



Design and Creativity

Philips: Creative Product Design

Voice-over

The creative approach of teams at Philips Design can be clearly seen in the evolution of new versions of existing products.

Tom Delaey

A couple of years ago I was invited by a colleague to start a new project designing web cams. Himself, he had designed this little web cam which was used in a very professional environment, it was used for video conferencing and of course it also, it had a little pillow to sit on which meant that you could put it on top of your monitor and you could point it to whatever direction you wanted to. It was a very clever idea to use a sphere as a starting point to allow all this flexibility in the movements.

Then they've added to this a document reader which allowed you to point the camera towards a document that was positioned underneath it.

They wanted to find something new, maybe tailored a little bit more towards the consumer market.

Voice-over

Projects start with a team briefing and visual brainstorming of ideas and concepts.

Tom

We had a workshop with four people and we go off location for three days. In the morning we have a briefing from the marketing manager and from a mechanical engineer. The afternoon we'll start sketching, we'll produce first ideation's quite freely, without underlays, without technical restrictions. After a heavy first day we'll have a relaxing evening, going to the movies or sauna or whatever, entertainment. We might use the entertainment later on, that's what we've done a few times, as an inspiration to the workshop. Then we'll work, the two days afterwards, we'll work with underlays, with the technical requirements, we'll try to fit a shape around it

So the idea was to then create an object that was friendly, easy to use, would express user friendliness and be like a little domestic pet sitting on top of your monitor like a little friend watching you.

Voice-over

Over the next week, Philips Design's model makers turned the dozen 2D ideas the team had sketched in the workshop into 3D foam models.

The team evaluated each of their designs to identify the one to take forward.

Tom

We had a little shape, pear like shape which we thought was maybe the most useful to hold and to be able to point towards things you want to show, that's why we liked this shape a lot.

But then another design, a designer had thought of using this little metal element and used that as a pivoting point so this resulted in, in fact in re-using that metal but externalising it and then eventually the real product was this one, allowing the lens to move within its housing, getting rid of an extra piece of rubber.

This one was named Little Pig for its features, it had little short feet. Of course when you have these movements it is extremely important to accentuate the movement in the design so we have a nice little detail around it which really shows and accentuates the joint, also the details around the lid and the microphone were carefully considered and since it is a little animal, we wanted to give it a tail as a strain relief at the back here.

Voice-over

Detailed drawings helped the team to find the optimum dimensions of the various components and develop the technical design.

For matters of styling, they drew inspiration from the things around them.

Tom's choice of colours was influenced by coloured plastic forks he uses to eat french fries.

Tom

These are the colours that were more the professional environment, the off black colours that you can see here.

Here more domestic, office environments. Again the French fry forks.

This resulted eventually in a little colour study.

Voice-over

But when the design was presented to the business group they rejected the bright colours preferring a neutral mushroom which fitted in with existing computers and accessories.

For business reasons, Philips decided not to enter the webcam market at that time.

Instead they sold the design to another company, who marketed it with considerable success.

Philips eventually decided that they would like to sell webcams in their own name.

This time, after the first night of their workshop, Tom and his team went to the movies.

Tom

We went to see Toy story and the result of this was that we decided to name all our little characters according to the movie, so we had a Mr Potato Head, we had Buzz Lightyear, all of these characters came in the concepts

Once again, the design sketches were turned into foam figures.

Voice-over

The team were very excited by the concept inspired by Mr Potato Head.

Tom

So we got a hard model made, business was still very excited and marketing decided to go on a tour in the States because our biggest customers, potential customers, would be in the States so they were visiting our national sales organisation in the States and they were shocked to see that we had designed such a playful toyful camera. They said they would never take it serious, it would not be perceived as a quality product but as a toy

Voice-over

But the ground work done by Tom and his team wasn't wasted.

They started with the original model, turned it on its side, and changed around some of the features.

What they ended up with was a camera shaped like a little duck.

This new webcam was essentially a direct descendent of the Little Pig.

It was Philips first success in the consumer webcam market.

As technology developed and parts became smaller Tom's design team started work on creating a new webcam that would be small enough to attach to a laptop computer.

Once again, the team's initial ideas were based around an animal theme, including a monkey with a tail and the idea which they chose to develop, a little bird.

Tom

What we wanted is for the business to explore the opportunities to use these bendable toy materials, there is usually a metal beam in there.

Unfortunately the business didn't have any contacts in Asia to find the right producer – we would have loved to have had a bendable material because the sizes of the laptops can be quite some difference in thickness so it would have meant that we could customise things very easily or make them customisable by bending the legs of that little bird.

They couldn't find something so we found a way to actually position counter weights, since the weight of the camera is on the other side it will always pull the back foot to the back of the monitor or the display.

Voice-over

The design team were asked to add a document scanner to the product.

This generated a completely new idea - using the mouse mat as the scanning bed as well as providing a counterbalance to the weight of the webcam.

Their brief was to make a product which packed up as small as possible. So the team gave it long telescopic legs.

They also gave the webcam its own egg shaped carrying case.

More creative thinking was needed to sort out the best solution for the telescopic legs.

Tom

We weren't sure whether we needed two antennas or only one. We were always working with two antennas at the side this way but it looked always quite messy because you had two objects that were just exactly behind each other and it created a quite cluttered image.

My wife, she is a dancer, taught me that when you dance you always have to show both legs to the audience. Also the furrow when you see these drawings, you can see the legs are one after the other, not one behind each other. So also here we then switched, we turned everything 90 degrees, giving us a perfect parallelogram allowing the lens in fact always to stay perpendicular or parallel to the working surface, so it gave us an extra advantage to actually reconsider the orientation of the two antenna.

Voice-over

The result is another successful Philips product.

Webcams continue to evolve, and to keep creative ideas flowing a new design team will take up the challenge of extending the family line.

Tom

We have got a nice little family that the business very consciously wanted us to continue. After the little pig we had a little duck, after the little duck we had a little bird but now it was time and for me to end this involvement because it wasn't maybe, it was lacking maybe a little bit of freshness or maybe giving an opportunity to someone else to explore new directions.