

Chris Strahl:

Hi, and welcome to The Design Systems Podcast. This podcast is about the place where design and development overlap. We talk with experts to get their point of view about trends in design, code and how it relates to the world around us. As always, this podcast is brought to you by Knapsack. Check us out at knapsack.cloud. If you want to get in touch with the show, ask some questions, or generally tell us what you think, go ahead and tweet us at The DS Pod, we'd love to hear from you.

Hey everybody. Welcome to The Design Systems Podcast. I'm your host, Chris Strahl. Today I'm here with Avery Oldt. Avery, welcome back. I'm really excited to have you back on the show.

Avery Oldt:

Thanks. Always fun to catch up with you.

Chris Strahl:

Thanks. Thanks. Well, you're the head of design and research at Amazon for Amazon fashion. How's the new gig?

Avery Oldt:

The new gig is great. I've been there just six months, so I'm not authorized to talk about anything top secret yet. But happy to share the 20 years that I've been in design and tech. It's always fun talking about design systems with you and leadership and how we make these things work out in the real world.

Chris Strahl:

So today before the show, we were discussing scale and scale's a really interesting topic just because when we think about what's going on in the world right now where you're seeing design budgets shrinking, product budgets shrinking, but no lack of consumer demand for all these experiences, we have to start thinking about scale a little less along the lines of how much product we're shipping and how effective we're being. And so talk to me about when you think about achieving scale, what comes to your mind?

Avery Oldt:

Yeah, I think the dirty word is efficiency and that really brings a lot of financial aspects and cues to mind about doing more with less, which is always an engineering problem to get a dollar out of a dime. But I really think scale is about working smarter. I really think that scale means you have an expanding number of people in your audience or an expanding number of programs at your company. You're a federation of 1,000 startups, like some of these big tech companies, and really scale is being effective across a huge surface area that has diversity and variety of stakeholders or customers. But you're not doing that by adding people. You're not doing that by adding billions of dollars in funding. You're doing it by working smarter, being palatable to your stakeholders and shipping value, shipping actual value that connects your audience with your brand or the value benefit of your product. Having actual value built into that what you ship is great, whether it's for one person or one million people, it's working smarter, not harder.

Chris Strahl:

When you think about scale as billions of page views and millions of users and all these other different things like that, that's still a lot of product that's out there. And obviously people are a part of the creation of that product, but when we think about what value do we emphasize at scale, what I think I heard you say was it's not about who can hire the most people with the most talent. It's about who can leverage that person in the best way to make them the most effective at what they're doing. But that brings up all these questions around what is that effect, what is that thing that you're really going for? And if your service area is this just massive thing, how do you think about that effectiveness?

Avery Oldt:

I always, as a designer, I always go back to the emotional outcomes with the audience. What actual impact do we want to have with the emotion of our audience? How do we want them to feel about our product or our company or our message? How do we want them connect with that? And that's just the scale of an idea. The thing that can run the fastest through an entire culture is an idea. It's not a piece of software and it's not a principle for your design system. It's really just an idea or a feeling. So I really think that's the value of having continuity across all of your programs. So scale for me was never about adding people. You had mentioned using someone more effectively or leveraging someone's talent more effectively. I actually think smaller teams are more nimble and can meet scale bigger than larger teams.

With larger teams, you have a lot more complexity around decision making, a lot more slowness around governance, a lot more gum up in the works where you just can't get to the end point where you're generating that emotional outcome because you don't ship value and you're just too slow. So I definitely think this new environment where we have thousands and thousands of layoffs is really, really hard for the people impacted. I think it's an opportunity to rethink how we do business. And some of the companies that are impacted by this were bloated. I think that you probably could run Twitter with a lot less people than they had. Certainly it's become a gigantic fiasco and there's a lot of drama around it. But if you go back to the baseline of maybe if there was any good intent, it's like yeah, you probably could be more lean and provide better value without a lot of the fluff.

And that's something you can apply without being a super villain. And I think it starts with the relationships. How do you form those relationships? How do you get leadership buy-in for what you want to do? And then how do you get those ideas to run further than you can personally run in the physical space within your team's charter?

