

Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry Lacks Strategic Vision

by Dobby Gibson

I remain as stunned as many parents: the Harry Potter books have kids reading again – for fun. Given the choice of Nintendo or a Harry Potter book, many 10 to 14 year-olds wouldn't think twice. They would choose the old-fashioned boxy thing over any toy that beeps, boinks, explodes, needs powering-up, or necessitates a remote control and a laser gun.

If you're unfamiliar with the Potter books, it is a series of four books written by a Scottish woman named J.K. Rowling that concern the adventures of an orphan, Harry Potter. In the first book, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, the horrible Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon Dursley inherit Harry after his parents are killed (referred to, but not shown) by the evil wizard Voldemort. Though Harry escapes his parents' fate, he is left with a lightning bolt scar on his forehead as a reminder. Revenge may be his, however, because he soon discovers he has magical powers – powers he hasn't fully mastered – and so it's off to training at Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry he goes.

These days, any pop culture phenomenon will eventually meet with a backlash, and the Potter books are no exception. Conservative Christian organizations such as Family Friendly Libraries have moved to have the books banned, calling them “dangerous” and claiming that the descriptions of magic encourage children to practice paganism. Cultural critics from the left are assailing the books in on-line forums such as Salon for their sexist subtext. I agree that the Potter books should be shunned, if not outright publicly banned, but for an entirely different reason: they're exposing children at a very impressionable age to dangerously bad business practices.

Harry Potter attends Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry for career training, ostensibly to build deep skills in his core competency: wizardry. But it is clear from day one that Hogwarts is plagued by shoddy leadership. Hogwarts' board of directors, known in the book as The Ministry of Magic, is loaded with (to use one of the author's favorite words) “dunderheads.”

Middle management within the organization is no better. The Defense Against the Black Arts instructors lack even basic public speaking and presentation skills and don't use PowerPoint. Professor Quirrel stutters. Mr. Filch snarls. Innovators within Hogwarts, such as Professor Minerva McGonagall, are forced to constantly defer to their managers. McGonagall operates with a unique understanding of the need to balance authority with rule-breaking (when it's for her subordinate's own good), but she appears to be forever relegated to the side of her superior, wizard Dumbledore.

Organizational structures this rigid typically prove just as brittle.

A consultant would take one look at Hogwarts and tell you that they sorely lack a strategic vision. Professor Sybill Trelawney is supposedly the organization's expert in divination, but in the first book she makes only one accurate prognostication, after which she falls into a numbed state. One critic aptly noted that because “her colleagues dismiss her, the entire intuitive tradition of fortune-telling . . . is discredited.” In other words, Hogwarts is ignoring the future. What new spells will define the sorcery marketplace in the years to come? What are the expected developments in the field of transfiguration? Hogwarts cannot answer

these questions. Even a simple mission statement would appear to be too much to conjure.

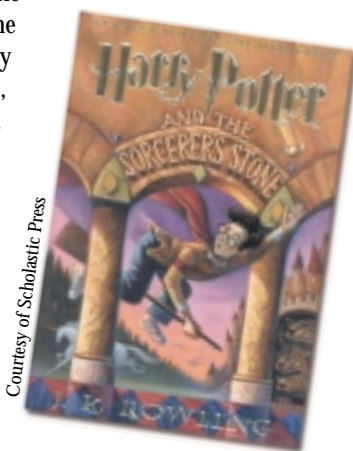
Finally, there is no mention of Hogwarts e-commerce strategy, which leads this writer to suspect they don't have one.

As one would expect, Hogwarts seriously risks sustainability. There are dissenters in the ranks, such as Harry's bullying colleague, Draco Malfoy. Furthermore, the Sorcerer's Stone, which has the power to make its keeper immortal, is as valuable to their operation as, say, the recipe for Coke is to Coca-Cola, but it's not even half as well-guarded. It doesn't seem as if Hogwarts has taken the most basic step of patenting the device, let alone developing a branding campaign. Like any aggressive competitor would, the evil wizard Voldemort comes looking for the Stone. Although Harry is initially able to partner with his colleagues Ron and Hermione to leverage additional wizardry, it is Harry alone who is left to preserve Hogwarts' product integrity and ultimate position in the marketplace.

In a world of fierce global competition, there is a Voldemort in every industry. Fighting without a team is a recipe for failure. Harry, for the first three books, has benefited from luck more than a long-term strategic vision. I'm concerned: are these the messages we want literature to be sending to innocent children? ☹

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The next book in the Harry Potter series, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire is now available. By March of this year it had already reached #1 on amazon.com's best-seller list based on preorders alone.



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