



Google, whose co-founder Sergey Brin is shown with its Google Glass technology, is cited as a pioneer of the Big Design way of innovating.

If we build it, the customers will come

Companies are learning to innovate first, then persuade the marketplace to embrace their vision

What if ... Those two, simple words are able to conjure extraordinary opportunities for visionary business leaders. ‘What if ... we could create a product so revolutionary it changes everything? What if ... we could develop an entirely new market? What if ... we could change the world by thinking in a different way?’

Apple Inc.’s late CEO Steve Jobs and Google Inc. co-founders Sergey Brin and Larry Page saw beyond the existing needs of the marketplace and created something revolutionary. No one needed an iPad – at least not until Apple created a marketing campaign showcasing the tablet’s capabilities. It then became a must-have tech toy.

Today, more and more, visionaries and activist CEOs are also creating new markets and then filling them by educating customers. Markus Giesler, who teaches marketing at Schulich School of Business, describes Big Design as the process companies use to develop awe-inspiring visions. Big Design leaders ask the ‘what if’ questions, develop game-changing products and services, and then use advanced analytics to finetune their innovations and develop cutting-edge marketing campaigns to maximize the product’s desirability. In fact, explains Prof. Giesler, they see product development and marketing as a sociological design process. Today, a growing number of corporations such as Mercedes Benz, BMW and Nestlé are similarly using marketing and consumer insights to produce unprecedented business opportunities.

“In our research, we found that Big Design companies, whether Google or a start-up like Nest Labs, follow the same sociological design principles,” explains Prof. Giesler, Chair of the Schulich Marketing Group. “They ask: ‘Do I tailor my innovation to the needs of the market, or tailor the market to the needs of my innovation?’”

In an era of rapid innovation and globalization, organizations are turning to Big Data to help predict consumer behaviour and market trends, then produce goods and services in a customized way to meet client demand. But leaders who embrace the concept of Big Design have the ability to disrupt marketplaces and gain a

clear advantage in the global economy by doing the exact opposite – first designing the revolutionary products and then using data to validate their innovations. Therein lies the opportunity for leaders willing to transform their organizations to capitalize on the untapped business potential that Big Design presents.

The only way companies can make that transition is by having the right type of CEO at the helm, according to Prof. Giesler. “Big Design is typically entrepreneur-driven. When you look at successful big designers, they start small, but end up changing life as we know it.”

Theodore Noseworthy, an associate professor of marketing at Schulich, cautions against an overreliance on analytics. In fact, he’s seen data-driven tunnel vision hinder creativity across otherwise progressive organizations. “We’re seeing companies tap consumers in a different way to collect data and develop communities,” he says. “They’re getting unfiltered insights into how their community responds and they can translate that into growth.”

“But one of the side effects of having data points such as those is that we’re constantly responding. That can stifle incremental innovation and the kind of radical transformation that can change the world. That is the drawback of being entirely driven by data,” adds Prof. Noseworthy.

To transform their corporate cultures to embrace Big Design as both an operational principle and driver of organizational culture, corporations need to think and act very differently, says Prof. Giesler.

“We need to move away from the idea that all we need to do to have a successful business is focus on the customer,” Prof. Giesler explains. “Customer-centricity has become so commonplace in companies, it’s resulted in tunnel vision of how a business can be successful.”

Lastly, he says that leaders need to “move away from the

dictatorship of finance.” That means ignoring short-term fiscal goals in favour of long-term growth and innovation. Electric car and battery-maker Tesla Motors Inc. or Amazon.com, Inc. are good examples of corporations that have typically prioritized innovation above short-term profit maximization.

“Some of the most successful companies in history have violated all principles of standard marketing and financial management,” Prof. Giesler points out. “They have been revolutionary in getting to where they are. Sometimes you need to go against traditional wisdom.”

DEVELOPING GLOBAL EXPERTISE IN

Big Design

- Schulich’s marketing faculty, which includes Russell Belk – globally regarded as the “father of qualitative marketing” – was ranked #1 in Canada in the field of Consumer Behaviour according to a survey published in the *Journal of Marketing Education*.

- Schulich’s MBA specialization in Marketing continually develops new courses that meet the quickly evolving demands of the business world, including the world’s first-ever course in Customer Experience Design.

- Schulich’s NOESIS Lab, developed by Theodore Noseworthy, Canada Research Chair in Entrepreneurial Innovation and the Public Good, conducts groundbreaking research into consumption, consumer behaviour and design.

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