

QUARTERLY OF THE INDUSTRIAL DESIGNERS SOCIETY OF AMERICA **SPRING 2018**

INNOVATION

Innovation On Innovation

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QUARTERLY OF THE INDUSTRIAL DESIGNERS SOCIETY OF AMERICA **SPRING 2018**

INNOVATION[®]



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INNOVATION ON INNOVATION

21 Design in the Context of Innovation

By Brian Roderman, FIDSA
Guest Editor

22 Crossing the Chasm

By Brian Roderman, FIDSA, and
Luke Jordan, IDSA

26 Innovation on a Wednesday Morning

By Raleigh Gresham

30 Meeting the Mobility Demands of the Future

By Todd Summe

34 *Why It's Insights, Not Ideas, That Truly Drive Innovation: The Innovation Myth*

By Jonathan Dalton, IDSA

37 The Art of Collaboration

By Luke Jordan, IDSA, and
Kate Whitney, S/IDSA

41 Brainstorming Tools Begetting Brainstorming Tools

By Daily Gist

42 The Experience Revolution

By Brian Roderman, FIDSA, and
Kate Whitney, S/IDSA

FEATURES

19 IDSA Sketchbook

Sponsored by 3M

46 *Dinnerware You Can Print: Dine with Design*

By Herb Velazquez, IDSA

IN EVERY ISSUE

6 Chair's Report

By Megan Neese, IDSA

7 IDSA HQ

By Chris Livaudais, IDSA

8 From the Editor

By Mark Dziersk, FIDSA

11 Design Defined

By Scott Stropkay

13 Beautyity

By Tucker Viemeister, FIDSA

15 A Look Back

By Tsai Lu Liu, IDSA

45 Book Review

By Mark Dziersk, FIDSA

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Left: Dine with Design. See p. 46.

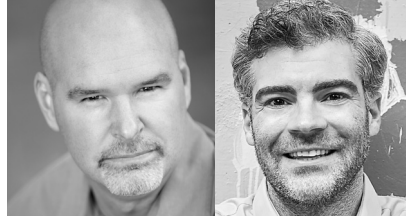


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Advertisers' Index

- c3 IDSA Featured Firms
- 18 IDSA Membership
- c2 International Design Conference 2018
- 4 International Design Conference 2018
- c4 LUNAR
- 1 Tactile



By **Brian Roderman, FIDSA**, and **Luke Jordan, IDSA**
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CROSSING THE CHASM

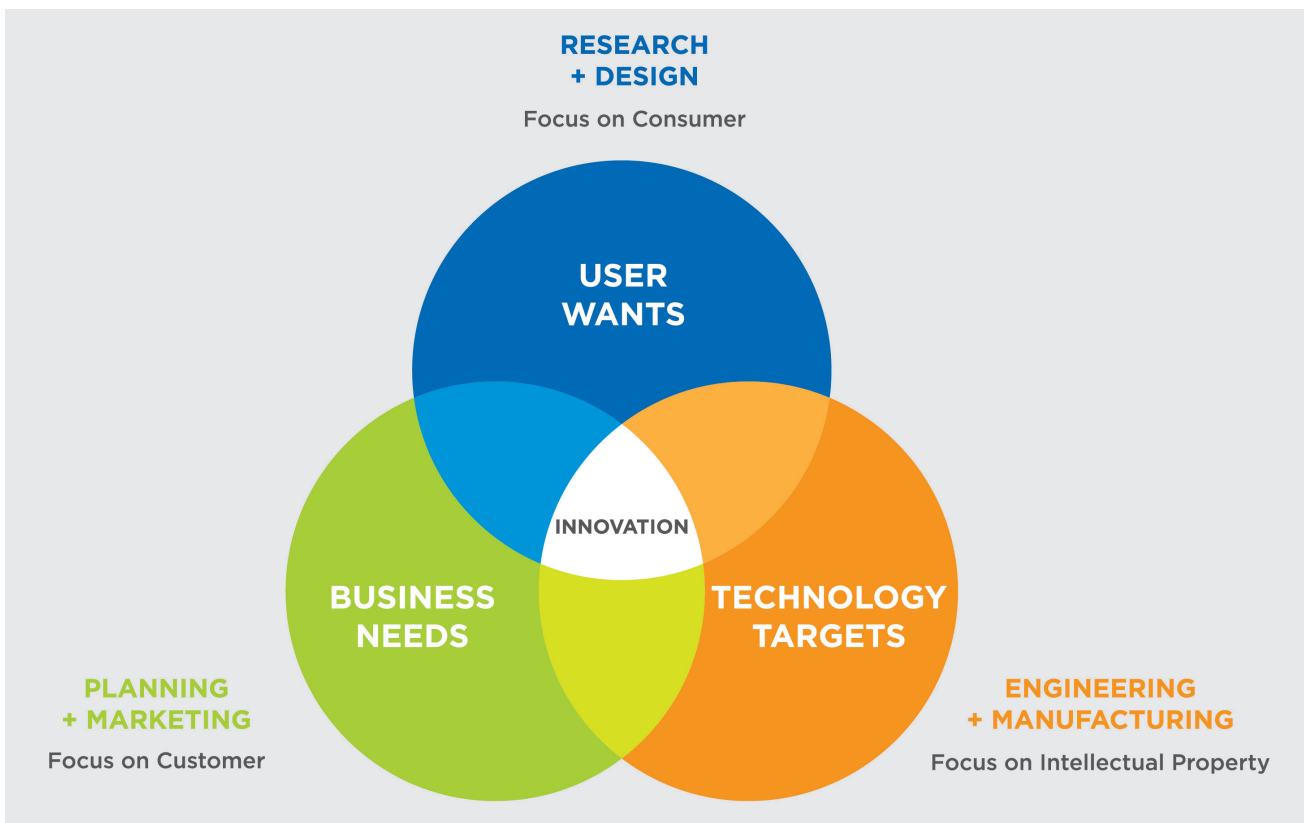
The days of the lone inventor toiling away in their garage to build the next big thing are gone. Modern innovation happens in multidisciplinary teams that represent all types of people and roles.

