

YEAR 12

Product Design Summer Project

Coursework Context:

Design thinking is concerned with **solving problems** through **design**. The idea **being** that the future output of the process will provide a better answer than the one already available or if nothing is available – something entirely new.

For your first project in Year 12 we will be working with Block Design, a company which makes innovative, beautiful products for creative living.

They want you to design a product as part of a solution to a problem, which can be sold by their company. This means your product must sit inline with their previous items.

Task 1:

Research Block Design so as you are able to identify the types of products that they make and who their customer base is. A brand manual is attached to help you with this.

You should consider who would shop at Block Design, what price point their products are and what their overall style is.

Present your research on a Power point slide. Make sure to outline your thoughts and ideas throughout.

An example slide is provided below to support this:

Block company - mood board

It seems that Block are trying to appeal to young professionals (20-30 age range). This age range is very aware of their aesthetic and are possibly more aware of the image they are putting out of themselves to the world than ever before. This is due to the heightened role that social media takes in our lives, where we see extensively into people's personal lives. On their website, it shows that Block is buying into this social media age, as they urge customers to tag them in posts. This shows that they are aware of the fact that if you are visible on social media, you are going to get a lot more enterprise.

Customer profile:

- Age range will probably be around 20-35
- A lot of people who buy Block's products will be working executive office jobs or work from home.
- They will be very social and be aware of the image they are putting out to the world of themselves
- Trends will influence this demographic a lot, as they will want to keep relevant.
- People who live in bigger, more metropolitan cities (London, Paris etc) will probably be more drawn to this, as they will be more aware of popular culture than people who live in more rural areas.
- In the Block company profile, it states under that the latest Spotify listens people like Bonobo, who is quite an alternative artist. This will be more 'cool' to their social circle than more mainstream, pop artists.
- This age group living this sort of lifestyle will be unlikely to have children, so will have disposable income to spend on these kind of products.

According to Block's website, "colour is integral" to their collection. This will appeal to their target market, as it sets out a particular desirable image to the people they socialise with. Looking at their products, it seems that they are sleek, simple and serve an obvious purpose. Many young adults are going to be living in flats or apartments and have limited space. Block's products serves this purpose as they make their products as simple as possible. The target market is also going to be more likely than older people to work from home, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. This means that they need stationery and desk tidies to help separate their work and home lives, which are happening in the same space. Something else I have noticed about their products is that they are quite minimalist, which will also help with reducing clutter in a home office set-up. In fact, Block's slogan is "A tidy desk, a tidy mind", so this shows that they are in tune to what their customer will need.

They make their products in their own workshop, which will reduce the carbon footprint of the piece and will make it feel more personal. Many young adults really care about the environment and want to do their part in reversing climate change. This demographic are likely to have attended at least one protest or march in response to a social issue.

Block only works with independent retailers, such as Papier Tigre. This is a paper shop in Paris. Mini city breaks are popular with the millennial demographic, so they are likely to come across this shop. This age group is also more likely to shop in independent retailers, as they want a more personal feel to their purchases.

After taking a glance at their website, it is clear that Block products are well made, so will be worth the money, as most of their products are rated 5 stars. The reviews here are from the Letter Rack (£12), and they all say how thrilled they were with the product.

They also stock at museums and galleries, such as the Tate Modern. This young generation that Block are appealing to commonly attend exhibitions, so this is a good place to sell their products.

In regards to the price range, it looks initially like Block's products are quite expensive. However, the popular millennial slogan "buy less, choose well, make it last", most commonly applied to clothing, is also being integrated into the shopping habits of young adults when they are buying any form of item. Vivienne Westwood first popularised this when she began to slowly transform her company to become more sustainable. This means that they are more likely to pay slightly more than average for an item if they know it is going to last a long time and is going to be a worthy investment. The Block product pictured above is an example of making something last. It is a vase that can be used either way, therefore elongating the lifespan and reducing waste. This item will cost you £38, which I think is not too bad for two glass vases in one.

Task 2:

Explore potential problems. As Design and Technology sits within a context we must consider problems and solutions to said problems in order to create something which is new.

You may also want to consider growing trends for products in the market to help you to identify a product which will be needed in the future. What kinds of products are their customer base looking for? What is their customer doing in which you may discover a need for a certain product?

A good example of this would be Block Designs vase which has been designed to hold both a single stem flower as well as a bunch so as that the vase can continue to be used as flowers die or wilt simply swapping the vase around.

Remember that simple solutions are usually the best ones in this case.

You may want to present this on another slide in the form of a mind map.

