

Design Centric Attitude – Marketing Approach For Emerging Economies

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CHALTA HAI: USKA ASAR KYA HOTA HAI

“Interested in reducing that ‘extra flab’ on your body in a matter of hours? Would you like to grow hair on that balding pate of yours in just a few days? All you need to do is watch TV and order the ‘miraculous’ products being advertised through the phone.” Will it really enthrall the customer?

A salesman walked into the verandah and sold a hand operated sewing machine which is very similar to a stapler. It worked extremely well in his presence. It never worked after that. Why did it go wrong? Is it designed according to the micro need of the customer? A salesman of Eureka Forbes succeeded in convincing the customer for a sale. For how long did the customer use the product? Customers are easily convinced to purchase vacuum cleaners. But most of the customers don’t use it for a long time. What might be the reason for it? Somewhere, the connection is lost while reaching out to the customer. Is the product designed according to the expectations/needs or requirements of the customer?

The symptomatic Indian malaise of a “chalta hai” attitude towards product design is a matter of concern. Design has the opportunity to step forward and say “Here’s what we think we should do and should be doing.” ‘One size doesn’t fit all’ is an attitude towards the concept of a formalized design process. However, the speed of its market and the pace of technology both require the marketer to be keenly aware of how best to manage product development.

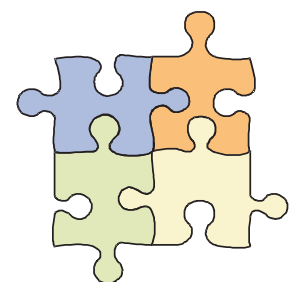
CENTER OF CENTRICITY

Samsung announces “We blaze a new trail for the global printer industry into a design-centric printer era, getting out of functional competitions.” What is it claiming? We have come across words like product centric, user centric or buyer centric; but a new coinage ‘design-centric’ was used by Samsung.

Customer centricity looks at products and services in their broadest sense – from purchase to use- to service to disposal, including related information and services – from the customer’s point of view to meet his product/service needs and wants better. **Buyer centricity** looks at markets and the process of going to market from the buyer’s point of view. **Design centricity** looks at the entirety of the product-customer experience from the micro-details to the overarching macro picture.

DESIGN: AS A BUSINESS FAD

Innovation and technology have been the lashing punch behind new product and service development since years. To position uniquely and to differentiate from the competitors in the global competitive market environment, companies try to make use of these forces. While design represents a great inherent significance in products and services from the outlook of creative research consultants and intuitive business experts, this concept has not always been meaningfully clutched by the marketers. But now that is found to be changing.



Often, organizations view ‘design’ as a business fad. Design should be viewed as a process, a way of thinking and working that allows organizations to strain through ideas and pursue those that can be developed into products and services people will want to buy. Design is the amalgamation of interwoven elements like form, function, desirability, manufacturability, affordability, and cultural reference. Beyond this, consideration has to be given to the visual, emotional, functional and cultural elements which can be packaged and shipped into a brand at an affordable price. Businesses only get the best out of design when they perceive it as being something of core strategic importance.

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Of course, declaring oneself as a 'design-centric organization' is not that simple. Design is expected to be able to project and embody the future rather than the present: that is where added value comes from. Companies like Nokia and Sony come out with the most innovative products. But how many products really satisfy the needs of the customer? How many companies are pondering upon the micro aspects of the product design?

DESIGN-CENTRIC STRATEGY: WHY SHOULD ONE LOOK AT THAT?

Sustainable success in innovation means you just have to sweat the small stuff. To attain sustainable growth, escalate competence and to achieve continuous improvement, businesses should necessarily lean on design and should not simply apply a makeover treatment to what they are already into. A Design should act at the heart of the strategy as a catalyst for completely new offerings. For product creators, design is not about the most extreme, advanced or progressive idea but it is about the *right* idea. Design is closely associated with innovation, which is the key to standing out and maintaining competitiveness. That applies to any business size, no matter how large or small.

According to 2005 research by Design Council of US which promotes the vital role of design in making businesses more competitive and public services more effective, about 70 percent of US businesses that see design as integral to their operations had introduced new products or services in the last three years, compared with only a third of overall companies. It also proposes that innovation is not simply something you'll get around to when "convenient"; it suggests that innovation is essential.

If a marketer aspires to garner the benefits of design, it must do more than just engaging sizzling designers or branding itself as "design oriented" or stamping itself as 'pioneer in new product development'. Design should not be perceived in terms of the 'look and feel of a product' or service, and undoubtedly not as something that's only introduced once all the key decisions have been taken and all the costs have been committed. There's no point touting amorphous marketing promises on branding and identity if the final product doesn't reflect these in the actual customer experience.

'BIG BOYS' INTO DESIGN CENTRICITY

"I want P&G to become the number one consumer-design company in the world, so we need to be able to make it part of our strategy. We need to make it part of our innovation process." Alan G. Lafley, CEO, Procter & Gamble.

