



**Companies are constantly struggling with how to differentiate themselves in a fiercely competitive market. One way that is often ignored is an investment in good design strategies. Many companies overlook the importance of design and how it can be used to benefit the entire organization, both externally to the marketplace and internally to employees. Organizations that view design as an investment in a strategic asset – their brand – know that it helps create consistency. It is consistency that helps articulate your company's value proposition that can lead to market differentiation.**

Leading companies like Herman Miller, Apple Computer and Nike have successfully used design to develop long-term relationships with their customers and employees. By building customer trust and loyalty, these companies have made it more problematic for their clients to switch to their competitors. Design is one way to reinforce your customer's decision to purchase your products and services.

Often the value of design is measured only by the visual. However, a good design captures the voice and values of your company and creates a complete user experience. By integrating design across all mediums, your company can convey a more powerful business value to your client. To build a strong corporate identity, a company should consider all contact points with a company's image. Every customer interaction with the brand, from an advertisement, to corporate letterhead or through a web site, must send a unified company message.

For example, good design is a dominant factor in the success of interactive projects. Interactive media creates a close, highly controlled relationship between you and your customers. A compelling, visually engaging web site, kiosk, or CD-ROM reinforces your company's brand and identity.

Web sites not only provide information but also enhance your company's image. According to StatMarket, most Internet users now go directly to web sites and do not rely on search engines and links from other sites. In the U.S., almost 58 percent of users go directly to sites, up from about 50 percent last year. StatMarket states that the increasing use of direct-to-site navigation demonstrates that "branding is indeed taking hold on the web."

Design is important on the Internet because you are working on a level playing field – there is no physical location fostering differentiation. The only cues your customers receive are the ones you provide them. On the web, as opposed to on the street, switching costs for your customers are low. With one click of the mouse, they can easily gather information about your competitor. Good web design, not usability, will become the way to stand out from your competition. As developments improve the usability of web sites, companies must implement more sophisticated design strategies to differentiate themselves.



When developing web sites, too many companies look to existing designs. This does not inspire or create a meaningful user experience. Forrester Research found that 40% of web users did not return to a site when their first visit resulted in a negative experience. The impact could mean millions of dollars in lost business.

The challenge is to create a unique personal interactive experience that takes place through a highly impersonal venue - a computer monitor. The Internet is one of the main reasons why corporate reputation has become critical. By eliminating design problems and usability mistakes early, your company will create higher perceived value. The result: increased sales and market share.

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**Notes and Significant Sources:**

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