

Synthesis: Visual Design Testing R.io

By Trish Lamanna

The following is an overview of the results collected from our [visual design testing sessions](#) conducted internally at Rangle. Over the course of a day, six people from three domains (creative, marketing/delivery and technology) provided their opinion on what three websites said to them using a structured word association test. This is a summary of the findings.

Table of Contents

[What the data suggests](#)

[Insight #1: Experience principles and brand attributes are provably different value systems](#)

[Insight #2: There are no truths, only perspectives](#)

[Insight #3: The unintended consequences of design decisions](#)

[What this means all together](#)

[What we do well](#)

[What we could do better](#)

[Flaws with the data](#)

[Recommendations for next steps](#)

[Recommendation #1: "And then we improve it..." Shift the experience principle of *Timeless* to instead be *Effective*](#)

[Recommendation #2: Use less boxed in layouts, break patterns and leverage animated interactions to increase feelings of *Fluidity* and *Refinement*](#)

[Recommendation #3: Elevate and expand the human aspects of the Rangle brand](#)

[Recommendation #4: Strike a balance between CMS control and inspired storytelling.](#)

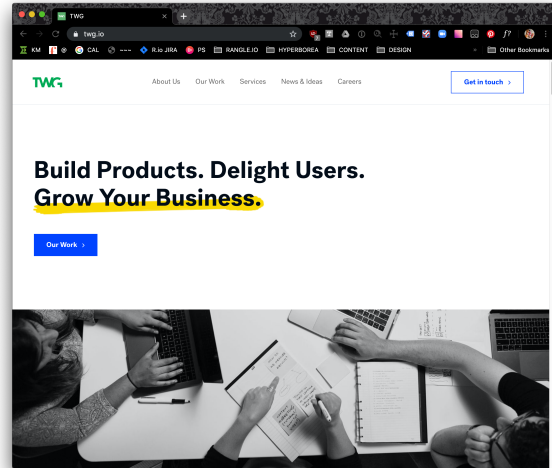
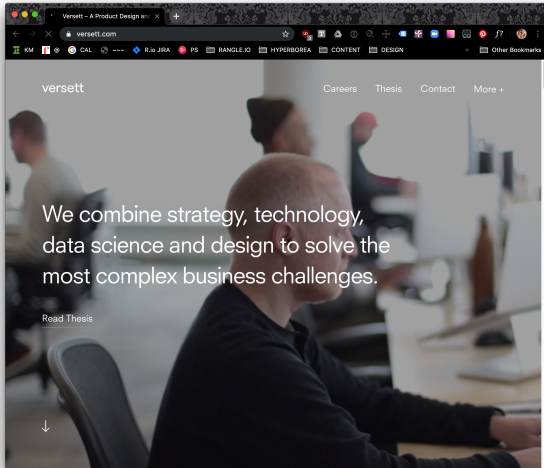
[Resources](#)

What the data suggests

Conducting visual design testing was an interesting experience. **Visual language** is the act of communication without words. The need to understand why the combinations of certain shapes, colours and spacing say certain things to certain people is what visual design testing seeks to find out. There were a few key themes that emerged when we began to sift and make sense of what we see in the data, linked in the spreadsheet below.

Insight #1: Experience principles and brand attributes are provably different value systems

We started our testing by asking our subjects to examine two Rangle competitors, [versett.com](#) and [twg.io](#) for 3 minutes each. After the 3 minutes, we would present them with two groups of structured word choices using Rangle's specified Brand Attributes and Experience Principles along side two different questions.



For Experience Principles:

"If you were to evaluate the over all experience of this website, taking into account how all the design, content and technology works together, what words resonate with you more?"

Experience Principles

- Approachable (Human)
- Inclusive
- Timeless
- Focused
- Unified
- Flexible

Experience Principle Antonyms

- Reserved (Corporate)
- Restrictive
- Trendy
- Distracting
- Unrelated
- Rigid

For Brand Attributes:

"If you were to just evaluate the overall aesthetics of this website based on fonts, colours and shapes, what words resonate with you more?"

