One_Knight_In_Product-E101-Wolfgang_Bremer

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SPEAKERS

Jason Knight, Wolfgang Bremer

Jason Knight 00:00

Hello, and welcome to the show. I'm your host, Jason Knight. And on each episode of this podcast, I'll be having inspiring conversations with passionate product people. If you want that in your stocking, you're in luck! Unlike Santa Claus, I don't care if you've been naughty or nice; either way, you can head over to OneKnightInProduct.com, where you can sign up to the mailing list, subscribe on your favourite podcast app or follow the podcast on social media, and guarantee you never miss another episode again. On tonight's episode, we talk about that sometimes tricky relationship between Design and Product. But, more than that, Design and the whole business. We ruminate on why it's important for designers to be involved up front, why they shouldn't just be seen as pixel pushers, reflect on the characteristics of good design teams and take a peek into the darker side of design and think how we might avoid manipulating people with dastardly design choices. For all this and much more please join us on One Knight in Product. So, my guest tonight is Wolfgang Bremer. Wolfgang's a dual citizen of two of my favourite countries, Germany and Canada and is also a design leader and speaker who likes building products and simplifying people's lives. Wolfgang says that when he's working at a large company, he's always yearning to work at a startup. And when he's working at a startup, he's always yearning to work at a large company, proving that he's truly embraced the ambiguity of product design. Speaking of hugging, he wants us all to embrace design and designers. But sorry, Wolfgang not whilst we're socially distancing. How are you doing tonight, Wolfgang?

Wolfgang Bremer 01:28

Hey, I'm great. Thanks for having me.

Jason Knight 01:30

Good. It's good to have you here. I'll give you a hug once we've got this all over and done with

Wolfgang Bremer 01:34

Yes, please. Looking forward to that.

Jason Knight 01:37

All right, so first things first, you're the head of design for Elli. So what does Elli do and what are you designing?

Wolfgang Bremer 01:43

Yeah, if I only knew. No, so, yeah. Right. Head of Design for Elli. That's right. So Elli is basically a brand of the Volkswagen Group. And we're working on everything that has to do with let's say, electricity, EVs, and all these kinds of things. Everything, but the car side of things. So we are not building the EVS. But we are, you know, for example, building the wall boxes to charge the EVS, we offering green electricity and all these kinds of sites.

Jason Knight 02:08

Right, so you're designing like, the charging stations and the software on the charging stations, or the actual physical charging stations themselves, or

Wolfgang Bremer 02:16

Yeah, so for example, for private people, if they have a... usually when they buy a car it comes, in Germany at least, you know, with a charging cable in your trunk, and then you go can go to a power plug, you plug it in and a charges very slowly. So the other thing you can do is you can buy one of our wall boxes, install them in your parking garage at home, you drive home, and you just plug it in and charges for the high capacity. So it's faster. So that is one of the things we're working on the ID charger, we call it and yeah, so basically, we are designing the experience, how to charge, the charger itself, the hardware, you know, the thing you actually mount to the wall. And then on the app side or software side of things, the app and the tools you can use on your phone and your computer to actually, you know, see what's going on with the charging situation. And this is mainly on the B2C side of things. And then we have also products for the B2B side of things, for example, fleet charging, and all these kinds of things.

Jason Knight 03:07

So it sounds like quite a big portfolio there. What would you say roughly the percentages is of, like, physical product work that you're doing versus digital, then? Because a lot of people would sit there thinking that the physical stuff sounds harder, because you've got to build stuff. And you got to build physical prototypes, rather than just making a bunch of software and updating over the wire, like, how does that balance out for you?

Wolfgang Bremer 03:26

So for me, hardware is new, and it's very exciting. And it's also terrifying, obviously, at the same time, because you cannot just, you know, push out a patch afterwards to you know, change the hub, you know, you already.. you have to design it, you have to think of all the use cases early on. And then you of course have to manufacture it and there's a whole, like, like the lead time is very long. And then once it's at the wall, you can only you know, maybe patch by a software, certain things here and there and roll out new features. But done is done. And definition of done here is very strict. So yeah.

