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# 100 Ways to **Maximize** Your Physical, Digital, and Human **Assets**



## Three Insights about the Future of Product Specification in the Phygital Era

"PARTICIPATING IN THIS HACKATHON WAS INCREDIBLY INFORMATIVE AND INSPIRING," SAID  
MEGHAN SHERWIN, CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER AT KEILHAUER.

by Amanda Schneider

# As we look forward, one thing is clear: Change is happening faster, and it's harder than ever to keep up let alone stay ahead.

ThinkLab, along with recent participating sponsors — Clarus, DIRTT, Designtex, Janus et Cie, Keilhauer, Koroseal, Lutron and Mannington Commercial — are helping to tackle [the industry's biggest issues](#) through a series of [hackathons](#).

## **Hackathon 2021: Driving Economic Success in the Phygital Era**

While the first hackathon tackled the Evolution of B2B business development as we all moved remote in 2020 (and ideas still stand as we tackle the hybrid world), the second [ThinkLab Hackathon](#) dove deep into how product specification will change as a result of increasingly hybrid work in the design industry. ThinkLab data suggests architects and designers have 26 times the specification power as the average American consumer has buying power. And, when you get into the [Interior Design Giants of Design](#), the number can be as high as 111 times. That statistic should be empowering for architects and designers to consider their sheer power in how their decisions will shape the future. [Recent Metropolis insights](#) estimate by 2050, the interior design industry will have influence over almost one-tenth of the world's carbon emissions. How we reach them has dramatically shifted in the past 18 months, and many standard ways of doing business need to reframe in response.

The result of the Hackathon is a playbook titled “100 Ways to Maximize Your Physical, Digital and Human Assets.” The playbook shares an additional 100 ideas to prompt new connections between sales and marketing teams to maximize, evolve and rethink “the way things have always been done” and continue to harness and maximize the specification power of a powerful design audience in the areas where manufacturers and distributors typically make the biggest investments.

Let's dive into those three insights about the future of product specification in the phygital era.

Here's what we can share so far:



**Hybrid + phygital will drive innovation from manufacturers to create new streamlined experiences for architects and designers.** Hackathon teams, made up of diverse specifiers from prominent A&D firms like NELSON, Ewing Cole and HDR (plus many more) along with commercial real estate firms CBRE and JLL, and prominent dealer design leads, helped us explore the future of:

- Showrooms
- Libraries
- Events
- Product presentations
- The rep (our favorite ... and don't worry, it's good news!)

**Designers wish we had had this conversation sooner.** At the kickoff of our panel discussion (a private event held just for sponsors), our panel of design participants were asked to share the one thing that was most surprising to them about participating in the hackathon “The most surprising thing for me was that it actually took something so catastrophic like the pandemic to get this conversation going,” said Amy Mays, a design director in N.Y. “I was like, ‘Oh, we’re finally talking about it,’ and was very excited to be invited to be involved.”

Many participants see much more opportunity to continue these discussions moving forward.

**Designers want the capability to self-serve, but what makes reps great in the future remains the same.** One of the most dramatic sessions really covered how the digital era is shifting what we need and when from our product partners. “As designers, we’re all visual, and we have the need to save information somewhere so we’ll be able to find it again,” said Shannon Noon, with Ewing Cole in Pennsylvania. “But we have to make that easily searchable, easy to digest and easy to forward, whether on my computer or on my phone. I’m not sure why we are all creating our own spaces for this information when it could exist on a website.”

Kristin Cerrutti, with Nelson Worldwide echoes how needs have shifted: “We’ve had some of these struggles for years, but it has significantly increased with everyone going remote. At the moment, we are having to communicate to our clients in completely different ways than we were before. Today, we need Revit files even earlier in the process and install photos to be able to see things like seaming. Remember, we’re trying to sell ideas to a client who might be inherently less visual than most of us are. This helps save all of us from the heartache and shock of walking in and not being what they expected.”

Erica Waayenberg, ThinkLab panel facilitator, summed up all the panelists’ sentiments: “Right now what makes a great rep is that they understand the design process, they are trustworthy, effective communicators and responsive. That hasn’t changed. Some of the digital tools may feel like it’s infringing on the role of the rep, when in reality it’s leveraging digital tools for the rep to be increasingly effective

and consultative where digital tools cannot.”

But don’t take it from us — hear from some of our leading sponsors about the plans as a result of this most recent Hackathon.

“Participating in this Hackathon was incredibly informative and inspiring,” said Meghan Sherwin, chief marketing officer at

Keilhauer. “The insights we received from this project will inform our customer experience practices as we move forward, making sure that our phygital solutions remain an equitable experience for everyone. We’re inspired to continue expanding our virtual storytelling to ensure we are connecting meaningfully with the design community.”

We are excited for the design community to experience the innovations that come from these brands in 2022 and beyond, and we will be excited to tell their stories. Want to stay informed? Want to join in? Be sure to:

1. Tune in to season three of Design Nerds Anonymous, our podcast where we will be sharing insights uncovered from our recent Hackathon. Missed seasons one and two? No problem. Check them out here or wherever you get your podcasts.
2. A&D, CRE, distributors and other product specifiers: Sign up to be among the first to learn when new ventures launch, including our Hackathon 3 research panel in January 2022, with which we will dive even deeper into product specifications by category.
3. Manufacturers and distributors: If your sales teams are looking for fresh ideas, already available to you is our first Hackathon playbook. We estimate that many sales reps in our industry have gone from 80% face-to-face time to 10%. This book helps you explore new ways to connect. We’ll be diving deeper in our next Hackathon, launching December 2021, which will look at balancing investments in the physical and digital world by each unique product category. If you want to participate or get more information, simply reach out to Olga Odeide, director of business development.

*Amanda Schneider is president of ThinkLab, the research division of SANDOW. At ThinkLab, we combine SANDOW Media’s incredible reach to the architecture and design community through brands like Interior Design Media, Metropolis, Luxe and Material Bank with proven market research techniques to uncover relevant trends and opportunities for the design industry. Join in to explore what’s next at [thinklab.design/join-in](https://thinklab.design/join-in).*

# The Challenge

## Business Development in the New Digital Era

### COVID-19 has caused us to rethink a lot, quickly.

Our industry, formerly built on human interaction, was forced into a digital world that presents unique challenges for business development.

Many of us have pushed our business’ evolution forward, faster than ever. And spoiler alert: The world isn’t going “back to normal.” Some of the new practices we’ve adopted along the way are likely to stick.

This is a vital time for rethinking. The future will require us to reevaluate our tool kit, adopt new tools, and use old tools in new ways. We have to disrupt ourselves.

How, you ask? Read on . . .



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