

# Best Practices Designers' clients have their say

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# Foreword

Designers shape organisations, brands, products and services. They make innovative ideas concrete and visible. Designers work in all specialist areas and on all levels, from one-man businesses to large organisations that operate globally. Given this variety in shape and size, the skills, prices and working methods of designers can be very diverse.

Clients also come in all shapes and sizes. From small and medium-sized enterprises operating in a business-to-business environment to multinationals that can hold their own with competition from abroad. Many of these enterprises have experience in working with designers and design bureaus. They usually consider the use of designers as a pure necessity – after all, they all want their products or services to stand out against those of their competitors.

As the Association for Dutch Designers, at BNO we were curious about the experiences of clients with designers. How do they view designers? Do they see the use of designers as an extra – the cherry on the cake – or as an integral part of their working method? And what does working with designers actually give them? To find out, we decided to interview a number of clients. Eight of those interviews are printed in this booklet.

The interviews in themselves are worth reading, but we have also used them to put a number of insights on paper. Insights that relate to both designers and clients. Because BNO attaches great importance to optimising the relationship between our members and their clients wherever possible. To the benefit of both sides.

Rob Huisman  
CEO

[bno.nl/bestpractices](https://bno.nl/bestpractices)

# Introduction

## The Creative Challenge Call

Creativity has a very important contribution to make to the Dutch economy. The value of more and more products and services is being measured by their creative component, such as the form, the meaning, or the way consumers experience them. That often requires intensive cooperation.

The creative sector and other business sectors can be of great assistance to one another in achieving this. But it is not always easy for them to find each other. The aim of the Creative Challenge Call is to stimulate the development of networks among the creative and other business sectors so that the economic value of creativity can be utilised more effectively.

The Creative Challenge Call is initiated by the Departments of Economic Affairs, and Education, Cultural Affairs and Science. The call in 2006 resulted in more than four hundred applications, and 39 of these projects received support. One of them was BNO's Best Practices project.

[creativechallengecall.nl](http://creativechallengecall.nl)

## Best Practices

The aim of Best Practices was to enter into a dialogue with entrepreneurs about the strategic value of design for their companies. In that way, BNO wanted to build up a network of influential contact persons in the Dutch business sector who recognise the strategic importance of design. BNO would then record the cases in a publication and on a website. You are now reading that publication, and the website address is:

[bno.nl/bestpractices](https://bno.nl/bestpractices).<sup>1</sup>

## How were the companies chosen?

To arrive at a balanced selection of companies, the process began by formulating the following list of requirements and wishes:

- The case in question had to involve design being used in a successful way.
- The story of the company had to be interesting, stimulating or had to arouse people's curiosity.
- A majority of the companies had to be medium and small-scale

- The companies had to come from different parts of the country.
- We wanted to highlight different design disciplines (product development, graphic design, spatial design, fashion, corporate identity and brand development).
- The stories had to be 'new' (everyone is now familiar with the Senseo, Bugaboo and Hema cases).

We then asked our cooperative partners for advice.<sup>2</sup> They came up with a huge number of tips. All the companies in question were placed on a longlist.<sup>3</sup> Then we began the time-consuming process of phoning, emailing and making appointments. Not all managing directors or senior managers were interested and of course we too had our own preferences.

In the end, we interviewed eleven companies: AGU, BMA Ergonomics, Grapedistrict, GM the Furniture Factory, Hero, Hortilux, Jumbo (makers of games), Neopost, Nieuw Amsterdam publishers, Pas Reform, TNT Post and V&D.

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<sup>1</sup> For BNO, the Best Practices project was the starting point for a more comprehensive project, which will focus for two years on the perpetuation and expansion of our network in the business world. The measurement of design effectiveness is one of the central issues there. For more information, visit [bno.nl/bestpractices](https://bno.nl/bestpractices).

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<sup>2</sup> During the Best Practices project, BNO worked together with the following parties: CBM (Central Federation of Furniture Manufacturers), Design Connection Eindhoven, Design Management Network (DMN), the Thin Sheet Federation (FDP), the NRK Federation (Dutch Rubber and Plastics Industry), FME-CWM, Koninklijke Metaalunie (Royal Metal Union), Modint, Premisela (Dutch Platform for Design and Fashion), and Syntens.

<sup>3</sup> The longlist can be downloaded from: [bno.nl/bestpractices](https://bno.nl/bestpractices).

Of the eleven, eight cases were selected for inclusion in this booklet. Why these eight? Because they tell the story of the added value of design in the most effective way.

As a result of the interviews with the chosen companies, the following articles appeared in trade journals:

- ‘Paying attention to design pays off’, World Poultry, vol. 23, no. 4, 2007. Article on the use of design at Pas Reform. The World Poultry journal has a circulation of 25,000 and is distributed worldwide to companies in the poultry sector.
- ‘Design is motor voor innovatie’, Groenten & Fruit, week 27, 2007. Article on Hortilux Schröder. Groenten & Fruit has a circulation of 7,500 and is distributed to companies in the horticultural sector.
- ‘Méér dan een mooi plaatje’, Metaal & Techniek, September 2007. This journal has a circulation of 12,000 and is distributed to members of the sector association for metal (Metaalunie).
- ‘De meerwaarde van design; AGU luistert naar de klant’, Tring! Het grootste fietsmagazine van Nederland, Issue 4, October 2007. Circulation 140.000.
- Two articles on Best Practices and a number of other projects of the Creative Challenge Call were published

in VM Verenigingsmanagement  
(April 2007 en September 2007).

- A monthly log was published in Vormberichten, The magazine for members of the BNO, which has a circulation of 4000.

All the articles can be downloaded from:  
[bno.nl/bestpractices](http://bno.nl/bestpractices).

### The cases in tables

The cases were distributed equally over the SME and larger companies (Table 1). In addition, they deal with all the design disciplines (Table 2).

Table 1

	Business-to-business	Business-to-consumer
SME	Hortilux Schröder BMA Ergonomics Pas Reform	AGU Nieuw Amsterdam Grapedistrict
Large (> 200)	Neopost	Hero



Tabel 2

Design discipline	Bedrijf
Corporate identity	Grapedistrict Pas Reform
Graphic design	Nieuw Amsterdam
Fashion design	AGU
Product design	BMA Ergonomics Hortilux Schröder Neopost Pas Reform
Spatial design	Grapedistrict
Packaging design	Hero

# Eight Best Practices

## 1 In vino veritas

### **The Grapedistrict shop formula**

Start-up company skillfully instructs designers to create a successful shop formula in a short space of time.

## 2 Seating equipment

### **The Axia Profit computer chair from BMA Ergonomics**

Distinctive niche-oriented company slowly but surely conquers the wider market with competitively priced, ergonomic and modern-day office chairs.

## 3 An eye-catching cover

### **The books from Nieuw Amsterdam**

In just a few years, relative newcomer manages to attain top position in the publishing world with well-designed books.

## 4 Cuddly machines

### **The mail processing machines from Neopost**

To consolidate its leading market position, this internationally operating company concentrates on user-friendliness and recognisable design.

## 5 Fruit in a bottle

### **Fruit2Day from Hero**

Thanks to a strong concept and ditto packaging design, relatively small player becomes market leader in the Netherlands with a new product.

## 6 The best possible hatching process

### **The hatching machines from Pas Reform**

In just a few years, hatching machine producer is one of the top three in the world thanks to a reassessment of its core business, improved machines and a new corporate identity.

## 7 In the saddle

### **The bikewear from AGU**

Small player on the sportswear market can compete with giants like Adidas and Nike by cleverly taking advantage of the requirements of North-European consumers.

## 8 Growing with light

### **The lighting systems from Hortilux Schröder**

Thanks to design, Dutch-Belgian combination stays ahead of its competitors in a business-to-business environment.



Best Practice 1  
Grapedistrict  
Wine shop

# In vino veritas

Grapedistrict at the Van Woustraat, Amsterdam

**'We're convinced that we're  
the only people in the wine  
world who are listening to  
the consumer.'**

Gijs Groenevelt, Grapedistrict



Theo Lindemann (left) and Gijs Groenevelt

**'Strikingly succulent wine. Interesting fruit but the nose is still somewhat closed. Very fine tannins. A sensual aftertaste with no hard edges.'** (from a random wine website.)

'Wine drinkers have changed', says Gijs Groenevelt of Grapedistrict, 'but the wine world hasn't changed with them. Publications about wine are aimed purely at the connoisseur or the serious amateur, while just 7 percent of all wine drinkers are actually in that category. And the other 93 percent? Well, they have to figure it out for themselves. For us, the founders of Grapedistrict, that wine world had absolutely no attraction. Even though we really love wine. So we saw a gap in the market.'

Grapedistrict opened its first shop in April 2006, followed by a second a month later, both in Amsterdam. 'We want to help people purchase wine in a nice and easy way. All too often people buy wine because they're impressed by the label. Or a wine dealer talks them into buying a far too expensive bottle. Or they end up rummaging around the supermarket with their wine guides. That's just too crazy for words!'

### **Young wine drinkers**

'A study of over five hundred 18-25 year olds showed that this age group is interested in wine, and eager to learn more... The wine industry could lose a generation of customers if it doesn't get better at capturing the attention of younger drinkers.'

Source: decanter.com

### **Blush, rich, honey...**

Together with former college friends Joost Bockwinkel and Freek Padberg, Gijs Groenevelt decided to find a way to make wine more accessible. 'We wanted to portray wine more as a brand,' says Groenevelt. 'That's how we ended up with nine categories, based on how we think people want to choose. We believe that people are looking for an easy light wine to drink in the park and not a 2005 Italian Trebbiano.' The nine categories have names like blush (red, light), rich (white, heavy) or honey (sweet). Brand design bureau VBAT designed the wine categories, each with its own colour and logo. 'VBAT was involved from the very start in working out the concept and refining it,' says Groenevelt.

'All the categories deliberately have English names. Up to now, all publications about wine have been in Dutch or French. We wanted to distance ourselves from that.' The Grapedistrict logo reflects the colours of the categories. Groenevelt: 'That's where professional designers like VBAT have really added something extra. Or I should say 'everything.' The first time we saw the logo, we were shocked. We thought it wasn't cool or manly enough. But VBAT said: This is your story! The logo stands for everything that you stand for, it's all there. And they were right. It's now our most important asset.'

## Women

The wine world has traditionally been a man's world. Nowadays more and more women like to drink wine too, but they don't feel very comfortable in traditional wine establishments or when faced with it on the supermarket shelves. 'We really aimed our message at them,' says Groenevelt. 'And it's working, because a huge number of women are now buying wine from us. And it just proves that our story and what we're doing is what people really want.'

