

# Design-thinking as a strategic advantage

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The world we live in is changing rapidly. Thus, we ought to move with the same speed in order to keep up.



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This new trajectory set by digital technology has influenced everything from how we communicate to how projects are implemented. Therefore, we have to do things differently and this means we will have to do away with old systems. However, we will still need a traffic manager to action those briefs.

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When one mentions design, what probably comes to mind is the great pyramids of Giza, a nice pair of designer jeans, electric cars, skyscraper buildings, the iron chair of *Game of Thrones*, etc. But what do we exactly mean by "design" in a brand-building context?

This term, design, is actually a term that incorporates various “design” capabilities as it relates to our field: graphic design, packaging design, interactive design, etc.

Hence, here we are referring to design thinking with regards to brand building and marketing. That said, technology has brought a lot of new ways of marketing. That is why it is paramount to think about designing differently without losing the essence.

## Building brands by design

Generally, when we talk about brand building, we put a lot of emphasis on advertising. When applying design thinking for a sole purpose of building a brand, it’s important to look at it in its entirety in order to get the best out of this critical element of creativity.

Advertising is but one of the arrays of brand building channels. So, design thinking should be applied across all channels of communication and marketing. A holistic approach will actually aid and avoid creating a fragmented brand image, as well as dilute the brand differentiation, and consequently confusion the marketplace.

When using design-thinking in brand building the ultimate aim is to create a fixed but flexible system that will connect all elements that in motion towards a single goal which is to gain brand equity. Hence, design-thinking must disrupt, inspire, and ultimately build a love for the brand through a greater focus on consumer or the user. Apple does it. Nike does it. As it stands design-thinking is under-leveraged as a strategic advantage. And as result lose the opportunity to make a much bigger impact out of brand activation programmes.



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In addition, designing on purpose builds relevance and leads to a culture that will resonant with the target market. Consequently, using purposeful design will also create a connection which will broaden the impact of all brand activation programs, and brand experience. The brand that uses design thinking as a strategic advantage creates things that people have to have. In this digital age, wherein everything is ‘supposed’ to be connected.

Fragmented or isolated brand building activation programmes will create dissonance in the consumer’s mind. For example, the brand’s website as an entry point should contain all necessary keys to unlock all doors leading to different compartments of the company; if you are a retail brand when customer visits the website they should able to buy or order stuff without leaving the platform, they must also get everything under one platform and manoeuvre seamlessly. That way you would have created something that customers have to have.

Again using Nike as an example, Nike doesn’t make footwear. It creates sculptures that people choose to wear. It doesn’t create retail spaces, it creates experiences. Nike is very serious about using every opportunity to design on purpose and leverage this as a strategic advantage that gives them a competitive edge. Nike’s reputation for design excellence is known worldwide creating massive brand loyalty and an enormous brand image.



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According to David Butler, the author of *Design to grow: How Coca-Cola learned to combine scale and agility*; he suggests five designing principles for strategical advantage:

- Connect everything we design to the brands.
- Clearly define visual identity systems for brands and use them to connect all of the communication tools.
- Create design management tools and guiding principles to ensure a high level of quality across the system.
- Use design to build more consistency between activation brand programs.
- Create a follow-through system across the brand system

## ABOUT RIRHANDZU SHINGWENYANA

Rirhandzu Shingwenyana is a marketing, advertising and communications professional with experience in account management, social media and digital marketing campaign management.

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