



the CROW Chronicle

one to get wrong, because when time is short and there's a lot to do, the temptation is to add more. more projects, more priorities, more activity, more things to put in the plan.

At The Crow Flies, we think the opposite is often needed: step back; work out what's really going on. Decide where you can make a difference. And be ruthless about what matters most. That's what this Autumn Crow Chronicle is about. Five considerations for the run-in to Christmas - and the run-up to 2027 - on making better decisions about research, strategy, planning and portfolios. No crystal balls or 47-point frameworks. Just a few questions worth asking before the year gets away from you. **Because a good brand building isn't about fitting everything in. It's about knowing what matters enough to leave everything else out.**

1

Before you plan, diagnose

Around now many organisations start planning with a blank sheet of paper, and jump into 'what are we going to do next year?'

Crow intervention: the better question is, 'what's actually changed?'

- What's changed in the market?
- What's changed for customers?
- What's changed with competitors?
- What's changed in our organisation, business or our brand?
- What have we learned from this year's activities?

Crow Hourglass Planning incorporates a robust 5C method to the situational analysis that means you start with a clear view of current reality, including what's working today



2

Don't commission research. Commission an answer.

The Autumn is a great time to understand your underpinnings for future growth, and research clearly plays a role.

Crow intervention: often many research briefs aren't clear on what they want to learn, not because of the brief *per se*, but because the business isn't quite sure yet

Research is usually a small part of a marketing budget but punches above its weight because everything hangs off it. So as part of the brief be clear what the decision is that the research needs to help you make.

- If the answer is **x**, what will you do?
- If the answer is **y**, what will you do?

And if the answer is that 'you'll discuss it', you're probably not quite ready for research. Research shouldn't be corporate therapy, it's critical ammunition for action and growth.

3

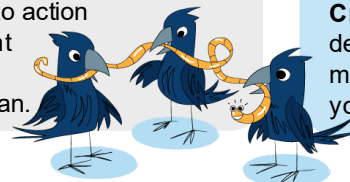
The Golden Threads really are golden

If a plan fails, then the business or brand fails. Yet, too often, plans are treated like simple common sense rather than an opportunity to drive engagement and action – and ultimately impact your market.

Your business or brand should have golden threads that link from your current reality, through your target needs and proposition and on into choices and action.

Crow intervention: Can you draw a line from what you've learned about your consumer / customer to what you're planning to do next year? If not, somewhere between insight and action the thread has been lost.

This is why The Crow Flies is a brand building agency; yes, we undertake research, but we always look to turn it into action through a cogent and compelling proposition & plan.



4

The portfolio problem no one seems to be dealing with

When you're in the weeds of day to day execution sometimes the issues that need to be resolved up close get missed. And one of the most common is how your brand or proposition portfolio is organised.

Individually, every brand, proposition, product or sub-brand may make perfect sense. They always do. But collectively, they can create a mess – internally & externally.

The symptoms are common:

- Overlapping roles
- Confusing customer choices
- Duplicated investment
- Internal debate & argument
- Innovation creates yet more complexity

Crow intervention: before you decide where to put next year's money, have you decided where your brands should be playing?

5

The courage to leave things out

The marketing industry can fetishise about 'what's new'. But there are plenty of brand building principles that aren't fly-by-night. And one is the Crow philosophy of **sacrifice**.

Crow intervention: the hardest of planning isn't deciding what to do. It's deciding what not to do at all.

A test: your plan should contain:

- Fewer "priorities"
- Clearer choices
- Harder decisions
- Pin-point focus
- Greater alignment
- More commitment to scale

The best test is to ask what you would take out of the plan if it was half as big? You'll be getting close to what's actually important if you do that. Any brand should be thinking between 1 to 3 big activities, depending on the budget.

