

Major assignment 3

Research Report

Strategy & Management in Design

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Introduction

My chosen profession? Accident or fate? If the decision were left on its own merits I would have found myself to be an aircraft engineer and an artist come designer in my spare time. To pursue a career in design was not fate nor was it preordained, it was a calculated step taken on the realisation that one didn't need to lock oneself into a single system to achieve goals and ambitions, but that knowing and being better at a skill, trade or corporate with persistence would allow steps closer to a given goal, then branch out to other said ambitions if one kept abreast of opportunities and an open mind.

Money drives most things in society, but media even more so. On the realisation of this I persisted with the career path of graphic design and communications in a strategic manner. I started my employment at a young age, when people of my age were in their first year of university undertaking a bachelors degree, I had through persistence and a bit of hard work got myself into the industry working with like minded people and corporate clients which one would complete work for as a junior graduate after a two to three year period after completing their degree.

Suddenly my eyes were opened to how a small and efficient team of people could out put the requirements of large corporations through effective management of time and resources.

Through this I was introduced to the world of being a 'master of media', or to have the skill of having many skills, from design, through to broadcast, animation, directing and the new emerging internet and its new technology. From this experience I was pushed to learn time and people management and to delegate work and requirements to a group under my supervision to take a project from brief to completion and delivery.

Systems of file management and clients as well as being actively involved in the open book management of the small company introduced me to the business side of the company as well. I was taught how to curb and manage my creative urges as a result of the exposure to the business end of things as we all know that at a young age and full of energy we are all too eager to impress our leaders and employers with our creative skill, yet somehow I was saved from this and taught how to operate in a frugal manner.

Team work and management was emphasised as crucial elements of business as having a small team to out put the volume of work and many different projects simultaneously required very few errors within tight deadlines of delivery. Having moved from this employee to a printing and publishing environment I was once again in the same situation with having a small team of senior professionals outputting huge volumes of work in a relatively short time span and having the work environment working like clockwork.

From exposure of clients meetings and liaisons I witnessed first hand how strategies were enacted and executed to win new clients and jobs. I witnessed first hand how teams were created to fulfil the requirements from a small pool of staff and resources as all members of the staff were encouraged to better and gain more skills to their arsenal so as they could be detracted from any given project and placed as a fill in staff in another ongoing project should deadlines change and or more emphasis were needed.

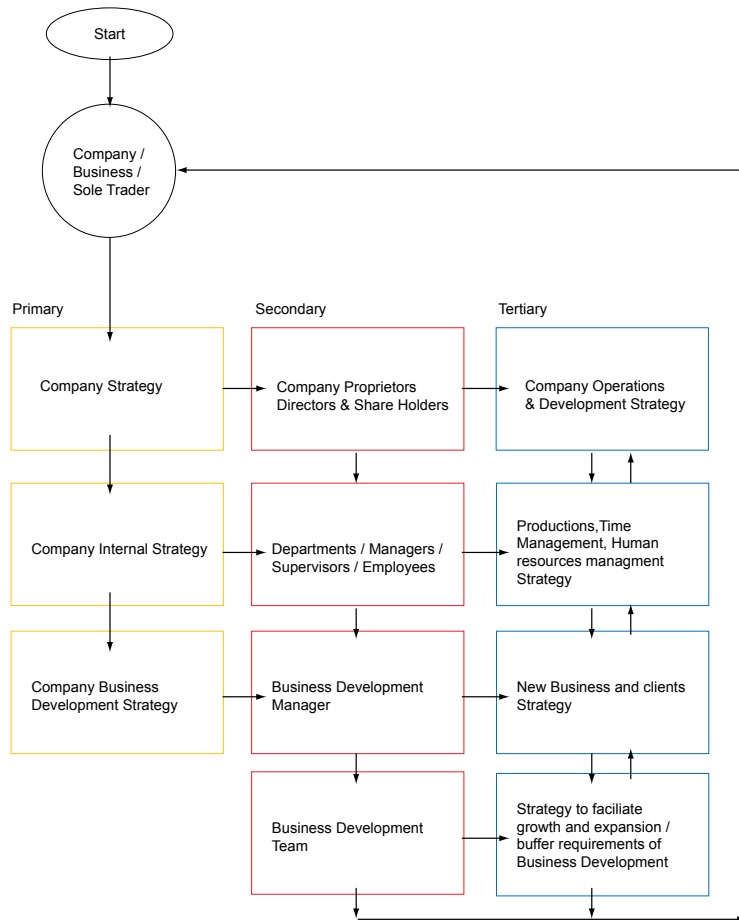
The team was a group and we worked more as a family, where employees feelings were considered and a helping hand was there to solve problems outside of the company while being inside. People were always motivated to come to work and partake in the environment which was created. All employees were open minded and open to criticize openly so as there were no animosity within members that would detract from the task and the company at hand.

