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Visual identification graphic projects for the purpose of the automotive industry with the use of the design thinking methodology

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PART 1

Introduction, main concept

Describing the process of creating graphic visual identification projects for the automotive sector involves more than just the process itself, as it focuses its attention primarily on a human being. This paper presents the designing process, including mind mapping, empathy, problem definition, generating ideas, prototyping and testing, which leads to the creation of visual identification for the automotive group and projects for market purposes.

The uniqueness of visual identification projects is not limited to graphic editing, but could be compared to a path involving design thinking methodology, which presents the effectiveness and innovation of graphic design. It is a means of gaining an advantage over competitors through a consciously user-centered approach to brand design. Developing technologies change the world around us and customers alike. Automotive companies do not only provide us with cars, but also offer emotions.

Looking for solutions with the use of the design thinking methodology involves experiencing and checking the advantages of focusing on a particular product or service. Based on the ever evolving technology and vast work experience of the author as an advertising expert for different car brands, teams and companies, the paper gives examples and transforms ideas examined with the use of current communication processes and practical methods - graphic creations and projects developed in advertising agencies or marketing companies. The challenge of considering many different variables was worth taking and became an extra value.

Skills of designers are combined with cohesive actions. Years of experience, access to technical resources and human needs serves as an introduction to combining the desirable forms with the human perspective. Design thinking is a process, which involves passing on the designing tools to those who were never linked to design in order to be able to apply these tools in the wider context of market issues or requirements. Communication revolutionised by Internet use has brought people closer together and given earlier non-existent possibilities, which thanks to numerous AI models, opinions and generating ideas options make work easier, but at the same time do not offer a manual form or cultural dialogue opportunities. Designing assumes originality. It combines social curiosity and meaningful creativity with profound knowledge.

The aim/main idea of the paper

Until recently, potential clients visiting car showrooms had a basic knowledge about brands, types of engine and bodywork colour. These days, there are fewer clients, but they are much better prepared. Stereotypes, easy access to social media and digital resources makes it possible to assess the value, quality and trends based on the opinions of other people within a very short time. Modern technologies make it easier not only to configure but also to surf the Internet without restrictions.

Personalised advertising tempts us to buy without having to leave our homes or offices. Semidigital brands, such as in the car industry, shows and proves that it reaches the global customer using a combination of existing projects and advanced digital and internet based technologies as well as physical contact points and traditional promotional methods.

Therefore, a graphic project aimed at fulfilling both the market and the automotive company's needs has to combine the values from users' experience (UX) and the tradition of the brand (e.g. reliability, prestige) with modernity and innovation. The design process needs to strive towards simplicity and memorability. It has to be comprehensive and include both minute inscriptions on screwtops and digital or large-scale, billboard type advertising in open city spaces. It also needs to be timeless and use simple geometrical shapes, such as circles, triangles, rectangles, lines and other signs, which do not require costly rebranding.

The main idea of this dissertation links both traditional and contemporary designing practices in the automotive sector. The classical approach, based on rigid visual identification is compared with the design thinking methodology, which introduces the user's perspective and iterative creative process.

The paper aims to **combine** and **develop** existing concepts through an empathetic, contemporary approach to designing with market needs in mind. It also presents a critical view of outdated models of brand communication and promotes more flexible and engaging solutions. The goal of the paper is to present an outline of a graphic model to be implemented in an automotive company.

Observation as a process

Using the design thinking methodology to better understand the analysis of business activities has to take the users, in this case the automotive industry or car dealers, into account. Thanks to the hospitality of the automotive industry, advertising agency workers or freelancers cooperating with them have the opportunity to be present at the premieres of new vehicles, participate in test drives, observe workers from different company branches and units, meet the clients and witness the service and customer care employees at work.

Thus, they can directly address the needs of supervisors or chief executives or have a chat with more familiar employees to find out what needs changing in order to make the brand more recognisable. In other words, putting oneself into the position of the user helps to understand what needs to be done and what is most important for the automotive industry identification. Expressing our opinions helps to create an improved message.

Design thinking helps¹ to navigate and control the project despite external limitations. Starting with an idea and moving on to the creation of an actual product with a set framework makes it possible to indicate the starting point and the goal, determine a deadline and follow the process allowing for corrections in the future, while maintaining a high level of creativity.

It is not always easy to assess which research techniques to apply for the collected information and whether a synthesis directed at finding good solutions is necessary. Observation is qualitative, not quantitative, even though anthropologists seem to focus more on the latter feature. The bell curve² which aids engineers and managers in the automotive industry confirms that in order to learn something new, we need to look at its symmetrical ends. One can never assume that the managers will share our opinion, however explaining a complicated problem and adding new insights during a presentation might convince them to approve changes for the better. Fifteen years of cooperation with automotive groups, leading projects and supporting innovative processes in the technology sector as a freelancer has shown that with the help of an outsider it is easier to identify what is expected of visual projects in the context of market needs and current trends. The design thinking methodology, design services and the working environment as a social factor makes it possible to solve problems with different teams through experimenting and moving between the "three dimensions"³ of innovation, i.e., „inspiration, creation of ideas and implementation". People involved in such a process are likely to be more engaged and motivated which adds value for potential clients.

¹ Brown T., *Zmiana przez design, jak design thinking zmienia organizacje i pobudza innowacyjność*. Libron, Wrocław 2013, p. 30.

² Idem, p. 43.

³ Ibidem, p. 49.

Historical outline

The design thinking theory dates back to the 1960's and 70's. It is based on openness and improving under the influence of others combined with a clear client orientation approach. Herbert Simon describes the method in *The Science of the Artificial*, published in 1969, stating that it is a combination of analytical and intuitive thinking which uses transformation and changes in business models. Simon was an advocate of prototyping through trial and error and his conclusions lead him to valuable solutions.

In 1987, an article by Richard Buchman, *Wicked Problems in Design Thinking*, discusses the issue of solving problems with the use of design thinking, which initiated and defined the aim of the idea and popularised this way of thinking in academic and business circles⁴.

David M. Kelly, a professor of Stanford University and later a co-founder of a planning and design company IDEO, together with his brother were also interested in the idea and as a result of a changed approach assumed that it is essential to engage designers of products and services from the very beginning of the designing process. The theory turned out to bring forward good outcomes even at the testing stage and proved the system successful both in academic and business settings.

IDEO is considered to have pioneered and popularised design thinking⁵. It was one of the first few companies which combined designing with business to create innovative products (such as the first Apple computer mouse) and profitable services. IDEO defined Design Thinking as a combination of three areas - desirability, technical feasibility and viability with the clients' needs and expectations in mind.

Tim Brown was the first to operationalise and introduce the term into design. The methodology has equally many supporters as opponents. Those in favour stress its holistic character, while the latter treat it as a merely business concept. Tim Brown claims that the client is its main aim, while the design problem is its starting point. Nowadays, most designers do not focus on designing something, but on solving a particular problem. In order to inspire the creative process the designer should remember about the following stages:

Empathise
Define
Generating ideas
Prototype
and
Test.

They are aimed at understanding the actual clients' needs and providing solutions which are desirable, feasible and viable.

They include errors and adjusting as well as improvements in order to perfect the final product. Empathy, generating ideas and implementation - mind mapping, testing and launching are key.

Design Thinking is characterised by:

- human orientation and the focus on understanding clients' needs;
- iteration - it can be repeated with different outcomes;
- cooperation and engagement of different perspectives;
- visualisation: figures, presentations;

All of the above generate viability, desirability and feasibility.

⁴ Michalska-Dominiak B., Grocholiński P., *Poradnik design thinking – czyli jak wykorzystać myślenie projektowe w biznesie*, Helion S.A., Gliwice 2019, 2022, p. 17.

⁵ *Design Thinking co to jest?*, <https://www.dt-institute.pl/blog/co-to-jest-design-thinking/> [Accessed: 12.02.2026]

At the beginning of the XXth century, in 1919, in the German city of Weimar, Bauhaus - an arts and crafts university was founded by Walter Gropius, a modernist visionary, who believed in self-development and aesthetics more than in technicalities and strived to combine all fields of art into one contemporary form based on the following assumption:

Simplicity+minimalism = functionality

Despite a relatively short life-span, Bauhaus and its new ideas revolutionised architecture and design and still influence modernistic trends around the world today. The founder of Bauhaus, Walter Gropius wrote:

„Schooling alone can never produce art! Whether the finished product is an exercise in ingenuity or a work of art depends on the talent of the individual who creates it. This quality cannot be taught and cannot be learned⁶. Skills and reliable knowledge are indispensable foundations of all creative efforts.

