

Design To Innovate

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Zanif Design
Consultancy
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Commitment to Design

If Mr. Ken Yeung, CEO of Silicone Zone, is asked how he made his company into the top 25 home appliances manufacturers in the US, with a 35% market share for kitchenware, in just seven short years, he would probably answer, "Using design to innovate". Besides bringing in the right designer, Yeung is clear about his company's vision and how its culture should be adapted to facilitate product development. **"The designer is like my girlfriend. I take a lot of time to build up our relationship,"** he says. Still, the product design process could be a challenge to both parties.

When Yeung first established the company in 2002, he already realised good product design should be the company's top priority. "Once you have that nailed, fame and fortune as well as the distribution network would all fall into place," says Yeung. In the beginning, due to a shortage of capital, Yeung who studied design and architecture had to take on the product design work by himself. The business took a long time to grow, however, he had never given up. Eventually, his efforts paid off and the company received market-wide recognition.

Design is the Soul of a Product

Since the inception of his company, Yeung has already collaborated with designers from Europe, the US, Mainland China and Hong Kong. "Design is the soul of a product. **To come up with good product designs, it is necessary for the designers to gain an in-depth understanding about the company's culture and characteristics,"** Yeung says.

Silicone Zone has fully integrated design and creativity into its business activities. Designers are involved in areas such as branding, product development, research studies, packaging, exhibition, showroom display and marketing. From 2002 to 2007, the annual growth rate of the company is about 45% to 60%. Its products can now be found in department stores, large super-markets and high-end grocery stores throughout USA, France, Italy, China and 20 other countries.

Zanif Design Consultancy, founded in 1989 by renowned Hong Kong product designer Winnif Pang, collaborated with Silicone Zone and designed the first soft cup cover in the market which prevents the drink spilling out when the cup falls over. Another ingenious creation by Pang for the company is an ice cube container which can also function as a stirrer. With its innovative design, the product won the prestigious German iF Product Design Award.

Enhancing Competitiveness

The collaborations between Silicone Zone and designers have set good examples for other local SMEs. Pang, who is also the chairman of HKDA (Hong Kong Designers Association), says many Hong Kong SMEs have faced a difficult year because they have not been able to move up the value chain by transforming their OEM (original equipment manufacturer) businesses through strengthening their design capabilities. He also points out that many companies have failed to satisfy customers' needs and have fallen behind their mainland counterparts.

Pang says many SME owners do not understand that strengthening their design capabilities can add value to their products as well as to the company as a whole. He thinks **designers can help companies shape their culture** by using technology effectively, **differentiating the company from competitors**. While an innovative culture can give rise to products with originality, it can bestow a sense of pride upon the employees and ultimately lead to business growth by winning over a loyal crowd of customers at the same time, Pang adds.

Since using design to improve business has become a trend among small-to-medium enterprises, companies should proactively seek for suitable design partners to work with, Pang advises. He reminds SME owners that they should prepare their companies' background information including vision, market position, strengths and weaknesses for the designers. With a better understanding of the business upfront, designers will help the company by offering their professional advices and services, leading the company to a prosperous future.



Zanif Design Consultancy was established in 1989. Aims to merge creative designs with the essential objective of making good products in terms of aesthetics and functions, Zanif optimizes design further as well as branding, costing, production, materials, engineering and marketing. Founder Winnif Pang has also launched his own life style products under his designer brand "Hooobbe" in 2007 in US, Europe, Japan and Taiwan.

SiliconeZone is an innovator when comes to developing silicone kitchenware since 2002. Headquartered in Hong Kong, SiliconeZone actively distribute her branded houseware merchandises with operations in Asia, Europe and North America through its distributing network in over 30 countries all over the world.

"Design as a Turnaround Strategy" series is initiated by The Hong Kong Design Centre and the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce. This series of 4 roundtable luncheons are to enhance the role of 'design' in business, to raise awareness of design management and also help members from both design and commerce to upgrade their businesses through strategic design management. This is the preview mini case version of "Design as a Turnaround Strategy" Brochure to be published early 2010.