

The Fresh Canvas: Helping Founders Understand the Power of Design-Led Thinking

SECTION 1 TITLE

The Fresh Canvas: Helping Founders Understand the Power of Design-Led Thinking

SLIDE 1: TITLE, NAME, DATE

SPEAKING NOTES

- Designing for a startup is exciting, and challenging, and sometimes frustrating.
- You're free from clumsy legacy systems, shoulder to shoulder with visionaries, and chartered with creating something fresh and mind-blowing that's going to make people's lives better. You come on board expecting to eat, sleep, and breathe innovation.
- And then reality happens.
- The volume of work that needs to be done is massive, the deadlines are brutal, and the creative freedom you expected may not be everything it was cracked up to be. This is true whether you're working with a global team or a domestic company.
- So let's all just go home, right? Why even try?
- You can get around these hurdles.
- As a designer in a startup, you have great opportunities if you can do three things:

- Understand how your founders think
 - Deepen your business know-how, and
 - Become a champion of design-led thinking across your organization.
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- Everyone in this room is capable of achieving these things.
 - You all work for startups, so I know you're not scared of challenges—and the fact that you're sitting in this audience tells me you already have the motivation to build excellence in your designs *and* in your organization.
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SECTION 2 TITLE

IS CODE KING?

SLIDE 2

Misconception #1

The code and the business model are the whole story

SPEAKING NOTES

- Is code king? The short answer is NO.
- A good UX can create value, and founders know that.
- At least they think they know it—but not everyone can recognize quality design when they see it, or get over the misconceptions that are common to people outside the design world.

- Founders who don't have a true understanding of how design can impact their results may be stuck in an outdated and LIMITED way of thinking about design.
 - One or more of a startup's founders are usually engineers, so it's natural that they'd perceive the code as the source of the business's value,
 - And another founder is usually the business expert, who believes the business model will drive success.
 - Since there aren't many founders who are UX designers, it's not surprising when design work is perceived as less important than the code or the business modeling.
 - But **we know** (*including audience*) that code alone or a business model alone isn't enough to bring a product to market, and *definitely* not enough to make a customer love a product so much they would, for instance, tattoo its logo on their bodies... (GO TO NEXT SLIDE)
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SLIDE 3

http://www.nivas.hr/blog/wp-content/photos/06_adobe_for_life.jpg

SPEAKING NOTES

- And this is the kind of love we want to inspire.
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SLIDE 4

Misconception #2

Shortening Time-to-Launch is more important than researching user expectations

SPEAKING NOTES

- Every startup is trying to beat its competitors to market, roll out minimum viable product in time for a certain conference, or meet some other deadline.
 - That leads to shortcuts all over the organization, but it's just normal life in a startup.
 - Thinkers as different as Confucius and Shakespeare have said that "Perfect is the enemy of good," and that's especially true for designers working in startups.
 - Perfect is a driver that motivates you, and settling for anything less is a downer.
 - The trick is to weigh what you can get done now in a *good* way against what you can get done in the future in a *perfect* way.
 - This means your founders have to have bought into the iterative design model.
 - And this may not be a big hurdle—technical founders are accustomed to iterative production because software development operates the same way, but you still need to set the right expectations about what you can produce within your deadlines.
 - This also means you have to be really creative in finding ways to test your designs on the fly. Otherwise, you may end up having to start over later, and that's going to take time and money, two things that startups don't have in excess.
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SLIDE 5