## Wine popular

The consumption of beer has been diminishing for years in the Netherlands. Wine, on the other hand, is becoming more and more popular. In the past 5 years annual wine consumption rose from 19 litres in 2002 per person to 21.5 litres in 2006, a rise of 13 percent. Source: Productschap Wijn, 2007 (wijninfo.nl)

## Tasting panels

The founders of Grapedistrict made the unusual decision to stock no more than 125 bottles in their shops. To compare: traditional wine shops stock at least 500 bottles and large supermarkets have 300. 'If you have a smaller range, you make it easier for people to choose,' says Groenevelt. 'But at the same time we thought: who are we to say which wines we should be buying? So we devised a system where our customers help us choose the range.'

Every wine is tasted twice. First by the 'professional panel,' consisting of several wine professionals (including the Grapedistrict founders). The approved wines are presented every month to groups of customers: the 'tasting panel.' 'We put fifteen wines in front of them and get them to evaluate the wines for flavour, appearance and price. And depending on the reactions, we decide whether that's one of the wines we'll have in the shop.' Groenevelt is proud of this system: 'We believe we're the only people in the wine world who are listening to the consumer.' The tasting panels have been so successful that Grapedistrict is now thinking about other ways to get as many customers as possible to express their opinions about new wines – for example, through the Internet.

## Multi-channel

Besides the shops in Amsterdam and now Utrecht too, Grapedistrict also sells wine through bars and restaurants and through its website. The aim is to quickly grow into a national network of Grapedistrict shops using franchisees. Theo Lindemann of VBAT commends this professional approach: 'The formula is really clear and simple. And that's what successful retailing is all about. Nowadays, to stand any kind of chance you have to take a professional approach right from the start. That is, if it's your ambition to grow.'

'One great example of this, I think, is Rice to Riches, a shop in New York that sells rice pudding. They've really thought it through, just like Grapedistrict. They went multi-channel straight away: shop, delivery service, catering, and a dynamic website. And that's helping them to stand out from their competitors. It's no longer good enough to just open a shop with nice products. Consumers already have a huge choice, 24 hours a day. You need to have a story or something they can relate to or can identify with, something that makes it easier for them to make a choice.'<sup>4</sup>

## Goede opdrachtgever

Before opening their shop, Joost Bockwinkel, Freek Padberg and Gijs Groenevelt had worked at Heineken and ING. In their previous jobs, they had regular contact with design bureaus. Which makes them the perfect clients for design agency VBAT to work with. 'Although they were in business for the first time, they were still very professional,' says Theo Lindemann. 'That made a huge difference. They were well able to articulate their core target group and what they wanted to achieve.'

Groenevelt: 'We did it all in six months, from the first ideas to opening the shop. Every month that we weren't open cost us money, because all three of us had resigned from our previous jobs.' The three entrepreneurs had decided to live on the cheap as much as possible. They paid themselves no salary, did not go on expensive wine-tasting trips and worked in a rent-controlled office. However, they did decide to invest in the design side of things so that they could create a professional brand from the start.

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<sup>4</sup> For more information about Rice to Riches, see: [ricetoriches.com](http://ricetoriches.com).

To keep the design costs under control, they defined clear frameworks for VBAT. 'For example, we chose the packaging ourselves and asked them to add a design to it,' says Groenevelt. 'That's a lot different to when you say: We still don't know whether we want paper or plastic. And together with VBAT we also wrote a precise briefing for Bens Chop Design Group, which designed and built our shop layout. Now that we have all that, our shop formula can be rolled out really quickly,' says Groenevelt. 'Our shop in Utrecht was open in just two months.'

### Growing

Grapedistrict was launched eighteen months ago. 'In the retail world, they say you should be breaking even in three years and should be making a healthy profit in five years,' says Groenevelt. 'In our case, we started making that profit much earlier: we were cost-effective within one year. Of course, we haven't counted the initial investment that still has to be earned back. But if you put that investment down to just one shop, it will never be profitable. And yes, we're now paying ourselves a salary! We can even open another shop – we want a third one in Amsterdam. Once we find the right place we should be open in two months. Maybe even sooner.'

#### Grapedistrict / [www.grapedistrict.nl](http://www.grapedistrict.nl)

Specialist wine shop, three shops, first opened in April 2006.

<b>Employees</b>	< 20
<b>Market</b>	The Netherlands
<b>Market situatie</b>	The market is dominated by three traditional franchise chains, the supermarkets and thousands of individual wine shops, which all present the products in the same way.
<b>Market share</b>	Unknown
<b>Ambition</b>	A national network of Grapedistrict shops within a few years.
<b>Competitors</b>	Specialist wine shops, supermarkets

#### Design

VBAT (brand identity) / [www.vbat.nl](http://www.vbat.nl)

Benschop Design Group (shop layout) / [www.benschop.nl](http://www.benschop.nl)





Axia Profit office chair

Best Practice 2  
BMA Ergonomics  
Axia Profit office chairs

# Seating equipment

**'They have their own style  
and they know exactly what  
they're doing. What ultimately  
counts is the result.'**

Pamela Musch, Studio DenHartogMusch



Matthé van den Oord

Up to a century ago, physical work was the order of the day for almost everyone. The only people who actually sat down to work were a handful of writers and office clerks. The situation is a lot different nowadays. In this modern age, Dutch people spend around 35 years of their lives sitting down with a body that is not built for it. The consequence? Pain in the lower back, the neck and around the shoulders. And that results in less productive employees or even high levels of absence through illness.

#### **Back complaints**

Approximately 2.4 million adult Dutch people suffer from chronic lower back pain, a complaint that can last at least three months. The same number of men as women. An estimated 9 percent of all days off work are due to lower back pain.

Source: Centre for Prevention and Health Care Research, 2005

#### **Dancing shoes are for dancing with**

If sitting is unavoidable, then do it as healthily as possible, says Matthé van den Oord, Managing Director of BMA Ergonomics in Zwolle. His company makes office chairs based on an ergonomic and biomechanical concept on how to sit. 'You don't run a marathon wearing dancing shoes,' says van den Oord, 'and for special tasks like working at a computer you need special chairs. For the layman, and that includes almost everyone, an office chair is an office chair. But we see it as an advanced piece of equipment.'

#### **Innovaties**

'Our latest computer chair, the Axia Profit, is patented,' says Van den Oord. 'There are no chairs on the market that can do the same.' Most office chairs have a movement mechanism under the seat that makes it possible to sit actively and passively (see box). 'The tilting mechanism in our chair works much better than the synchronous mechanism you see in most chairs,' according to Van den Oord. When you lean back in a synchronous chair, the chair-back tilts two or three times as much as the seat. When you are leaning backward like that, your eyes are often too far away from the computer screen. You start to compensate for that by bending forward, with the result that you round your back and cause all kinds of problems.

### Seating posture and office chairs

For short-term activities at a desk, an active sitting posture is recommended, while lengthy jobs require a passive posture. When sitting passively, the chair-back is used, so that the pelvis and the back are well supported. When sitting actively, you are normally not touching the chair-back and you sit forward in your chair, as it were. That puts a lot of strain on your back muscles and is therefore less suitable for lengthy tasks.

Modern office chairs make it possible to sit both actively and passively. There are three movement mechanisms available on the market: the synchronous mechanism, the free-float chairs (also called multi-dynamic chairs) and the tilting mechanism (also called the bracing mechanism).

Source: Hugo Bos, 'Most office chairs don't sit well', Arbovisie, 11 (2003)

With the tilting mechanism, the chair-back and seat once they have been adjusted properly are in a fixed angle to each other. When leaning backward you are still sitting relatively straight and your eyes are not too far from the screen. And when you lean forward the seat tilts forward with you but the chair-back is still supporting your back.

### Rest point

'We also put a lot of thought into the pivotal point of our chair', says Van den Oord, 'which is located right under your sitting bone (ischia). That's because you yourself also tilt over your sitting? bones. If the pivotal point of the chair is not positioned correctly, which is the case with most chairs, your shirt is pulled out of your trousers every time you lean forward. Furthermore, our chair has very special weight settings. In whatever posture you sit, you maintain a counter-pressure. When you lean back, the chair produces more counter-pressure; you find a point of balance in every position. And in that way the chair is full of small but very practical innovations.'

### From adviser to entrepreneur

In 1988, Van den Oord, originally a tool builder, started the BMA Biomechanical Consultancy firm together with physiotherapist Cees Bruin. 'We advised people on workplace design and high-quality, ergonomically sound products. At the time, we were impressed by the chairs made by a company in Sweden, and in the end we began to import them. But in around 1995 we started to miss certain products in the company's range. Particularly a chair that was suitable for a computer workstation. At the time, working at a computer was becoming very common and there were more and more reports of complaints such as RSI. There were no good solutions on the market.'

‘We had developed some ideas about how to solve the problem and we asked the Swedes to work them out. But they were unwilling to do so. Because we were convinced our idea would be successful, we set to work until we had a functional prototype of a computer chair. We showed it to the Swedes and asked them if they wanted to produce it. When they declined our offer, we set up production ourselves in 1996. I think the Swedes were suffering from the not invented here syndrome. They’re probably sorry now.’

Switching from being an importer to a producer was not a very drastic step. ‘We already had a product development department and a limited production line to adapt the Swedish chairs to the requirements of the Dutch market. Our product development department was really enthusiastic about our own chair and was looking forward to producing it. The first chair came on the market at the end of 1997.’

### **New markets**

Business is now booming for BMA Ergonomics. Besides computer chairs, the company is also producing special chairs for check-out staff, receptionists and security personnel, as well as conference chairs. The company’s turnover is growing by 20 percent a year. Last year (2006), they sold 80,000 chairs in Europe (more than half of them in the Netherlands). Van den Oord estimates that BMA has a 10 percent market share in the Netherlands and Belgium. BMA

is quite small in the other European countries. ‘So that’s where our growth potential is,’ he says. ‘But the time has to be ripe for it. When you fall ill in the Netherlands, you continue to receive your salary for two years. That’s why businesses are investing in ergonomic furniture – they’ll do anything to make sure their employees don’t fall ill. And as soon as the climate changes in the surrounding countries, you’ll see that our products really start to do well.’

In the meantime, BMA is not just standing around waiting for that to happen. The company is investing in new niche markets: markets in which special chairs are needed. Chairs for security staff, for example. ‘Those kinds of chairs have to satisfy totally different requirements to ordinary office chairs,’ says Van den Oord. ‘They are used 24 hours a day, in an environment in which the work can be very monotonous. So that people start picking at the chairs. They even play with them: racing through the corridors, crashing them into each other. Those chairs therefore have to be a lot stronger than ordinary chairs, so that they’re not completely worn out after six months. We’re also thinking of building in devices to keep the chair occupant alert, as is the case with some car seats.’

