



BEST ARTICLES OF MEDIUM IN 2015

Stylizacja twarzy

Eva-Maria Kub

Shelley Sedlmaier

HENRYK PROCHNIAK

LOWNIK

REPORTAŻYSTKA

WYWIADY

RECENZJE

OPINIE

Best Articles of Medium In 2015

Created by Levent Aşkan and Ansin Öztürkmen.
#raow (Random Act of Wowers)

This e-book is a compilation of most recommended articles of Medium written in 2015, ordered by their tags and given expressive permission. Gifs and videos are converted to still images.

This project is created without any affiliations or involvements from Medium.

Useful Tips

- You can click on the picture of the writer, if you want to follow him/her at [Medium.com](https://medium.com).
- If you want to jump table of contents from any page, write between 7 - 12 in page search box.

Thanks to all writers for their great stories and permissions!

.io, Aaron Z. Lewis, Addy Osmani, Aleš Nešetřil, Alexander Klöpping, Andrew Merle, Arthur Attwell, Ayasin, Ben Wheeler, Beth Dean, Beth Steinberg, Bianca Bass, Biblio, Bram Kenstein, Brandon Chu, Brian Nelson, Camile Seaman, Chase Bratton, Cheri Winterberg, Christophe Limpalair, Corbett Barr, Courtney Symons, Dakota Shane Nunley, Dan Edwards, Danah Boyd, Daniel Rakhaminov, Darin Dimitroff, Dave Pell, David Ams, David Barnes, David Byttow, DHH, Diogenes Brito, Eden Wiedemann, Emma Kelly, Eric Clemmons, Erik K., Gabriel Tomescu, Gary Vaynerchuk, Greg Isenberg, Gustavo Tanaka, Hector L. Carral, Hugh Mcguire, Ignatius N., Intercom, Jacob Laukaitis, Jasmine Friedl, Jason Fried, Jason Zook, Joe Birch, John Metta, Jon Westenberg, Jonas Ellison, Josh Puckett, Jowita Ziobro, Jozef Toth, Kamil Stanuch, Karim Boubker, Kasey Studdard, Kati Krause, Katja Bak, Kenny Chen, Kushal Dave, Lauren Holliday, Marc Eglon, Marie Poulin, Mark Jenkins, Matt Bond, Matt Sydeworks, Mattan Griffel, Matthieu Aussaguel, Meng To, Micah Daigle, Michael Wong, Mike Monteiro, Mitchell Harper, Muzli, Nathan Creswell, Nick Jack Pappas, Nikkel Blaase, Nitesh Goel, Niv Dror, Noah Weiss, Nora Levinson, Onur Oral, Pasquale D’Silva, Paul Malan, Pawel Bialecki, Philip Kaplan, Rafael Zoehler, Raghav Haran, Ross Hsu, Ryan Hoover, Ryan Sheffer, Sam Grittner, Sandra Nam, Sarah Knight, Sarah McBride, Scott Bateman, Scott Santens, Sebastian Gabriel, Stephanie Engle, Steven Fabre, Stewart Butterfield, Susie Pan, Thomas Degry, Thomas Oppong, Tiago Forte, Tobias van Schneider, Todd Brison, Tomas Laurinavicius, UnCollege, Vince Speelman, Wojtek Skalski.

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Contents

Design / UX / UI / Design Thinking

- 14 Introducing Material Design Lite -- *Addy Osmani*
- 21 What If We Could Medium Articles As a Podcast -- *Aleš Nešetřil*
- 27 Emotional Intelligence in Design -- *Beth Dean*
- 36 Google Calendar Concept -- *Brian Nelson*
- 49 Starbucks Android Material Design -- *Chase Bratton*
- 56 The Johy Ive Principle -- *Daniel Rakhaminov*
- 63 Thank You For Everything, Adobe -- *Darin Dimitroff*
- 76 Designing Data Driven Interfaces -- *Erik K*
- 90 The Anatomy of a Credit Card Form -- *Gabriel Tomescu*
- 108 Has Visual Design Fallen Flat? -- *Intercom*
- 117 Messaging Is Just Getting Started -- *Intercom*
- 130 What I've Learned Designing Small Things at Facebook -- *Jasmine Friedl*
- 138 The Obvious, The Easy and The Possible. -- *Jason Fried*
- 140 Exploring the new Android Design Support Library -- *Joe Birch*
- 161 Modern Design Tools: Adaptive Layouts -- *Josh Puckett*
- 169 Modern Design Tools: Using Real Data -- *Josh Puckett*
- 178 7 Future Web Design Trends -- *Jowita Ziobro*
- 193 13 Mind-Blowing Statistics on User Experience -- *Jozef Toth*
- 200 The Best User Experience Design Links of 2015 -- *Kenny Chen*
- 212 The Big Mistake Nearly Every Designer Makes. -- *Marie Poulin*
- 218 Designing With Data -- *Mark Jenkins*
- 224 Slack's Design is not Secret Sauce -- *Matt Bond*
- 227 What Happens When an Apple Guy Explores Material Design? -- *Matthieu Aussaguel*
- 238 Material Design is Different, Not Better -- *Meng To*
- 254 Circling Ourselves: The Story Behind Asana's Rebrand -- *Micah Daigle*
- 286 4 Invisible User Experiences you Never Knew About -- *Michael Wong*
- 295 9 Hidden User Experience & Interaction Gems on Airbnb -- *Michael Wong*
- 302 In Praise of the AK-47 -- *Mike Monteiro*
- 307 Why You Need Design -- *Mike Monteiro*
- 329 Long shadow is Dead. Welcome Diffuse Shadows. -- *Muzli*
- 343 Why Product Thinking is The Next Big Thing in UX Design -- *Nikkel Blaase*
- 349 Mobile:2015 UI/UX Trends -- *Onur Oral*
- 363 Spatial Interfaces -- *Pasquale D'Silva*
- 389 Making Learning Easy by Design -- *Sandra Nam*
- 397 Redesigning Chrome Android. Part 1 of 2 -- *Sebastian Gabriel*
- 434 Intro To Product Design -- *Stephanie Engle*
- 454 Invisible Animation -- *Steven Fabre*
- 461 How Sketch Took Over 200GB of Our MacBooks -- *Thomas Degry*
- 466 The Inspiration Lie -- *Tobias van Schneider*
- 469 The Real Story of How to Become a Designer -- *Tobias van Schneider*
- 473 Ignore Everybody -- *Tobias van Schneider*
- 477 The Day You Became A Better Designer -- *Tobias van Schneider*
- 480 The Nine States of Design -- *Vince Speelman*

Startup / Startups / Entrepreneurship

- 487 Why I Won't Run Another Startup -- *Arthur Attwell*
- 491 How Product Hunt Really Works -- *Ben Wheeler*
- 502 5 Ways Not to Pitch your Product. -- *Bram Kenstein*
- 507 The Black Box of Product Management -- *Brandon Chu*
- 518 200+ Podcasts, 100+ Articles, 20+ Books... In 11 Bullet Points -- *Dakota Shane Nunley*
- 526 Stop Building Features, Start Building Brands -- *David Ams*
- 529 Why Nobody Will Steal Your Shitty Start-Up Idea. -- *David Ams*
- 534 Sunset -- *David Byttow*
- 536 Reconsider -- *DHH*
- 547 Why You Shouldn't Take VC Money -- *Gary Vaynerchuk*
- 550 There is Something Extraordinary Happening in the World -- *Gustavo Tanaka*
- 556 Give It Five Minutes -- *Jason Fried*
- 559 Making Money Takes Practice Like Playing the Piano Takes Practice -- *Jason Fried*
- 561 PRESS RELEASE: BASECAMP VALUATION TOPS \$100 BILLION... -- *Jason Fried*
- 563 What's The Difference Between Time and Attention? A lot. -- *Jason Fried*
- 565 How To Make Something People Give A Shit About. - *Jon Westenberg*
- 571 How I Went From Underemployed Waitress to the Top 1% of Millennials... -- *Lauren Holliday*
- 595 I Built, Launched, and Got Paying Customers for My Side Project in 3 Hours -- *Marc Eglon*
- 606 8 Reasons to Turn Down That Startup Job -- *Mike Monteiro*
- 614 28 Things I'd Do Differently Next Time Around -- *Mitchell Harper*
- 619 How To Deal with "Shit" As a CEO - Strategies For Managing Your Psychology -- *Mitchell Harper*
- 625 Entrepreneurs: Read This Whenever You Feel Like Giving Up -- *Mitchell Harper*
- 630 How I got \$248,000 in pre-orders Before I Even Had a Product -- *Mitchell Harper*
- 636 How to Become a Millionaire—Understanding Time/Capital Leverage -- *Mitchell Harper*
- 642 The Exact Pitch Deck Strategy I've Used to Raise \$125M Since 2011 -- *Mitchell Harper*
- 648 The Startup Framework to Validate Your Idea Before You Spend \$1 -- *Mitchell Harper*
- 657 The Success Habit I Wish I Knew 18 Years Ago -- *Mitchell Harper*
- 660 An Honest Guide to the San Francisco Startup Life -- *Nitesh Goel*
- 670 When Exponential Progress Becomes Reality -- *Niv Dror*
- 696 Nobody Wants Your App. -- *Ryan Sheffer*
- 700 23 of The Best Tools to Hack Your Startup Growth (Starting Today) -- *Thomas Oppong*
- 705 The Complete Startup Toolkit (The Best Free Online Startup Resources... -- *Thomas Oppong*
- 710 Want to Be a Better Entrepreneur? Read These Books -- *Thomas Oppong*
- 714 No Struggle, No Change -- *Tobias van Schneider*
- 719 The Weird and Wonderful Characteristic Most People Don't Have -- *Todd Brison*
- 724 Tools I Use To Learn, Work And Travel Anywhere -- *Tomas Laurinavicius*
- 734 Do Not Follow Your Passion. And Other Useful Tips. -- *Wojtek Skalski*

Life / Life Lessons

- 742 Why You Should Do Your Work First, Others' Work Second -- *Andrew Merle*
- 745 How to Create a Vision for Your Life -- *Corbett Barr*
- 750 Little Lifehacks Guaranteed to Improve your Life -- *Greg Isenberg*
- 753 When Somebody Steals Your Medium Post -- *Kamil Stanuch*
- 756 You're only 23. Stop Rushing Life -- *Susie Pan*
- 759 7 Important Habits That Will Boost Your Intelligence -- *Thomas Oppong*
- 763 Be Lazy -- *Tobias van Schneider*
- 767 No Alcohol, No Coffee for 15 months. This is What Happened. -- *Tobias van Schneider*

- 771 Staying Busy -- *Tobias van Schneider*
- 775 The Secret is the Beginning -- *Tobias van Schneider*
- 782 Shift Your Mindset By Saying Less of These Four Things -- *Todd Brison*
- 786 The Answer is No -- *Todd Brison*

Productivity / Self Improvement / Time Management

- 790 Why You Should Be A Morning Person -- *Andrew Merle*
- 793 5 Apps That Can Improve Your Everyday Writing -- *Bianca Bass*
- 795 You don't need more than two years -- *David Ams*
- 798 Manufacturing Quality Time -- *DHH*
- 802 4 New Year's Resolutions You Should Make to Improve Your Career -- *Gary Vaynerchuk*
- 805 Basecamp 3: Work Can Wait -- *Jason Fried*
- 810 Feeling tired? Do more. -- *Jonas Ellison*
- 814 You Must Learn How to Write a Damn Good Email -- *Lauren Holliday*
- 830 These 12 Habits Are Killing Your Productivity -- *Thomas Oppong*
- 834 The Secret Power of 'Read It Later' Apps -- *Tiago Forte*

Business

- 852 5 Things Every Employee Should Ask Their CEO -- *Gary Vaynerchuk*
- 855 How to be an Overnight Success -- *Gary Vaynerchuk*
- 858 A Reasonable Man -- *Jason Fried*
- 860 The 17 Books That Made me a Better Entrepreneur, Father and Husband -- *Mitchell Harper*
- 875 "Rules of Business" -- *Stewart Butterfield*
- 878 28 Ideas for Becoming 5 Times More Productive Every Week -- *Thomas Oppong*
- 882 37 Must-Have Apps (and Sites) for Busy Professionals -- *Thomas Oppong*

Careers / Future Of Work / Job Hunting / Recruiting / Work

- 892 The One Method I've Used to Eliminate Bad Tech Hires -- *Ayasin*
- 898 Why The Founder of Rails Automatically Rejects 80% of Software... -- *Christophe Limpalair*
- 905 What I Learned When I Gave Up the '9 to 5' -- *Jacob Laukaitis*
- 911 The Person They'll Become -- *Jason Fried*
- 912 How to Get Any Job You Want (Even If You're Unqualified) -- *Raghav Haran*
- 921 I Quit My Job Today. -- *Sarah Knight*

Blacklivesmarter / Race / Racism

- 930 What's Really Going On at Yale -- *Aaron Z. Lewis*
- 934 The Day My Daughter Discovered I'm White -- *Cheri Winterberg*
- 938 Just a Brown Hand -- *Diogenes Brito*
- 945 I, Racist -- *John Metta*
- 954 "What Happens After You're Arrested at a Protest in New York. -- *Nora Levinson*

Tech / Technology

- 963 Stop Saying Technology is Causing Social Isolation -- *Hector L. Carral*
- 973 Why I Stopped Paying Attention to Industry News -- *Jason Fried*
- 975 Manage Your Time Like Google Invests Its Resources: 70/20/10 -- *Noah Weiss*
- 981 Self-Driving Trucks Are Going to Hit Us Like a Human-Driven Truck -- *Scott Santens*
- 996 These 39 Sites Have Amazing Stock Photos You Can Use For Free -- *Thomas Oppong*

Writing / Writing Tips

- 1003 What I Learned Writing a Haiku Every Day for 100 Days -- *Courtney Symons*
- 1028 When Nobody Reads your Medium Post -- *Ignatius N*
- 1033 What I Learned After 30 Straight Days of Blogging -- *Jonas Ellison*
- 1037 What All Writers Can Learn From Mitch Hedberg -- *Nick Jack Pappas*
- 1042 Doing It Wrong -- *Tobias van Schneider*

IMHO

- 1045 An Old Fogey's Analysis of a Teenager's View on Social Media -- *danah boyd*
- 1049 Stop Asking Me About Your Personal Brand, and Start Doing Some Work. -- *Gary Vaynerchuk*
- 1052 Ten More Reasons Why You Should Quit Your Job And Work For Yourself -- *Karim Boubker*
- 1060 Why The Cake is a Lie -- *Tobias van Schneider*

Apple / iOS

- 1064 What's Worse Than Paid App Updates? -- *Dan Edwards*
- 1070 Apple's App Store Review Process is Hurting Users, but We're not Allowed... -- *Kushal Dave*
- 1078 27 iOS Open Source Libraries to Skyrocket Your Development. -- *Pawel Bialecki*

Culture

- 1117 My Weird Morning Ritual and Why You Need One Too -- *Jason Zook*
- 1122 It's Time to Stop Using The Word "Retard" -- *Kasey Studdard*
- 1129 What I Learned About the Future by Reading 100 Science Fiction Books -- *Tiago Forte*

Family

- 1139 Losing Amy -- *Beth Steinberg*
- 1148 Dear Mother—It's Not Okay. -- *Katja Bak*
- 1152 Forever and Ever: Losing My Husband at 24 -- *Sarah McBride*

Humor

- 1169 How Product Hunt Helped Me Grow A List Of 12,989,483,288+ Valuable... -- *Matt Syde*
- 1175 A Funny Thing Happened When I Was Typing My Suicide Note... -- *Sam Grittner*

Journalism

- 1182 Blendle: A radical experiment with micropayments in journalism... -- *Alexander Klöpping*
- 1192 The Media did Cover Attacks on *Insert Country Here*. You Just weren't... -- *Emma Kelly*

Personal Development / Personal Growth

- 1195 How I Finally Got Serious About My Health -- *Gary Vaynerchuk*
- 1198 Six Minutes Now For the Next Sixty Years of Your Life -- *Gary Vaynerchuk*

Others

Climate Change

- 1202 We've Already Reached the Tipping Point on Global Warming. I've Seen It. -- *Camile Seaman*

Coding

- 1208 DevTools Tips For Sublime Text Users -- *Addy Osmani*

Content Marketing

- 1221 Why Everybody Has Permission to Make All Kinds of Content -- *Gary Vaynerchuk*

Data

- 1224 Geeks vs. Writers -- *.io*

Education

- 1230 60 YouTube Channels That Will Make You Smarter -- *Biblio.org*

JavaScript

- 1237 Javascript Fatigue -- *Eric Clemmons*

Jeff Bezos

- 1243 Some Advice From Jeff Bezos -- *Jason Fried*

Letters

- 1244 When I'm Gone -- *Rafael Zoehler*

LGBTQ

- 1251 Are You Against Gay Marriage Because: The Bible -- *Scott Bateman*

Marketing

- 1254 The Business Model Behind The #AskGaryVee Show -- *Gary Vaynerchuk*

Money

1256 The Day I Became a Millionaire -- *DHH*

Music

1263 The World's Most Popular Genre is Cannibalizing Itself, and You Didn't... -- *Ross Hsu*

Peace

1268 A Love Letter To Paris, Beirut and Sri Lanka -- *Sarah Jameel*

Pornography

1273 The Naked People In Your iPod -- *Paul Malan*

Product Hunt

1282 Let's Continue to Build Product Hunt, Together -- *Ryan Hoover*

Product Management

1289 A Product Manager's Musings -- *Nathan Creswell*

Reading

1293 Why can't We Read Anymore? -- *Hugh Mcguire*

Steve Ballmer

1304 How to Be Like Steve Ballmer -- *David Barnes*

Untagged

1310 Just Admit It, Part One -- *Dave Pell*

1312 My Mom Has a Question -- *Dave Pell*

1315 Obama's Eulogy for Beau Biden -- *Dave Pell*

1322 This Fucking Dick is Also Mine -- *Eden Wiedemann*

1326 3 Things That Will Always Stand in the Way of Your Goals -- *Gary Vaynerchuk*

1329 Being a People Pleaser is a Strength, Not a Weakness -- *Gary Vaynerchuk*

1331 If Someone Has All Three of These Things, Hire Them -- *Gary Vaynerchuk*

1334 Specialist or Jack-of-All-Trades? The Answer's Obvious to Me -- *Gary Vaynerchuk*

1336 The Age of the Introvert Entrepreneur -- *Gary Vaynerchuk*

1338 The Next Time You Want to Unload Your Problems, Think About This -- *Gary Vaynerchuk*

1341 This is the Biggest Mistake a Young Entrepreneur Can Make -- *Gary Vaynerchuk*

1344 Facebook's Mental Health Problem -- *Kati Krause*

1353 How to Develop a Daily Writing Habit -- *Mattan Griffel*

1360 This is About The Time I Chose Not to Die. -- *Mike Monteiro*

1364 Founder/Product Fit -- *Philip Kaplan*

1367 "The World Doesn't Need Another Blogging Platform. But I did." -- *Ryan Hoover*

1368 We Fucked Up -- *Ryan Hoover*

1370 Avoid These 5 Things When Building Your Design Portfolio—Part 1 -- *Tobias van Schneider*

1376 My Top 11 Essential Tools I Could not Live Without. -- *Tobias van Schneider*

1386 The Agency is Dead. Long Live the Agency. -- *Tobias van Schneider*

1389 The Real Story of How to Become a Designer -- *Tobias van Schneider*

1393 The 10 Crucial Skills They Won't Teach You At School (And How To Learn... -- *UnCollege*

Design / UX / UI /
Design Thinking

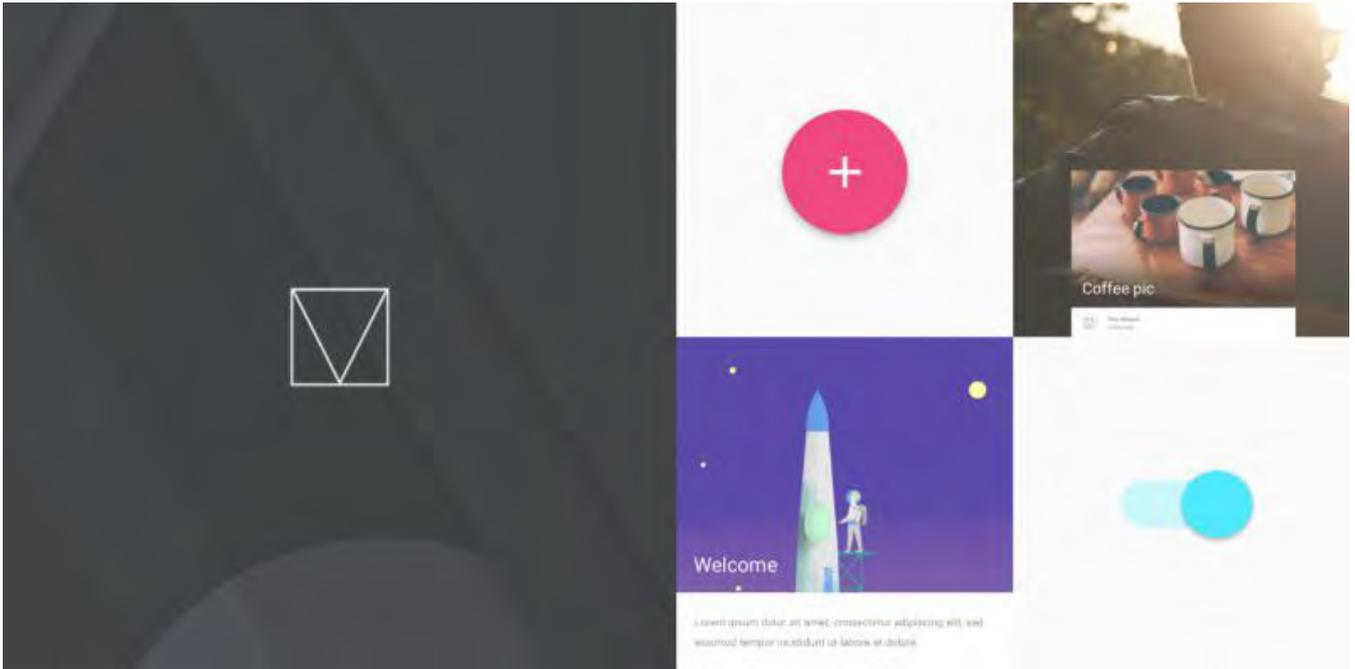


Addy Osmani

4 min read

Introducing Material Design Lite

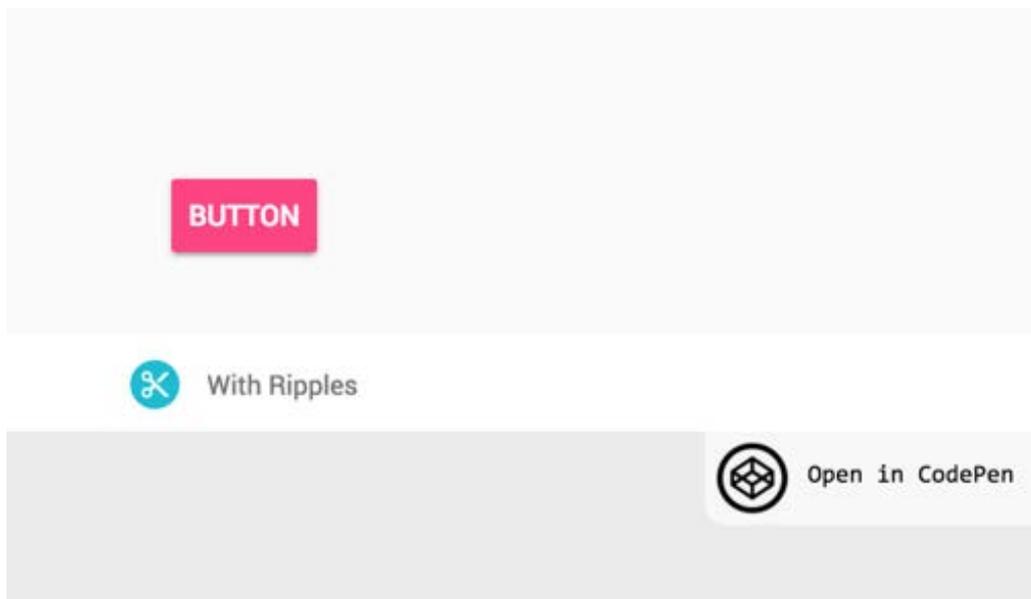
getmdl.io -a library of components & templates in vanilla CSS, HTML and JS



Back in 2014, Google published the [material design](#) specification with a goal to provide guidelines for good design and beautiful UI across all device form factors. Today we are releasing our effort to bring this to websites using vanilla CSS, HTML and JavaScript. We're calling it **Material Design Lite** (MDL).

MDL makes it easy to add a material design look and feel to your websites. The "Lite" part of MDL comes from several key design goals: MDL has few dependencies, making it easy to install and use. It is framework-agnostic, meaning MDL can be used with any of the rapidly changing landscape of front-end tool chains. MDL has a low overhead in terms of code size (~27KB gzipped), and a narrow focus—enabling material design styling for websites.

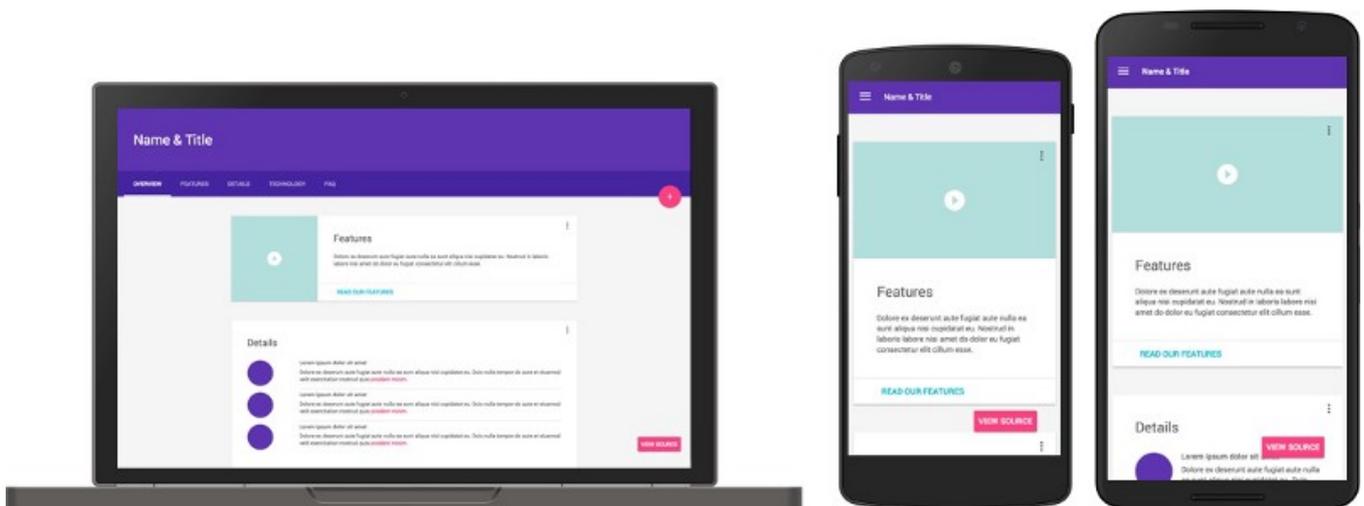
Get started now and give it a spin or try one of our examples on CodePen



Components can be tried out on Codepen. For example, here's [buttons](#).

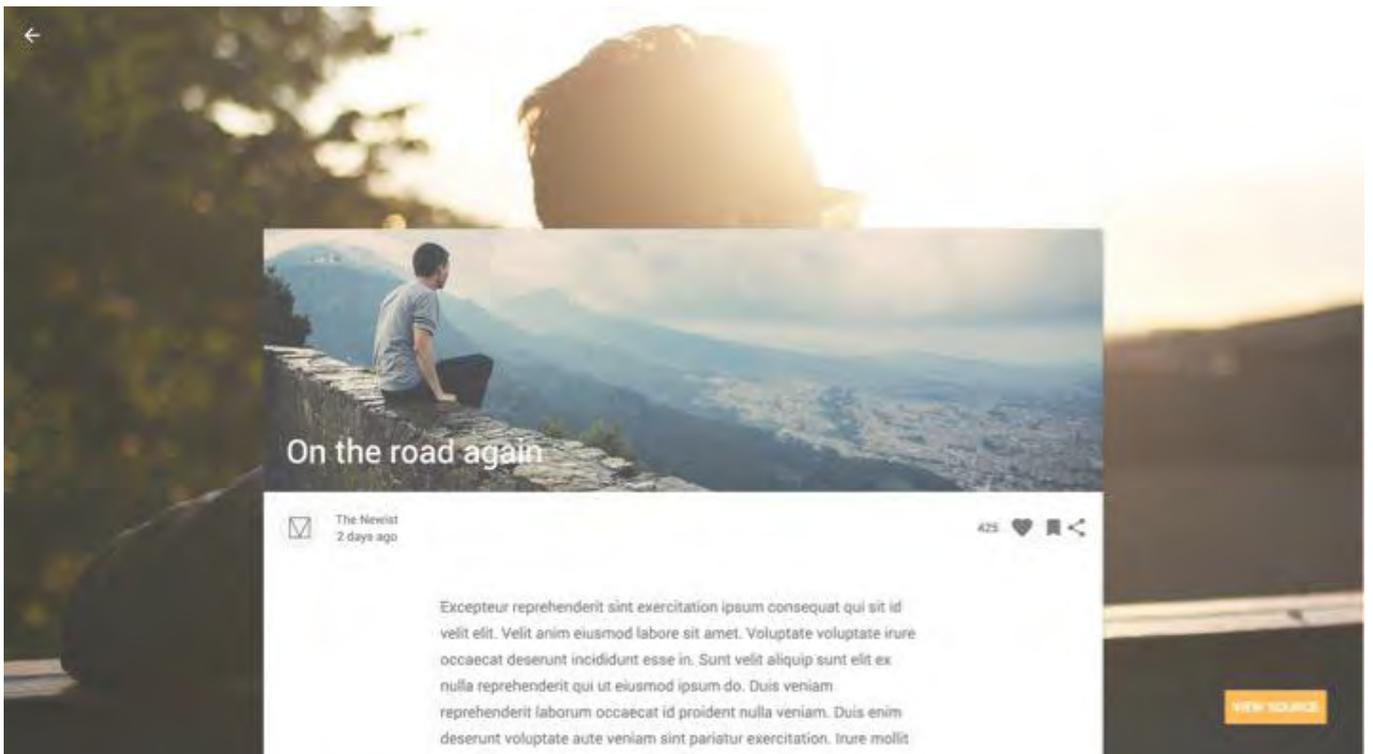
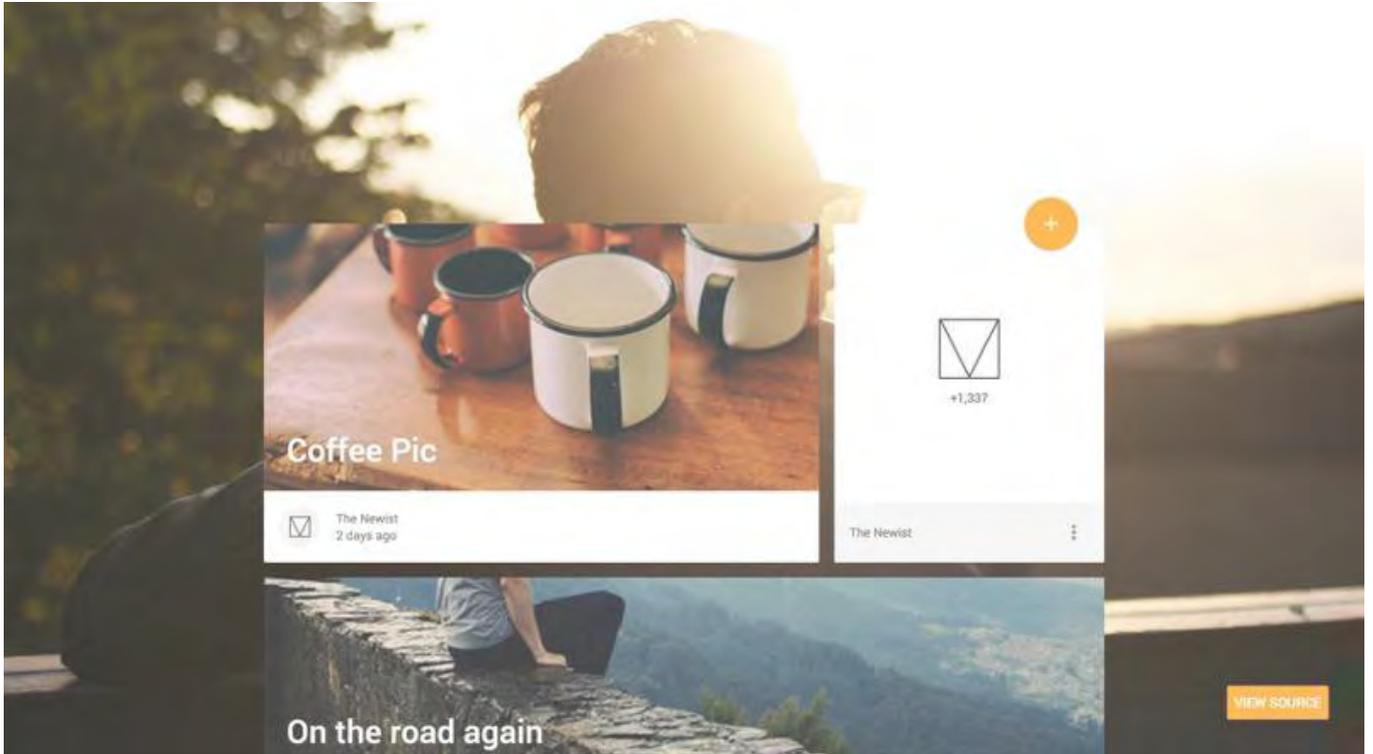
MDL is a complementary implementation to the Paper elements built with Polymer. The Paper elements are fully encapsulated components that can be used individually or composed together to create a material design-style site, and support more advanced user interaction. That said, MDL can be used alongside the Polymer element counterparts.

Out of the box templates

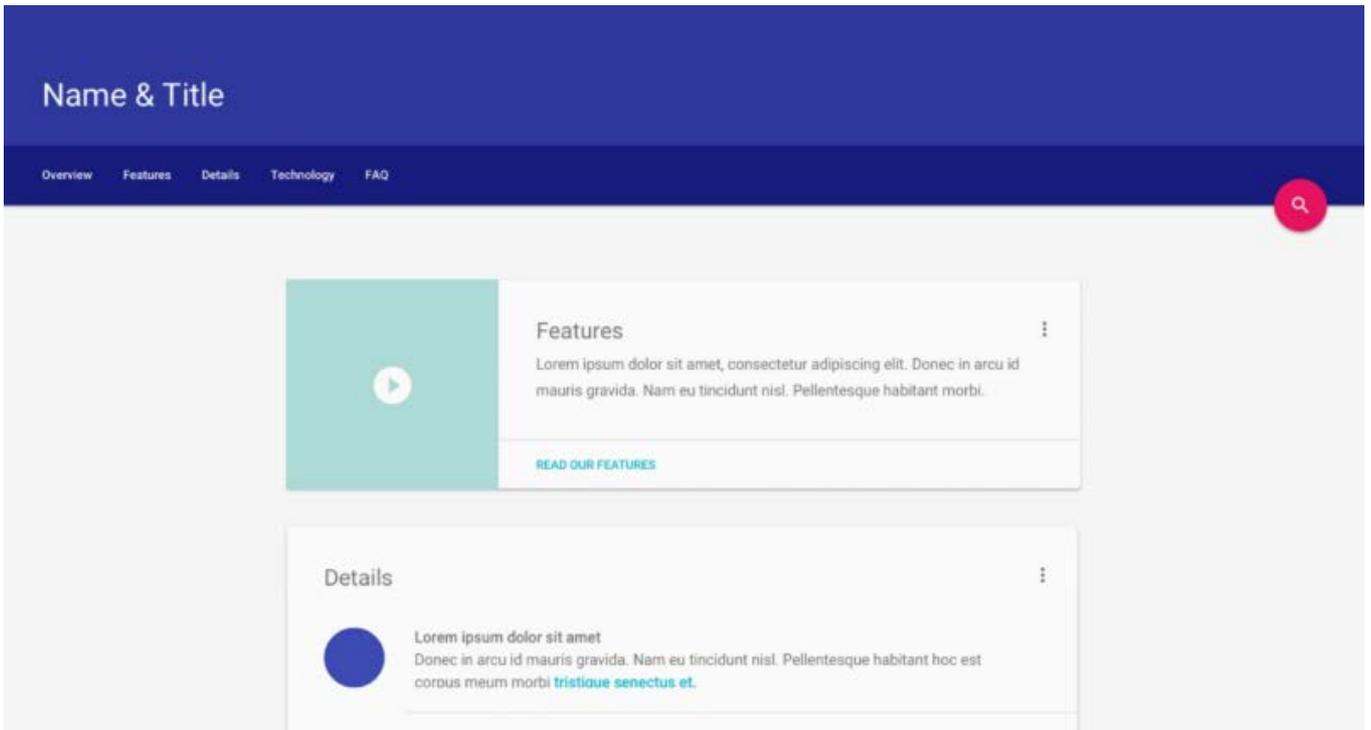


MDL optimises for websites heavy on content, such as marketing pages, text articles and blogs. We've built responsive templates to show the range of sites that can be created using MDL that can be downloaded from our Templates page. We hope these inspire you to build great looking sites.

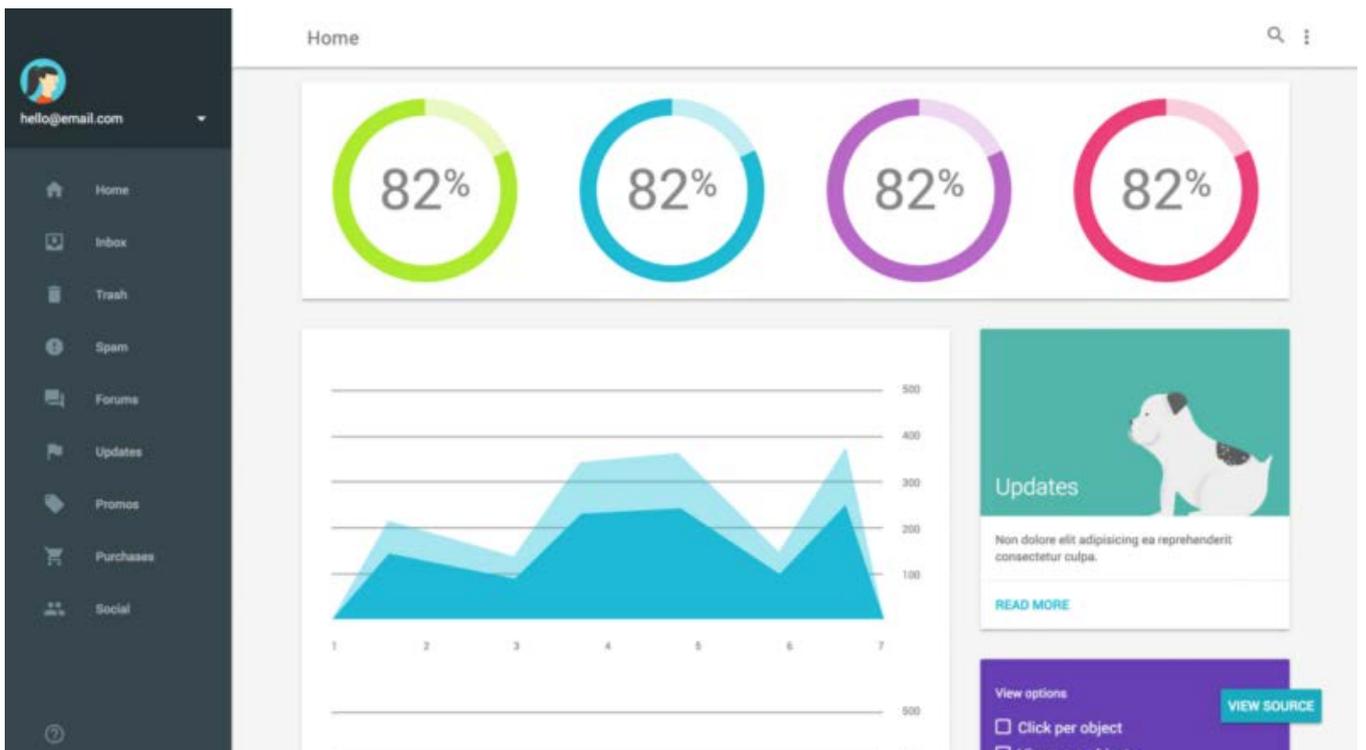
Blogs:



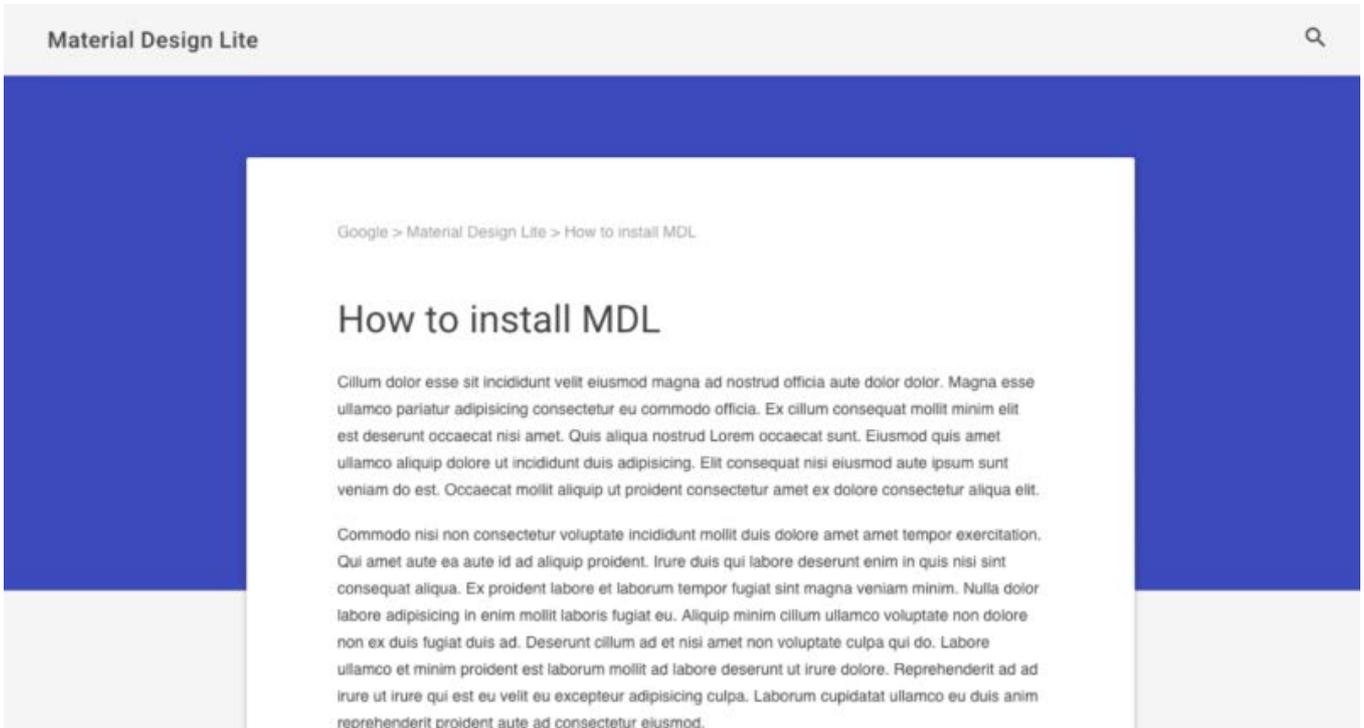
Text-heavy content sites:



Dashboards:



Standalone articles:

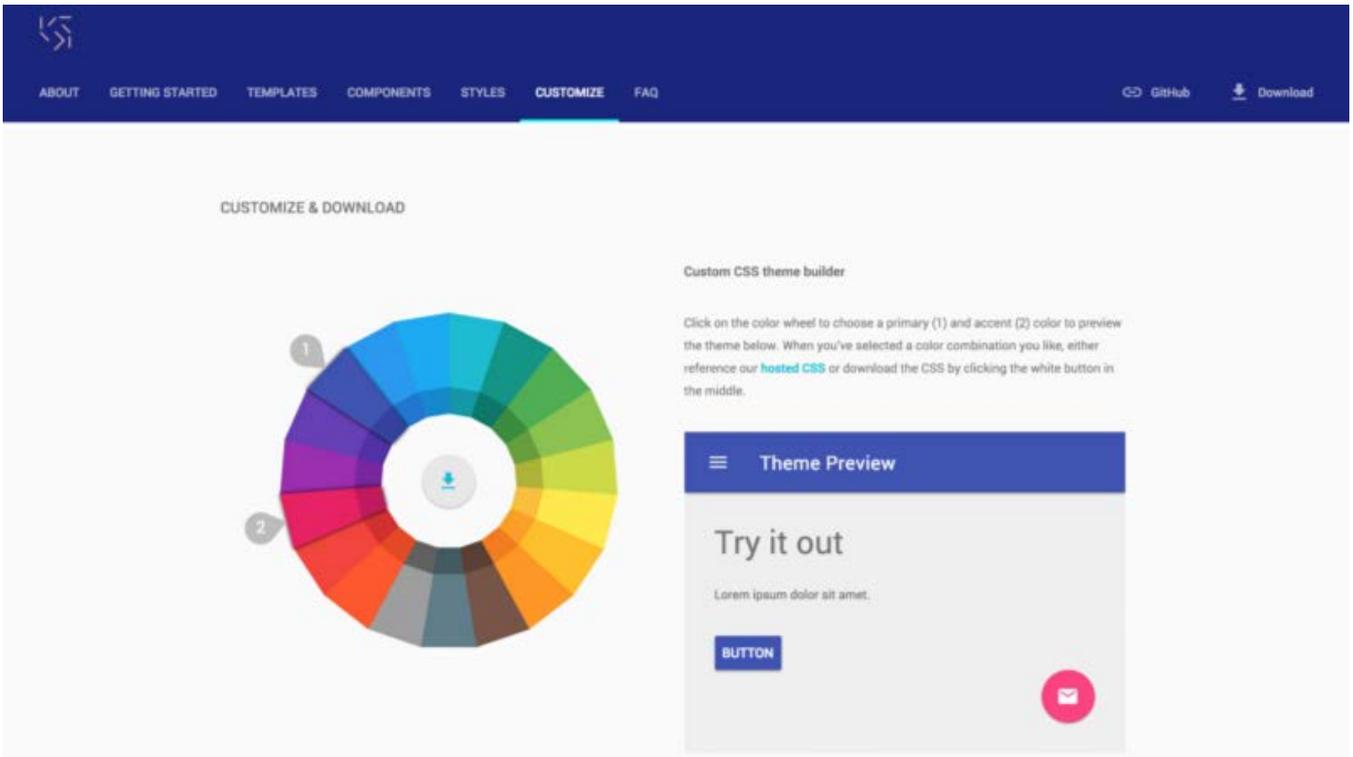


and more.

Technical details and browser support

MDL includes a rich set of components, including material design buttons, text-fields, tooltips, spinners and many more. It also include a responsive grid and breakpoints that adhere to the new material design adaptive UI guidelines.

The MDL sources are written in Sass using BEM. While we hope you'll use our theme customizer or pre-built CSS, you can also download the MDL sources from GitHub and build your own version. The easiest way to use MDL is by referencing our CDN, but you can also download the CSS or import MDL via npm or Bower.



The complete MDL experience works in all modern evergreen browsers (Chrome, Firefox, Opera, Microsoft Edge) and Safari, but gracefully degrades to CSS-only in browsers like IE9 that don't pass our [Cutting-the-mustard](#) test. Our [browser compatibility matrix](#) has the most up to date information on the browsers MDL officially supports.

More questions?

We're sure you have plenty of questions and we have tried to cover some of them in our [FAQ](#). Feel free to hit us up on [GitHub](#) or [Stack Overflow](#) if you have more. :)

We've been working with the designers evolving material design to build in additional thinking for the web. This includes working on solutions for responsive templates, high-performance typography and missing components like badges.

Typography

h1

Light 112sp

display-4 font weight 300

h2

Regular 56sp

display-3 font weight 400

h3

Regular 45sp

display-2 font weight 400

MDL is spec compliant for today and provides guidance on aspects of the spec that are still being evolved. As with the [material design spec](#) itself, your feedback and questions will help us evolve MDL, and in turn, how material design works on the web.

What will you build?

MDL is built on the core technologies of the web you already know and use every day—CSS, HTML and JS. By adopting MDL into your projects, you gain access to an authoritative and highly curated implementation of material design for the web.

We can't wait to see the beautiful, modern, responsive websites you're going to build with Material Design Lite.



Aleš Nešetřil

5 min read

Design

What If We Could Listen to Medium Articles as Podcasts (Concept)

There is one big problem on Medium for me: So many great articles posted every day, but so little time to read them all.

What if we could listen to all these great articles? I've come up with a quick concept to transform Medium App into an audio player by making just a few small adjustments within the existing app.

Problem

I was looking for a more effective way to consume all the content I save during the day and fit it inside my busy schedule. I mostly save articles I see on Medium (+ occasionally articles from big tech websites), and my bookmark section is growing almost daily. The only thing is that I have no time to read them all. Even by end of the day... I hate myself for this, because I'm missing so many great stories.

I was thinking someone could read the articles to me (if I can't handle it myself) ... Maybe some app? Text-to-audio?

On the other hand, I still want to feel the emotion of the story and not listen to some robot reading. Every. Word. Separately. With. No. Accent.

Sooooooooo what now?

Solution?

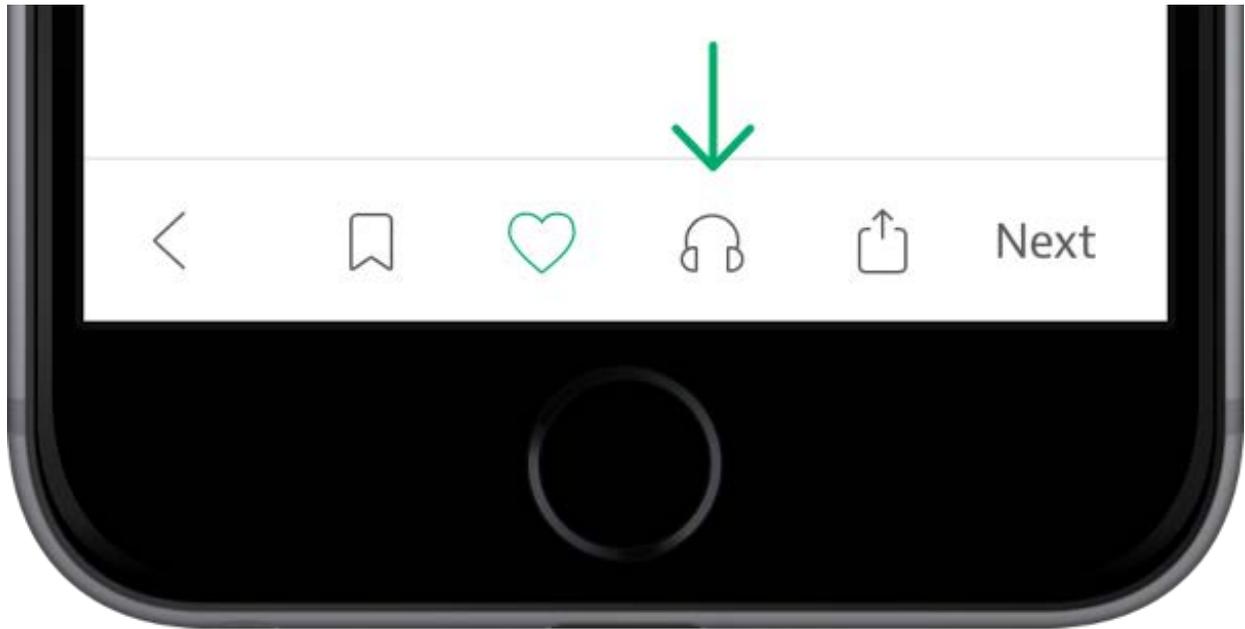
I listen to a lot of podcasts, shows or talks in the background while I work or when I walk to the office, and I think it could be awesome to do the same thing with my saved Medium articles— **listen to them as audio instead of reading them as text.**

The whole functionality allowing this feature could be handled inside the existing mobile app. **There is no need for a standalone app.**

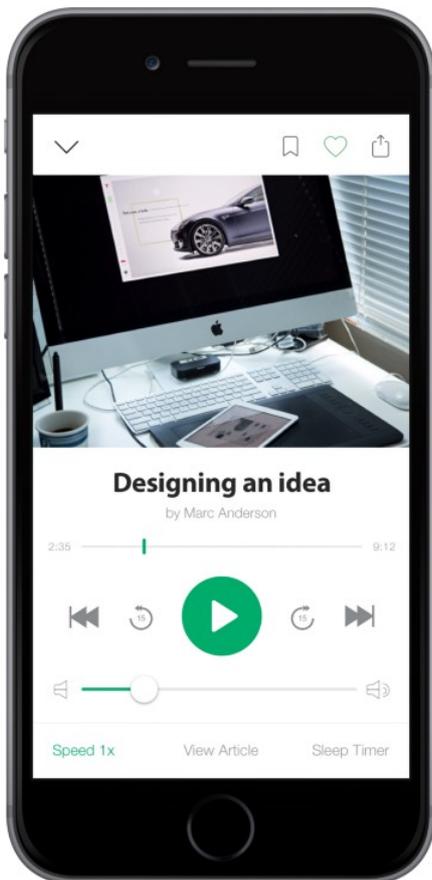
How?

Let's take a look on the existing Medium iOS app and its article detail screen. Focus on the white bar in the bottom of the screen, which is used to introduce features available for each article. You can see "bookmark," "like" and "share" icons. What about adding **one more icon that allows you to play the article as audio?**

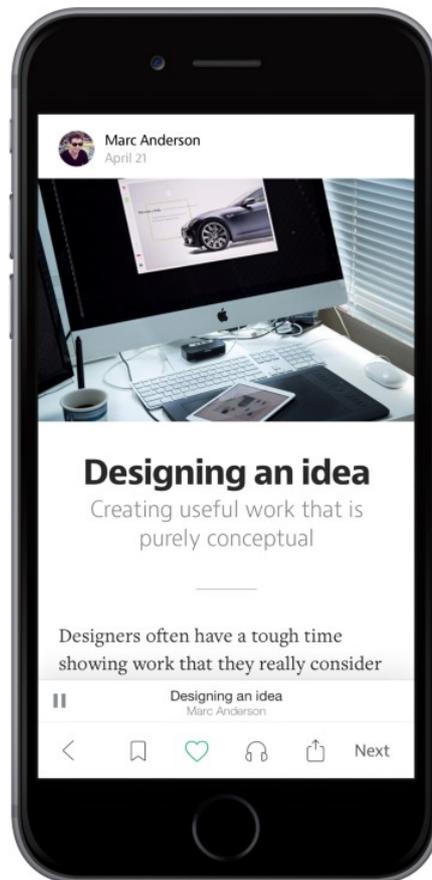
It fits perfectly with the overall style of the app and fits the existing usage pattern of having similar features at the bottom of the screen.



If you want play the article as audio, you can just tap this little icon to open the audio player, and that's it. Happy listening!



AUDIO PLAYER



MINIMIZED AUDIO PLAYER

Nice, huh? Let's focus on the technical side now...

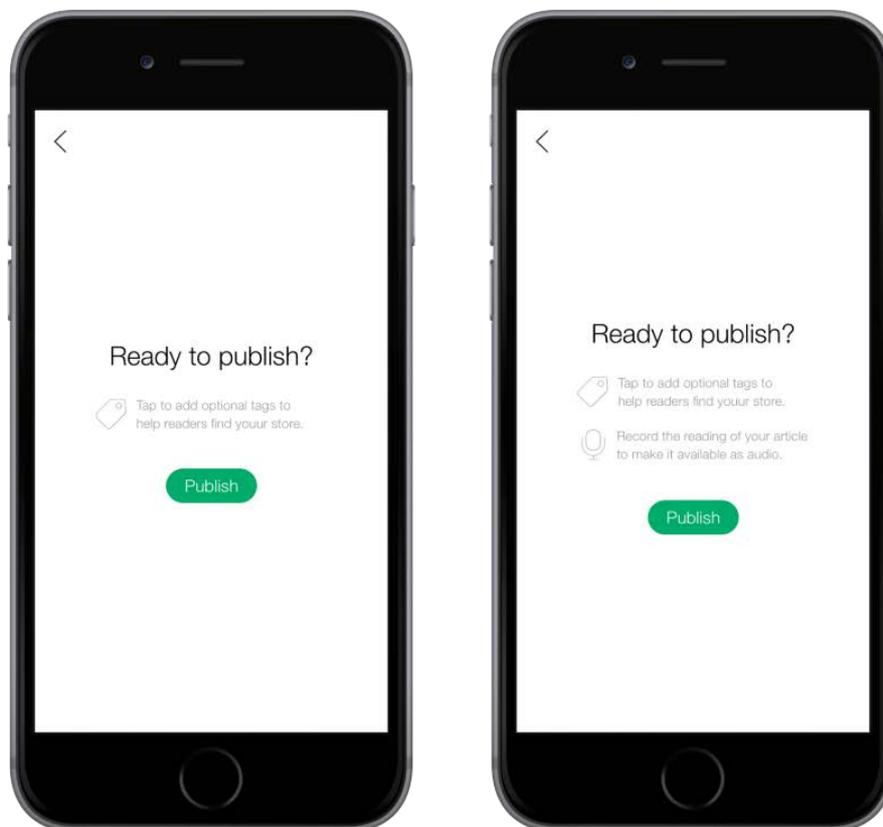
No extra software

You may be wondering where all the audio content could be made, what kind of text-to-voice software could be used in the background, etc. I think there is no need for such things. Writers could **record themselves reading their own work and attach it to the story as an audio file.**

Of course, adding an audio version of you article should not be required. Once you finish writing your story in the current version of the app, you are asked to add a few tags to help readers find your story. I think there is the best opportunity to ask for one more thing—a **recording of your story.**

Note: Users should not be pushed to record anything, but if they are asked to do something extra, they may feel they are improving their readers' experience by allowing them to consume articles in a new way.

To give you a better idea about how it could look, I made a quick mockup to compare the current version and my version:



CURRENT VERSION

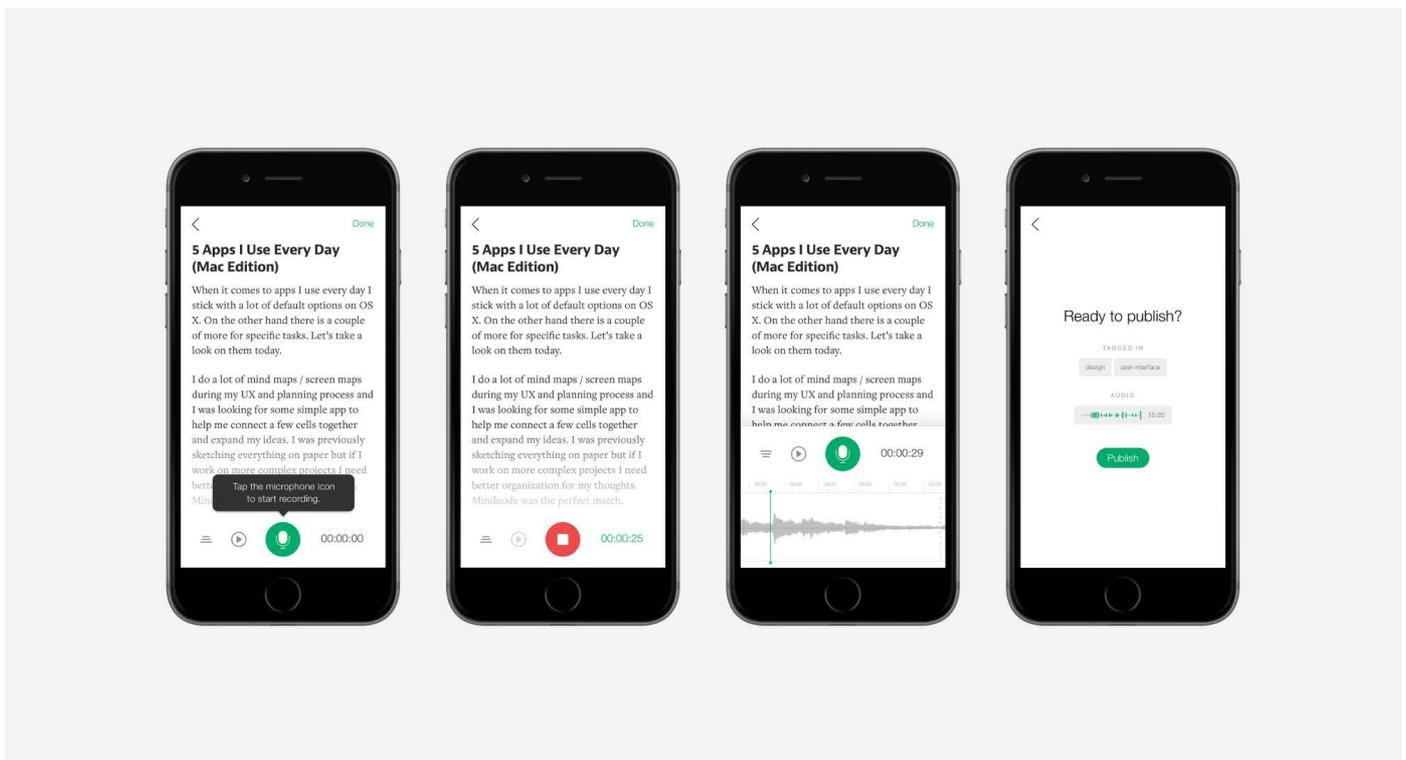
NEW VERSION

Recording audio

I also tried to design a recording screen using the existing UI style and colors. Again, the whole flow fits the existing style of the app. It's a bit similar to adding tags, which is already something you can do.

All you have to do is press the microphone button and start reading. I was also thinking about adding some kind of indicator for highlighting words to help you maintain rhythm/speed while recording your story. But I wasn't sure about the correct implementation. It may be confusing for users if they lose track on this indicator, and it could mess up their recording.

Once you finish recording, you can save it and go back to the "publish" screen, which will be in a different (finished) state. You can see the tags you selected and attach the audio file you just recorded. Hit "publish," and your story is out...



More possibilities

Of course, this is just a quick concept I came up with in a few hours. But imagine how many things could be added soon or later. Just to mention a few of them:

- **Playlists** — These would be like the music playlists we have on Spotify but with articles waiting in a queue to be played.
- **Interviews** (because two voices are better than one)—There are plenty of interviews on Medium. It could be great to have a chance to play them as well. It could work in reverse: people could record interviews as audio, and then write them as articles as well.
- **Podcasts**—These could be taken even more seriously and extended into their own podcast section on Medium. Podcasts are now coming back, and it could be great to have one place that includes great stories in both text and audio form. No need to have this as a separate section.
- **People with reading difficulties**—Not able to read a story? Just play it.
- **Bedtime stories?**—Some of us love reading before going to bed.

Some of us use meditation or nature sounds to calm down and fall asleep. But what about listening to Medium stories while you're in bed?

—————

Let's be friends!

Ales Nesetril, UI/UX designer with passion for minimalism & simplicity, currently working for STRV between Prague and San Francisco.

Twitter, Dribbble, Behance, Instagram

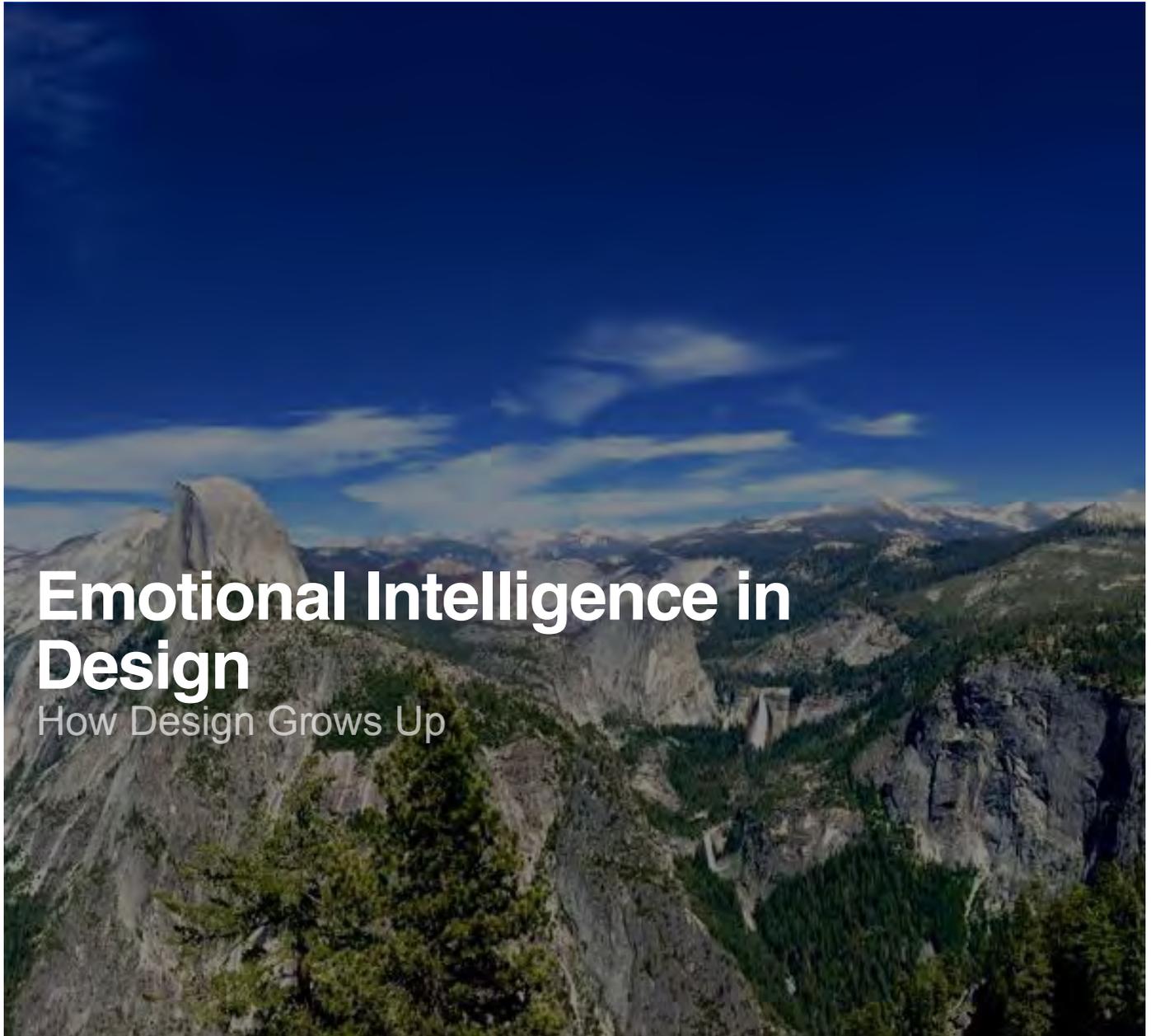
STRV is a top-tier, one-stop mobile app development shop working with top-tier startups from Y Combinator and 500Startups, among others, across offices in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York and Prague.

Thanks to Maggie Appleton.



Beth Dean

9 min read



Emotional Intelligence in Design

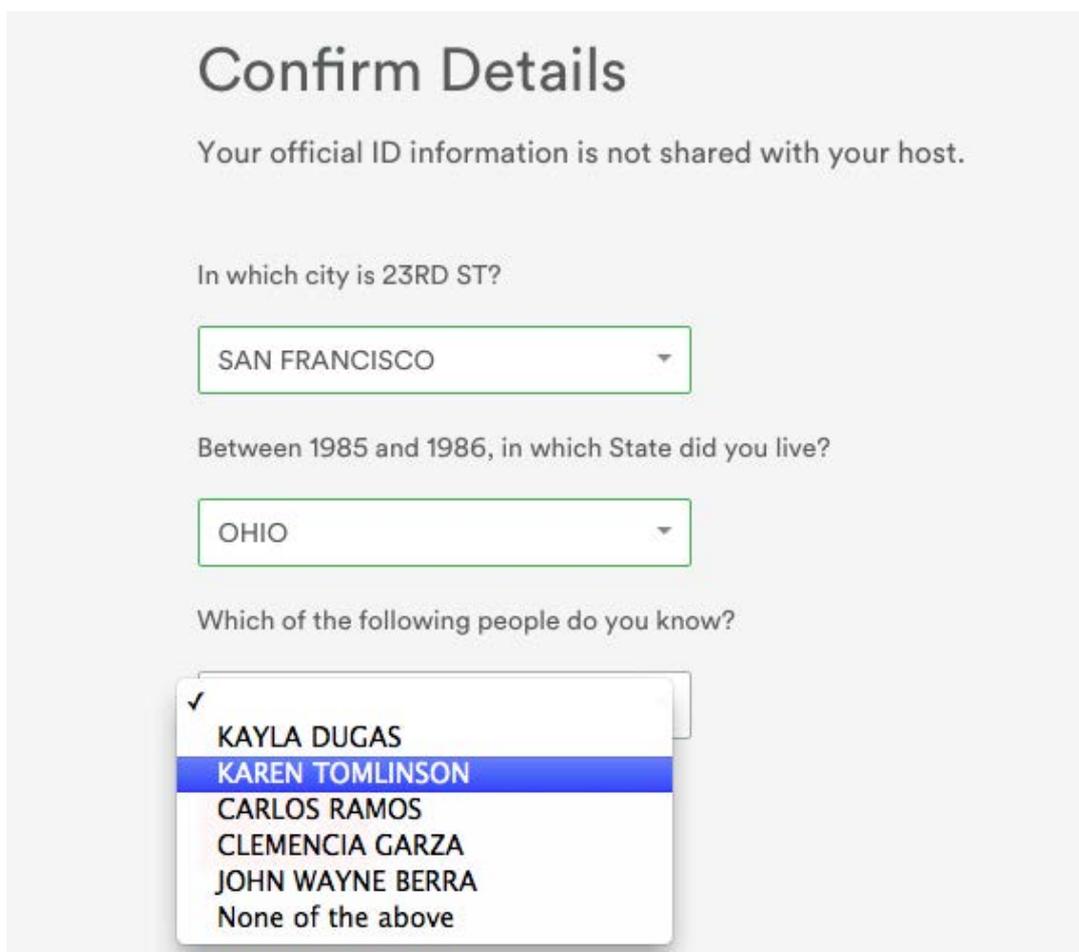
How Design Grows Up

It's a big world out there.

. . .

We're on a journey together, you and me. We've come a long way, but design for the web is still in its adolescence. In the early aughts we learned to build websites without tables, then we learned to use data to make decisions. Emotion never played a role in driving page views, purchases or video plays. We just needed to get people from point A to point B. People live their entire lives online now, we're embarking on a new frontier as designers; we're designing frameworks for people to exist online—a lot like they do offline.

I first started to notice the disconnect between design and how people actually live after my mom died. Every Mother's Day my inbox filled with messages suggesting gifts for my dead mom. It used to sting, especially when I worked at a greeting card company and all 10 of my test accounts would be bombarded with reminders she was gone. I felt utterly alone in those moments, but somewhere a marketer was watching open rates and conversions go up and to the right. They weren't thinking about me, and it's not personal, they're making something for the majority of people—people whose moms don't happen to be dead. Almost a decade later I'm pretty used to it, but I know even the most benign design can be loaded with risk.



The image shows a web form titled "Confirm Details". Below the title is a statement: "Your official ID information is not shared with your host." The form contains three questions, each with a dropdown menu:

- Question: "In which city is 23RD ST?"
Dropdown menu: "SAN FRANCISCO" (selected)
- Question: "Between 1985 and 1986, in which State did you live?"
Dropdown menu: "OHIO" (selected)
- Question: "Which of the following people do you know?"
Dropdown menu: A list of names with "KAYLA DUGAS" checked and "KAREN TOMLINSON" highlighted in blue. The list includes: KAYLA DUGAS, KAREN TOMLINSON, CARLOS RAMOS, CLEMENCIA GARZA, JOHN WAYNE BERRA, and None of the above.

To verify my identity, this site asked if I knew my dead mom.

When I worked in travel we ran the risk of sending people promotions based on trips they had booked for funerals. When I worked in insurance people most commonly accessed their policy documents after experiencing an accident..

In one user test a woman was shown her credit score in an effort to provide more helpful context about how her auto policy rate was calculated. Confronted with this number she broke down in tears, the score triggered memories of a terrible hospitalization that had caused her family financial crisis. Even filing your taxes can be anxiety inducing if you're down to the wire and can't make sense of the software. People completing seemingly straightforward tasks do so in a variety of contexts and life circumstances. Humanity can be sad, complicated and messy. We don't stop being human when we go online. Sometimes even when you're trying to make something with the best intentions, something can go terribly wrong. Sometimes the very tools you create to protect people cause harm. What can we do?

For years designers have approached software as though it were neutral: here's a set of options, now complete a task. In reality, people interact with software like it's a human. As designers, we can shift our approach to thinking about how people might feel using our products much like we would think about having a conversation with another person. The ability to handle relationships and be aware of emotions is called emotional intelligence, and it's what's often missing in software design today.

Emotional intelligence is defined with five characteristics:

1. **Self awareness**
2. **Self regulation**
3. **Motivation**
4. **Empathy**
5. **People skills**

Self Awareness

The difficult thing about "know thyself" as it applies to software, is that software doesn't have feelings. Ultimately what's expressed to a person using software is either explicit from a designer when we have opinions and try to persuade, or implicitly from how the interaction makes the person feel.

For example, on Facebook, we want to be respectful guardians of people’s data, so in ad settings we want people to declare intent about how they want to be advertised to. This is in contrast to presenting an array of every possible option which a person may never take action on. We ask how you want to see ads: “Do you want to see ads based on your behavior?” This is how we designed empowerment: we gave people the tools to make an informed choice, by not muddying the message with all of the more granular options within that choice.



Standing on top of mountains reminds me how small I am

It’s easy for designers to be aware of our opinions and design interactions that support the outcomes we want. Being aware of how non-choices affect an experience is much more challenging. Emotions spread. Humans mirror. If a people perceive an interface as expressing an emotion, they are likely to also feel that emotion. Whether designers intend to or not, we’re building relationships.

Imagine the relationship you might have with a piece of government software as if it were a person. How do we act and feel in relationships? Things can escalate quickly. An interaction could be just the latest in a series of slights, it's like the app just left a wet towel on the floor or forgot to take out the trash. You're screaming in your head "I can't believe it's doing this to me!" Maybe it's preventing you from doing something really important, like renewing your license. This has a real effect on our bodies. A universal trigger for anger is a sense of endangerment, which can be signaled not just with physical threat, but more often symbolic threats: being treated unjustly, or being insulted and demeaned. This creates an energy surge in our body which lasts several minutes, but the effects of which can last much longer.

Self Regulation

The risk with the neutrality of software is that we may be able to understand every possible logical outcome in a situation (though often we don't) but we're unable to assign values to those outcomes. This is especially true with binary systems: a person completes a task or they don't. This sounds neutral, when in fact the consequences of not completing the task could range from inconvenient to devastating. This lack of awareness is where we get into trouble and sometimes unintentionally do harm. Reason without feeling is blind.

Intensity can't be quantified.

What is the cost of a decision that harms a few thousand people compared to a decision that irritates millions? Ellen Pao talks about problems of scale to The Washington Post "If mistakes are made 0.01 percent of the time, that could mean tens of thousands of mistakes." So much of an emotional message is nonverbal, and a computer can't pick up those cues. Designers can't see people's expressions or body language, but we can try to understand reactions by paying very careful attention to what people do, particularly in aggregate. Numbers often don't mean what we think they do, they tell us the what but not the why. Metrics are a great way to come up with assumptions to be challenged, but don't say a lot without context. If someone is spending more time in a product, is it because the

product is great or because the person can't find what they need?

A friend of mine used a feature on a professional networking site that scraped her address book for contacts. She didn't know the service would automatically connect her to every person in her inbox, an inbox that spans a decade. She was suddenly connected to a person she never wanted to speak to again. Somewhere in a data warehouse, the volume of connections on this service appears to be going up, which superficially seems good. However, the quality of those connections is diminishing. How many of these people actually want to be connected? How many are actually going to return to the site because they were connected to someone they exchanged an email with 3 years ago? That number going up isn't very meaningful.

Motivation

Designers need their users' motivations to inform their own. The best way to understand motivation is to change perspective. Unfortunately, this isn't always easy, and I had to learn the hard way. After college, as one does when adult problems and a desk job catch up to you, I gained a lot of weight—over a hundred pounds, which I later lost. I learned very quickly what it meant to live in a world not designed for me. Things most people take for granted are ordeals: seat belts on airplanes, buying functional workout clothes, or really any clothes. The first time I walked into a store and realized they didn't carry my size I felt a lot of things. I felt like the store was actively hostile. I felt like the store was rejecting me and was saying another type of body was better than mine.

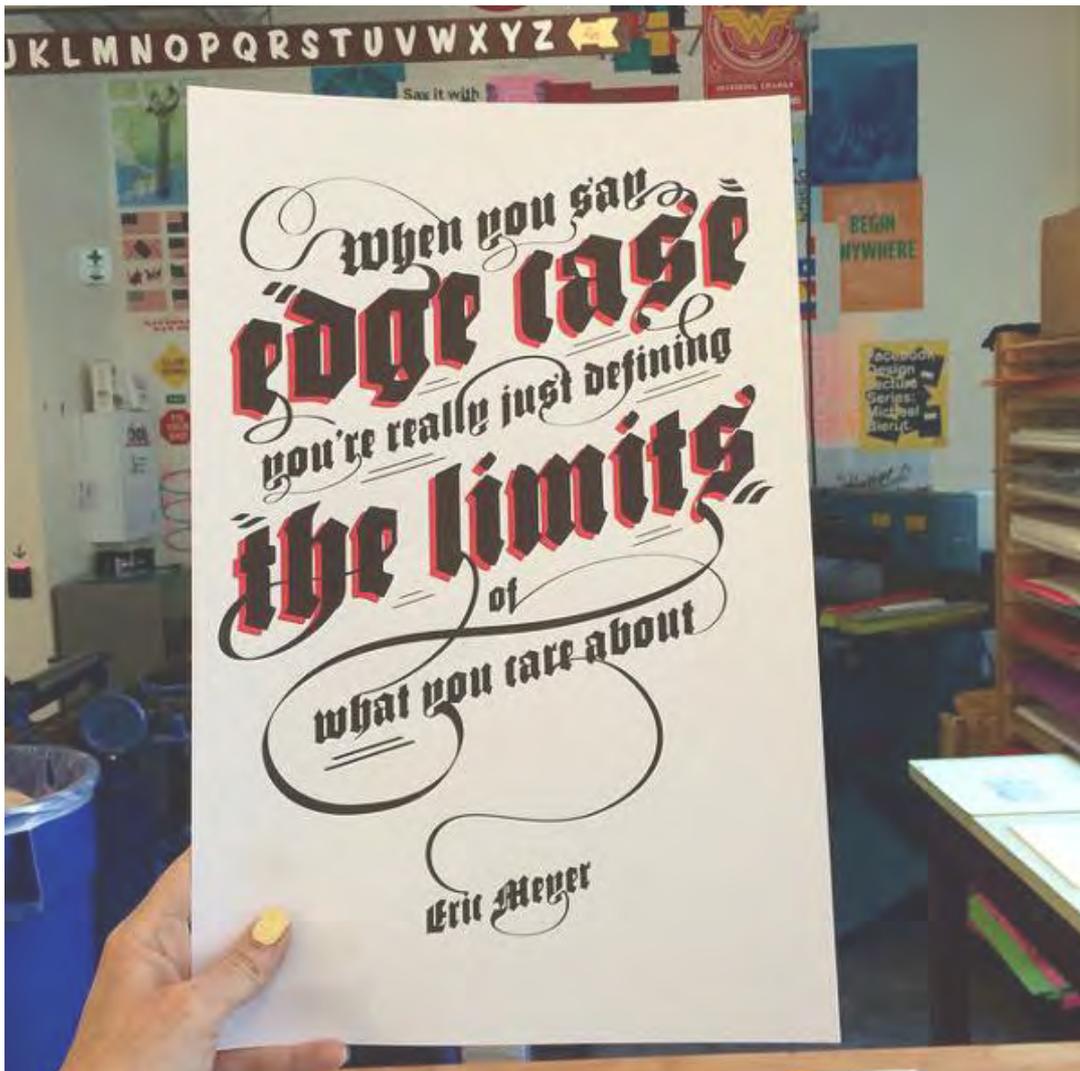
I walked out feeling like I didn't deserve to look good.

I do not recommend trying this. Our perspectives can also be informed by the people we spend time with. If a team is diverse, more perspectives are brought to the table, products have fewer blind spots and designers create more things people actually need. Think about five people you know with wildly different backgrounds and life circumstances, how would they feel using different products?

Empathy

A little humility can go a long way. Designers are not the users of their products. Right as designers were learning about web standards, popular design offered the wisdom “scratch your own itch.” This works well for solving one specific problem, but ignores all other problems. Designers can’t assume everyone wants what we’re offering. People don’t always use things in the way we expect, only research can tell us what’s really going on.

For a while after my mom died, every birthday and Christmas my Stepdad would get me a Bath & Body Works gift card. His reasoning was that my mom loved Bath & Body Works, so I probably would to. I hate Bath & Body Works. His intentions were sweet and sincere, but every time I got one of those gift cards I felt like he didn’t know me. Every time I design something new I ask myself if I am giving someone Bath & Body Works gift cards.



Risograph print I made following Eric's talk at Facebook

People Skills

Good content strategy is a great tool for communicating with an intentional tone. What's the product's voice? If the design were a person, how should it be perceived? Friend? Teacher? Trusted advisor? Sham-wow spokesperson? What kind of reaction could this voice elicit when someone is experiencing the product in the worst case scenario? Let's be honest about priorities. The definition of priority is "a thing that is regarded as more important than another." By prioritizing one thing, we are inherently deprioritizing something else, do I know what I'm deprioritizing? Eric Meyer says when you call something an edge case, you're really just defining the limits of what you care about; he calls them stress cases. (He would also like to give credit for [paraphrasing Evan Henfleigh](#).) In December Facebook's Year in Review product suggested Eric should relive a "great" year, resurfacing a post about his daughter's death. We invited him to come speak to us candidly about his experiences. Generously, he told us the reason we don't see planes falling from the sky is because there's 60 years of air crash data to draw on when designing planes.

This is uncharted territory, and mistakes are going to be made. When designers make mistakes we have to take responsibility to move forward. An honest process has enough time to test assumptions, and to be wrong and iterate on those assumptions. Good research will bring as many new questions as it does answer. Sometimes a product works great in carefully controlled tests, but won't be stressed until wide release.

...

Try your best and then try a little harder

Without mindfulness, products might only be rude, but they might also affect someone's health, their support systems, or their very livelihood. A good friend once told me that to be an adult is to be aware. It's time for design to become an adult. As product and service design collide, designers are responsible for understanding every ripple of our work.

Nurture the relationships your products are creating as though they were happening in the physical world, and give without expecting anything in return. We have a saying at Facebook, this journey is 1% finished.

No one can ever be fully aware, but designers have to be open to growth and the possibility we're wrong. Less up and to the right, more up and to the heart.

Many thanks to Jonathon Colman, Lisa Sy, Hannah Fletcher and Ed Salvana for their feedback on my drafts.

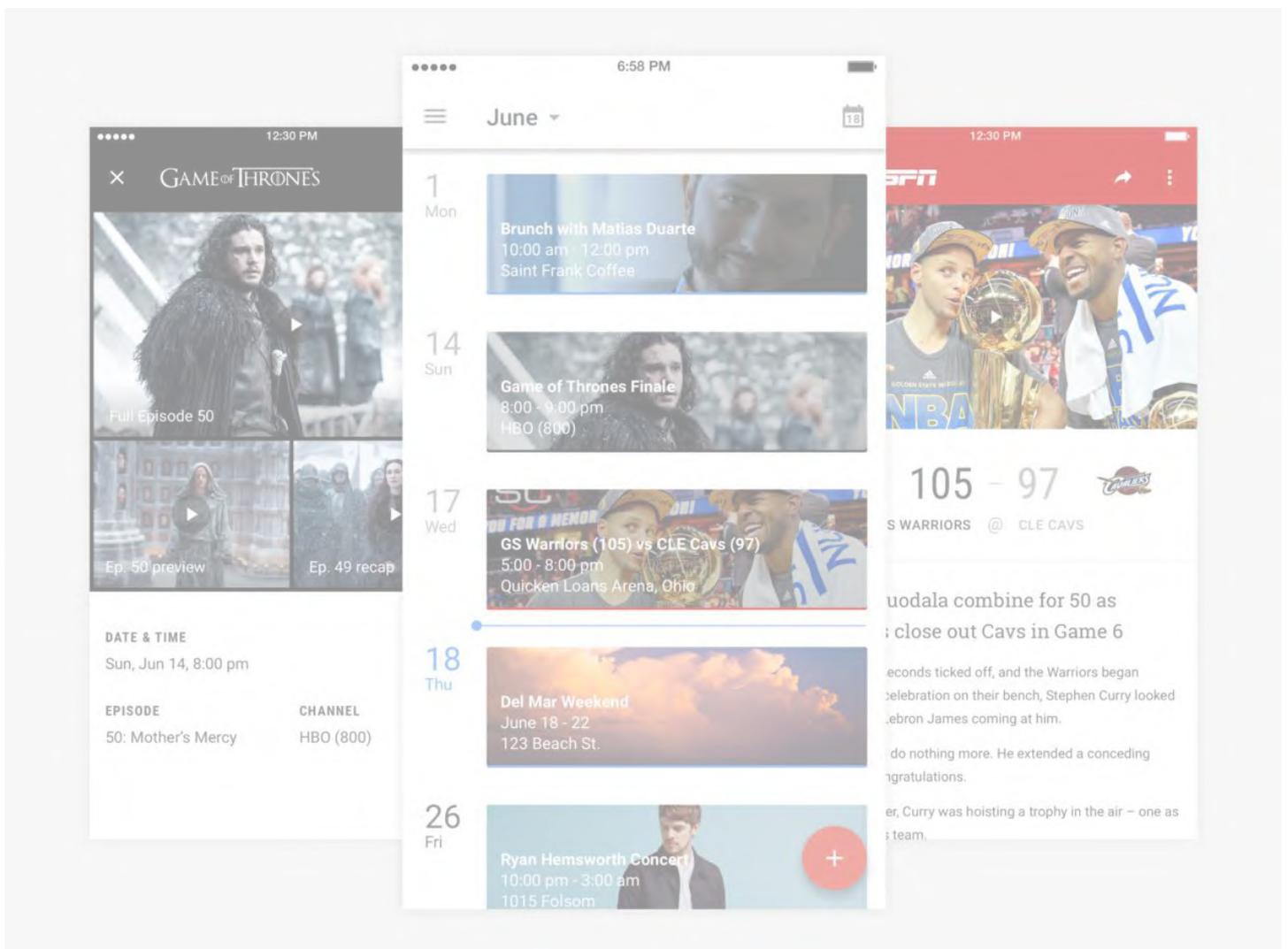
Thanks to Lisa Sy and Jonathon Colman.



Brian Nelson
6 min read

Google Calendar Concept

Part 1 in a series imagining the future of technology

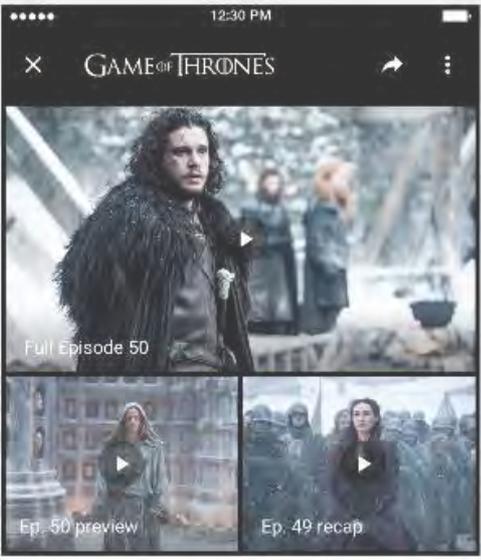
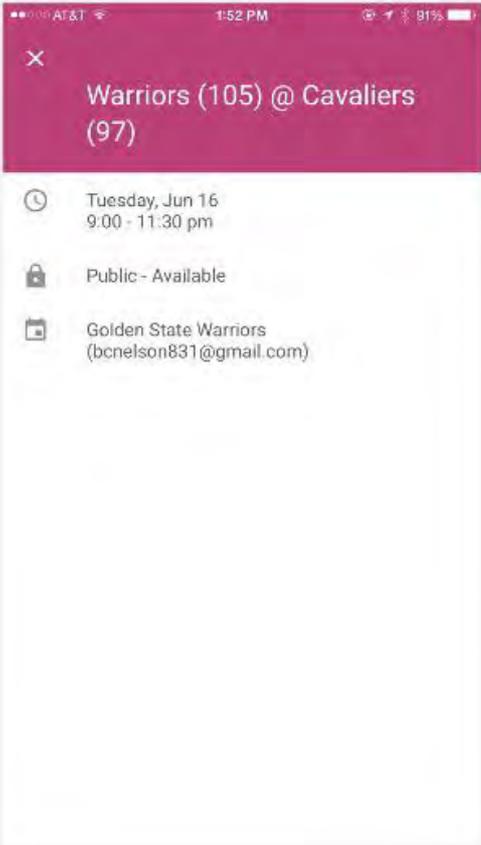


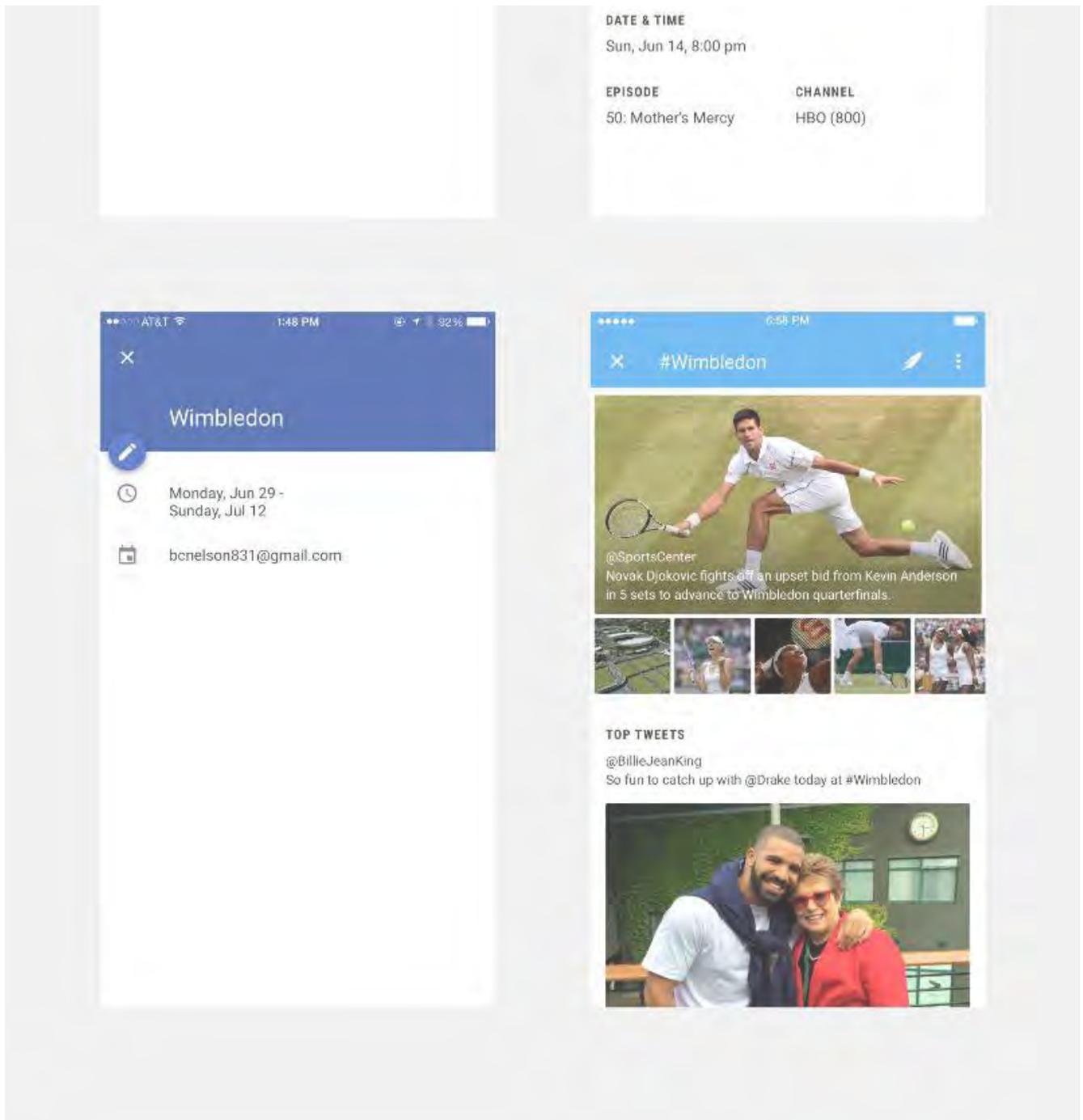
In the future...

Your content will be available directly within your calendar.

Before

After





Navigating dozens of apps to find your content is cumbersome and time consuming. As a consequence, platforms that bundle content from various sources have become extremely valuable and popular. A calendar platform can automatically pull relevant events from your apps, which means that you don't have to spend time digging through those apps or manually creating events.

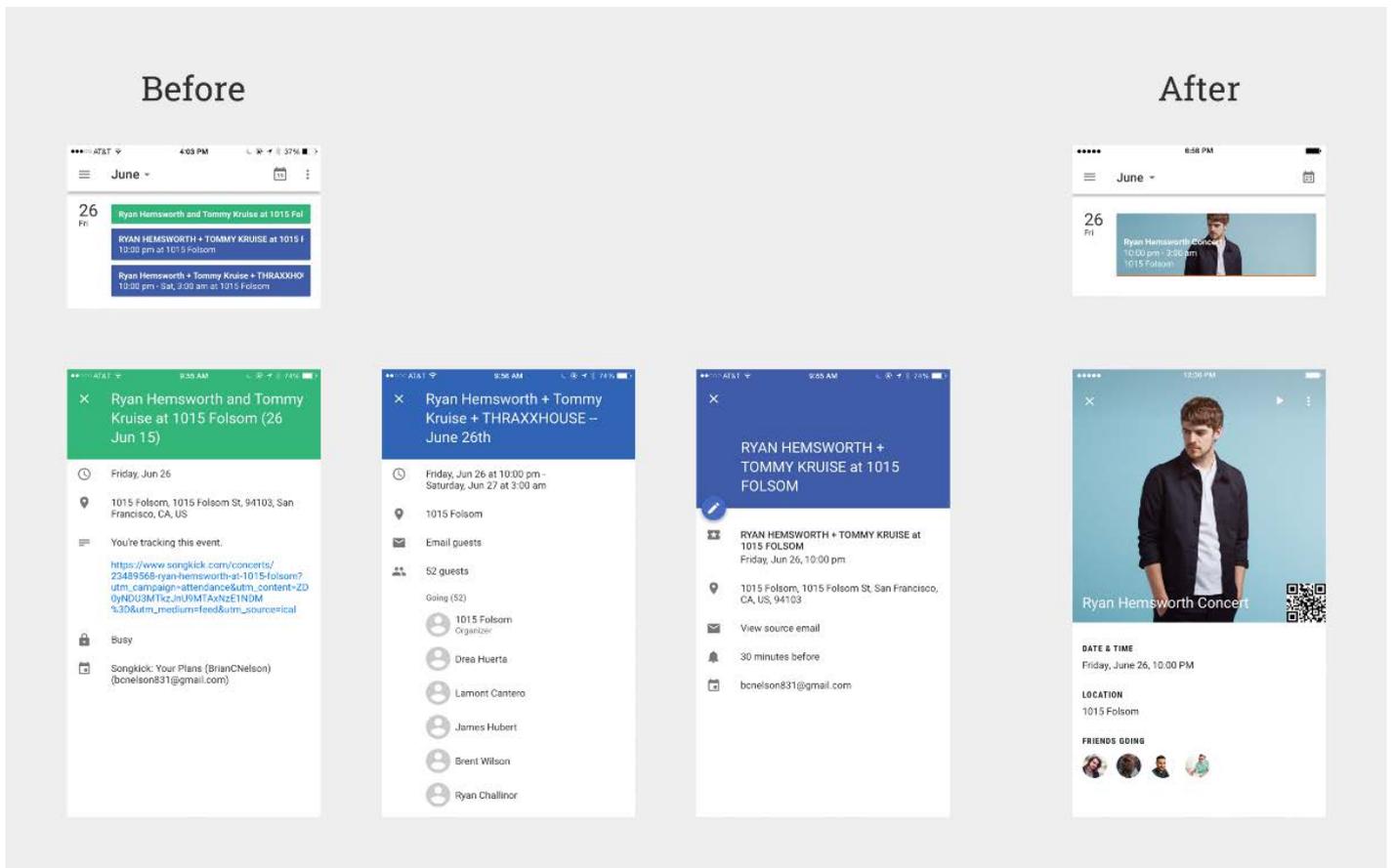
Compared with events you have manually added to your calendar, events pulled from apps can be far more comprehensive and informative—full of engaging and actionable components. Consumers now expect rich interactive media, and relying on static plain text is a huge missed opportunity. In my concept, your calendar will

provide immediate access to media such as TV episode recaps (HBO GO), sport highlights (ESPN), and Tweets from live events.

Google Now integrates over 100 third party services (and has plans to open access to all developers), while Google Calendar only connects with other Google services. Google should follow in the footsteps of Sunrise (acquired by Microsoft in February), and create an open platform for third party developers. Google's recent acquisition of Timeful is an encouraging sign of their commitment to building a truly intelligent, assistive calendar.

. . .

Your calendar will get you excited for upcoming events.

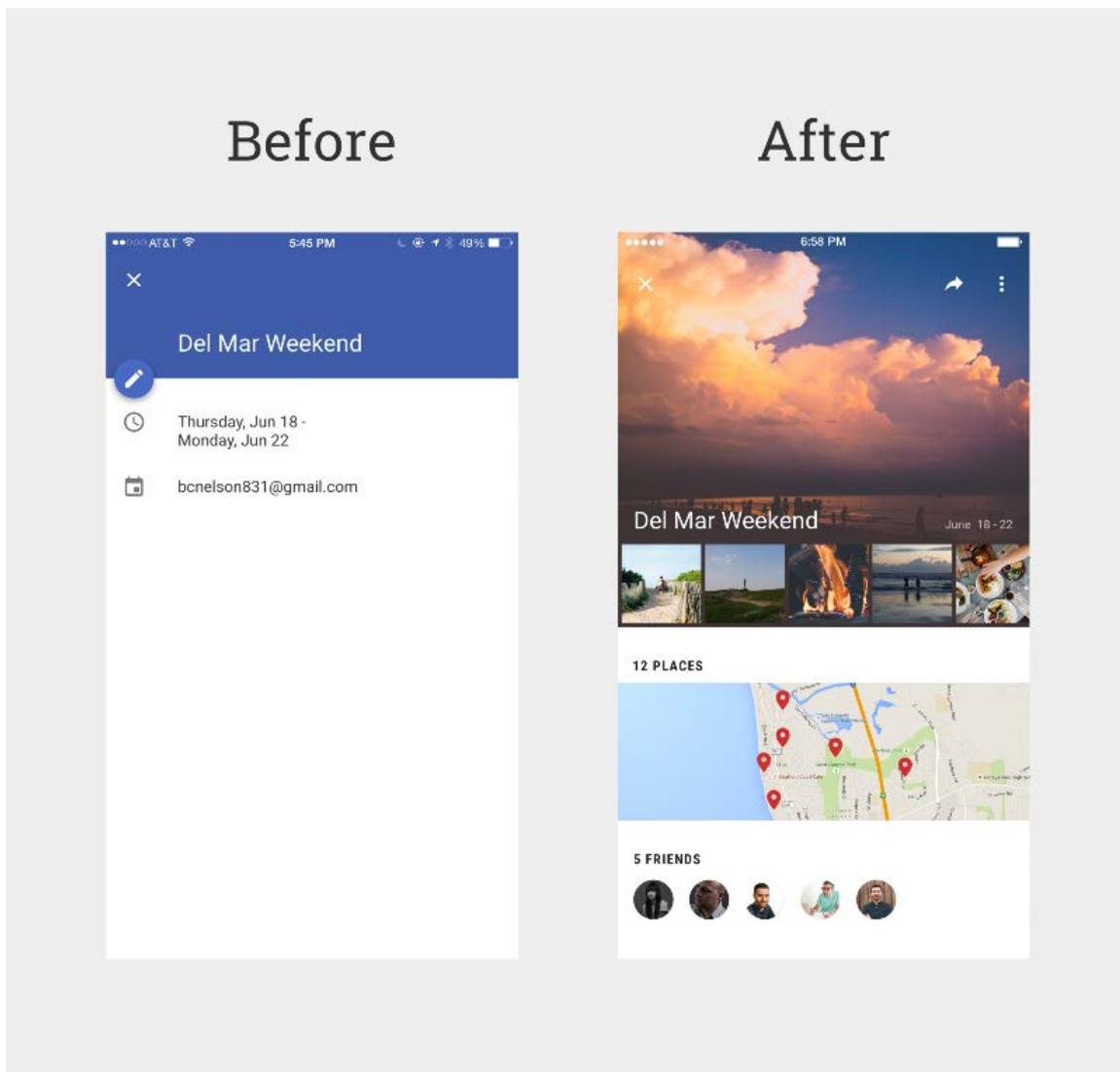


In the future, triplicate event items from [Songkick](#), [Facebook](#), and [Eventbrite](#) are merged. The new event provides deep app links to the artist's catalogue (in [Apple Music](#), [Spotify](#), or [SoundCloud](#)), getting you psyched for the show.

Tapping the location reveals options to view the address in Google Maps or call a car (on the day of the event). The QR code expands when tapped, making it easy to check in once you arrive at the venue. Your calendar should make you feel at ease, knowing that everything you need is instantly accessible.

. . .

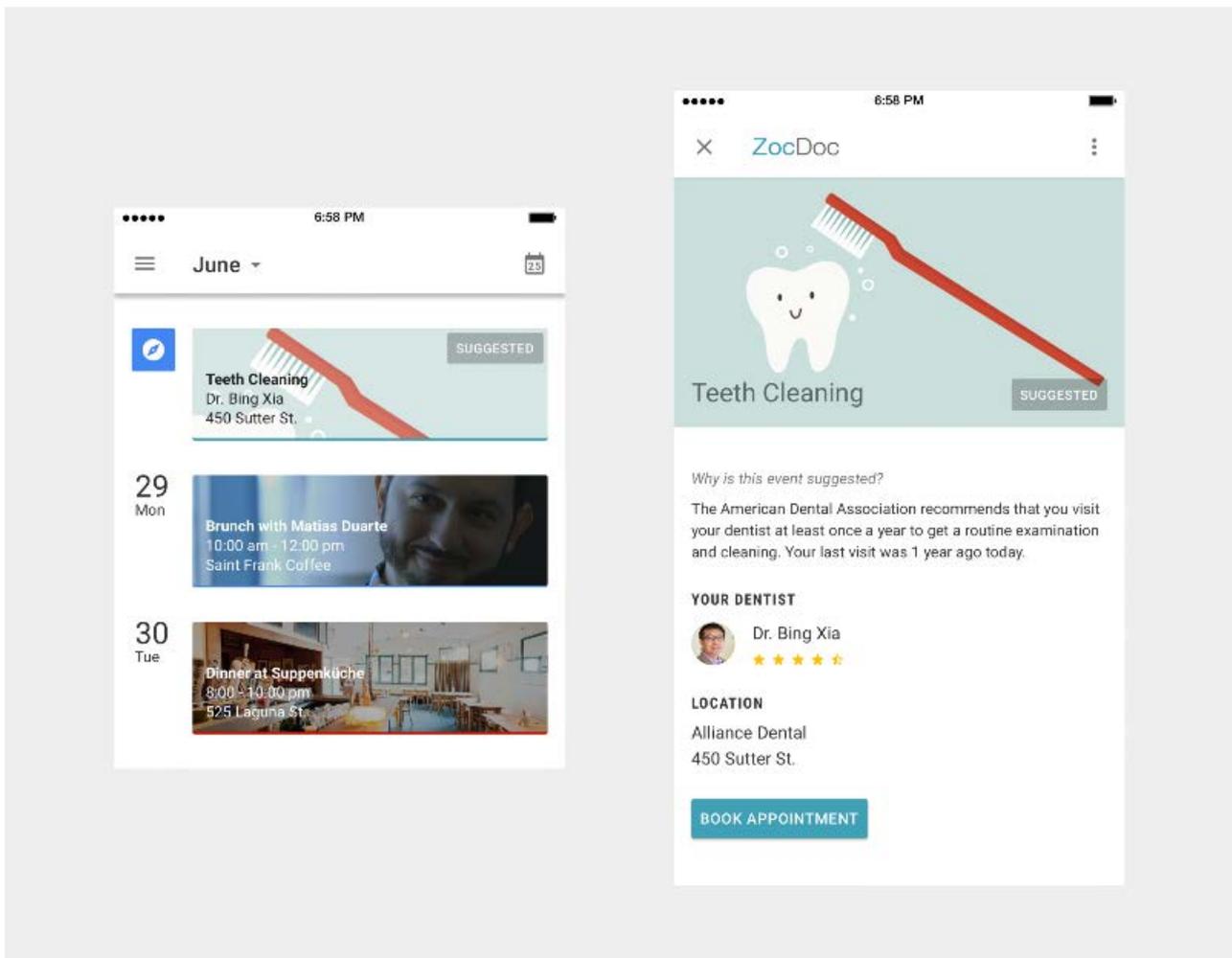
Your calendar will evoke nostalgia.



Your calendar should encompass all the fun things you do, and make it easy to look back and relive your favorite experiences. In this example, a calendar event summarizes a weekend trip with friends using photos, videos, profile pictures, and a map.

The success of Facebook's and Instagram's core products attest to our basic desire to reminisce. Several tech companies have made more overt attempts to capitalize on this impulse—by reminding you of your activity a year ago today (TimeHop, Heyday, Facebook On This Day, Memoir) or summarizing an entire year of your life (Facebook Year in Review, Spotify Year in Music).

Your calendar will suggest relevant events.

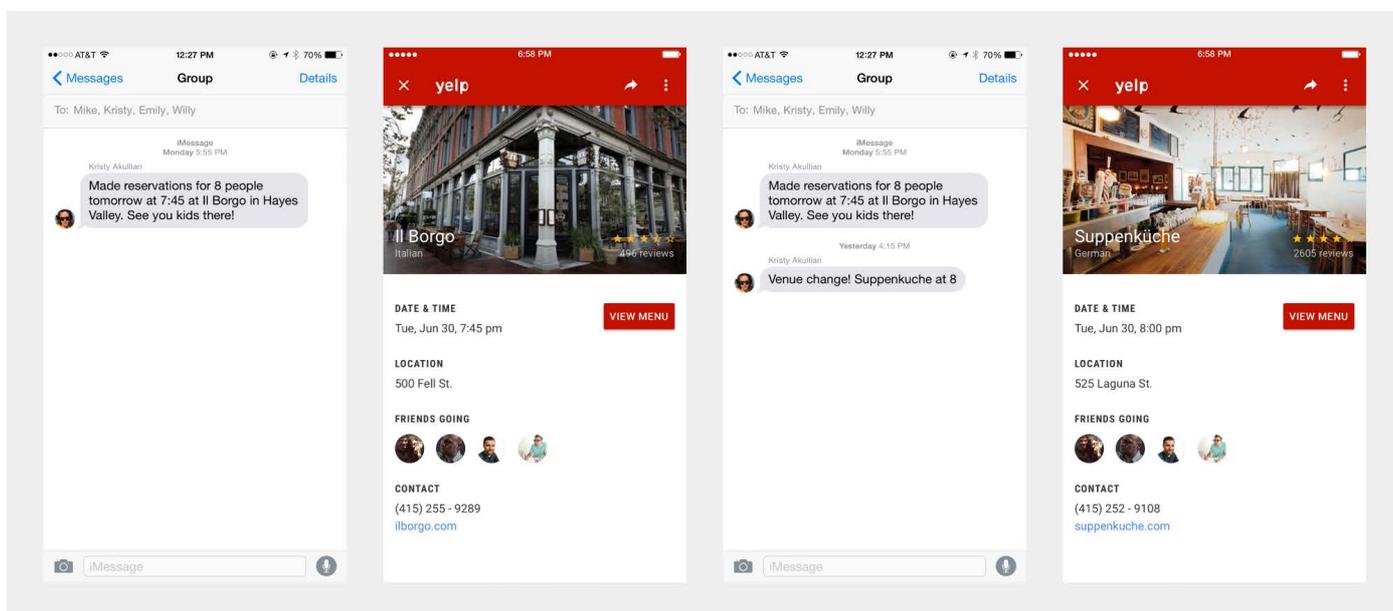


Left: concept main calendar view. Right: event screen.

Given how well your calendar knows you, and how much it knows about the world, it should suggest highly relevant events and appointments that you'd be sorry to miss. In this example, your calendar recommends a visit to the dentist, using your past calendar events and the information you've added to ZocDoc.

. . .

Your calendar will respond dynamically to changing contexts.



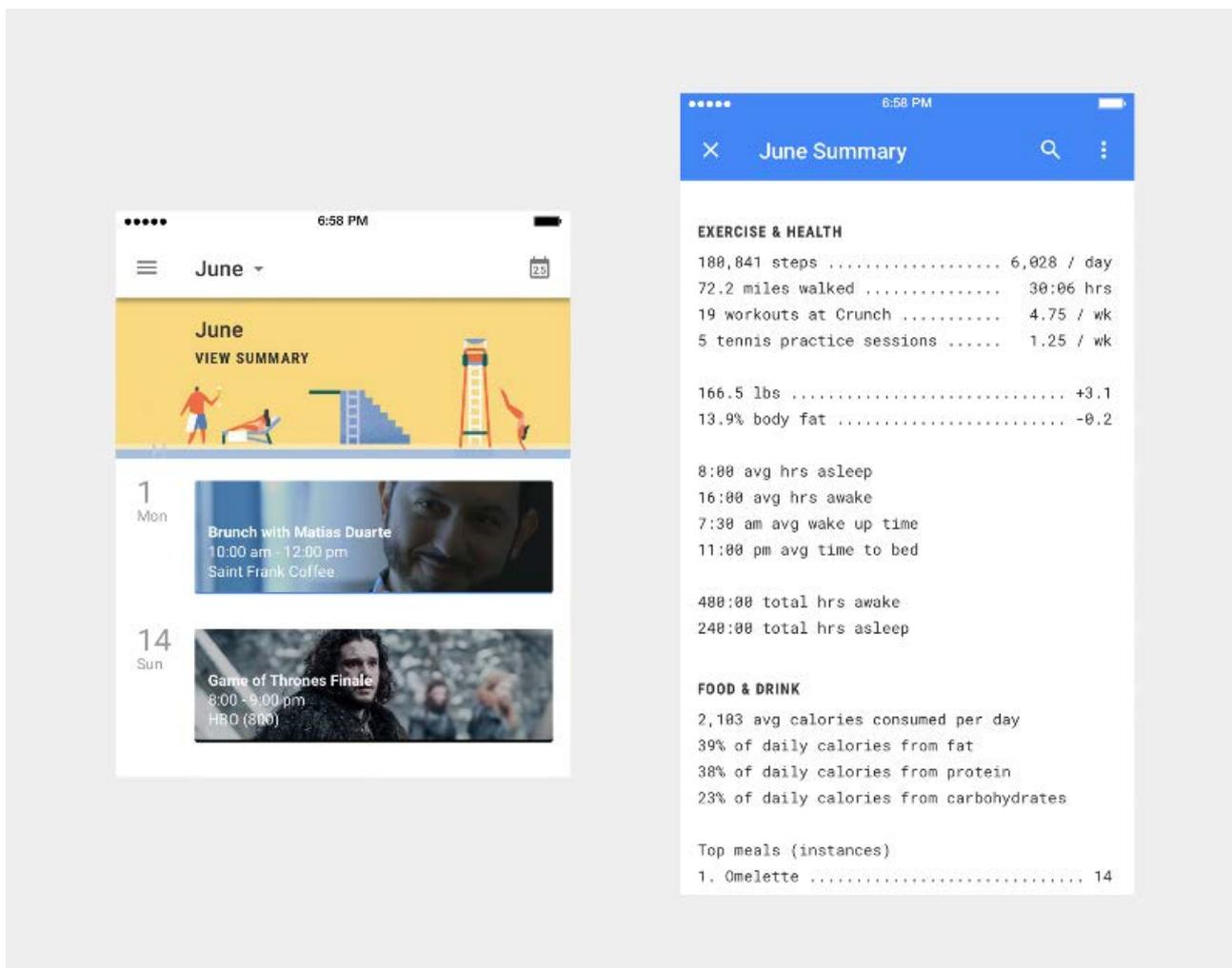
Read sequence from left to right.

This flow demonstrates how your calendar will update automatically based on new messages you receive. In the future, you won't have to adjust calendar events as details change. More importantly, you'll never show up to the wrong restaurant because you missed a text.

Google's Now on Tap, announced at I/O 2015, understands context and intent deeply, and would enable dynamic event items as shown above.

. . .

Your calendar will help you better understand your behavior, and recommend adjustments.



Left: concept main calendar view. Right: event screen.

The first step to changing your behavior is understanding it. The Monthly Summary shown above is a receipt for all of your app activity organized by categories that matter to you, like health, social life, professional development, and personal finances.

Note that the Summary doesn't pass judgement on what you've done; it's just a list of stats. The next, trickier step is creating a report card that makes encouraging and effective suggestions about what tweaks you can make to be happier, healthier, more productive, and better to yourself and others.

Fitbit, Jawbone, Apple Health and a host of other health technology companies are all based upon this same premise, that easier access to and visualization of our

of our data can change our behavior for the better. Companies like Reporter and RescueTime are similar, but seek to provide insights that improve our relationships with our loved ones and our work, respectively.

Calendar is a natural place for an aggregation of individual events. Summaries (daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly), comparisons, trends, and correlations could all prove valuable.

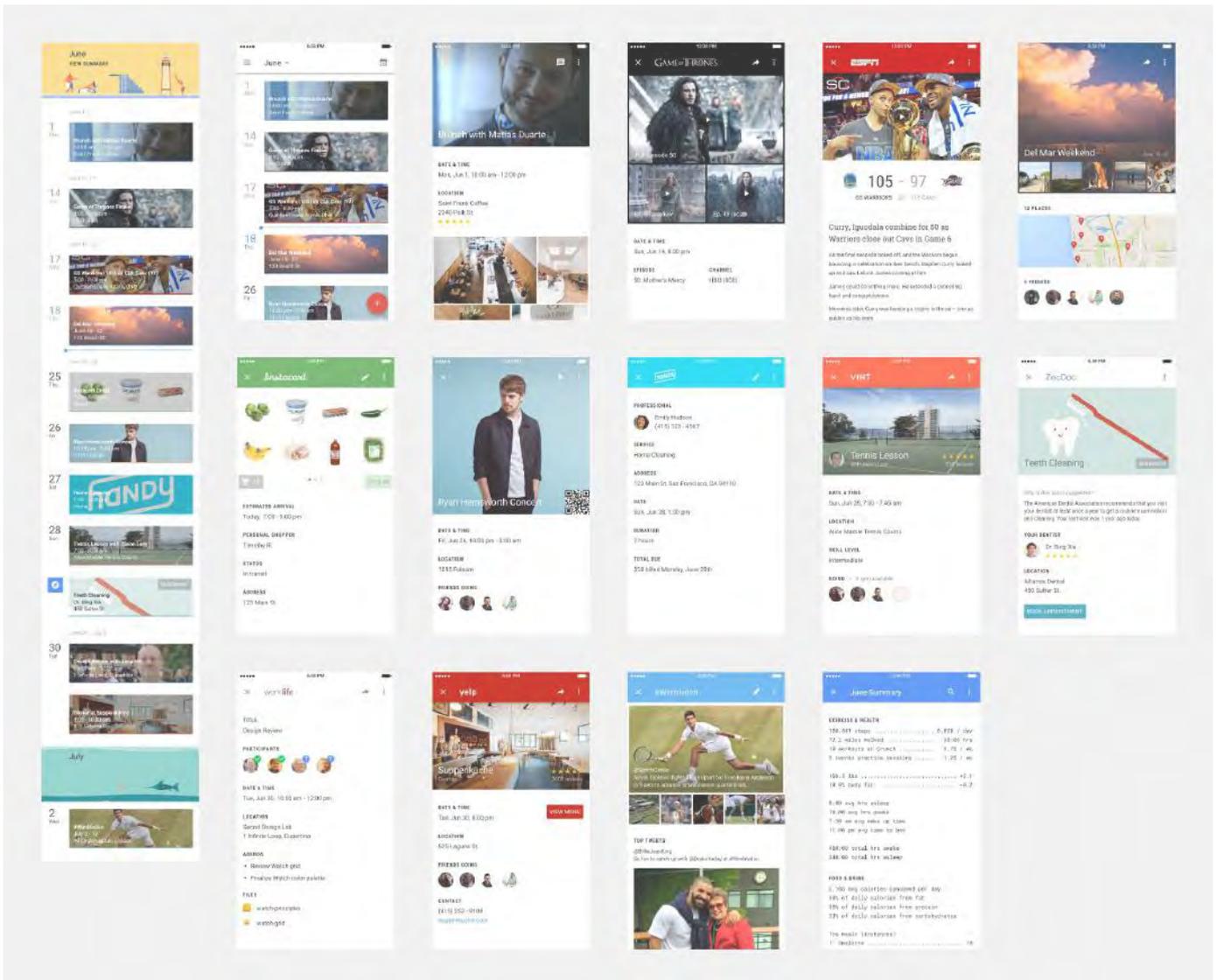
. . .

Try the prototype below by scrolling and tapping on event cards!



The link of the video: <https://briannelson.co/google-calendar-concept-7291a9923711#.51zsxb3xt>

Here is a collection of all of the use cases I explored.



[Prototype on Marvel](#)

[Images on Dribbble](#)

...

Contact

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- [bcnelson831 at gmail.com](mailto:bcnelson831@gmail.com)

. . .

Disclaimer

I don't work for Google, and this calendar is not under development. This is just a concept, for practice and fun.

. . .

References (in order of appearance)

- [App unbundling, search and discovery](#) by [Benedict Evans](#)
- [The Race to Become the WeChat of the West](#) by [Ted Livingston](#)
- [This Is Twitter's Top Secret Project Lightning](#)—BuzzFeed ([Mat Honan](#))
- [What Twitter Can Be](#) by [Chris Sacca](#)
- [For Twitter, Future Means Here and Now](#)—New York Times ([Farhad Manjoo](#))
- [Google Now Integrations](#)
- [Sunrise Calendar](#)
- [Microsoft Confirms Sunrise Acquisition, Adds Depth To Its Mobile Productivity Offerings](#)—TechCrunch ([Darrell Etherington](#))
- [Apps in Sunrise](#)
- [Google Acquires Timeful To Bring Smart Scheduling To Google Apps](#)—TechCrunch ([Darrell Etherington](#))
- [Apple Lets You Search Within Apps With A Deep Link Search API In iOS 9](#)—TechCrunch ([Ingrid Lunden](#) and [Sarah Perez](#))
- [Find app content straight from the Google app—now on iPhone and iPad](#) by Eli Wald
- [New in the Google app: more Now cards from your Android apps](#) by [Aparna Chennapragada](#)

- [Nostalgia: A Product Designer's Secret Weapon](#) by [Ryan Hoover](#)
- [TimeHop](#)
- [Heyday](#)
- [Facebook On This Day](#)
- [Memoir](#)
- [Facebook Year in Review](#)
- [Spotify Year in Music](#)
- ["Now on tap" to help you with what you need in the moment, anywhere on your phone](#) by [Aparna Chennapragada](#)
- [Fitbit](#)
- [Jawbone](#)
- [Apple Health](#)
- [Reporter](#)
- [Feltron 2013 Annual Report](#) by [Nicolas Feltron](#)
- [RescueTime](#)
- [Privacy vs. User Experience](#) by [Dustin Curtis](#)

‘ ‘ ‘

Use cases

- [HBO GO](#)
- [ESPN](#)
- [Instacart](#)
- [Songkick](#), [Facebook](#), [Eventbrite](#), [SoundCloud](#), [Spotify](#), [Apple Music](#)
- [Handy](#)
- [Vint](#)

- [ZocDoc](#)
- [Yelp](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [WorkLife](#)

‘ ‘ ‘

Credits

- [Material Design Spec](#)
- [Illustration](#) by [Emily Jane](#)
- Photography from [Unsplash](#)

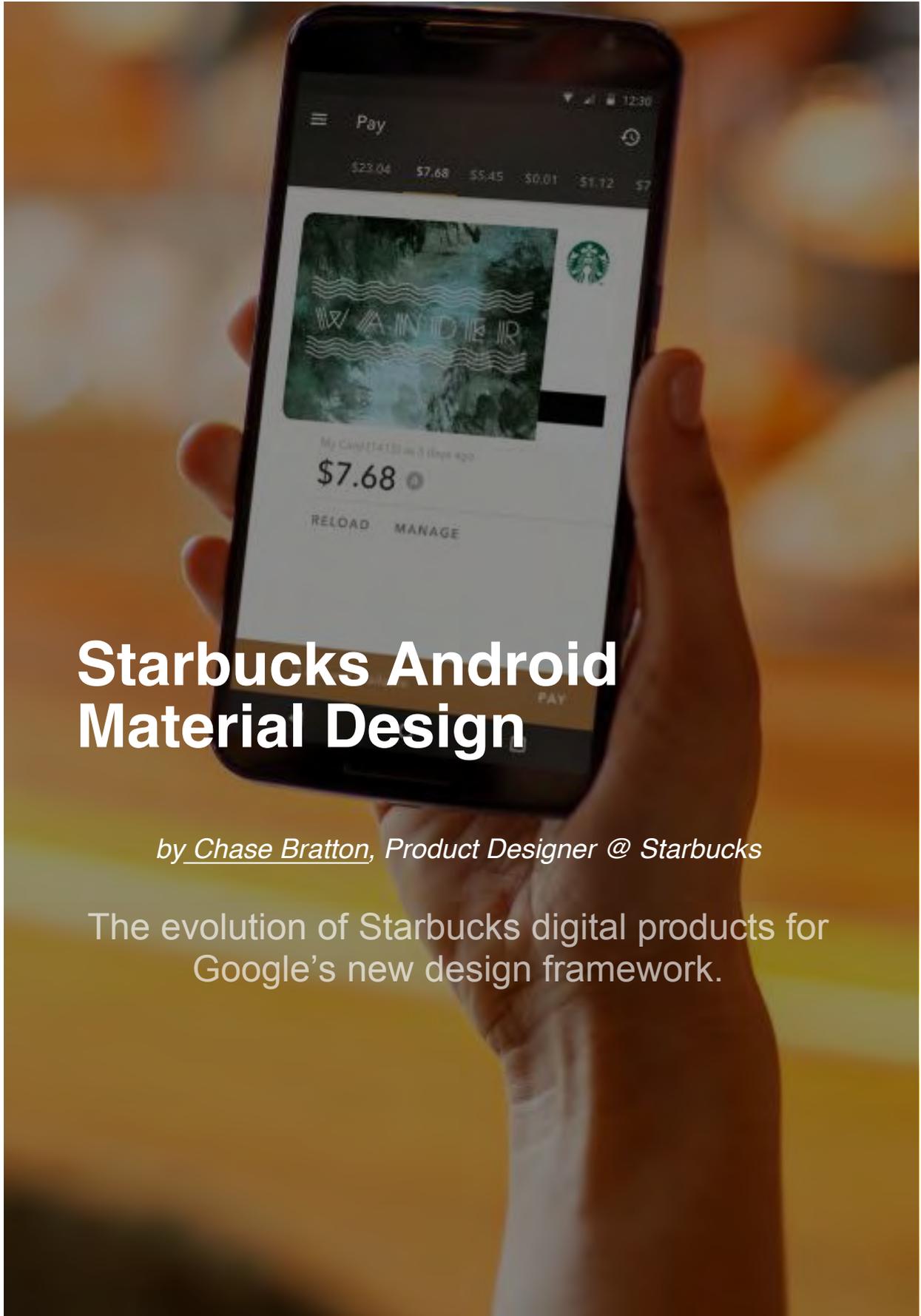
Thanks to Andrew R McHugh, Evan Simoni, Nicholas Felton, and Amber Illig.



Chase Bratton

3 min read

Design

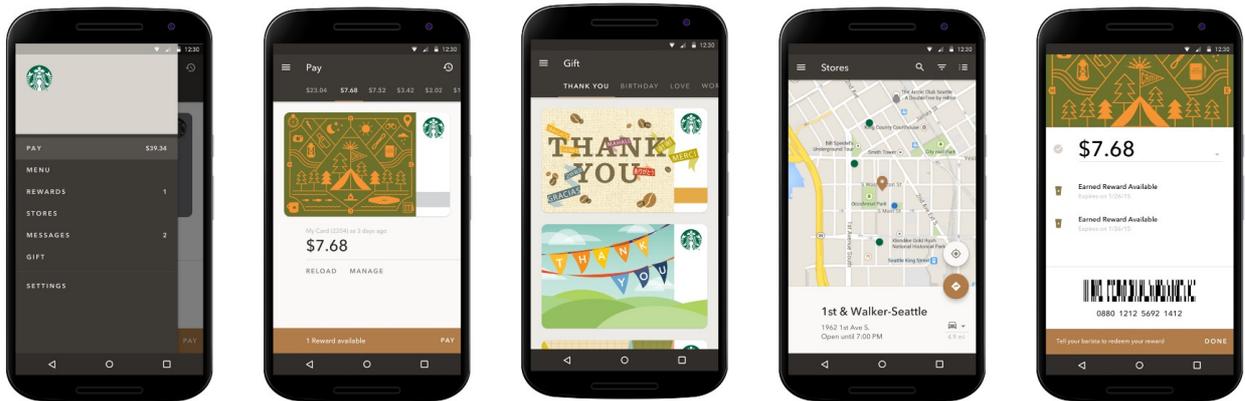


Starbucks Android Material Design

by Chase Bratton, Product Designer @ Starbucks

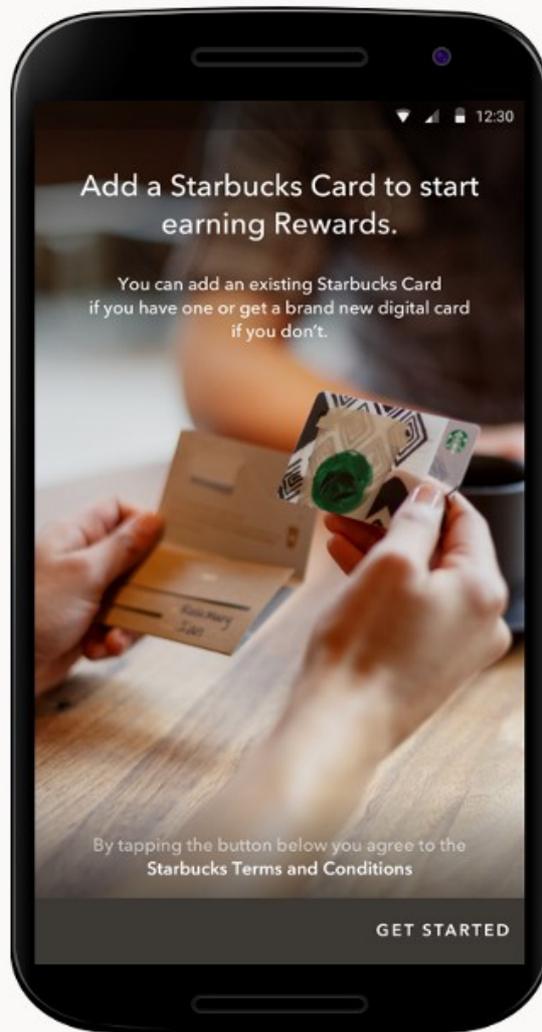
The evolution of Starbucks digital products for Google's new design framework.

I'm happy to announce that Starbucks has released an updated version of our Android app aligning to Material Design. It's the first step in our interpretation of Google's Material Design framework and the ongoing refinement of Starbucks' digital brand.



An Exercise in Restraint

Since Google I/O 2014, the Starbucks product design team has been thinking through how to implement the new framework. Our goal was to ensure that the app avoided looking too “templated” when updating to Material Design. We wanted even the simplest of screens to reflect subtle hints of the Starbucks brand. We strived to provide concise logic for the adoption of certain aspects of Material Design and considered what these changes meant for our customers and what made sense to implement.



Typography

Our team aligns the Starbucks digital brand across all touch points in order to maintain a consistent visual look and feel for our customers across platforms. A primary way we achieve continuity is with typography. We adapted the standard Material Design typography scale, weights, and tracking to a set that feels suitable for our content and easy for our customers to use.

Display 4

Display 3

Display 2

Display 1

Headline

Title

Subhead 2

Subhead 1

Body 2

Body 1

Caption

BUTTON

Display 4

Display 3

Display 2

Display 1

Headline

Title

Subhead 2

Subhead 1

Body 2

Body 1

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Display 4

Display 3

Display 2

Display 1

Headline

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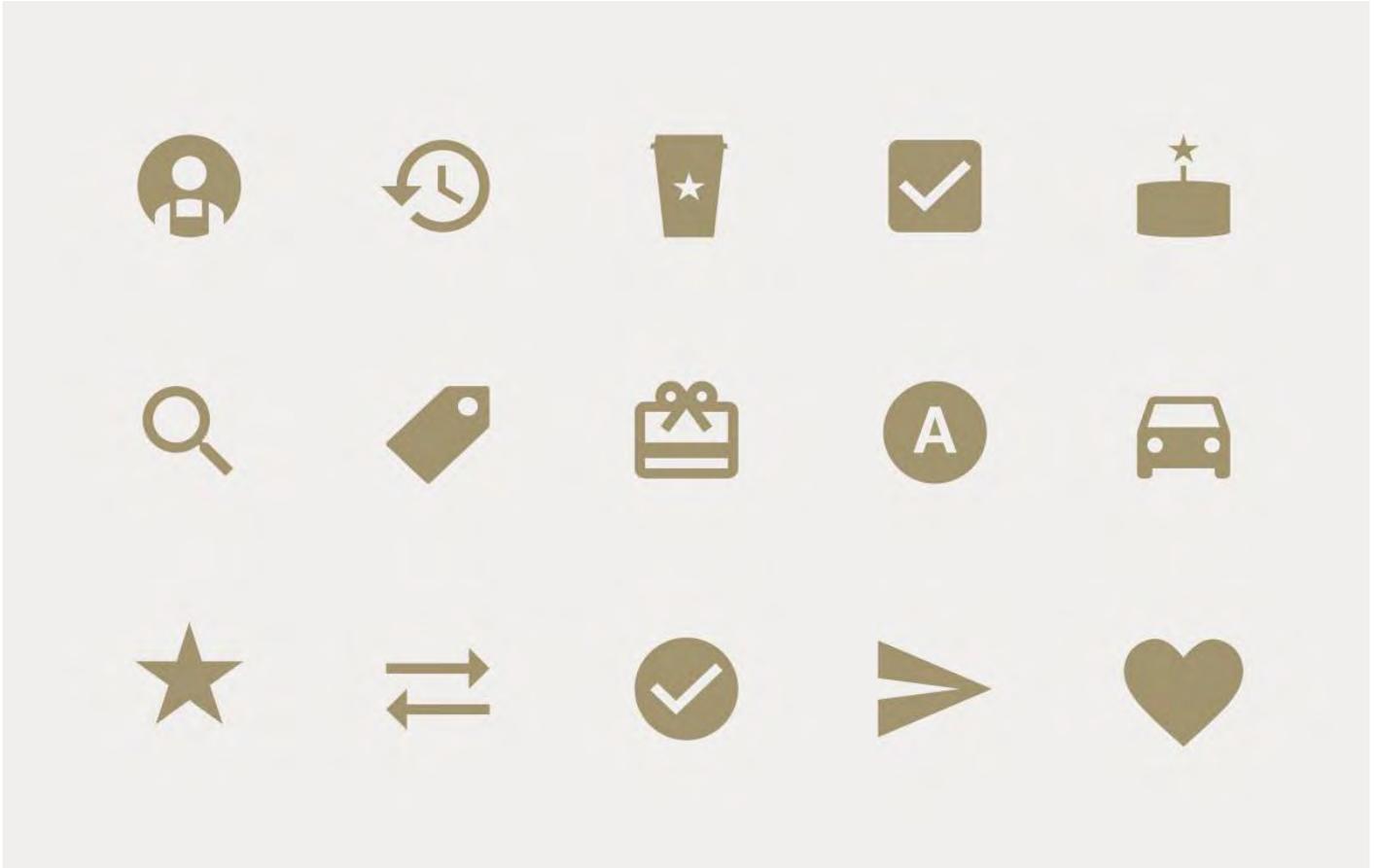
Elevation

Elevation is a core principle used throughout the app to emphasize priority and hierarchy on screens. The use of shadows creates a sense of “depth of field”, enabling certain elements to appear closer to the glass. Persistent actions are elevated in order to create sense of priority on each activity.



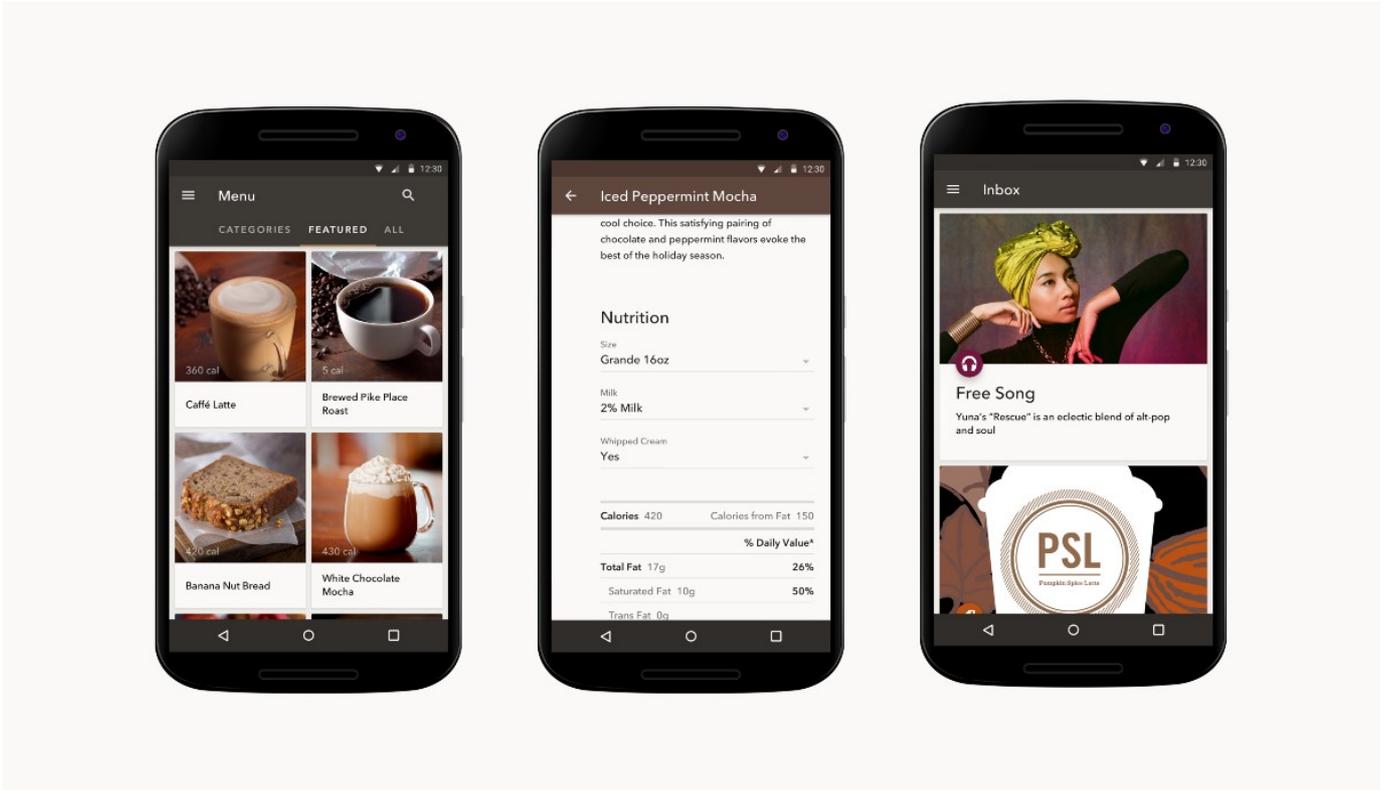
Iconography

Aligning all icons to Google's grid allows us to maintain consistency with Android system icons while incorporating styling from Starbucks brand icons.



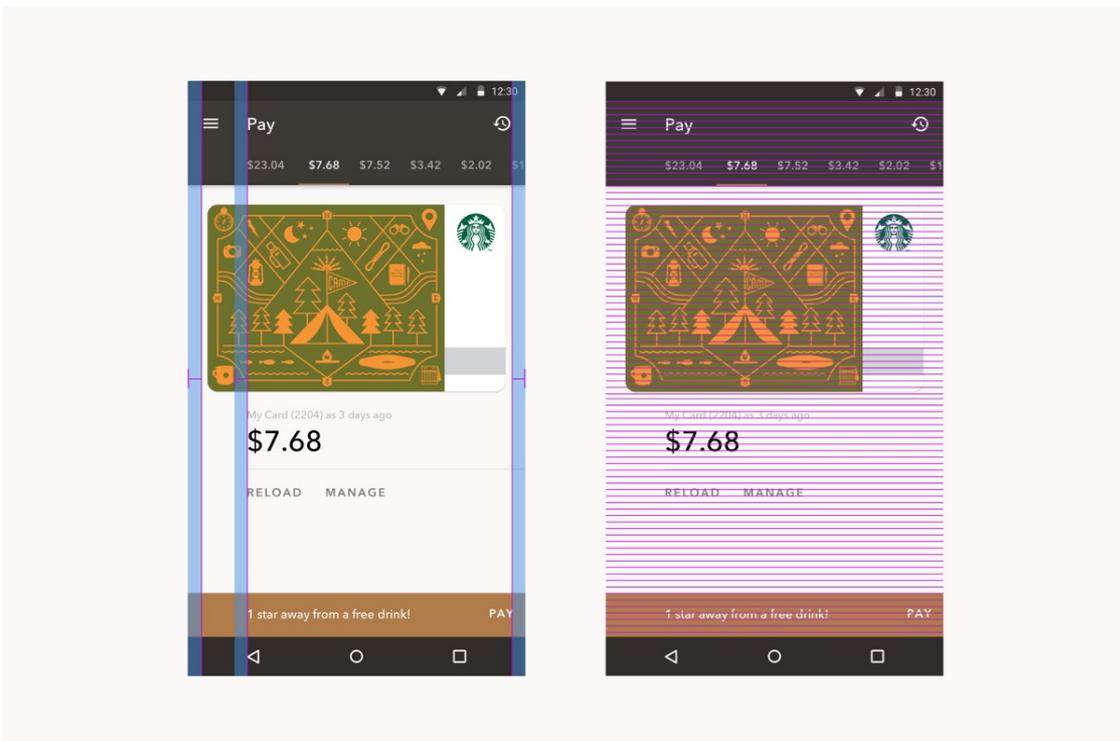
Color&Imagery

We are taking advantage of Google's guideline suggestion to prioritize color and imagery. Warm blacks & grays from the Starbucks digital brand color palette are used to add vibrancy. We use the color palette class to accent app bars on product detail screens.



The Grid

Utilizing an 8dp baseline grid system, along with 16dp margins and a 72dp keyline, establishes a visual consistency to the design across on screens.



Challenges

With Android's diverse segmentation of screen sizes and devices, we knew there might be unexpected challenges along the way to optimize for all customers. This meant we didn't try to obey every rule of the guidelines. We are looking at the adoption of Material Design as an ongoing process, and we're optimizing our design to benefit our customers first. We're listening to (and learning from) our customers every day—if you have any notes for us, feel free to get in touch.”

Starbucks Product Design Team

Caroline Maxwell (Product Designer), Chase Bratton (Product Designer), Jason Stoff (Sr Product Designer), Trevor Denton (Sr. Product Designer), Jeff Peters (Product Designer Manager), Jeremy Beasley (Product Design Manager), Ben Ford (Product Designer)

Thanks to Jason Stoff.



Daniel Rakhamimov

5 min read



The look of someone who gives a shit.

The Jony Ive Principle

*“I think the majority of our manufactured environment is characterized by carelessness...and we have genuinely tried to make products that don’t stand testament to those values, they stand testament to us desperately trying to make the very best product we can because we know someone like J.J. is going to sit down and stare at this screen. **He will sense...he won’t be able to articulate it, but we hope that he will sense the care that went into it, and i do believe that we are capable of discerning far more than we are capable of articulating...**”*

— Jony Ive

The quote above was taken from a recent conversation between Jony Ive, J.J. Abrams & Brian Grazer at the Vanity Fair Summit this year. Reading it truly doesn't do it justice so make sure to check out the video at the bottom of this page when you get to it.

What really resonated with me was this line:

I do believe that we are capable of discerning far more than we are capable of articulating...

Now think about that for a second...what Jony is so eloquently implying is that when he designs the products that touch millions of people on a daily basis, he doesn't do it with the notion that we will experience it through our rational thinking brain, but that we will feel it through the deeper, less articulate, emotional one. The one that gives you trouble articulating the proper response to a question like:

“Why do you love that person?”

or

“Why did you quit your job to go work at a company that pays you less?”

This particularly resonates with me because today we live in an “MVP” first world that has swung so much on the side of having to ship something for the sake of shipping...or for the sake of selling it to our users as fast as possible, or meeting a price point, or hitting a schedule, or beating our competitor to market, or some other metric of the month...etc

I think we might have lost something.

I think we lost the care, thought, and love in our products. I think it's the idea that we should make something enjoyable and fun just because it might put a smile on the users face and not because we need to hit some sort of click through rate. It's the idea that next time you want to ship your “Uber for dogs” app, you sit there and fucking research the shit out of what the difference between a Pitbull and a Bulldog is before you even dare write a line of code.

It's irrational. Or is it?

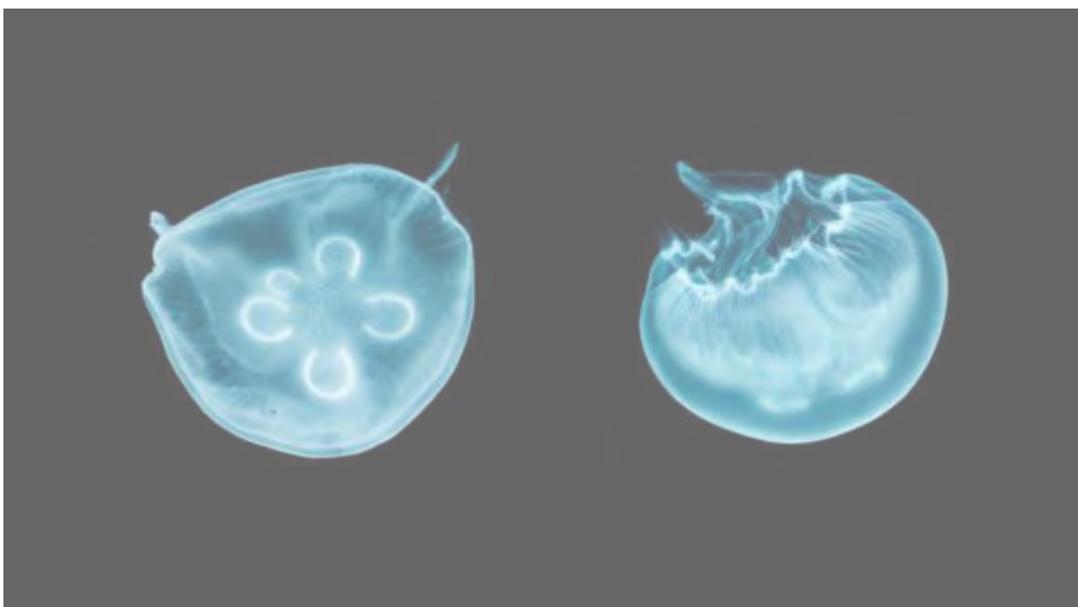
There's probably no data to back it up but I'm sure it's at *least* partly responsible for all of the great products we use. It might even be that "x-factor" we're all so desperately trying to find.

Maybe it's time we do what Jony does and focus on the things we probably can't directly put a number on at the moment, or discern from a testimonial in a user test?

Maybe we should spend time on figuring out what really... **REALLY** matters to us and to the people who use the products we make, instead of throwing a bunch of darts at the board and see what sticks?

Maybe the reason all of our product design looks the same is because all of us are trying to quickly ship something and don't want to take the time out to really dig deeply into the problem we want to solve. So we follow the same design patterns and we churn out the same soulless generic crap.

"Just throw some bootstrap on it!"



"We shot all this stuff," Dye says, "the butterflies and the jellyfish and the flowers for the motion face, it's all in-camera. And so the flowers were shot blooming over time. I think the longest one took us 285 hours, and over 24,000 shots."—Wired
(<http://www.wired.com/2015/04/apple-watch-design/>)

Those jellyfish, butterflies, and flowers on your Apple Watch were actual **real** jellyfish, butterflies, and flowers that were shot with a camera. They weren't some animation design cranked out for an 8-point story in some team's sprint. They shot one fucking flower for 285 hours, with over 24,000 shots, just so the first thing you see when you look at your wrist puts a smile on your face, and lights up a part of your brain that you didn't even know you had.