The spirit of Bauhaus could be paraphrased as follows:

To create a good composition it is necessary to understand the relationship between digits, forms and space. Bauhaus represents the courage to create simple and well thought-over spaces and objects. Its projects are not merely decorative, but also practical.

A renowned expert from the Cracow Academy of Fine Arts, in a book *Digits and Proportions in visual communication* (*Liczba i proporcja w komunikacji wizualnej*) suggests that geometrical relationships improve the clarity, aesthetics and functionality of a project. The structure and clarity of visual language is based on mathematical correlations. The aforementioned theories, design thinking and Bauhaus along with a broadened approach to design suggest that good graphic projects should be well synchronised and valuable.

Artistic reflection and works of art and design are always well thought-over, have their own rhythm and natural order. Older and newer inventions powered with a bit of modernity are key to the understanding of the designer's idea and a surprising means of expression at the same time.

Design and market needs

Graphic design plays an important role in the automotive industry and shows that there is a constant customer demand for new ideas. The efficiency of each element impacting the client relies on their careful selection and combination. Current technologies and trends in the visual arts world can be easily observed, e.g., on the Internet.

Typography is a means of transferring content into a visual form, which is easily remembered and reinforces content marketing⁷. An engaging content marketing serves the purpose of getting new customers according to one's needs and is a highly effective product of marketing evolution. Content combined with typography makes for a better value and is necessary for getting the message across.

Logos and subtle or more radical changes to a well-known sign can totally modify brand communication. Using design thinking in the process of designing a logo involves a deeper understanding of the brand's identity, its mission and its customers. As a result the logo is not only aesthetically pleasing and functional, but also reflects the company's values.

⁶ See: Myczkowska - Szczerska A., *Liczba i proporcja w komunikacji wizualnej*, Wydawnictwo Akademii Sztuk Pięknych im. Jana Matejki w Krakowie, Cracow 2018, p. 74.

⁷ *Content marketing. Podręcznik do content marketingu – Proste sposoby na zmianę twojego podejścia do marketingu*. Warsaw 201, p. 6.

Colour scheme affects our emotional perception and plays an important role in the creation and positioning of the new brand image. It involves defining the problem and playing with different combinations either in front of a computer screen or with the use of post-it notes. The search for a target customer involves creating a “persona” and establishing their age, gender, cultural background, occupation and lifestyle, choosing from various demographic or cultural groups. Based on colour psychology and how different colours affect our moods, e.g., red and yellow boost energy, while green and blue make us calmer, bring balance and the feeling of being in touch with nature, good or bad associations are created. For example, white, associated with purity in the West, in some Asian cultures is a symbol of mourning. Mind-mapping and brainstorming helps to define the aims and navigate the project. Iterate and cyclic approach with constant feedback and returning to the point of defining the problem and generating ideas improves the final colour-scheme and ensures that the applied changes are relevant and the colour-palette will become fully functional. Checking the context of use involves studying the perception of colours and their clarity as well as the sequence of events in which the colours will appear, e.g. on the computer screen, in daylight or at night, etc. All of these are tested.

This is how the “brand book”, a document with all the rules of using a logo and graphic architecture, is created. Due to the empathetic understanding of the consumers, their needs and the context, the graphic designs are better suited to the real problems of the target group. Every big company which moves with the times is not only using AI, but also the skills of art designers, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, engineers and marketing experts. Design thinkers strive for a deeper understanding and like many architects, engineers and graphic designers apart from regular studies in the main subject areas graduate from extra MBA or marketing courses.

The main difference between regular multidisciplinary teams and interdisciplinary teams is the fact that design thinking is the opposite of group thinking. A good project should be simple, not complicated. The craft of a good creator is based not only on the designer’s idea, but also on the activities and instruments that open up different strategies and make the project functional.

Visual communication design methods, the use of Design Thinking

As a rule, the designing process starts with a brief - a short document describing “what needs doing”. The key information together with the customer’s expectations set the project’s aim, establish the customer’s age, budget and technology and ensure that the process runs more smoothly. At the foundations of creative ideas lies a set of instructions.

checklist:

1. Brief’s analysis, analysis and context

Identifying the aim of the project, rebranding, target group and place of action. Context and desirability of the product with competition in mind. Answering the question: what does the client not communicate outright?

2. Iteration process (design thinking)

Designing as a cycle of empathising, generating ideas, prototyping, testing and implementing, which ensures that the project addresses real customers’ needs rather than subjective ideas of the creator.

3. Grid system as an indispensable element of composition

The key component of graphic composition makes it possible to prioritise content and maintain visual order.

4. Typography as a carrier of meaning

Conscious use of fonts as well as line and letter spacing are the tools that provide the message with tone and rhythm.

5. Rules of composition, colour and contrast

These make it possible to steer the customers' attention, put information in order and add emotional character.

6. Building the hierarchy of visual information

Thanks to careful designing the customer is supposed to intuitively know where to start reading.

7. Customer research and testing

A/B tests make it possible to measure the efficiency of interactive projects and modify them based on the obtained data. Switched on CTA allows us to check customer activity - how many "clicks" or how often "buy now" buttons are pressed. It measures the graphic composition, photos, page view and advertising slogans. For example, companies such as Google, Amazon or Netflix test hundreds of variants to optimise conversion.

Design integration

A graphic design for the automotive industry has to combine traditional brand values (such as reliability, prestige) with modern and innovative approach (digitalisation).

1. Multidimensional use of brand books

Brand books are tools which can aid various aspects of an automotive company's activity - from marketing materials, group identification to more and more popular digital interfaces of vehicles. The key process of the brand image management involves cohesive application of graphic elements, both printed and digital, according to the rules described in the brand book. Logos always need to be clearly displayed in accordance with guidelines. Consequent colour-scheme and the use of defined colour palette (CMYK, Pantone, RGB) communicates and coordinates the message, making the brand recognisable even without a visible logo. Following the "less is more" rule it is advisable to limit the array of colours. While designing complex 2D projects (e.g. packaging), it is better to use minimal amounts of ink to make recycling easier and billboards can be designed to be printed without intense colours, such as CMYK, but using those with a pure ingredients list. Let's use eco paper to be more green.

2. Sustainability and eco-friendliness

In the age of growing eco-awareness automotive brands have to communicate their sustainability efforts. Social media, newsletters and signage must reflect the brand's visual identification. Digital versions of projects should make work easier, not the other way round. Coordinated efforts in the context of development and eco-friendliness (so-called eco-branding) means that different elements are strategically managed and add a pro-ecological value, showing that the company feels responsible for social issues and takes real action to protect the natural environment and reduce the carbon footprint.

2D materials, logos, leaflets, business cards should be "natural". Their colour scheme should be simple with earthy tones, such as beige, shades of brown, greys, brick red and other subtle varieties. The typography and fonts should be basic, legible, sans serif, authentic and human-like.

3. The answer to a dynamically changing market expectations

Graphic design needs to be flexible and readily adapted to potential technological advances in the future. It needs to be easy to implement and cohesive with the system. It should favour digital solutions whenever it is possible from the application point of view.

The advantages of design thinking

The design thinking approach in graphic design involves a deeper understanding of the brand's mission and its customers, it breaks with the tool and business - oriented thinking and moves toward iteration. Service design is a complimentary method, which serves the purpose of identifying and solving issues linked to user experience. Generating different ideas and choosing the ones that are the best solution to a given problem are key.

UX (User Experience) is a service measuring the satisfaction and effectiveness of a project. Interaction with the service makes it possible to determine what is perceived as pleasant and what is considered a nuisance.

UI (User Interface) relates to different graphic elements which interact with the user and includes the design of buttons, menus, forms and the whole structure of interactive functions, which make the service easier to use.

Combining Design Thinking, UX and UI makes the projects more useful and innovative, it improves customer satisfaction and goes beyond conventional designing and thinking patterns. Design Thinking as a universal code can be applied alongside many theories to put projects in order.

Its advantages include:

- higher income; the empathetic approach makes it possible to come up with accurate and useful solutions;
- innovative approach to problem-solving through brainstorming, testing and finding good solutions;
- reduction of business risk through prototyping and testing to eliminate errors before the product or service is launched;
- a combination of different areas of expertise: design, technology, marketing, psychology;
- tested, practical methods used by big companies; developing better products, services and strategies;
- quick reaction to changes, iterate approach to market needs;
- a wide range of the process participants, leading to improved communication and creative thinking.

Statistics and scope of design thinking

The information about customers and statistical data based on opinions, assumptions and conversations might be insufficient. Conventional desktop designing does not focus on customer needs, so the questions why we design and who is the design for are crucial to the process. Many companies concentrate on what to sell, but direct their attention to competitors and their products in order to produce something similar.

