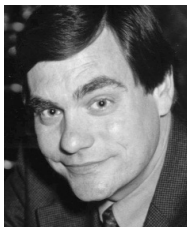


Experience Design that Drives Consideration

by Kevin A. Clark, Ron A. Smith, and Kazuhiko Yamazaki

In today's competitive, information-rich environment, Kevin Clark, Ron Smith, and Kazuhiko Yamazaki assert that loyalty has been replaced by "a strong permission to be considered again," especially in business-to-business relationships. The challenge is to design experiences that delight customers from first impression through ownership to disposal, a quest they examine in the context of three case studies.



Kevin Clark, Program Director, Brand Experience Design, IBM



Ron Smith, Senior Strategic Designer, Customer Experience Design, IBM



Kazuhiko Yamazaki, Manager, User Experience Design Center, IBM, Japan

Customer loyalty as we've known it is disappearing.

Making a good product that was better than the competition's used to win the day. A good product by itself could create a relatively loyal customer following.

As product offerings become more interchangeable, and customers better informed, this loyalty effect evaporates. This is known as *commoditization*. Distinctiveness moves from expected product quality and basic usability to

multi-sense triggered emotional connections for the customer.

The strategy, design, and engineering of service offerings are now following the same pattern. They are becoming increasingly interchangeable in a global economy.

We find the design professional is called upon to render service offerings distinctive in the marketplace, just as industrial designers, in the footsteps of Raymond Loewy, did for product offerings.¹ Designers deliver competitive advantage by helping resist the direct comparability that fuels commoditization.

The post-loyalty strategy: Be the company with *strong permission to be considered again* during the next purchase cycle.

1. Todd Leopold, CNN.com, "Planes, trains, automobiles, Coke bottles: The world Raymond Loewy created," Nov. 14, 2005.

Loyalty

Loyalty has the quality of being somewhat blind and unquestioning. Informed customers aren't loyal, but they may keep your offering on a short list for consideration the next time they're thinking about buying. Consideration effectively converts to purchase when offerings are designed to be *extremely convenient* to acquire, when they are designed with *better functional or service capabilities* than the competition, or when they are designed to deliver a *distinctive experience* infused with emotional and sensory elements.

There is also a huge difference between mere habit and serious consideration. We suggest that the increasingly elusive quest for customer loyalty should focus on making an investment in *being considered a second time*.

The pioneering work done in the consumer product environment is now starting to drive emotional experiences in business-to-business (B2B) commerce. Adding experiential content in the B2B environment makes for deeper connections with customers.

To discover this deeper connection that drives competitive advantage, the IBM Client Experience Design Method uses "day in the life" observational research to discover the unexpressed and unmet needs of customers and to deliberately find ways to connect with them emotionally. Although the "you are part of the family" loyalty is gone in many parts of the First World and late-stage emerging economies, this design method offers an end-to-end view of the customer ownership experience that will lead to high levels of consideration in the future.

The New Expectations of Customers

Customer expectations are continually reset, and the result is that last year's luxury features are this year's standard equipment. The amount of information now available to consumers is driving unheard-of levels of product performance and service expectations. Ironically, not all of this information is logical data that can be easily compared.

Emotional connections break the "better features this year" cycle.

Emotional and experiential information is reasserting its primary place in design and delivery. We say *reasserting* because it has always been part of the designer's repertoire. In an age in

which the rules of mass production and mass deployment no longer hold firm economic sway over offering selection and purchase behavior, strategic design becomes a foundational element of competitive advantage.

The role of the designer has always included the need to create desire. Although this necessity has taken a back seat in recent years to the importance of usability—engineering disappointment out rather than driving delight—even usability guru Donald Norman has seen fit to remind us of the role of emotion in purchase decisions. Although he is best known for his 1988 book *The Design of Everyday Things*, with its heavy emphasis on function, Norman wrote *Emotional Design* in 2005 in the full recognition of the need to infuse emotion into the act of design. Norman wrote that the earlier work has drawn "well-deserved criticism from designers: 'If we were to follow Norman's prescription, our designs would all be usable — but they would also be ugly.'" He continues: "Usable but ugly. That's a pretty harsh judgment. Alas, the critique is valid. Usable designs are not necessarily enjoyable to use..."²

"The surprise is that we now have evidence that an aesthetically pleasing object enables you to work better," says Norman. "Indeed, emotion makes you smart."³ Norman's assertion here is based on clinical research data showing that decision-making capability is derived from a blend of logical and emotional abilities. Individuals who have suffered injury to the emotional functions of the brain show a diminished capacity to make decisions. To be fully effective, design must engage the entire experience of the user throughout the awareness, consideration, purchase, ownership, and disposal phases of the interaction.