Brand Attributes

- Modern
- Approachable
- Unexpected
- Fluid
- Refined

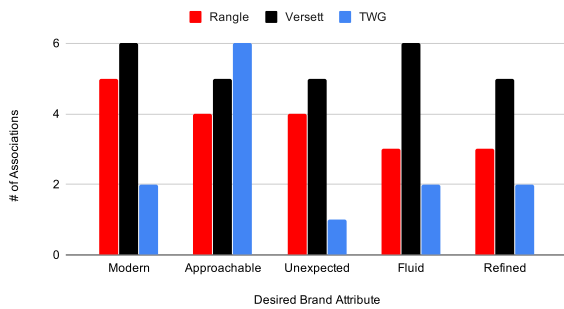
Brand Attribute Antonyms

- Out of touch
- Reserved
- Predictable
- Stiff
- Basic

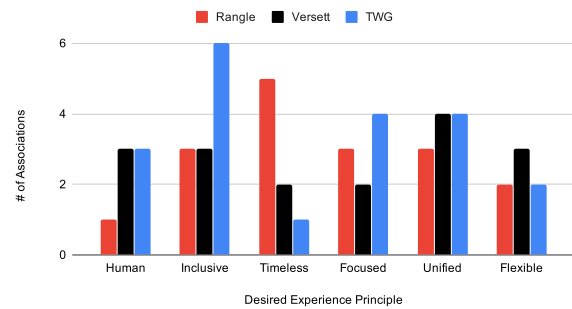
Why this is important:

During our internal stakeholder interviews, we asked Rangler's who they felt our top competitors were. TWG was a name that continued to be among one of the first declared as our top competitor and a great example of how they sell themselves online. Versett was also named as a top recommendation for having a premium web experience that we wanted to strive towards. However after this test, we were able to have more of an exact idea of what people felt strongly about when they said these companies were competitive which enables us to know what to take inspiration from, and what to leave behind.

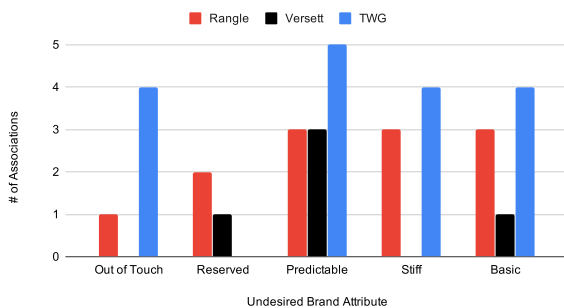
Desired Brand Attribute Association



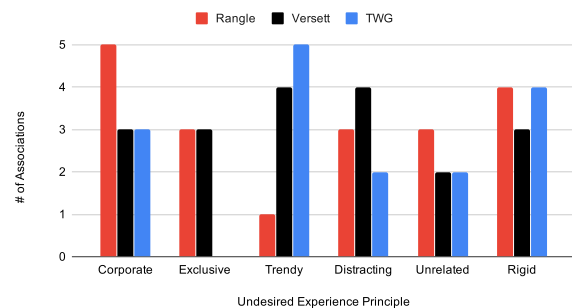
Desired Experience Principle Association



Undesired Brand Attribute Association



Undesired Experience Principle Association



Key takeaways:

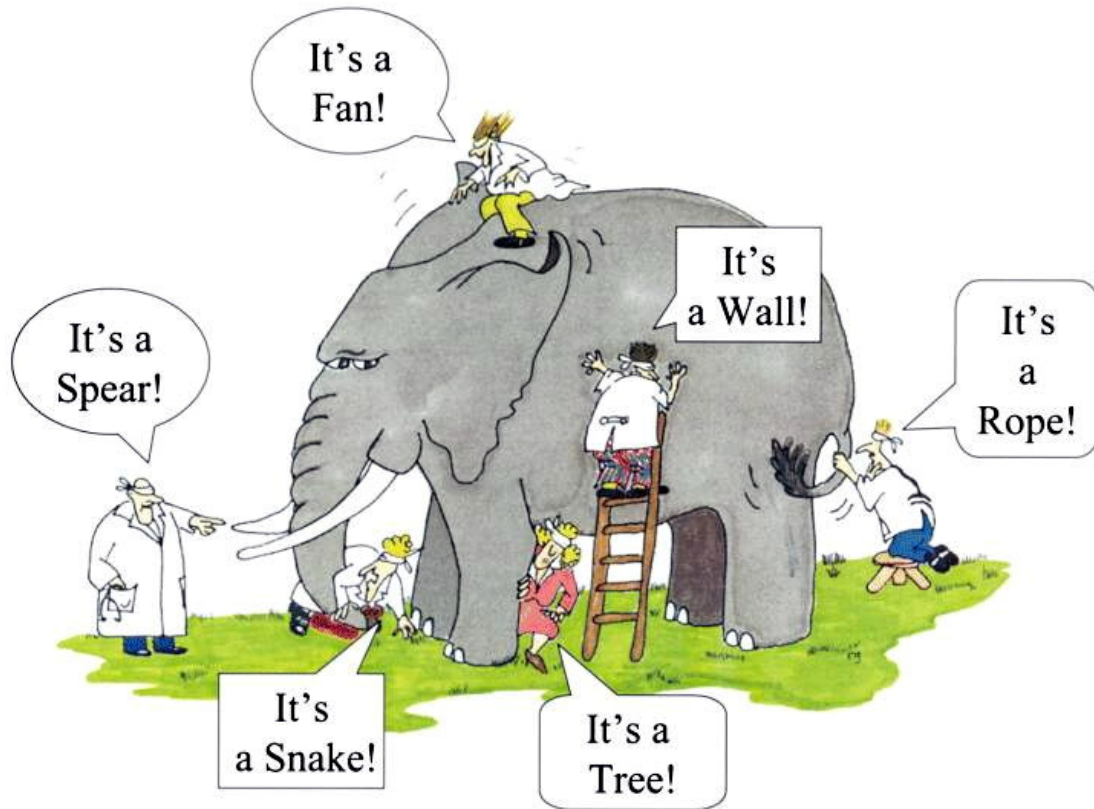
- Versett is a good example of the design aesthetic space we want to play in based on our desired brand attributes of modern, approachable, unexpected, fluid and refined.
 - However, Versett performed poorly across the board from an over-all experiential perspective
 - While the aesthetic design is a good example of the visual design, it is a poor example of our over all desired Experience Principles of *human, inclusive, timeless, focused, unified and flexible*
- While TWG is a good example of *approachable* visual design and an *inclusive* experience, they performed poorly as being a good example of what it means to be *modern, unexpected* and *fluid* from a visual design perspective.
 - TWG's use of *approachable* visual design seemed to take away from their ability to also appear *unexpected*, and instead was reported as being *out of touch* and *predictable*.
 - TWG's use of animation and quirky illustration lended itself to the over all experience feeling too *trendy* and will fall out of favour fast. Some users said the experience already felt dated.

- Rangle performed strongly overall from a visual design perspective, but fell down from an experiential perspective
 - This tells us our brand is strong, and has the legs to continue to evolve and expand in the direction it's headed in
 - R.io ranked very highly as being experienced as *timeless*, but poorly as *human*. This begs the question of some unintended by products of our design decisions explained below.

Insight #2: There are no truths, only perspectives

The Blind Men and the Elephant is a famous Indian fable that tells the story of six blind men who each feels a different part of an elephant's body, but only one part, such as the side or the tusk. They then describe the elephant based on their limited experience and their descriptions of the elephant are different from each other.

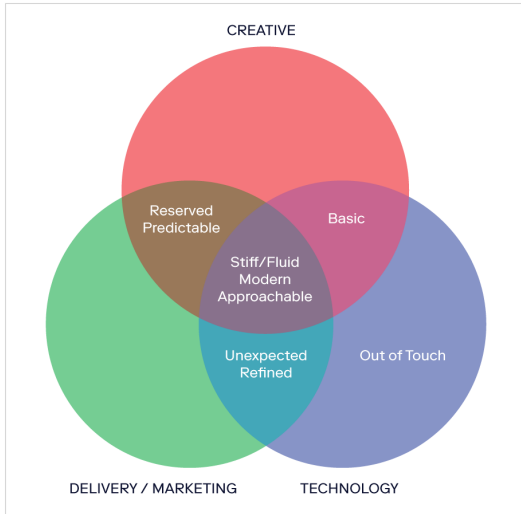
It was six men of Indostan,
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant,
Though all of them were blind,
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind...