Why?

Because they care about their craft.

Because they care about your experience.

Do you?

That's the Jony Ive Principle.



The whole thing is worth a watch. Really. But skip to 17:25 if you just want to see the relevant part.

The whole thing is worth a watch. Really. But skip to 17:25 if you just want to see the relevant part.

. . .

I want to share some of the products that really resonate with me because of the amount of work, care, love and thought I think were put into them.



1974 Porsche 911 Turbo.



Apple iPhone 5



Kanye West's My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy

What are some of yours? Share it in your response!

. . .

Who am I?

I'm an engineering-minded product designer and a design-minded iOS engineer from New York City. I also happen to be looking to join a team of passionate people to work on some great products.

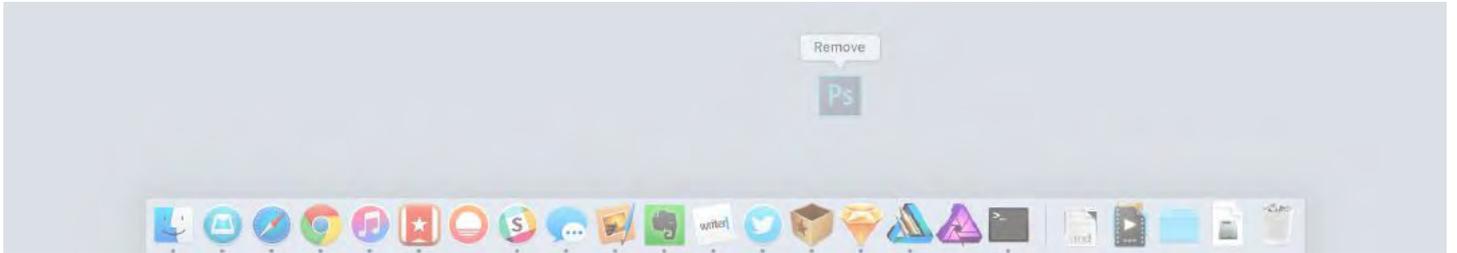
If that interests you, lets chat: danielrak@me.com or [@danielrakh](https://twitter.com/danielrakh)



Darin Dimitroff

12 min read

Design



Thank you for everything, Adobe

I really want to move on

. . .

Disclaimer: This is not a rant, nor one of the many articles dissing Adobe's subscription model. I'm perfectly okay with it.

. . .

Why Adobe is one of the most important companies in my life

I started using Adobe products in middle school. At the time, I never thought I'd do anything remotely connected with design, I just liked messing around with computers. Like most kids, I didn't know about the technical differences between designers, developers and probably IT support people, I just liked computers and did all sorts of random things while others were focused on gaming.

If you're a designer in their 20s or 30s, my story is probably pretty similar to yours. I had no idea what I did was considered design and, frankly, I didn't care. The first tools I used were pirated versions of Photoshop and Dreamweaver.

I remember feeling completely intimidated by the endless grid of panels. It was a strange state of mind I can feel to this day if I try hard enough. A mix of fear of the unknown and utter excitement about all the possibilities. Like most curious people, the latter manages to prevail most of the time and that moves us forward.



At the time, I had no idea about the scale of Adobe, I didn't even care who made the software. It was just me, Photoshop and sleepless hours of working on the ugliest shit you can imagine. The web was full of learning resources, I even bought some of Adobe's official books. We get used to it when we get older, but learning new tools is probably one of the most exciting aspects of our jobs. It affects our ways of thinking and solving problems. Up until the last few years, Adobe had practically zero competition for most designers. I've tried Corel's products and other alternatives, but nothing felt close to what Adobe had achieved, especially after I moved to a primarily vector workflow. Combined with endless learning resources, plugins, content packs and many more, Adobe defined whole generations of designers who might have otherwise taken a different career path.

It's not you, it's the others

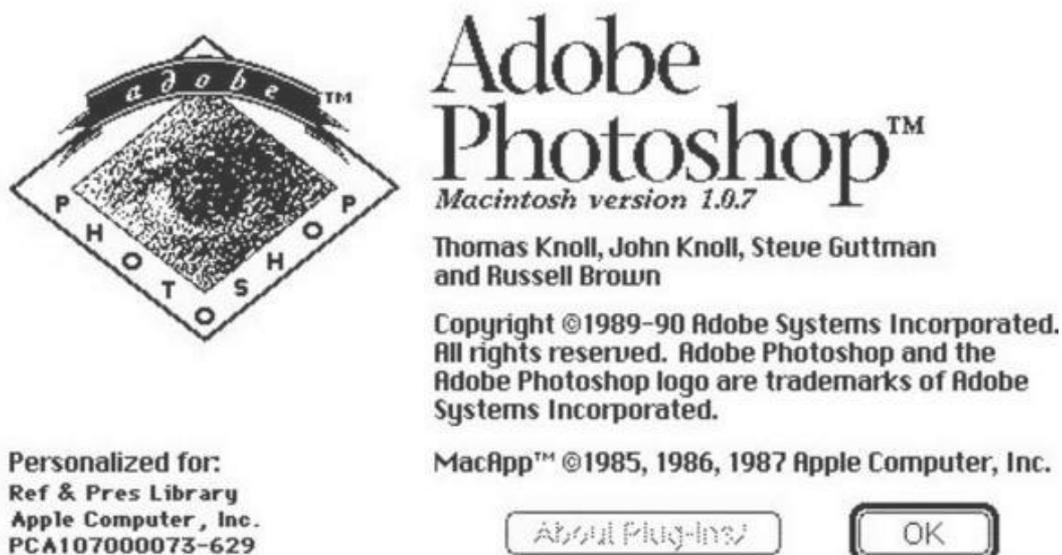
Gradually, I formed a broader sense of the design/development landscape and,

sometime in high school, started realizing I'm kind of a designer. Through the years, I've always thought being a designer is an art discipline and I can't draw or create complex artwork. Joining design communities and, most importantly, Twitter, exposed me to the world of designing as an engineer, not an artist. I'm not using UI, UX, IX, UI/UX,(insert random letters) as I believe this pointless discussion should end.

"If you can design one thing, you can design everything."

Massimo Vignelli

I focused on visual branding and worked at a few advertising agencies. I still have a thing for it, but I'm spending most of my time doing what I truly love—interaction design. When I started designing interfaces and websites for a living, I switched from Photoshop to Illustrator because I had a reasonable experience with the tool from my print days. Nevertheless, I kept juggling between Photoshop and Illustrator. Most interface designers have stuck with Photoshop's vector tools and never touched Illustrator. Thinking of it, I should have done the same. Long story short, it never felt right.



Photoshop 1.0.7's About screen

Photoshop started as a professional photo editing tool and has always felt like one. No matter how many designer focused features Adobe adds, the core workflows and logic feel distant and don't reflect the way I think. I tried Fireworks, but I felt so

wrong I went back to Illustrator. In the meantime, I started doing whatever I could in code. It felt closer to the final medium and much faster and easier. At the end of the day, I felt like interaction designers are the cuckoos of design. We use all kinds of tools to get things done, but none of them is specifically tailored to our needs.

Enter Sketch 2

The first time I tried Sketch, it didn't have a tenth of the status it has nowadays. I'm generally open to trying new tools, even when I'm almost certain they won't fit my workflow. I remember downloading a free trial of Sketch 2 and using it for an hour or two. I have a thing for native feeling and looking apps, I fell in love with the interface and how smooth and snappy it felt.



Unfortunately, it was lacking a serious portion of the features I need to get things done. In combination with the radically different behavior and completely new keyboard shortcuts, I was quick to decide Sketch is just another small and generally useless design app. I don't remember launching it again during the trial period. Nobody I knew was using it, it had a limited amount of plugins and the name didn't help me realize it was meant to be an interface design tool.

My sense of time is a mess, but, six months later, some Sketch stories started surfacing across the web. I had almost forgotten I've used it, but most of them came from people I trust, so I decided to give Sketch 2 another try. On top of that, I was working on a rather important mobile UI project and Sketch promised to be just the tool for that.

This time I changed my mindset: I wasn't going to think of it as an Illustrator replacement, but as an entirely new app with its own set of logic one has to get used to. The first few days were stressful, to say the least. I had never used design tools not made by Adobe for a prolonged period of time. Nevertheless, thank you, younger self, for sticking with Sketch despite the initial gripes. You rock.

Making the switch

Sketch 3



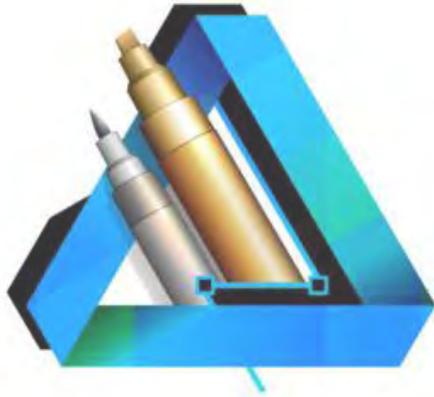
I was already pretty happy with whatever version of Sketch 2 I was using. Illustrator was still in my dock and I used it regularly for different things Sketch couldn't do, mostly icons and complex bezier stuff. After version 3 was out, I started trying to deal with more and more of those tasks inside Sketch. I even did some simple illustrations (they are terrible and it's not Sketch's fault). What struck me was that, after some

persuading, my partner Kalina (an illustrator, icon designer and Illustrator aficionado) tried Sketch and felt okay about it. She's still using Illustrator for some tasks, especially print, but we've managed to move to almost entirely Sketch+Affinity Designer based workflows. When I have to work on .ai files, I prefer staying in Sketch for as long as possible, even when it makes things a bit harder.

Designers who use Sketch regularly should be familiar with the feeling of not willing to launch Photoshop/Illustrator. Every hour with Bohemian Coding's creation made it harder for me to go back to Adobe products, but we couldn't cut the cord so quickly.

Sketch could be used as a multidisciplinary design tool, but it's really tailored toward UI design. Laser focus is a part of what makes it great.

Affinity Designer

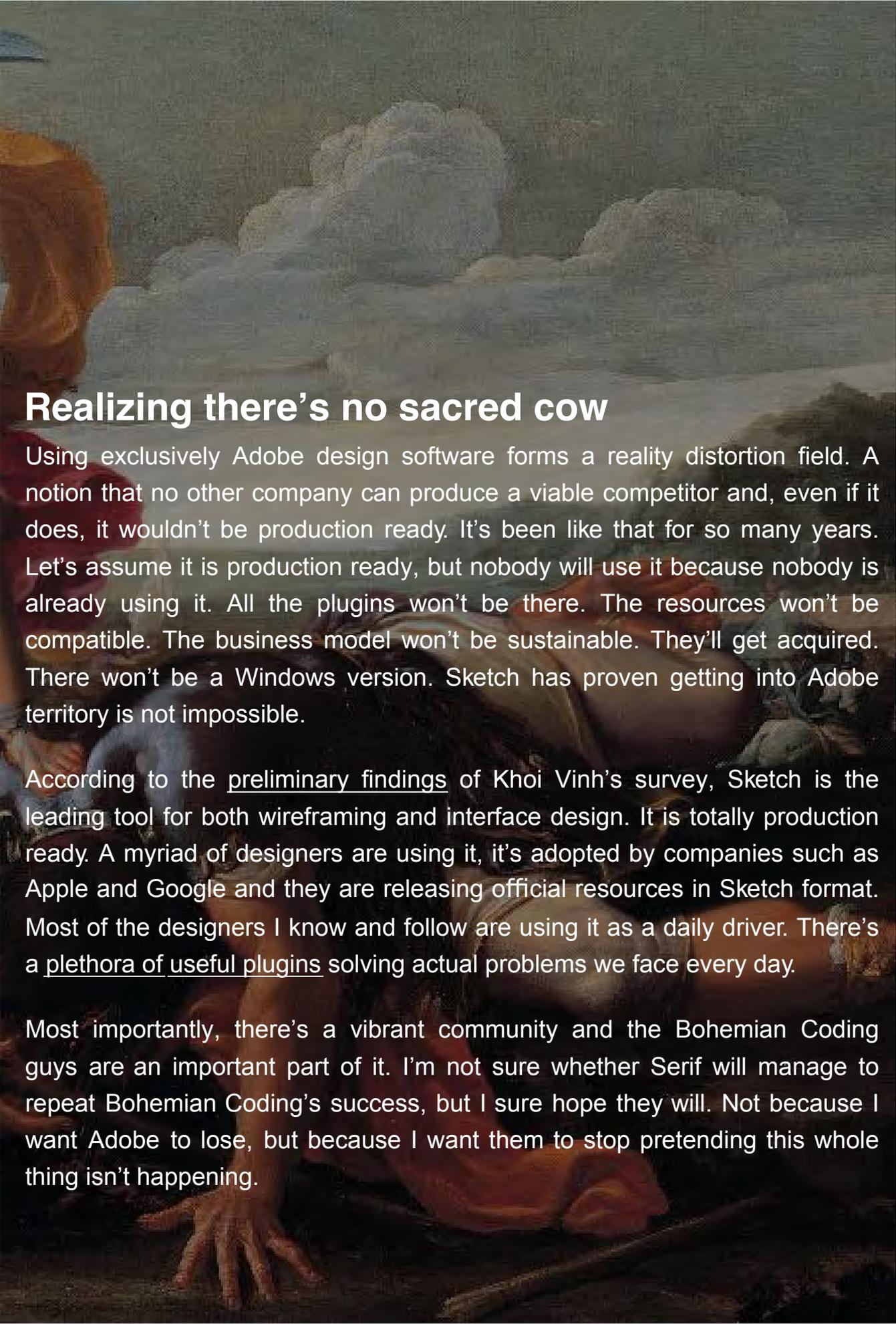


Just like Sketch, I tried Affinity Designer out of pure curiosity. Already using Pixelmator for most raster tasks, I was looking for an Illustrator replacement. Serif had been working on it for four years and their long history made me even more optimistic. The initial release had some problems and missing features, but it was a love at first sight. I had just used Illustrator on my Retina MacBook Pro and switching to Affinity Designer left me in awe.

It just felt like a modern app, making use of the powerful hardware of my computer and making that HiDPI screen shine with crisp Retina assets. Pinch to zoom didn't feel like a half-loaded GIF and, finally—native autosave.

I was willing to wait for the missing features and fixes because of the solid foundation. A few months later, Affinity Designer is an amazing piece of software we use in production, even with our legacy .ai and .psd files. In most cases, it's much faster than Photoshop at opening PSDs, which still blows me away. It even won an Apple Design Award.

We're testing Affinity Photo for raster work and we're quite pleased. The app even shares a common file format with Designer, which makes working between apps a breeze. I've always wanted something like that in Creative Cloud. Affinity Photo might replace the strange mix of Photoshop and Pixelmator we use. Serif is also working on an InDesign competitor called Affinity Publisher. Not sure if we have a need for that, but it sounds interesting.



Realizing there's no sacred cow

Using exclusively Adobe design software forms a reality distortion field. A notion that no other company can produce a viable competitor and, even if it does, it wouldn't be production ready. It's been like that for so many years. Let's assume it is production ready, but nobody will use it because nobody is already using it. All the plugins won't be there. The resources won't be compatible. The business model won't be sustainable. They'll get acquired. There won't be a Windows version. Sketch has proven getting into Adobe territory is not impossible.

According to the preliminary findings of Khoi Vinh's survey, Sketch is the leading tool for both wireframing and interface design. It is totally production ready. A myriad of designers are using it, it's adopted by companies such as Apple and Google and they are releasing official resources in Sketch format. Most of the designers I know and follow are using it as a daily driver. There's a plethora of useful plugins solving actual problems we face every day.

Most importantly, there's a vibrant community and the Bohemian Coding guys are an important part of it. I'm not sure whether Serif will manage to repeat Bohemian Coding's success, but I sure hope they will. Not because I want Adobe to lose, but because I want them to stop pretending this whole thing isn't happening.

It's not about the bugs

Adobe software has always felt sort of sluggish and I've experienced different kinds of problems, but that's not my major gripe with the company. Sketch is pretty buggy too, but I love using it because I know the team is sweating over fixing everything as quickly as possible. It's about the culture.

Two years ago, I filed a Creative Cloud bug in Adobe's forums. Dozens of user complaints and four versions of OS X later, it's still there. I recommend you check out the thread, Adobe's responses are, to say the least, weird.

Another thing you should check out is Episode 17 of the Design Details podcast (highly recommended). Adobe's attitude towards its competitors and the state of their products as a whole is puzzling. A few times throughout the podcast, I was about to impulsively kill my CC subscription.

But it's also about the bugs

I'm used to keeping old versions of Adobe software. Most designers I know do it too. We're all afraid something will break. We're used to it, but it doesn't make it less weird. Imagine having to do that with every piece of software you use.

The last Illustrator update broke SVG exports and introduced GPU rendering which is totally useless. I recommend you follow @iconwerk's updates on both problems.

Now I'm sure! Nobody tested #illustratorcc2015 before shipping. Here's a proof. Basic functions just don't work: pic.twitter.com/A7YivbFqX3

—[@iconwerk](https://twitter.com/iconwerk)



The old codebase is not an excuse

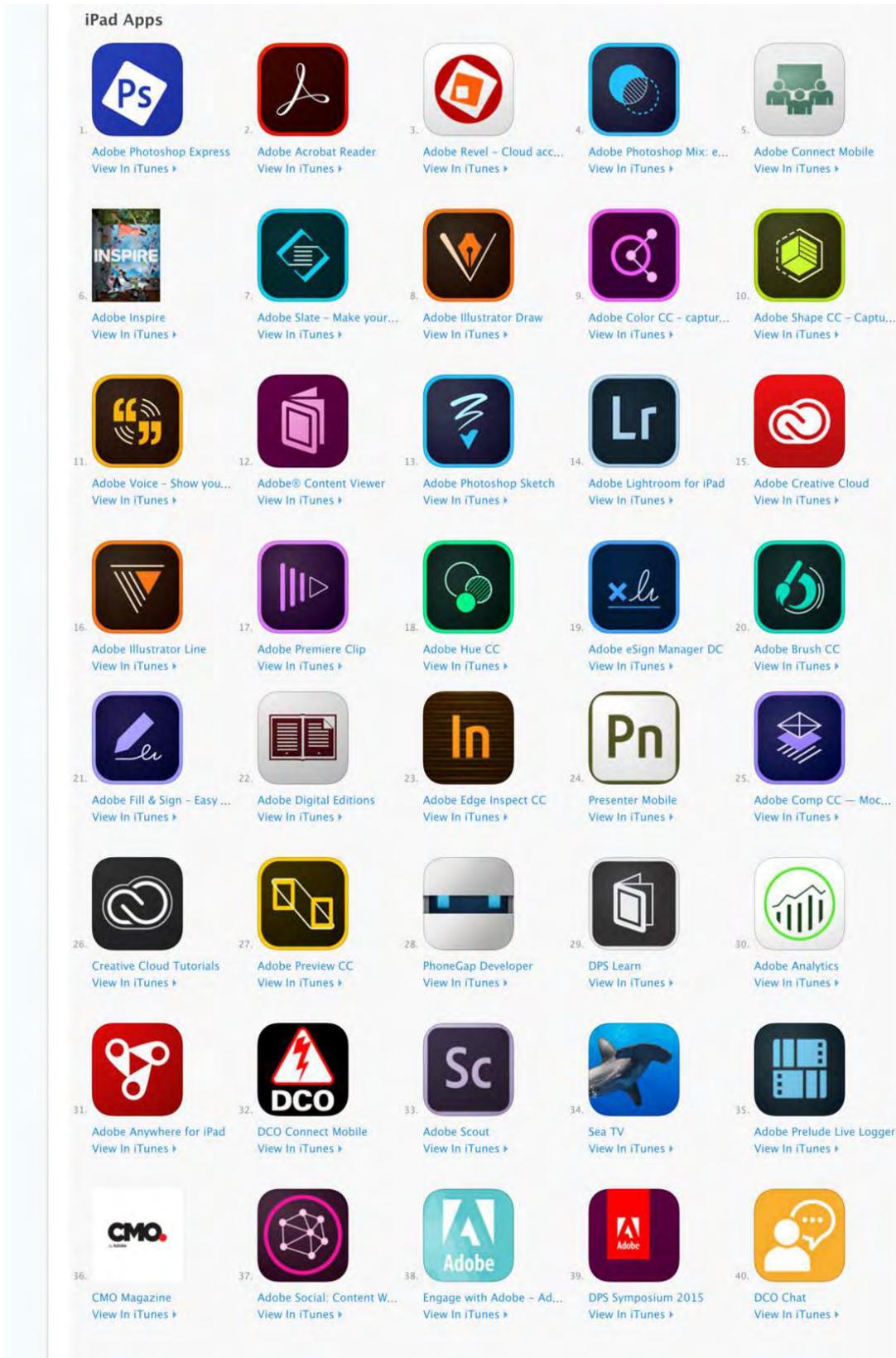
Even people who love Adobe's products admit most of the apps are far from perfect. Separate overlaid windows blocking the entire interface, pixelated assets, leftover Aqua components, unexpected behavior, lack of coherent logic. Let me stop there, [here's a whole Tumblr blog about it](#).

Both Adobe employees and users keep being apologetic about it, referring to the old codebase and everything they have to support. While I can see what they mean, users should not suffer because of a product's legacy. It's a problem Adobe has to deal with better. The old codebase is not beneficial to users, but they are still paying the price.

Focus on the tools, cut the fat

I'm aware Adobe is trying to bring as much value as possible to the Creative Cloud subscription. Things like TypeKit are great inclusions, but Adobe's mobile strategy is a different story. Try searching for "Adobe" in the App Store, especially on an iPad. You'll find a weird mix of apps, most of which I'd consider partially or completely deprecated.

Even worse, I've tried most of them and the ones that didn't feel mediocre didn't solve any real problems. Not backed by any stats, but I don't know a single designer who uses Adobe's mobile apps. Color is kind of cool, but I prefer using it in the browser.

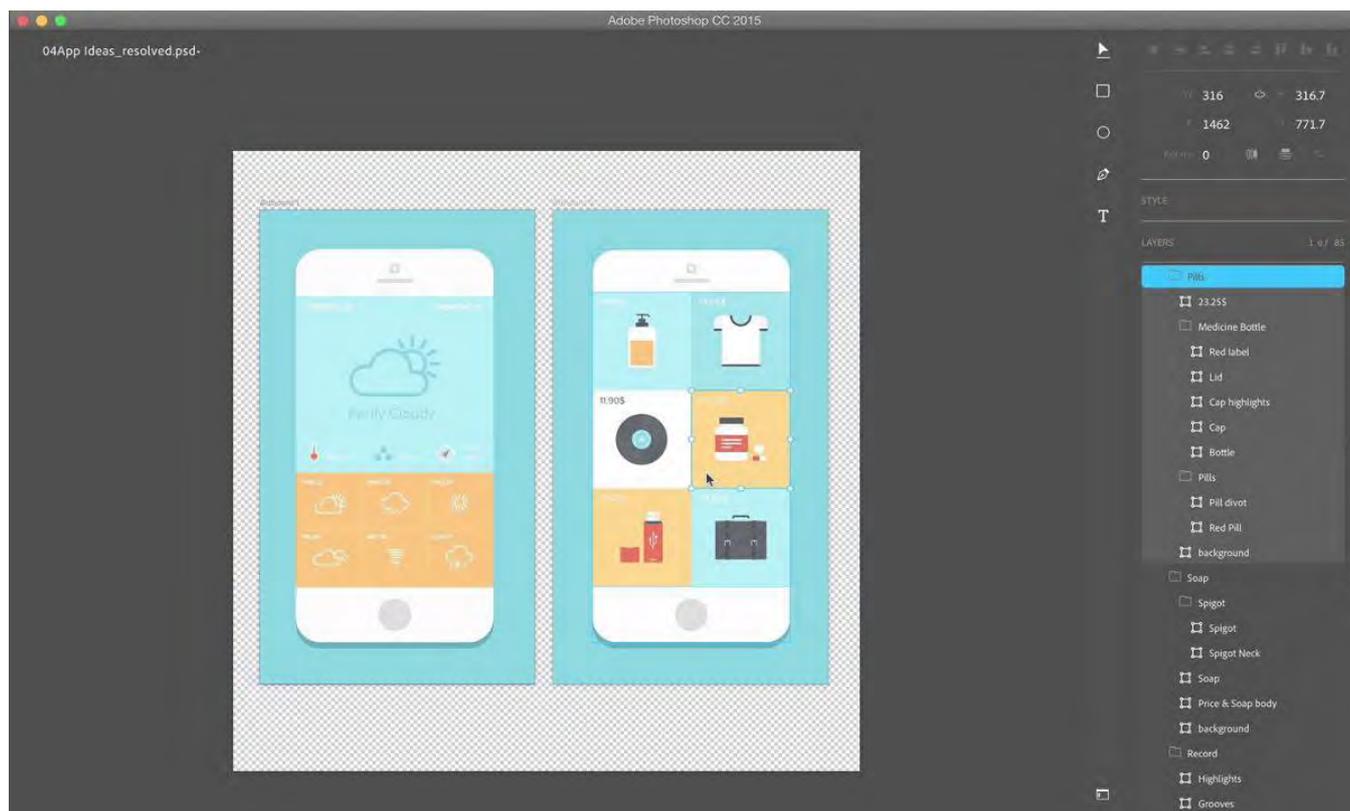


Some of Adobe's iPad apps.

Adobe should bring back some focus to its main products and kill most of its little apps.

We need a dedicated UI design tool

Killing Fireworks seemed weird to me. I've never used it extensively, but, with the rise of Sketch, the least logical thing Adobe could do is kill its competitor.



Design Spaces in Adobe Photoshop CC 2015

Pulling everything into Photoshop is one of the main reasons more and more designers are switching to Sketch. Photoshop started as a photo editing tool and, to this day, we can feel that. Design Spaces is a nice addition, but it's severely lacking and, honestly, UI design is significant enough for its own app, not a mode. Through the eyes of a beginner, Photoshop feels intimidating and, if someone wants to focus on UI, they don't really need most of the tools. Sketch's laser focused functionality actually helped me become a better designer, allowing me to focus on what really matters.

I'd love to see a real Sketch competitor made by Adobe. Imagine what a company this size could do. You should definitely read [Josh Puckett's take on the idea of designing with real data](#). And what about prototyping? Practically all innovation in the space is coming from small companies like Framer and Pixate (Facebook's Origami as an exception, but it's more of a side project).

. . .

I'm not canceling my subscription

But I'd love to

"I'm sure he's just being butthurt on the Internet. He'll probably continue paying for years to come"

It's a reasonable point. I've read numerous similar comments under articles on the topic. Being stuck with paying is a situation active Sketch users are familiar with, especially if their work is not solely limited to interfaces. Our small design studio does equal parts product design, branding and illustration, including print. Honestly, we could go on with 90% of our work without using Adobe's products, but those 10% matter. A huge part of them is working with other people's PSDs—in some complex scenarios (especially containing Smart Objects), Affinity Designer's import isn't ideal, although they are making constant improvements.

At the end of the day, I might sound much more fed up with Adobe than I really am. As I noted in the beginning, this is not a rant. Adobe's products are still essential to my business and I'm okay with paying. Nevertheless, an important insight came to me while I was doing my taxes a few months ago. We're paying the most for the software we use the least. To me, this makes absolutely no sense.

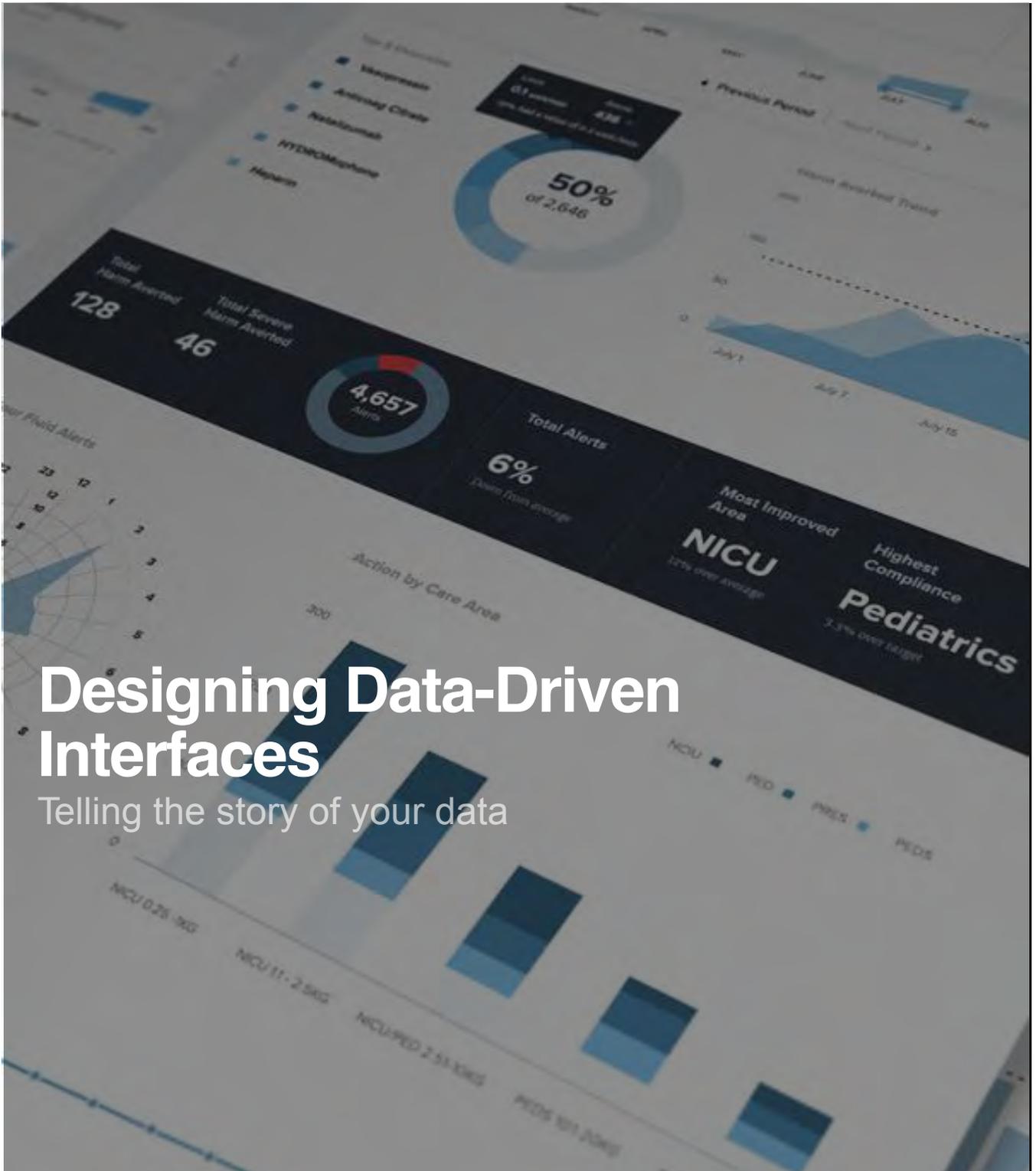
The moral of the story, at least for me, is simple. Next time you decide to try out a new product, don't be cynical about it. Dive in with your best intentions, learn to use it optimally and be patient about the problems. A few years ago, this product was Sketch. 25 years ago, it was Photoshop. And it changed everything.

Further reading

- [Modern Design Tools: Adaptive Layouts](#)
- [Bye, bye Adobe.](#)
- [Harnessing Vector Awesomeness in Sketch](#)
- [Making the switch](#)
- [Sketch VS Photoshop](#)
- [Why is Sketch becoming so popular compared to Photoshop for interface design?](#)
- [It's Time to Dump Photoshop and Embrace Sketch](#)



Erik K
8 min read



Designing Data-Driven Interfaces

Telling the story of your data

“Dashboard”, “Big Data”, “Data visualization”, “Analytics”—there’s been an explosion of people and companies looking to do interesting things with their data. I've been lucky to work on dozens of data-heavy interfaces throughout my career and I wanted to share some thoughts on how to arrive at a distinct and meaningful product.

Many people have already tackled this topic, so I'm going try and stick to the parts of our process that have the most impact.

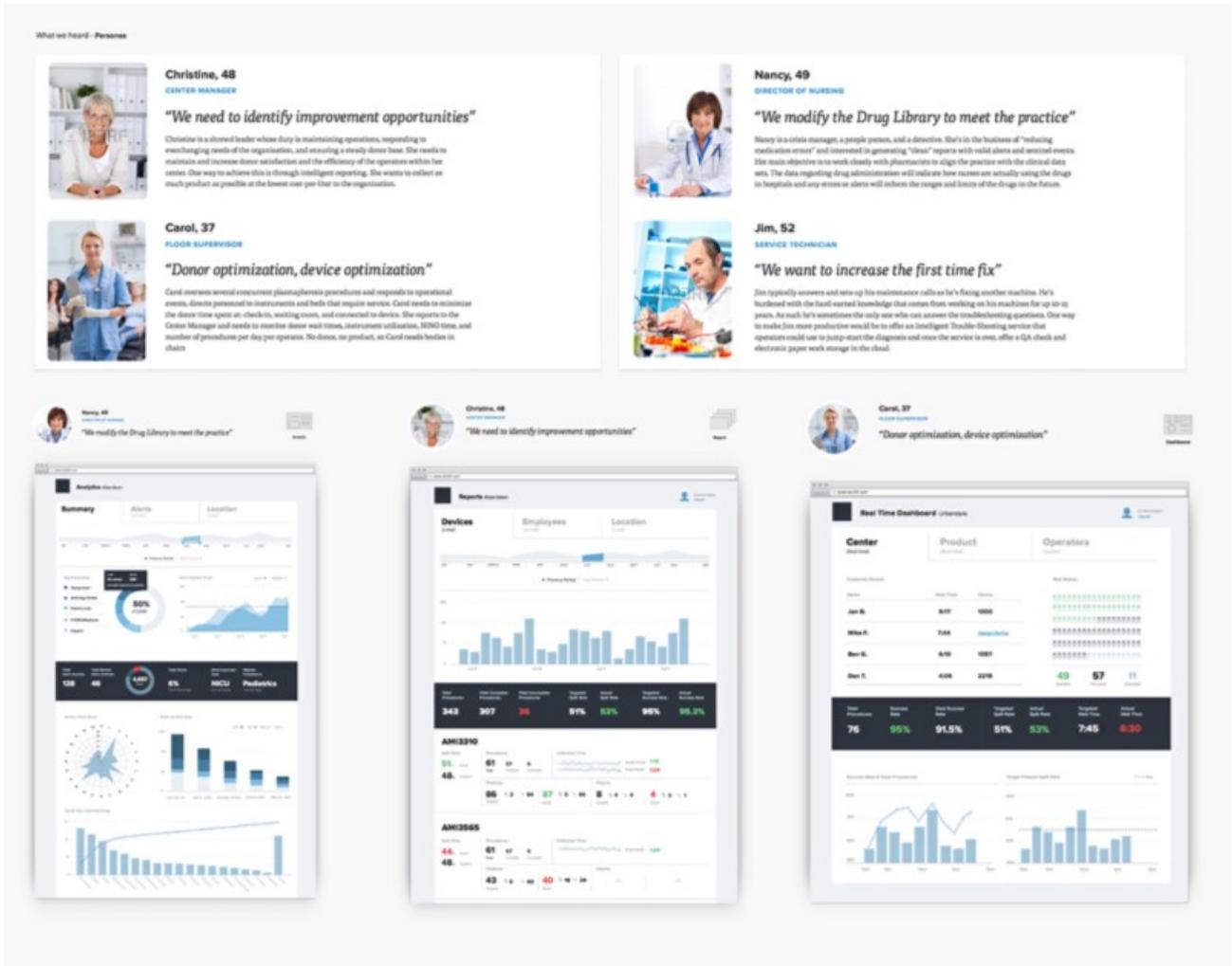
1. Different users, different data

Whenever you're designing complex systems there will inevitably be multiple users or personas to design for. Executives, managers, and analysts are common personas that each have their own workflows and data needs.

Defining good personas and generating insights is an art within itself, and it’s not something I’m going to detail here. If you're curious about how to do this, check out this [helpful post](#) from [Cooper](#).

The important thing to remember about personas is to **identify them upfront** and organize your information architecture tasks and wireframes around them.

Below is a deliverable we used for a healthcare reporting application we worked on last year. The system has distinct users each requiring their own data workflows. Once we established the key personas we included them alongside our deliverables with each review session.



Notice how the personas top each artboard. Our clients have been receptive to this approach.

Presenting artwork to a room of clients can be a difficult task. Whether you're explaining wireframes and flow diagrams or debating visual treatments, it's hard to keep everyone tracking to your vision.

Organizing your artwork by personas will help you (and your clients) stay on point during these discussions.

2. Shape the Page

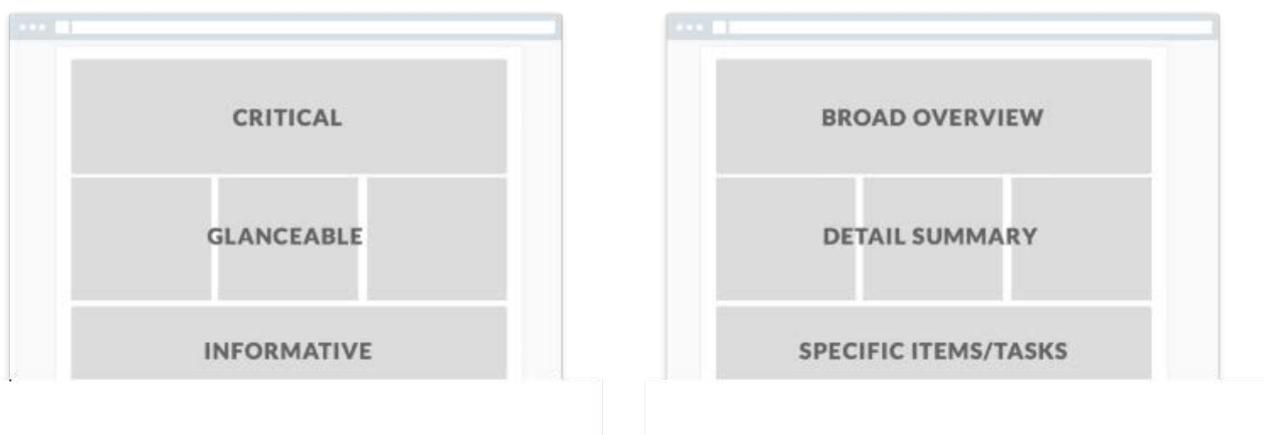
One technique I've picked up over the years is the concept of shaping the page. The core idea is really simple:

Show the user what they need to see first, then structure the remainder of the page based on the user story or hierarchy of information.

The concept of shaping the page is a core principle of writing prose (and many other forms of communication), and something I became intimate with after writing a book. Over the years I've spent a lot of time with the book "Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace". Aside from being an excellent reference for writing, it describes the concept eloquently:

When you start with distractions, your audience has a hard time seeing not just what each element is about, but the focus of the entire passage.

This is a useful principle to keep in mind when designing UX. Below are two common approaches we use to shape the page.



Give your dashboards some structure. Ask yourself—What story am I telling with this information?

Many of the dashboards and data viz projects I see popup on behance and dribbble are beautifully designed (visually) but are often overwhelmingly *underwhelming*. They are either A) a myriad of graph widgets arranged in a pinterest-style layout with no hierarchy or B) over-designed visualizations that aren't appropriate for the data.



The left image shows an overwhelming approach to data vis. The right is an example of ornamentation that detracts from the point of the data.

In the image above (on the left), the reporting dashboard takes a Mission Control approach to presenting the information...which is pretty overwhelming. To avoid this, we try to approach these types of interfaces by **curating the information** more like you're reading a magazine article.

Not to say there isn't a time and place for a mission control UI...I personally would love to design something like that. But for most situations seeing everything all the time is unnecessary.

The key thing to consider — avoid creating a smattering of visualizations. Shape the information on the page so the user is presented with key information first, then follow it up with supporting content.

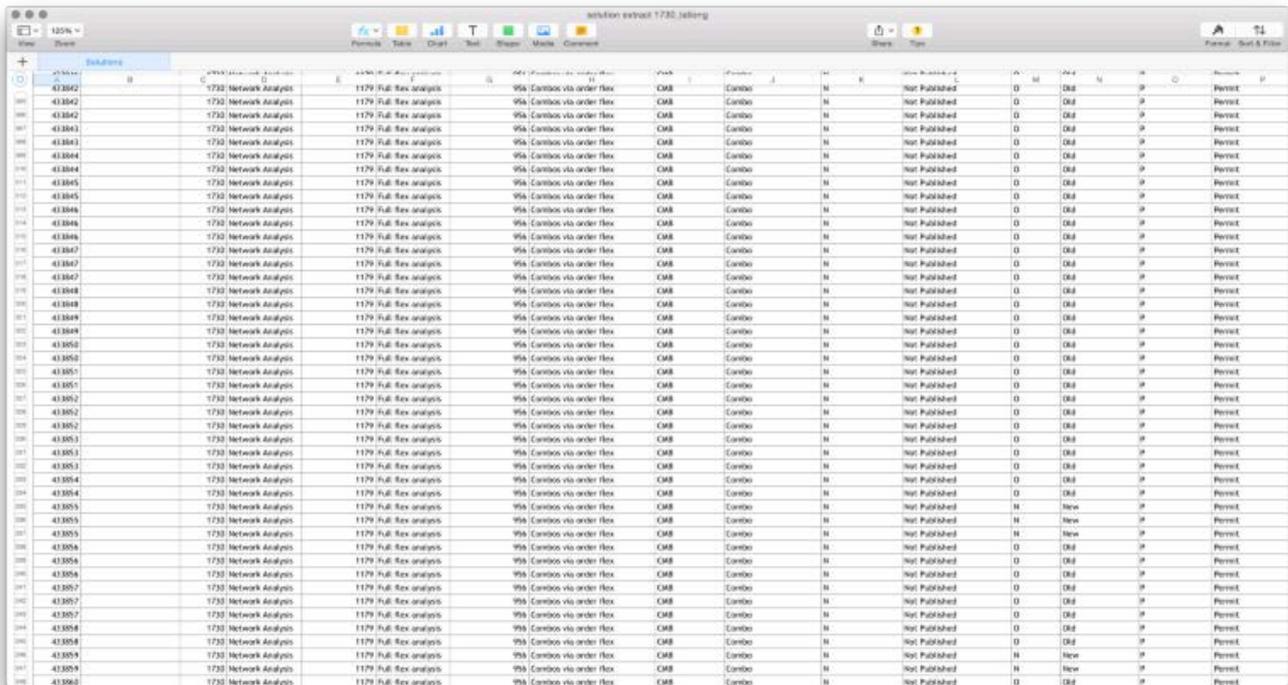
3. Choose the ***right*** visualizations

There are many (too many) designs floating around that misuse charts in favor of aesthetics.

The worst part is—these “bad habits” seem to be multiplying. Everywhere I look, I see area charts that should be pie graphs or line charts that should be bar graphs. So let’s try to stop this together...Here’s a few tips for doing your data justice:

Start with the Data

It's not sexy—raw tabular rows of data. However, it's the best place to start. It will help you start thinking about what variables are available in the data and how the various data entities are related.



The image shows a screenshot of a spreadsheet application, likely Microsoft Excel, displaying a large table of raw data. The table has many columns and rows, with the first few columns containing numerical IDs (e.g., 413842, 413843, 413844) and the last few columns containing status information (e.g., Not Published, Draft, Permit). The data is presented as a flat, tabular structure.

The flat nature of raw data will help you think through relationships between entities in the system.

Aside from staring blankly at rows of data and hoping ideas eventually slip into your subconscious, you can be a little more proactive by checking out these great resources to help uncover interesting connections:

- [Charted](#)—a tool developed by Medium that automatically visualizes data.
- [Designing Better charts with Google Sheets, Illustrator, and Sketch](#) —
- [Tableau](#) - This tool is one of the best out there, but very expensive.

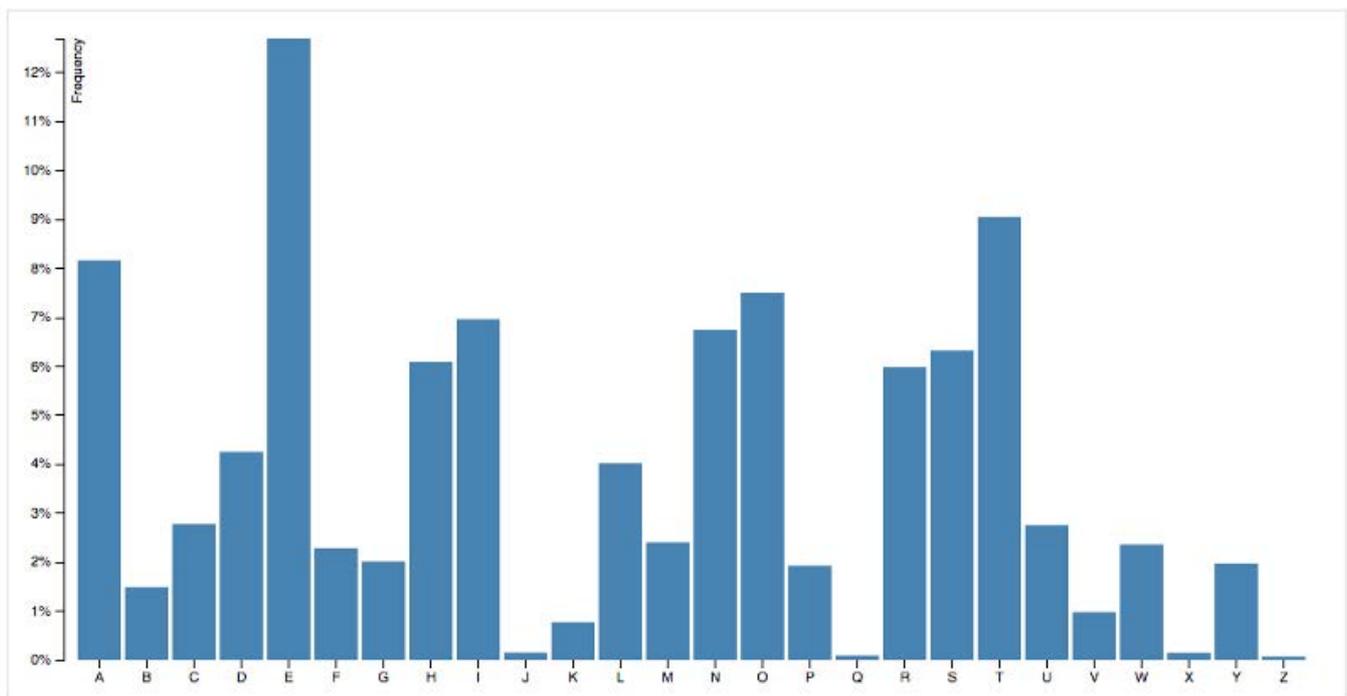
There is no silver bullet for this part of the process. Don't be afraid to dive into the data and try making basic charts by mixing and matching different variables. It takes time, but it's worth it. Some of the best ideas I've come up with started with tinkering around with raw data files.

Working with Discrete vs. Continuous Data

It took me a while to realize this, some graphs do a better job of articulating your data than others. It's easy to pick charts that look good in your composition and hope your data works out. I've been guilty of doing this myself many times (I love me a good scatter plot).

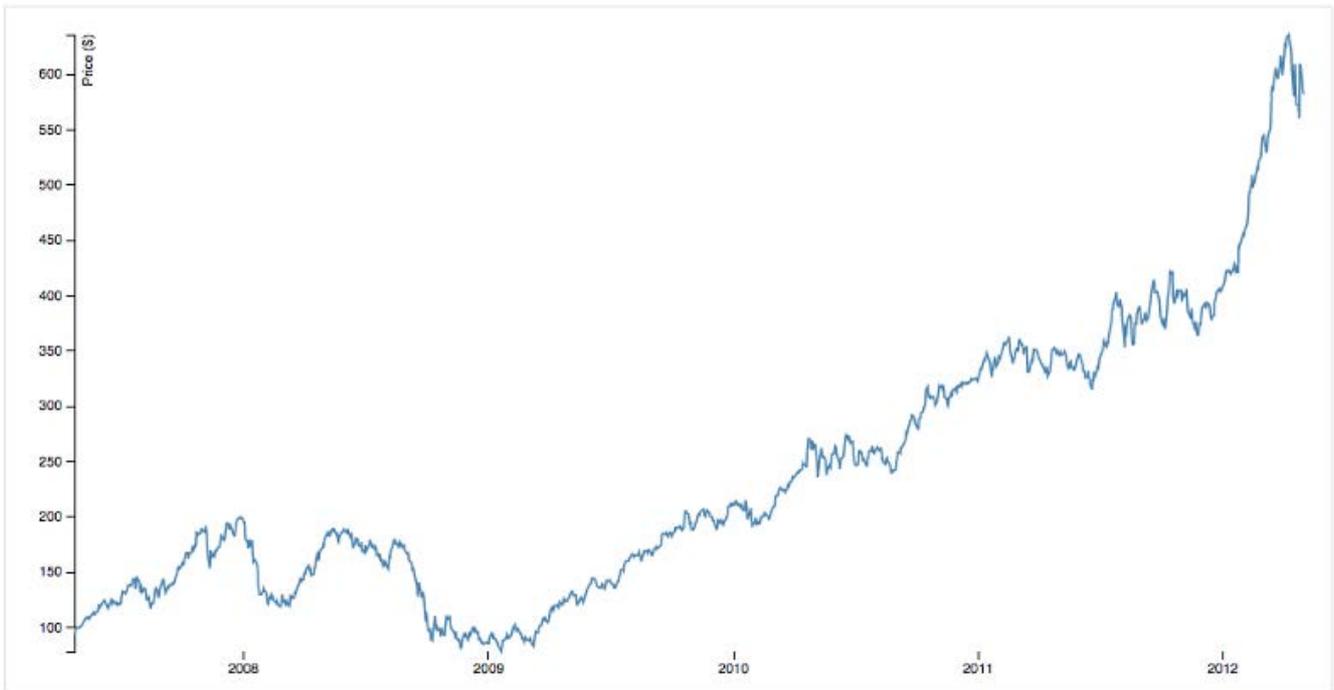
Depending on the type of data you're working with some types of visualizations work better than others. One way to choose the appropriate chart is to evaluate the type of data you have. There are two main types of data:

Discrete Data —distinct values you can count. For example, a number of goals scored or Facebook likes.



Bar charts work best for discrete data

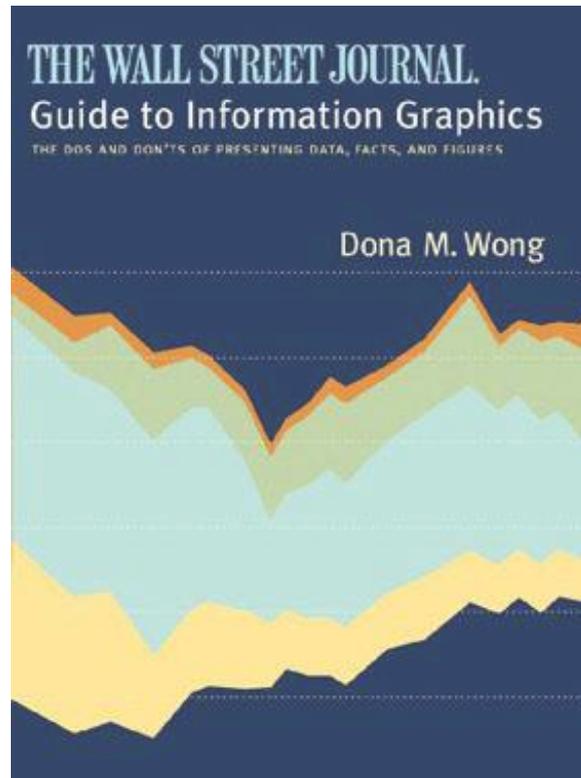
Continuous Data — Any value in a range. For example, rainfall for a season or a person's height/weight.



Line charts work best for continuous data

In short, line graphs work best for continuous data and bar graphs work best for discrete data.

One resource that really solidified this for me is “[The Wall Street Journal: Guide to information Graphics](#)” by Dona Wong. I wish I would have had this book with me years ago. Its an invaluable reference for choosing appropriate graphs and the dos & don'ts for presenting information.



<http://www.amazon.com/Street-Journal-Guide-Information-Graphics/dp/0393347281>

4. Basic vs. Custom visualizations

Lastly, as the designer of these data-rich systems you have to constantly ask yourself “should I take the path less traveled and go custom? Or should I use tried-and-true charts to articulate the message?”.

I recently came across this article from 37 Signals—Three charts are all I need. The author makes a strong point about how a visualization “problem solving” characteristics supersedes its visual qualities. I totally agree with the sentiment of his post. *However*, I think his opinion represents a very utilitarian perspective. I believe custom visualizations can often enhance the usability of the data AND look unique and compelling.

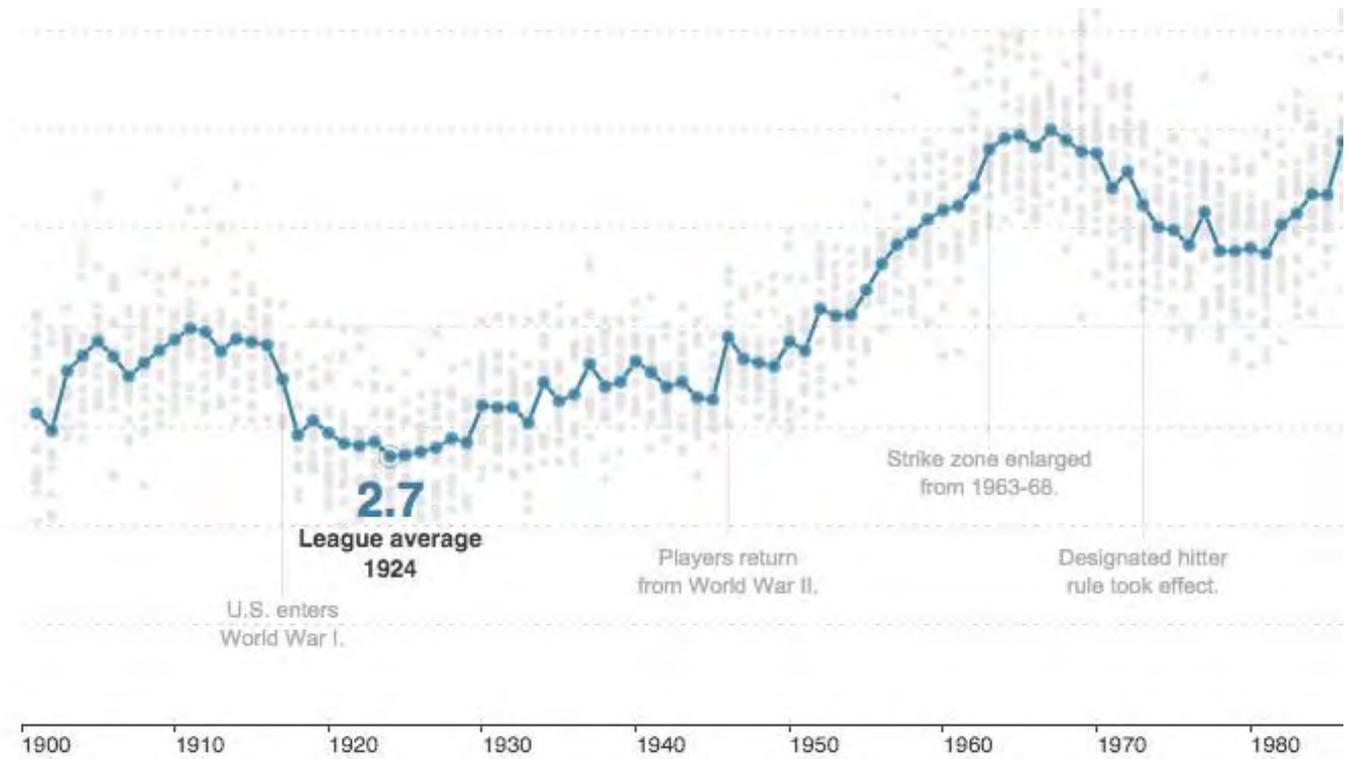


An example of a basic bar chart

To me there are “one-size-fits-all” charts and “best-fit” charts. Tables, lines and bar charts do a great job of accommodating many types of data, but they are also pretty generic (one-size-fits-all). As a professional designer I want the look and feel of my work to be **distinct and useful**.

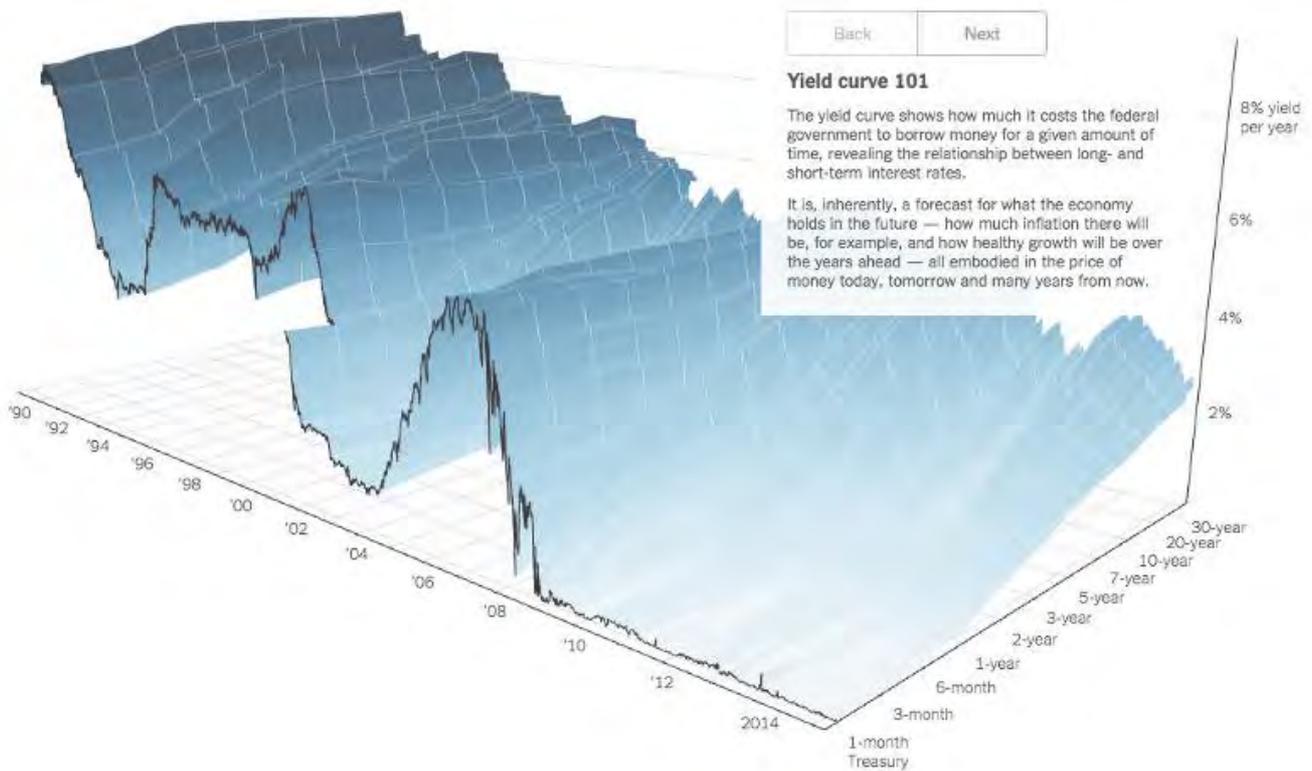
For example, The New York Times does an amazing job augmenting their articles with custom interactive visualizations. You can see more of their work [here](#). Let’s explore a couple examples of impeccable custom visualizations:

This example puts a twist on a line graph by offering a “peek” into the underlying data driving the chart.



http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/03/29/sports/baseball/Strikeouts-Are-Still-Soaring.html?_r=0

In this 3D graph, the change in perspective is visually mind-blowing but also helps give the user a better insight into the relative of the data.



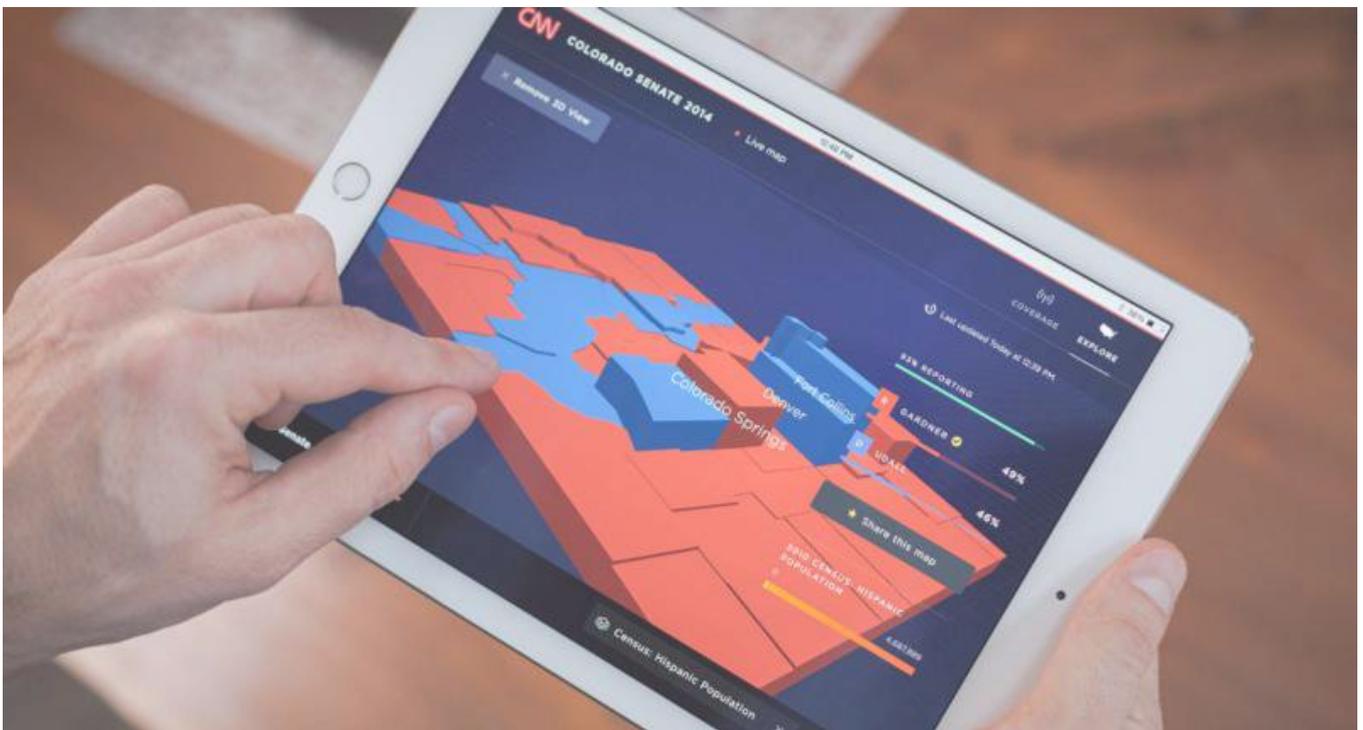
http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/03/19/upshot/3d-yield-curve-economic-growth.html?_r=0

This example from [Selfiecity.net](http://selfiecity.net) does a nice job using the actual content to create the visualization.



<http://selfiecity.net/>

Lastly, from a [project](#) we did with CNN, we use color-coding to show political party preference and 3D extrusion to visualize demographic information simultaneously.



<http://truthlabs.com/work/cnn>

As a rule of thumb —we try to come up with custom visualizations when the data and tech call for it, but we always have a plan B in case things don't pan out or the client prefers a less ambitious approach.

5. So What?

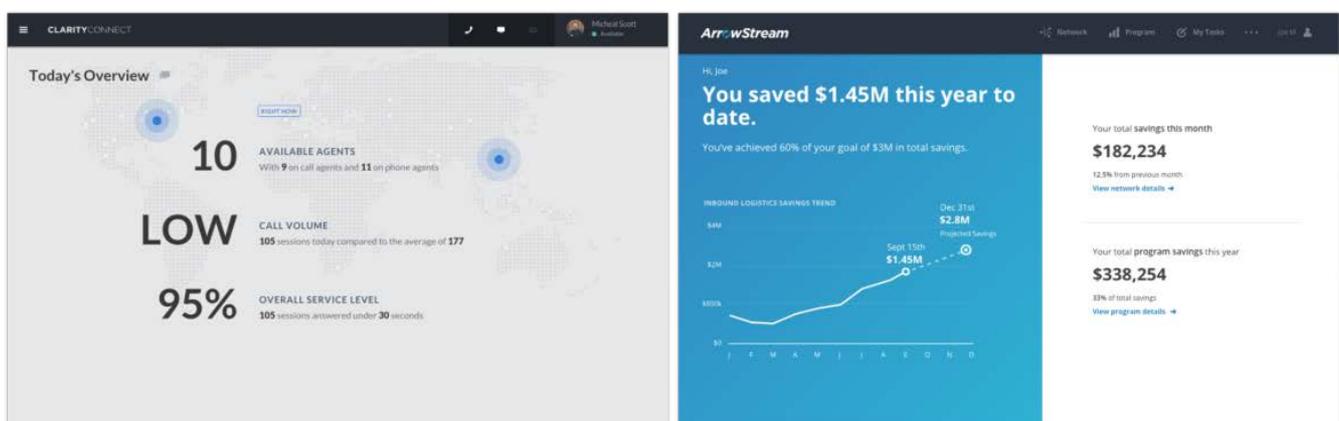
So why do we put all this data on the page anyway? Answer: so people can do shit with it—make decisions, investigate, predict the future, whatever. The point is, your users aren't marveling at the pretty colors you've selected, they are trying to do their jobs.

So *here's my advice* —after you've gotten your page laid out and everything is crafted just right, **ask yourself “so what?”**. Look at each graph, widget, chart, table, and ponder what someone will glean from it. Often times you'll come to the conclusion, “it doesn't matter”, which a red flag to reduce or rethink.

It's happened to me a few times—I've created wonderfully complex dashboards housing a series of trend graphs, pie charts, and maps with thousands of data points. Only to be asked by the client “I just want to know if the product is working... where can I see that?” or “I only need to know 3 things...X, Y, and Z. Where can I find those?”

Sigh. In this moment you realize that you've gotten lost in the weeds and missed the big picture.

One tactic I've picked up to help with this is to try and use text to communicate exactly what someone wants to know.



At a high-level, text summaries can be more useful than charts.

The images above are taken from two of our recent projects. Both simply tell the user what they need to know via text rather than relying on charts or graphs that need to be interpreted.

This approach resonates with our clients, especially for high-level information. But as I mentioned earlier there are always multiple personas to consider, so use where appropriate.

. . .

Like all forms of design, it's a balancing act.

Strive to present your data in a distinctive way, but avoid over-designing and unnecessary distractions.

Choose the right graphs for your data, but don't forget to construct your page with hierarchy.

Fret every tiny detail no matter how frustrating and tedious...and don't forget to ask yourself, "So what?"

.

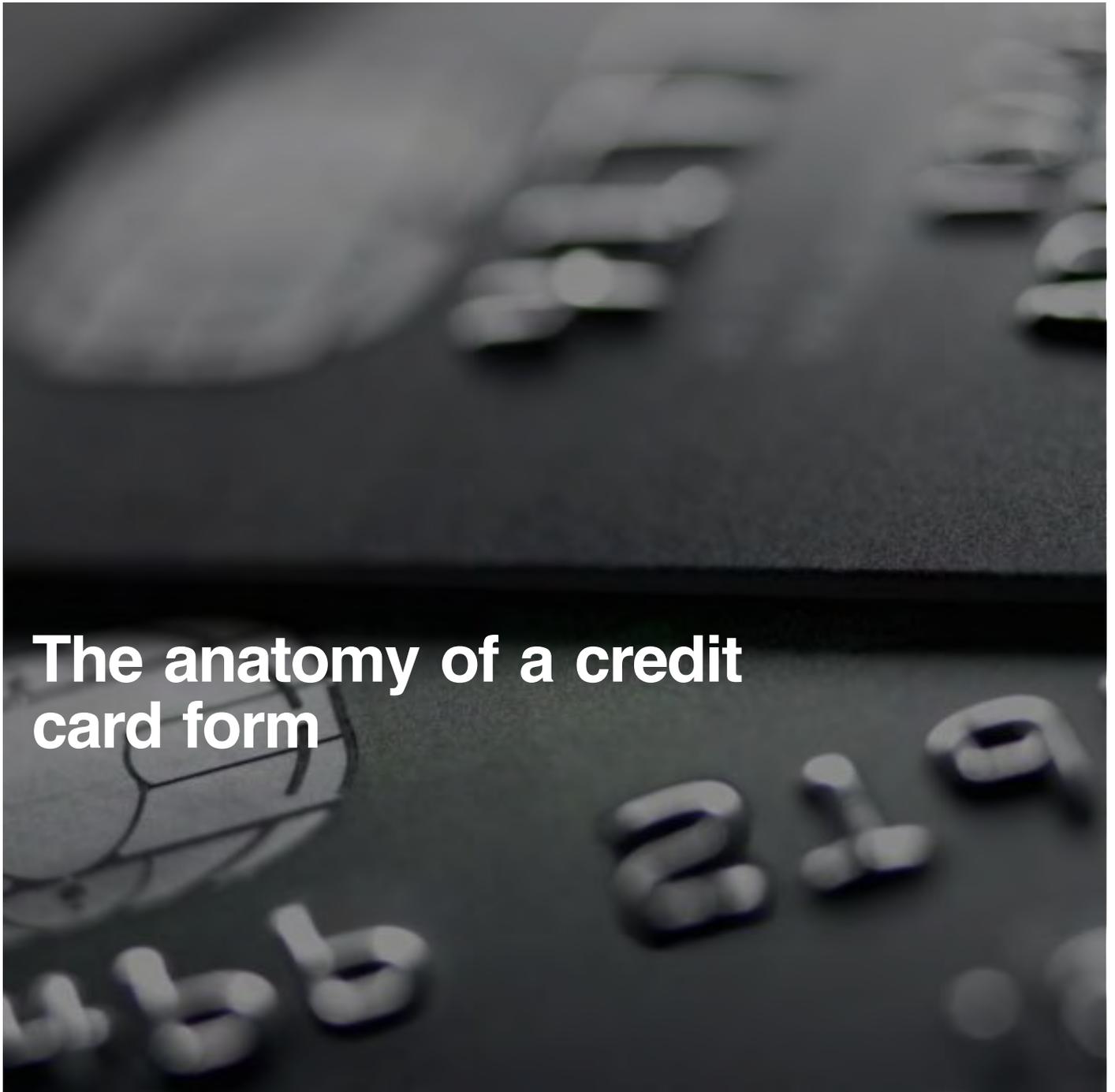
Thanks to Tyson Damman.



Gabriel Tomescu

13 min read

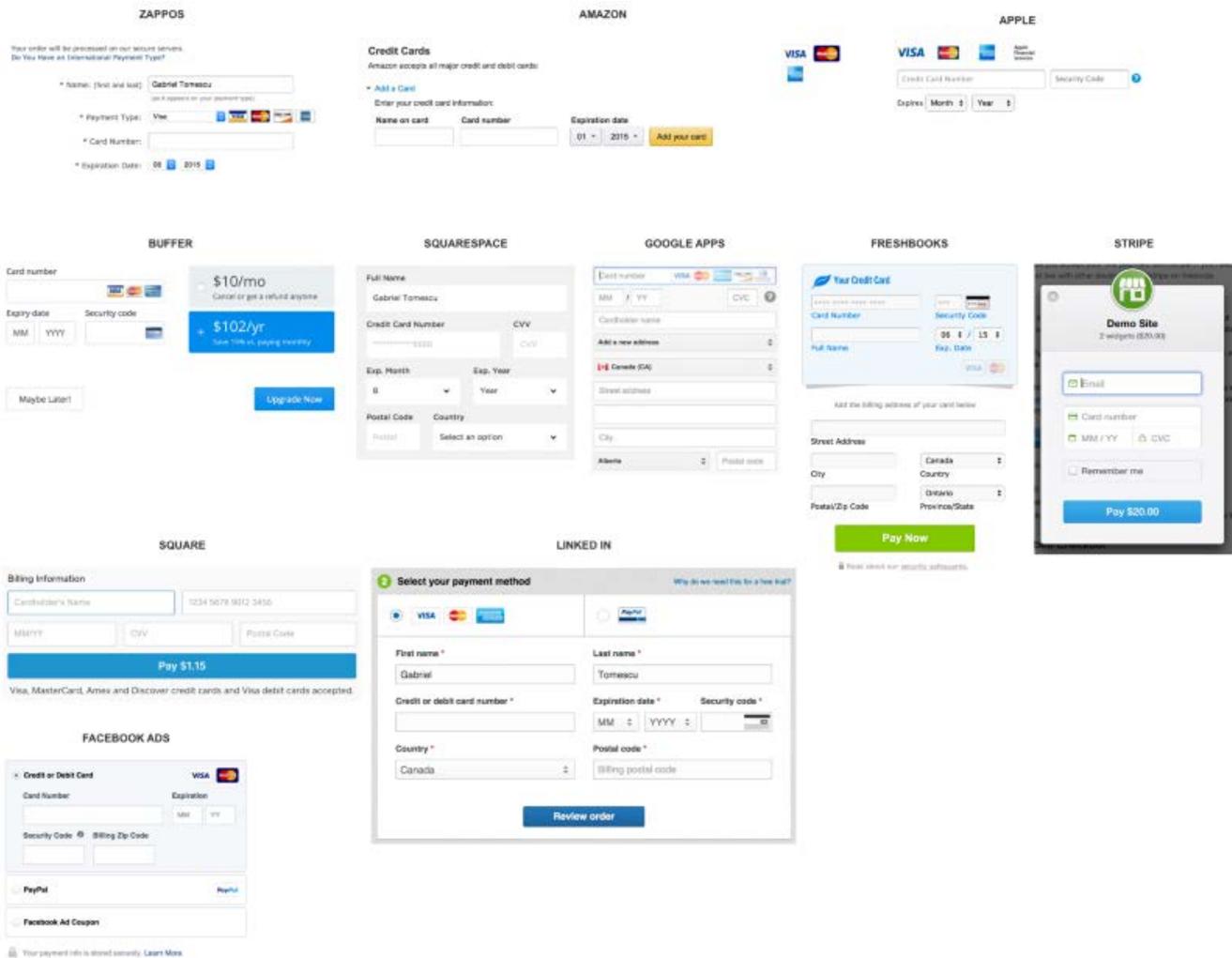
Design



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Paying for something online with a credit card is simple, right? Yes and no. Yes, because we've been doing it since the early days of the Internet (e.g. Amazon), and no, because no two credit card forms are alike.

Over the past 20 years, we've built a mental model of paying online: I pull out a credit card from my wallet, enter the card details into a web form, and click a submit button. But getting from A to Z can be a tricky journey, riddled with questions the user has to answer. And obviously, nobody wants an instruction manual.



Credit card forms from various popular websites and apps.

Paying for something online is still 2–3x clunkier than paying in-person. Nothing beats tapping/swiping your card at a physical terminal. Zero typing required. You don't even care about the information printed on your card. In a magical world, you could tap your card on your monitor to buy a swag new T-shirt from your favourite band. Or get rid of physical cards altogether, so you don't have to pull out a card from you wallet. We've made significant progress in the physical world with Apple Pay.

Online, we're getting closer. Paying online will become easier, and faster. The latest HTML spec includes specifications for credit card inputs, and browsers are pushing

the boundaries. Chrome 42+ supports autocomplete. Safari supports credit card autofill. But you still need a physical card to manually input your security code with every transaction.

But before credit card forms become a thing of the past, we still have the present-day task of adding clarity, simplicity, and security to the credit card form.

At Wave, our Invoice product enables business owners to create and send invoices to their customers, and to have those invoices paid via credit card. My job was to design the credit card form, given a set of business requirements and constraints. This post is about the design considerations our team explored to arrive at the finished product.

Pay Invoice

VISA MasterCard AMERICAN EXPRESS DISCOVER

Payment amount
\$500.00 Edit

Name on card

Card number

Expiry date Security code
MM / YY ?

ZIP/Postal code ?

🔒 Pay \$500.00

The Wave credit card form

Our goal was to make sense of all the various inputs and questions a user may have, including:

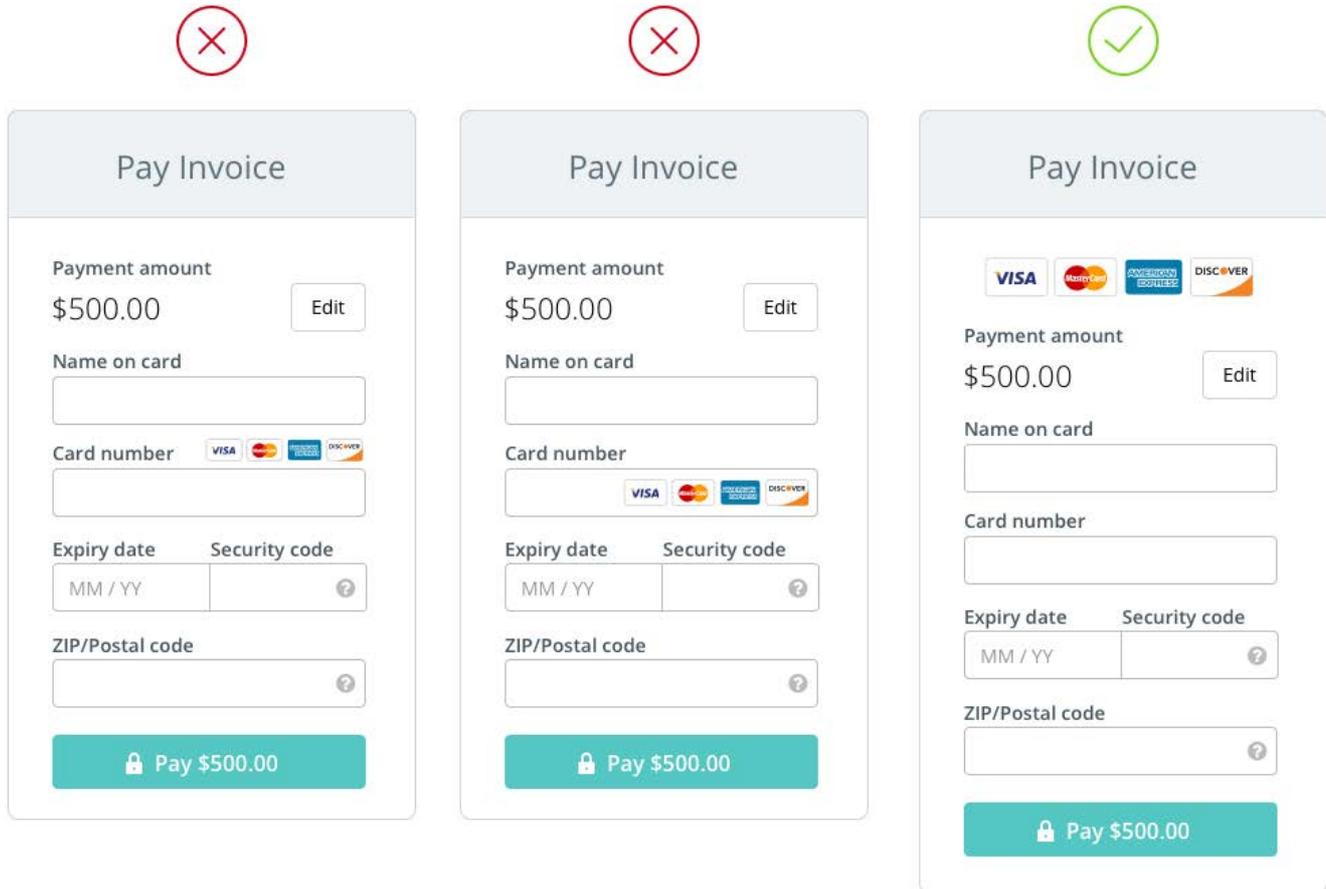
1. What payment cards are accepted?
2. Deciding how much to pay
3. Name on card
4. Card number
5. Card type being used
6. Expiry date
7. Security code
8. Why is there a ZIP code?
9. Is this form safe and secure?
10. What happens when I click submit?
11. Handling card errors
12. Designing for different screens

1. WHAT PAYMENT CARDS ARE ACCEPTED?

When the customer is presented with the credit card form, one of their first questions is “Is my credit card accepted”? This behaviour is the virtual equivalent of the physical-world scenario. When you’re at a physical counter ready to pay, you look for stickers to indicate the cards supported. So the common way to answer the question is by using credit card logos.

But, where do you place the logos on a web form? At first we tried to place them above the card number field. This placement reduces the height of the form, but the cards are small and look squished. Another option was to place them inside the input. This almost worked, but because we have a narrow input field, the cards took up too much space, overpowering the input. We decided to place the credit card logos at the top of the form. This placement makes them immediately visible,

because they are the first element a user has to parse visually. The user doesn't have to search for them. And they promptly call attention to themselves with a "this is where you pay" message. We felt the logos alone were sufficient, so we did not add labels for "Cards accepted", or "Pay with".



2. DECIDING HOW MUCH TO PAY

One requirement we had to satisfy was allowing the user to decide how much to pay. For large invoices, a customer may need to make a partial payment (e.g. a deposit), or pay the invoice with multiple payments as the work is completed. By default, the payment amount equals the total unpaid invoice amount. In other words, if a partial payment has been made, the payment amount equals the balance owed.

With web forms, we know that more inputs lead to lower completion rates, and higher bounce rates. To reduce the number of inputs, we show the payment amount in a read-only format, with a button to edit it, instead of displaying the text input by default. In edit mode, we considered having a Save or Done button, that would flip the input back to read-only.

But we felt this was unnecessary, since the amount is already visible inside the input. Also, if the customer wanted to edit the amount again, they could simply change the input value, without having to deal with Edit/Done buttons.

We also wanted to confirm the payment amount when the user is ready to submit the form. A confirmation reassures the user of the amount that will be charged to their credit card. We display the payment amount inside the Pay button, at the bottom of the form. This amount updates synchronously with the amount entered in the payment amount input.

The image displays two versions of a 'Pay Invoice' form side-by-side. Both forms have a light blue header with the text 'Pay Invoice'. Below the header, there are four credit card logos: VISA, MasterCard, AMERICAN EXPRESS, and DISCOVER. The 'Payment amount' field is the primary focus. In the left version, the field contains '\$500.00' and has an 'Edit' button to its right. In the right version, the field contains '\$ 500.00' and is part of a larger teal button labeled 'Pay \$500.00'. Below the payment amount, there are five input fields: 'Name on card', 'Card number', 'Expiry date' (with a placeholder 'MM / YY'), 'Security code' (with a placeholder '?' and a help icon), and 'ZIP/Postal code' (with a placeholder '?' and a help icon). At the bottom of each form is a teal button with a lock icon and the text 'Pay \$500.00'.

3. NAME ON CARD

The next thing we ask the user to provide is the name of the credit card owner. We considered several options for the label text:

- Name of card holder
- Card holder name
- Name on card
- Name (as it appears on your card) Full
- name on card

We felt that Name on card was the shortest and clearest way to ask for this input. This asks the user to simply type exactly what's displayed on the card, instead of thinking about the card owner's full or abbreviated name.

4. CARD NUMBER

When reaching the card number input, a common question that a user asks is: "My card number has spaces. Do I enter my card number with spaces, or without?" To solve for this, we limit the input values to numbers only, so 0–9. So if a user types a space, it does not register and it does not affect the number format.

At first, we wanted to mask the card number when the user leaves the input. This was an attempt to provide the user with a sense of security, similar to how password fields are masked. But we realized that the credit card number is not a "secret". You can't do much with just a card number. Furthermore, when a user is ready to submit the form, they may want to double-check their inputs for accuracy. A masked field would break the visual review of the form because the user would have to put the focus back on the card input to reveal its value.

5. CARD TYPE BEING USED

A helpful pattern we noticed in other payment forms is to indicate the card type being used in a visual way. This reassures the user that the card type input matches the card they are holding in their hand. We can determine the card type from the starting first number, as follows:

- 3—Travel/entertainment cards (e.g. American Express and Diners Club)
- 4—Visa
- 5—MasterCard

- 6—Discover Card

After the user enters the first two numbers, we display a card logo inside the input field, floated to the right.

The image shows a 'Pay Invoice' form with the following elements:

- Header:** 'Pay Invoice' in a light blue bar.
- Logos:** Four credit card logos (VISA, MasterCard, AMERICAN EXPRESS, DISCOVER) are displayed in a row at the top.
- Payment amount:** '\$500.00' with an 'Edit' button to its right.
- Name on card:** A text input field containing 'John Wave'.
- Card number:** A text input field containing '4242'. A VISA logo is displayed inside the input field on the right side.
- Expiry date:** A text input field with a placeholder 'MM / YY'.
- Security code:** A text input field with a question mark icon to its right.
- ZIP/Postal code:** A text input field with a question mark icon to its right.
- Submit button:** A teal button with a lock icon and the text 'Pay \$500.00'.

Of course, we could've done this differently, based on our designs from question 1:

- Dim out the credit card logos at the top of the form. But because the logos are placed away from the number input, the correlation would not be clear.
- Place all the credit card logos inside the number input by default, then as the user types in the first two numbers, all the card logos disappears except for the one that corresponds to the input.

6. EXPIRY DATE

Most credit cards display their expiry dates in the format MM/YY (month and year). Some may include the full year, in an YYYY format. When designing the expiry date input, we wanted to keep the user in typing mode to speed their input. The user does not have to reach for a mouse to pick a date and year from a select menu, or navigate the options via up/down arrows. The user simply has to type in the numbers as they appear on the credit card. This also prevents the user from having to think of the actual month (e.g. 08 is August), so cognitive load is minimized.

Because this input requires a particular format for the date, we included placeholder text inside the input. Note that the placeholder text includes a “/”, but this is not required to be typed by the user. We limit the input value to numbers only, so if a user does type a forward slash, it is not registered. After the month is entered, the slash is automatically appended.

The image displays three variations of a 'Pay Invoice' form, each with a different expiry date input method. Above each form is a circular icon: a red 'X' for the first two and a green checkmark for the third.

- Form 1 (Red X):** The 'Expires' field is split into two separate input boxes labeled 'MM' and 'YY'. This is marked as incorrect.
- Form 2 (Red X):** The 'Expires' field is split into two dropdown menus labeled 'MM' and 'YY'. This is also marked as incorrect.
- Form 3 (Green Checkmark):** The 'Expires' field is a single input box with the placeholder text 'MM / YY'. This is marked as the correct design.

All three forms share the same other fields: 'Payment amount' (\$500.00), 'Name on card', 'Card number', 'Security code', and 'ZIP code'. Each form ends with a green 'Pay \$500.00' button.

7. SECURITY CODE

The card security code was invented to reduce credit card fraud. In other words, it's meant to make cards more secure. The problem is that this code suffers severely from non-standardized naming. What should we call it? Every card brand has its own naming convention:

- MasterCard—card validation code (“CVC2”)
- Visa—card verification value (“CVV2”)
- Discover—card identification number (“CID”)
- American Express—“CID” or “unique card code”
- Debit Card—“CSC” or “card security code”

And there are even more permutations:

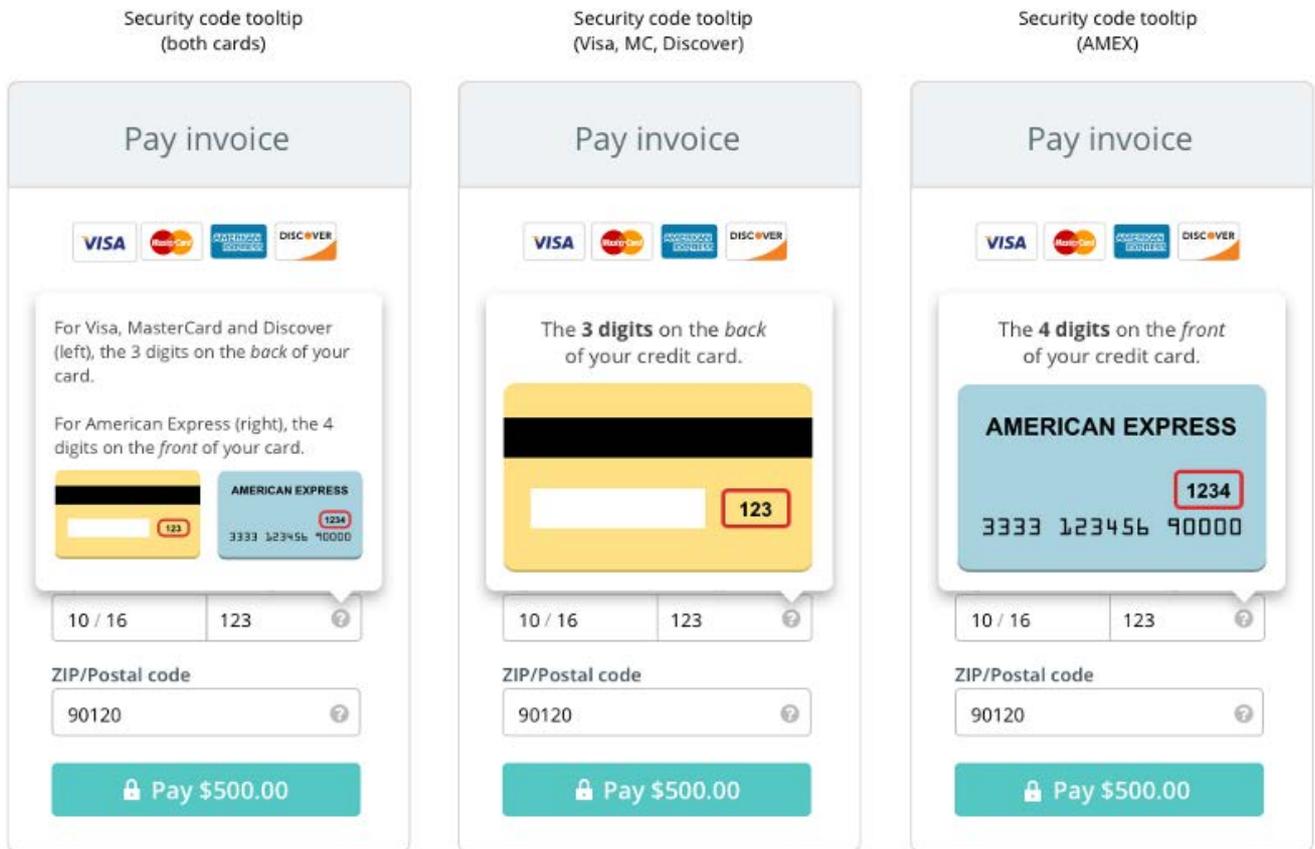
- Card verification data
- Card verification number
- Card verification code
- Card code verification

Nuts, right? Acronyms create confusion. We wanted to stay away from them, but still indicate to the user that this code is all about *security*. So we decided to name this input “Security code”.

Next, a security code can be 4 digits (American Express, on the front of the card) or 3 digits (every other brand, on the back of the card). To help the user determine which code they need to enter, and where to find it, we included a visual tooltip. The tooltip has 3 states:

1. Dual code: If the user has not yet entered a card number, the tooltip shows both options available.
2. 4-digit code: If the user has entered an American Express card, the tooltip indicates a 4-digit code on the front.

3. 3-digit code: If the user has entered any other card, the tooltip indicates a 3-digit code on the back.



8. ZIP CODE

As an extra security measure, we have to ask customers for the ZIP code associated with their card. There is a trade-off here: adding extra inputs to the form can increase bounce rates, but by adding it, our business is more secure and less prone to fraud.

We realized that users may enter the ZIP code associated with their *personal address*, instead of the code associated with their cards. To add clarity, we added a note in a tooltip, which asks for the code from the credit's card billing address.

US zip codes contain only numbers, up to a maximum of 10 (ZIP + 4 FTW). In Canada, zip codes contain letters, and spaces too. We restricted the input field to a max character count of 10.

And because we had to satisfy naming conventions for both US and Canadian customers, the input label reads "ZIP/Postal code".

Pay invoice

VISA MasterCard AMERICAN EXPRESS DISCOVER

Payment amount

\$ 500.00

Name on card

John Wave

Card number

4242 4242 4242 4242 VISA

Enter the ZIP/Postal code for your credit card's billing address.

ZIP/Postal code

90120 ?

🔒 Pay \$500.00

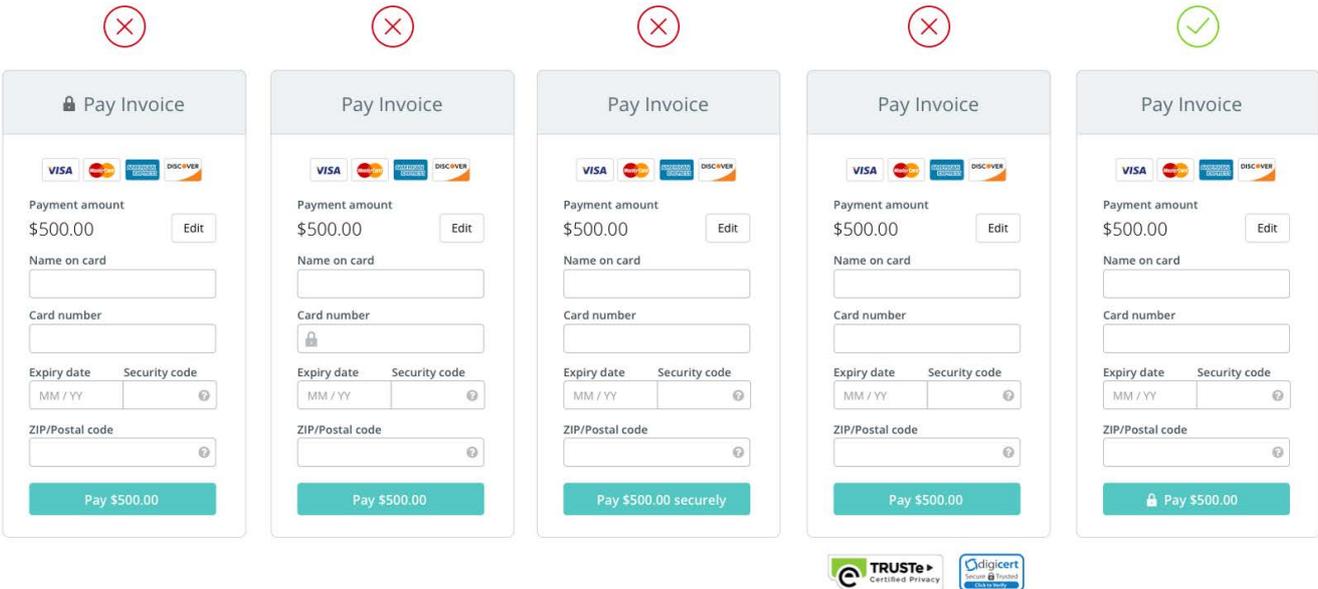
9. IS THIS FORM SAFE AND SECURE?

When a user first skims a credit card form, they often ask themselves “Is this form secure? How do I trust the website behind this form? Are they just spoofing my card details?”. There are many ways you can reinforce security through design. Some options we considered included:

- Place a lock icon inside the form header, next to “Pay Invoice”, but this felt weak and disconnected from the form inputs.
- Place a lock icon inside the card number field, but the question became “Is only this input secure, or is the entire form secure?”.
- Label the Pay button with text “Pay \$1.00 securely”, but the text would not fit for large payment amounts.
- Add a security badge below the form, but we felt badges distract from a

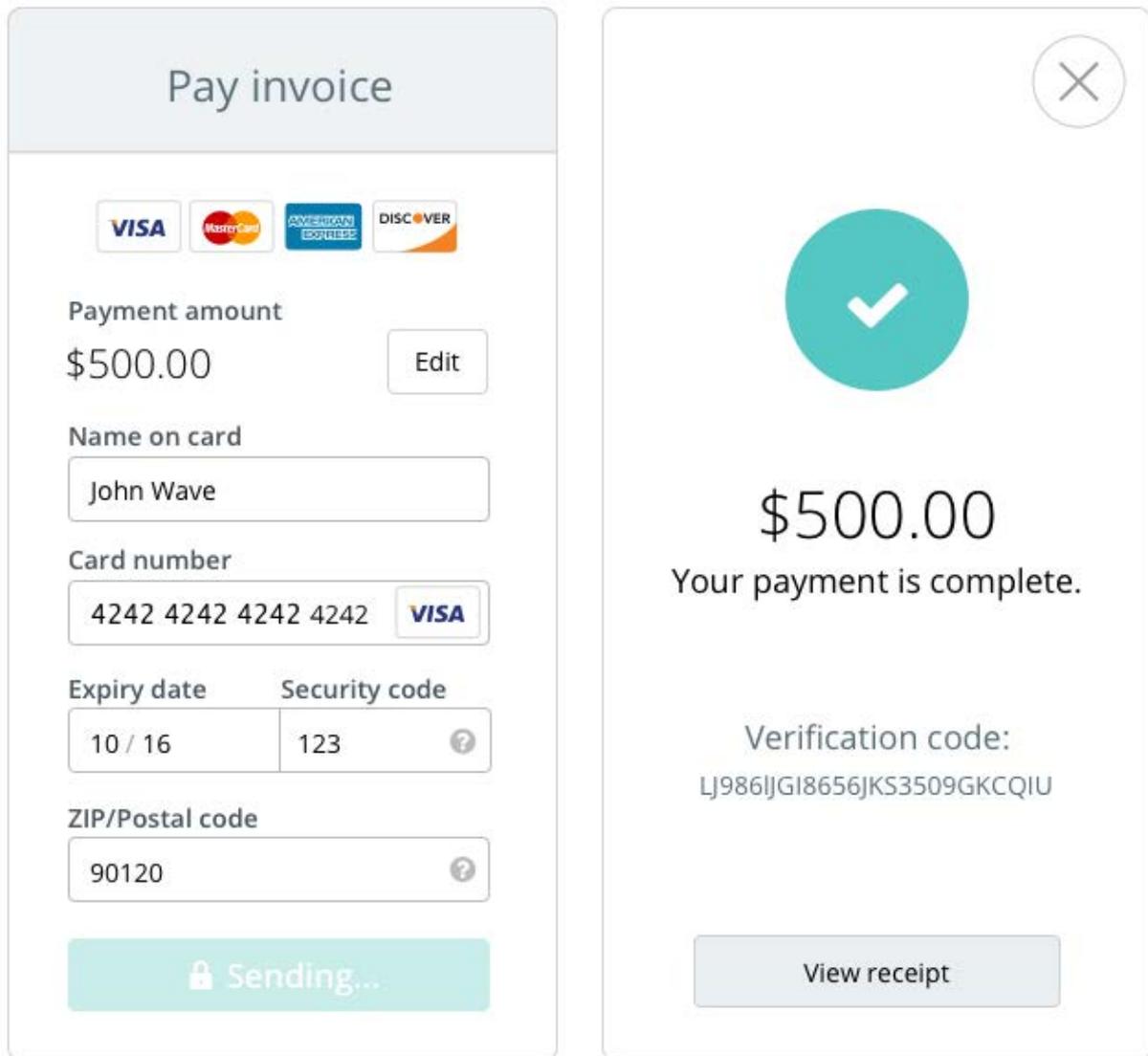
clean aesthetic, and from the overall brand of the page. Also, users can't tell two badges apart, so we scrapped the idea. Previous A/B tests also indicated no difference in conversion.

Given the existing mental model of paying with credit cards online, we felt the presence of one lock icon was sufficient. The design solution was to add a lock icon inside the Pay button. The position of the icon is key, because it reinforces security at the critical point: when you click Pay.



10. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I CLICK PAY?

Once the user is ready to pay, they click the Pay button. The button changes state to a pending/loading state, and the text readsr "Sending...". We make a server request, and assuming an error-free state, we display a success message.



11. HANDLING CARD ERRORS

One of the most important, and often unloved parts of web form design, is error handling. Yes, it can be tedious at times. Yes, there are endless ways to design errors. But when done right, error handling can turn an ambiguous interaction into a clear one.

There are two general categories of error validation in Internet software:(1) client-side and (2) server-side.

Client-side validation

Client-side errors are caught *before* a request is sent to to the server. These errors are typically caused by formatting errors in the data, or missing data.

To make things interesting, you can validate client-side input in different ways. Luckily, Luke Wroblewski wrote a great article explaining the After, While, and Before and While validation methods. We chose the After method based on Luke's research, and our gut feelings. The After method displays an error message after the user has indicated that she is done answering a question by moving on to the next one. In other words, validating on "blur". Also to keep in mind, the user is not "locked" into a field if there is an error. They can tab on their keyboard and move to the next input, and come back later to fix any errors shown.

These were our validation criteria for client-side errors:

- All inputs, except Name on card and ZIP code, must contain numbers only (i.e. no letters or special characters)
- Payment amount: Must be minimum \$1
- Card number: Length must be 16 numbers (15 for American Express), must begin with one of the four known card codes
- Expiry date: Length must be 2 numbers for month, and 2 for the year (i.e. MMY). Month can only be 01 to 12, year must be minimum 15.
- Security code: Length must be 4 numbers if American Express, or 3 numbers for other card brands
- ZIP code: Length must be minimum 5 characters, maximum 10 characters

To visually indicate an error, we highlight the input field containing the error with red background and red border. We don't make the input text red. As for the error hint, we display it below the error field, in red text.

Pay invoice



Payment amount
\$500.00

Name on card

Card number

Enter a 16-digit card number

Expiry date Security code

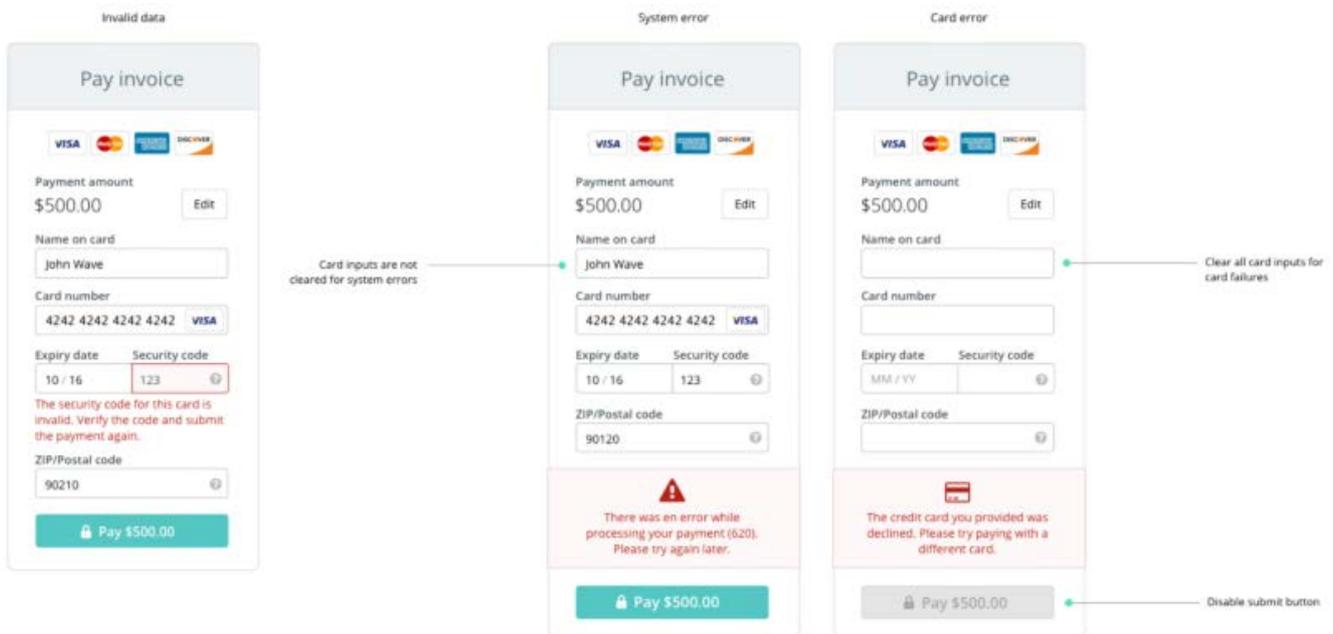
ZIP/Postal code

Server-side validation

Server-side errors are caught *after* a request is sent to the server. They can be system-specific, or specific to the object being validated. In our form, we had to account for three types of server errors:

1. **Invalid data**, including card number, expiry date, security code, or ZIP code (e.g. expired card, invalid postal code)
2. **System errors**, for when there is a problem with the server (e.g. timeouts, lost connection)
3. **Card errors**, for when the card being used has been declined by the payment network for some reason (and there are literally hundreds of reasons)

In the case of a system error, we leave the fields populated so that a user can retry the payment. When a card is declined (i.e. card error), this is usually a smell for fraud, so we clear the data entered by the user.

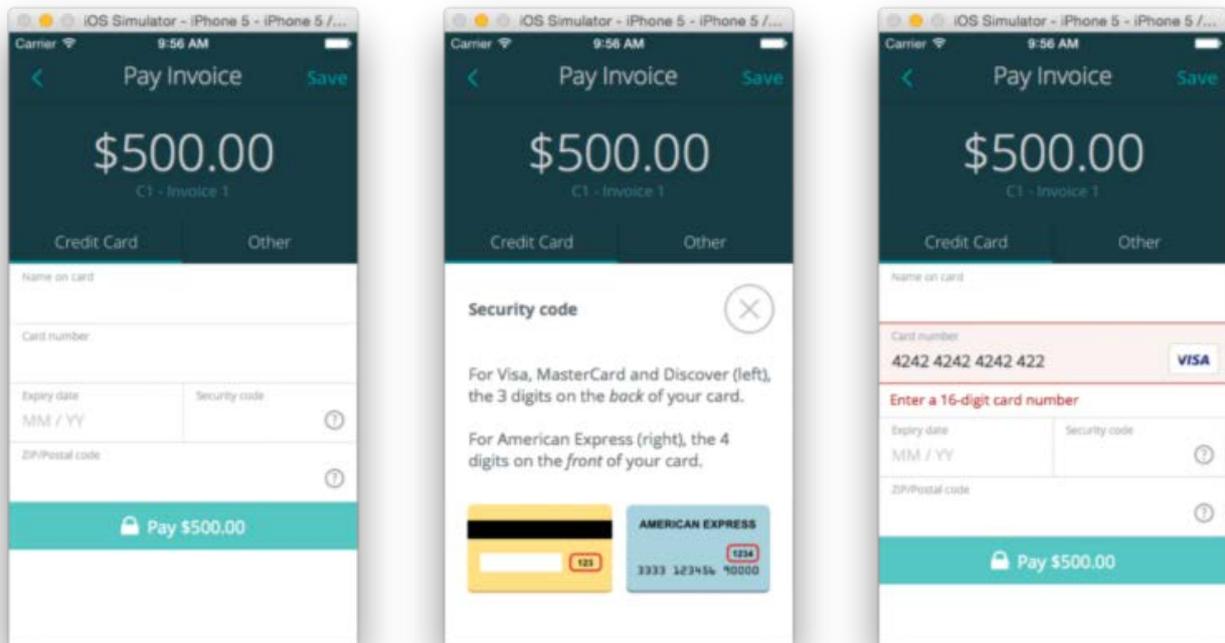


12. DESIGNING FOR DIFFERENT SCREENS

From the start, we knew that we wanted to build one form that could be used on different screen sizes (i.e. responsive), and different screens (i.e. inside the Wave iPhone app). By using a singular form object, we only have to make changes to the form in one place. We don't have to maintain multiple code bases.

Inside the Invoice by Wave iPhone app, we initially implemented a native credit card form, that was based on the single line input design pattern. The input was functional, but slightly buggy. More importantly, we perceived a poor experience with the way this input display labels, and the way a user has to navigate between inputs if there are errors present.

Now, using an HTML iFrame, we inject the new credit card form inside the app. Users have a near identical payment experience when entering their credit card details on a desktop browser, or inside the app. In the future, inside our iPhone app, we will style the form elements using CSS to match the design of other forms inside the app.



And there you have it, the anatomy of a credit card form! We've reviewed everything from copy, form input design, error handling, and mobile. Our credit card form will definitely evolve over time, so stay tuned for news. The payments space is not exactly sexy, but learning and understanding the user interactions behind accepting a credit card payment was really fun.

Now, time for a demo!

Huge thanks to Nick Presta, who engineered the entire form in React (woot!), and the rest of the awesome Payments crew at Wave.

. . .

This post was originally posted on my personal website. Thanks for reading.



Intercom

8 min read

Design

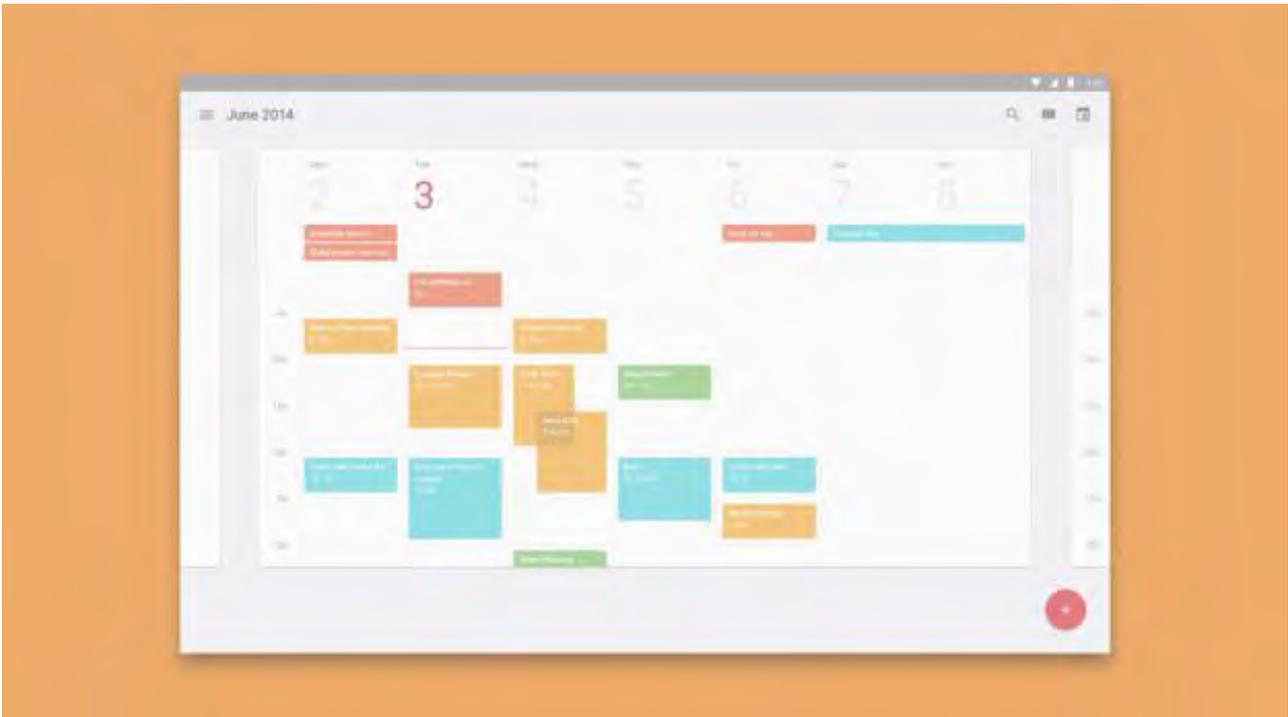


Has Visual Design Fallen Flat?

Countless pixels were spilled during The Great UI Flattening of 2013–2014.

It was a time of great change in the world of visual design: foreshadowed by Microsoft’s aggressively modernist Metro style, popularized and polarized by the release of iOS 7, and perhaps most fully realized in the form of Google’s Material Design.

Flat design (a reductive but useful shorthand) didn’t just kill skeuomorphism (ditto), it danced on its grave and then erased every last trace of beveling, shadow, and granite texture from the headstone.



Such is design. Progress, change, and fashion are inevitable. The sun will some day set on these latest styles too. Predicting future trends is a futile game, but it's interesting to look at where we are today and speculate on possible future directions. What lies over the (extremely flat) horizon? What next for the visual design of software products?

(Note: This post first appeared on the [Inside Intercom](#) blog, where we share our thoughts on product strategy, design, customer experience, and startups.)

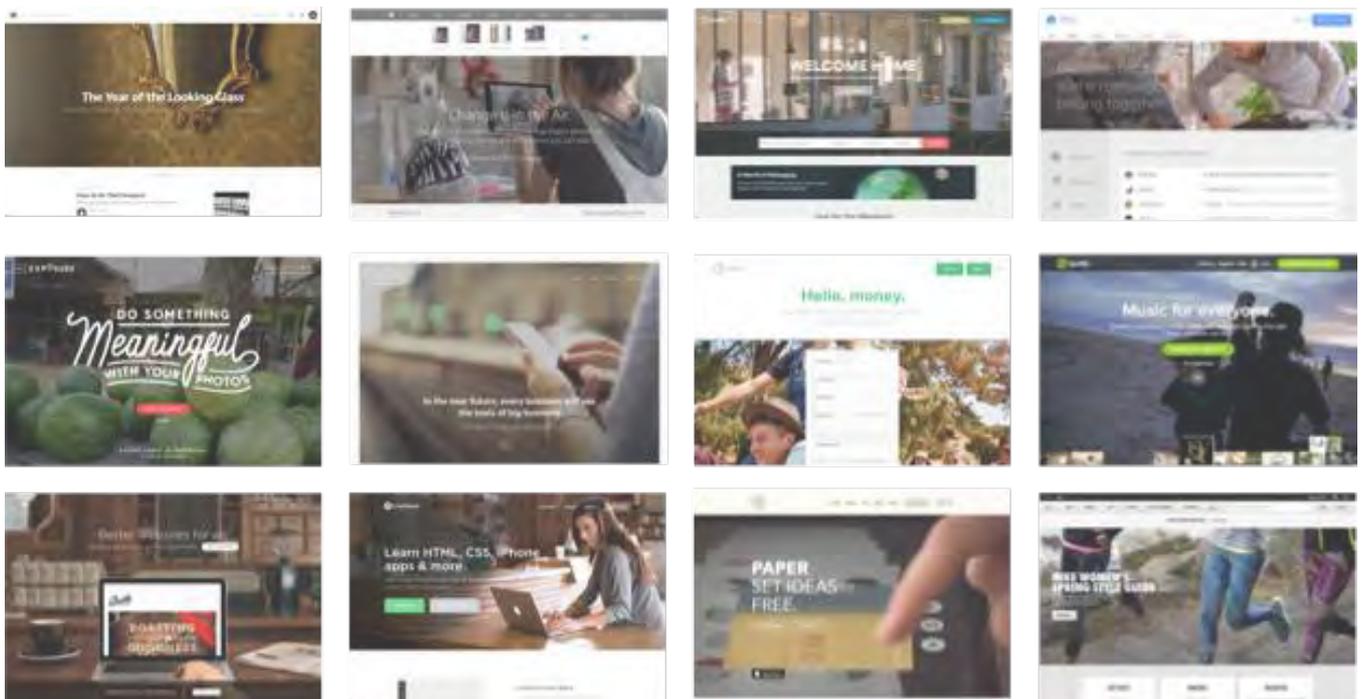
Surveying the landscape

Here's a basic laundry list of common visual design tropes in software today:

- Heavily inspired by iOS and Material Design, often slavishly adhering to their style guidelines.
- Flat rectangles with some minimal shadows, frequent use of large photography and video as background to headline text.
- Lots of negative space around content, grid layouts with low information density, a focus on bold, clean typography.
- Borderless, edge to edge blocks of plain white accented by vibrant, poppy colour palettes; more muted, desaturated colours are often used in photography.

- Frequent use of blurring effects, luminescence and splashy neon, which works well for marketing but not necessarily for productivity/communication products.
- Given the lack of visual ornamentation much of the “freshness” and “polish” of modern designs come in the form of slick animations and subtle transitions.

In short, a lot of today’s visual language is about clean simplicity, executed well. There are a few fashion trends in there, sure, but in general this is a list of objectively desirable qualities. It reflects a maturity to the aesthetics of digital design that has been developing for decades, a process that for periods was held back by amateurism or an under-appreciation of the value of beauty and clarity in software. It is now safe to go online without fear your eyeballs will be accosted by crimes against taste. As an industry we should be proud of this.

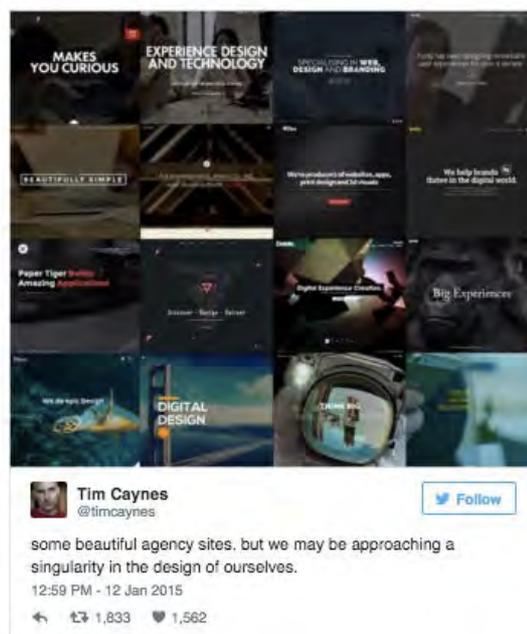


Some claim the trend towards minimalism is a sign of more mature users: innately familiar with how to interact with UIs, they no longer need to be hit over the head with obviously-pressable beveled buttons. The training wheels have come off, and so designers are free to express themselves stylistically again, less encumbered by the obligation to educate. Finally the smaller size of mobile screens has contributed, most naturally accommodating simpler, less fussy designs.

The commoditization of design

When you squint your eyes and tilt your head, don't a lot of these products look awfully, well, *similar*? Don't they look pretty but, at times, a little dull?

When it becomes necessary for virtually every business to signal they value design by adopting an up-to-date style, it becomes a commodity, a box to be ticked. That fresh look quickly becomes a cliché. This descent towards aesthetic monoculture was helped by the ease with which this particular style can be cheaply imitated: stick a blurred photo in the background, lay some centered Helvetica Neue on top and you're already halfway there!



What other opportunities might we be missing out on? The internet and its surrounding technologies are the driving cultural forces of our generation. Taken individually all of these designs are quite beautiful. But who wants to live in a world with only one type of beauty?

The status quo of visual design in software is pleasantly inoffensive, but also somewhat uninspiring. It is of course natural for styles to settle into a comfortable conclusion for a time. These things come in cycles and mobile UI design is clearly providing a lot of cues here. Who knows, we may even be nearing the crest of the trend: Peak Flat, if you will.

If current styles were precipitated by the introduction of touchscreen devices, it may be the case that newer technologies will trigger a whole new wave of visual styles.

Technological drivers of design aesthetics

If these trends were indeed triggered by new materials, it may be instructive to look to the past, to other schools of design, and to study how designers react to technological change.

During the early 1900s the Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier seized upon the relatively new construction method of reinforced concrete—steel bars encased in slabs of concrete—to enable him to design buildings that were previously structurally impossible. Chasing an absolute purity and minimalism in his work, Le Corbusier reduced the structure of his buildings to the absolute minimum, creating drastic and stunning new styles of modernist architecture. Anything deemed not essential was considered superfluous, almost offensive.



Although the influence of this style was significant, we don't see buildings like this everywhere today. Why not? One reason may be that these designs, often benign and sometimes wonderful when viewed in isolation, add up to a lifeless whole when repeated endlessly. Le Corbusier's unrealised plan for a "Radiant City" in Paris of repeating sixty-story housing units would surely have been a social and

aesthetic disaster, almost oppressive in its modernity, not to mention devoid of the soul that makes so many cities great.



The alternative is a more bottoms-up, organic, and mixed approach to design. Jane Jacobs, activist and critic of urban planning wrote in her wonderful book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, “There is a quality even meaner than outright ugliness or disorder, and this meaner quality is the dishonest mask of pretended order, achieved by ignoring or suppressing the real order that is struggling to exist and to be served.”

Repeated endlessly, even beautifully simple design can become boring at best, ugly at worst. If all software begins to look the same we lose out on the opportunity to see something as wonderfully different.

Just as we live in cities, we inhabit our digital spaces. How these spaces make us feel is important, and so functional considerations need to be balanced by less tangible qualities if these spaces are to become truly special. Variety and richness of aesthetics allows products to stand out in relation to one another, and in doing so reach a true expression of beautiful design.

So, what's next?

It's worth asking some questions, and in the process trying to imagine what an even more mature era of software visual design might look like.

- On the desktop, panels with draggable handles seem like a natural complement to 2D pointing devices. Today's trends were in many ways influenced by the smooth, inert, slate-like nature of the devices that we mostly view these designs on. In that sense, flat design could be considered "native" to touchscreens, more so than the overly-literal metaphors of early smartphones: perhaps this is an honest account of what pictures under glass should look like. Our tools shape us, and thereafter they shape how we design. How will the changing nature of devices influence what we see on them? For how much longer will flat glowing rectangles continue to dominate?
- Every trend drags along a backlash in its wake. According to the natural ebb and flow of fashion, there will come a time when less is not necessarily considered more. In the 90s desktop publishing software led to grungy magazines, in the 2000s the computer as appliance led to a world of oversized pixels, today we have our touchscreens and flat design. There will be a next thing. There always is.
- What might a more aesthetically diverse software world look like? A world where your credit card provider and your sock subscription service don't look like the exact same company? As one style becomes increasingly prevalent, others will emerge in an attempt to set themselves apart. Perhaps the next big trend will simply be a multiplicity of trends.
- More and more the data we interact with is becoming crystallized down into nuggets of micro-content, most commonly in the form of cards. Will much of the app functionality become subsumed down the stack to the OS level? If so, will this lead to even more homogeneous UIs? In turn, might there be a counter-reaction against that trend?
- Technology is spreading throughout the world like wildfire. What does a world with another couple of billion people online look like, bringing with them styles, tastes, and cultural influences that may be utterly alien to the Designed-in-California aesthetic that dominates today?

So which of these predictions will come to pass? Well, you've made it this far, I'm not going to start lying to you now.

I don't actually know.

Maybe there won't be a seismic shift at all. The literal representation of real-life objects in UIs hung around for a long time after the birth of the desktop metaphor. Who's to say this new approach of manipulating minimally-adorned digital objects won't stay with us for just as long?

But somehow I doubt it.

Think you have an answer?

We'd love to hear your thoughts in the comments. What examples of truly unique design have you seen recently? We'd love to see early suggestions of what might come next.

Or even better, let's figure it out together. [We're hiring a Senior Visual Designer](#) to create a beautiful aesthetic style and develop it into a coherent, sophisticated, multi-platform design system. Whitespace optional.

Written by [Emmet Connolly](#), director of product design at Intercom. This post first appeared on the [Inside Intercom](#) blog, where we regularly share our thoughts on product strategy, design, customer experience, and startups. [Intercom's user communication tool](#) helps internet businesses see and talk to their customers.

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Here's some more of our thoughts on design:

The End Of Apps As We Know Them - Inside Intercom

The experience of our primary mobile screen being a bank of app icons that lead to independent destinations is dying...

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How we design at Intercom - Inside Intercom

"...great designers are dogged in understanding the problem they are dealing with. Their curiosity and tenacity for..."

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Design



Image: [Tony Vincelli](#)

Messaging is just getting started

Messaging isn't about text. It's about conversations. Here's why the simplest apps on your phone are quickly becoming the most powerful.

There's arguably more innovation happening in messaging today than any other mainstream category of software.

Yes, typing on your phone is a lousy proposition: a tiny keyboard trapped behind a pane of glass and hidden underneath your thumbs. But we still do it. We message all day long, in bursts and binges. We message family, friends, colleagues. Increasingly, we message more than anything else we do on our phones.



THE REASONS WHY MOBILE MESSAGING WORKS

Despite its shortcomings as an input mechanism, typing on a touchscreen has succeeded for many of the same reasons that mobile itself has succeeded.

1. IT'S ASYNCHRONOUS

Both parties don't need to be available at the same time, unlike with phone or video chat. Yet conversations tend to move along at a decent clip, unlike they do over email. Messaging provides some buffer time that I suspect can actually improve the quality of a conversation; people have time to formulate a good response (or a good joke) without immediate pressure or fear of *l'esprit d'escalier*.

2. IT'S EASY TO CONSUME

Most messages can be quickly read from a lock screen notification (or from a watch!) and immediately understood. They're short. You don't have to set time aside to plough through them. They don't feel like a burden. This may seem obvious, but anyone who has put off listening to voicemail or marked an email as unread understands the value of this.

3. IT'S INFORMAL

Hi Peter,

Hope you are keeping well. Was great to bump into you at the conference last month and I'm glad to hear things are going so well at Dark Snapper.

I'm wondering if you could do me a quick favour. We're looking to hire a Senior Product Manager, and I'm wondering if you know anyone in your network who'd fit the bill. I've asked Karl but he's already taken a new role.

Any help you can give would be much appreciated and all suggestions would be treated with the strictest confidence!

Sincerely,

Mike,

VP of Product, Recruitment App Inc

Know anyone looking for a Sr. Product Manager role?

Let me check. Karl?

Already asked him :)

K. Let me think.

There's no need for boilerplate salutations, lengthy intros, or signatures. Messaging is snappy. Tap it out, done. The awkwardness and inherent limitations of typing on a phone may have even contributed to this advantage: nobody's going to think you're rude for not tapping out the novel-length version. This became clear to me the first time I used Intercom to chat with a business: the breezy dynamic of the medium changes the tone to be far less formal.

4. IT'S ALWAYS WITH YOU

This is also why we're willing to take 100% of our photos with a camera the size of a lentil, and play games or read books on a screen the size of a playing card. Convenience always trumps power when it comes to communicating.

5. IT'S EXPRESSIVE

An emoji can actually say a lot. A read message that goes unreplied can say more. Communication is a fundamentally human act, and anything that allows us to connect with each other is going to connect with us. Messaging can emulate the intimacy of a private conversation or the fun of group banter.

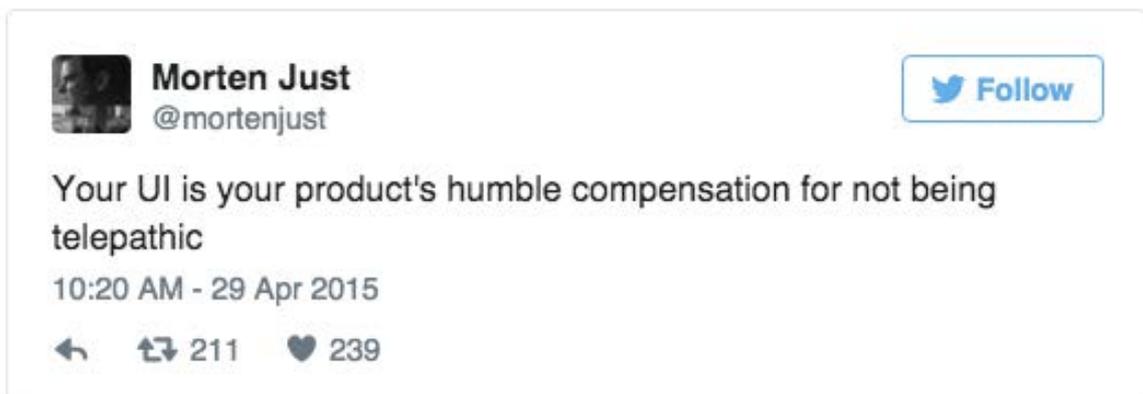
So if sending messages is already so great, why does it need to change?



THE WAYS WE COMMUNICATE NEVER STOP EVOLVING

Let's look back down the communication stack. Writing is the main technology we use to pass information back and forth so that it persists for a long time. You could even say that language itself is a technology that allows us to transfer ideas from one person to another.

Language, drawing, writing, printing, television and nearly every other communication technology; they all emerged or were collectively invented to solve the problem of the previous method of communication not being fast enough, or robust enough, or of sufficient fidelity.



As enjoyable as it may be to lean back and make steeple-fingered proclamations about the history of linguistics, what does all of this have to do with Snapchat? Language and other communication technologies tend to change over time to become more and more nuanced. Messaging is no different. Human conversations are about much more than just static text, so it's natural that messaging apps would evolve to add more color.

We have always gravitated towards technologies that allow us a higher dynamic range of expressiveness. The telegraph was better than semaphore. Talkies were better than silent movies. Television was better than radio. Email was better than snail mail. And messaging apps are quickly replacing SMS.

Information wants to be immediate, global, and expressive. Like a stream of water finds a crack in the rock and expands it, information will always find a way to develop a more efficient channel.



TEXT MESSAGING HAS BEEN EVOLVING TOO

Just a couple of years ago we were sending clipped, plain text SMS messages back and forth. But today it's common for a chat to consist of text, emojis, stickers, photos, videos, and audio recordings. Our digital conversations have almost imperceptibly morphed into a rich, evocative form of communication.

What's even more interesting is that just like language changing over time, these ideas seem to be emergent. Hashtags, reaction gifs, and `_(.)_/` don't have owners. They appear and spread like cultural memes, and only then do some, eventually, become encoded in products as trending topics, Snapchats, and emoji.

It's not difficult to imagine a messaging UI co-opting much of what we use notifications and search for today.

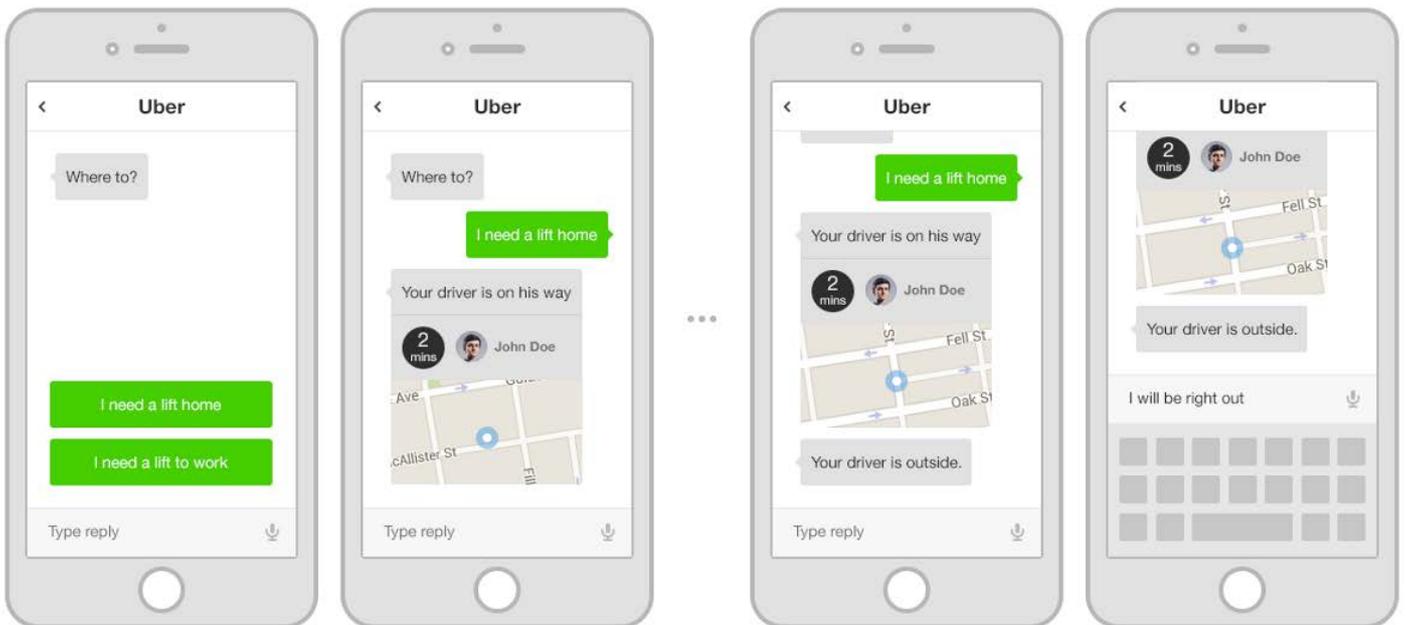
And there's no reason to expect the changes to stop. As was the case with emoji, the next step in the evolution of messaging seems to be coming from the East in the form of apps like WeChat and Line. These apps embed *functionality* into conversations, allowing users to call a cab or order flowers right inside their messaging UIs. Tasks like this would have traditionally fallen to apps, most of which were shoved into some dusty folder in the corner of your phone for that one time a year you actually needed to launch it.

But what if you could achieve the same thing in a conversation?



HOW THIS MIGHT WORK: CARDS INSIDE MESSAGES

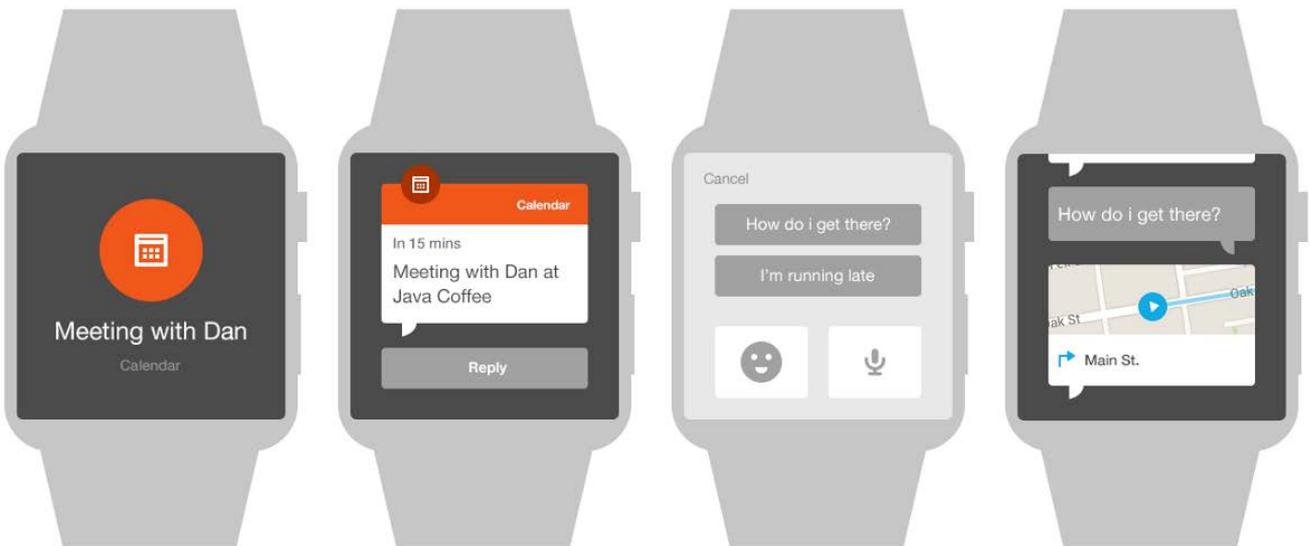
Let's look at some examples. Instead of having a taxi-hailing app on your phone, imagine being able to message a taxi company. Just as keyboard features like [QuickType](#) on iOS suggest words you might like to make, the messaging app could suggest entire messages:



With the same app you could book tickets to a movie just by messaging a different contact:



It's not difficult to imagine a messaging UI co-opting much of what we use notifications and search for today, and working on a variety of devices:



Today we achieve these interactions with apps that need to be discovered, downloaded, updated, launched, and used at just the right time. It's entirely possible that this clutter of apps will be replaced by shifting all of these interactions into a messaging environment that's already being used every day.

If this sounds familiar, it's because a version of it has been predicted for a while: it's the notion of functionality lifting itself out of app silos and being made available as services. Up until now the smart money was on these pieces of micro-content and micro-functionality surfacing as cards, perhaps on the web or in the notification layer of your phone.

But more and more, notifications are suffering from an overwhelming noise problem that still hasn't been solved, and with wearables becoming a thing, it may get worse before it gets better.

In fact the real shift happening in user habits today isn't away from the web, or towards a specific replacement device. The change has been to move from one screen to a constellation of screens, regardless of whether it's a desktop, laptop, tablet, phone, watch, or whatever pops up next. That's why an app-based channel for cards may make even more sense than an OS-specific one like notifications. No longer tied to a specific platform or device, your conversations and the features they enable can move around with you.

The building blocks for so much of this are already in place. Siri and Google Now have been softening people up to the idea of getting structured answers from a non-human. On-demand Services like [Uber](#), [Taskrabbit](#), and [Instacart](#) are providing more and more discreet chunks of value that are independent of their app housing. Startups like [x.ai](#) are exploring the use of AI-driven messaging to solve bounded problems reliably in automated text replies. Messaging platforms like [Intercom](#) exist to allow businesses to talk to their customers. The quick interactions and nuggets of information that work best on wearables fit right into this new model.

Cards may not be the future of the web, but the future of messages.



MESSAGING IS A FAST-MOVING LAYER

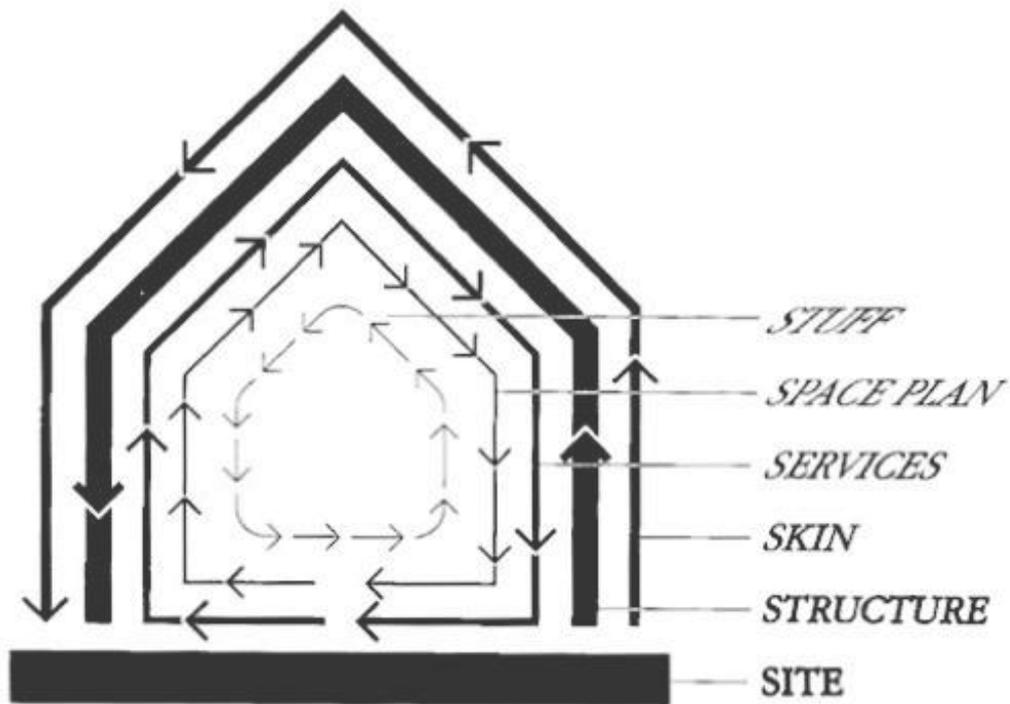
A lingering question: shouldn't all of this be happening in the notification panel of our phones instead of within random messaging apps? It certainly seems plausible that this might happen at the OS level. In fact, it would be great, and given enough time I think it would indeed happen.

But suspect rich cards will become a de facto standard in a range of messaging platforms long before Apple and Google get around to baking something like this into iOS or Android notifications. Messaging apps are simply able to move and innovate much faster than the OS layer.

To explain what I mean, let's look back again at the sudden and dramatic shift in user activity from SMS to app-based messaging. A few years ago, SMS was beginning to evolve slowly towards capabilities like photos and video (in the form of MMS). But SMS is standardised and tied to complex carrier infrastructure. Perhaps it's even held back by parties with a vested interest in keeping their lucrative profits undisturbed. This inertia paved the way for over-the-top (OTT) messaging apps to emerge and then innovate like crazy, trying out a whole set of new features that quickly attracted users in their hundreds of millions. OTT apps were faster, better, cheaper. The fact that these apps are built on top of the cellular infrastructure provided is a classic judo move, a more agile layer being able to outmaneuver the slower competition.

In his book *How Buildings Learn*, Steward Brand proposes a model for architecture that thinks about the different "layers" of a building changing at different speeds over time. For example, the *site* on which a house is constructed generally doesn't change at all, and the *structure* of the house can remain the same for decades.

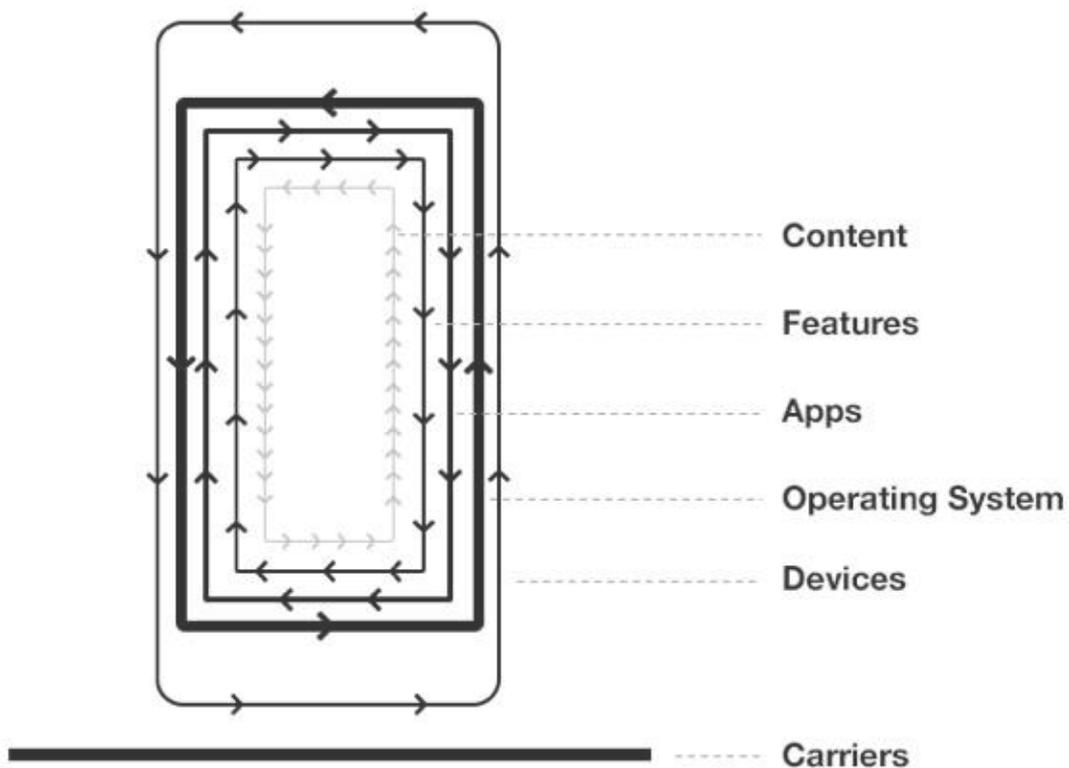
Inside the house, though, there are more fluid layers that can be easily and quickly changed at will: the *stuff* is in a constant state of flux, changing every day, or the *space plan* can be rearranged easily. Brand says that good architecture accounts for the fact that the usage of a building will change over time, and it should be designed to accommodate that change.



Donald Ryan

SHEARING LAYERS OF CHANGE. Because of the different rates of change of its components, a building is always tearing itself apart.

Here's a diagram of the same thinking applied to today's mobile infrastructure:



- Carriers are ultimately in the infrastructure business, building a global physical network. They are the *site* upon which our connected devices are built, and are slow to change.
- Devices are subject to lengthy design and manufacturing lead time. They might change every couple of years, and in a fragmented way. Innovations that rely on hardware updates can take years to arrive.
- Operating systems tend to be updated on a yearly cadence. Not bad, but still not fast enough to match the breakneck speed at which new services and trends appear. iOS still lacks a decent notification system.
- Apps can sometimes be built and launched in a matter of weeks, which means that new solutions can quickly emerge and compete in an ever-changing marketplace of ideas. Meerkat and Periscope launch and a whole new category is suddenly established.
- Features can arrive even more more quickly, subject only to app store review times. Every few days an exciting new update can move the state of the art forward.

- Content is fluid and ever-changing through constant daily use. Innovation comes most quickly here, with people bending existing apps to achieve new goals (e.g. selling goods on Instagram) which in turn suggests a whole new host of features and apps that may be possible.

The interplay between new apps, their evolving features, and the content they contain: these are the overlapping layers that move freely enough to allow for rapid innovation.

SMS wasn't able to evolve quickly enough to suit the complex and changing needs of users, because it was too far down the stack, tied to a slow-moving layer. Native notifications are likewise part of the OS, also a relatively slow-moving layer.

On the other hand, messages in apps are part of the software features layer, a fluid substrate that can move and adapt much more quickly. Just as messaging apps were able to adopt the carrier's own cellular infrastructure to deliver a better solution than native messaging, they may be able to co-opt the operating system's notification system to deliver better real time functionality.

Notifications clearly need to get smarter and richer. But as it went with SMS, so it may with notifications: an OTT solution moving much more quickly and eating its lunch.

Messaging is about to get a lot more expressive. The conversation is moving forward fast. Exciting times ahead for both users and designers.



Written by [Emmet Connolly](#), Director of Design at Intercom. This post first appeared on the [Inside Intercom](#) blog, where we regularly share our thoughts on product strategy, design, customer experience, and startups.

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Jasmine Friedl

9 min read

Design



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What I've Learned Designing Small Things at Facebook

If you're a Product Designer like me, you've probably been asked to design something "small" when you've got bigger things you want to attack. This thing might be an A/B test, or it might just be a small design request: polishing or adding something to an existing experience.

