



'Fostering a culture that values diversity in a corporate structure can seem overwhelming.'

Ilene Wasserman | Tactics P12

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'Without consistency you don't have anything'

20nine Design Studios originates brand identity

GROWTH STRATEGIES



CURT HUDSON

Holly and Greg Ricciardi, owners of 20nine Design Studios, in their offices.

ADAM STONE
SPECIAL TO THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

CONSHOHOCKEN — When Lisa Huffman set out to find a designer for an alumni magazine, she pretty much knew she was asking the impossible.

"We needed something that we hadn't seen at other independent schools, something a little bit more contemporary, fairly young, fairly fresh," said Huffman, director of communications at Malvern Preparatory School.

"At the same time, we are an all-boys school, so we needed something that had a masculine look to it, but something mom would still want to look at when it came in the mail."

To fill the order she turned to 20nine Design Studios. Since 2002 the Montgomery County-based firm has specialized in just this kind of work, crafting an array of visual media in the

effort to forge unified brand messages for its clientele.

In a basic sense, it's all about repetition, doing the same thing over and over again. "Consistency is the number one thing in brand messaging. Without consistency you don't have anything," said Greg Ricciardi, who owns the business with his wife Holly.

That brand image typically has to stay consistent across a range of materials. A job may start with a logo design, which in turn carries over to stationery. The look and feel are then incorporated onto the Web site, into advertising, and throughout trade show materials.

All that is good news for Ricciardi, who often can parlay a simple brand-identity project into a work of considerable scope.

"If we are in at the ground level of building the corporate identity, it is just a natural progression to continue to every-

There are definite elements to a sale that grip the prospect

Got a BIG appointment? Want (or need) the sale?

Sure you do — everyone wants to make the sale, especially when it's a BIG one.

Well, here's the good news: This column is not about "how to make the sale." Rather, it contains elements of a sale that engage the

prospect. It's way more powerful than your typical, "probe, present, overcome objections, close, follow up."

These elements go way beyond your system of selling. They go way beyond traditional selling. These elements are for professionals who want to build relationships — not just make a sale. These elements will make the prospect respect you. These elements will lead to partnering. These elements will make the prospect want to buy from you.

Here are the major elements about the sale that you must incorporate into your presentation:

1. Develop a belief system in your company, your product or service, and yourself, that's so strong you assume every sale before you walk in the door. This mental mindset is the single most powerful element you can possess. If belief is weak, the passion will be weak, and the prospect won't catch your fire.

2. Do your homework the night before. Prepare ideas to help the customer produce more and profit more. Being ready with ideas that will help the prospect will breed your own self-confidence. You'll feel ready to win.

3. Pre-relax. Set your own internal tone. Listen to your favorite music on the way over. Be bouncy and in high spirits.

4. Set your mind on helping them achieve their objectives — not selling your stuff. That will set a game plan and the agenda for the meeting at the same time.

5. Tell the prospective customers you have come with a few ideas



SALES MOVES

Jeffrey Gitomer

20NINE: Consistency is the main ingredient for the creation of a company identity

FROM PAGE 10

thing else, because at that point we already understand the company's philosophy. We know their goals and objectives."

"Company philosophy" may seem like an abstract way to talk about a visual design project. Yet customers say the designers' willingness to plumb the intangibles yields a better end result.

"They take a holistic view of what you are trying to accomplish with your brand," said Dana Wormer, director of corporate marketing at Exton-based software maker Bentley Systems Inc. "They take into account who is our user, what kind of emotional connection are we trying to make with them, what is it we are trying to say to them, and how we want them to respond."

Behind this design philosophy is a practical business philosophy, grounded in the Ricciardis' many years in the design industry. "We took everything we liked and disliked about all those different environments over the years, and started from there," Greg Ricciardi said.

Perhaps their most notable innovation has to do with business structure. Unlike most design shops, 20nine has no account executives to mediate between designers and clients.

"A lot of clients don't like the middle man, so we eliminated that role," Ricciardi said. "It allows our designers to talk directly to our clients and our clients in turn talk directly to our designers. So it creates this relationship between our creative staff and our clients."

To fill the managerial role usually played by the account executives, 20nine employs a studio manager who oversees all production, in order to ensure that the work gets done on time.

The numbers tell the story of the plan's success, with revenue increasing from \$536,000 in 2003 to about \$1.2 million last

year. Most of that growth has come through referral business, but in the middle of last year the company went pro, hiring Gabriella Lamesta as its first salesperson.

"We were getting too big and I couldn't handle it," Ricciardi said. "I was picking up a lot of referrals but I wasn't able to pickup new business."

In the search for new business, the biggest challenge faced by the branding house is, coincidentally, branding.

"We are only 4 years old, and we haven't

yet put a strong focus on public relations or any kind of media relations," Ricciardi said. So far the firm has worked quietly to introduce itself in the community. Now Ricciardi says it is time to strut its stuff, starting with a sharp new Web site highlighting its accomplishments.

"We have legitimized our presence now, we have said 'who' we are," Ricciardi said. "Now we have to show people what we have done and what we can do."

What Ricciardi can do lately is sit behind a desk, rather than a drafting board,

and it's frankly a little depressing for the designer-at-heart.

"I don't like the fact that I am not hands on creatively, sitting down on the computer and designing," he admitted. "But I get just as much joy out of the position I am in now. I get to sit with the client, I get to build these concepts, and I get to put together the team that works for that client."

"When all is said and done it's a different kind of challenge. I am guiding instead of doing, and I really like that." ■

'I get just as much joy out of the position I am in now.'

Greg Ricciardi
co-owner
20nine Design
Studios



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UP CLOSE

COMPANY: 20nine Design Studios
LOCATION: 1100 E. Hector St., Suite 305,
Conshohocken, Pa. 19428
OWNERS: Greg and Holly Ricciardi
TYPE OF COMPANY: Graphic design to build
brand equity
NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 9
2003 REVENUE: \$536,000
2004 REVENUE: \$776,000
2005 ESTIMATED: \$1.2 million

LESSONS LEARNED: To run his design firm effectively Greg Ricciardi removed a sacred level of management, the account executive, and let customers talk directly to designers.