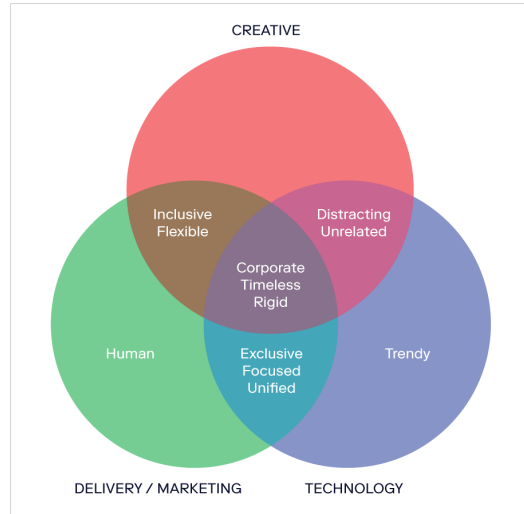
Why this is important:

This parable is very relevant when we start to consider the background and perspective of where each of our subjects stood within their domain, highlighting which attributes and principles they all interpreted differently. These individual points of view illustrate how our mental models can sometimes lead to miscommunication and conflict. It's very easy to be seduced by the "rightness" of our own views, but by gathering data about a particular situation from different perspectives, we get a better sense of the whole and can make more robust decisions.

