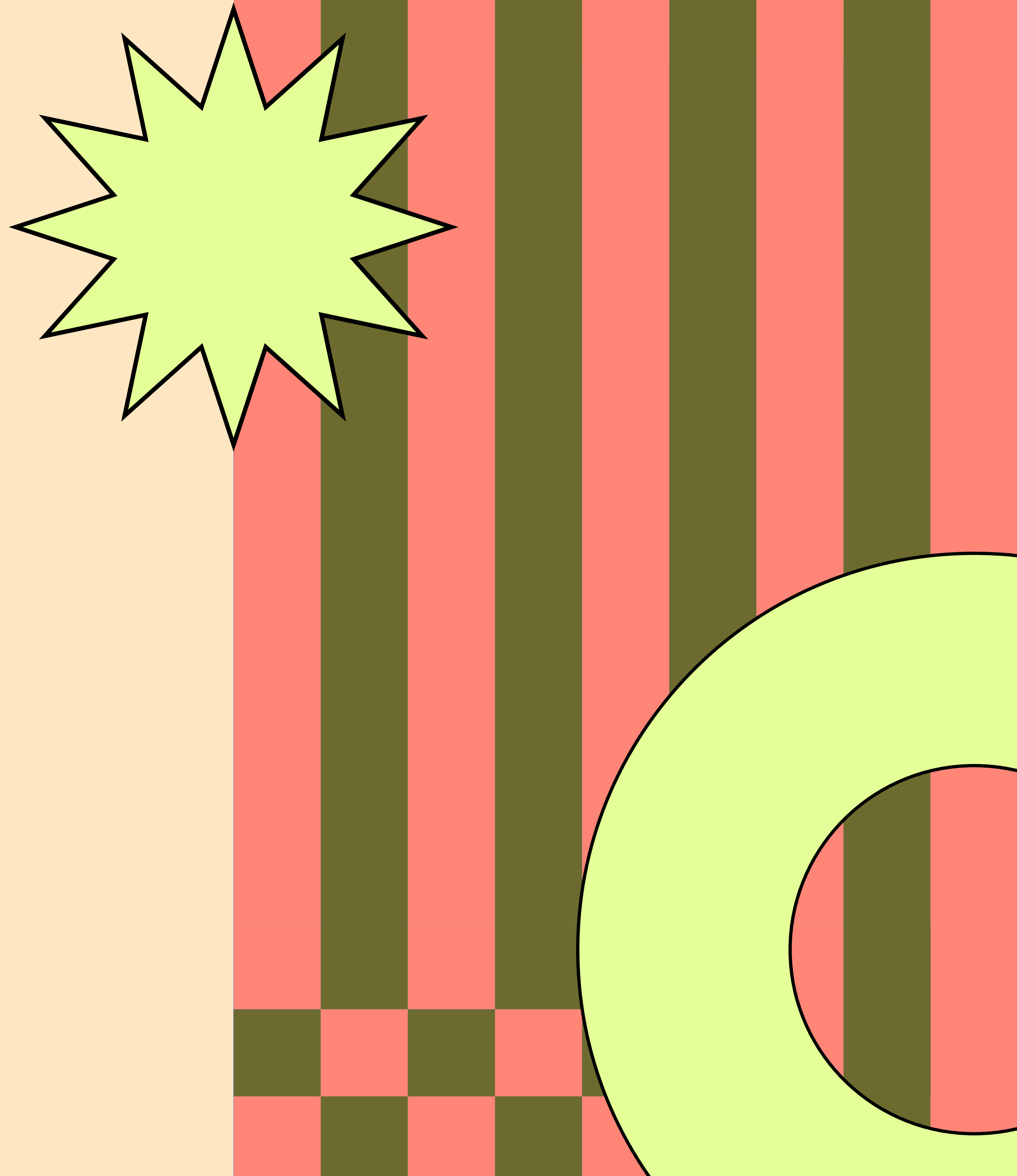
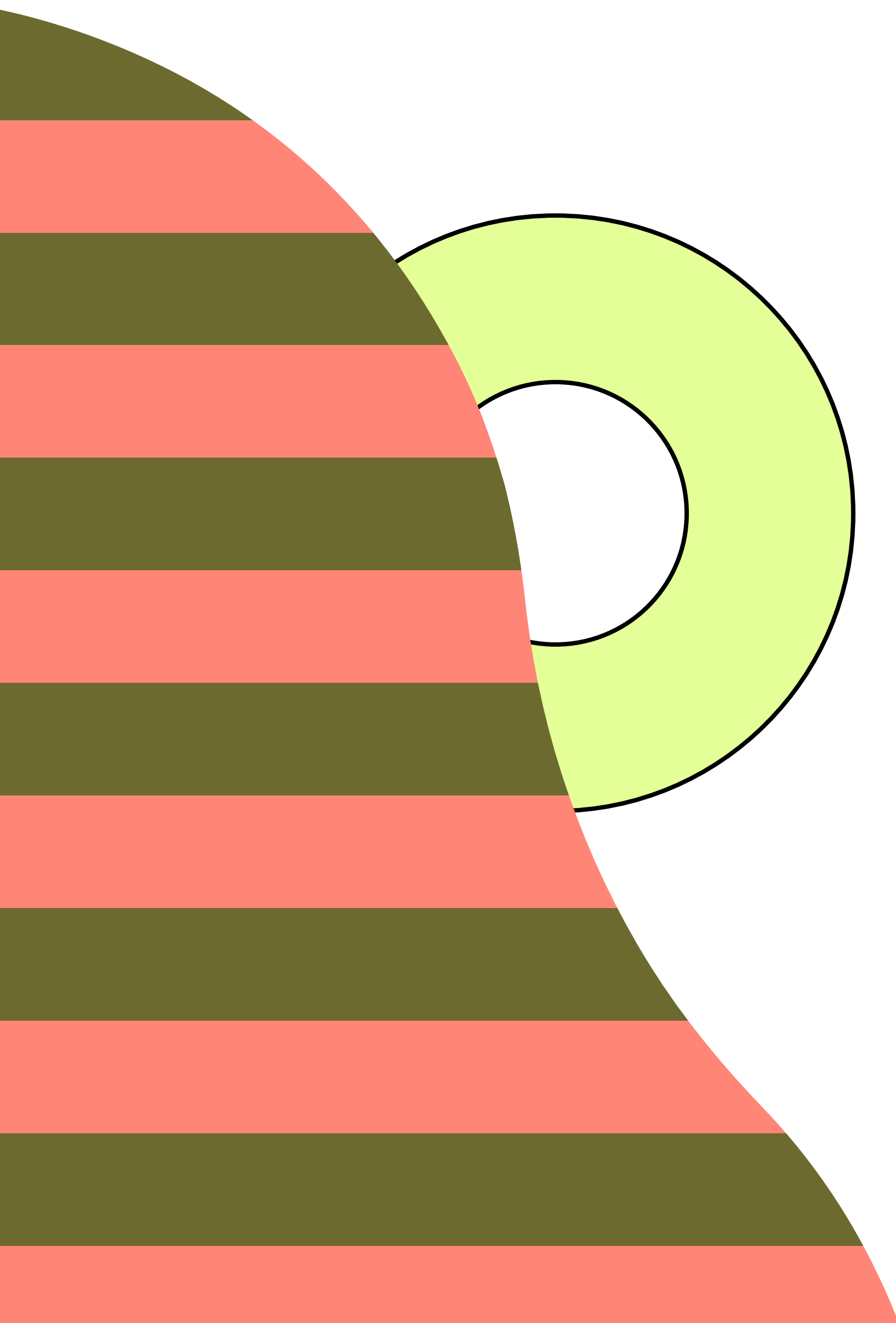


