

BtoC: Active meeting places

Space for experimentation and design beloved by the biggest architects of all time, from Leonardo da Vinci to the 20th century vanguards, from Le Corbusier to Charles & Ray Eames or the Castiglioni brothers up to our days, the exhibit design or temporary architecture confirms its role as an extraordinary communication tool able to establish a direct connection between companies or institutions and a wide and diversified potential public.

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We are talking about projects that originate from a given content, not about artworks. The contents to be presented can be extremely different from one project to another: a product rather than an idea, a cultural content or a commercial one. And around this core, the project of displaying and communicating finds its *raison d'être* by building a sort of three-dimensional alphabet made up of characters, structures, objects, light, images - all different elements but functional for understanding the text that generates it.

Hence, the designer must have an in-depth understanding of the values of the brand to be communicated, because it is on this basis that a valid project can be developed, one which is ultimately capable of adding value to that brand and sometimes also of opening up new opportunities for development.

IT IS A CRUCIAL STEP that often results in the establishment of close relationships with one's own customers (who constitute the active part of the project). From our experience, we see that very often established relationships become so intense that they go beyond the working environment where they were born and turn into solid friendships! Certainly, in today's market system, points where companies and the public can meet are increasingly turning into strategic occasions to communicate the core elements of the brand. To evaluate beyond the high manufacturing qualities of the product, beyond the innovative design, the materials or the technologies involved (factors marked by ever more subtle and imperceptible differences compared to current productions), whether or not there exist elements strong enough to clearly distinguish that particular product from similar ones. It is the moment to discover other qualities, too, made of traditions handed down or found anew, of entrepreneurial responsibilities or ethics sustained, of innovative visions and of reading the contemporary.

THE TECHNICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ONE PRODUCT AND ANOTHER HAVE NOWADAYS NARROWED AND HAVE BECOME MORE IMPALPABLE. The gap is given also by the idea that lies behind the product, by the behaviors it generates, by the prospects it opens. The project of a booth, an urban work, or the creation of an event are hence finalized at creating a place having high expressive synthesis, capable of conferring centrality not only to the product to be displayed (whether it be commercial or cultural) but also to the project that generated it, to the entrepreneurial idea that produced it, to the cultural or behavioral sphere that yielded the inspiration.

We have long discussed the role and function of the exhibit project in relation to the object on display, on the importance and value it can confer to the subject of the exhibition. But the project of contemporary exhibiting has today shifted away from these sharp-cut oppositions and has generated complex, transversal projects from which what emerges with ever more clarity is how the cognitive experience constitutes the real output of the action of exhibiting.

Designing an exhibit then becomes telling a story, giving a strong interpretation, intervening in the given space through components of diversified densities: architectural structures, design elements, time, course, light, technology, graphics, images... The extremely tight lapse of time that runs between the design-project-implementation-use phases represents a fundamental peculiarity of the exhibit project; a unique particularity compared to architectural schedules in their traditional meaning.

For this reason, the exhibit project opens for the designer unique opportunities for experimentation and innovation, exasperating references to the contemporary and more often dealing with topics emerging from connected fields that

influence the present, rather than with the history of the project in its strictly disciplinary meaning.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ARCHITECTURE AND ART HAVE INTENSIFIED, but certainly the knot of innovation has become the relationship with the world and the communication tools in a wide sense of the term. Graphics and architecture have gotten closer and have involved other elements in this weave, thus investing spheres that go from the material to the conceptual: technology, multimedia, the virtual, the sensorial.

Thus the exhibit design is shaped by the construction of an artificial landscape with variable horizon, within which the visitor, moving inside the space and interacting with the structures object of the project, is taken inside a new dimension that stimulates perception, activates the senses and his/her desire to deepen this experience and to know more about it. A changing landscape, a place to explore, where the design of the course constitutes the decisive element. It concerns the key of the reading, studying the rhythms and pauses, reasoning on the times and movements of the visitor within the space: his or her presence, possibilities and freedom of behavior can all be "designed".

When the places for communication between the brand and the public move away from the trade shows and from venues traditionally dedicated to this activity, new and interesting spaces of contamination between public and private open up.

Isolated episodes of communication like events, pop-up stores or "guerrilla" shops become temporary places of high impact on the area they are involved in. In fact, considering using temporary exhibit architecture as an active, behavior-generating tool means thinking about uses and appropriations of private spaces as if they were public, and vice-versa. This creates important dynamics that play a role of huge responsibility in the definition of the cultural and aesthetic qualities of our cities. o