

Perspectives on How Sustainability is Pushing Design

An Afternoon of Open Discussion with members of The Designers Accord and Business & Marketing Leaders

Date: June 3rd, 2008

Location: [Sustainable Brands 08](#) – Monterey, California

SPEAKERS

[Valerie Casey](#) - Global Practice Head, [IDEO](#)

[Lucas Daniel](#) - Lead, Strategy, [Gravitytank](#)

[Eric Park](#) - Creative Director, [Ziba](#)

[Lynelle Cameron](#) - Director of Sustainability, [Autodesk](#)

[John Creson](#) - Executive Creative Director, [Addis Creson](#)

Peter Falt - Director of Strategic Planning, [BMW DesignWorks USA](#)

SUMMARY

The Designers Accord is a coalition of diverse professionals, who are working together to create positive environmental and social impact. It's made up of over 100,000 members of the creative community, representing 100 countries, and each design discipline, striving to integrate the principles of sustainable design into all practice and production. Adopting the Designers Accord provides access to a community of peers that shares methodologies, resources, and experiences around environmental and social issues in design.

This panel discusses the organization, its mission, sustainable design practices at each of the panelists' companies, while also taking questions from the audience.



INTRODUCTION



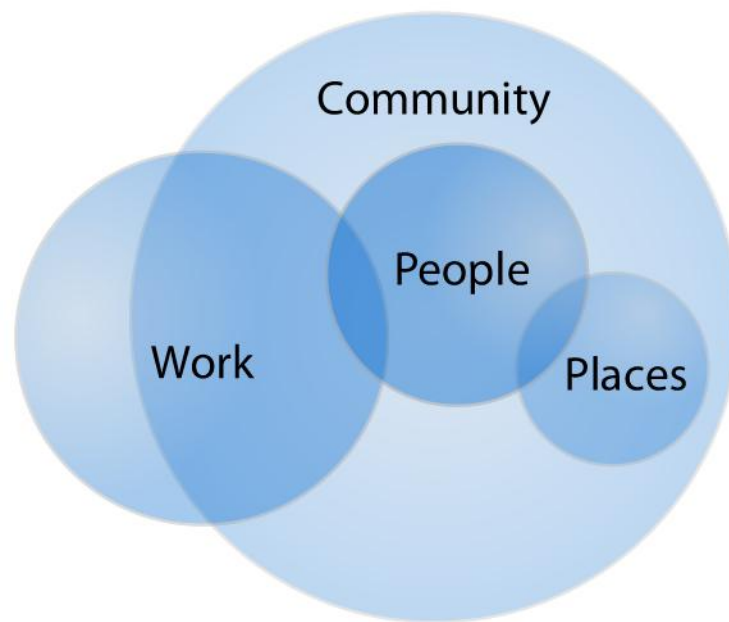
{Valerie welcomes audience, and asks how many people are familiar with the Designers Accord. A good number of people raise their hands, considering this is mostly a business-oriented audience. Valerie introduces the following statement on screen:

THE DESIGNERS ACCORD IS A GLOBAL COALITION
OF DESIGNERS, EDUCATORS, RESEARCHERS,
ENGINEERS, AND CORPORATE LEADERS,
WORKING TOGETHER TO CREATE
POSITIVE ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL IMPACT.

*{Valerie says they use the words “**Environmental and Social Impact**” because it is more meaningful to their mission, than using the word “**sustainability**”, which can be interpreted in various ways.*

Supplemental Information: There are 3 ways to join the Designers Accord, and 5 guidelines for each constituent category to follow. Please see: http://www.designersaccord.org/da_guidelines.html

{ An infographic is shown and explained by Valerie. It has been reproduced as shown }:



1st: Greening your People & Places

- Measuring your carbon footprint in all your locations.
- Establish a program to educate your internal teams on the most important things you can think about regarding sustainability, social impact, and environmental impact.

