

The Power of Design

*Design is a key enabler of innovation in business. Criticaleye caught up with **Laura Haynes** for her views on why a healthy design ethic helps companies shape ideas into practical business solutions*

What does 'design' mean for a business?

It means change, transformation and continuous improvement. It is about creating a point of difference and, perhaps most importantly, creating and improving value. It means examining everything in the business... to ensure that it's achieving what it set out to do today and leading towards improvement tomorrow. As a human-centric activity, it focuses on the users and how to create the most successful outcome or the greatest understanding from a user's

perspective. It is also about a unique process that serves to identify priorities and attempts to make things simpler and, therefore, more easily understood or utilised.

So is design related to innovation?

Yes, and they are very closely tied because design links creativity with an objective end. I am a member of the Parliamentary Design Commission with George Cox, writer of the Government-commissioned publication, The Cox Review. He wrote about the importance

of design and design processes as enablers of innovation in business... He described design as 'creativity deployed to a specific end'.

How can an organisation become 'design-led' and what does this look like?

Design is often thought of as creative output alone, but good design involves a rigorous process that includes research, planning, prototyping, testing, validating and evolution at its heart... and, of course, directed creative thinking. A design-led organisation is one

that understands the value of design to its products, processes and communications and engages designers at all levels to help to address business challenges. Historically, people defined design as ‘problem solving’ and a design-led organisation as one which uses designers to help solve problems. But the real breakthrough in the last few years has been made by organisations that incorporate design processes into their own thinking and approach. Creativity is an essential part of design thinking: creativity, imagination and the freedom to think laterally.

Which businesses understand the value of design and the design process?

There is Apple, of course, but other successful manufacturing companies like Dyson were founded on product design and the principles of the design process. And there are successful engineering companies, such as Arup, which thinks carefully about design at all levels. IBM seems to value design, too, and not necessarily because of the products it has historically provided, but because it uses design processes to develop its own offer and to think about its audiences and how it works with them. And there are a number of consumer companies, such as John Lewis/ Waitrose who seem to ‘get’ design and how to apply it... you can see it in the customer experience from store through to product, process and communications.

How does the UK compare in terms of producing design excellence?

The UK has long been recognised as a centre for design excellence. Other countries, however, understand the importance of design and are making major investments in education, commercialisation and policy. Singapore has identified the importance of design to its economy and is making a major investment in design development. China, Taiwan and India are doing exactly the same. As they move from ‘made in’ to ‘designed in’, it’s no secret that other countries have borrowed from our designers and our design schools.

How is the UK competing with this change?

Sadly, recent government policy and investment seems to be lagging behind some of our international competitors and we run the risk of reducing the advantage that we have had historically. If Britain was to recognise how good design is a driver for success and invested accordingly, it would do wonders for the economy. There have been great strides made in service, product and communications design aimed at culture and behaviour, but these things need continuous commitment and investment.

Why does Apple ‘get’ design?

It’s not just that it has beautifully designed products but because it takes design and the design process to the very core of everything it does. Its design is human-centric and is based on the user experience. Its strategy is driven by design and is about creating new markets and ways of looking at things. It is about asking: ‘Does music have to be delivered through CDs or is there another way?’, then designing and delivering a new system that answers that question.

Breakthroughs have been made by those that incorporate design processes into their own thinking

What can we learn from Apple’s approach?

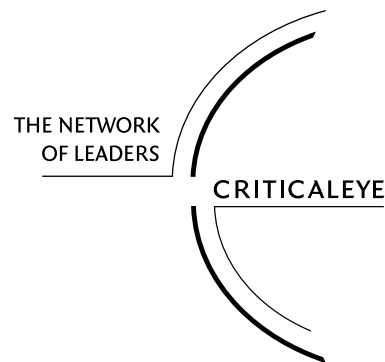
A design-led organisation like Apple takes exploration and collaboration into its core way of doing things. The design process demands that you explore outside the obvious. Good designers open things up before they close things down and they look outside for inspiration in the larger world to create solutions and new opportunities. Diversity is also important because it allows us to challenge the obvious or expected.

Why is diversity an important design ethic?

It’s vital because it encourages new ways of seeing things. Cultural diversity allows for the collusion of one perspective with another and greater empathy with diverse audiences. The risk in certain types of organisations is that ‘group think’ or collaboration among only the same types will deliver the same ideas and solutions. You need people with multi-disciplinary backgrounds; social, racial, geographic, and in terms of differences in ages and in outlooks. Multi-disciplinary teams that include designers, engineers, communicators, scientists, economists, anthropologists and so on, are needed to bring fresh insight.

What tips do you have for directors wishing to push design in the boardroom?

Set clear commercial goals and measure the impact of design activity and investment because then the case is made. Of course, good design takes resource and commitment: human, financial and time. It cannot simply be bolted-on. But the benefits are worth it.



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Laura is the founder and Chairman of Appetite, a brand creation and development consultancy, and is also President at the Design Business Association. Her expertise lies in helping organisations to embrace change, enhance image and expand potential through a unique approach that fuses strategic planning, innovation and intelligent design. Among other accolades received in 2012, Appetite was appointed to the specialist design panel by London Legacy Development Corporation to work on graphic design projects at the London 2012 Olympic Park.

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