How UI Kits Develop Design Languages

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When user interface (UI) designers embark on the course toward a new design, attaining a central hub of assets opens the opportunity for smooth sailing. At the heart of a design, its cohesive and uniform design system strengthens a design's look and feel with consistency that eliminates cognitive friction when applied to digital or print mediums. Within the anatomy of a whole design system, UI kits function as an overarching language that informs other vital elements of a design.

What does a UI kit entail?

UI kits embody all the elements and features of a digital design. For example, when scrolling through a website, you may come across icons and interactive widgets or buttons to submit a request — these features are found in a UI kit that can be utilized throughout an interface when designers are developing a website or mobile application.

When dissecting the structure of a UI kit, it is composed of two main parts: components and styles. Components are the features a user can interact with that convey meaning and function — such as input fields, checkboxes, radio buttons, sliders, icons, micro-interactions and more.

Styles, on the other hand, are the visual attributes to the design that make up those components — such as color story, fonts and typography,and even the shapes. Together, the component and styles make up a UI kit, as it functions as a

primary source that forms a brand’s visual identity.

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UI kits steady the design process

Particularly in the wireframe and prototyping process of an interface design, the assemblage of UI components and elements are sometimes pieced together from pre-existing UI kit component libraries. Designers can pick and choose which element to utilize in prototyping stages, such as wireframes. For example, say a UI designer is composing the preliminary step to a design, such as a wireframe for a mobile application, but before they can delve into the development tier, there must be an outline of the design.

Tools like Adobe XD allow designers to pick and choose pre-made templates (say, a log-in screen) and plop them right into their outline without having to develop a new screen from scratch. Not only is this convenient, but these templates are paramount to pushing a project along the trajectory of completion, especially with a project on a tight timeline. UI kits steady the design process with these ready-to-use elements, which also saves on overhead costs.

Picking elements from UI kits, however, should be strategically selected to ensure consistency throughout, even if the project is still in its infancy. Consistency within UI elements aligns the tone of a project, which can then be easily updated with a consistent style. A good design attains components that are carefully selected, such as a consistent navigation menu or interactive buttons that are all the same geometric shape, size and color story.

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UI kits and brand storytelling

For digital design interfaces, UI kits are a great asset to have a collection of assets in one place. A company's established UI kit is also quite essential for delivering a brand visual story with one interconnected language within a brand guide. Brand guidelines communicate the fundamental components that curate a brand's identity, such as UI elements within UI kits, typography, logo sizing/spacing, color pallets, tonality and overall company attributes.

Brand guideline manuals reflect all the visual assets found in a UI kit, and those assets also need to reflect the tonality, mission and purpose that a brand is aiming to convey. For example, if a non-profit organization's brand book evoked a tone of seriousness within its content, its UI assets from a UI kit should not be neon-colored elements or flashy. Rather, adhering to a consistent visual kit would perhaps have neutral and light color integration throughout with rounded, minimalistic iconography and component style. Thus, when selecting from a UI kit to compose a new one, careful design decisions matter when propelling a brand story.

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Streamline your design process

Building a UI kit is like putting together a puzzle to realize the bigger picture. Every piece should fit together perfectly to create a unified design. When initiating the preliminary steps of a UI kit, it is always important to consider the following:

Before piecing together the puzzle, it is important to navigate a conceptual phase to sort out what the intention of your design will achieve, if it aligns with a brand's tonality or if there are any pain points it will plausibly mend.

Once the design purpose is fully fleshed out, you can then decide on the theme of the UI kit. This helps streamline the components you will select or design, and the language of consistency will then take place to match its similar pieces. When piecing together your design kit, it is also imperative to attain all main structure assets covered.

From there, designers can select the style in which their components will be and customize them to fit into their design structure. Another great practice when piecing together a UI kit for stakeholders is to offer diverse design directions and allow them to select which they find much more favorable to be further iterated and ultimately finalized. UI kits are a limb that branches out of an entire design system and instills a visual language for designers, users and everyone in between to comprehend and enjoy.

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