that leverages your core.

Authenticity

Be genuine. The message becomes effortless.

Values

Be clear on what you stand for and enforce those values (and show that you do).

Purify

Strip away the unnecessary and retain what is essential. What then remains is pure.



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JOINED-UP COMMUNICATIONS FROM A SPECIALIST AGENCY IS THE BEST WAY TO ACHIEVE COMPELLING RESULTS

An integrated communications strategy is vital to the successful delivery of any campaign, says **Duncan Shaw**, group creative director at Living Group

Design on its own is a powerful agent for change, especially when delivered by a specialist consultancy – whether specialising in a delivery expertise or a market sector – but, when combined with 360-degree thinking, the sum of the parts is far greater than the whole.

Can you imagine a world where you don't need to make sure that, within your group of communications consultants, agency A is talking to agency B, or where agency C is busy undermining the efforts of agency D, while all are battling for their share of the budget? Even better, imagine a world where the burden of consistency across all communications does not fall on your shoulders and a world where you can be confident that your marketing strategy will help achieve or exceed the business's corporate objectives and targets.

With the technology sector evolving ever more rapidly, perhaps one day we will all be relying on satellites to develop and deliver our joined-up communications strategies. After all, they are already capable of communicating across multiple platforms, conducting research studies, monitoring situations, acting as navigators, defining positioning and reporting back to you. Back in the real world, all this is possible, albeit through current communications techniques, typically most effectively created and executed by agencies that have the capability of delivering integrated campaigns across multiple platforms and channels.

There is also a strong case to be made for sector specialism. Clients are recognising the value of working with an agency that has a genuine understanding of their business and their marketplace. You could liken it to the decision to buying a new suit. Do you opt for an off-the-peg solution from a supermarket chain or a hand-made, bespoke, version from Savile Row? For most, there is only one choice – a specialist provider with an award-winning reputation, that is passionate and creative across all areas of execution and guarantees long-term satisfaction.

This is particularly relevant for sectors that are multifaceted and require specialist knowledge. Demonstrating their intrinsic understanding of your business's aims and objectives and the sector in which you operate from the very outset is key to whether the campaign they develop will succeed or fail.

Added value

Today, the role of an effective communications agency has changed beyond all measure. Clients expect a much more in-depth understanding of their business and their sector. Ask yourself this: could you walk into your current agency and say: "From now on, we will listen to everything you say and won't make any decisions about the business without consulting you first. We want you to determine our positioning and elevator pitch and help us put the proof points behind our key messages

Living Group's global integrated communications campaign supporting Ernst & Young's report Opportunities in Adversity achieved award-winning results



Ensuring projects run smoothly, budgets stretch further, schedules run to time and results deliver tangible business benefits are the basic levels of service a client should expect from its agency

and business pillars." It is quite possible that the organisation you are working for may not have this exacting need, but what is important is that your agency is capable of delivering it.

Ensuring projects run smoothly, budgets stretch further, schedules run to time and results deliver tangible business benefits are the basic levels of service a client should expect from its agency. Easily said, but easily achieved? Well, yes – when you have teams that plan and meet regularly and understand every minute detail of a project, including: aims and objectives, how the campaign fits together, efficient resolution of unforeseen challenges, guaranteed consistency of messaging, and seamless execution and delivery.

However good a campaign has the potential to be, one of the factors most critical to its success is employee engagement and buy-in. Investing and diarising time with your staff when planning a launch (however big or small) must not be overlooked. It is easy to forget that, unlike the marketing team and a few others, most of your colleagues have not been living

and breathing every element of the campaign development. Don't fall into the trap of sending a company-wide email and assume it will suffice. Invest time in hosting training courses, web chats and team meetings if you want your campaigns to be embraced by the majority.

Evaluating your investment

The most important part of the communications process is determining the success of a campaign. This should be an integral part of your campaign planning if you are going to achieve maximum impact. As a specialist in joined-up communications for the financial services sector, Living Group has worked with many clients to deliver award-winning integrated campaigns. A recent example of this is Ernst & Young, which provides an exemplary case study showcasing the results an integrated approach delivers.

