

THE VALUE OF DESIGN

creating desire, the time famine and how Google aced branding

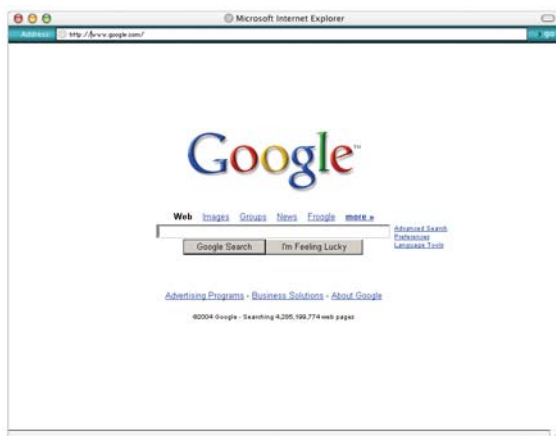
by Harry Bartlett

CREATING DESIRE

Visual communications and graphic design serve three purposes: to effectively communicate information, increase usability and create desire for a product or service. While communicating information and increasing usability are critical to successful design, creating desire has become a key component of a company's ability to differentiate themselves from competitors.

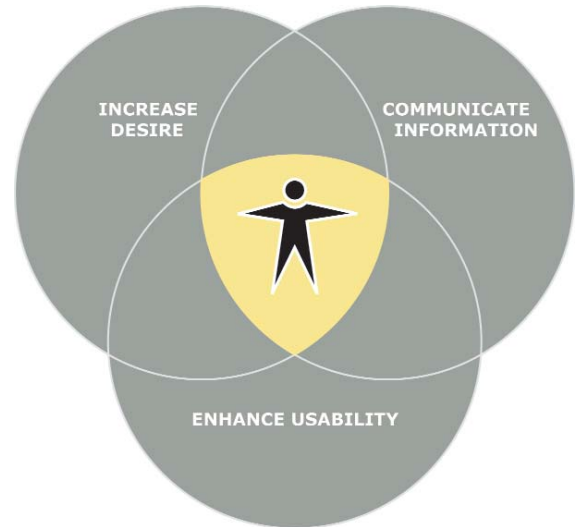
In order to create desire for a product or service you must first have a holistic and in-depth understanding of what the prospective customer wants. As Chris Charron of Forrester Research points out the 'customer experience is becoming the next competitive battleground' and for companies to be successful they 'must delve inside the brains of consumers'.

For instance, Google's success to a large extent, can be seen as a design victory i.e. success based on an effective design, creating desire for the service. The effective design in this instance is the classic less is more dynamic. Google saw how Yahoo and other search engines were filling their screen with multiple services and products,



most all equally weighted and distributed on the home page. In the design community this type of layout is sometimes referred to as 'portalitis', a particular form of crowded and overly complicated page design common to web site portals.

Google was brilliant in realizing that what their customers really wanted was easy to use, high



quality searching capabilities and resisted the temptation to add features that would detract from this singular focus. Consequently, the home page layout has a fraction of the amount of information that Yahoo has. This stripping away of non-essential features, directly added to the 'desirability' of the service.

TIME FAMINE

So when a start up says the design of the logo, or web site doesn't really matter, that it's the product/service that is king, they're not really viewing their product/service from the customers point of view. The visual communications that comprise the branding and marketing are an integral part of a customer's experience of the product. Great design looks easy when done well, it's simple and communicates value quickly. Being able to efficiently communicate a desirable branded experience is increasingly becoming harder to do and equally important.

The exponential increase of products over the past 25 years has led to an intense competition for shelf space as well as mind share. This combined with ever more complex lifestyles, moving faster in an attempt to catch up with work demands and diversified recreational opportunities, has created what some call a 'time famine'. Designers have responded to this time famine by

focusing on communicating more efficient messages. The quicker a message and brand experience can be communicated, the greater it's impact. Apple's iPod T.V. spots and Nike's emphasis on it's logo and tag line, are 2 noteworthy examples.

QUANTIFYING VALUE

But what about the 'value' of design? In order to determine a return on investment you must be able to quantify the value that the design has produced. Variables such as customer conversion rates, amount of sales transactions, lead generation, proposal generation, unique web site visitors etc. are but some of the metrics that can be used to measure the ROI. The exercise of determining a measurable return points to the value and need for an effective marketing plan that incorporates testing. Testing is critical for pre and post project analysis. The pre analysis part is essential for understanding what the customer needs, wants and what is of critical concern to them and the post analysis quantifies the success of the overall marketing program as well as what enhancements are appropriate.

To use the Google analogy again, they didn't need to spend \$50,000 for their web site to be designed because they knew that would not solve their customer's problem. What they did

need was a name that communicated their intelligence and mathematical expertise and an extensible logo that can be dressed up for different occasions. Google could have intuitively known what their customers wanted from a branding point of view or they could have performed some basic testing to find out. Either way the customer's problem pointed to the design/branding solution and provided a tremendous return on investment.

Ultimately the value of design is embedded in the ability to understand what a customer wants and communicating with them in a way that will increase their desire for the product and lead to a sale.

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