

Insight

DESIGN; A Friendship through Hardship






Why Invest in Design?

The Value of Design
in Challenging and
Difficult Periods

By Tajrobeh Design Studio | Autumn 2022

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We write
only about
what we have
experienced
first-hand
and lived
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We **deeply understand** the value of help and companionship, when we are deeply troubled and challenged.

Social, political, economic and environmental concerns, and confusion about how to interact with fast-changing technologies and ultra-modern innovations (such as blockchain, AI, etc.), have created an ambiguous and out-of-control atmosphere for general public. On the other hand, businesses are also struggling with a challenging and pressing economy. Now the question is:

In the era of pervasive economic, political and social crises, should we "pay" for design? Is it really a priority?

If the managers' viewpoint of design is a "cost" viewpoint, then in critical situations, the Design Department is usually among the first units whose budget is reduced and even eliminated.

The irony is that Design in its contemporary meaning was born in the heart of economic challenges. During the American economic recession in the 20s and 30s (The Great Depression), the role of designers to create influential and effective products became more prominent. This is merely a reference that

designers are used to deal with difficult economic times, and Design has been forged in the heat of economic challenges.

Managers must be able to estimate the economic VALUE of the Design, not just its PRICE. To estimate these values, one must know its effects and impacts. In difficult times, Design can be an effective friend and companion for businesses in at least three layers:

First Layer:

Product Design

1- Improving the product/service experience

Improving products is not always about technology and materials. Sometimes a little intelligence in the user experience of the product can make it competitive. For example, when you browse the furniture markets, you can find very few sofas with the right proportions for comfortable sitting, while many of these designs are copies of famous and important designs of the furniture world. With a little more precision, and benefiting from the expertise of a designer who can correctly define and refine the proportions of the sofa (reverse engineering!), it is possible to make a beautiful and comfortable furniture with just the same amount of materials and work load.

Another example of "Low Design" is digital services with bad user interfaces. By applying the right and effective design for the user experience and interface (UX/UI), many digital services can become a competitive and pleasant product, without imposing a lot of cost on the company.

A large part of people do not need products with highly-detailed technical features, rather, they like to:

- 1- have a product with reliable and trouble-free **fundamental functions** that won't cause any technical concerns for them;
- 2- use a product with pleasant **usability**, so that their humanity is respected;

3- have a product that in terms of appearance and **aesthetics**, has an identity and represents a decent and progressive lifestyle (we are not talking about luxury products here).

Design can be effective in all three layers (Function, User Experience and Aesthetics). The most important challenge and mission of design is to create a balance between these factors in such a way that they express a progressive lifestyle without creating an expensive and out-of-reach product.

A large part of Iran's society (and of many other countries) has regressed economically in recent years because of inflation, but due to being connected to the world through various media and digital networks, it has edgy and modern expectations of its life and does not want to backslide.

By creating products and services that have an enlivened user experience, without complex technical specifications, design can help companies to bring their affordable products closer to the people's modern expectations.

2- Reducing costs!

The default mentality of many business owners and managers is that

"Design = cost";

"Design = everything becoming more expensive".

But this is not necessarily the case. Design in different stages such as, material selection, production methods, installation, maintenance and repair can optimize processes in a way that leads to economic savings in the mid-term and long-term.

Also, when the design of your product is of high-quality, it becomes an influential and living billboard for your brand and carries an effective part of your advertising burden.

Second Layer:

Brand Identity and Experience Design

1- We buy stories, not products

We want genuine and novel human experiences; Stories and experiences that relate to our human roots, and at the same time, represent our modern lifestyle. The human feeling and liveliness of the brand, the feeling of respect, reliability and reassurance, all of these can be designed.

If you don't communicate the positioning and identity of your product, it does not mean that it doesn't have a positioning and identity. People will assign some characteristics to your product on their own. It is better to design and communicate your product positioning and brand story in advance.

Lead your audience's mind to a correct perception of your brand.

From the moment the product is seen on a billboard or in the digital space, up to the store and at the point of purchase, and until after that when people use your product, all this path and its experiences can be designed to make your brand image stronger and more prominent.

2- Creating a sense of belonging inside the company

A clear brand identity will be a reason for the employees of the organization to work more enthusiastically and more motivated. Because they can have a dialogue about their work with others. The feeling of belonging to a larger whole, and the pride of being a part of it, is achieved by Internal Branding.

Being a part of the "Mercedes Benz" family and story, is a source of pride, even in the most difficult periods!

Third Layer:

Communication Design

1- Creating a Dialogue through product/service design

In many projects, we have witnessed that the business owner tries to sell a product that he himself "recognizes" as important and useful for intended customers, without a real understanding of them; But a professional design team focuses on the needs, desires and values of the users and conveys these messages to the audience with its designs:

- "We understand you";
- "You are important and precious";
- "As a human being, you are worthy for us to walk the obsessive and long road of creativity and design".

Through this approach, the audience feels valued by the product and its producer, so they talk more about it with the people around them, invest emotionally more, and in this way, brand loyalty increases.

It's been said that:

"A great product is the one that creates a dialogue".

2- Social Identity (A Brand Beyond Product)

In a time when people experience various intense emotions and feelings, any type of interaction (positive and negative) will be remembered stronger and longer. When everything feels hopeless for the people, you stay hopeful and promising. Be reliable even in critical situations. How? ...

Don't be gray.

In the final sequence of the film "The Fablemans" (directed by Steven Spielberg), a sentence from the great director John Ford (played by David Lynch!) is quoted, which is a great lesson for the main character of the film (a teenager who loves filmmaking) and for us as well:

"When the horizon is at the bottom, it's interesting;
When the horizon is at the top, it's interesting;
When the horizon is in the middle, it's boring as shit."


Most of the times, in people's minds, being in the middle translates to being average (or even low-level). Conservative reactions may gain a little security for your business, but it destroys its power of impact and remarkability.

Have a clear stance on social, political, economic and technological trends and incidents. Let your customers and audience know your brand values clearly, with high contrast and transparency.

Manifest your own stance and style. Communicate with your audience prominently and powerfully, not in a gray and lifeless manner. In the dusty and uncertain conditions that have led to a pervasive thirst for certainty, any person or brand that can offer, manifest and express clearly, can solidify its position in the minds of its audience, because people are thirsty for transparency and certainty.

It's been said that

"Good friends are not only the ones you can laugh with, but also the ones you can cry with."

The same goes for businesses and brands. Stay with people in difficult times. And of course, design is an experienced companion in times of economic and social challenges, and business and brand owners can cry in the presence of designers! 

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