Marketing Analysis On

The Impact of an In-House Designers

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Executive Summary

With more than 93% of communications being visual, it is vital to understand the importance of effective design that correctly communicates the brand's identity (Al Noman 2023). Forbes reports that expert use of custom graphic design in marketing materials drives 42% more revenue per visitor (Crawford 2023). The designer's role in a company's marketing department is vital in improving and evolving the brand's identity and client or customer experience. Not only are you looking at the external factors, but you can experience a shift in the internal stakeholders and surrounding communities. An in-house graphic designer's impact on a company's marketing communication creates a stronger brand identity and internal trust, brings innovative, creative ideas to the marketing team, and allows room to continue to adapt to industry trends and disruptor.

In-house designers give direct access to a professional that unlocks the potential to build a more robust and representative brand than using an agency or freelance designer. While the goal is always to be on brand, you'll see that an in-house designer provides a deeper understanding of a company compared to an outside source. More profound knowledge of a brand's inner workings leads to more robust communication, shorter lead times, and accessibility (Townsend 2024). With an influential designer on the team, communications from marketing become more accessible and appealing, building trust between the team and internal employees.

The critical part of an integrated marketing communications team is having an individual who can understand the impact of visuals but can collaborate without hindering one's thought process. However, not all marketing teams can understand the process for designers to create compelling designs. As a part of the future state of the industry, we will look at how to effectively utilize a designer and understand the process it takes to mesh the two design and marketing thought processes together.

At the end of this report, you'll be able to:

- Identifying the three designer options with positives and negatives for a company.
- Understand the effectiveness of an in-house designer on the brand and marketing team.
- Find how to blend designers and marketers to create an effective team.
- See the effects of AI and how designers can integrate the disruptor into their creative process.

As the tides change, so does design. To stay competitive, designers must continuously improve the brand and their own skills and knowledge. As more companies begin to understand the importance of strong marketing communications and how their brands' identities are perceived, I expect a rise in job opportunities for internal positions.

About the Author

My name is Chloe Jones. I have been an in-house graphic designer within the marketing department for two and a half years. As a designer, I have been able to experience what an in-house designer can accomplish within an organization that utilized agencies and freelancers before joining. I also have seen an in-house designer's impact internally and externally on a brand's identity. I've built a bridge between the company and the marketing department by focusing on communications and continuously bringing innovative ideas. This improvement has built trust between the departments, which has led to an increase in workload and the ability to look at moving to a growth marketing strategy.

This report complies with many ideas that support the overall theme that design impacts how a brand resonates with its audience and stakeholders while continuously improving its identity. When looking at the individual pieces, the information that is being shared highlights the integration of teams, the importance of brand identity, the impacts that AI has made within the industry, and the threat it puts designers under.

As I look to the future, I am confident that in-house designers will continue to be an integral part of a marketing communications team with the support of freelancers and agencies to help lift the workload. This process has also helped me identify that I am looking forward to being able to move into a management role within the creative or marketing space to help connect the two to work more seamlessly to enhance the output of the department while building the brand.

Current State of the Industry

Designers are increasingly popular as the world has begun to understand how many people are influenced by design. Understanding the current state and what it means in the future is essential. An In-house designer can bring many strengths and opportunities to a company, but they face many weaknesses and threats as the field changes. This SWOT analysis highlights where we currently stand and hints at pieces discussed later in this report.

S W O T

Strengths	Weakness	Opportunities	Threats
* Strong understanding of the brand * Timely workflow * Cost efficiency * Internal confidence	* Limited perspective & Skills * Internal forces * Workload variability	* Skill development * Remote ability * Content marketing collaborations	* Outsourcing options * Budget constraints * Technology changes * Talent retention

Strengths
In-house designers must understand what pieces make them competitive with employers. The ability to create and improve a brand starts at its most significant strength: profound knowledge of the brand. Sure, other types of designers can create innovative designs, but in many cases, they still need the finer details that set a company apart from others (Hyde 2024). The ability to work quickly is another critical piece in a company's workflow. With access to project owners and other key personnel, projects flow faster while internal confidence is built (Townsend 2024).

