

QUARTERLY OF THE INDUSTRIAL DESIGNERS SOCIETY OF AMERICA **SUMMER 2013**

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QUARTERLY OF THE INDUSTRIAL DESIGNERS SOCIETY OF AMERICA

SUMMER 2013

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FROM THE EDITOR

HEAD BEFORE HANDS. THAT'S HOW I DEFINE STRATEGY.

Just in case that's too simple: Strategy is a plan of action or policy designed to achieve a major or overall aim; the art of planning and directing overall operations and resource expenditures.

Still I always say that when it comes to design, or design strategy, you can never be too simple. That's not to say that strategy isn't sometimes prescriptive. Here's part of the strategy we use to publish this journal:

No later than Nov. 1 of each year, develop three themes for the following year's spring, summer and winter issues. (The fall issue is always dedicated to awards.) Themes should be explored with the input of the Advisory Council (AC), Publisher (PUB) and Managing Editor (ME). Relevant topics should be considered that are of current interest to industrial designers and have not been covered in the past two years. The Executive Editor (EE) is responsible for writing a paragraph on each topic that will be used to solicit authors and interest advertisers, and will be published in the annual editorial calendar.

To me strategy is the idea that we center where we are now, create the goals and dreams we see in the future and then plan how to get there. That said, strategy also needs to be flexible enough to take advantage of those unforeseeable opportunities and unpredictable changes in conditions that require, to use a football term, calling an audible. That's when a quarterback sees something amiss with the play that's phoned into his helmet and in the moment calls a new play out loud, an audible—responding appropriately to what the circumstances dictate.

I never expected that a strategy issue of *Innovation* would be guest edited by the talented design strategist Mark Capper, IDSA, an accomplished research expert, author and founder and CEO of Kompas Strategy. When he and I

reconnected after working together almost a decade ago, I jumped at the chance to work with him again and called an audible on the theme and timing for the summer issue. We at *Innovation* are very grateful for his contributions; Mark is a terrific combination of design and strategy, which is also the definition for competitive advantage in the future.

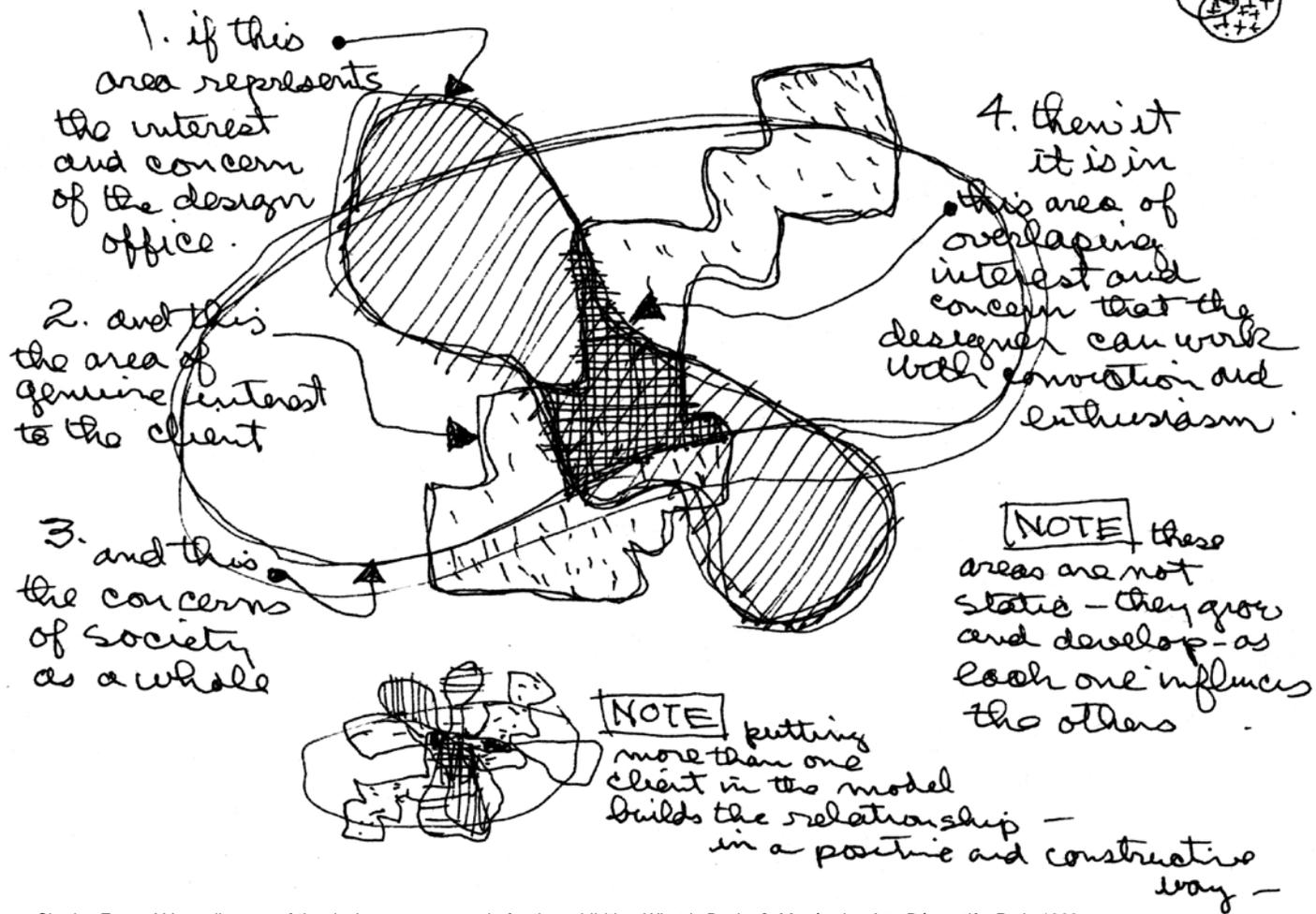
Today we live in a world where the previous advantages of a marketing or distribution strategy have been effectively neutered. The Internet informs and reveals empty promises and charlatans. Products can no longer be pushed at people. And products that do not consider the user first can no longer be pushed to a shelf or store because addressing user needs defines success or failure. So in effect the idea of a marketing or distribution strategy (marketing strategy statements, strategic roadmaps, corporate strategies, product launch strategies, innovation strategies, etc.) is bumping headlong into the idea of design strategy: strategy that is simple, sometimes prescriptive but always flexible and which addresses, foremost, the user need. For as Charles Eames once famously said, "Recognizing the need is the primary condition for design."

