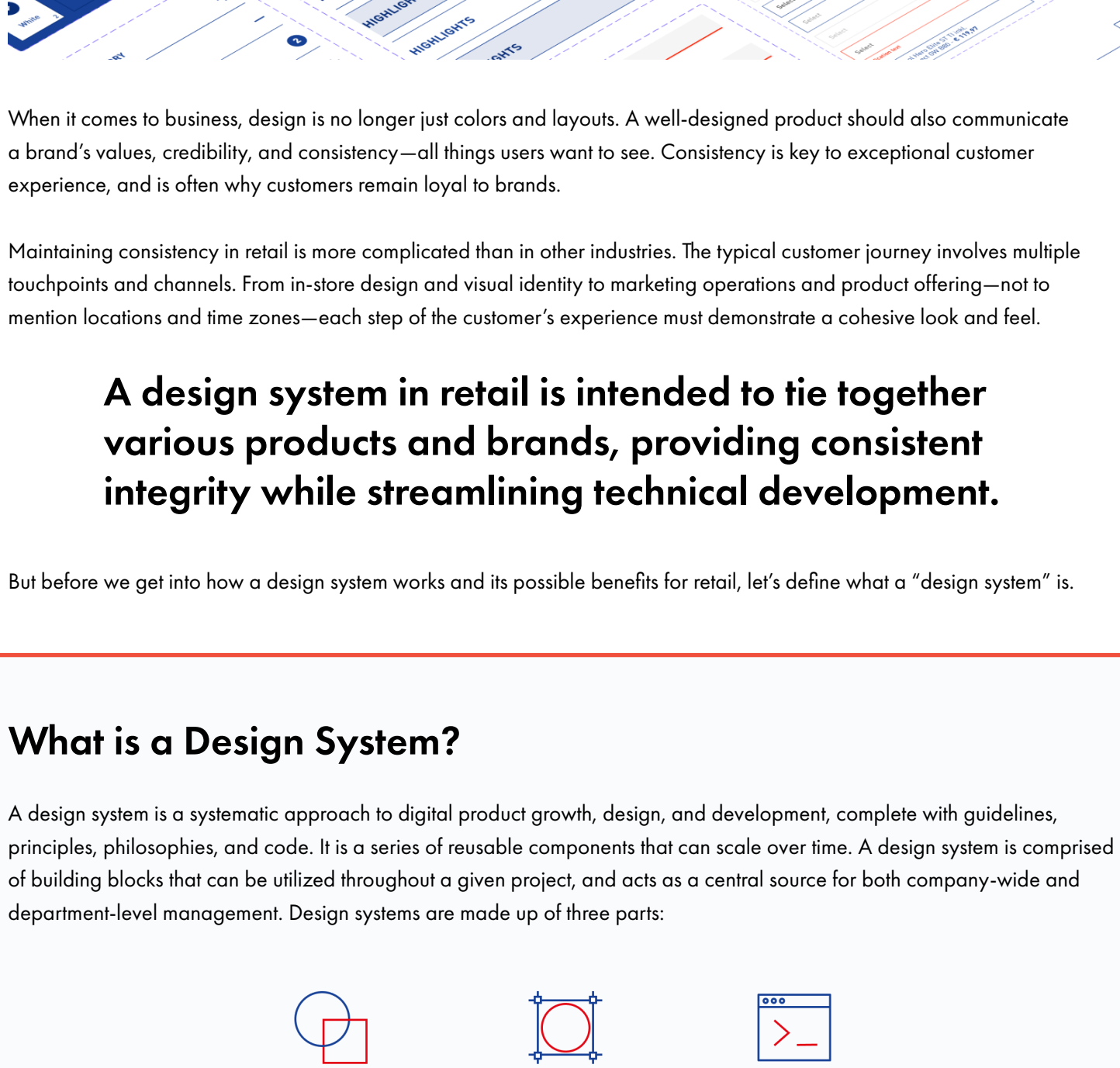


A Guide on How to Leverage Design Systems in Retail

A growing number of retail channels and consumers seeking out the best shopping experiences creates new challenges for those serving the retail sector. So, how can design help today's retailers stay competitive, continuing to deliver exceptional customer experiences?



When it comes to business, design is no longer just colors and layouts. A well-designed product should also communicate a brand's values, credibility, and consistency—all things users want to see. Consistency is key to exceptional customer experience, and is often why customers remain loyal to brands.

