

Why Companies Should Focus on Design Thinking To Survive In The Post-Covid World



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Airbnb. Uber. Spotify. These inventions/brands are known for disrupting their respective industries. The common thread here? All of them are the product of design thinking, a term often credited to global design and consultancy firm IDEO – practitioners of human-centred design since their beginning in 1978.¹ Since then, design thinking has evolved as a mindset and methodology, even being adopted by the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford as a five-stage process²:

Empathise – Fully understand your customer through observation and interviews

Define – Synthesise findings to form a “user point of view”

Ideate – Brainstorm possible solutions in a structured manner

Prototype – Give a physical, digital or diagram form to selected ideas

Test – Put prototypes into practice to see if they meet end user needs

Understanding this process, especially in a COVID-19 world, is essential to ensure business continuity and success. Read on to discover precisely why!

The Power of Empathy

The key to closing sales lies in anticipating customers’ needs and demonstrating how your product or service will suit those needs best.

Only by genuinely connecting and understanding their lives, desires, and pain points, can they envision the benefits your offering brings – proof of why empathising is such an important part of the design thinking process.

An example of this is Tencent, the world's largest video game vendor and creator of messaging giant WeChat. Showcasing how its tech infrastructure can be redeployed for the greater good, Tencent Health created an online healthcare platform offering timely assistance and advice to users across mainland China during the early stages of COVID-19.

Alexander Ng, Vice President of Tencent Healthcare stated: "What we did was we really thought about things from a user's point of view. In China, getting appointments with doctors, getting prescriptions is very, very difficult. And it takes you a whole day. There's a lot of information asymmetry within China. So we try to equalise that."³ Subsequently, the platform was also launched in English, giving users worldwide access to epidemic updates, AI-powered COVID-19 self-screening tools and more. As expected, Tencent and its platform received global acclaim and increased brand recall.

Bringing Ideas to Life

After the initial steps, the executional steps of ideating and prototyping are arguably the most important ones, since they are directly responsible for the creation of revenue-generating innovations. Let's take a second to think: what would you do if you needed to deliver large scale internet connectivity to remote, disaster-stricken areas? Would you start excavating the ground and laying fibre optic cables? Or would you use balloons? As wild as the latter idea sounds, that's precisely what Alphabet (better known as parent company of Google) did with its Loon balloons.

In July 2020, Alphabet's Loon division, which uses floating balloons to provide internet, launched its first commercial service in Kenya. This 4G LTE service was provided to Telkom Kenya subscribers via a fleet of around 35 balloons, with network coverage of around 50,000 square kilometers across the country.⁴ This followed the launch of other Loon balloons in disaster-hit regions, such as Puerto Rico in 2017 after Hurricane Maria, as well as Peru after a 2019 earthquake.

All this was made possible through years-long cycle of ideating and prototyping different components, accompanied by rigorous testing to ensure maximum airborne time and durability, among others. Alphabet managed to not merely think outside the box, but to deliver yet another innovative service alongside those we are already accustomed to using.

Transforming for Success

Suffice to say, design thinking is central to how businesses can emerge from the COVID-19 fallout, due to its emphasis on adapting to market needs. Close to home, Singapore gaming company Razer announced in April 2020 that it had begun producing face masks with a fully automated production line capable of manufacturing up to 5 million masks a month.⁵ Surprising? Perhaps. More importantly, it shows how companies that embrace design thinking for business innovation can unlock more revenue streams for continued survival.

We've only scratched the surface when it comes to understanding the application of design thinking for innovation. Thankfully, gaining a stronger foundation of the subject takes only two days of your time through a professional development course that we offer. Simply go through the SIM PDEL [Design Thinking course](#) details to get started!

¹ IDEO: History (of Design Thinking)
(<https://designthinking.ideo.com/history>)

² Interaction Design Foundation: Design Thinking
(<https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/topics/design-thinking>)

³ SCMP, 28 Aug 2020: How can design thinking help 'reboot' our post-Covid-19 world to create 'new normal' that benefits everyone?
(<https://www.scmp.com/presented/news/hong-kong/topics/unleash-design-thinking-forum/article/3099096/how-can-design>)

⁴ The Verge, 7 Jul 2020: Alphabet's Loon balloons provide their first commercial internet service in Kenya
(<https://www.theverge.com/2020/7/7/21315961/alphabet-loon-balloons-internet-kenya-telkom-4g-remote-areas>)

⁵ CNA, 24 Apr 2020: Razer's face mask manufacturing line begins production, able to produce 5 million masks a month
(<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/razer-face-mask-manufacturing-covid-19-5-million-12673442>)