Our challenge was to support the launch of Ernst & Young's research-based report Opportunities in Adversity, addressing an economy in deep recession and providing

insights from major global companies. The report was launched via internal and external campaigns across EMEA, supported by critical touchpoints encompassing both off- and online media. Here are just five of the achievements the campaign delivered on a global scale:

- 84% more speculative client meetings than predicted (33,135 were made).
- 252% more actual projects won than predicted.
- Revenue exceeded by 300%.
- Design investment recouped after two weeks.
- Chairman's Award winner, 2009 CIM Marketing Excellence Awards.

Andrew Shaylor, global marketing and communications director at Ernst & Young, says: "If you want to achieve your place at the table, delivering revenue is the only way to attain it. Our campaign Opportunities in Adversity exceeded all expectations and is testament to what a joined-up communications can really deliver for your business and has secured our place at the table for the long term."

So what could joined-up communications mean to you? Well, the proven results for this approach speak for themselves, but in short, the benefits of briefing a single consultancy to deliver communication solutions across design, digital, PR and reporting are compelling, not least because it guarantees delivery of a first-class campaign, executed with controlled precision by an agency that has results at the heart of everything it does. ●



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iFAD OR NEW ERA? HOW CAN ELECTRONIC PUBLICATIONS MEET YOUR BRAND'S NEEDS?

Truly cross-platform electronic publications are set to write a new chapter in communications media development, says **Simon Goodall**, partner at OPX

John F Kennedy once wrote: "The one unchangeable certainty is that nothing is unchangeable or certain." That is certainly true of communications, where technology brings massive shifts in behaviour at an ever-increasing pace.

The one area that really hasn't changed much over the past 50 years is magazine and newspaper publishing, where print has remained king despite the development of various online versions of print titles.

That was until the arrival of Apple's iPad in May this year. Suddenly there is a new, potentially mass-market format for editorial communications, and that is something that will affect thinking not just for publishers, but a much wider corporate communications audience, too.

For the publishing industry, the emergence of tablets like the iPad is too big an opportunity to ignore. Against a background of steadily declining print sales, the prospect of a new generation of readers subscribing to an online service has huge potential upsides.

No print, distribution or vendor costs, and the opportunity to deliver a richer user experience makes iPad titles a must for the publishing sector, particularly if ownership of these devices reaches anywhere near the uptake of iPhones and smartphones (which is estimated at 12.8 million in the UK as of August 2010).

Take The Times Online, the first mainstream

British broadsheet to launch a subscription for its online service. The new site actively encourages interaction between the user and the writer, offering a host of features to make reading online a more enjoyable and engaging experience.

Although time will tell whether it becomes a sustainable business model, the potential benefits are so great that it seems a well-judged move that may steal a march on other newspaper rivals.

More for less

Many corporate organisations also produce editorial publications for both internal and external audiences. These can range in scale from the ubiquitous newsletter to more substantial quarterly magazines and journals that seek to position businesses as thought-leading in their respective fields.

For these corporate communications publishers, the benefits of going digital are huge. For one, it can be far more cost-effective, with substantial savings on print and distribution costs. It also has obvious environmental benefits that can enhance a company's wider CSR credentials.

Not only that, but the speed at which digital communications can be put together provides almost real-time information, insight and analysis. But apart from the production advantages, it also gives the reader a far richer experience.

