

✦ Whitepaper

# Design as a Funding Catalyst for **SaaS Startups**

A guide to how quality brand, web, and product design accelerate trust, funding and valuations.

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# Why Design Matters for Funding

Investors form opinions before you say a word.

While pitch decks, product demonstrations, and sales presentations serve as the voice of the product, a **potential investor's first impression comes from the unspoken voice: design.** The visual language of your product establishes credibility and signals operational maturity before you ever begin a pitch.

A mature design system acts as a bridge between early traction and institutional legitimacy. Strong design accelerates diligence and supports higher valuation multiples by projecting stability.

This paper combines industry research with Partywave's direct experience aiding dozens of SaaS companies through brand, web and product design. We examine how strategic investments in mature, intentional design serve as essential infrastructure for securing capital.

<sup>1</sup>Elizabeth Sillence, et al., "Trust and Mistrust of Online Health Sites," Northumbria University, 2004.

94%

of First Impressions  
Are Design Related<sup>1</sup>

# The Startup Credibility Gap

When trying to get first-round funding, startups often face a “credibility gap,” where limited traction, few metrics, and little history make it difficult to establish legitimacy with investors.

Value propositions only go so far. In crowded SaaS markets where competitors make similar claims, startups without strong design differentiation risk getting lost in the noise. For investors, customers and talent alike, design can bridge this credibility gap, filling the gap where hard data is thin, and creating trust.

The credibility gap is unavoidable in early SaaS, but a focus in design will help close it. **Well-designed brands, websites, and products communicate readiness, giving investors confidence that the startup is built to last.**

<sup>1</sup>WebFX, "40+ Website Statistics Every Marketer Should Know in 2025" (Revalidating Stanford Web Credibility Research).

<sup>1</sup>Sheppard, Benedict, Hugo Sarrazin, Garen Kouyoumjian, and Fabricio Dore. "The Business Value of Design." McKinsey Quarterly, Oct. 25, 2018.

**75%**

of Users Admit They Make Credibility Judgements Based on Website Design<sup>1</sup>

**2x**

Revenue Growth for Design-Driven Organizations vs. Their Peers<sup>2</sup>

# Brand Design

Storytelling that Wins Investor Confidence

When your brand identity is clear and consistent, it tells a story that investors can trust without having to say a word.

A compelling brand identity is equal parts visual consistency (logos, typography, colors, imagery, textures) and message architecture (what your company is trying to communicate). When working well together, these make your company easy to remember.

# 93%

of Executives Surveyed in Harvard Business Review Study Agree That Long-Term Brand Building Is Essential for Growth<sup>1</sup>

**Companies with stronger brands consistently achieve higher win rates, better retention, and greater pricing power** - outcomes that directly influence valuation multiples.

<sup>1</sup>Harvard Business Review Analytic Services. "Building Strong Brands: Investing in Long-Term Branding to Ensure Resilience and Meet Customer Needs." Sponsored by Frontify, Harvard Business Review, October 2025.



Vendelux : Before and After Brand Refresh



## Brand Design

# In Practice: Sixfold

Operating in insurance underwriting, Sixfold faced skepticism in a conservative sector. Its bold but credible pink identity, approachable visuals, and strong narrative humanized a complex technology. This clarity helped secure a Series B led by Brewer Lane.

## Challenge

No brand presence in a sector where trust is everything.

## Solution

A distinctive identity that made a complex AI product feel credible and human.

