The Business Value of Design Systems

From consistency to cost savings and revenue growth

Case studies from design executives and design system leaders at Grammarly, SAP, Linear, Freshworks, Notion, and Hyundai Motor Group

DESIGN EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

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Defining design systems

Figma describes a design system as “a set of building blocks and standards that help keep the look and feel of products and experiences consistent.”At its core, a design system provides a unified language and structured framework that guides teams through the complex process of designing and building digital products at scale.

According to Figma, design systems include three key layers:

- **The system itself** - overarching principles and guidance that define how teams design and build across a product ecosystem.
- **Component and pattern libraries** - reusable visual and interaction elements that bridge design and engineering to accelerate delivery.
- **Foundational elements** - the visual language, aewdccessibility standards, and brand guidelines that maintain consistency and trust across experiences.

Across the industry, definitions like these emphasize consistency, collaboration, and efficiency — how shared components and governance streamline the design-to-development process.

DXC builds on this foundation and expands its scope.

> “Design systems are the infrastructure that enables organizations to design, build, and govern digital products and experiences with consistency, compliance, quality, at scale.”

Gordon Ching
Founder & CEO, Design Executive Council

Design systems are good for business

When Figma commissioned this research with the Design Executive Council in 2025, our goal was to understand how design systems have evolved — from early style guides to their modern role as business infrastructure for experience management. Through conversations with senior design leaders across industries, one theme was consistent: Design systems have matured beyond design and engineering utilities to become strategic enablers of scale, efficiency, and growth.

This report examines that shift. Drawing on executive interviews and case studies from **Grammarly, SAP, Linear, Freshworks, Notion, and Hyundai Motor Group**, we explore how global companies structure investment, governance, and adoption to create measurable business value. Across these organizations, design systems have become the connective tissue between design, engineering, and product — raising quality standards, accelerating delivery, and strengthening brand integrity.

At their best, design systems reflect how design can operate as a business function. When built and governed effectively, they reduce operational friction, manage risk, and improve the scalability of experiences across markets. They also anchor a company's creative culture — empowering teams to move faster, onboard seamlessly, and focus on higher-value work.

As companies enter the AI era, the strategic importance of design systems is increasing. Intelligent, generative, and adaptive experiences depend on structured, reusable, and governed design infrastructure. Without it, organizations risk fragmentation and missed opportunities.

This research offers frameworks and language to help design leaders articulate the business value of design systems in terms that resonate with executives—advancing a shared understanding of how design contributes directly to performance, resilience, and long-term business value.

Gordon Ching
Founder & CEO, Design Executive Council

Research questions

How are design leaders articulating the value of design systems to business stakeholders?

What is the relationship between how companies scale efficiently and the role of design systems?

How do design systems improve customer experiences and revenue growth?

How are design systems driving operational efficiency and enhancing cross-functional collaboration?

How is AI impacting investment interest in and funding for design systems?

Key insights of design systems' business value

Insights from design leaders at Grammarly, SAP, Linear, Freshworks, Notion, and Hyundai Motor Group

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This study profiles a diverse range of companies — from early-stage startups like Linear, to medium-sized private firms such as Grammarly and Notion, to young public companies like Freshworks, and large multinationals including SAP and Hyundai Motor Group.

We see directional signals that the business value of design systems lies in their capacity to improve enterprise margins by influencing 2 fundamental levers of performance: cost savings and revenue growth. When both are unlocked concurrently — through efficiency gains, design-to-development velocity, streamlined digital governance, and new monetization opportunities — design systems begin to show measurable impact on profitability.

Further research is needed to quantify the degree to which design systems contribute to margin health and to determine the average time-to-payoff, including how investment scale, governance maturity, and organizational adoption affect ROI realization.

What primary business goals is your design system positioned to support?

The following analysis is based on a multiple-choice survey question. Our analysis focuses on 2 primary categories of business value positioning:

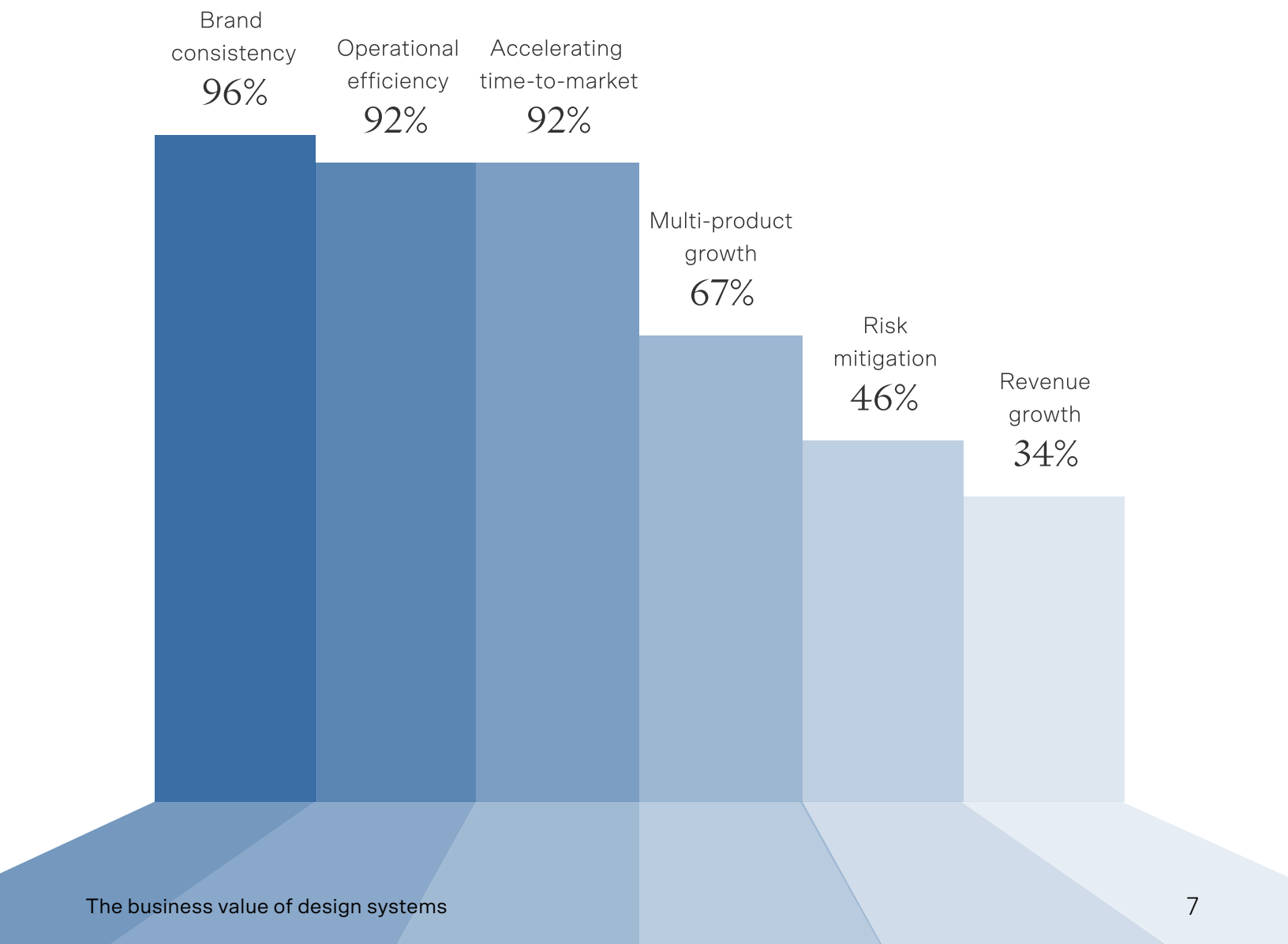
Core benefits

In the earlier stages, design systems help **reduce effort**, **improve consistency**, and **accelerate time-to-market**. They deliver measurable gains in brand cohesion, operational efficiency, and production velocity, making them the most common entry point for securing business funding and adoption.

Advanced benefits

With stronger governance, measurement, and cross-functional integration, design systems begin to drive broader business value — **enabling multi-product scalability**, **mitigating risk**, and c**ontributing to revenue growth**. These outcomes position design systems as critical infrastructure for digital business performance.

24 global design leaders and design system experts see the value of the design system for:



How are leaders across different company types articulating the value of design systems?

Companies of all sizes are leveraging design systems to improve how they govern and manage digital experiences. Along with this increased adoption, design systems are driving greater visibility into the core and advanced benefits for business performance.

