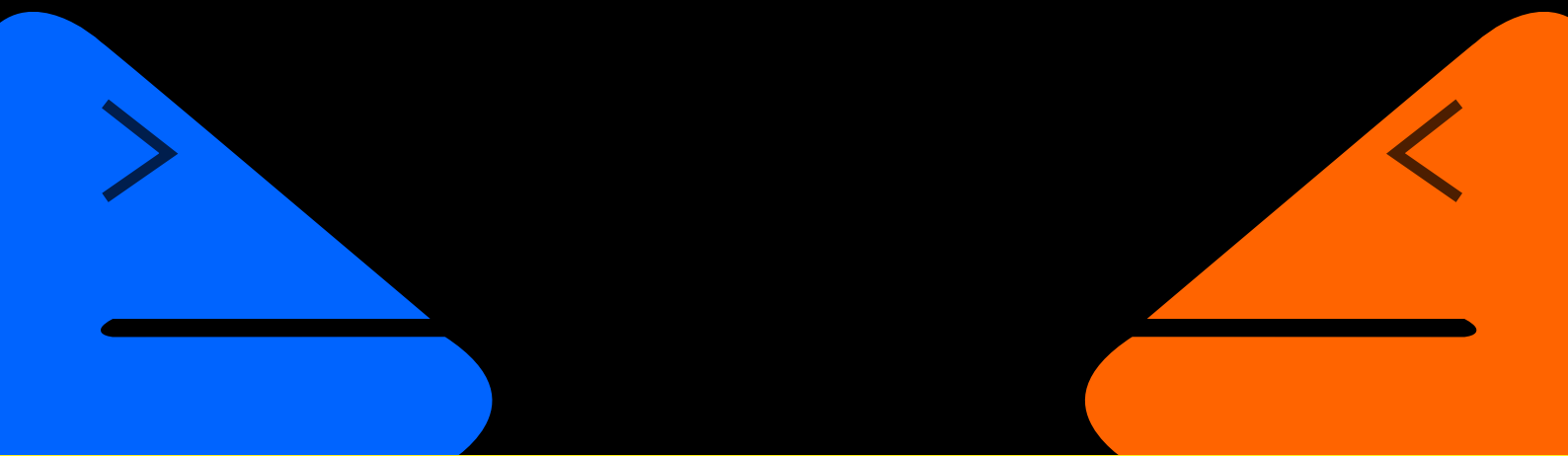


At What Point is an Interior Designer Consulted in the Development of a New Business?



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Abstract

The aim of this report is to assess current attitudes towards the use of interior design in business, to stimulate discussion, and suggest further research into the role of interior design in modern business models. As companies seek more effective ways to navigate changing business and cultural environments, this report asks whether interior designers are at the forefront leading the way, or by focusing on styling are interior designers providing services that businesses really want?

Data was collated from existing research studies in this area, and literature, data, statistics, and current thinking on this topic was examined. The search for information specific to interior designers and the extent of their involvement in the planning strategies of businesses revealed a need for further research in this area. Consequently, as interior design shares much common ground with other design disciplines, and are often grouped under the broader term 'design', information concerning the 'design industry' was considered relevant to, and include interior design.

This report concludes that interior designers have the ability to contribute positively to the development of businesses at all stages, but may need to further investigate ways in which these design services can be structured, enhanced, and communicated more effectively to business.



keywords: interior designer, business, design value,

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Introduction

The aim of this report is to assess the state of current attitudes towards the use of interior design in business and the value of interior design in modern business models. As businesses search for effective ways to negotiate changing business and cultural environments, this report asks whether interior designers are at the forefront leading the way, or by focusing on styling, whether interior designers fulfil their potential to provide services essential to modern business. Data gathered from opinion, statistics, and literature, mostly from the past decade, was examined to observe and evaluate current attitudes.

It is natural to assume that interior designers consider their own profession as having an important value, and this value is well documented by trade associations that represent the industry:

“Interior architects and designers are critical to solving contemporary and future challenges such as sustainability, economic change, land shortage and cultural shifts. As the way we work, play and learn continues to rapidly change, interior designers will become one of our most valuable assets. The design of spaces is more important than ever in terms of creating spaces and places that people can both be happy in and function effectively within, as our societal framework evolves around us.” (Massey, 2010)

The International Federation of Interior Architects/Designers (IFI) see the value of design on a multitude of levels, quantifiable in different terms, but always contributing to the health, security, safety, and comfort of people, and being “practical, aesthetic, and conducive to intended purposes, such as raising productivity, selling merchandise, or improving life-style” (U.S. Government’s Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2009).

Interior designers bring “immense value to business” by improving efficiencies, systems and equipment reliability, enhancing branding and image, and incorporating flexibility for change; while also introducing intangibles such as art, sensory, emotional, and experiential elements into a “vision to achieve design excellence, above and beyond the successful solution of all design’s pragmatic considerations” (Caan, 2010).

Interior designers deal with the manipulation of all types of interior spaces. But this report asks whether interior designers are providing a service that businesses consider important in helping them increase their effectiveness in generating profits. This report also seeks to discover if designers are often consulted in the very early stages of developing the business concept/business plan, and if business owners consider that designers have anything to contribute at the idea formation and planning stage. If not, are designers generally called in at the latter stages to apply design to an already decided business concept/plan, or a tightly scripted design brief, or just to “put a face” to the business?

Literature Review

The term 'interior designer' is used to describe a person working with the interior space of a building, and whose involvement may range from the decoration of a single room to the design and implementation of large-scale highly complex interior environments. Add to this the growing amount of home furnishing and commercial interior suppliers, and everyone from the hopeful amateur to the seasoned professional, and all grades in-between, and it becomes clear the extent of the gulf of expertise, knowledge, and professionalism that exists under the banner of interior design.

The struggle for identity and respect, in an industry where the public perception is often at odds with the reality of how designers perceive themselves, often finds the dedicated professional interior designer trying to distinguish their profession from amateurs, to "communicate their design skills, education and business acumen —and prove they are, indeed, professionals" (Bowles, 2010).

