Leading by Design

*Design goes beyond appearance and aesthetics. **Criticaleye** speaks to business leaders to find out why it's the executive and non-executive directors who understand what design can do that possess the competitive edge*

A true design ethic empowers a business in so many ways. From how a product or service is delivered to the way in which a team approaches a particular problem, design has become the differentiator between high-performing organisations and those content to just make up the numbers.

Mark Spelman, Global Head of Strategy at Accenture, says that "design has become an essential interface between understanding actual and latent customer needs, and translating them into a corporate value chain that can deliver products and services to multiple market segments".

Laura Haynes, Chairman of brand management agency Appetite, and President at the Design Business Association, says: "Design means change and transformation, continuous improvement, devising a point of difference and, 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."

On one level, of course, this is about getting the right look and feel. **Jo O'Connor,** CEO at clothing accessories retailer, Tie Rack, says: "People want to enhance their image and adorn themselves with a product that has been well-designed and they have been clever enough to choose – 'Look how well-designed I look', rather than 'Look how expensive I look'...

"H&M have the most expensive models wearing £9 dresses. People are demanding fantastic design for very low prices [but] will spend £500 for a new piece of Apple technology. To respond to that, or to be a player in a consumer business, you have to take on board the fact that 'design' is an integral part of everything you do... Everything has to be thought-through, not thrown together."

Don Elgie, CEO at marketing and communications group Creston, adds: "[Good design] can make or break a brand... You've got to think about... the physical product and its design, the design of the graphic on the pack, the brand name itself, and even the design of that name."

It's a key factor in the success of international businesses, too. **Mark** says: "In a world of big global brands, it is fascinating to see how important designing local variants has become in order to get the best scale effects of global combined with the penetration of local markets. Products from Caterpillar trucks to Coca Cola carry the power of the global brand yet configuration, taste and packaging are designed to meet local needs."

Indeed, the international competition is hotting up when it comes to design excellence. **Laura** says: "Singapore has committed to a huge investment in the improvement in design activity, design education and design uptake in businesses. China is doing exactly the same... borrowing from our designers and design schools to build a generation of designers and design processes."

INNATE VALUE

Aside from external engagement with customers and consumers, there is another less tangible element to design. For **Sally Fuller**, Director of Leadership Practices at communication services provider KCOM, "design can inspire or inhibit behaviours and set the company's tone of voice".

The touchpoints within an organisation can be far reaching. **Clive Ansell**, CEO at Education and Technology services provider Tribal, says: "You need to make sure that your production and operation teams and your R&D teams have that awareness and professional capability inbuilt... the truth is not enough people realise that good design builds competitive advantage."

# It's about understanding that this is not just about aesthetics

Matthew Dearden, Chief Executive at outdoor advertising company Clear Channel, admits that "design is one of those words that different people use to mean different things", but that doesn't undermine its overall importance in how a business approaches a project and its execution.

"Often businesses treat design, whether that is office design or process design, as though they could choose not to do it, and that's a fallacy as ultimately you have them by default," says **Matthew**. "If you are saying design isn't important to you, you are actually choosing to have a non-designed organisation."

From a board perspective, it's about unlocking the power of design by incorporating it into the core of the business. **Ian Ryder**, Deputy Chief Executive at BCS, the Chartered Institute for IT, sounds a positive note: "Leaders who understand that design applies equally to [all] processes, from manufacturing through to logistics and customer services, will always run better, happier and more successful businesses."

For **Laura**, it's "a rigorous process with research, planning, prototyping, testing, validating and evolution at its heart... and, in the boardroom, it's about understanding that this is not just about aesthetics".

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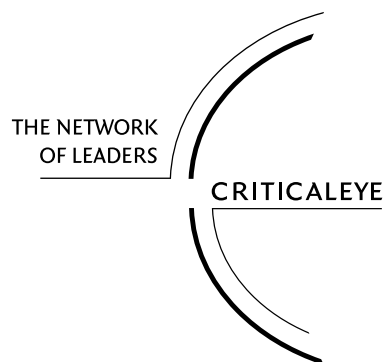
COMMUNITY COMMENT

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CEO
Tribal

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Chief Executive
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Ian Ryder
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