

Rosamund Lannin: Hi, thank you so much for joining me today. We are going to be talking about “Modular content: Designing in pieces for flexible experiences.” Before we get started, I wanted to just tell you a little bit about myself. My name is Rosamund Lannin. I'm a content strategist. I live in Chicago, but I grew up in San Francisco, California, and St. Paul, Minnesota. I work for Bounteous, an agency that creates big-picture digital solutions. We're talking about modular content today, but what does that mean?

We are going to talk about what modular content is and what that means in practice. We're going to talk about how Airbnb and TiVo use modular content and component design to make user experiences feel like home, and we're going to talk about how modular content helped tivo.com's redesign succeed. Get stoked. Let's start by talking about the opposite of modular content, which is singular content. Singular content is like a painting or a design comm. The content, it's designed to work specifically within the context of that page.

Until relatively recently, most design has been considered in terms of the singular page. This can get people into the idea that every page must be its own completely unique design, but completely unique content. Sometimes, that's okay. Here, we have a portfolio website for a programmer out of Toronto appropriately titled My Static Self. This site is much more focused on experience. In the case of a small portfolio website or more of a small marketing website, that works, but when you need to go beyond a website for one person or beyond a marketing website, having a singular approach doesn't serve the user experience as well.

Enter modular content. Modular content deconstructs the idea of page as sole content container. It considers content as discrete elements that can be applied many ways across pages and beyond. That might sound familiar because modular content dovetails pretty hard with the idea of atomic design, which was first voiced by Brad Frost. Brad Frost gave shape to the idea that we're not designing single web pages or single app screens. We're designing for systems, and modular content is like this as well. We're not creating content in a static vacuum. We're creating content that can be used across a content universe.

Here's an example of that could look like. If we look at Sephora's website, you can see that the home page is attractive and it looks well designed, but it's really a series of discrete content modules. At the top, you've got user information, which is an evergreen chunk of information indicating that you, the user, are here. As you go down, you could see that there is an announcement, which is something timely and urgent that you need to know right away when you're on the page. Big and bold in the middle, you've got featured content, which is what you want people to really focus on right now. That's your campaign or promotion.

Now, home page content tends to be a bit more singular, which makes sense. You usually only have one home page. As you dive into a list of product pages, which is all that we're looking at here, we're looking at these teasers or products, you start to see content patterns. You've got a key product interaction, which is a way that you can love

each product and add it to your wish lists, something that you'll see repeated throughout the website as well as this module, this nugget of information, a product teaser. It's letting you know what you're getting into before you take a deeper dive. It's giving you a preview of coming events.

As you move throughout the experience, the content stays modular. This is a page that shows past orders. The content is presented again. In terms of raw information, it's not that different from what you saw on the previous page, the list of product teasers. It's just built in a way so that it's appropriate to the context of where you are. You're looking at your past orders, you're seeing a bit of what you need to know about the product to make the decision if you need to order it again. It's just product information.

It also continues with those recognizable symbols that indicate interactions. You're able to love and save information from this view as well. Here again, this is the email that you get after you receive your order. In terms of content, in terms of that layered information, it's not that different from the past orders page and it's not that different from the product list view. You've got a recap of your product information. The idea is that the content is repurposed in a thoughtful way throughout all of these views so that it feels unique, but it's consistent and appropriate.

That's the heart of what modular content is. The way modular content works is by decoupling information from the traditional page format. It works doing that and it works with component design and they come together to create beautiful, coherent, flexible experiences. You might be thinking that sounds really cool, but what does it all mean? Let's break the idea of modular content down. Let's start with the definition. What is modular content?

Modular content is a form of structured content that's designed, created, and delivered as discrete components within the content whole. How does that work? What does that look like when you see it? It means content that can be delivered in a variety of contexts. You can see here how Clinique translates well from the desktop to the app. It shows how it can move between those experiences both digital and physical. You could even go into the store extending this even further. Modular content also works by marrying intention with structure in a scalable way.

It means that content must be understandable within its architecture. What you can see here on TiVo's website, you can see that product information is clear within the overall architecture of the site in the navigation, but it also shines on a landing page. There's thought to how that content puts together within your overall experience. Modular content and component design, when they're paired together, they create experiences that are consistent, informative, and flexible.

