

Invisible Design

By Pau De Riba

After the “premium” stage where design acts as quality mark, good design should become a “commodity”, a component of the welfare society we take for granted.

Graphic design and design in general is nowadays still reclaiming its value and trying to achieve what other disciplines achieved long ago: recognition, awareness, power. What would happen when this stage is over? What will be the perception of the design role?

Design as a premium

For the general public, design is linked to the added value and premium concepts. The design is well-established in business-to-consumer companies, where design acts as a differentiator, as an indicator of product quality, a product that goes beyond the minimum requirements. In some sectors the design can still be seen as a hip sign, in others simply acts as a sign of care and quality: the premium pack that wants to defense its status over the white-label version, the independent filmmaker who wants to stay apart from Hollywood or a restaurant promising a special meal. They all share the concept of «design as premium». But it shouldn't be like this forever.

Design as a commodity

There is a design concept that goes far beyond being a sign of status. As design culture continues to grow good design will be seen as an obvious requirement, as a commodity. A specific design proposal may be distinctive but not simply the fact that something is well designed. The role of design as a product differentiator¹ or as a promotion tool will not be so predominant, and design will gradually be perceived as another component of the welfare state.² One of the pending issues of high-quality design is to have a large-scale impact on our society, impact for all audiences, impact in every field. The design has already played an important role by facilitating the use of everyday things, and its impact can increase by helping to understand complex information, giving visibility to valuable ideas, communicating with socially responsible messages, participating in the innovation of products and services or spreading creative culture, for example. It will be a design less focused on the graphic language and more aware of the design use and especially its social, economic, environmental or cultural impact. Businesses and organizations won't write great speeches about the benefits of investing in design, they will simply because «this is how things are done», «because everyone does it», or «because there we are not so crappy».

Ultimately asking why should you invest in good design it will no longer make sense. The deeper we have embedded an idea the more invisible becomes for us. Nobody is surprised seeing lights turn on after pressing the switch . Good design will be taken for granted to become invisible.

Published on 17/12/2013

-
1. [Humantific calls strange-making](#) the design role of differentiating similar products (as in branding) as the opposite of sense-making, where design works to improve the user comprehension of a complex topic (as in data visualization).
 2. Both [Reinaldo Leiro](#) and [Giulio Vinaccia](#) have written in FOROALFA about this idea (in spanish).

FOROALFA

ISSN 1851-5606
<https://foroalfa.org/en/articles/invisible-design>