From these companies I ventured out into freelance and some instances of trying to be employed, yet what I discovered as common practice at certain companies opened my eyes further at how hierarchy systems within management often hinder the progress of establishing any form of a strategy in a small and large business which utilises graphic design and communications amongst other resources.

Hierarchy of Strategies

We will use the term hierarchy of strategies to define that a business or individual relies on a levels or hierarchies of strategic planning in order to operate a business, design and generate new means of business. Although each industry may differ in their acumen the underlying primary strategy structure may apply broadly to most.

Hierarchy of Strategies



Treating your Business as an Entity

One of the first rules of business we learned was to treat your business as a separate entity even though it may be a business or sole trader operation. By doing so you detach yourself from the business and in turn this helps you to maintain a level sense of management by curbing your personal emotions with your business and clients.

Even though in the instance of a sole operator roles may be assigned to each section of the hierarchy which may be played out by the proprietor, broken up and time allocated for each section to delegated to external resources such as book keeping and accounting. The problem of managing time and employees is a less burdened task, yet must still be managed by the trader and service provider as a crucial part of the overall business strategy.

Ethics and Moral rights of Strategy

Moral issues and human emotions are a crucial factor in a companies strategy. Managing human resources is a balancing act as is managing clients. 'It's not personal, it's only business' a famous quote from the movie The God Father III is quote that should not apply to business, after all every business deals with clients on a personal level yes ?

This was quoted in the book written by Peter Sheahan , Flip, I had the pleasure to find this book while trawling through paper in the recycling department of Visy Board on some ' hands on ' work a couple of summers ago. This book reads like great novel but written and specifically aimed at managers and business owners come to the age of new trends in business practice. The writer consults national and international blue chip clients on exactly the same issue as being discussed in this writing, strategy and how to be at the fore front of it. Business is personal according to Peter Sheahan describes hoe business trends have gone the full circle and "whats old is new again", meaning business has become a personal event.

The old ' who you know not what you know ' , takes second precedence in Flip, trust is a key factor in new business relationships as well as ' unlearning practices which are losing relevance ' . Clients would like to know that there is mutual respect for them working with you rather than just the financial additive.

Mutual trust and respect are born of ethics which are written and form the back bone of strategy in any business.

However it is up to the merits of the company employees which go to uphold these codes of ethics and principals, both at an internal level and those associated with working with clients. Note we use the word, ' working ' rather than ' dealing ' . Such is the new standards of client communications and ethical strategy.

Ego's, Productivity & Dinosaur Management

Managing human resources filters down from management levels. Often a manager or in the instance of Graphic design, an Art Director is appointed who has had relevant experience in their industry and maintains an active interest in their field for future procurement. This would be in an ideal situation, in my brief and period of serving as an employee I have found that this is seldom the case. Often managers are appointed to their status from ' climbing the corporate ladder ' and are so far dislocated from what they are to manage that an anything goes once approach is taken. I'll coin the term ' dinosaur management ' . I came up with this term while studying corporate business and the term ' dinosaur ' goes to managers and owners of business who rule over their company with an iron fist approach, discipline is down to a point where one would get fired on the spot for a minor out step.