### **Form follows ergonomics**

BMA has been working together with studio DenHartogMusch for ten years. 'We got on well from the very start,' says van den Oord. 'We divide up the design process: we work on the technology and then outsource the design. We provide studio DenHartogMusch with clear frameworks. We want a functional design, you have to be able to see how it works by looking at it. And maybe it sounds a bit arrogant, but we actually believe that design is part of the ergonomics.'

Pamela Musch of Studio DenHartogMusch endorses that view. 'BMA is very clear about those kinds of things: they know all about ergonomics, and they buy the design expertise. The Axia Profit was the first computer chair we designed from top to bottom. The previous line of Axia chairs was functionally perfect, but it didn't look very modern. BMA wanted a chair that interior architects would also find attractive. We must have done a good job, because we've already received four awards for the Axia Profit.'

### **Intuition**

At BMA, the development and design of chairs does not always go by the book. There are no fixed budgets, no planning schedule, so time to market is not relevant. 'It's an organic process', says Musch, 'BMA really takes its time, sometimes years. They give the initial impetus, based on their knowledge of the ergonomics and the technology, and we do the same on the basis of the design. Sometimes we come up with ideas for technical solutions and they take them up and develop them. Sometimes they come to us with a particular shape, and we advise them on it. And sometimes the whole process stops for a while.'

The Axia Profit has appeared in many different shapes in the course of time. 'Matthé van den Oord is ambitious and very single-minded,' laughs Musch. 'If he doesn't like a particular solution, you can say or do whatever you like, it won't do any good. That means we have to have a flexible attitude as designers. Which is not always so easy.' Musch appreciates the unconventional product development process at BMA Ergonomics. 'They have their own style and they know exactly what they want. In the end, it's the result that counts.' A newly designed chair is evaluated by a dealer forum of around twenty people. It is only when that forum is enthusiastic ('No, not just enthusiastic, they have to be eager,' says Van den Oord), that the chair goes into production.

### Not a street-fighter mentality

‘We’re a niche player’, says Van den Oord, ‘and that’s how we want to stay. We can’t compete with the big guns like Ahrend, who are real street-fighters.’ Musch is more pragmatic about it: ‘I think Ahrend does indeed see BMA as a competitor. The Axia Profit is selling for around 750 euros, so BMA has created a competitive product. BMA also stands out from its competitors in the way it utilises its biomechanical and ergonomic knowledge to the full.’

‘We’ve gained our market share thanks to our knowledge,’ agrees Van den Oord. ‘That’s how people recognise you. And because we have just one product and so cannot offer a total package as project organisers, we’re dependent on dealers. To build up a good dealer network, you have to work hard, but I think that above all you have to be reliable. So you don’t say after a few years: Goodbye, I’m going to start up on my own now. We invest a lot of time in our dealers. We call it “dealer management”. We supervise them and train them. And we get a lot of feedback from them.’

### BMA Ergonomics / [www.bma-ergonomics.com](http://www.bma-ergonomics.com)

Production and distribution of computer chairs, chairs for security staff and other specialist chairs for the office environment.

Employees	70
Market	Europe, with the core market in the Netherlands and Belgium
Market situation	Calls itself a niche player. Now one of the top three providers in the Netherlands and Belgium, with a market share of around 10 percent.
Ambition	To continue expanding its market share in other European countries (BMA has sales organisations in Belgium, Germany, Ireland, the UK and a licence partner in Finland).

### Design

Studio DenHartogMusch / [www.denhartogmusch.nl](http://www.denhartogmusch.nl)

### Awards (Axia Profit)

Selection Dutch Design Prizes 2006  
FX Design Award nomination 2006  
FIRA Ergonomic Excellence Award 2006  
FX Design Innovation Award 2006





Best Practice 3  
Nieuw Amsterdam  
Publishers

# An eye-catching cover

Books published by Nieuw Amsterdam



**'It has to look good,  
makes you want to pick it up  
and get you interested.  
And then, of course, we hope  
that the book also sells well.'**

Berend Jan Veldkamp, Nieuw Amsterdam



Berend Jan Veldkamp

A relative newcomer, Nieuw Amsterdam publishing house is flying high. Founded in 2005, it can already count itself among the top players in the Dutch publishing world. The Amsterdam-based publisher not only has many top Dutch authors on its list, such as Hans Münstermann, Mart Smeets, Rascha Peper, Henk Spaan and Matthijs van Nieuwkerk; it also has a very successful webshop.

### **Design an integral part**

Berend Jan Veldkamp, business editor, is very clear about the role of design: 'Without design, our products aren't products; they're just loose pages and manuscripts. In that sense, design is an integral part of the product – not just for us but for every publisher. Otherwise you simply can't be successful. Besides this, design is also a huge part of the product's added value. This, together with the hallmark of a reputable publisher, turns it into an end product that people are willing to spend money on.'

### **The power of the cover**

Nieuw Amsterdam works with around fifty regular external designers, who design brochures, marketing materials, bodywork and book covers. 'Our designers come from different backgrounds because the books we publish are so diverse. For example, a book for a museum that is full of illustrations is designed by a different designer than? a business book full of text and graphs.' Of all the graphic design commissioned by the publisher, the dust jacket is the most important commercial instrument. 'It has to look really attractive, make you want to pick it up and get you interested. And then of course we also hope that the book sells well.' Is the design first tested by a consumer group? 'No. That's done indirectly by the book trade, because new books are presented to them first in our brochure. Then if we get certain reactions, we can make the necessary adjustments.'

### **Internet TV**

In September 2007, Nieuw Amsterdam became the first publisher in the Netherlands to have its own culture programme on the Internet: Nieuw Amsterdam TV. To make the broad-casts, the publisher even built its own TV studio. With this initiative, enthusiasts can be kept informed about cultural developments and the publisher can highlight its own products. This is a good pull strategy that is being used more and more often by the business sector, and very successfully too.

Source: zoomz.nl

### **Imprint**

What makes Nieuw Amsterdam unique is that all its books are published under the same imprint. 'We believe that this makes our brand extra powerful. On the other hand, it also entails a certain risk. Anything that one party does can have repercussions on the rest.' This decision has led to particularly positive results among the press and the book trade. 'We were able to build up a position

there in just two years, so we're well recognised in those circles now. As what? As a publisher that focuses on modern marketing instruments (webshop, Nieuw Amsterdam TV), combined with a wide-ranging list that's positioned higher in the market. For example, we don't do any gardening books or thrillers.'

### **Costs of design**

How much does Nieuw Amsterdam invest in design as opposed to all other costs? 'That's hard to say. Design is one of our regular costs (regardless of the number of copies printed). The variable costs are paper, printing and binding and, of course, authors' royalties. The primary investment is around 10 percent of the cost price. That's higher for illustrated books, but for a reprint that's much lower or even zero. By the way, all of this excludes marketing costs.

### Design as a means of competition

Has design become more important as a way of keeping ahead of the competition? 'Our area of competition is in the bookshops, which are choosing ever fewer titles even though more and more books are being published. Of course, we are also competing for the consumer's attention. Are people going to read a book or watch television? And if they are indeed going to read a book, will they buy one of ours? Which means you do everything you can to grab people's attention. So, yes, of course design has become much more important. We're all trying to continually raise the level the market is accustomed to. The expectations of the end users are also increasing all the time, and that includes the design element.'

**Nieuw Amsterdam publishers / [www.nieuwamsterdam.nl](http://www.nieuwamsterdam.nl)**  
Publishers, founded in 2005

<b>Employees</b>	25
<b>Market</b>	General-interest book market in the Netherlands
<b>Market situation</b>	An adult market with a high level of competition where there is still always space for new initiatives.
<b>Market share</b>	Unknown
<b>Ambition</b>	The publishers are at full strength and do not aim to become any bigger, although they are of course aiming to produce more successful products.
<b>Competitors</b>	Unknown

**Design**  
Various designers

**Best Practice 4**  
**Neopost**  
**Mail processing systems**

# Cuddly machines



The DS-62 mail processing system fills 2200 envelopes an hour

**'It's not for nothing  
that we're a world  
market leader.'**

Eric van der Vegte, Neopost

Eric van der Vegte



‘We have four hundred people at Neopost Technologies in Drachten’ says Eric van der Vegte, Manager Mechanical Engineering. ‘A quarter of them are working in Research & Development, which makes the company very top-heavy.’ Neopost invests 5 percent of its turnover in R&D, and in Drachten even more. ‘And we need to so that,’ according to Van der Vegte. ‘It’s not for nothing that we’re a world market leader.’ Besides R&D, in Drachten the company also produces, assembles and distributes its envelope filling machines.

### **Neopost?**

Neopost Technologies in Drachten is part of the international Neopost Group. The Neopost Group (with its headquarters in Paris) manufactures machines for mail processing: envelope fillers, franking machines and mail unpacking machines and software for tracking and tracing mail packages. With its envelope filling machines, Neopost is the global market leader.

### **Glossy**

‘The mail market is developing fast,’ says Van der Vegte. ‘People are sending more and more mail. At present, that’s nine billion mail items a year and that number is growing by 1,5 percent every year. Which means we’re packing more and more mail, and the type of mail is changing too. In the past, we packed huge numbers

of bank statements, but the emergence of email has prompted a switch to direct mail, advertising. That means we’re handling more and more glossy printed matter, and that slippery stuff is difficult to process. Besides this, our customers want to be able to send thick or indeed very thin paper, or recycled paper. So our machines have to be able to handle all of that.’

### **User-friendly**

So there is no shortage of technical challenges, but the approach to the users of the machines has also changed at Neopost ‘In the past, our machines were located somewhere out of sight in a mailroom and were used by trained personnel,’ explains Van der Vegte. ‘It’s still like that in the larger companies, for which we make high-volume mailroom machines that can process huge amounts of mail.’ Nowadays, however, smaller companies also want the convenience of automatic mail processing. The low-volume machines that Neopost develops for this target group are no longer hidden away in mailrooms. ‘They’re now positioned next to the photo-copiers and the printers, with which our machines are compared, whether intentionally or not. They’re operated by secretaries and receptionists. So we pay a lot of attention to user-friendliness. And the machines also have to look good, as “cute” as possible.’

### **The myth of the paperless office**

‘Over the past thirty years, many people have proclaimed the imminent arrival of the paperless office. Yet even the World Wide Web, which allows almost any computer to read and display another computer’s documents, has increased the amount of printing being done. The use of e-mail in an organisation causes an average 40 percent increase in paper consumption.’

