

# Trying is the new talking

Singapore is an ideal place to prototype ideas as it has all the ingredients to create a perfect learning-by-doing environment

FROM THE  
DESK OF

**Paul Bennett**  
Chief Creative Officer  
IDEO

I HAVE always loved Southwest Airlines iconic CEO Herb Kelleher's famous quote: "Yes, we have a strategic plan. It's called doing things." This speaks to me as a designer - design is fundamentally an act of making and creating tangible things - and it speaks to me as a consultant who is growing increasingly frustrated at what I can only describe as the mass overthink that seems to perpetuate modern business today.

Recently, I ran an office for 400 senior executives who worked for a large US corporation; two of their key internal complaints were that they were never fast enough to go to market with new ideas and that they spent an inordinate amount of time proving to each other that whatever they were trying to do - be it launch a product, a service or a piece of marketing, was "valid". I asked them to write down on a Post-it note how many years they had been working since they left college.

The result was staggering: sitting in that room was over 5,300 years of experience. What was also staggering was they never recognised or acknowledged what an amazing business asset that incredible collective brainpower was.

One very senior executive stood up and said: "We need to do two things. We need to start to trust each other and our intuition and we need to learn to get things out in the world more quickly because of it. We can beat the competition by trying harder at trying."

There are two aces in this point: clearly the value of trusting your gut is one, but the other is the notion of getting something out there in the world and learning by doing. The new business world is being led with intuition and agility, and ideas that are successful rely on new creation

and feedback cycles that make it easier to launch, then learn. It is time for a new approach. To be clear, I am not prescribing rashness, but I am suggesting boldness.

All this leads me to one wide one word that I really want to see appear more in the lexicon of Singapore business is the word "prototype".

Prototypes for us are ways to make ideas concrete, whether they be services, spaces, products or interactions. We build product and experience prototypes on a daily basis: an entire airport is cardboard for the US Transportation Security Administration to prototype staff interactions and behaviours; a new ATM for a bank; a new food product for consumers to try out. Low tech and simple helps consumers drop their fears, try out and play with something, and give honest feedback.

Singapore is an ideal place to prototype ideas. It is small and perfectly formed - sophisticated, multi-racial, highly networked, media savvy, all the ingredients are here to create a perfect learning-by-doing environment.

And not just ideas for the local market, but prototyping them for the regional and global stages as well. We are already embarking on this journey with our public sector clients, who are embracing this, and talking to the private sector about what this means for them.

I am excited by some of the early examples that I see emerging: the Burger King pilot store at Clarke Quay - the first in Asia, and the new Citibank bank experience that was prototyped in Singapore before being rolled out to Japan and now to the rest of Asia. My colleague spoke at an inaugural event, the Next Bank Asia (<http://nextbankasia.com>) Singapore forum, where we managed to catalyse some new conversations with this sector.

But - I say with love, one critical mindset has to change. I've said this before of Singapore, but the hysteria that seems to reside here around measurement is antithetical to much of what I have just said.

Endless KPI discussion does not allow for the required intuition or agility, or to be frank, much creativity. Just as it was with my US client, not recognising the value of resident wisdom and intuition means that new ideas are often cumbersome and overthought and more nimble players can sprint ahead.

Prototyping can help, by making



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things real and tangible, getting feedback and building confidence, and making the entire creation cycle more powerful and useful.

I am not suggesting that measurement is not important; it is, of course. We like to measure different things at various parts of the creation journey, first measuring Input ("How relevant is the question we are asking?") to Throughput ("What is the level of participation?") to Output ("How valuable is our work to people. What have we learned?") to eventually Outcome ("Did it meet the brief we set?").

To us and our clients, Measuring the

Journey is as important as Measuring the Destination, one I would love to see Singapore adopt building on top of existing experiments in districts such as Punggol's Eco-Town and Jurong Lake is a good way to begin, they are already setting themselves up as perfect test beds to prototype new ideas and methodologies to both create solutions and garner feedback.

So a final thought: if Singapore's goal is to move from an efficiency-driven economy to an innovation-driven economy, perhaps it is time to start doing that versus, well, talking about it! Here's to trying harder at trying.