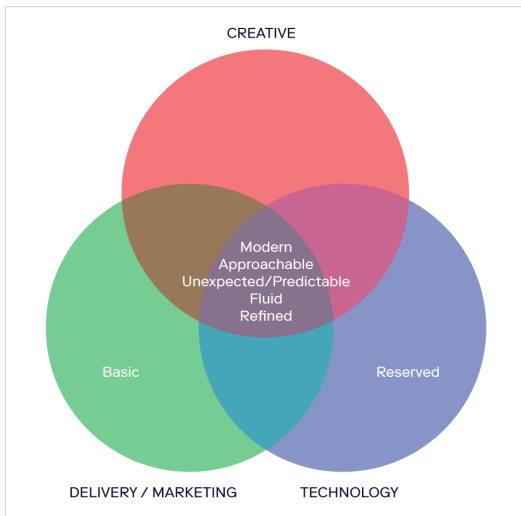
Rangle Brand Attributes



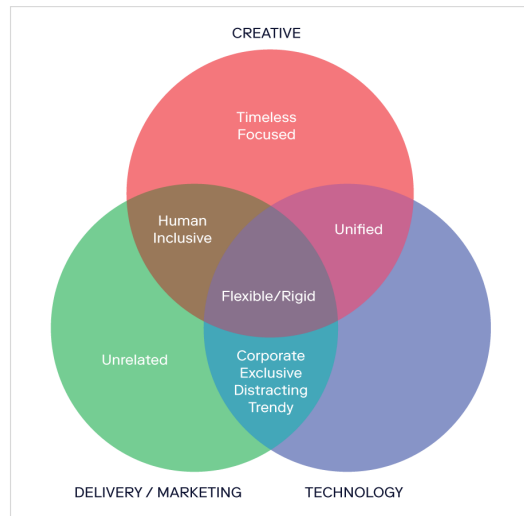
Rangle Experience Principles



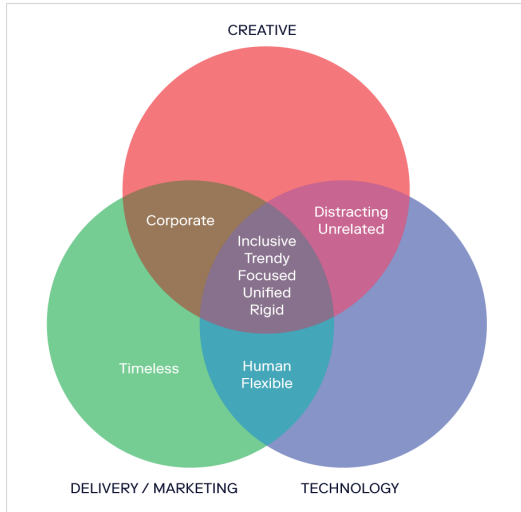
Versett Brand Attributes



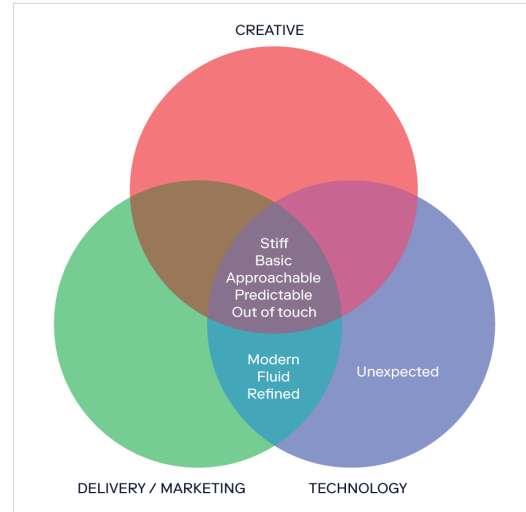
Versett Experience Principles



TWG Experience Principles



TWG Brand Attributes



Key takeaways:

- When we add lenses to who felt which attributes and experiences were resonating with them, it highlights particular growth areas
- *Delivery / Marketing*
 - Delivery and marketing are domains within Rangle which serve as vehicles in which work gets delivered and talked about.
 - This group was an outlier at times with their understanding of some of the attributes and principles in practice.
 - It's possible delivery and marketing aren't as familiar with the actualization of these attributes in practice, which highlights a possible need for more teaching and having more understanding of our audience when we speak to them about design.
- *Technology*
 - Technology was an interesting outlier at times, and also had a lot of overlap with delivery and marketing at interesting times.
 - Some words meant different things to their different domains. When subjects in tech were asked what *fluid* meant to them, they would try to rescale the browser to see if the page reflowed in a responsive manner. *Fluid* to visual design however, would instead lean more towards meaning how well your eye flows down the layout of a page.
 - Subjects in technology felt our aesthetic was *out of touch*. This would make sense considering the cutting edge appeal of modern web that would be familiar to them, which includes lots of animation and shape transitions.
- *Creative*
 - Creative overlapped quite a bit with both delivery / marketing and technology. They were an outlier only within Versett's experience feeling *timeless* and *focused*.

- This highlights the fact that creative has the ability to over-index value of the overall experience based on visual design only. Meaning if the visual design is desirable, we have a tendency to dismiss or overlook what the entire experience is feeling like, even if it's undesirable to others.
- *General*
 - Overall, creative will need to be more purposeful and robust with our communication regarding rationale behind design choices.
 - Creative will also need to be careful to not over-index value by weighting visual design too heavily against the entire picture of the experience and content.
 - Success will require the visual design, content and experience working harmoniously.

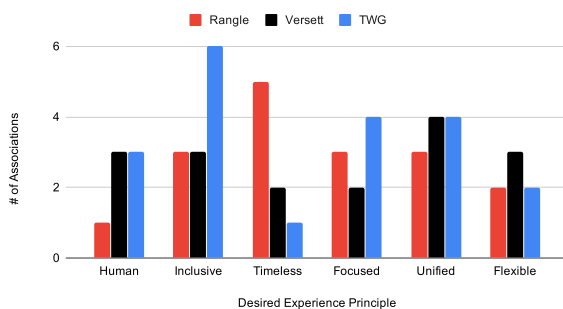
Insight #3: The unintended consequences of design decisions

When it comes to anything socially minded, especially in regards to the linking of experiences to words based on feelings, funny by-products are promised to emerge. As humans we need to be careful that we don't carry around the hubristic belief that we can fully control the world around us, in design or otherwise.