Figma

Anticipation, experimentation and AI: Design trend report





Digital design teams are caught in a pivotal moment. We know generative AI capabilities like text, video and image generation and more are going to change work in big ways—but we don't know how or when.

Venture capital firm Sequoia Capital—early investors in companies like Apple, AirBnB and Zoom—shared at their 2024 Sequoia AI Ascent event that they expect 40–50 more companies to hit \$1B in revenue from AI*.

While many of those are likely startups that have yet to break through, AI looms large over all of our futures. It has the potential to shake up all design and development jobs even more than the smartphone did.

However, Sequoia Partner Sonya Huang recently acknowledged* that while many had predicted a “Cambrian explosion” of AI apps in 2024, an evolutionary burst of wildly successful applications hadn't materialized during the first half of the year.

*Sequoia AI Ascent, March 2024

At times like these, we look to a principle first stated by Roy Amara, who led The Institute for the Future:



“We tend to overestimate the effect of a technology in the short run and underestimate the effect in the long run.”

This phenomenon has been observed so many times it's called **Amara's Law**.

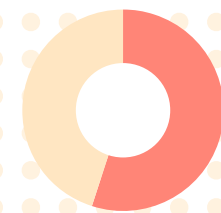


But while the wildest AI promises may be far off, AI is already impacting how designers, engineers and others design and build sites, apps and digital products. And similarly to what we experienced during the rise of mobile, many brands will be capitalizing on the application layer of AI.

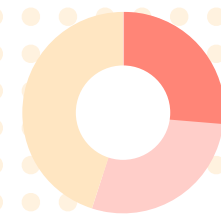
What's an application layer? It's what most of us see and interact with every day. For mobile, think Uber. For AI, it may be AI music generator Suno, video generator Sora, or chatbot Claude. Distinct from the infrastructure layer—the servers, the cloud and the network—the application layer is where user experience matters most, where an interface and a product succeeds or fails based on its design.

That makes AI a huge opportunity for product development teams. We decided it was time to read the room—and share what we found. We polled nearly 1,800 designers and developers from four continents about the impact generative AI is having on their work in 2024—and what they're planning on doing about it in the future.

The results show that while generative AI is still in its early experimental days, a lot of things are starting to take shape.



For instance, just over half reported they're already building AI products and features.



On the flip side, fewer than half of those people say they've actually launched something.

This eBook provides a snapshot of how your peers in digital product design and development are already using generative AI and their views on what comes next.

