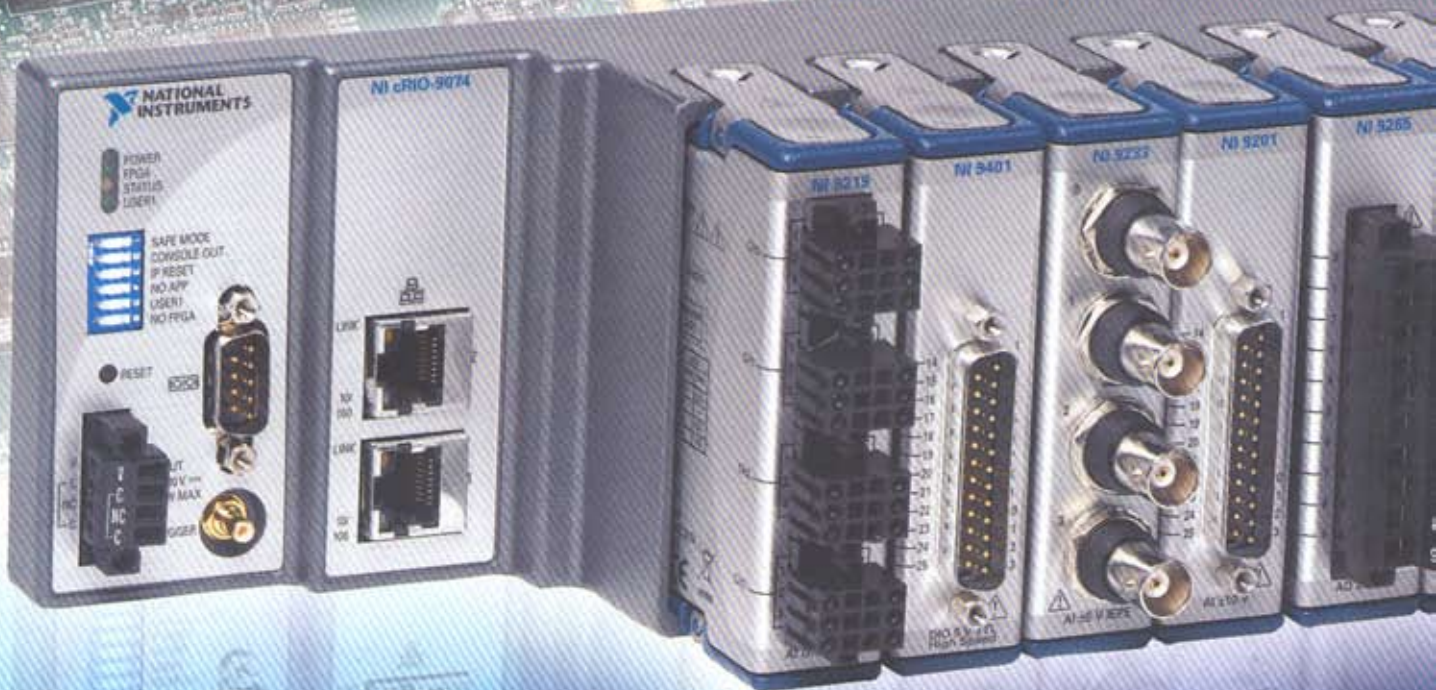


CONTROL ENGINEERING UK

Control, Instrumentation and Automation in the Process and Manufacturing Industries

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Instruments with style

We often think of what a product does but rarely think about how it looks or feels. This often overlooked, yet hugely important, aspect of product development played a large part in the design of a Michell Instruments dew point meter.

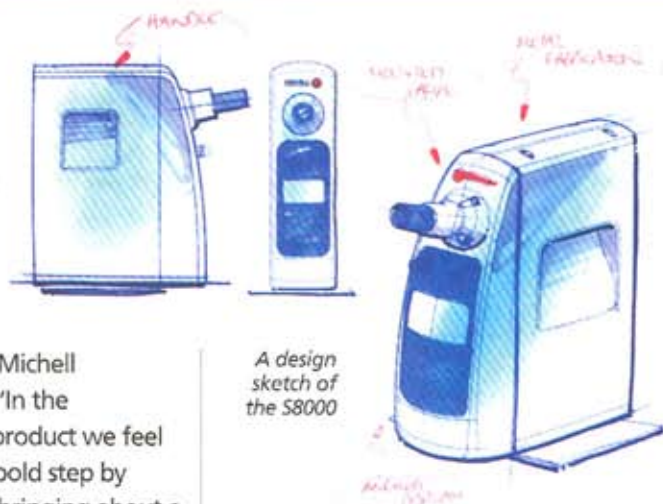
Alasdair Barnett, director of Cambridge-based product design and development consultancy, DesignEdge, says manufacturers of all types of products are seeing design as another way of competing.

But why bother for a product unlikely to be seen beyond the factory floor?

Barnett explains: 'Firstly, design plays an important part in understanding the end user and making products simple and effective to use. Design can also save money, such as through choice of materials or production processes.'

'Secondly, aesthetics. Design is in every part of our lives, it comes into every product we choose as consumers, so it is inevitably making its presence felt in other markets such as technical products.'

For Michell Instruments, specialist in moisture and humidity measurement, bringing in design was about giving the product an aspirational feel. For the S8000 Integrale Dewpointmeter design was at the forefront.



A design sketch of the S8000

Andrew Stokes, of Michell instruments explains: 'In the development of this product we feel that we are taking a bold step by forcing the issue and bringing about a sea change in the traditionally very conservative instrumentation sector. Function and price are still the key 'must have' factors but I believe that if we can also give our customers a sexy looking product then that will also become a key aspirational attribute.'

'DesignEdge got on with the 'real' design as soon as possible rather than producing reams of heavily stylised but wholly impractical sketches.'

Barnett says for DesignEdge a new project begins with a product specification.

'The specification should include technical and environmental issues such as recycling of components and also defines the relevant standards to which the product should conform,' asserts Barnett. 'After detailed planning and identifying key milestones we generally approach a new project by brainstorming ideas with the client and undertaking research into competitor analysis and product trends.'

The result for Michell's S8000 was a moulded fascia, a tactile elastomeric keypad and soft touch surface coatings. The instrument was made easier to use and more versatile by designing it to be used vertically or

horizontally depending on space, allowing the unit to be both portable and space saving, while offering a rack mounting system.

'The product required a careful consideration of the ergonomics and user interface especially around the microscope,' said Barnett. 'We also explored colours and product branding resulting in a move towards a more sophisticated and advanced overall aesthetic.'

Andrew Stokes says the company now has a 'class leading instrument' with regards to performance and style.

'The S8000 is a visually stunning laboratory instrument in its vertical orientation and there is nothing like it in our sector,' he says. 'In the horizontal format it retains a lineage with the product presentation formats that the more conservative traditional industrial applications / users require.'

The new design forms part of Michell's repositioning of its brand image, establishing a clear corporate identity to tie its product lines together.

Stokes concludes: 'The S8000 design project is the pioneer in this respect, setting the design cues that will be followed up throughout our entire product portfolio in due course. Until the S8000 project there had only been a cursory attempt at establishing a brand identity and as a result our pre-S8000 portfolio was a bit of a mish-mash of different looks, colour schemes and formats.'

Design Edge
www.designedge.co.uk



'The S8000 is a visually stunning laboratory instrument', says Stokes