

Return on imagination counts for just as much as return on investment

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RETURN ON IMAGINATION

“In the new economy, return on imagination counts for just as much as return on investment.”

Richard Henderson discusses his thoughts on the journey towards a creative solution, and on how clients and their designers can achieve a great result.

In 2006, the majority of businesses are still largely driven by ambitions of successfully achieving returns on investment, and company values are predominantly evoked by profits, results and stability. This is certainly nothing new; after all, favourable bottom lines and solid economic returns are still the defining elements for a company’s universal success. Indeed, the attitude remains that if money is to be spent by an organisation, then positive value and return must be evident; moreover, it must be assessed, proved and measured.

However, while this notion of ‘Return on Investment’ (ROI) has grown over the last decade to incorporate a variety of different value adds, including staff, resources, products and technologies, design and brand identity are still battling to find their way into the psyches of value-conscious, return-driven companies and their respective decision makers. This is somewhat ironic, because in order for businesses in today’s increasingly ‘ideas-driven economy’ to progress and actively compete, respect for the power of imagination must continue to grow and quickly.

As companies seek advantages over their competition through innovation, new market strategy, business systems, procedures and practices, imagination has gradually positioned itself as the business currency of the future. This currency’s horizons need to be expanded, design must be included, and imaginative branding design must be viewed as a vital dimension of an organisation’s business strategy.

In the design world, ROI should really be an acronym for *Return on Imagination*. The higher the investment in imagination, the better the outcome should be. Creativity and imagination are not limited to the realm of artists and poets, everyone can imagine new possibilities, which is why in business, the go-getters are those who identify new points of view or innovative paths to success within competitive markets. Highly successful organisations rate imagination as a KPI: ‘Show us new ways of thinking and we’ll help you grow your career.’ Unfortunately though, creative imagination is still not embraced around the world, because the majority of businesses unwisely distrust the amorphous realms of creativity.

Faith in imagination, however, requires trust, which is the crucial element of working relationships. Yet by examining the agenda of meetings between most companies and their creative teams, a gaping hole in dialogue and trust emerges. Where there should be talk of the true visionary identity of the company and how that will steer it towards a bright future, there is still too much silence. This dialogue is missing because too many businesses, corporate or otherwise, hold misconceptions that design is merely an end product. If this were true, then the designer’s job would be limited to doodling towards a finished logo and, beyond that, applying it and associated brand elements to collateral, signage, merchandise etc.



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Defining the true nature of the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games



‘Unifying Sport – winning together’ (Creative idea)

The creative idea provides the basis for the identity design and empowers the brand communication program. It is the visual manifestation of the powerful truth.

Businesses need to appreciate that an essential part of design's role in contributing to business value lies in the power of imagination and the strategic maintenance of a clear business identity.

It's hard to find a designer who understands the relationship between creativity and business strategy. But creative teams *do exist* that generate *real value* for businesses. They're designers who recognise that corporate design encompasses the development of entire brand identities that are more than a superficial panacea that makes a company look good.

A good brand identity should be inspirational and able to be integrated into a wide range of associated corporate and public communications, yet at the same time it needs to be developed in a manner that is completely transparent, accountable and budget-conscious. It needs to be timeless, not tiresome, and it must achieve beauty within budget!

Once the identity of a business is discussed with designers, the value the design team returns to the business increases over time. It's simply a matter of knowing what to talk about, and with whom. And it is this value that is gradually being recognised as not simply a *Return on Imagination*, but moreover a *Return on Imagination*.

The power of strategy and imagination were harnessed in the brand identity design program that R-Co developed for the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games. The impact of a considered, finely crafted approach, demonstrated that effective design for business can deliver substantial rewards.

Some thoughts for designers working in the brand identity sector:

1. The right idea - how you can come up with it:

- Make sure the problem is worth solving.
- Understand the problem, because you know it contains the solution.
- Put the problem into words.
- Find something unique about the problem.
- Talk about the problem and give it meaning.
- Engage with the problem - and develop the best creative solution.

2. The harmonious combination of left brain process and right brain creativity empowers the solution.

3. Ways to measure the value of creativity - you can do it without using complex formulas;

- Can the idea be put into words?
- Is the brand 'central' to the idea?
- What is the breakthrough insight?
- Does the idea have the 'size' to cut through borders and language?
- Is it inspirational?
- Is it based upon relevant and compelling ideas?
- Can it be implemented and applied?

4. Building a successful client relationship - how to work with your client to add value:

- Put yourself in their shoes, so you understand their objectives.
- Listen to their issues and ask questions that articulate the problems.
- Help develop a detailed brief on where their brand is now.

• Demonstrate a winning attitude that helps you inspire their team.

- Contribute to marketing solutions in the brand world.
- Always look for ways in which you can add value.
- Create circles of trust.
- Listen to their needs - and then develop the right solutions.

5. Be imaginative and you will have the power. There is a risk in staying safe.

6. The value of creating a great business relationship - we're on the path together:

- **Aspire**
To leadership and vision and to instilling faith and enthusiasm in those around you.
- **Trust**
Be trustworthy, honest and transparent. Eliminate the hidden agenda.
- **Bend**
Be flexible. The best results don't always come by following a formula.
- **Acknowledge**
Show respect. Acknowledge everyone's contribution.
- **Search**
Seek intellectual stimulation. Encourage new ways of thinking and fresh ideas.
- **Demand**
Expect and ask for excellence. Set the benchmarks and arrive at an agreement.
- **Express**
Have the courage to express an opinion about what you believe is right.