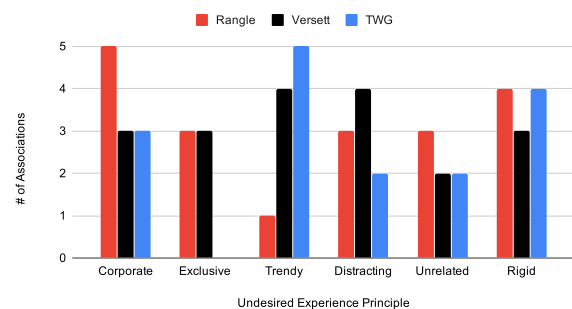
Why this is important:

Unintended consequences are defined as outcomes that are not the ones foreseen and intended by a purposeful action. A core cause of this is that some of our basic values will sometimes enable undesired after effects even if the long-term result may be favorable. These long-term consequences may beg the question if changes to our values are required.

Desired Experience Principle Association



Undesired Experience Principle Association



Key takeaways:

- One needs to wonder if a byproduct of achieving our goal of *Timelessness*, is to unintentionally appear *corporate* and *rigid*.
 - 5/6 people agreed that Rangle's website experience was *timeless*, however only 1 out of 6 people felt it was *human*.
 - 5/6 people agreed that instead of *human*, which is our intended experience principle for R.io, the experience felt very *corporate* and cold, which is the word some subjects preferred.

- By achieving *timelessness*, one wonders if we took away from our ability to stay flexible to our business needs and warm to our user's experience of ourselves.

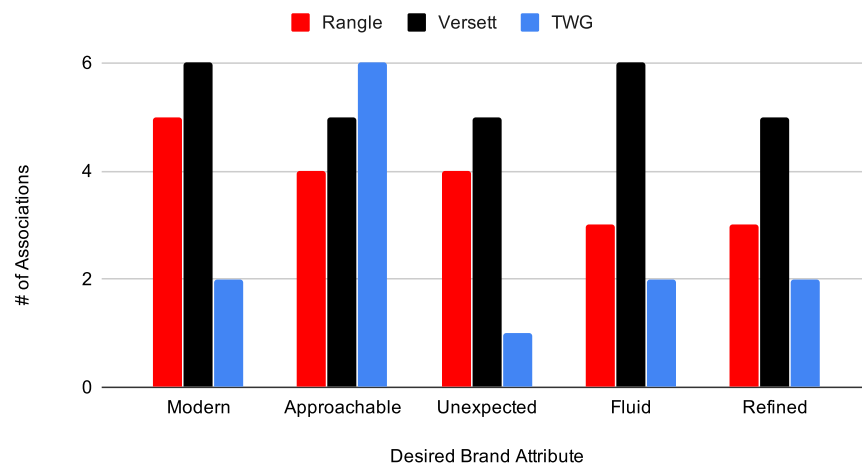
What this means all together

Overall, we're in a very exciting place for our brand and web experience. After looking at our competitors and measuring them against ourselves, we now have an idea of where we need to focus our efforts going forward.

What we do well

Overall, Rangle's brand shows a very strong foundation that we can continue to work on flushing out online by elevating it's more unseen human aspects. The data shows us how we can close the gaps between ourselves and Versett, with an opportunity to retest new design work on R.io in the future to see if we have closed this gap.

