

≡ HOW ≡

# DESIGN PRINCIPLES

CAN EVEN APPLY TO

# AGENCY MANAGEMENT

Yorkshire agency **HMA Digital Marketing** has recently grown from 10 to 21 people. Here, they discuss how Dieter Rams' 10 famous design principles can even be applied to the *management of agencies themselves...*



Contributions by

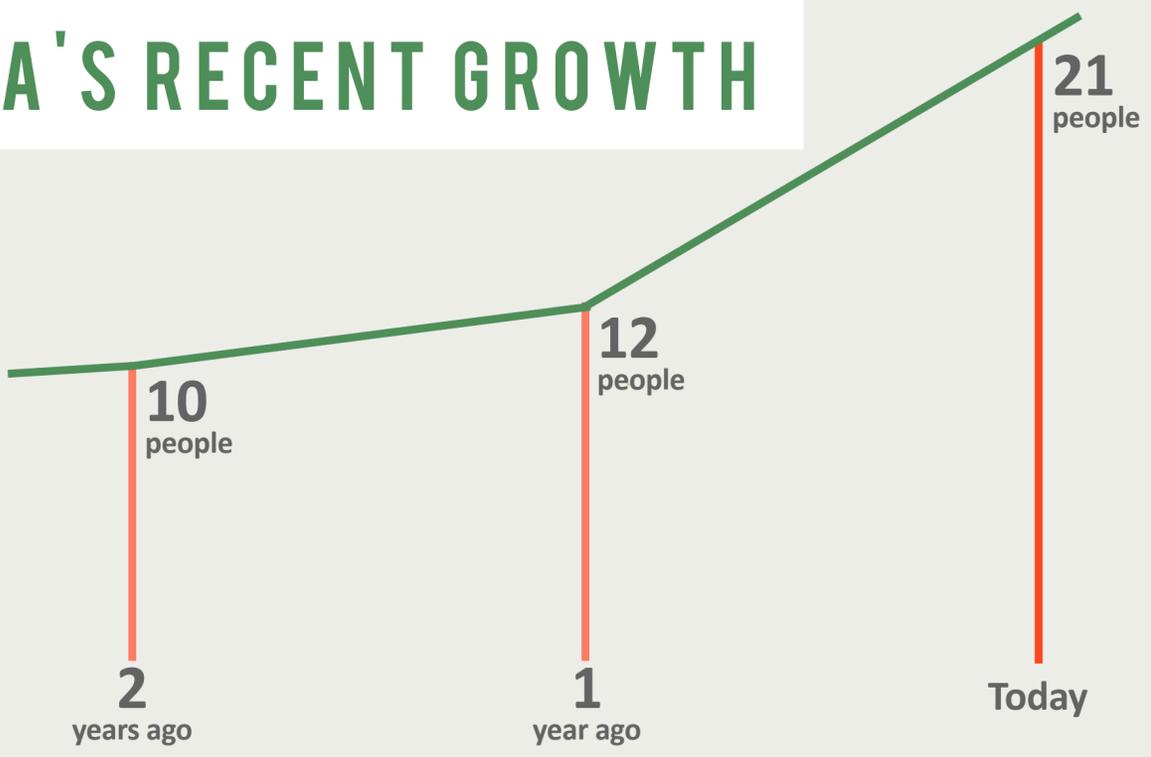


**Nicola Tiffany**  
Managing Director

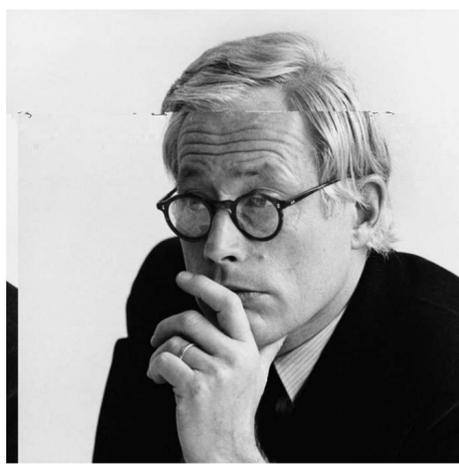


**Barbara Pemberton**  
Office Manager

## HMA'S RECENT GROWTH



HMA clients

WHEN **DIETER RAMS**,

**LEGENDARY DESIGNER**,

INTRODUCED HIS CELEBRATED *TEN PRINCIPLES OF GOOD DESIGN*, HIS IDEAS INFLUENCED A GENERATION OF DESIGNERS INCLUDING **JONATHAN IVE AT APPLE**. ACCORDING TO RAMS, DESIGN SHOULD BE:

USEFUL

HONEST

AESTHETIC

LONG-LASTING

INNOVATIVE

THOROUGH TO THE LAST DETAIL

UNDERSTANDABLE

ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY

UNOBTRUSIVE

AS LITTLE DESIGN AS POSSIBLE



These principles are inspiring, not only for their design wisdom. You can even apply them to the management of a digital agency like ours!