Why? Because they keep making the same mistake and their decisions do not bring forward the planned results in the longer term nor do they increase the value of the solution.

Why? Because in the chase for competition the companies do not focus on their own goal and do not follow the customers' path from the initial point, therefore skipping the Customer Journey stage presented below⁸:

⁸ *Customer Journey, Customer Experience Mapping*, <https://www.interaction-design.org>
[Accessed: 19.02.2025]

brand awareness (the moment we become aware the brand exists);
pondering - gathering information and comparing offers;
purchase - the decision making point, final contact.

According to IDEO it is worth giving the designing tools to those who never considered themselves to be linked to design in any form. This approach makes it possible to see the brand from the customers' rather than the organisations' point of view and apply the tools to a wider array of problems.

Design and ideas meet on the verge of emotions and actions, which leads to better conversions and stronger relationships. In combination with an empathy-based visual design thinking map, which tracks each user's interaction with a product from the very beginning, it is possible to identify all the ups and downs as well as critical points. That enables the teams and decision makers to meet the users' real needs. It's worth remembering, though, that the design thinking method can not be used to solve issues where there is no interaction between people or people and companies, i.e., those that are not directed at people, business or technology. For instance, when building advanced machinery, IT systems or creating projects which have a short deadline or do not require testing (e.g., social media graphics for a single event), design thinking is not the way to go.

Professor Richard Buchanan suggests that it works best in the following four areas: visual communication, industrial design, service design or complex systems linked to work or living space.

Other areas ⁹ based on discovering and solving real-life problems are linked to:

Product Design, Service Design, Experience Design, Interaction Design, Brand Design, Communication Design and Business Model Design, make up a customer aimed structured system. Ideas are generated with empathy, prototyped and tested on real users, which provides order.

Design thinking in an automotive group setting - an analysis

An understanding of the automotive industry and the automotive group in particular require specific skills and a human-centered approach (Human-Centered Design, HCD). It is not only about completing a project - certain company standards and requirements, such as the visual identification system (SIV, System Information Viewer) have to be followed.

If official materials are not available, conscious creative use of the resources at hand and the sense of style become key.

An analysis and understanding of the industry makes it possible to create graphic designs tailored to the users needs. The knowledge of graphic programmes, internal and external specification, different formats and digital carriers helps to create refined graphic designs and is the main tool of effective working process.

Design thinking enables us to look into the dealership business not only from the sales point of view, but also from the clients', partners' and employees' perspectives.

The design thinking model suggests the following strategy:

- Empathy: a detailed understanding of the needs of the dealers, car users and drivers as well as customer preferences; an analysis of the car industry specifics and trends; identification of expectations regarding the brand and its image in the context of the latest trends and taking into account the perspectives of individual, fleet and service customers as well as employees and partners. The clients use digital channels more than the dealers. It is important to understand the differences between the brand culture and expectations of the premium and rational customers. Empathy involves the analysis of the process.

⁹ Wrona S., PhD., *Design Thinking. O co chodzi?*, PARP. Centrum Rozwoju MŚP, pdf p. 42.

- Problem definition: it involves answering the following question: what are the challenges of building a cohesive visual identification of an automotive company? For instance: how can a brand integrate technological advancements with tradition and prestige? Other problems involve: drop in sales as a hidden, declared issue, competition, inconsistent project strategy on the dealer's or branches' level, inconsistent navigation, brand experience, webpage, app or SoMe ad, outflow of customers.
- Generating ideas: creating different graphic concepts tailored to the needs of the dealer and the automotive group; digital onboarding, digital app making the service and contact easier; matching conventional forms of communication and design rules with the automotive brand's guidelines, outdoor-indoor advertisement, dependance on an importer.
- Prototyping and testing: creating visual prototypes (logos, promotional materials, vehicle interfaces) and testing them on users to check what their impression of the company's visual communication is; monitor messages, services, promotional campaigns, service discounts, dealer events; app simulations and target group prototyping.

Ethics and economy from the designer's point of view

The designers' job is not only to solve problems, but also to answer a lot of questions. They need to act responsibly, taking into account social aspects, such as the needs of different user groups, including older or disabled people. This social aspect involves an identity search dialogue. Making the details as simple as possible we make the design highly expressive and legible.

While creating synthetic graphics of logo, infographics or illustrations we are operating with an image in the simplest, yet suggestive manner. Visual identification systems are also about ethics, honest communication, respect for copyrights and social responsibility. It is important to avoid visual manipulation and stereotyping which can mislead the users.

From the economic perspective it is important that the project is effective, so the identification system has to be calibrable, legible and functional for different media, which has a direct impact on the costs of its implementation and maintenance. The project should also be sustainable, e.g., using the minimal amount of resources, such as paper, ink and materials, and suitable for use in various communication channels.

The economical system approach means that the designer needs to take into account the impact of their work on the environment, society, public space and the future of communication. A good project does not shout, but rather engages in a visual dialogue.

From an economical point of view, creativity does not exclude functionality. Well-considered identification becomes the tool for building lasting relationships between the brand and the user in the context of the changing media and distribution channels. Current design is not only about aesthetics, but also about emotional strategy, it becomes a kind of story, which has to be legible, flexible and balanced.

Human senses and emotions take centre stage in the process. That is why design also becomes the art of inventing a common language linking the brand with social awareness. Graphic design has become a dynamic field of tensions between technology, aesthetics, communication and social responsibility. We live in a visually overwhelmed world dominated by algorithms, speed and image simplicity. Hence, graphic design becomes not only the means of attracting attention, but also of restoring order, creating meaning and exercising empathy.

Graphic design becomes the language of culture, not merely a communication tool, but also means of dialogue and identity building. At the same time the designer needs to remember that ethics and

availability are also important, that the form is not pure and impacts decision-making, behaviour and emotions.

Polish philosopher Tadeusz Kotarbinski, one of the developers of praxeology, considered the designer to be an artist and a creator.

Conscious action has to be functional, effective and economical. It is an optimised process combining loose elements in order to reach a projected outcome. The project as a whole is directed at a set aim. It should be ethical and serve the good of a person, not merely generate income¹⁰. The idea is to create projects, distinctive assets which do not only look good, but also carry meaning, build relationships between the sender and the receiver of the message and make it easier for different society groups to navigate the complex world, taking into account the various user group needs.

The designer's manifesto

For me, graphic design with market needs in mind and designing visual identification systems are not merely formal tasks, but acts of trust. Before I get down to work, I study the brand's language, its history and needs - I am open to dialogue. Using the design thinking method and trusted alternative design techniques I create a visual reality with many advantages.

Each visual project intervenes with a realm of social, cultural and emotional meanings. Visual identification is not only a part of the brand's architecture, but also its story. When well-designed, it does not need words - it is intuitive, memorable and builds relationships. It is a language of emotions built on rhythm, proportions, light and space. It is a story about who we are and where we are heading in the form of signs, systems and colours.

Creativity has become the currency of durability, an investment in meaning. This dissertation is meant to be the platform for combining the two values. Graphic design for the automotive industry with the use of the design thinking methodology is an attempt to create a visual language, which does not only meet market needs, but also initiates dialogue between the brand and the human being, so that the brand is widely discussed. Designing with the use of a methodology is not a declaration - it is a conscious choice based on our worldview and efforts to co-create it through a combination of analysis and narration when asked for advice by various companies.

Examples of global companies using Design Thinking

Apple

Minimalist interfaces, UX/UI webpages. The iPhone and iPad introduced a breakthrough in telephone usability, for example, instead of conventional keyboard Apple focused on easy screen navigation. iMac (the computer) is an essence of aesthetics, functionality, reliability and simplicity. Apple keeps improving its products¹¹. The ever changing offer on their web pages is a good example of good design, not only in terms of graphics, but also regarding functionality and almost obsessive attention to detail in accordance with the "Think Different" philosophy.

¹⁰ Cabała P., *Prakseologia analiza działania*. Cracow's University of Economics, https://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.desklight-30c53a17-61a3-4395-9cf5-2ccf1a5b43f8/c/Prakseologia_Nr147_2007_str9_17.pdf. [Access: 20.02.2026.]

¹¹ *How Apple uses Design thinking and innovation at the core*, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-apple-uses-design-thinking-innovation-core-syed-maaz-siddique-3ujnc/> [Accessed: 12.02.2026.]

Google

Since 1998 they have been experimenting with different logos, e.g., Google Doodles, an interactive version on the main search engine page, commemorating, among many others, Maria Skłodowska Curie, National Independence Day, World's Earth Day, Freestyle Skiing 2026, etc., in an effort to educate.

