USER STUDIO

Pioneering Service Design in France

User Studio in Paris is France's first service design and innovation company. Here, Founding Partner Matthew Marino tells us about User Studio's practices in bringing design to new territories, working in multi-disciplinary ways and helping organizations define innovative new services.

Tell us about User Studio, and what drives you in your work

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

Our company is also growing, and we are working on a broad range of international projects ranging across banking, local government, energy, telecommunications, healthcare, culture, media and urban development. We specialize mainly in innovation projects, where we integrate a large variety of disciplines in order to generate original results. We also work on R&D projects to develop new tools and skills, and

to sharpen our creative edge. Although we approach most projects in a cross-disciplinary way, we realize that many service delivery channels are now digital. This has encouraged us to develop a strong digital culture involving user experience, data visualization and information design expertise. These skills 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 seems like an obvious goal it is not as simple as it sounds. Service Design is still in its infancy, and in the past it often focused on making existing service architectures more useful and accessible. We strongly believe that Service Design can reach a new level by also concentrating on the creation of beautifully crafted service environments. From a business perspective, this translates into creating services that really stand out, attracting new customers while ensuring that the faithful stay onboard. But Service Design can also be used to reach broader social goals,

such as encouraging people to change their behaviour. For example, a service environment that appeals to people on a visceral level might be more successful at getting them to adopt sustainable energy consumption habits.

What are the current drivers of change in User Studio's design practices?

More and more organizations and sectors are expressing interest in design's ability 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 these organizations.

Most of our projects involve our team, the client's team and, wherever possible, end users. We have been exploring how to better facilitate collaboration between these groups; such as by developing software to help us conduct creative workshops, or teaming up with a professional facilitator who makes sure that all participants' voices can be heard.

Increasingly companies come to us with a general business goal, but no specific idea on how to reach it. We help define the service as well as designing the way it works, feels and looks. We specialize in designing services composed of multiple mediums such as websites, newsletters and physical spaces. This requires (and encourages) our team members to become very versatile designers.

What excites you about design at the moment?

I find the explosion of data exciting – big data, open data, personal data. As the production of digital data becomes increasingly accessible, designers have an essential role to play in making data meaningful to the public, as well as in helping organizations become more transparent to their customers. A new user-supplier relationship needs to be invented! To illustrate this idea we have prototyped

several concept projects – notably *Refact*, an independent service to help users transform data-heavy phone bills into easily understood infographics. We like to speak about the shift from data visualization (from a purely communications perspective) towards data use (tools created from a service perspective that allow you to use your data in useful ways).

What do you think the future of design practice will look like, and why?

Design entrepreneurs: We are seeing more and more design practices developing and marketing their own products. A great example of this is *iA Writer*, a 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 and service development activities.

Networks of independent players working together: More and more design teams seem to be composed of 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 skillsets and expertise.

Client-designer partnerships: Designers and clients are increasingly 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 – rather than interacting only at key project validation meetings. Our own experience has shown that this approach is much more enjoyable, and produces much better results. *~end~*