In the business world, still largely considered a male dominated environment (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000, pp. 127-136; Spence & Podmore, 1987), the current attitudes towards interior design and its legitimacy as a profession will greatly influence its perceived value to business. The willingness of businesses to spend time and money employing an interior designer, at any stage of the business, will also be influenced by the wider, more pervasive attitude to interior design, generally regarded as being "feminine, superficial, and mimetic, as compared to a male, rational, and original architecture" (Havenhand, 2004, p.33), and therefore have a limited role to play in serious business. Pointing out that there are gender implications attached to interior design, which are largely responsible for its inherent assignments of inferiority Havenhand (2004, pp. 32-42) claims that these issues have been purposely overlooked, resulting in the inability of the interior design industry to acquire the proper self-consciousness needed to solve its identity problem.

Although taking a more pragmatic stance Mogulescu (1962, pp. 44-46) adds further evidence of this lack of identity, being a result of many other factors:

"As happens with any gold-rush, so to speak, some newcomers know what they're about but most just plunge in and hope—all go by the name of "interior designer," and the burden of knowing who is who and making the right choice falls upon the business executive or client."

He draws attention to the fragmented nature of the interior design profession where interior designers, decorators, furniture sellers, and architects present themselves as capable of doing the same tasks (with varied levels of knowledge, experience, and expertise), and make choosing a suitable designer more complicated and frustrating for business owners. He argues that interior design could demonstrate value to business, and despite not having legally protected status (like architecture), it was gaining recognition among executives as a technical, specialised, complex profession capable of existing independently on its own merits.

Defining Design

Design gives people meaning to things (Verganti, 2010). Czarnitzki & Thorwarth (2009) define design as "trying to make sense (of things)", and cites Walsh (1996) to point out that "the term design (as it is used in English) covers a wide range of activities: architecture, fashion design, interior design, graphic design, industrial design and engineering design"; while all require creative visualization of ideas to introduce new products and services to the market (Bruce and Cooper, 1997).

**“Make it like a
sunflower”
— Steve Jobs,
CEO, Apple**

(Busch 2010, pp. 20-20) uses IDEO president Tim Brown's definition of the thought process common to all disciplines of design as “a discipline that uses the designer's sensibility and methods to match people's needs with what is technologically feasible and what a viable business strategy can convert into customer value and market opportunity”. Busch adds that this way of thinking, although not a new technique, is becoming accepted in business, but many more suspect that this ‘next big thing’ is just another fad in a long line of fads to hit the business world.

In order to convince otherwise, Naga & Noguchi (2003, pp. 429-437) in a series of experiments tried to understand how designers use this creative visualisation, and developed a model of “a thinking path” for the thought process of design. Using “difficult keywords” (that are sufficiently remote from the object to prolong the creative process) they investigated how designers create various images of a desired design object when stimulated by a design goal consisting of those keywords. They concluded that when solving design problems designers use a thought process that worked by “decomposing” the design goal to a level where its meaning could be related to visual images.

Martin (2009) recognises this particular characteristic but suggests that traditional business thinking excludes and actively discourages the designers way of thinking:

“There is a form of thinking –analytical thinking– that dominates thinking in business. It is deeply rooted in the past; it seeks to extrapolate the past into the future using deductive and/or inductive logic. In opposition to analytical thinking is not design thinking but rather intuitive thinking —knowing without reasoning. Intuitive thinking imagines the future. It is about invention, the most disruptive and unsystematic form of thinking. To me, design thinking is the productive combination of analytical thinking and intuitive thinking.”

Martin argues that in order for business to use design strategically it needs (non-designer) advocates, or “protectors of validity” at the highest corporate levels. Analytical, reliability, and quantifiable results-orientated demands of traditional business processes can stifle new ideas by requiring proof that they will work before being tested out, preventing the “creative leap of the mind” from playing a significant part in future directions ^[1].

High profile companies like IDEO have shown that design is crucial for understanding the market, observing people in real-life situations, visualizing new concepts in use, evaluating these by prototyping, and implementing these concepts in a commercial situation (Kelley & Littman, 2001).

There is a growing acceptance that the traditional way of doing business is no longer effective; that in an environment of digital interaction and social media, where the customer has control over the brand, companies need to find new ways to connect with their customers and to add value by providing a memorable experience (Seymour, 2007).

Schmitt (1997, p.3), in saying that “business processes do not provide value to customers” argues that managers and marketers have forgotten what customers really need and care about, and instead become preoccupied with “quality function deployment”, and “activity-based accounting”, “business process re-engineering” and “cost savings”, “defining core competencies” and “strategic planning”, and that value is easily provided when customers' experiential needs - their aesthetic needs - are satisfied.

Taking slightly different directions to arrive at similar conclusions, (Norman, 2002, pp. 36-42; Pine, 2004; Pine & Gilmore, 1999) argue the importance of designing a memorable experience for customers; —their ideas gaining enthusiastic traction with designers and business people alike, as evidenced by their evergreen popularity on speaking circuits and the best-seller lists.

[1] citing Apple and Google as examples of companies whose ideas would never have been allowed to proceed if subjected to these processes.]

Methodology

While there is much current thinking relating to the relationship between design and business, the quantity of research specific to interior design in this area is small, and therefore limits the scope of this report to provide an accurate statistical overview of the involvement of interior designers in the planning and development of new businesses.

Admittedly, it is beyond the capacity of this report to be able to present a precise account of interior design's role and value in business, but rather to highlight the opportunity for more research. Therefore, a method of research was needed to gain an understanding of the subject where conclusive information is not readily available. Information was examined from a variety of sources using observation, capturing data, reflection and analysis, influenced by Leonard & Rayport's (1997) methods employed in emphatic design.

For example, the comprehensive studies existing in this area relate to 'design' as a broad term grouping the design industry and not exclusively to interior design. This is further complicated by evidence which shows that it cannot be automatically assumed that interior design is always undertaken or provided by an interior designer.

InterTradelreland (2007, p.15) report demonstrates that there is a lack of specialisation among its respondents across the main disciplines of design, where it was found that Interior and Exhibition Design services were also being provided by those who identify themselves as providing services primarily in other disciplines.

