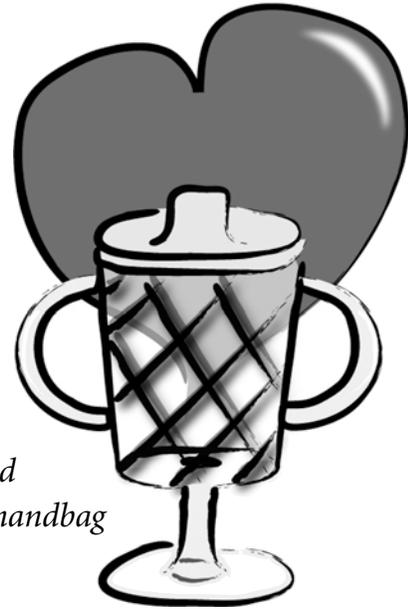


Design with Heart

by Robyn Waters

As good design enhances life, it merges with desire and touches the soul, according to Robyn Waters. In the “claustrophobia of abundance,” businesses should consider this connection essential to sales and growth. To facilitate such links, Waters highlights a design process and designers who synthesize a focus on the head (need), the handbag (value and price), and the heart (desire).



Robyn Waters, Founder and President, RW Trend, LLC

“The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing.”

—Blaise Pascal

What inspires design? A need for profits? A quest for fame, notoriety, or market leadership? A desire to beautify?

Where does good design come from?

Consider for a moment the obscure cocoa bean. Would you believe the cocoa bean inspired one of our society’s most timeless and recognized designs? In designing the iconic Coca-Cola bottle, Swedish immigrant Alexander Samuelson—an engineer employed by the Root Glass Company in Terre Haute, Indiana—found his inspiration

from an illustration of a cocoa bean in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is intended to resemble a ship. Its brilliantly reflective titanium panels call to mind fish scales, echoing the other organic and fish-like forms that commonly occur in Gehry’s designs.

Did a bug inspire Ferdinand Porsche when he designed the first low, light, aerodynamic, and economical VW Beetle?

The first Vespa was produced in 1946 and became an instant success. When Enrico Piaggio first saw the scooter his designers had developed, he

remarked “Sempra una Vespa!” thus instantly naming the design. Vespa is Italian for wasp. Did an insect inspire the design of that first Piaggio scooter?

For Arne Jacobsen, there isn’t any question which came first, the chicken or the egg. Jacobsen’s Egg Chair was inspired by the elegance and beauty of a hen’s egg. The chair is an example of the movement in design that adapts organic forms in such a way as to bring comfort into our living spaces.

Mother nature versus human nature

I suppose one could say that nature inspired these designs. Perhaps that’s true. But I think it was more than just Mother Nature at work.

I think human nature played a big part in the ultimate success of each of these examples. In fact, I think human nature triumphed. With all of these products, it’s the *heart* that ultimately helped them to become icons in our lives. Think about it.

Coca-Cola once professed that it wanted to “teach the world to sing, in perfect harmony.”

The Guggenheim Bilbao is more than a well-designed venue to house modern art. The museum virtually resurrected a dying city in the rust belt of Spain and brought it to world prominence.

The original purpose of the Volkswagen Beetle was to be a car ordinary folks could afford to buy and drive.

The Vespa was designed to help Italians get around a war-torn, war-ravaged country. In post-WWII Italy, the roads were blown up and gasoline was in short supply. Believe it or not, the inexpensive Vespa could accommodate a family of four and get them where they needed to go, in great style.

The Egg Chair was designed to welcome travelers to the lobby of the Royal Hotel in Copenhagen and to help them feel at home, even if they were half a world away from their homes.



Coca-Cola



VW Beetle



Egg Chair



Vespa



Guggenheim Museum

I think good design ultimately delivers more than function or beauty. It even does more than bring beauty to the bottom line. Good design makes you feel good... it makes your life better. Good design touches your heart. And when it touches your heart, design and desire become one.

Need versus desire

Never before in human history have consumers faced so many products... or so many choices. Global prosperity is fueling economic growth and mammoth consumption. The Internet has spawned a global marketplace. Increasingly

sophisticated consumers now have the ability to seek out and purchase whatever they need. There are almost no limits to what any of us can locate and purchase.

