

A VIEW FROM SUE UNERMAN

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# Why is transformation important for brands and agencies?

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Why is transformation important? There's an easy answer to this. Pop down to your local town centre and ask the blacksmith. If you can't find the blacksmith, look for the town crier and ask him.

If you don't look out for the inevitable consequences of external changes to your business, then you'll end up in the same place as those two once flourishing career paths.

The pace of change now is such that every business must have an agile approach to transformation.

If you do, particularly if you are the fastest or the first, then it can be a competitive advantage. In the 20th century you needed a USP or unique selling proposition to have a competitive edge. Now the agility of a business to adapt to real time changes can be, in

itself, its USP.

In the past a USP was a product attribute (“the sweet that melts in your mouth, but not in your hand”) or a positioning statement (“we’re number two so we try harder”). Now it may be the brand’s ability to change its messaging in real time, or its variants to suit fashion, cultural memes or season fast enough.

In the 20th century you needed a USP or unique selling proposition to have a competitive edge. Now the agility of a business to adapt to real time changes can be, in itself, its USP. This requires a reallocation of resource in the business. A change of focus and a new set of key performance indicators including one about speed of delivery.

Customer experience in buying and using the brand too must be a key consideration, of course, and as important as the brand personality and idea.

Sometimes this is out of marcomms scope or sub-contracted. Customers, often with better tech in their pockets than businesses offer their employees, will not be patient or understanding about inadequate mobile experiences or poor delivery or complaints procedures. If a business puts the web experience in a different silo to the marketing then it needs to transform.

Recently tech giant Gartner declared that the biggest threats to innovation are internal politics and an organisational culture that doesn’t accept failure, or ideas from outside, or change. As Gideon Spanier stated in this Raconteur special report, “companies must be willing to think, move and respond faster”.

This is not to suggest that any business should throw the baby out with the bath water. Anyone with a memory that dates back to the turn of this century will remember watching organisations chuck money at ill-advised internet initiatives that failed to deliver any lasting change, let alone transform those businesses.

You also don’t have far to look for businesses that did transform their offer, but failed to do

the same for their business plan. The solution is to transform with agility. Don't replace current processes designed to deal with anachronistic silos with a lengthy elaborate redesign of new processes or more elaborate matrix management.

Work in sprints with minimum viable products and individuals who can respond to change. Create a culture where people enjoy working in project teams rather than are stuck with tribal and defensive department structures. While this is easy to design it is harder for traditional businesses to deliver. Working on a very human and empathetic level to deliver change is essential.

Or carry on as normal, and look out for whatever happened to the blacksmiths.

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