

The value added and need for professional industrial design in South-Africa.

Creativity is a basic human quality and was far more prevalent in our past. Humans were forced to invent and create items that would help them perform their daily tasks. Today our consumer society suppresses these creative abilities by claiming that one can buy anything you will ever need and furthermore that, if you don't own a certain item, your life cannot possibly proceed without untold misery and a severe lack of social standing.

What is Industrial Design?

Industrial Design was first defined during the Industrial Revolution. Product Design is as old as the human race itself, while Industrial Design is the art of developing products for mass production. Industrial Design concerns itself with not only the pure function of the product, but also all the other constraints inflicted on the design in order to make it a commercially successful product.

Industrial Design closes the gap between the scientist \ inventor who conceives the device and the salesman who must sell it at a price the market will bear. The Industrial Designer traditionally has been labelled as a stylist with a basic insight into mechanics. The modern Industrial Designer has become far more specialised and offers a professional service with a very wide scope. Industrial Design has been referred to as the link between art and engineering.

Definition of modern Industrial Design:

Industrial Design is a controlled process of compromise that gives birth to products that are acceptable to the mass market.

Typical activities and considerations during the modern Industrial Design process must be:

- *Market trends and styles*
- *User requirements*
- *State of the art manufacturing processes and materials*
- *Commercial constraints*
- *Innovation*
- *Value adding*
- *Marketability and product image*
- *Project Management*

Good Industrial Design cannot be applied as an afterthought like a coat of paint for cosmetic purposes. It has to be an integral part of the development.

Why Industrial Design?

The main focus of the modern product development program must be value adding to the end product, with maximum commercial gain for the owner of that product and its intellectual property. Value adding can benefit both the manufacturer as well as the end-user of the product. The following points highlight some of the advantages that good Industrial Design can add to the development process.

1) User Value:

These are the value-added features that are evident to the end-user of the product. These features are often the deciding factor on which products are bought and are formidable weapons in the hands of the marketer of the product.

2) Risk Management

Modern product development is an expensive exercise and requires a huge financial investment, even for the simplest product. This investment, like any other investment, is not risk free. Sound professional design will add tremendous value as well as improve the risk factor by greatly increasing the chance of commercial success. ***The Design process must not be viewed as a grouch expense, but rather as a sound investment into the product.***

3) “Know-how” and experience

The professional Designer has many years of experience and can identify the classic pitfalls prior to the design process. It is also very important to associate your product's development with companies and suppliers that are prepared to add value to the design process. The professional Designer also has a vast knowledge base of state of the art production methods and materials.

4) Cost advantage & Competitive edge

Professional design fees are not cheap. The initial investment is soon recuperated when the added value results in commercial successes and increased profit.

5) Time to market

In today's fast changing marketplace the competitive edge is normally reserved for the company that first introduces a specific product. The design process must be managed in such a manner as to ensure effective design without compromising on the end result.

The good designer must also know when to stop. The product must offer more benefits than the competition in a form that the consumer finds comfortable and familiar. The critical point of the design, therefore, occurs when we provide the most advanced technology in its simplest form.

Industrial Design in South Africa

“When in Rome do what the Romans do”. Companies in South Africa are starting to explore foreign markets and some are even world leaders in various highly specialised industries. The most common problem that local companies are experiencing in trying to market their products internationally, are not a lack of functionality or specification, but rather poor product design image and inadequate mass production Industrialization. More and more local companies are realising that professional Industrial design is the key to international commercial success.

Unfortunately there are only a few Industrial Design consultancies in South Africa. This number is growing steadily, with more and more young talented designers qualifying every year. Educating local industry in the need for Professional Industrial Design will not only lead to a more lucrative design profession, but will also drastically stimulate the international product exports.

Companies must not only focus on keeping up with technology and their competitors, but should actively strive to create the new “state- of- the-art” through continuous design.