Brief and initial ideas

When Tara Ashe, creator and lead designer of Block came in to talk to us about the brief she wanted us to work on, we were expecting something quite rigid and that it would be clear to understand what she would like from us. Instead, she gave us an open brief, saying we should design something that we thought would work with her brand. She answered our questions and gave us some good advice as to what she thinks would sell well. She also mentioned that she would love to see a fabric product in the Block range. Since textiles is my speciality

Trends:

To help me get some ideas about what to use to influence my design, I thought I would look at some current trends and see if the ideas come from there.

- COVID-19 safe - something that solves an issue that has arisen out of the coronavirus pandemic
- Small businesses - more and more people are making a conscious effort to shop local and support local businesses, which suits Block well.
- Environmentally friendly - the generation that Block are appealing to are some of the most environmentally conscious people in history, and that affects all areas of their shopping areas. It is essential that my final product caters to these considerations.
- Plants - during lockdown, gardening and plants became exponentially popular, especially in young adults. Because of this, people need things like watering cans and plant pots a lot more.
- Minimalism - a core part of Block's philosophy is making things as minimal as possible. Tara told us that they try and keep each product to two components to maintain the low-tech aesthetic. She also said that they mostly stay away from pattern as much as possible.

Environment:

Being environmentally sustainable is one of the most pressing concerns in design today, and if you are a consumer who cares about plants and your impact on the world, that is going to influence all of your purchases. I think I am going to focus on making some sort of plant pot, but made out of fabric. To help me decide how I can make my product suit the user as best as possible, I thought I would look at some sustainable plant pots, and see how I could make mine different and better.

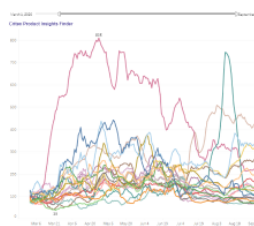


These pots are biodegradable because they are made out of plant fibres. This means that they can be planted straight into soil, if you have an actual garden to work with. It also ensures that, even at the end of their lives as plant pots, they are not going to make a permanent impact on the environment. However, many young adults live in apartments that don't have gardens, that may only have a small window box at best. Because of them being made out of plant fibres, they may disperse over the consumer's belongings and furniture, which will not be good. They also do not look very sturdy, as they are made for planting in soil. As a result of this, it may mean that the plants topple over. For a pack of 48, it costs £6.99, which I think is quite inexpensive. The price I would suggest will probably be more than this, as it will be a more lasting product and will be made of better materials. After looking at this, I have realised that it may be a good idea to make my product out of a material, as it will be biodegradable, but will not disperse in the same way. It may also be an idea to make them bigger, so that they can be used for a greater range of plants.



This is another environmentally friendly alternative to ordinary plastic pots. These mini pots are made for succulents and starter plants. They come already drilled with a drainage hole and, as they absorb water over time, an unique pattern will appear in the terracotta because of the material having a high salt content. These are quite commonly used in gardens to house bigger and/or more spread out plants. However again, I don't know how well this type would fit inside someone's home. Terracotta pots are heavy and bulky, and would be hard to move to different places and different houses. Also, if they break, which is easily done, you would have a lot of sharp terracotta and masses of soil everywhere. Going more out of the box, these pots can kind of only be used as a plant pot, whereas the fabric planter that I am thinking of making could be used for pens, makeup etc.

A trend that I would like to particularly focus on is plants, as they are especially popular with the demographic that Block caters to (20-35 year olds). It may look like this is a recent surge of popularity, due to people having more time during the pandemic to tend to them, but plants have been a steadfast millennial craze for a few years. The Head of the International Aroid association (aroids mostly consist of foliage and are some of the most popular houseplants) estimated that attendance at their weekly sales fairs had climbed from 500 hundred to around 3 thousand. These types of plants are popular because you receive instant pay-off (no waiting for them to bloom) and they are not high maintenance. An American study found that, out of the \$52.3 billion spent on lawn and garden products in the US annually, a quarter was spent by 18-34 year olds. This trend has been mirrored somewhat in the UK, and has been accentuated by the period of quarantine. In the graph below, it shows how home and garden sales have changed during lockdown. The pink line that is a long way above everything else represents pots and planters. This shows that the market is there for a product for plants. One of the main reasons why this generation are becoming amateur botanists is because they want to participate in the wellness effects of them. Having your apartment covered with lush vegetation with definitely make you feel like you are sat in a nicer place than a rented third floor flat. There is also the community aspect. Because the rise of plant popularity originated on Instagram, there is a whole world of people to connect with over this shared love. After lockdown, this is even more important, as many young professionals will have been working from home, on their own or with only a few housemates.



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We will continue with this work once you return in September. We will have a meeting with Tara, the owner of Block Design, who will give you a bigger insight into her company and discuss your ideas with you before we begin the design stage.

Any questions regarding this work please do contact Miss Westaway at g.westaway@tsatrust.org.uk.