

Little Sun: Or where technology meets design and more!

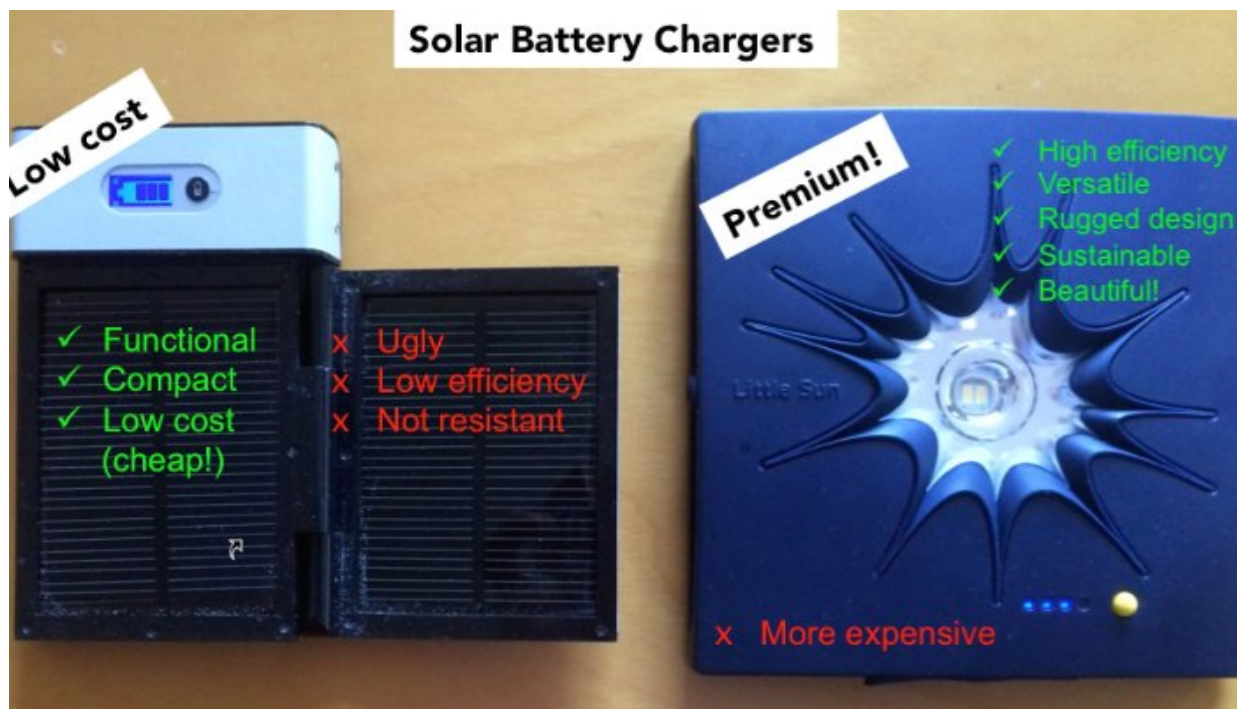
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Summary

Product design analysis of the "Charge" Solar Charger and global strategic analysis of the company Little Sun.

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Solar products don't have a reputation of featuring best in class design. Manufacturers usually build practical, useful and often low cost products. Sometimes some of them think about long-term reliability, but that's a smaller share of them. And best-in-class design is an even rarer feature...

But some companies have understood that such products need a better design and not surprisingly, they become successful. "Little Sun" is one of them and their story is worth an analysis...

It was created in 2012 and by an usual mix of an artist (Olafur Eliasson), a technical entrepreneur (Frederik Ottesen) and a designer (Felix Hallwachs). The company started to draw attention with their "Charge" solar charger and the associated Kickstarter campaign in September 2015.

The "Charge" packs core functionality (big and efficient battery & solar cell), a good to have feature (lighting) and all that packaged into an artistic, quality and water resistant (IP44) casing.

The excellence in terms of design can be witnessed by the component choices.



First good choice, the solar panel with best in class yield and full size solar cell: 5" 2,5W mono crystalline with back contact from SunPower. The panel is perfectly integrated to the device dimensions and almost invisible with its dark navy blue color and no bus bar connection visible. So we move away from cheap products that look like a DIY assembly with parts of solar cells (see the charger on the left side of our front picture!).

Second good choice: the battery with 4400mAh capacity. That's twice or more the capacity of a high end smartphone or 1/3rd to 50% the capacity of a tablet. This allows the charging not to depend solely on one daily sun charge. So this allows reserve capacity for a smartphone. And this also makes a difference as people are much less likely to get less frustrated when their solar charger didn't achieve 100% recharge status while in front of sun for a single hour! It's known to experts that you'd need for this a panel much larger than 5x5"!

Then packing a light inside is always useful, you use it if you like but it's not annoying as it's perfectly integrated into the monolithic design.

Beyond the technical approach, the company also uses state of the art product marketing approaches for technology products today. They 3D-printed the prototypes (maybe also used for early customers testing) and tested and sold the concept to early adopters via the crowdfunding platform on Kickstarter in September 2015!

But it goes beyond good technical design and good product marketing, the company is also a social business and this makes the difference! They want communities without electricity worldwide to benefit from premium products that are sold in wealthy countries. It adds profound meaning to the product purchased: you have a great experience with a nice product and you know you indirectly help people that need it!

Not surprisingly, the funding expectations on Kickstarter were exceeded 5 times (265 000€ instead of 50 000€ requested) by over 2 000 contributors. But it's also worth knowing that they received USD \$5 million investment by Bloomberg Philanthropies 1 year and half before their Kickstarter campaign, so this must have helped them to make things properly! To me, what matters today is that the product launched successfully and deliveries were done almost in time in May 2016. This must have been challenging, but they made it.

Finally you may say, that for a 100€ product, it's the least we could expect! Yes, that's right, but how many products have such a complete value proposal today on this market? And why so many company just don't succeed because they stick to the easy way of low cost products? Is it because they don't know how to add value to their products??

Little Sun has now left its mark in the consumer solar charger and defined a new standard!