



Strategy is one of the oldest disciplines in human history, though the word itself has come to mean many different things over time. At its core, strategy is about making choices under conditions of uncertainty in order to achieve a desired outcome. Long before it was used in business, marketing, or communications, strategy emerged in military thinking, where leaders had to decide how to deploy limited resources, position their forces, and anticipate the actions of opponents. The word itself comes from the Greek "strategos," referring to a general or leader of an army. In that original context, strategy was concerned with the overall direction of a campaign, while tactics referred to the specific maneuvers carried out on the battlefield. This distinction remains important today. Strategy determines where to focus and what priorities to pursue, while tactics determine how those choices are executed in practice. Over time, the idea of strategy moved beyond the battlefield and into other domains of human activity. In business, strategy became the discipline of deciding how organizations compete, how they allocate resources, and how they position themselves within a changing environment. As markets grew more complex and competitive, businesses realized that success could no longer be achieved simply by offering better products or services. It required a more holistic approach, encompassing marketing, communications, and brand management. In the context of brands, strategy plays a unique role because brands do not compete only through the objective qualities of products or services but also through the perceptions, feelings, and associations that they evoke in the minds of consumers. A brand's strategy therefore focuses on defining what a brand stands for, what role it wants to play in people's lives, and how it should be understood relative to competitors. A strong brand is not simply a logo or a visual identity; it is a collection of elements that consistently expressed across experiences, messages, and interactions over time. One of the central challenges in branding is to create a brand that occupies a unique position in the minds of consumers. This requires a deep understanding of the target audience, the competitive landscape, and the broader cultural context. Positioning therefore involves identifying a brand's unique value proposition and communicating it effectively to the target audience. This process is often iterative and evolves over time. Marketing strategy builds on these foundations by determining how organizations reach and engage the audiences they care about. It involves understanding who those audiences are, what motivates them, and how they consume information. Marketing strategy also considers not only the message itself but also the timing of those interactions, and the broader journey people take as they move from awareness to consideration to purchase. The goal of marketing is to create meaningful connections between organizations and the people they serve. This requires an understanding of human behavior, cultural dynamics, and the competitive landscape in which they operate. Communication strategy is closely related to marketing strategy, which focuses on how organizations build reputation and credibility in the broader public sphere. While marketing often concentrates on consumer engagement and demand generation, communication strategy is concerned with how organizations are perceived by a wider set of stakeholders, including media, communities, employees, partners, and regulators. Communication strategy recognizes that organizations exist within complex cultural and social systems, and that reputation is a critical asset that must be actively managed. It involves identifying the key messages and narratives that are authentic to the organization and resonant with the audiences that encounter them. These narratives might involve innovation, leadership, social responsibility, or cultural participation, but they must be consistent and compelling. In this sense, strategic communication often involves identifying narratives that are authentic to the organization and resonant beyond the organization itself in order to gain traction.

*We spoke with **Jenn Green, Head of Strategy at King Ursa**, about the state of strategy today. From the limits of frameworks to the rise of AI-generated thinking, we explored how the industry increasingly rewards work that sounds resolved without ever making a real choice.*

Q: How did you first get into strategy? What was the path like?

A: Strategy was a natural progression once I realized it was where my education, talents, interests, and general quirkiness coalesced. I moved into it as a junior at TAXI at the turn of the century, when the discipline was just starting to take shape in Canadian agencies. There weren't established playbooks, so I bootstrapped: video camera, street interviews, talking to real people in the wild. Qualitative was my starting point. A few years client-side in insights and intelligence helped me build my quantitative grounding as data-driven approaches were maturing, which ultimately pushed me back toward qualitative with more conviction. From there, I moved through a mix of hybrid and leadership roles across agencies, developing a more collaborative, workshop-driven approach to strategy.

Three years ago I joined King Ursa, which has been the biggest shift. It's where AI became a real part of my workflow, not a side experiment. That's changed how I think about the role of the strategist and where judgment actually sits.

What I'd tell my younger self is that the discomfort of not knowing what strategy "is" was the training. Twenty-five years in, the most useful thing I do is still holding the question open longer than is comfortable for anyone in the room, including me.

Q: What is your view on frameworks in strategic practice?

A: A framework should help you think, not replace the thinking. Most frameworks are organizing devices for thinking that's already happened. They're how you communicate a decision, not how you arrive at one. That's a legitimate use, and they're genuinely helpful for presenting fulsome thinking in a way that's easy to follow. But the frameworks I find most useful are the generative ones: the ones that act as collectors, inputs, and guides for how we're going to dissect a problem and develop hypotheses. The 4 C's. The 5 Whys. Emotional journey mapping. These work because they don't pretend to give you the answer; they give you a structured way to find it.

