

CASE STUDY OF THE VIABILITY OF THE STYLING FOR BUSINESS TO BUSINESS PRODUCTS

Public summary

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This public summary has been written about a bachelor assignment of the study Industrial Design Engineering at the University of Twente, Netherlands. In this assignment the student helped the company PBF-group B.V. which develops and produces high tech power supplies. A product styling strategy was developed for PBF their flagship product, the LAPS3800 (*Figure 1*), which is a modular power supply for industrial laser machinery. The case of PBF holds larger scientific and commercial interest because styling is uncommon in business to business products with similar properties to the LAPS3800. Because it is a component of a bigger machine it was unknown whether styling has market benefits for the LAPS. In the project a recommendation on why and how PBF should implement styling was formulated using a structured project approach.



Figure 1. The current LAPS model

Analysis phase

An analysis of the various topics surrounding the project its topic was performed based on the following research question: *How can PBF implement styling principles to increase the value of their semi-modular LAPS product?* In the analysis phase research was done on the background of PBF, the LAPS, styling principles and value creation principles. From this analysis it was learned that styling could add value to the LAPS in three ways. Firstly, by adding features which helps people connect the LAPS to the brand of PBF (Paulman, ND; Cready, 2018). Secondly by incorporating features in the styling which improve the LAPS its interactions with humans (Crilly, Moultrie, & Clarkson, 2004). Lastly by choosing an appearance which better conveys the LAPS its function (IDpartners, 2017). All these three improvements would add value to the LAPS because they improve upon the service PBF provides its customers (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Formulating styling as a service gave insights on what guidelines a styling proposal for PBF's LAPS3800 should adhere to.

Design phase

In the design phase a design proposal was made through an iterative process, based on inspirational tools and design sketching. The final design was made to incorporate as many value creators as possible, while keeping the design easy and cheap to implement for PBF in a prototyping phase (*Figure 2*). The final design improved the LAPS in three ways. Firstly, its appearance communicates properties of the LAPS, the brick pattern is a metaphor for the LAPS its modularity and strength. Additionally, the company style of PBF is baked into the pattern, making it easy to associate the product and brand. Secondly the lay-out of the styling helps PBF explain the LAPS its internal workings, this lay-out also helps to break up the LAPS its geometric form. These features will make the LAPS more memorable than its competitors. Lastly the final design improves human interactions, the addition of finger holes makes the LAPS easier to pick up. Using a budget and cost estimation, the final concept is expected to add more value than investment costs.



Figure 2. The design proposal for the stylized LAPS prototype

Results

Trough carefully designing a prototype that minimizes the changes to the existing LAPS, a suitable prototype has been made. This prototype would execute the theory found in the analysis phase at a low investment cost, allowing PBF to perform market research with this prototype. This is necessary because PBF would be the first organization in their industrial sector to introduce stylized power supplies to the market. Therefore, there is little known about how the market will react. Overall, based on the analysis phase and design phase combined, the bachelor assignment suggests that PBF would be able to benefit from implementing styling.

Conclusion

The thesis discusses that there are valid indications that styling could positively impact PBF their business strategy. A correctly styled product communicates its technological quality. Furthermore, its more memorable. Potential clients can be informed more easily about what the LAPS does.

To further prove this, the thesis recommends PBF to perform a market research using the final design as a prototype. The prototype is easy to manufacture in small quantities which will allow PBF to do prototyping and market analysis without overinvesting.

Even though design theory can provide new insights and improvements for the LAPS, the thesis also recommends PBF to act cautiously. Because it will also steer PBF into unfamiliar waters, which is risky to do while the economy is struggling.

To conclude, when answering the research question, it can be stated that the provided design and design principles would provide value to the LAPS and thus helping PBF moving to a service focused business model.

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