Weakness
While there are many strengths, in-house designers have some weaknesses that need to be addressed. Due to having to become a jack of all trades, many in-house designers need more exposure to design trends, styles, and skills that agencies or freelancers might have due to specialization. The other side of design is ensuring there is work to create. With in-house design, there is potential for fluctuating workloads, which can be challenging for a company that can utilize external designers when needed. When the workload is high, navigating internal politics and conflicting priorities can lead to confusion on how to manage projects and affect the quality of work. These weaknesses can lead to companies' stakeholders not wanting to add the designer to their teams.

Opportunities
When evaluating the opportunities, designers continuously look for new ways to adapt to the evolving industry. From skill development to the ability to be fully remote, designers can develop their skills and knowledge of programs and tools that disrupt and innovate the industry. With many roles being considered for hybrid or fully remote options, this opens the opportunity for companies to expand their reach to more candidates with a range of experiences. Another ample opportunity is the ability to collaborate with marketers to integrate leads into engaging conversations, which can help identify the right paths for strategies.

Threats

Like any industry, there are always ongoing threats. For in-house designers, the most significant dangers are outsourcing and budget constraints. Many companies currently utilizing a form of outsourcing tend to stick with that outlet until it's unmanageable in terms of budget. After all, agencies offer a group of creatives with different focuses, which can lead to a better option for optimizing a company's budget. With an in-house designer, companies must consider the cost of an additional person, including benefits, salary, bonuses, and other aspects of an employee. The other threat that companies face is talent retention. With an evolving industry, competition is tough, and talented designers are in high demand. Companies with talented designers can face talent poaching or leaving for more competitive salaries and benefits. Another factor is the continuous technological change. In this field of work, designers constantly need to stay updated on training, tools, and trends to remain relevant. With the looming approach of AI, there is a threat of non-designers assuming it can replace a designer.

Another critical component when looking at the current state is understanding the competitors identified while conversing with Kendra Townsend, Director of Marketing. Before adding an in-house designer, her company utilized freelancers and an agency to create all the creative marketing materials. One of the biggest hurdles she faced while trying to add a new person was the cost of an additional team member, along with the team's structure. "Both options weren't up to par with what our in-house designer has been able to do." (Townsend 2024). Understanding each type of designer helps by looking at a chart for each designer's strengths and weaknesses.

In-house vs. Freelancers vs. Agencies

In-house Designer

Pros:

* Saves money
* Innovative ideas
* Dedicated to the brand
* More efficient
* Ability to represent you in public

Cons:

* Limited abilities to tools that aren't provided
* Burn out and project overload can lead to quality issues and quitting
* Doesn't offer outside perspectives

Freelance Designer

Pros:

* Dedicated to client relationship
* Niche spaces
* Cost effective based on skill level needed and project type
* Useful for brand that are unable to hire internally

Cons:

* Cost varies on the experience, technology, and tools they need
* Blinders to industry trends
* Limited to contracted hours/money
* Limited knowledge on the company/industry

Agency Designers

Pros:

* Group of specialists across disciplines
* Access to tools and networks
* Ability to keep deadlines (even short staffed)

Cons:

* Expensive depending on agency
* Might treat companies different based on their scale
* Limited Knowledge on the company/industry

(Taylor n.d.)

