

RESEARCH

## Design thinking has a buy-in problem: Forrester

April 21, 2020



*Gina Bhawalkar is principal analyst at Forrester Research*

By LUXURY DAILY NEWS SERVICE

Design thinking as a method for problem solving and innovation has been in existence for many decades, but it has drawn a surge of attention in recent years from both advocates and skeptics.

Subscribe to **Luxury Daily**  
Plus: Just released  
State of Luxury 2019 **Save \$246 ▶**

According to a new report from Forrester Research, the benefits of design thinking such as an 85 percent average ROI and higher for individual projects, averaging 229 percent get businesses' attention. This significant return on developing a mature design thinking program includes organization-wide and project-specific benefits such as reduced risk, greater efficiency, increased sales and improved culture.

"Despite the benefits, many key stakeholders don't get it and won't take the plunge," said Forrester analysts Gina Bhawalkar and Sam Karpinski, who authored the report titled, "Get Design Thinking Right: The Obstacles You'll Face and Six Tactics To Overcome Them."

Why the reluctance? To find out, **Forrester** surveyed design-thinking advocates about the resistance they face from colleagues.

Respondents told the market researcher that they encounter a wide range of misconceptions about virtually all aspects of the methodology, ranging from when to apply design thinking and how the process works, to how long it takes.

To overcome the skepticism, Forrester has devised six tactics to help marketers get design thinking right. They are based on follow-up interviews with design thinking practitioners from nine companies.

Emphasize that it is about solving customers' problems, and not aesthetics. Some stakeholders, when they hear the word "design," think only of the aspects of design work that have to do with how things look, which they may see as outside their comfort zone.

As a result, they are reluctant to participate in design thinking activities.

"By clarifying that design thinking is a problem-solving and innovation method, you can increase understanding

and buy-in," the report said.

Show why and how it is useful to stakeholders. Some stakeholders are skeptical of design thinking because they think it will either fail to produce results or it will produce results that will make their workload heavier.

"By showing why and how design thinking can reduce their workload and improve their work product, you can turn naysayers into advocates," the report said.

Be specific about the research it should be grounded in. Customer research consumes time and money that many stakeholders are reluctant to invest.

"By presenting specifics when discussing the necessary areas of research, you can show why that research is necessary and how it will have a direct impact on your project and your company," per Forrester.

Persuade participants and stakeholders to linger in the problem space. Most people find it easier to generate ideas and potential solutions than to cultivate empathy and a deeper understanding of customers' problems and needs. So they skip to problem solving, which stunts the relevance of their proposed solutions.

"By setting expectations so that participants don't do this, you can increase the odds that they'll produce valuable innovations," the report's authors suggested.

Help participants solve problems from users' perspectives instead of the company's. Every person approaches situations from their own point of view. This is a natural aspect of cognition, but it biases our perceptions and therefore our work, and we tend not to be aware of it when it happens.

"By helping participants become aware of their own points of view, you can help them achieve a more customer-centric perspective," the report said.

Compare its time frame to those of processes that participants know already. Because many stakeholders have mistaken ideas about how long a design thinking project will take, they may be reluctant to try design thinking or frustrated when it fails to result in a new product within a week.

"By comparing its timelines to your current product development and project timelines, you can set more accurate expectations for your project and team," the report's authors said.