



## **VISION&VALUES :: TIME FOR A CHECK-UP?**

**DESIGN WEEK BUSINESS INSIGHT :: 11 FEBRUARY 2010**

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A business without a vision is a business without direction. Far too many design companies are reactive in their development and, even if they are growing and profitable, they have arrived where they are by accident. Opportunities are pursued without sufficient challenges about their usefulness; projects appear from design-buyers and are accepted, whether or not they are a good fit; senior people with specific skills and experience join or leave and change the company's capabilities. Like boats without a destination and without navigation charts, businesses like this are drifting, subject to sudden arrivals in ports they never wanted to visit in the first place.

Now, I'm all for pursuing unexpected opportunities, and it can be wonderfully exciting to set sail on new high seas. But I am also a believer in Pasteur's observation that 'chance favours the prepared mind'. Where does preparation come from? First from vision, and then from focusing on that vision.

Successful people tend to be vocal on the subject of vision. Mohammed Ali, boxing's Heavyweight Champion of the World not once but three times, said: "Champions aren't made in gyms. Champions are made from something they have deep inside them – a desire, a dream, a vision. They have to have the skill, and the will. But the will must be stronger than the skill." Anita Roddick, founder of The Body Shop and herself a champion retailer, once said: "If you have a company with an itsy-bitsy vision, you have an itsy bitsy company." Martin Luther King said: "I have a dream." Interestingly, not: "I have a plan".

And what about focus? At a recent DBA event on the relationship between risk-taking and creativity, Gary Lee, Head Chef at the Ivy, said that the most important attribute of a successful chef was focus. Not skill with a sharp knife; not ace taste-buds. Focus. Bill Gates – and whether you like his products or not, you have to admit he's successful – would agree with him: "Only through focus can you do world-class things, no matter how capable you are."

Your vision, once clear, should be understood by, and shared by, everyone in the business, whether you employ one or a hundred. If there are only a few of you, you can chat about it over a coffee. If there are a lot of you, you'll need to get it to everyone more formally, especially if your offices are in more than one location.

A good vision will always be underpinned by a set of values; again, these should be understood and shared by every person in the business. Your values are the things which are important right now, and which you think will be important in the future.

Once established, your vision will allow you to run your business more effectively. Decisions and actions on everything else will follow easily: finance policies, marketing strategies, recruitment criteria. Your vision will also help you to develop your overall business strategy and plan.

Why not give yourself a vision check-up? Get together with your management team and do a bit of dreaming. Think, and then think again. Consider your finances, the number of offices, geographical location, the type of work you want to be doing, the clients you want to work with, the colleagues you want to have around you and the values that you won't compromise on. Look ahead three or five years' time; for newer and smaller companies, or those working in rapidly-changing markets such as digital, two years might be more realistic. Then give your vision a reality check, preferably with a trusted external adviser.

One projective technique you can use is to imagine your company appearing in a magazine feature in three (or five, or two) years' time. What would Design Week's writers say about it? Another is to imagine a fairy godmother or genie giving you one wish to create the business exactly as you want it. Regrettably, the wish won't come true without a lot of input from you, but it's a good place to start.

You can tell if your vision is getting a bit murky, by the way, when you can't describe it easily and convincingly to someone else, or when you just can't get excited about it any more. And you'll know when your vision is crystal clear. That's when you are brave enough to turn down work – any work, even the attractive and profitable stuff – which doesn't help you to achieve it.

#### **FIVE-POINT VISION CHECK-UP**

1. Do you have a vision for your business?
2. Can you describe it easily to other people?
3. Does everyone in your business understand and share it?
4. Are you all still excited about it?
5. Are you brave enough to say no to work which doesn't fit it?

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