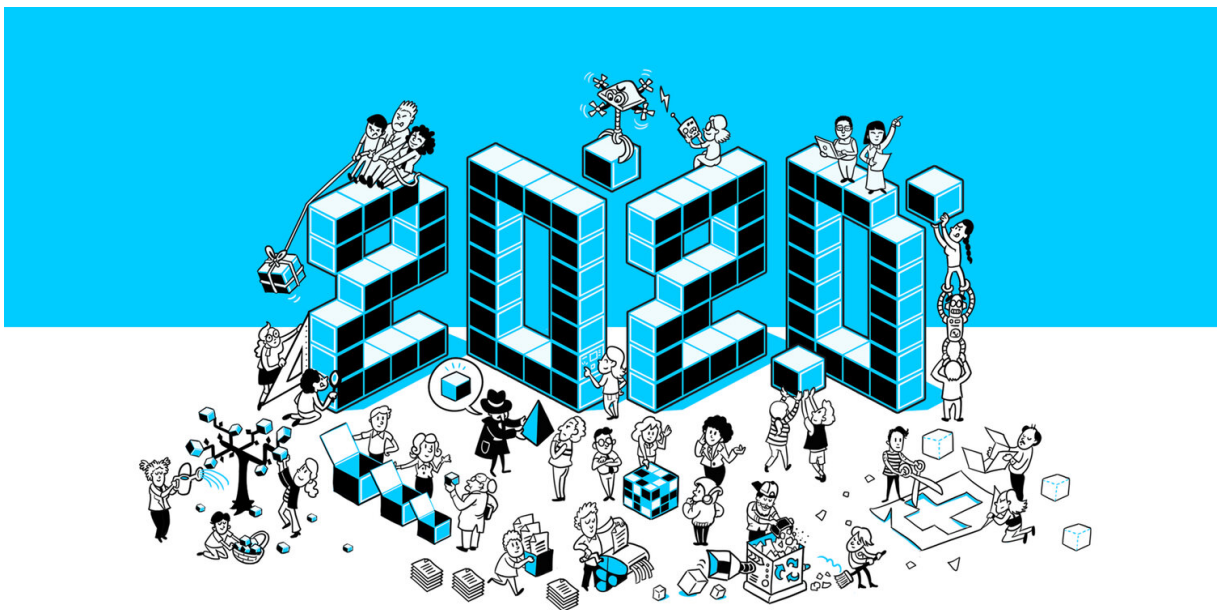# THE State OF UX in 2020

We have seen a lot this year. After curating and sharing 2,411 links with 358,917 designers all around the world, we have identified a few of

the trends our industry
has been writing, talking,
and thinking about.
Here's what to expect
for UX in 2020.

The State of UX in 2020. Illustration: Gus Morais

From the editors

We have always talked about 2020 as an iconic year. Most of us have participated in at least one "2020 vision" project within our companies. Turns out 2020 is finally here, and it is now time to bring our so-called visions into fruition.

This is our fifth consecutive

year publishing a trends report. If you have read any of our previous editions, you know **this is not an article about UI trends, but rather a more holistic analysis of UX Design as a discipline**. We'll be covering the tools we use, the methods we apply every day, how we collaborate with one another, the career challenges we face, and how our community can make an

impact on the world around us — one that we, consciously or not, have helped to design.

While last year we the design community reflected on how the experiences we create can impact the world (from enabling tech addiction to influencing democratic elections), this year's report carries a more positive outlook: 2020 is the year of pragmatic

optimism. It is
the year for
designers to
conscientiously
improve not
only the digital
products
people use
every day, but
also our
companies and
our industry.

What follows is
our review of
the past and
analysis of the
present, with
an ever-
watchful eye
on the future
of UX.

Hope you
enjoy the ride,

Fabricio + Caio

#1

Designing for the post- truth era

The rise of deep fake videos and misinformation being

used to drive political agendas makes us question our sense of reality. As designers of digital products for the next decade, we need to focus our efforts on designing for transparency and encouraging critical thinking from our users.

In May 2019, American president Donald Trump tweeted a video of Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi that had been edited to make her sound drunk. When challenged on TV about Facebook's role in the viral spread of this video, VP of Product Policy Monika Bickert argued that instead of removing the fake video from its service, Facebook opted to show an alert warning users that the veracity of the video has not been confirmed by fact-checking agencies.
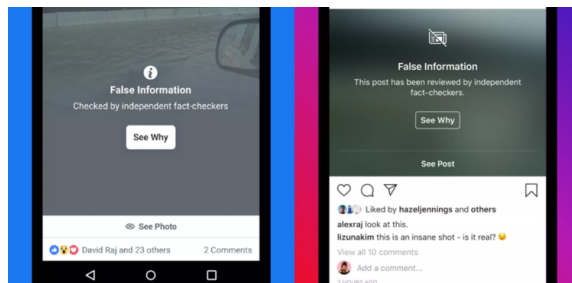
Facebook to start labeling false posts more clearly, but not removing them from its platform. Source: The Verge

A few months back, Youtube introduced disclaimer copy next to the video player UI that lets people know which company or entity is behind the content they are watching. The Guardian has added the date an article was published to its social thumbnail, to prevent users from re-sharing old news stories thinking (or pretending) that they are current.

Designing for transparency

We're living in an era of fragmented truths and whataboutisms. Globally, at least 70 countries have experienced

disinformation campaigns. "How could we possibly compress all of these contradictory reality bubbles into a single history textbook?" asks design researcher Aaron Lewis in his brilliantly written article about the "post-truth" present.

Companies need to make product changes to fight the harm of misinformation — but how far are they willing to go?

News outlets have started to re-think the way articles are written, in order to mitigate ambiguity and the misinterpretation of facts. Axios, for example, has a unique way of outlining different perspectives in their articles and guiding readers towards a more

critical approach to news consumption.
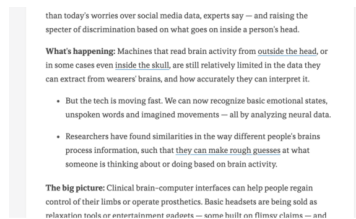
Axios' articles are written in a way that helps readers understand all sides of a given issue.

