

Perpendicular Angel Design

Organizing and simplifying, one illumination at a time

An Event Apart 2017: Practical Branding by Sarah Parmenter

Posted on [April 4, 2017](#)

Sarah Parmenter's talk was about branding and how, because so many of our sites look almost indistinguishable, brands aren't as strong on the web as they once were.

The work that I do is more form and app related, but Sarah's talk made me really think about the ways that I might be able to enforce the brand from within a form/app related website. So that's a good thing. Plus, I have other project sites where a strong brand would probably be a really good thing :)



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Time for @sazzy's Practical Branding and I cannot get a quality pic of the cool pink/grey of her opening slide which gives me a sad #AEASEA

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Before responsive design, we have lots of very character-heavy creative brands... while converting to responsive we lost that [#AEASEA](#)

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We're still designing our sites as if they're big boxes with more little boxes in them. (Guilty!) [#AEASEA](#)

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Every company is now a media company [#AEASEA](#)

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As responsive design came along, we lost the uniqueness around different brands and visual design. [#aeasea](#)

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Websites have become homogenous thanks to frameworks like bootstrap and patterns [#AEASEA](#)

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Erin Walker (Joyce)
@E3Writing

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The web is a primary artistic medium. We should treat it as such. -
[@zeldman](#) in [@sazzy](#)'s talk at [#aeasea](#)

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It's time to start bringing design back into the foreground [#aeasea](#)

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Everyone is looking at what everyone else is already doing. There's no need for the skins of what we do to look the same [#AEASEA](#)

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We tend to be self-indulgent: how can we use X in our next project?
Instead of is this right for the brand I'm working on? #AEASEA

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@bishopart

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Waiting for permission stifles innovation. @sazzy #aeasea

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People are on "flat" design because "this is what google's doing" -
we have to bring gradients in because apple did - #AEASEA

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There's no logic to trying to apply someone else's brand to our own.
Don't apply Apple's branding to your projects! #AEASEA

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If you're buying someone else's design elements, that's a red flag for branding. Do your own brand [#AEASEA](#)

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Rebecca Watson
@RVivusArtDesign

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Find inspiration beyond the boundaries of your profession to put design back in the drivers seat. [#backseatdriverframework](#) [#aeasea](#)

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Conor Meagher 
@conrmahr

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"Branding is the product of deliberate conception." - [@sazzy](#)
[#aeasea](#)

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"Branding is not a pattern library or mood board." - [@sazzy](#)
[#aeasea](#)

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Pattern libraries should have the design decisions around the spacing, typography elements, etc in them. #AEASEA

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Lots of designs happen as a happy accident - ooh! I like that! That's perfect! Crap, that only took 5 minutes. How to explain? #AEASEA

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Pure design research (pitting brand elements up against each other) isn't generally useful. #AEASEA

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Sara made a point here that we fall back on tools like The Golden Ratio to explain our design decisions, but we have to be honest about the fact that those tools aren't the be-all and end-all of the decisions. (But I missed it in the tweets.)



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This is also the golden ratio. It's not a silver bullet [#aeasea](#)

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A lot is happening by gut instinct especially if the designer's been in the business a long time. #AEASEA

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Design research is like jury duty, it only takes one dominant person to throw everything out. #AEASEA

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Note though that competitive research and accessible research still need to be done, they're not the same as design research

#AEASEA

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*Create tension by playing
with contradictions.*



A Brave New

@abravenew

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a good reminder from @sazzy that contradiction isn't something to run away from #aeasea

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Hamilton - a rap about the founding fathers. AEA at Disneyland. Contradictions can create interesting elements #AEASEA

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Facebook audience insights (free tool) can give really great deep dives in where competitors lie in the marketplace #AEASEA

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Where do customers also go if they're going to this brand? Can show unexpected connections [#AEASEA](#)

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Work with a copywriter! They have the most important pieces of information about the company [#AEASEA](#)

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Copywriters can talk to people on your behalf when you need distance from the client [#AEASEA](#)

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Refreshing a brand: it's really throwing out the old meaning of a company and creating a new one [#AEASEA](#)

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Most companies do great things with 3-4 spokes of this brand wheel [#AEASEA](#)

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Just deciding which spokes you're going after is an activity around shaping the brand. What's important? What's not? [#AEASEA](#)

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A logo should be simple enough you can draw it in the sand with your toes [#AEASEA](#)

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An app icon (or logo) should be a single defined silhouette of what your brand represents [#AEASEA](#)

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Spotify has simplified their logo, Vox, airbnb, all simplified a logo [#AEASEA](#)

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Sometimes interviewing a CEO and one of the lowest paid employees gives insight faster and under budget [#AEASEA](#)

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TOTALLY NSFW: google “airbnb logo parody” and wow, the research didn’t quite work the way they wanted [#AEASEA](#)

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Companies are afraid of simplifying their logomark, feeling that without the wordmark, their company is not identifiable. [#aeasea](#)

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The color Tiffany Blue was a happy accident. IMO probably one of the most recognizable brand colors in existence. [#aeasea](#)

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When Airbnb did their redesign they created their own color (it’s a bit salmoney orangey warm red) [#AEASEA](#)

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David Watson

@caughtexception

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"They just created a new color... which is, interesting, because I just used the, um, color dropper and created it, too." -@sazzy at #aeasea

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Spotify is using some unusual color mixes for their gradients. Gradients can hide terrible quality photos #AEASEA

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(Una tells us later that the gradients can also be a great way to save on file size too. Notes to come!)



