

Powering Up Product Design

Consumer demand for good product design is driving the phenomenal success of Apple's iPod, Target stores and even a wastebasket – namely, the Garbo, designed by Karim Rashid for Umbra. Manufacturers who ignore the importance of industrial design do so at their peril, sure to be overtaken by competitors whose products may be equal in quality but superior in eye appeal. Our in-house industrial designer (and multiple International CES Innovations award winner) offers the following advice:

Consider the end-user's needs. When developing a product, make it easy for the consumer to use. A clean interface typically manifests itself as good design – a basic principle known as “form follows function.”

Also consider your materials. Returning to that popular wastebasket, Rashid's use of polypropylene in translucent colors provides the ideal complement to its sleek lines. Contrasting textures can create further visual interest – especially helpful for products that don't offer much room for design innovations.

Keep in your target market's cultural loop. Being aware of trends in music, fashion, entertainment and lifestyles will inform product design. Know how members of your target market see themselves, and your product will be able to enhance their self-image (and perhaps even social status, as owners of a certain portable digital music player can testify).

If you are not a member of the demographic group to whom you're marketing, talk to people who are. Get input from consumers through your website, as well as such face-to-face opportunities as event sponsorships. Meet with members of your sales staff who fit the demographic to learn what they're hearing from retailers and their peers.

Keep up with technical improvements in materials and tooling that allow you to economically bring good design to market. When form follows function, so do profits.

