

WORKING LIVES

A CREATIVE REVIEW
ADOBE RESEARCH REPORT



A special report from Creative Review
in partnership with Adobe

CREATIVE REVIEW



Foreword

Welcome to Creative Review and Adobe’s special report on the Working Lives of design leaders at some of the world’s biggest brands.

As David Burnand of Adobe explains on page 4, we wanted to explore how these leaders are responding to the challenges of designing products and services in a world that demands creativity at unprecedented speed. We have looked at how the design departments our interviewees lead are organised, how they collaborate with their internal stakeholders, and the skills they need to do their work and set themselves apart from the competition.

On the following pages you will find interviews with each of our design leaders, from a wide range of industries, as well as a summary piece picking out the key trends and findings from our research.

We hope that you find the following both enlightening and valuable in your work.

Patrick Burgoyne,
Editor,
Creative Review

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Introduction

The role of design in the new age of experience



Brands today are no longer just creating products, they're in the business of building experiences, experiences that span all aspects of the customer journey, and drive customer loyalty. These must be innovative, compelling, personalised and, most importantly, well designed, meaning there's never been more pressure for design teams to channel their creativity at scale.

As the case for stand-out, design-led experiences becomes

stronger, designers' roles are changing. They're collaborating with the entire business, taking on a data-driven approach to become architects of the customer experience and all facets of external-facing communications.

Here at Adobe, we wanted to find out exactly how the working lives of creative professionals have changed in light of their new-found responsibilities, the increasing pressures they face, and the new tech-

nologies at their disposal.

Through this series of interviews with creative leaders from the likes of Microsoft, Sainsbury's and the BBC, we've heard how creative-first customer experiences are changing their working lives, with content velocity, data-driven design, personalised customer-centric UX, and collaborative, agile working arising consistently throughout these conversations.

Emerging technologies, such as



Voice Assistants, Virtual Reality (VR) and the Internet of Things (IoT), were also a recurring theme for these creative leaders, who are being challenged to ensure these devices and capabilities can improve the customer experience, and ensure the UX is first in class.

It's certainly a challenging time to be a creative, but never has there been more excitement, opportunity, or responsibility in the industry either. At Adobe, we believe all busi-

"WE WANTED TO FIND OUT EXACTLY HOW THE WORKING LIVES OF CREATIVE PROFESSIONALS HAVE CHANGED"

nesses should be able to push the boundaries in building design-led experiences, with creatives sitting at the heart of them. We hope this Creative Review inspires you to take your design team on the next step of the creative journey, and for your business to become a true experience maker.

David Burnand, Enterprise Marketing Director, Adobe EMEA



Adam Roberts,
Senior UX Design
Manager, Samsung

How do you cast and structure your teams in the most appropriate way for each project?
I like people to be on a project from start to finish, so even if their core skill is not involved throughout I think it is important that they have visibility throughout the whole process. For instance, we have researchers, designers, coders and developers in my team, and I will get a designer or a developer involved within the research phase just as much as I would use a researcher within the design phase. If a researcher just hands over a piece of work then a designer won't get the subtleties. I also feel the researcher should be constantly understanding what research brings to the design.

How much autonomy do you give each team once a project has been set?
We have a pretty flat structure here, so although we have hierarchy in terms of levels, I like to think that a junior person has just as much of a voice as a senior person. We have a front end lead, a mid-design lead and maybe a development lead, and the leads aren't necessarily based on levels - someone junior may still be best suited to take on more leadership and ownership of a specific project.

Do project teams sit together throughout the project?
We have pods, which are basically three sided meeting rooms with an open front, and our desks are situated outside the pods.
When we start a project it is very much about collaborative working, or workshops. I think multiple minds are better than one so we sit and work together. Each pod is assigned to a project, and each one is populated with inspiration. Once projects get going and you need to get more digital, people will start working on their work stations but there is still lots of sharing. I am quite an advocate of collaborative working.

What processes do you use for project management?
I have spreadsheets which are constantly updated based on resource management. I don't like people to work on too many projects at a time because I don't feel they can fully embrace the project, so it is a juggling act.
Because our projects aren't short term it is not about resourcing hour by hour, it is more week by week. Internally we have tried a lot of different resource management tools but they generally become too complex and require too much admin. Spreadsheets work well for me.

