



THE FUTURE OF DESIGN THINKING

BY FRESH CONSULTING

freshconsulting.com

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Today's Need for Design Thinking

The complexities of the modern world continue to push today's businesses to find creative solutions to their most significant challenges. Thriving, let alone surviving, is more difficult than ever in a global, ever flattening competitive marketplace where every industry has become saturated with the latest efficiencies and tools of the trade.

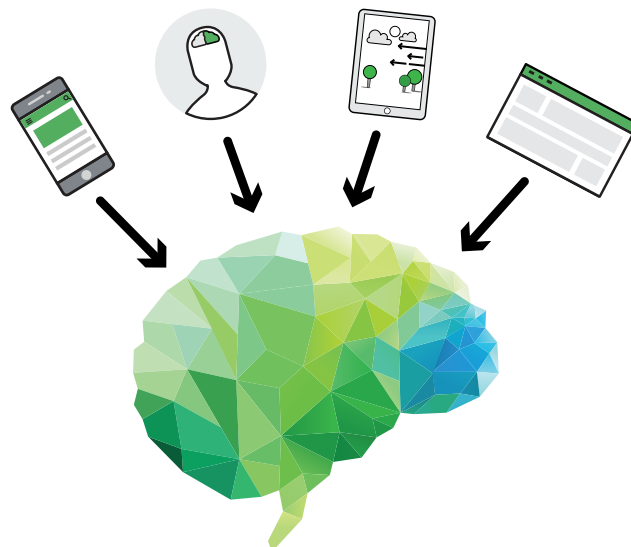
Lacking vision and imagination, more traditional organizations have begun to suffer from obsolescence. With the rapid pace of change, big companies can die quickly when they lack a culture of innovation. A new mode of thinking, feeling, and operating has been rapidly emerging: one that focuses on experiences where design plays a central role.

Design thinking is a holistic process that is unmatched in its ability to explore visual solutions to complex problems. At its heart is the quest for new incremental or breakthrough innovations. The innovations of today aren't as easily uncovered by merely analyzing data and crunching the numbers.

Instead, design thinking shifts problem-solving to be undertaken with a holistic design eye, an analytical mind, and an empathetic human touch – ingredients that juxtapose humans and business. Even though a chief designer has not always had a seat in the C-suite or the boardroom, innovation itself is often the combination of design and numerical justification.

That's probably why Roger L. Martin, former Dean of the Rotman School of Management, labeled the future of innovation – historically something 1) new that has 2) value – as "design thinking" when he said, "The most successful businesses in the years to come will balance analytical mastery with intuitive originality in a dynamic interplay that I call design thinking."

Design itself speaks words for you and is synergistic and scalable with almost any function, industry, or vertical. Putting the lens of design on any problem allows its practitioners to look past the status quo of knowledge work and gain new insights for the most nebulous or rigid of problems.



The Rise of Design Thinking

Design thinking is present across an array of industries, and organizations continue to adopt it looking to equip their teams with a mindset that is prepared for the future. Professionals in tech, healthcare, finance, education, retail, and other

industries have implemented the design thinking process to dive deeper into their respective challenges. As more businesses find success through design thinking, the more prevalent the process has become.

Design Thinking Stats

1. Researchers at the Hasso Plattner Institute studied the impact of design thinking on for-profit and nonprofit organizations. From ~300 responses, they found sustainable improvements were made to both company processes and customer experiences.
2. The Design Value Index Study from 2015 showed that Nike, Starbucks, Target, and 13 other design-driven businesses had 10-year returns that outperformed their peers on the S&P 500 by 211 percent.
3. In a survey called "Creative Difference" done by design firm Ideo, 100 companies were assessed in an attempt to quantify innovation. It found when teams iterate on five or more different solutions their product launch is 50 percent more likely to succeed. When those surveyed answered that they felt they were able to challenge the status quo, the chances of a failed launch decreased by 16.67 percent.
4. Some 1,600 results of book titles that include "design thinking" now appear on Amazon, most of which were published within the past decade.
5. In a Google Scholar search, "design thinking" appears in 17,300 scholarly articles published since 2013.

What is Design Thinking?

