the
SoDA REPORT On
in partnership with **Adobe**

Design Systems

SoDA

Welcome to this special edition of *The SoDA Report on Design Systems*, developed in partnership with Adobe.

We are thrilled to release the latest *SoDA Report On* publication, a series of white papers dedicated to emerging technologies, industry practices, evolving methodologies and perspectives on the changing digital landscape.

In this report, we take a closer look at *design systems* and the role they can play in a thriving digital design ecosystem.

While the principles of *design systems* have been around for a long time (one can see early incarnations in a mash-up of brand style guides, code libraries and carefully crafted wikis), there's no doubt that they have emerged to tackle a uniquely modern challenge.

As interfaces proliferate and design teams collaborate across a wider and more distributed network of stakeholders (end-users, business leads, developers, empowered content creators, regionalized teams, and more), *design systems* can play a critical role in shaping the speed, consistency and scale at which design challenges and customer experience enhancements can be tackled. In fact, some would argue that *design systems* are absolutely essential for ensuring that these complex ecosystems don't devolve into chaotic, inefficient and utterly disjointed landscapes.

But like any new method wrestling with emergent challenges, there is no unified perspective on design systems... how to make them, what role they should play and whether or not you even need one. Our authors tackle these questions from a number of angles and deliver well-rounded viewpoints on how to think about and approach *design systems* in your organization. And whether you are new to the topic or a seasoned veteran, our colleague at Adobe, Cisco Guzman, provides sage guidance for your journey:

"Design systems are not canons... that constrict creativity, or panaceas that eradicate inefficiency. They are communication technologies— environments in which designers, developers, contributors, and stakeholders consciously, collaboratively explore patterns by which meaningful, humane, and inclusive experiences can come to fruition."

We'd like to thank the team at Adobe for their support of SoDA and for collaborating with us on this report. If you are interested in becoming a subscriber of *The SoDA Report* series, please email SoDA and we will ensure you have priority access to the release of upcoming editions.

We hope you enjoy this report and, as always, welcome your feedback, ideas, and contributions for future editions.

Tom Beck
Executive Director, SoDA

Design Systems

PERFICIENT/digital

Brian Flanagan & Joey Southard, Perficient Digital

5 Steps for a Successful Design System Implementation
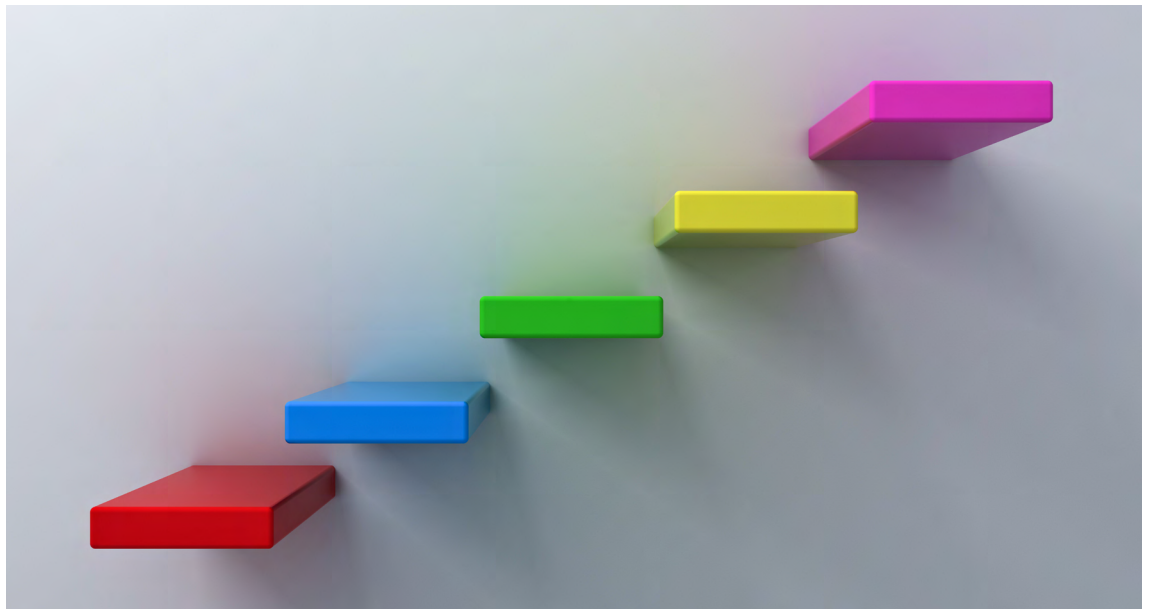
The proliferation of digital experiences on a growing number of channels and devices has fueled the need for companies to develop scalable design systems. These provide standards that can streamline production, promote innovation, and enable teams to deliver at scale. Here are five steps for creating an effective enterprise-level design system.

Step 1: Define
The first step is to define the scope of the solution, including who will have access, which applications will be supported, and what elements (brand, UI, etc.) will be included. Most design systems include brand elements such as logos, typefaces, color, and tokens; guiding design principles; and a library of UI elements and patterns, including code snippets for each component.

