

# newdesign

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## Medical focus



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Medical | Consultancy | Diversity | Audio | Politics

# The whole package

Alistair Welch meets **Taco Schmidt** and **Ype Jorna**, co-founders of Qindle, a Dutch design agency that aims to blend brand and product awareness in helping clients to create meaningful innovation



Speaking to Taco Schmidt, the co-founder of Amsterdam-based innovation agency Qindle, he jokes that the company is so young that he is still buying furniture for the consultancy's studio located near the Centraal station in the Dutch capital.

Setting up a new design business is no easy task, but Schmidt, alongside his fellow co-founder Ype Jorna, certainly seems to have hit the ground running and although Qindle only officially began trading in May 2017, the company has already built a wide-reaching portfolio of clients across the FMCG, consumer products, industrial, and healthcare sectors.

According to Schmidt, Qindle aims to

combine product and brand design expertise to help clients realise positive impact for people, business, and the environment. The consultancy's outlook is the product of the expertise and experiences of its founders.

Schmidt himself trained as an industrial design engineer and spent ten years at the Dutch interdisciplinary design agency Reggs where he specialised in design for medical devices and consumer electronics.

Meanwhile, Schmidt's Qindle co-founder Jorna comes from a more brand-focussed background and ran the Amsterdam office of Futurebrand for a number of years before deciding to pursue this new venture. Both designers realised that the disciplines of brand and product design were becoming ever closer and that an agency that sought to offer clients the benefit of both could be a compelling proposition.

"I've always thought that the combination of a brand-focussed and a product design-focussed design company would be an interesting one," comments Schmidt. "Industrial designers have a certain type of creativity combining a more analytic point of view with a more creative perspective. What would happen if you could bring that creativity more to the front and offer that proposition together with marketing?"

Jorna adds that the design landscape in the



Netherlands tends to be quite traditional with agencies typically offering one fundamental skill, whether that be in product, packaging, or brand. Qindle's mission is to offer a more holistic approach to innovation that avoids a siloed model in favour of a flexible, multidisciplinary method. "We want to stay very open to all types of new thinking – to all methods of designing," he continues. "That keeps us very alert and 'out there' in our way of working."

The company currently has nine staff and in the coming years will look to expand to a team of around 20 to 25. Qindle works with clients in a range of sectors combining branding, product design, and technology skills into one proposition.

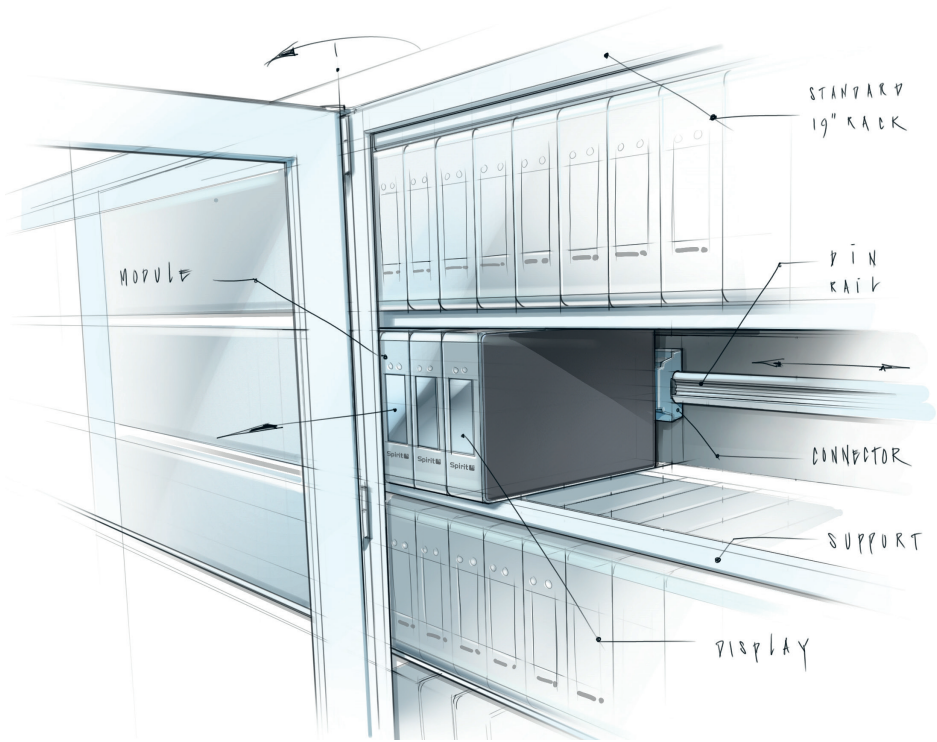
Qindle's relationship with the toy company JumboDiset demonstrates how the consultancy is using both design and business thinking to address the client's future. Indeed, Schmidt recalls that this engagement started with the insight that there was a danger that, given the increasing dominance of digital, a traditional toy company like JumboDiset – which specialises in wooden figures, puzzles, and board games – might not have a business in ten years' time.

