

Print Coverage Report

on

**Mr. Nick Talbot interview coverage in
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'Design-led thinking is the key for Indian product solutions'

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India has a vibrant product startup community that is conceptualizing, designing and developing products for not just the domestic market but for global markets as well. However, competing with the best in the world, whether it is from London, Korea or California is not easy. In a conversation with Deccan Chronicle, Nick Talbot, Global Head of Design and Innovation, Tata Elxsi, shares his expertise on 'Design-led Thinking' and how startups should approach innovative design processes to provide their customers with a delightful user experience. Here are some excerpts from the interaction.

What are the steps that Indian startups should take to make an impact in global markets?

Unless Indian entrepreneurs are prepared to benchmark their products against the best there is around the globe, there is a strong chance they are not going to end up scaling to become the next billion dollar company. Benchmarking is the key, not just from a design point of view but, from a functionality point of view too. So, it is important for entrepreneurs to have a global mindset.

Second, they must have the courage to say, let's look at the best of the best whether it is from Korea or California or elsewhere in the world and have the confidence and the ambition to know that they can compete and be better than them and not just be nearly like them or come up with me-too products.

The next step is to completely and objectively understand the customer. I have seen a person who comes up with an idea, thinks his idea is great, his Mom and family and a few of their friends think it's a great idea and that's enough reason for them to steam ahead with the idea and create a product without actually checking if anybody would want to buy it. They don't stop to think whether they can modify it, optimize it, polish it, so that when its finally shown to the world, it is mind blowing and irresistible. Setting the bar high enough in terms of ambition is the only way for them to beat competition. From an interface, experience and service point of view, global competition is unimaginable.

Unless Indian entrepreneurs wake up to face it and find ways of bettering it, building a billion dollar company will remain a distant dream.

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At what stage should a start-up engage with the design-led thinking process?

Design is a vital part of the global competition that Indian startups have to face. Most entrepreneurs think they can't afford design and that they can come back to the design element further down the line, when they've got some traction for their product. But, if you ask these entrepreneurs to name their top 5 heroes, Steve Jobs will definitely be one of them. On the one hand, they say Steve Jobs and the Apple story is amazing, on the other hand, they are not prepared to take design seriously. The whole user experience and interface needs to be irresistible whether it is a soft product, an online product or a hard product. Therefore, design has to come first, at the concept stage itself.

LG Electronics has 500 designers in just one location in Seoul apart from design teams in other parts of the world. Every single aspect of every product they put out has been considered, prototyped, tested and checked from a design point of view until it is perfect and refined to the point of being delightful. We are a design and innovations services company so we encourage our clients to test their products at the earliest keeping the design aspect in mind, within the first 4-6 weeks when they have something that can be tested. To start with, they should test the look and feel, the user interface with real people and elicit their views. This process of testing must happen phase by phase, until the whole product finally evolves. Design is a living

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thing, you don't design a product and throw it in the market. The cruelest thing of all is when people invest a lot of their time, sweat and money in building something that has a fundamental flaw, and when you realize too late, you don't have the time and the money to fix the flaw. Investing a little bit as you go along in design, prototyping and in testing (not engineering testing) with real people takes some courage for startups and entrepreneurs. While entrepreneurs may not be able to bear their products being rejected, unless they listen to what people feel about their products they can't make their products better.

How do Indian customers respond to design services vs customers in mature markets?

I have noticed an India-centric phenomenon unlike other design markets I have worked in. Companies here actually pay us money and then choose to ignore our advice. Design is a soft subject and everybody has an opinion about it – even a CEO and a CFO who don't have an opinion on hard-core engineering, will have an opinion on design - on the form, shape, colour and texture. So you have a situation where you have people who are not clear what the objective is along with a bunch of opinionated people who think they are clever, then

Q&A

Nick Talbot

Global Head of Design and Innovation, Tata Elxsi



you end up in a mess.

The difference between the UK, US and European markets vs the India market is that brand managers and marketers in India are often not clear on what it is that they are trying to do in the first place - the bit that comes before the creativity and the design, which is, framing the brief properly, after understanding their consumers and understanding what that briefing should be. Once they've got that, there should be no confusion. Very often we end up helping Indian customers build a brief. But, there are some exceptions like Tata Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra, Marico and HLL who have professional design processes in place. These companies know that design is not a random, super creative, opinionated process, it is a targeted, logical and creative process.

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What is size of the market for design services in India?

The global market for design services is \$20 billion, and it is just an \$80 – \$100 million market in India. However, the India market for design services will explode in 5 years, which is the reason I am here. This is because, Industry is beginning to understand the ROI on design services investments as it is facing stiff competition from overseas in every industry vertical possible. India has a huge services market, so we have recently launched services design. For instance, we are redesigning the service workflow of a hospital right from the point of where they greet the customer/patient to when he or she is discharged from the hospital. While startups have the humility and wisdom to know that they don't know enough about the design process in creating a product for global markets and know that the quality of design can be a huge differentiator; Chief Marketing Officers of large companies think they know it all. If design goes wrong, it can take too long and too much money to redo it and launch it before competition comes up with something great.