

How Design Thinking Can Help Drive B2B Innovation

By Dan Attivissimo

In today's business environment, there is mounting pressure for B2B marketers to do more with less. The pace of business is fast, teams are lean, competition is fierce, and the need to remain innovative is higher than ever. Yet, what many should remember is that innovation doesn't necessarily mean creating "the next best thing". Innovation is a continual process of improvement and seeking to better understand new and different ways of satisfying the needs of customers. There is a lot that B2B marketers can borrow from consumer-oriented businesses to rev up their innovation efforts. One effective way is leveraging the principles of design thinking and applying it to product development / innovation initiatives.

Below, we will look at each of the 5 steps in the design thinking process and how B2B organizations could apply them to their businesses – specifically for product development so that as new products are developed, they are desirable (customers want it), feasible (the company can do it), and viable (the business can scale it).

The AMA defines the 5 steps in design thinking as:



Gain a deep understanding of your customers / end-users' behaviors and needs



Clearly frame the problem to solve



Cross-functional brainstorming



Rapidly bringing ideas to life



Experimenting and capturing quick feedback from customers / end-users



Hover over the icons to reveal further information about each step

Reference: www.ama.org/marketing-news/the-5-phases-of-design-thinking/

While there are 5 clear steps in the design thinking process, it is not always linear. In fact, the design and innovation process is meant to be agile and iterative, meaning teams might go back and forth between stages before moving forward (e.g., test, learn, ideate, prototype, test again) as new information may challenge ingoing hypotheses or lead to new ideas. The benefit of following this process is quite rewarding as innovation efforts are closely linked to customer needs and the design of products is strongly informed by customer feedback so products provide added-value, are differentiated, and commercially viable to produce.

B2B International along with its sister agencies across Merkle B2B are uniquely equipped to help clients unlock new innovation opportunities that contribute to an overall more valuable customer and brand experience.

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