



Korporate Kamikaze: When Strategy Crashes Into Design Delusion

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Is anyone still designing for actual humans?

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It is slow-motion brand suicide — hidden behind mood lighting and marginal gains.

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Opening

Have you noticed it too?

More and more, companies are launching products and services that go directly against what customers actually want.

Not out of necessity, but because of a dangerous mix of cost-cutting, ego, and arrogant detachment from real life.

Flight Experience

I recently had the *privilege* of flying a newly unveiled First Class cabin from one of Europe's few remaining premium airlines.

It felt more like a design showroom than a passenger experience:

- A box with ceiling-high walls and no windows for the middle seats
- No footrest, no space for hand luggage
- A table for one on a seat for two, with one shared screen
- One big bed — to do what, exactly?

Luxury, reimagined by people who design for customers, but never speak with them. Or better yet — never consume, enjoy, or pay for the product the way they do.

Product Strategy

As someone who works in strategy and product design, I see a proud brand walking straight into its own propeller.

In Germany, there is a word for this: *praxisfremd* — unfit for the real world.

So let us call it what it is: **Korporate Kamikaze** — a proud dive into self-destruction, backed by PowerPoints, pixel-perfect mock-ups, far too much confidence — and far too few in the organisation who actually care.



BMW Case

BMW offers another textbook case.

Remember the legendary *Drehdrucksteller* — the iDrive?

A single rotary knob that replaced dozens of buttons. **Initially mocked, eventually iconic. Copied by most.**

Now? Removed from newer models.

- To save €150 per car?
- To make space for one more cupholder?

Now drivers are left smearing touchscreens and tapping through endless menus, while brand loyalty quietly erodes.

As **Wolfgang Reitzle**, former Head of Development at BMW, once said:

“The most expensive product is not the one that is expensive to make, but the one that doesn’t find customers.”

Hotel Case

And it is not just cars and planes.

Recently I tried modifying a flexible reservation at a premium hotel.

I had booked three nights. I wanted to remove one.

Suddenly, the system said “no rooms available” — unless I upgraded to a suite.

Staying less suddenly meant paying more.

The lighting?

- Beautifully designed — and completely impractical
- You cannot find your socks, check your face, or read anything while walking around the room
- Switching them off at night becomes a treasure hunt through design minimalism

The shower?

- The words *shampoo*, *conditioner*, and *body wash* are printed so small that nobody over 40 can tell them apart

without wearing reading glasses — while singing in the rain

Reflection

Are we still humans — or are we dancers, choreographed to serve machines and margin targets?

Are we building products for people — or performing theatre for spreadsheets?

This is how great brands quietly erode.

As explored in *The Rise and Demise of Great Companies*, it rarely happens through crisis



— but through disconnection.

Through decisions made in rooms far from users, data without context, and confidence without consequence.

(Video here, worth watching: <https://youtu.be/qvn5v71Pc4U>)

Call to Action

What can we do?

1. **Force decision makers to see with their own eyes**
No more relying on focus groups or filtered feedback. Use the product. Fly the seat. Park the car. Sleep in the room.
2. **Ask users what they would actually pay for**
Would people pay €0.10 per day for a footrest, a rotary knob, or a window? Most likely, yes.
3. **Be honest about cost-cutting or price hikes**
Tell the story. People understand trade-offs. What they resent is being misled.
4. **Make executives live the consequences of their decisions - and take accountability**
No exemptions. No filtered reports. No comfort zones. Just the raw, lived experience.

Because this is not innovation.

It is not strategy.

It is **Korporate Kamikaze** — a uniquely European form of self-inflicted brand damage.

Have you seen this in your company, your country, your daily life?

Let us call it out. The *Drehdrucksteller* deserves better. So do we.