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Business stories Discovery Yachts

Since commencing the Designing Demand programme Discovery Yachts has grown from 60 to 100 staff and launched two new models. The company is now producing around 10 yachts a year and predicting a £2m increase in turnover.



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Mark Waterhouse, Sales Director; Nigel Stuart, Managing Director and Ben Collett, Production Director

An award-winning luxury yacht builder, Discovery Yachts was founded in 1998 to ‘create the world’s most perfect blue-water cruising yachts’. Over a decade later, the Southampton-based company was a highly successful business with a growing workforce, producing around six yachts every year, each specifically designed to match the detailed requirements of its new owner.

The challenge

Whilst Discovery Yachts’ design and build quality was top-of-the-range, the company’s marketing collateral failed to reflect the quality of its yachts or the values of the business. The company was in a strong position to build sales and about to launch two new models, but needed strategic, design-led support to consolidate its position and help the business grow.

The response

MD Nigel Stuart had been in post for just over a year when Marine

South East recommended he found out more about Designing Demand, a Solutions for Business product developed by the Design Council. This intensive support programme was specifically created to help businesses tackle key strategic design issues and improve performance. “I went along to an introductory workshop and could instantly see the potential benefits of being able to work with leading designers,” said Nigel. “But I was also aware of the likely cost and time commitment, and have to say I signed up with a certain degree of trepidation. Two years on it is undoubtedly one of the best business decisions I have ever made.”

Design Associate Gavin Pryke has been working with Discovery Yachts throughout the process. “The company had already achieved phenomenal success without any formal understanding of its market position or how the business looked to the outside world,” said Gavin. “This was a passionate and highly experienced team, and there was clear potential

for further growth both in terms of new products and increased sales. The challenge was to help them implement a strategy that not only reflected their business model but also highlighted the unique individuality of their products.”

The Designing Demand process began with a full day site visit. “Gavin and his team came in, walked the site, saw our yachts and asked a lot of key questions. More importantly they helped us all to understand how strategic marketing could be applied to our business and the real benefits it could bring,” said Nigel. “When they left everyone had bought in to the importance of developing our brand and creating a professional marketing strategy.”

Following that initial visit a series of design-led projects were identified that could all bring significant benefit to the business. Whilst strategic branding was very much at the heart of the project, developing a customer experience plan and harbour yard tour, as well as creating a design brief for new product development, were all integral to the process.

Branding the business

It was clear that Discovery Yachts needed expert help and Gavin drew up a shortlist of suitable branding agencies. Independent brand consultant Rebecca Battman was appointed following pitches by four design agencies. A unique combination of strategic thinker and qualified designer, Rebecca began by going right back to basics, talking to existing customers and all those involved in design and production before reporting her findings, both good and bad.



▶ “When I first came ‘on board’ it was obvious that marketing was still seen as an expense, not an investment,” said Rebecca. “My job was to turn that attitude around and show them how strategic branding could help them achieve the price premium they wanted. My initial work clearly showed that the product was great, but also highlighted that the message needed to be a lot more aspirational: Discovery Yachts are in the business of selling the ultimate dream.

“To take the business forward we needed to reposition the company from being seen as a ‘small, family-owned business’ to becoming an ‘enterprising British business in pursuit of perfection’. Four points of distinction were identified and the branding positioning clarified: the Discovery Yachts message was encapsulated as designed for performance; built for safety; equipped for luxury and defined by quality.”

Once the company’s proposition had been defined it was then a reasonably short step to creating a look and feel that could be

developed across the business, in print, on the web and on company vehicles.

“By this stage I felt we had all taken the branding issues to heart, but just how completely the process had changed attitudes was brought home when our slightly skeptical production manager told me he had counted 35 logos on his BMW but only 4 Discovery logos on our boats,” said Nigel. “It was clear that the Discovery brand really had become central to everything we do.”