Chris Strahl:

Yeah, so you think about this idea of by hiring a bunch of people, you shift the problem space, you shift the problem space from creating valuable software, creating software that has that feeling that you mentioned to how do you get all these people to actually work together effectively? And that dramatic shift in the idea of what the problem is. Most of my career I've spent on teams of 20 or less and that's been where I've been most productive and most happy. There's a lot of, look, no offense if you're a part of 1,000 person team listening to this podcast, but there's a lot of people that hide out in 1,000 person teams that don't necessarily see their talents put to full effectiveness. And so when I think about what it takes to build really great software and ship really great software, I do agree with that idea of nimbleness.

But also how do you make sure that the thing actually still ships? Because I think that is one of the reasons why all these big organizations have such scale of engineering talent or scale of design talent is because 70% of the time the thing that you're working on doesn't see the light of day and you have to

give up on that project. And that thing that was probably a little precious to you because the organization decided that it wasn't the thing that was going to work in the market.

Avery Oldt:

And we could digress on this too because I think that's an interesting topic about never being able to ship something. It happens a lot in design and it happens in those big teams where you have a lot of momentum for ideas that might not be fully vetted. They get so far and then they get exposure and then leadership is like, yeah, why are we doing that? Let's just cut that off and move somewhere else. But I think that's a topic for another time. It's interesting you said teams of 1,000 people and 20 being the sweet spot. I almost think you can't have a team that big. It's not a team anymore. You all might have the same HR billing partner where you're all getting paid by the same corporation, but it's not a team. You have to know everyone's name. You have to know the humans you work with and what motivates them. So yeah, 20 and less, and I would even say a dozen people, is the sweet spot for a team where you can really be super effective at scale.

Chris Strahl:

I think it's eight. You mentioned the decision fatigue. I could think that the amount of time I've spent in management with just horrible decision fatigue based on a team of 18 or something like that. Anyway, another digression. What you just brought up with this idea that having a smaller team that is a team where you know everybody's name, where you understand people, what you're really talking about there is you're talking about trust. And you had alluded to leadership a moment ago as the way of making these small federated startups inside of these big organizations effective with systems. Explore that a little bit for me. Tell me about what you mean when you talk about we have this trust and this leadership support for a work smarter not harder situation.

Avery Oldt:

Yeah. Well I always love to say the best and most effective design system is trust. And earlier we were talking about how do you scale and make small teams or individual people with talent effective across a really big surface area and I've been in those situations where man, you've got a great principal designer and a great software architect. And they built the best design system ever, but nobody cares. Nobody cares, and it goes nowhere and someone else will discover that talent and take them away from you or they'll get frustrated and leave. So the thing that is a really key ingredient in hitting scale is a leader that really believes in your program or your tenants of building a design system or building, whether it's voice and tone guidelines or brand tenants or principles, whatever, a leader that really can endorse you and evangelize your cause beyond the scale that you have with a small team.

So if you have a dozen people or eight people, we keep shrinking the number now. Six is really the right. Having one leader that believes in the value you bring and having that person really endorse what you're doing is huge. If you have leadership that just doesn't understand you, just doesn't understand the value that you can bring, you're at a really big disadvantage. So having trust within your team is really important. Having trust with a leader that can endorse you is really important because they'll do the things that you can't do on your own. So the people we talk about who get frustrated who can't implement anything is because they don't have the authority. So if you had a leader, and I've been in cases like this recently where you have a leader who really cares, they're like, damn it, why do all these buttons look different?

Why are we shipping things that confuse our customers? Why do we have these different programs that look like completely different companies? If you have a leader who has a keen design eye like that and they know that inputs into engineering and design are what will fix that problem, that's great. Man. Run with that because then you can get your small team of six to 12 or whatever your sweet spot is to organize around that authority and your good idea is to cover a surface area that is so scalable exponentially you're going to win in that case. You will win. And then it's a matter of are you ready for that. That's the second question on scale, it's like, do you have leadership support and endorsement? Are you ready?

Chris Strahl:

So when you think about what does readiness mean, so okay, you got leadership, you got trust, you got a small team, six to 12, you've got great leadership buy-in, everybody's stoked. Everybody knows the direction that they're headed and is excited about it. Your advice then is get ready. Get ready for what, what do you mean?