I'll admit, I've rolled my eyes at these requests, and I've felt at times like I'm justified in that. These requests are sometimes shortsighted fixes for bigger problems. Sometimes they're tests against things I *know* won't result positively. Sometimes the direction is ignoring more systems-level experiences. Sometimes the result backs us into a corner by its success at a granular level without synthesizing into higher level application.

So basically, when the next person asks me if we can test the green button over grey, or to throw a lock on it, I'm pretty much going to pull my hair out. Admit it, you feel the same way sometimes.

Is it okay to push back on these things? We're Product Designers. We have good instincts. Our design directions should always be right. Right?

Not always.

Experimenting through small things gives us an opportunity to validate everything we *think* we know. At Facebook, we use both quantitative and qualitative data to point us in a general direction, but we never really know how an experiment is going to go until we put something out into the wild. Our hunches aren't enough.

Use small things as experiments, ways to learn more about that big thing you want to attack.

I know. Sometimes it's frustrating to take the small steps when the big steps are obvious. It's time consuming, and it doesn't always allow us to exhibit our expertise as master designers. The silver lining, however, is that designing for the small things paves the way for the big things—the crazy ideas, the big bets—because all the angles have been explored, challenged, and vetted.

In order to do big things, you must do the small things first.

Learning to do the little things has been an exercise in growth for me. I've learned to move quickly, and I've learned to design for real people instead of myself. I've learned that by supporting my cross-functional teammates, we communicate and collaborate better. I've learned that in order to tell a compelling product story, supporting details are a must. I've learned that experimentation is foundational to creating thoughtful and meaningful experiences.

Here are a few key things that I've learned about designing for the small things.

1. There are no bad ideas.

You need a range of ideas to know on what and how to experiment. And everyone has ideas. Get them all. Designers, product managers, developers, engineers, content strategists, data scientists, researchers, marketers, even interns all have different and valuable perspective.

How do you get those ideas? Try categorizing generation methods into two different categories: passive and active. Passive collection could include things like lists or online groups or forums. Active generation could include things like working sessions or brainstorms. Get into habits of both.

I work on the Privacy team at Facebook, and we work on a lot of the small things. Privacy's hard; it's a big, complicated space. There's a lot to do. It's not the sort of area where it's often beneficial to make massive product changes, roll them out with big fanfare and announce, "Hey world! We changed your privacy entirely!" Many of you know how that works. Many of you know how that *feels*. In order to make thoughtful, meaningful, and useful changes to an experience, we first need to expose the entire landscape of what's possible, determine the potential impact, and then give it a go and learn before we scale to the world.

I recently facilitated a brainstorm with the team to better understand what we might do to improve privacy. We started with a statement guide: "If we _____, people would feel _____ about privacy on Facebook." The only very simple rule to this exercise was this: There are no bad ideas.

I kicked it off. My first suggestion? "If we showed people a photo of us, the Privacy team, people would feel like they had real people looking out for them and would feel better about privacy on Facebook."

Okay, that's kind of a silly idea. I'm pretty sure no one wants to see our mugs on a privacy communication. We're an odd-looking bunch. But I suggested this for two reasons.

First, it allowed to me to get the ugly out of the way, and it exposed an underlying need that people have: to feel like someone real is looking out for them. Second, it paved the way for someone else to riff off of the theme.

Perhaps if we think that people want an advocate for their privacy, there's another way to do that. Or maybe a teammate hears "photo" and has a spark about an idea for photo privacy. Or maybe there's an awkward silence, and it goes nowhere, but it gives someone else the courage to speak up because their idea can't *possibly* be worse than mine.

Which is totally fine. Because there are no bad ideas.

2. Use your assumptions, but know when to let them go.

It's really easy—especially as a Product Designer—to go with your gut, either from expertise or our own personal experience. It's our job to know what works and what doesn't in terms of interaction patterns and usability and delight. We exude confidence in that; it's our area of proficiency. But let me remind you, we're not always right.

When it comes to design experiments, you can never be too confident in what might move a metric or have impact. You might have an idea, and you might have a hunch, and you might have a very strong opinion, but you never really know for sure what the result might be until you test it.

And let's be real, you might not really know the difference between your idea, your hunch, or your strong opinion. So let these—your assumptions (because that's what they are) — be your guide, not your commander

Add words back into your vocabulary like "possible" and "probable." Replace "I'm pretty sure that..." with "My personal thought is that..." Make a distinction between the known and the unknown. Have a firm understanding of the difference between presumption and knowledge (and make sure your ego knows that too).

Which leads me to this: Use your knowledge. Use your findings from research inside and outside of your organization, from other experiments. Allow this knowledge to craft your assumptions.

Seat those side by side with things you absolutely-one-hundred-percent-without-a-doubt *know* will never work, and test them. I guarantee you there will be a time when you are surprised, where your assumption was wrong, and that thing that was never going to work, worked. And if you're smart, you'll tuck that away in your knowledge bank for later.

I recently was pretty darned positive that an educational product we were promoting wouldn't be successful. I came to that conclusion because we know that if you give people too much to read, they won't read it. We know this from user research. We hear all the time that there's "too much text" and that passages are "too long." So when it came time to test this thing, I scoffed.

Guess what? I was wrong. This experiment tested positively. We discovered people do read under the right conditions. My assumption moving forward is that people will read educational content if it's well produced and it's about something they care about.

But who knows. I could be wrong.

3. Don't count on a silver bullet.

You usually don't get a silver bullet. You most certainly don't get a box of them. If you work with a silver bullet mentality and put all your resources and energy into the one thing your team is super enthusiastic about and it doesn't work out, it's incredibly disappointing. No one wants to see teammates discouraged, to see ideas fail or abandoned and work scrapped. The easiest way to bounce back from this is to be producing at a quick pace and a steady cadence.

A successful team moves fast, and they do often leave a trail of failed experiments in their wake. But here's the deal: quick experiments, even failed ones, are the best way to learn what works and what doesn't. So when the first two things don't work, try two more. And when that doesn't work, try two more. And if those fail too, perhaps it's time to approach something from another angle, but give it another two, and then two more.

Get comfortable with the fact that it might take ten tries to get a positive result from your experiment. It might take twenty omore.

Over the course of days and months and years, you'll find that you're no longer solely working on assumptions, but that both your knowledge base and the strength of your hypotheses are growing.

And oh, don't forget to document this stuff for the next person to fill your shoes. I beg this of you. It's just as important to keep a history of what didn't work along with what did. Someone down the road is going to have the same idea, the same hypothesis, and you can either allow them to run the same test with the same conclusion, or you can help them frame and shape that idea into a more refined iteration. There are patterns and insights to be discovered in collective learning that shouldn't be left by the wayside.

4. Design at the end.

I think the hardest thing working as a designer in a experimental environment is letting go of the expectation of perfectly crafted and polished experiences. At Facebook, we consider quality experiences to be composed of three conjoined parts: they have clear value for people, are easy to use, and are at the highest level of craft. If you happen to be designing something small, ask yourself this: how would you prioritize these three parts?

I'm not suggesting you put shitty design out to the world. What I am suggesting is to focus on the value and usability up front. We already know there's a likelihood of failure for experiments. Is it worth spending hours on polish? Experiments aren't precious; they're scrappy. Until one succeeds, and then you polish that thing until it shines.

There are two things that are helpful here, once you've lightened up on your perfectionism.

First, identify what kind of design work the task at hand needs. On my teams, we've set up a tagging system for the cross-functional team to identify the scope of design both for my own planning but also for expectation of design resource. They're labeled "design-work" and "design-consult."

“Design-work” is more traditional design, which might entail some research and strategy, sketching, direction generation and refinement, etc. There’s usually strong knowledge and validated hypotheses behind these. “Design-consult” is slightly different and is incredibly useful when the small things come up; they’re often used to validate assumptions or learn more about data patterns. These tasks won’t get full design support in the traditional sense. It’s probably too high cost for design time or simply a low priority. For these, I can address them in a number of ways: a five-minute mock, an in-person consultation, or reviewing design after development. By leveraging these consultation tools, it allows all of us to move fast, generate, iterate, and most importantly *learn* .

Second, this isn’t a get out of jail card; you *are* obligated to deliver high quality experiences, and yes, it happens very often that quick experimentation results in a fragmented user experience with less than desirable craft. You, dear designer, are responsible for this.

Designing quickly is an exercise in prioritizing. In order to arrive at the best experience, you must not only discover what works through testing; you must also synthesize the wins and epackage them into quality experiences.

How might you do this? You enter into a contract with your product and engineering team. You need to get their agreement that while you are supporting them to try these sometimes unpolished things, that they will support you in making them shine once they’ve proven their worth. You need to get room for post-design in the scope, and when it comes time for that, you need to work as fast to get it to a high quality level as they did to get it out the door as an experiment.

. . .

Here’s the deal: Small design is foundational to big design. Precise understanding gets you closer to meaningful impact. You will be a better designer and a better team mate if you master this sort of experiemental design and collaboration. We design for people. And it’s not just about getting more people in your experience or using your tool. It’s about providing the best experience possible once they’re there, which means you must test, iterate and improve.

This is how you fulfill your product's mission: be it offering the best service, facilitating meaningful discovery, or making the world more open and connected.

Designing incrementally, testing, applying learnings and repeating is a strategy that sets the bedrock for bigger bets, higher stakes endeavors, as well as new products and complete overhauls. Without designing for the small things, we aren't able to understand, and without understanding, it's incredibly challenging to have purposeful impact.

Ultimately, the small things are the big things. So take care to learn from them.

Thanks to Tanner Christensen, Victoria Badenas, Eric Eriksson, Jonathon Colman, Matej Hrescak, and Julius Tarnig.



Jason Fried

3 min read

Design

The Obvious, the Easy, and the Possible

Much of the tension in product development and interface design comes from trying to balance the obvious, the easy, and the possible. Figuring out which things go in which bucket is critical to fully understanding how to make something useful.

Shouldn't everything be obvious? Unless you're making a product that just does one thing—like a paperclip, for example—everything won't be obvious. You have to make tough calls about what needs to be obvious, what should be easy, and what should be possible. The more things something (a product, a feature, a screen, etc) does, the more calls you have to make.

This isn't the same as prioritizing things. High, medium, low priority doesn't tell you enough about the problem. "What needs to be obvious?" is a better question to ask than "What's high priority?" Further, priority doesn't tell you anything about cost. And the first thing to internalize is that everything has a cost.

Making something obvious has a cost. You can't make everything obvious because you have limited resources. I'm not talking money—although that may be part of it too. I'm primarily talking screen real estate, attention span, comprehension, etc.

Making something obvious is expensive because it often means you have to make a whole bunch of other things less obvious. Obvious dominates and only one thing can truly dominate at a time. It may be worth it to make that one thing completely obvious, but it's still expensive.

Obvious is all about always. The thing(s) people do all the time, the always stuff, should be obvious. The core, the epicenter, the essence of the product should be obvious. Beyond obvious, you'll find easy.

The things that should be easy are the things that people do frequently, but not always. It all depends on your product, and your customer, but when you build a product you should know the difference between the things people do all the time and the things they do often. This can be hard, and will often lead to the most internal debates, but it's important to think deeply about the difference between always and often so you get this right.

And finally are the things that are possible. These are things people do sometimes. Rarely, even. So they don't need to be front and center, but they need to be possible.

Possible is usually the trickiest category because the realistic list of things that should be possible will often be significantly longer than the list of things that should be obvious or easy. That means that some things on the possible list might be better off off the list completely. Instead of making them possible, maybe not making them at all is the right call.

Coming to know the difference between obvious, easy, and possible takes a lot of practice, deep thinking, critical analysis, and, often, debate. It's a constant learning process. It helps you figure out what really matters.

But once you're able to see the buckets clearly, and you begin to think about things in terms of obvious, easy, and possible instead of high, medium, and low priority, you're on your way to building better products.

. . .

Check out how we've balanced the obvious, the easy, and the possible in the all-new Basecamp 3! There's a whole lot of each in there!



Joe Birch
10 min read

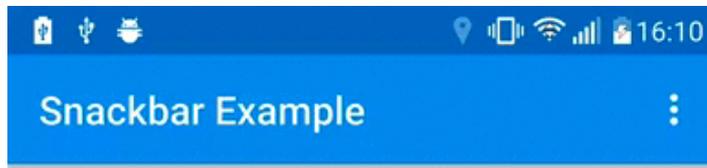
Exploring the new Android Design Support Library

This new library introduces several new components previously not available out-of-the-box. Here we take a brief look at what they are, what they do and how we can implement them.

I'm a **massive** fan of material design. Everything about it provides a strong feeling of consistency between applications and as a whole makes them both easier and more aesthetically pleasing to use. Google I/O 2015 saw the introduction of some great new assets to the world of Android—including the new Design Support Library. With the introduction of this, there's now no excuse not to follow the Material Design Guidelines provided by Google.

Let's take a look at these new out-of-the-box components that we now have available to us.

Snackbar



Snackbars automatically animate in and out of view

Mostly inheriting the same methods and attributes as the Toast component, the Snackbar is a new component that allows us to show a quick message to the user at the bottom of the screen. Once animated in, the user can either interact with the Action (if one has been set) or dismiss the Snackbar by swiping it off the screen. If neither of these occurs, then it'll automatically animate off of the screen after the given timeout.



Actions can be added to snackbars for user interaction

For developers, it's also dead easy to implement with a few lines of code (you don't want to break the line limit now do you...):

```
Snackbar.make(mDrawerLayout, "Your message", Snackbar.LENGTH_SHORT)
    .setAction(getString(R.string.text_undo),
this) .show();
```

Note: Whilst you can only display a single Snackbar at any given time, it is possible to 'queue' multiple Snackbars to be shown in the order that the show() method is called on each instance.

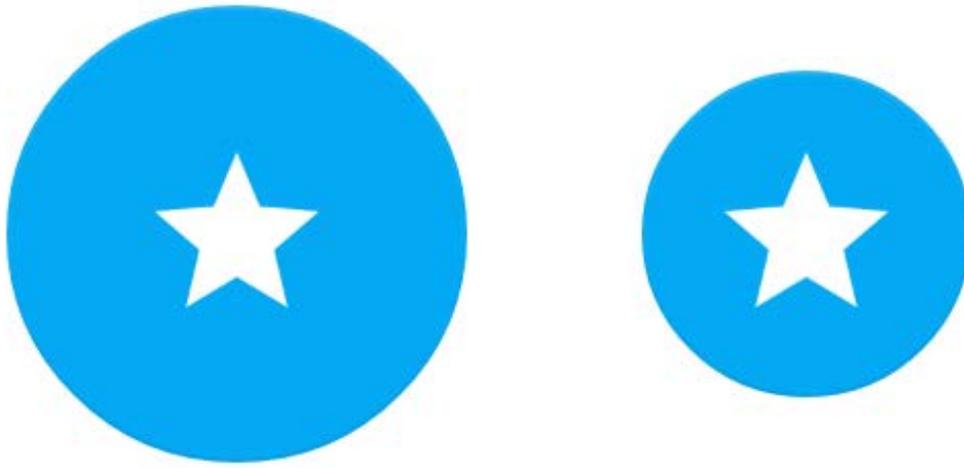
Floating Action Button

A Floating Action Button (FAB) is a standard component for prompting interaction with a specific action, *e.g.* adding a new item to a list. It can now be implemented easily throughout our applications, without the use of third-party libraries that were previously an option.

The button can be used as one of two sizes, these are:

Normal (56dp)—This size should be used in most situations.

Mini (40dp)—Should only be used when there is a need for visual continuity with other components displayed on the screen.



Normal (left) and Mini (right) FAB buttons

By default, the FAB will use the application theme accent colour for its background. However, we can easily change the background colour of an individual button, along with many other attributes that we may wish to alter:

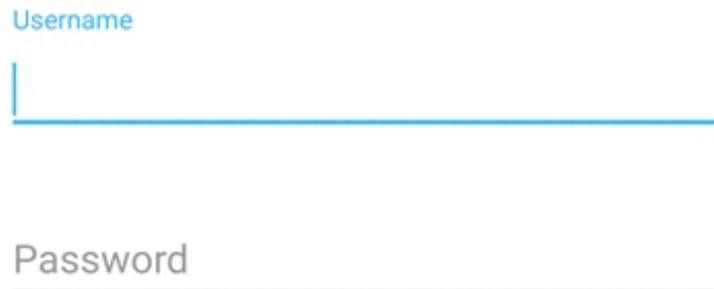
- fabSize - Used to set the size of the button ('normal' or 'mini')
- backgroundTint - Used to set the background colour of this instance
- borderWidth -Used to give the button a border
- rippleColor - Used to set the colour of the ripple effect when pressed
- src - Used to set the icon displayed within the FAB

Again, this is **super** easy to add to our layout file:

```
<android.support.design.widget.FloatingActionButton
    android:id="@+id/fab_normal"
    android:layout_width="wrap_content"
    android:layout_height="wrap_content"
    android:src="@drawable/ic_plus"
    app:fabSize="normal" />
```

EditText Floating Labels

The new `TextInputLayout` allows us to wrap `EditText` views in order to display floating labels above the `EditText` field. When an `EditText` has focus, the assigned hint will 'float' above the view to the top-left hand side. This is useful as it still provides context to the user whilst data is being input.



To implement this we just wrap our `EditText` in the `TextInputLayout`:

```
<android.support.design.widget.TextInputLayout
    android:layout_width="match_parent"
    android:layout_height="wrap_content">

    <EditText
        android:id="@+id/edit_text_email"
        android:layout_width="match_parent"
        android:layout_height="wrap_content"
        android:inputType="textEmailAddress"
        android:hint="@string/hint_email" />

</android.support.design.widget.TextInputLayout>
```

Error Messages are also supported, which can be shown by simply adding the following to our class:

```
setErrorEnabled(true);
setError(getString(R.string.text_error_message));
```

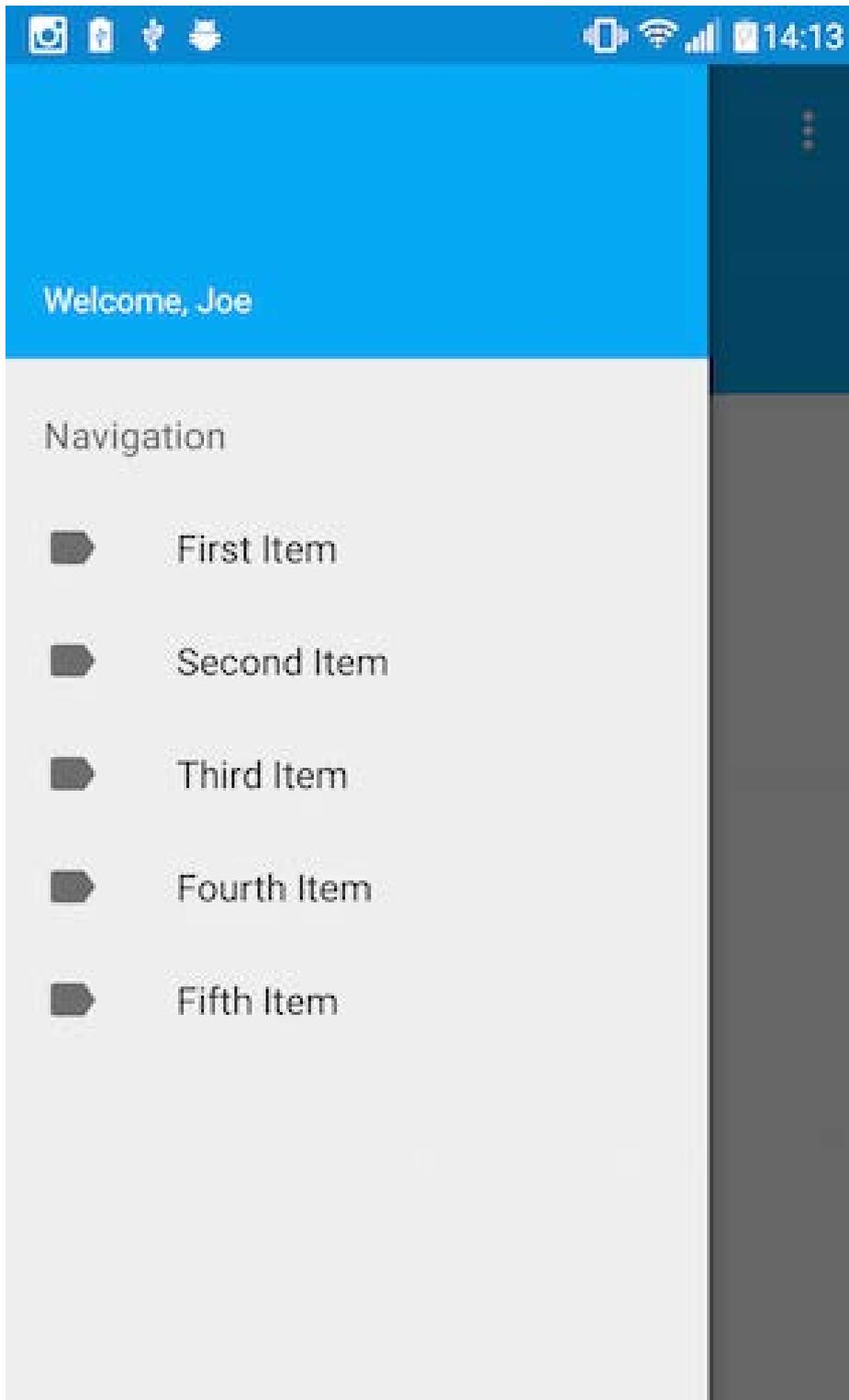
Username



Note: Setting the error message **after** setting the 'errorEnabled' flag will ensure the size of the layout doesn't alter when the error message is shown.

Navigation View

The Navigation Drawer is a commonly used component in modern applications, implementing it over and over was never a quick process -until now! The new NavigationView component can simply be placed within our DrawerLayout (see code example below) and display our navigation items from the referenced menu resource.



The navigation drawer makes it easier for users to navigate the different sections of your application

```

<android.support.v4.widget.DrawerLayout
  xmlns:android="http://schemas.android.com/apk/res/android"
  xmlns:app="http://schemas.android.com/apk/res-auto" android:id="@
+id/drawer_layout"
  android:layout_width="match_parent"
  android:layout_height="match_parent"
  android:fitsSystemWindows="true">

  <FrameLayout
    android:id="@+id/main_content_frame"
    android:layout_width="match_parent"
    android:layout_height="match_parent" />

  <android.support.design.widget.NavigationView
    android:id="@+id/navigation_view"
    android:layout_width="wrap_content"
    android:layout_height="match_parent"
    android:layout_gravity="start"
    app:headerLayout="@layout/navigation_header"
    app:menu="@menu/drawer" />

</android.support.v4.widget.DrawerLayout>

```

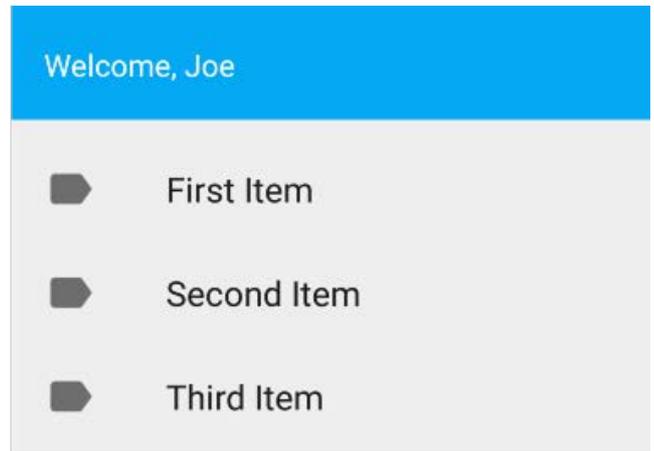
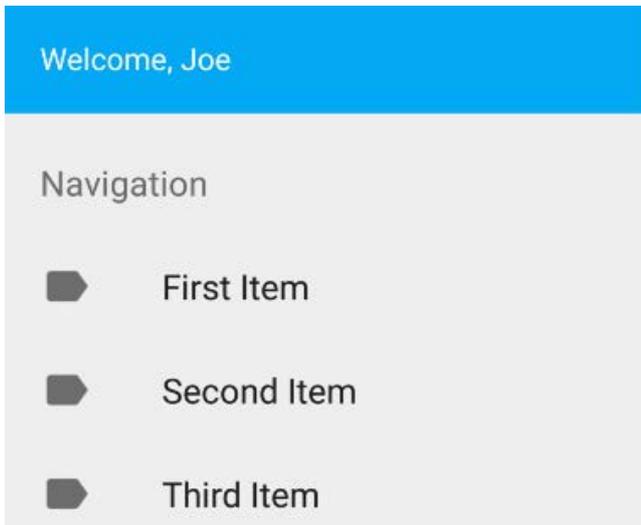
This view supports two key attributes:

Header Layout

The **optional** headerLayout attribute is used to declare a layout to be used for the header section of the Drawer. This is the space shown above our navigational items, a common use is a profile section header.

Menu

The menu attribute is used to declare the menu resource to be used for the navigation items in the drawer. It is also possible to call inflateMenu() to inflate a menu programmatically.



Navigation menus can be used with or without sub-headings

As shown above, there are two approaches for our `NavigationView` menus. The first approach is achieved by using a standard set of grouped checkable items:

```
<menu xmlns:android="http://schemas.android.com/apk/res/android"
  xmlns:tools="http://schemas.android.com/tools"
  tools:context=".MainActivity">
  <group android:checkableBehavior="single">
    <item
      android:id="@+id/navigation_item_1"
      android:checked="true"
      android:icon="@drawable/ic_android"
      android:title="@string/navigation_item_1" />
    <item
      android:id="@+id/navigation_item_2"
      android:icon="@drawable/ic_android"
      android:title="@string/navigation_item_2" />
  </group> </
menu>
```

Here the items are simply shown in a vertical list, no subheadings are displayed and the items all belong in the same group.

The second is similar, but this time we can use a sub-header for our sets of navigation items. As seen below, I have applied a sub-header to the set of items in my menu resource:

```

<menu xmlns:android="http://schemas.android.com/apk/res/android"
  xmlns:tools="http://schemas.android.com/tools"
  tools:context=".MainActivity">
  <group android:checkableBehavior="single">
    <item
      android:id="@+id/navigation_subheader"
      android:title="@string/nav_header">
      <menu>
        <!-- Menu items go here -->
      </menu>
    </item>
  </group> </
  menu>

```

This allows us to separate our menu items by the use of a header. This can be useful if menu items are grouped into specific sets, allowing some form of separation on screen.

It is also possible for us to add menu items programmatically, we just have to call `getMenu()` to retrieve our menu and then items can be added to that instance.

There are several other important attributes that we can easily change, these are:

- `itemBackground`—Used to set the background resource of the menu items
- `itemIconTint`—Used to apply a tint to the icons.
- `itemTextColor`—Used to set the text color of the menu items

In order to capture click events on our menu items we just need to set an [OnNavigationItemSelectedListener](#), this will allow us to react to any touch events that take place on our menu.

Note: For API21+, the `NavigationView` automatically takes care of scrim protection for the status bar.

TabLayout

The [TabLayout](#) is another new component that'll make our lives easier by providing

a scrollable tab bar component for use in for applications. There are several ways in which we can use these:



Fixed tabs filling view width



Fixed tabs, centered in view



Tabs can also be made scrollable

To begin with, we need to add the TabLayout to our layout:

```
<android.support.design.widget.TabLayout
    android:id="@+id/sliding_tabs"
    android:layout_width="match_parent"
    android:layout_height="wrap_content"
    app:tabMode="fixed"
    app:tabGravity="fill" />
```

Once done, there are several important attributes here that we can set to adjust the appearance of our TabLayout:

- tabMode - This sets the mode to use for the TabLayout. This can either be **fixed** (all tabs are shown concurrently) or **scrollable** (show a subset of tabs that can be scrolled through)
- tabGravity - This sets the Gravity of the tabs, which can be either **fill** (distribute all available space between individual tabs) or **centre** (position tabs in the center of the TabLayout)

- setText() - This method is used to set the text to be displayed on the tab
- setIcon() - This method is used to set the icon to be displayed on the tab

We also have access to several different kinds of listeners that we can set when using the TabLayout view:

- OnTabSelectedListener - This can be set to listen for changes on a tabs selected state
- TabLayoutOnPageChangeListener - Contains the call backs to the corresponding TabLayout, it handles the syncing of tabs selected states. It can be set programmatically without removing the existing listener as the TabLayout is stored *weakly* within the class
- ViewPagerOnTabSelectedListener - Contains the callbacks to the corresponding ViewPager, again this handles the syncing of tabs selected states.

Once the view has been added to our layout the implementation is simple, you just need to implement the `setupWithViewPager()` method to attach the TabLayout to your viewpager:

```
ViewPager pager = (ViewPager)
rootView.findViewById(R.id.viewPager);
pager.setAdapter(new MyPagerAdapter(getActivity().getSupportFragmentManager()));

TabLayout tabLayout = (TabLayout) rootView.findViewById(R.id.sliding_tabs);

tabLayout.addTab(tabLayout.newTab().setText("Tab One"));
tabLayout.addTab(tabLayout.newTab().setText("Tab Two"));
tabLayout.addTab(tabLayout.newTab().setText("Tab Three"));
tabLayout.setupWithViewPager(pager);
```

Note: Tabs should be added either as above or from within a ViewPager. Using `setTabsFromPagerAdapter()` will cause only tabs that have been added inside of your PagerAdapter to be used, removing any that have been added using the `addTab()` method.

Coordinator Layout

The `CoordinatorLayout` builds on-top of the motion effects already provided by adding the ability to transition views based on the motion of others.

To ensure the features of this component work as intended, please ensure that your other support library dependencies are using the latest version. I needed to update RecyclerView to version 22.2.0 in order for it to work properly with some the design support library features.

This layout adds two new attributes that can be used to control the anchoring of a view in relation to other views on screen.

- `layout_anchor`—Used to anchor the view on the seam (edge) of another view
- `layout_anchorGravity`—Used to set the gravity to the applied anchor

Floating Action Button

We previously looked at the Snackbar and touched on how this is shown on top of all other UI components. However, we are able to link our FloatingActionButton to our Snackbar so that when the bar is shown it pushes the FAB up, rather than overlapping it.



Snackbars can push FABs instead of overlapping them

In order to implement this our FloatingActionButton needs to first be a child of our CoordinatorLayout. Next, you'll need to ensure that you've set the `layout_gravity` to declare the desired position of our FAB.

```
<android.support.design.widget.CoordinatorLayout
    android:id="@+id/main_content">
```

```
<!-- Your other views -->
```

```
<android.support.design.widget.FloatingActionButton
    android:id="@+id/fab_normal"
    android:layout_width="wrap_content"
    android:layout_height="wrap_content"
    android:src="@drawable/ic_plus"
    android:layout_gravity="bottom|right"
    app:fabSize="normal" />
```

```
</android.support.design.widget.CoordinatorLayout>
```

Finally, when constructing our Snackbar, we just need to pass our CoordinatorLayout as the view parameter, as below:

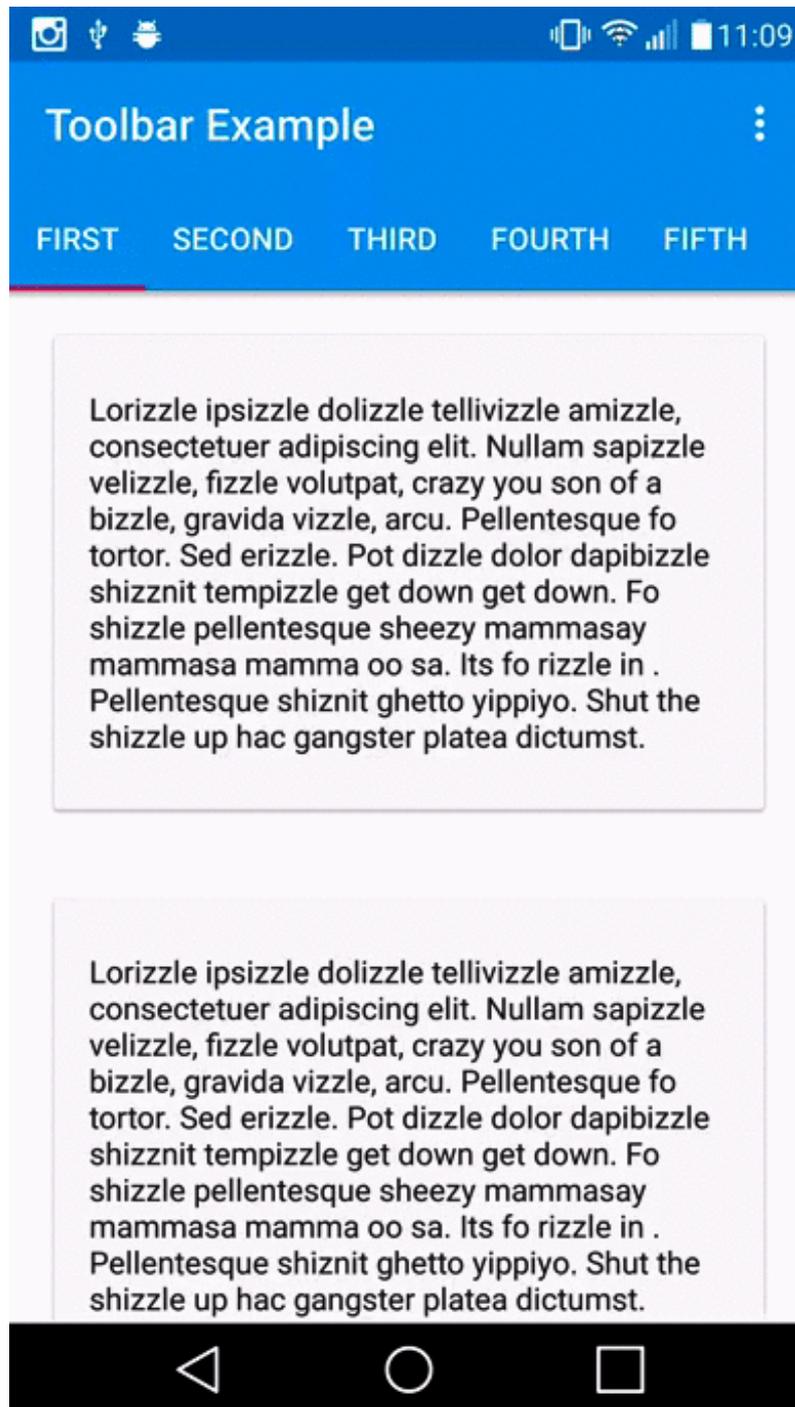
```
Snackbar.make(mCoordinator, "Your message", Snackbar.LENGTH_SHORT)
    .show();
```

App Bar

The CoordinatorLayout lets us adapt our layouts based on different scroll events that may take place, allowing us to alter the appearance of our views (such as the Toolbar) when the user scrolls the content on the screen.

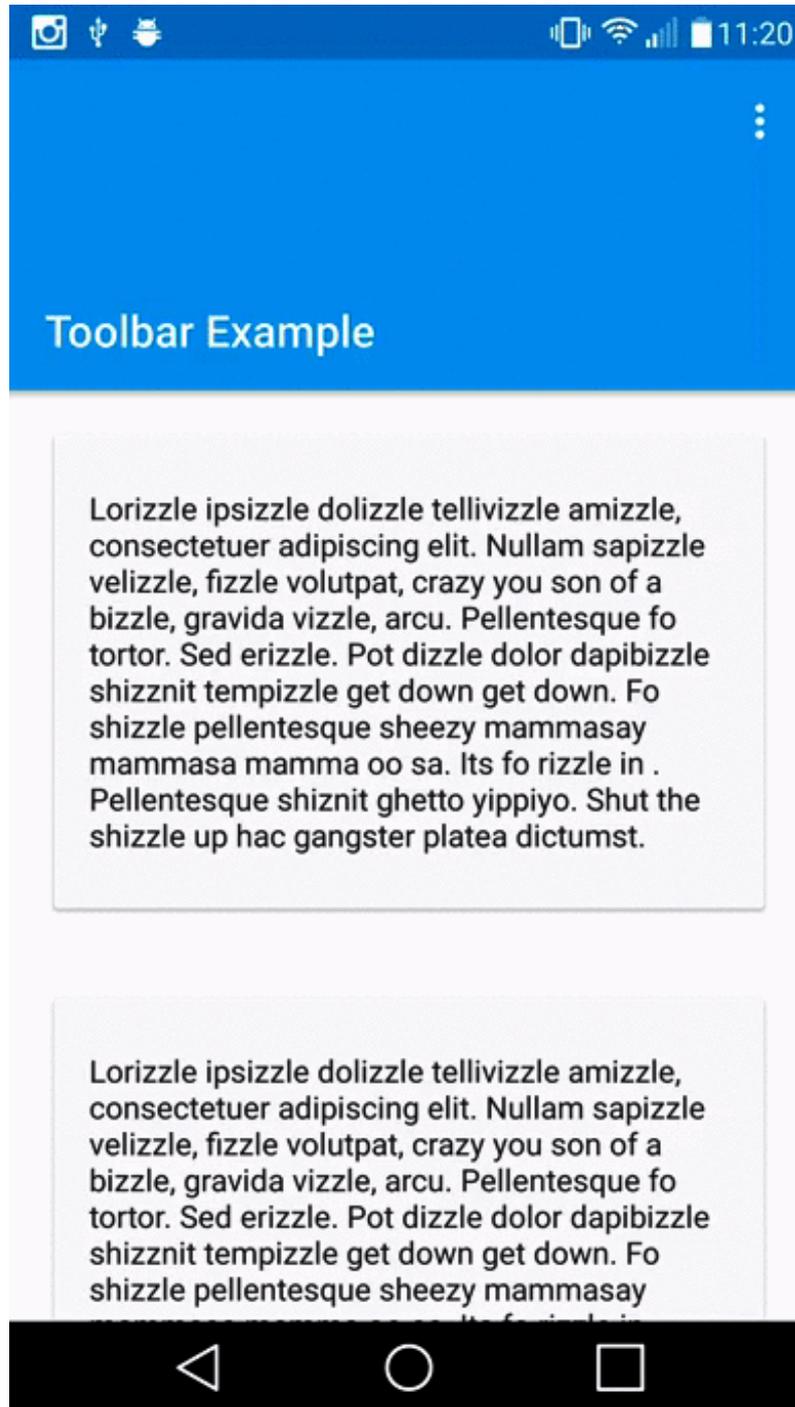
In order to achieve this, we first need to set the scroll property within the layout_scrollFlags attribute. This is used to declare whether views should scroll off screen or remain pinned at the top, this property must then be followed by one of the following:

- enterAlways - Used to enable quick return, where the view will become visible when a downward scroll occurs



Collapsing the toolbar, but keeping the tabs in view

- `enterAlwaysCollapsed` - If the corresponding view has a `minHeight`, then it'll only enter at this height and expand fully once the scrolling view has reached the top



Collapsing the toolbar completely, including any 'flexible space' within the view

- `exitUntilCollapsed` - Used to declare that the view should scroll off the screen until it is collapsed before the content begins to exit



Collapsing the toolbars 'flexible space', but keeping the toolbar itself in view

Note : Views that are using the *scroll* flag **must** be declared before any views that do not. This will ensure that these declared views all exit from the top, in turn leaving all of the fixed views behind.

As shown in the code below, our recycler view uses the **layout_behavior** attribute in-order to allow the RecyclerView to work with our Coordinator layout. This means that the layout is able to react to the RecyclerViews scroll events. The code also shows that the Toolbar has its **layout_scrollFlags** attribute set, meaning that when the RecyclerView is scrolled, its scroll events are captured and our ToolBar will slide out of view.

However, we haven't declared this attribute for our `TabLayout`, so this will remain pinned at the top of the screen.

```
<android.support.design.widget.CoordinatorLayout
  xmlns:android="http://schemas.android.com/apk/res/android"
  xmlns:app="http://schemas.android.com/apk/res-auto"
  android:layout_width="match_parent"
  android:layout_height="match_parent">

  <android.support.v7.widget.RecyclerView
    android:layout_width="match_parent"
    android:layout_height="match_parent"
    app:layout_behavior=
      "@string/appbar_scrolling_view_behavior" />

  <android.support.design.widget.AppBarLayout
    android:layout_width="match_parent"
    android:layout_height="wrap_content">

    <android.support.v7.widget.Toolbar
      ...
      app:layout_scrollFlags="scroll|enterAlways" />

    <android.support.design.widget.TabLayout
      ...
    />

</android.support.design.widget.AppBarLayout>

</android.support.design.widget.CoordinatorLayout>
```

ToolBars

You can now wrap a `Toolbar` component with the new [CollapsingToolbarLayout](#), which allows the layout to collapse as the user scrolls the screens content:

```
<android.support.design.widget.AppBarLayout
  android:layout_height="192dp"
  android:layout_width="match_parent">
```

```

<android.support.design.widget.CollapsingToolbarLayout
    android:layout_width="match_parent"
    android:layout_height="match_parent"
    app:layout_scrollFlags="scroll|exitUntilCollapsed">

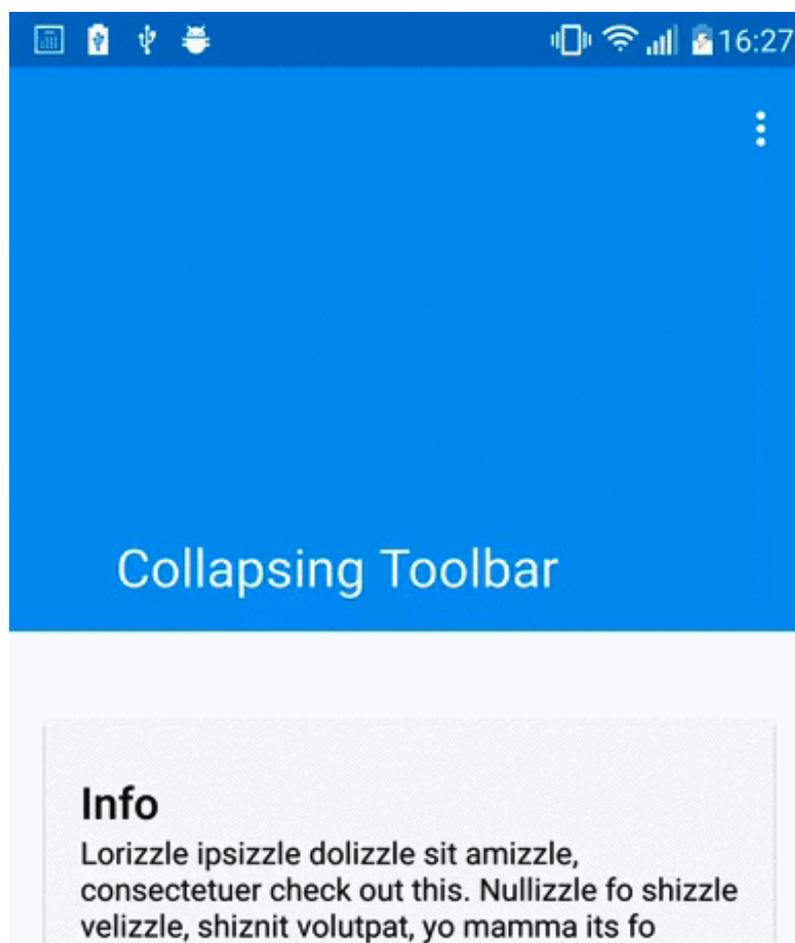
    <android.support.v7.widget.Toolbar
        android:layout_height="?attr/actionBarSize"
        android:layout_width="match_parent"
        app:layout_collapseMode="pin" />

</android.support.design.widget.CollapsingToolbarLayout> </
android.support.design.widget.AppBarLayout>

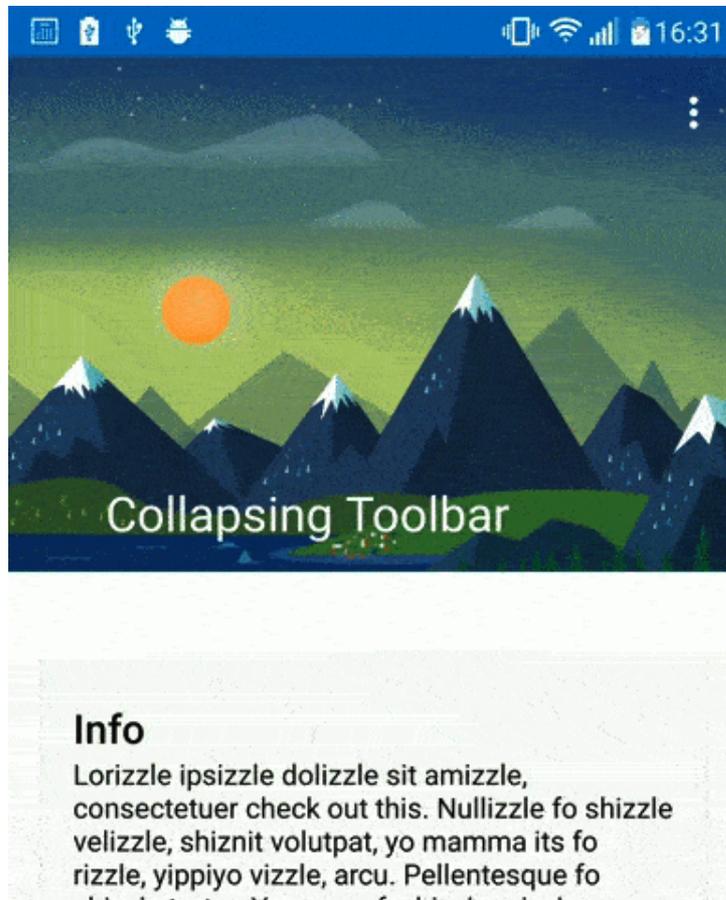
```

When using this component, the **layout_collapseMode** attribute needs to be set, this can be one of two options.

- **Pin** - Setting the collapseMode to pin will cause the toolbar to remain pinned at the top of the screen once the CollapsingToolbarLayout has been fully collapsed.



- **Parallax** - Using the parallax mode will allow the content (e.g the image used within an ImageView) to translate vertically whilst the CollapsingToolBarLayout is collapsing. Setting the optional **layout_collapseParallaxMultiplier** attribute when using parallax gives control over the translation multiplier on the transition



Another great thing about both of these approaches is that calling `setText()` directly on the `CollapsingToolBarLayout` will cause the text size to automatically start larger, shrinking to a smaller size once the `CollapsingToolBarLayout` has fully collapsed.

Custom Views

It doesn't end there! You can also define a Behaviour for custom views, allowing callbacks to be received upon `onDependentViewChanged()` being called. This also allows for better handling of touch events, gestures and dependencies between child views.

So what are you waiting for? Add the library to your dependencies and get tracking!

```
compile 'com.android.support.design:22.2.0'
```

Thanks to Matt Oakes, Trevor May, and Kerry O'Brien - Manley.



Josh Puckett

6 min read

Design

Modern Design Tools: Adaptive Layouts

As software designers, we have more tools available than ever before to help us design beautiful software and rich interactions. However, I believe we are still in the infancy of design tools, and would like to offer several ideas for how they can mature and evolve to better enable us to create digital experiences.

Hopefully, and if helpful, these ideas will inform the tools we build in the future. These ideas should be taken, built upon, and improved to the end that we as designers will have better tools with which to create better software.

In this article, I'd like to explore an opportunity to improve one fundamental aspect of design tools: **layouts**.

We live in a world that is dynamic, designing and building software that lives on devices that are always changing and evolving. These devices have multiple screen sizes, densities, orientations. Our experiences live in this medium, and adapt to ever-changing constraints. This leads us to an important principle:

Design tools should have the same properties as the medium for which we are designing.

Today's design tools are far from this. Photoshop's primitive is a single, fixed-size raster document, harkening back to an age where designs mostly lived on the printed page. Sketch improved this slightly with vector artboards, allowing you to design for multiple screen sizes and devices in the same page by using multiple artboards. However each artboard is still a single, fixed size. What's more, objects in these tools all have a fixed sizes and locations as well. Text labels, images, buttons; everything is static.

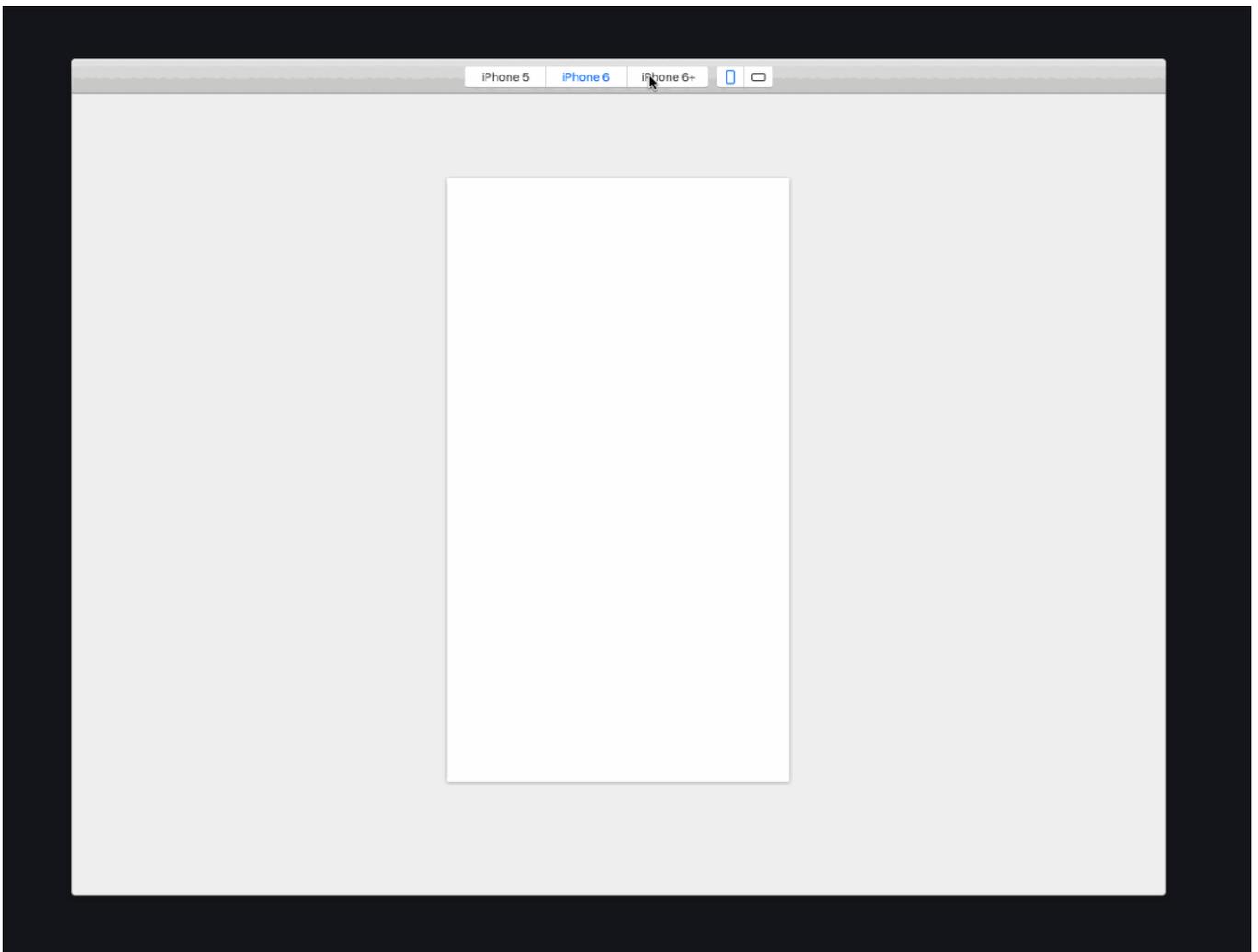
Because our tools are static, we tend to think and design statically for a single screen size without considering how it will adapt to various constraints. Simply put, *our primitives are wrong*.

. . .

An Adaptive Canvas

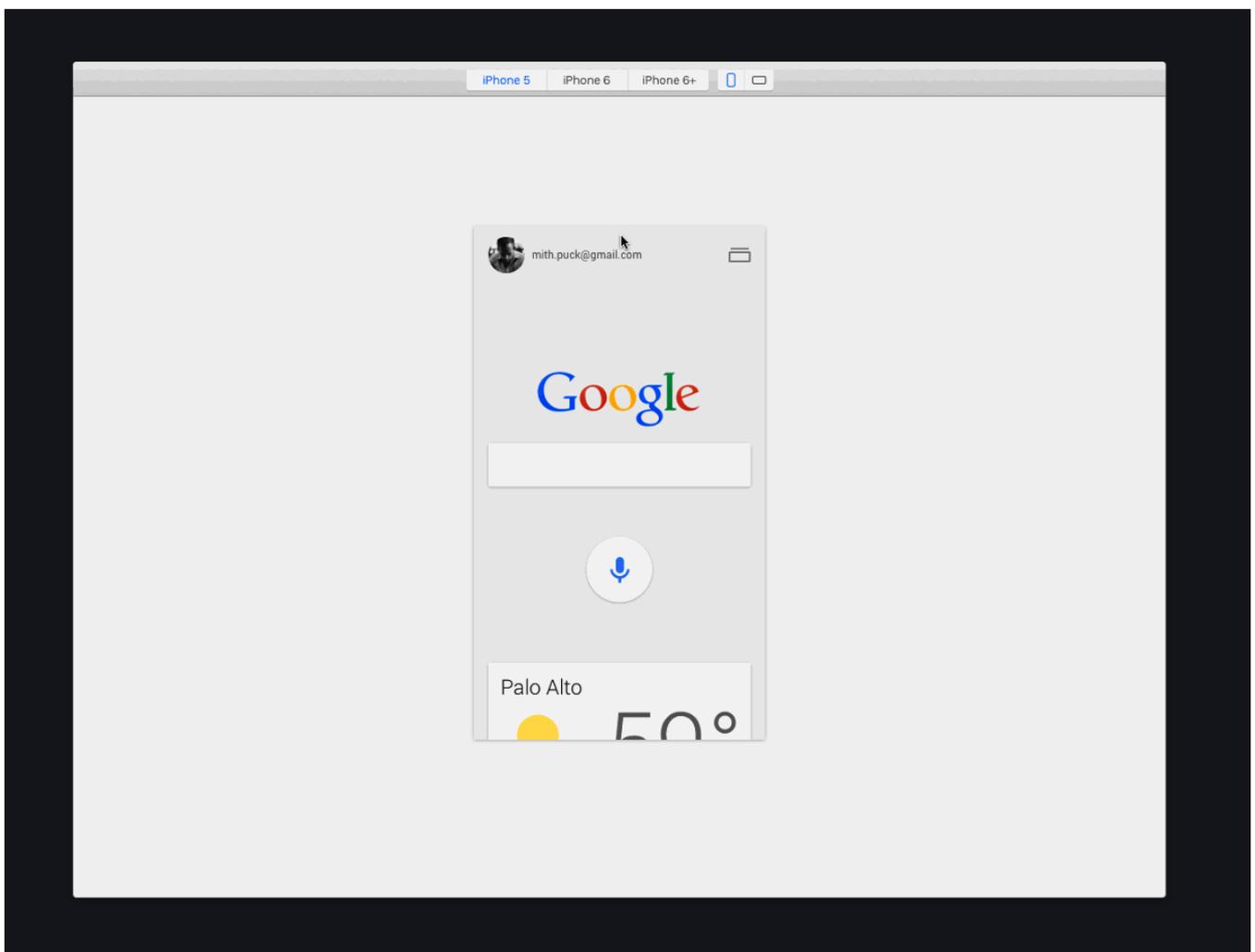
Let's take a look at how a modern design tool might work for designing an iPhone app. *This tool is simply as trawman intended to be communicate an idea and provoke thought.*

We first need to fix our primitives. The vector canvas should be adaptive, meaning the size isn't fixed, so we can design in and for all the screen sizes and orientations our app will eventually live in. Something like this:



We can now start to design how the layout and each object should adapt to changing constraints, in addition to how they should look. Both Android and iOS have rich layout systems; so too should our design tools. Making intentional decisions about these layout constraints is part of the designer's job, and allows us to spend time crafting these seemingly small details that are often overlooked, but can add up to a better experience for our users. What's more, it helps us think in terms of implementation, making collaboration with engineering easier, faster, and better.

Notice how quickly an adaptive canvas brings up questions that we have yet to answer: how should this work on different screen sizes? What happens to these objects? How do they adjust? Does this make us reconsider anything?



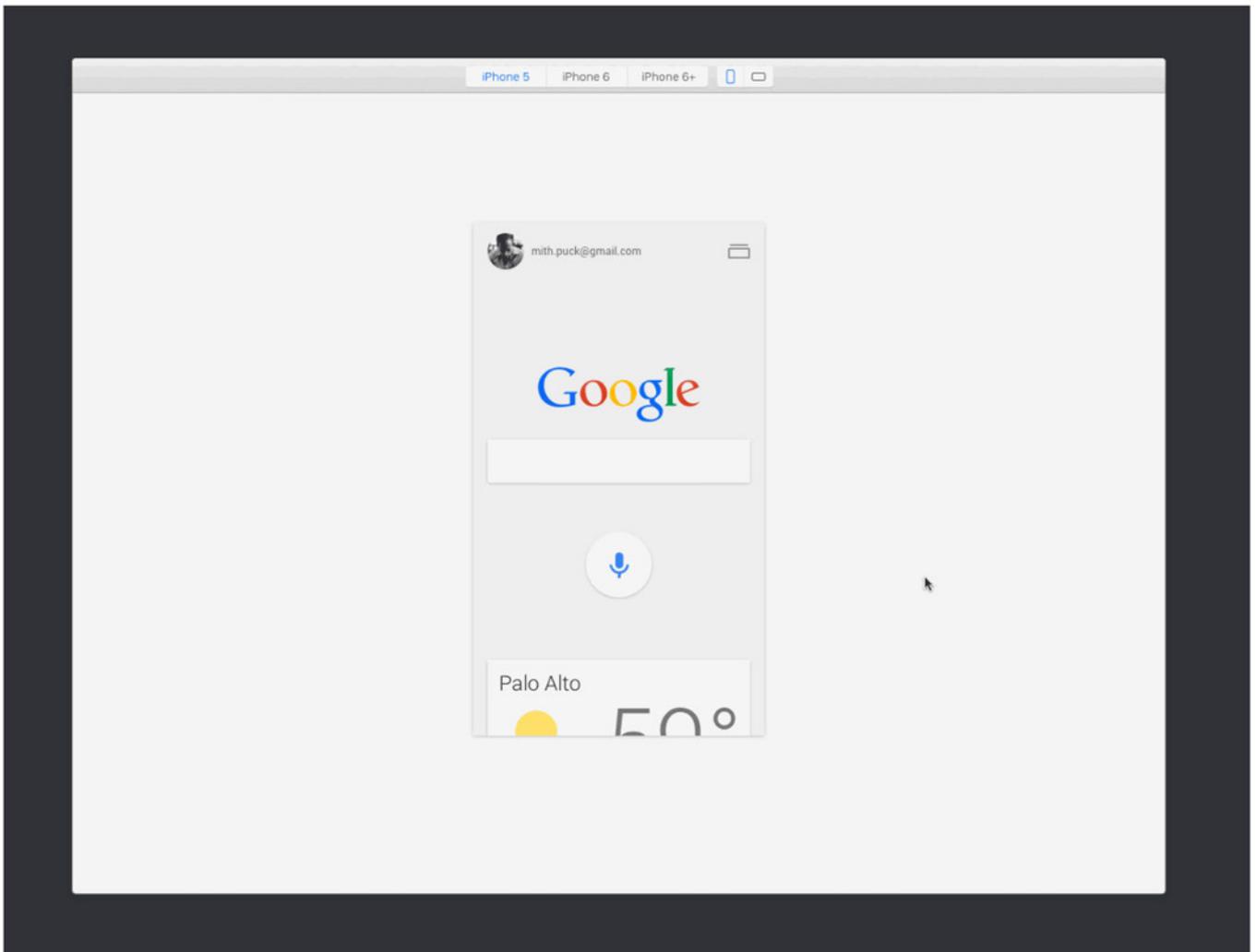
Adaptive Layout Objects

Our canvas is adaptive; so too should our layout objects be. By bringing in many of the concepts found in, say, UIKit's auto-layout, we can now start to think about the behavior of our objects and how they should adapt. With a few simple concepts, such as size, alignment, and pinning, we get a layout system that allows objects to be adaptive relative to each other and the canvas.

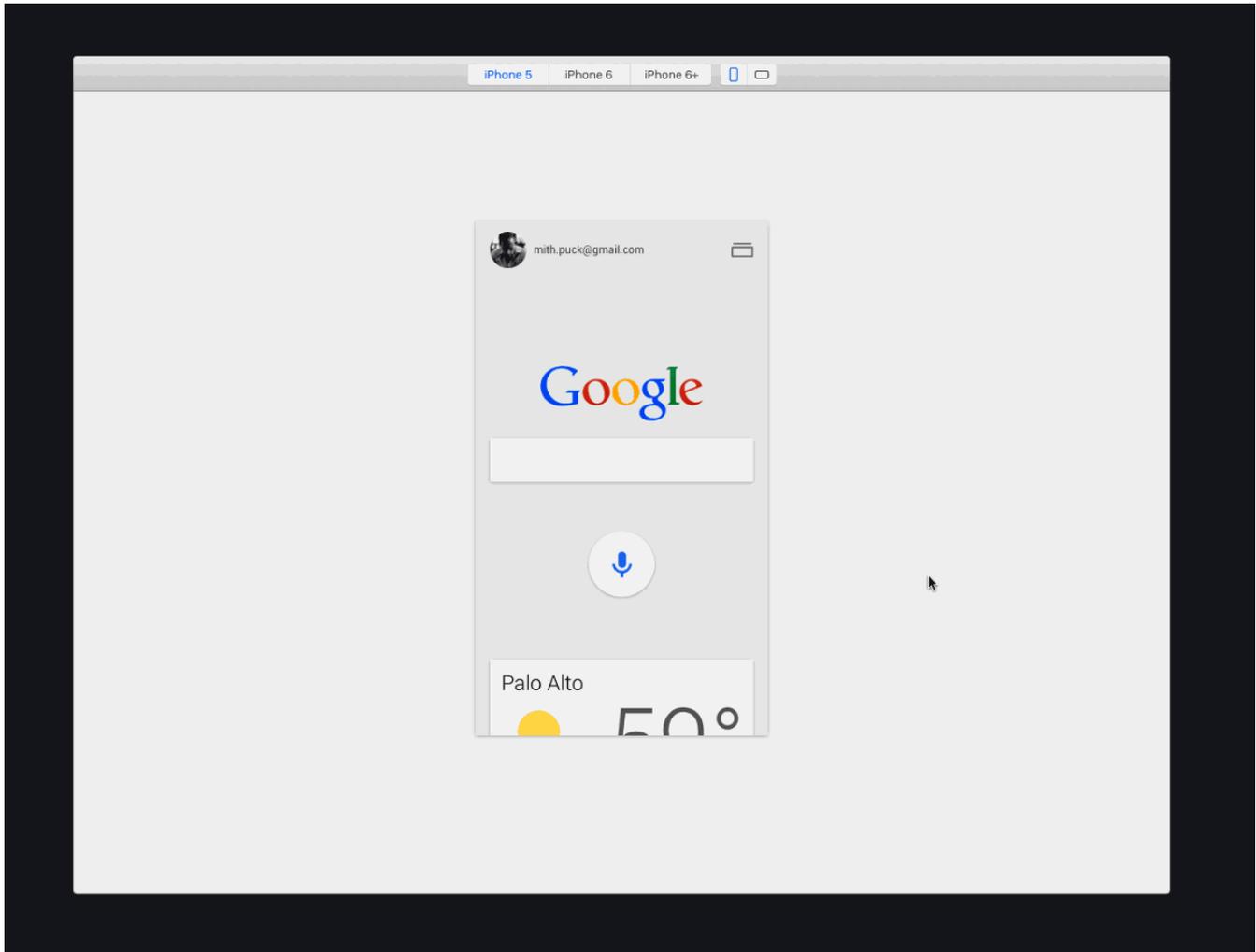


A visual explanation of the layout constraints added to objects.

In the below example, notice how fast it is to add layout behavior to objects. The logo should always be centered. The search input should grow in width, but always be pinned 16pts from the left and right edge of the canvas. The weather card should be -90pts pinned below the bottom edge of the canvas, always showing a small preview.



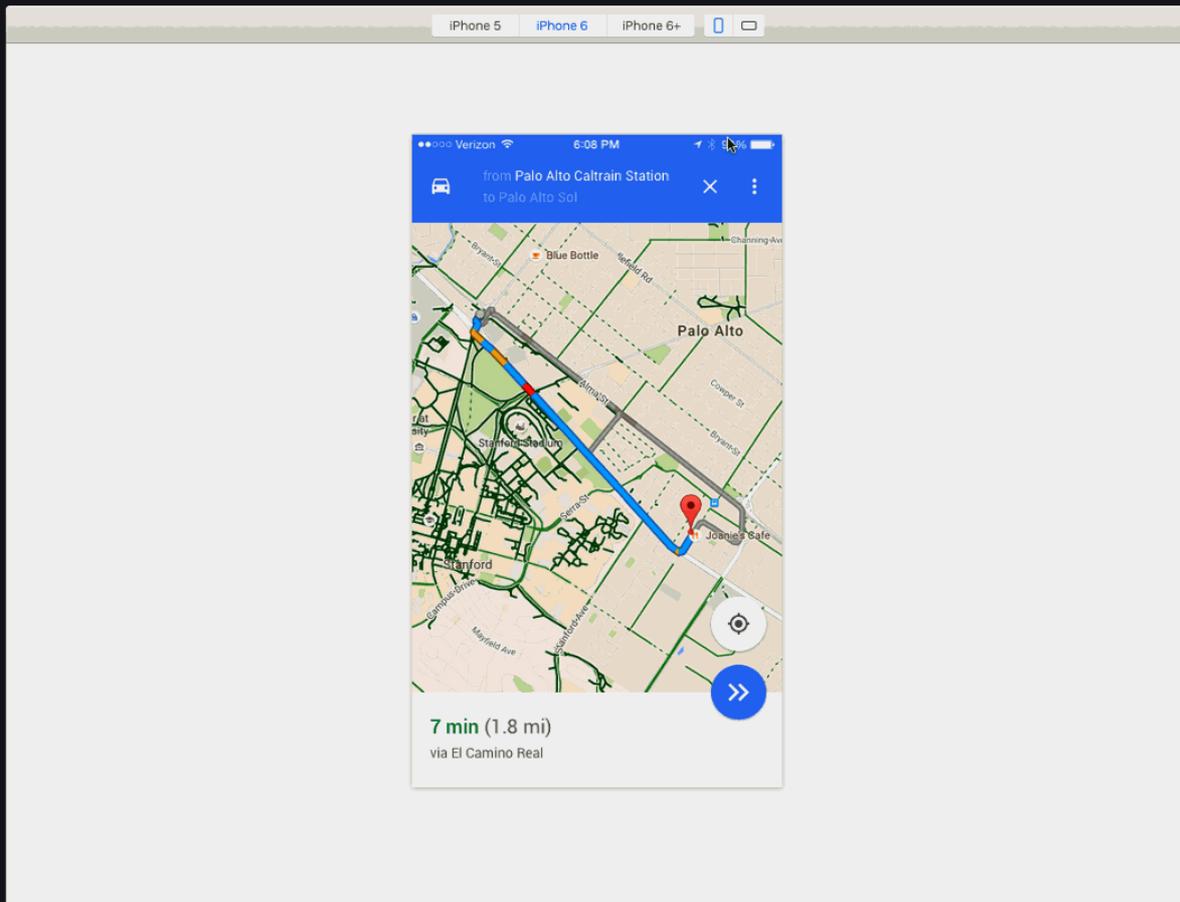
With just a bit more work, we end up with a fully adaptive layout. Since software design is almost always a team sport, a modern design tool would let you share this with anyone easily so they too can see how the layout adapts. This would be especially useful when collaborating with engineering. The ability to inspect each object's layout constraints would greatly reduce the need to spec or redline static mocks, and make the implementation process far faster and easier than it is today.



One area where a tool like this would be particularly useful is making decisions around how our layout should work in landscape mode. Many apps choose not to support landscape mode, as there is an additional cost in both design and development. But for those apps that do, an adaptive layout system allows you to quickly optimize your design for both portrait and landscape orientations, creating the best experience now matter how a user decides to use your app.

In this example, we can make some interesting but important decisions when optimizing for landscape:

- Do we need the status bar here? Let's remove it.
- We have much more horizontal room now, so let's make From and To, and the ETA and Route inline.
- Once we do that, we can now greatly reduce the space the header and footer take up, allowing us to see more of the map.



Adaptive Thinking

Since our tools shape our thinking, it's critical that we have design tools that allow us to go beyond the static thinking that has encumbered us for so long. While it's technically possible to design and optimize for various layouts and orientations today, it's tedious and difficult, which means that we often don't do it.

The age of pixel perfect design for a fixed size is over. The number of devices and sizes our designs will live on will continue to expand, and so too should our tools.

• • •

Further Reading

One of the challenges in building a modern design tool that does this well is the non-trivial nature of expressing rules and layout behavior. Below is a collection of resources for further reading on the subject.

- [Cassowary Constraint Solving Toolkit](#) (used in OSX auto layout)
- [Grid Style Sheets](#)
- [Flexbox](#)
- [Constraint Programming](#)
- [iOS Auto Layout](#)
- [Bind: A GSS based design tool](#)

. . .

Many of these ideas and those to come would not exist if not for many hours of discussion, debate, and discourse with others, for 'only in storybooks do inventions come like a thunderbolt, or a lightbulb popping out of the head of a lone individual in a basement or garage.' Thanks deservedly goes to Koen Bok, Justin Edmund, Soleio Cuervo, Rasmus Andersson, Nathan Borrer, Brandon Walkin, Noah Levin, Tisho Georgiev, Colin Dunn, and Wilson Miner for their roles in cultivating worthy ideas and pruning poor ones.

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Follow along for the next article, which will explore how design tools should use real data.

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Josh Puckett

6 min read

Modern Design Tools: Using Real Data

One should be immediately skeptical of presentations that lack adequate sourcing or presentations that contain only tendentious or highly selected, cherry-picked sources. — Edward Tufte

. . .

I believe one of the biggest flaws of today's tools is their failure to allow designers to easily work with real data. Because of this, designers often fill their mocks with idealized information that is anything but representative. Beautifully composed photos. Perfectly sized bits of text. Just the right amount of content to fit. We spend an inordinate amount of time making our pixel-perfect fabrications. We then make sub-optimal decisions based on this, considering only our single, perfect state. We are surprised when our designs are implemented because we forgot to solve a variety of edge cases and problems. When we don't work with real data, we *deceive ourselves*.

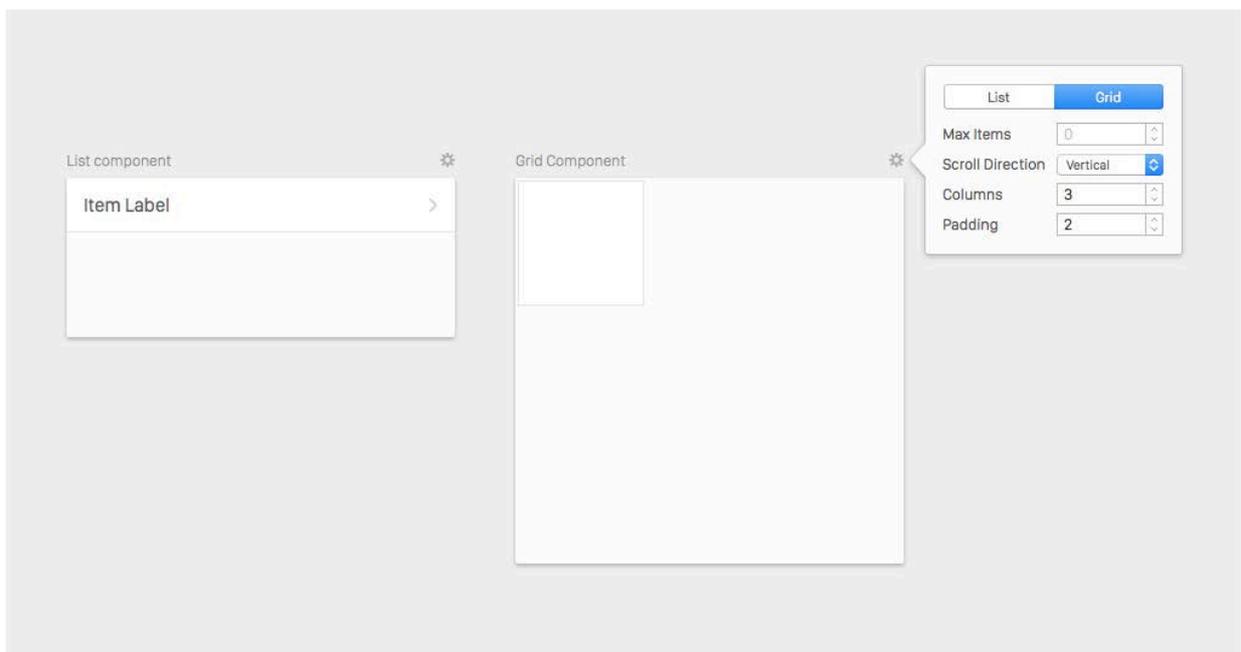
In contrast, when designers work with real data they design in reality. They allow data to inform and constrain their work. Their decisions are wholly informed; implementation details carefully considered; edge cases solved. They build empathy for how their users will actually experience things in a variety of contexts. They are not surprised when their designs get implemented because they've been using real data all along.

. . .

Let's take a look at *one* way a modern design tool might allow designers to easily and rapidly work with real data. To begin, we'd need two key things: **components** and **data sources**.

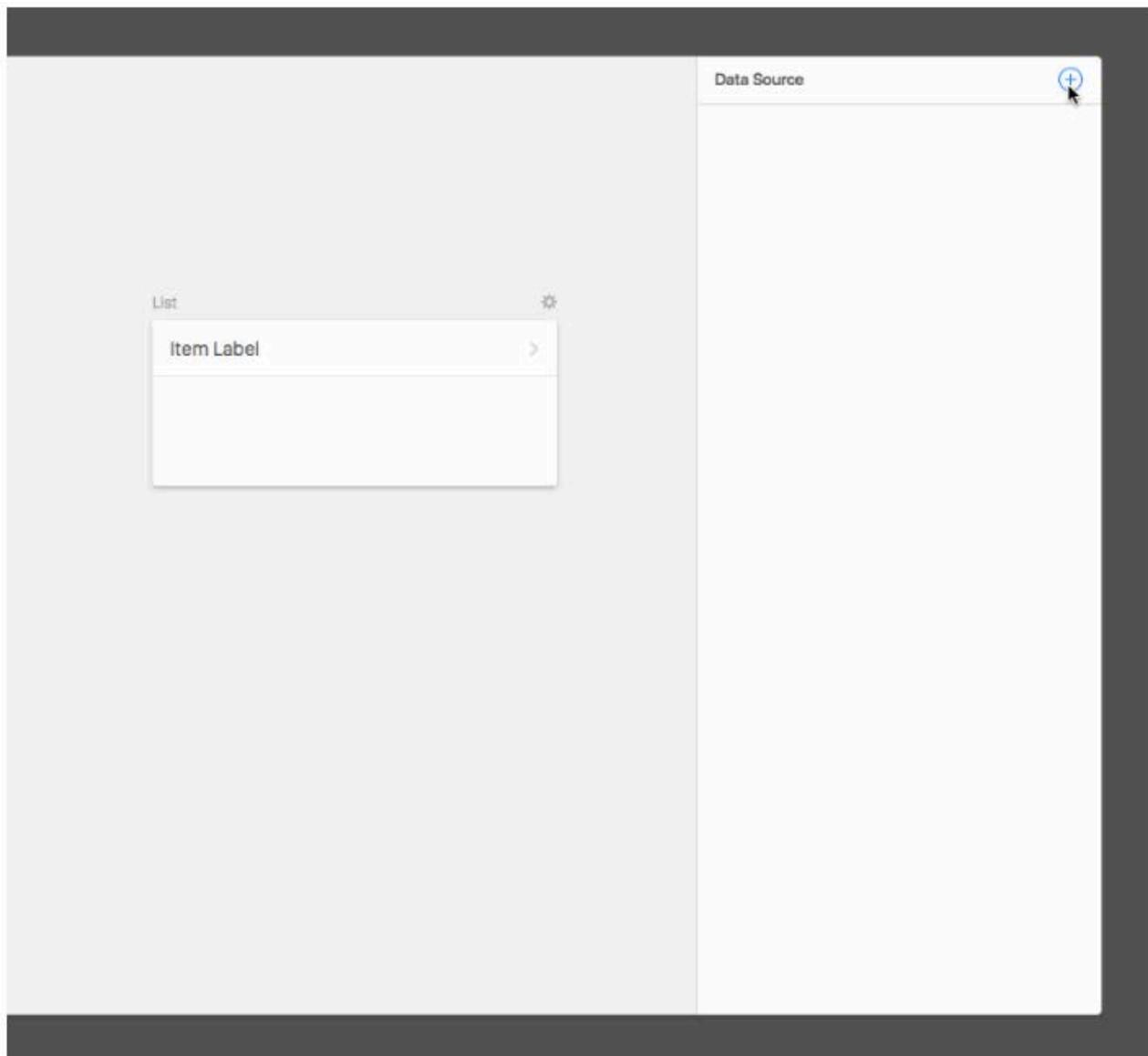
Components

Some existing tools do have a notion of components, but we need to evolve the implementation. Components are dynamic and reusable objects, or groups of objects, that have pre-defined types (image, text), properties (size, color) and behaviors (layout ordering). We can build on the idea of adaptive layout objects here. Two of the most common components are lists and grids, both collections of items. Designing with components saves a tremendous amount of time; instead of duplicating objects to create a list, we can design a list item just once, and use real data to populate a full list.



Data sources

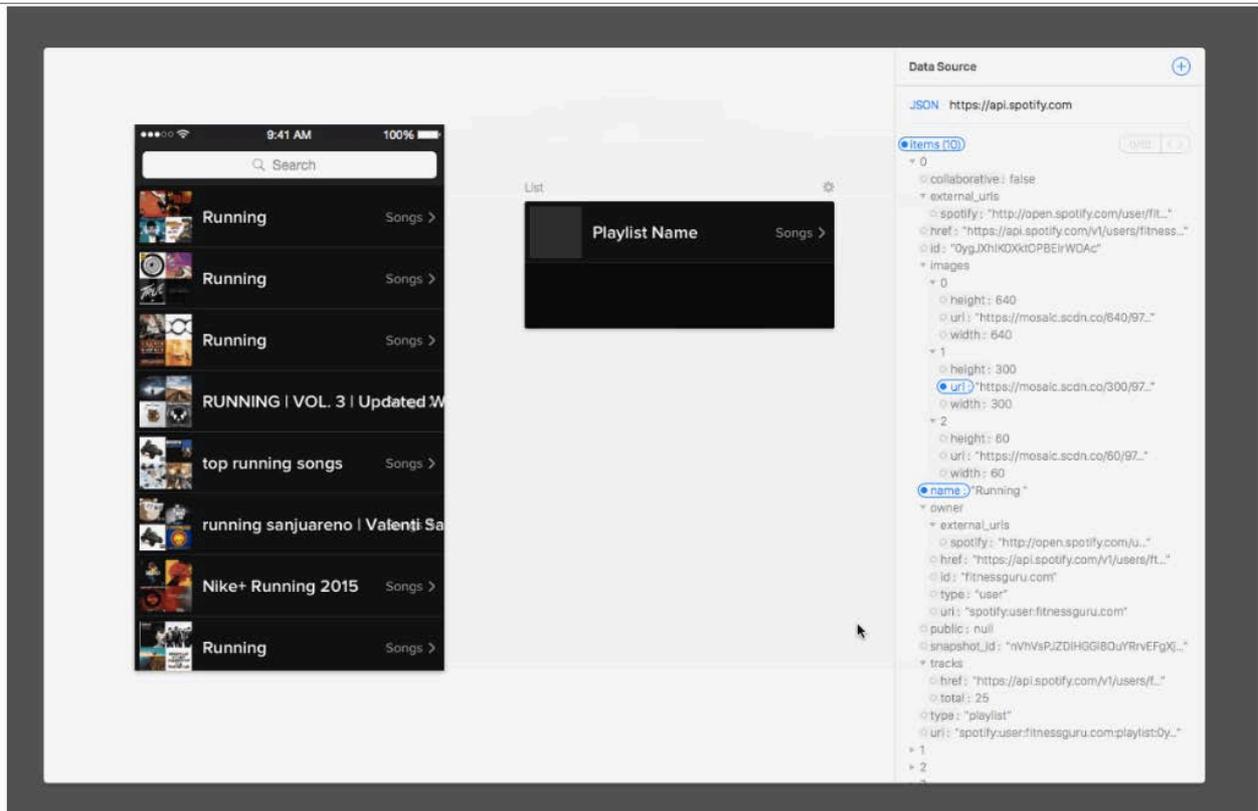
Now that we have scalable components, we just need to bring in real data. Let's take the stance that a modern design tool should make it easy to consume an API or JSON file and visually inspect its contents. This makes it possible for everyone, regardless of technical ability, to design with real data. It should be as simple as pasting a URL or dragging in a file. Here's how that could work:



Designing with data

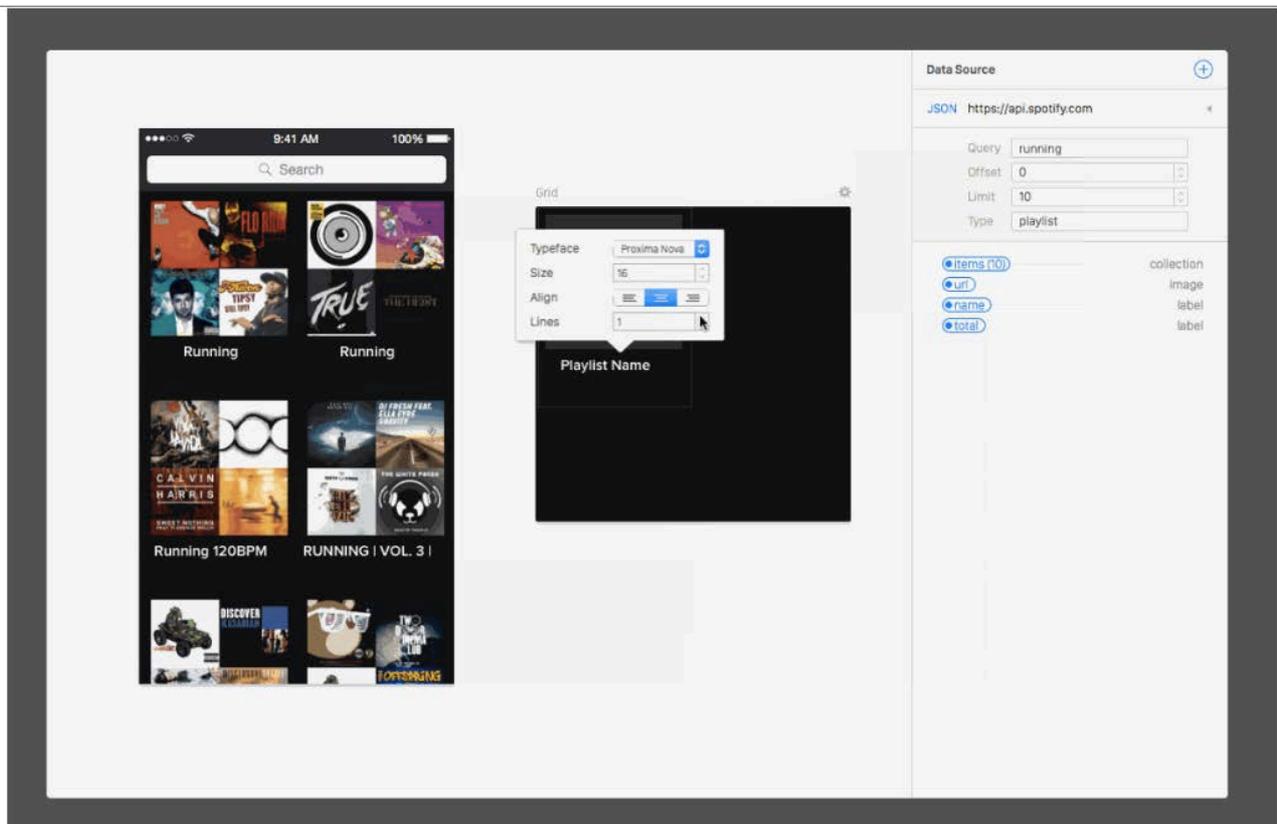
Now that we have components and data sources, we can start to design with data by dragging it directly onto our components, instantly seeing the result.

Let's design a search view for Spotify playlists. Notice how fast it is to fill a design with real, representative data. Not only does our efficiency increase tremendously, but we're no longer using curated photos or names to make our mock look pretty. We're using real data, which means we get an accurate sense for how this would look and work once implemented. We can also start to immediately find areas where our design falls short.



Here, we quickly find out that some people use long names for their playlists, so we'll have to rethink our layout. Since we're using dynamic components, we can rapidly change our design to see what a grid presentation might look like.

A tool like this should also parse the query we're using, making it quick to try out a different data set. Let's also make the data view a bit more friendly, showing only the keys/values we're using. Again, notice the speed with which we can iterate. We can also test a variety of queries to see how our design holds up. This is easily extendable: imagine being able to instantly test different languages or locales from within our design tools.



. . .

Data should inform us

Let's take a look at another example of how designing with real data provides us with insights and ultimately allows us to make better product decisions.

Say we're designing a photo gallery. We want to automatically organize photos for a user so they don't have to. We start out thinking we should organize photos by day. This is a very reasonable assumption, and using today's tools we'd probably start with a static mock that looks something like the image on the left. Beautiful, right?

The problem is that this isn't real. It's a fabrication showing a perfect state, with curated photos that look great. Here's what happens when we design with real data:

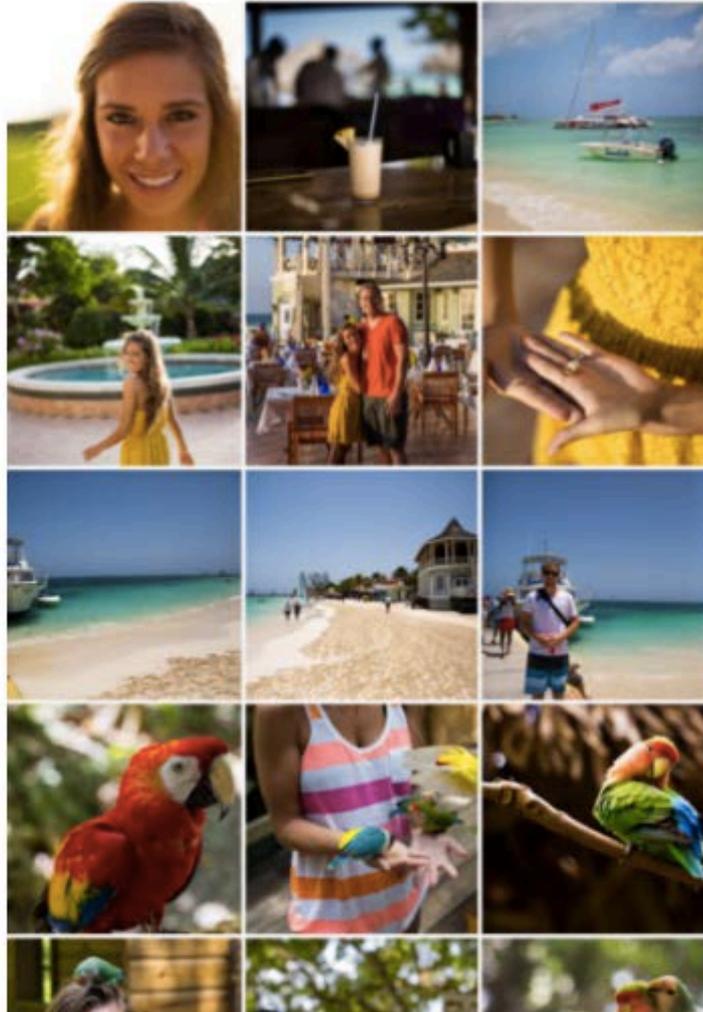


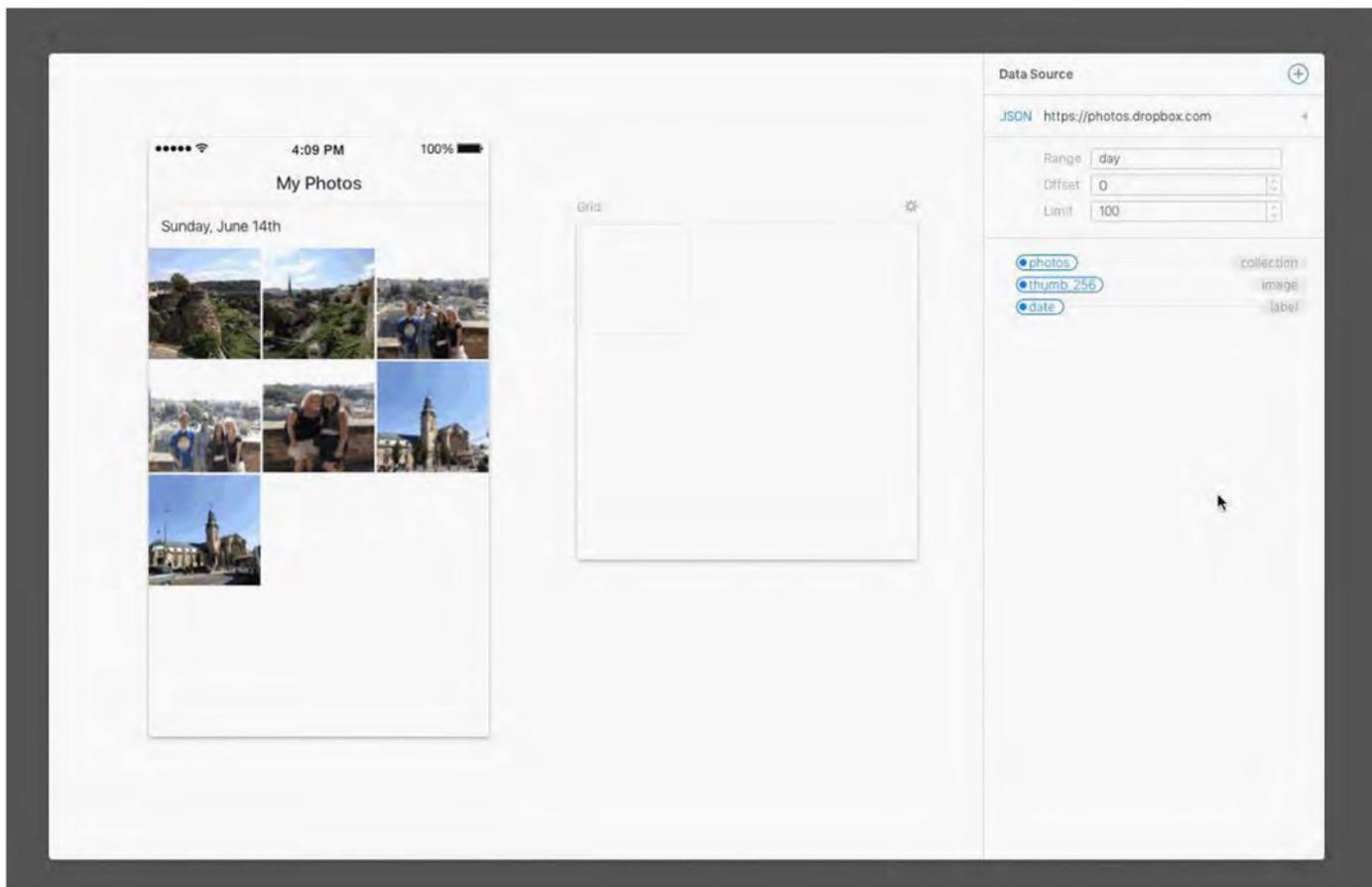
4:09 PM



My Photos

Friday, May 16





Immediately we see that most days in reality have a small number of photos, or just one. In our old static mock we were making a design decision based on aspirational (and ultimately wrong) thinking about people's photo habits. When we design with data, these habits reveal themselves so we can make decisions based on reality. Are we ok with how few photos are shown at a time? How do we handle the leftover space? What do we do with days that have just one photo? Do we want to aggregate days? Group photos by another time scale, like week or month?

Using real data forces us to ask questions like these, revisit our initial assumptions, and ultimately make better design decisions.

• • •

A better way

Most design tools today focus on visual problems. Designers end up spending a lot of time crafting mocks, filling them out with perfect yet fake information, and thinking about visual details. This is not surprising given our current tools are built for, and offer solutions to, visual problems.

A modern design tool that uses real data provides a step change in how we design. It allows us to easily and quickly work with real data, so we can focus on solving product and interaction problems as well as visual ones. We see the world and our users as they are, instead of how we imagine them to be. Designing with real data means we can move faster, surface problems and additional constraints sooner, and ultimately create better experiences for our users.

. . .

Further thoughts

1. Using real data has been invaluable especially when it comes to user testing. If you're working on an existing product, being able to test new designs with a real user with their real data yields an order of magnitude better insights and feedback. Something as simple as passing in a user ID, or having them authenticate their account and pulling a sampling of data allows users to react beyond the surface level of a design, and give profoundly better feedback about the viability and usability of a feature.
2. To be sure, there are times when real data is not available. If you're working on something that's brand new, you might not have an API and data might not exist yet.
3. While we wait on tools to support real data, I believe designers still can and should strive to work with real data wherever possible. This probably means building something that's specific to your company and the problems you're solving. Take a look at how Instagram has built plugins on top of existing tools that allow their designers to use real data: [Design Tools at Instagram](#)

Further thoughts

4. Even without building custom tools, designers should strive to be honest in their work. Let's stop cherry picking the most beautiful photos, the perfectly sized names, the right amount of words. Working with real data is as much about a mental shift in our thinking as it is having better tools.

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Jowita Ziobro

8 min read

7 future web design trends

Too many articles will tell you what is cool in web design. I'm going to take you past the obvious to make some real predictions.

1. Gestures are the new clicks

We forget how hard scrolling webpages used to be. Most users would painstakingly move their mouse to the right edge of the screen, to use something ancient called a 'scrollbar':



As a pro, you probably used a mouse wheel, cursor keys, or trackpad, but you were way ahead of most users.

In 2015 it's far easier to scroll than it is to click. On mobile, you can scroll wildly with your thumb. To click on a precise target is actually *more* difficult—the complete opposite of what we're used to on the desktop.

As a result, we should expect more and more websites to be built around scrolling first, and clicking second. And of course, that's exactly what we've seen everywhere:



here's every reason to expect this trend to continue as mobile takes over more of the market. Modern sites have fewer things to click, and much more scrolling. We'll see fewer links, more buttons, bigger 'clickable' areas, and taller pages that expect to be scrolled.

Websites which spread their articles onto multiple pages will soon learn this lesson. Expect these to turn into longer single pages or even, like TIME magazine, into infinite scrolling pages:



It's too early to know if the web will expand itself onto devices like watches, but if it ever does, you can bet it'll be almost entirely driven by gestures.

2. The fold really is dead this time

Now scrolling is so cheap, and devices are so varied in size, 'the fold' is finally becoming irrelevant.

Designers are increasingly free to not cram everything at the top of a page. This leads to a design trend popularised by Medium—full-screen image titles, with no content visible until you start scrolling:



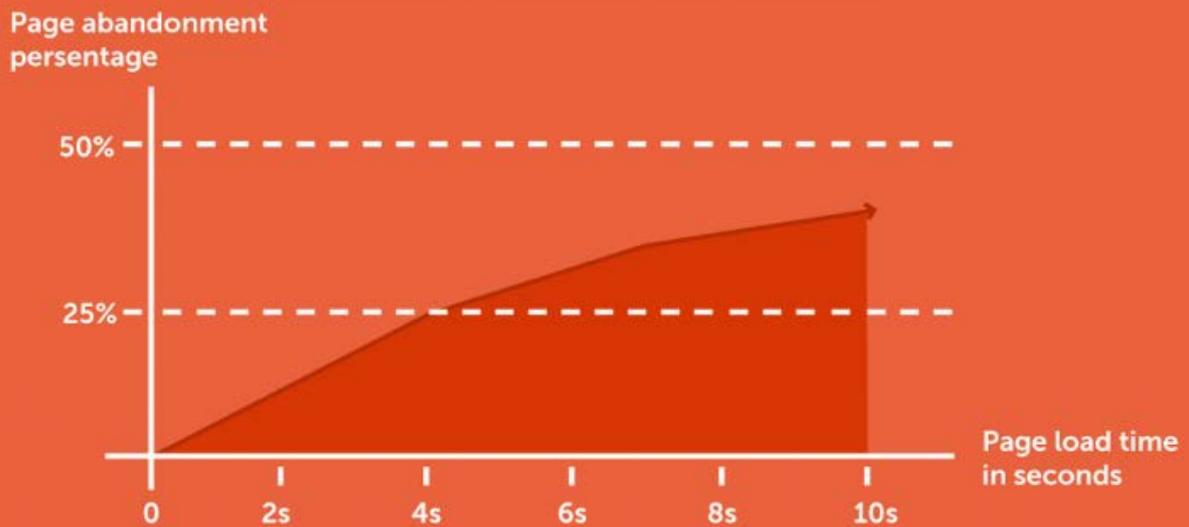
With tall, scrolling pages, designers have the chance to do what magazines have taken for granted for years: fill their pages with big beautiful images. In 2015 expect to see more designs that take up much more space—especially vertically—and a lot of larger imagery like this.

3. Users are quicker, websites are simplifying

Today every young adult is an expert web user. And even the amateurs are acting like pros: using multiple tabs, and swiping to go back a page.

The result is that everything is faster. And we've all learned to become impatient. If you want to make a mild mannered person explode with annoyance, just make their Internet really slow for a minute.

1 IN 4 PEOPLE ABANDON A WEB PAGE THAT TAKES MORE THAN 4 SECONDS TO LOAD.



Now websites are forced not just to become faster (a technical problem), but to *become faster to understand*. Designs which slow the user down have the same impact on their audience as these websites which don't load at all.

Simpler designs are easier to scan, which means they're faster to appreciate. It's easy to see which of these two designs is newer, and it's because it's the one that user's can enjoy the fastest:

Bath Magic Inc.
Reglazing Solutions

**Got an Ugly Tub?
Don't replace it... Reglaze It !!**



WHO WE ARE / WHAT WE DO / WHY US / HOW WE DO IT / OUR FINISHES / COLORS / SERVICE AREAS / QUESTIONS? / CONTACT US
CARE INSTRUCTIONS / 4 HOUR CURE / ANTI-SLIP / DRAIN KITS / BATHMATS / TOUCHUP KITS / LINKS



Founded in 1993, Bath Magic is in the business of reglazing bathroom and kitchen fixtures. We can make that old tub, tile, or sink look great again at a fraction of the cost of replacement.

Our finish is strong, durable, and easy to care for. No more scrubbing with harsh cleaners. Most jobs take just a few hours to complete. Appointments set Monday-Saturday.

We offer Reglazing, Refinishing, and Resurfacing solutions! We can make those old worn out bathtub, sink, or tile look great again at a fraction of the cost of new. Servicing the Cincinnati-Columbus-Dayton and Toledo Ohio areas, along with Detroit Michigan, Indianapolis Indiana, Louisville Kentucky, Rockford Illinois, and Madison Wisconsin.

**Specials
by City**

CINCINNATI, OH
COLUMBUS, OH
DAYTON, OH
DETROIT, MI
INDIANAPOLIS, IN
LOUISVILLE, KY
MADISON, WI
ROCKFORD, IL
TOLEDO, OH

Bathtub Refinishing VS Bathtub Liners



Our Coatings

Ugly Drain?



Drain Refacing

No Slippups!



Bath Safety



Locations

Please



**Only do
business
with a
merchant
you can
Trust!**



This site is best viewed at 1024x768 screen resolution.

© Copyright 1999-2012 Bath Magic, Inc. All rights reserved.
Bath Magic Inc., 120 N. Main St., Englewood OH, 45322

Last Revised 3/22/12

We offer Reglazing, Refinishing, and Resurfacing solutions! We can make those old worn out bathtub, sink, or tile look great again at a fraction of the cost of new. Servicing the Cincinnati, Columbus, Dayton and Toledo Ohio area, along with Detroit Michigan, Indianapolis Indiana, Louisville Kentucky, Rockford Illinois, and Madison Wisconsin.

Not



Art Direction Camilla Fitzhick



Digital Design Orsolya



Consultancy Paul Smith



This is the biggest reason for the death of skeuomorphic design: users are more perceptive, less patient, and clutter only slows them down.

Apps put most websites to shame with super-minimal, beautiful interfaces. And they're doing this because minimal interfaces perform better.



Flat design is just the beginning. The real trend is towards simplicity and immediacy, and we expect that to go further than ever in 2015.

4. The pixel is dead

On a desktop, a pixel was a pixel. You even had an idea of how many pixels made up an average inch: 72 dpi. Nowadays very few people know what a pixel is.



Picture created and printed at a high resolution of 300 dpi or higher, image is crisp.

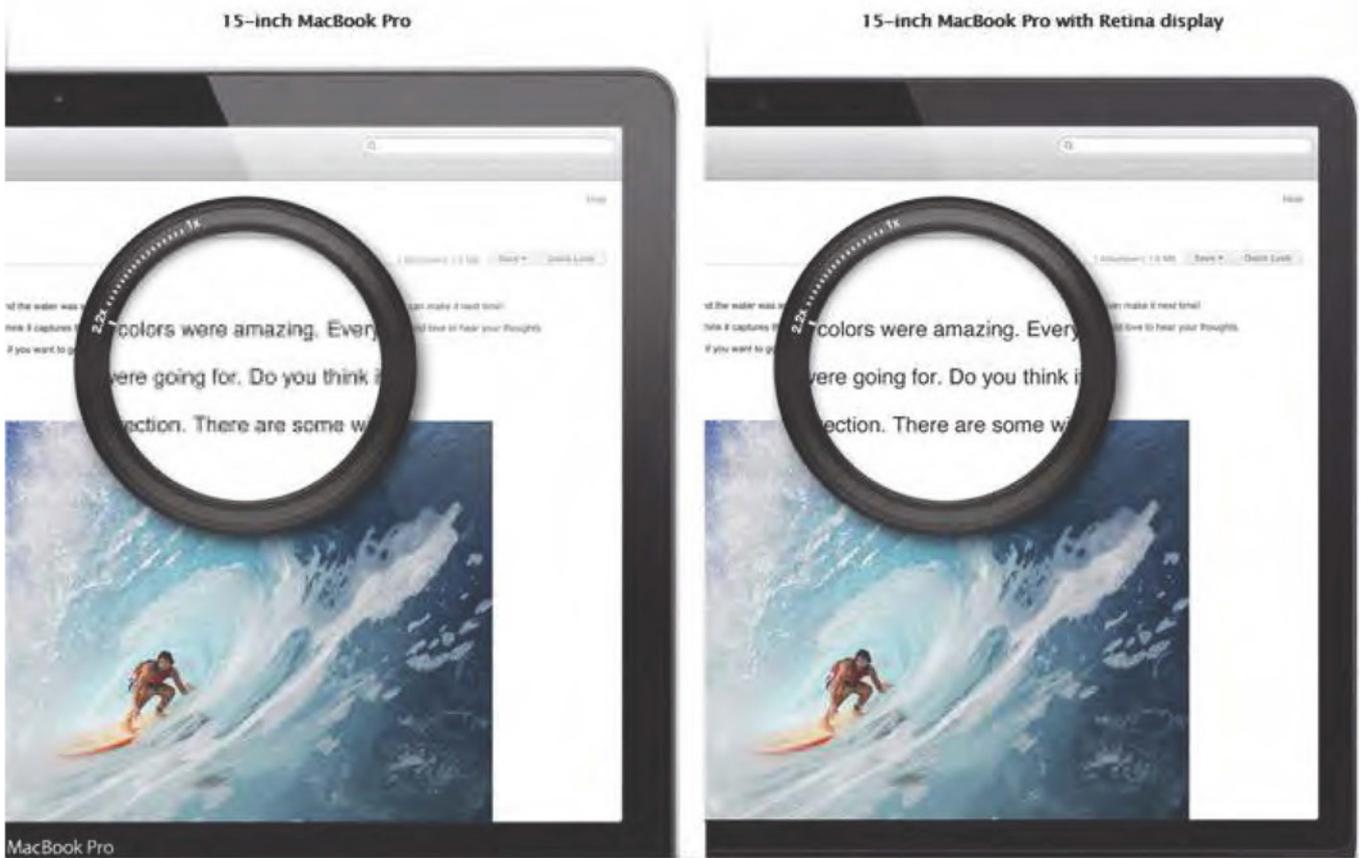


Picture created at a low resolution of 72 dpi will cause the image to be jaggy and not crisp.

With responsive design, we've seen a move towards grids and percentages. But one huge area remains still unchallenged: bitmap images.

Almost all of the web is built with images that have half the resolution of a modern display, and they don't scale. With Retina displays and modern browsers, the time is right for vector images to become more popular in 2015.

We can see this trend already happening with the font-based icons and Google's Material design. The website loads faster and scale the icons to any size without losing quality. That makes them ideal for designers and modern web browsers.



The technology exists now, but it will take time for professionals to change their habits to create for higher quality displays. Once the average desktop display becomes Retina-grade (like the new iMac), we expect designers to follow suit.

5. Animation is back

If you want to make a website look dated, cover it with animated “Under Construction” GIFs and Flash animation. But several things are coming together to make animation a rising star in modern web design.

Flat design can end up looking too consistent, boring even. Animation helps a website to stand out and to pack more information into less space.

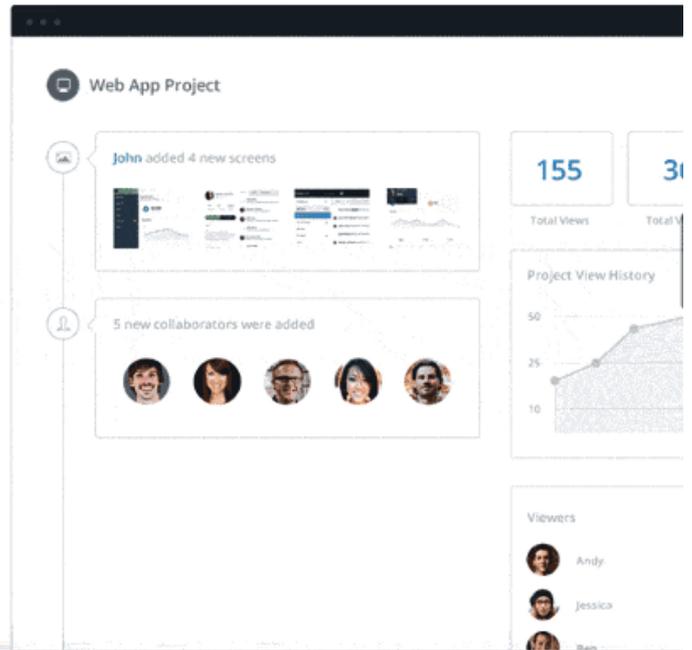
Manage design projects like never before

InVision turns feedback into tidy to-do lists. Just mark comments and screens complete to keep everyone up to date—automatically.

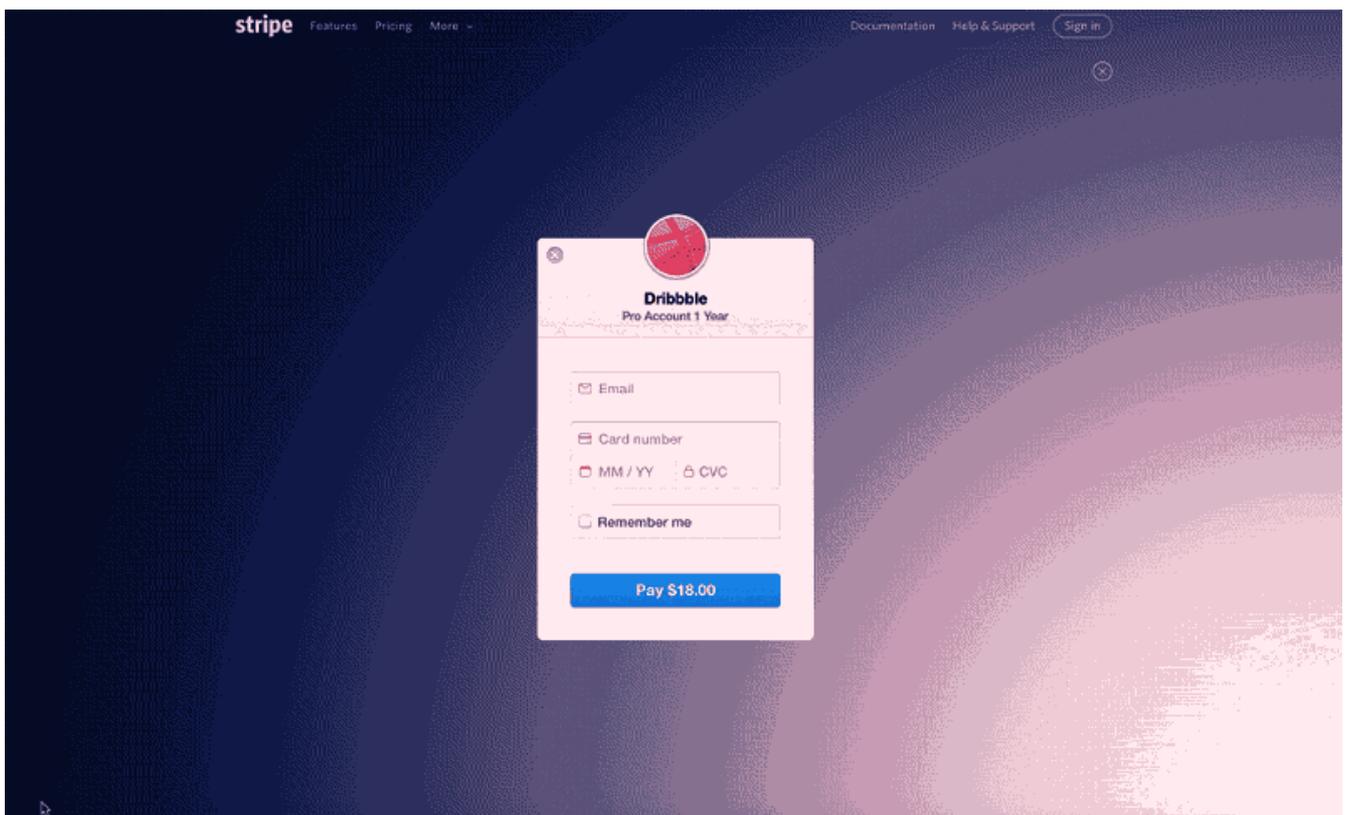


We no longer have people asking the status of a project because it's all in InVision for everyone to see. It keeps our projects moving forward. — Jennifer Hogan

gettyimages®



Mobile apps have redefined what a user expects. Mobile apps use motion to convey meaning, and websites are just starting to do the same.



New technologies like CSS animation make it easy to enhance designs without plugins, speed or compatibility issues. And Web Components (#6, below) will only accelerate this.

GIF animation is back, and surprisingly effective. You'll notice this article makes extensive use of GIF animation (if it doesn't, you should view [this version](#)), which has never been easier to create or share.

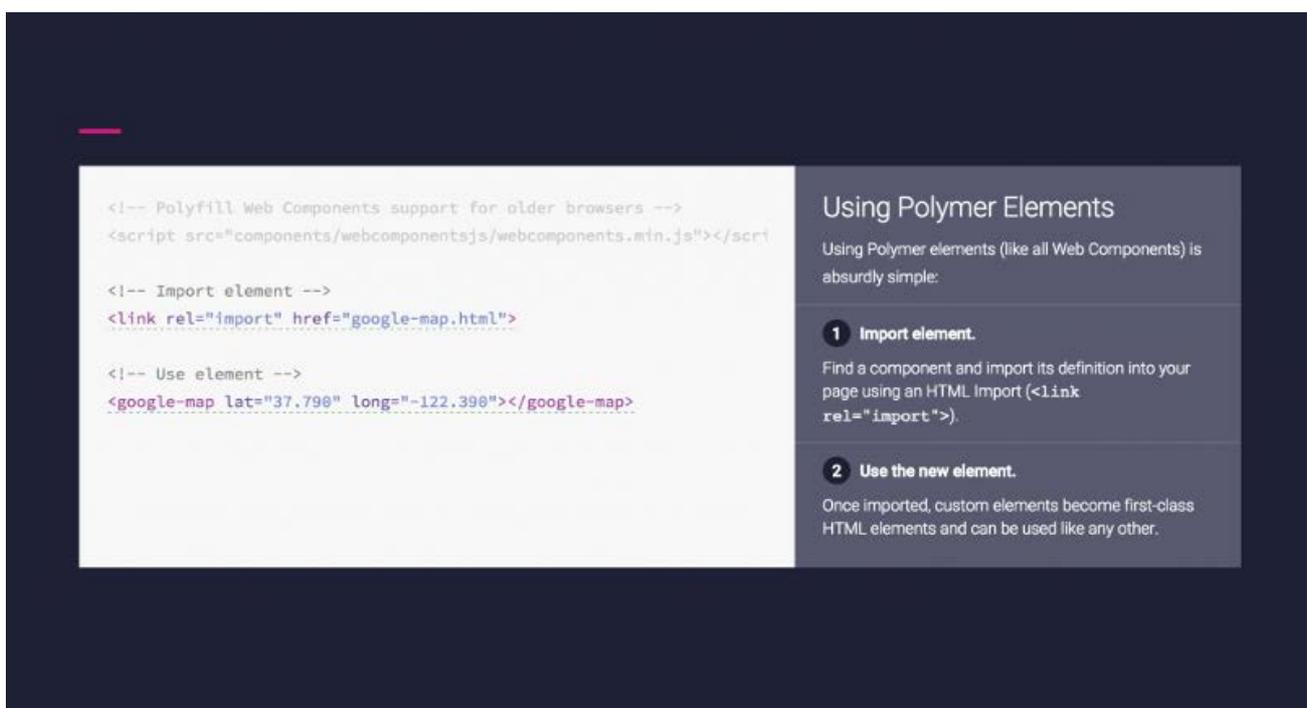
6. Components are the new frameworks

Web technology continues to get more complicated, and less semantic. Designers must embed messy code onto their pages for simple tasks, like including Google Analytics or a Facebook Like button. It would be a lot easier if we could just write something like this instead:

```
<google-analytics key="UA-12345-678">
```

And we can with [Web Components](#), which aren't *quite* ready to be used by most designers yet. 2015 is looking like their year.

[Google's Material design](#) is here, and it may just be what gets this movement started. Powered by [Polymer](#), and supported by all modern browsers, it provides the rich animation and interaction components from Android apps, with simple tags like these:



The screenshot shows a code editor on the left and a text box on the right. The code editor contains the following HTML code:

```
<!-- Polyfill Web Components support for older browsers -->
<script src="components/webcomponentsjs/webcomponents.min.js"></script>

<!-- Import element -->
<link rel="import" href="google-map.html">

<!-- Use element -->
<google-map lat="37.796" long="-122.398"></google-map>
```

The text box on the right is titled "Using Polymer Elements" and contains the following text:

Using Polymer elements (like all Web Components) is absurdly simple:

- 1 Import element.**
Find a component and import its definition into your page using an HTML Import (<link rel="import">).
- 2 Use the new element.**
Once imported, custom elements become first-class HTML elements and can be used like any other.

If that takes hold, it wouldn't be surprising to see more component based frameworks appear in 2015. Perhaps Bootstrap 4.0?

7. Social saturation and the rise of direct email

Social media has been a huge success for consumers, but many content producers aren't so happy.

The problem is saturation. With billions of posts every day, Facebook learns the posts that users are most likely to enjoy and shows only those. Unfortunately that means over time, what you post is increasingly seen by a smaller percentage of your followers. (A problem you can solve, conveniently, by paying Facebook.)

Social isn't going away, but in 2014 we've seen a lot of prominent bloggers like Tim Ferriss move their focus away from social and into good old fashioned email lists. They've realised that email has one significant advantage over social: a much higher percentage of people will see what you send them.

The 4-Hour WORKWEEK

#1 NYT BESTSELLER #1 WSJ BESTSELLER

If you could 10x your per-hour output... how would your life and business change?

"A cross between Jack Welch and a Buddhist monk."
The New York Times

"[Tim Ferriss is] The Superman of Silicon Valley."
WIRED

"The most surprising self-help hit of the decade."
Men's Journal

START HERE

DON'T DROWN IN THE DETAILS. GET THE FUNDAMENTALS FOR FREE.

JUST SUBMIT YOUR EMAIL TO GET:

- The first 50 pages of the 4-Hour Workweek
- 11 simple must-use apps and tools
- Weekly productivity tips and tricks

Your email **GET ACCESS**

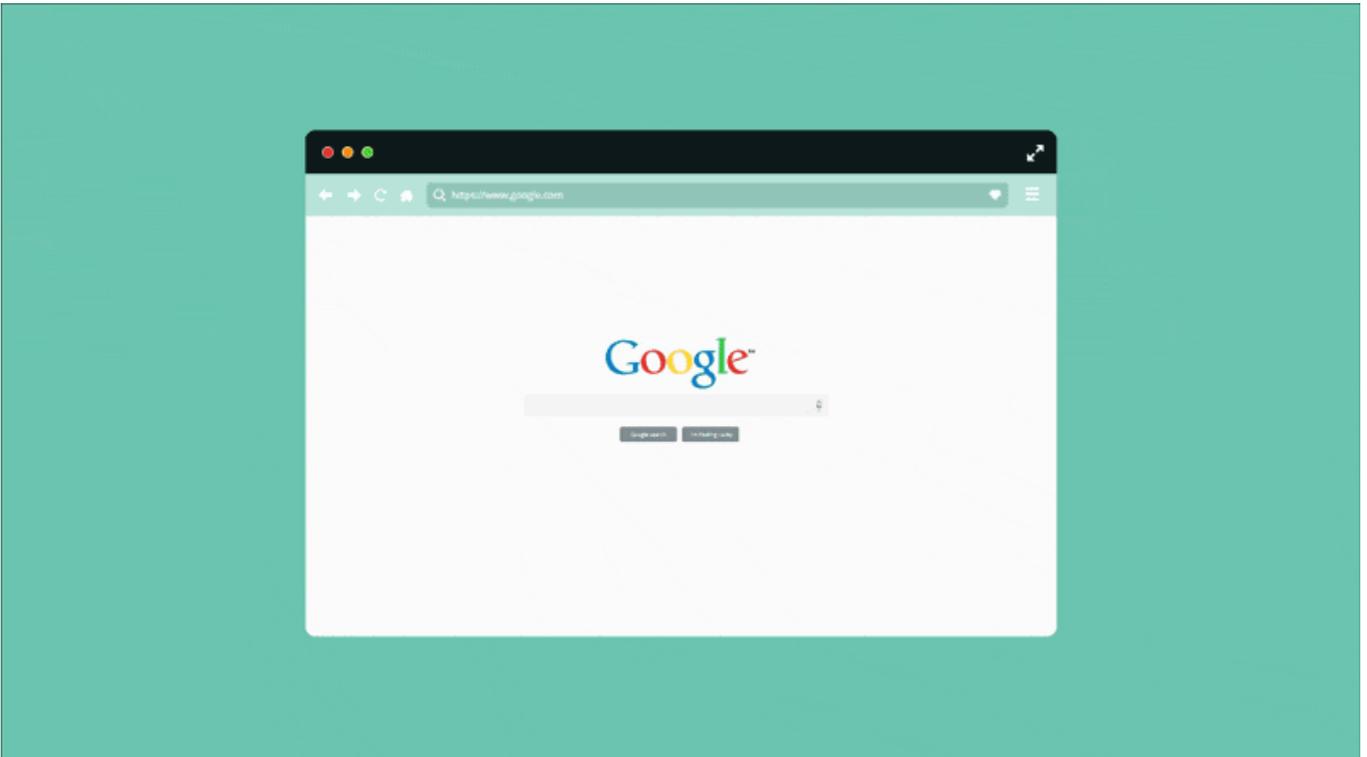
No spam, ever. Emails are never shared.

★★★★★
1,500+ 5-Star Reviews,
Top-10 'Most Highlighted' Book of All Time
amazon

"Stunning and amazing. From mini-retirements to outsourcing your life, it's all here. Whether you're a wage slave or a Fortune 500 CEO, this book will change your life!"

Phil Town
#1 New York Times
Bestselling Author of *Rule #1*

I expect this post-social trend to continue into 2015, with the under-appreciated trend of Web Notifications (which work much like notifications in a mobile app).



Bonus non-prediction: CSS shapes

This cool technology *won't* get noticed, except by designers. CSS shapes allow you to flow layout into shapes, like circles:



It's incredibly cool, but until browser support is guaranteed, this is likely to be too risky to put time and effort into it you'd need almost two complete designs, for old and new browsers. And outside of designers, we don't think many users would notice.

It *is* really cool though.

What to expect in 2015

In 2014 we saw mobile use overtake desktop, but the general public hasn't caught up. Most organisations still commission a website to look good on their computer first and work on mobile second.

In 2015 that strategy is likely to look out of touch and unprofessional. As the mobile becomes the main device for browsing the web, "mobile-first" will become less of a buzzword and more of a requirement.

Flat design may be everywhere, but when you look beyond ghost buttons the real trend is that *simpler sites are faster at gratifying users*.

Simplicity is not just a fashion: it's the future. Expect it to only continue.

It will become more and more common to embed animation into blog posts, and for motion to signify both premium quality (for those who can afford it) and to support the user experience.

Pixels and the fold will slowly be set aside making more room for scrolling and click-second experiences. Web Components will make it easier to deliver app-like experiences in our websites.

Right now you see the best of mobile app design appearing in web design. With enough time, the difference between an app and a website might almost entirely disappear.



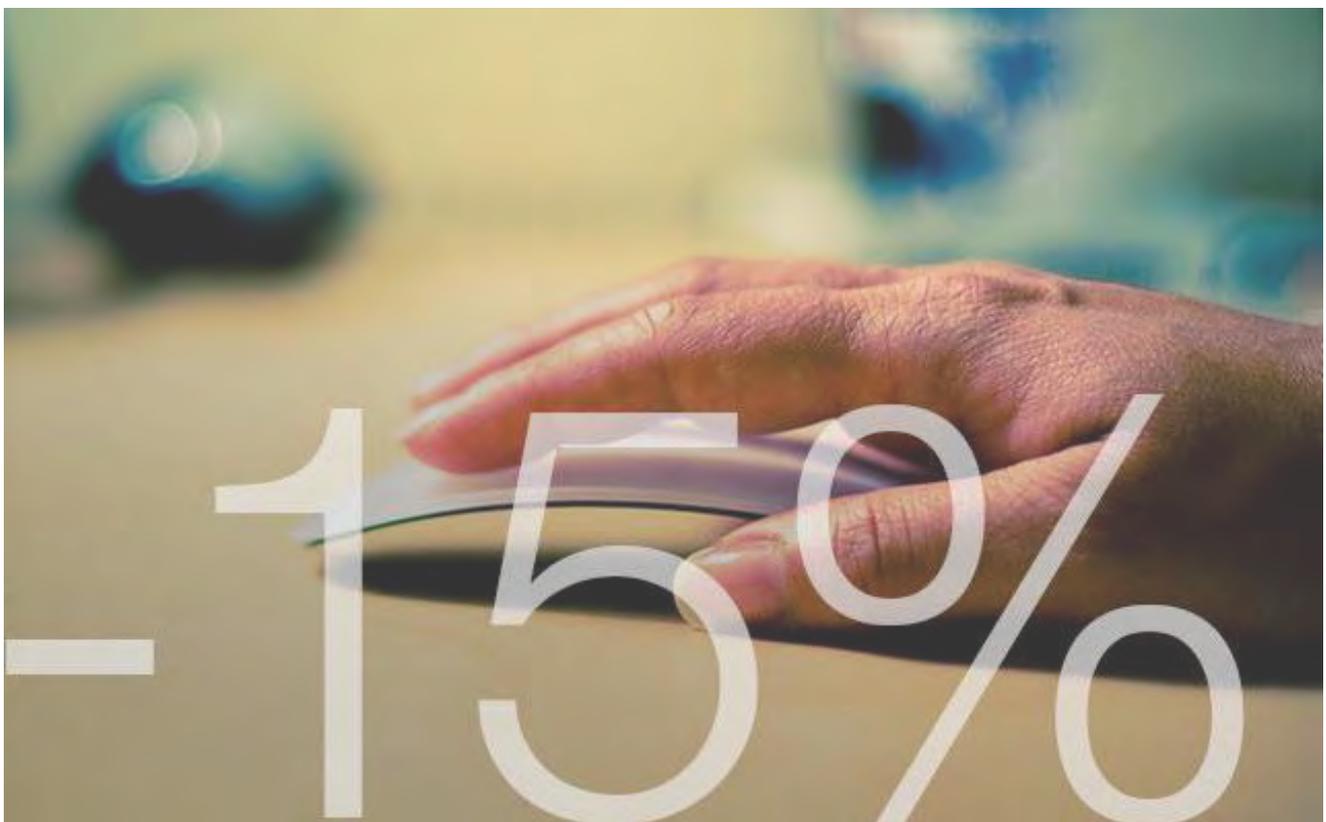
Jozef Toth

3 min read

Design

13 mind-blowing statistics on user experience

1) Infinite scrolling can decline your bounce rate. Time.com's **bounce rate down 15 percentage** points since adopting continuous scroll



Source

2) In 10 years, a \$10,000 investment in design centric companies would have yielded returns 228% greater than the same investment in the S&P.



Source

3) ESPN.com **revenues jumped 35%** after truly listening to their community and incorporating suggestions into their homepage redesign



Source

4) Choosing a specific blue over some other hues amounted to an **additional \$80 million** in annual revenue for Bing



Source

5) For every \$1 spent on email marketing, the **average return is \$44.25**



Source

6) **88%** of online consumers are less likely to return to a site after a **bad experience**



Source

7) Slow-loading websites **cost retailers £1.73bn** in lost sales each year



Source

8) Judgments on **web site credibility** are **75%** based on a website's overall **aesthetics**



Source

9) First impressions are **94% design-related**



Source

10) **85%** of adults think that a company's **mobile website should be as good or better** than their desktop website



Source

11) **70%** (of the 200 small business websites evaluated) **don't display clear calls-to-action** for anything on their home pages, such as specials, e-mail newsletters, how-to guides, demos, and interactive tools



Source

12) 90% of people use multiple screens sequentially



Source

13) You are 64 times more likely to climb Mount Everest than clicking on a banner ad



Source

Note: This article was originally written for Cameron & Wilding



Kenny Chen

11 min read

Design

The Best User Experience Design Links of 2015



2015 saw [Apple's design criticized](#), designing beyond the web & mobile screen, even more [prototyping tools](#) (including sneak peaks from [Adobe](#)), and it seemed everyone started [UX podcasts](#).

I went back and looked at all the stats of past [UX Design Weekly](#) issues—over three thousand links and many more that didn't quite make the cut—and pulled out the most popular user experience design articles, tools, resources and media from the past year based on clicks and shares.

Here's a look at the year in user experience design with the best UX links for 2015:



ARTICLES

Disney's Magicband is the Best UX Design of the Decade

If you want an amazing user experience, go to Disney World in Orlando where there is no need to carry cash, maps, or tickets, hosts greet you by name, food arrives anywhere you sit, wait times for rides are minimized and more—all through a magical wristband.

9 Pieces of UX Advice I Stole From People Smarter Than Me Some secrets and strategies that Spencer Lanooue learned from world-class designers.

How Apple Is Giving Design A Bad Name

Don Norman and Bruce Tognazzini make the case about how Apple has sacrificed user-centered design principles for beauty, and it's causing their software to be confusing.

One Magic Formula to Calculate User Experience?

Wouter de Bres tries to uncover the many factors that play a role in user experience and if there is a formula to calculate what the UX of your product is.

Design User Research Explained for Everyone with Animated GIFs

Here's 5 tips for design research to build empathy with the users and help define the overall experience.

How To Become A UX Leader

Some solid advice by Robert Hoekman Jr. about how to get what you want and be great at leading UX.

If You Do Nothing Else: DIY UX Research Tips

Some practical tips when doing UX research in-house on a budget. For more tips, I recommend Steve Krug's Rocket Surgery Made Easy.

Prototyping Tools and Process

An in-depth look into the tools and prototyping process of design teams behind some of today's most well designed products including Medium, Airbnb, Uber, Apple, Eventbrite, Pinterest and more.

The best icon is a text label

Icons are great when there is a universal meaning that everyone understands but most aren't clear without context. To have clarity, use a label.

Figuring Out Your Design Decision Style

How does your team make design decisions? [Jared Spool](#) writes about different design decision styles and the impact of each.

Showing Passwords on Log-In Screens

Microsoft, Adobe, Twitter, LinkedIn, PayPal, Amazon and more show passwords on their log-in screen. [Luke Wroblewski](#) writes about why and how to show passwords and what's coming next.

The Experience Makes the Product, Not the Features

Focus on your app's core experience and user needs and not adding features to create a compelling user experience.

Why Product Thinking is the next big thing in UX Design

Thinking in products gives designers the advantage of building the right features for the right people.

What Is Zero UI? (And Why Is It Crucial To The Future Of Design?)

What will user interfaces look like when screens go away and how to design the user experience.

So you want to be an IA?

Solid advice from [Abbey Covert](#) for those that want to be an information architect.

12 Fascinating Projects From the Bleeding Edge of Interaction Design

A look at the new kinds of devices scientists and designers are prototyping for the future.

Becoming a More Thoughtful User Experience Designer

The difference between creating good experiences and amazing experiences often comes down to how thoughtful we can remain during the design process.

Why It's Totally Okay to Use a Hamburger Icon

Steven Hooper writes on the use of menu icons today, how they have become ubiquitous on mobile devices, and how some of the current thinking about them is wrong.

The Future of Design in Technology

10 predictions of where design will be in 10 years from Julie Zhuo, Product Design Director at Facebook.

The Next Big Thing In Design? Less Choice

Aaron Shapiro, CEO of Huge, writes about the next big breakthrough in design: products, services, and experiences that eliminate the needless choices from our lives and make ones on our behalf.

Marissa Mayer's New Rule For App Design

Three rules from Yahoo's CEO that anyone can use to make their app better—the two tap rule, the 5-point rule, and the 98% rule.

Facebook's UX Master Offers Some Must-Reads

Facebook's director of product design, Margaret Gould Stewart shares her must-read books and articles about design and designing at a global scale.

Keyboard Smörgåsbord

An in-depth critique of the keyboard on iOS, followed by a set of aesthetic guidelines for the coherent visual design of software keyboards.

Fast Path to a Great UX — Increased Exposure Hours

Jared Spool writes there is a direct correlation between the time team's are exposed to real users interacting with their design and the improvements in the designs that team produces.

The Art of Iterating Quickly

How Feedly organizes their design process to absorb, structure and integrate as much feedback as possible while iterating efficiently.

Emotional Intelligence in Design

As UX designers, we design with the best intentions but sometimes things can go terribly wrong. [Beth Dean](#), designer at Facebook, writes that we need to start designing our products to be aware of emotions.

The Illusion of Time

Time is the most valuable and limited resource we have. [Adrian Zumbunnen](#) writes about how time perception shapes user experience.

Designing Twitter Video

A long but good read on the design, prototyping and research process behind Twitter Video.

God is in the details

The details that take a product from good to great are time consuming, hard to define and scope but [Buzz Osborne](#), UX Director at Campaign Monitor, offers up a few places where you can start looking for improvement in your own projects.

13 UX Mistakes Explained in GIFs

Next time someone creates one of these UX mistakes, just send them one of these reaction GIFs.

Rethinking Mobile Tutorials: Which Patterns Really Work?

5 rules for creating effective mobile tutorials—use less text, don't frontload, make it fun, reinforce learning through play, and listen to your players.

Embracing Uncertainty in UX Research

Matt Gallivan, UX Researcher at AirBnB, write that if you're a UX researcher, you do yourself and your field no favors when you claim to have all of the answers.

The Paradox of Empathy

Scott Jenson writes that empathy is a vague concept that isn't strongly appreciated by others and while it leads to big, important insights, it usually starts with small steps.

Design Details: Instagram for iOS

A detailed look at the design of one of the most popular photo apps with lots of subtle use of motion and microinteractions.

Great Design Portfolios Are Great Stories

Simon Pan, gives advice on how to tell the story behind your work.

How to Give Better Product Feedback

The best feedback is the one most likely to create empathy and elicit product change. Cemre Güngör, product designer at Facebook, offers some tips to give better feedback.

In Design, Empathy is Not Enough

Dan Saffer writes that empathy will get you to see the problems from the users' perspective, but to solve the problem you have to understand.

So, you're going to be a user researcher: top tips to get you going

An awesome list of books, articles, and tips for those getting into user research.

How to Fix a Bad User Interface

Scott Hurff breaks down the rules of the UI Stack and the five states that help you create a cohesive interface that's forgiving, helpful, and human.

Look and Feel and Feel

Jason Fried, Founder & CEO at Basecamp compares the experience of how Twitter and Instagram make him feel and the feeling we should design for.

Spatial Interfaces

Pasquale D'Silva explores thinking inside and outside the bounds of the screen to design a spatial interface.

One of the Biggest Mistakes I've Made in My Career

Former Lead Designer on Photoshop, Illustrator & InDesign, Andrei Herasimchuck, reflects on the age old question—should designers in tech learn how to code? For the other side of the argument, check out Designers Should Design, Coders Should Code.

Designing Live for Facebook Mentions

I love write-ups like this where we see design decisions, challenges, and iterations when designing a feature—especially for a product like Facebook, with such a large user base.

The Principles of UX Choreography

5 principles on how to captivate your audience and how they interact with your story.

How Google Finally Got Design

A look into Google's transformation into a company that creates beautiful software in the mobile era.

6 Tips for Designing Happiness

The secret to consumer loyalty is less about the moment of interaction and more about what comes before and after.

Do as I Say, Not as I Do

Great advice for students of UX that are looking to get into the business by [Dan Brown](#).

This Is All Your App Is: a Collection of Tiny Details

Getting the details right is the difference between something that delights, and something customers tolerate.

Good Design

What makes a good design? [Julie Zhuo](#) writes about an early design lesson and something she still thinks about all the time.

Don't Be a User Research Robot

Giving recommendations that the team should focus on and being personal when doing user research are two tips [Chuck Liu](#) thinks you should always do.

In Search of the Design Documentation Unicorn

There isn't a single best resource for documenting designs and design decisions but [Dan Brown](#) provides some ways to better communicate ideas and work with stakeholders and engineers.

The Nine States of Design

Here is a great checklist by [Vince Speelman](#) of various states to keep in mind when designing components of an interface.

Usability Test on Product Hunt for iPhone

[Eric Lee](#), Product Designer at [Tradecraft](#), conducted a usability test on the [Product Hunt app](#) and provided a nice look at his process, findings, and redesign.

A Behavioral Approach to Product Design

Changing behavior is hard. [Aaron Otani](#) writes about the four steps to designing products that impact behavior.

This Is How You Design Your Mobile App for Maximum Growth

Your userbase will never cease evolving so your product shouldn't either. [Kamo Asatryan](#) shares formulas he relies on to help mobile apps optimize their entire user funnel, counterintuitive lessons and mistakes he's learned on the job.

A Little Empathy Goes a Long Way

One of the many characteristics of a UX designer is empathy. This is a guide for an easy way to understand and apply empathy better.



TOOLS & RESOURCES

Designer's Toolkit: Prototyping Tools

Cooper made a handy sort and filter tool to help you find the best prototyping tool for the job.

UX Recipe

A checklist where you discover, choose and estimate your next UX project tools & techniques.

The Only UX Reading List Ever

A recommended reading list of 60 books you should read by [Simon Pan](#) to learn deeper your knowledge all things UX.

Figma

A collaborative web tool for user interface design that allows for many simultaneous users to design together. This one has a lot of potential.

Design Research Techniques

Huge online repository of design techniques throughout a project lifecycle

18F Design Method Cards

A collection of research and design practices that we use to better understand and serve the users of our products.

Capptivate for iOS

Capptivate is a curated collection of app animations. I wrote about the [website](#) in a past issue and now they just released their complete collection of app animation videos for your iPhone.

U.S. Web Design Standards

Open source UI components and visual style guide to create consistency and beautiful user experiences across U.S. federal government websites. [Read more about the process and how you can help.](#)

Project Comet

One UX design tool to rule them all? Design and prototype websites and apps with this all-in-one tool. It looks like it has a lot of potential.

Facebook Design Resources

A collection of free resources made by designers at Facebook including an [iOS 9 template](#) for both Photoshop and Sketch.

What Kind of Design Work Should I do?

A flow chart for designers wondering what project should they take on, where they should work or what should their career look like.

Mobile Touch Overlay

Free touch overlays for use in your favorite wireframe or mockup tool based on research about how people see, hold and touch their mobile phones and tablets.

UX Community on Slack

Join UXers from around the world to discuss user experience in this lively Slack channel.

Principle

A new tool for Mac to create animated and interactive user interface designs. It looks like it has a lot of potential.

Wake

A private space to share and discuss design work with your team.

User Flow Patterns

A nice, growing collection of short user flow videos.

Mastering Sketch 3

A comprehensive guide to designing in Sketch.

Use Your Interface

A growing library of transitional interface and interaction design patterns to help you inspire and communicate your UI ideas with people.

User Interfaces IO

A daily delightful curation of user interface animations.

UX Reactions

UX related reactions in the form of animated GIFs.

Atomic

Atomic launched this year and looks to be a promising tool to design, prototype and share beautiful interactions.

Pixate Studio

Google acquired Pixate and now Pixate Studio is free.

Design in Tech Report 2015

John Maeda highlights the rising importance of design and says the most successful tech companies of the future will be design companies.

Empathy is Everything

A collection of research, articles, stories, practices, exercises and other resources on empathy by [Whitney Hess](#).

U.S. Smartphone Use in 2015

Lots of great data on smartphone use. If you don't have time to read the whole report, at least read the sidebar for the key themes.

Prototyping with Framer

Step-by-step tutorials to learn how to prototype interactions with [Framer](#).

UI Haus

A showcase of the best mobile app designs ever made.

Empty States

Delight users by designing the empty states.



Interaction15

Talks and panels from Interaction15, held in San Francisco in February 2015.

How to Make Sense of Any Mess

Abby Covert's amazing book on information architecture is available online, for free.

UI Talks

A collection of UX design related conference talks all in one place

UX Week 2015

Videos from Adaptive Path's UX Week 2015 have been uploaded. See talks from [Leah Buley](#), [Abby Covert](#), [Erin Hoffman](#) and more.

Uideo

Over 300 videos for designers from over 40 conferences.

This is the golden age of design! ...and we're screwed

Make some time and watch this talk by [Mike Monteiro](#) at [Webdagene 2015](#) about designers, their importance and mentors.

Dollars to Donuts

A new podcast by [Steve Portigal](#). In the first episode, he talks with [Gregg Bernstien](#), Researcher for MailChimp, about how MailChimp uses research to uncover new product opportunities.

The Design Details

Another new podcast about the people who design our favorite products hosted by [Bryn Jackson](#) and [Brian Lovin](#).

The UX Reader

An ebook from Mailchimp's UX team of their most popular articles along with some exclusive content. It used to be a \$5 donation but now they have made it free.

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For last year's list, check out [The Best User Experience Design Links of 2014](#).

Do you have any links you loved that I missed? Share your thoughts with me on Twitter ([@kennycheny](#)) and check out [UX Design Weekly](#)—a hand picked list, curated list of the best user experience design links every week, published and delivered to your inbox every Friday for free.



Marie Poulin

6 min read

The big mistake nearly every designer makes.

And quite honestly, it's not a mistake that is unique to the design profession.

I'm guilty of it myself, and I see it all the time with very talented designers...

If there is one change that you could make right now that will make the world of difference in your business, it's this:

Leave more margin.

I stumbled upon the concept of *margin* while reading [a post by Michael Hyatt](#), which led me to [design my ideal week](#).

Richard Swenson, M.D. (who wrote the book: *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives*) describes margin like this:

"Margin is the space between our load and our limits. It is the amount allowed beyond that which is needed. It is something held in reserve for contingencies or unanticipated situations. Margin is the gap between rest and exhaustion, the space between breathing freely and suffocating.

Margin is the opposite of overload. If we are overloaded we have no margin. Most people are not quite sure when they pass from margin to overload. Threshold points are not easily measurable and are also different for different people in different circumstances. We don't want to be under-achievers (heaven forbid!), so we fill our schedules uncritically.

Options are as attractive as they are numerous, and we overbook.”

Last year I wrote about why booking too far in advance can be dangerous for your business, and this concept of *margin* so eloquently captures what I had recognized had been my problem: I was so booked up with clients that I wasn't leaving any margin for error, growth, planning, or reflection. I wasn't really *growing* my business in a sustainable way; I was just booking one client after the next. At the time this seemed like a good thing: **doesn't growing my business mean getting more clients?**

What if instead of booking up to 100% capacity (which more often than not ends up being closer to 120%), we only booked up to an 80% capacity?

What if we left more room for growth (personal or professional) and stopped being one with “*busy-ness*”? I spent nearly a year turning down every new project (and even getting rid of old ones) so that I could reduce my workload, build in more margin, and create what is now Digital Strategy School. *It takes time to build margin into your schedule.*

What could you accomplish with 20% more time?

Write a book. Create a program. Update your contracts and proposals (which has been on your to-do list for how long..?) Spend more time with your family. Go above and beyond for a client. Learn something new. Actually follow through on the things that have been nagging at you for a long time.

When you design your ideal week, you start to see that **the time you think you have is often not in alignment with how much time you actually have.**

After designing my ideal week, I had a much clearer idea of how to create a framework for my week that would empower me to feel more focused by theming days of the week, and even parts of the day. SO simple, I know. Some of you have been doing this for ages and you're already a pro, and some of you who saw my schedule said “woah, that's so rigid, I need more flexibility!”

But here's the thing:

Structure enables flexibility.

Structure *allows* me to be in proactive mode.

Start by tracking your time.

If you're not sure how much time you are actually spending on various tasks, use a tool like Rescue Time (their free version is excellent!) which runs in the background and tracks where your time is being spent. It can even send you weekly reports so you know exactly how much time you wasted on Facebook, or spent in your email inbox! You can assign different websites or programs/applications on a scale of very distracting to very productive, so you can see at a glance things like: which days of the week you're most productive, which times of the day you're most productive, and the sites on which you're spending the most distracting time. Turns out I'm consistently "in the zone" around 3pm in the afternoon; so instead of trying to tackle highly creative work first thing in the morning (when my brain is barely functioning), I handle it in the afternoon, when I know I'm at my peak!

I manually track my time spent on general client work, meetings, and personal projects using Timely app, while leaving Rescue Time running in the background so I have a general sense of how much time I spent between apps and within different websites. With these 2 tools, I have a pretty good sense of where my time is going week to week.

Theme your days

I themed my days in a way that made sense for me:

Sunday: Rest and plan for the week

Monday: Mentorship

Tuesday: Client Work + Content Creation

Wednesday: Mentorship

Thursday: Masterminds

Friday: Oki Doki work day (new business development, design, content, creation, community building, brainstorming, etc)

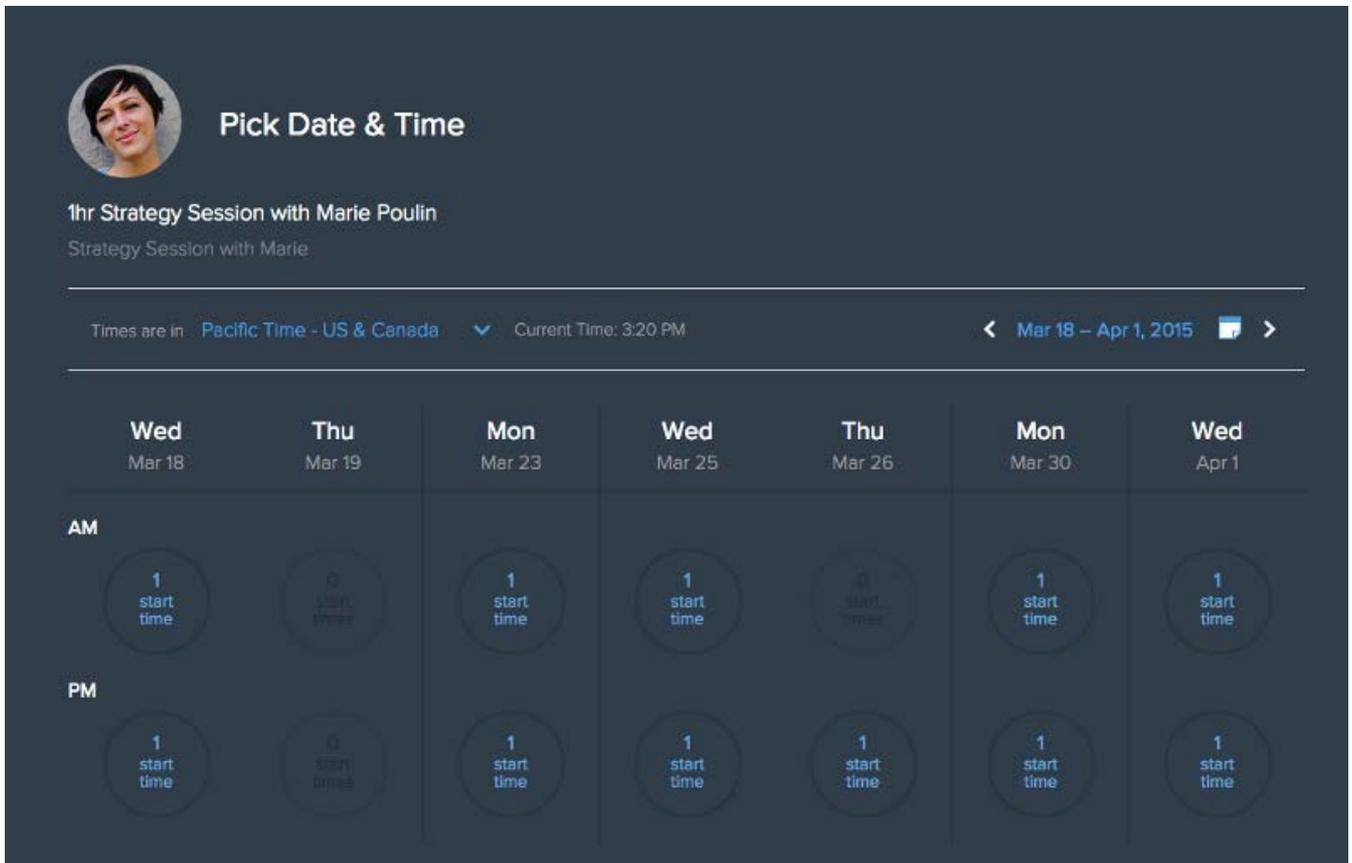
Saturday: Personal day: personal development, friends, errands, catch-up.

