

Organisations as diverse as Apple, Amazon, Ikea, Nike, Uber and the UK Government have shown the power of design.

Delivering remarkable products and services, they have spearheaded the notion that success can be founded on innovating what is delivered, and how.

As a result of these well-known examples (alongside many others), 'design' is now a word that is used in the boardroom of many firms.

It has also led to the creation of teams with a fresh focus on clients and client service. These 'customer experience teams' are building internal expertise in design, as well as calling upon the experience of outside professional services firms.

The result is a reinvention of many products, a reworking of the physical and digital experience that's provided to clients, and the creation of a strategic roadmap for further improvements.

Design does not, however, apply exclusively to customers and clients. Within the enterprise, there are many opportunities for design to reshape the way that staff work, and to reinvent the processes that underpin key activities.

This can, and should, happen at many levels. At the lowest level of design, there are dozens of small inefficiencies and frustrations that nag at staff every working day. At the highest level, whole portions of organisations can be examined and improved.

This article outlines the value of design in the enterprise, provides real-world examples, and offers practical approaches.



**James Robertson** is the managing director of Step Two Designs, an intranet consultancy based in Sydney, Australia. James is the author of the best-selling books "What every intranet team should know", "Designing intranets: creating sites that work" and "Essential intranets: inspiring sites that deliver business value".

## 'Design' is a powerful word to drive organisational change

### The many faces of design

While 'design' is an increasingly powerful word at every level of organisations, it also encompasses a broad set of practical meanings.

It's useful to think more deeply about what 'design' means, and how it might be applied within enterprises.

In practice, design includes:

- **Visual design**, including appearance and colours. Great visual design conveys a sense of clarity, generates a positive emotional response and powerfully conveys the underlying brand or message.
- **Usability**, including ease of use and accessibility. This ensures that users will be able to quickly and confidently use the solution or product.
- **User experience**, which encompasses the broader aspect of how things work, and how they are structured. Looking at the system or solution as a whole, user experience ensures that the shape, structure, and interactions are right.
- **Design thinking**, which takes a fresh look at the system or service in the broadest context of user and business needs. This can lead to major improvements, or entirely new solutions.

The first three elements of design are important, as they ensure that systems, services and processes work in a productive way.

These foundational elements involve practical techniques and methodologies, which are outlined in *Designing intranets: creating sites that work* ([store.steptwo.com.au](http://store.steptwo.com.au)).

Beyond this, design thinking offers a powerful approach to redesigning the enterprise, which we will explore further.

## The need for design in the enterprise

Organisations do not run as well as they could. At every scale, there are issues and roadblocks that impede the smooth operating of businesses, as well as holding back the delivery of great services to clients and customers.

At the small scale, these issues include:

- systems are cumbersome and hard to use
- complexity of systems impacts on staff and business productivity
- information and answers are hard to find
- solutions don't meet regulatory requirements, such as accessibility
- processes are fragmented across many different systems
- staff training is slow and costly, due to the complexity of systems and processes
- staff uptake and adoption is less than desired levels
- frustration in systems reduces staff engagement and satisfaction
- bad design leads to mistakes and poorly-informed decisions

At the large scale there are also many challenges, including:

- internal systems and practices don't provide an effective foundation for delivering great customer outcomes
- poorly designed systems act as an anchor to organisational growth
- inefficient internal practices make it hard for organisations to 'do more with less'
- overall pace of innovation is slower than needed
- different areas and aspects of the organisation don't work together cohesively
- mistakes caused by poor design have a significant organisational cost and increase business risks
- poor design leads to resistance to change by staff
- strategic projects and changes don't succeed as well as they could

**Poor design has a big impact within organisations**

## The role of design

Given time and sufficient resources, design can address or resolve all the issues outlined in the previous lists.

Through the application of a range of techniques, methodologies and principles, design can tackle both small and large challenges.

