Retrospective Design Thinking

David Vespremi

Whether by nature or nurture, I grew up with a deep appreciation for good and thoughtful design. My Mom, an architect, and Dad, an artist and early pioneer in desktop computer publishing, likely sealed that fate for me. We moved to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1984 right as the initial Silicon Valley boom was happening.

Professionally I've had the good fortune of being in the right place at the right time. I was on the ground floor of Tesla as they emerged from stealth mode and later ran marketing for one of the big aftermarket automotive companies, K&N, working to establish that brand in new markets and popularize it among a much broader cross section of buyers. I helped with the launch of TopGear in North America as a consultant, orchestrated the go-to-market strategy for a hybrid drive system for Porsche cars, and played an instrumental role in shaping the turnaround strategy for a struggling Silicon Valley robot vacuum manufacturer as it sought to reclaim the leading market position it lost years prior.

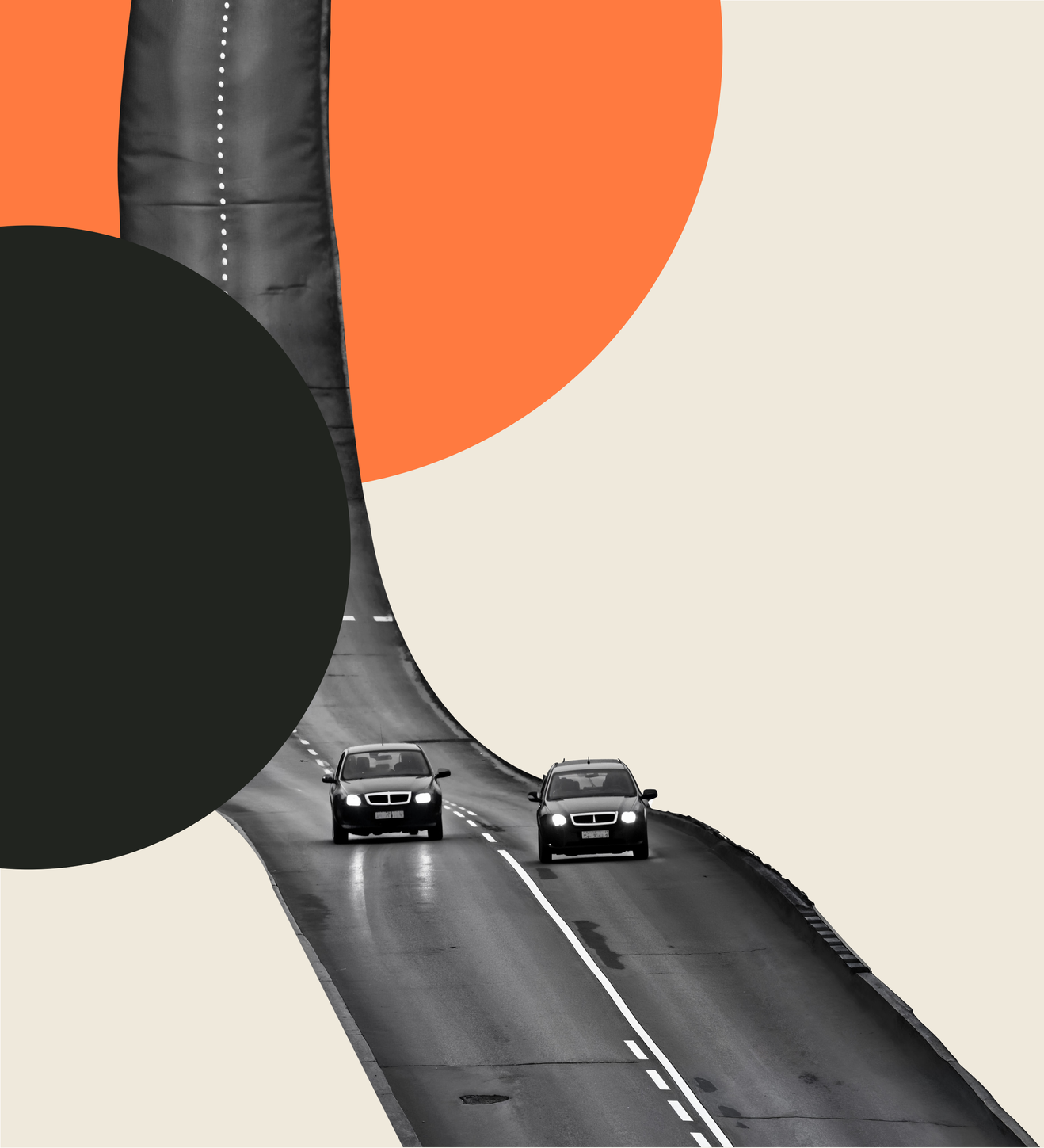
I've worked closely with some truly talented and brilliant CEOs who came to rely on me as both an advisor and as a strategic resource in bringing new and innovative technologies to market. Since my professional focus was generally in the marketing field, this meant I cut my teeth designing and building ad campaigns, communications initiatives, packaging redesigns and all the rest. But more importantly (and excitingly) I got to brainstorm on how products and services were being positioned and introduced to the market. I received invaluable mentorship from the esteemed Andy Cunningham, Steve Jobs' right hand woman, on the importance of brand positioning as the cornerstone for effective marketing. I had a front row seat to the debate of whether or not an electric car should have a grille with a badge in the middle and saw how a certain multi-billionaire's idea of making a four-door sedan with the nose of a McLaren F1 grafted on was ridiculed. I was also part of discussions with accomplished industrial designers in home electronics and automation around how and why it is that we bond differently with robots and home assistant devices than we do with other appliances and gadgets.

Along the way I came to understand not just how it is that we come to value the roles that brands and their respective products play in our lives,

but also how designers, engineers, product planner and, CEOs (and the board members they report to) shape entire market landscapes by continually defining and redefining product categories. It was my exposure to and appreciation of this ever shifting and evolving landscape of product categories that serves as the premise for the analysis that follows. I begin by posing the question of when do we look back in order to look ahead and arrive at the insight that we, as go-to-market leaders, can be just as methodical about triggering the buying public's desire as we are about making sure that the products we design and build satisfy their perceived needs. It is this anchoring bond that we as consumers have with the objects that we acquire that come to define not only our perceptions around the brands that manufacture them, but our perceptions of ourselves as well.

What follows is the introduction of thought exercise that asks whether companies are approaching the emotional aspect of connecting with consumers early enough and with enough rigor in the design and concepting process of product planning. Is the emphasis on the known needs of consumers and the race to meet those needs being weighed too heavily relative to the opportunity to tap into the "want" side of the equation? Rather than cultivating wants as merely a marketing and sales exercise after a product offering is nearly fully baked, is there an opportunity to evaluate whether and how to do this sooner in the product planning process?

In the analysis that follows, I draw from a handful of distinct product categories spanning cars, consumer electronics, and furniture. Across these categories, I seek to demonstrate that there's a formula that can be applied to nearly any product or service, regardless of category, that helps inform the relative opportunity for building an enduring emotional connection with its intended audience.



01 Twin Drivers on the *Path to Purchase*

It’s an old adage that the two primary drivers behind every purchasing decision are needs and wants. The needs are the tangible, the rational, the objective, and the measurable. Wants are intangible, subjective, and harder to nail down with any specificity. As the saying goes, *the heart wants what it wants*.

The dance between wants and needs is equally at play both for initial purchases as well as for repurchasing something we have come to identify with as our established brand preference.