Misconception #3

Good design is a nice-to-have that can be added later

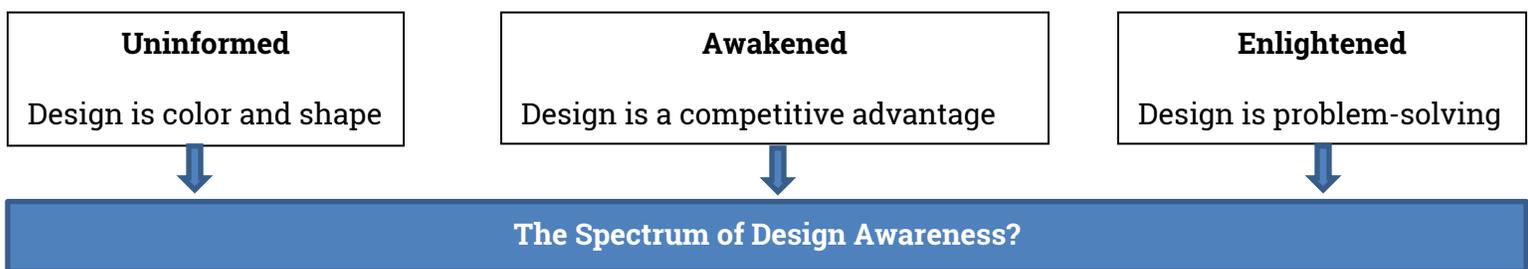
SPEAKING NOTES

- This is a misconception that goes hand-in-hand with a lack of understanding of the value of design.
- It's pretty much limited to people who think UX is color and shape, and who aren't thinking of the user in the U and the experience in the X of UX.
- At the same time, *better design is* something that can and should be added later.
- So the challenge is to have a guiding principle to use as your North Star in the design process
- If you have that, your iterations will leapfrog the product forward without a lot of detours.
- But you have to be sure you have strong founder buy-in on that North Star, so you can refer back to it when you need to defend a decision.

SECTION 3 TITLE

WHAT FOUNDERS THINK

SLIDE 6

What Founders Think

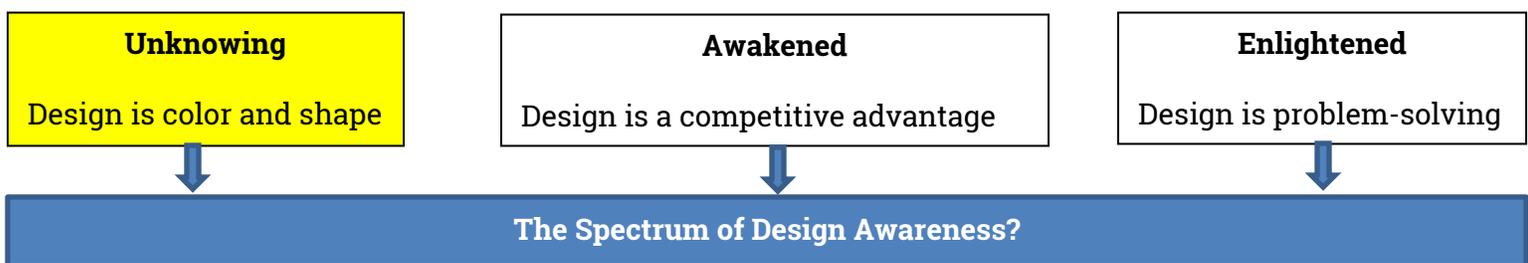
SPEAKING NOTES

- There's an evolution to how founders value design.
 - Most founders who are new to product development fall on the lower end of this spectrum.
 - Don't scorn them—they're learning.
 - And you're teaching.
 - You can use your communication skills to move your founders along the spectrum, no matter where they're starting from.
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SLIDE 7

Field Guide to Founders

THE UNKNOWING FOUNDER



- Doesn't connect design and value
- Solving a business problem, not a people problem
- Trouble distinguishing between personal taste and effective design

SPEAKING NOTES

- So, take a look at the founder who lacks a sophisticated understanding of the value design delivers.
- This founder isn't resistant to good design; he, or she, just hasn't yet made the connection between the user experience and his product's success.
- Technical founders focus on producing good code, and they can lose sight of the user experience in their pursuit of fixing bugs and adding features
- Those things are important, but **we know** they're not everything.