How has the speed at which you must work/complete projects changed in the last five years?
Everyone always wants everything tomorrow and I don't think that has really changed. But my team has grown and, as it has grown, we are getting more projects, and those projects are getting more diverse. The more you do the more knowledge you have about what the stakeholder likes, the technical constraints, the cost per unit etc so you actually save yourself time. But I don't feel that the timescales have shifted that much because we tend to be quite regimented in terms of when we launch products.



**"I THINK MULTIPLE
MINDS ARE BETTER
THAN ONE SO WE
SIT AND WORK
TOGETHER"**

*Above: UX design
for the Samsung S8
mobile and for its
TV range*



Lee Schuneman,
Studio Head,
Microsoft Lift
London

How do you cast and structure your teams in the most appropriate way for each project?

We are a large group of people who are always available to go after tough problems. It's not really like we have to hire a team for this project or that project - we are all here together.

If we have three projects on the table then it is definitely a case of who is the right fit, and people can put their hand up if they want to go after a particular one. Part of my role then is to be the coach. It is no different to a sports team - here is my squad, here are my strikers, defence and midfield, who do I pick to go after this particular goal?

In terms of time spent on a project, what proportion is on conceptual, presenting, amending etc and what on making?

We are always running towards some sort of date, but there is also an ex-

pectation of high quality, so there is some fluidity. A lot of companies are super happy to just put it out there and let the customer decide, but for our business there is a certain level of quality that needs to be achieved first. Beyond that, we can iterate and develop it further.

Externally, with our customers, we do a lot of user testing. We have the Windows Insiders Programme, with about one million people around the world signed up to be part of the software development process. They get to see things quite early and give great feedback and guidance, so they are really engaged.

How do you involve other stakeholders in the creative process and provide visibility to stakeholders, clients and other interested parties?

We are a very large organisation and there are many stakeholders. We ex-

pect our teams to be very good at telling their story and communicating their vision, and to be able to build advocacy within the company about what we're trying to achieve.

One initiative we have created within our team in London, which has been adopted around Microsoft, is a weekly video magazine show. The team has a film crew around them 24/7, and they capture different moments about the progress of the project. Every week we package that into a 3-5 minute video show and we send that out around the company. Once you have this human connection it transforms how people think about it and engage with it. It is powerful.

How do you manage feedback?

We have a product owner - a person or a few people who are given accountability to deliver against metrics. These might be customer

metrics or some sort of store rating. There are probably about 20 different inputs and it comes down to a few people who sit in a room and listen to the input, remember the goal they are trying to achieve, and make some decisions. Those decisions might be to go and experiment with something specific with a view to influencing a metric - experimentation is a key part of success in this world.

How has the speed at which you must work/complete projects changed in the last five years?

We are in a privileged position in that we are expected to build software that shows the way for everyone else, so we are always going to prioritise quality over time. That doesn't mean we have a bottomless pit of money, but when you're at the edge of innovation, quality is the deciding factor every time.



**“WE ARE IN A
PRIVILEGED
POSITION IN
THAT WE ARE
EXPECTED TO
BUILD SOFTWARE
THAT SHOWS
THE WAY FOR
EVERYONE ELSE”**

*Left: Working with
the Surface Pen
on the Microsoft
Surface Book*



“MY FAVOURITE LEADER WAS MILES DAVIS WHO ALWAYS GAVE THE KIDS IN THE BAND THE RIGHT TO TEACH HIM. I LIKE THAT”.



Clive Grinyer,
Premier Design
Director,
Barclays UK

As a creative director or leader, how much is your job one of overseer or supervisor and how much supporter and facilitator? Leadership is an essential part of managing design. I try and bring together elements of all the best [leaders] I’ve worked with. Inspiration and permission are probably the most important elements for me. Inspiration to challenge and aspire to the best, beyond what is asked for and expected. Permission to think big, not be pressurised into what’s convenient. It’s vital that designers define what good looks like, and that isn’t just what your competitor is doing. Support is vital, people need to feel safe and supported.

Designers, when at the top of their game, feel they have to review and approve everything. It’s a mistake I sometimes make. My favourite leader was Miles Davis who always

gave the kids in the band the right to teach him. I like that.

In terms of location, do project teams sit together throughout the project? We try to physically position teams together and this is very effective. If not possible, a shared workspace for workshops and intense working is helpful, somewhere you can leave stuff on the walls without fear of it being wiped. Increasingly we present on the walls rather than in PowerPoint – analogue presentations are much more real and have higher impact.