## Result

# \$30M

Series B Round & Growing Rapidly



# Web Design

## The Digital Pitch Deck

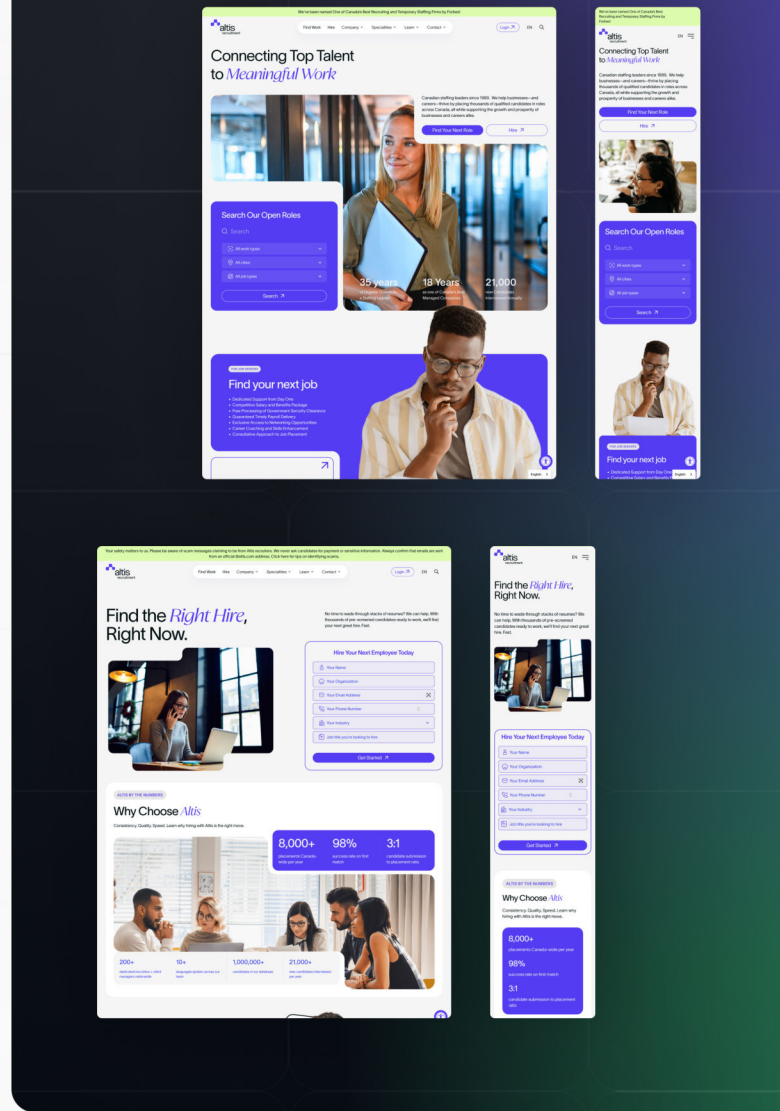
A website should serve as a product's first digital pitch deck. It will likely be an investor's first touch, before a product demo, before meeting the team, sometimes before they even know what the product does.

A website must clearly speak to ICPs (Ideal Customer Profiles) while relaying business outcomes and next steps in seconds, milliseconds even. It must also keep the most important information front and center. Above-the-fold clarity is essential.

**An effective website is the digital pitch deck that investors rely on for clarity and evidence.**

<sup>1</sup>Bargas-Avila, Javier. "Users Love Simple and Familiar Designs – Why Websites Need to Make a Great First Impression." Google Research Blog, Aug. 29, 2012.

<sup>2</sup>Dahal, Sirjana. "Eyes Don't Lie: Understanding Users' First Impressions on Website Design Using Eye Tracking." Master's thesis, Missouri University of Science and Technology, 2011.

