

§ THE PLAYBOOK SERIES • FREE • NO FORM, NO FOLLOW-UP SEQUENCE

The AI playbook for *Design*

How to keep craft in charge while the tools get faster than the org chart.

AI is not killing design - it is splitting it. Production design shrinks while product design grows, and the design system becomes either your best asset or your most bypassed one. This playbook covers the split, the roles, and the 90 days that decide which side you land on.

Figma's own research says 91% of designers now use AI weekly - and 32% trust what it produces. That gap is not a bug in the tools. It is the job description of every designer you keep.

91% / 32%

designers using AI weekly vs designers who trust its output.

FIGMA AI REPORTS, 2025-26

11th

graphic design's rank among fastest-declining jobs - while UX ranks 8th fastest-growing.

WEF FUTURE OF JOBS, 2025

10 of 12

technical writers laid off at Canva, months after an AI mandate.

ACS INFORMATION AGE, 2025

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PART ONE

What actually *changes*.

The World Economic Forum's jobs data tells the story in one line: graphic design is now the 11th fastest-declining job category, and UI/UX design is the 8th fastest-growing. Same report, same year. AI is not coming for design - it is coming for production, and it is promoting everything else.

The tools are genuinely quick. A working prototype in fifteen minutes is real. So is the catch: practitioners describe the output as a high-fidelity wireframe with the wrong design decisions embedded - not accessible, not semantic, not on your system. Fast to first draft; expensive to done, unless someone with taste is steering.

01 Prototyping collapses to minutes Figma Make, v0, Lovable and friends turn an idea into a clickable thing before the meeting ends. Wonderful for direction-setting and killing bad ideas early. Dangerous the moment anyone mistakes it for shipped work.	02 Production design mostly stops being a role Resizing, versioning, asset adaptation, UI copy variants - the volume work that filled junior portfolios is machine work now. The WEF decline number is this, measured.
03 Research synthesis genuinely speeds up Single-study qualitative analysis is the strongest evidenced use case. AI degrades on multi-study synthesis, where the nuance lives - so it does the transcription and clustering, and your researchers do the meaning.	04 Non-designers now generate UI PMs and engineers can produce plausible screens without opening Figma or touching your design system. That is not a hypothetical governance question. It is happening in your organisation this week.
05 The design system becomes AI infrastructure Tokens and component docs structured for machine consumption make AI output dramatically better. A design system that is not AI-legible is a very well-documented museum.	06 Taste becomes the deliverable When anyone can make something plausible, the value moves to knowing which plausible thing is wrong. Figma's 32%-trust number is your job security, if you organise around it.

PART TWO - THE HONEST BIT

What it costs *you*.

Total demand for designers looks stable - 82% of hiring managers say need has held or grown - but composition is shifting hard against juniors and pure-production roles, and 45% of designers already feel it. Both things are true: the function survives, some of the jobs in it do not.

Canva is the cautionary tale nobody in design wants to discuss: it told staff AI would not cause layoffs, mandated AI adoption, and then let ten of its twelve technical writers go. The lesson is not that Canva is wicked. It is that reassurances outrun plans, and your people know it.

01

Junior roles thin out first

The production tasks that trained juniors are automating away. If you still want senior designers in five years - and you will - you must now build the apprenticeship on purpose: paired critique, real problems, judgement reps.

02

The design system paradox lands on you

Your system is simultaneously more valuable (it is the only guardrail that makes AI output usable) and more bypassable (AI generates plausible UI without it). Make it AI-legible or watch the investment strand.

03

Design debt now compounds at machine speed

AI tools do not know which modal variant you standardised last sprint. Off-system output that looks on-brand is the most expensive kind, because nobody flags it until it is everywhere.

04

Craft roles adjacent to design take the hit

Technical writing at Canva. Photography and modelling at H&M, replaced by digital twins. If your function commissions craft, the commissioning is changing whether you plan for it or not.

05

The Figma line item becomes a question

When PMs prototype in vibe-coding tools and engineers generate UI in their editor, seat counts and tool boundaries stop being settled. Do not assume the current stack survives its next renewal unexamined.

06

Quality failures are now design failures

The Coca-Cola backlash, the uncanny faces, the plastic-looking animals - every public AI embarrassment was, at root, a design quality decision someone did not make. That accountability is moving to your desk. Take it in writing.