The problem is that the industry has gradually inverted all of this. We now use frameworks as substitutes for thinking, not containers for it. The brief template gets filled in. The funnel gets mapped. The job-to-be-done gets articulated. And somewhere in that process, the actual question about what matters more than what else gets skipped. I use frameworks. I also throw them away constantly. The test I apply is whether the framework is helping me see something I wouldn't otherwise see, or whether it's helping me feel like I'm doing strategy without having to actually choose anything.

The most rigorous strategists I know are the ones who can work without the scaffolding when the situation calls for it. The least rigorous are the ones who use it as a short cut.

Q: What are your biggest frustrations with how strategy is practiced?

A: There's a version of strategy that looks rigorous on the surface: frameworks, research, stakeholder alignment, polished decks. But, avoids the one thing strategy is for: making a hard choice about what matters more than what else. You can spot it by what's missing. No sacrifice. No real "no". Every objective is included. Every audience is addressed. Every attribute survives. The logic holds. The deck is thick. And nothing in it would force a client to actually make a choice and prioritize.

That's not strategy. That's facilitation with strategic vocabulary.

What's frustrating is that this kind of work is increasingly rewarded. It's safer to approve, easier to defend, and harder to argue with than something that takes a clear position. And AI amplifies it.

Q: How do you spot poor strategy and is that a people problem or a system problem?

A: What isn't there: sacrifice, tension, friction. What the brand is willing to be bad at, which audience it is willing to lose, and which objections it isn't trying to pre-empt. If a strategy survives every stakeholder review without anything being given up, it is almost certainly not strategy.

The other tell is harder to name and increasingly common. You can read a deck and not be able to locate the real insight. The tension that prompted the work has been smoothed away. The hypothesis has been laundered through enough hands, frameworks, and AI passes that nothing carries a clear point of view. It reads as authoritative without being authored. That is a newer failure mode, and it is becoming pervasive because AI tools make it effortless to produce thinking that sounds resolved before anything has actually been resolved. It is both a people and a system problem, but the system drives most of it. Most strategists know how to make a sharp choice; the system rewards them for not making one. Compressed timelines, multi-stakeholder approvals, pitch dynamics, procurement, and now AI tools that make accommodation effortless all push in the same direction: toward work that is comprehensive, inclusive, and unobjectionable. You can train people to make sharper choices, but not inside a system that punishes them for doing so. That is why senior strategists are disproportionately valuable. Not because they are smarter, but because they have the standing to say “this isn’t a strategy yet” and hold the line long enough to make a real choice.

Q: What indicates that a team is not working well? And what would you change if you saw that happening?

A: I read this as integrated teams — strategy, creative, account, production — because that’s how most of us actually work. The clearest tell is when the team has stopped disagreeing. Meetings are efficient, decks come together quickly, everyone is aligned, and nothing in the work has a clear point of view. Integrated teams are supposed to generate productive friction. Strategy and creative should pull against each other. Accounts and clients should push back on both. When that tension disappears and the work moves frictionlessly through the system, it usually means the team has prioritized momentum over judgment. The other tell is when articulation outpaces understanding across disciplines. The strategy sounds finished, the creative sounds defensible, and the account narrative sounds aligned. But if you ask anyone to defend their piece without the deck, the answers thin out quickly. Tools that make polished output cheap have widened the gap between what teams have said and what they have actually figured out together. What I would change is reintroducing friction deliberately, especially across disciplines. Strategy should be willing to leave creative uncomfortable. Creative should push strategy further. Accounts and clients should be willing to slow both down when the thinking is not there yet. Integrated teams work best when each discipline is doing its job rigorously, not when everyone is being agreeable in service of the timeline. The shorthand: if a team is never in productive conflict, the work is not being made, it is being assembled.

Q: What is the weirdest or most controversial perception of strategists?

A: That we're the smart ones in the room. It's a flattering myth and it does more damage than people realize. The actual job isn't being the smartest person in the room. It's being the person willing to stay in the discomfort longest: the discomfort of not knowing yet, of choosing badly, of being wrong in public, of saying the unpopular thing when the room wants alignment. That's not intelligence. That's a kind of professional stamina. The "smart strategist" framing also encourages the wrong behaviors. It rewards articulation over judgment. It makes us perform thinking instead of doing it. It turns strategy into a status game rather than a service to the work. And it's deeply tied to why so many strategists end up writing decks that sound impressive and decide nothing. The strategists I respect most are the ones with the highest tolerance for being uncertain in front of other people.

Q: To what extent do you think the pursuit of awards influences the products and services agencies create and is there a risk it sometimes outweighs real client or consumer value?