Internal forces are also a significant factor when adding an in-house designer. Many companies believe they can continue running like they have been for the last 10-15 years. This issue is a big habit break for any designer a company utilizes. It took Townsend 2 years from the initial pitch to the hiring date of her in-house designer. During that time, leadership teams continuously tried to prolong the additional person because of the success that they've already had with the external vendors. It's been two years since the hiring date, and she has only received compliments on how well the in-house designer can grasp the brand identity with innovative approaches that the external vendors could never do. This is due to the in-house designer being able to communicate with stakeholders and co-workers, which builds a deeper understanding of who the company is and what the goals are for each project (Townsend 2024).
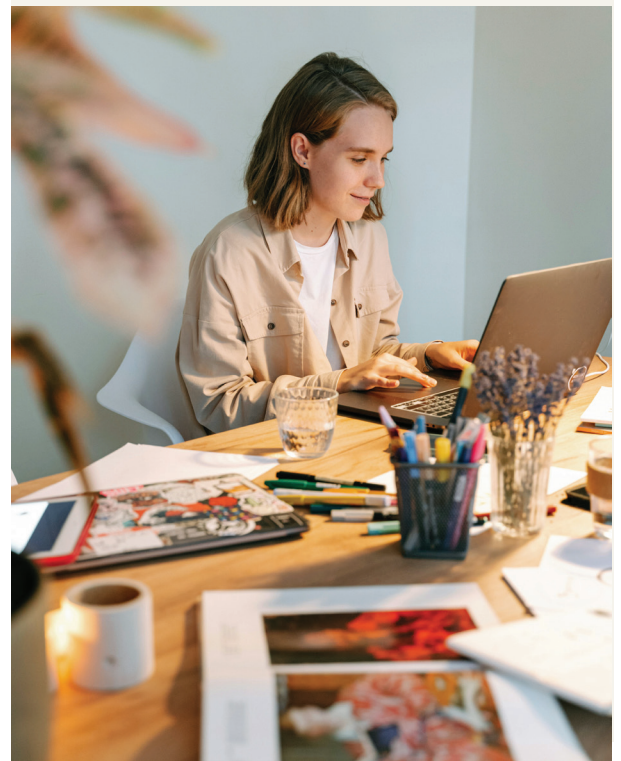
Trends From The Research

With an industry that utilizes trends to stay relevant in the visual landscape, there is more to dive into. Andrew Hyde, Vice President of Strategy, shared his insight on the pieces that help companies win with clients. A few pieces included the support that marketing and the designer offer to create innovative solutions that make our brand stand out. In his experience, having an in-house designer changed the game. Kendra Townsend shared her insights on her experience gaining and utilizing an in-house designer. Both interviews lead to 3 common trends: in-house designers have a more robust understanding, effective design leads to improved brand perception, and an integrated marketing communication department can lead to innovative ideas.

Utilizing an in-house designer is a move that companies can make, knowing that the designer intends to build more robust materials because they are fully ingrained into the brand. When designers can focus on one brand, it offers a deep understanding of the values, the growth

the company strives for, the people inside the organization, and so much more. The other side to this trend is knowing the company's strategies to help implement and suggest suitable materials to create (Hyde 2024). The connection between the brand, the materials, and the strategy is a huge part of hitting the set KPIs and ROIs (Pleiser 2023). If you are utilizing the outsourced designers, some created pieces don't feel like they connect to the brand as closely as those developed in-house.

This blends into the next identified trend: designers affect brand perception. Townsend shared that internal stakeholders feel more confident and that customers and communities are starting to notice the shift in the materials the in-house designer has created. The brand's perception has been elevated to make it feel like a billion-dollar company while remaining close to its family-run roots. That perception change has led to the department being utilized in new ways. Clients are the key to knowing if the brand's perception has changed or continued but has noticed the elevated materials.

