



What we've learnt from BlackBerry

Having worked with BlackBerry for seven years, we at Pope + Wainwright were fortunate to share an incredible experience alongside some brilliant individuals within the business.

At their peak, BlackBerry were the fastest growing company in the world, worth \$67.3 billion with 50% market share. No one could have foreseen that five or six years later, BlackBerry would suffer a spectacular fall, leaving them with less than 1% market share. Except, with the benefit of hindsight, it is clear to Pope + Wainwright that there were fundamental issues within the brand that contributed to its decline – something we were powerless to do anything about...

The product failings of BlackBerry are well documented, but their internal communication struggles are often overlooked as playing a critical part in their downfall. Product development was the output of an often politically turbulent company, one lacking clear strategic direction, with teams working in silos to the detriment of focusing on the bigger picture. Jacquie McNish, in her book, "Losing the Signal", used the BlackBerry 10 launch as a great example of how the internal struggles were being led from the top. Thorsten Heins (the then CEO) is believed to have wanted to make the new BlackBerry 10 a full touchscreen platform, whereas Mike Lazaridis (founder of BlackBerry) was adamant that it had to have a physical QWERTY keyboard. Without a clear direction, important decisions were always a compromise; so they launched with the touchscreen Z10 and then two months later came out with the Q10 QWERTY. This epitomises the absence of clarity and vision within the business. With ambiguous senior-level decision making, how could a product led company such as BlackBerry ever hope to survive and build upon the incredible brand that it once was?

Pope + Wainwright has grown as a strategic design consultancy, with the ability to see businesses from the inside-out and the outside-in. This unique position allows us to notice when a brand or business isn't working, and flag it early on.



The need to say yes. Like many other agencies, we felt pressure to say “yes” to succeed, and ultimately be commercially minded. It’s far easier to say yes to a client (in order to get paid a fee) than to actually do what you think is right. If we could turn the clock back, we would have been less reactionary to BlackBerry’s needs and wants, and more transparent with our clients about the problems we noticed and directly experienced from working closely with them.

Positioning. We’ve realised that it’s about how you position yourself as a creative agency to clients. You can either position yourself as a service, to therefore do effectively whatever they ask, or you can position yourself as a strategic partner. Partnerships allow us to build up trust, enabling us to break down the silos that exist within businesses and develop more meaningful connections. We ensure that we provide our clients with an environment where they can find their voice, without feeling like they are entering dangerous territory, and our projects are inclusive by looping as many people into the process as possible.

Values. Our experience has also shaped Pope + Wainwright’s own internal values of collaboration, transparency, honesty and enjoyment of our work. Whilst many firms say something similar, we are actually investing heavily, both in time and money, to make sure that our entire team understands them, believe in them and work that way. Without this attitude, we have seen from first-hand experience that this leads to frustration.

Our experience with BlackBerry has had a huge and positive impact on Pope + Wainwright. The experience has shaped who we are today and where we are going in the future as a business. We know what doesn’t work and we remain focused on working in a way that is not detrimental to the bigger picture, the brand, the client or to ourselves. We are not afraid to follow what we believe is the right path, even if that means we may lose a client. There are not many individuals or companies that would have been exposed to the experience of working closely with a global company - such as BlackBerry - through the rise and fall of its brand. This rich and diverse experience gives us a unique insight into how big organisations can fail. By knowing how they fail we also know so much more about how they can succeed – a key to how we work and partner with all of our clients today.

George Wainwright, Partner & Creative Director at Pope + Wainwright