For example, Product and Industrial Designers (41%), Fashion and Textiles Designers (63%), Graphic and Communications (28%), Digital and Multi-Media (32%), all claimed to provide Interior and Exhibition Design services; the report concluding that the primary driver for business is not the service type, but the relationship between client and designer. The same report did not include architects and architectural practices, which may also provide interior design services, as "it is harder to link the input of the architect with the added value created for the final consumer of a product or service than for designers working in other disciplines."

A search was conducted for literature both specifically referring to 'interior design', and under the term 'design'. Preference was given to results returning information with a high relevance to interior design, although general design related information (that broadly included interiors) was also examined, where a high relevance was also returned. Authors own university online library database was searched, as well as Google Scholar, the main search engines including Google and Yahoo, using variations on the terms interior* design* and business*. Bibliographies in returned results were also examined, and keywords, references, and links found formed the basis for further searches.

Design industry reports covering different regions ^[2] were examined to try to identify common trends and isolate results that would relate in particular to interior design. The central question of this report was open to professionals equally in design and business categories, and asked through online business networking sites. ^[3] While most of the respondents were involved in design, brand development, and marketing, and provided insightful and passionate responses, it was interesting to note that fewer other business professions chose to respond, highlighting the difference in attitudes and priorities among designers and business people, and this led to further searches for information in this area. ^[4]

^[2] Rep. of Ireland, United Kingdom, Denmark, and European Union.

^[3] e.g. LinkedIn, IIDA, SmallBusinessCan, in start-up, entrepreneur, and design categories.

^[4] [See Appendix]

Findings

43% of businesses who used a designer to add value reported a great impact on competitiveness, compared to 25% of those who did not use a designer.

Companies are becoming aware that the tried and tested methods of selling “faster, better, cheaper” does not work any-more, and realise that design is key to moving away from competing solely on price and gaining new customers by strengthening brands and identities (Czarnitzki & Thorwarth, 2009). Despite this, companies are still slow to bring design into their strategic planning policies. This ‘paradox’ is identified by the finding that, for example, among Irish SME’s 78% think design is important for staying ahead of the competition, yet only 15% plan to significantly increase their investment in it (Centre for Design Innovation, 2007).

This mind-set appears to be the result of relying on traditional business processes that can be measured, even if those methods are not working as effectively any-more, rather than taking a new or different approach to connecting with consumers through design (Martin, 2009; Seymour, 2007).

The case for not using interior design is not vocalised, but instead, can be seen clearly in the reluctance of businesses to use it. For example, only 17% of UK businesses employ an interior designer, despite studies showing that design increases the chances of turnover and employment growth, by 1.8 times.

Businesses get most payback from adding value when they use a designer to do so (Design Council, 2007), and with an increasing body of research proving this to be the case, even where the benefits are appreciated, most businesses still do not actively employ design (Centre for Design Innovation, 2007; Danish Design Centre, 2003; Design Council, 2007; Design Council, 2010; InterTradelreland, 2009; Koostra, 2009).

The reports mentioned (above) defer to the Danish Design Centre (2003) 4-step design ladder model to try to establish where design is used in the strategic planning in business, where:

Step 1 — No Design; Step 2 — Design as Styling; Step 3 — Design as Process; Step 4 — Design as Innovation.

This model allows the level of design maturity in business to be quantified, and the point at which a designer is consulted in strategic planning to be assessed.

Interestingly, results showing the percentage of businesses using design (using the criteria defined in the 4-step model) were similar across all reports, indicating a wider trend in attitudes to design across different regions. Not surprisingly, over 50% used no design or design as styling alone. Company/brand image (54%), communication (47%), customer experience (40%), and competitiveness (43%) are highlighted as areas where businesses reported design to have had a positive impact and was beneficial “to a great extent” when employed in those areas.

However, businesses are unconvinced of the direct influence of design on business performance in exports (21%), turnover (28%), market share (23%), and profit (25%), with employment (17%) and sustainability (18%) scoring particularly low. This indicates that the business approach to design is still largely underdeveloped. Clearly, many businesses are not convinced of design as an investment that will generate a return, especially those businesses competing on cost alone. This further implies that businesses have little confidence in research study reports demonstrating the link between design added value, greater competitiveness, and less reliance on competition through cost (Koostra, 2009).

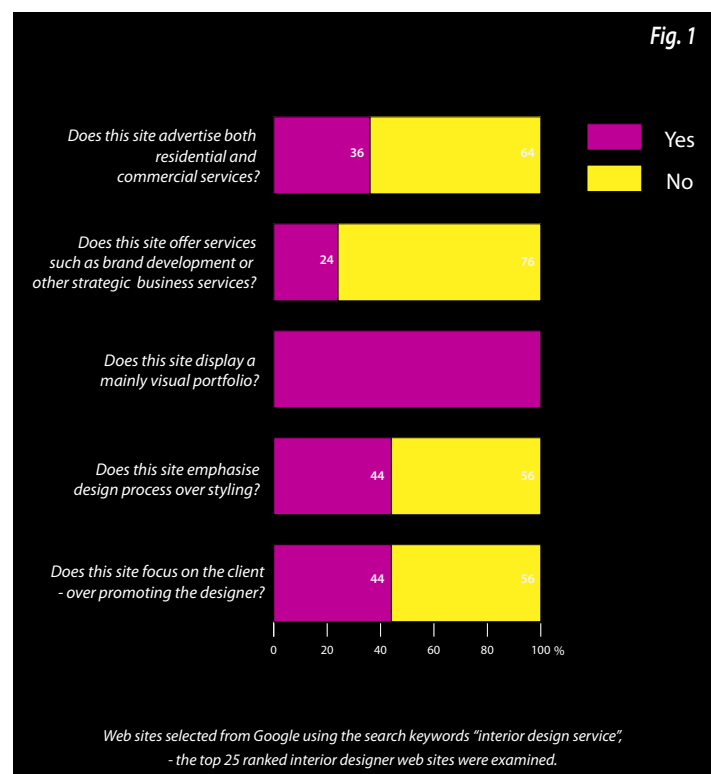
The reasons for differences in attitude and action is puzzling, but suggests a variety of contributing factors, such as; aversion to risk, inadequate support mechanisms, limited innovation and design capability both within the company and amongst designers (Centre for Design Innovation, 2007).