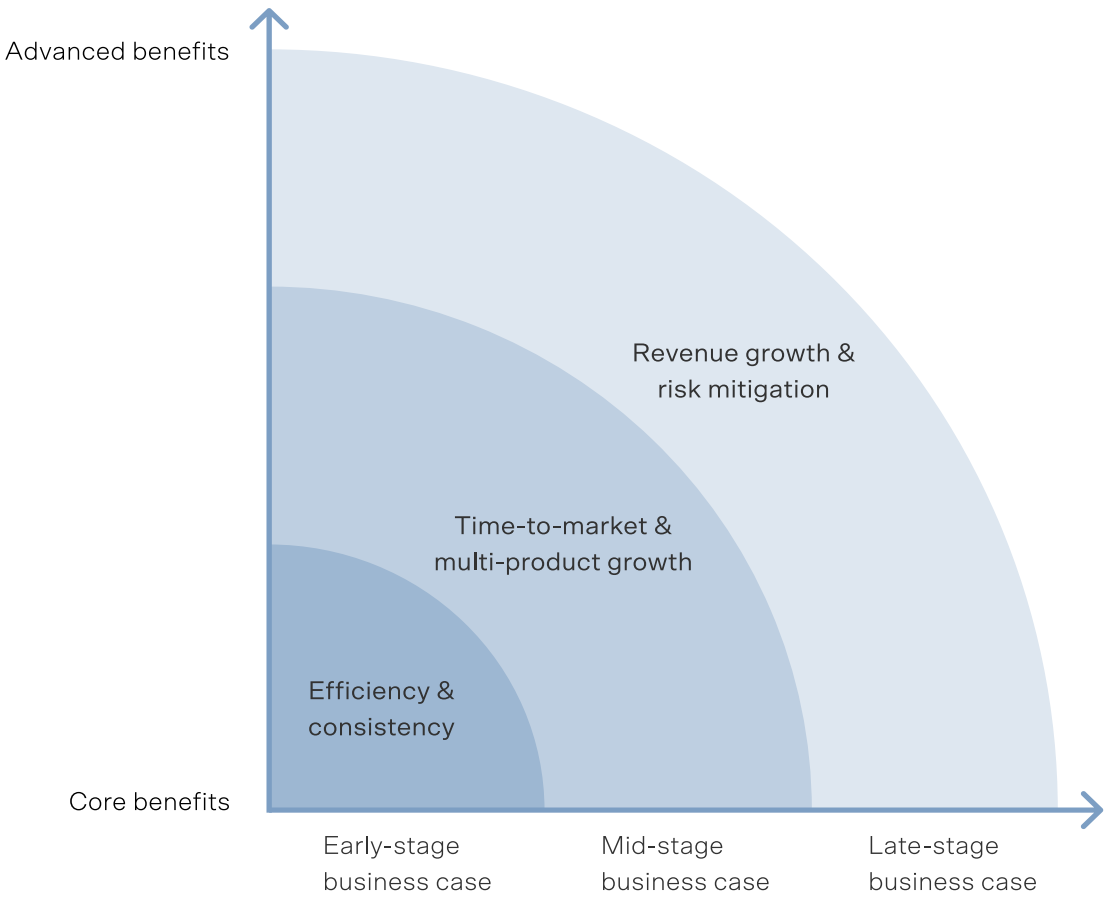
Our research shows that in earlier use-cases, organizations begin their design systems journey with core benefits around efficiency gains — focused on cost savings, quality, and consistency. These foundational benefits justify early-stage investment, framing design systems as an optimization tool that reduces waste, improves quality, and accelerates development.

As the system matures, its value proposition shifts to more advanced benefits. In mid-stage business cases, design systems enable faster time-to-market, multi-product scalability, and operational leverage across teams and platforms.

Ultimately, late-stage business cases position design systems as strategic enterprise infrastructure — fueling revenue growth, risk mitigation, and innovation capacity.

The value of a design system isn't defined by company size — it's defined by maturity.

For leaders, the takeaway is clear: Your business case should evolve as your system does. The more deeply the system is integrated and measured against business outcomes, the higher its strategic altitude and the more compelling your narrative to executives becomes.



Core benefits - impacts on cost savings

Design systems deliver immediate and measurable operational value by improving efficiency, consistency, and time-to-market. These foundational benefits make them a clear entry point for executive investment.

Faster time-to-market

In the foundational stages, design systems reduce production and maintenance costs by standardizing reusable components and eliminating redundant work.

- **Operational efficiency**: Centralized assets streamline workflows, enabling teams to deliver with speed and precision.
- **Reduced complexity**: A unified system eliminates integration delays, ensuring faster delivery across markets and platforms.
- **Automation and AI acceleration**: AI tools and coding agents automate repetitive tasks, bridging the idea-to-reality gap faster.

These operational efficiencies compound over time, reducing technical debt and creating recurring savings that offset maintenance costs and reinvest capital into higher-value innovation.

Reduced need for customer support

Design systems proactively lower customer support costs by simplifying interactions and minimizing usability issues.

- **Predictable user journeys**: Consistent interfaces reduce confusion and prevent errors that typically drive service demand.
- **Unified experiences**: Cross-platform coherence enables customers to build familiarity, reducing learning curves and supporting dependency.
- **AI-enabled efficiency**: Automated ticket summarization and faster resolutions improve customer response times and service capacity.

Together, these outcomes translate to leaner operations, reduced overhead, and stronger customer trust — turning quality and simplicity into measurable business efficiency.

Advanced benefits - impacts on revenue growth and risk

As design systems mature, their value extends beyond efficiency to strategic business multipliers. They create scalable foundations for new offerings, enable market expansion, and enhance customer experience to drive loyalty, repeat engagement, and recurring revenue growth.

Enterprise expansion

Design systems drive enterprise growth by creating a unified foundation that connects products, regions, and teams while embedding governance and compliance at scale. As organizations expand, these systems ensure consistency, reliability, and brand integrity across markets.

- **Scalable portfolio infrastructure**: Centralized principles streamline collaboration, reduce duplication, and enable faster development across multiple product lines and regions.
- **Adaptive code and compliance**: Unified engineering foundations support complex requirements such as right-to-left layouts and adaptive experiences, while embedded data privacy and globalization standards uphold regulatory confidence.

Together, these practices position design systems as the connective infrastructure for portfolio expansion and governance — enabling enterprises to scale confidently, maintain trust, and deliver uniform experiences worldwide.

Improved customer experiences and satisfaction

Mature design systems create cohesion across products, fostering trust and long-term loyalty that directly improves CSAT and NPS and drives revenue expansion.

- **Consistent brand experience**: A consistent user experience across every brand creates a smooth user experience and increases adoption across portfolios.
- **Customer advocacy**: High-quality experiences turn users into advocates, fueling organic growth.
- **Personalization and delight**: AI-driven design customization deepens engagement and retention.

The result is sustainable customer growth, higher lifetime value, and stronger brand equity, proving that consistency is not only aesthetic, but also drives revenue.

Ecosystem monetization

In their most advanced form, design systems become monetizable platforms.

- **Platform revenue**: Extensible systems generate new streams through partnerships, APIs, and third-party integrations.
- **Ecosystem scalability**: Developers and partners build on a unified design foundation, expanding the business's reach.
- **Strategic differentiation**: Positioning design systems as business infrastructure elevates them to revenue-generating assets.

This evolution reframes design systems as organizational IP — driving recurring revenue and cementing their role as engines of business growth.

AI in design systems: *Levels of impact*

Emerging patterns show that AI's role in design systems now extends far beyond task-level automation. AI is already reshaping business capabilities and redefining how organizations innovate, compete, and scale. These shifts go all the way from tactical gains that accelerate task-level efficiency to high-level transformation. At the more strategic level, AI becomes embedded in organizational systems, informs decision-making, and powers consistency at scale.

Leaders across industries are already pointing to this shift: Freshworks sees AI as essential to accelerating the path from concept to code, while SAP emphasizes its ability to democratize design systems for non-designers without sacrificing cohesion. Hyundai Motor Group envisions "ambient AI" that continually learns from user behavior, feeding insights back into evolving systems.

The strategic opportunity for design leaders is to position AI-enabled design systems as living ecosystems that serve multiple business imperatives — driving revenue, cost efficiency, innovation, risk management, and governance — demonstrating their enduring value and adaptability in the AI era.

Team-level

Improving design and development productivity

Early AI use cases focus on automating repetitive design and engineering tasks to save time and energy to focus on higher-value areas of contribution.

Organizational-level

Streamlining business operations

AI supports organization-wide adoption and usage of design systems, enabling cross-organization efficiencies and capacity, while minimizing risks around quality, globalization, localization, accessibility, and compliance.

Business-level

Improving design and development productivity

Future AI integrations will allow design systems to provide businesses the ability to power AI-era customer experiences that intelligently learn, anticipate, predict, and personalize how to best meet user needs in real-time.

Snapshot of recommendations

Recommendations for driving business adoption of design systems

01

Communicate value in board-level language

(Read more on p.62)

02

Accelerate design system adoption by generating cross-functional advocates

(Read more on p.63)

03

Build a multi-phase strategy for sustainable design system growth and governance

(Read more on p.63)

Recommendations for scaling impact of design systems

01

Build a code-defined foundation to accelerate innovation

(Read more on p.64)

02

Leverage AI for quality assurance and compliance

(Read more on p.65)

03

Embed inclusivity and compliance requirements for global adaptation

(Read more on p.65)

Business profiles

The 10 interviewees that we profiled are design executives, product leaders, and design system architects from both scale-ups and multinational enterprises across North America, Europe, and Asia-Pacific. Together, they provide an inside look into how organizations at different stages of scale and growth approach their design systems.

This mix of company size and regional diversity enables a nuanced exploration into how design systems are being built, governed, and scaled in varied environments, while also illustrating the collaborative dynamics between executives and design systems leads as they articulate and deliver business value.

Publicly-listed companies we profiled:

SAP

HYUNDAI MOTOR GROUP

freshworks

Private companies we profiled:

grammarly

Linear

Notion

Design leadership voices

Arin Bhowmick

SAP

Executive Vice President,
Chief Design Officer

Arin Bhowmick

Notion

Head of Design

Eric Wood

42dot (Hyundai Motor Group)

Senior Vice President,
Product Experience

Chris Jacobs

42dot (Hyundai Motor Group)

Principal Product Designer,
Infotainment

Rebecca McMillin

Grammarly

Director of Product Design,
Foundations

Collin Whitehead

Grammarly

Vice President of Design

Kedar Shiroor

Freshworks

Senior Vice President,
User Experience

Senthil Shanmugam

Freshworks

Senior Director of
Product Design

Conor Muirhead

Linear

Head of Product Design

Yann-Edern Gillet

Linear

Product Designer

Interviews - Grammarly

Grammarly empowers more than 50,000 organizations worldwide, bringing trusted communication and productivity tools into over 500,000 applications and websites.

