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Suffusing the
Organization with
Design Consciousness

Stefano Marzano, Managing Director, Philips Design

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Suffusing the Organization with Design Consciousness



IT'S CALLED "High Design," but it's not about an elite sense of style. At Philips Design, Stefano Marzano explains, it refers to a philosophy that emphasizes the creation of solutions that fulfill genuine needs and that are of enduring value. It's an interdisciplinary approach that takes advantage of technology, but with an ethical, human touch. It's a way to open innovative frontiers in design, and it's a mode of thinking evident throughout Philips, from units developing consumer electronics to those making complex medical equipment.

By Stefano Marzano



STEFANO MARZANO,
MANAGING
DIRECTOR,
PHILIPS DESIGN

Who hasn't dreamed of being able to change the world? Who hasn't tried to imagine how things could be in a better society? The great challenge to being an industrial designer in one of the largest corporations in the world is that you know you can place a brick in the building of the future. You know that whatever you design will be produced in millions of units, purchased by millions of people, and used in millions of homes—how satisfying, if you create a useful, meaningful product that people really need and want!

But what are the consequences if you don't?

When I became head of Philips Design in 1991, I realized the enormous challenge and responsibility I was accepting. It is my belief that thoughts alone are not sufficient to create a better future, but that without thought there is no solid basis for growth. Accordingly, I decided that my first move in this new position would be to define a design philosophy and propagate it throughout the

organization. I wanted to create a vision and a mission with which all Philips designers could identify, and thus enrich themselves and their work. Since then, this design philosophy, which we call High Design, has been the principal driving force behind all our everyday and long-term activities, and it has been embedded in a design process that is at the basis of all our work.

High Design is born from the belief that the spirit of the industrial revolution, based on the maximization of quantity at all costs, has resulted—despite all its benefits—in the loss of many of the old cultural and essentially human values from our lives. The result: alienation and emptiness. No one in particular is to blame. The very nature of our society made it inevitable. At one time, the relationship between the user and objects was one of trust and affection. We would keep and cherish forever the tool that served us well, or the shoes that were so comfortable. But in this throwaway society, which prizes

newness above proven worth, and flashy gimmickry above genuine usefulness, we have forgotten how to care for objects. We have forgotten that objects are “creatures produced by our spiritual sensibilities and by our practical abilities,”¹ that they are products of art in its original meaning of techné.

I saw that electronic products had even more potential to be perceived in this way, but that they were not. Why not? Perhaps because they had always taken nonhuman-related forms (that is, as black, white, or gray boxes). And why have they always taken nonhuman forms? Perhaps because they are perceived as essentially an industrial product, and most people see industrialization as the destructive process that spoils our earth (the whole environmental problem arose after global industrialization). Perhaps because technology, if not managed responsibly, can cause irreparable damage.

I feel that people should be scared not by technology itself, but by unethical technology—technology that is an end in itself. In fact, it is not technology that determines man’s destiny, but rather man himself, in deciding in which way to use technology. The future does not just happen by itself. It can be influenced by those who are prepared to shoulder the responsibility for making decisions today.

Responsible Design

Governments, surely, and—possibly to an even greater extent—large corporations have a definite responsibility and a role to play in shaping the future for us all. Corporations create, manufacture, and sell large amounts of goods or services. In the process, they utilize technological skills and knowledge; they use natural resources in both the creation and destruction of the items they make; and they influence people’s behavior and lifestyles (just think of how the introduction of mobile phones has changed our lives). This is why I believe that corporations should shoulder the responsibility for making the best possible decisions today for the best possible tomorrow.

We designers also have to bear this responsibility, in that we play a key role in the creation of the products and services that a large number of people will use. We can create products that people don’t really need, that are difficult to use, or that don’t fulfill people’s desires. Consumers might still

purchase these products under the influence of advertising, fashion, or a sincere personal belief in the item—but get rid of them shortly after. In such cases, we designers would be responsible for contributing to a further development of the throwaway society. As an alternative, we could create new products that are the answer not only to consumers’ needs, but also to their dreams. We could “father” meaningful objects that support people in their daily tasks, express the values they believe in, and stimulate their emotions and creativity. These products would not be used and thrown away in the blink of an eye, and future generations would thank us for it.

Against this background, in 1991, we defined our mission: To create a harmonious relationship among products, people, and their environments, both natural and man-made.

In an attempt to attain this goal—which is easier said than done—we have developed a new, holistic approach to design, in which both the philosophy and the practicality of design are worked out with equal rigor by all the members of our team (450 people worldwide). The philosophical background of our design is conveyed to all the employees through lectures, publications, and introductory courses in order to ensure that we all share the same vision—that we all support the same ideals.

