Inside the
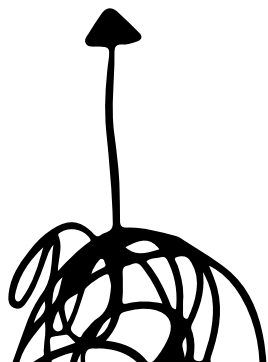# New Creative Team

Examining the evolving roles and skills needed to design inclusive experiences and tell a compelling brand story.

Think small.

Those two words changed automobile advertising in 1959. Volkswagen wanted to create buzz for its mini-but-mighty Beetle. The carmaker moved away from flashy, colorful ads popular in newspapers and magazines at the time. Instead, it opted for mostly white space. The Beetle took an unassuming position near the top left corner. Text in small font along the bottom explained some of the unique benefits of the vehicle — like squeezing into small parking spaces and never needing antifreeze.

The campaign helped a funny looking car named after an insect become one of the hottest selling automobiles in the United States. Most of all, the "Think Small" campaign is an iconic early example of designers — not executives — leading a major business initiative, defining a brand voice and achieving incredible success.

More than 60 years later, creative teams face another monumental moment. No longer just graphic design order-takers whipping up marketing materials at the boss' behest, creatives are now full-blown business leaders who contribute to the most important company conversations. You are tech wizards crafting intuitive user experiences. You are leading branding efforts. You are looking inward at company culture and values — and bringing it all to life for your target audience.

As a designer, you finally have a seat at the table, and the conversation is not about fonts and colors. It's about harnessing design to improve revenues and solidify brand positioning.

To add value and support positive change in this new era, it's time to expand your skill sets and redefine how you collaborate with teams. You must monitor the latest developments in technology, forge relationships across the organization, and have a deep understanding of the cultural changes happening within your companies and industries.

In this eBook, we'll explain four new realities creative teams are facing today — and offer actionable takeaways that will help creatives not only prepare for the current reality but thrive in it.

5 Takeaways For
Design Leadership Success

Brands count on today's design leaders to provide context to product offerings, translate and communicate corporate values to the public and build strong relationships across their organizations. All of this requires a new mindset and new skills.

Arianna Orland knows this all too well. As the Co-Founder of **In/Visible Ventures** and Creative Director of User Experience, Brand and Design Systems at **Twitter**, Orland knows the skill and effort necessary to succeed in today's landscape. During a recent HOW Creative Leadership Summit session, she shared these takeaways.

01
You have been entrusted to lead.
The discipline of design has arrived, so leaders should come from a position of strength and domain expertise when working with colleagues across an organization. Don't let "imposter syndrome" set in. Come from a position of expertise to be a more compelling leader.

02
A little bit of coffee goes a long way.
A design leader must build relationships, so it's crucial to book meetings with people across an organization — from entry-level to executive. Some meetings may be duds, but others will change your perspective entirely.

03
Become fluent in the language of the business.
Understand the objectives and key results that executives measure. Listen closely as people describe the business internally and externally. If leaders talk about the business in particular ways, use that common language and terminology when discussing design strategy.

04
Design leadership is a work in progress.
Design leaders are on a constant mission to learn what might resonate with customers and team members. Remember, not every tool and tactic is going to work well for every project or team.

05
For your work to be widely shared, it must be understood.
Your work can be amazing and artistic — but if people don't understand what you are doing, it won't resonate. If you clearly articulate your project and its benefits, you have a better chance of being the team people are excited to work with.

REALITY 1 :

Design Distills and Reaffirms Core Brand Positioning and Values, and That's More Important Than Ever.

For some companies, mission and core values are truly interwoven. **Patagonia** believes in environmental and social responsibility. **CVS** is all about health and wellness. **Harley Davidson** and **Jeep** denote rugged Americana. **Nike** stands for excitement and human potential.

From startups to stalwarts, companies are trying to connect their core values and outward facing brands to build brand loyalty and motivate customers — especially younger ones. In fact, **76% of Gen Z consumers** are more likely to support brands that are authentic in their advertising. Meanwhile, **62% of consumers** 18-34 and 50% of 35-54-year-olds say they enjoy buying products that show their social or political ideologies.

