



DESIGNING STRATEGIES

Business Strategies for the Design Industry

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An interesting article recently appeared on the business page of my local paper, *Akron Beacon Journal*. The feature story was about the owner of a 92-year-old family hardware business. The company was started in 1917 by the current owner's great-grandmother. Yes, his great-grandmother. She was a Polish immigrant, and also a home builder, but that's a whole other story.

Asked about the long term success...and survival...of the family business in this day of big box home improvement stores, Frank Wrobel, the owner shared that it is about a culture; things that have little to do with hardware. Wrobel likened the store to a coffee klatch; a place where people...customers and employees alike... meet and talk about everything from politics, their families or what is in the daily newspaper. Of course, there are typical questions about hardware and plumbing parts, but the West End Hardware culture allows for the other questions and conversations as well. What West End Hardware has successfully created is a community.



Visualize

A restaurant/bar in our area, *The Winking Lizard*, has branded itself as a family-sports bar type of informal eatery. One thing they are known for is having a live 'lizard' (iguana) in a glass cage at each restaurant. Another feature is their beer drinkers 'club'... *World Tour of Beers*... that attracts hundreds of loyal customers who like beer each year. Tour members pay a fee to join. Each year a new list of beers from around the world is posted and members go on virtual world tour through beers from around the globe. During their world tour, members have to drink 100 different beers. At the end, if they are successful, they win a customized jacket with the company logo. In addition, the members attend other hosted events: group outings to ball games, golf outings, picnics, and parties. A community has been formed. A community of loyal customers based on a common love of beer.



Are you fortunate enough to have a community of your customers who feel comfortable enough to talk to you about any topic at all? Or, do you hold them back at arms length, only discussing your products and their benefits, or terms for a sale? Do you know anything at all about your customers except what your contact management and bookkeeping software can tell you? Do you have any clue at all what these loyal customers think about, what is important to them as individuals... you do have loyal customers, don't you? Customers who are loyal, even during a recession? If not, you might think about developing a community of your customers and converting them into loyal customers.

Analyze

What have you done to develop a community of loyal customers for your organization? What common interests do your customers share? Have you even tried to find out what common interests they might have? Back to that same question I ask you over and over: *if not, why not?* Just as the Internet has made it easier for consumers to input their ideas and opinions into our businesses, opportunities have been provided for business owners to gather information from customers and develop communities.



How can you develop that coffee klatch atmosphere to engage your customers? What venues can you provide where customers can gather and talk about anything they please? Business relationships today need to be far more than someone selling something and someone buying it. We operate in a more complex arena than ever before. The Internet has broken down walls at a more rapid pace than most of us are able to handle. Customers demand far more from us than in the past.

Add "community building" to your next planning meeting. Set some goals and objectives. Think about how you might physically or virtually develop community for your business... coffee gatherings at your office, showroom or store, on-line bulletin boards, message boards or blogs. Get everyone in your organization on board for this venture. It's not a marketing issue, it's not a sales issue, it's an 'everyone' issue.

Strategize

"...put community before commerce..."

John Hagel, III & Arthur G. Armstrong

Authors of *net.gain: expanding markets through virtual communities*

Visualize - Analyze - Strategize
Plan for success!



Terri L. Maurer, FASID

Designing Ways To Survive These Turbulent Times

It's hard to believe NeoCon is more than a month behind us. I enjoyed seeing and talking to some of you there. My marketing plan now takes advantage of my travels to connect with those of you in cities I visit. Even with the advantages of e-mail and social media sites, there is nothing like a face to face meeting and chance to talk to build community. Added to our list of business programs this year and presented at NeoCon were: *Move Your Customer Experience to WOW!* and *Build an On-line Presence*. Both were well received by designers, architects, retailers and industry exhibitors.

If you are interested in bringing these, or our other programs to your area, give me a call at 330.666.0802 or e-mail me at: tmaurer@maurerconsultinggroup.com.

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