

GUEST LETTER 04.04

IN-HOUSE DESIGN: WOULD YOU LIKE FRIES WITH THAT?



GLENN ARNOWITZ MANAGES WYETH CORPORATE GRAPHICS, THE IN-HOUSE CREATIVE SERVICES DEPARTMENT FOR WYETH, A RESEARCH-BASED PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANY. HE IS ALSO CO-FOUNDER OF INSOURCE, AN ASSOCIATION DEDICATED TO ADDRESSING ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO THE IN-HOUSE DESIGN COMMUNITY. CONTACT: WWW.IN-SOURCE.ORG

Many creative directors of in-house design departments often admit that they feel as if they are managing a fast food restaurant and not a design team for a Fortune 500 company. And with the majority of their clients taking the drive-thru, the demand for faster turnaround becomes even greater. In-house design departments are constantly pressured to provide quality work at an unrealistic pace, even more so than their agency counterparts because their core clients are a floor or sometimes only a few cubicles away. The onsite convenience and fast turnaround have clearly contributed to the success of these departments and made them an invaluable resource, but one that is often abused by the internal client.

Is it possible to become a victim of your own success? To a certain extent, yes. By taking on too many projects, you run the risk of compromising quality, especially if the department is understaffed or lacks the talent necessary for projects beyond their capabilities. Also, if you continue to operate at an unrelenting pace, you run the risk of burning out your most precious assets: your designers. Therefore, you must delicately balance the needs of the corporation and the capabilities of your department without alienating your well-valued corporate clients.

How to do this? There are a few ways, but let's take a few steps back. When I was building my in-house department, one of my primary goals was to capture more high profile projects that would make our services essential and contribute to the success of the organization. This was achieved by building relationships and reaching out to the various internal business groups throughout the company. But it didn't happen overnight. These relationships developed over many years, through the implementation of initiatives designed to attract and keep clients. Branding and marketing our department, creating a departmental website, displaying framed samples of our best work, holding an open-house and creating an online requisition form all contributed to the effort.

My ultimate goal was 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 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 I could trust. I can't stress enough the importance of knowing and accepting your limitations, as well as saying "no" to a project beyond your capabilities.

Discuss each project with the client and the resources needed to deliver quality design. Assess and determine if you can meet the deadline. If you can't, suggest alternative outside resources. By enlightening your clients, you are in essence helping them to understand the process and the time involved in producing a well-crafted piece of design, and, believe me, they will walk away with more respect and a greater appreciation for you and your team than if you delivered mediocre work.

As your clients round the corner to the pick-up window, remind them that fast food design provides instant gratification with minimal artistic nourishment, and will probably leave them hungry in an hour or so.