Avery Oldt:

Get ready to have 1,000 partners coming to you saying so-and-so said we had to implement this design system or whatever you call it and we need to look good and continuous with all the other products. How do we do that? And you will not be able to deploy your team of six or 12 or whatever we're saying it is to those 1,000 partners. You have to be ready with really excellent communication, really great roadshow where you can say, all right, now everyone's down to get what we've got. How do we distribute it to everyone? So do we already have really good talking points on the value that we're selling? Do we show them the benefits of expense reduction and churn reduction and higher quality, less errors, speed to market? Do we have all those talking points ready?

Do we have really good, I hate to say documentation, but documentation, do we have digestible stuff we can give people, get them excited and not make them feel like they're responding to a really hard mandate that's in the realm of compliance? You just got a big endorsement. Now how do you spread the derma and your message everywhere?

Chris Strahl:

Well, and compliance is in the carrot and stick continuum very much on that stick side of things, whereas your carrots are like, how do you build interest and conviction? It sounds almost like a sales process. You get awareness and then all of a sudden you got to get people convicted. And then once you get people convicted, then it's all about how do I actually get them to implement. The parody there being something like, what's the first time you've ever heard about Knapsack? What makes me convince you to use Knapsack? And then how do you actually get it bought through your procurement team? There's almost always that similar idea of adoption of a design system.

Avery Oldt:

Yeah, totally. It's absolutely a sales process because even though design systems and components have been around in this form or another for 15 years, literally, they didn't really get popular until the last decade and they haven't really been effective at scale in large companies for the last four or five years maybe. And so people still don't fully understand what the benefit is and what the value is to them as a stakeholder in your company or to the customer. They're like, why are we doing this? So you have to get over that hump of we have trust in the team, we have a leader who endorsed us. We have the

momentum now. How do we make sure we don't feel like we're a police force? We want people to feel good and excited. We're bringing them really awesome tools that are actually going to help all of their KPIs or OKRs or however they're measuring themselves and it's going to help the customer.

So you should be ready before you get that endorsement. Don't be the misfit who's always frustrated because no one listens to your good ideas. Make them more palatable. Become a salesperson for those ideas so that when you do get a green light, you're ready to go and your answer isn't like, great, we have a green light. Let's hire 100 people. Your answer is fantastic. Your answer's got to be fantastic. I need a forum. Get me on the next all hands meeting, get me in the next update letter to your leadership team. Get me in that forum where we can start sharing all the stuff that we already have ready to go. Everyone's going to deploy it. We'll be done with the initial roadshow this quarter, and then we expect everyone to continuously update and come to alignment over the next X number of years to infinity. You're never done. So yeah, be ready for that scale.

Chris Strahl:

Well, let me unpack that selling just a little bit more. And so I tend to think about these sort of systems ideas as having a couple of layers. There's what you tell designers, there's what you tell engineers. There's what you tell product people and it's how you align all that to ultimately user customer value. And I've always said for designers and for engineers, you're selling the same value and that this makes your life easier and it makes you more effective, but you sell it in different ways. The designer really cares about this intent, has a more accurate representation in the actual product. And I spend a lot of time in this podcast shitting on designers, but let me shit on engineers for a second, and engineers just want it to be the path of least resistance. What lets me get this thing shipped as quickly as possible or as easily as possible?

And so the product person seems to be the nexus of this and I've been exploring this concept for a couple of weeks now about the product person is really who looks like the hero if this goes well, you're taking away some pain from some designers and from some engineers, but you're really making that product person stand out if they're able to effectively create a system that ultimately delivers more user value. And it has to be couched in that because it can't be just couched on this will let you ship more software because while that's interesting to some people, that's not really what we're trying for. We're trying to make better software and by better that means more valuable to an end user or to a customer.

Avery Oldt:

You hit right on it. That's the value you sell to the product team. The product team doesn't really want another box they have to check. They want to ship the software, but they also want to hit all their metrics. They want to hit increased conversion or increased satisfaction or increased brand recognition, sales, whatever that is generated when the customer sees value in the software of the product. So that's how you sell it to the PMs. That's how you go and say, look, here's a new thing. We have a mandate. We're going to do this stuff. We're all going to align towards this future mountain. We're going to climb together and have 100% continuity across all of our programs because we use these systems. That's going to help you hit your metrics. It's going to help you ship better quality. It's going to lower your QA cycles, it's going to make you 100% compliant with visuals out of the gate. You're never going to have like, oh my gosh, stop the sprint.