All of them can be found on: www.google.com/doodles¹². The design system imitating the real world with the use of shadowing, perspective and movement makes it easier for the user to understand the interface through animation, touch and interaction. Project Sprints, such as Google Design Sprint involve a structured process of understanding, sketching, decision-making, prototyping and testing, used to solve problems, e.g. when designing Gmail, Google Maps or Google Meet. Thanks to analyses and the design thinking methodology Google¹³ eliminates unnecessary products and graphic zones, drawing conclusions from previous errors. At Google the design thinking method focuses on people and real problems. Therefore it is not merely a technology in use. Fast reactions and reduction involving teams of employees and learning from one another are key.

Coca-Cola

The evolution of changes based on customer research is one of the advantages of using the DT theory. According to a report by the Design Management Institute¹⁴ Coca-Cola's results have been good in the last 10 years. Their success is attributed to their design rules, branding evolution based on customer research and backed by good strategy and innovation. Coca-Cola is also the biggest business brand on Facebook with over 107 mln fans and its reach is constantly expanding. The company explores a modern advertisement backup and has many sites for different countries. CC understands that brand engagement and generating contagious marketing ideas are key. This means that stories have to evolve and change interaction into communication between customers through various channels with the use of new ways of thinking.

Improved customer experiences, new packaging, modified graphic designs and advertising campaigns lead to Coca-Cola's superiority over its competitors. "Brand experiences" such as customised labels with customers' names on them is just one of the examples of good practices. Others include: lighter or recycled bottles or designing and creating bottles without labels, e.g. in Japan, Korea and Great Britain. Initiatives, such as building a Cobot 2.0 robot to expand the drinks' storage capacity, in-company HR processes, cutting down 250-pages long documents to 25 pages are not only socially viable improvements, but also new elements of project thinking¹⁵. The launch of "Create Real Magic" Internet platform made it possible for the designers to combine AI's creativity with the extensive brand's library with the help of GPT-4 and Dalle - including the images of the famous bear and Santa Claus. Thanks to its posters, postcards and animations Coca-Cola has become part of common creative experience¹⁶ and not only a drink.

¹² See: www.google.com/doodles

¹³ *Practice innovation with design*, <https://rework.withgoogle.com/intl/en/guides/design-thinking> [Accessed: 16.02.2026.]

¹⁴ *Design Thinking and innovation At Coca-Cola Company*, <https://www.coursehero.com/file/27553206/Design-Thinking-and-Innovation-At-Coca-Cola-Companydocx/> [Accessed: 17.12.2026]

¹⁵ *Design Thinking and innovation At Coca-Cola Company*, <https://www.coursehero.com/file/27553206/Design-Thinking-and-Innovation-At-Coca-Cola-Companydocx/> [Accessed: 17.12.2026]

¹⁶ *Coca Cola AI: How Artificial Intelligence Is Shaping the Brand's Future*, <https://medium.com/@salmanamir6969/coca-cola-ai-how-artificial-intelligence-is-shaping-the-brands-future-75371b85b386> [Accessed: 18.02.2025]

IBM

The company stands out in terms of technology patent potential and leads in the world's rankings of patent applications. Their research resulted in creating hard drives and they specialise in hybrid cloud, artificial intelligence and technology consulting (with ever growing ranks of experts in the field). Design thinking is the standard methodology of their global teams and it is part of the company's culture¹⁷. Every 2 to 3 weeks IBM organises regular sessions where it presents real prototypes and projects involving user perception thinking by inviting real users to cooperate with them on a regular basis.

Their own model of Enterprise Design Thinking / EDT aids scaling. The identification of IBM's logo, created in 1956 and in 1972 modified by Paul Rand into a bar version, is iconic. Even though design thinking was developed later, in the 1980's and 90's, there are similarities between the methodology and Rand's approach. Following the modernistic paradigm Rand's work maintained clarity, was systematic and built systems (not only the logo). It was rational and inspired by the designer. The applied proto-design thinking system was less formal and faster, it reduced the number of team members involved, did not require studies and was more based on hypotheses. Used in limited budget circumstances, the Proto-Design Thinking equals fast, iterative thinking in a draft version and makes it possible to combine the two theories.

A design-team process created by people for people

The user as the receiver of a project takes priority and is closely followed by the design team striving to find problem solutions and change perspectives. The engagement of company employees or teams directly linked to it is essential at the initial stage of the process as it makes it possible to understand the in-company relationships and design valuable solutions. The designer is responsible for reaching set goals without structural changes. At the final point of the process, there is the person or company ordering the project. This is when the deadline and the framework for feedback are established.

The goals are always vectorial and help to answer the questions why we design and who for. It is worth remembering that in order to ensure the highest possible outcome, the organisation should invite experts and representatives of fields that are not directly linked to the project. A good team should be diverse and preferably exclude members with strong leadership skills, who might negatively affect the team's work. In order to avoid such statements as "it is impossible", or "this can not be done" with the help of e.g., a marketing specialist, an IT expert, a graphic designer, an engineer and a lawyer a group of people of various traits of character, who can think outside the box, can be established.

A personality assessment is crucial for understanding human behaviours. A free personality test¹⁸ makes it possible to perform a complex analysis of a person's character and qualify them for a particular task, e.g., teamwork, selection of duties, leadership or those requiring particular resilience. The test has a wide range of applications, aids the decision-making process and helps to structure the team. The main idea behind design thinking is to exercise empathy towards those that you design for. In this context leadership is about building empathy culture towards those who were chosen to help¹⁹.

¹⁷ *What is Design Thinking?*, https://www.ibm.com/think/topics/design-thinking?utm_source=chatgpt.com [Accessed: 24.02.2026]

¹⁸ *Testy osobowości. Personality tests*, <https://myiq.com/pl>, <https://personality.co> [Accessed: 21.02.2026]

¹⁹ Kelly D., Kelley, M., (as quoted in BrainyQuote). *The main tenet of design thinking is empathy...* BrainyQuote, https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/david_m_kelley_564008?utm_source [Accessed: 3.02.2026]

For example, a homogenous team of engineers might generate technical solutions that are unattractive for the user, whereas a diverse team is more likely to come up with solutions that are feasible, desirable and viable. Moving along the three dimensions of inspiration, observation and understanding towards generating ideas, i.e., the process of transforming observations and hints into ideas we can reach the implementation stage, in which the best ideas are translated into refined plans of action.

Inspiration + generating ideas = implementation

By combining the three pillars of design thinking in the automotive industry we link technology, emotions and complex processes with digital transformation. Projects with market needs in mind for an automotive group (VW service dealer) serve as a good example of that:

Roles in a small team of 5 thinkers:

1. Facilitator - a person responsible for the transformation and the design thinking process
2. Marketing communication strategist - a person, who knows customer behaviours and introduces brand positioning.
3. Osoba techniczna. Dbą o wykonalność techniczną. Technology specialist - a person responsible for technological viability.
4. Graphic designer, UX/UI. specialist with digital and analogue experience.
5. Customer representative, service advisor around 40 - 50+ years old with local experience. Education: technical as opposed to humanities.

Goals:

- to increase the number of Volkswagen service customers by 25% per year;
- to present information about the service activities in a graphic form; posters should be legible and displayed in the area where vehicles are admitted to the service.
- to repeat projects throughout 4 digital SoMe channels.
- to minimise the number of resignations from the services provided

Effects of the process:

- testing of graphic projects of a single service activity on the brand's customers, observations, prototyping and reminding about the service activities;
- report and summary of the process.

Notes:

Correct note-taking involves writing down words that should not just be partially remembered, they make up important content expressed by the respondents. As a rule, they should not include deeper thoughts, but valid points made by customers. By selecting important information and filtering it through our own lense, the notes become more concise. Usually we jot them down on post-its or special Moodboards - our own boards of inspiration. In order to carry out the interviews the team needs to possess the necessary knowledge and be provided with a selection of post-its and coloured markers.

The interview should cover the customers' real needs and problems by asking questions, such as:

The process of choosing the project

Decision making

What is important for you when choosing the brand, product or graphic design?
What does the graphic design choice look like in your company?
What previous experiences impacted your current decisions?
In which situations do you consider the change of graphic design or visual identification?
What would need to happen in order for you to consider taking up a new project or rebranding?

Needs and project expectations

Areas of interest

What marketing goals should the graphic project achieve?
What user needs should the visual project meet?
What should an ideal cooperation with a graphic designer look like?

Have you ever used the services of a different designer/freelancer before?
Have you encountered situations in which the graphic design did not meet the expectations of users and managers?
Which materials should include an ideal identification or marketing materials?

