

By [Sara Keats](#)

In March, UX thought leaders gathered in Seattle to share their insights at ConveyUX, the annual user experience conference powered by Blink. Among the more than 50 speakers were several subject matter experts from Blink, who led workshops, moderated panel discussions, and delivered talks on a variety of UX-related topics.

Since 2013, ConveyUX has offered an annual gathering for professionals involved with the research, design, development, and strategy of digital products and services. ConveyUX delivers a wide range of education and networking opportunities, as well as interesting speakers and session topics.

The three-day conference was packed with insights and riveting discussions. Here are a few themes that emerged in the Blink-led sessions.

Design leaders from different industries share common challenges

One of the most exciting ways to chart the growth of Blink and ConveyUX has been to see the seniority of our guest speakers mature alongside the conference. We were thrilled to welcome senior leaders to this year's ConveyUX conference stage.

Anne Vande Creek, a director of client relations at Blink, moderated a panel discussion about leading design in an enterprise environment. Panelists included Lana Voynova from Best Buy, Shelley Letsinger of GE Power, and Zeeshan Syed of Oracle (pictured below).

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They shared their reflections on why robust enterprise systems drive innovation and results, and how design systems help teams scale and create efficiencies and cohesiveness. These leaders found common challenges across the different spaces they each work in.

David Westen, our chief strategy officer, led a discussion with Marymoore Patterson of Panasonic, Kimberly Wiessner of REI, and Peter Brown of Cara Veterinary (pictured below) about the setbacks and failures they have experienced designing products and services. Each shared stories of their most memorable missteps and described how those experiences have made them better product leaders.

Some common themes included miscalculations when bringing products into new languages and cultural contexts, and learning from mistakes and keeping morale afloat when teams fail. The panel explained that failures are opportunities for growth.

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There is a power in borrowing techniques and frameworks across disciplines

Heidi Adkisson, a principal designer at Blink, created a workshop to help designers learn [how to use object modeling](#). In the workshop, she explained the concept of an object model. An object model depicts a system as a set of objects, actions, and relationships, and provides a structural perspective. This perspective, though likely less familiar to designers than the task perspective, offers a lot of value to designers.

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Object modeling is particularly useful in planning a design system because it provides the foundation for a consistent system vocabulary. This approach encourages a structural perspective, which compels designers to think outside of current solutions.

In the workshop, participants learned how to create a Narrative Object Model using Slack as an example. Unlike traditional object models, Heidi's "narrative" version uses plain-English descriptions for objects and their relationships. Through a series of exercises using Slack as the example, participants practiced modeling objects by giving them names and describing their relationships (pictured above).

"I loved attending Heidi's workshop," said Megan Greco, a visual designer at Blink. "She was able to take a gnarly topic and explain it in a way that was engaging and fun for the whole room. Her exercises were well thought out, and everyone left the workshop feeling inspired to use object modeling in their own work."

"I am dying to get on a project where I can use Heidi's object modeling framework so I can use it in real life," added Claudia Haon, a UX designer.

Heidi said, "As a workshop leader, I found attendees to be deeply engaged, asking interesting (and challenging!) questions," she said. "I felt that we all were able to grow as a group on the topic."

Blink marketing director Brent Summers also presented on a topic that hinges on an interdisciplinary approach: the UX Flywheel for marketing. The UX Flywheel is a strategy model that explains how successful marketing is enabled by three simple ingredients: desire, trust, and action. The iterative flywheel approach is an alternative to the "marketing funnel" that puts customers at the center of all marketing activities.

The UX Flywheel is compelling to designers, researchers, writers, and marketers because it uses universally understood concepts to align contributors to the same goal: give customers a positive experience. Attendees of this session learned how UX can help identify opportunities, envision new services, introduce new products, and increase customer lifetime value.

These presentations illustrate something we love about consulting at Blink: the opportunity to tailor our approach to each client's specific needs. Our 20 years in business has yielded us a tremendous wealth of knowledge about techniques, methods, and frameworks in a wide array of industries. In addition, we have a culture of knowledge sharing both inside and outside the company that helps advance our ideas and thinking.

Being intentional about how you work makes for better collaboration, better projects, and a better life

Blink principal designer Lauren Javor (pictured below) shared her thinking about optimizing the design process in a session called, "The Goldilocks Zone: Riding the Inflection Point to Optimize Design." Javor has worked with some of Blink's favorite clients, including [Art with Heart](#) and T-Mobile. Using personal stories and economic principles, she explained how to consciously regulate the level of effort over the duration of a project. She shared some of the practices she has developed to optimize her design work and spend more time on the non-work activities that feed her creativity and energy.

"I loved this quote from Lauren Javor's presentation: 'Do less better. We want to be ruthless with our prioritization,'" said Melanie Johnson, a project manager at Blink. "Weniger, aber besser" or "Less, but better" is most often attributed to Dieter Rams, and like, "design is never done, it's just due," it's a design idiom with broad applications. In Lauren's presentation, she repurposed the concept to be about her work altogether.

"I've been giving a lot of consideration to Lauren's ideas about the importance of making sure you carve out time in your work to utilize both focused and diffuse brain modes," said Claudia Haon, a UX designer. You can read more about [how we use different thinking styles at Blink](#) from our chief culture officer, Linda Wagener.

"I really appreciated Lauren Javor's vulnerability. She spoke about her work struggles and how they related to and interfered with her personal life, and I liked that her talk was around being able to work less and enjoy life more, while maximizing your output and work quality," said Kevin Burzynski, director of client relations.

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Peter Stern, head of design in Seattle, also spoke about approaching projects, especially collaborative work, with authenticity, generosity, and good humor (pictured below). In "Get Comfortable Being Uncomfortable," Peter, who has led large, complex projects at Blink, like [our work with NASA](#), discussed how discomfort can bring engagement, growth, and job satisfaction in design. He argued that embracing discomfort is a skill like any other, and that it can be learned, improved, and shared.

Peter's talk included stories about how he learned "the hard way" that discomfort on projects can be an asset, methods he has developed to keep project leaders and their teammates comfortable being uncomfortable, and, of course, his beloved good humor and wit.

"Peter's talk was everything you want at the end of a long day full of talks," said Alexi Glines, project manager. "His talk was insightful, filled with useful tips, and funny enough to break

through the afternoon energy crash.”

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The beauty of networking without handshakes

ConveyUX took place in the first week of March, just as Washington state was beginning to respond to COVID-19. Following the guidance of King County Public Health, Blink implemented additional precautions such as disinfecting surfaces regularly, encouraging no-contact greetings, and posting signage about handwashing. Inspired by a meme, we also designed and assembled badges to promote “alternative handshakes,” which helped bring some much-needed levity to the situation.

The alternative handshakes were such a hit that we collected additional concepts for a limited edition second run of the badges for the second day of the conference. In total, we gave out over 800 handshake buttons.

If you would like to make your own 2.25-inch alternative handshake button, you can access the designs [here](#).

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What's next for ConveyUX?

Many of the sessions at ConveyUX were recorded and all attendees of the 2020 Seattle conference will receive exclusive access to the video library for six months. Anyone can check out sessions from prior conferences, as well as interviews with past speakers, on the [ConveyUX YouTube channel](#).

ConveyUX returns to Seattle in March of 2021 with a new and exciting roll call of world-class speakers, sessions, and topics and we hope to see you there! Please sign up to join the [ConveyUX community](#) and be notified as soon as early bird tickets go on sale. See you in '21!