



H-Paper

Hybrid Thinking

The H Agency www.theHagency.com

50% creative + 50% strategic = 100% effective

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At The H Agency we use the term hybrid thinking to describe the blending of creative thinking and strategic thinking. It gives us a common frame of reference to discuss creative ideas and solutions in a language that our clients understand and relate to. It enables us to step out of the role as graphic designers and move into the position of strategic partner.

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Hybrid thinking - 50% creative + 50% strategic = 100% effective

For years, design was considered a down-stream aspect of business and marketing processes. A product or service would be developed to fill a perceived market need. Then in the final stages, the designer would be called in to create an “attractive package” to make it more appealing to consumers.

But today the creative thinking process is being taken a lot more seriously. According to Tim Brown, the president and CEO of the creative consulting firm IDEO, “...today, if you are developing a marketing strategy, building a new retail space, streamlining a manufacturing operation, or creating a marketing plan to introduce or promote a product or service, your planning is influenced and enhanced by creative thinking. In a presentation to MIT Sloan business students about design and innovation, Brown explained that the creative thinking process is applicable to a wide range of business challenges, “from products to services to spaces.”

More and more products and services we see today are the result of mixing creativity and strategy into a more unified and innovative approach to developing and marketing products and services. It’s a hybrid: 50% creative thinking + 50% strategic thinking = 100% effective.

This right brain (creative) and left brain (strategic) approach to marketing and design blends creative concepts about how the product should look, feel and work, and then shapes, designs and crafts the final form to meet a strategic marketing and sales plan. The resulting products and services creatively fill the needs and desires of their target consumer groups.

What’s creative thinking?

Creative thinking is about idea generating – solution engineering is another way of putting it. By observing the world and combining insights and ideas into new arrangements, we come up with new ways of showing and expressing ideas so that people see them in a new light.



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What's strategic thinking?

Strategic thinking identifies consumers' needs through research and measurement. It looks at the numbers, the costs and the potential profit for developing products and services, and it measures the most efficient way to fill those needs with products or services. It considers goals and objectives, vision and mission statements. It plans, strategizes and develops tactical approaches based on market data, business trends and projections. It operates linearly, using logic, probabilities and purpose.

What's hybrid thinking?

At The H Agency we use the term hybrid thinking to describe the blending of creative thinking and strategic thinking. It gives us a common frame of reference to discuss creative ideas and solutions in a language that our clients understand and relate to. It enables us to step out of the role as graphic designers and move into the position of strategic partner. We believe this blending of creative thinking with strategic thinking holds huge potential for the future of marketing, especially in today's economy. We feel it's an evolutionary step toward better, more useful, and more appealing products and services.

Hybrid thinking and the value it adds to marketing and sales are becoming important parts of the strategic planning process. Our conversations with clients are no longer about whether a brochure should be blue or green, but about who's the target audience? What are their needs, and what's the best way to reach them? We discuss new and creative approaches to communicating the benefits of a product or service and how this positively affects the bottom line. For us, hybrid thinking is more than just a perspective; it's the way we work.

Some examples of products that use hybrid thinking:

NIKEid – Custom, design-your-own shoes. People are definitely attracted to custom shoes for more than their function. They know that Nike is a reputable brand but they don't want to have the "same old shoes" as everyone else. NIKEid can market to any audience because anyone can buy these shoes since you make them exactly how you want them. And they are still affordable.



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Creative thinking – Everyone has different tastes and styles and each wants to express that in the way they dress. Strategic thinking – Give consumers the option to have their sports/activity shoes with their own custom design, and make it easy to create through an interactive website.