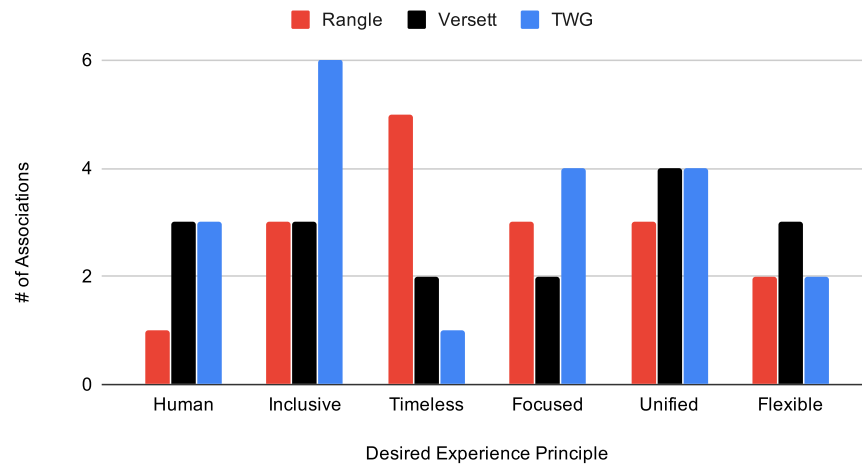
Desired Brand Attribute Association



What we could do better

Our web experience shows us where the greatest gaps are, one of which is closing the more *human* aspect of R.io. Considering our achievement of *timelessness*, at the sacrifice of human warmth and *flexibility*, this experience principle is up for examination, where my hypothesis is by evolving it, will solve some other gaps like *flexibility* and in the overall aesthetics as well such as *fluidity*.

Desired Experience Principle Association



Flaws with the data

Unfortunately as with all data, flaws from the collection of it will put bias in unknown areas until more data is collected. When we seek to retest the newest work to come from the evolution of [R.io](#), we will want to make sure to solve for two things:

- Testing externally with targeted consumers
 - Due to a heavy reliance on our external personal networks, we made the decision to be purposeful with our requests for personal favors of other people's time, and chose to do so at a later time with newer designs to put in front of external users.
- Including business/product as a fourth category domain
 - Due to time constraints and the leanness of this type of testing, we were unable to measure the opinions of product managers, biz dev and client partners.
 - We will require these opinions in the next round of testing.

Recommendations for next steps

Recommendation #1: "And then we improve it..." Shift the experience principle of *Timeless* to instead be *Effective*

For a product to be timeless it must have fundamentally good design, be iconic and culturally recognizable, and be able to have enough time to prove it's as good today as it was years ago. However digital design has a very substantial handicap in this regard.

Timelessness is perhaps in the medium:

- The web is a living organism and designers are constantly adapting to new variables.

- Entire paradigms can shift overnight, platforms come and go and designs can get flipped on their heads in order for a business to survive.
- Software systems don't typically age well— they become dated quickly and much of it becomes unusable as the underlying enabling technology shifts beneath it.
- R.io should only be timeless if we suspect the needs of our business will be invariable and unchanging, which doesn't seem to be the case if we look at Rangle's history.

This principle meaning and word can continue to be evolved, but as a starting point:



03 Timeless Effective: We understand trends, but they do not dictate our experiences, effectiveness does. Our goal is to serve and inspire credibility from within.

Recommendation #2: Use less boxed in layouts, break patterns and leverage animated interactions to increase feelings of *Fluidity* and *Refinement*

When you know the rules well enough, you're able to break them in a way that serves our goals. Creating visual tension at specific times, breaking the grid, and creating a layout that breaks the self-imposed boxing in of content will go a long way to lead users eyes down the page and through our experience.

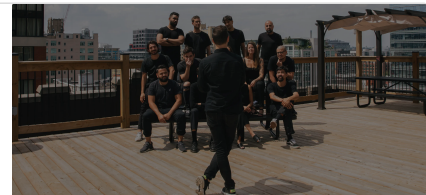
R.io is being given a renewed opportunity to flex our creative and technological muscle. We need to leverage subtle interaction animations to help communicate the full extent of not only what we're capable of, but also our message baked within. We should demonstrate restraint when animating interfaces due to accessibility, but we do require more than we have had in the past.

Websites of note that do these well:

Home

Jam3 is a design and experience agency that partners with forward-thinking brands to solve problems in the space between people and technology.

🔗 <https://www.jam3.com/>



Versett - A Product Design and Engineering Consultancy in Toronto, Calgary and New York

Versett partners with high-growth companies to design, build, and grow their products. Together we solve the big challenges with the right process.

