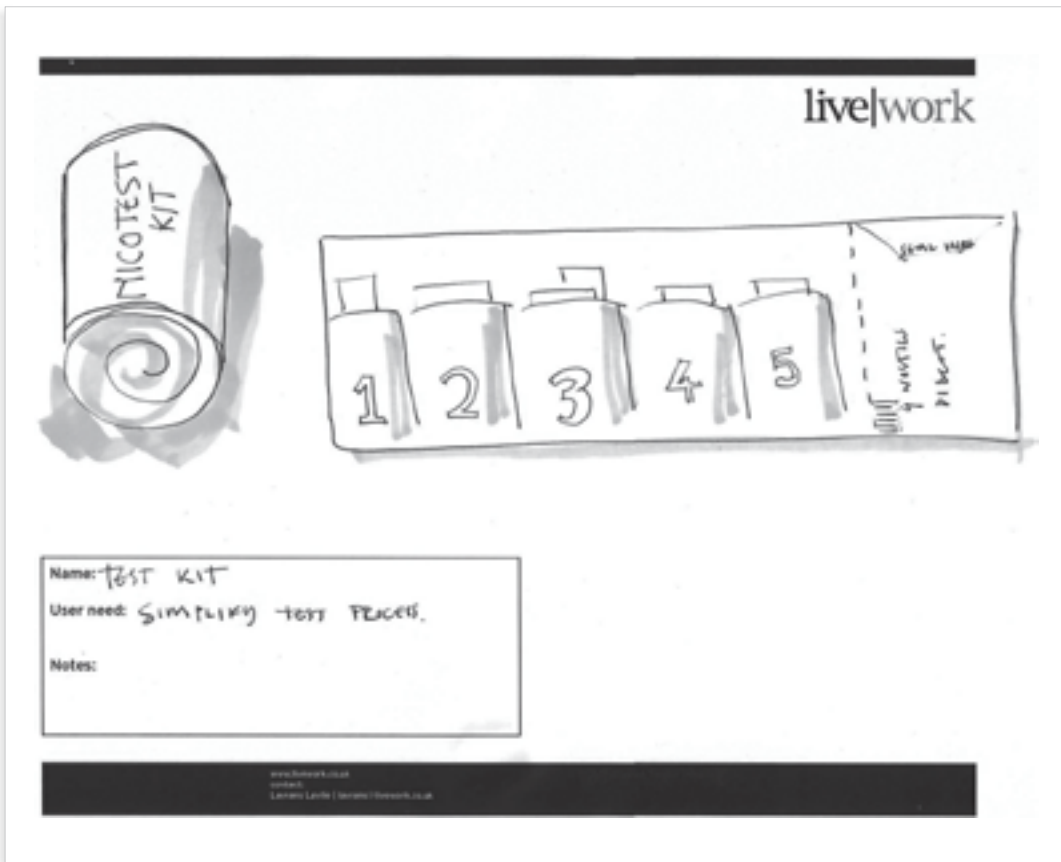
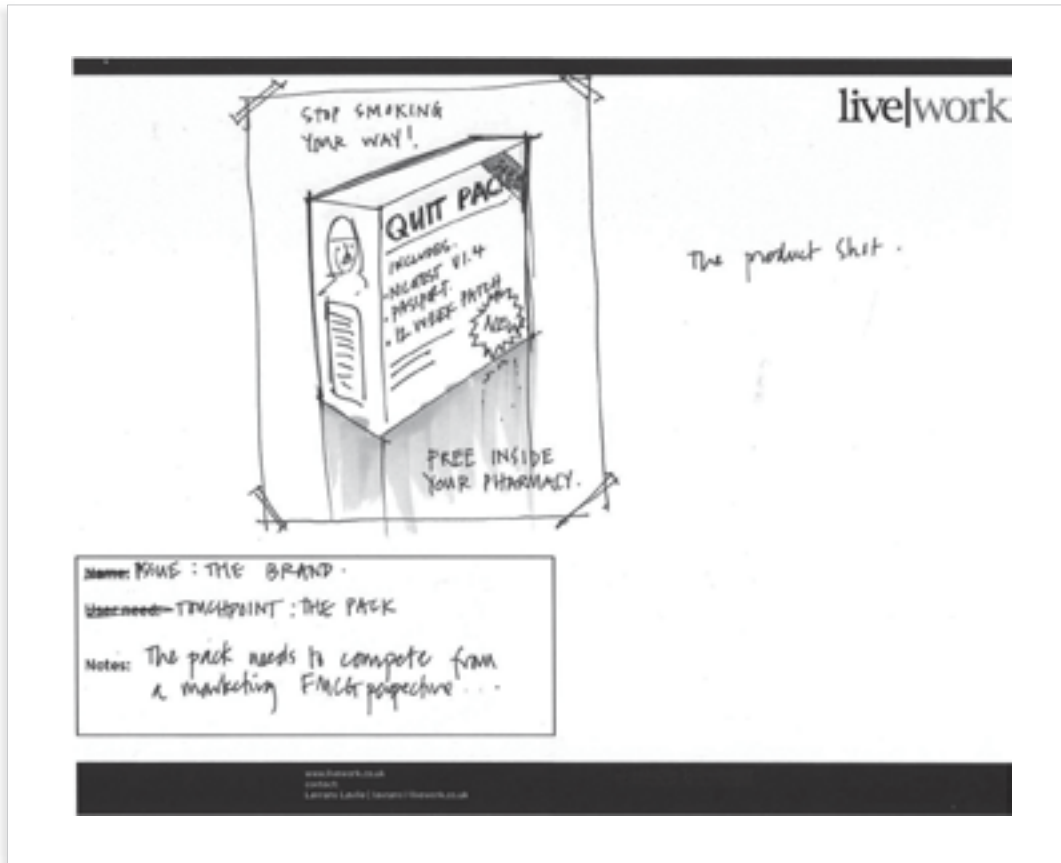