Consistency of branding materials is another critical aspect of perception (Pleiser 2023). Utilizing the in-house designer will keep your brand's guidelines up and create a standard within the materials. The goal is to have
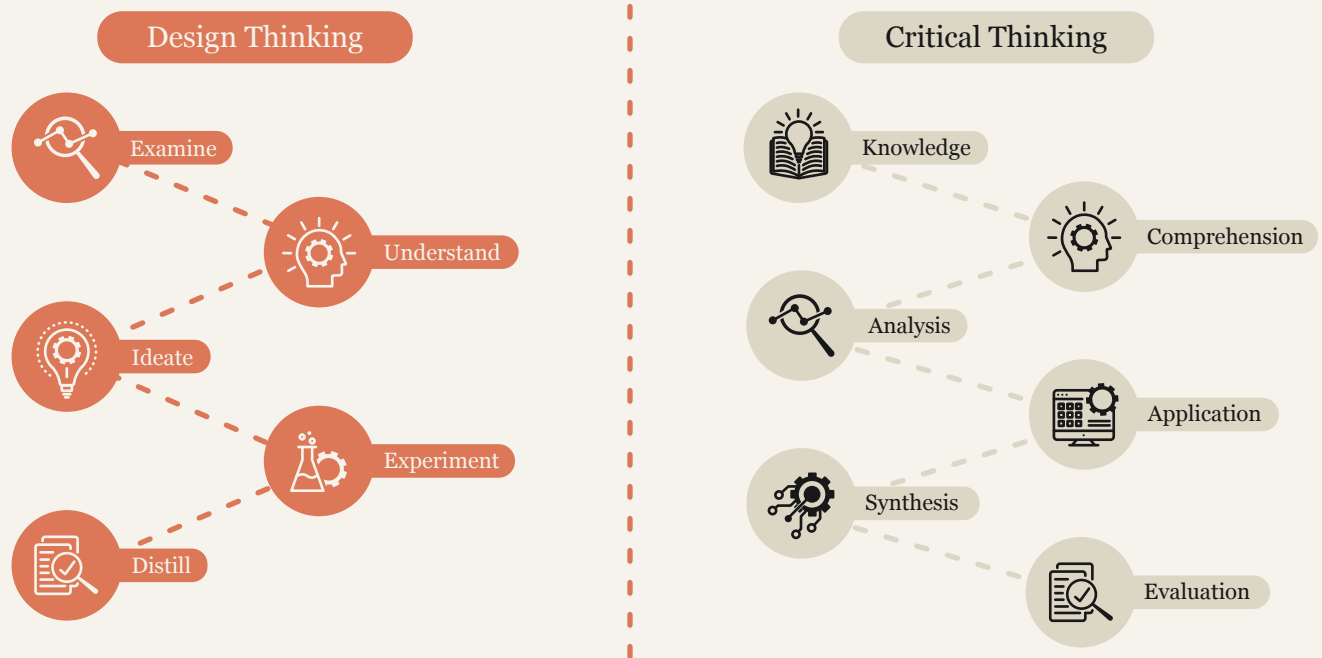
cohesive materials across multiple divisions or campaigns. When guidelines are not being kept up, it opens a lot of problems with how the perception of the brand is being guarded. If materials cannot replicate or stick within the guides, it will confuse the consumer and show a lack of integrity and trust. Having guidelines creates the ability to tell the brand story and can be used by multiple people, including external vendors. In-house designers utilize the guides to continue evolving brand materials as design trends and materials are needed while still being recognizable.

The last trend integrates both sides of the brain to have robust and innovative marketing materials (Mathur 2023). A winning marketing communications team can see and use all perspectives and inputs to formulate the best results (Hyde 2024). Understanding both sides of thinking can help improve projects, communication, and a well-run team. Designers are known to have a creative process that works through the project. During this process, many trials and errors, research, and problem-solving include more of the visuals being built. Still, to a marketer, it can seem chaotic compared to their critical thinking process that tends to analyze and digest data. Below are the two types of thinking processes.

Designer vs Marketer Thought Processes

Design Thinking

- Examine
- Understand
- Ideate
- Experiment
- Distill

Critical Thinking

- Knowledge
- Comprehension
- Analysis
- Application
- Synthesis
- Evaluation

When comparing the two, it might seem on par that one side of the brain is being used more heavily for the respected career path. When looking closer at the two processes, one can see that they can combine one another. For example, the knowledge phase in critical thinking is similar, if not the same, as the examine phase for creatives (Blijlevens 2021). Comparing the actions of each side to those of the other, there are a lot of similarities, but the difference comes from the approach they take to solving those problems. Designers are more likely to approach the problem by answering with visuals and using a user experience point of view to explain the conclusion.

