

Top 5 common product design mistakes and how to avoid them



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Reading time 9 mins

Key Points

- Jumping the gun and rushing to get a product to market leads us open to failure
- Common product design mistakes include: insufficient research, no quality assurance, disregarding feedback, neglecting documentation, and paying too much attention to

aesthetics.

- Product design solutions: market research and validation; robust quality assurance and standards verification; targeted user feedback; consistent documentation; and prioritising aesthetics correctly
- Learn how to design products that are innovative but also effective and sustainable
“Design is intelligence made visible” – Alina Wheeler.

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As we saw in our previous article regarding the [process of designing a new product](#), there is no definitive blueprint for success. However, there is a common approach that successful design follows – and similarly, common product design mistakes that even veterans are prone to making:

1. Not doing enough research

2. Overlooking quality assurance (QA)
3. Ignoring user feedback
4. Neglecting documentation
5. Focusing too much on aesthetics

Designing a new product is an exciting and rewarding process, but it also requires careful consideration of many different aspects. If you don't take the time to plan your product well in advance and address any potential issues, you could end up with a product that fails to meet customer expectations. Here are five common mistakes to avoid when designing products and solutions to prevent this from happening ^{[1] [2]} [— —](#).

Product design mistake #1: Not doing enough research

Intuition is excellent but not infallible. Designing a successful product that will outlast passing trends or can be re-launched to suit anticipated trends requires data rather than hunches.

Research is a crucial stage of designing any successful product. The mistake many designers make is creating products based on what they think customers want instead of what they know customers will need.

The product design solution: Find out who your users are and their needs to create a successful product. Too often, people skip this step and jump straight into prototyping, leading to missed opportunities or a sub-par product. Make sure you research the market thoroughly before developing your product further to have as much information as possible. Read our previous article that covered the [techniques you can use for market research](#) and to do your due diligence.

Product design mistake #2: Overlooking Quality Assurance

Quality assurance is often an afterthought during the development process, but it should be one of your primary focuses when creating a new product.

Many small businesses and entrepreneurs rush to get their products to market and compromise on quality. The consequences can be severe if your product doesn't work as it should or stops working entirely after a short time. In the best-case scenario, you can recall it, reimburse customers, or repair it under warranty. In the worst-case scenario, as we saw in our article on [medical device tips for device engineers](#), poor-quality products can cause severe injury or even death, exposing you to graver legal repercussions.

The product design solution: Bugs can appear anywhere, so ensure there are clear testing processes

before releasing a newer product version: even minor bugs can have disastrous effects on user experience or your reputation! Many quality issues are caused by poor product design ^[3] –

- Send prototypes for reliability testing, find their weaknesses, and address them
- Don't be afraid to fail, and don't take it personally when a product doesn't work as it should. The feedback you'll get from this (see #3 below) is invaluable to the process of making your product better
- Avoid using cheap or local components (i.e. from foreign suppliers) that could malfunction in ways your sample prototype hadn't envisioned
- Ensure that the workmanship where the products are manufactured (i.e. factories) is of a high standard. This will not only protect you from product malfunction but also supply-chain issues which could expose you to reputational damage and legal repercussions (e.g. [inhumane working conditions in offshore factories](#))
- Use a risk management tool to assess potential problems early. [Download our free Failure Modes and Effects Analysis \(FMEA\) tool](#) to get these bases covered.

Product design mistake #3: Ignoring user feedback

You can't please all of the people all of the time. The same thing goes for your users. Regular users will have different experiences from those who use it every once in a while. Others might have feedback that has nothing to do with product functionality (e.g. where the product is sold or colours they don't like). This makes it easier to ignore user feedback altogether, which is a mistake.

The product design solution: Understand and accept that this is part of the process. When rolling out a product, always collect user feedback during testing and post-launch stages and use it to inform future designs. This will help to improve quality and create better experiences for customers in the future:

- [Stop talking to 'all users'](#) as this can get overwhelming. Categorise your customers and address each segment accordingly. If you want to improve a feature, engage with the customers that use it. If you want to understand why customers aren't using a feature, talk to those who don't.

Feedback is ongoing. How do your customers feel about the product after a year? Two years?

- Act on feedback rather than just listening. Address any problems quickly, follow up with users regularly, and thank them for their input. This builds trust with current customers

and reinforces your brand identity

- Don't fall for the vocal minority. In other words, those who give feedback the loudest aren't necessarily the most justified. Treat every feedback cluster (e.g. interface, design, functionality) as a potential hypothesis and test it before making changes.

Product design mistake #4: Neglecting documentation

Regardless of the product you're designing or the level of compliance needed to bring it to market, proper documentation is essential: keep track of progress throughout development phases. Ensure, and improve transparency and communication between team members, and make this information readily available.

Another problem many designers make (especially with large and increasingly globalised teams) is not keeping track of the design, compliance, or quality assurance questions being asked. Your team might follow multiple directions and, ultimately, leave you with no holistic picture of the overall process, goals, or objectives ^[4].

- Why was one solution better than another?
- Where are all the research links?
- How do you go about receiving group feedback from consumer insight reports?
- How do you communicate with the R&D team?
- Were there other prototypes that didn't make the final cut? Why didn't they? How was this communicated? Was there a consensus?

The product design solution: Keep a record of the key decisions and processes made along the way and track every change/iteration. Not only will this help you to compile the technical documentation needed for conformity assessment (e.g. your FMEA report), but it's also a requirement for [international standards certification such as ISO 13485](#).

Product design mistake #5: Focusing too much on aesthetics

Human-centred design is an integral part of the design process, in which aesthetics play a significant role. But we often prioritise form (what it looks like) before function (what it does). For example, people with a hearing disability don't necessarily want to wear a hearing aid that's bulky and ugly – even if 100% technically fully functional. For this reason – and others – most designers emphasise visually appealing products because we tend to buy with our eyes first.

However, spending too much time on aesthetics can detract from the overall quality if done incorrectly. If a hearing aid is aesthetically pleasing but bulky and cumbersome to manipulate, users will find it uncomfortable and won't wear it.

The product design solution: Consider the visual elements carefully, but prioritise usability, performance and reliability as they are essential components of any successful product or service.

“Design is intelligence made visible” - [Alina Wheeler](#) (branding consultant, author)

Avoiding the most common product design mistakes requires extensive research, testing, feedback, paperwork, and prioritising product features correctly. In so doing, you'll not only produce something genuinely innovative, but you'll also do so more efficiently – saving time and money.

Are you a product designer, engineer or customer with tips you feel should be added to our list? Send us a message and let us know – your feedback is as important to us as it is to developers who want the same from their customers!

Comments

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