LETTER FROM THE DESIGNERS

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Partnering with The Communications Network on this issue of *Change Agent* provided an opportunity to think more broadly about how the ideas within could reach a wider audience and engage them more deeply. Determined to make the most of it, we challenged ourselves to push the boundaries of what a traditional print publication could be.

When ComNet contacted Constructive to design this issue of *Change Agent*, we were flattered. We're a proud member of The Network, and have always appreciated its ability to elevate important issues at the intersection of strategic communications and social change. The opportunity to help push thinking and connect readers to fresh ideas naturally appealed to us. That we'd be given creative license to redesign this issue from the ground up was icing on the cake. And Sean's promise to become our favorite client this year–well, that was the cherry on top. We were thrilled!

All good design exercises begin with discovery, and our engagement with The Communications Network was no different. We discussed collaboration–the idea that even with both of our teams on this project being relatively small, a partnership built on trust would enable us to accomplish some truly ambitious goals. We discussed the concept behind *Change Agent*–that it's not just a series of one-off publications, but something that's continuously evolving. We discussed the content–deep, inspiring narratives from leaders across the field, stories that deserve telling and retelling so that audiences can apply vital insights to their own work. And of course, we discussed design–the notion that to be effective, design must be purposeful, and it must meet the audience where they are, in whatever medium they prefer.

We can't emphasize the importance of this last point enough. According to a 2016 study by Nielsen, we now spend almost 11 hours consuming digital media each day. Tablets, smartphones, and PCs are leading this growth, with 63 percent, 60 percent, and 21 percent year over year increases, respectively. So, from the very start of this engagement, it was obvious to all that for *Change Agent* to be effective as a design solution, it had to honor its name and change significantly–from a printed artifact into a transmedia experience that reaches audiences wherever they are.

Putting printed matter online isn't a particularly innovative idea. The problem thus far with conventional approaches is that they aren't actually designed for the web. This may seem obvious, but we believe the implications are deeper than many may realize. Most attempts to bring print content online involve posting a low-resolution PDF on a website or embedding it in an online PDF vie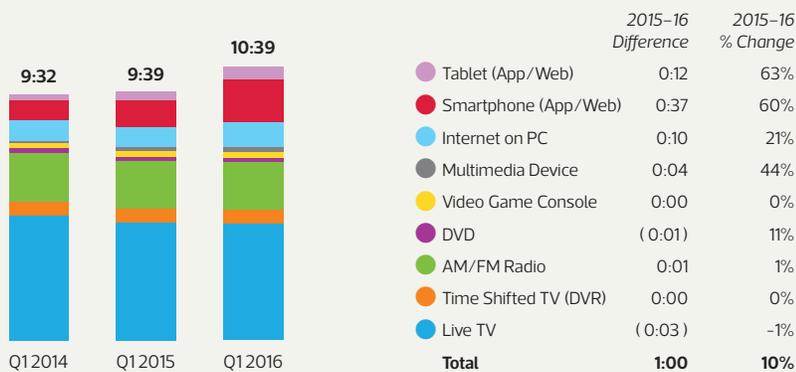wer such as Issuu. While we may all get a kick out of those skeuomorphic page transitions, there are serious limitations to this approach–namely, that the content is still locked up in a PDF! That translates to a poor content consumption experience for smartphones and tablets, with none of the baseline benefits that web-native content offers, such as navigability, shareability, and analytics.

Thus, our dilemma with this issue of *Change Agent*. Authors have contributed some amazing, engaging content, and it would have been a crime to lock it up in a PDF where no one would find it. The content deserved to be appealing, interactive, and accessible; it deserved to be print-native and web-native at the same time; it deserved to be transmedia.

