Looptail

Looptail

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Letter from the President

It's been an exciting few years at Grassland Ventures and if you are reading this, you're one of the first to dive into our inaugural edition of Looptail. This publication is our way of recognizing and celebrating many of our existing clients and partners. It's also a great way for us to connect with new contacts to share some of the emerging trends and opportunities we're seeing through our work. This is just the beginning of an annual tradition we hope you'll enjoy.

If you don't know much about us, let me introduce you to Grassland Ventures. We are a team of Canadian-based product analysts, project managers, product designers, software developers, and quality assurance specialists. We work directly with leading organizations to help them define, design, and build the digital product experiences that will help them grow their businesses.

We also operate the Grassland Ventures Startup Studio – partnering with entrepreneurs to build and scale new start-up technology companies, addressing validated market opportunities. As of August 2024, we've started work on our sixth project through the Grassland Ventures Startup Studio. We had a goal to hit 10 startups by 2030 so we're significantly ahead of pace — we're going to have to readjust our target!

For us, the next year is about embracing ambition and discovering new directions. Internally, we're pushing ourselves to innovate and embrace new ways of working. Whether it's our development and adoption of artificial intelligence and machine learning systems or our continued efforts to strengthen our product design-thinking capabilities, we know we can push the bar higher. We're committed more than ever to challenging our partners and clients to aim higher and achieve more in less time than they thought possible.

I hope you enjoy flipping through the content that we've pulled together. If anything you see piques your interest – reach out. I'd love to connect with you!

Kirk Morrison
President

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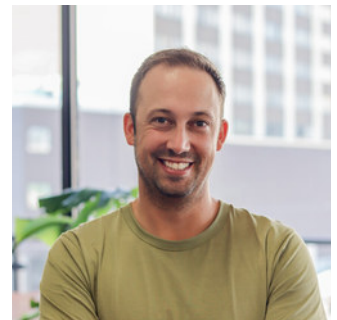**Role:** Product strategy; product design; business development
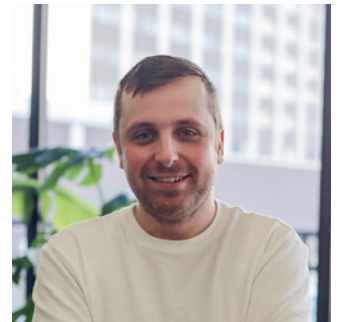
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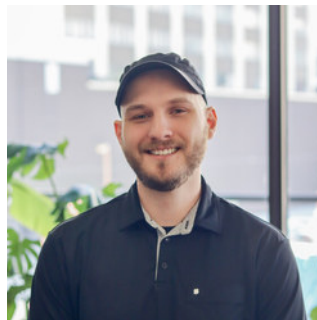
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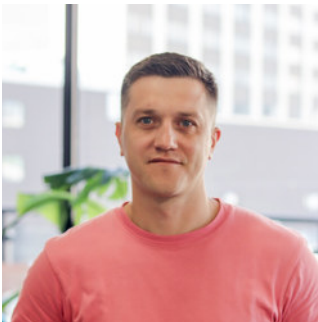
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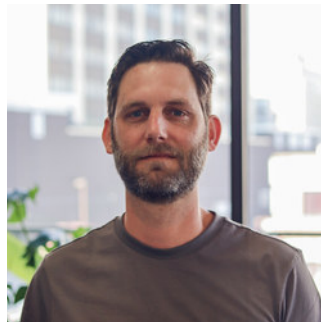
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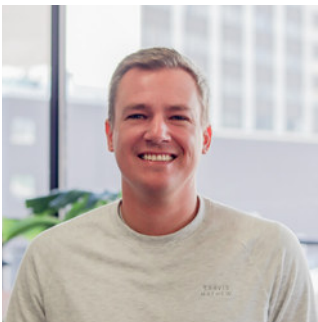
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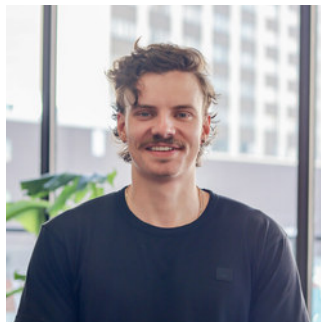
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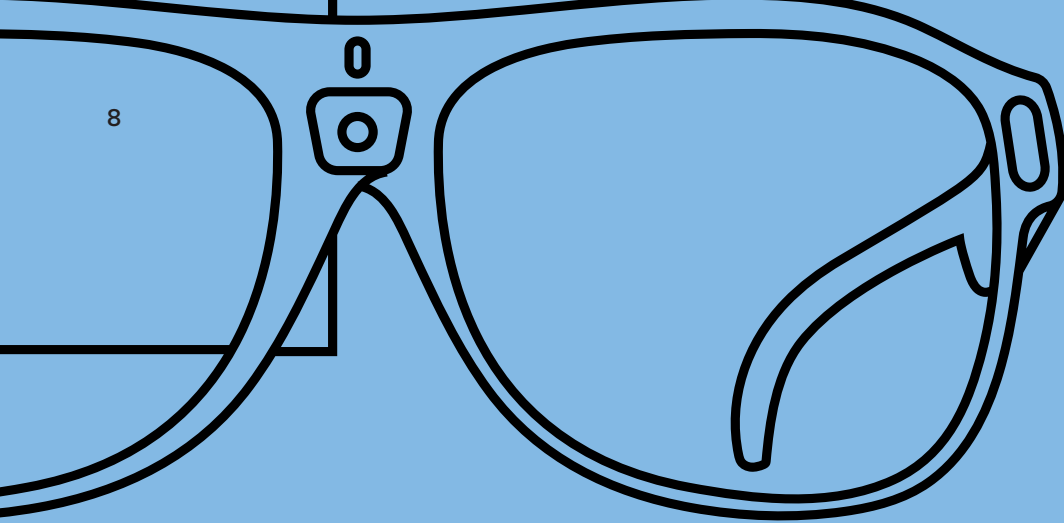
How Our Venture Studio Helps Startups Gain Traction
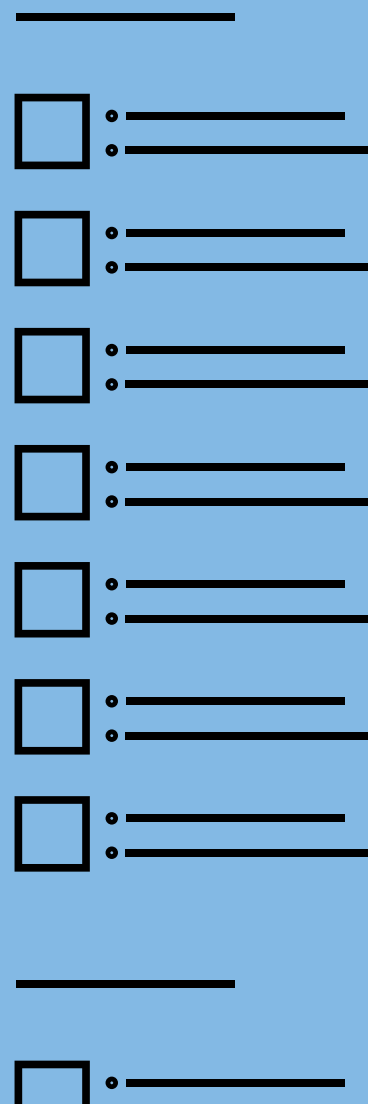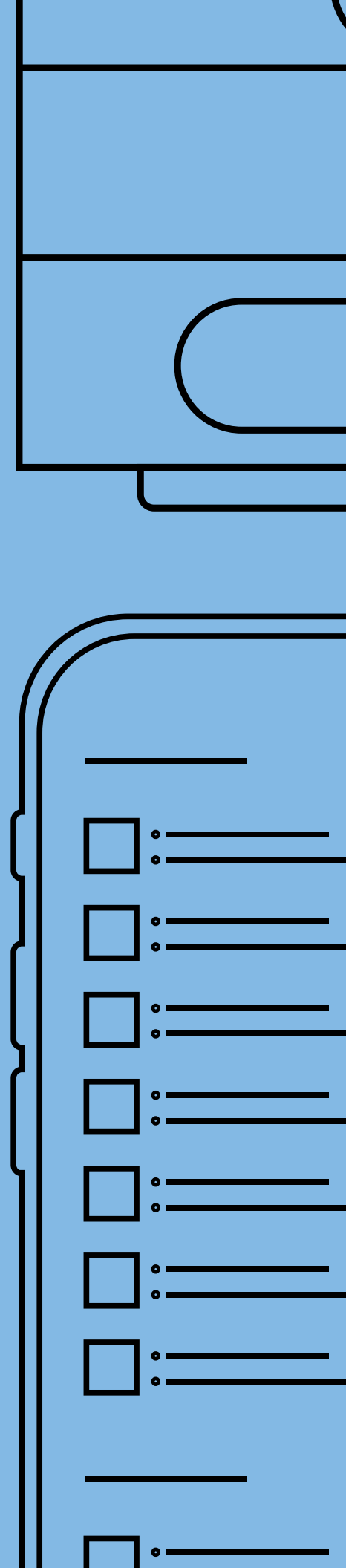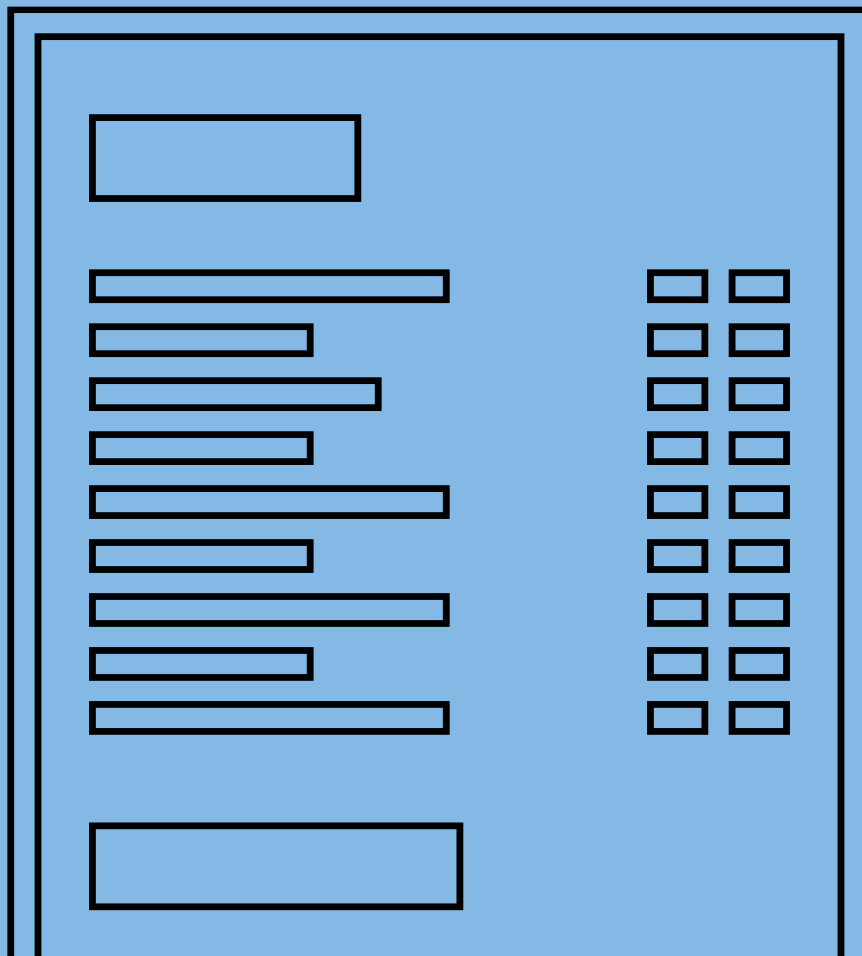
The Grassland Ventures Startup Studio is looking to surpass its goal of building 10 new startup ventures much earlier than expected.