Jason Knight 03:59

And Elli's part of the Volkswagen Group. So it's a pretty big, well known German company with long history. And I've worked myself for a pretty big, well known German company with a long history before as well. And I think it's fair to say that when you're working for any large enterprise, and especially one that has some of the manufacturing background that Volkswagen have, for example, that they can maybe unfairly (or maybe fairly) be considered very legacy and slow moving, right? It's not necessarily... or they're not necessarily seen as the most agile, iterative, fast moving lean organisations. And is that something that affects you at Elli? Or, like, Are you kind of working very closely with all the Volkswagen big company processes? Or are you kind of able to be a bit more of a Lean Startup, kind of within the bigger company?

Wolfgang Bremer 04:48

I would consider us a quite Lean Startup, I would say. So we have a lot of freedom in like the things really what we really want to work on the tools we use the ways of working and you know, how we name our teams. What what meaningful stuff we have, you know, it's like very startup ish, you know. And after spending the last, I don't know, 3, 4, 5 years, at a bigger company, so work at Elli now, although it is part of a bigger corporation, it feels very, very startup ish and very agile, you know, things are moving all the time, you know, priorities change from time to time. So it's very lean, and very, like, Hey, we are all sitting in the same boat, we are trying to, you know, really electrify your life in a good way, you know, so let's get this done. And let's let's work on it together, which I really appreciate.

Jason Knight 05:29

And how many jokes about 1.21 gigawatts do you get through in an average week?

Wolfgang Bremer 05:33

A lot, especially on Slack. The GIFs coming in are crazy.

Jason Knight 05:38

But that's interesting, because you're talking about big companies and small companies and we

But that's interesting, because you're talking about big companies and small companies and we said in the intro and obviously before this, that you tend to kind of get a bit bored of big companies and bounce to small companies, and then you get a bit bored of the small companies and bounce back to big companies. And we've both worked for both, you know, I spent a long time working for corporates before moving into startup world. And obviously, have my own opinions about the good and bad of that. But in your eyes, what are some of the key attractions, and I guess, disadvantages of working for each?

Wolfgang Bremer 06:08

That's a really good question. And you're absolutely right. For me, it's usually like, when I work at a start up, I guess I start seeking more the stability side of things, you know that it's not changing so frequently, and that you're more have of like, I guess, like also the funding and all these kinds of things. And when I work at a big corporation, I feel things are moving so slowly, you know why there are so many decision makers, so many levels of things, why do you need so many approvals? You know, why am I not allowed to use certain cloud software because of GDPR, and all these kinds of things? So it's very, it feels very restrictive. You know, and then I usually... I guess, humans, or me, myself, and maybe humans, in general, tend to see bad things more than they see the good things, which is unfortunate. And I'm trying to change myself for the better. But these things usually come up, you know, and then it's like, "oh, okay, I have to find another decision maker, and I have to fight politcs"... all these things. And then it for me is like, "Okay, time to go for something more lean again". But Elli so far, it has been a really good experience, because there's a lot of really smart and engaged people there who really want to help and we all have the feeling we're sitting in the same boat, we're trying to ship the right things together. And there is only at times that to feel once you tiptoe over the Volkswagen world, let's say that sometimes, you know, there's a bit more of a hierarchy there, let's say, processes to be followed. But so far, it's... I'm fine.

Jason Knight 07:34

So far, so good. But I'm sure anyone from Elli will be listening, or anyone from Volkswagen, they'll be listening intently to make sure that you're fine. And you're not getting itchy feet already. But you're the Head of Design there. So we've already talked a little bit about some of the things you're designing. But that type of design feels like you probably a few different types of designers as well, like people that have got maybe specialties in certain types of design around the physical stuff or around the digital stuff. So how big is the team there? And how have you laid that out to succeed in that?

