



InSource

Identifying and Addressing the Inhouse Design Challenge

InSource was conceived in September 2002, and for the tens of thousands of creatives who work in-house at corporations, publications, institutions and nonprofits, it could not have been soon enough. Founders Glenn Arnowitz (left), assistant director, Creative Services at Wyeth, and Andy Epstein (right), creative director at Gund, Inc., realized that there were few opportunities for dialog, training and support for inhouse design directors and managers, and they formed the association with a commitment to addressing those issues. Arnowitz and Epstein then started calling their peers and quickly found other directors like themselves who were feeling isolated and unsupported in their professional pursuits.

InSource has moved quickly to provide a venue for initiating dialogue designed to support the group, holding their first breakfast at Wyeth, which included a powerful presentation by Peter Phillips of the Design Management Institute, a respected expert on inhouse management who helped set the tone for all future discussions, followed by a roundtable conversation in which attendees spoke about the challenges their departments were facing and possible solutions. Other meetings have centered on presentations by Moira Cullen of Hallmark, Donna MacFarland and Brad Kear of The Vanguard Group, and design and branding consultant Carla Hall.

STATE OF THE HOUSE

From this very first meeting, several points became clear. There are more practicing inhouse designers than agency and design firm designers, and the segment continues to grow. The design community is waking up to this fact, and is beginning to address inhouse issues more deeply than ever. The key issue for inhouse designers is to gain the respect of peers in their organization, and of the design and business communities. In addition, belt-tightening in corporate and design America is having an impact on many inhouse creative groups, who are being forced to do more work with fewer staff.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

It has also become clear that most inhouse design organizations share fundamental challenges. These include:

The Need to Justify

It is critical for inhouse designers to justify their existence, and to show the value of their role. Crucial to this effort is the need to communicate that value to upper management in terms of bottomline savings and efficiencies, and in terms of how good design supports the company's branding and sales objectives.

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Building A Strong Team

Yet another special issue for inhouse designers involves the challenge of building and maintaining a good team. This includes identifying and understanding the specific skill sets, attitudes and lifestyle priorities that designers need to possess to successfully fit into a corporate design department. Those who will succeed generally value stability, security, better fringe benefits and predictable hours over peer recognition, a more relaxed working environment and a more entrepreneurial career path. They have the ability to work in a structured hierarchy where conformity is valued and teamwork is emphasized over individualism. Inhouse designers also must possess strong written and verbal communication skills, since they generally work directly with their clients rather than through an account executive. And since most inhouse departments don't have project managers, the designers need strong organizational skills; the ability to multitask is critical to their success

Staying Fresh

Maintaining enthusiasm and staying fresh in a setting that is not always conducive to creativity presents a perennial challenge to inhouse designers. Inspiration days, conference attendance, building a library of trade periodicals and books, and the determination to push the limits on every project, can all go a long way towards keeping the creative sparks flying.

Marketing the Inhouse Group

Branding a department, creating a departmental intranet site, displaying framed samples of your best work, holding an open house and developing promotional brochures — these are ideas that can help inhouse departments gain the attention they deserve. Arguably, the best way to market the group is to form and maintain strong personal and working relationships with clients and upper management.

Working Smarter

Inhouse teams are used to playing hard, but they have to play smart, too. Sometimes, adopting the simplest procedures and work habits can save hours of production time that can be dedicated to concept and strategy. The first step is to identify the areas that yield the best results. At department meetings, it is important to have "what's working/what's not working" sessions. Is the department getting clear direction from clients? Are archived files easily retrievable? Does everyone on the team understand their priorities? Drill down and look at ways to address chronic problems. The areas that tend to yield the biggest efficiency gains are proper labeling and archiving of projects and digital assets, implementation of effective project request and tracking procedures, and automation of repetitive production tasks.