By Kirk Morrison

Some of the most intriguing and innovative products to emerge from Grassland Ventures in recent years have been born in the dynamic environment of the Grassland Ventures Startup Studio (GVSS). Here, Grassland Ventures not only invests in startup projects alongside a network of impressive entrepreneurs and investors but also plays an active role in their development. By leveraging a skilled team to create cutting-edge technology and establish robust organizational structures, we aim to ensure that each startup is primed for market success. Working alongside the Grasslands team, venture collaborators contribute essential subject matter expertise, sales and operational capabilities, and crucial investment capital. This combination of resources creates a powerhouse of innovation and growth and drastically reduces the time it takes to bring a new product to market.

What is a Startup Studio?

The concept of a startup studio was pioneered by Bill Gross with the founding of Idealab in 1996. Based in Pasadena, California, Idealab was created as a hub for generating and developing new business ideas. It was designed to systematically launch and grow multiple startups by providing shared resources, mentorship, and capital, thereby reducing the risks associated with new ventures. Idealab's model proved successful and influential, leading to the proliferation of the startup studio concept around the world. Fast forward to today, you can find all sorts of different flavours of venture studios out there — including the one operated at Grassland Ventures which is focused on leveraging the teams' deep product design and software development capabilities to rapidly bring new products to market in partnership with an impressive group of collaborators.

How Do Projects Start?

There is no one single way that a project is identified but it's undeniable that the best projects are born from real life lived experience. Oftentimes, starting with a focused scope to solve a problem within a single business can be a great way to stumble upon even greater opportunities to serve an entire industry. Whether you're looking to build something one-of-a-kind built to serve your business or you believe you've stumbled upon the solution an entire industry is looking for, Grassland Ventures wants to help.

David and John Thomas were innovators at the time of federal cannabis legalization in Canada in 2018. Through their experience developing and operating dozens of dispensary locations, they identified a number of key opportunities not being addressed by existing technology providers attempting to service the burgeoning industry and sought out a partnership with Grassland Ventures to develop BudSense. Initially, BudSense was designed to scratch the itch that the Thomas brothers had in their own business but today BudSense is used by over 800 legal cannabis dispensary locations across North America.

David Thomas, CEO of BudSense

Grassland Ventures makes navigating development projects easy. From budgeting to design to build I've never felt more confident with a technical team. Their attention to detail and build quality is second to none.

"

The opportunity to build HomeTeam Live was recognized by Tanner Goetz and Logan Fraser after working for years in sales and marketing in the sports and entertainment industry. Grassland Ventures partnered with HomeTeam to develop a custom-built streaming platform that was brought to market in less than six months. Today, HomeTeam has been used by hundreds of thousands of viewers and employs a dedicated team working to further scale the technology to new markets globally.

The Grassland Ventures team often employs a design-forward approach to confirming alignment with potential partners around joint venture opportunities. By documenting key pain points and product ideas, our product team can very quickly develop digital prototypes that can be used to validate market potential with both customers and potential investment partners.

Why Does This Model Work?

Startups founded with the help of a venture studio are proven to be more successful due to the presence of established processes, experienced teams, and highly-efficient fractional resource allocation. These startups benefit from iterative development, which ensures better product-market fit, and they have easier access to funding and long-term support. The combination of these factors reduces risks and increases the likelihood of success compared to independent startups.

The Grassland Ventures Startup Studio offers several key benefits:

Access to Diverse Expertise

Access to a fully fractional team of experienced professionals, including product analysts, user interface designers, software developers, and quality assurance professionals. All of these roles are critically important to the development of modern technology products, but in the early days, you might only need a few months of effort from each group.

Speed to Market

Working with Grassland Ventures, entrepreneurs and corporate innovators can move faster from idea to execution. The teams' resources and structured processes help accelerate product development and market entry, reducing the time it takes to bring a product to market.

Lower Risk

The Grassland Ventures model often involves co-founding startups, meaning the venture studio shares the risk. This can provide a safety net for entrepreneurs, as Grassland Ventures is invested in the success of the company and aims to offer more hands-on support than traditional investors.

When the Grassland Ventures Startup Studio was started, it was the goal to support ten projects by 2030. With the sixth project already underway, the target is going to need to be readjusted. Here are some of the exciting projects that GVSS has collaborated on:

BudSense
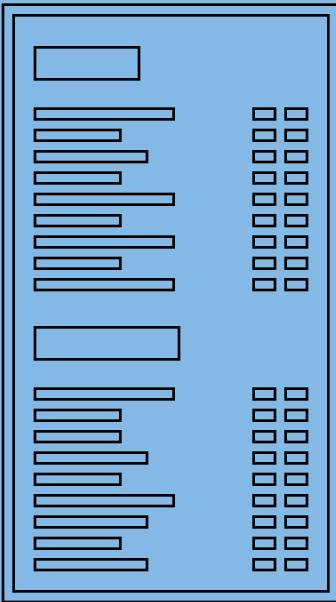
Industry Retail
Launch Winter 2020

A project that began around the time of cannabis legalization in Canada, BudSense has become an industry leader in helping cannabis retailers generate real-time inventory information for paper, web, and digital in-store menus.

Since launch, BudSense has grown by nearly 100% each year and the product is actively guiding retail shopping experiences in over 800 stores across North America.

HomeTeam Live
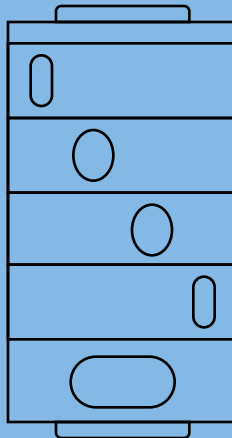
Industry Entertainment
Launch Spring 2020

Streaming software that provides broadcast-quality video using AI-enabled cameras. Events are streamed live allowing parents, family, coaches, athletes, fans, and scouts the ability to log in and watch the event from anywhere in the world.

Notable partnerships with notable leagues including The City of Regina, the Western Canadian Baseball League, United States Premier Women's Football League, USA Football, and Grand Slam Curling.

StoreToDoor
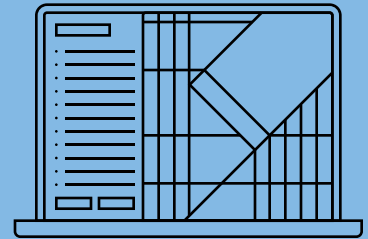
Industry Retail
Launch Winter 2020

A web-based product that helps local retailers access a wide market of delivery drivers that will help deliver products on the day that they were ordered.

Sophisticated technologies like route-mapping, delivery tracking, and contextual regulatory compliance helped StoreToDoor get off the ground in its early days.

Experience Insight Group (EIG)
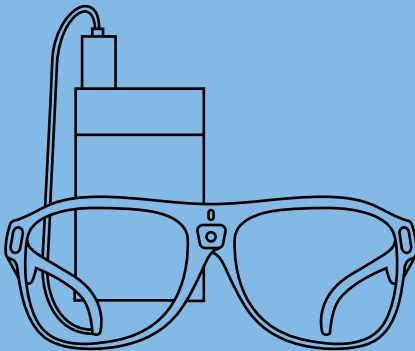
Industry	Retail
Launch	Winter 2023

The value we place on user experience is so high, which is why it made so much sense for us to help start EIG. The glasses used by EIG to conduct behavioural analysis are embedded with dozens of cameras and sensors – both forward and reverse facing – in order to deeply track how people navigate through digital and physical spaces.

Once the data is collected from research participants, EIG uses advanced software to find insights that can inform design decisions that would be hard to quantify in any other way.

All-Day
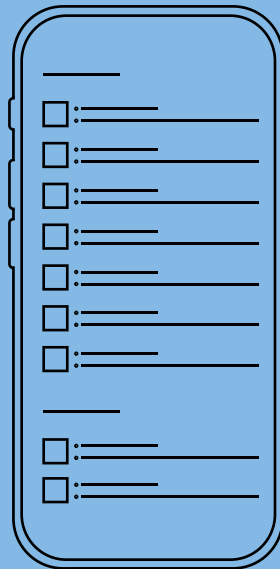
Industry	Hospitality
Launch	Fall 2024

Featuring a web-based portal for hospitality groups to access and manage vital information for customers including food items, allergy information, and beverage inventories.

All information set by the client can be accessed by customers who are able to scan QR Codes in the restaurant, creating a more accessible experience for patrons. All menus that customers see are tailor-made to match the brand and aesthetic of the establishment.