Source: A.J. Sellen and R.H.R. Harper, *The myth of the paperless office*, MIT Press, 2001

### **Further and further**

‘In the past, our designs were often technology-driven,’ says Van der Vegte. ‘People were amazed that the mail automatically ended up in the envelope. Then, the easier it became to use other office machines, the more we had to take that route too. So we’ve been focusing on user-friendliness since 1970, 1980. You just have to keep taking that extra step.’

Neopost does that by conducting extensive field tests with new machines. And it keeps its R&D staff on their toes by getting them to operate the mail processing machines once a year at a local mailing company and sending them into the field with the service engineers. Van der Vegte: ‘We get them to operate the machines themselves and also see how our customers are using our machines. It’s very difficult for technology buffs to keep their hands in their pockets and their mouths closed while looking at people operating the machine. Because you can already hear by the rhythm of the machine that a feeder is running empty and that it should have been topped up long ago...’

### **House designer**

Maarten van Lelyveld was the house designer for Neopost Technologies for forty years. He is now retired. Van der Vegte: ‘Maarten used to call in regularly, he lived close by. We could always phone him and he’d drop by the same afternoon – that was a great luxury.’ Through the years, Van Lelyveld developed a style of design that was based on what you could do with steel sheets. ‘He always wanted us to try out new things’, laughs Van der Vegte, ‘so that caused some commotion. For example, Maarten’s radii kept getting bigger and when setting a sheet you had more and more problems



with spring-back. So with convex lids with really big radii, we pressed the sheet into shape as well as we could and then stretched it around the rest of the machine to get the right curve. But we didn't always succeed in getting these types of shapes stable during production. That's why we've been working more with plastic in the past few years, because our series are growing and it's easier to shape plastic.'

### **Philips Design**

The Neopost group is a collection of a few dozen companies, each with its own identity. To clearly show that all those companies are part of one organisation, around a year ago the Neopost Group decided to hold a brand campaign. It took a critical look at the design of the mail processing machines. The Neopost folder inserters come from Drachten, and the franking machines from Paris. Both organisations originally worked with other designers. 'That wasn't good for the image we projected to the outside world,' says Van der Vegte. 'If a customer has a line with Neopost machines, you want that customer to realise that they all come from Neopost. So we started looking for an international design partner. Philips Design has a branch in the Netherlands and one in Paris, and that's a big advantage. They've been solely responsible for the design of all Neopost machines for around a year now.'

### **The exterior**

Philips Design's expertise is called upon the moment the machines pass from the development phase to the engineering phase. During the development phase, the machine's architecture is defined – for example, does the machine run from left to right or from top to bottom, and where will the dividing welds be positioned. 'By the end of the development phase we have the frame, but we still don't know what the exterior is going to look like,' says Van der Vegte. 'Philips Design then gives us the global design of the casing, and we carry on with that. But somebody with a design background regularly comes along and makes sure we're not infringing on the global design.'

'We had a different working method with Maarten van Lelyveld,' says Van der Vegte. 'He used to walk around here every day, and he knew everyone involved. He could see the machines slowly developing and if he didn't like something, he never hesitated to say so during the development phase. We don't have that now. With Philips Design, we work much more at a distance. You ask a question and you receive an answer. But we don't really have much experience yet in asking the right questions.'

### Learning procedure

‘We have to learn to be partners,’ explains Van der Vegte. ‘We still have to get to know one another.’ For example, Van der Vegte was surprised when Philips Design presented a foam model of a new envelope filling machine. ‘We thought: it’s nice, but this isn’t possible and that has to be done differently. But what do you think happened? The designers at Philips Design saw this as the definitive model! So what we saw as filling in the details was seen by Philips Design as drastic changes to the accepted proposal. That was a shock for us. It was a bit of a misunderstanding. But the machine looks really great now.’

### The importance of design

Neopost operates in a niche market. The company has two major competitors worldwide. ‘They’re just as busy with design as we are,’ says Van der Vegte. ‘But I wonder whether customers would choose our machines just for the design. If they like the look of our machines, that might influence their choice. But what the machines ultimately have to do is package the mail. And as long as our competitors’ machines also look good, I don’t think the design is a decisive factor. But I’m not sure about that, we’ve never really looked into it.’

#### Neopost / [www.neopost.com](http://www.neopost.com)

Development, production and sale of high-tech solutions for mail processing.

<b>Organisation</b>	The Neopost Group has its main office in Paris, Neopost Nederland is made up of Neopost BV, the marketing and national sales office in Almere, and Neopost Technologies in Drachten (production and R&D).
<b>Employees</b>	5,000
<b>Market</b>	Worldwide. Neopost has branches in thirteen countries, and sales and service centres in around 100 countries.
<b>Market situation</b>	Neopost is the world market leader for envelope-filling systems and the European market leader for franking systems.
<b>Competitors</b>	Pitney Bowes (US) and PFE (UK)

#### Design

Philips Design (for around a year; before that, the company had a long-standing working relationship with Maarten van Lelyveld).

#### Awards

Good Industrial Design 2001  
Industriële Form Award 2004

Best Practice 5  
Hero  
Fruit2Day

# Fruit in a bottle



**'In the beginning we weren't  
at all sure whether Fruit2Day  
would be successful. We believed  
in it, but would the market  
embrace it too?'**

Alica Dekker, Hero Nederland



Alica Dekker

In 2003, Hero was preparing to storm the market with a new product. There were already plenty of fruit juices on the supermarket shelves, with leading brands such as CoolBest and Tropicana. 'It was a really difficult market,' says Alica Dekker, International Marketing Manager at Hero Nederland in Breda. 'We were in a bit of a squeeze. To make the breakthrough we had to differentiate, we had to create a new product.'

Hero started its search by first formulating the philosophy behind the new product. 'At Hero, fruit plays the leading role in almost all our products,' says Dekker. 'However, fruit juice contains just some of the good things in fruit. With the new product, we wanted to get closer to real fruit. But it still had to be drinkable, because spoonable isn't convenient enough. And we wanted to switch to small, individual packaging. That was an emerging trend at the time, called on-the-go consumption.'

Ten percent of 19-30 year-olds in the Netherlands do not eat enough vegetables and fruit. The average young person eats just 100 grams of vegetables and one piece of fruit a day. Even if you add fruit juice, the total is still less than 400 hundred grams. Everyone requires an extra two tablespoons of vegetables and one piece of fruit.

Source: Food consumption survey (2003)

## The product

The product development department at Hero set to work. 'In our laboratory at the factory, experiments were carried out with combinations of pieces of fruit, fruit juice and fruit puree,' says Dekker. 'We kept on getting new variants to taste. It was a question of trial and error: the juice was too thick or too thin, the pieces of fruit were too big or too slushy. We wanted the fruit to be really crunchy. So little by little we found the right fruit and flavour combinations. When we ended up with the tasty product we were looking for, we called a meeting with the designers.'

Ronald Lewerissa of Flex/the InnovationLab and Danny Small of Millford Brand-id have been working with Hero for a long time. They were handed a beaker of the new product to taste. And they were asked to develop a packaging concept that was as close as possible to real fruit.

## Fruit shapes

'Danny and I devised all kinds of concepts,' says Lewerissa. 'One of them was packaging in the form of a halved orange. The idea was to present them in bulk in orange crates in the shop. We also devised bottles all a little bit different from each other, just like apples. We could do that because when plastic bottles are being manufactured, you can make subtle changes to the shape of every bottle. We imagined a supermarket shelf well-filled with all the slightly different bottles from which you'd

pick out your favourites, just as people do in the vegetable section. The bottle that was based on two stacked pieces of fruit, now available everywhere in the shops, was also one of those initial concepts.'

The designers devised names like FruitBreak, DagFruit and FruitSmash. 'We soon hit on the idea of making "two pieces of fruit" central to the concept,' says Lewerissa. 'At the time, the Netherlands Nutrition Centre was running the campaign "Do you eat fruit twice a day?" Danny Small thought of the name 2Day. After a consumer survey, Hero changed the name to Fruit2Day because 2Day wasn't clear enough. We also thought it would be interesting if this new product had the nutritional value of two pieces of fruit. Then Hero could make things easy for the consumer.'

Hero sat around the table with the Netherlands Nutrition Centre. 'We had to be able to substantiate a claim like that, of course,' says Dekker. 'Together with the Netherlands Nutrition Centre we defined the criteria for the product. That covered vitamin C, folic acid, fibres and so on. Our laboratory then set to work on that.'

## **The consumer**

'At this stage, we presented everything to the consumers,' says Alica Dekker, 'in in-depth interviews that took around forty minutes. The designs were worked out in foam models onto which we stuck graphic designs. We tried to find out which associations the different concepts evoked. The bottle based on two stacked pieces of fruit ended up as the clear winner. Our test subjects found it the most attractive option and also the most logical. We also tested the different names.' Once the decision about the packaging and the name had been made, Hero conducted a flavour test. They asked consumers to taste different flavour combinations. 'But without the design this time,' says Dekker, 'because now it was all about the content.'

## **Oval**

Flex/the InnovationLab was responsible for designing and developing the bottle and Millford Brand-id for the graphic design. 'Hero didn't have the production capacity for the new product,' says Lewerissa. 'That meant we didn't need to stick to the existing production lines, so we were given plenty of freedom in the design of Fruit2Day. Portions of 200 millilitres give you a relatively small volume. To still have a certain presence on the shelf, we decided on a bottle with an oval diameter. That means that a relatively large surface of the bottle is facing the consumer.'

'An oval bottle is more difficult to accommodate on the filling line than a cylindrical bottle', says Dekker, 'but the impact on the shelf is so much greater that we decided to use it anyway. However, it did mean that we ultimately had to commission the development of a completely new filling line, a huge risk. But this particular concept had done so well in the consumer tests – it had satisfied all the requirements a hundred percent – that we said: Let's go for it!'

#### **Down to the last detail**

'We didn't want one of those standard straight bottle-caps,' says Lewerissa. 'That didn't fit with the shape of the bottle. In one of the first designs, we had no cap at all, just an aluminium seal. But the result of Hero's consumer survey was clear: people wanted a resealable cap. So we developed a tapered cap that fits the shape of the bottle. That cap was specially produced for Fruit2Day.'

The Fruit2Day bottle is made of blow-moulded polypropylene and is completely covered by a full-colour printed PET sleeve. 'That caused some commotion,' says Lewerissa. Because of its shape, the bottle tended to trap air in the sleeves. The supplier protested, of course ('Impossible!'), but we stuck to our guns. In the end the problem was solved by making very small perforations in the sleeve to de-aerate it.'