Wolfgang Bremer 08:04

Yeah, so I only joined Elli a couple of months ago. So, so far, for me, it's very much looking and understanding what has been done in the past, you know, what is working? What is not working? Or what can be improved? And how do we improve it? You know, so far, the team is about 10 ish people, I would say the company itself is a bunch of like, several hundred people. So we are currently looking into how we properly staff the design team to accommodate for all the needs we actually have. And starting for me is like trying to identify the actual needs, you know, again, coming back to what is working, what is not working? And where do you want to go strategically versus tactically in the short term. Yeah. So it's a mix of UX designers and

looking into hiring researchers, software design, as well as hardware design. And then of course, we also work with external providers on certain things, we don't feel we should bring that kind of capacity in house.

Jason Knight 08:57

Makes a lot of sense. But I'm assuming that there's also some form of product team there that is separate to the design team, or at least I hope so because you know, I've got a stand up from a product peeps. So is that then a fairly harmonious relationship that you have with the product team that are actually defining the product goals? Or do you have to kind of butt heads with them every now and then?

Wolfgang Bremer 09:15

No. So far, it's surprisingly, a good cooperation, like the way we work together. Yeah. So we have a product team and R&D team and the design team. We of course, have a marketing team as well. And then we figure out how we work together. So far, there's no head butting, which is really good. It's really working together on this rocket ship towards the stars. Yeah, we, for example, when you talk about OKRs, and these kinds of things, we're all involved there. We draft things together, we communicate together. It's not like "oh, let's see what Product came up with versus product things oh, let's see what design came up with again", you know, like them and us kind of thing. It's really like we are working on these things together.

Jason Knight 09:52

Yeah, no, that sounds like a really healthy dynamic because I think it's fair to say that there's not always that healthy dynamic between product teams and design teams depending on, obviously, the culture of the company and the types of people in the teams and the expectations. And I guess as long as you've got that alignment, then that can be really helpful to make sure that you can kind of go together hand in hand, and maybe even have those hugs that were talked about earlier. But you obviously also have a bit too much time on your hands, as well. And I know that you've got kids. So I don't understand how that works, like having that time on your hands. But you're also doing some consulting on the side. What sort of companies are you consulting with when you're doing that consulting? And what sort of stuff? Are you helping those companies with?

Wolfgang Bremer 10:30

So mainly I'm doing consulting when I'm not employed somewhere, and I'm not actually having a full time job.

Jason Knight 10:36

So you're not consulting now then?

Wolfgang Bremer 10:38

Yeah, for now, it's like, in the sense of, you know, if a friend of mine comes up and has an idea, or some thoughts, "hey, can you help me I'll do something, how do I set these things up?" You know, it's like really, like having a, let's say, one, two hour conversation on the phone with a friend basically, you know, just helping them over a bump or getting them started with something. And usually, if I do it full time, then it's yeah, how to integrate, for example, design into a company, how to find designers for a startup, you know, how to make sure that design and product actually works together hand in hand, like these kinds of things.

Jason Knight 11:09

So let's wiggle one of those teeth, then; when it comes to hiring designers for the startup, like, what are some of your hiring principles? Obviously, it's gonna be very different, depending on the type of company but like, are there any kind of general principles that you would sit there and say, right, if you're looking for designers, this is the type of person that you need to be doing that design? Well, is there something that genericises like that?

Wolfgang Bremer 11:31

I would say that's really hard. And as you said, it probably depends on the company you're hiring for, especially on the size of the company, you know, it's only like, really, really small company, I say to people need to design now you obviously need somebody who has, who is good in lots of the areas: UX, UI, research, even maybe ...

Jason Knight 11:48

It's all the same, though, right? It's all the same...

Wolfgang Bremer 11:50

It's all the same! Yes, yes. No, absolutely not. And it's very different. And then the part of the problem also is especially for then more mature companies, I would say is to actually realise what design means not just, you know, like, yeah, lip service, but actually, doing something meaningful and being involved early, with research to understand and figure out is the thing we ... I usually try to phrase it in a way, you know... let's put it differently. I often hear from designers who say, product, people don't come to me with the solution come to me with a problem, you know, yeah, because we, as designers, we try to figure out is the solution, people come up with actually the right solution? And then usually, I say the most important question designers can ask is why, why, why, why, why, and like many times the road to figure out, where does this request actually come from? And is the solution which is being proposed the actual solution to the actual problem? Or is something else going wrong, which has not been discovered yet? And for any company, this is crucial, because we want to discover the things first, that you can solve the proper problem and not just, you know, put in the feature, let's say, and figure out afterwards like, well, that didn't really help. Because, yes, it's not solving the