Some pundits say that we are living with a *claustrophobia of abundance*—meaning we have too much stuff, stuff that doesn't always mean a whole lot. Who really needs

another pair of jeans? A TV with a bigger screen? Another cup of expensive coffee?

To add to the complexity, we've reached a point where manufacturing and distribution methods are mostly perfected. That means function and value have become minimal expectations for every product we consider.

Professor Robert Hayes of the Harvard School of Business said a few years back, "Fifteen years ago, companies competed on price. Today it's quality. Tomorrow it's design." Well, tomorrow is here. Design has become a powerful advantage in the business arsenal.

But, if our needs have been met and the quality improved to where everything is good and the price is such that most can afford the good stuff, isn't it time to ask ourselves this basic question: What is it that we *want*, not just need? What will keep us shopping, buying, and coming back for more? What will keep the retail world ka-chinging?

The answers to these questions aren't always found in the marketplace. Numbers won't show

you the way, either. Statistics and analysis can't really point us in the direction of *what's next*. A number or statistic is a measurement telling us what's *already happened*.

To answer the question: What is it that customers want next? I believe you have to first determine what's important. You have to go *inside*, into the hearts and minds of consumers, to understand what they value... what's important to them. That's the basis of my *trend from the inside out* philosophy.

My trend philosophy was developed as a result of more than 30 years in the retail trend and product development world. The first half of my career was spent in the department-store world, cultivating high fashion and trying to convince *fashionistas* everywhere that in order to be truly cool they needed to be on trend and if they wanted to remain hip, they had to constantly be on the lookout for the *next big thing*.

I began to revise my philosophy when I went to work for Target. When I joined the company, there were five people in the trend department and the company had \$3 billion in sales. Three years later I was named trend director, the company had achieved \$10 billion in sales, and my department consisted of eight people, including our first designer.

A few years later I was named vice president of trend, design, and product development. We were growing fast, and over the years I hired many more designers, including graphic designers, CAD designers, industrial designers, technical designers, and clothing and fashion designers. By the time Target reached \$48 billion in sales, there were more than 100 designers and trend managers working in design and product development, and Target had become a nationally recognized brand that customers loved.

The 3H design theory

My 3H design theory is a basic part of my *trend from the inside out* philosophy. I developed it as a way of explaining to young designers the three main reasons why a customer would come in to Target to buy something that they were designing.

The *head* is about *need*: I'm out of toothpaste, time to buy. The *handbag* is about value and

*Never before
in human history
have consumers faced
so many products...
or so many choices.*

price: It's on sale, so I'd better stock up. The *heart* is about desire: I *love* that and I have to have it.

When it was still a small, regional discounter, Target realized that in order to differentiate itself from the competition it would need to embrace a strategy other than lowest price. It knew the economies of scale realized by the sheer size of WalMart wouldn't be an attainable goal. Design became the ultimate differentiator, the secret sauce in a simple formula that reframed the discount retail landscape and turned Target into the *upscale discounter*.

The formula is simple—I view it as a three-legged stool. Target's mission is to be trend-right, guest-focused, and design-driven. (Note: Target calls its customers *guests*, in the Disney tradition.) Trend-right comes out of Target's department-store heritage. Notice I didn't say *trend-forward*. The trend has to be interpreted and translated into something that makes sense for guests' lives.

Guest-focused means that everything Target does should focus on seeing things from the guest's perspective. Target never tries to preach to its customers; instead it seeks to surprise and delight them. The company did that by learning more about its guests than just their zip codes, ages, and income levels. A concerted effort was made to really know and understand the lives of customers: what was important, what really mattered, and which issues were challenging them on a day-to-day basis.

At Target, design became a driving factor in the owned-brand product development process. It was about much more than form or function, or cutting out costs. Design was the tool used to help translate a trend into something fun and meaningful that would inspire desire, not just fulfill a need.