#### **To market**

'In the beginning we weren't at all sure whether Fruit2Day would be successful,' says Dekker. 'We believed in it, but would the market embrace it too? So we started with a pilot line, a kind of kitchen with a ten-metre long worktop. We stood there cutting the fruit ourselves, as it were.' That was in April 2004. Fruit2Day was an instant success. 'In three months, still during the pilot phase, we had sold all our stock. And that was without any extra promotion campaigns. We were out of stock for quite some time.' Hero decided to upscale. A new filling line was purchased. In May 2005, commercial production started and now a million bottles leave the factory in Breda every week.

'The design of Fruit2Day: the shape, the imprint, the name and the product itself: everything fitted perfectly,' says Dekker. 'I'm convinced that the design has really helped the product to become a success. You also get that impression when you talk to consumers. We've designed other new concepts since then, but it's very difficult to come up with something as unique as Fruit2Day.'

### Fuller all the time

Fruit2Day was the first of its kind. 'It now has a lot of imitators on the market,' says Dekker. 'The chilled liquid fruit shelves are getting fuller all the time. I took a look around the supermarkets in the past few days. It's getting more and more difficult to orientate yourself. I'm hearing the same from consumers. Things are developing so fast, people no longer know which product stands for what. So we have to be careful with that. Personally I think that packaging will become much more important. It will start to play more and more of a marketing role, even more than other types of advertising.'

Sales of Fruit2Day are increasing all the time. Besides the Netherlands, the fruit drink is now also sold in Belgium, Germany, Switzerland and Spain. 'Our competitors are having a hard time,' says Dekker, 'even though there's more media budget available. That media push just isn't working any more. And then along comes Fruit2Day and conquers the market just because of the concept and how it looks!'

### Hero Nederland BV / [www.hero.nl](http://www.hero.nl)

Producer of food in which fruit plays a major role:  
jam, soft drinks, snacks, fruit juices and chilled liquid fruit.

Employees	200
Company	Hero Nederland is part of the international Hero group, which has companies in almost all the European countries and its main office in Switzerland. Hero Nederland, located in Breda, focuses on developing, producing and marketing products under the Hero brand.
Market	Europe
Market situation	In the Netherlands, a market leader in the chilled liquid fruit segment, where there is intense competition.

### Design

Flex/the InnovationLab / [www.flex.nl](http://www.flex.nl)  
Millford Brand ID / [www.millford.nl](http://www.millford.nl)

### Awards

Good Food Annual Prize from the Food Centre  
for Fruit2Day (2004)  
Annual World Juice Award 'Best New Juice Product' (2006)





Pas Reform's egg hatching machine

Best Practice 6  
Pas Reform  
Egg hatching machines

# The best possible hatching process

**'Design has become an  
integral part of our company.  
It's an asset for us, not the  
cherry on the cake.'**

Henry Arts, Pas Reform



Henry Arts (left) and Paul Beerten

It is only when an egg is in tip-top shape that it produces a healthy and strong chick. That might seem self-evident, but it is not. For many years, the main activity of Pas Reform – a producer of hatching machines in Zeddum – was selling machines. ‘All we talked about was nuts and bolts,’ says Marketing Manager Henry Arts. Then in the late 1990s, the Board of Directors decided to change course. The egg would become the main point of focus. ‘We wanted to stand out from our competitors with our in-depth knowledge of a chick’s embryonic development. And we wanted to use that knowledge to improve our machines, to be one of the top three in the world,’ says Arts.

### **New strategy**

The decision to change course coincided with the arrival of a new Managing Director at Pas Reform, Bart Aangenendt. Together with Henry Arts, he developed Pas Reform’s new strategy: to be ‘a specialist in the area of hatching’ instead of ‘a supplier of machines.’ Aangenendt and Arts decided to invest in knowledge development, customer orientation and design. To start with, they employed an embryologist, Dr. Marleen Boerjan, to conduct scientific research into the needs of chick embryos. Then they improved the services they provided to customers by setting up customer teams. Last but not least, they called in design bureau LaVerbe to help them translate their strategy into a new corporate identity.

‘Before 2000, we were a totally different organisation,’ says Arts. ‘But now innovation is an integral part of Pas Reform’s DNA. It’s hard to imagine that we paid so little attention to embryonic development, because it’s actually the crux of our business.’

### **Pas Reform Academy**

The arrival of embryologist Dr. Marleen Boerjan signalled the start of the Pas Reform Academy: free training and knowledge transfer for hatchery managers from all over the world. ‘It’s a unique selling point for us,’ says Arts. ‘Every year dozens of groups of students come to us and you wouldn’t believe it many hatchery managers have never seen the inside of an egg. We make them aware that they’re working with live creatures.’

### **Sparring partner**

At the time, LaVerbe was working for another company in the poultry industry. ‘Which gave them a good head start,’ says Arts. ‘LaVerbe was already familiar with the poultry world so we didn’t have to explain everything to them. Added to that, LaVerbe is a full-service bureau, providing services that include advice on getting your message across, graphic design, new media, photography and user interface. That’s a lot more efficient than when you have to go from company A to B to C.’

Paul Beerten, Senior Designer at LaVerbe, describes how the collaboration began. 'It started off on a small scale, with a brochure. Our relationship grew slowly, very organically. We didn't hold a session first about the mission and core values, which you probably would do now.' Arts: 'But we did spend hours philosophising together about how to achieve our ambition to be one of the top three in the industry. Paul was a great sparring partner for me.'

### **Red light**

'The brochure that signalled the start of our cooperation in 2001 set the tone for the new house style,' says Arts. 'It was the first expression of Pas Reform's new identity.' 'I remember it well', says Beerten. 'In the photography we were trying to express how we care for our eggs. Then we thought of adding a red light, and that created exactly the right mood.' The Pas Reform customer teams were given the new brochure to take with them on the road. 'Not printouts, but very professional-looking printed matter. That says a lot about how serious the message was,' says Beerten. The company's corporate identity was established over the space of three years. 'We gradually adapted the content and tone of voice of our brochures and PowerPoint presentations,' says Arts. 'And at the same time we developed a new website and modernised our machines.'

### **From egg to chick in 21 days**

Pas Reform's hatching machines are usually used for chickens' eggs, although they can also be used to hatch the eggs of turkeys, pheasants and ducks. A chicken's egg spends eighteen days in the pre-hatching machine (called a 'setter'), and then it goes to the hatcher. The eggs hatch after three days. Most of the chicks are destined for the meat industry.

### **Chicken a favourite**

Chicken is popular worldwide. The consumption of chickens already makes up around a third of the world's total meat production and that share is expected to grow even more. Due to the rising demand and the increase in scale, over the years hatcheries have grown enormously: an average hatchery 'produces' one to two million chicks a week.

### **Optimal climate**

During the hatching process, it is very important to maintain a specific temperature and level of humidity. Because they have to stay closed all the time, Pas Reform's machines have a large peephole. 'Visual feedback on the hatching process is really important,' says Arts. Furthermore, the division into compartments in the machine is unique. In each compartment, the temperature and humidity can be regulated separately so that each 'batch' (of 19,000 eggs) can be hatched under optimal conditions.

### **Redesigned machines**

The hatching machines were redesigned by VanBerloStudio's. 'We discovered that the production and assembly could be made more efficient,' says Arts. 'VanBerloStudio's achieved that by making the profiles and other components uniform, by giving the machines a modular structure and by preassembling the console and the cooling/heating system. We also enhanced the machine's user-friendliness with the big peephole and the ergonomic position of the screen. Plus the fact that the machines are now easier to clean and are therefore more hygienic,' says Arts.

### **Design as an asset**

LaVerbe worked together with VanBerloStudio's on the machine's appearance and user interface. That resulted in a colour console, different lettering, an asymmetrical design and a user interface with language-independent icons. 'Before 2000, our engineers always thought of design as a cost item,' says Arts. 'Now it has become matter-of-course to include design in our discussions at engineering level and it is often an engineer that asks me: "Might this be the right time to call in VanBerloStudio's or LaVerbe?" Design has become an integral part of our company. It's an asset for us, not the cherry on the cake.'

The more a chicken embryo grows, the more heat it produces. At the start of the hatching process, the eggs have to be warmed in the pre-hatching machine, then later they have to be cooled. In the latest fast-growing chicken breeds, the embryos produce considerably more heat than 'traditional' chickens and Pas Reform expects this trend to continue. The company has therefore built 40 percent extra cooling capacity into its machines. 'Our machines are future-proof,' says Arts.

### A proud appearance at the Expo

The modern series of hatching machines, the 'Smart Incubation System', was launched at the Hannover Expo in 2004. 'What struck me most was the self-confidence that the Pas Reform people radiated,' says Beerten. 'They were really proud of the company and the product. And it's been like that from the start, from that first folder with the red eggs. The company's identity, the scientific groundwork by Marleen Boerjan, the care taken with the documentation, the message spelled out by the salespeople, the information in the brochures: they all correspond with what our people stand for, and that has a kind of snowball effect on our self-confidence. That was very clear to see in Hannover.'

### Added value

The cost price of the hatching machines has risen by a few percent. But their added value has risen many times more. That is reflected in higher turnover figures. Between 2004 and 2007, Pas Reform's turnover quadrupled. 'That's all autonomous growth,' says Arts. 'And now we're one of the three biggest players in the world.' The number of sales agents increased during the same period from thirty to sixty. 'Before 2001, Pas Reform had struggled to find good agents abroad,' says Arts. 'Now they're coming to us. For me, that's probably the most convincing proof that our formula is working.'

#### Pas Reform / [www.pasreform.com](http://www.pasreform.com)

Producer of egg hatching machines and hatchery mechanisation equipment.

#### Employees

60

#### Market

Worldwide

#### Market situation

Niche; the world market is dominated by just a handful of companies, including Pas Reform.

