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Brand Computing™

Harnessing Internet Technologies
To Perfect the 21st Century Business

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Cloud Computing. Social Networking. The Mobile Web.

There are so many conversations in today's business world around these rapidly exploding technology trends that their true use, value, and impact are often misstated and obscured. Moreover, the relationships and dependencies between these technologies are consistently overlooked as businesses rush headlong into implementing and deploying products with little more strategic vision than "we have to be first."

As has always been the case with engineering, the scientific advances do not exist in a vacuum. A lever is only valuable to someone who has something very heavy to lift. Just like that most basic innovation, today's cutting edge technologies can only add business value when applied to a specific problem.

This whitepaper is devoted to placing these technologies in the only context that should matter to any successful business: their brand identity.

Your brand identity IS your business context. It states who you are as a business, and every business is a solution to a problem. To put it more succinctly, every business is an answer to a question.

"How can I use the Internet to find any information I need?"
Google[1].

"How can I fly anywhere in the US with as little cost and hassle as possible?"
Southwest.

"Where can I always get a great cup of good quality coffee?"
Starbucks[2].

"Who can give me the most innovative computers that are so intuitive that even a child can use them?"
Apple.

Each of the four examples above positions those businesses within the context of someone who has a need that must be resolved. In other words, they define both their potential customer base as well as the opportunity that's available to add value for them.

Old businesses die when either their customers stop asking their question or someone else has a better answer.   And startups fail when they answer a question that no one has asked.
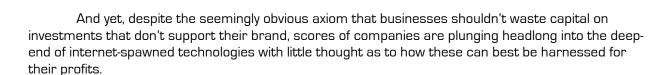
Your brand is the organizing principle around every decision your company makes. Any decision you make that is not in line with your brand is a choice that moves your business further away from solving the problem that all of your potential customers experience.

To that end, any investment your company makes that is not directly tied in some fashion to your corporate brand identity is a wasted expense. An auto mechanic would not invest in fine textiles and sewing equipment unless part of their brand value involved somehow reupholstering luxury car interiors with silk. And a restaurant would not waste its hard-earned profits buying mannequins and clothing racks, unless fashion and shopping were somehow linked to their value proposition. In both of these examples, these unorthodox investments are just symptoms of a confused brand identity that lies as the root cause of an inevitable business failure.

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[1] "Google's mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful." "About Google – Company", Google.

[2] "Our mission: to inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time.", "Our Starbucks Mission Statement", Starbucks.

And yet, despite the seemingly obvious axiom that businesses shouldn't waste capital on investments that don't support their brand, scores of companies are plunging headlong into the deep-end of internet-spawned technologies with little thought as to how these can best be harnessed for their profits.

Consider the drumbeat for cloud computing over the last three years. Business executives have been bombarded with media messages telling them that they must "go to the cloud". But these messages are coming from such a diverse and contradictory collection of vendors that the term "cloud computing" is practically meaningless now. A business that says they are investing in "the cloud" today could mean anything from (a) building a client-facing website that runs on Amazon Web Services, to (b) backing up their legacy data on an external data store that is available over the internet, to (c) converting their old IT infrastructure into an elastic cloud.

These are all completely different technology investments that serve completely different facets of a potential business. Cloud investment (a) is a very direct example of a strategic brand investment, while (b) and (c) would have to be components of a larger strategy. In other words, a business should only choose to move their data to cloud-based storage if it affords them some sort of strategic advantage - easier external access, lower IT maintenance costs, etc. Similarly, an in-house cloud solution is a tremendously powerful tool, particularly as a platform for an internal software development organization, but it is still only a tool. Its presence, in and of itself, is not a strategy.

Across all of its various incarnations, it is still some form of infrastructure intended to support whatever initiatives the business has determined can help it answer the core question for its clients in new and innovative ways. But the initiatives need to be defined first. Cloud computing should never be the beginning of a brand strategy.

Similarly, social networking and social media have dominated recent headlines and have threatened to completely overshadow traditional marketing strategies and media platforms. Executives repeat Facebook's 845 million users[3] and Twitter's 340 million daily tweets[4] like a mantra, as if that will instantly convert all of that traffic into sales for their companies. The size and scale of social networking is all that's necessary to inspire businesses to build a presence on these platforms in the hopes of engaging an entire universe of paying customers.