"This is an extremely complex challenge for everyone working in the news industry, and the design is only a small piece of the puzzle," explains Al Lucca, Head of Design at Axios. "The bigger challenge designers will have in 2020 is on how to take people out from the noise and anxiety cycle of social media and online news, and teach them how to spot fake news, which eventually will bring everyone back to healthier and more trustworthy conversations."

The same way Google has started its journey to combat deep fakes, Adobe has recently announced its own service to spot manipulated

images and videos through the use of AI. The same company that pioneered image and video editing is now helping people differentiate Photoshopped photos from real ones.

2019 in deepfakes: from fun experiments to political retaliation.

A threat that affects every industry

The internet has made us all cynics. Every company, in one way or another, is being forced to operate more carefully in order to regain users' trust and prevent the spread of misinformation. In 2019 we've seen the rise of third-party tools that can support companies

and individuals identify misleading content: from services that spot fake customer reviews in e-commerce sites, to tools that audit Instagram and Youtube profiles in search of fake followers.

As product designers in the year 2020 we have a lot of work ahead of us: designing tools to filter out fake content, making users more aware of the treachery of deepfakes, and stopping the spread of misinformation. But even more importantly, we will be responsible for raising awareness inside of our organizations, establishing principles around truth and reporting how our platforms might be misused by agents with hidden agendas.

#2
The rise of micro- communities

The promise of large online communities where designers can talk freely and learn from one another has not panned out. Instead, micro-communities are on the rise. Pick one or

two trusted colleagues, select a few mentors outside of your bubble, and build your own sounding board if you are looking to have more honest and in-depth conversations about design.

We have all joined more design-themed Slack, Linkedin and Facebook groups than we can keep up with — maybe in response to the visceral human need to feel like part of something bigger than ourselves. But the reality of online communities is quite different from what they initially seem to promise. Groups with thousands of designers either become inactive once members realize they have little in common, or remain active but end up devolving into an endless stream of self-promotion and content marketing pieces. Discussion threads on Reddit or DesignerNews don't delve deep

enough into a topic because they are held back by miscommunications between participants. Design Twitter slowly becomes a shallow stream of polarizing, angry, and loud voices.

While large online communities play an important role in making design more accessible to more people, we have to re-focus on the smaller communities we build ourselves in order to get the full value out of our conversations.
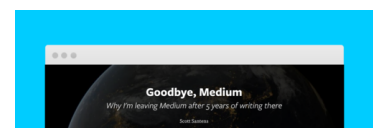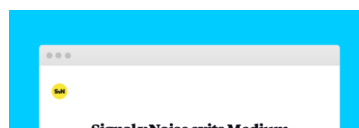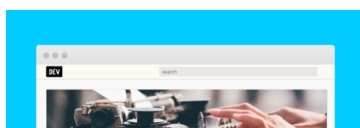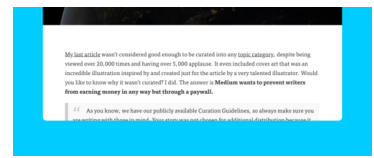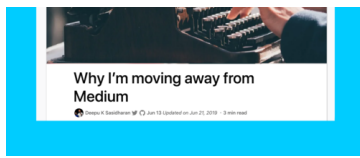
2019: from *medium* to small communities. 🥂

The online design migration

All this doesn't mean designers have stopped having online conversations with one another; it just means these conversations are migrating to a new type of community which is more intimate and focused. They are happening over WhatsApp, Telegram, direct messaging, and super-niched hubs. They are happening one-to-one or in small groups, rather than in large forums.

Designers are informally creating their own sounding boards:

people with whom
they feel
comfortable
sharing feedback,
exchanging design
references,
discussing trends,
or asking for
advice on topics
like salary, work
dynamics, and
career.

The same shift can be seen with
design events. While large design
conferences are a great platform
for networking, small local
meetups are more rewarding
when it comes to learning and
development, since they allow
participants to engage in more real
and honest question-and-answer
sessions.

"The intimacy of
smaller settings
allows people to

open up to each other in more authentic ways," explains Kat Vellos, Senior Product Designer at Slack and founder of BayAreaBlackDesigners. "Smaller groups make it easier for participants to build psychological safety with each other. That's much harder to do in a large room with hundreds or thousands of people. Psychological safety is the most important thing for getting people to trust each other and gel, and small groups/events will always be able to provide this in a more manageable way than humongous conferences."

In 2020, the most relevant discussions in design are becoming local, authentic, and focused. Large communities become primarily a way to find and build smaller ones. In a world where everyone is shouting at each other, quieter and more thoughtful conversations become incredibly precious.
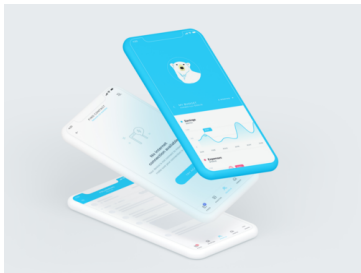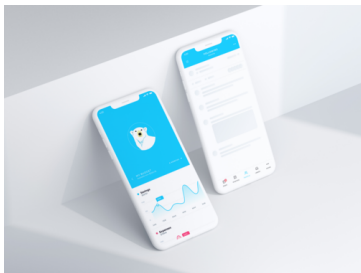
Flying phone mockups (so you
don't focus too much on the
actual design): one of the
hottest portfolio trends in
2019.
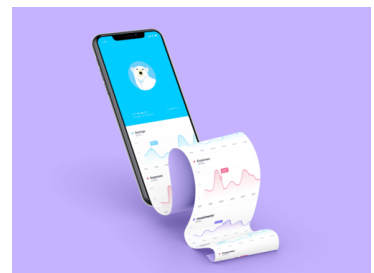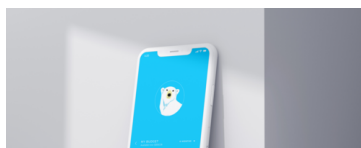
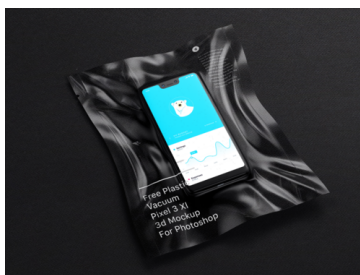When 812px are not enough.

