



## The Cult of Design

By Ernie Buffalino

### The Secret Weapon that is No Longer a Secret

All you have to do is open an issue of Fast Company magazine any month to know that leaders of product driven businesses all have one thing in common: design and innovation. The art of brand building and using design to attract a cult following is paramount for every product driven business in today's shrinking marketplace. Particularly in fashion, the customer is looking for those brands that "get them" and unlock that emotional urge saying, "I belong here."

Clearly, this is the experience for Apple and J.Crew - two brands that still garner lines

at the cash register. Design is their secret weapon and it is no secret. Everyone, from Burberry to Pinkberry, has caught on to the fact that outstanding design, creating a strong point of view and this sense of belonging or cult, make for a winning formula. Fashion leaders who understand the value of brand building are highly focused on one thing: stellar talent. Recognizing it, getting it, developing it and retaining it. Smart companies that recognize building synergistic design teams, deeply engaged in creating a vision that inspires this cult response with customers is the key to sustainability

and Darwinian survival in times like these. The design experience must be reinforced at every consumer-facing touch point building on the dream that the brand promises. Talent from a variety of specializations, such as marketing, merchandising and visual display teams must be highly orchestrated in a way that supports the design of the dream. But what's the secret to spotting stellar talent in a sea of resumes? Here are a few tips that may help you in your quest to find that magic combination for your team:

**Using design to attract a cult following is paramount for every product driven business...**

## The Passion Factor

Whether a candidate is a “newbie” or a seasoned pro, the most valuable people on your branding team are the ones who have enthusiasm and passion for your industry. Creative talent should love their profession. Apart from the resume, body language will speak volumes about your candidate’s interest in the position. Arrange for more than one round of interviews to scan candidates and weed out the least motivated people from the aggressive and motivated people. Also, ask to see personal portfolio samples as well as work they’ve done for clients. Often times, a creative’s greatest potential can be found in projects that are done outside of the parameters of a work environment.



## Diversity vs. Seniority

Look for candidates that have a diverse background of experience beyond the number of years in the industry. Working in more than one company and wearing different hats in each position leads to an invaluable bank of knowledge that can reinforce your brand at every consumer-facing touch point. Talent from a variety of specializations, such as marketing, merchandising and visual display can help you create highly orchestrated campaigns that maximize the dream that the brand promises.

## Game Changers

Sure, creative talent that produce good de-

sign are nice to have, but those who overcome extraordinary obstacles to create successful campaigns are invaluable. Ask for a behind-the-scenes perspective on a candidate’s portfolio to identify “game changers” that think beyond the tasks at hand. Game changers prosper through innovation and by recognizing opportunities, despite the odds. Your success in an unpredictable marketplace will largely depend on the focus and skills they offer and their ability to spot opportunities in otherwise bleak conditions.

## Other Success Traits

Let’s be honest, creative, talented and successful people share some traits that are inherent among achievers. Watch and listen for some of these cues:

- Achievers are constant learners. They don’t pass up a chance to learn something new because they recognize it can ultimately benefit their work, their creativity and their portfolio;
- Successful people have a broad view of the world around them and embrace change. They are open to new ideas and even radical new ways of doing things. Non-achievers are rigid, petty in their view of the world and are unwilling to let go of their deeply held views in favor of new and richer perspectives;
- Achievers are acutely focused on their goal. Their implacable commitment to their goal resonates in everything they do. If your brand is closely entwined with the pursuit of their aspiration, your company will benefit from their singular focus;

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## Pre-Screening

So where do you find these super stars?

Well, you won’t find them through classified job ads or job fairs. These super talented people don’t usually go looking for jobs; jobs find them. Recruiters with deep ties to an industry are usually the best conduits to these stars because they know who the most talented people are and where they work.

Save yourself time, money and effort by consulting with staffing experts that specialize in your industry. Recruiters can do the heavy lifting ahead of time to ensure that only the top candidates walk through your door. By applying their industry expertise, recruiters can pre-screen candidates with in-depth interviews, portfolio assessments and reference checks. Times are tough among fashion companies competing for a shrinking consumer pool. But we are also in a new renaissance age of design, technology, innovation and genius. Companies that excel in the branding game know that “super talent” is the most valuable asset, never captured on a balance sheet. Building for the future by attracting the best and the brightest design people is top priority for companies who thrive while the competition struggles to merely survive.

## About The Author



Ernie Buffalino is Vice President of Creative Talent for 24 Seven, a premier, full-service talent resource for the world’s leading brands in Fashion, Marketing, Creative Services, Retail, Beauty and

Entertainment. He has more than 20 years of experience in the fashion and retail sector and now recruits senior level talent at 24 Seven. To learn more on how 24 Seven can help you find the best and the brightest design people, call Ernie at 212.966.4426 or any of our other office locations.

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