

Humanity in design

Design can tell stories, promote social intervention, and should create consequences not artefacts. Design is about being human, for humans, and for their future sustainability - and this includes addressing new communities being created by social media

By Danette Breitenbach



AT THIS YEAR'S Design Indaba a number of speakers spoke about design being essentially human - whether a brand message, part of the economy, a city or an online community.

Lesson 1: Understand the human heart

Having fun is human, says Piyush Pandey, national creative director of Ogilvy & Mather, Mumbai, also known in India as the 'Minister of Fun'. "Designers must understand the human heart and then design messages for humans." According to him humans experience nine emotions ranging from love to hate. He showed how, by designing advertisements with humour as the underlying theme, a brand was able to appeal to the Indian population, which is firstly very big and secondly very diverse. "We used very little spoken word because there are so many languages. By engaging and involving your audience and showing respect for their intelligence, you will settle the brand in their hearts.

"Spark their imagination and take them on a journey. Designers must feed on life; the way it used to be, is now, and the way they would like it to be."

Lesson 2: Part of the economy

"Design must be firm and strong. Previously design was interpreted as an art form. Today it should be more tied up with the economy."

Manubu Mizuno calls himself the Samurai designer, and it is his view that in any field of design what is essential is how a company's goods or services are viewed. "It is the story of the brand. Consumers are not interested in the content of goods, but in the context. They are attracted to one particular brand's story, if the brands in that sector are similar in price."

For him the crucial points in branding are concept, context and design. "In the future, design must do something with the economy."

Lesson 3: Social intervention

Bill Drenttel left the corporate environment and started the Winterhouse Institute, which works only on projects with social impact that innovate.

The Winterhouse Institute works on projects such as healthcare by utilising design methodologies to innovate this industry. "We use design to stimulate social intervention. Designers should make change, not just respond to it. We are the start. Designers are in the consequence business, but they think they are in the artefact business."

What does design for social innovation look like? "When at Harvard, instead of hundreds of case studies on the battles between Coke and Pepsi, there are case studies on solar power."

Lesson 4: Be an urban thinker

Mokena Makeka from South Africa calls himself an urban thinker and designer, not an architect, despite being qualified as one. Cities are his passion. "Cities hold the potential for new relationships, but can be cancerous. There is a rhythm and complexity in a city, but at this time cities are in a crisis."

Therefore, he says, we need design now more than ever. "Buildings are more than just bricks and mortar - they are human spaces." His first project was a SAPS building in one of the townships around Cape Town. "The design parameters given to me only served to dehumanise a place that should be viewed as a place of safety. I changed the design to make the space human."

So how does a bus shelter become more than just a bus shelter? "If design is great it will lead to changes. We must develop techniques to fight for design. It is not just about the aesthetics of design, but about engaging the human."

This is important because if design interventions do not work spatially, other interventions will not work. "The urban framework is presenting opportunities; if we start with communities and use the traditional, private and public. It means reading the terrain and then using it to create frameworks that work. The city of the future demands more creativity."

Lesson 5: Design driving economics

Bruce Nussbaum, known for his NussbaumOnDesign.com blog and named one of the 40 most powerful people