Feels a bit lonely here.

An accident waiting to happen.

So. Many. Layers.

Designing in a vacuum.

3

Design as a team sport

The old stereotype of the "rockstar designer" is (thankfully) going away. As digital teams

grow and projects become more complex, designers are being valued by collaboration and team enablement rather than only individual tasks.

It takes two to tango

Designers working at smaller companies often sign up for UX-team-of-one positions: a brave endeavor to push the entire design process forward on one's own while simultaneously creating a culture of design in the organization. A rewarding —but often isolating— role to take on.

At the other end of the spectrum, designers at larger companies are often initially attracted by the idea of being part of a more structured team, only to find out that many of the challenges presented by

smaller companies are still there. Designers are isolated in their own product teams (which often belong to different budget centers) with rare moments of true collaboration. As a designer, can I provide insights into the product strategy? How should the developer hand-off go? Internal politics often create additional territorial lines, further complicating productive exchanges between co-workers.

Real collaboration requires a set of rules, not a set of roles.

This situation is also worsened by the misconceptions of the "10x designers" or "design unicorns". Many designers, trying to sustain that image, keep pushing for a one-person show. Without the input of other team members, the

final product often reflects the bias of a siloed, myopic worldview.

Designers as enablers

If your team is constantly asking for clarity about a project, or your workflow feels like you're pushing tasks through a production line, these are signs you need to step up and act as a facilitator, reframing the design process in different ways.

- Pushing for more user research could be framed as growing curiosity across the team to learn more about the users and the product space.

- Polishing an interaction or animation could be done in collaboration with developers and be

framed as a desire to deliver high-quality experiences.

- Feedback could go beyond "leaving comments on the doc", and happen in both structured and unstructured ways.

Design is a horizontal discipline. Our natural ability as designers to empathize with others and understand their motivations can work in our favor within our companies as well. In 2020, being an enabler in our organization means bringing the team together towards a common goal, checking your ego at the door, and creating a safe space for collaboration regardless of titles or departments.

IS ~~2019~~ 2020 THE YEAR WHEN YOU WILL FINALLY UPDATE YOUR PORTFOLIO?

Tweet

#4

Rendering intentionality

Adding new features to a product is relatively easy. Ensuring we're solving the right problems is not.

Products start small and focused. They do one thing really well — and that's the primary reason they become successful.

But soon, the team behind the product comes to the conclusion that it must do more. Features are added, new use cases are covered, and functionalities

become more sophisticated over time.

This can happen for a few reasons:

- Users are asking for features, and the product team is accepting their feedback directly

- Business stakeholders create pressure for constant growth, leaving the design team scrambling for new ways to generate revenue

- The performance of the product team is evaluated by the number of features it delivers as opposed to the relevance of those features for the end users

Often, after adding several features, it's too late for the team to go back. The product's original value proposition, which is what attracted users in the first place, is now diluted. The user experience rots as the product becomes more

complex and less meaningful to its users.

"Design is the rendering of intent."
— Jared Spool

When facing issues on how to keep a product relevant over time, the first reaction is trying to course correct the product by... adding even more features. We are once again perpetuating the same mentality that created the issue: building on top of something that, to start with, wasn't right. Most importantly, we are just perpetuating established values. Many issues related to bias, abuse, and misuse will be sewn into the lines of code, unless designers are actively working to fix them.
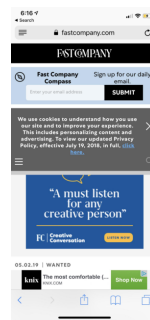
For teams who are rewarded for adding features to a product, removing one can feel like a failure. For these teams, design is the rendering of features.
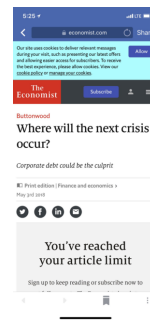

The state of mobile web in 2020: we talk about changing our users' lives, but can't push back on that pop-up request. Source: RdBannon

Source: Lukew

Source: fredbenenson

Source: LegendOfVinnyT

Great products do less, but better

Focusing our products is a hard path, but not impossible to walk. Clearly stating their position on privacy, Tonic has managed to create a news app that doesn't require a login and uses a more transparent algorithm to make content recommendations. It would have been easier to add a "sign in with Google" to capture user data. But Tonic went a different route, which in the end, is simpler for the user.

Another example is Basecamp, who recently removed the pixel tracking from their emails. As its founder David Heinemeier Hansson explains: "The tech industry has been so used to capturing whatever data it could for so long that it has almost

forgotten to ask whether it should. But that question is finally being asked. And the answer is obvious: this gluttonous collection of data must stop. Privacy isn't just the right thing to do, it's also better business. Discerning customers are already demanding it, and everyone else will too soon enough."

In 2020, being intentional about our designs means knowing that our job is to solve user needs, not to keep developers busy. It means caring more about our users and the impact of our work than about the work itself.

The death of design files

Back in 2006, Google Docs changed the way we collaborate: no more attaching files to your emails. A similar transformation is now happening with design files, and we are finally able to streamline our workflow while collaborating with more disciplines in real time.

File management has always been a popular topic within the design

community, from jokes about the way we label our files to thoughtful discussions on file versioning and how to share files with our stakeholders.
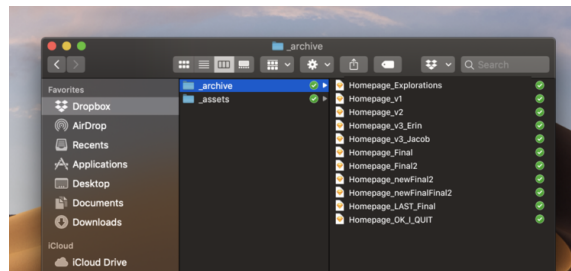
Caption_FINAL.txt

But what happens when we don't have files at all?

