

# Big Things are Coming.

**What's next for Design**  
in the era of AI and automation.

Stephen Fritz



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00.

# Introduction

## 00. Introduction

# “What happens to Design when anyone can create a screen?”

These last few years have seen a great shift in Design's place in the world of Product Development. The conversation has been dominated by a focus on whether Design is “at the table” with our partners, the state of Design maturity in organizations, and most importantly whether companies even fundamentally value Design at all. In February 2024, the crisis was finally coined “The big design freak-out” by Robert Fabricant, in his Fast Company article.

The challenge we face as Designers is multi-dimensional. The feeling today that Design has fallen out of favor is largely due to a down economy. When money flows, growth and innovation are the priority and that is when Design is valued. When money tightens, emphasis shifts to impact and efficiency and that is where Design is viewed as expendable.

It would be easy to sit back and simply wait for the market to turn and assume that the value of Design will inherently return with it. It will. However, we are not going to return to the same environment that we left.

The one thing Designers always counted on was the craft of designing screens. That is our bread and butter and has kept us at the table during challenging times. It is the one thing our partners can't, or won't, do without us. However, the emergence of prompt-based AI and low-code/no-code tools will accelerate a fundamental shift in how companies develop products—because eventually anyone will be able to create a screen. But this shift will not just impact Design, it will impact everyone: the way we work and the way companies are structured.

In the face of this impending disruption, what few Designers seem to be preparing for is the inevitability that this fundamental skill – designing screens – is poised to be performed by anyone. It is critical that we ask the question: **what happens to Design when anyone can create a screen?** But this shift is not the end of the coming disruption, it is just the beginning. Therefore it is impossible to ask that question without asking: **what happens to everything?**



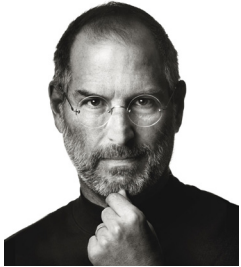
Robert Fabricant, *The big design freak-out: A generation of design leaders grapple with their future*, Fast Company, 2/15/24

01.

How did we  
get here?

## 01. How did we get here?

### a. The golden age of Apple



Steve Jobs returns to Apple



Think Different campaign



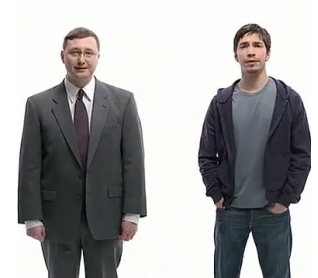
iMac



iPod



iPhone



I'm a Mac campaign

### The golden age of Apple

The most significant factor in our lifetimes that impacted Design's impact on culture and business was Apple. Specifically the era from 1998-2007 when Steve Jobs returned to Apple. From the moment Jobs returned he signaled things to come with the launch of the Think Different campaign. He let everyone know to expect big things, and that his goal was not just to change computing, but to change the world, and he did just that.

Apple's first big launch was the launch of the iMacs. These new fun and friendly computers got rid of the traditional towers and built the computer directly into the monitor. The design was colorful and beautiful, something everyone wanted to have in their home. The commercials that showed the assortment of colorful iMacs spinning like a flower to the Rolling Stone's She's a Rainbow were every bit as stunning as the computers themselves. Technology had never looked or acted like this before.

Next up was the iPod. Not the first MP3 player by any stretch, but the one that made MP3's and streaming music viable for the first time. Beyond simply creating the beautifully designed device Apple had finally gotten the majority of record companies to agree to streaming their music in a Apple store, making the device revolutionary as a product and ended up finally creating the streaming music business. Every company noticed the combination of the interdependence of Design and business in the iPod's success.

Finally, in 2007 Jobs introduced the iPhone. Phones were a big market but the iPhone again opened up entirely new markets with its revolutionary product. With the touch screen replacing the popular Blackberry keyboard, the iPhone had a full screen to show the internet and truly make the device a small computer. It's promise was to combine the phone, computer, and camera and put it in your pocket.

From 2006-2009 Apple ran the "I'm a Mac" campaign contrasting the choice between Mac and PC with cool and hip Justin Long as the Mac versus the uncool and out of touch John Hodgman as the PC. This campaign cemented that Mac had finally taken over PCs as the mainstream computer of choice, but also that if you didn't get it you were a buffoon.

If you were a Designer in 2007 Apple had single handedly delivered business to you. For the first time Designers weren't begging companies to let them think of ideas, companies were coming to Design in pursuit of their iPhone - their big idea that would open new markets like the iPod and the iPhone. Jobs championed Design in all his business, and all leaders emulating Jobs sought to learn how to work with Design.

## 01. How did we get here?

### b. The evolution of the Internet



YAHOO!



Phase 1:  
Building the foundation



amazon

Phase 2:  
Viable for business



NETFLIX

Phase 3:  
Design-led

### The evolution of the Internet

The Internet has been a long evolution with many different phases, disruptions and huge advancements.

#### Building the foundation

The initial wave of how most of us experienced the Internet in the early 1990s was with products like Yahoo!, Netscape, and AOL. While it wasn't entirely clear what the Internet was or where it was going, the first time people heard "you got mail", or had a chat on AOL Instant Messenger the possibilities and potential started to become clear. For Designers, it was a whole new uncharted world to explore.

#### Viable for business

The next big wave of companies and products to emerge in the early 2000s would be the ones who still tend to dominate the field today: Facebook, Amazon, and Google. While Facebook perfected the social network and help the Internet really connect people for the first time, Google and

Amazon were the first signs of real business. Amazon had finally gotten E-Commerce right, and Google got search right and became everyone's starting point to the Internet.

#### Design-led

It was the next wave of companies and innovations that brought Design to the forefront. While Design was certainly a part of the Internet's development, it was not seen as a critical part. However the next wave of disruptions in the early 2000s and 2010s would change that: Uber, Airbnb, and Netflix. While each business was innately disruptive with its business model, it was acknowledged that Design and User Experience were differentiators for these brands and critical to their success. This era coined the phrase "Design-led" companies.

It was this final wave of "Design-led" Internet that overlapped Apple's release of the iPod and iPhone leading Design into one of the strongest eras it has ever had.



01. How did we get here?  
**c. Design Thinking**

**Design Thinking**

It was mainly IDEO and Tim Brown who brought the approach of Design Thinking back into the spotlight using it as a technique for customers to ideate innovation through a human-centered approach. Design Thinking was wildly successful and embraced by business as a tool that unified business, technology and Design through the lens of viability, feasibility and desirability.

In 2015, Design Thinking was featured as the cover story in the Harvard Business Review. It felt like Design had finally made it into the boardroom. If a business wanted to build their own Design team like Apple, Uber, AirBnB or Netflix, Design Thinking was the way to do it.

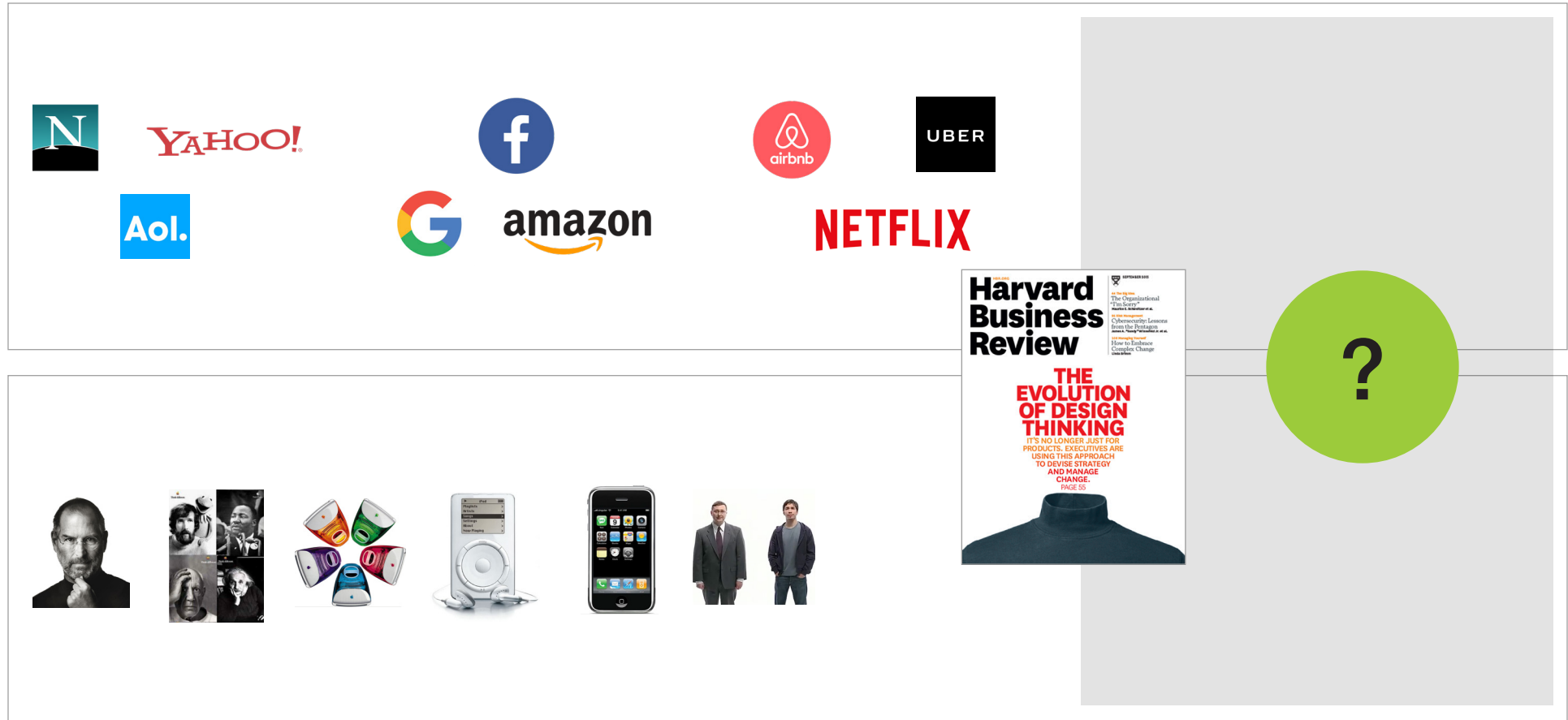
This should have been the beginning of a new age for Design, but it was not to be.



