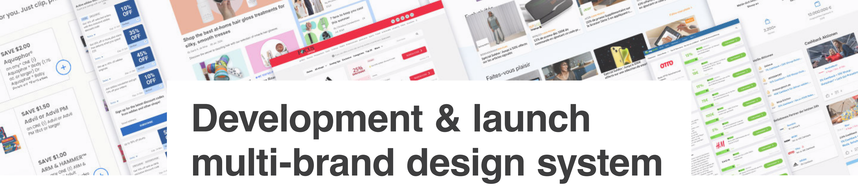


Development & launch multi-brand design system

All brands, all platforms, all at once.

Project timeline
September 2021 - present

Client
Global Savings Group

My Contribution
Design lead, project manager, strategic design direction, product design

Team
Product Manager, Engineering Lead, Product Design team, Business Stakeholders

Context

Global Savings Group (GSG) is a leading provider of discount codes and cashback offers across Europe, EMEA, and the Americas.

Product Offering:

1. **White-label discount-code platform**: served via leading news publications as a subfolder, leveraging partners' brand credibility. Available in all regions, browser-only, with no user registration or data handling. Supports 54 publisher brands and six own brands.
2. **Branded discounts products**: combines discount codes with comparison articles and affiliate links. Available in select regions, browser-only, with no user registration or data handling. Supports two brand environments.
3. **Branded rewards product**: offers cashback and gift cards. Available in select regions, browser, app, and extension. Involves complex user registration, data handling, and in-product payments. Supports two brand environments.

Challenge:

The discount products (both branded and white-label) were built on outdated technology, requiring significant manual effort to update. Each page needed to be designed in Sketch (now Figma), manually coded, QA'd, and pushed to production. This process was slow, labour-intensive, and prone to bottlenecks and QA issues.

The rewards product had a basic design system mainly for Product Designers, but it was also slow and relied heavily on manual work.

Product Managers, Designers, and Engineers were frustrated with the time, effort, and risk involved in working on these outdated systems. Recognizing the urgent need for improvement, GSG committed significant resources to find and implement a better solution for the team and business as a whole.

Objectives

Create a design system that allows for all GSG products to be maintained, updated, developed, and pushed to production in a time- and cost-efficient way, with minimal reliance on manual intervention. Across browser, app and extension.

We identified three key questions for the project to address and provide us with meaningful measures for success:

The Design System should help product teams design and develop solutions faster without the need to recreate common assets.

01
How can we shape the development process to be faster, more streamlined and efficient?

02
How can we implement the Design System in the most impactful way to maximise success?

03
Can we really rely on a single design system to serve all of our product needs?

Key Success Measures

RoI
12% increase in RoI on the Discounts Product since adoption and rollout of the Design System in 2021/2022.

Brand
Consistency across products has notably improved, with the experience gap between touchpoints reduced.

Time
Average time to market has improved by circa 7.5% since adoption by all Product teams.

Scale
Build, test and launch times are considerably faster, with updates pushed to market in half the previous time.

01
How can we shape the development process to be faster, more streamlined and efficient?

I organized workshops with Product Designers, Engineers, and Product Managers (PMs) across the full product suite to understand their pain points and working processes. These workshops revealed common issues which, once addressed, would allow us to create a faster and more efficient process with fewer roadblocks for the individual teams.

Painpoint: making changes was slow. Teams were frustrated with how long it took to get approved designs to consumers. The development process was cumbersome, full of friction and with multiple steps and dependencies that were unclear and unjustified. Designers felt like they were tossing files to Engineers without feedback, while PMs spent too much time connecting the dots.

Proposal: rebuild the working process to remove roadblocks and dependencies, increasing delivery speed and reducing delivery costs accordingly.

Action: I conducted an intensive audit of the process across all three specialisms. Collaborating with function leads, we identified a desired workflow that served everyone's needs more effectively. This required considerable trust, as the team was used to the old ways of working, and found change uncomfortable. I worked hard to build trust in the proposal, and together with Engineering and Product leads, established the new process with minimal pushback. Once implemented, the teams quickly realized the benefits and embraced the changes with minimal disruption.

Outcome: a new development workflow was defined and implemented, with greater time given over to initial briefing to ensure cohesion across Design, Engineering and Product. The various responsibilities were identified and the interactions/crossover points clearly documented and regularly monitored to ensure they remain frictionless. The process is now much faster with fewer blockers, and the time from briefing to production has improved by almost 45% over the past 18 months.