We have to go back. Everything is off by two pixels and internally you'll have better relationships because of that. PMs are going to love that. They're really going to eat that up and that's sales. That's you saying you're not going after it like you're regulatory compliance or legal and you have to beat them to death.

You can't ship this unless you get the right buttons in there. It's like no, you really want to lean in on what's their motivation. And as a designer, that's easy. The PMs are your customer, figure out what motivates them, figure out what's going to be a successful outcome for them in their role, and it's not a mystery. They want to ship good product and get good numbers.

Chris Strahl:

Well, even at a meta level in the feeding frenzy that is product budgeting, which is constant and ever-present inside of large organizations of who ends up more resource constrained than other teams. There's nothing that a senior leader inside of an organization in product likes more than a product owner that's not asking for more people that is delivering without having to say, I could deliver double this roadmap if I just had three times the headcount. Because everybody says that and everybody's been saying that for a decade in product. And I think what shows up as a hero statement in that executive KPI dashboard is I can assure you 30% more roadmap with no additional headcount if I'm able to adopt this system well across my organization.

Avery Oldt:

And your headcount ask may change from in the past, you might say, oh, I need three more teams to do this. You may advocate for headcount in somebody else's team. If you're that product lead, you may say, hey, you've endorsed so-and-so to get this design system off the ground at scale. I really want you to give them two more people. They need two more people on that team over there to really help everyone else and that will make us all more effective. It's funny, and I see this a lot where once you really get good partnerships and you start to show value, you will get other people to advocate for your central team that does design at scale. That is really where the magic is. And you can have, you had mentioned somebody who has a big team, this can really help small product teams as well.

People who haven't gotten any funding yet, they can run a lot further and faster with structural components that are already fully baked. And then it's all about the idea. It's all about this new feature idea is really valuable. We don't need to grab designers for three weeks to start building out what it looks like. We already have all the pieces. We're just going to put them together and launch it. That helps a lot of PMs who haven't gotten traction yet. And I think rolling that up to a big organization that's a division of all product in this area, that man, supersedes everything.

Chris Strahl:

And it's interesting because you did bring up the other side of the coin from the designer perspective of yeah, I want my intent to show up better in my product, but I also don't want to feel constrained by the system that I use. Then likewise on the engineering side is like, well, I want to be able to not have to spend a bunch of time in workflow or a bunch of time in decision hell to get changes to my patterns or components made in order to actually go solve an engineering problem. And so there are definitely the positive sides of those things of, hey, I ship faster, it's a path of least resistance or hey, my intent now matches my product, but then that other side of it. I love your ability to disarm that by basically saying what we can do is we can now shift our advocacy into other teams and we can talk about how we work collectively better together instead of individually better together.

And there's some very simple things that you've mentioned in your language here that I think are powerful ways of communicating very complex concepts, and design systems are complex stuff. This is all really hard. There's the way the code works, the way you tie to design, there's all these different things that are really, really challenging, but conceptually, the value statements that you make are very simple

and I think that's an absolutely essential key to selling this inside of your organization and to what you say in that roadshow. Tell me about some of those simple ideas that are so impactful that help describe these really complex concepts in a way that's palatable to a decision maker.

Avery Oldt:

And I think I mentioned some of these already, but it's funny. Know your audience and I've always said I hate sales. Sorry, I've always said I am not a salesperson. I never want to be. Earlier in my career I've seen roles that are sales engineer or sales UX designer and I'm just like, oh my god, no, I never want to be in that cycle. It's terrible. But I've found out over time, really if you want to get your ideas across, sales is a key skill and I've just stumbled into how this works really well just because I focused on design. Designers are really salespeople. They really understand their audience, they understand the messaging they have to bring.

