

# THE HUB

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BEST PRACTICES

## Motorola's Edge

**Geoffrey Frost, chief marketing officer of Motorola, on the success of the Razr, the meaning of the Pebl, and the future of “the device formerly known as the cell phone.”**



**The Razr is said to be the “yang” of Motorola’s design strategy and the Pebl is the “yin.” What does that mean?**

Well, if you want to become the outright leader in design, you have to do two things. One, have amazingly radical, built-in surprises so that our products have the “whoa” factor. “Whoa” is the new “wow”; we want to make products that are so amazing that people just look at them and go, “whoa!” But we also have to have consistency, so that we stand for geometries and approaches that are recognizable as Motorola’s.

The conundrum is: How do you have both consistency and surprise in a design language? We struggled with this, and what the design team came up with was basically to create a sort of genetic chart—with a mother and a father—or a “yang and a yin” of the design family that would evolve.

One would be angular, and über-techno done up in new, radical, metallics and ceramics and the like—overtly edgy, super-thin, and so forth. The other one would be more rounded, softer and more self-evidently “human.” Again, the design is very simple. But if you put Pebl and Razr next to each other, they are kind of the “yin” and “yang,” the “mother” and “father,” of our design family.

**Where does marketing fit in?**

Marketing and design have really grown together. The marketing and design teams are intimately connected because the “design” and “experience design” are the keys for us. Design—because as marketers, we’re lucky enough to make a product that lives in the physical world. If you get to play with real, live objects that you can touch and hold, that’s a huge, huge advantage in marketing.

For Motorola, those objects happen to be the defining icon of our time—the cell phone.

It is probably the single-most important vehicle of self-expression of any object today. We have seen through the success of the Razr that having a really, really compelling physical design is incredibly powerful. But we also have to think in terms of “experience design.” What are the other experiences we should imagine and create?

**How exactly does Razr pay off that idea?**

Razr is meant to embody—visibly—a whole new take on what these devices are. The world got pretty used to thick, plastic, candybar phones. We consciously made the decision to radicalize that. You’ve seen it in Razr and you’ll see it again soon in a new product called Slvr that is going to mean the end of the fat, candybar phone. The Slvr is 11.5 millimeters thick—thinner than Razr. It’s not much thicker than a pocket protector.

You’ll see experience design yet again in our Rokr phones—dedicated, optimized music →



← design—with stereo speakers, even a micro sub-woofer—in a phone. If you wear it around your neck, or have it in your pocket, you'll *feel* the music as much as hear it.

We're beginning to play with audio-visual ringtones—not just audio, but visual—because the world in which we keep our phones in our pockets all the time is over. People like to put their phones out on the table in front of them and let their friends see them. Now when a call comes in, you can set it so that you're visually alerted.

### Is that the payoff on the experience side?

On the experience level, it's really all about self-created experiences. I jokingly refer to the cellphone as "the device formerly known as the cellphone" because it is morphing and evolving so fast into so much more. For example, with our Rokr phones, we'll be able to stream wirelessly and effortlessly through your car stereo system using a Bluetooth connection.

So, you might be listening to music on your Rokr phone through a wireless Bluetooth headset or a pair of sunglasses and then get in your car and stream it through your car stereo. The idea is that it's all effortless—that you can just push a button and seamlessly flow your musical experience through all the spaces that you have in your life.

It's not just about music. It extends through a whole series of things we like to do—like email, for example. We're looking pretty hard at voice-to-text and text-to-voice email. We're looking at time-shifting. You might be watching an episode of a TV show you recorded, and realize you have to go; with the push of a button, you can download the rest of the episode onto your portable device and watch it at your leisure as you wait to catch a plane.

### What do marketers need to understand about the potential of 3G technologies as a medium for marketing?

3G technology is one of the many steps on the path to a world where every molecule of air is a broadband connection! We're spending a lot of time thinking about the amazing new experiences you can design in a world in which the internet isn't something you have to go to or plug into. The internet is something you breathe in; it's something that follows you wherever you are.

This is especially true with today's technology—which not only gives you huge bandwidth, but also knows exactly where you are and who you are. So, what would that mean the next time I want to go to a Google Map? What if I went directly to my Google Map, where I was? And it reflected what I liked? Or what I had on my schedule? It's a really, really interesting space.