How? Let's pick just **3** of these principles.



*Client work by HMA*



# 1. USEFUL



“In our industry, ‘Useful’ means *‘Effective’*. Dieter Rams’ point is that design isn’t merely about attractiveness. It has a job to do. Clients of creative agencies today make it crystal clear that *effectiveness is their priority*. It seems obvious, but not every agency fully grasps it.”

## HERE’S AN EXAMPLE OF THE CHANGE IN THINKING

“Jeff Stark, ex of Saatchi & Saatchi, has worked in the industry for 20 years and is a prominent commentator. He says

*‘You can’t be a temperamental genius anymore. Clients are less in awe and less reverential about what we do.’*



Stark added: *‘There has been a demystification of what we do which has consequently devalued our contribution. There isn’t the respect and reverence for what we do anymore, plus above-the-line advertising is no longer the nuclear weapon it once was.’*

*‘Plurality is changing everything, the creative person in the advertising agency, the hot shotwriter, is no longer the kingpin that he once was.’*

**Jeff Stark**

Of the industry’s future, Stark predicts the demise of the traditional full-service advertising agency: *‘Clients will buy in a more ad hoc way. People aren’t prepared to pay big dosh for what we bring to the party anymore.’*



That makes so much sense to us. There’s a new realism and transparency today. Clients really will not put up with mystery and pomposity.



**RESULTS**

“At HMA we have always had a total focus on **producing results for clients**. We work hard to clarify the exact purpose of each job, and seek out the benchmarks, the impact and the effectiveness on the client’s business. It’s a key part of our culture.



“**We have a very loyal client base**. More than one client is still with us from our very beginnings. We feel sure that our constant drive for quality and results has been fundamental to this.”

## FOCUS

“Effectiveness also relies on **specialised knowledge**. You can’t be a generalist and expect to make the biggest impact in everything you dabble in. In our case we committed to digital early on. We’ve been a digital agency for as long as there have been digital agencies!”