Untitled Project Coming Soon
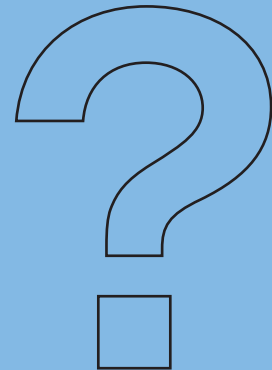
Industry	Finance
Launch	2025

Providing modern technology solutions to the stewards of some of the world's most valuable and reliable investment vehicles.

Have an idea that you want to bring to life? Let's work together to build the next one. Reach out to hello@grasslandventures.ca.
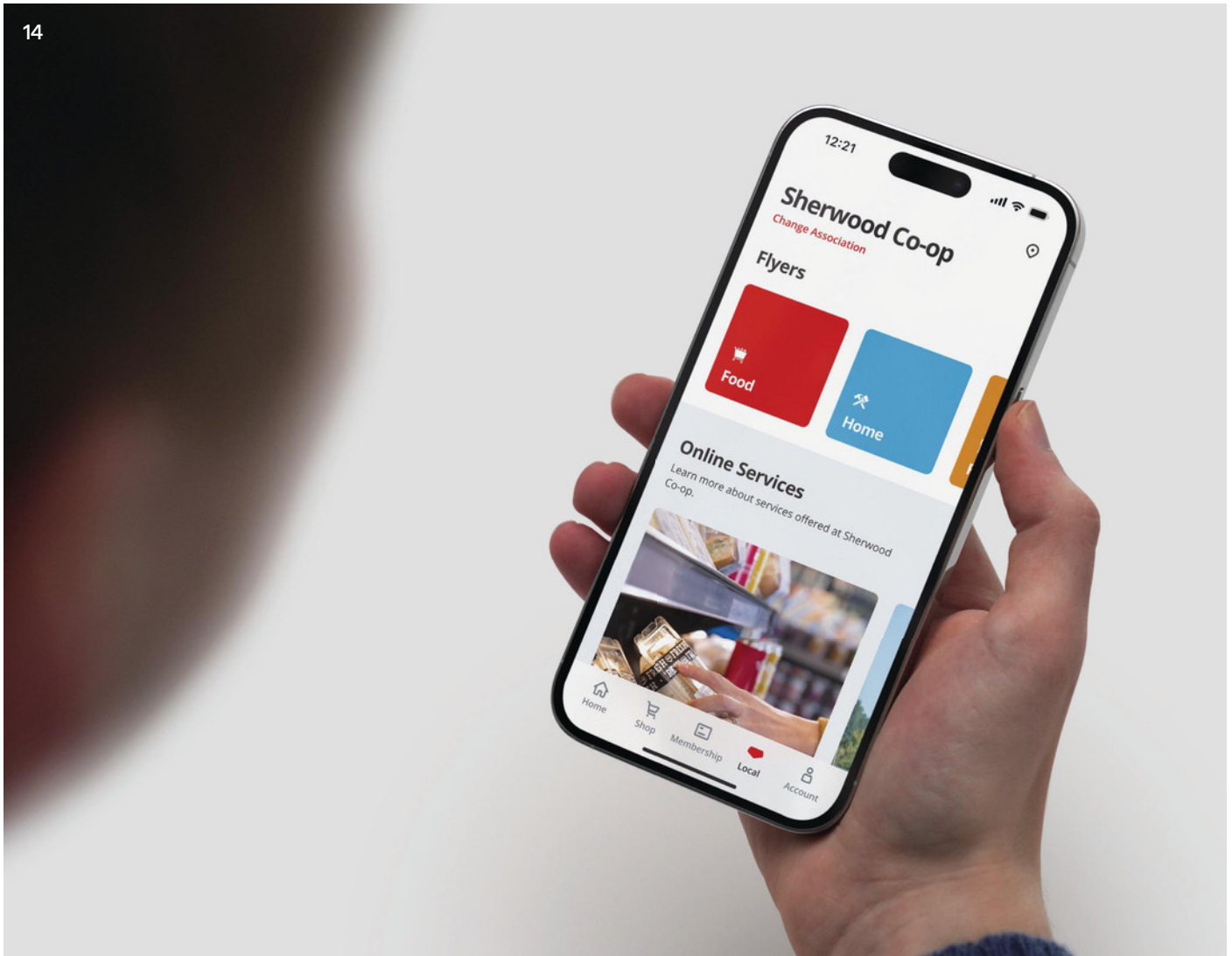
Membership Matters

Since 1928, Co-op has been serving customers across Western Canada, helping build sustainable communities and providing long-term sustainable value for its members.

By Brian Lee
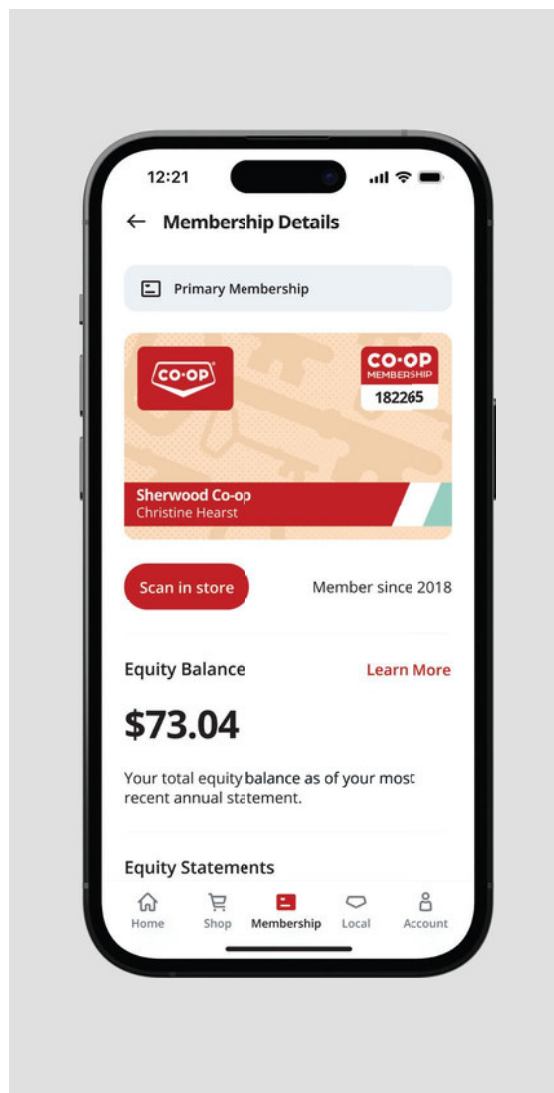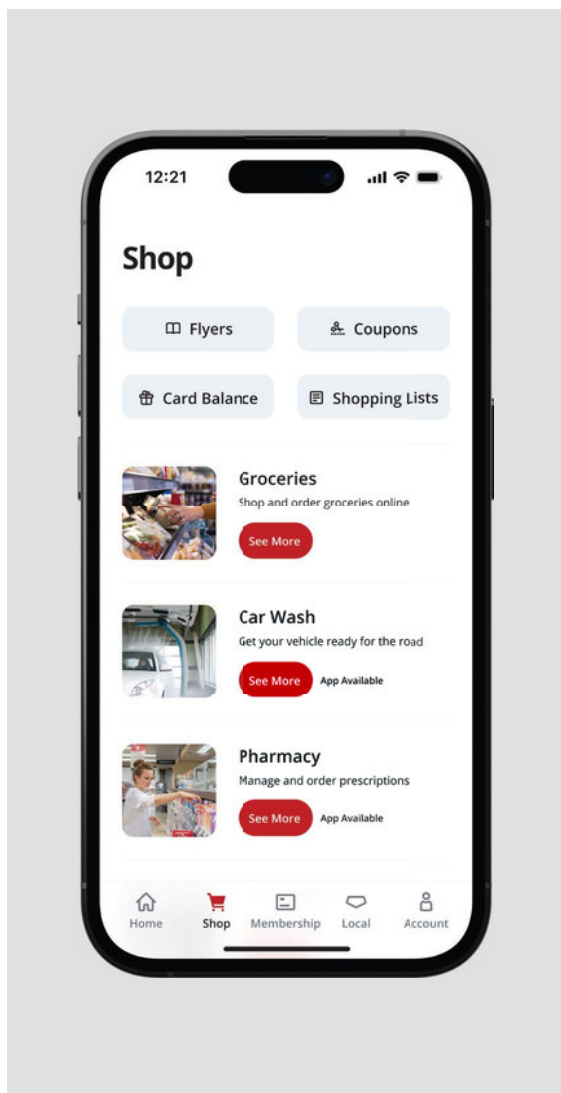
The Shop tab combines offerings from all of Co-ops different customer facing services.

Members are able to quickly see information about their memberships.

Federated Co-operatives Limited (FCL) does business differently. At its core, FCL is a co-operative that supports other co-operatives that serve customers across Western Canada. FCL is a wholesaling, manufacturing, marketing, and administrative co-operative owned by more than 160 independent local co-operative associations. These local co-ops own and operate agro centres, food stores, gas bars/convenience stores, and home centres.

Recognizing the rapidly evolving expectations of retail consumers – and armed with an understanding of a number of exciting digital initiatives planned – FCL recognized the need to reimagine the mobile app experience it was providing to Co-op members and customers across Western Canada. By doing so, they aimed to increase wallet share, enable cross-commodity sales, better showcase their unique brand differentiators and values, and attract new members.

Grassland Ventures started working with FCL in 2020. Initially, our work together was focused on developing a strategy that would clearly define how a new Co-op mobile app experience could be designed to support a broad array of digital initiatives that were moving ahead. This strategy then evolved into a multi-year partnership focused on delivering new iOS and Android apps, as well as supporting product design work across a variety of other online channels.

We felt like the partnership with FCL was a great fit for our organization – many of our team members had a strong understanding of the Co-op brand promise as many of us are members of Co-ops across Western Canada ourselves. That said, we knew that Co-op customers and members are highly diverse in terms of their needs and that it would be important to engage a wide variety of stakeholders to ensure that the product experience we created with the team at FCL was going to appeal to a wide swath of users.

To meet the needs of Co-op's customers and ensure the brand's unique value proposition — heritage, local, and community — our team utilized a holistic design approach that engaged a wide variety of stakeholders right from the beginning of the project. This allowed us to develop a clear vision for the product prior to a single line of code being written. The result: an end product well aligned to stakeholder goals and expectations – something that is unfortunately rare in transformational innovation projects in large organizations.