But while the social network's power to engage in a powerful and personal manner is undeniably enticing, it is still, at its core, a media platform, and basic marketing principles still apply. The largest television audience in the world was 2.5 billion viewers[5], but no business reasonably expects to use that as any sort of marketing benchmark. Instead, they look for the segment of users who are actually asking the questions they are hoping to answer, and then reach them with their solutions in a compelling and engaging message.

Social networks are no different, and should be treated with the same thoughtfulness and care as a business would treat any integrated marketing campaign. It is not enough to simply create a Quora account or a Tumblr page, just like it would not be enough to buy a billboard that just displayed your company logo. In the example of the billboard, you would research what your expected customer profile would be and where they would most likely pass on their daily commute to decide where to actually place your billboard and well before deciding the proper message to capture their attention as they sped past it on the way to work.

Similarly, there is a plethora of social networks, each one with distinct user profiles and behavior patterns. Perhaps Instagram is more in line with your desired customer segment than Pinterest, and those users may be more enticed by more closely curated and personal content. In that instance, it is the responsibility of your business marketing team to build a presence on the right

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[3] Emil Protalinski [February 1, 2012]. "Facebook has over 845 million users". *ZDNet*.
[4] Twitter Team [March 21, 2012]. "Twitter Turns Six". *Twitter Blog [blog of Twitter]*.
[5] Princess Diana's 1997 funeral is still the most watched television event in the world, with 2.5 billion viewers. John Urry, *Global Complexity*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2003, p. 134

network in a fashion best suited to match both your brand intent and the appetites of your chosen social network.

The latest innovation to grab the collective business consciousness is mobile technology. With the expansion of Wi-Fi and high-speed cellular networks, coupled with the proliferation of smartphones, tablets, and other mobile devices, businesses have an unprecedented capacity to reach their customers anywhere they can get phone service. Mobile presents the opportunity for the next step after social networking. Now, instead of just connecting and engaging directly with your customers, depending on your business model, you can actually deliver value to them instantaneously anywhere in the world.

Again, the numbers are staggering, especially when you consider the installation rates for some of the most popular mobile applications, like the game Draw Something, which was downloaded and installed by 35 million users in the space of 6 weeks[6]. On the other hand, the road to mobile application success is littered with numerous failures, where companies perceived the App Store landscape as a gold rush and scrambled to stake a claim while forgetting product marketing fundamentals.

After all, a mobile application is no different than any other software application. It is still a product that must service a particular client need to be successful. If your business is to sell detergent, it is much less valuable to give a customer a brochure than a sample of said detergent. Yet so many of the first round of business apps were little more than electronic press kits that were quickly deleted because they did not offer anything useful to the customer. Furthermore, most app stores are very insular environments with extremely limited marketing, promotion, and recommendation features. So simply creating and uploading an app to a store would be the equivalent of producing a product, shipping it to Wal-Mart, and then relying exclusively on Wal-Mart to promote and sell your product.

A mobile application has to be treated with the same care as any product launch, and it must involve all facets of your business, from the executives who provide strategic direction and determine business value, to the marketing professionals that identify who and where the potential customers are, to the IT specialists who construct both the presentation and underlying framework to support the unpredictable adoption and usage patterns inherent in the new mobile marketplace.

Individually, the cloud, social, and mobile each have the potential to add tremendous value to your company. However, treated as a collective toolset that is unified under the guiding principles of your corporate brand, they have the capacity to radically transform your business for the better. A company that can distill their brand value proposition in such ways that it can be translated into a mobile product that reaches customers directly and personally in the social networks where they live, flexibly and at cost due to a cloud based infrastructure is one that is perfectly suited to navigate our elastic and rapidly changing business environment. But it begins with treating all of these and any future tools as brand technologies, called into action specifically to answer the question that is right on the tip of your potential customers' tongue.

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[6] Brian Chen and Jenna Wortham [March 25, 2012]. "A Game Explodes and Changes Life Overnight at a Struggling Start-Up". *New York Times*

About ClearBlu™

ClearBlu Consulting™ is a management consulting firm dedicated to helping their clients harness the full power of their corporate brands through the strategic application of 21ˢᵗ century processes, tools, and technologies.

If you would like more information on how ClearBlu can help you build a better business, contact us at info@clearbluconsulting.com.

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