- Along the same lines, founders tasked with building the business are focused on attracting investors and establishing relationships—if they have an opinion about the design, it's likely to be based on their personal taste rather than on what will delight users.
 - With these types of founders, the product focus is on solving a business problem, like building a better procurement solution or helping people rent out spare space, and of course the product does have to fulfill its purpose...
 - But markets are simply collections of people, and if people don't adopt a product, that product isn't going to be a success. A feature may be great, but if it's hard to use or hard to find, it isn't creating the best value.
 - Your job is to help founders understand that.
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SLIDE 8

Field Guide to Founders

THE AWAKENED FOUNDER



- Connects design and value but doesn't know how to translate to product
- Needs help defining specific goals that design can help achieve
- Needs help designing ways to test if result is achieved

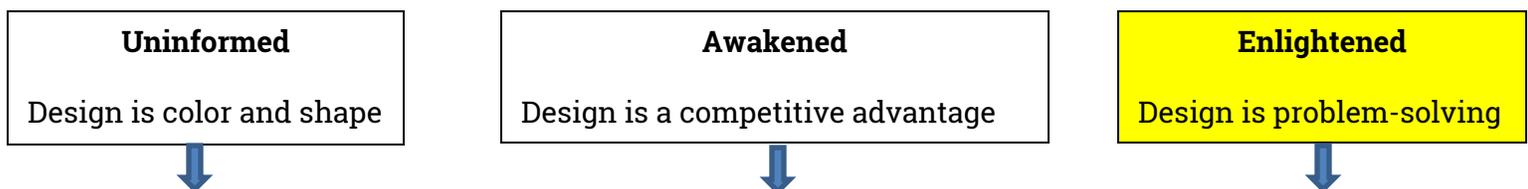
SPEAKING NOTES

- The awakened founder knows that design is important because she's read that it's true—but she doesn't know what to do about it.
 - That's how you get founders who say, "Make it look like Slack," even though the product is nothing like Slack.
 - These founders are ready to advance along the spectrum, and the way to keep them moving forward is to demonstrate that your designs are helping the business achieve strategic goals.
 - That means you have to design good tests at the same time you're designing the UX.
 - Your instinct may be infallible, but you have to prove that to others by showing evidence that supports the direction you've chosen to go, from the beginning of a project along every stage of its progress.
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SLIDE 9

Field Guide to Founders

The Enlightened Founder



The Spectrum of Design Awareness?

- Understands good design is part of the product's DNA
- May need help understanding that good design should be part of the entire company's DNA

SPEAKING NOTES

- If your startup's founders are enlightened, you may think you can sit back and focus on producing exceptional design.
- And you can—but where would the challenge be in that? You'd get bored.
- Instead, you have the opportunity to find new and bigger challenges. You can focus on more than product development—you can focus on finding ways to improve operations throughout the entire organization.
- And the paths to creating a design-led culture aren't limited to startups with enlightened founders—any designer who chooses to lead an effort like this can apply the same steps...
- Although in less evolved companies, the steps will take longer and require more proof along the way.
- But they are doable.

SECTION 4 TITLE

DESIGNER / INFLUENCER / LEADER

SLIDE 10

Designer/Influencer/Leader

- **Problems**
A natural need to solve problems
- **Processes**
The backbone to push for appropriate processes
- **People**
A willingness to connect with people throughout the organization

SPEAKING NOTES

- I've seen many designers who were hired to be a company's sole design resource end up leading a whole department, and they all had these things in common:
 - A natural need to solve problems
 - The backbone to push for appropriate processes, and
 - A willingness to connect with people throughout the organization.
- Maybe you've heard the expression, "if you only have a hammer, every problem looks like a nail." If you're a designer, every problem is a design problem.
- But to become a leader with organization-wide influence takes more than a design eye—it takes a knowledge of business principles and vocabulary.
- You need to be able to talk to decision-makers in their own language about things that matter to them, so it's worth investing your time in reading the

books your founders are reading, like *The Lean Startup*, and listening to the podcasts your founders are listening to, like *Startup School*.