In contrast, marketers are looking to explain using data points, both qualitative and quantitative. Due to these different approaches, the information collected might differ. That can lead to confusion and frustration when working to solve the same problem (Blijlevens 2021). Thus, it is essential to learn each other's approaches to help each other understand how conclusions were made and what the next steps could be.

Future State of the Industry

The future state of the design industry is constantly shifting and evolving as technology improves and programs and tools are released. The outlook on designers is improving, but the most significant hurdles come with disruptor's vocal about removing the need for a designer. With designers being adaptive and innovative, the concern lies in the factors outside of the industry. The future state of the industry will include better brand identities with buy-in from internal and external stakeholders, the ability to adapt to disruptor's, create strong integrated marketing communication teams, and continuously improve
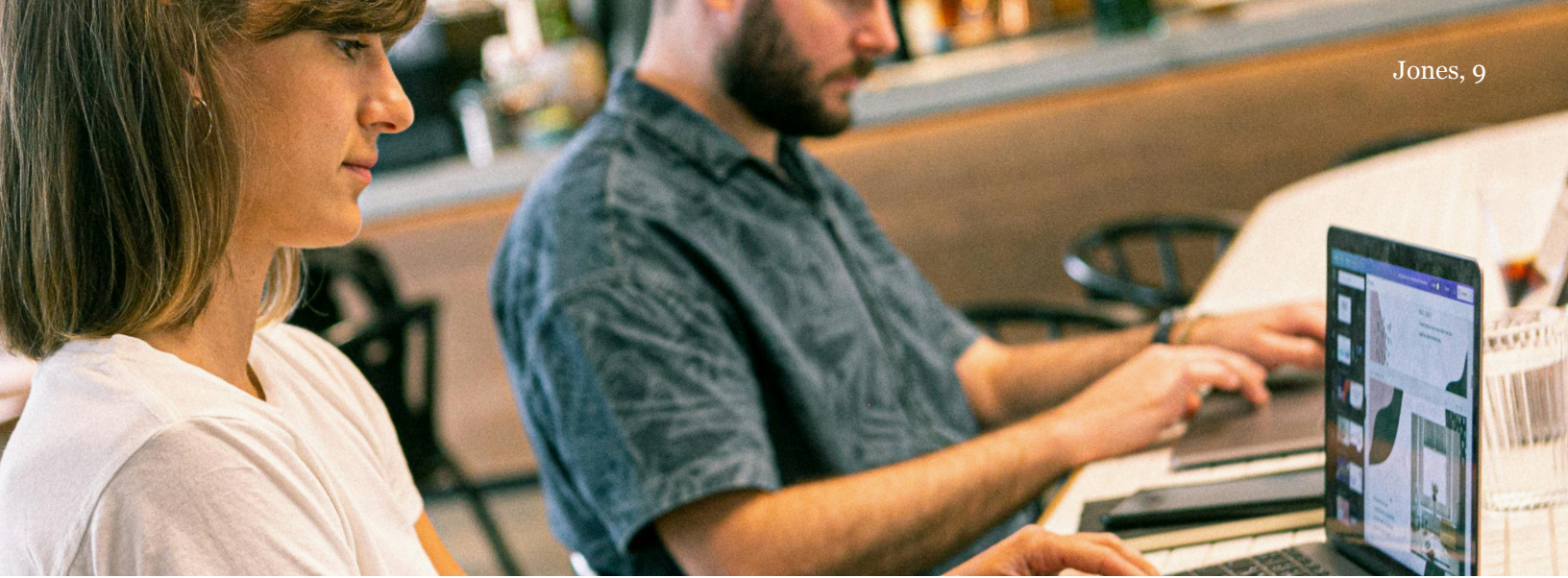
When companies shift to using a robust and internal designer, developing the brand's identity will help achieve marketing strategies that will move the company forward. While these strategies are accomplished with problems being solved, they build confidence, trust, and loyalty to improve. While branding encompasses all activities that create and maintain the brand identity, an in-house designer works to get the most profound understanding of the brand to formulate the best visuals (Chashnitska 2022). When Internal stakeholders can see and understand the strategies behind design choices, they can start seeing who the brand is.

