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Ideation Explosion Created by Storyboards

The technology revolution hasn't displaced the storyboard as an instrumental advertising agency tool. Now, The Company Crayon (New York, NY) is pushing this low-tech medium as a multi-stage, organization-wide, client-side research-insight producer. President Trudy Williams, Ph.D. (in developmental psychology),

Company Crayon as a business. "My approach is a creative one," Williams stated. "And that's why it works. When you present someone with a creative medium, you stimulate their creative thoughts and ideas. I've found access to our visual thinking often is denied in the workplace. I use the storyboards to tap into that capability."

Williams' client contact normally commences with R&D product

THE COMPANY CRAYON CONCEPT STORYBOARD

THEN



Sam's work involves an overcrowded desk and frequent use of a printer, a fax and a copier.



He is swamped by three sets of wires, maintenance manuals and menu instructions....

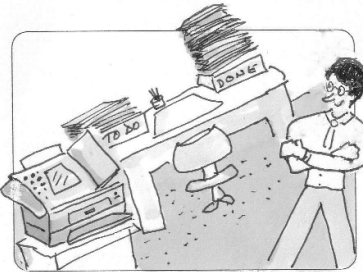


...And three sets of supply vendors and tech support (with long waits for a response).

NOW



Enter OneStar all-in-one printer/fax/copier



Sam saves time, space and expense. He deals with only one vendor for all his supply, maintenance and tech support needs.



Free from wrestling with three different machines, Sam uses the integrated menu to gets things done easily and quickly.

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offered The Company Crayon's tagline--"See what you think™"--as an explanation of her services with RBR. Also degreed in fine arts, Williams says her clients include Verizon, Pitney Bowes, JPMorgan-Chase and Equitable Life (among others), whom she claims, with few exceptions, all have been repeat customers.

Williams kicked off the storyboard concept in 1992 as a consultant for various product development, software development and communications companies. In January 2004, she began to concentrate her service on researchers and registered The

developers, with whom she conducts "on-site interviewing to begin the process for arriving at the images and text that will represent the concepts," she related. "R&D likes to rapidly test ideas. I sit with client development teams as they brainstorm in ideation or graphic facilitation sessions. My services get people involved and capture their rich, innovative and actionable responses, which I storyboard. The cost of one of my boards--including consulting time--is \$3,000 to \$5,000, but the hidden value--the creativity drawn from the participants--has no cost." Her

clients quickly recognize how Williams' storyboards stand-in for expensive prototypes and, more importantly, facilitate, define and refine communication between the brains of developers and concept designers.

"My work is less costly; you don't have to create 3-D prototypes. And it's faster than traditional methods. Often, new product development departments generate a number of early-stage concepts for a major client. They're on a deadline and lack the time and money to build prototypes to test them all. I've also been told my storyboard avoids pre-elimination of certain concepts or ideas. Companies really value screening concepts that would've otherwise been shelved, finding what works, what doesn't and what should get further testing. The ideation in my sessions have far less inherent censorship and are less politically encumbered. They encourage and entertain everyone's ideas--building on each one."

Her complete storyboarding cost depends on consulting time and the number of storyboards and concept iterations. Total yearly cost to her clients has ranged from \$7,500 to \$60,000. In a particular departure from the norm, she provided a 10-session course in visual thinking for one company's development group, "an attempt to instill the skill so that it's maintained after I leave," Williams said.

She shared her typical process with *RBR*. Sketchpad in hand, she interviews the R&D powers (preferably on-site but also workable remotely) for 45 to 90 minutes to get at the issues behind the product or concept. "The first draft relies on my interviewing skill and my experience in business and as a psychologist. I work highly visually from the start," she reports. "Some rough sketches pull people into thinking visually. I say, 'From what I'm hearing, this is what I'm picturing.' They often reply, 'Since you mentioned it, I was picturing this.' My sketches jump-start their imaginations. Interestingly, many times, their pictures don't match their words--which helps them realize they don't understand their problem as clearly as they thought. They need to consider several streams of information--what they have in their head and what they believe they want to express orally." R&D carries Williams' completed storyboards throughout the organization, where her

interviewing sometimes is repeated. Her work has been known to travel from R&D through all the internal stakeholders--strategic planning, product development, business units, etc.

Williams contends that the finalized storyboard shines most of all once it is turned over to the MR department. "It's great at eliciting actionable customer perceptions," she asserted. "It's very generative, revealing an accurate reflection of what the solution is

meant to address, to what degree it does or doesn't, and also to surface other attributes the client may not have considered."

The blueprint for each storyboard is one page of six comic book-type cartoon panels--three on each of two levels--and Williams'

corresponding formulated text. The first three, displayed on the top of the page, capture the problem's most salient features. The bottom three present solutions that address each facet of the problem(s).

Insights from storyboard interviews often lead developers to concept enhancements. She explained, "My questions are very facilitative, helping create a storyboard that resonates, 'Yes, this is my world; this is my need.' With this buy-in, participants become much more engaged in the solution and can recognize how each solution addresses their need.

"People come alive when they see the boards and really assume ownership of them. I've stiffened my storyboard paper because when you put it in their hands, they gesture, ideate, act as if they own the storyboard and the ideas build off one another. The casual, low-tech sketches on paper are unintimidating to participants. They aren't afraid to trash something they don't like. There's much less censorship and much less time spent battling political opinions than you find in purely verbal groups (in which everyone tries to get their particular idea out). And unlike one-dimensional oral presentations, my visual presentations engage many senses," she said.

The reflexive nature of the storyboard methodology allows moderators to send Williams immediate feedback from focus groups and IDIs, so a storyboard with a refined concept or enhancement can be created for subsequent groups. Thus far, Williams hasn't participated in focus groups, actively or indirectly, but she revealed there have been discussions to introduce her into this function to further the immediacy of her work.

"One major MR firm is interested in involving me in its focus groups. My presence adds to their cost, but I can help capture insights in real time and revamp storyboards for respondents who are present or post them for online respondents," she suggested. "I've been asked after some focus groups and IDIs to change the storyboard in time for a follow-up group. I can make those changes rapidly--a couple of days--even when I'm not there. **RBR**



THE COMPANY CRAYON

See what you think.™



The Company Crayon President
Trudy Williams, Ph.D.

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