While you will use it to develop products such as websites, internal sites, and apps, you should also treat the system itself as a product. Give it a memorable name – not just "the design system" – to help people recognize it as a tangible resource.

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Step 2: Create

Before you can create your design system, you'll need to decide where it will live. For enterprise organizations, there are two primary options to choose from – utilize a hosted service like Frontify or InVision or build your own solution, based on your CMS platform. Your goal should be to find or create a solution that will:

1. Enable you to stand your system up quickly
2. Handle your storage and bandwidth needs
3. Integrate with the design and development tools you use
4. Be accessible to users throughout your organization
5. Fit within your budget

Once you've decided where your design system will live, you can use tools like Adobe XD, Sketch, and Figma to design and create the individual components. We recommend a modular approach for your design structure, such as Atomic Design. This will maximize both consistency and efficiency, as it helps your designers and developers reuse components rather than reinventing the wheel.

Step 3: Launch

A design system only works if people know about it, so socializing your platform throughout your organization is crucial. You need to build a promotion strategy to spread awareness, drum up excitement, and set expectations in the weeks leading up to launch. Help your colleagues understand why the system exists, how they should use it, and the time it will save them. Then, host a launch event to officially inaugurate the system.

You also need to determine how you'll provide onboarding and training during launch, as you update the design system, and as new people join your organization. The way you handle both the initial launch and ongoing adoption will determine the long-term efficacy of your design system.

Step 4: Manage

Each step we've covered so far requires a strong team of product owners, whether solitary, centralized, or federated, and that need only increases after launch. Don't think you're all done just because your design system is up and running. Remember, your system is a living, breathing product. As technology, customer expectations, and your organization continue to evolve, your team will need to ensure that the system keeps pace.

As with any other product, you'll want to update and improve your design system through a regular release cycle. Organize needed enhancements, wishlist items, and user suggestions into prioritized buckets you can tackle iteratively. Use versioning to stay organized through each release, regardless of how often you update.

Step 5: Measure

There is no point in creating a design system if it doesn't help your organization improve. Quantifying design quality and brand consistency is difficult, so focus on improvements in productivity, efficiency, and user experience. How quickly can users create new experiences now? How often are components being used? How satisfied are your users?

To determine this, you'll need to do some benchmarking before launching your design system. Identify products your teams regularly work on, what goes into them, and how long they take. If you regularly develop microsites, for example, your teams should be able to create them more quickly and with less repeated work using the design system than they could without it.

To measure how people are using the system, assign a value to each code snippet so you can track how often the components appear in your live environments. This will also help you understand which components are the most valuable and which groups are carrying your design forward by contributing new components to the design system.

Maintaining efficiency and brand cohesion throughout an enterprise should not be an ongoing struggle. With proper planning, alignment, and management, you can establish a design system that will guide experience creation and help you stay ahead of evolving technology and customer expectations.

About the Authors:
For more than 20 years **Brian Flanagan** *has worked with clients to design and execute cutting-edge user experiences. As a digital experience strategist, he is responsible for driving digital strategy for enterprise clients and oversight in delivering best practices. In this role, Brian keeps Perficient Digital and its clients on the cutting edge of new design strategies for next-generation technologies to consistently exceed client and peer expectations.*

Joey Southard *is a seasoned digital marketing and UX strategist with nearly 20 years' experience in the industry. In his role at Perficient Digital, he drives results by bridging the gap between elegant design and concrete business objectives, helping brands attract, influence, and ultimately connect with users consistently at every touchpoint.*
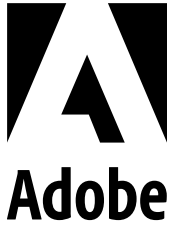
Design Systems

Cisco Guzman, Adobe

Design and Production in the Digital Age

Design systems have become an important topic within our communities and organizations. Many of us are asking whether and how we can benefit from the promise of greater consistency, efficiency, and scale. We're working toward a shared understanding of what design systems are, how to create/manage them, and how to foster their growth in ways that guide rather than constrain creativity. We remind one another to consider human factors—beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors—since those are ultimately what determine their success. We've even made room for humor and skepticism in our discourse.

Healthy skepticism aside, the design systems conversation is critical because it drives a deeper, necessary dialog about transforming how designers, developers, contributors, and stakeholders work together to create digital experiences—and how we communicate across silos more effectively.

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Looking Back

The proliferation of the printing press during the industrial revolution – widely regarded as one of the most defining phenomena in human history—transformed how we communicate. Mechanisms for systematically creating, reproducing, and disseminating printed narratives dawned—and as designers, we became its craftspeople and disciples.

As the means of expression shifted from paper to pixel in the 20th century, we took the tools and processes we had at our disposal and did what designers do: we captured what our minds could see; we shared those ideas with others; we often wove gold out of straw; and we always got the job done. We used software to extend into this new realm, and adapted—helping one another along the way.

Though the means of production shifted, we continue to rely on paradigms and workflows that evolved during the print era, even as we face the mounting pressures of content velocity, the need to work across silos, an ever-expanding array of platforms/devices, and the thrill of emerging technologies.

