

## Marketing & Design

If a survey were conducted amongst engineers and rotational molders requesting them to list the most important qualifications for a good designer, most would limit the list to technical knowledge. Few would include artistic skills, graphics, styling and marketing knowledge. However, when we are consumers looking for a TV, car, piece of furniture or any other personal item, how do we make our selection when price and performance are comparable? That's right, we choose based on how the product looks! We look for a product that reflects our personal tastes and represents who we are. Products are designed with character, whether it is intentional or not.

Consumers are attracted to products based on appearances and frequently make their purchasing decisions accordingly. How many of you have purchased a power hand tool and based your choice on how rugged the tool looked?

When you purchase a car, do you care about the finite element analysis results of the dashboard, or the density of the seat cushion? What about the alloy composition of the chassis? The answer is no. You cannot possibly comprehend all the information, even if it were available. What you do care about is the appearance, cost, ride, reliability and other factors dictated by design.

Unfortunately, many rotational molders haven't learned how to include design as an effective marketing tool when they interact with their customers. They often focus their attention on the practical aspects of their businesses which include cost, production and delivery. Molders fail to realize that superiorly designed products typically demand higher prices, greater sales and increased profits. These benefits are then usually transferred to the molders, who can sell their products at a higher price. Some progressive molders are beginning to understand this symbiotic relationship and have incorporated designers into their strategy of building long-lasting relationships with key clients. These molders are forging partnerships with their customers by sharing the development of important products, making it virtually impossible for their competitors to effectively compete.

Specifically, how does design influence product marketing? Product design typically accounts for marketing considerations such as appearance, color, graphics, user interface, quality, reliability and safety, as well as the overall embodiment

(concept) of the product itself. This last factor is often underestimated or overlooked by most people. It pertains to the overall architecture of the product and how it is presented to the consumer. A good example is a vacuum cleaner, which comes in all shapes, sizes and orientations. Vacuum cleaners are classified as uprights or canisters. Within each of these classifications, there are dozens of styles, shapes and qualities. These varieties have emerged based on a combination of innovation, customer needs and technological advancement. The Dyson vacuum cleaner is an excellent example of how an innovative design concept made its inventor a billionaire by literally turning an otherwise mundane industry on its head. Other examples include products like roller blades which evolved from roller skates, rotationally molded kayaks which

progressed from traditional construction methods and playground equipment which was usually constructed from wood or steel.

The product concept is critical to the market for which it targets. If the basic concept is ill-conceived, the product is destined for failure,

**“The product concept is critical to the market for which it targets. If the basic concept is ill-conceived, the product is destined for failure, no matter what the price may be.”**

no matter what the price may be. A good design requires careful examination of marketing considerations. Designers who typically specialize in bridging marketing with engineering disciplines are called industrial designers. They are taught to think in a multidisciplinary manner and to provide solutions by creatively interpreting a wide range of factors that will affect the overall outcome of a design. Typically, industrial designers think of the consumer and the factors that will influence their person's purchasing decisions. These considerations must be consistent with marketing requirements, along with engineering and manufacturing concerns. Marketing requirements can be subtle or obvious, practical or frivolous, but the fact is that the product's design is consistent with the marketing strategy. If the two are not properly integrated, the product will not sell.

The next time you are involved in the development of a product as an OEM or molder, consider partnering with an industrial designer. A qualified individual or firm will provide you with design solutions that include marketing as well as engineering parameters. As a result, you'll obtain the competitive advantage that is necessary to successfully expand your business.