IN THE MODERN BUSINESS WORLD, the technologies of analysis never stop evolving. At Korn Ferry, science—from the advanced social sciences to those that focus on analytics and big data—has merged with the art of understanding how people work together culturally.

At one time, helping to place an executive at the highest levels of a client’s organization was an intricate dance made up of “gut feel,” intuition and personal knowledge. Candidates were vetted through a series of phone calls made to contacts whose networks touched the candidate’s own networks. But we knew that technology could offer better solutions.

So to improve its industry-leading ability to combine expert intuition with candidate testing, Korn Ferry set out to reimagine its digital tools. The existing methods for assessing candidates and communicating results were out of date, complex to use and hard to understand. Korn Ferry wanted a partner to design a new suite of tools that could capture client needs, test candidate abilities, integrate analysis with expert experience and intuitively communicate the combined results to clients. To do this, Korn Ferry needed a partner that understood how human
experiences are impacted by design and technology. We turned to frog, a product design and strategy firm with studios around the world.

Making meaningful experiences is frog’s mission, and we apply this ambition to a diverse set of industries from health care to automotive to banking. Our client diversity is matched by our own internal breadth. We’ve harnessed our expertise in research, design, strategy and technology as well as our backgrounds in business, anthropology, programming, technical architecture, art and more—integrating the arts and the sciences in the innovations for our clients.

This diversity and DNA enable frog to approach challenges from multiple perspectives. The resulting collaboration enables fast, iterative concept creation, balanced thinking and identification of valuable (and feasible) solutions.

This was demonstrated on the Korn Ferry–frog Search 2020 program. Collaborating deeply with Korn Ferry’s data scientists and IT team, frog went back and forth to ensure that the interactions we were designing to be useful and beautiful remained faithful to the deep science behind the assessments. We conducted four stakeholder workshops over a five-week period in two cities, establishing design principles, conceptual direction, redefined user flows and our technical approaches. It was a team effort in bringing the best talent to the table. Korn Ferry’s chief marketing officer, Michael Distefano, told CEO Gary Burnison that this was “the most collaborative project I’ve been part of.”

The workshops clarified the key design challenges for the project, including:

- **How to make rigorous and thought-intensive candidate testing feel as easy and enjoyable as possible.**
- **How to balance the depths and complexities of scientific analysis with expert intuition and compelling candidate stories.**
- **How to create a design and development framework that could be intuitively extended into the many other Korn Ferry applications.**

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frog created simulations on iPads that allowed stakeholders to get a feel of the applications, making their feedback rich, specific and valuable. frog continued seeking input by using the simulations with a global user council, which provided real-life usage and cultural feedback.

The tool will not—nor should it—replace the high-quality human interaction that is a hallmark of the Korn Ferry brand and experience. This is a supporting player, not the leading role. Overall, the user experience (“UX”) hinged on making it easier for Korn Ferry search consultants to have authentic conversations with their clients about a set of candidates, while simultaneously allowing clients to understand the candidates’ stories more easily.

Using insights from Korn Ferry consultants, frog worked hard to ensure that this was a UX that required no advance training, was intuitive for candidates and clients, and added value to the process. frog tackled these challenges by prototyping how the conversation would progress between consultant and client—simulating typical interactions both face-to-face
(using tablets) and remote (using Web prototypes). Even our frog/Korn Ferry stakeholder interactions over the course of the program, which were in-person as well as remote, helped develop and refine the UX. Adjustments were made based on the dynamics that emerged.

Iconic data visualization, an interface design that references the familiar cards Korn Ferry has used for years in placement conversations and progressive disclosure (a design principle that enables users to go as high-level or deep as they like and still have a meaningful experience) were further honed for ease of use and for fluid, accurate interpretations and extensions.

Simultaneously with the design efforts, frog worked side-by-side with Korn Ferry to architect and write the code that would bring the applications to life. An agile approach (software development methods that flexibly and quickly build and refine software in collaborative, cross-functional teams) was used to guide and demonstrate progress, again affording frequent feedback from business and technical stakeholders.

In order to leverage the investment in frog across Korn Ferry’s digital experience, the tool itself was built with extensibility in mind; the visual and interactive design, as well as underlying code, are being shared across multiple aspects of Korn Ferry’s digital presence with clients.

The results excited Korn Ferry stakeholders and users, creating internal demand for the applications and prompting one user to say, “I was so busy liking [the new tool and its design], I was humming to myself.” The applications are being rolled out this year.

*Agile software development is a group of software development methods in which requirements and solutions evolve through collaboration between self-organizing, cross-functional teams. It promotes adaptive planning, evolutionary development, early delivery and continuous improvement, while encouraging rapid and flexible response to change.

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**Ever seen a master carpenter’s tools and hands? If you talk to the carpenter, chances are he or she will acknowledge it takes years—sometimes more than a decade—to break in a well-made chisel. During that time, the carpenter’s hands change. They become calloused and creased. They become rough. And yet, surprisingly, they also become more sensitive. The hand conforms to the tool; the tool conforms to the hand. They are one. If that’s the case with an object that is little more than a slab of steel and a block of wood, shouldn’t we expect to see something similar with people, computers and data? Shouldn’t we see as deep a relationship form between an analyst and his or her computer? Between his or her software and the way he or she sets up and analyzes problems?

We do. UX, short for user experience, is changing everything, including professional services. Long gone are the days of relying on an “old boys” network to find a company’s next generation of executives. “I know a guy who knows a guy who knows a guy” has become an overworked trope in TV humor, but business professionals can do much better nowadays. Complex algorithms and enormous data sets have given us the power to augment and complement the human process of recruiting, using statistically validated tools. These new tools help us understand the complete person and gain an understanding of how well he or she will fit not just into a new role, but into a new organization. Sometimes say people get hired for what they know, and fired for who they are. Recruiters are great at determining whether someone has the right experience for the role. Now, by using today’s cutting-edge tools, they also have the means of identifying the type of culture in which a candidate will perform best. With these new instruments, they can immediately discover what drives candidates in their careers and in which areas they are most competent.

Having access to statistically validated instruments is one thing, but making those complex tools dynamic so users will have an easily understandable, highly interactive set of reporting dashboards is something else.

frog Design has been leading the charge in UX for years. From their earliest days helping Steve Jobs design the Apple IIC, driving innovation at Disney Cruise Lines and adding excitement and flair to Louis Vuitton, frog has transformed complexity into simplicity.

With frog, our ambition was straightforward: to take a data-dense process and leverage it into something the world would like to embrace. In other words, our goal was to make analytical tools fit effortlessly into a knowledge worker’s hands. **