"That was the starting point of an innovation project in collaboration with JumboDiset to create new ideas around physical-digital combinations," says Schmidt. "We looked at how they could use the content they already have – including a range of great licenses such as Peppa Pig in the UK – as a starting point to create new ideas. Instead of waiting for a brief, we come up with an idea and start to design."

Focussing on play as a fun means of developing social and cognitive skills, Qindle has supported JumboDiset's marketing, design, and R&D teams around a process of collaborative innovation. Trend-based ideation sessions gave rise to a number of unique game experiences which have translated into several tangible product cases that, it is hoped, will offer the client a clearer understanding of a brand and product path.

"A lot of our clients are facing the fact that their brand proposition is not relevant anymore," adds Jorna. "They have to figure out what is their position likely to be in the coming ten years. Thinking about innovation is good business sense."

Exactly how Qindle might help a client to address its relevance in a changing market depends to a great extent on the sector in



which it operates. "Looking at FMCG, for example, we see a lot of brands that are struggling with new target groups, millennials for instance," explains Schmidt. "How do brands cope with issues such as sustainability or the health implications of products?"

Jorna continues: "Many such businesses have been running for decades and are organised around a particular process. The world is changing and it's a question of whether they can cope with that change. So, what happens? Well, most of them panic: they are experienced marketers but they don't know what to do and so they come to the traditional organised agencies who often don't know how to help

either. The thing that can really help them is to reflect and assess what their assets are, what is still relevant, what are your quick wins."

The transformation of a business model through design is certainly not confined to the FMCG and consumer products sector. In the industrial market Qindle has collaborated with oil and gas specialists Spirit IT to add a product dimension to a company that had previously been essentially software orientated.

The resulting product, the FLOW-X flow computer, is a combination of hardware and software innovation that has helped Spirit IT – now part of ABB – to further its co-operations with oil and gas providing companies around the

Opposite | Left: Taco Schmidt  
Right: Ype Jorna  
Below | Sketch work for Spirit IP





world. “It was based on a really simple insight – to create something physical with all the software knowledge behind it,” adds Schmidt.

Understanding how designing the right hardware can help a software proposition to succeed is integral to a piece of ongoing work Qindle is conducting with a wearable technology start-up. “The company has developed a new type of sensor that measures your standing/sitting behaviour whilst working,” comments Schmidt. “They had made a version of the sensor that you could carry in your pocket but, honestly, it was an ugly thing that was difficult for a woman to



wear with a dress, so it didn't work. It's a really smart algorithm, but they can't sell it because the physical design doesn't fit. That's the interesting thing that we can bring as industrial designers: a correct product experience.”

