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# How do we keep abreast of global changes whilst surviving within a competitive marketplace?

Nancy Spanbroek
Curtin University of Technology, Australia

Abstract
*Interior Design education needs to evolve to keep up with continuous global change. The design world is going through a major transition, brought about by shifts in the world; electronic communication, deregulation, global economics, and environmental crisis. These changes affect the function and requirements of building interiors, highlighting the need for flexibility.*

*Due to these continual changes, the need for developing lifelong learning skills in education are paramount in order to lead, or at least to survive, a demanding and continually changing marketplace. Response to these changes must occur within education and the profession. This paper discusses some possible changes.*

There is a sense of wonder, a feeling of completion in design that is lacking in many other fields. Designers have the chance to make something new, or to remake something so that it is better. Design gives the deep satisfaction that comes only from carrying an idea all the way through to completion and actual performance. It can be compared to the emotions aroused by making a kite and then being able to fly it in the sky: a feeling of closure, pleasure and achievement. This enriches us both professionally and as human beings and provides us with joyous affirmation of what we do. [Papanek:1995]

The world is experiencing dramatic social, political, economic, technological and environmental changes, all of which are liable to effect the interior design profession and its relationship with the living environment. These dramatic global changes demand that the profession stays abreast of each new development, '.....and that current trends must be recognised and future impacts anticipated', [Hasell & Scott:1996] for it to survive within a competitive market place. How can the interior design practising professional keep abreast of these changes?.

## The Profession

Over the past century, Interior Design has grown into a recognisable profession with its own body of knowledge, distinctive from Architecture and Interior Decoration. 'Current designers and educators go well beyond aesthetic issues to include those technical, functional, and environment and behaviour issues that affect health, safety, and welfare of the world population at work, at play, and at home.' [Ibid]

With rapid changes and more global competition (the Pacific Rim market is a classic example, where Australian based designers find they are competing with European and American design firms for design contracts), the market conditions will intensify. As a result the areas of design speciality will become even more focused. Design practices will need to stay ahead of global trends and to maintain a level of flexibility in order to survive.

> The profession now needs to critically look at its future direction in order to maintain its foothold within a competitive market place. [Hasell & Scott:1996]

Interior designers keep abreast and build up in knowledge of global changes predominantly through project work. Interior design practices tend to specialise in areas of niche markets, such as commercial offices, hospitality, retail design etc., with the larger practices generally taking on more than one area of speciality. Each new design project, brings new challenges, challenges that reflect social, demographic and environmental changes, economic conditions and business cycles, together with new technologies. The

designer's role is to investigate solutions for each new design brief, this investigation may also unearth new materials/products and new design practices, allowing the design firm to gradually build up knowledge based on project experience.

The knowledge and/or expertise gained in these areas of speciality, are seldom shared amongst other competitors. Consequently, the energy and resources employed by each design practice is mammoth as each new design project differs from previously designed projects. This pattern of enormous resource investment into new projects is seen to repeat itself amongst many design practices. For design practices to maintain their foothold within the competitive market place they will need to re-look at how this knowledge base is gained and maintained. Practices need to develop more collegial communication with their competitors in order to keep abreast of market trends.

Byrne et al (1994) outline future predictions of design practices as:
• Theory attracting younger inductees into higher-salaried strategic design positions,
• Strategic design firms are adaptive in skills and services, they work selectively on projects, methodically adding value to products and services by clever alliances and team management,
• "Strategies" continually lead the way by showcasing knowledge-based research and designtechniques.[Byrne, Eckersley, Makela, Shaffer:1994]

These predictions illustrate how critical on-going education will be. Designers need to support design initiatives with theoretical research. Designers have to keep their skills up to date to meet client service demands. Design practices may need to partner with other design practices offering complimentary design specialities when competing for projects. Teamwork becomes a critical factor, where designers are required to work with a multi disciplinary team. A team adaptable to new work practices, resourcing team members skills and knowledge. Designers with research skills will become major assets to the design team. Strategic design firms look

to continually update their staffs' skills and services, and specialise in design projects where they have both experience and a strong knowledge base.

