


Building compelling business cases for Design Systems



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**Design Systems
are here to stay**

According to the UXPin Enterprise UX Industry Report

70%

of companies have a Design System

Source: UXPin Enterprise UX Industry Report 2017 to 2018

An aerial, high-angle view of a dense urban skyline, likely New York City, with the Empire State Building prominently visible in the center. The image is in grayscale and has a dark, semi-transparent overlay. Centered over the image is the text "How accurate is this for the audience here today?" in a white, serif font.

**How accurate is this for the
audience here today?**



We're convinced

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But this guy isn't

Why do product teams want design systems?

- **Growing design teams**

Organisations are investing more in design.

- **Infinitely more complex design problems**

Software needs to become more sophisticated to keep up with the demands & desires of our users.

- **Distributed teams**

Agile delivery models encouraging cross functional teams, making it harder for teams to stay in sync

But most of all ...

Maintaining design & tech debt is starting to feel like this:





“

This all makes perfect sense, the
benefits speak for themselves.
This is a no-brainer.

— ME, 4 YEARS AGO

This was going to be me:





**EXPECTATION
VS**



REALITY



So how can we **design our business case** to best communicate the **clear and tangible benefits** of having a design system?

An aerial view of a city skyline, likely New York City, with the Empire State Building prominent in the center. A teal banner is overlaid across the middle of the image.

THE IMPORTANCE OF

UXing your business case



Audience
Know your ~~enemy~~

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Know your audience

- **Emphasise benefits that appeal to your audience, not to you**
Resist the urge to only focus on the team benefits, and focus on measurable business benefits instead.
- **Write in the parlance of your audience**
Avoid jargon and use the language of business to craft your business case.

A line of Spartan warriors in a battle formation, holding spears and shields. The scene is set in a dusty, outdoor environment, likely a battlefield. The warriors are wearing traditional Spartan armor, including helmets with crests and carrying large, round shields. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows and highlights, emphasizing the texture of the shields and the intensity of the scene.

Don't go to war alone

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Don't go to war alone

- **Get internal buy-in before external**

There's no point in trying to convince upper management that you need a design system if you haven't successfully convinced your team yet.

- **Form a united, cogent case together**

Get designers, developers, BAs, product managers together and get every team's perspective. You'll find more and more benefits this way.

A person is seen from behind, standing in front of a building. To the left, a pedestrian crossing sign is mounted on a pole. To the right, a sign reads 'LOCATION FILMING' with contact information for 'BUILDING THE ALLEY' and 'CALL: KASH CO. (314) 360-7501'. The scene is set in an urban environment with a green metal fence and a window with a grid pattern in the background.

