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The Power of Design in Global Development

International Trade Forum - Issue 3/2009



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IDEO is a leading innovation and design firm that works with public, private and social sector clients to address organizational, social and global issues. The head of IDEO's social innovation design domain, Jocelyn Wyatt, talks to Trade Forum about the power of design to change the world.

TF: IDEO is responsible for design innovations like the original Apple mouse and the Palm V, but you claim to be more interested in what the design profession can do to solve global issues. What is the IDEO ethos?

JW: IDEO began 30 years ago by designing products like those you mention. However, over time we've applied the approach of human-centred design to services, spaces, businesses and systems. We believe in the power of design thinking to enrich and transform, and to take on big challenges that the world faces, from climate change to education and health care to financial inclusion.

TF: What specifically does IDEO do?

JW: IDEO is an innovation and design firm. We work with our clients to develop innovative solutions to address the challenges faced by their organizations. Our clients range from Fortune 500 companies, such as the Bank of America, Nokia and Kaiser Permanente, to social sector organizations including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, American Red Cross and Oxfam, and public sector institutions like the World Bank, the United States Department of Energy and the United Kingdom's National Health Service.

We take our clients through a design process that includes three phases: inspiration, ideation and implementation. In the inspiration phase, we go out into the world and talk with and observe customers or users to understand their needs. We then brainstorm and come up with a number of solutions and refine a select few into visually represented concepts. Finally, we work with our clients to develop an implementation plan to pilot-test and then scale the concept.

TF: What innovations has IDEO delivered in developing countries?

JW: We are currently working with Acumen Fund on a water project in India and Kenya (see box: The Ripple Effect). We have developed a social marketing campaign to spread awareness about the importance of drinking safe water and a water delivery business and cart for female micro-entrepreneurs to deliver water in slum communities. We also worked with Vision Spring to develop an eye screening camp and eye-care programme for children in rural India. This project included the design of a system to help teachers spread awareness about eye care and conduct preliminary eye screenings with their students. In the United Kingdom, we designed aspects of the new Oxfam charity shops that generate revenue for Oxfam's work worldwide.

TF: How do you think design contributes to the creative industries in developing countries?

JW: As examples, we've had the opportunity to work with local design firms in India, giving us the opportunity to learn about designing for the local context. In other countries, like Cambodia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya and Viet Nam, we've worked with many local organizations to build their design and innovation capabilities through workshops and projects.

TF: In looking for a design solution to a particular problem, how important is an understanding of the cultural context to the outcome?

JW: Understanding the cultural context is a critical aspect of good design. On all projects, we include an anthropologist, psychologist or cognitive scientist to lead the team through the qualitative, observation-based research phase. We always work with local organizations, design firms or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), so they can help us with language and cultural translations.

TF: Have you noticed any trends emerging in your industry that will have an impact on development?

JW: In the past several years, the design industry has become increasingly committed to addressing big challenges in the world. There has been a move within design firms like IDEO to take on these challenges and do more work with public and social sector organizations. At the same time, new organizations like Catapult Design and Project H have been created to focus specifically on addressing design challenges faced by under-served communities.

TF: What are the lessons for entrepreneurs in the creative industries in developing countries?

JW: As organizations and companies throughout the world better understand the role of design for innovation, there will be more demand for design firms. There is a real opportunity to bring design and innovation to sectors that have not traditionally incorporated these approaches into the work they do.

TF: What is the responsibility of the design community to further education and contribute to progress in developing countries?

JW: I think designers are excited to work on the complex challenges posed by the developing world and are eager to take on this work. For example, we developed the human-centred design toolkit as a way of helping NGOs and enterprises through the design process.

Jocelyn Wyatt leads IDEO's social innovation design division. She has served as an Acumen Fund fellow in Kenya, led Vision Spring's eye-care programme in India and project-managed a USAID contract in Washington DC. Ms Wyatt has an MBA from the Thunderbird School of Global Management (Arizona, USA) and a BA in anthropology from Grinnell College (Iowa, USA).



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The ripple effect: Seeding innovation in the water sector

Some 1.2 billion people worldwide drink unsafe water. Acumen Fund and IDEO, with backing from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, joined forces to tackle the issues of water transport and storage. The Ripple Effect project aims to improve access to safe drinking water for over 500,000 people in India and East Africa. The first phase of the project took place in India (November 2008 to June 2009) with a second phase in East Africa (July 2009 to March 2010). In each region, IDEO's work started with field research to understand the needs and desires of stakeholders in the water journey, from customers to providers. They then gather organizations to share insights and work out solutions - products, services and systems that improve water delivery and storage. To date, the project in India has contributed to new distribution models, automated water-vending machines and better vessels for existing businesses. These small-scale pilots

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provide the organizations with opportunities for learning and experimentation, developing new business innovations before taking them to scale. IDEO and Acumen Fund plan to follow a similar model elsewhere in Africa.

For further information about the Ripple Effect visit <https://client.ideo.com/rippleeffect/project/index.html>



Human Centered Design Toolkit
for NGOs and social enterprises

The human centered design toolkit: A free innovation guide

For years, organizations have used human-centred design (HCD) to arrive at innovative business solutions. In collaboration with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and non-profit groups such as International Development Enterprises, International Center for Research on Women and Heifer International, IDEO has specially adapted this process for NGOs and social enterprises that work with impoverished communities around the world. The resulting HCD toolkit helps organizations understand people's needs in new ways, find innovative solutions to meet these needs and deliver solutions with financial sustainability in mind. The toolkit has been downloaded by 14,000 people from 141 countries and has been used on a variety of challenges ranging from designing a maternal health clinic in Nepal to marketing materials for drip irrigation in Pakistan.

Download a copy at www.hcdtoolkit.com