With recent acquisitions like Coda and Superhuman, Grammarly is evolving into an AI-native enterprise platform that unites language, accessibility, and productivity, helping teams work with speed, clarity, and impact on a global scale.

Rebecca McMillin

Director of Product Design, Foundations

Collin Whitehead

Vice President of Design

Key points

01 Why design systems are critical for driving brand cohesion across products

02 How partnerships and champions embedded the system into their culture and secured executive buy-in

03 How governance and tooling unlocked speed and cut costs

How design systems became infrastructure for multi-product growth at Grammarly

AI holds the promise of transforming productivity, but too often it's layered onto existing tools in ways that create fragmented experiences and limited returns. Grammarly is taking a different approach, building what CEO Shishir Mehrotra calls an "AI superhighway" that integrates directly into user workflows across more than 500,000 applications and websites — meeting professionals exactly where they work.

Recent acquisitions reinforce this vision. In 2025, Grammarly acquired Coda, a $1.3 billion collaborative document platform, followed by Superhuman, an AI-powered email client with $35 million in annual revenue. These moves extend Grammarly into the most critical productivity surfaces — documents, workflows, and email, marking its shift from a single-product tool to an AI-native productivity ecosystem built to meet professionals at their point of need.

Growth at this scale, however, introduces complexity. Each product carries its own design language, technical foundation, and user expectations. Without a unifying system, fragmentation would risk slower delivery, inconsistent brand experiences, higher operational friction, and rising costs.

As Grammarly's VP of Design, Collin Whitehead, notes,

> "Without the design system, it would have been impossible for Grammarly to expand into a multi-product offering."

Launched 3.5 years ago, Grammarly's design system has become the connective tissue linking products and teams. It unified 3 disparate design languages into a single source of truth, reduced engineering overhead, accelerated time-to-market, and lowered development costs.

More importantly, it created the infrastructure to scale — supporting acquisitions, strengthening cohesion across brands, and positioning design as a strategic driver of growth. This case study highlights how Grammarly embedded this cohesion across brands, teams, and workflows.

Scaling design system adoption through partnership and trust

In many smaller organizations, design systems often receive limited attention, and driving change can be complex. Leaders without a design background may not be accustomed to design workflows and priorities, making it harder to demonstrate how design systems act as strategic enablers.

For Director of Product Design, Rebecca McMillin, scaling Grammarly's design system demanded a multi-pronged approach defined by governance and enablement. Rebecca and her team framed the initiative as a partnership that helped every team move faster and deliver with greater consistency. Rebecca explains,

> "We positioned our work as more partnership-centric and showed that we are all working toward this goal together."

Actions for impact

Approach 1:

Embedding designers across teams

Designers from the design system team partnered directly with product and engineering groups. This hands-on involvement accelerated adoption, solved immediate problems, and built trust, particularly with teams unfamiliar with design systems.

Approach 2:

Hiring dedicated integration engineers

Engineers were brought in to integrate the design system and ensure its adoption wasn't a side task. Their role was to remove blockers, prioritize adoption, and demonstrate support through office hours and ongoing dialogue, without imposing mandates.

Approach 3:

Deploying design technologists

Design technologists joined engineering teams for short sprints, working on specific challenges and delivering visible outcomes. This deepened understanding on both sides and proved the system's value in real use cases.

Approach 4:

Coupling with rebrand efforts

By linking design system adoption with rebranding initiatives, Rebecca's team created natural entry points for teams to draw from the system. This not only built consistency but also generated renewed interest and momentum.

Through this partnership model, adoption was not enforced but earned. It was anchored in trust, support, and shared business outcomes.

How Grammarly turned advocacy into enterprise-wide buy-in

This partnership model evolved beyond adoption into a powerful engine for advocacy that turned the system from a single team's initiative into a company-wide enabler. For mid-stage startups looking to mature their own design system, this study offers a unique perspective on how scaling can be achieved through trusted champions who bridge design, engineering, and leadership.

Building a network of champions

Roughly 10 advocates across design and engineering serve as extensions of the core system team. They answer questions, remove barriers, and demonstrate value in everyday work, enabling the design system to function as connective tissue throughout the organization.

Even when results are not captured in traditional metrics, the trust built through these relationships has reinforced the system's presence and embedded it into organizational culture.

Fueling innovation through the system

Advocates have also become catalysts for innovation. By experimenting with AI prototyping and integrating the design system into prompt-to-code tools, they have generated new energy and visibility.

Weekly demos and shared experiments have broadened awareness, reframing the system from a mechanism of consistency to a driver of creativity and future-facing capability.

Inspiring teams to have a shared vision

Perhaps the strongest signal of business value came when engineering leaders themselves advocated for resourcing, offering to trade headcount to secure further design system investment. This bottom-up case for funding shows that design systems, when trusted and proven, transcend design: They become recognized as strategic infrastructure by the very functions accountable for delivery speed and product quality.

The metrics that won executive buy-in

Rebecca has had consistent success in demonstrating how design systems deliver measurable business outcomes. At another global consumer-facing social media brand, she proved the impact of design systems through a theme-based project where a rollout that typically required 3 months was completed in just 4 days. The result: $67,000 saved on a single feature and $16 million in annual efficiencies — all achieved with only 60% system adoption.

Now at Grammarly, Rebecca is applying the same principles at a larger scale. As the company expands into a multi-brand ecosystem, she has focused on building an infrastructure that ensures cohesion across diverse products while reducing time-to-market. Under her leadership, Grammarly adopted the theme-based design system and tooling such as Figma's Token Studio. This investment streamlined workflows, minimized engineering overhead, and created a flexible platform for rapid brand integration.

Rebecca made this payoff very visible,

> "Our internal surveys revealed that the design system enabled 25% time savings in the work week for the design and development teams."

Launched 3.5 years ago, Grammarly's design system has become the connective tissue linking products and teams. It unified 3 disparate design languages into a single source of truth, reduced engineering overhead, accelerated time-to-market, and lowered development costs.

More importantly, it created the infrastructure to scale — supporting acquisitions, strengthening cohesion across brands, and positioning design as a strategic driver of growth. This case study highlights how Grammarly embedded this cohesion across brands, teams, and workflows.

Over the past 3.5 years, Grammarly's design system has evolved from static style guides into a dynamic ecosystem embedded directly into everyone's daily workflows.

Rebecca's vision is clear:

> "The system should feel transparent, enabling teams to work faster without stepping outside their tools."

To achieve this, Grammarly has focused on 3 priorities:

- First, service-level agreements with engineering established a shared quality bar, improving performance and reducing UX issues while making the design system synonymous with product quality.
- Second, localization became central to strategy, with right-to-left readability and in-house linguists ensuring cultural nuance, accessibility, and global reach.
- Third, compliance is being automated with new tools like a Figma linter — a plugin that automatically checks whether designs meet system standards, removing guesswork while preserving creativity.

By embedding quality, accessibility, and compliance into workflows, Grammarly has leveraged its design system as a business infrastructure, reducing time-to-market, driving product cohesion, and enabling scalable innovation.

Interviews - SAP

SAP is the global leader in enterprise applications, serving 269 million cloud users worldwide. Its portfolio spans more than 100 solutions from supply chain and HR to finance and CRM, forming the industry's largest cloud offering.

Founded in 1972, SAP has grown from a 5 person startup to a multinational with 105,000 employees headquartered in Walldorf, Germany.

Arin Bhowmick

Executive Vice President,
Chief Design Officer

Key points

01 How SAP evolved from legacy to AI-ready design infrastructure

02 How early investment in design systems delivers compounding returns in adoption, productivity, and customer trust

03 How the CDO positioned the design system as a board-level KPI for growth driver

From the pre-web era to the AI era: How SAP unified a 50-year-old portfolio

SAP's design system roots stretch back to the era before the web. Over the past decade, the Walldorf, Germany-based company has transformed its design system from a product-level toolkit into a strategic capability driving brand cohesion, scalability, and customer trust.

What began with the launch of the Fiori Design System in 2012 became a move to unify a 50-year legacy of diverse portfolios across products, web, and mobile under a single, cohesive cross-channel experience. Instead of individual teams building one-off innovations, SAP develops them once within the design system and scales them across the portfolio. This foundation now extends to AI, with SAP creating dedicated patterns and components to embed AI consistently across products.

The result is not just harmonized interfaces but critical infrastructure, embedded with governance, reusable components, and best practices that accelerate innovation and reduce costs while enabling growth at scale.

Today, the design system touches every corner of SAP's business.

As SAP's Chief Design Officer, Arin Bhowmick, explains,

> "From enterprise applications to marketing channels, even to an ad in an airport — the goal is the same: to ensure every interaction feels SAP."

With over 70% of global organizations already depending on SAP to run their core operations, the imperative to deliver consistent, scalable experiences across a global footprint has never been greater.

Maintaining brand cohesion across countless touch points can be challenging, particularly when AI-driven use cases risk being designed differently across products. This advancement can easily turn into a fragmented and frustrating experience for users. However, SAP's design system provides the guardrails and shared foundation needed to unify these complex scenarios, ensuring that every interaction feels consistent, trusted, and distinctly SAP.

