

A synopsis of 'The BIG Idea' by Robert Jones

Published by Harper Collins Business 2000

In these times we want more, want change, want excitement. We live in a World of the journey not the destination. We feverishly pursue the next idea, the next exciting thing.

We want the future to be different from the past so we keep our options open – there is a sense/mood of what is next rather than “the world around is full of change and uncertainty.” We love the change.

To provide for this future being different, we keep all options open, therefore we need something that expands the minds of customers and staff, widens possibility. What is needed is a big idea. An idea that rebels against the sameness that takes good product and service that most companies espouse into something more.

Organisations need to propose a whole emotional world around their big idea – something people can react to or join. Instead of being a clothing retailer or computer company, they open themselves up to more possibility with their “big idea” e.g. Orange is not about mobiles but optimism, Starbucks is coffee as a cult, Sony is about miniature perfection rather than electronics. The Big Idea must excite / inspire people. People are joining something such as winning and the big idea meets an inner need for self-fulfillment at both the collective and individual levels.

It is not that the organisation is selling them a mortgage or a plane ticket: it is more they are joining a world of irreverence, poetry or whatever ... It is a world they like, feel at home in, want to be part of. NHS big idea was free health care for everyone. The Big idea needs rediscovering, redefined, people do not want “value for money” they want “values for money” – values from how taxes are spent, or how their donations are put to use. Reacting against sameness – going for distinctiveness. Looking for “the stand”. Free range eggs is an example of animal ethics, rustic romanticism – this ‘stand’ does provide value – customers will pay 15 – 20% more for the story that goes with free range eggs. Not “products” but “dreams” – looking for a story. As developed society ages, more value is attached to experience, less to novelty, more to reality, less to image – people are searching for authenticity. e.g. Charles Schwab – lower price share broking – not only stands for better deals for customers but also about attitude. In the world of values for money, unless you stand for something you won’t stand out. People don’t just want to buy, but they want to “buy in” to a company. e.g. Amazon for “completeness” or Soil Association for “organics”.

Old organisations claim to be “customer driven”. New organisations stand for something. It proposes something which a customer wants and doesn’t pander to customer demands where they undermine the big idea. Old organisations aim to win loyalty from customers and employees but ‘loyalty is what remains when belief has gone’, Companies with a big idea inspire belief; something more intelligent, more deeply motivating, more dynamic, something to want to change behaviour. Old organisations aim for profit or long-term shareholder value – the new aim beyond profit for what can improve all stakeholders. Old organisations use their board / vision as tools – new see their ‘big idea’ not as a tool but as their core – almost to nourish people. e.g. Nike’s big idea is winning, its soul is about winning.

Examples of “Big Ideas” Ikea (formative): a better everyday life for the many. BBC (broadcaster): authoritative. Starbucks (coffee): sociability. Cisco (electronics) outside in – and customers have a major say about strategy. Southwest Airlines: irreverence.

Exploring and establishing an organisation’s Big Idea is a good starting point for sorting out the “What can we be best at in the world’ component of their **Hedgehog** concept