

Why Every Business Leader Should Use Design Thinking

The need for problem-solving is at the heart of many businesses in scaling. Utilizing an effective problem-solving [strategy can often impact a business's](#) value and how much revenue it can generate. Businesses rely on two distinct methodologies to tackle challenges: the design thinking process and traditional problem-solving methods. Design thinking is the iterative process of thoroughly understanding problems and curating technologically feasible and economically viable solutions. According to Adobe, this process can be valuable for businesses, as those who employ design thinking report having 50% more loyal customers and 41% more significant market shares.

While traditional methods aim to address challenges and find solutions, they differ significantly in approach, mindset, and outcomes. Traditional methods need more emphasis on creativity and innovation as they are typically derived from known methodologies. In today's fast-paced business environment, where customer-centric solutions are essential, traditional methods may need to be updated as they involve prolonged analysis and planning.



[Design Thinking](#)

For design [thinking expert](#) Nuoya Li, her first encounter with the concept of “design thinking” was at the Athena Workshop with Ogilvy in Chicago, organized

by the Center of Excellence for AI at one of the largest US technology corporations. This workshop introduced Li to a new sales method focused on improving data quality while connecting various datasets around contacts, sales plays, client insights, and marketing interactions. The workshop also identified pain points for sellers, including unrealistic sales targets, an influx in administrative tasks, and ineffective tools.

Li's expertise in design thinking has helped her succeed in several different roles in her career. She was previously a [technology leader in AI product management](#) and analytics for cognitive enterprise transformations for internal and external organizations. Following in her father's footsteps, who worked as a social entrepreneur to help address environmental issues in developing countries, Li became one herself and is currently the co-founder of Forest [Friends Innovation](#) Studio, a technology consulting firm providing small to mid-sized companies with prototyping services.

As a design thinking practitioner, Li likes to set a positive tone and drive innovation by planning and developing new ideas. With Forest Friends Innovation Studio, she aims to lift people and "add value to others' lives instead of extracting values from others."

According to Li, we can simplify the design thinking process into five steps:

- Understanding the users' needs, pain points, and motivations.
- Defining the problem statement.
- Exploring solutions through ideation techniques such as mind mapping and brainstorming.
- Developing prototypes of the solutions.
- Testing the prototypes to obtain feedback from users.

This is crucial for confirming the potential solution's capabilities and identifying areas for improvement within the team.

The Athena Re-imagined Workshop that Li participated in further validated this approach. The collaborative event aimed to bridge the gap between marketing and sales, streamline the Cognitive Sales Assistant as a foundational sales tool, and promote intelligent selling techniques by aggregating high-quality data and machine learning models. The team used major design thinking activities, including persona validation, journey mapping, pain points prioritization, and

solution brainstorming to draw up “a seller’s ideal day” by different seller roles at the end of the workshop.

Empathy emerged as a [critical practice in design thinking](#), which means that designers immerse themselves in the user’s environments better to understand their perspectives, emotions, and challenges. The workshop has led to successful outcomes for business [transformation leaders from various teams](#) and emphasized the necessity for improved data quality, streamlined processes, and user-friendly tools to enhance the efficiency of the tech firm’s salesforce. Coming out from this workshop, Li shared major takeaways back to the Chief Analytics Office from an analytics standpoint:

- Poor data quality of contact information (e.g., social media)
- Contact to be filtered and sorted
- Multiple sellers contacting the same prospect
- Internal contact was hard to find
- Difficulty tracking against objectives and goals
- Lack of robust industry information
- A mismatch between client IT spent and product price and opportunity value

Businesses can incorporate Li’s design thinking methods into their processes innovatively. Li believes that influential leaders should not only foster a [design thinking](#) first mindset but also invest in relevant education and enablement so that employees can acquire the skills for quick adoption.



[Design Thinking 2](#)

Nuoya Li leading a design thinking workshop for one of the largest US home improvement retailers

The insights from an external client workshop on IT transformation that Li attended again highlight the advantages of embedding design thinking into workflows. Through a series of whiteboarding exercises with the largest home improvement retailer in the United States, Li and her team, as part of the pre-sales organization of a Fortune500 technology corporation, quickly identified the top three prioritized ideas around improving observability, visibility, and the trace file process for the client's IT organization. Both teams shared the same long-term vision: predictive insights for root errors.

The workshop started by recapping business opportunities, followed by the technology sales team presenting a technical architecture and technology roadmap for clients to review, a product demo that could fit the use case, and then ended with a solution vision and success criteria that laid out the foundation for future scoping work for the proposed Proof of Concept or prototype.

[Leading product development and strategy at Forest Friends Innovation Studio](#), Li and her team aspire to unlock the power of AI to develop platforms and applications for mental health practitioners and their patients. Li enjoys exploring new aspects of her career and truly values the diversity in her experiences that have shaped her into who she is today.

Nuoya Li's commitment to making a difference in the world is evident in her innovative work and strategic vision. She believes that we shall measure true success by the [positive changes](#) one brings to others' lives, and her dedication to this principle drives her everyday entrepreneurial ventures.