

Continuous

Branding

**For Service-Based Organisations
Ambitious to Grow**

Craig Thatcher

CHAPTER 2

**Find your
Tail Wind**

Our world is changing rapidly. Opening up new opportunities at an exciting rate whilst closing down old ones for those too weak to keep up. Anyone running a service-based organisation is looking at different ways to grow their brand, revenue and margins whilst managing in a challenging environment.

Overcoming internal inertia and anything else that gets in the way is like sailing into a head wind. One of my clients described Continuous Branding as a ‘tail wind’, which is a neat analogy, because we all know how hard sailing into a head wind is day after day.

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Printed in the United Kingdom and published simultaneously in electronic format.

First edition, 2015

ISBN: 978-0-9932168-1-7

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

We make progress but we expend a lot of effort; everything seems harder to achieve and it takes longer to get where we want to be. On the other hand, having a tail wind makes the going a lot easier and we achieve what we want with far less energy.

The tail wind created by Continuous Branding makes it easier for your people to understand precisely what you mean, what you expect from them and gives them powerful reasons why they should get behind your brand – regardless of the specific jobs they do and whether or not they have direct contact with your customers or clients. On the other side of the coin, your competitors will find you're making their lives more difficult. You'll be slowing them down by taking the wind from their sails and forcing them to work a lot harder to get past you.

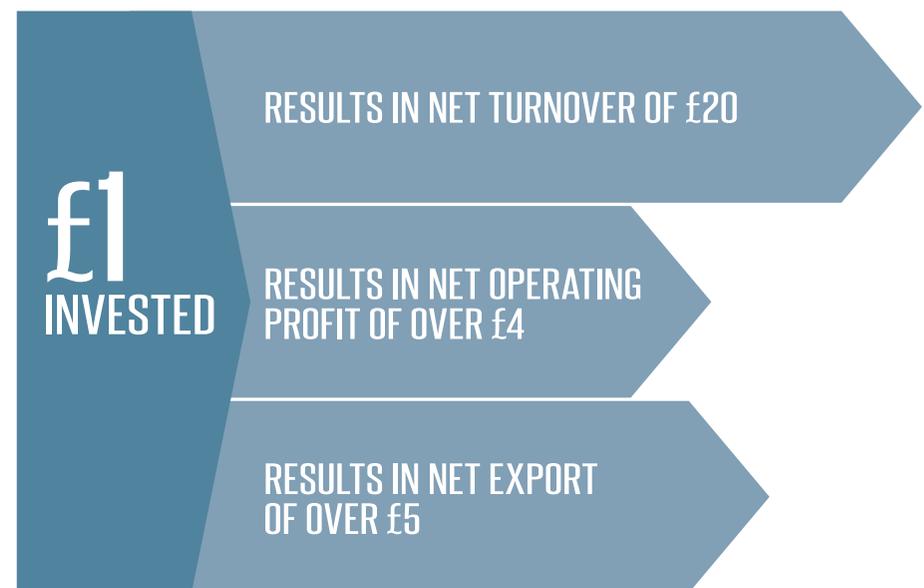
Continuous Branding enables you to focus clearly on your clients first, not on yourself or your own organisation. It seems to me that the thousands of business decisions made every year to make life easier for organisations often result in making things more difficult for their clients. You can't expect them to stay loyal if they feel overlooked, put out and put upon. Disillusioned, they become a prize prospect for a bright young entrepreneur who gives them a simple and easy way of engaging with their brand instead of yours.

EXAMPLE: Every one of us has felt the frustration of phoning a company to listen to endless recorded messages telling us which buttons to press before being put through to a 'real' person. How would you feel if your call was to make a complaint? You'd be furious by the time you eventually got through. I always press the option for the sales line, even if I have a complaint, because their calls are answered quickest. I wonder why that is?

If your goals are becoming more difficult to achieve and you're finding it harder to grow, you may reach a tipping point where you'll have to take decisive action. I know that you won't have sat still and will have attempted to make the path easier to traverse. Along the way you'll have tried all the traditional management techniques to grow or get out of trouble. Then you'll suddenly reach that point. You'll know precisely when you get there – telling yourself that you need to slightly re-fresh your brand. I can't predict your precise circumstances, but it will be for all sorts of different reasons. For example, you may find new competitors popping up ever more frequently. They may be genuinely offering better value and more innovative services or making all sorts of promises to win new contracts. Or your key people may have left to start up on their own. Alternatively, you may just have lost your edge. If you feel like you're coasting, not growing or even shrinking you need to face the issues and re-focus on what made your organisation great to start with. Then communicate this clearly. You might just need to freshen up your act or you may need to overhaul your brand more fundamentally with a new market position to support a new strategic direction. At a real push you might be forced to change your brand name as a result of a merger or acquisition.

You may have left your assessment so long your competitors have already re-positioned you without you even being aware of it. They'll have achieved this because their brands are now occupying the most desirable positions in the minds of your clients and your marketplace. Your brand has been unceremoniously relegated to a less advantageous position. That's why you've been finding it so hard to make progress and to grow. And that's why it feels like that head wind has been blowing stronger and stronger.

The power of branding is now acknowledged by many, with considerable supporting evidence for design acting as a mechanism or motor for growth and innovation. In 2013, research conducted by Warwick Business School on behalf of the Design Council (www.designcouncil.org.uk) interviewed forty eight leaders of world class companies and the main findings were that design is customer-centric and greatest when intimately related to solving customer problems. It is most powerful when culturally embedded, and best when it has strong senior management support and can add value to any size of organisation. Design also transforms the way that organisations think and work. Research has shown that for every £1 (US\$1.50) invested in design, the result is a net turnover of £20 (US\$32), a net operating profit of over £4 (US\$6) and a net export of over £5 (US\$8).