We are looking for new ways of working so that our organizations can focus on creating experiences that matter.

Looking Forward

The horizon is bright with possibility and, together, we are creating a vision for this better way of working and communicating. On this path, we will come face-to-face with challenges, questions, and concepts which will likely include:

Creating environments in which organizations can elegantly blend both free-form and constraint-informed design. The belief that we need to choose one modality over the other is a false dichotomy. It is the dialectical relationship between design and development—not the primacy of one over the other—which has shaped the experiences we have today. We should seek to create environments that champion diversity of thought and let people work in ways that feel natural to them—giving them the ability to contextually shift between free-form and constraint-based methods.

Challenging the linear relationship between design – and its by-products: the notion of handoff itself; the tedium of manual overspecification; cumbersome, de-contextualized back and forth between designers and developers; and low code reuse. We must set our sights on an evolved relationship between design and code which acknowledges that digital phenomena exist simultaneously as drawn objects, as code, and as shared artifacts at a moment in time—all at once, interconnectedly.

Creating ecosystems for open, transparent design & development in which requirements from all angles can be interleaved, fostering shared understanding; a place where we can grapple with what is desired and what is possible, feasible, and expeditious; access to a record of the collective movement toward and through decisions, alterations, and tradeoffs; an environment in which it's easy and intuitive for people to contribute and take from the system.
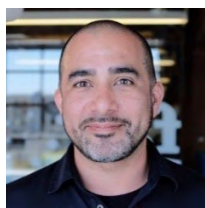
In Parting

Design systems are not canons that require governance, controls that constrict creativity, or panaceas that eradicate inefficiency. They are communication technologies—environments in which designers, developers, contributors, and stakeholders consciously, collaboratively explore patterns by which meaningful, humane, and inclusive experiences can come to fruition.

These are some of the themes that have surfaced in conversations with teams and organizations throughout the world as they make sense of design systems and the ever-changing landscape of design and development. We're thinking about these issues deeply as we shape how Adobe XD can help you create and scale design across your organization and better connect design and development. I hope you'll reach out to connect as we travel down this new path together.

About the Author:

Devoted to empowering creativity and expression through technology, **Cisco Guzman** *believes he has the best job in the world working with hearty, soulful people on Adobe XD. He's gone from teaching himself Photoshop and Illustrator on a Mac Centris while studying interdisciplinary philosophy at Stanford to helping shape how organizations create and get the job done. He enjoys pondering, ideating, making, and connecting.*
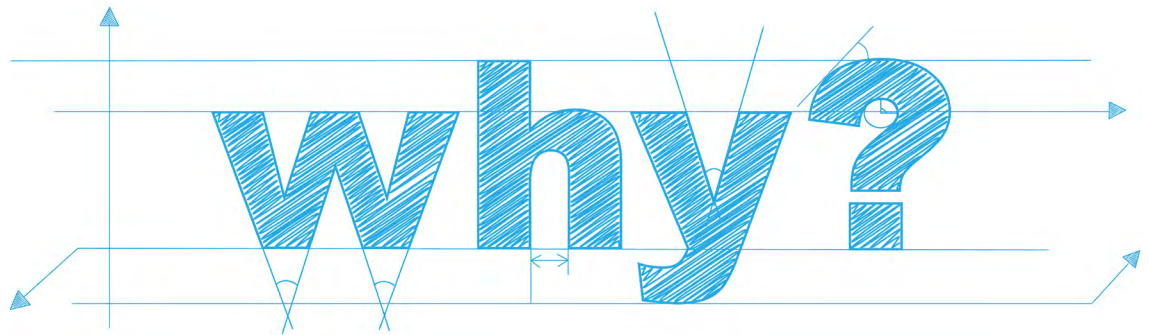
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ueno.

Halli Thorleifsson, Ueno

But Why?

The first mistake is almost always a lack of clarity on the Why. Why are we doing this? If everyone working on a problem has a shared understanding on the why the rest becomes a lot easier.

This is true for almost anything but it's especially true for systems since they are by definition created to scale. When lack of clarity hits scale, the problems really start to compound.

A system won't solve a problem that isn't clearly defined. It will only make it more messy.

So instead of talking about the how or the what of design systems I want to talk about the Why questions involved. If you can answer those and articulate them clearly to the organization then the rest will be a lot easier.

It's worth noting that I'm assuming that you've already tackled the big Why. That your company has a clear human problem that it is trying to solve and the entire organization is aligned on what that is. And I'm also assuming that you already have clearly laid out initiatives for the next year at least that you are mapping to.

If you don't have answers for those you need to go further up stream and get those answers before you proceed but let's assume those basics are in place and let's get into the Why of your design system. To make it easier it might be helpful to approach the question from a few different points of view.

"We want to identify the patterns that help our users to be able to accomplish their tasks faster so they can spend their time living their lives."

From a cost point of view the answers might include: We want to save resources so we can stay competitive on pricing. We want to get more out of our teams so we can invest more in other areas.

From the design/product/dev teams point of view the answers could be things like: We want to move faster so we can experiment more. We want to spend less time on execution so we can have more time solving the hard problems. We want to learn more about our users so we can serve their needs better.

