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Design Processes – Wise Tip #2

Topic. Design processes for branding and marketing publications and products, including web and print.

Who can benefit. Organizations developing branding and marketing publications and products in-house or with outsourced professionals. CEOs and managers making product and budgeting decisions.

Putting it all together. This article is written based on many real situations – the problems and the solutions. A design process assists and supports excellent product design – if done well, the process actually enhances the creative ideas and solutions.

Cautions. Many organizations operate in ‘design chaos’ – spending excessive money and time on design projects and/or ending up with mediocre designs. Some fear a design process, thinking it is not “organic” or “dynamic” enough. This is a result of misunderstanding the use and effectiveness of a good process. Some decision makers do not know what good design is, do not want to know, and therefore simply should not be involved in the design process – they should responsibly delegate those in the organization that do have adequate skills.

Recommendations.

Elements of a good design process. These may look differently in each organization; however the core principles are proven “best practices”.

1. Record the design process. Write the process in a step by step format for everyone to follow. This enables your organization to follow it correctly each time. Build the ‘creativity’ and ‘organic-ness’ into the process itself – this will most likely take place in steps 2 and 6 – 8.
 2. Before each project, define the project requirements clearly. This should include how the product will be used, the target audience, variations needed as the product line grows, colors, size, and all the specific design elements particular to the product. Use examples and non-examples. A meeting with the design team sometimes will be great benefit to get everyone on the same page.
 3. For each project, plan a realistic budget and schedule. Define how many compositions will be needed, how many reviews you anticipate, and the corresponding budget and schedule. Include ample reviewer time to examine the designs and come to consensus. Often too little time is spent by the reviewers and a knee jerk reaction results.
 4. Define the design review team. Include a small limited number of reviewers – usually 2 or 3 are sufficient. This streamlines the review discussions and does not involve too many opinions that are difficult to acquire consensus. The reviewers should be knowledgeable about design and not new or infrequent participants in these types of activities. The reviewers should have a thick skin – able to receive feedback and other people’s opinions. The reviewers should also be somewhat diplomatic – able to state their opinion without offending others.
 5. Inform the design review team about the requirements. The requirements should be in writing. This enables the team to quickly review products with a clear understanding of the project goals and requirements. This keeps the project on task and prevents confusion and resulting scope, budget, and schedule increases.
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6. View each design individually. Assess the emotional impact. Assess the logical design principles. There are several methods in this step that should be used as part of the process. If time permits, allow the reviewers time to 'sleep on a design' for a day or two before deciding.
7. View all designs together. Assess the emotional impact. Assess the logical design principles. There are several methods in this step that should be used as part of the process. If time permits, allow the reviewers time to 'sleep on a design' for a day or two before deciding.
8. Select the top designs. Define what design elements were good and what were not. Be as specific as possible. A meeting with the design team sometimes will be great benefit to get everyone on the same page for the next stage of design.
9. Refine the designs. This may be resolved in multiple cycles of reviews by repeating steps 4 through 7 with slight variations.

The Company

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