Decision-making process within the project

Final process and decision

What does the decision-making process of choosing the project look like?
Who is taking part in the assessment and approves the project?
At which stage of the designing process do doubts or changes occur?
Does the final project differ from the initial concept?
What criteria are used to choose the final graphic design?

Experiences from using the project

Project and services usage

What graphic designs are used on an everyday basis by your in-company marketing team?
Are there any issues with the use of visual identification?
Which graphic design elements work best to communicate with customers?
Which elements of the project are most problematic and need changing?
What are the positive aspects and difficulties of working on a graphic design?

The example shows how to use such questions in order to move on. Why are these questions in line with design thinking? Because they focus on user experience, explore market and communication needs and help the design team to understand the context of graphic design usage.

Asking these important, open questions require more than a simple yes/no answer. The “look me straight into the eye” approach, one of the most powerful non-verbal communication tools, builds trust²⁰. Direct 2-3 second long eye contact makes it easier to read the interlocutor’s intentions and demonstrates engagement. Eye contact is one of the most important elements of communication. When used correctly it makes it easier to understand both sides - the interviewer and the interviewed. However, the aim is not

²⁰ Patrz prosto w oczy. How to Overcome Eye Contact Anxiety, <https://www.verywellmind.com/how-do-i-maintain-good-eye-contact-3024392> [Accessed: 27.02.2026]

only to become better artists, who have a deep understanding of the human condition.

Research conducted by Jeanne Liedtka, professor of management at Darden Graduate School of Business at the University of Virginia, confirms that exploratory questions asked during interviews with users make it easier for different organisations to identify design issues and create more accurate communication solutions. The researcher suggests that design thinking lets us immerse in the user experience and leads to project conclusions, shifting the organisation's attention from the product itself to user experience and discovering their needs²¹.

Experimenting and completing consecutive stages of the project, we narrow its range and make it more detailed, more precise. At the divergence stage new options appear, while at the convergence stage they are eliminated in order to make choices. That is how the inspiring story is unveiled.

Short description of figures:

fig.01. Mood and choice graphs. Ordering data, choosing options predicting team behaviour at different stages of the project. The choice graph resembles a funnel with the opening representing the range of initial possibilities.

fig.02. Canvas design + Double diamond design process. It includes a design-based strategy outline and planning, e.g., storytelling, problem recognition, solution finding, analysis and synthesis, generating ideas, testing and implementing.

fig.03. Empathy map, user model. It presents observations, thoughts, feelings, concerns and gripes. Persona, archetype on an Audi example.

Space with a synergy effect

Another important element of teamwork is space and its arrangement. Usually it is associated with a lecture hall or the boss's office with a desk and enough space to put up large-scale models, mind maps, Persona maps, etc. Using post-it notes and posters with all the necessary data sets an agenda for systematic, homogenised work for all the team members. It also makes it easier to meet the needs and introduce changes in a flexible manner depending on the challenge and team engagement.

When energy drops, smaller challenges help, e.g. tasks involving describing one's routine till 10 a.m., presenting the toaster mechanism, including the slice of bread popping out, in the form of a drawing, according to the rule "the number of pieces of paper equals the number of stories"²². Such creative tasks, based on assigning meaning, help break out of standardised thinking during longer periods of stagnation and particularly good attention, they build empathy and inspire new ideas. Creating stories together, own experiences and interpretation of the same material shows how different user needs might be and leads to better results. Such exercises transform abstract ideas into simple forms and data into stories, making it easier to create empathetic solutions focused on a human being.

Designing with market needs in mind in a small company, an example

Many of our clients fulfil their missions and visions by requiring not only research but also a detailed analysis while designing. Therefore, strategic cooperation with the automotive industry demands engagement and observation on a daily basis. Design thinking involves a declaration of

²¹ See: Liedtka, J. (2018), *Why Design Thinking Works*, Harvard Business Review, 96(5), p. 72-79.

²² Michalska-Dominiak B., Grocholiński P., *Poradnik design thinking – czyli jak wykorzystać myślenie projektowe w biznesie*, Helion S.A., Gliwice 2019, 2022, p. 46.

personal interaction with the customers in order to understand their experiences, eliminate problems and meet the expectations of our contractors.

At Fun Art, we decided on a particular direction in selecting clients with the use of design thinking methodology, which was the result of a particular market need. Focusing on the customers' needs, led to strong relationships and reaching a certain level of the services provided, so that the customers are willing to choose our offer or complex services again and again. The bigger the task, the higher risks and concerns whether set goals are going to be met thanks to iterative thinking and whether the company's prestige is going to be maintained. The company's audit is also crucial for successful outcomes.

Within its 30 years of experience, Fun Art has cooperated with many companies in Poland, not only from the automotive, but also technological industry. Some of its contractors closed down and for the last 16 years it has been working mainly with automotive brands, such as Volkswagen, Audi, Skoda, Toyota and Kia. One of the examples of successful DT use is former Auto Special Kraków, a Volkswagen and Audi dealer, later renamed Sobiesław Zasada and recently merged into Cichy Zasada group. The merge took place during the COVID pandemics and introduced lots of changes, but the cooperation with Fun Art has been maintained with advertising services regularly ordered. The long-term cooperation is a ground for experimenting and testing implemented changes. The time and technical as well as design solutions used make it possible to apply the 5 stages of Design Thinking.

1. Discovering - who are we designing for?
2. Challenge - expectations, gripes, advantages
3. Solution finding - generating ideas, solving problems
4. Prototyping - presenting solutions, discussing what does the client think about the idea?
5. Testing, planning, implementing - speed, time of completion, minimal implementation requirements.

The cooperation with the automotive group resulted in a complex communication system between the service provider and the customer. Designs of various service activities proved that the design thinking methodology worked correctly. The example of such a system, although attributed to the headquarters of the Audi brand, suggests that it was initiated in Cracow, in the Fun Art advertising agency. The aim was to draw the attention of a client visiting the service, as an opportunity to build a relationship and come back to use the service again and notice various service activities.

In the process of designing the space where cars are admitted for service, the space, consultant and customer type were taken into account. The management was happy to go ahead with the implementation of a solution which was both standing out and functional. A well-thought out information board was the agency's first idea for the Volkswagen and Audi dealer and was part of the "discovering anew" approach.

It is worth mentioning that the initial Audi logo was created in 1932 as a result of a fusion between four brands - Audi, DKW, Horch and Wander into Auto Union and for many decades was flat. Only after many subsequent changes, in the 1990's it became 3D with a polished, chromium-plated look and since then has been synonymous with the modern brand image. However, working on the advertisement with the famous rings in 2009 was far from easy.

Back then, the technology for 3D projects and full-colour printing was available only for the biggest companies. Small agencies did not have the possibilities to introduce simplified ideas and quick changes into their projects. With the use of a brandbook of the Audi logotype from 2009, Fun Art decided to alternate the technology and logo, making them simpler and easier to replicate on various formats or available carriers.

After the solution was presented and with the then director of the Lesser Poland regional branch,

Janusz Łopata's approval, the first stage of the project was implemented. It was a "Welcome in the service" board, a light structure made of dibond in a 2D plotter technology with the Audi logotype and a 1970 advertising slogan "Advantage thanks to technology, we invite you to the service". It has since been considered a big contribution to the brand's image by one of the Audi and Volkswagen dealers of the Cichy Zasada Group as part of the prototyping, testing and implementing projects for the brand.

The change of 3D logos into 2D ones has become one of the biggest trends in rebranding in the automotive industry in recent years. Back then it was an answer of a small advertising agency to a problem, in which the brand was meant to be easily recognisable.

The next step was to change the ugly walls of the service. Usually, such changes can not be implemented fast, as they call for costly rebuilding. In the case of car services it is normally quite a time-consuming process and requires the dealer's and architecture team of the premium brand's permissions.

FunArt put forward a couple of changes, including decorating the walls with self-adhesive foil. The proposal was accepted and as an experiment the walls were decorated with colours used typically for the Audi car models. The foil made the place not only more aesthetically pleasing, it also protected the walls from external factors, such as dirt. The implementation proved successful and it was done at a relatively small cost. The solution of the problem was met with approval from the management, employees and the dealer's audit companies.

The third step involved preparing service information for part of the advertising campaign at regular intervals and with changing focus for each of the different service activities. The goal was mainly to attract the clients, who came in for a car service in order to fix a problem, but simultaneously noticed new possibilities and was eager to use not only the information provided but, thanks to the marketing funnel strategy²³ and the design thinking methodology, was also happy to take advantage of the new options. The empathetic approach and discussions led to a conclusion that such activities should be organised on a regular basis. The subsequent challenge and solution finding led to the creation of posters in aluminium frames protected with a thin plexi layer with a simple click in/out mechanism, which made it possible to change the posters with ease.