#### Design

LaVerbe (corporate identity) / [www.laverbe.nl](http://www.laverbe.nl)

VanBerloStudio's (industrial design) / [www.vanberlo.nl](http://www.vanberlo.nl)

#### Awards

Nomination Dutch Design Prizes 2006

Best Practice 7  
AGU  
Bikewear

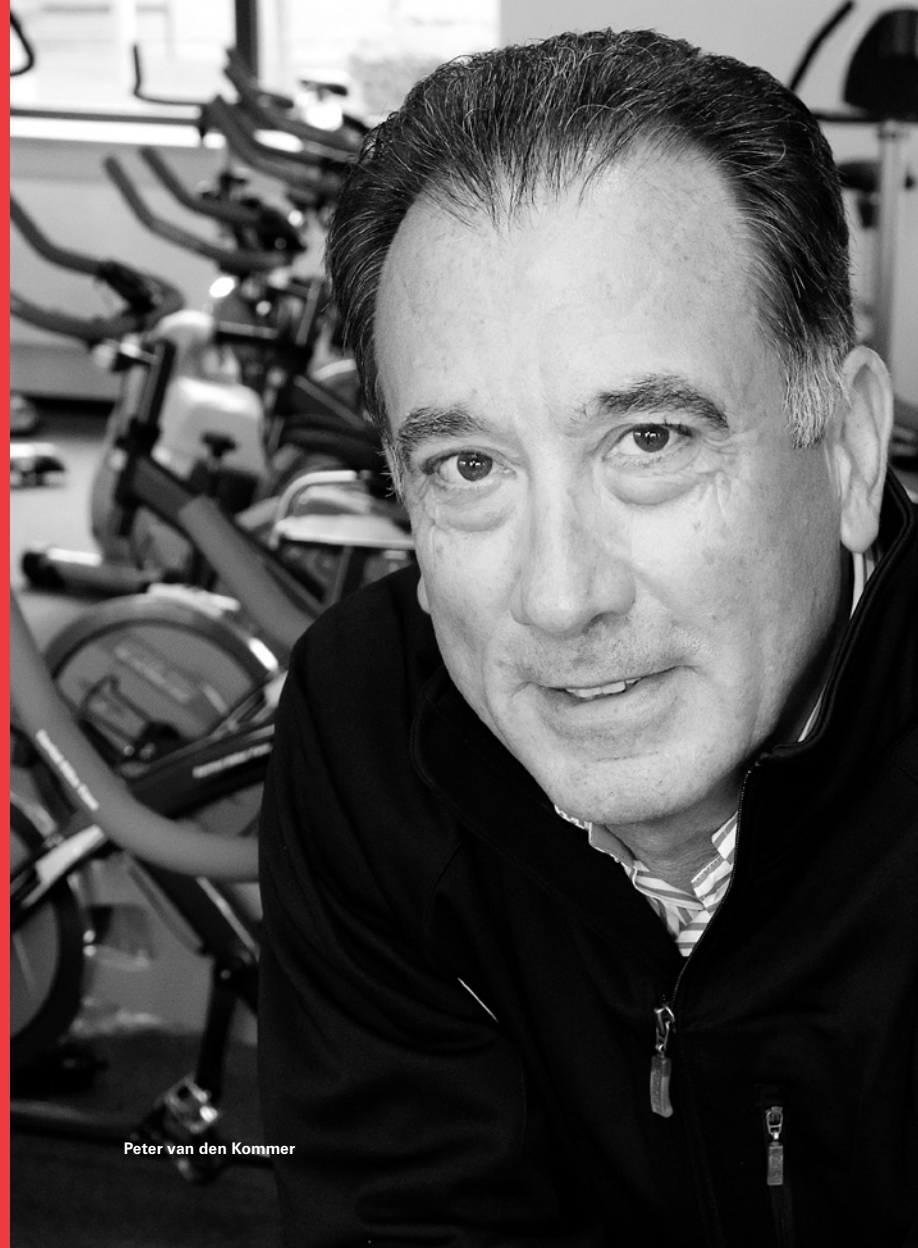
## In the saddle





**'Our great strength  
is that we're fast  
and innovative.  
We're a small player,  
so we can react quickly.'**

Peter van den Kommer, AGU



Peter van den Kommer



‘The invention of bicycle carriers for cars was a huge shot in the arm for our sector,’ says Peter van den Kommer, Managing Director of AGU in Alkmaar. ‘It really changed the way people use their bicycles. People over 50 now regularly drive somewhere with their bicycles for a day out. In fact, they’ve become one of our main target groups. And as well as being able to afford a good bicycle, they also buy all the accessories. And good bikewear.’ AGU developed a line of bikewear specially for this target group, the Casual Line, which was launched in 2006.

### **Comfortable bikewear**

Professional cyclists wear tight sports clothing. But it is not the type of clothing a 50 year-old leisure cyclist wants to be seen in – certainly not at an outdoor café, for example. With its Casual Line, AGU took advantage of people’s desire to wear comfortable, loose but still functional bikewear. For the ladies, the company designed the ‘skort’, for example: a combination of a skirt and shorts. The inelegant but functional cycling shorts with a chamois gusset are hidden under a wraparound skirt. What’s more, the shorts are removable, so that a change of clothing is possible on long cycle trips. For the gentlemen, there are loose shorts also with removable undershorts. The Casual Line, which has only been on the market for a year, has already become a real success story for AGU.

‘Some of the items in the Casual Line had been in our collection for longer’, says Van den Kommer, ‘but in 2006 we made a separate line of it for the first time, aimed at the 45 to 55 age group. We’ve also had a successful women’s line for the past seven years. And young people are still an important target group for us, especially when it comes to sports clothing for riding mountain bikes and racing bikes.’

### **Colour in the shops**

The breakthrough for AGU came in 1978, when the company won a nationwide contest for the best cycling rainwear. The judges were most impressed with the lightweight materials used in AGU’s rainwear. AGU lived on that success for years, but from 1985 onward started facing some serious competition. ‘Like Adidas, for one,’ says Van den Kommer. ‘They were threatening to catch up with us, so we had to move fast. That’s when we started working with external designers. Before then, we did everything ourselves. Nobody had any design training when we started with the bikewear in 1976,’ says Van den Kommer.

The designer we called in took a fresh look at our product lines. She suggested that we use more colour instead of the usual dark blue and grey (which hide any stains if the clothing gets dirty). We took the plunge and remained the market leader thanks to that use of colour. One of our dealers once remarked: AGU has brought colour into our cycle shops.’

### **Cycling Netherlands**

The number of bicycles in the Netherlands continues to increase. In 1985, there were eleven million bicycles, while in 2004 there were just under fourteen million. Dutch people cycle over thirteen billion kilometres a year, which is almost a thousand kilometres per bicycle!

Source: Foundation for Scientific Research into Traffic Safety and CBS.

### **Market leader**

‘Our great strength is that we’re fast and innovative,’ says Van den Kommer. ‘We’re a small player, so we can react quickly. We think Nike is slower in developing new ideas.’ AGU is the market leader for bikewear and rainwear in the Benelux and is also strongly positioned in Northern Europe. That’s mainly due to the positive price/quality ratio, with its high-quality products costing around 10 to 15 percent less than the leading brands.

‘We can keep down our prices because our clothing is made and packed in China and Vietnam,’ says Van den Kommer. ‘We’ve been active there since 1991; in fact, we were one of the first Dutch companies to move its production to the Far East.’ Van den Kommer often travels to the Far East to keep an eye on things and does the sourcing himself. ‘In Vietnam, a seamstress works 30 percent

slower than in China’, he says, ‘but you do get the best stitching done there.’ AGU also has a central warehouse in Alkmaar from where it can supply its dealers without delay.

### **Involvement of the consumer**

Fashion is ‘intimate’ and has a direct impact on our personalities. By wearing a particular item of clothing, we show the world who we are. That is why AGU is happy to listen to new ideas from consumers. Every year, the company organises consumer panels, where a group of consumers examines and discusses the new bikewear collection. In the same way, AGU also organises dealer panels. ‘Dealers are asked lots of questions by consumers, so they know exactly what’s going on. We usually invite the dealers’ wives, because they often work in the business too and have more of a feel for these types of things,’ says Van den Kommer. ‘In the old days, it was an honour to be asked to sit on a panel like this, but unfortunately that’s no longer the case. Now we have to tempt them with a day out at a health resort!’

Trade fairs are also a good place for Van den Kommer to pick up new ideas. ‘I like going to the trade fairs,’ he says. ‘Then you meet what we call ‘multi-cyclists.’ They know everything about cycling and often have some very original ideas about our products. That can be very inspiring.’

### **Open approach**

AGU has a remarkably open approach to consumers. Peter van den Kommer leads by example: he is friendly, interested and ready to listen to people's opinions about cycling or cycle clothing. He tells a good story about a letter he received in 1981 from 24 nurses ('All 24 of them signed it!'), in which the girls asked him to design a raincoat for skirt wearers to make it easier for them to hop on their bicycles. The nurses had to cycle to work in uniform and found the raincoats and ponchos then on the market very awkward. 'So that's exactly what we did', laughs Van den Kommer, 'and within two years we had sold a million of them!' Still a standard in the AGU range is the parka: a long raincoat in bright colours, with a generous slit at the front and back.

### **Objective look**

Another important stimulus for keeping up with developments comes from the external designers that AGU hires or that spontaneously contact AGU with ideas. 'The growing competition is making design more and more important for us,' says Van den Kommer. 'Investing in design costs a lot of money, but we earn back every penny – and more! For me, design is part design, part technology and part economics. Those three aspects always have to be in balance with each other. That's quite difficult to do so it's great to get an objective look at things every now and then.'

### **BikyBiky**

In early 2006 AGU was contacted by Rotterdam communication bureau CosyCosmos, which had hit on the idea of the BikyBiky: a waistcoat for children that helps them learn to cycle. Parents running next to the child's bicycle can grab the handle on the back of the BikyBiky to keep the child in balance and not strain their own backs.

'AGU was enthusiastic right from the start,' says Norbert Schut of CosyCosmos. 'BikyBiky is a product that adds something extra to the AGU brand. Nowadays it's getting more and more difficult to reach consumers because they get so bombarded by the market. But a catchy ad isn't enough any more. That's why we try to think of products that add to the brand and at the same time spread the message of that brand. AGU is a quality brand and with the BikyBiky we wanted to create a light-hearted, useful product that AGU can use to show how happy it is with its customers.'

### Added value

When CosyCosmos came knocking at AGU's door, they had already developed a prototype for the BikyBiky. AGU quickly made the design ready for production and took on the production and distribution tasks, while CosyCosmos receives royalties. 'It's doing very nicely', says Peter van den Kommer, 'but it's always difficult to measure whether it's also doing something for the AGU brand.'

CosyCosmos has its own way of measuring success. 'We look at the free publicity gained by a product and calculate the media millimetres. That's the amount you would have had to pay for the same amount of ad space,' says Norbert Schut. 'Up to now, we've calculated that the BikyBiky would have earned around 90,000 euros in PR value. We think that's a very nice amount indeed.'

### AGU BV / [www.agu.com](http://www.agu.com)

The development, production and sale of rainwear and cycle clothing. Dealing in parts and accessories for bicycles and mopeds. Exclusive distribution of brand items.

