

Product Development Technologies Outlines Strategy for Successfully Designing for Developing Countries

Bob Coon.

Global design firm offers three guidelines for those looking to break into new markets.

Traditionally, products offered in developing countries have been based more on what trickled down from products in the U.S. and Europe rather than on unique user needs in such countries. However, as the world changes, more companies are seeing these markets not as afterthoughts, but as new areas for growth via a specific offering.

Designing products for developing countries presents unique challenges and an awareness of critical nuances. Over the course of several years working to design products for use in countries like India, Malawi, and Mexico, we've developed several guidelines that allow us to create successful products that properly serve our clients in these emerging markets. This three-step strategy is outlined below.

1. Don't make assumptions

The first step in successfully designing for developing countries is to check assumptions at the door. It's tempting to make preliminary judgments based on what one thinks he already knows, but holding on to assumptions can actually hurt the development process.

The U.S. is very focused on product aesthetics and market fit, while developing countries tend to prioritize function and utility. However, this doesn't mean that users in developing nations don't care about product aesthetics. Holding on to these assumptions hampers the development of successful products. Product developers often begin product development cycles with these assumptions in place, and therefore already have ideas about the product and what needs to be created.

Oftentimes, product managers also have strong assumptions about what they believe will give them more market share. We want our clients' products to do well in the market - so we know we need to first verify their ideas, otherwise we risk creating unsuccessful product offerings.

Ultimately, it's necessary for the development team to fully immerse themselves in the respective culture and market for which they're designing in order to verify or reframe initial perceptions and ideas before moving forward.

2. Understand the culture and market

While the importance of beginning with a good understanding of the culture and

market for which a product is targeted may seem obvious, it's often a step that is glossed over. Product developers need to truly immerse themselves in the culture and market in order to develop an understanding of its intricacies. Needs and desires can differ within nations and tend to change from nation to nation as well. Product developers need to avoid generalization and get to know each different area.

Developing countries often have common attributes - but they are not all the same. A developer must understand the different cultural and environmental forces at work for each area. As an example, when designing a pill dispenser for India, product developers have to keep in mind the very specific cultural and social stigmas that surround a particular disease and the implications of taking medication for that disease. Such a product may result in divulging to family and friends that the user has a disease, and ultimately be a barrier to helping the patient in any meaningful way, or worse, be a destructive and alienating force. It is imperative for the development team to understand the cultural and lifestyle aspects in play and remain unbiased by their own belief systems.

Beyond environmental concerns, product developers should also consider factors such as maintenance, wear and tear, reliability, cost and accessibility when designing for developing countries. Premium materials and emerging technologies might be tempting to incorporate into a new design, but if the end-users can't afford the product or maintenance that comes with them, the design can really be a failure.

3. Know that flexibility is key

It's important to let the product evolve throughout the process. To this point, we advocate an open development process where the entire team - from researchers to engineers - is involved from beginning to end. This helps the team as a whole understand user needs from the start, and ensure that the product is fulfilling its intended purpose. This means adopting an iterative process where development and prototyping are both done several times. While this type of cyclical process can seem inefficient at first, it's truly necessary to produce a successful end product.

Product developers have to be extremely adaptive and roll with the punches during any product development program, especially when they're designing a product for use in another country. Be prepared to be flexible, especially when the future of a product offering and company brand are at stake.

[Source](#) [1]

Source URL (retrieved on 04/01/2015 - 2:12am):

<http://www.mdtmag.com/blogs/2010/09/product-development-technologies-outlines-strategy-successfully-designing-developing-countries>

Links:

[1] <http://www.pdt.com>