When you have the idea of a discrete module of content and also a shape that it fits within, you can create a really holistic experience that feels familiar no matter where you are. Now, we've mentioned component design a couple of times. Let's talk about what that is. Component design is the practice of splitting a user interface into smaller parts, or components. How does that work? It enables design that can be delivered in a

variety of contexts. It creates visual and functional consistency across different platforms. It's the structured side of modular content.

On the left, you can see Airbnb's hosting workflow, which is how you list your place for people to stay. On the right, you can see how that starts with smaller parts and then comes together to create a fairly complex workflow. By starting with those smaller parts, you create a workflow that you can replicate across different channels or locations. We have been focusing on the front end of component design, but there are some team benefits as well. Component design allows designers to work more efficiently and effectively.

It helps reduce unexpected and disjointed experiences and it encourages collaboration and evolution. This works for a few reasons. When content or design is created with a single space or idea in mind, it can be hard to easily build on it because each page and each shape was created without a bigger vision. What that means is that experiences can take longer to build. That can mean you end up reworking components and designs over and over again whenever you have new content, and it can mean that it's really hard to adapt your work to other platforms.

For a client, it means more time and more money and more difficulty expanding. On the internal side, when you build for a singular vision, it means that it can be easier to be siloed in your own discipline. It means that you can only focus on the content or only focus on the interactions or only focus on the visuals, but when you build modularly, when you're building modular content, a design team will need to work together more to make it all work.

Component design should always be backed by content strategy. When it is, it helps users intuitively navigate and successfully interact with every kind of experience. When you have content that moves and shapes that move with it, it creates something holistic and familiar. It feels like home no matter where you are. A way to sum up that result is the idea of decoupling information from the traditional page format. It's the idea that interfaces are made up of smaller components, and that this applies to content as much as interactions or visuals.

Going back to Sephora's website, it is one page, and it looks like one page, and it really pulls together and sings that as one page. If you break it down, it really is a series of modules: user information, announcement, featured content. Then you layer that throughout the experience. This idea of getting away from the traditional page format, it can be really scary for people, it can be scary for clients. They might be afraid that it will make their experience generic or ugly, or just somehow not as unique or good.

As we're about to see in these examples of modular content, that's just not true. TiVo, an example of modular content and stunning visuals, Airbnb, very modular content, but it also feels clean and streamlined and modern and looks really nice. Going back to Sephora, it feels very designed and beautiful and put together both in the store and on the app and on the desktop, and their content is very modular as well.

Just a quick recap, what did we just go over? We've talked about how singular content is specific and intended for a single use and purpose. The converse of that is modular content, a discrete module of content that's part of a greater system. When you have those modules, they're flexible. They help content translate across pages and platforms. We talked about how component design really backs up modular content and vice versa, how they come together to make an informative, appealing, and unique experience.

Component design and modular content, they work really well together. They make experiences that create places where you want to be and take interactions. We could keep talking about that, but what's really helpful is to see what that means in real life. Let's look at how modular content plays out in practice. Let's start with an example of Airbnb, who uses user information as a guidepost. It uses it as a way to inform you, but also ground you in the experience.

So, user information is one of the first things you interact with on Airbnb, you need to access it to log in. It immediately shows you that you, the person, the user, are there. It also shows you that everyone else is there. You start to see other people's user information, and it lets you know that you and they are all part of your experience. It also allows you to really navigate throughout the experience to understand it in different contexts, you're able to see the user information in different shapes and ways, and then that means different things.

Sometimes user information is an avatar that leads you to the host. Sometimes it's a more full description of the host, which is when you'd be ready to find out something more about your property. Sometimes user information isn't there at all because you're just browsing, and you might not need to know anything about yourself or the person who's renting your property yet. It fades neatly into the background when appropriate, but the idea is that your name and face are a sign. It's not just telling you your name, which you probably or hopefully already know, it's a sign of where you are in the experience, it's a sign of what you're doing and what that means for you throughout Airbnb.