Some things have changed ever so slightly yet a lot of things have remained the same. I have found that often a manager seeks to educate themselves from younger employees as they do not possess the need or want to learn and keep at the forefront of their job. As Cameron Foote puts it, the seven motivational factors are seldom practiced either as the management do not know of the methods or they are reluctant to act them out for fear of the unknown effects due to their text book methods of dinosaur management.

Rather, managers pit ego's of their staff to accelerate or boost productivity rather than applying any motivational buffers. In fact from my personal experience I have seldom found that the majority of work places practice any forms of strategies as mentioned in ' emphasize teamwork ' extract.

Control & Prosperity

“ You don’t own your brand, you don’t own your customers and you don’t own your staff. These days you have less control and influence over them than ever before. If you are smart you will flip this negative into a positive and use it as a catalyst to tell a better story, add more value and to become an awesome place to work. This is the only way you will get significant control and even then it won’t really be control, just influence.”

The above extract is from the opening paragraph of Peter Sheahan’s Flip book, with the chapter entitled, ‘To Get Control, Give it up’. This chapter discusses the issue of ‘dinosaur management’ as discussed previously, it says how companies like to hold on to the power they have created on a primary level while the same apply to management who refuse to embrace change and let go of business models which were proven to be successful yet in the contemporary find that these same practices are suffocating their work and company.

With Foote’s seven motivational factors, this extract is also aimed at secondary management level :

- *Stop resisting* and learn to embrace the changes that are forced upon your business model and distribution networks.
- *Connect and interact* with your customers, not just so you can build valuable relationships with them, but so you can access their expertise for better product development and profit from the interaction too.
- *Let go* of your desire to control the research and development process and tap into the pockets of individual brilliance that can be found when you open your door to a wider community.
- *Resist the urge to own and hold onto everything*. Explore new business models where money can be made in relationship with suppliers and even competitors that your organisation cannot or will not exploit in isolation.
- *Empower* your staff to do their job.

We can see from the combination of the above and the writings of Foote, that a synergy has to be developed for a new type of strategy in business. An example of a company which follows these notes would be Apple computers, they embraced change by being one of the first corporate computer companies to market and ride the wave of the MP3 music revolution, they connected with customers in this way and allowed their research and development team creative freedom to make the next big thing. Even though they design a lot of devices they do not thrust full emphasis on one product, meaning not holding on to everything and they empower their staff to do their job by allowing a relaxed atmosphere to congregate creativity in all its multiple facets.

In the instance of a designer or design studio this would be akin to keeping a visual process diary or a ‘scrap book of ideas’, where employees would be granted time per week to exercise their creativity and record this in their ‘scrap books’, by doing this the studio and management have allowed their employees freedom of expression, they have let go, they will not be holding on to the creative recorded in the employees’ diaries and management and employee are connected and are interacting on the internal secondary level, empowering staff to do their job, which is building synergy in the working environment all towards prosperity.

By carrying out a control system such as this we are using Foote’s seven motivational factors with new methods of staff, client and development environment interaction. Companies such as 3M for instance have time allocated for staff members in their research and development department for just such creative endeavours, some of the companies’ greatest selling products have been a result of this. Simply, ideas cannot be ‘juiced’ from employees under pressure to perform, secondary management must give up some control and the ‘dinosaur management’ principals for innovation to take place and to cultivate and harvest talent.

This is one example of winning while losing.

Client Relationships Strategy & Value for Money

"Getting what you need is so yesterday. Today is getting what you want and too much is never enough".

