

Suits you, sir?



For my 50th birthday my wife bought me a made to measure suit.

Before I go on I would like to stress that in the same year I managed to run a mile in under 6 minutes and downloaded a Tiny Tempah LP (I think that's what you still call them...) - I'm trying to resist the descent into late middle age.

The tailor had been in his business for 40 years. He was a Yorkshireman, so kept his banter precise and to the point. He was, however, keen to point out the previous error of my ways in having always purchased 'off the peg'.

He asked my waist size, which I confidently replied was 35". He measured me and demonstrated that I was almost a 37".

We had a brief conversation about the variance that different stores and brands have in the measuring they apply to their trousers. He convinced me that I was most unlikely to find anything in a high street store that would either;

- a) *Match the waist size indicated on the label*
- or
- b) *Fit me properly*

His assertions were confident and have, to date, proven to be right. Trust an expert!

It's interesting - this line of thinking is absolutely in line with my views on brand strategy development. I've long been a made to measure man when it comes to the process of delivering a strategic programme.

I've had to resist the urgings of several past colleagues on this. They have pointed out that many of the leading agencies place heavy emphasis on their own proprietorial trade-

marked processes. "Wouldn't we look better if we had something like that?" I've been asked. And not always that politely...

At one level I have to admit I've been tempted. An owned, appealingly named process can become a brand in its own right - something tangible for a Client to buy into and to use to justify a significant expense to his or her Board colleagues.

In what can still often be regarded as (or sold as) the 'black art' of brand strategy work this element of tangibility can be a reassuring anchor to many marketers. But to my mind, this is a false confidence.

Using analogies from the experience of brands in other sectors or international markets can be helpful in driving towards a solution to a brand challenge. But every brand is, or perhaps more pertinently, should be different.

In my experience, the real danger of adopting the same 'tried and trusted' approach and techniques to every brand limits the potential to arrive at a truly unique solution.

More than that, every business is different too. Making a brand deliver effectively against what it promises is down to the people within that business, so any brand development programme needs to involve at least some of these people and to ensure that they have ownership of its outputs. Because every organisation works in different ways, through different structures, and with very different individuals, the way in which this internal engagement is developed also needs to be appropriately tailored.

Every development process is written from scratch, to fit the specific brand challenge we're faced with.

And of course there are also the more functional differences that need to be considered – most notably budgets and timings. Editing down a robust, proven £100k six month process to fit a £20k budget that needs to be delivered in 6 weeks is self-evidently riddled with issues. Like trying to squeeze an XL body into a medium jacket...

Let me give a couple of examples.

Some years ago I was a participant within a (this is not an exaggeration) 35 stage brand and product development programme conducted by a highly reputable UK consultancy for a food business. It was immensely thorough, with every key stage assessed, reviewed and tested robustly. It was scheduled to run for 18 months. It was intended to deliver an absolute sense of certainty to the delicate process of bringing a new range of products to market. It actually resulted in almost complete stasis and a real sense of frustration within a business that actually had a much more urgent commercial need to get new ideas developed in order to revive an ailing performance. I think it was abandoned at around stage 17...

More recently I was invited to participate in a brand strategy development process for an international business that was run by another experienced set of consultants. They employed a rigorous process that had been used effectively for one part of this customer's business, but in the session I attended it became apparent that one key stage in the process was focusing on an end benefit of the brand that ignored the core qualities that actually delivered that benefit and were key to its competitive advantage. Could the process be adjusted to consider how best to incorporate these key elements, we asked? Sadly not, we were politely informed.

Unbending adherence to a practised formula superceded the specific needs of this brand. The end result was a strategy template that the marketers are likely to struggle to actually deliver.

So, we have avowedly resisted all temptation to create a trademarked strategic development process at The Brand Nursery. We don't want to depend on something that we have created to suit ourselves, instead of an approach tailored to meet the needs of our Clients.

That's why at The Brand Nursery we promise that every development process is written, from scratch, to fit the specific brand challenge we're faced with. We even have an unwritten (but observed) rule not to 'cut and paste' from previous proposals – it promotes lazy thinking, and writing from start to finish on a blank sheet makes you really focus on addressing the particular issues to be confronted.

My made to measure experience allowed me to select the cut, lining, pockets, colour, buttons, zips and style that suited me (I wonder whether that's why it's called a 'suit'...?). I find it more comfortable and easier to wear than my recent high street purchases, and I consequently wear it with pride.

It's made me a convert to the made to measure approach.

If you'd like us to measure up your current brand challenge, please get in touch and we'll see if we can develop a plan to suit you.