

GYPSIES in the PALACE

"Start by thinking like a designer. It makes no difference whether you are looking at a product or a service, think design."

C by Steve Harvill

Can you imagine a company like Proctor and Gamble which has always entrusted its long term success to research and development shifting its focus to design? It sounds unbelievable, but CEO Ed Lafely wants to "put design into the DNA of Proctor & Gamble (P&G)." He wants design literally to create an experience each time you touch a P&G product. Lafely realizes that design, not price, will be P&G's driving value in the future. The P&G Crest Spine Toothbrush is a child of design. Selling for \$3.00, this design concept has taken P&G from the position of a "new player" in the toothbrush market to a significant 15-20 percent market share.

In business we are entering the gold rush of design and the more you pay attention to this bonanza, the better leverage you will discover for your company. Design is virtually dominating the business scene. The traditional collaboration between form and function is giving way to a new, neo-orthodox outlook. A new path forged by an iPod-chasing perspective is becoming a legitimate and necessary goal for companies.

We may be a marketing-weary American public, but we are very design-savvy buyers. As customers we really want something that looks right, feels right, operates in an intuitive manner and turns heads. At Creative Ventures we call this "the whiplash effect." The product looks and performs so well that when you walk past it on an aisle it makes you turn your head so fast it gives you whiplash!

Designers are now "gypsies in the palace." They are challenging the king in importance. From Target Stores, which bases its advertising campaigns on its designers, to Sports Cuts hair salons, where the "shop" is now designed like a sports arena with multiple TV screens

showing sports, design is paying big dividends. I recently read the assertion that design has taken the place of substance. I think that conclusion is only partially accurate: design IS substance.

Don't believe me? I'm sure by now I don't have to preach about the iPod, perhaps the highest level of design bar-raising we've seen in recent memory and the product by which all others are measured. It might surprise you that the iPod impact on design can play a role in such unlikely places as the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

The SPARC (See, Plan, Act, Refine and Communicate) Lab at the Mayo has created a design focus on the patient experience. SPARC generates ideas to improve that human experience through design. Examples are new check-in kiosks and new, planned nurse-patient interactions that increase patient comfort. The design axiom is create things that feel right and you can differentiate yourself in a crowded market.

Design is about listening. Focus groups for Dodge helped set the design direction for their hottest model in recent memory, the Caliber. First of all, it has a cool look, but what captivates buyers are little design gems like lighted cup holders, a glove box that keeps four beverages cold, and an interior map light that disconnects and becomes a flashlight.

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The Express clothing stores commissioned twenty-one designers not to work on their clothing, but instead to work on the clothing hand tags (those tags attached to the clothing). They were fun and energetic designs, each one unique. Observations showed customers going through clothing items just to see the different hand tags. The idea is to use design to create a new touch point for the product!

Love those Altoid mints! Wrigley used design to drive Altoids' popularity. Take a look at packaging. The nostalgic type face, the crinkled paper that really serves no purpose, the handmade look of the mint, the tin size...all are design issues that allow Wrigley to charge a 400 percent sales price premium.

The Hewlett Packard 12c calculator has been a design cornerstone and has remained unchanged since 1983. It has sold over 15 million units and remains the choice for the real estate and financial industries. It is a wonderful example of the functional foresight of great design.

So, what can you do to get on board this design locomotive?

Start by thinking like a designer. It makes no difference whether you are looking at a product or a service, think design:

- **HIT THE STREETS:** Get fresh insight by observation, by looking around. What do you see that grabs your eye? We routinely take clients on field trips for this specific purpose. There is great insight in observations. If you want to design and act like a five star business, go visit the nearest Ritz Carlton hotel.
- **RECRUIT:** Get some curious people to come in and visit with you about your ideas. Designers regularly conduct group meetings to get a feel for what connects. No one of us is as smart as all of us.
- **SIMPLE IS BEST:** Always look to simplify.
- **ASK 3 "WHY" QUESTIONS:** When pursuing design, the "3 Q's" are critical. Ask, "Why there is value in this?" When you get an answer ask why again and take your digging to one more level of why. By then you can almost always find the answer.

Can design apply to what you do? Design applies to everything! Do you do any marketing? Think design. Do you have letterhead, a website, a newsletter? Think design. Design is the key strategic element driving business and it can be a key leverage point for you.

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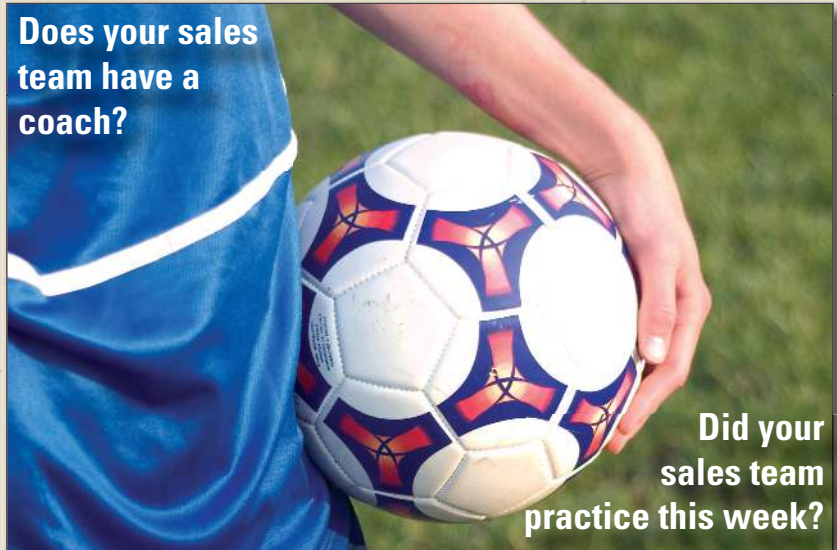
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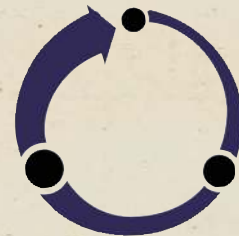
Mia Hamm has been coached since she was five.

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