In 2019 we have seen designers from companies big and small gradually shift their workflow to a file-less model — whether they are jotting down ideas in Dropbox Paper, defining content strategy on a Google Spreadsheet, organizing project information on Notion, wireframing on Whimsical, or designing the UI entirely on Figma.
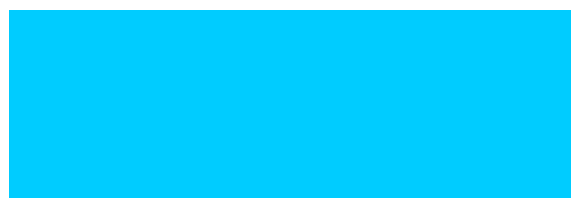
The output of our work is not a design file

Let's be honest: every year there is a new list of tools that designers struggle to keep up with. This year was no different, except for one thing: instead of focusing on novelty features, design tools are shifting their focus towards better collaboration.

The product of our work as designers is not the mockup we hand off at the end of our workday; it's every decision we made with the team and how we influenced the organization at large.

In that sense, owning design files is an outdated concept. "In a pure cloud world, this atomic unit of documents seems increasingly archaic. Documents are more a constraint of a pre-cloud world," explains Kevin Kwok in his essay The Arc of Collaboration.

The main reason we design something is to be able to share it with our business stakeholders, product managers, developers, and users. Designing *is* sharing.

If a prototype is finished but isn't shared with the team — does it really exist?

[Tweet]

Collaboration, baked in

It will take time for designers to fully accept the idea of a file-less design workflow. While in the past UI tools have been fighting a feature parity battle, each trying to become the one-stop shop for design, prototyping, and feedback, in 2019 the tools leapfrogging the competition are the ones offering accessible collaboration in real time.

"When Figma first launched at the end of 2016, the industry wasn't ready for a 'file-less' design process and we had a lot of detractors. We had to win people's trust and prove that a web-based design tool could be just as fast and powerful as a native application. We also had to show designers that their productivity wouldn't grind to a halt if other people and teams had open access to their design work." — explains Noah Levin, Design Director at Figma.

A tale of breaking down barriers

As companies aim to become more design-driven, browser-based tools open up doors for new levels of collaboration.

When designers are not the key holders anymore, we can invite

other people to participate in our process. Our value is no longer the fact we are the only ones able to make changes to the design file. Instead, we can focus on *why* these changes are needed in the first place.

Although initially many designers had reservations about allowing other people to watch and follow their work in real time, they are gradually realizing that the benefits of real-time collaboration greatly outweigh the downsides.
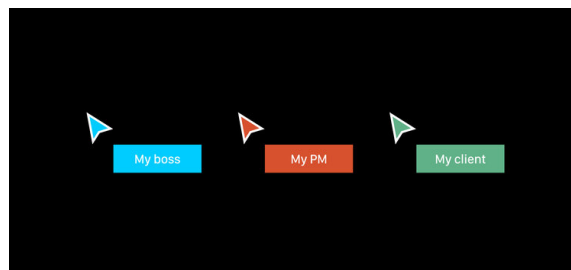

We love to leave comments on our product manager's Google Docs, so why wouldn't we let them into our space as well? Image: Felipe Minutti

Specialized tools won't cease to exist any time soon: as designers, we will continue to rely on Photoshop for image editing, After Effects to demonstrate more

refined animations, and Illustrator
to dive deeper into an illustration
style for our brand.

For product designers, whose
value is not just creating mockups,
2020 will be the year to focus on
tools that augment our
collaboration superpowers and
help us reach new parts of the
organization.
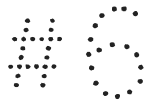
Rediscovering information architecture

As most of our civic, social, and commercial interactions move to the digital space, we need to find new ways to map and visualize the digital ecosystems we create and live within.

Moving fast has made a huge mess

As we move our lives to digital spaces comprised of information, from streaming services to food

delivery, companies are extending the reach of their business and increasing complexity for their users.

Jorge Arango, author of *Living in Information*, observes, "we now live in a world in which we form our opinions in places made of information. 2020 is a presidential election year in the U.S. We can expect lots of thinking (and speculating) about the role of social networks in politics."
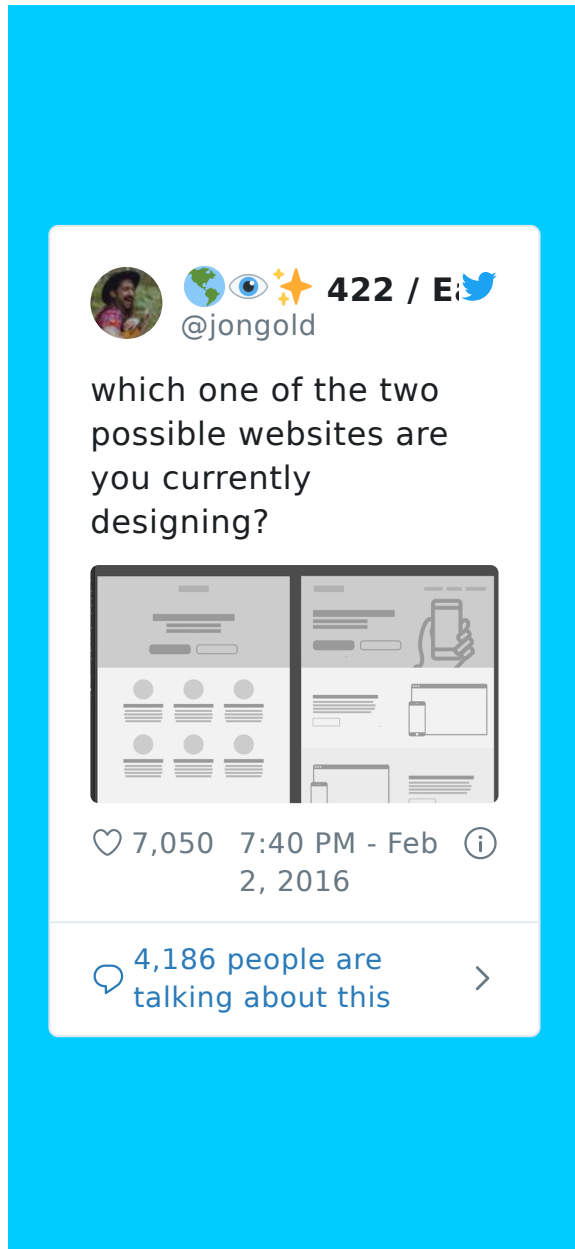
Understanding and designing for these information spaces is becoming more important than ever: "Designers must understand the structural aspects of these places and how business models inform these structures if we are to

respond meaningfully to the challenge of designing ethically."