When deciding to invest our time, energy, and money towards acquiring something with functional requirements we can easily articulate – for example, a house (price range, neighborhood, and number of bedrooms and bathrooms…) we can likely rank these requirements in terms of relative importance, bucketing them in terms of “must haves” and “nice to haves”. When we think we have selected something that will meet our needs, just before we commit, we try it on. Whether it’s touring a house that checked all the boxes online, stepping into a dressing room to see how a shirt fits, or going for a test drive in a car, or touring a house that checked all the boxes online, it’s the experiential aspect that is the deal maker or breaker. This is where the needs meet the wants and where the tangible meets the intangible.

In the example of buying a home, it’s the feeling that a house gives us when we step inside it for the first time, completely independent of the rational criteria that either attracts or repels us. It’s in this moment that

> *the head and the heart act as independent sources of truth for whether something suits us or not.*

This applies to other areas of our life too, including how we might screen dating profiles against a sense of what seems like an exciting prospect vs. the spark that either does or doesn't materialize on a first encounter, or whether we come away from a job interview energized or ambivalent. When we drill down further we come to realize that we are asking for an object, place, person or experience to meet us where we are, to satisfy our needs while surprising and delighting us with something extra. This second piece has been called "the feel good factor" or "X factor" and elevates our expectations so that the overall impression we form transcends the sum of its parts.

The quantifiable, objective, and measurable criteria lend themselves to what marketers call personas. Personas are the demographic and psychographic profiles we create to define the subsets of people we think would be most interested in what we have to offer. We can create buyer profiles that model for income, age, gender, lifestyle factors, and a host of other criteria that help predict how perfect or imperfect a fit we have relative to capturing a perceived market opportunity. Based on checking boxes, we identify subsets of consumers that we will come to see as slam dunks while others we believe can be swayed to take a closer look. As unique as individual people are, all of this predictive modeling and product/brand positioning works best when we are connecting the dots between what people have already identified that they know they want and what we have to offer. If we have a computer mouse that we are selling for laptops, we can bucket

this accessory based on whether it works for Macs, PCs, or both. In fact product to market fit will have been established early on in forecasting before the spec for the product is even established. In this process we would be looking at how big the market opportunity is relative to the buying universe. We would already have determined how many people buy trackballs, mice, and other input devices and we would already know what types of computers they most commonly buy. We would have a sense of whether this input device works best in a professional setting or for home use. We would be thinking about what would motivate someone to buy a mouse in the first place. In some instances it might be used to augment devices for which no factory mouse was offered, in others it would need to functionally surpass shortcomings of an existing mouse that they are already using. In either instance we would be looking at what perceived need(s) it addresses. Is it an office manager or head of operations buying it to increase productivity among their design staff or to address ergonomic shortcomings based on the feedback of an ergonomic audit? Is it for gamers who want an advantage in competitive game play? Is it for students or commuters who need it to be mobile and fit easily in the side pocket of a backpack? For each of these audiences we would be looking at pricing and distribution models to make sure we can profitably sell the device to the audience for whom it is intended and that the perceived value it delivers surpasses the investment in time and energy needed to acquire it.

The same applies for cars, clothes, electronics, furniture, homes, and just about anything else one could imagine.

As market producers, we identify the market opportunity, build for perceived market fit based on meeting the needs and requirements of our target buyer personas, and run projections to ensure that we can profitably sell at the scale we need to justify the expense in engineering, materials procurement, manufacturing, distribution, and marketing our offering. This is good insofar as we have mapped for all the known criteria that we can use to validate market fit for our offering. At the right price, offered to the right subsets of people with enough awareness and availability, it should sell reasonably close to projections so long as it maps to what we know people are in the market to buy based on any rational requirements they have and relative to all known competitive offerings within our category.

The entire discipline of product marketing is tasked with understanding and predicting product-to-market fit, driven by some of the best technical/engineering and sales minds converging to make this possible. With enough data points, experience, and insight, these experts can predict with considerable accuracy whether a particular product offering is likely to be competitive even before it's ever rolled out at any meaningful scale.

However, it's important to note that these predictions are based on taking a snapshot of what buyers are looking for based on parameters defined by what exists today and on what we think is likely happening in the market in the foreseeable future based on competitive intelligence.

As soon as a disrupter appears and shifts the parameters by dramatically changing the value proposition or opening up a new category entirely, the list of consumer expectations shifts accordingly.

The hurdle that these new disruptive offerings have to overcome is the innate market inertia of established consumer behaviors. In the days of audio cassette tapes, for years consumers shopped for tape decks based on what level of noise reduction they offer, if they auto reversed at the end of the recording, or offered power eject. Then along comes the CD player and the relative value of these tape deck-specific features become irrelevant. The cycle repeats again - this time when the CD player, which nailed fidelity, but was susceptible to skipping, is itself replaced by digital media. From here a familiar pattern emerges where early adopters are willing to overlook whatever flaws and shortcomings the new disruptive market entry has– generally higher price, limited market availability, unknown reliability and unknown future support in order to have the prestige of getting in on the ground floor of something new and exciting. The earlier in, the higher

the coolness factor, and conversely, the earlier in, the higher the risk.

This coolness factory is important because its power to rearrange all the rational sorting criteria speaks directly to the heart and ego as opposed to the brain and budget.The product or offering becomes an extension of oneself. It's more than merely differentiating the product in its target category; it's differentiating its user from people that are still connected to legacy offerings and therefore stand on the wrong side of history. It's in this setting that the heart overtakes the mind and wants dramatically overshadow needs.

If early adopters are passionate enough, influential enough, and enthusiastically evangelize their new acquisition widely and convincingly enough, market acceptance and share of market grow in response. This in turn prompts competitors to race to bring their own offerings to market, attempting to match or beat the disruptive new offering squarely on the terms that allowed it to disrupt the market in the first place. If the story of the CD player is higher fidelity than cassette tapes that preceded it, then assuredly the attention goes to maximizing the platform for audio fidelity. If for digital music it's about storage capacity mapped to price, then that defines the new contours of the battle for market share going forward. It's this critical inflection point that I would like to focus on. Not the early adopters, but the second wave – the point at which an offering's market position begins to solidify around new criteria as a once novel new entry becomes increasingly commoditized

for the first time in a competitive setting. The reason this particular phase of market growth is so fascinating to me is because

> *it is at this point when the market is sufficiently destabilized in the race to match or exceed performance against newly established criteria, that there's an often profound missed opportunity for smart competitors to look back historically, far back in fact, in order to secure an enduring competitive advantage.*

In fact, statistically it's often the case that earliest disrupters aren't the ones that leave behind an enduring legacy. It's the second, third, fourth, or fifth market entry that nails it and becomes the new standard bearer for success and ultimately market segment domination. First movers like Friendster, which begat Myspace and ultimately Facebook is one example. Yahoo was the king of search engines before Google. BlackBerry owned the smartphone market before the iPhone.