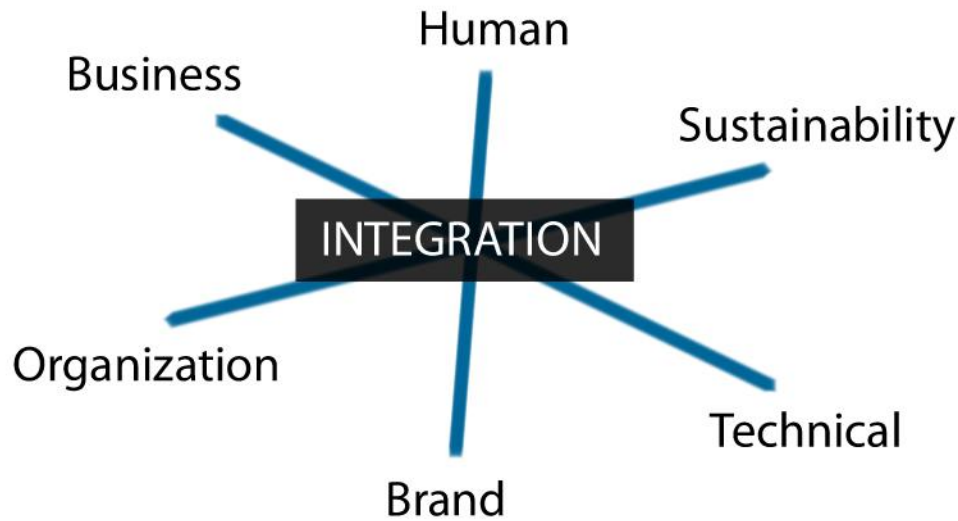
2nd: Portfolio or Work Product

- Everything that you do, every client/product you touch, we ask every adopter to engage in a conversation about sustainable alternatives, and think about the environment, social impact, and life cycle of the products & people we're touching. *{This involves asking questions to re-perspective the product/ service's goal, core benefit, or desired experience first, before thinking about form}.*
- The most radical aspect is to take the methodologies and the best practices that they are experiencing in their work, their workplace, and in their relations with clients and customers, and actually share them back with the community.

3rd: Community

- This approach is fundamentally different from the traditional model of how the design and creative industry works, which typically involves keeping everything close to the designer or within the firm. What we are seeing is that the days are over of being very competitive and exclusive with information. What we need to be doing is embracing an entirely different model so that we can take a very active leadership role.

{An infographic is shown and explained by Valerie. It is has been reproduced as shown}:



{Valerie continued}:

Philosophically, we are not asking design firms to create a green product line or portfolio. We never want a designer to say: *“Oh, I’ll make a green mobile phone for you, or a green house for you, or a green retail experience for you.”* What we want to do is really get to the point where, when we talk about sustainability, we are putting it at the same level as thinking about organizational behavior, brand design, technology in business, and then human factors. So it should just be one of the many frameworks that we are using. And we ask all the adopters not actually to take out a line item, and describe their business as *“oh, and we can also green this product for you”*. It really needs to be an integrated part of the business.

We are supporting this knowledge sharing through a global network, and we are partnering with [Architecture for Humanity](#), which has the [Open Architecture Network](#), and we will be building this web platform so that all of these informal conversations, *{some of which you’ll hear about today}*, actually can happen on a digital platform, and we can reach a much, much, broader audience. Our intention is to launch the beta version this summer.

[Cameron Sinclair](#) started Architecture for Humanity and won the [TED](#) prize in 07, with which Sun Microsystems (American computer hardware/software manufacturer) funded the creation of this platform. So we are actually joining forces with about 5,000 architects from around the world, building projects in various places, and we’ll be adding into their network.

The last point is about really understanding the power of the collective; the power that the creative community can make, working together, and how we can actually collectively, change consumer behavior, change the way business does business, and really understand different kinds of consumption habits. The power of the collective though, is pretty meaningless unless you have individual accountability, so what the Designers Accord tries to do is create a framework so that people are accountable. They need to report

their carbon footprint reduction, and they need to provide evidence of bringing materials, best practices, and methodologies into the community. They also get the benefit of being part of this global network of peers who share this passion and are thinking really creatively about this.

