

As the Dust Settles, Design Clarifies

by Wendy Baird, Insight 180

In three years, the vivacious economy ignited by the 90's has come to a screeching slowdown, terrorism has shaken trust, and war has clouded the world's vision towards a global economy. Many companies are reluctant to take risks of any kind in how they conduct business and market themselves. In fact, many are laying dangerously low, hoping the economy will pick up before it catches up with them.

"There is little question (strategic) design will be one of the accelerators of market growth when economies begin to rebound", says Eric Crefe, from American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA), "Design adds differentiation to the generic products of the global economy." As the rebound kicks up steam, good design gives companies a chance to clarify their differentiation, to send their message louder and clearer.

Determining your message.

As much as we wish it wasn't so, buying behavior has just changed. Any research or marketing strategy that made sense before, just doesn't hold now. So the first step, in determining a message direction is to check in with your competitors. Find out what they are saying about themselves, what they are claiming they do best. The web is where they're saying it, and it's at your immediate reach. So finding that

information is easier now than it has ever been.

Using words and images to make the complexities of positioning strategy and product lifecycle development clear is what good design does. It's more critical than ever to let your customers know who you are in the world and what you intend to do for them.

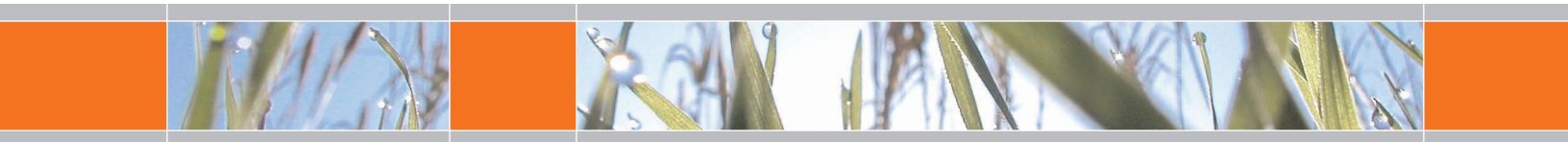
"Corporate credibility is at an all time low", says Crefe. Truth is the most important asset a company can have. Many people would trust companies if they acted more like human beings. So be real in your messaging. Overpolishing takes the glow off of creativity.

Take a Stand.

Don't shy from commitment. Customers aren't watching your every move as closely as you'd like them to. You can make adjustments if you say something today you want to put a different take on later. If you think of your company as a person – living, breathing, growing, you'll be able to take those risks that have such a great chance of paying off.

Simple dos and don'ts.

As you develop your messaging and decide on your marketing plan, stick to the basics – clarity over flash. It's better to have one simple, clear message, that



[c o n t i n u e d]

you repeat over and over and over, than to try to impress with cleverness. No where is this more true than on the web. Err on the side of clarity; don't make users work to find information on your site. When the internet first broke on the scene, we all believed it would change the way companies do business. We could reach more people and get to them more directly. Well, that's true. But ultimately, business is won by clear messaging, simple communication, and honesty.

*This article appeared in the
2004 **The Business Monthly**.*