

Simplifying design

From the classroom to the boardroom **Heather Martin** believes a deep meaning combined with a splash of 'magic' is the ideal combination for design success



Heather Martin

Director of Interaction Design for Smart Design

Heather Martin currently works as the Director of Interaction Design for Smart Design and based at the firm's Barcelona office. Just prior to her post at Smart, she co-founded the renowned Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design (CIID). Before this, she held positions at IDEO and Tangerine, was Academic Director of Interaction Design Institute Ivrea (IDII), was a Research Fellow at the Royal College of Art, and worked with a number of high-profile clients along the way such as Prada, Lufthansa Technik, Intel, Sony, Samsung, Nokia, LG Electronics, and Artemide. She holds a degree in product design from Newcastle University and a degree in interaction design from London's Royal College of Art.

Name

Job title

Career

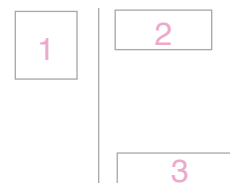
Heather Martin has lived in two worlds most of her design career - academia and consulting. She has always enjoyed the mix. The academic world has exposed her to provocative and challenging thinking while the consulting world has helped to ground her work in real world constraints and a deep appreciation for the human qualities of design. She refers to this as 'sense-making' by focusing her passion and expertise on designing inspired but meaningful experiences for people in their everyday lives.

After spending several years in academia as a Research Fellow at the RCA, Director of Interaction Design Institute Ivrea, and co-founder of Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design, Martin's focus is now back on clients in her new post as Director of Interaction Design at global design consultancy Smart Design. She has set her sights on guiding companies, particularly those in the European market as she's based at the firm's Barcelona studio, towards creating holistic products and experiences.

"Smart has a 30-year history of creating products that speak to

people on a very human, tangible level. Their work has always been very carefully considered. It's not flamboyant, pretentious, or gimmicky," Martin says. "I am really happy to be part of a company where there is a strong human approach to design, that has a legacy of successful products on the market as well as the in-house expertise to build end-to-end solutions. To me that is quite a unique mix. Not many design agencies have all of these under one roof. For this reason, I feel Smart is really well placed for designing new experiences, as we move into the era of designing multiple products that coexist together as part of a much larger ecosystem of products and services."

Martin defines what she does: "As a designer, I've always operated in the realm of the digital world, even when I was an industrial designer at Tangerine and IDEO. I have always been fascinated by technology and what it can do, but at the same time I have a strong desire to simplify the design of these devices to make sure people can use and understand them. Nowadays, we must not only design the device well but also the experience enabled by the device. When



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Simplicity is very important when designing experiences

we start to talk about larger ecosystems of devices we need to also understand the connections between all these interconnected devices because collectively

they all have to work seamlessly together to deliver an experience that binds people to a brand."

When asked for examples of companies that are getting it right, she pauses. "When I am using a product or service experience and enjoying it, I think 'Oh, that feels right' but then when something comes up that disappoints me or feels wrong or disjointed my mind says, 'I'm lost, or I don't get it.' As soon as I start to feel this my experience quickly deteriorates. If this happens a lot it will affect not only my experience, but how I regard the brand. It is hard enough to get people to adopt your new service or device, so you have to make sure that the experience you give them is consistent and well considered. That's when you gain customer loyalty."

With the lines between interaction and service design newly blurred Martin sees that European, in particular UK-based companies, are designing elements of service and experience in a better way than their American counterparts. She attributes this to the prominence of and competition in the mobile phone industry and a culture of public

services that are more pervasive in Europe. She hopes to bridge the disciplines and bring the best thinking and techniques from service design and apply this thinking to the design of experiences. As she defines it, "service design is the design of intangible experiences that reach people through many different touch points that happen over time."

As well as consistency as a key element, she would argue that simplicity is very important when designing experiences. "No one wants to spend hours reading manuals in order to understand how to use a system. We need to design the object, interfaces, and behaviors in an intuitive way."

Recently, there has been a shift from feature-driven technology to a more people-centered focus. For many years, technology has tended to be everyone's focus. But Smart Design likes to think of technology as just an enabler of experiences. Martin's hope is that we don't see 'feature creep' in software and applications just as we saw in the electronic devices of the late '90's and early '00's. She insists that a considered design is one that understands what's technically possible but chooses to go in the direction of what's right. "As designers, we must find that sweet spot in what we design; design that has deep meaning combined with a bit of 'magic', that makes perfect sense for people." |

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