

Insight

How to Fail Design?

What we learned from our failed projects?

Based on true characters, stories and experiences



By Tajrobeh Design Studio | Autumn 2021

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We write
only about
what we have
experienced
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What prevents design projects to have real and effective outcomes?

The Usual Suspects!

Many of the companies and brands that we designed for, no longer exist! They failed for different reasons and stopped trying. Some of them failed at design management and implementation stage. Through reviewing these failed projects and businesses, we discovered some patterns and common factors for their failures.

In this article we share them with you, hoping that it sheds a light on how to manage and implement design in your business and organization.

1: Design as a Mandatory Formality or a Formal Mandatory

Rarely someone disagrees with Design and its application in the organization. No one says: "I don't agree with using Design!" or "I don't think it's a good idea to design our product"! So when someone in the company (or even from outside of the company) begins talking about starting a design project, everybody confirms the importance of design to develop their products and market.

But they rarely discuss the real outcomes and impacts of the design process. Because determining design outcomes and its real values need a deep knowledge and insight about design projects, the kind of which rarely can be found among non-designer managers. The problem here is that they usually don't admit to having no knowledge about it, yet worse, they pretend to know everything about the functions and impacts of design.

In this regard, Design becomes a matter of a "Correct" and "Important" subject, not a process of creating "Value". And this is the beginning of a Mandatory Formal Project that runs just in the surface of organizational efforts. A project that is just a badge of honor for the company, with no depth and clear agenda and expectations, and even sometimes with no dedicated director or department.

The "Mandatory Formal Project" syndrome is mostly seen in those kind of managers who see design projects as a tool to develop their resumes and as a credit for themselves, not as a tool for Organizational Development.

Before initiating any design projects, first illuminate the real problem and challenge, and your expected outcomes and impacts. Then determine the role of each department to properly implement the final results and designs. And of course it is a good idea to ask your design team to lead this process.

Most of the times, before entering the design process, you need to have a Branding and Development Strategy that gives the design team proper food for thought and helps them adjust the process.

2: Facadical Design

You can renew the look of your organization through designing the surface of your brand touchpoints (and that's not necessary a bad thing to do). It might give your employees and customers a fresh feeling about your company. But if changing the appearance and facade of the brand (such as graphics of touchpoints and products) is not accompanied with a real and deep brand experience, it will (at its best) be just a superficial and shallow transient wave.

You can see some of these shallow and perfunctory efforts in many businesses and brands that have mistaken "Rebranding" with changing just their logo and colors; while their real brand experience has not been changed and redesigned at all.

Designing your brand "Inside-Out" is always more sustainable and believable.

3: Dictative Design Order

Some managers see themselves just as someone who orders design. They don't involve and engage themselves in the design process. They assume that everything can proceed through just spending money and they don't have to think about it anymore. Dead Wrong.

When a manager or business owner assumes that outsourcing the design projects means that they don't have to participate in the design process, then they won't have a sense of belonging to final results and therefore, their mind won't fully commit to implementing and rendering the designs in their organizations. Especially when the company is in a crisis and Design doesn't seem to be of important priority.

You can't (and shouldn't) outsource your design projects entirely. Your internal teams and managers should be a part of the design project. It helps to impregnate the final outcomes of the design project to internal values and identity. And also you can increase the probability of proper implementing of the final results, because of the sense of belonging among your internal members.

Don't let your design team to become isolated, because the final outcomes will be strange and alien to you. Also, after entering the implementing stage, feed your design team with constant internal and external feedbacks about the designed items (product, service, Ads,...), so that they can recalibrate and refine their outcomes accordingly.

4: Design as a "noun", not "verb"

Design won't become real and effective in a company just by having some designs! "Having Design" doesn't mean "Being Designed". Many of the design outcomes that are being delivered to companies end up becoming sterile and being documented (and buried) in Chic Brand Books, Power Point Presentations and Catalogues.

Design is an action, requiring active engagement and implementations. Internal teams and managers including marketing, technical and design department should define and regulate their programs for design agendas. All of the organization should act to make design real and effective.

As a manager or business owner, don't accept any design unless is accompanied with an Action Plan.

The design team should review and refine their outcomes, based on the feedbacks that are gathered through implementation of the designs in the real circumstances. As a manager, ask your design team for these reviewing and refinings as their After Sales Services.

5: Small(-minded) Design!

After an intense and long session with our client about their business development strategy and identity design approach, one of their top level managers asked us: "Can you design a small brochure for our organization, before we enter the identity design project?" (Imagine our level of frustration after hearing such a small-minded request).

Knowing and minding the difference between "Necessary" and "Emergency", or between "Important" and "Not-Important" is highly recommended even for daily activities, let alone for business development.

It's very easy to fall in for "Small-Manageable-Tangible-Low stakes" activities. You may attract some attention by doing some fast-rewarding activities such as designing a brochure or even running a 360 degrees advertising campaign! But it doesn't necessarily means that these actions are effective.

Making Small and Fast impressions are quite common, especially among middle-managers. Because they help them get some attention and appreciation from their bosses. They create an image (or illusion) about themselves as an active and effective manager. But these empty low-level activities won't help developing the company in a real and sustainable fashion.

Another common example is the long and repetitive sessions about redesigning the Logo, while there is no solid and reliable program to enhance and enrich the customers' experiences of the brand. Because firstly, reviewing the design of the logo "seems" easier and more tangible, and secondly, everybody can have an opinion on the logo, but few people are insightful enough to put themselves in users' shoes and review the overall brand experience.

Many of companies are eager to penetrate their target audiences' minds with small fast-rewarding actions, and without having any designed and clear identity. With that, they replace "deep and effective" branding programs with "small but noise-making" activities. An approach that we call it "Organizational Propaganda".

If you want to harness the power of design for developing your business and brand, your identity and strategy should be redesigned prior to any visual and outer-layer design activities.

A little bit of patience and strategic foundations for your brand, pay off remarkably in mid-term and long-term.

6: Moot Design!

It's been said that "A camel is a horse, designed by a committee."

Some managers are misunderstood that holding brain-storming (and other kinds of) sessions can give them good designs. In fact they've mistaken Idea for Design. Ideation can't replace the complex process of the design projects.

An idea might seem and sound great and effective in the moment, especially under the synergetic vibe of a hot brain-storming session, but after a short period of time, we might find that it's a naive and oversimplified idea.

With this Moot approach, at the end of the brain-storming session, some ideas are finalized (in a dangerous way) and no one is usually responsible for reviewing the real impacts of the perceived ideas through time. The organization finds out about the difference between their idea and real design, in a hard way and after wasting so much resources and time.

Don't trade the real design outcomes -even if they are hard to achieve- with simplified and raw "shiny" ideas -even if they are tempting. By converting early ideas to sophisticated design programs through professional design processes, make it hard for your naive competitors to compete with you.

How to fail Design?

There are other factors that can fail a design project to be added to this list. We can summarize most of these factors under the terms "Oversimplification" and "Shortcutism".

The attractiveness and charming aspects of the Design world can lead us to being ignorant toward its dangers and hardships.

We can design a sustainable and successful development for our organizations and brands through a better and clearer understanding about Design and its Processes.

We wish you a Designed Success.



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