Equipped with an exciting product design vision, our attention turned towards development of new iOS and Android mobile apps. These fully modernized digital platforms were built on a modern and scalable foundation that will allow FCL to add new and expanded capabilities over time. With this new digital platform, FCL will continue to track consumer behavior and trends, choosing where to lead and where to keep pace in a rapidly changing competitive landscape.

The new mobile app aims to prioritize what most Co-op members value most — their memberships, dynamic content tailored to their local experience, and the unification of digital services for the first time.

With the new app, users can instantly buy new memberships, providing convenience and driving growth. They can also manage existing memberships and view cash back and equity statements online.

Since its launch, app downloads have surged by an impressive 147%. Online sales of memberships have soared, and app reviews have significantly trended towards positive user experiences. The number of digital customer accounts created has also spiked demonstrating that users everywhere are recognizing the benefits of this enhanced digital channel.

Launching the new Co-op mobile app was one of many exciting milestones on FCL's digital roadmap. It serves as an exciting foundation from which Co-op will build as it continues to launch new and exciting digital capabilities.

The team at Grassland Ventures is excited to see where FCL goes next and is excited to continue to support our friends at Co-op as they drive forward new initiatives to enhance the experience of their members across the country.
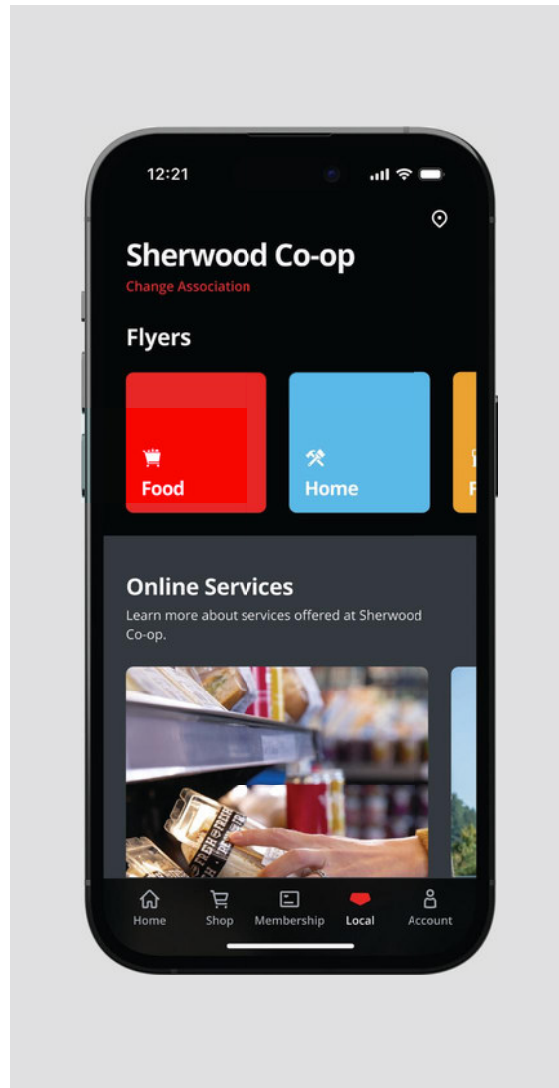
Dark mode was developed to help give customers an experience that they're used to in other apps.

Are your systems talking to each other?

When your systems aren't talking, it's your team and customers who are left hanging. Grassland Ventures can help.

1. Watch the Clock

Have you ever been woken up – mid-sleep – by a ding coming from your cell phone, only to find that you can now get $3 off your next food order? From our experience, there is no offer good enough to be sent in the middle of the night. It's important that your notification strategy considers your users' time zones to avoid this exact issue.

Notifications should be sent at the most convenient times according to the individual user.

2. Make It Valuable

Notifications are easy for users to turn off. It's better to ask for permissions in context and communicate the value that granting push notifications access will provide. Users are more likely to grant permissions if asked during a relevant task and thus are less likely to become irritated and stop using your app altogether – something you certainly don't want.

5. Make It Concise

Efforts should be made to ensure that you are able to get across any meaning, direction, or specifics as efficiently as possible. Your users' time and attention are valuable. The goal of being concise isn't about limiting the information you provide, but providing information in as few words as possible without losing understanding.

As copy is developed, it is important that it is implemented across all parts of your UI. Users should have the same experience across the app to avoid creating confusion.

6. Tone & Voice

When crafting copy, you need to put yourself in the shoes of your user. By considering their perspective, and more importantly the in-app situation your user may be experiencing, you can effectively communicate in an emphatic and aware tone. By taking the time to invest in your brand's voice, you can ensure that you'll find the most effective way to communicate with your users. To find your voice, you need to consider what words come to mind when thinking about how you want your brand to be perceived.

After you've found your tone and voice, the next step is to seamlessly integrate them into your content. It's crucial that your copy first clearly relays your message, and subsequently communicates through your consistent brand voice.

Lessons in App Strategy

In order to stay relevant, innovation and high quality tech is a must. Our team has spent a lot of time developing mobile apps from the ground up, and as tech leaders we think it's important to share what we've learnt along the way.

By Tess Saunders & Brian Lee

3.   Change It Up

To keep your users engaged, we recommend utilizing different types of messaging and diversifying the messages that are coming from those channels. For example, you could utilize push notifications to promote an upcoming event, an in-app notification to share a personalized offer, or follow-up with a discount code in an email to get them back onto your app.

Various types of notifications should work together in perfect harmony to create an enticing and enjoyable user experience.

7.   Majority Rules

The trouble with navigation bars and filters is that the list of elements to include has the potential to get quite long. Navigation should accommodate the needs of the majority of users.

You can find out what your user is looking for and where they spend the most time through data analytics and user feedback. Capitalizing on those analytics and feedback, we recommend assigning different priority levels to common user tasks and giving prominence to paths and destinations with high priority and frequent use.

Once you have implemented navigation that you believe accommodates the majority of your users, extensive testing is required. You always want to ensure that your designs are intuitive and that you understand your users as much as possible.

9.   Picture Perfect

Graphic components – including icons – should help users understand the options within your navigation bar. Icons are great tools to communicate key messages of the product and assist users in understanding where they ultimately want to end up on your app.

Users are accustomed to specific icons – just as a stop sign is designed similarly almost universally throughout the world, users expect particular icons (i.e. the bookmark or camera icon) to be the same in any app.

4.   Keep It Simple

Simple and direct language ensures clarity for the user and leaves less room for interpretation. It's also best to avoid the use of acronyms, internal jargon, and technical terminology that users might not understand. Use familiar and understandable words and phrases, especially when launching uncommon experiences.

The goal of communication is simple – understanding, and in business in particular, getting your desired results – but many of us know, communicating simply isn't always that simple.

8.   Bigger Isn't Better

Navigation must be discoverable and accessible while occupying as little screen space as possible.

Yes, you want to make sure that users understand how to navigate, but that doesn't mean your navigation interface elements need to be the focus of the screen. While you want to make sure elements are not consuming the screen space available, you do need to ensure that elements are big enough for users to interact with. Provide adequate space between navigation elements so that folks aren't tapping buttons they didn't intend to.

Ensure you're testing your navigation elements with users throughout the prototyping process. This will allow you to see how users interact with your designs. The last thing you want is to release an app that you soon find users are abandoning because they can't use it the way your team intended.

> Simple and to the point is always the best way to get your point across.
>
> - Guy Kawasaki

Why the United Airlines App Flies Circles Around Its Competitors

Better self-serve options for guests on cancelled flights help United Airlines standout from the competition.

By Kirk Morrison
Originally published on February 9, 2024

Recently, I found myself navigating a snowy layover in Denver en route to Calgary and was left with a renewed appreciation for one of my favourite mobile experiences — the United Airlines mobile app. It was on this trip that the United app revealed its true prowess beyond mere convenience. What unfolded that blizzardy day was a combination of technological savvy and employee resourcefulness that resulted in a huge impact on a fellow traveller that I met along the way.

The snowstorm had led to the cancellation of my afternoon connection to Calgary, but the United app wasted no time in notifying me. As the plane taxied to the gate, I delved into the app's array of rebooking options— back to Miami, milk-runs through alternate airports, a complete refund, or a later flight to Calgary. It even suggested a detour to Edmonton that — combined with a rental car — might have got me to my destination faster.
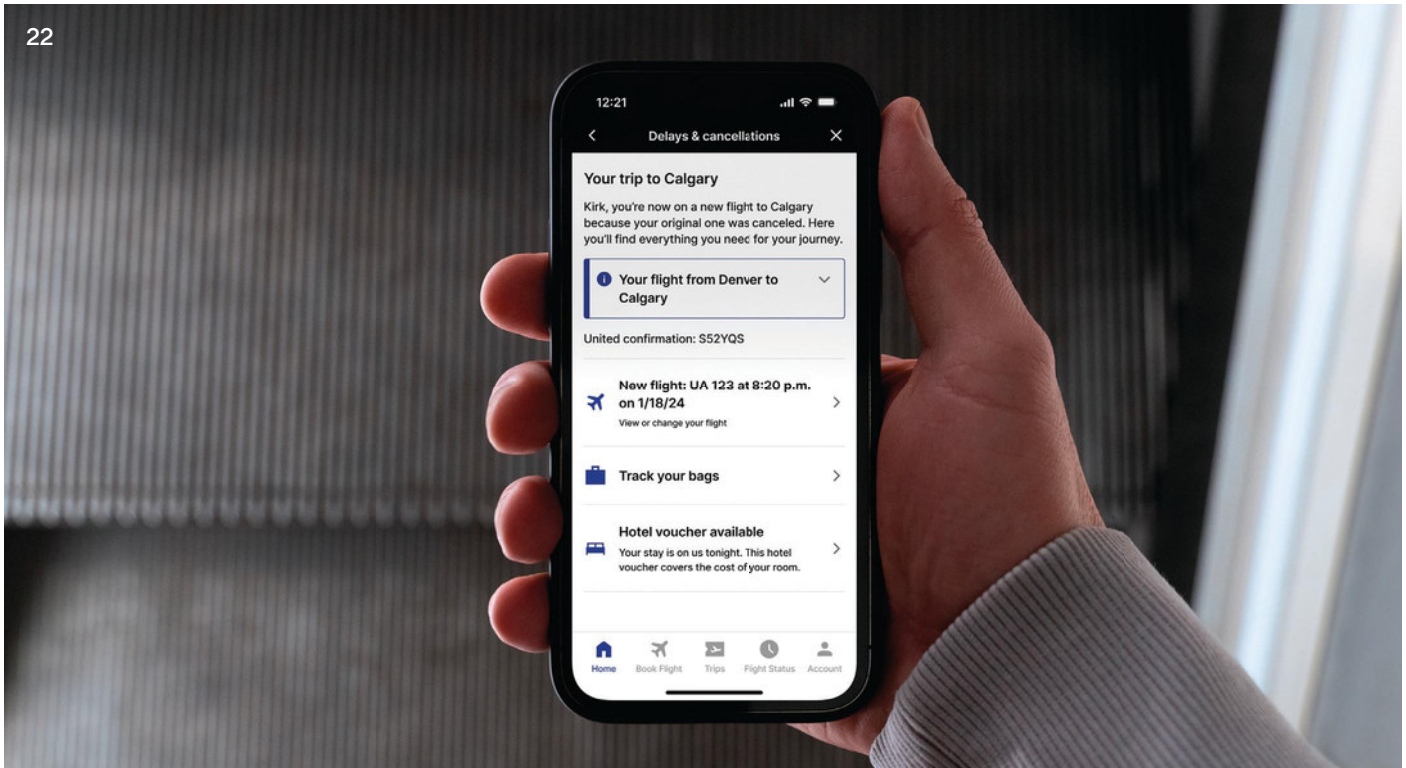
Without much hassle, I rebooked my journey (one that I chose, not one that I was assigned) and had complimentary food vouchers loaded onto my phone before stepping off the plane. Bummer that I'd be delayed, but that kind of comes with the territory connecting through Colorado in January.

