



Placement Report
Jordan Earle

After 6 months of back and forth discussion with various recruiters at Square I got on a plane in September bound for San Francisco. I had successfully landed a Design Internship on Square's support engineering team.

Support Engineering is responsible for Square's entire support platform. From internal tools used by the phone support team to the consumer support dashboard. We were responsible for it all - we had one of the most diverse portfolio of projects across all the teams at Square, despite being one of the smallest teams.

Originally, the internship was to last a full year - in the end it was cut short - just 16 weeks - due to a budget decision on my team and my inability to work longer than a year. Despite this, I still had the opportunity to work and lead on several major projects - including a complete overhaul of one that's seen by several million unique users a month.

During my initial weeks at Square, I joined Square One—the process that all new Squares go through when joining. Various teams from across Square came to present their departments and work to us - making sure we had a knowledge and understanding of the whole company.

Comms gave a talk about internal culture at Square, talking about the transparency and internal sharing—through Slack (a messaging service), Town Square, Shadow Sessions and an internal wiki. The strong belief in transparency—from internal communications to the office layout (open plan with lots of glass) seemed to make for a great work environment of sharing and collaboration.

Then we had a talk from the Design team—talking about how we should be looking at design as problem solving, not just making stuff

look good. This was one of the talks during Square One that interested me most, since I was joining as a designer. We also had a really interesting design thinking exercise, matching font styles with various shoes which got us thinking about brand and image.

We heard from pretty much every team at Square from Square Capital: Cash, Caviar, Infosec. It was an intensive week crammed full of talks, but we all learned a lot and got a great overview of life at Square.

Before the orientation week was over I got to meet Jack Dorsey at an executive roundtable and speak on stage at one of the Square Town Hall meetings.

Orientation and Square One was a great way to get me up to speed with all things Square and get me prepared for the weeks to come. Working at Square was unlike anything I had previously done. Prior to working at Square, I did not have to take into account limitations on my format/style; I worked independently. Suddenly I was working for a global company and had to work inside a box. Having to take internal style guides, turning that rigidity into a tool to create great designs was an incredibly fun challenge.

My first major project at Square was a competitive analysis presentation. I was tasked with looking at the support offerings from Revel, Clover and Paypal and compare them to our own offerings. My initial findings revealed that they were all lackluster; including Square's own support systems. I put together a 100 slide report detailing proposed changes. I suggested things like changing line width and line spacing to make pages friendlier to parse.

Other new suggestions included accordions - to compress page length, full width images to make pages more user friendly and breadcrumbs,

making the navigation structure easier to follow and understand for users.

My earlier research, as part of IxD302, was a massive help with this project - my research on line height and width in long form text directly translated to my proposed support article design.

This presentation and supporting report was shared amongst my team. Then, it was sent company wide. I got some great feedback from across the company.

I was also shown by Jimmy how I should be keeping my folders structured. When you're working for yourself, it's not something you consider - but when your work is being viewed by hundreds of other employees on the company server, it's important that they're able to easily access the latest version and see previous versions, too.

I also learned a great deal about Keynote and presentation design. I wanted my report to be easy to follow along with without including pages of text. I had to deliver the presentation to several high-level Square designer. My previous presenting experience helped boost my confidence about this presentation.

After I completed this project I moved on to my next task. Implementing my previous suggestions to create visual mockups and prototypes.

We use Sketch at Square, so I already had a high proficiency with the app from all my IxD and freelancing work. I did learn quite a bit about various Sketch plug-ins; tools like Sketch Measure are great time savers.

I started each of these designs with a style tile, taking elements from Square's style guide and elements I liked from other support centers - like Google's or Casper's.

Afterwards, I worked on several versions of the design in Sketch; I created desktop, tablet and mobile views of each design. I changed things like colour and minor layout changes between each. I would review these with my design lead before moving forward with the best design direction.

Once done, I would break down the design using Sketch Measure; I was able to clearly list heights, widths and other important elements like font size. This is all to make engineers lives easier later when they implement the designs.

To persuade the executive team at Square of our design, I used Invision prototypes. This tool helped us visualize our designs and walk an executive through a design from the end-users perspective.

