Designing for Scale

Building EverDriven's First Comprehensive Design System

Kayla Goodison, 2025

The Challenge

Imagine joining a company fresh out of bootcamp, excited to dive into your first UX role. Now imagine that company is on the verge of a major rebrand—new name, colors, mission, everything—and there's already a design system project underway.

The reality check? You're witnessing attempt number one, which would eventually fail. You'd later become part of attempts two and three.

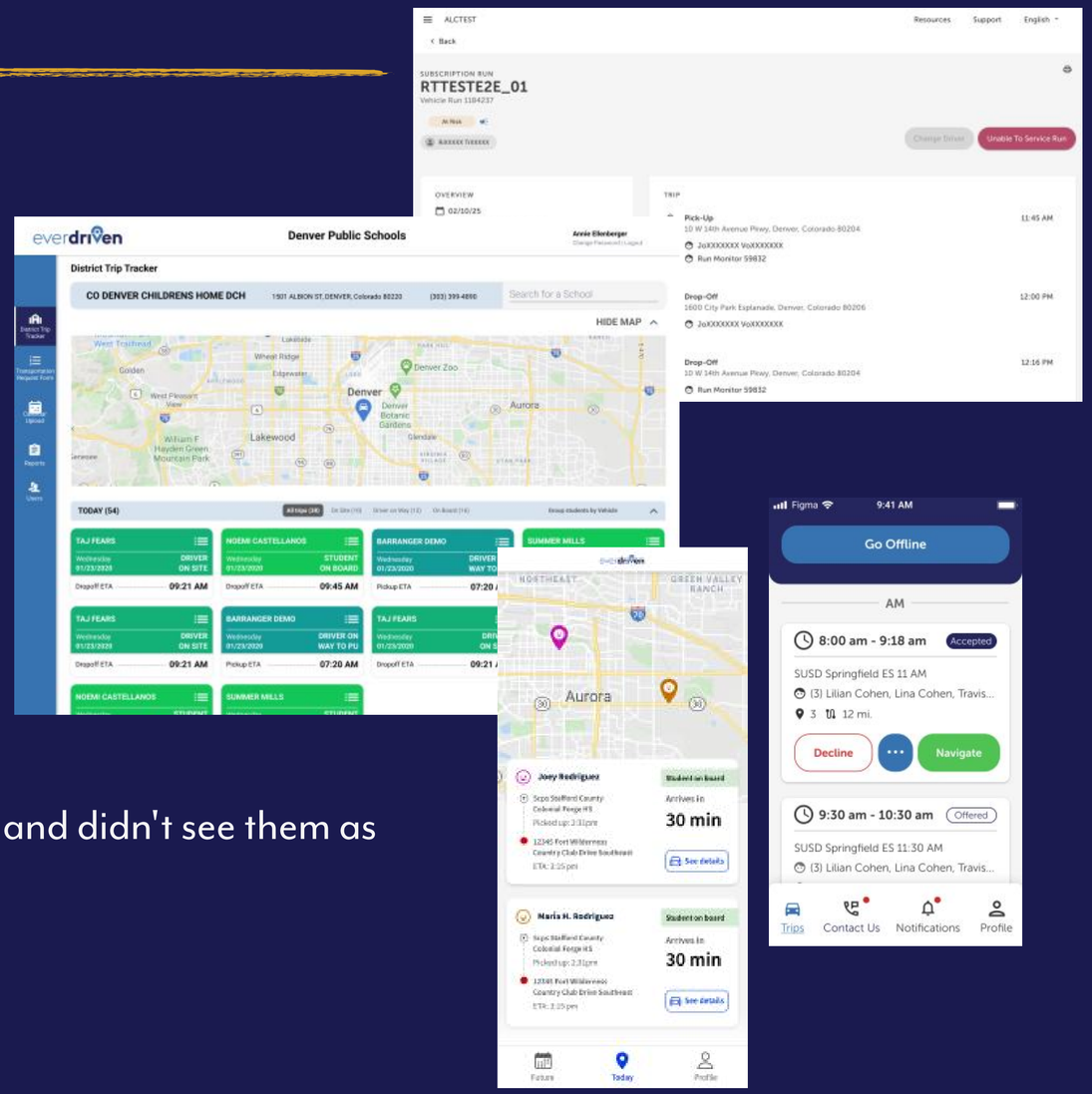
What Was Actually Happening

- Products looked like they were designed by four different companies
- Engineers were building custom components from scratch for every feature
- User confusion was mounting across platforms
- Development time was becoming unsustainable
- Previous two design system attempts had failed

The Problem in Pictures

Before: Four Different Companies

- Different button styles across products
- Inconsistent color usage
- Varied typography treatments
- Conflicting interaction patterns



The Result: Visual inconsistency across products, engineers rebuilding the same components repeatedly, and none of our products passed WCAG A accessibility standards.

