



Business
Link

What different design disciplines could do for your business

An increasing number of UK businesses are using design to support their business strategies and around a third regard design as an integral part of their business. Use of various design disciplines is also rising.

This guide explains some of the different design disciplines that businesses in the UK are using and looks at future trends for the use of design in business. It also shows you how to use design and work with design professionals to improve your business' performance, branding and products, and discusses the business case for employing a designer.

The benefits of design to your business

Design is about much more than the appearance of your products. It can play a part in nearly every aspect of your business' operation.

Design Council research shows that many businesses see design as an important tool they can use to help them survive and develop. About a third of UK businesses see design as an essential or significant part of their operations.

Design can bring a range of benefits to your business. For example, you can:

- improve your online branding by working with graphic designers - use our interactive tool to investigate what kind of website is best for your business
- create better customer interactions and experiences by working with service designers - see the page in this guide on how to use service design for your business
- streamline your operations and infrastructure by working with workplace designers - see the page in this guide on how to use workplace design for your business
- increase sales of your products by focusing on user needs during the design process - see our guide on user-centred design
- improve your market position by commissioning packaging designers - see the page in this guide on how to use packaging design for your business
- get greater customer loyalty and fewer customer complaints after employing retail designers - see the page in this guide on how to use retail design for your business
- create new products and services and open up new markets by working with product designers - see the page in this guide on how to use product design for your business

For more information on the advantages of using design in your business see the page on the business benefits of design in our guide on how can I use design in my business?

Use graphic design for your business

Graphic design is the process of using words, images, colours and messages to communicate ideas and important business information.

It can be used for anything from annual reports to large scale advertising or banners, and can influence an audience's perception of your business, product or brand. You can use graphic design to communicate and connect with your customers.

Graphic designers can:

- create an identifiable, memorable brand identity for your business or products
- establish your business' positioning within its industry
- differentiate your business from your competitors
- promote and communicate your business and its offerings to different audiences
- increase sales through better advertising

Designers can help on a range of graphics projects, including:

- websites
- marketing materials like brochures and product sales sheets
- business cards
- flyers
- annual reports
- logos
- signage

If you are interested in employing a graphic designer, see our guide on how to choose and work with a designer.

Using graphic design in your business

Businesses use graphic design in many ways to achieve different objectives.

The Design Council has compiled a set of case studies which explain how small businesses from different sectors have used graphic design. These include:

- Events caterer Knifey Spooky which needed a strong identity to stand out from the competition. It worked with graphic designers to create business cards, staff t-shirts and promotional materials.
- Charity Breast Cancer Care which worked with graphic designers on a new logo that was used on a range of communications materials.
- High street furniture retailer Wells Interiors which needed to rejuvenate its image with a more contemporary offer. Graphic designers helped it promote its products better using revamped bags and brochures.

You can find examples of how businesses have used graphic design on the Design Council website - [Opens in a new window.](#)

Use service design for your business

Service design is a way of helping you improve your services by making them more useful, efficient and desirable for your customers. Service design works to improve your customers' overall experience.

Service design is about planning and creating the infrastructure, communication materials and levels of service delivered by staff. It can be applied at any point where customers interact with your business to improve their satisfaction and enhance your reputation and profitability. You can also use it to eliminate potential failures when you are developing new services.

If you employ a service designer, they will look at how you deliver your service and how efficiently it operates. They can interpret what your customers need and what their behaviours are and will turn this into potential services. They will look at designing the full service as well as each individual aspect within the service - remember, redesigning existing services is just as challenging as developing innovative new ones.

Examples of service design

Many types of business could benefit from using service design more efficiently.

