

Marketplace Research

From Opportunity to Strategy

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When talking to innovative, successful architects about how they redefine and reinvent their practices, one question always seems to pop up: Is reinvention an opportunity or a strategy? The

answer seems to be a little of both. Consistently, these are people who have the talent of serendipity. By being open to opportunity—having the wit to recognize it and the dexterity to take immediate advantage of it—these architects have made it a habit to take full advantage of their regular share of luck.

Reinvention starts with relationships

Micic and Partner, a German strategic planning consultant offers one example of how opportunity evolves into strategy. Their analogy to explain the self-evident value of strategy development (with a gentle jab at typical strategic plans): The ship's captain does not check the radar every five years. To stay afloat and on course, one must be in tune with the radar screen constantly. The strategic radar system they suggest is a set of goals and relevant information that allow you to "faturize," first about yourself, then about your company and organization.

Our research suggests that the opportunity to create such a strategic radar system starts the moment an architect begins a relationship with a client. Opportunity may arise when you are already providing more traditional services to a client. You might be asked to assist the

client in meeting an adjunct need, or you may perceive the need yourself and propose a solution that furthers the client's business strategy. The question is: Do you leave it as an isolated opportunity or do you develop a strategy to further the value proposition placed in front of you?

One firm might see such a situation as an enhanced opportunity to exceed the client's expectations on the design project. Another might think of it as an added service, integrated into the overall fee. Still another might say that it increases the benefit to the client and bill it as a separate item in an overall integrated scope of work. (We suspect that many firms would like to bill separately for such a service, but don't because they do not know *how* to charge for the service. Perhaps they are unaware of the value it really creates for the client.)

Four buckets

Micic suggests that we think of our strategic radar system as having four buckets: future projections, future opportuni-



ties, strategic elements, and action. (See graphic). Another way to visualize this process is that opportunity leads to strategy.

A future opportunity manifests through an understanding of a need, the insight to see the need, or the awareness of a trend—all of which offer a vision of what needs to be done. Then you have a choice.

You can:

1. Take advantage of the opportunity, play it out and benefit, and move on or
2. Develop a strategy that follows that vision beyond the initial request. In this case, you understand how this strategy may affect a greater number of clients and provide a broader base with the firm. Such a strategy requires devising a structure to deliver value on a sustainable, ongoing basis.

Visions that make it into the opportunities bucket need to be filtered through the sieves of:

- Competencies
- Benefit for the clients
- Benefit for the design professional
- Time horizon
- Differentiation
- Motivation
- Resources required.

After "filtering," the architect can define strategy, then implement action.

Who are we becoming?

It has been said that "future markets arise between markets." Correspondingly, services become more sophisticated and deeper and develop as specialties

between services, just as expertise develops between disciplines and skills. We wrote in the June 2000 *AI Architect* of the "hyphen-architect" and the connection of expertise in and around the architectural profession.

Our findings are showing that such opportunities exist for architects when clients ask services beyond "traditional service." Yet many architects work mostly to

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benefit the client's project, the "piece of architecture." This is all well and good, but it is also possible to develop strategies to move beyond this particular edge. To do so, you have to think beyond that one opportunity, strategize, and move in a consulting basis for the delivery of the value the client is requesting. You can think, as Micic does, of asking, "Who are your strategic relatives—who is strategically related to your business?" We can then think of mutation—To which business are we mutating?

Paradigm shift

Many of us recall the work of Joel Barker, father of the paradigm shift and author of *Paradigms: Discovering the Future*, which details the process of motivation or how we can think effectively about change. It is process-oriented, while the

Micic approach is content-oriented.

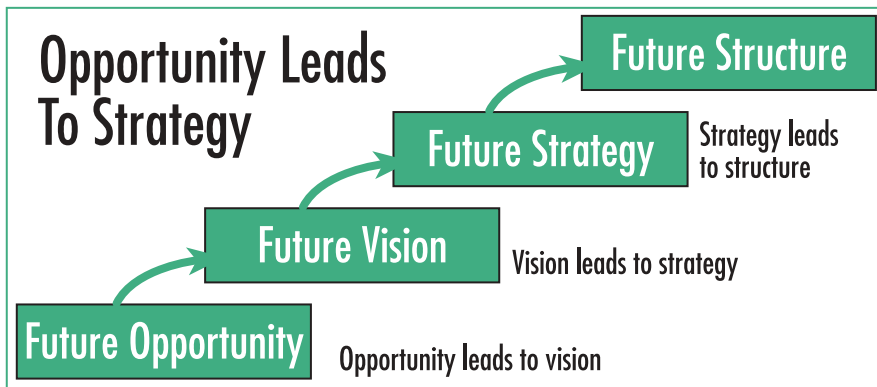
You can marry the Barker theory to the Micic theory. Barker states that we create wealth through innovation, and that innovation occurs through diversity. We create sources of energy when we make order out of chaos, when we address the relationship of complexity to diversity. This energy creates opportunity, and we must be ready to respond to that opportunity. Responding means developing a strategy to move the opportunity along.

Barker speaks of the power of the "edge," the cutting edge, that is. When edges intersect, you have a "verge," where high levels of innovation are possible. The marketplace out there is full of edges and people are looking for differentiation. And once you get a verge going, it moves with extreme energy.

We used to think of the universe as a machine. We look at it now as a flowing, living system—with order arising at the



edge of chaos. Making order out of chaos—finding markets arising between markets, discerning new activities between disciplines, and achieving innovation through diversity at the verge—seems like a natural flowing and living evolution for the architect.



Marketplace Trends Continuum

- August:** Value analysis process
- September:** An opportunity/strategy process to define services and markets
- October:** Value, the return on investment from providing services to further clients' long-range financial proposition
- November:** How one receives the true professional value for providing services that further the return on investment to achieve the clients strategy.

Want to learn more? Visit the author's Web site, www.richardwhobbs.com.