- Along the same lines, you need the ability to both CREATE good processes AND get them accepted, even if you meet resistance.
- This takes a dual passion—passion for the work you're doing and passion for defining and creating a design culture in the company you're working for. If you only care about one or the other, you'll peter out. So part of your job is to keep your own excitement alive as well.
- A good way to do this is to teach others about the design process, and engage them in your work so you have allies who are invested in your ideas.
- Find friends in the org chart. For instance, at Adobe, we have an advocate on the government team who has a broad skillset and a lot of influence within the company.
- We recognized that he would be a great proponent for design, so we leverage him all the time to give us input on product fit, technical feasibility, and how to prepare for difficult meetings.
- When you find someone like this, cultivate the relationship by inviting them to design reviews, asking them for advice, or just taking them to lunch.
- People want to get excited about design, so give them the chance to care about what you do.
- Often, designers sit at their desks, quietly designing, unaware of the opportunities around them.
- But opportunities rarely come knocking—it's up to you to go find them.
- Root them out by building relationships throughout the organization to find problems you can solve. Ask people in Accounts Payable or IT what sticking

points they experience in a typical day, and take a shot at solving their problems.

- Look for non-design people who light up when you show them your designs. These are potential advocates.
- Invite them into your design process to get their opinions, and sift through what they actually say to find out what they really mean.
- “I don’t like the color” is a criticism that’s easy to brush off, thinking it’s just somebody’s personal taste, but maybe they mean the color overwhelms the text. Dig deep and keep an open mind. Above all, ask questions.
- The more you involve other people, the more they will care about what you do.

SECTION 5 TITLE

THE \$50 MILLION DOLLAR BUTTON

SLIDE 11

The \$50M Dollar Button

- Blend of design and business
- Cross-functional team
- The customer perspective

SPEAKING NOTES

- I want to give you an example of what that looks like in real life.
 - We wanted to upsell users of our free product to our paid product.
 - This wasn't only a design project, and it wasn't only a business project; it was a blend of both.
 - At Adobe, we really like cross-functional teams. A good designer or a bunch of good designers working with cross-functional teams with expertise in different areas can solve business problems in ways no one can predict.
 - And there's another benefit to using cross-functional teams—inviting other experts into the design process creates an opportunity to evangelize the value that design-led thinking delivers in an organization.
 - We worked on this project with a team that included product managers, marketers, engineers, and, of course, designers.
 - Our North Star was the customer perspective.
 - Considering a business problem from the customer perspective reveals opportunities and weaknesses that can surprise us.
 - Some of the things we find will be little—make that button red—and others can be massive—overhaul that product line.
 - Either way, projects don't sit in the planning stage for months or go through repeated design iterations as feedback is incorporated in drips and drabs.
 - The customers' view is represented from the start, because designers are trained to always consider their audiences.
 - And that's how design-led thinking breaks the paradigm of running businesses through spreadsheets and creates the paradigm of running businesses from the customers' perspective.
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SECTION TITLE 6

MINIMUM VIABLE DESIGN PROCESS

SLIDE 12

MVDP

- Low-bandwidth
- Fast
- Flexible

SPEAKING NOTES

- But you're in a startup—you're asking yourself how you're going to make all this happen, since you're probably either a solo designer or a member of a small team.
- Plus, in a startup, everyone else has a full plate, too—it's not easy to get people to participate in your cross-functional team. You have to prepare to optimize their time.

- To prioritize work, you need to know what's important to users.
- We like to use low-bandwidth ways to quickly capture user feedback.
- For instance, we might put a sketch in front of internal users or throw together a quick prototype that is pushed to users through a testing service.
- We also have core users of our products right inside Adobe who are willing to give us feedback.
- Before we test a nuanced interaction on customers, we do quick prototypes and send them around to internal design teams.
- We look at everything from the terminology we're using to which functions get the best uptake.
- After internal users give feedback, the changes are released to customers and then we seek *their* feedback.
- We have a lot of conversations with product managers because they're constantly in the field talking to customers, so they know the difficulties users face.
- If your startup doesn't yet have product managers, try whoever does your business development.
- We combine that input with known problems we're trying to solve, make improvements, and then interview the same product managers, plus actual users, to get a fresh round of feedback.
- This is faster and just as accurate or more accurate than the old lab user studies and use case scenarios.

