REA Group is a market-leading online advertising business specialising in real estate. ThoughtWorks helped introduce the Continuous Design approach to REA in order to maintain its leading market position in times of increased competition.

Continuous Design helped ensure REA’s continued success

REA currently operate 13 websites around the world, with most of the sites ranked first in their respective markets. REA Group aims to deliver effective online advertising solutions through their stable of sites to help real estate agents sell or rent properties and win new listings.

Their business goal is profitable growth in markets where their position is strong and the market size and market dynamics are attractive. Continuous innovation and the delivery of a great user experience – for real estate agents, commercial clients and house hunters alike – have been the keys to achieving this goal.

REA’s intention was to achieve this through a combination of continued innovation and improved development processes. ThoughtWorks took it further, suggesting they pilot a more dynamic, collaborative approach towards product envisioning, planning and high level design. The plan was to utilise experience design techniques to respond rapidly to market opportunities and reduce the time from concept to delivery. We facilitated multi-disciplinary teams to collaborate, share, prioritise and deliver results. Simply put, REA and ThoughtWorks rallied the troops through the process of Continuous Design.

Armed with customer insights, understanding of context and our product hypothesis, REA and ThoughtWorks set about envisioning the solution. We facilitated the process using design-thinking methods to explore opportunities, combined with visual communication to rapidly sketch out ideas, thus inspiring further development and tangential ideas from the team.

REA has worked closely with the ThoughtWorks Australia and China teams on various projects since 2010. Daily standups, a 24/7 Skype connection between the different locations and key staff rotating between locations have resulted in better understanding of the strategic business objectives, the projects, and the individuals in the various teams.

The Approach

What is Continuous Design?

Continuous Design is iterative and evolutionary, building change into the process as a priority requirement. It’s about going from envisioning to ideation, research, and product release with continuous user feedback, while keeping the focus on the newest technology innovations at the lowest possible risk. This method makes collaborative thinking and design possible, while bringing measurable benefits to your product in rapid fashion.

“Thoughtworks helped introduce the Continuous Design approach to REA, and it is now a core part of our software envisioning and development process. We work closely with our delivery centre in Thoughtworks China to produce software with a great user experience through continual collaboration and timely feedback.”

Richard Durnall, Head of IT Delivery
We incorporated Continuous Design in three phases:

**Phase one – The Pilot**

This six-week process included multi-disciplinary workshops, user research and testing as well as proposition prototyping for a new consumer product. The Pilot explored:

- Improved methods for turning ideas into reality
- A streamlined process for developing ideas that can be rapidly executed
- Creating an environment that encourages team collaboration, contribution of ideas by everyone, as well as group ownership and buy-in of new initiatives.

**Phase two – Bedding in the practice**

At the conclusion of the Pilot phase, we bedded down the process and used it to kick-start the development of several new and innovative products:

- REA iPhone application
- Home Ideas, a step into a new market
- Agent Desktop and Hub Online products.

**Phase three – A new internal design group**

We kick-started and supported the journey towards new design groups within REA, including how these groups and individual design resources would engage with other internal teams on any projects going forward.

As a result of our input, REA are adopting Continuous Design techniques within their product design team. They are continually improving their products and constantly innovating in response to customer data. More importantly, incorporating a collaborative design culture within REA's entire organisation is allowing them to better leverage the ideas of their own people. It is also enabling them to promptly and efficiently deliver products that are in tune with their customers’ needs.

**The business benefits**

There is now an environment of team collaboration and joint product ownership within REA. Anyone who is willing to think creatively about a problem or opportunity is welcome to contribute. This stimulating atmosphere is reflected in results like these:

**REA iPhone application**

- Consistently in top 10 lifestyle apps, #19 in all Top Free Apps, rated 4+ stars in 2010
- 800,000 downloads in less than 2 years
- 2,000 downloads a day

**Home ideas**

- Diversification from buying and selling real estate, a step into a new market of home design and renovation
- ‘Ghetto testing’ approach to creating new features, using a build-measure-learn feedback loop
- Using prototypes, built in code to test concepts with actual site users
- Constant improvements and adjustments based on site performance
- Continuous Design and Delivery helped increase unique visitors by 30%
- Increase in return visits

More than just a process, Continuous Design is an entire philosophy intent on finding out what makes your market and customers tick, testing the ideas and getting the right ones out into the real world, fast. It’s about always delivering products that resonate with users so they keep coming back for more, again and again. And that’s the secret of REA’s continued success.