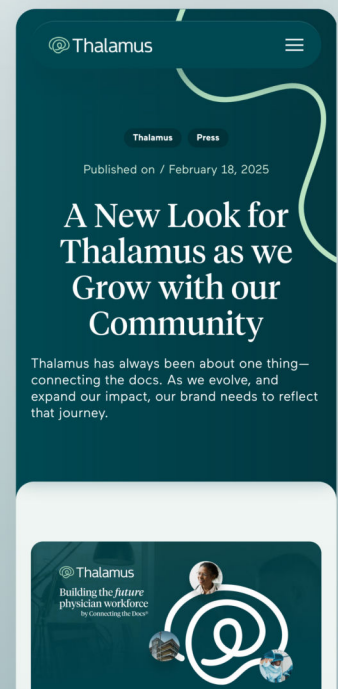
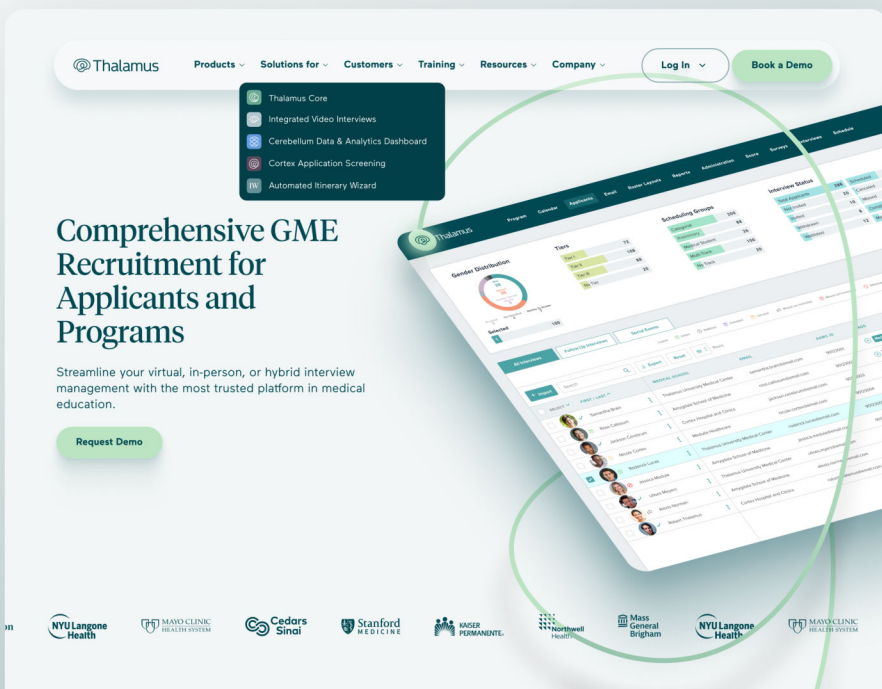


**17** Milliseconds

for People to Develop an Opinion of a Website<sup>1</sup>

**2.6** Seconds

for Eyes to Settle on Key Areas of a Web Page<sup>2</sup>



# @Thalamus

## Web Design

# In Practice: Thalamus

Thalamus, a physician workforce platform, redesigned its website to highlight credibility. Its structured content and institutional visual system emphasized mission and scale.

## Challenge

A mature, established platform held back by an outdated website that didn't reflect its scale or credibility.

## Fix

A modern, dynamic Webflow site built to communicate institutional trust and support fundraising.