Designing for Services - Multidisciplinary Perspectives:
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Some of the sketches by live|work designers suggested improvements to the design of the existing service, but some of them suggested innovations in g-Nostics' business model.

Service design: a 21st century interdiscipline?

Lucy Kimbell

That a field of practice called service design is emerging is not in doubt. Scan the pages of design magazines, the web-pages of design festivals, or the glossy prospecti of design schools, and you are unlikely to find the term “service design” appear. Where service design has become visible is at conferences which draw together practitioners and researchers from several disciplines, including the Emergence conference series at Carnegie Mellon University in 2006 and 2007 and the Intersections conference in Gateshead (2007). Meanwhile the influence of design, design management and what some people call “design thinking” is increasingly visible in non-design contexts such as business schools and in magazines such as *Business Week*. A further development is a shift within design research and theory away from the legacy of modernism and the traditional divide between form and function, towards a greater attention to semantics as is seen in the influential book by Krippendorff (2006).

These developments during the early years of the 21st century raise questions for those who are involved in different ways in the designing of services, whether they call themselves designers or not, and for those whose research is concerned with the study of services and service innovation in particular. It is not yet clear that service design is a distinct category – but there are designers who successfully sell and practise service design, including contributors to this publication. It is not clear what intellectual resources this emerging discipline can or might draw on, whether it lives in design, or services management, or services marketing, or service operations or a “services science”. And there is evidence, as Bruce Tether describes in these pages, that a lot of the designing of services going on within organizations is “silent design” – that many services are being designed without the benefit or constraint of a discipline of service design.

In this context, the exploratory research project from which this publication is an output might offer some insights, even at this early stage of analyzing the data it assembled. The comments that follow should not be considered findings, but rather perspectives and provocations for the work that colleagues involved with the project have been considering and will be developing further.

One thing to think about is the extent to which service design is distinguishable from other kinds of design practice and theory. In their engagements with their science enterprise pairs, and in the accounts they provided in five project events held in Oxford, the service designers involved in *Designing for Services in Science and Technology-based Enterprises* made use of processes and methods that would be immediately recognizable to non-service designers. They sought to understand context and user needs, they observed, they mapped opportunities based on insights they gathered, they sketched, they made prototypes, they balanced requirements and constraints, they asked “what if” questions. They not only

paid critical attention to artefacts but also focused intently on the human users and providers of services. True, they had some specific vocabularies and tools, evident in their uses of the term “touchpoints” and the notion of the customer journey. But in the ways that they went about their engagements with the enterprises, much of their practice will be familiar to design practitioners and to design theorists.

