Profit from a design system!

Websites

Social Media

Mobile Apps

Ads

Info Displays

Newsletter

Emails

One brand, many touchpoints, an infinite number of user interfaces.

No matter whether corporate website, online store or social network, a brand has to assert itself on a variety of channels and leave a good impact everywhere. Corporate design manuals and style guides are designed to help achieve this. And more and more companies are turning to design systems. What are they good for and how do they work?

Our modern technologies have led to a paradigm shift in the way we communicate. The information unit «page», which has been generally accepted for a long time, is increasingly disappearing. It is being replaced by multi-layered user interfaces in which we navigate by various interaction processes.

As a result, the requirements for content publishers are also changing. In addition to readability and aesthetics, usability and responsiveness – i.e., the ability of content to adapt to the medium in which it is presented – play a key role.

This turbulent change is forcing communication designers to re-evaluate their traditional design and development methods and rethink how they want to communicate with their clients and what should be the final results of their work.

As a consequence, in addition to the already established content management systems, design management systems – or **«design systems»** for short – are now also being used more and more. These are designed to help designer and content providers meet the growing communicative demands that users are placing on digital services.

What is their advantage?

I don't think I need to say much about the positive impact that a consistent and positively perceived brand experience has on the business value of a company.

Every marketing team or every UX professional is aware that a coherent and consistent corporate design has a positive influence on the customer journey and ultimately on sales. Along with product and service quality, it is one of the most trust-building factors regarding brand perception and product value proposition.

All the more surprising that many companies do very little to ensure the quality of their design elements and standards. Many methods and tools in this regard are often a bit old-fashioned, make use of digital bridging technologies (such as PDFs) or are characterized by significant media breaks.

In many cases, the companies themselves are not responsible for this situation. If you take a look at the development workflows of many digital agencies that supply them, you will see that their approach is very traditional and outdated.

What is the reason for this?

Most frontends are still created «page template-based». For this purpose, key templates such as the start page, overview and detail pages and the content elements used on them are usually designed - first via wireframes and then via mockups.

If the budget allows, a developer handoff and, if necessary, a style guide or UI documentation are created for quality assurance purposes, but these are usually only valid until the next relaunch.
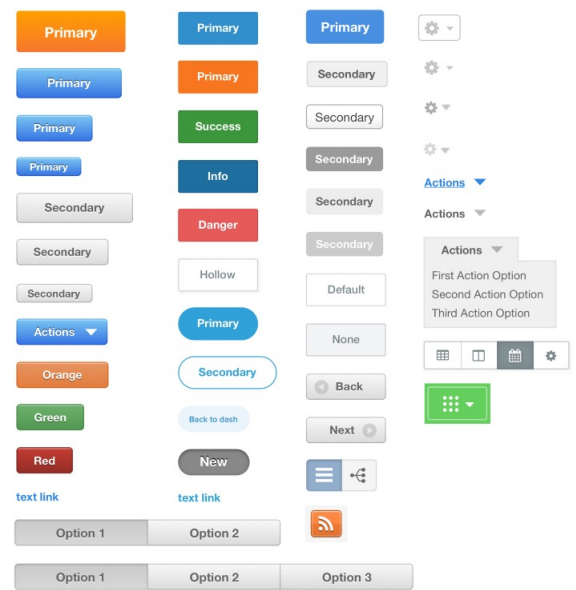
This approach is neither efficient nor sustainable.

Much better would be to first develop a «**modular design system»** that provides designers and developers equally with components with which they can then – quasi via **«drag & drop»** – create a variety of templates and applications.

This not only reduces the effort and thus the cost of technical realization, but also leads to an integral harmony and consistency of the resulting solutions.

Good design is modular!

A design system differs from a style guide in that it schematizes or patterns a design. This enables a systematic and modular approach to the conceptual design of artifacts. That is why the development of a design system should be at the beginning and not at the end of the conceptual process.
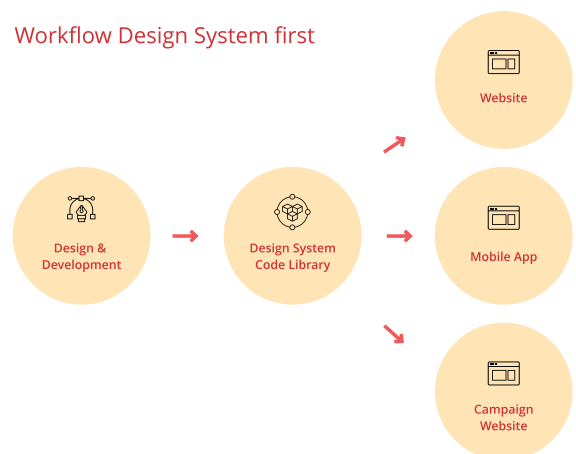

These buttons were used on a single website.
This is not an unique case, we could list many other examples here. We are wondering, how can there be so many different buttons?
Source: https://medium.com/hubspot-product/

Workflow Website first

Workflow Design System first

These things happen when no design system is used in the creation of a complex digital application:

- Equal things are handled unequally. Inconsistencies arise.
- Some work is performed twice. Redundancies arise.
- The properties of many design components are chosen arbitrarily, without a formal principle. The application appears incoherent.

