

This is a translation of an article about Switchmode Consulting in the business traveller publication Business Traveller Denmark, October 2012. The article is written by Mette de Fine Licht. Photo by Jens Astrup.

The Integrated Marketing Audit and the Woman Behind It

Detective, doctor, and SWAT team all in one person. Helene Venge helps international companies improve their marketing performance. Meet the woman who has gained her executive experience at companies like Sony, Levi's, and Lego and has always applied the 3 marketing principles of People, Process, and Plan - the principles that her consultancy is based on.

Transformer methodology

"Switchmode is the metaphor for my methodology. It's the name of a certain kind of power supply which optimises the electrical input. Apple was the first company to use this kind of power supply in 1977, and I came across it in an article about Steve Jobs whom I admire greatly for lots of different reasons", Helene explains.

"A switchmode power supply wastes less energy, produces less heat, and takes up less space. It optimises the electrical input to produce more effective electrical output, more efficiently. And that's what I do: I help companies strengthen their marketing practice by optimising the input so that the output significantly improves.", she says further.

"The input are the 3 P's that I work with: People, Plan, Process. **People** is concerned with the marketing organization: Is it the right structure, does the team have the right skills, do they have the right agencies, how effective are their internal relationships and so forth. **Plan** is concerned with the planning and the marketing strategy: Is there a sound connection to the business strategy, is there a useful KPI framework in place, is adequate analysis being applied, and are there focused plans with concrete activities, budgets, and resource allocation.

Process is concerned with ways of working: Is there a marketing process and is it directly linked with the core business processes, are there tools and templates in place, is data readily available and easy to access etc".

Is it sexy?

"You can't hire Switchmode to do 'output projects', such as eg deliver campaigns, visual identity, a new product, store design, PR and so on. Switchmode is different from most other marketing consultancies in that way", says Helene.

"Experience has taught me that if the input works the output is more likely to work also. And vice versa. Good data in, good data out. Bad data in, bad data out. And also that when things need to improve, you need to look at the whole picture, not just one small part of it. So I concentrate on helping companies build a high performance marketing practice altogether," Helene says and explains further:

"Strategy is obviously a main ingredient but it's not the only one. A lot of marketing folks, also client-side, think that strategy is the sexy stuff but the operational side of things is equally important. Strategy has very limited value without the operational set-up to match. Without it, the marketing efforts become expensive and frustrating. Marketing operations may seem less sexy but I don't really care, it has to be there and it has to be highly efficient. That's plenty sexy to me!"

"My view on marketing is holistic for lack of a better word. And I do combine management and marketing consulting. I'm marketing detective, doctor, and SWAT team in one person. I dig around in the company's marketing practice, diagnose the problems, prescribe the remedy and in some cases also execute the



solutions, if I think I'm the right person to do so and if the company wants it."

Helene's clients include large, international brands of a certain size with the resources - and challenges - to work with. The projects are often spread across several months where she tags between her base in Copenhagen, Denmark, and the client's office. It's intensive, demanding, and interesting - just like Helene's professional past.

From music to jeans

in 1994 after 6 years at the university and with her MA in the back pocket, Helene came across a job in the music industry, more or less by accident although she'd previously been involved in live music and venue management. She became product manager at Sony Music Denmark (today SonyBMG), a dream job for any young, music loving and marketing keen person at the time.

"It was great! I marketed UK and US artists such as Oasis, Suede, Fatboy Slim, Bob Dylan, Rage Against the Machine and so on. Got an enormous network, met a lot of people. At the time in the 90s there was still money in selling CDs and it was like a marketing playground where we tried out a bunch of new things all the time. Ideas were something you went for rather than close down due to lack of resources", Helene describes.

"There was more money, but also marketing at the time was a lot simpler, it was prior to the internet as predominant media channel and the proliferation it led to."

Despite the excitement of the music industry and parallel studies at Copenhagen Business School, Helene started to look for a change. "I missed the long-term planning. Music marketing tends to be short-term and tactical which is great and useful but you to lack the longer view", Helene recalls.

So when Levi's called and said they need someone who knew something about marketing and popular culture to manage the brand's marketing in Denmark, Helene said "Yes, please, I'll take it".

"I brought my entire network from the music industry into the fashion and lifestyle industry which helped me carry out marketing initiatives that at the time in 1999 were new and different. Product placement and other forms of collaboration with artists were only emerging at the time - today it's obviously mainstream", Helene explains.

In 2000 she was asked to move to Levi's European head office in Brussels for a so-called shorter period of time. Which ended up being 6 years. From here, Helene worked and traveled across Europe and the US and got a detailed view of what it takes to design, manufacture and market a pair of jeans.

"I worked closely with the entire value chain, including designers, suppliers, sourcing and procurement, product developers, finance, and sales and got into the inner workings of the company, which is a really healthy and good experience for *any* marketer.", Helene firmly states.

In 2002 she became head of digital marketing for Europe. At the time, the Levi's brand was going through a major revitalization and it was Helene's job to make that happen successfully in the digital environment: Which digital channels to employ and how, locally and pan-European.

"At the time in 2002 the digital landscape was different than it is today. Google had just started their operations, and mobile phones were only used for talking and simple text messaging. And yet, a lot of fundamental stuff hasn't changed at all but has simply been augmented by the digital evolution. Such as our requirement for transparency as consumers, quality, and access any time anywhere".

Helene took on the task with spunk, energy and a firm belief that what she was doing was valuable for the brand and its consumers. And without knowing it she was already well into examining the 3 P's of the brand's digital marketing practice: She fired and hired external partners, streamlined the budget, re-designed the strategy and the priorities, and optimised the digital operations.

It worked and Levi's had a digital comeback all the while Helene was oblivious to the fact that one day she would establish her own consultancy on those very principles.

From Brussels to Billund

Four years later, in 2006, Helene was ready for new challenges and returned to Denmark. Not because she missed her country but because her next job was at Lego's head office in the small village of Billund, Denmark. Here she was business director for Lego's consumer customization business, Lego Factory (later renamed Design By Me). Also here, she took the proverbial step back to look at the business and implemented a number of strategic as well as operational improvements.

After a couple of years in Billund, Helene started to miss her home turf in Copenhagen. Her mother had passed away the year before which had promoted reflections about life and work, like such events often do. "I had worked non-stop for 15 years with 60+ work weeks every week. Suddenly I felt the need to unplug. I've always loved my work and my jobs but maybe it was time to stop and think", Helene says.

However, the pedal met the metal quickly again because shortly after the move back to Copenhagen Helene was head hunted to a job as marketing director for the large Nordic telco Telenor, which in Denmark consisted of

the two well-established local brands Sonofon and CyberCity.

And just like at Levi's and Lego, she initiated an examination of the company's marketing practice across the 3 P's of People, Plan, and Process and put a number of changes in place.

Switchmode powers up

A year later Helene needed the break that never came after Lego. She left Telenor and took a sabbatical year of traveling, additional studies, did a few lectures and consulting jobs, and blogged about marketing performance.

During this time, the Switchmode methodology and consultancy started to take form and launched in 2011. Helene has since then trademarked the methodology called the Switchmodel.

"My ambition is not to have 90 employees but to be happy and very good at what I do. Happy about the clients, projects and results that I help them deliver to their business. I can't say where I am in 5 years - who truly can? I focus on my professional skills and satisfaction and then let's what happens".