Jon Kolko, *Design Thinking comes of age*, Harvard Business Review, 9/2015

01. How did we get here?

d. Macro-Design vs. Micro-Design



1995

2005

2015

2024

01. How did we get here?

## d. Macro-Design vs. Micro-Design

“ In hindsight, it is now easier to see that when Design arrived in mass to businesses via Design Thinking, **businesses were no longer buying innovation.**”

### Macro-Design vs Micro-Design

When you look back at the period from 1995-2015, it was an unheralded period of growth and innovation. Bolstered by the commercial adoption of the Internet, we had entered a new industrial era with equally as fundamental disruption. There was a huge appetite for risk in the pursuit of the next big thing. While the market fluctuated during the dot.com bust, post 9/11 stock market crash, and even through the great recession, innovation continued.

During this period there was a huge level of macro-design. Every couple of years something new would happen that would make us re-think the Designs of the previous years. Design was in a state of constant adaptation to the latest innovation.

But something happened, sometime around 2015 business seem to change its mind and lose its appetite for risk. The growth mindset slowly began to shift to efficiency and focus from creating the next new thing shifted to

hardening all the things we had spent the last 20 years coming up with.

In 2015 business decided that our designs were done and that our job was no longer to re-invent but now to scale and incrementally improve. And for the past decade we have been making the same product experiences with slight incremental improvement. All the while we streamlined our production process to help business get more with less to the point where they didn't need us all that much anymore.

The best example of this would ironically be the iPhone, which is in essence the same thing it was when it was released. Every year Apple would add a new megapixel to the camera and make it a little bit bigger, but fundamentally it is the same phone that was introduced in 2007.

In hindsight, it is now easier to see that when Design arrived in mass to businesses via Design Thinking, businesses were no longer buying innovation. Designer's inability to sense the larger trend of businesses shifting to an efficiency mindset made Design Thinking seem tone deaf, like we weren't listening, and that we were over complicating things.

But Design made our greatest misstep by trying to remedy our predicament by demonstrating that we were business people who could make measurable "impact." We drifted more into a role of "Product-lite" rather than Design. In doing so we committed our biggest sin - we became dull. If you think business wasn't buying Design's innovation, they wanted the new "business impact" Design even less.

This partially explains the slow burn of the last decade for Decade. To identify the other aspect we need to look at how we manifested ourselves in organizations.

01. How did we get here?

e. Where does that leave us today?



Pete Jaques, Forrester 2024 Customer Experience Index. 07/15/24

e. Where does that leave us today?

When i wrote this book, nearly everything I have written has been a personal hypothesis. However on June 17th, I encountered what I considered to be validation in the form of the **Forrester 2024 Customer Experience (CX) Index**.

Is it proof? No.

Is it evidence to support my thesis that corporations have been building the same experiences for over a decade? Absolutely.

**“ US consumers are having, on average, the worst experiences in a decade.”**

**Rick Parrish**, VP/Research Director - Forrester



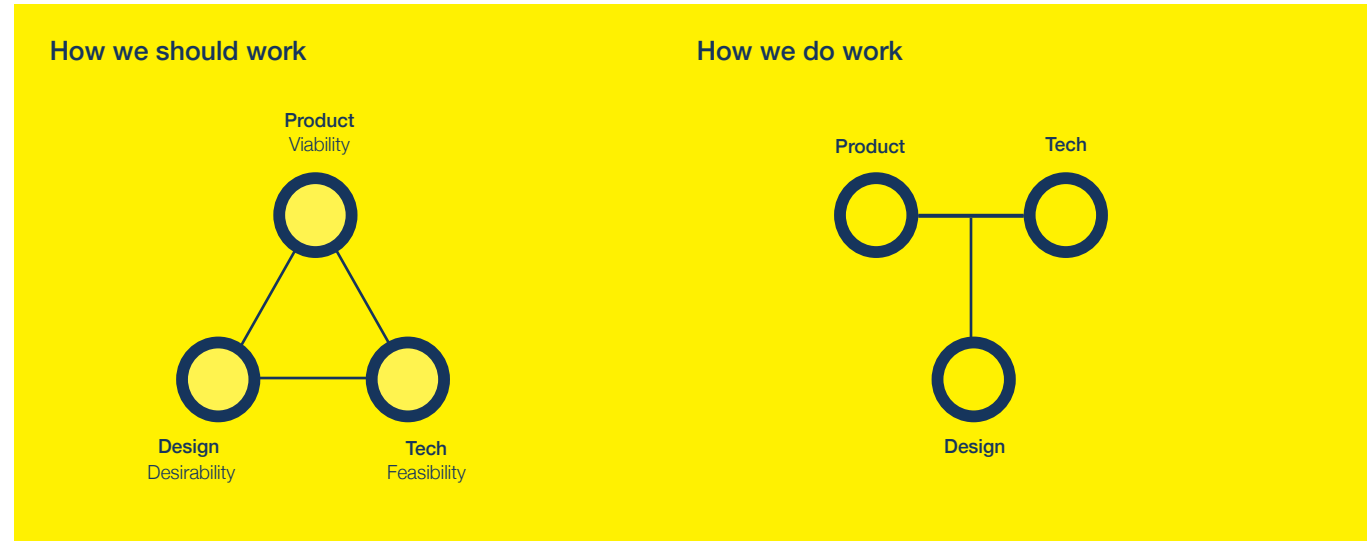
02.

# Design in organizations

## 02. Design in organizations

### a. The triad

The 'Triad' represented by Product, Design and Technology.



### The triad

The foundation of Product Design is the construct of the product triad: Product, Design and Technology. In theory, the 3 disciplines act as equal partners representing their distinct specialty.

**Product** represents **Viability**:  
a solution that aligns with business goals.

**Design** represents **Desirability**:  
a product that solves a true human need.

**Tech** represents **Feasibility**:  
the best solution in the current state of what is possible.

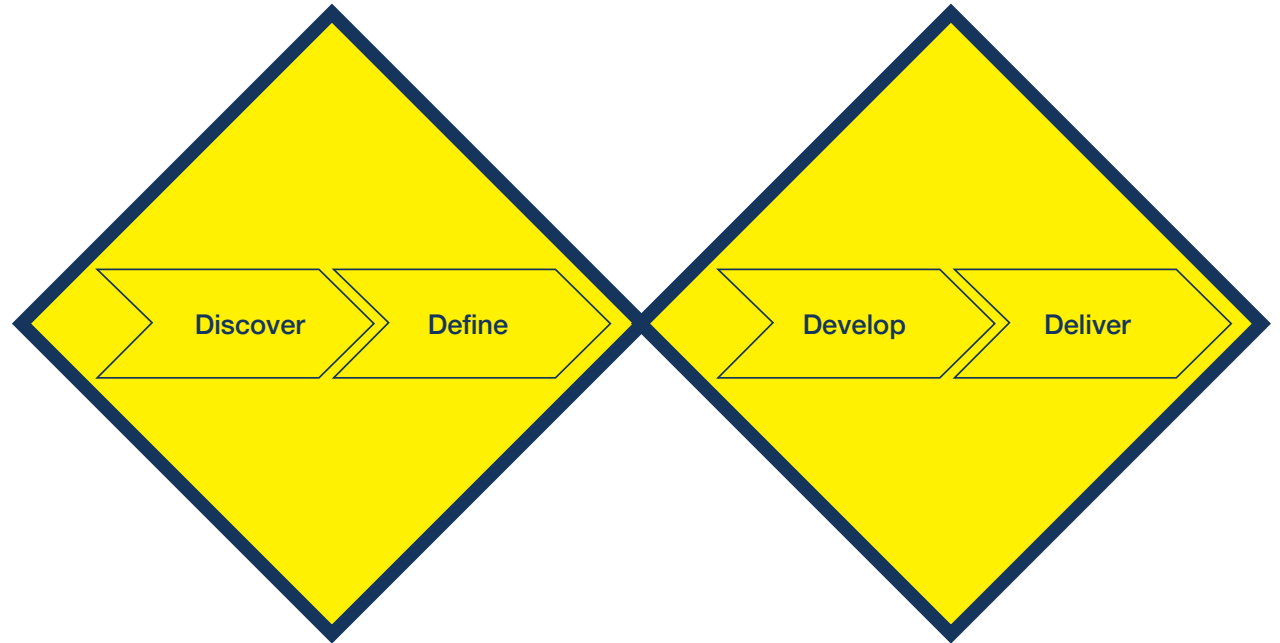
But if you've worked in product development you know the triad only exists in theory. In most organizations the triad is dominated by a struggle between Product and Tech, and Design is a distant third trying to get a "seat at the table" as an equal partner. As a matter of fact, in most

organizations now Design reports into Product. This alone tells you a great deal about the perception of the value of what Design does today.

The triad wasn't always this way for Design, it worked for a while. But then Design's value in the partnership decreased. What happened?

## 02. Design in organizations

### b. The process



The general Product Development framework - the 'Double Diamond', or Discover / Define / Develop / Deliver.

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### The process

New ideas and features can come to a team a number of ways. Design is usually brought in after an idea has enough shape that it now needs "Design", and that typically means "what it looks like". The majority of non-design partners believe Design is brought in when there is a screen to make. We are absent in the early stages of work when strategy, definitions, and meaningful conversations are happening.

Even in more "mature" organizations, if Design is brought into the Discover and Define phases, we rarely "own" it. Our involvement is often based on faulty premises and prescriptive solutions creating an often no-win scenario for Design. Push-back is seen as 'being difficult' or our acquiescence and involvement creates an endorsement (sometimes ownership) of flawed ideas that we don't agree with. The question of who leads strategic work is so gray that any organization could believe that Product can lead research or discovery work every bit as well as Design, if not better.



