

Tools for thought

As any master chef will tell you, having the right ingredients is important, but the real art is combining them in a way that is appealing and easy to digest. This is precisely what the New Value Signs tool does. It presents output from design research projects in a clear, usable format for use in the creative process.

The New Value Signs tool has been described as everything from a 'tool for enriching and widening creative scope' to a 'way of condensing design research information into a format more suitable for assimilation' and even 'something that should be compulsory input for all projects,' as one Philips Design employee put it during feedback evaluation sessions.

Supporting the design community

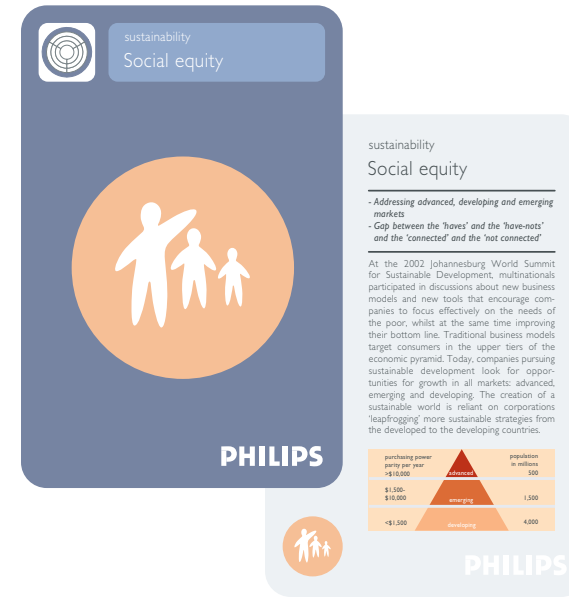
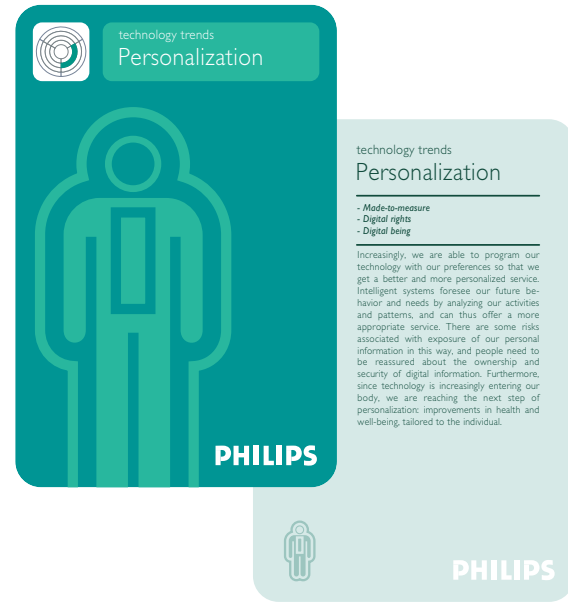
It is also the first element in the Brand Design Management cultural program. "Our department's task is essentially to help the design community within Philips carry out its work more effectively," says Bas Griffioen, Project Manager of the New Value Signs tool. "The cultural program is one of three main tasks in the Brand Design Management portfolio. We started it approximately 18 months ago, with the intention of creating tools that would give our creative directors more 'food for thought'. The New Value Signs tool is the first tangible result."

"There was a definite need to make design research information more widely

available," says Marion Verbuken, Creative Director of the New Value Signs tool. "Creatives in all different disciplines and branches told us they wanted more knowledge, more access to existing data. We set up review teams to determine how best to address this. We discovered, for instance, that people often cut and paste parts of research reports, in a sort of do-it-yourself cross-fertilization process. So we thought; 'why not put this kind of information in a format which allows them to more easily grasp the content and create links or focus on specific topics?'"

Providing creative teams with the latest relevant background knowledge helps ensure they work to the highest possible standards, incorporating our design research into design realization, which of course is a major advantage for those the work is being carried out for. Clients benefit because they can get a quick and clear overview of all information relevant to their project during discussions and workshops. The New Value Signs tool can even support Customer Relationship Management, because it brings greater clarity when communicating to businesses about issues such as services and design approach.





How is the content structured?

The New Value Signs tool covers three main areas - culture, business and technology - that are subdivided into separate time periods: from the present-day until three years from now (short-term), from between three to five years (mid-term) and from five to ten years (long-term). People are at the center, as they are the starting point for everything we do at Philips Design. And sustainability ties it all together, which is why it completely encircles the rest of the model. Geographically, it focuses on Philips' key growth markets: China, India, the US and Europe.

