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Left: Fruit bar LOOP by SIGNCE, see Housewares Showcase starting on page 52.



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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

SO, YOU SAY YOU WANT

In the last century industrial designers gave form to products.
In this century they will give form to experiences.

In our recent survey of IDSA members, *Innovation* came out as the runaway number-one membership benefit. And so it should, as the critical, thought-provoking mouthpiece of IDSA. In other parts of the survey, IDSA fell way short of members' expectations. As we head into the next decade, we are going to raise the bar on everything we do, starting with the above thought about the future of our profession in a world run by a global economy and, for the most part, global design thinking.

Is there a reason for this trend? Of course! A large, technology-driven social revolution is underway that we need to frame our design thinking around in order to become a more important contributor to positive change in the world.

To understand how we can do this, we need to first place our profession in the context of sociocultural history. There have been three great sociocultural revolutions—the Agricultural, Industrial and Information/Knowledge revolutions. These revolutions do not stop and start in sequence; they run in parallel with staggered starting times. We are 30–40 years into the Information Revolution, which is equivalent to the 1880–1890 period of the Industrial Revolution. The automobile had just been invented, flight was a few years off, but the great growth engine of steam-driven machinery that powered the early phase of the revolution was fully implemented. Enormous change had happened, but still it looked nothing like the waning stages of this revolution by the 1980s!

And so it is today with the Information Revolution. The great engine of this revolution so far, the microchip, is fully implemented and becoming pervasive in all objects—from simple toothbrushes, books and musical instruments to medical diagnostic equipment. Even more fundamental per-

haps is that all of these devices are connecting to the Internet to become part of a much larger information system. Our made world is undergoing massive change.

And therein lies the issue. There is no grand plan in a sociocultural revolution. The future is shaped by those who do something about defining it today, tomorrow and every day from now on.

In order to successfully create experiences on the connected information infrastructure, we need a new framework for design and its contribution to the world, one that embraces the Information Revolution and provides a clear view of how all designers can contribute to building the brave new information-based society in a manner that is engaging, useful, sustainable and human-centric.

Preparing the design profession to lead the implementation of the Information Revolution is our first priority. Design speaks to the world through so many organizations that we reduce the power of our voice to business, government and the public to a whisper from many corners of the room. The following model for the design profession provides a unifying structure. It provides a lens through which all design disciplines can view their contributions to society, and a common core of information that we all have to deal with and collaborate on. If it is accepted it would provide a basis for design to speak with one loud unified voice.

Today design mainly gives shape to the physical man-made world, but that is changing because of the influence of information and electronics. Imagine the design profession as a pie divided into three slices. Each slice represents a different field of design—objects, communications and spaces. Looked at from a business perspective, objects, communications and spaces would look like this: creating

A REVOLUTION?

value propositions, communicating value propositions and spaces to make, sell and use value propositions. The inner core of the new design pie would be represented by information, the common building block of most designed outputs in the future. On the outside edges of the pie exists the realm of tangible, visible objects—books, posters, products, buildings, interiors, equipment, automobiles—the physical output of today's design makers. This level of design represents the vast physical design output of the Industrial Revolution. The core represents the Information Revolution.

So far, as a profession, we have dealt with the design of things on the outer crusty edge of the pie; there has been little interconnectivity between objects, communications and spaces. The unfolding Information Revolution will force a more fundamental change on design (i.e., all objects, communications and spaces will gain intelligence and become driven, controlled and interfaced using information as opposed to mechanics such as printed words, levers or dials.) Information will become the common core of the design pie.

In order to respond we will need a new set of common design skills to deal with information for all the design professions. These skills could be interaction, experience design, design for sustainability, design thinking, brand design, design management and, last but not least, design making. Making objects, communication devices and spaces will still be required, but the greater value and benefits will come from the connection of information and the translation of information into useful tangible benefits—the output of design thinking.

This new model implies changes for design education,



The field of design in the 21st century—a unified view.

design's role in business and design's role in society. Whereas during the Agricultural Revolution it was the farmer who was the interface and control point between mankind and the land, and during the Industrial Revolution it was the engineer who was the interface between mechanical power amplification and mankind, in the Information Revolution there is a very good case for design being the interface and control point between information and mankind.

The first interesting experiments of the Information Revolution are well underway—the Internet, the iPod

(Internet portable), the Kindle, digital information-driven billboards, the new digitally-skinned Yas Marina Circuit Hotel in Abu Dhabi and many more. For anyone with one eye on the future there is little doubt about the direction we are headed for the next 20–50 years. The question is rather, how will we choose to react to it? Embrace it or resist it? The answer to that question will define the position we assume as a profession in creating it. Do we want to lead it or go forward resisting change and clinging to the notion of an object-based industrial past?

Using the above model as a reference point, it is clear that we will always need design makers; however, in addition to this, the Information Revolution will require a greater contribution from design thinking, collaboration and the creation of sustainable intangible value than we are presently focused on as a profession. This is why I believe we will give form to experiences this century.

Our leading consultancies already count “product design” as less than half their output. In a world where connectivity and information are becoming more important, how is your thinking changing to meet the challenge?

—Clive Roux, IDSA
IDSA Executive Director



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