In the same way that the customer experience has become a topic of strategic discussions, the enterprise experience warrants similar attention. In this way, we can start to 'redesign the enterprise', in a constructive (not destructive) way.

In practice, there are four elements that should be considered when applying design in the enterprise:

1. deeply understand the problem
2. design new solutions
3. deliver outcomes that work
4. strengthen internal capabilities

Each of these is explored in the following sections.

## Field research underpins great design outcomes

### 1. Deeply understand the problem

The starting point for any design project must be to build a deep understanding of how staff work, in the context of the broader business context.

This goes beyond basic requirements gathering, to encompass 'needs analysis' or 'ethnographic research'.

This involves:

- spending time with operational staff, in their working environments
- using a mix of research techniques, including one-on-one interviews, contextual inquiry and workplace observation
- conducting open-ended research that aims to flesh out the bigger picture
- engaging with key stakeholders and business owners
- understanding business processes and objectives
- clearly capturing and communicating research insights

In the consumer context, there are many stories of researchers going into homes and observing how dinner is made, houses cleaned, or even teeth brushed. Insights from this field research then drove the creation of new products and services.

The big advantage for enterprise design is the captive audience: staff. These are all people paid by the organisation itself, making it much easier to conduct field research.

In practice, even a small amount of sufficiently deep research can uncover many opportunities for improvements or new solutions.

(We have written many articles on how to conduct effective research, and *Conducting intranet needs analysis* is a good starting point for further reading.)

## Take the opportunity to design on a larger scale

### 2. Design new solutions

Having gained a rich understanding of the organisation, seize the opportunity to use the full power of design to explore new solutions and ideas.

This is where ‘design thinking’ comes in, with its rich toolkit of ideation and innovation techniques.

Like innovation in customer-facing solutions, this design work is done with a clear goal of helping the organisation to work better, and thus meet its strategic objectives.

To achieve this, it is often valuable to take a two-stage approach to the design thinking. First there is a broadening out of the problem space, uncovering many different ideas and solutions.

The result is a long list of possible outcomes, some small and others big, some easy to put into practices and others entirely ‘blue sky’.

The second stage of the design process then narrows down, looking at the ideas through the lens of business needs and real-world practicalities.

The outcome of the design work may be a new system, a different staff experience, or an entirely new way of work. (The case studies to come will show what this can look like in practice.)

### 3. Deliver outcomes that work

Underpinning major design changes of interfaces, systems or processes must be the delivery of solutions that work well for staff.

This involves addressing design fundamentals, including usability, findability and accessibility. Solutions must also engage emotionally with staff, strengthening the internal brand and organisational culture.

This is design at its most practical, and there are a range of techniques that can be used at this point in the process, including:

- card sorting
- tree testing
- usability testing
- prototypes (both paper and online)
- accessibility testing

These techniques are outlined in *Designing intranets: creating sites that work*, which shows how they can be used in an enterprise context.

## Organisations must strengthen their enterprise design muscles

### 4. Strengthen internal capabilities

Design is a practice, not a one-off project, and organisations must strengthen their internal capacity and capability if they are to harvest the full benefits.