Consideration Challenges for the Design Professional

Although traditional customer loyalty is on the wane, we can work to limit a customer's "consideration set" at the next purchase opportunity by delivering a superior ownership experience.

Although most enterprises already spend a

2. Donald A. Norman, *Emotional Design: Why we love (or hate) everyday things*, Basic Books, Cambridge, 2004, p. 8.

3. *Ibid*, p. 10.

Experience Design Guidelines from the American Institute of Graphic Arts

The definition of experience design by the American Institute of Graphic Arts is not mass production but rather design that accommodates every user in an adaptive and purposeful way.⁴

- An approach to design that goes beyond traditional boundaries, striving to create experiences—not just products or services
- Looking at a product or service throughout its lifecycle from the customer's viewpoint—from before he or she perceives a need for that product to when he or she discards it
- Creating a relationship with individuals, not targeting a mass market
- Concerned with invoking and creating an environment that connects on an emotional or value level to the customer
- Build upon traditional design disciplines in the creation of products and services, as well as of environments

lot of time and energy trying to increase customer awareness, experience design would suggest placing resource bets on customers who are already aware of your offerings. Get them to consider your product more regularly, and they will buy it. It is possible to short-circuit the awareness phase altogether, if you can create a superior ownership experience that limits the number of offerings under consideration in the next go-around.

It is possible for customers to go beyond loyalty to become your advocates. True, it's difficult enough to make an emotional connection with customers, but getting customers to be advocates as a result of their ownership experience should

4. Adapted from the American Institute of Graphic Arts website.

be your goal. Having customers state they like something and share it with others is the ultimate proof of a great experience delivery.

This places a new challenge on the shoulders of the design professional. It means the design has to not only make a great first impression but also continue to delight the customer throughout the ownership experience. Design offerings that continue to deliver on customer expectations after purchase means design that begins in the physical world and connects to customers in the virtual world.

The Scion car brand is a good example of a new physical good that can adapt and change over time. Owners can continue to customize these vehicles from Toyota after purchase, including changing the wheels and interior accessories. Because it is “open-standard,” the Scion also promotes innovation from after-market suppliers in much the same tradition as the open-PC standard pioneered by IBM. Options and accessories blur from a dealership experience to an ownership experience. At the high end of the Toyota franchise, the ownership experience of driving a Lexus is just as much about how the car is serviced and the owner is treated as it is about the vehicle's driving performance.

Designing experiences to last throughout ownership is a new imperative in a world in which consideration is king.

A response: The IBM Client Experience Design Method

IBM design has a long history of meeting the design opportunities presented by ownership. As can be seen from the IBM Client Experience Design Method shown in **Figure 1**, a great deal of attention is spent at the front end of design engagements to ensure that the voice of the customer is heard. IBM design teams also observe their customers to help them discover unex-

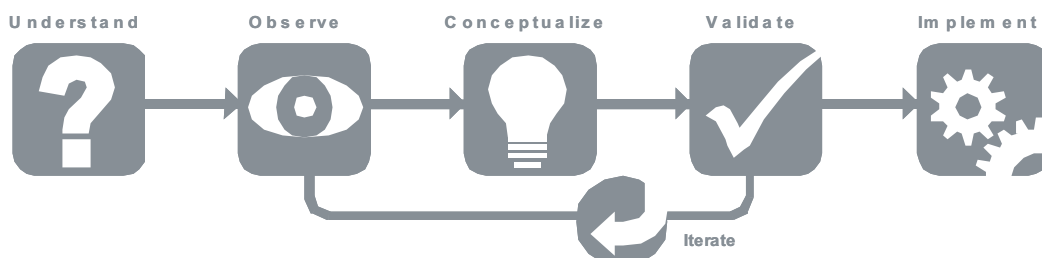


Figure 1. The IBM Client Experience Design Method emphasizes the use of observational and ethnographic research to drive design ideation by discovering the unspoken needs of customers.