For designers to keep abreast of global trends and to increase their knowledge base, the following resources are available:
1  In Design Journal references
2  Attending Conferences
3  Using the World Wide Web
4  Links with Traditional Education Modes
5  Attending Design Salons

## 1 Journals

Design journals publish current design projects but rarely is an in-depth article written about the research, design process or the knowledge gained on a given project.

> These design magazines will have to reflect more concern for substance as well as style; when that is not applicable for them, scholarly journals will have to fill the void. [Giard:1990]

This view is supported by Owen, who describes design publications as being predominantly trade magazines and portfolio presentations, not peer reviewed journals. [Owen:1991]

> Articles are also another means to disseminate design knowledge, but these are rare. The majority of articles published describe a superficial perspective of a design project, not descriptive. [Giard:1990]

For design journals to be worthwhile for updating information and expanding designers knowledge base, designers themselves need to be more willing to discuss their theoretical design approach, revealing the design processes employed, and the tools and skills used to successfully complete the design project. Designers need to participate in critical discourse on their own design projects and other published design work.

## 2 Conferences

Giard's comments on the industrial designer reflects that of the interior designer, where the profession is busy practising, but in many

instances does not deal with the broader issues. Conferences should be an opportunity to exchange ideas rather than a collection point for trade literature. In contrast, members of other professions regularly share their knowledge through conferences and journals, thereby advancing their discipline. Giard believes that substance has been overshadowed by form, resulting in a very meager legacy for future generations of designers. [Giard:1990]

Designers are reluctant to enter design discourse, they are protective of their designs and approaches to design solutions. Consequently, conferences attempting to hold an open forum on design are inevitably superficial and generally used as a form for self-promotion. This reflects the lack of theoretical based knowledge employed by design practices. The attitude of 'learning by trial and error' will not sustain future design practices. Clients are far more design literate today than they have been in past 'bull' periods, far more demanding of design services, and economics plays a greater role in the successful tendering for design projects. Designers must open their doors to design debate or choose to be nudged aside by price driven competitors such as office planners, furniture suppliers and partition contractors.

## 3 World Wide Web

There are numerous search engines available on the world wide web related to design, environmental design, design technology, and design theory. Universities now offer design programmes in distance education on the WWW. Costs are equivalent to university fees and students participate in the same program as that attended by local students. More and more educational programmes are available on the internet, and designers, once enrolled within the educational programmes are able to participate or access the information available within that program. Plagiarism and information overload become the major problem areas with this new form of information technology. For the designer, the legitimacy of the information presented is the main concern. Until there is an international body that reviews the information presented on the internet, the traditional educational

bodies will remain the primary source for information legitimacy.

## 4 Education

Educational institutions currently offer the main avenue for continuing education. Journals, conferences and inter-disciplinary communications are either not at a satisfactory level or do not occur. The WWW will become the easy access education source in the future, but must be carefully monitored by education and disciplinary bodies to ensure prevention of plagiarism, and legitimacy of information.

Design education needs to keep abreast of global changes. For this to occur educationalists need to re-think their approach. In Australia, all University interior design programmes are 4 year degrees, some offering an additional year for a masters degree. The traditional approach of studio and lecture based teaching continues in education streams of building technology, theory, communication, history, and design. Little focus is given to areas of research, team work, social sciences, or psychology.

Cal Swann suggests that new graduates need to be independent learners. They will need to be information literate and by that is meant literate in how to search for information and to use it intelligently, not just to be computer literate in design software programmes. Graduates need to be skilled communicators in presenting their ideas to others and skilled people at dealing with those other people. They need to understand teamwork and how to use their creativity in the team situation.