In the following sections we will be looking at electric cars, home robotics/ automation, and home furnishings as examples of categories in which a look back to the past can strengthen the "want" side of the equation. This

will be followed by a formula that I have used over the past twenty years that I'm happy to share for calculating the relative need for a backwards glance. Following this, we will consider the importance of establishing authenticity in bolstering the credibility of any nostalgia drivers that we have elected to include in our market offering fidelity than cassette tapes that preceded it, then assuredly the attention goes to maximizing the platform for audio fidelity. If for digital music it's about storage capacity mapped to price, then that defines the new contours of the battle for market share going forward. It's this critical inflection point that I would like to focus on. Not the early adopters, but the second wave – the point at which an offering's market position begins to solidify around new criteria as a once novel new entry becomes increasingly commoditized for the first time in a competitive setting. The reason this particular phase of market growth is so fascinating to me is because it is at this point

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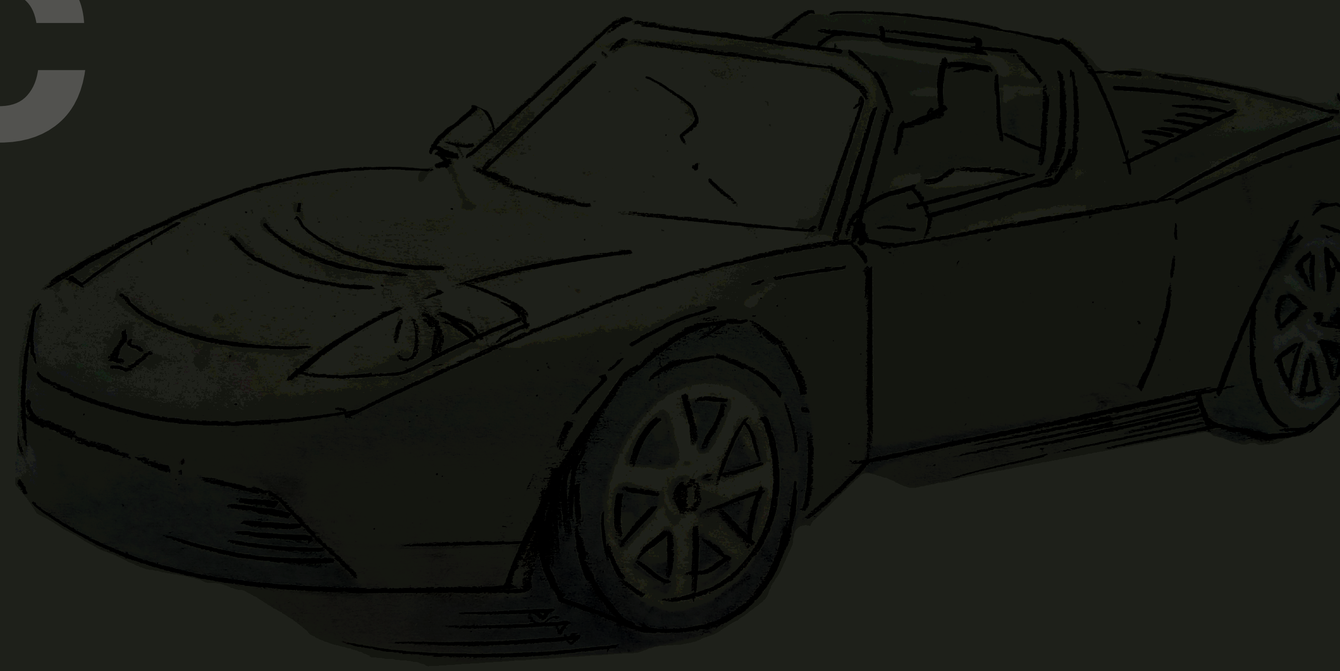
Example:

Electric Cars



Throwing the Baby Out with the Bath

As a child, I collected Hot Wheels and Matchbox cars. I made it my business to learn everything there was to know about cars and could recite 0-60 times and top speeds of any cars we encountered on road trips with my parents, which as an immigrant family exploring the U.S. by camper van, was a frequent occurrence. I was fascinated by the origin story of cars– where they were made and why they looked and performed the way they did. Neither of my parents were car people so this often meant scouring magazines and committing to memory everything I learned. I began to pick up design cues that could help me pick out a car from a great distance well before the badge on its trunk lid had come into view.

After college, with disposable income finally available, I bought a Toyota MR2 and proceeded to extensively modify it over the course of subsequent years. I had no mechanical training whatsoever, but made it up for it with sheer enthusiasm and tunnel vision focus. I made it my business, and perhaps even bordering on obsession, to understand how cars are designed and built and why certain compromises are made in the final versions that were brought to market. I also sought to understand a how these engineering and design decisions could be reexamined and re-engineered to arrive at a different conclusion, potentially culminating in a version of a car that better matched what I understood as its true potential.

I eventually became a globally published authority on modifying cars through a Dummies book I wrote on the subject and that MR2, having been featured

in nearly all the popular tuner magazines of its day, was acquired by the Petersen Museum in Los Angeles and remains on display there now.

Although my background through those early days of making a name for myself in the car industry revolved around innovations in combustion engine technologies that allowed cars to perform to their absolute highest potential, it was in the mid 2000s as an early hire at Tesla that I came to developed an appreciation for the potential of electric cars.

I learned more about the history of the electric car and the waves of development that finally allowed it to find success as a viable mass market offering. The electric car has been around since the advent of the automobile. First appearing on the scene in the late 1800s, giving the internal combustion engine cars a run for their money at the turn of the 19th century, electric cars were generally praised as being smoother and quieter than those that were powered by internal combustion engines. They were ultimately overshadowed by their noisier and rougher running counterparts as the infrastructure to support fueling for gasoline eclipsed that of battery electric cars. As a result, beyond a few historical anomalies, electric cars lay dormant for nearly an entire century.

Fast forward 100 years to California in 1990 with new emissions mandates looming on the horizo. There was a profound first mover opportunity for General Motors to reintroduce the electric car in the form of the EV1,

perhaps the most fully realized and most robustly developed compliance car designed to meet looming stringent vehicle emissions mandates. The EV1's raison d'être, along with those of several others released by major manufacturers at the same time, was to serve as a backstop while the manufacturers fought for legislative relief from the emissions mandate. Finding success in doing so, they each quickly deprioritized and eventually abandoned further development of a consumer facing electric car for the time being.

During their short time on the scene the EV1 and the other compliance cars were minimally marketed to consumers. In fact the EV1 was only offered as a lease and was taken back by General Motors and unceremoniously crushed when their leases were up, despite a group of early adopter protests. The film, "Who Killed the Electric Car," (2006) directed by Chris Paine, does an excellent job of detailing this brief resurgence and rapid decline of the second coming of electric cars. Later in 2006, more than fifteen years after the demise of EV1 and other compliance cars, Martin Eberhard and Marc Tarpenning introduced the Tesla Roadster. We'll call this the second wave of the modern electric car given that the true first wave was back in the late 1800s. What Martin and Marc realized in re-imagining the electric car was that although electric cars could in fact be run significantly cleaner than those powered by internal combustion engines, they also had inherent tradeoffs, chief among them was that there was absolutely nothing cool about the prior compliance cars. Those cars

checked the necessary boxes and unintentionally surprised and delighted a rabid subset of early adopters, despite never having been marketed, much less marketed as desirable. What they didn't do in seeking to redefine the category was to appeal to the heart as much as they appealed to the mind. The majority of the compliance cars looked indistinguishable from the humble economy cars that they were based on, which in turn were sold on value for dollar as opposed to outright desirability. The EV1 was designed to be aerodynamic and efficient first with aesthetics and performance being an afterthought.

Martin and Marc knew that if they had any hope of success in launching a third wave of the electric car, it would need enough range to be usable as primary transportation for upwards of 90% of use cases. For this to be possible it needed an expensive lithium ion battery coupled with a purpose engineered AC induction motor dictating a price many multiples over that of an economy car. If such a car with such an expensive battery were to sell profitability at $100,000 or more, it had to meet or exceed the appeal of cars costing similar money, the Porsche 911 being the long established benchmark.

Marketing such a car as being cheap to run or better for the environment simply wasn't going to cut it. In no universe would a rational buyer spend that kind of money to save at the pump or reduce their carbon footprint. No, this car would have to appeal to the heart as much as it did to the conscience.