This is based on research by Eden Partners: Evaluating Designing Demand 2012 and Centrifuge: Evaluation of Public Services by Design 2010.

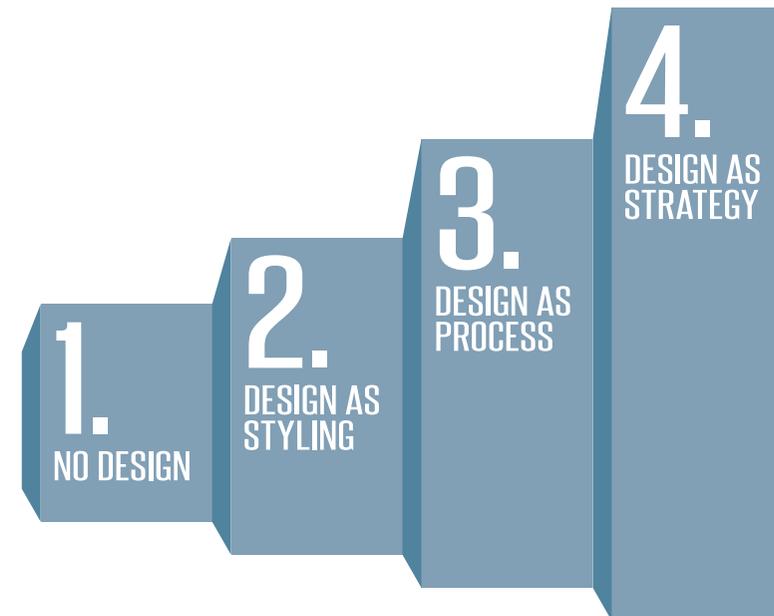
In 2003, to help assess the economic benefits of design in Denmark, the Design Ladder was developed by the Danish Design Centre (www.ddc.dk/ddc). It was used to identify the different levels of design being used in organisations within the country. Take a look at steps 3 and 4 – design is not simply an add-on but is used to structure development and strategy.

Stage 1: No Design. It plays little or no role in product or service development.

Stage 2: Design as Styling. It is only relevant in terms of aesthetic considerations such as style, appearance and ergonomics.

Stage 3: Design as a Process. It is considered in terms of a process or method in product or service output but is only employed at the initial stages of development.

Stage 4: Design as Strategy. It is integral to a company's continuous renewal of their business concept as a means of encouraging innovation, is fused with the key objectives and plays a role at every stage of development.



Design Ladder developed by the Danish Design Centre.

According to Sharing Experience Europe (www.seeplatform.eu/casestudies/Design%20Ladder), between 2003 and 2007, the distribution of Danish companies at stage 3 of the ladder rose from 35% to 45% and the number of companies at stage 4 rose from 15% to 20%. It serves as a model for explaining to organisations that design is more than merely about styling.

Awareness of the strategic importance of using design in both the private and public sectors is growing through the outstanding effort of the DBA (www.dba.org.uk), the trade association for design in the UK. It builds bridges between designers and organisations, and champions effective design. Through its close relationship with the Bureau of European Design Associations (www.beda.org) and other European partners it's also enabling better design management by governments across Europe. This is achieved by bringing design management training to the public sector using best practice from the private sector and adapting their set of successful design management tools (on-line from mid 2015). Despite the public sector commissioning billions of Euros in design services each year, the benefits of management and decision making around using the design process are not widely understood and therefore design thinking is not fully capitalised upon. Another project is helping exploit the full potential of design for innovation by making twenty one recommendations to the European Union to ensure design is at the heart of driving growth and prosperity in European economies.

As we can see, there is significant interest in the strategic use of design at an international level. An increasing number of private and public sector organisations are using design in this way to drive growth for themselves, their country and for the European Union. You can use it in precisely the same way to help your brand grow by reaching out and engaging with the right type of clients. A note of caution here - only clients that are a good fit for your brand are actually desirable! In the business-to-business world the wrong types of clients will drain your resources by wasting your time and not wanting to pay the full price for it. They'll drive you down on costs, make thin promises about how much they'll spend with you and quibble over everything. It's best to refer them to your competitors which might slow them down, leaving you the 'clear water' and time to look for more of the right type of clients to help you grow your brand.

So regardless of whether you sell to other organisations or to consumers, to grow consistently your brand must be relevant to clients that are an ideal match and who are happy to pay for a quality service. Your brand needs to make a fair profit to enable you to provide them with the service they expect. You also need to recruit, train and develop the best people whilst delivering a decent return to your shareholders. By working with these clients you'll be able to satisfy everyone involved. If you compromise, sooner or later, you're going to disappoint yourself and the people around you.

In this chapter we've found out that more organisations are using design and branding strategically to drive growth, but there's so much change and turbulence going on in every market how can you stay ahead? The next chapter is all about preparing yourself and your brand for the future.

Key points in this chapter

- Recognise the feeling of a 'head wind' slowing you down, because Continuous Branding is like a 'tail wind', making progress a lot easier.
- There is considerable evidence for design acting as a strategic motor for growth and innovation. Design is more than merely styling. Organisations can incorporate it into their own particular way of doing things.
- Awareness of the strategic importance of using design in both the private and public sectors across the European Union is growing through better design management.
- Servicing the wrong clients will drain your resources. Your brand only needs to be relevant to clients that are an ideal match. Don't bother with the others, let your competitors struggle with them.



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Graham Jerome-Ball, Director of Global Branding at Informa plc, is securing his brand's future with Greenfisher as his creative partner.

Craig Thatcher
branding specialist_author_managing director
M +44(0)7497 462520
craig@greenfisher.co.uk

www.greenfisher.co.uk
T +44 (0)118 933 8558

dba design
business
association