
PREFACE

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“This is the era of design.”

The mass media proclaimed the above as the new millennium began. Academics and professionals have been holding conferences about it for a while now. Designers themselves have insisted on it all along. But what, exactly, does that statement mean? A proliferation of hip hotels and award-winning potato peelers do not an era make.

Because those of us who are part of the design profession are optimists, always on the lookout for how we can make our environment better, we're eager to claim that the twenty-first century is, at last, the era of design, the time when design—and designers—have come into their own and taken power as a cultural force. But do we agree about what design is? To be sure, each designer has a unique vision and works in a unique way. Yet, we're all part of one profession, and being a professional of any kind acknowledges that there is a common ground shared by its practitioners. Do designers know the coordinates and parameters of their profession? Do they realize what they must *learn* if they are to be successful designers in the twenty-first century? More important still, as professionals, do designers know what it means to *do* design?

“The New American Professional: Distinctive (towering) competence.”

In *The Circle of Innovation*, Tom Peters refers to the New American Professional (NAP) as a “white collar professional . . . whose creativity/organization effectiveness is barely mentioned in the pages of business and management books.” For designers, that phrase should strike a responsive chord. Pick up a best-selling business book and if it does, in fact, contain a reference to the work of designers, the reference is peripheral at best. This, in part, is why this book needed to be written. Whatever specialty designers work in, whether they're seasoned professionals or relatively new to their careers, they need a single written source of best practices and benchmarks for excellence. The identification of this need was the impetus behind the *Interior Design Handbook of Professional Practice*, a joint venture between McGraw-Hill and *Interior Design* magazine.

Traditionally, the question at the forefront of designers' minds has been "What do clients want?" The *Interior Design Handbook of Professional Practice* asks—and answers—another question altogether: "What do designers need?" This is a book not only for the present, but also for the future. It is prospective. It assumes that, yes, this *is* the era of design. And it becomes a tool for designers to be better prepared to sustain the profession of design and carry it forward.

"Work is not where you are. It's what you do."

These words, from the manager of the real estate program at a global consulting and technology firm, sum up how business leaders perceive the workplace as the twenty-first century begins. They apply to the designer's workplace as well. Although the client may be in Copenhagen and the designer in Maine, communication happens, design is implemented, work gets done. Once-narrow professional boundaries have stretched to span the circumference of the globe. In design, as in all slices of life, the globe—and, at the same time, the individual—is the place to be. It's where things are and where they'll stay for the foreseeable future.

Globalization is only one of the challenges grappling the design profession. It is wise to expect and prepare for challenges from all directions, including the economy, the physical and social environment, and academia. Today, design transcends aesthetics. Through access alone, designers are in a position to provide leadership in the realization of the New World.

Our daily life reflects an unsettled time. Groups of people, as well as organizations and nations, seek new leaders, with new definitions of leadership. Designers must step up and take their places in the front ranks. Individuals and organizations everywhere are in transition, adapting to an economy that looks much different than it did even a decade ago. In the old economy, products were, for the most part, tangible. Now, expectations shift continually. The new economy values new information and new perspectives, an intangible product, that seem and feel very different to us, that require us to experience new levels of perception, that put demands on our sensibilities. Now, and apparently forever, individuals and businesses want higher quality and better, faster performance from their environments, from service providers, from their tools and toys, from anyone, anyplace, or anything that affects the individual. On this competitive stage, high quality is still the goal but speed is gaining on it for first place.