The world in which we live today is no longer the black-and-white world that we once had. People are increasingly complex and have lost many reference points (political, religious, ideological) that helped them in the past to make decisions about what was good or not. To understand what people want now and will want in the future, mere statistics are no longer sufficient. If a company like Philips, a mass producer of electronic goods, really wishes to create meaningful products, it needs to get to know its multi-faceted audience in depth. Only this knowledge can help us to create products that truly meet people’s existing and latent needs, and therefore to be an ethical, as well as

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that determines man’s
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which way to use
technology*

1. This definition is by Ezio Manzini of Domus Academy, Milan, Italy.

commercially successful, company. It is amazing how companies that put the quality of what they produce, the well-being of their employees, and a sincere concern for the consumer and the environment at the top of their list of values are, in fact, much more economically successful than those whose only goal is to generate shareholder value.

High Design

In order to obtain this knowledge of people, we at Philips Design have created a multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural team in which experts from socio-cultural disciplines (sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and the like) work together with designers and with Philips's technologists, scientists, engineers, and marketers. The work of these teams is developed in accordance with High Design—a research-based process, seamlessly integrated into our clients' business creation process, which, due to its multi-disciplinary approach, guarantees the human focus of the results.

Philips Design operates as an autonomous design studio within the corporation and is responsible for the custody of the Philips brand. Working on a project basis, we support all the Philips product divisions with design services that range from strategic design and identity design to product and service design and visual communication design. Although our headquarters are in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, we have 22 branch studios in several locations in Europe, Asia Pacific, and the US. We place members of our team wherever we need them to support the businesses.

We offer most of our services to the Philips Group, which is in itself a major challenge for a design studio, if you consider how vast the Philips portfolio is (lighting, domestic appliances, consumer electronics, industrial electronics, medical systems). This means that we design all of the Group's products, communications, and environments. In other words, its identity.

This may seem more straightforward than it actually is. Especially in the area of identity design, it is not easy to convey the same brand values for a domestic appliance—for example, a toaster to be used by people at home—as for a large medical system, such as an X-ray unit that will be used by hospital staff. These two products are born from different requirements, aimed at different users,

Figure 1



Integris 5000

Designing medical systems means keeping in mind the needs of three user groups: the hospital manager (who purchases the machine), the medical staff (who use it), and the patient (who will undergo examination in it). In order to satisfy all these groups, the machine must be easy to install, maintain, and clean; it must be operable in a natural and instinctive way; and it must look friendly, reliable, and reassuring.

and purchased by different types of buyers. Still, if you look at both items carefully, and if you use them, you realize that both convey the care and human focus we have put into their design. This is because the people who designed them all share the same vision. This shows how Thoughts can become Facts (see figures 1 and 2).

Strategic design is a relatively new service that we offer. Within our strategic design team, we explore new directions in which we can create truly human-focused designs that can feasibly translate into commercially successful propositions for the Philips Group and our other clients. These range from the transport industry to banking and many other sectors not in direct competition with Philips. Working for a diversified portfolio of clients, on a wide range of design-related issues, helps our design team to continuously improve its knowledge and skills, which are our main assets. It also helps us to identify opportunities to fuse our competencies with those of our clients, in order to create new areas of business. Working with "external" clients is a win-win situation. We offer them our knowledge, experience, and design approach (developed through years of work for the Philips Group). And through the work we carry out for them, we increase our knowledge and skills, which we will be able to offer to the next client.

The main service we offer to external clients is strategic design. Through our research in the socio-cultural and technology fields, and by talking to opinion leaders and experts from different disciplines, we collect a substantial amount of data on emerging lifestyles. The analysis of this data gives us an idea of possible needs and requirements that people might have in the future; the knowledge of technologies that are currently being developed helps us to know what we could feasibly propose to address those needs. The final data are then translated into various scenarios for the future, which contain opportunities for the development of specific products and services. The purpose of this whole process is to identify a future that is not only probable and possible, but also preferable and in harmony with people's values. We call this methodology Strategic Futures, and we see it as a continuous learning process that is constantly evolving.

The most recent application of this approach is the project La Casa Prossima Futura (the Home of the Near Future), which was presented last September in New York. It is an exploration of the many ways in which technology and design can together enhance the quality of people's lives in the home

Figure 2



Essence range: Toaster/Sandwich maker

Trends research has shown that people look for peace and tranquility in their homes. The design of this product quietly expresses the essence of the product's functionalities (it is a sandwich maker, as well as a toaster) without making a loud design statement. At the same time, the forms speak convincingly of its sturdiness, ease of use, and high performance. The color palette recalls ceramics, a material traditionally worked by hand, embodying the full traditional quality of care and craftsmanship. The Essence range suits the lifestyle of people who enjoy cooking, are fairly interested in features, and have an above-average interest in design.

