

Really, How Hard Can This Be?

by John P. Mulhall

I confess. You got me. I don't know how to build a house!

It's true. I admit it. I wouldn't even know how to repair a car engine!

And, yes, it's a fact. I haven't a clue how to fly an airplane!

I feel like such a failure!

Wait, wait, wait...actually, no I don't.

It takes years of training, testing, and certification to become a general contractor...a huge investment of time, energy, and passion to become a mechanic...and don't get me started on what kind of commitment I'd have to make in both money and man hours to master the art of flying.

So, I don't feel like a failure at all. Exactly the opposite, in fact. I'm pretty content allowing trained professionals to do these things for me.

I *want* a pro to build my house! Sure, I may fix the little things when they break, I may even dabble into minimal remodels, but for all of the big stuff...give me someone who knows what he's doing...I certainly don't want my roof falling in around my ears!

The same goes for my car engine. Oil change? Sure. New battery? I can do that, maybe. Anything else...I'm calling in the experts. There is no way I want to find myself broken down in the middle of the desert!

And all of this goes 10 times over for flying! Trust me when I say that I am simply not qualified. Bad things will happen. Although, now that I think about it, I *have* watched many movies about airplanes...and, heck, I even did a flight simulator once...so who knows! I mean, really, how hard can it be?

Naw.

I'm actually *very* comfortable knowing that there are people ready to assist me with these things; people with training and skills that I don't possess. I'm at ease with handing these folks the reigns from time to time.

So, I have to wonder why some organizations are so resistant about hiring creative professionals to attend to their creative needs. Like branding and logo creation, web design and implementation, creative writing, or video production.

“Well, our intern Bobby does graphic design as a hobby, and he was already playing around with some logo ideas, so that will probably work just fine.”

“My cousin Jill took some web design classes at the YWCA and she’s gonna take a crack at the website first.”

“We do all of our own creative writing. My assistant does most of it. She writes screenplays too!”

“The CEO is trying his hand at making a video for a new division of our company. I am trying to talk him into hiring a company to do it for us, but...”

That last one I heard just today. And I have to say it made me chuckle. I just have to imagine that the CEO of a high-end IT firm has much more important things to do with his time, but...I guess not?

So what is it exactly about these types of creative endeavors that make people in unrelated fields feel that they are suddenly capable of rising to the occasion?

Is it the frustrated artist trapped inside? Unrealized dreams of a career in Hollywood, or of writing that great American novel? Are they driven by memories of that blue ribbon they won for the drawing they did of a Stegosaurus in the 2nd grade, or of that production of “Guys and Dolls” they helped stage manage in college?

Or has the bar simply been lowered? Do companies not expect quality, or think that they need it?

I am truly very curious, because it seems to me that there is actually quite a lot riding on some of these things!

A company logo, for example, is a precious and fragile thing. It is the crux of a company’s brand image. When done well, a logo can pique initial customer interest, spark immediate brand recognition, or imbue a company with unique qualities that help define it to its target audience; qualities such as strength, trust, stability, loyalty, consistency, forward movement, or superior service. These are intangibles that only the best logos are able to achieve. However, when done poorly, a logo can send exactly the wrong message to potential clients and confuse them, or worse, it can turn them off your brand completely.

If you truly only get one chance to make a first impression, then why treat that first impression cavalierly?

Creative messaging is equally important. And there are people who work and study for many years, who labor at their craft, and do this for a living. They know which words to

use when crafting a brochure, a website, or a script, and they know which words to avoid. They capture attention, draw readers in, fire imaginations. It is a skill, plain and simple.

And likewise, an effective video can go tremendous lengths to legitimize a brand, communicate a message, and enable an audience to gain an immediate sense of a company's identity, values, and sensibilities. But there just aren't that many people who can produce quality video. (Trust me, we have a hard time finding quality people to work for us, and when we do, we work with those people for a long time!)

Anyone who's wasted an afternoon browsing the channels of YouTube can attest to the fact that there is a LOT of horrible video out there. In fact, well thought out, well written, professionally produced videos that present clear and engaging messages are in the minority; so much so that it's almost startling when you find one!

Or maybe it's the intangible quality of creativity that allows its value to be so minimized. No bones about it, creative consulting is a hard thing to quantify.

Or maybe it's just the ubiquitousness of the tools. We live in a time when even a company on a modest budget can purchase design and production software of their own. And even hardware prices are minimal compared to days past.

But editing software doesn't make someone an editor, design software doesn't make someone a designer, owning a camera doesn't make someone a filmmaker, and opening Microsoft Word doesn't make someone a writer. Not any more than owning a stethoscope and lab coat make someone a doctor. (Something else I don't know how to do, by the way.)

Whatever the reason, it is time for these companies to study their peers, and figure out which ones are communicating their messages most effectively, and branding themselves most successfully. I am absolutely positive that they will find the most prosperous among them are sticking to the business they know, and turning to creative partners for their creative endeavors.

And that the CEOs aren't editing their own videos.

The bottom line is that there are real tangible benefits to be attained when companies mature, discard the "do-it-yourself" mentality, and embrace the value of collaborative creative partners. By building a relationship of mutual respect and trusting in their expertise, great achievements and (even more importantly) great profits can be realized.

Now if you'll excuse me, I have to go book some airline tickets.