Peter Sheahan sums up strategy for clients in this one sentence. With the design market proliferated with designers clients have more avenues to choose for their needs. Sometimes its a case of cheap service disguised as value for money which sees the client actually spend a premium of getting the job done right when they were in fact looking to spend as least as possible. In the chapter Fast, Good, Cheap - Pick 3, in his book, Flip, the points of creating a mutual beneficial business and personal relationship in a strategic manner is discussed. Peter touches on the subjects of economic changes, how the perception of clients and business have changed as a result of these changes.

This is one factor which is always overlooked by studios and sole trade designers as strategic point to expose when giving the selling speech to prospective clients. Remember that we would like the client to think that they are ' working with us ' and that they are part of our family as we have become a part of theirs.

Due to numerous competition and the fast paced nature of the design business, competitive advantages today can simply become necessities in business. According to Peter, " faster, better, cheaper, or yesterday's great is today's good and tomorrow's unacceptable ". Clients want more as they do not understand our business of creative , rather they go by what they have told, or exposed to in the market as the norm.

I have taken a stance to show the clients just what is is that a graphic designer does, and the answer came to me simply in layman terms , " we make you look good ".

This is a great way to start a relationship with a client, as the information given is easily understood and has enough of a comedic angle to start up a conversation come selling opener. How does a designer make one look good, for we do not do hair dressing, we do not tailor suits , how ? Simple we create and build your image for your business to make you, the client look good to your potential clients. Its an image driven , vain world and we as designers are your first step in attaining an outfit and image to win new business, in fact we are more important then the hair dressers and tailors due to how business is generated, a projected image on the internet is now the face of your company, so when a client is talking to you on the phone and viewing your web site, they have already created an image of your company in their minds which is projected from how your web site looks and operates. This is just one example of a strategic factor of building a relation ship in the new business world.

Speed of delivery equals value for money to clients, clients want more for their money so as a service provider its would be to your benefit to deliver more in the least amount of time. In the introduction I talked about being efficient, this being a strategy in itself. For instance, your practice may build up a library of commonly used components of a presentation or web site and thus the time to develop either of this will be shortened drastically as a result. This means that the client is happy that you have provided them with a service with a solid foundation, that did not take long to build, hence did not cost them a great outlay. Money saved for the client in this manner shows that you as service provider are thinking of a clients needs first and will provide you with more work from a client on a regular basis. Remembering that the design market is saturated, we can and have given the client perceived value for money, when in reality we have put a strategy in place to recoup losses if any from the initial job by establishing a means of reoccurring business.

Communication and making the clients understand where their money is going into a project is another vital factor of an strategy. As we have seen the old method of being an almighty designer has gone. We cannot demand a set figure without justification as the clients demand this so it would be beneficial for the designer to present the client a break down of costing before they raise the issue. Its a crucial part in client communication and liaison strategy.

Providing the client you opinion or advise equates to you providing them with consultation, which seems like an added benefit to the designers overall service. Even though your opinion may be disregarded its a little bonus service which a client appreciates none the less and goes for that personalized, value for money service and better relationship for the future.

Conclusion

From the examples provided within this document, we can see that the utilization of strategy, in any business and design orientated share a common method. Creativity can have a rate applied to it being a service thus the rules of strategy across all disciplines of business apply to it also.

This documents highlights pressing issues which I have encountered in personal past tense and ones which are today in most scenarios of the graphic design industry. We have touched briefly on subjects of how the economy plays a role in determining the actions and reactions of designers and clients alike, the role which this plays on society and the physiologies of clients and design business and sole operators.

To fully dissect the issue and to construct any manner of a standard strategy would take a long time indeed and would be something that would be consistently evolving as media and delivery methods evolve.

We as designers should not harbour resistance to change as we are the procreators of it to a point, rather we should embrace change and educate the blind around us to see what it is that we do and why it is important to them. That should our backbone strategy before the plethora of strategies and sub strategies applicable to daily working scenarios of business, management and procurement.

The issues presented in this writing will remain the same if companies do not take an active interest and act upon them.

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Notes.