Why does this work? Why is user information utilized well throughout Airbnb? It works because Airbnb does a great job of recognizing content's function. It's understanding what that content means for you as a user, and what it does. So, your name and your face are an easy personal way to indicate identity. They show you that you're logged in, that you are the person taking action, or it shows the other people that you're interacting with. It's knowing what that means.

They use that function, that idea of the content and what it means to different parts of the experience, to help establish the baseline of it, the required elements, what it needs. By extension, establishing those required elements helps figure out where a content module could be scaled up or scaled down, so talking about user information. You'll need a first name, you might need a last name, you might need a visual image of your face. You might need a description of who you are. Those are your required elements, the building blocks of that module of information.

Once you know that information, once you have a baseline of what information you need to represent, and how it might vary, it becomes a lot easier to build variations, it becomes a lot easier to build out. In this case, our baseline is the user needing to know they're there but then you can build out, they might need to know that another person is there as well. These contexts can be represented in different ways.

They can be represented with a name, or just an image, an avatar of your face, or a description or some combination of all of those things. Right here, we have my profile. Someone's here, they probably want to know more about me, the user. There's some information that's appropriate to that view. You can see just my first name, which is nice and personal. You can see some qualifying information about me as a user, and you can see a description of who I am, what my life is about, why you want to rent your property to me.

By having that established baseline, it gives a better sense of what variations work and it lets you use that information across different contexts because you have a strong and consistent base.

Moving beyond the information itself, let's talk about components. A big part of creating that recognizable information is building a good container and working within that container. You can see here that Airbnb has a variety of simple, streamlined shapes that represent content. By bringing consistent, familiar content together with those consistent shapes, it bolsters the idea that you are in the right place. You're seeing a shape that's familiar and information that's familiar. It's letting you know that you are somewhere recognizable, and then it's getting you the information that you need to move forward.

To hit all these right notes, it's really important to always start with the user. What I've created here is a pretty simplified high-level version of moving through the Airbnb experience, and how information plays into that. When you visit airbnb.com, you're going to see the user information right away, you'll need to log in to get the full experience. As you explore your trips, you, the user, will remain there the entire time, but you're going to start to see other people's user information as well, that of the host, or maybe other people that you're taking a trip with. Again, it might fade into the background if you don't need to acknowledge it.

At some point, you're going to book your trip, and you will be key to that as well. You and your hosts will be connected to each other or you might be connected to other people you're taking your trip with also. Then you're going to receive a confirmation email, which will let you know that your trip with these other people and this host has been booked. You're drawn to them again. That information will need to be represented in a different way there.

At some point, you might revisit your trip information, you might message your hosts, you might message the other people that you're on a trip with. That's another opportunity to represent user information and ground the user in a familiar way. Then you'll take the trip. You'll go on your trip, you'll have a great time. You might message with the host some more. Again, user information comes into play.

Then at the end of your trip is a really big opportunity for user information to be represented well. You're giving feedback to your host, and they might be giving feedback to you. What this all means is that understanding the user journey is really key to all the other parts of this. By understanding the ways that a user interacts with the experience, it helps content move with the person, and it helps it take on the right details and shape and structure for wherever you are throughout the journey.

That's Airbnb, and why they use modular content well. Let's talk about TiVo. TiVo is another great example of modular content. In 2019, TiVo and Bounteous worked together to launch a redesign of tivo.com, and modular content was huge. TiVo has great modular content, but it doesn't sacrifice anything in terms of visual design. What really made that work was because modular content came in from the start. What you're seeing here is part of the homepage experience. It's not just a nice picture of a TiVo product. You've got a headline, a description, and a descriptive CTA. Those are woven together with that big beautiful image not just to impress the user, but help them understand what they're getting. You can see, especially with that CTA, Explore Edge for Antenna, you know exactly where you're going and what product that is. We'll get into a little bit more about that later.

The idea is that those big bold images were paired with modular content to make something that was stunning but didn't leave you lost. Bringing that modular content in, beyond the big hero image, is into the more traditional ways to get to a product, the navigation. Similar content is transposed into this as well. It's just recontextualized to make more sense in its location.

Right here in the navigation, we've got again, a nice product image, a very descriptive, clean product name as well as the description. It's another way to know exactly what you're getting into. As we get into these product detail pages and a person gets more ready to buy, the content stays modular. It just expands or contracts as needed to make sense of where they are in their journey.

