

The strategist is dead, long live strategy

 By [Heidi Brauer](#)

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In my [BizTrends](#) piece last year, I confessed to having a magic wand in my office.



Heidi Brauer, chief marketing officer of Hollard Insurance.

I described how, over time, I've come to see that trend analysis can be self-fulfilling prophecy, and so I hope that if I see a glimmer of something and I use my wand, I can magic it into being a real thang.

One of the things I said I'd like to magic into reality, was this:

We will stay on purpose.

Children often cry that another child did something to them 'on purpose'. As brand leaders, we will be more 'on purpose'. In the best way, not a way that's stuck to a point of view. In a world of increasing sameness and decreasing budgets, we will be more consistent, persistent, insistent and relentless with our purpose and brand's messaging.

In this year's article, I'd like to share a radical thought:

“ *In the context of marketing and advertising, I don't think strategy should come from The Strategists.* ”

Imagine if there weren't any strategists and we didn't outsource our 'what if?' and 'here's why' thinking?

A few weeks ago, at an evening full of energy and passionate debate, a room full of creative industry people debated the value of the strategist.

In this age of convergence (the term doesn't only apply to technology), it feels as if everyone is having to shift along their competency continuum to try new things, because there's no room anymore for work that is insular and disjointed. So how do we leverage that when it comes to strategy?



Convergence marketing

Heidi Brauer 3 Feb 2015



Being 'on purpose' is nothing more (or less) than strategy. Strategic focus is the gift that enables us to say more with fewer words.

Communication that is consistent, persistent, insistent and relentless will help us sell an idea more succinctly and more compellingly than we can ever imagine, with less money. And in this economy, doing things with fewer billboards, less TV, optimising content and messaging, is essential.

We know this in our bellies. But current marketing and agencies models are anchored in the construct that places the responsibility for strategy on one person/team in the ecosystem. Often strategists float in and out of the team, finding a human truth for one brand before moving onto the next, never to see the fruits of their labours.

On the same evening, I was asked if strategy is always important, even for small pieces of work (admittedly, the question was intended as a provocation to stimulate the debate).

“ *My response was that no work is unimportant. And more so in challenging economic times, when everything is vanilla and we're all really selling the same s#it. Yes, every single teeny, weeny, thing you produce matters. It all adds up, building gorgeous layers of a brand cake that is unreplicable, delicious and unique.* ”

Multi-layered brands cakes are what we need – cherries, icing, sprinkles and all – in a world of mostly bland, me-too stuff that no amount of media money can redeem.

And making scrumptious cake that stands out all the time doesn't come from a long-forgotten strategy, in a huge document, in a cupboard somewhere, that's useful for putting the PC projector at the right height (OK, that loosely resembles my old definition of market research, but, hey, if it works...)

Baked in strategy that sings

The more baked in your strategy is, the more it will serve you. If it's short and sweet, a few power pages that everyone can articulate (in an elevator, say, like the proverbial pitch), it'll be easier to make your brand sing in every piece of work. And you're more likely to have a strategy that sings if it's co-created rather than the responsibility of one/a few.

To that end, it's worth taking a moment to ask yourself if everyone in your team can describe the brand and the purpose of the brand in the same way. Do they know what you want it to achieve, now and in the future? Doesn't matter what words they use, but is the gist the same?

“ *Can you all describe it when you don't have the PPT deck, when the power goes out and there's no preso and you've left the handouts on the plane? Or when the strat person has flu and the exco suddenly wants to know? Can you all say what this piece of communication (big or small) is meant to achieve? Why you're doing it? Why you're investing so much (or so little) in it? That's strategy.* ”

I don't care much for labels. What team people are on. What department they work for. I just know that when we all know as much about the business and the market as one another, when we all see ourselves as equal, when we liberate thinking from the silos and constructs inflicted on us by agency and client models, the brand wins.

The thinking is better, it's more joined up, it hums with the resonance of unified direction and understanding (apologies to Wolfgang Grulke, whose model I've bastardised to make this point).

We've taken the word 'strategy' and made it ex-clusive (sic), scary and Higher Grade. Perhaps we'll serve our brands better if in the future, strategists disappear, but purpose and strategy shine brighter than ever.

ABOUT HEIDI BRAUER

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