A: Love them or hate them, awards are currency. They shape what gets made and how agencies define success. The increased weighting of effectiveness over the past decade has been a meaningful shift. Commercial impact is the right thing to measure, and the discipline of proving it has made the work sharper. Where I'd like to see the conversation go next is into the upstream mechanisms behind those outcomes. Sales lifts, share growth, and even multi-year business effects sit on top of something measured less directly: the cognitive and emotional shifts that produce them. Changing what people believe about a brand. Unsticking long-held associations. Building the kind of trust that converts into advocacy. Those are some of the hardest parts of the job, and ultimately the things that drive the durable outcomes the categories already celebrate. It's not that the industry doesn't value long-term brand building. The challenge is that the work driving those effects is harder to isolate, harder to attribute cleanly, and harder to package into a simple case study. Belief change and trust-building rarely show up tidily within a campaign window. As a result, the weighting can still favour what's easiest to prove over what creates the most durable commercial advantage over time. Effectiveness, fully understood, includes the work happening at the level of belief, association, and trust. Recognizing that layer more explicitly would push the discipline forward.

Q: With all the change happening (especially around AI) what is one thing you want to protect?

A: The thing I most want to protect is the forming stage of strategic thinking. The phase before the real tension becomes visible, when the problem is still unstable, competing explanations are still alive, and judgment is being shaped through unresolved ambiguity rather than resolved too quickly.

AI is extraordinarily good at smoothing things out. Give it a confused brief and it will generate an articulate, persuasive direction in minutes. The logic will hold together. The tensions will appear reconcilable. But a smooth answer that satisfied the room is not the same thing as legitimate resolution.

The danger is that strategists begin mistaking expansion for interrogation and articulation for understanding. AI can help pressure-test thinking once relevance has been determined. What it cannot do is decide what deserves weighting in the first place, especially when the most important variables are emotional, political, contextual, or only half-visible. That part of the work develops slowly. It comes from sitting with uncertainty long enough to feel where the real tension is. Not just answering the question, but interrogating whether the question itself is correctly framed.

For experienced strategists, occasional shortcuts are probably manageable. What worries me more is what happens to younger strategists under timeline pressure. If AI removes too much of the friction too early, they can appear highly productive without ever developing the judgment that makes strategy valuable in the first place.

Q: How screwed are we from 1 to 10 with the AI in creative industry?

A: Six. I'm not worried about AI replacing strategists. I'm worried that careful, disciplined thinking will stop feeling like it's worth the time. AI makes it cheap and fast to produce work that sounds smart, well-argued, and strategically reasonable. And most of it is good enough to move forward. It passes review. It sounds intelligent. Clients approve it. Campaigns launch on time and profit margins strengthen.

That changes how agencies make decisions. When this kind of work becomes cheap and fast to produce, the time and effort needed to make genuinely sharp work starts looking wasteful by comparison. The danger isn't a big, obvious failure. It's that the safer thinking and defensible logic is quick to get approved. But real choices weren't made, tension was toned down and with it the opportunity for work with real cultural impact falls squarely on the creative department.

AI slop in creative work is easier to spot. In strategy, the slop is harder to see because it looks competent. It reads as thoughtful. It uses the right vocabulary. The problem is that nothing in it was hard to produce, and nothing in it would be hard for anyone else to produce. Over time, "good enough" becomes the working standard. The work still functions, so the bar lowers without anyone noticing. The gap between passable strategy and exceptional strategy starts to feel smaller than it actually is, even though the downstream commercial difference between them remains huge.

That's the risk I think the industry is underestimating. Not replacement. A slow lowering of the bar.

Q: Final thoughts on the state of strategy right now?

A: I'll go somewhere slightly different, because I think it's the most important shift in the discipline and we're barely talking about it.

Algorithms aren't just curating what people see anymore. They're shaping identity. The version of the world each of us encounters is so tightly tuned that it starts to feel like reality. Other perspectives don't just feel wrong, they become harder to access. It's more than an echo-chamber. It's an environment that reinforces who you think you are and filters out what might challenge it.

This is the cultural condition strategy now operates inside. It creates an opportunity for brands willing to take a position and accept the consequences. Work that tries to speak to everyone gets ignored. Work made for the people already listening for it lands.

The problem is that "pick a side and lose half the market" doesn't usually align with shareholder value, at least in the way it's currently measured. So most brands choose the safer path: be present, be inoffensive, be addressable to everyone. In an algorithmic environment, that often means being effectively invisible. The work that lands is true for someone in particular. The current toolset is built to average that specificity away, and what's left is work that's true enough for everyone and meaningfully true for no one.

If I had to leave the industry with one idea, it would be that the next generation of strong brands will be defined by what they are willing to exclude, not just what they include. Strategy's role is to help organizations understand that choice and act on it.

The brands that matter in the next decade will be the ones that finally let go of the idea that being for everyone was ever working. The math was always there. The algorithm has only made the reckoning unavoidable.