## 02. Design in organizations

### c. The sketch

“ ...in a scenario where a product or tech partner is able to build a screen with much more depth and fidelity, **how long will they continue to bring in Design?**”

#### The sketch

If you are a Designer, I am certain that many times a partner has come to you with a 'sketch', or a 'wire frame' as a starting point to your involvement. This might even be the norm for many of you.

It is not uncommon that partners go so far as to start building something, and bring in Design to ask for guidance on “what it should look like”.

The takeaway here is that our partners will create a screen themselves if they can, but there are limits to what they can create as well as what work they value doing themselves and what work they prefer to delegate. But in a scenario where a product or tech partner is able to build a screen with much more depth and fidelity, how long will they continue to bring in Design?

## 02. Design in organizations

### d. The great Design redundancy

While product development aims to work iteratively in increasing fidelity, in reality most teams still produce all products twice: in Figma and then in code.

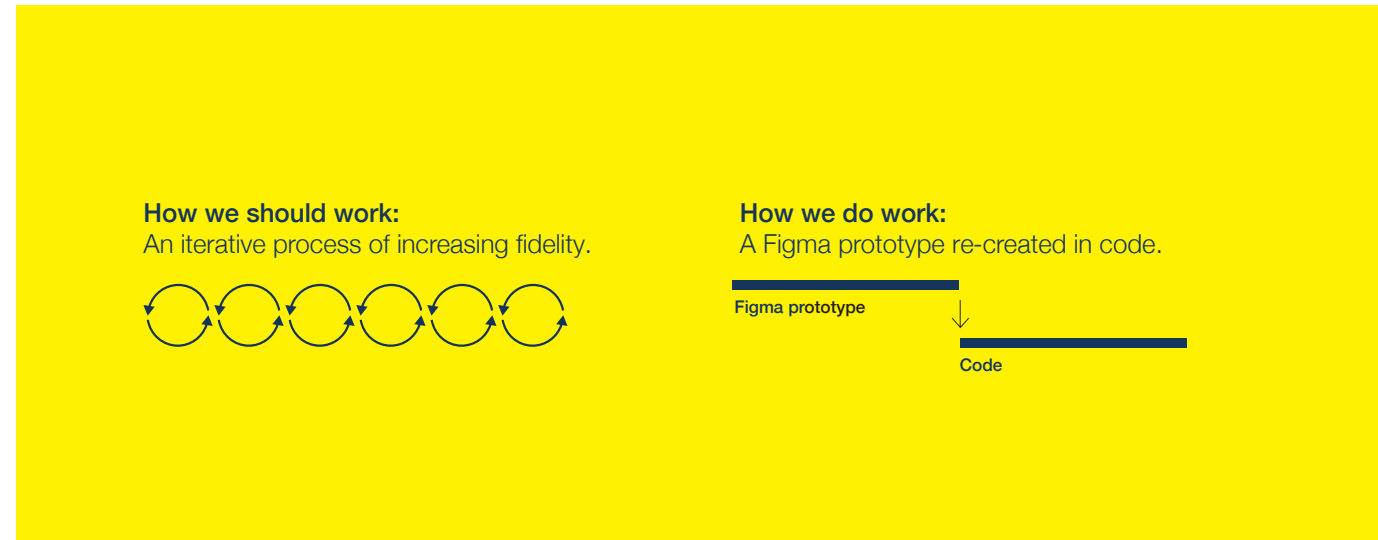
### The great Design redundancy

What is the way that organizations experience product designers the most? Figma prototypes.

Despite all of our greatest efforts to be defined and recognized for “Big D” Design, our workshop facilitation, research, and human-centered strategy, the majority of our partners view us as the people who make the Figma prototypes.

Why have our partners ceded that sole territory to Design? That is a critical question. Partially because our partners can't operate Design tools today, but that's not the only reason. Our partners are looking for Design to fill in the details.

While Design views the details as the user's needs, unfortunately the details in Design prototypes end up mostly being requirements and providing options for our partners and business stakeholders to evaluate and



make decisions. In making our prototypes, the majority of our work is digging up requirements and uncovering undocumented business processes.

Why has Design embraced this role? Mostly because there is a long-term notion that this is the Trojan horse into the conversation that builds to Design having a larger “seat at the table”. Also, before Component Design Systems, this is where the craft really happened.

Today, when our prototypes are complete, they are fleshed out in comprehensive journeys and flows, marked up, and handed to developers to re-build in code. So in effect, organizations build everything twice.

Consider the time it takes to build and review these elaborate, high-fidelity prototypes. Weeks and months are spent creating an artifact that will ultimately be re-built in code. When the code is built, it is never quite what

was intended from the original Design and there are often revisions made to ensure the experience matches the desired experience. Sometimes when an experience materializes in code it just isn't the same as it was in the prototype, and needs to be re-thought.

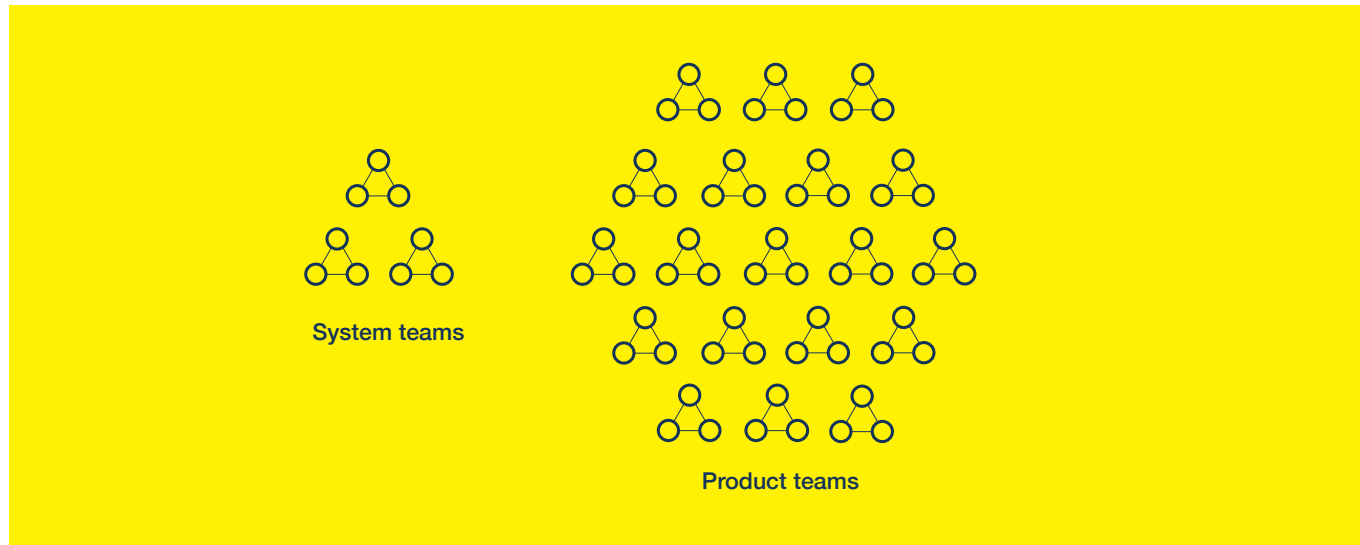
Now consider the fact that this has happened using Design Systems that were intended to create efficiencies and streamline design and development.

How efficient is this process? How smart is this process? Has it led us to our seat at the table?

## 02. Design in organizations

### e. The arrival of Component Design Systems

The majority of resources live in Product teams with the assumption that the major design decisions are being made by the component design system which is constantly understaffed and under funded.



### The arrival of Component Design Systems

Around 2015, the first component design systems such as Material Design by Google and Carbon Design System by IBM began to emerge. They promised a unified experience and speed of development through re-use.

Now that we're in an era of component design systems, almost every company has a small system team and a larger ecosystem of product teams that are building experiences with the design system. However, Design systems were not simply created for a consistent experience, they were also intended to bring efficiencies to how we all work and accelerate product development.

However, there were 3 results of Component Design Systems coming into Organizations that had a significant negative impact on Design.

#### 1. Creating component libraries in Figma

Designers have long avoided working in code because it felt like it was too difficult or complex to learn, or a distraction from the true work they felt they needed to do. We were moving into an era of dynamic and data-driven experiences, but still designing in still images using Adobe products and Sketch. When Component Design Systems arrived, Design should have made the leap to working in code.

Ironically Figma is a great Product for Designers to do exploratory sketching. But that is where we need to end.

The parallel universe that Designers have created in Figma is defeating the purpose of leveraging re-use to focus on more important problems, we now focus increasingly on our Figma universe where it becomes the real product we're designing. The amount of time, money and effort

used to create and maintain Figma Design Systems, and their use by Designers in business /product silos, has resulted in one of the most egregious wastes in Product Design today. Figma has created an alternate language, adding new features with each release, for Design to mimic code behavior with things like auto-layout and prototyping. There is also an equally convoluted world for code handoff consisting of tokens that require primitive and semantic naming, adding up to a world that provides little value to anyone except for Design.

Figma is where Designers lost their connection with craft, remaining ignorant of the nature of the environments they were designing for. The choice to create our work environment in Figma not only increased the gap with our partners but it also created a new world of complexity that has become far more difficult for Designers than it would be to just learn code, which would exponentially increase our speed, quality, and business value.

## 02. Design in organizations

### e. The arrival of Component Design Systems

“The choice to create our work environment in Figma ...created a new world of complexity that has become far **more difficult for Designers than it would be to just learn code**”

#### 2. Commoditizing old Design into components

Most Designers are unaware of the fact that the unintentional outcome of Design systems was the commoditizing of our offering. While the intent was to componentize the common elements in order to make way for the larger challenges, the larger challenges never came. Businesses had no interest in moving past existing design conventions, leaving Designers in a position where the only thing that was advancing in Design was the systemizing of our past Designs to create an efficient production method that increasingly required fewer Designers.

#### 3. Shifting global Design away from the teams that actually fund Design

Given the need for the component system and an organization's dependency on it, it is one of the most wildly underfunded and understaffed teams in an organization. Design systems tend to operate at a level of just getting by, not being able to provide the variety, flexibility or breadth of components and the depth of thought required to meet

the expectations of our partners or make experiences truly personalized, accessible, and inclusive.

