

Good behaviour

Nick Mival explains how **DCA** continues to expand as a business and to develop its design provision

Through 2011 DCA enjoyed another year of internal development and external recognition. The Warwick-based product design and development consultancy again topped the *Design Week* rankings for product design, won more design awards and improved its position in the Sunday Times FastTrack 100 for international export.

"These awards demonstrate the quality of our work and the rate of growth in our business, reflecting the fact that over 70 percent of our work continues to be for the export market," says director Nick Mival. "During the last twelve months we have focused on delivering the highest design quality to our existing clients while steadily expanding our size and services."

In moving, over recent years, from a medium-sized to a large agency, DCA has had to balance bringing in the structure and systems to run a large agency effectively while

attempting to keep its original friendly and approachable spirit in its working culture. 2011 saw DCA grow by over 20 percent in terms of staff numbers and the company is developing an expanding 'campus' of offices and workshops across Warwick town-centre. Indeed, Mival senses that the consultancy is at the centre of a burgeoning creative hub in the heart of England: "With us, Jaguar Land Rover, Aston Martin, and a number of other great, innovative companies

based locally, there is serious growth in creative services in the region. In the past we might have struggled to get the best personnel, but now an attractive network of like-minded people is developing."

During 2011, DCA's core business has continued to be medical device design led by managing director, Rob Woolston. Other key successes have been led by DCA's technical director Rob Bassil in



the commercial and industrial sector, with launches of the X-Net anti terrorism vehicle arrest system and a Red Dot and IDEA win for 3M's M series headgear. "Building on our expertise in train design, during 2011 DCA's transport sector has expanded to work in automotive and aircraft interiors," explains Mival, "while in our consumer sector we have continued to build our expertise and expand our service offer in product and packaging design for FMCG and consumer healthcare brands."

Mival, who leads the consumer sector, explains that this year he has been focussing his clients on product design quality. "In the West we have had 20 years of the factory moving further and further from the design team at the same time as design steadily moving upstream to the executive suite and the world of strategy. The latter is great, but now, more than ever it is important as product designers to remember we are delivering a product and to keep in touch with the *craft* of product design." He adds: "As our consultancy is over 50 percent engineering, we are still very involved in making things. We want to help our clients avoid falling into the trap of

having a great strategy and a great concept, but ending up with a poorly executed product through a lack of care and rigour."

Connected to this, increasingly, DCA's multidisciplinary teams are developing new ways of exploring, defining and controlling the way that products *behave*. The consultancy has always had a strong provision in defining the 3D visual brand language for clients' projects. However, the visual aspect is not the entire story.

"Obviously a consistent visual brand language can reinforce brand value," says Mival. "But our teams, made up of researchers, industrial, interaction and usability designers, engineers - mechanical, electronics and



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software - are now developing interactive brand languages for large organisations which look at all aspects of sensorial design across a large range of products. This includes how a products feels, how it sounds, even how it smells and tastes. We are mixing subjective intuitive techniques with rigorous testing and objectivity to add consistency and control of the behaviour of product across a brand's portfolio."

When asked for a general outlook for 2012, Mival stated: "2011 has been great for us; 2012 could be even better. Contrary to what we keep reading in the press we are optimistic about 2012. We are helping our clients fuel economic growth through great design. We are consolidating our successes of the last few years and will continue to carefully expand the team, ensuring we only hire the very best, allowing us to continue to deliver the value and quality our clients have come to expect from working with us."



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Rigorous design

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