



THE POWER OF DESIGN

PART 3: FUNCTION

THE POWER OF DESIGN IS A SERIES IN 5 PARTS LOOKING AT THE DIFFERENT WAYS IN WHICH DESIGN CAN BE USED WITHIN A COMPANY, CUTTING AWAY HYPERBOLE IN THE TYPICAL DESIGN SALES PITCH AND INVESTIGATING THE REAL BENEFITS OF DESIGN TO CUSTOMERS, THE ORGANIZATION AND ITS REVENUE. THE 5 PARTS DISCUSS INCREMENTAL STEPS: NO DESIGN, STYLE, FORM & FUNCTION, SOLVING BUSINESS PROBLEMS AND ACHIEVING LEADERSHIP.

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Two premium multi-touch watch kits for the iPod Nano called TikTok and LunaTik. The kits are designed to simply and elegantly transform the Apple iPod Nano into multi-touch watches - via Kickstarter.

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If only designing successful new products was always as easy as making the new one work better than anything before it. Every product manager knows that it's not - but try telling that to your designers! Their training is in making things look and work better. What your designers would call incremental functional improvement is one part of creating successful design, but it's not enough to ensure success. That's why adding blades to razors has been such a game of diminishing returns.

Clearly there are good reasons to compete by making something that works better than any competitor. This is the beginning of innovation. But that still doesn't take us out of 5 blade razor territory. The improvement must be much bigger than that. It's important to actually make something easier or more effective for the customer in a way that they can somehow measure. And when they measure it, it must be dramatically different. As Doug Hall and his peers point out, a big reason why many products fail is the ordinary person's resistance to change. This means that a new design has to be an extraordinary improvement over previous designs before someone is persuaded to give it a try. The temptation to take a leading product and make the new one 10% better is a well-documented way to fail with new products.

The way that companies usually go about innovating is by studying other successful products (especially competing products) and trying to improve on them. This is both the strength and

weakness of functional improvement. On the one hand, improved function can clearly give a new product an advantage, but because the new product is based on previous products, it's also easy to copy.

This means that there is seldom a long term advantage to functional improvement and success is often hit and miss. This focus only on single products instead of the deeper thinking that can produce a whole system of innovative ideas, hampers longer term success.

Like adding style to products, adding extra benefits by innovating is not normally costly compared to the potential for success that it offers. It can be quite an efficient way of using existing resources to improve sales. You don't have to be 3M, HP or Samsung to have innovation. It's just a way of thinking that can be learnt. Innovation is simply a clever idea that has been successfully commercialized. Any company can do it by training its people to think like, well, designers.

But developing people's creative abilities is still not an asset that can give a company a long term edge. It's a great start because it creates the raw material for the reinvention which every company must have to succeed, but to win in the long term a culture of innovation is needed.

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