If you consider how businesses experience Design today, what you now must consider is how our partners really perceive us.

We pulled the most important global Design work out of the teams that have all the funding. The majority of Designers left in product and business teams were suddenly seen doing what appeared to be far less valuable work of assembling pieces from a Design System.

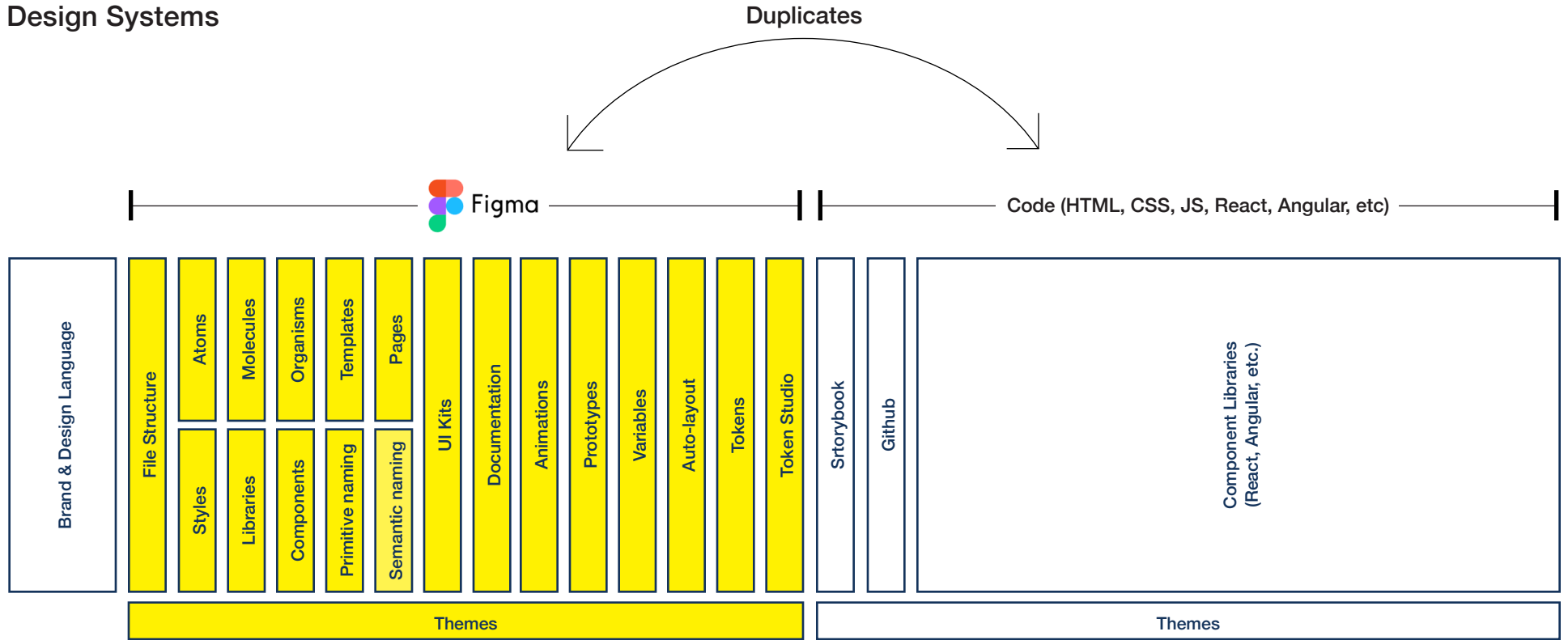
Designers in business and product silos wanted to do research and user experience work, but in the efficiency age our partners saw that as just complicating things. But when our partners did ask us for research, what they're often really asking for is requirements. When our partners ask for screen design what they're often asking for is the build specs for the development teams.

When business and our partners see us today, we are most

often doing work that is inefficient, and low-value. If we're brutally honest we will admit that companies don't hire business analysts anymore because that's predominantly what Design does now.

When we consider the current state of Design, and why so many Designers were laid off over the last years, is it really that hard to believe? If you're in the business looking to cut costs, you're looking at these triads determining which one is the most expendable, and given the situation is it any surprise that Design was the common choice? Even in a situation where Design is outnumbered by tech and product partners at ratios of anywhere from 5:1 to 20:1, we were still viewed as the most expendable choice.

## 02. Design in organizations e. The arrival of Component Design Systems



The Figma component design system provides **no value to a business**, it exists only to allow Designers to avoid working in code.

### Wasted cost

The time, costs and resources wasted to create, maintain, and use a Figma design system for businesses every year.

**\$1,000,000's**  
Enterprise

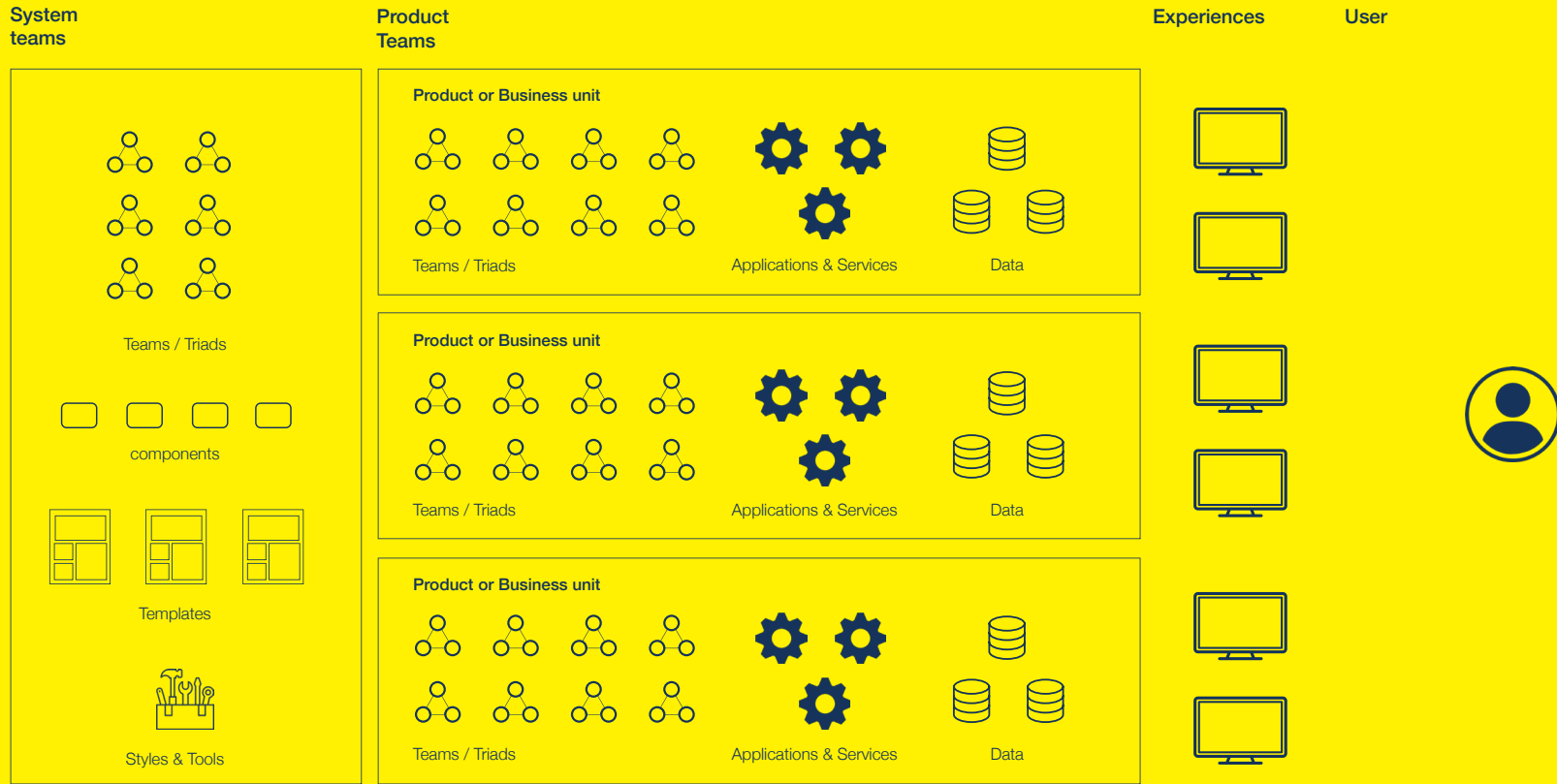
**\$100,000's**  
Small/Mid-size

**\$10,000's**  
Startups

02. Design in organizations  
e. The arrival of Component  
Design Systems

“ ...in a situation where Design is outnumbered by tech and product partners at ratios of anywhere from 5:1 to 20:1, **we were still viewed as the most expendable**”

02. Design in organizations  
**f. The organization of today**



**1. The System**

The team tasked with making the most critical global decisions is under-staffed, under-funded and under-valued. Global components are not designed thoroughly enough to fit most product and business specific uses and problems. Components are not designed with enough input from product ecosystems and have little learnings from ongoing use.

**2. Product Teams**

The majority of resources are working in product or business silos, creating fragmented experiences. Applications, services and data live in silos, often created through repeated acquisitions and reorganizations creating an ecosystem where services and data are redundant, inconsistent and incompatible with one another. Teams spend more time focusing on how to create *any solution* with what they have rather than the best one for users.

**3. Experiences**

We are still using the organizational model created in the late 1990s / early 2000s when the Internet became available for general use. The silos we have created have resulted in a fragmented experiences where users encounter multiple versions of the same company. While the end of macro-design after 2015 allowed us to scale our process for efficiency, we have been repeating the same solutions now for over a decade.

“While the end of macro-design after 2015 allowed us to scale our process for efficiency, **we have been repeating the same solutions now for over a decade.**”



## 02. The organization of today

### g. What does it all mean?

**“It is urgent that Design come to the table with a clear POV today before businesses or partners create a solution for us.”**

#### What does it all mean?

Explaining that the ways we work today don't work very well is not something new. But understanding how we got here, and why things don't work will help us to systematically create a point of view for what comes next.

