

RUG INSIDER

RUGS AND CARPETS
FOR THE DESIGN PROFESSIONAL

SUMMER 2019 - VOLUME XXIII - ISSUE 1

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ORIGINAL



COPY

COPY CATS

If copying is human nature, innovation is divine.

BY ARIC MORRISON

Whether one chooses to embrace the 1714 sentiment of Eustace Budgell who viewed imitation as “a kind of artless flattery,” or the notion of Charles Caleb Colton who a century later viewed it as the “sincerest form of flattery,” it remains in 2019 that creatives—including those who design and make rugs and carpets—still grapple with what to do with those who copy—or is that flatter?

If imitation does in fact prove to be the best, most sincere form of flattery, then I would think it is incumbent upon a business, particularly those which innovate, to be certain that everyone knows the source of such flattery. Therein lies the key to understanding the impact of new ideas and their execution. An unrealized idea is, after all, of little real value.

Fundamentally speaking, it is relatively easy to do things the same way others do them so long as you simply take the time to replicate what is being done. On the other hand, because they are willing to do those things others don't have the vision or fortitude to attempt, the true leaders of industry are those who routinely carve out a

niche within their segment. The first true art is the inception and creation of a design or concept, a benchmark if you will, by those at the vanguard of industry.

There is a useful lifespan for new product or service launches and it exists on a finite timetable. Companies have built business empires understanding the implications of innovation to the competitive landscape. When an organization truly embraces this reality, it also begins to differentiate itself in terms of strategic planning.

It isn't every day that a business originates a new product, good, or service that can stand proud above the competition as being the newest, greatest, or next big

thing. When it does occur, everyone seems to very quickly be made aware of it. This is typically due to an aggressive introductory campaign and a resonance with consumers, both of which spread the message wide in grand fashion in order to capitalize on sales. Before the competition even knows what hit them, the new product is in the marketplace wherein it thrives for a period of relative exclusivity.

From that point, after having created a discernible introductory splash, the new product or design begins to cause a noticeable disruption or shift in the way others prepare to compete against its innovator. Typically, these competitors attempt to take market share in the form of a so-called knock-off version to the original. For genuinely new ideas this is always going to happen; it's a reality that must be accepted. It remains both as part of that whole flattery concept and seemingly as an expression of the nature of humanity itself.

Eventually, the retail and wholesale marketplace becomes flooded with duplication, replication and one-off attempts to capture some of the creative momentum. Again, this is always going to happen. When a great product hits the market, others are going to try to find a way to capitalize on it.

In fact, some businesses actually have a brand position that it is better to duplicate than to originate. Hence, in reality, there are only two segments: the innovators and imitators. Others may fall somewhere in the middle, but these true extremes are the ones causing the most disruption.

Innovators are the thought leaders and have already been working on multiple new ideas for quite some time. They accept the creative cycle as a reality, and position themselves at the forefront of it. They also accept that competition will always take some of the market share. They revel financially in the introductory phase of the product cycle. And, their business plans are centered on two critical notions.

The first is to remain very respectfully positioned as the originator of a new design or concept. Businesses that continue to be relevant in this space have carved a strong identity against competition. It is a part of their strategic branding, and one that makes them consistently relevant.

Second, when you bring a unique product into a competitive space with a strong campaign, the potential is veritably unlimited for a period of time. All revenue streams lead to one business in terms of exclusivity, with the financial upside existing for as long as it takes others to realize they are being beaten. It can take a significant amount of time until production shares are eventually eroded.

The companies that do this well are the ones that understand the importance of staying ahead of the creative

curve, and will continue to thrive. With strong marketing and positioning, their point of differentiation becomes obvious and they are always on top of the industry because of it. They remain nimble enough to have pivoted before the competition has even begun to copy them; their next big thing is already in development at that point.

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At the end of the day, it all comes down to messaging and reputation. Each plays an integral role in the decision of a consumer, retailer or wholesaler when purchasing a rug or carpet. If it has been replicated to the extent that it appears to have lost its original discernible traits, then it can quickly become a casualty to ambiguity amongst a sea of the same. Those businesses that lay in wait, and those that don't originate, have nothing more to offer and should not be viewed as long-term viable competition. Rather, for those at the vanguard, the competition, and the drive to do better comes from within - propelled by the same innovative will which first gained them prominence.

I find it interesting that instead of taking a moment to examine why a company is not positioned at the vanguard, or to ask "Why is my company not the one being replicated?" so many choose to try and keep up with what their competitors are doing. As long as this dichotomy exists, there will always be room at the top for the true innovators to continually thrive.

The company that understands it's best not to look back at the places already traveled, but to always navigate ahead is the one that can throw away the rear view mirror and enjoy the open road alone, and for many miles to come.

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