There is also a lack of understanding of the terms 'innovation', 'creativity', and 'design' — the "most used and abused words in business" — due to the association of excelling in these areas with business success (Von Stamm, 2008). Von Stamm (2008, p. xi) explains that not understanding the meaning of these terms leads to confusion:

"While most managers agree that innovation and creativity are essential to ensuring long-term success, many struggle with realising it in their business, and translating it into everyday reality".

Interior designers have the ability to guide this transition between *creative idea* and *implementation*, but may not be as effective conveying this message to the greater business world. Also, as mentioned earlier, the capacity for interior designers to provide effective solutions varies greatly among individual designers and design firms, and often the manner or means designers use to advertise their services do not elucidate these differences.

In order to explore this further, a comparison of interior design web sites was made under the following criteria (*fig. 1*) in order to test an approach that designers generally use when advertising interior design services:



An overview of how interior designers advertise their services was examined, to gain an insight into how potential clients might view their service offerings. Reviewing these sites, it is interesting to note that:

1. 100% used a photo portfolio showing visual examples of past projects.
2. 64% claimed to offer a full range of services to residential and commercial clients, but were in fact offering, without differentiation, the same type of interior design service for residential and commercial situations.
3. 56% could be described as vanity sites promoting the interior designer as a brand, over how they could deliver design solutions for potential clients.

**“I make solutions that nobody wants to problems that don’t exist.”
—Alvin Lustig**

When a business works with a design agency, one in eight (81%) UK businesses think the design industry communicates the value of its services well (Design Council, 2007). This shows that 81% (of the converted) are happy with how design is communicated in the design-client working relationship. However, more research may be needed to discover why more businesses do not use design, and how the value of design can be communicated to the majority still remaining unconvinced.

An analysis of responses gathered from designers and business professionals ^[5] suggests that businesses generally do not consult a designer early in the business planning process, and that design is generally not considered a priority, especially in interiors. Most designers reported that being consulted late in the project had a negative impact on their ability to provide the best outcome for their clients, and that design becomes more styling as the project progresses as there are fewer opportunities to make changes. Commercial designers reported being involved at all stages and prefer to be involved right at the beginning of the formulation of the business concept, but nearly all respondents felt that they should be the first port of call for an entrepreneur for assistance in the development of their business idea.

This would imply that many business owners feel that designers have little to contribute at the idea formation and planning stage of a business, reinforcing their notion of design as superficial and unnecessary exercise that brings little real advantage. This is in stark contrast to Kotler & Rath (1984, pp. 16-21) who recognized that designers are most effective when they are consulted in a strategic role, and that using design to enhance products, environment, communications, and corporate identity is a potent strategic tool to gain a sustainable competitive advantage.

The concept of ‘whole building’ design, where interior designers are consulted as part of a wider design team at the planning stage, is an approach that would involve designers in the earliest stage of the building program. Interior designers are “extremely important in the ‘whole building’ design process and should be contracted at the onset of the project, referred to as the pre-design phase or programming phase, with the other major disciplines, key stakeholders, client, and end-user contacts” (Mazarella, 2010). Although it is not standard industry practice, there is a growing appreciation of the need for this type of integrated approach to building design to reach the best possible project outcome.

For example, the Guinness Storehouse, Dublin became a “victim of its own success” when the amount of visitors to this tourist attraction became too much for the layout of the building. The award winning new layout was designed to accommodate better entry, exit and ticketing facilities, increase floor space by 15%, update branding, guide orientation through the building, and create a memorable visitor experience. A holistic approach to the re-design made sure that the company’s aims to create a unique customer experience were carefully considered, and as a result, had a measurable effect on business and profits (Martello Media, 2010). However, it is unclear whether this ‘unexpected success’ could have been anticipated (in planning for future expansion) by a professional interior designer if consulted earlier in the building’s renovation history (e.g. Brooker & Stone, 2007), especially when dealing with a highly successful, 250 year-old, worldwide brand.

The hotel industry has long recognized the valuable contribution an interior designer can make in the planning stages:

“Even at an early stage ... if public space is not sufficiently dimensioned, an interior designer can take this into consideration at an early stage of the planning process and can optimally utilize and design the available space ... too late a stage, the then already committed architectural design can not be changed, so that an optimal allocation of space as the necessary basis for ambience and atmosphere is no longer possible” (Fidlschuster, 2010)

**“Good design is
serious business”
—A.G. Lafley,
Procter &
Gamble**

The combination of businessman Ian Schrager’s business acumen and celebrity designer Philippe Starck’s sharp eye for spotting a trend has proven a powerhouse combination in the hotel industry. From 1984, Schrager and later Starck (as well as later collaborations with other celebrity designers like Benjamin Noriega Oritz, Marcel Wanders, Andree Putman among others) fuelled the popularity of the boutique hotel, and “since then, boutiques, with their invisible check-in desks, monsoon showers and ‘philosophies’, have become a mainstay of international lifestyle glossies.” (Farrow, 2008)

Interior design has grown on the back of the appeal of high profile celebrity designers, where the reputation of the designer is more valuable as a marketable endorsement of the company, than as a provider of functional design.

Referring to a similar phenomenon – the ‘starchitect’, (Ouroussoff, 2007, p. 1) is more theatrical declaring:

“The pact between high architects and developers, to them, is a Faustian bargain in which the architect is nothing more than a marketing tool, there to provide a cultural veneer for the big, bad developers whose only interest is in wringing as much profit as possible from their projects.”

But, even the celebrity designer has a shelf-life, and their use to marketers will have a limited time-span. Consumers will only trust the celebrity endorsement for as long as their brand remains strong, or until the designer is replaced by the “next hot designer”. Thus the high-profile designer is only as valuable as their current reputation in an image-conscious society (Busch, 2010, pp. 20-20).

Conclusion

This report concludes that interior designers have the ability to contribute positively to the development of businesses at all stages, but may need to further investigate ways in which these service offerings can be structured, enhanced, and communicated more effectively to business. Interior design is not considered essential in business – unless an interior designer has proved their value in other areas such as branding or marketing. Interior designers collectively, have not communicated the value of design to business well, and consequently, businesses view interior design as an expense, and not as designers believe, an investment.