We used a lot of the same information elements across the website, but we worked with interaction and designs to layer them. Right here, what you're seeing is a shop page, which indicates that the person's at the buying point. You have the name, the image, or in this case, a video but you also have a nice bulleted recap of what this product does just reminding the person of why they're buying it, what else they need to know about purchasing it, and also a nice confident recap of the price.

Everything is very clear and it's really only an extension of what you've seen before at the homepage and the navigation. Throughout all of this, what we wanted to do was keep things informative but also visually exciting. Also, focus on the vision of what TiVo was going for with their redesign. The core of tivo.com is products and the content and design always needed to reflect that.

What you can see here might look very custom but really, it was built using a series of content modules and design components brought together with visual style to create

something that was clear and informative, but also colorful and really beautiful. Why does this work? How did this all come together?

A big part of understanding TiVo's needs came from discovery. Right here, you can see a picture of me and my colleagues working with TiVo to have a discussion about what was needed both in terms of content and interactions. By engaging them with stakeholder interviews and workshop exercises, we helped build the idea of a content universe and then brought that back to the page level.

What this did was, it helped to establish the idea that content could be expressed many different ways, that the content didn't need to just live in one space, but the content was actually much more effective if it was structured and distributed throughout the experience and also throughout the website.

Throughout all of this, we needed to remember TiVo's vision. TiVo wanted a modern unified user experience designed to generate leads and increase conversion by showcasing TiVo as a technology innovator. That's kind of a mouthful. What it meant for content was the content needed to be informative and confident and also a touch playful. It needed to say we're here, this is what TiVo is about, and this is what distinguishes us without a lot of clutter but with a lot of stunning visual impact.

Where that came into play is on the homepage with this wizard, which helps people self-select what they need in terms of a TiVo experience. A big part of this was merging together those key product lines but also giving people a visually appealing, exciting way to figure out what they needed without having to go to the navigation. This is a great way to establish TiVo and tell them what TiVo is all about, but also make it visually exciting. Again, working with design and interactions to streamline and shine, a big part of this project was showing products in a few different ways but also keeping them familiar. They should never be confusing.

Throughout this project, we needed to keep thinking of the future not just because that's always a good idea, but at the time of the project, TiVo plans to expand it to Canada, which they have since then. Why we needed to keep that in mind was because we needed to create an experience that translated really well. We needed to create something that could be put together again without the need necessarily for another full redesign.

That's really where modular content came into play. By creating these discrete modules and discrete components, we were able to create something that was visually beautiful but also could be recreated in another context, maybe even with very different content. We were building a base that could be extended, in this case, into Canada.

Okay, what did we just talk about? We talked about how Airbnb uses modular content. We talked about how they layer user information throughout the experience to provide both information and create a sense of place showing that you are there. We talked about how TiVo pairs flexible content with stunning visuals to highlight their products as well as their value statements, and we talked about why it works. We talked about how

a strong understanding of content, interactions, and style, bring it all together and help you create content that can really move.

With TiVo, we have touched on some of the highlights of the project. There's a lot more to it. There's a lot more that really made that content modular and helped it shine visually and from an interaction perspective as well. I want to start by talking about some of the pillars of modular content, what it actually means to make it.

Modular content means content strategy. It means knowing your structure and it means having and understanding across your team. Let's talk about what that meant for TiVo. Let's start with content strategy. To make modular content, you need a content strategy based in knowledge of your client, their content, and the experience ecosystem.

Content strategy is pretty key to thoughtful content. It means that it can move and flex because you have an understanding of what it does, where it lives, and what it means for your client and audience. What that meant for TiVo, that focused on products. Products on TiVo should be close siblings and not as strange twins. So, one major thing that we learned talking to TiVo was that they had a lot of products but they all looked very similar. What that meant is that users weren't able to tell what each product actually did.

You can see on your right, there are three products and unless you're a pretty big TiVo expert, I would challenge you to understand how these products are different. It's really hard to tell from the product imagery, so yes, we had to solve that problem of look-alike products. We also had to go a little bit deeper than that. We needed to not lean on the images but we also had to call out better what features and benefits were for each product. Not only what is each product but what can it do for you as a user because that was a part of it as well.

