

# HAS YOUR PARADIGM SHIFTED?

Doing business these days has changed, and keeping up with the changes can give you an advantage on your competition.

By Dan Wenke

An online dictionary defines “paradigm shift” as “a significant change from one fundamental view to another. Usually includes a discontinuity. A change in basic assumptions within the ruling theory of science. It has since become widely applied to many other realms of human experience as well.”

Change is a part of life, whether we like it or not. I look for these changes and try to exploit them to my financial advantage. When things become stagnant, competitors begin showing up. I like change, and I don't like the competition too close. I like the advantage.

I'm not interested in bringing back the good old days. On the contrary, I want my iPod; podcasts; and music, TV, and movies on demand along with e-mail, IM, cell phone, Skype, and all other VOIP tools. I want to be connected, and I want my business clients connected to me. My plan for the last 24 months has been to embrace these changes and use as many of them as I can to keep ahead of the pack. Change is my weapon of choice. Just call me a “Frameanista.”

What does this have to do with “paradigm shift?” Just as advances in agriculture and the industrial revolution changed the world, so the introductions of the PC and the Internet have now got us all on a fast track. They have changed almost every aspect of our lives and businesses.

The PC has become so powerful that it allows everyone to process more work and to research, design, and develop new products in a shorter time span. The Internet allows us to share data and communicate at speeds that it can sometimes be hard to fathom. It is also a catalyst for a paradigm shift. That is, we are moving from a mechanistic, manufacturing, industrial society to an organic, service-based, information-centered society. Improvements in technology will continue to impact everyone globally. Change is inevitable.

Do you fax or e-mail? Can you work from home just as well or better than you can from an office? Do you check your e-mails once a day or all the time? Are you connected? Do you have a website? Do you have a blog or read other blogs? Just a few years ago all these things would have seemed amazing. Now they're commonplace.

## Communication

How easy is it for someone to call you? Do you have one phone number or a few? You need to be in contact with the office, customers, family, and friends. One way to stay ahead of the curve on this is [www.grandcentral.com](http://www.grandcentral.com). This website offers you a phone number in almost any area code you want for free and for life. It takes incoming calls and refers them to

your cell phone, office phone, home phone, Skype number, or what ever number you assign to it. It offers selective ring tones you can assign depending on the caller as well as Caller ID. It also offers voice mail that can be heard online. You can also e-mail the voice mail to anyone who needs to hear the message.

Recently I was traveling with a friend from South America who always had to “go back to my office” to call home. I pulled over to the side of the road, went online with my Verizon card in my laptop, and logged on to Skype. For two cents a minute we were calling home. Go to [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com) to find out more. Skype, by the way, was recently purchased by eBay. My Grand Central connects to Skype, too, which allows incoming calls to be forwarded to me in China.

No matter where you work, live, or vacation, you can be reached with one number. Make it easy for your clients to contact you and for you to contact them. When you simplify, you can get more done.

## Have Checkbook, Will Travel

I love to sell and market, and I especially love selling art-related products. These days I don't get a chance to do much of that because my partners and associates do a good job of it while I'm in China. My first job in China was like every other foreigner's job. I came for a week or two, saw as much as I could, and then returned to the U.S. to turn that information into sales. That took about 90 to 120 days from point of sale to cash in my pocket. I learned quickly not to waste time on people who couldn't or wouldn't pay me money. I also soon re-learned the old lesson of working with as few people as possible between me and the decision-makers.

What worked best was to deal with trustworthy, capable associates and partners, which allowed me to spend almost all my time in China. We opened an office and hired staff, which proved to be the missing link in our business. It gave us an advantage in competing with established companies. We could deliver ahead of them and do it better and at greater value. While we didn't keep stock in the U.S., market conditions have made such a shift that almost every large buyer now understands that for goods to be priced competitively they have to be imported.

Most U.S.-based manufacturers who considered their factories major assets just a few years ago may now find them to be major liabilities. Using a U.S. factory to augment orders and filling short stock between containers is a great idea. The problem is that people like me can do the same thing without even owning a factory in the U.S.! So who would want to own a factory in America these days?

## Adversity Also Means Opportunity

What you were barred from doing at one time may now be an opportunity. Make use of the change. Large production companies once thought they were alone in the field. Their purchases of large quantities and low prices gave them an advantage. That is no longer the case, especially with China in the picture. The paradigm shifted when China came into the picture. It became the great equalizer. The smallest wall decor supplier can now throw his hat in the ring to compete. Internet, Internet calling, faxes, and low cost air travel have made all this possible. Your money works as well as that of a large company. You may have tried to sell wall decor and photo frames in the past and found yourself at a price disadvantage. Go abroad and level the playing field. Dust off those old skills and start making calls (it would help to make trips to China and line up sources). Then get ready to sell and ship.

## Interactive Catalogs & Websites

Your catalog is your informational connection with your buyers. Prior to the paradigm shift, the fastest way to get new information in front of buyers was a broadcast fax. It was not used to any great degree. If you wanted to distribute color catalogs, it was expensive and time consuming. And nothing is more expensive than an unfinished, unprinted, undistributed catalog.

Today, I can create a graphic file in China, send it to our offices in the U.S., and it is in front of our buyers the same day if needed. We can then use old school tools like the telephone to follow up to schedule meetings and take orders. E-mails in PDF or HTML formats both work great. I do get lots of unwanted e-mails. But if something comes from my industry, especially from a customer or supplier, I read it. Most do not send stupid or irrelevant materials and neither should you.

An e-mail that whets buyers' appetites and gets them to send an e-mail back to you or to look at your website in more detail is what you want. And so do they. Adobe Acrobat version 8 offers powerful tools for this process. Your customer can fill out a "return to sender" PDF e-mail form that will actually drop the information into a spreadsheet for later database use by your company. You still have to make your presentations in this format

tantalizing and follow them up with standard sales and service techniques. What you do get, however, is the chance to throw more bread on the water and to do it faster and cheaper than ever.

Are you too late to catch the wave? Absolutely not. We're only six years into the new millennium. As I tell my staff and partners in China, "The future is behind us." ■



Dan Wenke is owner of China Frame and Mirror, based in Yiwu, China, with offices in California, Illinois, and Europe. He can be reached at [info@chinaframeandmirror.com](mailto:info@chinaframeandmirror.com).

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