

## MAKING PROFITS: WHAT THE PROPHETS DIDN'T TELL US

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*Feb., 2002* — The idea flows into your head. The concept takes shape. It grows. It has life. It is a masterpiece. Mission accomplished. You go to sleep fulfilled.

The next morning you spring from bed carefree. You flick the light switch, nothing happens. You click the remote-nothing. Pick up the phone-dead.

When the bill collector pounds at your door, your masterpiece is not acceptable as payment. Ingenuity alone does not support us. In this regard, we all answer to the same master. His name is money.

Clever invention and profound creativity are no substitute for marketability. In order to make money, an idea must offer something so valuable people actually part with their money to own it. Even a great visionary cannot create a product so revolutionary as to escape the fundamental laws of commerce: to identify, build, and sell products people will pay for.

For the internet profession to survive we need less Prophets, and more Profits.

The internet was flooded in financing, deals and new goods. Financiers and innovators were cutting deals feverishly. Paupers were made kings, then were reversed back to their original stations. New products hit market at record speeds but stuck to shelves with record inertia. With few exceptions, money flew generously in every direction save one - from buyer to seller.

It is tempting to believe money is not a proper valuation of our creative success, especially when our strongest concepts don't result in profits. Profits transform us from hobbyist to professionals. Profits shift our priorities, guide our strategies, and keep us focused on reality. With this perspective our work product is not only evaluated on ingenuity, but also for purpose and value. Now every step in the creative process aims to serve an agenda, from utility to persuasion.

While profit alone does not measure the value of an invention, it does testify to that invention's ability to reach, influence, and be embraced by society.

Profit quantifies our professional aptitude to identify and execute an idea that the world finds valuable.

How do we reunite Prophets with Profits? I cannot pretend to provide a complete solution, our industry thrives on individual creativity. Instead I offer strategic guideposts -- reflections on wisdom that were lost in the flurry.

First, identify a market need or strategize to manufacture desire long before any production begins. . Although need assessment begins with the question "Do they want this, or can we make them want this?", evaluating need is a complex undertaking that encompasses many other questions: Does the cost correlate with the desire for the product? How easy is it for the buyer to adopt the product? Is the overhead to purchase, download, install or customize the product so overwhelming that the buyer's desire gets stymied?

Second, evaluate your market to identify supply/demand barriers. If a market is saturated or overwrought with competition, generating brand awareness, or convincing prospects to switch alliances can be prohibitively expensive. Strategize affordable techniques that circumvent this market hurdle in advance.

Third, remove all personal and political agendas. Optimize the product's features, form, and aesthetics to maximize market approval, not interpersonal issues.

Fourth, if an organization is to succeed, every team member must base his decision-making, on satisfying customer 's needs, from the moment of invention, through production, sales and fulfillment. Once this need has been fulfilled , the focus shifts to remaining competitive.

Fifth, ensure that design supports and serves the customers' sensitivities. Aesthetics are highly subjective, and have a prejudicial effect on customers. The wrong visuals can impact the market's willingness to accept a product. They can deem your product useless, complex, boring , or anything other than valuable and exciting.

Finally, never compromise communication. The ability to communicate a product's worth is as valuable as the product itself. Communication design should persuade and reinforce the customer into believing they NEED this product. A tasty story is equally appealing to media.

In summary, aesthetics will not sustain need for an undesirable product. Likewise, a product of great value hidden behind a mask of weak design won't reveal its worth and create a market. The most magnificent product in utility and design will only succeed if the value is evident to the buyer.

These guidelines may be rudimentary, but they are critical. Unfortunately, they are not being religiously applied. If everyone in business, including us "*creatives*",

applies these tenets to his or her duties, and we work as a focused harmonious team, more success stories will result.

The digital world still holds out the promise of a profitable new marketplace. But this market remains bound to the foundations of old commerce. Supply and demand are inescapable prerequisites.