ITERATIONS

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90 years of Philips Design:
from designing artistic advertisement to designing for ecosystems with data - Interview Paul Gardien, Vice President Philips Design

Philips is a leading health technology company focused on improving people's health by serving both professional and consumer markets. With a multinational workforce of approximately 69,000 employees, they touch billions of lives every year with innovative technology solutions and services. The creative power, represented by Philips Design, is key to ensuring that innovations are intuitive, powerful, differentiating and truly relevant and meaningful for people.

Being around for more than 90 years, Philips Design has grown into an internationally renowned design studio of substantial proportion. The studio has dealt with multiple transitions over the years. They faced a move from a lighting company into a health tech company and moved along from branding to product design to experience design. Now a new challenge is faced, one of designing for ecosystems. We interviewed Paul Gardien, the current VP of Philips Design and long-time Philips employee, to get his perspective on how the design practice has developed and how Philips Design will change with the new ecosystem challenges at hand.

Q. Please take us on a short trip down memory lane. How did Philips Design start and develop over time?
If you see what we have developed into, a global design studio with more than 500 employees, it is always nice to mention that Philips Design once started as a small 'artistic propaganda' team, 92 years ago. Initially, their role was to support marketing and marketing related materials. However, this team quickly expanded, involving multiple disciplines. For a long time, product design was, of course, the most important discipline. In the 80's and 90's we introduced more user experience research-related disciplines, such as sociologists, anthropologists and ethnographers, to dive deeper into human behaviour. When computers became more important, user interface designers found

their way in. Around the turn of the century, branding was an important next move in our competence. Today, Philips Design is responsible for designing the experiences of all the touchpoints people have with Philips products and services. This entails a very broad variety of instantiations and therefore, a broad variety of skills and disciplines ranging from design innovation to product design, user interface, packaging design and communication design. Since, as a company, we are now transitioning from a dominantly hardware oriented focus to a more digitally driven company, this also requires more digitally savvy designers.

Q. How has this transition to a more digital company influenced the design department?
Our primary focus was, and is, on designing the overall experience of all Philips products and services. This ranges from in-store presence and branding to early stage product design and front-end design innovation. On the one hand, digital has influenced the way we connect with people. If we think of the more consumer-type of product categories, such as male grooming (e.g. shavers) or kitchen appliances (e.g. air fryers), we think about how people encounter our products and how they learn about the functionality of the products. A lot of these purchase decisions have moved online, so the online media have become increasingly important to design for. On the other hand, products in the consumer as well as the healthcare domain become connected and merge with other digital

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services around them. They become part of larger ecosystems which requires a different approach to design for. These ecosystems are even more apparent when connecting customer health solutions to hospital and healthcare professionals. For instance, in the Banner Health pilot, we created a hospital-to-home ecosystem of measuring vital signs and connecting patients and professionals through their data. Thereby we reduced the hospital admissions by nearly 50 percent. In this digital and connected world, the way these products and services act upon the data that drives them is rapidly becoming what we actually design for.

Q. So, one of the major challenges of these days is designing for ecosystems? But what do these entail?
Yes. The ecosystem is comprised of multiple products, services and a variety of users and stakeholders which makes it too difficult to comprehend at one time. Therefore, we are looking at new ways to define products and services. Not only from a brand or brand experience starting point but also from an ecosystem point of view.

A lesson we have learned over the years is that focusing on individual instances of this ecosystem makes it difficult to bring them together, to bring a consistent experience. Besides, it is challenging to bring them to market because some parts of the ecosystem pay for other parts. An example of this is how Google's advertisements pay for the search engine. We have done extensive research in how to define ecosystems and learned that we best define these around human activities, such as a mother-and-child care ecosystem.