Going along with that, we really had to connect to the people that were interested in these products. We had to call out features, what the benefits were, and what does it mean for you as a person purchasing it. Their current content wasn't really solving it even though they were leaning pretty heavily on those visuals and that text to tell all that story, but it wasn't doing it. That was one of our big pain points that we needed to work through.

Let's talk about users. We knew that calling out those product differentiators was going to be key. For TiVo, that meant turning back to their audience. It meant focusing on why people were shopping with TiVo, what was in it for them in these products. That meant focusing on cable loyalists and cord-cutters, which were two of their major user segments.

Cable loyalists, those are people that keep cable for the ability to watch live TV and because it's bundled with internet and a phone service. They are people that want to use cable. That is going to be part of their TiVo experience.

On the other side of cable loyalists are cord-cutters. Those are people that are not using cable or don't want to use cable anymore.

They don't want to spend money on channels that they don't use. How that played back into TiVo's products was, people who wanted TiVo products that worked with cable versus people who wanted an over-the-air or OTA antenna solution, which meant that they didn't have to use cable to still watch TV. What that meant for the content, was that products needed to be distinguishable. These two audience segments needed to know right away, "Is this product for me? Is it for me, someone who uses cable, or is it for me, somebody who doesn't want to use cable at all and wants to use an over-the-air antenna solution?"

That was a big part of discovery, but what we also explored in discovery was how content would be expressed. I want to get back to the idea of decoupling information from the page format, getting away from the page. One of the big challenges that comes with modular content is fear of content loss. The idea that if you're not able to drop a paragraph of text or tons of images on every page, your content is going to be less effective.

Now there's research showing that's not true. What can really help is walking through what your content is, your content types, as well as everywhere it lives. What that means is remembering all of your content channels. That's what we did with TiVo as part of discovery. You can see to your right what we've called out in that table, are a few different areas of where TiVo's content is expressed beyond the website.

This was a really fun exercise because it flexed the idea of showing them everywhere that they were using their information. They were using it in retail locations, third-party physical retail locations, third-party digital retail locations, and even going further beyond digital. They were expressing their content through print, promos were being shown that way.

That was another way to express products and features, or even through podcasts and audio.

The idea was that by defining those content types, working with them to show here's what you're saying, and also a content ecosystem where it lives. That helped them understand that their content lived everywhere. It helped establish the idea that their website didn't need to be a holding place for every single idea, about every single product, promotion, and everything surrounding TiVo. It really took a lot of the weight out of the website, which helps create the idea that you can streamline your content and you're not losing anything.

It showed that information could be expressed in other places, or in some places that it should be expressed other places. It's the idea that putting your information in the container isn't losing your content. It's just giving it to users through many avenues, and in the process, it's strengthening your message a lot more.

It helps you ask also not just my content can live everywhere, but it drives back to the idea of, "Where are your users when they're here? What are they thinking when they're in a third-party, physical retail location? What's going on in their environment when they're reading something in print? What are their emotions when they're listening to a podcast?" So, not only is the website not the only place to store content, we worked through the idea with them that a single page doesn't need to express every piece of information either.

The idea that not every page needs a giant content block, it doesn't need a ton of images. It just doesn't need to hold every single thing. By doing that, we took them kind of on the idea of a journey, not just throughout the entire experience, but within the website and even within individual pages.

What this really helped with was when we were building content models and wireframes. We looked back to that user journey and considered what people needed to know every step of the way, not just throughout the buying process, but when they're on that page. What are they seeing right away? What's kind of that trip that they take as they scroll throughout it?

Then we built structures and designs that incorporated those information needs. Another big point that came out of that was the idea that products should have multiple forms of expression. Products were pretty core to their vision, and that meant that product information needed to be expressed in a few places. It needed to be expressed really well and really contextually each time.

We worked with them on the idea that product information should be expressed on the homepage, both in the navigation and main body area, bringing in a name and a description, which let the user know right off the bat, what the product was about. Then again, that journey continued. Products needed to be represented on the product detail page, which is a place to go into greater detail about features and pricing.

