

03.02.2025

LESS BUDGET, HIGHER EXPECTATIONS

WHY EFFICIENCY IN DESIGN DOES NOT COME FROM SPEED, BUT FROM CLARITY, PRIORITIZATION, AND GOOD DECISIONS.

Table of Contents

When design begins with classification	02	Ensuring flexibility	04
Prioritize instead of perfecting	02	The thing about AI	04
The right way to deal with feedback	03	Efficiency is a matter of choice	06

Last year, they were impossible to miss: big headlines on billboards in Stuttgart: "Company X lays off 1,000 people at the end of the year." The sentence sticks in your mind. You feel sympathy for those affected and wonder how secure your own job is. At the same time, you scroll through social media and come across countless videos of graduates who, despite numerous applications, cannot find a job. Budget cuts are no longer an exception, but everyday life.

"WE HAVEN'T BEEN GIVEN ANY ADDITIONAL BUDGET FOR THIS, SO WE'LL HAVE TO MAKE IT WORK AS IT IS."

A phrase that is taken for granted today. In kick-offs, in emails, sometimes almost casually. And then there is a short pause, not because no one wants to follow up, but because everyone understands what it means. Less time. Less leeway. Higher expectations.

But for us, that's no reason to compromise on quality, quite the contrary. Right now is when it's decided whether design will remain superficial or really make a difference. Because when resources become scarcer, it's not about less design, but about better decisions and optimized processes.

WHEN DESIGN BEGINS WITH CLASSIFICATION

Efficient design does not begin with layout, but with understanding. In most cases, a briefing serves as the basis for effective collaboration. "It defines the goals, framework conditions, and requirements of a project in order to avoid misunderstandings and unnecessary correction loops. [...] Today, we no longer understand a briefing as just a static PDF with requirements, but as a dynamic, iterable control tool, which is also increasingly being used for AI systems. A good briefing is therefore a prompt, a work instruction, and a basis for validation."

Quoted from Webdesign Journal:
<https://www.webdesign-journal.de/briefing/>

HOW IT CAN BE HELPFUL

- Identification of absolute no-gos
- Brief strategic context
- Transparent deadlines and budget specifications
- Clear prioritization

WHAT CAN BE A HINDRANCE

- Attempting to explain the entire brand
- Long texts instead of clear statements
- Preconceived solutions
- Unclear goals without context ("modern," "innovative")

In many projects, the challenges lie not in the design, but in the structure: goals are unclear, expectations vary, and framework conditions are vague. Our task as creators is to bring order before we design. Not to slow down the processes, but to make them sustainable. We ask questions that help to uncover the real problem. This creates clarity. And clarity leads to better decisions, fewer loops, and design solutions that work.