For example, if your business is a **transport provider**, you could consider using service design to offer services other than those typically provided by your competitors. These might include:

- an online way to show when low-cost or free delivery is available if enough customers in one area require a delivery
- web-based tracking of packages or shipments

If you are a **food provider**, you could use service design to extend your service, for example:

- delivering directly to your customers' door
- offering new menus based on research into what customers need
- special offers for different times of the year based on ingredients supplied by local growers
- daily menus delivered by social media channels to local customers

If your business is an **educational institution**, you could use service design to consider service extensions, such as:

- distance learning courses
- web-based services that enable lecturers and students to communicate
- allowing people to check the availability or renew library books or access digital copies of books and articles via the internet

Read information about service design on the Design Council website - Opens in a new window.

Use packaging design for your business

Research shows that consumers make about 70 per cent of their purchase decisions at the point of sale. It is also estimated that each piece of packaging design has approximately three seconds to grab shoppers' attention.

The main function of packaging is to sell the product at its point of purchase, so you should think carefully about how your products are packaged. In particular, consider the structural and functional design of your packaging - how will it advertise and then protect your product during delivery to shops, customers and beyond?

The **structural design** of your product's packaging can also promote it by making it more recognisable or practical than competing products or by giving extra information and benefits to the customer. For example, you could add vouchers or incentive schemes to your packaging.

The structural design of packaging can also save money and time while your product is being delivered to shops. **Retail-ready** packaging is designed to protect your product while it is transported to shops, but it can also be easily opened and put onto the shelf where it becomes part display case, part dispensing aid.

Once you have created the structure of your packaging, you can consider the design. Graphic design can create visuals that attract the buyer but also help you fit onto your product all the information that legislation requires.

Green packaging

The use of 'green' packaging is increasing rapidly to meet consumer demand for recyclability and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Designers can help you develop packaging that is environmentally friendly, making it more attractive to potential customers.

When deciding on your packaging requirements, consider how far your product has to travel from its source to its point of purchase. This is especially important when determining how many products can be shipped per pallet.

Also, think about how your product's full lifecycle impacts on the planet, from its initial packaging to the point of sale, use by the customer and finally to its disposal.

Read information about packaging design and green packaging on the Design Council website - [Opens in a new window.](#)

Use workplace design for your business

Workplace design isn't just about choosing the paint colours for office environments. The space in which you work can have a direct impact on staff productivity and creativity. Also, if clients regularly visit your workplace, it can affect how they see your company.

A workplace designer can help improve your business' image and, therefore, also improve communication and the development of new ideas and processes.

There are many things to consider when designing your workplace, such as:

- architecture
- layout
- lighting - and its appropriateness for your workplace
- furniture
- materials
- technology
- the appearance of your meeting rooms
- an open and inviting reception area
- functional work areas

Examples of where a workplace designer could help

Workplace designers can:

- improve the way a car manufacturer's administration and assembly hub functions
- help an accountancy firm shed its grey image
- help a clothing retailer integrate a new wing of its business into the company's headquarters

How do you start creating an innovative workspace?

If you want to redesign your workspace, you will need to do some initial research. You should try to:

- determine your business objectives
- analyse the areas you want to improve
- involve a selection of staff: choose people from different parts of the business including your Chief Executive, as well as key managers and more junior staff
- set a realistic budget
- set clear objectives
- attempt the project on a small scale before taking it throughout the organisation
- do a post-project evaluation to see if any changes are needed

If you hire a workplace designer, they will not only employ their visual and creative skills. They can also manage the design project, involve key stakeholders in the development process and work with you to help you understand and set the aims and brief for the project. And when the implementation of their designs is underway, they can manage the relationship with the builders and other contractors and adapt designs quickly.

'Lean' methodology, mostly used to streamline manufacturing processes, is often used to redesign workplace environments. For more information, see our guide on the lean methodology.

Use retail design for your business

Retail design involves creating a space for your goods to be sold. This increasingly means online as well as in a high street shop, shopping centre or department store concession.

When undertaking a retail design project in a shop, think about which areas of your retail environment you want to change. These areas could include:

- store frontage
- fascia
- signage
- lighting
- packaging
- merchandising
- furniture
- point of sale displays
- decorations

Retail design can improve your customers' perception of your business and your brand. It should represent your customer base and the message you are trying

to get across.

