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# Design Driven Innovation: Changing The Rules Of Competition By Radically Innovating What Things Mean



## Synopsis

Until now, the literature on innovation has focused either on radical innovation pushed by technology or incremental innovation pulled by the market. In *Design-Driven Innovation: How to Compete by Radically Innovating the Meaning of Products*, Roberto Verganti introduces a third strategy, a radical shift in perspective that introduces a bold new way of competing. Design-driven innovations do not come from the market; they create new markets. They don't push new technologies; they push new meanings. It's about having a vision, and taking that vision to your customers. Think of game-changers like Nintendo's Wii or Apple's iPod. They overturned our understanding of what a video game means and how we listen to music. Customers had not asked for these new meanings, but once they experienced them, it was love at first sight. But where does the vision come from? With fascinating examples from leading European and American companies, Verganti shows that for truly breakthrough products and services, we must look beyond customers and users to those he calls "interpreters" - the experts who deeply understand and shape the markets they work in. *Design-Driven Innovation* offers a provocative new view of innovation thinking and practice.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

One of the Design Primers for Businesspeople. Eschewing the received wisdom that the customer is always right, Politecnico di Milano professor Verganti focuses on game-changing designs that up-end expectations and create entirely new markets... Verganti also includes a useful section on

how executives can attempt to instigate their own programs of radical innovation. One of the Best Innovation and Design Books of 2009. - BusinessWeek, December 16, 2009

How should a company devise new meanings and create the designs to embody them? Mr. Verganti suggests that companies form relationships with "interpreters" individuals and organizations looking at settings similar to the one in which the company's products would be used. For Mr. Verganti, it might be said, if life imitates art, corporate life should imitate the making of art. - The Wall Street Journal, October 9, 2009

If you follow Mr. Verganti's advice, it may take a while, but your competition will be left wondering how it was you managed to redefine (and capture) their business. - San Francisco Book Review, September 2009

Verganti tells how design innovators add "unsolicited meaning" that consumers don't even know they're craving; and they create products people can't live without. - BizEd, November-December 2009

One of the best books of the year is undoubtedly "Design-Driven Innovation". In it Verganti attacks one of the central mysteries of innovation; how can a company successfully create a product that is a radical break from the past, and which shows the way to a new future? - John Caddell on The Customer Collective, August 12th 2009

Consumption-driven wealth and status are being replaced by identity, belonging, and a strong desire to contribute and do something "meaningful" rather than just acquire things. Roberto Verganti, in his new book, Design-Driven Innovation, argues that there is a "Third Way of Innovation," driven by meaning, or to be more precise, by those cultural "interpreters" who have the ability to "make sense of things" and give existing things new meaning; and thus create new markets. - Design Mind, September 2009

Roberto Verganti's fascinating analysis will stimulate all thoughtful business readers, students, and practitioners alike. This passionate and keenly observed book offers a valuable and provocative new view, and will be a fundamental reference for all those interested in design and determined to pursue innovation as a driving factor in their profession. -- Luca di Montezemolo, Chairman Ferrari S.p.A. and Fiat S.p.A.

Every manager interested in innovation should read this book. The perspectives it provides will make a crucial difference to managers in the twenty-first century. -- Marco Iansiti, David Sarnoff Professor of Business Administration, Harvard Business School; coauthor of The Keystone Advantage

Verganti shares powerful insights into both the process and value of design-driven innovation, to the benefit of business leaders and, ultimately, the customers we serve. -- Brian C. Walker, President and CEO, Herman Miller Inc.

