



ABOUT DI

JOIN/SUBSCRIBE

ARTICLES

CONTACT

PRINT THIS ARTICLE

EMAIL THIS ARTICLE

# The Power of Intentional Design

**B. Joseph Pine II**

Mass Customization is no longer the oxymoron it was when Stan Davis coined the term ten years ago, nor the “new frontier” it was when I wrote my book five years ago. Today, it is a competitive force (and design dynamic) to be reckoned with, fast on its way to becoming an imperative. Why? Because it is doable. Because it vastly increases the value provided to customers. And because it sizzles with uniqueness.

There is no longer any reason that customers should settle for standardized goods and services (no matter how elegantly designed) when companies can efficiently deliver exactly what each desires. Embracing the principles of Mass Customization eliminates the sacrifice inherent in trying to fit unique individuals into uniform molds. (Form follows failure.)

Mass Customization transforms the task of designers. The job is no longer endeavoring to achieve the one best integrated design that captivates the imagination of all, but rather to create a modular architecture that enables myriad permutations, so that one and only instantiation can then be built that exactly matches the particular needs—while still captivating the imagination—of an individual customer. The palette is no longer (just) modeling clay and Foam-cor but the digitized representation of all possible product permutations—a fundamentally new context for a collaboration that matches product capabilities with customer needs. (Form reproduces representation.)

Be clear, however, in understanding that the task is not giving customers more choices. Fundamentally, customers don't want choice; they just want exactly what they want. One of the more intriguing approaches, in fact, is transparent customization—observing a customer and then designing the perfect good or service for that customer without him or her even knowing it has been customized. (Form precedes perception.) Ritz Carlton, for example, has its associates write down any preferences (such as for hypoallergenic pillows or for a squeezed lime in Pepsi) and presciently fulfills these preferences on subsequent stays at any of its hotel properties. With transparent customization, the company remains the determiner of design, but does so on behalf of individual customers rather than aggregated marketplaces. As with the Ritz, it aims to make customers go “Wow! How did they do that?”

Increasingly, the task of design will shift from designing goods

2002

FROM THE ALMANAC:

**Alberto Alessi**

*"Design is one of the most typical art forms of our time (as well as fashion, photography, music, cinema). The Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo has called them 'commercial arts,' meaning that, opposite from the classic arts, they need the consent of the public."*

See the [Almanac of Architecture & Design](#) for more.

**INSIDE DI:**[Current Issue](#)[Board of Advisors](#)[Senior Fellows](#)[Member Feedback](#)

*DesignIntelligence* is a monthly newsletter publication published by the Design Futures Council. It is produced by The Greenway Group, Inc. The services are designed for leaders involved in transformative processes improving the built environment and the design professions.

**RESEARCH SUPPORT:**

Victor O.  
**Schinnerer**  
& Company, Inc.

or services to designing experiences, to making customers go “Wow!” This is much more than empathetic design. Steven Skov Holt described it in *Renaissance* as “what we mean when we say that we ‘design the experience of the product’ and not just the product itself.” What I mean is that experiences are a distinct economic offering from either goods or services: the experience is the product itself, not just a by-product.

To stage a true experience—one that is engaging, memorable, and inherently unique to each individual customer—we must “richly design with intention in mind.” As with an actor in the theater who cannot possibly give a believable reading of a script without first understanding the motivation, relationships and sub-text of his character, a customer will not find much value beyond mere goods and services without the compelling intentions of a designer who understands the why of every function, activity, and sensation. (Form internalizes intention.) To fully understand that we live in a world largely devoid of intention, merely look at what is happening on the World Wide Web, where companies are mindlessly trying to find a more efficient means of delivering goods and services through consumers’ PCs when what individuals value is the experience of the Web itself. As Andrew Grove, CEO of Intel, said at November’s Comdex computer show, “We need to look at our business as more than simply the building and selling of personal computers. Our business is the delivery of information and lifelike interactive experiences.” Exactly!

Chrysler created a huge storefront in the Mall of America called “Great Cars, Great Trucks.” When I talked with the manager about Chrysler’s intention in designing the showcase, the answer I received was not terribly engaging: “to get the word out to consumers about what great cars and trucks Chrysler builds in a non-threatening, non-sales environment.” I suggested to him that the company ought to treat it as an experience and charge admission. “His reply? “Oh no—if we did that, customers would feel they had a right to tell us what they wanted to do here.” Exactly.

Do not confuse experiences with entertainment; the latter is merely one type of experience. And do not view theater as a metaphor. Work is theater. Goods are props and services the stage.

Customers are the actors, and designers the playwrights. Now what do you intend to do about it?

—B. Joseph Pine II, Author, *Mass Customization: The New Frontier in Business Competition*