From a user point of view the answers might be things like: We want to have consistent experiences across our products and platforms so our users don't need to think too much about their options every time. We want to identify the patterns that help our users to be able to accomplish their tasks faster so they can spend their time living their lives.

Those are just a few example answers, they won't be the same for all organizations although many of the ones I outlined will probably sound good to you.

But the next important thing is to get full alignment with the team on which of these are the real Why. Which ones just sound good vs which ones are crucial to your success. And to make it extra fun you should make sure you prioritize the answers.

Once this is all in place you can answer the how, when and what questions. For example, if speed is your main Why and your team isn't that big you may decide that a fairly shallow system is the way to go and you may identify the few key areas that will speed the team up.

Now, I know enough designers and developers to know that this isn't what they spend most of their time thinking about when they are working on a design system.

Most of our time is spent deciding on the execution. And there is absolutely nothing wrong with that. Successful teams are amazing executors. But we won't execute on the right things unless the Why is clearly articulated and shared.

About the Author:
Halli Thorleifsson *is the founder and CEO of Ueno. A creative director and designer, Halli founded the agency as a one-man operation out of his Reykjavik apartment in 2014. Four short years later, Ueno has more than 60 full-time employees and offices in Reykjavik, San Francisco, New York and Los Angeles.*

zemoga

Marcela Sánchez & Juan Velasco, Zemoga

Building a New Design System? Start Here.

There is no such thing as a secret formula to deliver great design systems. Of course, it's always inspiring and educational to take a look at successful case studies in the industry.

Google's Material Design, Atlassian Design, and Airbnb Design Language (just to name a few) are great references for designers and leaders, available to anyone interested in borrowing lessons from others with more expertise in the area. However, keep in mind, what worked for one of them will not necessarily work for any organization. Every process is different and every organization is unique: imagine the journeys each one of those teams went through, the roadblocks they ran into, the discoveries they made along the way.

Design-oriented teams frequently make use of design thinking notions in order to build the foundation for the design of digital products. A design system is a product in itself (not a by-product of an app or a website) and it should be structured around the particularities of the organization it's being built for. That's why we, as leaders within an organization or as external consultants, planning to get a design system initiative going, need to make sure we start by going through a process that helps us understand a few general aspects that are key in this early stage.

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About the internal team

As mentioned earlier, a design system is a product and, as such, it's created for people to use. Who are these users? do they already exist in the organization or will they need to be hired at some point? What are their strengths and weaknesses? Who's going to be a contributor and who's going to be a consumer? Who's the ultimate decision-maker? Understanding all these nuances, learning about the users and developing empathy is essential. If this product is meant to be defined, built, evolved and maintained, it's our responsibility to make sure that the organization has the required internal structure, processes and protocols to support that. And if it doesn't, then that will be part of our job.

About the organization

Design systems are not just established and rolled out. They need to continually evolve and be valuable for everyone in the mid and long term. This requires dedication and organization-wide commitment, so buy-in from leadership is required. This guarantees that the team will have, at least, the required resources to define and maintain.

Sadly, the organizational challenges don't end there: if the design team sees value in a design system but the product team doesn't, then there's a potential risk to be managed early on. Do the different teams see value in a design system? Is the design team aligned with the engineering team? Is there a collaborative culture built into the organization's DNA?

About the products

A clear understanding of the big picture helps us be strategic from the get-go. Organizations, over time, can grow a collection of digital products, and these products, owned by different teams, become interesting collections of visual languages and seemingly arbitrary patterns. As we plan to dive deep into the complexity of these products, we'll need to find out which digital products currently exist within the organization and which of these products are going to be supported by the design system. A comprehensive map of this landscape and an inventory of the patterns we find in this process will be our best allies. Knowing the size of the monster will help us and the team come up with the right approach.

Having gone through the points above, one question that we should always ask ourselves is: "Are we solving a real problem or just responding to a trend?" This question is bigger than it seems. Identifying a problem and mapping out the initiative's objectives in the short–, mid– and long–term is the starting point to help us define a roadmap based on priorities. Design systems don't need to be robust and mature from day one. They can begin as a collection of principles and loose patterns but can evolve to become more comprehensive and precise in the way every pattern is documented. The foundational characteristics of our design system as well as the scope of the initiative are expected to evolve and adapt over time based on findings made along the way.

About the Authors:

Marcela Sánchez is a graphic designer with 10 years of experience in UI and UX Design based in Medellín, Colombia. During the last couple years of her career she's specialized in Design Systems, leading interdisciplinary teams in the planning, execution and maintenance of robust systems. She has collaborated with brands such as Jet.com, Sears and Bank of America. Additionally, she spends part of her spare time training Brazilian jiu-jitsu and experimenting with lettering and sign painting.