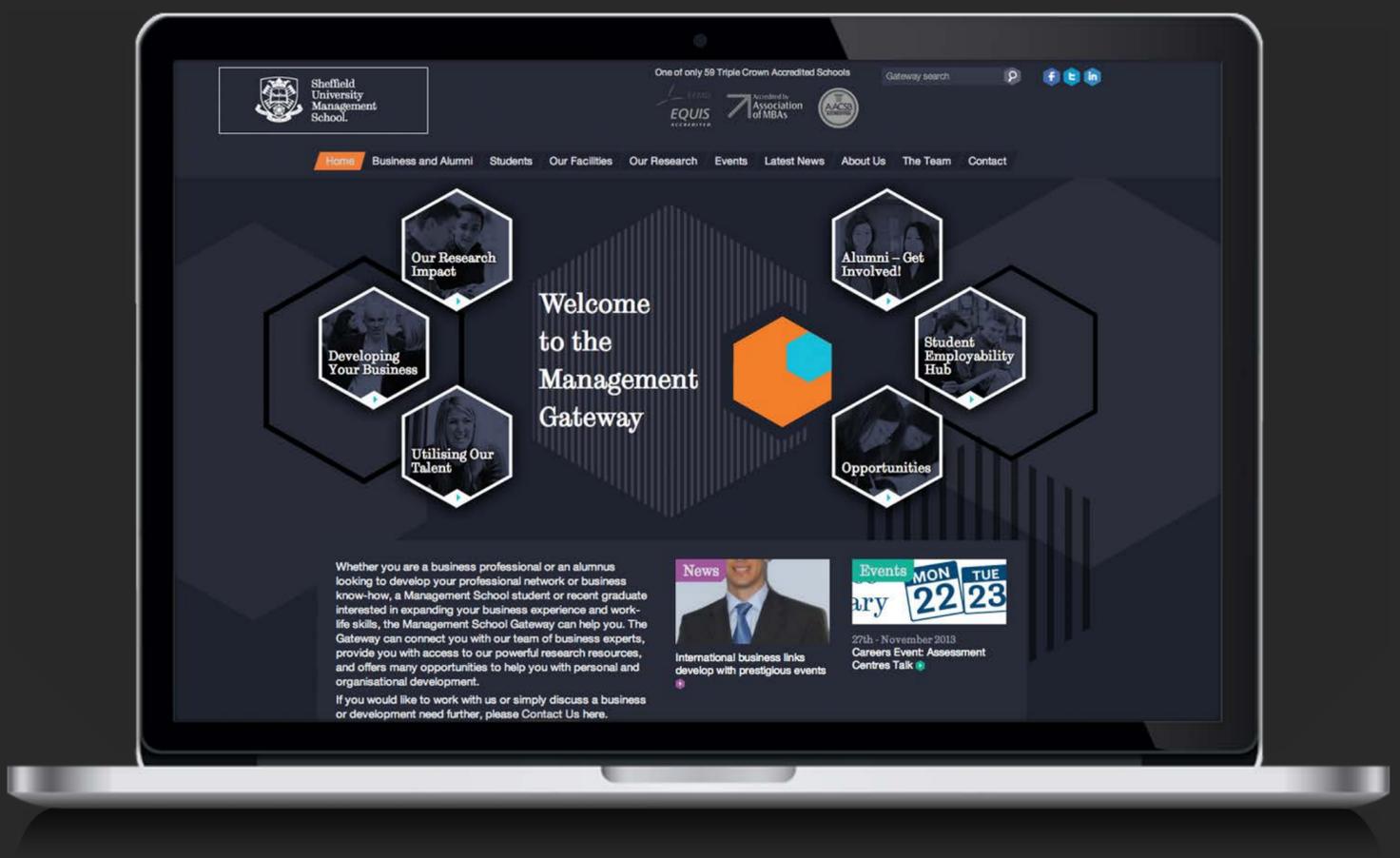
“2-3 years ago we decided to **grow our business**. This was not for the sake of growth in itself, but in order to be able to offer an ever-improving service to clients and a wider, deeper set of digital specialities. For us, that’s what growth is for.”



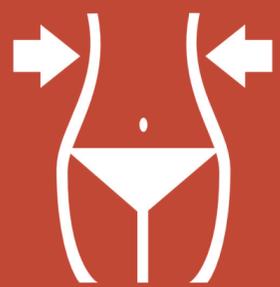
“Another benefit: growth’s created **career opportunities for the team**”.



“Two areas of particular growth for us are Healthcare and Science/Technology. We hired in **specialist skills** to manage those areas. We also have a good relationship with the University of Sheffield, both as a client and as a partner in various research projects.”



## 2. LEAN



Applied to the running of an agency, Rams' *'As Little Design as Possible'* translates as *'Leanness.'* Everybody's familiar with 'lean manufacturing' and 'lean startups'. I think clients are increasingly expecting their agencies to be lean too. Nobody wants to pay for bloat."

## FOCUS

"In our early days, when we had under 10 people, we developed our own system. It had **3** issues:

1. We knew it didn't do what we needed it to do.
2. It was dependent on one person to make it work.  
It wasn't scalable. We needed a system that
3. would take care of the business agency fundamentals and allow us to grow when we chose to.

"When we were ready for a new system, we looked at three offerings and chose Synergist. This was in 2007.

“One big reason for implementing Synergist was to avoid wasting so much time running the **mechanics** of the agency when we want to focus purely on clients. So, when planning our growth we went for ‘lean growth’.



“‘Lean’ doesn’t mean ‘thin.’ It means order, and making everything work optimally. No waste. No inefficiencies. If an agency has inefficiencies, it’s the client that finishes up paying for them. You need process to make it work.



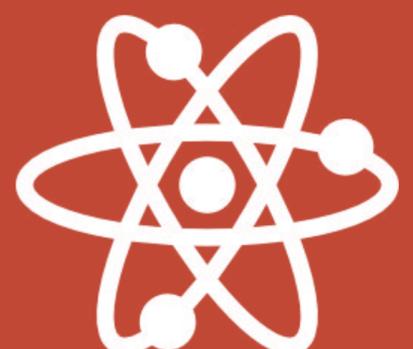
“Synergist plays a significant role in helping agencies drive through efficiencies. Says Rob: “For example, it has helped us to automate reporting. Before Synergist we used to spend hours and hours on producing reports.

