

# Design-driven: Service design in the spotlight



By Leigh Andrews

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Service design hasn't received much media attention - until now. Since the [Loeries added a 'service design' category](#) to their annual celebration of communication excellence, many have been wondering how to get this right...



Robert Bloom

Robert Bloom is head of [DesignThinkers Group South Africa](#), a global network startup that specialises in service design thinking and building culture of trust and autonomy to enable innovation.

They're set up at the V&A Waterfront at Workshop 17, the co-working space intended to make a difference in Africa as people network, share ideas and find ways to collaborate for a purpose.

But this isn't a promo to get you to sign up for their classes - it's an exploration of how improving service design can enhance your business' overall reputation in the market.

It's an important trend to note, as local advertising is now shifting focus to every customer interaction point - especially those that aren't part of your current campaign. Take a few moments to think of the staff manning your reception desk and your call centre agents. Are they living the brand? If not, it's time to rethink everything.

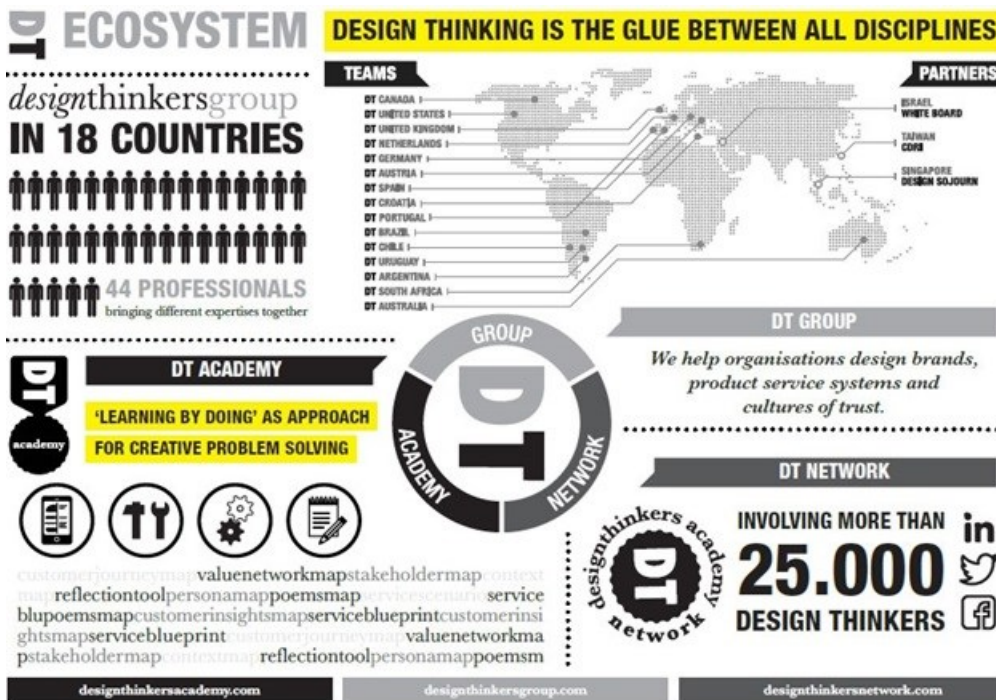
Here's a little more on the DesignThinkers Group and how to enhance your service design...

## The SA DesignThinkers Group startup

Bloom began Creo Consulting in 2013 to help companies adopt a more design-led approach to innovation.

Having researched and co-developed the design strategy for the Western Cape with the CCDI to answer the question of how design can be better used to support innovation in the Western Cape and catalyse economic growth, Bloom decided to focus on service design thinking as a discipline. In September 2014, he set up a partnership with Design-Thinkers Group, founded by Arne van Oosterom in the Netherlands. From working in coffee shops and on client premises, Design Thinkers SA has now taken up office space at Workshop 17 to facilitate training courses.

Bloom says that globally, DesignThinkers Group is one of the leading design-driven innovation agencies. It's part of the global network now in 18 countries of service design practitioners, researchers and strategists helping organisations around the world making the transition from being strictly product-oriented and sales-driven, towards being service orientated and human centred.



## Cocreating value with consumers

That's by no means all they do though, having also started the DesignThinkers Academy. It's about building a network of practitioners in South Africa who specialise in human-centric design, the tools and methods needed to become more empathetic and connected to customers' and stakeholders' needs. That's where service design comes in.

Bloom points out that today's customer is empowered to make choices, which in turn makes strong brands vulnerable as customers no longer accept mediocrity and being exploited.

Don't think you can sit on your laurels though, as this is spreading across every industry. Banks are being disrupted, the larger consulting houses are wondering what to do as nimble design agencies and start-ups are eroding their market share, and mines have to now learn how to actually add value to extracted commodities. Design-led firms around the world have stronger sales and profitability than non-design led firms. In the United States, for example, the [DMI Design Value Index](#), which is research performed by DMI, found that design-led firms outperform the S&P by 228% over 10 years.

It's here, in the co-creation of value, with diverse teams that usually require the inclusion of customers, that organisations start to build the trust needed for stakeholders to believe in and re-connect to a brand. [Research shows](#) that the costs of bringing in new customers is far higher than the costs of retaining current customers, and those who receive poor service will with brands far quicker than previously.

## How to enable 'service design thinking'

It's simple: Companies that want to become more user-centric need to adopt a top-down and bottom-up approach. It is not just a matter of sending people on training. Companies need to engage across the "silos" that have formed and find a way to build a cross-company approach to providing seamless customer experiences to write home about.

That said, there's no single formula that works for all. Service design thinking is about researching, testing and experimenting, giving space and time for people to innovate and putting together diverse teams who collaborate together empathetically to build new ways of doing things.

This involves some long-term internal narrative generation: story-gathering and story-telling. Bloom says to ask, "What are people really thinking and feeling within the organisation? What are stakeholders' perceptions and experiences on what the company actually does? Is the organisation playing lip service to its vision, mission and values?" If the results aren't as

expected, it's a sign that competition is stealing market share as they are more innovative or you're simply not paying enough attention to detail when it comes to customers' wants and needs.

It's about building a culture of trust, making people feel valued, giving people space to experiment and letting them know that failure is acceptable, if not encouraged. When staff and teams are given the autonomy to experiment, amazing things can happen.

Service design thinking avoids spectacular failures that can sink a ship. It advocates prototyping early on in the design process, so that learnings can be made with the stakeholders involved in order to iterate or pivot before the product hits the market. The internal culture of trust allows for diverse teams to research and come up with new products and solutions based on grounded and tested concepts that have been validated with customers.

If this has piqued your interest, you can find out more from the [DesignThinkers website](#) or follow them on [Twitter](#). Who knows - start to make the change today and you could be a future [Loeries Service Design](#) winner!

## ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh\_Andrews.

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