In terms of time spent on a project, what proportion is on concepting, presenting, amending etc and what proportion is making? We use a classic design methodology, and the time taken on each stage varies. The most vital part for me is dis-

covery, finding out what’s really going on and asking the difficult questions that challenge people’s perception and find out what the real customer experience is.

Creating a hypothesis, or Battle Cry as we call it, usually drops out quite naturally. We then run two week sprints to create concept solutions and then construct prototypes and experiments for testing before moving to the development and delivery stages.

How do you involve other stakeholders in the creative process? There are three critical stages for stakeholder input. Firstly, agreeing the scope and objective of the project. This can involve “challenging the brief” but it’s vital to have everyone working on the same project, and that doesn’t always happen.

Secondly, I like to play back the discovery and hypothesis Battle Cry, as learnings from discovery are usually the nuggets of gold for creativity and subsequent solutions.

Finally, the experimentation and prototyping stage, where we can show impact and real evidence that our ideas will work and can be scaled. We use daily stand ups for the teams but rarely more senior stakeholders.

One area we are seeing more of is having stakeholders take part in the early customer testing. This insight is usually highly revealing and a great experience for the whole team, setting the tone of the project.

How do you manage feedback? Using the double diamond design methodology allows us to complete the project at the design vision, although of course a project is never

fully completed until it is delivered to the right quality and impact measured.

How do you measure success? KPIs depend very much on the project but of course customer satisfaction is the essential KPI. Employee satisfaction is also a key KPI in many instances.

(Please note, these views are based on Clive’s career experience and not necessarily specific to Barclays’s)

Above left: Fusion data visualisation of e-crime and threat intelligence for Barclays



Darren Wallace,
Head of Design,
BMI Healthcare

What factors take into consideration when choosing the right skills for your team?

For me, typography is a real need. Someone who can handle typography well in print can usually handle it well online. So when I am looking at a book, I am looking for a designer who has a print discipline. Most emerging designers are new media and they don't do that - there is a print eye and a print aesthetic that comes across, and for me I can tell the difference.

We are on the cusp of two different worlds [print and digital] - one is disappearing and becoming more specialised, and the other is taking over and there is still a debate and need for brand quality across all channels. That is important.

In terms of time spent on a project, how

quickly do you move toward a 'prototype'?

Once we have nailed something and we have a campaign and branding, for me it is about quick turnaround because it is a commercial sphere and we want speed to market. I build in time for creativity because I believe that if you make space for the creative process and don't go in with fixed ideas, it can give you that difference, and in business you need to stand out.

Once we have put as much time as we can into creativity, I want a prototype as soon as possible. There is a certain point where I decide we can show the client, and I want the client to sign off at the concept stage, to avoid any hiccups later on. One thing I say is that business should be 'as formal as possible as soon as possible'. It is the same with the creative part - it should be formalised

as soon as possible because that gives everyone a line in the sand and an understanding of which direction we are going creatively.

How has volume of assets produced on each project changed?

Last year we did thousands of individual assets and this year that number went up by around 20%, so it is growing each year. I will constantly train up our team's capability, scope and reach.

How many projects go through your department in a typical year?

We have numerous different products and treatments and they are all handled separately. That number keeps going up year on year!

What are the major challenges around producing work at the speed demanded today?

I think if you start with the end in mind you can short cut a lot of challenges. So if you write good campaign copy, if you work in an integrated environment with an integrated team, you can set things up in a way that is refreshing and creative and forward thinking, and if you do that at the beginning it helps later on.

To me, process is important. We build a system, a hierarchy, a visual language and signposting, because we are a large organisation and what we are speaking about sometimes is quite a complex offering, but if you get those things in place it makes it easier later on.

For example, we have just finished the major assets for a campaign, and I know that as soon as those assets go live people will ask if they can have additional items. That's fine, because at the beginning I thought

about those bits and we have the framework to do that, so it makes the decision making easy later on. I get my designers to think that way too. And always make space for creativity, because that elusive thing is what makes the difference out there.

CARDIOLOGY

SPECIALIST HEART CARE

LOOK INSIDE: THE CATH LAB

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4. Coronary intravascular ultrasound
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12. Radiofrequency & Cryo ablation of atrial and ventricular arrhythmias

For more information from
Annie Ollivierre-Smith,
MBE, Cath-Lab Manager,
Nurse of the year 2013.

