

# perpendicular angel design

organizing and simplifying, one illumination at a time

## AN EVENT APART DC 2018: SCENARIO-DRIVEN DESIGN SYSTEMS BY YESENIA PEREZ-CRUZ

The last time I saw Yesina Perez-Cruz speak, it was at the An Event Apart in Seattle in 2016, and she covered performance issues on websites. I don't think it's coincidental that she's speaking now on scenario-driven design systems, because there's a heck of a lot of bloat to be picked up in the performance of a site by building off a framework where you only need one or two features. And scenario-driven design is a solid approach to preventing bloat, as well as meeting your business goals.

(pdf backup)



**Anne Gibson**

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Next up: [@yeseniaa](#) with scenario-driven design systems

Design is scaling.

Design problems are increasingly complex.

Design is increasingly remote. [#AEADC](#)

11:32 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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**Anne Gibson**

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There are lots of posts about design systems. Strong principles result in a strong cohesive system. Spotify has succeeded at this. 18F is also producing a design system to clean up the incredible inconsistency of government systems [#AEADC](#)

11:34 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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Definition of a design system:

Collection of reusable components?  
method of design products?  
Like building with legos? [#AEADC](#)

11:35 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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“A system is an interconnected set of elements coherently organized in a way that achieves something”

Don Ella Meadows, Thinking in Systems [#AEADC](#)

11:35 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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3 parts:

Elements

Interconnections

Purpose

When they all exist, it feels cohesive and unified and connected.

#AEADC

11:36 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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A bad design system feels disjointed, confusing, difficult to use. No one knows how to use them and they get neglected over time

#AEADC

11:36 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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Too much focus on the elements and the patterns, and not enough focus on the way elements come together, will cause a system to fail. You need to understand how a pattern comes together to achieve the purpose of the product #AEADC

11:37 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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Start your design systems with user scenarios. Not components, modules, or legos! [#AEADC](#)

11:37 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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2 1/2 years ago Vox kicked off a design system for 8 brands, 350 websites. Why?

Easier to design, build, launch, maintain, and evolve the sites on our platform

Faster to launch new brands

Tell better stories, faster![#AEADC](#)

11:39 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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Every brand's website was very distinct and tailored to their brand's need. Visual design system was incredibly custom. Different editorial missions, content types, audience needs, typography and branding [#AEADC](#)

11:39 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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Need to both unify and provide enough flexibility to allow brands to feel distinct.

What components do we need to build? How can we combine them? How do we still provide a unique look and feel? #AEADC

11:40 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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Early assumptions that didn't pan out:

- 1 smaller modular components
- 2 address inconsistencies in design with layout, color, theming
- 3 hypothesis: set of flexible brand agnostic modules with a theming system would give the most range #AEADC

11:41 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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Thought that general components would be the most flexible. Hero sets. story blocks. Layer with the theming system. Allow brands to feel unified yet distinct.

Fail: sites felt too similar. Didn't reflect critical differences in content, tone, and audience. #aeadc

11:42 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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Modules created didn't have a clear purpose, so variations were presentational or visual. Elements have to \*achieve something\* or the modularity doesn't really matter [#AEADC](#)

11:43 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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You can't start with individual components or patterns. Successful design patterns don't exist in a vacuum. They don't ignore the context they're in, the people using them, the content they need to display, and how they need to work together. [#AEADC](#)

11:44 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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We should start with language, not interfaces.

- Alla Kholmatova [alistapart.com/article/langua...](http://alistapart.com/article/langua...)

11:45 AM - Jul 30, 2018

**The Language of Modular Design**

Teams who want to adopt a modular design approach should start with a shared vocabulary, emphasizes author Alla Kholmatova.  
[alistapart.com](http://alistapart.com)

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Start with fast, unified platform.

Be scenario-driven when creating variations

Find key moments for visual brand expression that serve our audience [#AEADC](#)

11:46 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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Load quickly, be accessible, work well across devices

Should have a unified core experience

seamless across brands

Scenarios should drive variation

All patterns should solve a specific problem

Not creating a one-size-fits-all solution [#AEADC](#)

11:47 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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No hypothetical situations - don't anticipate needs that don't exist.

Don't work in the abstract, don't only reference other design

systems when designing your own [#AEADC](#)