"Information architecture is the way that we arrange the parts of something to make it understandable."
— Abby Covert, How to Make Sense of Any Mess

Information architecture is a foundational part of digital design, yet it has been less prominent in the design discourse in recent years. When the software market was heating up, the pressure to launch products quickly forced businesses to copy established structures from their competitors. The incentive to fix structural problems was low since it required

a lot of extra work; the reward was not clear and neither was the path to get there.

🌎👁✨ **422 / E** 🐦
@jongold

which one of the two possible websites are you currently designing?

♡ 7,050 7:40 PM - Feb 2, 2016 ⓘ

💬 4,186 people are talking about this ›

Furthermore, designers entering the field are trained to fill this need to move fast and conform to a rigid development process with their product teams, one which they reproduce over and over. For

Jorge Arango, the work of the designer often happens in a limited environment, focused on the user interface, missing the opportunity to impact the conceptual structures that underlie the experiences.

The architecture of everything

As we enter the year 2020, things start to change as information environments become the core of all digital institutions surrounding our lives. "Organizations are stewards of information environments, and information structures are a key strategic concern. Companies, governments, and non-profits must aim for these structures to be useful, usable, and coherent — not just for themselves and their stakeholders, but for society as a whole," explains Arango. "These

factors increase the strategic importance of design in general and information architecture in particular. IA is long overdue for rediscovery and resurgence."
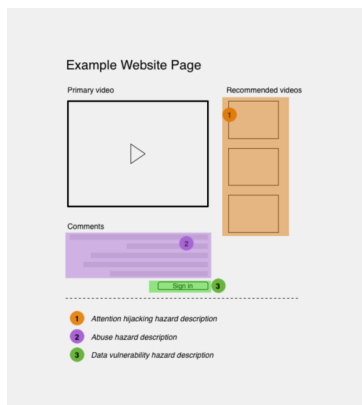
The hazard mapping by Erika Hall is an example of a way to visualize impact of the information displayed.

However, it's not only designers who need to understand information architecture. Since our lives are intertwined in multiple information systems, being able to visualize how these systems affect everything from our day-to-day lives to our larger political and economic structures is an important piece of knowledge for everyone to have. GDPR, the European regulation on the handling of personal data, and

CCPA, the Californian version of it, are good examples of this need for transparency. Not only are these regulations tackling how we can reclaim the ownership of our data, but they help people visualize and understand how their personal information is organized, handled, and connected within their digital ecosystems.

In 2020, we need to leverage our visualization skills to make sense of the bigger picture of a product's information environment — rather than solely focusing on its interface.

The Chobani Effect: branding from health and wellbeing startups are all starting to look like everyone's favorite yogurt. Images: Kyle Chayka
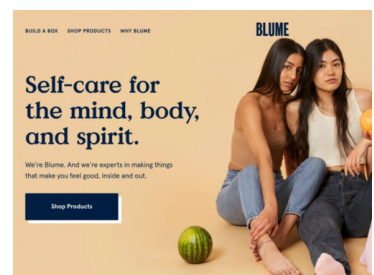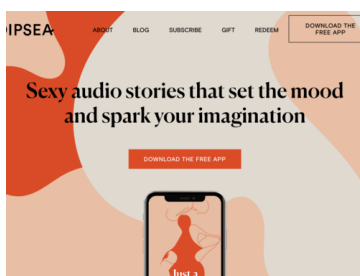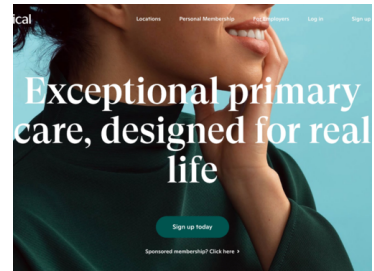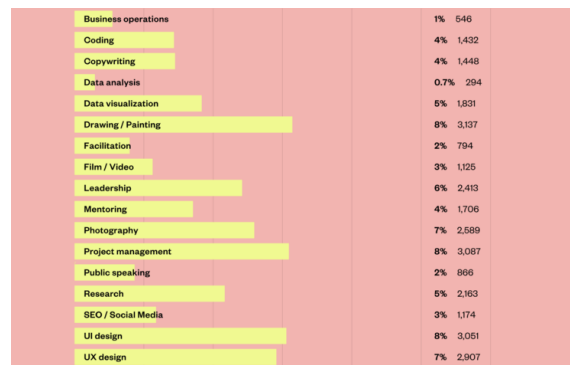
#7

Embracing new superpowers

It's time we stopped drawing lines around who is a designer and who is not. UX is a fast-growing discipline, and we need to enlist everyone's superpowers in order to deliver the

experiences people
really need.

The plurality of skills listed on the latest design census from AIGA hints at the future of the design industry, as building digital products becomes a more complex science. Every couple of months we see articles submitted to the UX Collective about new specializations — from "UX Writing" to "Video editing in UX". Every time this happens, we see the design community reacting in one of two ways:

- By becoming defensive: "You can't do video editing and call yourself a UX designer!"

- By feeling overwhelmed: "Wait, as a designer, do I also now need to learn how to edit videos?!"

Both come from a place of anxiety, something we all experience in our ever-evolving careers. Maybe because we think someone with a broader set of skills will steal our job, or because it's overwhelming to think about keeping up to date with every new specialization that comes up.

You can be a great designer with a wide skill set, but not everyone needs to share the exact same skill set to be a great designer.

Dividing is excluding

There is no new magic formula for the design process or universal standards as to what should be included in the job description of a designer. While creating the right nomenclatures can be important for recruiting purposes, we cannot let labels become territorial boundaries. The rush for coining new terms such as "UX Writing" in the last year can end up excluding professionals who have been thoughtfully working and studying that field for decades under a different title. We could be learning from them instead. Our industry should not be about dividing, but connecting.
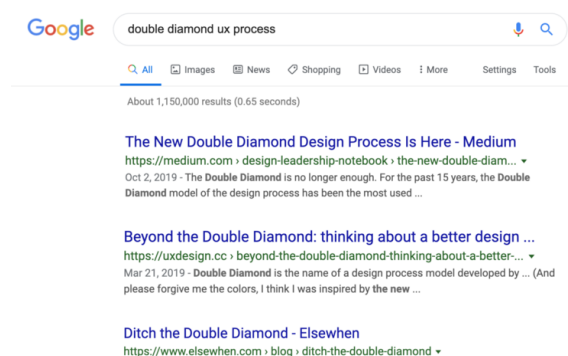
Writing about the double diamond? There's a lot of great content out there that you can credit and build from.