1. Interior designers are not often consulted at the planning stage of a new business, as interior design is considered as more styling than process. This perception is reinforced by interior designers in the way they present design services by focusing on highly visual representations of the end result, rather than on ideation, problem solving, innovation, and creativity in the design process and how these can be practically applied for the benefit of business.

2. Many business professionals appreciate the value that good design can add to a business, but for various reasons, do not engage the services of a designer. These include, financial constraints, lack of available or suitable design expertise, lack of awareness of the designers role, or where business find that they cannot justify spend on aesthetics or on an unfamiliar process that cannot be guaranteed success.

3. Instead of striving for legitimacy by trying to align itself as supplementary to architecture (Havenhand, 2004, pp. 32-42), interior design may need to focus more on becoming a stand-alone profession, with closer association to business and allied professions. There may also be an advantage to this autonomy, by off-loading the architectural mantra of ‘form follows function’ in favour of ‘form *and* function’ encouraging emotion in design where “attractive things work better” (Norman, 2002, pp. 36-42).

“Without an understanding of brand creation, messaging, and strategy, today’s designers are destined to become the hairdressers of tomorrow’s creative environments—great for styling but light on strategy.”
—Harmutt Esslinger, FrogDesign Inc.

Recommendations

4. Interior design does not have a clearly defined, universally accepted unique selling point that can be marketed as essential as a business investment with clear links to profitability. Otherwise, interior design is considered as a business expense. Design, if it was considered an (intangible) asset, therefore having a quantifiable value and appearing on the company balance sheet, would perhaps have business take more interest in introducing it into their business strategy.

1. Interior designers could benefit from research to learn how to communicate the value of interior design as a profession (over self-promotion) more effectively in business environments to provide services to business that are considered essential. By promoting high standards in interior design as a profession, designers are in fact promoting themselves by their association with a clearly defined profession that is recognized, valued, and respected.

2. Broadening the range of services to highlight attributes that are inherent, but not usually associated with interior designers. These may include intangible abilities that designers learn to develop such as using creativity in problem solving, visioning, and the ability to employ both convergent and divergent thinking in unfamiliar situations.

3. Design needs (non-designer) advocates to ensure new ideas are not stifled (Martin, 2009). For design to become accepted or valued in business, design needs advocates at the highest levels in business to protect creative thinking and design when new ideas are confronted with the demands of traditional proof-based analytical processes.

4. A portfolio showing examples of past projects may not be the most effective way to present interior design as a profession not dealing solely with styling. By emphasising the superficial features of surface decoration, focus may be taken from design as a process (or innovation), and by focusing solely on past projects completed to fulfil specific criteria, designers may not be exhibiting their ability to provide unique solutions, or navigate the unknown with creative, innovative, and inspirational design.

5. Business and design are often considered separate disciplines, but in commercial design in particular, they are interdependent in achieving the same end result. Interior designers may benefit from having a comprehensive knowledge of modern business practices.

6. Entrepreneurs consider themselves to be business people, but by taking an idea and turning it into something tangible they are also involved in the process of design. By realising this, they may lend a more willing ear to designers who can demonstrate the value of design, and how innovative design be of “immense value to business” (Caan, 2010) during the concept development, planning and marketing stages.

In 1962 Mogulescu (1962, pp. 44-46) asked:

“Confronted by this abundance of interior design riches, how does the business executive decide? Everybody seems to be a designer. Are there, then, special qualifications by which a truly professional, trained, experienced interior designer can be recognized? Are there standards? How does the executive make judgement?”

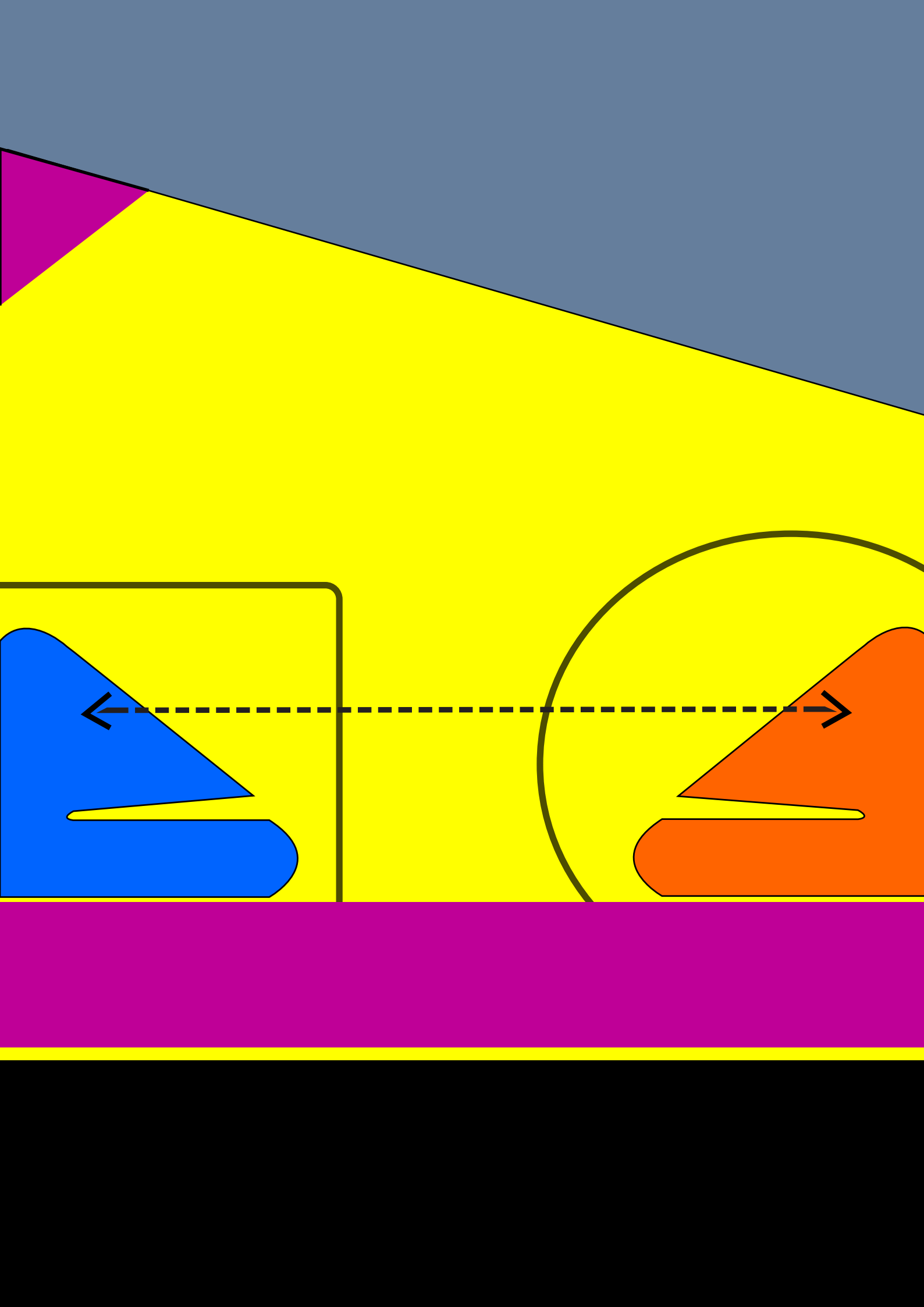
Almost fifty years later the same questions are being asked.