{A timeline of progress is shown}

- 1) Began with an article *{by Valerie Casey}* and encouragement from [Paul Hawken](#), noted environmentalist. Founded in July 2007 with 450 designers from 3 countries and 4 disciplines.
- 2) By January 2008, there were 3,500 designers from 21 countries and most disciplines (interaction design, mechanical engineering, research, industrial design, architecture, interior design). This happened through word of mouth (*people talking with others*), informal meetings, and a [BusinessWeek article](#).
- 3) Now there are 100,000 designers *{audience claps}*, with 70% from outside the United States. So it's really a global coalition with people from various countries with different regulations, while sharing unique political views, social views, and simple material analysis.

{Valerie mentions [a blog article from Mindtribe](#), and tells the story}

A Silicon Valley (Northern California, USA) engineering firm, was talking to a well-known vendor about different material choices. The vendor brought in a case of materials. The lady who wrote the article said that she and another designer were there and at the end of the conversation, she picked up a material and asked if it was recyclable. The vendor stopped for a moment, paused, look at her curiously, and said that only two times in his entire career had anyone asked him that question, and the first time was yesterday. It was remarkable, because when they did this further inquiry, they discovered that the people who asked the day before, were actually members of the Designers Accord, and they said that the reason why this is happening is that we're all asking these questions. And we may not be making a huge impact that you can see in the marketplace right away, but by participating in this conversation, you're forcing people to find out the answers to those questions. The vendor didn't know if the material was recyclable, but now with having two voices asked, and also the awareness that the entire industry is considering this, or especially his clientele, we have this really amazing kind of powerful effect. And it's those incremental things we do every day that are going to be part of making this radical change, and that's what this Designers Accord is all about.

PANEL DISCUSSION



{Valerie introduces Lucas Daniel from Gravity Tank, and briefly describes his firm's innovation and market opportunity consulting services} Through the evidence that you're seeing around the Designers Accord, how do you see this involvement is changing your practice?



{Lucas}: It's definitely different. People in this arena now aren't really holding information and practices too close within their organizations. So the anecdote that I bring is that we were working on a project with an internal product planning team for one of our large clients, and they were wrestling with how to interpret broad corporate sustainability initiatives at the ground-level and tactical level, and how does that actually impact making the product design they were going to pursue. So, rather than approach the process new and come up with a perspective of our own, we decided that it would be best to source the collective thought capital available, and look for great evidence and case studies. I saw Terry Swak of [Sustainable Minds](#) talk at last year's [Sustainable Brands conference](#), give a great presentation with case studies. So I emailed her and said that I'd love to learn more and borrow some case studies. So she did. We spent some time on the phone and it was such a great experience that we decided to invite her to our workshop, where she collaborated with us and some other people. In the end, it was a great format for us to collectively talk about it. Afterwards having created our deliverable and summed everything up, she asked if she could get a copy, so I emailed it back. I think it's this sort of back and forth communication and collaboration that's really starting to raise all the boats at once. From a couple conversations I've had here, we really need to figure out how to produce the narrative (*story*) overall. One of the things that is going to hurt all of our firms is if we're all sort of consulting for these clients independently, while bringing our OWN definition of sustainability and sustainable design. So what we really need to do is look at a collective narrative and really share the same stories, examples, and case studies, and start to bring that to light.



{Valerie}: I think that's a great point. If you're outside the design industry, it may not seem that palpable to you about this competitive nature of design, but in reality it's fiercely competitive. People are always protecting this notion that we're all sort of against each other, and I think that in this case you can have a much better chance of innovating if you're not spending all of your time defining what sustainability is and trying to educate your teams, but rather pool each others' interests and build on each others' notions. With [Design Continuum](#), another large design firm, I called their people up and said that there's a couple of small firms in San Francisco that are really looking for a quick way to engage in those conversations with clients, and I said that what we did to begin, is that we made a physical space, like an exhibition of green products and things, and let people try the difference between this soap and that one, while looking at different bottles and shapes...but in essence make it a physical, experiential thing, rather than giving a lot of rhetoric around design. It resulted in a wonderful experience. They just shared that and now these little firms are doing so and are able to take on some of those strategies, then send on their successes or failures, etc., back to the community. And you can see that this has a sort of wonderful amplified effect.