As Arin notes:

> "The design system is not just a 'nice-to-have'; it's not just about making experiences cohesive with a unified look and feel, it has a practical purpose.
>
> We want coders to code product functionality and not spend time trying to be different. We also want to have a very opinionated point of view of what we stand for and you cannot do that without our design system."

The payoff has come through greater user adoption, designer efficiency, and the ability to scale innovation consistently across industries. For design leaders navigating enterprise growth, SAP's journey demonstrates how a well-rooted system can become a growth engine for the enterprise.

Phased adoption approach for seamless integration

SAP's design system has been intentionally structured as a four-layer model, enabling adoption in phases rather than disrupting the whole design experience as the system evolves.

At the foundation is the **design language**, the visible expression of SAP's brand. Colors, typography, and iconography establish a unified identity, embedding trust and recognition in every customer interaction.

Building on this are **UI components**, the reusable "building blocks" that bring efficiency to teams while safeguarding consistency across diverse products. For SAP, adoption here is advanced, with 80 - 90% of products already aligned.

The third layer, **design patterns**, elevates components into standardized solutions for recurring scenarios like search or checkout. These patterns, delivered with both design specifications and reusable code, accelerate adoption and reduce reinvention across product lines.

At the top are **floor plans (page layouts)**, the architectural blueprints of complex workflows. By orchestrating patterns into complete end-to-end experiences, they represent the highest level of maturity and the one SAP is now evolving toward.

This approach recognizes the realities of enterprise complexity — like acquisitions and customer-driven product customizations — while ensuring a cohesive experience across SAP's vast portfolio and continuing the momentum around innovation.

The business case for SAP's design system

SAP's design system demonstrates how disciplined design practice translates directly into measurable business value. Beyond aesthetics, it has become a growth engine — driving adoption, efficiency, creativity, and customer satisfaction.

The following four areas outline how SAP's design system delivers tangible impact across teams, customers, and the enterprise as a whole.

Faster customer adoption through a consistent experience

For enterprise companies with multiple products like SAP, the design system ensures that customers experience the portfolio as a unified whole.

Products built on a common design language integrate seamlessly. This makes it easier for customers to adopt multiple products without additional training, ultimately strengthening SAP's ability to cross-sell, grow revenue, and scale.

Productivity gains across design operations

Standardized components, patterns, and code free designers from repetitive work, enabling them to focus on higher-order challenges. A specific example is in spend management, where 8 separate products with different UIs were unified into 1 cohesive solution. Arin noted,

> "Instead of lengthy rewrites, the design system enabled integration within 3 - 6 months, thereby reducing duplication and accelerating innovation."

Improving customer experience at scale

At SAP's scale, even the smallest details matter. For example, a button that's off by just a few pixels is sometimes enough to slow users down under pressure and trigger a support call. These moments illustrate why consistency is essential to prevent small flaws from becoming costly business problems.

Over a million user feedback data points — spanning both user frustrations and moments of delight — collected via in-app experience surveys are fed as insights into the design system. These insights help to improve customer experience at scale and their impact is visualized into metrics such as customer satisfaction, ease of use, and usefulness.

Scaling creativity for innovation

While many designers feel that design systems stifle creativity, Arin thinks otherwise. He believes that the design system acts as a foundation akin to Lego blocks on which designers can iterate using a set structure and build innovative, complex solutions with confidence.

Arin notes,

> "Rather than 25 teams reinventing the same button bar, shared components allow consistency to innovate at scale."

Through enablement programs, forums, and learning resources, SAP has cultivated a design culture that encourages the use of design systems to bring alignment across teams.

Ultimately, SAP's design system is driving business efficiency by growing customer satisfaction, enabling faster innovation and ensuring every product interaction reinforces trust in the brand.

How a Chief Design Officer positioned design system adoption as a board-level KPI

At SAP, enterprise-wide adoption of the design system has never been about surface-level aesthetics — it has been about driving measurable business outcomes. As the CDO, Arin has been pivotal in reframing design as infrastructure for growth. He emphasizes that design systems must be communicated in a language business leaders understand, grounded in measurable outcomes rather than design principles alone.

Through Arin's leadership, the design system has been elevated to a board-level KPI, tracked with OKRs, reinforced through governance checkpoints, and integrated into monthly executive reviews alongside core business metrics.

This shift positioned design not as an afterthought but as a lever of enterprise strategy. Since SAP is based in Europe, the company needs to not only abide by strict European data privacy laws, but also consider how to appeal to many different markets in the region. Under Arin's leadership, accessibility, localization, and European data standards are baked into every component.

Arin's personal investment: Spending nearly 10 hours each week in design reviews, critiques, and code scans, he ensures consistent adoption across teams and embeds accountability at every layer of the organization. By framing the system as an enabler of efficiency, scalability, and brand trust, he has won buy-in across SAP's vast product ecosystem.

Most importantly, Arin has anchored success through customer impact. SAP's mission to "make human lives better" demands a global design system. His focus on usability benchmarks, lifecycle research, and accessibility tools has closed the loop between design intent and customer experience, proving that disciplined design leadership can shape enterprise growth at scale.

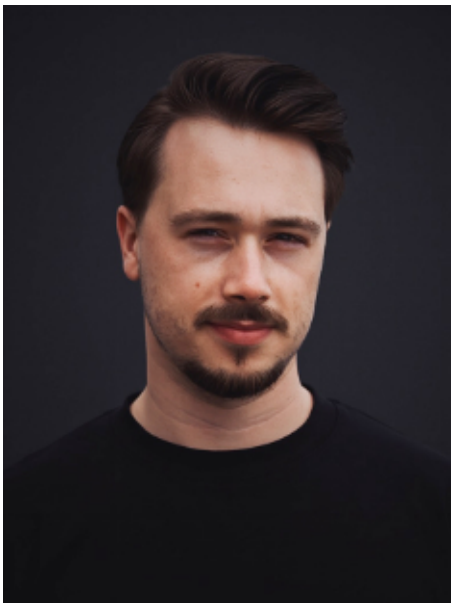
Interviews - Linear

Linear is a design-led software company redefining issue tracking and product development.

Founded in 2019, it has scaled rapidly to a $1.25B valuation by its Series C round in 2025, serving global technology leaders, including top AI companies like Open AI, Perplexity, and Cursor.

Conor Muirhead

Head of Product Design



Yann-Edern Gillet

Product Designer

Key points

01 How Linear hires for craft and nurtures it as a shared company value

02 How Linear prioritizes context over rigidity in design systems

03 How prioritizing quality as a north star lead to higher customer retention and advocacy for Linear

How a Chief Design Officer positioned design system adoption as a board-level KPI

Linear entered the crowded issue-tracking market in 2019 with a bold conviction: Quality and craft would be their differentiators. This vision was spearheaded by Linear's three founders — 2 engineers paired with 1 designer who elegantly combined technical precision with creative vision. This unique mix shaped the company's philosophy that beauty and quality must extend beyond product design into every aspect of the business, from customer support to engineering to sales and beyond.

Linear's commitment to craft and quality, soon positioned the company at the forefront of modern software development. By 2025, the company achieved a $1.25B valuation at its Series C round, with adoption from leading AI innovators such as OpenAI, Perplexity, and Cursor.

From the outset, design was treated as a strategic function — a guiding force for building features customers would truly love. To support product expansion and an increasing density of features, the team created a design language and primitives to act as foundations for the experience. These fundamentals allowed the team to scale the product, without introducing adoption barriers or time-consuming documentation.

What sets Linear apart is its culture of shared values around craft and quality, strengthened by design-led leadership. Since this mindset is embedded across the company, the design system never needed formal buy-in; it naturally became part of how the team works. Rather than a separate working group, engineers and designers contribute to it organically through their everyday work.

Conor Muirhead, Head of Product Design at Linear, says:

> "By hiring designers and engineers that are committed to craft, we remove the burden of documentation. Instead of detailed specs, docs, and systems, we lean into our alignment on quality, taste, and good judgment."

A system upheld by quality standards that drive customer retention

Without clear metrics of success, could sentiment or team pride be a proxy for early-stage design system value?

Linear measures the impact of the design system in a non-traditional way: By recognizing the pride and care the team pours into every detail, and how that converts into a quality product. Yann-Edern Gillet, a Product Designer at Linear, explains the team's approach:

> "It is less about rigid rules and numbers and more about whether the product feels crafted with intention."

Linear does not treat its design system as a rigid structure. When "what feels right" diverges from spec, the team adapts components for context. This flexibility, along with a mindset to deliver above and beyond, ensures that the design system reflects Linear's quality standards.

This pursuit of quality is Linear's north star, and it is evident through customer sentiment, retention, and growth. One specific measure is customer feedback: Users often share stories of reporting a bug and seeing it resolved within hours. This rapid response reflects Linear's belief that defects are unacceptable, creating not just satisfied users but "superfans" who amplify the brand through word of mouth.

Retention metrics also validate the value of this approach. Yann highlighted that:

> "Linear's net revenue retention has risen from 133% in 2023 to 171% in 2025."

This steady growth reflects how a quality-first experience directly drives customer stickiness and long-term business value.

The design system is thus a mirror of Linear's internal culture and shows up in contextual changes that ensure context-first designs over rigid consistency.

How Linear embeds quality into its operations

At Linear, quality is deeply embedded in daily operations and reinforced by leadership. Tuomas Artman, Co-founder of Linear sheds light on this value:

> "Attention to quality only works when it's a habit and like any habit, it fades if you miss a rep."