However, Design is not an equal partner today in product development or organizational structure, and will most likely not be a partner in determining how AI and low-code/no-code tools will be used. In the struggle for owning the product development world, these tools represent an opportunity for almost anyone to redefine the space to their short-term advantage. There will soon be a time where Product will propose a vision where they require more funding to leverage AI and the rationale will be that they will need less Technology and less Design. Technology will make the same case. These conversations are already being had.

If you are a Design leader and you are put in a position

to have to react to a decision that your organization has already made about AI and low-code/no-code tools, the chances that it will put Design in a better place than it is today are very low. The chances that it will put Design in a worse place are fairly high.

Given that the shift to AI-driven screen creation will be the beginning of a much larger and more fundamental shift in organizations, it is urgent that Design come to the table with a clear POV today before businesses or partners create a solution for us.

03.

# What's next for Design

### 03. What's next for Design

#### a. What does the future look like?

“ It's not that we can't envision the experiences of tomorrow, it's that **we can't envision how to build them in the organizations of today.**”

#### What does the future look like?

It is very easy to look at AI and think that it will mean a reduction in staff. That is because people are looking at how we work and what we build today. We have in reality been building the same experiences for users for the last decade, we work incredibly slowly, and we rarely move beyond an MVP of a product before we move on to the next thing. In that world, we could get rid of half of any given company without AI being in the conversation. This is why it is so critical that the organizations of today need to become something new. When you allow yourself to think of the world that is possible, a very different picture begins to emerge.

People have already been arriving on what the future of the experience will be. While we are still living in a world based on pages and templates, there lives a different experience based on a smarter system that knows who you are and creates and re-creates personalized experiences for you

dynamically. It's not that we can't envision the experiences of tomorrow, it's that we can't envision how to build them in the organizations of today.

### 03. What's next for Design

#### b. A glimpse at the experience of tomorrow

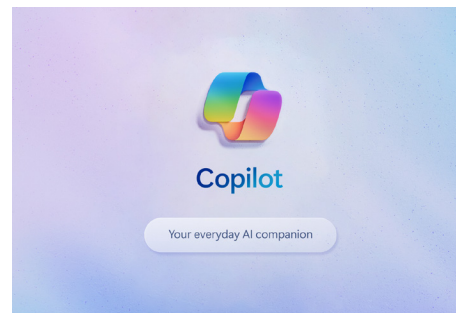
##### AI enhanced features



Apple's new "Apple Intelligence" is an AI offering provides a range of capabilities, such as enhanced Siri interactions with natural language understanding, integration with generative AI models for more personalized responses, and new image creation tools.



Google's Gemini AI is a state-of-the-art, multimodal AI model that integrates text, audio, images, code, and video to deliver versatile performance across a wide range of applications.



Microsoft Copilot is an AI assistant integrated into Microsoft 365 applications, including Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, and Teams. It uses advanced AI, such as large language models (LLMs), combined with Microsoft Graph data, like emails and documents, to assist with content generation, data analysis, and presentation creation

### 03. What's next for Design

#### b. A glimpse at the experience of tomorrow



#### A glimpse at the experience of tomorrow

We will find the first peaks at an experience of tomorrow in unexpected places. My example will be something that is rarely heralded as an example of good design, user experience, or even an example of a product that people like - Microsoft Office.

We know Microsoft Office as a suite of products such as Office, Excel, Powerpoint and others. Its comprehensive offering can contain Outlook, cloud storage, Sharepoint, Teams, and more. The suite of products can be called many things but, despite Microsoft's best efforts, integrated would not be one of them.

However Copilot was one of the first AI efforts from a big player, and it introduced some big clues to where experience will go when driven by AI.

Most view Copilot as Microsoft's obligatory AI add-on,

instilling bits of AI throughout the products in the Office suite. This is true. But there is also a very fundamental shift happening with Copilot for those who are paying attention.

Copilot is not another product in the Office suite, Copilot sits on top of the suite of products integrating them in a way that we've never seen before. Copilot proactively scans the content of your office applications and brings you actionable summaries and insights from the work contained in your products: your email, your calendar, transcripts from your meetings, and begins to integrate your work and give it a new level of meaning for you.

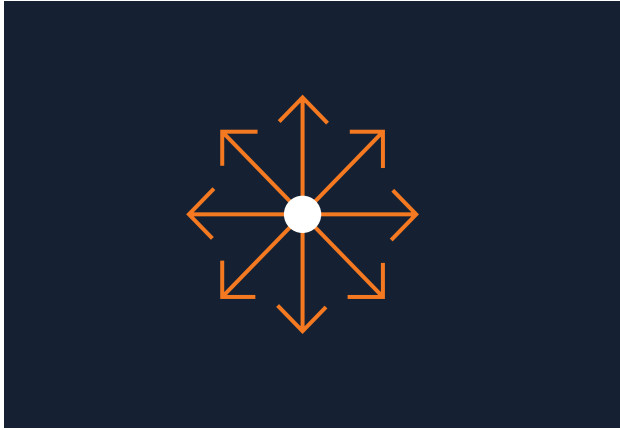
Copilot turns the current model of user experience upside down. The fundamental shift here is that the current model of the Office suite is that the apps are currently just mindless tools, you have to make sense of everything, put it all together and use each tool separately to do your work. The new model has Copilot beginning to do that

job for you, telling you what your day looks like, what messages have come to you, what is important, and what you need to action.

While it is still rudimentary today, Copilot - or whatever Copilot evolves into - is the new Microsoft Office. A singular, integrated, dynamic, personalized, proactive experience.

## 03. What's next for Design

### c. The New Experience Principles



#### 1. Unified

A singular point of entry to brands and products that integrates the fragmented experiences and organizations of today.



#### 2. Personalized

Each experience will be dynamically rendered unique to the needs of the individual.

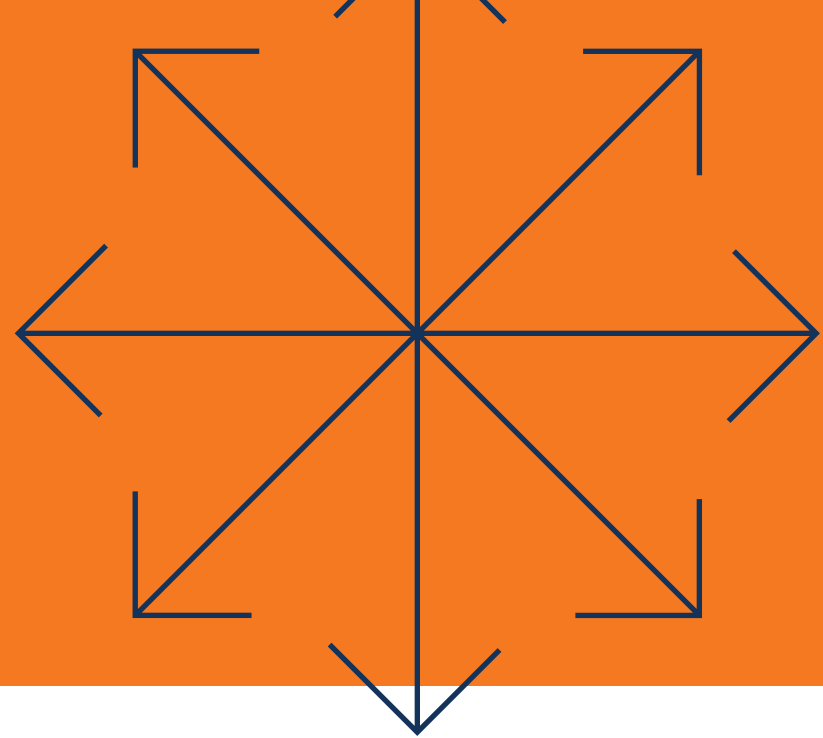


#### 3. Proactive

Systems will bring meaning to your experience and assist you in determining context, priority and urgency.

## 03. What's next for Design

### c. The New Experience Principles



#### The new Experience Principles

Beyond the Copilot example, let's imagine how that example and the new Experience Principles apply to other businesses.

Let's start with banking. If you have multiple products with the same bank you know that you deal with multiple businesses within that bank - your checking company, your credit card company, your loan company, your mortgage company, etc. While they all bear the same name, none of the companies know what is happening in the other. When you are Online it is all separated and you have the exact same tools and product experience that every other customer has, if you speak to someone on the phone it's worse.

Now let's use the Copilot example. Imagine a singular point of entry to all your banking with that business, it is unique to you, and it will proactively present you with

context and meaning to your finances telling you your current health, your monthly budget, your long-term savings and investments, and what actions you need to take. When you need help from a human, that person will also have access to that same unified view of you and your finances in order to assist you faster and more thoughtfully.

But let's take a step back even further. Imagine a financial company or product that could aggregate multiple banks, investments companies, and create a singular and holistic view of your financial health providing you actionable advice on what do today that would help your day-to-day budget and spending, long-term saving and show you where you are potentially at risk.

When you start to see this work you begin to understand that this outcome is not something that will simply occur by plugging AI into existing business, this is the beginning

of another 20-30 year era of Macro-Design and innovation. It is a fundamental shift of how companies are structured and what we are building today, and the work required to make this possible will not be an age of efficiency and layoffs, it will be an era of growth with all hands on deck to map out the new future because everything will be up for grabs again. Any company will be able to take the lead in this environment and startups will again be able to unseat giants the way that Google, Facebook and Amazon did.

## 03. What's next for Design

### d. The Design tools for tomorrow

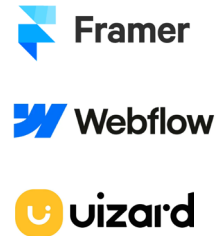
#### Old / current tools

Static screens



#### Transition tools

AI features, Code environment



#### Tools for tomorrow

AI-Native, Viable code, Data-driven



### The Design tools for tomorrow

While the state of Design and development tools are still evolving, there are some big signs of where things are heading.

The most fundamental shift that Designers need to embrace for Tools is finally making the leap into tools that generate code. Designers being in a world of Adobe, Sketch and Figma has kept us away from where our partners live, made us wildly inefficient and ultimately ignorant of the knowledge we need to master our craft.