Then lastly on the shop page, which is what you're seeing right now. The shop page is where someone is probably just there to buy. You can tighten up that information again. Again modular content; it can flex or expand for what the users need, and by thinking about where they are in their journey, you can get that appropriate context and layer it in a way that makes the most sense and looks really good.

When we knew what we needed to say, when we had an idea of those information buckets, we also had to translate how that played out on a granular level. What points did we need to say in every part of the experience? We needed to ask and answer, "Is this product for me? What do I need to know about this product to make my decision?" Always, always, always, what is my next step?

As you can see to the right in one of our sketches, this was one of our first attempts at answering those key product point questions. You've got the product name, your first skimmable level, which going back to our user needs, it needed to let users know whether the product was for cable or over-the-air antenna.

That name also needed to show that users didn't have to just rely on the image, because as we've established, their products look really, really similar. The product name really meant a lot. It needed to tell you that this product is for me and it needed to make it very clear what this product was. So, underneath the product name, we have a description. That acts as a supplement to the name, but it could never throw the user off their path. It really needed to pair with the product name, to open up that story and tell the user a bit more about what this thing is.

It needed to keep enhancing the idea of what the product is and what distinguishes it, which in the case of TiVo was, "Is this cable? Is this over-the-air antenna? What's the value of this? Is this a more economic choice? How does this work for me?"

As a content module, that's really the base. What is this product? What does it do? Why should I as this specific user want it? Information-wise, everything after that was key product points it can be built on and it should be built on. By starting with those key points and really understanding and visualizing what needed to be said, we were able to figure out a lot better what shapes and interactions were needed across the site.

That also helped us get down to the line-by-line level of pages, the content itself. We completed a content audit, to help understand the shape of TiVo's content. One of the big things that came out with it was the idea of quality over quantity. Streamlining what they had, as opposed to just putting more and more of it in there. Through that content audit, we also were able to recommend some content strategy best practices. Going back to the idea of streamlining, avoiding long headlines and copy blocks, not giving people long past information, and not having redundant or duplicate information, that's best practice stuff.

There were some areas that came out of the content audit that were pretty specific to TiVo's needs as well. Namely, providing immediate information about the product and highlighting its competitive advantages. What the copy really needed to do was to tell you, "This is what this is." It needed to clearly delineate not just what the product was, but also the differences between the product itself and the product features.

Also going back to that earlier point of audience connection, it needed to do a better job of really talking to people. Weaving in testimonials and ratings and value statements about why that appealed specifically to that user. We talked a lot about content, delineating products and features, but that content needed a place to live.

That brings us to structure. Modular content starts with content strategy and information, but that information always needs a place to go. Let's talk about the shape of things. A big part of what made TiVo successful was not just the information, but a structure that reflected that information and also vice versa. Where that really came into play was components. They needed to contain the information but also be built in a way that could be reused and styled with visual design. They couldn't be hyper-specific to one type of information. What you're looking at right now is one of our key components, which was horizontal media with copy.

This component, it sprang from a need to call out features about a product without relying on giant long blocks of text. The information need was “tell me more.” We blended that need with interaction principles of being able to skim and also the visual idea of being eye-catching. These are also stackable, which was part of both a content need and honestly a content compromise, which meant that sometimes TiVo had a lot to say about every product. Each product had a lot of details, but it wasn't always possible for them to streamline information from the get-go.

So, we took that need, the idea of a lot of information, and we brought it back to the idea of skimmability. This was our compromise. If you're going to have a lot of information, break it up into chapters. Each one of these components was a separate chapter. By breaking it up into those chapters, it meant that they didn't have to sacrifice too much in terms of copying but it also made it easy to focus on what you care about or by stacking these components, the user would start to recognize these as feature, feature, feature, which meant that they could just scroll past all of it if they didn't need to focus on it.

Where this also really worked was when products had varying degrees of content and that was okay. It is totally normal and natural for products to have varying degrees of detail about them. We didn't want to force the content into the visual design because that means you don't know as much about the product, and that gives less of a good experience. What this component did is it kept all the products feeling comfortable and consistent.

Sometimes the product might have two of these or might have four or even six instances of this component. What this component did is that it showed that there is more information, but it never made you feel like you're in a totally new place. It just made you feel like it was a bit of a longer scroll, but it didn't feel unfamiliar. I just want to show how this component worked in various ways throughout a product page.

