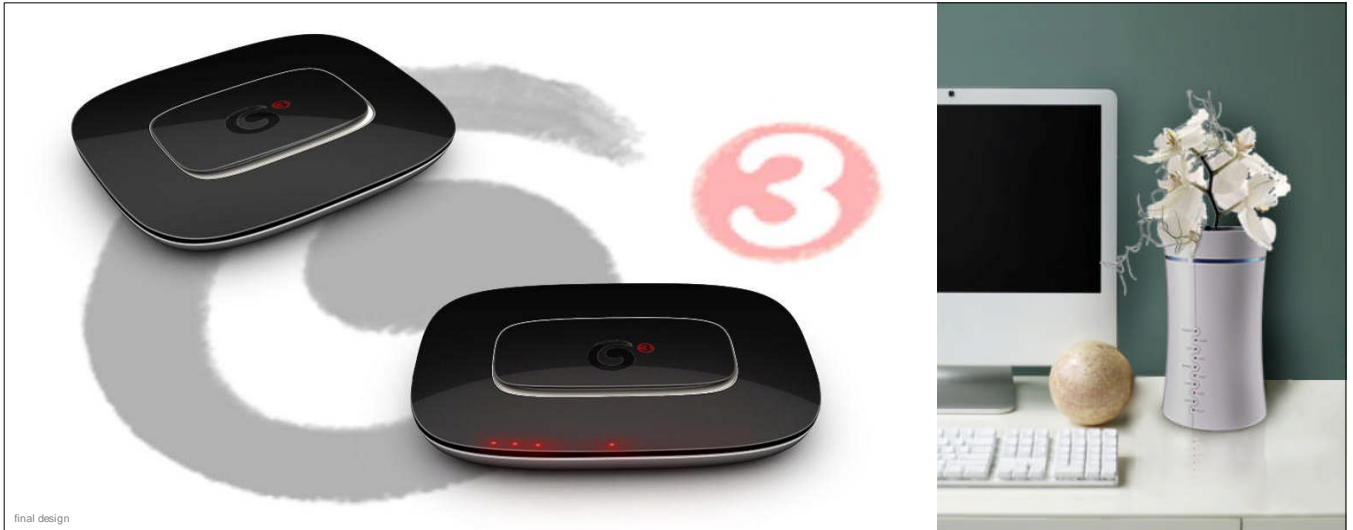


Defining a flagship product for the mass consumer market

Case Study: 3G Modem Router (2009)



Introduction

On the 7th of January 2009, the Chinese telecoms regulator granted a TD-SCDMA 3G licence to China Mobile - the country's largest mobile telephone operator. 3G high-speed networks enable operators to offer a wider range of faster and more advanced services, while achieving greater network capacity. Simultaneous use of speech and data allows users to watch TV and conduct video conference calls, all in a mobile environment. As in the West, this new telecoms technology is expected to transform how we communicate in both our private and business life, bringing with it new commercial opportunities and revenues.

Brief

China Mobile has branded its 3G business with a new logo and slogan "G3, leading the new life of 3G times". The theme of their G3 brand stems from Tai Chi, an old but profound Chinese word for "supreme ultimate force". The letter G is designed with the brush technique used in traditional Chinese ink painting, and the swirl hints to the infinite life changing qualities of this technology. The red number 3, in the style of a Chinese wax seal, resembles the red sun rising eastside - meaning there's a promising future for the 3G business. China Mobile has therefore decided to promote its latest services as a blend of tradition and innovation, and these are brand messages that we needed to reflect in our design too.

Whilst their main business is providing telecoms services, China Mobile has always been a dominant player in the hardware market too. As with their new 3G mobile phones, they were keen to rapidly develop a wireless 3G desktop modem and network router, targeted towards the mass SOHO (small office, home office) market in China. We were invited to pitch with 2 other consultancies, but our experience in the IT sector and previous good work for this company won us the job.

Activity

For this project we assigned a team of 10 industrial designers, 2 mechanical engineers and 1 project manager. By analysing and understanding the cues within their brand (i.e. tradition and technological innovation), our designers explored a number of potential styling directions aimed at decorating the desk to improve the working environment. Traditional routers are often hidden away and tangled in disorderly wires, so we wanted to create something that people wanted to have on show and enjoy looking at. We developed a diverse range of concepts, some using soft natural forms and some with sharp modern aesthetics to convey the technical attributes. We even developed one idea based on a stylish vase that would accept fresh cut flowers - just to brighten up the user environment and humanise this unassuming little box of tricks. The client selected one of our more organic forms, as it represented the harmonious side of their brand (like a pebble in a river constantly changing). They also accepted our suggestion to temper this soft shape with a contemporary high-gloss plastic finish, just to counterbalance the soft and hard. Once the board signed off the concept, our engineers proceeded to develop the concept into full manufacturing detail, able to

house the internal electronics and allow sufficient cooling ventilation. As a mass market product, cost was a key focus at this stage, together with quick assembly methods and good structural integrity for a reliable service life. We supplied a presentation prototype of the finished design, and as always, a complete manufacturing design file for their suppliers to use in production.

Results

We successfully completed the project in 2 months, giving sufficient time for their manufacturing partners to begin preparing for volume production. The product is expected to be released for general retail sale very soon.

In September 2009, China Mobile previewed the product at the Wireless & Networks Comm Expo & International Mobile Phone Conference in Shenzhen, and it was highly praised by many leading industry insiders and media commentators who attended.

Our design was the only one selected by China Mobile as their approved gateway product, and they're confident it will help them gain a greater share of the growing wireless gateway market. PER Design has a strong track record designing IT products such as this, and we will continue to create more value for our clients and consumers in this fast-paced sector.

Finally, in November 2009 our design for China Mobile won us a Red Star Design Award - one of the most highly prized accolades in the Chinese design calendar. The judging committee comprised 10 experts from 6 countries, including heavyweights like David Kester (Chief Executive of the UK Design Council), and Max Burton (Executive Creative Director of Frog Design). In fact we had a fantastic haul at this event, with 9 Red Star wins all classed as "excellent", plus we won the top award - a Gold Star, given to just 1 consultancy every year to mark "outstanding" work. No consultancy has ever won so many awards in 1 year at this influential event!



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