



BIG-BOX RETAILING PREDICAMENT OR OPPORTUNITY?

With this issue of *Innovation*, we begin a new focus: a new series of ideas, discourse and investigation into the dynamics that are driving innovation and design to a more central position in today's world. We hope to cover a lot of new ground, dig deeper and address compelling insights that will connect with you more than ever.

Mark Dziarsk contributed a lot to *Innovation* over the last four years and made fantastic strides in the dialog it has raised. He donated countless hours on behalf of this work, and we have all benefited. Thanks, Mark, for all you've done.

I am proud to be able to take on this role of executive editor of *Innovation*. I will also be joined by a team of our peers who represent a cross-section of perspectives and experiences. They will form the Editorial Advisory Board and will work to gather the latest ideas and design content for a broad and inclusive approach to each issue. The team will be announced in the summer issue. Larry Hoffer, IDSA's director of communication, will form a key member of this team as well, serving as a link that bridges IDSA's goals with the publication. Karen Berube will continue to act as *Innovation's* managing editor.

Since being asked to lead this activity, my mind has been spinning with all the topics and issues many of us have searched for in vain in design-related articles across many publications. I feel we have an incredible potential to cover these topics. *Innovation* can provide a frank, insider's view and understanding of the many processes we and our colleagues have been exploring. "Everything you always wanted to know about innovation and design but were afraid to ask," is how I envision the possibilities we can investigate together.

New Frontiers

What a great time to have the opportunity to explore more depth in our profession and the role we play. The value of design and innovation to business and the market is no longer debated. Business publications around the globe have embraced the value of design's contribution to competitiveness and basic business acumen. We are in a golden age where design has been recognized as a full-fledged partner in the businesses that have achieved world-class processes.

What remains to be uncovered are the specifics. How are these processes managed? What are specific tools that we and our partners can use? What new ways of focusing on successful approaches are being uncovered? The "new" news is the knowledge and techniques that are emerging to manage innovation in deeper, more detailed ways and, at the same time, foster creativity rather than stifle it.

While most companies have applied many of the attributes of innovation and design, only a small percentage have learned the processes to incorporate them well in their daily practices. And the culture of innovation in a corporate environment is even more important to embrace in order to use it naturally, constantly and pervasively—not merely to pay homage to design and innovation but to embody it throughout the corporation.



Photo: Maurizio Cigognetti, Getty Images

The new frontiers in innovation are in the details, the processes and the management of all its permutations. It is as much a frontier for CEOs, marketing professionals and engineers as it is for designers. And new approaches to uncovering these tools are emerging now more than ever before.

Our Invitation to You

While some publications cover business primarily and others cover design for consumers and professionals, there are

few places for us as professionals to share our insights into how we uncover successful innovation and design techniques. Since Innovation is in such a unique role to bring state-of-the-art thinking to the profession, the coming issues will begin to highlight more real insights and shared studies. By observing processes in action, we can learn both the successful program outcomes as well as those that failed. We all know that learning occurs from our mistakes as much as from our successes.

With this renewed focus, we want you to embrace this publication as your own, and we welcome your articles and content ideas. Your contributions will make for a richer and more connected interaction that all of us can benefit from. Consider *Innovation* an open forum for exploration and a source for colleague-to-colleague dialog. For those who have not been part of the regular set of contributing authors, please think of this as a new opportunity for involvement.

As we've discussed potential themes for upcoming issues, I've been motivated to learn more about the following topics. Some of these might provide the foundation for insights of your own. While the ideas below are not necessarily slated for any particular issue, we'd like to know what you think. Or maybe there are some things you'd like to see covered in future issues. Let us know. Just drop us a line at innovation@idsa.org.

■ **Design and the Non-Visual:** Many products today demand a total experience well beyond the visual qualities that used to be the primary domain of designers. Now designers are being charged with creating experiences that are delivered through dynamic qualities mechanically, through software, through smell and sound, and more. What specific methods are being used to manage the non-visual design of products?

■ **Universities and the Design Profession:** In some professions, educational institutions are making real impact, performing research and exploring new studies that sometimes have a major influence. What is taking place between design education institutions and design professionals? Where are the waves coming from in our discipline? Which design education institutions are pushing the boundaries of innovation, and what alliances or connections are being made between education and practicing professionals?

■ **Corporate Design Groups and Their Consultants:** What are some of the models for great design and innovation? What approaches are making the best of inside expertise coupled with the best of consulting perspectives? Are there any fundamental differences from one match-up to the next? What seems to make for the best results, and are these models able to be used for companies who want to

grow their in-house and external base to become a powerhouse? Are there models that seem to fail and others that seem to succeed by design? Has this marriage changed in the recent past compared to prior years? What are the visual results from these relationships?

Now Onto the Theme: Big-Box Retailers

Over the past decade or more the role of big-box retailers has grown to an unforeseen size and impact, especially in the US but increasingly globally as well. They have affected the economy in profound, and unanticipated, ways that have rippled throughout the country. Issues as significant as the balance of trade, labor wages, small-town economic health, foresting policies and labor laws have come into play with the decisions these retailers make.

With the scale of these changes have come the strategies by which these companies make decisions about what they buy. The retailers' buying decisions affect millions of people. They filter the world of choices that reach the market and in turn shape the country and its products. What has been the impact on design? Does design benefit? Does business improve? What does it mean for the consumer? Where is it going from here, and what does it mean for designers?

Other questions come to mind: Has the variety of design available in the market changed? Are there more or fewer choices when it comes to design? Are products as innovative? Has it polarized consumers to identify with "design" box retailers vs. "anti-design" box retailers? When retail buyers become involved in the development process for new products, does design benefit or is it compromised?

Design, innovation and brand alignment are also connected to the interiors, space planning and experience of shopping in these mega stores. What have our colleagues learned from helping to improve these experiences?

Please take a look at the contributing authors' articles. I'd like to know what your conclusions are about these questions and the insights revealed in the articles. Have you had any experiences with the big-box phenomenon you'd like to share?

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