The Obstacle: The organization had normalized these inefficiencies and didn't see them as urgent problems to solve.

The Basics

Roles

Design System Architecture, Cross-functional Leadership, Documentation, Solo Ownership

Timeframe

2.5 Years (Fall 2022 - Present)

Tools

Figma, Confluence, Material UI, Design Tokens, Claude (for documentation)

The Mission

Create a design system that actually gets used while learning how to build design systems from scratch.

Learning From Institutional Failure

The First Iteration: Too Complex

Fall 2022 - October 2023 (14 months)

I wasn't leading this—I was the new hire, learning how design systems can go wrong.

What Happened: Maximalist Material Design 2-based system with heavy use of color, built on the heels of a major company rebrand, that scope-creeped into un-usability. This was also before Figma's 2023 variable updates, which limited design system architecture capabilities.

Desperate Measures: In an effort to force adoption and "ease users into it," the team created "hybrid pages" that combined existing designs with the new system elements—essentially creating something so ugly we'd have no choice but to fix it.

User Reactions: Users specifically disliked these hybrid designs—we actually had a user ask us to change the hybrid approach back!

Why It Failed: Engineering VP halted the project because custom components were taking longer to build than starting from scratch

What I Learned: Complexity isn't sophistication. Engineering constraints are real constraints, not suggestions.

Taking Ownership: The Goldilocks Problem

The Second Iteration: Too Simple

January 2024 - December 2024

My colleague and I took over. Our solution? Pure Material UI, straight out of the box.

What Worked:

- Implementation was fast—MUI took engineers 1/3 the time to build
- Worked well with our React Native framework for mobile apps
- No scope creep
- Immediate adoption
- Typography improvements: used the same font family as Marketing but switched to the sans serif variant (Marketing uses the serif version) for better digital readability

What Didn’t Work:

- MUI doesn't have everything we needed (our date/time components weren't versatile enough)
- Some components frustrated designers in Figma (paper components, instances)
- Pure MUI felt generic and didn't serve our specific product needs

The Strategic Solution: Just Right

The Third Iteration: Strategic Foundation

December 2024 - Mid February 2025

Strategic Research & Planning:

- Evaluated popular design systems to determine which could meet our technical needs and aesthetic goals—some felt too maximalist or inflexible, while MUI offered the right balance
- Developed our design system vision statement in tandem with the product organization's broader vision work, as part of EverDriven's "Tech Revolution" initiative
- Attempted stakeholder outreach via Slack to understand different teams' needs and constraints (with limited response)

Vision & Principles

Our Vision

“EverDriven's design system enables our design and marketing teams to deliver a unified and accessible user experience at an accelerated pace. Through a secure, uplifting, and empowering interface, it aims to ignite a sense of fellowship among our internal and external partners.”

Key Tenets

- We prioritize consistency over flexibility
- We value complexity when it supports ease of use

The 70/30 Philosophy

Component Development Phase

Mid February 2025 - Present

I handled 70% of the development work while my colleague contributed 30%. When she left in March 2025, I became solo owner. We utilized Figma's 2023 variable updates and MUI's built-in variables to build our strategic hybrid approach.

The Philosophy: Use MUI as our foundation, but strategically deviate where it genuinely doesn't meet our needs.

MUI Foundation (70-80%):

- Buttons, form fields, basic layout components, icon library, design tokens

Strategic Customization (20-30%):

- **Switches:** Material Design 3 for visual consistency
- **Date/Time Pickers:** Built for better versatility
- **Colors:** Brighter, less grey—better for screens and contrast
- **Typography:** Fine-tuned kerning adjustments

Building for the Organization

Breaking Down Silos

Established comprehensive Marketing partnership (started Dec 2023, paused mid-year, re-established April 2025) for brand-adjacent consistency across font families, images, illustrations, and content guidelines.

Documentation & Education

July/August 2025: Built comprehensive Confluence wiki with component guidelines, WCAG compliance instructions, and implementation notes.

Early September 2025: Hosted company-wide lunch and learn to educate stakeholders on the system.

