



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. 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 focusing on operational efficiency or short-term actions, but of coherent long-term thinking about where opportunities lie and how they can be pursued effectively. From this broader business perspective, strategic thinking gradually expanded into specific applications within organizations, including 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, images, and associations that they create in the minds of consumers. Brand 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 element that is consistently expressed across experiences, messages, and interactions over time. One of the core challenges in brand strategy is to create a brand that is both distinctive and relevant. Positioning therefore involves identifying the space a brand occupies in the competitive landscape and how it differentiates one brand from others in the same category. Some brands become associated with reliability or safety, others with innovation, luxury, performance, or cultural relevance. These associations are rarely accidental. They are the result of deliberate choices about how a brand communicates and behaves 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 a product or service might address those needs. Marketing strategy 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. Brand strategy is closely related to marketing strategy, but also by the stories people tell about a company, the issues it chooses to engage with, and the actions it takes in response to challenges or opportunities. While marketing often concentrates on consumer engagement and demand generation, brand 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 earned through consistent messaging but also by the stories people tell about a company. The issues it chooses to engage with, and the actions it takes in response to challenges or opportunities. In this sense, strategic communication often involves identifying narratives that are authentic to the organization and meaningful to the audiences that encounter them. These narratives might involve innovation, leadership, social responsibility, or cultural participation, but they must resonate beyond the organization itself in order to gain traction.

*We spoke with **Kristian Visconti, VP, Strategy at Angry Butterfly**, about the evolving role of strategy today – from the importance of real-world insights and cross-disciplinary collaboration, to why great strategy should challenge safe thinking and stay involved through execution. We explored the value of human curiosity and healthy disagreement, the influence of awards on creative work, and how AI can support strategy without replacing the rigour, time, and messy thinking that make great ideas possible.*

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

A: I took the long way into strategy... starting off as an account service intern. Though I had always had my sights on strategy, I started my career in accounts, which looking back was the biggest blessing before making the switch. In accounts you touch every part of the process, develop relationships with the whole agency and really get exposure to what clients care about, which I think set me up to have huge empathy for all parts of the process and to have a longer term view of what to look out for up front in the process. I enjoyed a lot about accounts, but always found myself most excited by the strategy and campaign planning, so when an opportunity came up to make the switch, I did.

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

A: I like frameworks to spark thinking, but prefer real world cases. I find frameworks helpful in a workshop, as a starting point on a brief or a reference to strengthen an argument. For me, often a framework is the internal starting point that sparks a line of thinking. But I find the most value in pointing to similar problems in the past or in different industries. I find a real world case to be the most helpful tool in solving our clients problems.

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

A: Strategy shouldn't start with the answer, or stop before the work begins. I have two frustrations that bookend the strategic process - the first being often clients have an idea of the ending point on a project - this can be helpful to understand the problem in their view, but it can sometimes lead to a strategy that is regurgitating their internal narrative and data back to them. The second is at the end of the process when strategy typically drops off, I like to be involved in the media planning/comms planning and even the creative execution where strategy is sometimes left out of the conversation because this is often when the most collaboration can happen with media teams to bring the idea to life in an innovative or unconventional way to have the most impact.

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

A: If a competitor could slot right in, it's not great strategy. Poor strategy is easy to spot when pressure testing, if a strategy doesn't stand out for uniqueness or if a competitor brand could slot seamlessly in, it's unlikely to move the needle. I don't think this is a people problem, often, particularly in Canada, we're encouraged to follow the safe route. I've been fortunate to work with strategists in my career who are often pushing for the riskier, sharper articulation but told to pull back because it's more abstract and time consuming to sell in strategy, so we work towards crafting the creative idea as the thing that breaks through.

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

A: No disagreements. On any team, not being comfortable to disagree with one another is a recipe for blandness. Both internally and with clients, I always strive for an environment where disagreeing, questioning and healthy debate are encouraged - in my experience, that's how we've gotten to the best work. In the same vein, everyone having a seat at the table (or in the discussion), is important - clients, creatives, planners all have unique and valuable perspectives. Ultimately this comes down to communication - which is the business we're all in... Typically when I have seen teams not working well, there's some breakdown of trust and or communication so being able to facilitate an open environment and encouraging all voices to be heard is how I first approach this.

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

A: That we're all academics. While some of the best strategists I've worked with happen to also be highly accomplished academics, I think the traits that make the best strategists are empathy and relentless curiosity. As a strategist, one of our main jobs is to represent the audience's perspective and seek to understand why a certain behaviour is happening... or not happening. So being able to deeply understand and illustrate simply what it's like in a particular pair of shoes vs. citing the data that describes those shoes. The best strategists can find and quote the research but can also see a data point that sparks a curiosity to uncover the deeper story.

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: Not every great campaign wins awards. Not every award-winning campaign is great.

The reality is that the pursuit of awards doesn't impact the vast majority of work that agencies do. We know that our job is to help our clients' business and sometimes the most effective work doesn't mean driving an awards-centric agenda. When done well however, with a client that is willing to step outside the box, there are unique opportunities to do incredible, award winning work that also drives client and consumer value. I feel especially grateful to have been a part of a number of those projects over the years and I am always looking out for the next opportunity.

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

A: The time and rigour it takes to produce great strategy.

AI is great at giving you answers quickly. Ask it to outline a target audience, find recently published articles on a certain topic etc., and it gives you something plausible in seconds... but is it true? It takes time to interrogate these outputs, like we've always done with client data, consumer research... there's an uncomfortable part of the process where strategists grapple with contradictions and where talking with real people often uncovers a connection that leads into a solution. That messy middle part isn't inefficient, it's where insights get uncovered. So, while AI is a powerful and helpful tool for strategists, the thing I'd protect is the space and time to interrogate the outputs, discuss hypotheses live and do the actual thinking required to get to a sharp, unique strategy. It's a gift for AI to absorb the parts of our job that were always mechanical and laborious - the synthesis, summaries, cross-referencing. But if we just replace that gifted time with more automations, we're signing ourselves up for more conflict-averse, bland outcomes. In my mind, the best strategy is not to have AN answer quickly, it's to uncover the right answer, and I hope that to still be true as AI evolves.

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

A: Used properly, AI is magic. Used badly, and it costs us the magic.

5... I think it's too early to tell. At this moment, I think AI has the ability to make us all more efficient and effective. Those that aren't adopting it, will be left behind. But overuse, and over reliance can be dangerous. Our teams still need to have the fundamentals and knowledge to craft our AI friends into proper ad assistants. And used in the wrong way, it could be detrimental to the integrity and magic of our outputs.

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

A: Channel silos are a detriment to the planner and the brand.

I think now more than ever before strategists need to have a foundational understanding of all aspects of planning, sure some may be stronger brand planners, and others great comms planners, but the best I've encountered are great enough to be dangerous at both. Many agencies are siloed into channel specific practices, but I feel that does a detriment to the planner and to the brand.