

## CHANGING THE DESIGN PARADIGM

by Amy Stark

Consider this scenario. You've hired an industrial design firm to conceptualize a new product and they have delivered an array of exciting ideas. Exciting, that is, until the engineers tell you it cannot be done, tool makers tell you they can not build the tools, and manufacturing tells you most of the designs can not be produced - at least, not at your price or within your time-frame.

This is a reality that many companies encounter. So now what? You either start over at ground zero or head down the long, but much-traveled road of force-fit manufacturing.

Companies have come to accept the notion that new product development walks hand-in-hand with ongoing, costly manufacturing problems. But you really don't need a host of engineers bandaging a product all the way through manufacturing. The mold can be broken when design firms integrate **total product development** solutions geared toward reducing cost and time-to-market. With this concept comes responsibility for the total project, so the tendency to "throw the project over the wall" - from industrial design to engineering to tooling and, finally, to manufacturing - is eliminated. There are no walls in today's premier design firms! Transition time is eliminated from one step to the next. Think of it like this, successful design firms are like a relay team running a straight line from start to finish.

OEMs are searching for product development solutions as they downsize to remain competitive. Offering vertical integration of services is the solution. More and more, OEMs are looking to shift critical design and development responsibilities over to strategic (design firm) supplier-partners. This type of alliance allows the customer to focus on internal, specific core competencies. The design firm will then concentrate on its own well-defined strengths through numerous product development tasks. The result is cost-competitive products introduced in a timely fashion.

The world-class design firm should be a partner to the OEM, or an extension of their arms. This will also eliminate the finger pointing that accompanies any new project. The goal is to meet market introduction deadlines while allowing the OEM to remain focused on their core technology issues. Results are dramatic when time-to-market and cost targets meet world-class

benchmarks - a win-win situation for both the OEM and the design firm.

Lastly, it is important that the design firm is a quality driven organization. Any first-rate organization should establish and maintain a certified quality system to ensure each project conforms to the specified requirements. For example, ISO 9000 certification will provide documented evidence that the design firm is committed to taking on responsibility for new product development processes.

World-class design firms need to incorporate the following strategies:

- Design and engineering capabilities that translate seamlessly from product concept to the manufacturing floor
- Versatile, broad-experience based engineers
- Prototype strategies that confirm design intent
- Engineering analysis to ensure limited field failures
- Reduce transition time between phase gates
- Experience in latest manufacturing processes
- Demonstrated leadership in producing and testing finished product
- Deep-seated commitment to establishing long-term customer/supplier-partner alliances
- Certified quality system

Incorporate these fundamental strategies and the result will be a successful partnership.

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