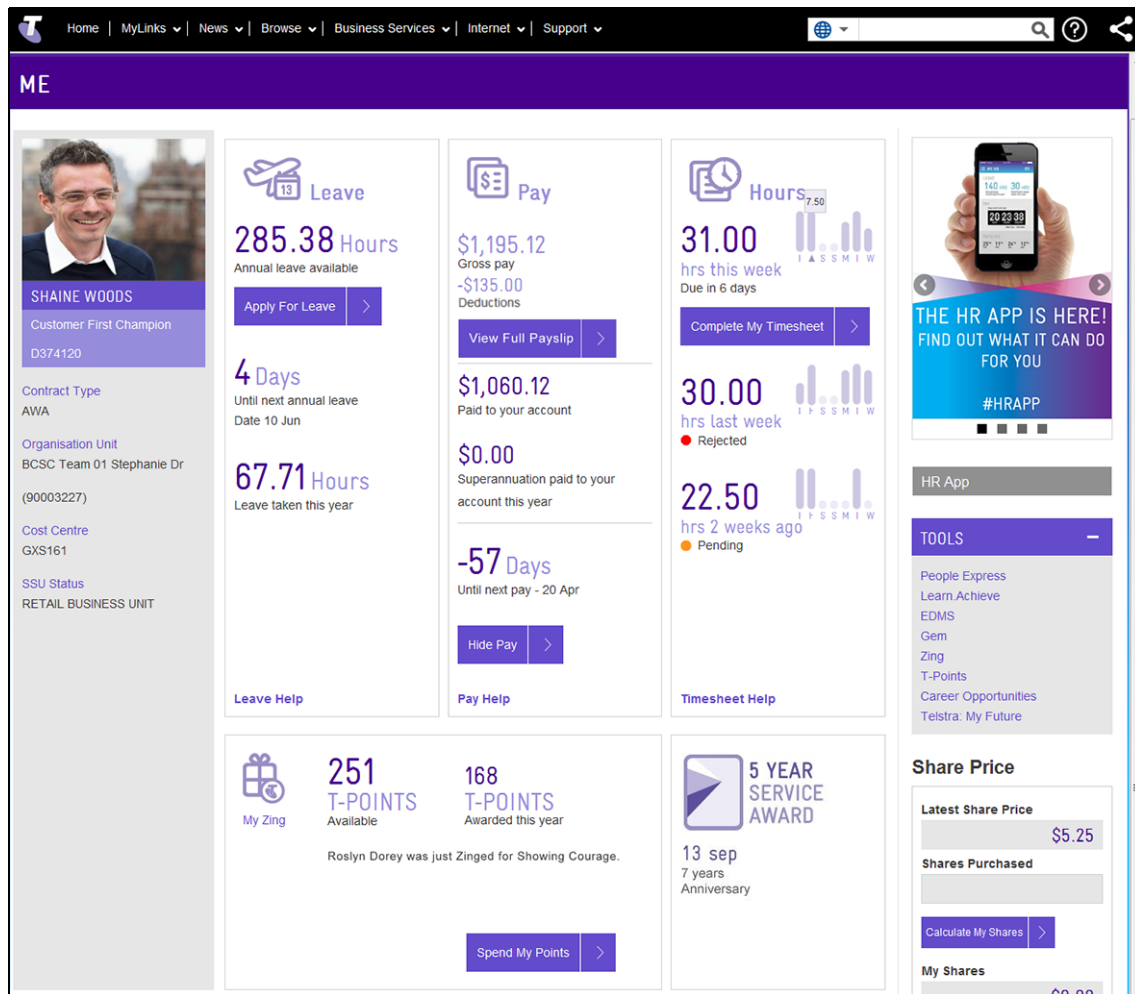
Externally facing, most larger organisations now have a ‘customer experience team’ (or equivalent) who have an ongoing brief to find opportunities for improvements that deliver business benefits.

These teams often mix in-house staff (to ensure continuity) with external professional services firms (to bring in fresh ideas and approaches).

Within the enterprise, this responsibility can be taken up by the intranet or web teams, or established as a separate and specialist team.

Whatever the approach, organisations need to use early successes to grow support for larger initiatives.

In time, leading organisations will see their enterprise design initiatives as a competitive advantage, alongside customer-facing design capabilities.



The new 'Me Page' delivered to staff, replacing the traditional HR landing page. Screenshot courtesy of Telstra.

## Putting design to work

Assuming that you are excited about the power of design within the enterprise, what does it really look like in practice? Two short case studies will show what outcomes can be delivered.

The first is from **Telstra**, a major telecoms company based in Australia, with 40,000 staff.

When a multidisciplinary team was brought together to redesign the HR section of the intranet, the goal was to deliver a better design and structure for the existing content.