{To John}: You've been experiencing some of that in the bay area yourself as well, correct?



{John}: I see our firm as independent. My previous life was in larger organizations, but now when you're constrained with the number of resources one has, you tend to be a bit more entrepreneurial in terms of the types of individuals you reach out to. And so by nature, I think we create our own networks, and I think it's actually beneficial because the problems we're working with

are getting more complex. Right now we're working on a project called *Better Places*, from this gentleman who is creating a fundamentally new infrastructure for transportation, and now he's talking about energy and the subscription cell phone model as a way to think about how one purchases cars. These are the kinds of projects we're beginning to work on, and frankly they're beyond our capacity, so we have to reach out to many luminaries in the business. I think the common ground I've found is that as we're all sharing this sustainability envelope, the dialogue is easier. Before, getting for example some kind of information from a competitor was just more difficult. For some reason, we're now in a kind of open source world; it's broadly about sharing, learning, and wanting to improve. There's this shared ethos around that, and it's really truly amazing. In the last couple years, it's been opening up.



{Valerie}: I'm interested in that notion of having the agility as an independent firm, versus something like *{points to}* Peter, you're involved with [DesignWorks](#) which is owned by BMW, and we had an interesting conversation the other day when another division of BMW said: "*Oh we heard about this thing called the Designers Accord*". And DesignWorks came to the Designers Accord voluntarily as well. There were very few people and organizations that we had to seek out to be a part of this. The last sort of holdout was [Pentagram](#), and they signed up two weeks ago.

{To Peter Falt}: So Peter, do you want to talk about that sort of corporate hierarchy, the parent, and the level of flexibility you have in taking on an initiative like this?



{Peter}: First thanks for inviting us. Yes, it's different, but what's at least helpful is that BMW has its own sustainability policy, and so certainly they're making their own path. Having them as a parent, we do get a little bit of the Right Hand / Left Hand issue, so although we're trying to do similar initiatives, BMW, MINI, and the other brands are finding ways to make an impact in the marketplace. As a parent company, we benefit from their resources, from their knowledge bank, and certainly anything that we can bring to our non-BMW clients. There's not really a mandate that comes down from them - it's mostly guidelines that are there, that as a subsidiary we can adhere to.



{Valerie}: So there's a pre-existing structure in place, while the Designers Accord gives you an action arm for it, right?



{Peter}: Yes, there's a sustainable management system in the parent company as well as DesignWorks, and I think that the Designers Accord, from what I can tell, has given us access to individual designers culturally outside of DesignWorks. So it's actually more of a flux between consultancies and industries, rather than just inside the DesignWorks team and our efforts.



{Valerie}: Interesting. *{To Lynelle}* Lynelle, I'm going to have to pick on you, *{to audience}* because before Lynelle was at AutoDesk, she was leading corporate social responsibility at [HP](#) (*Hewlett-Packard Corporation, American Computer & Hardware Manufacturer*) for seven

years. So as the only sort of non-designer on the panel, I'm wondering how you have seen this change, or how you've seen over your eight years, how responsive this community or this culture has been to design changes. What are you seeing at AutoDesk especially?



{Lynelle}: For those who maybe don't know, [AutoDesk](#) makes 2D/3D design software, people know us from the building space (AutoCad), what people don't probably realize is that as you look around this room, and you look at tables and chairs, light fixtures, doors, or if you think about how you got to this conference in an airplane, through an airport, did you ride in a car, on a highway, or think about the electricity delivered into this building, wastewater treatment plants - there's a 90% chance that all of that I just mentioned was created using some piece of AutoDesk software. So we're a company working across many, many different industries. 2/3 of our business is international. And so that gives us an incredible opportunity, but also an incredible responsibility to think about the tools that we're giving to our customers to make smarter, greener, and more sustainable design decisions.

