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“You really don’t gain market share in a good economy — **you gain market share during recessions.**”

– Christopher Liechty, page 31

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THE DESIGN REVOLUTION IN BUSINESS

At one time, Target was a sleepy, Midwestern discounter, struggling to distinguish it from other big-box retailers. But in the early 1990s, Target's CEO put design at the core of the company's differentiation strategy. Apparently it worked. Target (or "Tar-zhay," as it's sometimes called) has blown past competitors like Sears and J.C. Penney to become second only to Wal-Mart in revenue among general merchandisers.

Target has implemented the famous statement of IBM President Thomas Watson: "Good design is good business." From the products Target sells (including teapots by architect Michael Graves and fashion by Isaac Mizrahi) to graphically innovative advertising to the design of their stores to the innovative prescription bottles in their pharmacy, Target has been consistent. As Robyn Waters, Target vice president has said, "Design became the tool that made our brands consistent and let us connect with our customers."

Tom Peters, one of the most influential business thinkers of our age, has said, "I simply believe that design per se, is the principal reason for emotional attachment (or detachment) relative to a product or service or experience. Design is arguably the number one determinant of whether a product, service or experience stands out — or does not."

That's why business magazines such as *Fast Company* and *Business Week* publish annual issues on the importance of design.

Design is sometimes mistakenly thought of as superficial, easily copied or unrelated to creating value. Good design is not just about making things pretty. Design is a process of iteration — finding the best possible solution through analysis, trial and error. It's hard work. The cartoon characterization of a light bulb suddenly turning on is a myth.

Design is literally all around us. The world we live in is increasingly artificial, made so by human beings. Design is not even restricted to the making of material artifacts, but includes the design of processes, policy and prescriptions. I came across a definition of design that I really like: "Design is forethought before making."

You don't need the budget of Target or Apple to add value with design. The School Improvement Network is a Salt Lake-based company that teaches teachers how to teach in school districts across the nation. They recently went through a complete brand overhaul, from their identity (logo, color, typography) to their website to company literature and trade show display. The impact internally and externally has been considerable.

In the words of School Improvement Network President Chet Linton, "A couple years ago, we decided we really needed to build an identity that could last for many years — that would create some type of iconic presence, that would easily be recognizable. The firm we worked with recommended that before they just start

designing, they do a full brand analysis, which really became the guiding force in creating a brand and logo that not only looked great and had that iconic presence that we wanted, but one that had real and deep meaning, matching the values, focus and mission of our company."

No matter the product or service, investing in the look and feel your company projects can upgrade the perceived value of your offering. The design of your building, your office space, your website, your business card and your product all affect the image of your company — your brand — in the mind of your customer. Remember: you don't own your brand, your customer does. Managing the perception of your brand in the mind of your customer allows you to influence their behavior and drive the performance of your business. Good design helps you do that. ■



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The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Utah CEO.

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