The Tesla Roadster, their electric first car offering, would be positioned as a true competitor to the decades' long standard bearer of performance cars. For this to be the case it had to accelerate like a 911, handle like a 911, and have the curb appeal of a 911, a car model that had been in series production and refined for more than forty years before the Tesla Roadster was even contemplated. They partnered with the venerable British manufacturer Lotus, long renowned for designing sleek cars that were second to none in handling prowess, while they would marshal their internal resources to focus on bringing in the power, range, and efficiency to make the overall package a compelling alternative to the very best vehicles that Europe, Japan, and America had to offer. The formula worked. In 2008 they brought to market a car that offered the same zero tailpipe emissions and low running costs as the compliance cars from the first wave of market entries nearly twenty years prior, but with the acceleration, handling, and looks of the best combustion cars of its time. Fold in the promise of advanced

driver assistance and over the air updates not available in the wave of compliance electric vehicles (EVs), and the appeal of new school EVs was undeniable.

By looking backwards at historic combustion car benchmarks and forwards to a cleaner/greener future in equal measure, Martin and Marc had forced the industry's hand, eventually laying the groundwork for increasingly higher production volume models like the Tesla Model S and Model X, and later the even higher volume Model 3 and Model Y, all designed and built on the same fundamental premise of having one's cake and eating it too – no compromises. Competitors from both legacy manufacturers and new upstarts followed suit and before long the market had become crowded with a variety of different flavors of the premise that Tesla had first delivered; no excuse EVs that people would gladly cross-shop against the best of combustion engine powered cars.

Here's where an interesting inflection point materializes. If Tesla had thrown down the gauntlet as an industry disrupter, and without a doubt they had from the competition's standpoint, what did competitors need to do to beat Tesla at their own game? There was one obvious answer: price relative to range. But this constraint was largely dictated by the cost of batteries, something no manufacturer had any clear competitive advantage in overcoming. Beyond this it was obvious that this new breed of EVs could and almost universally would accelerate ferociously, overshadowing the fastest supercars in their

initial surge of acceleration. Looks mattered too. These cars would need to look and feel desirable, like they belonged squarely to this new generation of automobiles without veering too far off script in terms of how cars have historically looked. In fact it wasn't until Tesla's 2024 Cybertruck that this convention would be challenged.

The third wave of the EV has held for nearly two decades after the launch of the Tesla Roadster back in 2006/2007, a span of time long enough for many people to have owned more than one EV back to back, or in some cases, migrated from an EV to combustion and back to an EV again. With nearly universal industry convergence on the overall value proposition of EVs settled, and even alignment on a common charging interface standard (the NACS charging standard that Tesla themselves pioneered), it seems like the industry has settled into a groove where their EV offerings are far more similar to one another than not. One can conclude that the market share of EVs relative to combustion cars will map to follow EV adoption curves, since the Tesla Model Y is now the number one most popular car model sold worldwide of any car currently on market, gas or electric. Far from the end of the story, this is actually where things get interesting. In that nearly twenty year span of time, now with the polarizing Elon Musk at the helm of Tesla, the fanfare has died down. Automotive journalists who once heaped gratuitously effusive praise on Tesla and the consumers who drive them have grown accustomed to the blisteringly quick acceleration,

the great handling from a low center of gravity, and the smart features of Tesla and other EVs.

> *The common refrain is that the cars are tremendously competent, but they are commuting appliances rather than objects of desire. The sheen has worn thin.*

Certainly, familiarity plays a large part in this. When something that was once scarce and unfamiliar becomes ubiquitous and more broadly attainable, it becomes less special. But is there more to this explanation? Is it really just the case that we've seen, owned, rented, and been driven around in enough EVs as Ubers and Lyfts to not see them as anything more than ordinary, now having grown accustomed to aspects of these cars that once made them exceptional and remarkable? I'll posit here that as in other examples, in the rush to compete on price, range, acceleration and looks, the manufacturers have collectively thrown the proverbial baby out with the bath. Anyone that has owned a classic car alongside a modern one, especially alongside a modern EV, can tell you that there is something irreplaceable about the old classic. It may leak oil on the driveway and fail to start far more often than the modern car, may be more costly to

run and certainly emits copious amounts of exhaust while being slower, less safe, and a whole lot less clever than modern cars, but there's still something there. Something that makes us want to put up with all its foibles and eccentricities knowing that by any practical, rational measure it has otherwise been rendered obsolete by its modern progeny.

If you follow automotive aficionados you'll hear comments about old cars feeling more analog, and by comparison modern cars feeling too synthetic like a video game that sanitizes and takes the drama out of driving a piece of machinery to its limits.

> *An older car, one that may or may not kill you in a minor accident or leave you stranded, still has a certain je ne sais quoi to it.*

The absence of the roar of an engine is an obvious example, having dropped the engagement of one of our senses entirely from the driving experience. But is that really all? If so, both EV's and combustion cars alike now have piped in fake engine and exhaust sounds in the cabin (and sometimes outside for the benefit of passersby too) - does this sufficiently address the perceived shortcoming? Others have pointed to the easy, almost effortless accessibility of power in modern EV and continuously variable transmission (CVT) equipped combustion cars – but do fake shift

points that simulate the revs of a combustion engine adequately allay this? Does our suspension of disbelief stretch far enough to allow for shift points that we know are fully synthetic and have zero bearing on what the car's mechanical components are actually doing? For some, these ersatz concessions may be enough. It's just enough of a throwback to breathe a bit of character back into the car, however thin the veneer. But for many, perhaps most, these half steps simply amplify and underscore what was lost along the way in terms of character and charm rather than atone for their absence.

This doesn't mean that a look backwards is the wrong move. In fact, it's absolutely what car manufacturers should be doing. But maybe a more sincere and honest look in the rear view mirror of automotive history and evolution is in order. For example, car enthusiasts of a certain age will remember that before air conditioning was ubiquitous and when people smoked more commonly, rather than lower the window down (which would create a buffeting effect and/or drive cigarette smoke back into the back seat), cars used to have little triangular windows called quarter glass that could pivot in and out to direct fresh air into the cabin. By the 1980s, these had been relegated to history books. Could a modern car, EV or otherwise, bring back the quarter window to reconnect us with the fresh air from outside? In classic cars from the 1980s and 1990s there was often a crotch level vent, aka the "ball blower," under the steering wheel. These days, beyond defrost, it's head, chest, or feet only. Similarly, many

classic cars had pop up headlights. Ostensibly these were removed in the interest of pedestrian safety, and yet, the Cybertruck and countless other modern vehicles present a much more formidable and deadly front end to pedestrians than a pair of opening and closing headlight covers. The appeal of pop up headlights? For those of us that grew up with them, the look and feel of the headlights popping up and down gave a sense of occasion. Sure they probably hurt aerodynamic range when up, but modern cars likely could offset this in part with our aero advances so that the sum of these still presents an acceptable overall drag coefficient. In the past, bonded/glued coconut fibers, which are in fact organic, had a unique feeling to them without the carcinogens found in the foam of modern cars. The click of mechanical door handles, swiveling headlights or fog lights that turned with the steering wheel, and perhaps, most importantly, a stick shift that did more than simply change piped in engine sounds were all part of the appeal. Could any of these be brought back? Could the traditional “H” pattern stick shift be repurposed such that the “gears” correspond to levels of regen assist on an EV? One could imagine downshifting through gears from minimal to maximum regen to get the feeling of engine braking. Could the clutch pedal make a return as a means to to shift torque from the front to rear wheels on all wheel drive EVs, to simulate the unloading effect that would occur during traditonal gear changes – something that the driver could feel as they shift through the different levels of regen assist? Could an electric car have a convertible top that you manually unlatch and throw back with one hand to better connect its occupants with the

environment outside? Could cloth seats and door cards with wild patterns make a comeback, at least as an option? Could branded accessories like Hella driving lights, BBS wheels, Recaro seats and similar be back on the menu?

When we think of the growing popularity of resto-modded cars, those that use a vintage chassis but update it with modernized running gear, from prominent tuners like Singer and Alfaholics offering premium “backdated” and throwback variants of modern cars that have been customized to provide a nod to the past while remaining firmly rooted in the present, it seems the major manufacturers have declined to follow suit. As a result,

the soul and opportunity for self-expression are absent in most modern offerings.

