



DESIGNING STRATEGIES

Business Strategies for the Design Industry

A Maurer Consulting Group Publication

Volume 7 • Issue 31

January/February 2010

Undoubtedly we have come through the worst recession most of us have ever experienced. Companies large and small folded entirely, others merged to stay afloat. Some have been treading water for a very long time. It remains to be seen how far into 2010 these turbulent times will take us. News reports talk about the recession being behind us. Yet other reports talk of a jobless recovery, one of the big unknowns, as unemployment rates hover between 10-11%. Consumer confidence is not moving up yet.



How can you not only keep your organization afloat, but increase sales and growth? "Crazy", you say? Many large companies we know today began in the throes of the Great Depression. People saw a need and set out to fulfill it. Entrepreneurs thrive in these situations. They think positive thoughts, develop solid plans and move forward. Others sit around scratching their heads, bemoaning the economy and difficulties it has wrought, while the movers and shakers see light bulbs going off in their heads and set off to be the next best thing in the market place.

Visualize



What have you done during the recession? Not just sit around waiting for a miracle that will save your firm, I hope. One thing there has been more of during this period was time. Savvy business leaders and entrepreneurs took advantage of unexpected free time to make their business stronger, more efficient and more customer-friendly. Those who embraced the free time analyzed and reviewed their firm, its systems and procedures, readying themselves to start out stronger as the economy swings upward and people start buying again. Wise business leaders analyzed the situation of their firms, determining what was working, what was not. Others spent time innovating, developing new, exciting products and services to attract customers. And, they utilized this new found time to review their marketing strategies.

The savvy ones decided not to cut their advertising, but to market their firms more than ever. Certainly costs were cut in some instances and less expensive marketing channels utilized, but they did not reduce efforts to keep their names in front of customers. Others moved into panic mode, cutting costs and tightening belts, including marketing budgets. Competition at the end of this recession will be very different than it was two years ago. Those who you were up against in the past may well not exist in the future. Of the firms you competed with, which will survive? Which of the survivors will be top of mind with your customer base? Keeping your brand in front of your target market is a critical strategy in these times. If they don't hear about you or from you, will they assume you are no longer in business or interested in selling to them? Now is the time to make sure you are at the top of their list of valued suppliers.

Analyze

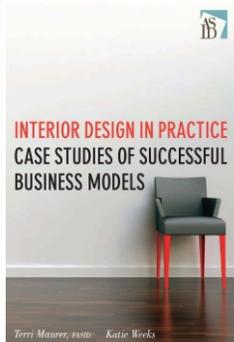
What do you do if you haven't been marketing this whole time? Get up tomorrow, set aside some time to develop a solid marketing plan to alert customers that you are still here, ready and able to serve their needs. Of course funds have been tight and budgets cut. Investigate ways you can utilize new digital marketing channels on the Internet to present your brand in the best light to your target audience. Look for situations where you can network in person it's all about relationships, after all. Start investigating the multitude of new social networking sites on the Internet. Take time to review each one to see if they will work for your needs. Can you speak, or write articles for groups in your target audience? Investigate how to get started, what groups your customers belong to and who arranges their conferences and meetings. Develop a speech or article that can be repurposed in a number of ways.



Develop a strong strategy before jumping into five or ten sites, only to find they are a waste of your time. What do you want to accomplish? Who do you want to reach? Will a given site be a good place to spend your time or money? Do your customers participate there? Are competitors there and already established? Would a different site give you more advantage? Assess each site: how many people participate there, who are they, what applications are available for you to present your brand to that community? Don't wait one more day before getting into brand marketing mode. If the economy turns around quickly, you could be left behind those whose internal light bulbs went off months ago. Move forward with confidence, focus and determination.

Strategize

Another Goal Realized!



The book I've worked on for two years is complete. *Interior Design in Practice: Case Studies of Successful Business Models* comes out this month. The culmination of the process with co-author, Katie Weeks, brings both relief and satisfaction. This exciting experience connected us with a variety of designers with firms of all sizes and business models across the US and Canada, a few even operating globally.

The book takes designers from the point of thinking about starting a business, through deciding on a business model and launching, to growth and expansion, then to succession planning or preparing a business to sell as a valuable asset. The book includes advice from professional consultants and real-world case studies of design practitioners. Whether a designer is considering starting out on their own or ready to grow and expand their business, the book provides vital business education.

If you know a designer who can benefit from *Interior Design in Practice*, or want to read the case studies yourself to see what makes designers successful, or challenges them, the book is listed on a number of online bookstore sites. Think of this book for a give-away or raffle item at an industry event, or a donation to a design program.

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