- The result is a better understanding of how our work product is performing that was gained faster than if a traditional method was used.
 - And this approach doesn't have to take a lot of people. If you're in a company of seven people, start there. Or make some friends here today and be each other's user groups.
 - Remember—we're not aiming for perfection, we just want something that will work today.
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SECTION 7 TITLE

YOUR NORTH STAR

SLIDE 13

YOUR NORTH STAR

- Software-centric: Workflows and use cases are software-centric
- User-centric: Narratives

SPEAKING NOTES

- So you've found a problem and solved it with a cross-functional team that was guided by the user as its North Star.
 - Now you have to bring your results to life for your founders.
 - The traditional approaches are workflows and use cases.
 - These describe the user through the wrong end of the telescope, putting the logic of a software program before the humans it's meant to serve.
 - A better approach is to show the solution in use by a representative customer.
 - Tell the story of how the user interacts with the product and how it fits into his life.
 - You can provide supporting information on the business benefits your solution provides, like saving money or speeding time-to-market, but focus on the user first.
 - Here's an example: *(go to next slide)*
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SLIDE 14

Meet Miriam (pic from Day in the Life)

SPEAKING NOTES

- When Adobe shifted its corporate strategy, my design team had to communicate a totally new idea.

- We wanted to show the value of making documents available to users, anywhere on any device, without making them download or upload or worry about versions.
- On top of all that, the user experience had to be seamless across devices, so users wouldn't be distracted by differences between the desktop, tablet, or mobile experience.
- Try expressing *that* in a workflow.
- We tried to just explain the idea, but we had a tough time. The concept was confusing to explain out loud, and the emotional impact of the experience couldn't be expressed with charts and numbers.
- Even the other teams involved, engineering and product management, were left with questions that weren't addressed well by the usual techniques.
- So what does a UX designer do when faced with a challenge like this? We think about the audience.
- In this case, our audience was the business leaders in our company.
- We needed to infuse our presentation with emotion, to deliver delight so they could see how this new idea would impact on the user.
- We needed to humanize our idea
- People connect with people. Nobody looks at a rectangle and feels anything, but the image of a human face incites all sorts of feelings.
- We decided to try a narrative, a simple story featuring one busy woman interacting with the product as she moved from her home to her office and into her evening.
- Our representative user, Miriam, would bring the new user experience to life for decision-makers.
- Here's what that looked like: *(go to next slide)*

SLIDE 15

(2-3 SCREENSHOTS OF THE DAY IN THE LIFE NARRATIVE)

SPEAKING NOTES

- This is different from a use case because a use case describes a user performing a task with a software tool.
- This narrative showed a user living her life and how the technology blended into her activities.
- With Miriam as a model, the features and functions were no longer abstract workflows.
- The leaders immediately understood the concept because they could relate to it.
- Using a narrative makes sense even beyond that, though—think about how much sense your product will make to investors and analysts when you're looking for funding and coverage.

SECTION 8 TITLE

EXTENDING YOUR INFLUENCE

SLIDE 16

Now is the Time for Design (*and designers*) to Shine

- Design is more important than ever
- Designers are more influential than ever
- Your opportunity is now—lead with confidence

SPEAKING NOTES

- Design should be a vehicle to articulate and visualize new business strategies, and it's up to you to communicate that usefulness to your founders.
- Find champions among the founding team to support design-led thinking in the organization, and once you've done that, you've also made a place for yourself as a leader.
- That's good for your career, but it's also good for your users and it's good for your company.
- So don't hesitate to speak up in meetings with leaders—you have knowledge they need.
- Don't hesitate to find and solve problems throughout your organization—you will strengthen the company for everyone.
- And always be confident about the value of your work. You are the user's voice inside the company, and your ideas and your talent are what will take your product from good to great.