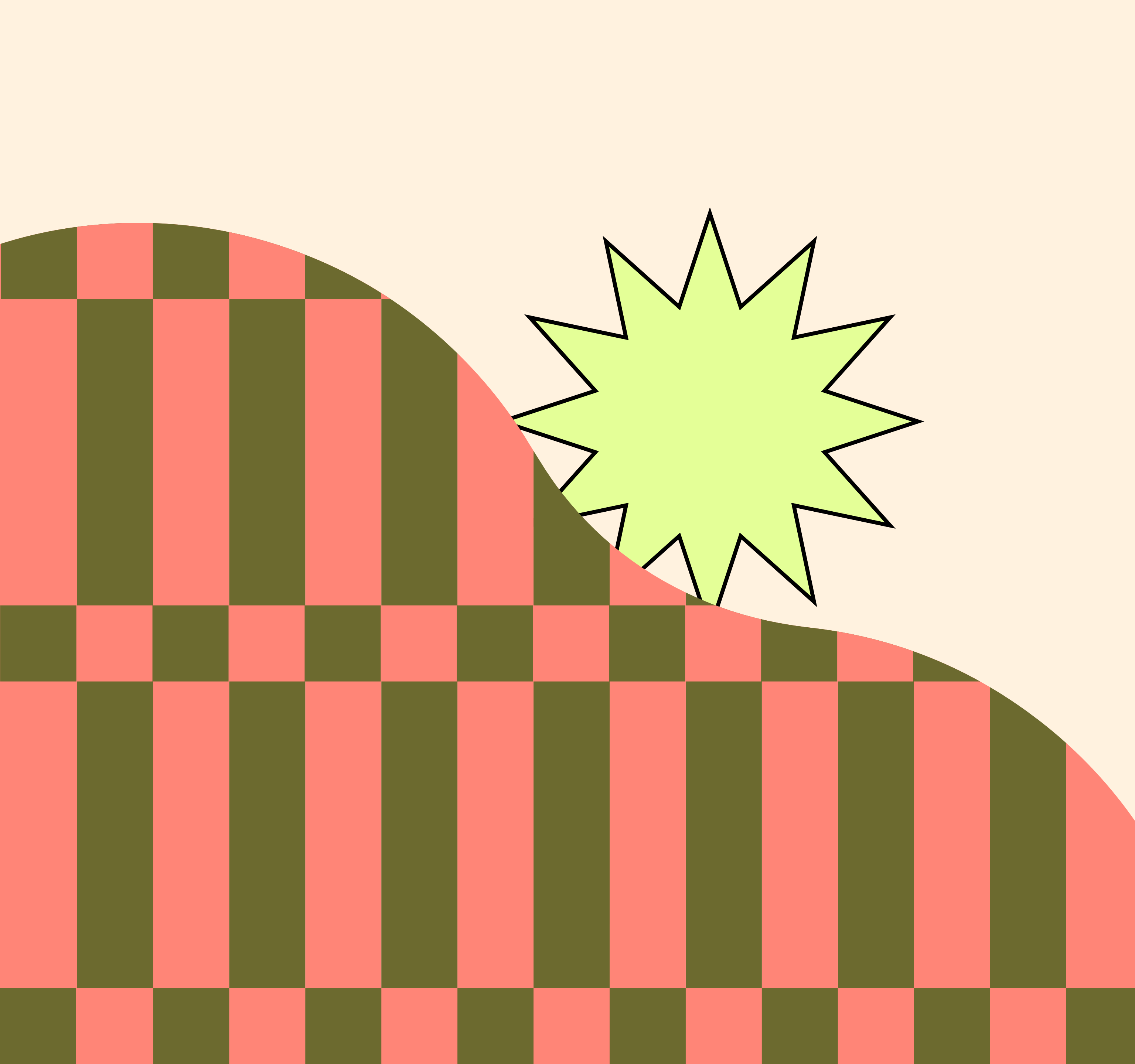
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New products, features, services you're shipping →

Future: How to move forward in a rapidly changing AI environment →





Present: Who's using generative AI— and for what?

How much impact AI has on your day-to-day depends on your role.

Some of the more obvious early use cases for designers exist in the research phase. As Janelle Estes, lecturer at Bentley University and former Chief Insights Officer at UserTesting, **points out**, “[Writing research plans] using generative AI is a total time saver. I’m looking at this plan and I’m saying ‘okay, this is 70-80% there.’”



However, taking things to the next level is another matter. **“I feel like I have a little bit of a safety net because I know what good is. For those who don’t have the experience or the education to know what good is, how do you know the 30% that’s missing?”** says Janelle.

In many roles, AI is already shifting certain tasks—and the skills needed to perform them.

For instance, if AI can help someone generate an image quickly, people can use it to generate mood boards, pictures of interfaces, and many other visual options. At that point, skill and expertise shifts from generating images to choosing the right one.

And while AI can help everyone move more quickly, it's what designers, developers, user researchers and others do with the output that matters most. For instance, designers will need persuasion skills to explain to stakeholders why one image is right, or how the interface works best to solve them.

What hasn't changed? Product design teams must be able to understand user and stakeholder motivations and concerns. In other words, they're the keepers of context.

“If the way tasks are carried out changes, then the ability to persuade or contextualize may become more integral,” says Andrew Hogan, Figma’s Head Of Insights. “It will be more important to tell a story and to have the confidence and expertise to choose the right option. How will you work together with people to reach the best outcome?”