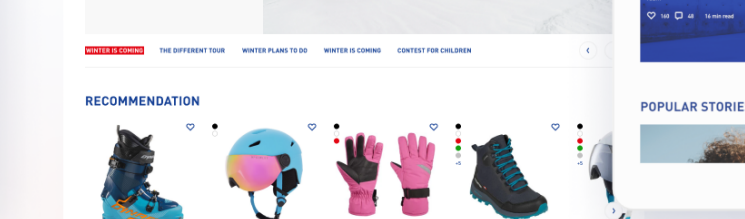
Maintaining consistency in retail is more complicated than in other industries. The typical customer journey involves multiple touchpoints and channels. From in-store design and visual identity to marketing operations and product offering—not to mention locations and time zones—each step of the customer's experience must demonstrate a cohesive look and feel.

A design system in retail is intended to tie together various products and brands, providing consistent integrity while streamlining technical development.

But before we get into how a design system works and its possible benefits for retail, let's define what a "design system" is.

What is a Design System?

A design system is a systematic approach to digital product growth, design, and development, complete with guidelines, principles, philosophies, and code. It is a series of reusable components that can scale over time. A design system is comprised of building blocks that can be utilized throughout a given project, and acts as a central source for both company-wide and department-level management. Design systems are made up of three parts:



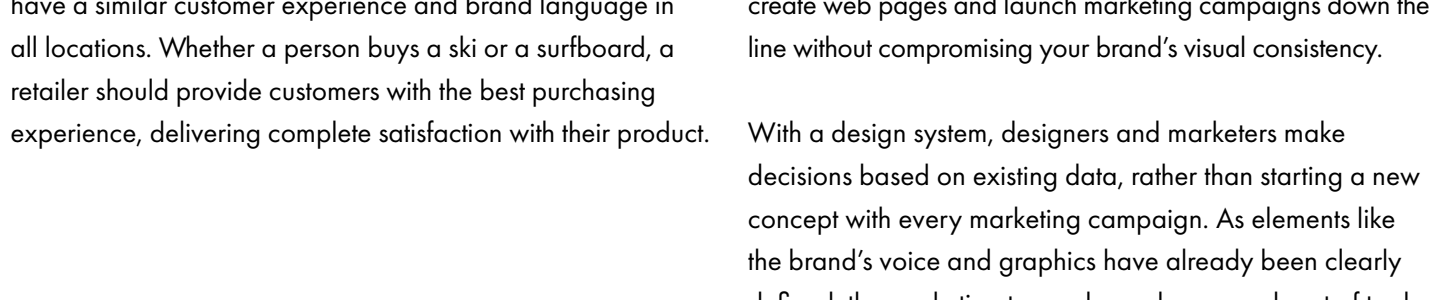
Style guide(s)	Pattern library	Component library
Containing information about how things should be done consistently across a product, website, or suite of products and websites. Style guides set the company's standard for features including typography, colors, icons, and brand identity.	Including UI elements, like buttons, input fields, and tables. The pattern library also delineates what such tools are for what and when to use them.	Taking things to the next level with UI patterns and code.

A design system is a complex independent project. With a clearly defined and structured design system, designers and developers can focus on solving user needs instead of simply recreating elements. A design system is an ever-evolving ecosystem—not just a set of components and colors. The very best design systems are never done.

Is A Design System Worth The Effort?

The short answer is yes. But certain facts should be taken into account, namely:

- ✓ A design system is a long-term commitment project that requires a dedicated team, budget, owner, and management.
- ✓ A design system is an additional project in the entire product development ecosystem that should constantly evolve, because trends and demands also change.



Companies like Apple, IBM, and Uber have raised the bar for customer service, and users now expect the same from other brands. Design systems allow teams to develop products efficiently, avoiding needless repetition and setting higher standards for consistent user experience. Managing multiple brands and shops under one umbrella means supporting multiple digital experiences for a global online retailer.

Benefits of a Design System in Retail

As a jumping-off point, it's useful to ask yourself questions like:

- ✓ Do new product landing pages have to be created regularly?
- ✓ Are multiple internal teams working on developing your digital assets?
- ✓ Does your company have sub-brands that all have to follow the same brand guidelines?

If you answered yes to any of the above, creating and using a design system will carry many benefits to your business.



