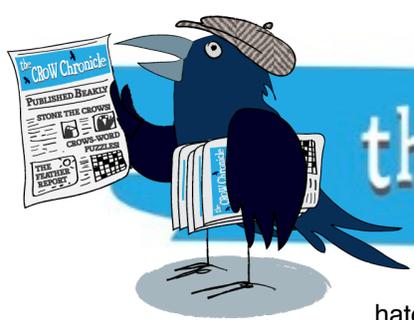


Bet The Crewe Chronicle isn't as informative as this, eh?



the CROW Chronicle

And finally, (5) **Failing to unite**, align or enthuse key stakeholders involved in signing off or implementing.

Merry Christmas Crow Friends! Hopefully you've hatched your plans for the Festive Period and you're beginning to look forward to winding down after another challenging, exciting and hectic year – we're with you! However, before we do, you've just got time to sit back, pour yourself a brew (no, not that sort – yet!) and have a read of our Christmas Crow Chronicle. This time the focus is on top tips for **planning** (brand, category, business – all applicable here) and also a page of our famous **brand mashups** for your delight & delectation. Enjoy, have a very Happy Christmas and see you in 2022!

In response to these issues, we have developed '**Hourglass**' brand planning, reflecting the shape of the process planning needs to follow. Hourglass planning is rooted in tackling the 5 big causes that lead to ineffective planning or plans to trip up. It's broken down into three stages:

Planning – the bridge from strategy to action



Planning is a vital building block of all business as well as marketing, but it is often treated as something that 'just happens', at the same time each year rather than when it's needed, for which common sense alone is good enough and frankly which becomes something of a template filling exercise.

In our experience, this is a seriously flawed view. In fact, we would contend that unless marketers apply greater rigour to the discipline of planning, we will limit our ability to deliver the primary aim of brand building companies, to positively impact target customers to effect successful change. And if we can't do this, we won't be taken seriously by others in the business. So why then do brand plans often fail? We've identified that there are consistently **5 big causes**:

(1) **Confusing tactics with strategy** and therefore the task at hand. Misunderstanding what strategy is, the difference between it, diagnosis and tactics and a fascination with 'shiny new things' all get in the way of building an effective plan. Planning **links** – it's why we call it 'the bridge to action' and it needs to bridge effectively from the situation the brand faces today through to what direction you're going to take and from there through to the actions.

(2) **Getting the diagnosis wrong** based on the situational analysis, likely caused by data gaps, overbearing opinions or underplaying owned strengths of the brand or a competitor.

(3) **Derailed process due to misalignment**. Mid-way through the process and intervention from a senior leader questions the work so far, losing momentum and bursting the precious bubble of confidence that's been created.

(4) **Choosing the wrong strategy** e.g. not leveraging a real strength or perhaps taking on a competitor in the wrong way.



Diagnose:

understanding the situation the brand or company is in, and why.



Decide: working out how do we deal with the situation we face. Where do we want to be? What are the options for getting there cognisant of our competitive situation? This is the strategy.



Do: the plans or tactics. Working out what the few, high impact, activities are that we need to execute in order to achieve our strategy. And being clear on what the distractions are too



Good **diagnosis** is built around starting by **going broad** in analysis; not just in terms of the content and approach to gathering data and making sense of it, but also in listening to the perspectives, opinions or strongly held views of key stakeholders in the process.



Then we make sense and **choose what's important**. Don't miss the human act of sensemaking and choice. You don't want to end up with a very comprehensive but utterly useless synthesis of the current state. It's what you choose to pull out and take action on that's important. Focus on the few enablers and blockers of growth because these will flow through to the heart of your action plan. Be clear on who you're **competing for** and evaluate and test everything through their lens.

In the **decide** stage we focus on ensuring **long term foundations** are in place. Purpose or mission, vision and goals are not interchangeable. You need to know the role of each and how together, they help you make clear decisions that will be right most of the time.

A **small number of action platforms** should flow **directly** out of the diagnosis. If you can't see the insight threads from the diagnosis at the top of the process to the actions at the end, then your plan is likely misdirected and you'll struggle to get buy-in and engagement.

In the **do** stage we're looking for **brand activities that deliver against the essentials**. Effective brand plans always deal with three themes: the brand's 'mental availability', its 'physical availability' and bridge between the two, trial & repeat. The 4P's fit here. And great brand plans **sacrifice not salami-slide**. Don't confuse this with prioritisation. Too often, prioritisation is a pretence that some things are more important but, through sleight of hand, we still try and do everything. You can't. Kill stuff properly and **just focus** on what's important.

Our experience in brand planning is built from both client side and agency experience. If we can help you with your planning challenge in the New Year, get in touch. In the meantime, stay safe, stay well and have a Cawsome Christmas!