Figure 2 and 3. Inspired by the culture of China, this prototype MP3 player uses the metaphor of a meditation stone for the device and a rice bowl for the charger/download base. These are familiar metaphors to customers in China, but refreshing and new for global markets.

pressed wants and needs.

Rather than accepting what customers say, we actively encourage and engage in research that observes *what customers do*. IBM Design Consulting Services uses the Client Experience Design Method both across the company and with external customers. Collaboration with IBM Business Consulting Services strategists and IBM Engineering and Technology Services engineers provide clients with rich sources of inspiration for design ideation and iteration, leading to distinctive offerings that deliver competitive advantage.

Case Study: A Fresh Look at MP3 Players

The personal digital music player market is saturated with consumer choices. In a design styling study for an external IBM client, the Design Consulting Services team offered a series of designs influenced by specific cultures, lifestyles, and demographics. The goal was to move upscale to attract the affluent sector of the marketplace with more-exclusive product offerings to compete on the global stage and to create brand loyalty with these customers.

Elegant was the key concept informing these new MP3 designs. But what is an elegant design or, more important, an elegant mobile sound reproduction experience? Here's what we came up with: beautiful, simple forms, rich material, intuitive operation, high-quality tactile interaction, reliability, absence of irritations, and pride of ownership.

We selected China as our country of focus. Our aim was to create emotional bonds with the owners of these devices. The Chinese people, we speculated, are looking to the West for the latest trends and styles. Instead, we chose to turn the

tables and look into the rich Chinese culture to find a meditation stone and a rice bowl that would be subconsciously familiar to the Chinese, but refreshingly new to international markets (Figures 2 and 3).

We used a pendant as a reference, believing it would appeal to young women as jewelry (Figure 4), and a carabiner hook and metal case to imply rugged equipment to men. We chose rich materials—real metals (not plated plastics) polished black or white, and we minimized visible controls to demonstrate the owner's appreciation for finely crafted objects.

Much of the innovation in the designs came



Figures 4. MP3 jewelry-inspired pendant.

in finding ways to simplify the experience of using these products and reflect that simplicity through visual expression. For instance, rather than connecting cables, we created a “charging bowl” into which the player gently drops or slides the river stone shape of the player to rest, perfectly centered and naturally aligned to the charging contacts. We also explored the best way to prevent inadvertently activating the device’s controls when carrying it in a pocket or a bag. Our research told us that the standard lock-switch solution used by many players did not satisfy the need for an easy and recognizable way to lock the controls. In our solution, the cover rotates the bottom third of the product 180 degrees to disable the switches. It also maintains the desired elegant appearance with a natural reminder that the controls are inactive (they are on the back). By picking up on the familiar metaphor of the rotating motion of a deadbolt door latch, we discovered a way to bring surprise and interaction that is useful and, more important, memorable—a key attribute to attract future consideration for the next purchase cycle.

Case Study: What’s in a Pocket?

What if you had x-ray vision and could see inside the pockets of people around you (**Figure 5**)? What would you see? What would a middle-age man be carrying? What would a younger woman have in her pocket? What might they carry next?

IBM posed these questions in what we called the Pockets Project, using ethnographic research to investigate business opportunities and new patterns of emerging usage. The project was meant to engender a new way to discuss innovation in the world of small personal electronic devices. The resulting insights continue to inform projects today—several years after this design exploration.

IBM design practitioners conducted ethnographic research to see what people really do carry in their pockets and purses, briefcases and backpacks. Beyond these observations, we asked: Can technology improve or replace some of the traditional items we carry? Can we converge, eliminate, or make redundant such individual pocket items as identification cards, credit cards,



Figure 5. What’s in a pocket? What are the implications of simplifying and orchestrating the jumble we carry with us every day?