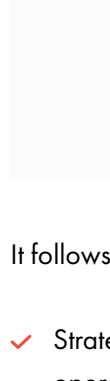
Create Cross-Channel Consistency

Today's consumers attach great importance to what a brand stands for, how it interacts with its customers, and how consistent the company is. A study by Harvard Business Review shows that 70% of consumers use multiple channels to research and buy products. Brands that demonstrate consistent experiences across different channels are more likely to improve customers' perception of the brand and increase purchase intent.



Enhance Brand Recognition


When we hear the word "brand," we usually imagine logos and color palettes. Although those pieces are essential to effective branding, they aren't the entire brand. Branding is a company's character. It's not just the visual packaging, but also the emotions users feel when interacting with the brand. The design system allows you to house all of the elements that make up your brand in one central location.



Scale Effectively

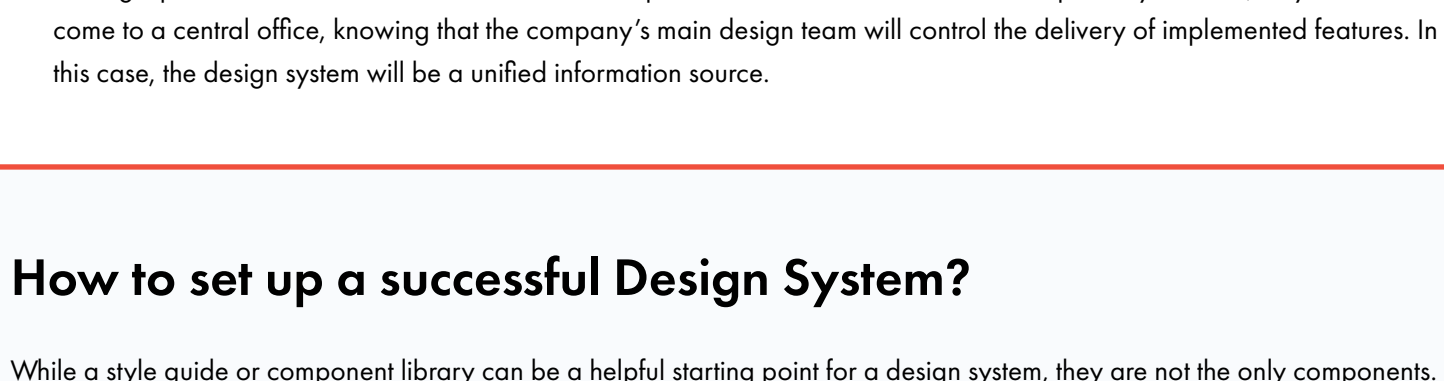
Every retail business starts with a common goal: growth. If you want to avoid downtime and preserve customer experience while growing your business, you need to think about scalability before it's necessary.

Because you're launching a new line of eco-friendly products. Say you've already prepared for global scaling, we can predict and control the process in all locations. This is where the design system comes in. Having a design system ensures control over critical business considerations like scalability, implementation of new features, and an increase in web traffic.



Control Distribution Channels and Communication with Strategic Partners

Imagine that a global retailer sells goods from various brands, which are its strategic partners. The retailer's performance depends on the popularity of the brands they represent. Accordingly, strategic partners also control the business within multi-brand companies. As a rule, partners have to have official representatives monitoring sales within the retailer's brand. If the brands want to change something in the sales flow of its products, then such edits will have to occur across all of the retailer's sites. Control over sales channels involves changing the design of the site. But site design changes should be consistent. For example, if a partner is interested in changing something on sites in 15 countries, they will want to have a unified point of communication. They will also want to be sure that changes in all affected countries will occur at about the same time, in the same way, and without problems.



It follows that:

- ✓ Strategic partners want to be sure that any changes will be consistent on all websites at the same time. (These websites can operate on different platforms but be under the same design system.)
- ✓ Strategic partners do not want to contact retailers' representatives in different countries separately. Instead, they want to come to a central office, knowing that the company's main design team will control the delivery of implemented features. In this case, the design system will be a unified information source.

How to set up a successful Design System?

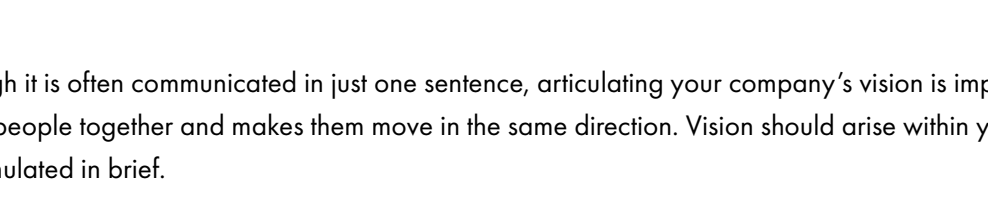
While a style guide or component library can be a helpful starting point for a design system, they are not the only components. Let's dig into the fundamentals of design systems.

