

Why is good design so important?

Good design satisfies customers, communicates the purpose of the product or service to its market and brings financial rewards to the business. The objective of good design, whether of products or services, is to satisfy customers by meeting their actual or anticipated needs and expectations. This, in turn, enhances the competitiveness of the organization. Product and service design, therefore, can be seen as starting and ending with the customer. So the design activity has one overriding objective: to provide products, services and processes which will satisfy the operation's customers. *Product* designers try to achieve aesthetically pleasing designs which meet or exceed customers' expectations. They also try to design a product which performs well and is reliable during its lifetime. Further, they should design the product so that it can be manufactured easily and quickly. Similarly, service designers try to put together a service which meets, or even exceeds, customer expectations. Yet at the same time the service must be within the capabilities of the operation and be delivered at reasonable cost.

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Good design enhances
profitability

In fact, the business case for putting effort into good product and service design is overwhelming according to the UK Design Council.² Using design throughout the business ultimately boosts the bottom line by helping create better products and services that compete on value rather than price. **Design** helps businesses connect strongly with their customers by anticipating their real needs. That in turn gives them the ability to set themselves apart in increasingly tough markets. Furthermore, using design both to generate new ideas and turn them into reality allows businesses to set the pace in their markets and even create new ones rather than simply responding to the competition. The Design Council's surveys indicate that:

- while 90 per cent of businesses which are growing rapidly say design is integral or significant to them, only 26 per cent of static companies say the same;
- using design can help to reduce costs by making processes more efficient and cutting materials costs. It can also reduce the time to market for new products and services;
- also, almost 70 per cent of companies which see design as integral have developed new products and services in the last three years, compared with only a third of businesses overall;
- companies judged to be effective users of design had financial performances 200 per cent better than average.

Short case Ocean Observations²

Design is not just an important issue for products like the iPod. Even communications service providers are finding that design can make a difference to customers' perceptions. This is the basis of Swedish company Ocean Observations' success. The company started in web design when its founders saw a rise in demand for attractive mobile phones and a market for well-designed and packaged content. Now the company designs navigation menus and icons. Sofia Svanteson, CEO and co-founder of Ocean Observations, says it was the first design company of its kind in Sweden and one of the first in Europe. 'We saw the similarities between the web and mobile media.'

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Source: Sofia Svanteson

Its first task was to design Samsung's usability graphics, including its icons. Svanteson says that the Korean market invests heavily in design and advanced interfaces, both graphically and technically. *'We had to think beyond the normal three-level tree menu that is so popular in mobile phones. So we created something that is similar to a dartboard where the user can navigate vertically, horizontally and circularly.'* This fresh thinking started with Samsung and continued with the mobile phone operator '3' in Sweden. It was so pleased that it presented the design idea for all 3 companies around the world. *'The operator has a cool design image,'* Svanteson says. *'Its shops have won interior design prizes in Sweden and its Swedish website is cool and modern. But when we looked at the graphical interface in the mobile phone, we were surprised. It was traditional and boring, with icons*

that were too detailed, something that does not work well on a small screen or with the 3 brand attributes.' She compares the early mobile industry with the internet. *'In the beginning, the web looked awful and was not very user friendly. The same goes with the mobile phone interface. First everything was black and white and had boring icons. Colour screens paved the way for better icons and lively content.'*

Questions

- 1 How can this case be an example of 'design' when there is nothing 'physical' about a mobile phone navigation system?
- 2 What do you think would be the main objectives of this design assignment?

Critical commentary

Remember that not all new products and services are created in response to a clear and articulated customer need. While this is usually the case, especially for products and services that are similar to (but presumably better than) their predecessors, more radical innovations are often brought about by the innovation itself creating demand. Customers don't usually know that they need something radical. For example, in the late 1970s people were not asking for microprocessors, they did not even know what they were. They were improvised by an engineer in the USA for a Japanese customer who made calculators. Only later did they become the enabling technology for the PC and after that the innumerable devices that now dominate our lives.

What is designed in a product or service?

All products and services can be considered as having three aspects:

Concept

Package

Process

- a **concept**, which is the understanding of the nature, use and value of the service or product;
- a **package** of 'component' products and services that provide those benefits defined in the concept;
- the **process**, which defines the way in which the component products and services will be created and delivered.

The concept

Designers often talk about a 'new concept'. This might be a concept car specially created for an international show or a restaurant concept providing a different style of dining. The concept is a clear articulation of the outline specification including the nature, use and value of the product or service against which the stages of the design (see later) and the resultant product and/or service can be assessed. For example, a new car, just like existing cars, will have an underlying concept, such as an economical two-seat convertible sports car, with good road-holding capabilities and firm, sensitive handling, capable of 0–100 kph in seven seconds and holding a bag of golf clubs in the boot. Likewise a concept for a restaurant might be a bold and brash dining experience aimed at the early 20s market, with contemporary décor and music, providing a range of freshly made pizza and pasta dishes.