Design thinking is a multi-stage process that applies a designer's mindset to organizational and global complexities, in traditionally designed areas, and non-traditional functional areas (e.g., not only product design, but also business strategy, finance, medicine, agriculture, city planning, etc.).

We can identify four key components of design thinking:



1. Establish Empathy for Your Users

Design thinking is a real user-centered process. You are addressing the needs of real users by seeing the world through their eyes.



2. Engage in Holistic Analysis of the Problem

Tackling vague, unknown problems can seem insurmountable when relying on linear processes and singular perspectives.



3. Create Iterative Visualization of Ideas

Along the design thinking journey, the creation of visual design artifacts assists in easing concepts and project pieces into reality.



4. Conduct Cycles of Testing and Exploration

Testing is an iterative process that can take place at any stage of design thinking, and it exposes hidden usability issues.



Step 1: Establish Empathy for Your Users

Design thinking is a real user-centered process. You are addressing the needs of real users by seeing the world through their eyes. You are discovering how the user thinks and feels, and evaluating that qualitatively and quantitatively.

Through empathy and the use of a shared emotional language, you can humanize and simplify the creative solutions that you produce and iterate upon. In this stage, you observe, engage, and make tangible the problems that were once intangible to stakeholders.

Understanding

Comprehending the users' and stakeholders' needs and motivations is a crucial initial step. Elements of the understanding phase include:



1. Understand business objectives to define problems



2. Listen to stakeholders to ensure clarity and accuracy



3. Define functional and technical requirements to establish limitations

User Research

Who is the user? What makes them tick? What do they want? Through various methodologies, user research can glean the answers to these questions. Research methods include:



1. Use personas to create empathy



2. Observe users in context via ethnographic research



3. Identify painpoints in the user flow with observation



4. Outline goals with user stories and maps



Step 2: Engage in Holistic Analysis of the Problem

Trying to tackle vague and even unknown problems can seem insurmountable when relying on linear processes and singular perspectives. Design thinking implements a nonlinear process: different design stages can occur in parallel or iteratively.

Problems are analyzed from multiple perspectives as data and heuristics continually inform the design team's decision making. The holistic analysis provides a 360-degree evaluation that cultivates prolific ideation and sound solutions.

Analytics and Discovery

The goal in utilizing analytics and discovery is to gauge the effectiveness of a design and ultimately create intuitive experiences:



1. Provide designers with data through metrics and analysis



2. Gain an overview of the field with competitive analysis



3. Deliver creative solutions with ideation and strategy



4. Establish benchmarks to evaluate the product quantitatively and qualitatively

Interested in learning more? Check out our white paper on [Methods of UX Analysis](#), where we dive deeper into 8 methods we use at Fresh.



Step 3: Create Iterative Visualization of Ideas

Along the design thinking journey, the creation of design artifacts assists in easing concepts and project pieces into reality. Ranging from lightweight sketches to interactive prototypes, these visual aids streamline the design process each step of the way.

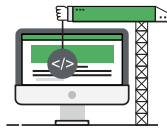
The act of creating and experimenting with these imperfect models fuels creative thinking and exposes potential flaws that might have gone unnoticed until much further into the design process.

Wireframes

Using wireframes allows designers to build the skeleton of an interface. Wireframes loosely establish the structure of the final product, while adhering to usability principles. Higher-fidelity models are built upon them.



1. Provide visual options with concept sketching



2. Organize label, and structure content with information architecture



3. Use system/ process flows to map the user journey



4. Create taps, clicks, and swipes with interaction design

Mockups & Prototypes

Whereas wireframes establish structure, mockups and prototypes bring the interface to life with color, content, interaction, and motion. These are higher-fidelity models that give a sense of the finished product.