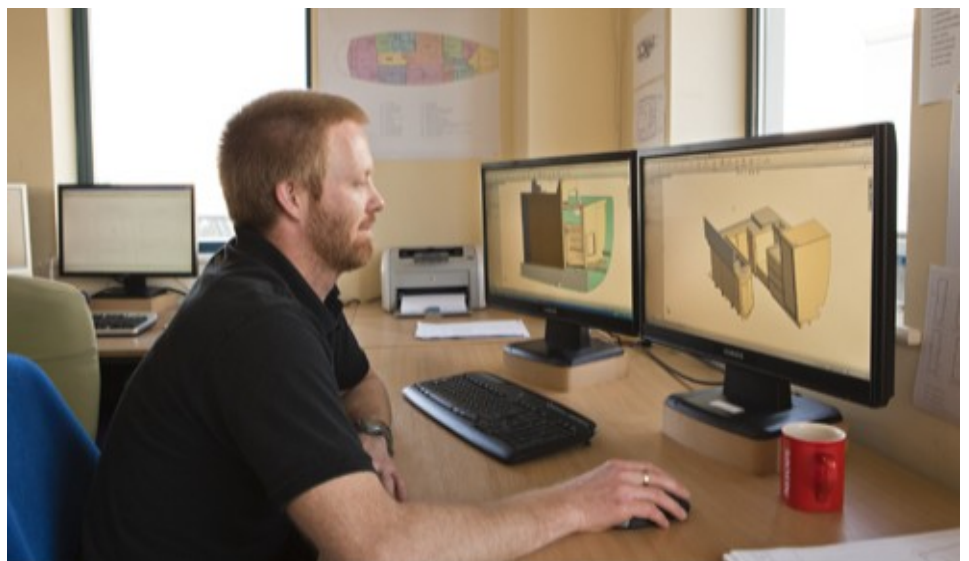
The customer experience

Whilst the logo was important, the branding strategy had to extend far beyond a simple image to succeed. Rebecca’s research had looked closely at the customer experience and this was now used to identify opportunities to increase sales. In particular a new harbour yard tour was identified as being crucial to the sales process. Potential customers were not just ‘buying a yacht’, they were buying into the philosophy behind the company and its products. A well-designed harbour yard tour allowed both to be presented to

best advantage. Prospective customers were now encouraged to meet the team behind each production process, appreciate the build quality and form a real understanding of what makes Discovery Yachts so distinct from any competition. A staff uniform of subtle cream trousers, deck shoes and branded black polo shirts was also introduced to further reflect and bolster the company ethos. The overall effect of the improved tour when combined with a test sail in a dream yacht, was to take each customer on a well-crafted journey, imparting a huge amount of detail and highlighting the quality of the product, its safety, performance ability and obvious luxury.

Having developed a route to encourage potential customers to buy into the company ethos, Discovery also asked existing customers to become brand advocates. Discovery Yachts had begun to acknowledge their customers as valuable assets and to work more closely with them, exploring how they used their yachts to make that experience even better.

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design is much more customer-centric, stemming from feedback nearly 50 Discovery owners. Nigel calls the new design process, “much more balanced”. Rebecca talks of a more “disciplined and rigorous approach”. In fact the change in approach to new product design is both. Discovery Yachts is now increasingly focused on its growing customer base. The company has a much clearer understanding of their requirements and as a luxury yacht builder, every aspect of the design process is now attuned to exceeding those requirements. Launched to great acclaim at the PSP Southampton Boat Show, the stunning £1.4m blue-water cruiser is testament to Discovery Yachts’ achievements.

The outcome

Since commencing the Designing Demand programme Discovery Yachts has grown from 60 to 100 staff and launched two new models. The company is now producing around 10 yachts a year and predicting a £2m increase in turnover. Rebecca Battman describes Discovery’s path as an “absolute success story for the value of design”.

Nigel is equally passionate about the role design has played in moving the company on. “We spent thousands – more than I expected, but it is not a problem. If it makes sales it is more than worth it. I feel we got so much more than we originally bargained for when we first signed up to the programme. It has fundamentally changed our attitude and that has been beneficial for the business, both now, and in the future.”

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“We are now encouraging customers to become part of our ‘family’”, said Nigel. “We post their travels on our website and actively encourage feedback and photographs. Their adventures are a wonderful endorsement of each yacht’s capability, and from a company perspective we get to see exactly how each yacht is being used. This is key information that allows us to design features to further improve the yachting experience and day-to-day life onboard.

“It is a new way of looking at design and one that we are now also applying to new products. The approach is much more systematic and we hope it will also reduce the time it takes to bring our new models to market.”

New product design

The newly launched Discover 57 is a direct result of the company’s new approach to product design. Billed as the ‘ultimate short-handed cruising yacht’ the 57 is the first yacht Discovery has produced which has not begun with designing the hull. In fact the

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