By making craft a shared responsibility, the company ensures that excellence not only comes from the top down but is nurtured through consistent habits across teams.

Operational framework for quality:

Hiring for craft and alignment

At Linear, the commitment to quality starts before someone even joins the team. The hiring process is designed not only to assess skills, but to identify candidates who share the company's definition of excellence and can carry its culture of craft forward.

As part of the process, candidates participate in design interviews with the team, critiquing products and suggesting improvements. The goal is to understand how individuals interpret excellence and whether they align with the company's standards for craft.

In the final stage, candidates complete a paid week-long trial that replicates real-world conditions, allowing the team to observe how they work, collaborate, and solve problems under authentic circumstances. This practical lens eliminates surprises and validates whether candidates naturally operate with the same rigor and care expected at Linear.

Embedding quality through weekly rituals

Weekly design critiques exemplify this approach. On Tuesdays, the design team gathers for critiques with CEO Karri Saarinen that set a high bar for craft and ensure alignment at the executive level. These sessions are intentionally informal, yet they build a culture where excellence is visible, shared, and expected.

In Europe, weekly quality syncs add another layer of accountability. Each engineer is expected to bring a quality issue — ranging from accessibility fixes to pixel-level adjustments — that they found and resolved. Here's what a quality sync at Linear looks like. As Yann notes,

> "Over the last 2 years we've completed more than 1,000 small acts of polish as part of Quality Wednesdays."

Eventually, these incremental refinements compound into a product that feels intentional and trustworthy for the customers and strengthens Linear's market positioning.

As Conor explains,

> "The goal is to keep everyone constantly on the lookout for little paper cuts that lead to quality issues. It's the accumulation of care that is felt by anyone using Linear."

Testing for excellence through product reviews

Before releases, "feature roasts" push this scrutiny further. Teams collectively stress-test new features, surfacing both minor and major issues. By crowdsourcing the quality lens, Linear raises confidence in delivery and reduces blind spots, ensuring customers experience more reliable features and a consistently polished product that deepens trust and loyalty.

Directing energy toward progress and impact over maintenance

Linear’s approach to quality is not only cultural but deeply technical and anchored in practices that prioritize efficiency and agility.

Instead of treating the design system as a rigid rulebook, the company invests in tools that make iteration faster and more meaningful, ensuring that energy is spent on progress rather than maintenance. Linear's engineering team developed a "tweaks toolbar," an internal tool that allows designers and engineers to make adjustments they think will improve the user experience directly in production. Being able to make these last-mile tweaks in situ empowers the team to do rapid experimentation and iteration with real user data.

The team introduced this model when they were working on the first iteration of Linear's timeline view. They wanted to experiment with how projects connect and get the details just right. With the tweaks toolbar, engineers and designers could adjust various variables in real time, helping them collaboratively find the right points of intersection between 2 projects for the timeline feature.

Design teams also benefit from workflow practices that keep design aligned with production while reducing overhead. Rather than rebuilding full screens, designers drop live screenshots into Figma and replace only the elements they’re iterating on, thereby saving significant effort and eliminating the need to maintain a full reproduction of the app.

With this approach, Linear’s design system minimizes maintenance work and accelerates experimentation. The team prioritizes shipping functional code over perfecting mockups, enabling faster learning and better user experiences. This sustains a culture of continuous refinement, where progress, not prolonged maintenance, drives product quality and innovation.

The collaboration behind Linear's product success

Linear's product development process is intentionally lean, designed to shorten the path from idea to experience. Instead of spending months perfecting designs in isolation, new features move into the internal release channel within 1 to 2 weeks. This allows other teams to "feel" the product early. In turn, the project team can gather more meaningful feedback and iterate quickly, shifting discussion away from static mockups toward insights grounded in real use.

Collaboration between designers and engineers is central to this speed. Designers have direct access to the codebase and tools to make changes themselves, from updating icons to refining components. When deeper support is needed, engineers step in seamlessly, ensuring there are no rigid handoffs.

Projects are typically staffed with a small triad: 1 designer and 2 engineers working in tight loops to balance ideas, prototype in code, and refine continuously. This model acknowledges that some technical and visual debt is inevitable and values the dance of ideas back and forth between engineers, designers, and product managers. Leadership believes that this highly collaborative rhythm is not only enjoyable but also essential for creating a "fantastic" product.

Conor states the underlying strategy for this as:

> "By reducing boundaries between design and engineering, we're essentially doubling the care that goes into making the product great — everyone on the team is responsible for the experience."

Linear's story shows that a design system is only as strong as the craft and clarity behind it. With a lean team and a shared love for quality, Linear has turned collaboration into a driver of excellence. Their system functions in practice by embedding iteration into daily workflows and enabling faster innovation without heavy governance.

Interviews - Freshworks

Freshworks is an India-based SaaS leader offering Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Information Technology Service Management (ITSM), and customer engagement tools and serves over 73,000 customers worldwide. In 2021 it became the first Indian SaaS company to be listed on NASDAQ.

Known for its easy-to-use, AI-augmented software, the company enables rapid deployment, scalable service automation, and frictionless customer engagement across industries.

Kedar Shiroor

Senior Vice President, User Experience

Senthil Shanmugam

Senior Director of Product Design

Key points

01 How a movement for uncomplicated software enabled Freshworks to stay competitive in a complex enterprise market

02 How leadership's customer obsession translated into a sustainable market edge for Freshworks

03 How a phased measurement strategy scales an enterprise product with consistency and opens a path to platform monetization

04 How designengineers are building the infrastructure to scale innovation in the AI era

How a movement for uncomplicated software became a competitive advantage for Freshworks

Launched in India in 2010, Freshworks offers CRM, ITSM, and customer engagement tools. In 2021, it became the first Indian SaaS firm to list on NASDAQ — a milestone that marked its growth into a multi-billion-dollar enterprise. The next headwinds for Freshworks to remain competitive in the SaaS landscape were:

The next headwinds for Freshworks to remain competitive in the SaaS landscape were:

1. Managing consistency at scale and complexity as Freshworks moved upmarket.
2. Keeping up with the rise of GenAI and AI-powered automation.

These shifts demanded sharper differentiation and Freshworks had to fundamentally rethink its approach. Senthil Shanmugam, Sr. Director of Product Design at Freshworks, sheds light on this reality:

> "In a market of 900+ SaaS alternatives what would make customers choose our product?"

Freshworks saw this pressure as an opportunity to deliver uncomplicated software that is easy to set up, adopt, and scale. This philosophy not only fueled growth but also made design and user experience non-negotiable differentiators. Today, the company is extending this advantage through its AI Agent Studio to help customers boost productivity across CX and EX workflows.

Central to this evolution was its design system, which became more than a way to standardize components. That clarity didn't emerge by default; it was intentionally designed. As the company scaled, so did its product portfolio: 11 distinct offerings, each evolving independently and often overlapping. The result was internal competition, inconsistent user experiences, and growing complexity. The risks of overlap and inconsistency drove the design team to act, a challenge that Senthil articulates as:

> "How can we unify the experience for end users and also improve the velocity and consistency within our own practice?"

Launch of the Uncomplicated Movement

Launched in June 2025, the Uncomplicated Movement started as company-wide push to remove friction, reduce complexity, and in turn simplify processes and elevate the end-user experience.

As the company scales, the design system is evolving in lockstep. Aligned with Freshworks' ambition to scale into a multi-billion-dollar revenue company, the Uncomplicated Movement is rooted in founder Girish Mathrubootham's provocation: "Are we building for our core users or feeding the feature factory?" According to Senthil,

> "The Uncomplicated Movement translated into 20 - 30% quarter-over-quarter growth in customer adoption and engagement through Q2 and Q3 of 2025."

Building on that momentum, Freshworks is now developing Dew, a design system to retain the growing customer adoption and sustain growth at scale. Under the leadership of CEO Dennis Woodside and his management team, the design system has become a strategic business initiative tied directly to business growth. Unified experiences and time-to-value are now seen as key levers for winning new customers and driving net dollar retention. With macro trends like AI-powered automation reshaping SaaS, the leadership is doubling down on building AI-native, unified experiences through Dew to strengthen Freshworks' market advantage.

Freshworks' leadership alignment has helped sustain this vision. Dennis grounds decisions in customer feedback, while CPO Srinivas Raghman and CTO Murali Swaminathan share a vision for unified experiences, backed by a centralized R&D budget. With this leadership support, Freshworks was able to position the design system as a core business capability that drives customer satisfaction.

Customer obsession as the north star

Unlike many enterprises that saw design systems primarily as a way to unify fragmented interfaces or drive operational efficiency, Freshworks built its system to simplify the entire customer journey. Every decision starts with the Ideal Customer Profile (ICP), a strategic lens that guides components, patterns, and features.

Globalization readiness was prioritized from day 1 and as of October 2025 the Freshworks product supports 43 languages, including right-to-left (RTL) layouts for Middle Eastern markets. Accessibility is also a core pillar — Dew is designed to be natively accessible, ensuring inclusivity by default. In an era where global B2B SaaS products are governed by stringent accessibility standards, this focus not only makes the product more usable and approachable but also unlocks new avenues for growth and retention. AI strengthens this inclusive approach with automated support for multilingual experiences.