actual problem. But coming back to the question of what kind of designer to I would say, small companies should probably hire a designer who is good in many areas. And the bigger the company, the more dedicated or the more specialised a designer should probably be given, hopefully, that you have enough headcount to staff the team properly to actually have people representing all the groups who then can work together from research, over user experience design over visual design, brand design, and all these kinds of things.

Jason Knight 13:32

And would you consider yourself personally one of those all rounders that can kind of do everything well, or you... Would you consider yourself somewhat of a specialist in certain areas, or you prefer certain areas?

Wolfgang Bremer 13:43

I would say I'm more focused on the UX side of things, I can do UI and I can do research. But I my no means of, like, really professional there. So working for a really small startup, I would be good in all these disciplines. If you would now hire me, or try to hire me as a researcher, dedicated researcher for a company, I would be terrible.

Jason Knight 14:06

Well, we won't put that on the CV. But I've worked with designers in the past who have maybe struggled a little bit with iterative development, in the sense that they kind of.. it almost feels like a waterfall. Like, you know, let's assume that they get up front of that waterfall as much as possible. Like a waterfall where they want to kind of understand the problem, fine, or design something, but they want to design like this perfect flower of a design and then bring that to you. And then the developers are then going to go and develop exactly that and if there's a single pixel wrong, or if the colour's not quite right or whatever, then they start to get very angry and start throwing accusations around. Now, I'm sure not all designers are like that. But is that something that you've encountered either yourself when you were younger and less experienced or maybe with members of your team that have kind of had that attitude and and maybe found a way to get them through that or over that?

Wolfgang Bremer 14:59

Yes, actually, I did. I mean, there's actually a lot to unpack there, I would say. So for example, when you say somebody, you know, like the sense of, it almost sounds like, you know, designer create something, hands it over to engineering, engineering creates something, designers totally not involved, you know, and then afterwards get something handed back, like, oh, but that's not what I designed kind of thing. You know, so for me, obviously, directly, the problem was like, well, we should not work in silos, you know, like, we are one team again, you know, we should work together. And we should, you know... when I was still a hands on designer, some of the best designs I did was actually directly working with a product manager, and an engineer, like, directly together, you know, and it starts off with, "Hey, I was thinking about this kind of feature, can you talk about it?" then we all go into a meeting room. Well, Zoom meeting

nowadays, were the whiteboard or virtual whiteboard. And we hash out an idea, you know, it's like, "Hey, this is the current screen, for example, we have this and this and this, you know, and I have the feeling that users can't find or can't perform whatever kind of action", you know. And then the three of us you figure something out together, for example, design would propose well if I can't find it should make a more prominent, really oversimplified example, it's, you know, and then person says, "Yeah, that makes sense, would also, you know, align nicely with whatever other feature" an engineer says, "yeah, it should be doable, because of whatever software stack we use should be an easy thing to fix", you know, and then we all agree on who is taking what next steps, we do it and we check in, like, the next day or two days after whatever makes sense to see. Okay, is it actually, as we imagined, is it possible to see as an easy fix can be can we do it? And when can we do it? How does it look? And does it work? You know, which to me, is the ideal way of working, working together, you know, over creating a design, throwing it over the fence and hoping one comes back over the fence is what the actual design, which to me, that usually does not work.

Jason Knight 16:44

Yeah, so I guess the argument there, which is a really good one is, yeah, let's actually work cross functionally, right, and not work in silos, as you say. And I think that, for my perspective, that feels like a very big company thing to do. Like we were talking earlier about politics and processes and stuff like that. And I guess the argument there isn't necessarily that designers can't work in that kind of iterative way, but just that they're not always able to, because of the corporate hierarchy that they sit in. So the the fix here isn't that we need to get attitude training for the designers, it's that we need to, we actually need to look at how we fix that culture more than anything else. But do you think that all designers can work like that? Like if you've been a designer in a big company, as you have obviously in the past, like, have you seen designers that actually, in many ways prefer that more throwing it over the fence, throwing it back? Or do you think that all designers inherently want to work in a collaborative fashion?

