

# COLLABORATING FOR BRAND VALUE AND LONGEVITY

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In tough economic times a holistic, three-dimensional approach to product development that puts together the collaborative excellence of all creative disciplines is vital for brands to entrench their value without compromising quality.

**T**he current risk-averse nature of our economy is the right time for all the creative people involved in initiating, developing and marketing products to start collaborating to add more value to the process of products for our clients' competitive advantage.

Too often the creative disciplines involved in taking a product to market work in silos, only collaborating in the final stages. A more focused approach, through which a product's financial viability is determined early on will bring more value to the product lifecycle and is far more cost efficient.

Products are becoming more important to the brand than they were a few years ago and consumers are aware that brands are more than visual. They are also tactile. A good-looking product may fail in its target market because it doesn't feel right in the hand, or operates clumsily.

Making a product work at the right price is a challenge – and it's a skill that product developers bring on early in the development lifecycle. This is why it is important to collaborate with experienced product developers at the early stages because they understand the complexities and costs of product manufacture and can produce prototypes for evaluation.

Product developers have hands-on exposure to a wide range of materials because they are not beholden to a manufacturer or a specific process. Early in the process they can determine the financial viability of a product, helping curb expenditure on ideas that may be altered or abandoned.

Marketing spend has to be wise these days. Product developers' expertise can inform that budget.

I believe that unnecessary costs can be cut from the entire product process if brand houses and product

developers collaborate at an earlier stage. As product developers we manage the technological risk through the entire process. We examine the environmental and sociological impact of the product, ensuring its market success. We bring a toolbox of ideas and experience to the team that offer insight to brand strategists.

The product conceptualisation, production and marketing process must be integrated if they are to protect the brand's value in the present – and with developments in the future.

Manufacturers have approached us for help with interpreting and translating two-dimensional concepts given to them by creative agencies. While these have been true to the brand identity and well executed, they lack three-dimensional resolution and have not explored issues of usability.

Based only on the creative brief it is likely that the manufacturer would produce something based only on his experience and capabilities. The full potential of the manufacturing spectrum would not have been explored for the best options to enhance the look and feel of the brand's value.

We use our expertise to understand the brand language as created by the branding agency. We explore the real need for the product and how it will be used and experienced. Then, always mindful of the budget, we incorporate our experience in the choice of material and production processes to ensure that brand value is delivered into the hands of the target market.

Usually there has been little discussion about the customers in the target market, how they interact with objects, what materials they enjoy handling, and how much they are prepared to pay for the product.

There is so much more to communicating a brand than the two-dimensional look of the product. Introducing industrial design early in the process ensures that the end product – as well as packaging and signage – is acceptable and affordable to the targeted customers, and build trust in the brand.

The initial two-dimensional product idea – that has probably gone straight from the concept proposal to the manufacturer – may produce a product that, once it has been manufactured is either too expensive for the target market or, in order to beat the budget, short-cuts



The Snuza Baby Monitor, designed by ...XYZ Design. The Snuza aims to prevent cot death, also known as SIDS (Sudden infant death syndrome) whereby an infant stops breathing.

have been taken in functionality and materials used, jeopardising its market acceptance.

Product developers need to influence the look, feel and functionality of the company's future range of products to ensure consistency and brand recognition. Apple computers are a superb example of how, for more than 20 years, the look, quality and finish of all their computers have had the undeniable Apple stamp – and it's not just the logo. It's the way they are designed, manufactured and finished – the whole essence speaks of quality.

Nokia, on the other hand, has little brand consistency, apart from the logo.

When we are involved in developing products for clients, we work in networks of brand houses, software developers and strategists who all have a good understanding of the clients' product and marketing strategy.

An example is the Snuz range of baby products where we worked with strategic brand identity designer Julie Scott of ID&B.

A client came to us with an idea for a baby monitor. Our first step was to thoroughly investigate the market for these products. What were customers looking for, what would make them buy our product, what would they be prepared to pay, what would the product look like and what materials should be used?

All these issues were discussed with one main underlying question in mind: Would the business make a profit from this product? We discussed at length with the clients their vision for the product and further product ideas within the range. We scoped the future of their products, what they would look like and what modifications could be made within the brand identity. We take the view that as brands grow and evolve, the essence that we distil in it at the start must be recognisable in the future.

Together with ID&B we spent months determining what the brand needed to communicate to the customers and then formulated a strategy that would inform the

brand design and the tools that would deliver that. These included getting the name right, the shape and colours of the product that would create confidence in the brand.

The skill is to merge the brand's essence and values with the users' expectations of the brand and how they experience it.

A considerable time was spent choosing the appropriate material for the monitor and testing the elements with which it would come into contact, such as ensuring there would be no allergic reactions to babies' skin and ointments used on the skin.

Had we not invested this time and effort in the development phases, the product may have not appealed to the target market, been too expensive or could have had a negative reaction – all of which would have irreparably damaged the brand.

The monitor has proved successful and further branded products are being developed and marketed, capitalising on the elements we got right long before the product reached the shelves.

The economy is taking strain and companies, wary of risk, are inclined to spend less on taking new products to market. We firmly believe that brand houses and product designers should collaborate sooner in product gestation. This ensures that the appropriate expertise and experience are applied before too many dead-ends are explored and expensive prototypes wasted.

This strategy holds tremendous benefits to all involved in the process. We – the brand strategists, advertising agencies, product developers, marketing agents – should not be in competition with each other.

Africa doesn't have a mature networking ethos when it comes to product initiation, development and branding. I hope new creative networks will be forged during the coming months as financial disciplines focus on the value delivered during product development. <