PART THREE

What good looks *like*.

A good design function ends up smaller in production, stronger in judgement, and central to how the whole organisation uses AI - because design is where taste, systems thinking and user evidence already live. The teams that thrive stop defending tasks and start owning quality.

01 Designers direct, machines produce Seniors set direction, prototype with AI at speed, and gate what ships. The 15-minute prototype is used to think faster, not to ship faster than thinking allows.	02 An AI-legible design system Tokens, components and usage rules structured so the tools consume them - which means AI output lands on-system by default, and the bypass problem shrinks to an exception process.
03 Research with humans on the meaning AI handles transcripts, clustering and first-pass synthesis. Researchers spend their recovered hours on the multi-study, contradictory, actually-hard questions - and on being in the room where decisions happen.	04 A designed apprenticeship Juniors learn judgement through critique and real product problems, not through the production work that used to double as training. Fewer hires, better formed, with a visible path to senior.

THE CHANGE, ACROSS ALL FIVE PILLARS

PEOPLE Production thins, direction grows - and the junior path is rebuilt around critique and judgement reps.	PROCESSES A named quality gate between generated work and shipped work, wired into how prototypes become product.	DATA Research synthesis accelerated by machine, with humans kept firmly on the meaning.	PLATFORMS A design system made AI-legible, so generated output lands on-system by default instead of around it.	PARTNERS Commissioned craft - writing, photography, illustration - renegotiated deliberately before it drifts.
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PART FOUR

The first *90 days*.

The goal is not to adopt tools - your team did that without asking. The goal is to put quality, systems and roles back in charge of what they adopted.

I

WEEKS 1-2

Audit the adoption you already have

Find out what tools are actually in use, by whom, on what work, and what has shipped off-system. No blame - you need the real map, and you will not get it twice.

II

WEEKS 3-6

Make the system AI-legible

Structure tokens, components and rules for machine consumption. Pick one product surface and prove that AI output can land on-system. This is the highest-leverage design work of the year.

III

WEEKS 7-10

Put a quality gate in front of generation

Define what 'should a machine have made this?' means for your brand, name an owner, and wire the gate into how prototypes become production. Measure rework before and after.

IV

WEEKS 11-13

Redesign the roles, out loud

Publish the honest version: production shrinks, direction and systems grow, and here is the junior path we are building. Your designers have read the WEF report too.

THE DAY-90 SCORECARD • WHAT YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO SHOW

- Share of AI-generated output landing on-system versus bypassing it
- Rework rate before and after the quality gate
- The real tool map - including what was on personal accounts
- One product surface proven to accept AI output on-system
- The role map published: what shrinks, what grows, who owns quality

PART FIVE

The traps - and six questions worth an *honest hour*.

01 Banning the tools Your team is already using them; a ban just moves the usage to personal accounts and removes your visibility. Govern what exists rather than legislating against the tide.	02 Trusting the demo The prototype looks finished because looking finished is what these tools are best at. Accessible, semantic, on-system and correct are separate properties, and none come free.
03 Defending tasks instead of quality Fighting to keep production work in human hands is a losing position held for honourable reasons. The winning position is owning what good looks like, wherever the pixels come from.	04 Letting the system rot Every week the design system stays machine-illegible, more off-system UI ships around it. The asset does not strand on a decision day; it strands by a thousand bypasses.
05 Starving the pipeline quietly Not hiring juniors feels like a savings line until your senior bench retires. If the apprenticeship automated away, build a new one - deliberately, and in the budget.	06 Promising no job changes Canva promised. Ask its technical writers. An honest account of the split - production down, judgement up - is uncomfortable once; a broken reassurance is expensive forever.

THE SELF-ASSESSMENT • MORE THAN TWO UNCOMFORTABLE ANSWERS IS AN AGENDA, NOT A CRISIS

- Do you know which AI tools your designers actually used last week?
- Could an AI tool consume your design system today and produce on-system output?
- Who owns the quality gate between generated work and shipped work?
- How much off-system UI shipped last quarter - and would you know?
- What does your junior designer pathway look like once production work is gone?
- If design headcount stays flat, what does the team do more of, specifically?

START WITH THE WORKSHOP

Book your *Catalyst Workshop*.

1-2 executive days to turn this playbook into your first move, the case for it, and a 90-day mobilisation plan. hello@veriteer.com

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