When we think about our customers, and Valerie asked me to talk a little bit about what we're seeing, we certainly have plenty of the green innovators, the leading companies, the companies that are here today [{Sustainable Brands 08}](#), and clean tech firms that are using our software. And then we certainly have plenty of customers who don't even know how to spell sustainable - I mean a lot of our industrial machinery customers. But I think the majority of our customer base is of organizations that are on the very beginning of the sustainability learning curve. They know it's important, they know they have to do something about it for their brand, and to be honest, they're completely overwhelmed and confused. And so they're coming to us and all of our resellers and saying, *"Help us, and how do we get there, and how can your tools help us?"* So we're working closely now with our reseller community, to have them educate our customers about tools we can bring them.

At AutoDesk, our mission is simple. It's five words: To simplify & democratize sustainable design - Make it easy, and make it accessible everywhere. The make it easy part is through our tools. But the Designers Accord really comes into the democratize piece. How do we get this out there to many, many customers; not just the green innovators and leading design firms like the fellow panelists here. So when Valerie asked about the career progression here and something I've thought about a lot over my career - probably many of you too - is this idea of incremental v. radical revolutionary change. In each step of my career path, I'm looking for that revolutionary change. I started first in a nonprofit context over in the Himalayas, working with mountain people to protect vast amount of resources, biodiversity, water and forests, and that felt really revolutionary. But then it quickly felt incremental after a few years. Then I went to work for an IT hardware company and that felt really revolutionary because I was now in the private sector doing environmental work. We did some great things, but then that started to feel incremental. And now working with the Designers Accord, working with customers all across the globe to push this envelope for sustainable design, it's really starting to feel revolutionary.

Again, one last point, is this idea of competition and collaboration. The Designers Accord goes against our nature as businesses to compete against each other and have proprietary material databases, and all our sustainability secrets. I'm on the board of the [Bio-Mimicry Institute](#), which is all about mimicking nature in design. And I think what nature can provide us on a Designers Accord context, where it's fierce

competition with predator-prey relationships, it's survival of the fittest, and yet it's also beautiful collaboration when you think about how much is interdependent and related to each other, and I think that's exactly what the Designers Accord is trying to do – maintain competition in this very collaborative sense. At AutoDesk, our expertise is software tools, but our vision is a sustainable future, so we can't get there by ourselves.



{Valerie}: I like that sort of interconnectedness of things, and as soon as you start to do any sort of life cycle analysis, or start to look at where materials are from, you see that wow, there's very few degrees of separation between the decisions we make now as designers and the impact they have. In fact, when we think about our zone of control being actually quite narrow sometimes, being on the strategy of design or the detail design side, but the zone of influence that we have being huge, you start to think about responsibility in a different way.

{To Eric}: I was thinking about your background, and just knowing that many of us who have come, like everyone here I'm sure has some sort of similar story, like an author has described as a "*Spear in the Heart Moment*", when you have this epiphany saying, "*I have to do something*" It's not just being part of a community, but actually really feeling it as an individual as well. And I know that you *{Eric}* had that kind of moment well in advance of the design community, probably about 7 years ago.



{Eric}: I think the really interesting thing about sustainability and design, is that I think the design moment is finally here, and the moment that Valerie was speaking about was in Portland, Oregon. There was a conference call, called the [Natural Step](#) conference in 2001; there were about 60 people together to talk about sustainability. And it was a very interesting meeting of people and minds, and at that place I met Darcy from Nike who was looking at opportunities within business and sustainability, and she had a role where she had to explore and come up with new ideas on how to do this. So I started a conversation with her, and thought about how does [Ziba Design](#) and the work that we do play into this. So through this kind of collaboration, she decided to try the way we think out, and brought us in to help her frame an internal conversation to get marketing on board to the importance of sustainability to the consumer. At that point, Nike had adopted Natural Step and was working internally to change their manufacturing practices - some might say because of external pressure, while others saying that people at Nike were trying to do what's best. That opportunity was a great one to really explore how relevant is sustainability to consumers; at that time this was about values and that was the word that would come out. People would understand values. But the main considerations were still focused solely on areas like performance and cost, among others on a list of decisions. So we tried to figure out what kind of role we could play, and through that work we were invited to this really great collaborative work that [Peter Senge](#) was putting on amongst major corporations that were trying to figure it out, like the BPs (British Petrol), Nike, and so on. There were business leaders getting together back in 2001 in Aspen, Colorado, to figure out, "*How do we make change and how do we share? How do we cross pollinate?*"