Wolfgang Bremer 17:43

No, probably not. Because I think it's like, how we as humans are and there are some humans who are more extroverts and introverts, and I, myself, I consider myself more of an introvert, you know, so I do not always enjoy talking to people and walking with them in person and all these kinds of things. And having ...

Jason Knight 17:59

Depends on the person, right?

Wolfgang Bremer 18:00

Yeah, exactly. depends on the person and on the other people in the room. Right? And then, of course, if there are people who are, let's say, more introvert, or more shy, or feeling less confident, or not confident enough, you know, they would rather, I would assume, throw

something over the fence or send something by email, versus talking to somebody in person actually trying to work, like directly together. I could also see it being related, somehow, between being more junior versus being more senior, you know, because things like this come with experience, you know, you throw something over the fence, you're surprised something else comes back. Do it a couple of times, you probably learned that like, "Oh, that doesn't cut it. So let's try a different approach".

Jason Knight 18:41

That makes a lot of sense. But aside from that kind of developer relationship, then I know that also keen to make sure that design is really, really integrated with the rest of the business and kind of a strategic partner and an enabler, rather than just kind of a service that gets designs dropped on them at the last minute and asked to push pixels around. So what are some of the ways that you've managed to change that dynamic if you've seen it? Like, how can you change that attitude within a company to make sure that the design team are really there from the beginning, not just from that development cycle? But like, from the kind of problem definition and business goals? Like, is that something you've had a lot of success with in the past?

Wolfgang Bremer 19:20

Yes, and no, to be totally honest. I think it always depends on the company and the team you work in and with. On the culture, you know, because often, well, maybe often is the wrong word, but it depends on the maturity of the company. You come in and the question basically, is what is design understood as, you know? And to many people is like, design is making things pretty, which is one facet of what design is, you know, but there's so much more, talking about motion design, user research, user experience, design, interaction design, you know, from user journeys over service design, there's so many things you know. But people tend to focus on what is visible or visual, you know, you open your phone you have an app is like, "Ah, looks like crap" or "looks fantastic", no matter how it works, you know, but the first impression is always the visual impression. Same with a car, you know, if a car looks great or not, doesn't matter, if it runs 1000 kilometres versus 500, you know, which is really would be really great. If you know, it has a really low maintenance cost or something, you look at it, and you decide if you like the car or not. And that's, I guess, just part of human nature. You know, that's who we are and how we are. And I think it's really important to bring that knowledge into the company as part of being a designer, you know, it's like, what is design? What does it mean? How do designers work? How do we as a design function, work as part of the product development process, you know. And product development process, there's already a product in there, there's development in there, it's just design is kind of missing, you know, even in the term. You know, so for us, it's like, very important to be advocates for design. And I guess, also to find friends in the other areas of the company, who also think about the experience, you know, not just like... and I'm oversimplifying it, I'm an engineer, I sit down, I code something that, you know, but I, as an engineer, can also, of course, think about the experience of that sense of, you know, how fast will this piece of code I'm creating here? You know, latency, how fast will this load? What impact will this have on the experience? Yeah, and there's actually a funny GIF, which Tobi Lütke, the CEO of Shopify shares, from time to time on Twitter, where we see, you know, real life and latency, somebody, you know, opens the door, and actually, the door doesn't open.. it opens five seconds later and because of the open bad, the person runs into the door, you know, right in front... trying to drive a car, and pressing the accelerator and the

