Using a New Innovation Spirit to Help Transform China's OEMs

以创新精神助力中国OEM企业转型

邓肯·特纳（Duncan Turner），IDEO上海办公室工业设计团队成员。

我们都听过这样的故事。一位来自西方、初露锋芒的年轻设计师及创业者，听说中国是个生产制造和赚钱的好地方，于是往裤兜里揣上一笔还不足以投资第一轮生产的资金就上路了，准备去那里实现自己成功的梦想。可随之而来的是不得不面对的挣扎求存的现实：一方面要尽量扩大生产规模来满足需求，另一方面要始终确保品质标准。这个故事的主人公就是我。

加入IDEO上海办事处之前，我有好几年时间都一直来往于英国和中国：先在英国把新产品设计好，然后前往中国，到那里和各种OEM（原始设备制造商）硬件厂商展开“拉锯战”，尽可能说服他们按照我的规格要求生产，然后把产品推向全球市场。要说服他们绝非易事。这些大型工厂平时接惯了大生意（像通用电气、惠普这些堪比巨人歌利亚的西方品牌），要让他们把我这种订单规模只有人家几分之一的小客户的需求摆在第一位，确实颇费周折。

在饱尝了几年“拉锯战”的痛苦之后，我开始认识到这么“来来回回”下去不是办法，于是决定扎根中国，近距离地和供应商一起开发产品。回想前前后后与4家OEM工厂的合作经历，我发现有一点很有意思：虽然换的工厂规模一家比一家小，但我们生产创新产品和开发技术的能力却越来越高，速度也越来越快。还有我们生产多品类产品的能力也在不断提高，品类越做越广。从过去只能勉强用

邓肯在参加一个贸易展览。当时展出的烤箱手套是现在永久收藏在纽约现代艺术博物馆的一部分。

邓肯的第一个OEM工厂。

6个月时间完成一张5000件单一产品的采购订单，到后来不到一周时间就能生产超过5000件多品类的产品。

直到现在我还记得，就在我准备带着设计动身前往中国的时候，有位投资人特别提醒我说："他们怎么不开发自己的品牌来坑我们？"他的警告确有发生，不过没有成功，因为当时和我合作的那家工厂发现，打造品牌所需要的投入远远超过了他们的预期。由此出现了另一个问题：到底有哪些因素阻碍了OEM厂商去成功地开发自己的品牌？我之所以分享自己的这个故事，是因为看到制造业正在经历这么多的变革，我有理由相信现在是时候好好想想这个问题并有所行动了。

虽然，为大型西方品牌代工生产仍能带来不错的收益，但中国的OEM市场正在萎缩。对于许多行业来说，利用在中国代工生产来获得成本优势的时代正在走向终结，那些依靠给西方品牌加工生产而发展起来的OEM企业正在遭受影响。如今，来自东南亚、印度和非洲的竞争对手已经开始通过压低价格来和许多中国公司抢夺生意。另外，特别是在3D打印技术和高级自动化的驱动下，一些其他的深刻变革也开始带来更多新的生产方式选择。

随之造成的影响已经显而易见。宜家在中国的OEM工厂目前损失惨重就是一个实例。近期，很多新闻头条普遍对中国制造业下滑、前景堪忧表示惋惜，并宣称以"中国制造"为标志的时代即将告结。就连那些现在还在依赖代工生产取得发展的行业（比如智能手机行业）也公开承认好景不长，迫切需要找到新的出路来维持生意。

那么OEM厂商的出路究竟在哪里？多年来，这些厂商一直在为西方企业生产高品质的产品，现在似乎是时候应该效仿三星和HTC开始推出自有品牌，打造属于自己的"歌利亚"，与他们曾经的西方客户展开竞争，在全球销售自己的品牌产品。不过，虽然这些都合乎情理，而且显然很有吸引力，但中国的OEM企业能真正做到这种转型的寥寥无几。它们的竞争步调太慢，无法迅速在一个完全没有经验的复杂的新世界里营销和打造品牌。由于它们害怕承担风险，习惯了靠微薄利润来经营生意，所以一旦新技术要求长时间的开发投入，又不能立即带来成本效益，它们就会觉得很难接受。尽管OEM厂商也会对流程和成本做出创新，但却很少关注用户需求。简而言之，它们更多的是考虑如何利用成本去竞争，而不是凭借产品价值。从根本上看，它们挣扎的焦点其实在于思维上的转变：从快速追随者转变为创新者。

