SESSION SUMMARY

Conference: SoCap, 09/06/2011

Panel Topic: Design for social innovation

Moderator & Panelists: Maria Giudice (Hot Studio), Sarah Brooks (Hot Studio-Moderator), Karin Hibma (CRONAN), Michael Cronan (CRONAN)

Design, Methodology, Approach: Reports and expert opinions from panelists.

Main Panel Discussion Points:
In this panel discussion, Maria, Sarah, Karin, and Michael talked about the importance of design as a core process in the way companies develop and place products and services in order to meet the needs of the general public. The main three points discussed were:
1. The importance of design today
2. The best way to gain insight and determine a specific user profile
3. How to set the stage to encourage participation and collaboration.

According to Maria, design plays a key role in trying to find solutions to the problems of today's world. With globalization, the world is at a point where there is not a single problem but an ecosystem of problems that need to be resolved at a scalable way. Because designers focus on individuals first, they have the ability to create an aggregate of possible solutions that could meet the needs of the individual.

In order for designers and organizations to find solutions, it is important for them to gain insight and to determine the specific person they are designing for. According to Maria, in order to find the right answer, it is important to prioritize and define a user profile: a rich description of the particular kind of user that you are designing for. Michael added that even more importantly than finding answers is finding the right questions to ask. By following the premise of asking people who, when, what, where, why, and how, it really brings designers to the root of the problem and provides more questions to need finding. Spending time with the people that organizations want to target can also help a designer understand their needs and experiences to design compelling solutions for that targeted user.

Lastly, in order to have a successful design process, it is important for organizations to encourage participation and collaboration. Some tips from Michael: having food on the table, avoiding side conversations, and creating expectations of 100% participation (everyone in the room participating) is a great way to create an environment where open communication and active participation is the norm.

The role of design today goes beyond the notion of creating artifacts. The role of design in today's corporate and non-profit world is becoming an avenue to providing global solutions that generate true impact. To achieve a true design process, designers must focus on asking the right questions and encouraging a collaborative work environment.

Outcomes & Analysis:
Design thinking is a relatively new concept that still needs to be incorporated in many corporations and organizations worldwide. This session explained the importance of design thinking to find impactful global solutions and raised awareness of the importance of the role of designers.

Keywords: design thinking, user profiles

Paper type: Review of conference panel.