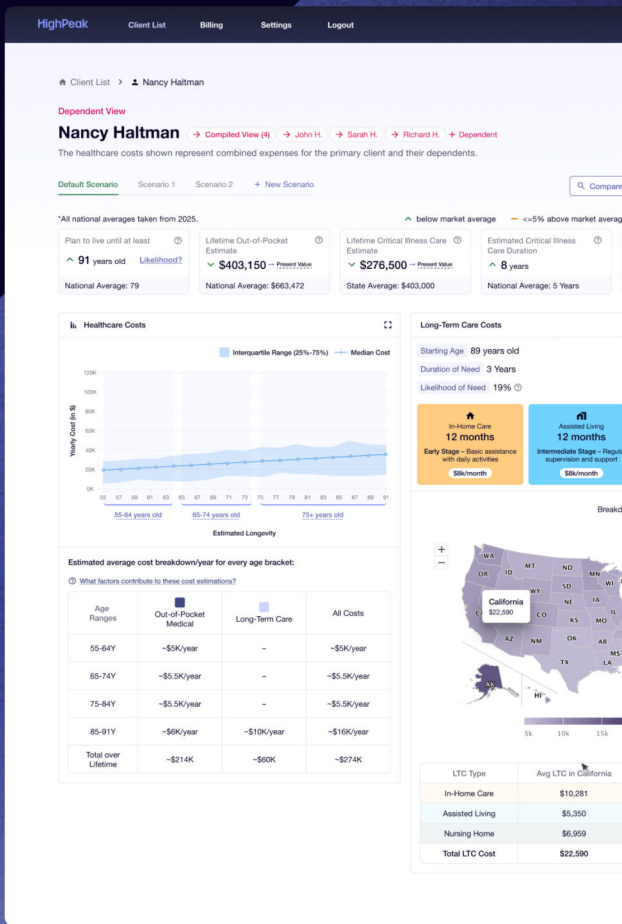
## Result

**\$30M**

Series B Round

Over  
**50%**

Boost in Site Traffic



# Product Design

## Proof of Execution

A SaaS product's interface is proof of execution. Investors judge whether teams can ship, learn, and iterate through the quality of UI and UX.

Clean design is a top indicator of retention and expansion, both critical valuation drivers.

Onboarding is the first investor checkpoint. Smart defaults and guided onboarding accelerate time-to-value.

For investors, activation and week-one retention are the clearest signals that a product is gaining traction in its market.

By designing for clarity and removing friction, startups demonstrate their ability to create scalable growth curves. **Investors trust what they can see. A well-designed product is evidence that a team can execute reliably at scale.**

# 25-30%




Increase in Retention Rates in Apps with Intuitive UX/UI<sup>1</sup>

# The Investor Lens on Design

Investors value mature design, but they don't view it from the same perspective as a product team or a design team.

Leading SaaS Venture Capital firms like [Sequoia](#) and [OpenView](#) explicitly factor brand and design signals into their evaluation of early-stage investments, preferring companies that project confidence and user-centric innovation.

VCs view design maturity as a proxy for operational maturity. A design system signals discipline, scalability, and repeatability. **When companies present consistent identity, professional web surfaces, and structured product UX, investors see reduced execution risk.**

	Design Effect	KPI Impact
 Brand	Clear positioning & consistent identity	→ Improves perceived credibility, pricing power and win rates
 Web	Structured architecture & optimized conversion flows	→ Increases sign-ups, lowers customer acquisition cost
 Product	Intuitive onboarding & UX clarity	→ Boosts activation, retention and net revenue retention

# Building a Design System for Funding Readiness

A design system may seem unnecessary in early stages. **It isn't. It's the infrastructure for scalable growth.**

It aligns teams around shared patterns and accelerates execution. For investors, it provides reassurance that the company can handle rapid scaling without collapsing into inefficiency.

Design systems are not overhead. They are evidence of a company's operational maturity and scalability.

<sup>1</sup>Bhawalkar, Gina. "You Need A Design System — Here's Why." Forrester, May 24, 2020.

## 50% + 35%

Design Systems Reduce Design Time by 50% and Development Time by 35%, Accelerating Speed-to-Market and ROI<sup>1</sup>

The screenshot displays the Sixfold Design System interface for a case named 'Mirage West Construction'. The interface includes a search bar, a 'Back to Cases' button, and a 'Risk Details' section. The 'Risk Details' section shows a 'Moderate Fit' status with a 'Quoted?' button. Below this, there are three signals: 'Written Safety Manual' (Positive signal), 'Reported Loss History' (Negative signal), and 'New Re' (Negative signal). A modal window is open, showing the details of the 'Written Safety Manual' signal, which is a positive risk signal because the company has a written safety manual.

Sixfold Design System in Practice

# In Practice: Sublime Security

**01** Adaptive detection that drives efficacy

Continuously detect and respond to new email threats with tailored detection logic that evolves at the speed of attackers.

**02** Adaptive detection that drives efficacy

Continuously detect and respond to new email threats with tailored detection logic that evolves at the speed of attackers.