Expanding is including

Rachel McConnell, UX content strategist and author of *Why you need a content team*, knows a thing or two about pursuing a specialized career: "A lot of our career is spent 'finding our space.' This means you'll have to spend a lot of time doing things you don't necessarily feel comfortable with — but that's OK if you use that time to learn as much as you can from those around you. I've found the most collaborative teams to be those where I've learned from other disciplines. There's space for many different shapes of designers as we all bring different talents to experience design and each perspective enriches the final outcome."

In 2020, rather than dwelling on questions such as whether designers should code, we should be welcoming new and much-needed skills to our fast-growing field.
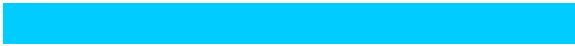
8

Invisible design systems

We see the term Design System everywhere: conferences, articles, tweets, courses, capabilities slides. While a design system is a powerful way to scale a product, our focus on its output (the pattern library itself), rather than outcome makes us miss the invisible value of its systematic approach.
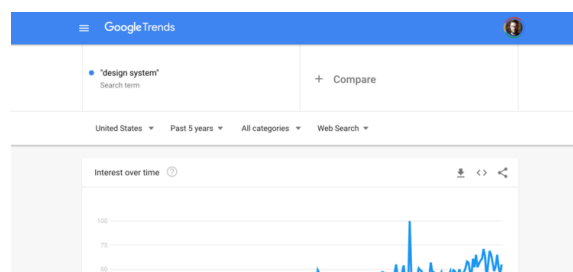
A quick search for "design systems" on Google Trends shows that interest in this topic has been on the rise over the past few years. On Medium, a handful of new articles are published with that tag every single week. The topic has become such a buzzword that even a Twitter account was created this year to mock designers' obsession with design systems.

The Design Sys 🐴
@horse_designsys

every discussion of design systems ultimately becomes a discussion about buttons

♡ 120   10:52 PM - Sep 14, 2019   ⓘ

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It's easy to appreciate design systems. From a user experience perspective, designing interfaces with common UX patterns creates familiarity for users, since they know what to expect from experience moments they regularly encounter in the product. From a technical perspective, reusable UI components can mean more efficiency, scalability, and less re-work for developers.

A design system is not (just) a UI library

The first image that comes to mind when one thinks about design systems is that of a component library: a repository of UI patterns such as buttons, dropdowns, and cards that designers and developers can easily copy and paste to speed up their work. But that's only the tip of the iceberg: a

design system has to take into consideration broader aspects of a company's operations, including tooling, governance, people, accessibility standards, technology stack, and workflow.

When these broader aspects are not considered, companies end up with design libraries that are abandoned within a few months — which is why designers need to start thinking about design systems as a living organism that connects the whole organization.

Design system, design governance, and design library are three different projects with three different approaches. One won't solve for all.

In an article where she coins the expression Invisible Design System, design systems advocate Jina Anne questions the necessity of having those public repositories as we evolve our practice: "As our design and engineering tools get closer and closer together, will we come to a point where we don't need the website? Can our tools surface suggestions for better accessibility, localization, performance, and usability, because our design system is baked into the tools?"

Luke Wroblews
@lukew

your design system is a distraction.

♡ 904   4:52 PM - Sep 17, 2019   ⓘ

212 people are

A design system is a reflection of a company's values

"Critically, a design system is about people: how they interact, how they understand one another, and how they work together to achieve a common goal. It's made by people, used by people, and experienced by people. It's challenged and shaped and broken by people. (...) Our role as a systems team turns from that of organizer and enforcer to that of anthropologist and researcher." — Daniel Eden, Where We Can Go.

Before revisiting which color to use

for calls-to-action, we first need to revisit the values our company holds.

The experiences enabled by a company reflect its values, both in terms of the specific service it provides, as well as its worldview. As designer Tatiana Mac explains in her talk *Building Socially Inclusive Design Systems*, without a clear intent and a clear awareness of our biases, the design systems we create perpetuate established patterns that exist in the world around us. If 83% of tech executives are white, and if the ratio between men and women is 4:1 in STEM, there is a high chance the design systems created by that group will exclude people who don't share the same race, gender, sexual orientation, philosophy, socioeconomic status, language, nationality, and ability as them.
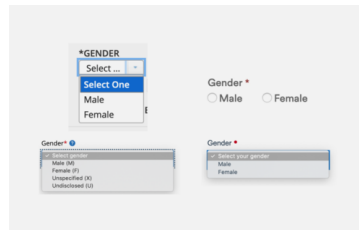
No wonder every gender dropdown starts with "Male" — and in many cases excludes non-binary people. (Source: image from the Building Socially Inclusive Design Systems presentation by Tatiana Mac)

In 2020, we should be spending less energy in creating new components for our design system, and focus our attention in understanding the systems behind the design.