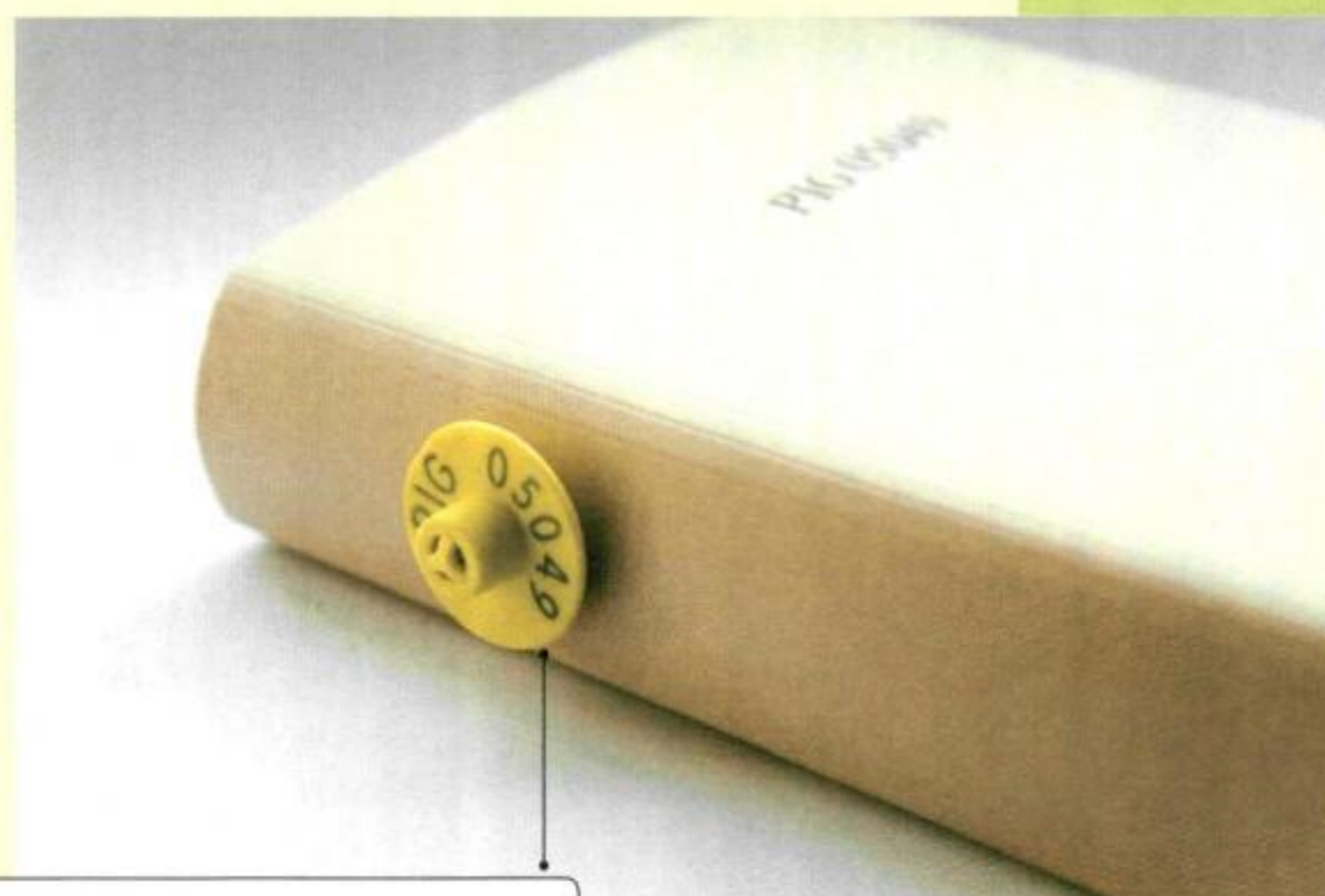


in design by *ID Magazine*, speaks of the space where design connects to business and what this business means for design. "Imagine equilibrium where design and economy are one. We would call it 'designomic', the meaning of which is design-driving economics. We are emerging from a recession and design has a different form and function. People are turning to design - from the housewife redoing the drapes in her house to nations rebuilding cities."

He also says that the rise of social media means we need new ways to reach the new communities being created on these platforms. "Today social systems are more important than culture and technology design. We are designing for people, creating economic value for corporations. Design has evolved into a very powerful business model with social media being revolutionary. Design is so optimistic and it has a future-facing perspective."

Making a pig of yourself

PRODUCT DESIGNER Christien Meindertsma explores products and raw materials in works that give an understanding to processes that have become distant to the man in the street because of industrialisation. She explores wool, for example, back to the source of the yarn. Sheep are not her only speciality and her book *PIG 05049*, which was published in 2007, gives a breakdown of the products made from a pig. She calls the pig a material and says 185 products are made from a pig. For example, their skin is used in chewing gum, their bones used in the transport of bullets and ammunition, and also in the printing process of pictures and negatives. The uses for the meat of a pig make up one half of her book. For the smokers out there, the blood of a pig is used in cigarettes. So if you give up smoking, you can always chew chewing gum to ensure you still get your daily intake of pig...



The actual ear tag of Pig 05049 before a book was written about him