pedals but they only react five seconds later, and the steering wheel obviously doesn't work, you know? So just imagine having this kind of experience in real life. This is obviously part of the experience. And if you have the right people in the different departments supporting you, and also, basically on your behalf, or together standing up for like, "Hey, you should really involve design, and how can you get some research on this?" early on, it saves us all so much time and trouble, you know, and frustration, because I've been in many, in many projects, where people are at the end, just so super frustrated, because somebody decides, somewhere based on, unfortunately, a gut feeling, are we gonna do these priorities and something something I know the user, you can just trust me, whatever, you know, this is like, yeah, yes, great. But no, that's not how it works most of the times, you know. And then people just follow this person and create something. But in the end, it doesn't work out. And then people get frustrated, you know. And one of the big problems I always see, not only in startups, but also big corporations is when people leave a company, because then it's too late, you know, you lost the person, because they got too frustrated, or maybe not paid enough, or it was not good enough to compensate for the frustration. You need to make sure that the people are being involved, and that we work on something together, which makes sense. And I think bringing design in early on is also a remedy for this kind of problem.

Jason Knight 23:04

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And obviously, there's a lot of parallels with how you might see product management working in certain organisations as well. I think that some of the frustrations that you call out, especially around gut feeling, and "I know the customer" type conversations which, in my opinion, maybe workout one time in every 10 or something like that, or two times in every 10. I think any success that you get there is almost certainly going to be an... almost like an educated accident, right? It's not necessarily going to be based on the actual decision that was made, you kind of just make it work as you go. But one of the things that I was curious about, and I know that you've worked in a bunch of different companies, large and small... if we're considering having that kind of advocate for design, and that advocate, I guess all the way up through to the executive level within the company. Like, I know, some companies have like a Chief Experience Officer these days if they're really serious about it, but I'm sure that that's the minority of companies. Do you feel that it's important for the design team to report through a certain C suite member, like to get that credibility and buy in? Or is that something you just have to tackle from the ground floor and make the progress you can from within the team?

Wolfgang Bremer 24:18

That's a really good question. And to be honest, I think yes, design should have a way to communicate right to the top as as design. Because not only it gives design an equal voice to technology, like CTO and product CPO you know, but it also sends a message to the whole company, you know, it's like, "Hey, you're putting design on the same level, as you put product and engineering and often marketing CMO", you know. Just like we care about the experience. And we want to have somebody in charge driving these things and work together with all the other stakeholders on the same level. And I think this is very important. And of course, the ideal case, which, unfortunately, is not always the case for every company. But I think, I don't know, I

have like 20, whatever years experience in working in design, and I've seen so much change in the last 20 years. So I keep my fingers crossed the next, let's say, five years, that this will become more the norm in many more companies.

Jason Knight 25:21

Yeah, no, I think and also in a lot of companies, you don't even get a CPO at the moment. Yeah, the product team will go through either the CEO through a VP, okay, fine. Or maybe it'll go via the COO, or sometimes even the CTO or you get like a CTPO, and there's all these different variations. So just for the record then, if you can't have a CXO, who do you want to report to?

Wolfgang Bremer 25:42

I think it depends on the company. Because the

Jason Knight 25:44

That's a product manager's answer, come on!

Wolfgang Bremer 25:47

No, I think you want to report through a person who knows about the value of design. And it doesn't matter if that person is of CPO, a CTO, a CEO, a CMO in that sense, to me, it's like, as long as that person understands the value of design, and supports that... it's fine. As the first step for sure, you know, but if you are unlucky in your position, where you're like, oh, you know, for whatever politics, you got pushed into that area, now this guy or this woman has to, you know, also deal with design, you know, reporting through them, then, of course, that's not gonna work in the long term.

Jason Knight 26:25

Fair enough. You spoke a few times before this call about poor quality management, and we could probably do an entire podcast episode on that. So I'm not going to ask you to name and shame or go through any old triggering war stories. But if we assume that by calling out bad management that you want to be a good manager, what are some of the guiding principles that you like to operate under when it comes to managing either your team or kind of leading from the front and making sure that your team kind of with you for the journey and engaged and happy and being developed?