### On a more basic level, how do Motorola's designs account for things like different texting behaviors among consumers around the world?

We actually work very hard to analyze the different character sets and various languages, such as Mandarin character recognition, for example. Using either your fingertip or a stylus, the user can create the characters; the phone recognizes them and converts them into text.

We're actually playing with one idea that lets users simply trace characters with their fingertips over the entire keypad. The keypad senses the shape you're drawing to make it even faster. This is really about inventing not just new kinds of modes of experience but new languages.

Another example is what we call "push-to-view." The thought is that maybe putting a camera in a phone isn't about digital photography; maybe it's about the instant ability to allow me to share with you what I'm seeing right now, with one push of a button.



### The Razr, at \$499, was twice the price of any previous cell phone. What's the lesson there?

There's a big lesson about the limits of traditional research. Our traditional research told us that there was a total available world market of about two million units for a \$499 phone; we sold over two million units in the UK alone. So, the real lesson is, the best way to predict the future, as Peter Drucker once said, is to create it. The best way to predict the total available market for a new thing is to invent it.

If you want to be a leading company, you have to create the products that create your destiny. Just like good poker players, you don't want to spend all your time trying to figure out what everybody else is doing; you want them to spend their time trying to figure out what you're doing. The world loves the phrase, "fact-based decision making." The truth is, there are no facts about the future. There are facts about the past. There are indications. There are hints and there are clues about what the future could be.

Marketing is not a business of rules. Yes, there are rules. Yes there are inferences you can draw about things that kind of work and things that kind of don't. But at the end of the day, the great marketing practitioners are in the business of what my former boss, Ed McCabe, called "brilliant exceptions."

And then those exceptions become the new rules for everybody else.

### Is the current industry obsession with measuring R.O.I. counter-productive?

No, I think it's a question of balance. I think it's really, really important to see what the money you are spending is actually doing. But if you think that there's a magic formula for creating brilliant exceptions, you're crazy.

There are no facts about certain things that are really, really important—new design directions, new "experience design" directions and new kinds of experiences that can create new businesses. At the end of the day, we have to assemble the best clues and inferences we can, and the best set of facts on what's gone before, and

make the leaps—to make the bets—on the new things.

That's one of the great things about (Motorola CEO) Ed Zander. When Ed joined Motorola, we were already working on Razr and we kind of knew we had a great product. He took one look at it and said, "How many can you make?" It's like what Malcolm Gladwell talks about in his book, *Blink*, which is a pretty profound piece of work. Malcolm speaks to exactly this question, which is: How do you make the really, really big decisions?

### **How has your view of advertising changed since your days at Foote, Cone & Belding?**

The business obviously has been doing an awful lot of soul searching. There's an obsession over what is advertising really—where is it going? I think the big question should be, "What *isn't* advertising?" Once upon a time, none of the things that advertisers now take for granted existed. There was no such thing as a radio commercial or a print ad, or an outdoor board. They were all created as ways to have a conversation with the public.

But in recent years, we've heard a lot of talk about "new media" as if there's such a thing as "old" media, or that any invention needs a separate category. Just as we are talking about cell phones as "the device formerly known as the cell phone," it might be fun to begin to talk about advertising as "the industry formerly known as advertising." Some companies get a certain momentum by looking from the outside back in to see what they're really up to, or what they could be up to.

### **How did you apply that perspective when you arrived at Motorola?**

One of the first things we did was create a Motorola office in Hollywood. In 1999, the strategy was really pretty simple. It was to permeate the micro-culture in Hollywood that really creates the macro-culture that we all live in—around television, film, music, music video, and so forth.

This wasn't about making a bet on one or two big movies and launching big consumer promotions. It was based on

the insight that Hollywood is home to a disproportionate number of alpha techno-geeks, who love to have the latest, greatest gadgets. The film industry is totally in love with technology and its possibilities.

The byproduct was that our products began to appear in more and more shows. A lot of people said: "Gee, are you making all sorts of deals?" And the answer was: "No." What we were really doing was just penetrating, and living and breathing, in that community.