Rather than a soulless conveyance device, both EV and combustion alike, perhaps modern cars could look through their greatest hits from the past and do more to underscore and elevate the driving experience to focus on the tactile and the visceral as the “falling in love” part of the car purchase and driving experience.

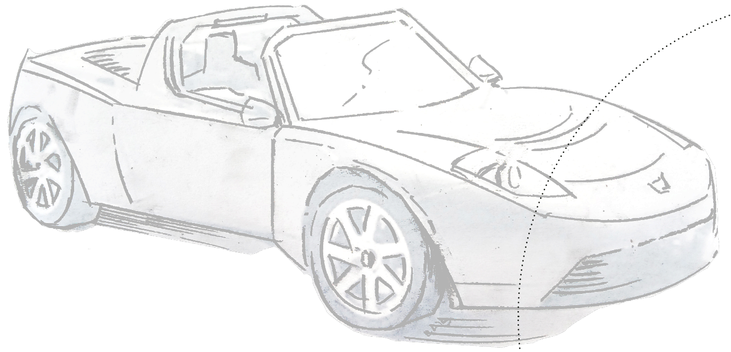
It’s safe to say that as EVs have converged around common principals that render blistering acceleration and more range than one could ever need to be a viable market participant, the need to differentiate on design and

engineering that speaks to our deep rooted positive associations with cars becomes heightened. The perfect recipe seems to have been what the emerging cottage industry around backdating new cars has figured out; maximizing profound advances in technology while still preserving and honoring ties to the past is critical. The magic is in being able to do this in a way that doesn't come across as forced and disingenuous. Overtly retro designs like Volkswagen's New Beetle in the late 1990s, the reboot of the Ford Thunderbird of the same era, never mind the host of classic hot rod inspired cars from the Prowler to the PT Cruiser to the HHR and more have taught us that shallow reskins fall out of fashion just as quickly as they appear. Let's not overlook borrowing muscle car names like Mustang for cars that have virtually zero commonality with their lineage. Perhaps no clearer sign of jumping the shark in this context is adding muscle car noises to EVs. So crass and off-putting that it has the potential to unite both ardent EV naysayers and potential EV buyers alike in turning their noses up at even contemplating a purchase. Fake tachometers that don't correspond to EV motor RPMs is another example of lazy thinking when it comes to trying to build enduring affinity through fakery.

If there were a single word that could be used to encapsulate what is missing from modern cars, both electric and otherwise, it would be "engagement." They can still offer utility without engagement, and thereby check the "needs" side of the equation as a conveyance device, but not gratification. For them to rise above mere competence and achieve true and lasting appeal, they need to forge a tactile and visceral connection to both their driver and their occupants.

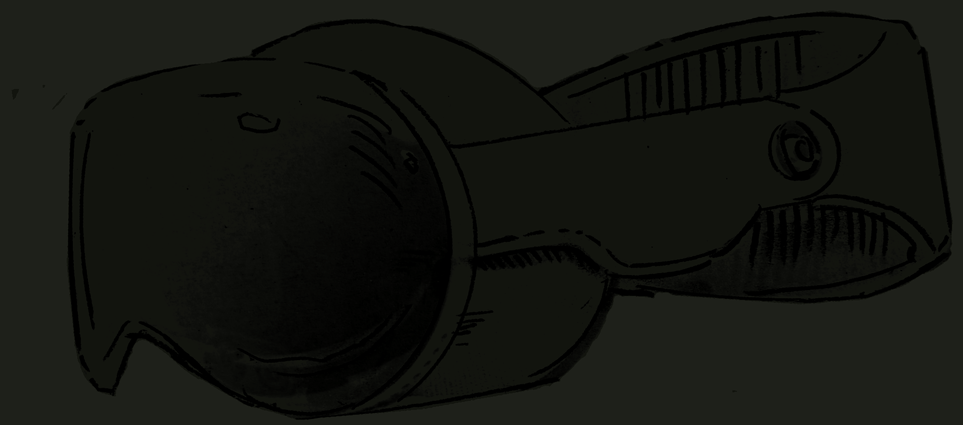
Engagement occurs at two levels – one being how we interact with it and the second in how we relate to it.

As it happens, by maximizing for interaction, we are also amplifying how we relate to it relative to the roles cars have played in our lives. When we feel the rush of air on our face, having opened a quarter window, it's both the act of opening and angling a window to cool us and equally the memory of what it was like as a child to feel and hear the sensation of speed through the air rushing in. When we grasp the shifter, we are both engaging the sense of touch, while bringing us back to a time in which grasping the shifter meant that we, not a suite of computers or sensors, were in charge of what the car would do next. The more a car engages us through raw, tactile sensation, the more it reminds us of the cars we owned and loved, or loved and aspired to own, and the more deeply connected we feel with it.



Example:

Consumer Robotics & Smart Home Automation



The Disappearing Act

Contrasted against cars is the category of consumer robotics and smart home automation. Collectively we generally have first-hand experience in cars going back to our earliest childhood memories. By contrast, home automation has nowhere near the footprint in our collective psyche spanning from Millennials backwards. Higher income households dating back to the 1970s and 1980s experienced automated luxuries like electric blinds andhard-wired lighting systems, but these were still user-controlled conveniences. The device automated something we did manually, but it did so strictly on an as-requested basis. Routines were derived from an end user manually setting them, not because the device itself had any way of monitoring surrounding conditions or changing preferences. It happened only because we told it to and so it would remain until we told it otherwise.

The technology landscape shifted dramatically when the word "smart" first came into the equation in home automation.

When home electronics were no longer limited to a suite of sensors that told them what to do, but could instead connect to the cloud via a WiFi connection, this represented a sea change in how these devices could store and recall data - something that proved essential in predictive behavior. Initially this meant leveraging the power of machine learning in its simplest form. In this first evolution, a device would work in relative isolation, using known algorithms to determine what it should do and when based on its understanding of the environment in which it operates. Since then, the meaning of "smart" has evolved to include the concept of entire ecosystems of products talking to each other, aggregating data inputs from a variety of sources to paint an increasingly detailed picture of what goes on in our homes without us having to set the routines ourselves. For the majority of the buying public that came of age from the early 2000s and back, the idea of an integrated smart home with multiple devices monitoring and anticipating our every movement by talking to the cloud and one another is still very much a new and novel concept.

While we didn't collectively grow up with mechanical servants or butlers that could anticipate our every whim, what we have instead are popular science fiction reference points ranging from Rosie the Robot in The Jetsons, (Hanna-Barbera) to HAL in "2001: A Space Odyssey," (1968, Stabley Kubrick) that foreshadowed what it would one day be like to live in an environment where things were done for us without us needing to do much of anything other than go about our daily lives. Is it any wonder that the most popular name that people give their robot vacuums is Rosie? HAL on the other hand would be a great name for an automated voice assistant.

The recent arrival of smart home devices in our lives raises the question of whether looking backwards in designing robotic and home automation technology is helpful in driving us to form a stronger bond with these devices than we otherwise might. The answer, it turns out, is both yes and no.

As discussed in the previous section, engineering advancements in cars, most especially around EVs, tend to emphasize the capability of the car rather than the engagement between the man and machine. It's for this reason that EVs have increasingly been criticized as soulless transportation appliances. The more the car does for us and the less it relies on us as drivers to competently control it, the more detached the whole experience becomes. Yet by contrast with consumer home automation and consumer robotics, the whole point is to make our lives easier through minimizing interaction. When we are required to interact with smart home technology, there's generally no innate reward. In fact, the mere act of making us repeat a voice command in order to automate the process of turning something on or off when we could just have easily flipped a switch ourselves is rife with frustration. It's fun to control a car as it hurtles through time and space. There's no such reward in interacting with a light bulb or theromastat in our home.