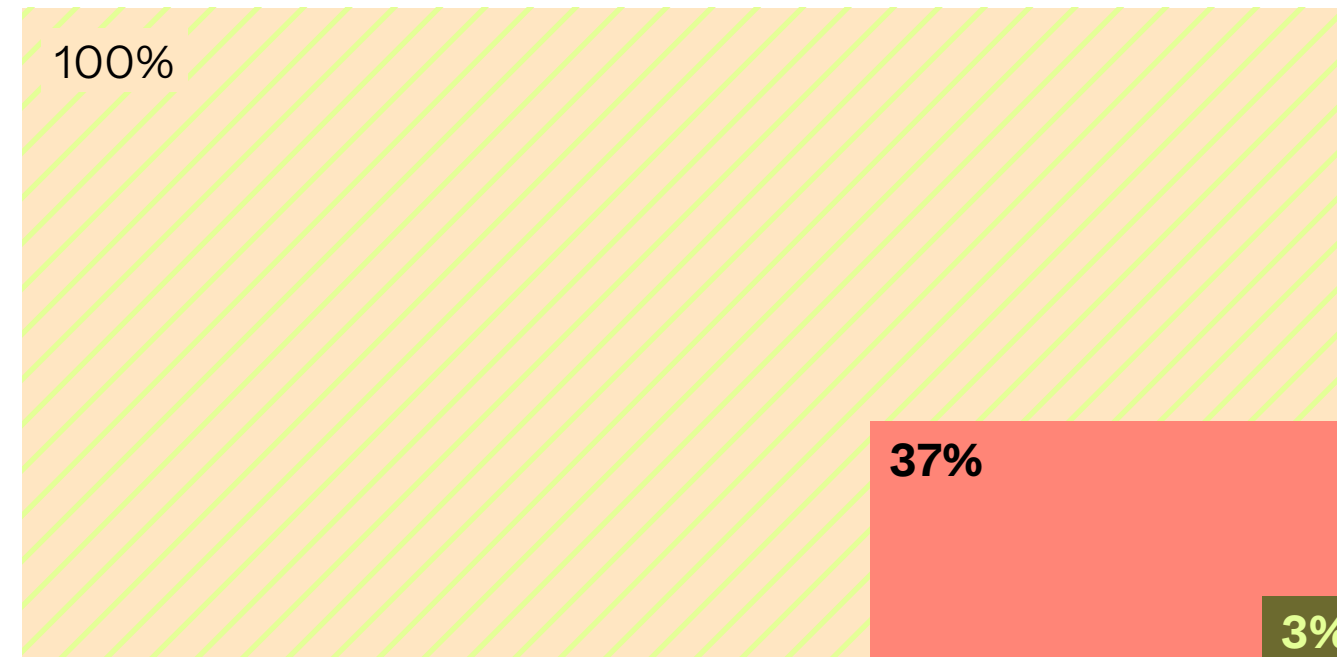
The first wave of AI impacts

Our research shows that designers have been slower than developers to feel the transformational effects of AI: engineers are more than twice as likely to say AI has “significantly impacted” or been “transformational” to their work.

Developers are much more likely to report gains in productivity and efficiency, and are more likely to say AI output is reliable. When asked about changes to their work, developers describe using large language models (LLMs) to assist with the tasks they perform on a daily basis.

But it’s not just about tools. Developers are 60% more likely to say AI has had a transformational impact on the products they work on.

However, it’s executives who are feeling the impact and urgency the most. *See table - AI impact by seniority, page 7.*



Only 3% of executives say AI has had no impact on their work, and 37% say it’s already created “significant” to “transformational” impact over the past 12 months.

This likely reflects a drive to figure out how AI can make their companies more efficient, profitable and competitive—by lowering prices or enhancing products and services. Given executive excitement around AI, we expect to see pressure from the top to incorporate it into work, but it’s the individual contributors where most of the actual use cases will take shape.

That gives designers, engineers and other individual contributors a lot of power and a big opportunity right now.

At her “**Emerging thoughts on AI assisted design**” Config 2023 presentation, Great Question Principal Researcher Jane Davis shared her vision:



“[It’s] our responsibility and our opportunity, as practitioners, to set the terms on which these tools are used in our work. This is a moment of technological change and a tremendous shift in paradigm.

Collectively, we can make those decisions and we can set those terms but we have to do it collectively, and we have to do it thoughtfully.”

AI impact by seniority

AI pressure is trickling from the top down.

Over the past 12 months, to what degree has AI affected your work?			
	Seniority		
	IC	Middle Management	Executives
Transformational Impact	2.3%	3.7%	10.2%
Significant Impact	12.4%	18.2%	26.5%
Moderate Impact	32.7%	33.2%	28.6%
Slight Impact	43.5%	41.2%	32.7%
No Impact	9.2%	3.7%	2.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Executives are seeing the highest percentage of transformational or significant impact from AI.

AI impact by industry

The impact of AI is remarkably similar across sectors, although the Financial Services and Insurance industries are taking a more cautious approach than others.

