

Understanding Design
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Module - 02
Start of Section 1
Lecture - 08
Users & Contexts

Hello, there welcome back to Understanding Design. Hope you had a chance to get familiar with the interesting materials in the module one reference tab on the course platform. Last time we touched upon how users are at the core of every design activity, and how design is user centered. In our conversation today Professor Chakravarthy and I will focus on this aspect of design. Why do designers give centre stage to the user when most other arts like, painting, music or poetry, would put the creator's imagination at the centre? It's because design is a little different from other creative fields and we will discover how as we go along. How did this focus on the user come about?

Well, for any design to succeed, it is important that designers understand who is the user, and in what context the product is going to be used. This helps us to assess what is being designed and whether it is relevant for the user and if it serves the intended purpose. Take for example our heritage lighting project.

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In most of our monuments, we found out that it is completely cluttered with tubelights, wires and switches.

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And it completely spoils the ambience in the structure. We designed the special fixture which matches the aesthetics of the heritage structure. As well as has the lights behind so that they are completely hidden and we have backlighting to see the structure in a much better way. We also have put this up in display over here where you can see.

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This is an expression of communication design. The lighting makes it look precious, creates a certain sense of respect. Does it discourage graffiti writing you know like Mayur loves Neha?

I wish it could, but when the ambience is better people do respect the heritage monument.

That was a site-specific design which of course, can be adapted to different locations. There must be other examples where the users are all of us?

Yes let me tell me about this interesting project of mine, the common post box which is available in all locations. Yes, that is the one. This is universal design and it is available and okay for all climates and all localities. Let me now show you my case study of how we went about designing it.

This has been his passion for quite a while.

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So, here we have the new design with the combination of the aesthetic of the earlier round post box as well as the modern image of a rectangular box with good manufacturing facilities. The most important aspect in the postbox was that we made it very convenient for the people.

So, we have a large opening where the door opens and we can actually see a large opening and you can easily pick up all the letters and put in his bag at one go. So, that was really user friendly for the post man. Then what is in for the users? So, the large envelopes, we have a large postings slot as well as for children we kept the height low. So that even the second class going child could post the letter very comfortably. Let me also tell you about the materials and processes we use in this.

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We use stainless steel and powder-coated it red so that it can work in all climatic conditions, it could be the rainy areas or it could be seaside where the rusting is very high or it could be in very very hot temperatures. Oh, that reminds me, when it is extremely hot when you post a letter inside and if it is made of metal you could get scalded.

So, here we designed this posting slot with plastic. So, that even if a small child goes and posts a letter the hand will not, you know, get hurt. Now let me tell you about this postman bag which we redesigned; earlier post men were carrying small letters and these letters were hardly heavy.

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Today the postmen have very very heavy loads. They carry business post, they carry book posts and because of that we redesigned the post man bag like a back pack. So, that it is very very convenient to carry long distances when they go closer to the homes they can actually use a sling to dispense the letters very easily into the homes. Finally, we launched this box we went to the India post and they finally, said this could be tried out in the field.

Oh they must be so, pleased.

Oh yes, it was really implemented and we make some mockups and we gave it to them. Let us go back to the example we used last time that of designing a chair. A designer who is given such an assignment would like to know where the chairs is going to be used is it for an office or for a classroom or it could be even for an old age home. This question leads the designer to the end user the person who will be actually using that chair.

Which brings us to the context of the user, as designers we need to know exactly where the chair will be used, what the local conditions are like, what the environmental factors are, what the users socio-economic circumstances are. Let us speak more on the context and why it is important.

We could say that context is a sum total of all the factors that affect the way the user interact with a product or a service or a process. These factors range from intrinsic ones like user physiology, user habits, age, physical limitations to external ones like the user's workspace, their home, the climate and cultural factors.

Okay let us listen to an expert who has written extensively on user centered design. Click on the next tab visit the link and play the videos.