Consumer robotics and home automation by design excel at taking on the repetitive and the mundane.

The entire value proposition lies in calculating how many seconds, minutes, or hours we would have spent vacuuming, compiling grocery lists, or adjusting window blinds in the hopes that we can reclaim this time and instead spend it where it counts. There's a great quote from Joanna Maciejewska that says

"I want AI to do my laundry and dishes so that I can do art and writing, not for AI to do my art and writing so that I can do my laundry and dishes."

In other words, home automation should ultimately enrich our lives by increasing our bandwidth to do the things that gratify us, not automate and thereby lay claim to our sources of gratification.

In the context of consumer robotics and home automation, user gratification comes in equal parts from saving us the physical effort of taking care of a repetitive task that we would rather not do, and just as importantly removes it from our mental load altogether as though that task no longer exists. The hallmark of its success is the ability of these devices to anticipate our needs by monitoring our daily patterns and preferences so that they can

with some degree of accuracy know when they need to act without being told. The better they can synchronize and coordinate based on shared input data, the better they can collectively achieve this objective. For example, a smart doorbell confirms for the smart thermostat and the light dimmers that an occupant has left the house and that the last occupant is almost always out by a certain time each morning. This lets the robot vacuum know when to initiate a cleaning cycle at a time that's least likely to disturb anyone. With this continued evolution of a smart home ecosystem, the smart house essentially programs itself by constantly monitoring us and learning to anticipate the patterns of our lives. The misstep occurring within the consumer robotics and smart home device category is that because we are early in the adoption curve and prices are still relatively high, companies that manufacture these products are spending a lot of time and money making them look sleek and premium, making them as conspicuous as possible, the idea being to draw attention to these devices as status symbols.

What if instead we approach this another way? What if the suite of automated and robotics helpers were hidden away, neither seen nor heard from unless actively called upon, which would be almost never. Although there are analogs to murphy bedsand hideaway can openers and ironing boards well before this time frame, it was really during the heyday of modular kitchens in the 1960s that we first began to see major electrical appliances like refrigerators and dishwashers hidden from view by integrating them with

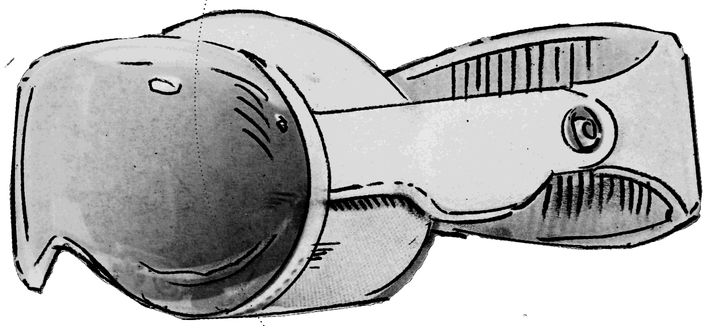
their surroundings. In the 1980s and 1990s this trend reversed course as both major and countertop appliances became status symbols and were more often conspicuously on display. It's against this backdrop that smart home technology emerged onto the scene. Here it's important to draw a distinction between home appliances and consumer robotics or home automation. An appliance like a dishwasher, coffee machine, washing machine, or clothes dryer mechanizes something laborious and historically have been viewed as implements, meaning they require some level of human interaction to tell them what to do and when to do it. A simple analogy might be a drill or electric toothbrush. We know what it's for and that it works only when we tell it to. The premise that something we bring home can monitor how and when we use it and then draw its own inferences around what it learns from us and its surroundings through machine learning and AI, that it stores and references back to a data set it has acquired on its own, is a profound one. Why then am I positing that these devices be camouflaged within our homes to be minimally conspicuous? The answer is that

the success of these devices is not in how we relate to them based on some historic reference point, but in how they relate to us.

We are not deriving any fulfillment whatsoever from interacting with them. In an ideal scenario, they would have done their jobs without us even being the wiser other than our awareness after the fact that the repetitive mundane job that we opted out of has been done. Add to this the fact that for these technologies to work, they require a bevy of sensors from cameras and microphones to access to our WiFi access to talk to the cloud, and the more a user is aware that he or she is being actively monitored, the more disconcerting it all becomes. For this reason, the ideal design of smart home technology is one that visually disappears, like a wildlife photographer observing animals at a drinking hole. There's no upside in making its presence known. The less we see, hear, or think about it, the better it can do its job.

The idea of being monitored 24/7 in the most private spaces that we occupy is one that is unsettling at best and entirely objectionable at worst. The marketing and advertising of these technologies can and should seek to tie them into some historic normalization of interactions between people and sentient devices. Whether it's KITT from Knight Rider (Glen A. Larson) or C3P0 and R2D2 from Star Wars Original Trilogy (George Lucas) we want to be sold on the premise of these devices being trustworthy. However, once purchased and in operation, the less we see of glowing, or worse yet blinking LEDs, the better.

There will surely come a time in perhaps fifteen or twenty years when the smart home technology of today is viewed as primitive and quaint. At that point, there will be a nostalgia play to be made tapping into our collective consciousness around something we have since grown to trust because we've grown up with it, like an 8 bit arcade game relative to its modern corollary. But because of the high likelihood of mistrust, the desire not to interact with it directly, and the fact that we are still in the infancy of this technology, making it disappear upon arrival is likely the best course of action today.



02 The Long *Look Back*

That backwards look is the comfort that tells us that everything is going to be OK. It lets us know that advances in technology can be trusted and accepted into the most intimate spaces of our lives–our homes, our cars and more.

The notion that wants and needs factor in like an angel and devil in our purchasing decisions, or that nostalgia factors into the want part of the equation, are not novel insights. However, understanding where nostalgia works to bolster our wants, based on how familiar something feels to us is another matter entirely. Here we have arrived at almost a mathematical equation that states that for the relative level of disruption something represents, an inverse ratio of nostalgia needs to be present to act as a counterbalance for our wants to match or exceed our rational purchase drivers.

Two effective strategies for enabling this to occur when the level of category disruption is high is (1) downplaying the prominence of technology post purchase– designing use cases that allow for new technology to fade into the background as opposed to highlighting its existence, and (2) ensuring that carry over legacy reference points are abundant and thoughtfully implemented along the way.

Together, we can call these the **BWA** or **Backward Weighting Average** where category disruption added to the number of competitors in the space added to the amount of time that has passed since market launch added to conspicuousness gives us a number.

Add these four variables together, divide by four to arrive at an average– the higher the number, the higher the BWA score. The higher the BWA score, the more important it becomes to incorporate a look back.

