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## Commercial store design neglected by interior design schools

3 SEP 2014 | SAVE | EMAIL | PRINT | PDF



BY: CALLIE VAN DER MERWE

Despite the strides made in interior design and retail design, most design schools are failing to cover this in their curricula and there is a need for a business approach to this rapidly growing industry.



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I remember back in 1985, when I went to study architecture, there was no such thing as an 'interior design' school. Mostly, you could only study architecture or industrial design. By extension, there were of course also no shopfitters or shopfitting companies, only cabinetmakers. The skill set around retail and restaurant design was therefore extremely limited.

Whilst certain interior or retail design companies have recently made massive strides in this field, most if not all, interior design schools, have sadly not. In truth, they have and still are leading students completely astray, as their programme does not address any of the realities around the biggest opportunity that exists in this field today, namely commercial store design.

It could be said that commercial store designers are, or should be, in the business of solving business problems with design solutions, as opposed to merely solving design problems with design solutions. For me herein lies the rub, as most schools seem to teach the latter. This not only completely misdirects the expectation of the students, but also ill prepares them for the real world challenges.

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understanding of design, a firm grasp of all the economic and commercial



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imperatives that underpin and justify the very existence of design, is required. A world that is enamoured with how something looks is more concerned with the effect the spatial solution will have on maximising the ROI of the brand. By extension, one can therefore say that design follows money, but paradoxically money follows design. This core fundamental is hardly ever taught and seldom understood in design education.

By further explanation, the term 'design led innovation' is emerging as a fundamental business proposition, which is rapidly being adopted by many design firms and many small and large retail corporations. The value that design, in this context, brings to an organisation is increasingly being seen by business as a strategic driver of company growth. Fundamentally the tool and process most applied towards ensuring this outcome is called 'design thinking' and, whilst widely adopted by international business, it has not enjoyed the same level of awareness and required focus in local interior design teaching. This process of 'design thinking'- includes the study of natural consumer behavior, supported by sound business fundamentals, and sits at the heart of the disconnect between design teaching and design doing.

## Design-driven companies outperform public companies



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Empirical evidence that this new process of design thinking is no longer optional, is the study done by the Design Management Institute (DMI), a Boston-based non-profit organisation focused on design management. It was calculated that in the past 10 years, design-driven companies outperformed the Standard & Poor's 500 - a stock market index of 500 large publicly traded companies - by 228%. These companies included brands such as Apple, Coca-Cola, Ford, Herman Miller, IBM, Nike, Proctor and Gamble, Starbucks and Disney.

There is also a second very controversial point of disconnect between design teaching and real world design doing. That is the notion that once a 'successful designer' one should somehow be protected and entitled by a divine right to be respected and disproportionately rewarded and compensated for the connection to name, or icon if you will. Whilst this may have been the acceptable way of designers pre the economic crunch, this reality no longer exists. Our value should equal the value we bring. Schools have yet to catch on.

At a recent Ted Talk, Nille Juul Sørensen, CEO of the Danish Design Centre literally kicked an iconic design chair on stage. He supported his action with this view. "Do the designs we do make sense and give meaning to people? Our designs probably give meaning to 1% of the world's population. We need to start designing for 99% of the population if we truly want to influence the future..."

If the future of interior design therefore belongs to those who understand the power of design to affect change towards a



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someone will write an article similar to this reminiscing in disbelief on the time back in the day, when no such school was around.

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#### ABOUT CALLIE VAN DER MERWE

Callie van der Merwe is CEO of Design Partnership.

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### Comment



#### Jens Smith

Callie has hit the proverbial nail on the head. Retailers are often too trusting or have separate "Design Directors" who have no commercial leaning. Looks Nice doesn't always translate into "Make Money". Taking this further...is it not then logical that designers should share in the wealth generated by their designs, services and advice that helped achieve the economic successes? It's an investment to have a properly designed retail store that generates income and not only accolades from other designers! Skimp on that and run the risk of less returns. Such economic and retail business savvy designers should be as much a part of the retailers boardroom decisions as other retail players are.

2 people liked this **Posted on 3 Sep 2014 17:24**

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#### Loray Daws

I agree and want to take this a step further - what about the "warehouse section" - no "real training" available either! Anyone interested can contact me at [loray.daws@gmail.com](mailto:loray.daws@gmail.com).

**Posted on 4 Sep 2014 17:48**

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