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## Design as strategic planning

WHEN most board members communicate their strategic planning ideas to a company's executives, the meetings are mostly preoccupied with financing, markets, human resources. The word `design' rarely, if ever, enters the conversation.

Effective design liberates people from the ordinary, but that isn't the kind of subject that usually comes up in company board meetings. Yet giving people new identities is the key to getting a product noticed. Asserts Malaysia Design Council's Omar, `Appearance sells. Aesthetics sells too, and with a higher price tag because it gives a greater sense of value. But after something is sold, does its design transfer to quality? Quality is where engineering turns design into sales that go on and on. The words "Made in Malaysia" have to say "Quality" too.'

Omar adds, `Design will graduate Malaysia from the league of contract manufacturers to a nation renowned for producing and manufacturing the best consumer and industrial products. Prime Minister Mahathir's ideas on design reflect Malaysia's need to create not just products with an identity but products that are uniquely Malaysian.'

Product design is a key element in Malaysia's manufacturing-industry strategy of vertical value addition. `Product design is the decisive factor in advertising,' points out ITM's Tamyez. `The design must have psychological appeal beyond the product. Only then does advertising work.' Yet in Malaysia today, product design only makes up about four per cent of the total cost of the advertising budget of a new product. `The entire Malaysian product design industry has revenues of only about RM10 million, which is less than what many companies spend on quality control,' says Tamyez.

Tamyez questions the generally held view that product design is advertising's little brother: `Ironically, it is the advertising that is ephemeral - it is "here today, gone tomorrow". You have to repeat yourself endlessly to get people to buy something. Product design, on the other hand, remains visible for years. People encounter product design virtually every day. It is by far the most cost-effective element in brand identity. The industry truism is that advertising adds customers while design adds value.'

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