Four variables to consider when looking back:

1. The relative level of category disruption.
2. How crowded the market is.
3. How quickly can build market scale beyond the early adopters.
4. Conspicuousness in how we interact with it.

$$BWA = \frac{\text{disruption} + \text{competitors} + \text{time} + \text{conspicuousness}}{4}$$

Let’s say I’m advising Tim Cook at Apple on the release of the VisionPro VR headset. If we were to apply this methodology, we would say that VisionPro is less of a category disruptor than when Steve Jobs launched the iPhone. We would have scored the iPhone a five on a scale of one to five as there was no other device on the market that reimagined a smartphone as a four-in-one device that would be a mobile phone, an iPod, a digital camera and an email/web browser in one with a touchscreen interface. By contrast the VisionPro was launched into a landscape in which other VR headsets like the Oculus and Meta offerings already existed and did much of the same thing both functionally and technologically, so we would score that a two for category disruption. In terms of how crowded the market was at launch for each of these products, the iPhone launched in a very crowded market selling in high volumes, certainly hundreds of thousands of units nationwide and likely millions globally with Nokia, LG, RIM (BlackBerry), Samsung, Ericsson, Sony, and countless others all competing in a lucrative and growing market. VisionPro launched into a growing, but still small market of VR headset users, a tiny sliver of the market for mobile phones back when iPhone launched in 2007. Here we will score the iPhone a five and the VisionPro a one. In terms of moving to mass adoption, the iPhone scores high here too. It was something that everyone could, and likely would, quickly adopt in large numbers based on being priced right, wide carrier availability at launch and the relative size of the market it was being launched into (mobile phones were just about ubiquitous at the point). Here, the iPhone scores another five while the VisionPro, which in

stark contrast launched into a niche category at a high price, would take some time to migrate to mass adoption, if it ever did. We will score the VisionPro as a one here. Finally, we arrive at conspicuousness. This one is a little more nuanced. It’s abundantly clear that wearing a headset and goggle combination is very conspicuous, arguably more so than using a mobile phone. However, the use case of the mobile phone is much more broad, so many more people in many more settings will see you using a mobile phone than a VR headset. It will be seen socially among friends, by colleagues at work, family at gatherings, and strangers out in public in transit. In short, everyone will be seeing you interacting with it in every possible context. The VisionPro, however, will most likely be used in private or in very limited work settings. It’s not something that many others will likely have the opportunity to observe the user interacting with. We will score the iPhone as another five and the VisionPro, rather generously, a two.

Adding these up, we can see that the iPhone, having scored a perfect five out five in all four categories earns a twenty. Divide that by four and we have a BWA score of 5. The Vision Pro got two ones and a two twos for a total of six and a BWA score of just 1.5. From this, we can conclude that the iPhone, relative to the VisionPro, would benefit substantially more from the backwards look. But let’s look more closely at how this is used in practice.

Let’s begin with the name. By combining so many core functions into one, the iPhone had more in common with a Swiss army knife than a mobile phone by combining so many core functions into one. Steve Jobs could have named it something like Macintosh, Lisa, or Newton, as he had in the past, making no reference to its origin story or the category it was almost certainly going to upend. Even the closest name he had launched, iPod, which reshaped the digital portable music category, didn’t harken back to any historical analog. No, Jobs instead took one of the device’s functions, the telephone, which happened to cast the biggest and historically longest shadow in our collective consciousness, and named it after that. Arguably, its ability to make and receive telephone calls was its least interesting function, but rather than call it an iDevice, it was named an iPhone. He added “i” (for intelligence) in front of “phone,” something we’ve known since the days of Alexander Graham Bell, and put the entire industry on notice that from here on out Apple would be redefining what we know a phone to be.

[As an aside, the Swiss Army knife is interestingly also called knife for likely much the same reason. Although it’s also a corkscrew, a can opener, a saw, a magnifying glass, and a multitude of other things, people habitually carried knives in great numbers

than any of these other tools, and therefore, the category it disrupted was hunting/survival knives, not bottle openers or saws.]

Next, Jobs was a stickler for form factor - the sized, shape and tactile feel of a product. The device could have been any size or shape, but he wanted to render the entire mobile phone category obsolete, including not only the flip phones that preceded it, but personal digital assistants like Blackberry and Palm Pilot. To do this, the iPhone had to be usable with one hand and fit easily into the front pocket of a pair of jeans. He then considered how it is that we interact with the device, including the user experience and user interface. Again, he looked at the familiar, including not just his Macintosh operating system (OS) with a graphic user interface (GUI) dating back to the early 1980s for Apple, but even further back to Xerox PARC, the future products division of Xerox, the experimental. Iconography including manila folders, a trash can, and envelopes dating back to the days before computers were ubiquitous in an office setting were themselves a throwback to the known and familiar.

The very first TV commercial that ran for the original iPhone launch opens with black and white footage of Lucille Ball picking up a telephone call from a rotary telephone followed by a series of scenes from old movies and television shows depicting scenes of phones being answered with

the word “hello”. The commercial ends when a call comes in from a John Appleseed (another historical reference from our childhood lore) and the single word “hello” by way of product introduction.

Having nailed a perfect BWA score and then masterfully connected the technology in name, form, function and marketing to the past, is it any wonder how the iPhone became a breakthrough hit and reshaped our collective understanding of what it means to be a smart phone? Although the iPhone is a clear and concise example illustrating how the BWA scoring system works to determine whether a backwards glance is essential for a breakthrough category defining product offering, we can also look back at our earlier case studies to spot similar approaches throughout. For example, Tesla’s first car was not the Model S, X Y or 3,

it was the “Roadster”, a nod to the earliest open top cars at the turn of the century, harkening back to a simpler time when the automobile first represented freedom and the call of the unexplored open road, not a mere transportation conveyance for navigating daily gridlock.

The two major robot vacuums that battled it out for market dominance when the category launched were named Neato, a quaint phrase harkening back to the 1950s to describe something impressive (and containing the word “neat”), and the Roomba, referencing the rhumba dance popularized in the 1930s with a nod to the word “room” that speaks to the funny, dance-like movements a robotic vacuum makes as it cleans.

Building in these historical reference points encourages us to connect with category defining products with an open mind and heart. This represents the promise of fulfillment, tapping into both our needs and our wants in equal measure, and bringing us something we find approachable, intuitive, and, ultimately come to perceive as an expression and extension of ourselves.

This latter piece is no small aspect of a breakthrough success. We see ourselves as unique and individual, yet the products and services we choose to acquire to express that individuality are far from bespoke to us. They are mass produced and can be purchased, owned, and enjoyed by

anyone with the ability to afford them. Yes, cars, phones, furniture, and fashion can be uniquely combined and accessorized, but what we are actually being asked to buy in its naked and unadulterated form is far from tailor-made for us.

We have now arrived at the role of authenticity in the analysis. Earlier, I called out the fact that a shallow insincere nod to legacy is not enough to forge a powerful, enduring bond between us and the objects we are contemplating to acquire for ourselves. I gave examples of how that bond needs to be visceral and tactile-- something that hardwires us into a connection between man and object, and ideally one that reaches deep into the recesses of our past, to make this newfound connection feel familiar and trustworthy. This authenticity is what informs trust and what allows for the suspension of disbelief that attaches our hopes and dreams to something we perceive to be expressive of ourselves and at the same time, lasting, enduring, there for us through the ups and downs of life as it unfolds.

When we think about the word “authenticity” we know it to be a synonym of “real” or “genuine”, distinct from fake or a cheap copy of something else. But it actually goes deeper and further back than that. For something to be truly authentic we have to have a sense of its origin story, its provenance. It is not sparkling wine, but champagne - and all that it entails to come from this specific region in France, with specific standards, produced by a specific method, and all the rest.

I would argue that a better synonym for authentic than either “real” or “genuine” is “credible.”

We want to believe, and for that to happen, there needs to be enough credibility behind the thing to make that possible for us. When something is “incredible” (not credible) it’s far fetched. Try as we might, we can’t reconcile it with reality. When something is credible, or has credibility, we believe it is what it purports to be. We feel that we can bank on it.

In some cases, authenticity is established by a first mover within a category, but as discussed before, first movers aren’t necessarily the ones that come to be the category dominators. In other instances, authenticity can come from our belief that a company that shares our values and thus we want to support it with our dollars. One wonders in the example of Tesla, that had it not been Silicon Valley upstart vs. the world, would the story have played out differently? What if Tesla had been a spin-off of the Detroit big three and headquartered in Motor City? Would the claims of reimaging the automobile have rung as true if our associations with that particular place and that long established industry conflicted with the promise of redefining the automobile as we knew it?