So the things that I bring into the room, if I'm talking to say like the CFO, and we're really advocating for building out this new group that would be the group that employed design systems across the whole company at scale, I don't talk about sticker sheets or specific products that I would use. I don't talk about whether we should be using Sketch or Figma or whatever. I don't talk about any of that stuff. I almost just jump into, we figured out a way to repeat work essentially infinitely without added cost. We can ship faster new ideas without adding more bodies, and this is when ears perk up. We can reduce our error rate, we can be more ADA compliant. Consistency brings less lawsuits.

Chris Strahl:

There's your stick CFO.

Avery Oldt:

You really just lean in on what they value. So when you're talking to accounting, it's all about cost reduction. When you're talking to engineering, it's all about speed and reduction of errors. When you're talking about sales, it's about how can we create value for our customers without added expense. So you just lean in there and just talk like a person. I think you just be human. When you start going into the jargon about design systems, that's when you lose them. When you start really being a design nerd, which is great, if you're in the design team, you're like, hey, look at this cool new way I've built refaming everything, that's awesome. But when you move into another room with a different audience, you need to speak a different language and you got to keep it simple.

Chris Strahl:

I love that. That's great advice. Fundamentally, when you're selling this across an organization, you're trying to get organizational leadership buy-in, you're trying to leverage those connections and those contacts, and then you're trying to also message it appropriately to the right audience, and this is all about ultimately creating something more useful. And I think you said something that was really impactful here. When you think about that usefulness and not just making more things, what is that in your mind?

Avery Oldt:

One thing I often hear within companies is they want more brand awareness. They want more emotional connection with their audience. They want more social engagement. The bottom line is drive additional

sales because they're connected to the product. They want more of that product, they tell their friends about that product, all that stuff, but the value for the customer is almost familiarity. I love these things. Whatever product we're talking about, I love this show, I love these shoes. I love this car because it's familiar. It's something I identify with. I've created this identity of myself that includes your product, and so I want to have that familiarity with everything you build.

I forget who it was, but there was a designer a while back, I was watching a clip of them talk about brand and they said they had a really funny metaphor. They said, if Nike decided to make a hotel, you would know what that hotel would be like. You would expect, you'd be like, okay, Nike Hotel, what do I imagine? They're going to have a track indoors, they're going to have hoops in the lobby, they're going to have really cool graphics and huge pictures of athletes. I get it. I would understand what a Nike hotel was, but if Hyatt wanted to make shoes, you'd be like, I don't know what the hell.

Chris Strahl:

What would that be?

Avery Oldt:

You would have no idea. It's because Nike has a brand and Hyatt has a logo. That's the big difference between those two companies. So the value you bring to customers, I think a lot of that value, not all of it, but a lot of it is in familiarity and having continuity across your products is something that has great value to people who've transferred their part of their identity to you. I wear Nikes and if you come out with a new product that doesn't have continuity to your other products, the value is not there. Familiarity is big.

Chris Strahl:

Thinking about that as it relates to systems. So I think that what you're saying is that your brand is really a fundamental part of your approach to your products and that is done with systems. And so I have long thought that the most effective design systems are the ones that own the brand. They own the digital representation of that brand and they're the ones that get the most buy-in, they're the ones that get the most adoption, they're the ones that get the most attention inside of organizations, but I've never heard it put so concretely that a design system is actually a way of building brand inside of your organization.

Avery Oldt:

A friend of mine, Mark [inaudible 00:27:18] who also lives in my town in Mill Valley, has written about this before in his work on brands as patterns and I think there's more awareness that brand is not just your visual identity, and so the evolution of brand into product organizations is a big move over the last few years. The evolution of brand into being owned by people who are not just in marketing I think is a huge win because you start to get more deeply engaged in having brand be the essence that's built into your product no matter what it looks like. If it's familiar in a way that taps into that identity that you have expanded, the customer has expanded to include your brand. If it's familiar and it feels like you have that same emotional connection, that's a win. That's value.

You're going to be like, I want that product and that consistency across products and that familiarity, whether it's something that's audio or video or visual or interaction UX that really needs to be owned by product design. That really needs to be owned by someone, and this is what you see at Apple. They didn't have the brand Apple owned solely by the marketing team. The brand was built in their teams that

integrated hardware and software together in a space that was very design led. That's the difference between being able to scale those ideas we talked about earlier. Ideas have scale, familiarity has scale, emotion has scale, so systems naturally fall into that. Having someone who thinks systematically about how do we keep these things in the same zone for our audience and not go wildly off zone with something that's going to fall flat, that's where you see products really fail.