Can design save the world? No, but it can definitely help make it better, especially if integrated within the systems that already

have direct impact on the economy and on policy making. Roberto Verganti belongs to a small group of enthusiastic experts and interpreters that have set out to explain the culture of design to the powerful but unaware, so that they can appreciate its full potential. -- Paola Antonelli, Senior Curator, Architecture and Design, The Museum of Modern Art

This is a great addition to innovation literature. The author provides numerous examples and case studies to drive home the importance of innovative design practices in today's companies. However, after a while the book becomes a little repetitive. Almost all the examples seem to be of Italian companies. It would have been really nice to read about innovation practices and success stories from a more geographically diverse set of companies. Also, if the author condensed some of the repetitive narrative and focused on the core ideas, the book could be shorter and more useful. But overall, a good read.

**Good Cases:** All the stories / examples are interesting, and the dynamic nitty-gritties are pointed out, e.g. the highly circumstantial success of Fiat Panda.  
**Biased Opinion:** In order to make a strong case for Design-Driven Innovation (DDI), the author has to antagonize the whole discipline of User-Centered Design (UCD). UCD is described as something similar to asking the users what they want, which is scandalously biased. It's true that UCD puts emphasis on users, but that in no way implies we can not articulate or facilitate brave new insights by understanding the users and their contexts. Thus DDI is actually NOT in any conflict with UCD. The author takes a very narrow view of UCD just to highlight how different DDI is, which is a shame.  
**Trivial Theory:** The framework the author presents is vague and close to truism. Saying something like "to implement disruptive innovation you need to gain the right insights, find the right people, etc." is similar to saying "to innovate you need to be innovative", which doesn't really yield any more useful information. Although the characteristics of successful radical innovations in the past are summarized, that alone by no means affords a proven theory - it's just a *post hoc* case of correlation vs. causation. Just because many radical innovators have something in common doesn't justify that you can follow the same rule and succeed. The book has a promising point that I can totally agree with, but the author simply fails to deliver anything convincing to make that point.

While we are seeing a rise in books which acknowledge the role that design plays in innovation, Verganti's book is a reminder that well-structured, entrenched design-driven innovation processes have been in place for many years. Verganti uses a number of examples from northern Italy to

illustrate his well-considered and usefully described method for discovering 'meaning' in products and services. The difference between this and any other book on design and innovation (that I've come across in the past 15 years) is that Verganti provides a practical, easy to understand method which can be applied and tested in other environments. So unlike many books which continue to mystify the 'design process', Verganti proposes that the structure that is built around identifying and developing the problem is central to achieving innovative outcomes. Where the method seems to fall short is in the way in which it engages audiences. The creation of meaning is, for the most part, undertaken, reviewed and assessed by interpreters. These interpreters are those engaged in a design discourse. The method doesn't extend to engaging audiences through social networking, something which is on the rise in the design sector. The strength of Verganti's method is that it calls for identifying interpreters and engaging in a discourse around design. If this method, (which seems to be the key to success in Italian innovation) encourages designers to become more active in their engagement with discourse, then it will have done what few design and innovation books could do.

Roberto Verganti finally translates into business-speak what every designer knows in their gut: that an innovative design process requires intuition AND a rational, analytic view. Informed intuition beats user-centered research. Truly innovative design happens when enlightened manufacturers trust design 'interpreters' to create new positions within the culture - to make a new proposal for how we live. For designers, this distinguishes between design for incremental newness and design for radical cultural innovation. Verganti provides this fantastic bridge between theory and practice to illustrate how radical new ideas can transform the market by proposing new categories rather than catering to existing ones. The hard lesson for business is this: real innovation is propositional and risky, not researched and proven. Twenty years after Branzi's 'Learning from Milan' we get the business version....

DDI is an insightful book particularly about the Italian design industry and reveals the reasons behind why they are highly regarded for their design around the world. In hindsight, I wish I had read the second section of this book before the first one. This would have allowed me to identify myself (the reader) as one of the Interpreter and then try to understand how the DDI strategy works described in section one of the book. Verganti could have taken the inverted pyramid approach of writing the most important section about DDI, which is the "process", at the beginning of this book. After reading this book, I got the impression that DDI seems to have been effective and a successful

methodology in smaller groups of people working closely together.

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