Finally, in the pantheon of the credible and the authentic are the people

themselves that use and rely on the offering. Whether these are the endorsements of or athletes that we admire or identify with, or even better, grassroots level people spending their own hard earned dollars on something because they believe it's right for them, a jury of our peers goes a long way towards bolstering authenticity.

From a process standpoint, we've established that the analysis begins with a BWA assessment and, depending on the score we engineer in the backward glance while "keeping it real" to elevate authenticity. Earlier I had referenced the scenario of advising Tim Cook on the launch of Apple VisionPro. Having scored low on the BWA, the inquiry would have stopped as there would be no call for a backwards glance and no big role for authenticity. The market was still too small, too emergent, and as a result the gravitational pull of the products in it would collectively hinge on functional need based parameters, i.e. features and usability for price. However, Tim would be right to ask: people still need to want the thing for it to sell, right? And the answer is of course, but rather than connecting the product itself to our collective psyche, we leverage marketing to do the heavy lifting by selling the experience of using the product. This stands in juxtaposition to the experience of owning the device and the association that comes with identifying so closely with the object. Between kids high-fiving during a video game or an adult reliving a cherished memory from what we can assume is an interaction with a deceased relative, we can still forge powerful emotional connections through the experience of using the

thing and leverage these connections to sell the experience. However, and importantly, the thing itself is merely a conduit; our emotional associations and connections are transferred through it, not onto it. So even in the absence of a backwards look that brings the product into frame for us, advertising and positioning can go a long way in establishing functional relevance of the product in terms of what it enables. This may seem like a nuanced distinction, but it is an important one.

There's another aspect worth calling out here too. A product can score high on the BWA score, masterfully incorporate the backwards glance, and be 100% authentic to its target audience and still end up as a colossal flop. Earlier, I referenced the iPhone as an exemplar of doing all the right things the right way in redefining the mobile phone market category. Here's the rub. At the same time that Apple launched the iPhone, the Canadian company Research in Motion (RIM) was rolling out a trackpad enabled BlackBerry that still relied on a traditional QWERTY keyboard instead of a touchscreen like the iPhone. Judged on its own merits, the trackpad enabled BlackBerry should have been a runaway success. It would have scored highly as being competitively priced in the same large and rapidly growing smartphone market. It, too, was conspicuous and, because of BlackBerry's track record selling to young, upwardly mobile execs and captains of industry, even had a whiff of status symbol to it. It also had a robust carrier network behind it, and, best of all, the QWERTY keyboard employed a brilliant backward glance, incorporating something old, tried,

and true with a piece of technology that was cutting edge at the time; their keyboard for thumbs was nothing short of a unique and elegant inclusion of the tactile, front and center, in products that would otherwise be an anonymous and cumbersome to use digital devices void of meaningful consumer connection.

The critical area where it would have fallen short is disruption. The QWERTY keyboard had already been featured prominently on BlackBerry's products for years prior. It was the category disrupter of its time, but no category stands still for long-- especially not one that was scaling as rapidly as the mobile phone marker of the mid 2000s. By the time the trackpad-enabled BlackBerry launched the category it would be redefined again by the iPhone and the ecosystem Apple was building behind it. Apple's technology was more advanced, its potential audience fit was far broader, no longer limited to prioritizing the needs of business users above all others. When we factor in the camera and digital music capabilities, something that didn't matter in a professional setting but added clear value to a device that could be used both professionally and recreationally, the writing was on the wall for RIM. No trackpad could atone for the fact that with the launch of the iPhone the market had simply moved on. While they held their market position briefly on the merits of their strong carrier network, with the subsequent release of the 3G iPhone and launch of the App Store, Apple soon overtook them and left them for dead.

This was a classic case of a company resting on its laurels and stretching out an existing product for too long. RIM should have known this better than anyone as they themselves did much the same thing to the market that Palm had first cultivated but failed to evolve quickly or proficiently enough to incorporate the growing surge in mobile communications. Interestingly, this may be exactly the crossroads that we find ourselves in for the electric car market of the 2020s. Now, more than ten years since the launch of the Tesla Roadster, perhaps the most tactile and analog of the EVs, featuring both a manual convertible top and a shifter in the center console, every model they have released since has been less driver focused and more of a commuting appliance than a plaything. Each new model was successively more isolated from the visceral experience of driving. In fact the Model X was even marketed at launch on the premise of being able to shield the occupants from chemical warfare attacks thanks to its advanced filtration system. As the S, X, Y and 3 grew long in the tooth, Tesla released the unpainted stainless steel bodied Cybertruck with more than a passing nod to the DeLorean of the 1980s. Perhaps a better execution of this premise is by Rivian with their forthcoming RX and R3X. With a similar form factor, interior, and exterior details to the hot hatchbacks of the 1980s and early 1990s that Gen X grew up driving and loving, plus a projected price point to match that, puts it in line with those cars from our past. Rivian's salvo seeks to engage us around the joy of driving quickly down twisty roads, like a WRC car, whereas the Cybertruck just copies an aesthetic.

Between the two one is more authentic in both purpose and execution with the other being a passing nod to the past, showboating its angular styling with little driver gratification behind it (ironically the same criticism levied against the DeLorean back in its day).

Yes, Tesla needed something like the Cybertruck to remain edgy and relevant and as a means to roll out important new technologies that it would no doubt fold into future versions of its volume selling model, but instead it fell short. An edgy new look has only taken it so far, and a new crop of competitors have been waiting in the wings, taking notes.

03 The *Crystal Ball*

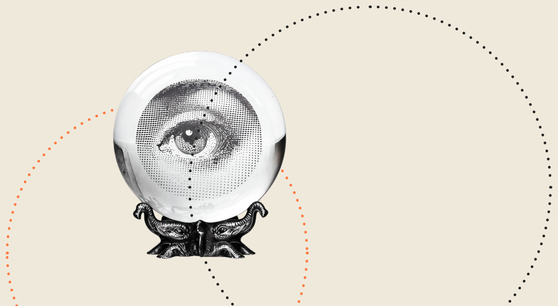
Across all categories of goods and services there are two important global factors at play driving us towards increasing homogeneity applying in equal measure to architecture, cars, furniture, consumer electronics and beyond. The first of these factors is in regulation and the second in our collective connectedness.

Regulation in the form of universal building codes are functionally useful and valuable. Rather than a patchwork of requirements varying broadly from region to region, architectural and design firms can adhere to a singular set of expectations for projects all over the globe. This also means that buildings, both commercial and residential, start to converge around certain styles and construction methods and that our urban skylines and residential streets start to look more alike no matter where you find yourself. This is also true for cars with regulations dictating not only occupant safety and emissions, as in years past, but also variables like pedestrian safety and the increasing need to be able to shorten BOM (Bill of Materials) to the fewest possible components sourced in the biggest possible volumes at the most competitive prices. This is true for consumer electronics along with most other manufacturing industries as well. The second variable for this increasing uniformity and anonymity of design is in our interconnectedness.

Before the internet, before remote work from anywhere and global virtual teams, there was a regional flair that was very much part of the provenance of a place and time.

Certain countries with certain histories and cultures pioneered a way of thinking around how things should look and function. The less centralized these became over time, the more regionless designs became the norm.

These two trends, one regulatory and one social, show no signs of abetting and are likely to continue to influence design, and as a natural byproduct, our tastes, with the passing decades. Companies, and more specifically, strategic visionaries within companies that can identify a clear vision and adhere to it in the face of these limiting factors will be the ones that break through the growing homogeneity and tap into something deeper, forging an exceptionally strong connection to our unspoken wants and desires. In doing so, they will be looking backwards in equal measure as they look forwards, and will define our wants early on, mapping to them as precisely as they do our needs. These will be the breakthrough category leaders of our future.



Thank you