With new technology and programs coming out regularly, designers have been tasked to stay up to date on those tools and be able to utilize them correctly. With AI programs like Chat GPT and Dall E, designers have now been posed with one of the biggest design disruptor's the industry has seen in a decade. In 2022, AI created a wave of uneasy feelings across the design industry. The most at risk were copywriters and digital artists, as the most extensive AI programs revolved around image and copy creation (Bajarin 2022). Now that many people have discovered the pitfalls of AI, we can begin to utilize it as a supplementary tool within our design process rather than a replacement (Wong, 2023). With AI still developing, designers can get ahead of the process and show how a human is still needed. After all, someone employed with a company for several years will better understand the brand's identity, values, and language, which will create effective marketing materials.

As we've discussed, creating well-integrated teams relies on understanding each other (Blijlevens 2022). Combining both approaches leads to creative solutions with data-driven solutions and shows that communication can be achieved even with different techniques. The purpose of having an integrated team is to share insights and work through both sides' ideas to find the best solution. Townsend was able to experience what a designer can bring in terms of skill set but also shared how ideas brought to her by the designer have shown a new perspective on communication.

Above all, attention to detail matters. When working as a marketing team, it is crucial to understand how to create aesthetically pleasing designs that help communicate with the audience. The attention to detail can make or break a brand. Sharing an ad that uses old branding or language that's not industry standard can lead to clients not trusting the company (Hyde 2024). As a marketing team, teamwork must be smooth to allow editing and reviews to ensure that materials are up to par with the brand's guidelines and industry standards and achieve the end goal. Poor design choices and lack of attention can lead to the brand's reputation declining and being seen as untrustworthy to do business with.

Disruptor's & Innovations

In 2021, AI entered the world of art and design. This disruptor brought a lot of uncertainties to the industry, as many saw this as a replacement for creative roles (Bajarin 2022). From digital artists to copywriters, AI programs like ChatGPT and Dall. E opened the conversation about how technology might be a better choice than humans. In the early phase, these programs should work effectively, but from terrible grammar to extra appendages, these programs needed to produce products that could be shared as a branded creation. With programs continuously learning by the input they receive, many other concerns come with AI, especially for companies with sensitive data.

Understanding the history of AI and how designers can utilize AI to increase production value will help with their likelihood of being hired by companies sold on these programs. This resource helped identify what designers need to prepare for to stay relevant and competitive in the eyes of a business. While designers will always be necessary, AI has created a new way of thinking and how projects are being produced. Companies still need something in that these art-based programs still need a person to input the prompts and what it could mean for data security. I've already witnessed our company trying to avoid AI because sensitive data was leaked, but it is now available.