Conduct a User Research

User research includes customer surveys, speaking with stakeholders, and evaluating the brand's digital experiences. It's essential to assess the entire brand, especially when it comes to omnichannel eCommerce.

Follow Atomic Design Methodology

Once done with your research, it's time to proceed with the fundamentals by employing what's called *atomic design*. Atomic design is a methodology invented by Brad Frost, based on the idea that every design system can be defined as a series of coexisting building blocks. Frost's concept groups elements based on a chemistry-inspired approach, starting with the most basic UI elements—what atomic design calls *atoms*—and progressing to the site's most complex aspects, such as templates and pages. The idea is to break down all components of a company's design system into smaller, reusable pieces. Let's look at the five stages of the Atomic Design methodology:



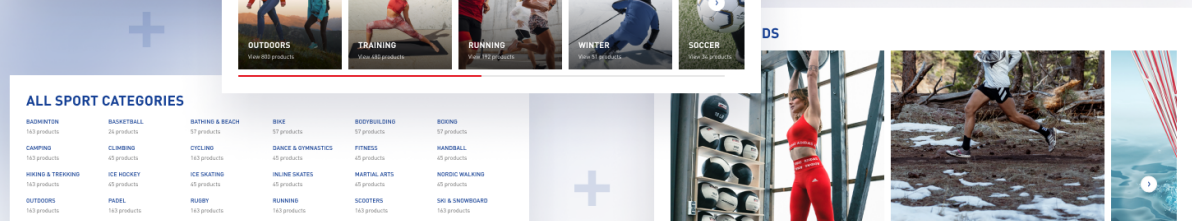
- ✓ **Atoms** are the foundational building blocks of a design system's interface. As in chemistry, atoms are the smallest functional units of atomic design, and consist of colors, text styles, icons, and borders.
- ✓ **Molecules** are a combined group of atoms. These are still simple, but already logical, components. For instance, buttons and text fields can be grouped to create a search form.
- ✓ **Organisms** are atoms and molecules working together in a complex structure. These are more significant elements that can function on their own, such as a navigation bar and a search field forming a website's header organism.
- ✓ **Templates** consist mainly of groups of organisms combined into a proper website layout. This is where we start to see the design coming together and the structure in action. The only thing missing here is the final content.
- ✓ **Pages** are the last stage of the atomic design module. Here, designers drop in elements like images and text: content that sketches out what the final UI will look like.

The not-so-obvious challenge here is to avoid getting lost in building all of your brand's various components without understanding the bigger picture. The atomic design allows designers to be consistent, creating a natural flow for both simple and more complex projects.

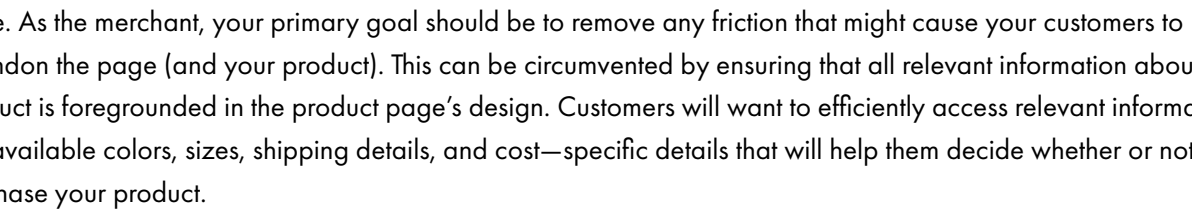
Design System Components

Vision
Although it is often communicated in just one sentence, articulating your company's vision is important because it brings people together and makes them move in the same direction. Vision should arise within your team, and should be formulated in brief.

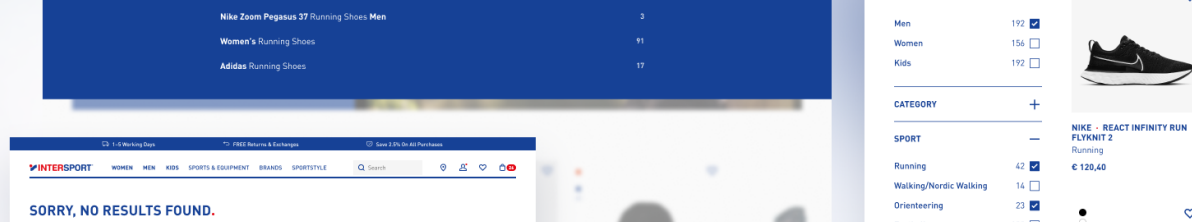
eCommerce UX Design and Customer Journey
In order to understand how an eCommerce website should look and function, let's consider the stages of a typical eCommerce customer's journey.