I think that's the moment we're at right now. Back then, it was collaboration about operations, corporate social responsibility, and brand stakeholders. Now we're talking about collaboration among an even

broader set. And for those of us who were in multi-disciplinary contexts, we realized that massive collaboration is the way of the future, and the only way you can do that in this extremely complex world is by: making it simple, sharing, and by trying as much as possible not to engage in business/consultant speak (words). Try to figure out what are common ways to think about being collaborative, massively, in order to make the kind of change in the world we want to see. And that's what makes me excited.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



{Lady from Audience}: I'm just curious if the panelists can give examples of how they've collaborated in this environment. Projects that you've worked on together, shared assets, and so on?



{John}: Part of what we've done is that we have a core set of skills, and as we've placed the stake in the ground, we really want to be involved in positive change, and that involves working with other organizations that feel the same way. It's really accelerated our internal learning as well. This is what we have called "*graying the walls*" in our own office, and we know we need to reach out while bringing in leaders to our space to educate us, so we work a lot within the academic community as well, particularly with UC Berkeley, from which we can bring in some of the various PhD candidates and leading thinkers to help us with open thinking - essentially on behalf of some of our clients' businesses as well as other business leaders. We're kind of fortunate with Berkeley. We just finished working on a solar project, and there happens to be a variety of solar energy projects arising all around us. So there's a lot of knowledge, kind of shared value in this. First there was this sense of moral conviction out there, but now we're moving more into the economic opportunity, and bridging that thinking into outreach and relationships.



{Valerie}: That sort of collaboration happens so often in a quieter, more sort of private way. I had several occasions when I was working with a previous employer, where I called up a peer at a competitive firm, and said that I have this project, I don't really know about the material; I didn't disclose the client name nor the IP (intellectual property) issues; and I asked if they had any leads around a sustainable material. Now we don't want to do that with the Designers Accord. We are well and truly BEYOND substituting materials.

We want to change consumption habits, we want to change the way people think about business, about being a consumer and engaging with their environment. But there are some of those detail things that I just didn't have my hands on. And without hesitation, this peer of mine said Yes, absolutely – here are five resources, and here's a thing that we did internally. Feel free to use it. Because they knew that it would have a net benefit. Right now, my employer and I are working on a project with a huge corporate client, that we know another consultancy is engaged with. They have a different side of the business, so what we want to do, is sort of pool our understanding of the client's organizational behavior in order to come up with an appropriate plan to help them with their sustainability protocol.

So it's not like that at the end of the day there's a product in Best Buy (*American electronics retailer*) that's co-designed by different firms, or that there's ever a Designers Accord product, with a seal of collaboration on it. But it is sort of that ongoing iterative process; that's where the conversation is really taking place.



{Eric}: I think John made a nice point earlier about how the topic of sustainability and product impact has created a different sense of collaboration and discussion. We've worked with our clients, and it's amazing how our ability to draw other experts into a discussion is openly welcomed. We've had design experts in packaging, sustainability, and supply chain management, come together and talk with us. I think it's because what the nature of the value is about - there is that openness. Everybody is still working through what's right to share, what should be shared, what's proprietary, what's not proprietary, and certainly larger corporations have not entered the MySpace (*popular American online social network*) mindset about how they think about the future and collaboration. So, this here right now, is the first time we've sat together at a table formally to talk about the Accord; and we're all curious - what is the way forward and how is it going to play out. I think it's going to be in the engagements that arise in the coming year that will tell the story.



{John}: It does seem like a natural evolution in terms of design and how "*brand*" came to the table, and now MBA (Master's degree in Business Administration) graduates have come to design table, which gave "*brand*" I think more credibility in terms of the kinds of problems we must address. I see this as a continuing evolution in terms of the new individuals that are going to be required to help with the problems today. You definitely want to go into this area. One specific example of someone we partnered with is [Lunar Design](#). We've done a lot of work with them, and have added an industrial component to their work, and we help them in a way to improve the clients that we work with collaboratively.