For further information or referrals to BMI The London Independent Hospital

Call 020 7780 2608 (Cardiology Unit) Call 020 7780 2400 (Reception)
Email anna.kuday@bmihealthcare.co.uk Web bmihealthcare.co.uk/ih
Visit BMI The London Independent Hospital, 1 Beaumont Square, Stepney Green, London E1 4NL

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Serious about health.
Passionate about care.

**“FOR ME,
TYPOGRAPHY
IS A REAL NEED.
SOMEONE WHO
CAN HANDLE
TYPOGRAPHY
WELL IN PRINT CAN
USUALLY HANDLE
IT WELL ONLINE”**

*Left: As Head
of Design for
BMI Healthcare,
Wallace is
responsible for
the production of
thousands of assets
per year*



Charlotte Briscall,
Head of Digital
Experience,
Sainsbury's

How do you cast and structure your teams in the most appropriate way for each project?
We are what I call a partnership team. We use agile development methodologies to deliver a lot of our digital products and services for Sainsbury's customers and colleagues, so teams include everyone from engineers to marketing colleagues. Alongside this we come together as a community of practice and share tools and learnings from each of the products we are designing.

What sort of skills do you look for?
Designers within cross-functional teams are now expected to - and want to - adopt the broader remit of a product designer, and rather than having a graphic design skill set, a user experience skill set or a research skill set, they are becoming multi-skilled. They have a specialism in one area but

they have all these tools to draw upon when needed.

The type of people I am looking for are people who have a deep interest in design, ecommerce and digital, whether they have come from a product design or industrial design background or a technical background like computer science. I am also looking for people who have a deep understanding of human needs - in fact, a number of people in my current team have a psychology background. This combination of skills allows us to not only design how something looks but also how it works.

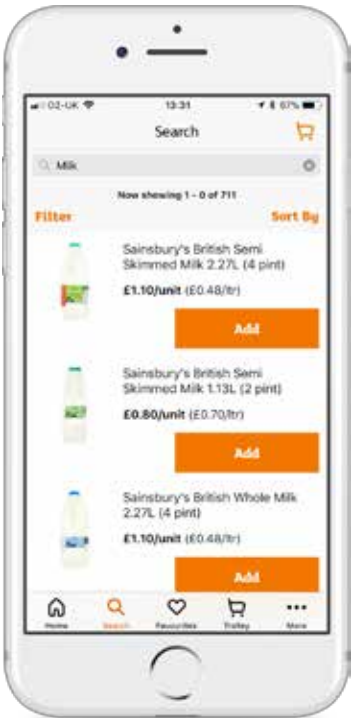
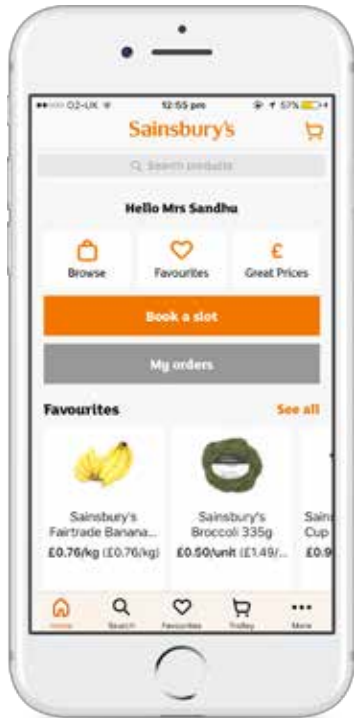
In terms of time spent on a project, what proportion is on conceiving, presenting, amending etc and what proportion on making?
We follow a user-centred design approach so conceptual work, prototyp-

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BACKGROUND"**

ing, testing and building is a continual cycle with customer feedback along the way.

As a creative director or leader, how much is your job one of overseer or supervisor and how much supporter and facilitator?
I am a facilitator and supporter but alongside this I also need to provide a vision for how we play our role in supporting the delivery of Sainsbury's strategy. I do this by running a combination of team meetings, at which I provide business updates, and more informal drop-in sessions where the team can raise any questions or concerns they may have about a particular project that week.

In terms of managing quality of design, we have really put the traditional critiquing and sign-off process behind us and replaced this with a set of tools and principles for design-



ers to work within, allowing them more freedom and the ability to work more quickly. We also have regular 1:1 conversations with each of our team members to ensure that they are on track with achieving their personal development goals.