Industry	Average
Advertising and/or Marketing	42.9
Healthcare	42.8
Media	42.3
Technology and/or Technology Services	42.1
Telecommunication Services	41.7
Retail	41.3
Professional and Business Services	40.1
Financial Services and/or Insurance	34.9
Energy, utilities and/or waste management services	32.6
Total (9)	41.1

Scores represent a weighted average based on the overall degree of impact of AI on respondent's work lives.



The era of DIY AI

The phenomenon of DIY AI is probably the most immediately transformational opportunity for the majority of people.

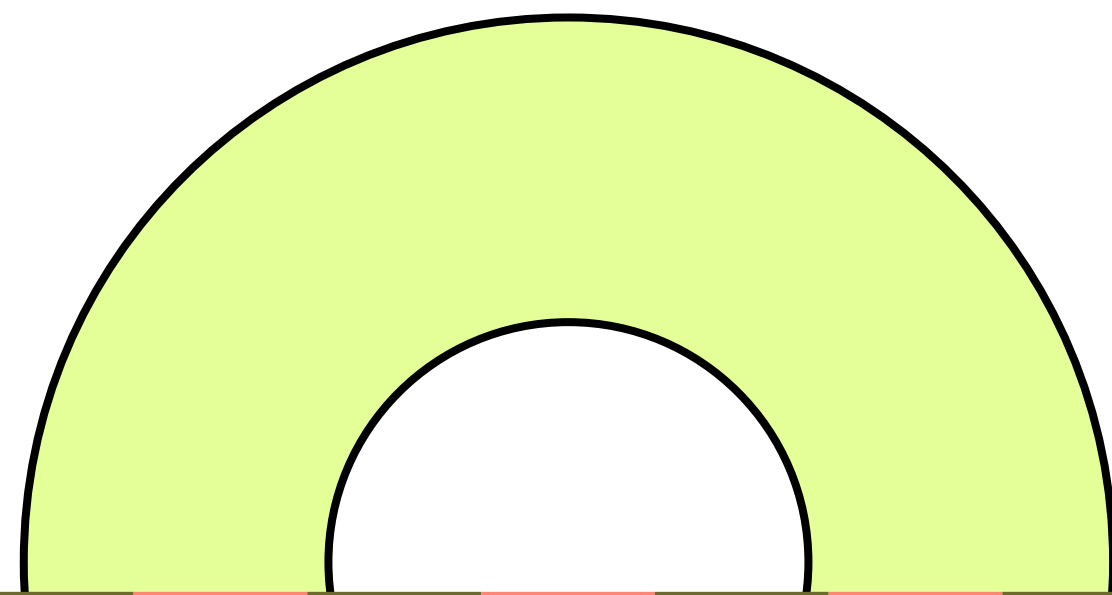
Generative AI has given people with no coding or automation skills the ability to create their own automation aids.

One example comes from an agency designer we spoke to who was frustrated at having to manually track content changes or reflow copy that might not have been amended. They used ChatGPT to build a simple tool for checking for changes in a source document—saving time and likely reducing errors.

There are likely millions of examples of DIY AI projects that enterprising designers and engineers have used to make their work more efficient. But it still often requires research, work, and trial and error to find the right tools, plugins, and even prompts for the machine.

Of course, at many companies these initiatives are company sponsored. Indeed, at Figma we've integrated **AI into FigJam** to help product teams run more effective meetings, visualize ideas and plans, suggest best practices, and, of course, automate tedious tasks, so they can focus on the bigger picture.

“When we talk about lowering the floor and raising the ceiling, we mean creating products that are more accessible but also expand what’s possible,” says Noah Levin, VP of Design at Figma.



Collaboration and caution

AI has the opportunity to improve how people across organizations work together, but we're not seeing the impact yet.

According to our survey, AI has changed individual workflows more than it has impacted collaboration. **Only 6% of respondents said AI has had a significant or transformative effect on collaboration while three times as many said it had changed their individual work.**

It makes sense that most organizations haven't quite figured out how to use AI across teams. Updating multiplayer workflows requires more thought, input, and expectation-setting. Investing that time means there's a higher cost to switching tools, so organizations should take some time to select and test the tools before rolling them out.

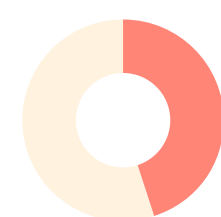


The coming wave of AI: New products, features, and services

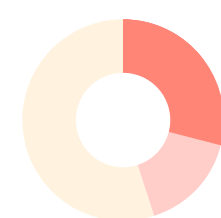
FOMO drives early efforts

Our survey showed companies are moving quickly to ship AI features and products, and a huge number—**89%**—say AI will impact their products and services in the next 12 months.

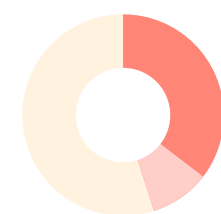
But there's a lot going on under that surface:



Less than half of people working on an AI feature have actually launched anything



Only one-third of respondents who report shipping an AI feature are proud of it



72% of respondents that shipped AI features said AI plays only a minor or non-essential role

So if AI is doing so many things and if it's so important, why have so many early efforts fallen short?

There's a lot of evidence the tech—and not user needs—is driving AI features and product development right now. At the moment, in some organizations, it's innovation in search of a problem.