Tech Support

The organizations that most inhouse designers work in are not Mac-oriented. This creates the need to connect with the IT guys and help them appreciate the beauty and simplicity of the Mac platform. It

Insource As Experts

InSource has been created to serve as a gatekeeper to outside resources, and draws strength from the expertise of its members. They are in the trenches, faced with the daily challenges of managing an inhouse design department, and are always on the look out for support. Members inform each other with their experience, knowledge and expertise. The group has made it a priority to identify the select articles, books, websites and experts on inhouse design, and act as a resource to its members by making these materials available. More importantly, the board of InSource realized early on that its members were its most valuable resource for providing real world strategies and tactics to the inhouse design community at large. To that end, InSource values and nurtures its grassroots culture, holding events in an intimate forum. The roundtable is the heart of the events and provides an opportunity for participants to trade war stories, discuss challenges, share solutions and strategies. The current board of directors is now driving InSource towards expanded forums and a broader reach into the design community through partnerships with other design and marketing organizations. The current board of directors is:

Glenn Arnowitz

Assistant Director, Wyeth Corporate Graphics

John Baker

Creative Director, Cendant Corporation

Ivan D. Boden

Manager and Senior Art Director of Creative Services, ISO's Corporate Communications Department

Andy Epstein

Creative Director, Gund, Inc.

Emily Cohen

Consultant to creative professionals and to NYU School of Continuing and Professional Studies

Robin Friedman

Business Development Manager, Aquent

Susan A. Kran

Senior Manager of the Graphic Design and Print Production Group, Bristol-Myers Squibb

Joan Lamensdorf

Creative Manager of the Category Promotion Design Center, Pfizer Consumer Healthcare

Joan Mazzeo

Director of Art & Design, Pearson Learning Group

Bruce Rogers

Manager of Creative Services, Atlantic Mutual Companies

Martin Shova

Associate Director, Creative Services, Kraft Foods North America

Contact: In-source.org

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also helps to find outside Mac consultants to recommend to them. Most important, accept the fact that, in a non-Mac world, designers need to stay current on digital technology.

Agencies Are Your Friend

Repeat this mantra at least ten times: “Agencies are my friend.” The truth is that an inhouse department is not always the best choice for certain branding and marketing projects. Accept that fact, and then partner with your company’s agency of choice, so that you’ll not only get to share in some of the glory but you’ll develop healthy working relationships with outside creatives who can offer you new and insightful strategies for improving your own work habits and design and management processes.

Deadlines and Reality

Discuss each project, and the resources needed to deliver quality design, with the client. Assess and determine if deadlines can be met and, if not, suggest alternative outside resources. By enlightening clients, you help them understand the process and the time involved in producing a well-crafted piece of design. In the end, they will have more respect and a greater appreciation for you and your team than if you deliver mediocre work. Operating at an unrelenting pace raises the risk of burning out the most precious assets: designers.

THE UPSIDE OF INHOUSE

The consensus view is that there are many upsides to inhouse design departments from the designer and the client perspective.

For the designer, these can include: (1) regular hours, also known as “having a life”; (2) corporate perks such as stock options, benefits and child care; (3) security, stability and a certain level of comfort; (4) the opportunity to develop strong business relationships with internal clients; (5) the ability to assemble a strong creative team dedicated to the products and ideals of the organization; (6) a shared vision and purpose regarding the organization’s mission; (7) knowledge and understanding of the company products or services; (8) access to resources and



Glenn Arnowitz, Wyeth

‘If We Build It, They Will Come’

On Co-Founding InSource: I have discovered a kindred spirit in Andy. We’re both the same age. We both live in old Victorian homes built in 1890. We each have two daughters. We both manage an inhouse team of six designers. But although the companies that we work for couldn’t be more different in size, products and culture, we share the same challenges and frustrations, and also a burning drive to provide the best services for our companies. Our commitment to InSource is an extension of a deep conviction regarding design excellence, and has helped to foster new relationships and build this growing community of inhouse creative directors. During our first conversation, I realized that the ideas that Andy and I tossed around would be of value to other inhouse creative directors and that, “if we built it [InSource], they would come.” And they did. People are hungry for information, and I believe we are providing a unique forum to explore design and management issues rarely discussed in the mainstream. One of our biggest challenges as a growing organization is to provide value to members outside of our geographical area, who can’t always attend our events. We currently have over 400 members from around the country and the world. As our website continues to become more robust, I envision InSource taking it to the streets and planning events around the country that will give members the opportunity to open new dialogs, share stories and strengthen our community. Inhouse design is finally starting to get some respect and many organizations now recognize the benefits of having a strong internal creative team. But that’s not enough. We need to think strategically and understand how our services impact our companies and ultimately the bottomline.