11:47 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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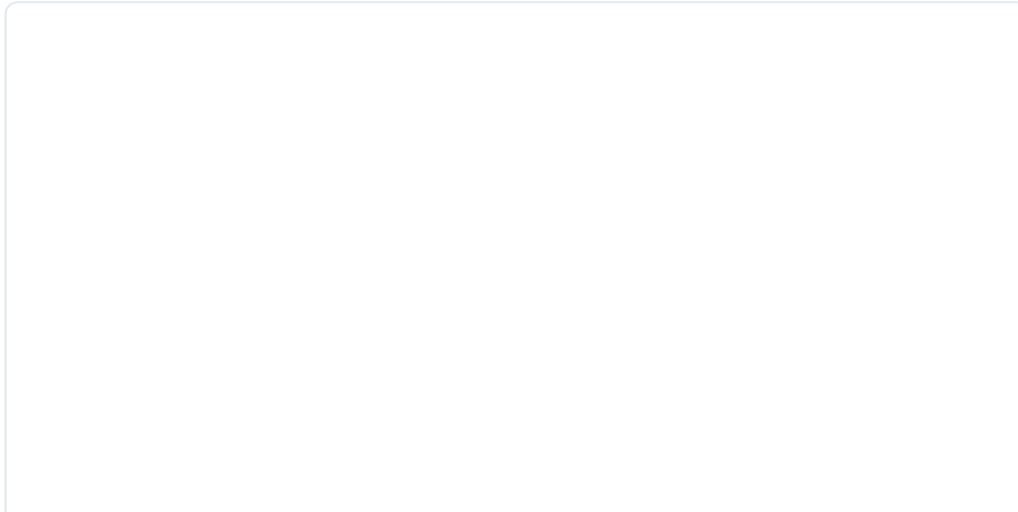
@perpendicularme

How to identify scenarios:

Do a UI Inventory. Audit all the UI elements of the site.

Brad Frost, [bradfrost.com/blog/post/inte...#AEADC](http://bradfrost.com/blog/post/inte...#AEADC)

11:49 AM - Jul 30, 2018



**Interface Inventory**

Many are familiar with the concept of a content inventory. Content audits are usually performed in the early stages of a website redesign process

[bradfrost.com](http://bradfrost.com)

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Use a purpose-directed inventory to describe what things are being used for and in what stage of the process someone is doing something. Why is there variation in the modules? Sign-up vs purchase

Alla Kholmatova, [smashingmagazine.com/design-systems...#AEADC](https://smashingmagazine.com/design-systems...#AEADC)

11:50 AM - Jul 30, 2018

**Meet “Design Systems”, A New Smashing Book**

What are the key qualities of a well-functioning, enduring design system? Throughout the book, Alla will share an approach that will help you every day [smashingmagazine.com](https://smashingmagazine.com)

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Keeping this map in my mind helped me think in families of patterns joined by a shared purpose, rather than individual pages.

–Alla Kholmatova#AEADC

11:50 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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So (looking at a library example) look at all the patterns for filtering items, or the patterns for learning about a book. Notice the difference between presentational differences vs semantic differences. They may look similar but solve different problems.

#AEADC

11:51 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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Map out the content of the pattern for viewing and learning about a book: thumbnail, title, author, published, type. Variant with a status. Build a pattern that allows for those pieces. Now it's a more flexible component #AEADC

11:52 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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- Identify core workflows and the patterns that need to support these workflows.
- Understand the role each pattern plays in a user's journey.
- Define how the patterns work together to create a cohesive experience.#AEADC

11:52 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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Sales force starts their guide with “know your use case”.

If you have designers or engineers thinking in terms of user flows and say “yes I’m solving this problem, here’s the pattern that will help me solve it”#AEADC

11:53 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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Shopify’s Polaris system puts merchants first. Each pattern explains the problem it’s solving for a merchants. #AEADC

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Scenarios can help to guide visual design standards. US Gov’t has different type systems based on the problem you’re solving. Default for digital services that feature forms, another for more promotional sites. Users understand how to apply it #AEADC

11:58 AM - Jul 30, 2018

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(@yeseniaa then went over how her team built out the process, while @TwitterSupport locked me out because apparently live-tweeting a conference is “spam”) #AEADC

12:01 PM - Jul 30, 2018

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Distinguish between very general patterns and very specific patterns. Content block vs Events block. Scorecard / ratings systems for 3 different things have different goals (where to eat vs what game to buy vs what product to buy). So content was very different. #AEADC

12:03 PM - Jul 30, 2018

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With each of the iterations of the scorecards, the components become flexible enough that any of the brands can use the “game scorecard” but at the same time it stays true to the scenario that “i want to buy a game”#AEADC

12:05 PM - Jul 30, 2018

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Homepages are the trickiest to unify - incredibly robust and distinct for each brand. Started with identifying core workflows. What's the value of the homepage today? Who's the audience? What are they looking for? How are our current homepages performing? Research [#AEADC](#)

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Audience is composed of loyal followers - they want to know what's new, what's important, and what's helpful?

3 main areas of purpose for a homepage, then the components that will answer those questions. [#AEADC](#)

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3 components: Story feed is made up of entry boxes (mostly presentational with variants for things like "review" or "map"). Generic homepage heroes didn't provide critical differences. New heroes were purpose-driven. Newspaper, Evergreen, Morning Recap. [#AEADC](#)

12:09 PM - Jul 30, 2018

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In the process of naming an element, you work out the function as a group and a reach an agreement.

Alla, again [#AEADC](#)

Name components collaboratively! Entire team will understand purpose.

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Do design systems stifle creativity?