Take Action: Nail the Context

Assess your organization. What are its core values? What is the company's mission? Why should consumers and clients care about the business? The answers may not be obvious, so it may be helpful to interview your peers in other divisions. Once you develop a solid framework, you can clarify the vision and core values in the context of a larger business narrative — and use that as a foundational piece for any design project.

The process of distilling and reaffirming brand positioning and core values increasingly falls on creative teams. It's your job to understand what the brand stands for and what motivates people to work each day. Creatives distill that message for consumers so they can identify and connect with a brand in authentic ways.

Apple is a great example. The brand stands for innovation, imagination, and creativity — and design clearly leads the way. The user experience for an iPhone or iPad is intuitive. Packaging is crisp. Apple Stores are sleek and minimalist. Nothing about Apple is ever busy or noisy. That's on purpose — and it's good design.
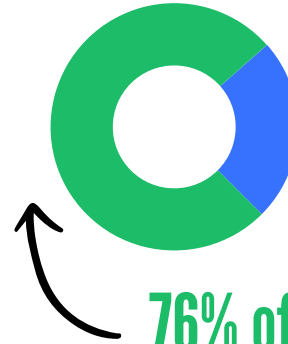
76% of Gen Z consumers are more likely to support brands that are authentic in their advertising.

Consumers who say it's important to buy from brands that share their values and ideologies:

62% Ages 18-34   **50%** Ages 35-54   **21%** 55+

REALITY 2 :

Design, Content and UX Are Converging

Designers are in charge of the visual voice. It's what people experience when interacting with a product or service on social media, watching video content or reading the company blog. Design must be built into the user experience from the very nascent stages or it risks missing the mark.

In today's digital world, developing a visual voice and brand identity takes coordination. Creative teams may include brand designers, animators, photographers, UX designers, software developers, video editors, web developers and more. Design leaders need to understand how each of those roles converge and support the entire process.

Take Action:
Research, Research, Research

For each project, work across your organization to understand what each team brings to the table. Then do your homework. If it's a web project, brush up on your web design and wireframing skills. If it's a video for social, analyze the numbers to learn which types of content have been most effective at reaching your audience. Once you do the research, you will be well positioned to execute.

These days, designers should be:

Data analysts and storytellers.
If you are uncomfortable with numbers, you'll be at a disadvantage as a design leader. That's because today's designers must be equipped to analyze user data, industry trends and other metrics and apply these insights to visual storytelling. Combine that data with old-fashioned gut instinct and design intuition for powerful results.

Content marketers.
Content is king. Companies need assets to share on social media, blogs, email newsletters and beyond. All that content needs a consistent look, feel and message — and it's integral for design to lead that effort.

Social strategists.
Social media channels are a brand's gateway to the world. Visual messaging is crucial. Every element must have consistency. When content reaches new audiences, the branding comes through loud and clear.

Web developers.
Creatives should develop a baseline understanding about how to design the layout, usability and visual appearance of a website or web-based experience. You need to create something visually pleasing and user-friendly — and something that programmers can actually build on the back end.

> **Education and design are a two-way street. You are never too old or too seasoned to learn. Continue to be a sponge.**

Maureen Carter,
Vice President of Design and UX at BET
Speaker at the 2021 HOW Creative Leadership Summit

REALITY 3 :

With Timelines Accelerating, Collaboration Is Key

Deadlines are tighter. Workloads are heavier. Every team has design needs — and they all want projects finished yesterday. Meanwhile, restrictive corporate structures and left-brain executives may hamper creativity, complicate projects and push deadlines to the brink.

Creatives feel the pinch. It's not uncommon to work long after the traditional workday ends or feel stuck when you can't get everyone aligned. To overcome that reality and influence others, focus on forging deep connections with team members.

Take Action:
Focus on Small Wins

You don't need to develop deep bonds with everyone in your organization overnight. A small breakthrough with an executive or business unit can be just as impactful to plant seeds of change — and set you up for long-term success down the road.