02
How can we implement this in the most impactful way to maximise success?

This project had the potential to be hugely expensive to the business both in terms of time and financial costs, and could fail spectacularly, given the extensive involvement of the Product team and implications for the live product offerings. The impact needed to be meaningful and noticeable, with minimal room for error. The challenge was to implement the new design system in the most impactful way to maximize success, which required a clear understanding of what "success" meant in this context.

Painpoint: this project was high-risk and could be hugely expensive for the business as a whole. The impact needed to be significant and precise, with minimal room for error. Understanding what "success" meant was crucial as our team had little to no prior experience with a functional and established design system.

Proposal: create breathing room by shifting priorities, reassigning resources, developing a shared vision of success, and defining success metrics.

Action: I worked with stakeholders to set a core success metric: the Design System would be in production on three specific domains by March 2022.

Workload reprioritization was approved. Designers completed the core component library and handed it to Engineering in under two months, earlier than was expected. Engineers had four months to move these into production, allowing Product Designers to engage in testing and QA, making iterative improvements to the patterns and layouts to ensure maximum quality of output.

Without a clear and agreed upon measure for success, it would have been entirely impossible to deliver the project successfully.

Outcome: with the reprioritization, Product Designers handed off the core component library and product patterns to Engineering in less than two months. Engineers then had four months to move these into production, enabling Product Designers to engage with testing and QA, making iterative changes. The Design System was delivered with maximum impact and efficiency.

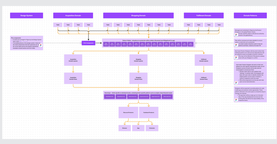
03
Can we really rely on a single design system to serve all our product needs?

The biggest question of all. There was considerable concern that a single Design System wouldn't be able to serve the various intricacies of the GSG product offering, and if it was able, that it would be slow and cumbersome to manage and work with.

Painpoint: product teams were used to working independently, and the idea of one tool meeting all needs seemed impossible. They feared losing unique product USPs, leading to uniform, bland offerings. Product Designers were comfortable with brand-led solutions, resulting in bloated style guides and weaker products.

Proposal: develop a brand-agnostic design system to solve consumer needs while creating a distinct brand layer to maintain brand identity.

Action: to ensure confidence, I collaborated with Product Designers to develop a pattern library stripped of brand assets, focusing on core components. These brand-agnostic patterns became the foundation for building versatile new patterns and pages. I guided Product Designers to shift from brand-led to brand-agnostic approaches, focusing on solving product and consumer problems first. This involved dedicated 1:1 sessions and a structured development cycle to build their confidence and skills. I presented this new approach and pattern library to Product Managers, demonstrating how we could easily build solutions while maintaining product integrity. The brand layer allowed us to address specific brand needs dynamically, supporting recent brand updates. This Design System enables us to create unique, branded experiences, changing hearts and minds and improving iteration and production. A shared pattern library is being established to provide Designers with access to all live patterns, allowing the Design System team to manage and maintain the assets, and giving the Product Designers the potential to create solutions at pace while also identifying where new patterns are required.



Outcome: the Product Designers now take a brand-agnostic approach to problem solving, working with their PMs and Engineers to fully understand the challenge at hand and focussing to solve this well before implementing any brand considerations. This change in behaviour is enabling Designers to product solutions that are robust and scalable, setting the business up for future development over time. The implementation of a dedicated brand layer allows for specific brand patterns and flows to be established and implemented, serving the differentiation needs of the brand teams and maintaining the individuality of the product offerings.

Shaping the GSG Product Design Team

Data-driven problem solvers

Project timeline
September 2021 - present

Client
Global Savings Group

My Contribution
Design lead, team manager, hiring manager

Team
Product Designers, User Researchers, Design System Specialists

Context

In 2021, GSG's Product Design function operated in silos, with two separate teams, white-label and cashback, functioned independently with minimal crossover. The white-label team, consisting of two part-time designers, two midweights, a user researcher, and a team lead, shouldered the responsibility of maintaining and developing offerings for a staggering 47 brands, all while facing tight deadlines and complex product needs. The cashback team, though slightly larger with a junior, three midweights, a senior, and a lead, contended with similar challenges. Here, designers functioned in a hybrid product/brand role, focusing on research for various brands. However, limited collaboration across the teams meant they primarily operated as "artworkers," with minimal strategic input into product development. This resulted in inconsistencies in user experience and a lack of support for Product Managers.