The fragmented nature of the interior design industry, if not addressed, may mitigate against a combined, co-ordinated effort to consolidate a prominent role in the modern business environment. An environment that is becoming increasingly receptive to design, new ideas, and new ways of doing business. An environment where interior designers *can* be at the forefront leading the way.

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Appendix

Question Details:

At what point is a designer consulted in the development of a new business?

This is a question that will have many different answers depending on the design discipline and type of business, but I would mainly like to ascertain the following:

[1] Are designers often consulted, or “brought on board” in the very early stages of developing the business concept/business plan? Do business owners consider that designers have anything to contribute at the idea formation and planning stage?

[2] Are designers generally called in at the latter stages to apply design to an already decided business concept/plan, or a tightly scripted design brief, or just to “put a face” to the business?

Sample of responses:

1. “[1] Usually no. More the exception than the rule. For example, creative peeps can be terrific contributors in open ideation sessions.”
[2] Yes. Plus, the more direction that can be provided at the outset will great aid in developing strategically sound creative ideas/solutions.
It’s truly a risky thing to let the creative folk get involved with planning and strategy. They just get so emotional :-)”
2. “In my experience:
1) Designers are not often consulted in the early stages of business planning. Marketing Strategists, Branding Experts, and the like are. Sell yourself as high up in the strata as fits your expertise.
2) A well-developed business plan is integrated with a thorough marketing plan, which anticipates what kind of “face” the concept will require. In practice, however, design seems to be almost an after-thought for new business masterminds.”
3. “Product designers are a vital part of any product related business and should be brought on-board as early as possible. Not only can their conceptual designs help garner feedback and entice investors, their eventual contributions have literally made companies. Industrial designers create functional and emotional connections that define the customers’ experience with the product. Decisions made early on in the product definition phases can save costs and greatly affect the bottom line. Designers can help raise, save, and make money while providing enormous value to end users.”
4. “I would say it very much depends on the brief or the requirements of the company. If you are pitching for that new business to gain new clients it may well require the designer to be involved from the off set. Then again they may not be needed until there are some technical issues to be resolved and it is time to execute the project. Personally I have been involved both ways, as I now run my own company and still design, I feel clients really like this as an advantage to selling to their needs, by having the design experience in that initial period can really settle thoughts from the start.”
5. “Personally I have been involved at both levels. The best way, for me, is to be involved right from the beginning. I love to know how the business works, how they want to grow etc.
The most successful brands I have helped create have been done this way, but usually these are companies who are already open to new ideas and ways of thinking, and because of that their businesses grow really well.
They take on a designer and treat you as an expert in your field, they want the strategic side, which makes the job a real treat to work on.”

6. "A designer / design thinker / service designer is useful near the start of setting up a business to look at how the processes work, what the consumer would experience and how the design strategy for the business would push the business forwards over the coming years."
I've done a little of this 'human-centered design' and it's far easier to do all this at the start of a business than possibly change things once the business has started. Hope that helps."
7. "If you are running tight on budget and you think you have a great idea, designer is not needed at all. Just have a look at Craigslist. But if your target audience is some kind of designer community you have to have designer first in every aspect of your project.
There is no right or wrong answer here."
8. "My answer to your question from an interior design point of view is you must be there very near the beginning, in particular with commercial spaces. Great spaces are about: Work/function, placement, navigation and these days energy efficiency. 'The Build' is both exterior and interior, regardless of it being a major up-grade or new structure. Good design and education of clients is about design function, so the earlier the better. The spend up front or rather parcelled (a good suggestion) benefits the client.
The interior design is the integrated public face of the business.
If you were a graphic designer, then you can come into the picture very near the end in most cases and have to be creative with existing product/ideas. Mind you in this arena there may be little or no comparative capital (building) 000,000.00 + costs. Hope this should make sense. Be Zen and bend in the wind, be inventive (that's part of your job) be strong and educate your clients when ever you can (while your working with them. Your business is about you, and you give plus, personality, efficiency (cost scheduling), planning and clear guidance (be direct) get the business and get the return business. Cheers! I found your question very well formed for creating responsive comments."
9. "In today's emerging mass of clutter and noise, where a brand has much more visual appeal than it did a decade ago, both scenarios are happening. The question is which is more effective? A company can choose to create its entire business plan and conceptual brand identity and then share this information with the design experts; however, the result is a narrow, limited market share. What some businesses fail to realize, is the design experts work with a wide variety of company brands, strategies and even marketing development. So what happens when you include the input of the design experts? You get the inside on what's circulating, differentiation factors, leading innovation, marketing outlets, etc. Your business plan begins to look a lot more like Apple's latest release "consistent and powerful!"
10. "[1] It really depends on the brain of the project manager :)
But personally, I feel everyone should be involved from day one of project planning. True, designers may have a lesser role in some cases (specially in the beginning), but then they are also good thinkers + there may be some points that will need their expertise.
[2] Shouldn't be done. Although many times clients feel that design is just the "look" of the company. But design (along with the team, research, marketing, advertising, strategy, etc.), makes it wholesome as a brand. Perfection means to take care of everything."
11. "(This answer is going to cover tech products/companies, in markets that are very image conscious (fashion, cpg, medical, etc.) or where design is a significant differentiator, then most of this can be ignored, and the design/designer should play a more/earlier significant role).