Figure 6. The InfoCore computer can connect to several types of conventional and new devices for user interaction.

multiple keys, PDAs, and cell phones? Are there cultural barriers to implementing particular design directions?

We achieved a convergence solution through the use of the InfoCore—a self-contained and fully functional computer—stripped of its user interfaces and packaged to fit in a pocket (Figure 6). The InfoCore is easy to carry and can connect to any number of larger devices, or it can become a wearable computer when it is connected to a head-mount display. It pulls a lot of capability into a single device and presents the possibility of significantly reducing note redundancies.

One major “Aha” was a convergence reversal, the usefulness and amplification of a concept that began with a cellular phone provider—the Cellular Hub. It’s essentially a wireless phone with data capability (Figure 7). Any number of devices can connect to the Hub, and it offers the user the benefits of voice-controlled, hand-free operation; image and voice on multiple platforms; and remote monitoring capabilities for medical and security purposes. Whatever is in your pocket, if it is connected to the wireless Hub, it becomes more useful and powerful.

Case Study: The New York Stock Exchange Trading Floor

The New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) is the world’s largest equities market, with an average of 1.4 billion shares traded every day. Even with the introduction of online trading, 80 percent of the trades each day (over 1 billion) are still handled by 1,000 brokers on the floor of the exchange.

Continually increasing trading volume forced the NYSE to install a wireless computer network several years ago. Traders could access it with a tablet computer or a PDA using custom software. The wireless communication data was transferred to brokers who would take phone orders in booths at the periphery of the trading floor. From the wireless devices they could also



Figure 7. The Cellular Hub is essentially a wireless phone with data capability, to which various devices connect by using the Bluetooth wireless protocol.

access real-time price information and confidential tracking information from their company databases.

At the time, the new wireless system offered significant benefits over the old paper-slip system, but it was still based on off-the-shelf devices that were less than optimal for the trading-floor environment. Even with real-time market data, trade execution capability, and other information, many traders continued to rely on the traditional and more familiar paper-slips. The exchange wanted more traders to move to the automated system, with its inherent speed and efficiency.

When we first started working with the NYSE, they knew exactly what they wanted—a big screen, all-day battery life, and the ability to handle all activities, wherever the trader was in the exchange. We prototyped the new system as a harness-worn device, but the traders uniformly disliked it.

We gained permission, with a little arm-twisting, to go out on the trading floor and really see how the place worked. This observational research turned out to be pivotal in getting the requirements right for this project—and fully

satisfying the needs of the stock traders.

First, it was immediately apparent that these professionals worked in about two-hour blocks of time. A device with a three-hour battery life would be fine for one work session, and could then be exchanged at a battery bar we designed as an easy stop-over point for breaks, lunch, and so on.

We also discovered that when the traders were off the trading floor, they wanted to disconnect from the work day. It's high-pressure work, and having the device and data interaction follow them off the floor was undesirable. So the wireless infrastructure only needed to cover the trading floor—simplifying logistics, installation, maintenance, and wireless data security considerations.

We designed the devices so that they would fit in a hand and be lightweight enough to carry for hours at a time (**Figure 8**). The screen takes up almost the entire surface of the flat face of the handheld, and the back is curved to mate securely with a wrist strap for the average hand. This design is still in production and in use at the NYSE, and it is being considered for other industry applications.



Figure 8. Floor traders at the New York Stock Exchange give this IBM-designed handheld wireless trading device top scores in user satisfaction.

Creating Consideration with Experience Design

Offerings that address the end-to-end acquisition and ownership experience will have superior chances of attracting brand and purchase consideration a second time. A complete user experience includes usability, accessibility, appearance, personality, branding, and so on. Moreover, a design should span the entire lifecycle, and not be limited to just one scene of the user's time. Also, it should cover the total environment that is related to all the materials needed to achieve the user's goals.

As mentioned earlier, a well-informed business strategy leads to the design of truly useful and innovative offerings for users. At IBM, we listen to the desires of people around the world and consider their desires, along with our original designs and development inspirations, and this is how we achieve leadership in the marketplace.

Listening and leading in the design of consumer experiences is the key to driving high levels of consideration in a world in which customer loyalty is increasingly difficult to come by.

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