

About design
Directory listings
Live issues

Case studies


 Search

Service design by Bill Hollins

You are here: [Design Council | Home](#) [About design](#) [Design disciplines](#)
 Service design by Bill Hollins

[E-mail this to a friend](#)

[Printable version](#)

[Download PDF of this page](#)

Learn more about
 service design

What is service design

[The business case](#)

[13 lessons](#)

[Things to remember](#)

[Service blueprinting](#)

[Key challenges](#)

[Future trends](#)

[Recommended reading](#)

[Where next?](#)

[Glossary](#)



The UK services sector is growing, but service design and its management are often poorly planned, argues Bill Hollins.

This article reveals how companies can gain competitive advantage by applying design techniques when creating and improving

their services.

24 November 2006, Updated 28 September 2007

What is service design?

The service sector is growing, both in terms of numbers employed and in its importance to the British economy as the manufacturing sector declines. However, as with manufactured products, services must be designed and this design must be managed.

Service design can be both tangible and intangible. It can involve artefacts and other things including communication, environment and behaviours. Whichever form it takes it must be consistent, easy to use and be strategically applied.

Only recently have managers in organisations involved in the service sector realised that a conscious effort in applying design techniques to services can result in greater customer satisfaction, greater control over their offerings and greater profits.

Recently, several consultancies including Live|Work and Engine have turned their attention to designing services and are offering their assistance to the wider community.

In more depth

You can find a listing of companies that specialise in service design in the [Where next?](#) section of this article

Many senior managers involved in the service sector are still unaware of the benefits that design can bring to their offerings and, as a result,

You will need Adobe Reader to view PDF files. You can download it here.



More help is available on our [accessibility page](#)

Poll

Help us provide you with the information you need. Which of these areas do you work in?

- Business
- Design
- Education
- Public sector
- Other

About the author



Bill Hollins teaches design management, marketing management and operations management at the University of Westminster. He also undertakes management consultancy for

many organisations are operating at a sub-optimum level.

Unfortunately, there are few resources available that can assist these managers in the application of design to their service products. In this section, you can find an overview of the discipline and some tips on implementing service design in your organisation.

What is a service?

In Principles of Marketing, Philip Kotler defines a service as 'any activity or benefit that one party can give to another, that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything. Its production may or may not be tied to a physical product.'
There are five ways in which most services differ from manufactured products:

1. **Customer contact** - Generally, in manufacturing the customer is probably unaware of how the product came about. In services, production and consumption tend to occur at the same time.
2. **Quality** - In manufacturing measures tend to be quantitative, and quality tends to be measured against things like drawings. The measures of quality in a service tend to be qualitative and there are few quantitative measures. As a result, there is a wider variability in services and it is more difficult to control the quality of a service – as it is often down to the individual person supplying it.
3. **Storability** - Because services tend to be intangible, it is usually impossible to store them. For example, a car in a showroom if not sold today can be sold tomorrow but an empty seat on an aeroplane loses its value once the plane has left.
4. **Tangibility** - One can physically touch a manufactured product but most services are intangible. One cannot touch legal advice or a journey, though one can often see the results.
5. **Transportability** - Most services cannot be transported and therefore, exported (though the means of producing these services often can). It is estimated that only 11% of services are exportable although this is fast changing

Service design as a growing discipline

Business and management courses are fast-growing areas in education and increasingly, courses or modules in these courses are being included that show how to manage products and services. The design of services is a natural component of such courses.

There are plans to open a college in Northumbria that has services and service design as its main focus. This is planned to have 6,000 new service design graduates per year and between 270 to 350 faculty by 2012.

The University of California, Berkeley is offering a Services Science graduate course for the first time in 2006.

Paul Horn, Senior Vice President and Director of IBM Research, has suggested a new academic discipline of Services Science that would 'bring together work in the more established fields of computer science, operations research, industrial engineering, management sciences, and social and legal sciences, in order to develop the skills required for a services-led economy.

In more depth

Read Paul Horn's article [The New Discipline of Services Science](#) in BusinessWeek online (January 21 2005)

There is a need to educate service providers on the importance of total design, to show that it needs process and leadership – and also to show that innovation can occur throughout every stage of a product's usage.

Direction Consultants.

Quote

'Service designers will need a shift of attitude – they'll have to design with rather than for people.

Robert Young, Director, Centre for Design Research, Northumbria University

[Next page](#)

[What we do](#)
[Our history](#)
[Our Council](#)

[Our people](#)
[Contact us](#)
[Jobs](#)

[Your subscriptions](#)
[Our publications](#)
[Press](#)

[Sitemap](#)
[Financial statements](#)
[Freedom of information](#)

Copyright © 2007 Design Council | [Conditions of use](#) | [Privacy policy](#) | [Accessibility](#)

Legal notice: By using this website you agree to be bound by our [Conditions of use](#). The Design Council is not responsible for content on external websites linked to from this site.