



BUSINESS

ARE YOU INTERESTING?

Judging by the mail we get here at HOW, design firms all talk about their services in exactly the same terms. This ad-industry veteran tells you how you can *really* stand out.

Have you ever wondered whether prospective clients find your agency or design firm interesting? Because generally, they don't. It seems that however much we perceive ourselves as unique, prospects and clients often count us as a dime a dozen.

We may be experts in helping clients figure out their brand essence, but we're remarkably poor at doing this work for ourselves. We make the same claims using the same words. We bestow fancy names on our "unique" branding processes and think these are distinction enough. We parade our award-winning

work before potential clients as if that alone communicates our creative abilities. When pitching new business, we create work on spec to illustrate our superior insight. We all do all of these things, thereby encouraging clients and prospects to perceive most agencies and design firms as one and the same.

Developing your unique brand promise, unique strategic deliverables and unique processes are essential steps, but they'll only take a design or ad agency so far. You must do more to be interesting. Self-branding and creative deliverables are viable methods for

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BUILDING YOUR BRAND

A brand is a promise you make to your clients. It's a claim of distinction, a quintessential uniqueness for your agency. Brand results from a process of truth and self-realization about your agency that begins with a ...

DISCOVERY SESSION

Once the discovery is completed, the agency uses these facts and insights gained to bring forth a ...

BRAND ESSENCE

The brand essence is a short statement about your agency and what makes it interesting and unique. It's like the theme statement you used to write in college for your term papers—everything one needs to know in one paragraph. Out of this brand essence comes a ...

BRAND STATEMENT

This is your rallying cry. It's a defining phrase that you can place beside your agency's name. It's the key to being interesting. With the brand statement in mind, your agency should then concentrate on its ...

BRAND VISUALS

Right: This is the last step in the branding sequence. Start here, and you're starting wrong.

convincing clients and prospects that your agency is a worthwhile partner. But it's time to consider new and advanced thinking about your agency's uniqueness. That thinking must focus on the factors that truly make your agency "interesting." Here's how:

FOUR WAYS TO STAND OUT

1.. Adopt not just a brand, but a distinct point of view. If a brand is a promise, then a point of view is the fulfillment of that promise. To be interesting, you must express something very different from your competitors. You just can't be another empty suit saying you'll deliver advertising or design or strategy or thinking—or whatever. Alex Bogusky of Crispin Porter 4- Bogusky puts it another way: "Our work should change the way people relate to and interact with advertising." (Hence, Crispin's quest to continually re-mole! the definition of the industry.)

2. It's all about the content. One of the most important ways you can express your difference is to write about it. Too many agencies and design firms simply publish pictures of their work. Instead, producing valuable business, strategic and marketing content on a regular basis (pictures *and* words) positions you as a

firm with a distinct point of view. The web is a powerful tool. Your content will find its way into the hands of prospects who will read it and appreciate it, especially if you use web-optimization strategies to deliver it. (For more information on creating a smart self-promo website, see "Rock Your Website" on page 112.) This content will help establish a meaningful difference between you and your competitors, define your expertise and make you more interesting.

3. Lose PowerPoint and get real. Agencies are overdependent on PowerPoint and its brethren for presentations. Slide shows are far too linear and, let's admit it, really boring. To make your agency more interesting during the presentation process, you need to use other techniques to pique the prospect's interest.

Ernie Perich of Perich & Partners in Ann Arbor, MI, uses another strategy. Perich enters most presentations as the "regular guy" agency. They work hard, roll up their sleeves and emphasize that they work cheek by jowl with their clients. In place of PowerPoint, Perich lines the room with flip chart sheets filled with research, statistics, target audience information, competitors' ads, etc. Many clients are looking for just that kind of commitment and "regular guy" attitude in their marketing partners.

"There's a hell of a lot of high-falutin' agencies out there," Perich says. "We're like your next-door neighbor or your buddy from high school." The intimacy this forms between agency and prospect is very appealing and potentially bonding.

4. Maximize that first meeting. What's the only purpose of a first meeting with a prospect:¹ To get a second meeting! Far too many agencies and design firms spend the whole first meeting showing and telling about their company. In other words, doing a capabilities presentation—the dreaded "dog and pony show." That's not very interesting.

Geile-Leon does first meetings a different way. Prior to that initial confab, this St. Louis-based agency researches the prospect's business and market. Then they put their findings into a notebook, with a cover that displays the prospect's name and industry. At the beginning of the meeting, rather than talking about his firm, principal Tim Leon asks the prospect to talk about his company, his industry, his target audiences and his competitors. During the conversation (where the prospect is now talking, rather than the agency-folks), Leon refers from time to time to the notebook; "Yes," he'll say, "that jibes with the information here on page 23 of our intelligence book," or, "Did you know that your main competitor is spending 2.3% of sales on marketing?"

The tactic is brilliant. At some point, the prospect will ask about the intelligence book. Leon then holds the book close to his chest and says something like, "This is information we've gathered, analyzed and compiled because of our great interest in your industry. We'd feel uncomfortable giving it to you, but we'd be happy to put together a summary and bring it back at our next meeting."

"Gee," the prospect says to herself, "finally an interesting agency. Not just a bunch of marketing robots."

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CREATE GREAT CHEMISTRY

These philosophies and techniques can help agencies and clients find one another. When all is said and done, clients usually hire the agency they have the best chemistry with.

And speaking of chemistry: Please try to exhibit some charisma. Chemistry only happens when the right ingredients are in place. The old adage that you do business with people you like is still very true. You don't have to be the prospect's best buddy or play golf with him once a week or go to dinner monthly. Those are the old-fashioned methods of your father's generation. Businesspeople today are time-challenged; they don't generally have time for a lot of business socializing. But prospects still seek relationships that are

comfortable, respectful and enjoyable. You must find ways to exude charisma and to show your agency is competent but also easy and even fun to deal with.

One final point: Think seriously about the clothing you wear as you visit clients and prospects. Details matter here. Advertising and design people should have a certain "cool" factor about their style of dress. The right tie, a funky but businesslike jacket, a crazy pair of socks or even an unusual briefcase are all things that register with a prospect or client and help move you into the "interesting" category.

In a world where smaller agencies compete with everything from media firms to giant global agencies to Google, creating distinction is essential. When it comes to selling your agency or design firm, be interesting—or be out of the money. ■■■

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