The Power of Design

In his latest book 'The Steve Jobs Way - iLeadership for a New Generation', Jay Elliot recalls the importance that Apple, the makers of the iPod and iPad, place on good design;

'He wore a Porsche wristwatch, again chosen because he was so in awe of the museum-quality design. Whenever anyone noticed the watch and admired it, Steve (Jobs) would take it off his wrist and present it as a gift, a way of saying "Congratulations on recognizing excellent design." Minutes later he would have an identical one on his wrist again: He kept a box of them in his office so he could give them away… At around $2000 a piece'

It sounds an extravagant way of rewarding those that recognise good design, doesn't it? But who would dare argue that design is not one of the foundations of Apple's success which has led to Apple being recently voted as 'The Most Important Brand in the World'?

Yet, in these days of austerity and cost-cutting, design is often the first sacrificial lamb to the slaughter. It's true that design can, sometimes, increase costs but this is often said without first understanding the payback of good design. Good design, be it structural design, graphic design or any other type, greatly increases loyalty to a brand or product. It helps to give brands an identity and, in turn, the brands with the greatest identity reduce the choice of the consumer. Seriously, who would buy an MP3 player that doesn't carry the Apple logo? As they say in America – 'it's about having skin in the game'.

Of course, we aren't all working in the glamorous markets of consumer electronics or designer goods. But this doesn't mean that design should immediately be taken out of the thinking when launching or re-launching a product or brand.

In fact, I believe that good quality design (and remember, quality design can reduce overall costs and increase revenues at the same time) is more important than ever. In a world of me-too products and ever increasing price competition, it is the role of packaging to really communicate the value of a brand, and engender consumer loyalty. As we know, once consumers are loyal to a product or brand, the price pressure that we all try to remove ourselves from does, in some ways, disappear. After all, I don't think there's a retailer on earth that ever decided to stop selling the iPod, did they?

So, even in these difficult times, we should, I believe, continue to invest in design and encourage, nurture and appreciate creativity as these are the foundations of long-standing success rather than short-term sales. Ask Steve Jobs. After all, Apple wasn't exactly an overnight success story. And while you're there, tell him how much you like his wristwatch….

Best,

Steve