Early on, Freshworks realized that customers weren't just looking for a better interface, they wanted to spend less time learning how to use it. As Senthil notes, "With AI we are now able to unify interactions across products and interfaces by automatically translating tickets, summarizing responses, and adapting to multiple languages. This allows us to match users' existing mental models so they don't have to relearn how to use the product, which in turn reduces confusion and aids adoption."

He says that when customers move from a different tool, they often comment on easy of use and onboarding.

By prioritizing usability, Freshworks moved beyond using the design system for improving interfaces to making adoption, onboarding, and scaling seamless. In a market that the team at Freshworks noticed was burdened by long training cycles and high support attrition, this frictionless approach created a durable competitive edge.

Senthil articulates this impact:

> "The design system helped Freshworks transform its customer obsession into measurable business outcomes that reduced customer service costs and time-to-resolution by 28%."

Measuring impact through consistency, satisfaction, and speed

Freshworks launched Dew in November 2025 to unify their enterprise-wide portfolio and have also developed a measurement framework for tracking the success of the design system.

This framework has universal backing in the company, and each product area has adoption targets in their roadmap. The team has laid out a three-phased strategy designed to evolve alongside the system itself — tracking impact both internally and externally.

Stage 1:

Develop a coherent product experience identity

Started Q4 2025

The journey began with creating cohesive brand identity.

Freshworks believes design language must extend beyond aesthetics to define how its products show up in the world. Kedar Shiroor, SVP of User Experience at Freshworks, defines this as:

> "Think of the design system like dressing for a formal dinner. Your outfit signals how you want to be perceived. It reflects your personality."

Freshworks believes that establishing this baseline will not only strengthen adoption but also help to position the system as a strategic sales lever.

Stage 2:

Track customer satisfaction

Started Q4 2025

Once visual cohesion was in place, attention shifted to the customer.

How do customers feel during onboarding? Where do they struggle? How easily can they move across workflows? Freshworks tracks these signals using Customer Satisfaction (CSAT) scores, time-on-task analysis, A/B testing, and funnel diagnostics.

The goal is to measure whether design choices reduce friction, boost task resolution, and increase product "stickiness."

Stage 3:

Track developer productivity and satisfaction

Starting Q2 2026

The next stage of metrics will turn inward once they have a codified design system. Freshworks plans to have bi-annual usability benchmarks, comparing pre- and post-system experiences and mapping them against Net Promoter Score (NPS) and Preliminary Satisfaction (PSAT).

In parallel, the team is building a front-end developer productivity score to track efficiency and satisfaction.

If developers match customer admins in how they advocate for the product, Freshworks will consider it a true marker of system maturity.

Freshworks believes the design system is more than a tool for consistency and measurement; It's also a platform asset with monetization potential. Like many B2B SaaS companies, the company sees the system as a foundation for its marketplace strategy, particularly in the mid-market segment.

By enabling third-party developers to build confidently on a unified front end, Freshworks is designing conditions for growth that extend well beyond its own walls.

Accelerating innovation through design-engineering collaboration

Freshworks' design system is jointly owned by design and engineering, a model that embeds accountability at every level. A core team of 15 leaders maintains the system across portfolios, anchored on a unified React front end. This structure ensures that patterns, layouts, and logic scale consistently, even as third-party apps extend the platform. As Kedar observes:

> "Every new feature now begins with the system and not around it."

One role has become central to this model: the design engineer. These hybrid practitioners bridge design and code, reducing friction and closing the idea-to-interface gap. From FigJam to Figma to Dev Mode, they operate in a single collaborative loop.

As Senthil notes:

> "Figma's evolution positions Figma to become 'the GitHub for designers.' Dev Mode creates the joy of building and designers, engineers, and PMs can finally smile together."

The outcome is more than streamlined workflows. By consolidating design and engineering in one environment, Freshworks accelerates innovation, eliminates duplication, and ensures consistent experiences at scale.

The design system has matured into a business capability — driving faster time-to-market, improving operational efficiency, and providing the strategic infrastructure required to compete and grow in the AI era.

Interviews - Notion

Notion is a leading productivity and collaboration platform with more than 100 million users worldwide. Trusted by Fortune 100 companies, it unifies docs, wikis, databases, and projects into a single workspace. Its modular architecture and minimalist ethos fuel enterprise adoption, enabling flexibility, consistency, and global scalability in one integrated platform.

Randy Hunt

Head of Design

Key points

01 How a design system built on a minimalist mindset helped the team prioritize efforts and accelerate time-to-market

02 How a commitment to craft and the pursuit of improving customer satisfaction translated into a quality product

03 How technical fluency and precision enabled Notion's design systems to be more resilient

04 How an early cultural immersion set the foundation for a scalable design system

Notion's minimalist approach to product excellence

Notion sits at the intersection of productivity, collaboration, and knowledge management. In a market crowded with enterprise tools, it has distinguished itself through radical flexibility and a minimalist ethos. From 1 million users in 2020 to 100 million users in September 2024, Notion has become a global platform, with ambitions to reach 1 billion users. Its modular "Lego-like" workspace allows individuals, teams, and enterprises to build everything from notes and wikis to complex databases and workflows without rigid templates.

At the center of this growth is a design philosophy anchored in essentials. Typography, color, and icon tokens are synced to code in Figma, enabling the team to streamline production and be responsive to iterative feedback, while avoiding the weight of sprawling roadmaps.

As Randy Hunt, Head of Design, explains:

> "We move quickly by focusing on usable outcomes, but also pay attention to detail in the final delivery."

In its early years, Notion's focus was on getting the experience right: Prioritizing craft, design language, and user delight above everything else. This approach ensured that the fundamentals of the product resonated deeply with users while the modular design left room for flexibility.

As the product scaled, the interconnected nature of its Lego-like software exposed the need for systemic-level thinking to sustain that craft. Growth brought redundancy and inefficiency, making structure essential. What started as a craft-first approach has since evolved into a pragmatic, code-driven framework that preserves flexibility while ensuring consistency, enabling teams to move faster and with greater clarity.

"The design system efforts at Notion historically have been somebody's side quest, a pet project," says Randy. Today, under Randy's stewardship, it is a structured company-wide effort shaped by the intersection of technology and talent.

Practical to its core, it is simply called the "Notion Design System," a tool to cut bloat, improve productivity, and enable faster, more consistent decisions.

An early cultural immersion that accelerated the path to global expansion

Notion's global expansion was rooted in cultural immersion rather than a conventional market-entry strategy. The co-founders' year in Kyoto rebooting the product sparked early adoption in Japan, Korea, and France — markets that many companies approach only after establishing an English-speaking foothold. This early, organic pull broke the standard sequence and gave Notion traction in regions typically seen as difficult to penetrate.

As Randy notes:

> "A bottoms-up growth in a few different countries helped us be everywhere."

He continues: "As the core experience remained accessible to anyone with basic English skills, Notion was able to extend its reach globally without having to rebuild the product from the ground up."

Over time, Notion invested in localization specialists and integrated structured translation layers and string management systems directly into the application. Today, this investment enables the company to operate effectively across 19 major regions, spanning East Asian, Southeast Asian, and European markets. The breadth of coverage not only supports diverse scripts and workflows but also strengthens Notion's ability to deliver consistent experiences around the world.

By combining cultural grounding with scalable technical infrastructure, Notion was able to build a globally compatible design system.

A malleable design system for a fast-moving landscape

Notion's design system combines technical fluency, a deep commitment to craft and quality, and a focus on staying aligned with emerging technological capabilities.

In a rapidly evolving landscape, the system is viewed as a malleable tool that can adapt to shifts in technology and scale consistently as the company expands toward a global portfolio.

Levers for scalable impact:

A lean team structure

The system began with just 1 engineer and 1 designer who fostered and championed adoption. Within a year, it grew to also include 4 engineers focused on internal components that eased engineering pain points. A lean structure kept investment simple — allowing quick decisions and keeping improvements closely tied to organizational priorities.

Software-builder design culture

High technical fluency across the design organization enables most team members to code, deploy, and prototype at high speed. Designers act as "software builders," collaborating closely with engineering and product to jointly shape priorities and execution. This collective fluency creates an adaptable team that is able to respond quickly to change and can easily contribute to design systems.

An explorative roadmap defined by technological shifts

To meet growing user needs while staying flexible in their product roadmap, Notion's experimentation and curiosity demand a design system that evolves at the same pace as their iterations. The underlying technology and capabilities of the system amplify their ability to deliver efficiently, keeping governance and localization streamlined across deployments and global releases.

Scaling design to production with agent-enhanced automation

Notion now uses agent-enhanced coding to automate workflows and simplify refactoring and rollouts. Multiple Model Context Protocol (MCP) servers expose tools and data to AI agents, giving them controlled access to assets, Figma references, and production code. This architecture drives automation, streamlines governance, and maintains consistency at scale.

As Randy notes:

> "We have put a lot of effort into writing detailed component rules and documentation, and that's what gives us consistent, predictable results when we use AI agents now."

Together, these approaches create a malleable design system that evolves with technology, aligns with business priorities, and scales globally.

By blending adaptability with precision, Notion has built a resilient foundation that positions the company to compete effectively in an AI-driven future.

When impact is measured through sentiment signals

Over the past year, Notion has shifted its evaluation of the design system toward qualitative impact — measuring how work feels and functions rather than relying solely on metrics. Engineering and design collaborate to set quarterly priorities, often focused on front-end performance and usability. Progress is maintained through a steady rhythm of updates, from refactoring color tokens to refining components, creating a continuous flow of improvement.

