

PRIMARY COLORS

What is Black and Blue and Red all over? Shirlaws' recipe for success.

BY MYKE FOLGER

TO MAKE SOMETHING truly remarkable, you oftentimes must break it down into parts, like a recipe for a cake.

So when a company is ready to grow from \$50 million a year to \$250 million, never is a simplistic, fast and effective recipe more needed.

That's what Shirlaws provides for companies that are ready to expand—including Colliers International. In the last four years, Colliers has grown by more than 280 percent. Rapid growth like that can create challenges, and knowing how to navigate them is crucial.

"That kind of growth creates pressure on the people-resourcing platform," explains Stewart Gall, CEO of Shirlaws Business Coaching, a consulting firm based in San Francisco, with offices in Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Spain and Dubai.

Shirlaws has been working with Colliers for the past year, helping the company build a platform that supports its growth and operational capability through its "next phase of business development."

Shirlaws uses a simple color code: Red, Blue and Black (RBB) to compartmentalize companies and help them find bottlenecks, strengths and areas that are being underutilized.

Red applies to infrastructure, human resources, administration, accounting and all the other non-revenue generating support staff.

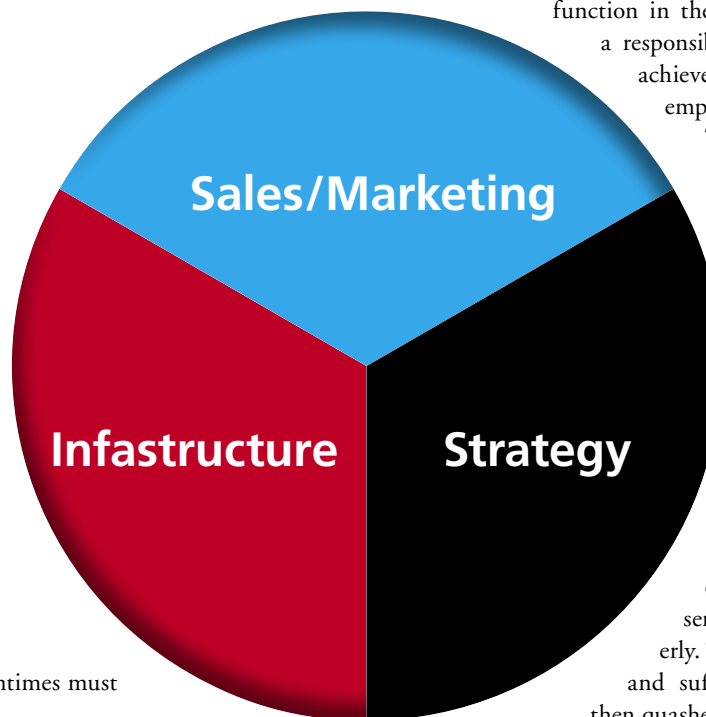
Blue is about sales, marketing, product and service design and delivery, serving customers and generating revenue.

And Black is all about strategy, market positioning, business planning, referral relationship building and growth creation.

"Color creates a common language for the business," Gall says from his San Francisco office. "From the cleaner to chairman of the board, everyone in your business should be using the same vocabulary. RBB becomes a common language from office to office—the Kansas operations team now has a common language with the California sales force. The language creates business efficiency."

Shirlaws' system has allowed Colliers to identify the key areas where it could expand efficiency and seize opportunities to create the next phase of business growth, he says.

This method further allowed Colliers to address its resource mix, identify the right specialist to perform the right role and make sure each



function in the business was covered by a responsible team. When that was achieved, Colliers empowered its employees.

The color-coding system gives employees top to bottom access to management theory, and that builds empowerment, Gall says. The theory is a balancing act of colors. Gall identifies simple over-resource and under-resource effects within each color. For example, if Red is under-resourced, that means there won't be enough infrastructure to service the customers properly. That then bumps into Blue and suffocates cash flow, which then quashes the future growth aspect found in the Black arena.

"If a business under-resources in Red it will not have the infrastructure to deliver to clients and will end up with blockages and back-logs," says Gall. "If it is over-resourced in Red, overheads go up too much and it damages profits."

With the American dollar limping along, the instability of oil production and lack of access, companies across the globe are feeling the financial squeeze. So they look for ways to "cut costs to maintain profit levels as revenues decline," Gall says. For example, to fend off skyrocketing fuel costs, the American airline industry implemented fees for stowing additional bags. Auto manufacturers are rethinking their inventories and dealers are providing buying incentives such as gas gift cards.

"Planning the allocation of RBB into the business can allow for growth in the areas that maximize return when the market comes back," Gall says.

Telefonica 02 Europe is another of Shirlaws' prime clients. Telefonica provides integrated mobile, fixed and broadband services to businesses in the U.K., Ireland, Germany, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The company hired Shirlaws as a business coach, and in the most recent fiscal quarter, Telefonica made 903 million euros, growing its revenue by 12.6 percent.

"Shirlaws has worked with us over the past two years with excellent results," says Peter Erskine, chairman and chief executive of Telefonica. "Their approach has helped me with some high level strategic issues faced by our business as well as helping to create the right cultural and commercial balance."

As the United States begins its climb out of the doldrums, Gall says it's important for American firms to "know where to invest to maintain market share, understand their client's needs and have the right infrastructure to build for the next growth cycle." [KL](#)

For information on how Shirlaws can color your business world a success, visit shirlawscoaching.com.