How do you manage feedback?
We have 'kick off' workshops before a team starts the product design cycle. In these initial workshops we use the double diamond approach of discovering and framing, which helps to align our stakeholders in what we are trying to achieve and how we are going to measure success. Once we are in a design sprint we start to map out key customer journeys and then quickly move into design, customer testing and development.

We focus on output rather than documentation, which can be very

difficult in a large organisation, but we overcome this by bringing together cross-functional teams from across the whole of Sainsbury's and involving them from the start.

*Above: From
Sainsbury's
grocery shopping
mobile app*



Above: The BeoLab 50 speakers



Kresten Bjørn Krab-Bjerre,
Senior Manager,
Sound Concept,
Bang & Olufsen

How do you cast and structure your teams in the most appropriate way for each project?
At Bang & Olufsen, the formation of project teams is highly competence driven. Depending on the product concept being worked on, we gather the best people within the specific areas that are key to the concept. For example, do we need the acoustic specialist who is an expert in creating big sound out of a small cabinet, or is it a loudspeaker where there is less space limitation?
We also ensure that all the fields of competences are represented in the team, for example, design, acoustic, mechanics, UX, aluminium, product architecture (how the technology inside the product is positioned) etc.
How much autonomy do you give each team once a project has been set?

[We give] autonomy within the frame of creating a fantastic product both from a design and performance perspective. In many cases, this means that people need to think out of the box and take a completely different path that has not been used before, so a certain degree of autonomy is key to finding the right solutions. We meet regularly to ensure that no-one is moving off on a tangent and losing sight of the common goal.
Compared to others within this industry our designer is a key player. S/he is with us throughout the whole process and has a deep knowledge about our competencies and capabilities, and needs our help to create the optimum design. Therefore, very often, a final Bang & Olufsen product is more attractive and purposeful than the original design model.

As a creative director or leader, how much is your job one of overseer or supervisor and how much supporter and facilitator?
My role is highly focused on being a supporter and facilitator. We have just reinvented and optimised our working process so that the design process is out in the open. This ensures that it is clear to everyone what we are working with, giving the opportunity for everyone to contribute to concepts and ensure that all current knowledge within Bang & Olufsen is being executed upon.
In terms of location, do project teams sit together throughout the project?
Just last week our whole organisation relocated from six different locations to one big, new location called the Innovation Lab. The aim is to bring people closer together on a daily basis, not only when you have your dedicated

meetings. We now have room and facilities to accommodate the designers working with us for an extended period of time (not only one-day meetings) to ensure that they make full use of our knowledge and facilities. We expect a great deal of synergy and more flexibility with this new way of being organised.
How has the speed at which you must work/complete projects changed in the last five years?
Everything moves faster now. The rapid change of technology also means that we have to move faster. But ways and tools to do that have also changed over time. Moving from analogue to digital loudspeakers have had a tremendous impact on the development time too.
The fact that every single improvement does not necessarily need

to be a hardware change but in some cases can be handled digitally has cut a substantial time off the development process. 3D-printing of early prototypes is also helping us to move faster through development.
On average, we have cut the time “from concept to product” by 30-50 % over the last three to five years.



Jane Murison,
Head, UXP & Design
BBC Future Media

How do you structure your teams for projects?

We have a whole suite of interactive products and services which are ongoing, such as iPlayer and BBC Sport, and for those we have embedded teams. We talk about having an embedded federated model, which is a fancy way of saying we embed the teams and we have a consistent set of behaviours we apply in terms of process and method.

Then there is our own stuff, which is about making things consistent or joining things together in an improved way. For example, the Global Experience Language is a team we look after, and they work with all the product teams to ensure people behave consistently. We also have specialist teams, such as UX architecture, and these get deployed into the product teams and work on

strategy together to create consistency.

In terms of time spent on a project, what proportion is on conceiving, presenting, amending etc and what proportion on making?

It depends on the project. We have a lot of stuff in our toolkit. We have used design sprints a lot for conceiving and making things real enough so people understand what you're on about. We also use researchers regularly at an early stage too, but when we get into delivery mode we fall in with agile methodologies, and within that we have a toolkit of things to ensure it is user focused.

One thing we use is 'rapids', where we just book in a load of lab based user research, so we know on a Thursday afternoon there will be time in the lab with participants,

without necessarily knowing what we are doing in advance. User focus continues to be part of the development process.

How do you involve other stakeholders in the creative process?