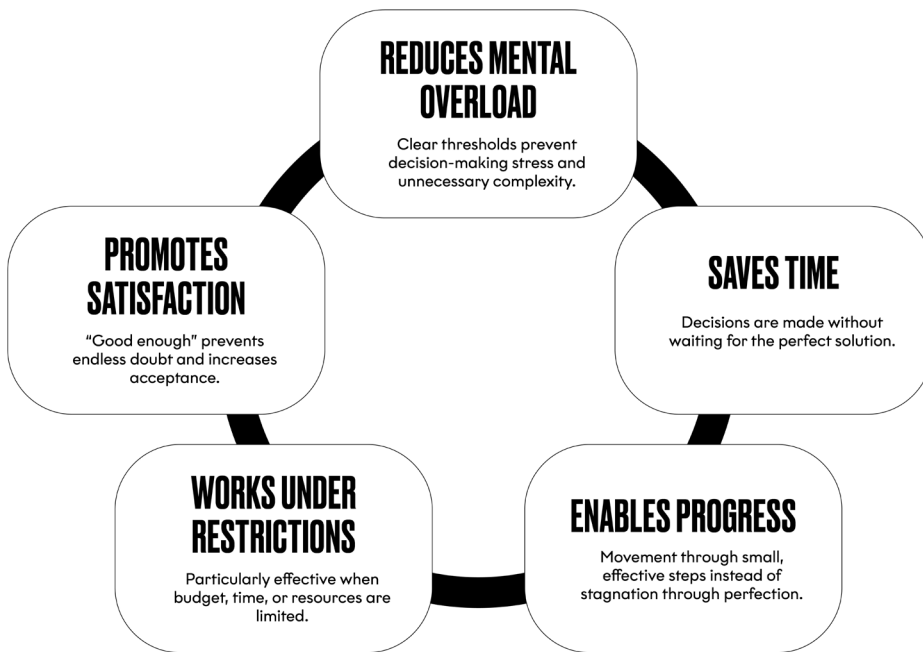
PRIORITIZE INSTEAD OF PERFECTING

However, clarity alone is not enough. It is merely a prerequisite for making decisions. But not every possible decision is a sensible one. Time or budget constraints in particular highlight the importance of prioritization in the design process. Efficiency does not mean implementing everything at once, but rather making conscious decisions about what will actually have an impact.

A helpful conceptual model is the principle of "satisficing." The term is composed of the English words "satisfy" and "suffice" and was coined by economist Herbert A. Simon (1956). He uses it to describe decision-making processes in which people do not search for the perfect solution, but rather one that fulfills their goals to an acceptable degree. This principle is applied worldwide, and we also benefit from it in design.

See Faster Capital:
<https://fastercapital.com/content/Satisficing--Satisficing--The-Art-of-Good-Enough-in-Bounded-Rational-Decision-Making.html>

We know satisficing better as the "good enough" principle. At first, this sounds negative, as if it lacks ambition or care. In fact, the opposite is true. Because in design, there is no such thing as "perfect." In the digital space in particular, design is an ongoing process that strives for ever greater optimization: content is adapted, performance is reviewed, interfaces are further developed. In an ideal world, this happens continuously, but in reality, time and budget constraints often stand in the way. This is exactly where "good enough" comes in. The decisive moment is when the result fulfills its purpose and further optimization no longer adds value. Perfection is seductive for creators precisely because it is unattainable. However, the pursuit of perfection is not a sign of quality, but often a problem of efficiency.



"Good enough" does not mean sloppy, but focused. The key questions are:

IS THE IDEA UNDERSTANDABLE?

DOES THE DESIGN SUPPORT THE BRAND?

DOES IT FULFILL ITS PURPOSE?

One example of this was the optimization of the Airbnb logo, which was hotly debated on social media. From a designer's perspective, the optimization is understandable; the question is rather why these inconsistencies existed in the first place and why they were not addressed earlier. From the perspective of efficiency and Instagram comments, however, a completely different picture emerges: the adjustments are minimal and barely visible to many. They were criticized as expensive, unnecessary, and impractical. In the everyday life of many medium-sized companies, such an effort would be neither realistic nor communicable. The example clearly shows that not every supposed design "perfection" is automatically sensible. Being efficient also means recognizing the right time to stop.

Reputeforge via Instagram:
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DH6PAyjt29/>

THE RIGHT WAY TO DEAL WITH FEEDBACK

Once it has been decided what is "good enough," the next critical step begins: dealing with feedback. Feedback is a central part of every design process and, at the same time, one of the biggest efficiency factors, both internally and externally. Feedback such as "bolder" or "more modern" provides a rough direction, but often remains vague. This is where our real work begins. As creators, it is our job to classify feedback, question it, and translate it into clear courses of action. All of this takes place in dialogue with the client so that we can work together toward the goal. This turns abstract, subjective opinions into a clear, productive discussion. That's why it's so important not to just send results or feedback, but to discuss them in a presentation meeting. This is the only way to identify problems together and translate them directly into a solution-oriented process.

