Accessible Design Systems:

CarMax's Driving Force for Online Inclusion

CARMAX®

Summary:

The largest used car retailer in the U.S., CarMax, is as committed to providing "iconic customer experiences" as it is to innovation. To simplify the rapid creation of inclusive digital experiences at scale, CarMax built Horizon, an internal design system. By codifying its brand design guidelines and practices, CarMax has not only made design and development more efficient, consistent, and scalable, but also ensured that accessibility is built into every new digital property from the beginning. We spoke with CarMax's Molly Covert, Product Designer and Manager of the Horizon Design System, and Robertson Odom, Principal Software Engineer, to better understand CarMax's journey to adopting a company-wide framework for accessible design—and how both the retailer and its customers have benefited.

What we learned:

Why CarMax prioritizes accessible design

- CarMax defines accessible design as ensuring that their products work for everyone. Company values like "do the right thing" and "put people first" drive their commitment to accessibility.

</> Embedding accessibility

- CarMax built the Horizon Design System to empower product teams to increase velocity while improving brand cohesion across its digital portfolio.

- CarMax worked with Level Access to embed accessibility into its design system, actively mitigating the risk of digital accessibility barriers throughout the creation of new digital experiences.

- While building Horizon, the team treated accessibility requirements as acceptance criteria for all design and coded elements. This required educating design and product teams about digital accessibility.

- For details that can't be included in code, the Horizon Design System's documentation website hosts accessibility information for all system components.

How design systems work

- A design system is like a LEGO™ kit: it's a set of reusable components and patterns (encompassing both design and coded elements) that meet clear standards and can be assembled in a variety of ways. Design systems also come with instructions (documentation) to guide the use of these components and patterns.

- Design systems help developers as well as designers create digital experiences efficiently and consistently, since they're not starting from scratch.

Key benefits of design systems

- With an accessible design system, CarMax's product teams spend less time focused on the granular details of design and development, and more time innovating.

- CarMax's team has proven that by slowing down temporarily, to create their design system, they've actually sped up their development process. By equipping teams with a set of accessible, pre-built components, they have reduced the amount of time needed to fix bugs—including accessibility issues—in quality assurance (QA) and testing.

"When it comes to accessibility, WCAG conformance is really just the floor. It's the bare minimum for making sure that a subset of the population can at least access your content. But we want to go beyond that and create useful, wonderful experiences for everybody."

"There's no established team managing accessibility at CarMax. It's a shared priority, part of our company culture. When you embed accessibility in team processes and share responsibility, you also embed those values at a team level."

"It's really important for us to codify accessibility as we build because it's just as important as color or typography."

Molly Covert,
Product Designer and Manager of the Horizon Design System

"The comprehensive tools and reporting system that Level Access offers support our distributed approach to accessibility. We can manage accessibility at both the individual team level and the organizational level, allowing us to share responsibility while operating autonomously."

"Our design system significantly reduces both design and technical debt. We're building accessibility directly into components, so when we update these components, changes flow back into all consuming artifacts and applications. That ensures a user's experience remains consistent across our digital portfolio."

Robertson Odom,
Principal Software Engineer

Learn more about how CarMax accelerated accessible development with a design system in our <u>customer spotlight.</u>

Level Access empowers organizations to address accessibility at every stage of the digital experience creation life cycle. Our advanced software and expert managed services include detailed design evaluations and developer tools as well as testing, monitoring, and governance solutions. We'll also upskill your team through role-specific training so you can embed accessibility into your ongoing processes.

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