



**SEE DESIGN**

Sharing Experience  
on Design Support  
for SMEs

## **Case Study of Good Design Support Practice**

This case study is a snapshot of activities taking place during the lifespan of the SEEdesign project from 2005 to 2007. For updated information please contact the organisations directly.

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Czech Republic

# Design Awards in Czech Republic

Design Centre of the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic's Design Awards have been running since 1991. They were introduced as a way of increasing awareness amongst SMEs of the importance of design and the benefits it can bring to a business. The Awards now form a major part of the Design Centre of the Czech Republic's design promotion campaign.

The so-called 'Velvet' Revolution in Czechoslovakia in November 1989 radically changed not only the political system and brought freedom, democracy and human rights to the population, but at the same time also changed the country's economic system. State ownership of industrial enterprises, including small and medium size manufacturers, was abolished and replaced by private ownership. The economy was opened to foreign capital which started to buy big Czech companies. During the years following the Velvet Revolution, the overwhelming majority of big Czech companies were in hands of different foreign enterprises. Small and medium size enterprises therefore started to play a very important role in the Czech economy. At present Czech SMEs employ 61.5% of the Czech active population, their share in GNP is exactly 34.92% and their share of the export market is 30%. This share could be higher if their products were better from a design point of view. Unfortunately new private owners of SMEs either do not have much knowledge about the importance of design or do not have enough disposable capital for hiring skilled designers. Such a situation required an intensive design promotion campaign.

The aim of this campaign was and still is to convince owners and managers of SMEs that design is a very important tool in increasing the quality of their products and thus increasing their export potential. Secondly the aim of design promotion was and still is to increase public awareness of the importance of design for improvements in the living standards of the Czech population. The Czech government gave the task of implementing a design promotion

campaign to the Design Centre of the Czech Republic, which was established in 1991 by the Ministry of Industry and Trade as a governmental organisation.

Various means of design promotion have been used, such as exhibitions (domestic as well as foreign), lectures, conferences, publications, mass media etc. The most effective method has proved to be the system of Design Awards. The Design Award system in Czech Republic has two main goals: first to honour publicly enterprises that, with the help of skilled designers, are using design as one of the most effective means for increasing a product's quality and also as a tool of innovation for their production. Secondly the example of these SMEs should serve as a means to attract other SMEs and show them that they can also win some awards if they use design and thus increase the quality of their production and their competitiveness in the world market. Put simply, we are trying to convince those SMEs that are still not using designers to follow the example of design oriented SMEs.

There are different kinds of design award in the Czech Republic, including the Award for Ecological Design, Design Evergreen Award, Award for Design Management Activity, Award for Design Promotion and Publicity, Award for Important Contribution to the Development of Design and also the International Design Prestige Prize. Since 2005 there has also been a special award for students' work. The aim of this award is to look for new talent, their creativity and unconventional approach to design solutions.



The most important award is the Excellent Product of the Year. It has three levels: the highest is the National Design Prize - every year only one product is awarded this title; the second level is Excellent Product of the Year and the third is Good Design. Products for these categories are judged and selected by an independent international jury in order to ensure fairness of the judgment and also the chance to compare Czech production with similar foreign production.

The main goal of the Czech Design Award system is to motivate producers, managers and designers towards the continual enhancement of Czech industrial production by way of quality design and to acknowledge the results they have achieved. The system also serves as an information guide for consumers about the quality of awarded products, bearing in mind that all awarded products have the right to display a special tag guaranteeing the quality of the product. The manufacturers of awarded products can also use this tag in marketing and promotion.

Traditionally all these awards are given out at the beginning of April each year in a ceremony in Prague's famous Bethlehem Chapel under the auspices of the Czech Prime Minister and with ministers and other important state officials as well as the families of awarded designers or manufacturers in attendance.

Since 1991 when the system started 18 products have been given the title of National Design Prize and more than 100 products have received the title 'Excellent Product of the Year'. These products are shown at a number of exhibitions in the Czech Republic as well as abroad.

The Design Centre of the Czech Republic closed in December 2007.