Especially when many stakeholders are involved, different perspectives collide. In order to deal with such situations constructively, it makes sense in exceptional cases to use

See Quality: <https://www.quality.de/lexikon/disagree-and-commit/>

the “disagree & commit” decision-making principle. This approach originates from Amazon’s management culture and promotes open discussion without blocking processes.

The principle is simple: all participants are invited to openly share their arguments, concerns, or data. These drafts are seriously considered. In the end, however, a clear decision is made, even if complete consensus is not possible. Because with many subjective opinions, a “final call” is needed at some point. After this decision, everyone goes along with it, regardless of their own preferences.

See CTOFramework:
<https://ctoframework.com/people/leadership/disagree-commit/>

In the design process, “disagree & commit” is not a standard tool for us. As an agency, we are committed to satisfying our clients while delivering results that we can proudly present as our work. We want to convince, first with arguments and later with measurable results. However, the principle can help when projects get lost in endless loops or too many voices block progress. It protects against stagnation and makes it possible to take the next step, even if not every wish is deliberately taken into account.

In other words, not everyone has to be convinced, but everyone has to go along with it.

ENSURING FLEXIBILITY

Good feedback creates clarity and commitment. But clarity does not mean that nothing can change. Design processes rarely run in a linear fashion: requirements change, new insights are gained, priorities shift. Working efficiently therefore does not mean sticking to decisions once they have been made, but rather questioning them at the right moment and consciously developing them further.

In everyday life, efficiency arises from this interplay: clear design principles provide orientation, and adaptability ensures movement. This allows the creative process to respond to changing conditions without having to start from scratch every time. Decisions remain comprehensible, the core remains stable, but the path remains flexible.

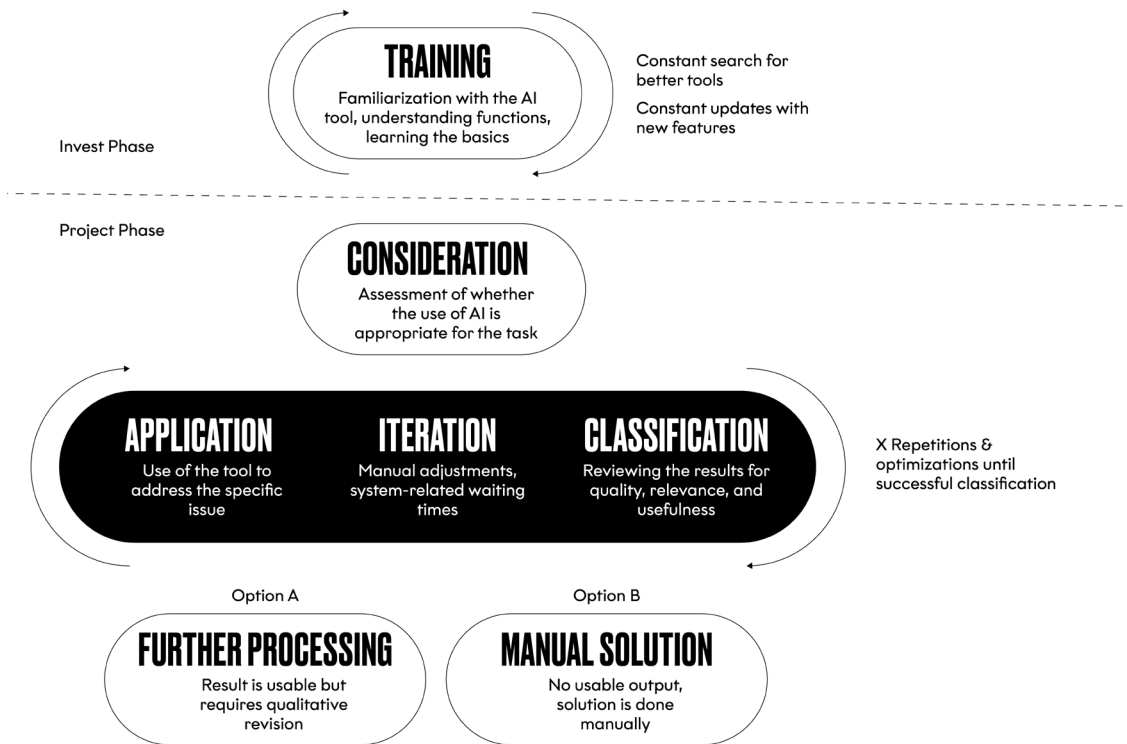
In concrete terms, this means that feedback is incorporated without overturning the entire concept. New requirements lead to targeted adjustments, not new beginnings. Instead of renegotiating every detail, refinements are made where they really have an impact. This saves time, reduces loops, and protects quality.

