

Serves them right

**Service design is design, but not as you know it.
Oliver King explains**

To start with, let's get two definitions out of the way: 'design is the process of making something better for someone' (I think that means anything for anyone), and 'service is the act of helping someone to do something' (and again that's anyone and anything). Surely then a definition of service design is: 'the process of making the act of helping someone do something better for someone!?' Perhaps not, but at least it highlights two core concepts - service design is about orchestrating a performance, the act of helping someone, and there are two groups of people who should benefit - those being helped and those doing the helping.

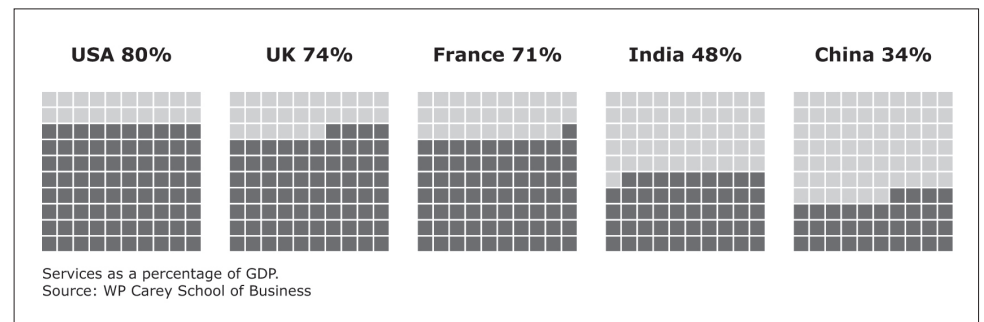
So, there we have it - service design is a weird kind of design discipline that specialises in figuring out where, when and how organisations can help people do stuff. But let's step back a little. Is service design anything new? And if not, why are we hearing so much about it today?

The answer to the first question is no. Services have been 'designed' by all sorts of people - from entrepreneurs to philanthropists - for ages. And indeed they still are, which raises the interesting question of whether you have to be a designer to design a service. The answer to the second question is a little more complicated.

Service design, like all other types of design has materialised to meet the needs of an emerging modern world. But far from the utopia we were taught to expect at school,

our world is overshadowed by complexity, frustration and apprehension. Set aside the demographic time bomb, climate change and world security, on a day-to-day basis things aren't as easy as they used to be. These days the question on everyone's lips is this: 'how can you help?' The answer that service design provides is 'like this...'

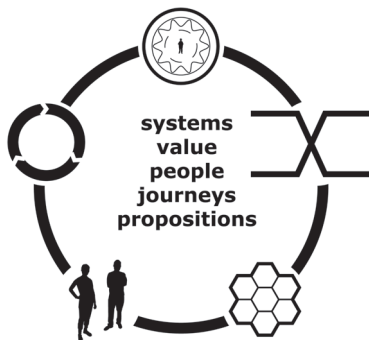
But there are more fundamental reasons for the rise of services, for example population growth, technology, democratic expectation and entrepreneurship. Simply put, with so many demanding people trying to do so much through so many channels it's no wonder the proliferation of choice they encounter seems so overwhelming.



Of course I paint a dark picture. We should be embracing and shaping the rise of the service economy where in the UK alone services represent 74 per cent of GDP and upwards of 80 per cent of all employment. We're told the service economy is driven by several factors, principally wealth in the developed world, where people are more inclined to pay others to do stuff for them, and product servitisation where manufacturers wrap services (maintenance deals, subscription offers, etc) around the things they make as a way of generating more revenue, preventing churn and defeating competitors (think Apple, iPod and iTunes).

So, that explains why having access to good service is important from the human perspective but what about the commercial argument? Well, how's this? Happy customers spend more money more often reducing your cost-of-sales and increasing revenue and brand preference ratings. And if you can find ways to provide your service more efficiently, you can reduce your costs-to-serve too. In a public service the same rules apply. Whilst it's not about making money a public service has to be efficient and effective. Its customers - or in other words its patients, students, passengers, residents, etc - have to find the service useful, usable and desirable against the alternatives.

That is the 'why' but what about the 'how'? Specifically, what are the key concepts and skills that people need to design services? Let's start with some of the basics. Services are systems of value creation, yet they don't exist until the moment a user and a provider of a service begin to interact with one another. In this way, the users of a service help to co-create it. Services are also produced through complex and dynamic systems of people, processes and resources, which all need to be considered during the design process. This means that to make something better the designer may have to go toe-to-toe with some dirty operational aspects of the service rather than its glamorous look and feel. Yes, that's right, designers squaring up to management consultants. Their suits may be sharp but we look better in black!



Because of these basics, at the heart of service design is a model called the 'Five Fundamentals' which outline the realms that need to be explored during the service design process. They include:

- Value

As both users and providers value successful services, key performance indicators for both parties must be identified and met. For the user of the service, service design seeks to make it more useful, usable and desirable. For the provider, it seeks to make its provision more efficient and its deployment more effective and sustainable. Dealing with the 'value' realm means that service designers have to be as adept at empathic research as business planning to unearth and qualify what the two parties value and why.

- Systems

Services are delivered through systems of people, things and processes and therefore service designers need to explore and understand how to orchestrate and innovate within this system. The 'systems' realm, as you'd expect, requires system thinking skills and an ability to discern and choreograph the relationships between contributing factors.

- People

People are an implicit part of a service experience - whether as a provider or receiver of the service. This being true, they also need to be an implicit part of the design of the service through participatory research and co-creation.

- Journeys

Services are experienced over time, so it is possible to innovate before and after the

formal experience begins. In this way, service design ensures that a consistent and progressive experience is provided and received. Designers then need to be comfortable identifying and branding both static and dynamic elements of a service. That's the difference between designing a physical service environment, like a hospital, and how the staff should behave within it.

- Propositions

The final fundamental is an appreciation of constructing propositions and an understanding on how to package the provision of services as a consumable and differentiated offer in a marketplace.

The service design process is much the same as a regular design process. It begins with research to understand the context that surrounds the project, the users needs and requirements and what 'materials' can be used to build the service. From there concepts are co-created with users and providers, synthesised down into propositions which are modelled, researched and iterated to formulate service blueprints and finally production specifications.

It's within this process that designers really demonstrate unique skills perfectly suited to dealing with service design. To start with they understand how to imbue specific qualities into things. An obvious point when you're talking about designing a physical thing, but when you're designing a service,

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An international mobile telecoms service provider came to Engine for assistance after purchasing another operator in a foreign country. Engine helped them to identify their current call centre service values and translate them into the new cultural environment. In order to bring these values to life and provide compelling training materials, a series of films and interactive storyboards were produced for call centre staff to learn from.

Engine worked with a leading bank to develop financial service propositions for an under-served market. These visualisations of the customer's journey through the proposition helped the internal service design team to understand how the customer would interact with key touch points, and explained the underlying mechanics of the proposition to other areas of the business that needed to help take the idea forward.



Ideaplay is an innovation toolkit for young entrepreneurs developed by Engine in partnership with the Design Council. It uses a simple story telling technique to help teams of people to develop design solutions to everyday problems, and then prototype and pitch them back to the group.

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