Putting Innovation Back in the Hands of Designers

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Designers create the most value by solving problems and creating new and innovative solutions. Is it possible for designers to develop innovative new products when they are separated from the processes of product construction and manufacturing? OPDD faculty members, Andrew Deceuster and Andrea Olsen, presented on the topic of bringing innovation back into the hands of designers at the 2019 Outdoor Retailer: Snow Show. Their presentation, “Putting Innovation Back in the Hands of Designers” focused on discussing where innovation has gone and how it can be brought back to product designers.

Olsen, a former apparel designer at Columbia Sportswear Company and PrAna, shared her concern for the many similarities among products in the industry that don’t truly solve problems, and more often than not, simply mimic other products on shelves. This lack of innovation, she described, is due to designers simply drawing lines on paper, designing with pencil and paper and digitally, but never getting their hands dirty.

For designers to truly innovate, they need to understand product construction, manufacturing and materials. It’s difficult to be innovative by simply by drawing a 2-D image and sending a pattern to a factory where the construction is sorted out. Bringing the ability for designers to manufacture and prototype, in addition to sketch, enhances their ability to think outside the box and push the limits of their designs.

Deceuster continued these thoughts by emphasizing the need for designers to rapid prototype, test, and then go back to the drawing board when they experience the products they are developing hands on.

It’s once designers experiment with hands-on prototyping that the possibilities of creation and innovation open up for new products and solutions to be developed.