Timing is everything

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Timing is everything

- **Recognise your position in the funding cycle**

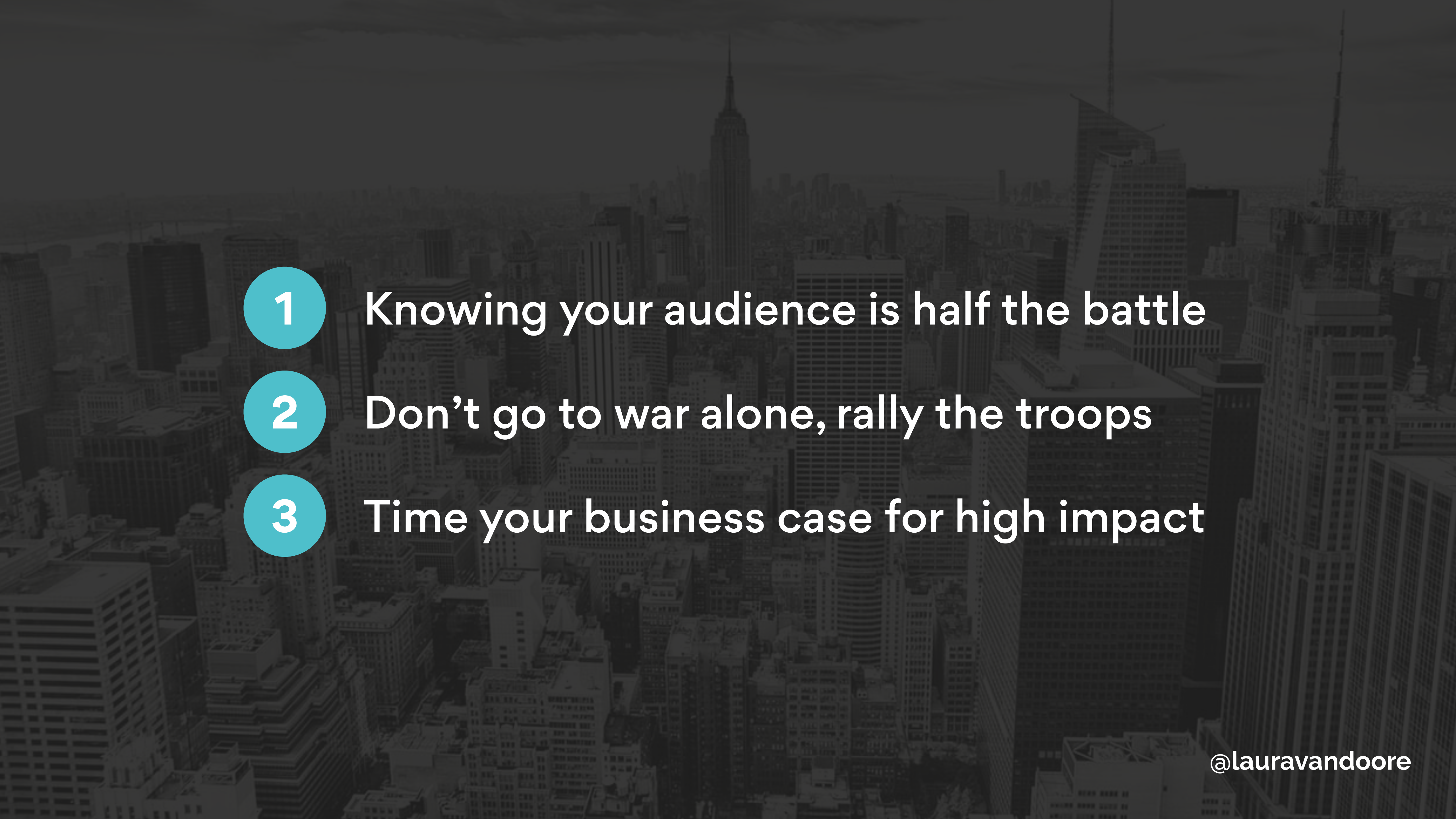
Is the business investing to scale up? Or is upper management doubling down on cost reductions? Try to avoid asking for a large investment when the business is scaling down.

- **Present the cure when the pain hurts the worst**

If a design system has been a hard sell, focus on waiting for an opportunity where the benefits can really shine.

Getting the timing wrong can make
the rest of your case fall over



- 
- 1** Knowing your audience is half the battle
 - 2** Don't go to war alone, rally the troops
 - 3** Time your business case for high impact

THE CHALLENGE

Translating team benefits to
tangible business outcomes.

What are the benefits of design systems?

- **Consistency** — A consistent experience across products & devices
- **Efficiency** — Efficient workflow & communication across teams
- **Maintainability** — Easier to test and maintain code
- **Accessibility** — Baked in accessibility, to create more inclusive products
- **Scalability** — Less of a headache to build upon through the future



What does it look like if we re-interpret or **translate these benefits** into a format that **provide business outcomes**?

Team Benefit:

Efficient workflow

Business Benefit:

28%

Faster to market

Team Benefit:

More maintainable

Business Benefit:

34%

Less maintenance cost

Team Benefit:

Consistent Interface

Business Benefit:

18%

Less support requests

Team Benefit:

Accessibility

Business Benefit:

12%

Potential userbase increase

Team Benefit:

Scalability

Business Benefit:

A stable foundation that will support the next 5 years of feature growth

An aerial view of a city skyline, likely New York City, with the Empire State Building prominent in the center. A teal banner is overlaid on the image, containing the text 'THE ANATOMY OF'.

