
Pretty Isn't The Point

3 Questions That Lead
to Killer Products



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"Design should be the foundation, not just decoration. Great design creates a perfect fit between the product and the human. Beauty is just another function of the product."

Lars Martin Haukohl
Product Designer

Humans are intrinsically drawn to beauty. Whether it's a person or a product, pretty usually wins. But when it comes to product design, whether it's a mobile application, a phone, a speaker or the head unit in a connected car, pretty will only get you so far. Once the newness and beauty of it wears off, that product has to perform. It has to deliver. If it doesn't exceed a user's expectations, don't expect success. Users increasingly have near zero tolerance for products that don't "wow" their fickle tastes.

All too often the physical design of the product -- how it looks, how it feels, its presence in its intended environment -- is treated as an accoutrement rather than as a baked-in aspect of the design. Instead of incorporating a design-led philosophy at the beginning, design is often considered after development has begun, frequently relegated to the role of decoration. The end result is a beautiful product, but one that falls short of its potential. This point alone frustrates engineers and developers to no end. Beauty is great, but if the functionality and "stickiness" of the product isn't there, you have failed. And users have a long memory.

DESIGN FROM THE BEGINNING

Involving designers at the genesis of the product design process ensures that your product is not only visually appealing, but functionally appealing to your customers as well. A good designer should be able to visualize and execute the perfect fit between the product and the human. But what does a GREAT designer do? They find the WOW, the ability to stun customers and leaves competitors scratching their heads. Beauty is simply another function of the product.

And sometimes beauty is best expressed through simplicity.

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WHEN LESS IS MORE

Design can not only enable you to create an iconic, lasting product and support a valuable brand, it can also guard against pointless add-ons that add needless complexity to a product. Which, of course, translates into a longer time to market and greater costs in terms of materials and man hours.

Fashion designer Coco Chanel famously said, "Once you've dressed, and before you leave the house, look in the mirror and take at least one thing off." That's good advice. Not just for those of us getting ready to go out in the evening, but from a product standpoint as well. Just because you can doesn't always mean you should when it comes to design and accoutrements.

Consider Flip's approach to camera design. Though the company is long gone, its approach to camera design was ingenious. Users didn't need all the bells and whistles. They just wanted to be able to take a picture quickly and easily. Yes, the picture should be of good quality, but users were happy to settle for "good enough" when it came to photos. They were more concerned with having a camera that was easy to use; one they could grab when a moment hit and capture it without fiddling with dials and settings. Unfortunately, convenience and quality came together in the smart phone revolution, and Flip failed to find another market.



Though its functionality was limited when compared to smart phones, the Flip phone is an iconic example of user-centered design.

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THE NEED FOR A DESIGNER'S PERSPECTIVE

Integrating design into the product development process at the beginning allows it to inform not only how the product looks, but how it operates and feels. This results in a much more substantive and rewarding experience for the user.

MIT confirmed this. In a study of the many approaches to product development, they found that no one methodology was key, but that design played a crucial part in all of them. Some stages of the process were more important than others, but all stages needed to be considered and prioritized. "First, [design] helps an organization identify critical areas to tackle in product development, and prioritize tasks accordingly," the study said. "It helps to cut development time, and therefore shorten a new product's time to market. Secondly, it helps an organization to efficiently allocate scarce resources, and lead to minimizing development cost and increasing productivity."

Those are three huge wins for any organization, regardless of their size or industry. So how does a designer manage to add such value?

It all starts with three questions.

3 QUESTIONS THAT LEAD TO KILLER PRODUCTS

What If?

You've gone over your project a thousand times. You're clear on what its goals are. But have you asked "what if?" Could you be missing something? What if there was a feature you could add (or eliminate) that would make your product, interface or portal even better? What if there's a way to make it even more intuitive and attractive to the user? What if there was a way to make your product even more profitable?

3 Ways Design Aids Product Development:

- Prioritizes tasks
- Cuts development time
- Shortens time to market

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A designer allows you to do this. By forcing your team to pause for a moment to reassess your goals and ask yourself 'what if,' you can look at your project from multiple angles. Instead of asking about the product's features and functions, you're now asking questions about its potential. Inspiration and insight can come at the most unexpected times. It's vital that you and your team continually question yourselves in order to create the best possible product.

What Wows?

You wouldn't have embarked on your product development path if you didn't have a goal in mind; often it's a problem to solve on behalf of the user. It might even be an easy one. But why stop there? Why not roar past user expectations and present them with a product they couldn't have even conceived and now can't live without?

Integrating design into your product development process enables you to do that by incorporating user feedback, prototypes and focus groups into the mix to create a product with more depth and breadth in terms of "stickiness" with your market. It gives you real, actionable data you can take back to your team to come up with something even better than before. Don't settle for just meeting your customers' needs.

Blow their minds.

What Works?

It's one thing to come up with the next Great Idea That Will Blow The World's Mind, but it's something else to actually make that happen. Incorporating design into the early stages of product development gives your team the structure and insights you need in order to produce an amazing, market-ready product that's both practical and profitable. Feedback from industrial engineers, UX and UI developers as well as those within your organization can also ensure that you stay on track.

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THE NEED FOR A DESIGNER'S PERSPECTIVE

You know your product inside and out. You've spent so much time thinking, planning, and talking about it that it almost seems like a real, living thing. That's good, but it can also be dangerous. A designer brings valuable perspective to your project and introduces an aesthetic that's crucial but often missing in your plans.

Asking questions about your product's potential, what will delight its users and what's feasible allows you to build a practical, actionable roadmap that results in a killer product.

Embedding design into your product development process from the beginning is not only better for the user, it's good business sense. It ensures that all participants have a 360 degree understanding of the project they're working on, its key features and functions. It illuminates potential for improvement as well as further refinement.

So why settle for "good enough" when you can have "the best imaginable?"

~~GOOD.~~
~~BETTER.~~
BEST.

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