### **How do you measure the value of that kind of presence?**

People tend to default to measuring what's easiest to measure—they'll count up the total seconds of screen time and how important the product is to the plot, and come up with a bunch of mathematical models that can equate the value. Funnily enough, they're usually trying to equate it back to television commercials.

I'm not sure that direct measures of that kind are as useful as tracking cultural magnetism—cultural heat—which is less linearly connected. For example, we do deep-dive studies of what various demographic and psychographic groups think of Motorola's products. We look at how we are doing in terms of design, utility and just pure fun. How are we doing on our rates of recommendation at retail? Are we seen as a more innovative company? Are we a maker of "whoa!" products?

We're also tracking conversations on certain 'blogs and message boards among those who are, by definition, alpha-tech-loving-consumers. That tends to be a lot more forward looking than econometric analysis, which we also do. Some would say it's more of a qualitative view. I would say it's very, very quantitative around the impact of permeating that level of the culture.

### **Who are these alpha consumers?**

That's interesting. Personal tech—the fusion of person and technology—is one of the rare categories where, instead of younger brothers and sisters looking to older brothers and sisters to see what's cool and what they should have, older siblings look to younger siblings. We jokingly said a few years ago that the teenager is →

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107 Post Road East

Westport CT 06880

203-227-7060 ext. 227

info@hubmagazine.com

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← the CTO of the family. I'm not sure it's not the 9-year-old today!

One of the things that's quite funny to watch is how a lot of middle-aged marketers have fallen in love with the idea of making really simplified devices for kids, where there's one button to call mom and another button for dad. Go talk to a kid; they want a more sophisticated device than the one *you* have.

You know, I love science fiction and I read a lot of it. The famous William Gibson quote that everybody likes is: "The future has already arrived. It's just not evenly distributed yet." What he's saying is that there are people of the future, already here, walking among us. If you can figure out who they are and co-create with them, you're actually doing a rather amazing job of not only anticipating, but also shaping where the world can go.

### From an internal perspective, how do you make sure that Motorola hears those conversations?

We very consciously know we have to turn the company inside out. We have to make the walls transparent and permeable and begin to find those "alpha consumers" and involve them in how we create products and define them. A few years back, we brought a whole bunch of teenagers from around the world into our annual officers meeting and had them just tell the unvarnished truth to our top 500 people. It was a pretty big wakeup call.

### What did you learn from that experience?

One of the big realizations is that the number-one medium for creating a great brand is a great product. When you have a real "whoa!" product everything else falls into place pretty easily. The other thing is, when you start looking at all the things we do in "the industry formerly known as advertising"—whether it's TV spots or interactive campaigns or viral events or whatever—is that the best way to look at those are as products, too.

Your ads are the most pervasive products you make. No personal-tech product will ever be in as many people's hands as the experience of a Super Bowl spot or an incredible new piece of film that every kid in the world is downloading and passing on to his or her

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friends. When you start thinking of the advertising as a product, and the product as your ultimate form of advertising, and really subject both to the same standard, it gets really interesting. When they accelerate together, you get a great feedback loop going.

### What excites you most about "the device formerly known as the cell phone"?

It's a space where there's so much natural heat. These devices are not just becoming an icon of self-expression; they're increasingly becoming vehicles of self-extension. When I talk about "the device formerly known as the cell phone"—yes, it's a physical icon of self-expression, but it's also an "ability amplifier" that can enable me to do things that were formerly impossible.

While there's plenty of convergence going on just on a pure tech level, there's also huge convergence going on at the experience level. It all kind of meets in this little control center that you carry in your pocket that you used to use just to make phone calls. But it touches all the other spaces that we live our lives in—from our living rooms to our cars to our offices to just out in the street.

We're well aware that no one company could possibly do it all alone. We're beginning to think of ourselves more and more as a "catalytic" force for combining the right partners to create an "it's all ours" world that is infinitely bigger than any "it's all mine" world could ever be. It's an incredibly exciting time to play in that world. ■

**Geoffrey Frost** joined **Motorola** in 1999 as corporate vice president of global marketing and communications, was promoted to senior vice president of marketing in 2003 and named chief marketing officer in 2004. Prior to joining Motorola, he was global director of advertising and brand communications for Nike, and before that was executive vice president of Foote, Cone & Belding, in New York.