Juan Velasco has been in the industry for over 20 years and has spent a good part of that time leading Zemoga's design team. Currently his main areas of focus are team growth and new client initiatives. In addition to this, he spends part of his time overseeing the design process in general, following trends and understanding how can be leveraged by clients. He's collaborated with brands such as Sony Interactive Entertainment, Paramount Pictures, Toyota, Bridgestone and Brooks Brothers, helping them deliver digital products for the US market.
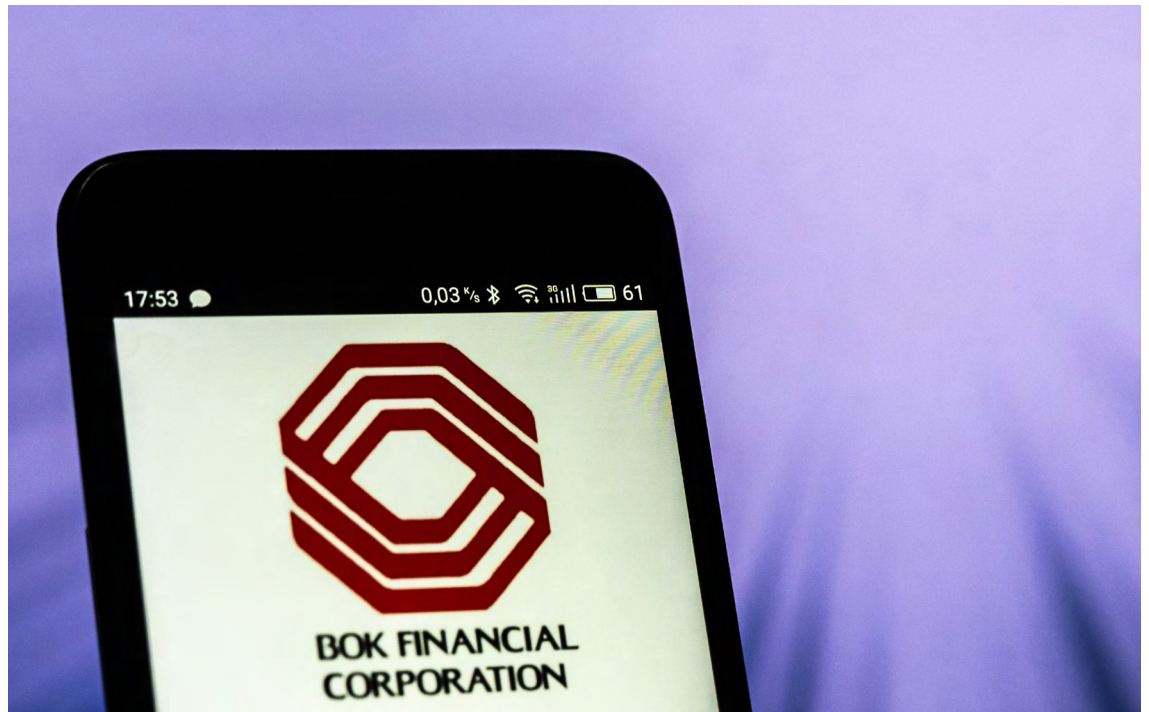
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Ogilvy

Dan Saltzman, Ogilvy

To Compete on the National Stage, BOK Financial Developed & Embraced a Design System

The leadership at BOK Financial (BOKF), is ambitious: they want to keep pace with and beat out top-tier, national financial organizations. BOKF was investing in the digital tools that national players had, but its solutions weren't delivering the expected results. Leaders soon realized that keeping up in brand experience doesn't just mean moving fast—it also means moving thoughtfully with design-led, customer-focused decision making.

In 2015, BOKF hired its first user experience designer, Lance Love. Now vice president, manager of experience architecture and digital design, Love knew he could improve the bank's offerings with a more unified user experience (UX). He also knew that this kind of transformation would take buy-in from across the business.

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Creating partnerships to make the case for a design system

Love didn't want to serve line of business (LoB) leaders a set of design rules they didn't understand or believe in. He wanted to convert leaders, even those who had never thought about design, into evangelists who saw the worth of a consistent user experience. And while many LoB leaders might not intuitively understand design, Love knew he could show them its value.

Love used business leaders' admiration for the national competition's digital offerings as a learning opportunity and showed how top-tier banks gave users a uniform experience across their digital properties and offerings through a design system. From there, Love sought out more teachable moments, such as when LoB leaders realized that their products were good—but not good enough.

"We used failure as an opportunity to introduce people to new ways of solving problems," he said.

By connecting the shortcomings of these not-quite good enough projects to a lack of design system implementation, Love was able to create buy-in with the development team and LoB leaders. The discussions about a design system also gave design teams and business units a common language when working together on an app or web offering.

With support from his LoB evangelists, Love showed that a UX design system served BOKF's unified branding initiatives, as well as the goals of its flagship, Bank of Oklahoma. The regional bank was pushing to compete nationally, and digital tools would be key in holding its own next to banking giants. Love and his growing team showed that every digital experience was also a branding experience. As their design system gained consistency, it supported more unified outreach and reduced the cognitive load for users. Repeated navigation patterns made exploring another offering easier. BOKF's design system turned points of frustration into points of curiosity.