Seven hours of airport limbo later, I was ready to board the late-night flight to Calgary and was about to hear a story that took my already strong appreciation of United to a new level.

Seated beside me on the plane was Dave, an older gentleman from Indianapolis with a dream trip decades in the making. He shared with me that skiing the Canadian Rockies had been his lifelong aspiration, and he was en route to Banff to make it a reality. However, he too was initially booked on the cancelled Calgary flight earlier that day.

Dave, travelling solo and without a cell phone, faced an overwhelming line at the United customer service desk after hundreds of other flights were also slashed from the board earlier that day. Undeterred, he took a chance (a 'Hail Mary' as he called it), stopping a passing United employee in the concourse.

In an unexpected twist, the employee pulled out their phone, launching the same United mobile app that had been my lifeline earlier. In a matter of minutes, they navigated the app, entered Dave's flight details, and successfully rebooked his journey. A serendipitous encounter that more than likely saved Dave's dream trip.

The day left me contemplating the synergistic potential of technology and human intervention, not just as a heartening story but as a real-world lesson. I can't help but think that United has been intentional in both the development of its customer-facing technology as well as in its efforts to empower its worldwide staff to help customers benefit from these investments — even if they don't have their own cell phone to use!

And if you think that this is 'soft stuff' that doesn't have a big impact on the bottom-line and long-term success, think again. United, boasting a stellar financial performance in 2023, proudly touted their ongoing efforts in customer experience and technology as key drivers of success. And in 2023, the United app was named the Best Airline App by Business Traveler USA and was the most downloaded airline app globally.

As I muse on the broader implications, I think about other industries undergoing transformative shifts — transportation, personal finance, retail, and even government services. The collaboration between people and technology, as showcased in Dave's story, holds the promise of revolutionizing experiences, increasing efficiency, and elevating customer satisfaction to new heights. The potential is not just exciting; it's a testament to the limitless possibilities that lie ahead. This is the type of stuff that keeps me up at night.

Keeping your project on track...
From every direction.

Our latest venture, All-Day, is a custom built product that allows restaurants to provide reliable allergen information for customers. With customizable menus, users can access important information before heading to the restaurant.

12:21

← Back
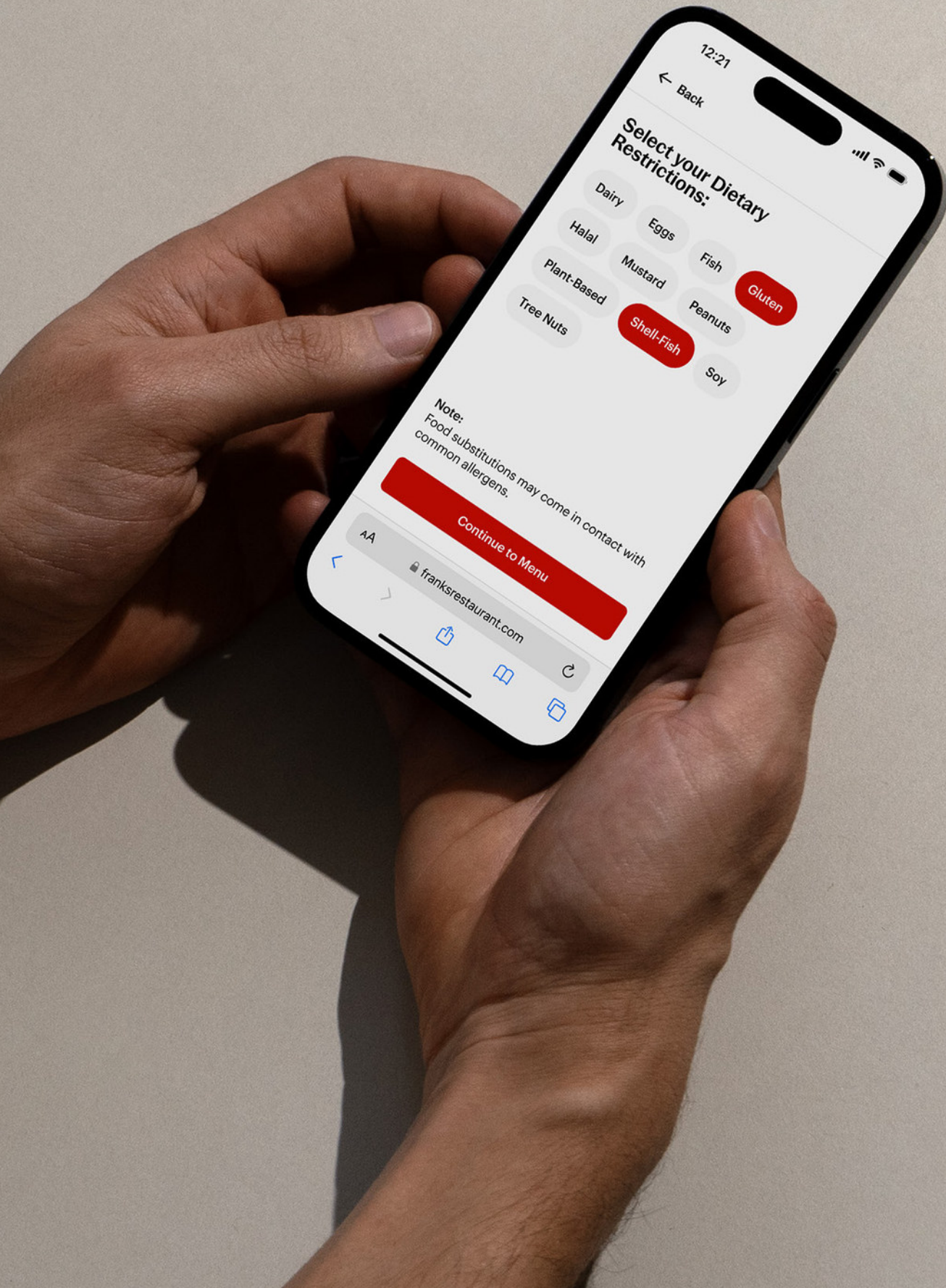
Select your Dietary Restrictions:

Dairy

Halal   Eggs

Plant-Based   Mustard   Fish

Tree Nuts   Gluten

Shell-Fish   Peanuts

Soy

Note:
Food substitutions may come in contact with common allergens.

Continue to Menu

AA   🔒 franksrestaurant.com

Save Your Bacon with All-Day

Our latest venture project aims to solve important problems in the restaurant industry, making dining experiences more accessible to more people.

By Brian Lee

Grassland Ventures and Leo's Group have a long history of collaboration. So, when Leo's approached Grassland Ventures with a challenge, the team crafted a solution that not only met their needs – but one that they viewed as an opportunity to benefit their competitors by delivering technology in an underutilized space.

In an effort to deliver information to customers in a way that traditional menus can't always communicate, Mike Ash of Leo's Group knew two things:

1 Customers are increasingly looking for clear and reliable guidance on allergen information when visiting bars and restaurants

2 Generic menu solutions in the market aren't geared up to meet these expectations and have high subscription costs

As a result of this collaboration, All-Day was born – a lightweight platform designed to simplify allergen and beverage management for restaurants and bars. With an intuitive back end, restaurants can easily upload menu items, configure allergen (e.g. gluten intolerance) and dietary restriction (e.g. Halal or Vegan) details for food items, and update information on the latest beer, wine, and liquor offerings at their locations.

The hospitality industry faces a well-known challenge with high employee turnover, with many staff in serving roles lasting only about six months. Statistics Canada highlights that 40.4% of accommodation and food service businesses struggle to retain skilled workers. This constant turnover creates significant hurdles, especially as customers increasingly demand more detailed information about their food. Restaurants and bars depend on their staff to accurately convey this information, but the training and communication

required to ensure consistency can be daunting.

Adding to this challenge, a 2019 University of Düsseldorf study revealed that 18.3% of restaurant employees couldn't name a single food allergen, and only 30.2% could name three. These alarming statistics pose a real risk to the growing number of customers who need to be mindful of allergens when dining out.

Remember that scene from Emily in Paris where Emily works as a server and misunderstands a customer's allergies? If you haven't seen it, here's a quick summary: it ends badly with the customer having a reaction that could have been easily avoided.