Solving the pioneer's problem

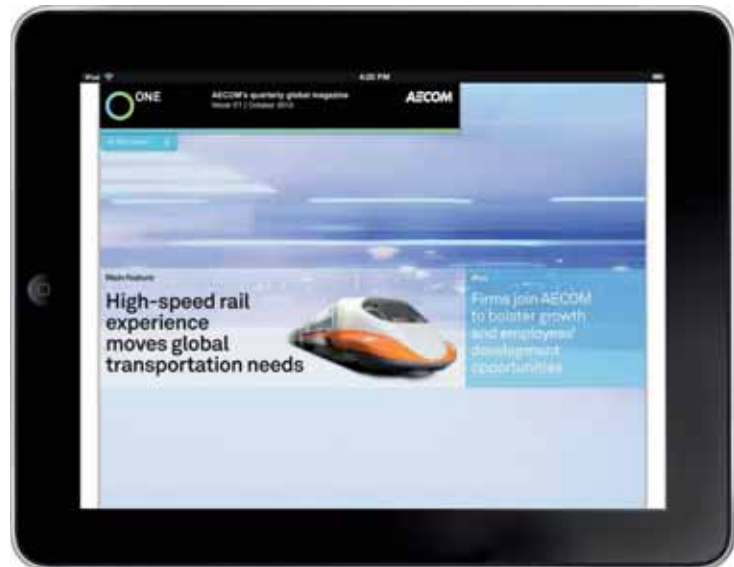
The launch of advanced technology such as the smartphone, iPhone 4 and the iPad offers great opportunities but, with current ownership of tablets in particular still quite low, there is a danger that many communicators and marketers could overlook them completely as a potential way to reach their audience.

Creating something really exciting for an iPad that will impress the chief executive is nice to do but hard to justify when upwards of 95% of your audience is currently going to want any digital communication to be delivered to their desktop PC. It's great to be a pioneer, but most companies will want to take the majority of their stakeholders with them, not focus on a few early adopters.

The solution to this dilemma lies in creating something that is cross-platform – capable of delivering a new and engaging experience whether viewed on a PC, an iPad or a smartphone. The challenge of achieving this is something we have been looking at with one of our clients, AECOM, which provides global professional, technical and management support services.

AECOM found that distributing a printed magazine to internal and external stakeholders was challenging and costly – economically, environmentally and logistically. That is why the firm approached us to create a global electronic magazine that would replace previous printed versions.

Design-wise, the project has given us the opportunity to combine traditional print elements with a strong web sensibility to produce something that is an effective hybrid of both



OPX was approached by AECOM to create a global electronic magazine that can be viewed on a PC, an iPad or a smartphone

Something richer

The backbone of this new publication remains well-crafted words and strong images, but the new digital format also provides a more immersive, richer experience. This allows the reader to break free from the traditional linear pattern of print, with moving imagery, sound, video and podcasts all an essential part of the content mix. It also means providing additional information and links with every article, which the reader can access with a click of their mouse or a swipe of their tablet or smartphone.

The medium is the message

Deciding to create an e-magazine that spans digital formats works well for a business that wishes to position itself as both pioneering and leading-edge. What is more, it gives the company the opportunity to reach a new and wider audience by encouraging staff and clients to forward any elements that they think will be of interest to others.

Design-wise, the project has given us the opportunity to combine traditional print elements with a strong web sensibility to produce something that is an effective hybrid of both. Other iPad publications we have seen, such as the recently launched Sports Illustrated app, mirror a print approach much more strongly and will not work effectively on a normal desktop. That is clearly very limiting, particularly when desktop users currently form the large majority of any readership.



It is also strange from a design perspective. Why deliver a new form of communication that so closely echoes the look of an older medium and has such limitations in terms of usability? It's a bit like those early cars that looked like horse-

drawn carriages. In the end, a new, functionally driven aesthetic will surely prevail.

All told, the AECOM publication seems to us like the start of an exciting new chapter of communications, with vast possibilities. ●



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ETHNOGRAPHY'S IMPORTANCE TO BUSINESS: CONNECTING WITH CONSUMERS' NEEDS

Ethnographic research needs good observation, analysis and interpretation, says **Paula Zuccotti**, associate director and head of research, Seymourpowell

The key to unlocking ethnographic research relies on an intersection beyond just good observation and analysis. How many times have you heard companies wax lyrical about the wonders of ethnographic research but appear frustrated about the end results?

"We spent time with consumers; it was amazing, but we're still not sure what we've learned..." This is what I normally hear from organisations when discussing their experiences with the methodology. Ethnography has become one of those words like "innovation"; companies must have it on their roster, but the majority still wonder how they are supposed to use it.