Sublime, an AI-enabled email security company, approached us to rebuild its website while actively fundraising. The project included updated branding and a new design system to support the company's rapid growth.

## Challenge

An existing website with inconsistent styling, a limited CMS structure, and outdated page templates.

## Fix

Cleaned and restructured the site from the ground up with a proper design system, allowing for future growth and easy updates.

## Result

# \$150M

in Series C Round Funding

Ready to see Sublime in action?

Experience how our email security platform stops advanced threats while giving your team full control and transparency.

First name  Last name

Email address

Organization

Select all applicable use cases

Tell us more

[Get a Demo →](#)

Latest from Sublime

May 16, 2025

Attack Spotlight

ScreenConnect as malware via Canvas abuse and DocuSign impersonation

Bobby Fiori, Head of Machine Learning

April 30, 2025

Attack Spotlight

Figma abuse from compromised vendor used in credential theft attack

Bobby Fiori, Head of Machine Learning

April 28, 2025

Sublime News

Key findings from the Q1 2025 Sublime Email Threat Research Report

Bobby Fiori, Head of Machine Learning

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# Action Framework

## Preparing for Funding

Investor readiness grows quickly when a design framework is in place. Startups should audit their design maturity across brand, website, and product surfaces.

The right investments depend on where you are in the journey.

### Pre-seed

Emphasize narrative clarity and homepage basics.

### Seed-stage

Enhance onboarding and publish case studies.

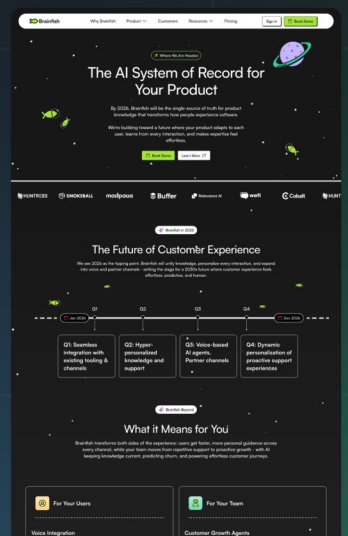
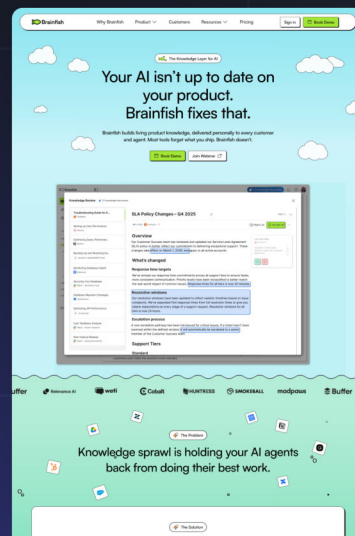
### Series A-ready

Formalize design systems and ensure growth experimentation is disciplined.



# \$6.4M

## Series A Round & Growing Rapidly



A **30-60-90 day roadmap** keeps teams aligned with fundraising timelines.

Investor readiness requires intentional design investments. By focusing on credibility signals at the right stage, founders increase speed and likelihood of funding success.

# The Takeaway

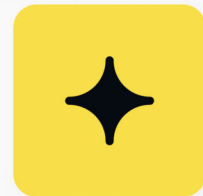
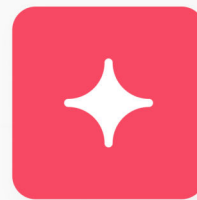
Design is the unspoken voice of the product.

It speaks first, within milliseconds, and that voice carries through every level of the product until a final decision is made.

Do we invest? Do we buy? Can we use? Design can answer these questions without a single spoken word.

**For SaaS startups seeking funding, design is a critical factor in shaping investor trust, customer adoption, and valuation.**

Companies that invest early in design maturity reduce skepticism, accelerate diligence, and unlock higher valuations.



## Let's Build Something Investors Notice.

Partner with Partywave to build the brand, web presence, and product design that investors notice before you say a word.

Get Started with Partywave [→](#)