The key to creating an effective transmedia experience is to start with a medium-agnostic, content-centric process. Rather than design a print product and attempt to retrofit that to the web, or vice versa, we focused on developing a core design system, with type, colors, content structures, design patterns, and media that could be adapted to both print and web.
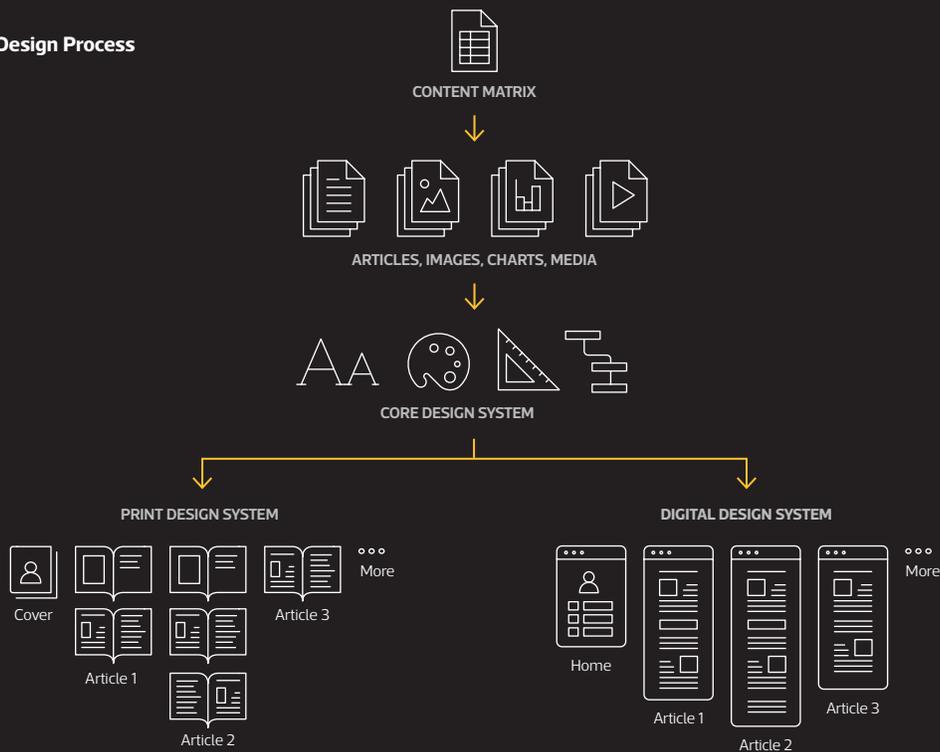
Of course, it's impossible to create a universal design system that is 100 percent consistent across print and web; each medium offers different strengths and weaknesses. Print is suited to long-form narratives, with high-resolution media, sophisticated layouts, and a linear, horizontal reading experience. Digital products, on the other hand, lend themselves toward shorter, more digestible narratives; with interactive media, simpler layouts for smaller screens, and a non-linear, vertical reading experience. So creating a cohesive design across media

55

FIGURE 1

Average Time Spent per Adult per Day Based on the Total U.S. Population

	2015–16 Difference	2015–16 % Change
Tablet (App/Web)	0:12	63%
Smartphone (App/Web)	0:37	60%
Internet on PC	0:10	21%
Multimedia Device	0:04	44%
Video Game Console	0:00	0%
DVD	(0:01)	11%
AM/FM Radio	0:01	1%
Time Shifted TV (DVR)	0:00	0%
Live TV	(0:03)	-1%
Total	**1:00**	**10%**

Q1 2014 — 9:32 Q1 2015 — 9:39 Q1 2016 — 10:39

Source: Nielsen Q1 2016 Audience Report, accessed 11.07.16 online at http://www.adweek.com/news/television/us-adults-consume-entire-hour-more-media-day-they-did-just-last-year-172218

FIGURE 2
Transmedia Design Process

CONTENT MATRIX

ARTICLES, IMAGES, CHARTS, MEDIA

CORE DESIGN SYSTEM

PRINT DESIGN SYSTEM

Cover
Article 1
Article 2
Article 3
More

DIGITAL DESIGN SYSTEM

Home
Article 1
Article 2
Article 3
More

required first drawing on our collective experience across each medium to establish the common core of a design system, and then leveraging each medium-specific design system to its fullest expression.

In print, production is relatively straight-forward; you design a document, print it, and distribute it. Online, production is far more challenging. To shorten our runway, we relied on Exposition™, a long-form publishing platform Constructive debuted for the Lab at ComNet 16. Designed to support immersive, responsive experiences for long-form narratives, we felt this Word-Press-based platform is ideally suited to meet the challenge of making *Change Agent* more accessible, engaging, and extensible.

To streamline the content development and population with our design systems,

we devised a custom workflow integrating commonly available applications and processes. Google Apps served as our transmedia content management system: we used Spreadsheets to organize everything in a content matrix, Docs to collaborate and update various articles in real time, and Drive to share all of the media files. We then integrated these with the print application (Adobe InDesign) and web technology (Exposition / WordPress) in such a way that we could flow and reflow content dynamically–ensuring that print and web always matched. By integrating the content deployment in this way, our team could focus its attention where it added the greatest value: applying the core design to the print and digital systems and maximizing their native strengths.

Thinking back on Sean's promise that ComNet would become our best client this year, it occurs to us that picking a favorite client is a bit like picking a favorite child: even if bias exists (and we're not saying it does), the official position is that each one is special and cared for equally. So while we cannot explicitly say ComNet is our best client, we can say that we have never had a better partner. Throughout this process, they've been as open, engaged, accessible, communicative, and supportive as anyone we've ever had the pleasure to work with.

They have displayed uncommon courage and trust in allowing us to stretch our legs and run as far and fast as we could. That, in turn, translated to a better outcome. We hope you agree that it shows.

If there's one takeaway from this project, it would be this: communications challenges are hard, and effecting systemic change is harder still. In the face of enormous challenges, social change succeeds not through force of will, or timing...it succeeds because it is, by definition, social. It harnesses our diverse strengths and strengthens our bonds to create dynamic teams that enhance our collective impact. Regardless of whether we're out to change the world, or just our own little parcel of it, we'd all do well to start with better communication and collaboration amongst ourselves.

Constructive *is a NY-based brand strategy and experience design firm that helps leading social change and education organizations achieve greater impact in the world. Learn more online at Constructive.co and on Twitter @constr_ctive.*