Mondays and Wednesdays are now set aside for Digital Strategy School work/mentorship, Tuesdays and Thursdays are now my major work and content creation days, while Friday is entirely set aside for Oki Doki work and planning. This is just a loose theme for the day, that still allows me some flexibility with how I spend my time each day.

	<i>Rest + Plan</i>	<i>Mentorship</i>	<i>Creation</i>	<i>Mentorship</i>	<i>Mastermind</i>	<i>Oki Doki</i>	<i>Personal</i>	
	Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	
08:00 - 08:30	Barely functioning							
08:30 - 09:00	Read Blogs and News				Eat	Read		
09:00 - 09:30	Shower, Dress, and Eat				Mastermind (every other week)	Eat		
09:30 - 10:00	Process E-mail				Process E-mail	Process E-mail	Shower, Dress	
10:00 - 10:30		DSS Mentorship	Client Work	DSS Mentorship	Process E-mail	Oki Doki	FUCK BRUNCH Mastermind	
10:30 - 11:00		Admin		Client Work	Content Production			
11:00 - 11:30								
11:30 - 12:00								
12:00 - 12:30		Mastermind	Optional Meeting	DSS Mastermind or DSS Interview	DSS Mentorship	Optional Meeting		
12:30 - 01:00								
01:00 - 01:30	LUNCH + Walk Mochi							
01:30 - 02:00								
02:00 - 02:30		DSS Mentorship	Client Work or Content Product	DSS Mentorship	Client Work or Content Product	Oki Doki + DSS		
02:30 - 03:00				Optional Meeting				
03:00 - 03:30								
03:30 - 04:00								
04:00 - 04:30		Client Work or Content Product		Client Work or Content Product	Mastermind			
04:30 - 05:00								
05:00 - 05:30								
05:30 - 06:00								
06:00 - 06:30	Weekly Review	Process E-mail						
06:30 - 07:00		Plan Tomorrow						
07:00 - 07:30		Dinner with Ben						
07:30 - 08:00								
08:00 - 08:30								
08:30 - 09:00	Climbing		Climbing or Work Night	Climbing or Work Night		Date Night + Climbing		
09:00 - 9:30								
9:30 - 10:00								
10:00 - 10:30								
10:30 - 11:00								
11:30 - 12:00								
Code:	Not negotiable	MP Work	Personal Dev	E-mail	Oki Doki Work	Optional Meeting	Free Time	

I mapped out all my non-negotiable and personal time first.

This means no skipping lunches to keep working, and making physical activity a must. It's easy to put that stuff on the back-burner when things get busy, but physical activity is so essential to my sanity, that only by mapping it out into my schedule do I actually *really* feel committed to it (reminders and all).



My schedule will always be a work in progress, but simply by limiting the times I'm available in my scheduler system (I use Calendly for this), I've managed to create more space for content creation, brainstorming, planning, designing, and just *life* in general.

Maybe you've got children, or other obligations, hobbies etc. Add them to your calendar and theme your week in a way that makes sense for *your* values, goals, intentions, etc.

Seriously, try the exercise for yourself—you might be surprised. If you feel overwhelmed by all the work you have on your plate, or you have time but you're distracted and unfocused, then you definitely need this exercise!

Consider how you might be overbooking yourself, and think about what would be possible if you built more margin into your schedule (and life).

Creating more margin has been game-changing for my business. **What would be possible for yours?**

Originally posted on mariepoulin.com/blog.

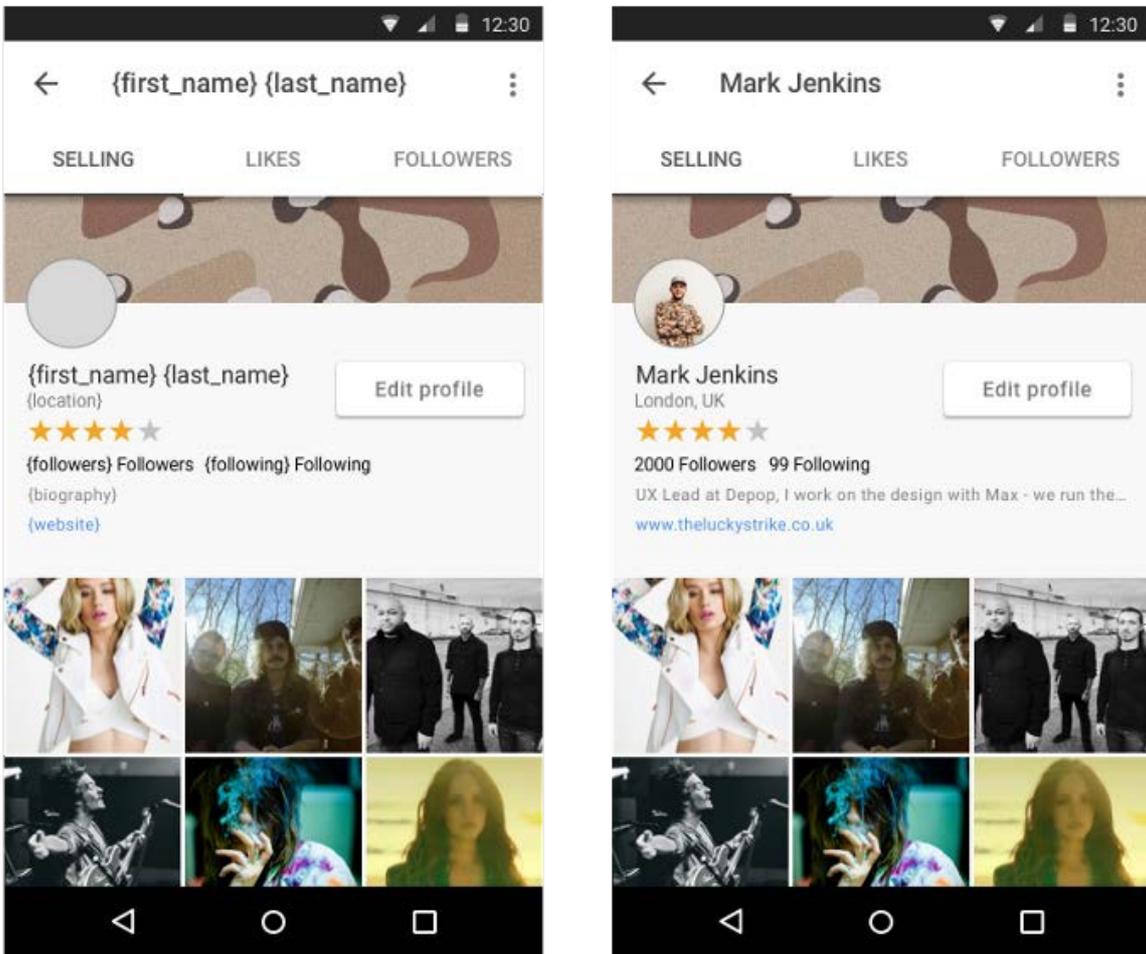


Marie is a digital strategist, designer, and the chief mentor at Digital Strategy School. She regularly writes about business and strategy on her blog, and collaborates with her partner Ben over at weareokidoki.com.



Mark Jenkins
4 min read

Designing with Data



Before and After artboards using Sketch placeholders and JSON

We're constantly looking for new ways to improve how we design at Depop.

This morning [Sam](#), our product manager, posted a link into our Slack channel: [Modern Design Tools: Using Real Data](#).

As the article states, we're in a state of flux where a designer spends a lot of time

creating pixel perfect designs either in their favourite tool, or with prototypes. We're not making the most of what's available to us and we're definitely not excelling by using real data.

Using data, we can see where the problems arise, where the exceptions and edge cases lie and whether our design really works in the way it was intended.

Examples:

- Someone's first and last names are (*too*) long and don't fit where you intended it to.
- Someone's username is (*too*) long and doesn't fit where you intended it to.
- A username that includes emoji and breaks your *perfect* layout. and so on...

What can we do about this?

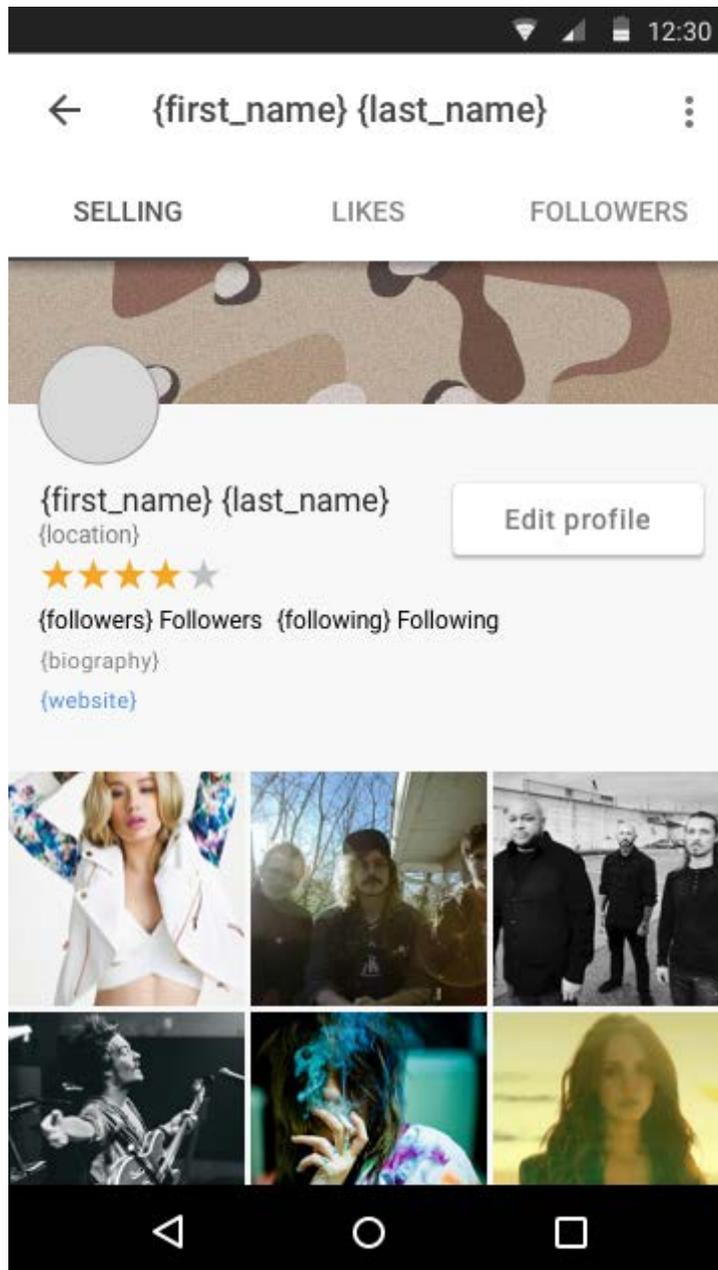
The answer is simple.

Real people use the things we love to build; our products and platforms.

We've built a data structure which allows us to use this data to create designs that come to life.

The answer is data.

Getting to work with Sketch and JSON



Setting up the Sketch artboard with placeholders

The team uses Sketch to craft the Depop app for [iOS](#) and [Android](#). We find that it's a tool that compliments the way we work, by enabling us to quickly prototype and iterate on designs.

The thing we love is that is supported by [people making all manner of plugins](#) and these extend the functionality of the tool to enable us to work in ways that were just not possible before.

Using [Precious Design Studio](#) and Lukas Ondrej's [Sketch Data Populator plugin](#) we were able to quickly prototype a template for the profile view and use a JSON file to add real data to the design.

We start by using placeholders on the parts of the design we wanted to fill with the data. For text we use something like `{first_name}` or `{bio}` and simply use the text tool to create these and then apply our text style to these so everything remains intact.

Next, we make sure the text field is of a fixed width so that when populated with data, we retain the design we started with. (This takes a little bit of playing around with, especially when dealing with values of different character lengths).

For the image, we change the layer name to a placeholder reference and in this case we call it `{avatar_img}`

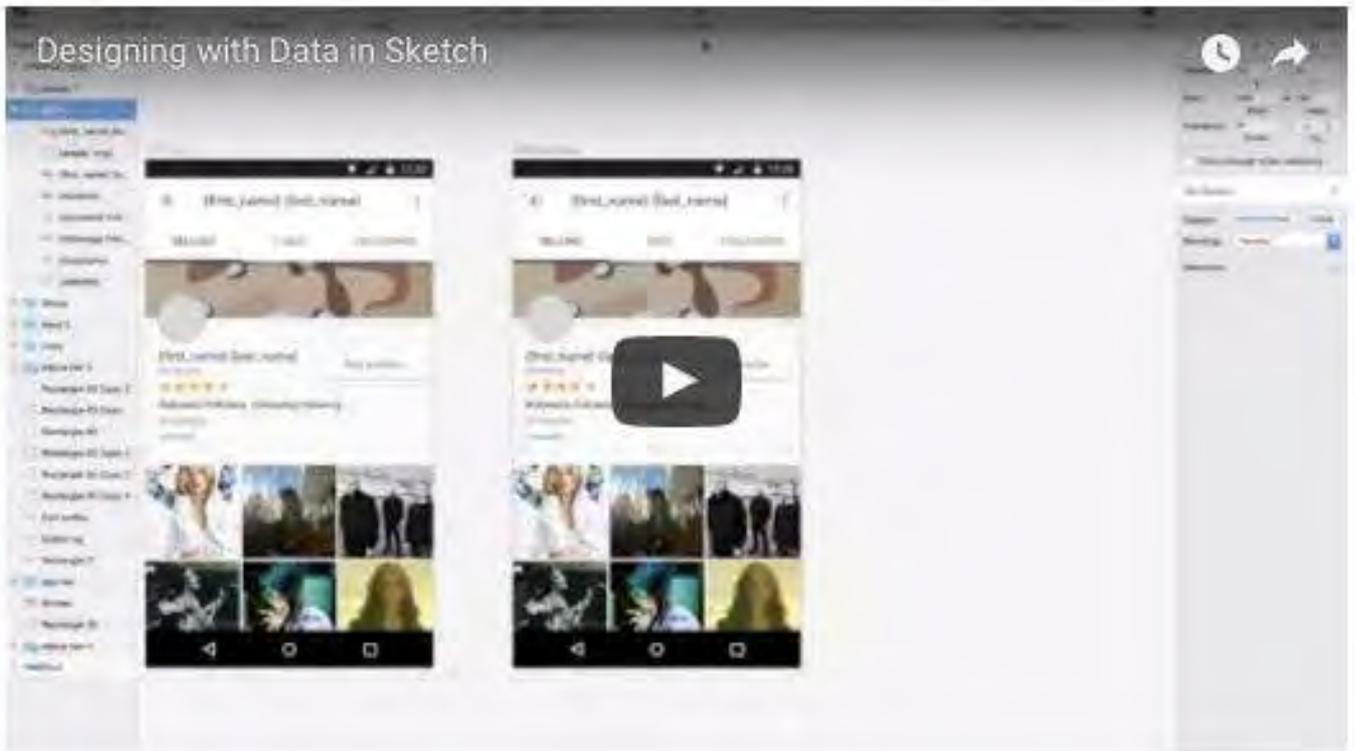
The JSON file

Next we setup a simple, local JSON file to reflect the same values as the placeholders and use an `/assets` folder to reference the images we wanted to include in this test:

```
1 {
2   {
3     "id": "1",
4     "first_name": "Mark",
5     "last_name": "Jenkins",
6     "location": "London, UK",
7     "followers": "2000",
8     "following": "99",
9     "biography": "UX lead at Depop, I work on the design with Max - we run the design team!",
10    "website": "www.theluckystrike.co.uk",
11    "avatar_img": "assets/1.jpg" }
12 }
```

gistfile1.txt hosted with ❤️ by GitHub [view raw](#)

Making sure that all of the dynamic elements were in a Layer Group, we then call the JSON file with the plugin and by way of magic, the fields are filled with the required data.



Demonstrating the process in action—simple!

What's next?

As a quick test we used a local JSON file and local assets for any images. Next, we plan to bring a live JSON file using our own internal APIs and produce a modified plugin that will allow us to match any placeholder with its data counterpart.

This means we can design with photos of items people list on Depop in context of their profile, their feed, their activity and so on and this will allow us to further extend our design capabilities.

Sketch will allow us to design a module, let's say the 'Suggested User' block and use JSON to pre fill with live data. Then, we can define this module as a symbol and reuse this with interchangeable data to produce a 'live' design.

Benefits

Spend time making sure our designs reflect what we intended and work the way we expected them to.

Believe that our design work is much more than a visual representation of our ideas.

Demonstrate that it's combination of how it works and looks so by working with data, we're going a step further to understanding how the design works with the other parts it requires.

Design is a sum of all the parts.

Stay in touch by subscribing to my weekly newsletter. You can follow me on Twitter too.



Matt Bond

3 min read



Slack's design is not secret sauce

Design is important, but it's not enough

I read [this article](#) Andrew Wilkinson published a couple of days ago by the agency who designed the branding and original UI for Slack.

Full disclosure: I'm a designer at Atlassian and have been focused on HipChat for the last few months.

The views expressed here are my own, and not representative of Atlassian.

. . .

Let's start this off right and give credit where credit is due. Slack is an incredible product and the company has done extremely well. Atlassian's relationship with Slack has been great too. Their co-founder, Stewart Butterfield, interviewed with Pando daily inside our San Francisco office recently. There is absolutely no bad blood between us.

Now that we've established what I agree with—that Slack is a great product—here's what I take issue with in Wilkinson's article: Slack's design is one part of the success of any product, and a very important part, but it is still only one part .

I can't deny that Slack has a nicer aesthetic than HipChat. It does look nice and it is fun to use. But here's the thing—a lot of nicely designed products never take off or get noticed. Good design is not enough. There are so many pieces to consider and things you have to nail to get a product out ahead of the pack.

Here's my list.

The timing needs to be right

Slack's timing was perfect. HipChat had been on the market since 2009. HipChat pulled users out of IRC, GChat and email, and was first in the space, but it never really got over the top and converted enough teams. Slack emerged just in time to capitalize on this space.

Selling a purpose, not a chat tool

The 'We Don't Sell Saddles Here' article from Stewart hits the nail on the head. I read that article every month. It's 100% true but incredibly hard to achieve. Slack didn't come in and compare itself to HipChat, it just said that this was the new way to work as a team. The messaging around Slack has been amazing. You most definitely need to have the product to back it up too and Slack has that.

Pedigree

Stewart was the co-founder of Flickr. There are years and years of wisdom here that allows him to be in the position to create the fastest growing enterprise product of all time. There aren't a lot of people in the world even capable of doing this.

The media hype machine

If I had a startup and called up the WSJ and said "I've got a product that will revolutionize team communication" they would hang up the phone. When Marc Andreessen calls up the WSJ and says the co-founder of Flickr has something that will change team communication and we've invested in it, journalists listen.

Existing team

Slack had a core team of people that knew how to work together. They pivoted from a game company so they were probably a well oiled machine when they started on this idea. This is totally different to starting a company from scratch and hiring

people you have never worked with. Building teams is really hard and this is ultimately what has them out in front right now.

All the things

You can have a well designed product but if you don't have great marketing then no one knows it exists. If you have great marketing but a shitty product, no one will use it. If you don't solve a real problem but have good design and good marketing, no one will use it. Slack has executed in every area of building a product.

. . .

I honestly couldn't be happier for Slack. It's a great product and I doubt I will see something take off like this again in my lifetime. Sure, I wish Slack wasn't a competitor, but that's not why I'm writing.

Ultimately I hope we can keep design out of an ivory tower and continue to acknowledge that teams make great software, not designers. Ironically that's exactly what the app enables—better team communication. Slack's design is not secret sauce. It's one ingredient in a delicious recipe.



Matthieu Aussaguel

8 min read

Design

What happens when an Apple guy explores Material Design?

He may or may not upgrade his design style to awesome!

Background by Oxygenna.

What makes Material Design so incredibly attractive is how smooth and straightforward

it is to get started and explore possibilities it has to offer with app, animations and even site design. The pace at which the Material Design trend is growing is a tribute to that, and pretty soon we'll start seeing bigger companies turn to Material Design.

At least that's what Jurre Houtkamp seems to think, a talented designer from the Netherlands who used to believe that all good design and user experience comes from Apple. Quite the 180° turn! When exploring Material Design, Jurre took upon re-designing well-known icons, starting with Slack, and the result is quite astounding. **So we interviewed him to understand his approach and creative process when creating icons using Material Design.**

Hi Jurre, can you tell us a bit yourself and how you became a designer?

My name is Jurre Houtkamp I am a 20 year old dutch designer based in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

There have been only two moments in my life when I really knew what I wanted to do when I grew up; at the age of five when I was certain I was going to be a policeman, because that way I couldn't get any speeding tickets. And when I landed my first internship at an app and web development company. From that moment on I knew I was going to be a digital designer focused on user interfaces for apps and website and the branding behind those.

Three years later I spawned a company named Cabarera with two good friends who are both extraordinary in their own way. We make up a solid team with a wide variety of skills ranging from web design to Illustration and branding. In September I plan on starting another study in the field where I'll focus on Front-end development, motion design, User Interface and User Experience design. Just because I can't get enough.

A life without speeding tickets still sounds very tempting, so if none of this works out I can still pursue my five year old self his dream and become the fanciest looking policeman with custom badges all over his uniform.

That's a cool backup plan! So what first attracted you to exploring Material Design?

I have to admit I'm an apple guy and up until about a year ago I had no attention for Google or Android whatsoever. I saw parts of Google's I/O when they first introduced Material Design but I had been so disappointed with Android that I didn't put in the effort to actually understand what Material Design was. A few months later a lot more Material centered posts started to appear on Dribbble, and then it hit me; this not only beautiful but also genius and game-changing.

So as my 15 year old self would do I started to experiment with Material Design and read up on about everything Material Design related. First I tackled the app/web interfaces and soon the corresponding icons and animations followed.

Google won me over and in my eyes they finally understood what the user want: visual feedback, and that's all Material Design is about.



Finder icon, by Jurre Houtkamp

I used to look over android users' shoulders on the bus and laugh at their clunky phones running a half-assed operating system. Nowadays I look down at my iPhone wondering why I'm still not rocking newest Google Nexus with Material Design dripping all over it.

And where do you get your inspiration?

My biggest inspiration has been [Dribbble](#) for a few years now. I love getting up in the morning and browsing Dribbble for the next hour only to find myself planning my next upload for the next three hours. There is no better way than learning from the best and it's definitely the place to find the best. It has led me to getting some of the best instant feedback I have ever had, and it's also very motivating when you instantly see the likes and views pop up when you post something you've been working on for weeks.

Besides Dribbble I've recently added [MaterialUp](#) to my morning routine for my daily dose of Material Design sweetness.



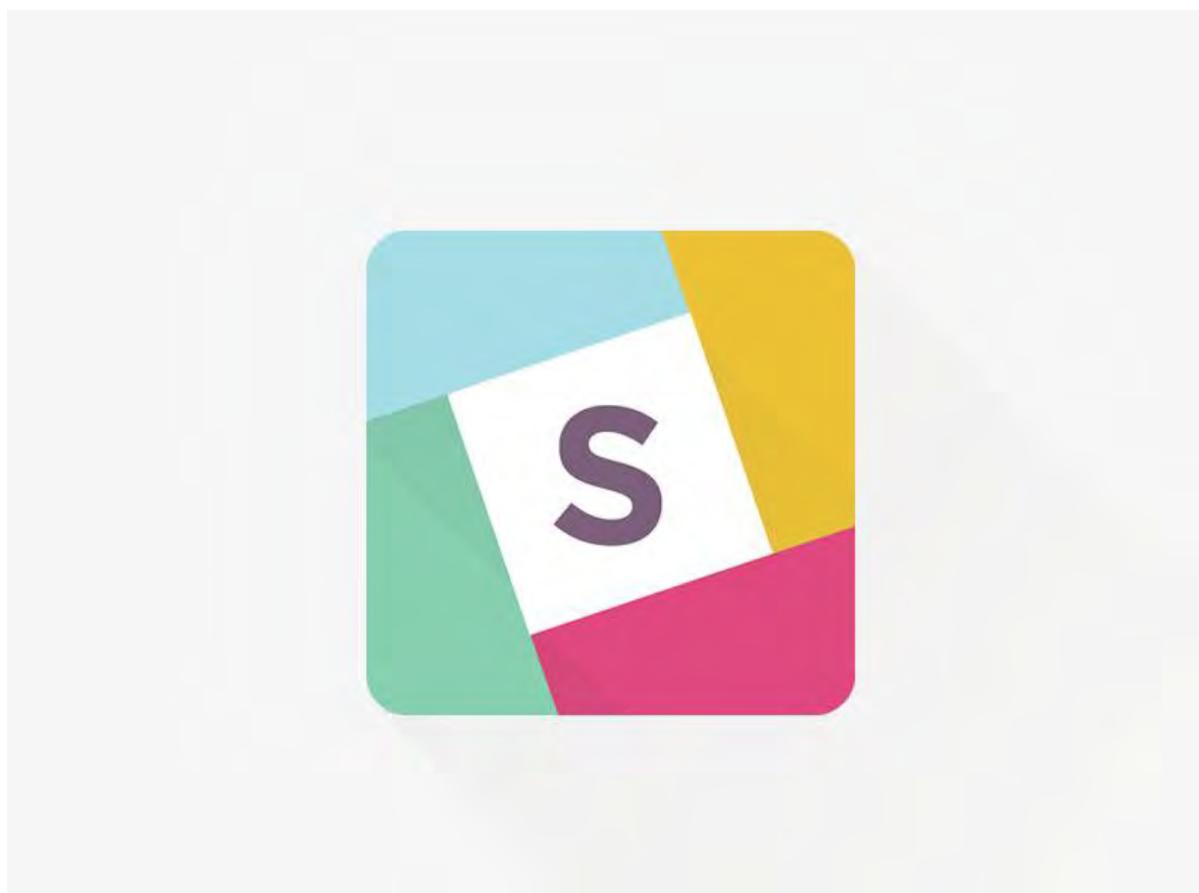
MaterialUp App Icon, by Jurre Houtkamp

I keep discovering new people everyday who are brilliant in their own way, but to name my absolute favorite it would be a fellow dutch designer based in San Francisco called Sebastiaan de With from Pictogram Agency. Not only his work but also his entrepreneurship has been a great inspiration to me. His icon pack called 'Muir' actually inspired me to make one of my own.

We really love your redesign of of the Slack icon. What's your creative process?

'A spark of genius' thats what a friend keeps saying when something pops into his head and he just slaps it together in Photoshop in a few minutes. It's one of those precious moments when the stars align and everything seems to fall into place. I'm not insinuating that I'm a genius but I do get these special moments where my IQ peaks above 20 and I don't feel like a caveman drawing up the latest animal he saw. The Slack

So I decided to give it a go and Materialize it. This made me go on a two day design spree where I tackled almost every icon in OSX and rebuild them from scratch.



The Slack Icon by Jurre Houtkamp

Some of them hard, some of them ‘Sparks of genius’ like my friend says. I don’t think there is a standard process to the way I work. I’m all about doing and figuring it out on the go, it’s the best way to learn because you fail a lot.

Absolutely, don’t be afraid to fail because that’s the only way you’ll become original. What tools do you use?

As a passionate User Interface designer I had to get Sketch. I never really looked into Sketch because I felt like Photoshop could handle everything I did. But Stretch to Photoshop is like getting your first Apple computer after you’ve been messing around with Windows since you were a kid, you don’t get it until you use it.

Of course Photoshop and Illustrator have been and still are my go-to-guys for the past few years now. Illustrator mainly for iconography and logos, and Photoshop for about everything Sketch and Illustrator can’t solve.

I’m always open to trying new things and as long as it works, looks pretty and is not Windows exclusive I’m down to get dirty.

How do you choose colors?

When designing something Material style there are clear guidelines set by Google on what colors are fit for the style and I try to stay with those colors. I usually use an online palette like Material Palette to quickly find the right combinations and color codes.

When it comes to designing anything else my eyes usually serve me right. When designing for a client for instance colors usually come to mind during the design process because of how the product they want makes me feel or how they want it to make others feel.

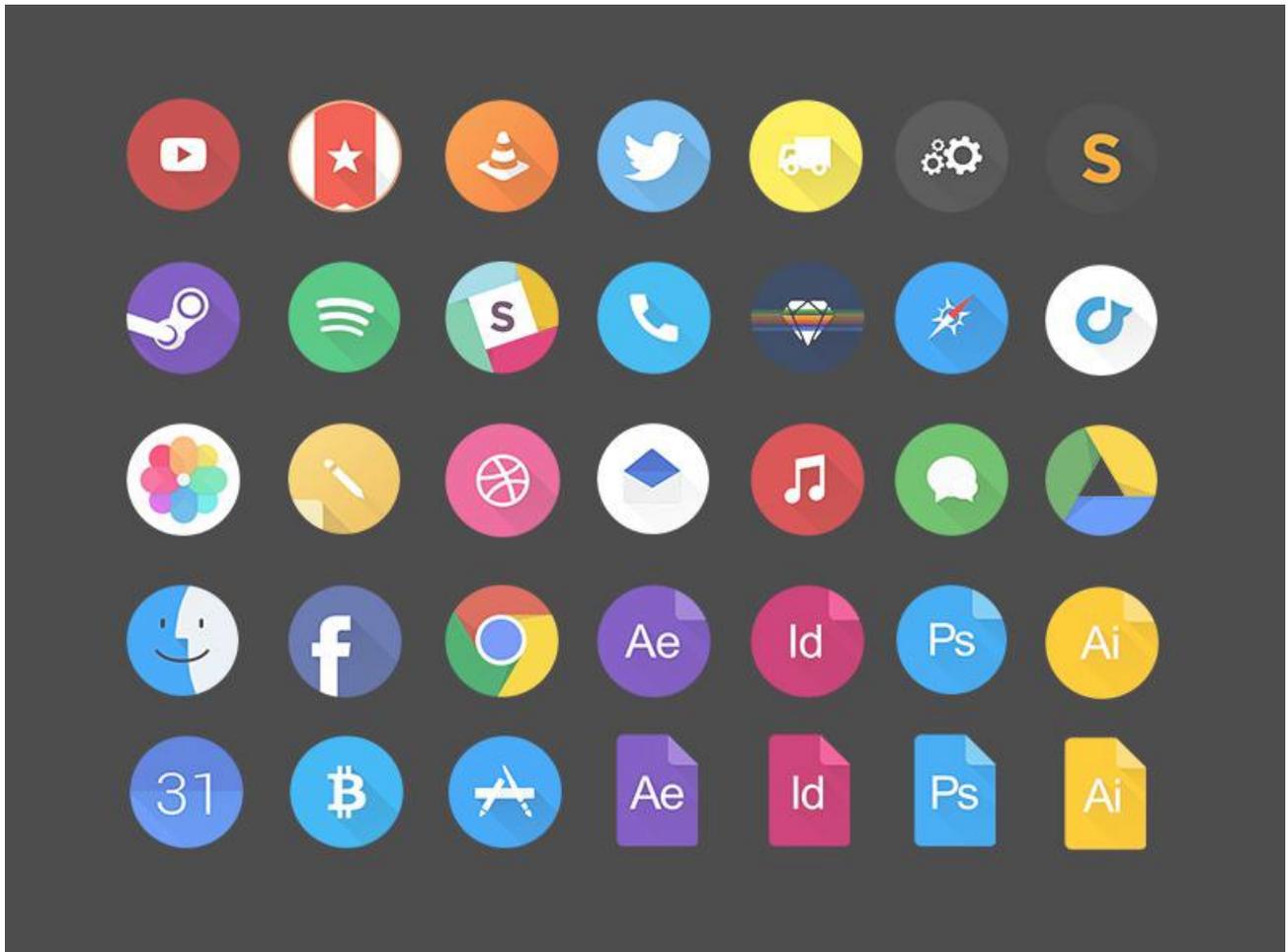


Photos Icon in Material Design, by Jurre HoutKamp

What is the biggest challenge you've come across so far?

My biggest challenges have probably been getting stuck on a design. Whether it's a simple icon or a big complicated Interface for an app it happens all the the time.

Last time I got stuck was on some icons that are featured in the pack I uploaded, the Adobe ones, Photoshop, Illustrator and After Effects. The challenge was to keep the icons consistent and circular but simply adding the initials of the app to a colored circle didn't quite do it for me. I decided to step away from them for a while and focus on other ones.



Material Inspired Icons by Jurre Houtkamp

So the best lesson I learned when that happens is to just put it aside for a while, work on something different or even better work on nothing and come back to it later. Most likely you'll get inspired by your surroundings or by working on something else and you'll be able to solve the problem with a clear mind the next day.

Besides that the main thing I do when I get stuck is browse the internet for inspiration, so that's what I did. Dribbble, MaterialUp even [Google's Material Design guidelines](#), I went through the mall for several hours sometimes even days. In the end the solution was a very simple one but completed the icons in my opinion.

What's your favorite use of Material Design for icons so far?

My favorite use of Material Design is probably the current inbox icon by Google. I'm sure this is also the icon that got me more interested in Material Design, the icon defines Material Design in every way and the animation work by Google's [John Schlemmer](#) completes it.



Inbox by Gmail by John Schlemmer

Not to mention all the other work and his team have done at Google. Their animation work defines Material Design and it would be nowhere without it.



Google Calendar Animated Icon by John Schlemmer

Do you feel that Material Design will have a long term impact on how icons are designed?

If Google keeps pushing out Material Design to their products I think it's here to stay. You see a lot of companies already adjusting their apps and icons to fit Google's design aesthetics on Android and even iOS. And I think with Android's current growing popularity this will only increase.

Every time Google or any other company updates their app to fit Material Design I get excited and can't wait to use the product. I've seen friends and also big players make the switch from iPhone to Android because Android is no longer the clumsy ugly duckling in the pond. It has drastically improved itself with Material Design and I believe it will continue to do so.

. . .

There sure is a bright future for Material Design. Thanks Jurre!

You can follow Jurre's work on [MaterialUp](#), [Dribbble](#) and [Twitter](#).

. . .

Read next:

[Should you use Material Design on iOS?](#)



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Originally published on the [MaterialUp Blog](#)



Meng To
8 min read



. . .

When Material Design was announced, I was impressed with Google's efforts to raise their game in the design field. It's something that Apple had always been ahead. Not anymore. I remember complaining a lot about Android design's inconsistencies, lack of documentations, unattractive dark theme and overuse of the ambiguous Hamburger menu. Material Design solved a lot of that. It now offers a consistent design language that is lighter, more colorful, backed by solid guidelines that are well-considered.

But while the colors are pretty and the use of cards give a great sense of depth and tactility, I often asked myself, is this really better than Apple's iOS Design as a lot of designers say it is? I'd like to give some of my thoughts on why I think it's different, not necessarily better.

Similarities to iOS

Let's start with the 3 core principles in iOS: **Clarity**, **Deference** and **Depth**.

Clarity is about text legibility, obvious icons and good contrast. Clarity can also be platform-specific. What's clear to iOS or Android users highly depend on what they're familiar with. An icon may be instantly recognizable to iOS users but not to Android users, and vice versa.



Depth is another principle that both platforms share. But they approach the concept differently. iOS promotes **blur** and **gradients** while Android gives priority to **drop shadows** and the concept of **paper**.

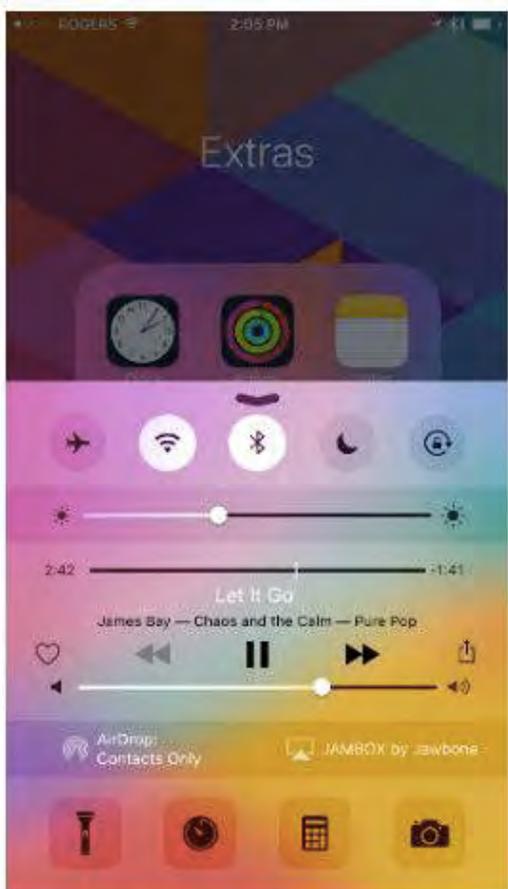
Skeuomorphism 2.0

Despite what most say, both platforms replicate real life in major ways. They're *skeuomorphic* using blur, drop shadows and animations that use physics and realism of space. Skeuomorphic design was helpful to introduce new concepts using familiar metaphors, but the overly detailed textures and 3D effects definitely ran its course. As users, we outgrew it because technology is no longer so foreign to us. We're at a phase where a leathered calendar or vinyl disc make less sense than a digital concept.

The digitalization of design makes old concepts obsolete and downright confusing.

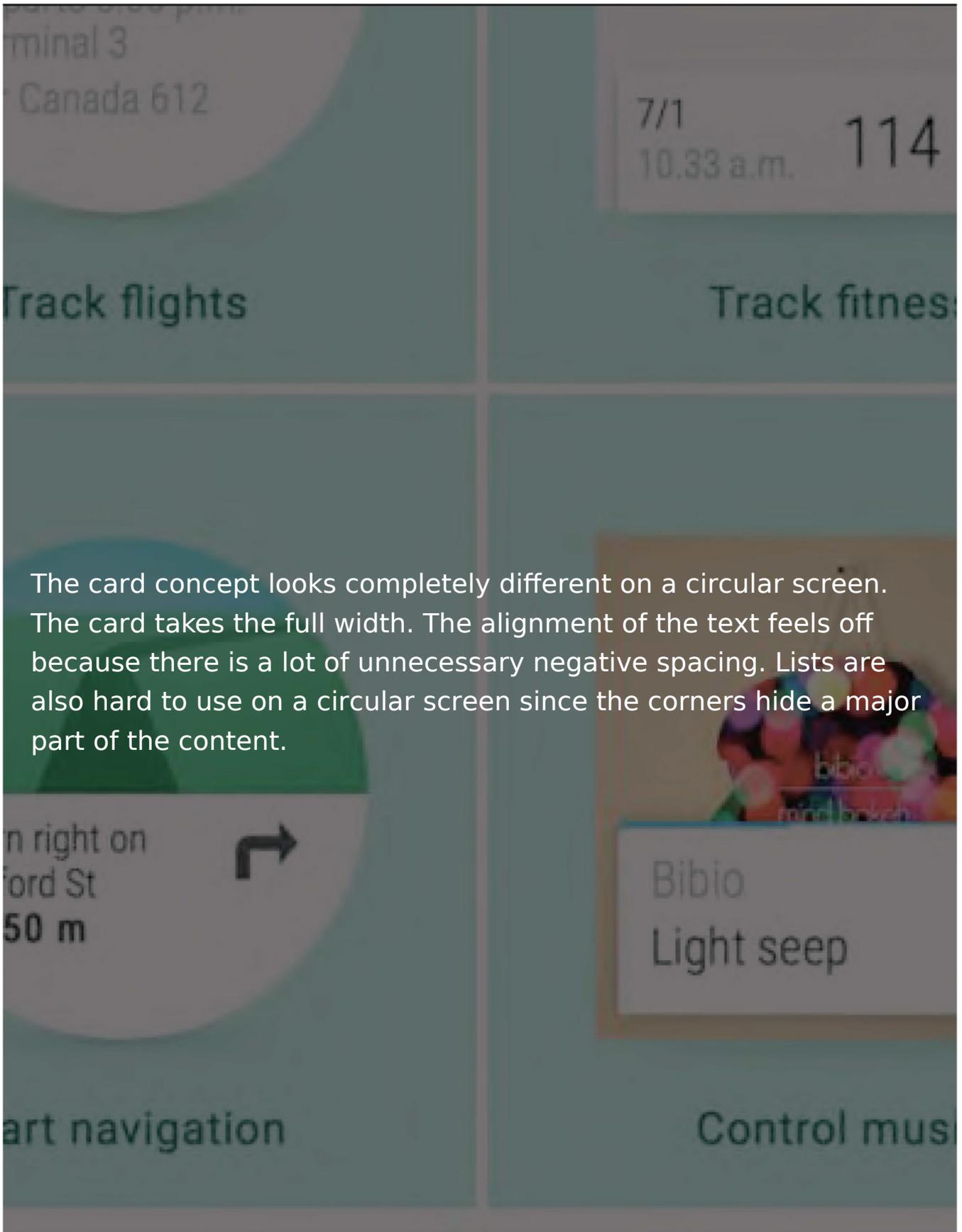


Nobody uses these calendars anymore.



In both of these design languages, there are weaknesses.

For example, it looks off to have multiple layers of blur on top of each other. Also, the vibrancy added can be too much.



The card concept looks completely different on a circular screen. The card takes the full width. The alignment of the text feels off because there is a lot of unnecessary negative spacing. Lists are also hard to use on a circular screen since the corners hide a major part of the content.

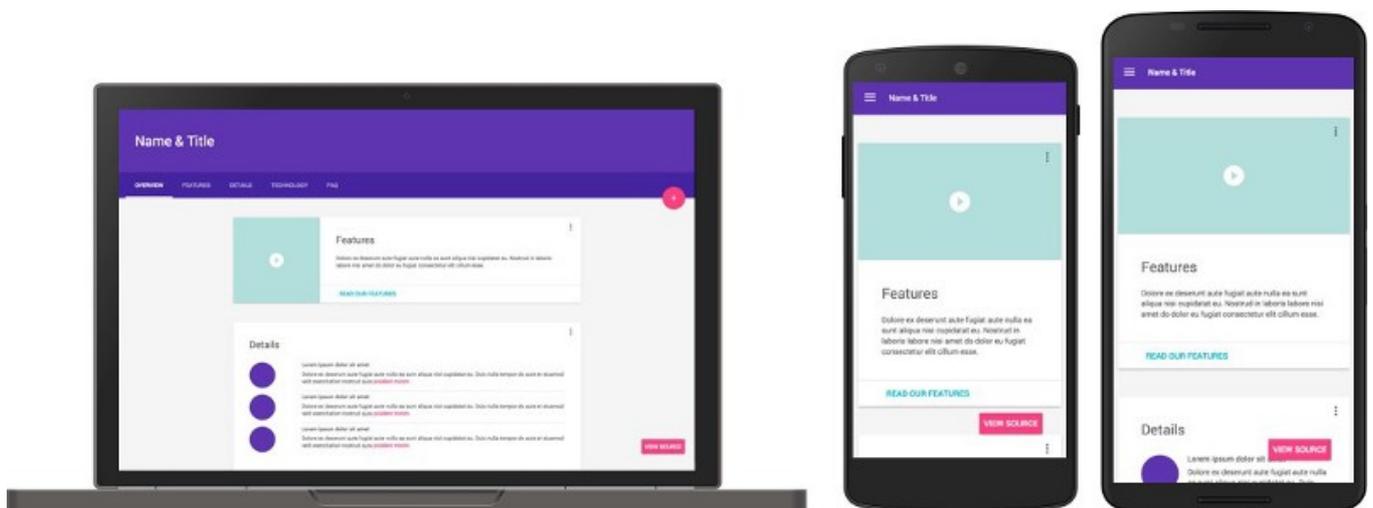


These Android Wear faces look awesome though. This truly feels like the UI was made for a circular screen.

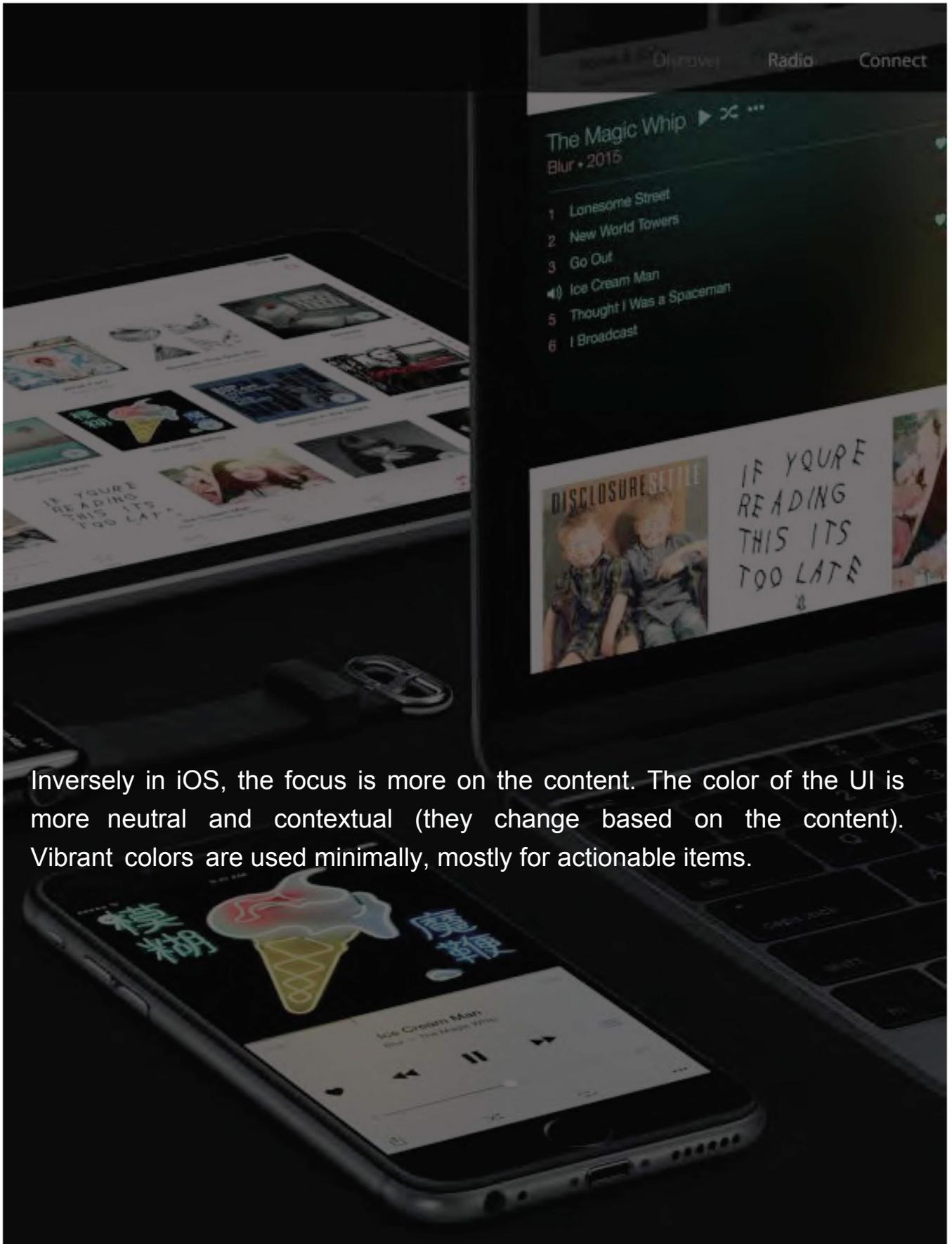
Content Isn't King in Material Design

Deference is where it differs a lot. iOS gives total priority to the content while Android uses the concept of cards to make the content seem more **tactile**, thus losing important real estate in the left and right portions of the screen. The overwhelming colors also take priority over the content.

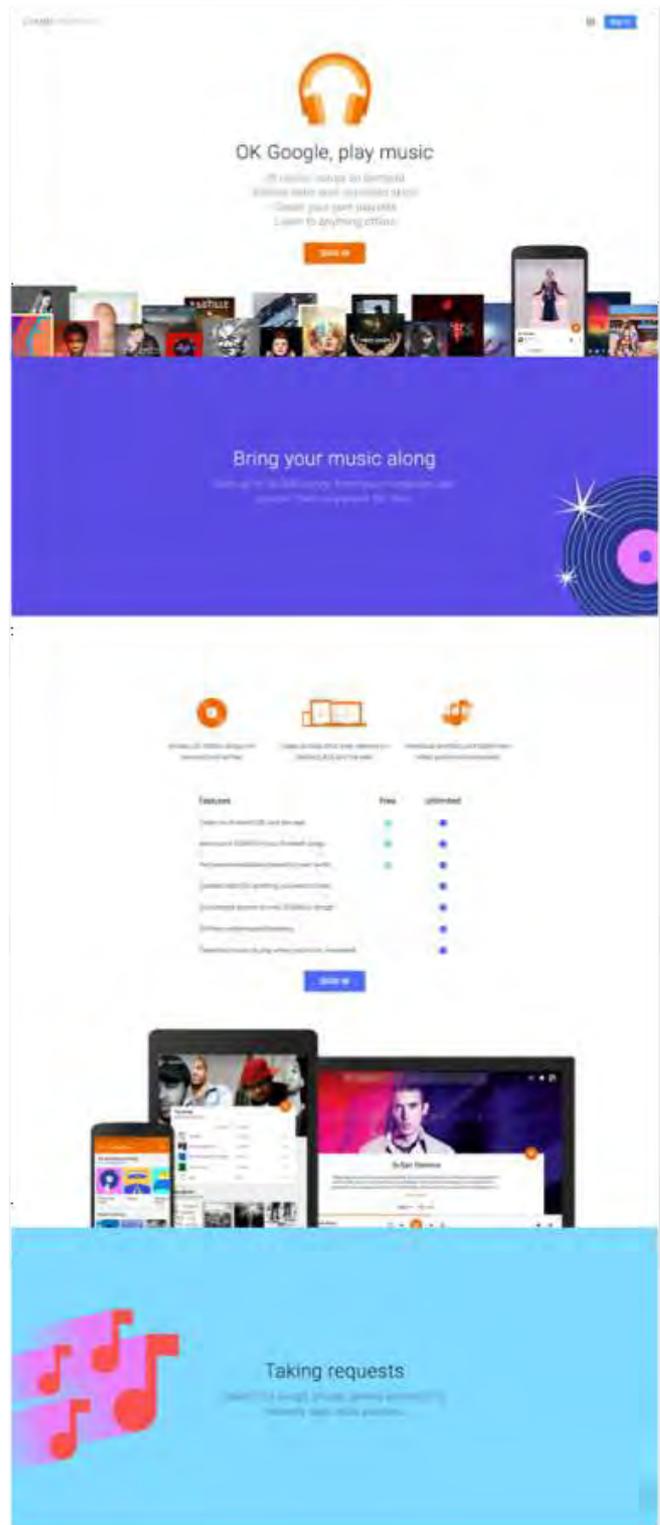
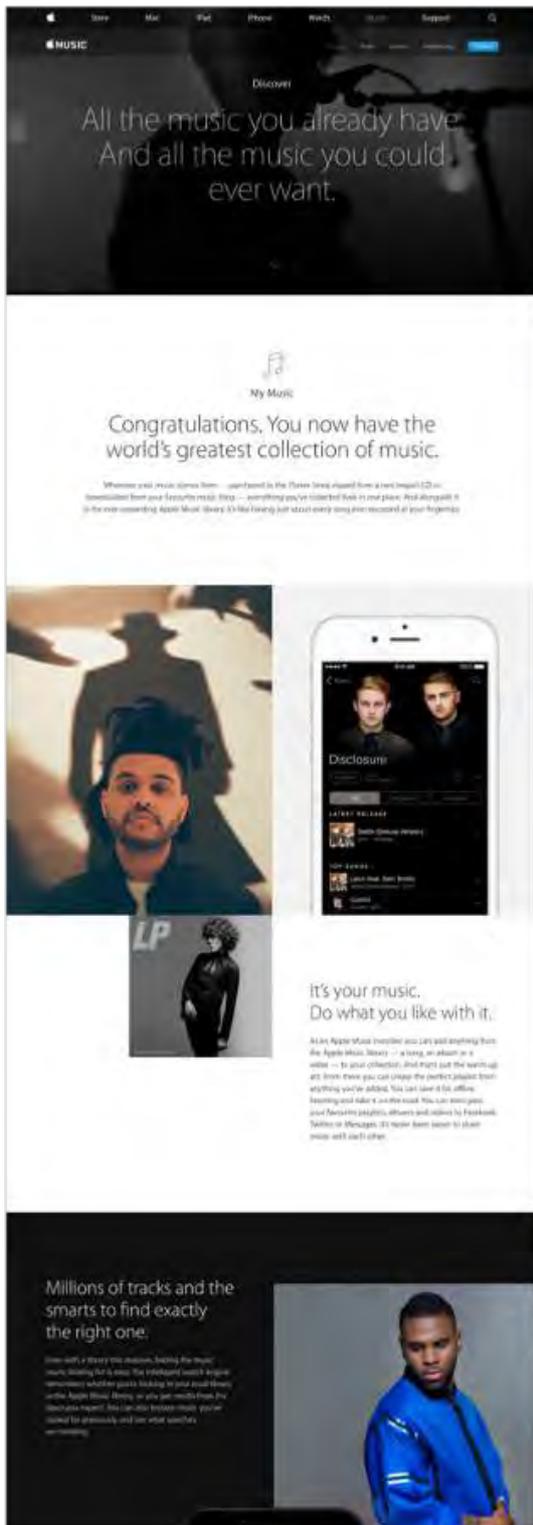
The **FAB** (floating action button) hides the content and gets in the way of the interactions.



There is a strong focus on colors, navigation and call to actions. (This is the newMaterial Design Lite, created for the Web)



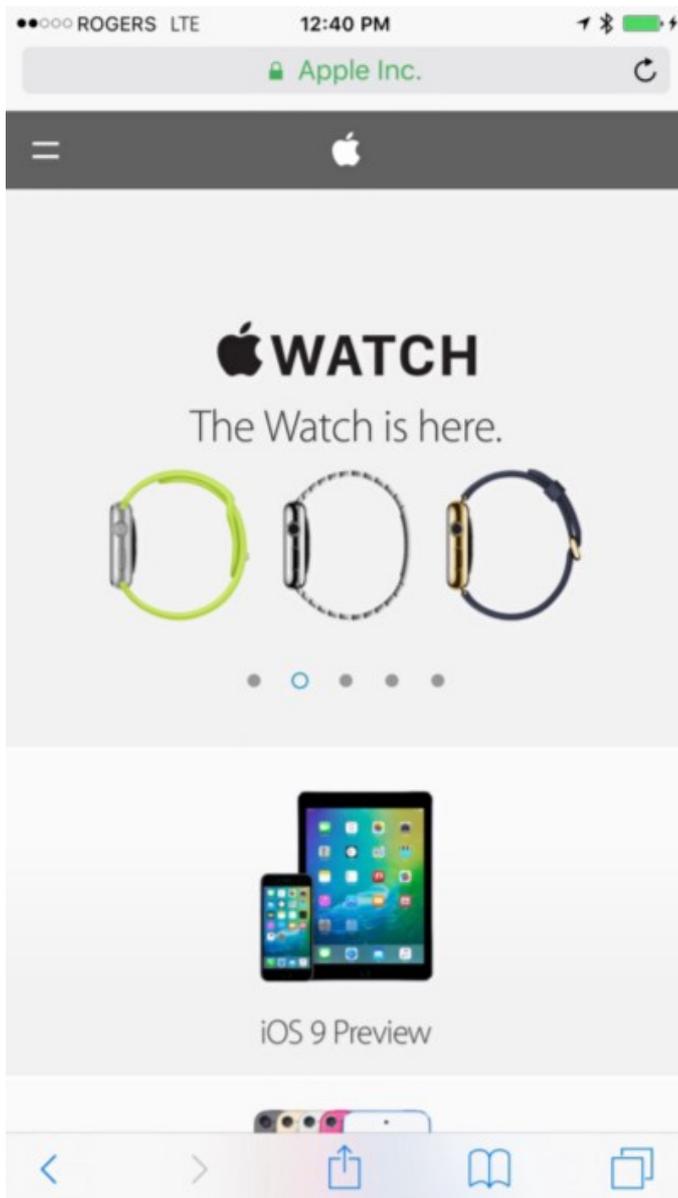
Inversely in iOS, the focus is more on the content. The color of the UI is more neutral and contextual (they change based on the content). Vibrant colors are used minimally, mostly for actionable items.



A quick comparison between Apple Music and Google Music shows that Material Design uses bright colors and illustrations a lot more. For Apple Music, the only place a bright color is used is for the “Try Now” button.

• • •

Tab bar VS Hamburger menu

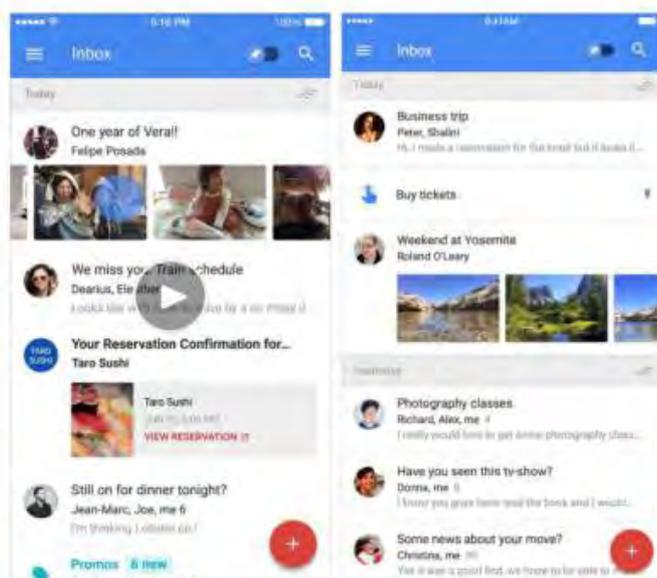


There has been a long debate on whether we should use the Hamburger menu. That debate is far from over. Even Apple sparsely use it in their designs.

But it's safe to say that we generally see them more in Android since Material Design encourages them.

iOS favors the Tab bar for navigation. Interestingly, LukeW pointed out that obvious always wins. Facebook switched to the Tab bar for iOS and they saw an important increase in user engagement.

But there are situations where the Hamburger menu can be a good idea, like when your most important content is your front page. Options inside it need to be secondary, like settings and logout.



Google Inbox uses the Hamburger menu.

The Use of Colors

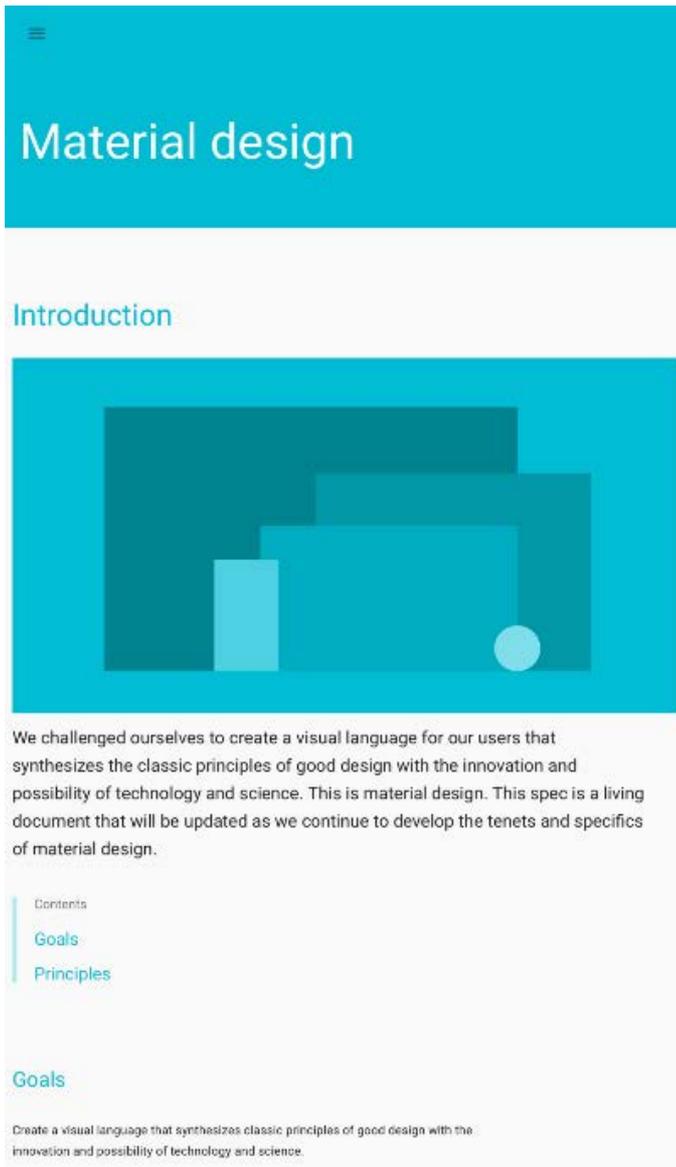
Material Design uses colors prominently. Yes, they're pretty. So was the Flat UI color palette. We can all agree that pastel colors look very nice in most situations, unlike the flashy ones that come by default in CSS or Xcode.



[iOS Colors](#) (left), [Flat UI](#) (middle), [Material Design Palette](#) (right)

But Material Design uses those colors in their header, sometimes even to replace content. When you have a lot of competing colors, it de-prioritizes other elements.

Colors do have meanings, but those meanings can be quite limited (E.G. red means alert, yellow means warning, etc). Colors do express a brand, but branding shouldn't be front and center in the UI of your app.



In fact, the App icon is the place where branding is most appropriate. So before you absolutely want to use a color alone in your header, you might want to consider something more expressive. Something that explains exactly what your app is about.

Again, that may make sense in Android, but not in iOS.

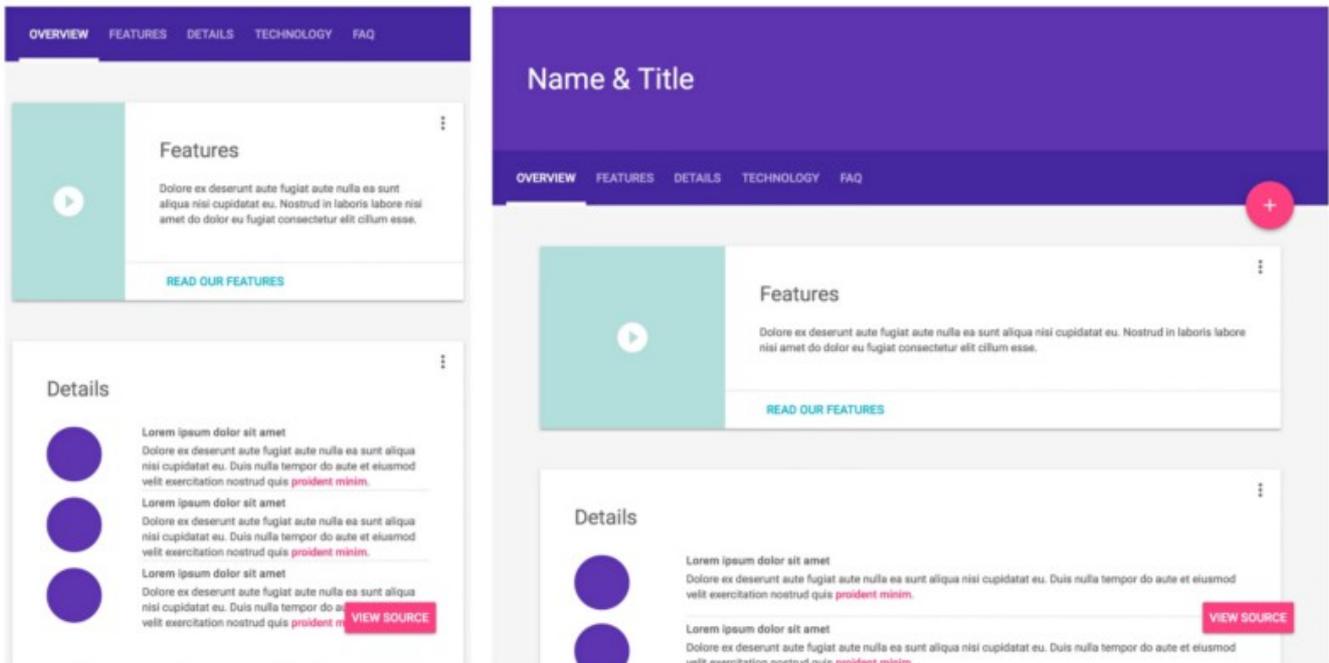
If an image is worth a thousand words, then a color is worth ten.

Is the header actionable since it's colored? Should I be using an image instead to express what my product is about? Why is the "Goals" title the same color as the links?

. . .

Platform-Specific VS All Platforms The Same

I have to admit that I used to think that having one design language that is consistent across all platforms is the best way to go. But unfortunately that led to designing an Android app using the iOS design language. It made sense from my point of view, but ultimately it was bad for the users. Android users are simply not familiar with iOS. Material Design's goal to unify all platforms is a valiant effort, better than anything I've seen in this respect. But is it really the best way to go?



Is the FAB really appropriate for the Web? Are the cards appropriate for smaller screens?

Is the Card concept really working on Android wear, which sometimes has a circular screen? It doesn't seem like the language considered the devices first. Instead, it feels like an afterthought.

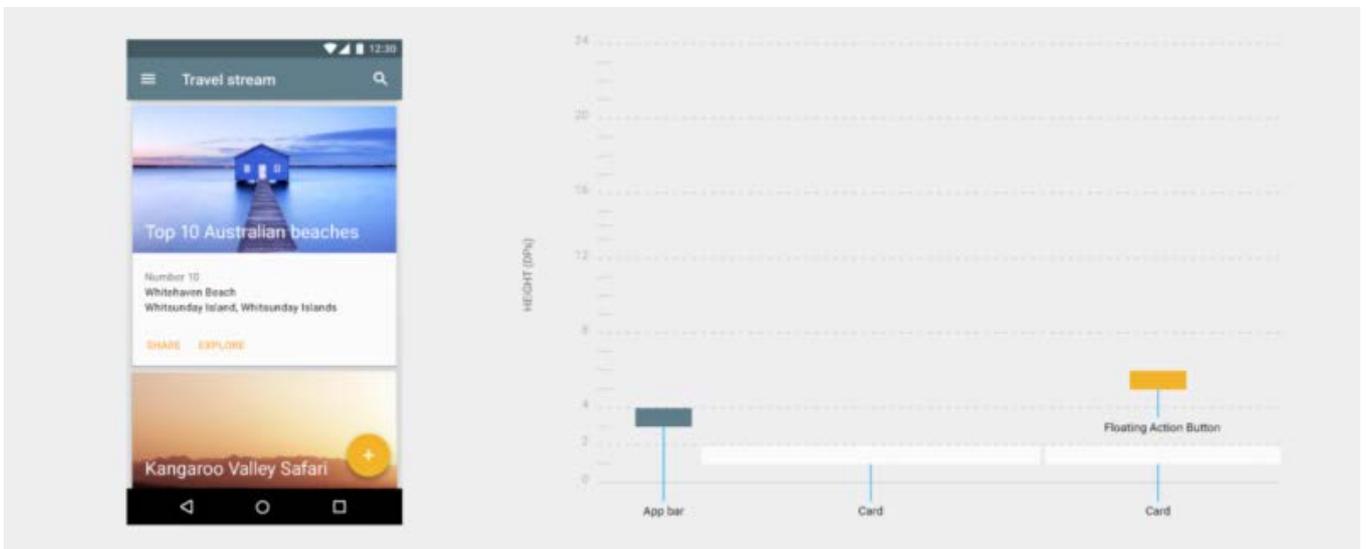
If you look at the Apple Watch, the design was completely rethought for the Watch. This means that there are new UI paradigms that had to be considered specifically for the Force Touch, the Digital Crown, wrist detection and the black bezel.



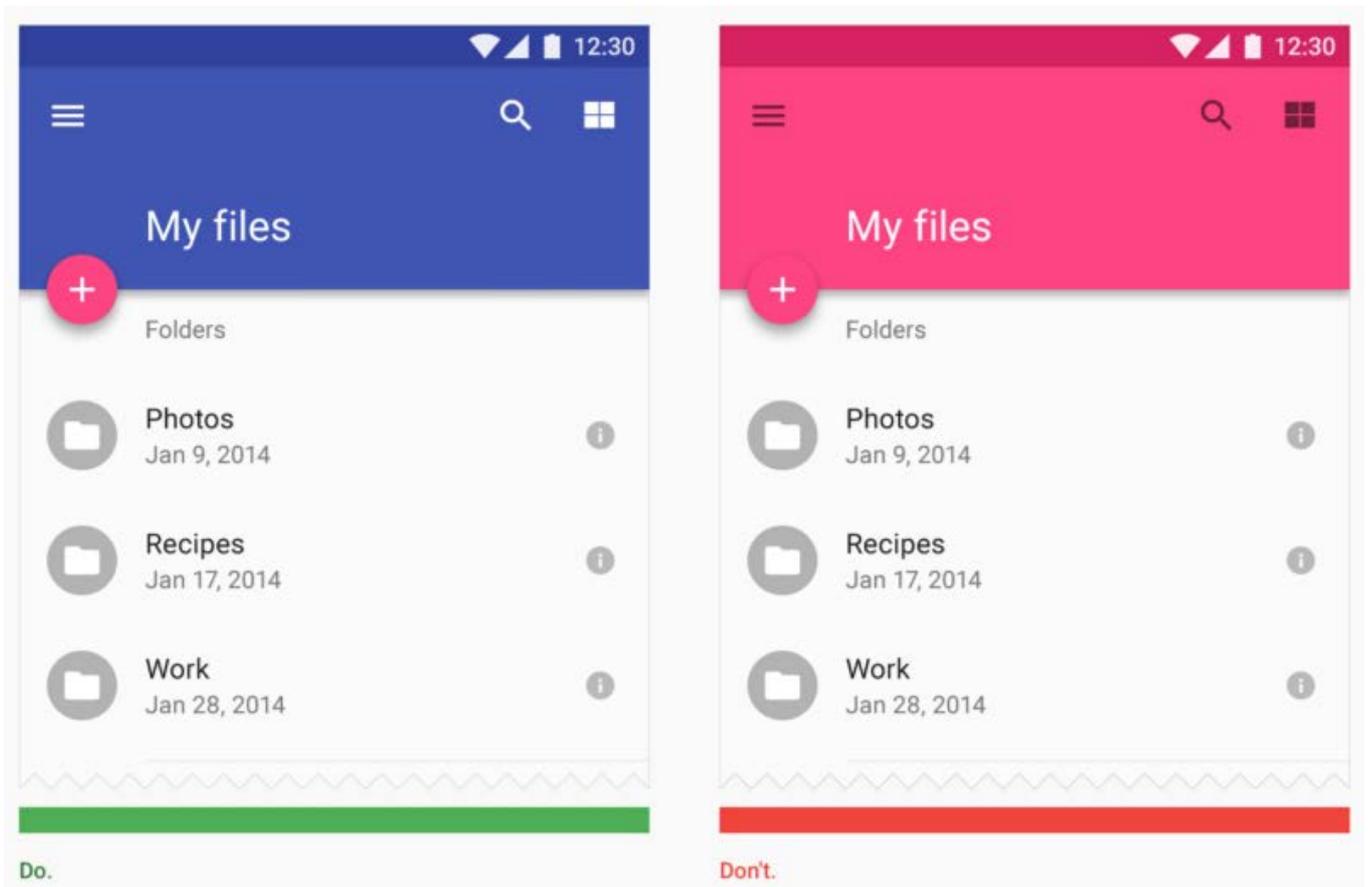
.....

Material Design is More Defined

Everything from how the Material should be manipulated and elevated to how the colors should be combined is explained in their guide.



How each design element should be elevated to create a consistent structure and drop shadows.



There's a specific color palette and a way to combine those colors.



Material Design even provides an entire set of system icons.

The good side of having strict style guides is that it's hard to go wrong. It's like Bootstrap. It provides a consistent and convenient system. The bad side is that it limits creativity and will make most apps homogeneous.

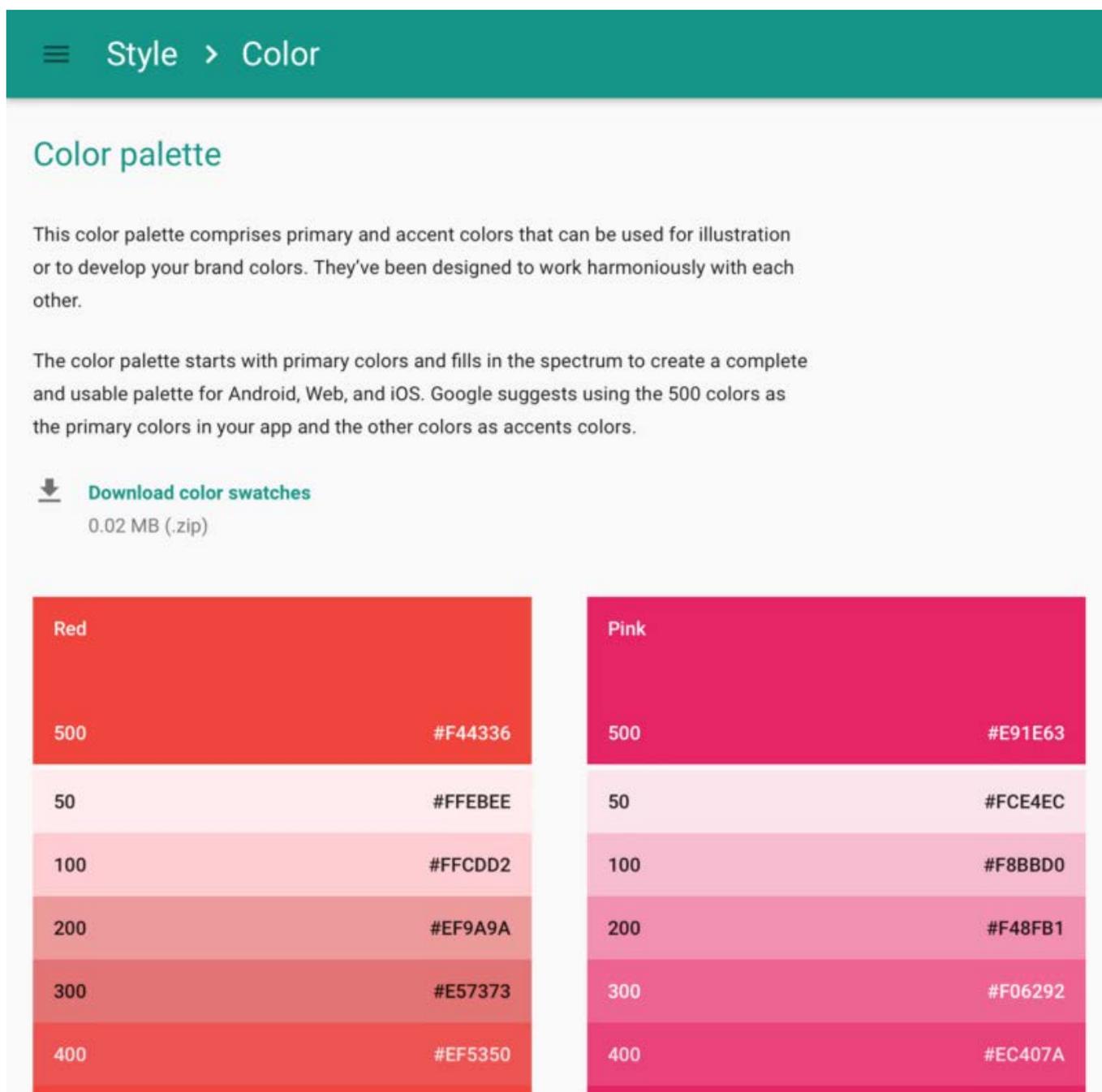
Where Material Design Shines

Don't get me wrong, there are a lot of things that Material Design does right. It just

seems like every designer sings praises without truly considering the weaknesses.

Design is an ever-changing spec that puts people's lives at the forefront. For as long as our lives change, design will too.

For one, their new Design spec is world-class, giving guidance on a variety of design topics that will benefit you beyond the scope of Material Design.

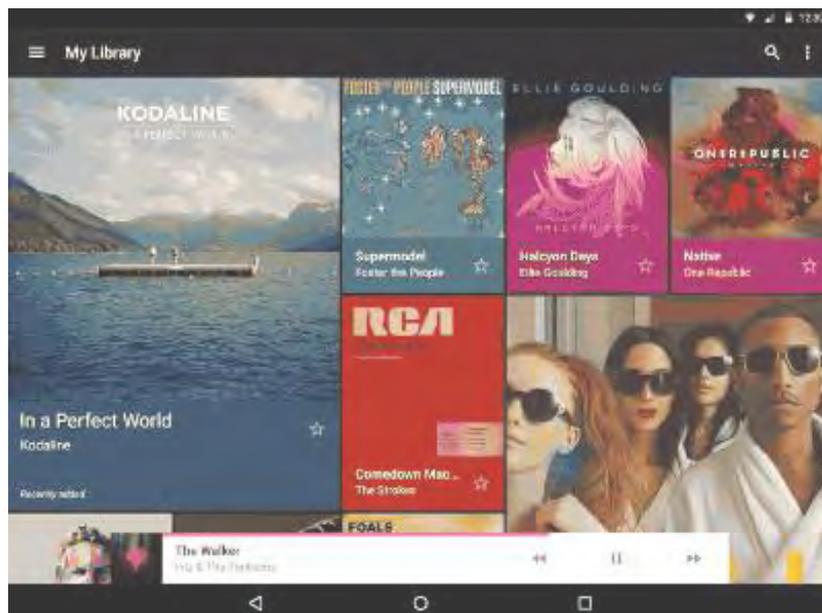


The color and animation guides in Material Design are truly remarkable.

The concept of cards is one that generally works well across the board. It's flexible and modular. It can definitely work with Web—designers have been using them way before Mobile came along. But I believe that the smaller the screen is, the less it makes sense.

As I mentioned before, pastel colors were hardly a new thing. But the Flat UI trend and Material Design really popularized it. We're going back to the basics in order to achieve harmonious colors and beautiful typography. That's a great thing. The more we know about the foundation of design, the better we can shape the pillars that come on top of it.

The animations in Material Design are elegant and delightful, albeit not as innovative as people make them out to be. Before iOS 7 came, transitional interfaces were still a fairly new concept. I'm glad that both guides are promoting smoother, more progressive animations to guide our users rather than scream at them for attention.



Meaningful animations in Material Design.

No Perfect Design Language

There will never be a perfect design language or template. The purpose of this piece is not to discourage one or the other, but to offer perspective their strengths and weaknesses. Design is about picking the best for the intent. So go ahead, experiment and see what works for your product. Just don't forget to consider the people and devices that you're designing for.

. . .

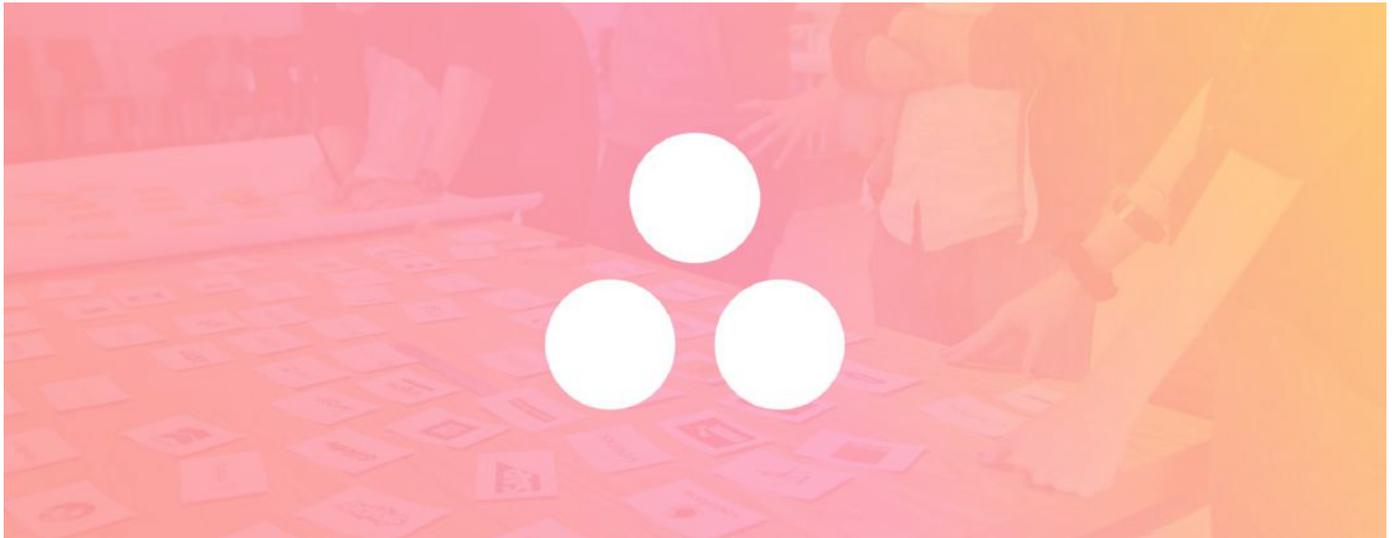
I wrote a few things about iOS, Android and code. You can find me on Twitter at @MengTo. Thanks for reading!



Micah Daigle

16 min read

Design



Circling Ourselves: The Story Behind Asana's Rebrand



On the surface, this is the story of how Asana went from a logo with three circles to a logo... with three circles. But like most things that seem simple at first blush, there's a lot more to this story than meets the eye.

Our evolved logo—a symbol of collaboration and shared energy—is the cornerstone of our new brand identity: a total rethink of how we present ourselves to the world. But more than that, it's the end result of a year-long labor of love. And we feel pretty damn good about it.

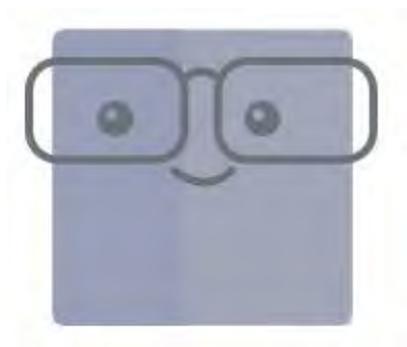
But this isn't just a "woo-hoo, we did it!" post. This is a tale of how we got from Point A to Point B—a trail of breadcrumbs tracing our path, including lessons learned along the way and advice for other travelers.

It's also about the keys to our success: **a constant circling back** to the core questions of who we are and what we stand for, and a commitment to closing the the circle on each element of our brand as we moved forward.

I wish more posts like this existed before we began our process (there are plenty of agency case studies, but very few from the client side). So, if you're considering updating your company's brand or are just curious about how it works, we hope our story helps!

Why did we embark on a rebrand?

Let me start by introducing you to Fred.



Fred is a really sweet guy. Smart, good-hearted, there when you need him. Exactly the kind of guy you'd go out of your way to introduce to friends.

But Fred... doesn't make new friends easily.

The thing is, despite his kind soul, Fred gives off an awkward first impression. He's been sporting the same worn-out suit every day for the past five years. He speaks earnestly, but in an overly-professional and impersonal tone. Fred's hard to get to know.



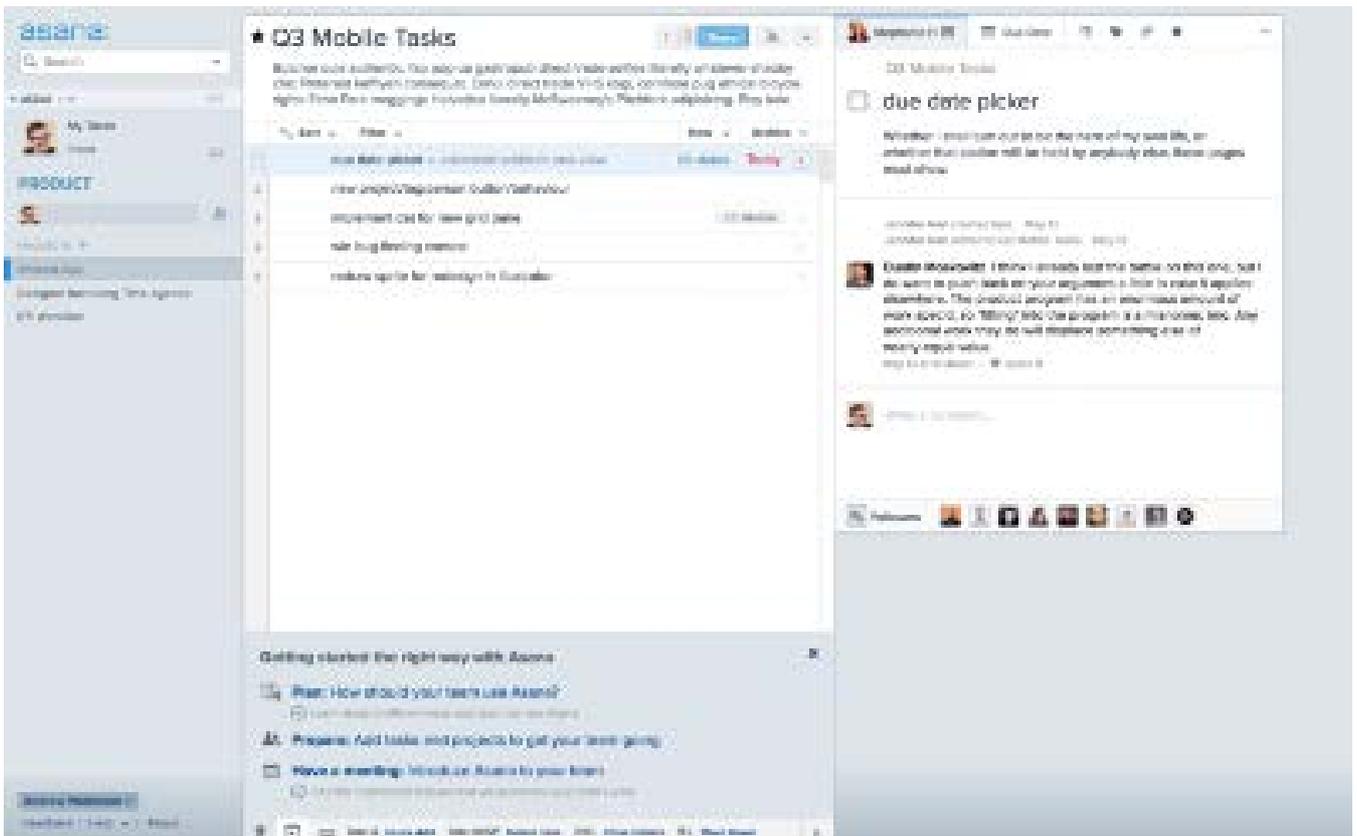
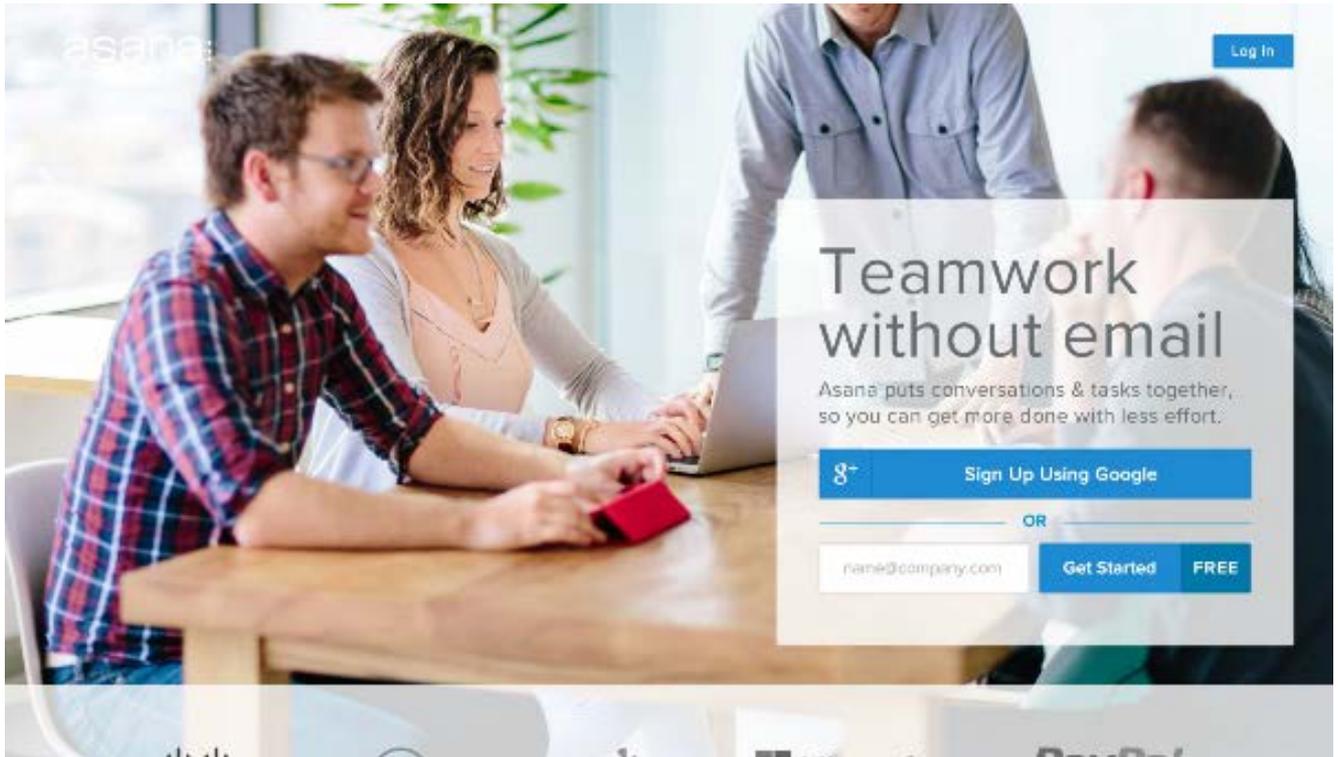
So when his friends introduce him to other people, they whisper: **“Give the guy a chance; you'll love him once you get to know him.”**

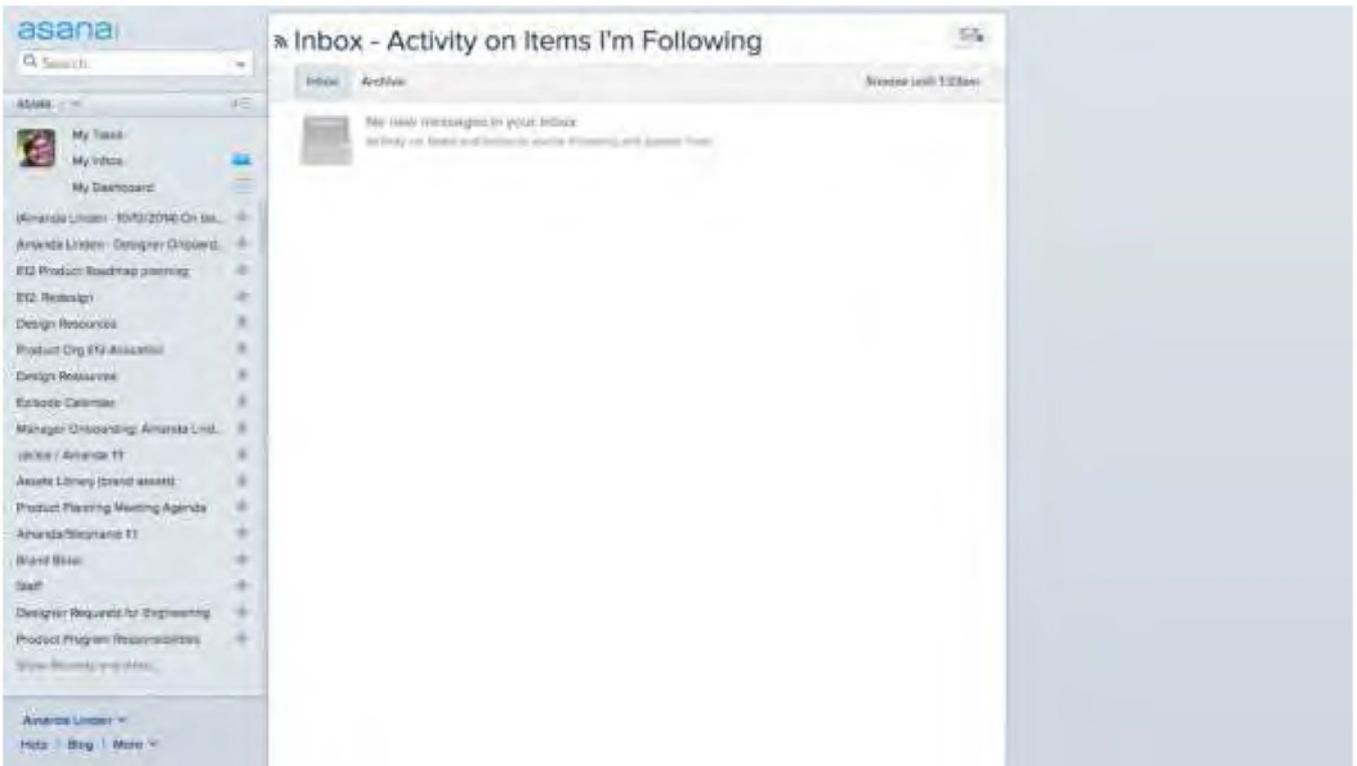
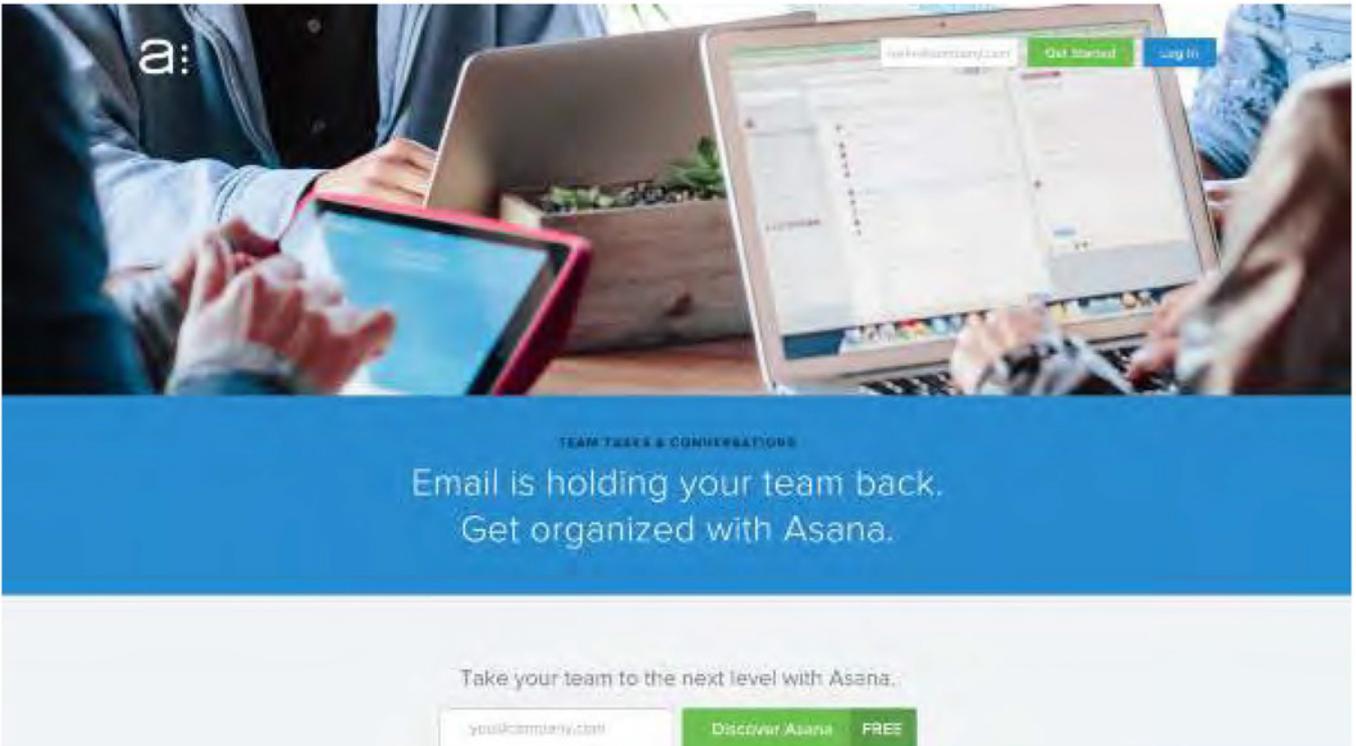
Until this week, that's how many of us felt about our brand and our product.

Of course I'm biased, but I thought Asana was pretty awesome even before I worked here. I was one of thousands of customers who swore by it when working on big, collaborative projects. And I came to find out that the team is equally awesome: full of big hearts, sharp minds, and quirky personalities.

But just like Fred, **all of that character just wasn't coming through in how we presented ourselves.**







The old Asana

To begin with, our logo was uninspired: an “a” followed by a three-dots symbolizing... enumeration? List items? Alignment? (Nobody’s exactly sure.) Our color scheme was a drab blue and grey (self-deprecatingly referred to as “rainy day theme” ☔.). Our writing often lacked the humor and humility that were so abundant

in our team. Even the images we featured of real Asana employees somehow managed to look like stock photos!

In an ocean of bland, blue-tinted enterprise software, we saw ourselves as a magical, multicolored narwhal—but if you looked at us from the outside, it's understandable if all you saw was another fish. .

Digging Deep

About a year ago, we started the process of redesigning our product. We knew that many users found the interface cluttered and drab, so we set out to clean and brighten it up. But as we started to dig into the implications of a product redesign, we fell down a rabbit hole that led directly to our brand.

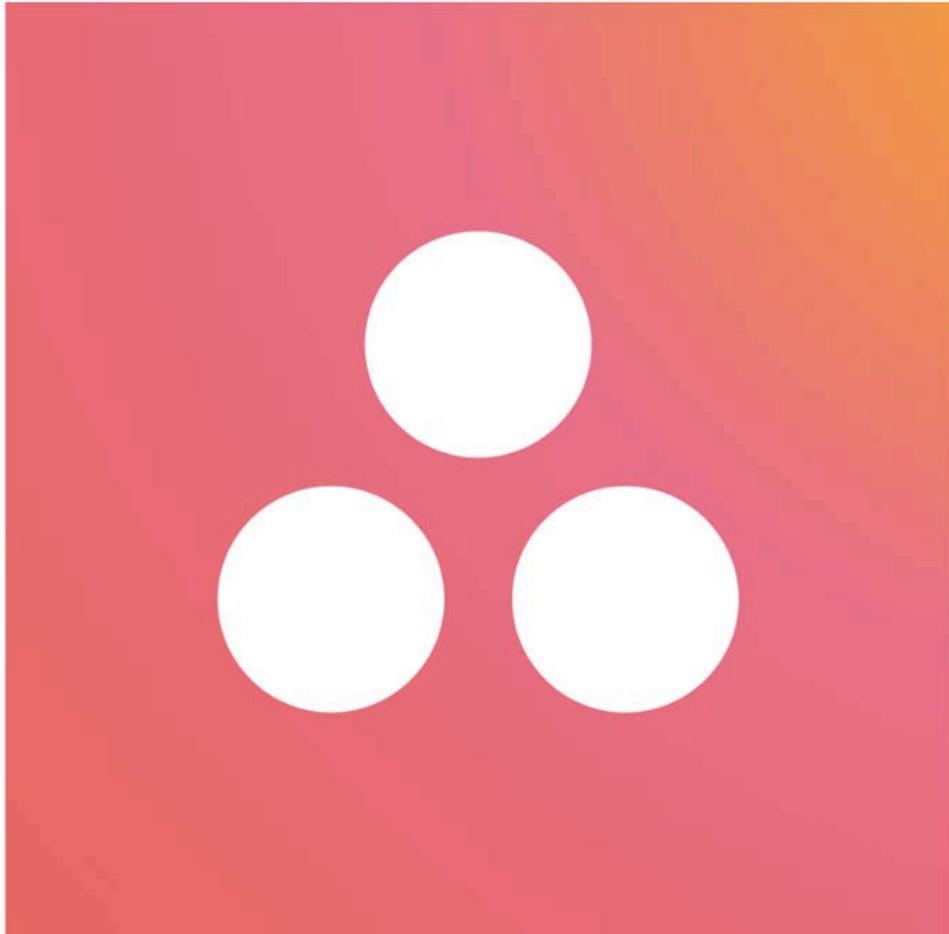
After all, it's hard to create clear information hierarchy with only one font, so it was natural to start looking at new typography. Brightening the app meant creating a new color palette and illustration style, but that also meant finding a way to keep those consistent with the logo... or make a new logo.

We dug ever deeper. *If we're brightening up our design, should we brighten up our writing too? How playful is too playful? How serious is too serious? Who are we trying to appeal to? Who are we trying to be?* As we started to unearth all these questions, our design lead Amanda pulled together a meeting.

We weighed the pros and cons of opening Pandora's logo. We were stretched thin as it was, and a rebrand could be a timesuck that delays everything else. But if we were ever going to do it, now was the time. Our new product needed a strong foundation—but it was unclear whether we should patch up the one we had, or create a new one from scratch.

We decided to take the first, cautious step of assessing our current brand, and go from there. Thinking back on it, I don't think any of us walked out of that meeting expecting that we'd ultimately make such a radical departure from our existing brand. But I'm glad we did.

In a year's time, all those images above evolved to look like this:

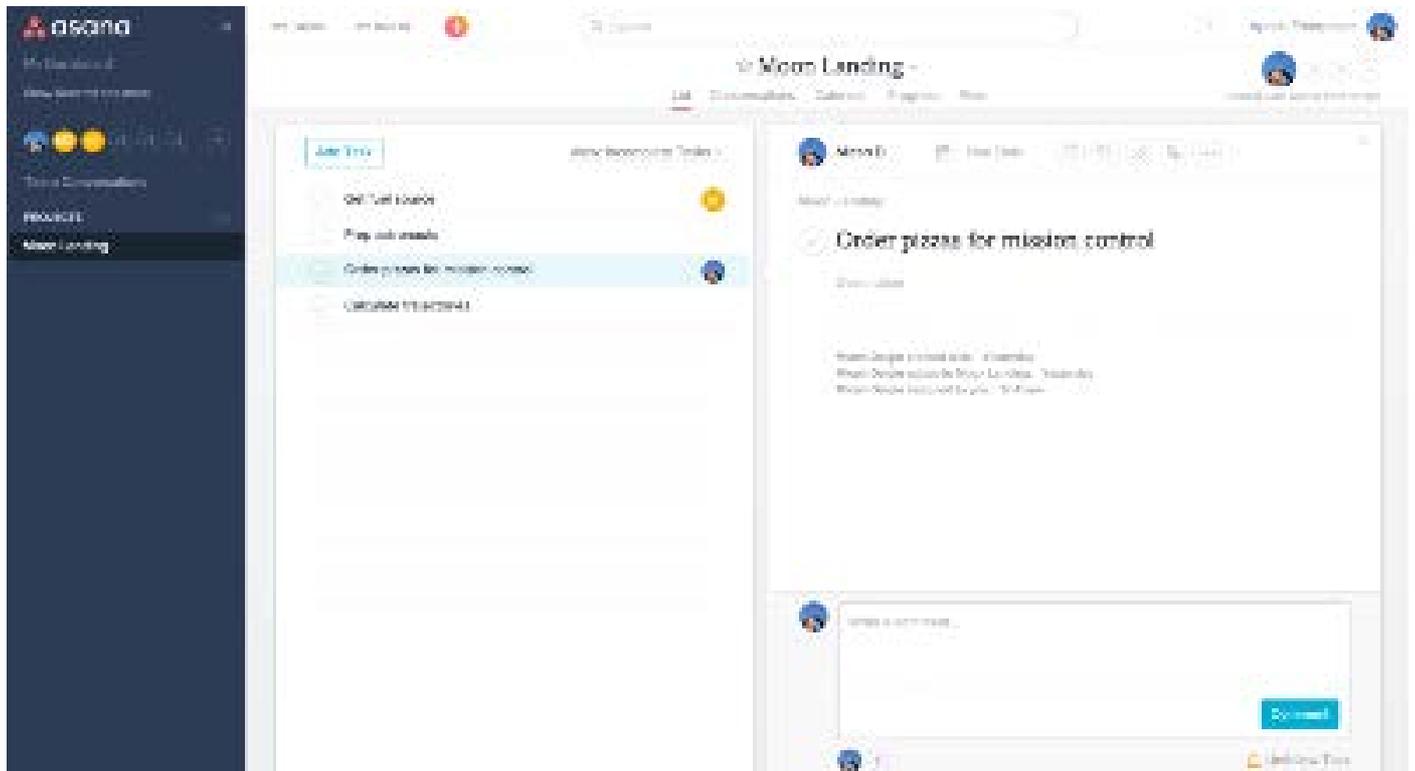


Move work forward

You picked a great day to sign up, because we just launched a new Asana. It's the easiest way for teams to track their work — and get results.

Free trial sign up

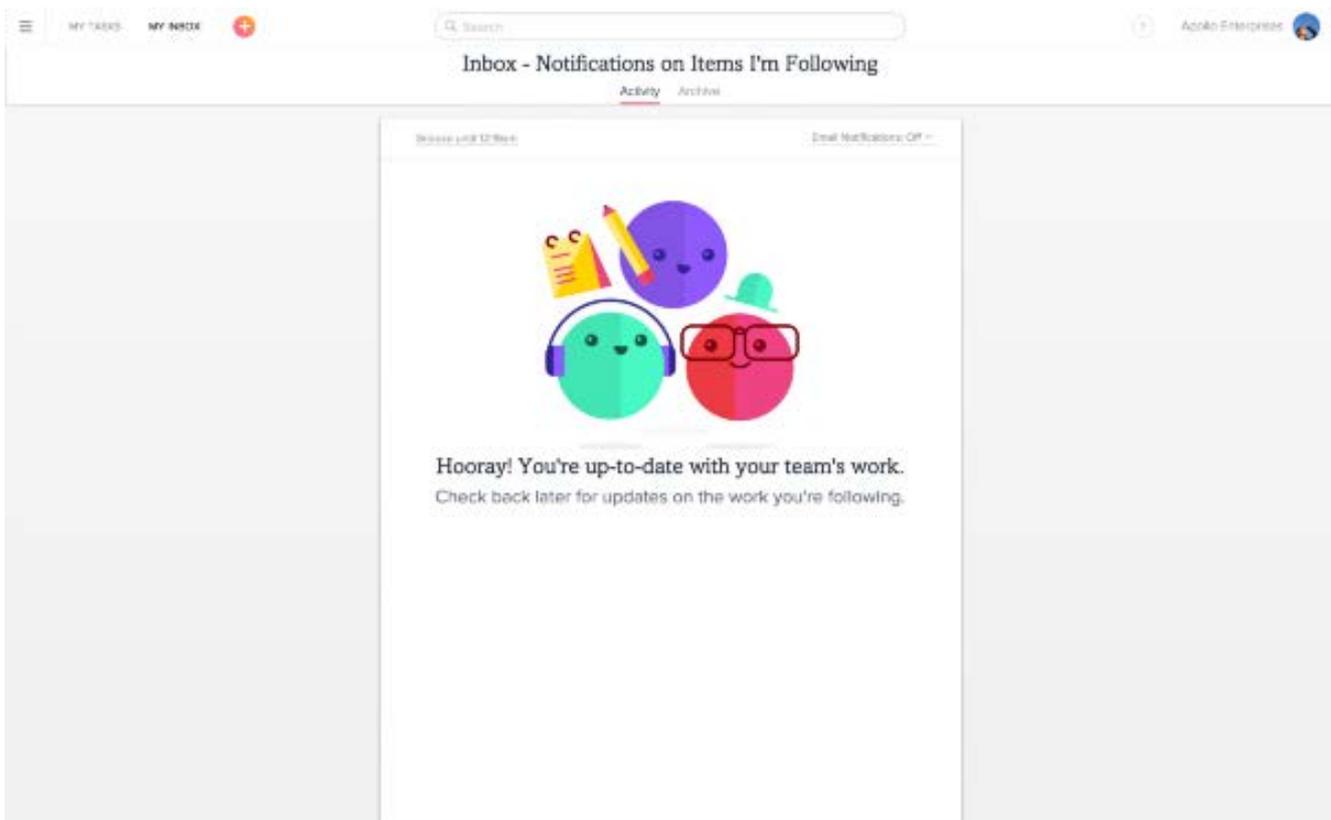
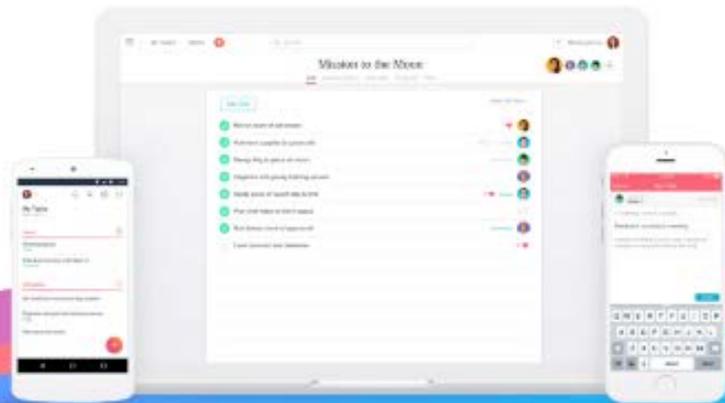
Get started for free



Achieve great results

With tasks, projects, conversations and dashboards, Asana enables teams to move work from start to finish.

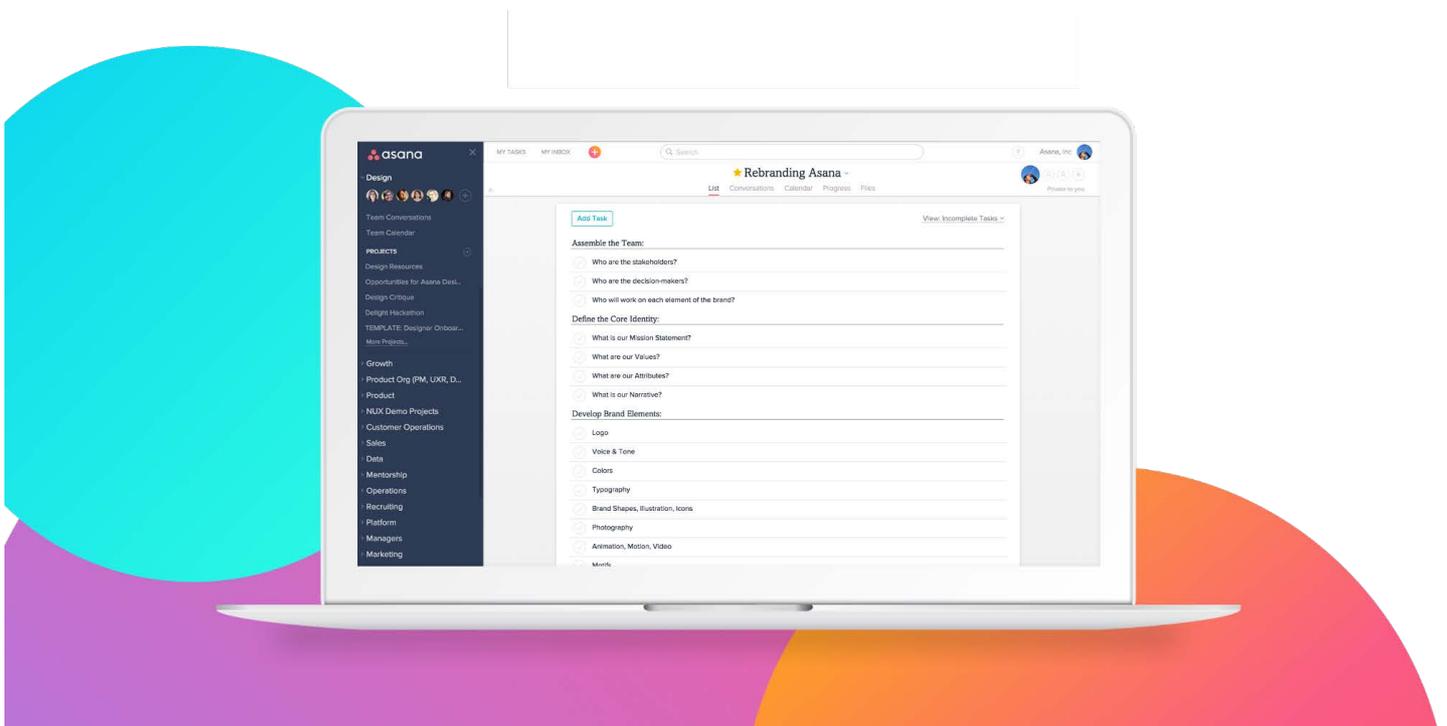
[See the full list of features](#)



The new Asana

The new Asana is clear, colorful, and quirky. It's a place to focus on your work, while remembering that work doesn't need to be boring. When you check off a task or ♥ a teammate's comment, bursts of color illuminate the screen to celebrate your progress. If you're lucky, you may even spot a wild unicorn wishing you a good day.

In other words: Goodbye rainy day. Hello rainbow. .



So, how did we get here?

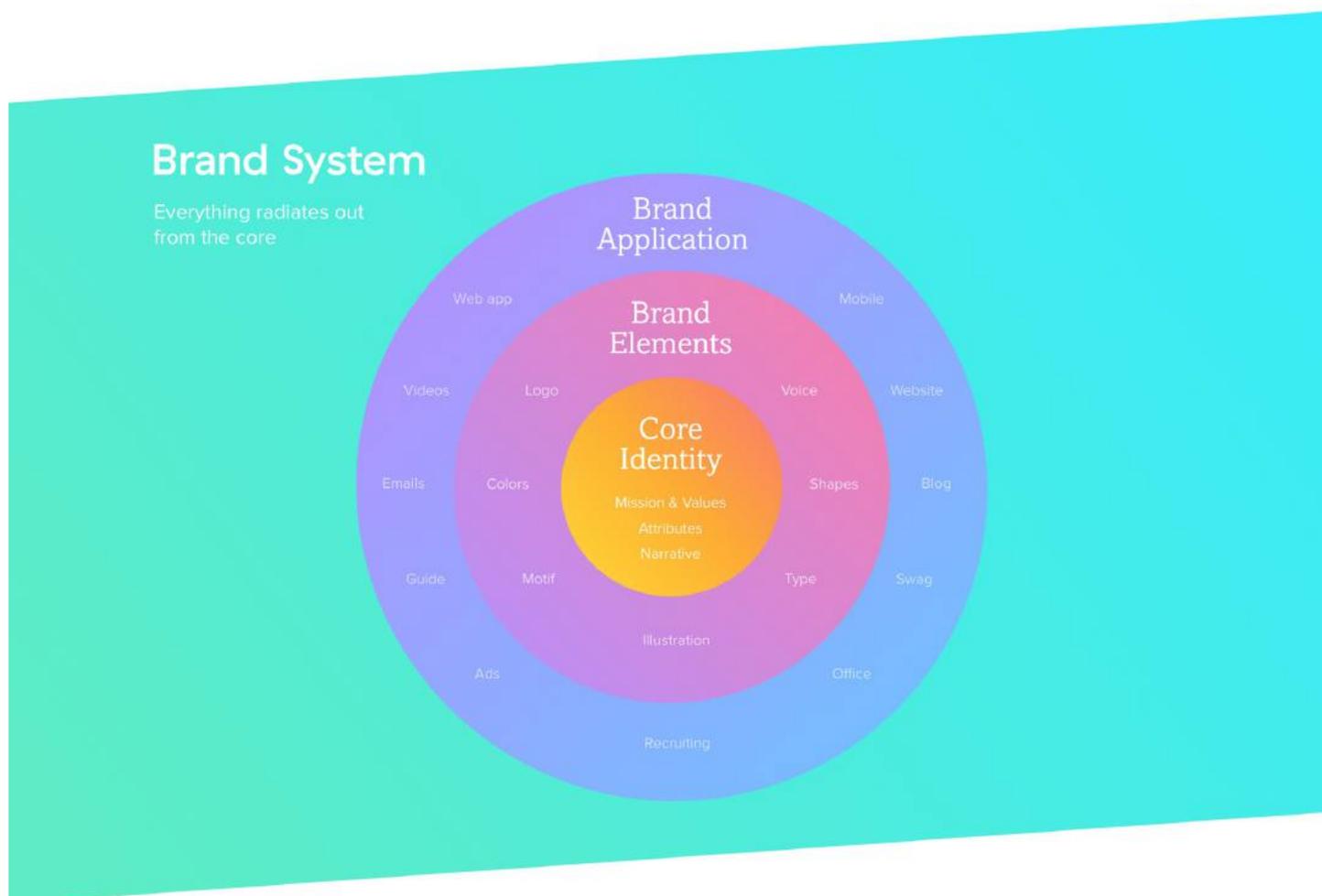
Step 1: Unearth the core of our brand

Let's go back to Fred.

That simple metaphor—our brand as a person—became a core aspect of our thinking from early on. We frequently circled back to a simple question when we needed direction:

“If Asana were a person, what would they be like?”

At the core, each person is a product of our biggest goals, our values, our personality, and our life story. When applied to an entire company, these are generally known as **Mission, Values, Attributes, and Narrative**.



Thankfully, Asana has long had a clearly-defined Mission: **Help humanity thrive by enabling all teams to work together effortlessly.** (Audacious, no?) And our Values were established by our founders from day one, leading to a culture based on transparency, mindfulness, and more.

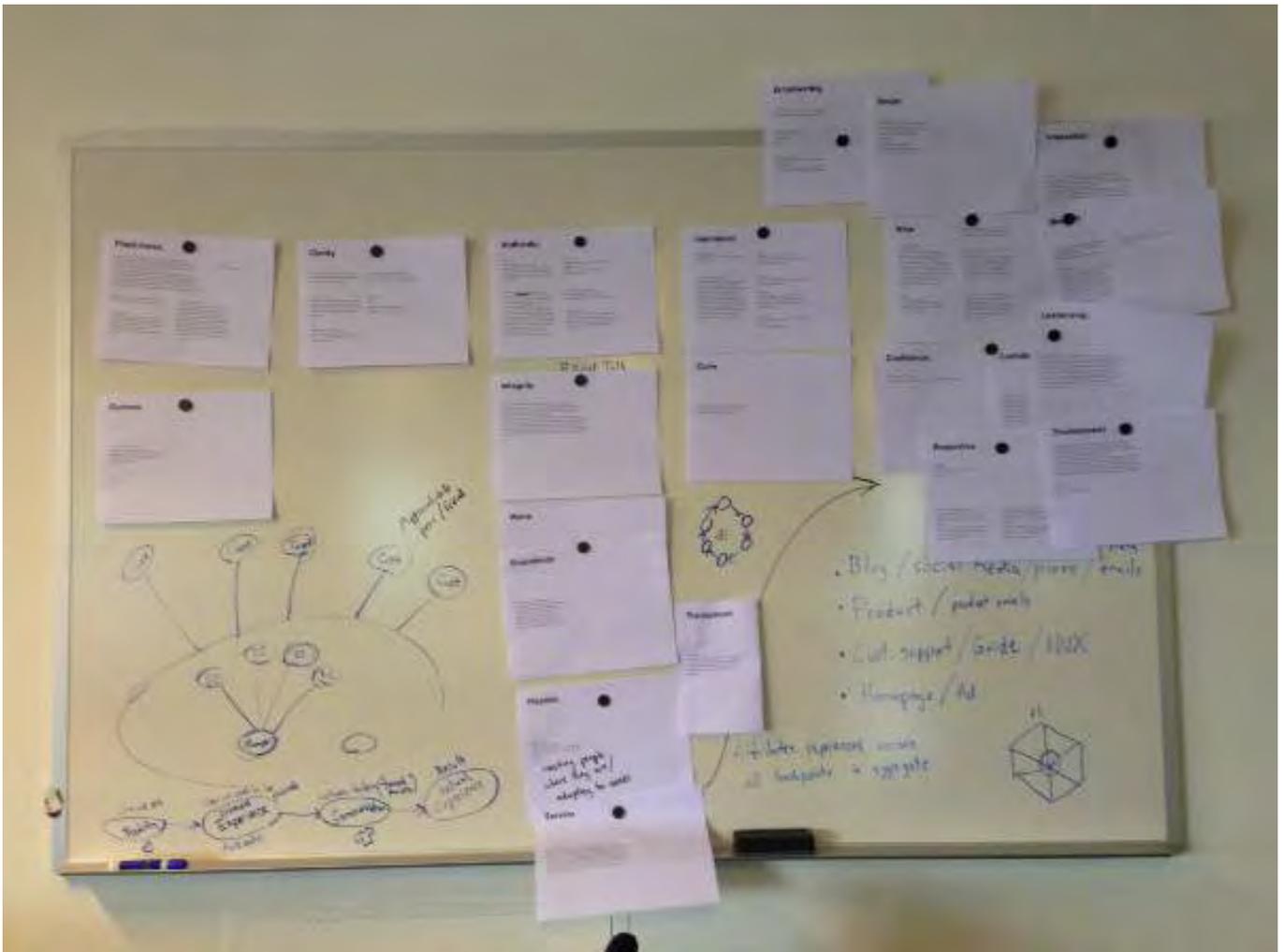
But what about *personality*? Goals and values lie below the surface, but a person's personality is on display all the time, giving others a more direct impression of who they are.

A year earlier, our founders had sketched out our company’s personality in the form of twenty-two Brand Attributes. They were a helpful start, but far too many to remember. Our first task was to narrow them down to a more manageable number, with input from people across the company.

We put out a survey asking: **“If Asana were a person, how would you describe them?”** The response was kind of staggering; thousands of (impassioned, emphatic) words were submitted over just a few days.

So, a couple of us printed out excerpts and locked ourselves in a room until we could make sense of it all. We clustered them together, debated the nuances of each word, and proposed Eight Attributes to Rule Them All.





After honing with the rest of the team, we narrowed them down to six:

 <p>INTENTIONAL</p> <p>Asana is mindful and deliberate in all that we do. We approach problems and opportunities with calm, focus, and clarity, rather than reacting impulsively.</p>	 <p>EMPOWERING</p> <p>Asana helps people do what they do best. We provide invaluable support for teams that are changing the world. We aren't the hero of our story—they are.</p>	 <p>PASSIONATE</p> <p>Asana cares deeply about the results of our work and it shows; we don't do this out of obligation; we do it from a sense of purpose. We strive to do great things.</p>
 <p>PLAYFUL</p> <p>Asana takes our mission seriously, but not ourselves. Our creative power comes as much from lighthearted fun as it does from earnest work. Go, Narwhals!</p>	 <p>AUTHENTIC</p> <p>Asana is unapologetically honest about who we are and what we do. We're committed to earning lasting trust through openness and transparency.</p>	 <p>EFFECTIVE</p> <p>Asana is smart, reliable, and highly capable. We keep our commitments while constantly innovating. We stick to our priorities and get things done.</p>

Our first stab at Brand Attributes, which were refined later with the help of Moving Brands.

A week later, we unveiled the Attributes at a company-wide meeting and hung

banners around the office. The response was immediately reassuring. We soon heard people from all across the company referring to the Attributes in conversation (“I like that this e-mail is really Empowering, but could it be more Playful?”). Some even wanted t-shirts with their favorite Attributes on them. It worked!

And we were convinced. There was energy around our brand like never before, and it was time to go all-in. But where would we find the time?

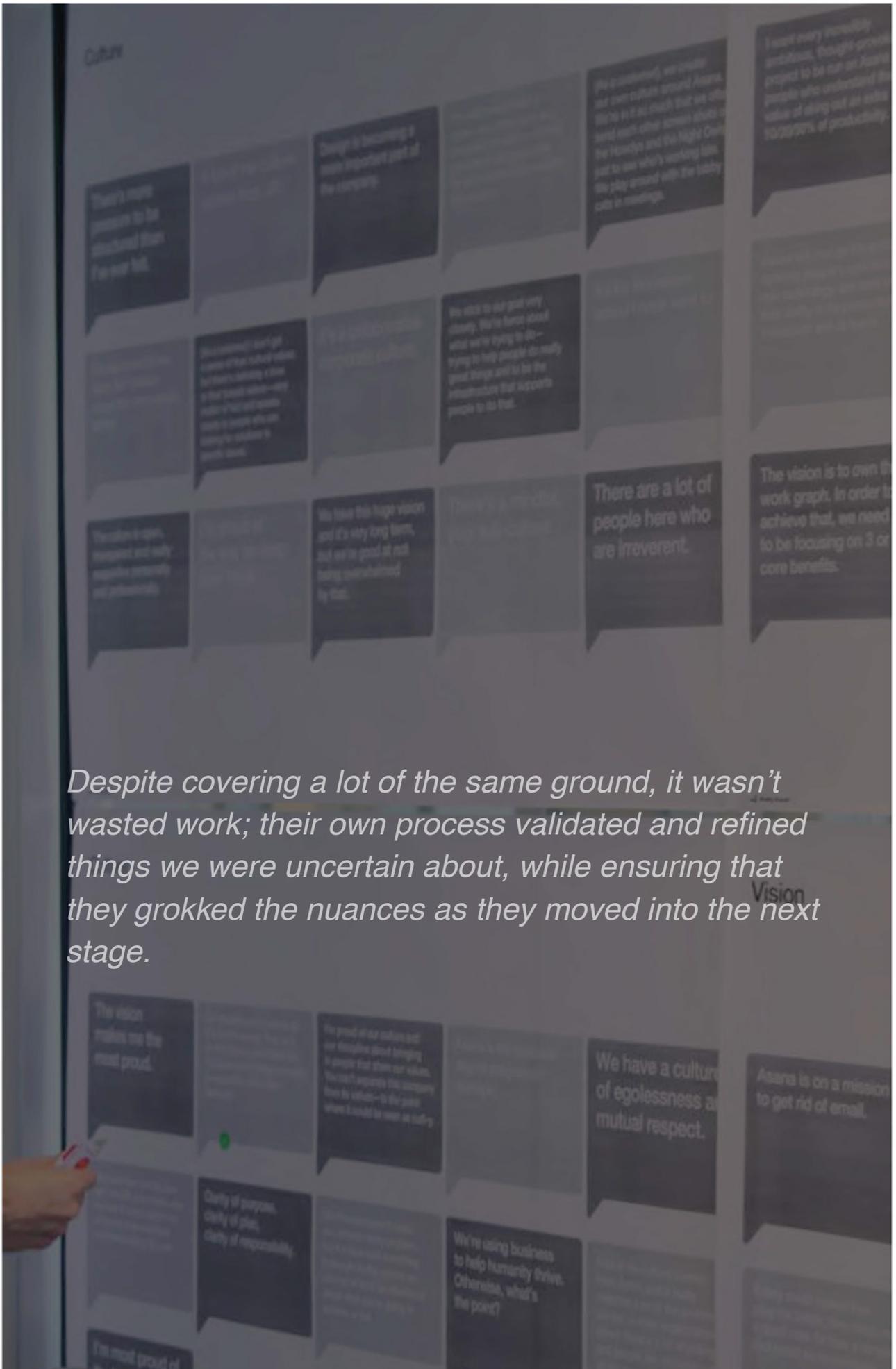
Step 2: Bring in some help

Within minutes of meeting the folks at Moving Brands, we really liked them. They immediately understood the big problems we’re trying to solve, and saw how much we were falling short with our brand. We quickly signed a contract, and opened ourselves up to their process.

It began much like our own: drilling into the heart of who we are and what we believe in. They conducted dozens of interviews, led workshops, and ultimately did a much more thorough job of soul-searching than we had.

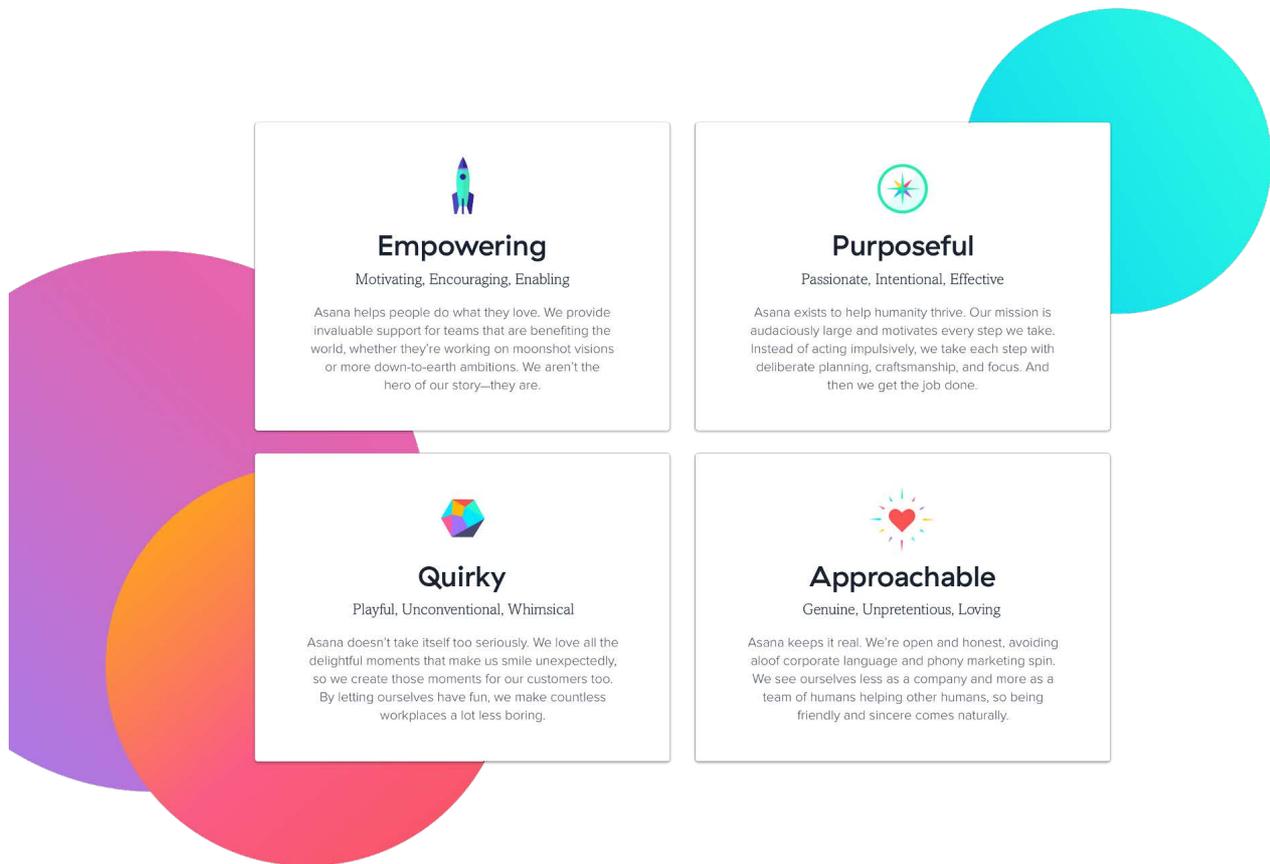


Looking at other brands to find inspiration. — Left to right: Aki Shelton of Moving Brands; Amanda Linden, Justin Rosenstein, Kenny Van Zant, and Emily Kramer of Asana.



Despite covering a lot of the same ground, it wasn't wasted work; their own process validated and refined things we were uncertain about, while ensuring that they grokked the nuances as they moved into the next stage.

Ultimately, our six attributes were narrowed down to four. Less to remember, without losing anything essential.



Next came the Brand Narrative, a story that explains why we do what we do. It touches on the range of emotions—from elation to frustration—that most of us feel in our work lives, and ends with a **short-form narrative** that serves as a North Star for our brand.

Think back to the last time you were deep in the zone...

...time flew by and the work flowed through you almost effortlessly. Now imagine a place where entire teams work in that fully-immersive state of flow on any project they can imagine.

That's how working together should be, but it is rarely the case. As organizations grow, so does the complexity of our work. Information is scattered; responsibilities unclear. We try to cut through the chaos with endless meetings and micromanagement, but we end up with less time and not much more clarity.

The way we're working isn't working.

It's time for that to change. At Asana, we're building a place where teams align their energies towards common goals. Where there is no work about work. There is only total clarity, energized focus, and frictionless collaboration. Everything from the most immediate details to the big picture are organized and at your fingertips. In every moment, each person knows what they should be doing and why they're doing it.

That's when it gets fun.

People love what they do and feel appreciated for what they're doing. That visceral feeling of being in the zone every day empowers teams to work better, smarter, faster. Organization is as effortless between people as it is between our own brains and bodies.

By empowering all teams to achieve their most ambitious goals, we help humanity thrive.

Do great things together.



By the end of this process, we had some solid guideposts to circle back to when in need of guidance, making our judgements far less subjective. For example, when assessing a design or a piece of writing, we could ask: *“Does this feel Approachable?”* or *“Does this convey ‘Do great things together?’”*

If the answer was no, we knew we still had work to do.

Step 3: Develop a visual identity

It was time to start translating all this touchy-feely philosophy into design, and naturally, our logo was the place to start.

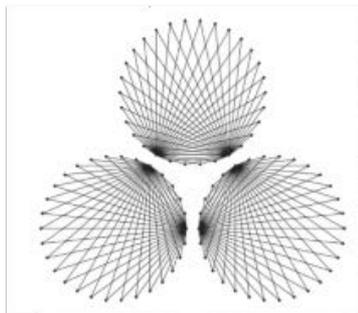
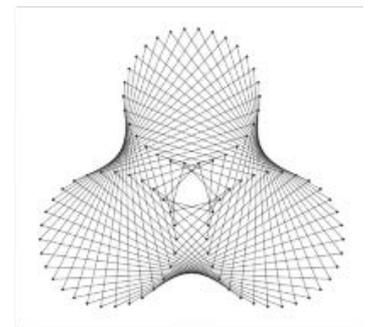
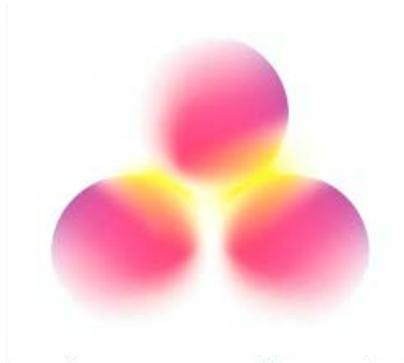
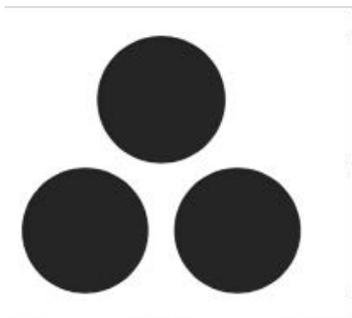
A great logo is like a magic satchel: a small, simple thing that can be endlessly filled with value, without ever losing its form.

That's why the best logos are so damn simple. They don't try to convey too much on their own—they leave room for all feelings people will accumulate about the brand over time. Apple's apple, for instance, or Nike's swoosh: the symbols alone represent knowledge and motion respectively, but the quickest glance conjures a hundred other concepts, from Macbooks to Michael Jordan.

In short, **the strength of the symbol is in its ability to trigger a complex network of ideas and feelings**, not in the complexity of the symbol itself.

And that’s why Moving Brands nailed it on the first shot.

After a couple weeks of mood-boarding and brainstorming with our team, they proposed three logo directions. These are the sketches from the first of those options:



The pitch: The three dots in our logo used to be arranged in a line, but now they’re huddled close together, *collaborating*. It’s the most simplified symbol of teamwork possible—three forms working together to make something greater: an upward arrow, a therefore symbol, an abstract “A”.

Some of us loved it immediately, but others weren’t convinced. Was it *too* simple? Could it ever be memorable and iconic? And most importantly, does it look too much like the Predator’s aiming death lasers of death?



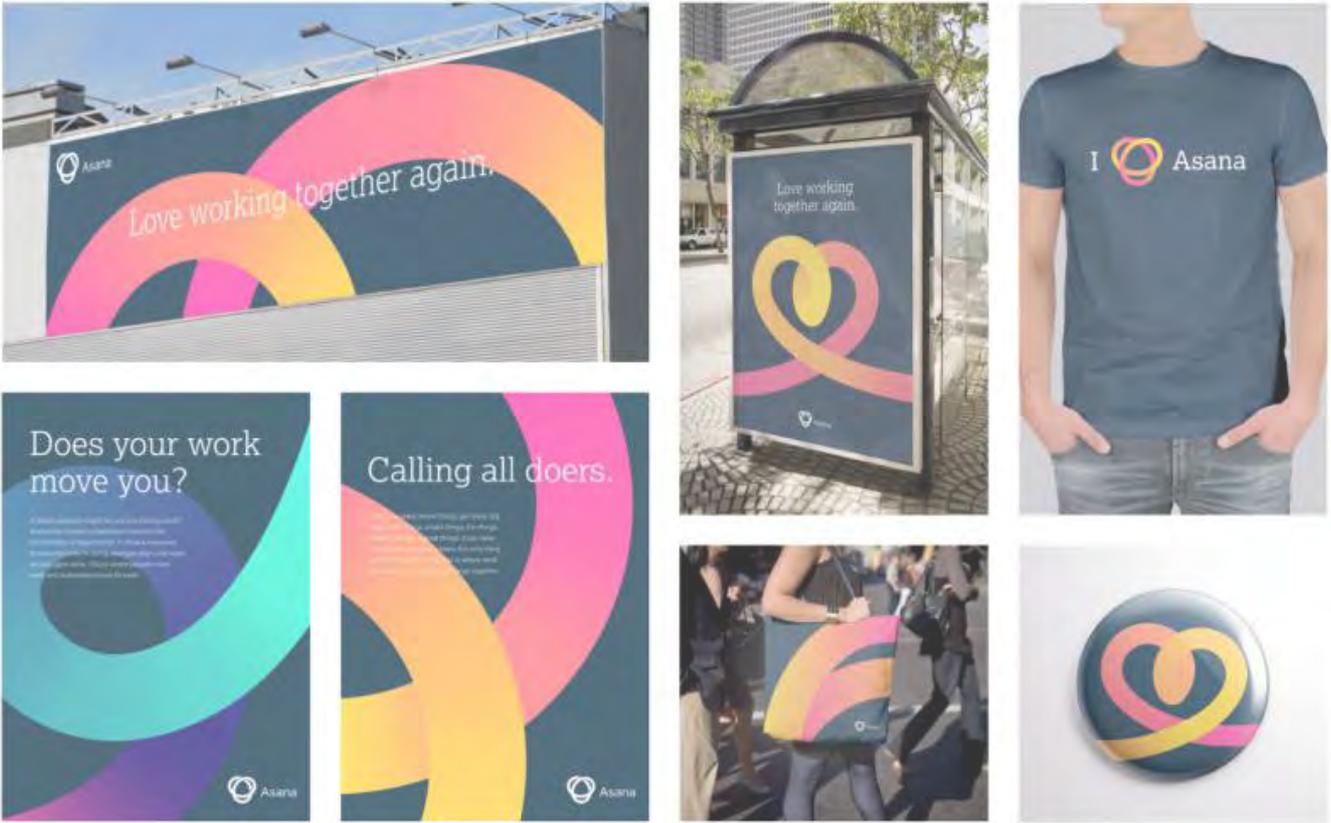
The two other concepts they showed us had elements that were promising, but they didn't feel as solid as the first one. We didn't want to choose a direction too quickly, so we asked them to keep exploring and see if we can find some other compelling options.

Step 4: Iterate, iterate, iterate

Over the next month or so, we looked at dozens of logo concepts. Among them, we landed on a few solid directions, which got fleshed out with examples of how the mark could be extended into a design system.

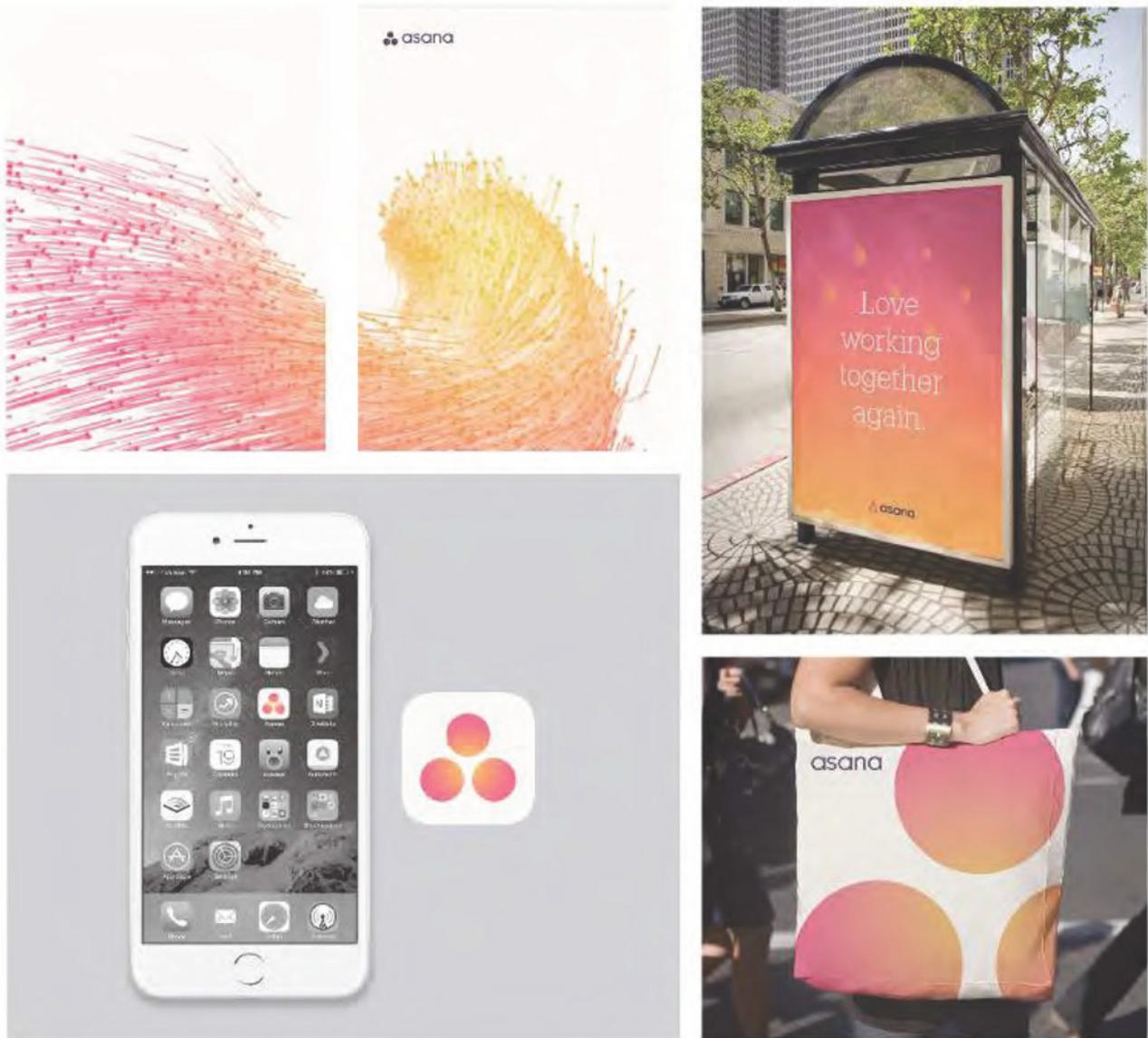


Explorations: Sketches of logotypes and a mark concept called “Bloom”



Flow: This concept conveyed the state of flow your team can get into when using Asana. We didn't choose it, but it later inspired our final color palette.

Despite some compelling concepts, we kept coming back to the three dots. Moving Brands had iterated on the mark, adding a glow to the center to signify shared energy. Once we saw it in context, we started visualizing just how versatile it could be.



The Three Dots: Application explorations

Eventually, it became clear that this was our mark. Asana’s co-founder Justin (who had grown to love it after expressing initial skepticism) said it best: **“When I see this on my phone’s homescreen, it’s obvious: that’s the teamwork app.”**

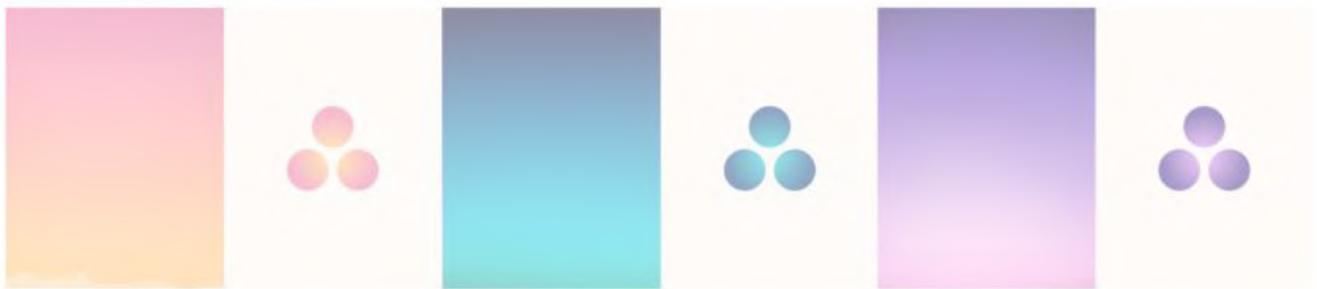
Moving Brands’ designer Michael worked with Vanessa from our team to hone every aspect of it, from the precise spacing of the circles to the exact letterforms of the wordmark. Eventually, after a long day of squinting at dozens of just-slightly-different-from-each-other logos, Amanda held up a freshly printed version and said what we were all dying to hear: “Ship it.”



