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Raising awareness of the value of graphic design: An interview with Landor Associates' Britt Dionne

August 3, 6:46 AM • SF Graphic Design and Branding Examiner • Stephanie Orma



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I once read that the average salary of a graphic designer is nearly equivalent to that of a doorman in New York City. Based on the hourly wage of many of my peers, frankly, that's not too far off. Sure, there's a small percentage that fair better...and an even smaller percentage that fair great, but the overall

data is certainly indicative of the fact that most companies still do not understand, appreciate, or value graphic design's role in business. Even [Landor Associates](#), the global strategic brand and consulting firm, understands the need to inform their audience on design and branding issues – which is exactly why I was so intrigued by [Britt Dionne](#), Senior Marketing Communications Manager at Landor's world headquarters in San Francisco.

Call it raising "brand awareness" or what have you; in plain English, Britt's job is to communicate about design and branding for a living. Through innovative initiatives, print collateral, and article writings, Britt more than just educates current and potential clients about the firm's visual, verbal, digital, and strategic capabilities. She's seriously getting folks excited about the industry-at-large by engaging them in relevant, thought-provoking discussions on the intersection of design, branding, business, and society.

And don't think for a second that because Britt's not in Landor's creative department that her job requires any less imagination. As I chatted with the charismatic, seasoned MarCom pro at Landor's modern industrial-loft-like Front Street location, I learned just how much inspired, visionary thinking her work entails.

After a brief hiatus from Landor, Britt was rehired in



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early 2008 to “raise brand awareness of Landor in San Francisco’s key markets.” But there were no real specifics. With the utmost of confidence from her boss, Managing Director [Courtney Reeser](#), but with no more direction than, “you tell me what you think we need,” and “your job is only limited by your imagination [and marketing budget],” Britt was in uncharted territory.

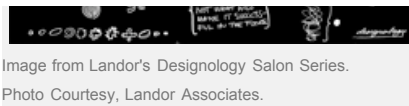


Image from Landor's Designology Salon Series.
Photo Courtesy, Landor Associates.

However, within six months Britt and her partner-in-crime, Landor's Chief Strategy Officer, [Russ Meyer](#), developed some unique opportunities to reach out to their target market. They conceived, launched, and now produce the [Salon Series](#), Landor's “ongoing, ever-changing thought leadership experiences.” In essence, the Salon brings together an eclectic mix of expert panelists with diverse backgrounds to discuss unique brand-related topics. Landor hosts the invitation-only event several times throughout the year with attendees including senior-level marketers, thought leaders, and other interesting folks with compelling ideas to share, many of which are also Landor's current and potential clients.

Britt explains, “No one was doing this. There were no examples from any other companies. We knew we didn't want to do a conference with slide shows and talk about ourselves. We're doing the opposite. It's about bringing together interesting, smart people to talk about things that we might not even know anything about.”

For instance, at Landor's May 2009 Salon Series, [Designology](#), expert panelists were brought together to discuss, “the role of innovation and design thinking in brand building.” In order to get the audience engaged and thinking about the topic prior to the event, Britt sent out [Pre-Salon Surveys](#) asking the guests to define “design.” Try asking your clients that in your next meeting and you'll probably get a few blank stares accompanied by an, “ugh, what are they trying to sell me now” roll of the eyes.

But because the Salon is not about Landor or any firm trying to sell their wares, but rather an exciting event on a stimulating topic being discussed by innovative thinkers, the audience becomes engaged. Britt adds, “We're streaming the Salon now so people can watch the entire podcast or 2-3 minute highlights video. So we really try to make it accessible for people to experience in many different ways.” Bravo to Britt for bringing the value of design to the forefront of discussion! To learn what insights came out of Landor's *Designology Salon*, watch the [highlights video](#) or [podcasts here](#).



Partial view of Landor's journal on design and branding issues, *The Front*. Photo Courtesy, Landor Associates.

Britt also communicates about design and branding to Landor's current and potential clients through her writings. She is editor of *The Front*, the San Francisco office's journal of branding and design issues. Prior to joining Landor, the journal did not exist so I give Britt oodles of credit for conceiving, creating, producing, and editing/authoring it! Britt pens feature articles and “brings together the best of Landor thinking from around the world.” The ultimate goal of *The Front* is to put Landor at the forefront of their audiences' minds through interesting, inspired articles including buzz-worthy news about the Salon Series.

What makes Britt's writing distinct is her voice. It lends an easily relatable, personal tone to a large, global corporation - not an easy task, to say the least. Since the journal is currently only available as a printed piece, you can check out a sample of her writing in her blog article, [“Today's Forecast: 74 degrees with some scattered brands.”](#) Poignant and thought-provoking, Britt successfully connects with her audience – precisely the article's main point on the need for brands to engage consumers in a genuine way.

As a side note, I thought it was interesting to learn that Britt always includes an inspiration piece in *The Front* written by one of the firm's designers. Since most graphic designers do not typically write, their articles give Landor's clients rare insight into the process and conception of design by some of the world's most renowned professionals. Visually speaking, the designers have free reign in the journal to express themselves creatively, allowing for “bold, cool designs that some clients might not have the guts to do.” Britt adds, “I don't think I could work somewhere that didn't value design, because now it's just a part of how I think. It needs to be smart, it needs to look good, it needs to connect with people.”

It's fantastic that there are people out there championing for the value of graphic design. Sure,



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Landor's intentions are specifically to raise brand awareness for their firm; but I do believe the dialogue creates a trickle-down effect—the more movers and shakers that “get” design, the more other people will too, and on and on. In the meantime, I highly appreciate people like Britt and design bosses like Courtney Reeser, who allow their employees the freedom to explore, innovate, and create opportunities for discussion on the importance of our industry's role in business and society.

Stephanie Orma welcomes comments, tips, suggestions, topic ideas, pitches, etc. For more info or to contact Stephanie visit: [Orma Design & She's SO Creative](#)
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Comments

Lisa Gainor says:

Stephanie-
I always love your point of view and writing style. Thanks for sharing, it sparked some ideas for similar discussions here in Chicago. Landor is a leader in our industry and for such an international studio to take a genuine personal approach to design and it's worldly meaning is refreshing.
Best, Lisa

August 7, 7:27 AM

Lindsey says:

Very interesting blog.

I guess this must be somewhat of an epidemic, because I just read another great article talking about Direct Mailings, that says something similar.

mintie.vox.com/library/post/do-mass-mailings-increase-roi.html

Thanks for the info
Lindsey

August 6, 10:17 AM

Sal Randazzo says:

Hi Stephanie,

Thank you for the informing article about Britt's good work to outreach to the general business community about the value of design.

As we emerge from the recession, the design community needs to really outreach to the general business community in order to stay relevant.

Regards,

Sal Randazzo
Sal Randazzo Design

August 3, 10:14 AM



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