



design that matters

INNOVATION FOR SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

DESIGN THAT MATTERS: INNOVATION FOR SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

OUR MISSION

Design that Matters (DtM), a 501c3 nonprofit based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, develops new products and services that allow social enterprises in developing countries to hurdle existing barriers to scaling and impact. DtM has built a collaborative design process through which hundreds of volunteers in academia and industry donate their skills and expertise to the creation of breakthrough products for communities in need. DtM was founded in 2001 at the MIT Media Lab, and incorporated in 2003.

We are focusing our search for new clients on projects in health, education and clean water, and a geographic focus in India, Bangladesh and Indonesia. Our immediate objective is to launch projects with four new clients in 2007. Our long-term goal is to deliver a better quality of service, and a better quality of life, to one million beneficiaries through products designed for our clients by 2011.

THE NEED

In developing countries, social entrepreneurs serve those at the bottom of the pyramid; namely, the over four billion people who live on less than \$2 per day. The growth and efficiency of these social enterprises is inhibited by lack of access to financing, information technology, consulting services, and other forms of intellectual capital. Social enterprises in developing countries can offer better services and scale more quickly if provided access to better products, particularly those designed specifically for their needs. DtM was created to provide this service.

OUR RESPONSE

DtM's service includes design talent, ethnography, new and creatively repurposed intellectual property, and a collaborative design process that translates the needs of social enterprise into breakthrough products and services. All of our design work and business analysis is performed by volunteers from academia and industry, using the infrastructure available at their host institutions. Our academic contributors include MIT, Stanford and Cal Tech, and our corporate partners include IDEO, Fisher Price, Solidworks and Optikos.

DtM has structured our collaborative design process such that participants are motivated by self-interest as much as altruism. For academic partners like MIT and Stanford, DtM "design challenges" serve as curriculum materials in existing university courses, engaging students in real-world problems while helping faculty to meet recent university accreditation requirements for "capstone" or experiential-learning courses. With corporate design partners like IDEO and Optikos, DtM works with management to convert staff "whitespace" (paid, but un-billable hours) into collaboration opportunities for their best staff, recognition that boosts staff retention and a challenge that leads to skill development in what we call "minimum resource design."

DtM selects clients from existing social entrepreneur networks, such as Ashoka and the Draper Richards Fellows, for whom a new product or service represents an opportunity to overcome barriers to scale. Our clients are recognized leaders in their field and credible representatives for their beneficiaries. They are also reliable distribution channels for the new products and services that result from our collaboration.

DtM's most successful products are the "Kinkajou" Microfilm Projector, which transforms teaching conditions for nighttime adult literacy classes in West Africa, and an improved intravenous flow controller, which saves lives by improving accuracy and reducing errors during drug delivery in developing countries. Through our collaborative design process, over 700 volunteer students and professionals from around the world have contributed to the development of our products over the last four years. The DtM project experience is for many volunteers their first exposure to problems faced daily by people in underserved communities. DtM alumni are embracing their role as citizens of the world, and many have realigned their life trajectories to focus on careers in the social sector.

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