

IS THERE A BETTER TANGO TO BE DANCED BETWEEN MARKETING AND DESIGN? - HOW BRAND MANAGERS AND DESIGNERS DO (NOT) COOPERATE IN THE BRANDING PROCESS AND SERVICE CREATION

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Abstract

This paper argues for a better cooperation between designers and marketers, specifically when it comes to investigation of the market and approaching the customer. Earlier research has shown that these professionals often work relatively parallel to each other. Here, we analyze and discuss the different prevalent methods mostly used by marketers and designers respectively. The designer most often study *the customer/user in action* and the products in use, while the marketers mostly study *the customer through surveys asking for their opinion* about things they have already approached. The designer's methods enable them to relate to creative and non-existent possibilities, finding solutions beyond the wish and opinion of the customer. The marketers surveys are limited to existent opinions, but can give detailed information about the distribution of different opinions about existing solutions. We argue that marketers and designers both would gain from a closer cooperation, by taking part in each other's investigations.

Introduction

Within the area of business studies a commonly presented and highly esteemed perspective is that every organization should place the consumer and his/her needs, in the very focus of its very existence. Many argue that the ability to understand the consumers' needs and wants, and the ability to produce commodities in accordance with these, are the foundations of 'every successful business'. (e.g. Kapferer, 2004; Keller, 1998; Alam, 2002; Edvardsson et al, 2004) Within the last decade, when the concept of branding has evolved, exploded and almost invaded marketing to such an extent that marketers often define themselves as brand builders, the customers emotional and aesthetics need has been in the very forefront for practitioners and researchers alike (e.g. Kunde, 2000; Schmitt & Simonsen, 1997; Söderlund, 2003).

Within the area of design 'the user perspective' is surrounded with an aura of almost mythical character, much alike what the customer perspective is for business. Starting with an analysis of the user and his/her need is part of a generic design process and so much cherished that it is taken for granted as part of the design profession and how it is constructed (e.g. Dreyfuss, 2003; Eppinger & Ulrich, 2000, Ireland, 2003; Plowman, 2003). Creating emotional and aesthetic values for the company and the user has of course always been high on the design agenda. Regardless whether it is explicitly constructed so or not, the designer is heavily involved in the brand building process.

Designers and marketers, therefore, could be constructed as two groups who work with rather similar taken for granted professional perspectives and almost intertwined professional activities. However, empirical studies made by Johansson and Svengren (2005) shows that in many companies designers and marketers work rather separately and independent from each other. The co-operation(s) between marketers and designers were, in the companies studied, less frequent than the co-operation(s) between designers and technicians. Many designers and marketers did simply not see reasons to work together. However, in companies where designers and marketers do interact and work together we can see that both parties gain from this co-operation (e.g. Svengren, 1995; Johansson & Svengren, 2005).

A literature review on design and marketing indicates that the relation between marketing and design has been far from neglected. Texts of Bruce & Bessant (2002), Bruce & Cooper (1997), Cooper & Press (2003) and Borja de Mozota (1998), all have a marketing perspective on design as their point of departure. However, they all discuss design from a marketing perspective, focusing on *design as (a) strategy*. Furthermore they rely upon Porter (1989) and elaborate on the value chain from a design perspective. So in a way Porter and 'strategy' has become the lenses through which the collaboration between marketers and designers have been seen and constructed theoretically.

However, literature on branding shows a pattern where design and the design competencies frequently are seen as 'supplier(s)' of product attributes, something to be added to 'the core' i.e. the brand itself. Even though contributions of the likes of Olins (1989) and Mollerup (1995) can be found, these texts that actually discuss branding from a design perspective are less referred to within the branding discourse apart from discussions concerning visual identity and closely related areas. The designer and/or the design profession, and its more or less obvious part in the branding process, is surprisingly seldom given a prominent position. It seems like this interface between marketing and design is constructed as 'unknown territory' and therefore in many ways is neglected or given less attention.

In this paper our point of departure is the gap between marketers and designers, and specifically between brand managers and designers. Our focus is also on the roles of these two professional groups when working within the fairly new sector of 'service design'. What is the role of the designer and the brand manager within this process? What could be said from an analysis of the different roles that could improve both roles and their way of co-operation? And how can these roles be constructed/understood in a way that creates as much value as possible from the perspective of the organization as a whole?

We argue that both professions would gain from blending each other's ways to approach the customer. In this paper we analyze the character of the gap between the two professions. We focus on what is more or less taken-for-granted (Bitner, 1965; Johansson, 1998) ways of constructing their relationship to the customer/user. We also discuss the different methods used in order to learn more about the customer/user and how they differ between marketers and designers.

