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## DO YOU HAVE THE BUILDING BLOCKS TO SCALE?

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**A design system is the foundation for a scalable digital enterprise, yet few companies have implemented it. To level up, this system is a must-have.**

Imagine two toy houses. House A is constructed of wood and glue. House B is constructed from LEGO pieces. Later, you decide you want to do a complete makeover of the layout, and you would also like to add a little shed in the yard. This is quite an undertaking with the house made of wood but relatively easy with LEGOs.

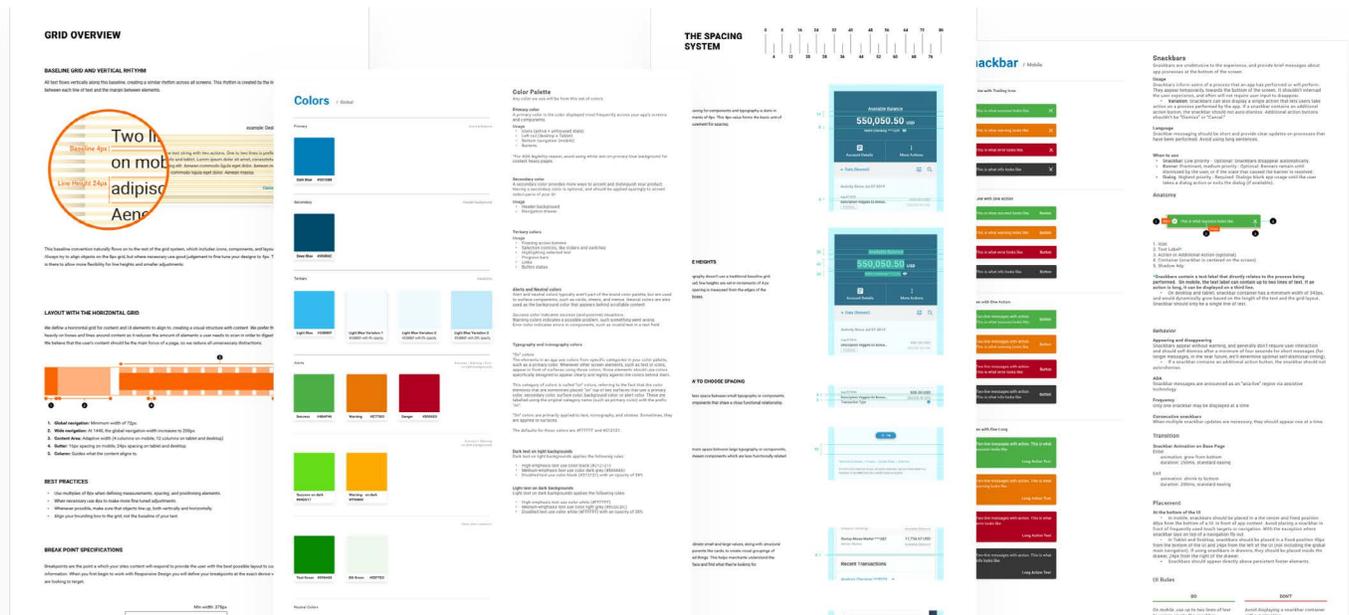
Most websites and apps are analogous to a house made of wood and glue. They are somewhat rigid. Any additional change or modification often requires significant work from scratch. To address this problem, design systems have been developed to

create reusable and scalable digital components.

While most companies lack a design system, this approach is quickly becoming the standard operating model among leading tech companies like Airbnb, Salesforce, and Uber. In these companies, the system serves as a single source of truth for product, design, and engineering teams to improve workflow productivity and reduce communication ambiguity. In this article, I will touch upon five common questions related to design systems.

## WHAT IS A DESIGN SYSTEM?

I often hear the terms pattern libraries, style guides, and design systems used interchangeably. In reality, a design system is a combination of all and more. It is a collection of reusable UI elements assembled in different variations (like LEGO pieces) following explicit usage and interaction guidelines. It should build with scalability in mind.



# HOW CAN ENTERPRISES BENEFIT FROM A DESIGN SYSTEM?

I have worked in product teams across several enterprises and large companies. Here are some of the pain points I often hear:

- Designers do not like doing visual quality assurances (QAs).
- Designers do not like to pixel-push.
- Developers do not want to get inconsistent mockups and guess the specs.
- Developers do not want to get requirements that are not technically feasible.
- Product managers would much rather have the team build new features to enhance the experience than pay off design debt.