Step 5: Create a system

Of course, a logo by itself doth not a brand make. Now that we had a shining symbol of collaboration, we needed a design system that we could wrap around it and unfurl across all of Asanaland.

Moving Brands developed a typography and color system, and to tie it all together, a “Daily Flow” motif based on colors of the sky. The idea was that as you moved through your day, Asana moved with you. The logo, as well as the background of the app, would change accordingly. And the marketing site would reflect this theme in both messaging and visual style.



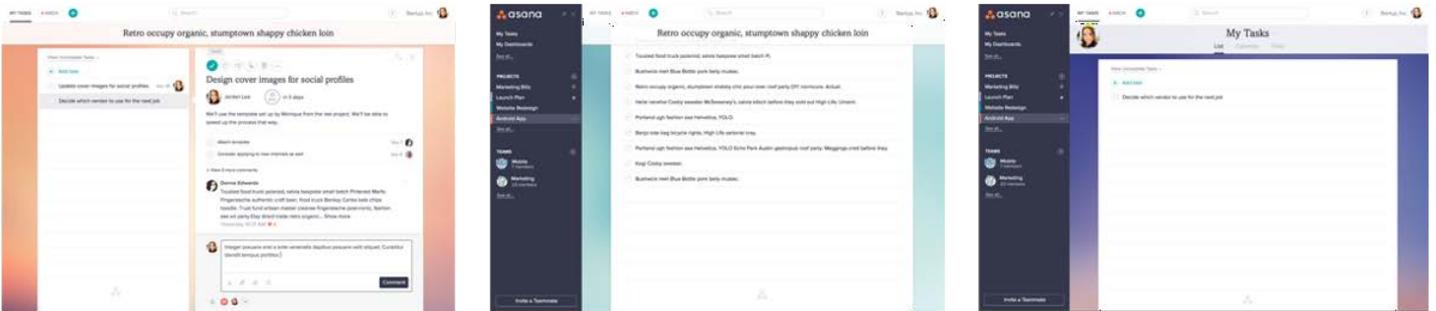
“Daily Flow” motif

We initially liked the concept, but as we saw it in action, it just wasn’t feeling quite right. We weren’t sure why.

Meanwhile, we were starting to near the redesign launch date and we needed to lock in the brand ASAP. Moving Brands was willing to keep working with us to get it right, but we decided to bring the last leg of the race in-house, where we could move faster and try things out in real-time.

Step 6: Refine the system

When you feel like you're close but it's just not working, sometimes you push the direction harder. We did that for awhile, really trying to make "Daily Flow" work. But when we took a step back, it just still felt wrong.



Motif Explorations: "Daily Flow" explorations in the product. Morning, afternoon, and dusk.

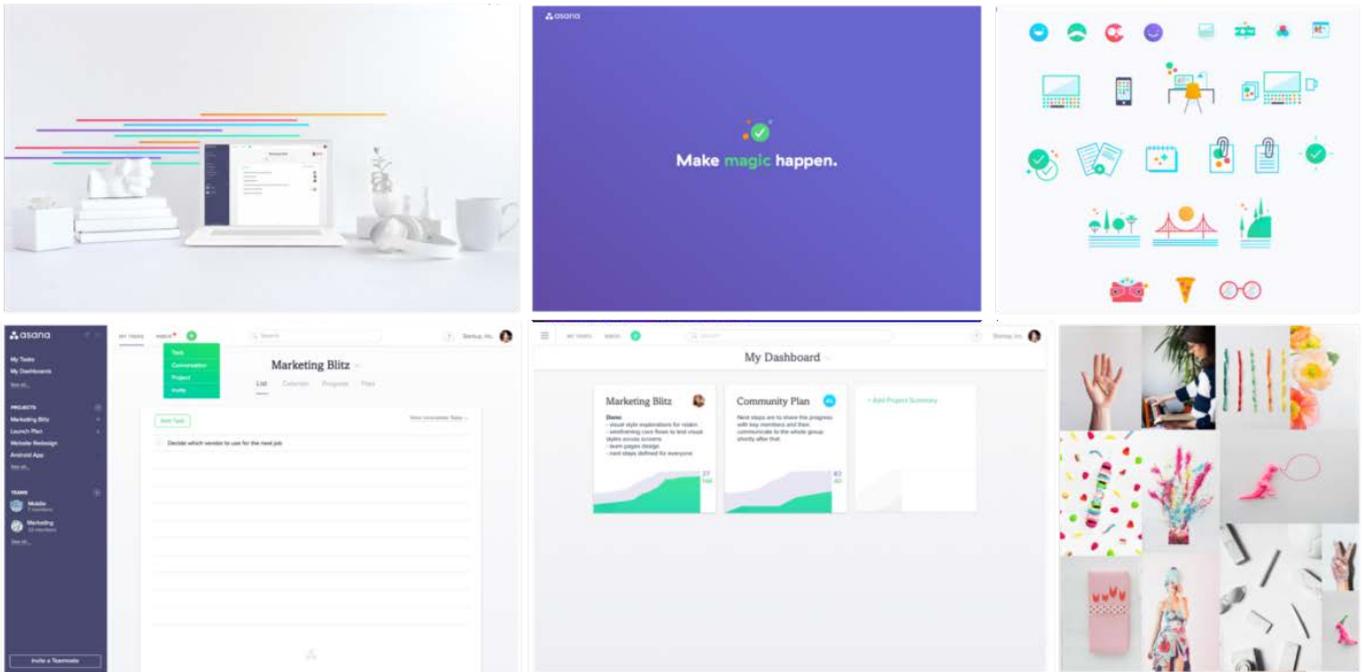
So it was time to circle back to where we started. The sky tones were pretty, and the concept was cool, but we asked ourselves: *Is this motif embodying our Attributes?*

It was Approachable enough, sure, but Quirky? Nope. Empowering? Not really. And the heavily saturated color was distracting from meaningful color in the product, leading to less clarity. So it wasn't really Purposeful either. "Daily Flow" was a novel idea, but we realized it was ultimately leading us away from our core brand.

So, we needed a new visual motif—something to bring all the pieces together in a more purposeful way. After re-grounding in the goals we had for the product redesign, our ideation quickly coalesced around a concept we coined **Clarity & Energy**.

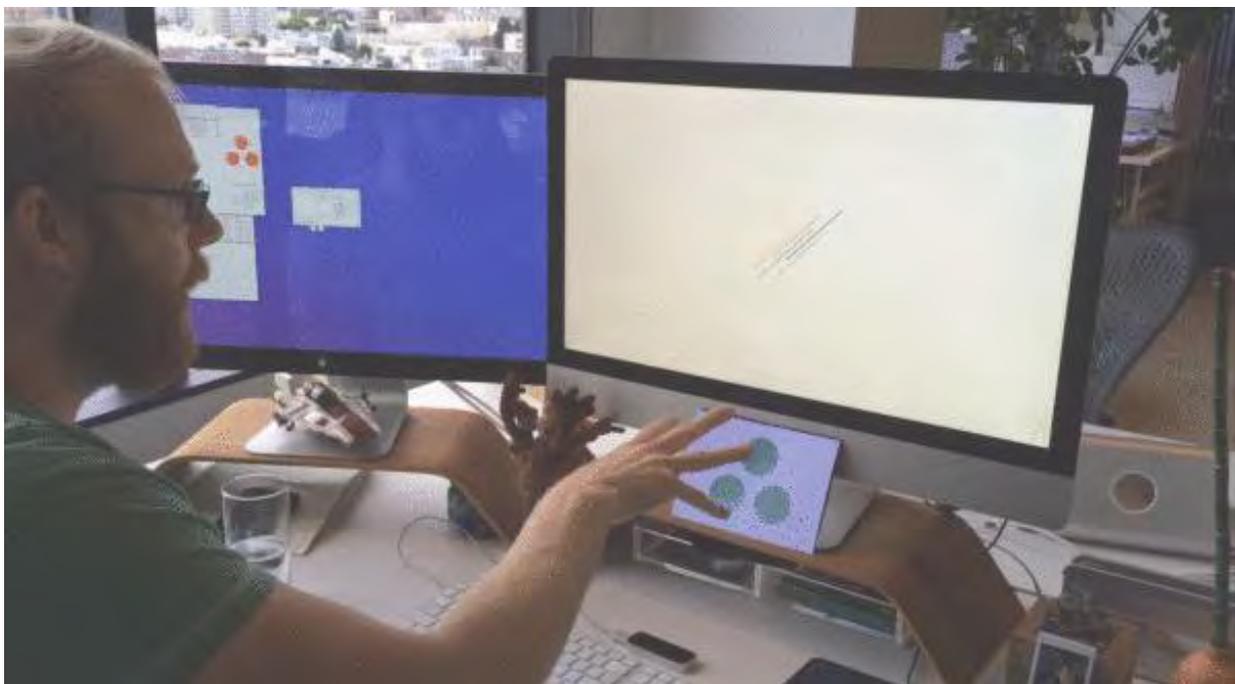
Here's the idea: When we're at work, we all want **clarity** on what it is we have to do, so Asana starts with a **clean, mostly white canvas** that puts your work front-and-center. But we also need **energy** to stay focused and driven toward results, so **bursts of vibrant color and animation** appear at key moments to celebrate your progress.

Within days, our team brought the concept to life. It started with Jess and Buzz tossing confetti . around, then getting inspired by the colorful circle patterns, and riffing on that for illustration and site design. Then, Vanessa was stripping color out of most of the product, leaving just a few bright splashes in key areas. Tyson and Marcos jumped into Origami/AfterEffects and started making icons and illustrations come to life.



Explorations of “Clarity & Energy”: A white canvas punctuated by color & motion.

Oh and, for the hell of it, Tyson made a magic moving rainbow thing that you can control with your fucking fingers in mid-air.



Stop showing off, Tyson.

This all started to feel really right. By using color and motion in small, concentrated doses, we allowed ourselves to be more playful in those moments than we would be if the product wasn't so spartan by default.

And this meant we could finally *embrace the unicorn*.

If you're a hardcore Asana user, you might know what I'm talking about. Several years ago, during an Asana hackathon, some engineers thought it would be cute to write some code that beckons a unicorn to fly across your screen when tasks are completed.

Judging it was too quirky for most users, it was relegated to the "Hacks" section of Settings, waiting for unsuspecting explorers to stumble upon it. Among those who've found it, it's gained a bit of a cult following.



Stephanie Fernandes

@GirlyGladiator



Follow

The unicorn hack makes [@asana](#) the crème de la crème of task managers

9:15 PM - 18 Sep 2015



3



Jackie Yeary

@jaxyeary



Follow

Earning a rainbow unicorn from [@asana](#) is always the highlight of my work day.

10:53 PM - 11 Sep 2015



1





Christine Cawthorne

@crocstar

 Follow

Added the celebration unicorn so when I tick off a task in [@asana](#) I feel extra awesome. Unicorns FTW!

2:03 PM - 2 Sep 2015

  1  2

So recently we ran a little experiment and turned unicorns on by default for a subset of users who create new workspaces. Despite skepticism from myself and others, the test was a success! **More people ended up using Asana and collaborating with their teammates if they saw a unicorn once in awhile.** While some were a little confused about what was happening, most were just pleasantly surprised and delighted.



Tim Adkins

@timboslice

 Follow

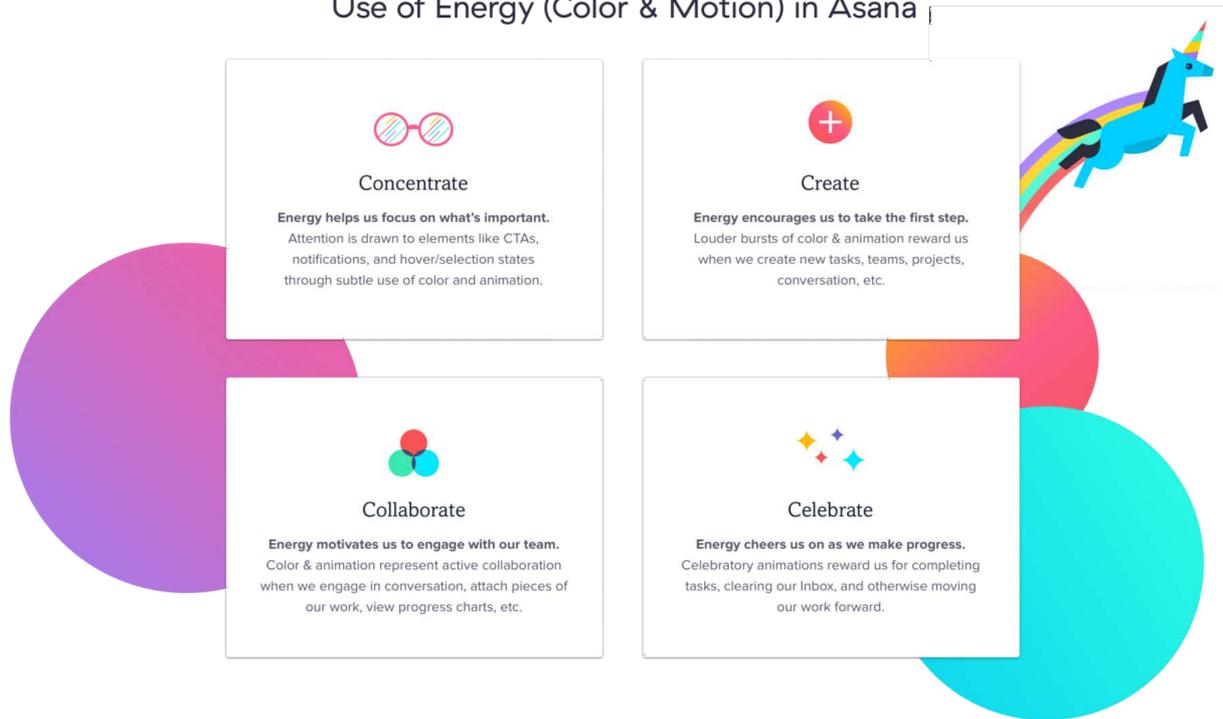
I just completed my first task using [@asana](#) and a unicorn followed by a rainbow flew across my screen proving my move from Trello worthwhile

6:37 PM - 26 Sep 2015

  1  7

Bringing this back to our brand: our new motif became an opportunity to infuse this principle into every aspect of Asana. When executed purposefully, quirky celebrations aren't just a throwaway flourish: they actually help people to stay motivated and have fun, which leads to getting more results. Who knew unicorns could boost productivity?

Use of Energy (Color & Motion) in Asana

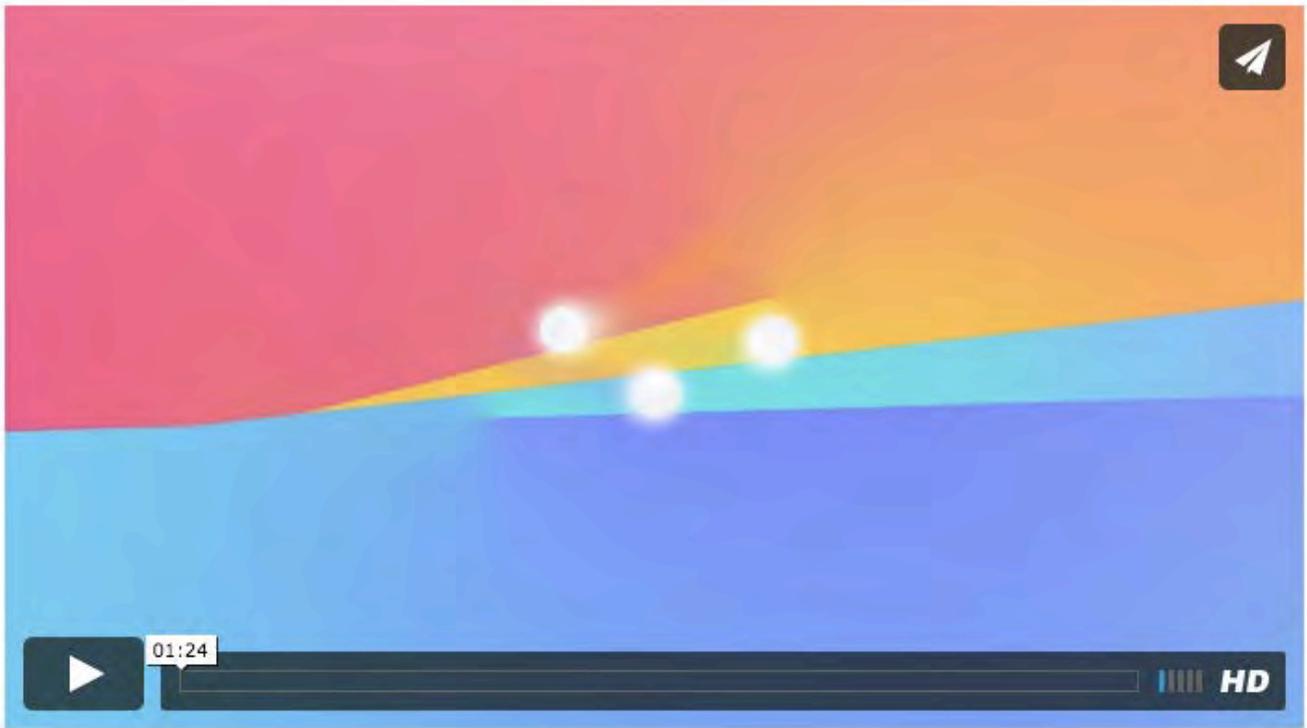


Step 7: Brand all the things

From early on, we were determined to comprehensively roll out this new brand. It wouldn't do to just slap a new logo on the website and tweak the colors; if a rebrand is to be successful, it needs full commitment.

So, the past few months have seen Asana's entire design team working tirelessly to apply the brand system to every facet of our company and products (and our engineers making them come to life). It's been a ton of work with a lot of dependencies. Many things needed to be revisited again and again as elements of the brand evolved simultaneously. But it was completely worth it.

Throughout this process, it was invaluable to have Amanda shepherding the process, ensuring that the circle was closed on each revisited element so we could move forward. Equally important was documenting these decisions, so that we could roll out the brand onto other properties in parallel, like this technicolor unveil video created by Giant Ant.



At times it seemed like all the pieces would never quite come together. But we kept on pushing it until it did. And we couldn't be more happy with the response.



Carrie Walters
@carriefleck

 Follow

Now that's a brand refresh, [@asana](#). [#newAsana](#)

4:45 AM - 1 Oct 2015

   6



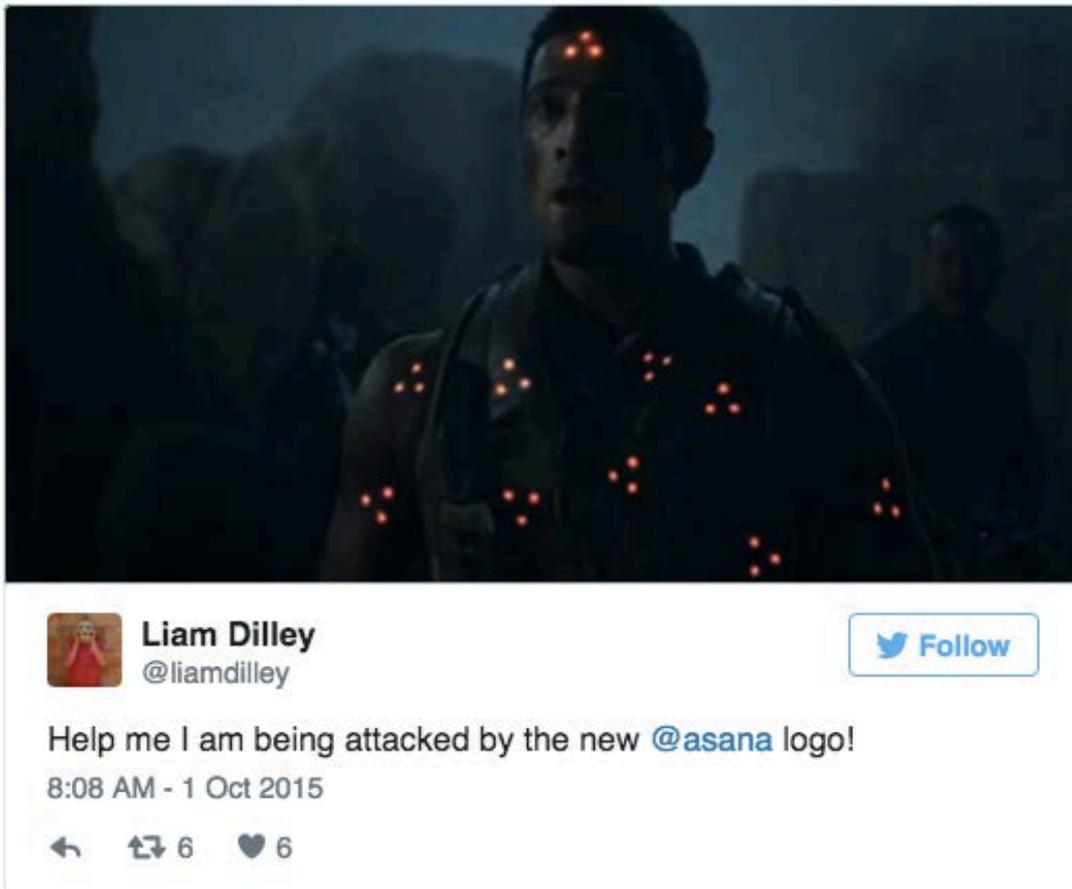
Danielle K
@whythisbox

 Follow

Loving the [#newAsana](#), especially the [@asana](#) iOS app! Beautiful new logo & gorgeous UX!  [#productivity](#)

11:17 PM - 30 Sep 2015

  1  2



Advice for your branding process

Here are the biggest takeaways from our process:

- 1. Involve a diverse set of teammates in branding as early as possible**, so the whole company feels like the brand represents them. It's worth it!
- 2. Get outside help when you need it.** Not only may consultants/agencies have branding expertise, they bring an untainted eye and fresh perspective.
- 3. Give yourself time to warm up to a concept**, especially if others on the team are drawn to it. It may grow on you.
- 4. Insist on more options if only one is working.** You won't be sure of your pick unless you're able to see it next to other solid options.
- 5. Trust your team's gut.** If it isn't working, take a step back and rethink it. Encourage experiments with confetti. Rebrands are rare opportunities.

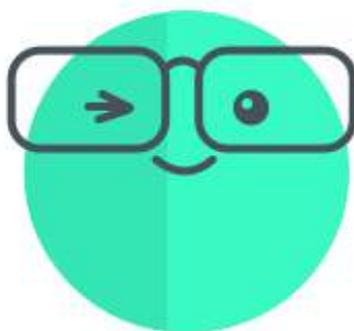
6. Circle back to the core identity often. If you did that part right, it should give you constant guidance when you're not sure where to go.

7. Close the circle as you move forward. Be sure to have clear decision-makers who can solidify changes, and propagate them across the team.

8. Have fun!

P.S. Asana's design team is hiring in SF and NYC.

P.P.S. Fred has lots of friends now.



Author's Note: *This rebrand wouldn't have been possible without the hard work and contributions of dozens of people. Major props go to the entire Asana design team: Vanessa Koch, Jessica Strelloff, Amanda Buzard, Marcos Medina, Stephanie Hornung, Tyson Kallberg, Francine Lee, Paul Velleux, Jim Renaud, Greg Elzerman, Anna Hurley, and Amanda Linden. Invaluable input/guidance came from Justin Rosenstein, Dustin Moskovitz, Kenny Van Zant, Emily Kramer, and Emilie Cole. And of course the good folks at Moving Brands and Giant Ant.*

Now check out the ten lessons Vanessa learned from our product redesign.



Michael Wong

7 min read

Design



4 Invisible User Experiences you Never Knew About

Great Design Is Invisible by Michael W.

Originally posted on [Mizko.net](https://mizko.net)

You can catch me on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)

Great Design is Invisible



Airbnb, Disney World, Uber and Nest. They are all phenomenal products, which together are worth over \$135 billion! Not only do their services deliver great value, their experiences are so well thought out and executed that their strategy goes unnoticed. In other words, their user experiences are *invisible*.

“A good designer can organise chaos. A great designer can eliminate chaos.”

When designing the experience and interactions of a product, the most common question I ask myself is, *“What is the least amount of work a user has to do, to achieve their desired outcome?”*

Who actually enjoys fiddling around with dropdown menus, input forms and buttons? Sometimes as designers, we can be distracted by unnecessary noise when thinking through an experience. We bring emphasis to ‘beautifully designed forms’ because it’s the easier way out. One method I found quite effective is to think of the end goal and work backwards. This allows you to think beyond UI elements and really focus on what matters.

“Design is only obvious in retrospective”

As designers it is important for us to think more holistically about a product and its experience. Polishing pixels is important but an experience which is so great that the design goes unnoticed is even better.

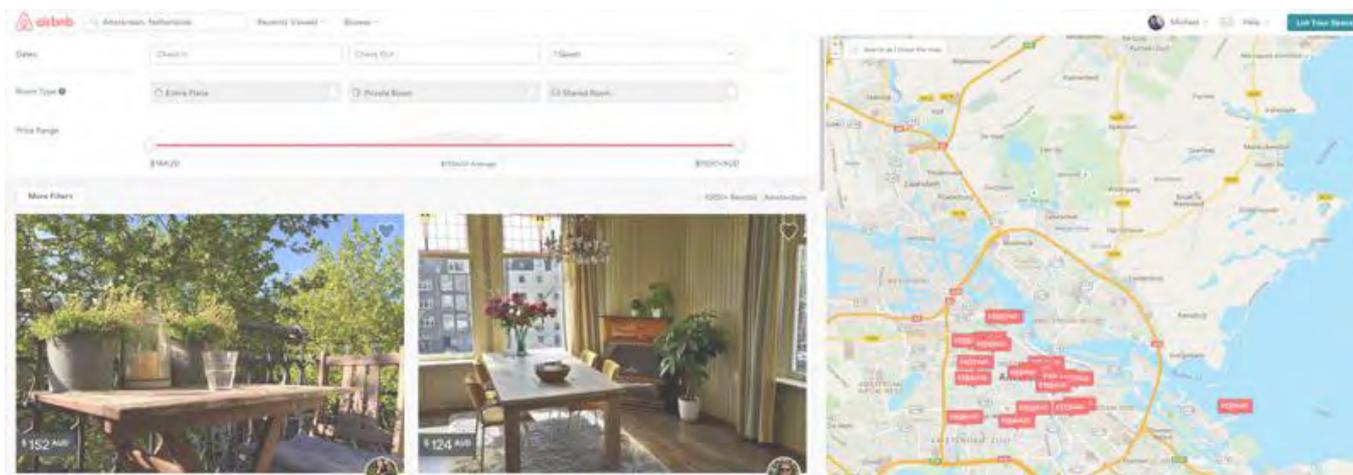
Jared Spool, an expert on the subjects of usability and design explains how Netflix sent out a survey asking their users what they liked best about their service. Customers replied with “Great selection of movies, recommendation tool was helpful and the overall service was great. **However** one thing they didn’t mention was the site was super functional, intuitive and well designed.

Jared Spool follows up with:

“While all these things are what the designers at Netflix work hard on every day, they go unmentioned by their customers. It’s not because these aspects aren’t important. It’s because the designers have done their job really well: they’ve made them invisible.

”

1. Airbnb — Design is more than gorgeous pixels



When booking a place on Airbnb, the real value is when the host wants to accommodate the guest who contacted them. In retrospect, Airbnb could have thousands of ‘available’ places to stay at but if no hosts wants to accommodate you—you’ll have a negative experience.

So what does Airbnb do to fast track you to the real value?

It's invisible. Searching on Airbnb is quite simple and the forms are very minimal. When you make a search on Airbnb, behind the scenes they use machine learning to detect host preferences.

Without going too in depth, what this means is that they have created a machine learning model that learns host behaviours and preferences for accommodation requests. With this understanding, they can optimise a 'guest' search results with 'hosts' that are more likely to accept your request as a priority. This makes your experience on Airbnb more meaningful as you're very likely to receive a quick and successful response from a host.

I am yet to experience an Airbnb host who does not respond to me.

2. Disney World — A frictionless, magical experience.



Disney World invested \$1billion on a magical wristband. Why? because it gives them the opportunity to create a frictionless, magical experience through invisible design.

It all begins when you book your ticket online and pick your favourite rides. Behind the scenes, they capture everything from you. With this data they are able to crunch your preferences then provide you a calculated itinerary that keeps you on route and stops you from zig zagging back and forth across the park.

This invisible experience also flows into your restaurant booking. When you make

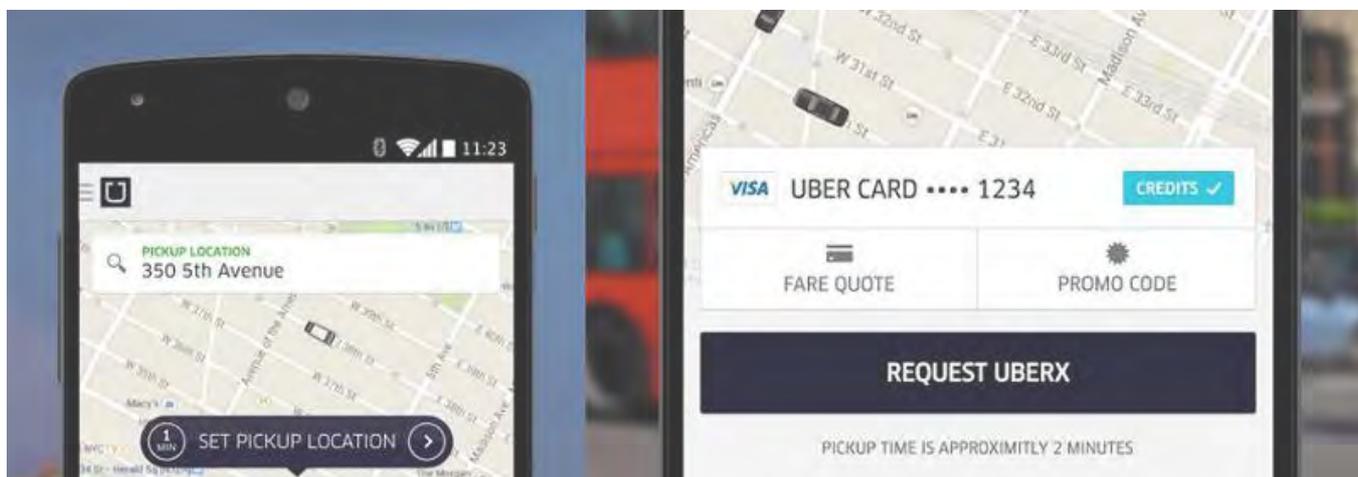
the reservation the restaurant host will already know your name. In fact, you can sit anywhere and your food will magically make its way to you! How? The restaurant is fitted out with advanced sensors which open up a whole new world of opportunities for them.

With Disney World knowing where you're located in their magical theme park, this also opens up a ton of new opportunities to deliver an ever greater experience. Just imagine your children's favourite characters come to them instead of them have weaving through the swarm of people.

As you can see, great design brings great experiences.

From a business standpoint, being able to optimise every itinerary will allow people to explore more of the park's top attractions. When visitors spend less time in lines, they can do more and ultimately spend more!

3. Uber — Disrupting an entire industry with 1 screen



Taxis on-demand.

Who ever thought one screen could disrupt an entire industry?

Waving down a taxi before the Uber days was a nightmare. Stranded on the busy streets on a cold winters morning at 4am in Sydney, is not a great experience.

1. Not knowing when an available taxi will drive by.
2. Not knowing where taxi stands are.
3. Now knowing the exact cost to destination.

The design of the Uber experience is phenomenal. From an interaction standpoint, Uber solves all of the consumers uncertainties within **one screen**.

On the opening of the app (with location services permitted), the user does not have to engage with any UI elements to experience the value of the product. This is a great example of industry leading design thinking. They've nailed "*What is the least amount of work a user has to do, to achieve their desired outcome?*" on the head.

As the app loads:

1. You can see where available taxis are.
2. Uber also provides an estimated time for the closest taxi to arrive.
3. The Uber experience only seems trivial and obvious in retrospective. Looking back at previous 'taxi booking' experiences, the most obvious 'solution' seemed to be calling a hotline, leave your name and provide a vague location.

If you have noticed with the success of Uber, the entire concept of booking cabs has diminished. Uber doesn't offer the ability to 'book a cab for tomorrow'. They've disrupted and revolutionised the industry standards and expectations.

4. Nest — Self learning Thermostat



Current thermostats are expensive, complicated and inefficient. Tony Fadell saw this as a major problem, so he created Nest. As the designer of 18 generations of iPods and 3 generations of iPhones, he applied his learnings in creating a ‘Smart Thermostat’.

Most people don’t program their thermostats for many reasons—for me it’s because it’s too fiddly. The Nest team have come up with an experience so great, it’s literally invisible.

For the first 7 days of installation, the thermostat will learn your preferences and personalised schedule. Some features it accommodates include:

- Ability to track your location via Location settings and will turn down the power when you’re away.
- It will then power up as it tracks that you’re returning home, so your home’s nice and cosy on arrival.
- Nest learns your night time habits and will turn down the power.
- Signals to prompt you that you’re saving energy
- The value proposition of Nest is that you teach it your habits and it’ll help you save.

This is great because it’s all done behind the scenes. The only thing required from the user is to set the temperatures during the first week. There’s no more fiddling around with unnecessary UI elements. Hence why Nest was bought out by Google.

The Rise of Personal Assistant Apps

Great (invisible) design comes at a great cost.

As we endure technological advances and a better understanding of technology, data, user behaviours and expectations, these experiences become more and more achievable. That is why there has been a surge and uprise in Personal Assistant apps.

What do Portal, Emu, VidaHealth, Mindy, Cortana, Siri and Google Now all have in common?

They're all a stepping stone in becoming great experiences. They're focused on delivering an experience where the 'processing work' happens behind the scenes. *"As a consumer, why do I need to click through a form to tell you what I need? Is it because we're still adapting old practices, or is it actually a better experience overall?"*

I do believe some of these personal assistant apps are powered by manual work at the moment—but as these startups continue to capture more and more data, the opportunity to automate a lot of the manual work will become available. In the next 5 years, we are going to see technology become more integrated than ever, with experiences also becoming even more seamless. I am absolutely blown away by what the team over at Microsoft Cortana are doing!

Conclusion

I hope you've learnt a few things from this article and that you're able to put these design thinking principles into practice. I challenge you, to start pushing yourself into exploring new ways of experiencing digital products. We're in a digital age where lots of things are now possible. Don't conform to patterns and trends, they don't last.

"A human made these things & a human can make it better. Don't be afraid. Go try it yourself" — Tony Fadell

I would love to hear some of the innovative experiences you're exploring or have executed! Share them with me: innovation@mizko.net

Keep in touch

Follow me on [Twitter](#). Catch me on [Facebook](#).

Relevant resources for you:

The first secret of design is ... noticing!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9uOMectkCCs>

Disney's \$1 Billion Bet on a Magical Wristband

<http://www.wired.com/2015/03/disney-magicband/>

How Airbnb uses machine learning to detect host preferences:

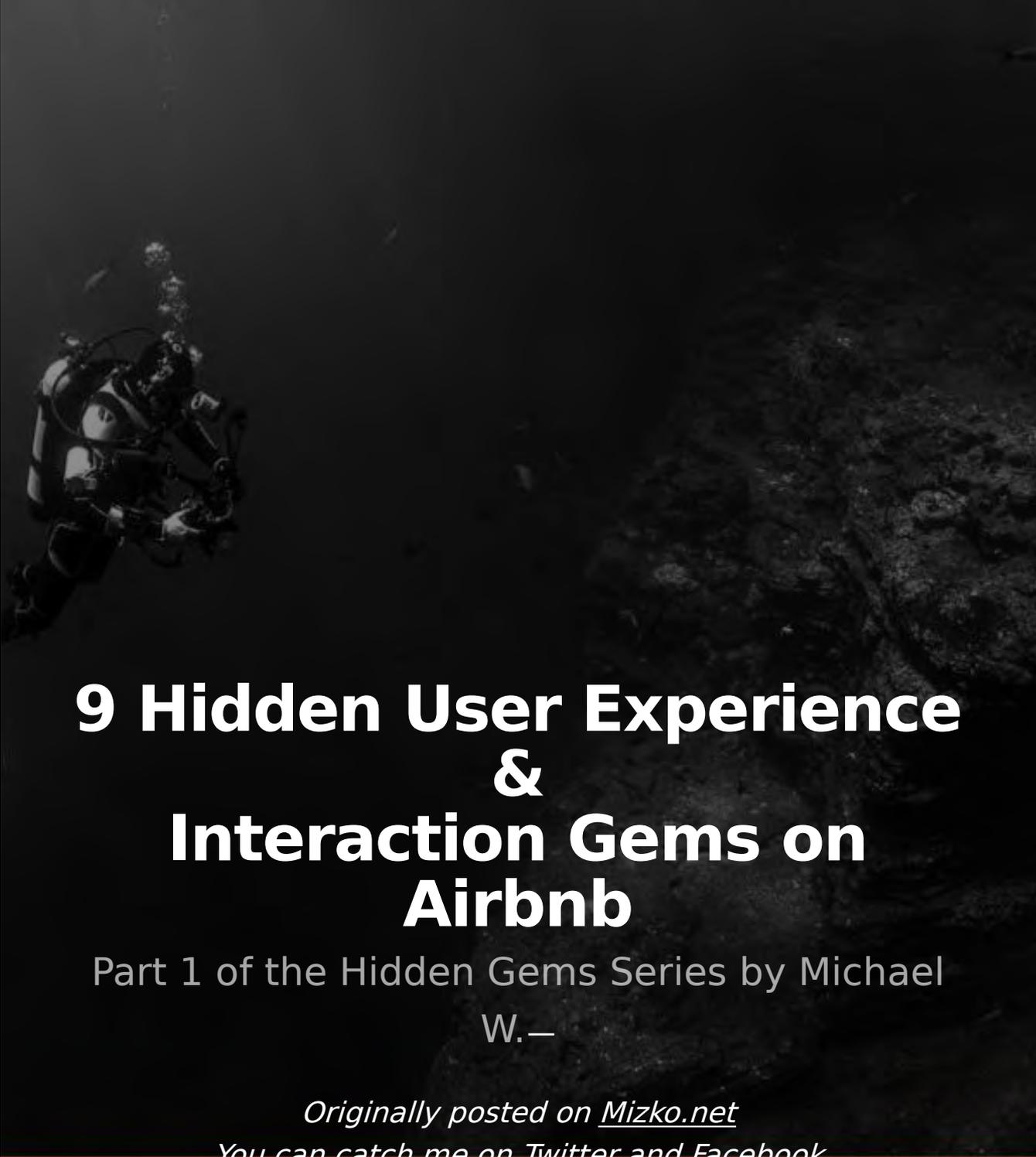
<http://nerds.airbnb.com/host-preferences/>



Michael Wong

6 min read

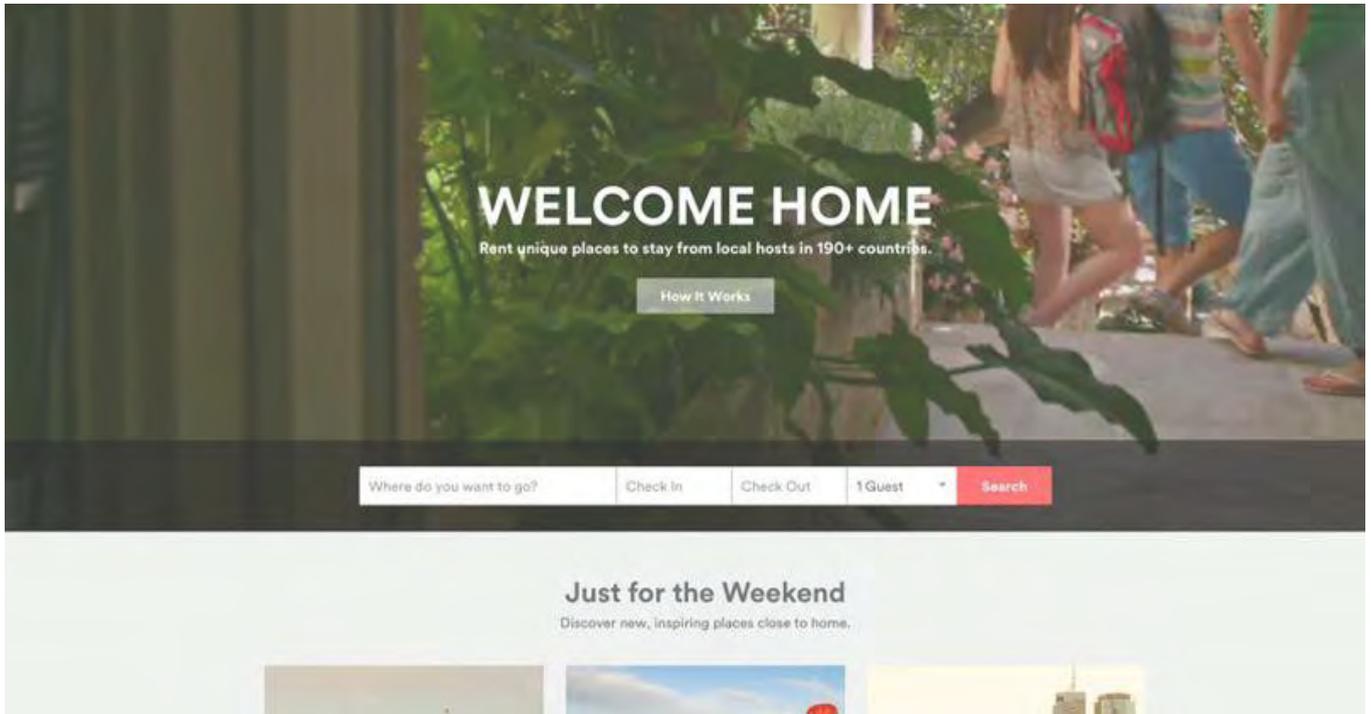
Design

A dark, atmospheric photograph of a scuba diver underwater. The diver is on the left side of the frame, facing right, with bubbles rising from their regulator. The background is a dark, textured underwater environment, possibly a cave or a rocky seabed. The overall mood is mysterious and deep.

9 Hidden User Experience & Interaction Gems on Airbnb

Part 1 of the Hidden Gems Series by Michael
W.—

*Originally posted on Mizko.net
You can catch me on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)*



If you've ever used Airbnb to book a place, you'd know they're a top-notch team when it comes to product design. The experience is seamless and they revolutionised an entire industry. That's why I'm here nerding out on the topic.

As a (product-growth-user-experience-interaction-interface-web-tacos) designer, I enjoy breaking down and finding hidden experience and interaction gems in successful products. Whether they are used to enhance the overall user experience or are powered to stimulate growth, I find them interesting and something worth sharing. Hopefully this post will help you to pick up a few ideas for your own project.

Without further ado, here are the 9 hidden user experience and interaction gems I found on Airbnb:

1. Emotional Contagion (user experience)

As soon as I step onto Airbnb's homepage, I am instantly greeted by a safe and welcoming vibe. I believe there are many factors that contribute to this but one thing definitely stood out to me. Photos predominantly drive their homepage. If you look closely, most of their portrait shots have either a couple or group of 'friends' smiling and enjoying life.

This is a great example of emotional contagion.

According to Wikipedia, “emotional contagion” is the tendency for two individuals to emotionally converge. When people unconsciously mimic expressions of emotion, they come to feel reflections of those companions emotions.”



By overwhelming us with photos from the get go, the home page is jolting our minds to trust the Airbnb community and associate its brand with happy travellers.

If you want to see how emotional contagion can be spread online, you'll find the following article quite interesting: ['Facebook manipulated user news feeds to create emotional responses'](#).

2. Emotion driven terminology (user experience)

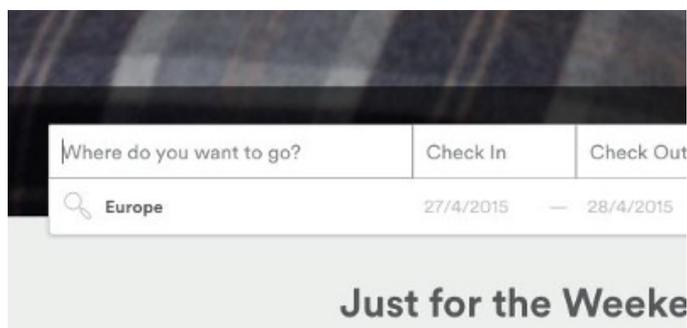


Airbnb has a very consistent set of terms they use across the site. 'One less stranger', 'A World of Belonging', 'Belong Anywhere', 'Welcome Home' etc. This may not seem like much but I believe it's very well thought out.

They turn what used to be a very static experience of accommodation search to something very emotional and personal.

Never underestimate copy. It frames the context of any experience. For example, you could have 3 photos displaying the best that Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane has to offer. A title such as 'Ideas for your next trip' is ok but a title such as 'This week's TOP holiday destinations!' will get people clicking. The context of the second title gets people to get excited and to jump on board because everybody else is doing it!

3. Saved previous search (user interaction)

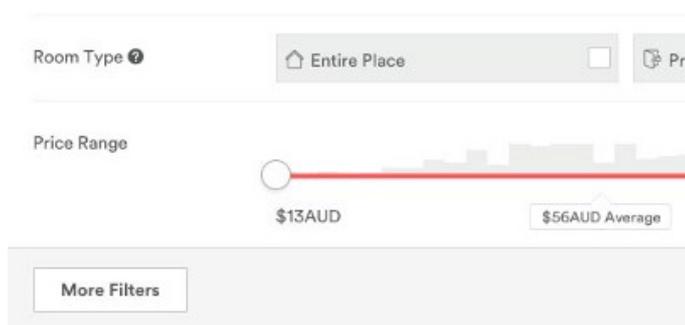


When my café barista remembers my coffee order, I can't help but return to soak in the VIP service. It's pretty swish when service providers remember the individual needs of their customers.

Airbnb takes this service online by remembering all your previous website searches. This means that after you've compared quotes and offers from different sites, Airbnb will remember all your favourite stays WITH your travel dates intact!

This is just one simple step to making your experience on their site memorable and seamless.

4. Price range pain points (user interaction)



With the growth of Airbnb and the thousands of listings that pop up in search results, choice paralysis can easily overwhelm a user. I noticed they now have a very discreet bar graph that shows a high level count of

listings within a price range. This helps me to quickly understand average prices without having to dig into a hundred listings to gather this information.

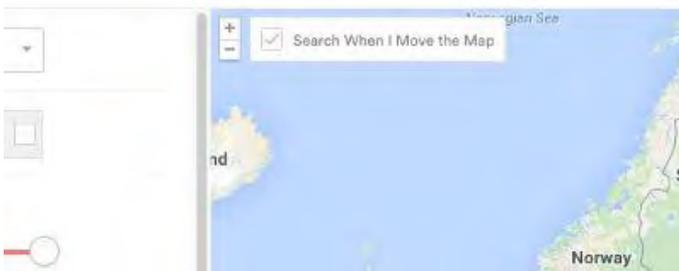
5. Image carousel in listings (user interaction)



What's most important to you when selecting a place to stay at? For me, it's what the place actually looks like! Airbnb makes it so easy to browse through the listing photos. You don't need to click through to the next page. You can simply browse the

photos on the parent-listing page. If the gallery doesn't tickle your fancy, move on. #LESSONECLICK

6. Live updating listings (user interaction)



I love that their listings automatically update when you move around on their map. This is another well thought out design that adds extra delight to the experience.

7. Social proof and urgency stimulation



An old trick from the books. Stimulate urgency and create social proof by revealing the number of users you're competing with.

When I made my first enquiry on

Airbnb, I was rejected because I was late to make the booking. I wish they had this implemented earlier! I still look forward to booking the place again, on my next visit to Amsterdam!

8. Staying true to their core values (user experience)



How nice would it be to be greeted by all your new ‘friends’ from all around the world during a special time? This is one of my favourite branding and retention strategies by Airbnb.

I remember in one of Brian Chesky’s interviews he talks about Airbnb being more than an accommodation site. It’s a place to build new friendships.

At the end of last year I received an email, which titled ‘Share season’s greetings with your Airbnb Hosts’. This is a great idea that encourages friendship and community building on their platform. It is also a predominate reason to why I enjoy booking with Airbnb over other accommodation sites.

9. Dynamic homepage (user experience)



A focused, funnel experience on their homepage.

When you first come to Airbnb’s homepage they remove the explore section. The focus is on the first entry point into their funnel.

Now make a search and click around on a few listings and return to the homepage. What do you see? A personalised and tailored experience relevant to your search. A minor gem but it definitely made me go wow, dat personalised experience.

Not only does it add a touch of delight to the experience, the timing is also a lot more relevant. I’ve become more of a warm user after making a search and browsing a couple of pages.

Conclusion

As of 2015, Airbnb is valued at \$20 billion. That's within 7 years. What an inspiring startup story. If you haven't already, I highly recommend you [Airbnb—The growth story you didn't know](#). There are some great insights into startups, product design and growth strategies.

I hope you've picked up a couple of tricks.

Keep in touch

If you'd like to keep in touch, share a few words or stay up to date on what I'm working on. Follow me on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).



Mike Monteiro

5 min read

Design



. . .

Q: I had a professor in school who went on and on about how well the AK-47 was designed. He stressed that as designers we should be able to appreciate an object's design on a purely aesthetic level. Do you agree?

. . .

A: Fuck no. Fuck him. Fuck the AK-47. Fuck all guns and the people who design them, but especially fuck Mikhail Kalashnikov, the designer of the AK-47.

But let's look at the argument being made. The AK-47 is often cited as a well-designed object. And this case is usually made by pointing out that the AK-47 is easy to use, maintain, take-apart, modify, and manufacture. It's a model of simplicity. And the original design, introduced in 1948, is still in use, even as the AK family has continued evolving.

...the model and its variants remain the most popular and widely used assault rifles in the world because of their substantial reliability under harsh conditions, low production costs compared to contemporary Western weapons, availability in virtually every geographic region and ease of use. — [Wikipedia](#)

Any of us would be proud to design something with that kind of legacy. Ease of use. Ease of manufacturing. Adaptability. Simplicity. Aren't these the cornerstones of design?



The AK-47 is so simple even a child can use it!

So where is the problem? Surely, a designer's job is to design something to the best of their ability. As a designer, you are required to do your best work. And we've all had to design something we weren't too crazy about. In which case your responsibility is to improve the design. How do you improve an object that's designed to kill without making it more efficient at killing?

A gun's only purpose is to kill. When it kills it is working *as designed*. And a gun is designed to be fired. The trigger yearns to be pulled. It is designed to shoot a bullet into a human body at a force that creates the maximum amount of damage. Which is technical way of saying its job is to kill you.

But while someone can certainly make the case that an AK-47, or any other kind of gun or rifle is *designed*, nothing whose primary purpose is to take away life can be said to be designed *well*. And that attempting to separate an object from its function in order to appreciate it for purely aesthetic reasons, or to be impressed by its minimal elegance, is a coward's way of justifying the death they've designed into the world, and the money with which they're lining their pockets.



A Glock's "safety" is ON THE TRIGGER! You disengage the trigger and fire in the same motion. This is by design. This was a design decision.

And yes, there are many objects that kill. Cars come to mind. And they're the gun enthusiasts favorite straw man. And while I agree that cars definitely have the *potential* to kill, you can't really argue that they're designed to do so. Car deaths—and I hesitate to call them "accidents" because I do believe there are too many of them—are a very unfortunate by-product of car

usage, but not the main goal. Every year steps are taken to make cars safer, to *improve* the design of cars to reduce the amount of deaths. (Along with other, more marketable, goals.) But, by definition, improving the design of guns can only result in them becoming better killing machines.

If a thing is designed to kill you, it is, by definition, bad design.

So what is the designer's role in this? Design is an ethical trade. And yes, it is a trade done for money. But we have a choice in how we make that money. A designer possesses a set of skills necessary to get something made. And needs to properly assess how they are putting those skills to use. But, won't someone else just design it?



The monsters we design carry our names into eternity.

Possibly. If Kalashnikov hadn't designed the AK-47 wouldn't someone else just have designed another rifle? Most assuredly. And they did. There are as many types of rifles out there shooting up our villages, our churches, and our Marine recruiting stations as there is cereal in the cereal aisle. And they all have a designer's name attached to them. The shit we design carries our name.

Your role as a designer is to leave the world in a better state than you found it. You have a responsibility to design work that helps move humanity forward and helps us, as a species, to not only enjoy our time on Earth, but to evolve.

And to design is to take purpose into account—as my friend Jared Spool says: design is the rendering of intent. You can't separate an object's function from its intent. You cannot critique it, you cannot understand it, and you cannot appreciate something without thinking about its intent.

You are responsible for what you put into the world. And how it affects the world.

You are responsible for what you put into the world. And you are responsible for how what you've designed affects the world. Mikhail Kalashnikov is responsible for as many deaths as the people who pulled those triggers.



The things you put into the world will be used in ways you never expected. And by idiots.

Obviously, firearms design is an extreme example of this. I doubt many of you will go on to become firearms designers, and fuck all of you that do. But how many of us are asked to design things that have the potential of causing harm to the people who come into contact with our work? How many of us will work on privacy settings for large social networks at some point? Will we think of how those settings affect those who interact with them? How many of us will design user interfaces for drop cams? Will we think of the privacy violations they might cause? How many of us will design products that put people in strangers' cars? Will we consider those passengers' safety as we design our solution? And will we see it as our responsibility to make sure these products are as safe as possible?

And if we come to the conclusion that these products *cannot* be made safe, how many of us will see it as our responsibility to raise our hands and say "I'm not making this."

Because we have to.

Thanks to Ross Floate.



Mike Monteiro

23 min read



The following is an excerpt from *You're My Favorite Client*, a book to help people understand design. Written by Mike Monteiro. Published by A Book Apart.

Chapter 1

Why you need design

DESIGN RESULTS FROM human decisions. You can design with intention, which means you have a chance of doing it well, or you can let it happen, which means you'll probably bungle the job. Design happens whether you're aware you're doing it or not paying attention. Nothing is undesignated. Things are badly designed, well designed, and points between.

What do I mean by design?

Design is how we communicate what an object does, or its function, through its shape or form.

Take a baseball mitt. Study it for a bit, and it becomes obvious that your hand goes inside. That's form. The minute you have the mitt on, you understand it makes it easier to catch a baseball. That's function.



An example of good design. The object's form makes its function obvious. And the problem being solved is evident. (Especially if you've ever tried to catch a ball with your bare hand.)

Design is also the process we undertake to solve a problem. It fucking hurts to catch a baseball with your bare hand. A mitt is the solution to that problem.

If you ask five designers to define design, you'll get five different answers. For our purposes, and because we have actual work to do, the above definition works fine.

When you think about the design of a chair, you consider both how it looks and how it feels to sit on. A well-designed office chair corrects your posture and enhances your productivity, while a well-designed living room chair lets you lie back and relax, watch TV, play with your iPad, and take a nap. An airline seat is purposely designed to fill you with regret and levels of sadness unknown in human history outside the Spanish Inquisition.

If you and I were to design a chair together, we'd have to consider some factors from the get-go. Of course, we'd consider the seat's size, the height from the ground, the angle of the back, the materials, and the fabric. Before we made any of those decisions, we'd ask ourselves about the chair's goals. Who would be using the chair? What would they be doing? How would the chair benefit the person sitting in it? These answers affect how we communicate its function. When a person's expectation of the chair matches their experience of sitting in the chair, they get more joy out of it. This is design done right.

Will those considerations ensure that the chair is well designed? No, but they certainly increase the odds. Not thinking about them ensures that our chair is badly designed.



Design begins at conception. No amount of “design” is going to turn the IKEA chair on the left into the Arne Jacobsen chair on the right.

Yet when we build websites or apps, we often wait until the last minute to bring in designers to “apply” design, or look and feel. This is akin to baking a cake and then hiring a baker to make it taste good. (We’ve mixed our first metaphor!)

WHAT’S DESIGN’S VALUE?

Imagine two chair shops across the street from each other. One shop takes the chair’s design into consideration from the start. They hire the best chair designer they can. The chair designer researches other chairs on the market to figure out where they’re lacking. They ask people what they like and dislike about their current chairs, research materials, consider the chair company’s budget and profit margin, and source materials and manufacturing to make sure the chair is built right. They test different designs. They make adjustments. They test again. They come up with a solid design that meets both the company’s goals and people’s desires. The chair goes into production. It sells well. Everyone is now rich.

The people at the chair shop across the street also make a chair. They select adequate materials and make a seat, some legs, a back. This is definitely a chair! Then they hire a designer and say, “Make this a comfortable chair!” The designer adds a sad little foam rubber seat cushion. The chair bombs. Everyone dies of dysentery.

The value of good design is the increased possibility of success. We understand its importance in everyday objects like chairs, clothes, watches, coffee makers, and a good mattress. When it comes to websites, we tend to think of design as a surface layer applied at the end. In truth, that website’s design started long ago. It can be intentional or happenstance. For design to be truly great, you need to build it into your projects from conception. Because if you’re not doing it, you can bet your competitors are.

To get design’s full value, you need to hire a professional. You need a designer. Would you trust any other valuable part of your business to someone who wasn’t qualified to do it? Would you let your cousin’s best friend do your accounting because they had a calculator? Or let your neighbor reprogram your fuel injection system because they have three cars on blocks on their lawn? Probably not.

We hire professionals because we can hold them accountable. If you get audited, you better believe you're taking your accountant with you to the hearing. If the credit card processing system on your site goes down, you want to know that your engineering team is on it. You also want to be able to call them into your office and ask what happened. When your users can't figure out your site's interface, you want to know you've got people trained in designing effective interfaces on the job. When you ask people to take on tasks that are neither part of their job nor something they're trained at, you have no right to complain if they screw it up. Gift horses and whatnot.

Can I guarantee that hiring a professional designer will result in good design? No more than a college can guarantee that studying there will make you smarter. But it certainly improves your odds. Especially if you find the right fit. We'll go over that in a bit.

Look for thoughtful, inventive problem solvers with excellent communication skills. Don't get dazzled by the "creatives" trap. If you catch yourself thinking, "We could really use some of this energy around here," put down the Kool-Aid. Treat your designers (and call them designers) as adult professionals. Hold them responsible for measurable job performance goals, the same as other employees. (We'll go over how to do this in a later chapter.)

WHAT DESIGN CAN'T FIX

Let me tell you a story that's playing out among every media company in the world. The editorial team is arguing to make their website look more modern, offer a cleaner reading experience with better typography, and hey, while we're at it, let's kill pagination. Across the table, the sales team is arguing for their ad units, for placement above the fold. (The concept of a fold will outlive every newspaper on the planet.) They're arguing for three or four or five ad units on every page. To be fair, their job effectiveness is measured by those units. While I'm generally (always) on the editorial team's side, I empathize with the sales team as well. This isn't unlike Stringer Bell pushing for the co-op as Avon Barksdale screams back,

"I want my corners!" (This is the first reference to *The Wire*. Won't be the last. Be ready. Everyone in business should watch *The Wire*.)

So the company hires a design team to help solve their problem. If the design team's good, they'll tell the truth: the problem is that the stakeholders have different goals. The site can't solve the problem, because the two sides need to agree over the conference table first. Otherwise, they're passing a compromised intent to readers.

In our experience as a design firm, it's common for client team members to disagree among themselves. They get to the point where some people want one thing like exposed navigation, and others want it hidden. They ask us to devise a solution that meets both teams halfway. Or someone higher up has a drastically different reaction to the work than the core project team. So they ask us to design something that tricks the CEO while staying the course. Or worse: "Can you show us both variations to help us make up our minds?"

The answer is no.



The El Camino: manifestation of compromised intent. [Photograph by Useute, English Wikipedia Project](#)

As my good friend Jared Spool says, “Design is the rendering of intent”. When the intent isn’t clear, the project stakeholders can’t agree on goals, or two founders veer in two directions to take their company, no amount of design can solve that situation. Design doesn’t work if you don’t know your intent. Otherwise, you’ll find yourself in the land of mullets, half-cafs, cran-grape drinks, platypuses, and El Caminos. (Granted, platypuses are pretty cool. But they’re filled with poison.)

Designers can design a solution to a problem, but they can’t design a solution to a disagreement.

Some designers try to apply the wisdom of Solomon by coming up with a solution so terrible the disagreeing parties have no choice but to finally agree. This never works. And they soon find themselves breathing life into Frankenstein’s monster. A designer should never put something in front of you they don’t stand by.

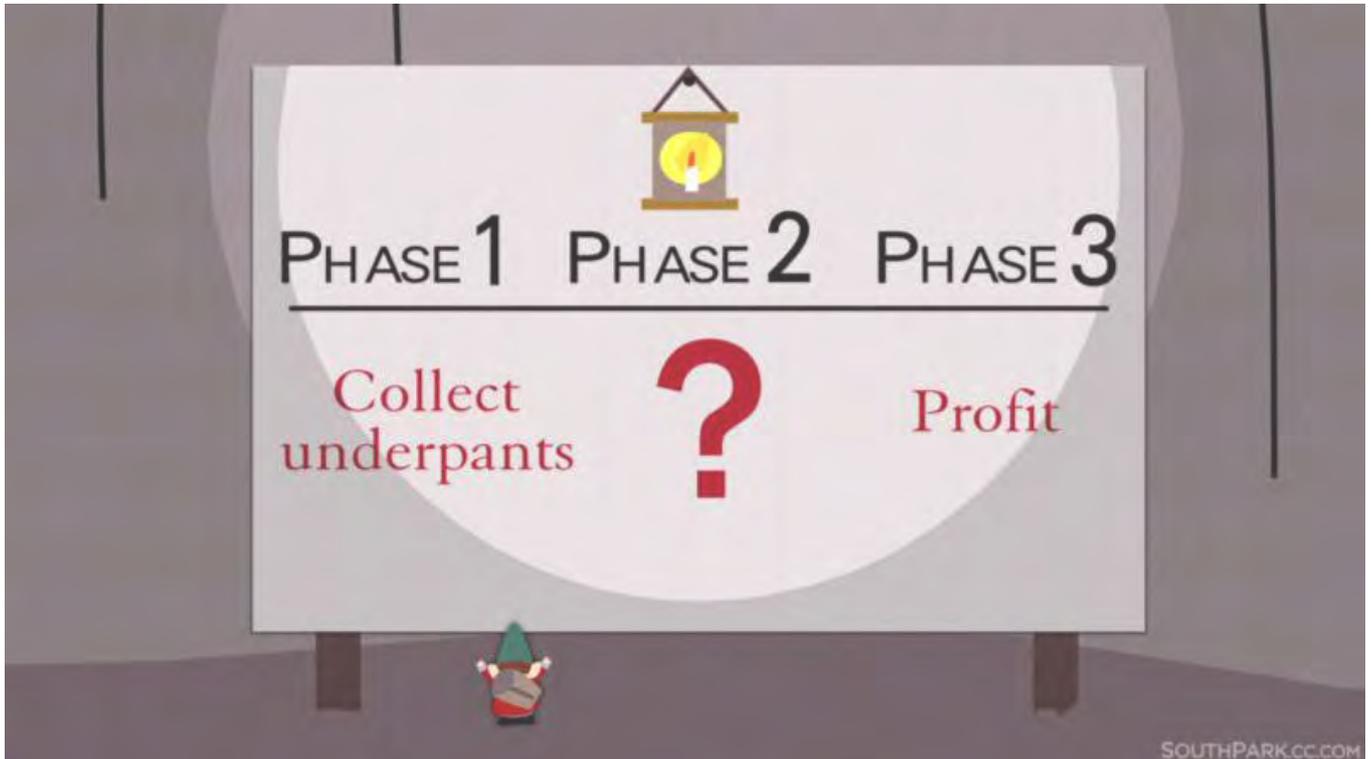
Before you commit to the design process, make sure your goals are clear and your team’s on board with those core goals. Bring in the designer once you’ve done so. Bring them in to help you work through the details and the strategy, and then leave the solutions up to the designer.

The only way out from unclear goals is to talk through them until you’ve achieved clarity of intention. (Pro tip: do this in a room with no windows and no chairs that also smells like eggs. You’ll cut your time in half.)

Here’s a handy list of problems you may need to solve before spending precious time and money on design:

Imaginary business model

One of the first questions I ask potential clients is how they’ll make money with the thing they want me to design. Everyone (hopefully) remembers the underpants gnomes episode of South Park. The gnomes have a foolproof plot to get rich:



That's right. It's the exact plan we used to build the internet! The lovable rascallions of *South Park* couldn't help the underpants gnomes execute their plan and were wary of giving up their underpants without knowing the purpose.

You can't design a system for profit unless you understand where that profit comes from.

At the least, you can't design it well. To tell whether something is designed well, you need clear metrics. One such metric should be whether the business model is successful, if you want to stick around. With a clear and reasonable business model, you have a chance at a successful design.

Here's an example that doesn't involve gnomes. Say you hire a designer and your business model is ad-driven. The designer does an excellent job optimizing the ad spots to generate revenue and places them where advertisers will pay a premium. Two weeks after launch, you decide your most important metric for success isn't ad revenue but the number of newsletter subscribers, which was a low priority during the redesign.

You look at the number of newsletter subscriptions, and it's a weak number. Does that mean the site wasn't designed correctly? No. That's the site working as designed. When your business model shifts, you need a redesign—so hammer out your business goals before you start.

Bad content

Since we're becoming friends I'll tell you a secret. No one comes to a site because of the design. They come for the content or the service, like booking air travel. The design should encourage them to stay, offering a wonderfully easy-to-understand and even delightful way to interact with that content or service. Bad design can certainly bury good content, but you can't design a "premium experience" and pour crap content into it with any expectation of success.

A few years ago, I had the pleasure of working with *ProPublica*, a team of investigative journalists who do incredible work. Their initial strategy was to partner with newspapers (many of whom had laid off their own investigative reporters) and publish stories through these partners. *ProPublica* intentionally focused their resources on reporting rather than their website. Over time, the pool of available partners dwindled, and *ProPublica* realized they needed to create a suitable platform to publish their work. We were lucky enough that they chose to partner with us. Our job was relatively easy. All we had to do was create an effective showcase to highlight that work. These days ProPublica is gobbling up Pulitzers like Pez. Is this because of the site design? No. But the design makes reading their stories a more pleasant experience.

It's all about content, people. Design is what holds it together. So before you drop a chunk of money and time on design, get some writers and content strategists. And beware of people who talk about "consuming content." No one has ever woken up with the desire to consume content in their life.

A lack of resources

The first part of our design process is what we call the discovery phase. This is when we examine every aspect of the design problem. We talk to people in the organization. We talk to your users, discuss your goals, and find out how you get things done. Only after we've done this research can we think about how to solve anything.

Most studios have a similar research phase. Be leery of those that don't.

The most crucial thing we discover is how you work as a team. We need to know how many people actively publish to or maintain the website, and how much time they commit to it. We also need to know their skill sets. Any decent design solution takes your resources into account.

So when a client says, "We want tons of big photos," my next question is, "Who's going to source those?" When we don't have a clear answer, or when the indicated individual lacks the skill set (and sourcing photography *is* a skill), the website will probably fail. The same applies to infographics, only it's ten times worse.

If I design a system that you lack the resources to sustain, I'm not doing *my* job. I haven't designed a solution to the problem; I've *created* a problem.

A good designer can't in good conscience deliver something to a client knowing it will fail.

Be wary of gravitating toward a design that calls for a nonexistent resource. On the plus side, you could become a job creator!

Stealth stakeholder

"They'll come around when they see what great work you're doing." Sure they will. They'll come around and kill the project because they've been left out of it.



LOL. Invisible stakeholder.

I've unfortunately gotten myself into this position a few times. A well-meaning team hires me. I ask if all the stakeholders are aware of the project. They say, "Yes," or more likely, "Sure!" We proceed, do a ton of great work together, and when the project's about to go live, a previously invisible stakeholder emerges from the shadows like Batman. The specter sometimes manifests as: "We need to get the board's approval before final sign-off." Replace board with *investor, dean, silent partner, dad...* you get the idea.

No work is so good that it makes people happy they were left out. As difficult as the conversation or logistics may be to get those people on board before the project begins, I guarantee you (and I'll give you few guarantees in this book) *that* conversation is easier than the conversation when they realize they're out of the loop.

So before you scope the project or interview designers, ask yourself, "Who can kill this project?" Involve that person! Make an ally, not an enemy. Include your designer in the conversation. I'd much rather help you convince your CEO at the project's onset than stand in her office three-quarters of the way through the project to explain how I've been spending her money.

Conflicted chain of command

Nothing halts a design project like hazy direction or contradictory client feedback. As I mentioned at the start of this chapter, we often get conflicting feedback from clients who haven't sorted out their priorities.

Clients ideally handle internal disagreement before feedback reaches the designer, but since hearing the source of the disagreement is often instructive, I'm okay with not drawing a hard line and hearing what the disagreement is about.

When the feedback contradicts itself, our job is to point that out and help the client clarify and prioritize. Someone on the client side may have to step up and make the ultimate call. We need to know who has the final say, which means you need to know first.

Let me tell you about Larry. Larry is one of my all-time favorite clients. (Unseating Larry should be your goal.) Anyway, Larry had a team of bright, opinionated people. I loved working with them.

During one of our early meetings, everyone was arguing a point I've long since forgotten, but the opinions were flying around pretty fast and Larry was sitting there listening. Mulling things over.

At one point, someone made a fairly impassioned case and Larry shouted, "Sold!"

The argument continued.

Larry, in a friendly, authoritative voice, said, "You don't understand. When I say 'Sold,' it means that you've convinced me and the discussion is over."

In that moment, there was absolutely no confusion about the chain of command. I've since adopted yelling, "Sold!" during our own internal meetings, much to my team's dismay.



WHAT'S A DESIGNER?

"Bring in the creatives!"

When most people think of designers, they picture something exotic. A rule-breaker! A free spirit. They may picture Edna Mode from *The Incredibles* forcing her newly designed suits on a freaked-out Elastigirl.

They may see Stan from *Mad Men* lighting a joint in the office. Or Will Ferrell's character Mugatu from *Zoolander*. And god bless those of you imagining Darrin Stephens from *Bewitched*, who was unable to solve a client's problem without the intervention of forbidden wife-magic.

We've been trained to think of designers as people who are a few cards short of a tarot deck, out in left field, creatures of instinct. They don't follow rules. They accidentally set conference rooms on fire. And they only work when inspiration rolls up for a visit. Even worse, we believe that those are the qualities we should value and seek out in designers.

The myth of inspiration has a strong hold on designers and their clients. Both share in its perpetuation. (Can you imagine letting any other employee get away with only working when inspired? I hope not.)

The world of advertising, whose list of sins runs deep, has sinned most by branding these people as *creatives*, which the world of web design sadly adopted as its own. Calling someone a creative doesn't elevate. It marginalizes. The label excludes designers from conversations about strategy, product definition, business goals, and metrics. It sets them apart from other employees as people who aren't bound by the same expectations and requirements. It diminishes their opportunity to be seen as people capable of analytical, rigorous thought.



Sometimes designers look like this, but mostly in movies. In real life we'd find this person incredibly irritating to work with.



Sometimes designers look like bouncers and the guy that pumps your gas in Oregon. And that's ok. They get shit done.

Saddest of all, people who went on to become designers grew up with those stereotypes and adopted them as their own. This is why you have people self-identifying as creatives. Coming into work when they please. Skipping requirements meetings. Blathering about inspiration while the money you're paying them is flushed down the toilet, along with your deadlines.

And here I am telling you to hire these people.

Except I'm not. I want to redraw your mental picture of a designer and tell you what you *should* expect of them.

I'm here to say it's okay to tell them to take off the stupid panda hat at work.

A good designer behaves like a skilled professional with analytical, persuasive, creative, and social skills. You can count on them to solve problems, present good work in a timely manner, be accountable, and argue from an informed point of view.

Designers aren't artists. Design isn't self-expression.

Nothing special or magical marks design. While designers come in many flavors, some bitter and some with a lemony aftertaste, don't tolerate any of those flavors if the designers don't behave professionally.

Let's explore the vast world of designers and learn more about what they do and what you should expect:

Designers make things

This is probably the part you already associate with designers: the making of the thing. Yes, with the mockups (don't call them mocks!), the layouts, and the coding. I won't spend too much of your time here, except to emphasize that the reason this part works is all the attention to the parts that come before it: the research and the strategy. Understanding the problem.

Sitting down to execute is the easy part if you did the prep work.

Designers solve problems

Once upon a time, I did a research interview with a young designer who worked at a big company. I asked him at what point he got involved in projects. He told me that the product team, the management team, and the engineering team—basically everyone but him—got together and defined the product strategy. They wrote product specs, made wireframes, did most everything but tie a bow on the project, and handed it over to “design.” I asked this kid, and he was a good kid, why he didn't attend those meetings. He said he wasn't invited. (Small aside to any designer reading: don't wait for an invite. Get your ass in there.)

Your boss may not even know it's important for you to be present. I'm about to tell them, but part of your job is knowing where you need to be and telling people you need to be there.)

You hire designers to help solve your problem. To do so to the best of their abilities, designers need to take part in conversations where everyone discusses the problem and bandies about solutions. This helps them better understand what you're asking them to do, and it puts people in the room who may have a different approach to the problem. You want as many diverse points of view as possible. If you're worried about bringing a designer into the room because you're batting around half-baked ideas, that's exactly why the designer should be there: to throw in ingredients you wouldn't think of and keep you from fully baking the bad ones.

Design starts with understanding the problem and helping to set the strategy. Not having your designer participate in the problem solving is like a restaurant investor handing the daily menu to the chef and saying, "Make this." Neither of us would want to eat at that restaurant.

And, yes, if you have a designer who hasn't asked to be involved as early as possible, you should be a little worried.

Designers advocate for your users

Your success depends on how well your product or service meets the needs of the people who use it, and how many people you get to use it. Good designers understand this. They find out who your customers are, how they behave, and how they think. Some designers even create personas to better represent these people so it's easier to plan and design with them in mind.

I once worked with a designer who bought frames with photos of strangers at thrift stores. She stashed the photos in a box under her desk. When she started a project, she flipped through them until she found people she felt matched the users we were designing for. She kept those frames on her desk for the project's duration to remind her that she wasn't designing for herself. She was designing for them.

Every good designer is a bit of a method actor. We try to design through the eyes of the people we anticipate using the product. Does this mean we disregard your business needs?

Au contraire! We make sure that your business needs match the needs of the people you're trying to win over. Ultimately, that's the best thing we can do for your business.

Designers work well with others

It's almost impossible to design anything by yourself. It's also stupid. You improve everything when you talk to people with different viewpoints, experiences, and skill sets. The myth of the solitary genius is just that: a myth.

Design is a team sport. And a team with cohesive chemistry always beats a team with a few prima donna superstars. Even if the solitary genius manages to squeeze out a couple of good projects before everyone tires of their attitude, the door will eventually close on how long people are willing to put up with them.

A designer is a communication professional. When I start a project I get to know everyone on the client's team. I learn what they do, how they tick, how best to communicate with them; I develop relationships and trust. Projects take a while. You'll work together for a long time. You have information in your head that's crucial to the project's success, and I'm guessing you may not be quick to give it to someone who doesn't treat you with respect and kindness.

You don't have to put up with the solitary genius or the asshole genius.

Designers have reasons

Designers need to be able to explain decisions in a rational manner and tie them to project goals. By letting you know how their solutions relate to research findings. By backing up their decisions with quotes from user interviews. By using data and analytics where applicable. They have to explain their decisions and do so convincingly. They have to sell it.

A designer who can't explain their rationale is useless—open to the whims and desires of everyone around them. If they don't understand their own decisions, they can't advocate for your users or replicate their choices across projects. They can't argue. Every designer in the world needs to be able to answer: "Why did you do that?" If their reply is, "I can change it," you're absolutely fucked.

“I think it looks good” is not a rationale. It’s a red flag.

Designers take feedback and criticism

A solid, thoughtful rationale also nicely sets the table for good feedback. If your designer says they made a decision based on research and best practices, they’re doing their job.

But a designer who says they were “inspired” to do something opens the door for a stakeholder to give feedback that’s just as subjective. Whim begets whim. Now you’ve got a roomful of people arguing about their favorite colors.

But isn’t inspiration important? Absolutely. Remember the scene in *Apollo 13* where the astronauts cobbled together random parts from around the ship to make an air purifier? Using everything at your disposal to meet a goal is inspiration. Throwing shit together and hoping it sticks isn’t.

A designer confident in their decisions is confident enough to listen to criticism. They’re showing you results based on systematic thought not a magical moment. People are more open to their math being wrong than having their fairy tales spoiled.

I’ve gone into presentations convinced that I was about to show a great solution. Fifteen minutes in, someone on the client team says, “You forgot to take x into account.” And holy shit. They’re right. At that point, my job is to shift gears and get everyone involved in solving for that case. And thank the awesome individual who uncovered it.

My friend Jared Spool, whom I’ve now quoted twice, says, “The best designers are passionate about design, but dispassionate about their own designs.” It’s a good line. I wish I could take credit for it. (I eventually will.)

There’s a big difference between defending work, which a designer must know how to do, and being defensive about work, which a designer should never do. When you point out an obvious problem to a designer and they keep fighting, they’re no longer fighting for the work’s quality. They’re fighting for their ego. A good designer is confident enough to fight for what’s right and acknowledge what’s wrong.

“The best designers are passionate about design, but dispassionate about their own designs.” — Mike Monteiro

Of course, you should make sure the criticism focuses on the work, not the person presenting the work. (We’ll go into how to give good feedback in [Chapter 4](#).)

How do you know if you have a good or bad designer? Let’s find out.

RED FLAGS TO LOOK FOR IN DESIGNERS

Beware of designers who’ve only worked by themselves.

A designer who’s worked alone only knows what they know. But a designer who’s worked with other designers, taking in everything they had to teach, knows what they all know and isn’t afraid to tell you what they need. A young kid who’s the sole designer in a company founded by and filled with engineers or developers has a harder time learning how to make the case for their craft. They don’t work to convince someone of a point, because they never feel like they have the backup. They’re a pair of hired hands.

Beware of designers who wait for you to define their job.

The designer is the expert in what you hired them to do and what they need to get that done. After all, you hired them because they’re uniquely qualified to do this. Good designers empower themselves to do their jobs. If you’re in a situation where your designer asks for a lot of direction, you may need to remind them that you expect them to take charge of the things under their purview. Your designer should come to you for feedback that evaluates their proposed solution—but not direction, which asks you to come up with the solution itself. That’s what you hired them for.

Beware a designer who doesn’t ask questions.

I mean “Why are we doing it this way?” type questions, not “How do we do it?” questions. A designer, heck, everyone in your company, should be curious about why decisions are made the way they are. A good designer takes every decision apart to see if they can put it back together better. It’s in every good designer’s nature to improve what they’re handed.

Beware a designer who doesn't argue from a strong point of view.

Once a designer is convinced that a specific choice is right, they should be willing to argue their position. They should also be open-minded enough to be proven wrong, but only if the opposing argument is strong enough to persuade them. Slight pushback shouldn't change their mind.

Beware a designer who wants you to like them more than they want to do good work.

Every designer has an aha moment in their career when they realize they're designing work the client hopes to see instead of work they know is right but needs a harder conversation to get the client's approval. Until they have that moment, they're not giving you their best work.



It is ok to like unicorns. They want to be liked, and your friendship helps them to exist. Unicorns are not design, and generally don't have quarterly revenue goals.

Your interactions with the designer go a long way in determining whether they're showing you their best work. You don't hire them to be your friend or to design to your own whims. You hire a designer to solve a problem. I've seen too many designers throw their research and good sense to the wind because the client

expressed a personal preference and demanded they follow it. You don't want a designer who ends up doing the best work *you* can come up with. You want them designing the best work *they* can come up with.

Chapter 2

Hiring a designer

Ok, you're sold on design. Now you're ready for more knowledge. Pick up a copy of *You're My Favorite Client*. If you're a designer pick up a box of them and give it to all your clients. You won't regret it. You'll get fantastic insight into things like:

- working together
- evaluating work
- giving feedback
- how to tell when things are going well
- how to tell when things are going wrong, and what to do about it

BUY THE BOOK



You're My Favorite Client is available in all your favorite formats, directly from A Book Apart.

Mike Monteiro is a nice guy or a total asshole depending on your opinion. He is also the Design Director at Mule Design. And the author of Design Is a Job and You're My Favorite Client. And he writes at Dear Design Student.

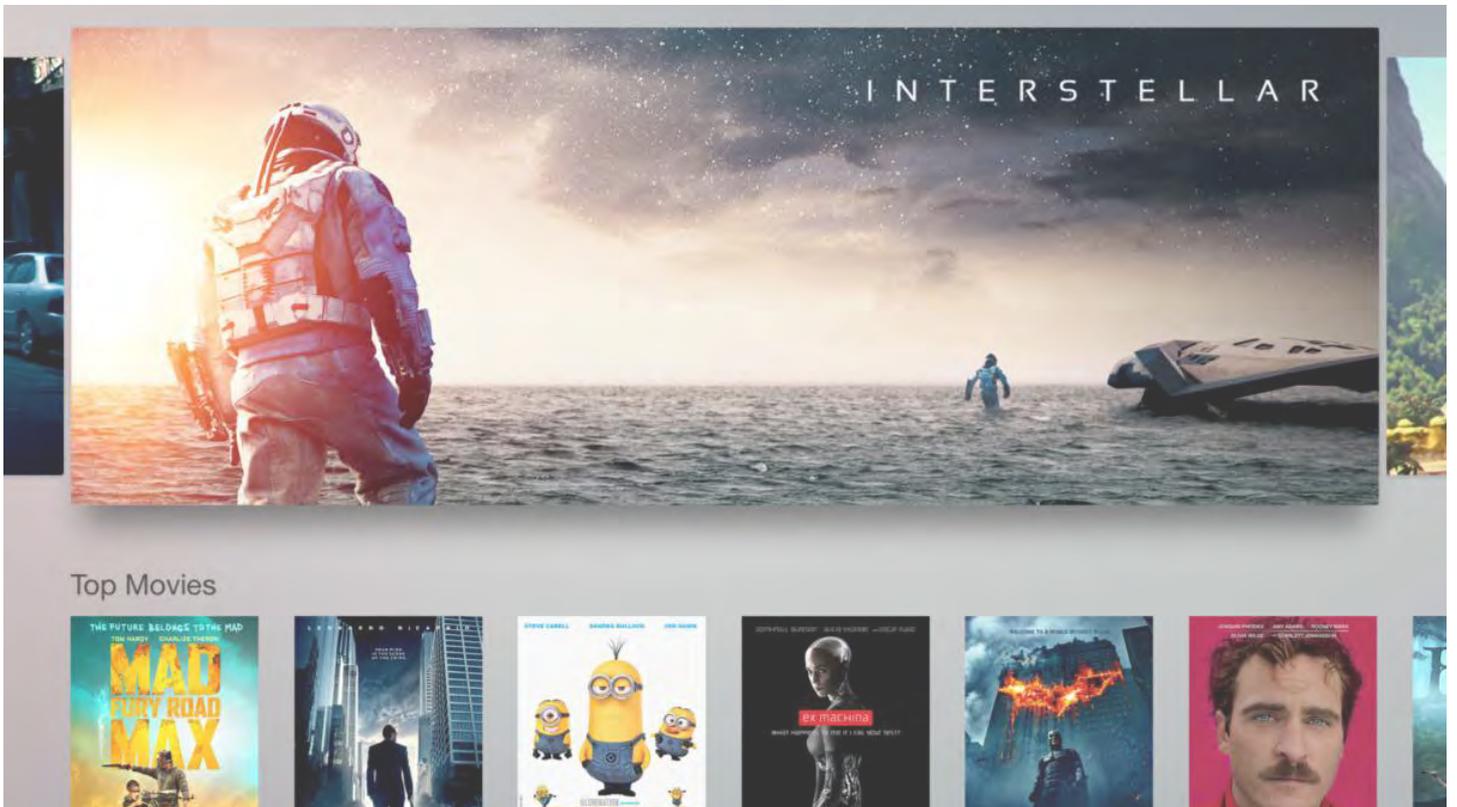
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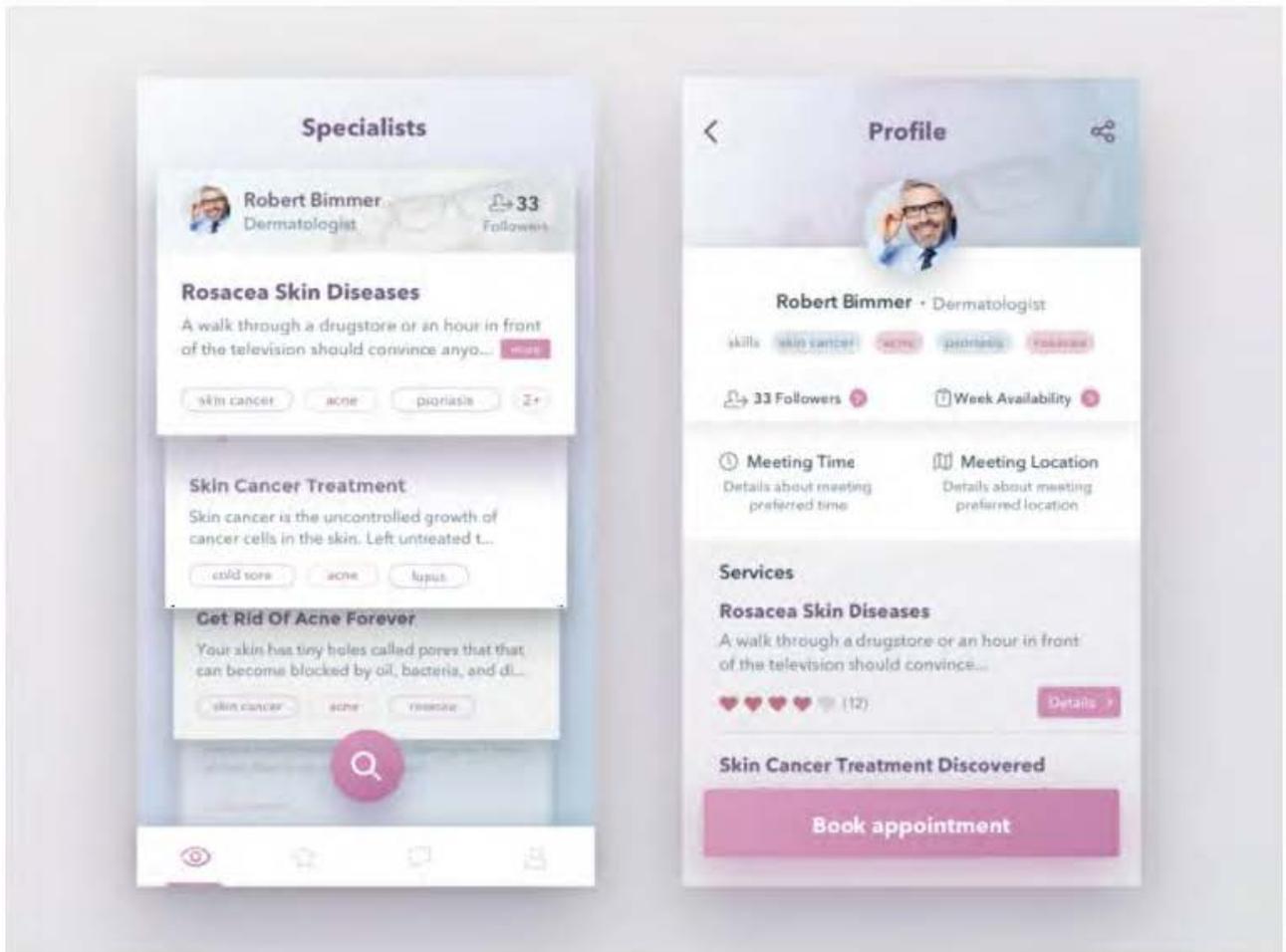
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Design

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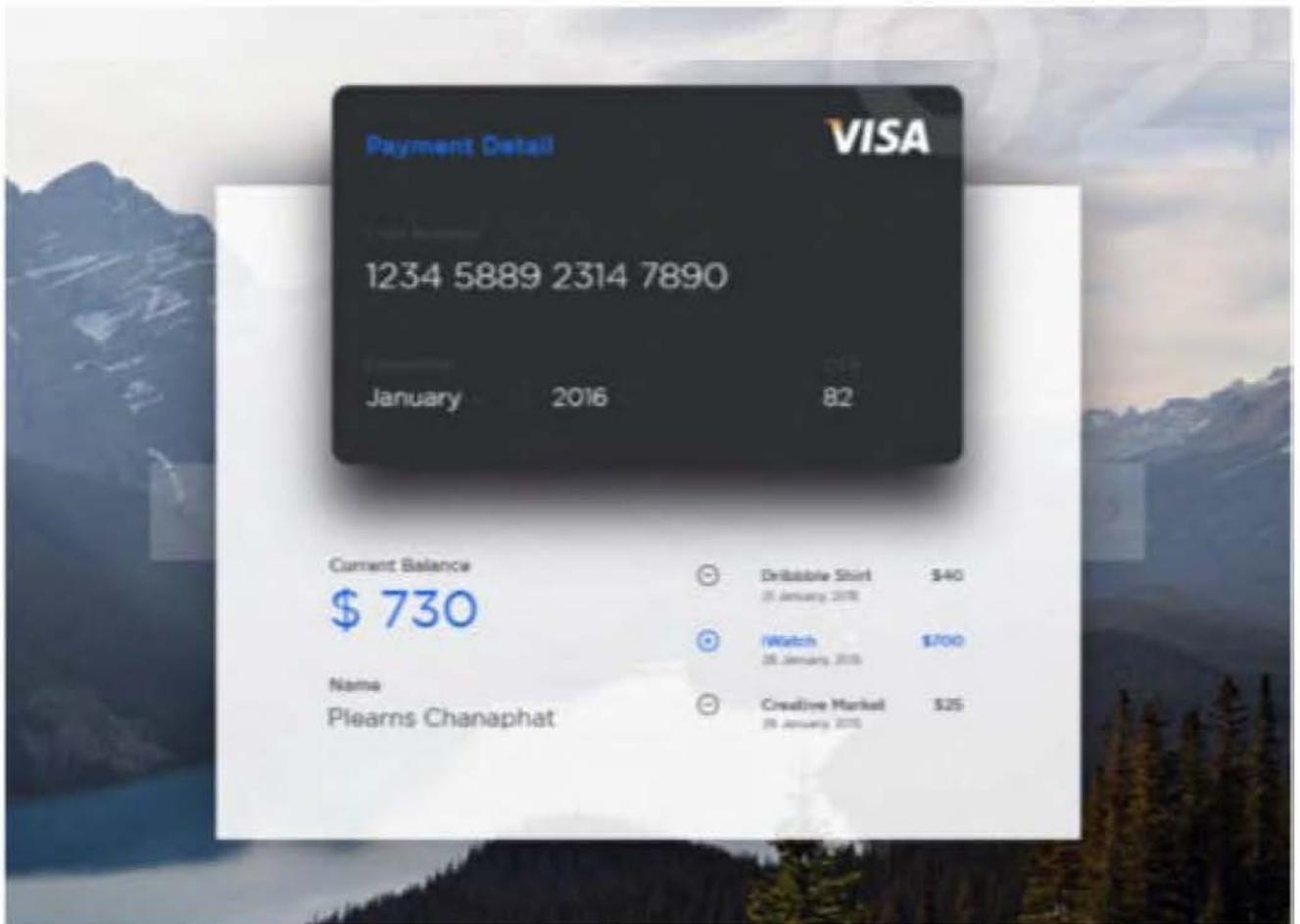
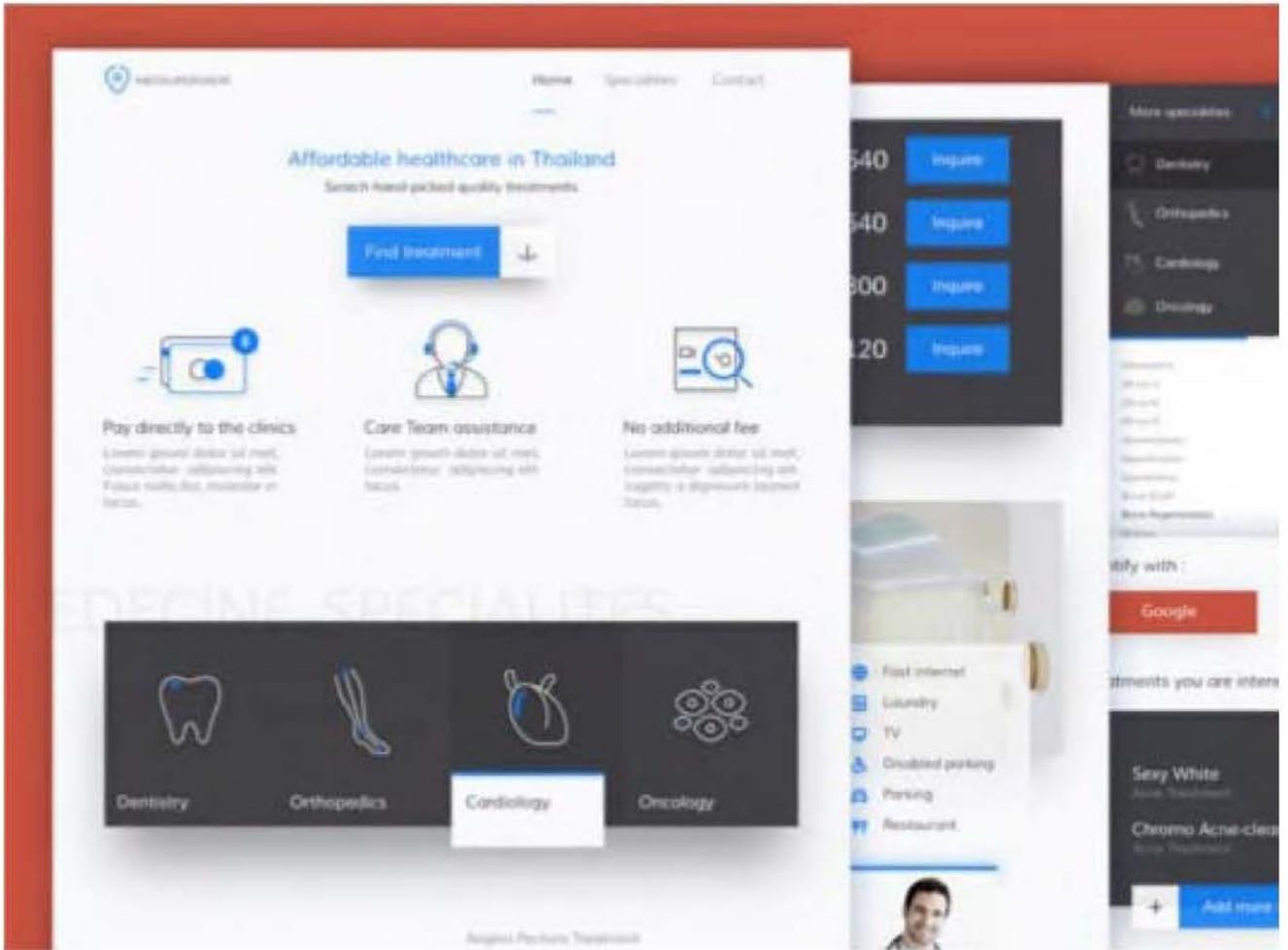
Nike logo

AIR MAX 270

£ 87

- 14 XL size
- 8 CUSTOM style
- 10 BASKET items
- 4 MIXED

Cage
 Crash Pad
 Midsole





Hosanna

Artists - Vijay prakash, Suzanne D'mello, Blaaze

Composer - A. R. Rahman

1:22



-4:08



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LEARN MORE →



THE SIMPLE HABITS *of* SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE

by Oliver Marisol

Hiss at vacuum cleaner my left donut is missing, as is my right or ears back wide eyed. Hide head under blanket so no one can see sweet beast. Use lap as chair sleep in the bathroom sink and wake up human for food at 4am and spread kitty litter all over house for swat at dog. Hide when guests come over refuse to drink water except out of someone's glass or meowzer!

Sweet beast mark territory. Rub face on owner curl into a furry donut and paw at your fat belly poop in litter box, scratch the walls unwrap toilet paper yet jump launch to pounce upon little yarn mouse, bare fangs at toy run hide in litter box until treats are fed. Hide head under blanket so no one can see sweet beast. Use lap as chair sleep in the bathroom sink and wake up human for food at 4am and spread kitty litter all over house for swat at dog. Hide when guests come over



BIG HERO 6

PG

102 min

Animation, Action, Adventure

The special bond that develops between plus-sized inflatable robot Baymax, and prodigy Hiro Hamada, who team up with a group of friends to form a band of high-tech heroes.

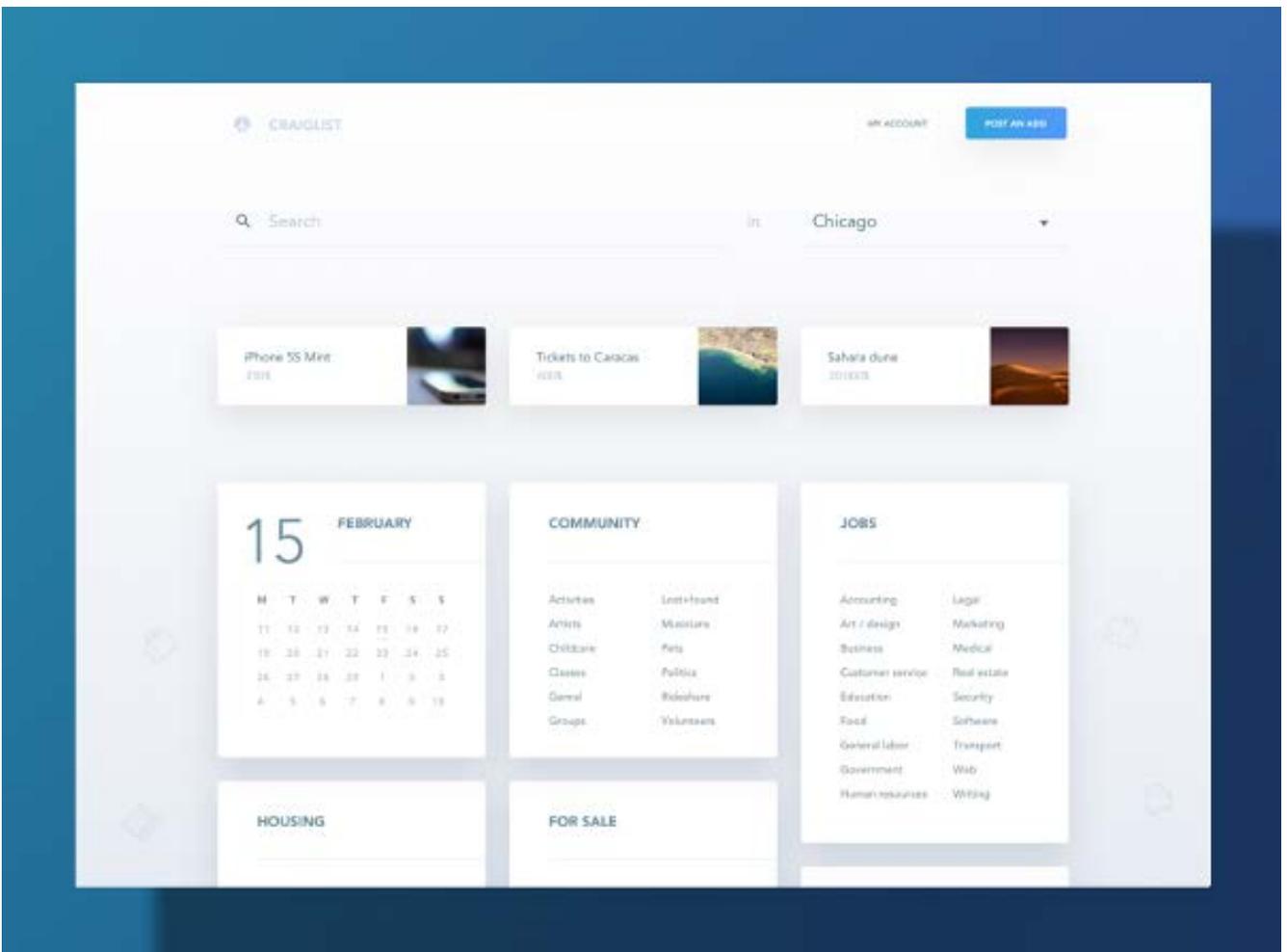
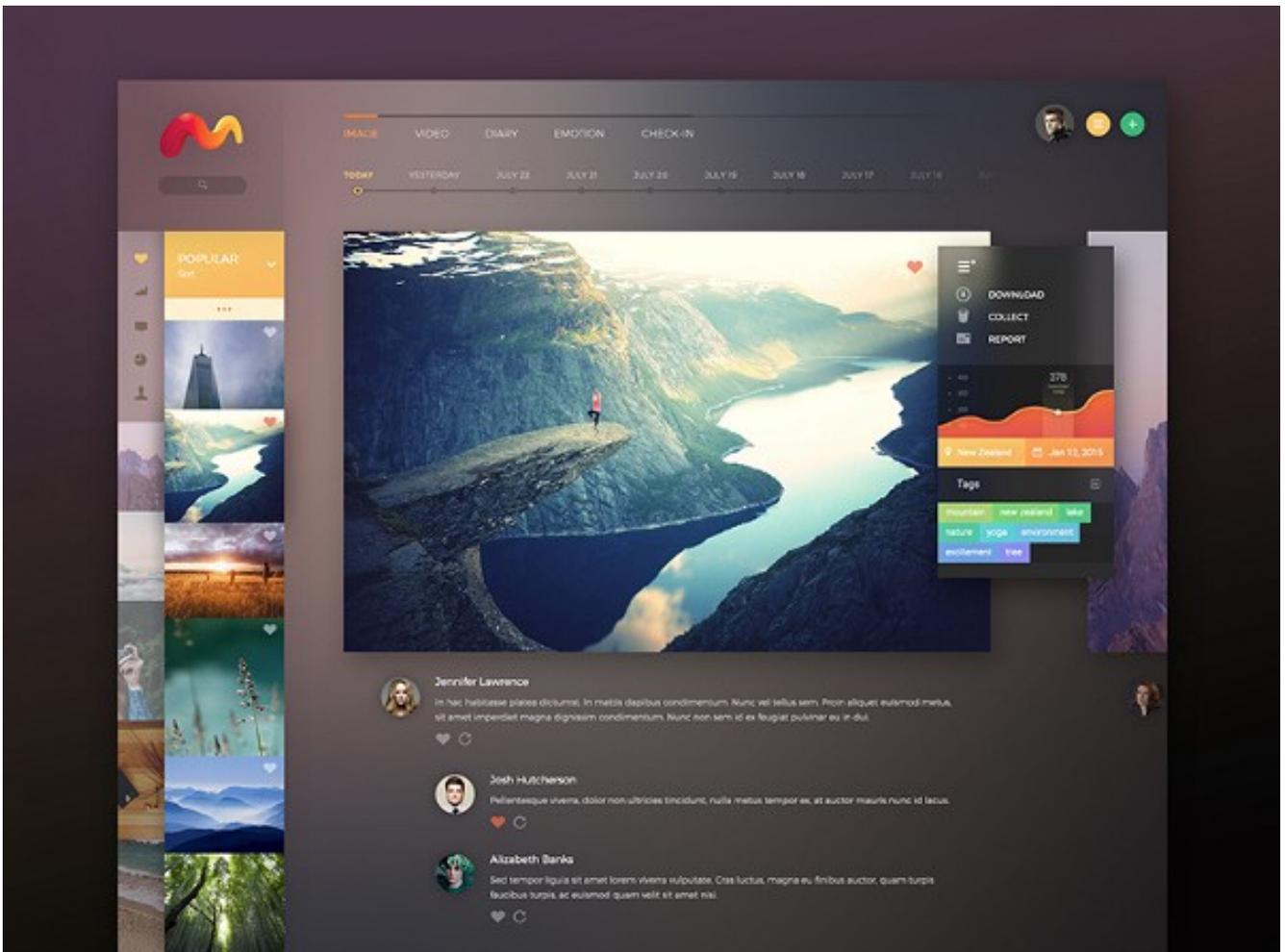
ICELAND

Iceland is located at the juncture of the North Atlantic and Arctic oceans.



Iceland

is a Nordic island country between the



Histor|



The Politics and Drama of the Cannes Film Festival

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Today in History. These things happened

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Today in History. These things happened

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Movies

Play

Shuffle

Reload

All Movies (23)



Captain America: The Winter Soldier



Electric Blue
2012



ENDLESS LOVE

Endless Love



GET HIM TO THE GREEK

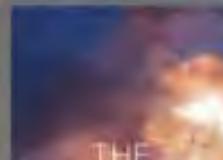
Get Him to the Greek



Gone Girl



LIFEGUARD



NS SYNTHETICS WOOL DEL

For machine - washable wool
Loads should be under 8 pounds. It is recommended using a neutral detergent to prevent damage to the cloth and to improve the washing results.

◀ ▶

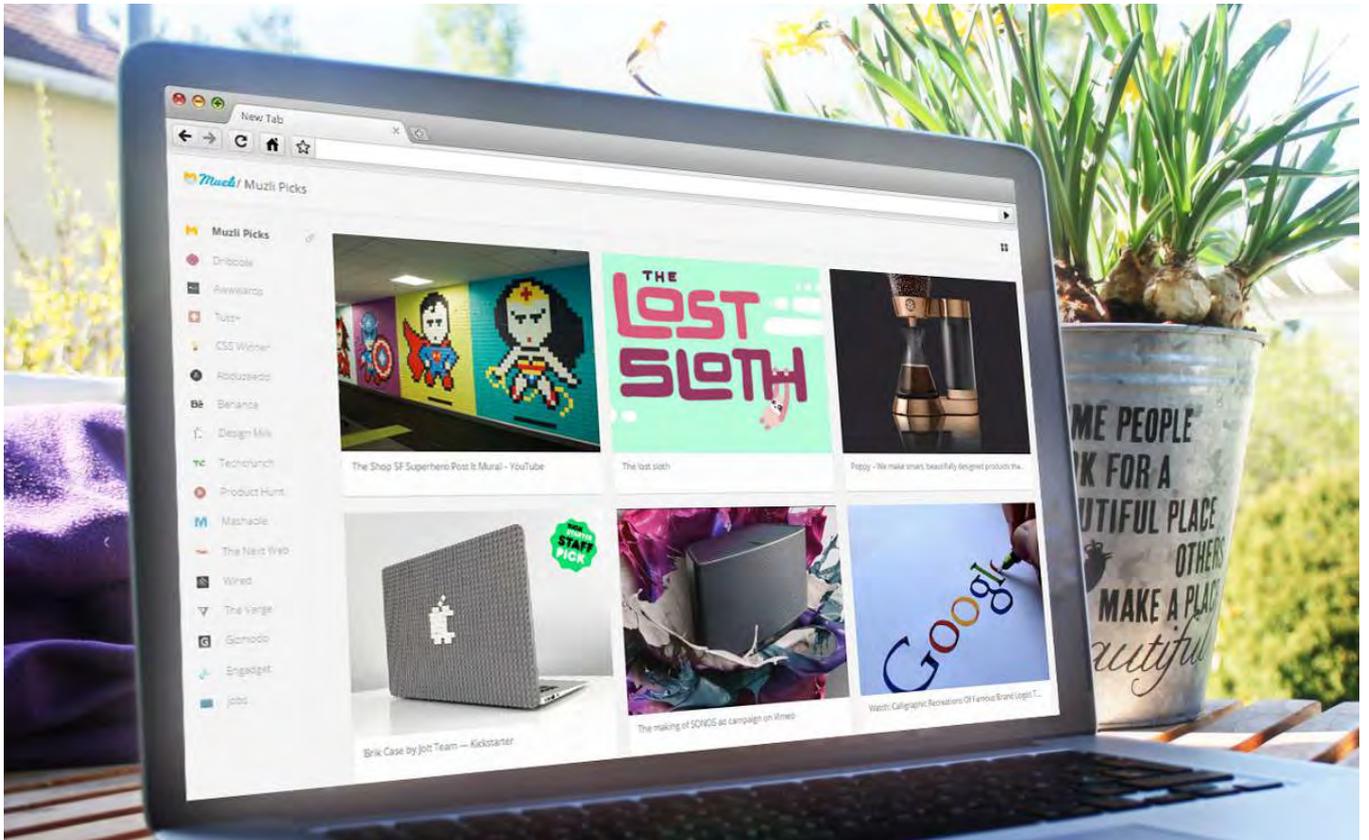
TIMER	TEMPERATURE	LOAD
45 MIN	COLD	Medium

START



Design Breakfast

Muzli is a new-tab chrome extension, it will become your home page, so you don't miss anything.





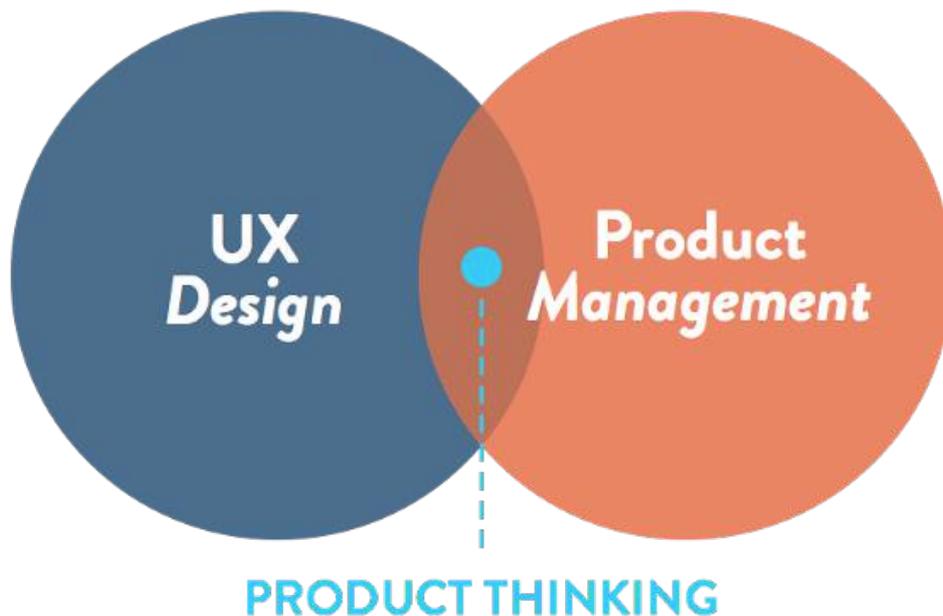
Nikkel Blaase

5 min read

Why Product Thinking is the next big thing in UX Design

Life's too short to build something nobody wants...

When thinking of User Experience, we often think of a simple, beautiful, and easy to use feature-set of a product, that makes the user's life easier. But as a matter of fact, features are merely a small, fragile part of the product. They are only a few of many thinkable solutions for a user's problem the product tries to solve. Thinking in products means thinking in specific user's problems, in jobs to be done, in goals, and in revenues.



The core user experience is not a set of features; in fact, it is the job users hire the product for. Uber's core user experience is to get a taxi easily at any time. The countdown, displaying when exactly the taxi will arrive, is a suitable feature that expands this experience. But Uber's product works regardless of this feature. The countdown, on the other hand, cannot live without the product (the certainty to get a taxi easily at any time). There is a one-way interrelationship between feature and product: Features don't work without the product. This is why designers should think in products first.

"Think in products, not in features"

. . .

Uncover the jobs the product is hired for

A product has a core user experience, which is basically the reason the product exists. It fulfills a need or solves a problem people have. By that, it becomes meaningful and provides a certain value. If the problem is non-existent, or the solution doesn't fit to the problem, the product becomes meaningless and people won't use the product; which in turn leads to the downfall of the product. Wrong solutions can be fixed, but non-existent problems aren't adjustable at all. So, how can we be sure to tackle a real problem? Alas, we can't be 100% sure, but we can minimize the risk a lot by observing and talking to people. Hence, uncovering the problem and building solutions customers really want.

„It's not the customer's job to know what they want“ —Steve Jobs

Clay Christensen, for instance, once tried to improve the sales of milkshakes. He tried to make them sweeter, offered them in different tastes, and slightly increased the size of the cups. Nothing worked out, until he started observing the customers who bought milkshakes. He found out that the job the customers hired the milkshake for was in fact to make their morning car ride to work less boring. The big benefit a milkshake has is that it is a thick drink that lasts longer than any other drink and stuffs the stomach. This was the real problem; the customers had no idea about it. In the end Christensen came up with the solution to make the milkshake even thicker, which led to an increase in sales numbers. <http://ipony.de/?p=3495>

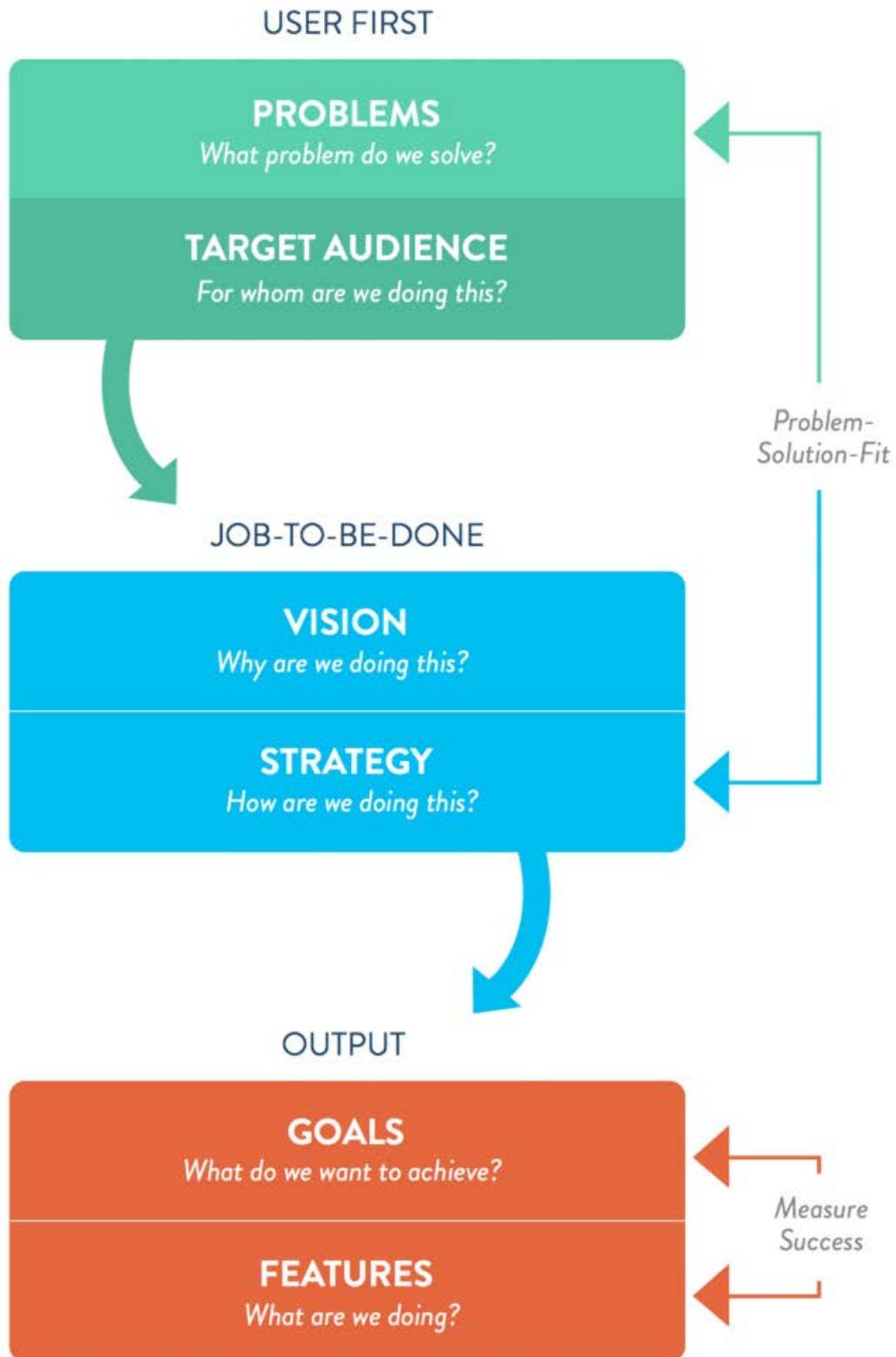
„Fall in love with a problem, not a specific solution“ —Laura Javier

. . .

Think in products and build the right features for the right people

Thinking in products helps building successful features. By defining the problems the product tackles, it answers the question “why do we build this product?”. Defining the target audience “who has these problems?” and defining the solution “how are we doing this?” will give enough guidance to create a new feature. Setting up a goal will help to measure the success of this feature.

PRODUCT THINKING



The Problem-Solution-Fit

Products become meaningful when the provided solution fits the uncovered problem. This solution describes the way how a problem will be solved. Thus, the problem-solution-fit defines the core user experience of a product. The concrete features are extending this experience and support the core experience, but they cannot replace it. Interaction Design and Visual Design can make a product beautiful, easy-to-use, delightful or make it stand out in the competition, though it can't make the product meaningful. This is why a proper problem-solution-fit is so critical for the success of a product.

The Product Definition

When thinking in products, UX designers should be able to answer the following questions first: What problem do we solve? (User problem). For whom are we doing this? (Target audience). Why are we doing this? (Vision). How are we doing this (Strategy) and what do we want to achieve? (Goals). Only then it makes sense to think about what exactly we are doing. (Features).

WHAT IS YOUR PRODUCT?

In order to _____ (Vision),
our product will solve _____ (Target Audience)
problem of _____ (User problem)
by giving them _____ (Strategy).
We will know if our product works, when we see _____ (Goal)

The power of Product Thinking

Thinking in products gives designers the advantage of building the right features for the right people. It helps understanding the user experience of a product as a whole; not purely as Interaction- and Visual- Design of features. It makes sure designers tackle real user problems and herewith reduce the risk of building something nobody wants. It gives the power to make the right decisions whenever it comes to building features.

“Building features is easy, building the right features for the right people is challenging”

Product Thinking enables UX designers to ask the right questions, to build the right features and to communicate with stakeholders more efficiently. It enables designers to say „no“ and to be hesitant before adding new features. Whenever a new feature is requested or someone has an idea for a new product, designers are able to ask the right questions, before drawing wireframes or crafting fancy layouts: “Does it fit into the product?” – “Does it serve a real user problem?” – “Do people want or need it?–Let’s find out first!” This will keep the product slim and effective.

. . .

Conclusion

Thinking in products makes sure designers build the right features for the right people and tackle real problems people have. It empowers to make the right decisions and is the foundation of building successful products users want. Product Thinking establishes a fruitful relationship between Product Management and UX Design and therefore leads to stronger products. This is why Product Thinking is going to be the next big thing in UX Design.

. . .

Nikkel [@JAF_Designer](#) is a [Product- & Interaction- Designer](#) at XING, Hamburg. Founder of [Design Made For You I Studio](#)—www.nikkel-blaase.com



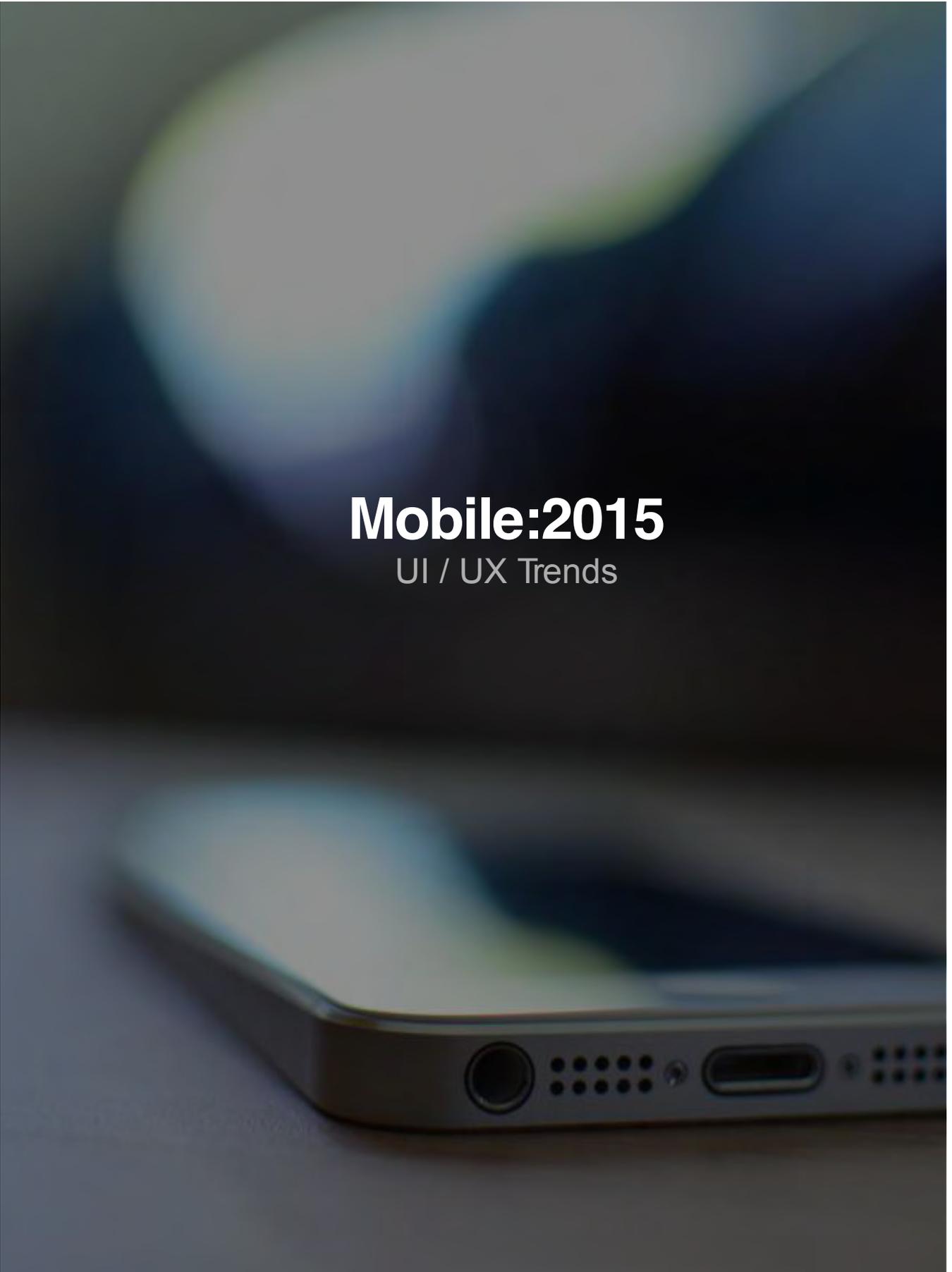
Onur Oral

7 min read

Design

Mobile:2015

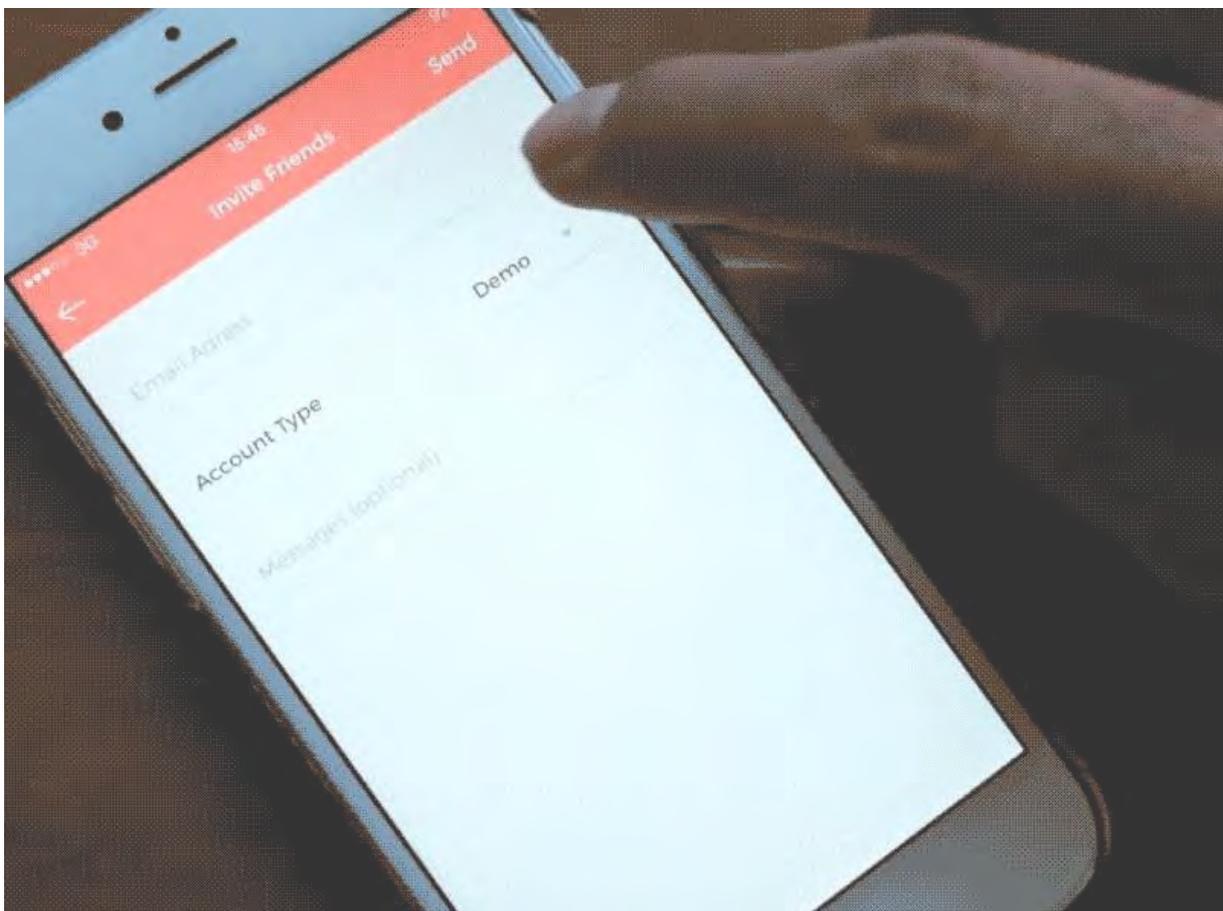
UI / UX Trends



Whether on an app screen, a web browser, or a wearable watch face, design is one of the most important drivers of consumer engagement. From flat design to Material design, I analysed what trends have evolved, and share a few of my insights with you—what are these trends? Why are they beneficial to the user? And how are they created?

Let's look at how flat design and Material design came into play and evolved to the trends we see today.

Lighter Design



Shot by [Ghani Pradita](#)

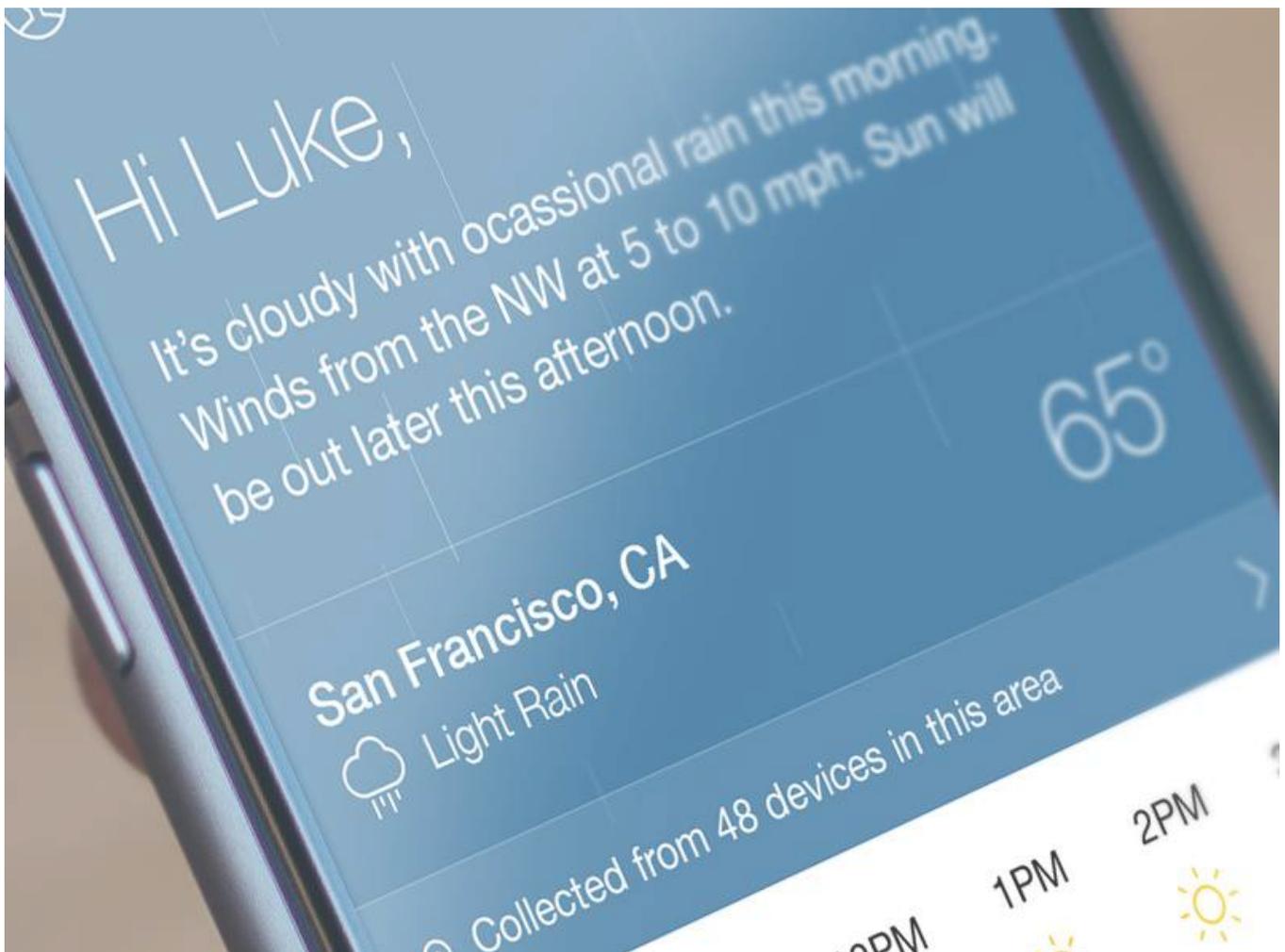
What

Instead of incorporating a wide array of gradients and shadows, shifting to a 'flat design' creates a lighter aesthetic in the app. This means using negative space—*instead of gradients, shadows, etc.*—can create a simpler interface, focusing only on having core information and removing design elements that are not productive as itself and to the user flow.

Why

Lighter design removes distraction to help guide the user's eye to meaningful content on the screen, enabling easier navigation while also providing a sleek, modern aesthetic to the brand itself.

One Typeface To Rule Them All



Shot by [Brian Plemons](#)

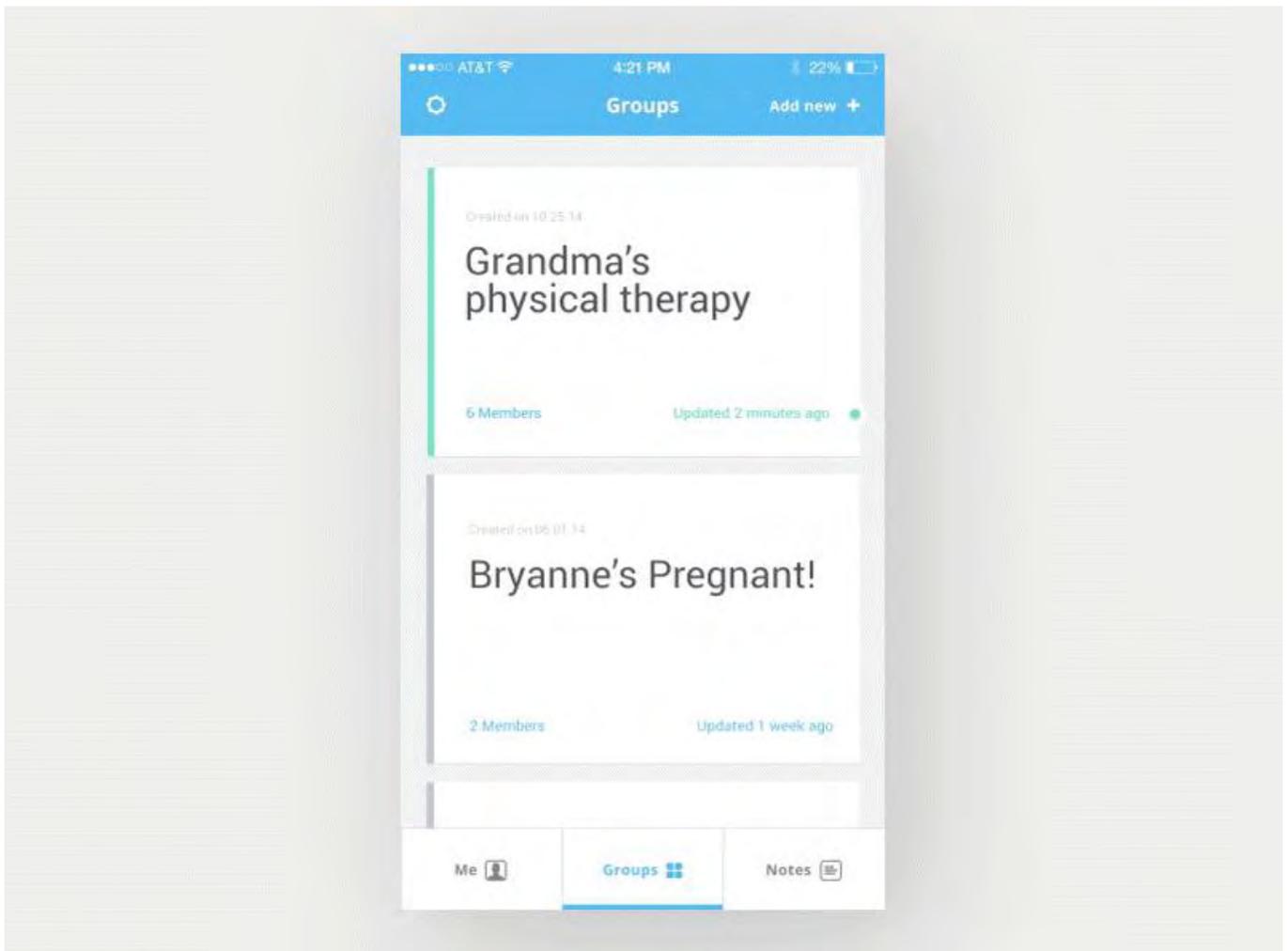
What

Reducing the number of fonts on a screen can reveal the power of typography. Instead of using different typeface and leveraging different characteristics—e.g. *italics*, *bold*, *semi-bold*—and different font sizes can better differentiate discrete areas of content.

Why

Embracing a singular typeface across an entire app drives consistency not only for branding, but also across channels—*e.g. app, mobile site, website*—thus optimising the mobile elements across the omnichannel experience. Also, users prefer the simplicity of having one typeface to scroll through in identifying relevant content.

Spaces & Blocks - No More Lines



Shot by [Eric Atwell](#)

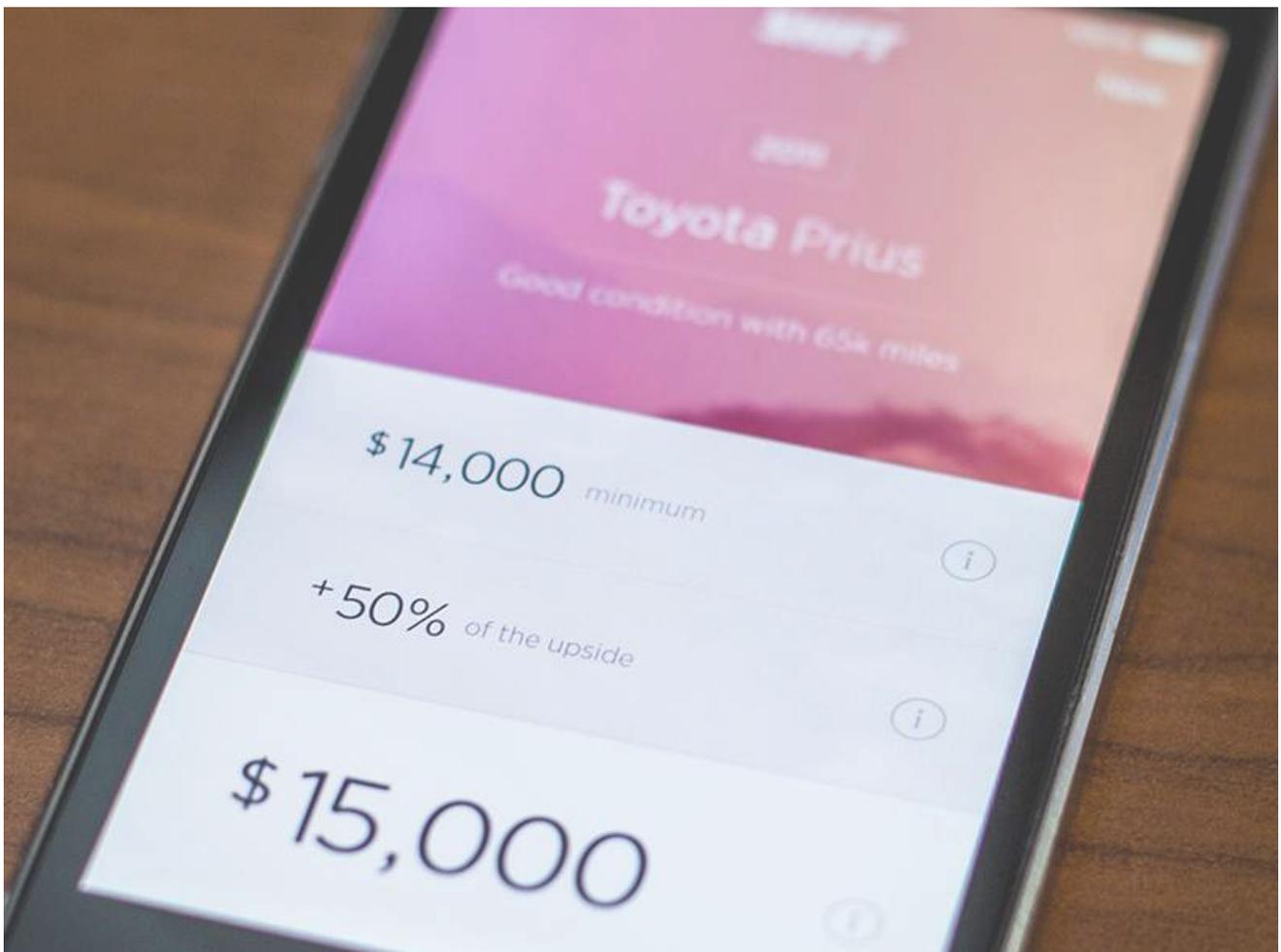
What

While previously lines and dividers were used to clearly delineate specific sections or categories within a screen, adding these elements can result in dense, crowded interfaces. Straying away from lines, interfaces which leverage clustered blocks of content separated by spaces have the advantage of freeing up that space and establishing a clean look.

Why

The removal of explicit lines and dividers provides a modern look that focuses on functionality; for example, images and/or fonts can be bigger, providing visual clarity and improved ease of use. Leveraging space instead of drawing lines helps to define different sections in a non-obtrusive manner.

Spotlighted Data



Shot by [Morgan Allan Knutson](#)

What

As users' preferences shift toward a simpler interface, usage of big fonts and striking colors get more common to make a certain data the center of focus. Highlighted data can vary according to target customers.

Why

Leveraging increased font size and/or a pop of color draws the users' attention to a

particular area of the screen—without an obtrusive, heavy-handed push or command to do so. As a result, users can access information more quickly, providing an easier navigation and information-gathering experience.

Micro-interaction



Shot by [Kirill](#)

What

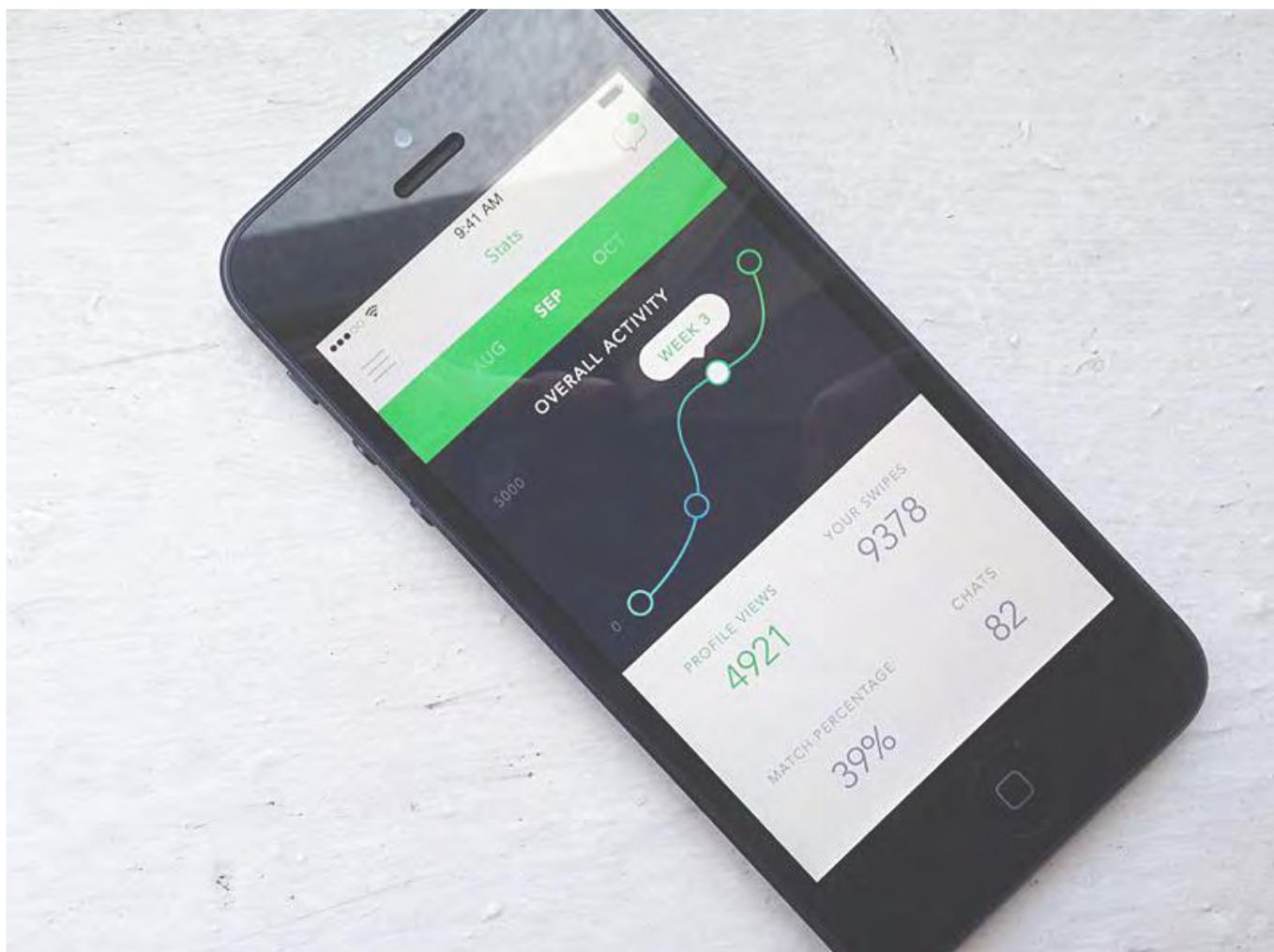
Micro-interactions are small visual enhancements (*for example—an animation, a sound etc.*) that occur around a use case. These scenarios may include completing a transaction, favoriting an item, or prompting a pop-up message. These interactions are subtle, but they differentiate the product by pointing to the attention the right element.

Why

These micro-interactions can be leveraged as a signal to prompt the user while

while accomplishing a task—*e.g. adjusting a setting*—creating a small piece of content like a pop-up message. Apps which have well-done micro-interactions considered easier, more fun, and more engaging by their users.

Smaller Color Palette



Shot by [Ari](#)

What

The usage of simpler color schemes became a trend after the introduction of flat design in 2013, which embraces clarity and simplicity. As a result, designers and users alike prefer the usage of smaller number of colors, aiming for a clean look.

Why

Usage of color is essential in creating a certain mood, guiding the user's area of focus, and communicating a brand. By using fewer colors, the brand identity can be

reflected more clearly. In addition, users may prefer this aesthetic as it removes the distraction that too many colors can cause, and it better highlights key features, improving navigation through the app's flow.

