

DESIGN IS THE KEY TO BUSINESS SUCCESS

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Business pundits regularly inform us that innovation is the key to business success. There is a certain amount of truth in this, but it's a big ask for business to launch into the new product field when the average new product developer sees four out of five products fail in the market. Faced with a huge bill for research and development, marketing and production, an 80% failure rate is a bitter pill to swallow. The smart entrepreneur would do well to ask themselves: how do I ensure that my new products and services succeed in the marketplace?

Products and services fail in the market for a number of reasons: insufficient understanding of the customer, poor quality, improper marketing, or perhaps because the item in question just doesn't work properly. It may come as a surprise to most businesspeople, but all of these issues are design issues.

When we think of design however most of us tend to visualise some wonderful object we have purchased or just hankered after in the past. Either way, the item has made a connection with us and we can feel it. These emotional experiences (for that is what they really are) contribute to the formation of our individual design appreciation. We know we like certain things, but do we understand why? And the really big question is this: do the companies that make these things we like know why we like them?

Those that do tend to have a relatively strong track record in creating desirable products and services; those that don't strongly contribute to that 80% market failure rate.

The difference between the winners and the, um, losers, is usually their level of understanding of the process of design. Those that understand design and know how to manage it properly give people the products and services that make that mysterious emotional connection. We know who they are, but most of us don't quite know how they do it until now.

Through a series of six articles we aim to demonstrate that design is really something quite different from the common perception. Part of the problem has been our education system which has, until very recently, kept the worlds of design and business quite separate. This has had the effect of designers consistently failing to understand and articulate design in business terms.

Designers often talk about, but usually fail to explain, the principles of good design. To help clarify design to businesspeople, designindustry has recently published a list of ten design principles. These have been developed to define and evaluate design for those who need to understand its value and put the concepts to work. The design principles seek to demystify design for business; to make it accessible as a tool for better market success. The principles are equally applicable to services, processes and products.

The first four design principles describe the design process.

Enhancement requires that the motivation for design should be to change the status quo for the better by addressing an opportunity or need.

The Expansion phase of the design process throws open the possibilities and disrespects precedent to generate alternatives.

Eclecticism reflects the importance of design drawing influence from complementary

disciplines such as psychology, fashion, technology and art. Finally, Contraction involves the filtering of alternatives by considering the constraints of the real world such as cost and organisation capacity, goals and values.

The remaining six design principles describe the quality or criteria for design.

Contextuality means that a design should consider internal contexts such as production cost and manufacturability and external contexts such as market environment and culture.

Simplicity requires that design is logical, restrained and focused on its core purpose.

Functionality ensures appropriateness for getting the job done right.

User-focus demands that design empathise with the user and seek to empower and make an emotional connection.

Prescience means that design should predict and deliver on what will be demanded tomorrow, not just today.

Sustainability ensures that design's use of resources caters to present and future needs.

The series of six articles that designindustry is contributing explores each principle, explains how to identify it at work and suggests how to apply it to the development of better products and services.

Understanding these principles and placing them at the very heart of your organisation takes leadership, vision and tenacity, but the stakes are high.

Tacking design on to what you do is unlikely to bring success, but thoroughly understanding design and deploying it as a tool is a different story. It promises to give your organisation the means to bring together the traditional disciplines (such as engineering, accounting, operations, packaging, sales and marketing) with newer disciplines (such as design, usability and technical communication) in the service of one great idea: to create consistent and world-beating products and services.