Wolfgang Bremer 26:56

That's a really good question. And as you say, I think it can feel a whole podcast, if not the whole book series. But for me, it's very important. So yes, I had a lot of terrible managers in my past, not all of them, but unfortunately the majority. And due to different reasons, you know,

like, sometimes it was too much micromanagement, not enough freedom to actually, you know, explore and, like, develop yourself. Very often not being there as a mentor kind of thing, you know, actually helped people to grow and understand more, and not only mean, on the design side, but really on everything, like on the business side, on the company side, on the domain side, how everything comes together, but more like a designer, y'know, she won't go to Design Conference to get better, whatever, you know. Like, like, this, this whole facet of things missing. Then even to small things, you know, like, in bigger corporations, when you ask for vacation days, you know, and they don't approve it for I don't know how many weeks and you're always send another email, it's like really small things, you know, but all these things kind of add up in the end, you know, and you feel like, why is that person not... you know, why is that person not responsive to me, I'm working for that person. But seems like a one way relationship, but it shouldn't be. It should be, I have a manager who believes in me, who sees my potential for growth in areas, which I might not see myself, and helps me to develop these areas and to make myself better, you know, because, if that person, if my mentor helps me to be better, I will be better for the company, it will be better for my team. And for me, I, I really try to be there for my team. I try to make sure that they know I'm always available, that they can come to me with anything, no matter how big or small. I will always be there to have their backs, no matter you know, somebody from other areas complains about something, they can always say, you know, "Take it up with Wolfgang", okay, no problem, you know, I will, I will fight any battle for them. And usually I say, you know, I'm there for opening doors when doors need to be opened, I'm closing doors, you know, when doors need to be closed too, to protect the people in the team. But yeah, for me, it's like, I want to give the people that freedom, they need to be their best selves, and I want to be there to support them and help them grow in all the different directions. And for me, as I mentioned earlier, that does not only mean the design area, but really like talking about domain knowledge and business knowledge and these kinds of things. Because I find designers often again, are treated like... designers are often seen as making things pretty, but all too often, the problem is bigger in the sense of that they don't have access to the information the business side of the company has, or maybe the product side of the company has, you know, to understand why are you building this new product now, you know, because, oh, because we as a business we make so much revenue and profit out of this meaning we as a company can grow and then the money we get in we can invest actually, all these kinds of things. But if design doesn't understand that, how they be supposed to be treated as equal to the company and then it creates an understanding of why we actually building the things why are we actually designing the things we are doing, you know, and for me, this is very important for designers to understand.

Jason Knight   29:58

Yeah, I completely agree and again a lot of that resonates with things I've considered with regards to product management as well, like sometimes product management don't get all the insight or the context that they need either. And obviously, they're supposed to be there to be the advocate for the user and the advocate for the business. So it's a really interesting dynamic. And I think something that everyone should try and do a little bit better. And I think that also what really chimed with me from that was this idea that you shouldn't feel like an imposition on a manager, like your manager is there for you, right? Like, if they're just treating you as a part time gig, because they're doing all this other important stuff, then they're missing a whole part of their responsibility. So I think we should all make sure that, you know, those of us are managers that we're doing our best to give full attention to the problems of the people that we manage. But you talked about being our best selves, I wanna talk about being our worst selves. Now, you called out before this call, dark design patterns as a particular bugbear.

And obviously, I'd expect a designer on the side of good to have that opinion. So like design patterns, where you can have a designer who basically tricks people into doing stuff that they want, via manipulating their cognitive biases, making buttons bigger or smaller, or making opt in or opt out of things the wrong way around, all that sort of stuff. Now, I'm assuming, again, a designer on the side of good like yourself doesn't really employ such patterns. But what's the worst offender in your eyes? Like a real... an example of a really bad design pattern that you would like to see anyone that's done that thrown into the sea?

