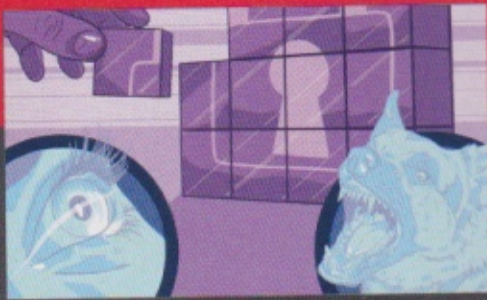


# VOICES

Opinions, thoughts & advice



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\* BIG BUSINESS

## DESIGN FOR GIANT ORGANISATIONS

**Andy Duke** shares his tips for effecting design change when working with large businesses

> We'd all like to just work with small Silicon Valley startups, designing in the corner of a trendy coffee shop with nobody to answer to or please but ourselves – however the reality for most of us is working with huge, slow-moving, massive organisations.

These gigantic corporations are often epitomised by multiple layers of middle management, confusing silos of product ownership, lack of communication, huge amounts of regulatory red tape and risk aversion – the list goes on. So it's no surprise that a lot of these businesses are littered with unsuccessful design projects that have failed, not through any lack of design expertise but because of struggles to work within the constraints that come with a huge business environment.

So if you're given the opportunity to work on a design project within one of these monolithic organisations, what do you do? Whatever type of design task

you're working on within a massive organisation – whether it's redesigning a website or launching a new digital product – here are some great tips that I've uncovered over the years.

### 1: GET A SENIOR CHEERLEADER

One of the best ways to achieve successful design change within large and complex businesses is to find yourself a supporter or project sponsor at a very high level. They can leverage their position and influence to really help you out if you find yourself being challenged.

### 2: REALISTIC GOALS

If you try to steer an organisation that's the size of a supertanker as if it's a speedboat, you're doomed to failure. Make sure the level of design change you're looking to bring about matches what's possible. Try and aim for gradual change over time rather than changing the whole design landscape overnight. Go into the challenge with your eyes open – successful design within massive organisations is slow and you need to prepare for that from the get-go.

### 3: LEARN THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

One of the things most people neglect to do is invest time up front to understand the nature of the organisation that they're designing for. Instead of just raging against the machine, spend some time conducting short stakeholder interviews with key individuals to learn the inner workings of the organisation. Why is there so much regulation? Why is brand ownership split between three different teams? Investing this time at the start will enable you to respect design ownership as it exists but also to challenge it effectively at the same time.

### 4: LOW-HANGING FRUIT

A great way to set about your quest for design change within an organisation is to get some impressive wins under your belt early. Often within large organisations where design changes happen at a glacial pace, there are some design quick wins



you can pick off early and gain yourself some favour, which will come in very handy when you tackle the bigger changes that are needed.

### 5: OFFER VARIANTS

Another great way to increase the level of stakeholder engagement on your design quest is to ensure you offer multiple design variants and options to stakeholders and welcome their input. It really can make people feel as though they have a voice.

### 6: SHARED DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Creating a set of shared design principles across all stakeholders may seem like a fruitless task but it creates a great opportunity to have a shared vision, break down silos and can often be useful to refer back to if things get fractious.

### 7: DESIGN BY MICRO-COMMITTEE

'Design by committee' is traditionally the kiss of death in large organisations.

Having to create a design that 20 people all agree on invariably produces bland and uninspiring work. To combat this, you should look to thin down the crowd to only the absolute decision makers. By all means involve the wider group for awareness but you should only ever allow your design direction to be beholden to the smallest group possible.

### 8: HAVE AN ANSWER TO 'WHY?'

Whenever you present a new design direction or thinking to a massive organisation, always underpin it with a strong data-driven justification. Offering up a completely new site design because 'it's better' will always fail when under scrutiny from multiple layers of stakeholders, whereas a new design direction underpinned by rigorous analytics or user testing will succeed time and time again. ■

\* PROFILE

Duke is head of design and development at Stickyeyes. Over the last 10 years he's delivered successful projects for his share of giant clients.