Gif curation: one of the
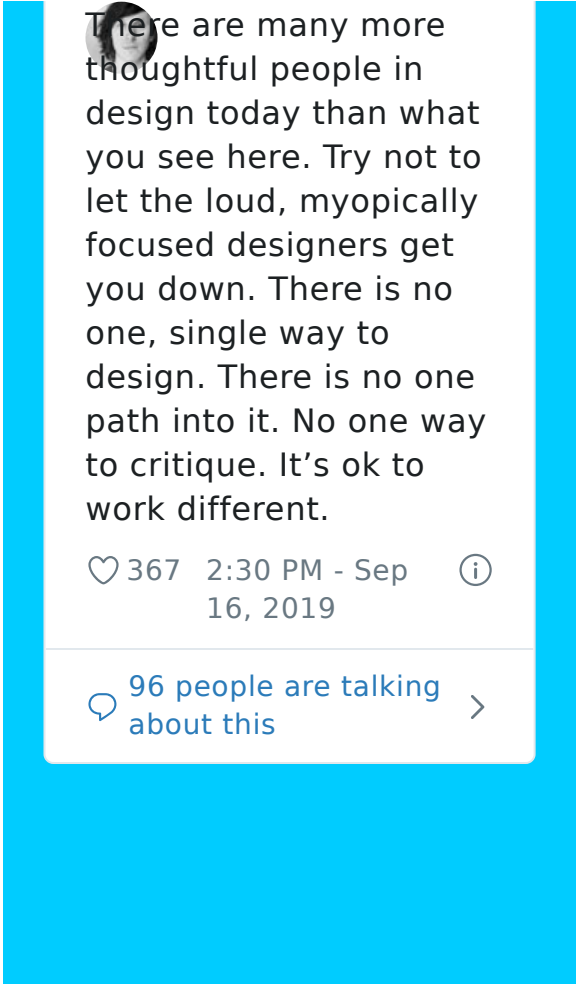top design skills in 2019.
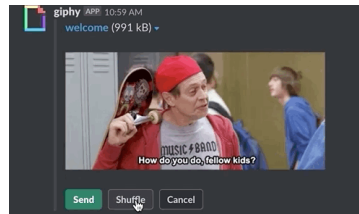
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Designers,
unite

The internet has become a place where people go to argue and shout rather than engage in fruitful discussions; the design community is no different. If, generally speaking, designers share the same goals, why can't we agree on anything these days?

Design communities are not immune to the tendency towards polarization that has taken over the world. Design Twitter has become a stream of miscommunication; the most popular blog posts we've seen this year have polemical titles. Polarization sells.

Tanner Christen
@tannerc

There are many more thoughtful people in design today than what you see here. Try not to let the loud, myopically focused designers get you down. There is no one, single way to design. There is no one path into it. No one way to critique. It's ok to work different.

♡ 367   2:30 PM - Sep 16, 2019   ⓘ

💬   96 people are talking about this   ›

We have a bigger challenge to solve

As designers who work for businesses, we all more or less share the same goals: to create products we can be proud of, ones which will improve people's lives and move the economy forward.

We might disagree on more tactical points, like when to use a hamburger menu or whether to use Sketch or Figma. But in the larger scheme of things, these discussions drain us of the energy we could be using to do more impactful work.

Fighting over the "right way to design" won't make us stronger as a discipline. Why do designers pick trivial battles on Twitter, instead of fighting against the broader, systemic forces who actually do have a negative impact in the world?

Instead of engaging in petty disputes, why don't they lend support to those who do have something relevant to say?

If we don't end this cycle, no one else will

We reached out to Vivianne Castillo, UX researcher and advocate for more humanity in tech, to get her opinion on the types of discussions we see in online design communities:

"Are these debates keeping our community in a constant state of prolonged adolescence that stunt our maturity or are they deepening the wealth of knowledge and expertise in our field?

With 2020 on the horizon, there comes a time when our community needs to ask ourselves difficult questions for the sake of challenging the orthodoxies around the perceived need for these endless and cyclical debates. Why would we want young designers to take part in these debates and how does that lead them towards maturity in their craft?

We can't move on from these repetitive disagreements and debates until we understand how we got here and why we've stayed here for far too long. Contrary to 'move fast and break things' this is about slowing down and mending ourselves, our industry, and our understanding of what it means to contribute value to the rest of the professional design community."

Offset charity won't save our souls

Yep, design has ruined lots of things. We work for companies, and companies need to make money to reward their investors. In their drive for profits, companies often make decisions which cause social and economic problems in society.

To compensate for the harm perpetrated by the companies we work for, we designers get involved in offset charity initiatives, hoping it will make us feel better about ourselves. What if we were also able to make an impact at our own companies? What if we were able to influence, or even reverse, some of the harmful decisions made by our higher-ups?

Escaping big tech alone won't change the game

In 2019 we have seen designers leave big tech companies because they fundamentally disagreed with decisions made by company leadership. When Google bid for Project Maven, a contract with the US Government to incorporate AI into drones (which could be used for military purposes), many designers walked off the job in protest.

While announcing one's departure from a tech company is a powerful way to raise awareness and hold organizations more accountable, these actions alone won't change the game — and many of us are not in a position to make this move. Is there a way we can stay in our current companies and provoke change from the inside?

Walkouts, unions, and grassroots campaigns are some of the ways tech workers are provoking change. Photo: Eric Risberg/AP

It's time we roll up our sleeves

2020 is the year to put petty disagreements aside and start taking action — whether that means meeting up with other designers outside of work to discuss the implications of our practice, or making the move to more formally unionize as a profession. In fact, the tech industry hasn't yet seen its workforce unionize, as other workplaces like the automobile industry and the public school system have traditionally done. When executives at Kickstarter learned that its staff was attempting to unionize, employees were fired and the CEO made a public statement announcing that

the company did not support the initiative.

Which is a good sign it might be time for all of us to organize.

THE YEAR OF PRAGMATIC OPTIMISM

As designers, we know that the key to solving any problem is optimism. If we didn't believe we could fix things, we wouldn't have become designers in the first place.

"Design is optimistic. It brings new things into the world. Designers take on problems, model them, frame them, and create responses through the distribution of

material, real or
virtual, in space."
— Ann M
Pendleton-Jullian,
John Seely Brown,
Design Unbound

Optimism is the only path forward.
Not that naive optimism that leads
people to claim "I'm a designer
because I want to improve
people's lives" or to avoid calling
out what's wrong just for the sake
of being "nice." But an optimism
that is pragmatic, focused on
tangible action, and which
understands how to turn frustration
into motivation to create better
things in the world.