In a designer's ideal world, they should be consulted at the very beginning...

However, the business reality is that there tends to be less of a fiscal need to have a designer on board until you're business/product has proven to be successful with early adopters. The psychology of the early adopters allows for 'rough around the edges' type of products, and for them being first to use and test a product that still has some kinks is OK. As the product/service goes more mainstream the need to prove that you are legitimate, or the shift to non-personal selling/marketing, creates the need for a polished image...

Additionally, the growing concept/strategy of Failing Fast or Least Viable Product, where you create just the bare essentials of a product/company to test its viability, means that (quality) design is considered only after it looks like the product would be a success.

Some suggested reading material (covers some of the psychology of the customer, and business strategy of early stage companies):

...and it's worth noting again: if the product or service is for an image-conscious market, ignore all the above."

12. "Great question and one that lead anywhere!
Naturally if you are one of the big boys: Landor; Interbrand; Futurebrand etc...it would seem more the case that scenario 1 applies...with their huge account servicing and 'branding' departments etc...that would rarely otherwise be the case.
However, for the rest of us - it is the latter scenario. Everything becomes last-minute and having to be shoe-horned in...just doing the work means that there is little opportunity to step in front of the client before hand or too few spare hands/ minutes to be able to pre-empt a client or even be considered able to be part of the process.

The "brought on board" bunch means that the clients are large enough themselves to be able to afford the consultancy time and have a department within themselves that is able to focus and handle that aspect ...

Clearly the lower down the scale of the enterprise (the majority), the less likely either is to be the case - budgets are much closer to zero and the owner of the client company would be busy chasing a lot more important things.

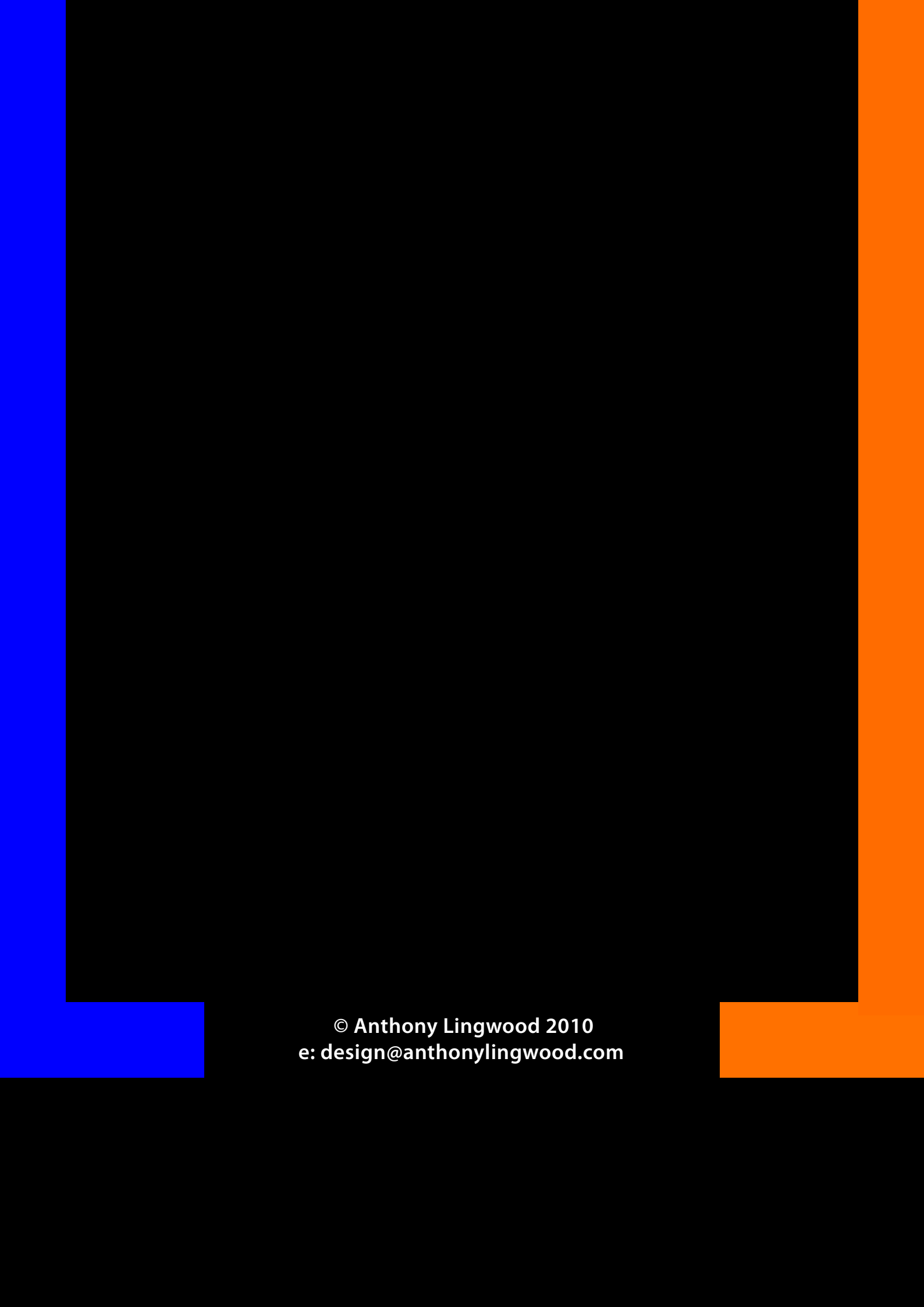
Thank fully I have had a somewhat limited experience of the brought on board aspect - though this was the case since the new CEO had the rare insight to bring an agency into the mix quite early on in the process - but that was a unique case. But it was not so much about bringing me on board to assist with the business plan or to 'consult' on it more like have an early enough understanding of what was being planned to ensure a much longer term visual solution. I was the CI expert - so that is what they listened to me about and briefed me on ...

