



The Financial Argument for Great Design

Financially oriented people, such as myself, often focus too much on the numbers. If we can increase the bottom line by cutting cost, we jump all over it. This can lead to some big problems for growing the business. A good example of this is when a business spends money on design.

Now more than ever, great design has become critically important for adding value and selling products. Great design captivates users in such a way that businesses reduce their time and effort on selling the product; i.e. the product sells itself. This increases sales and lowers your cost. The last thing you want to do is undermine this process.

Investments, such as design, need to be viewed differently by financial personnel. The good news is that design does not have to be costly. It can be simple changes that pull and retain customers each time they make a buying decision. For example, Iams Pet Food surveyed customers and found 70% of customers were women. Women respond to color. Iams re-packaged their products in different colors and raised their customer retention rates through a simple design change. The returns from this design investment were enormous.

For most businesses, design requires two types of investments:

- 1) UX Design – This is the first and perhaps most critical stage where the UX (User Experience) Designer learns everything about the user and the experience they are seeking from your products or services. It is the job of the UX Designer to document how your products should look, work and interact with the user. A wireframe mockup is often used to illustrate the blueprint for your product – this is what the user wants.
- 2) UI Design – Once you have the architect for design completed per UX, you need a second level of expertise for converting the wireframe into specific elements that interface with the user. This is referred to as User Interface (UI) Design. The UI Designer bridges the gap between the creative UX phase and the production and engineering phase which builds the product – usually a prototype to start. UI Design is both an art and a science, trying to get the elements exactly right so the user experience is enjoyable.



Once again, be careful not to cut corners by thinking you need just one of these two phases. Great design emerges when you have two distinct skill sets: UX Design > UI Design. This reduces rework's and gets you to final production sooner, minimizing your overall investment and maximizing your returns.

Finally, great design has its place in how you present financial information. A great source for financial design comes from Edward R. Tufte. In his book [The Visual Display of Quantitative Information](#), Tufte advocates several principles for great financial design:

- Unified Macro Micro Structure – Users should be able to grasp and visualize the big picture in a single sheet of information and at the same time, comprehend the detail. This requires good arrangement and structure.
- Visual Stratification and Separation – Put some kind of order or hierarchy within your presentation. Distinguish layers or parts (past vs. future, amounts > \$ 1 Million, etc.). Give users some choices in how they want to view the information.
- Small Framed Themes – Break out large chunks of content into framed areas with labels / captions. Make it easy for the user to understand.
- Integrate with Visuals – Do not present just numbers, communicate with graphs, charts or other visuals. Visuals should add something and not just be “Chart Junk”

Design has its place in many places throughout your business and regardless of how you see the business (financial, sales, production, etc.), you should embrace design. Apply it in how you deliver your products, services and even your financial presentations. Great design is a killer in today's highly competitive world.

Additional tips on financial design > <http://www.pinterest.com/exinfm/visual-presentation-of-financial-information/>