This momentum is guided by team sentiments. Instead of just waiting for formal reviews, feedback also moves naturally through team channels — a quick emoji or a note of appreciation signals how well changes resonate and keeps the momentum high. Randy notes,

> "A fire emoji or praise for craft are small, but also telling signals of success for the design system."

These small exchanges embody Notion's collaborative rhythm, where progress is both visible and felt. By tracking progress with sentiment-driven validation, Notion measures success through engagement and alignment. Short-term updates sustain energy, while long-term initiatives — backed by leadership and a commitment to craft — build enduring value.

A design-led mandate that values craft by default and skips the red tape

At Notion, growth is not chased; it's earned through a culture anchored in craft, consistency, and delight. Randy says, "the team works from the belief that the game happens on the court, not on the scoreboard," focusing on the daily discipline of creating exceptional work. They love what they do, work hard to do it, and try to be the very best at doing it.

That energy is channeled into designing experiences users will love, with the business impact treated as a second-order effect. This shared love for the medium and its craft has been translated into a product embraced globally. Customers recognize the attention to detail, rewarding it with loyalty.

As Randy explains:

> "Our primary goal is to make great stuff for people. It just happens to drive pretty awesome growth too."

Leadership's design background fuels this ethos. It helps that 1 co-founder is a designer, so Notion values design by default, making buy-in for the design system effortless. The company is also anti-red-tape and operates with minimal bureaucracy, focusing on how well the work is done rather than justifying it. This anti-red-tape culture frees teams from unnecessary hurdles, fuels innovation, and ensures energy is spent on creating and shipping impactful work.

Leadership's minimalistic approach and love for craft, supported by a design system that anchors clarity and consistency into the product, has helped Notion achieve product excellence backed by over 100 million users worldwide.

Interviews - Hyundai Motor Group

Hyundai Motor Group (HMG), ranked among the world's top 30 brands with a $23 billion valuation, is building innovative products: a future mobility ecosystem powered by AI, cloud-based mobility platforms, and autonomous driving technologies.

Its technology arm, 42dot, drives this transformation by developing software platforms that reduce integration costs, enable faster time-to-market, and ensure consistent user experiences across global markets.

Eric Wood

Senior Vice President,
Product Experience

Chris Jacobs

Principal Product Designer,
Infotainment

Key points

01 How HMG is transforming manufacturing with software-defined vehicles to lead an era of experience-driven mobility

02 How a software-defined approach ensures accuracy, quality, and consistency across platforms and markets

03 How HMG's design system is reducing integration costs, accelerating time-to-market, and enabling enterprise-wide scalability

From steel to software: Hyundai's leap into experience-defined mobility

Hyundai Motor Group (HMG) is signaling its intent to lead the future of mobility through design. The company has elevated its design capabilities by creating a Global Design Division under Chief Design Officer Luc Donckerwolke, charged with setting the vision for next-generation vehicles with a mindset of 'Progress for Humanity.' This bold shift positions design as both cultural compass and growth engine, guiding HMG toward its target of 10.09 million global sales by 2030.

(Hyundai: 5.55 million vehicles, Genesis: 350,000 vehicles, Kia: 4.19 million vehicles.Total: 10.09 million vehicles)

Eric Wood, SVP of User Experience at 42dot (HMG's AI and mobility platform company), notes that HMG is on course to become the world's third-largest automaker with ambitions to redefine global mobility in cities around the world.

For decades, automotive design followed a rigid model: assemble components from multiple suppliers, fine-tune until functional, and then freeze the design for years. That model falters when the design has to scale across more than 30 vehicle models and global markets.

Eric points out that this challenge goes far beyond scale and transcends into the mounting complexity of building modern vehicles. Integrating and validating those systems for even one car can take years. Multiplied across dozens of models and global markets, the process becomes prohibitively costly and risky, and it clashes with the speed required for over-the-air updates and rapid innovation. HMG's shift toward a software-defined architecture addresses this head-on, collapsing fragmented systems into a unified framework that enhances efficiency, scalability, and control across their 3 brands: Hyundai, Kia, and Genesis. Eric highlights,

> "With software-defined vehicles, the entire vehicle becomes the experience designer's canvas."

At the center of this change is Pleos Connect, a vehicle experience system developed by 42dot launching across HMG by 2026. It supports real-time updates, adapts to local markets, and enables unified brand expression across a diverse product portfolio. By orchestrating lighting, sound, animations, and controls under a single software layer, Pleos Connect transforms HMG's design system into infrastructure for innovation and growth at scale.

Managing complexity and ensuring consistency across 30+ models

42dot designs for a product ecosystem that spans compact vehicles to luxury models, with screen formats ranging from 11.9 to 27 inches. To ensure consistency and manage complexity across the different models, the design system accounts for varying screen dimensions, incorporating physical reach, viewing angles, and control positioning, while also adapting hardware and software to user context.

The infotainment system layout decisions are guided by visibility and interaction zones; fonts scale with distance, and functions adapt to regional requirements. Physical interactions are standardized across models to avoid redundancy and reduce costs. To further accelerate innovation and scale consistently, 42dot created internal Figma tools that map digital designs to real-world size on 8K displays, enabling accurate, extensible comparisons across platforms and vehicle models.

This software-integrated framework ultimately reduces complexity across a portfolio of more than 30 models, and makes scaled manufacturing manageable while sustaining quality user experiences. Eric notes,

"For the first time, we're scaling design across 3 brands, 30+ models, and various screen sizes through a single software platform.

This would be inconceivable without a sophisticated design system."

As HMG transitions to software-defined vehicles, hardware elements like steering wheel buttons are becoming adaptive, responding to context, drive mode, and environment. To validate these hardware elements, Eric's team uses a custom-built seating buck, a full-scale ergonomic rig that can replicate the ergonomics of any consumer vehicle made by HMG.

As Chris Jacobs, Principal Product Designer for Infotainment at 42dot, explains:

> "Designing an infotainment system isn't just about the screen. It's about the space around it, and how the driver physically experiences it."

Tools like Protopie are tremendously important to the team to create cohesive experiences across platforms — screens, phones, tablets, pedals, stalks, and steering wheel controls. As Eric notes, without this capability, they would be designing with blinders on. Protopie allows them to test ergonomics, accessibility, and usability early in development to ensure the best customer experience outcomes.

Bringing the customer experience into the development stage closes the gap between creators and users. By arming teams with real-world insights, the physical adaptation of the design system through the prototype enables the team to design user-centered experiences at scale and drive consistent quality across the 30+ models.

Demonstrating the value of the design system

Since its automotive division was founded in 1967, HMG has had decades of success in vehicle manufacturing.

However, even after 58 years in business, they still need to justify the shift toward a software-defined framework with clear customer and business value. Eric notes,

> "We are not out of the woods yet. We're constantly showing what value the new feature unlocks for our customers and what they care about in ways that resonate with engineers, executives, and business units alike."

Key areas of impact:

Driving efficiency in manufacturing

Vehicle integration is one of the most resource-intensive stages of production. By operating from a unified codebase, down to firmware, Eric's team reduces dependency on third-party systems and accelerates delivery across models by bringing capabilities in-house.

This vertical integration reduces coordination overhead and unlocks long-term savings in both cost and time. The unlocked free time opens a new space for automotive manufacturing, giving engineers the ability to innovate and define experiences at the software level.

Together, these efficiencies make a clear business case that resonates with HMG's leadership — showing how the design system's impact extends beyond design execution to enterprise performance.

Measuring and improving performance real time

Eric envisions a future where design measurement is built into the product lifecycle. He notes:

> "The holy grail is to measure a design's performance in-market, bring that data back into Figma, make the update, and redeploy, without needing to wait for the model refresh in 2 years."

He imagines a workflow where real-time feedback through clicks, heatmaps, and hesitations are captured from user interaction with the system and synced directly with Figma.

This enables ongoing optimization without the overhead of relaunching, turning the design system into a continuous business capability that supports faster iteration, improved customer experience, and sustained competitive advantage.

A single source of truth driving real-time innovation

At 42dot, the relationship between design and engineering has moved from sequential to synchronized. Both teams now operate within shared tools like Figma and Confluence to work on the design system, enabling real-time collaboration and eliminating the lag of traditional handoffs. Chris delightedly says,

> "Engineers and designers finally speak the same language. That shared understanding has transformed how we ship."

Designers no longer work in isolation and document after the fact. Engineers engage early, providing input during the design process rather than retrofitting solutions downstream. This shift reduces rework and enhances cross-functional clarity.

Weekly design reviews have become a key ritual. Designers lead critique sessions, while engineers observe, question, and anticipate implementation needs.

Chris claims,

> "Engineers are excited to be in design reviews; this is the first time I've seen that kind of energy."

Later the same day, engineers run product demos, turning insight into execution. This closes a common pain point in development: Designers saying one thing, engineers deploying another, and shows what becomes possible when teams synchronize well.

This dual cadence strengthens alignment, accelerates innovation, and directly reinforces the design system efforts, ensuring that components, guidelines, and interactions are built consistently into the design system as a single source of truth.

Building global adaptation into the system the 'Hyundai-Way'

The 42dot team has excellent collaboration across North America, South Korea, and Poland, who work in lockstep to meet global design challenges from localization to engineering integration.

To ensure international usability, designers use custom-built Figma plugins that support multilingual UX writing and script variations. For instance, it helps to check if the design retains consistency in German, which is famous for its long words. Chris explains,

> "German serves as the litmus test: If a design works in German, it's ready to scale globally."

