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Involving the Industrial Designer in Ecodesign

Although the most proactive companies are clearly recognising the benefits and necessity of environmental commitment within their organisation, little research has been carried out to help companies understand how to involve industrial designers in the process of ecodesign.

This collaborative project between Electrolux and Cranfield University, aims to address this problem and investigate how industrial designers can be actively encouraged to be involved in ecodesign. The intended outcome of the study is to provide new information and potentially new approaches to improve the way in which industrial designers tackle ecodesign.

The aims of the project will be,

- to determine how ecodesign thinking can be encouraged in industrial design,
- to identify the most effective methods being used by companies to communicate ecodesign thinking to their designers,
- to look at how industrial design skills can be/are being used to benefit ecodesign and,
- to identify ideas and approaches which may be suitable for use in main stream industrial design.

The project will involve collecting data from companies and organisations that show particular prowess in design and/or ecodesign. For example, information will be drawn from the work carried out by; industrial designers in inherently 'green' companies, designers in proactive companies and ecodesign focused design consultancies. Particular attention will be paid to creativity, communication and education processes.

By benchmarking a broad range of companies it is anticipated that a detailed picture of the current best practice approaches to ecodesign, being used by industrial designers, can be built up. Appropriate ideas will be selected from the findings to be developed for testing on the Electrolux design team, through live design projects, to help them tackle ecodesign. Through a process of testing and developing, generic approaches to help industrial designers in develop their understanding and approach to ecodesign, will be produced.

Electrolux and Cranfield University recognise that there are great benefits to be gained from combining professional and academic excellence. It is anticipated that the outcome of this project will lead to the development of a clearer picture of how successful ecodesign can be achieved by industrial designers, in turn this should lead to a greater understanding of how the design profession should tackle ecodesign.

For further information on this research contact Vicky Lofthouse or Dr Tracy Bhamra, Eco Innovations Groups, Cranfield University, Building 53, Cranfield, Bedford, MK43 0AL. v.a.lofthouse@cranfield.ac.uk