From the *Harvard Business Review* on strategy:

Today's dynamic markets and technologies have called into question the sustainability of competitive advantage. Under pressure to improve productivity, quality, and speed, managers have embraced tools such as TQM, benchmarking, and reengineering. Dramatic operational improvements have resulted, but rarely have these gains translated into sustainable profitability.

It goes on to argue that:

Gradually, in the last two decades, tools have taken the place of strategy. As managers push to improve operations on all fronts, they move further away from viable competitive



Charles Eames' Venn diagram of the design process, made for the exhibition *What is Design?*, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris 1969.

positions. Michael Porter argues that operational effectiveness, although necessary to superior performance, is not sufficient, because its techniques are easy to imitate. In contrast, the essence of strategy is choosing a unique and valuable position rooted in systems of activities that are much more difficult to match.

Since design can be one of the most difficult tools to imitate and quantify, it makes sense that in turn it becomes the enabler of truly effective strategies.

By the way, it looks like I'll be able to employ more design strategy in thinking about this journal in the next two years. From the executive editor's job description: "The

executive editor of *Innovation* serves a two-year term and is appointed by IDSA's chairman. The chairman may appoint the executive editor to serve an additional two-year term if desired by both parties."

It worked out that this is the case, and I am privileged to stay on. I am looking forward to two more years of working with *Innovation's* exceptional team refining, progressing and following the strategy we have developed for the journal.

By the way, here is the last part of *Innovation's* strategy: "For each issue, including the fall, write a brief (750-1,000 words) introduction to the theme."

Please enjoy this issue.

—Mark Dziarsk, FIDSA, *Innovation* executive editor
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DESIGN AS STRATEGY



“**Design:** to create, fashion, execute, or construct according to plan.

Strategy: a careful plan or method; a clever stratagem.”

—Meriam-Webster



By Mark Capper, IDSA
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Mark Capper is a design, brand and innovation strategist and the president of Kompas Strategy. Prior to Kompas Strategy, he held positions at Added Value, Herbst LaZar Bell, Herman Miller and Hauser Design. He has an MBA from the University of Southern California, a master's in engineering from the University of Michigan and a bachelor's in natural science from Michigan State University.

There has always been interplay between design and strategy, whether in the mind of a single designer, the collective mind of a team or the strategic plan of the organization. Traditionally, strategy has preceded design. It was delivered to the designer in a brief or in an initial project meeting. Today, design has become an integral part of the process through which strategy is defined.

Design and strategy have become intertwined through successive elements of creation, research, thought and evaluation involving many disciplines as well as the ultimate user. The design process has now become the basis of design thinking and is being applied in many applications, including the design of products, environments, user experiences and systems. Design thinking is even being used to design organizations and align organizational structures in harmony with purpose, values, systems and culture.

For some organizations, design *is* the strategy. These organizations have realized the power of design in creating desire, developing a loyal following, enhancing the user experience and innovating. These organizations have made design their key differentiator and are being rewarded with strong consumer demand, higher margins and customer loyalty.

Design has become synonymous with innovation, and many organizations look to the designer or the design consultancy when they are seeking innovation. In these cases,

design is defining the strategy through the creative process and the development of new ideas.

This issue of *Innovation* delves into the interrelationship between design and strategy. The theme, design as strategy, implies that strategy is no longer simply the creation of the plan that is executed through design—rather, design has become more integrated and is now a part of the strategy. This issue takes both a broad and deep look at design and strategy. We explore the interplay between design and strategy from several perspectives from the boardroom to the project level. We look at the role of design in blue-ocean innovation and in defining design strategy through understanding the local culture. We delve into how to frame inquiry in design research and the pitfall of design convergence.

I want to thank all of the authors who contributed their thoughts and ideas. My hope is that this issue opens new perspectives and deepens the understanding of design as strategy. ■

Charles Eames with the Solar Do-Nothing Machine, made for Alcoa in 1957.

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