

## Visual Critique of Vacuum Cleaners

Jamie McAtee

For this paper I chose two handheld vacuums the Dirt Devil Kone and the Dyson Root 6 that seem to be targeted to two different audiences. Based on the design of the vacuums the Dyson Root 6 seems to be targeted toward a male audience and the Dirt Devil Kone toward a female audience.

### Dyson Root 6



In my research for this project I visited Target with my male friend. We visited the part of the store where the vacuums are sold. He was immediately drawn to the Dyson Root 6 hand vacuum. He picked it up and started playing with it saying he would like a vacuum like this. I thought this was an interesting reaction since when you think of men you don't usually think of them liking vacuums let alone wanting one.



The Dyson hand vacuum looks more like a power tool than what you would think of as a traditional hand vacuum such as the DustBuster seen at left. The grip looks more like one on a drill than on a vacuum. The on and off of the vacuum is controlled by a trigger switch similar to the on off switch of a drill.



The coloring makes it look like it is made of metal and the orange is reminiscent of the Black and Decker power tool line pictured to the left.

Bolter and Grusin discuss how new products often referencing previous media. In this case the Dyson is making a very clear reference to the previous design of power tools such as the drill.

The vacuum doesn't have a bag it instead has a clear bin that captures the dirt and spins it around in a circle. It shows the user how much dirt they are picking up instead of hiding it in a bag or a colored compartment. This was another thing my friend noticed on some of the larger Dysons. He thought it was really cool how you could see the amount of dirt you had collected.

The description of the product on the Dyson web site points out a lot of technical things that would probably appeal to a more masculine consumer. The site says this vacuum has “Twice the suction of others in use”, “Root Cyclone™ technology” and “Re-charges up to 3x faster”.

This could be interpreted as the vacuum is twice as good as the one someone else has. It uses a cool technology to pick up the dirt. If you leave it out and forget to recharge it you can do so much quicker than other vacuums.

It also comes with a few attachments make it so it can clean in a variety of places. This is similar to the various attachments you can put on a drill. The video of the attachment on the web site shows the user going from vacuuming around the computer to cleaning the keyboard by just moving the brush piece down on the attachment.

In searching out more information about this product I found that many people complained about the battery life of this vacuum. Many people bought it because of their trust in the Dyson brand but when they used it they were disappointed in the fact that the battery lasted 6-8 minutes.

### Dirt Devil Kone



The Dirt Devil Kone was designed by product designer Karim Rashid. It comes in a variety of colors but only the white one glows as illustrated above. I was drawn to it because I thought it was really nice looking.

The official Dirt Devil site describes it as: "The Dirt Devil KONE is a cordless hand vacuum unlike any you've seen. Dirt Devil had famed product designer Karim Rashid create an elegant, sculptural form that can be left on display - on your table, shelf, or counter. That way, your hand vac will always be charged. Always ready. No more searching a closet only to find an unplugged unit. KONE, It's the new shape of clean."

The top of the Kone is the vacuum and the bottom is the charging station. The design of the Kone encourages the user to put the vacuum back in the charger since it looks incomplete without the top, this helps keep the unit charged. With less attractive vacuums the user would have to make sure they keep it plugged in wherever it is stored so it will be ready when they need it. I have seen one of these sitting out in the open of a fairly nice hair salon in Bloomington. It doesn't really look out of place and looks more like an art piece than a vacuum.

This vacuum seems to appeal to a more feminine than masculine audience based on its design to be attractive and a show piece instead of something to throw in the closets. Although it comes in a few colors the light pink and plum colors seem to push it even more toward a feminine audience. The multitude of colors allows people to match it to the color scheme of the room that they are putting it in.

The Kone was designed by Karim Rashid, a famous product designer. This seems to be following a trend of bringing high fashion items to a level where more people can afford them. Target has done this with a few designers, some for clothes, others for general household goods. Rashid also designed the packaging for the Method line of cleaning products sold by Target. This packaging is much more attractive than your typical cleaning product. Most of the mass produced designer items seem to be in areas where women typically control the purchasing such as house hold purchases and clothing.

The design of this vacuum as something more like a work of art than a vacuum makes it seem like they are pushing it a little more as a status symbol than a household appliance. The Kone is one of the most expensive products in the Dirt Devil hand held vacuum line. Another Dirt Devil product in the same hand held vacuum line is marketed as "Put The Power Of An Upright In The Palm Of Your Hand". This would seem to indicate that this is a more powerful vacuum than the Kone since an upright vacuum is generally more powerful than a hand held. The more powerful yet less fashionable vacuum is eight dollars less than the Kone. The high style of the Kone seems be their reason to justify the higher price and less power. This is also seen with the Target designer brands since a Michael Graves mop is generally the most expensive and typically best looking mop in the store. Is it really better at what it does because it looks better?

One could take Bolter and Grusin's discussion of the hypermediated experience of the African subjects with the photographs as somewhat similar to the reaction of people to the design of the Kone. The African subjects were interested in the fact that they could hold the paper before they became interested in the image on the paper since they hadn't seen paper before. This can be related to the design of the Kone since people seem to be drawn to the design of the Kone because it is unlike things they have seen before. After they realize the functionality of the object they may attach more value to it since it does more than just look nice.

In looking for images of this on the Internet I found many people talking about why they liked and disliked this device. Even though many people said it was a little underpowered, the exhaust was in a bad place or it vibrated a lot when using. Many people seemed to be ok with these problems because of the design. One person said she liked the white one because it glowed and matched her Mac.

## Comparison

The Dyson is the more expensive of the two vacuums at \$150 compared to \$43 for the Kone. The Dyson brand is generally considered a luxury vacuum that is of higher quality and is more expensive than others. Users of this Dyson were very upset when the product didn't live up to the quality standards they thought it should have since it has such a short battery life.

The more masculine design of the Dyson seems to achieve the desired effect of encouraging males to purchase their product. It is seen as powerful, cool and unlike a typical vacuum that is boring or feminine.

The more feminine Kone seems to appeal to a more fashion conscious audience that is possibly more concerned with the design of the product than the function of the product. The Dirt Devil brand is generally the more affordable option and is available everywhere. I am not sure of the quality reputation of the Dirt Devil brand. Users of the Kone complained about the placement of the exhaust vent, the under powering of the product and the vibrations from the product.

The Dyson seems to be the more powerful of the two vacuums based on complaints from users of the Kone. They both seem to struggle with battery life which makes one wonder if increased battery life should have been considered in the design of both of these products. How long should a hand held vacuum last without having to be recharged? What does their audience think is the ideal amount of time and could this have been done without compromising too much as far as the design.

These two products come from the same line of hand vacuums. They are very different in their target market but share a battery life problem that is a definite design flaw.

## Sources

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