In some instances, Canva is another innovator adopted as a disruptor. It poses the biggest threat to why Marcomm teams aren't hiring internal designers. The CEO of Canva, Melanie Parkins, talked about the reason Canva was initially started, which was to offer a simple platform to use to teach design students how to design with the beginning concepts of design, thus notifying those who are using them that they still need to have foundational skills to use the platform correctly (Nelson 2023). Untrained people are now using Canva to create graphics for their company because they've been told it's easy to use at any skill level. While it is an excellent tool for teams with limited budgets, it can also lead to non-designers thinking they can create the same level of designs as someone trained and educated in the field. Townsend pointed out that her team of two used Canva due to the lack of resources and education. Due to that, she encountered many designs from other departments that were off-brand and not easy to read. Even older materials the marketing team created before the in-house designer are noticeable because of the poor design choices. Now, the entire company is starting to notice the
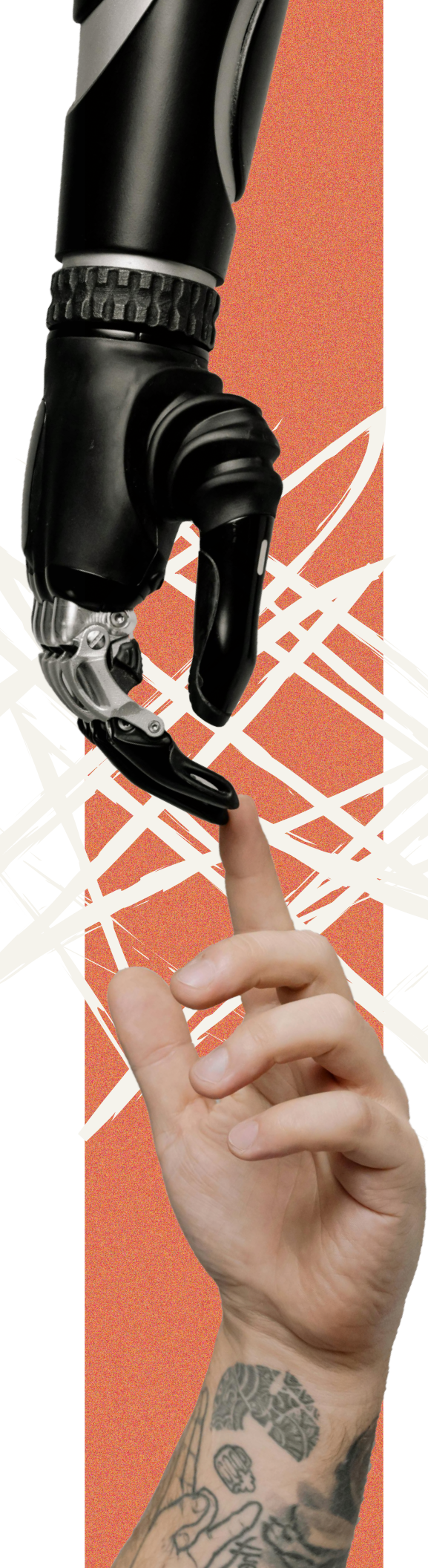
Recently, Canva released a new set of tools at their 2024 Canva Create event. In the introduction to the co-founders, one quote sticks out at the 50-second mark: "I don't have to hire somebody to do this" (Canva 2024). This quote opens the door for hundreds of thousands of viewers to see before they even show the new tools, which are AI-based. This mindset shares with the world that using Canva is the equivalent of having a designer. As discussed, the tool is excellent for making templates to share, has a great workflow between team members, and offers easy solutions when needed. A few moments later, the subject matter talked about branding items like logos, labels, and other materials being designed in Canva. That's a problem because Canva designs are known for lacking the uniqueness and character that a designer can create. These quotes are the reason why so many are looking to Canva to solve their problems without considering the consequences that come with it.

On the other hand, Canva can be used as a supporting tool that has opened many companies up to access an easy-to-use tool with an extensive number of templates, fonts, and other graphic elements that can launch companies in a better direction. It also offers a setting where multiple users can edit a document all at once, which helps with workflow and access files that might need review when the designer is on PTO or can't be in a meeting. It's a great tool when used correctly.

Conclusion

In-house designers are crucial to a company's success by ensuring brand consistency, fostering innovation, and improving communication across departments. Their intimate knowledge of the company's culture and objectives allows for more cohesive and aligned design solutions, enhancing both internal and external perceptions of the brand. By working closely with other teams, in-house designers can swiftly respond to changing needs and market trends, driving efficiency and reducing costs. Ultimately, skilled in-house designers contribute significantly to a company's competitive edge and overall growth. Overall, the presence of in-house designers cultivates a more agile, responsive, and cohesive environment, driving not just the brand's aesthetics but also contributing to strategic decision-making and long-term business success. Their impact is multifaceted, enhancing everything from brand loyalty and customer engagement to operational efficiency and innovation.

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