Derringer Bicycles – Retro-look motorized bicycles. This is a cool retro product that appeals to people into the whole retro, hipster environmental lifestyle. It functions as a mode of transportation but you buy one for many more reasons. Sure, there are better bikes you could buy and less expensive. But when you purchase one of these, you become more of “a part of the club.” They have a Myspace / t-shirts / and a riders’ club that you become a member of when you purchase. Riders can post pictures on the website of themselves with their bikes. Creative thinking – People want to ride bikes and reduce the use of fossil fuels; they want to be part of the whole green movement. Strategic thinking – Take current motorized technology, put it in a package with a retro-look. According to the company’s website, “Derringer is the neo-classical interpretation of a 1920’s-era board-track racing motorcycle.” Add a variety of custom colors, accessories and branded apparel and you have a product with hip-appeal written all over it. The website and social marketing aspects allow for measurement of customer and fan participation. The club-like brand builds a sense of membership. This builds community and enables further measurement of participation as well as continued sales and connections with other bike owners and friends.

iPhone – When Apple introduced the original iPhone in 2007, they completely changed the definition of the telephone through their distinct hybrid approach to design and marketing. These guys really have the idea of hybrid thinking down to an art/science. Creative thinking – The iPhone doesn’t look like a telephone and doesn’t act like a telephone. Its sleek, sexy design makes it immediately distinguishable from competitive products. It’s a combination of several useful devices in one, including telephone, iPod music player, digital camera, wireless web-enabled device that lets you surf the web, check e-mails, send text messages and lots more. Strategic thinking: The latest, “improved” 3G iPhone has an even lower price tag than the original, making it accessible to an even wider consumer audience. Also, by allowing independent software developers to create new software applications for the iPhone, Apple enables further expansion of the iPhone’s capabilities and usefulness, making it more appealing to an ever-increasing audience of consumers.



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Hybrid thinking – a new dynamic to the sales equation

One important difference in hybrid thinking is that it looks beyond facts and figures and considers the consumers' experience of a product or service and how it appeals to their "emotional" needs. In the traditional business-strategic-thinking perspective, the customers' emotional responses to a product were rarely considered. The primary measure of customer satisfaction was sales figures. A product's success was simply a function of cost and profit. Hybrid thinking introduces a new dynamic into the sales equation.

According to Tim Brown, creative (hybrid) thinking adds a "human-centered" approach to problem solving. To explain, Brown used an example of a project to redesign a hospital emergency room. As part of their investigations, an IDEO staff member stretched out on an emergency room gurney bed to see what the experience felt like. In the video he made from the bed, you see 20 minutes of ceiling tiles, and you realize that the most important thing that person needs is more and better information about what's going on while waiting to be treated.

Steve Jobs, Chairman and CEO of Apple, said it best, "Design is not just what it looks like and feels like. Design is how it works." This doesn't imply that functionality is less important in strategic planning, but in the marketplace today when a consumer has a choice between two products of equal functionality, the aesthetics of the design can be the deciding factor for a purchase.

Hybrid thinking and its influence on product design and marketing has also made marketers more aware of the social aspect of certain product sales and use. This is not a new phenomenon, but one that is becoming increasingly important with the rise of Internet use and especially social networking websites.



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People purchase product brands today, not just because they fill a functional need but also because owning the product expresses something about the consumer's personality, tastes, beliefs and values. New products and services today take advantage of this social aspect and make product purchase and ownership something like being part of a club. Through the use of websites, blogs, and other interactive social media sites, marketers can take advantage of word-of-mouth and viral marketing possibilities to emphasize this social aspect of a product or service.

The future of hybrid thinking

A main characteristic of hybrid thinking is its adaptive quality. As the marketplace changes, and as consumers' needs and preferences change, hybrid thinking will generate new and more effective ways to design and market products and services. If we look at current trends for indications, we can make a few assumptions: customization and individualization of overall product design and features will continue to be an influence as will ecologically oriented or "green" products and services and products that tie in to social issues. In all cases, consumers and their satisfaction levels and needs will fuel the future of hybrid thinking as well as new directions and approaches to delivering tomorrow's products and services.