Balanced Innovation

First, let's focus on the traditional role of the designer. In the design process, the primary focus is the user—on the needs and wants of those receiving (or using) our product or service. Typically, designers are trained to build and protect the user of the solution or system. We tend to focus on human concerns like pain points, usability,

aesthetics, work flow and feel. This is practiced in methodologies like qualitative research, design thinking and human-centered design, which are intended to represent the user in the organization.

But in innovation, the picture looks different. The user wants are still a priority, but the innovator must balance them



Innovation lives at the balance point of business needs, technology targets and user wants.

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Brian Roderman, FIDSA, president of IN2 Innovation, has worked as a design and innovation consultant for more than 30 years.

A frequent public speaker, he is active with IDSA, having served six terms on the national Board of Directors. He was recently recognized as an IDSA Fellow and one of 50 Notable IDSA Members. ■ **Luke Jordan, IDSA**, is an innovation strategist for IN2 Innovation, and heads their Atlanta office. Along with his expertise in strategic innovation and design, he leads IN2's corporate training initiatives, teaching creativity-, innovation-, and experience-centric content. Jordan is also the Chapter Chair for IDSA in Atlanta.

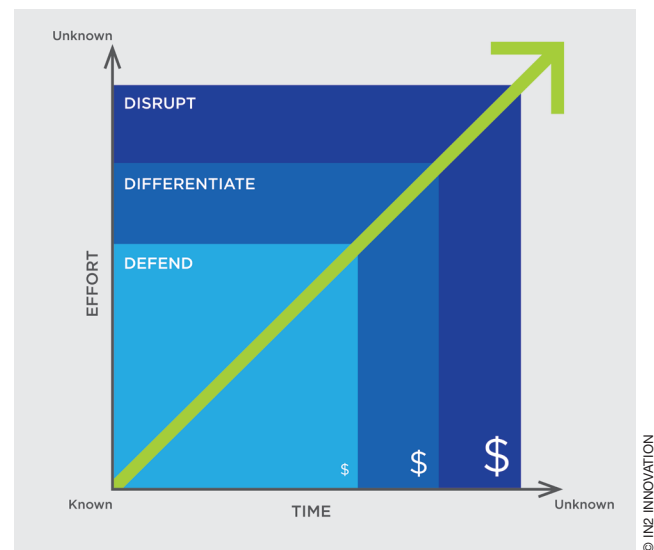
against the company's overall strategies and priorities—referred to here as business needs—and an understanding of the technical challenges in creating unique intellectual property, or technology targets. Before an innovative solution can be sold to the consumer, it must be sold to a business, and it must be executed by technology specialists who ensure that it can actually be built.

The key word here is *balance*, with all three circles holding equal weight. Successful innovation lives right at the center. For designers, leading innovation means not only representing the user bubble but also helping the team find the balance point between business needs, technology targets and user wants (BTU). We represent this balance in our BTU map (left).

While this is a pretty simple concept, we find that the big struggle in innovation lies in maintaining this balance throughout a project, from inception through launch. Designers can help lead by understanding the core priorities of the business and technology teams.

