# LEGAL DESIGN BY DEFINITION

**During the past year, legal design has boomed. By now it has become a well-known term and area of expertise. When I began as a Legal Design Adviser at Houthoff, people looked a bit puzzled when I told them about my job. Now the response is more often: "Oh yes, I've heard about that".**

As is often the case with innovations, they mature slowly but surely and with growing pains. Before an idea has grown from infancy to maturity, it goes through various stages and peaks at the 'trend moment': all of a sudden everyone is a legal designer and everything is a legal design. The term Legal Design seems to become a collective term for all designs created within the legal services sector. There has been a recent surge in a collection of definitions of what legal design is, resulting in a proliferation of 'legal design work'. It's time for a clear definition: what is Legal Design and what isn't?

Is Legal Design indeed everything where legal content (in whatever shape or form) touches design? Or is it everything that touches design within a legal context? In the latter case a brochure of a law firm or a nicely laid out pitch document would also be legal design. You could argue that this is the case and that legal design is only the interface between design and legal. For me, however, it isn't. It is evident that design is a discipline no organisation can afford to do without. Design always has (or should have) a place in the boardroom. This also applies to the legal industry. But not all design done within the legal industry is legal design. Or at least not for me. Well-designed pitches, brochures, teaching materials, interactive websites and icons in documents – I applaud them all – but to me that is nothing more (or less) than using the advantages that visualisation and design have to offer as a didactic or marketing tool.

Legal design is <u>more</u> than just bringing design into the world of law. So here's my definition:

**Legal design = legal strategy × perception**

For me it's about the response that the design evokes. Empathy should – in particular for a legal design – always be the cornerstone of the legal design. When designing an effective legal design, the human dimension should never be ignored. It is never about the design; it is all about the effect that this design has on the recipients (and their behaviour).

For me Legal Design is the combination of legal content with behavioural design where the design itself is the tool you use to achieve a goal: to clarify, explain, support or convince. Within the 'umbrella' Legal Design, I therefore make a distinction between different types of design: client design, contract design, stakeholder design, negotiation design and litigation design. All of which need a different approach and a different kind of design.

As with any developing field, the market will determine over time where the boundaries are, what the term implies and what corresponding level of work is required. I am looking forward to these developments. For now, I'm curious to learn what you think about this. Is Legal Design more than just introducing design to the world of law? Are there different types of legal design or is everything the same under a common denominator? I'd love to hear from you; whether you agree or disagree.

Legal Design | *Designed to deliver*

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