1. Use brand identity integration to establish consistent personality



2. Establish user flows with interactive prototypes



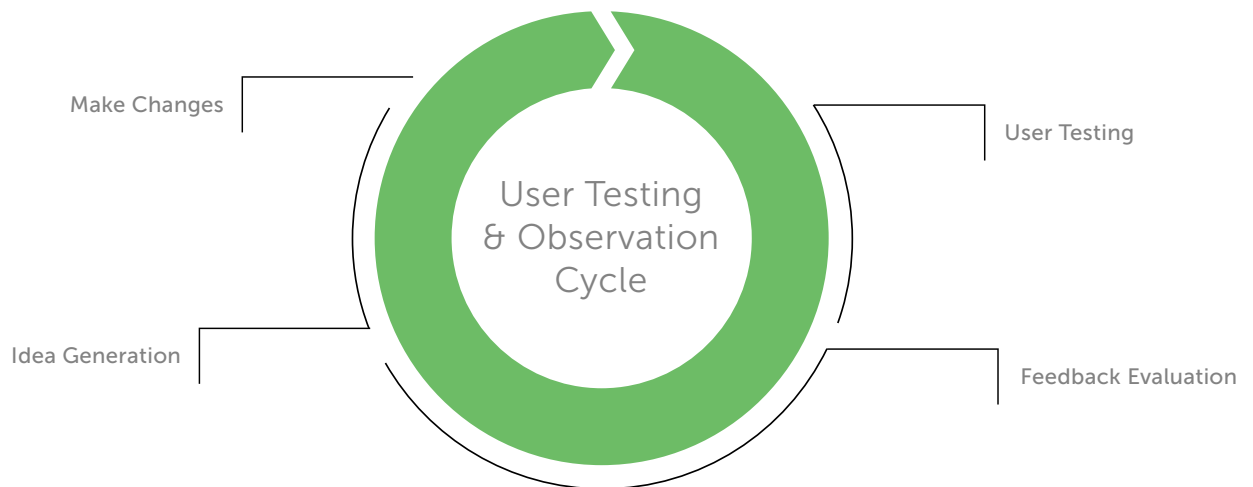
Step 4: Conduct Cycles of Testing & Exploration

User testing is an iterative process that can take place at any stage of design thinking. Hidden usability issues come to the fore when tools such as user surveys, interviews, observation, and more are implemented.

Watching users interact with interfaces and listening to their feedback saves time and money, preventing errors that might linger into the later stages. Testing ultimately creates polished and intuitive products that function how they were intended to.

User Testing & Observation

Design thinking is a process that is comfortable with failure. Multiple iterations are expected, and with each one, the product improves.



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Case Studies in Design Thinking

When organizations make a conscious and overt effort to incorporate design thinking into their work their ability to innovate soars. Valuable learnings and creative solutions emerge

organically from this user-centered process, resulting in greater financial rewards and user loyalty. For those who need more analytical justification to invest in the creative capabilities of your team, consider the following case studies.



Transforming a Massive Corporation

In 2000, Procter & Gamble (P&G) hired A.G. Lafley as CEO to revamp its entire organization. Lafley believed design thinking held the answer to the company's downward turn. Focusing on the three core elements of empathy, prototyping, and strategy, Lafley and his team applied design thinking beyond just P&G's products. The company saw profit growth of 15 percent per year and doubled its market value to nearly \$200 billion.



Rebuilding a Website, Thoughtfully

Wacom, a creator of design tools, undertook the refresh of their website with a design thinking mindset. They identified two distinct customer groups: professionals and novices. The design team built out an elegant site that was not only aesthetically pleasing but created a crystal clear delineation between their products. Wacom was able to innovate their entire business, with a result of a 300% increase in overall site traffic.



Streamlining Customer Service

Toyota used design thinking to restructure its customer call center in California. New training, redesigned internal processes, and better software tools were all implemented with a design thinking mindset. All stakeholders, including service reps, software engineers, and business executives participated throughout the process. The results were faster response times, two fewer calls for each customer resolution, and millions of dollars saved.

Design Thinking Outlook

Tim Brown, CEO of Ideo, who coined Design Thinking, said, "It's a methodology always in pursuit of unforeseen innovation, so reinventing itself might seem like the smart way forward. But in practice, design thinking is a set of tools that can grow old with us."

Design thinking is a practice that will grow with the continuous advancements of the modern world. As complexity continues to increase with our confluence of technical advancements, so does the need to speak with powerful simplicity, one aspect of good design.

The dual nature of design thinking, both intuitive and analytical, will help ensure you solve seemingly insurmountable problems in the simplest ways.

And it's upon these design-led solutions that modern organizations will redesign themselves and consequently reinvent themselves to grow and prosper.

Global organizations have already adopted the process on a global scale, and reaped rewards. In the interest of differentiation and the creation of value, we recommend adopting a design thinking process for your company.