Q. You argue that these ecosystems are difficult to comprehend at one time. How does this influence the way you approach these design challenges?
*The model that we use in developing ecosystems is one with three activities: 'position, create and enable'. In the first, we develop a clear position on what the company wants to deliver and why. Before we further detail this position, we quickly start to experiment within this hypothesis, by creating specific instantiations in that ecosystem. To enable these explorations and bring them to the market, solid enablers are required. For example, we have set up a 'digital accelerator' program. This is an environment where we can develop digital propositions so that you don't need to start from scratch every time. It builds*
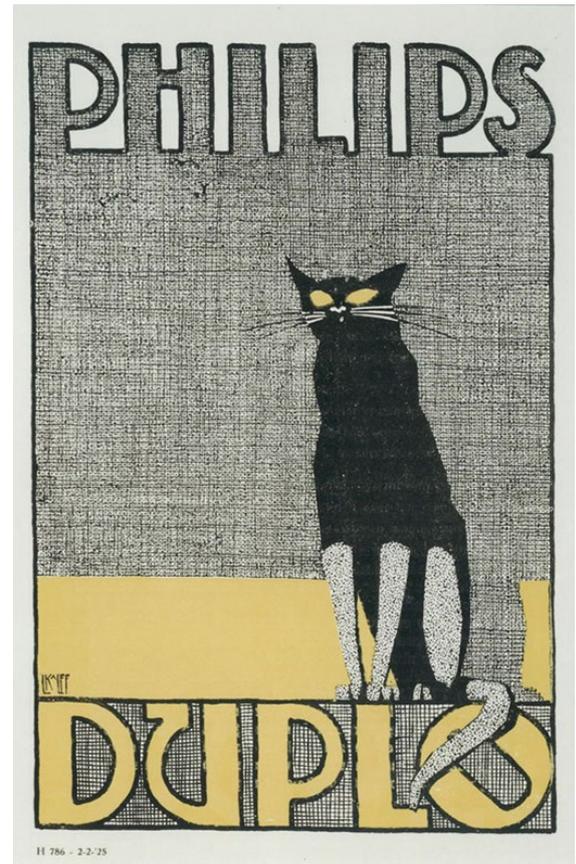
First poster designed by Louis Kalff with the first social wordmark that became the model for the standardized and protected Philips wordmark, as it still appears today (1925)

The iconic Philishave as a pioneer for electric shaving (1939)
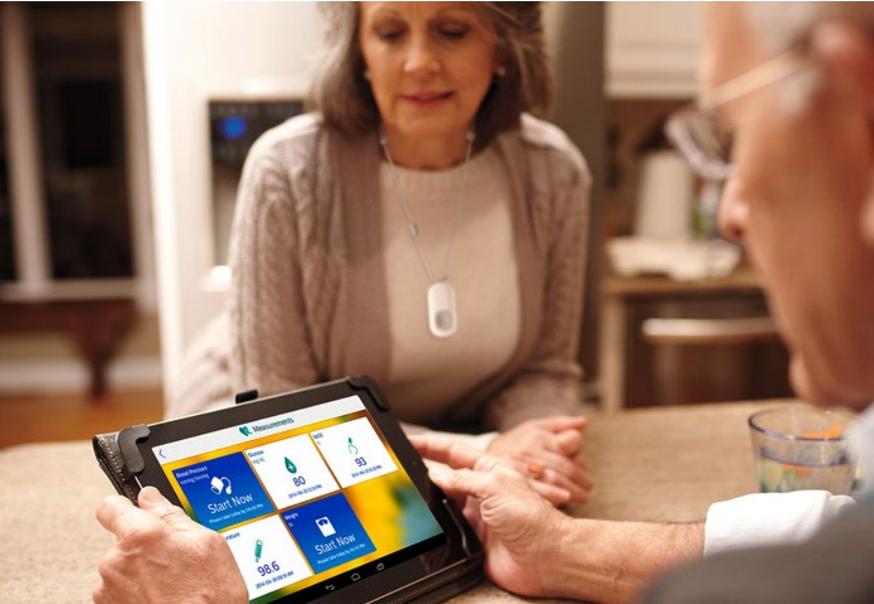
Participants in the Banner Health Pilot using their connected devices to stay in touch with their professional

Children are guided to brush better while having fun with the Sonicare for Kids

on people, people that know and understand each other. It also builds on prototyping tools and other elements that play a crucial role, such as common privacy regulations. Lately, one element that has clearly changed is that we moved our experiments from 'experience labs' [in- house lab settings simulating real life environments] to real world environments. This way we can understand the implications of our designs within these complex ecosystems. Since using old methodologies will result in old products and services, I would like to stress that we are continuously searching for and developing new methodologies, tools and competencies to be able to adapt to these new challenges.