“Synergist is a powerful system, which benefits from having someone driving it. Our SuperUser is Barbara.



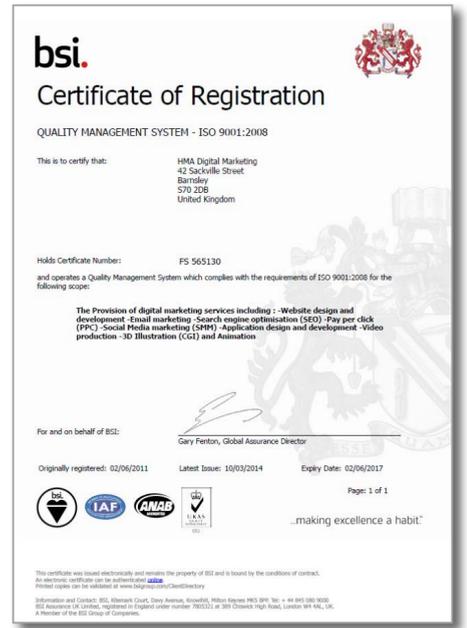
*Client work by HMA*

### 3. THOROUGH TO THE LAST DETAIL





One ongoing aspect of our life at HMA is the need to prove to large organisations that a small agency in Barnsley can do the job. One way of proving our seriousness is our ISO and quality management story. It proves a commitment to excellent customer service. Our Quality Management is externally audited by the British Standards Institute (BSI), accrediting us with the international standard for quality management, ISO 9001:2008.



The way in which clients benefit is 3-fold:



**1** We are able to dedicate more time to servicing our clients rather than manually analysing information (or trying to find information!)

**2** Everything is stored centrally so if one person is unavailable, another should be able to pull information off the system for a client at any time

**3** We're able to accurately give information as to studio availability instantly to manage expectations of when work will be delivered.



*Even Steve Jobs spoke glowingly about the need for process. For all their design and creativity credentials, Jobs said that "Apple is a very disciplined company, and we have great processes. Process makes you more efficient".*

"Having such a system makes sure you don't miss anything. It helps us to maintain all aspects of quality."



"From a Client Services perspective, Synergist is the first thing we open in a morning and the last thing we close when we go home. It contains relevant details for each client and job which make it easier to co-ordinate projects and work between us and the studio.

““We use most features on Synergist including

- Clients
- Purchase orders
- Contacts
- Quotes
- Jobs/Phases
- Billing Plans
- Estimating
- Invoicing, etc etc

“Before Synergist we used Filemaker Pro and there were a lot of manual processes which meant there was a greater margin of error when preparing information.



“Synergist has streamlined our information storage, how we report on what has happened and also how we plan for the future (billing plans, scheduling). If I was asked to name just one invaluable tool, it would be *Synergist’s Data Viewer*”.

“Synergist is the linchpin of our Quality Management System. It provides a central repository of information which facilitates project management, enables us to access information more readily and provides us with the financial information we need to make business decisions on projects and with regards to the development of the organisation.”



“It also gives everyone in the team easy access to every aspect of jobs, time, even marketing notes. Everything’s *just there*. It means that all the reports are available to everyone, so if ever the Synergist SuperUser is not in the office they all still have access to it.”



“Having our system also shows you how long jobs should take, so it helps in quoting. All of this is part of the same quality process.”



“With digital there is a great deal of data to manage. You have to have a systematic approach to managing it.”

*Client work by HMA*



# THE FUTURE



1. I think all agencies will focus much more on *outcomes* for the client than they ever have before

2. They will have to show more sensitivity to clients' budget issues and the pressures brand managers are under to prove *value for money*

3. They will need to show a stronger *spirit of partnership* with clients. 'We're both in this together to make it work' rather than a vendor-knows-best, patronising approach

## ...AND TALKING OF THE FUTURE...

"An agency can't always predict what data it will need. For example five years ago we didn't have anyone in business development. Now we have three people in that area. Synergist was able to accommodate that."

synergist®

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"Sales forecasting is critical for us, because the system gives us confidence in hiring people. Without such a system, you're hiring with a wing and a prayer."

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"Synergist is an essential part of what we do."

Client work by HMA



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Implementation and consultation by