In terms of involving internal stakeholders in conceiving, we don't tend to run design sprints without non-designers in the group. We have had the most success with sprint zeros when we have the editorial team, developers and product owners in the room. Without all of those elements, we are not producing realistic design ideas.

How we manage external feedback for broadcast is often extremely different to what we do for a digital product. We have moved away from big bang releases [in digital] to a much more progressive release

strategy to allow people to get used to changes in direction iteratively. We have to treat it with sensitivity.

How has the speed at which you must work/complete projects changed in the last five years?

It feels like there is always pressure to do more than we are doing, but the danger is that you try to do too many things and you do them all badly. It is far better to do fewer things more effectively. If you look at our most effective digital experiences they usually have a singularity of purpose, which is what attracts people. For example our weather app is a fantastic utility and, arguably, iPlayer is a fantastic utility.

I've been working in digital experiences for 20 years and there is always more that you could do. You get an injection of technology and

you suddenly have to serve the needs of that new technology. Recent ones for us are conversational and voice experiences. We need to understand user needs for voice interfaces quickly so we can provide BBC experiences on that platform.



**“YOU GET AN
INJECTION OF
TECHNOLOGY AND
YOU SUDDENLY
HAVE TO SERVE THE
NEEDS OF THAT
NEW TECHNOLOGY”**

Left: BBC Sport
mobile app



Thomas Johansson,
Design Director,
Electrolux Group
Design,
Electrolux AB

How do you cast and structure your teams in the most appropriate way for each project?

Within Electrolux Group Design we put together teams of highly talented individuals such as researchers, product designers, UX designers, CMF designers, graphic designers and digital modellers that work seamlessly with marketing, engineering, purchasing, manufacturing and management.

As a creative director or leader, how much is your job one of overseer or supervisor and how much supporter and facilitator?

My job as a design director is to promote and foster a global, structured design identity and to fuel our consumer experience innovation pipeline. I am responsible for setting

clear goals, overseeing, managing, inspiring, supporting, nurturing and evangelising, and giving our design teams elbow room to create solutions that help shape living for the better.

All design work is based on our ‘Human Touch’ design philosophy. Electrolux is a human-centric brand and we focus on making functionality an emotional experience by designing for all our senses. We call this design philosophy the ‘Human Touch’.

In terms of location, do project teams sit together throughout the project?

Electrolux has design studios in North America, South America, Europe and Asia. Most project teams sit together while for other projects we work with dispersed teams that collaborate virtually across the studios using Virtual Reality (VR) rooms

with large screens (Power Walls), VR headsets, cloud-based video meetings, OneDrive etc.

In terms of time spent on a project, what proportion is on conceptualising, presenting, amending etc and what on making?

Our design process is to understand, create, define and realise. We use 3D software, VR/AR and Rapid Prototyping in a cyclical and iterative process to test, analyse, learn, change and repeat as early and as fast as possible.

How do you involve other stakeholders in the creative process?

We employ agile methods and tools such as scrums to increase decision velocity, with complete transparency and visibility to the stakeholders using agile reporting methods.

How has the speed at which you must

work/complete projects changed in the last five years?

Speed to market is a critical driver of our competitive advantage. We have clear processes for our design and development work and those processes are continuously being improved to maximise speed whilst ensuring a best-in-class consumer experience.

Within design we create both digital and physical prototypes, animations and real-time 3D visualisation. Digital prototyping has streamlined and sped up our design and development process significantly.

What about the volume of assets which must be produced on each project – how has that changed?

Designing and developing a best-in-class Internet of Things (IoT) user experience is one of our biggest challenges today, and the deliveries on

Interaction Design, User Experience and Interface Design have grown accordingly.

“MY JOB AS A DESIGN DIRECTOR IS TO PROMOTE AND FOSTER A GLOBAL, STRUCTURED DESIGN IDENTITY AND TO FUEL OUR CONSUMER EXPERIENCE INNOVATION PIPELINE”



Left: PerfectCare washing machine and dryer, designed by Electrolux Group Design



Martin Samuelson,
Virtual Design Lead,
Three

In terms of location, do project teams sit together throughout the project?

I like the team to be gathered in the same area of the office at roughly the same time. It's not about discipline, being in at nine and being there for the sake of being there - it's for the purpose of passively contributing your competence and knowledge to the team when the team is there. I don't think working from home, decentralised teams and external vendors are good solutions to the modern, digital company, and there isn't any solution yet that can fill the gap of physical proximity.