Right here, it's being used to show an introduction to a product. You've got its main image and the key points about it. Using design and some variation of positioning, it helped different features feel unique within the product page. As the person went down the page, both the content and the visuals continue to make each feature feel distinct, even though, again, we're using the same component and the same key points within each component.

What this component shows is the usefulness and the beauty of modular content. It's content and information architecture and visual design coming together to make sure that your content is reflected uniquely, without the need to create a completely unique singular design each time. Why this works is because we got down at the beginning to what we really needed to say and how we were going to say it. That helped us create these components that were stackable, that were technically a series of stacking blocks, but also a really informative and beautiful experience.

I'm making this all sound really seamless, like it just seamlessly came together, but it was definitely a discussion and there were definitely compromises that needed to happen. This component itself was actually the result of a compromise. Again, what can

really help is coming back to the idea that a website is not a painting. It's a living thing. You can work together to get to a point that mostly works for mostly everyone and then see what your users and your information tells you. You can let it breathe.

To get to that point, you really need understanding, specifically a shared understanding between your team, between design, engineering, content strategy, development, and the client and the users. This was pretty key on TiVo because sometimes, it can be really hard to think of content in a modular way. It can be difficult to think non-traditionally about content. It can be difficult to understand that even though you have all these components, you have different content, and it still needs to work within them.

Where this came up on TiVo is when we were working through the idea of a support page, which you can see to your right. We had created the components to make one but TiVo was having a really hard time visualizing it. The idea of extending their system, of taking all these components and making a new page on our own, that created a lot of confusion. What we ended up doing is creating a light visualization to show how that content could fit together.

To your right again, we have a light wireframe showing them that this is how your support page could look. You have everything that you need to build it. This absolutely took more time and this absolutely took more conversations. We felt that it was pretty important because when you're building with a system, when you're telling a client, the idea that you have everything you need, and you run into the idea where they have doubt about what they need, that's a really a moment to build confidence and trust.

We didn't create a completely new design. We didn't extend it too much farther but we just pulled together as a sketch to show them that, "Look, this is a way these components could come together." You have everything you need, and then to help build the idea that this system could be extendable. That breaking away from that singular idea of, I need to create a brand new thing every time I have a new piece of content. It's, no, you have new content, but you can use what you have to bring it together in an understandable way.

At the heart of these compromises was communication. Making modular content is a process. It requires an understanding of the many needs and factors that affect content. This is a picture of me and my colleagues after a really fruitful workshop with TiVo. We look really happy here, because it was a beautiful day in San Jose but also because we had discussions where everybody felt heard.

I can't emphasize the importance of that enough, that idea of talking to each other and communicating. This picture was after a more formal review, but by reviewing regularly and informally, you can really get a sense of what you're doing both as a team and with the client. By informally, I mean, it doesn't have to mean big scheduled review sessions. It can just mean pulling each other in when you're at a point where you have a question about how information works or a component or how something translates to visuals.

What that means is working with all parts of your team, bringing in the interaction designers, bringing individual designers, talking to the developers, and understanding how these interactions are going to work on a page, how style and color are going to play into it and even things like the technical limitations, what is this system capable of? How is my content going to function within that? Getting to that point means communicating frequently. Not just giving each other feedback but going back to the goals that were defined in content strategy.

It also means not just working with your internal team. It means remembering that your team always includes the client and audience. They are as much a part of this as everybody internally and they might even be more of a part of it depending on what day of the project it is. All right. What did we just talk about? We talked about how modular content means information that's considered part of a system.

We talked about how it works with components designed to create beautiful, coherent, flexible experiences. We used Airbnb and TiVo as examples to see how modular content plays out in real life to make strong and compelling digital ecosystems. Through TiVo's redesign, we focused on the pillars that make successful modular content: strong content strategy, a knowledge of structure, and team-wide collaboration and understanding.

I hope that that made sense and that you're able to take it into your next project. I wanted to thank you all for joining me today. Thank you, Confab, for having me. If you want to reach out to me I'm @rosamund almost everywhere on the internet. Thank you so much.

[00:48:50] [END OF AUDIO]