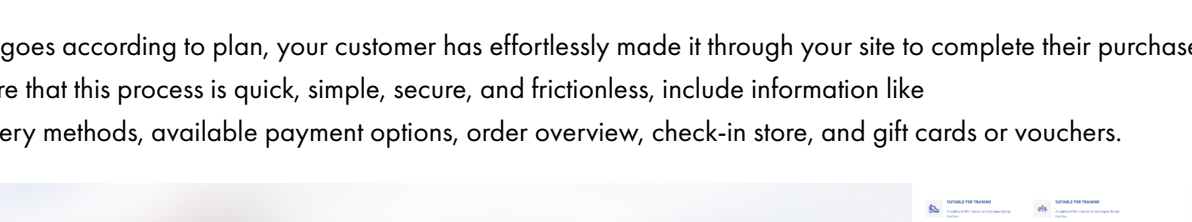
- ✓ **Attract & Inspire**
How do customers find out about your brand? They might discover it through an ad, social media, blog post, or organic search. However, in most cases, your homepage will be a customer's first impression of your company. As such, your brand's website landing page should clearly define your unique selling offer, add eye-catching and on-brand imagery, provide a user-friendly experience, and communicate important information.



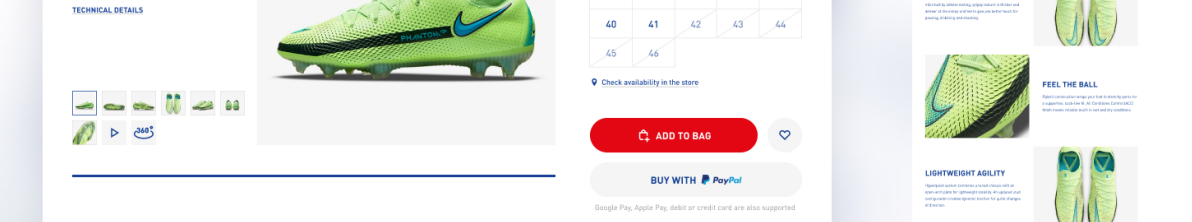
- ✓ **Browse & Discover**
Search functionality is an essential part of UX design. Your brand's website should be transparent, making it accessible to search and browse through product pages. Additionally, it's important to include a thorough filtering system, so that users can quickly and easily find what they are looking for.



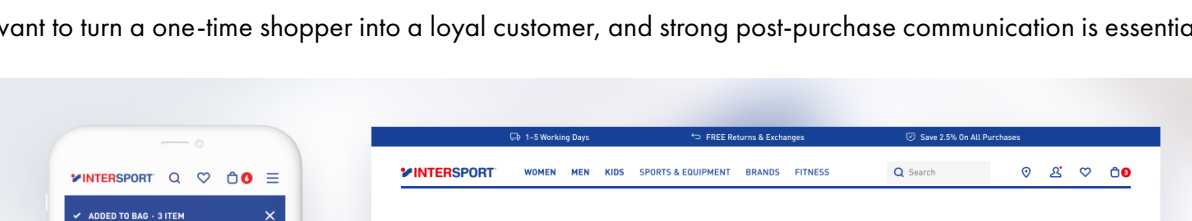
- ✓ **Decide**
As soon as your customers discover the items that interest them, they should find themselves on a product detail page. As the merchant, your primary goal should be to remove any friction that might cause your customer to abandon the page (and your product). This can be circumvented by ensuring that all relevant information about your product is foregrounded in the product page's design. Customers will want to efficiently access relevant information like available colors, sizes, shipping details, and cost—specific details that will help them decide whether or not to purchase your product.



- ✓ **Buy**
If all goes according to plan, your customer has effortlessly made it through your site to complete their purchase. To ensure that this process is quick, simple, secure, and frictionless, include information like delivery methods, available payment options, order overview, check-in store, and gift cards or vouchers.



- ✓ **Deliver & Retain**
Once a sale is made, the customer journey is not yet over: their purchase needs to be delivered. In most cases, you will want to turn a one-time shopper into a loyal customer, and strong post-purchase communication is essential.



