

# Deutsche Telekom: design as a process of sustainable change

How does a huge group like Telekom manage not just to think in terms of technology and infrastructure but to embed the principles of design throughout the enterprise, thus ensuring the entire company is involved in improving the customer experience long term? At Telekom, one of the biggest design departments in Germany is dedicated to bringing about a gentle revolution in every single department. Headed by Philipp Thesen, its unwavering efforts have already resulted in success and been honoured with numerous awards.

Deutsche Telekom operates in 14 countries, has over 160 million customers and annual sales of approx. €70bn. The former state-owned company has a workforce of approx. 225,000 people and is in the midst of a breathtaking transformation process as it changes from a classic infrastructure enterprise into a pioneer of digitalisation. In an increasingly complex digital world, Telekom has set itself the goal of accompanying its customers any time, anywhere. It goes without saying that this includes first-class network quality and excellent service at the necessary conditions. But the crucial task is to find sustainable ways to simplify people's ever more mobile daily routines and enhance their lives with experiences in the digital space. First and foremost, this task is a question of design, of creating products and services that are both reliable and easy to use. Which is why, when Telekom's design department was launched several years ago, it initially focused on just that: the design of products and services. Meanwhile, what started out as a small team of designers has grown into one of the biggest design departments of any company in Germany. Today, more than 100 in-house designers collaborate with a large network of freelancers and national and international design agencies. In the early years, the development of innovative products and services played the key role, based on use cases that had the potential to become relevant in years to come. These visions were given tangible shape in the Telekom Design Gallery.

## Consistency

In the early years, the design department developed a consistent design language and worked passionately on giving shape to numerous products and services, as well as on embedding a new and consistent experience across the whole of the company's diversified product portfolio. "Consistency is indispensable for any brand. Just like in an ecosystem, the corporate design, feel and product behaviour have to be consistent along the entire length of the customer experience chain," says Philipp Thesen, who has been responsible for the design of all products and interactive experiences since joining Deutsche Telekom as head of design nearly two years ago. Realising that smooth end-to-end interaction between all products and services is of crucial importance for creating a seamless and positive customer experience, the design department compiled an Experience Toolbox of design guidelines and assets at an early stage.

Especially for a provider like Telekom, coordinating the infrastructure and technology so smoothly that the customer experiences it as perfectly simple and well-functioning is of course an extremely complex task. And if that goal is to be achieved, designers have a key function to perform at Telekom – as in any customer-centric company: they are, in a very classic sense, the "customer's advocates", the people who fight for the best customer experience so that customers are delighted with the products and services.

## Telekom Design Customer Lab

That's why the designers at Telekom observe, study and analyse their customers very intensely. Since last year, the Telekom Design Customer Lab has been conducting systematic surveys of customers from various segments. The demographic characteristics and lifeworlds of concrete sections of the population were systematically condensed and translated into archetypical personas, which are then used to represent the different groups of consumers. This systematic customer segmentation permits the definition of different needs and requirements and facilitates the search for and selection of suitable candidates for the focus groups held at the Telekom designers' product clinic. The focus





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groups are invited to come to the lab to evaluate new product ideas and prototypes; this direct and honest customer feedback is then immediately incorporated into the design and development process. Philipp Thesen: "It's extremely interesting, informative and, above all, very enlightening. In situations like that, we get a very clear sense of how important the communication between people and their things is – and ultimately, that's what design is all about. Nowadays, design plays the key strategic role of transforming customers' needs into simple experiences that are meaningful and relevant to them."

At the same time, listening very carefully to what customers really want is just the first step in the development of solutions that retain their value and are thus sustainable. The designers at Telekom have meanwhile developed a strategic design thinking process; besides practising it within their own department, they also make it available to all their colleagues at Telekom in the form of a complete framework of methods and tools. As a result, the design department's focus is no longer just on the company's design language, but on its internal processes as well. Philipp Thesen: "If we want to convert Telekom into a truly design-driven company, we have to embed strategic design skills and digital transformation throughout the whole enterprise. Design thinking isn't a specialist discipline only for designers; it has to permeate the entire corporate strategy. Because each and every one of Telekom's 225,000 staff is directly responsible for the customer experience. That's why our motto is that there is no value to design thinking without doing."

## DESIGN THINKING DOING

DESIGN THINKING DOING is the title of the manual the Telekom design department makes available to its colleagues throughout the group. It contains all the established methods, processes and tools of the design thinking approach that have been adapted for the standardised product development processes at Telekom. A digital version is available to all staff. In addition, the Telekom Design Academy was recently founded with the aim of anchoring the crucial principles in every corner of the group and in the minds of as many employees as possible. It gives Telekom staff the opportunity to take part in individual training activities, seminars and workshops so as to familiarise themselves with the methods and tools. According to the academy, more than 5,000 employees have taken part in its programmes in 2016.

As a crucial component in the overarching corporate strategy, this ambitious process of change, which is gradually taking hold in all parts of the company, is key to Telekom's success. Philipp Thesen: "We have to harness the design momentum that is unfolding within our company right now and use it sustainably. In our market, which is shaped by increasing oversaturation and pressure to consolidate, there's only one really differentiating factor at the end of the day: the customer experience. Design is a decisive success factor in that respect, because in the digital world the boundaries between communication, the brand and the product experience are blurring, giving rise to a single end-to-end experience that also encompasses the service customers receive. If we succeed in using our technology and our design to simplify and improve the world around us a little, Deutsche Telekom will continue to play a leading international role in the digitalisation of our everyday lives in future too."