This leads to the following implications:

1. The design lacks expressiveness and inner harmony due to its incoherence. The brand is visually perceived inconsistently or not positively.
2. The translation of design into code as well as the maintenance and quality assurance of the application is much more complex due to inconsistencies and redundancies.
3. Inconsistencies reduce usability and make the application difficult to learn.
4. This leads to disruptions within the user journeys. In the worst case, there is a breach of trust or a complete breakdown of certain customer journeys. Interested persons and potential customers are lost forever.

A design system helps to bring continuity to a user experience of a brand. Not everything has to be thrown overboard with every relaunch. An evolution of the design to changing conditions is not only possible, but also makes absolute sense. Complete breaks often unsettle users and customers more than they benefit them.

In addition, a design system is the ideal tool when designers and developers communicate with each other and also when different employees, teams or agencies work together on a project over a longer period of time.

Digital applications require a code-based design system

A design system is particularly practical if it is available online and provides „code patterns" of the individual design elements. Since all design elements are made of native code, they can be rendered pixel-perfect and 100% responsive, exactly as they will in their later application.

This gives you a true «look & feel» at a very early stage within the design process. This not only reduces the number of necessary correction loops, but also helps to avoid unpleasant surprises.

Advantages of design systems

1. They increase the quality of your design
A design system ensures the consistency of all elements. This leads to greater usability and a consistent appearance. It reduces visual „uncontrolled growth" and guarantees the design quality for a long time.

2. They save effort and costs
A design based on a deductive building principle is technically much easier to implement, since code is also fundamentally modular. In addition, it can be expanded more easily. Both factors significantly reduce the effort and costs involved in creating digital solutions.

Atomic Design

In the summer of 2013, the American front-end designer Brad Frost presented his new design approach «Atomic Design». This approach is based on a scientific view of design, that functional, i.e. good design should be consistent and modular in all its individual elements. And conversely, when you look at design results through the eyes of an atomic designer and break down it into its smallest individual parts, all its weak points and contradictions are much more clearly visible.

In principle, this approach was not entirely new. Many designers have intuitively worked this way for a long time, and there are similar design-theoretical approaches and postulates from Gestalt theory and the Bauhaus – but in their simple metaphorics and in the application focused on websites, as Brad Frost describes his system, Atomic Design is very contemporary, plausible and above all very useful.

The analogy to the physical world, in which matter is composed of atoms and molecules, which in turn form cells, which in turn form organisms, gives the model its metaphorical armor.
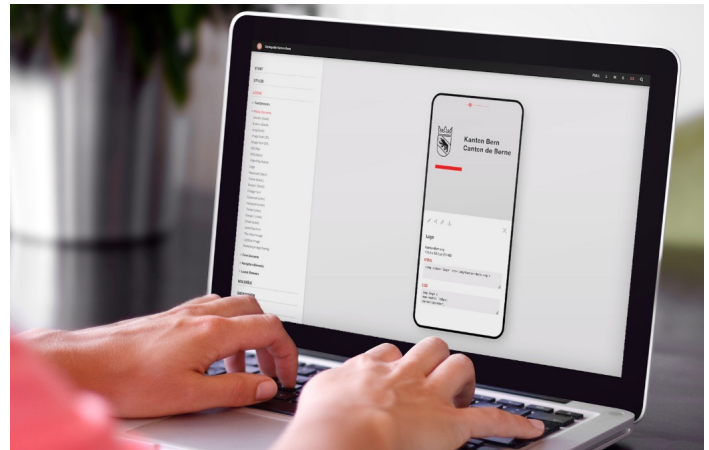
Thus, an Atomic Designer assembles simple basic elements into complex design components. Similar to Lego bricks, you can create a multitude of complex applications from the same basic bricks, which are, however, all coherently related to each other. This principle of modularity leads to consistency and thus to a harmonious appearance of all artifacts.

Individual development of design systems

As an experienced partner in the development of design systems, we can also build an individual design system for your company that precisely meets your requirements. Contact us. We will be happy to show you how you can integrate a design system into your workflow, whether for a planned website relaunch or to manage your brand guidelines..

In addition, we have developed our own application called **«AtomicKitchen»** for the individual creation of design systems, which we offer as an online service or as a stand-alone version.

AtomicKitchen

AtomicKitchen is a web-based application that allows you to easily create and manage modular design systems. With its user-friendly interface, it helps designers and developers create code-based design components.

With AtomicKitchen, you can build online style guides, UI documentations, and code pattern libraries that can be used both as a final conceptual deliverable or as an iterative coordination tool between designer and client.

The design components can be assembled in AtomicKitchen up to complete page templates, which are available to the UI factory practically via drag-and-drop. In this way, complex responsive correlations can be evaluated, so that time-consuming prototyping can be saved.

You and your team and/or your client receive a complete, pixel-perfect «look & feel» of your future digital solution - even ahead of the actual realization. This not only guarantees a perfect golive, but also leads to a reduction in effort - and not only within the technical realization, but also in the following quality assurance phase.

The code of each individual design element can be simply copied and pasted from the online style guide. In addition, the complete design system including all assets is fully portable, i.e. it can be exported, viewed offline or shared with third parties.

More information about AtomicKtichen can be found on our website: **https://atomic-kitchen.com**