How do you involve other stakeholders in the creative process?

Generally, I think a good work stream is one that is driven forwards by all the stakeholders participating and feeding in input throughout the whole project, from ideation to live. Ideally, everyone with a say also has a role and is contributing work, not just opinion. It is a kind of syndicalism, where the workers in the team who know the product the best also decide where to improve it and how.

How do you manage feedback?

We try to not work in projects any more, it's more of a constant, small steps process of focusing on a KPI and being creative with how to improve it. Of course we are part of projects that happen around the house, but for our own work streams we simply hypothesise on actions on our KPIs and iterate until we have measurable change in our A/B tests. Sometimes we are right, sometimes we are wrong, and when we are wrong we work with our analytics team to find out why and how. The main feedback we react to is user feedback - from discussing needs in interviews or testing prototypes. If the user understands what he or she is doing, enjoys the experience or finds it easy to understand, and the data is showing significant improvement, then we are doing a good job. This is also the rationale for our designs, and it's hard for organisations

to argue against it.

How has the speed at which you must work/complete projects changed in the last five years?

It has slowed down significantly. I started my career in digital marketing and production, where we took specs, presented beautiful designs and then fought over the implementation. The old agency approach. We could churn out microsites and revamped websites in a matter of weeks and months. Now the industry has a more mature approach and our work is more integrated into the companies we work for. We are hiring designers and developers to be part of businesses rather than consulting third parties.

We work more slowly, but with organisations [it means] having more purchase and mandate in creating integrated products and experiences that are part of the business offering, not tacked on services or campaigns. Companies need to innovate themselves and offer presence, service and products in the digital sphere, so being a creative or a developer means we are increasingly a part of the core business.



“IF THE USER UNDERSTANDS WHAT HE OR SHE IS DOING, ENJOYS THE EXPERIENCE OR FINDS IT EASY TO UNDERSTAND, AND THE DATA IS SHOWING SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT, THEN WE ARE DOING A GOOD JOB”

Above: From the tre.se website



Jason Gregory,
Head of Product
Design, iZettle

How do you cast and structure your teams in the most appropriate way for each project?

We work in product teams, all of which are cross functional and contain all of the necessary skills and capabilities needed to enable them to do their best work. We have a rigorous recruitment process, where attention to craft, problem framing, data awareness and user centred design are front and centre, and a necessary skill set for all the designers in our teams. There's an implicit understanding that everyone on the team is a strong contributor.

But we're not just here to design. Leadership and collaboration skills are an essential part of an iZettle designer's toolkit and thus are essential qualities that we look for in our designers. We are confident from the start that we have the right people

to be able to succeed in any team on any project. To further support this, each team has an agile team coach who plays an invaluable role in setting up and maintaining a healthy team culture.

How much autonomy do you give each team once a project has been set?

Our teams are fully autonomous. They're brought together around clear missions directly linked to strategic company bets and empowered to deliver on these.

We spend time with each team at conception and throughout its lifecycle to ensure that the purpose is clear and that everyone within the team understands how they are contributing to that purpose. There's a lot of truth in the idea that the first product you need to build is your team. In order to achieve great things

we have to take risks. A team that wasn't empowered, that didn't feel ownership - of both their successes and failures - would be reluctant to take risks, and innovation would suffer at the hands of that.

How do you involve other stakeholders in the creative process?

All our product teams work with agile methods but are only bound by general agile principles. They are free to find their own way within them as they all have a unique set up and [each one has] unique problems to solve.

Visibility is achieved through public, tentative, roadmaps and backlogs, daily stand-ups where anyone can join, and regular demos showcasing work in progress as well as shipped features. The teams are also free to use tools like Trello or Jira, although we do use Slack as a

mandatory, company-wide communication tool.

How do you manage feedback?

Being a product company nothing is really ever finished. We are learning about our users and their needs all of the time so our process is continuous.

Design reviews play an important role in our ongoing process of iteration while a team is working on a product or feature. We are able to provide diverse inputs and support the designer in driving towards the goals of the work.

As well as 'design feedback', feedback also comes to us in the shape of insights from user testing. Prototyping is a core component of how we work. We want to learn quickly at low cost and understand what is possible before releasing to the world. Alpha and beta tests play a big part in

helping us to understand the success of solutions.

How has the speed at which you must work/complete projects changed in the last five years?

