



design &  
innovation news

## **Printed Electronics Exploitation Programme – a design perspective**

What, you may ask, has industrial design to do with printed electronics? Not a lot, judging from the initial reaction of scientists and technologists to a presentation on the topic at the Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining (IOM3) on 10 February. But most soon changed their minds.

Leading strategic design professionals Phil Gray of Quadro Design Associates and Joss Newberry of OpiusDesign presented a design and innovation lecture, *Designed to Provoke*, to an audience of scientists, technologists and companies working in the printed electronics sector to demonstrate how innovations in printed electronics could affect the future of packaging, display and signage. Both presenters are also directors of British Design Innovation (BDI), the trade organisation for leading industrial designers, service designers and innovation professionals.

For some delegates the *Designed to Provoke* seminar, which was organised by IPI (Europe), was their first exposure to design thinking and structured innovation, a sector which still has to confront the prejudices of those who pigeonhole 'design' as a task to be placed at the end of the technology development process. This myth was addressed and largely overcome during the lecture by presenting a number of powerful case studies.

A keen interest in the creative process was shown by the audience, with a number of delegates wishing to learn how strategic designers gather consumer insights, how this is used to create ideas and how these ideas are then evaluated. Consumer insight and experience research is still somewhat intangible to those outside the design profession and often met with incomprehension and some scepticism, although those who have experienced its power need no convincing of its worth. Similarly, those who have already experienced strategic design and worked with designers are much quicker to engage early and see its value.

"It seems that Quadro and Opius may have [demonstrated] a way around the

Mexican stand-off that currently exists between end users being unclear on what their customers want or really care about, and the technology providers who are not clear what products they should be developing," said Brian Weeks, managing director of IPI (Europe). "[While] not appropriate everywhere and every time, [their approach] is a breath of fresh air for those wishing to create innovative applications."

Something of a contradiction remains in the fact that printed electronics, a self-professedly forward-looking new industry, retains a rather traditional viewpoint by thinking only in terms of current business models and appearing unwilling or unable to change its views on defining profit and the market. Uncertainty, fear of failure and a lack of understanding of the need for a pipeline of innovative ideas are key barriers the industry needs to overcome.

The Designed to Provoke presentation resulted in successful links being forged with a significant technical community who welcomed Phil and Joss with open arms, and alongside whom they hope to establish a pivotal role in its future success.

#### **About BDI – the Voice of industrial and Service Design**

British Design Innovation (BDI) is the trade organisation for leading industrial designers, service designers and innovation professionals that promotes members' creative expertise, knowledge and experience.

#### **About Quadro Design Associates**

Professor Phil Gray and Morag Hutcheon founded Quadro Design Associates, an international strategic industrial design consultancy, in 1998 to help companies develop their business through the effective use of design. Phil is Visiting Professor of New Product Design & Development at Middlesex University.

#### **About OpiusDesign**

Joss Newberry founded OpiusDesign twenty years ago as a consultancy that blended industrial design with engineering. Driven by quality and process, Opius became increasingly aware that innovative, groundbreaking products were being stifled by the design brief. In 2000 the company went Strategic and set out to develop the tools to deliver innovation, fundamentally influence the design brief and nurture a heightened instinct for how design and innovation can be compelling to consumers. OpiusDesign has an international client list and a focus on UK SMEs, including start-ups.

#### **About IPI (Europe)**

IPI (Europe) specialises in helping companies accelerate their understanding of disruptive technologies by providing a single independent source of expertise on the disruptive technologies that are enabling the creation of a whole range of new components, products, processes and systems.

#### **About the Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining**

The Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining (IOM3) is a major UK engineering institution that promotes and develops all aspects of materials science and engineering, geology, mining and associated technologies, mineral and petroleum engineering and extraction metallurgy, as a leading authority in the worldwide materials and mining community.

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