

**Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design, Wrocław**  
**Faculty of Graphics and Media Art**

**ABSTRACT: SYNTHETIC DESCRIPTION OF THE TASK**

PhD title: **Developing a Design Strategy and Visual Communication**

**for the Korner Design Brand. Defining the role of design in building a brand identity.**

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I started my collaboration with Korner Sp. z o.o. in September 2018 under the Polish Ministry of Education's Industrial Doctoral Programme, which I was involved in until March 2022 at the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław. Established in 1992, Korner Sp. z o.o. is active in the furniture, interior design and construction markets, distributing components used for furniture manufacturing and building boards from well-known brands. The company operates 13 branches throughout Poland.

Korner Sp. z o.o. needed to make significant changes in the approach to building its product range, including in the fields of marketing, corporate image and customer service. As part of our relationship, Korner Sp. z o.o. expected me to develop a new, well-conceived corporate image and design strategy and to make it stand out from the competition. The Industrial Doctoral Programme helped launch a transition process and triggered the introduction of new tools and methods that had not been used by the company before. To help achieve my task, two PhD supervisors were named: an assistant PhD supervisor on behalf of the company and an academic PhD supervisor on behalf of the university.

Before a change process could begin, I had to define the company's needs, which were identified in a design audit I carried out at the start of our collaboration. The audit enabled us to take steps to ensure design- and innovation-based change. The audit revealed inconsistent image and marketing activities and an untapped potential of design in meeting business goals. At the same time, the company's directors became increasingly aware of the role of product design, which determines the appeal of a product range and a company's competitive position. Previously, Korner Sp. z o.o. had not conducted any research into customer needs.

The sole yardstick of customers' preferences had been Korner's attendance at trade shows, customers' interest in products (or services) in the company's branch offices, and feedback collected by customer advisors.

I conducted research into key aspects of the company's operations and its environment – studies of employees, competitors, customers as well as analyses of social, technological, industry and market trends. The findings of the research informed my design-based activities – developing a design-based strategy based on both the existing position of the company and the directions of its development.

The company wanted to attract a new group of customers and expand its market presence. This led to the creation of the idea of building a new brand, Korner Design, which was one of the main

objectives of my PhD.

Another important objective of my research was to determine the impact of design on the company's development – whether the potential of design serves the company's strategy and is properly explored by it.

The Industrial Doctoral Programme provided an opportunity to turn ideas into project and implementation activities, to develop terms of reference that would enable the executive board to appreciate the potential of design and the employees to recognise the important role of design in the development process. Using a set of (internal and external) resources, I started to develop a number of solutions that the company had not previously used and that had to be aligned with its policy.

In Korner's case, it was best to assume that the scale of changes would be incremental and then increasing over time, and that the changes would be modeled on processes that were already present in the market (i.e. adaptable).

Based on various definitions of the notion of innovation, we assumed that an innovation can be anything that has not been used by the company so far or can be improved on.

The process of implementing the Korner Design brand is an innovative step for Korner Sp. z o.o. The new brand is both a product and a service. It was assumed that the brand would be implemented using the resources and know-how of Korner, the parent brand established in 1992. In 2018, the company wanted to enter a new market niche and decided to transfer a part of its brand value to a higher level. The new brand enhances the parent brand in a particular product context. It aims to distinguish itself from the core brand by adding a certain attribute (personality) to indicate that it targets a specific market segment.

Korner Design 'embraces the new', charting a new direction in the company's thinking and communicating with customers.

My role was to develop an action strategy for the new brand aimed at a new group of buyers who appreciate product design, quality and good service. These 'creative' customers follow all kinds of innovations, respond to change, follow trends and seek novelty. This group includes creatives such as product designers, architects, interior designers, artists, freelancers, industrial design and art school students as well as furniture manufacturers who put a high premium on design.

An important part of my thesis was the development of a design strategy for the new brand, as well as the development of new methods (tools) for promoting products and services to be included in the company's marketing strategy. Given the ever-increasing need to use design as a crucial source of competitive advantage, we implemented two Korner Design showrooms, in Katowice and Wrocław, where the company showcases a choice selection of its products and high-class components for a specific group of customers. Both showrooms are effective marketing tools that help influence the company's image.