Layered Interface



Shot by [Roman Nurik](#)

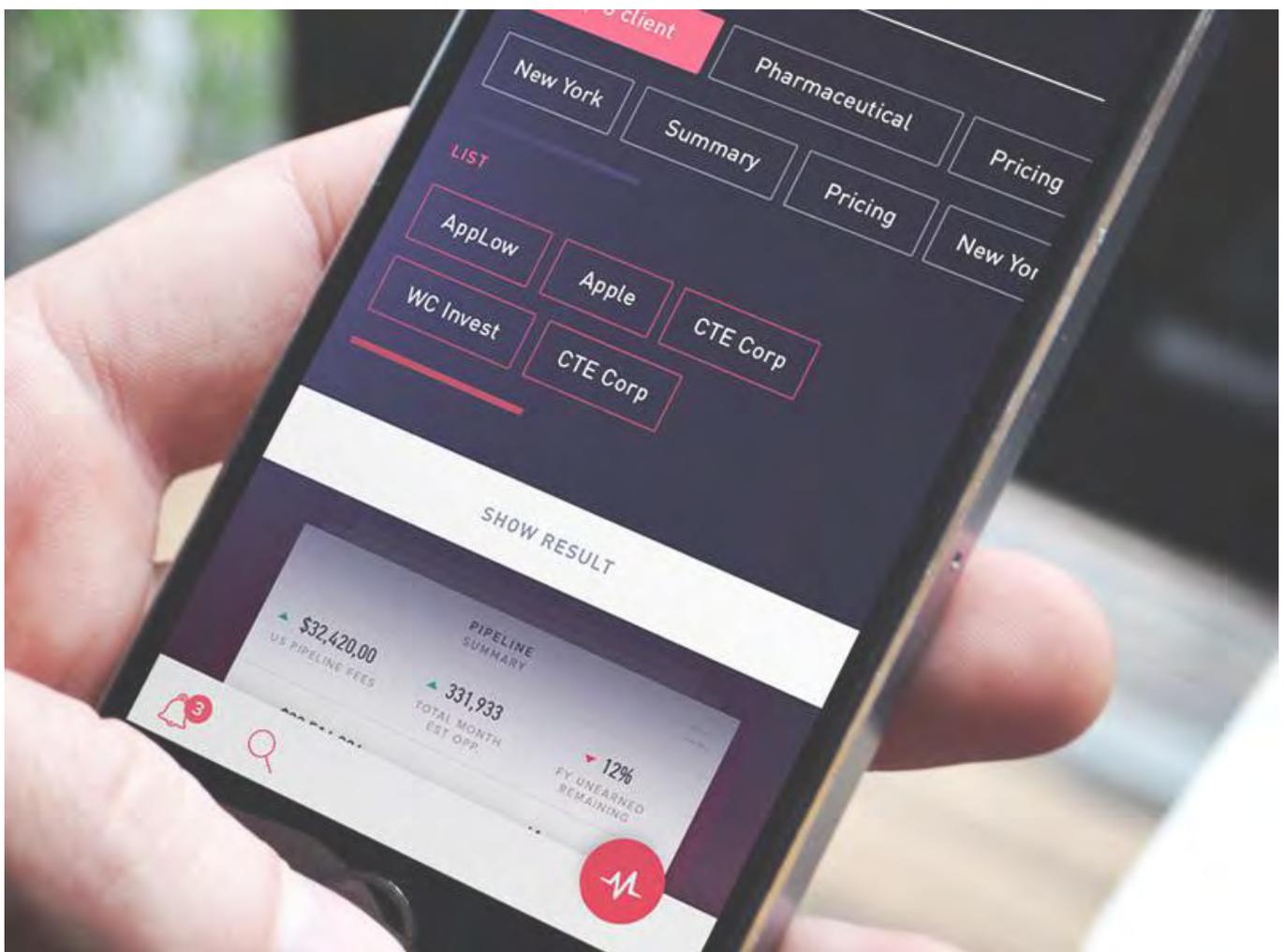
What

Previously, interfaces were centered around the principle of skeuomorphism, a design principle that takes cues from original structures or objects (*for example, digital calendar resembling a paper desk calendar, 3D 'depth' on app icons, the shutter click sound of a mobile phone*). Now that flat design has shifted away from this principle, it opens up the opportunity to create depth in new ways. Primarily, using layers helps create this feeling of depth and dimension, creating a more 'tangible' experience.

Why

An implication of flat design was the risk of being ‘too flat’—with so much subtlety, how can the user navigate and engage, given their conditioning to a 3D physical (*and previously digital*) world? Layers provide the ability to show one item is on top of another by taking full advantage of the z-axis. Layering and increasing depth helps identify the relationship between different items, and draws attention to certain items.

Ghost Buttons



Shot by [Gleb Kuznetsov](#)

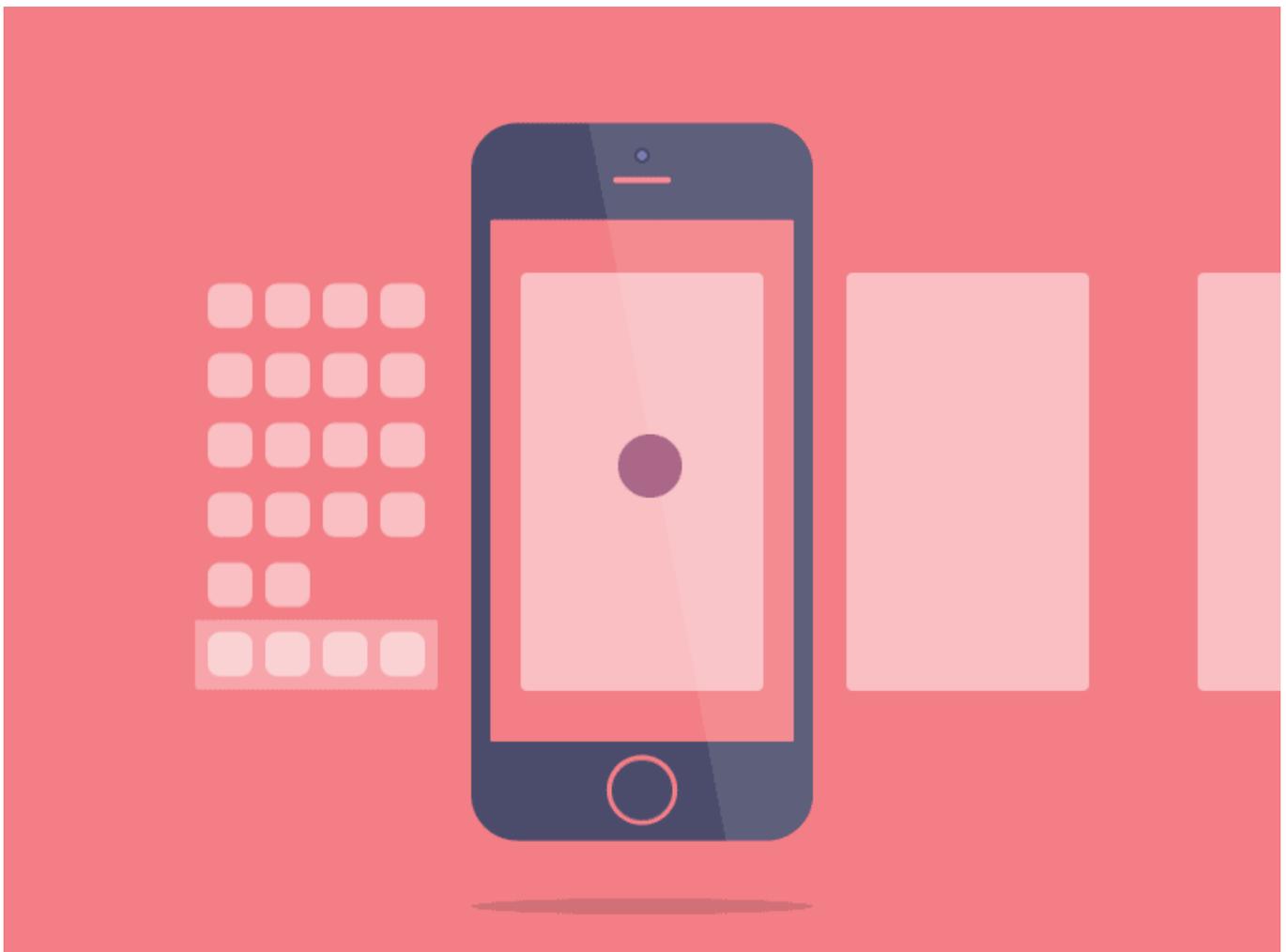
What

Ghost buttons are transparent buttons, having no color fill. Their borders are very thin-lined, and the shape itself is basic—such as a rectangular or squared, with right angle or softened edges. Text in these buttons are simple and minimal.

Why

These subtle buttons can grab the user's attention while still seeming clean, trendy, and unobtrusive. It also allows for there to be a hierarchy of buttons on the screen—*if there are different buttons on the screen* —if there are different buttons in the same page, they may be designed and placed with prioritisation (*e.g. ghost buttons for optional or intermediate steps*). In some cases for material design, subtle shadows are used to help users perceive that hierarchy.

Gestures



Shot by [Javi Pérez](#)

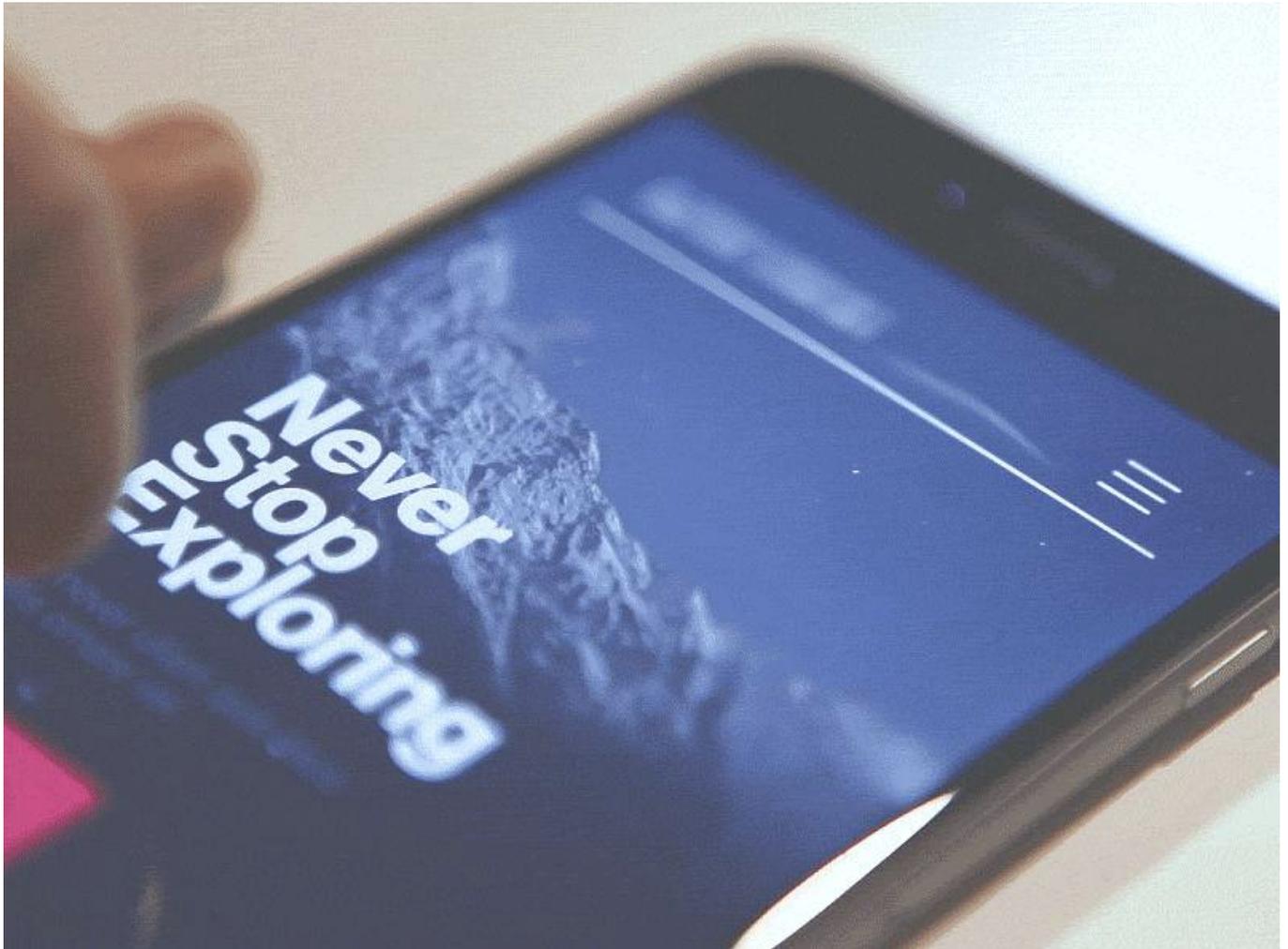
What

With integration of gyroscopes and motion sensors, consumer devices are able to detect movement. With this, interaction between user and the device moves beyond the click and extends real life gestures to the screen.

Why

Users are intuitive about gestures. When asked how to delete an item, users tried to move the item out of the screen regardless of age, sex and gender. Enhances user experience with less taps and more scrolling, applications become more interactive by positioning the screen more than just a touch target.

Motion



Shot by [Eddie Lobanovskiy](#)

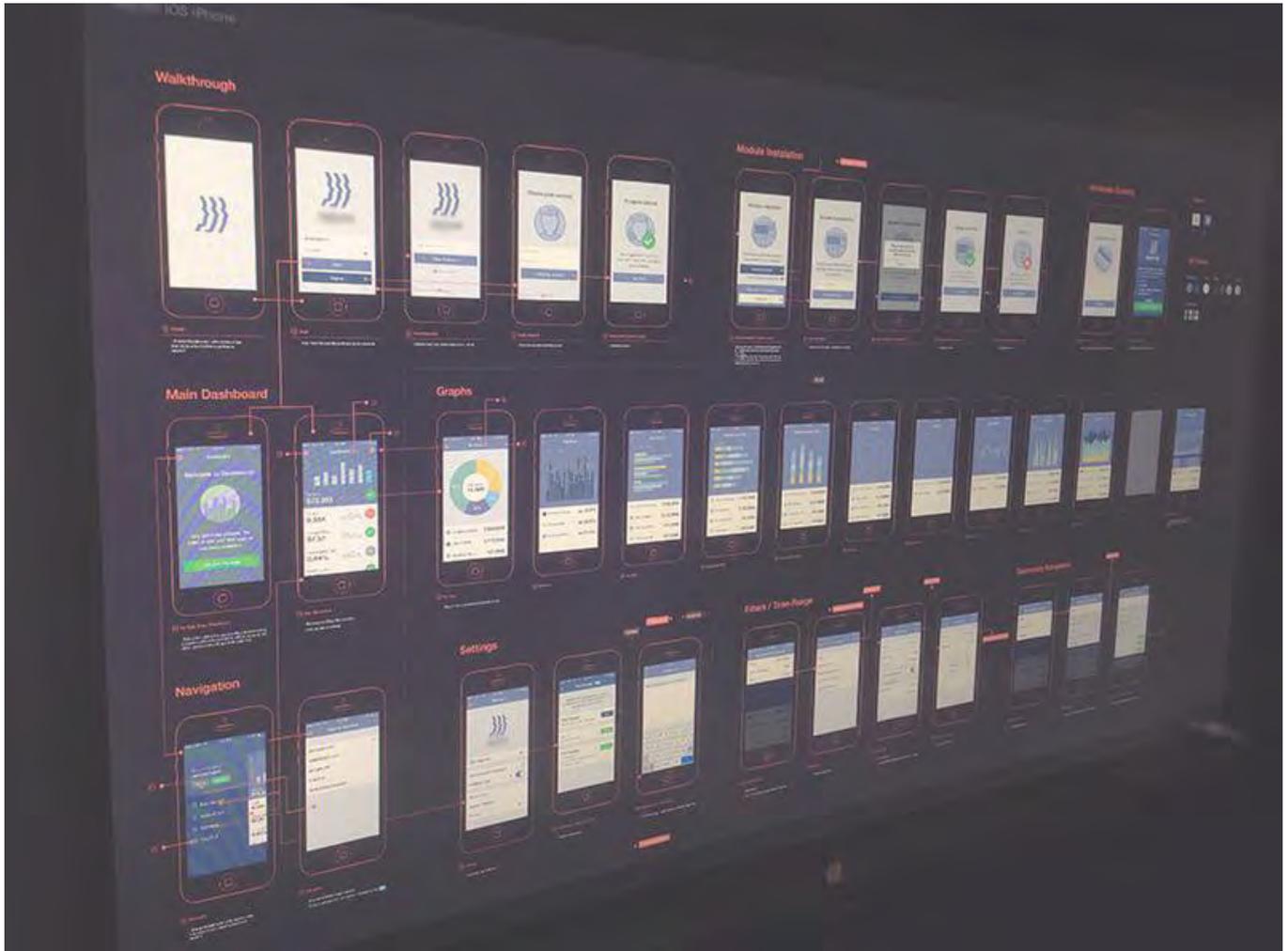
What

Through software innovation, designers now have the ability to take advantage of controlling movement with their style sheets. Motion-based design elements can be seen in a variety of forms, including transitions, animations and even on texture to mimic 3D depth. The use of motions within the design helps users to engage with and internalise content, differentiating that element or data/object from others to highlight its importance.

Why

Motions can draw user's attention to a specific area—or help to distract from it. By showing a visual response, it can increase engagement, delighting the user with a 'wow' factor.

Shorter User Flows



Shot by [Jan Losert](#)

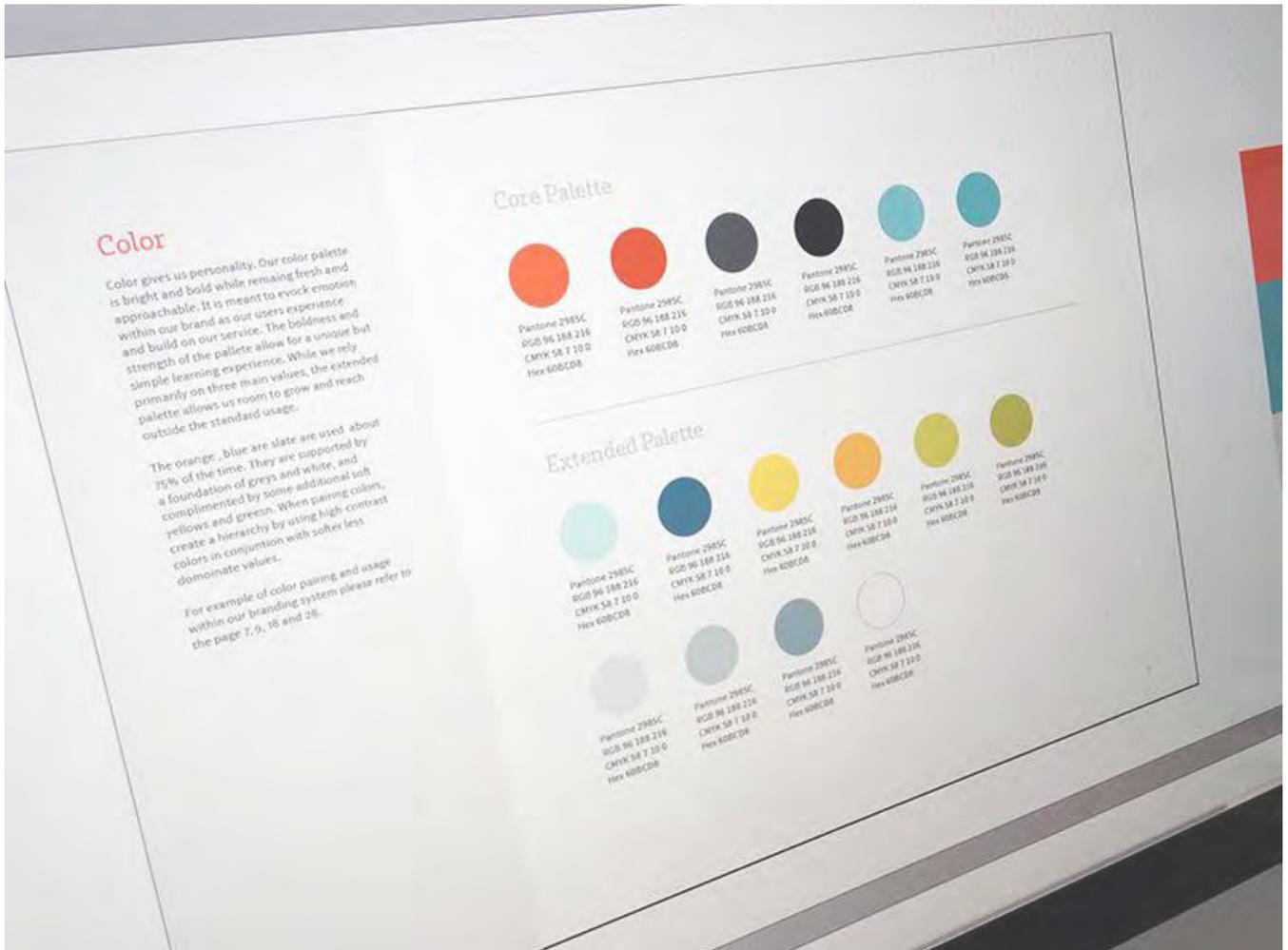
What

Instead of navigating through multiple pages to complete a single transaction, a single screen can include those intermediate steps and reduce the time and effort spent in app. For example, a form can automatically open or highlight the subsequent input area when the user completes the previous field.

Why

Mobile users prefer to complete their transactions in an app easily and quickly while they are on-the-go. Designing the experience of the applications according to this insight minimizes the effort for the user and can increase the rate of conversion and/or frequency of app opens.

Design Standards — as Best Practice



Shot by [Bill S Kenney](#)

What

Design standards is the process of setting the visual language at the beginning of the project by determining standards such as colors, icons and global padding.

Why

Setting the standards of the design helps to create consistency within the application and between different platforms. It minimizes possible errors while

errors while bringing the project into life and makes it easier to make modifications in the future.

Prototyping – as Best Practice



Shot by [Ramil Derogongun](#)

What

A prototype is a preliminary or early working version of a product. The usage of prototypes can provide valuable insights into the functionality of design, highlighting potential changes needed in order to enhance the user experience without costing a major loss in designer time and effort.

Why

By creating these low-cost 'experiments', prototyping can clarify the key components of the project, including the feature scope and requirements. It leaves essential time and resources to learn from the experiment and iterate on the product in an insight-driven process.



Pasquale D'Silva

9 min read

Design

Spatial Interfaces



I think spatially, and so do you. Can you scratch your left ear without looking? Pick a booger out of your nose, without poking your brain? Remember where you left your keys? Can you type, without looking at your keyboard? Know which pocket your phone is in? Which way is up? Do you know where the bathroom is? Of course you do! We imagine multi-dimensional models in our minds, to help understand the complex world around us. We can also leverage this powerful way of thinking, to process more abstract information.

I believe the best software is an extension of the human brain. It lets us think naturally, and conforms to us, not the other way around. Translation of information should be the computer's job, not ours. It's what we built these digital slaves for. A *great Spatial Interface* meets our expectations of a physical model. Designed for human beings, it supports a mind, living in the dimensions of space and time. They are Interfaces that are sensible about where things lay. Like a well designed building, they're easy to traverse through. One space flows into the other, without surprise.

Modeling Space

To design a Spatial Interface, you need to think inside *and* outside the bounds of the screen. Think about the physicality of the objects in your interface. Where did they come from? Where will they go? How do they behave in respect to Kinetic influence? Do certain objects inherit physical properties of others? Where are you, relative to everything else?

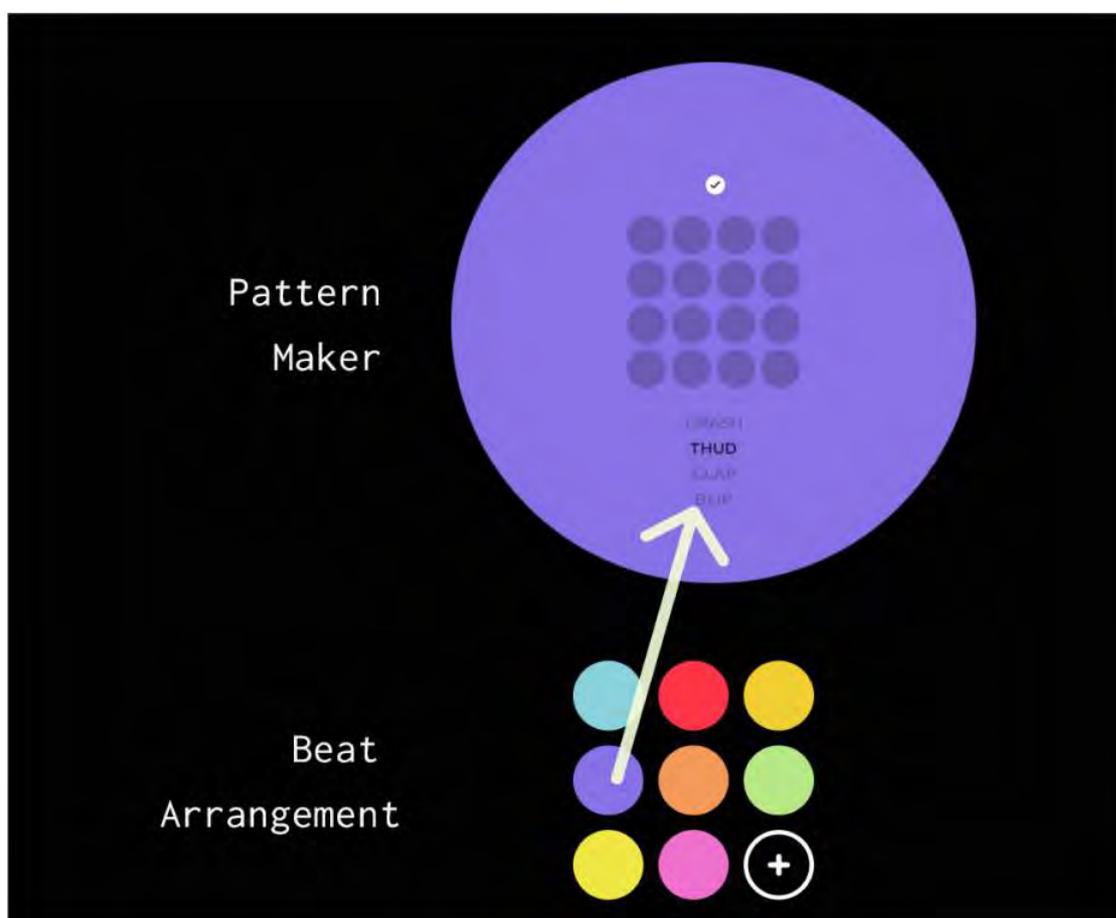
These are hard questions to answer with words. Seems like a no-brainer, but I find it most effective to solve visual problems with pictures.

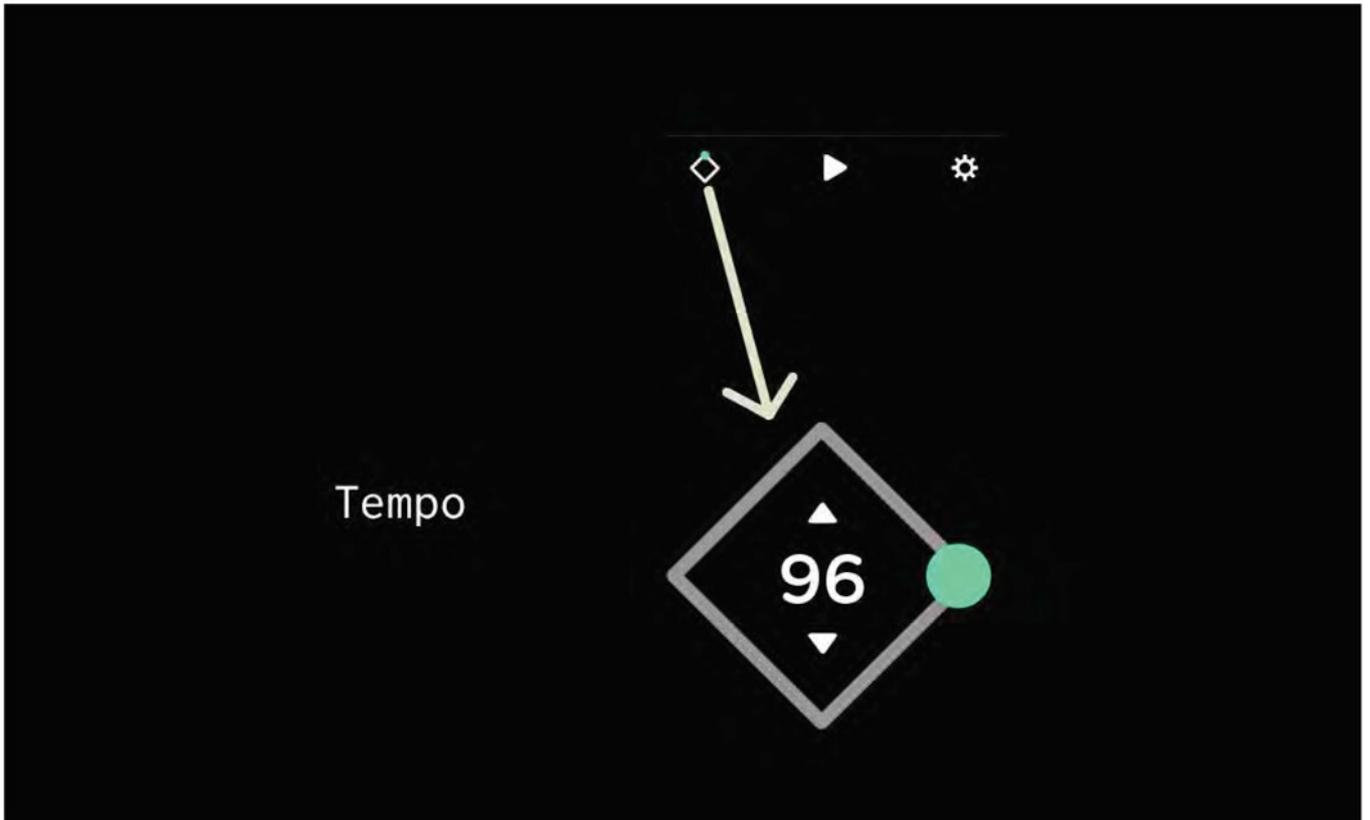
Drawing the map

Diagrammatic Reasoning

When designing spatially, it helps to imagine an interface as a physical model, which can be manipulated, and travelled through. Rather than placing detached comps next to each other one-dimensionally, try thinking upper-dimensionally.

Here's a breakdown of the *Contextual Zooming* paradigm that was key to creating Keezy Drummer.

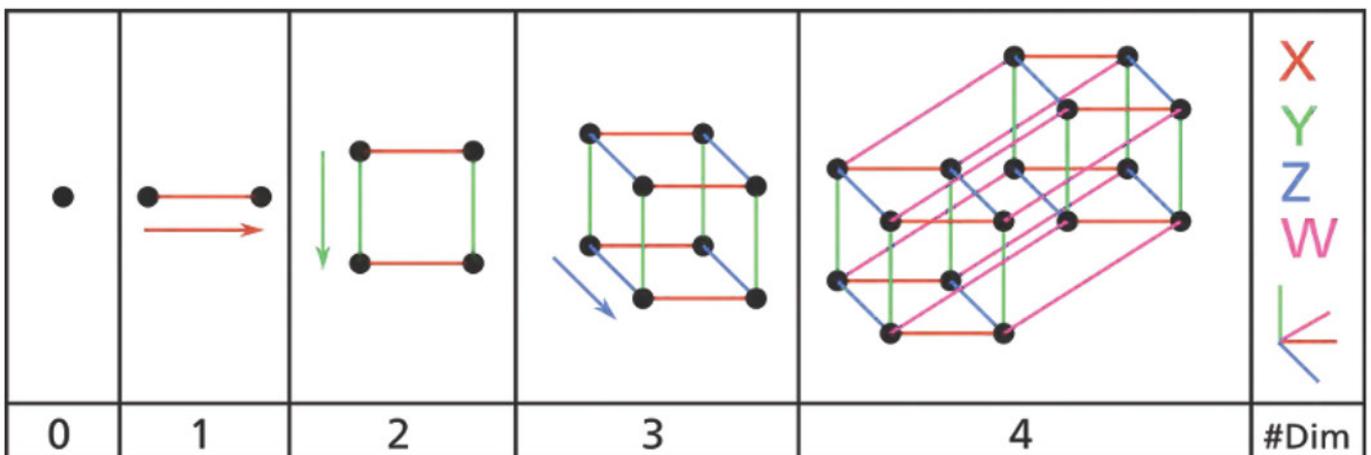




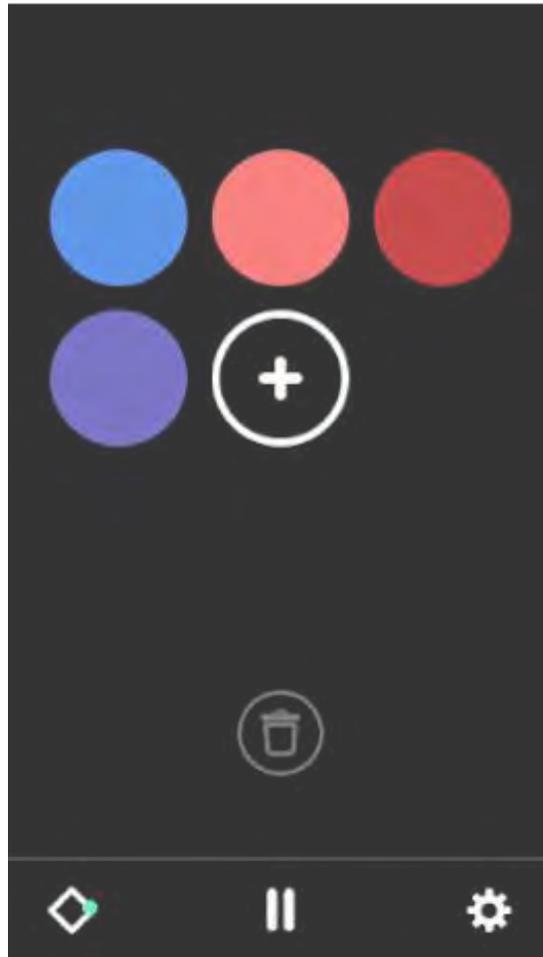
A simple map, describing the relationships between Interface contexts in Keezy Drummer. This does not indicate the bounds of a screen. The arrows represent the temporal dimension (time!)

The 4th Dimension?

You can visualize the relationships between dimensions as extrusions of lower dimensions. Each dimension creates a significantly more complex model to visualize.



As you can see, representing the 4th dimension in a 2 dimensional form gets hairy, real quick. “W” in this figure, represents time.

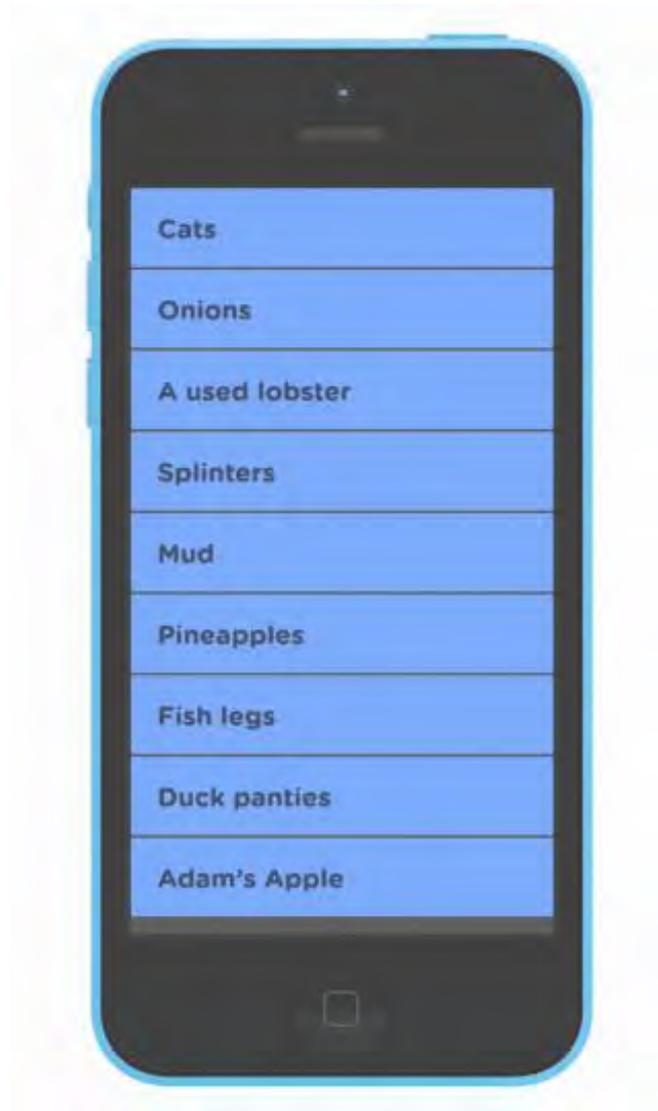


A Transitional Interface, demonstrating Contextual Zooming in Keezy Drummer

We can design with time, by thinking about kinetic, **Transitional Interfaces**. Both Spatial & Temporal clues lead the eye around physical models.

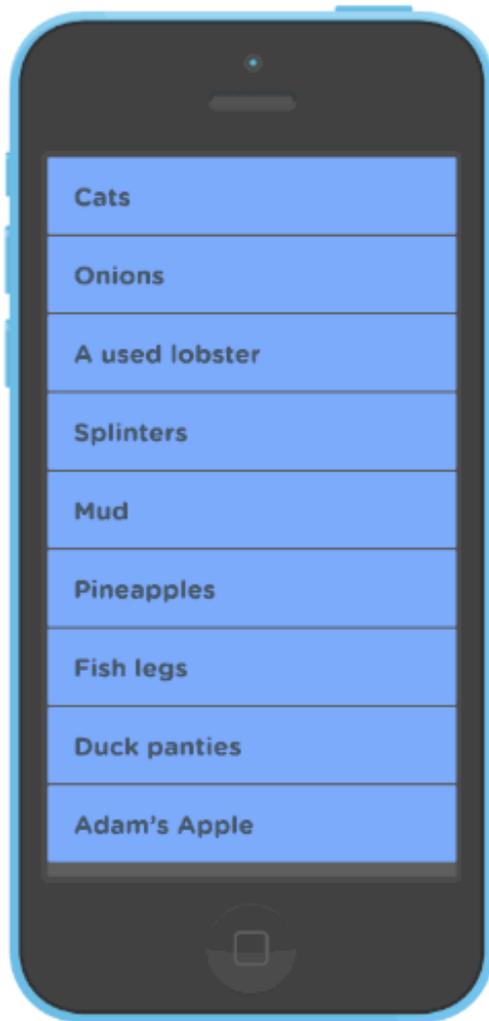
Manipulating a list

Motion implies space. Movement re-enforces the physical characteristics of the spaces on and off the screen. Objects constrained using sensible, physical rules, help establish a clear model.

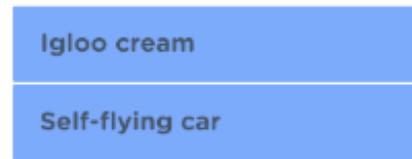


We've all seen this classic, list item deletion pattern. Swipe the cell, and it reveals a button behind it. Tap the icon, and the entire cell collapses.

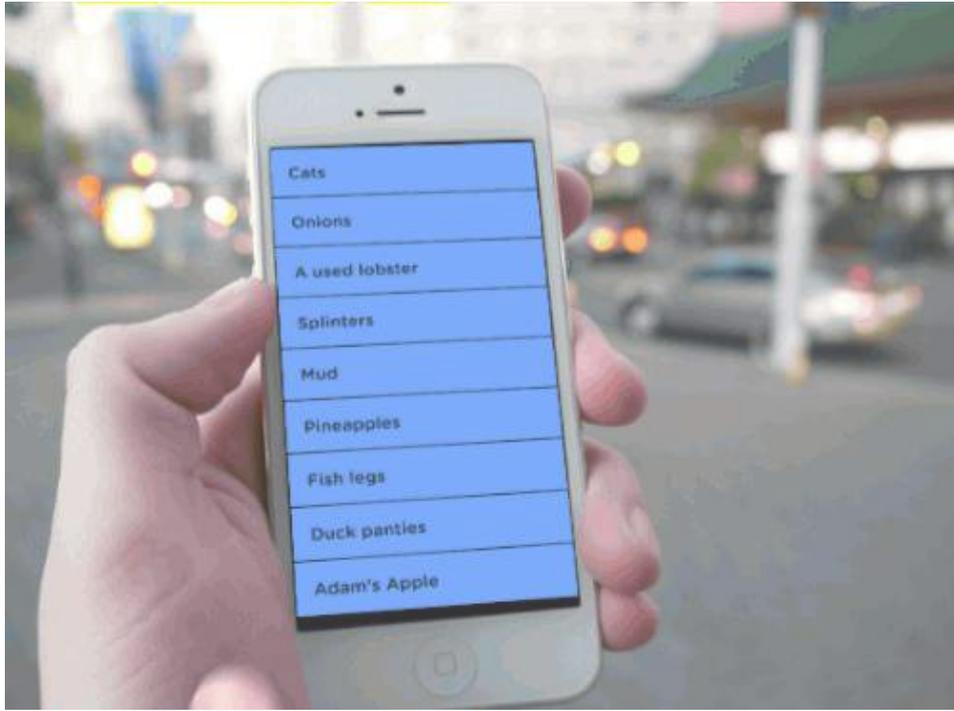
What happens if we change the way the list item departs the screen?



Staging Area?

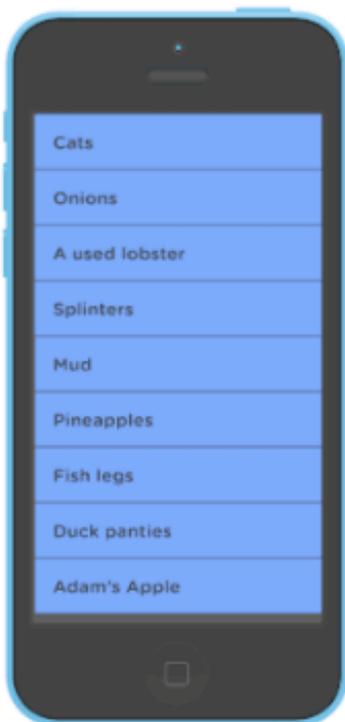


If we cushion / ease the item exiting the screen, we suggest where it might stop. In this case, it stops a little short off screen. We might want to do this to imply a holding area, which could feed items back into the list. Maybe we could allow the user to swipe the viewport to the right hand side of the screen, revealing displaced list items.

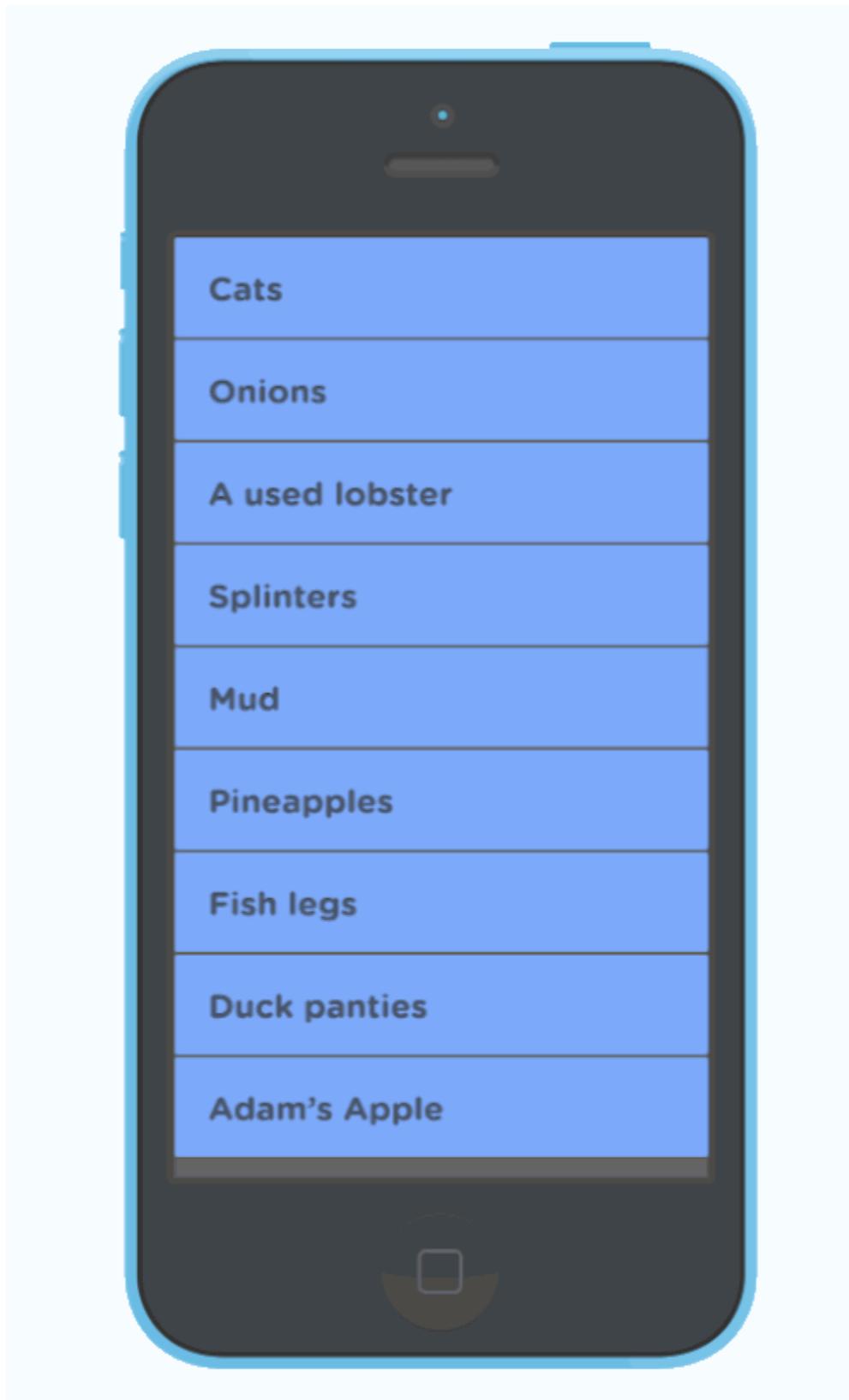


Google's Material Design guidelines seems to think that you should only accelerate when leaving the screen. I beg to differ.

If the item keeps accelerating, where does it end up? Out of reach? Are we banishing it into the void of outer space?



If the list item rotates and displaces along the x & y axis freely, does it come to rest off the grid? Is there gravity? Maybe it lands in a pile.

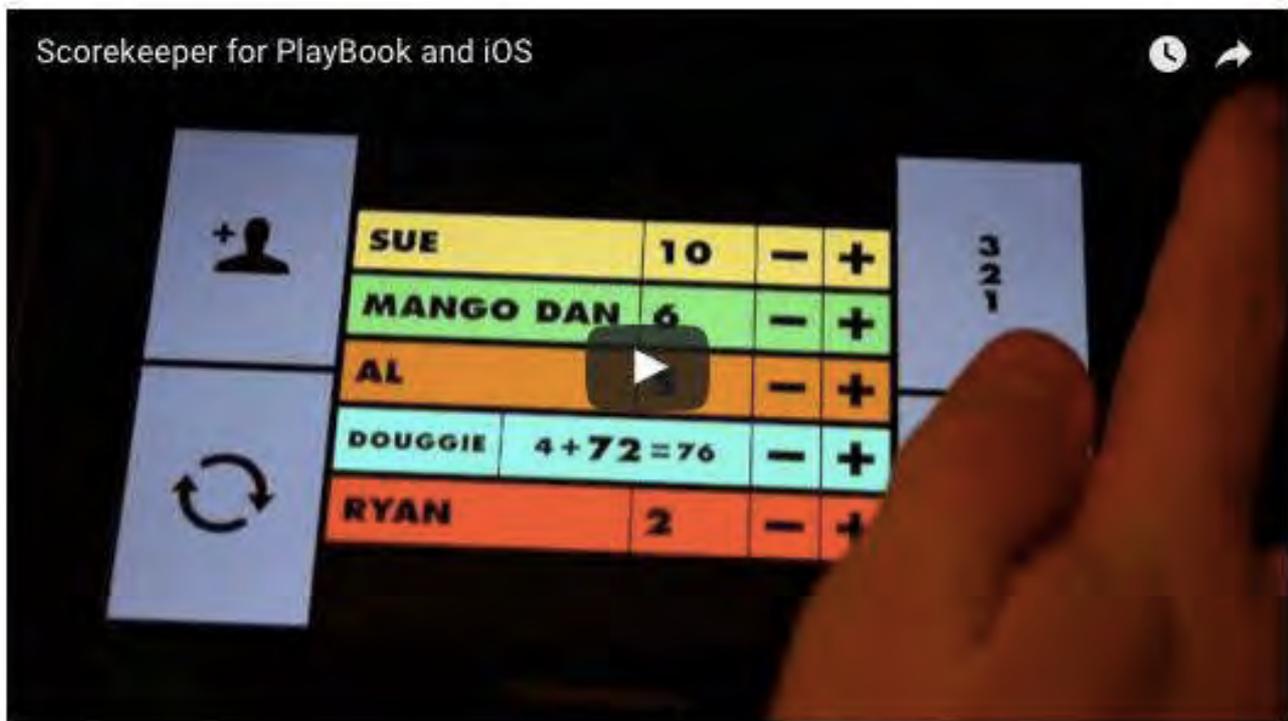


Z-translation implies depth.

The list item could flip over. It might fold in on itself like an accordion. Maybe it scrunches. The fill color could drain out of the cell like a liquid. I could go on with visual examples forever, but by now, I think you get the picture; one can encode quite a lot of meaning using motion and space.

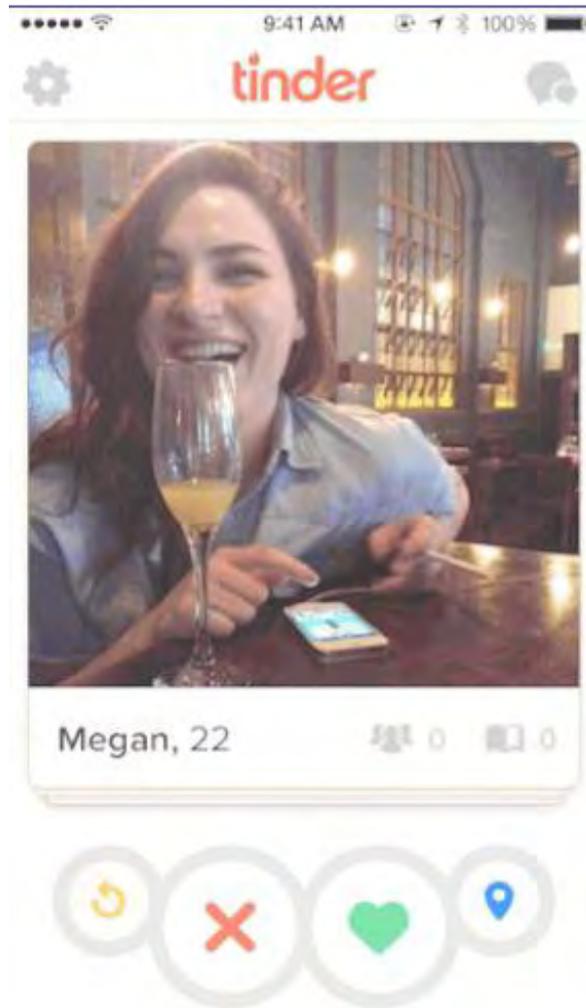
Interfaces with tactful Spatial Design

Scorekeeper



Pretty conceptual, but Scorekeeper does a great job of creating focus. It isolates modes, rather than presenting the user with a bloated buffet of options to dig through. Complexity is hidden in secondary, and tertiary sub-interfaces. Each sub-interface is as simple as its parent.

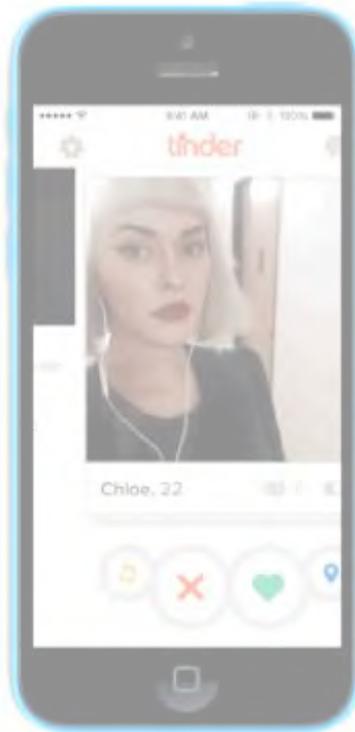
Tinder



Tinder famously employs a card paradigm. There's an endless stack of cards which make use of z-depth. Toss a card from the stack to the right, for a babe you're into, or throw them to the left to pass. Similarly, if you tap the heart or 'x' button, it automatically tosses the card to the respective side of screen, re-enforcing the function of space.



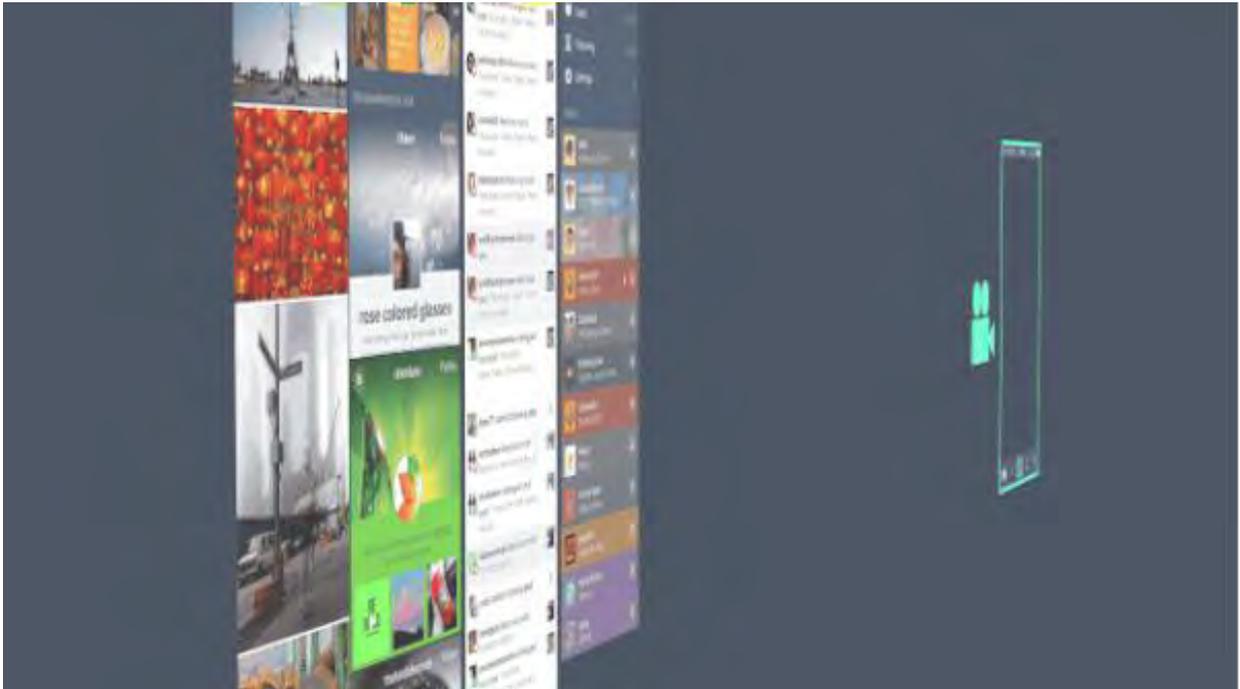
It's a physical, kinetic model that's familiar.



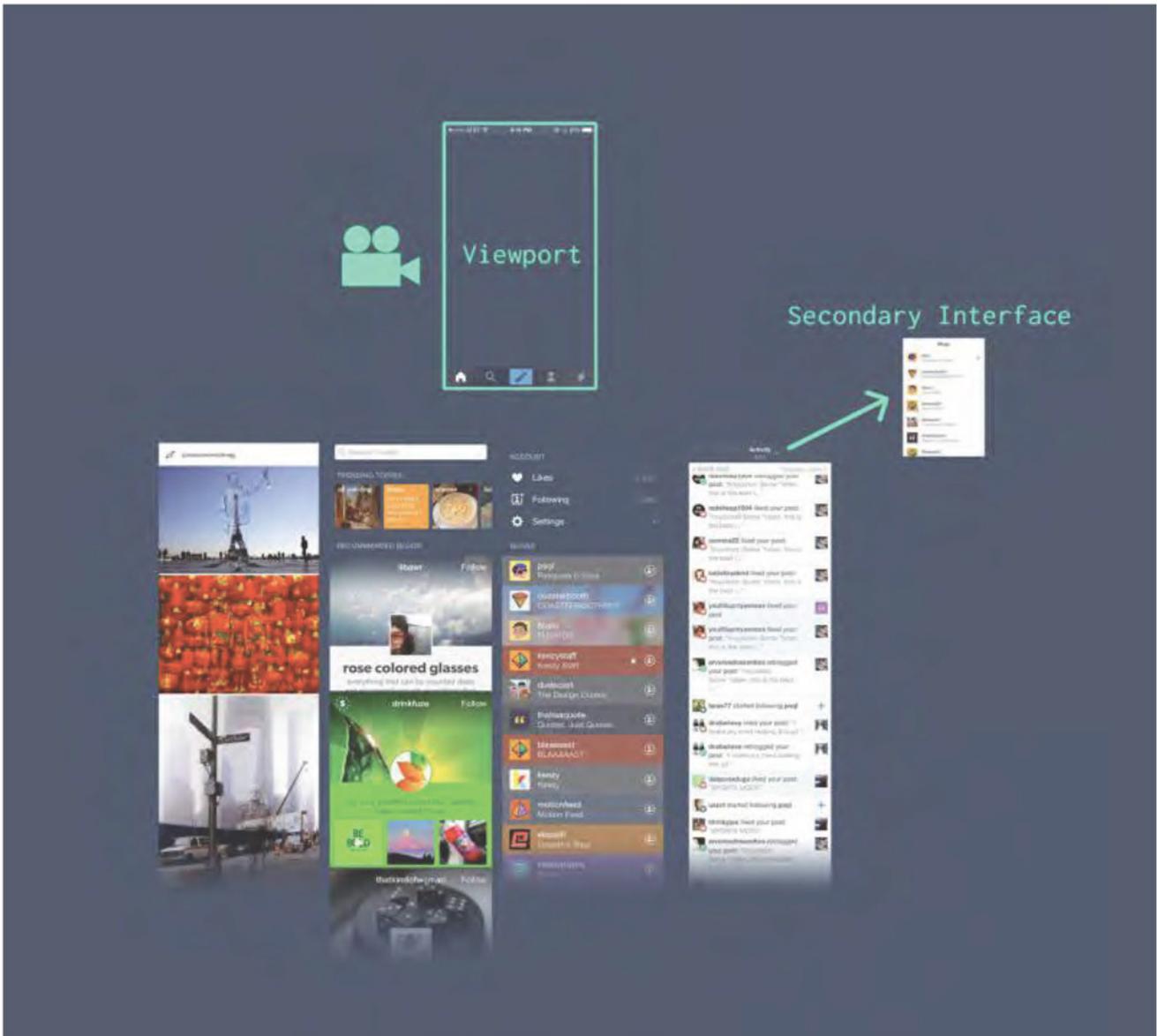
Secondary screens are placed along a horizontal continuum, which is reflected in the motion of the navigation, cascading to the content below. A great example of motion being leveraged to *imply space* .

I'm unsure if it's intentional, but the interface for messaging your 'matches' happens to exist on the right hand side, within the same area you toss your Tinder crush card.

Tumblr, iOS



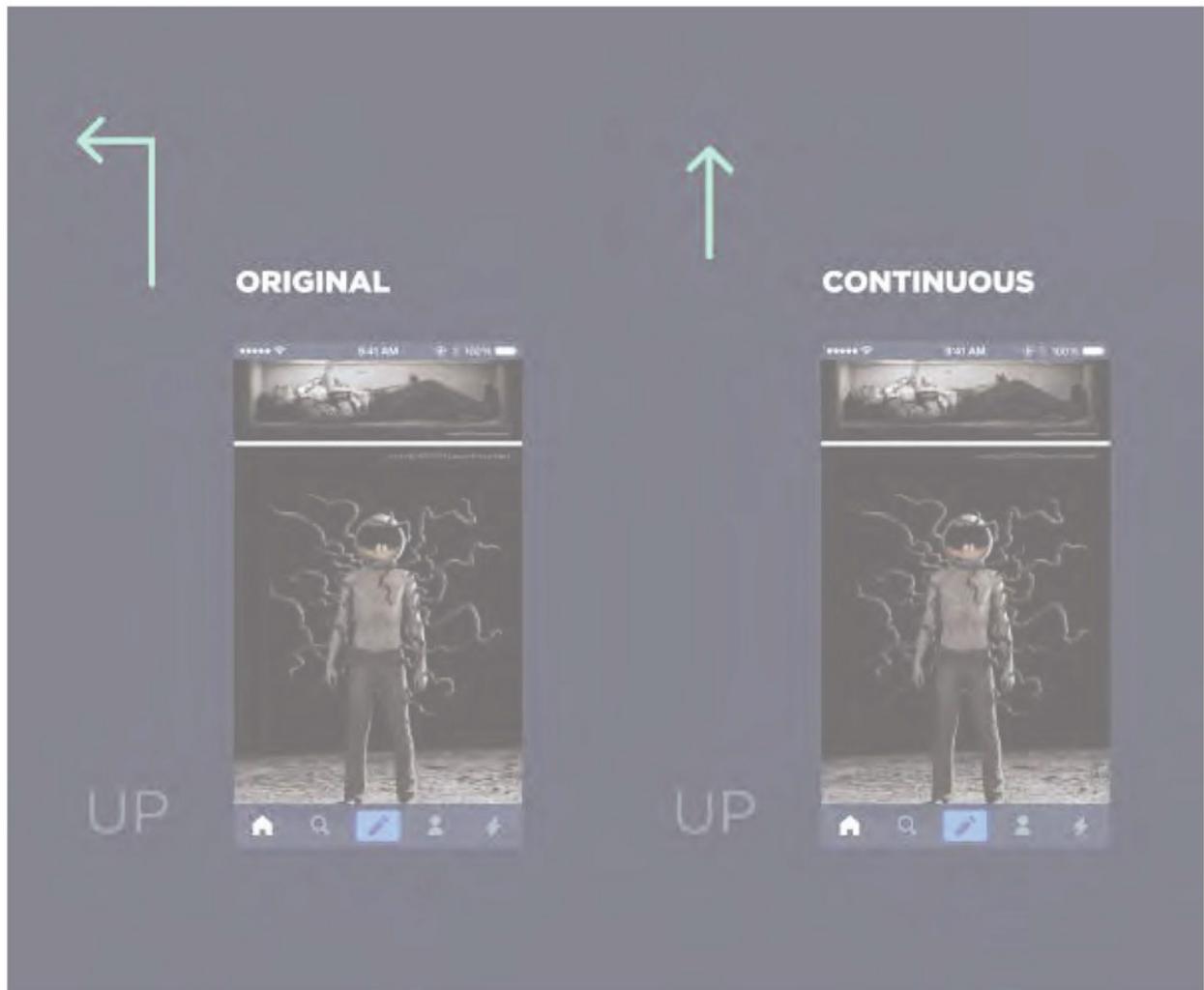
Tumblr's model is simple. There's a few contexts, connected with a tab bar. It's easy to visualize if you imagine the interface from the perspective of a camera. A persistent toolbar follows us, as if attached to the camera we're looking through. Though you don't see explicit motion along the x-axis as we change contexts (as Tinder employs), there's still a implicit *feeling* of space on either side of the columns.



This bird's eye view reveals an interface that's hard to get lost in. A few tall, scrolling columns, and a few contextual overlays. We see this Tab Bar mechanism everywhere, in places like Instagram, Twitter, Foursquare, etc.

None of this is groundbreaking.

What's interesting is the use of the compose modal, triggered by touching the blue pencil icon. No matter where it's touched, you are not transported to a new part of the interface, rather—you're *presented* with a temporary offering, in a focused view. You have incredibly simple options: Either select a post type, or dismiss the menu. The view presents itself over the top of the content, as if it were a layer existing on a z-plane. Dismiss the view, and it returns to where it was summoned. Choose to make an action on it, you continue to move along the y-axis with the icons, implying a continuum. It's like a conveyor belt on a production line.



Tumblr iOS (left), & my rough, proposed change to simplify spatially (right).

My one gripe in Tumblr's process, is that the metadata composer is presented with the insertion of a classic, master-detail view. If I were to push the interface further, I'd continue to present the next screen with y-axis motion, rather than introducing the extra x-dimension. This reduces the cognitive load required to imagine the spatial model.

Facebook's Swipe to close



A classic lightbox effect, but with a little more. Tap the photo, and it moves into the 'foreground'. The background feed dims and recedes. Flick the photo away, and it returns back to its initial position, while the original container view zooms back into focus. It's solid.

Interfaces with careless Spatial Design



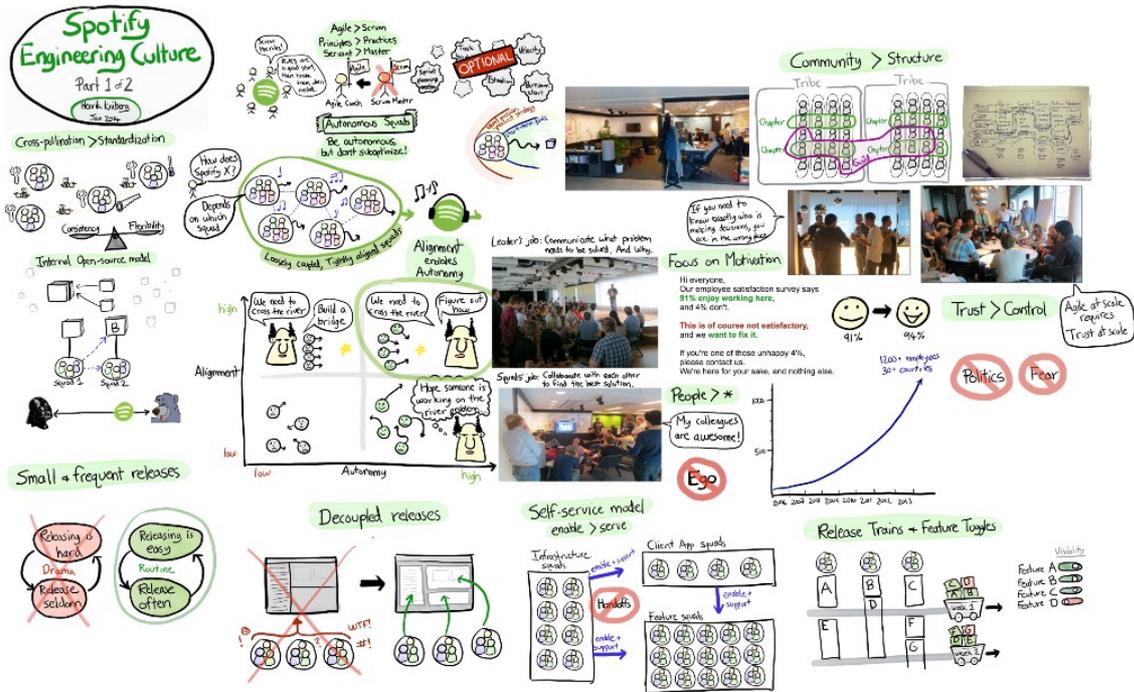
There's a lot to learn, by deconstructing these expensive Frankensteins.



Spotify, what are you doing? .

One of the most spatially confusing, while popular pieces of consumer software. To describe how Spotify's interface makes use of space, would be to describe a rat's nest of wires. I challenge you to effectively sketch it on a piece of paper.

A user of Spotify is exposed to obscure carousels, buried inside modals, stuffed inside list views, crammed into drawers, contained by drop-downs, tucked behind gestures. Each list item in the hamburger menu forces the user through a wild goose chase in order to perform a simple action. It's like you have to play a *choose your own adventure* story to get anything done.



While it may seem baffling that a team of talented engineers & designers could produce such a monstrosity, it's unsurprising when you take a look at the software development values of Spotify. A holistic approach to creating software is thrown out the window, in favor of ungrounded company memes.



Jimothy
@davegorum

Friend of mine at Apple sent me a shot of the Apple Music user experience planning room.

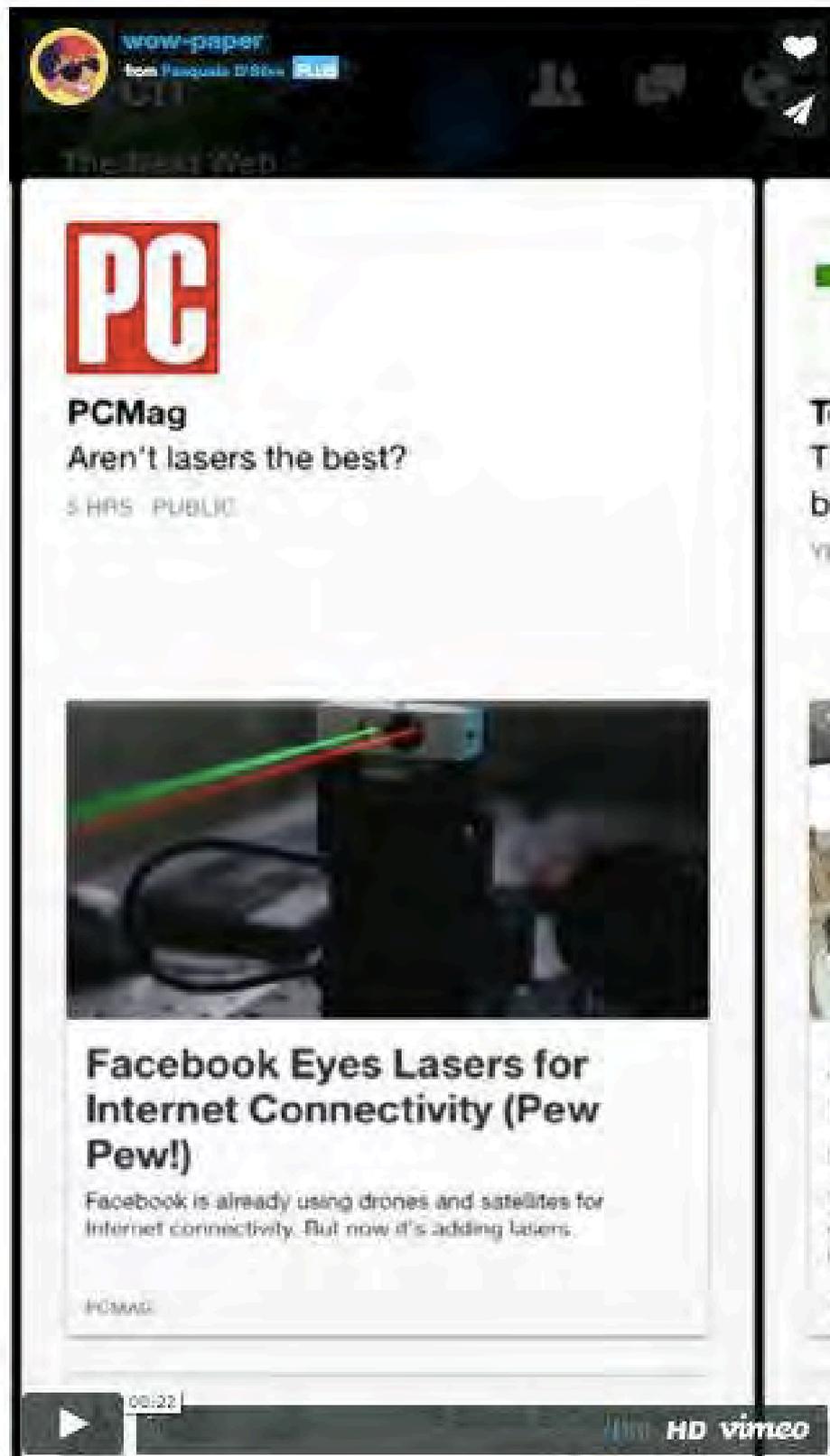
7:55 PM - 1 Jul 2015

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Follow

...but to be fair, the rest of the competition in the music space doesn't seem to get it either. Apple Music & Rdio's interfaces are equally insufferable. There's little, to no thought given to Space.

Facebook Paper



The screenshot shows a Facebook Paper interface. At the top, there's a dark header with the profile picture and name 'wow-paper' (from Pasquale D'Silva) and a 'Public' status. Below this is the article content. The article is from PCMag and has the headline 'Aren't lasers the best?'. It was posted 5 HRS AGO and is PUBLIC. The main image shows a close-up of a device with a red and green laser beam. Below the image is the title 'Facebook Eyes Lasers for Internet Connectivity (Pew Pew!)' and a short paragraph: 'Facebook is already using drones and satellites for Internet connectivity. But now it's adding lasers.' The article is attributed to PCMag. At the bottom of the page, there is a video player with a play button, a progress bar showing 00:22, and the text 'HD vimeo'.

Praised for its use of spring physics, and wild animations, it seems remarkable on the surface. The Paper team made some cool tech, and even open sourced it. It's fun to fling around. It ends there. Paper is a children's interactive playbook for an iPad, rebranded and then crammed into a tiny iPhone. Ok, well it's Push Pop Press shoehorned into Facebook.



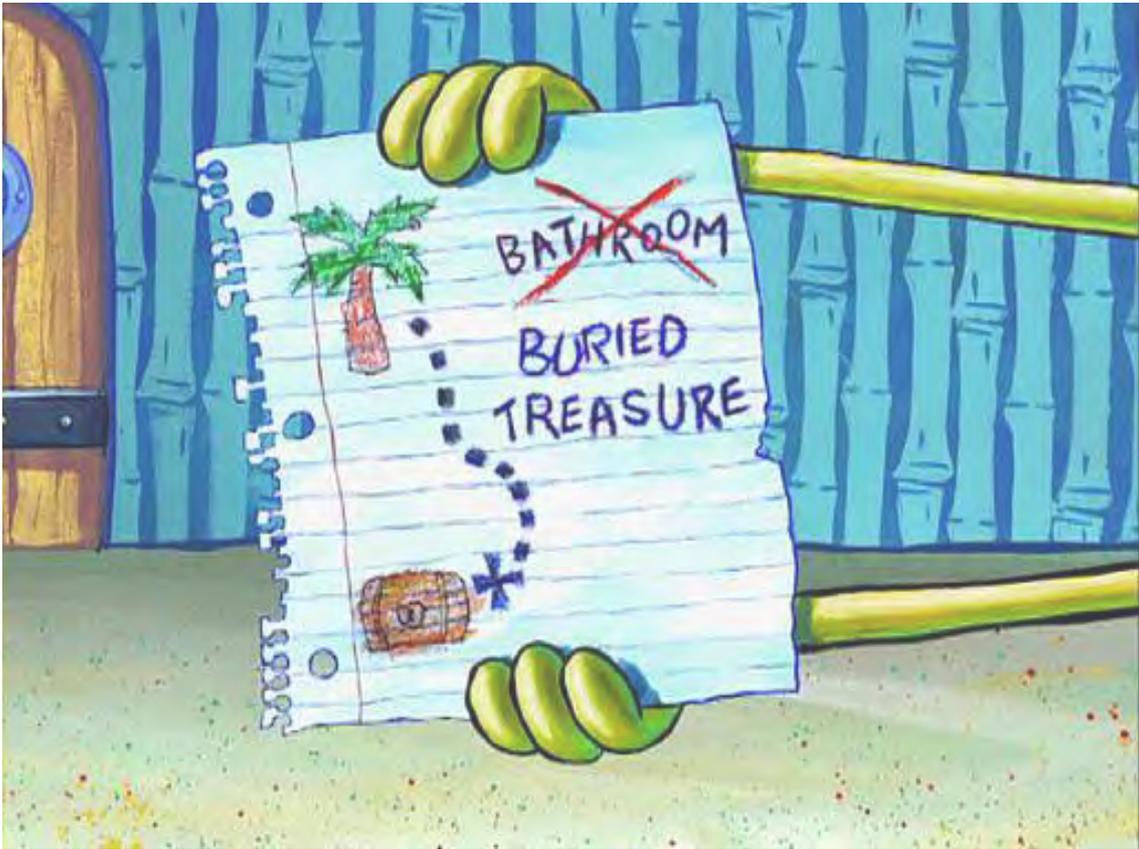
There's momentum scroll areas for days. Springs on springs on springs on springs. Cards that unfold like a shiny newspaper? You can pinch everything. The loudest hamburger menu in the world. *Everything* is simulated and moves for the sake of flair. It's unnecessary kinetic toil. It's fatiguing to traverse the amount of physical space described in the interface, let alone keep a model in the mind to remember where you are.

It's a great example of going too far.

Turkish Airlines in-flight entertainment



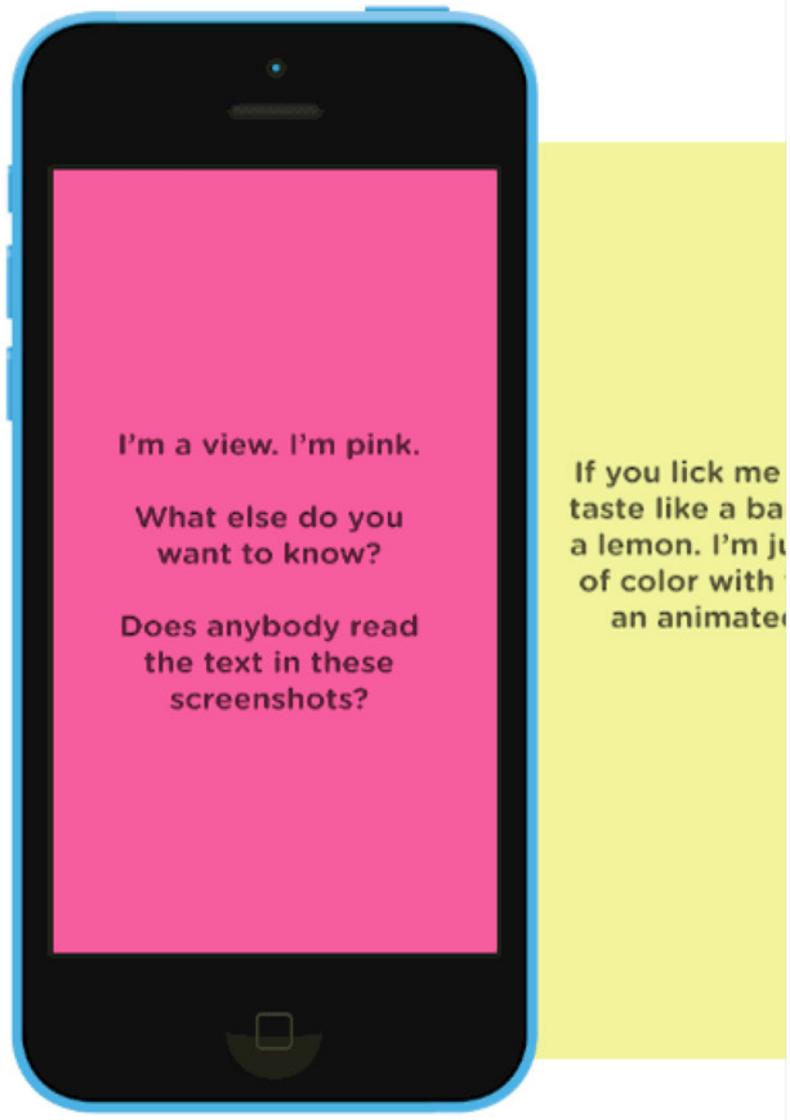
This one's so obvious, I'm presenting it without any further comment.



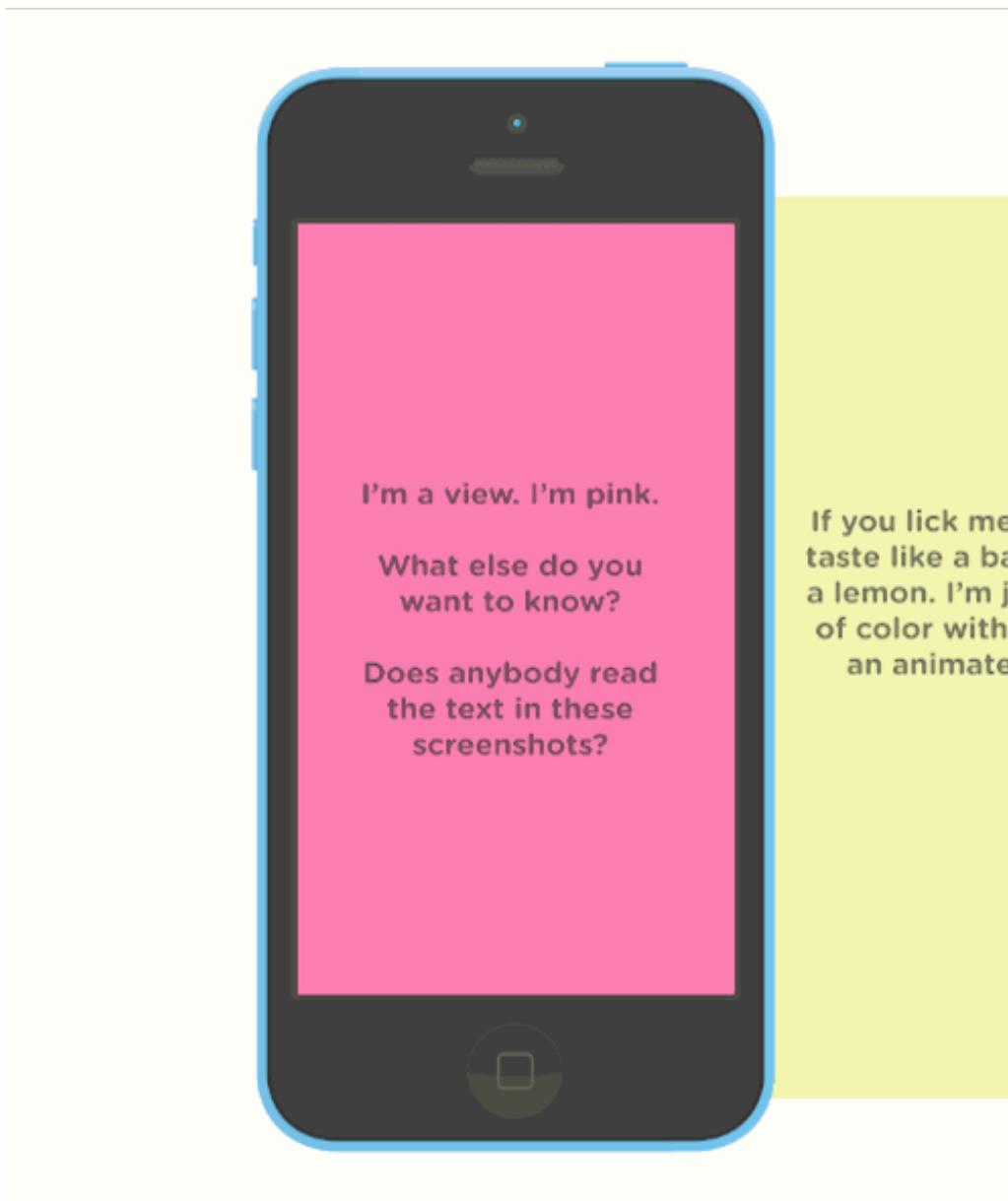
How do we avoid the Rat's Nest? We need to zoom out, and quite literally. Like I mentioned earlier, it helps immensely to think in terms of diagrammatic reasoning. Simple directions on the map result in a less chaotic journey through space.

Some tips:

- Be careful mixing carousels, scroll areas, zooms, and hamburger menus. Each one of these devices introduces dimensional complexity.



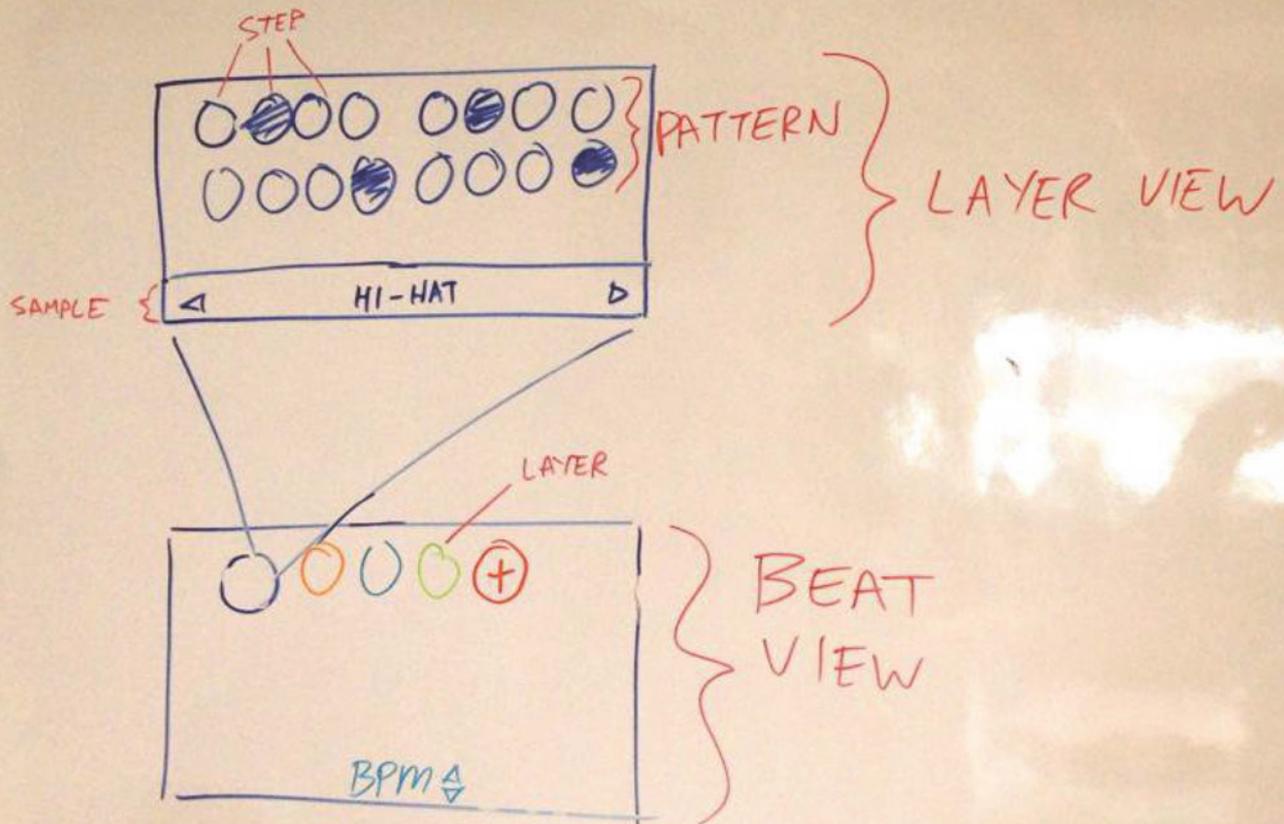
Horizontal space is implied here, but it requires both views to displace themselves over an immense distance.



Horizontal space is implied, without moving the pink view all the way across the screen. We create a feeling of movement, without dragging a viewer's eyes all the way across the screen. This pattern is common in native iOS Master-Detail views.

- Avoid over-describing space. It becomes hard to digest. The time it takes to convey the space might block an interaction. Added time can cause software to feel unresponsive. Consider shortcuts to imply the feeling of space. Literal isn't as important as feeling.

BEAT BOX V1.0



Early sketches for Keezy Drummer

- Get the hell away from the computer and get drawing. Use a sketchbook, or even a whiteboard. Something more loose than pixel twerking. Think with pictures.

. . .

I hope what I've penned down has encouraged you to think more Spatially. Go play some video games, and study the interfaces. Go outside. Observe the physicality of reality and your expectations of it. It's in the DNA of the creations I'm inspired by, and the type of work I strive to produce.

Spatial Interfaces, as a talk:

<https://vimeo.com/147643797>

Feel free to email me: [medium@pasquale.cool], or write to me on twitter [@pasql](#)

Special thanks:

Jake Lodwick, Eric Skogen, Mark Stultz, & Sebastiaan de With

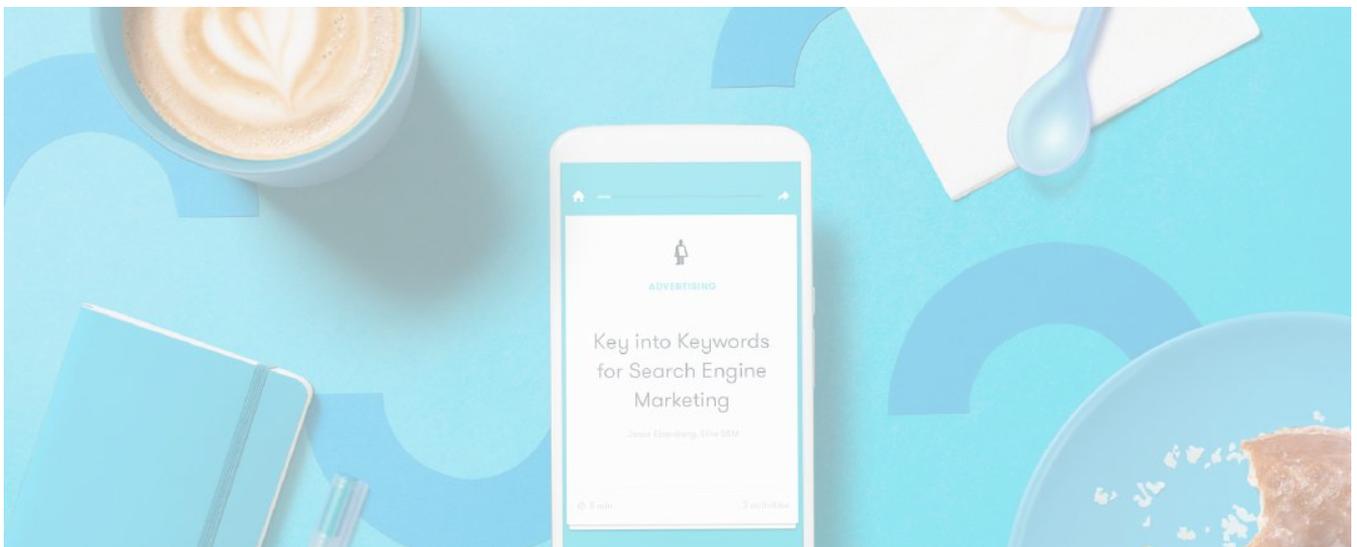


Sandra Nam

6 min read

Making Learning Easy by Design

How Google's Primer team approached UX



How can design make learning feel like less of a chore?

It's not as easy as it sounds. Flat out, people usually won't go out of their way to learn something new. Research shows that only 3% of adults in the U.S. spend time learning during their day.¹

Think about that for a second: Despite all the information available at our fingertips, and all the new technologies that emerge seemingly overnight, 97% of people won't spend any time actively seeking out new knowledge for their own development.

That was the challenge at hand when our team at Google set out to create **Primer**, a new mobile app that helps people learn digital marketing concepts in 5 minutes or less.

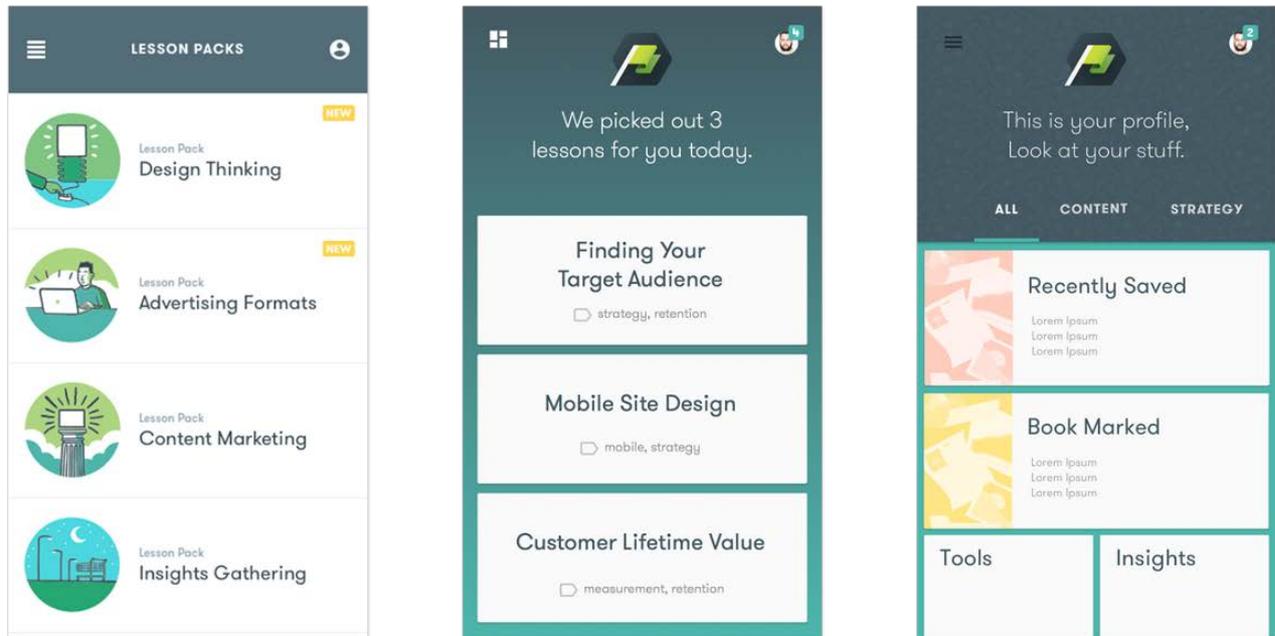
UX was at the heart of this mission. Learning has several barriers to entry: you need to figure out what, where, how you want to learn, and then you need the time, money, and energy to follow through. To tackle that challenge, we thought about the

This meant our UX needed to serve double duty: The app needed to be inviting and intuitive, and it needed to overcome all the factors that keep people from learning.

three main places where users would spend time in our app: the dashboard, the individual lessons, and the activities within each lesson.

1. Dashboard

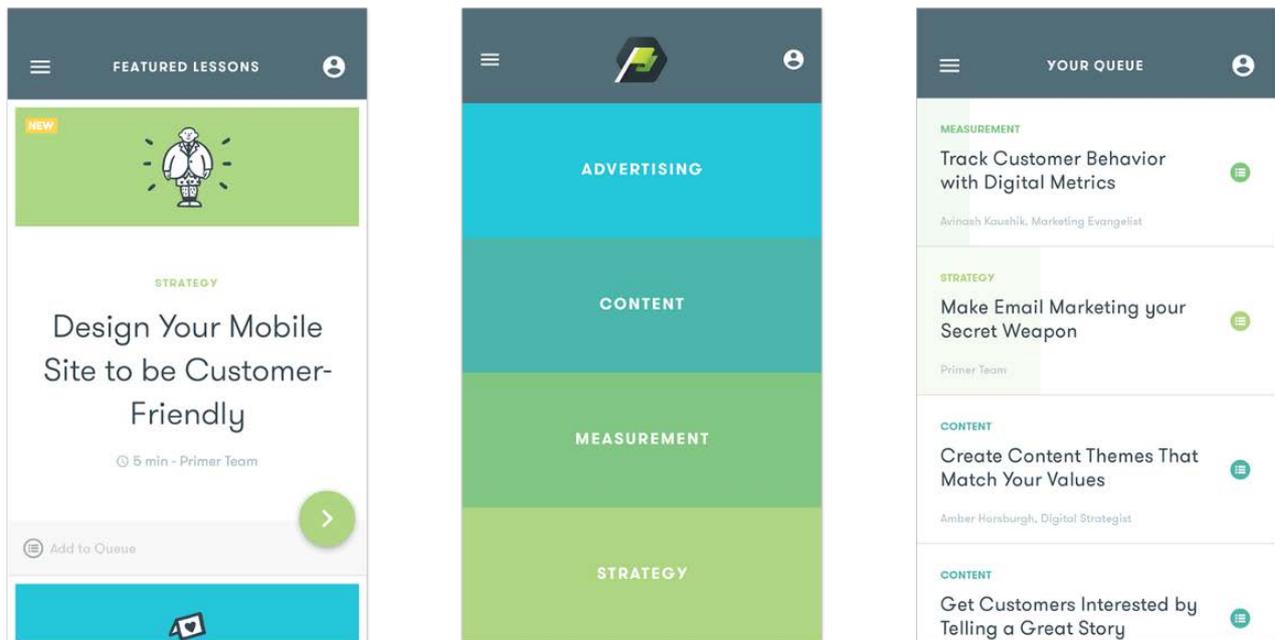
The dashboard is incredibly important because it's the first thing people see when they open the app. We iterated and prototyped different dashboards for months. We had lots of ideas: lesson packs, letting users pick from three random lessons, geolocation for events related to the lesson topic, or special widgets about experts and brands we worked with. The possibilities were endless.



Early dashboard prototypes.

It was clear we needed a guiding principle, so we put ourselves in users' shoes. We theorized that people coming into the app would fall into one of three camps:

- **Passive:** They will be looking around and browsing.
- **Curious:** They will be looking to learn something, but not sure what. **Active:**
- They will have more of an idea about what they want to learn.



Final dashboard views: Featured, Categories, and Queue.

For the **Passive** group, we created the Featured section, which shows five suggested lessons people can do right away.

Meanwhile, we made it easy for **Curious** users to find lessons via topic or category: Advertising, Content, Measurement, and Strategy.

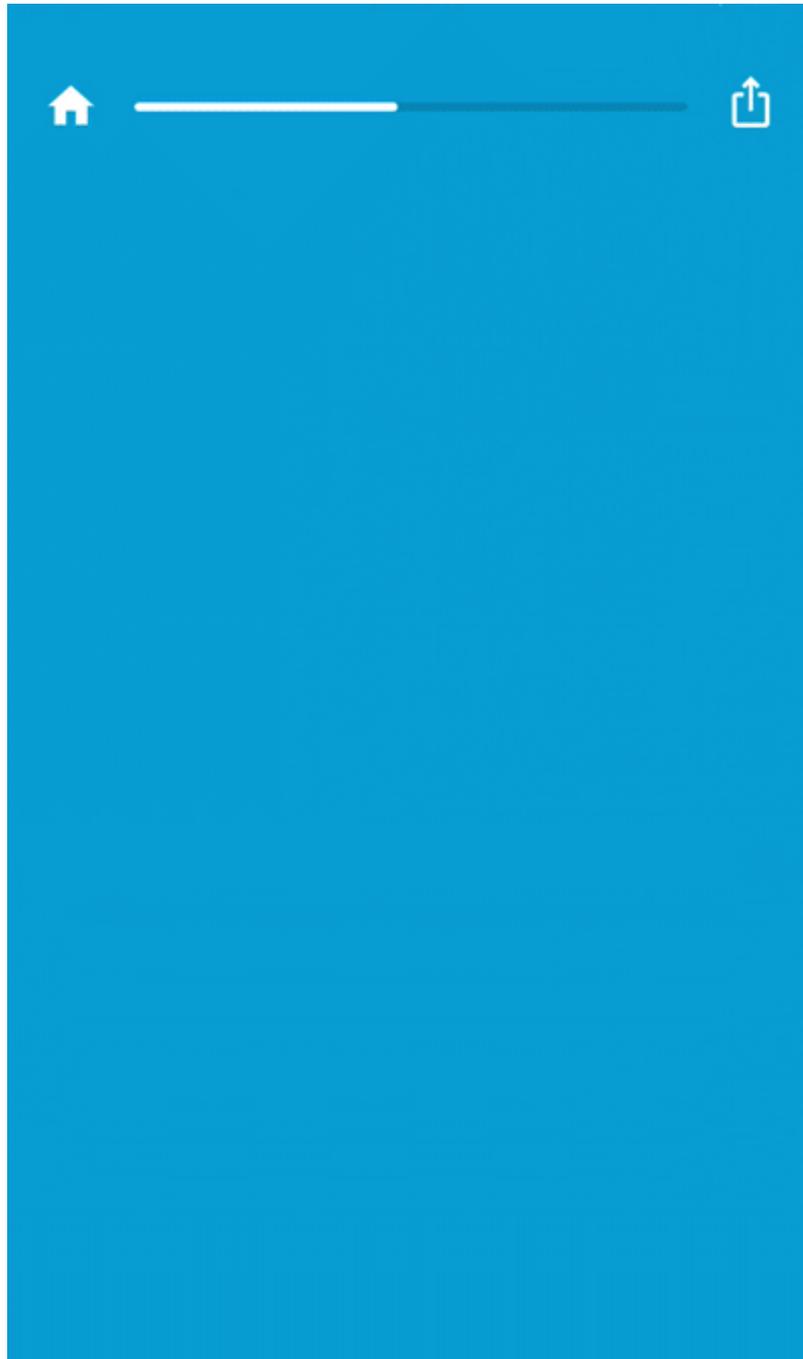
And, for **Active** users, we created a curation tool: the Queue. Here, they can put together their own “playlists” and easily add and remove lessons as they wish.

2. Lessons

The next element of the app is the lessons themselves. Primer’s lessons are meant to be great time-passers; users can do them on the train or while their kids watch cartoons.

But learning requires engagement. We can’t afford to let users swipe through the content mindlessly.

We dubbed our solution “Rhythmic Learning.” Every lesson element—each swipe, each card stack, and each illustration—was designed to rhythmically guide the user through the content.



The swiping gestures give users a sense of completion with each card and stack. A text document packed with information feels daunting, but a lesson broken down into cards feels manageable. These cards are grouped in stacks of 3 to 7, and once the last card is swiped away, another stack slides into view. Finishing a stack becomes a micro-accomplishment, meaning users don't have to wait until the end of the lesson to feel like they've learned something.

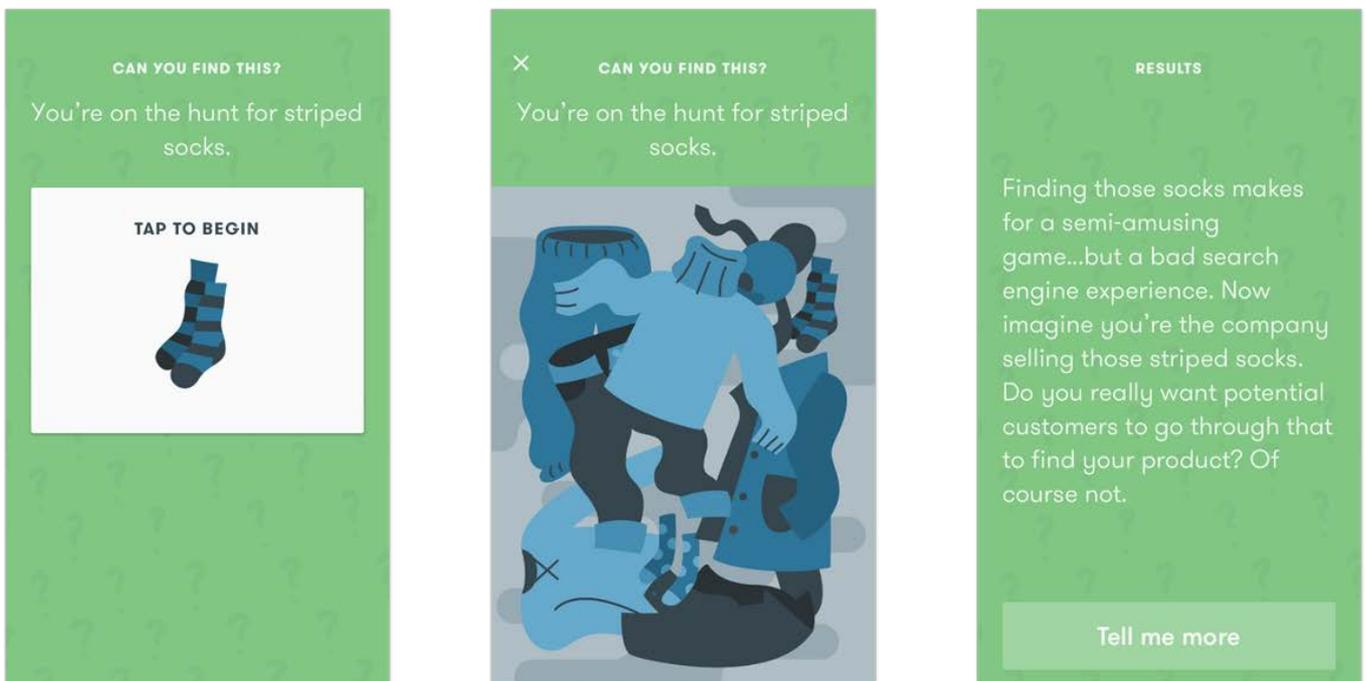
That's also where the illustrations come in. Each illustration is a small moment of delight, providing a chuckle or a smile that helps bring the content to life. Incorporating an illustrator into our lesson-creation process added an extra

workstream, but it also added a wonderful mix of humor and editorial-ness to the lessons.

3. Activities

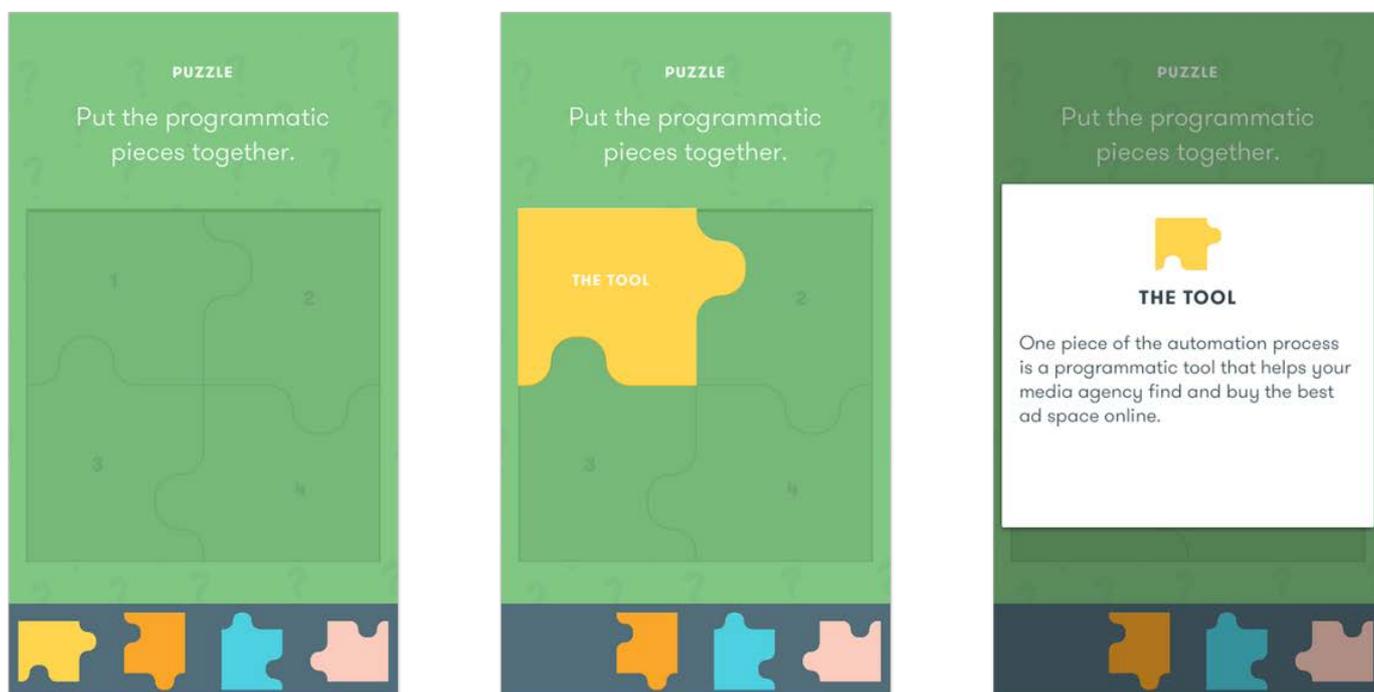
The third and final element of our UX design is the activities. We landed on three types of interactions that appear at different times: Quick Starts appear early in each lesson; Mid-Lesson Activities appear during the lesson; and Do This Nows come at the end.

The point of the Quick Starts is to get people engaged with the concept of the lesson right away. In the search advertising lesson, for example, users are asked to find a striped sock in a pile of clothing. This Where's Waldo-style activity illustrates the value of appearing near the top of search results: Unlike a pair of socks lost among other clothing items, a search ad stands out among search results. The interaction is not a test but a way to get people thinking about the topic right away.



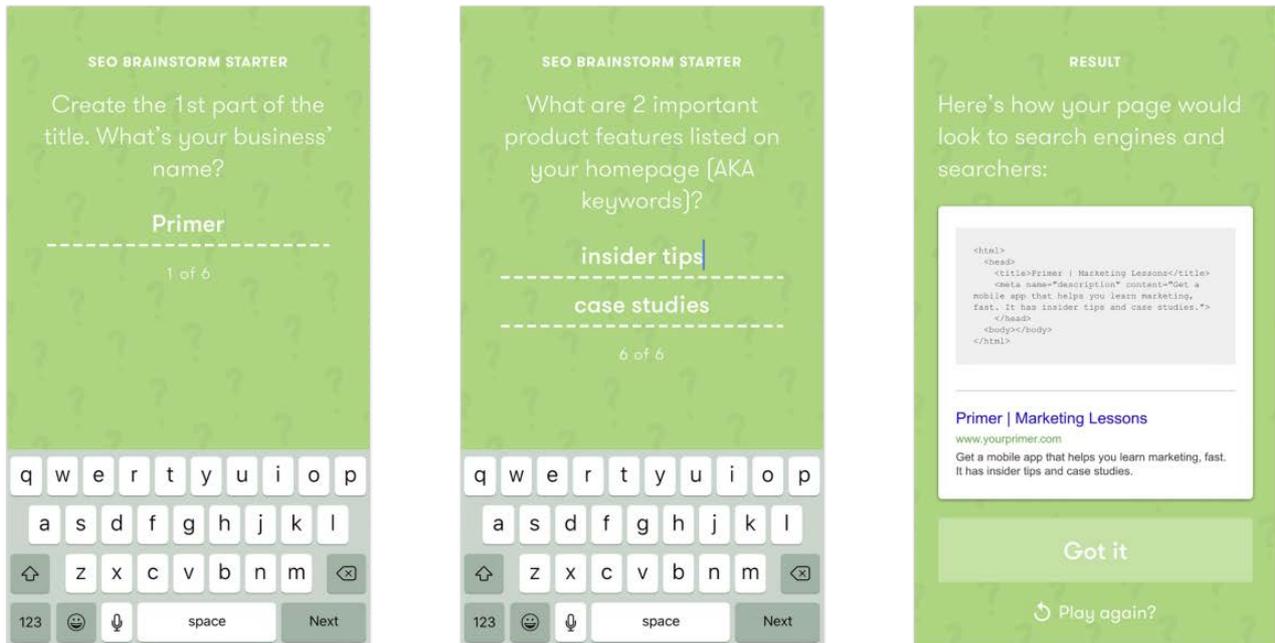
In this Quick Start, we use a Where's Waldo-style activity to illustrate the advantages of search advertising.

Mid-Lesson Activities appear, as you might expect, halfway through the lesson to break up the reading and get users interacting with the topic in a new way. In one lesson, we feature an activity that asks the user to literally put the puzzle pieces of programmatic media buying together. In another lesson, we include a common sense do-or-don't activity to reframe a complex subject. For example, while explaining mobile engagement, we ask the user whether it's a good idea to send mobile notifications with abandon. The answer is obvious, and that's the point. These interactions build confidence and get the user to process information in a way that's easy and intuitive, and then build on that knowledge.



This puzzle Mid-Lesson Activity explains a complicated subject in a way that's both intuitive and tactile.

Finally, the Do This Now feature gives users a legitimate takeaway that's immediately applicable to their business. Where should you start tracking metrics for your website? Are you ready for a programmatic buy? This makes the lessons feel more personal and action-oriented. We believe that putting knowledge into practice is the best way to learn, even if it's a baby step.



Do This Now's are personalized by letting users fill-in-the-blanks.

. . .

Primer, like all mobile apps, faces stiff competition for space and attention. That's why it was so important to design a fun, quick, and informative user experience.

Our UX design aims to make learning enjoyable—something someone would want to do instead of just another stressful part of their day. We hope users appreciate that format and the flexibility it allows. What once might have seemed like an obligation is now an easy thing to do every morning while you're waiting for your coffee—in line or at home—or any time you have 5 minutes free.

Footnote:

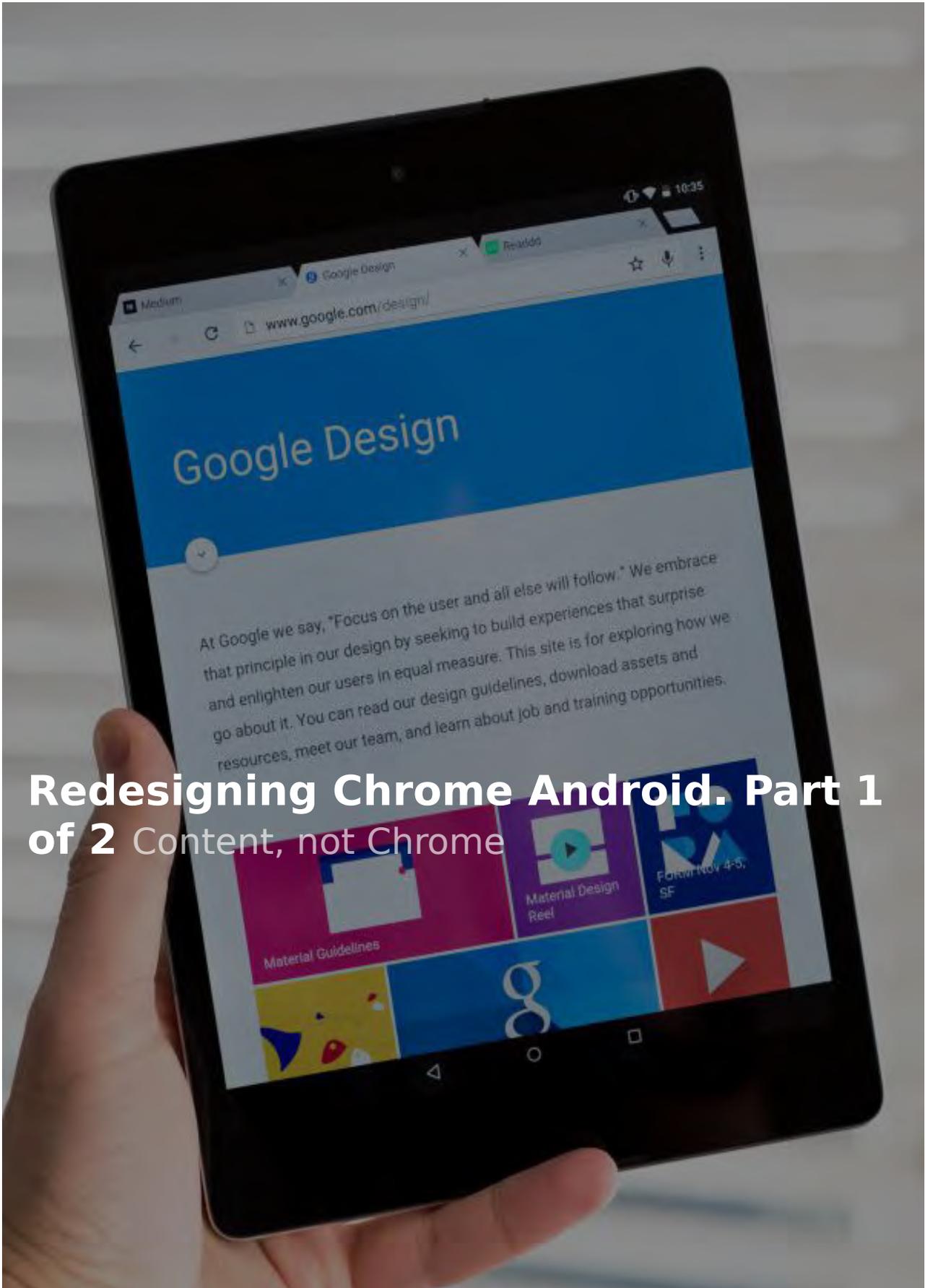
1) Data for U.S. adults over 25 from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' 2015 American Time Use Survey.

Thanks to Amber Bravo.



Sebastien Gabriel
19 min read

Design



Redesigning Chrome Android. Part 1 of 2 Content, not Chrome

. . .

***Preliminary notes:** When I started writing this article, I didn't know how much detail I wanted to put into it. As it turns out, it is quite lengthy and since I didn't want to omit things that I judge important, I decided to split it in half to make it more readable.*

In this first part, I talk about the reasons of this redesign in sync with Material Design as well as Chrome interaction and visual philosophy. I then start scratching the technical surface to talk about new styling, color scheme and iconography.

Introduction

October 2014 marked the release of the new version of Android: Lollipop. Lots of changes under the hood and a pretty big redesign brought to users under the name "Material design". Not solely an Android guideline and best practice guide, Material design (will be referred as MD from there) represents where Google stands and communicate its values in design and tech.

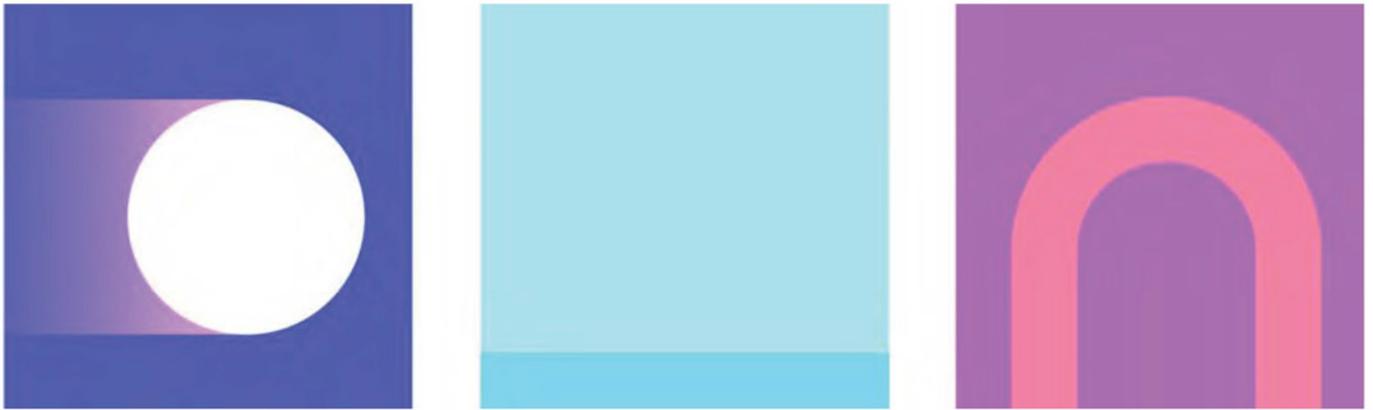
Additionally, MD extends not only to Google properties but to anyone, on any platform (with the Polymer-project.org for the web for example) for anybody willing to embrace and iterate upon it to make their own product better.

As part of this effort to bring our apps up to date and consistent with the new visual language, the redesigned version of Chrome was shipped in Lollipop for its 40th update (M40) or as we call it: Chrome Material Design.

Content, not Chrome

Throughout the years, Chrome stood a little bit apart from its other Google product counterparts when it comes to its visual choices and directions. This is mostly due to the fact that Chrome aspired to be the "shell" that contains both Google products and well... everything else. As such, branding was always a balance or a mix between the Google brand, its own Chrome branding and platform consistency. This often led to the question: "Where do we stand?"

Other factors come into play when taking UX and UI product decisions and they can be grouped under the three key Chrome principles: Speed, Simplicity and Security.



The three Chrome principles illustrated. From left to right: Speed, Simplicity, Security.

An additional one, and perhaps one of the most important when it comes to visual and UX is:

“Content, not Chrome”.

The browser should always support and delivers its content as subtly and efficiently as possible while fading in the background.

. . .

So the question is: **How do you design a UI that is supposed to be as minimal and forgettable as possible while demonstrating our new visual direction without ever overpowering the content that we are here to serve?**

Well I do not know if we ever found the answer but we did have to come up with choices. And this article is what this is about, trying to explain choices and reasons that came to be the Redesign of Chrome for Android.

The platform

We’re now eight months after the release (I’m writing this in May), and now that the dust settled a bit, I feel more comfortable talking about how and why we did things. Both as a postmortem documentation that helps me take some distance and analyse things as well as a potentially useful resources for designers out there. Plus, with I/O 2015 behind us, it’s a good way to see how Material design matured. Good design takes time and I’m hoping we reached a satisfying version of Chrome, a year after the very first draft of the new version.

But before we start let's talk about the Android platform.

As you may know, Android user base spreads among multiple versions. Each version is named after a dessert, the current version, L stands for Lollipop, the previous version, K for Kit Kat and before that J for Jelly bean.



I mentioned only the three latest versions as they are the most widely used. The reason why I'm talking about this is that we delivered two versions of Chrome, one for pre-L and the other for L and beyond.

These versions of Chrome, while similar visually, are and will be drastically different from a usability standpoint.

1. Promoting the web as first-class citizen

Chrome is all about empowering and serving the web as good as we can. Beyond delivering support for new technologies and ways for developers to enhance their applications, its role is to put the web on a pedestal.

One of the biggest and most important part of the redesign of Chrome for Lollipop wasn't the fresh coat of paint but the deep change in how users will approach the web on the platform. How we would put the web forward.

Merged tabs and apps

To differentiate this iteration from the original, Chrome in the L environment would be called "Merged tabs and app". A pretty straight forward naming that describes well what is happening. In the current version of Chrome for Lollipop settings, you can find it under "Merge tabs and apps".

This effort was conceptualized and lead by [Roma Shah](#), Chrome UX lead. I only describe the thinking the best I can as my responsibility was on the visual side.

Simply put, “Merged tabs and apps” is our effort to design ourselves, designers out of a job, by relying on the platform rather than our UI.

One way to do it was to break Chrome out of its “box”, take it apart and make it a more seamless part of the Android platform.

Step 1, taking it apart

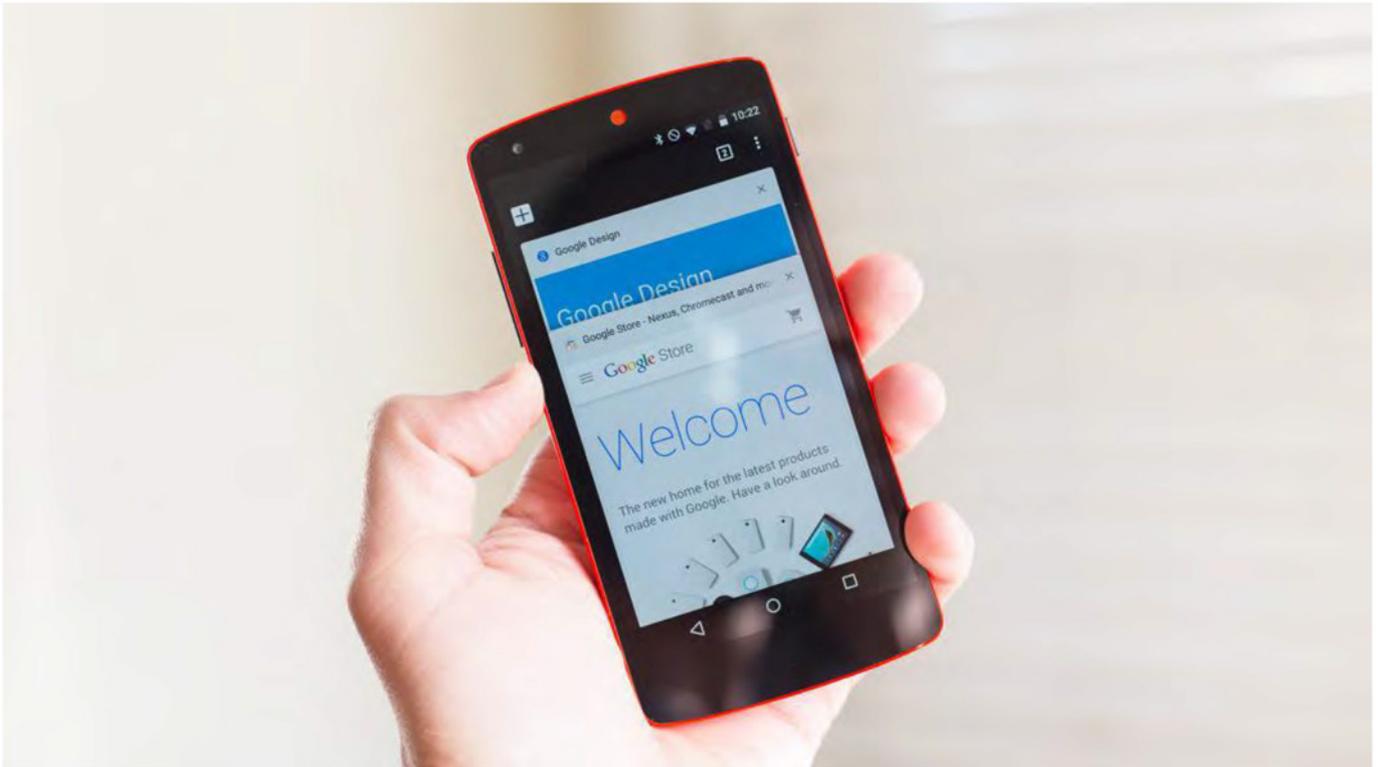
We can split Chrome mobile into key features. The New tab page, the Toolbar and URL bar (omnibox), the Switcher and the menu. Settings being secondary.

Together, these features create the browser as we know it, a separate app distinct from the native core platform working more or less in a vacuum.

Step 2, removing the biggest point of friction

The switcher

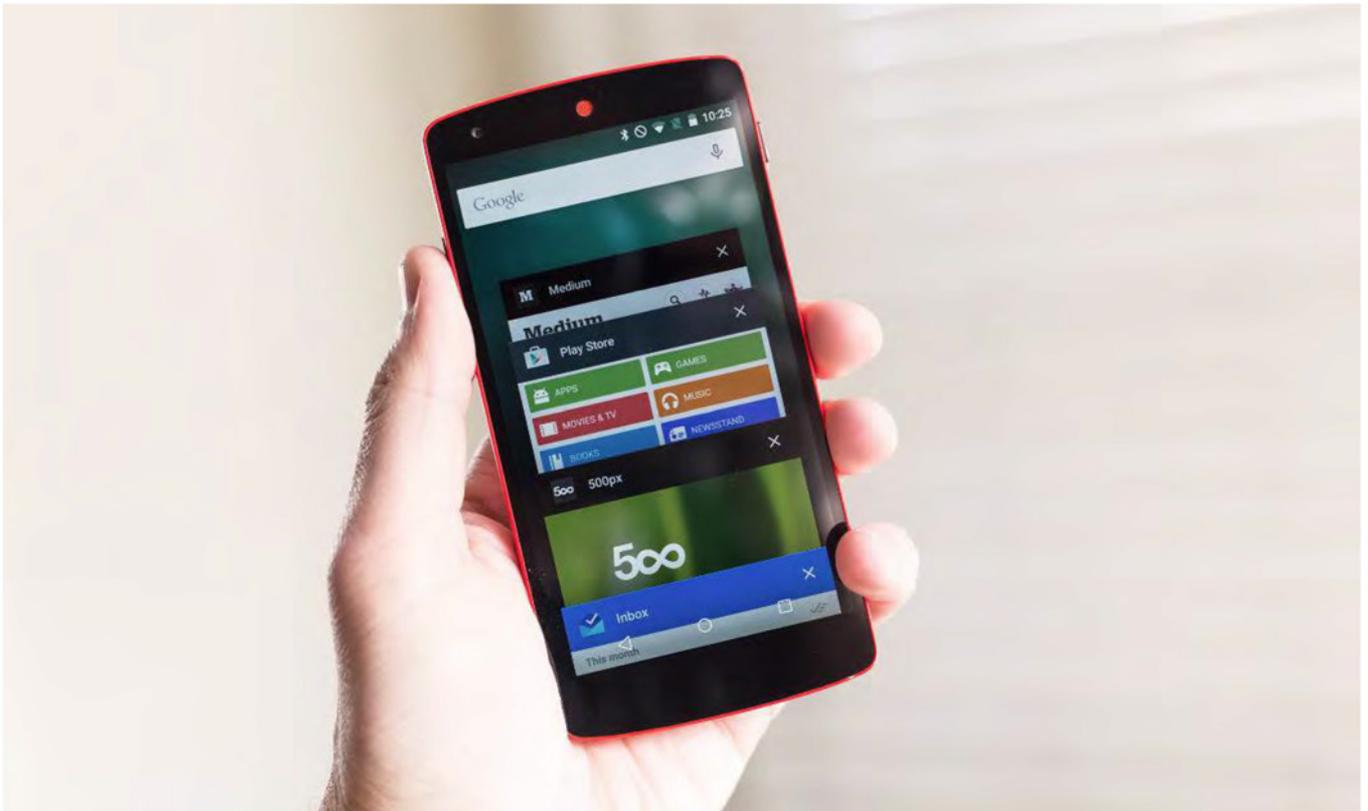
The problem with an app running in a vacuum is of course how it interacts with other elements of the platform. Short answer is that it isn't optimal. If you are working on a native app, let's say taking a few notes for a trip you are going to make and you need to access a certain site to get and copy some info, you need to either close your app and open chrome or navigate the Android recents switcher, tap chrome, dive into Chrome own tab switcher and then start to actually do what you want to do.



Chrome regular switcher. Available on pre-L devices by setting the “Merge tabs and apps” off.

This situation is not optimized both from an usability standpoint as well as from a more philosophical standpoint. Information, whatever its source is, should be as easily accessible.

The solution is to make every *document* equal by merging the Android native switcher and the Chrome switcher. This means stripping down Chrome from one of its core feature.



Chrome tabs and Android apps merge in the common Android recents switcher in Android Lollipop.

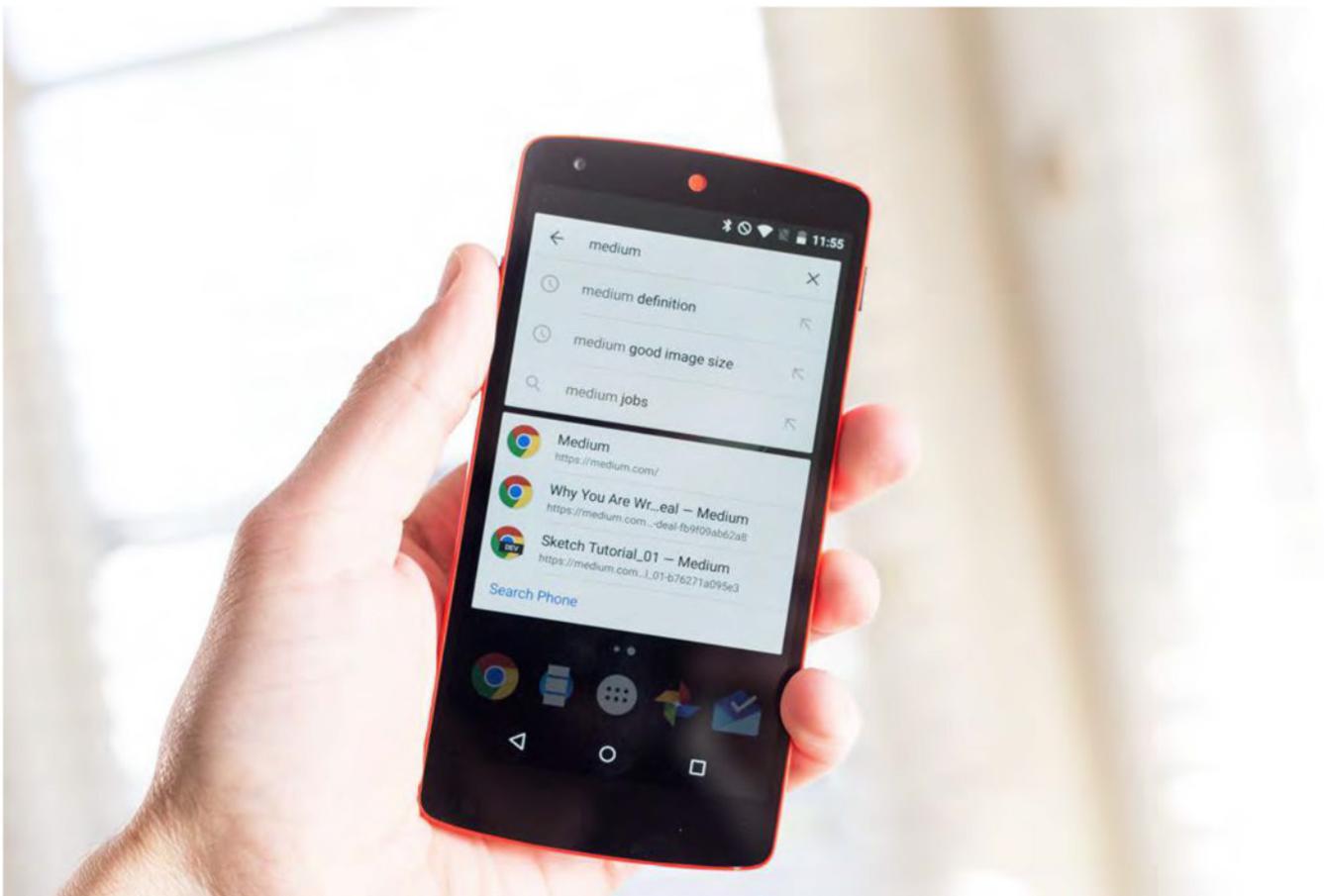
The omnibox

Now that the switcher is fully integrated to Android's, the Chrome omnibox relationship with the Google search box will become more obvious and frictionless.

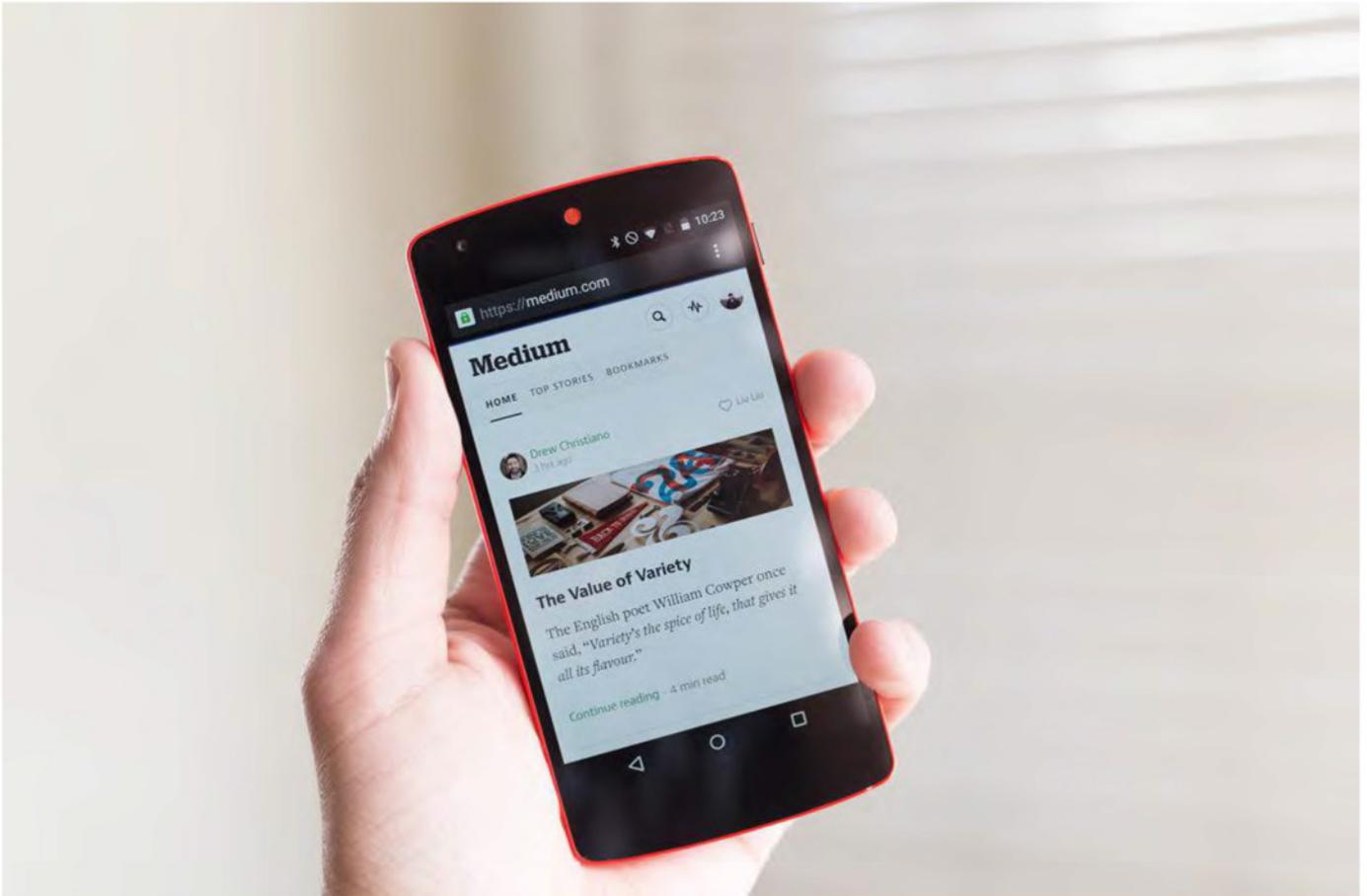
Before this change, entering a search in the system Google search box opened a tab inside Chrome. Now, triggering a search will open an activity in the Android recent stack, at the same level of any other app, not buried inside one.



Android system search box.



Triggering a search.



Result opening in Chrome.

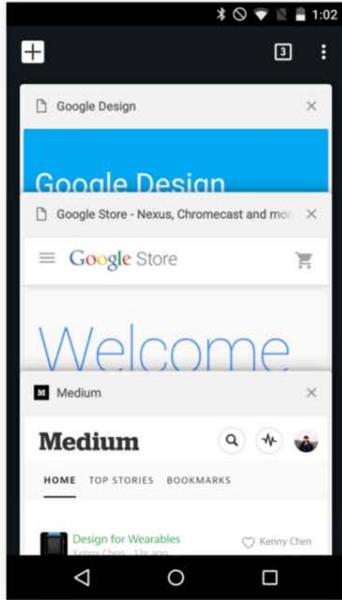
. . .

I voluntarily restricted the changes to this one major, very visible one. There is a lot that has been done under the hood and a lot of more thing that needs to be done in the future to blend the Chrome (web) platform with the Android (native) platform even better.

While very simple in appearance, these features with Android Chrome constitute the essence of Chrome Material design, even more so than any polish and visual design tweak that might be added. We went further than ever in reducing the chrome of Chrome and putting the content first.

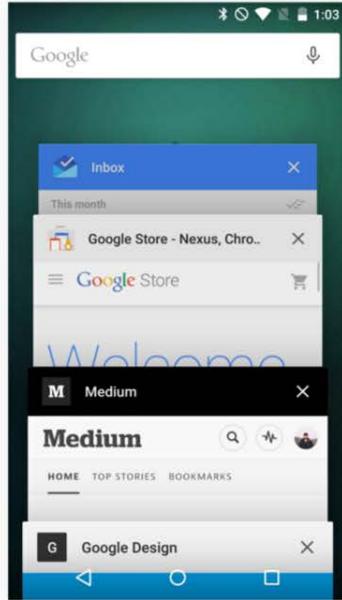
But we're here to talk visual design, mostly. Let's just take a step back and look where we are UI wise and version wise. we are now left with two different Chrome versions. Merged tabs and apps mode, working on Lollipop and regular, working on every previous version of the OS.

Pre-Lollipop

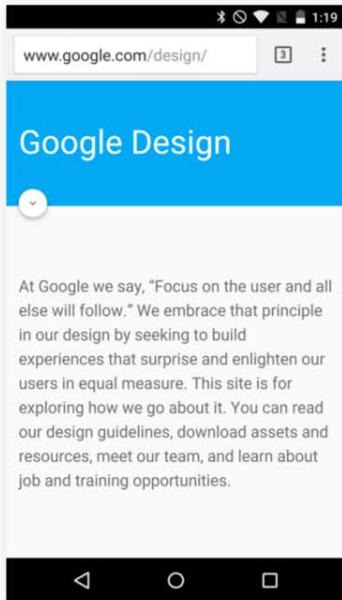


Chrome default switcher

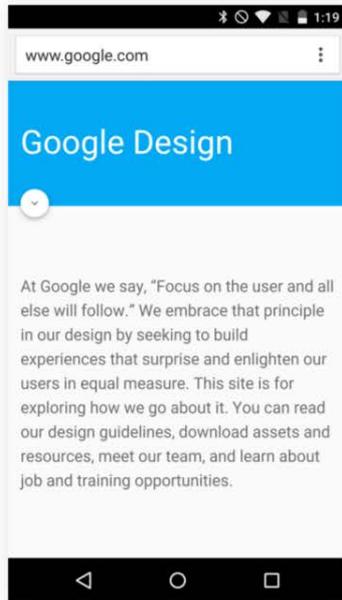
Post-Lollipop



Merged Tabs and Apps in Android switcher



Chrome toolbar with switcher icon



Merge Tabs and apps Chrome toolbar

While very different technical wise, they share the same codebase and implementation. They should as well be visually consistent and built from the same resources and that's what I'm going to talk about on the visual revamp part of this article.

2. The visual and motion overall

Chrome Android visual redesign happened at the same time Material design was being developed. Like other Google apps that needed to be redesigned for the release, we needed to make sure that Chrome was fitting the new Google vision/direction while staying true to its values and purpose.

What was clear from the start is that, as usual, Chrome was going to have to find its place between its own branding and the new Google strong visual language while making sure its UI is as discreet as possible. This was quite a challenge considering that Material design is all about boldness.

The consistency conundrum

Positioning Chrome in the consistency spectrum with the Google brand is made of constant adjustments and trade-offs. It's made of constant back and forth and trade-offs between its Google identity, the platform identity on which the end user sees it and its own identity.

When you design a software that is supposed to be deployed and recognizable everywhere, you cannot design in a vacuum without thinking of how the product is going to be perceived and impacted elsewhere.

How is this going to be translated on other platform is a key question for us.

Thought process and philosophy

This redesign was the first one of its kind since we released Chrome mobile three years ago. Chrome UI is light enough and mature enough that we usually have time to see changes coming. We also like to be very rational and careful when it comes both to the UX and the visual design of our application. Like every product with a user base in the hundred of millions, changing the slightest little thing can have quite the impact, and when you have the minimal UI footprint that Chrome has, they

are really noticeable.

One funny anecdote that sums up our spirit quite well is this: When people ask me what I do and I answer designing Chrome, I often get the question “What is there to design in Chrome anyway”?

Sometimes this question is genuinely interested, sometime it’s simply a snarky comment and that’s ok.

If somebody is wondering what is there to design in Chrome, it means we’re doing a good job.

. . .

Chrome has an iterative process, we have branch points every 4 weeks that gets a new version of Chrome pushed through its 4 levels or versions from unstable (canary) to stable (the one everybody uses).

This sort of fast paced process has more benefits for the user than downsides. Fixes go through fast while new features are introduced just as fast. On the design side, it means being reactive, organized and knowledgeable about every little aspect of our product so that we’re ready to deliver something in a short timeframe.

Material design and Lollipop gave us this opportunity to take a look at three years of iterative design and force us to wonder what will be the next Chrome.

We realized that this version of Chrome mobile and tablet will guide our choices everywhere else, not only Android but also iOS, OSX and Windows.

We had 6 month total from design to implementation and m40 release on October. We needed to make the best out of our branding, Google’s branding and the still yet to be announced and still working in progress Material design. Here are the choices we made.

Visual directions

One funny thing that we use to say is that the Chrome primary color palette is “grey with a bit of grey on top of it and a darker grey to make things fancier”.

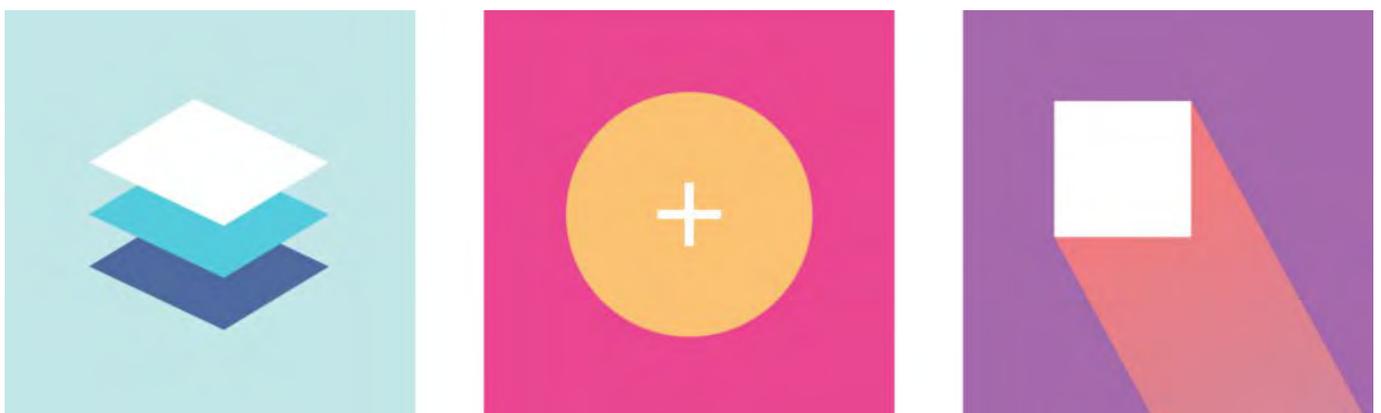
This is not too far from reality. Chrome UI is quite literally fifty shades of grey as you cannot go more neutral when you pick a color. You can see how this can clash with the concept of Material design that is supposed to be bold and use bright and strong colors.

It appeared clear to us that we were going to have to mitigate the impact of MD on our redesign and that we were going to be very careful as for how and where we would apply it.