Noticing consumer trends and customers growing concern about dietary restrictions and preferences – and the challenges of managing a rapidly growing team of front-of-house staff across dozens of
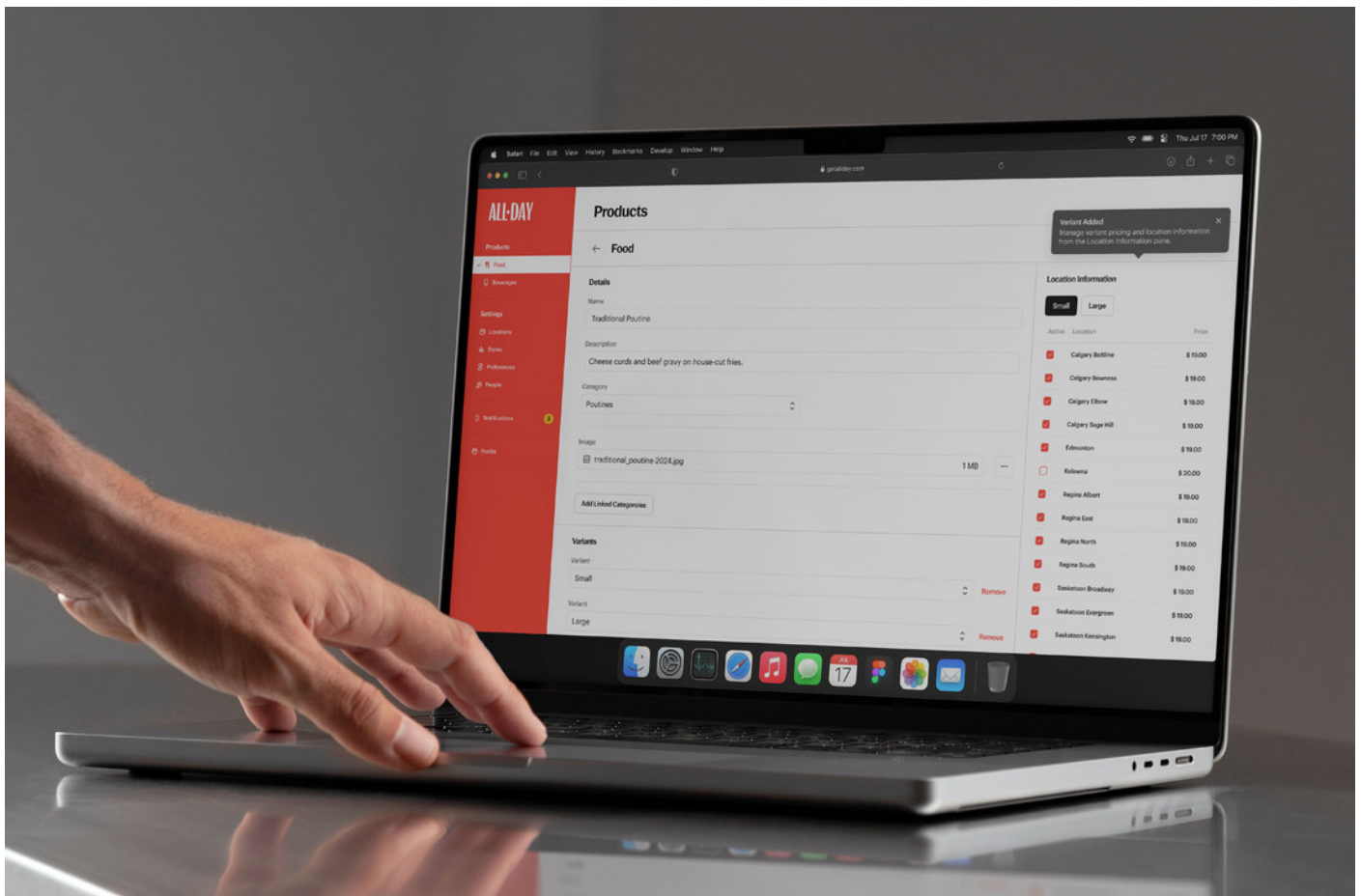
locations – Leo's sought to enhance their existing digital menu offering. They aimed to incorporate allergen information that customers could easily access at any of their 25+ locations across Canada.

Leo's sidestepped expensive platforms by crafting a custom solution, tailored precisely to their needs and aesthetics, with a sharp focus on allergen menus and dietary restrictions. Recognizing the broader potential, they seized the chance to license this unique platform to other restaurant groups — and so in collaboration with Grassland Ventures, All-Day was born.

With All-Day, restaurants and bars no longer have to depend solely on front-of-house staff for complex dietary guidance. Now, customers can instantly access a menu crafted precisely to their needs. For the friend with a soy allergy or the parent managing gluten intolerance, All-Day is a game-changer, empowering guests to confidently order the right menu items and get vital information at a glance. Plus, All-Day lets users know if dishes can be modified to suit unique dietary needs, setting a new standard for inclusive, informed dining.

Given the high staff turnover and escalating training costs in the bar and restaurant industry, having a reliable platform like All-Day to provide allergen information is invaluable. With All-Day, customers consistently receive accurate and up-to-date allergen details, regardless of whether their server has been with the company for years or is brand new and in training. This consistency not only boosts customer confidence but also enables the team to uphold high standards – and reduce liability – more effortlessly than ever before.

As technology and customer expectations evolve, All-Day is set to address even more operational and marketing challenges faced by bars and restaurants. With a focus on staying ahead of industry trends, All-Day will continue empowering establishments to create safer, more tailored dining experiences while boosting efficiency and team productivity.

All-Day is named after the restaurant term referring to the total orders of a certain dish that need to be prepared.
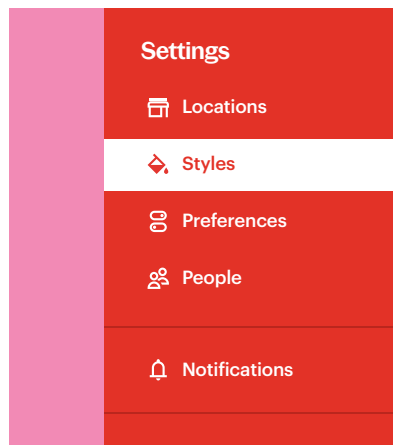
Custom icons designed in-house help give All-Day a premium feel that is contextual to the restaurant industry.

A colour palette influenced by foods and drinks give life to the product and help differentiate the product from common generic software.

YOUR TEAM'S GOALS
ARE OUR TEAM'S FUEL

What Design Means to Us

By Conor Christie

Research

Research could be grouped as its own category within the product development cycle, but is a necessary part of the design process as well. As a project begins, it allows the design team to explore many pathways, both obvious and ambiguous. This stage provides opportunities to talk with stakeholders including clients, customers, and others who are involved with what is being built. The information revealed through research often guides our next steps. One of Grassland's best strengths is the ability to question these assumptions and challenge why things have been done in certain ways. This is what makes a great development partner.

As the company has grown, so has the capacity to strengthen the research methods that are used. One of the biggest ways that this has been done has been with eye-tracking glasses. The tests that have been done in order to study specific eye movements have helped build better understanding of how people consume information, both physically and digitally. The output of these tests involves key metrics like fixations, when an eye has stopped moving and focuses on a specific subject, and saccades, a quick eye movement in-between fixations. These types of metrics reveal so much about how successful the environments we design are. If a test subject is looking around too much without fixating on what the design is trying to convey, the layout must change to make that journey more accessible.

Communication

Design has always been the most effective way to communicate with clients. A long-standing belief at Grassland's has always been that mockups from Figma (a common industry design tool) are way more approachable for people than scanning through a long list of requirements in an Excel spreadsheet. In stakeholder meetings, this offers people the ability to use their brain-power on thinking about the possibilities that can be taken, instead of spending their focus on trying to read through row after row of technical jargon. This is a method we use for every project and for every stage of the process. Whether we are chatting with prospective clients, or in the middle of the product development process, it's been a proven game-changer.

Providing mockups and design artifacts in the early stages of a project allows for all stakeholders to get on the same page. By doing this, we remove the risk of people making assumptions or having misinterpretations. Alignment early on helps create better outcomes for all.

♿

Accessibility

An area of design that has been a bigger focus for the team is accessibility. It is an extremely important responsibility for accessible features and functionality to account for, but is often left to the wayside. Accessibility is often not a phase of a project but happens through every stage. Time is spent creating typography guides, allowing for system tools to increase text sizes for people who have visual impairments. Symbols and icons are developed to help people navigate through digital spaces even if they're not native english speakers.

Investing in accessibility is a win for everyone, although it can be hard to make a case for with others. Making accessible products and experiences does cost more in the short term. Extra hours inevitably have to be spent double and triple checking aspects like colour contrast ratios and text sizing properties, among other things. Whatever considerations are made during development only stand to improve people's experiences with the product. This is how accessibility should be looked at. Experiences that are easier for some, will be easier for all. An accessible checkout flow will lead to more sales. When accessibility is incorporated into what is built, more people can access the products and ideas.

🎨

Aesthetics

One of the more obvious aspects to involving designers in technical projects is the ability to develop a modern and sophisticated design system for the product. Countless hours are spent on visual information including typography, iconography, colours, imagery, and general layout. These categories may seem inconsequential on their own, but when incorporated into a product in a careful and methodical way, provide an experience that people expect from tech products that are produced by Facebook, Apple, Netflix, and Uber.

Although it may be hard to measure the return on investment on time spent on aesthetics, it is well-accepted that a product that looks good will create a sense of trust and credibility for people. A credible product means people are more willing to put their credit card information in, purchase products, and even tell their friends about it.

↻

Iteration

Both the design and development teams work in an extremely iterative nature. Grassland works best when we can build our ideas, show them to people, rip them to shreds and rebuild them better. This has been a key tool when communicating with both potential and current clients. From a design perspective, having an iterative design process allows for the team to feel comfortable bringing ideas up, and being less precious about them when a different direction is taken.

Iteration happens throughout the organization. Initial drafts or ideas are often dreamt up through brainstorm sessions before the team even opens Figma, sketching ideas on a whiteboard or notepad. Once a general direction is settled on it's time to start building out basic layouts or flows in the design tool. This is another inflection point of iteration, where other designers and project leads will start to refine what has been done so far. Design iteration also occurs with the development team where feedback is given on different factors such as complexity of backend systems required for the designs, or how they can be integrated with a client's existing infrastructure. At this point, designs are often shown to clients and related stakeholders to provide feedback on how well the designs match their internal and external requirements.

This whole process allows for quicker time to market and for products that are built to be more flexible. The Grassland team is not precious about the ideas we build and this is what gives us an advantage over larger organizations that are in the same industry as us.

Tren

Take a look at some of the hot topics that the Grassland Ventures team has been discussing at the water cooler.