Ethnography's ethos is spending time with consumers in their real environments, observing their interaction with quotidian objects and activities in order to make sense of the wider context of their everyday lives. It is about pure observation with minimal intervention and honest performance rather than task analysis. This is why ethnography has been more successful than traditional marketing techniques in informing and inspiring the design process.

Ethnographic research has become a necessity in the field of product, packaging, interaction, brand and service design for several reasons. First, it supports the need for approaching problems and briefs in a holistic and sophisticated way. As designers, we find

ourselves working in more complex environments, where no product lives in isolation and a greater ecosystem needs to be taken into consideration. Second, ethnography also enables global organisations to reach out to consumers at a personal and local level.

Although user empathy and observation have always been inherent in the design discipline – we can find examples of it in products more than 100 years old – the commercial, formalised use of ethnography within our industry dates back just 15 years. What started as a niche process within the bluechip companies of Palo Alto in San Francisco has now become mainstream.

The good thing about this is that we are now able to quote brilliant case studies; the bad thing is that everyone thinks they can do it, running the risk of losing best practices and blurring the main ethos of the process. As a result, we need to rethink what we actually do and push our discipline a step higher, including not only quality observation and excellent analysis, but also good interpretation.

1. GOOD OBSERVATION

The first step towards successful ethnography is to re-engage with best practices and to remember this is not about having "been there, bought the T-shirt" but about good observation – knowing what and how to observe by learning to look and think in a different way:

- Actions before words

This is the fundamental differentiator from other research techniques: observation rather than enquiry, learning how people actually do something rather than their verbalised memories of how they think they do it.

- Learn from users' talents and ways, not from what they do right or wrong
The first mistake is to presume "we" are cleverer than "them". The second mistake is to presume they are wrong. We should actually be asking ourselves: what are they doing and, more importantly, why are they doing it?

As part of a research project with a major consumer electronics client, we were asked why users were not engaging with the business applications on its devices, for example calendars and reminders. Instead of reporting on the failures of the applications, we turned the problem on its head and drew inspiration from the dialogue and interactions between the users and their personal assistants.

- Look for subversion
Watch out for things that are done differently and think of them in terms of shortcuts, work-arounds, and alternative solutions. Then think about your clients' briefs and how that subversion may work within their current portfolios. Ten years ago, we discovered that one user was playing CDs on her DVD player: what we then referred to as "the death of the hi-fi". That simple example of subversion unlocked the user's take on device convergence in contrast to the manufacturer's.



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SITTING UNCOMFORTABLY? IT'S TIME TO LEARN HOW TO CONNECT WITH GENERATION Y

Brands need to tune into the attitudes and demands of today's tech-savvy Millennial generation, says **Nick Howe**, managing director at Uniform

At the tail-end of the last millennium, a couple of friends and I decided that we wanted to create a design consultancy that transcended distinctions between marketing, design and advertising disciplines. In our eyes, what mattered was simply great communication. We set out to make that communication as rich, interesting and relevant as possible. Our aim was to create stories for our clients that brought their brands to life.

Over a decade later, stories are still at the heart of what we do at Uniform, although the social context in which they are now told is radically different and continues to evolve at an incredible pace. This shift in the methods, means and frequency of communication between brand and consumer is redefining the stories that need to be told to excite people, and, more importantly, to drive conversations between consumers. For many marketers, this presents an uncomfortable transition from a traditional advertising model to something that feels more vague and undefined and therefore uncomfortable – but that's a good thing.

The revolutionaries causing this shift are opinionated, values-driven and digitally native – the so-called Millennials or Generation Y. Born in the Eighties and Nineties, they are the youth of the developed world. With an average age of 20, they've grown up with Google in a period of unfettered growth, opportunity and transparency, and until recently pretty much

everything has gone their way. As a result they've got strong opinions about products, brands, the world and pretty much everything else in between. This manifests itself as a healthy cynicism, and distrust of what the media, and in particular brands, tell them. With trusted brands like BP exposed for adjusting digital images to make them look busier in the wake of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, and some high-street fashion retailers criticised for struggling to manage an ethical supply chain, who can blame them?