Organizations have built Figma design systems, libraries and tools as elaborate and complex as the products they are intended to design for. These Figma libraries are an incredible waste of a company's time and money and will become irrelevant to modern product design.

The most basic rule of designing for data-driven and dynamic experiences is using live data. There is no other alternative. Designers who remain in products like Figma and Adobe creating static images and prototypes will be completely unable to Design for a dynamically rendered, AI-driven experience.

New products like Uizard are showing how prompt-based AI Design tools can not only address visual design and layout, but also consume component design systems and generate designs from them. While the prompt-based design is not ready for prime time yet, it will be soon.

Products like Framer and Webflow have both gained traction and support from Designers for being viable no-code design options. Framer in particular is starting to get very strong support as a Figma alternative. The current drawback to Framer is that it doesn't export the code it creates. There is some kind of proprietary environment

that enables the no-code experience which they would need to overcome in order for Framer to be a long-term solution. While Webflow does export code it doesn't seem to have the same appeal for Designers at the moment.

The Design tool of the future will be some combination of a Uizard-like AI-prompt capability that can consume (and ultimately create) component design systems, combined with a tool that generates viable front-end code that can be exported.

What remains to be seen is how Designers and Developers work together in this new model, and that will also have an impact on the tools. But I can't see a future where Design doesn't ultimately own creating the front-end code in whatever form that becomes.





# 04.

# The System-led Organization™

Conway's Law

“Organizations which design systems ... are constrained to produce designs which are copies of the communication structures of these organizations”

“Don't ship your org chart”

- Steven Sinofsky

## 04. The System-led Organization

The **System-led Organization** puts resources, data and capabilities into a centralized and unified system from the start, allowing AI and automation to operate at their full potential.

### The System-led Organization

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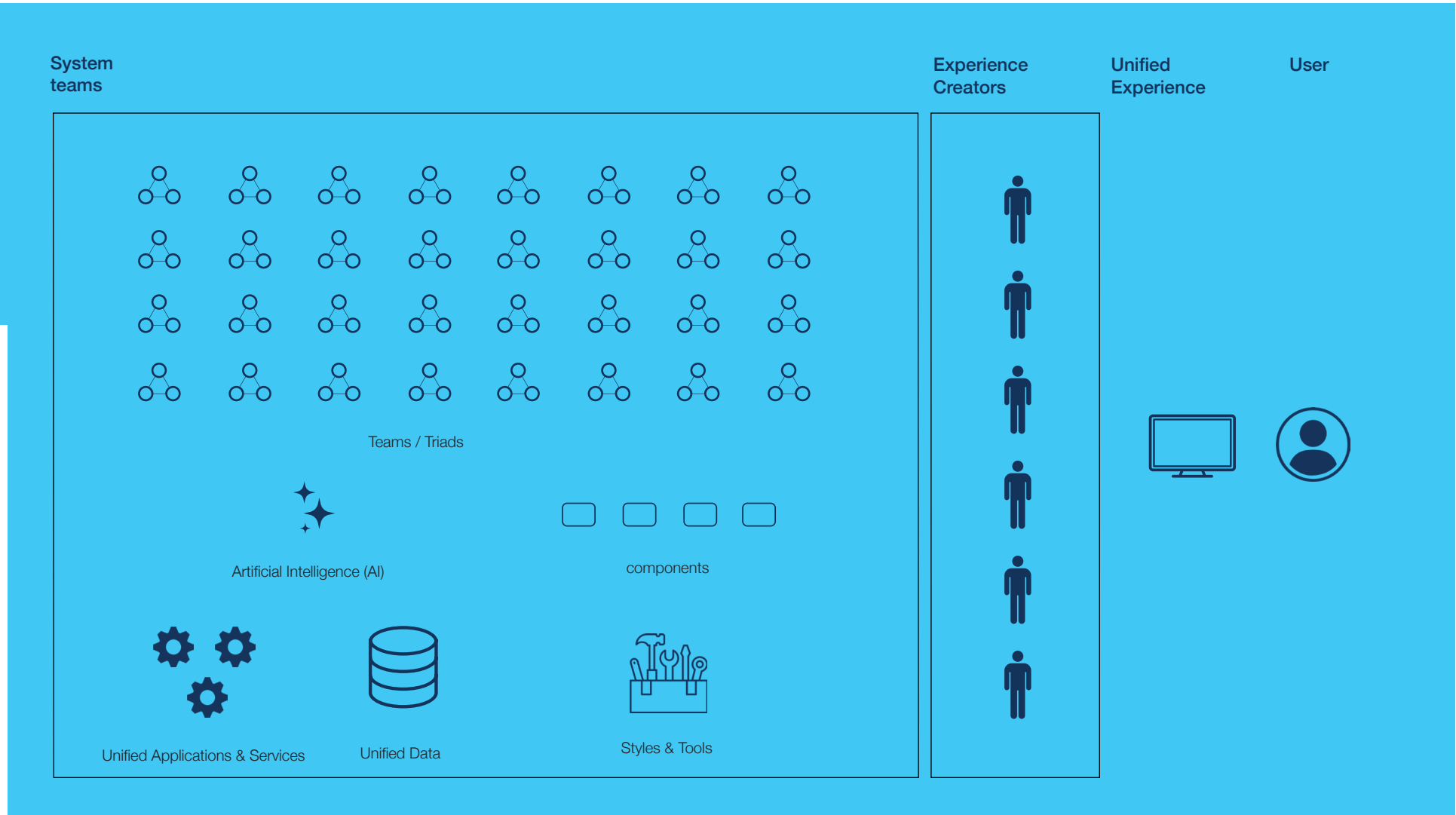
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# 04. The System-led Organization



# 04.a

## The System-led Organization

# The big shifts/ For organizations

# “Customer Experience quality in the US falls to an all-time low.

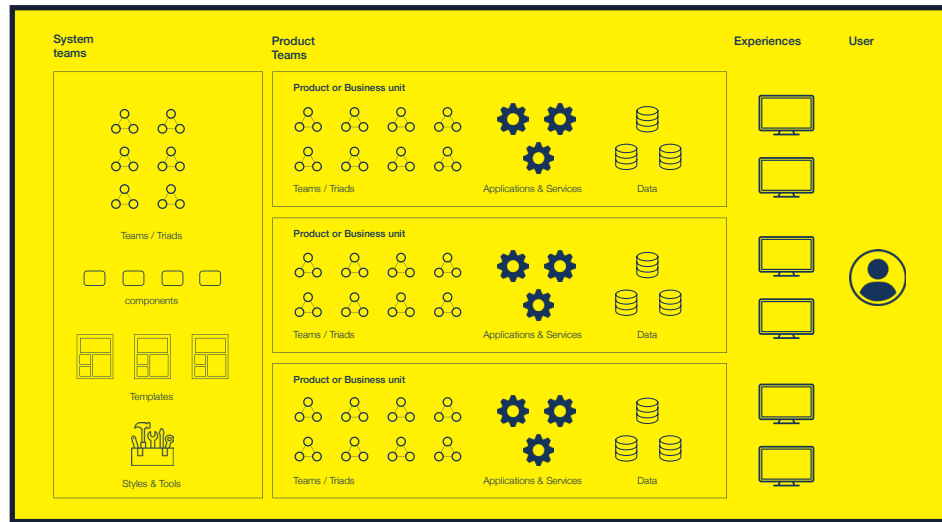
...Several factors, including brands' inability to provide seamless customer and employee experiences...

Brands want to create better experiences, and they realize that putting the customer at the center of their business is the way to do it. However, organizations struggle with the scale of change that this requires. It's worth it, though, as our research finds that firms that are customer-obsessed grow revenue, profit, and customer loyalty faster than their competitors.”

Forrester 2024 Customer Experience Index

## 04. The System-led Organization

### a. The big shifts - For organizations

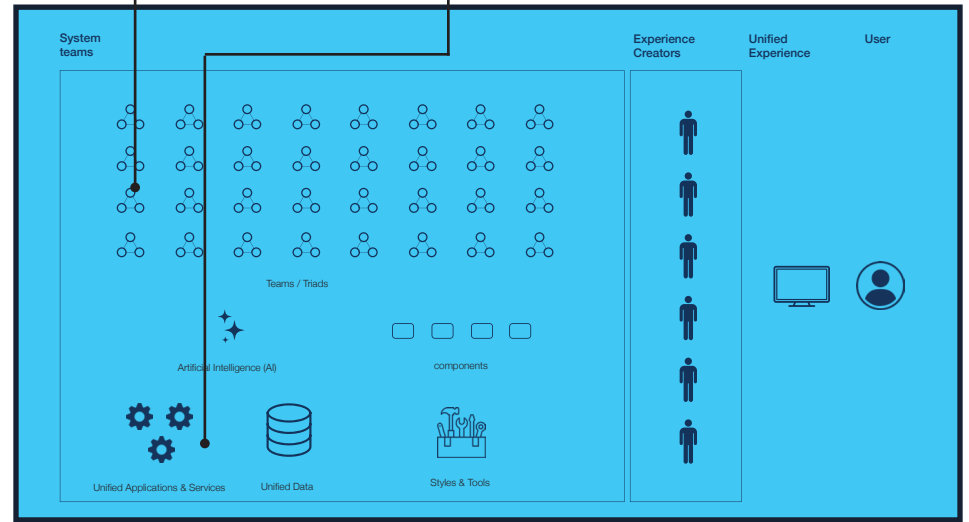


Current state

#### 1. Put resources where they belong

Resources need to be allocated where they make an impact. The emphasis needs to shift from a large ecosystem of triads creating fragmented products and experiences based on an incomplete system to an ecosystem of teams building a unified system. If the focus of work and resources is placed on the system then the depth and breadth of the experience grows exponentially. We can move past the current model of templates into a dynamic, data-driven and personalized experience.

The reason why Design is so undervalued in product triads of today is because we don't need to be working in business or product-specific silos anymore, and neither do our product and tech partners. A bad economy is shining a light on that for Design, but AI will act as the catalyst to reveal the waste in the model of triads as they are organized today.