The framework also accounts for accessibility across regions that have left vs. right-hand drive, mirrored layouts, script direction, and even typographic justification. Every element is scrutinized for quick and easy access to the driver and relevance across markets. As Chris highlights,

> "We're trying to build a uniform quality of experience for all markets, and we aren't just myopic on Latin."

While the design system ensures that every interface feels native in any market, it also retains a unique identity for all the 3 brands of HMG.

As HMG pursues its target of 10.09 million global sales by 2030, the design system provides the adaptability to maintain consistency across diverse regions, streamline delivery to accelerate time-to-market, and unlock innovation at scale, positioning it as a central driver of customer satisfaction, enterprise value, and global growth.

Looking ahead, this approach reflects the Hyundai-Way: A mid-to long-term strategy for market leadership built on innovation, adaptability, and design as infrastructure. HMG is committed to creating a future centered on mobility and energy while flexibly responding to market shifts. By continuously enhancing products and services through software and AI, HMG positions its design system as a core enabler of customer satisfaction, enterprise value, and sustainable growth — anchoring design as both a driver of business value and a catalyst for global mobility transformation.

The impact of AI on design systems

What are early use cases of AI in design systems and development?

Efficiency is one of the most visible early business cases for adopting AI in design systems. This aligns with broader market narratives around AI adoption as an enabler of productivity gains.

While still an emerging space, design leaders across both fast-growing startups and large enterprises are actively experimenting with generative AI and agent-driven workflows to embed acceleration and automation into their design systems and product development processes.

- AI is beginning to show tangible impact through automation of operational design and engineering areas, including:
- Batch operations on icons and components
- Text generation to support design and content workflows
- Theme generation based on contrast, patterns, or other parameters
- Complex search across design assets and systems
- Hex-to-token conversion to codify values instantly
- Embedding design systems into AI coding tools (e.g., Lovable, Cursor) to accelerate prototyping
- System updates with coding agents to shorten iteration cycles and maintain consistency

Where do companies see potential for adopting AI?

As teams become more experienced with AI, the benefits keep expanding. They may start with improved efficiency and time savings, but then they compound into higher-impact, more strategic use cases that transform capabilities and processes.

Automating enterprise-wide compliance checks

AI can scan designs and review code to flag errors and suggest fixes, reducing manual review and accelerating release cycles. SAP sees this as a way to make compliance seamless, while Grammarly harnesses its potential with a Figma linting tool to automatically check design system compliance.

Unifying user experience across markets

Freshworks illustrated how AI can bridge regional differences by summarizing and translating customer support tickets across languages. This ensures that the design system not only standardizes components in implementation but also delivers a consistent user experience globally.

Performing real-time system improvements

Hyundai Motor Group's vision of "ambient AI" demonstrates how systems can learn from user context and preferences such as music choices or driving habits, and feed those patterns back into the design system. This creates a more adaptive system that evolves in alignment with real-world usage.

By tracking user behavior and capturing insights directly from interactions, agentic AI has the potential to update design systems dynamically. This shifts the design system from being a static library of rules to a living ecosystem that reflects user needs and delivers business impact faster.

Recommendations to drive business adoption of design systems

01 Communicate value in board-level language

Frame the design system's impact through metrics your business understands — linking it to revenue growth, cost efficiency, and competitive advantage. Use the language of performance and investment returns to ensure C-Suite and boards clearly grasp its strategic value.

"Designers should avoid leading with saying it's a good design practice. To secure enterprise buy-in, the value of design systems must be expressed in the language of business impact."

Arin Bhowmick
Executive Vice President & Chief Design Officer at SAP

"We're constantly showing what value the new features unlock for our customers and what they care about in ways that resonate with engineers, executives, and business units alike.

Eric Wood
SVP Product Experience at 42dot, Hyundai Motor Group

02 Accelerate design system adoption by generating cross-functional advocates

Champion adoption by tracking and communicating usage growth metrics, highlighting case studies, and sustaining momentum with sentiment surveys. These share-outs prove value, build trust, and inspire organization -wide adoption.

"One of the most effective ways I've seen us create advocacy for resourcing and for funding overall is to just have our partners do it for us."

Rebecca McMillin
Director of Product Design, Foundations at Grammarly

03 Build a multi-phase strategy for sustainable design system growth and governance

Start with small project areas that create immediate value, and then expand gradually. Build a recipe for repeatable business value creation. Begin with core atomic elements, then layer metrics and components to keep the design system practical, adaptable, and sustainable as organizational needs and complexity grow. Match your efforts with the readiness of the organization.

"Start small and evolve the design system as the product evolves. Build only what's needed at a given time, piece by piece, rather than all at once."

Conor Muirhead
Head of Product Design at Linear

Recommendations for scaling impact of design systems

01 Build a code-defined foundation to accelerate innovation

Define the system directly in code to accelerate innovation and ensure real-time alignment between design and development. This approach will simplify cross-team integration, improve scalability, and enable products to evolve consistently.

"The coded components in the design system bring consistency, speed development, and avoids redundancies from compounding over time."

Arin Bhowmick
Executive Vice President & Chief Design Officer at SAP

02 Leverage AI for quality assurance and compliance

Leverage AI tools to embed automated checks and balances in the development process. This accelerates quality assurance, strengthens consistency across products, and reduces costs and risks.

"The biggest unlock from AI has been in carrying craft quality directly into production, shifting the industry from endless visual QA and MVP compromises toward delivering Minimum Lovable Products faster."

Kedar Shiroor
SVP User Experience at Freshworks

03 Embed inclusivity and compliance requirements for global adaptation

Embed privacy, accessibility, and localization into components to ensure consistency across regions and products. This approach avoids one-size-fits-all pitfalls, protects brand integrity at every customer touchpoint, and reduces costly rework downstream.

"We bake extensibility into the design system to handle different global requirements, ensuring every interaction — from enterprise apps to airport ads — feels distinctly SAP."

Arin Bhowmick
Executive Vice President and Chief Design Officer at SAP

Conclusion & reflections

"It's futile to enforce a design system because you want the experience to be consistent.

When design leaders align systems with measurable business impact and outcomes that are quantifiable and undeniable, then the system advocates for itself."

Collin Whitehead
VP of Design at Grammarly

Design systems are no longer just about component libraries or visual consistency; they have become strategic infrastructure for business growth.

At scale, they determine how quickly organizations can respond to market needs, how confidently teams can operate within compliance frameworks, and how effectively customer trust is maintained. Design leaders have a crucial role in ensuring design systems are framed, managed, and evolved not as cost centers, but as engines of measurable business value.

The leaders we engaged across industries underscored this point. Design systems accelerate revenue opportunities by reducing duplication of effort and enabling faster launches. They improve operational efficiency by providing common patterns that reduce rework and risk. And, when implemented with care, they reduce compliance burdens and enhance accessibility, turning what might be seen as overhead into lasting competitive advantage.

Yet the greatest value of design systems is not efficiency alone, but their ability to create cohesion across complex organizations — aligning design, product, and engineering around a shared language. When elevated to this level, design systems become levers for scaling innovation responsibly: providing the guardrails to move fast without breaking trust, and the frameworks to embed brand, inclusivity, and user needs into every product experience.

For practitioners, this requires a mindset shift: from building for consistency to building for adaptability. They must leverage design systems to adapt their products across regions, cultures, and business contexts, while also communicating and measuring impact. Design leaders must champion systems as investments in resilience that not only reduce cost, but also unlock new capacity for revenue generation and retain a competitive advantage.

By reframing design systems as business-critical infrastructure with cost savings, collaboration, and monetization value, leaders and practitioners together can ensure these systems are not just tools of efficiency, but instruments of enterprise transformation.

This research offers evidence, language, and frameworks to help design leaders jumpstart, maximize, and sustain the business value of their design systems and accelerate the future towards systems-based product development. Looking forward, the work remains ahead of us to drive near 100% design systems adoption while nurturing a culture for innovation, and redirecting our attention to what matters most: advancing the impact of design on business and human outcomes.

Reflective questions

Aligning with business objectives

Which business objectives or pain points does your design system directly address?

Which of these creates the strongest momentum for continued investment and adoption?

Creating strategic value

How are you reinvesting time and resources gained through design system efficiencies into higher-impact, strategic work?

Where do these shifts create the greatest value across the enterprise?

Measuring and communicating impact

How are you quantifying your design system's contribution to business performance?

Which metrics or narratives best demonstrate credibility and ROI to executive stakeholders?

Building stakeholder alignment

How are you engaging cross-functional partners to strengthen and sustain the business case for your design system?

Who are the key stakeholders you must influence to ensure long-term adoption and support?

Expanding enterprise value

What value does your design system create beyond operational efficiency — such as enabling innovation, accelerating time-to market, improving governance, or reducing risk?

How can you position these outcomes as strategic enablers of enterprise transformation?

About the author:

DESIGN EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Design Executive Council (DXC) is the premier membership organization for senior design executives leading at the world's most influential companies.

Our network spans industries, from technology and financial services to healthcare, media, retail, and more — bringing together leaders who shape the experience design functions behind over $3 trillion in market capitalization and $1 trillion in annual revenue across the Fortune 1000.

DXC exists at the intersection of design and business performance. We equip design executives and their teams with peer forums, business intelligence, leadership development, and boardroom preparation, ensuring design leadership plays a central role in growth, innovation, and corporate governance.

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Thank you to our contributors for shaping bold and provocative perspectives on the business value of design systems and the critical role design and research in driving business success in a world with AI.

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Unlocking the experience advantage