For the business, how does the innovation initiative align with the strategic mission of the company? Granting the appropriate authority and funding to advance an initiative often requires a leap of faith (i.e., a risk) by company leadership. Often, resources are limited, and this new initiative might constrain other activities. And once the solution begins to form, sales and marketing need to align to launch the 360-degree brand campaign to support the goal. This covers everything from the social platforms to the media distribution plans, all of which must be forecasted and designed to. All while managing project timelines and the push from partners and customers to hit official launch dates.

Technologists own the critical details to launch the product or service, including manufacturing specifications and back-end requirements. They scrutinize everything from operational qualifications to manufacturing approaches so that the best solution makes it to market as inexpensively and efficiently as possible. The goal is often to create the simplest solution possible by removing the complexity that surrounds the technology they support. In today's world as the solutions grow in more sophisticated ways, such as the internet of things and cloud-based management, this means even higher expectations early on in the new initiative to see



You can plot three levels of innovation—defend, differentiate and disrupt—based on the market return you expect to make on your investment.

if the company can push the known boundaries and strive to develop new intellectual property for the organization.

To be successful as innovators, we must understand, respect and communicate with our business and technology partners and their perspective on innovation. Only then can we design successfully for them and with them. When we find the balance of the BTU and become comfortable with all three spheres, then we transition from being a designer to being a true innovator.

Tiered Innovation

While many businesses have different perspectives on how to do it, we have found that categorizing the level of innovation we are working to achieve is invaluable. We refer to this as gains mapping: How much impact are you trying to create with your new innovation? And how comfortable is your organization with placing big bets, taking risks and venturing into the unknown?

The map above illustrates three levels of innovation: defend, differentiate and disrupt. A defend-level innovation

usually means making tweaks to a company's existing known offering to improve it or promote market acceptance. At the defend level, we are generally improving the products or services that are already in the company's portfolio. We are working in a known space where the focus is to protect (or defend) the territory you currently won to promote incremental growth. As an example, think of adding video games to your brick-and-mortar media rental service.

To differentiate, you make a move into the unknown territory by building upon a known, successful platform, adding additional features (e.g., adding a mobile platform where users can renew their DVD rental without facing late fees). The solution may not actually be new to the world, just new to the company and the offering it provides. While competitors may already play in the market space, you have a better mousetrap.

Oftentimes when people think of innovation, they are really thinking of disruption. A disruptive solution upends the current market dynamic by offering a totally new, unique offering (for example, a subscription-based service to stream media on your TV instead of renting DVDs). Actually launching a disruptive innovation typically requires that a company commit to making significant investments. Because they are working in a totally unknown space, the company will have to tolerate a great deal of ambiguity—and risk—to bring the new solution to market.

This requires a big bet, but successful disruptions come with big financial rewards. The payoff is that you create—and own—market share. At least until someone brings a differentiated solution to compete with your innovation and you shift into defend mode.

Staged Innovation

Organizations tend to group innovation into two major buckets: strategy and execution. On the strategic side, the focus is to orient the organization in the right direction to protect its future. This might be as straightforward as “grow sales by X% this year” or “beat competitor X in Y market.” Other times, the strategy is loftier or more ambiguous, like “attract a younger customer base” or “shift from being a ____ company to leading our market with connected technologies.”

To do this, companies, in general, tend to structure execution teams who are ready to build and launch new

things according to the requirements and specifications they receive. These teams work best and fastest when they have solid guardrails and as little ambiguity as possible. Traditionally, that's where industrial design lives—as a tactical initiative where you build an idea into a resolution of form, fit and function. Doing this well is a major undertaking, which certainly should not be overlooked.