Future state

#### 2. Centralize applications, services and data into a unified system

Applications, services and data need to shift from specific product or business silos and move to a centralized system. This is not a new idea, but too big of an idea to approach implementing in a world without AI and automation. However, with the exponential processing and speed that AI offers, we will finally be able to transition to an organization with unified, centralized data and applications.

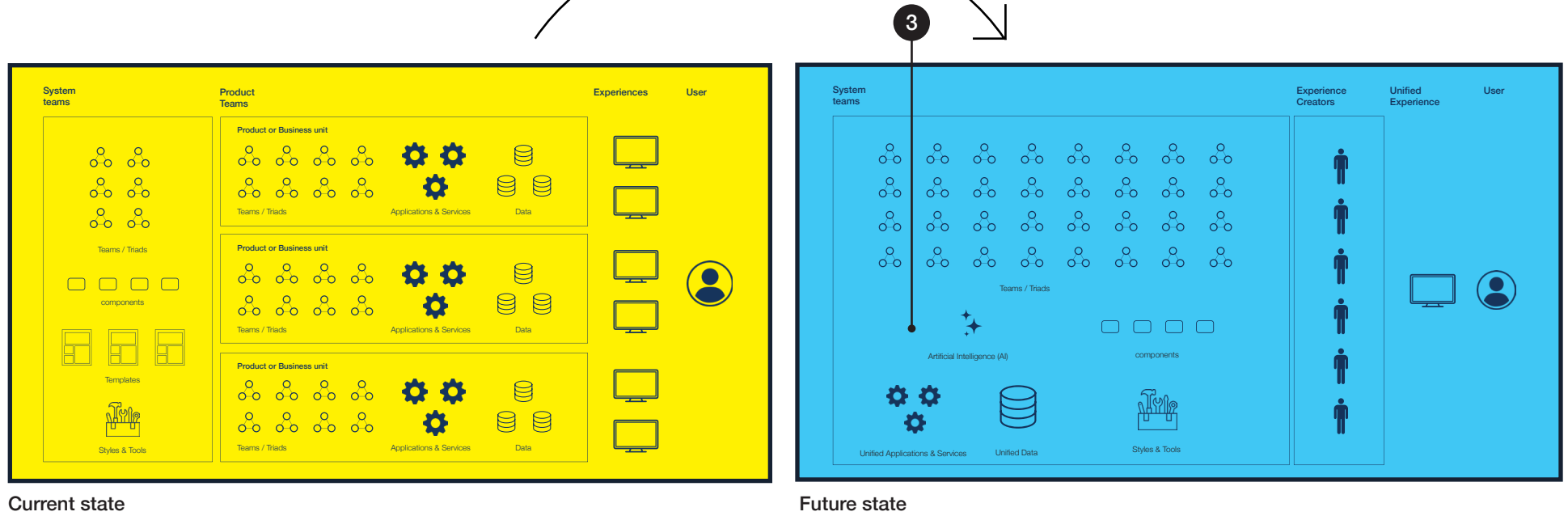
*Everything needs to be created to benefit all of the organization and all of the users.*

That sounds like “All things to all people”, but it's not. It means nothing is created that isn't integrated into the system as a whole and able to be used by any team for any use in the future. Today, most solutions are built problem and user specific and other teams and users cannot benefit from it.



## 04. The System-led Organization

### a. The big shifts - For organizations



Current state

Future state

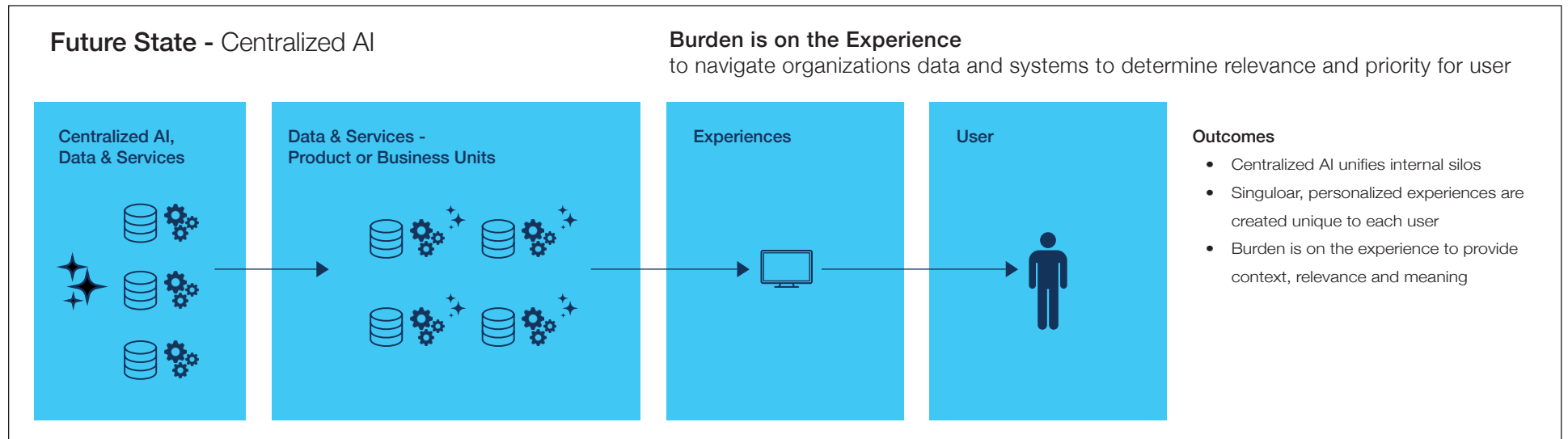
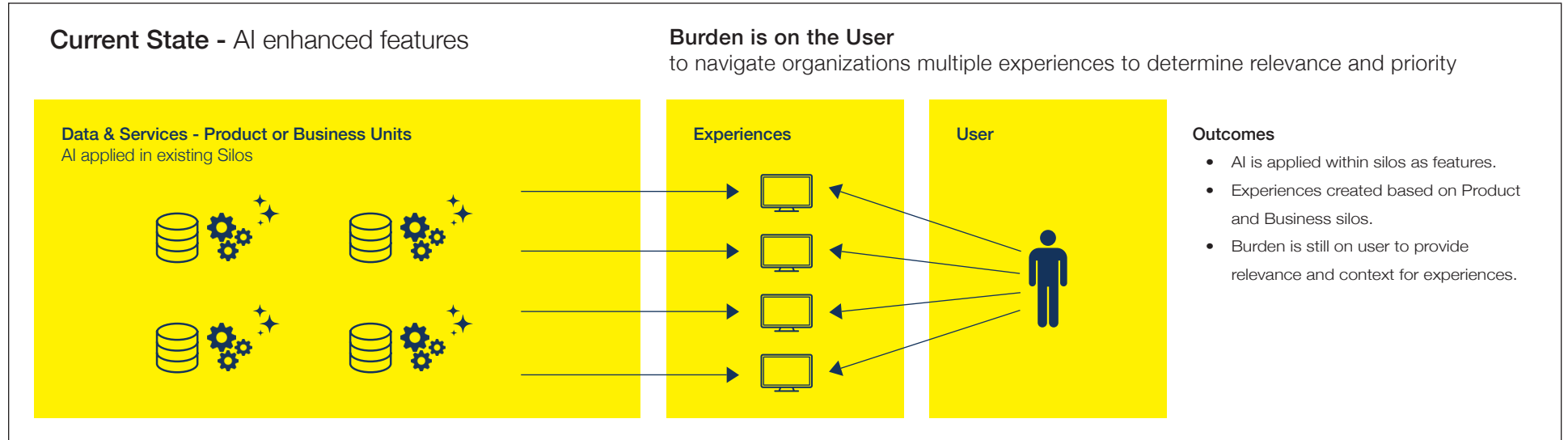
### 3. Centralize AI

While AI will permeate every aspect of organization, to reach its true potential it will need to work at a system level with comprehensive, unified data.

The other main reason to shift the organization to a system-led model is that as AI rolls out into the siloed organization of today it will only have access to fragmented data sets and won't be able to make the radical benefits we envision today with convoluted, fragmented data sets. Additionally, rolling out AI in the fragmented and siloed organizations of today has the highest risk for unforeseen chaos.

## 04. The System-led Organization

### a. The big shifts - For organizations



04. The System-led Organization  
**a. The big shifts - For organizations**



**4. The new hybrid role:  
Experience Creator**

If a system is built properly, then creating experiences with it doesn't require a triad. It needs a new hybrid person, what I'll call an 'Experience Creator'. This person will be a hybrid of the Product and Design roles today bringing a deep knowledge of the business and customer. This person will have a clear problem to solve and the ability to work with the system to create new experiences.

The system should be built for individuals, not triads, to work with it. Any questions of technology, usability, accessibility, and personalization need to be solved at the system level allowing the Experience Creator to focus on their problem. The Experience Creator should own ~80% of the decisions from their specific subject matter expertise (business, industry, and user) while the system team should have ~20% consultative role assisting an Experience Creator resolve questions about the system. This ongoing consultation helps the system constantly learn where it needs to grow and improve.

**Experience Creator**



# 04.b

The System-led Organization

# The big shifts/ For Design Leaders

“ Similar to organizations, It’s not that we can’t envision how Design should work tomorrow, it’s that **we can’t envision how Design can do the work of tomorrow in the organizations of today.**

But with a view of tomorrow, the shifts become clear.”

## 04. What's next: The System-led Organization

### b. The big shifts - For Design Leaders

#### 1. Set the agenda

Whether people agree today is less relevant than being the first to “the table” with a strong and actionable vision. As the market shifts to an emphasis on innovation again, being the ones who saw it first will give us advantage. Though controversial, we need to start establishing the ideas of a system-driven organization as well as the organizational shifts required.

#### 2. Shift your resources

Design resources need to be where they can succeed. Make the case to the organization for Design to happen at the system level and begin to shift resources there.

The challenge here will be more of funding, as business and product silos are the most funded. Making this case early will help the inevitable transition. Rather than getting ‘carte-blanche’ Design resources to work in a vacuum, business units will fund system resources that provide the components that meet their specific needs.