Building an open-minded team

Part of Love's success was the intentional way he grew the team, now a robust group of 19 UX professionals. His first hire was a digital native, a designer who understood how to incorporate data into design decisions. Data gave the UX team another crucial common ground with their stakeholders and the groups decided together what should be measured. Armed with qualitative and quantitative insights, the UX team was able to deconstruct its own assumptions and remove the less effective elements of the design system.

This mindful, flexible style extended to the team's relationship with Ogilvy, BOKF's experience design agency.

"The partnership was based on design goals—not about Ogilvy trying to be the smartest people in the room, or about Lance setting prescriptive design rules," said Dan Saltzman, vice president, design and user experience at Ogilvy. "We were invited to be an outside voice asking questions based on the goals Lance and the business had set."

Coming in with fresh eyes, the Ogilvy team identified both intended and unintended patterns within the existing design system and helped Love and his team refine them.

The design system gives BOKF stakeholders a shared approach to deliver new products for its customers. A common language helps developers, LoB leaders, and the UX team develop products faster with more consistency, allowing this rising financial powerhouse to compete on the national stage.

About the Author:

As Vice President of Design, **Dan Saltzman** *leads Ogilvy's digital transformation efforts and co-manages its design and research teams. He understands the challenges that Ogilvy's clients are facing while also possessing the experience and drive to accompany them down the path of digital transformation. An active thought leader, Dan is a dedicated mentor to the students at General Assembly Denver, where he is a career coach and provides portfolio reviews. In his free time, Dan loves to attend live concerts, cook, and snowboard in the Rocky Mountains.*

Reason.

Michael Dingle, Reason

How to Make the Business Case for a Design System or Do You Really Need One?


Design systems are on trend. Since Google published their Material Design in 2014, we have seen a meteoric rise in the amount of publicly released design systems, from IBM to Shopify, Salesforce, the United States government and more… they're all at it.

A lot has been written on the value of design systems, what they are, and how they should be used—at its core though, design systems are nothing new, they are just back in fashion now. They have been around for a long time, newspapers, architects and even public transport systems embraced design systems long before us digital lot thought they warranted their own website.
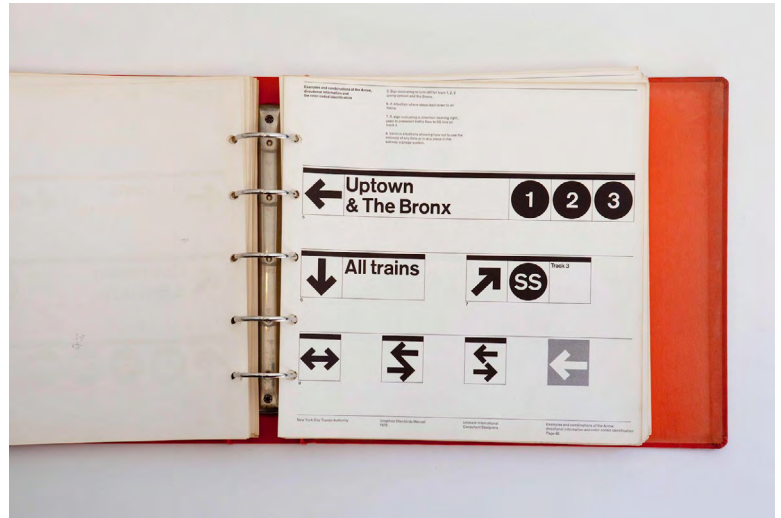
One of the greatest examples of a design system is the alphabet. Using 26 (I am referring to the current Latin alphabet for this analogy, so please, no factual references) simple elements and a series of strongly defined but loosely held rules, the alphabet has enabled people everywhere to invent with the most unbridled of creativity in a format that anyone can understand. I will come back to this example in a moment.
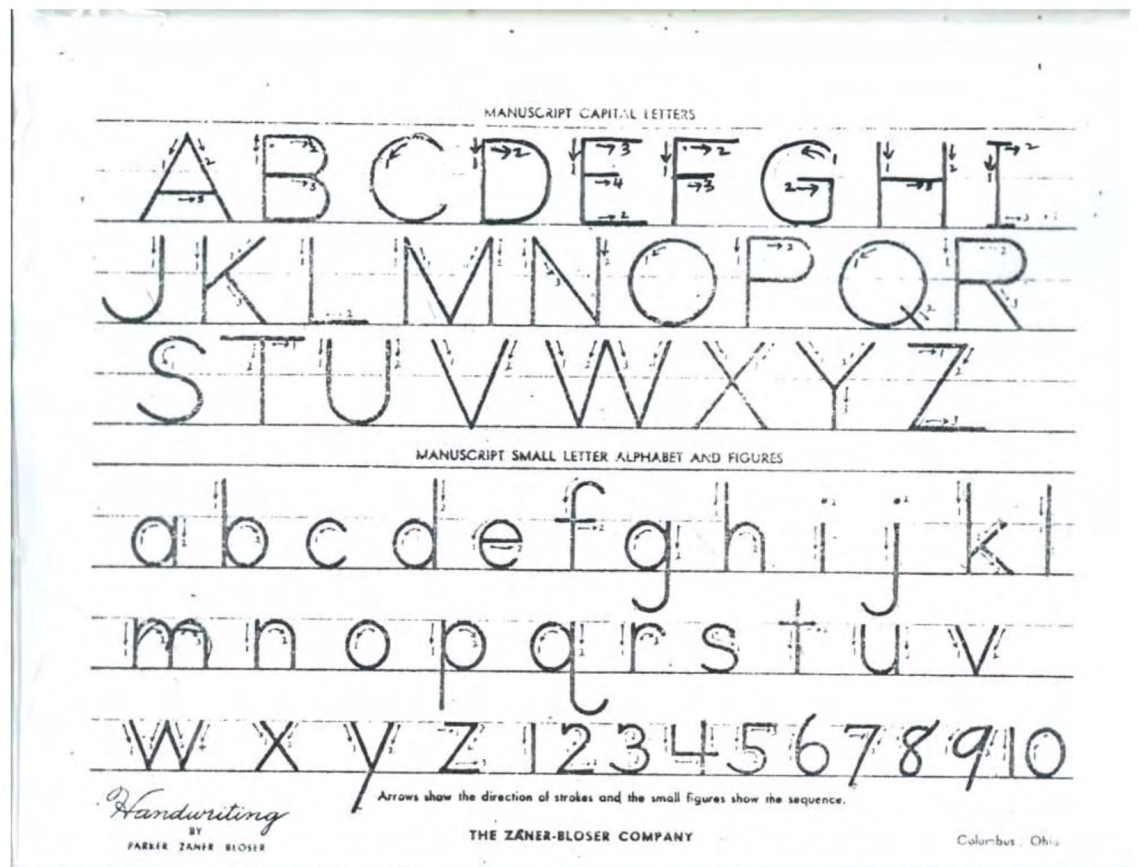
Back to the subject at hand, design systems. As an agency owner, consultant and ultimately a designer, I am constantly faced with stressed-out but dedicated clients, managing too-small budgets, with already too-small teams when the question 'do we need a design system?' gets asked.