But that's not unusual, according to Mia Blume, Founder of Designing with AI. "Technology always comes first," she said in [our recent webinar](#). "It shows us new opportunities. We're still figuring out what's possible—there's this experimentation and play and discovery and research that's happening, which means that the product and design part is coming a little bit later. Yes, design will come. That doesn't mean design shouldn't be happening now."



AI feature fatigue

Companies itching to be first to release AI features—or just trying to keep up—will find themselves in a market flooded by AI products and features.

Figma researchers conducted dozens of interviews with the end users of AI products and noticed growing indifference to the idea of ‘yet another AI feature’—a phenomenon we’re calling ‘AI feature fatigue.’

Why? Even the people building the products and features are skeptical about the need. More than 20% say solving user problems is a top challenge.

A few important obstacles stand in their way:

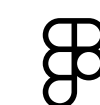
- **Unpredictable AI models and outputs:** Generative AI sometimes spits out incorrect or even nonsensical conclusions, making it a bad fit in cases where you can’t verify the results.
- **Data privacy and security concerns:** Putting data into public AI models can lead to unpredictable outcomes. But even using private AI closed to a company introduces security risks, like sharing data with an employee with the wrong level of access.
- **Coherently blending new features:** In many cases companies are adding generative AI to existing products, sites, and apps. Should AI be a new tab, a magic wand, or some kind of beta feature on the side? Feature bloat and information architecture complexity are always a risk, but even more so with a brand-new capability.
- **Design of interactions:** Generative AI encourages building different interaction designs, like chatbots, but these experiences can be confusing. Users may not even know where to start or what questions to ask. You also need to help users understand what to expect and indicate how confident you are that your tool is giving them the right answer. Next up: agents that complete tasks on behalf of users, but also need oversight and guidance.

Not every AI product enhancement will need to show up as a specifically labeled feature. By leading with customer needs—and not tech for its own sake—companies can add huge value to their offerings.

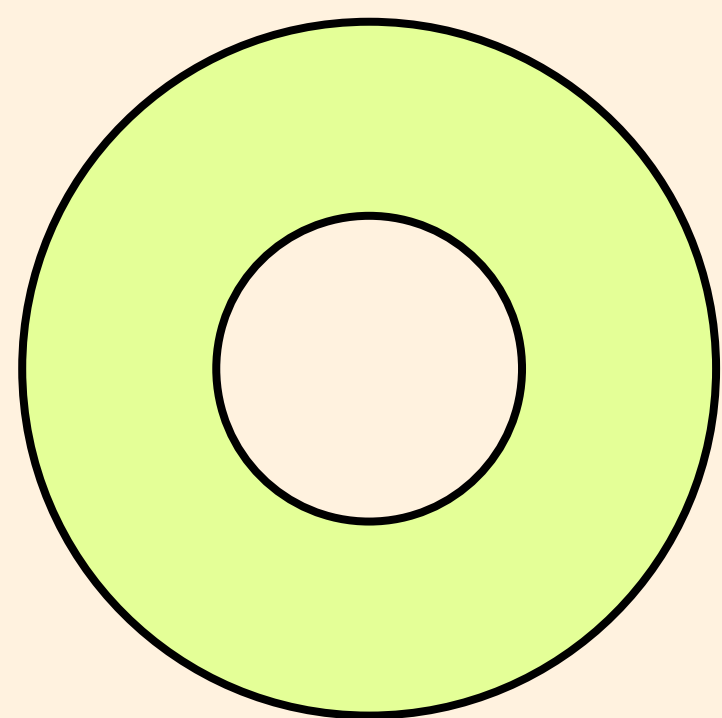
Zan Gilani, a product manager for Duolingo, shared how they’re thinking about AI in our [recent livestream](#):

He said it’s already helping them to scale existing processes, like content creation. He said that if you’re creating a set of ads for different target audiences, you can use AI to replicate that to a much more granular degree.

Maybe there’s a huge sense of building urgency among companies racing to bring AI-enriched products and services to market. But that users aren’t interested in AI for its own sake and aren’t designed well. That delta will come to a head in 2024 and 2025.



It's go time: How to pivot with AI



Move forward in a rapidly changing AI environment

Right now generative AI is being hyped like a brand new technology. This isn't uncommon, when many new technologies launch it's not clear how they'll be used. It's often the job of design to connect technology to user needs.

At some point books were a new technology. Printing presses. Computers. Phones. All became more useful over time.

When the iPhone launched there was no app store—but just a few years later there were millions of apps that addressed many needs, and smartphones became the centerpiece of our lives.

Andrew Hogan, Figma's Head Of Insights:

"In 2010 Apple trademarked the term 'there's an app for that.' By 2014 there were so many apps that competition created even more pressure to be great. Just having an app wasn't enough. Companies that made design a priority had an advantage because mobile created so many opportunities but also made everything more complex."

That's a lesson for people who create products and services: you're never selling technology. You're selling solutions and opportunities that come from understanding human needs.



Take AI into your own hands now: Quick steps to get started

AI tools and use cases are proliferating wildly, and it's easy to get stuck in analysis paralysis. Here are some ways to cut through the indecision and overhaul your work, the way you collaborate, and even your company's products.

Your work

Trying your hand at AI now will help you understand its potential and limitations, preparing you for a future in which it will surely play a bigger and bigger role. And you might just find it injects new life into your work.