On Becoming the Resource for Design: My ultimate goal for my department is to become a resource center for all design-related issues. If we weren’t able to solve the design problem internally, I would work with outside resources to help facilitate the process. Recognizing our limitations, and accepting the fact that there were projects that exceeded our capabilities, led me to create a network of vendors that I could trust. I can’t stress enough the importance of knowing and accepting your limitations...

On Brand Management: Communicate to employees the value and importance of a strong brand identity and how it effects your company in the marketplace. Publish a brand guidelines toolkit and illustrate how color, fonts, clear space and placement are all integral to building strong brand recognition. Create a brochure that will serve as a reference guide and assist employees when basic issues arise concerning logo usage. Make your brand guidelines accessible on the company website and alert employees that the information is readily available. Contact your vendors, as well. Create a “Hall of Shame.” Display samples of both correct and incorrect logo usage, so your clients begin to understand the difference. Be the “Chief of Logo Police.” Require that employees contact you for all logo-related issues and become the repository for all company logo files. Let them come to you. That way, you can manage the artwork and maintain consistency.

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information; (9) less competitiveness and friction, more teamwork and cooperation; and (10) a chance to work on a wide variety of projects in different types of media.

From management's and the client's perspective, there is also an upside: (1) on-site convenience a floor or cubicle away; (2) the designer has an intimate knowledge of the brand, corporate culture and business objectives; (3) faster turnaround; (4) inhouse departments serve as liaisons to external resources such as printing; (5) the ability to work directly with a designer, receive personal attention and be involved in shaping the project; (6) no charge backs; and (7) they are often more efficient and affordable than working with outside resources.

MYTHBUSTING

There are many powerful and longstanding myths about inhouse versus outsourced design. Among the myths that InSource hopes to pierce are:

The Agency is Always Better

The conventional wisdom is that because the internal client is paying a lot of money to an outside agency, the work is always fantastic. Not always. There are countless stories of marketing managers, unhappy with outside agencies, turning to their inhouse teams to salvage or implement a failing project. Depending on the size of the organization, it is almost impossible to take on all of the creative work inhouse, so understand the capabilities, admit the limitations and seek out the plum projects for which the department is best addressed.

Corporate Culture Stifles Creativity

Creating visual communications for the same client with the same products day-after-day presents a special challenge. Combine that with a more regimented corporate culture and strict branding guidelines, and it's a wonder that inhouse groups create anything that's visually and conceptually compelling. But they can and they do. By pushing problem-solving and creative talents to the limit, inhouse teams often find ways to do more with less. Inhouse teams also understand that the best design solution



Andy Epstein, Gund 'Community, Communication, Content'

On Co-Founding InSource: When we formed InSource, Glenn and I refused to complain about the lack of attention paid to inhouse design, and chose instead to be proactive and look for ways to end the isolation and lack of access to information relevant to our work. It wasn't hard to find others to join us in our venture, and the rewards have clearly made the planning, hard work and time commitment that we and the board, as volunteers, have put into building InSource well worth the effort. InSource now has over 400 members from as far away as Australia and Iran, and we continue to grow. This fact clearly illustrates what other industry groups and experts are beginning to acknowledge — and we already knew — that inhouse designers have been a large, invisible and frequently ignored group within the design community who are now looking for community and support.

On the Three C's: InSource is committed to addressing these needs through a program emphasizing what we're calling the three C's: Community, Communication and Content. *Community* involves putting inhouse creatives together through our website and by providing events where peers can meet face to face and have a chance to swap war stories, find a shoulder to cry on and seek inspiration from others' successes. It's the touchy-feely goal of the group. *Communication*, facilitated through the same avenues as community, is more about addressing the nuts and bolts, day-to-day needs that in-house creatives have. InSource has been able to connect members to help them find reliable vendors, management consultants, staff and job opportunities. *Content* designed to support the inhouse community is InSource's biggest challenge and its most exciting opportunity. It involves finding the precious information already circulating in the industry and making it available to our members through our website, but more importantly it means tapping the valuable well of our members' expertise and making it available in the form of commonsense, real world commentary and advice.