{Lynelle}: I think it's a great question because there is probably not many case studies we can learn from. One of the conversations we've been having over the last six months involves a materials database we operate. So there's a lot of companies and corporations that have proprietary materials databases, and we have a real interest in trying to collaborate and bring those together, again, to try and give access to many different people. There are a handful of companies that I know, that are thinking about - "*How do we make it more of an open source model that everyone can collaborate and contribute to?*" Sustainability of materials is a very slippery dataset, and the more we can collaborate and get clarity on that, the faster we can all move forward.



{Gentleman from Audience to Lynelle}: I was wondering since you're at the heart of the matter on everything that we see and touch, if you could elaborate more on your thoughts and work.



{Lynelle}: At a very high level, we are doing 3D digital modeling software for a building, shoe, or piece of industrial machinery, so that you can experience that design before it's actually real. You can analyze the energy impact on that design, the different materials and how they'll react, compare two different models, you can visualize exactly what that design is going to look like. That's the essence of what we provide. Not only can you optimize the design, early in the design process which is really the key, but you can also prevent all those physical prototypes from being made. You can test what a shoe is going to do in a marathon, without making it and having someone test it in a marathon. There's [a couple of new tools](#) that we're launching that you can find out about.



{Gentleman from Audience}: I think you're underselling the potential impact of things like this, because we're all talking about changing the flow of materials in the world, right? That's harder than anything. One can redesign a business, which is one part of that. Designers are at a hinge point, with respect to materials and influencing strategy, and a lot of other people here are from different areas creating ripple effects, so how do you network? This is not just about how do you collaborate on projects - it's one part of being intentional on causing the right thing to do. How do you see this?



{Valerie}: It feels like such an intractable problem when you look at it, as big as that. In so many of the conversations I have had with designers – to get a designer to change their habits, you don't say: *"Would you like to create positive environmental and social impact?"* You say, *"Do you want to create impact? How are you going to do that, and what are the ways you can do it?"* There's this truism, where one says that if you have a difficult problem - make it a business problem. Then, other people will become interested in it. And that's actually what we're ending up doing - extending this and bringing in all of the stakeholders as much as we can.

But I agree, it's also very grassroots. And everyone here on the panel, has another job and a thousand other things that they do, and that's kind of the difficulty about galvanizing a group as disparate as this as well. We all have a thousand ideas, and we're just trying to be surgical about how to push it forward. But I welcome any help with that.



{Gentleman from Audience}: How do you bring marketing people into this process? Because depending if you're in a medium or large company, marketing people are often responsible for understanding the market, the customer, and driving that inside doing an MRG, PRG, whatever it is. It seems that it needs to come from the top and the bottom. Just wondering if you had some thoughts on that.



{Valerie}: Just one quick reference; there's an organization called the [Frameworks Institute](#) that had done this study of how consumers had receptiveness to environmental terms, and they actually made this recommendation that we stop calling it *"climate change"*, and start calling it global warming. This is because it's much more accessible. So in my experience with the Designers Accord so far, people who are the best marketers, whether they are in a corporate environment or design

environment, they are the ones who are able to say: *“Have you thought about sharpening that message a little bit?”* And so it’s so much around the communication, and so right now the role that marketers are playing in the Designers Accord is on structuring the communication around it. But I imagine that it’s the same thing with graphic designers - they all come in very late at the end of the process, but they’re the first point of contact for consumers. So what we’re trying to do is shift those, and right now we’ve got a lot of momentum from the bottom up, and we’re working on a couple of key relationships to amplify this effect much more.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Designers Accord](#) website.
- [Interview with Valerie Casey](#), by Alan Chochinov of Core77.
- [Are We Green Yet?](#), by Creativity-Online.
- [Early Evidence the Designers Accord Is Working](#), by MindTribe.
- [The Designers Accord Makes a Statement](#), by WorldChanging.
- [A New Model for Green Design](#), by BusinessWeek.
- [The Next Step in Sustainability Conversation](#), by Sustainable Life Media.