

Bo Mortensen

Department of Entrepreneurship
and Relationship Management
University of Southern Denmark

Phone: +45 6550 1461

Mail: bsm@sam.sdu.dk

Background

Bo Mortensen is a researcher at the Department of Entrepreneurship and Relationship Management, University of Southern Denmark. His research and teaching are within the intersection between business and design. He holds a Master degree from Aarhus School of Architecture.

Department of Entrepreneurship and Relationship Management

The Department of Entrepreneurship and Relationship Management is located at the University of Southern Denmark, campus Kolding, and employs approximately 85 people. This location is central to the growth centres within the Triangle Region and offers a unique opportunity to close cooperation with the companies and public authorities in the region in respect to research and educational projects.

For several years the research of the department has been based on learning networks with companies and trade promotion institutions. In addition to this, the department has a long tradition of problembased cooperation across traditional business research areas and very often by means of external funding. The research of the department concentrates on two key areas: entrepreneurship and relationship management and originates from traditional research areas such as marketing, applied economics, accounting, operation management and organization.

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PHD DISSERTATION OF

Bo MORTENSEN

AT THE DEPARTMENT OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP
AND RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

**‘SELLING THROUGH VISUAL AND
TANGIBLE REPRESENTATIONS:
PERSPECTIVES FROM THE DANISH
ADVERTISING INDUSTRY, B2B SELLING,
AND CO-DESIGN’**

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Selling Through Visual and Tangible Representations: Perspectives from the Danish advertising industry, B2B selling, and co-design

The Danish advertising industry has in recent years undergone a series of changes, triggered by globalisation and technological innovations, which has meant that large parts of the classic graphic production have been outsourced. As a result, some agencies have begun to focus on more strategic services, such as management consulting and business development, in addition to providing more traditional services like communication strategies and creative production. These changes have also affected individual agencies' selling process and the way they talk to their customers in sales meetings in order to achieve alignment on the customers' problems and their solutions. In order to better discuss the extended problems and solution spaces with customers, some agencies have begun to experiment with new meeting and workshop formats. Here, it may be possible to discuss both the problem and the solution through visual representations (something you can see) or tangible representations (something you can both see and touch). The focus of this thesis is to understand what is going on in this type of face-to-face interaction by answering the following research questions:

How might the use of visual or tangible representations in face-to-face interaction support a seller's and a customer's alignment on the framing of the customer's problem and the seller's solution in a relational B2B selling process?

To answer this question, I present seven case studies of Danish advertising agencies and examine how the B2B selling literature currently describes the use of visual or tangible representations in sales meetings. New perspectives are also brought in from the emerging theoretical field of co-design, which has a special focus on the use of workshops and representation formats. These three perspectives – case studies, B2B selling literature, and co-design

literature – are used to develop a conceptual framework. This framework is used to understand how different actions and mechanisms in face-to-face interaction, linked to the use of visual or tangible representations, can lead to alignment between the involved parties. The conceptual framework, along with the different possible combinations of its dimensions, is the main contribution of this thesis.

The thesis shows that the action of showing a visual representation to the customer, in combination with telling the customer about it and asking questions, can lead to alignment on the framing of the customer's problem and the seller's solution through the mechanisms of visualisation, persuasion, and dialogue. In this case, the representation format is communication media. These pre-made representations (such as films, folders, flipcharts, slides, and drawings) are produced outside the sales meeting with the intention of communicating a certain message to the customer when used during the interaction. The thesis shows that communication media can be used for almost all types of face-to-face interaction but may be inappropriate for more informal meetings.

Further, the thesis also shows that the action of making a tangible representation together with the customer, in combination with asking questions, can lead to alignment on the framing of the customer's problem and the seller's solution through the mechanisms of generative tangibility and dialogue. In this case, the representation format is generative design tools or design games, which are typically used in workshops with many participants. Generative design tools are tools that support the generation of ideas and concepts in the workshop. These tools can be posters that are filled out with drawings and sticky notes, or they can be tangible objects that are used to build representations. Design games share many of the same characteristics as generative design tools but add elements of game play from board games, wherein the players take turns, move game pieces, and follow some overall game rules. The thesis shows that successful use of these two representation formats requires that the involved parties be committed to a relationship. Without this, the customer will not feel safe about sharing information and participating in the workshop.

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