Not easy to set up for students to learn, as we have concentrated so heavily in the past on individual creativity (which is still a requirement to be developed at the same time) as they all need to be able to lead a team in the search for creative solutions to new problems as and when they are confronted. [Swann:1996]

Design graduates more than ever will need to be resourceful and keen team players. In addition to design skills, graduates will resource information on a variety of design issues, they will be literate and familiar with information technology, in order to support

their design approach. Future practices as previously predicted by Byrne et al, in *Three Lies to Live*, looks to designers to be able to undergo theoretical research. Designers unfamiliar with this level of research, cannot sustain a long term employment life. Equally, graduates who are unfamiliar with team work, and prefer to work in isolation, protective of their 'design', are not active members within a design practice. As information is ever increasing, and work practices continually altering, it is impractical to expect one designer, to keep abreast of all changes within a specific field. Therefore, designers within a design practice need to work together as a united force combining all their knowledge and design skills.

Currently, Tertiary education is the main instrument for practising professionals to keep abreast of global changes, let us consider its future possibilities.

## 4.1 Undergraduate Education

Byrne et al (1994) outlines the future implications for design in education as follows: Split in design is reiterated in design education. Students tracking strategic design as a career select from fewer but higher quality programmes, mostly paired with business/ management departments at universities: learning centres on teams and case studies. Students seeking technopractice affiliate themselves with vocational-technical schools. [Byrne:1994]

There will be two main streams of designers within future design practices. Firstly, the designer who understands how to theoretically research, work within a team, be able to manage their time, and have an understanding of business practices and business management. Secondly, the designer who has up to date technical skills, able to work within a team, strong time and project management skills and expresses an understanding and sensitivity towards design.

## 4.2 Post Graduate Education

It is often taken for granted that graduates will continue to develop under the guidance of senior designers and their

peer group networking - perhaps through the professional organisations or attendance at conferences and up-dating skills at Technical Colleges. It is all relevant, but it must be more - that's equivalent to Roger's 'haphazard, trial and error learning' (from his poster abstract) that he rightly condemns as mere project-based learning. It has to be more.[Swann:1996]

Graduate studies generate research and experimentation, often with professional and industrial support, which in turn enrich the profession. Experimental and theoretical ideas are worthless without their effective application to the real needs of professional practice, building a bridge between theory and practice. A design masters programme should not simulate professional practice and simply match its current state of the art, or the state of the art will never improve. [McCoy:1990] Educational programmes should challenge existing design practices, encouraging research and experimentation with specific fields of interior design supporting and enriching the interior design profession. This information must be shared with the design industry, and a forum established that enables this sharing of ideas. Practising professionals should be encouraged to participate in all levels of education critiques, thereby being exposed to new areas of research and design experimentation.

## 5 Design Salon

The Design Salon has operated at the margins of the education system while the day-to-day business of classes, exams, projects, and papers goes on unchanged. The Design Salon, as an alternative to traditional learning methods, is particularly successful at the graduate level in interior design. The participatory nature of the Design Salon has implications that could infuse and fundamentally alter the educational process, broaden content, and expand relevance toward more socially responsible design.[Klein:1996]

This forum, established for both post graduates and practising design professionals should encourage an exchange of ideas, exposes practising professionals to new

theoretical research and allow designers to explore and challenge new ways of design practices. The design salons' success depends on the participation of designers who are willing to disclose their design knowledge, approach and solutions to design.

## The Future Practicing Professional

By the year 2005, the knowledge base of professions quadruples but also becomes more "perishable", and the 'half life' of designer's useful information base shrinks to 2.5 years. Workers entering the job markets will make six complete job changes in their lifetime. Corporations will work with their professional associations and universities to create corporate schools and programmes that grant degrees or certificates. Educational facilities will be forced to open their schools for up to 20 hours a day to help re-educate adults. [Byrne et al:1994]

These predictions reflect the need to keep abreast of changes. Re-education and life-long learning skills will become the key factor for the survival of a practising design professional. Whether the designer is able to access information via the world wide web, or attend weekend workshops, or follow the traditional educational modes of part-time study, we must assume in all instances, that the practising profession identifies the need to continually update their knowledge base, and have the time to do so.