Build relationships

You may think your job is to create beautiful things or express branding visually, but you should spend a large portion of your time building relationships with people across your organization. Stakeholder management, protecting your team and evangelizing the value of design should be part of your daily to-do list.

Be empathetic

Creatives talk a lot about empathy for the end user but might not extend that empathy to colleagues. Rather than trying to convince everyone about the value of design, listen to pain points and problems, and have empathy for colleagues' struggles. Consider how design can be a source of support to tackle these challenges head-on.

Be patient

Everybody has different perceptions of what it means to be "excellent" or "beautiful" — and these nebulous concepts take a considerable amount of time and clarification to figure out. Be patient and open-minded while going through review cycles and "selling" your ideas to decision makers.

Remember, they are just people

The stakeholders who are waiting on your work (and critiquing it) are just people. They are human beings with their own deadlines, budgets and fears. Seeing them as such can help you connect and understand the intent behind their feedback.

REALITY 4 :

**Design Helps Support Diversity, Equity and
Inclusion (DEI) Efforts**

After global calls for racial equality in 2020, organizations are putting diversity, equity and inclusion at the forefront of their agendas. Many companies promised sweeping changes to product accessibility and user experiences that are fit for all audiences.

Intention is a start. But execution is a must — and companies haven't always answered the call. From **photography film** not recognizing the nuances of dark skin to **self-driving cars** failing to detect dark-skinned pedestrians to facial recognition apps that **falsely matched** dark-skinned members of Congress for criminals — racially biased design execution has hindered well-intentioned projects.

Now your creative teams are being called upon to incorporate inclusivity at the very beginning of any project. You're tasked with making sure UX is accessible. You're being asked to diversify your own teams to bring expanded thinking to projects and eliminate blind spots. You're taxed with understanding your organizations' DEI efforts — and disseminating that to the world.

When to Examine Diversity in Your Design Process

Diversity in design is not a one-and-done exercise. At all phases, examine if you are being diverse, equitable and inclusive — and iterate accordingly. Here are four times to check in on your processes.

- **At the start of a project:**
  Launch with diversity in mind so you don't realize later that you've built something unintentionally exclusive.

- **In an ideation session:**
  As you continue to develop your project, think critically about what might exclude or harm groups of people.

- **While developing your go-to market strategy:**
  Determine who you are marketing to and how you are communicating that message. If it's tailored to just one group of people, you probably need to make some changes.

- **In a feedback loop:**
  When a project is over, have an honest, open discussion about how you performed with regard to DEI.

Take Action:
Ask Yourself These
5 DEI Questions

Tackling implicit and explicit bias in design is no easy task. And it's certainly not something you should take on alone. The design world is filled with fantastic organizations, such as **Project Inkblot**, which are created to guide companies through this ongoing process. These incredible tips are provided based on their proven process.

01 **Who are we?**

If your design team is full of white, male faces, you probably aren't getting the diversity of opinion it takes to create inclusive designs and experiences.

02 **Who are you designing for?**

Understand the needs and desires of the communities that use your product.

03 **Who are you excluding?**

Design can be limiting. For example, if you make videos without captions, you sideline the hearing-impaired community. Figure out if your design is exclusionary and make sure it gets corrected.

04 **Have you engaged with underrepresented communities?**

During the design phase, you should cultivate mutually beneficial relationships to gain valuable feedback that will help improve your product or service.

05 **What is the worst-case scenario?**

Sometimes things go wrong. Contemplate the possibilities and determine which communities might be hurt worst if something goes awry.

Make Your Mark as a Creative Changemaker

As a creative, you can no longer afford to think of yourself as an artist who happens to work in a corporate setting. Instead you must become business leaders, techies, branding experts and user experience ninjas who can disseminate company values and DEI efforts with ease. It's a big job, and that's why HOW Design Live is here to support you as you navigate these new realities.

HOW DESIGN

We encourage you to register for our latest **virtual event** or join us in person at the **How Design Live conference in Nashville on October 19-21.**