By implementing a design system, we can:

- **Reduce design debt.**

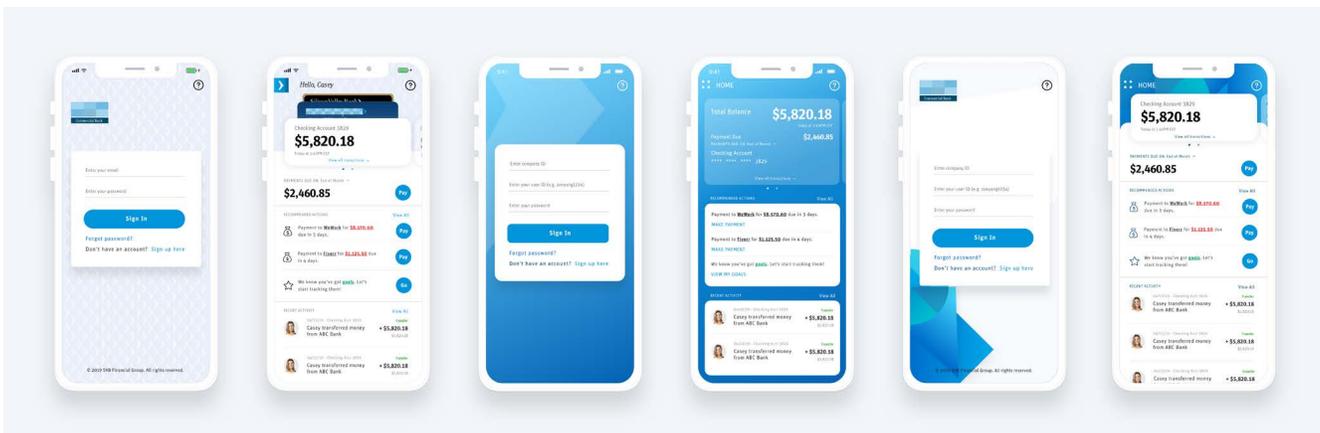
Non-reusable components and inconsistent styles often generate design and development debt. A design system can help reduce design debt.

- **Facilitate a collaborative and communitive culture.**

It was not until I started developing a global design system for my client that I realize other organizational teams had built components that can be reused for our project. There was absolutely no reason to have two types of dropdown menus for the same purpose, only slightly differing in UX patterns. Several teams often work on a single product or several digital products under the company umbrella in large organizations. A design system can serve as a bridge between groups; therefore, it helps build components with good reusability.

- **Reduce repetitive work and increase time to market.**

Having highly reusable components in a central repository, complemented with clearly documented rules and guidelines, can reduce the time spent on visual QAs and technical tasks. Designers and developers can use their time for more meaningful tasks. Combined with agile practice, it would increase the potential for a faster product release.



# WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS FOR DESIGN SYSTEMS?

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Of course, you can build an entirely custom design system. It maximizes the user experience and user interface (UX/UI) flexibility but costs more time as a tradeoff because you will need to set all the rules from the ground up.

You can also choose a strict or loose off-the-shelf system.

- **Strict System**

A strict system (e.g., Material.io) comes with a comprehensive and detailed principle, styles, and best practices. It saves a lot of guesswork; it also allows for minimal customization.

- **Loose System**

Material UI, which uses Facebook's react framework and has a naming convention and the visual are very similar to Material.io, is a type of loose system. They allow more freedom for experimentation for both designers and developers.

# HOW TO BUILD AN EFFECTIVE DESIGN SYSTEM TEAM WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION

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The common mistake is seeing a design system as a one-off project instead of a product. A design system should be viewed as a product that is consumed by other teams. It is scalable and will evolve. To form a design system team, the core members should include but not be limited to:

- Design (UX/UI/Visual)
- Engineering (front-end or full-stack)
- Product Management

The team may also occasionally need content strategists or specialists.

## In conclusion

**A design system is a full-on product that can help an organization scale its digital portfolio with efficiency. It may seem like an upfront investment, but the benefit is too significant to ignore. We will surely see more and more enterprises adopt design systems at the foundation for all digital products.**

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