那么，如何才能帮助这些OEM厂商转变思维方式呢？我最近的一趟深圳之行或许可以给出答案。

我去参加了一个名为HAXLR8R的硬件创业活动。这个活动主要是吸引和资助年轻的创业者，让他们投入由

邓肯的工厂。

制造商共同参与的速成计划中，帮助他们快速将硬件创意变成实际产品。这些创业者将有111天的时间让项目得以推向众包资金平台，并直接在旧金山的创业投资人面前进行展示。

这个以创业为理念、根植于快速软件开发的速成活动正在创造着巨大利润，来自众包平台的第一批订单资金相当可观。比如，Nomiku这款开启了全新市场、让真空低温烹调法走进普通人家庭的简单烹饪设备，当时就从Kickstarter募集到了超过50万美元的资金。当HAXLR8R创始人西里尔·埃布斯威勒（Cyril Ebersweiler）在和我聊到为什么当初会选择深圳作为硬件创新中心时，他的回答可谓一语道破本质：与制造商近距离地一起开发产品不仅仅是为了更快地获得新创意，而且可以确保这些创意始终在供应商的制造能力范围之内。从目前取得的成功来看，西里尔确实把握住了问题本质，这不仅适用于初创型企业，还适用于中国所有的OEM企业：只有成为反应敏捷、勇敢无畏的大卫，而不是徒有勇士外表的歌利亚，OEM企业才能构筑新的未来。

仔细想来，我们在IDEO的工作方式也有异曲同工之处。我们的设计流程侧重于快速建模和反复完善，在建模中启发思考，从而降低风险。我们注重通过深入了解人们的核心需求来开发新的价值，致力于帮助各类大型企业决策未来，其中就包括希望成功转型做品牌的OEM企业。我们的建模范围非常广，包括苹果的第一只鼠标、三星手机、新西兰航空的飞机座椅、方太的厨房电器、The North Face在中国的数字零售体验和State Farm保险公司的整套新业务。在为大公司开发新事业的时候，我们基本上会采取类似于初创公司的做法，帮助它们像灵活敏捷的初创公司那样思考和行动，转变它们的思维焦点，让它们更多地关注人本身。这样，我们就能帮助这些公司吸引新的消费群体，开发新的、深受市场期待的产品和服务，并开拓新的市场来推动未来发展。

我认为，开辟中国制造业的下一个前沿阵地并不在于走品牌路线。OEM企业不需要做巨人歌利亚，只要能更多地像敏捷、勇敢的大卫一样，积极地学习硬件初创活动的做法，把学习到的经验渗透到自己的企业组织当中，带着长远的视角，从以成本为核心的创新走向以人为核心的价值创新，那么它们就可以获得不错的发展。

我的切身经历让我见证了自己的创业公司和灵活的OEM供应商之间的这种共生关系是如何创造双赢局面的。这不仅让供应商的营收翻了一倍多，而且它们还开始学习如何和我的初创公司一起快速开发振奋人心的新产品。我认为，这种共生关系在未来应该以更大的规模生根发芽。初创公司敏捷无畏的姿态及其挑战常规和主宰自己命运的信念，加上OEM企业在快速开发产品方面的广泛而深厚的技能经验，将共同汇聚成一股强劲的力量，不断推动构建中国制造业的崭新未来。

小贴士：

大卫与歌利亚的故事：取自《圣经》里有关少年大卫如何打败巨人歌利亚的故事。现常用来形容看似弱小的一方与看似强大的一方之间的较量，且较量结果无法按常规逻辑来预判。

Forging a new future for OEMs in China: A case of becoming David, not competing with Goliath

By Duncan Turner, IDEO | 10 March 2014

We ' ve all heard stories like this one. A budding young designer entrepreneur from the West hears China is the place to go to make things and to make money. So he heads out to seek success with a little less than enough funds for the first round of production in his back pocket. What ensues is a crazy existence of living on the knife-edge of business survival, trying to scale production to meet demand while struggling to keep the standard of quality. Well, that was actually my story.

Prior to joining IDEO Shanghai, I spent years back and forth between UK and China; designing new products in the UK then waging an extended battle with various hardware OEM (original equipment manufacturers) in China trying to make the products to my specifications, and bringing them to the global market. It was a struggle to get these large factories to prioritize my needs when their other customers (Goliath western brands like GE and HP) were giving them orders multiple times larger than mine.

A few years later and a number of battle wounds accrued, I started to realize that "back and forth" was not really working and so decided to base myself in China to be closer to my suppliers to develop products with them. As I reflect on the journey of working with the four OEM factories, it is interesting to note that each move I initiated was to a smaller and smaller factory, while at the same time, the ability and speed of my business to create innovative products and technologies increased. So too did our ability to produce products across a much wider portfolio. I went from struggling to meet a purchase order of 5,000 units of one product in 6 months to producing well over 5,000 units across multiple products lines in less than a week.

I can though still remember an investor warning me as I prepared to set off to China with my designs: "What' s there to stop them from developing their own brand and completely ripping us off?" The warning came true but the attempt was not successful as the factory I was working with

realised that there is much more to launching a brand than they had anticipated. So a different question arose: what's stopping OEMs from successfully developing their own brands? I tell my story because I believe it is now time to think about this question and act on the answer as there are so many changes happening in manufacturing.

