

Redesigning the world one business at a time, to surprise and delight customers

 By [Leigh Andrews](#)

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Big brands shared the role of design in their business at Business of Design, with Adrian Morris, partner and MD at Design Partnership speaking of the current physical reboot trend responding to a changing landscape, while Brian Mtongana, head of design at Woolworths, honed in on the role of packaging in sales.

Morris kicked off by saying there's **no such thing as a bad brief**, but we do need a more inclusive and better design process. In addition, with everything moving and changing at such a rapid rate, there's a prerequisite to stay relevant.

Think of when the car was becoming more prevalent – the question was whether citizens would need walkways. And so, Morris says, architects developed schemes around cars, with a vision of building 'machines for living' extrapolated onto cities. None of these were realised, but the idea that the car shaped the city was taking root. Now, Morris says we're seeing a shift away from this. Leftover city spaces are being reinhabited, like the elevated High Line park, a disused railway track in New York.



Adrian Morris.

Morris reveals that what makes these projects work is the attention they pay to **tactile human experience**. If you're a legacy brand looking to leap onboard and enhance your customer experience, take heart from the fact that it's already been done by some of the country's biggest financial institutions.

How often do banks surprise and delight customers?

Morris says the first step was for Design Partnership itself to design a mantra in their business on 'design that works'. Their design work for Absa in the Mall of Africa is then an example of this:

Some of the **standout, fresh design features** here are 'plug and play', so the branch can effectively be redesigned in the space of an afternoon, and the waiting area doesn't have outdated magazines to browse through but instead has foosball tables. These are so popular that when a consultant is free, the clients are often still immersed in their game and surprised to be called back to reality – nice way for a bank to surprise and delight customers, says Morris.



ABSA, by Design Partnership

Dave Nemeth 7 Jun 2016



Morris also shared that in working on Standard Bank's airport lounges designed for private clients, they aimed to bring something pleasurable back to the journey as air travel is so exhausting for the average traveller today. You often have different pockets of time to spend, so three different experiences were created at three different sites in OR Tambo International airport, 15, 30 and 60 minutes from the gates. At the first, effectively a Wi-Fi hot desk, all travellers can charge devices, grab a newspaper and water as it's a transit area. The next two require proof of your bank card to gain access as CaféBlue is a deli area, boosting the pre-flight experience with complimentary deli style meals and drinks on the go, while the last is a premium library lounge with premium drinks and cuisine to choose from.

Morris concluded that 'old school is new school'. In an age of constant disruption, a **return to legacy values with refreshed design** may be best.

Why Woolworths' design work works

Brian Mtongana, head of design at Woolworths, rounded out the retail advertising run after the afternoon tea break, in a fascinating presentation on the commercial impact of design. Mtongana began on a personal note, showing that he loves and lives the brand so much that his presentation was designed in Woolies' instantly recognisable font. Little wonder as this creative decision-maker's first project out of varsity was designing First African in Space Mark Shuttleworth's spacesuit patch. That proved the kickstart for his innate curiosity and love of design to overlap his personal and private life, as his job now involves constantly being curious and trendspotting across the globe. Mtongana goes so far as to call himself a '**communication activist**' who loves typography and clever word play.



Brian Mtongana.

The 'Googletu' t-shirt he designed with Justin Nurse's Laugh it Off brand is an excellent example of this:

“



#Googlethu #iLEADetal #iLEADERS #etalMixer #BRANDetal #teambuilding

A post shared by iLead et al (@ilead.et.al) on May 26, 2017 at 6:54am PDT

”

On the role of design in business, Mtongana said at college, design was understood as an art or form of expression, but on entering the industry it was merely a form of communicating a business idea to consumers. Up to 80% of their design work is time spent on research and customer engagement, as well as their thought process and emotions to motivate customer behaviour change. Customers in turn often give detailed suggestions on how to improve various offerings.

So, Mtongana says, **as much as you want to express yourself as a corporate designer, it's about the brand**. Design is a process of synthesising insights while also boosting branding and marketing, reflecting who the customer aspires to be. “We don’t call ourselves Woolies, YOU call us Woolies”, he explained. Mtongana adds that some customers go as far as to purchase Woolies’ bags and take their trolleys into other stores so it looks like they’ve purchased a Woolworths trolley-full.

This is why in designing, you need to ‘be the consumer’ and know what they want to see on the packaging. As a result, Mtongana showed us how they live the brand internally through designs of some of their internal communications. It’s colourful, bright, bold and doesn’t feel like corporate black and white at all – I’ll be paying more attention to the packaging when I next push a trolley through the store.

How to use retail design to boost your bottom line

Mtongana says to think about how to improve your customer’s perception of your brand, which should represent your customer base and the message you are trying to get across to those customers. He listed the following from Puma and

FuseProject as really clever product design as it solves an existing problem and makes the world a better place - yes, really:

Mtongana also shared local case studies of distinct branding and visual branding. Bos Ice Tea stands out for Mtongana as one of the most iconic SA designs, and he pointed out that a Nando's ad is instantly recognisable based on the font and memory structure created.



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This is not limited to print though, Mtongana showed how that feeling of "Nando's" is even associated with seeing their ads on TV:

Speaking of how design plays a role in product sales at Woolworths, Mtongana said their packaging is updated every three to five years to keep things fresh and based on trends – and it works. As an example, he spoke of how their new juice box packaging was launched in Winter. Sales went up 40% with no change other than the clean new design. Even their **food**

photography is easily recognised as 'Woolworths', due to the aesthetic they have created over time.

The Woolworths at Waterstone Mall in Somerset West is their flagship store, with global recognition by the Association for Retail Environments for the grand prize for design in the 'supermarket/grocery' category, effectively making it the best designed retail store in the world.



Mtongana says this is no small fry, we're playing in the World Cup when it comes to retail design and SA has lots of potential – we are definitely punching above our weight.

That's just a taste of the current flavour of design-thinking. [Click here](#) for our Business of Design coverage, and be sure to follow [@busofdesign](#) for the latest updates.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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