Case Study: Dataart's Universal Design System For Intersport

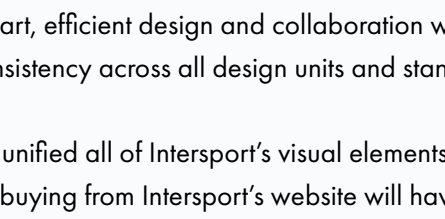
Intersport is a global sporting goods retailer operating in almost 60 countries. Each location has a digital presence, a board of directors, and a management structure. Global brands like Intersport need to have a singular design system through which each of their national organizations can build consistent digital environments.

A well-structured design system is much more than just different buttons on websites in France or Germany: it's about avoiding strategic miscommunications within a global business's network. A carefully considered design system will help large, international companies avoid confusing discrepancies, creating a sleek, cohesive wholes.

In DataArt's collaboration with Intersport, our goals were to:

- ✓ improve customer experience
- ✓ create a library of components for later development
- ✓ establish smart, efficient design and collaboration workflows
- ✓ improve consistency across all design units and standardize UX

Our system has unified all of Intersport's visual elements across products and channels for better brand recognition, meaning that a US client buying from Intersport's website will have the very same user experience as a British customer buying from Intersport's mobile app. DataArt's design system brings a consistent experience to Intersport's customers, regardless of where they're located: a US client buying from a website will have the same user experience as a British customer buying from a mobile app. It's like a multinational team with a common language.



While working on a design system for Intersport, DataArt's Design Studio followed the atomic methodology to make the design system clean and scalable. We gradually progressed from minimal, basic interface components (atoms) to more complex, ready-to-use templates filled with real content. We audited the existing Intersport brand alphabet, interviewed stakeholders from different departments, and performed demos. Eventually, we came up with unified, company-wide design principles.

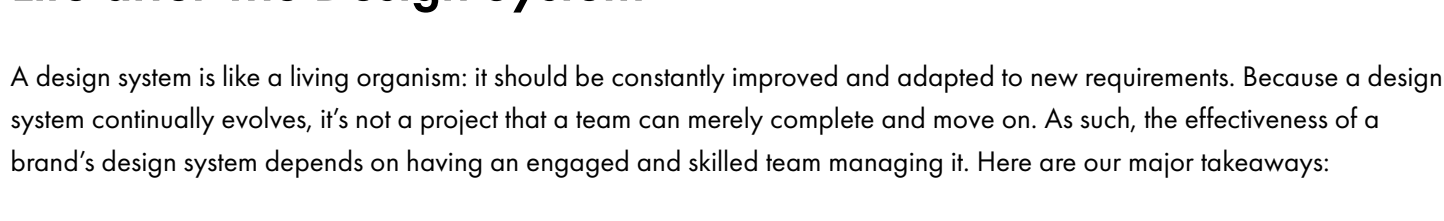
The DataArt Design Studio created a single style guide for all of Intersport's design elements, a rich library of reusable components that will save both time and costs on developing future design projects.

The Heart Design System offers a consistent, transparent digital experience across the ecosystem of Intersport products in all of Intersport's operating countries. In addition to building sturdy online scaffolding for Intersport's existing customers, our Heart Design System also improves brand recognition worldwide.

Life after The Design System

A design system is like a living organism: it should be constantly improved and adapted to new requirements. Because a design system continually evolves, it's not a project that a team can merely complete and move on. As such, the effectiveness of a brand's design system depends on having an engaged and skilled team managing it. Here are our major takeaways:

- ✓ Creating a design system is like being in a typical "work in progress" mode.
- ✓ Global retailers need to communicate constantly with franchisees. During adoption, franchisees only sometimes correctly interpret the design system, even if they have been well-written. Therefore, life after the design system involves constant communication with all adopters. This process needs to be controlled.
- ✓ When developing a design system for retail, one must consider the nuances of local markets. This comes down to whether decisions are made based on regular communication between teams or in relation to large markets.



Conclusion

Surviving in the digital age requires companies to be agile enough to incorporate newer and better technologies and approaches. An improved client experience builds trust and loyalty—the two things that can either make or break a company's progress.

A good experience makes customers happy. Satisfied customers will allow companies to meet their targets. If you do not provide value through fast and modern improvements, your company might end up spending more to market its products. Contact DataArt Design Studio for help regarding UX/UI design flows.