## Time Management

Time is critical for the practising interior design professional. The culture of the profession requires designers to work on average 10-12 hour days. These hours will increase with information technology. Designers have difficulty committing themselves to part-time education programmes due to practice commitments. Information must be packaged in a way that is easy to access, has no time barrier and is constantly updated to enable the professional to keep abreast of new emerging trends and information.

Design practices and practitioners must accept responsibility for supporting staff to continually update skills and information.

Suggestions for how this could be achieved are as follows:
- Time release from the work-place for intensive workshops on a 3 year rotation cycle, funded by employers with time donated from employees annual leave, (blocked vacation periods over a 3 year period could be used in this scheme).
- Job share programmes allowing staff to complete post graduate studies. (Given the nature of interior design practice, this would work best on a 3 month on and 3 month off basis).
- Fees for conference attendance and post graduate education programmes funded by employers as part of an employee incentive scheme.
- Firms establish employees educational requirements and career planning programmes.
- Firms would set criteria for continual education relevant to the firms market niche. (This could be tied to bonus schemes or profit share).
- Future fee structures for Interior Design firms, may well need to incorporate research as an initial service.

In all instances, the practising interior designer must have learning skills in order to keep abreast of global changes within the field of interior design. Candy (1994) states that

> Thriving, not merely surviving, in [a situation] where change is a constant and ever-present challenge - not an occasional, disruptive occurrence - is the most obvious sign of our lifelong learner. Not only do they possess the skills and knowledge to operate effectively and efficiently in this environment, but also have the creativity, intuition, and motivation to view this challenging environment as a vehicle for their own self-improvement. Our lifelong learner stands out from those who have similar skills and knowledge, and even the desire to learn, because of the ability to strategically manage self learning.

The perceived impacts of continuous education:-
- Requires life-long learning that presents a value and demand for both continuing and graduate education.

- Necessitates advanced graduate education for the generation of new knowledge. Partnerships among education, industry, and practice will be needed to support research. Educators have an increasing obligation to disseminate new knowledge.
- Requires integration of new knowledge into undergraduate curriculum so that we can educate future designers to be good consumers of research. Students, as critical thinkers, must learn to inquire in ways that lead to the pursuit of new knowledge.
- Spawns new specialisation's based on types of information (e.g., environmental psychology, materials technology).
- Encourages specialisation of design programmes in schools and universities as the wave of future education. Students respond to new markets and seek programmes based on type of design expertise offered. New roles emerge within the field as the preparation of interior designers changes. Certification tests and licensing restrictions will be reconfigured.
- Requires collaboration across disciplines within teams to examine multiple facets of increasingly complex projects and problems. [Hasell et al:1996]

## Conclusion

Education must change in the future in response to rapid changes in the global business environment. Education is an essential means of preparing future professionals for dealing with upcoming challenges, but our educational institutions cannot meet this challenge using current educational models.

Educational institutions must adopt new teaching methods, processes, and content. It necessitates accepting and approaching education as a lifelong process. [Hasell & Scott:1996]

Design practitioners must be encouraged to continually update their information and skill base, this must be supported by their employers and also by education facilities. It must be perceived to be highly desirable, perhaps even rewarded, after all, the information gained from continual learning is fed back into the practice and ultimately to the interior design profession.

As design gives the deep satisfaction that comes only from carrying an idea all the way through to completion and actual performance. [Papanek:1995]

So too can the life-long learner experience the emotions aroused by making a kite and then being able to fly it in the sky: a feeling of pleasure and achievement. This not only enriches the profession of interior design but also enables us to enhance the quality of life for our clients.

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