Challenge:

GSG needed a design powerhouse. As the company aimed for greater market share, a unified team with deeper product knowledge and strategic thinking was crucial. It was clear that there was a need for Product Designers to have deeper market and business knowledge, greater focus on user research, more engagement with strategic product development, and a meaningful culture of collaboration and interconnection.

The teams are geographically dispersed across London, Paris, Berlin and Munich, with very different cultures and communication styles. There was no consistency in terms of career progression or professional development, and as such Designers were stagnating in roles that were comfortable and offered insufficient challenge.

Objectives

Establish a Product Design function that best serves the needs of GSG and our consumers. Merge both Product Design teams (happened early 2022) and create one single team that delivers exceptional design work and strategic value to the business.

- Empower Designers to develop their skills and expertise through training, development and increased opportunities.
- Become data-led by putting user research at the heart of our decision-making through access to data and research tools.
- Deepen the knowledge of the team by adding a Senior layer to the hierarchy, supporting the more junior team members.

01
How do we establish a true team culture within a siloed environment?

02
Can we establish an environment where excellence is expected and delivered?

03
Design is subjective, so how do we even start to measure success?

Key Success Measures

Skills
The Product Designers now have greater skills across data and research, plus technical Design System topics.

D.S.
The Designers have now fully onboarded on the Design System and are serving Product solutions at pace.

Velocity
Thanks to the optimised workflow, Designers can create, iterate and test more quickly than before.

Quality
Designers now deliver work of greater quality with less time spent in feedback loops and QA.

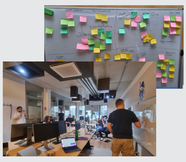
01
How do we establish a true team culture within a siloed environment?

Establishing a true team culture is challenging, not least because the tangible benefits aren't immediately obvious. The challenges with this topic included the very siloed team approach, a language barrier (the business language for GSG is English but for the brand Product teams it was originally French), and a reluctance to engage with the other team due to a perceived lack of crossover.

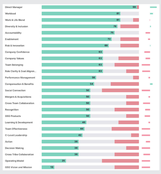
Painpoint: with the Design teams have operated independently of each other for so long, and on separate products, it was difficult to get them to find common ground and engage with each other in a meaningful manner. There were some cultural challenges to be addressed also, as each Product team had their own ways of working, on top of the expected challenges of running a multi-cultural team.

Proposal: merge the Product Design teams to create a single, holistic Design powerhouse to tackle all business needs.

Action: the Product Design teams merged in early February 2022. I quickly established regular team rituals, including work flow mapping and deep dives, and arranged an in-person event for the team to develop trust and build relationships. Leaning on the great wealth of skills and expertise within the team to develop in-team learning, there is now a strong mentoring culture within the team, with seniors and leads actively working with more junior members of the team as part of their own role expectations, improving skills for both parties. Following a lot of effort, there is now an active feedback culture within the team: Designers now actively share work in progress (this was never done before) and get meaningful feedback and guidance from their peers, enabling them to iterate and produce better quality work in a more efficient manner.



Outcome: the Product Design team now acts as a holistic unit, with meaningful communication and intentional collaboration. There is a culture of knowledge-sharing that supports individuals at all levels to grow their skills and depth of knowledge to support their ongoing growth and development. Team engagement scores have markedly improved over the past two years (going from 40% to 48%), attrition rates has dropped, and the quality of output has improved as noted by PMs and stakeholders across the business.



02
Can we establish an environment where excellence is expected and delivered?

Excellence can be a moving target, especially in Design. We faced issues with output quality, lack of creative problem-solving, and disengagement. Some Designers were under-performing, causing frustration among the team.

Painpoint: establishing standards of excellence is crucial for the Product Design team to improve and solve consumer problems effectively. Design is integral to product development at GSG, but engagement was lacking.

Proposal: audit the team, identify strengths and weaknesses, set development goals, and address under-performance.

Action: I conducted deep-dive sessions with each Designer to understand their strengths, weaknesses, interests, and areas for development. Feedback from PMs, Engineers, and Design peers provided a complete picture. I developed a Skills Matrix to identify the necessary hard and soft skills needed to ensure success in role, and established standards of excellence based on QA, process and delivery. Under-performance was addressed to set clear expectations for the team. An under-performing Designer was identified through peer feedback and my own observations. Despite efforts to help them improve, their disruptive behaviour persisted, and they were transitioned out of the business. This was necessary for the team's ongoing success and well-being, and while personally uncomfortable, was an absolute non-negotiable.

