



# the CROW Chronicle

This edition of the Crow Chronicle is about **planning**, one of the four pillars of our offer as a brand-building company.

We want to shine a spotlight on planning because it is the unsung hero in unlocking growth. Whether at a business level; at a business unit level, or at brand level. Great planning is the facilitator of any, and all, of these. Too often though, planning is seen as a bit of a distraction and drain on resource; something that must get done for the sake of it. We're asking you then to reconsider how you think of planning – because if done right, it's a huge opportunity to grow the business and more than this grow engagement and connection too.

## 1 Challenge your assumptions about what planning is...

You would not be alone if you undervalue the importance of great planning – most businesses, and most businesspeople, do. Typically, business planning doesn't have a natural home: does it sit with finance? Strategy? Sales? Marketing? Elsewhere? Is it owned locally, regionally or globally? As a result, the process of planning becomes more about getting a process and an output that's *acceptable* to all, more about herding cats to a timetable, than really developing a plan that will dictate action, unite and hold the business to account.

## 2 A great plan is a commercial liberator

There aren't many activities that a business undertakes where everyone has skin in the game and is responsible for delivering their part. The process of building the plan is an unbelievable opportunity to bring people together to sense-make about the current state of the business or brand, and (through a structured process) decide what needs to happen as a result. This means it is a brilliant opportunity to build engagement around one thing that everyone cares about. If done right, it can be one of the best team building activities a business can do.

## 3 Go broad and listen

Developing a great plan is recognising that it is constantly fragile right up to the point it is agreed. Someone who feels unheard can trip the plan up later – whether it is at sign-off, or even working against its implementation. A great process therefore goes deliberately wide up front – it takes on inputs that are both broad and deep, from inside the business and externally. Do this process thoroughly to unlock both crucial insights for the plan and internal engagement. Work hard to include and really hear people and gather data from many sources.



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## Narrow down and obsess

There's a time for going wide, and there's a time for narrowing down with ruthless focus. Here's our major learning about brand and business plans: *they fail through greed*. They don't get executed because the creators' eyes are way too big for the company stomach. Great planning is about narrowing down on what's important by sacrificing not prioritising. It's about identifying two or three big platforms you can obsess about, each with one big activity that you can hammer home in the market with as much investment and focus as you can muster.

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## Create momentum, nurture it as a precious resource

Planning is typically done in a set window in the year. There is a formal point where the plans need to tie into the numbers but don't underestimate the value of momentum within this. Planning shouldn't drag on. It should be pacey and energised. Focus, involve and corral in a tight window. If you can create a sense of urgency and momentum, people will feel more engaged because they will see their contribution is being used. If the process drags on, a disconnect is created between colleague contribution, the end plan and ultimately engagement.

## The Plan On A Page

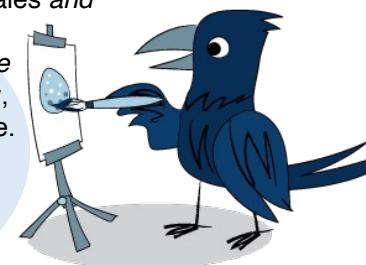
If a plan is going to steer the business and drive business success it needs to be referred to and used. If it's a 50-slide long PowerPoint 'deck'...forget it. If it's an Excel spreadsheet... forget it. Success is your plan on one page. Strategic foundations setting the direction. Critical enablers and blockers of growth called out. Targeting and positioning distilled nicely down. And the two or three activity focus areas logically flowing through from the enablers and blockers. One page. Easy to digest. Usable every day. Exciting. Shareable. One page.



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## Bring it to life

A great plan must work for the CFO and the CMO. It must work for sales and production. It needs head and heart. It needs numbers and narrative. Just as you launch a new brand, you need to launch a new plan. It is *the* opportunity to gather the troops in the year. Tell the story; bring the why, what and how to life. Oh, and leave everyone with ... the plan on a page.



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## 8 Rhythm and routine: 3 year, 1 year

Great plans work to a rhythm and routine; a great planning process is anticipated not feared. It's an opportunity to hear the diagnosis of the business and plan for the opportunities of tomorrow. But it takes time, focus and some investment to do it well. And too often, companies repeat a process every year on *autopilot*. There's no need. Human behaviour moves much slower than we think; retailers tend to move in cycles too – markets are more predictable than we like to imagine them. Every 3 years go deep. Do the full planning process and write a 3-year plan. Then in years 2 and 3 review it *by exception*. That way you can give back some of the most precious resource: time.

If you're looking for specialists to help you build a brilliant plan – for your business or for your brand, give Crow a call.