On the Differences between Inhouse and Independent Designers: While the design community may disagree on the specific differences between inhouse independent designers, there should be little argument that differences do exist. These distinctions in skill sets, disposition and motivators don't make one group better than the other, but they should be acknowledged, both by managers doing the hiring for their companies and those being hired. As designers, we all need to take stock of our life situation, our strengths and our priorities and then invest our time and energy into pursuing a career in one of these worlds.

On the Challenges of Being Inhouse: Like all fictional characters from Greek mythology, comic books and movie sagas who are a combination of man and animal, alien or machine, we inhouse designers constantly wrestle with two competing halves of our psyches. We must be intuitive yet logical, unique yet conformist and artistic yet technical. With one foot in the creative universe and the other in the world of business and finance, our workplaces demand that we be of two minds and spirits, much like our fictional counterparts.

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to a particular business need may not end up in an annual. True success is powerfully forwarding the company's objectives — which is, of course, what they're being paid to do.

Isolation From the Mainstream

Internal creative departments are the resource for all things design. And since design touches every department in an organization, inhouse designers have a broader range of projects and interactions with a wider range of employees than anyone else in their company. They also have access to information and resources unavailable to an outside agency. Thus, there are many opportunities for developing successful business relationships with upper management: informal meetings often take place in the hall, at a coffee station or by an impromptu visit to a colleague's office. Inhouse designers also often find that their organizations are committed to staying at the forefront of new technology, and that it's easier for them to get approval for hardware and software upgrades than their agency and design firm counterparts.

They Only Do Forms

Inhouse designers do forms... and brochures, newsletters, advertising, logo design, digital photography, product mockups, scanning, displays, presentations, custom illustration and the annual report.

The Art Department

Introducing the department to the rest of the organization can make a huge difference in how employees perceive the inhouse team. To dispel the perception that the department is a bunch of "artsy" bohemians, get rid of the "art department" moniker and find a more appropriate and professional name: creative services, corporate design, corporate graphics. This helps gain respect and more projects through review intact, on time and in budget.

Some Do's and Don'ts From InSource

Do Cry Uncle

When overwhelmed with projects, look for ways to either push the more production-labor-intensive work back onto other departments outside vendors or temporary staff.

Do Reach Out And Touch Someone

If you're ever feeling isolated, look to trade organization directories or even the Yellow Pages to find companies that you can call and find a comrade-in-arms.

Do Make the Water Cooler Your Friend

Ditch the email response, stop hiding behind the monitor and get out and mingle with the masses. It's not business, it's personal.

Do Learn to Talk Bottomline

It doesn't matter to upper management if the package comp is attractive or the new Mc G-66 is rad. How is your design or the purchase of that new CPU going to help the company's bottom-line?

Do Plan Your Work and Work Your Plan

Organization, prioritization and effective project management processes are as or more important than your talent for creating great design.

Do Know Your Net Worth

If there is any one thing you need to do, it is this one. Take all your overhead into account and figure out your per hour cost to your company. Then do some leg-work and figure out rates for outside services. This is the corollary to telling them what they want to hear: what's the bottomline of your worth and savings to your company.

Never Say Never

Whenever a client comes to you with a request you can't meet, don't say no. Explore with your client what you can do — whether it's locating an outside vendor, pushing out the deadline, partnering with the client's departmental resources or scaling down the project. Give them options, not no's.

Don't Avoid the Meet Market

Sure it's hell sitting through inane meetings where most of what's discussed doesn't pertain to you, but face time is good and seemingly useless information may shed light on future projects.

Don't Be Adversarial

Taking an adversarial stance with outside agencies is the fastest way to lose credibility with upper management. If the decision has already been made to make an outside firm the lead, why not assist your out-of-house peers and share in some of the glory.