It may be a cliché but handling uncomfortable situations is par for the course as a team leader and one of the most critical for the ongoing health of the team.

Outcome: With a focus on excellence, clear development expectations, and consequences for under-performance, the team now delivers above and beyond expectations. The iterative process is more streamlined, reducing errors and focusing on solutions that meet business and consumer needs.

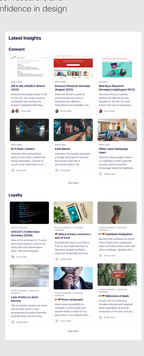
03
Design is subjective, so how do we even start to measure success?

One of the biggest challenges in Design is measuring success and proving the team's value to the business. The Product Design team lacked data and measurable insights, leading to questions about their impact and value. Designers felt they were making recommendations based on gut feelings without critical data to back up their choices.

Painpoint: without data and analytics, feedback was subjective, making it hard to pinpoint successes and areas for growth. Product peers often doubted the validity of design decisions, slowing delivery and eroding Designers' confidence.

Proposal: instil a data-led approach to Product Design, using analytics, user research, and measurable insights to gauge success and provide tangible confidence in design recommendations.

Action: to enable designers to be data-led, I established a training and development plan to ensure all team members had a baseline level of knowledge. This prevented Designers from becoming data-limited and afraid to make decisions without extensive research. Establishing research and data insights as supportive tools allowed the team to maximize their value while making informed design decisions. Designers engaged with Product Managers to understand the available data and analytical tools for their products. GSG's dedicated Data Team provided insights on customer engagement, click-through rates, and user events. Designers received training on these tools and ongoing instruction to use the data to inform their design process. I established a culture of product accountability, expecting Designers to be subject-matter experts with market and product data insights to support their decisions. This shift was well-received by the wider business but remains an active focus within the Design Team.



Outcome: incorporating data and analytics into their process has boosted Designers' confidence. They can now track and measure the impact of their work, better understanding how it affects consumers and the business, making them more valuable to GSG.

Going from fully VR to Virtual Assessment

Responsive product development

Project timeline
May 2020 - September 2020

Client
Cappfinity

My Contribution
Product & Graphic Design,
Video Production, Web Build
& Management

Team
Product Designers, VR Tech,
Behavioural Psychologists,
Chief Product Officer

Context

Virtual Reality (VR) has played a major role in the assessment centre offering by Cappfinity for a considerable time now. Authenticity is a cornerstone of the Cappfinity product offering, and VR allows candidates to be the most authentic version of themselves throughout the assessment. The business has a dedicated VR team, responsible for building immersive and engaging, industry-leading experiences that allow prospective employers to get a deep reading of their candidates truest selves. The VR assessments are an in-person offering, provided on-site by a specialist technician.

Challenge:

The Covid pandemic was a deal-breaker for the VR assessments due to their in-person and interactive nature. It was simply impossible to deliver the assessments in the same way but the need to serve customers was still present. In an effort to address this challenge, Cappfinity undertook a major project to redesign the VR experience and delivery it digitally through their CMS and Zoom.

Objectives

Design an immersive branded assessment experience for candidates that echoes the VR experience as closely as possible. To be delivered via supervised Zoom sessions, and therefore to be as low bandwidth as possible to prevent any potential lag or slowdown. Should this all be successful, develop the product for ongoing use to be scalable and easily replicated.

Authenticity and energy are the markers of success for Cappfinity, and the assessment experience has to delivery on both points.

01
How do we establish a true team culture within a siloed environment?

02
Can we make our CMS flexible enough to deliver the engaging experience we need?

03
Can we make this accessible in a way that the original assessments weren't?

Key Success Measures

Engaged
Candidate completion data scores ranked these assessments more highly than the usual Cappfinity offering.

Brand
The theming allowed candidates to engage with their prospective employer in a unique way.

Scale
Thanks to the Design System I developed to serve the assessments, Cappfinity was able to build more at scale.

Future
The success of the initial assessments led to the foundation of the Virtual Assessment product offering.

01
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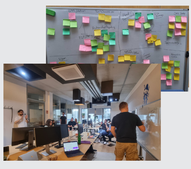

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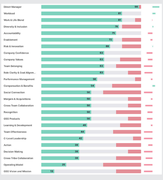

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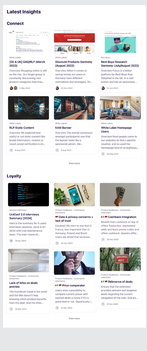

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