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Figma continues to skyrocket — 63% reported it was their primary UI tool

A look at the shifting design tools landscape according to UX Tools surveys



Seems like only yesterday I was writing about the [decline of InVision](#), a tool that was once the closest thing to an industry standard for design prototyping.

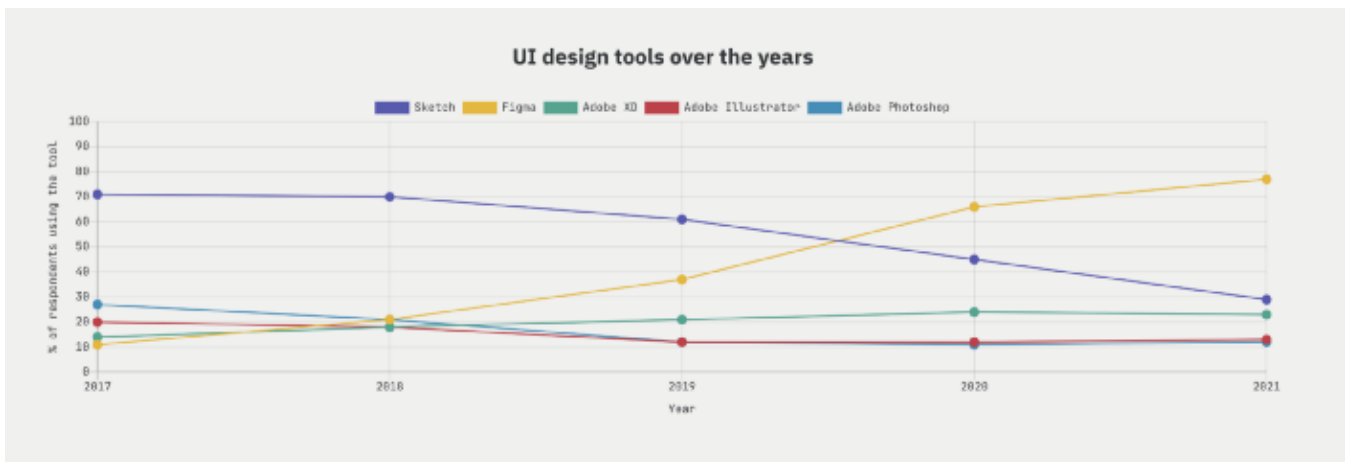
That decline occurred largely due to the cannibalization of InVision's prototyping



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A look at the last few years of UX Tool's always excellent [Design Tools Surveys](#) shows Figma had already moved ahead of Sketch in usage by 2020, although at that point it still wasn't hard to think things looked quite competitive. At the time Sketch had announced that its own version of collaborative design — ostensibly Figma's killer feature — was on the horizon. Surely it would claw back some of that lost position once it came out?

Well... maybe not.



Among those surveyed, Sketch usage is down from 45% in 2020 to 29% in 2021 (as compared to Figma's current 77%).

Those numbers add up to more than 100 because some users report using multiple tools. When looking at a comparison only of *primary* tools Figma comes in at about 63% compared to Sketch's 12%.

That's a huge difference. So huge that I wondered if maybe the survey overrepresented individual designers and smaller design teams. I looked at the raw data and honed in just on designers at large companies. And guess what? The percentage of designers using Figma as a primary tool in 2021 was exactly the same as the percentage of the total cohort. 63%.

And thinking about it, this actually does jive pretty well with my personal experience. My last (large enterprise) company was evaluating the switch when I left less than a year ago, though I never saw them pull the trigger. And my current is just about to



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Figma's web based nature offers major advantages that are hard for desktop apps to replicate retroactively

- You can log in and access your files from anywhere and without installing anything (though it still has a desktop app for those who'd prefer that experience).
- Figma works on windows AND mac. Mac-only was always going to be a huge competitive vulnerability for Sketch.
- While Sketch has introduced live collaboration it still doesn't hold up to what you get from Figma's inherently cloud-based nature. With Sketch you have to save things in a particular way to co-design and the default mode is still based on local files. The ease with which you can invite an engineer or PM to collaborate in Figma (assuming that's something you're open to) isn't really comparable.

Any of those cloud based, collaborative advantages probably got an extra boost from the increase in remote work due to the pandemic — though I don't think this fundamentally changed the way things were already going.

The barrier to switching is incredibly low

- These tools have aligned on very similar patterns, layouts, and features (any of which are relatively intuitive to begin with) which makes it extremely easy to switch from one to another without much re-training being necessary.
- Figma has an indefinite 'free to get started' model instead of requiring Sketch's up front \$100 purchase after a free trial which makes it more accessible for those learning the trade or giving it a comparative spin.

Other factors

I think the differences are mostly owing to the macro factors above, but there are some other important comparisons at the feature level. I wouldn't consider this list comprehensive — just some things that stand out to me.

- Figma has significantly more robust and integrated prototyping and animation capabilities. Sketch is still playing catch up here and can't seem to decide where or how it wants prototyping to work.



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- I know people prefer the way auto-layout works in Figma, though I haven't personally played with the most recent version of this much relative to Sketch's similar features.
- Figma commenting is just way better than the experience of commenting in Sketch Cloud or InVision.
- Figma keeps throwing in all these other crazy features. Audio comments. A whole dribbble-esque social network. FigJam white-boarding & widgets. Etc.

There are a few things I personally think Sketch still does better.

- As much as reliance on InVision is a crutch it does make for much cleaner lines around what work is officially 'published' and ready for the development team to look at/work on vs what you're playing or experimenting with. It's annoying in Figma to have to continuously copy experimental designs in and out of other pages and documents.
- I like the way Sketch keeps buttons at the highest level of the toolbar so you don't have to navigate drop-downs as frequently. And I personally think Figma overdoes the minimalism in its aesthetics at the cost of clarity.

Other Survey Insights

You can check out the [full](#) survey results for more insights but here's a few highlights that stand out to me:

- FigJam has grown massively, but Miro still holds the top spot for white-boarding. I'd be surprised if that lasts into next year though.
- Adobe XD is just below half of Figma's usage on windows specifically.
- Figma absolutely dominates as the primary tool for prototyping. 54% used Figma as their primary tool while XD was the runner up at 10%. Sketch comes in at 3% and InVision at 4%.
- Zoom and Google Meet were the number 1 and 2 choices for usability testing software despite dedicated testing tools getting high satisfaction ratings. There's



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I'm honestly a bit shocked at how quickly Sketch usage seems to have declined. I still remember being blown away by the massive leap it represented, and what it felt like to introduce it in teams where there was still heavy attachment to Illustrator and Photoshop. It absolutely raised the bar for design and moved the industry forward by leaps and I expect it to hang around for quite some time— though at this point I'm not totally sure what path could see it regain the top spot.

Though it's important to remember that's far from the only competitor out there.

Adobe XD in particular continues to churn ominously in the background as it...well, I'm not exactly sure what it's doing. But with Adobe's massive and inexhaustible support it can afford a more circuitous path.

Then there's the branch of 'No code' tools like Webflow that have been making massive strides and could eventually turn into major disruptors in the long haul.

And there's Axure — actually, never-mind. We don't need to talk about Axure. But there *are* a litany of other tools waiting in the wings.

Whatever the case we're definitely lucky to be seeing so much change and healthy competition. Personally, I find watching these trends evolve is surprisingly — fun? I guess it's not unreasonable that people interested in design would be interested in the companies behind their design products competing on the design of those products.

But anyway, for the present Figma gets to take a breath, sit back in its throne, and adjust its crown.

...but maybe don't get *too* comfortable.



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