A user-centred approach was followed, starting with user research. A solid project, but hardly revolutionary. After seeing some of the earlier winners of the Intranet Innovation Awards, the project team rethought their ambitions.

Starting from a blank sheet of paper, they asked: what would be the best design for meeting common staff needs, as well as providing benefits for the HR team?

The result was a new 'Me Page', structured like a dashboard, and radically different from a standard HR intranet landing page.

Key details were surfaced in the dashboard, driven by integration with back-end systems. Thoughtful elements were also designed, such as blurring out the salary by default, to protect the privacy of staff.

Beyond a beautiful appearance, this new Me Page dramatically reduced the number of calls to the HR call centre, in some cases slashing them by more than 20% for common topics.

In this way, a single page on the intranet, when truly designed well, has delivered benefits for both staff and the business.



‘mycoles’ reaches 100,000 staff in supermarkets scattered across Australia. Screenshot courtesy of Coles.

At the larger scale, **Coles** is one of the two biggest supermarket chains in Australia. It has 100,000 frontline staff, in stores scattered across the country.

As part of a major store renewal, Coles recognised that staff are critical in delivering great customer service. In addition to improving staff engagement, there was also a need to reduce turnover and absences.

At the time, 80,000 of the frontline staff had no email or intranet access, with communication reliant on local manager updates, posters and fliers.

Taking a ‘design thinking’ approach – informed by staff research – the project team identified the value of delivering an online portal for frontline staff.

Undaunted by the potential technical issues, they found a way of letting staff use their personal email addresses to access their corporate identity.

A substantial launch and change management campaign led to rapid adoption, even though usage was voluntary. Every aspect of the visual design was carefully thought through and crafted, down to the logo used for the ‘mycoles’ site name.

Staff suddenly had immediate visibility of the many staff benefits on offer (such as the weekly discounts on promotional items in the stores). This strengthened staff engagement and loyalty.

Processes were also streamlined, with paper payslips and printed forms replaced by online equivalents. This made it much easier for part-time and shift workers, as well as delivering business cost savings.

A ‘walk-crawl-run’ approach was taken, with many iterations of the site being tested by an ever-greater number of staff.

The clear focus on the bigger picture, and the strength of the design practices, meant that the project delivered something previously thought impossible.



Note that both of these case studies are outlined in full in the *Intranet Innovations 2014* report that is available online:

[store.steptwo.com.au](http://store.steptwo.com.au)

### **Harnessing the power of design in the enterprise**

Every day, staff wrestle with dozens of minor frustrations and issues, each adding to the overall inefficiency of their organisation.

More widely, organisations are transforming how they engage with customers, and where they sit in the wider landscape.

To do this, however, substantial changes are required within the enterprise. Processes and systems need reworking, and broader working practices need a rethink.

Design provides a powerful toolkit to help transform the enterprise. At lower levels,

frequent tasks and key systems can be streamlined, making them easier and quicker to use.

More broadly, design thinking gives a structured framework in which to review how the organisation operates. The result can be entirely new business processes and structures.

We've already seen the power of design in the customer-facing space, with most large organisations now supporting large customer experience teams, with an ongoing mandate to make improvements.

It's now time to establish similar resources within the enterprise, to kick start a designed process for improving how work is done. Starting small, such teams will quickly prove their worth, showing how it is possible to redesign the enterprise.



#### ***More articles!***

Find out when new papers are published:  
[www.steptwo.com.au/subscribe](http://www.steptwo.com.au/subscribe)



#### ***Did you like this article?***

Send your thoughts and feedback to:  
[jamesr@steptwo.com.au](mailto:jamesr@steptwo.com.au)



## ***Step Two* DESIGNS**

[www.steptwo.com.au](http://www.steptwo.com.au) • [contact@steptwo.com.au](mailto:contact@steptwo.com.au)  
intranets • usability & IA • content management • information management