

Make products with a future

Five reasons why your designers need to do things differently.

1. Don't market 'me-too' products

In these tough economic times, your company's products must stand out in the crowd, because its very survival may depend on it. But the rise of globalization and changes in design technology means there are now thousands of companies in the world that can potentially match your product, and probably offer it at a lower cost.

Even the strength of your company's brand and your customer's loyalty won't sustain your place in the market, so you need to develop products that provide a valuable, unique ongoing experience for your customers that can't be matched by your competitors. And this means channeling the innovation latent in your company by changing the approach and methods used to create your products.

Companies that do survive and prosper will be those that capitalize on innovation by moving to a holistic approach to design that focuses on the whole product and the 'connected' end user experience. It requires a platform-level unified solution that embraces all aspects of electronics design in a single environment.

2. Market 'only from me' products

A truly unique product that provides genuine and sustainable market differentiation is one that can only be available from your company. The style of your product and even the electronic parts can be duplicated, but innovation contained in the soft domain is difficult for others to copy, easy to protect, difficult for others to predict, and lets you bind your relationships with your customers. Ultimately, people buy experiences, not products.

To compete, your company needs to provide that customer experience by creating innovative, connected products that are not only functionally 'cool', but also hook into your broader ecosystem to extend and enhance the company-customer relationship. A 'connected' product can provide customers with additional and value-added services, remote product updates (software, firmware, and even soft hardware), remote diagnosis and more.

These services establish and sustain your customer base, provide a path for your future products, and help to make your brand truly unique. The approach requires a holistic design solution that allows to engineers focus on soft design and the bigger product design picture, while removing the barriers to electronics design innovation.

3. Help engineers be your ally

Remaining, or becoming, a leader in the market relies on a design team creating products that are unique, and deliver a positive long term customer experience. And that means your company's design teams need to adopt a design solution that promotes innovation, a soft-centric approach to product design, and the means to explore the latest technology.

This cannot be provided by traditional design solutions that rely on a loosely coupled collection of point tools, because this divide and conquer approach (dividing complexity into manageable chunks to conquer design complexity) kills innovation. Designers are forced away from considering the big picture, and cannot focus on the functional essence of the product design itself and how they can expand your company-customer relationship.

What design engineers need is a unified design environment that brings the whole design process into one sphere, eliminates low-level complexity, and frees them to focus on the final product while exploring new design concepts and ideas. Habit, conservatism or just stubbornness may make them reluctant to change, but even their own survival may depend on it.

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4. Compete using the latest technology

Electronics technology moves fast, but customer demands can move just as quickly. There's no point trying to compete with products that use older technology – today's customers are too savvy for that and your competitors will pass you by.

Your company needs to stay relevant and ahead of the pack by keeping pace with the latest design technology and design techniques. The electronics design systems your company engineers use must be recharged with new and relevant technology as soon as it's available, and provide the means for engineers to investigate it. Competing companies will have that technology in their products as soon as they can, so you can't let it pass you by.

For this to be possible your design solution supplier must anticipate future trends and quickly arm your design teams with the tools needed to explore and embrace them. Be wary of design solution providers that artificially segregate or hold back our design technologies, while only providing the newest technologies to an elite group of customers that can afford to pay a premium price.

New design technology and techniques should be seen as an opportunity to innovate and create unique product designs, so your company's electronics design tools must be continually developed to keep you at the forefront of design technology.

5. Be a smooth operator

Your company not only needs to develop great, competitive products but also get them smoothly out the door to your customers (and before someone else does). This means your engineers must be able to transition new designs to prototype form and on to manufacture without errors, design re-spins or delays.

Adopting a unified approach to product design makes this holistic approach a reality. It lets you manage the increasing pressure to bring products to market on time, and within budget, by centralizing all aspects of the process in one application and environment. All design information and resources exist in a single data store, providing controlled and coherent access for everyone connected with the product development process.

Market opportunities won't be missed, the ongoing relationship with your customers is extended and you won't be beaten to the punch by the growing number of competitors that can crank out those 'me-too' products when that opportunity exists.