Target was also ahead of trend in understanding and embracing the idea that a logo could become a *lovemark*. The idea that you could love a brand wasn't new; what *was* new was the idea of embracing that concept as a design strategy. The Sign of the Times campaign ultimately put Target on the national map by showcasing its commitment to great design and stamping the brand indelibly as a lovemark in the hearts and

minds of its guests. Target continues that tradition today with its Design for All campaign. By leveraging great design with a lot of heart, Target became known affectionately as *Tarzhay*.

The Starck reality sippy cup

One of the strategies Target used to showcase its commitment to great design was to develop unique partnerships with well-known designers and showcase their exclusive products in the stores. Michael Graves was a landmark first, and many others have followed.

When Target embarked on the Starck Reality Design Project with world-famous designer Philippe Starck, none of us really knew what to expect. As the head of the design department, I knew we'd learn a lot about the technical world of design. But I had no idea we'd learn so much about the *heart*.

One of the first products Stark proposed was a sippy cup, one of those sturdy, unspillable cups with a lid that kids can drink from without messing up the kitchen table or spilling milk onto the new sofa. Most parents consider sippy cups a standard piece of child-rearing equipment... a *need*.

The design that Starck presented was unique, to say the least. It resembled a clear, cut-crystal, double-handled loving cup on a pedestal. Initially the buyers were hesitant to even consider the design. It looked so impractical sitting on the pedestal, as though it were *more* likely to spill, not less.

To convince buyers to go forward with the counterintuitive design, Starck first demonstrated that if the vessel did tip or was knocked over, the liquid wouldn't spill. Therefore the *head* was satisfied; the product was useful and it worked. Because we were Target, the design, although chic, could still be made inexpensively and retail for \$3.49—still a value for the *handbag* test.

It was Stark's passionate belief that every little girl should feel like a princess when she drank from the sippy cup, just as Mommy does when

*The idea
that you could love a
brand wasn't new;
what was new was
the idea of embracing
that concept as a
design strategy.*

she sips champagne from finely cut crystal. Ultimately, he convinced the merchants to think with their *hearts* about this merchandising decision, and the design moved forward into production.

The sippy cup was displayed on the aisle end-caps and featured in fashion editorials; it ultimately became an icon for the entire Starck Reality Design Project. By leveraging great design that connected with the hearts of Target shoppers, a great product was delivered with a lot of buzz and a big Wow factor.

Target isn't the only company to leverage the idea of design with heart to deliver profits and

delight customers. Apple is another great company that has consistently delivered on this equation.

There are many Apple/Steve Jobs stories. My favorite is Jobs talking about the Mac OS X. When he was asked what distinguished the OS X operations system from other operating systems on the market, he reportedly didn't utter a single word about megahertz or

gigabytes, but instead replied: "We made the buttons on the screen look so good you'll want to lick them."

Hmmmm.... Need or desire? Isn't it interesting that the literal translation of the French term for window shopping, *leche-vitrines*, is *window-licking*? Window shopping is about dreams and desire. And that's what design with heart is about too.

Heart and soul

A chair must be relaxing. A telephone must be comfortable. A toy must be playful. No doubt it takes design expertise to accomplish these things. But to design a product with heart, you need a designer with soul.

My first book, *The Trendmaster's Guide*, is a simple guide that shows how anyone can become a trendmaster. It's an alphabetical tour of my personal trend philosophy. The letter S is for *soul*.

What is soul? How do you put it into a product? Unfortunately, there is no formula for soul. Products with soul can be big or small, useful or frivolous, cheap or expensive, simple or fancy, elegant or exotic. You can't measure, flow-chart, dictate, or expedite soul (much to the chagrin of Six Sigma black belts). Soul is one of the main ingredients that put the heart we all love into our products.

Charles Handy, the pre-eminent British management guru, said, "Soul is one of those concepts that, like beauty, evaporates when you try to define it, but like beauty it is instantly recognizable when you meet it." Products designed with soul are easy to fall in love with and much sought after in a marketplace awash with mediocrity.

Hiring designers with soul should be a top priority for any company looking to raise the love quotient of their product. Finding them may be challenging. My advice is to look for designers with passion—those who see a world of possibilities as opposed to those who believe there's only one right way to design something.