While there is still good money to be made from those Western Goliath brands looking to offshore their manufacturing, the pie is shrinking for Chinese OEMs. The end of an era of cost comparison advantages of off-shoring to China is drawing near for many industries, and OEMs that have made their business by working hard to deliver products for Western brands are suffering. And competitors in South East Asia, India and Africa have been undercutting many Chinese companies for a while now. Other significant changes, particularly driven by 3D printing technology and advanced automation are beginning to give companies new alternatives to production.

The effect is already here. IKEA's OEM factories in China are sustaining huge losses. Recent news headlines lament about the dismal drop in China's manufacturing and proclaim the end of an era. Even the industries that are still experiencing growth in original equipment manufacturing (e.g. the smartphone industry) publicly acknowledge that good times will not last and there is an urgent need to seek new ways to sustain business.

So what could be a solution for OEMs? These companies have been making exceptionally high quality goods for the West for years, so you can argue that it is now time for them to follow the likes of Samsung and HTC [AH1] and become Goliath brands themselves, compete with their once Western customers, and sell their branded wares worldwide. Despite the logic and obvious appeal, very few Chinese OEM's have managed to make this transition. OEMs are slow to compete on marketing and branding in a new and complex world of which they have no experience. Their risk aversion and habit of running their business on slim margins made it difficult for them to embrace long lead-time investment in new technologies outside of those driven by cost saving. OEM companies innovate on process and cost but pay little heed to user need; in short, they think more about competing on cost than on value. Fundamentally, their struggle is one of mindset to produce the necessary shift from being a fast follower to an innovator.

So, what needs to happen to help these OEM companies make such a shift? A recent trip I made to Shenzhen appears to hold the answer.

I went on a visit to "HAXLR8R", a start-up initiative focused on hardware creation. The premise of this initiative is to attract and fund talented young entrepreneurs and put them into a fast-track program of development with manufacturers to help them quickly turn hardware ideas into reality. The entrepreneurs have 111 days in which to get projects ready to go live on crowd-sourced funding platforms and in front of San Francisco based VC's.

This lean start-up inspired initiative, which has its root in fast-paced software development, is having some big successes with sizeable first orders from crowd-sourcing platforms. For example Nomiku, a simple cooking device which democratizes the sous-vide cooking method has created a new market for home sous-vide cooking. They raised over half a million USD of orders on Kickstarter. Cyril Ebersweiler, founder of the HAXLR8R program put it perfectly when he and I discussed why he chose Shenzhen as the center for hardware innovation - being close to your manufacturers and developing products with them is not only about being able to come up with new ideas faster, but the proximity keeps your ideas grounded within the bounds of possibilities of your suppliers' capabilities. Judging by the success so far, Cyril might just have hit the nail on its head, not just for the start-ups but also for OEMs in China – that the case for a new future for OEM's lies in them being less like Goliath and more like the nimble, fearless David.

On reflection, our work at IDEO is very much akin to this model. Our design process concentrates on fast iteration and quick prototyping with the aim of building to learn and mitigating risks. We help large corporations to decide their futures, including OEMs wanting to make a successful transition to brand, by concentrating on people, and understanding where their core needs are in order to deliver new value. We have been prototyping anything from the first mouse for Apple, phones for Samsung, airplane seats for Air New Zealand, kitchens for Fotile, digital retail experience in China for The North Face, to an entire new business for State Farm, the insurance company. Essentially, we take large corporations on new ventures by following a process similar to what start-up companies go on, helping large companies think and act more like nimble start-ups and shift their mindsets to be more focused on people. In doing so, we help

companies reach new consumers, develop new, sought-after offerings, and create new markets to fuel growth.

In the next frontier for manufacturing in China, I believe it will not be about pursuing the brand route, rather OEMs would do well by becoming less like Goliath and more like David. They should embrace and learn from the hardware start-up movement to impact on their own organization to help them think longer term, to grow their businesses away from cost-centered innovation to people-centered value innovation.

If I look back on my own experience I see how the symbiotic relationship between my own start-up venture and my nimble OEM supplier has profited both of us. Not only have they more than doubled their revenue, they have started to learn how to work with my start-up to create exciting new products really quickly. I see a future whereby this sort of relationship should be cultivated on a larger scale. The fearlessness and nimbleness of start-ups, their desire to challenge the norm and master their own destiny, mixed with OEMs' deep and extensive skills and experience in fast paced product development would make a formidable force in forging a new future for manufacturing in China.

ENDS.

Note:

The story of David versus Goliath: taken from the biblical story of teenager named David defeated a powerful giant named Goliath. Now used in everyday language to imply the seemingly weak versus the seemingly mighty, and where the outcome of the fight between the two cannot be predetermined using commonly assumed logic.