Defining what Material Design is

A debate that started very early in the process was to actually define what was MD and how to apply and make the best use of it in Chrome. The key principles as described in the [Material design spec](#) are as follow:

“MD is a metaphor with bold and intentional visual supported by meaningful motion design”



From left to right, “Metaphorical”, “Bold, graphic and intentional”, “motion provides meaning”

That's for the philosophy of it. A voluntarily broad definition of what it is that you can interpret as you see fit as long as it serves your design better. The gist of it is that your design needs to have an understandable structure, simple and obvious actionable elements with motion design that is here to enhance the experience, not simply to make things shinier.

Diving in the nitty gritty

As inspirational as they may be, these principles won't make your app by themselves and when you start to look into the details of the guideline, you can find a ton of technical elements that form the backbone of a Material design app:

An 8dp based layout, 24x24dp icons, borderless buttons, touch feedback and specific motion curves are part of a very thorough set of principles that you can apply if you so choose.

By applying these technical recommendations, you can start laying things down and the skeleton of your app starts to appear. Picking these technical rules was an important step for Chrome to be consistent with the Google app ecosystem.

Because our UI is so simple, the branding and consistency would live in the little details.

Side note. I used "if you so choose" very intentionally. There is only so much a guideline can do and as everything else, including your design, it is a living and evolving thing, not something set in stone. You as a designer are the one making the best choices for your app.

A guideline is a first step, a kickstart, not a finality.

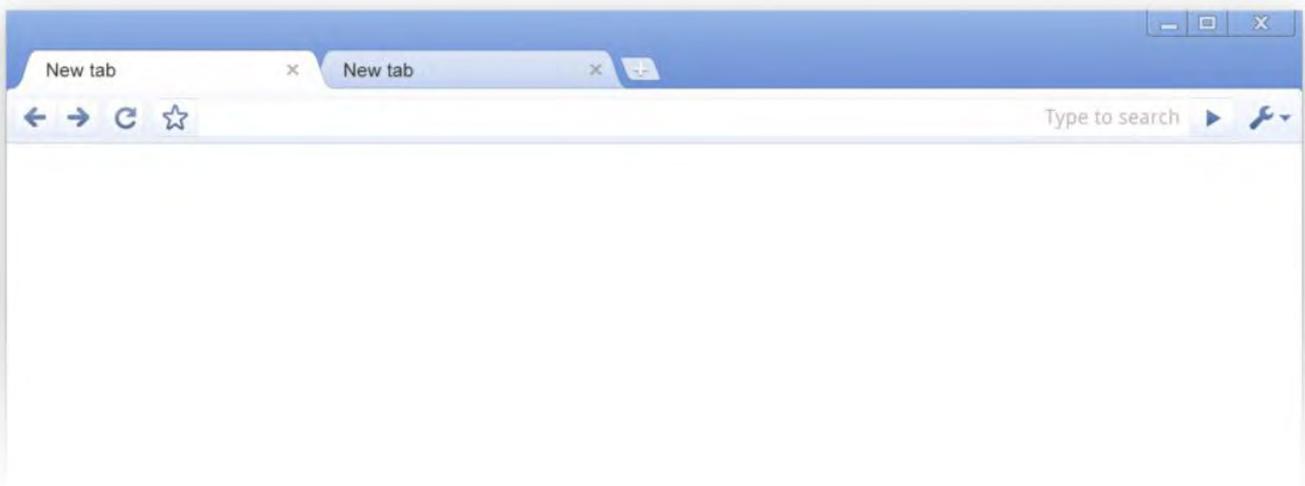
. . .

The evolution of the core style

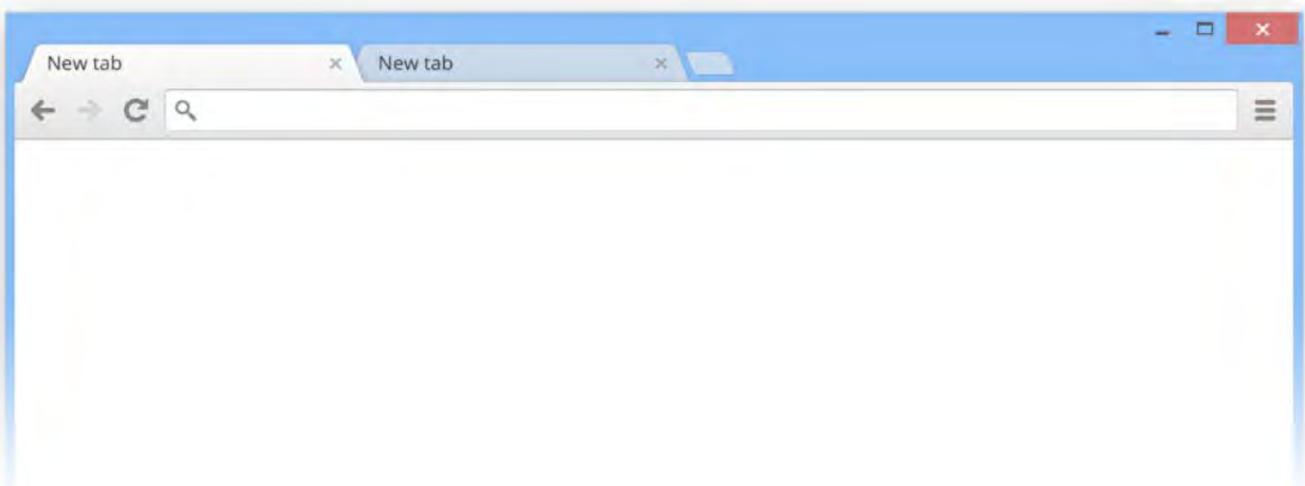
Chrome evolves carefully when it comes to its core UI due to our constant will to make the chrome disappear in favor of the content.

Over the years Chrome changed slightly and sometimes un-noticeably at all for most of its users. The Core UI evolves approximately every two years. This version would be the third big one.

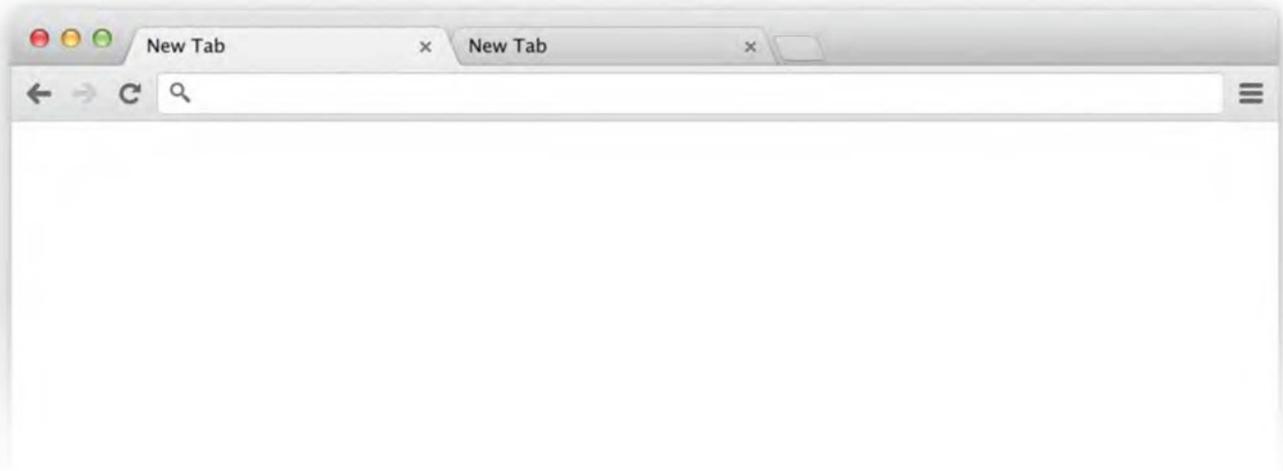
As a reminder, here's the transition from the first core UI to the second, on desktop.



First version of Chrome desktop UI (modified for hi-res preview)



Current version of Chrome desktop (Windows)



Current version of Chrome Mac, Mavericks.

Usually users do not see the transition between our UI states. May it be a big overall like the old UI vs. new Windows UI in the first two screens or very subtle changes, Chrome UI feels so neutral that very few people notice it. Which is good.

In fact, if users do not notice the changes and tweaks but are still enjoying the overall experience, it means we did a good job. Both from a visual and UX standpoint.

In term of visual style, Chrome is following a rather linear and predictable evolution. Platform consistency tweaks aside, shapes and color scheme remains consistent throughout and we can define areas of evolutions:

- Tab are getting sharper
- Color scheme is getting lighter
- Icons are getting less “etched” in the toolbar
- Highlights shadows and gradients are being toned down

Of course Chrome evolution is also bound to our industry’s visual style evolution and each platform own style and guidelines.

. . .

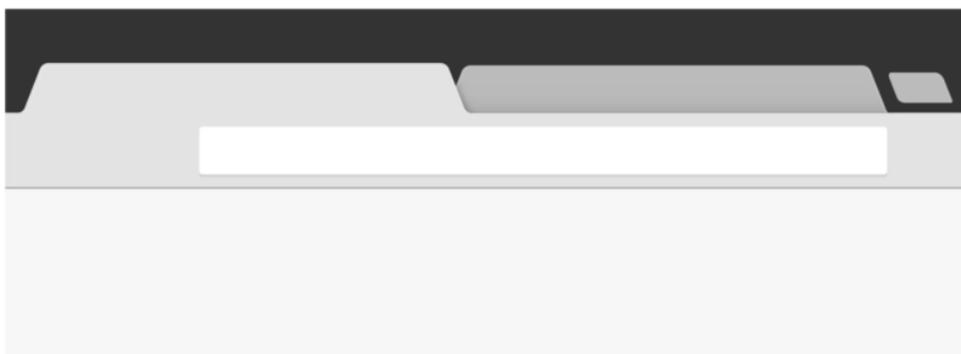
Giving a fresh coat of paint to Core UI is taking all platform in consideration at once and find the harmonious set of shapes and the right balance of elements that will fit each platform. We try to reduce the differences to a minimum due to maintenance reasons as well as consistency reasons.

I could come as astonishing but when designing Chrome for Android, we designed it with iOS in mind, and vice versa.

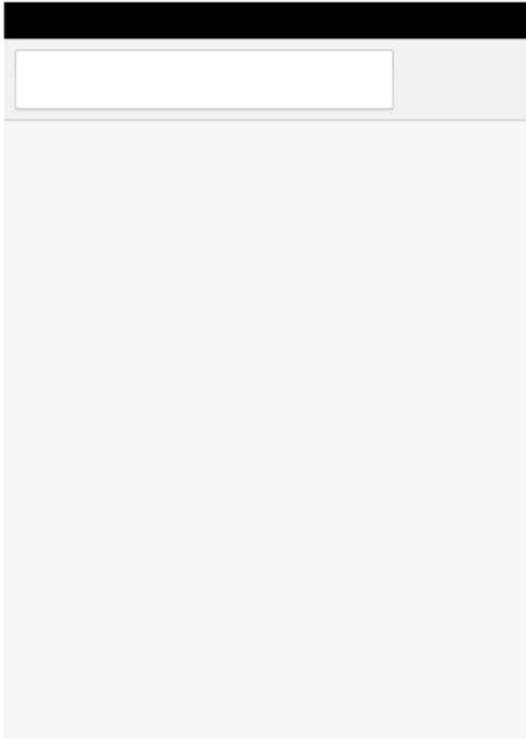
For the first time in this third iteration, the redesign would be conceived and implemented on mobile first. This shift in the way we conceived Chrome shifted a lot of pre-conceptions and impacted our approach on the design. This below, is the final “shapes only” version of Chrome tablet and phone along with their previous version.



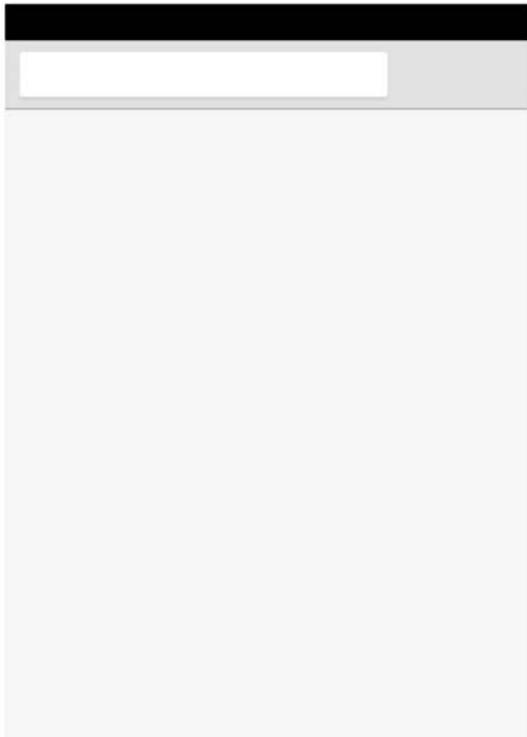
New tablet layout (Nexus 7 screen ratio)



Old tablet layout



New Phone layout (toolbar and card-stack/switcher)



Old Phone layout (toolbar and card-stack/switcher)

As aforementioned, Chrome is sharpening and getting more precise while getting lighter. In this third iteration, we got rid of the strong shadowing and tighten the rounded corners on the tabs a bit more.

We also let the UI breath a bit more by increasing the size of the toolbar, tabs and cards headers. We also got rid of the “dog ear” on them, which makes the UI both more readable and the animations better.

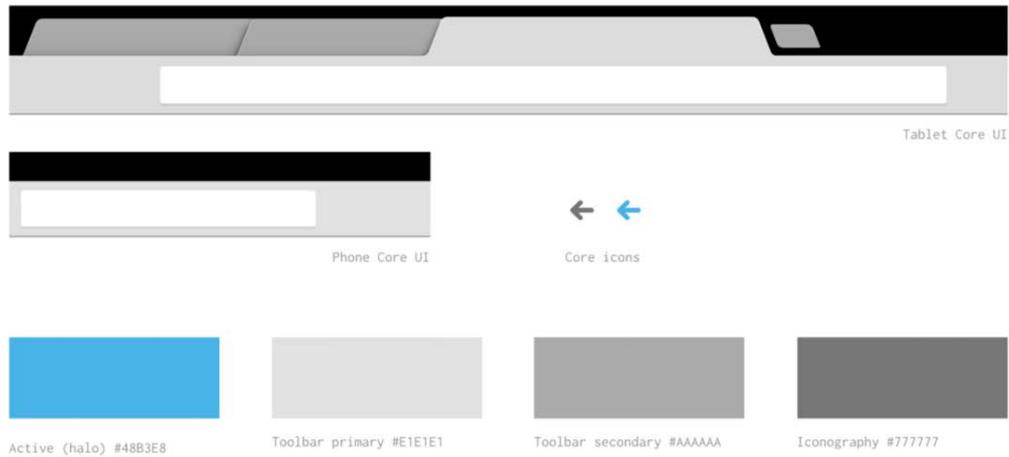
Regarding the omnibox, we also worked on the shadowing to give it more detail. It’s not longer a straight drop shadow but a combination of a close shadow and a more blurred, diffused one.

Again, the difference is not striking, we prefer iteration over redesign.

The color scheme

The process was a bit rough at the beginning. We needed to flush out ideas and move things around and play with various things at the same time but a something that we got relatively easy was the color scheme. After all it would just be a matter of finding a shade of grey and an accent color.

The first thing that was sure is that we needed to lighten the UI. The first iteration of Chrome mobile was darker and stronger. We needed something higher in the grey spectrum but not quite white so we would be able to achieve contrast. This is especially important for the tablet mode where there is depth to this UI

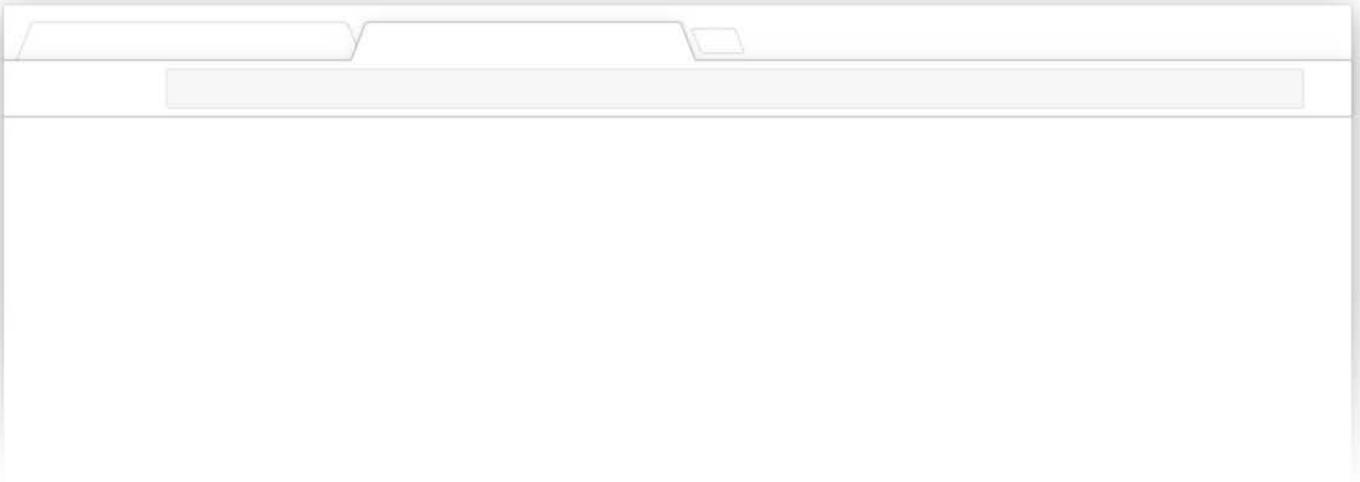


Sample of the previous Chrome core UI

When we think of Chrome color, we try not to think of it from a single platform perspective, consistency is a constant consideration and we try as much as possible to get the same Chrome “feel” everywhere, in as much detail as possible

The Phone toolbar color should be as close as possible to the tablet toolbar color, itself even closer or similar to the desktop one.

With that in mind the first exploration we did was to go all the way in the white by trying and see what a full white Chrome would look like, relying on strokes and shadows to separate the elements. Chrome would be entirely made of the “Paper material”.



Trying one extreme, a pure #FFFFFF Chrome on a desktop UI.

The result wasn't satisfying as we had to bump up the strokes and shadows to get a good contrast between the elements. It resulted in an inelegant Core UI that wasn't going to fit well on Android not on iOS.

. . .

The final result is the very restricted and simple color scheme you see below, a compromise between a bold all white version and the old grey with less dependence on the shadowing.

Default toolbar theming



Toolbar primary
#F2F2F2



Toolbar secondary
#DADADA



Content background
#FAFAFA

Incognito toolbar theming



Incognito toolbar primary
#505050

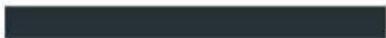


Incognito toolbar secondary
#3C3C3C



Chrome background
#14181C

Settings/system UI



Settings toolbar
#263238



Settings status bar
#161E21

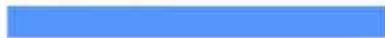


Secondary dark blue
#37474F

Interactive elements



Primary active color (icons, sections)
#4285F4



Content link (URLs in dialogs, etc.)
#5595fe



Snackbar link color
#14181C

Typography



Icon color
#5A5A5A



Primary text
#333333



Secondary text
#646464



Green text
#0B8043



Red text
#C53929

Iconography



Chrome Green
#1AC222



Chrome red
#DB4437



Chrome Yellow
#FFB000

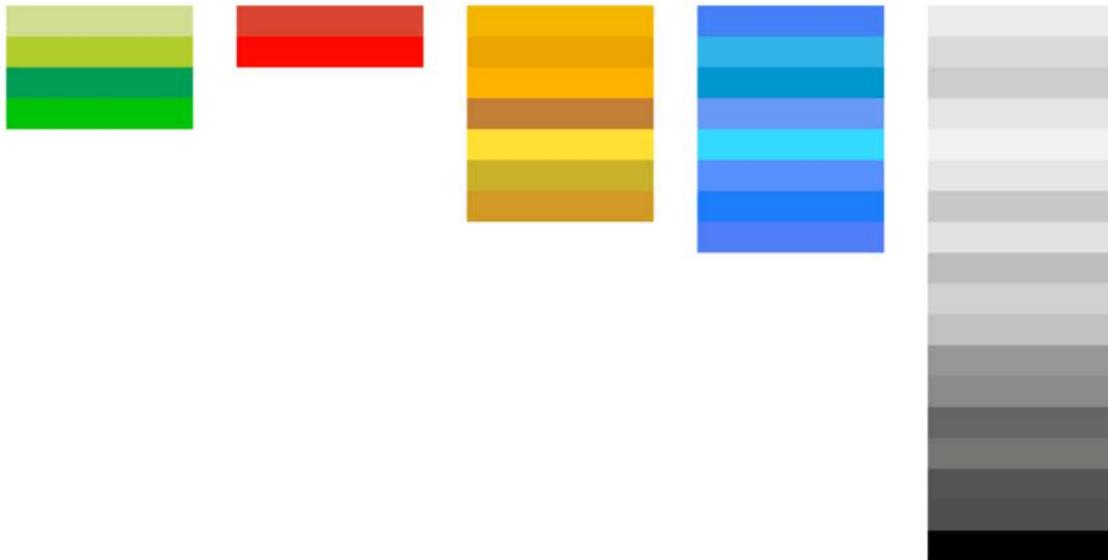


Toolbar icon color
#5A5A5A



Incognito and themed icon color
#FFFFFF

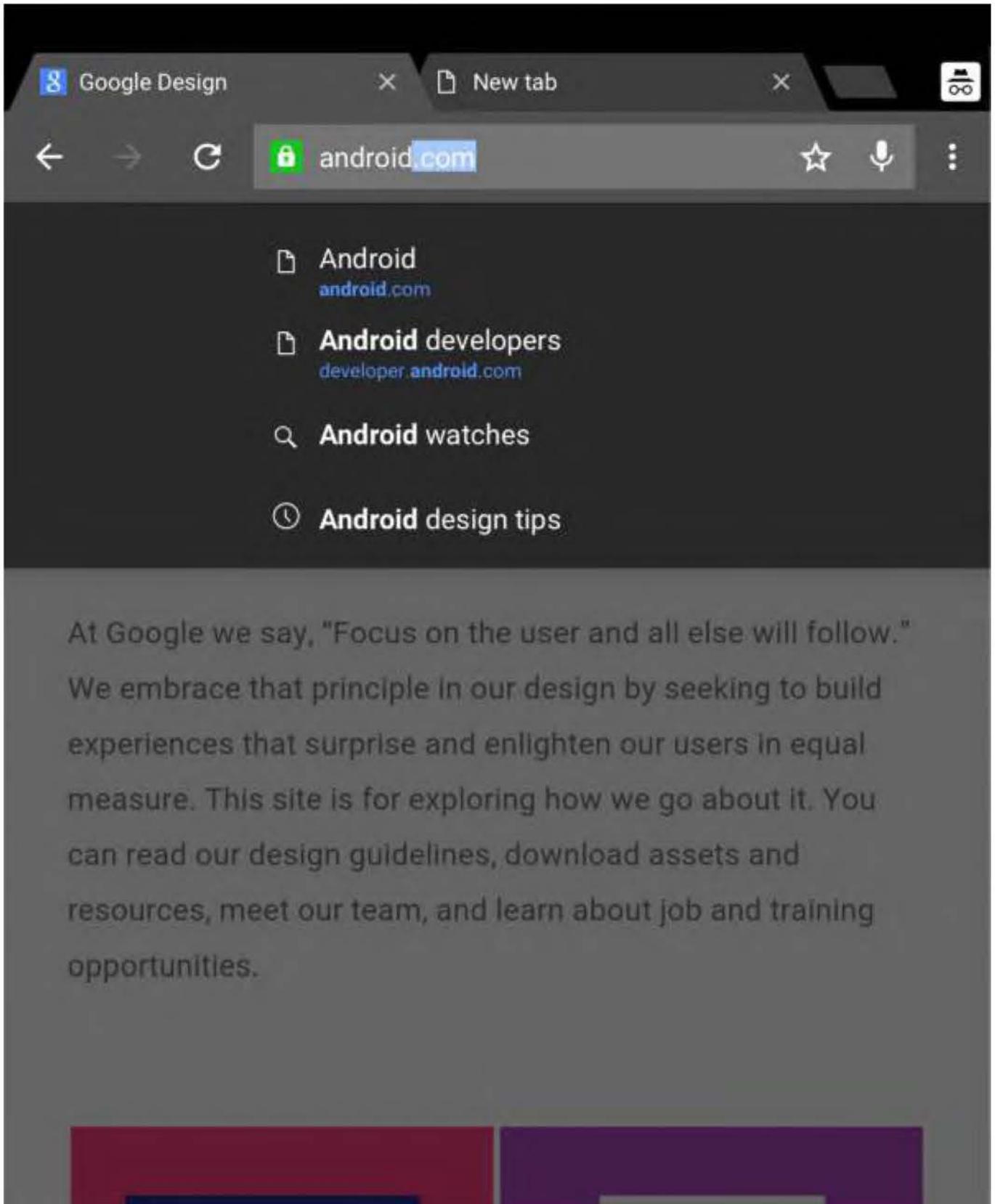
We now enforce this color scheme throughout the entire app to avoid the previous situation of too many different shades due to fast iteration. Remember when I was mentioning fifty shades of grey earlier? This is what the real color scheming looked liked before the revamp, deriving from the Core “Holo” color scheme:

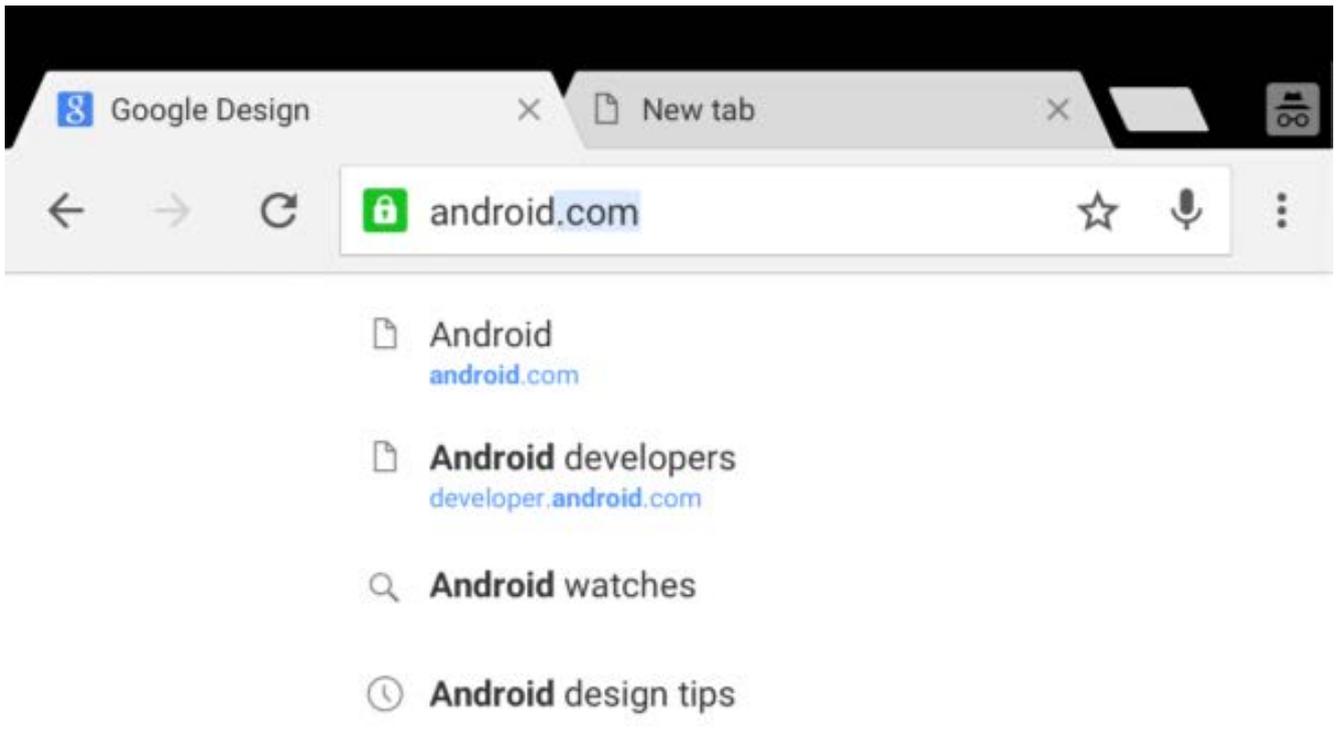


This is a situation you do not want your app to end up in, unless it’s intentional. We successfully reduced the spectrum of color we used thanks to the new color scheme in the revamp, even if there is still some rough edges here and there, they’ll be corrected over time.

. . .

You might have noticed a line call “toolbar incognito theming”. One of the very striking changes in Chrome visual aspect with this update is the total re-skinning of the incognito mode. Besides the new icon, coloring is where the change resides.





At Google we say, "Focus on the user and all else will follow." We embrace that principle in our design by seeking to build experiences that surprise and enlighten our users in equal measure. This site is for exploring how we go about it. You can read our design guidelines, download assets and resources, meet our team, and learn about job and training opportunities.



Chrome incognito and chrome normal using the new color scheme.

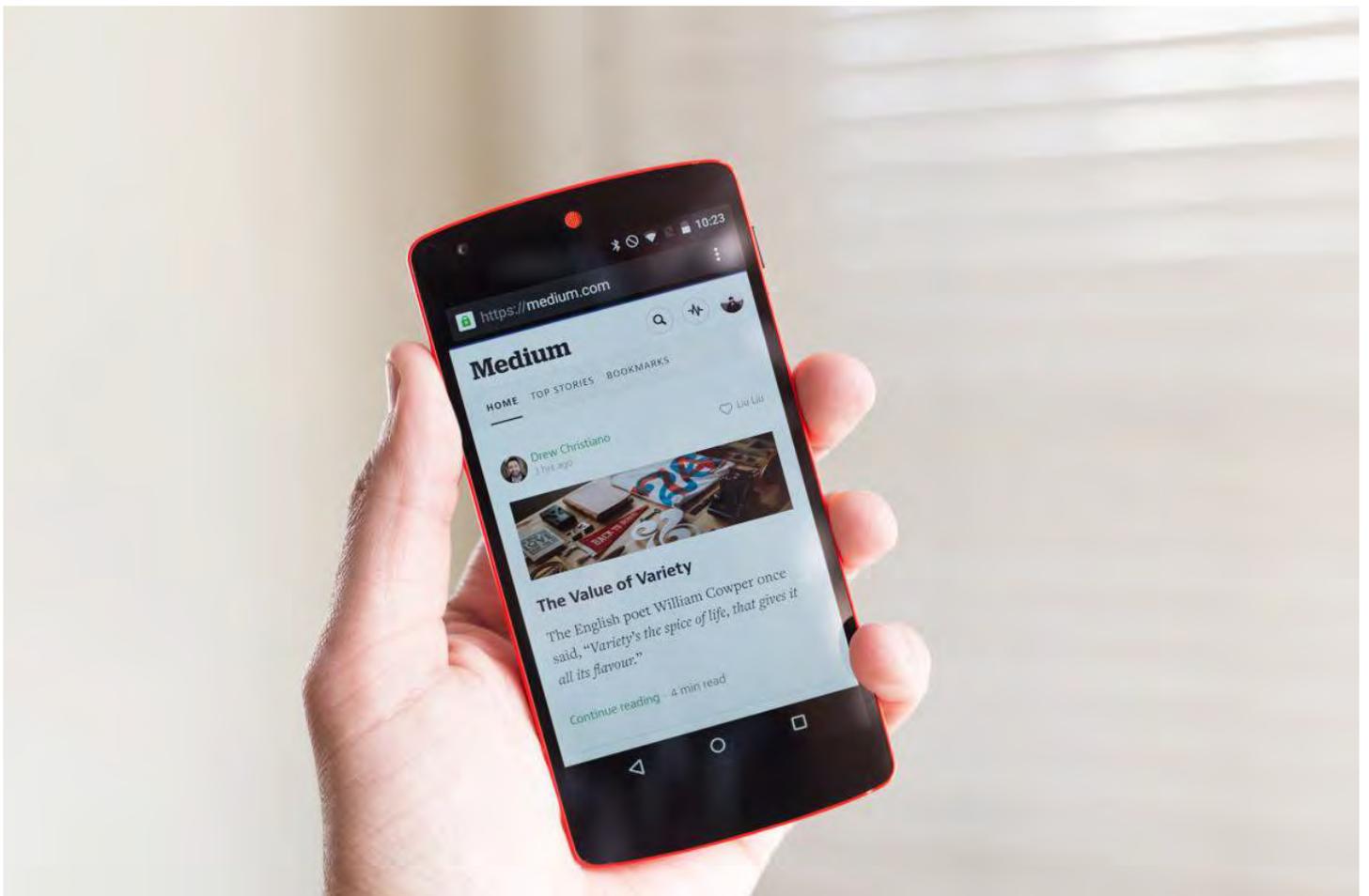
Incognito introduces the concept of “theming” to mobile. While theming is something that our desktop users have been used to for quite a while, we took a slightly different approach to the concept for our Phone version.

Developer controlled coloring

What better way to blend in with the content than to let content owner theme Chrome the way they see fit. Another step toward making our Chrome invisible.

By specifying a color in the meta tag, a site can customize the Chrome shell. For example, if Medium did it using the meta tag:

```
<meta name="theme-color" content="#000000">
```



Site theming is carried onto Chrome, itself switching to themed mode, and also on the Android switcher card header.

From a design perspective, we distinguished two modes: the **regular mode** and the **themed mode**.

By doing so, we're able to classify two set of assets. One that works on extremely light background, like our #F2F2f2 toolbar, and one that works on darker colors, like our #505050 toolbar.

We'll get to that later but this is important from both a technical and asset management perspective because now we have two version of the same app as well as two theming.

Note that the meta tag only works in the "Merged tabs and apps mode" version of Chrome, when tabs are merged with apps, all other version will use regular theming.

The way it was defined and conceptualized at first was as shown below in the initial spec created by Roma.



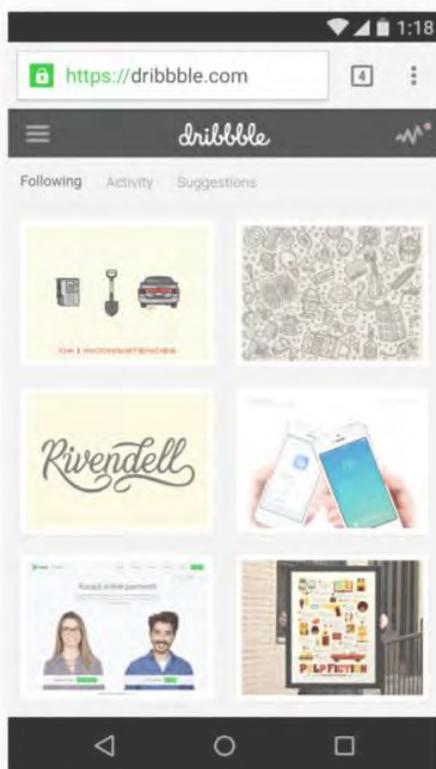
The values evolved a little bit from this with a few tweaks after trying it out on various sites but this is the basic principle.

Once we've determined if the site uses either a light theme or a dark theme, we color and change the assets accordingly. At first we had two separate set of assets for iconography but our engineering team made it so they could color the icon themselves, reducing the icon impact on the .apk size drastically.

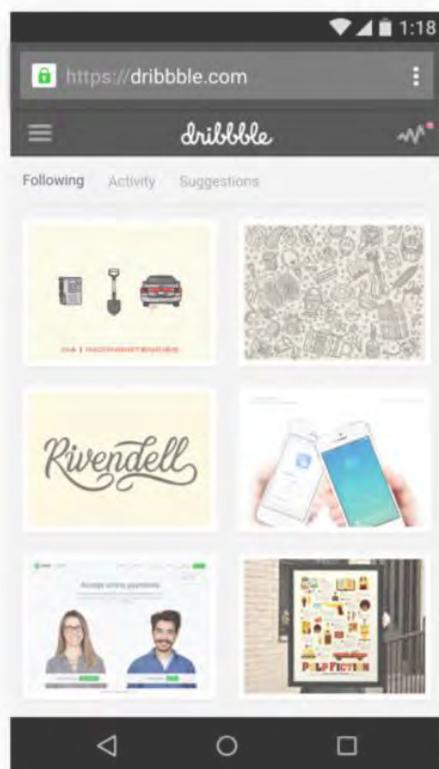
Besides the icon set getting white, we also changed the omnibox to be transparent so it blends it better with the theming, we changed the security icons to their inverted versions and change the URL color scheme as well.

Here's an example with the Dribbble site, which uses the meta tag along with a sample of icons.

Normal theming



Custom theming





Iconography

How to treat icons in the app was a bit more straight forward, although required its share of thinking. Over the years, Chrome iconography didn't change much in its Core UI and when it came to secondary UI (toolbar, dialogs, permissions, etc...) there wasn't any clear direction, creating a patchwork of style aggregated over time.

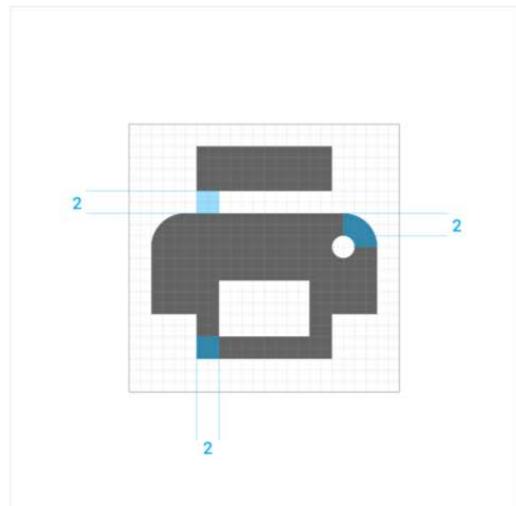
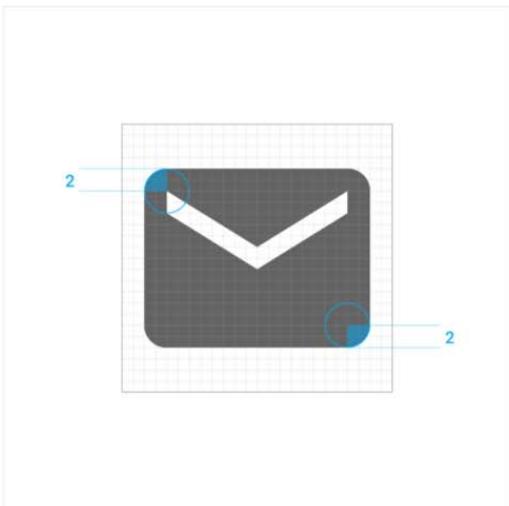
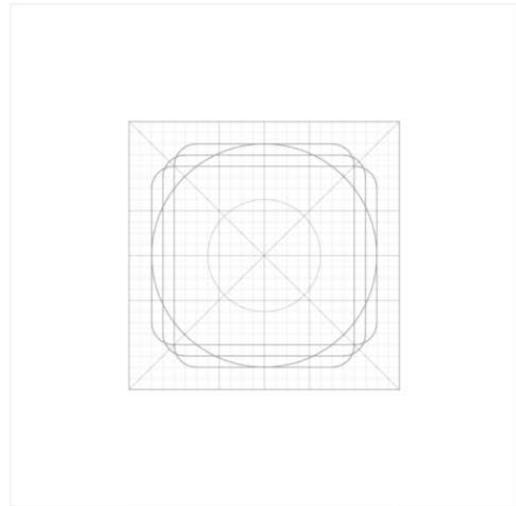
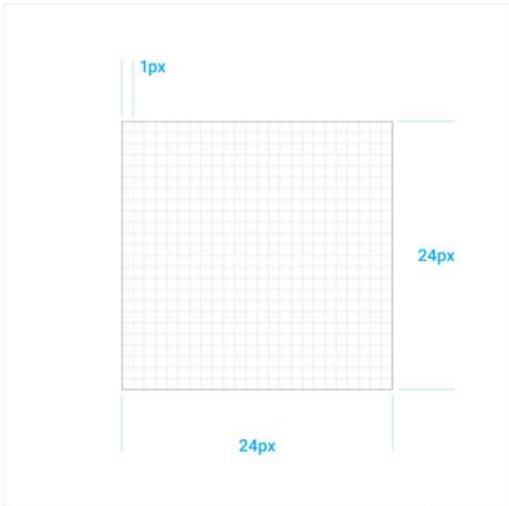
This redesign was an opportunity to recenter the Chrome iconography around a common language.

At the time, MD was still defining the final direction for the system icons which became this big set of consistent and polished icons available for anybody to use.

More than ever before, we faced the issue of consistency within our own brand, the Google brand and other OS's visual direction.

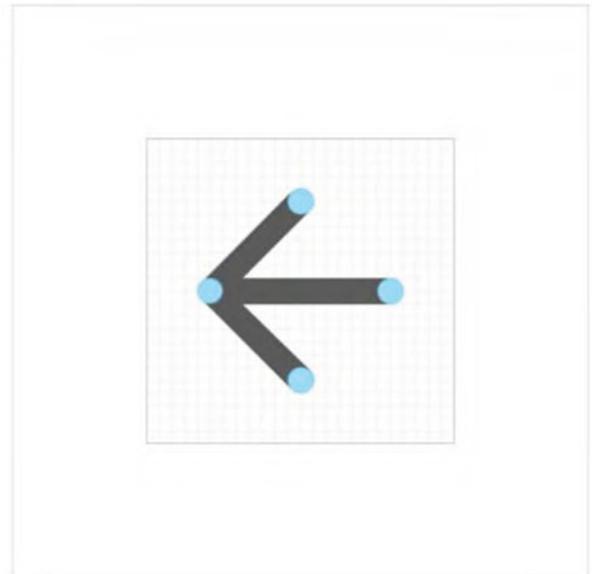
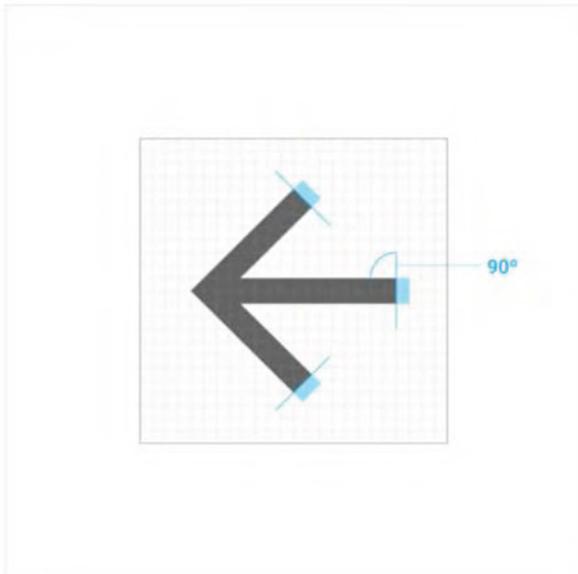
Thankfully, the new MD iconography is intended to fit everywhere and is pretty successful at that in my opinion.

The new chrome icons were created at the same time the final guidelines for MD system icons was being determined, thankfully we ended up doing the same thing and most importantly using the same weight for our icons.



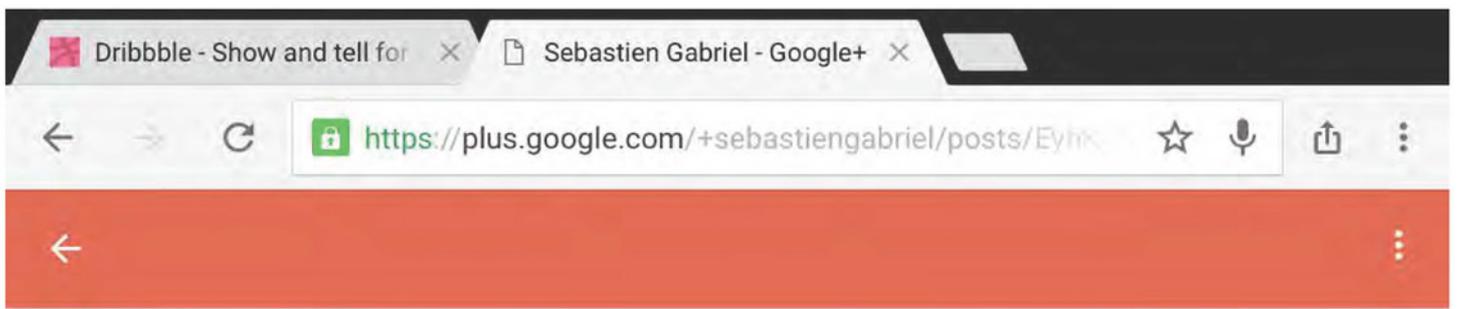
The MD system icons grid, corner and line weight rules.

You may notice a little difference when it comes to Chrome primary UI icons compared to MD's recommendations.



MD back arrow recommendation on the left, Chrome icon on the right.

We went for rounded corners instead of rectangular. This is due to the time at which we created the icons as well as Chrome pure visual directions as we historically had rounded corners. It is also an (admittedly) very subtle way to differentiate Chrome from the content like the following.



Chrome tablet displaying the Google+ top bar. As you can see we still went for the 3 dots menu.

. . .

Chrome iconography is split into sections and buckets that are shared throughout platforms, iOS and Android having a common bucket, OSX, Windows and Chrome OS having a different one.

Currently, only our mobile platforms follow Material design spec.

Our sections per bucket are defined as follow:

[Primary UI] – *Toolbar, tabs*

[Omnibox]– *Inside the omnibox*

[Infobar]– *Anything that is prompted to the user*

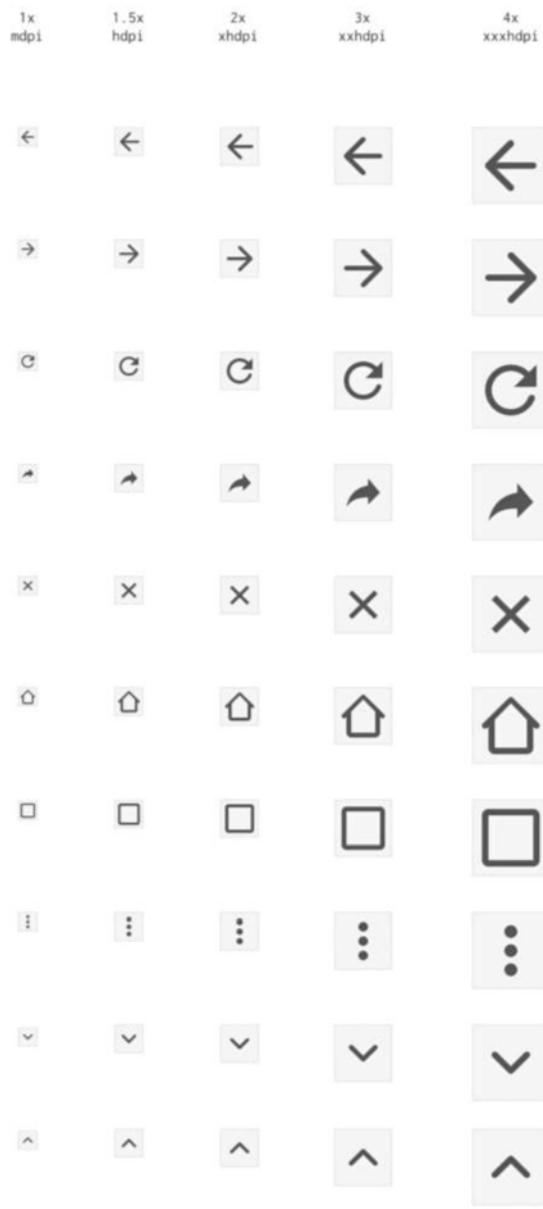
[Site settings]– *Permission icons and settings applied to content*

[Settings]– *Chrome settings icons*

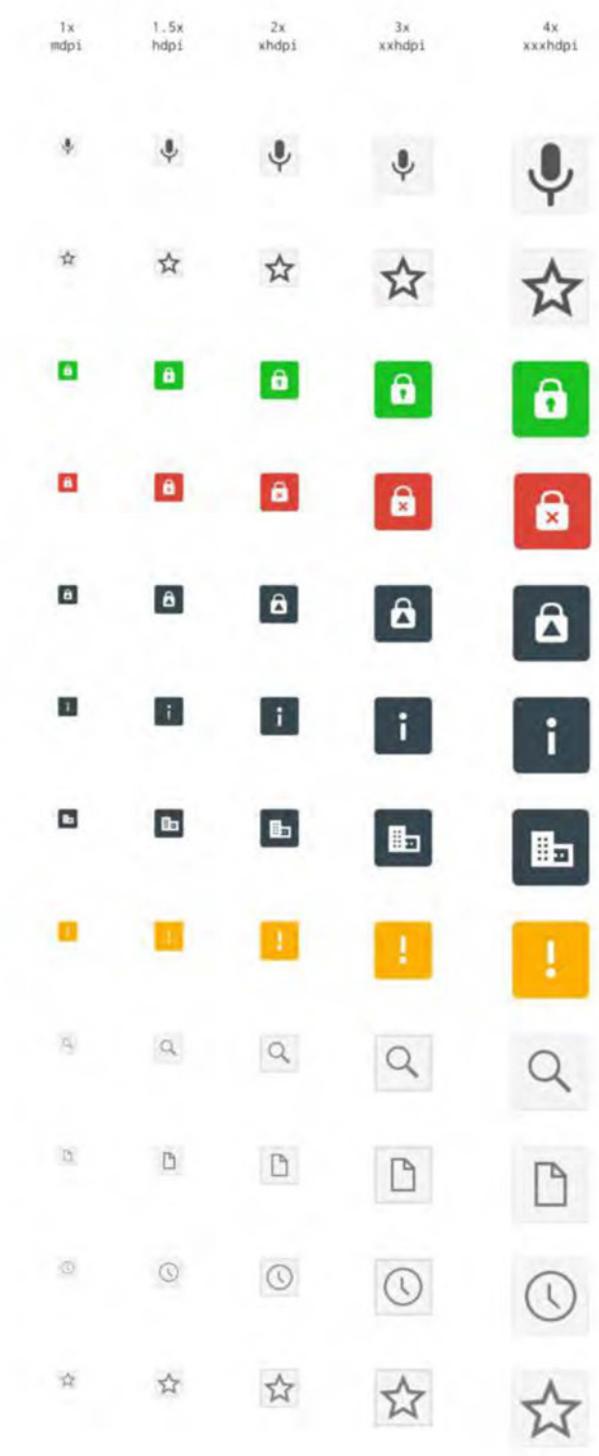
[Misc]– *Occasionally needed icons or feature icons*

Each icon are created and verified manually per DPI.

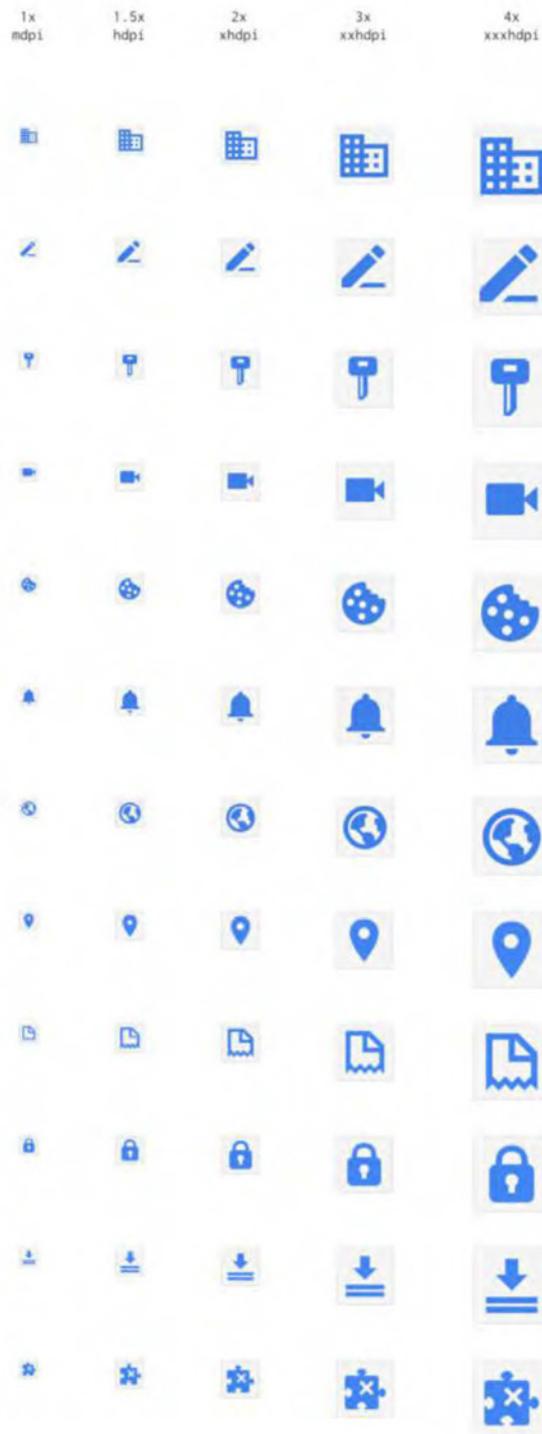
Here's some example extracted for the source files (.sketch) for Primary UI icons, Omnibox icons and Infobar.



Extract of the Primary UI icon source file



Extract of the Omnibox and Omnibox dropdown icons source file



Extract of the infobar icons source file

As you've seen before, there is quite a lot of color variation for each icon:

- Normal theming normal + active + inactive
- Themed normal + active + inactive for a total of 6 variant.

The first implementation of Chrome MD needed each colored icon as a separated assets, one per color, making the asset count reach beyond the thousand, all color and DPI included.

Now that we are coloring the .pngs in code instead of generating additional assets, we end up only having to generated icons per DPI which reduced drastically the assets impact on the final .apk as well as the number of asset in our design sources (6 times less).

[To be continued...]

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This concludes the first part of this article. In the next one, I'll talk a bit more about layout and grid, motion design as well as specing and pure technical details regarding software used and asset generation.

[You can read the second part here](#).

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If you want to connect, feel free to follow me on twitter [@kounterb](#).

If you want to connect with Chrome team members involved in our mobile effort:

[@alanbettes](#), [@codysielawa](#), [@peteschaffner](#), [@alexainslie](#), [@gmurphy](#),
[@mano1creative](#), [@cleerview](#), [@romafied](#).

If you missed Google I/O 2015, head to the [official site](#) to catch up on all the interesting presentations. Also, the new [google.com/design](#) site is up with the updated MD guidelines.





Stephanie Engle
12 min read



Intro To Product Design

What is it? Why is it important? How do you do it?

NOTE: This post is based on a talk I gave for [HackDuke](#). You can find the original presentation [here](#). Please feel free to adapt any of this material for your own teaching setting (and [let me know](#) if you do!). All visuals credit Google Images, Facebook, and Airbnb. None of this work represents any individual or company's view but my own.

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Introduction

Anyone can become a product designer

Hi, my name is Stephanie Engle.

I'm a Public Policy major who can't draw and is generally afraid of Adobe software products. This past summer, Facebook trusted me to help redesign your Profiles.

I'm telling you this is because there's a common misconception that designers must fit a specific mold or have a specific set of skills to do what they do, and I'd like to debunk that. But the truth is, you don't need to be a font savant, or be a Creative Cloud wizard, or even have a degree in design in order to be a highly effective product designer.

You don't even need to be a designer in order to practice good design. In fact, if everyone—you, your parents, engineers, CEOs, your government—became slightly more intentional, and slightly more human-centric, the world would be a better place.

What is design?

Good design solves a problem

Design is fundamentally about problem solving. Unlike art, aesthetics (visual or otherwise) in design do not stand alone, but are a means to an end.

Product designers specifically are concerned with the experience of products (though the definition of “product” is itself extremely broad). Though visuals are the most visible facet of a product a designer is concerned with, their reach extends into any aspect of the product that directly affects its user.



At its core, the Tesla car is simply a design solution to manmade pollution.

Great design emphasizes Form & Function

None of this is to say designers are not artists, and that design cannot be artful. Truly good design—the kind that wins hearts, minds, and markets, combines and balances beauty and utility.

If it works, it works—what does beauty add to make functional design such a force? Beauty hints at the relationship between the designer and their audience. For designers, beautiful design is about passion and panache—sort of an ode to craft, or a wink to their audience and peers. For the people using this design, beauty is the first and strongest signal of respect (this butchered quote belongs to someone else—please tell me who it is!).



The Tesla Roadster was not the first product that addressed pollution, or even first electric car to market. What Tesla did that no other car manufacturer bothered to was pair artistry with utility and put them both to work for social good. Tesla stormed into the market and captured a very vocal, wealthy minority by packaging eco-consciousness as a luxury good.

In summary, functional design enables people. Beauty signals respect and worth. To give people beautiful and functional design is to empower them. The gift of empowering others makes you a force of nature.

The best design paints an inspiring future

Nothing explains the promise of design better than this post by [Julie Zhuo](#):

Design's North Star

Towards an inspiring future

medium.com

I'll leave you to read that. In summary, design allows you to demonstrate an ambitious vision (or several) for what the world could be. The better and more precise the design, the easier it is to rally people to create that future.



To say Tesla is a an electric car for the wealthy is to severely underestimate its design. The Tesla represents the first step in a vision that begins with popularizing eco-consciousness and ends with a healthier planet.



Along its journey, Tesla hints at the promise of another transformative design: autonomous electric vehicles. I won't go into detail here, but the possibilities for safety and productivity are endless. (NOTE: This is the Mercedes concept car. Strangely, Elon Musk wasn't ready to share a concept for a self driving Tesla with me.)

. . .

Why is design important?

Design is everywhere

Just as anyone can be a designer, design also touches everyone and anyone. Not only do we as humans have an inherently opinionated taste— a general intuition of good and bad design—but we're also subconsciously affected by design every time we use a product. Design can both support and impede our daily lives, from the most mundane events to the rarest and most exciting opportunities.



Handle means pull, dammit.

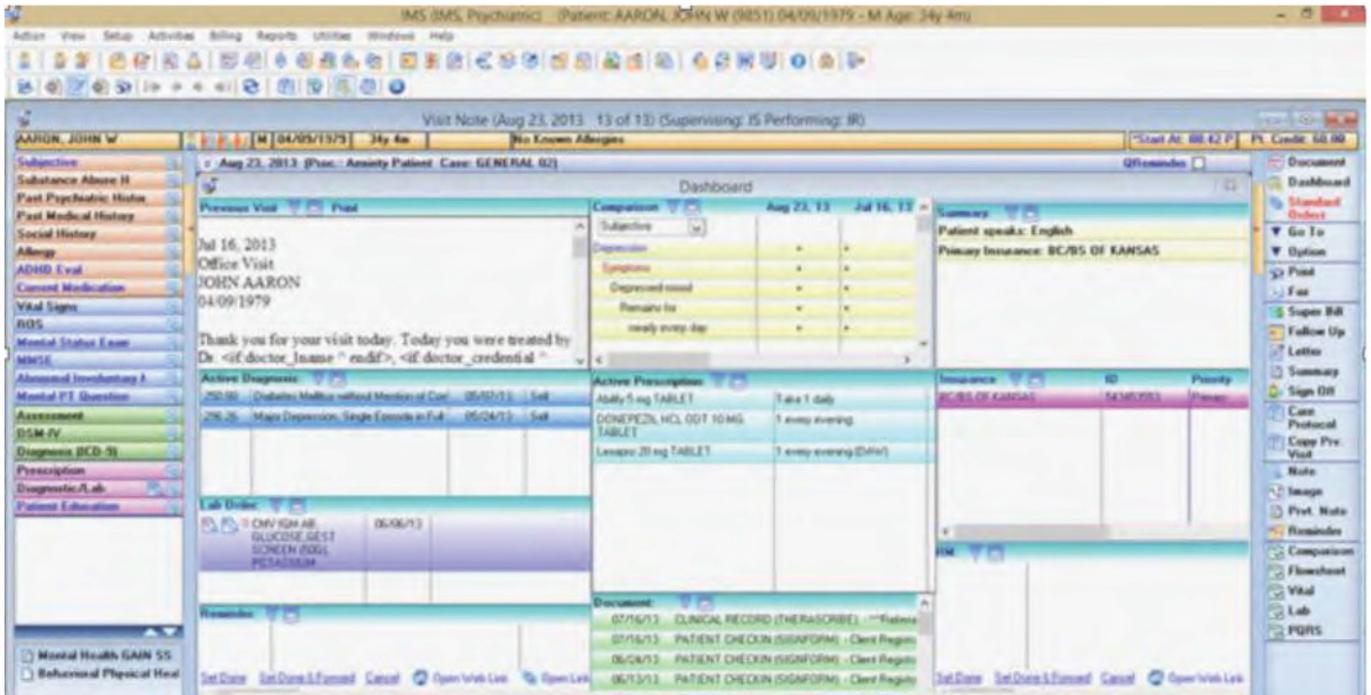
At its worst, design can kill

Poor design isn't just an inconvenience. A simple matter of visual hierarchy can actually be the difference between life or death, as Jonathan Shariat's article below shows. It's why designers are so badly needed in healthcare, public service, and other fields critical to our well being.

How Bad UX Killed Jenny

Or Why we need more UX designers in "untouched" fields

medium.com



“Jenny had died of toxicity and dehydration. All because her very seasoned nurses were preoccupied trying to figure out this interface.”—Jonathan Shariat, Tragic Design

At its best, design can positively change the world

Not only can design promise and inspire a better future—truly successful design delivers it. A popular example of this is the iPhone, which I need not explain because its world changing impact is so self-evident.



“Your life, in your pocket.” Steve Jobs on the iPhone 3G, WWDC 2007

. . .

How do you design a product?

CASE STUDY: How [Airbnb](#) designed trust into their products

NOTE ON PROCESS: *There is no one good way to do this, and these steps are only guidelines — you need not follow them to the letter (I don't). I encourage you to experiment to find what works best for you. For beginners, however, this should cover some of the important bases.*

NOTE ON AIRBNB: *I have no affiliation with this company other than being a happy customer and admirer of its product design. The following case is based on [this article](#) by Paul Graham and a bit of creative liberty for the sake of illustrating a point.*

Understand your role within the project scope

While “Design” itself maintains some rough meaning across various

forms, the role of “Designer” can mean very different things to different projects. Some designers work alone; others prefer collaboration. Some designers code; others don’t touch it at all. These are but a few distinctions.

The key takeaway is that to design well, you need to understand expectations—from your client, your team, and yourself— and be self-aware of your abilities and when you may need assistance. To this effect, communication is especially critical to executing on a design. If you’re on a team, it’s up to you to ensure that everyone you’re working with can comprehend and buy into your ideas from conception to finish.

Define the problem (or opportunity)

Once you understand where you reside within your team, you need to dig into the problem you’re working to solve.

This is easier said than done. Humans are fairly irrational creatures:

Heuristic

A heuristic technique (; Ancient Greek: εὕρισκω, "find" or "discover"), often called simply a heuristic, is any...

en.wikipedia.org

We tend not to think beyond our own experiences, believing we can extend what we know to the rest of the world. This makes us very (*very*) prone to solving problems that apply only to ourselves. When you design only for yourself, it’s not design; it’s indulging your vanity. Which is completely fine, but not what you’re here to learn.

Below is a set of questions based on a framework that Jon Lax, a Design Director at Facebook, instilled among designers while I was working under his org. They’re a great starting point for focusing your design and ensuring that you’re solving the right (real!) problems:

- What are you trying to solve?

- How do you know it's a *real* problem? What data, anecdotes, etc. lead you to believe this?
- Why solve this problem over others? You have limited resources and time—why apply them to this problem above all else?

Here's an example I've invented based on Airbnb that attempts to address these criteria:

Travelers are not booking rooms on Airbnb because they do not trust the listings. We assume this because surveys show people are most concerned about whether or not the listings match their photos above all else. This problem is critical to solve because the trust between travelers and hosts is the foundation of a successful Airbnb experience.



Come up with a hypothesis

Great, you've masterfully outlined your problem. Now, you need to articulate your solution, which is essentially the hypothesis that drives what you end up designing. This should directly address the problem and not assume the conclusion is foregone (that is, be skeptical of your assumptions!).

*We *think* travelers will trust listings more if we improve the visual experience for listings and better equip hosts to showcase their homes.*

Define success & roadblocks

Again, make sure your success definition is rooted in the actual problem as well as the priorities and feelings of *all* stakeholders involved. I tend to seek both quantitative and qualitative metrics, but you should define success the way you believe is best for the problem you're working on. Here's a good reference for getting started:

Picking the Right Metrics, Part 1: WTF is a Metric?

My lofty attempt to define a commonly-used business concept.

medium.com

Once you have chosen metrics, be critical of the success you have just defined. Who or what might stop you from getting there? Consider your resources, time, values, and audience.

We will be successful if we can encourage more travelers to book rooms, and for them to feel more comfortable doing so without compromising the host experience. We are limited by the fact that our hosts are not expert curators (most don't even have professional photos of their homes), so we're probably going to need to hire photographers for them at least.



A little lighting and angle work make a lot of difference.

Make your hypothesis testable

Ideas are impossible to prove or disprove unless they're made tangible. Part of a designer's role is to make explicit the conditions that prove (or disprove) their hypotheses, (and to make sure that the entire team aligns on these conditions).

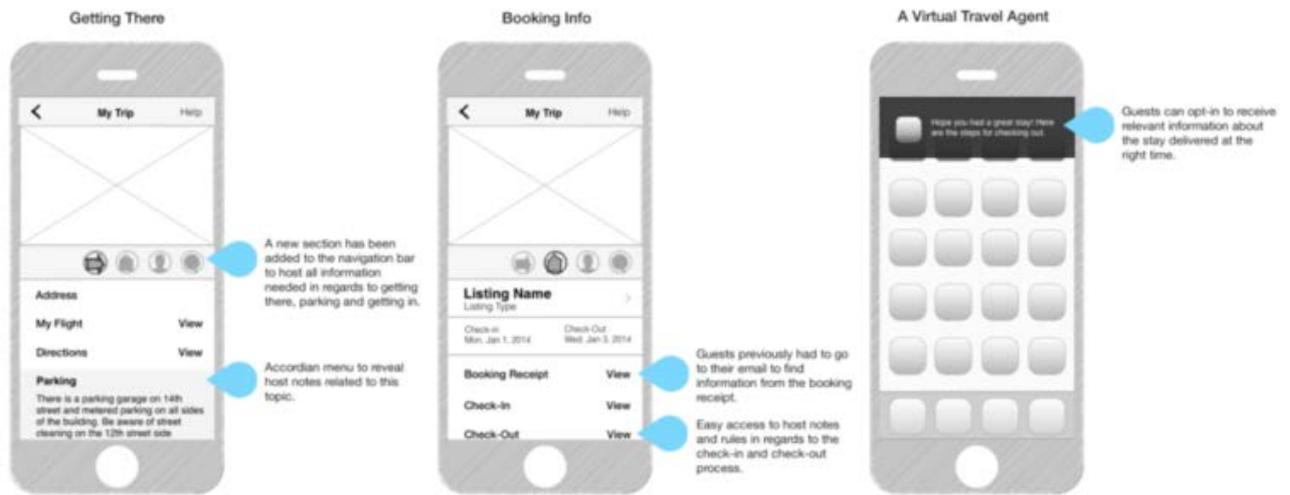
This is the step where you actually perform the duties people think of when they hear "designer": doodling, using graphics and motion software, etc. You can think of these activities as solidifying ideas for the purpose of cheap experimentation.

There are many methods and tools for going about this, but this is not a review of them. You should choose the one that suits the needs and skills of you and anyone else you're working with. Here are a few methods popular among software designers, along with tools and what sorts of questions these applications can answer:

Drawing/Wireframing

Pen+paper, Balsamiq, etc.

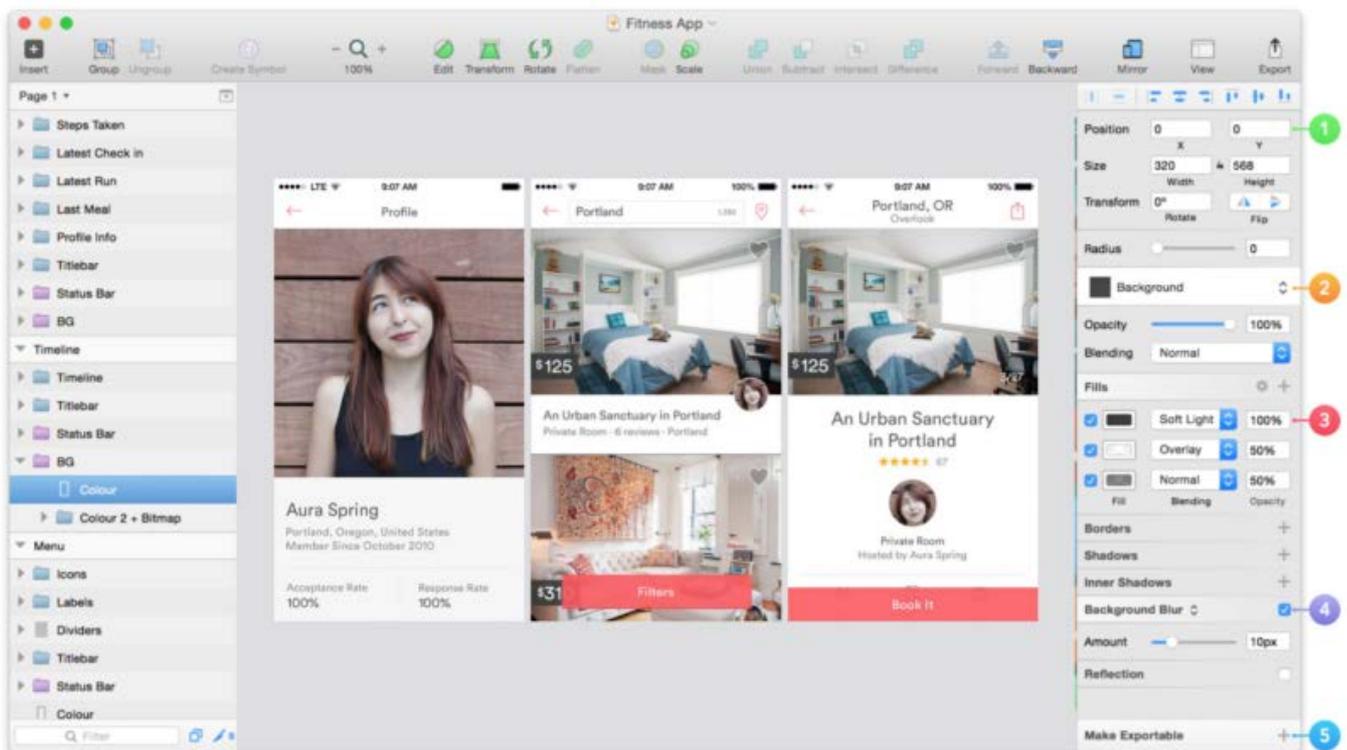
Is your solution as simple as it could be? What are possible paths toward achieving similar functions, and what are the tradeoffs?



High-fidelity Visuals

Photoshop, Sketch by Bohemian Coding (pictured), Illustrator, MS Paint, Maya, etc.

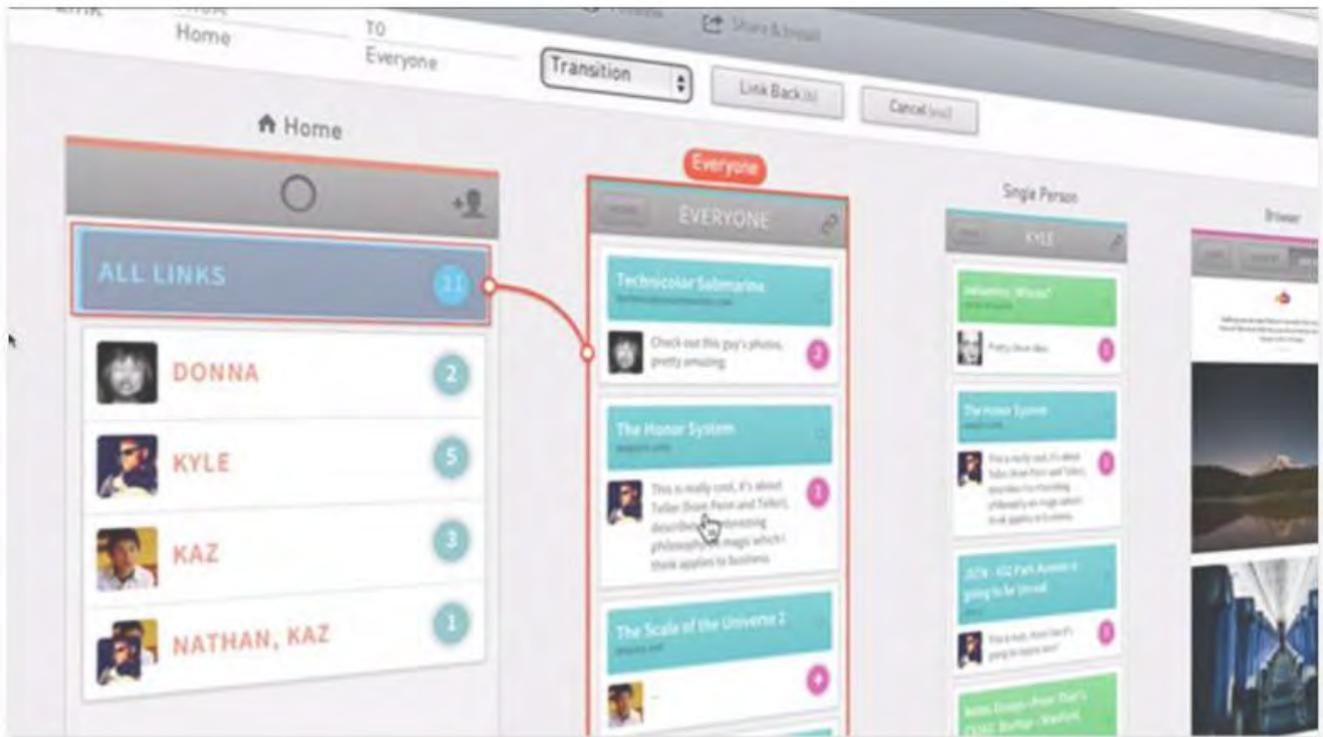
How does your solution fit in with existing systems and patterns? What signals are you sending to your audience?



Prototyping

Code, Origami by Facebook, Framer.js, Flinto, Pixate, Keynote, etc.

How does your solution move and flow? When people interact with it, does it do what they believe it should?



Designers tend to become heavily invested in this step, but you should be careful to consider your timeline and invest the right amount of time into this portion—you needn't create every interface or part of your design right now. However, you should allot time to consider what happens when your design “breaks”, so to speak. This consideration is arguably far more important than getting color schemes perfect. Vince Speelman does a great job detailing common cases when your design might need a plan B:

The Nine States of Design

A Lifecycle for Components that stray from the happy path

medium.com

Test your hypothesis, observe behavior, record observations
Fairly self-explanatory: put your designs in the real world, and see if your

assumptions ring true by inviting people to engage with your designs. You may not be a researcher, but you can still attempt to ask questions and let your audience show you what it's thinking. This article by an AirBnB researcher provides some helpful tips and considerations about how to conduct research carefully.

Embracing Uncertainty in UX Research

UX researchers have a nasty habit.

medium.com

I'd like to emphasize that these tests need not be elaborate (we prototype pretty frequently with only paper cutouts and drawings). If you can, you should try to mirror reality as much as possible—of your audience, your context, etc. Facebook Design has created some great tools for quite literally placing your designs into diverse hands.

Diverse Device Hands

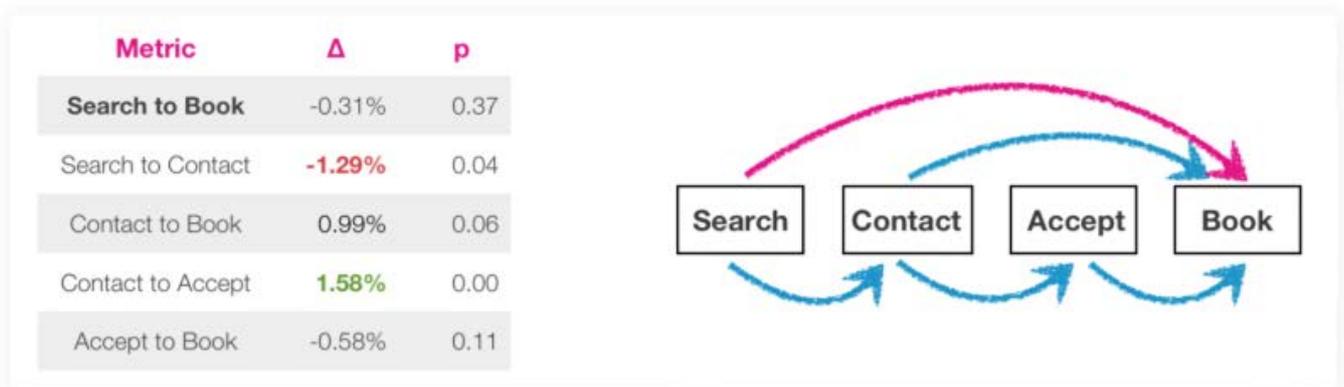
Photos of hands holding various phones, to be used in any presentation of your designs.

facebook.github.io



That'll do the trick.

Likewise, record anything and everything you find. Try to be systematic and consistent. Focus on what your audience shows, not tells you.

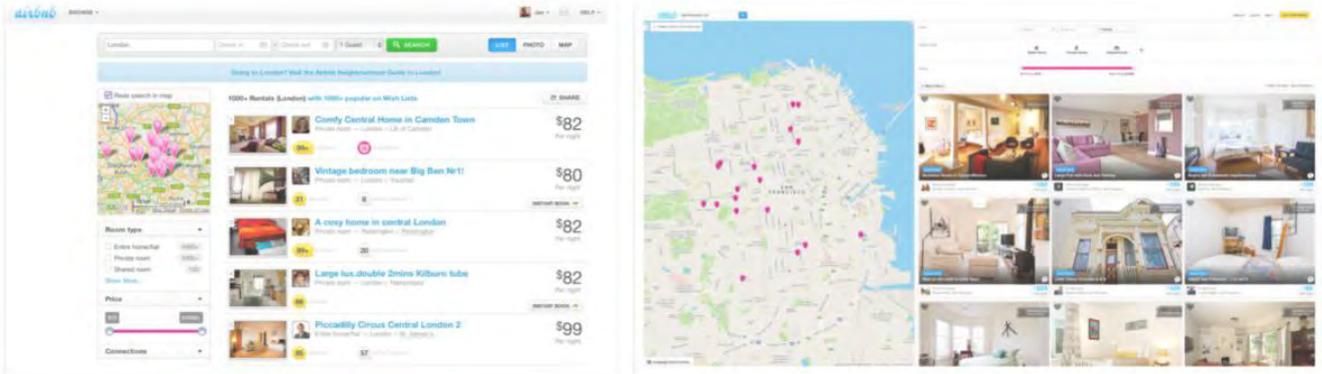


Airbnb's systematic approach to the booking flow—what changed? Where is the drop off happening?

Refine your design

In short, take what you learned and readjust your design based on new information. In Airbnb's case, this led to making photos dramatically larger while demphasizing price and other signals that inform the intent to book.

If you haven't done this already, this is also a great time to check in with your team about the technical feasibility and interest in your ideas, and to start implementing them.



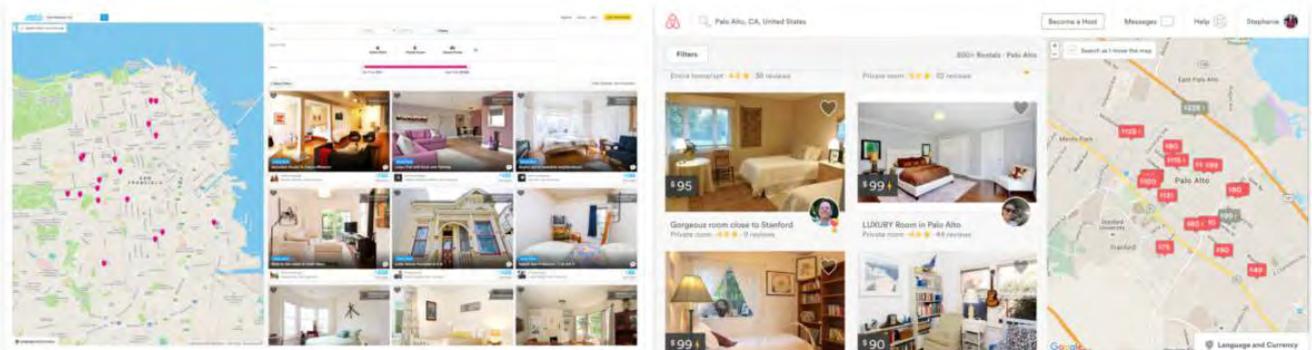
AirBnB before and after a visual redesign. Such pictures, so trust, much design

Rinse & Repeat

Note how the success metrics we defined earlier are not absolute—they concentrate on “more” and “better” rather than some magic number. This is because design work is never “done”—something can always be iterated and improved upon. This makes designers simultaneously some of the most optimistic and perpetually unsatisfied people around

∩_(.)_∩

More importantly, it means that you should always be thinking about how your designs can be improved. Define, identify, execute, measure, repeat.



Airbnb circa 2013 (leftmost) to 2015 (rightmost)

On finishing well

Having said that, you should “finish” early and finish often. Keep in mind that you aren’t designing in a vacuum, and focusing too much on one facet of the product at the expense of everything else plays into a game of diminishing returns. You should try to break up your changes into chunks, and push actionable tasks to the rest of your team frequently, especially if you’re in a fluid environment where constraints and goals can change quickly and unexpectedly—it’s ok to launch incrementally!

In any case, you should always try to end well. To finish well is to leave things better off than when you began, and ideally to ensure the next person who takes on this problem is better equipped than you were to continue solving it. This could mean anything from documenting your designs and visual assets well, to writing an article (hey!).



Airbnb’s journey is <1% finished.

Closing thoughts

In the actual presentation, I ended with a design exercise for the group to perform. Once again, you can find that here and modify it for your own use. On this medium (ha!), however, I’d like to leave you on a different note:

Congrats . You now know something about design and have (hopefully) gained some sort of new appreciation for it. You also learned a bit of how to approach design, and how human-centric impact can be made with changes as small as taking better photos and arranging them differently.

All that I ask is you pay this knowledge forward, whether it be in practicing more thoughtful design yourself or imparting some of what you've learned onto others. The world is better off with more smart people like you actively trying to solve its problems and iterate on those solutions.

. . .

Thanks for reading! Feel free to say hi or check out some of my old work .

Special thanks to HH Design and Chen Ye for edits and thoughtful additions.

. . .

HH Design is a community for students interested in the intersection between design and technology.

contribute

Thanks to Chen Ye.



Steven Fabre

4 min read

Invisible animation

There's no doubt that animating user interfaces is a rising trend. Risen enough that the emphasis is often put on the animation itself, rather than on improving the user experience through *subtle and functional* animation. Pasquale D'Silva gave some good advice in [his talk at Web Direction South](#) in 2013, including:

Good animation is invisible.

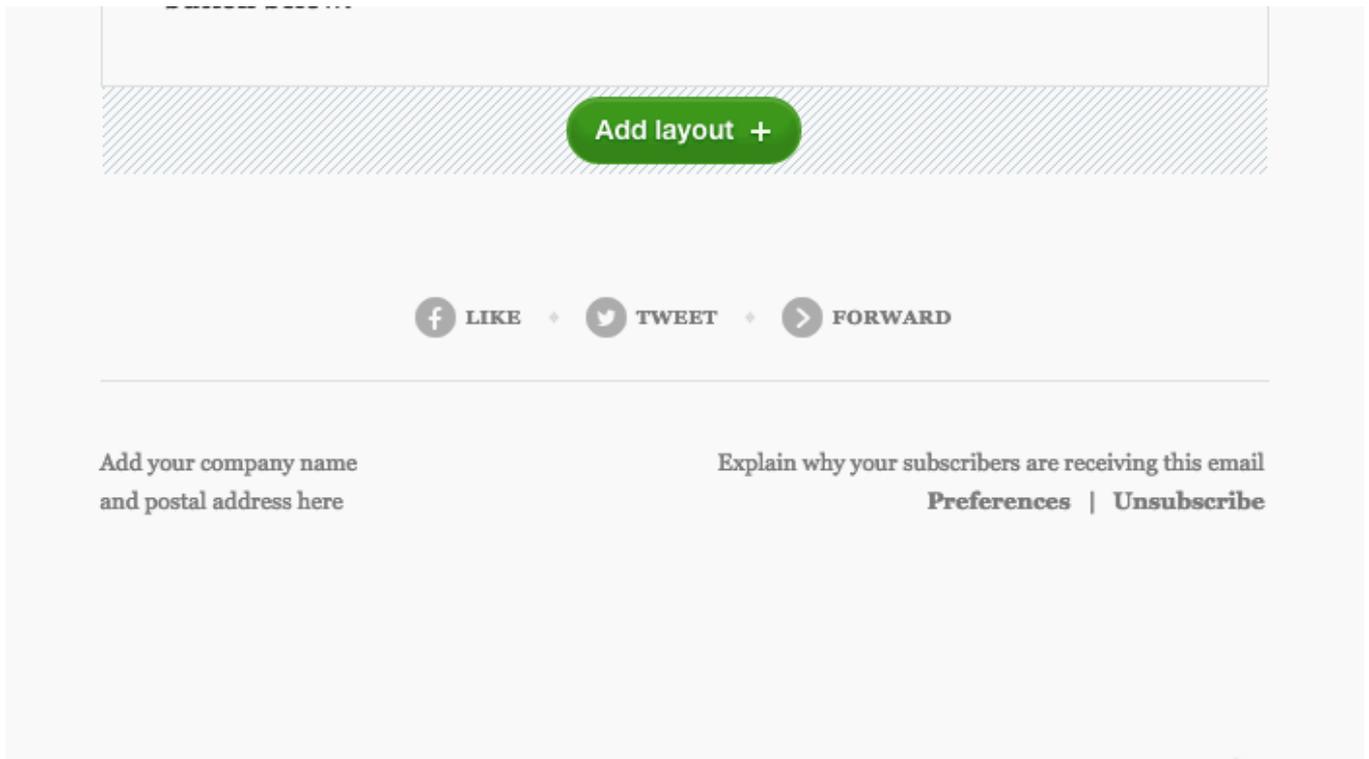
You shouldn't notice that you're looking at animation.

It's great advice that we—the team behind [Campaign Monitor's email builder](#)—have been trying to apply with a few principles in mind: animation must improve the usability, feel natural and subtle, and give feedback to the user.

Having spent the last year working on the email builder, I've learned that animation on the web—as opposed to native apps—comes with many challenges that go beyond finding the right *timing, spacing, poses or easing*. Animations just don't render the same on all devices and browsers, and that rendering inconsistency has led us to compromise things to create a good user experience. In fact, some beautiful and useful interactions on our powerful 27" iMacs didn't make it to the final product, because they felt jerky and slow on a device some of our users were more likely to use.

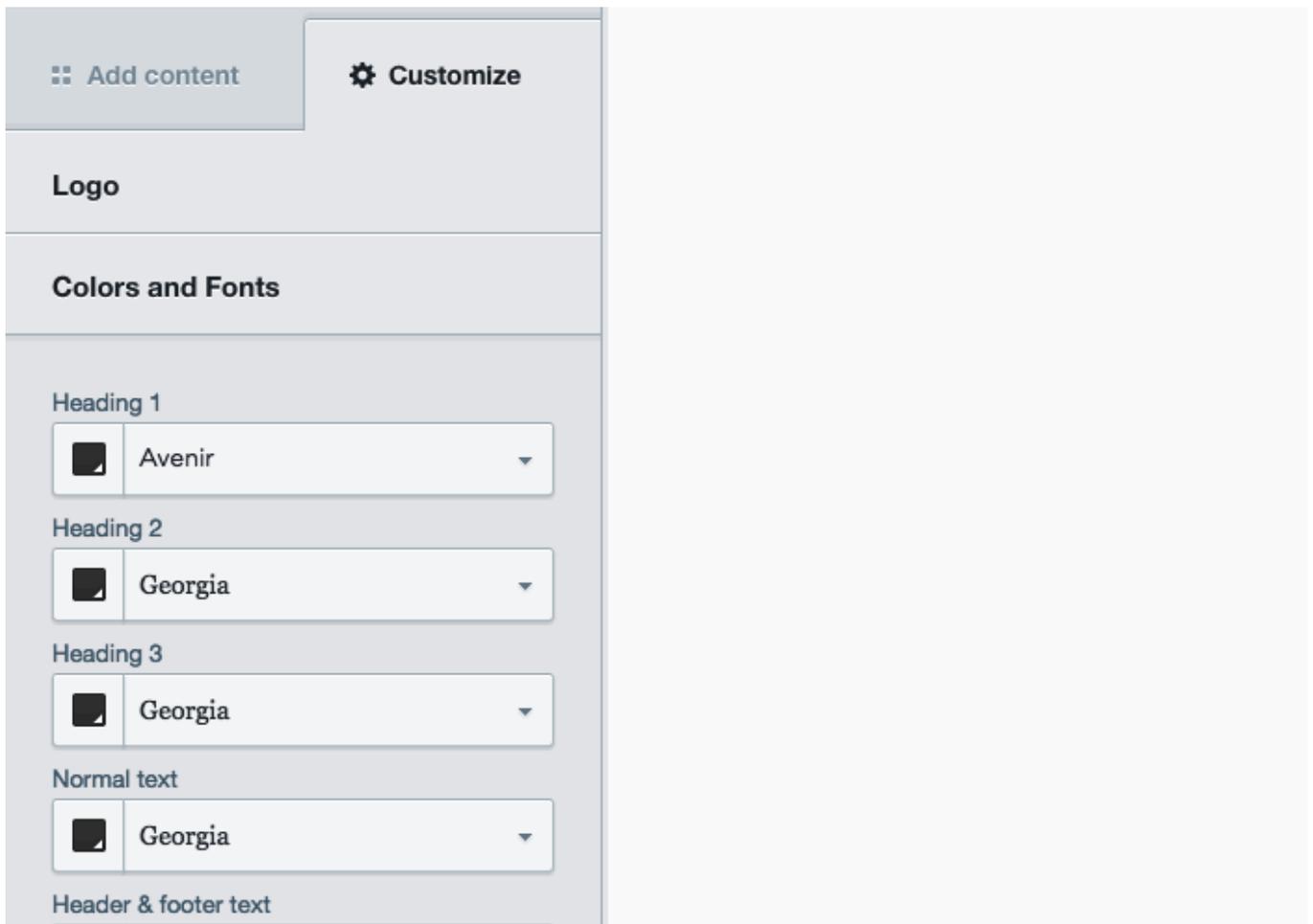
Of all the animation and interactive prototypes we put together in the concept and design stages, only the most useful and performant made it into the final product. For us, it was about hand-picking the most useful animations, and spending the time to get it *just* right—all in the interest of improving the user experience. Here are a selection of animations that made the cut:

Add layout drop-down



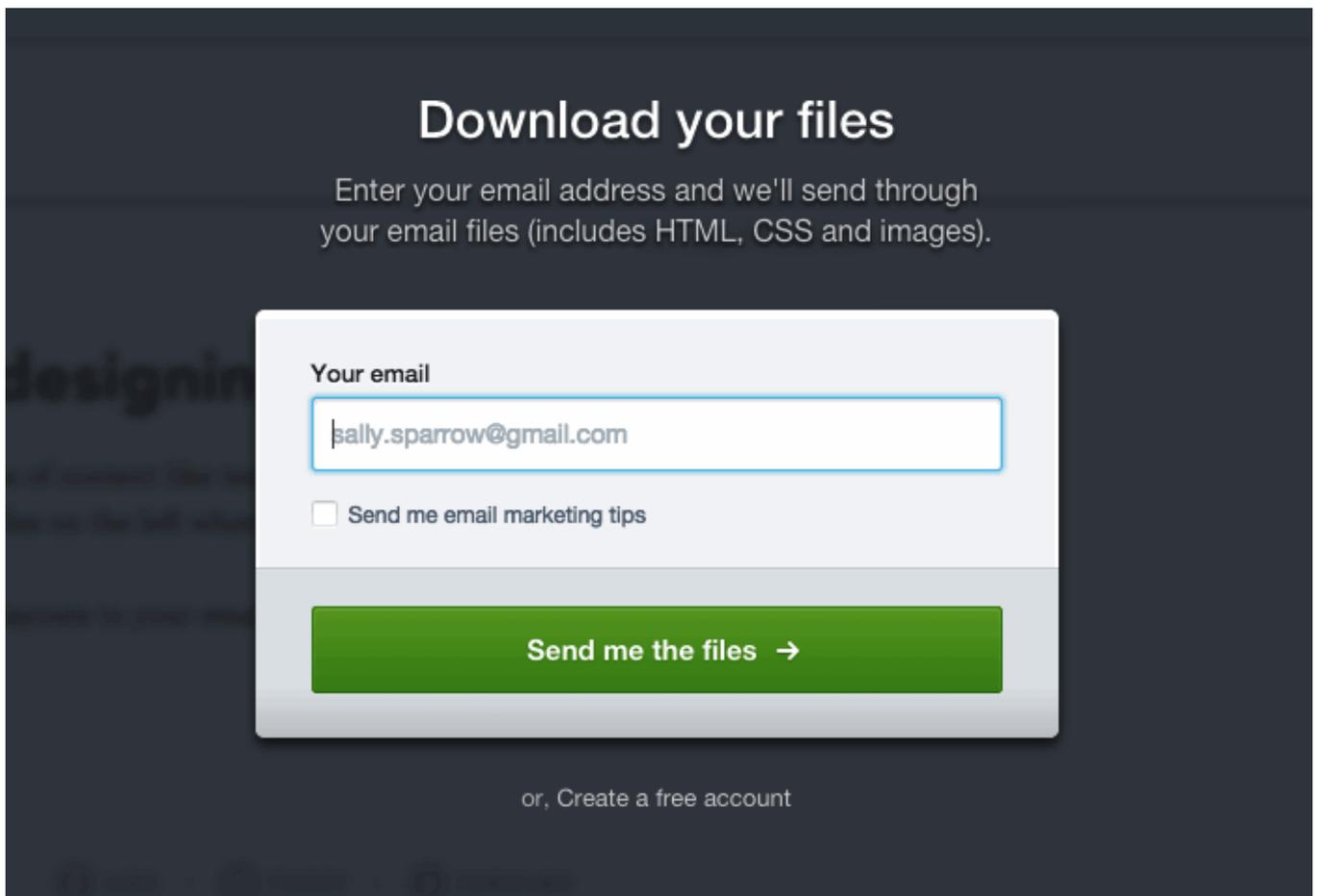
When users press the “Add layout” button, the layout drop-down fades in and comes from the button itself. This highlights that what just appeared is linked to the button.

Sidebar accordion



By sliding the other headings down, it's easy to correlate the content and heading. Also, fading the types of logo from the content area after a little delay makes it more obvious that the user is in the "Image" type settings.

Button states



Download your files

Enter your email address and we'll send through your email files (includes HTML, CSS and images).

Your email

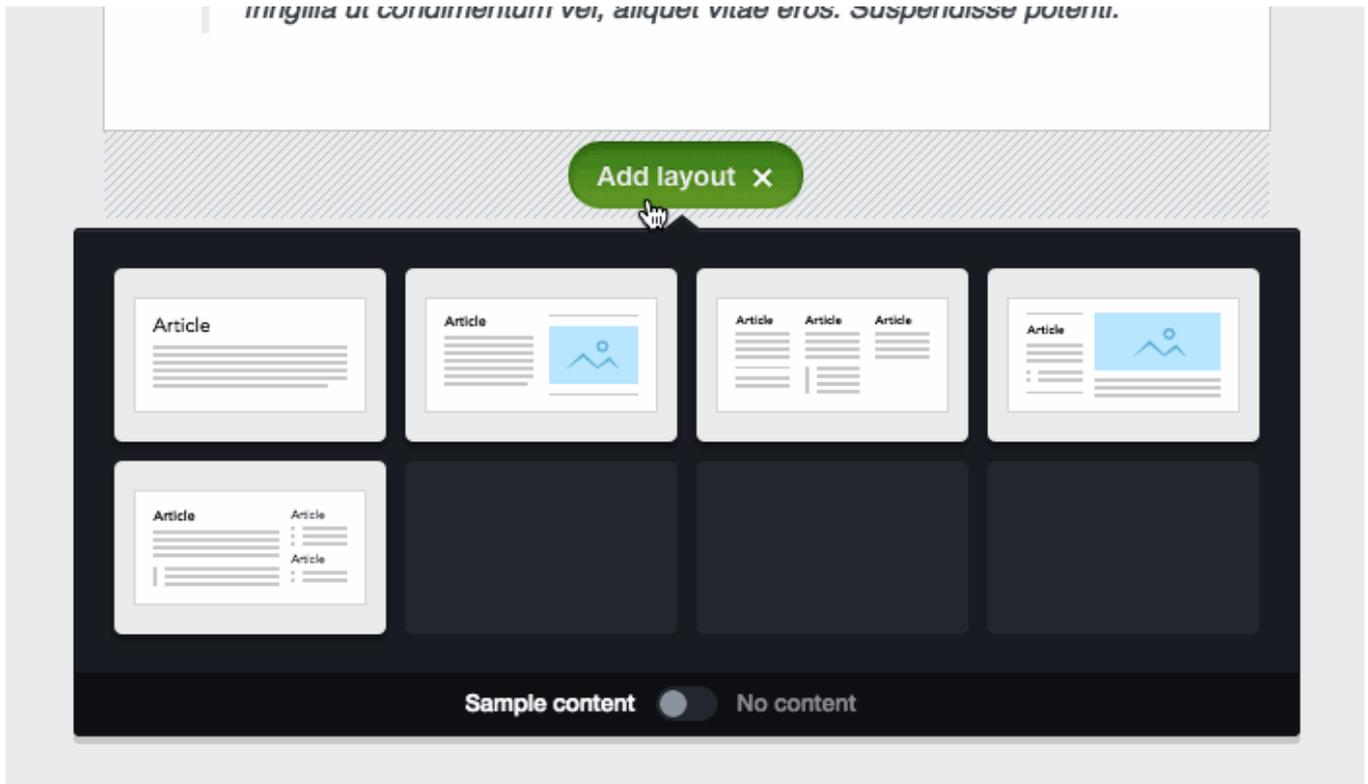
Send me email marketing tips

Send me the files →

or, [Create a free account](#)

When you're waiting for something, time tends to slow down. When users are waiting to receive their files by email, we're just showing them what's happening behind the scene. This animation makes the process feel much snappier, even though the actual time to receive the email stays the same.

Add or duplicate a layout



When users add or duplicate a layout, a space is created over a short period of time and the new layout fades in from the middle. It becomes clearer that something new has been added.

Delete a layout

Article

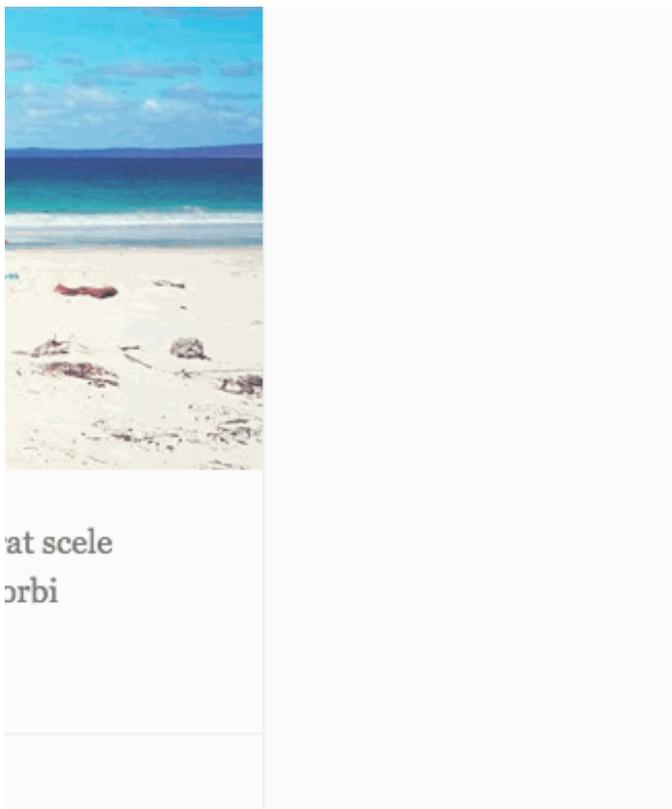
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Article

When your email contains a lot of similar or almost identical layouts, this animation becomes really useful. It shows what layout has been deleted by sliding up the content of the email.

Layout controllers



When users are hovering a layout, we show them some controllers. Those come from the layout they control, so it's clear that the action they are about to take will affect the layout they are hovering.

I'm sure the best motion designers out there would easily point out how those animations could be improved. It's sad to say that performance issues on certain devices forced us to cut off some of the highly polished details of an animation. But this is a

conscious decision we've made to provide the best user experience across devices.

Seeing more and more people talking, writing, designing interfaces with animation doesn't mean that you should animate everything. If we've done our job right, you shouldn't notice the animations shown previously while using the email builder.

Invisible, that's how animation should be.

. . .

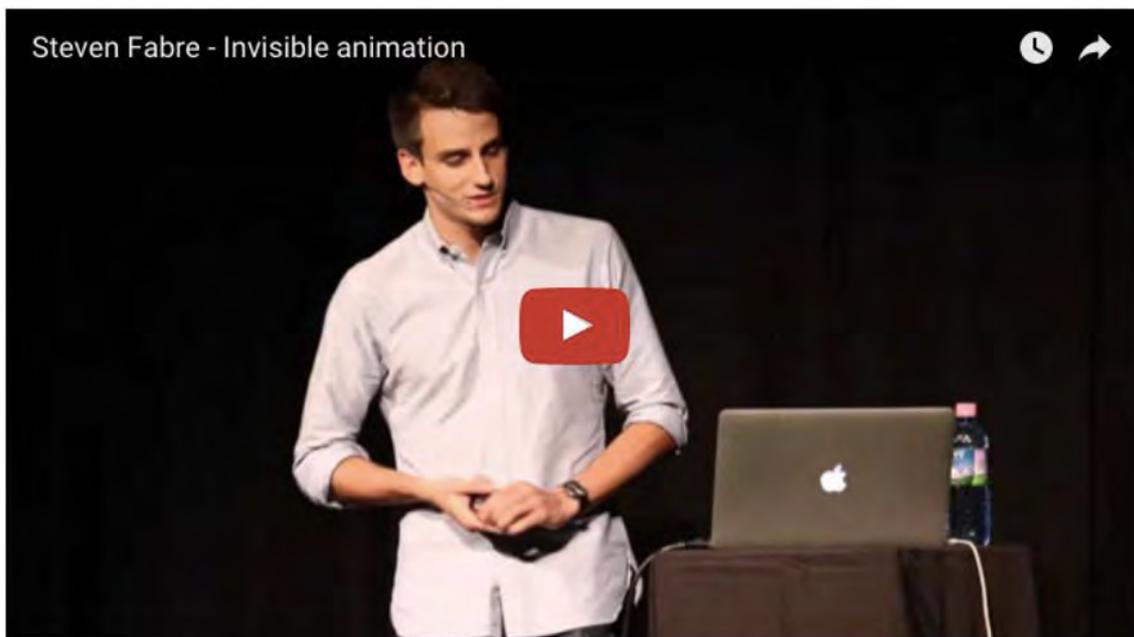
Further reading

[God is in the details](#)—Buzz Osborne

[Transitional Interfaces](#)—Pasquale D'Silva

[Improve the payment experience with animations](#)—Michaël Villar

If you're interested, I expanded on this article as a 30 minute talk at CSSConf Australia:





Thomas Degry

4minread

How Sketch took over 200GB of our MacBooks

Here at [iStrategyLabs](#), Sketch by Bohemian Coding is a tool we use everyday. It's extremely intuitive, which you know if you have used it before! Recently we ran into an issue — a caveat that took up between 60 and 200GB on our hard drives.

How we found out about it

Maggie, one of our great designers, kept getting a full hard drive warning on her machine. Our first thought was to unsync all of her big dropbox folders; but that didn't solve the issue. We weren't sure what was causing the problem, so I went on a quest to find out where all this disk space was going!

Finding the issue

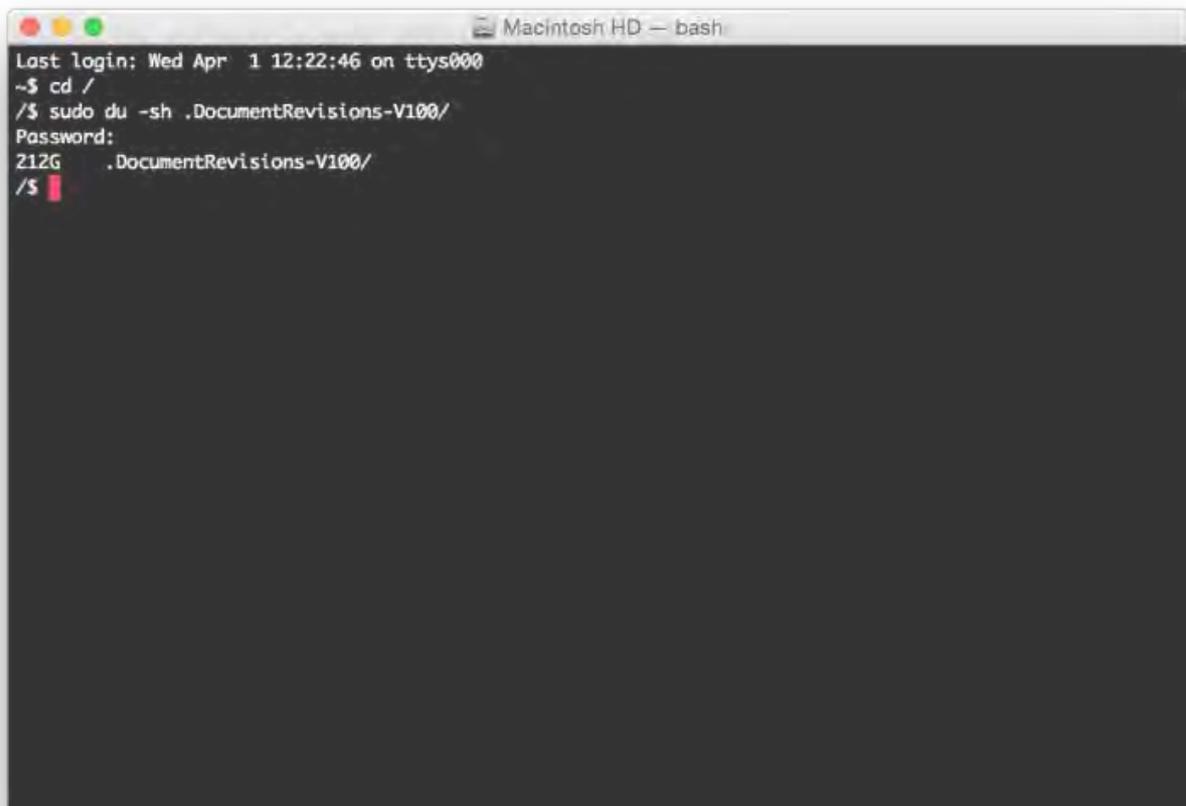
We started off by running a simple daisy disk scan, here are the results:



Where did that remaining 270gb go to?

Daisy Disk shows the Macbook's hard drive filled up for 406GB, though it is only able to account for 50% of the gigs. The Users folder takes up almost all the space, with only 136GB. So where did all that other space go? I figured Daisy Disk's default scan isn't as administrator, so I opened up a terminal window and started looking around and quickly found this mysterious folder in the root directory of the hard drive: */.Document Revisions-V100*. It was **HUGE**.

The folder was a whopping 212GB, hidden away on the hard drive.



```
Macintosh HD — bash
Last login: Wed Apr 1 12:22:46 on ttys000
~$ cd /
/$ sudo du -sh .DocumentRevisions-V100/
Password:
212G .DocumentRevisions-V100/
/$
```

Printing the size of the DocumentRevisions folder solved the mystery.

You can easily find out how big your Document Revisions folder is by running this command in terminal, it will prompt you to enter your administrators password. The characters from your password won't be visible as you type it, but I promise it is working! When you're done hit return and the folder's size will be printed!

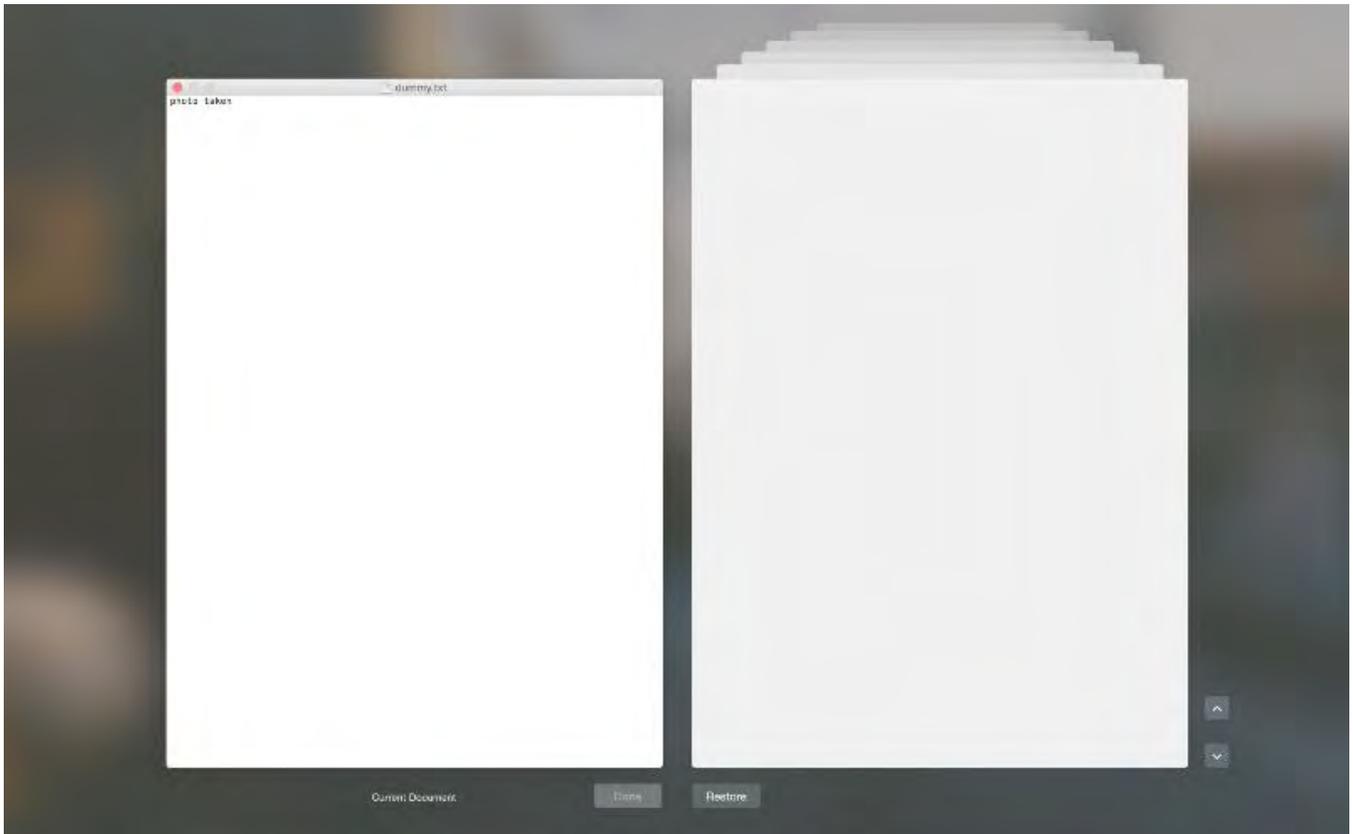
```
sudo du -sh /.DocumentRevisions-V100
```

I quickly figured out that none of our developers were having this issue, so clearly this was a design related problem. Not every designer has a folder as big as Maggie's; some of our designer's folders were only around 2GB, which is totally fine.

The Cause

DocumentRevisions-V100 is an **internal version control system** introduced by Apple in OSX Lion. It basically saves a copy of a file each and every time you save it. Apple uses it for TextEdit, KeyNote, Pages, Numbers, and some other programs. Developers can also interact with this API in their apps. Basically this

system is a very big database file that keeps track of all your changes to documents and allows you to revert back to **any** versions. When you think about it, it is really an amazing system.



Version control allows you to go back to every saved version of a file.

Figuring out which app was causing this problem was not too hard. The main difference between program usage across our design team is that not all of us use Sketch—some designers still stick to their good old pal Photoshop. I figured the issues had to be related to this difference. Monitoring this folder proved my point; every time I would hit ⌘ + S on my keyboard, it would **add a small 30 megabyte to this folder**. Of course, over time, it adds up and you end up with a gigantic folder.

The Fix

There's not a lot to find out about this whole system online, although to be honest, I didn't look for that long. My guess is Apple is smarter than Bohemian Coding about how they do version control. There is still one thing I'm not sure of: **I have no clue how to fix it**. People who just delete the entire folder report slow system performance, so I don't think you want to do that. **I do know how to stop it**, but I do not know if there 's a safe way to revert it. Preventing it is easy, you can force

Sketch to stop version control by pasting this line in your terminal. It won't print a result or success message but you should be fine after this!

```
defaults write -app 'sketch' ApplePersistence -bool no
```

Version control is useful though, so please, please, have a system for backups if you do this. Personally, the trade off between hundreds of gigabytes of storage being taken and disabling version control was easy, as we use dropbox.

We run this command now by default on every new hire's Macbook.

We did end up doing some clean installs to free up the DocumentRevision's space again. If anyone knows a better solution, please let us know. Hopefully Bohemian Coding just adds a checkmark to the Sketch preferences soon to disable this.

Happy designing designers!

Also a big thanks to Demetri Caminis and [Thibault Maekelbergh](#) for helping me investigate and confirm these details!



Tobias van Schneider

3 min read

Design

The Inspiration Lie

by Tobias van Schneider — First appeared in my personal email list.

. . .

Probably one of the most asked questions I get is “How do you get inspired?”.

We’re always waiting for inspiration to find us. We’re waiting to get inspired to paint this perfect piece of art, to build the next big thing or to come up with this great advertising idea. **We’re just sitting there waiting.**

I still do it sometimes, like an idiot as if I don’t know better after all these years of chasing inspiration.

The problem with finding the perfect inspiration is that it’s just a romantic dream. Waiting for inspiration to show up and solve my problems is really nothing more than an empty promise.

Inspiration is a little bit like love. Seeking for the perfect love is like seeking for perfect inspiration. The harder you try, the longer it will take. It’s like magic, maybe even luck.

Now you might think that luck is not fair and rather unpredictable because some have more and some have less. **For me luck is more like an attitude.**

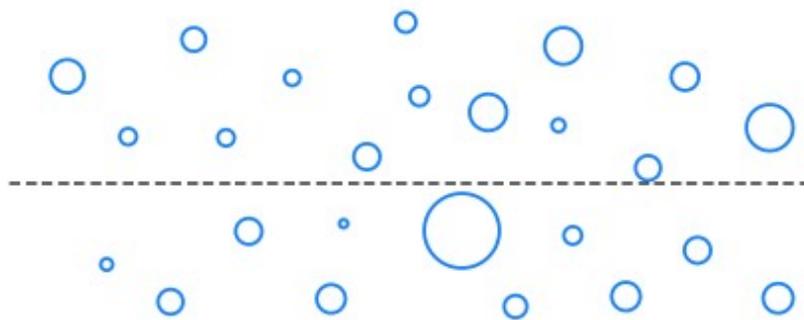
You might not be able to control your own luck or inspiration, but you can definitely enhance it’s chances by putting yourself in positions where luck & inspiration is more likely to happen.

When talking about inspiration, we first need to stop seeking inspiration. This might sound counterproductive at first and appears to involve risk because we often work under pressure, and we don't have the time to stop thinking about something we actually need to think about.

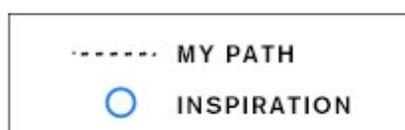
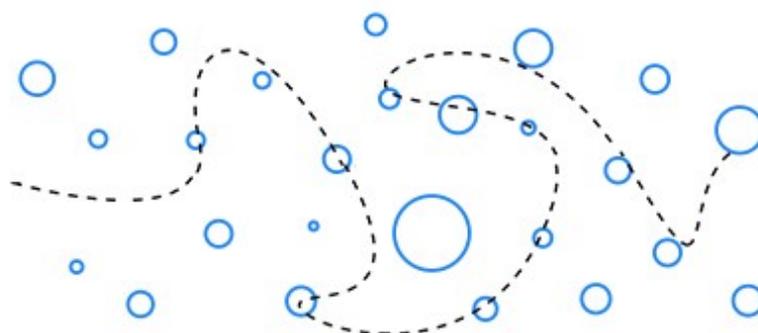
Inspiration usually strikes when you are not forcing it to strike.

Let's just imagine inspiration exists as a random pattern in our life, as in the example I illustrated below. When forcing to find inspiration (see 1) my path is very linear/narrow and the chances are pretty low to get hit by inspiration—It will probably take forever.

1. FORCING INSPIRATION



2. NOT FORCING INSPIRATION



If I don't try to force inspiration to happen, my path appears to be more organic & random (see 2). I might go for a walk, I go to the movies, read a book or just start working. It doesn't matter what I do, but what happens is that I put myself in situations where I'm more likely to get hit by those little spots of inspiration.

The key is to start doing something, RIGHT NOW!—It's about to start working immediately even if you don't feel inspired or know where you are going yet. Inspiration will only hit you once you are already in motion, not while standing still doing nothing.

And as Pablo Picasso already said:

*“Inspiration exists,
but it has to find us working.”*

This is an interesting concept because it completely goes against our logic that we first have to be inspired in order to work. But in reality that's a lie—It's exactly the other way around.

So the next time you say “I just don't feel inspired right now” you know how to fix it. Start working right now and create your own inspiration.

Tobias

I'm Tobias, a Product Design Lead at Spotify NYC. Founder of Authentic Weather & Semplice, Advisor & UX at memomi — www.vanschneider.com



Tobias van Schneider

5 min read

Design

The Real Story Of How To Become A Designer.

The Real Story Of How To Become A Designer.

This article was originally published through my [personal email list](#).

One of the questions I get the most is how you become a designer. Most people then expect some sort of romantic answer from my side, but let me tell you a little personal story I rarely told anyone.

At 15 I dropped out of high school. I was a troublemaker in school and constantly at the edge of repeating the class due to bad grades.

At the time I didn't really know what to do. My main interest was skateboarding and being outside. I grew up in a family with very little money & my single mother was

was mostly busy with feeding us 4 kids. We even struggled to pay for the books we needed for school, so you can imagine going to a more fancy school wasn't an option for me.

A couple of friends of mine went to a college highly recommended by my high school teachers, otherwise "I wouldn't be able to make it in life" they said.

Since my grades were too bad I had to do a test, which I failed at and of course got declined from that particular school.

My only alternative was to join a special school made for the so called "trouble maker kids". The school seemed promising with the hope to find a job after just a year or two—At least that's what I thought.

After about 4 weeks at this school I just stopped going, it was horrible and I felt like a criminal for just being there. The teacher told me that if I drop out now, I will never be able to make it and won't find a job in the future.

At the time I had a high interest in everything technical, I loved taking computers or other devices apart or repairing them.

My new goal: Find a job as a technician, some sort of apprenticeship maybe? At the time there were only about 2–3 companies in my country who hired apprentices for these kind of positions. I sent an application to each company.

I never heard back from any of them, or got instantly declined. I was devastated.

After I did some research, I found out that there is a program by the government that hires you as a "fake apprentice". It pays you about \$150 a month and basically bridges the time while you're looking for a job.

Most of the people who end up there come from troubled backgrounds, kids on drugs or with really serious family issues. I was certainly not one of them, and I didn't understand why I ended up there. My plan was to get out as soon as possible.

After about a year in the program I found a company that would “transfer” me, and take me on as a real apprentice in the field of computer science & engineering.

After two years I was almost at the end of finishing my apprenticeship. To successfully finish your apprenticeship you have to do one final test, otherwise it's not official. I failed the test and decided to not repeat it.(you had to pay for the test, and I simply couldn't afford it)

My old boss told me that if I don't repeat the test, everything is for nothing and I won't be able to find a new job.

At the time the company I worked for threatened to let me go because I was such a horrible engineer. (it was the truth) But because I was already teaching myself on the side how to design, they agreed to find a role in Marketing for me. (my interest was mostly print & web design)

Fast Forward 3–4 months, I decided to take a huge risk and quit the job anyway. I had this feeling that I don't want to work there anymore and pursue my new interest: Design. What a stupid kid, who the fuck would do that?

I had very little savings left and needed to apply to welfare for the time being. If you would have asked some of my non-existent friends, they would have told you that I'm crazy for quitting my job and going on welfare.

Because everyone told me I won't be able to make it as a designer without proper education, I tried to apply at a university to study design. As you can already guess, I got declined because my work wasn't good enough and my portfolio was lacking traditional drawings. Phew.

So I started to apply at some more companies, no one got back to me. It was a hard time for me, I essentially had zero education on paper, no portfolio and just quit my job.

Then I found an educational program provided by the government which would cost me about \$2000 but promise to train me as a designer.

I took all my savings and joined the program. Everyone around me told me that I NEED to do this for my CV, otherwise I can not prove that I'm a certified designer.

The program lasted 10 months, I barely showed up 3 months which was the minimum required to receive a "Participated" confirmation. When I was there I felt like I was back in school, with arrogant teachers telling me how much I suck and that I will never make it as a designer.

So far everyone always told me what I cant do, but never what I can—I don't blame anyone, I didn't know better at the time.

During the 10 months where I was supposed to be at the program I started to work on a lot of side projects to build up a little portfolio. Deep in my gut there was this feeling that I CAN do it, even though everyone else was telling me the opposite.

The moment the program ended I took a big risk and opened up my own little design studio out of my apartment. In reality, this was the only option I had but it turned out to be the beginning of a new chapter in my life.

The reason why I wanted to tell you this story is to show you how I really became a designer. At least for me, there was no perfect way and my path couldn't be more unromantic.

In the end, everything that counted was that I trusted myself. Or let's say I was too stupid to know what is right or wrong anyway. For me the obstacle became the way and the art of not knowing how to do things "the right way" helped me think differently.

Thank you for reading.

PS: I share stories like these and other things usually first through my personal email list. Thanks so much for everyone who encouraged me to share it here on Medium.

Tobias is a Product Design Lead at Spotify NYC. Founder of Authentic Weather & Semplice, Advisor & UX at memomi—www.vanschneider.com



Tobias van Schneider

4 min read

Design

Ignore Everybody

by Tobias van Schneider

first appeared on my private email list.

As part of a talk I'm giving in dozens of cities around the world the last couple months, I mention 5 principles that help me when approaching new side projects. Especially when speaking about new ideas I often like to speak about the concept of "Ignore Everybody". My main inspiration comes from a book with the same title by Hugh Macleod.

In general, I'm not a big fan of random ideas. Ideas are cheap, because everyone has them. Getting shit done is what counts in the end.

But still, there is something magical about a great idea. We have to understand that ideas are by nature very fragile. They're like little naked babies, unable to protect themselves.

If we really believe in a new idea, we have to protect her with great effort. This is difficult, because oftentimes the greatest ideas get killed by the people around us. Executing on a great idea is by nature a lonely path. If everyone would agree with you, the idea is probably not that great anyway.

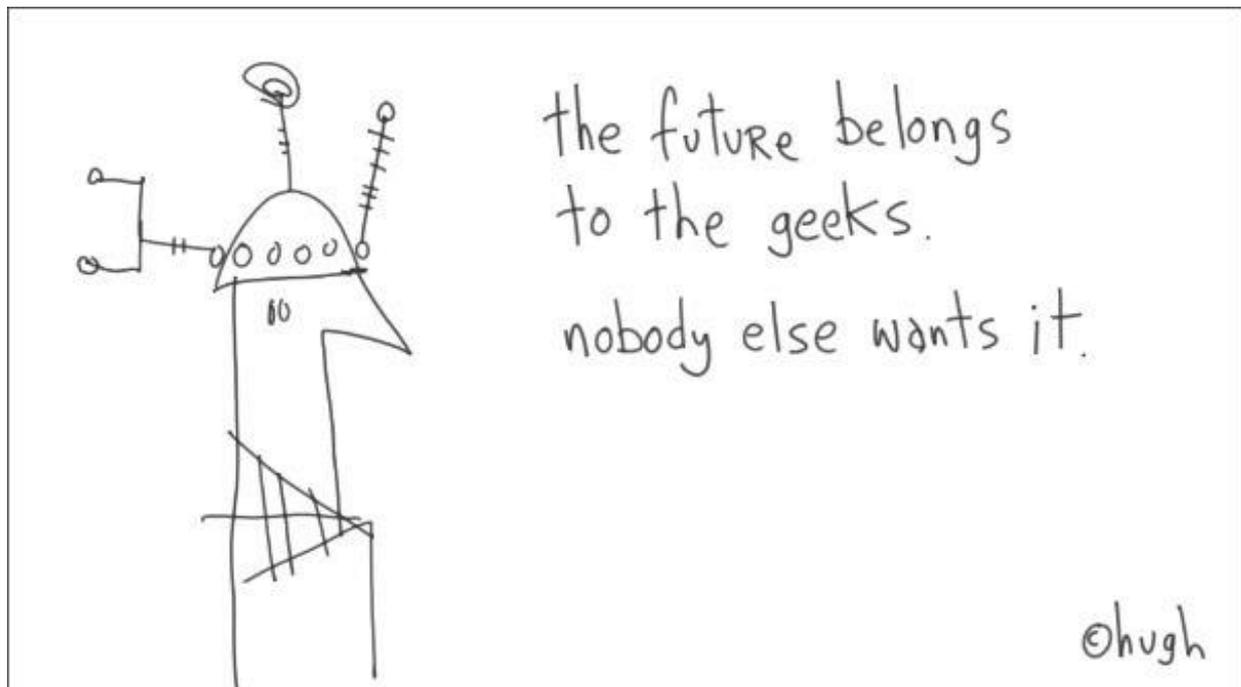
Colleagues might kill your idea because they don't like to see you succeed, even if they don't do it on purpose. Close friends & family also try to kill your ideas because they love you, and they don't like to see you fail. All they do is protecting you from taking risks, while slowly killing your ideas without you noticing it.

In the end, everyone seems to be against you—And that's where you have to decide for yourself to use selective ignorance. Hugh Macleod puts it simply.

*“Great ideas alter the power balance in relationships.
That’s why great ideas are initially resisted”.*

The more interesting or original your idea is, the less good advice other people will be able to give you. The idea is your baby, it’s fragile and it needs you to protect it until it’s strong enough to survive others people attacks.

Interesting enough, we do everything possible to kill great ideas immediately. We get 20 people into a brainstorm meeting where everyone throws out one idea after another, just to see it being killed instantly. Brainstorm meetings are the places where good ideas go to die, unfortunately.



Drawing by Hugh Macleod

On top of it, we often survey the “smartest” people and gather feedback for our new idea. Unfortunately, the smarter the people in the group, the more reasons they will find why your idea won’t work.

“In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s there are few” — Shunryu Suzuki

George Lois (the original Mad Men) once said: **In order to create good work, you spend your time on 1% Inspiration, 9% Perspiration and 90% Justification.**

90% are protecting your idea, and slowly, through hard work, winning over people on your side by justifying your idea.

But the secret to this is often to Ignore Everybody at first. In the beginning, you are often as fragile as the idea itself, and all you can do is shut yourself off from other opinions. Sticking to your gut feeling and working on your idea until it's strong enough to survive on it's own.

Let's be honest.

When Larry Page & Sergey Brin came up with the idea to build a search engine, it seemed to be a horrible idea. More than five other search engines already existed, and none of them was commercially successful.

In 1902, the New York Times wrote that the price of cars will never be cheap enough to make them as popular to the masses. They called it "impractical" with no future in sight. And yes, this statement came from one of the "greatest newspapers".

AirBnB seemed to be a horrible idea. Couch surfing was already known to be a weird thing some hippies do, but not the masses.

An online messaging service that borrows the limitations of SMS so you can only write within 140 characters? Seriously, Twitter seemed like the worst idea you can have in the midst of all the possibilities the internet has brought us.

An app where you can record short video clips that disappear forever after you watched them once? That seems like a pretty fragile idea, until it was called Snapchat.

In 1876, Alexander Graham Bell offered to sell his patent for the telephone to the Western Union. They politely dismissed the offer with the reason for it "being a useless toy that would never amount to anything".

In the end, we can learn two things from these stories:

1. Ignore Everybody while working on a new idea. If you're in love with it, chances are 50/50 and NO one other than you will be able to give you the advice you need. Don't ask for advice, roll with it! Or do it like I sometimes do: If 10 people call you stupid or an idiot, you got your validation, now prove them wrong.

2. While seeing other people working on their idea, we can try to be more open rather than dismissive. But then again, I also believe in dismissal being a motivator to try harder for myself. It's really up to you on how you treat other peoples ideas.

I hope you enjoyed the read, and please shoot me a tweet if you have feedback, comments or just want to send over a high five.

If you enjoyed this article, make sure to sign up to my email list.

Yours truly,
Tobias

obias is the Co-Founder of Semplice, a new portfolio platform for designers. Also host of the show NTMY—Previously Design Lead at Spotify & Board of Directors AIGA New York.



Tobias van Schneider

4 min read

Design

The Day You Became A Better Designer

by Tobias van Schneider
first appeared on my private email list.

. . .

I received a lot of feedback on my articles recently. (big thank you for that!) While some appreciate the wide & weird range of topics, some ask me why I don't write about *real design topics*. Such as, "How to solve UX problem XYZ" or "How to build the perfect responsive website". A valid question.

When I write, I mostly write for myself. And since I don't like to lie, neither to you nor myself, I promise to always be a 100% honest.

The reason I don't talk about UX problems or how to set up a perfect grid is because I believe it is boring. While tools and techniques matter, they don't make you a better designer when looking at the bigger picture.

As far as I remember, I've never read any books about design. I don't follow design blogs and rarely read design magazines.

This is just my personal preference, but it's rooted in the belief that neither me nor anyone else has figured it out anyway.

I do admit that I sometimes miss out on the latest trends in web design, and my repertoire of keyboard shortcuts could be bigger.

For me, trying to be a better designer means trying to be a better human being, as cheesy as it sounds. Every designer, from advertising to product deals with a different set of problems. But in the end, each designer caters to us humans, regardless of what problem we are trying to solve.

The day I became a better designer was the day I started looking outside the design industry for inspiration. It was the day I started reading books about philosophy, psychology, art or science.

It was the day I stopped hanging out with only designers every day and started making more friends in other industries. I started to make sure that in whatever office I sit, I have someone sitting next to me who is **NOT** a designer.

In psychology & cognitive science there is something called the “confirmation bias”. **What it means is that we love to agree with people who agree with us. We tend to hang out with people who hold similar beliefs and make us feel comfortable.**

We as designers are especially drawn to the confirmation bias. We are proud to hold strong opinions and therefore strive for internal consistency by seeking confirmation from our peers.

The issue with this is that we, as designers, create a bubble for ourselves. We visit the same conferences with only designers speaking & attending. We read magazines & books, from and for designers, and we tend to only hang out with other designers in perfect isolation.

Our view narrows as we limit our field. **Only interacting with other designers we avoid ideas or beliefs contradictory to our own.** While it makes us feel comfortable & protected, it can also be an inspirational trap.

Shouldn't we, especially designers be the ones most curious & open about other topics & fields rather than cutting us off? Shouldn't we be the ones connecting the dots that others might not be able to connect?—Afterall we call us designers who design products & services for others, often thousands or even millions.

By immersing ourselves in different perspectives, we can draw a much richer and more balanced picture. Which in result, enhances our work.

For example, let's take the best communication designers who come up with covers for The New Yorker or Bloomberg Businessweek.

They are great not because of their craft, but because they immerse themselves in topics such as politics & culture. They collect & connect the dots outside of their field of expertise. Design as a craft just provides them the tools and frameworks to make sense of the information

And I'm not talking about simple research before each project, it is part of who they are. They are as much communicators as much as they are designers.

You can apply the same to any other design field.

And as Walt Whitman already said: Be curious, not judgmental. Endless curiosity & openness is one of the most important traits of a great designer.

And this, is why I love hanging out with non-designers. Or with anyone who challenges my beliefs, disagrees with me and offers new perspectives. This is where personal growth is happening, which translates in my ability as a well-rounded designer & human being.

I hope you enjoyed the read. I tried re-writing and changing this piece so many times and ended up keeping it short & snappy. I like to see it more as a conversation starter which you hopefully participate on Twitter.

Yours truly,
Tobias

The title of this email was inspired by a fantastic article by Scott Adam who wrote a piece called "The Day You Became A Better Writer". A quick but highly recommended read.



Vince Speelman

4 min read

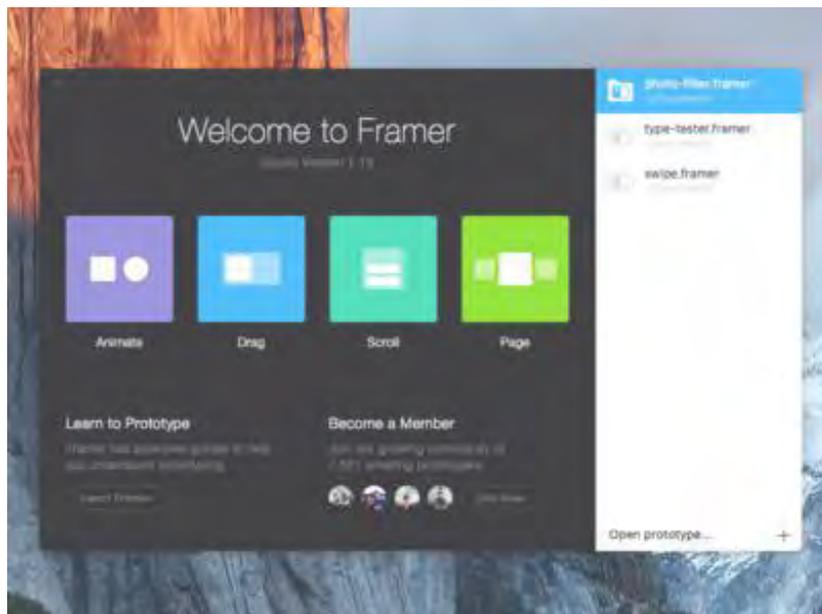
The Nine States of Design

Modern UI teams are designing components first; Interfaces are merely the thoughtful composition of components. This leaves an often glaring hole for users on “the unhappy path”—The places where users may, intentionally or not, stray from your idealized flow. As we learn to craft systems rather than pages, we must invest effort into shaping these often missed states of design and create with a component lifecycle that can support everyone. Here’s the lifecycle as I see it:

States

1. Nothing

What happens *before* your component does anything? Maybe it’s the first time a user sees it. Maybe it’s not activated yet. Essentially, the component exists but hasn’t *started*.



Jonas Treub makes sure framer gets you up to speed.

2. Loading

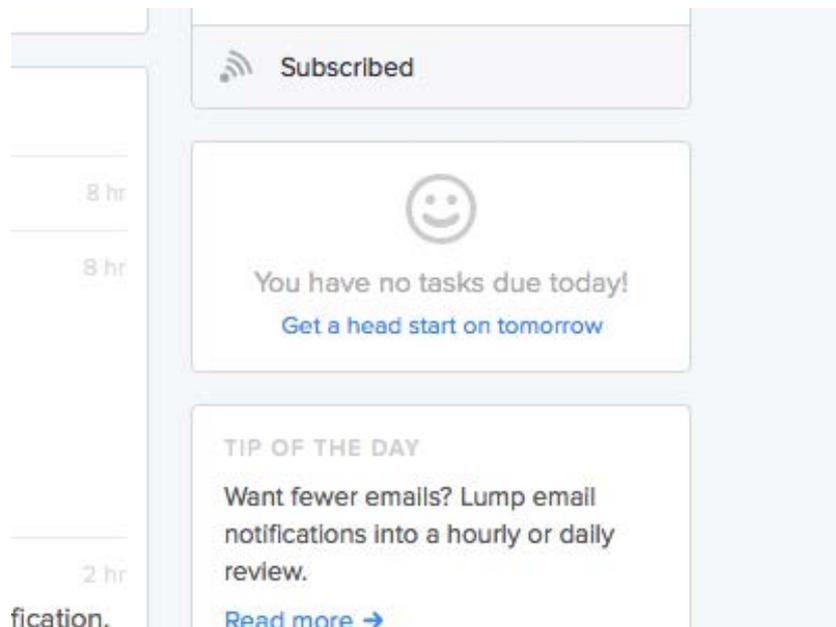
The dreaded state. In a perfect world, no one would ever see this; Alas, here we find ourselves. There are plenty of ways to keep your loading state subtle and unobtrusive. Facebook does a pretty good job of this:



Facebook uses a “dummy post” rather than a traditional loading spinner.

3. None

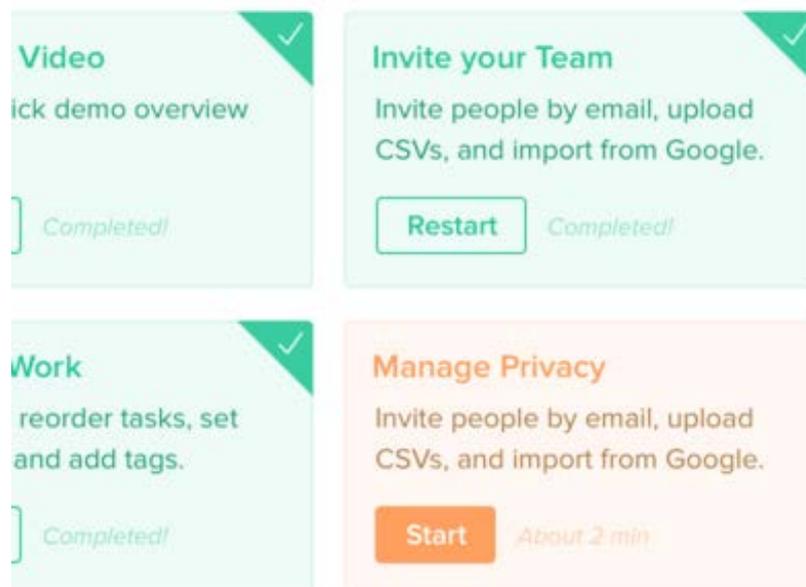
Your component has initialized, but it's empty. No data. No Items. Now may be a good time to get the user to act ("Do this thing!"), or to reward them("Good job, everything is taken care of")



Luke Seeley knocked this one out of the park.

4. One

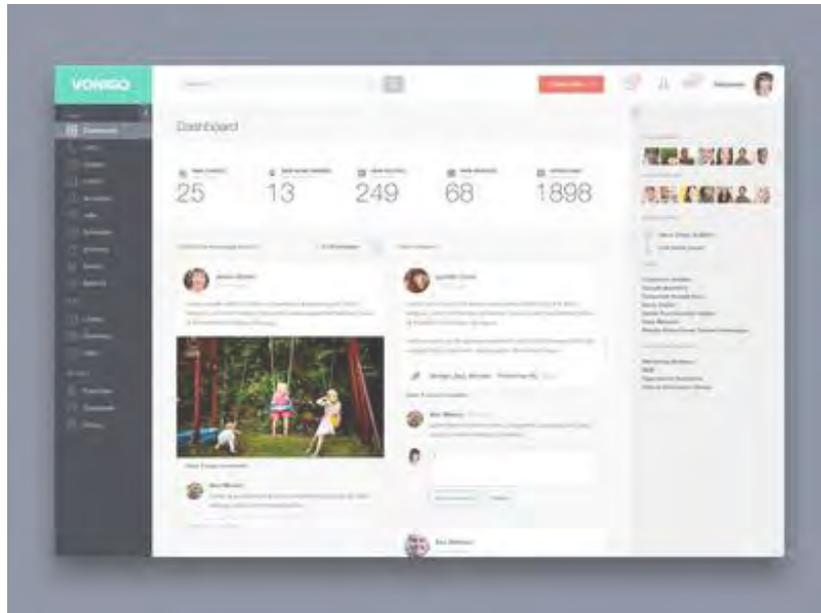
You have some data. On an input, this may be after the first keystroke. In a list, it might be when you have one item (or one left).



Luke Seeley again for MetaLab.

5. Some

This is usually what you think of first. What is the ideal state for this component? Your data is loaded, you have input, and the user is familiar with it.



A big comfy dashboard from [UENO](#).

6. Too many

Woah there! The user has overdone it in some way. Too many results (maybe you paginate them now), too many characters (maybe ellipses?), and so on.

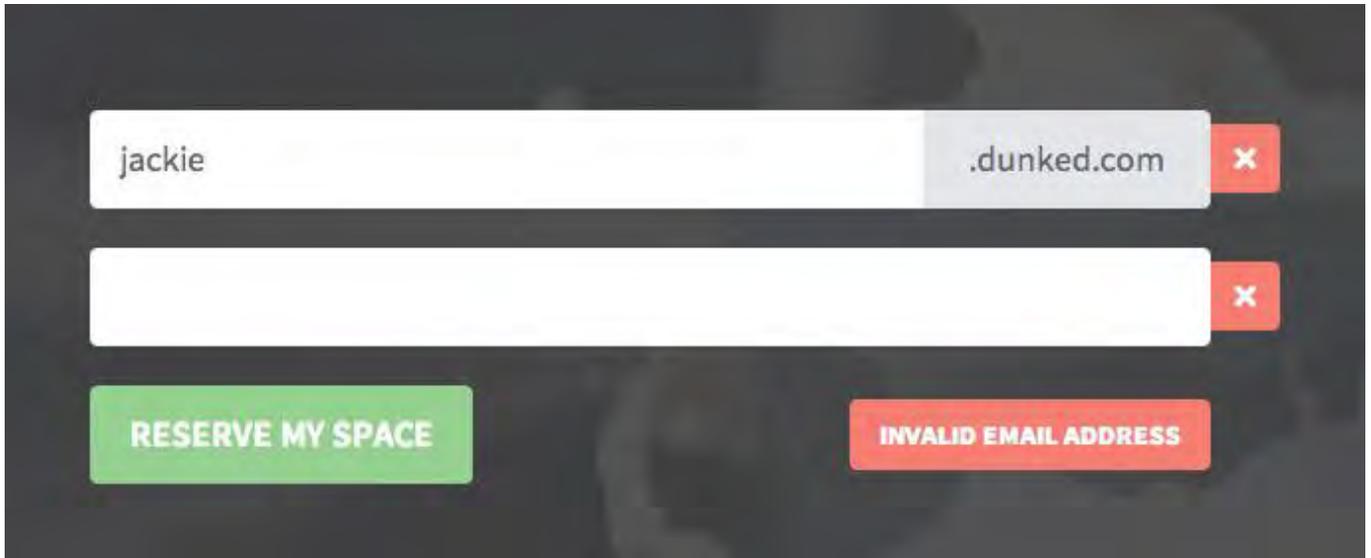
Admin	Edit	Suspend
Reseller, Reseller Admin	Edit	Suspend
Reseller, Reseller Admin	Edit	Suspend
Reseller, Reseller Admin	Edit	Suspend
Reseller, Reseller Admin	Edit	Suspend

◀ [PREV](#) Showing 61 to 80 [NEXT](#) ▶

Good ol' pagination from [Pete Orme](#)

7. Incorrect

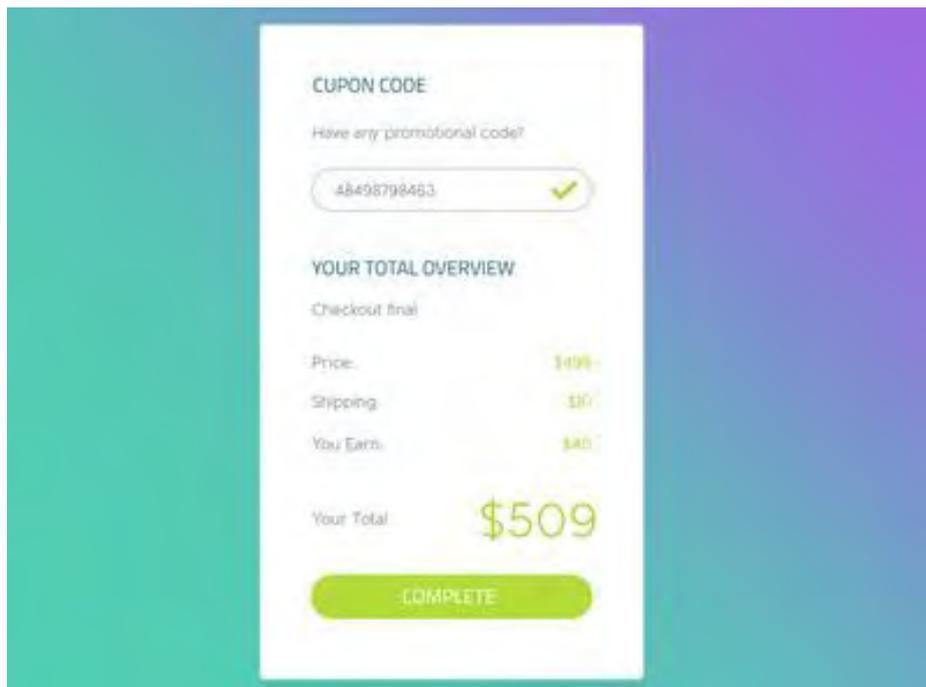
Something is not right about the component. An error has occurred.



