

Stop Controlling, Start Creating

Why it's more important to focus on efforts rather than results — and how consistency of effort creates coherence of results.

A few years back I had a client. This client had a beautiful website designed by a renowned design agency. On that beautiful website the client published articles that were well-reported and infographics that were quite attractive. From the outside, everything looked professional. Healthy. Successful.

But the client had a problem. Traffic wasn't growing. What can we do to improve, they asked.

I asked about the amount of content. 'No, we can't change that. Our budget is maxed out.' I asked about the quality of the content. 'No, we can't change that. We like our articles.' I asked about where they distribute their content. 'No, we can't change that. We don't have the staff.'

Then they asked: What if, instead of making any of those changes, we just redesign the site? Why would you do that, I said. That's the thing that's least wrong. Because, they said, and I will never forget this: that's the thing we know we can control.

The Search for Certainty Instead of Explanations

They should have been asking: What does our audience want? Why do they want it? How can we give it to them? They should have been looking for explanations of their marketplace.

Instead, they were asking: What do we want? How can we make what we want with as little pain as possible? They were looking for certainty of themselves. The result: They had created a perfectly consistent asset creation machine that very few people outside that machine cared about. A bright and pretty dead thing.

In other words, they spent very little time creating. Instead, they spent all their time trying to stay in control.

Consistency of Effort Creates Coherence of Results

The scariest thing in the world is to create. Creativity is an exploration of an unknown. It's trying something, seeing whether it works, then iterating on the effort until the result improves. It's testing your way to viability.

To be successful, the brand must be consistent. Not consistent in results, though that will come. Rather, consistent in efforts. Consistency of effort creates coherence of results.

- Apple is successful because they created a consistent process of building the iPhone. Each new release is different, yet the iterations are coherent.

- Ford is successful because they created a consistent process for creating the F-150. Each new model is different, yet the iterations are coherent.
- WIRED is successful because they created a successful process for making WIRED magazine. Each new issue is different, yet the iterations are coherent.

Focus on:

- Efforts, rather than results
- Building an engine of creativity, rather than a facade of assets
- The relationship with your audience, rather than yourself