The paper 1) begins with an analysis of how marketers approach and construct the market and the customer or consumer (as the marketer talks about the one who is buying and/or using the product/offering). It then 2) goes on to make the same analysis of the designer's relation to the user (that is the most common name of the 'consumer' within the design world). From this principal analysis of the character(s) of the ways designers and marketers approach the market, the user or the consumer, we discuss 3) what could be gained for respective part through a closer co-operation and inspiration from each other's professional agenda. We 4) conclude with some more general normative recommendations.

1. branding from the marketing Perspective

The concepts of 'the brand' and 'branding' have grown in both meaning and use the last decade. It has evolved from being a name given to make possible the identification of a product offered for customers (i.e. Keller, 1998, Aaker, 1996) to be constructed as 'the creation of meaning' (Strannegård, 2004) for a wide range of actors, internal as well as external ones. Brand associations and emotional values have been put forward as critical elements and the branding area as such has come to move away from the earlier product focused concepts. According to Kapferer (2000) the classical brand concept, where the brand is equal to the actual product, is no longer valid. Instead the brand is endowed with features,

images and perceptions (Kapferer, 2000). This 'evolutionary process' continues today where more and more emphasis is being put on offering emotional deliverance rather than functional benefits. A brand's perceived value(s), functional ones as well as emotional ones, are the results of an ever on-going process, which is affected by the individual organisations history, culture and structures. (Keller, 1998; Kapferer, 2004; Kotler & Armstrong, 1993) These elements are often understood as the foundations upon which the brand and its existence rest. From a brand-owners perspective this process of brand building aims at gaining highest possible brand-awareness, in order to establish clear and attractive associations and by doing so obtains increased market-shares. In turn this conquest is thought to lead to profitability and organisational prosperity. This might seem reasonable and rational, but indeed problematic. Brands are existences distinguished by being everything but rational and logical, rather the opposite. They are highly irrational abstractions whose meanings are constantly constructed and re-produced in an on-going polylogue. As such brands flee and thus they elude the will to define and bring order. This presents us with a situation where an area, which has been identified and put forward as increasingly important for every organisation, rests upon an insufficient and even failing logic. As with beauty the brand as such does only exist in the eye of the beholder, i.e. in the mind of those interacting with it. 'All' there is prior to the physical and emotional encounter between the actors are respectively the brand owner's intentions, purposes and wishes and the consumers' hopes and dreams. Every odyssey within the branding area can be understood as quest to make the illusive and absent relevant and present. Therefore, each and every activity associated with branding starts with a wish to make oneself to be perceived as being unique in relation to competitors in one way or another. But this uniqueness as such carries little or no value; instead the values(s) are created in the interface between brand owner and consumer. Through the application of functional and emotional (added)values relevance is being constructed for both parties. But the communication and mediation of the specific brand-offer is just one aspect. Even though consumer relevance is being constructed through communication the offer in question, and it's embedded promises, must rest upon the foundations of intra-organisational self-awareness. The value propositions, and promises made, need to be attached to competencies and other resources to the brand owner's disposal. Therefore we have to view the concept of brand relevance from two perspectives, internal relevance as well as external relevance. These perspectives should be seen as co-dependent and as being present in every service(brand) relationship. By narrowing the omni present gap between the designer(s) and the marketing function it is suggested that higher internal as well as external relevance can be obtained. A perceived higher external relevance, on behalf of the consumer, would ultimately result in an increased will to pay to obtain and be associated with the service offer in question. The internal relevance relates to how the design connects to the foundations upon which the service brand rests; i.e. identity and core values. The two complementing perspectives on design and brand relevance should be understood as being inter-dependent and constructed simultaneously.

Customer involvement in the marketing tradition

Historically the customer has been present through his absence within the transaction based marketing theories. Instead of focusing on customer needs the organisations has put their focus on efficiency of production and sourcing of resources. What could be produced were produced and due to the relative lack of alternatives the produced products were purchased by actors on the market. This pacification of customer, and their needs and wants, due to the focus put on the single transaction contributed to creating distant relationships between customer and brands. The customer was constructed as a passive receiver of offerings rather than an active part in the production of value. The marketing survey was, and is to a large extent, used to capture data regarding brand awareness and attitudes towards said brands. This gives us information on a confirmative level but no real direction for the future and as a consequence suffers the ability of organizations to provide offerings and solutions with the

ability to create desire among customers. Of course this resulted in the lack of loyalty when more options and competing offers were introduced. In order to make possible for customer to distinguish one offer from the other and to choose between them the issue of differentiation became crucial (Urde, 1996). This differentiation could not be obtained on the basis of functionality alone due to the minimal differences among products. Instead emotional associations became essential and as a consequence branding underwent a change of direction from a name given to a product to the production of emotional benefits. Therefore the importance of closing in on the latent and unspoken needs of customers has become even more crucial and here the traditional marketing survey fails.