The fourth step involved outdoor billboard campaigns to repeat service activities. The aim was to summarize the concept to, e.g. the main service slogan, such as: "12% off replacing the timing mechanism in cars older than 5 years". There was one image and one logo plus a focus on value. Graphic projects printed on 18 m² of the city's advertising space and outside the car dealer carried a different message. It encouraged the customers to take advantage of the main service campaigns. Billboard design thinking²⁴ was aimed at a different target group and was meant to visually summarize and present new services, products or concepts. The simple message combined with the "wow" effect of large format, metaphor and story was the component that sold the project. All the campaigns and projects combined together made an even greater impact. Digital technology used on screens, webpages and in the waiting room at the dealers contained all of the information. The summary and quick implementation of changing graphic designs were a result of conversation with different people - questions and observations. The diagnosis led to generating ideas and then to products and services that met the users' needs.

These four points or steps are draft sketches for a scenario. They are drawn from smiles on people's faces when new concepts become new products to be consumed by the clients. An ideal designer looks into innovative strategies, which strengthen the cooperation between creators and consumers. The testing at the end of stage five provides opinions and suggestions, while corrections make it

²³ Marciński G., *Czym jest lejek marketingowy. 4 etapy: świadomość, zainteresowanie, pożądanie, działanie*. Post-graduate studies, AGH University of Science and Technology, Cracow, 2023.

²⁴ McGuire S., *How to run a „Tieto Billboard Design Thinking Workshop”, Co dają Billboardy w Design Thinking*, <https://medium.com/@mcgvienna/how-to-run-a-tieto-billboard-design-thinking-workshop-ac2218e9b2d1> [Accessed: 21.02.2026]

possible to identify strong and weak points of a solution. A thinker with good professional skills which were not gained through education but through practice should use his knowledge to serve people. However, the designers might need extra tools to understand a particular culture and to find the right solutions. The path from observation to empathy finally leads to the following question: assuming that cultures are so diverse and the idea of “unruly crowd” has in the XXI century been replaced with the term of “wisdom of the crowd”, how should the collective intelligence be utilised? After all it is not “us against them”, but “us with them”²⁵.

The evolution of correct concepts with the Design Thinking methodology which is used by designers for people but also with people’s help is based on access to information and innovation. Inspired by the words of a double Nobel Prize winner, American chemist and biophysicist, Linus Pauling, who said: The best way to have a good idea is to have a lot of ideas²⁶, we link a set of facts with structural precision and creative thinking.

Short description of figures:

fig. 04 Audi logo shared by the brand’s dealer in a 3D version (Audi advantage due to technology)

fig. 05 Logo altered from 3D to 2D. (Welcome to Audi and VW service board). Welcome to the Auto Special service. Problem > insight > design decision. Fun Art.

Key companies from the automotive group using Design Thinking

Audi

They are not only a car producer. Thanks to an interdisciplinary approach, including designing experiences, they define design not as a form, but a complex user experience: embracing their emotions and sense of comfort as well as technology and digitalisation. Audi predicts future mobile needs and addresses key pillars of design thinking and human-centered design. In 2019, during an expert meeting of Audi Design Lab, apart from biodesign, issues such as using design thinking in space and car interior design were discussed with cognitive peace, perceptive comfort and user experience in mind.

Research-based design at Audi is an example of design thinking implementation, brand culture, design strategy and branding.

Thesis, rebranding process. Audi rebranding was carried out according to the rules of design thinking and included the analysis of the process stages and design decisions:

Empathising with a focus on the human being; meeting customer needs; the use of digital interfaces in apps, car screens and social media. Simplicity and clarity, generating ideas regarding changing the chromium-plated logo into a more digital-friendly one, simplifying the logo instead of changing it completely into a flat design. The creation of a flexible identification system, which works in print, on-screen and in car interiors. Prototyping the identification in different contexts: on webpages, in apps, marketing materials, car dealers and car models. Different identification for the Chinese market and for younger users. Conclusion: Audi uses design thinking not only for aesthetic changes, but as a design process based on empathy, testing and iteration. It is not just a form, but a strategy²⁷.

²⁵ See: Brown T., *Zmiana przez design, jak design thinking zmienia organizacje i pobudza innowacyjność*, p.. 62-69.

²⁶ See: Brown T., *Zmiana przez design, jak design thinking zmienia organizacje i pobudza innowacyjność*, p. 69.

²⁷ Audi MediaCenter, *Radical simplicity at the heart of our approach*, <https://www.audi-mediacycenter.com/en/press-releases> [Accessed: 2.02.2026]

Volkswagen

The approach of the Volkswagen group to design and innovation mirrors the rules of design thinking. This methodology is key in the strive for user-centred and flexible creative processes. The automotive industry is constantly growing and the expectations of customers quickly change. Limiting attention merely to bodywork or car interiors is only a supportive measure for the product and brand experiences. Projects do not change only in terms of graphics and electromobile transformation, but involve user research and testing. Design Thinking in the Volkswagen group is an active technology and philosophy aimed at creating the brand's image and advantage over competition not only in Europe, but worldwide²⁸. The philosophy is reflected in the rules of the process, in which VW produces studio models, prototypes and conceptual cars. Cooperation with experts from different fields generates holistic solutions. A clear UX tendency of the digital platforms shows a combination of competencies from the areas of technology and humanities alike. Quality, speed and shorter implementation time of innovations, better final solutions due to earlier formal error spotting show that the DT methodology is used at the VW group while validating problem solutions during implementation.

Škoda

The Škoda approach in recent years has shown a new design language called "Modern Solid", which uses a methodology close to Design Thinking in terms of meeting customer needs. Škoda does not design "rigid" lines and details based on visual trends. It is not only about aesthetics but about functionality. The process always begins with understanding the problem and testing various concepts and includes:

The sketching stage of conceptualising and defining the character of the vehicle and its message. First, clay and 3D models are created and then prototypes are tested and corrected to make them ergonomical, which is an important initial step of the projects, as it allows to precisely match all the elements. Škoda's vehicles are highly practical and of good value for money. For the producer, analysis of customer needs takes priority. Thanks to the use of a digital experience layer it was awarded for Interface & User Experience Design. The MyŠkoda app and Škoda Flow system show that the brand uses processes similar to Design Thinking in terms of designing digital interactions as well as UX/UI interfaces²⁹.

Škoda's new visual identification processes were not always referred to as Design Thinking, i.e., user needs research, but it combines traditional and modern approaches to create attractive, legible experiences. The combination of user needs analysis and interactive design is typical for DT methodology because:

- Designs are user-oriented,
- prototypes are made and tested,
- Solutions are iterated with feedback,
- It builds customer experiences.

Volvo

Exposing the culture of innovation and design focused on the human being, Volvo organises events and workshops dedicated to the design thinking methodology. With the use of this technique Volvo is improving the global system of customer and employee services. Thanks to the analysis of

²⁸ Volkswagen Group, *Sharpened design philosophy of Volkswagen Group is key to sustainable brand success*, <https://www.volkswagen-group.com/en/press-releases/> [Accessed: 2.03.2026]

²⁹ Škoda z nagrodami Red Dot Design Awards, https://portal.skoda.pl/informacje-prasowe/skoda-z-nagrodami-red-dot-design-awards-w-kategorii-interface-user-experience-design-3183?utm_source [Accessed: 4.03.2026]

Customer Journey it creates maps and identifies problems. As part of the “Volvo Care” project a service model based on customer experience and real needs was built. Customer needs are analysed, communication is improved and services are personalised. The post-sales process is improved with the use of testing and implementing. The Volvo brand (Roadmap) actively develops service design competencies according to key areas of design thinking: empathy, generating ideas, testing and implementing. As a result all the dealers record cohesive service and higher customer retention rates³⁰. UX/IA teams thanks to an analysis of the information architecture synchronised various components and designed a new car configurator, which does not only look better in terms of graphics, but also works for different markets as it is practical and comfortable to use. Implementing these solutions (digital and brand) alongside UX, as demonstrated by better organised webpages, led to creating a configuration tool, which proves useful in the context of visual identification and brand communication.

