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## User Studio: Pioneering Service Design in France



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By: [The Design Transitions Team](#)

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*User Studio, based in Paris, is France's first service design and innovation company. Founding Partner, Matthew Marino (@userstudio) speaks to Design Transitions about User Studio's practices in bringing design to new territories, working in multi-disciplinary ways and helping organisations define innovative new services.*

### ***Tell us about User Studio's design practices and describe why you do what you do.***

When we started User Studio in 2009, service design was virtually unheard of in France. The three founding partners, Denis Pellerin, Matthieu Savary and Matthew Marino, shared **a common vision that design could be a key ingredient to help organisations create compelling services with outstanding customer experiences.** Today, an increasing number of French organisations recognize design as a strategic means to transform their service offerings, and a small but growing local service design community has emerged.

The company is growing, and we're working on a broad range of international projects ranging across banking, local government, energy, telecommunications, health care, culture, media and urban development. **We specialize mainly in innovation projects where we integrate a large variety of disciplines to generate original results.** We also work on our own R&D projects

to develop our own tools, new skills and sharpen our creative edge. Although we approach most projects in a cross-disciplinary way, we realize that many of the channels through which services are now delivered are digital. This has encouraged us to develop a strong digital culture involving user experience, data visualization and information design expertise. These allow us to work efficiently all the way to the final stage of a design project.

We are committed to design that is not just accessible and useful but also desirable. Although this sounds like an obvious goal, it's not as simple as it sounds. Service design is still in its infancy and has often focused in the past on transforming existing service architectures into more useful and accessible ones. We strongly believe **service design can reach a new level by also concentrating on creating beautifully crafted service environments**. From a business perspective, this translates to creating services that stand out to customers, attracting new ones and ensuring that the faithful stay onboard. But it can also be used to reach broader social goals such as encouraging people to change their behaviour. For example, a service environment that appeals viscerally to people might be more successful at getting them to adopt more sustainable energy consumption habits.

***What do you think are the current drivers of change in User Studio's design practices?***

**More and more organisations and sectors are expressing interest in design to help them innovate**. This has motivated us to set up R&D, marketing and training initiatives that work in tandem to introduce design cultures to such organisations. Most of our projects involve our team, our client's team and, whenever possible, end-users. **We've been exploring how to facilitate the collaboration between such diverse groups of people**, such as by developing software to help us conduct creative workshops or teaming up with a professional facilitator who makes sure all participants' voices can be heard. Increasingly, companies are coming to us with a general business goal, but no specific idea how to reach it. We help define the service as well as design the way it works, feels and looks. **We specialize in designing services composed of multiple mediums** - websites, newsletters, physical spaces, etc. This requires and encourages our team members to become fairly versatile designers.

***What excites you about design at the moment (this can either be your own practice or other practices)?***

The explosion of DATA (big data, open data, personal data) particularly excites us. As the production of digital data becomes increasingly accessible, designers have

an essential role in making data meaningful to the general public, as well as helping organisations become more transparent to their customers. A new user-supplier relationship needs to be invented! To illustrate this idea, we've prototyped several concept projects, notably Refact, an independent service to help a user transform a data-heavy phone bill into an easily understood infographic. **We like to speak here of a shift from data visualisation (from a purely communications perspective), to data use (tools that allow you to use your data in useful ways created from a service perspective).**

### ***What do you think the future practices of design will look like and why?***

**Design entrepreneurs:** We are seeing more and more design practices developing and marketing their own products. A great example is iA Writer, the word processing app for the iPad developed by Information Architects, a Tokyo-based design firm. This trend will challenge designers to find the right balance between their creative consulting activities and their product/service development activities.

**Networks of independent players working together:** More and more design teams seem to be composed of small agencies and freelance designers, social scientists, developers and business consultants teaming up on a regular basis. It seems this trend will develop as designers work with an increasingly diverse range of industries, which in turn require diverse skill sets and expertise.

**Client-designer partnerships:** More and more, designers and clients are seeking a highly collaborative relationship. This can manifest itself in many ways, such as sharing strategic research, seeking government-funded R&D financing together, or just working as a team all the way through a project, as opposed to interacting mainly during the key project validation meetings. Our own experience has shown this to be more enjoyable and produce better results. Naturally, a startup-like mindset can prove challenging for larger, process-heavy organisations. But this can be overcome by building a work environment where trust, flexibility and trying new things are valued.

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2