The circles bring time into perspective, by showing what is the near future and what is long-term. As you move out from the center, you first encounter the short-term manifestations, which are generally more tangible. You then move into a more abstract domain, consisting of cultural values and trends in business and technology. And finally end up even further into the future, with 'what if?' scenarios and roadmaps. Obviously these are all inter-related.

The content is currently available as a set of 158 cards, a CD-ROM with digital versions of all cards, images, icons and diagrams, and through the Philips Design intranet site. The cards themselves are structured in such a way that you can orient yourself quickly and then go deeper for more specific information. You can zoom in and also zoom out. There are tab cards, which introduce scenarios, topics, trends and manifestations, (e.g. 'socio-cultural scenarios') and story cards that offer a more detailed analysis, often supported by images. A clear navigation system guides you so you can always find out where you are in the overall structure. In addition, each card has a unique reference code so you know where it belongs, whether it has been updated, etc.

Distilled essence

The New Value Signs tool enriches and widens the scope of our creative community, and forms a basis for stimulating dialogues by sharing a common vocabulary. It offers the distilled essence of design research projects. It is a translation, and in some cases a simplification, of existing information. It communicates in a convenient and playful way, and is therefore more enjoyable to use than a lengthy report. It allows users to pinpoint the areas that should be explored in greater depth. Behind every topic is a content owner who is specialized in that particular subject, so the tool can also be seen as a gateway to much more information.

The content of the tool is based on three major design research programs carried out by Philips Design - CultureScan, Next and Delphi - and complemented by recent data on sustainability. The information was therefore available already, although not in the most optimal or accessible form. These projects were ideal because they were non-client specific, which meant there

was no emphasis on any particular product or application. The information was objective, and could consequently be more widely applied.

A living tool

In this connected age, the obvious question is; why wasn't this created as an on-line resource? "We wanted to create a physical tool, because the card format encourages sharing and promotes familiarity more than a web-based tool," says Verbucken. "The card format is easier to use in internal deployment sessions as well as in workshops together with clients. Cards help create an overview of all the relevant information. As for the validity of information, the cards can be updated, replaced or removed as the world around us changes. We never meant the tool to be totally inclusive, we needed a starting point. It is in its nature to change, it is a living tool. In theory, once we have defined the content and structure, we can adapt it to any format in the future, such as a digital asset management system. From the beginning of the project there have been ideas on how to develop in this

direction, adding useful features like a powerful search engine for effective information retrieval and to help strengthen cross links between topics.

A digital format is obviously more in-depth, customized and future-proof, but the need for sharing knowledge and learning together led us to first introduce a card format."

Deploying the New Value tool

Deployment of the New Value Signs tool has already taken place throughout Philips Design worldwide, and the project was officially launched with the global management team in February. "We had face-to-face deployment sessions here in the Netherlands, as well as phone and video conference briefings with our other locations," says Ilse van den Hurk, Deployment Counselor of the New Value Sign tool. "We wanted to make sure that people are enthusiastic about it, and also feel at ease when using it. We encouraged everyone to give as much feedback as possible, because that is part of the very nature of the project."

The Indian wind-up radio: an example of how the tool is used

Take the example of designing a radio aimed at girls in their early teens living in rural India. You would sift through the cards to determine which ones were relevant. A topic such as streaming media across a network is almost certainly of little interest, whereas a card dealing with attitude towards the outside world on the Indian subcontinent almost certainly is. After a while you may be left with something like 20 cards, which can then be shared, passed around and used as a basis for discussion. The images on the cards serve as a further source of inspiration. The goal is to help the project team identify the key issues, so they can then start to properly consider the challenge at hand by creating a project framework and refining its scope.



Everyone should have one!

Reactions have been very positive. Philips Design's sites worldwide were delighted because it was such a concise and condensed source of information, and was also easy to navigate and use. One of the first comments was that everyone within Philips Design should have their own tool box! There has also been plenty of input that will be carefully considered when determining the next steps. For instance, many people inquired about having information online, and others expressed desire to cross-reference the data on the cards with the original source.

There is a great deal still to be done. "We want to further deploy the tool throughout the organization, keep it uppermost in people's minds, and promote its use wherever possible," says Griffioen. "Obviously there is the task of updating content, as well as the possibility of adding input from other projects as well; in that respect it is a never-ending story. Maybe it will spread beyond Philips Design, so we can involve for instance Research for technology roadmap information, or businesses in developing business scenarios."