

Designing for Services - Multidisciplinary Perspectives:
Proceedings from the Exploratory Project on Designing
for Services in Science and Technology-based Enterprises,
Saïd Business School

Edited by Lucy Kimbell and Victor P. Seidel

University of Oxford 2008



Detail from the pack used by the pharmacy assistant to deliver the service

Photo: live|work

Designers from live | work did a walk-through of the Nicotest service with pharmacy assistant Cherry Osborne at a pharmacy where it was being trialed



Photo: live|work

They know it in their gut

Ben Reason

Having been involved in Designing for Services in Science and Technology-based Enterprises as one of the participant-subjects, I would like to turn the mirror slightly and reflect on how the initial academic observations struck me as a design practitioner. My reason for this is that it was the academics that were the new and different factor in this project – we work with technology companies regularly, our experience with g-Nostics was a familiar one – so it is the academic interpretation of this project that I got a lot from and find most interesting to comment on. Below I refer specifically to the final event held in Oxford in October 2007 and the academics' brief presentations on that day, many of which are reflected in this publication. The question we were all presented with was: "How has our understanding of service design changed through the D4S project?"

First, some background. live |work is a service innovation and design company. We have been in business for six years and have a story about our inception that is relevant to the D4S project.

Our three founding partners – Chris Downs, Lavrans Løvlie and myself – came together while we were all working in internet design and production agencies. We had all found ourselves in this boom (and later bust) industry soon after graduation and had become old hands in a young field. In our work we were hired to design websites but often had to define the service proposition for our dotcom or corporate clients first as they were unsure what the internet meant for their businesses. So we were in the business of service design. We also saw projects fail because there was no consideration for the service as a whole. Each channel was being developed in isolation whereas modern services cross channels, such as from web to phone and from store to mail, and the customer experience crosses all of these. A web agency is not in a position to define a holistic vision so we saw the need for service design.

If we were going to be a service design company, who were the competition? We went online to find other service design companies but didn't find any. There were service design academics – such as Ezio Manzini in Milan and Birgit Mager in Cologne – but not service design consultancies. So we became the first.

There were disciplines that informed us – interaction design with its focus on the relationship between humans and computers; branding, concerned with managing the image and perception of a company, and the emerging world of participation co-design & action research. We were also into actor network theory (Callon 1986), interested in the complexity of systems and how actors can affect them, we read *Natural Capitalism* (Hawken, Lovins and Lovins 1999) and were keen to bring design to the green agenda of dematerialization and resource efficiency. We were aware of the UK Labour government's agenda of public service reform. We thought, as Bruce Tether stated during the D4S project, that as 72% of

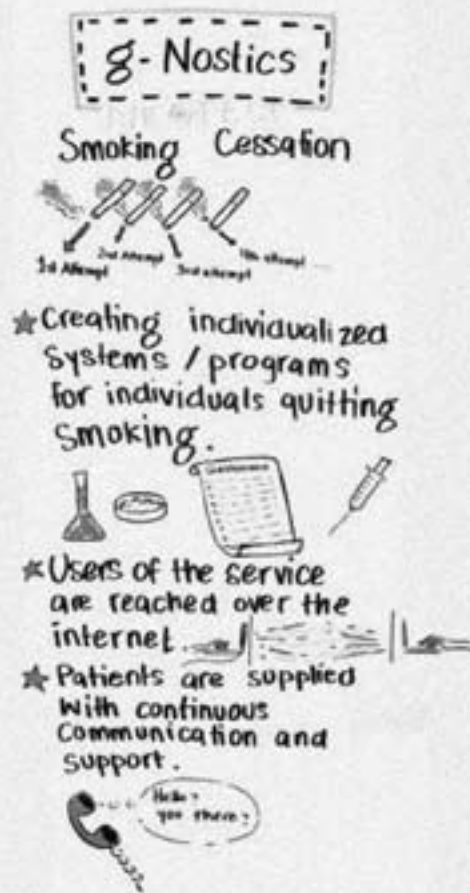
the UK economy was services but only 14% of R&D spend was in the service sector, that there was a huge market for service design.

We thought that to succeed we needed to create a market and a language. We felt that if we didn't have competition then the discipline wouldn't exist. During the D4S project Marc Ventresca discussed the role of language in the creation and growth of markets and institutions. Since founding live |work, we have diligently promoted the words "service design" and other terms in a highly motivated manner.

We were aware that we had a deep understanding of network technologies – and we often work with high-tech clients such as telecoms, financial services or emerging technology providers. Victor P. Seidel has described the relationship between complex product and service components and the fact that the D4S project brought together both complex product and service component sets. We feel that service design thrives on complexity and an ability to translate between different groups such as technologists, customers and businesses. It is no accident that service design has emerged when services are becoming more complex due to their use of network technologies. We have compared this observation to the emergence of robust industrial design methods and the professionals who used them during the dissemination of mechanical reproduction technologies in the early 20th century. Perhaps independent designers are only required once systems reach a certain level of complexity.

We aim to be a consultancy rather than a design production agency. We talk about using design methods rather than being designers as we feel that our approach – one that uses rich materials, photography, interviews and observations for our customer insights, employing sketches, models and visualization to communicate ideas and service propositions – is a way to create a shared understanding about ideas within project teams. We argue that design tools help move innovation through an organization as everyone involved is able to share and critique proposals. We have always talked about deliverables rather than processes and believe that what we now know to be "boundary objects" support successful service development. We have experienced this in action directly with a client who literally took a model from the table and ran off to deliver the idea. When Jennifer Whyte describes how designers use visual material to facilitate discussions with clients, or other "communities of practice", she is describing our pivotal role on many projects as translators between different teams or organizations. We create these "boundary objects" deliberately to enable discussions about what to do next. We often append them with the words "what if..."

We evangelize for the customer/patient/user point of view and a human-centred approach to design as Bob Young describes in this volume. We try to convince the world of service operations which, as Kate Blackmon described, is



Scribing: Sefi Amir

Service designers from live|work worked with the senior team from g-Nostics, offering personalized medicine including a smoking cessation service, Nicotest

focused on techne, that its service will be more efficient and effective if it delivers a more coherent episteme. We try to quantify this, and are getting there, but luckily find that people are convinced by the intuitive argument – they know it in their gut!

The final discussion of the D4S October event was about the role of academics in the development of our understanding of service design. The conclusion was that service design may be a field where design practitioners are currently leading the development of that understanding and social scientists are able to make sense of it from external viewpoints and various disciplinary perspectives. It was an interesting experience to have our work interpreted and reassuring that the interpretation felt accurate – if using different words – and that there is an emerging framework for our approach to business development.

References

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