Build relationships

If their cynicism isn't enough to make them brand-wary, then a lack of cash probably is. One-fifth of them are now NEETs – not in employment, education or training – while one in every seven graduates can expect to be unemployed on leaving university, which suggests they're going to be very careful with their pennies. Although the economic doom and gloom doesn't mean they'll stop shopping, brand owners need to work harder than ever to build relationships, and in turn loyalty, with consumers.

Talking at them doesn't work, so just telling them stories has limited effect. They expect to co-write or co-create the narrative, and brands are expected to listen and respond. To drive brand loyalty among Generation Y, brand owners need to understand better how to initiate and support the dialogue and conversations between brand and consumer.

Brand Behaviour Model
Our principles for creating successful consumer engagement



Oil Productions' interactive film Keeping Keeley for Lynx Twist is a great example of how brands can create engaging, shareable content that the Generation Y audience will absorb, endorse and share. Keeping Keeley gives the viewer control over the fate of the lead character as he tries to keep Keeley interested in him. And the results speak for themselves, with more than 500,000 unique visits across YouTube, Facebook and Xbox, and more than 500,000 Xbox Live downloads, with 86% watching the entire experience to the end.

Brand owners need to navigate the vagaries

Oil Productions' interactive film Keeping Keeley, for Lynx Twist



Uniform's Sunsilk film for Unilever



of how to influence and be part of the conversations that consumers have between themselves. Recent research has highlighted how context affects purchasing decisions, with positive recommendations from people online increasing the probability of a sale. If the products on offer have little to distinguish them, the social context becomes key. Increasingly, the opinions and recommendations of our friends and family are replacing advertising schmalz, providing a shortcut to navigate the often-overwhelming choice on offer.

A Facebook or Twitter comment can shift a consumer's perception of a product at internet speed. Coupled with the rise of smartphones, this creates a scenario whereby consumers are connected and talking to each other all of the time. To counter that immediacy, brand owners need to recognise how consumers talk to each other and become part of the stories they share.

We employ user-centric design methods to enable our clients to better understand the themes that underpin those conversations. Once established, we help them to engage and involve their consumers, supporting their efforts to build shared narratives and, in so doing, sensitively establishing brand ambassadors and foot soldiers. In developing these themes, we believe we have created a model for brand behaviour that will drive consumer engagement, and, ultimately, brand loyalty.

First, brand owners need to identify and align with a relevant and current topic around which

To drive brand loyalty among Generation Y, brand owners need to better understand how to initiate and support the dialogue and conversations between brand and consumer

the brand can develop a conversation thread. Second, equal focus should be given to the stories the brand tells and the conversations those stories create. The story must not only evolve, but also give the consumer a sense of participation in, and influence over, the brand. Last, it must be authentic and synergistic – from the issue and the brand values, right through to the story itself – in its behaviour and the way it communicates.

The four principles of our model are:

- Identify and align with a relevant topic
- Create a story and enable conversations around it
- Allow the story to evolve over time, and allow the consumer to influence its evolution
- Make it authentic and synergistic

While connecting with Millennials may be uncomfortable for some, designers are ideally placed to help brands uncover and articulate their stories in a way that invites their audience to engage with them, and ultimately build that much-desired brand loyalty. We've been doing

it for years for a wide variety of brands, from the Crafts Council to Unilever.

Brands are like stories – they take time to write, time to tell and need time to be enjoyed. They unfold and develop over time, creating a unique dialogue with each consumer – all vital elements in brand behaviour today and into the future.

As part of our ongoing research, we're testing out the principles that we believe make stories more likely to be shared and create an ongoing conversation with the consumer. We've embarked on a year-long project working with 250 20-year-olds from across the UK to define a clear picture of how to better understand them and enable our clients to connect with them. Along the way, we'll be developing new research methods to identify the kind of stories that Millennials enjoy sharing, and we'll be sure to share our findings over the next few months in a relevant, collaborative and authentic way. If you want to know more, get in touch and we'll make sure you're sitting comfortably again. ●

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