Tesla

The brand uses project thinking not only for vehicle construction purposes, but also for customer services and energy products. Innovation inspired by project thinking is Tesla’s and its creator Elon Musk’s advantage. Cars of the future, as we call them because of their progressive features, are not only attractive in terms of looks and functionality, but also due to rising to environmental challenges. Tesla uses the Design Thinking perspective in three areas - in branding with the letter “T” logo designed by RO Studio and characterised by visual minimalism based on simple, clear sans-serif typography, limited colour-scheme and large-scale, empty background; in UI/UI with one big touch screen with the car interface and OTA (over-the air) App, i.e., wireless data update in real-time³¹; and in technological storytelling, where graphics communicate with the future, technology and sustainable development. According to research, Tesla uses a classic Design Thinking model, Stanford d. school and the Double Diamond method. The team of interested parties, Marc Tarpenning, Martin Eberhard and Elon Musk alongside designers, engineers and other employees became part of the process by working on an assessment system and testing. The teams found out that customers prefer subtle support rather than complete take-over by the car. They also defined a problem of eliminating fuel vehicles and replacing them with non-emission cars different from the classical car architecture, which led to a decision to produce electrical vehicles for all³². After the UX design data analysis Tesla kept the minimalistic interface and has been reducing some elements in favour of big, legible graphic icons and high screen contrast. Tesla treats cars as digital products directly linked to user experience.

BMW

BMW actively uses Design Thinking to find solutions linking user emotions with technological advancements. It promotes the idea in a social and educational sense beyond company structures, for example, in Poland the brand came up with a programme called “Joy of Change” with workshops on design thinking for schools. The aim of the programme was to teach young people to think and solve problems in an innovative way³³. An ethnographic research by Designworks shows

³⁰ *Volvo, Doświadczenie klientów w salonach samochodowych, Case Study*, <https://klientocentryczni.pl/doswiadczenia-klientow-w-salonach-samochodowych> [Accessed: 4.03.2026]

³¹ *Tesla Branding Case Study*, https://acalytica.com/blog/tesla-branding-case-study-first-principles-thinking-in-action?utm_source [Accessed: 8.03.2026]

³² *Design Thinking @ Tesla*, https://www.dt-seminar.net/content/summer2024/cases-summer2024/design-thinking-tesla/?utm_source [Accessed: 8.03.2026]

³³ *Radość zmiany. Program społeczny BMW Group Polska*, <https://www.press.bmwgroup.com/poland/article/detail/T0264119PL/radość-zmiany:-startuje-program-społeczny-bmw-group-polska-i-fundacji->

that an interdisciplinary approach to digitalisation can lead to creative problem-solution. By using other processes, such as Lean Manufacturing, the philosophy of waste reduction BMW focuses on efficiency, flexibility and quality. The BMWi3 model, created within the BMW Project, is a good example of the process. Research on the lifestyle of the citizens of big cities such as Berlin, Londyn, and Shanghai led to conclusions that users often use cars on short routes and that parking access and digital pairing with phones are key just as environmental-friendliness and low emission rates. The challenge involved a car that would be ideal for city life - an economical and easy-to-drive vehicle from the top shelf. The design team generated ideas for a carbon-fibre bodywork, low turning circle and compact, lounge-like interior.

At the prototyping stage an ergonomic interior and an UX multimedia system were created plus the iDrive screen legibility was checked. The effects of using Design Thinking were as follows: first carbon based construction, pleasant, flat-like interior, good manoeuvrability and pioneering UX for an electric car. This classical example shows that Design Thinking starts with user style, not with technology.

The BMW logo and its rebranding is another example of Design Thinking in use. In 2020, with the launch of the conceptual BMW i4 model, the company introduced some changes. Research on the perception of the premium brand among young people showed that it is considered to be too technical and distanced. The move towards user experience was linked to identification and the digital environment for UI, apps and social media were amended. The navigation of My BMW app was simplified and made more legible for the user. In terms of graphics, the logo was flattened (flat design). The brand's ring was made transparent instead of black. The typography became more open and the visual system was adjusted to UI and screens. Logo testing as an interface element, not just a sign on the car bonnet, included lots of versions and graphic systems. The tests included, e.g. the logo's legibility and whether it looked more stylish than technical as well as if it serves its purpose in animation.

As a result it got redesigned in 2020 - the ring became transparent, rather than black, the logo was flattened, which made it lighter and the motion design was optimised.

It is worth mentioning that after full trial runs the old logo was kept at the car bonnets, and the changed one has since been mostly used in the brand's communication.

Case study, summary: the process did not start with aesthetics, but with user experience with the brand, which suggests a classic, workbook path of Design Thinking >UX>visual identification

Short description of figures:

fig. 06 Design changes of the BMW logo 1997 - 2020. Removal of the inner chromium layer with the historical layout intact. Argument: all in accordance with the rules of DT. Focus on user experience: simplified signet, UI/UX functionality.

Mercedes

Mercedes applies a design thinking approach — a methodology rooted in multidisciplinary collaboration. At Mercedes, teamwork demonstrates how it is possible to bridge technology and engineering within a large organisation. The human-centered approach stems not from market nuances, but from genuine human needs. A prime example is the MBUX (Mercedes-Benz User Experience) system, which employs design thinking alongside an advanced icon-based interface featuring the "Hey Mercedes" voice assistant.

Introduced in 2018, the technology uses speech recognition and artificial intelligence to process and generate natural language. It can even understand longer sentences such as "I'm hot, lower the

temperature" or "Show me the latest news." This design element fundamentally changes how humans interact with the vehicle and enhances driving safety.

2D modeling is widely used in showrooms, applications, and advertising. Mercedes analyses the premium customer's lifestyle, aesthetics, and visual clarity. Some recurring questions include: Does this design look and function like a premium? Or, for example, how to design an advertising banner or a showroom window that conveys the brand's luxury? Or, from a technical point of view, how to design a new, intuitive interface that invites interaction without causing distraction? The creative process involves generating multiple concepts and ideas — presented as sketches, moodboards, and typographic variants. Experiments with grid-based layouts follow established principles of minimalism: heavy use of black, white, and space. Signature elements include elegant typography from typeface families like Helvetica and high-quality photography, in which the car is always the focal point of the composition. Technically, this extends to the vehicle lineup, LED lighting, and the continuous refinement of digital aesthetics.

Many of Mercedes' print campaigns apply design thinking and develop a Key Visual. Image-based layouts typically follow three to four reference examples and mockups structured as:

Large photo > Tagline > Minimal photography > Mercedes logo³⁴.

Mercedes' portfolio also features numerous outdoor campaign examples — such as the Mercedes AMG campaign in Warsaw — integrated into broader brand initiatives³⁵. Graphic design work includes web banners, landing pages, and communication systems across Instagram posts, Instagram Stories, and other social media channels, built on the pattern of:

Problem > Concept > Design > Final materials

Mercedes-Benz Group, the German brand, is recognised as one of the most prestigious and innovative companies in the world, combining tradition, technology, and luxury. In 2023, it ranked 7th in Interbrand's Global Brand Ranking.

Short description of figures:

fig. 07 Design and the application of design thinking in the automotive industry. Scope: visual communication, objects, products, service design, complex systems.

fig. 08. Strategic logic of sequence: design and design thinking.

From mission, messaging, and visual identity through to touchpoints, social media, and implementation.

Selected features and aspects, logo identity in the Design Thinking process

Naming a new brand is not easy — nor is it work for the faint-hearted. The creative process is characterised by complexity and iteration. It sometimes requires not just linguistic knowledge, but also market research and an understanding of legal regulations. Building a strong new brand today is a formidable challenge even for a seasoned specialist.

The guiding idea is empathy and brainstorming, supported by the design thinking methodology.

³⁴ *Mercedes Benz Print Design*, https://teammanila.com/mercedes-benz-print-advertising-2012/?utm_source [Accessed: 12.03.2026] *Design Essential Mercedes*, https://media.mercedes-benz.it/design-essentials-il-design-firmato-mercedes-benz/?utm_source [Accessed: 12.03.2026]

³⁵ Instagram, Braughman group.media. *Kampania Mercedes*, https://www.instagram.com/p/DKg7TBUop_M/ [Accessed: 12.03.2026]

By stimulating creativity, a long list of proposals can be generated — and with patience and rigor, that list can be narrowed down to a name that is simple, memorable, bold, and appropriate for the target audience. There is enormous responsibility in designing something that will likely be reproduced hundreds of times. Through prototyping and testing, we evaluate not only the goal but the strength and potential of a name. Walls covered in sketches — reviewed by stakeholders — can spark the next, even better proposal. Positioning in this process should focus not on competitors' names, but on gathering supportive reference materials. A designer may need to review hundreds of proposals before zeroing in on the right one. Selection criteria, stimulation techniques, and preliminary research will produce a short list from which the correct name can be chosen.

Design Thinking questions for brand naming

Discovery - who are we designing for? A company, a dealer. What do they sell?

