Design – of Everything – Matters to New-Product Success

I've been researching, designing, developing, positioning, pitching and commercializing new products my entire professional career. But only recently have I come to fully realize the overwhelming importance of **design** in the commercial success of any new product. I don't mean only product design, what most think of as "design" as in industrial design. I mean the design of everything bearing on new-product success. Allow me to explain.

Fundamentally, only three things determine the success of any new product in any market:
- The accuracy of your projection of product (or service) demand by its targeted customers at the price offered
- Performance of the product relative to claims
- *Design* of everything related to the product

Let's assume for now that your selling efforts are appropriate and adequate, and let's focus on that third bullet: *Design*. What do I mean by that term? Let's explore some definitions.

Product Design

What is it? According to Wikipedia:

> *Product design as a noun: the set of properties of an artifact, consisting of the discrete properties of the form (i.e., the aesthetics of the tangible good and/or service) and the function (i.e., its capabilities) together with the holistic properties of the integrated form and function.*

Well, that's very nice. But a bit too esoteric for me. I think of product design as a combination of industrial design and user interface/experience design. For example: How does your product look? How does it work? How does it interact with its use environment? How does it interact with its user? Is its use self-evident or obscure?

Commercially Relevant Design

But product design, although incredibly important, is an insufficient criterion of commercial success. In my view, a much more inclusive definition of *design* is this:

> **Design is the No. 1 determinant of whether a product/service/experience stands out or not.**

If your *design* stands out, your product is more likely to be commercially successful. If not, probably not.

I maintain that this more inclusive definition of *design* includes not only *products* (things) but also *words and images* (messaging). Yes, I know, this requires some further explanation.

Complementary Words and Images Stimulate Success

Here are some important examples of beyond-the-product content that contribute to commercial success:

- Product-Imprinted Clues – Do words and symbols on the product itself contribute to understanding and ease of use?
- Display Content – Are the word choices and content organization on display screens intuitive and readily understood?
- User Guides – Is published user documentation well designed, clear and unambiguous? Are operating sequences completely and correctly described? Are screen shots and other images clear and readable?
- Online Help – Are online help files properly indexed, well designed, clear and unambiguous?
- IFU – Do the Indications For Use of medical products meet regulatory requirements and clearly describe both clinical applications and constraints?
- Promotional Literature – Do printed product brochures accurately describe product functions and usage benefits? Do they attract immediate attention? Are images relevant and attractive? Is market positioning made clear?
- Trade Show Materials – Do product displays and handouts grab immediate attention? Do they and your sales representatives clearly position your offerings? Are product samples and images accurate representations?
- Online Content – Are features and benefits clearly and simply described? Are images, animation and videos attention-getting, fully descriptive, professional, and brief?
- Scientific Literature – In addition to their primary purposes, do scientific publications also appropriately support your commercialization objectives?
- Product Comparisons – Do product comparisons use meaningful selection criteria? Are they clear and unambiguous? Are comparisons to competitive products fairly presented?

The moral of this story is this: Faulty or inadequate design may not always be the determining contributor to a product-launch failure. But the importance of design should never be discounted. And, in taking account of its role in commercial success, the design of everything bearing on new-product success must be considered.

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