Transaction marketing	Relationship marketing	Emotional & Symbolic branding
Focus on the single transaction	Focus on the relation(s)	Focus on value creation
Passive customer	Relations with customer	Co-creation with customer
Customer needs absent	The relation as provider of insights	Brands and their value(s) created in the minds of customers
Value creation within organisations	Value creation within relation	Value creation through relevance
Focus on resources and production	Focus on relations	Focus on value creation
Quantitative focus	Attitudes and strength of relations	Understandings

Still today many organizations focus on traditional market research techniques such as customer surveys and focus groups to capture relevant user data. (Dahlsten, 2003; Slater, 2001) But these ‘traditional’ techniques have attracted extensive criticism due to their perceived limitations regarding capturing latent needs of the customer. (Leonard, 1995) Instead they focus on collecting and assembling expressed needs that bring us none or little ‘new’ knowledge. This confirmative level of information gathering should not be underestimated; it serves its purpose, but is not adequate and sufficient regarding fostering innovativeness. Instead, the importance of observing the user in its own environment and/or involving said user in the actual development process has more and more frequently been put forward (e.g. Prahalad, 2000). Alam and Perry (2002) argue that customer involvement should play a more important role in service development than in the development of physical products. Still, studies on consumer involvement and related techniques are mostly to be found in product development literature. (Edvardsson *et al*, 2004)

In those instances where attempts have been made to involve intended users in the development process(es) this has included forms as co-development (i.e. Anderson & Croca, 1993), user involvement (Alam, 2002) and customer involvement (Pitta & Franzak, 1996).

But still, these strongly allied concepts (Edvardsson et al, 2004) focuses on what can be understood as how to manage to stretch the development process horizontally, meaning how to make users/consumers take active part in the production process by extending the value chain. Even though this of course represents an important part in the development of relevant service opportunities other perspectives are needed to get to the very 'core' of the dilemma, i.e., the construction of understanding(s) regarding the intended user. This could be seen as an attempt to further integrate vertical levels of understanding(s) into the service development process(es).

2. The designers relation to the user

If searching in a dictionary for the etymology of the verb 'design' one finds that it derives from the Latin *designare*, de and sign, i.e. to draw something with a meaning. In this sense it also means to mark or point out something (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989). The dictionary also refers to 'the making of a plan or a mental scheme for something to be realized, a preliminary idea, and a project'. This relates design to planning and organizing where organization design, research design, project design and service design are common terms. In this text the characteristic(s) of a service brand represent the starting point when entering the domains of design. Through the meeting of 'disciplines' possibilities are constructed and made possible to reflect upon.

Designers neither should nor could be seen as isolated existences. They work with creating products for the market and input from 'the market' is needed. How designers obtain these insights differ between different design disciplines, and from individual to individual. However, the typical methods used by industrial designers are based on *observations of users in action*. This is a strong tradition originating from the ergonomic influence on design and from the Bauhaus tradition that can be regarded as more or less a foundation for most industrial design in Europe. Through studying the user in action a lot of knowledge can be gained: ergonomic knowledge about fitness and form but also knowledge about preferences and opinions. Preferences can often be found without asking questions, just observing what is happening and what the customer prefers to use.

These research methods, related to the designers way of investigating the customer/user could be described as ethnographically and anthropologically inspired. This rests upon the belief that users/consumers do not know what they want in the future when asked, as in traditional surveys, they are not able to relate to the unknown in any useful way. The presented solution is a combination between user insights, knowledge in forms and trends and the constraints given by the situation. (Johansson & Svengren, 2005) The traditional perception of design focuses and limits itself frequently to the production of physical objects; artefacts. Our purpose with this paper is to expose other possibilities for design and design competencies, in this case the development of service-opportunities. Here design methodologies represent a quite obvious resource waiting to be understood.