In addition to a growing roster of clients in The Netherlands, Qindle is building relationships with companies across Europe and even in the US and the Far East. The consultancy is working with Haier, one of the largest developers and manufacturers of white goods and home appliances in the Chinese market. Like many of the companies with which Qindle engages, Haier

is looking to evolve and adapt its business model: in this instance that involves a transformation from a conventional producer of goods to a position of global leadership in connected products for consumers both at home and at work.

In designing for the Chinese market, understanding how cultural attitudes towards products differ between Europe and Asia is of the utmost importance. “Often completely different consumer insights will be important in China,” says Schmidt, who recently travelled to Qingdao on China's Yellow Sea coast to conduct a programme of design research with Haier. “Such projects typically start with interviews with consumers from which we create design stories which then feed into new mock-ups. It's a really interesting process because we are working together with Chinese designers, who have a completely different cultural focus. I think it's fascinating.”

Responding to cultural insights derived from consumer research and observation, Qindle proposed a new washing machine concept for Haier. “In Chinese families you have parents with one kid but often there is also a grandparent living in the same space, so you have a lot of different types of washes: big washes for kids, but also delicate clothes and stuff like that,” explains Schmidt. “Haier wanted to create a normal washing machine with a smaller vertical drum for delicates. The client's idea was to combine those two washing machines. They asked us whether you can make a shape around that and make one product? We said we wanted to start with the inside mechanism and create a completely new washing machine rather than merge two existing technologies.”



It's an ambitious approach, but Qindle has the in-house engineering capability and knowledge of prototyping to deliver. “Our brand promise is to ‘make it real’ so we have to be sure that whatever we come up with, it can be prototyped and produced,” adds Schmidt.

Qindle runs a small 3D printer in its studio which designers use on a daily basis to test design and engineering processes. Meanwhile, for higher-end, larger-scale models, the consultancy has a network of suppliers across The Netherlands and in China. Schmidt explains that access to affordable rapid prototyping has



made the product development process a more controllable, more enjoyable experience. “In the past you might sit for weeks behind Solidworks and then send something to prototyping and hope it would work, then you would tune it a little bit until in the end it did work. Now you can prototype and try parts every day.”

In addition to an awareness of cultural differences, an emphasis on sustainability is an important element of Qindle's identity. “That starts from our personal belief that creativity and design can play a really important role in making the world a little more social and a little more



sustainable,” comments Schmidt.

Aquible, a California-based start-up which is developing plant-based protein from water lentils, is one example of a sustainable enterprise that has worked alongside Qindle. The consultancy carried out an innovation session on behalf of the company that tackled translating consumer and category insights into a brand and design strategy with, in this instance, a target market of US millennials primarily in mind.

“These are typical entrepreneurs who are really focussed on bringing something new and meaningful to the world,” comments Jorna. “The

Opposite | Product development work for Spirit IP  
Below | FLOW-X flow computer for Spirit IP





is growing rapidly. "But our biggest focus is to communicate our proposition to clients in a manner that shows our unique way of combining, brand, design, and technology. We will continue to shape that into our service," says Schmidt.

"We aim to be working at a more strategic level in companies," says Schmidt by way of a final thought. "In the past designers might have been beautifiers, but now we are thinking more strategically and on the level of user experience. The experience of a product is leading functional design." |

company is addressing the issues of whether we will still be able to produce enough food for the world population in the coming decades. With them we have developed a whole brand proposition and product development roadmap covering packaging, naming, and design work. Such projects aren't necessarily big money makers but they are inspiring to work on."

As Qindle celebrates its first birthday, Schmidt says that the plan for the business is to maintain a focus on its three core sectors of activity: FMCG, consumer products, and healthcare and wellbeing devices. Nevertheless, there is an ambition to grow rapidly in a geographical sense towards being a truly global consultancy. Qindle is looking at opportunities to build a presence in London and, perhaps, an office in Shanghai to serve a Chinese demand for product design that



Opposite top | Qindle has conducted innovation sessions for toy company JumboDiset

Opposite bottom | Toy ideas for JumboDiset

Below | Qindle's studio is based in central Amsterdam

