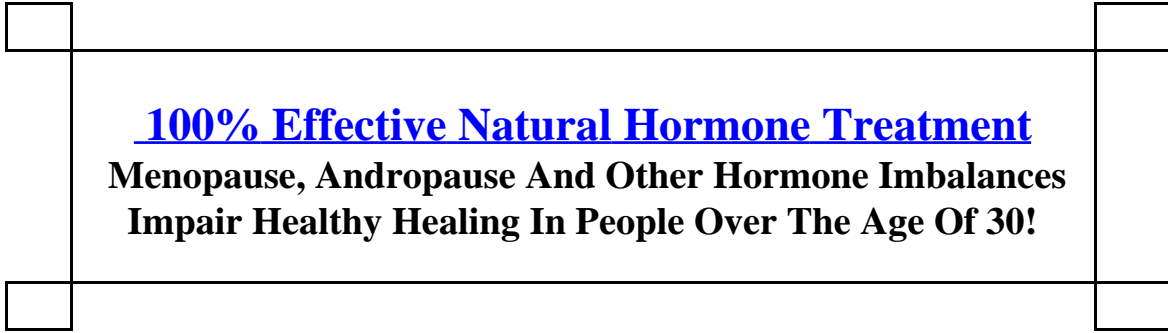


Got an idea worth working for? A case study.

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Got an idea worth working for? A case study.

By Mike Hayden

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As I've said before, businesses don't work by themselves; people work. And the thing that makes people work is an idea worth working for.

Here's how this principle worked for my client and me.

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1. Does this problem sound familiar?
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I arrive for my appointment with Carole, a product-marketing specialist who works for their VP of Marketing. In the lobby, we have a brief meeting where she explains the situation.

"Our 800 number is ringing off the hook! We can't handle all the customer's questions and complaints. We cover everything in our product manuals, but our customers

refuse to read them."

"Why won't they read them?" I ask.

"Our manuals were written by programmers and engineers. Our customers are radiologists and physicians and they refuse to read them!"

"Well, I'm sure I could..."

"Wait, there's more. We're designing our new 'flagship' ultrasound imaging system, and we don't want to make

the same mistakes again."

I say, "Good idea! It's always best to develop documentation as you develop the system."

"I agree," said Carole. "Our last effort was a hasty, last minute compromise – after we had already built the system. Now, we're paying the price. This time we're going to do it right. Let's go meet Greg, my boss."

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2. Have you ever been to a sales "shoot-out?"
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We take the elevator to the second floor, where Carole gives me a brief tour of the systems development area. She then escorts me to Greg's plush corner office with its view of Silicon Valley and south to Los Gatos. Carol introduces me to Greg, then tells him about our prior phone conversations and today's brief meeting.

After some cordial conversation, I ask Greg, "Can you tell me a little about your typical sales cycle?"

"Why? I thought you were a technical writer."

"Actually, I've spent a few years in sales and I'm well aware of the need for good documentation when selling. Maybe we can write the documentation to help you sell more systems. I assume you'd be interested in that."

"Hmmm..." he said. I could tell he was skeptical. "Well,

OK. We take part in what we call a 'vendor shoot-out.'

"Our shoot-out is the most important part of getting the order – if we don't ace the shoot-out; we don't get the sale.

"A shoot-out occurs when all competing vendors bring their equipment to a specific room in a hospital or clinic. In the room, there will be a real (or pretend) patient. We vendors then gather around the 'patient' to demonstrate our equipment to physician and radiologists."

"Brutal!" I exclaimed. "Exactly how does that work?"

"The vendor's technicians take turns showing the physicians and radiologists how their system works with

the patient..."

I interrupt with a question; "Do the physicians and radiologists get to 'test drive' the system?"

"Oh, no! The systems are so complicated that we must use experienced computer technicians for demonstrations."

"Are these technicians the same programmers or engineers who developed the system?"

"Yes. Unfortunately, they must be there to handle the inevitable problems and crashes."

"So, when do the physicians or radiologists get to try the system?"

"They don't. No vendor is willing to take that risk because of the possibility of a crash!"

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3. Is this an idea worth working for?
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I ask, "Suppose you wanted to buy a new car and the salesman would only let a mechanic take you for a demonstration

drive. Would you buy a car that you couldn't drive your self?"

"No, but this is different. After they buy a system, the winning vendor will give extensive training to the buyer's technicians who will run the equipment."

I respond, "OK, what if your new system were so simple to use that physicians and radiologists could demonstrate it to themselves? Would that be an advantage in selling?"

"Wow! Of course! But, I don't see how..."

"Let's not worry about how now, but let's set this as a goal: 'A system so simple that even a doctor can use it!'"

"Wait," he said, "I'm not convinced you're the one to do this job. Truthfully, we're looking for a radiologist who's familiar with ultrasound technology, someone that has worked with doctors, hospitals, and clinics."