It's been a bumpy ride, trying to optimise the way we work while growing like crazy at the same time. I think the key here is true collaboration.

Above: iZettle's card reader for retailers

Summary

Design leaders across major brands are putting the user at the heart of their creative process, designing digital products using agile processes and at unprecedented speed

All about the user



User-led

One striking trend emerging from the interviews carried out among some of Europe’s leading designers is the increased focus on the end-user at every stage of the design process. The digital revolution has made it easy and affordable to consult users throughout, to continually iterate and refine a product. This is impacting every aspect of design, from the way people work and the processes they use, to the speed at which work is carried out.

As Clive Grinyer, Premier Design Director at Barclays UK says, the organisation is increasingly seeing stakeholders involved in early customer testing, which helps to set the tone for a project. “This insight is usually highly revealing and a great experience for the whole team.”

At Sainsbury’s, Head of Digital Experience, Charlotte Briscall says the company follows a formal user-centred design approach, informed by continual customer feedback. This is enhanced by Sainsbury’s focus on understanding human needs – a number of people in Briscall’s current team have psychology qualifications.

Iteration

When it comes to digital, greater user involvement is steering brands away from big product launches towards slower ‘reveals’, with iteration based on customer feedback. BBC Futures is a case in point, with Jane Murison, Head of User Experience and Design, saying that the organisation has moved away from “big bang releases to a much more progressive release strategy”, in part to avoid alienating an audience which views the BBC as a familiar part of their front room. Sensitivity is the watchword.

This heightened user-centric approach is supported by the move towards an Agile way of working, meaning functional product prototypes are delivered continually and repeatedly during the design process, with product development a series of short iterative loops.

Location

Bang & Olufsen have recently relocated from six locations into one large Innovation Lab, with the aim of encouraging people to work more closely together on a daily basis and, as Kristen Krab-Bjerre, Senior Manager, Sound Concept says, “making full use of our knowledge.”

At BBC Future Media, specialist teams are deployed into product teams to ensure consistency, while design sprints involve editorial, developers and product owners, as well as designers.

Bringing together different skills sets for the duration of a project is also a focus at Samsung, where Adam Roberts, Senior UX Design Manager, has researchers, designers, coders and developers in his team, believing all input is valid at every stage, including using researchers during the design phase. This way of working has given rise to open meeting rooms, or pods, to encourage collaborative working, with each one populated with inspiration relating to a specific project. There is a growing emphasis on getting people together in the same room – often for quick, short bursts.



Competence not rank

This more collaborative, less formal approach has influenced management styles too, with a clear move away from hierarchies and authoritarianism to a subtler style of leadership which places the emphasis on competence, not rank. At Samsung, Roberts says junior people have just as much say as senior people, making the point that “someone junior may still be best suited to take on more leadership and ownership of a specific project.”

It is a sentiment echoed by Grinyer, who says that supporting his team of designers is vital, stressing that experienced designers often feel the need to “approve everything”, which is a mistake. “My favourite leader was Miles Davis who always gave the kids in the band the right to teach him. I like that.”

Krab-Bjerre adds that his role as leader is primarily one of supporter and facilitator too, with Bang and Olufsen’s new Innovation Lab designed to give everyone a chance to contribute ideas and thinking.

Velocity

While inclusivity is increasing, output is growing too. Darren Wallace, Head of Design at BMI Healthcare says project numbers are up year on year. The company produced “thousands” of individual assets last year, and he estimates that this has grown by around 20%.

Of course, while digital is ramping up the pressure, it is also easing the burden. Krab-Bjerre says Bang & Olufsen has cut its ‘concept to product’ time by 30– 50% over the last few years, in part thanks to innovations such as 3D printing of early prototypes. And when it comes to digital products, fast prototyping is now the norm, with Agile promoting the use of quick, continual design cycles which, as Briscall says, enables a company like Sainsbury’s to create a very thin slice of product design, release it into the hands of its customers, and learn from how they use it. It is about experimenting, something Schuneman says is “a key part of success in this world.”

Final thoughts

While today’s designers are tasked with fulfilling more projects and creating more assets, they have discovered a smarter way of working. It is a way that puts the user at its heart, capitalises on available skills, and uses time well to continually create, produce, experiment and hone, not to sit in meetings, process admin or indulge layer upon layer of management.

In short, the picture taking shape is of a more dynamic, productive way of working.