Contributions by Kevin Baker, Brian Lee, Tess Saunders, Conor Christie, Cari-Lynn Schoettler, & Kale Baiton

Video Streaming

The rise of video based content is growing and the infrastructure that supports this growth is becoming more complicated. Hosting now usually involves videos not only in high definition, but also 4k, and beyond. Our experience in building HomeTeam Live's streaming infrastructure makes us great partners in the entertainment technology industry.

Artificial Intelligence & Large Language Models

Large Language Models (LLMs) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies are rapidly transforming the tech landscape, driving innovation in areas like content creation and customer support. These updates offer companies new opportunities to streamline workflows and enhance user experiences, gaining them a step up on other companies who have to do this work manually.

At BudSense, we've developed an AI assistant that understands the context of our internal workspace, helping the team with tasks like coding, operational workflows, and support requests. This assistant boosts efficiency and can be applied across various aspects of our work, enabling faster, higher-quality product delivery to clients. We're excited to help our clients leverage our AI chat bot.

Omnichannel Experiences

As brands reach customers across mobile apps, websites, physical stores, and social media, delivering a unified experience requires a solid systems integration strategy. Integrated systems allow data to flow seamlessly across channels, providing customers with consistent interactions—like synchronized shopping carts and smooth transitions between support channels.

ds

Digital Loyalty Cards

Loyalty Passes in Apple Wallet are transforming how retailers connect with customers by allowing loyalty cards to be stored digitally on iPhones. This makes accessing rewards and special offers more convenient. Retailers can also send real-time push notifications for exclusive deals, driving repeat visits. Using Apple Wallet's Loyalty Passes helps retailers stay ahead.

Spatial Computing

Spatial computing enables users to interact with data and virtual objects in real-world spaces, using augmented and virtual reality to create immersive experiences. By overlaying digital information onto the physical world, it changes how people work, play, and collaborate. While powerful, it remains to be seen if it will take off with everyday people.

Single-Page Applications

A web application that loads a single HTML page and dynamically updates content as the user interacts with it, without requiring a full page reload. By grabbing only necessary data and updating parts of the interface in real-time, Single-Page Applications offer a faster and more seamless user experience similar to that of a desktop application.

Dynamic Island for Real-Time Updates

Apple's Dynamic Island on iPhone is being used to deliver quick, relevant updates right at the top of the screen. Instead of customers needing to open an app, important information—like order status, ride updates, or breaking news—can appear in this small, interactive area. This trend is all about giving customers value instantly without interrupting their experience.

LinkedIn Is Out?

Industry analysts see LinkedIn as ready for a shake-up. With its mix of job listings, networking, news, and social media, it may be trying to do too much and diluting its value. One analyst argues that unbundling LinkedIn into specialized, industry-focused services could spark multiple billion-dollar companies. While some defend LinkedIn, others see a chance for more targeted offerings.

System Feedback

No matter the task—whether using an ATM, a ticketing app, or changing your profile picture on Facebook—you should always receive confirmation that the action was completed successfully. Providing this feedback is crucial for ensuring a more accessible and user-friendly experience. Consistent and predictable interactions build trust in a product.

The Future of Cannabis Commerce

Discover how BudSense is transforming the cannabis industry with cutting-edge technology and innovative solutions.

By Tess Saunders

Gone are the days where retailers spend hours manually updating menus to keep up with the ever-changing cannabis market – one which is constantly introducing new products, strains, and varieties - a laborious task that often detracts from a store's primary focus — sales. No longer is efficiency or customer service impeded, allowing retailers to never look back.

BudSense distinguishes itself with a business model that empowers retailers to tailor their cannabis shops to their preferences, emphasizing efficiency and simplicity. Guided by core values of collaboration, empowerment, and humility, BudSense's platform enables cannabis stores to independently manage merchandise through i nnovative technology.

Retailers can effectively market products using both digital and print menu formats, benefiting from a system designed with flexibility and automation in mind. Integrated with retailers' point-of-sale systems (POS), BudSense ensures real-time updates on inventory, sale prices, and new arrivals – empowering retailers to customize the platform to their needs while automating updates.

Unique to BudSense is its unparalleled flexibility. Retailers can customize digital and print menus to reflect their brand identity by choosing designs, backgrounds, labels, and even the way the menu moves. BudSense frequently transforms clients' existing manual menus into fully digitized versions, seamlessly integrating BudSense's features while maintaining the retailer's original style.

BudSense collaborates closely with new organizations to develop custom private themes and tailored account configurations. The onboarding process is vital to BudSense, beginning with in-depth consultations to understand retailers' requirements and goals. This personalized approach extends to creating unique themes, print materials, and digital configurations for larger clients. With collaboration in mind, another BudSense core value, the design process is iterative with cycles of development based on continuous customer feedback, ensuring each solution meets the retailer's specific needs.

Part of the process of preparing retailers to work independently is BudSense's live support chat. Unlike the typical response of a large organization where an inquiry might sit in an inbox for days, BudSense ensures a response within 10 minutes and a solution within 30 minutes. BudSense aims to empower users from day one. The live support ensures a smooth transition, enabling retailers to gradually adopt and master the platform independently. With 269 independent companies currently using BudSense, over 90% of retailers have transitioned to complete independent operation. Not only does this tool set retailers up for success, but it provides yet another form of feedback for BudSense where they're able to understand what users may be struggling with and optimize pipelines to change what's not working.

BudSense invites collaboration and innovation into the workplace, not only working one-on-one with retailers, but constantly using that feedback to improve the platform and user experience - emphasizing another of their core values, humility. "Humility is something that everyone on our team should carry - in that we don't know everything and we can learn from customers of all types", says Andrew Cretin, BudSense's Chief Technology Officer.

Remaining at the forefront of innovative technology, BudSense recently integrated AI and machine learning into their business model. We talked with two of Grassland Venture's employees who are currently working as leads at BudSense - Kevin Baker, a lead developer with BudSense, and Andrew Cretin, Chief Technology Officer. When asked about the inspiration behind this move, Kevin explained, "We asked ourselves how we could empower our team to work at maximum efficiency without hindrance." This led to the creation of BudBot, an internal AI platform that streamlines pipelines and processes for product management and development. Developed by the BudSense team, BudBot leverages deep company knowledge and data to maximize developers' time and efforts.

One of the primary ways BudSense utilizes AI is through product management. BudBot guides new feature development, scopes out business requirements, and ensures these align with existing functionality. This tool handles organizational and management-intensive tasks. By automating these tasks, BudBot optimizes efficiency and productivity, allowing management and developers to focus on developing innovative technology. As BudSense grew and faced more complex tasks, BudBot allowed for sustained high productivity and rapid growth by keeping software development on track and simplifying codebase complexities.

BudBot provides developers with 24/7 access to a knowledgeable chatbot which has in-depth knowledge of the entire codebase, offering guidance on complex questions. BudBot also assists in product design by drawing on its understanding of the company to offer tailored insights.

Additionally, it plays a key role in customer support, aiding in addressing complex inquiries. "BudBot augments you with more efficiency and better tools - it essentially is allowing you to work faster" says Kevin. The use of AI at BudSense frees up time for employees to connect with clients, improve user experience, and increase capacity for more retail partnerships.

BudSense has already begun to notice significant improvements in their productivity and efficiency since implementing AI. And the plans for AI integration don't stop there, as Andrew and Kevin explained – the future of AI in BudSense is bright.

BudSense sees a future in which the use of AI will enhance continuity and communication between all team members. By utilizing AI's Large Language Model (LLM) to summarize all internal communications – including sales, operations, product management, and more – weekly recaps can be delivered to all employees, thus significantly streamlining work and freeing up time for deeper focus (delivering enhanced value for BudSense users even faster than before).

Another exciting capability of AI in BudSense? Andrew Cretin and Kevin Baker see the potential to replace the live support chat primarily with AI – using it as a first response and diminishing wait times all together. Not only that, but BudSense is working to tailor BudBot to perform predictive analysis to assist in running better retail products. Imagine a world where an AI bot was able to constantly be reviewing your company's data and offering insights into what product to promote and when.

AI integration is just the beginning of BudSense's future plans. Andrew shared some exciting upcoming developments for the company. Reflecting on their journey from a small team focused on digital menu merchandising, BudSense has grown tremendously since its launch in 2020. From only five employees and nation-bound, BudSense has tripled in employee size, has expanded into all of North America, and is now being used in over 800 locations at 269 companies. The evolution from digital menus to incorporating print menus and cards based on retailer feedback has been pivotal, alongside implementing a tiered merchandising strategy.

Navigating rapid growth hasn't been without its challenges. BudSense initially faced development slowdowns as they scaled to meet customer demand and manage over 10 POS integrations, which brought data normalization challenges. However – these hurdles spurred innovation, including the development of BudBot. With innovation at the forefront and their core values held closely, BudSense constantly aims to boost output, sales, and workplace efficiency.

BudSense continues to innovate with plans to enhance product flexibility across all menu formats, moving beyond traditional cannabis shopping where the focus lies on price and THC levels, to highlight secondary cannabinoids and terpene properties. This shift aims to educate consumers and elevate product awareness. They also aim to implement additional functionality to enhance media management and deployment, as well as introducing new types of reports such as the Dead Stock Report, Product Mix Report, and more – aiding retailers in making informed decisions surrounding purchasing and merchandising.

Looking ahead, since BudSense has expanded and created a market in the US, their aim in the future is to expand the product database to capture US-specific products and offer the ability to include more unique product attributes per region.

As they forge ahead, BudSense remains committed to pioneering advancements that shape the future of cannabis retail.