Wolfgang Bremer 31:37

Yeah, so yes, Dark patterns are the worst. I mean, they are done for a reason, of course, right, usually, to meet certain KPIs, let's say which I can understand, like, technically, you know, but I mean, if your product is so bad, that you don't want them to leave and hide the delete my profile button, then maybe you should consider doing something about the product in the first place in that sense. And by that, I don't mean like for the product side, but like the product itself. Yeah, engineering, product design, you know, like, let's ship a great product. One of the things I stumbled over on the past was, and I have to think, if I can get it together again, was, I think it's the Amazon app on iOS. And there's this smile.amazon.com, where you can, when you buy stuff, Amazon donates a certain percentage to, like, an organisation of your choice. And I think on iOS, when you want to disable the marketing notifications, they basically tell you, "Well, if that's the case, then you cannot use smile.amazon.com anymore", which I find just really, really mean, in the sense of, you know, so you're forcing me to see notifications. So that part of the stuff I'm buying through smile.amazon.com, you can donate money to organisation of my choice. This connection, I don't even know how to get to this kind of connection, you know, so I thought this is really the wrong approach. If you as Amazon really want me to have notifications on my phone, maybe you sent me meaningful notifications.

Jason Knight 33:05

That's more difficult, though. Right?

Wolfgang Bremer 33:06

Yeah, it might be I don't know, because I think they can... there's a lot of smart things you can actually do. I mean, Amazon has all these recommendations, like the whole recommendation engine behind it, you know, it's like, based on the stuff, you look at the stuff you purchase, and then the other person purchases the same thing and offers you you know, these kind of things. I mean, this is part of the business model, right? Very big part. So now, I'm sure they can do this for notifications as well, if I put something in my shopping cart, and I leave it there for weeks and weeks, you know, give me notification at the price drops! You know, like, there's meaningful things there to be done, but just, you know, like, this is just too hard for me, especially like this, this kind of, there's no correlation between like, "Oh, if you turn this off, you're gonna not get any money to any organisation of your choice anym§ore". This is to me like, sorry, but this is, this is not okay.

Jason Knight 33:53

Do you think I did on purpose or by mistake?

Wolfgang Bremer 33:56

I want to hope by mistake, but I don't know.

Jason Knight 34:00

Yeah, never put anything past Amazon, right? And obviously, there's lots of pieces of advice you could give to a budding designer or someone who's been designing for a bit and wants to up their game. And a lot of that itself will be context dependent, depending on the company and stage and the type of design that the designer's doing. But if you had one general piece of advice for any designer out there today looking to progress in their career or up their game, what's one piece of advice you'd give that designer?

Wolfgang Bremer 34:27

Wow, that's really tough, because again, it depends on so many factors, like UX vs UI. I think... So if I would at least structure it between like, let's say more junior, mid level designer and mid level and senior designer, I would say for the junior designer. Don't focus too much on the design itself, but try to understand the business early on. And for the more senior designer, I would probably say something similar, just slightly different. Very often. 80% is good enough. This is something designers hear and hate to do. I know it but very often we as designers, we see things in much more detail, let's say, as a, as a customer as the user. But we need to realise that. So very often going to 100% for us is like going to 120% for somebody else. And very often... What is the return on investment on this thing? You know? So keep this in mind when designing something

Jason Knight 35:23

Makes a lot of sense. And I completely agree. And where can people catch up with you after this, if they want to find out more about design or maybe talk to you about your dual citizenship or anything else they want to come across and talk to you about?

Wolfgang Bremer 35:37

I guess the easiest would be to catch up with me on Twitter, twitter.com/wolfgangbremer, and then they can also contact me by my website, bremer.co.

Jason Knight 35:46

Excellent. I'll make sure to link that in. And hopefully you'll get some additional people to your 20,000 and counting Twitter followers,

W Wolfgang Bremer 35:53

That will be amazing!

Jason Knight 35:54

Not that I'm jealous in any way, shape, or form. Well, that's been fantastic. And obviously really interesting to talk about some of your experience and opinions about design and how we can make it a strategic partner and really get it to be a key part of the business. Hopefully, we can stay in touch. But yeah, as for now, thanks for taking the time.

W Wolfgang Bremer 36:11

Jason, thank you so much for having me. It was fabulous to talk to you.

Jason Knight 36:16

As always, thanks for listening. I hope you found the episode inspiring and insightful. If you do again, I can only encourage you to pop over to OneKnightInProduct.com, check out some of my other fantastic guests, sign up to the mailing list or subscribe on your favourite podcast app and make sure you share it your friends so you and they can never miss another episode again. I'll be back soon with another inspiring guest. But as for now, thanks and good night.