What is the design strategy?

There really is no one definition of design strategy, but the goal is to merge business and creative objectives in a meaningful way that moves design beyond just an aesthetic exercise. Business strategy includes financial, product and market objectives, which are best expressed through brand touch points. “Design strategy is the roadmap for the visual and media components that help to build and drive these objectives.”

Design strategy is a dimensional, multifaceted plan that allows traveling down different paths.

In the broadest sense, “strategy” is a plan for how to achieve a goal. In business, strategy bridges the gap between policy (guidelines governing action) and tactics (a set of techniques). Strategy is what a company develops to differentiate itself from competitors’ actual or predicted moves. It’s complex and it drives every decision a business makes.

Design strategy, as a field of theory and practice, refers to the integrated, holistic planning process examining the interplay between design and business strategy. However, for most graphic designers, design strategy simply refers to the conceptual underpinning for their creative work.

Figure 1 Design Strategy Concepts
Any design strategy should address and include the following:

- Existing problems and ongoing challenges
- Current benefits and successes to be leveraged
- Unmet client/customer needs
- Changing client/customer behaviors and attitudes
- Emerging ideas and trends
- Opportunities to differentiate

**Design strategy** is a discipline which helps firms determine what to make and do, why do it and how to innovate contextually, both immediately and over the long term. While not always required, design strategy often uses social research methods to help ground the results and mitigate the risk of any course of action.

Design strategy can play a role in helping to resolve the following common problems:

- Promoting the adoption of a technology (Example: **Toyota** designing the hybrid **Prius** to resemble the conservative Echo instead of making the Prius look high-tech and adventuresome)
- Identifying the most important questions that a company's products and services should address (Example: John Rheinfrank of Fitch Design showed **Kodak** that its disposable cameras didn't exist to replace traditional cameras, but instead to meet specific needs, like weddings, underwater photography and others)
- Translating insights into actionable solutions (Example: **Jump Associates** helped **Target** turn an understanding of college students into a dorm room line designed by Todd Oldham.
- Prioritizing the order in which a portfolio of products and services should be launched (Example: **Apple Inc.** laid out the **iPod+ iTunes** ecosystem slowly over time, rather than launching all of its pieces at once)
- Connecting design efforts to an organization's business strategy (Example: **Hewlett-Packard**'s global design division is focused most intently on designs that simplify technology experiences. This leads to lower manufacturing costs at a time when CEO Mark Hurd is pushing for cost-cutting. Mark Hurd discussed HP's design strategy for determining environmental footprint of their supply chain.

**Designing a Selection Process**

The design of an assessment strategy should begin with a review of the critical competencies identified from the job analysis results. Once you decide what to assess, you must then determine how to structure the personnel assessment process. In designing a selection process, a number of practical questions must be addressed, such as:

- How much money is available?
- What assessment tool(s) will be selected?
- If using multiple tools, in what order should they be introduced?
- Are trained raters needed, and if so, how many (e.g., for conducting interviews)?
• How many individuals are expected to apply?
• What is the timeframe for filling vacancies?

For example, if your budget is tight, you will need to rule out some of the more expensive methods such as assessment centers or work simulation tests. If you are expecting to receive thousands of applications (based on projections from similar postings), you will need to develop an effective screening mechanism ahead of time. If you need to fill a vacancy and only have a few weeks to do so, then a multi-stage process will probably not be feasible. In working out answers to these questions, it is usually helpful to think in terms of the entire selection process, from beginning to end.

The selection of design features and design strategies are two critical decision stages in incremental change. This research aims to enhance the understanding of the influence of change analysis on concept and strategy selection. The objectives are to enhance current concept selection tools and to develop a more systematic approach to select design strategies.

Motivation: There is a need for product variety in today’s market. One possible way to address this need is to adopt incremental change (design), which involves the generation of new products through modification of existing products.

Objectives:
• Explore methods to evaluate concepts in incremental change
• Explore methods to identify components for design strategies
• Enhance understanding of the influence of change analysis on concept and strategy selection

Methods:
An extensive literature review was carried out in conjunction with industrial case studies to understand current concept and strategy selection practices and their limitations.

Findings:

Early results suggest that the consideration of change propagation during concept selection can help alert designers of potential changes and influence design choices. By classifying components based on change characteristics, appropriate design strategies can be implemented for individual components. These strategies include design for flexibility and design for standardization.
Here are some questions to ask yourself as you prepare for this new opportunity to let your design strategy talents shine.