Locations using BudSense across North America

Canada

Alberta		122
British Columbia		47
Manitoba		21
Nova Scotia		2
Ontario		223
Saskatchewan		42
Yukon		1

USA

Alaska		3
Arizona		7
California		47
Colorado		4
District of Columbia		1
Florida		5
Maine		7
Massachusetts		15
Michigan		17
Minnesota		1
Mississippi		14
Missouri		7
Montana		6
New Jersey		13
New Mexico		21
New York		43
Oklahoma		2
Oregon		7
South Dakota		3
Vermont		3

The
Creation of App

Our team of UX/UI designers create stunning and intuitive digital experiences.
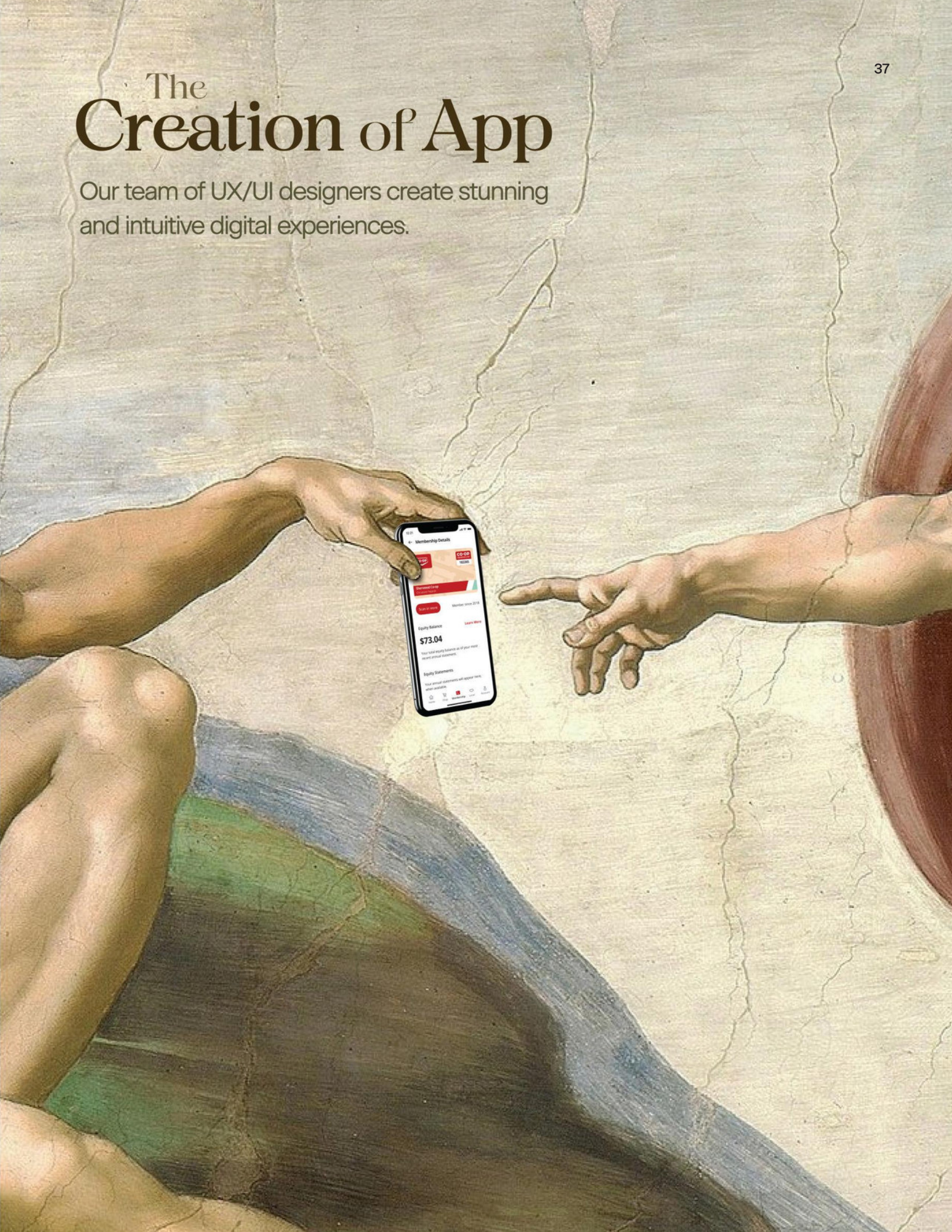
Services

We are a team of Canadian-based product analysts, project managers, product designers, software developers, and quality assurance specialists.

We work directly with leading organizations to help them define, design, and build the digital product experiences that will help them grow their businesses.

Technology Strategy

Technology strategy is essential from the outset of any project. Strategy should align with the overall business goals and ensure that the solutions meet the needs of partners while considering compatibility, cost, and ease of use. Grassland Ventures brings a key understanding of emerging technologies, evaluating potential impact on clients' businesses, and determining the most effective ways to leverage these technologies.

Experience Design

The Experience Design process, also known as User Experience (UX) Design, starts with research, including user interviews and usability testing, to understand the target audience and their needs. Prototypes are then created to provide a visual representation of the app or website's functionality and user flow.

Designs are put to the test with real people using eye tracking glasses and analysis software. This provides designers and clients an objective analysis of proposed designs.

Product Design

Product design is a process that involves creating new products or improving existing ones. It is an essential part of the product development process, and it helps to ensure that a product meets the needs of the customer and is functional, safe, and aesthetically pleasing.

Once information has been gathered from the research and strategy process, designers use it to develop product concepts and prototypes. Work is also done on making sure designs work well on a variety of devices and screen sizes. This saves time when developers begin to work on the project.

Software Development

Software development is a core service offered by Grassland Ventures. We work with programming languages such as C#, Swift, Kotlin, TypeScript, Go, and Java, and build within frameworks including .Net, Angular, and Springboot. The software development process typically begins with a deep-dive of the client's business requirements, which are then translated into technical requirements, as well as complete designs from the design team.

Through workflows that include agile development, continuous integration, and testing, we ensure the creation of high-quality, scalable, and maintainable software that meets our clients' needs.

Mobile App Development

Mobile app development is a critical area of expertise. While much of the industry has shifted to using multi-platform development tools like React Native or other similar platforms, Grassland Ventures has experience developing apps natively in both iOS and Android. Apps built natively often feel more responsive and can harness system features that other apps cannot.

The approach to app development includes testing, debugging, and optimization to ensure the app functions as intended.

System Integration

System integration involves weaving various software and hardware systems together to ensure that they work seamlessly within the end product. Grassland Ventures is knowledgeable in multiple technology domains and has experience working with different software and hardware platforms.

The goal of system integration is to enable different systems to work together to provide a unified and streamlined user experience. This helps clients achieve their business goals by ensuring that their systems work together efficiently and effectively.

Building Human-First Products

Human-Centred Design offers us a lens in which we approach building products that puts the user-experience in the forefront of all decision making.

By Conor Christie
Originally published on February 9, 2024

People are central to our development efforts, whether they are customers using a mobile app or administrators navigating a financial system. Understanding their goals and experiences requires empathy and extensive engagement with diverse user groups.

Identifying the underlying problems to be solved is crucial for the success of the final product. This involves thorough research, questioning assumptions, and delving into organizational structures until the root cause is understood.

People

Problems

Human-Centred Design (HCD) is the cornerstone of our approach at Grassland Ventures, inspired by the pioneering work of Don Norman, a renowned cognitive scientist and user-experience expert. HCD prioritises the needs and experiences of the individuals interacting with our products and systems, shifting away from the traditional focus solely on business goals.

In our HCD process, we concentrate on four key areas: people, problems, systems, and iteration. This process aims to provide our development team with a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the success of a product.

Overall, HCD guides our product development at Grassland Ventures, enabling us to create solutions that better meet client needs and serve end-users more effectively.

Viewing everything as a system is fundamental to HCD. Understanding the interconnections and limitations of each system component enables us to develop a more holistic understanding of the product.

At Grassland Ventures, we excel in iteration. Our culture embraces continuous improvement, recognizing that the product today may not be the final version. Iterative development allows us to showcase progress to clients early on and facilitates meaningful discussions that traditional requirements documents often cannot achieve.

Systems

Iteration

2024

Our Year in Numbers

What a year it's been so far. Reflecting on our achievements has been truly eye-opening. Sometimes, you don't grasp the full impact of your team and partners' hard work until you see the numbers that define the success.

As we review the figures that shaped Grassland, we're also diving into the metrics that defined our ventures. From breaking ground on new and exciting projects to milestones we are proud of, let's explore the story these numbers tell.

2,183

Hours spent testing and perfecting the products we built this year.

21

Conferences and working events attended.

Federated Co-operatives Limited, thriving in both the B2C and B2B sectors, proudly serves over 2,500 locations and millions of members across 500 communities throughout Western Canada.

10

Number of systems integrations used to connect with client POS systems.

750

Retail locations using an internal app for Co-op.

$1M

Annual Recurring Revenue (ARR) surpassed by BudSense.

In under six months, we designed, developed, and launched an internal app for Co-op. This rapid deployment showcases the efficiency and dedication to meeting partner's needs.

17

Companies that we have partnered with to date.

148

Unique events and leagues streamed on HomeTeam Live.

115%

Growth in Grassland Ventures website visits compared to last year.

5

Timezones that the team works across, from British Columbia to London, UK.

4,511

Screens and mockups in Figma, creating clarity for developers and clients.

4,170

JIRA tickets created by the Grassland Ventures team across various projects.

With exponential growth in the United States over the past year, BudSense has become the market leader in in-store cannabis merchandising in New York, surpassing competitors and establishing its stance in the U.S. market.

658

Suckers and bags of halloween candy consumed by the team.
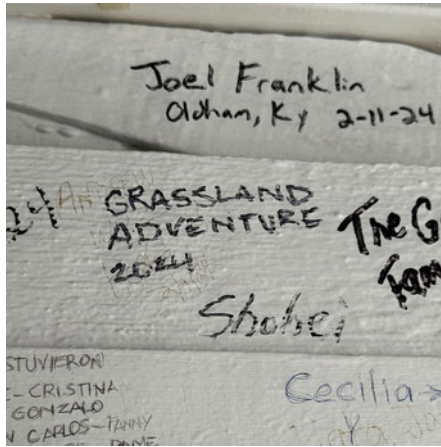
We'll lead you to new product possibilities

GRASSLAND FOR STRENGTH

To develop a strong digital product...

...you need a strong team of developers

Grassland
Advent
'24 ures

Grassland Adventures is our internal name for times we get together outside of work. Throughout the years these adventures have mostly taken place in Regina. Lately, the team has been able to travel together for various things like client meetings, conferences, sporting events, holiday parties, barbecues, and team retreats.

We hope that you enjoy looking through all of these pictures as much as we had fun doing them.

Grassland Ventures

Grassland Ventures works directly with leading organizations to define, design, and build digital product experiences that help them grow their businesses.

Looptail is our way of showing all of the work that we have done over the years as well as looking at exciting opportunities in our industry.

Visit Our Website