Q. How has the direction of Philips, moving into health topics, influenced this?
With Philips in the health care domain, our design topics become more and more related to systemic and lifestyle changes. In the ecosystems, this means that there are a lot more interactions with the end-users we can design for. Before this digital age, we sold a television to an end-user, and the next time we engaged again with that end-user was when it broke down after ten years. Now, when you coach somebody on tooth brushing for example, like we do in the Sonicare or Kids, your design has more frequent and daily interaction with that user. As the intelligence of these systems heavily relies on the data they collect, design has become more about designing the rules by which the product manifests itself. In defining these rules, I think design can bring a human element to the table. And that human element is needed for a product since people are not mechanical instruments who follow simple mechanical rules.

Q. So, in a few years from now, would you say that data science has become the new design competence?
Well, to be able to design for ecosystems the design competences need to change indeed. Our 'position, create and enable' model strongly builds on the integration of the three to empower innovation. For this we need designers that are creative and strategic, have hardware and software prototyping skills to explore new ideas and designers that have the skills to unravel what data is relevant and how it can become meaningful for people. We see different disciplines that make use of data and big data. In Philips Design we are interested in people's experiences around this data and how we can design solutions that

Position
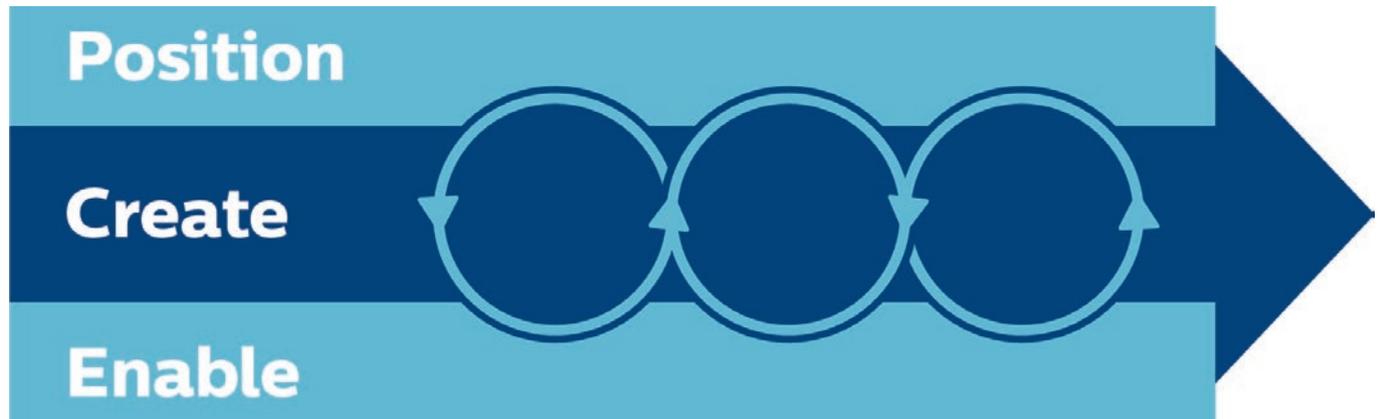
Create

Enable

Model of Position, Create and Enable in which new propositions are developed

are meaningful for them personally, in their context. Therefore, we balance big data with small and detailed datasets which are highly personal and context-dependent.

To emphasise this, we have recently set up a data-enabled design group, which sets out to use data as a creative material from early in the design process. Via data collectors, which are sensor boards that we put in real life situations, we collect detailed data sets that we link with highly qualitative insights we get back from people. Thereby we start to understand the meaning of patterns and unravel a more personal perspective on this data, that we consecutively use to create concepts and further detail our positioning. By using this design approach in their real-life setting, we can understand what our designs in the wider ecosystems mean for people.

Fields such as artificial intelligence hold a great promise in detecting patterns in big data, and more and more Philips' medical applications are building on this. However, it only manifests itself in interactions with people. Our role at Philips Design is to explore and design new experiences that are meaningful for people. As data is becoming more important in these ecosystems, we need to find ways to utilise and embrace it in our design approach because old methodologies result in old products.

The relevance of data from a smart bottle sleeve is explored in real-life contexts