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Pantone postcards can be found on amazon for like \$14 and you can pin them to the wall #AEASEA

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Jacob Wayne Smith

@j8ke

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Here's a link to those pantone postcards [#aeasea](#)
[amzn.to/2ouiGwJ](#)

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Pantone Postcard Box: 100 Postcards

With a palette drawn from the systems of Pantone, each postcard in this set of 100 offers a different bold hue to brighten up the mail.

[amazon.com](#)

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You don't need to work with a copy writer to set a tone. Define, then work with them to refine. (Get them involved early...) [#AEASEA](#)

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Voice & tone of voice for your brand needs to be defined by you, and then refined by a copywriter. [#aeasea](#)

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Nebulaskin was very corporate and hard to understand. Changed the tone to casual, normal conversation, easier to understand [#AEASEA](#)

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There are 4 channels that make up the basic social ecosystem that a brand should have. [#aeasea](#)

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Social ecosystem: publishing channels, aspirational/inspirational channels, follow-up channels, support channels [#AEASEA](#)

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Main channel: blog, website, tumblr. Aspirational channel: where images get posted. Not everyone should! FDA, for example

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Support channels: users will pick a channel for you if you don't pick one: twitter, Facebook, etc. What will you do for support? [#AEASEA](#)

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Follow-up channel: content from 1st channel is republished for the sole purpose of driving traffic. Blog post rewritten for Facebook

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You don't need to be big on all the social channels. You can pick one and concentrate on it. Where does it make the most sense

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If you're in a meeting where someone says "we need to dominate everywhere" you need to ask if it's the right format [#AEASEA](#)

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@bishopart

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It's better to be master of one than jack of all social media. [@sazzy](#)
[#aeasea](#)

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Typeface equity: we need to look at what makes the most sense for our brand. Use the same font pairings across everything [#AEASEA](#)

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Vox - Harriet Display & Balto, which they dominate. [#AEASEA](#)

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A Book Apart: Titling Pro, FF Yoga are associated with them in this industry #AEASEA

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Fonts In Use - fontsinuse.com - to make sure you're not going head to head with someone else's typefaces #AEASEA

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Zeldman
@zeldman

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Hey, hey, it's the Fonts! lineto.com/the+fonts @sazzy #aeasea

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Art direction is a huge part of our job but we don't necessarily allow ourselves to do that because it's not our title. #aeasea

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Art Direction - there's no excuse for using stock photos when we're all carrying fantastic camera(phone)s in our pockets #AEASEA

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Illustration is being used even on news websites #AEASEA

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Airbnb made a critical decision to employ professional photographers in apartments. Looks very professional #AEASEA

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Professional photos both build confidence with the customers and provide a professional look to the site [#AEASEA](#)

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Company values will always be unique to your company. There's always something that can help inform the brand [#AEASEA](#)

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Talk to the people who've been at the company the longest and ask them stories about the company [#AEASEA](#)

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I don't think that it's coincidental that this is consistent advice between Jeffrey Zeldman and Sarah Parmenter. The people who have been at your company the longest are the ones that have most likely most internalized the beliefs, behaviors, goals, and culture of the organization. Their voice is authentic.



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Authentic storytelling - value is less about brand attributes and more about brand meaning [#AEASEA](#)

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Chad
@lingokid

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Authentic Storytelling is so important for your brand. Own it and share it. Tell your story. [#aeasea](#)

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Stubhub swaying toward authentic storytelling. Selling what you can't get online, getting out from behind a screen [#AEASEA](#)

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@g_dibo

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[#aeasea](#) [#sarahparmenter](#) good talk on brand
[instagram.com/p/BSbsRYKFDKI/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BSbsRYKFDKI/)

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Layout: Vox breaks out of the grid, unlike most news websites that are very tight and boxy [#AEASEA](#)

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Spotify is nailing all areas of branding. Everything about their brand is strong. [#aeasea](#)

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Slogans: [@sazzy](#) hates them. If you need one, it's a red flag that you're not telling the story in a better way [#AEASEA](#)

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Case study: Frank Body. selling coffee scrub. You could make it yourself except their branding is so strong you want to buy [#AEASEA](#)

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Tone of voice, art direction, social ecosystem. Instagram is their most successful social media channel. [#AEASEA](#)

