



In-house creative leaders and managers have distinctive concerns, points of view, issues and challenges. Furthermore, developing and applying a corporate business sense are vital for success in building and sustaining a dynamic in-house creative team. That's why people came together for an evening of networking and community building among in-house creative leaders for the InSource In-House Perspectives 3 event held on March 23, 2017, at the School of Visual Concepts (SVC) located at 2300 7th Avenue in Seattle, Washington.

Three featured speakers, along with a follow-up panel discussion, provided practical advice and generated plenty of ideas about in-house creative work. **Hafiz Huda** (creative director at Amazon.com), **Erik Davidson** (director, brand and design at Vulcan Inc.) and **Kevin Mau** (brand and creative strategist at Boeing) shared their insights and lessons learned in applying best practices in their work. **Andy Brenits** (InSource president) and Nathalie Heywood Smith (InSource director of membership engagement), along with **Larry Asher** (SVC director), extended a warm welcome to everyone who attended this event InSource event in Seattle.



IN-HOUSE PERSPECTIVES Seattle featured (from left to right) Guiding Principles for an In-House Career by Erik Davidson (director, brand and design at Vulcan Inc.), Navigating Your In-House Career by Hafiz Huda (creative director at Amazon.com) and Positioning Yourself and Your In-House Creative Team by Kevin Mau (brand and creative strategist at Boeing). Photos by Thor Radford (radfordcreative.com).



InSource provides the following takeaway messages:

Navigating Your In-House Career

Hafiz Huda (creative director at Amazon.com) spoke about his career journey and why he was drawn to working with an in-house creative team. He prefers to be part of the strategic vision for a company over time, which is more far-reaching than only working on a specific project or being called in to solve a specific project as is often done when working with an external agency.

Based on his extensive experience and several examples he described in detail, he offers three lessons learned as advice for others to consider in their own career:

- Be flexible and pick your battles. He has seen firsthand the wisdom of this quote: "The reed which bends in the wind is stronger than the mighty oak which breaks in a storm."
- Consider what's next for you and your team. He encourages others to develop a "what's next?" mindset in figuring out how to consistently provide value. He embraces the meaning of this quote: "Dig the well before you're thirsty."
- You can't do everything—focus. He quoted a saying that his mentor often invokes: "Don't try to boil the ocean."

Guiding Principles for an In-House Career

Erik Davidson (director, brand and design at Vulcan Inc.) traced the steps he took in his career journey from working as an in-house designer to creative manager to creative partner in his organization. He enjoys the challenge of identifying/untangling problems and then proposing a solution for problems. He finds bringing ideas to life is what inspires him.

He suggests the following practical advice for growth as an in-house creative team:

- Evolve from your role as a creative service to a creative partnership. Erik discussed the importance of the following guidelines to make this happen:
 - "Learn from your mistakes, and celebrate your success."
 - "Live and breathe by project briefs."
 - "Establish and communicate your processes."
 - "Remember: Finding the solution doesn't mean being the solution."
 - "Have partners that you can work with and activate at a moment's notice."
 - "Agree on a team vision statement."

Erik also provided the following guidelines for individual growth:

- "Overcommunicating is better than undercommunicating." Make expectations clear up front when working with an internal client.
- "Take the time to build relationships of trust with colleagues and leadership."
- "Don't forget to build brands for your internal customers as well."
- "Share your craft and expertise whenever possible." For example, establish a common vocabulary early on in your interactions.
- "Leverage your earned capital (wisely)." Moving from creative servant to creative partner takes time and persistence.

He noted that his creative team's guiding principle/vision statement is this: "Do good work and have fun along the way."

Positioning Yourself and Your In-House Creative Team

Kevin Mau (brand and creative strategist at Boeing) discussed the need for in-house creative teams to be perceived as working as an in-house agency, not a graphics shop. He suggested several ways for teams to approach their work:

- Be the brand. The in-house creative team must strive to serve as empowered stewards of our company, communicating both the character and voice of the company. Everyone needs to be a (brand) believer.
- Be professional. The in-house creative team must approach clients' problems strategically. First, talk directly with the client and ask questions from the start regarding the purpose of a project, what the client expects the project will do for them, why should the target audience care about the project, and why our products/services are better than the competition. It's important to earn professional status, as well as to pitch the solution to the client and understand their need. Recommendation: Never send an email with the message: "Here are our ideas" with attached PDF.
- Know your value. Develop a clear understanding that in-house creative work has a direct effect on the company's revenue, using the following equation: creative + marketing + brand = sales. A company's sales force needs tools to influence a sale; the in-house creative team is on the front lines with sales as partners, providing tangible and intangible value.

Kevin believes this approach can be useful in changing perceptions about the work of in-house creative teams.



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Key Messages From the Follow-Up Panel Discussion

Nathalie Heywood Smith (who volunteers as InSource director of membership engagement) facilitated a lively panel discussion focused on career strategies for success in an ever-evolving marketplace.

On when individuals start thinking strategically about one's career:

- Some people develop a "what's next?" mindset that inspires them to learn and stay interested in their work; some people evolve in their focus from coming up with great ideas to understanding capacity issues including how much one can do given limited resources.

On how to look for allies:

- Reach out to a trusted design school/college professor or professional networking organization and/or build trust with others in your organization so you'll have advocates/ambassadors.

On what can be annoying about working with external agencies:

- Applying an external agency's design/deliverable for a specific need to the entire organization can be difficult and require extensive rework.
- An external agency's "win more work" mindset can undermine the in-house creative team's focus on "do great work for the brand."

On keeping your in-house creative team engaged and inspired in routine work flow:

- Conduct a SWOT analysis as a business practice to identify what the team is good at doing and in what ways the team can improve, make it a priority to know the capabilities of each team member, and move the work around.

On how to create great creative briefs:

- Work together: A live meeting may work best to gather the information needed; build trust over time and talk to the client about what is really needed; and ask the client key questions early on such as "What does success look like when this project is completed?"

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