How to spot a designer with soul? They tend to have voracious appetites for knowledge and a relentless curiosity. They aren't afraid to walk in other worlds, and they aren't afraid to show their enthusiasm and their emotions either.

Marking to the heart

Once you've unleashed the power of design with heart into your product development process, it's important to make sure your customers find out about what you've accomplished. In order to do that, you don't necessarily have to take out a full-page ad in the *New York Times* or unleash a flurry of press releases to the media. Word of mouth will spread infectiously as a result of the genuine enthusiasm generated about your product. But as a marketer, how do you talk to your customer in a heartfelt way and share what you've accomplished?

I believe you need to reframe how you think and talk about your product. Instead of listing features and benefits or plastering a giant price point in the headline, think about how you can reach your customers' hearts with your message.

Pampers was first to market with a practical

Hiring designers with soul should be a top priority for any company looking to raise the love quotient of their product.

and affordable disposable diaper. It wasn't necessarily glamorous, but it was well designed, functional, and worth the price. The marketing message was simple: Pampers makes moms happy.

When Kimberly Clark launched Huggies, Pampers had a 75 percent market share. KC added a lot of features and benefits to set the product apart from the competition. Huggies offered a better fit as a result of design improvements such as elastic leg holes and Velcro closures, and greater function as a result of better absorbency. Although the product improvements were significant, KC knew that the competition would eventually catch up and even out the playing field.

The smartest thing KC did when it created its marketing message was reframing Pampers's original value equation to take the heart into consideration. Yes, Pampers made *mothers* happy, but Huggies made *babies* happy. Just imagine how that made mom feel! Even the name Huggies implies something soft, loving, and wonderful for babies.

The stakes were effectively raised from a consideration of the next design innovation or technological improvement that would make mom's life easier to what was really important to mom—her baby! Huggies came from behind and ultimately surpassed Pampers as the leading disposable diaper on the market.

Another example of reframing your message to market to the heart is the story I once heard about the London Underground. For years, ridership on the Tube, and on the suburban commuter rail system, had been declining, even while London's streets became more and more crowded, parking spaces became harder to find, and pollution levels skyrocketed.

Transportation authorities knew they had to redesign their product to entice riders back to mass transportation. They set to work, cleaning up the graffiti, installing wi-fi in the cars, offering designer coffee in the newly remodeled café dining cars of the commuter trains, and improving overall efficiency and reliability.

They announced these design improvements with a big media campaign that trumpeted: We get you to work faster! The results? Nothing dramatic happened. Ridership levels remained virtually flat, despite the improvements.

After doing a little research and talking to their desired customers, the authorities developed a different approach to their marketing message. They now trumpeted: We get you *home* faster. Ridership went up dramatically. Why? It was the same cars on the same tracks going the same direction, back and forth, all day, every day.

The new message was a success because it got to the heart of the matter and focused on what was really important to the customer. What really mattered to them was getting home faster, to their families and to their lives. Getting to work on time was a given, a need. But getting home faster was a bonus, and a desired outcome as far as the heart was concerned.

Sense and sensibilities

Today, when a business sets out to design something new, it is often designed around a hard goal—taking into account form and function, materials, desired price points, production capabilities, and necessary profit margins. That only makes sense.

But I believe we have to look beyond the statistics and the numbers and appeal to other sensibilities, such as our emotions. I know that's an unpopular statement in today's numbers- and results-driven world. But I believe that things other than numbers can measure results. I like to quote W.C. Fields: "Statistics are like bikinis. What they reveal is important, but what they hide is vital." Those numbers may be hiding what's really important—like the way a product makes you feel.

Design with heart, I believe, goes beyond what is possible given the numbers, and surpasses it. Tom Peters says, "Design is the fundamental soul of a manmade creation; it's why we *love* something!" These days, if you want to thrive, not just survive in the crowded marketplace, you need to find ways to put *heart* into your designs, and *soul* back into the dollar sign. That's what design with heart is all about.

Robyn Waters can be reached by email robynwaters@rwtrend.com or visit her website www.rwtrend.com. ■

Reprint #06181WAT16