Design systems are great, but the answer to that question is all about context. For example, if your organization hasn't already invested time and energy into usability testing, building your very own Material Design is probably not the best deployment of capital.

> *Beware of the client who comes to you with the request of a design system. They have probably stumbled across material design or polaris and think…. I want something like that, and I want it in two weeks.*

So, how do you answer that question for the client if the answer is 'it depends'? At Reason we do it the same way we would do it if our clients came to us asking do we need an app? Do we need a new service?

We treat a design system the same way we treat a new product, service or venture—we focus on achieving two straightforward objectives, only this time we start with a solution in mind.
1. Are we solving a problem our customers want solved?
2. Is there a profitable and scalable business model?

To prove we are **solving a problem our customers want solved**, first define your audience, who is a design system for? Designers, engineers, execs, 3rd party teams… Now you know who they are, what is your value proposition for them? Focus on building a 'minimum valuable system' that solves a problem that your customers care about that requires the least amount of effort/investment.

Do this, test this, gather the evidence. If the data confirms that we are indeed solving a problem that our customers care about, great, we move on to the next objective– **is there a profitable and scalable business model?**

I hear you asking how might one measure a business model of a design system? Measures for this will depend greatly on the problem you are solving and the MVP you have created. For some it can be consistency or speed, for others quality.

> *I prefer creativity, IMO design systems should be about reducing the cognitive load of your people so they can focus their creative capital on innovating.*

Now there should be enough data to model the value created over cost to deliver at scale, a conservative model should point to profit in the near future.

If at either point you can't achieve either of the objectives, then don't force it, perhaps a design system is not right for you now, perhaps the problem is not real or big enough right now, that's not to say it won't be as you scale.

This approach not only informs if you should start but also when to continue the development of your design system. Continuing through the customer problem/ business model loop ensures that a design system grows and changes as customer needs, technologies and more importantly 'trends' change. It also tells us when we have reached maximum return for our design system.

Now back to the alphabet example I mentioned earlier:

Is there a problem our customers want solved? **Yes –** They want to be able to refer to stories and history without committing everything to memory.

Is there a profitable and scalable business model? **Yes –** The value and industry created on top of this 26-element design system.

In closing, design systems are great, but should be focused on the problem at hand. As armchair designers we get obsessed with the minutiae of details like consistency, with a default position that a design system will solve many of these minor problems. But it's difficult to see most consistency issues having a massive business impact for most situations, particularly when a business is in a high-growth mode—iOS 11 had 14 different share items in their app and no one would say Apple doesn't know what they are doing when it comes to design.

Implementing design systems in organizations must be done with care so as to optimize the right parts, while still offering the creative, untethered freedom design needs to explore. So, focus on the problem you are trying to solve, understand your design system's business model and build, measure, learn and don't be afraid to say no, not now.

About the Author:
Michael Dingle *is Partner and Co-founder of Reason. Think big, start small.*

viget

Kevin Vigneault, Viget

A Case for Agency Design Systems

As agencies, we think of design systems as something our clients should have. That the benefits of them – consistency and efficiency across products, sites, and teams – can transform their organizations. But what if we applied that thinking to our own work? What if we created our own design systems to leverage these same benefits for ourselves, and ultimately our clients?

