10 good reasons to work with a product design consultancy

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Reading time 11 mins

A product design consultancy...

- Helps you generate new ideas
- Provides specific expertise for your project
- Boosts your capacity

- Broadens the skills and knowledge you have available
- Makes you more agile
- Reduces your time to market

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Where are your pain points?

If this is the first time that you have thought about bringing in help from a product design consultancy then you've probably got a problem that you need to solve and are weighing up your options and the value an expert design team could bring. The chances are you've hit a problem that you either don't know how to solve, don't have the resources available to solve or there is something else making it impractical to solve in-house. It almost always comes down to some combination of pressures in a business, normally lack of time, expertise, agility or resources. You probably fall into one of these camps:

- You don't have the expertise to solve a problem in-house

- You don't have the time or resources to solve it in-house

- You don't have the agility to solve the problem in the timescale

- You need to create something new, but internal efforts have yielded predictable results

A product design consultancy can help with all of these problems. Depending on your business, it's size, industry and your position within it, a product design consultancy can offer you different benefits and advantages.

In this post we discuss the benefits of working with a product design consultancy from the eyes of the client and the different pain points they can help with. Written from conversations and feedback clients over the past 10 years, here are 10 reasons to work with a product design consultancy.

Reasons to hire a design consultancy

1. Consultancies may have expertise you don't

No two product design consultancies are the same and they tend to specialise in different areas. Some focus on strategy, some are more creative, others have deep specialisms in more technical fields such as medical and drug delivery devices. Depending on your specific challenge, you may find a product design agency who has expertise where you do not and this can mean you don't need to spend time developing these skills in-house. Finding a design consultancy who already understand your industry and have the expertise you need can potentially provide valuable insights and save you time and money.

2. You can focus on results rather than details

When you decide to work with a consultancy, you are hiring a ready made design team with systems and processes for solving problems already in place. Your consultancy will have a project manager to keep things on track and technical people that can engineer solutions to problems which would otherwise eat up your time, energy and focus. This means that rather than having to solve every problem you can step back and take a bigger picture view of your project. It allows you to focus on the business context and the value for your stakeholders. It will help to keep up the momentum and your enthusiasm for a project.

3. They may have solved a similar problem before

Sometimes you will find a design consultancy who have already done something similar, they may have designed a similar product, worked in your industry before or solved a similar problem in a different industry. Whatever the case, the obvious upshot of this is that they will probably already

have a good understanding of your industry, your customers or the problem in hand. They may also already have a good understanding of the technical and regulatory factors and be able to help you solve your problem more quickly and with less effort.

4. You don't have the time or resources in-house

Sometimes it is not a lack of knowledge, expertise or skills that you are facing, instead it is a lack of availability of those resources. You may have hundreds of designers and engineers in your company but they could all be busy with other projects or maintaining existing product lines. A product design consultancy can be like a functional design department that you can parachute into your company to solve an immediate problem without taking focus away from other important projects.

5. Internal development would take too long

If your company is quite large then the chances are everything takes quite a long time. Especially product design and development. There are lots of reasons why this happens and it tends to get worse the bigger the company is. Design consultancies are often very agile businesses and large companies can benefit from working with product design consultancies for their agility, creativity and problem solving ability. Even if your company isn't that large, since their focus is product design and engineering, consultancies are usually geared to do things faster than you can in-house.

6. You want a fresh perspective

If you've tried coming up with new ideas and keep coming up with predictable results it might be time to look beyond your organisation. One of the important roles of a product design consultancy is to challenge the way you do things and present you with solutions based on their own independent research of your market and user needs. These solutions include things that you might not have otherwise thought of (otherwise where's the value?). Handing your problem to someone outside of your organisation to solve can yield insightful and innovative solutions especially when driven by a robust design thinking approach.

7. You don't want to recruit for a short term project

Another benefit of working with a product design consultancy is that you get access to a pool of technical and creative people who are usually skilled, equipped with all of the latest tools and following a well oiled product design process. A product design consultancy will act like a plug and play design department for your organisation and should be able to slot in and be up to speed quickly. The advantage is that you don't have to recruit which is especially beneficial if it is only a temporary requirement or you need to move quickly. If you have a short term project which requires a team and you don't want to recruit, working with a consultancy could be a good option for you.

8. You can do more in less time

A product design consultancy is like a design and engineering department within your organisation. As well as providing scope for new depth of ideas and fresh concepts, having a design consultancy on board can increase your capacity to run more projects simultaneously. Your consultancy will do the coordination and management, assigning the right project managers and technical people to the projects. You can give them multiple briefs or even brief multiple design consultancies on different projects to accelerate your development.

9. They can step in if you lose key team members

Businesses are rarely perfectly resourced and even when they are the balance can shift if a team member leaves or a new opportunity or challenge emerges where the team has no expertise. Design consultancies, by nature, tend to have a broad range of people and skills and often they will have people who can step in to fill a gap at short notice. This can be particularly useful as recruiting the right candidate and replacing the lost skills can often take months.

10. You don't need to build an in-house design team

If you don't release new products frequently it can be expensive and unnecessary to retain a product designer or product design team in-house. You can work with a product design consultancy when you have a new project and then once the project is complete you don't have any further financial or legal obligations. It can also help to reduce the risk of losing knowledge through people leaving your company, especially if your company is small or has a very small design team.

How many of these apply to you?

The chances are at least one or two of these pain points apply to you. From the very largest to the very smallest organisations, most will some point have been experiencing a combination of these pain points. From startups who lack expertise in key areas to global organisations threatened by new competition and who need to be more agile. The problems are quite universal so if you've got a new challenge you might be wise to speak to some consultancies.

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