#### Organisation

The AGU Holding consists of four subsidiaries: AGU BV, Jacobsons BV, Van Megen Sports Group BV and Hesling Products BV

#### Employees

160

#### Market

Europe, with its core market in the Benelux, Germany and Northern Europe.

#### Market situation

In the Benelux, AGU is the market leader for bicycle clothing and rainwear.

### Design

AGU works with a number of external fashion designers. The design of the BikyBiky is by CosyCosmos ([www.cosycosmos.nl](http://www.cosycosmos.nl)).

### Awards

Best Contract Supplier 2003, 2006 (Bike Totaal) and in 2004 (Biretco).  
Grand Seigneur 1990 (fashion prize from Modint)

**Best Practice 8**  
**Hortilux Schröder**  
**Lighting systems**

# Growing with light



The HSE 1000 Watt lighting system

**'Whether it's practically feasible or attainable, is of secondary importance. But that's okay. Because the dream – the big picture – always has to come first. We automatically end up with our feet on the ground anyway.'**

Teun van den Dool, Hortilux Schröder



Teun van den Dool

Hortilux Schröder, based in Monster, manufactures lighting systems that are used in greenhouses to grow crops more effectively. Six years ago, the company called in design bureau Flex/the Innovation-Lab to think along with them and come up with ideas for improving their product. It led to a new generation of brackets that are energy-efficient, block less sunlight and are easy to install. 'We needed the designers to challenge our perceptions,' says Managing Director Teun van den Dool. 'They see opportunities where we don't see them, and they keep us sharp and innovative.'

### **First launch**

It is the year 2000. Industrial designer Jeroen Verbrugge spends a gruelling hour with Hortilux Schröder. Seated opposite him are Teun van den Dool, Managing Director, and Marco Brok, R&D Manager. They lean back in their chairs looking very sceptical. Jeroen has just proposed separating the 8-kilo body of the Hortilux growing-lamp from the bracket. 'The bracket is small and light so you can hang it up in the greenhouse. Then you position the body on the ground and connect the two with a cable. It means you have less shade on your plants on sunny days.'

Van den Dool has his doubts. Would it work? At the same time, he is also pleasantly surprised: 'First I thought: What are we doing with a designer like this, but Verbrugge clearly showed that he had given the technology a lot of thought. He was very practical.' Van den Dool makes a deal with Verbrugge: 'I have a greenhouse in my back garden and I'll try it out there tonight. If it works, you get the contract.' The next morning the telephone rings at Flex/the InnovationLab, Jeroen Verbrugge's design bureau. That phone call signals the start of a close relationship between Hortilux Schröder and Flex/the InnovationLab and the birth of the HR Remote growing-lamp.

### **More than just a technology buff**

Van den Dool and Brok are very impressed with Verbrugge's technical input. 'He's familiar with our production process – what it can and cannot do – and he can help us to devise some smart solutions.' But Verbrugge is more than just a technology buff: 'He's also pushing our products in the direction of design. We always end up having interesting discussions about that. Then we say: Hey, that's not as easy as it sounds! You're coming up with some great ideas, but they mean the mold will be too expensive. Jeroen in his turn then starts to feel that we're taking his design apart. It goes back and forth like that for a while, but in one way or another we always meet in the middle.'

Verbrugge: 'I always try to defend the design when discussing it with clients, especially when it involves more technical companies. That's because they have the tendency to push the design to one side because it's 'complicated'. But without a good design you can't have a perfectly functioning product, a product that stands out from its rivals. Then you might just as well buy a growing-lamp from China.'

### **Tomato cultivation**

Hortilux Schröder originally manufactured growing lamps for flowers cultivation. In 1998, while looking for new market opportunities, the company developed growing-lamps for tomatoes. 'At the time, it was still unusual to grow tomatoes all year round,' says Marco Brok, Head of R&D. 'As a tomato grower, that meant you were out of the running for three months every year. So you still had your costs, but no product. That was when we started developing growing lamps for year-round cultivation. We knew that tomatoes need much more light than flowers, but we had no idea of the correct light intensity. So we started experimenting.'

'It was a great success,' says Van den Dool. 'We were producing beautiful tomatoes in the middle of winter.' However, the horticultural sector is quite conservative. 'Their motto is: Seeing is believing,' says Van den Dool. 'Luckily we were able to persuade a few large growers to set up a trial independently. And when that turned out to be a success, people began to put a lot of money into it.'

### **Growing light**

The ideal growing light for plants is of course sunlight. Sunlight is made up of a series of colours, the light spectrum. The human eye is sensitive to just a small part of this spectrum. Plants are sensitive to much greater part. In this area of photosynthesis there are again a number of parts for which plants are extra sensitive. In other words: some light colours provide the plant with more growth energy than others. For growing-lamp systems, therefore, the better the lamp 'is geared' to the areas in which the plant is the most active, the higher the yield.

Source: Hortilux Schröder ([www.hortilux.nl](http://www.hortilux.nl))



### Electronic lamps

The first growing-lamp bracket designed by Flex/the InnovationLab, the HR Remote, was a conventional bracket. Nowadays most of the brackets that Hortilux Schröder sells are electronic. 'They're more compact and more energy-efficient than conventional brackets,' says Brok. 'Electronic brackets are more complex to develop, however. At Hortilux, we've benefited from our strategic cooperation with Schröder, which developed the reflector. And the production has been made more efficient by thinking first about the components and the number of parts in the bracket. In fact, Flex/the InnovationLab helped us with this. And also with the design, of course. Look at this plate with our name on it: that's a heat guard, intended to protect the electronics against the heat radiation from the reflector. With the 600 watt lamp we don't really need that guard, but it looks so good that we put it on anyway.'

'We're now busy with Agriport A7, the biggest project we've ever had,' says Brok. 'There'll be 40,000 of our brackets hanging there. They'll use a total of around 80,000 1000-watt lamps. That's 80 megawatts, the capacity of a medium-sized power station.'

### Changes in the greenhouse sector

The international greenhouse sector has developed explosively since the 1990s. There have been some radical changes. Scale increases have led to companies of unprecedented size. Operational management is many times more complex than it used to be. The grower is now the manager.

Source: Hortilux Schröder

### Agilight

Agilight is a sister organisation of Hortilux Schröder. 'We've also been working for the dairy sector for the past five years,' says Van den Dool. 'Nowadays cows are kept inside more and more often. Most barns have just a few light-bulbs, so the animals are largely kept in the dark. However, recent research has shown that good lighting in the barn increases the milk yield. That's good for the farmer and good for the cows.'

Agrilight is now a separate company. 'You're dealing with a whole new target group,' says Van den Dool. 'We had to really fight to become part of that world. For example, we had a stand at a trade fair in Utrecht, where nobody really noticed us. But things are going well now. We came up with a new idea and it caught on. We're even facing some competition now.'

'We designed the first Agrilight bracket ourselves because there were no funds available at the time,' says Brok. Flex/the Innovation-lab has created a new design in the meantime, which recently came on the market. 'It's turned out to be a great bracket,' says van den Dool. 'You could ask, why make such a nice-looking thing when you don't even see it in a barn? But I'm sure it will be worth it in the end. That farmer will see the difference. When he takes the bracket out of the box, he'll think: Hey, that looks good! When I get at least that kind of reaction, I know we've done well.'

### **Business-to-business**

Hortilux Schröder operates in a typical business-to-business market. There, too, the importance of design is starting to filter through. The competition is increasing and it is exactly in the business-to-business segment that many improvements are needed – for example, in the area of comfort and safety. The new electronic brackets from Hortilux Schröder, more compact and energy-efficient than the conventional brackets, were given a pre-assembly component – a lamp brace – by Flex/the InnovationLab to make them easier to hang up. In the past, it was a big job to hang up a 5-kilo growing-lamp in the greenhouse. Now the fitter first fits the lamp braces and when everything is hanging properly he slides all the lamps onto it in one movement.

The business-to-business market also offers plenty of opportunities in the area of design – for example, so that you can make your product stand out from the rest. For that reason, Hortilux' Belgian partner Schröder, which produces exterior lighting and floodlights, got Italian design bureau Pininfarina to design a futuristic lamp-post. An interesting choice, because Pininfarina is primarily known as a designer of Ferrari's and Maserati's.

### Total concept

For Van den Dool, the focus on design has now become automatic. 'For me, the work with designers is very important. They take a fresh look at any possible problems. They can devise a different solution and present it in such a way that you can't help being enthusiastic about it. Whether it's practically feasible or attainable is of secondary importance. But that's okay. Because the dream – the big picture – always has to come first. And then we automatically end up with our feet on the ground anyway.'

Of course, a nice lamp in itself is not enough: 'No horticulturalist will admit that he's buying our product because he thinks it's better-looking than the others, or because it's a bit more stylish. But we enjoy it, the knowledge that we've made something that looks good.' For Van den Dool, good design is more than just the product, it is also about providing a total solution: 'As a company, we try to focus on all levels on how we come across to the outside world. I like to think that our growing lamps are the hardware. They have to function properly and look good. But the software has to be right too: our people, their expert knowledge, their commitment to the customers. The important thing for us is the total concept. I'm convinced that it always pays in the end. And we can see that in our company's profits.'

### Hortilux Schröder / [www.hortilux.com](http://www.hortilux.com)

The development, production and sale of lighting systems for the greenhouse market gardening sector.

#### Organisation

The Hortilux Schröder Group consists of Hortilux Schröder, AP Nederland (the manufacturing company), Raymax (service and maintenance), PL Light (export activities to Canada and North and South America) and Agrilight (lighting systems for barns and agricultural buildings). Hortilux has a strategic cooperation with Schröder (Schröder has a minority share in Hortilux).

#### Employees

Hortilux Schröder Group: 150 permanent employees, 100 flexible

#### Market

Worldwide

#### Market situation

Hortilux Schröder is the market leader in the Netherlands and probably also worldwide.

#### Design

Flex/the Innovationlab / [www.flex.nl](http://www.flex.nl)

# Analysis

## Room for improvement

The eight cases discussed in this booklet are interesting in themselves. But what can we learn from them? The literature on design management provides us with a context in which we can analyse the cases.

**'Even in crowded markets,  
successful companies tend  
to compete by making their  
products different, not by  
making them cheaper.'**

(John Thackara, 1997)

### **Design?**

The word 'design' can refer to both the design process and the result of that process. In the Best Practices project, we view 'design' as a process and we interpret that process in the broadest sense. In practice, design is often seen as the process that includes making sketches to creating a model or prototype. However, we also think that the design process includes strategic decisions on how a particular product or service must be launched on the market while taking business objectives and consumer expectations into account. Design then becomes much more of an organisational process that involves not only the designers. The cases in this booklet include some good examples of this. The Pas Reform Marketing Manager remarked, for example, that: 'Design has become an integral part of our company. For us it's an asset and not the cherry on the cake.'