The result is design that grows with you, remains consistent, and lasts in the long term, even when the environment changes.

THE THING ABOUT AI

It is precisely this ability to classify and adapt that is crucial when new tools come into play, such as AI. AI is seen as a promise of efficiency: faster, cheaper, better. In practice, it is primarily one thing: a tool. And like any tool, it only works well if you know when to use it and when it is better not to.

In our everyday design work, AI is not a shortcut or a substitute for thinking. It is an established part of a process that consists of classification, testing, post-processing, and sometimes even conscious renunciation. Using AI does not automatically save time or money. Efficiency only comes through experience, clear decisions, and quality standards.



The following exaggerated but realistic examples from everyday agency life show how different this can look.

Example A: Saving time when speed is of the essence

An automotive customer commissions a campaign concept. The deadline is tight, with the presentation in a few days and the assets to be produced immediately afterwards. This is where we leverage the power of AI: within a short period of time, a visual concept is created that clearly conveys our idea and is already detailed enough to convince both internal and external stakeholders. This concept then serves as the basis for further development. Instead of starting from scratch, we make targeted refinements.

The result: significant time savings in the transition phase from concept to implementation, without compromising the quality of the final product.

Example B: When AI reaches its conceptual limits

A construction engineer is planning a rebranding. The idea: a strong, graphic layout principle with a clear system and high recognizability. AI currently does not deliver output that meets our quality standards for this type of design, so it is clear that the process will be carried out manually.

Result: No loss of efficiency, but a conscious decision in favor of quality, control, and design precision.

Example C: Cost savings through targeted use of AI

An industrial customer is planning a LinkedIn campaign with employees, but does not have the budget for a traditional photo shoot. Thanks to the latest AI developments, the creative team knows that individual portraits can be consistently transferred to defined scenarios. Visually recognizable, stylistically consistent. The setting and clothing style are determined in advance, and the assets are then generated and curated.

The result: a functional, credible visual world with a significantly lower budget.

Example D: When AI costs more than it brings in

A small craft business needs new images for its website. Stock material is not suitable, so AI is supposed to be the solution. The reality is different: varying results, repeated generations. Hours pass without usable assets. In consultation with the company, it also becomes apparent that some of the images would be technically incorrect. This is followed by time-consuming post-processing: incorrect hands, unnatural faces, and unrealistic details are corrected. New errors keep cropping up.

The result: visually impressive at first glance, but prone to errors in detail and much more time-consuming than expected.

Conclusion: AI can speed up processes and reduce costs, but it can just as easily tie up time and compromise quality. . AI is not efficient per se, but rather through clear classification. Through experience. And through the courage to say no at the right moment.

**Not every good solution is automated.
But every good solution is a conscious decision.**

EFFICIENCY IS A MATTER OF CHOICE

At Von Helden und Gestalten, we believe that brands become strong not because everything is perfect, but because the design is effective and consistent decisions are made. It is precisely under pressure that design with substance emerges: reduced, focused, effective. For us, efficiency does not mean lower standards, but rather a stronger stance.

**Good brands do not need more or faster design:
they need the right design.**