



## Shifting the Focus on Design Thinking

### Description

*This article was first published on Portfolio Magazine, Issue 58 in January 2022.*

**The founders of Creativeans suggest you take a step back to focus on the big picture and what today's businesses truly need.**

Digitalisation seems to be the buzzword these days, not surprising as Covid-19 has forced businesses to shut and condemned us to the confinement of our homes. If your business is traditionally brick and mortar or heavily relies on human traffic, you may find yourself needing a new way to do business suddenly. I can imagine you scurrying from offline to online, picking up the basics of video conferencing, and even restructuring your workplace and business model to be digital-first.

It is logical and urgent for many businesses to go digital, but are you doing it as a knee-jerk reaction to the pandemic? In that case, you risk the Shiny Object Syndrome, where instead of focusing on strategies for the long term, you get blinded by the buzz and excitement of digitalisation.

As a business leader, how do you take a step back and focus on the big picture of what your business truly needs?

The only way to create sustained profitable growth is through continuous innovation that is meaningfully differentiated and enabled by business alignment. For you to arrive at this sweet spot of innovation, you need to be agile, risk-taking yet calculative, with one eye on the horizon. You need to begin with a design thinking mindset.

Design thinking isn't a new concept, but it has been getting off the ground in recent years since design entered the boardroom, and it pays off. In an exhaustive study conducted by McKinsey, design-driven companies outperform industry benchmarks and score higher revenue growth. Companies in the top quartile in McKinsey Design Index also gave higher returns to shareholders.

At the onset of the pandemic, together with the Singapore Furniture Industry Council (SFIC) and Workforce Singapore, we developed a business transformation program for furniture companies that applied Creativeans's EDIT Design Thinking®.

SFIC's Design Thinking Business Transformation Programme aims to train individuals in design thinking skills to enable them to innovate and transform their business in accordance with their business transformation plans. It has helped guide and support them in their job roles by improving the way they manage their business models and processes, shares Mr. Phua Boon Huat, SFIC President.

This program successfully kickstarted transformation beyond digitalizing and relooks into furniture companies' brand positioning, customer experience, human resource deployment, and more.

As a small business, you might be thinking, "can I still apply design thinking?" Absolutely. The word "edit" means that design thinking is incremental and iterative. You don't need fancy tools or a setup. What's important is to start. Here's how:

EDIT is the acronym that represents the four key steps in design thinking: Empathize, Define, Ideate, and Test.

Throughout my consultancy work, I have realized that the first step of Empathizing is often the most underappreciated and overlooked. Partly because we're wired to jump straight into problem-solving mode, we end up forgetting to take a step back to listen and understand what people truly need and what their pain points are.

Let me walk you through the first step of identifying what truly matters for your business. These are three simple ways to practice empathy - observing, immersing, and engaging.

Start observing your customers. How have their buying behaviors changed since the pandemic started? If your business resides online, observe what your customers are searching for. In a study by Google, customers tend to make decisions in the Zero Moment of Truth (ZMOT). That refers to the moment in the buying process when the consumer researches a product before purchase.

Secondly, step into your customers's shoes and immerse yourself in their tasks or environment. Describe how you would feel and behave if you were your customer. You would be surprised how accurate and useful this can be as human emotions and needs tend to be universal.

Lastly, talk to them. Engage in conversations to understand your customers better. Ask open-ended questions to elicit more than a one-sentence response so you can have a natural conversation. You can use the five Whys technique to uncover their underlying pain points and discover their innate needs.

Digitalization is inevitable as we transit into a post-pandemic world. However, executing it without design thinking may blindside you from seeing what's more important to sustain your business in the long term. Use design thinking to start EDITing your way to success.



### **About the Writers**

*Kimming Yap and Yulia Saksen are the co-founders of brand and design management consultancy, Creativeans. Since their launch in 2012, businesses have trusted Creativeans to solve their strategic*

*and creative challenges in branding that includes the following touchpoints: Business design, UI/UX design, packaging design and communication design, across various industries and regions. Creativeans is also the recent award winner of the Singapore Packaging Star Awards 2020, Excellence Design Award 2020, and more.*