

e-Types Case Analysis

Introduction

In 2006, Copenhagen based design firm **e-Types** found itself in the middle of a defining controversy. Known for its rebellious philosophy of “smashing the world of design,” e-Types had grown rapidly since its founding by four graduates of the Danish Design School. The company built its reputation by creating identity-driven, edgy work that connected deeply with clients’ strategies and aspirations. However, when invited to a prestigious design competition for Denmark’s national sports team, the firm faced a difficult choice.

The situation was straightforward but fraught with implications: Should e-Types present the conservative “classical” design with a high likelihood of winning, the radical “edgy” design that reflected their creative philosophy but carried lower odds of success, or both designs and allow the client to decide? This decision was more than just a tactical choice in a competition. It reflected broader strategic questions about identity, growth, culture, and positioning in a competitive global market.

This essay argues that e-Types should present only the edgy design, because doing so preserves its identity, sustains employee morale, strengthens its long-term positioning, and builds the prestige necessary for international growth.

The Options at Hand

Option 1: Present the Edgy Design

- Estimated probability of winning: 20%
- Pros: Strong alignment with e-Types philosophy: pride and motivation for employees, prestige and differentiation in the industry.
- Cons: Lower chance of immediate success and financial gain.

Option 2: Present the Classical Design

- Estimated probability of winning: 80%
- Pros: High chance of securing the project, visibility through national exposure, short-term revenue.
- Cons: Contradicts e-Types identity: designers feel uninspired, risks cultural erosion and long-term dilution of brand.

Option 3: Present Both Designs

- Probability of winning: Unclear (likely higher, since client could choose).
- Pros: Demonstrates range and flexibility; gives the client choice.
- Cons: Risks signaling indecision; undermines positioning as bold and visionary, may reduce credibility by appearing to hedge bets.

Strategic Considerations

1. Company Identity and Positioning

From inception, e-Types differentiated itself as an edgy, boundary pushing firm. They were not simply graphic designers, but identity builders digging into the “soul” of clients and expressing that essence in bold, meaningful ways. Choosing the classical design may win the project but would undermine this differentiation. If they appear to act like any other conservative design firm, they risk eroding the very identity that makes them attractive to ambitious international clients.

2. Growth and Ambition

e-Types has clear ambitions to expand internationally. Growth requires revenue, but also a distinctive reputation. Many firms can produce conservative, client pleasing work, few are known for radical creativity. If e-Types compromises to win conservative projects, they may grow incrementally but lose the differentiation necessary for large scale international recognition. In contrast, consistently positioning themselves as the go to firm for daring, identity driven design could attract global clients seeking innovation.

3. Employee Morale and Creative Culture

Employees and partners at e-Types expressed dissatisfaction with the classical design. As one partner observed, “Why win the competition and maybe earn some money, but make this thing that doesn’t have meaning for you?” Sustained morale and pride in creative output are essential for retaining top talent and avoiding burnout. If leadership forces compromise that betray their ethos, employees may disengage or leave, weakening the firm’s creative foundation.

4. Prestige versus Cash Flow

e-Types leaders noted they operate on “two currencies”: money and prestige/street respect. While short-term cash flow from winning the competition would help, the prestige of staying true to their edgy identity is more valuable long term. Even losing with a bold design can generate buzz, enhance credibility, and attract future clients aligned with their philosophy. Winning with a classical design, by contrast, could yield revenue but damage prestige by associating e-Types with uninspired work.

5. Client Relationships and Fit

e-Types excels when working closely with clients to uncover their strategic essence. A design competition removes this opportunity everyone works from the same brief. Winning with a conservative design could lock them into a client relationship misaligned with their preferred style of collaboration. Losing with an edgy design, however, avoids such a mismatch and signals to future clients that e-Types is a firm that challenges conventions.

Recommendation

Considering the above, e-Types should present only the edgy design. This course of action:

- Preserves integrity by aligning with their founding philosophy.
- Motivates employees by valuing creativity and pride over compromise.
- Builds long term prestige as a daring and visionary firm.
- Signals differentiation to international clients seeking bold design partners.

While the probability of winning decreases, the strategic benefits outweigh the risks. The decision reflects not only a tactical choice but also an answer to the deeper question: What kind of company does e-Types want to be? By choosing edgy, they reaffirm their identity as innovators rather than followers.

Implementation Strategy Going Forward

The Team Denmark competition is a turning point, but e-Types must translate this philosophy into a sustainable strategy. A step-by-step plan can guide them through the short, medium, and long term.

Short Term (0–6 months)

- Clarify positioning: Publicly reinforce their identity as an edgy, identity driven firm through branding materials, website updates, and thought leadership.
- Selective pitching: Focus on clients and competitions that value bold design. Avoid opportunities where only conservative outcomes are acceptable.
- Employee alignment: Engage staff in internal workshops to reaffirm the firm's philosophy and ensure morale remains high.

Medium Term (6–18 months)

- Client portfolio curation: Build a showcase of edgy, innovative projects that highlight their strengths. Use these as case studies in marketing and pitches.
- International expansion: Target international clients in industries that reward bold branding (e.g., fashion, technology, entertainment).
- Partnership building: Form alliances with like-minded creative firms globally to expand reach without compromising identity.

Long Term (18 months and beyond)

- Global reputation: Position e-Types as the premier agency for identity-driven, edgy design worldwide.
- Thought leadership: Publish research, speak at design conferences, and lead conversations on the role of identity in corporate strategy.
- Sustainable growth: Balance financial health with creative prestige by continuing to prioritize projects that fit their ethos. Refuse clients that seek only safe, conventional design.

Anticipating Risks

Presenting only the edgy design of course carries risks. Losing the competition denies them short term visibility and revenue. However, e-Types financial position was strong at the time, with high demand and profitability. They could afford the loss. Moreover, the reputational benefits of maintaining integrity outweigh the revenue risks. If they consistently apply this approach, they may lose some competitions but gain a stronger, more differentiated market position over time.

Conclusion

The Team Denmark competition forced e-Types to confront a fundamental question: Should they prioritize short term wins with safe, classical work, or long-term integrity by staying true to their edgy philosophy? The answer lies in the identity they wish to build. Presenting the edgy design only allows them to preserve their culture, differentiate themselves internationally, and attract clients who value bold, identity driven design.

Ultimately, this decision is not just about logos or competitions it is about defining what kind of company e-Types wants to be. By choosing edge over conformity, prestige over compromise, and identity over short-term gain, e-Types positions itself for sustainable growth and enduring creative influence.