THE ANATOMY OF

A great business case



Buckle up

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1

Problem Statement

What are we solving?

1 Problem Statement

A good problem statement...

- Identifies the core problem
- Outlines who's impacted by the problem
- Describes how this negatively impacts business goals

1 Problem Statement

Problem selection

- Your product team is likely to be impacted by multiple problems
- Instead of selecting one of your 'own problems', UX your business case by choosing a key business problem.



2

Benefits & ROI

What are we gaining from the proposed initiative?

2 Benefits & ROI

“

A design system increases ROI largely because it reduces cost rather than directly increasing revenue

— BRAD FROST

Benefits & ROI

- **Financials come first**

Upper management will usually look for financial benefits first, and then focus on peripheral benefits, like employee satisfaction.

- **Emphasise business outcomes, over team benefits**

Remember to frame your business case around tangible business outcomes, rather than ambiguous benefits.

An aerial, high-angle view of a dense city skyline, likely New York City, featuring numerous skyscrapers and buildings. The image is in grayscale with a dark, semi-transparent overlay. A teal circle containing the white number '3' is positioned in the upper-middle section of the frame.

3

Cost & Resources

Presenting Cost

- **Demonstrate that you clearly understand the cost**

It's much easier to persuade the naysayers if you can calculate & clearly articulate the project costs.

- **Present multiple cost scenarios**

Give your case a better chance by presenting different cost/resourcing options to balance the project funding & risk.

An aerial, high-angle view of a dense city skyline, likely New York City, with the Empire State Building prominently visible in the center. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark grey filter. In the center, there is a teal circle containing the white number '4'.

4

Risks

Risks of going ahead

- **Be realistic, rather than utopian**

Try to be open and honest about the potential risks. Otherwise your business case will seem too biased and lose credibility.

- **Outline the risks of failure**

What's the worst case scenario?

Risks of falling behind

- There is risk in doing nothing
- **Bigger product team = Increased need for design system**
As a product team grows larger, there's more need for standardised ways of working. The more people you have, the less efficient workflows will be.

4

Risks

Make sure the reward
outweighs the risk.

An aerial, high-angle view of a dense city skyline, likely New York City, with numerous skyscrapers and buildings. The image is in grayscale. A teal circle with the white number '5' is centered in the upper-middle portion of the frame.

5

Implementation Plan


Delivery

- **Present a solid roadmap**

Show a clear, deliverable scope, as well as your plans to grow & extend the design system over time.

- **Pinpoint where you'll see a return**

Clearly indicate in your delivery plan when and how you'll start to reap the benefits of the design system (hint: the sooner the better)

- 
- 1** Problem Statement
 - 2** Benefits & Estimated ROI
 - 3** Cost & Resources
 - 4** Risks
 - 5** Implementation Plan

3 ROLLOUT STRATEGIES

To manage cost & risk



#1

Chip Away

#1 Chip Away

The design system is something that is only worked on in spare time, or when designers/engineers are between projects.



Cost



Risk



Speed



Quality

#2

Hibernation

#2 Hibernation

Getting a core team of designers & engineers working on the Design System full-time. Possibly allows the time for designers/engineers to come up with the best implementation.



Cost



Risk



Speed



Quality

#3

Piggyback

#2

Piggyback

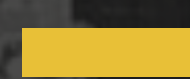
Plan to get the bulk of the Design System implemented as a part of another project. Balances out the cost better, as you see the returns immediately.



Cost



Risk



Speed



Quality

Rollout strategies

1

Chip Away

2

Hibernation

3

Piggyback

Design System Canvas

Company/organisation: _____

Core Problems	Key Benefits of Design System	Primary Users	
Proposed Scope	When & how will it be delivered?	Secondary Users	
		What resources will we need?	When will we start seeing the benefits?
		What are the risks?	

Benefits & ROI

Design System Canvas

Problem Statement

2

Company/organisation: _____

Core Problems	Key Benefits of Design System	Primary Users
		Secondary Users
Proposed Scope		When & how will it be delivered?
3	What resources will we need?	5
4	What are the risks?	

Cost Estimation

Implementation Planning

Risk Assessment

Thanks



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