- Investigate which tools you're allowed to use at work.
- Ask your coworkers what they're using AI for.
- Start small. Figure out how to apply AI to a new type of task—whether it's something you do a lot of (say, resizing images), or a non-routine task like brainstorming.
- Find a prompt guide that suits your problem. Chances are, someone has already invested a lot of time in using AI to solve a problem like yours.

Your team's work

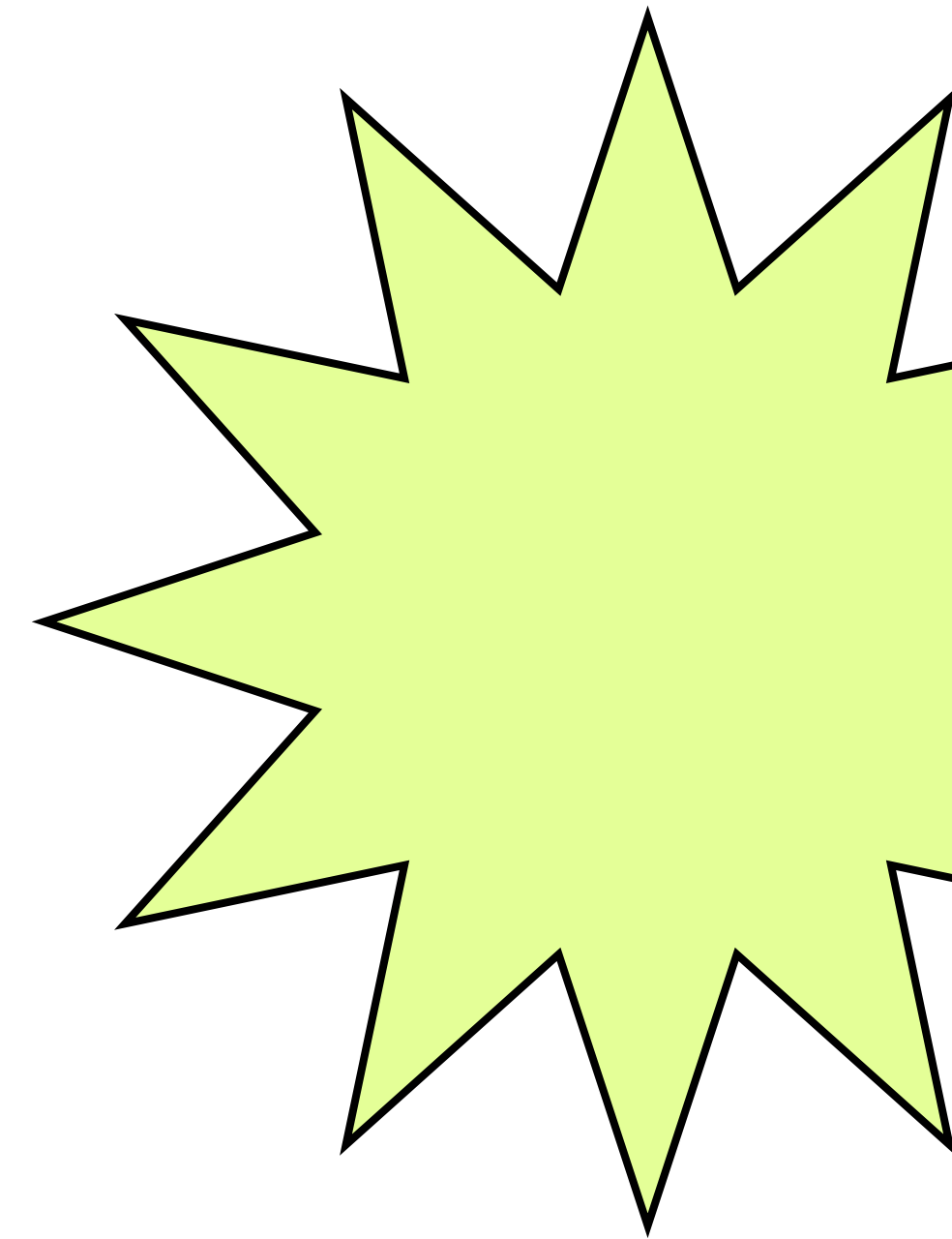
Strong collaboration takes a lot of work—sometimes it's meeting notes, or brainstorming aids, or just another pair of hands. Using AI to level up your collaboration could bring new ideas and tighter alignment to your teams.