3. What could be gained through a closer cooperation between the methods of marketers and designers – the need of a dual focus

Within the area of business studies a commonly presented perspective is that every organization should place the consumer and his/her needs, in focus of its existence. Keller (1998) argues that the ability to understand the consumers needs and wants and the ability to produce commodities in accordance with these are the foundations of 'successful marketing'. This perspective is even more cherished within the design literature where the user perspective is surrounded with an aura of almost mythical character. I would argue that the understanding of users, consumer and their needs are one of the foundations of all marketing

and communication, including the one labelled successful. The other part of this foundation, often placed in the shadows, is the understanding of the (service) brand's core value(s). Without this part we can never talk about effective marketing despite how well we know our consumers and their needs. Especially if effective and successful marketing and brand development is seen over time, where consumer needs alter and a somewhat stable foundation is needed. Thus a divided foundation is a necessity for every brand with aspirations on survival and prosperity in the long run. This duality exists and must be managed by every brand-owner and cannot be neglected. A significant part of the challenge can be attributed to the dynamics to meet and if possible exceed the consumer's expectations and the will to manifest the unique brands identity in relation to the service opportunity. How can balance be found, if balance is what is to be found, between satisfying ever changing consumer needs and hold on to the core values of the brand, the soul of the brand? Consistency and consequence in relation to change and flexibility, this is a challenge for every brand-owner and designer relation to handle. And this might be where these professions could find common ground.

In earlier research done by Johansson and Svengren (forthcoming) it was found that in five out of six companies studied as success stories in design, the relation between marketing and design was almost non-existent. Johansson and Svengren argue that a better co-operation between marketing and design in most cases would be fruitful and help the company to be more efficient in it's quest for prosperity through customer satisfaction and use of resources. But what can be obtained by closer cooperation for marketers and designers respectively? What reasons can be identified, i.e. what is there to gain? In our opinion there are several reasons for a marketer to approach and try to understand the designer's methods:

- The designer can through his or her methods get access to hypothetical, non-existent ideas, while the prevalent market survey only can get access to opinions and attitudes towards existing situations and artifacts.
- The marketers can only get access to the spoken needs, while the designer also approaches the unspoken needs.
- The designer works in dialogue with a specific and actual consumer in mind where a dialogue can be created between the designer, the consumer and the offering. The offering can be changed and reconstructed in the dialogue – either by making new prototypes or visual changes. The marketers on the other hand most often works with theoretical target groups on a more collective and general level.

The designer can have use of the marketers survey in different ways:

- The surveys can provide information about how the customers approach and think about already existent products and therefore supply a framework for improvement and the making of new products and offerings.
- The survey can sometimes answer the question whether there is a financially adequate group of customers needed in order to initiate a specific project. However, the survey can never answer if there is a market to potentially new things that is impossible to relate to and give opinions of.

The need for cooperation and the difficulties to do so

The aim of the customer/user in the postmodern world is not primarily to get things that meet their needs and wants, but to exceed them and to get surprised by the solutions offered

(Brown 1995). It, therefore, seems quite limiting to rely only upon the marketer's traditional surveys among customers or the sales force for new ideas in product development. Such a strategy is conservative in the way that it conserves the prevalent order and relies upon existing products being scrutinized and opinionated. This is not a good prerequisite for surprising the customer with something new!

However, on the other hand, only relying on the designers' experimental and creative ideas tested in action is also limiting. Since there are so many possible choices that some knowledge of the distribution of different values and choices are needed in order to stop the sub-optimization of marketing and design alike.

Instead of these parallel approaches where marketers and designers approach the same customer/user in two very different ways without cooperation, we look for more cooperative strategies, both in practice and theory, strategies that embrace the different profession's competencies.

Theoretically, we have to ask ourselves what different dimensions that might be of importance for hindering respectively facilitating learning situations and cooperation. Why do not marketers and designers want to dance with each other? Or, if they do, what hindering factors are built into the situation that from our perspective is not good neither from customer nor from marketers nor designers point of view? Can the different professional values and ways of educating the two groups be an explanation? Or is it "simply" different traditions that make it more or less taken-for-granted to work in parallel ways? Or can the gap between them easier be understood from a communication perspective, looking at the two professional groups as groups with different languages, values and traditions? Or might a power perspective maybe more fruitful – looking at the situation as a power game that keeps the two traditions in place?

Practically, we think there is need for experiments with new forms of cooperation between those who are willing to go for new role creation, trying to find new creative paths of cooperation. Such practical experiments can also be a good ground for reflexive research around the roles and the role of cooperation between designers and marketers.

Final conclusions

This paper has been an attempt to discuss the relationship between the designer and the marketer as stereotypical roles. We have analyzed their respective approach and methodological strategies when approaching the customer/user and we have found that they do so in different and rather parallel ways.

The result of our analysis is rather humble – we claim that new ways of collaboration is needed in practice. New ways of dancing together is needed. And we claim there are ways that allows both of them to use their own skills¹ and to get increased value from each other.

We also claim that this collaboration should be further investigated both theoretically and by practical experiments; experiments that in turn can be ground for further theoretical reflections.

¹ The metaphor of tango used in the headline is used because tango is a dance that allows both the man and the woman to make their own pirouettes, dancing independently at yes close together at the very same time.

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