



The Indian **EXPRESS**

JOURNALISM OF COURAGE



THE FINANCIAL EXPRESS

www.financialexpress.com

Read to Lead

Perversity sells design

Shombit Sengupta
Aug 24th 2014

Being customer friendly is what Leonardo da Vinci taught marketers through all his engineering designs. His *Mona Lisa*, the painting he did in the 16th century has been so enigmatic that almost 10 million people from across the globe still visit Louvre Museum in Paris every year to see it. No other work to date has achieved this kind of success. This can be considered as art marketing the Louvre.

Mona Lisa, La Joconde in French, is the world's best known, most visited, written and sung about, and most parodied work of art. It was a hugely controversial painting because it was perverse and ahead of its time. Paintings done then were large depictions of social and religious scenes in public buildings like churches or in palaces. But Leonardo's painting had a central figure portrait with aerial perspective, and that too of an unknown woman, not royalty.

A painting or a sculpture that's hung or erected in a museum is inspirational. But design that is applied through functional improvement for bettering the human quality of life represents an artist's strong discipline. Leonardo is reputed to be the most diversely talented genius ever to have lived. His micro detailed designs went beyond his sensorial painting canvas to upgrade human life. He conceptualized flying machines, armoured vehicles, concentrated solar power, and made important discoveries in anatomy,

civil engineering, optics, and hydrodynamics. His designs were 600 years ahead of his time. By providing people the benefit of science in everyday life, he became the future builder of the world.

With Leonardo as the reference, I find that European design, which has the order of discipline, creativity and process, is the authentic source of the world's best knowledge and knowhow of product design as we practice it nowadays. Last week I wrote about how German machinery is best but irrelevant to a section of the Indian market; Indian machines are compromised due to being in the demand led market where quality is not addressed. So in diametrically different angles, both fail to deliver customer benefit. The Germans need to have the willingness to change to become relevant to heterogeneous India, while Indian companies have to improve in capability to deliver excellence in products.

Let me today address my fellow industrial product designers in India. I can only tell you that if you have the good fortune of learning design principles from the work of designers or design schools in the five countries that I got exposed to, just grab that opportunity without asking any question. Let me describe my learning experience.

France taught me how to make any selling proposition very aspirational and very disruptive. The Germans hammered home the point to me about high precision, never deviate from the process. Americans see everything big, from them I learnt about how important it is to design industrial products for mass scale manufacture. The Japanese exposed me to how miniature

designing is done. It's not just flat reduction, aesthetics and neatness have to be perfect, while functionality can never be compromised; in fact it's heightened. The Italians taught me elegance and artistic sense at every stage and in the finished product.

Nowadays experiencing product design from all these countries is not so difficult in India as products from these five cultures are all here. So if you have the patience and passion for reverse engineering, that is reproducing another manufacturer's product just by following detailed examination of its construction or composition, you can easily learn. You will discover how these five countries approach industrial product design, and certainly improve your capability to become globally competitive. In today's context, don't forget to learn from the Koreans too.

A designer's heady combination of scientific and sensorial substance in product design is what will surprise the customer. It is the customer's first approach towards a product that should cue its usage excellence and feeling. That determines its success, not its engineering inventiveness alone.

Approach: Without any assistance, the customer should get magnetized towards easily approaching the product, especially a new product she is unfamiliar with. If she needs an elaborate user manual to make the product work, you've lost half her interest. The product's immediate appearance must be easy, inviting, glamorous, and psychologically in sync with the customer's requirement purpose. She should experience these four parameters after buying the product. She will then start talking about the brand to influence others to buy it.

Usage: The initial involvement of product usage functionality should be magnetic, provide independence, be devoid of intimidation and easy to use. It should be ergonomically in sync with the customer's usage habit. This is valid for after purchase too.

Feeling: The customer's feeling is hidden and intangible but that's what impacts her acceptance of the product. As a designer, if you

can gauge her feeling after she has approached and used the product, you can mastermind a strong concept for the design. If the customer's feeling is not distinctive, you can be sure there would be no word-of-mouth or excessive commercial success. You can assess this at the time of designing the product only when you can make her articulate her unstated feelings and carefully watch her eye expression, facial expression and body language while she is doing so. Not knowing the customer's feeling will make your product merely the material you've used.

"Pop art is for everyone," declared American painter Andy Warhol. He also said that when he makes any mistake in his paintings, people like it even more. In general, society always questions design that has some difference. That difference is being creative ahead of time. Most of the world's celebrated art and design have always been prematurely ahead so people have found perversion in them. At every design point, beginning from ideation, concept, design, prototype, tooling and the final product, the customer's ergonomic behavior is the central theme. You can only enrobe it in the design. You then have a design that has appeal and sells.

—Shombit Sengupta is an international consultant to top management on differentiating business strategy with execution excellence.

Reach him at www.shiningconsulting.com ■