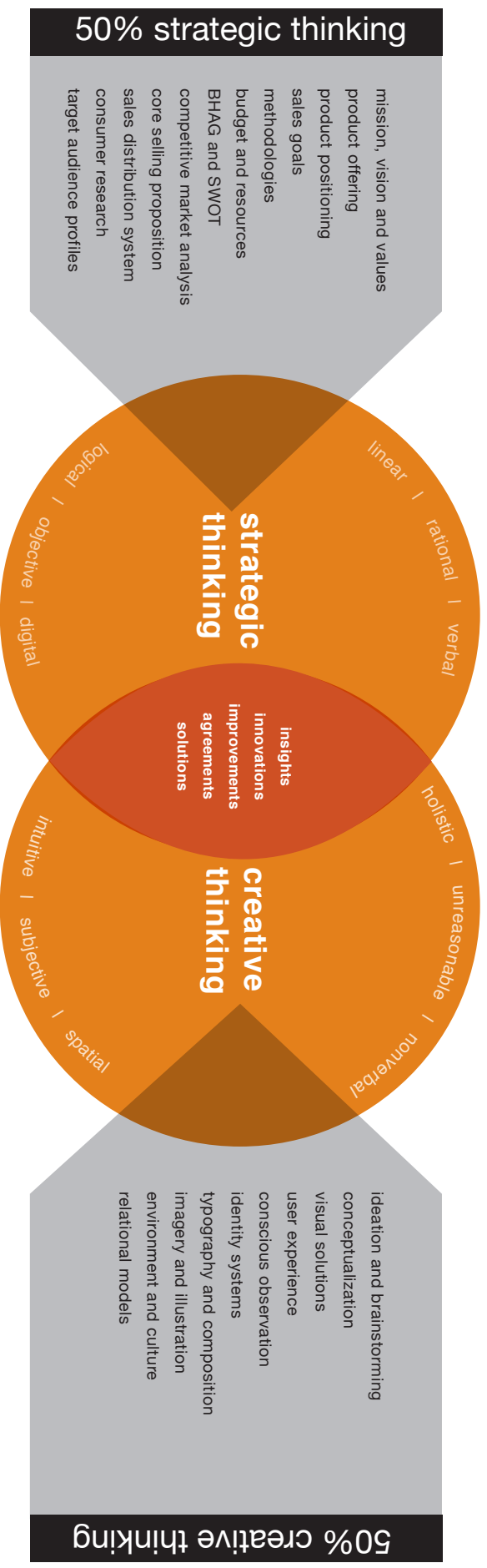


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Hybrid thinking – how it works.

This chart shows how The H Agency blends strategic thinking and creative thinking into a hybrid approach to problem solving. We take left-brain, strategic activities like core selling proposition, customer research and sales goals and apply activities like brainstorming, visual concepts, and imagery. We also combine left brain logical and linear thinking with right brain intuitive and holistic thinking to produce new insights, innovations and improvements to create more effective marketing solutions.

The H Agency Approach to Hybrid Thinking: 50% strategic thinking + 50% creative thinking = 100% effective





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H stands for hybrid

Hybrid thinking is an evolutionary step that puts design and the creative process into a language and form that clients understand. In developing design solutions, we use all of the same information sources as marketers: research, target audience demographics, sales data and support systems. Then through a collaborative creative process, we gather additional information and insights from the client, consumers, alternative approaches and observations, and then develop potential solutions that fit the needs and problems of that specific situation.

At The H Agency we use the term “hybrid thinking” to describe our process of working. In our opinion, this hybrid approach effectively uses both sides of the brain: the rational, analytic “business” side and the creative, innovative “design” side. By engaging both sides of the brain in idea development, we feel we create more effective and distinctive solutions.

WHAT DO YOU STAND FOR?TM

The H Agency is a branding, marketing and design agency founded in 1990 by Founder, President and Creative Director Winnie Hart and now with offices in New Orleans and Houston. The company has grown from a local New Orleans design firm into a regional agency that specializes in developing marketing programs and brand strategies for financial companies.

The “H” in The H Agency stands for the things that make us unique — hybrid, health, heart and helpful. It also stands for the systematic approach, uncompromising principles and unparalleled energy we bring to our work.

For more information about how to make your next marketing project more successful, contact The H Agency, 504-522-6300.

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