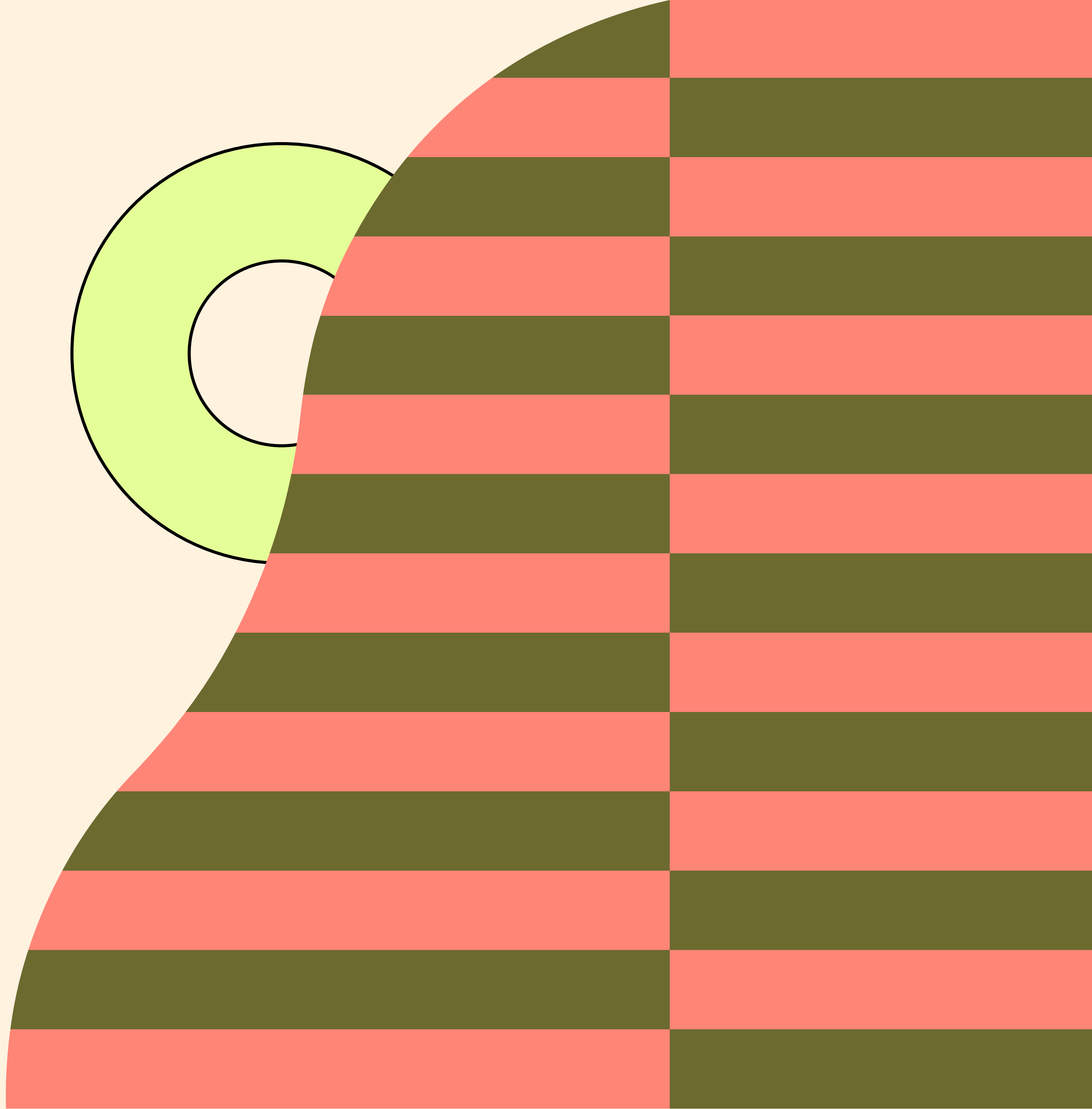
- Meetings are ripe for disruption. Try using AI to generate brainstorming and meeting templates for visual collaboration. “When you're starting with a blank file, it can feel really intimidating to know how to fill it up,” says Jenny Wen, a Figma Design Manager. “You might not feel like you're a visual thinker because, you know, not everybody's a designer, and that's totally OK.”
- Incorporate play to take the pressure off learning AI together. Ask how you can capture playfulness in a group setting. For example, one of the first things people do with AI is ask silly questions like ‘how do you make a ham sandwich?’ These kinds of games and party tricks help people imagine using the tools for real work. So, think about how can you play a game and experiment in a group setting. Can you all ‘make ham sandwiches’ and compare the answers? Or plan an offsite together with AI.
- Create an AI summary of a whiteboard session to sift through comments and create team alignment before outlining next steps.
- Use AI as another collaborator who can inspire new ways of thinking. “Good AI collaborators don't present output as a final verdict; they share suggestions in a tangible, low-fidelity form, so that you're invited to build upon them,” says Aosheng Ran, a Product Designer at Figma.

Your company's products and services

AI is mostly a wide green field of possibility, and the best ideas likely won't come from the top—they'll come from designers, engineers, customer service teams, and others on the front lines. This one's mostly on you but here are a couple of territories to consider:

- What customer challenges do you see frequently?
- What business opportunities have you declined to pursue in the past because scaling was too costly or inefficient?





The AI wave has just begun

AI is bringing changes and some growing pains. But we think it represents an opportunity, especially for people who lean in early and with intention.

Just like the iPhone came along and created a huge set of exciting new opportunities for designers and engineers, AI will create a whole new set of challenges and opportunities.

And that means designers and engineers should expect to be very, very busy in the coming years.

While AI increasingly takes on the more mundane tasks in design and coding, designers and engineers will be needed for higher-level thinking to create the next wave of work- and life-changing innovations.



This report was compiled in May 2024.
Find out about new AI features launched by Figma at Config, in June 2024.

Read more about Figma's approach to AI

[Learn more →](#)

