

Why you need design systems for social media

 By [Ernst Lass](#)

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With the majority of modern brand content now residing on social media channels, how do you create social media advertising that stands out? More importantly, how do you do this on a consistent basis within a quick turnaround timeframe?

There are several factors to keep in mind when creating a branded post for social media:

- Does this post convey the right message for my target audience?
- Does it visually represent the brand?
- Is the tone right in visuals and copy?
- Am I correctly adhering to brand guidelines?
- Will the post have the intended impact?
- And, most importantly, will it be able to rise above the noise?

Below are some tips for creating a successful social media campaign.

Notable visuals

Our news feeds are flooded with selfies, memes, babies, engagement photos, wedding photos, divorce selfies (apparently this is now a thing), pictures of breakfast, lunch, dinner, dessert and many, many, more (mostly mundane) life updates. To stand out from the noise your content needs to have a sharp, distinct visual style. Images with bold colors and creative flair have the ability to cut through the clutter and command users' attention while they scroll through their timelines.

Tight copy

A recent study on attention spans by Microsoft in Canada found that people's attention spans have dropped to eight seconds. Goldfish apparently have an attention span of nine seconds (insert sad emoji here). Any copy that appears on your post has to be short and punchy with a strong call to action.

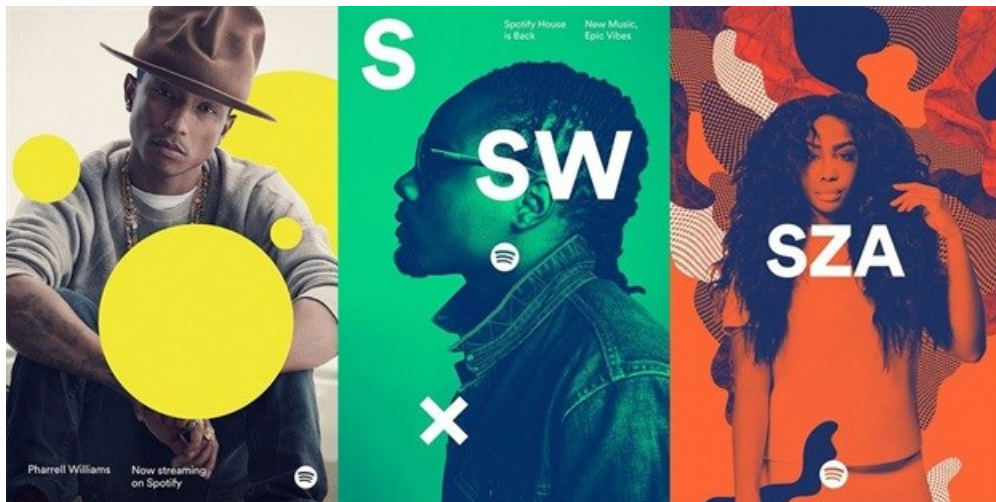
Strong design systems

Creating content that is both visually stunning and well written is no small feat. Then factor in the speed and volume at which it needs to be created for social media. The question begs 'but how?'

Design systems are the answer. Creating a strong design template that allows the creative team a form of expression, which can be finalised and delivered at break-neck speed is the ideal solution. In the past I have created design systems that work well for social media by taking inspiration from simple, cohesive campaigns. Otl Aicher's work for the 1972 Munich Olympics is a great example. The design system he created allowed his relatively small team to produce over 400 pieces of collateral in a short amount of time.



The work that brand agency Collins did for Spotify also comes to mind. They were able to create a design language that unified the diverse promotional images used to advertise the artists available on their platform.



I recently worked on two social media campaigns where we implemented design systems with great success.

For last year's University of Cape Town (UCT) admission campaign, my team created a rigid design template in which a wide variety of content could easily be added. The template allowed for enough variation so that no two posts looked the same, but it was obvious that they all belonged to the same campaign. With this campaign, we achieved an organic reach of 6%, well above the 2% industry standard.



Similarly, Native VML is currently finishing a campaign for the second iteration of the Jameson Indie Channels Music Video Grant. Posts for this campaign needed to attract the attention of the creative community, who needed to apply a significant amount of work in their entry, no small feat for a social media campaign, and needed to be rolled out in minimal time. By creating a single, rigid template that also allowed for variation and creative flair, we were able to quickly create posts that stood out and were noticed by our target audience. In 2016, the Music Video Grant received 150 entries. This year, we received over 400.



The effectiveness of both of these campaigns, and minimal effort required to roll out content, goes to show how valuable design systems were to outcomes of our campaigns and how useful they can be for you.

ABOUT ERNST LASS

After completing an Advanced Diploma in Multimedia Design and Production at City Varsity in 2006, winning the coveted 'Student of the Year' award, he went on to work for various advertising and design agencies. While working at one small seed (a pop-culture magazine and online platform), Ernst was responsible for the re-branding and redesign of the magazine and websites, resulting in an 800% increase in international sales.

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