🔗 <https://versett.com/>



Home - Reaktor

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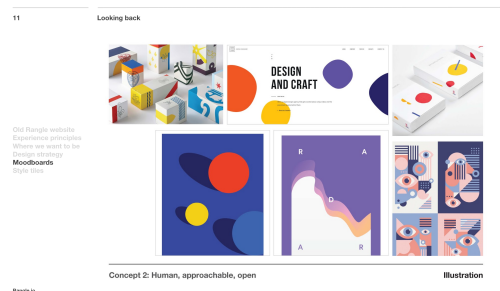
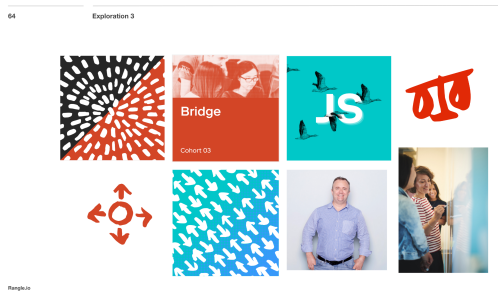
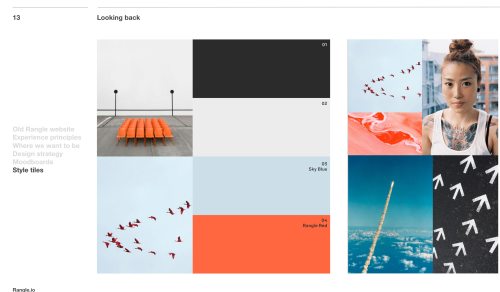
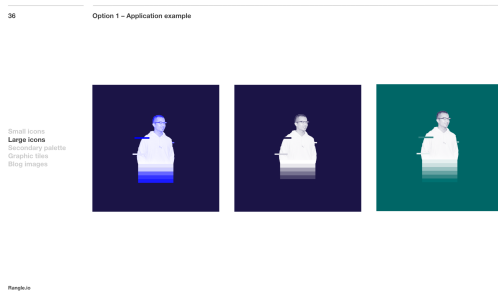
R <https://www.reaktor.com/>



Recommendation #3: Elevate and expand the human aspects of the Rangle brand

The Rangle rebrand was intended to stretch further beyond what it was given a chance to after the initial launch. There was a lot of work put into furthering develop the more relaxed, human side to the brand and have it incorporated into the website, full of colour and life. We now have an opportunity to bring this life back in while still maintaining the slickness of our experience in its entirety.

Thumbnails from this discovery:



Recommendation #4: Strike a balance between CMS control and inspired storytelling.

There will always be a need for marketing to have the opportunity to post and pull content from the website on the fly, without being blocked by development and design. In Q3, we built systems to solve this problem and enabled marketing to be able to build and edit each page on the Rangle website. The trade-off from this caused the overall result of our website to appear rigid and boxed in. We need to be able to strike a balance between strictly CMS controlled pages and sections that lack some strict CMS control.

This will be an ongoing investigation and conversation with marketing, strategy and technology to understand what they feel strongly about moving forward with, and what the needs are. We have yet to speak to technology to understand if there is a middle ground where content can be edited on by the CMS for some more front-end heavy pages, instead of ultimate control over the layout as well. Here are some proposed ideas to discuss for moving forward.

Sections of the website that should stay strictly CMS controlled:

- Learn with Rangle
 - Blog
 - Podcast
 - Webinars
 - Toolkit
- Community Events
- Join our team
 - Life at Rangle
 - Our Teams
 - Careers
- Contact Us


Sections of the website that will require more flexibility for the sake of enhancing the buyer's user journey:

- Home
- Who we are
- What we do
- Our Locations

Resources

Can Digital Products Be "Timeless?"

Do websites and apps belong in the MoMA? (They do) Working at HODINKEE, I'm exposed to iconic, timeless designs nearly every day. From vintage watches and design objects that come by my desk, to the classic cars I get to drive on the weekends, I'm fortunate to be

 <https://medium.com/startup-grind/can-digital-products-be-timeless-a04e30662029>



The Blind Men and the Elephant - The Systems Thinker

The parable of the blind men and the elephant illustrates how our individual perceptions (what Peter Senge calls our "mental models") can lead to miscommunication and conflict. Pegasus Communications president Ginny Wiley has a small sculpture of an elephant on

 <https://thesystemsthinker.com/the-blind-men-and-the-elephant/>