### **Design and business success**

In the UK, Denmark and Sweden, studies have been carried out into the relationship between investments in design and business success (in the sense of growth in turnover and profitability). It was found that companies that invest in design in general are (much) more successful. Here it should be noted, however, that it is not exactly clear whether these companies are doing well because they are investing in design, or whether they are investing in design because they are doing well. It would then be too easy to say: Invest in design and reap the benefits! The effective use of design is certainly not a simple matter and the relationship between design and business success is a complex one.<sup>5</sup>

**Each in his own way**

The cases in this booklet illustrate the different ways that companies use design. Each company has its own style and is successful with it. To describe that diversity, the Danish Design Centre introduced the ‘Design Ladder’, a model with four steps to describe the attitude of companies in their use of design (see Table 3).<sup>6</sup>

Table 3 The Design Ladder

<b>1. non-design</b> design plays a negligible role
<b>2. design as styling</b> the use of design is limited to the form or styling of a product
<b>3. design as a process</b> design is used to efficiently launch products and services on the market
<b>4. design as a continuous (innovative) process</b> design drives all business activities

<sup>5</sup> For more information about investing in design, see: Bruce Tether, The role of design in business performance. Report for Department for business, enterprise and regulatory reform, United Kingdom, no date. Can be downloaded from: [berr.gov.uk/files/file14796.pdf](http://berr.gov.uk/files/file14796.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> The Design Ladder was introduced in: The Economic Effects of Design, National Agency for Enterprise and Housing, Denmark, 2003 (research conducted by the Danish Design Centre).

The higher up on the ladder, the more strategically design is used that is: the more it is integrated into the business strategy, the more it is used in a target-oriented way.

**Design Management Staircase**

While elaborating on the Danish Design Ladder, two experts in the area of design management came up with the ‘Design Management Staircase.’<sup>7</sup> This looks at the way companies manage the design process and distinguishes five aspects for each step that illustrate the degree of professionalism with which design is used:

- 1. Awareness** to what extent are the companies aware of the advantages and added value of design?
- 2. People** to what extent are companies using the right people? (professional designers, multifunctional project teams, involvement of the Board)
- 3. Timing** at which stage of product development is design used?
- 4. Process** how professionally does the company organise the design process?
- 5. Expertise** how good/effective is the company in managing the process?

<sup>7</sup> For more information about the Design Management Staircase, see: Wolf and Kootstra, DME survey, 2007.

Table 4 **Design Management Staircase**

	awareness	people	timing	process	expertise
1. no design					
2. styling					
3. process					
4. strategy					

We can use these five aspects to examine the eight Best Practices cases.

### Awareness

Companies on the first and second steps of the Design Management Staircase are scarcely aware of the advantages of design. Indeed, they are hardly busy with design at all. On the fourth step, design is considered to be indispensable and everyone in the company is convinced of its effectiveness.

- The marketing manager of Pas Reform said the following in this respect: ‘Before 2000, our engineers always viewed design as a cost item,’ says Arts. ‘Now it has become matter-of-course to include design in our discussions at engineering level and it is often an engineer that asks me: “Might this be the right time to call in (design bureau) VanBerloStudio’s?”
- The Managing Director of Hortilux Schröder: ‘As a company, we try to focus on all levels on how we come across to the outside world. I like to think that our growing lamps are the hardware... But the software has to be right too: our people, their expert knowledge, their commitment to the customers. The important thing for us is the total concept.’

## People

The higher companies climb up the Design Management Staircase, the greater the involvement of senior management in the design process and the more often the companies call in professional designers.

In all the Best Practices cases in which senior management or the Board was involved in the design process, all the companies called in (external) designers. The companies all unanimously commend the 'fresh look' and professionalism provided by the external designers. As a rule, the cooperative relationship is not always perfect straight away, and almost all cases involve a learning process. But everyone knows that this kind of thing can happen.

■ 'You have to learn to be partners,' said Neopost's Mechanical Engineering Manager. 'You ask a question and you receive an answer. But we don't really have much experience yet in asking the right questions.'

■ The designer speaking about the design process at BMA Ergonomics: 'BMA really takes its time, sometimes years. ... That means we have to have a flexible attitude as designers. Which is not always easy.'

## Timing

On step 1 of the Design Management Staircase, the design process is not planned, while on step 4 timing is no longer an issue – that is, design has already become an 'ongoing activity'. Most companies in the Best Practices project are on step 3: design is used as early as possible in the development process.

■ The founders of Grapedistrict decided to invest in design so that they could create a professional brand from the start: 'VBAT was involved from the very start in working out the concept and refining it ... When developing the logo, professional designers like VBAT really added something extra.'

■ At Hero Nederland, the decision on how to launch the new fruit drink on the market was taken in close cooperation with the designers. The designer: 'We soon hit on the idea to make "two pieces of fruit" central to the concept.'



## Process

A company that conducts design management and aims for continuous improvement is on step 4. Ad hoc activities belong on the bottom steps. None of the companies that were interviewed employ a design manager. Management of the design process is generally the task of the Managing Director or somebody from senior management.

- At AGU, for example, decisions about the design are made by a team of around eight people, including the Managing Director, the Senior Product Manager, the Product Group Manager and the Field Organisation Manager. But the commitment of Managing Director van den Kommer is very evident. He does the sourcing himself: 'In Vietnam, a seamstress works 30 percent slower than in China', he says, 'but you do get the best stitching done there.'

## Expertise

If you can't measure it, you can't manage it. This is a time-honoured management adage. On step 1 there is no expertise in the area of design management. A company on step 4 knows what it wants to achieve with its investments in design, and it also measures whether it has achieved those goals – for example, by conducting market research.

None of the Best Practices companies measures the design effectiveness. There is also a certain amount of scepticism about it. Some managers (and indeed some designers) do not believe that the effect of design can be measured.

- Grapedistrict: 'I would even go so far as to say that it can't be measured.'
- Hortilux Schröder: 'We never expressed that in figures. But we do have a good feeling about it.'
- Neopost: 'As long as our competitors' machines also look good, I don't think the design is a decisive factor. But I'm not sure about that, we've never really looked into it.'

By studying design effectiveness, a company tries to find out the extent to which the design object (the product, the brand, the corporate identity) has a positive effect on the knowledge, attitude and behaviour of customers and users. BNO has developed an instrument to measure design effectiveness: BNO Design-effect (see: [www.bno.nl/designeffect](http://www.bno.nl/designeffect)).<sup>8</sup>

Not measuring design effectiveness has negative consequences for the designers in question. This is because none of the companies truly knows what their investment in the designers has actually given them. The result: all the people interviewed complain about the 'high' bills they received from the design bureaus.

### **Space for development**

The Best Practices cases are on step 3 or on the way to step 4 on the Design Management Staircase. That means that the companies in question are committed to design. They manage the design process very professionally, but even so, there is still space for them to further develop in the area of design management. The companies could benefit, for example, by measuring the effectiveness of their design so that their investments in design are no longer just a 'feeling' that they have. The Design Business Association in the UK came up with a very nice one-liner in that respect: 'Money spent on design is the largest single sum the board knows the least about.'

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<sup>8</sup> Literature on measuring design effectiveness: Gert Kootstra, Design management. Effectively using design to create success in business, Prentice Hall, Pearson Education Benelux, 2006.

# To conclude

The eight interviews printed in this booklet can never, of course, entirely represent design clients in the Netherlands. However, they have given BNO a number of very interesting insights.

## **Design effectiveness**

Companies with no understanding of the effectiveness of their design or their 'return on design investment,' are quick to consider designers very expensive. It is understandable (but a pity) that they complain about high bills. After all, they do not know what their design investments have actually done for them.

## **Designers wasting a good opportunity**

Design bureaus can gather information about the latest knowledge in the area of design effectiveness and how to measure it. Proactive bureaus can even include it in their service packages: 'We guarantee effectiveness!' Together with their clients, they can develop a design policy and make sure that the design effects are measured.

### **Long-standing relationships are rewarding**

It makes more sense to invest time in building up a long-term professional relationship with a design bureau than organising a competition for every design contract. The people we interviewed have generally invested a lot of time in the designers they work with in order to get to know them better and build up a relationship with them. They have often worked for years with the same designers.

### **Looking for the customer**

‘Almost all companies today compete to some degree on the basis of continuous innovation. And many turn to customers for information to guide that innovation.’ (J.F. Rayport and D. Leonard-Barton, 2007)

The companies we interviewed listen to their customers for inspiration about new (product) ideas or tips for improving their existing products. But it is becoming more and more difficult to ‘find’ that customer.’ They visit trade fairs, invest a lot of time in dealers, work one-on-one with consumers, try to use the Internet, and so on. But it can be difficult. The Managing Director of AGU sighed: ‘In the old days, it was an honour to be asked to sit on a panel like this, but unfortunately that’s no longer the case. Now we have to tempt them with a day out at a health resort.’

### **How do clients find designers?**

‘Research among European and North American clients shows that, when commissioning a designer, they rely overwhelmingly on past experience or on direct word-of-mouth recommendation.’ (John Thackara, 1997)

Thackara’s finding still applies. The Best Practices cases also show that when the people we interviewed are choosing a designer they mainly rely on recommendations from other people in their network. The most important lesson for designers is therefore: build a network and make sure that people have positive things to say about you.

### **BNO is not generally known**

To conclude, a point for improvement for BNO itself. Almost none of the companies we interviewed knew about the Association of Dutch Designers. Which is a pity, because BNO can help businesses (for example) in their search for a suitable design bureau. For more information about what BNO can do for clients, visit our website: [bno.nl](http://bno.nl).

# Appendix

## Recommended literature

Gert Kootstra, **Designmanagement**. Design effectief benutten om ondernemingssucces te creëren, Census Designmanagement, 2006.

Wolf en Kootstra, **DME Survey**, 2007 (publication being prepared).

Jeffrey F. Rayport en Dorothy Leonard-Barton, '**Spark Innovation Through Empathic Design**', Harvard Business Review, 22 September 2007 (digital publication).

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**The Economic Effects of Design**, National Agency for Enterprise and Housing, Denemarken, 2003 (research conducted by the Danish Design Centre).

## **BNO Best Practices**

### **Designers' clients have their say**

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#### **Concept and design**

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Irene van Nes en Ron Faas / [www.dietwee.nl](http://www.dietwee.nl)

#### **Photography**

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#### **Interviews**

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