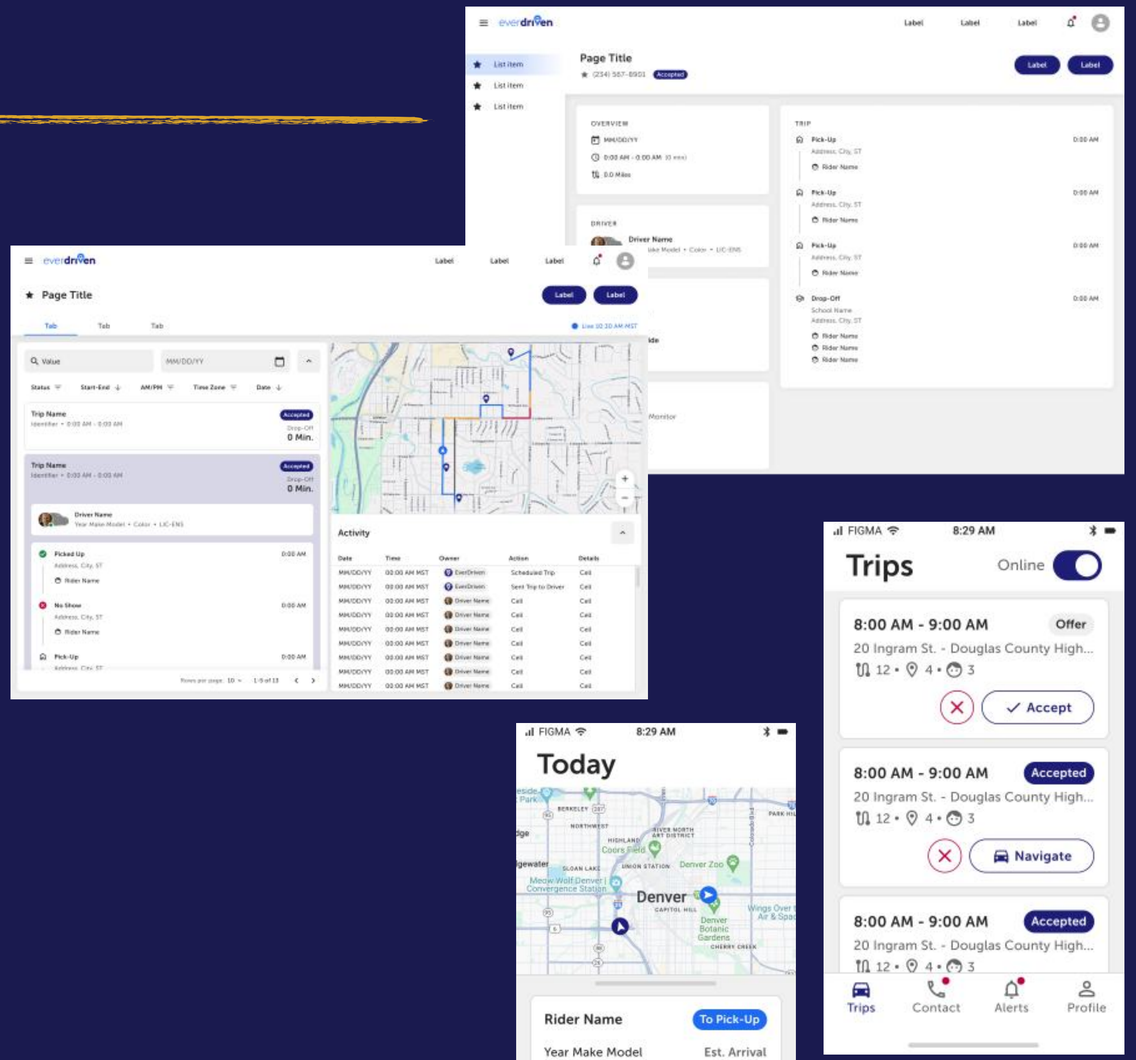
Key Learning: A design system without documentation is just a Figma file. Getting buy-in requires teaching people why and how to use components.

The Solution in Action

After: One Cohesive System

- Unified button styles and interaction states
- Consistent color palette application
- Standardized typography hierarchy
- Cohesive component library in Figma
- Design system documentation

The Result: Clear visual consistency, faster development, and a foundation for scalable design decisions.



Organizational Impact

66% Reduction in Development Time

Frontend engineers reported this improvement with MUI components versus custom builds (though we weren't able to validate further due to limited engineering participation in formal measurement).

Cross-Team Collaboration Standardized

Shared standards and documentation enabled better alignment between Design, Engineering, and Marketing.

Design-to-Development Handoff Streamlined

V1 mockup delivery improved from 5 days to 2 days with cohesive component library.

First Implementation Launching October 2025

Driver App release will be our first user-facing validation of the system's effectiveness.

What I Learned

The Goldilocks Problem is Real

- **Too Complex (Iteration 1):** Maximalist system that scope-creeped into un-usability
- **Too Simple (Pure MUI):** Fast implementation but didn't serve our specific needs
- **Just Right (Strategic Hybrid):** MUI foundation with purposeful customization

Documentation Enables Scale

Real adoption happens when everyone understands not just what to use, but why and how to use it.

Engineering Constraints Drive Design Decisions

Understanding that MUI reduced build time by 66% wasn't just a statistic—it became the foundation of our entire approach.

Communication is Half the Battle

The biggest ongoing challenge has been getting information to the right people at the right time. I can't assume engineers know Figma as well as designers do, and word-of-mouth isn't reliable.