Chris Strahl:

It is interesting because I do think about when you mention Apple, I think about an industrial designer being a brand owner inside of Apple, and I can't say the same thing for a lot of other companies, but there is this idea of this connection between product and brand and there's almost this democratization of the brand that happens much like the democratization of product that happens inside of systems. And so maybe brand is one of these things that we should be thinking about as another cross-functional discipline inside of a design system. I always think about, look, design systems democratize code. You don't need to be able to write code to be able to work with code inside of a design system. They democratize design because now you understand and you acknowledge that not all design decisions are made in Figma.

There's a lot of them that are made actually at the code level. Maybe we also should start to think about that as we're democratizing brand across product and not all the brand decisions are now being made by, like you said, somebody in marketing. A lot of the brand decisions are being made by somebody in product that is choosing to assemble an experience in a particular way.

Avery Oldt:

Building on that, I would say these are just the walls that are crumbling down in building all products. There are teams outside of your team that have a really strong, valid opinion I want to say maybe about your work and you should listen to them. Make friends, you should listen to them. Engineers should be weighing in on design. Designers should be weighing in on code, engineers should be weighing in on brand. This is the evolution away from design systems just being a sticker sheet of buttons and stuff like that into interaction design, micro interaction that happens in code and having really delightful moments in your software where the audience is like, yeah, wow. I'll just say Apple again. Apple always does this with their interactions.

Having that recognition isn't just built by one person, it's built by the engineer who writes the code, the designer who painstakingly works over the visuals on that thing, the person who's leading all of it in hardware and software coming together as brand. It's not just one lonely person who gets to make all the decisions in each of those teams and then somehow it comes together. The more integration you have across those teams, the more delightful the product is in the end.

Chris Strahl:

That's awesome. One last thing that I'm curious about in that is when you think about that feeling that you create and how that feeling really scales, how do you think of the measurement of that scale? How do you think about, what do I say? I nailed it on that feeling, man.

Avery Oldt:

Well, Chris, you've found the Achilles heel of this whole philosophy and it's hard, man. It's the area where we're still evolving. We don't have good well socialized metrics for how to measure that people

respect. I think you can still do, you could do NPS scores, you can do customer satisfaction, but it's all very vague in whether you can measure it really well. I think it's always going to get tied back to sales. It's always going to get tied back to satisfaction scores, but the satisfaction scores trying to hit an emotional outcome, it's all qualitative, so you can interview customers and ask them how they feel, but it takes a lot of time and people power to unpack that and then connect it back to your actual KPIs.

So this is the really hard part. I would say you know it when it happens, when you're a well established big company and you are design led and you're integrated across engineering, design and brand, you know it when it happens. You can see your product take off, you can see people being pleased with what you do. It's really hard to measure the way there. It's really hard to say, oh, we're 50% of the way to it happening.

Chris Strahl:

To delight.

Avery Oldt:

Yeah, it's almost like a pass fail. It's like a completely binary, are we doing well or not? And it's really hard to measure the way up there. There's no chart that says you're almost at delight. So I haven't figured it out yet. I don't know. It's difficult. I think good leaders use a lot of instinct in this space. You measure, but I think you still need intuition and instinct. So I think that takes a long tail of experience in a lot of different roles to really know if you're going in the right direction. Sometimes you fail, sometimes you take a leap and you completely fall flat. But I think instinct and intuition plays a big role here, and then you go off a cliff and then you're like, oh yeah, oh, we're finally doing it.

Chris Strahl:

It's like there are some objective measures. We all know that design by committee sucks. We all know that organizations that have huge teams that have terrible decision making skills and terrible communication sucks. It's very hard for those teams to actually make a quality product that people latch onto in a marketplace. And I guess you're right, it is born out by the sale of a product at some point, but the value that an organization places on design, design thinking and this democratization of that ability to create product, that seems to be how you do that at scale. There's lots of companies that are able to do it once or in a very small way. There's very, very few companies that are able to do it at scale across dozens or hundreds or even thousands of different applications of products.