Another element that was new to me was localisation and seeing how my work translated into other languages. Being from Northern Ireland - where most people speak English, this was never an obvious important element to me. Unlike the UK, though, almost 15% of the population speak Spanish in the US.

For some of our projects we scrapped entire designs because the design fell apart when translated to Spanish or Japanese. This is why localisation became an early step in my design process - making sure to consider varying word length and character size in different languages.

I think the global nature of the work was one of the most interesting aspects. The projects I designed had to be stress-free solutions that worked in various languages across the globe. Sellers would be accessing these pages when their Square system wasn't working and as a result they were not able to take sales - so they would obviously be stressed. We had to design stress free solutions.

The final project I worked on at Square would also be my largest - a complete overhaul of Square's status page. When Square systems are down, this is the first place people will go.

The current page was a poorly templated design. It was uninspired and not intuitive; information could not be easily parsed at a glance.

I essentially had full creative freedom for this project. I was told to design 3 versions. The first, a best case scenario, was the most boundary pushing style-guide breaking design I could create. The second, a middle-ground scenario, was a more moderate design; it took cues from my best case scenario and toned them down. The third, the least ideal scenario, stuck closely to the style guide; it did not feature any of the unique elements I wanted to include.

It was important to constantly be aware of the Square style guide (internally called Manhattan 2.0) but for this project my design lead and I agreed it was less important to be rigid about following it. This site would not be on the main Square domain and could be seen as somewhat of a testing ground for a future style.

In the end, the middle-ground scenario was the one we went with. Creating a design with giant colorful bold text; this allows users to glance and immediately know if there are issues. We designed this around a traffic light system - green for no problems, yellow for minor issues and red for a 'SEV' - a severe outage.

This design pattern was one of the earliest ideas I had for the site and I'm glad it was included. Other design changes were made, mostly around the typography of the site, using Square's 'Market' font. We increased various text size and made the entire page cleaner and much easier to parse.

I also completely overhauled the history aspect of the site; this made it easier for users to find previous outages and find out what was causing them.

When the system had a major outage, Square would include a post mortem page when the system is back up. This would detail the nature of the outage and the steps taken to rectify it. Before my redesign, this page was a wall of grey text. It was incredibly hard to read with no thought for accessibility.

Accessibility was a major forethought for this project. I sat down with several employees at Square who were in charge of researching this and we worked through several problems with the current pages. Things like the previous color combinations and iconography were very poor with visually impaired users.

When redoing this page, I made it much easier to parse and changed all the colors to make sure they're accessible for all users. We had the opportunity to do an eye tracking study on the redesign which was incredibly cool to be part of.

Just like localization, accessibility was something that was always an afterthought for me and not a major goal in my designs. My time at Square has definitely changed my perspective on this and for the better. Being equipped to incorporate these elements into my work only makes me a better designer.

The site finally went live and we had a small launch party for the project wrapping up at a local Thai restaurant. It felt amazing to have something that I had spent months working on be finally visible to Square users.

This would be my last project for Square and my internship came to an end. I'm incredibly grateful to all of the incredible people that I met

there and for the experience itself. I believe that I have come away from the placement a more well-rounded designer, taking consideration for a more global outlook in my work.

I've had the fortune to be able to work as a freelancer, in a small start-up environment, and now a large global company. Being able to have all of these experiences as a designer has only solidified the fact that I want to keep doing this line of work.

Out of the three, I think I enjoyed my time at Square the most. Once I graduate, I would definitely like to work in a large tech company again. The collaboration opportunities, the vast amount of accessible talent and just the friendliness of the people that work at these companies; it made it an incredibly fulfilling time.

Out of all the projects I worked on, my favourite was the status redesign. Having the freedom and flexibility to lead that project was incredible - especially since it was such a high stakes project.

Despite my internship ending earlier than I had intended, I stayed in the United States and San Francisco. I attended various design conferences and meeting with many from the industry - networking and making many new friends. I don't regret a second of my time spent here and I believe it will have a massive impact on my future career

I'm glad to have had the opportunity to hopefully leave a small mark at Square designing projects that will likely have a trickle down effect on Square's support design for the next several years.

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