Strategic Compromise Beats Perfectionism

The most important lesson: Perfect is the enemy of good enough. Our strategic hybrid approach wasn't theoretically pure, but it solved real business problems.

Looking Forward

Strategic Implementation Approach

New Products: Both new portals built entirely in design system from day one, with third-party developers having full access to materials

Existing Mobile Apps: Upcoming release built in design system, plus systematic approach to gradually migrate atoms and molecules through living backlog

Legacy Systems: Sunsetting two web portals allows us to focus resources on forward-looking implementation

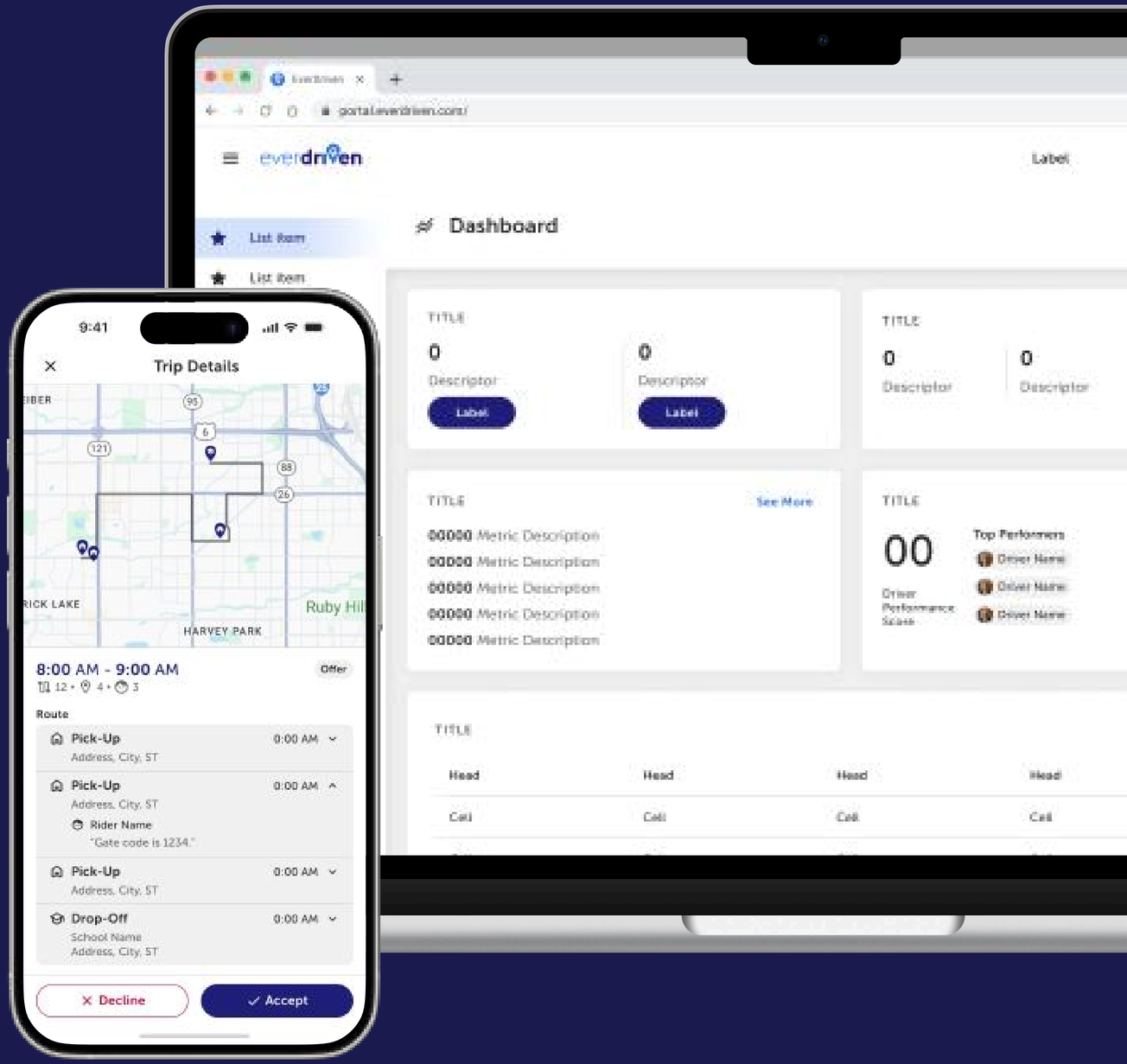
Expanding Capabilities

- Responsive design templates
- Dark mode expansion
- New illustrations with Marketing
- Token repository development (planned for next year to improve design-to-development workflow)
- Ongoing component additions based on team needs

The Real Lesson

Building design systems isn't about creating the most beautiful components—it's about solving organizational problems through strategic design decisions.

Sometimes, the best solution is the one that actually gets used.



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