1. Creativity and design are tough to defend. How design strategists have defended creativity in their lives as well as in corporate board rooms.

2. At the end of each day, ask yourself two questions: How can business leaders and designers join forces to build creative strategies that will ensure a more profitable future? How can business leaders and designers join forces to build creative strategies that will ensure a more sustainable future? Aim to come up with one new idea each day.

3. Design strategists strive to see problems through other’s perspectives.

4. Aim for profitability and sustainability as being co-existent, mutually beneficial and non-exclusive.

5. Highly successful design strategists take a definition – and stance – on design thinking? What is yours?

6. Design strategists know the outer limits of their roles. Do you have branding experts, graphic artists, presentation gurus, at your disposal? Have you kept their contact information up to date? Do you stay in touch even when you don’t have an assignment for them.

7. Read widely outside your area of focus. Stories on how companies utilize design to innovate and change appear in the most unlikely places.

8. Design strategists are right brained whereas strategic designers are left brained.

9. Many companies attempt to be innovative by spending on R&D, bringing in creative designers, hiring innovation consultants. What in your experience are the results for these and other interventions? How, in comparison, will their working with a design strategist lead to more satisfying results?

10. What’s your definition of a wicked problem? What makes a problem wicked? Complexity? How about time constraints?

11. Can you come up with at least two cases – whether those you were involved in or from the industry – where, through your or other’s intervention, a company’s productivity grew and their costs decreased, creating value for the company?

12. Why retain a design strategist? Two reasons; to help produce breakthrough innovations and create a competitive advantage for a business. Can you list five others?
13. Design strategists – and their clients – make use of a special type of thinking process: integrative thinking. Do you have a definition for integrative thinking?

14. What are you devoted to accomplishing? This is your devotion. Do you have one?

15. What’s your take on design research? Qualitative or quantitative? How do you distinguish between market research and design research?

16. In recent years designers have moved from styling consumer products to more strategic roles: designing experiences, services and business models. Describe how you have made this transition – and what insights from serving as a designer carry over to your strategy work.

17. How would you go about designing for customer loyalty? In a market economy characterized by global competition and commoditized products, how would you strategize so that companies gain deep and lasting loyalty from their customers?

18. Quick: What’s your definition for Creativity? For Innovation? For Design? How do you differentiate between each?

19. Distinguish design strategy from design management. What are meant by the two terms? How does each provide value for the client? For the fundamentals.

20. Your client asks you to take them through the steps of innovation – to help them understand and demystify the process for them. Do you explain that there are many methods or that you suggest one method no matter the client or assignment? How would you describe a typical step-by-step innovation process to your client?

21. Does design drive innovation or does innovation drive design? Or both? Prepare a short response for yourself should the need to discuss the topic come up (and it will.)

22. Describe your design strategy in terms of being a collaborative process. How do you work with others? How are they included and when in the process?

23. How well do you know your client’s business? Are you familiar enough with it to be able to comfortably speak using their terminology – not that of the design world? What method(s) do you have in place to go about becoming familiar with their language so that you can tap it when needed?

24. What would you do differently in approaching a small business and a large corporation? What impact, if any, does the size of organization have on how you operate as a design strategist?

25. You might find that you are doing things right – but are you doing the right things? Make a list of the things – in life – that you have let slip due to workload.
What is a strategist?

A strategist develops opinions on the future direction of a company and its brand, based on existing and predicted conditions, other known variables, intuition and research.

A strategist uses big-picture thinking, storytelling, insights, criteria development tools and synthesis in the development of agreed-upon end-goals.

A strategist takes a range of new media techniques and tools and combines them into an integrated approach best suited to the client’s needs.

A strategist analyses complex environments or problems and designs practical pathways and business solutions to achieve organisational objectives.

A strategist is someone who has the ability to see beyond the near term.

A strategist is concerned with establishing the long-term direction of a business.

A strategist is responsible for conceptually and holistically thinking of a future direction based on incomplete information.

A strategist looks at all inputs that will be important to a business and distills them into the right solution for future success.

A strategist identifies choices, evaluates them and recommends the best course of action to realise the client’s objective.

A strategist makes decisions based on a future goal, and connects the present to that future-state so that the path is perceived to be achievable by others.

A strategist is the thinker that informs the course of a project.

A strategist figures out how the various cogs and wheels fit together so that the whole machine hums.