This is a particularly challenging proposition for agencies. Product companies (ex. Shopify) can be very specific in their approach, while platform companies (ex. Google) can be extremely broad. For us, we need to find the sweet spot in between; something opinionated and specific enough that we gain consistency and efficiency, but not so specific that we limit our ability to apply the system across a variety of clients and projects.

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Here's an approach for developing a design system from an agency perspective:

1. **Getting started.** If you haven't already, choose an existing design system and get your team using it consistently. For us, that's been Material Design over the past few years, but there are plenty of other options to consider. We don't use Material on every project, but it's been a great fit for many of our application design projects; particularly mobile ones. Because we've used this system consistently across multiple projects and teams, we can share a common language and general design perspective on new projects.

2. **Leveling Up.** After using a system for a while, you'll notice that some of your results are better than others. Figure out what's working for you and what isn't. Modify the system to fit you better. Lean into what's working. Change the underlying system if there are things you don't like. For example, Material Design has very specific measurements for their grid. We found these measurements didn't work for some of our designs. We created alternate gutter/margin measurements and documented it so other designer and developers don't have to repeat the same discovery process.

3. **The End Game.** Eventually, you'll reach a point where you're no longer just generating work that feels derivative of someone else's system. You've created something that's flexible for all your client work but has a core design philosophy that feels unique to your agency. At this point, working within the system feels more natural and expressive than working outside of it.

Too often, agencies push pixels and invent components, only to put their efforts in deep storage, never to be used again. We convince ourselves that each client must have a completely new system, unique solely to them. How often is it the case, though, that a client needs a completely new design? This perpetuates inefficiency and slowly makes the company less competitive. In a market where we compete with businesses like Squarespace, creating an agency design system allows us to hone in on our competitive advantage.

The goal of having an organization design system is to focus on what our clients hire us for—creativity, innovation, and efficiency in the most impactful way. Having a design system to start from would free us up to do just that.

However, this would require an investment from leadership—This isn't just a parts kit, strung together over time. It's an intentional, deliberate design system that can shrink and expand depending on your client. As such, it has to be maintained outside of client work.

But the benefits of this effort would be rewarded. Too often agencies work on projects that feel similar to previous work. By creating an organizational design system, the repeat energy is no longer wasted. Instead, designers and developers are free to invest in the most impactful part of our work like research, design, and brand messaging.

About the Author:

Kevin Vigneault has more than ten years' experience working with custom websites and mobile applications and brings a well-rounded background to his position as Product Design Director. He believes in making websites and products that are simple in their structure, yet unique and compelling in their details. Most recently, he led the research, information architecture, and interface design efforts for Privia Health, the Hamilton Company, BDI Furniture, Knowledge to Practice, the Wildlife Conservation Society, and the World Wildlife Fund, to name a few.

Team & Partners

SoDA

SoDA serves as a network and voice for entrepreneurs and innovators around the globe who are creating the future of marketing and digital experiences.

Tom Beck, Executive Director

Tom Beck is Executive Director of SoDA and works closely with its membership, Board of Directors and corporate partners to create an indispensable global network for digital business leaders, creative visionaries and technology disruptors.

Lakai Newman, Communications Manager

A graduate of Emory University, Lakai Newman came to SoDA from a NY-based digital agency where he focused on creating compelling content for a number of blue-chip brands. He serves as SoDA's primary steward and contact for communications, social media, and marketing efforts. Lakai also serves as Associate Editor and Head of Production for *The SoDA Report*, SoDA's biannual trend publication that features primary research, thought leadership, and case studies from top digital agencies, production companies, and client-side digital marketing executives from around the world. He considers himself a natural "creative" that is passionate about global travel, cooking, pop-culture, and all things digital.

Jessica Ongko, Designer

Since joining SoDA's Operations team in 2014, Jessica Ongko has been deeply involved with strengthening SoDA's brand and visual identity while collaborating with agencies around the world to design and create publications, event signage, and both digital and physical assets related to the work of SoDA. A graduate of the Graphic Design program from advertising portfolio school, The Creative Circus, you'll often find Jessica trotting the globe and working out of airports during long layovers.

As the founding sponsor of SoDA, Adobe's goal is to provide tools and technologies to inspire the design and development of leading-edge digital content, help agencies build strategic relationships with clients, and support the overall advancement and growth of the digital marketing industry. Adobe empowers its customers to create and deliver compelling content and applications that turn engaging digital experiences into more valuable interactions every day. By efficiently creating and optimizing digital experiences across devices, agencies help clients maximize their marketing investments and fully realize their business potential. To learn more, visit www.adobe.com.

Cisco Guzman

Devoted to empowering creativity and expression through technology, Cisco Guzman believes he has the best job in the world working with hearty, soulful people on Adobe XD. He's gone from teaching himself Photoshop and Illustrator on a Mac Centris while studying interdisciplinary philosophy at Stanford to helping shape how organizations create and get the job done. He enjoys pondering, ideating, making, and connecting.

Kirstan Bell

Kristan Bell is a Senior Consultant for Adobe's Strategic Partnerships.