It's much harder to power vastly different brands with one design system, but there are ways to achieve flexibility of brand expression while still maintaining a system [#AEADC](#)

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Flexibility levers:

Content

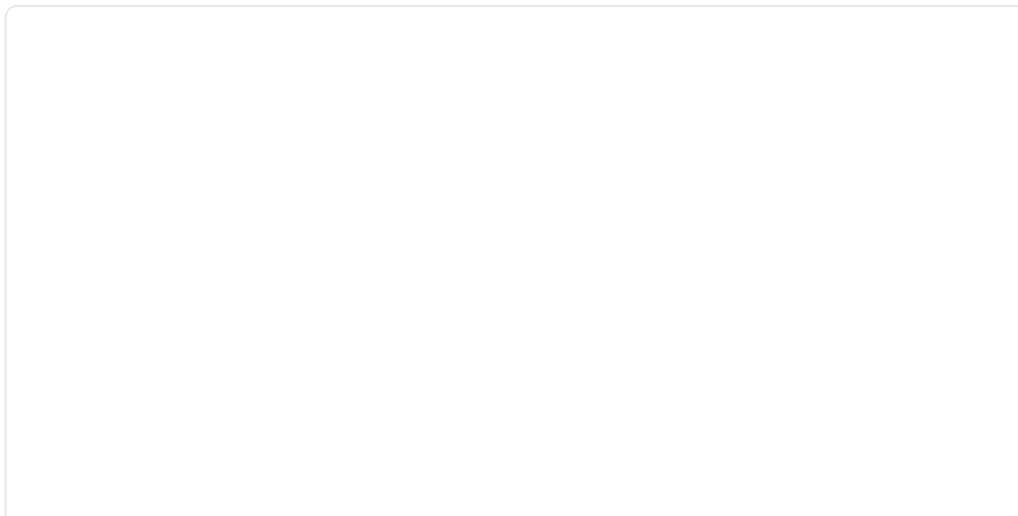
Structure

Style

Behavior

Brad Frost, [bradfrost.com/blog/post/patt...#AEADC](http://bradfrost.com/blog/post/patt...#AEADC)

12:12 PM - Jul 30, 2018



**Pattern Variations**

At the heart of a good design system is a set of solid, flexible components that can be arranged to create cohesive, delightful user  
[bradfrost.com](http://bradfrost.com)

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Google's Material theming system is an inspiring example of how much flexibility you can build into a theming system. [#AEADC](#)

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In some cases, Vox added components specifically for brand expression. Verge can use the component with the one-up hero to art direct the page and dramatically change the tone without needing back-end support [#AEADC](#)

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Scalable visual design system (theming system):  
Must create a platform where brands can feel distinct  
Need to express strong editorial voice and identity  
Brand expression is more than just colors and logos

foundational visual elements + room for customization [#AEADC](#)

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Foundational elements:  
Type scale  
Color system  
Whitespace variations

Design system needs to adapt to various font metrics because the vertical metric can be very different [#AEADC](#)

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Each brand had its own color palette, and every component needed to be mapped to those colors. Primary, accent, link, background, button. You'll probably have a lot of different color uses to track [#AEADC](#)

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Baseline theme, then each brand has its own values that hook into the system. That way each can look different while still being scaleable. [#AEADC](#)

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Good variation:

There's a specific problem to solve

Determined by user scenarios and content need

Strengthens brand voice that serves the audience.

In those situations, introduce a new pattern to the system. [#AEADC](#)

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Bad variation:

Visual variation on components that serve the same function across brands but don't do much to strengthen brand voice.

Example: 3 different newsletter modules that are 100% consistent in what they do. Low on the page. Unifying the design was better

[#AEADC](#)

12:22 PM - Jul 30, 2018

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Before the design system, lots of time building custom one-off solutions for “packages” of stories that went together. Reporters and developers spent a lot of time building and customizing. New “packages” use the design system, much easier to use for editors and writers [#AEADC](#)

12:24 PM - Jul 30, 2018

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Now they're focused on telling better stories, faster.

what's next in the system?

Create even more tailored experiences at scale.

Another round of refinements for elements that need strengthening.

[#AEADC](#)

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# Question and Answer period



**Anne Gibson**

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How to add or remove variation:

- User data that says people interact with component A, not with component B

What if Editorial wants something new constantly?

- Innovation is important, focus on what is good variation vs bad variation. #AEADC

12:30 PM - Jul 30, 2018

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**Anne Gibson**

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How to strike a balance between users and people making the site?

- Know your users, audience, analytics.
- Know how the story's produced. They're users too.
- Listen to editorial teams on where they want to move the brand#AEADC

12:30 PM - Jul 30, 2018

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**Anne Gibson**

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Relationship between the UI Design teams and User Experience team?

- Team works on websites and how they look on the web
- Team works on the content management system
- Each have their own design systems
- They work together to create what audience and editor

see#AEADC

12:32 PM - Jul 30, 2018

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