

Looking good

Design is increasingly being recognised as a necessary brand tool



Falguni and Satish Gokhale believe in 'doing things differently'

A machine is a machine, is a machine. Right? "Wrong!" says a band of designers – and more and more industries are agreeing with them, as they look for positive differentiators for their products – be it a scooter, car or an ATM, which everyone sees, or a CNC (computer numerical control) lathe that's hidden away inside a factory. Not only does an industrial designer make the product look better, its functionality improves, too.

While the Pune-headquartered Elephant Design added over 25 new clients in 2011, including Axis Bank, Delhi Duty Free, Essar Steel, Glenmark Pharmaceuticals, Mars International, Reckitt Benkiser and Wagh Bakri Tea, Design Directions – also in Pune – is particularly proud of a large-screen display (LSD) it installed for Reliance Industries' Jamnagar facility. "It's a live video wall in the control room, for situational analysis of plant data," says Satish Gokhale, founder director in charge of product design. "There are eight walls measuring eight metres by four metres each, which cover the operations of the entire refinery."

Adds co-founder Falguni Gokhale,

who looks after visual design: "There are two kinds of clients – one who want to know whether we've done something like this before, and the other who know we do things differently. We had to invent a way to create the display philosophy document, because there was no application available."

So the agency made a static prototype and took it to Jamnagar, where they consulted the people working on the project as well as Honeywell, which was Reliance's contractor and Design Directions' project partner. With something like 10,000 data points, and working with the client's people, while inventing its way, the work took six months to stabilise. "We had to create special dynamic objects which the operators could recognise," says Falguni. "We also had to do colour blindness testing, and eliminated blinking or flashing lights so that others wouldn't be distracted."

Satish, who has a string of product designs to his credit, from CNC milling machines for the Electronica group to medical equipment for the likes of GE, also explains the concept of the Tata Swach water purifier

for which he designed an adapter with a connector tool. "The filter uses reverse flow instead of the conventional direct flow – so, there's a longer period of contact with the silver nano-particles in the rice husk and ash used to filter the water," he explains. "The idea of the bulb design we created is that it shouldn't look rural, even if it's meant for the rural population."

At Elephant, director Ashwini Deshpande points out that the agency continues to draw from the depth of its team's "experience across several domains to arrive at innovative solutions to new-age challenges". Elephant won a slew of awards last year – from designing Venky's Xpress retail outlets for chicken to a strategic brand identity programme done for Nirlep non-stick cookware, package design for Britannia – for which it has worked since 2006 for its biscuits, cakes and breads – and the environmental design for the Suzlon One Earth Global campus.

Happy campers Clients are understandably happy. "The new design has definitely helped streamline and lubricate our image. There was a dramatic improvement in brand identity, recognising our products as upmarket," says Mukund Bhogale, managing director, Nirlep, with which Elephant has worked since 1990 "What was unique about Design Directions' approach was that ours was not a consumer durable but a tool room product. The big advantage of Satish Gokhale's design was cleanliness and neatness on the shopfloor, and an improvement in the cost-effectiveness of the machines," adds V.S. Ramakrishnan, a former managing director at Electronica.

"Design adds not only the cosmetic aura, but also makes workplaces efficient, functional and safe," says Harish Bijoor, brand-strategy specialist and chief executive officer, Harish Bijoor Consults Inc. "I do believe these three attributes are the most relevant for industrial machines, tool rooms, control rooms and the like. To that extent design is important in every sphere – whether it's your tube of toothpaste or your factory."