"I feel that only a radiologist could write documentation for our exotic new system. We'll keep you in mind..."

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4. But, will I lose this client?
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I say, "I understand your concern. May I speak frankly?"

(Yes.)

"Carole mentioned that you have many radiologists working here. Yet, your company delivers documentation that doesn't serve your customers."

"Your 800# is ringing off the hook with needless questions and complaints... You don't need a radiologist to write your documentation; you need an expert high-tech writer."

"As I've told Carole, I have experience in biomedical applications. Tell you what. Let me show you what I can do in just two weeks. If you're not satisfied with what I

produce, it won't cost you a penny."

"But, but I don't see how..."

"Let me worry about how. Do we have a deal?"

I stand there silently waiting for his response. I'm thinking I've really blown it! I've insulted his employee—radiologists and doctors in general.

I watch him agonize over his decision. I can't stand the silence, but I keep my mouth shut. Carole smiles, but I'm sure she's wondering now...

...Finally, he says, "OK, I'll give you two weeks. I guess we have nothing to lose."

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5. Did we do what customers wanted?
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I began interviewing designers, radiologists, and a few of their customers. I discovered nothing "wrong" with the old system. It did what it was designed to do.

But, intricate complexities required users to endure

extensive training. Plus, **THE DOCUMENTATION HELPED ONLY EXPERTS!**

Thus, customers were totally dependent on service engineers and expensive customer training.

To marketing, I promoted the idea that the new system should be designed from the outside—in by **USERS** — not from the inside—out by engineers.

This was a switch. Formerly, they had to market whatever engineers created.

We immediately conducted brainstorming sessions with customers and potential customers. We quickly discovered what **USERS** wanted, which had a positive impact on design standards.

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I was surprised when they decided to use the motto, "So simple that even a doctor can use it!" Of course, we used our motto only in-house. But, it gave us all an "idea worth working for."

Everyone knew that most doctors would seldom operate the system because they employ radiologists to do that. All doctors want is the data (images) for analysis.

However, we knew that doctors had strong buying influence... and if they could get a "hands-on" demo during the "shoot-out," they would be more likely to buy it.

Plus, we found that doctors loved the fact that we were thinking of them.

In 2 weeks, we developed tremendous inertia and excitement.

Over the next several months, we had frequent meetings with product designers and medical professionals. We brainstormed ideas for the user interface, and how the documentation might streamline user learning.

As I documented the system, I tried all the emerging features as a "dumb user." Hence, I found many bugs and discovered ways to streamline and simplify the user interface.

Sure, the programmers and engineers resisted changing the hardware and software. Yes, we worked long hours.

Yes, the Configuration Control Board had to approve the system and my documentation. And finally, everything had to be FDA approved.

But, we met the delivery date with a system "so simple that even a doctor can use it."

It all began with that idea worth working for.

Businesses don't work by themselves; people work. And the thing that makes people work is AN IDEA WORTH WORKING FOR.

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Best Regards,
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Mike Hayden is Founder/CEO of Senior Management Services and the Documentation Express in Silicon Valley, California. Mr Hayden is the author of "7 Easy Steps to your Raise and Promotion in 30–60 Days! The book that smart bosses want their employees to read." ISBN 0–9723725–1–2. More articles at <http://www.SeniorManagementServices.com/pvt–information.html>

Interesting Preliminary Results On Headlines

By James Brausch

Soon, I'll do a large study on headlines using a list of profitable and unprofitable sites. However, I have been running some split tests and have seen some interesting results in the last week or so. The sample size is small (3 sites), but all three split tests agreed on the following factors:

1. Blue (#000080) is winning over black by a small margin on all three sites. I hadn't expected that. I use dark blue just because I like it and the large study showed that any dark color was fine as long as it wasn't red. Green just never appealed to me and I wanted some color in my sales letter, so I've been going with that dark blue. Because darkness was important in the large study, I expected black to win over blue. It's a nice result to see that I'm not doing the 2nd place thing in this case.

2. Serif fonts (Times New Roman in the tests) are winning over sans–serif fonts (Arial in the tests). That makes no sense to me. Everyone knows that headlines should be sans–serif and regular text should be serif; right? That's just basic typography info. In fact, I think sans–serif fonts were specifically created for headlines. Well; it appears that isn't the case for sales copy. Times New Roman is winning over Ariel in number of conversions in three different split tests.

3. I've been using size 6 fonts for headlines. It's a fairly large size and it just feels right. Size 7 is just too large. Not so say the split test results. Size 7 has an average of 24% more conversions than size 6 in the split tests I've been performing.

I'll eventually do a real study on a few thousand profitable and unprofitable sites and have a conclusive answer to all three of the above questions.

I thought you might find the results interesting as I did though, so there you go... for what it's worth.

James D. Brausch focuses on product creation, copywriting and traffic generation on his blog here:

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Menopause, Andropause And Other Hormone Imbalances
Impair Healthy Healing In People Over The Age Of 30!