



FROM THE EDITOR

NURTURING OUR LIQUID NETWORK



Craig Blankenhorn/AMC

S ometime back in 1965—post the fictional but accurate Don Draper *Mad Men* emergence of advertising as a medium—a group of moderately seasoned industrial designer-types got together and decided that what they were doing mattered a lot. Maybe even more than Draper’s mission of convincing people to buy things.

The group recognized that they had a power to actually make the things people buy better and more meaningful, and that was important. This being a new kind of “super” power, it required oversight. The new profession of industrial design had been making a huge impact on the post-World War II manufactured world and needed to come together and be led by a community of leaders. A milestone moment was upon industrial design and action was needed. And so an organization was formed to disseminate information and establish rules of engagement: IDSA. The right organization for a time when a nascent profession needed to traffic the intersection of art and legitimacy.

Fast forward 50 years and we designers find ourselves at another crossroads. A now mature profession of industrial design is being co-opted and integrated and merged and acquired and bent hard in the service of business and society. Design’s power to affect change has been permanently ratified and like a rare perfume is being requested at a volume that simply cannot be accommodated. The profession finds itself struggling to keep up with the demand for leadership and at the same time shake off old mores. Depending on a person’s perspective, a designer will either embrace or fend off the dilution of product design by service and experience design and user interaction and design thinking. It’s either the best thing or the worst thing ever. These struggles are pervasive in every aspect of engagement from the boardroom to the factory floor. The massive demand for industrial design’s problem-solving prowess comes at the same time that information spillover is abundant and redundant, ironically diluting the traditional need for an organization like IDSA and introducing new memes and cadences of behavior. To say that information is consumed differently today than it was 50 years ago is an understatement of epic proportions.

Facing these shifting ground plates has been a challenge for IDSA. It has struggled in recent years to maintain membership while events and participation in services have grown. Said another way, most of the revenue that used to come from membership now comes from the purchase of

services. As IDSA shifts from a tightly knit, exclusive society to a network, it is being altered. It has been slow acknowledging the new territory it must fight for. Change is hard.

A network acts differently from a society. As the author Steven Johnson profiles in *Where Good Ideas Come From*, a network (like what IDSA has grown into), or more specifically a liquid network, acts much like a barrier reef where all things are interconnected and dependent upon one another. According to Johnson, liquid networks create platforms from which opportunity is created, but they are hard to quantify and understand and even harder to control. I think that's exactly right. A community of designers is a very special kind of liquid network, and we have very specific needs indeed. INNOVATION was created as one way to address these needs.

In this issue of our journal we look back at 50 years of IDSA, which has been making connections and changing its format and adjusting as best it can to the brave new world it finds itself in. It always pays to look back at where we have been in order to move forward in the right way, as Steve Jobs reminds us in a quote that appeared in the Summer issue that bears repeating: "You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future."

This issue has been carefully crafted to remind us of where we have been and to launch us on our way forward. In this spirit, I would like to suggest three strong emerging themes for IDSA and for the profession as a whole:

- Mastering the ability to disseminate quality curated information and messages in a 140-character, digitally enabled world in which the news is redundant and people are bombarded with information.
- Maintaining the enormous value of face-to-face encounters and group meetings with colleagues in which nuance is shared and communicated, where relationships that can last for decades are formed, and through which the profession and the businesses and the constituents it serves are serviced.
- Adding new tools to the discourse of design and the organization to address design's increased impact and the recognition of its value in the boardroom and at scale and within new communities, such as venture funds, management consultants and leadership councils.

IDSA is a liquid network with every part of it dependent upon the other to succeed. A community of designers is a very special thing indeed. In this issue we look back at 50 years of our community, IDSA—an organization that has been making connections and changing the lives and futures of people in the service of making this planet we live on a little bit better one product or service at a time.

Here's looking forward to the next 50 years and what the future may bring.

—Mark Dziersk, FIDSA, INNOVATION Executive Editor
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