The shakers and movers like Nokia, Sony, P&G keep on investing large amounts of budgets in R&D. From time to time, they launch new products with proper differentiation which cannibalize the market share of their own models. They don't give a chance to competitors to grab a piece of the market share.

They are not alone in the embrace of the concept of designing the entire customer experience or in its plan to make design the centerpiece of its corporate strategy. Samsung, an example of a global corporation that has built powerful equity in its brand over the past few years, is on the same path. And there are others: Nokia, Apple, GE, and BMW are also design-centric companies. Using the design approach to be innovative and creating a complete customer experience makes these brands and their products memorable. Finding these participants in design centric mode, the other corporates also jump onto the bandwagon.

"We want to design the purchasing experience... We want to design every component of the product; and we want to design the communication experience and the user experience. I mean, it's all design. And I think that's been hard for people to come to grips with." Mr. Lafley, CEO, P&G. Claudia Kotchka named it as '**design - centric culture**'

THE BATTLEGROUND OF DESIGN

Every department within the corporate structure is now in the design business. Some of the marketers recognized the need and power of design. Do all the BIG BOYS follow their footsteps? Design might be outsourced or done on the own. The concept of 'Design' has to be permeated throughout the organization without confining itself only to the R&D. Manufacturing, R&D, Marketing and sales department should necessarily embrace it. Every employee has to be made a part of it. Indeed, they are involved in designing the overall customer's experience with products, services, or packaging. There is definitely a revolution brewing in the corporate world, and it will have a powerful impact on the perception of the value of design in the very near future.

Dell satisfies its customers by customizing computers for a large customer base by turning around sets of components into finished computers quickly. The company ships these made-to-order computers out within a

matter of a few days or a couple of weeks. It can be stated unequivocally that Dell is in the business of designing customers' experiences.

EXPERIENTIAL BRANDING: A NEW REALM

The thought of 'experiential branding' was the one to detonate this new sphere of thinking in marketing, to a revolution of new possibilities. Experiential branding proposes that the customer's experiences with the corporate brand go well beyond the products or services the company offers. It protrudes into the heart of the customer's perceptions, positive thoughts, emotions and attitudes based on the interaction and thereby results in the deepening of the relationship with the corporate brand. These intangibles outshine the actual products or services a company offers in the marketplace, all of which can be easily purchased from a number of competitors. Bundling the customer's brand experience with an actual brand image, a unique experience is created in that company. In totality, the brand experience *by design* encompasses each and every customer.

Creating meaningful brand experiences for the customer begins with the actual design of its product or service, but then extends to its communication hierarchy in the packaging of those products/services- the business's website, its letters and special offers to customers, its call center interactions with customers, its advertising and promotions, and more. All of this, in concert, creates a total customer experience. A positive experience in one channel does not create total experiential branding; the sum of all of the customer touch points, if properly managed and aligned, do.

SHIFT FROM STRATEGY TO ATTITUDE

Stunning products like Apple's iPod MP3 player did not just happen. Organizations such as Apple which have an enviable record in design and innovation demonstrate an untiring attention to detail. Nothing is too small to be looked at during the design stage – and then, brutal testing is employed to validate these assumptions. Steve Jobs and his management group at Apple have a **design-centric mentality** and create an environment where such innovative thinking is possible. This fruited in a stream of marvelously successful new products.

Companies like Apple are constantly innovating and designing, not only their products, but their brand and their very business model. This spirit of design innovation is constantly keeping the company and its products hot, fresh and new, in spite of increased global competition. Design centrality should be imbibed into the blood of the organization and as an attitude to look at the entirety of the product-customer experience from the micro-details to the overarching macro picture. Myopically, the companies focus on the exciting big pictures with all the itchy-bitsy teeny-weeny items. But they miss the trees for the forest.

Design centric attitude suggests not to over-engineer the micro-architecture of every product – if the concept is to be a financial success, design has to balance issues of cost and profitability – but to avoid the very real danger of getting entangled in the tempting appeal of the Grand Idea at the cost of ignoring the myriad micro details that add up to a value-creating whole. Innovation deals with new insight, the striking concept with startling big picture. But if the heart of the idea is not reflected in the body of the product, then all the pains are in vain.

ACADEMICS FOR THE DESIGN CENTRIC

Stanford is initiating a new Institute of Design in order to teach design strategy to both business and design students. The University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management is kick starting a new B-school program in innovation and design strategy. Leading B-schools of US like Harvard, Georgetown, and University of California are offering courses in product design, product innovation, or the management of the design process in their curricula to MBA candidates, new programs are being pioneered in some MBA programs. This indicates just the beginning of the design era to instill our future design leaders (*business leaders*) in design thinking and strategy.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: CREATING CREATIVE ECONOMY

For the current leaders of design and business, we need to embrace the new "creative economy" as it begins to unfold. This is an exciting time for businesses, full of challenges but rife with possibilities. The corporate and design sectors must come together as they never have before. This critical integration of the analytical with the creative, by design, will yield the greatest dividends for product and service providers: Great customer experiences, deepening customer relationships, trust, brand loyalty and brand equity.

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