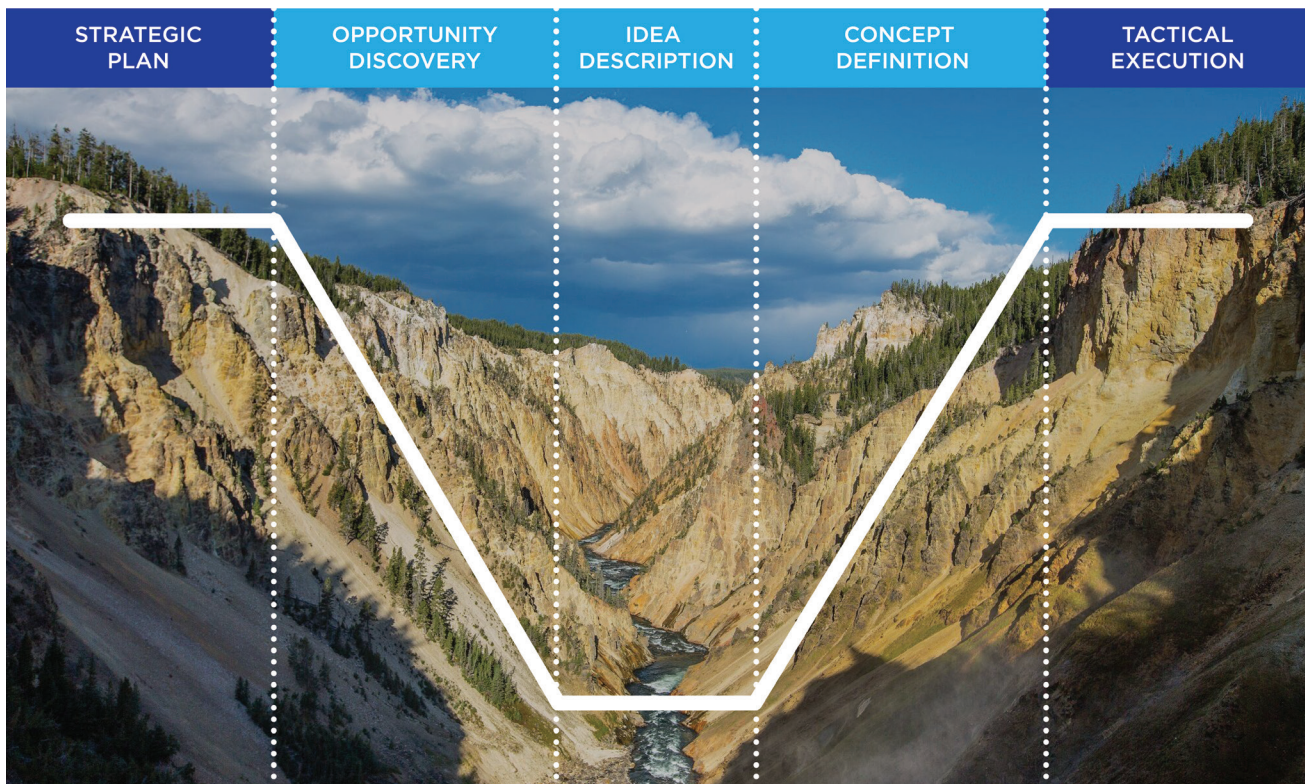
However, **we need to respect the huge amount of strategic innovation work that has to take place before you can scope an executable design project.** Think of all the effort that goes into building a traditional design brief. In many cases, this work—the real innovation work that is de-risking a project and removing ambiguity about what the project is and is not—happens before designers ever hear about it.

The kicker is, it is a major challenge for most organizations to set up the execution team with clearly defined projects. It is difficult to link their big goals to executed projects that generate organic growth. This is often called the strategy-execution gap. The size of the gap is directly related to the gain you're trying to create. The gap gets wider and wider as the strategy calls for bigger impacts (i.e., differentiation and disruption).

As an analogy, think of a canyon: Imagine that strategy is on the left ledge above the canyon and execution is on the right. We refer to the gap between the two as the chasm. In this analogy, the heavy lifting of innovation—the innovation space on a project—is all about crossing the chasm to set execution teams up for success.

In our experience, it is a lot less like building a bridge and a lot more like rappelling into the canyon, crossing a raging river and then climbing all the way back out the other side—discovering and defining what the new solutions are (and are not) that will connect the company's strategic plan to the teams ready to bring them to market.

The first stage of your journey is a big one: To continue our analogy, it's making it down the wall of the canyon. You will need to be equipped with the right tools to navigate the challenging terrain below. Identifying the mission you are on is key to knowing when, how and where to step off. As you traverse the slope, you will begin capturing useful data and key user insights that will allow you to discover your opportunities and successfully reach the bottom.



It takes the right process (and a lot of effort) to cross the chasm to close the strategy-execution gap.

Your next challenge is to cross the rapids: moving from insights to ideas. To make it to the other side, you and your team will need to generate a whole host of ideas that propel you across the current. Your momentum will come from the new-found understandings that you harvested from coming down the canyon wall. Usually, lots of ideas will begin to form the big ideas that could propel the company to the next level.

The third leg of your innovation journey now rises before you. You need to make it back up the other side of the canyon. To lighten your load, the team will need to consolidate the many ideas described in the previous effort into the concept that defines what your tactical team will execute upon. Again, they'll work best if you can set them up with a

clear picture of what the solution will need to be (and what it won't be). This is where we can leverage the ability to rapidly prototype concepts, which can quickly be built and tested for market feasibility—helping you gain the momentum to climb up and onto the right ledge.

While making this crossing can be difficult, it is important that you pass through each stage to properly scope your innovation efforts. By bringing a BTU-balanced team across the chasm, combined with an understanding of the level of innovation your company's strategy requires, you can clearly visualize what is required to innovate effectively. This is the best method for using our skill set as design innovators to quickly and effectively reduce the risk of doing new things. ■



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