Secondly, it was clear from watching the video recordings of the meetings between these service designers and their science enterprise pairs, quite how issues of business strategy were entwined with the design of services. That designers have something valuable to contribute to strategy is one of the key elements in the recent interest in design in both management academia (in for example Boland and Collopy 2004; Liedtka 2004; and Dunne and Martin 2006) and among some contemporary design practitioners (van Patter 2006). The empirical data from this exploratory project supports this. Even in their very first discussions with the science enterprise they were working with, the designers slipped repeatedly between service artefact and corporate strategy, between exploring the present service offered and imagining alternatives. For these service designers, the design of the service, its operations and the business model it enabled, were all entangled. This insight is echoed in empirical research in experiential services by Chris Voss and Leonieke Zomerdiijk, summarized within this publication.

An example of such interconnection comes from a conversation during a meeting between service designers from live | work and the team at g-Nostics, a company offering personalized medicine based on molecular profiling of individuals. After a brief study of the g-Nostics smoking cessation service, Nicotest, offered within a National Health Service trial, three designers used design methods such as mapping out the customer journey and sketching to identify what they saw as problems in the current offering and suggestions for improvements and new ways of designing the service, resulting in a series of sketches. In the interaction below, designer Ben Reason has been presenting these sketches to CEO Mark Tucker and his colleagues Pablo Toledo and Mark Allman. Some of the sketches Reason presents are of possible changes, but some of them suggest a new way of conceiving of the service, implying a different business model.

Mark Tucker

How much has this been drawn by suggestions we’ve been creating and how much has been created by your own people...by saying this is a gap that you’ve got?

Ben Reason

Good question. I think we work quite collaboratively so some of these things have come from observation...some of them are issues that Pablo’s told us about.

A few minutes later, Mark is again struck by the implications of one of the sketches.

Mark Tucker

Where's that thinking come from of a physical [...] pack ...you're bundling the solution into that ...is that one of your guys?

Ben Reason

Yeah.

Mark Tucker

Well that's very interesting. [...] You've arrived at the same conclusion independently.

A third observation is the extent to which products and services are, perhaps necessarily, mixed up with each other. In some of the D4S project workshops, some participants argued that agreeing on definitions of product and service was essential. But the self-described service designers, some educated in product design, seemed untroubled by their repeated shifts between the tangibles and intangibles in the services they were examining. In live |work's project with g-Nostics, designers paid considerable attention to the physical and digital artefacts through which users engaged with the Nicotest service. In IDEO's project with Prosonix, a company offering ultrasonic processes for a range of industries, much of the work was concerned with helping the company think through and develop its "B2B2C" services which involved use of its innovative technologies, which are sometimes sold as "products". Radarstation's work with Oxford Gene Technology (OGT) saw the service designers focus on the customer journey and customers' touchpoints with the organization, which offers both "products" such as micro-arrays as well as customized services based on its technology. In all three cases, product and service, artefact and experience were entwined in ways that were hard to distinguish.

The fourth observation came from a theme that emerged in the project events, raised in particular by academics whose work is concerned with complexity and value constellations, such as Jeff Johnson and Rafael Ramirez, a contributor to this publication. The service designers involved in D4S used the terms "stakeholders" and "service ecology" and seemed to conceive of services having multiple users, of different types, not all of whom were involved economically in the service provision or its consumption, and who engaged with the service through different configurations of space and time. However the representational tools they used, and sometimes their accounts of their activities, suggested to some participating academics a reliance on binomial sets of relations grounded in traditional economic and manufacturing models of production and consumption. A question was raised several times about the extent to which the service designing within D4S fitted within these binomial relations or forged new ones.

A number of issues follow from these initial insights. By framing the project as "Designing for Services..." rather than "Service Design..." the project investigators from the outset wanted to be attentive to the various design activities going on within the science enterprises, silent or otherwise. The short

discussion above and within these pages suggests that the designing of services undertaken in the project, and made visible to participants, can be viewed through a number of lenses, drawing on design theory and design management, as well as management theory, the social science disciplines, and newer areas such as complexity research. It is likely to be fruitful, then, to conceive of an emerging discipline of service design as necessarily an *interdiscipline* (Barry, Born and Weszkalnys 2008). We hope that future streams of research, based on this and other projects, will begin to contribute towards it.

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