Baxi, Tenshi and Freestyle Innovation find new service design offers for heating and hot water solutions
Thanks to increased awareness about the benefits of human-centred design, more businesses want to bring designers on board in the early-stages of innovation. Too often, however, companies struggle with finding or justifying the budget required for such a collaboration. Through the Innovate UK Design Foundations programme in 2017 £4 million of funding was awarded to 93 businesses of varying sizes. The objective was helping businesses work with designers to identify innovation opportunities and find viable routes to market. This case study series selects nine of those projects to highlight a variety of design approaches.

BAXI
Smart heating & hot water solutions

Baxi is an established business with over 150 years in the heating solutions market. To maintain their position as one of the largest suppliers of heating and hot water in the UK, they know they need to lead with innovative services. Funding from the Design Foundations intiative enabled Baxi to bring in designers from Tenshi and Freestyle Innovation to help develop an in-house design-led innovation unit. Baxi's Customer Insight Manager, Oliver Moffat, explains how they pooled resources and talent from across the whole business to start building a new innovation culture from within.

Establishing a design-led innovation culture

“As a non-design lead business Innovate UK introduced us to the benefits of design thinking,” Moffat explains. “Engineers are the developers of our products and they mostly work on optimising the function of the boilers. Working with Tenshi and Freestyle Innovation taught us not to do innovation aimlessly, but to really investigate what our customers’ experiences are. The crucial element was to get our staff involved from the start. Our engineers rarely get to talk to customers. We wanted to understand what does heating and hot water mean to a person? It turns out that people care a lot more about hot water than heating. They are happy to put on an extra jumper when it is cold, but not to miss out on a hot bath or shower.”

Valuing the experience of Baxi staff

“To build our cross-functional team we brought in talent from across the business. Staff were seconded to us one day a week. We wanted people with marketing experience, but also those who were curious and risk-takers. Those members of staff who joined our team were championed in the company and we know this approach has been successful because managers now want their people on our team. At the ideation stage we put the challenges on display and invited an even wider range of staff to get involved. This demonstrated the value we put on the experience of our staff, building confidence while digging out concerns and opportunities. Tenshi and Freestyle Innovation taught us how to unpick bad habits and approaches by asking questions we want answered. They encouraged us to bring in real life experience, to use simple language, and make the tools accessible. We wanted to build a toolkit that is useful for everyone and would continue to be operational after they left.”

Celebrating the process

“We hosted the Baxi innovation conference to celebrate the programme and it was hugely gratifying to see members of the team present the process back to the company as a whole, building up momentum and excitement about design-led innovation.”

Funding outcomes:

- Building design-led culture
- Design innovation toolkit
- Leadership forum
- Innovation conference
- Collaboration platform
- New service design offers