

Article: Innovating through design

The city of Eindhoven has the ambition to present itself as the Netherlands' prime design city, which has led it to earmark significant funds for a string of design awards to attract designers to the city. You would initially expect a creative environment to be an important prerequisite for the successful use of design in products and services. Verganti – an Italian professor of innovation management – recently published a study in Harvard Business Review showing that the imagination and motivation of entrepreneurs and managers far outweighs the availability of design resources in the direct environment on the way to making design flourish in a company.

In his article 'Innovating through design', Verganti draws a number of notable conclusions. He posits, for example, that the success of Alessi (teakettle model 9093) is not so much down to Italian architects, the high-style environment in Milan or the concentration of the fashion industry in Northern Italy. No, the real drivers of Alessi's success lie behind that. In Verganti's opinion, the executives at Alessi were the ones that brought different parties together and built an engine of innovation. In other words: design-driven innovation can take place anywhere in the world, providing managers or entrepreneurs recognize its importance.

In his HBR article, Verganti outlines a three-step plan for successful, design-driven product development, which he illustrates using the Alessi success story:

- Absorb: business leaders in Northern Italy organised and sponsored creative sessions that they could draw ideas from. Such sessions made Alberto Alessi realize that, for example, he should be developing a new basic shape for his kitchen products, and that architects could help him do that.
- Interpret: ensure the general public catch a glimpse of a new generation of products long before the actual launch. Alessi did that by exhibiting prototypes of his products in different museums.
- Address: make sure products attract widespread attention. Alessi cottoned on to the fact that advertising was not the right way for him to draw attention to his brand, and instead invited people from the design community to respond to his new product launches.

Reference(s)

Verganti, R. (2006) Innovating through design, Harvard Business Review, vol.84, no. 12, p.114-122. *

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