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Frank Body seeded their social accounts with the type of imagery they wanted to encourage others to add [#AEASEA](#)

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Engaged a lot of bloggers and influences with a style guide for the bloggers [#AEASEA](#)

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Created a male persona called Frank that is frank and honest in all communications. He's a bit abrasive, they're ok with that [#AEASEA](#)

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Tried to move their communications to a PR agency but the agency couldn't emulate their tone of voice [#AEASEA](#)

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Everywhere that frank body works they've converted things to their brand [#AEASEA](#)

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Their website didn't work in the US at first because their video of almost-naked women looked naughty, had to be redesigned [#AEASEA](#)

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Personal branding - authentic storytelling, art direction, and social ecosystems. [#AEASEA](#)

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Super huge celebrities might dominate across platforms, but that's very very rare. Pick one channel (twitter, etc.) [#AEASEA](#)

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Direct marketers are excellent at personal branding. @zeldman also has a great personal brand #AEASEA

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Consistency is important and really high for personal branding #AEASEA

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Find your authentic story within your company. Then look at using it to create other visual elements #AEASEA

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Consistency is key to personal branding. Can your content be relied upon to be there? #aeasea

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What equity can you create from typography, color, other elements?
Can users make content for you via seeded content? #AEASEA

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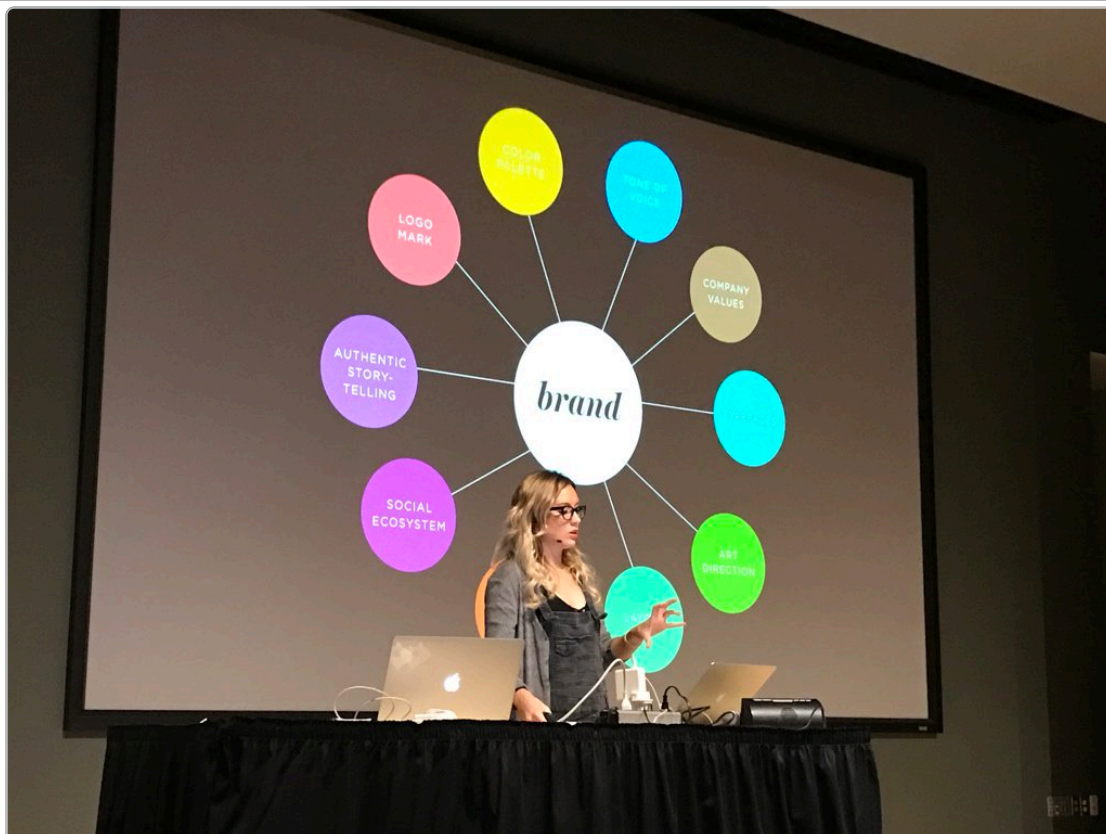
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Create tension by playing with contradictions. Think about every
single touch point of the business and design that experience
#AEASEA

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christopher hincks

@chincks

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Deep research and cultural understanding enables designers to find and tell a company's unique brand story. [#aeasea](#)

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Rebecca Watson

@RVivusArtDesign

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Authentic stories, design element equity, user involvement, tension through use of contradictions. All strategies for image branding.

[#aeasea](#)

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Danya Cosgrove

@itsnotdayna

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Data is only as good as the ppl who analyze it. There is no excuse for stock photography. 2 sessions in and my minds already blown.

[#aeasea](#)

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Also check out [Krystal Higgins' sketch notes from the talk.](#)

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