

Book: 'Universal Principles of Design'

The authors Lidwell, Holden and Butler wanted to make the core concepts of the different principles of design more accessible with this easy-reference book. Principles from the different design disciplines were selected on the basis of practical usefulness, number of misconceptions or erroneous use, and the strength of underpinning proof. The use of established design principles increases the chances of a design being successful. The authors also point out that the book can also be used to check the quality of the design process and product.

The 100 subjects are presented in alphabetical order, so that the book can easily be used for reference purposes. And the authors also applied segmentation on the basis of five questions and/or issues that designers often face. For each question, different principles from the book were selected to help designers solve any problems they might be facing.

The following questions are focused on here:

- How can the way design is perceived be influenced? (consider colour, alignment and visibility).
- How can design contribute to the exchange of information towards consumers? (such as hierarchy, mnemonics and storytelling).
- How to boost the user-friendliness of a design. (iconic representations, error messages and the 80/20 rule).
- How to increase the attractiveness of a design. (archetypes, framing and similarity).
- How can I make better design decisions? (modularity, redundancy and Ockham's Razor).

Each principle in the book is described on a two-page spread, with the theory on the left, and visual examples with further explanation on the right. And each principle is also briefly summarized. We will pick out two principles in the following to show what this book is all about.

The design principle referred to as Ockham's Razor states that simplicity should be preferred over complexity in design. Unnecessary elements go at the expense of a design's effectiveness. A fine example is the simple design of the Google website. Google's simple design makes it the web's most widely-used and recognizable search engine.

The design principle of affordance can help answer the question how design is perceived. The example used here is that of a door. When a door has a sign over the handle reading 'push', people will get confused. The handle suggests you will have to pull to open the door; but the sign tells you to push. By omitting the sign, and replacing the handle with a flat metal plate, people know instinctively that they have to push to open the door. Taking this into account in designs will ultimately benefit the effectiveness and ease of use of the design.

Reference(s)

Lidwell, W. Holden, K., Butler, J. (2003), *Universal Principles of Design*.
Rockport Publishers, Beverly, Massachusetts. *

*: available in the EURIB library.