So mostly scenario 2 has applied ..."

13. "I worked in both capacities but I do find that knowing the business from the beginning aids in creating a visual brand identity for the company. Sometimes those little nuances discussed in a strategy meeting help to spark a concept that will brand your entire company. Jumping in after everything has already been decided doesn't always all for the designer to do what they are paid to do ... which is design. Designers like all business professionals have a certain skills set that allows them to look at things from a different angle than your standard accountant/lawyer/CEO.
I know that I prefer to design from the beginning and help steer the direction of how a company is/should be branded. Luckily I've been able to instil in my clients the value of design and how it can easily escalate their business/sales."
14. "Designers should be brought in at the beginning. We are trained to help bring a brand to life so the more we know, they better. Also collaboration between people in different markets helps increase ideas. Promoting ourselves as strategic planners is a great idea, because (when costs are cut) we are the first on the chopping block because ANYONE can layout a newsletter ... or so they think."
15. "out of my own experience: in the beginning
1) Designers are sometimes or often brought in too late into the process.
Some business owners have the tendency to see a designer only as someone who makes things "look pretty" but it shouldn't be the way. They do have in fact valuable insight into specific things and should be taken seriously. Some business owners do consider designers input and they might have a good ideas for how to diversify revenue streams or create passive income.
2) if designers are called in at a later stage than the business owners vision should be pretty much rock solid. tightly scripted design briefs are horrible if they dictate too much. Honestly, if they know already how e.g. their logo looks like, they should get a book about illustrator and Photoshop and make it themselves. its not about putting a face on a business, its about tailoring the suit for it in collaboration with the client. What else are you hiring the expertise of a designer?"
16. "I like to come in and work with the potential business owner as soon as they come up with a basic business plan. It is best for all businesses to brand themselves early on so they have a unique and original identity. A designer can help express the companies philosophy through graphic imagery."
17. "Business is all about having a market and a niche. Once they got that we can get all creative! Super duper! Many below the line designers need to be mini marketers too. That's what will make your work stand out and help make a business become a success. If it wasn't for below the line designers, who can engage in a bit of creative thinking and strategy, everyone would use Vista Print - or worse still be 'designers'!!!!"
18. "Both. It depends on the amount of money a client has and control problems they bring to the table, too. It took me more than 6 years to hire a designer. And looking back today, it was one of my many mistakes."
19. "[1a] Often designers are not consulted in the early stages. Sometimes they are not needed in the early stages, although having a designer involved in your naming process even if peripherally is really valuable. If your company is a retail business where signage, visibility and consumer brand recognition are vital then getting a graphic designer involved early on is imperative.
[1b] Whether business owners consider designers making valued contributions in the idea formation and planning phase I cannot really say. A designer with a solid understanding of marketing is an asset when looking at branding, product packaging, etc. and may have a number of innovative ideas that can change the way the product or service is launched.
[2] All three in my experience. You get the least value working backwards in your list. If I

could not afford to have a designer on board from the beginning, I would call a few designer's in give them the business concept/plan and then have them construct a scripted design brief. Their project brief will illustrate whether they truly understand and are in sync with the direction. This separation should give them some room to generate ideas outside of your own and allow you to leverage the maximum value from the design process with a more modest project budget."

20. "If I could rephrase the question: when is the ideal time to consult a designer?
A basic axiom in design is: Form follows function.
I've known frustrated interior designers who are asked by (Fortune 100) clients to come up with far more than just the form...they're asked to be responsible for business concept and plan (but only get paid for designing the "form"). I think you'd agree that this is beyond the scope of what you really want to design. Design that the client will like and be able to work with should be built on a firm foundation. There's plenty of advanced planning that should go on to have enough information that a designer can use for direction. Of course, from a sales viewpoint, the sooner you're involved in the project the better. Capturing a client at the very inception of the plan can let you help design the project so that it's more cost effective, and at the same time ensure your place in the project."
21. "I think is relative, proportional to the relevancy of design for the business developer and I will also include cost considerations. Like you mentioned it is very particular to industry. Assurance on the plausible success of the concept or business idea to be developed is of high importance before considering any major investment, e.g. like bringing in a designer. I will also consider, specially these days, that tasks such as business viability, market research, etc., will supersede "design" in most cases.
A matter of efficiency as well, without plan, the design task becomes a sink-hole of attention, highly subjective. It requires too much attention at the beginning if plan is flawed. Therefore what is to be designed? Is it tangible or intangible?
A space, product, service, process, experience or a drug.
It's their business; they know better and surely appreciate the insight and experience a designer when it has advantage at the critical points on a business development. Relevancy (Importance), Economics and Efficiency, yet again it depends on the designer."
22. "I find that if I can be brought in at the beginning of a business development, we actually steer each other in refining the business brand direction. I have been able to both offer helpful advice to clients as they plan their businesses from the start, and also receive valuable information from them that allows me to better capture their brand in a strong business logo and identity."
23. "Ideal situation is point [1] but reality is point [2]. That's also because most designers do not want to understand the 'business' aspect of *their* design work."
24. "Great questions!
[1a] If a designer has a proven track record of visionary and strategic thinking, then yes they are brought in on what are called pre-design or visioning, problem seeking sessions. Our training as right brain problem solvers coupled with some good business acumen is a great combination of skills
[1b] Again those interior designers that utilize the potential of the creative solving/design process to predict and address planning issues are in demand.
[2] Well yes many are and that is fine. But to your previous queries there is a great big world of opportunity for interior designers to become the pre-eminent profession for the planning of any type of facility or business. We CAN BE included in the forefront of any discussion involving a structure or facility to house a human function. After all people work and live in the interior space right?
We as a profession need to grasp this opportunity – and soon."
25. "I am not sure of the statistics, but in theory, it would be a good idea to bring on a designer early who can help formulate the vision or branding of a place or business. Often times, a business knows what they want as an end result, but not how to get there. A designer can help show them the way. IDEO is one place that puts this theory into action. You may want to check out their web site.
Businesses are just starting to recognize that designers/visionaries will help their bottom line. They have recognized via graphics/logos/branding. We, as interior designers, still have a long way to go to have them realize this opportunity."



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