

We're designing for humans *and* machines now. Good design has to be something you can prove

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For decades, design has been shaped by the subjective opinions of a few senior people. As products grow more complex and AI agents become users too, that approach is increasingly risky. [Angela Pesta](#), who's spent 25 years building design systems at Amazon, Tesco, GitLab and now [bsport](#), explains why product teams urgently need a more evidence-led approach.

After more than two and a half decades in the industry, I've sat through my fair share of design reviews and I know how many of them end. Someone senior looks at the screen and decides whether or not they 'like' how it looks or works, and that changes everything.

We often call it the HiPPO, the highest paid person's opinion. And it's odd when you stop and think about it, because we're well versed in the importance of proper research, and evaluation tools have been part of our work for a long time. Yet when evidence meets opinion, opinion often wins.

The impact is that, over time, design drifts away from the people using it, and towards the people signing it off and the structure of the organization they work for.

It's known as Conway's Law, which established that any organization that builds a system will produce a design whose structure mirrors the organization's own communication structure. It explains why so much software feels carved up in ways that make no sense to the user.

Now we're designing for machines too

This subjective decision-by-committee approach isn't a new problem for design, but it's suddenly a riskier one. We're designing for AI as well as people now, and a machine can't muddle through a messy interface the way a person can.

A consistent framework for measuring quality is the way forward, and it's something every product team needs to build. Patterns and consistency is what makes a product legible to AI, and you only get it by holding every page to the same strict standard.

What we did to prove it

At bsport, I'm leading a major overhaul of our back office, and it's landing at the same time as a defining moment in our company: becoming AI-first. We've not shied away from doing both things at once because we know neither can wait.

We've cleared out the legacy interface completely and we're bringing in a new design system, while rebuilding the back office in phases.

It's critical that we build AI-UX that actually makes sense to the people using it, which for us is the owners of boutique fitness studios. So rather than relying on the opinions of our c-suite and whether they 'like' our work, we've put a series of quality measures in place.

It starts with a shared definition of what good means, which takes the form of a six pillar framework that defines from the outset what good looks like. This covers whether a product feels modern, works reliably, is self-evident enough to need no explanation, reduces mental effort, removes unnecessary friction, and is structured well enough for a system to eventually reason over.

Alongside the six pillars, I've developed an AI-UX maturity framework, adapted from the Nielsen Norman Group's model. It holds the whole project to a standard built specifically for designing with AI.

Building on this, I have implemented a scorecard system for every single piece of design that measures how well it works for both humans and AI. If something doesn't score above a certain number, we go back and work on it until it does.

Good design hinges on a real understanding of the people you're designing for, so we've built persona profiles that spell out, in simple and clear terms, the goals and key frustrations of each of our core users. They've been really well adopted across the teams and now form the foundation of every design decision we make.

We've also set up a Design Partner Program with 25 of our most engaged customers. Trained researchers survey them on the experience, and we look past the verbal answers to body language and tone of voice, since what people say and what they actually feel don't always line up.

Taken together, these measures mean we can be confident the design is delivering at every stage.

Even in the updates so far, we've seen the difference bsport makes for studio owners by sharing the load of running a boutique studio. In the new back office, the navigation has been completely rebuilt so people can find things without hunting. We've pulled booking management into one calendar view and untangled the marketing suite. Behind the scenes, SmartFill keeps quiet classes filling while AI insights turn a wall of numbers into a short list of what to do next.

The future is more exciting still. Soon bsport will enable richer search and smarter workflows, with AI tools for churn risk, spot capping and revenue forecasting.

Why we think the rules have changed

Ultimately, we're structuring today for automation tomorrow. In time, all software, bsport included, should act like a copilot, the partner you can simply ask a question or make a request and rely on to get it done.

But for us, software that simply works is the starting point. What we're really after is a product that delights people on a deeper level. It'll take time, but in an AI-first world that's exactly what separates the products people love from the ones they tolerate.

It's time to accept that the rules of design have changed. If you're not putting real measures in place to evaluate and improve your work, your product will struggle to deliver genuine value, and you will fall behind.

Now, more than ever, good design has to be something you can prove.

Spokepeople

Angela Pesta - CDO

About bsport

bsport is the world's leading boutique fitness management platform. With AI built into key workflows, bsport connects bookings, scheduling, payments, marketing, staff management, and reporting into one platform that automates, adapts, and guides at every stage. Backed by local, multilanguage support teams who understand boutique fitness, bsport helps founders understand their members, deliver their vision, and grow sustainably, without losing what makes their studio special.

[Website](#)

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