And that I think is what the unlock really is in this is not at the ability to just do this once because you can take a really talented team and through some level of force of will get it tap and once. But getting back to our theme of scale, pushing on this for a huge surface area with millions of people, that's where these systems are essential to achieving that feeling of delight across a huge number of products.

Avery Oldt:

And it's funny because it's the coordination of all those different programs where you get the value. So I think about 10 years ago, you could have a digital presence for e-commerce store. You could have a shop that was completely disorganized and it was really hard to find stuff, but they loved getting the product online, not having to go to a store, or call somebody on the phone. The bar was low a decade ago, the bar was low, but then in the last decade, every industry is starting to get better and better. The UX everywhere. I wouldn't say everywhere. Banking still has a long way to go, but it started to get better

because the customer expectation has been creeping higher and higher everywhere. They're just creeping up. So if you have a huge company that has gigantic scale and you have all these different programs, it's the connection of all those programs together in one cohesive vision.

I hate to keep saying Apple, this is where Apple wins. It's one cohesive vision across all of their products. They're still operating independently in a lot of ways, but they come into one cohesive vision. I also think about physical retail space. Costco, if you go into Costco and you're a Costco shopper, it's very predictable. You know where the price is, and some people decode that price and they're like, well, if it ends in 99, that means it's discontinued. They're not going to have any more of these. I better buy all of them. You know the route in the store that you usually take, where the electronics are, where the food is, what's the really good deal this week. You have predictability because they have a very mature system. They have really good and really high employee satisfaction. They have really good efficient processes to get you out of that store with all your bulk items really quickly.

When I go to Costco, there's not often a lot of frustration around with customers because they get the system and they leverage it for their own value and they love it because it's a cohesive system that they recognize that is familiar. If you think 20 years ago when I was a kid, if there was ever a discount warehouse store, it was a god awful mess. You'd go in there, just be stuff piled everywhere, bins and bins of stuff. Oh my God, retail outlet bins where your parents would be digging through this thing to try and find a sweater that would fit you this year, and it was just a mess. And 20 years later, we have Costco. It's beautiful. It's amazing, and it's still a warehouse. There's still no heat in there. There's still concrete floors. It's not pretty, but it's like it's their thing and people get it, and that's familiar and that's why it's powerful.

Chris Strahl:

I think it's no coincidence that you cited two companies that are often at the heart of the conversation around the consumerization of technology. The reason why we have this idea of an app mindset is because of Apple and the reason why we have this idea of what a retail experience should feel like is in large part because of Costco. And so all these different things represent, like you said, the leaders of that march towards a higher and higher bar for consumer technology.

Avery Oldt:

Yeah, as much as we scrutinize as designers and engineers and product people, as much as we scrutinize the world out there and be like, oh, some of this stuff is really terrible. We're actually living in a really magical time where products are so good. If you drop this stuff through a time machine 50 years ago, it would be magic to most people. The world is so jam-packed full of great products these days. If you take off your critical designer hat, it's really hard to find bad stuff honestly. I think the bar has just been raised everywhere and it's fantastic, and we should appreciate that.

Chris Strahl:

Awesome. Well, I think that's a great place to leave it with this moment of appreciation for all the products in our lives that have advanced so far, so quickly, and here's hoping to being able to do that at scale using systems. Avery, I want to thank you again for being on. It's always a pleasure to chat with you. Keep saying smart stuff on LinkedIn from time to time, so it reminds me to reach out and chat, and I really wish you the best of luck with the new gig and come back and tell us about it. I would love to hear about some of the stuff you're working on.

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Avery Oldt:

Yeah, it's fun. I love chatting with you. This topic is awesome. I know we revisit a lot of the same ideas over and over again, but that's where we learn. We keep hitting systems and growth and trust and it's all fun.

Chris Strahl:

Well hey, thanks so much. Take care everybody. That's all for today. This has been another episode of The Design Systems Podcast. Thanks for listening. If you have any questions or a topic you'd like to know more about, find us on Twitter at The DS Pod. We'd love to hear from you with show ideas, recommendations, questions, or comments. As always, this pod is brought to you by Knapsack. You can check us out at knapsack.cloud. Have a great day.