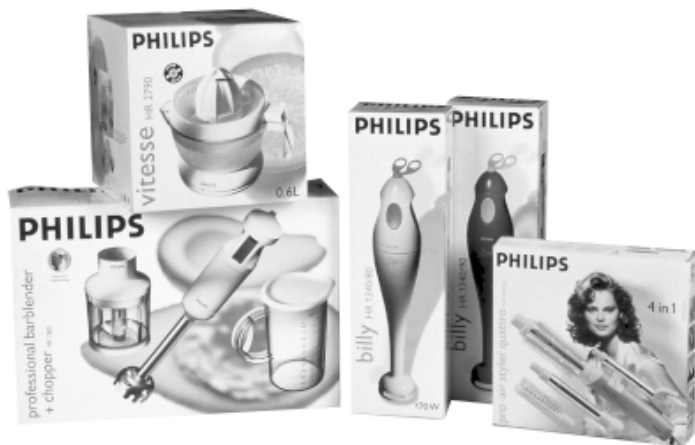
La Casa Prossima Futura

The Home of the Near Future will contain intelligent objects that can learn to behave in ways that fit our lives—getting to know our home environment, our relationships, and our rituals of everyday activities. The “smart” objects, as well as the physical structure of the home, will contain and develop an intelligence that is designed to learn, anticipate, and provide for our needs. Products will resemble familiar objects and furniture, with a greater relevance and significance to our home life than the “black boxes” of today.

The home of the future will look more like the home of the past than the home of today—no black boxes, but instead objects that are deeply rooted in our domestic traditions and that are enhanced by invisible technology.

La Casa Prossima Futura—The Home of the Near Future, has recently been shown at Saks Fifth Avenue, in New York. For further information, visit www.design.philips.com





Designing identity also means creating packaging that conveys the brand values and communicates the product's features.

environment. Beyond the obvious hype created by the “futuristic” concepts that make up the exhibition, we hope the public has understood that we want them to think about the future with us. As a company, we can help to shape the future by providing propositions that may influence the big, small, collective, and personal decisions that will shape that future. But we believe people should be at the center of this “shaping,” and we want our propositions to match the mental images people have about how the future will be, and about the quality of life they want.

In order to “create a harmonious relationship among people, objects, and their natural and man-made environment”—our mission statement—we need the support of every individual involved in the creation, development, sale, and distribution of our products—the engineers, developers, and marketers, not to mention the public and press. This is why we invest so much in communicating our ideas for the future, not only toward the end-users, but also within our own organization.

“Soft” Communication

The results of our visionary projects are regularly communicated to the board of management of Royal Philips Electronics. The publications that explain the background of the projects are widely distributed at all levels within Philips and outside the company. As far as product, identity, and visual communication design is concerned, we design every product, interface, and communication in close consultation with the client, and he or she plays an active role in the creation process. This allows people who are not familiar with design to understand and share our objectives. We also have a quarterly publication that specifically addresses the issue of how design creates value for the organization. In this way, we

A Camera with a Soul

People like using a video camera for e-mail messages, but some cannot overcome that “Big Brother is watching you” feeling that cameras suggest to them. The “anthropomorphic” form of this product imbues it with emotional values and therefore creates a friendlier relationship with the user. The inspiration for the first design proposal came from the film *Toy Story*, specifically from the character of Mr. Potato Head.

Made of environmentally friendly materials, the Desktop Video Camera is held in the desired position simply through the friction between the housing and the rubber feet, thus eliminating the need for a complicated means of adjustment or a ball-joint pedestal. The user interface is closely related to the familiar ones used in consumer recording devices—simple Record, Forward, and

Rewind buttons are fitted into the intuitive Windows user interface.

The V-Mail camera received the Gold Industrial Design Excellence Award 1999. The IDSA jury stated: “Video cameras traditionally have a watchful presence, leaving us ill at ease. Philips has brought animation and softness to this convention in a new creature that is playful, yet concise and essential in its form—confirming its plug-and-play objective. It is successful and innovative in its pursuit to be distinctive in the market.”



gradually increase the knowledge of what design is and what our design philosophy means within the organization and outside.

This soft communication has resulted in strong support for our activities from Philips's board of management, which has become one of the main sponsors of our visionary projects, and from its product divisions, which regularly commission us to conduct studies on the future of their business, as well as product, interface, and visual communication design.

At the same time, through external communication to the press and the public, we have contributed to the creation of an enhanced image for Philips—that of a human-focused company, capable of identifying people's existing and latent needs and of addressing them in a positive way.

The biggest challenge arising from our vision is the fact that it will never be achieved; fortunately, there will always be room for improvement and for development. After all, he who stops growing is no longer alive. I feel that having the courage to try to contribute in a thoughtful manner, even with small bricks, day by day, to the building of our future, is a great challenge for everyone at Philips Design. ♦

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This bookshelf is designed to harmonize with the domestic environment through its familiar use of traditional materials. The shelf contains a network connection, a recharging facility for interactive books, and a printer. The books contain a touchscreen, a pen and, in some cases, a camera. Each interactive book represents a "window" through which the user can access specific subjects, such as home banking, interactive learning, or the family doctor.



Storyboard enables the user to edit digital media in a simple way. It consists of a suspended projector, a series of tools, and a display mat. Media can be accessed from solid-state storage devices or from a domestic server. Storyboard provides a simple way for people to edit home videos or retouch photos using tools that resemble a pen or brush. It provides new ways to explore personal creativity, from the compilation of a simple, electronic photo album to a full multimedia presentation.

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