#### 3. Own the front-end code

Perhaps the most controversial proposal I put forward is this, because it requires Design Leaders to not just stand up for Design but to take what would be perceived as an aggressive ‘land-grab’ from our technology partners. However, it is the right thing to do and the right time to begin the discussion. While it is unclear what the ultimate answer will be in terms of how Design works with AI and automation, it is clear that Design needs to own the process, craft and tools that create a product’s front-end experience. If Design leaders are serious about a return to a focus on craft, there is no other way than finally moving Designers code.

## 04. What's next: The System-led Organization

### b. The big shifts - For Design Leaders

The immediate future will be exceptionally challenging for Design Leaders because it will require us to act boldly before a market shift back to innovation occurs, putting us back in a position of favor. We need to be the force that sees the shift first and provides an actionable plan forward.

**The time has come for Design to stop asking permission and start doing what we do best: providing vision.**

#### 4. Return to Macro-Design

Most Designers have not practiced true Macro-Design in over a decade, and that muscle has atrophied. Additionally, there is an entire generation of young Designers who have never experienced Macro-Design at all and will have to learn. The difficulty in returning to this altitude of thinking is that businesses aren't asking for it...yet. But Design Leaders will face a massive challenge in re-awakening this muscle in their teams and providing leadership here is critical for Design to be able to succeed.

#### 5. Be first with what's next

...and bring it to "the table". What we can bring today is a missing vision and approach. But as always, the devil lies in the details. The hard work will be figuring out how everything works, over time, in real-world environments. The next few years have the potential to be wildly disruptive, therefore continually being the first to the table with the right answers keeps Design not only **in** the conversation but **Leading** the conversation.

#### 6. Start leading again

We became so obsessed with being accepted that we stopped being the provocative force that brought the big ideas. We need to stop convincing the rest of the world that what we do can be democratized – it can't. Despite the infamous phrase 'you can't design in committee', that is exactly what Design has become. This is the moment for Design to not repeat the mistake of the last years of trying too hard to get everyone's permission or consensus **before** bringing a vision to the table.

# 04.c

The System-led Organization

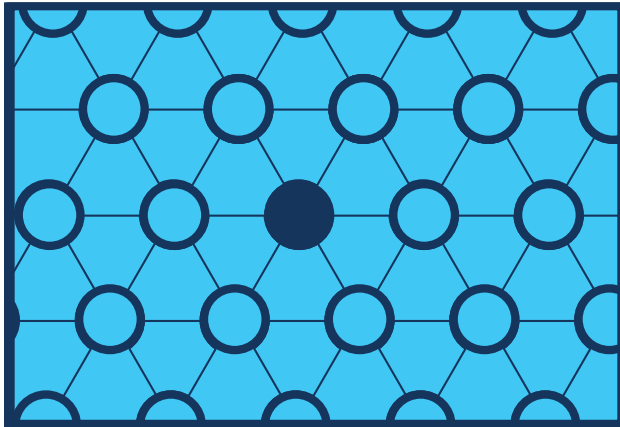
## The big shifts/ For Designers



### 03. What's next:

#### The system-driven organization

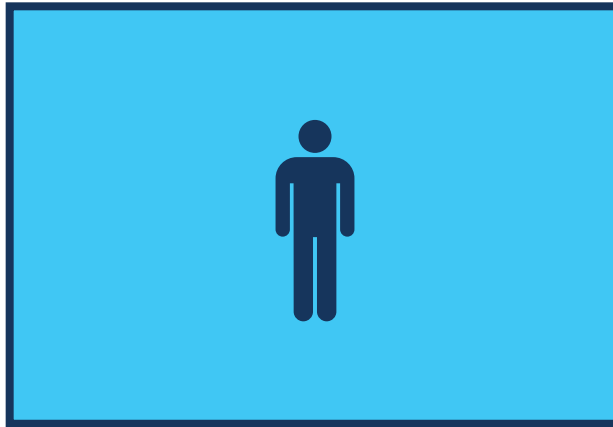
##### a. The big shifts - For Designers



#### 1. Become a System Designer

To remain in a role that most Designers do today, you will need to shift to a System Designer. While the processes will remain familiar, your perspective will need to change. Your users will become multi-dimensional as both the public consumer as well as internal colleagues.

You will need to think about Design on a larger scale, weighing the decisions that benefit both specific problems as well as the entirety of an ecosystem. You will need to be much more selfless in your decisions allowing for the greatest possible application and benefits that can be so broad as to benefit everyone and specific enough to be relevant to a single individual. You will also need to acquiesce to allow for another entity to make decisions with your system that you might not have intended, and learn to use that as input to consider decisions moving forward.



#### 2. Become an Experience Creator

A lot of Designers are already moving to Product roles because it allows an individual to have more impact on a product. Design has also rightfully focused on learning to speak the language of the business. These two things greatly anticipate the need for a new hybrid role that can create a human-centered experience with an understanding of the business and the ability to communicate in business terms.

As we move beyond the model of a triad being separate people, you need to be able to have a holistic approach of being able to create experiences representing the perspectives of viability and desirability while feasibility moves to the system team. You also need to embrace that you may not be called a "Designer" anymore.



#### 3. Embrace the craft of code

Once component design systems came to be, Design should have moved out of design tools like Figma and into code. The model of creating proxy experiences in tools like Figma is too costly and inefficient to continue without also continuing to decrease the perceived value of Design. To be relevant in a new model, Design needs to re-embrace the craft of experience by owning the code.

You can't design for a dynamic, data-driven experience in a flat, static environment. If you're a Designer, and have designed in front-end code, you know it's a very different craft than working in a Figma, Sketch or Adobe tool. You have deep control of the subtleties of an experience and can design more holistically since you are interacting and iterating the end result rather than a convoluted proxy. It is faster and produces a better result.



# 04.

# How do we get there?

## 04. How do we get there?

Very few businesses of today began as a pure digital product company. Every other business has had to add product development, and then product design, into an existing organization. It is no surprise that these first efforts don't work. We are at the end of trying to squeeze a product development offering into a business that had no understanding or appreciation for what it was. We are still operating off the models established in the dot.com boom and they don't work anymore.

To create any transformation, the process must begin with an awareness and acknowledgment of the problem. The current way we work is a waste of time, resources, and money that create continually inferior results. Once we have embraced that we have a problem and have a desire to change, we can only begin when we have a view of where we need to go and what we need to become.

Now begins the real work of, in essence, changing everything. I expect that it will be quite messy. AI and automation are being thrust into companies without a long-term vision or direction. There is just disruption, but not to a clear end. It is more of a dismantling than a re-building. As we ride out the down economy, the trend will continue to be that the smartest move is to reduce the workforce. This will continue until someone creates a shining example of what is possible with AI, which is inevitable.

This will be a moment similar to when Apple introduced the iPhone. The moment where the world sees what is possible, and then every company will feverishly shift

and obsess on how to create their 'iPhone:' where innovation finally meets the big opportunity and creates rabid demand with industry-changing profits. Everyone will chase their big disruptor, or just how to keep up and stay relevant in a new world. If you lived through that era, you know every company desperately wanted to be like Apple. Interestingly enough, the introduction of chatGPT and OpenAI were not tangible enough to act as the symbolic disruptor, as its impact is still hypothetical. It will require an application for the world to begin to understand the real impact, and push the motion forward.

With the speed and breadth offered by AI and automation, the market will be flattened again offering the ability for startups to be able to create major disruptions again, similar to the ones we felt by Google, Facebook, and Amazon. It is more probable that a startup can provide the first glimpse at the new big disruptors as they will be able to begin in a place that offers unified system data and can build a new model from scratch rather than have to turn the large ship of an older corporation.

For Design, it is safe to say we still have a future where we are not only valuable, but critical for defining and creating the digital world of the future. The challenge we face, made more urgent by our current situation, is that we face the potential to feel the most pain in the transition to a new future as companies rebuild. It is not that anyone realistically thinks that the world can continue without Design. The problem we face is that business doesn't understand how the design of today fits into a business of tomorrow, and that it is both our crisis and our

opportunity. To break through this moment it is imperative for Design to acknowledge the decreasing value of our current offering and come to the table with a new one.

If you've worked in any capacity on transformation you know that it's not the lack of technology or skill to move an organization to a new state, it is the inertia and resistance of those who fear what is next because they don't know their place. People won't move until they know what's next, what their role is and how they create value. In other words, will they have a new job or are they quickening the end of their job by changing?

The critical decision for every company and individual today is not if you will transform, but when. Those that preemptively work to create a new path forward today will have a clear advantage. The change is coming, the catalyst (AI) is here, and you can choose to define now how you will leverage it to your advantage or be caught off guard later and have to play catch up to potentially the largest disruption of our lifetime.

**“The change is coming,  
the catalyst (AI) is here.**

You can choose to define now how you will leverage it to your advantage or be caught off guard later and have to play catch up to potentially the largest disruption of our lifetime.”

## About the author

### Stephen Fritz



An accomplished Product Design Leader with over 20 years of experience, Stephen has been leading companies through radical transformation throughout the digital age.

Stephen founded Neon Navy to assist Design leaders guide their teams and organizations into the age of AI and automation.

Previously, Stephen led global teams at enterprise companies such as IBM, JPMorgan Chase, BT Global Services, Cognizant, and PepsiCo to help them navigate their evolution to data-driven, human-centered, agile businesses at scale. While at IBM, he led the conception of IBM's first full-stack component design system (now Carbon Design System), helping to usher in the age of product development with component design systems.

Steve began his career helping to create one of the first global digital agencies helping businesses like Chase,

Merrill Lynch, Siemens, and Valvoline establish their first online presence. Later he co-founded a digital agency named Olive that helped entertainment companies such as AMC Media (AMC, iFC, WE, Fuse), Viacom, Electra records and SONY navigate the emergence of digital downloads and streaming media.

Steve lives in New Jersey with his wife, two daughters, and multiple pets.



**Big things are coming.**  
What's next for Design in the era of AI and automation.

For more information contact:

**Stephen Fritz**

[steve@neon-navy.com](mailto:steve@neon-navy.com)