



PHR Strategic Minute

SHARED OBSERVATIONS ON THE BUSINESS OF BRANDING.

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When Thomas Watson, Jr. died last year, there was no shortage of ink extolling his extraordinary career. He was, after all, the man who transformed his father's business, a successful manufacturer of adding machines and time clocks, into the world's largest computer company, IBM; who built, in fifteen years, a \$7.5 billion-a-year enterprise that came to define American business in the postwar world; who Fortune called, "the most successful capitalist in history."

No one, though, seemed to mention the real reason why Thomas Watson, Jr. is held to be a heroic figure by designers everywhere; no one spoke of those five little words attributed to him that have repeated endlessly in articles, in speeches, at design seminars, in slick presentations to hesitant clients, over and over again, like a mantra: "Good design is good business."

Thomas Watson, Jr. in the mythology of our profession, was the perfect client. Even his great awakening was the stuff of myth, right out of St. Paul on the road to Damascus: "The inspiration for the design program came to me during a stroll I took down Fifth Avenue in the early 1950s," Watson wrote in his autobiography. "I found myself attracted to a shop that had typewriters on sidewalk stands for a passersby to try. The machines were done in different colors and had a sleek design. I went inside and saw modern furniture and bright colors. The name over the door was Olivetti." Later a Dutch friend sent him a bundle of Olivetti graphics, which Watson laid side by side with similar IBM material. "The Olivetti material was filled with color and excitement and fit together like a beautiful picture puzzle. Ours looked like directions on how to make bicarbonate of soda."

What happened next was simple. Watson found Eliot Noyes and appointed him IBM's consultant director of design. Noyes in turn brought in Charles and Ray Eames, Eero Saarinen, and of course, Paul Rand. The rest is design history.

Michael Bierut
From an article in *Design as Strategy*

Nº 3 in a series

Platt Hollow Road is a strategic advertising and design house specializing in creating new brand identities or giving existing ones a new shine in the marketplace.

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