For example, if a retail store sells luxury, high-end clothing, the store design should reflect the same message. However, a store that sells contemporary clothes to teenagers should be perceived as young and 'edgy'.

If you are an online retailer, you can also use design to your benefit. But your focus will be on the graphics and interactive tools on your website that enable customers to buy your products. You can still deliver a unique shopping experience online, and designers can help you ensure the way you deliver your goods not only works, but also communicates your company brand and delivers an enjoyable experience. This can all help build customer loyalty.

Use product design for your business

Well-thought out design can help your product have a wider reach in the marketplace and be more attractive to customers. These are important factors in selling the product, improving it and getting a return on your investments. Careful product design can also help you to reduce your production costs, optimise the use of materials and minimise waste.

Product designers do many things before their concepts are taken into production. The typical stages of a product design project are:

- **strategic enquiry and orientation** - your designers can contribute to the overall strategy of your product and provide direction and context
- **briefing** - a record of your product's description, functionality and features, how it compares to its main competitors, any recent research, technical specifications, sales targets and forecasts that should inform the design development
- **social, economic and technological context** - market research to find out how relevant and attractive your product would be
- **innovation** - the product should be a new idea, decided either through sketches, proof of principle models and/or computer-aided design layouts
- **concept generation** - design and development of potential ideas to create an original design that meets the original brief
- **design development** - what the product will look like, what it will be made from and how it will be produced after design and prototype

Depending on how often your business develops new products, it is worth considering whether to employ a designer to work as part of your in-house product development team.

Employing a designer to be part of your staff does not mean you need to establish a separate design department. Designers can work in-house, perhaps as part of the marketing team or can help manage your manufacturing function. They are used to considering both the commercial and operational implications of their designs.

Designers, whether in-house or independent, can also help you manage your product portfolio and plan for new developments. How and where your products are made, warehousing, distribution and scheduling are all part of the product design process.

Read information about product design on the Design Council website - Opens in a new window.

For more information, see our page on how to register a design in our guide on design right and registration.

Future trends for the use of design in business

The importance of design to UK businesses of all shapes and sizes is expected to continue to grow. To compete in an increasingly international marketplace, UK businesses have to produce and deliver innovative products and engaging services. Designers can help businesses turn their new ideas into commercial products and services. And, as long as people want to communicate with each other and use new products, there will always be roles for designers to shape the look, feel and functionality of the products and services we use.

Design can help to increase your value, create innovative products and services, and enhance your business performance. Using design efficiently and choosing the appropriate designers and design medium can also give your business an advantage over your competitors by differentiating your products from others in the marketplace.

In a tough economic climate, it may be tempting to cut budgets like marketing or new product development. But if you increase your investment and focus even more strongly on design, you are more likely to keep your competitive edge and increase your chances of survival. Many businesses are also starting to view design as important for business and the overall economic performance of the UK.

Read information about the impact of design on business on the Design Council website - [Opens in a new window.](#)

Sustainability and sustainable design

Sustainable design means delivering your product or service in the most efficient way for the least cost over the long term. It must meet both the current and future needs of its consumers without affecting the environment.

There are tax breaks for sustainable innovation to encourage businesses to use sustainable design.

For more information, see our guide on sustainable design.

Also, demand for recyclability, reparability and products with a long lifetime is likely to grow. Such environmental pressures will fundamentally affect product design into the future.

Design Council Helpline

020 7420 5200

Related guides on businesslink.gov.uk

[Design for start-ups](#)

[Choose and work with a designer](#)

[Designing a successful brand](#)

[Design for technology businesses](#)

Branding: the basics

How can I use design in my business?

Use innovation to grow your business

User-centred design

Sustainable design

Related web sites you might find useful

Design disciplines and business sectors information on the Design Council website

<http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/About-Design/Design-Disciplines/>

Business designer database on the British Design Innovation website

<http://www.britishdesigninnovation.org/?page=newlook/ddsearch>

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