Challenge - creating a short name for a new brand. Characteristics benchmarked against established brands such as Audi, BMW, and Kia. Meaning and associative systems. Ease of pronunciation. Search visibility for a dealership. Example name with advertising slogan. Creation of a graphic mark and brand book.

Solution - generating ideas around a short company name or a single-letter graphic mark. Narrowing the field and selecting a design. Presenting the mark to decision-makers. Identifying risks.

Prototyping and Testing - presenting the mark across various touchpoints. Creating a mini brand book. Examples across social media, apps, mockups, billboards, business cards, signage, and more.

Implementation Planning - domain registration. Defining a deployment timeline. Minimum requirements for digital rollout. Timing and execution of outdoor advertising. Planning all changes and the full project schedule.

The exhaustive supply of abstract and geometric brand symbols illustrates that sometimes it is necessary to take a step back and rebrand or even rework something that already exists into a new and improved form.

Analysis of supporting hypotheses, including design thinking frameworks, supports the conclusion that audiences display stronger emotional responses and more direct engagement toward widely recognised symbols and cultural icons in the idea generation process. A structured in-depth interview with Group X can more precisely identify the causes of Phenomenon Y as compared to quantitative methods. A graphic mark, however important, cannot tell a story on its own — it must be supported by visual and verbal communication.

The number of identifying marks, particularly corporate logos, grows year on year. Several terms are currently in use:

corporate mark - colloquial term for a logo

logo - common term for the graphic representation of a brand

trademark - grants exclusive right of use

brand mark - the concept of emotional associations

symbol/signet - a standalone graphic element without a name (e.g., Nike, Apple)

A logo with a brand mark (often called a signet) typically comprises three elements: the signet (graphic symbol), the logotype (name), and optionally a tagline (advertising slogan).
signet + logotype + tagline

A brand and the emotions it carries are its most valuable asset. Yet a truly strong brand does not reside in graphics or a signet alone — it lives above all in what customers associate with it verbally, anchoring the brand in memory. Choosing a unique concept that becomes synonymous with the brand is therefore essential.

As Ries and Ries (2002) argue in the key chapter *The Law of the Word* from "The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding":

"If you want to build a brand, you must focus your branding efforts on owning a word in the prospect's mind. A word that nobody else owns."

Prestige is to Mercedes what safety is to Volvo³⁶. Similarly, innovation defines Apple, and reliability defines Toyota. These words build loyalty because the customer is not buying a product - they are buying an emotional promise that the brand delivers through communication and action.

Each of these terms carries a distinct meaning. The designation *identifying marks* requires little explanation - the words speak for themselves. Unlike typical neologisms, this language is largely free of artificiality³⁷. Simplicity is the hallmark of well-designed identifying marks, and it does not contradict complexity.

Many people believe that a good trademark can be designed using software or AI that does everything automatically. Examples of such work can be found on platforms like Facebook Marketplace, Allegro, or Canva.com. As a result, proper mark design is defeated by fast but often low-quality solutions.

Until recently, marketing, advertising, and design were analysed through the lens of consumer behavior and attitudes. Only the concept of customer experience recognised them as balanced value components, requiring an understanding of the psychological foundations of emotion and human response. The functional aspects of experience will remain its core element, but their relative significance, viewed through the lens of design thinking, will grow alongside the evolution of contemporary design practice.

Overlooking the fact that a computer is merely a tool that supports and accelerates the design process leads to over-reliance on ready-made online templates and established patterns. The result is not original creation but the reproduction of schemes, fundamentally at odds with the nature of a designer's creative work. Artificial intelligence should be viewed as an execution tool, just like an orchestra's performance depends on a conductor. It is the human being who holds the primary role in the creative process and in decision-making.

³⁶ Ries A., Ries L., [in:] *Alina Wheeler, Kreowanie marki*, PWN, Warsaw, 2010, p. 118.

³⁷ See: Pawluczuk E., *Znaki identyfikujące. Rodzaje, funkcje i kryteria oceny*, Wydawnictwo Akademii Sztuk Pięknych im Jana Matejki w Krakowie, Wydział Form Przemysłowych, Cracow, 2001, p. 6.

Short description of figures:

fig. 09. Love brand chart with Brand Assets, showing percentage weighting of key elements in brand design, starting with the logo.

fig 10. Prototype. Developing a logo solution. Selected design versions: *Sketch E4 (Evo)*, *Sketch E8 (Evogen)*

fig. 11. Rejected logo proposal for Evo. A design not included in the Evo / Evogen brand book.

Design Verification

Analysing the conclusions drawn from the design experiment and presenting the concept, we assume that the integration of all activities with the presented designs and graphic materials is essential. Within the design thinking methodology, particular importance is paid not only to the visual aspect, but above all to the real needs of users and the market context in which the required projects operate — including automotive groups.

If the goal of brand identity and graphic design is not only promotional communication but also the building of lasting social relationships and the reinforcement of a sense of personalised design, then applying design thinking at the empathy and problem-definition stages becomes key.

Active user participation -one of the foundations of design thinking - can, however, create tension between audience expectations and the designer's aesthetic sensibility. This may require accepting solutions that do not always meet professional visual standards, which is one of the key design challenges.

To maintain design coherence within an identity system while opening space for co-creation aligned with market needs, it is essential to precisely define the boundaries of user integration. Establishing controlled areas of participation, for example, within selected touchpoints or communication elements, allows design requirements to be reconciled with social expectations, minimizing the risk of visual chaos.

The result is a proposed solution consistent with the logic of user-centered design, where iteration, testing, and system-wide flexibility play a central role. This defined framework not only promotes graphic order in the resulting identity materials, but also increases their social acceptance, translating over time into greater effectiveness and durability of the implemented designs.

PART 2 / Project

Final Conclusions

In the automotive industry, graphic design is not only an attractive marketing communication tool but also a means of building trust, conveying quality, and fostering long-term relationships. The empathy and problem-definition stages indicate that audiences expect not only visual consistency but also clarity, functionality, and the ability to identify with the brand across various touchpoints, from the product itself, through the digital environment, to the service experience.

The active involvement of different stakeholder groups, such as users, dealers, and technology partners, in the design process presents a challenge that requires scalable, functional, and adaptable solutions.

The subject of this paper was undertaken in response to a noticeable gap in existing graphic design solutions for automotive brand dealerships and visual identity systems, a gap that can also be observed across the broader automotive industry. Although there are projects distinguished by a high level of aesthetic quality, they are rarely comprehensive in nature or rooted in the actual needs of users and the market.

In many cases, the approach focuses primarily on styling, brand tradition, or current trends, while insufficient attention is paid to user experience analysis and changing market conditions.

From the perspective of the design thinking methodology, a key shift involves moving the focus from designing “for the brand” to designing “for the user and the market.” In the automotive context, this means considering not only visual aspects but also customer experiences at various stages of interaction with the brand, from marketing communication and product interaction to post-sales service.

The aim of this dissertation was to explore whether it is possible to create a visual identity system for the automotive industry that goes beyond being merely a marketing communication tool and instead becomes an integrated, open system that supports both user experience and brand development within a dynamic market environment. Such a system should not only reflect the organisation’s strategic direction but also take into account the emotional and functional potential of its audiences.

The conducted theoretical analyses, design experiment, and research indicate that applying design thinking principles, such as user empathy, iteration, testing, and co-creation, makes it possible to develop more comprehensive and effective identity systems. These findings suggest that incorporating real market needs and user experiences can significantly increase the acceptance of implemented solutions from the very beginning of the design process.

Technological progress in the automotive industry is unfolding before our eyes, redefining the way users interact with both brands and products. Every designed experience that incorporates interactivity helps build emotional engagement, increasing users’ willingness to share their experiences in both physical and digital environments. Within the context of design thinking, this means consciously designing solutions that integrate the physical product with digital and social media ecosystems, thereby strengthening communication effectiveness and expanding market reach.

In a rapidly changing market environment, designing visual identity systems for automotive organizations has become a complex process that requires not only aesthetic sensitivity but also a deep understanding of users and their experiences. In a society saturated with visual stimuli,

designers must do more than simply capture attention, they must provide meaningful experiences that go beyond superficial appeal. Today's audiences expect functional, intuitive solutions tailored to their lifestyles, which encourages designers to adopt iterative methods, continuous testing, and ongoing refinement of solutions.

By working within the design thinking framework, designers continuously analyse market needs and define problems while seeking innovative solutions that combine technological and emotional dimensions. Considering all key elements of the design process, from user empathy and ideation to prototyping and testing, makes it possible to create visual identity systems that support the development of cohesive brand experiences. As a result, organisations can better address the needs of contemporary users while reinforcing their engagement and loyalty.

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