

It's time to re-design ourselves

The world of graphic design is changing under our noses. All of us are reading the signs and adapting to survive over the long term – but are we evolving in the right way? There will always be a demand for our design solutions, but the UK may not always be seen as the world leaders in graphics, and are isolated graphic solutions going to be sufficient in tomorrow's highly challenging and competitive business world?

I've been watching the changes both from a distance and at first hand. UK companies are looking for new ways of thinking creatively in every aspect of their operations, and finding that the leaders of their design agencies have a unique and highly effective approach to creative thinking in business, not just in communications.

This is not new to us, but it is new to the business community. This aspect of our work needs to be recognised, valued and promoted because it gives the design industry a whole new approach to helping our clients maximise their success.

As part of the Design Council's immerse teams I have visited a number of businesses to advise them how to implement design throughout their operations. It's been fascinating, and a number of patterns have emerged.

A brand cannot be created without the business having a clear idea of their target audience, their core offering and the unique aspects that they bring to the marketplace. But many companies have not pinned this down, preferring to 'get on with what they do best', which often means bumbling about flogging old products rather than taking a bold and innovative approach to the future.

A new product development process cannot be maintained without the proper people in place, and the proper people can't work to their best ability if their colleagues are treading on their toes or pulling in a different direction. This requires a business plan and a strategic plan, plus some agreed tactics, and in turn this requires clear job descriptions, written performance contracts (and regular reviews) and structured board and operational meetings to coordinate everyone's activity.

These 'boring' processes are vital to efficient operations, and unlock the full potential of a business. They have been the territory of business consultants, and they don't always have the best reputation

– they can charge a lot, produce massive reports and tend to disappear off the scene. Their time has passed, and the door is now wide open for true creative thinking in all aspects of business operation.

We can call this discipline ‘business design’, to sit alongside graphic, interactive, product and brand design as a defined role. The problem is that not every graphic designer can become a business designer. I suggest that it is only those designers who have run their own businesses and have direct, real-time experience, who can evolve into creative business designers.

This is a call out to all senior designers who know and understand business operations to offer their broader creative thinking by positioning themselves as business designers, and lead a new wave of creative thinking throughout UK business. This will add new dimensions to the UK design industry and can only be a positive contribution to our economy as a whole.

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