2019 Highlights
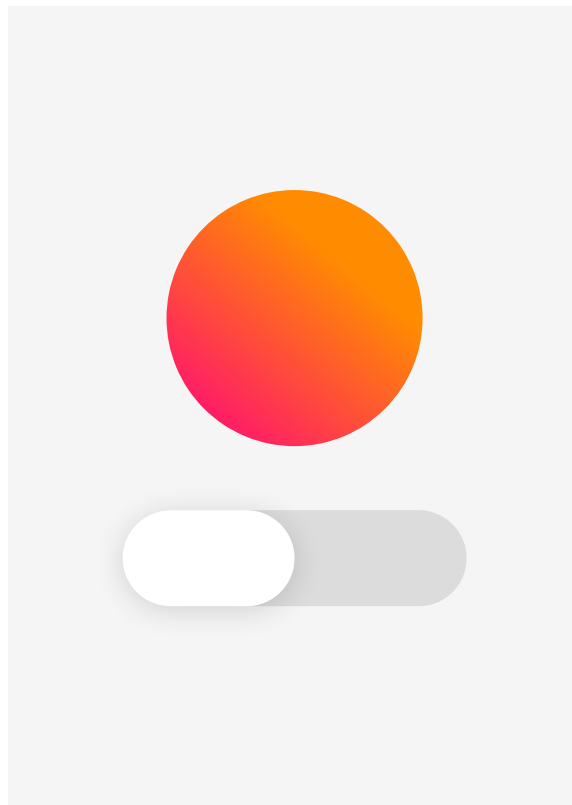
Buzzword of the year: Dark mode

For being every designer's top concern in a year where not much is happening anyway, right? (Source code)

Book of the year: Ruined by design

For pushing the ethics discussion to the design community attention in 2019. Now that the topic has your attention, you should also check out:

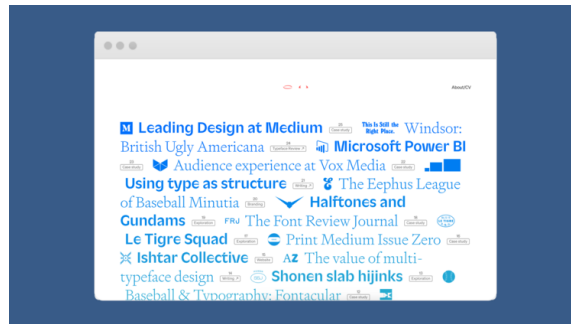Future Ethics

Technically wrong

Programmed inequality

So you want to talk about race

Game design of the year: Ape Out

For creating a masterpiece that

mixes brilliant music with unexpected visuals.

Portfolio of the year: Bethany Heck
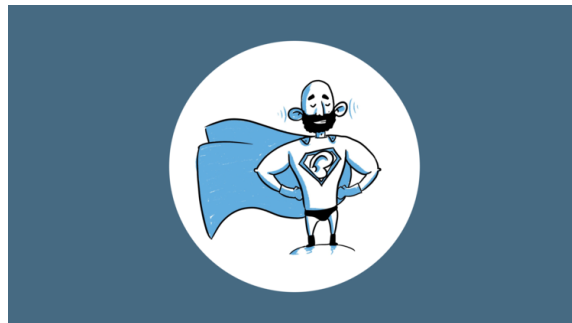
For the great reminder that portfolios don't need to look the same.

Blog of the year: rooki.design

For the fresh, high-quality content for upcoming designers in a beautiful package.
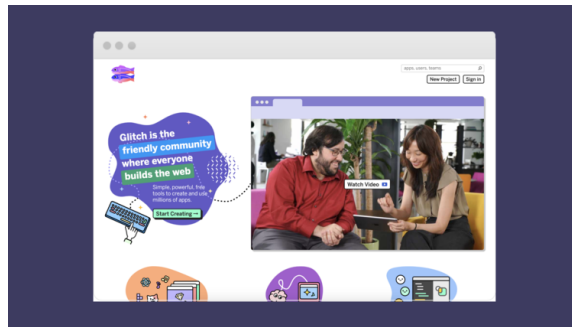
Product of the year: Glitch

For creating a friendly and collaborative community for developers and creators.

Author of the year: José Torre

For all his writing, smart thinking, and beautiful illustrations that inspire and provoke our design community.

Tweet of the year:

Positivity doesn't mean that you regurgitate the Koolaid. That's called delusional. Positivity is to identify and look at problems squarely in the eye and know that there's always a way to overcome them, no matter how difficult. Positivity is creative problem solving.

— Ha Phan

Talk of the year: Building Socially Inclusive Design Systems, Tatiana Mac

A must-watch before starting any project related to design systems. Or any project at all.

Project of the year: The Guardian's new vocabulary for climate change

For reminding us of the

importance of words in shaping a better future.

Tool of the year: Figma
For setting a new paradigm for collaboration, expanding the boundaries of design within an organization.

Articles of the year:
The league of evil designers by Linnéa Strid
Respect is the one value by Cyd Harrell
Design tools are holding us back by Tom Johnson

Image credits:

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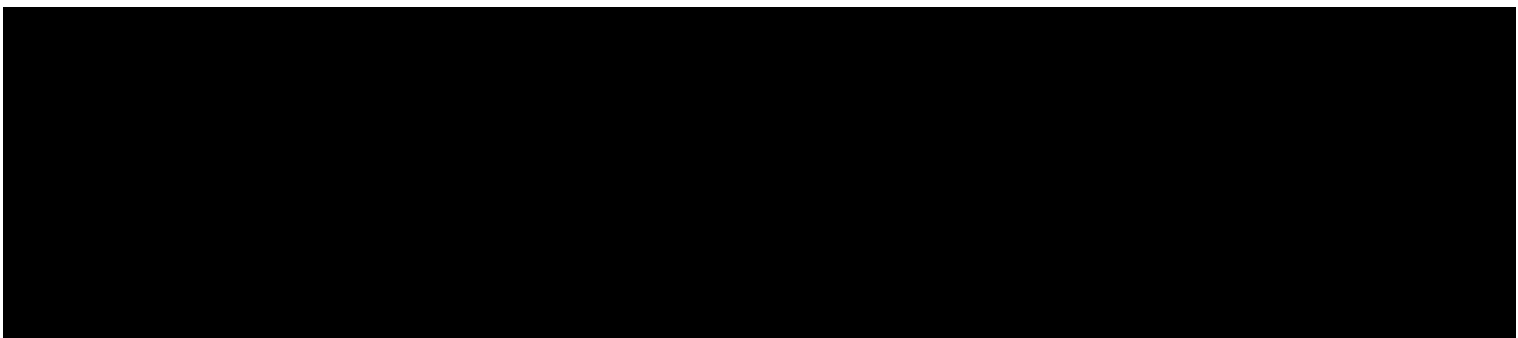
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We believe designers are thinkers as much as
they are makers.
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always wanted to receive.

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