Korner's need to develop was the impulse to seek various forms of advertising to become firmly entrenched in the minds of customers and to continue attracting new ones. Trade shows presented an opportunity to achieve this.

As part of the image-building efforts to support the new Korner Design brand in 2019, I took an active part in designing stands for major trade events (4 Design Days, Warsaw Home, Targi Meble

Polska).

The scope of my work included concept development, customer journey planning, creating displays (arranging products) as well as image-building and visual efforts. The industry shows offered the ideal opportunity to conduct research and test solutions on users. The research gave me information that could be later used to build Korner Design's range of products for new clients and to implement new design processes.

Over three years, I conducted research among clearly defined groups: inside the organisation (employees) and externally (customers from the target group, contractors). The research focused on: 1. the awareness and image of Korner Design (brand recognition); 2. employees' awareness of the impact of design on the company's development; 3. customer satisfaction; and 4. the commercialisation of art. The surveys/studies were presented to Korner, and my findings and analysis are described in the research section of my PhD thesis.

An important part of my work as part of my PhD was an attempt to facilitate dialogue between the artist, the company and the university. The revival of collaboration between artists and the socio-economic environment makes it possible to stress the vital role of design and the significance of artists as inspirers, stimulating the development of businesses and the whole economy. The principal objective of such efforts is to test and develop innovative business, academic and artistic ideas in conjunction with various entities and institutions. As part of the PhD, a number of initiatives bringing together Korner and the academy and art sector. These included a) themed networking sessions; b) training, advisory sessions, workshops and industry webinars; and c) networking activities at the Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław (conference, workshops, competition for students).

Launching a new brand and developing a design and visual strategy is a long-term process, largely dependent on external factors and circumstances and on the capabilities of the company itself. It is a great challenge, responsibility, consistency and a trust-based relationship with company representatives.

An important aspect of my research and implementation work was to develop methods for integrating design with the company environment; to encourage the directors and managers to use design and manage it properly within the organisation.

An important aspect of my research and implementation work was to develop methods of integrating design into the company's environment as well as encouraging directors and managers to make use of design and to manage it properly within the organisation. I made numerous visits to the branches and talked to company employees and customers. At first the relationship was difficult at first – there was considerable reserve and distrust on the part of employees but my projects and implementations were positively received and appreciated so I slowly gained their trust. Together with the company, I organised educational and development activities among the staff, which led to establishing new contacts and their opening up to the importance of design.

There is still ample room for change and improvement at Korner (see my PhD thesis for conclusions). However, the solutions reached in the thesis are the jumping points for further changes, and they not only concern the development of the new brand, Korner Design, but can also be applied to the parent brand. They include changing the way customer service is provided, improving the quality and level of services, changing the way the products are displayed in all

branches, improving marketing efforts, as well as changing the visual and communication language. As part of my activities, I proposed specific, measurable solutions that would translate into implementing the planned development programme. Ultimately, the idea of the new brand development strategy is to not only to meet customer needs, but also, which is particularly important, to reinforce the company's competitive strategy. The image-related solutions and projects I developed as part of my PhD, concerning product development and publicity have been implemented by Korner on an ongoing basis since 2018. They are consistently used by the company and produce the intended results.

Over more than three years of my relationship with Korner and my project and research work, the following goals have been achieved and implemented:

- increasing the company's recognition (visibility; increased awareness of its products and brand);
- developing a strategy, mission and vision for the new brand, Korner Design, in line with the company's needs;
- defining a brand identity by developing a visual strategy and language of communication;
- developing a design strategy (selecting partner brands and a product portfolio);
- introducing new business partners and new design collections;
- putting in place new marketing methods and image-building measures in order to support sales (customer experience: experience design and sensory marketing)
- developing new tools for communication between the brand and customers (support for designers and architects in the process of implementing two showrooms, implementation of furniture prototypes, implementation of state-of-the-art trade show stands, e-commerce tools)
- implementing a Korner Design networking platform (establishing relationships with the Academy of Art and Design and business);
- strengthening educational and development activities (through training, workshops, competitions and conferences for clients, students and employees).

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