



In his own write

“I got your Design Experience right here...”

Designers have become quite adept at uncovering insights that reveal unmet customer needs which enable companies to make products people want to buy. But there are some customer segments that categorically reject the prescription of preordained products and will even break the law to change them...



For example: why is it that everyone else has to comply with the EPA's noise regulations, but Harley owners get a free pass to bolt on outlaw straight pipes that can lay down an acoustic footprint the size of a small county? A single motorcycle roaring across the city late at night can literally rock thousands of people...and not in a good way.

Harley Davidson is an iconic American success story; once a great leader, then suffering a near-death experience from superior competition and then miraculously resurrecting itself through the sheer power of marketing by categorically matching its sub-par products to sub-par customers. Although, to be fair, Harley owners aren't so much customers as they are a Cult, an Iron Age group of losers united by their deification of chrome, leather and a lot of noise. Harley Davidson is a rolling altar to mediocrity, miraculously defying the free market's natural proclivity to crush anachronistic products into oblivion. But Harley owners don't care. They love the freedom of wind in their face and the Thundering Roar of Zeus between their legs as they careen down the road, middle fingers held high, striking abject terror into the poor sods left floundering in their wake.

So given the cognitive dissonance logically connecting market success and inferior products, my working theory is that most Harley owners are really clones of just one individual, a scruffy-bearded tattoo-covered middle-age guy with a big gut wearing a minimally-legal Nazi half-helmet and Men in Black sunglasses. Harley owners will tell you that their excessive noise is all about awareness and safety. “Loud Pipes Save Lives” they say. Well I say if that theory is valid maybe every vehicle should have loud pipes or better yet every vehicle should require an automatic horn-on feature when in motion, you know...for “safety”.

If Harley owners were really serious about safety you would at least see some of them wearing protective body gear in colors that fall within the visible spectrum of human perception. And they wouldn't cobble together illegal homemade death-wish chassis modifications like “ape hangers” which paramedics tell me refers more to the intelligence of the rider than to the configuration of the handlebars.

So, what we really have here is a sub-group of adolescent poseurs creating an ungodly and illegal racket all under the aegis of “freedom”. But that so-called freedom comes at everyone else's expense. Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes once said “The right to swing your fist ends where my nose begins”. OK, it would be more relevant if he said “ear” but the point is it's not a freedom, it's not a right, and it's not even a privilege to acoustically assault a whole population of people just because your diminutive genitalia and sociopathic persona just *have* to broadcast to the entire world that you're a “rebel”...at least when you're not kowtowing to the Man at your part-time day job.

OK, that said...full disclosure: I still want one.

Jay Wilson
jay@jwilsondesign.com

Jay is a principal in JWD and former senior director of design at Plantronics, now living with his wife and dog in Santa Cruz, California