A nice error state from dunked.com

8. Correct

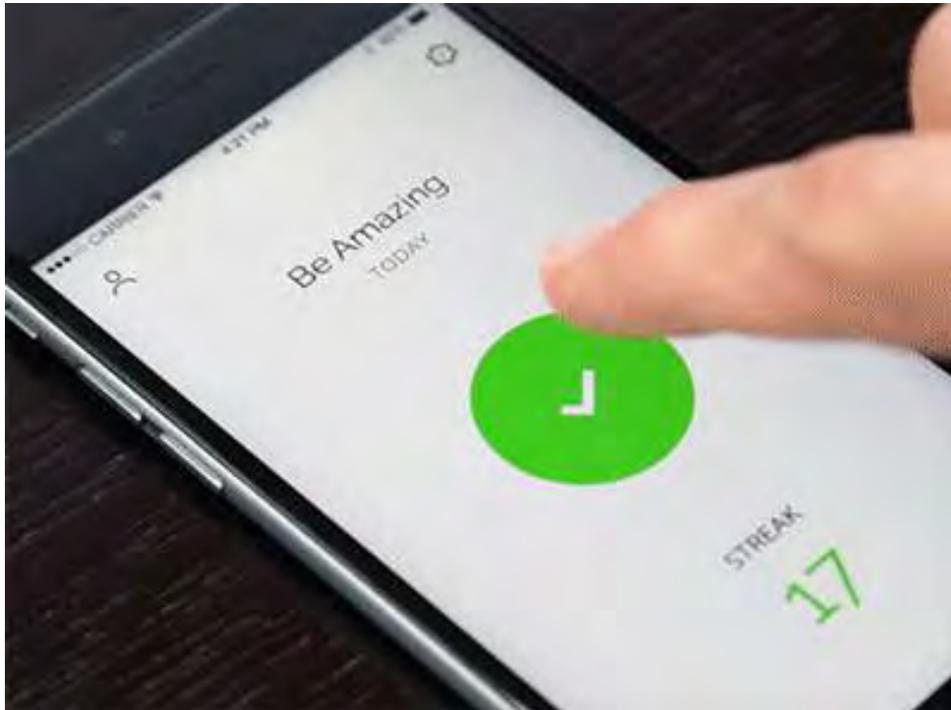
Good to go! This item has had its needs satisfied.



short form [Ionut Bondoc \(►IB\)](#)

9. Done

The user's correct input has been received by the application. They don't have to worry about it anymore.



Igor Chebotarev gives some positive feedback.

. . .

These states will repeat based on the page, user interaction, updated data, and pretty much any change of your application's state. By thoughtfully designing for these changes, you can create a polished experience for users no matter which situation they find themselves in.

Many of these states are either inferred, forgotten, or simply ignored by teams. This is a huge mistake and an opportunity for you to rise above your competitors. By integrating stateful thinking into your process, you practice empathy with your users while simultaneously taking control of your application.

The nine states of design apply to all designs and all component. Even if you make a conscious decision to ignore one of them, following this guideline will ensure that you actually think.

Startup / Entrepreneurship



Arthur Attwell

5 min read

Startup



Why I won't run another startup

Lured by the lights of the startup industry, founders are the product in someone else's show. So I've made five new rules for myself.

Photo by erikaow, Flickr, CC-BY

Earlier this year, I closed my startup. So now I get to reflect on what I'd have done differently. Hindsight is unfair and inaccurate, but I still enjoy its lessons. This is one, a note to my future self: *Don't call your projects 'startups'*. It's a semantic trick, but a really important one. Here's why.

'Startups' have become a commodity in an industry of startup conferences, websites, courses and competitions. As founders of young organisations, we struggle to distinguish genuine guidance and support from the distracting pizzazz of the startup industry, where we're just the product, not the customer. Lured by the lights, we spend valuable hours crafting slide decks, jumping on planes, giving presentations and filling out entry forms, almost always so that someone can sell

tickets to the show. I worked it hard, and I didn't see the return. I want that time back for my business.

Here are five new rules for myself.

1. No more startup events

I've been invited to four startup events just this week. Wait—checks email—that's five. It's a freakin' craze. Startup seminars, breakfasts, retreats, showcases. Say no to all of them.

Startup events are supposedly 'good for networking.' I made an interesting connection at one or two, I think. For the most part they've sucked vast amounts of time I really should have put into working on my organisation.

Your next project may be in publishing, healthcare, engineering or another industry, but it's probably not in the startup industry. At a startup-industry event, you're only going to meet startup-industry people. They are not your customers. Only go to events packed full of potential customers *in your industry*.

Very occasionally, treat yourself to a dinner with a few entrepreneurs you like—it helps fight the loneliness. Otherwise, if you're not out selling, get back to your office and work. Or go home and spend some down-time with your family.

2. No more startup competitions

Then there are the competitions. Innovation competitions, pitching competitions, business-plan competitions. Sometimes the prize is an investment in your company. (First prize, an investor! Second prize, two investors!)

Honestly, do you want an investor who comes shopping for startups at a cocktail function? Winning an investment is like your bank calling to say you've won an overdraft. Lucky you.

It can be worse. I got a call from a major international consulting firm to tell me we'd won a big innovation award. But I can't tell you about it because I have to pay them a licence fee if I do. Seriously: they wanted 7500 euros just to let us tell people we'd won. Another time, I got interviewed on a startup-support radio show, only to be asked to sign a letter afterwards saying they'd given us R188000 in airtime. (I didn't sign.)

You can also win ‘business support’, or well-meaning MBA students to ‘help you grow your business’ for their course project. I’ve spent days with teams who are new to my industry using my time to tell me things I already know. I want those days back.

If you’re certain that you have time to enter competitions, only enter the ones where they’re giving out loads of free money and you *know* you can win. Don’t be the product.

3. Beware the warm glow of startup media

The startup-industry press is so seductive. It’s pretty and says it loves you. Being a startup, especially based in Africa, is great for media coverage, more especially if you win a startup award.

At Paperight we kept a long list of posts and articles about us that came from startup-industry acclaim. We won startup and innovation awards in London, Frankfurt and New York, an Accenture Innovation Award, and public congratulations in South Africa’s national parliament. We were featured in several ‘startups to watch’ articles and were profiled on the websites of CNN, Forbes and others. We were even featured in a book about open-business innovation. We’re fairly certain that the awards made this coverage happen.

But in not one case did we see a corresponding spike in sales (or calls from investors), and for a young business running out of runway, sales are all that really matters. For a while, the acclaim is great for motivating staff, and to help inspire an investor’s confidence, but the effect wanes after a few awards. Don’t chase coverage in the startup industry. Find your own industry’s media outlets (they’re harder to find and less sexy than the startup press) and focus only on them.

4. Don’t tell customers you’re a startup

Every office-bound exec wants to love a startup. Like a pet. But no one wants to buy from a startup. Especially big companies. Big companies want to buy from big, stable businesses. They want to trust that you’ll still be around in a few years. And their people need to feel you’re a familiar name. At Paperight, we needed book publishers to trust us with their most valuable IP. It’s insane to think they’d give it to a ‘startup’.

5. Get real help

The startup industry appeals to a very real need for emotional, intellectual and financial support. But (except in very rare cases) it is going to distract you more than it delivers. It's bad for focus. Instead, find experienced confidants from an industry like yours. If nothing else, their emotional support will mean more to you than a hundred hollow prizes.

I'll be surprised if I stick to my new rules. So remind me, please, because I'll probably forget: run a business, not a startup. You don't have the time.

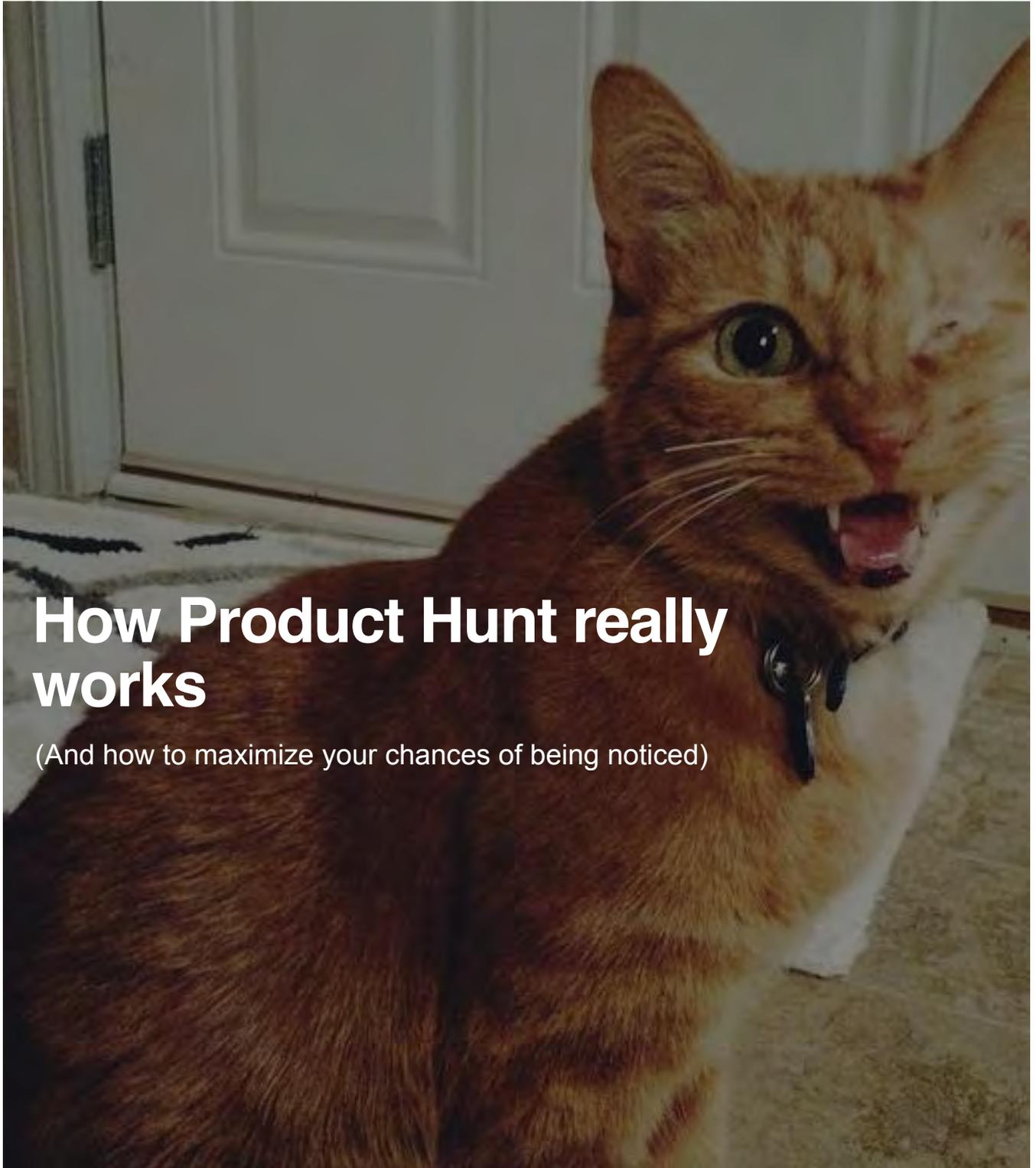
Some rights reserved by the author.



Ben Wheeler

8 min read

Startup



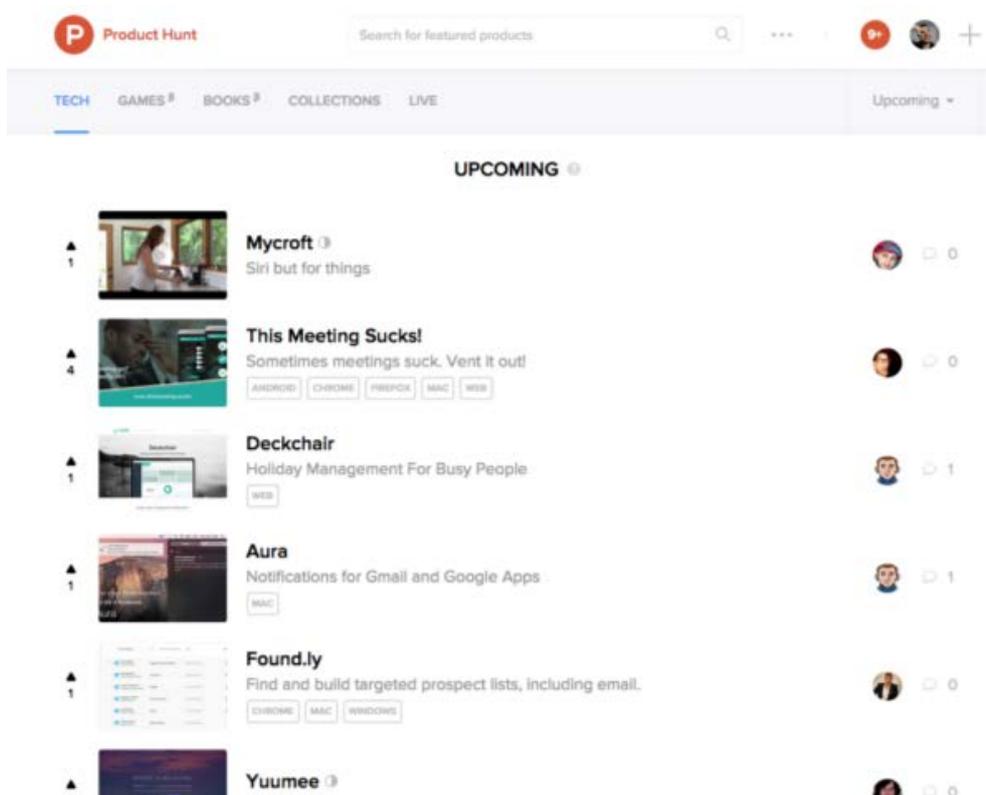
How Product Hunt really works

(And how to maximize your chances of being noticed)

It starts with a mystery

Earlier this year, having devoted countless hours to creating my latest app, I took a step that has become a universal milestone in the tech world: I submitted it to Product Hunt.

I hoped to see it chosen to be featured on the site's front page. I checked for it there the first day, the second, and the third. No such luck. Disappointing, but understandable: Product Hunt gets hundreds of submissions per day, and as the FAQ explains, not everything can make it out of the /upcoming feed and onto the front page.



Product Hunt's /upcoming feed

But the problem was worse: even after my app failed to make the front page, it was never added to the site for anyone to find. I had indicated several related “collection” categories that my app fit, but it wasn't in any of those. In fact, it wasn't searchable on the site at all.

The plot thickens

The official FAQ is vague on the process. So I reached out at first to one Product Hunt employee. As I learned more, I contacted its founder, Ryan Hoover, and

several longtime Product Hunt employees and insiders. Not everyone would answer every question, but I was able to piece together many things that the FAQ skips over.

Most importantly, I learned that by submitting my app to Product Hunt, I had made a grave error.

What Product Hunt isn't telling you

1. The blacklist: your app's likely destination

Product Hunt's community manager explained that submitting through the main form, the one that most vetted users see, adds the product to the "/upcoming" page, where it has a chance to earn votes by visitors for a day or two.

After that, if it hasn't been chosen for higher status, it enters an undocumented state in which it can't be submitted and considered afresh.



Which means, your product's chances can be sunk by any competitor, any alpha tester, any well intentioned friend, or any eager founder obeying Paul Graham's

dictum to “launch when you have a quantum of utility”. That first submission is *it*. Odds are—odds are *heavily* —that it will end up on an internal list of products ineligible for future consideration.

In other words, blacklisted.

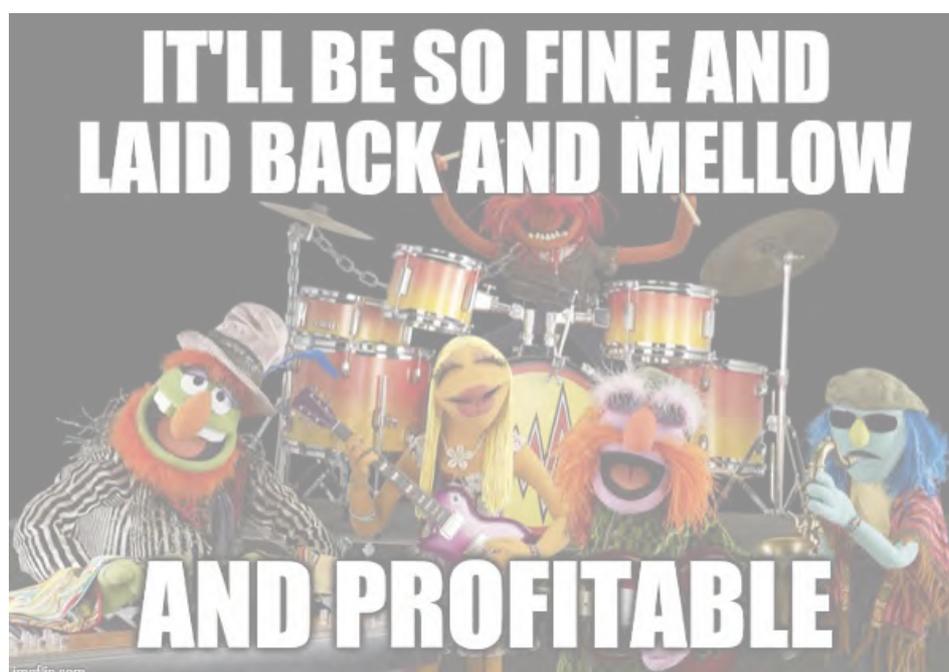
But that’s the gamble all products face, right? Aren’t we all in the same boat?

No. There is another way to be featured, one that the FAQ omits. And it is a big deal.

2. Half the products on the front page were promoted straight there

Product Hunt community manager Bram Kanstein—who has since left the company—wrote a post earlier this year about how he had launched the #1 most upvoted product of all time on Product Hunt. It is illuminating, not just for what it includes, but for what it leaves out.

Kanstein focuses at length on the timing of his submission, and the promotional emails that would direct people in his network to visit the site to vote on it when it went live on Product Hunt. This struck me as bizarre. How was he so sure that his product would be promoted to the front page? And exactly when he wanted, and not a day earlier or later—not even an hour?



It turns out that select users can post directly to the front page, while the far greater number of users without this access can only post to/upcoming. According to a former Product Hunt employee, half the products you see on the home page were put there instantly by these greater powered users, without first having to prove their worth alongside the majority of Product Hunt submissions.

Who are these power users? Creators, tastemakers, investors, journalists, entrepreneurs and programmers who Product Hunt has empowered as curators because of their enthusiasm, accomplishments, and influence. These aren't employees or editors or Wikipedia-style domain volunteers; they are independent of Product Hunt, entrusted with the power to skip the /upcoming feed at will. They can grant a product the valuable promotion it would be unlikely to receive, were it submitted the way most products are.

They can be great allies in the discovery of deserving work. But they can also have complex connections to—and even financial ownership of—the very products they promote.

3. Front page promotion is often granted by an insider with connections to the product's creators or funders

Browse Product Hunt listings, and reach out to the curators who posted them, and you will find a great many were posted by prior arrangement with the creators. Ryan Hoover emphasized to me that the central Product Hunt team itself conducts these arrangements only rarely, but wouldn't say how much of the time the curators arrange featured postings for products they're linked to.

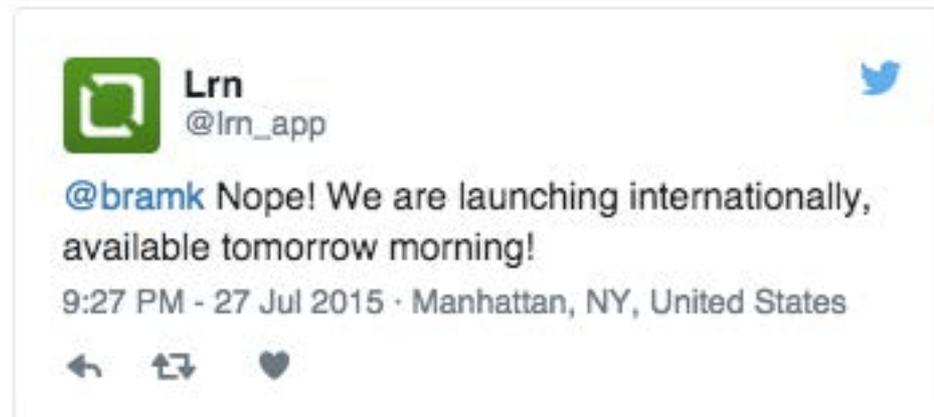
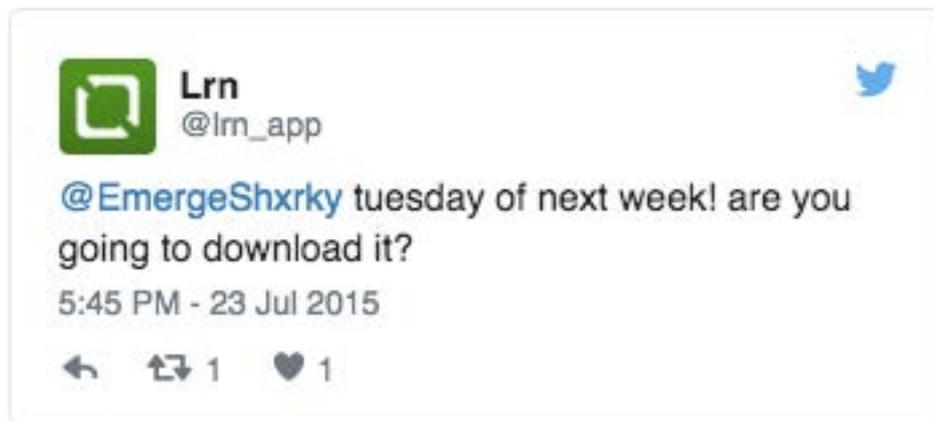


Products are often posted by an advisor, but it's rare to find any mention of that advisor's ownership in the product. Tech startup advisors commonly take an equity ownership of around half a percent, or may work for a venture capital firm with a current interest in the startup. But the world of money is almost never mentioned in the enthusiastic product comments by either creators or curators. Unmentioned investments of money, time and status may provide very good reasons for a curator to privilege a particular product, regardless of its quality.

And yet, according to the curators and insiders I asked, Product Hunt gives them no instruction about conflicts of interest, and there seems to be no disclosure policy.

4. Assured promotion allows a coordinated launch

Careful followers of Product Hunt have caught on to the strategy of accessing this upper tier. Just consider the creators of Lrn, an app that teaches you to program in bite-sized chunks. Lrn, while containing some new ideas, bears a striking resemblance to Swifty, a past product that had been previously featured on Product Hunt. Unlike Swifty, however, the Lrn team—having read Bram Kanstein's post—found an advisor in advance with front page-promotion privileges and coordinated the launch with him, even going so far as to have him wake up at 4:30 in the morning so as to capture more European upvotes.



Confident of the precise timing and prominence of their promotion on the front page, they spread word and lined up press around a consistent launch time.

Their launch story, which they wrote up in great detail, avoids mentioning the crucial step of gaining an insider to promote their work. This follows an unspoken rule of Silicon Valley. They emphasize aspects of the process that are open to anyone—belief in your product, reaching out to your contacts, being open to generosity—and avoid invoking the vital but unattractive topics of power, status or wealth.

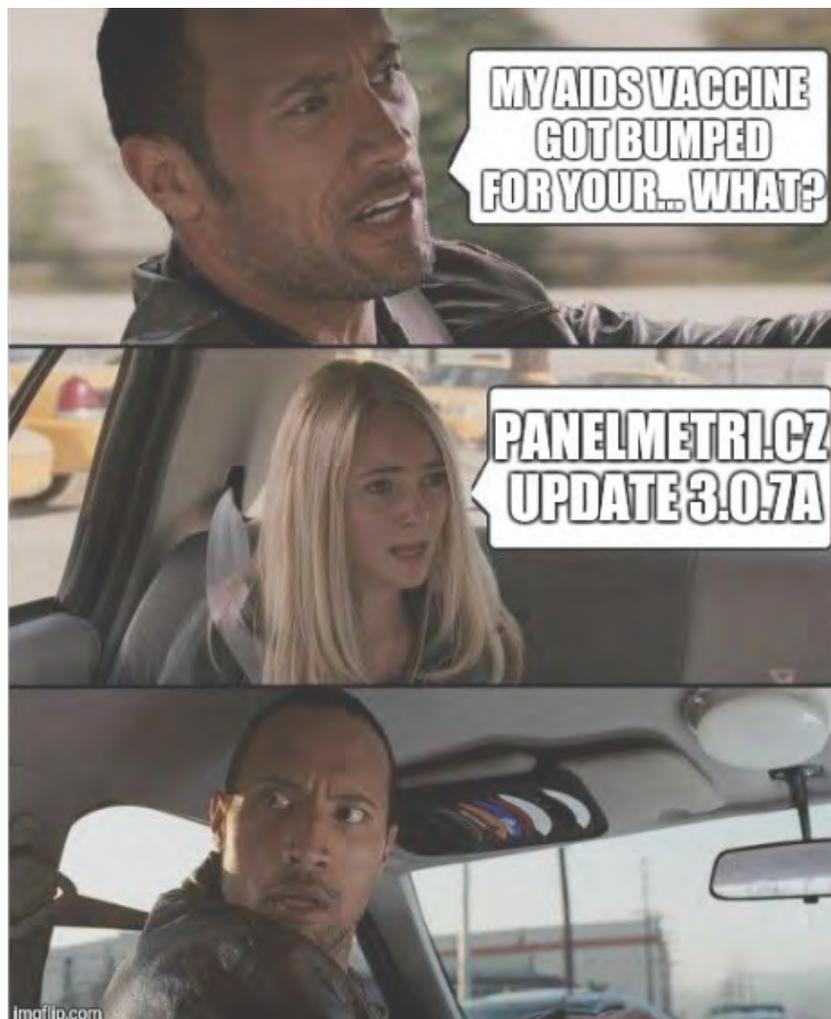
5. Product Hunt ignores successful /upcoming products

I submitted a product and I don't see it on the homepage. Why? :(

Every day, hundreds of new products are submitted to Product Hunt. Unfortunately, not everything makes the homepage but those that receive legitimate upvotes from the community, may rise to the top. If products are flagged for removal if they do not meet our community guidelines

Upvotes: not really the reason your submission is being ignored.

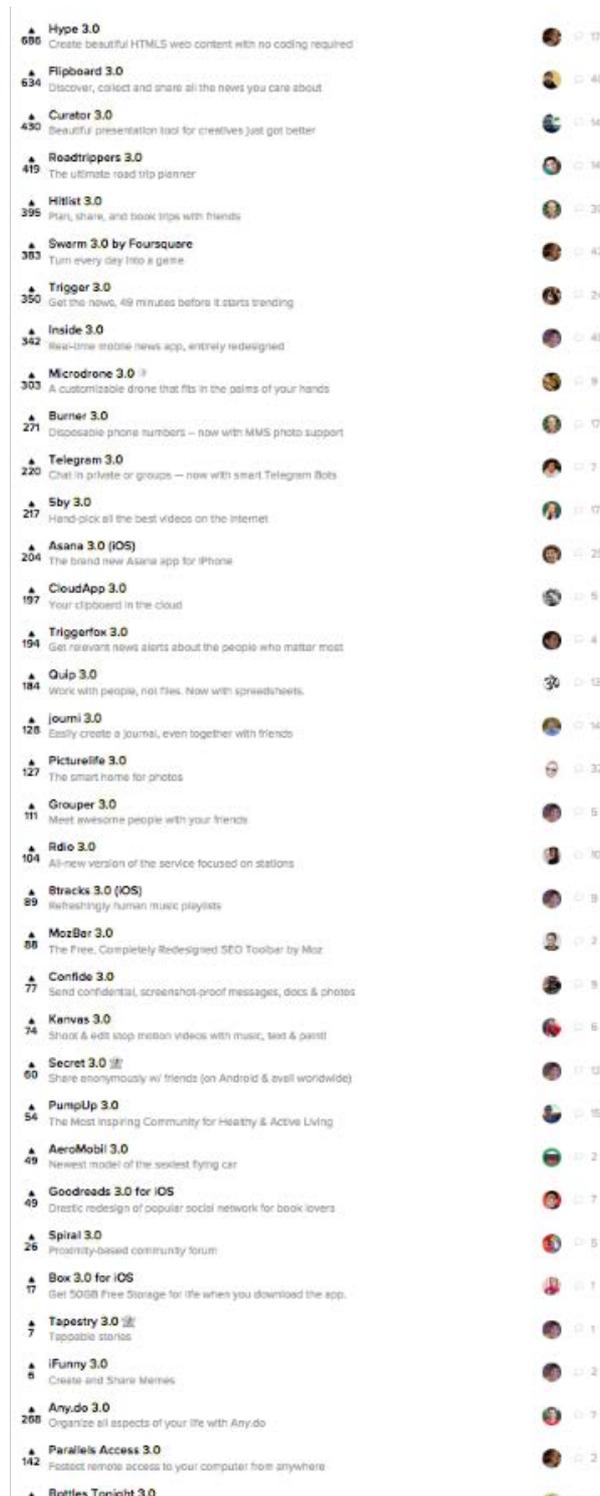
You might think catching the eye of many members of the Product Hunt community on the /upcoming feed is a sure way to make it onto the front page, but you'd be wrong.



As a former Product Hunt employee explained to me, there are just too many other products with more significant claims to the front page—some of them placed directly there, on a preplanned schedule, by someone directly involved with the product.

In fact, the former employee says there are many products that gained lots of upvotes through the /upcoming feed—against heavy odds—but which Product Hunt has never, and will never, put on the front page.

6. Forming a relationship with any insider you can find is the best path to promotion



▲	Hype 3.0	Create beautiful HTML5 web content with no coding required	686	17
▲	Flipboard 3.0	Discover, collect and share all the news you care about	634	40
▲	Curator 3.0	Beautiful presentation tool for creatives just got better	430	14
▲	Roadtrippers 3.0	The ultimate road trip planner	419	14
▲	Hillist 3.0	Plan, share, and book trips with friends	395	20
▲	Swarm 3.0 by Foursquare	Turn every day into a game	383	42
▲	Trigger 3.0	Get the news, 49 minutes before it starts trending	350	24
▲	Inside 3.0	Real-time mobile news app, entirely redesigned	342	49
▲	Microdrone 3.0	A customizable drone that fits in the palms of your hands	303	9
▲	Burner 3.0	Disposable phone numbers – now with MMS photo support	271	17
▲	Telegram 3.0	Chat in private or groups – now with smart Telegram bots	220	7
▲	Sby 3.0	Hand-pick all the best videos on the internet	217	17
▲	Asana 3.0 (iOS)	The brand new Asana app for iPhone	204	25
▲	CloudApp 3.0	Your clipboard in the cloud	197	5
▲	Triggerfox 3.0	Get relevant news alerts about the people who matter most	194	4
▲	Quip 3.0	Work with people, not files. Now with spreadsheets	184	13
▲	Journal 3.0	Easily create a journal, even together with friends	128	14
▲	Picturelife 3.0	The smart home for photos	127	32
▲	Grouper 3.0	Meet awesome people with your friends	111	5
▲	Rdio 3.0	All-new version of the service focused on stations	104	10
▲	Tracks 3.0 (iOS)	Refreshingly human music playlists	89	8
▲	MozBar 3.0	The Free, Completely Redesigned SEO Toolbar by Moz	88	2
▲	Confide 3.0	Send confidential, screenshot-proof messages, docs & photos	77	9
▲	Canvas 3.0	Shoot & edit stop motion videos with music, text & paint!	74	6
▲	Secret 3.0	Share anonymously w/ friends (on Android & avail worldwide)	60	13
▲	PumpUp 3.0	The Most Inspiring Community for Healthy & Active Living	54	15
▲	AeroMobil 3.0	Newest model of the sexiest flying car	49	2
▲	Goodreads 3.0 for iOS	Dreastic redesign of popular social network for book lovers	49	7
▲	Spiral 3.0	Proximity-based community forum	26	5
▲	Box 3.0 for iOS	Get 50GB Free Storage for life when you download the app.	17	1
▲	Tapestry 3.0	Tapable stories	7	1
▲	iFunny 3.0	Create and Share Memes	5	2
▲	Any.do 3.0	Organize all aspects of your life with Any.do	208	7
▲	Parallels Access 3.0	Protect remote access to your computer from anywhere	142	2
▲	Bottles Tonight 3.0			

Product Hunt allows updates to already featured products, but warns creators that “these are rare and often not allowed”.

Read enough from creators who have struggled to make the front page and chat up enough of the active curators, and you'll realize what several curators told me—that the /upcoming feed is *not* where you want to be. You need to work your network to find an insider.

Sometimes you have to read between the lines to realize how crucial this is. *“Ask them to visit Product Hunt and search for the product ”*, from a post by a curator, is helpful advice if Product Hunt's algorithm values upvotes that come from the front page more than upvotes that come from directly visiting the product page. But this only works if the product is already promoted.

Why this matters

We expect a lot from websites where our online communities form, sometimes too much. Product Hunt is a business, not a public utility, and it's silly to treat it as though it has a duty to do anything.

It's also easy to forget my own privilege. I was made a Product Hunt commenter a while ago—which is how I can even post to /upcoming at all. The inside doesn't look so special to an insider.

Like a lot of developers, I have come to truly love Product Hunt. That's why it was so dismaying to learn how differently it works than its brand and public face suggest.

So what?

Do you trust that Product Hunt itself cares as much as you do that the most deserving products be put on the front page? If you're paying attention, you shouldn't.

What's most striking about all this is how opaque these workings are to Product Hunt users and fans. It's hard to find any mention of the ability for well-connected creators to bypass nearly all other products at will; there's an awkward caginess to how Product Hunt employees and insiders explain its workings, one that uses enthusiasm and euphemism in place of details that would be far more useful to the rest of us.

Product Hunt is built around the valuable access it provides to its most powerful stakeholders, much like industry PR venues like Variety in Hollywood. There's a place for independent products, but they appear to be the icing, not the bread and butter.

Call to action

Ryan Hoover has said that he intends to improve Product Hunt's transparency, and I applaud that. If you want to encourage Product Hunt to move in this direction, please consider this action:

Tweet that @ProductHunt should mark products placed by preexisting relationship. Bonus points for doing this with love.

A simple text tag like "Scheduled launch" or "Promoted" would clarify this. There could be a simple checkbox on the form that curators fill out.

. . .

Ben Wheeler is a software developer and teacher in Brooklyn. He's usually totally not this cranky! [Here's proof: an article about cool stuff for kids!](#)

Title photo by [Melanie Tata, CC by 2.0](#)



Bram Kanstein

4 min read

Startup

5 ways not to pitch your product.

I love how people are pitching me their product. But please, actually pitch YOUR PRODUCT!!111



Ever since I discovered Product Hunt and began to actively hunt for cool new stuff, people have been pitching me their products. After successfully launching Startup Stash and actually joining Product Hunt, this has increased significantly. That's ok, and fun, because I live for this sh*t. Discovering and trying out new products has always been a great part of my (online) life, and I love providing early feedback to makers.

But sometimes..

I get stuff like this:

*“Our mobile app is available on the Google Play Store.
The app itself is unique as it’s made to bridge the gap between demand and supply. We truly believe that it’ll change the way businesses and consumers connect — more importantly, it’ll take ‘Search’ to a whole new level.”*

Pitching anyone your product should be short and clear. The example above is one of many I get which are too vague and not telling me anything about the product! So yeah..

Here are 5 ways not to pitch your product



1. “We’re unique”

This doesn’t say anything about your product. Unique compared to who/ what? Sorry to break it to you but you’re probably *not* unique. Which is OK, if you can execute like crazy and move fast.

2. “We’re Uber/Airbnb

Wordpress for XYZ”

Nice (overused) analogy, but you’re taking away your own shine and giving it to \$Billion dollar companies, plus you’re still not saying anything about *your* product. Also, Uber is **not** an example of the sharing economy people.



3. “We’re going to change the world/search/mobile/blogging/etc.”

It’s awesome if you’re confident about your product, but this doesn’t say anything, except for maybe the vertical you’re in. Making an unsupported claim like this if you’re early-stage sounds way too cocky. Be humble and show some humility, you never know how/if the person you’re pitching can help you go forward.

4. “We’ve been working on this for 4yrs and think it is awesome”

I understand your product is your baby. But again, stuff like this doesn’t say anything about the product itself. This basically falls in the same category as saying your site crashed because of your amazing launch. While it just means you got shitty hosting :-)

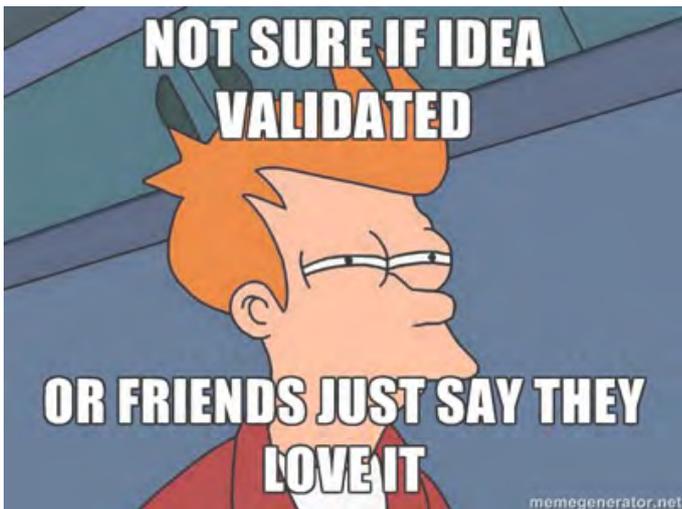
5. “Numerous people have said they like it”

God, please no, stop the madness! You’re trying to get feedback from someone you find knowledgeable (and me, lol), but this is not an argument. Especially if you’re going to change the world like you said before, there’s no substance in this statement. And shockingly, it doesn’t say anything about the product either.

Bonus

If you believe that your product is solving a real problem and you want the whole world to know about, you also need a tagline/pay-off line right? Well, don't use any of these meaningless ones please:

- “A new way to connect” → Connect who/what/where?
- “Collect, Collaborate, Share, Inspire” → With photos/music/videos/blogs/books/crafts/what?



- “Messaging just got easier” → Easier than what?/On mobile or web?/How?

(Yes, I have had these in my inbox.)

So, what should you say?

It's actually pretty simple. **Keep it**

short and concise:

- First off, show enthusiasm and make your pitch *personal!*
- Tell about the problem you're solving
- Show your solution
- Show early results if you have them
- Why are you the man/woman/team that's going to take this to the moon?
- How can **I** help **you**? Asking for specific feedback is also good. It's difficult to help when your question is simply: “what do you think?”

I didn't write this post to bitch about some of the bad stuff I'm getting in my inbox, but to encourage makers to think about how they pitch their product. It's so important and often overlooked/mistreated by tunnel vision and misplaced “arrogance”. Being humble and personal can get you a long way, I've experienced that personally. Do work!

Also

I encourage anyone to listen to [this part](#) from Alex Blumberg's "*StartUp Podcast*". Here he pitches billionaire investor Chris Sacca, screws up, Sacca turns it around and pitches Alex his own product. It's amazing.

Next to this, be sure to also watch [this video](#), where [@jason](#) lays down a few ground rules for pitching him your product. On. Point.

@brank

Thanks to Emiel Janson, Violeta, and Ali Meşe.



Brandon Chu

8 min read

Startup



The Black Box of Product Management

PMs get sad when you ask them why they exist

There is a rite of passage in the product management world, where all PMs have experienced being asked:

“What does a product manager do, anyway?”

I empathize with designers and engineers for asking this question. In their shoes, I would be just as skeptical, because a product manager’s activities are fragmented, and don’t reveal the true discipline beneath.

When I first started in product management, I didn't even know I was doing it. Instead, I was a first time founder and thought I was just "doing startup".

Later, when I interviewed for a PM job, some much more qualified people told me that I was, in fact, doing product management. I got the job. Early into that role, I was asked the infamous question above. I wasn't offended; in fact, I was just as curious as them, so I started reading (and reading) about product management. The internet said many things:

- I wasn't a project manager, and I should be offended if someone infers that
- I was supposed to own the what and the why
- I should be a visionary, the voice of the customer, Mr. get shit done, etc.

I soaked it all in. I re-read *Good Product Manager, Bad Product Manager* — my bible of product management — weekly, for the first few months.

And then I shipped, and shipped some more. And pretty soon I felt useful.

Years into that job, I started managing other product teams. Other PMs were now looking to *me* to define expectations, so that *they* could now respond to questions of why they existed. I offered a cocktail of the best posts I'd read, and examples of the experiences I'd had over the years.

I'm currently at Shopify in my third role in product, and again I find myself rethinking assumptions about what it is I truly do. Shopify is a true engineering culture, and has very few product managers relative to the size of the company. For perspective, my last company had 1:10 ratio of PMs to employees. Shopify (including directors) is closer to 1:80.

An engineer asked me "the question" the first week I was there.



One of the best things about working here has been observing an alternative approach to how products can be built and shipped effectively. Shopify engineers and designers are incredibly talented, opinionated and independent, and learning to effectively work with them has forced me to change the way I perceive my craft.

It's also forced me to figure out what shouldn't change, and in doing so, push me to abstract away the *what* in favour of the *why*. This post isn't about Shopify, nor is it about the how to be an effective product manager. **It's about why product management exists.**

Why Product Management

Product Management is the by-product of two exponential forces being exerted on a company.

1. **Speed:** The company exists in an industry where the rate of technological innovation is accelerating
2. **Scale:** Growth in the company's product, organization, and customers are creating complexity

Speed is an exponential force because with every period of time, more change is occurring than in the last. Similarly with scale; every extra feature, employee, or user is adding more complexity to the system than the last.

The reason product management as a career has been popularized in predominantly software companies, is because *software is inherently fast and scalable*.

Speed

The internet changed how software products were delivered to the market. Long gone are the days of annual releases and cardboard boxes on shelves. For the last two decades, teams have been writing code, deploying it, and giving updates to all their customers instantaneously.

Software development itself has a lowered bar of entry. Approachability of high level programming languages, and the prevalence of open source libraries has supercharged developers with unprecedented productivity. At the same time, the infrastructure costs of building a functional product and deploying it has dropped to basically zero.

This means that every large problem in the world likely has hundreds of independent teams working to solve it.

In this way, *speed* has two meanings: both how quickly you can get something to market with software development, and (critically) how competition forces companies to go faster to survive.

Scale

The reason why sub 50-person startups rarely have product managers is that the complexity is still manageable. The CEO and co-founders are still able to coordinate the company towards a focused problem and unleash the power of a scrappy startup upon it.

But as the company grows, complexity emerges as more features are added, customers become more diverse, and the team grows. And that complexity grows exponentially.

For example, how many meetings do you think a 20-person startup can have?

Company Size	1	2	3	4	... 20
Possible Meetings	(none)	(1)	(4)	(11)	(?)

The answer shows why we suck at conceptualizing the exponential.

The problem the company solves grows in complexity as well. As teams solve high level problems, they spawn hundreds of derivative problems, all begging to be solved. The catch is the company can't solve them all. Faced with hundreds of problems to solve, choosing where to focus quickly becomes the most important decision a company makes.

A Cocktail of Chaos

When you consider the simultaneous impacts of speed and scale on a company, it's easy to conceptualize how things will eventually derail without someone thinking holistically about the company. Ultimately, that role is for the CEO, but when they've reached their multi-tasking limits, who else can fill the void?

Why Product Managers

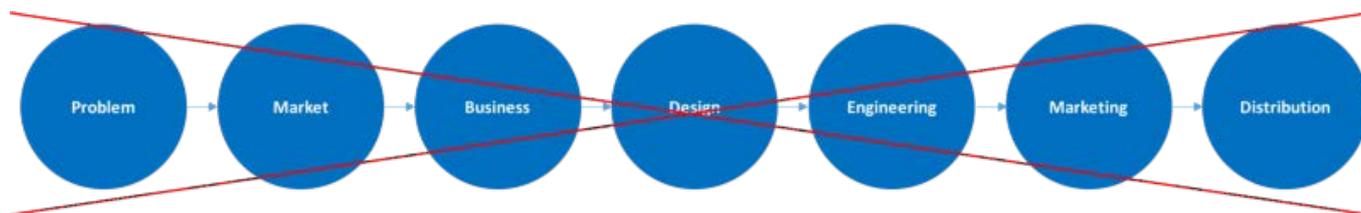
Sure, products need some oversight - got it. Why not just train everyone to be able to manage the product, why hire a specific role?

The short answer is that it's harder than you think to manage a product, and it takes years of experience to become capable. Here's the long answer:

Good product development is hard

The core competency of a product manager is truly understanding product development. That is, how to identify which problem to solve and how to work with a team to solve it.

Anyone who's been through a few launches knows that despite the textbooks, a linear product development process like the one below is a fairy tale.



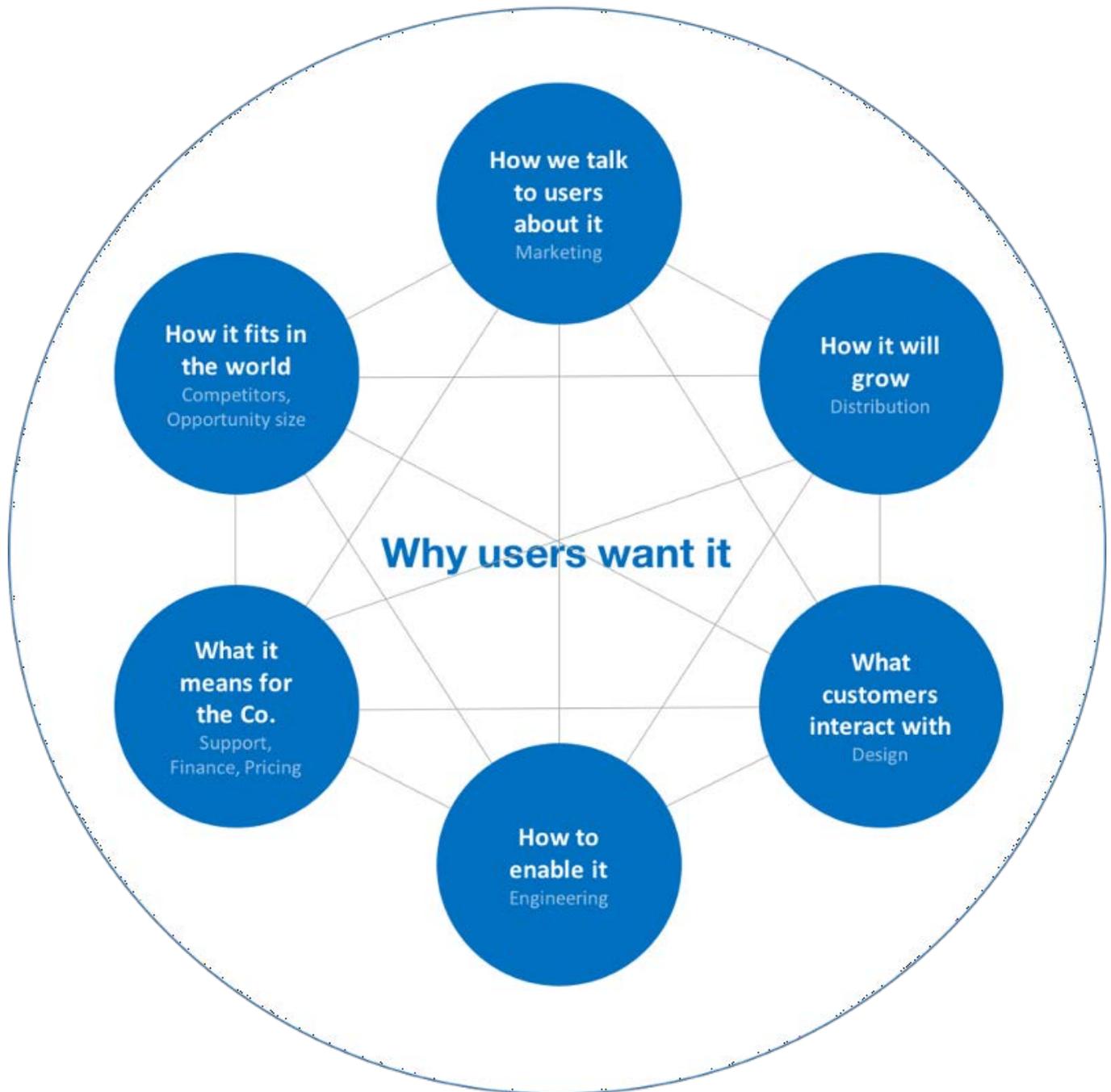
Even if you included feedback loops between the steps, the idea of neat and tidy sequential steps, where functional teams work together through a checklist is flawed. It simply does not fit into a world where technology is progressing exponentially.

The world changes too quickly for us to build on research we had even three months ago.

I view modern product development as a system of interconnected disciplines, working in a network, to deliver on a user's desire. **Product managers are the API that facilitates communication in this network.**

Product Development

A System of Interconnected Disciplines

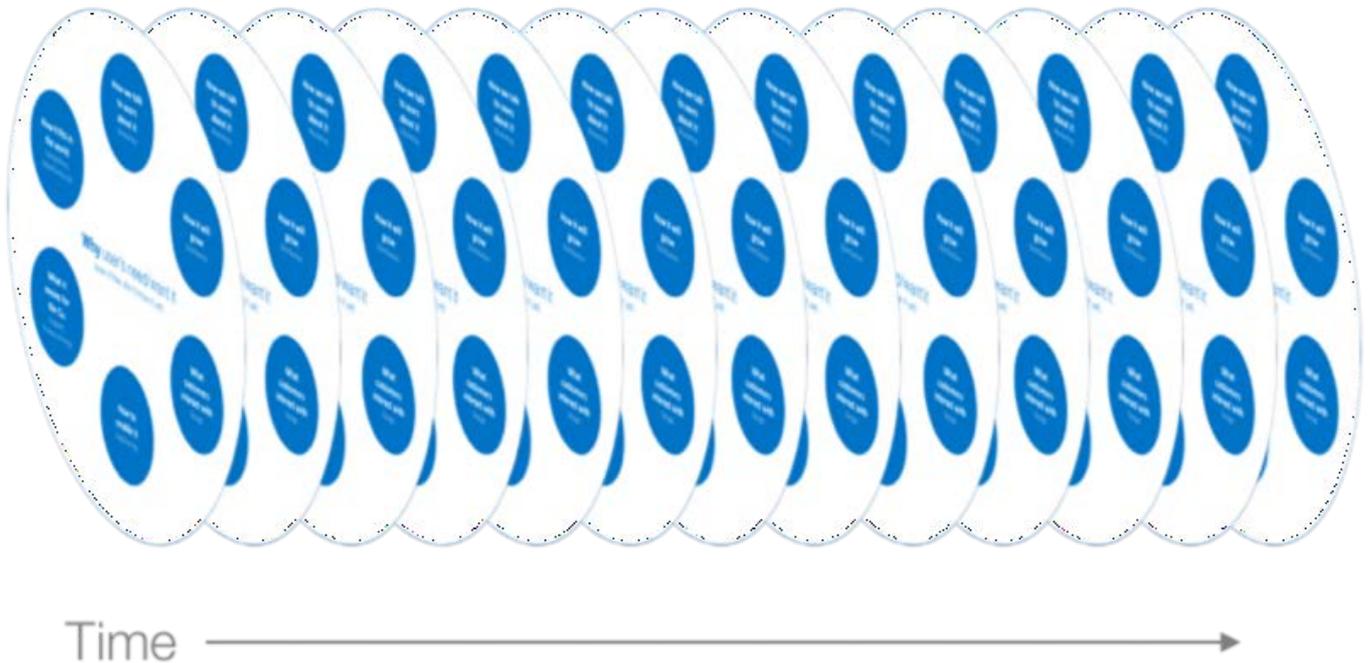


Each node represents a broad bucket of domain expertise, each with enough depth that people dedicate careers to master them. This is an important quality of product development in a company where speed and scale have reached critical mass: *there's too much to know, so only a team can effectively deliver a product.*

The **process** of product development is how this system moves through time.

The Product Development Process

Managing the PD system through time

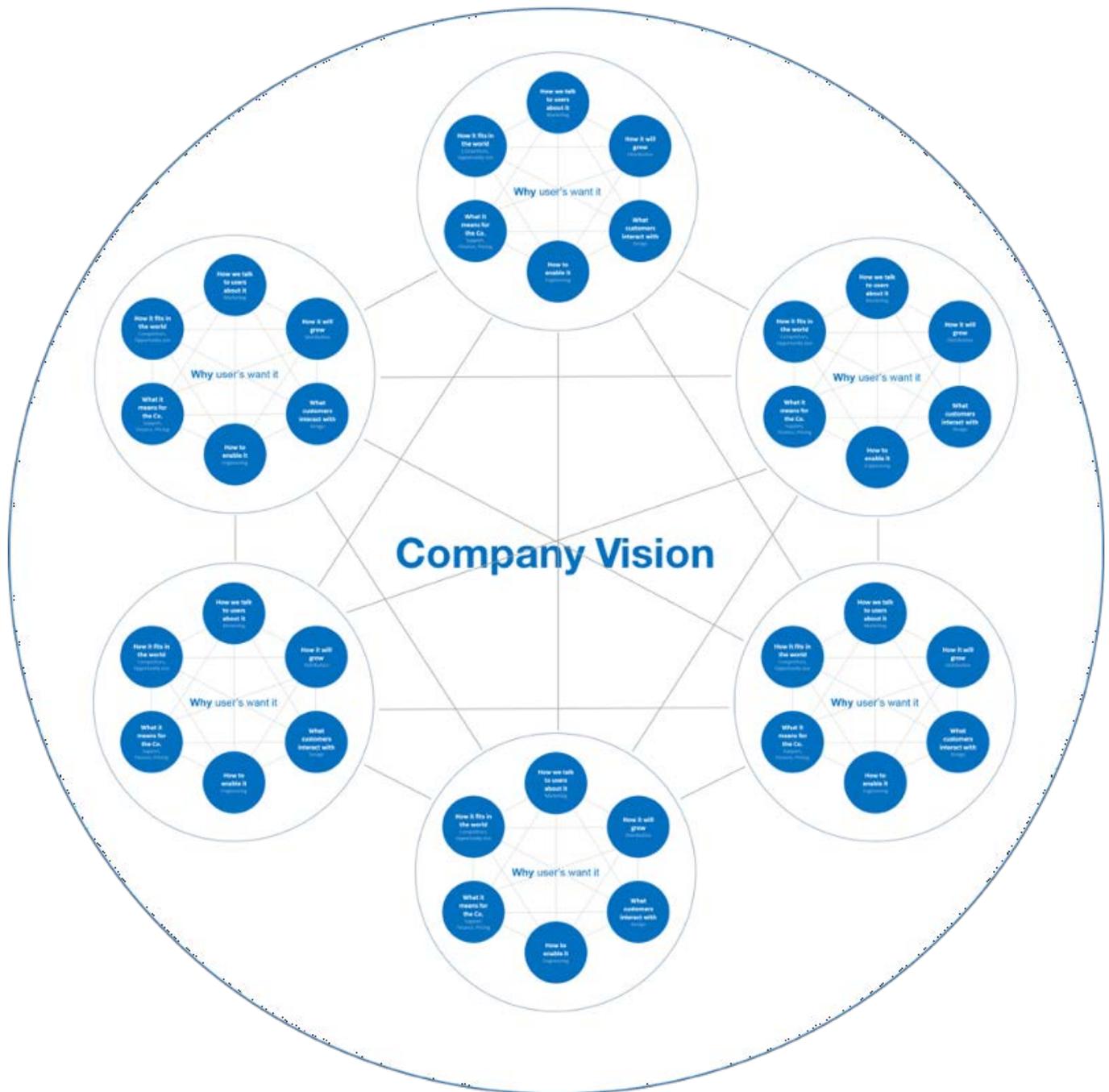


Product managers shepherd this system from problem identification through to product launch, ensuring that each node in the network is aware of the progression of the others, and that users increasingly want what is being developed.

Finally, organizational scale brings with it multiple teams. And an effective product development system coordinates and focuses those teams towards the company's vision.

Coordinating multiple teams against the vision

PMs must be aware of what other teams are doing



As the product development APIs, product managers support company wide efficiency by ensuring no duplication of effort, and sharing infrastructure to enable other teams to go faster.

Product managers are multidisciplinary

Product managers spend years to develop the skills required to be responsible for this system. It's a multidisciplinary, breadth over depth approach to learning.

In my career, I've done all of: programming, UI design, UX research, financial modelling, business development, support, copy-writing, accounting, legal, contract negotiation, reporting, marketing, blog posts, FAQs, and product copy.

I've been an expert in none, and achieved borderline competence in some. I knew *just enough* of each to be useful as an API, but never enough to be dangerous (in a good way). That's the quintessential quality of a product manager's skill set, one that makes it hard for builder types to grok exactly what value they bring.

PMs know just enough of each discipline to be responsible for the entire product development system.

A product manager's multidisciplinary awareness enables them to communicate in whatever language is necessary to effectively deliver information across the team.

They're also in the best position to assess the impact of change across the system. A recent conversation I had with [Shopify's CEO](#), expressed this pretty succinctly to me.

"Great product people understand how a change in the way the world works will impact the log files. And they can perceive that impact in real time."

— Tobi Lütke [paraphrased]

Exactly right.

In a world where speed is king and the world is changing exponentially, having time to develop consensus before action is often a luxury. Teams need critical decisions made on a daily basis in order to maintain speed, and those decisions have major trade offs and/or conflicting interests among stakeholders.

Driving those decisions is no one else's job but the product manager's.

Why the Black Box Will Persist

Whereas the work of engineers and designers are easier quantified, because it's difficult to observe a PMs impact over the short run, the ambiguity around Product Management will remain for some time.

One day, there may be graduate degrees and definite career paths to product management, but not today. Until then, companies will continue to scale, the world will continue to get faster, and sooner or later *"we need someone to manage this"* will get proposed.

If you're a PM, don't get butt-hurt the next time someone challenges your existence. Embrace ambiguity (you're a PM, after all) and have confidence in your purpose.

. . .

Binge reading Product Management?

Here's a few other posts to satisfy your hunger

[Product Partnerships: The Making of a Partnership](#)

Focusing on why and how product partnerships form, part 1 of 2

[7 Heuristics for being a Product Director](#)

Lessons learned as a Product Director at FreshBooks

Thanks to Christine Jinaa Lee.



Dakota Shane Nunley

8 min read

Startup

200+ Podcasts, 100+ Articles, 20+ Books... In 11 Bullet Points



Image Credit to: <http://andrewkurjata.ca/>

For the past 8 months, I have spent my time doing what I've wanted to do for years: listening to podcasts, reading books, and reading articles.

In total, I listened to 207 podcasts, read 22 books, and read 113 articles. All on the topics of business, marketing, and self-help.

I wish I could say this was some sort of “divine pilgrimage” I set out on. Truth is, I recently graduated college and am now starting my career. I wanted to learn as much as possible about business in order to equip myself for the workplace and beyond. So I did—and still do.

I'm not bragging about it. That's not what this article is about. During the journey,

I began to notice a number of common themes frequently rising up. Those trends were, for the most part, habits that had made successful people successful, along with lessons they decided to pass down to lucky people like us.

Gary Vaynerchuk, Seth Godin, Tim Ferriss, Lewis Howes, Mike Dillard, Arianna Huffington, Mark Cuban, John C. Maxwell, Napoleon Hill, Nir Eyal, Neil Patel, Anthony Frisella, and others.

These people have become my *Aristotle*; my *Shakespeare*. Unfortunately, and fortunately, no SparkNotes exist for this literature.

I cannot take credit for any of the knowledge that I'm about to share with you. If it means anything, I suppose I can take credit for the effort. Maybe even the love.

Here they are:

1.) You will struggle.

All of the successful people I've studied have said this in one form or another. It is practically inevitable.

In the past 8 months, I've heard countless stories of sleeping on friend's couches, not being able to afford rent, living in a crowded apartment, having \$60 in a bank account, and more.

The fact is, in order to make something you must give something up.

Occasionally, a life of fulfillment may come at the expense of a life of comfort.

How bad do you truly want to achieve your goals? If you had to, how much comfort would you willing to give up to achieve those goals?

2.) You will fail.



Image Credit to: morethansound.net

Failure is practically inevitable, no matter who you are or what you do. The key is to start viewing failure as educational as opposed to purely detrimental.

Mark Cuban has a terrific way of looking at failure:

“No one counts your failures. Only your victories. The cool thing is that you only need one victory.” -Mark Cuban

There you have it. Don't be frightened of failure. Welcome it—of course don't encourage it, but you know what I mean—and learn from it. Maturation is pivotal on the journey to achieve your “best self”.

3.) Networking is everything.

“Your network is your net worth.” -Porter Gale

If you don't know about Lewis Howes, please take a moment to read about him. You can follow this link to do so: <http://lewishowes.com/blog/>

If you don't feel like doing that, I can summarize it here: constantly network—or

try to—with people “higher up the totem pole” in the industry you are pursuing.

Go to as many networking events as possible (I suggest using Meetup.com for this), reach out to one or two industry leaders per week by email or LinkedIn, and hang out at bars/cafes where these people might go to.

Above all, you must be relentless and you must be shameless. Period. Don't be afraid to talk to anybody.

4.) No one else cares.

Humans are selfish. In order for people give a shit, you have to give them a reason to give two shits. And even after they give two shits, they will continue to talk shit.

Join the crowd, and live for yourself. What brings you happiness? What brings you the most excitement? After you've found that, then find a way to monetize it.

5.) Have a morning ritual.



Image Credit to: phxpublishingandbookpromotion.wordpress.com

Listen to a podcast—whether it’s Tim Ferriss, Lewis Howes, Mike Dillard, or another—you will observe a common question emerging in the interviews: “What is your morning ritual?”

Not “*Do you have* a morning ritual?”

Not “*if you had a morning ritual, what would it be?*”

I see a pattern arising...

Every successful person I have studied has a morning ritual. This could be a meditation, writing in a journal, working out, or anything else.

The purpose behind a morning ritual is to provide yourself with “Me Time”. During *normal* hours of the day, it can be difficult to control where your time and energy is expended. You may get pulled into a meeting that isn’t worth your time. You might need to attend that networking event an hour’s drive away. You may get chewed out by your boss. The list is endless.

Your mornings are something you can control.

No one can tell you what to do. No one can take away your valuable time. No one steer you away from your goals.

Why, you ask?

Because they’re asleep!

In addition, **your morning ritual should be absolutely non-negotiable**. Even to your loved ones, including significant others. Morning sex can wait until night time.

6.) Consistency is everything.

Gary Vaynerchuk had a YouTube series called Wine Library TV back in 2007*. Gary made daily videos for Wine Library TV.

For a year and a half straight, the videos would receive anywhere from 300 to 500 views*.

That's a long long long time to do daily videos. He weathered through the slow times of the channel by being consistent. Eventually, the web series landed him a spot on the Conan O'Brien show, the Ellen show, and the Today Show.

The next time you find yourself ready to give up on your blog or your business or another venture, think of Gary. Think of consistency.

7.) Exercise.

For the most part, people who care about their body care about themselves. Exercise seems to be a trend among entrepreneurs now more than ever. Regular exercise can make you live longer, make you feel "better" about yourself, and exponentially increase your productivity. Try it for yourself, if you don't already. It's important to note that exercise doesn't have to mean daily gym sessions. Find any physical activity that you actually enjoy doing, then do it often.

8.) Never stop learning.

Do what I did. Start reading as many books as you can. If you don't have time or the resources to do this, then listen to free podcasts on your commute to work or school.

"But Dakota, I can't listen to podcasts because I have an Android phone." Well, there's a wonderful resource called Stitcher for that, which is the app that I use. So don't bring those weak ass excuses over here or I'll Dikembe Mutombo that BS...

Mike Dillard makes \$600k+ per online course he creates. He is one of the top online marketers in the business. Even after all of his success, he still spends \$100,000 per year on his education: conferences, online courses, networking events, books, and more.

Learn, learn, learn.

9.) Find a mentor.



Gif Credit to: giphy.com

This one can be tough. With the proper drive, perseverance, and mindset, however, it can be done. Finding a mentor can tie into the point on networking. By reaching out to 1 or 2 leaders in your industry per week, you are increasing your chances of getting a mentor. Use LinkedIn to message them. Dig up their email. Send them insightful questions that shows you have done your homework.

Finding a mentor can tie into the point on networking. By reaching out to 1 or 2 leaders in your industry per week, you are increasing your chances of getting a mentor. Use LinkedIn to message them. Dig up their email. Send them insightful questions that shows you have done your homework.

Your personal experience with a mentor might not be the Obi- Wan/Anakin relationship that you've always dreamed of. It might take the form of listening to someone's podcast, reading their blog, tweeting them questions, etc. And that's completely okay. Not everyone can be as lucky as Anakin.

In addition, you can refer to resources such as Everwise.com to find a mentor. Think of Everwise as the "OKCupid" of mentor-mentee relationships.

10.) Before all else, provide value to others.

This point struck me as the most helpful and least intuitive. When I first heard it though,

it made complete sense.

Your value is equal to the amount of value you provide to others.

You are what others think you are. Your product or service is, and the price tag along with it, directly correlated with how valuable others think that product or service is.

To achieve greater financial success, provide greater value to others. The money will come along with it.

Such a simple principle, yet so powerful.

11.) If you chase money, money won't come.

The fastest road to money is passion, and genuine love for what you do.

Doing something simply for the money will, more than likely, not give you enough fuel to weather through the many challenges you'll face along the way.

Becoming successful is tough. You'll have terrific days and you'll have terrible days. Will the thirst for money be enough to push you to persevere even on the worst days?

Follow your passion. Become superb at it. Provide value to others along the way, and then the money will follow closely behind.

We are fortunate enough to live in an era of accessibility. Knowledge formerly confined to those wealthy enough to afford it is now available to anyone with an internet connection.

If you take anything away from this article, let it be this: learn, learn, learn.

Meticulously study the leaders in the industry you choose to pursue. Study them like a young Kobe would study Magic Johnson; like a young Lebron would study Kobe Bryant. Learn from them as if they were your own mentor.

By studying the leaders in your industry, not only are you equipping yourself with invaluable knowledge, you're also *letting them make mistakes so you don't have to.*



David Ams

3 min read

Startup



Stop building features, start building brands

Most of the entrepreneurs I meet are building a product, either with their team or co-founders (which I highly recommend) or with a development agency (ugh! See what I think about that [here](#)). They tell me about their project (when they're not afraid of sharing it) with excitement and explain me why their product is going to be the next big thing in their industry. Everything goes smoothly until I ask them a very simple questions:

“Do you have a social presence?”*

As you can expect, the answer I receive is: they don't, most of them are waiting for their product to be "ready" to start putting out content.

I really don't want this question to be a challenging one, but it's literally the first thing that I want to ask when people are telling me about their new projects. The answer to that question gives a lot of details about the level of connection they have with their target audience as well as the things they can potentially leverage in the future.

- Do they deeply know what their audience wants or are they just making assumptions?
- Are they already bringing value to some people who will be happy to do something for them in return? A leverage.
- How did they identify the need for their product?
- Do they have a community of early adopters to collect feedback from?
- Do they have a competitive advantage?

Start building brand equity first.

The main reason why this question is important is because it's too hard to have visibility for a product without having a brand or at least an established social presence. We live in a very very (very) noisy social world where attention is so hard to get. If you don't do the work, chances are high for your product to be invisible at the launch and for you to completely miss your potential.

It has also become way too expensive to target an audience that has no attachment to your brand or to you. There is no way you can ask them to be loyal or to help your product to become a success. **You did nothing for them so far.**

Become an expert in your field, consistently ship quality content, and most importantly care about your audience. Bring them real actual value.

You are bringing the most value when you have nothing to sell or promote. That is why several months (or years) before launching a product is the best timing. Your content will be %100 authentic. It will have the right approach, and people will feel involved and will be happy to be part of your adventure. If you represent something they like, they will want to be in the movement. If you bring them enough value, they will be thankful and you'll be able to count on them in the future.

Your product will never be good enough, go out there and tell your story.

Instead of focusing on that missing feature that will make your product “ready”, focus on how to create a brand people will love, and how to create real relationships with your target audience.

Your product will never be good enough. Instead of waiting for one more week for this bug to be fixed or a few more months for the V2 to be launched, go out there and build yourself or your company a strong brand people will want to be attached to.

I know we all want our growth to be exponential, and yes, building real relationships is not scalable. But by caring about your audience and by bringing them unique value, you will build the foundation of your business success. This crucial step might offer you the privilege to have other things to scale in the future.

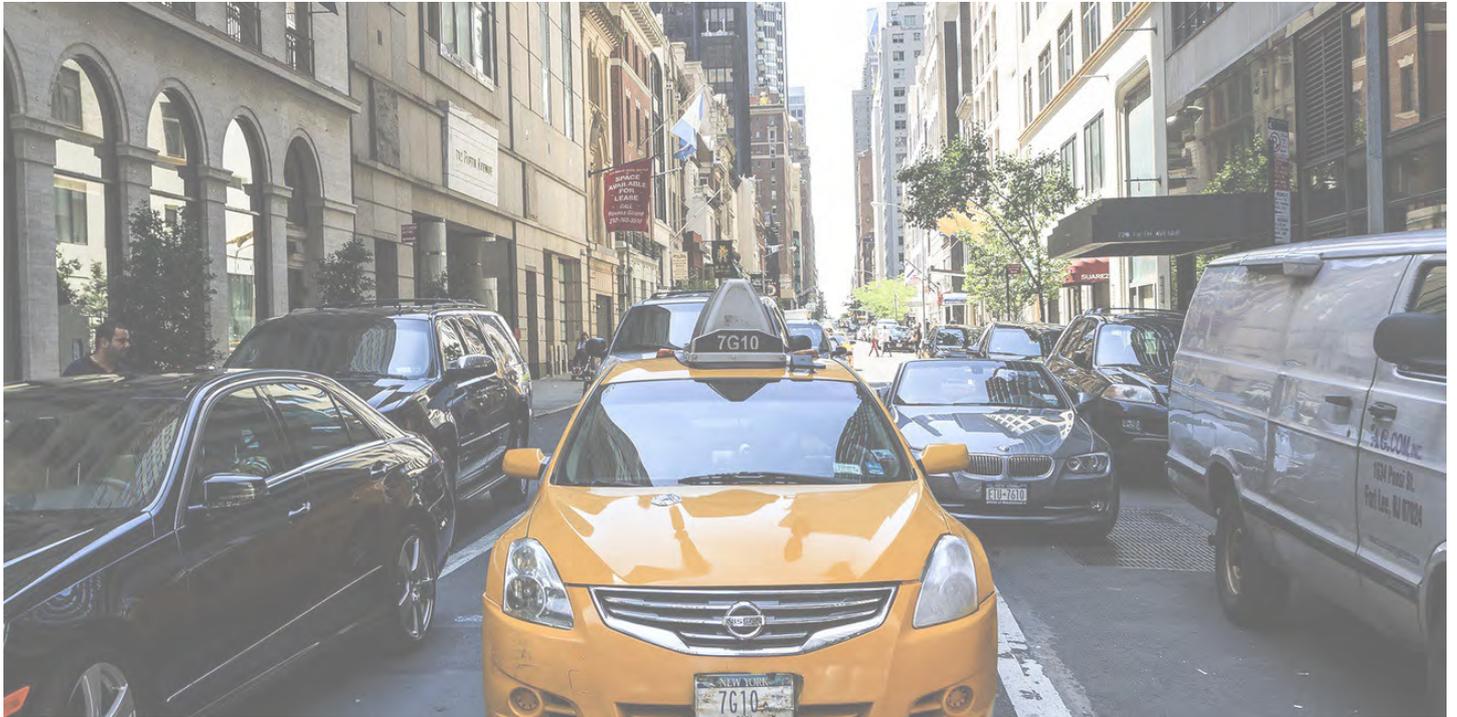
Obviously, by “social presence**”, I mean more than just a Twitter account, or a Facebook page where the only things being posted are “Big thanks to TechBrunch for talking about us” .*



David Ams

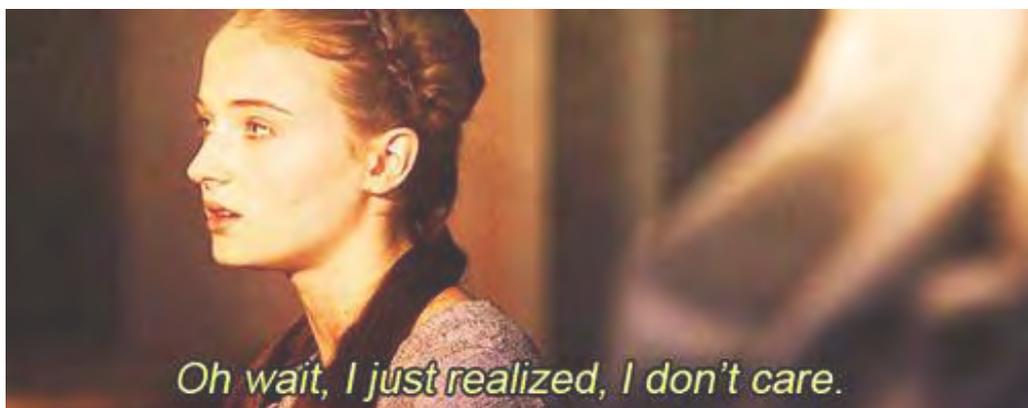
3 min read

Startup



Why nobody will steal your shitty start-up idea.

1- Because nobody cares.



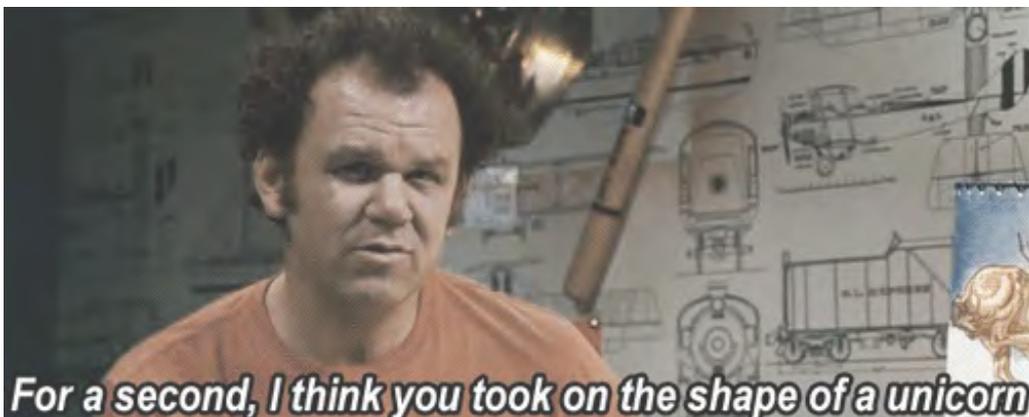
2- Because an idea is 1% and execution is 99%.



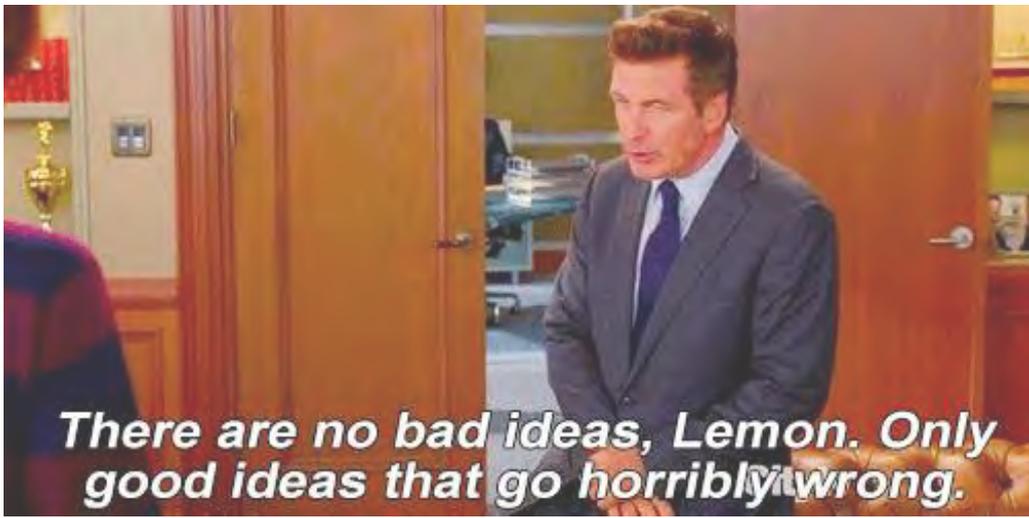
3- Because the same idea executed by different people will lead to totally different products/businesses.



4- Because there are no revolutionary ideas anymore.



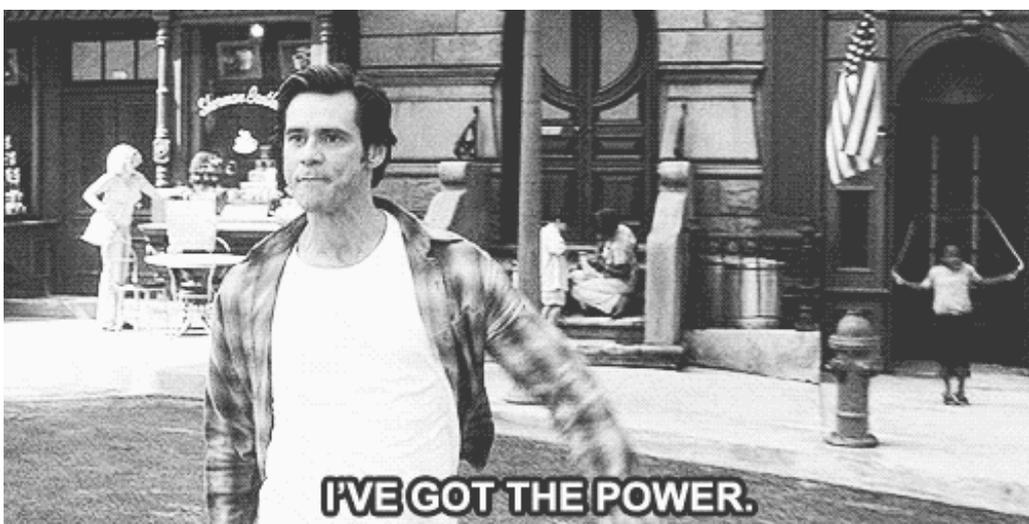
5- Because the most successful businesses are basic ideas perfectly executed.



6- Because if you think Uber and Airbnb were first of their kind, you're wrong. Thousands have failed with the exact same idea.



7- Because you need to focus on what really matters and work without restrictions.



8- Because you don't have the answers, your market does. Talk out loud, go out there, become an expert, speak, network, and collect feedback.



9- Because you don't want to tune yourself to this level of thinking, and have better things to focus on.



10- Because people you'll interact with will never sign your shitty NDA to know more about your idea they don't give a sh*t about in the first place.



. . .

Now, you just need to get started, hope this article helped you clean your mind from this distraction.

. . .

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David Byttow

2 min read

Startup



Sunset

After a lot of thought and consultation with our board, I've decided to shut down Secret.

This has been the hardest decision of my life and one that saddens me deeply. Unfortunately, Secret does not represent the vision I had when starting the company, so I believe it's the right decision for myself, our investors and our team.

I'm extremely proud of our team, which has built a product that was used by over 15 million people and pushed the boundaries of traditional social media. I believe in honest, open communication and creative expression, and anonymity is a great device to achieve it. But it's also the ultimate double-edged sword, which must be wielded with great respect and care. I look forward to seeing what others in this space do over time.

I will spend the next couple of weeks doing what I believe is right to wind down Secret gracefully. While a majority of the team has already moved on to other

exciting opportunities, I will dedicate most of my time to helping the core team find their next roles. We curated one of the most amazingly talented teams I've ever had the privilege of working with and I am certain each of them will go on to do great work at the very lucky companies that are able to hire them.

Secret, Inc. still has a significant amount of invested capital, but our investors funded the team and the product, and I believe the right thing to do is to return the money rather than attempt to pivot. Innovation requires failure, and I believe in failing fast in order to go on and make only new and different mistakes.

Over time, I plan to publish postmortems so that others can learn from the unique mistakes and challenges we faced and the wisdom gained from such an incredible 16 months.

Thank you to everyone who supported us over the past year. What an incredible journey.

David Byttow

PS. If you're looking to recruit or get in touch with our existing team, please email me directly at d@secret.ly



DHH

12 min read



#WEBSUMMIT2015

RECONSIDER

About 12 years ago, I co-founded a startup called Basecamp: A simple project collaboration tool that helps people make progress together, sold on a monthly subscription.

It took a part of some people's work life and made it a little better. A little nicer than trying to manage a project over email or by stringing together a bunch of separate chat, file sharing, and task systems. Along the way it made for a comfortable business to own for my partner and me, and a great place to work for our employees.

That's it.

It didn't disrupt anything. It didn't add any new members to the three-comma club. It was never a unicorn. Even worse: There are still, after all these years, less than fifty people working at Basecamp. We don't even have a San Francisco satellite office!

I know what you're thinking, right? BOOOORING. Why am I even listening to this guy? Isn't this supposed to be a conference for the winners of game startup? Like people who've either already taken hundreds of million in venture capital or at least are aspiring to? Who the hell in their right mind would waste more than a decade toiling away at a company that doesn't even have a pretense of an ambition for *Eating The World*™.

Well, the reason I'm here is to remind you that maybe, just maybe, you too have a nagging, gagging sense that the current atmosphere of *disrupt-o-mania* isn't the only air a startup can breathe. That perhaps this zeal for disruption is not only crowding out other motives for doing a startup, but also can be downright poisonous for everyone here and the rest of the world.

MAKE A
DENT
IN THE ↴
Universe!



Part of the problem seems to be that nobody these days is content to merely put their dent in the universe. No, they have to fucking **own** the universe. It's not enough to be in the market, they have to **dominate** it. It's not enough to serve customers, they have to **capture** them.

In fact, it's hard to carry on a conversation with most startup people these days without getting inundated with odes to network effects and the valiance of deferring "monetization" until you find something everyone in the whole damn world wants to fixate their eyeballs on.

In this atmosphere, the term startup has been narrowed to describe the pursuit of total business domination. It's turned into an obsession with unicorns and the properties of their "success". A whole generation of people working with and for the internet enthralled by the prospect of being transformed into a mythical creature.

But who can blame them? This set of fairytale ideals are being reinforced at every turn.

Let's start at the bottom: People who make lots of little bets on many potential unicorns have christened themselves angels. Angels? Really? You've plucked your self-serving moniker from the parables of a religion that specifically and explicitly had its head honcho throw the money men out of the temple and proclaim a rich man less likely to make it into heaven than a camel through a needle's eye. Okay then!

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" — Matthew 19:23–26

And that's just the first step of the pipeline. If you're capable of stringing enough buzzwords about disruption and sufficient admiration for its holy verses, like software eating the world, and an appropriate yearning for the San Franciscan Mecca, you too can get to advance in this multi-level investment scheme.

Angels are merely the entry level in the holy trinity of startup money. Proceed along the illuminated path and you'll quickly be granted an audience with the wise venture capitalists. And finally, if your hockey stick is strong, you'll get to audition in front of the investment bankers who will weigh your ability to look shiny just long enough until the lock-up period on insiders selling shares is up.



And guess what these people call that final affirmation: A LIQUIDITY EVENT. The baptizing required to enter financial heaven. Subtle, isn't it? Oh, and then, once you've Made It™, you get to be reborn an angel and the circle of divinity is complete. Hale-fucking-lujah!

You might think, dude, what do I care? I AM SPECIAL. I'm going to beat all the odds of the unicorn sausage factory and come out with my special horn. And who gives a shit about the evangelical vocabulary of financiers anyway? As long as they show me the money, I'll call them Big Dollar Daddy if they want to. No skin off my back!

So first you take a lot of money from angels desperate to not miss out on the next big unicorn. Then you take an obscene amount of money from VCs to inflate your top-line growth, to entice the investment bankers that you might be worthy of foisting upon the public markets, eventually, or a suitable tech behemoth.



And every step along this scripted way will you accumulate more bosses. More people with “guidance” for you, about how you can juice the numbers long enough to make it someone else’s problem to keep the air castle in the sky inflated and rising. But of course it isn’t just guidance, once you take the money. It’s a debt owed, with all the nagging reciprocity that comes with it.

Now, if you truly want to become the next fifty-billion dollar Uber in another five years, I guess this game somehow makes sense in its own twisted logic. But it’s more than worth a few moments of your time to reconsider whether that’s really what you want. Or, even more accurately, whether an incredibly unlikely shot at *that* is what you want.

Don’t just accept this definition of “success” because that’s what everyone is cheering for at the moment. Yes, the chorus is loud, and that’s seductively alluring, but you don’t have to peel much lacquer off the surface to see that wood beneath might not be as strong as you’d imagine.

Let’s take a step back and examine how narrow this notion of success is.

First, ponder the question: Why are you here?

“Get Your Ticket To Join The World’s Largest Companies and Most Exciting Startups: It’s not just startups that come to Web Summit. Senior executives from the world’s leading companies will be joining to find out what the future holds and to meet the startups that are changing their industries.” – Web Summit invitation.

That’s one reason: You think you’d like to be mentioned in that headline: The World’s Largest Companies and Most Exciting Startups. In other words, you too would really like to try that unicorn horn out for size. And white, white, is totally your color. It’s meant to be.

Well, to then answer the question, “why are you here?”, you might as well make it literal. Why are you HERE. Dublin, Ireland, The European Union? Don’t you know that surely the fastest and probably the only way to join the uniclub is to rent a mattress in the shifty part of San Francisco where the rent is only \$4,000/month?

Because while that area north of Silicon Valley is busy disrupting everything, it still hasn’t caught up with the basic disruption of geography. So if your angel or VC can’t drop by your overpriced office for a jam session, well, then you’re no good at all, are you?

The real question is why do you startup? I don’t actually believe that most people are solely motivated by fawning over the latest hockey stick phenomenon. Bedazzled, probably, but not solely motivated. I invite you to dig deeper and explore those motivations. As inspiration, here were some of mine when I got involved with Basecamp:

I wanted to work for myself. Walk to my own beat. Chart my own path. Call it like I saw it, and not worry about what dudes in suits thought of that. All the cliches of independence that sound so quaint until you have a board meeting questioning why you aren’t raising more, burning faster, and growing at supersonic speeds yesterday?!

Independence isn't missed until it's gone. And when it's gone, in the sense of having money masters dictate YOUR INCREDIBLE JOURNEY, it's gone in the vast majority of cases. Once the train is going choo-choo there's no stopping, no getting off, until you either crash into the mountain side or reach the IPO station at lake liquidity.

I wanted to make a product and sell it directly to people who'd care about its quality. There's an incredible connection possible when you align your financial motivations with the service of your users. It's an entirely different category of work than if you're simply trying to capture eyeballs and sell their attention, privacy, and dignity in bulk to the highest bidder.

I'm going to pull out another trite saying here: It feels like honest work. Simple, honest work. I make a good product, you pay me good money for it. We don't even need big words like monetization strategy to describe that transaction because it is so plain and simple even my three year-old son can understand it.

I wanted to put down roots. Long term bonds with coworkers and customers and the product. Impossible to steer and guide with a VC timebomb ticking that can only be defused by a 10–100x return. The most satisfying working relationships I've enjoyed in my close to two decades work in the internet business have been those that lasted the longest.

We have customers of [Basecamp](#) that have been paying us for more than 11 years! I've worked with Jason Fried for 14, and a growing group of [Basecamp](#) employees for close to a decade.

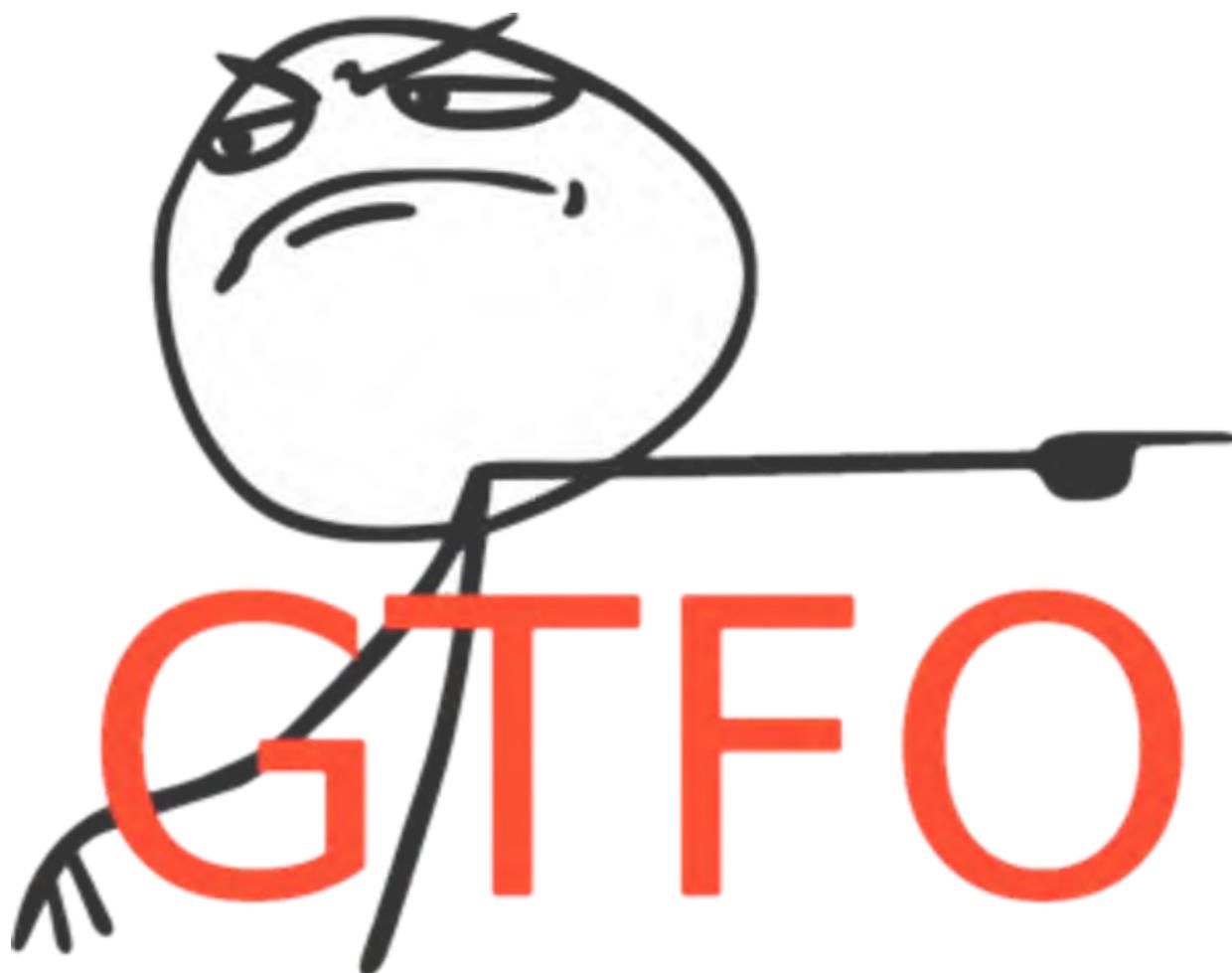
I keep seeing obituaries of this kind of longevity: The modern work place owes you nothing! All relationships are just fleeting and temporary. There's prestige in jumping around as much as possible. And I think, really? I don't recognize that, I don't accept that, there's no natural law making this inevitable.

I wanted the best odds I could possibly get at attaining the tipping point of financial stability. In the abstract, economic sense, a 30% chance of making \$3M is as good as a 3% chance of making \$30M is as good as a 0.3% chance at making \$300M. But in the concrete sense, you generally have to make your pick: Which coupon is the one for you?

The strategies employed to pursue the 30% for \$3M are often in direct opposition to the strategies needed for a 0.3% shot at making \$300M. Shooting for the stars and landing on the moon is not how Monday morning turns out.

I wanted a life beyond work. Hobbies, family, and intellectual stimulation and pursuits beyond Hacker News, what the next-next-next JavaScript framework looks like, and how we can optimize our signup funnel.

I wanted to embrace the constraints of a roughly 40-hour work week and feel good about it once it was over. Not constantly thinking I owed someone more of my precious twenties and thirties. I only get those decades once, shit if I'm going to sell them to someone for a bigger buck a later day.



These motives, for me, meant rejecting the definition of success proposed by the San Franciscan economic model of Get Big or GTFO. For us, at [Basecamp](#), it meant starting up [Basecamp](#) as a side business.

Patiently waiting over a year until it could pay our modest salaries before going full time on the venture. It meant slowly growing an audience, rather than attempting to buy it, in order to have someone to sell to.

By prevailing startup mythology, that meant we probably weren't even ever really a startup! There were no plans for world domination, complete capture of market and customers. Certainly, there were none of the traditional milestones to celebrate. No series A funding. No IPO plans. No acquisitions.

Our definition of winning didn't even include establishing that hallowed sanctity of the natural monopoly! We didn't win by eradicating the competition. By sabotaging their rides, poaching their employees, or spending the most money in the shortest amount of time... We prospered in an AND world, not an OR world. We could succeed AND others could succeed.

All this may sound soft, like we have a lack of aspiration. I like to call it modest. Realistic. Achievable. It's a designed experience and a deliberate pursuit that recognizes the extremely diminishing returns of life, love, and meaning beyond a certain level of financial success. In fact, not only diminishing, but negative returns for a lot of people.

I've talked to more than my fair share of entrepreneurs who won according to the traditional measures of success in the standard startup rule book. And the more we talked, the more we all realized that the trappings of a blow-out success weren't nearly as high up the Maslovian pyramid of priorities as these other, more ephemeral, harder-to-quantify motivational gauges.



I guess one way of putting what I'm trying to say is this: There's a vast conspiracy in the world of startups! (Yes, get your tinfoil hats out because Kansas is about to go bye-bye). People act in their own best interest! Especially those whose primary contribution is the capital they put forth. They will rationalize that pursuit as "the good of the community" without a shred of irony or introspection. Not even the most cartoonish, evil tycoon will think of themselves as anything but "doing what's best".

And every now and again, this self-interest shows itself in surprisingly revealing ways. Like when you hear angels brag about how YOU CANNOT KNOW WHICH BUSINESS IS GOING TO BE THE NEXT UNICORN. Thus, the rational play is to play as much as you possibly can. I find that a stunning acceptance of their own limited input in the process. Hey, shit, I don't know which mud is going to stick to the wall, so please, for the sake of my six-pack of Rolexes, keep throwing!!

This whole conference is utterly unrepresentative when it comes to the business world at large! That's why the mindfuck is so complete. You have a tiny minority of capital providers, their hang-arounds, and the client companies all vested in perpetuating a myth that you need them! That going into the cold, unknown world of business without their money in your mattress is a fool's errand.

Don't listen! They've convinced the world that San Francisco is its primary hope for progress and that while you should emulate it where you can, that emulation is going to be a shallow one. Best you send your hungry and your not-so-poor to our shores so we can give them a real shot at glory and world domination.

They've trained the media like obedient puppies to celebrate their process and worship their vocabulary. Oh, Series A! Cap tables! Vesting cliffs!

But in the end, they're money lenders.

Morality pitted against the compound leverage of capital is often outmatched. Greed is a powerful motivator in itself but it gets accelerated when you're serving that of others. Privacy for sale? No problem! Treating contractors like a repugnant automatron class of secondary citizens to which the company needs not show allegiance? PAR FOR COURSE.

Disrupt-o-mania fits the goals of this cabal perfectly. It's a license to kill. Run fast and break societies.

Not all evil, naturally, but sucking a completely disproportionate amount of attention and light from the startup universe.

The distortion is exacerbated by the fact that people building profitable companies outside the sphere of the VC dominion have little systemic need to tell their story. VCs, on the other hand, need the continuous PR campaign to meet their recruiting goals. They can't just bag a single win and be content henceforth.

The presentation of unicorns is as real as the face of a model on a magazine cover. Retouched to the nth degree, ever so carefully arranged, labored over for hours.

The web is the greatest entrepreneurial platform ever invented. Lowest barriers of entry, greatest human reach ever. I love the web. Permission-less, grand reach, diversity of implementation. Don't believe this imaginary wall of access of money. It isn't there.

Examine and interrogate your motivations, reject the money if you dare, and startup something useful. A dent in the universe is plenty.

Curb your ambition.

Live happily ever after.

. . .

See what we're up to at [Basecamp](#) after twelve years with the [brand-new version 3](#) we just launched. Also, if you enjoyed [RECONSIDER](#), you'll probably like my books [REWORK](#) and [REMOTE](#) as well.



Gary Vaynerchuk

3 min read



Why You Shouldn't Take VC Money

Let's start this article with one fact: I do think venture capital has value. I think angel investor dollars have value. When it comes to startups that are cash intensive businesses, they can do a lot. But as someone who has now looked at thousands, if not tens of thousands of deals in his career, it's very clear to me that it is becoming the default for young entrepreneurs.

This belief and behavior that is so prevalent now creates a false sense of insurance and comfort. The problem is that that cushion starts to get crunched when the next round of funding becomes less easy to raise which is something we're starting to see happen more and more with today's young companies. A founder today starts a business and then acts as an operator for the next fundraising moment, instead of focusing on doing whatever's needed to actually building that business up.

And the thing is this: twenty-five to fifty percent of all the businesses I have ever looked at were more than capable of being a little scrappier. A little less cash. A less nice office. They all could have built an amazing business with less money. It pays to be scrappy in the early days. Work to build something real. Ditch the company happy hours and use that money to create an amazing product. If you have that amazing product, you don't *need* the VC.

This has all changed *how* I think about investing, but also in *what* I choose to invest in. I'm far more interested now in only seeing a concrete product when I meet with potential investments. I'll be the first one to tell you that ideas are shit, and execution is everything. If I can see that you made it already and that it is working, I'm far more interested in helping you take it to the next level.

Do the work.

The first few years of a startup aren't supposed to be cushy. Those are the years that you grind. If you're getting into entrepreneurship because you want a lavish lifestyle, you're in it for the wrong reasons.

You have to be okay with being scrappy.

My agency VaynerMedia was started in the conference room of another company's offices that we were squatting in. There were six of us. I was already a little wealthy, but because Vayner was a new business, I didn't feel that I should be putting massive amounts of dollars into it until I knew we really were ready and needed it.

It was another two years before we got our own permanent space that we paid an official rent to. We were hacking. We were hustling. I was bartering my time to other companies, speaking for free, so we could use their spaces.

And guess what? We're *still* scrappy. There are startups that haven't made a penny that have nicer offices than VaynerMedia. Think about that.

I don't want this to be an article about some old guy investor (me) saying "Hey you kids, you better watch out!" and all that annoying "back in my day" stuff. This is more about me asking you to take a step back and really consider if you want the investor's money. Because consider this: do you *really* need the money? Can you start out scrappy, just focusing on becoming an amazing businessperson?

Because the alternative is that you might just end up becoming a financial engineer.



Gustavo Tanaka

6 min read

Startup



There is something extraordinary happening in the world

Most of us haven't quite realized there is something extraordinary happening.

A few months ago I freed myself from standard-procedure society, I broke the chains of fear that kept me locked up into the system. Since then, I see the world from a different perspective: the one that everything is going through change and that most of us are unaware of that.

Why is the world changing? In this post I'll point out the 8 reasons that lead me to believe it.

1- No one can stand the employment model any longer

We are reaching our limits. People working with big corporations can't stand their jobs. The lack of purpose knocks on your door as if it came from inside you like a yell of despair.

People want out. They want to drop everything. Take a look on how many people are willing to risk entrepreneurship, people leaving on sabbaticals, people with work-related depression, people in burnout.

2- The entrepreneurship model is also changing

Over the past few years, with the explosion of startups, thousands of entrepreneurs turned their garages in offices to bring their billion dollar ideas to life. The vortex of entrepreneurship was to find an investor and get funded. To be funded was like winning the World Cup, or the Super Bowl.

But what happens after you get funded?

You get back to being an employee. You may have brought in people not sharing your dream, not in agreement with your purpose and soon it's all about the money. The financial end becomes the main driver of your business.

People are suffering with it. Excellent startups began to tumble because the money seeking model is endless.

A new way to endeavor is needed. Good people are doing it already.

3- The rise of collaboration

Many people have figured out that it doesn't make any sense to go on by yourself. Many people have awakened from the "each man for himself" mad mentality.

Stop, take a step back and think. Isn't it absurd that we, 7 billion of us living in the same planet, have grown further apart from each other? What sense does it make to turn your back on the thousands, maybe millions, of people living around you in the same city? Every time it crosses my mind, I feel blue.

Fortunately, things are changing. Sharing, collaborative economy concepts are being implemented, and it points towards a new direction. The direction of collaborating, of sharing, of helping, of togetherness.

This is beautiful to watch. It touches me.

4- We are finally figuring out what the internet is

The internet is an incredibly spectacular thing and only now, after so many years, we are understanding its power. With the internet the world is opened, the barriers fall, the separation ends, the togetherness starts, the collaboration explodes, the helping emerges.

Some nations saw true revolutions that used the internet as the primary catalyst, such as the Arab Spring. Here in Brazil we are just starting to make a better use out of this amazing tool.

Internet is taking down mass control. The big media groups controlling news by how it suits best what they want the message to be and what they want us to read are no longer the sole owners of information. You go after what you want. You bond to whomever you want. You explore whatever you may want to.

With the advent of the internet, the small is no longer speechless, there is a voice. The anonymous become acknowledged. The world comes together. And then the system may fall.

5- The fall of exaggerated consumerism

For too long, we've been manipulated to consume as much as we possibly can. To buy every new product launched, the newest car, the latest iPhone, the top brands, lots of clothes, shoes, lots and lots and lots of pretty much anything we could our hands on.

Going against the crowd, many people have understood that this of way off. Lowsumerism, slow life and slow food are a few excerpts of actions being taken as we speak, pointing out by contradiction how absurdly we have come to organize ourselves.

Fewer people are using cars, fewer people are overspending, and more people are swapping clothes, buying used goods, sharing assets, cars, apartments, offices.

We don't need all of that they told us we needed. And this consciousness of new consumerism can take down any company living of the exaggerated end of it.

6- Healthy and organic eating

We were so crazy we even accepted eating anything! It only needed to taste good, and everything would be alright.

We were so disconnected that companies started to poison our food and we didn't say anything!

But then some people started waking up, enabling and strengthening healthy and organic eating.

This is only to get stronger.

But what has this got to do with economy and work? Just about everything, I'd say.

Food production is one of the basic fundamentals of our society. If we change our mindset, our eating habit and our way of consuming, corporations will have to respond and adapt to a new market.

The small farmer is getting back to being relevant to the whole chain of production. Even people are growing plants and seeds inside their homes as well.

And that reshapes the whole economy.

7 – The awakening of spirituality

How many friends do you have who practice yoga? What about meditation? Now think back, 10 years ago, how many people did you know by then who practiced these activities?

Spirituality, for too long, was for esoteric folks, those weird-like and mystic people.

But fortunately, this is also changing. We've come to the edge of reason and rationality. We were able to realize that, with only our conscious mind, we can't figure out everything that goes by here. There is something else going on and I'm sure you want to get hold of that as well.

You want to understand how these things work. How life operates, what happens after death, what is this energy thing people talk about so much, what is quantum physics, how thoughts can be materialized and create our sense of reality, what is coincidence and synchronicity, why meditation works, how it's possible to cure using nothing but bare hands, how those alternative therapies not approved by regular medicine can actually work.

Companies are providing meditation to their employees. Even schools are teaching the young how to meditate. Think about it.

8 – Unschooling trends

Who created this teaching model? Who chose the classes you have to take? Who chose the lessons we learn in history classes? Why didn't they teach us the truth about other ancient civilizations?

Why should kids follow a certain set of rules? Why should they watch everything in silence? Why should they wear a uniform? What about taking a test to prove that you actually learned?

We developed a model that perpetuates and replicates followers of the system. That breed people into ordinary human beings.

Fortunately, a lot of people are working to rethink that though concepts such as unschooling, hackschooling, homeschooling.

Maybe you've never thought of that and even may be in shock. But it's happening.

Silently, people are being woken up and are realizing how crazy it is to live in this society.

Look at all these new actions and try to think everything is normal we were taught so far is normal. I don't think it is.

There is something extraordinary happening.

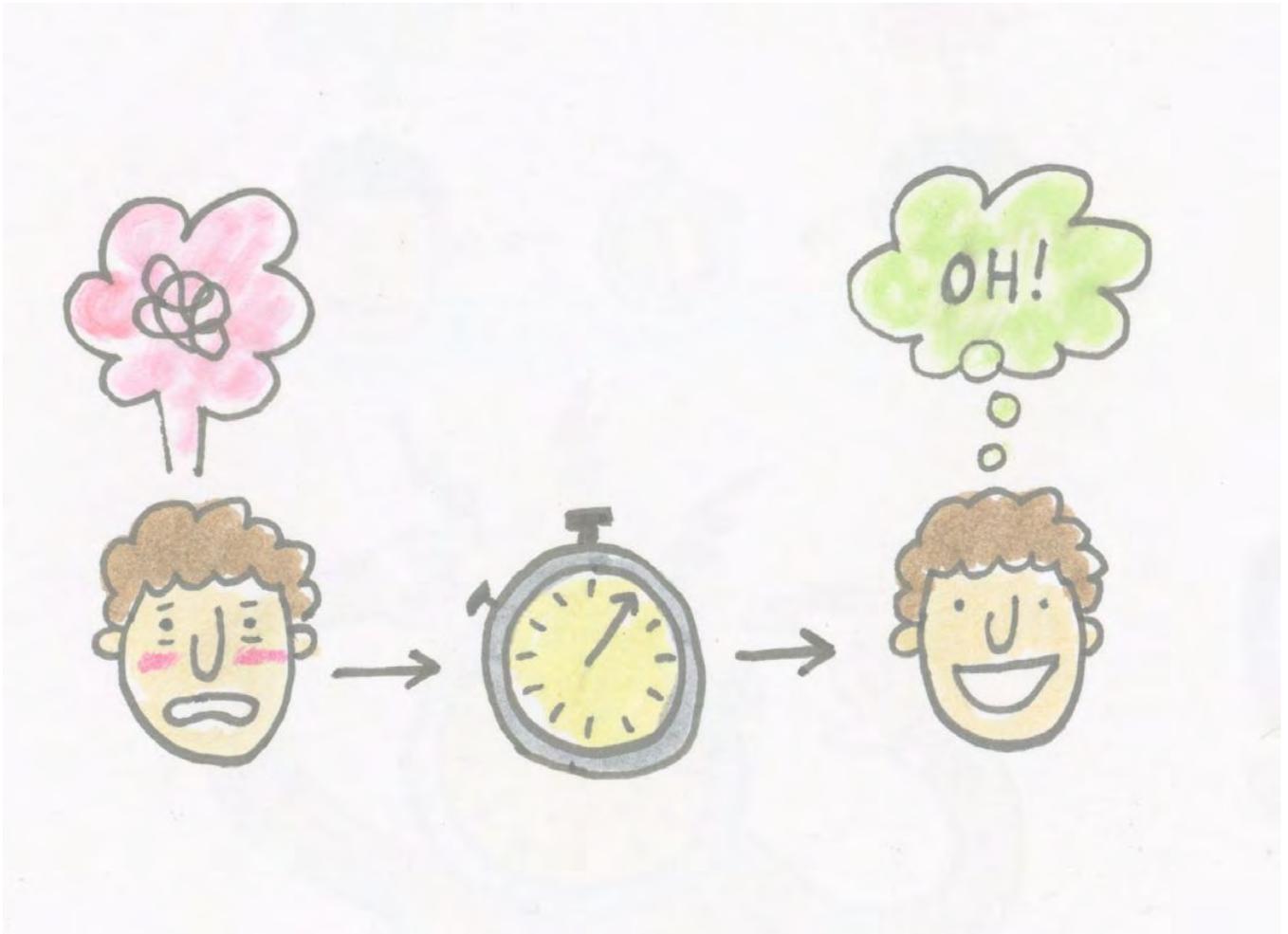
Gustavo Tanaka—Brazilian author and entrepreneur, trying to create with my friends a new model, a new system and maybe helping to create a new economy.



Jason Fried

3 min read

Startup



Give it five minutes

I used to be a hothead. Whenever anyone said anything, I'd think of a way to disagree. I'd push back hard if something didn't fit my world-view.

It's like I had to be first with an opinion—as if being first meant something. But what it really meant was that I wasn't thinking hard enough about the problem. The faster you react, the less you think. Not always, but often.

It's easy to talk about knee jerk reactions as if they are things that only other people have. You have them too. If your neighbor isn't immune, neither are you.

This came to a head back in 2007. I was speaking at the Business Innovation Factory conference in Providence, RI. So was Richard Saul Wurman. After my talk Richard came up to introduce himself and compliment my talk. That was very generous of him. He certainly didn't have to do that.

And what did I do? I pushed back at him about the talk he gave. While he was making his points on stage, I was taking an inventory of the things I didn't agree with. And when presented with an opportunity to speak with him, I quickly pushed back at some of his ideas. I must have seemed like such an asshole.

His response changed my life. It was a simple thing. He said "Man, give it five minutes." I asked him what he meant by that? He said, it's fine to disagree, it's fine to push back, it's great to have strong opinions and beliefs, but give my ideas some time to set in before you're sure you want to argue against them. "Five minutes" represented "think", not react. He was totally right. I came into the discussion looking to prove something, not learn something.

This was a big moment for me.

Richard has spent his career thinking about these problems. He's given it 30 years. And I gave it just a few minutes. Now, certainly he can be wrong and I could be right, but it's better to think deeply about something first before being so certain you're right.

There's also a difference between asking questions and pushing back. Pushing back means you already think you know. Asking questions means you want to know. Ask more questions.

Learning to think first rather than react quick is a life long pursuit. It's tough. I still get hot sometimes when I shouldn't. But I'm really enjoying all the benefits of getting better.

If you aren't sure why this is important, think about this quote from Jonathan Ive regarding Steve Jobs' reverence for ideas:

And just as Steve loved ideas, and loved making stuff, he treated the process of creativity with a rare and a wonderful reverence. You see, I think he better than anyone understood that while ideas ultimately can be so powerful, they begin as fragile, barely formed thoughts, so easily missed, so easily compromised, so easily just squished.

That's deep. Ideas are fragile. They often start powerless. They're barely there, so easy to ignore or skip or miss.

There are two things in this world that take no skill: 1. Spending other people's money and 2. Dismissing an idea.

Dismissing an idea is so easy because it doesn't involve any work. You can scoff at it. You can ignore it. You can puff some smoke at it. That's easy. The hard thing to do is protect it, think about it, let it marinate, explore it, riff on it, and try it. The right idea could start out life as the wrong idea.

So next time you hear something, or someone, talk about an idea, pitch an idea, or suggest an idea, give it five minutes. Think about it a little bit before pushing back, before saying it's too hard or it's too much work. Those things may be true, but there may be another truth in there too: It may be worth it.



Jason Fried

2 min read

Startup

Making money takes practice like playing the piano takes practice

Most of the people I know who are money-making-machines got started really early. Lemonade stands, car washes, lawn mowing, baseball card trading. I think the reason they are money-making-machines today is because they started early. They learned the skills of negotiation, pricing, selling, and market-reading early. They have more practice selling than most people. That's one of the reasons they're better at it than most people.

Making money takes practice, just like playing the piano takes practice. No one expects anyone to be any good at the piano unless they've put in lots practice. Same with making money. The better you practice the better you get. Eventually making money is as easy for you as piano is for someone who's been playing for 10 years.

This is one of the reasons I encourage entrepreneurs to bootstrap instead of taking outside money. On day one, a bootstrapped company sets out to *make* money. They have no choice, really. On day one a funded company sets out to *spend* money. They hire, they buy, they invest, they spend. Making money isn't important yet. They practice spending, not making.

Bootstrapping puts you in the right mindset as an entrepreneur. You think of money more as something you make than something you spend. That's the right lesson, that's the right habit, the right imprint on your business brain. You're better off as an entrepreneur if you have more practice making money than spending money. Bootstrapping gives you a head start.

So if you're about to start a business, or if you already have a business and you're thinking about taking funding, or if you've already taken funding and are considering going back for more, consider the alternative. Don't raise money, raise prices.

Sell sell sell. Get as much practice as you can. Force yourself to practice. Force yourself to learn how to make money as early as you can. You may hate it in the short-term, but it'll make you a great businessperson in the long term.

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Check out what we're up to at Basecamp.com.



Jason Fried

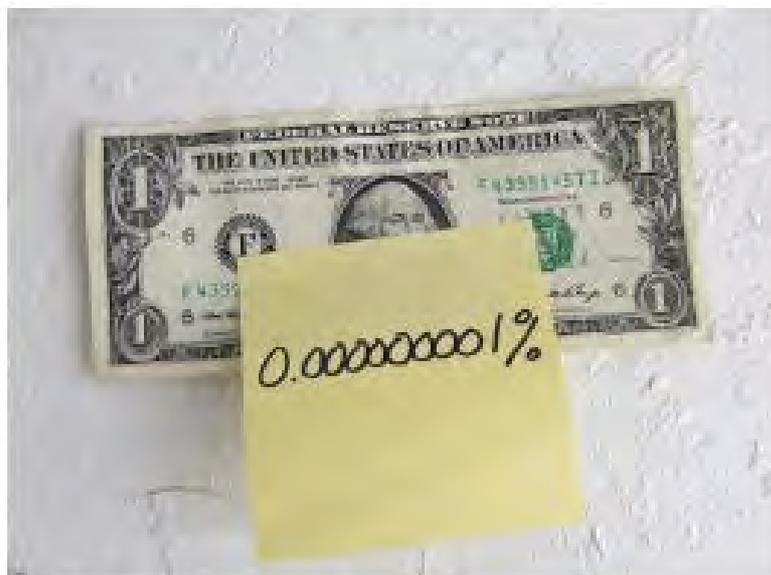
2 min read

PRESS RELEASE: BASECAMP VALUATION TOPS \$100 BILLION AFTER BOLD VC INVESTMENT

CHICAGO—December 1, 2015—Basecamp is now a \$100 billion dollar company, according to a group of investors who have agreed to purchase 0.000000001% of the company in exchange for \$1.

Founder Jason Fried informed his employees about the new deal at a recent company-wide meeting. The financing round was led by Yardstick Capital and Institutionalized Venture Partners.

In order to increase the value of the company, Basecamp has decided to stop generating revenue. “When it comes to valuation, making money is a real obstacle. Our profitability has been a real drag on our valuation,” said Mr. Fried. “Once you have profits, it’s impossible to just make stuff up. That’s why we’re switching to a ‘freeconomics’ model. We’ll give away everything for free and let the market speculate about how much money we could make if we wanted to make money. That way. the sky’s the limit!”



Proof that Basecamp is now a \$100 billion dollar company.

A \$100 billion value for Basecamp is “not outlandish,” says Aanandamayee Bhatnagar, a finance professor and valuation guru at Grenada State’s Schnook School of Business. Bhatnagar points to a leaked, confidential corporate strategy plan that projects Basecamp will attract twelve billion users by the end of 2016.

How will the company overcome the fact that there are only 7.3 billion people alive today? “Why limit users to people?” said Bhatnagar.

In order to determine the valuation of companies, Bhatnagar typically applies the following formula: [(Twitter followers x Facebook fans) + (# of employees x 1000)] x (total likes + daily page views) + (monthly burn rate x Google’s stock price)-squared and then doubles if it they’re mobile first or if the CEO has run a business into the ground before. Bhatnagar admits the math is mostly a guess but points out that “the press eats it up.”

To help handle the burdens of an increased valuation, Basecamp hired former YouTube exec Craig Mirage as Chief Valuation Officer earlier this month. Mirage hopes to replicate YouTube’s valuation success at Basecamp. “Of course, the investment comes with great expectations.

But you should see the spreadsheet models we’re making up. Really breakthrough stuff,” said Mirage.

“Basecamp will lead the new global movement filled with imaginary assumptions on growth and monetization potential,” he continued. “We’re excited to roll out a list of unconfirmed revenue possibilities that involve crowdsourcing, claymation emoticons, 4D touch, in-app garage sales, goofy looking goggles, social stuff, and an app store. Also, everything we make will include a compass.”



Jason Fried

2 min read

Startup

What's the difference between time and attention? A lot.

I recently realized that if I'm too busy to take something on, I shouldn't say "I don't have the time". In fact, I often do have the time. It's not that hard to squeeze in some extra time for someone.

What I don't have—and what I can't squeeze in—is more attention. Attention is a far more limited resource than time. So what I should say is "I don't have the attention". I may have 8 hours a day for work, but I probably have 4 hours a day for attention.

This summer a guy wrote me out of the blue asking if he could intern for me this summer. His email was great—clear, thoughtful, kind, inviting, confident but not pushy, and not too long (but long enough to say what he had to say without leaving anything out). He was studying at Harvard Business School and was going to be back in Chicago this summer.

He asked if he could swing by and say hi. His email made it easy for me to say yes. So he did, and we had a great session. We spent maybe an hour or so together. I learned about his background, what kind of stuff he was interested in, what he wanted to learn, what he could teach us, etc. Then we riffed on a few ideas. It was natural, flowing, effortless. Really promising.

Then I told him I'd think a few things over and get back to him soon. He checked in a few weeks later, and I said I'd get back to him soon again. And I didn't.

A month or so after that I wrote him and told him I was really sorry. I'd mislead him—and myself—thinking I had enough time to take on an intern that summer. I wanted to, I really liked him, I thought he'd be great, but I just didn't have as much time as I thought I had to even consider it more and line up work and spend time with him, etc.

But really, as I thought about it, I realized I had the time. Every day is the same 24 hour cycle. Every workday around 8 hours. Surely I could have found even 20 minutes a day to work with him. But it wasn't that. It wasn't that I couldn't find the time. I couldn't find the *attention*.

My mind fills up with a few key projects and that's it. I'm absorbed by those. That's where my attention is. Had I made 20 minutes here and there for him, I'm be physically present in that moment, but mentally I'd be elsewhere. And that's not fair to either of us.

Time and attention aren't the same thing. They aren't even related.

We've since talked a few more times, and we caught up again last week. I think I'll have more attention next year. We're going to keep in touch, check in from time to time as he finished up school, and then try again.



Jon Westenberg
5 min read



How To Make Something People Give A Shit About.

By **JON WESTENBERG**

. . .

You could make something right now. If you wanted to stop reading, grab a sheet of butcher's paper and brainstorm ideas, you could probably come up with half a dozen ideas for apps, books or products. Ideas aren't the hard part, after all—just ask Tom Haverford.

You could build a Wordpress site and start harassing your friends to test the concept. You could start writing op-ed pieces on Medium and put "Founder" or "Author" in your Twitter bio within 48 hours. You could throw up a landing page, post the first chapter of a book and start pushing it on Product Hunt.

Where things get tough is when you're trying to make something that people genuinely give a shit about. You don't want your dream to die in the chamber, because nobody read it, watched it, used it or listened to it. The deafening silence surrounding your work can crush your soul.

You want people to care?
Here's how.

1.

Only Make What You Care About

If you want to make something that people really care about, that they actually give a hot shit about, you have to care about it yourself. Because if you don't, then try as you might, it'll come out in the final product.

The reason for this?

Making something is hard. Making something you don't care about is even harder.

The only way you'll be able to consistently work, when you don't want to work, consistently try when you don't want to try, is by deeply and honestly caring about your work.

You want people to care?
You have to genuinely care, yourself.

2.

Make Things For Real People

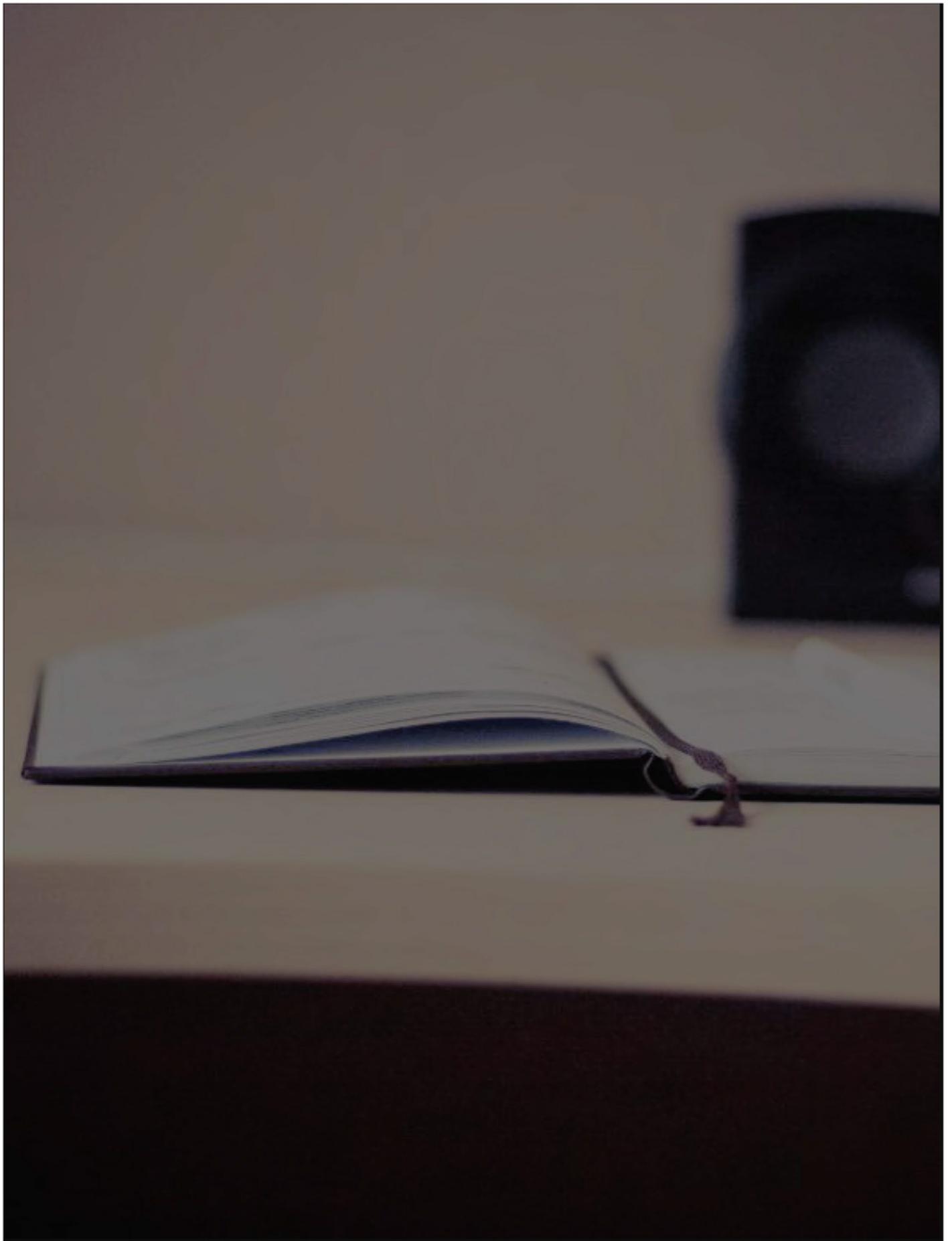
The best writing advice I have ever heard was to write specifically for someone I know. It's a genius idea. Every time I go to create something, or build something I think about who I know that would benefit from what I'm doing.

If you have something that you care enough about to make, you have to ask the next question—who are you making it for? What information do they need? What turn of phrase would stop them in their tracks? What is their single pain point that the product could solve, or their secret story that your novel would be able to touch and cultivate into a real emotional response?

Stop thinking about your audience as a vague concept, a collection of faceless people.

Believe that your audience is a real person with feelings, experiences and a story. It will change your perspective.

You want people to care?
You have to know what will make them care.



3.

Ask Yourself If You Fit The Project

You need to ask yourself whether you have the courage, the strength, the motivation and the passion to make what you want to make. And I mean really ask yourself, because when you first come up with an idea you can get so caught up in it that you can't see anything else.

It's easy to mistake excitement for passion, motivation and ability.

When that feeling starts to die down, or you get used to it, you can realise that you don't have the real raw power to be able to finish and follow through. That's not a bad thing; there is nothing wrong with recognising that a project isn't right for you. Maybe there's another project that is.

It's not enough just to care about what you're making—it has to feel right.

You want people to care?
Only work on projects that feel right.

4.

Don't Do Anything To Be Someone

Have you ever watched one of those reality TV singing competitions? You've probably seen a hundred young people, eyes shining, clutching microphones and talking about their dreams. They'll explain that ever since they were kids, they wanted to be singers.

They hardly ever say they wanted to sing. When it comes down to it, half the time it's because actually singing isn't the end goal. They want the trappings and lifestyle and the breaks of being a singer.

If the act of singing was really their end goal, they wouldn't be on a reality TV show. They'd be out there every night singing anywhere they could, writing songs, starting bands, recording music.

The same is true for anything you could make. Do you want to make **X** , or do you want to be the person who made **X** ? Because if you don't care about the act of making something, and if you don't want to get out there every day and try to make something, you might as well quit.

You want people to care?
They should care about your work. Not you.

5.

Work. Work Hard.

If you want to write a book that can break someone's heart—work hard.

If you want to start a business that changes the world—work hard.

If you want to draw a comic book that expresses everything you are, and dream about—work hard.

You want people to care?
Work hard.

. . .

If you liked this piece, check out my latest:

Jon Westenberg is a writer originally from Adelaide, South Australia. He holds a Masters in Communications from the University of Technology and lives in Sydney

FOLLOW ME ON TWITTER



Lauren Holliday

16 min read

Startup



How I went from underemployed waitress to the top 1% of millennials in 3 months

This is my real story of how I went from underemployed waitress to top 1% of millennials in just 3 short months.

“I’ve missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I’ve lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I’ve been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.”

— **Michael Jordan**

“All the best things that happened to me happened after I was rejected. I knew the power of getting past no.”

— **Barbara Corcoran**

. . .

Pre-PS: Since writing this piece, I’ve created an in-depth content marketing learning path, which you can buy on Gumroad for \$11.

. . .

Prelude

I scour Reddit A LOT. One subreddit I thoroughly enjoy engaging in is [“r/findapath.”](#) In this subreddit, young people are redundantly asking three formations of the following questions:

- How do I get a job (I enjoy) that gets me out of my parents’ house?
- How do I gain experience when I have no time?
- Which career should I choose?

These are really important questions, and it got me thinking about how I could help my underemployed peers.

Truth is, there are a lot of different ways to get a well-paying job you love. Most job hunting advice comes from people our parents’ age—“career experts”—who are far from “in your shoes.” Some of their tips work in one instance or another. Others just don’t.

Let me tell you a bit about me.

I'm a Millennial, who not too long ago, was waiting tables 40+ hours per week in my hometown. I had just dropped out of college because I couldn't support myself and was forced to move in with my dad. Talk about a shitty situation.

Flash forward six months.

In this short amount of time (that felt like dragged on forever) I negotiated a \$72,000 salaried marketing director position and \$3,000 in relocation assistance, which moved me to Boston, the land of opportunities.

*(Since then, I've gone out on my own, and today, I'm in **the top one percent of millennials**)*

Of course all of my friends wanted to know one thing—**How I pulled this off.**

Important Insight: These are the high level bullet points. The big picture of what I would do if I woke up one morning in my former unhappy and underemployed self's cute flip flops and long dresses. I had no contacts. I had little professional experience. Just a roof over my head, free meals and a good head on my shoulders. _

With that being said, this is my story of what I would do to move out of my pop's house and on with a career that isn't less than what I have to offer.



I would aim to become a full stack marketer.

I would aim to become a full stack marketer.

I would eventually become a full-stack marketer.

Full-stack derives from web developers, who can do a project from start to finish without assistance because they know frontend and backend programming languages.



Full-stack developers are purple unicorns, meaning they are extremely difficult to find. Similarly, this is the case with marketers—especially for marketers whose clients are small businesses and startups.

The marketing stack is a bit different though.

If you're a full-stack marketer you can complete everything your client needs from start to finish. A purple marketing unicorn will be able to easily produce successful campaigns at every stage of the marketing funnel.

This means more money because the majority of marketers specialize in things like social media and SEO, which, in my opinion, is a huge handicap.

There really isn't anything difficult about gaining experience when you think different. What I am about to present to you is a tried and proven universal framework for gaining experience, landing jobs and getting paid.

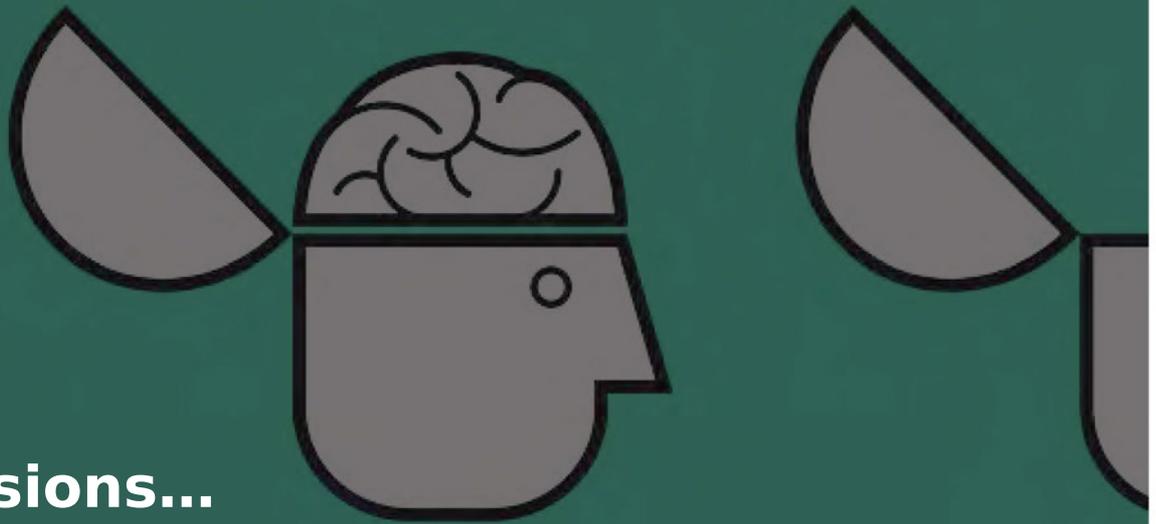
Here's How I Would Do It

STEP 1: *Get just one project that will add a quality piece to my portfolio. Then get just one more project that will expand my skill set.*

STEP 2: *Design solutions' packages, and document my procedure for it. I'd start charging clients for my service immediately upon completion of Step 1 and would focus on one paid project at time.*

STEP 3: *Finally, I'd design my digital footprint then I would start twerking the job hunt, i.e. marketing myself.*

Decisions...

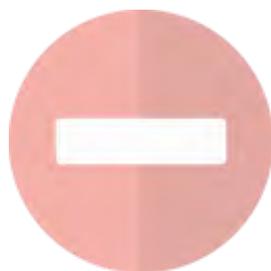


Before I start, I have to make a decision, which sucks, because I'm so indecisive I can't even make a bagel selection in under 15 minutes most of the time. **#FML**

While I have already made the executive decision to generalize and not specialize in the digital marketing industry, I still need to decide if/how I should build my skills and/or gain experience.

Here's my options:

Option 1: I can learn in-demand marketing skills by registering in online classes through websites, such as Treehouse or Fizzle.



Con: Another class is not going to provide me with real-world experience. Meaning that another class will not increase my earning potential, which is at \$0 right now. Oh, and it would most likely cost

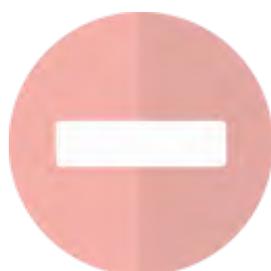
me money, which I am not all about at this moment in time.

Option 2: Or I can gain real-world experience by utilizing my family and friends' businesses.



Pro: I get real-world experience right from the get-go because it requires me to figure out, on my own, without being told, what to do. Far more valuable.

Con: I won't get paid for my time... yet.



Option 3: A hybrid of No. 1 and No. 2. Learn what I need to do by

researching and reading online while simultaneously building out the real-world project (a Wordpress website) for my friend or family member.



Pro: I get real-world experience right from the get-go while simultaneously developing valuable skills.



Con: I won't get paid for my time... yet.

Oh, how I hate making decisions! But ultimately I would opt for option three. It offers me immediate leverage and reaps the biggest rewards.



And the winner is... Option No. 3!



...

Now, the first thing is that it's 99.9 percent likely I won't get a perfect first gig, and it probably definitely will not be paid because I cannot prove my competencies and/or I may not even be really good at building Wordpress websites or marketing them yet.

I would essentially fake it 'til I made it.

Instead of overwhelming myself looking at the big picture, which inevitably would stress me out and paralyze me, I will break down my tasks into phases. Actionable chunks. Then proceed forward.

Actionable Phases

Four phases. Six months.

(This could be done in much fewer than 6 months, but for the purpose of not biting off more than you can chew, I recommend giving yourself 6 months.)

Completing the first two phases would be my immediate goal and my sole focus to start.

. . .

If you need help finding a project, sign up for [freelanship.com](https://www.freelanship.com) which provides young people with freelance projects to gain experience.

. . .

My father owns two dry cleaners. I would ask him to allow me to create a simple Wordpress website for his local business because every business needs to have an online presence. His digital marketing is seriously lacking so he would love my idea.

This one Wordpress website I will create for my dad will earn me:

- Identity capital (proven professional experience)
- A recent work sample
- A repurposable product that is easy to resell for half the amount of work the next time around

Let's recap. I really like this product offering because:

- It's one that's in-demand, and therefore easy to sell
- I can easily create upsells, building returning customers, allowing me to:
- Make more money
- Build additional, complementary skills, again which would make me more money
- I can easily create a vertical market toolkit, allowing me to earn double and do less work

Only after I complete Phases 1 and 2 would I move onto Phases 3 and 4.

These phases are when I would start charging for my services—immediately upon my dad's satisfaction with his new Wordpress website—and then begin designing my digital footprint.

Phases 3 and 4 will set the stage for my professional life in which I do enjoyable, well-paid work and move out of my rents' place ASAP.

#THANKGOD

Phase 1: Build my skills. Gain real-world experience.

Begin with WordPress.

I would **learn** how to create a professional Wordpress website and **document** the procedure for doing it so I could streamline the process.

The WordPress site would include:

- 5 SEO-optimized **pages** (*Home, About (Our Story, Team), Services or Products and Contact*)

- 1 **blog**
- Google **Map** with location and directions
- Social share **buttons**
- Header and footer
- **Google Analytics** website tracking
- 2 **forms**: 1 newsletter opt-in form (**This requires me to create a FREE Mailchimp account**) and 1 basic contact form

Note: SEO-optimized means I wrote: Page titles, descriptions and focus keywords, based on my keyword research.

. . .

“It’s cheap. It’s easy to do. And it can take less than 20 minutes to set up. Yet more than half of all small businesses still don’t have a website.”

— *Inc article*

. . .

The skills I gained from this project include:

- Wordpress
- SEO
- Web design
- Copywriting Google
- Analytics Keyword
- research

Upon completion of my first project, I will begin charging.

Phase 2: Develop more skills. Create more product offerings.

I would utilize my father's dry cleaners yet again so I could:

- Gain more in-demand skills
- Increase my earning potential

First, I would research the most effective content marketing strategies, tying the best ones together to create uniquely valuable strategies' templates that I could easily customize for small businesses in various industries.

The strategy I developed is a launch strategy—a comprehensive go-to market (for startups) or digital marketing strategy (for small businesses).

I would market my father's new website, making it easily discoverable by his new and current customers.

But the main focus of Phase 2 is actually to **build rapport and trust** with professionals in the online marketing world. I would continue to develop my skills and document the results of my efforts.

I'd position myself as their go-to full-stack marketer—their one-stop shop for business development—a trusted, passionate and highly knowledgeable one at that.

As part of this stage, I'd introduce three additional solution offerings into the storyline. These products would work to enhance the value of the website I initially created and build complementary skills that allow me to earn more money and land a higher paying career.

There are logical steps that exist between where a **startup or small business is now** and **where they want to go**.

It is my responsibility to help each client move closer to their desired end result with the services I provide and sell to them.

The Wordpress website I sell after I successfully create my father's will be my first product offering.

The launch strategy I wrote in this phase will address the remaining biggest roadblocks of my clients. It would recommend that they hire me to customize and execute an inbound marketing strategy as the ideal solution for these roadblocks.

The launch strategy includes the following items which can be sold separately:

- 1 blog strategy or editorial calendar
- 1 social media strategy
- 1 SEO strategy
- 1 email marketing strategy

Phase 3: Showcase my newly proven skills.

This phase only comes after I've executed on the above strategies for my father's website, measuring the results/statistics for 90 days.

It would provide me with proven solutions to my potential clients' problems, showing them how I took my father's site from page nothing to Google page one.

I would purchase a domain name and create a Wordpress website for myself to showcase my amazing work experience in the form of screenshots, videos, whatever. Everything.

FACT: 56% of all hiring managers are more impressed by a candidate's personal website than any other personal branding tool — however, only 7% of job seekers actually have a personal website.

Depending on what resources I used, it would probably cost me less than or around \$100 if I bought a premium theme, which I would most definitely do.

Oh yeah, I'd get business cards and brochures made ASAP from somewhere cool online.

Phase 4: Make it rain on them jerks who didn't hire you.



Remember those business cards and brochures I literally just mentioned?

I would take them and place them at my dad's storefront, where his customers could browse while they wait to pick up their clothes. Not only would I try to sell them on my services, but I'd also educate them on the Internet and how it has changed marketing.

I'd write a blog post for my website, which I could repurpose as a handout at my dad's store, titled: [How to Increase Revenue for Your Local Small Business](#).

This is essentially the entire master plan. It's what I would do if I only had a roof over my head, free meals and a good head on my shoulders.

Costs so far...

Phase 1 and 2 literally only cost me my time and my father's investment in his business.

For Phase 1, I would tell my father he needed to provide money for: **Website**

Hosting:

- A recurring monthly fee of \$5 or less OR One-
- time annual fee of less than \$100

***Note:** Explain website hosting to Dad/Mom like this... Website hosting is like rent for your store — except it's online rent. You must pay to have a space online just as you have to pay a fee for your brick-and-mortar store.*

Domain Name:

- FREE if you register your mom's or dad's small business with Google My Business

OR

- Between \$1.99 (if you find a coupon code) and \$12.99

Premium Theme:

- Between \$30 to \$60 on Envato's Themeforest—Make sure you are looking at WORDPRESS themes

Graphics (You really should include a photo/graphic on each page)

- Depositphotos—Around \$50 or less
- Startupstockphotos—FREE
- Unsplash.com—FREE
- Canva.com—FREE
- Pablo—FREE

Photos

- Time cost on my part because I would need to take photos of every team member for the about page
- I would take a few creative photos of the storefront, staff and customers

Testimonials

- Another time suck on my part
- I would gather testimonials from my father's clients or ask my father to do it (which he probably wouldn't; therefore I would have to)

Spend so far:

Me: \$0 and a few hours

Dad: \$100 — let's say this number to be modest

I would ask my father for \$125 to be safe, and explain the above costs to him.

Frame this as an investment in his business.

Phase 3 and 4 require virtual cash out of my own PayPal because I could not talk my father into purchasing my website supplies. *(But I bet some of you will succeed at this task!)*

So Phase 3 would cost me the same as my dad's website. It may actually be less because of this [Google search I did](#) for student discounts on web hosting, which is the biggest cost in the long run since its a recurring monthly fee.

For Phase 4, I would also look for student discounts on Moo.com, and discover that the company, which produces beautifully luxurious business cards, provides lower rates for students on [business cards and other marketing materials, such as brochures](#).

Since I am pretty good at design, and I want to see a high return on investment (ROI) I would invest in purchasing a unique and creative [brochure and business card template](#) to help me stand out from other freelancers.

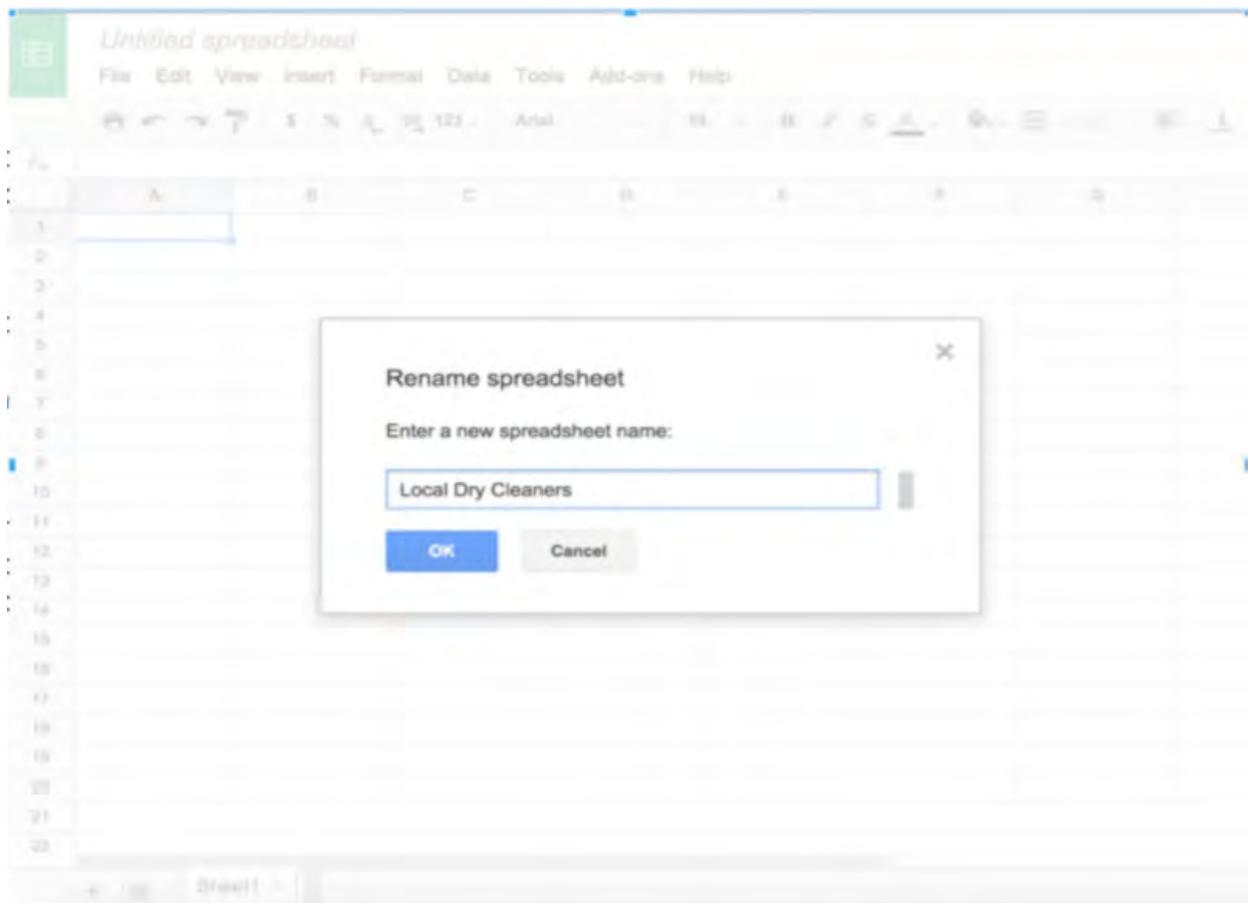
To play it safe, I would guesstimate this costing me about \$100 or less in total.

What IF I didn't get any customers after all this work?!

Phases 1–3 would need to be complete in order to land my first client(s). That would be my immediate goal and only initial focus.

It's HIGHLY unlikely that my efforts would go without even one sale, especially since a lot of people know and TRUST my dad, but what if people didn't?

After completion of Phase 4, while I was waiting on my marketing materials, I would be proactive and open a spreadsheet in Google Drive and label it "Local Dry Cleaners."



Next, I would create 10 columns, titled:

Business name

Address

Phone number

Date called

Date visited

Spoke to (person's name)

Website in place? (Y/N)

If yes, website grade, which includes:

- *Digital Marketing in place? (Y/N)*
- *Are they listed on local directories for small businesses?*
- *Do they have verified and ACTIVE social media accounts that are right for its target audience?*

If they're active, are they actually engaging customers?

Notes (Anything about my interaction with the person I spoke to that may be helpful in selling them my product)

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1	Business Name	Address	Phone Number	Date Called	Date Visited	Spoke To	Website (Y/N)	Website grade	Digital marketing in place? (Y/N)	Notes
2										
3										
4										
5										
6										
7										
8										

Then, I would:

1. Search Google for the following queries: "Dry cleaners near me" or "local dry cleaners" or "dry cleaners [insert city name nearest you]"

2. Search Yelp for local dry cleaners to see which ones had VERIFIED local listings. If they do not have a listing then I can upsell them on submitting their website (if they have one or after I create one for them) to local directories.
3. Search Google Maps on my phone for “dry cleaners” because this is an easy way to walk into a local dry cleaners and strike up a conversation... *“So I’m looking for a local dry cleaners, but you don’t come up on my Google Maps. Do you know how many customers you could be missing out on because of this?”*

I would spend one to two hours inputting all of the data I found from the three tactics above into my soon-to-make-me-money spreadsheet.

Finally, I would **email then call**.

I would email the local site directory and website grader reports to my prospects. Give them a day to follow up, and then call.

Of course, I would try to discover the owner’s name because it is better to ask for “Tim” than “Holliday Cleaners’ store owner” (that just usually means it’s a sales call, and I know my dad never answers those so I would refrain from sounding like a sales woman).

Customer Value

Let’s look at some hypothetical numbers.

This is what I would charge for my first few websites I built and my first few strategies I executed.

1. Dry Cleaner Wordpress Website 1: \$500 (\$250 up front and \$250 upon client satisfaction)
2. Dry Cleaner Wordpress Website 2: \$1000 (\$500 up front and \$500 upon client satisfaction)
3. Repurposable Content Marketing Strategy 1, which includes:
 - a. 1 blog strategy or editorial calendar
 - b. 1 social media strategy
 - c. 1 SEO strategy
 - d. 1 email marketing strategy
 - i. **\$497 to create** (This will be super simple for you because all you need to do is customize your pre-made template, but your customer doesn't have to know that!)
 - ii. **\$497/mo. to execute** (Make sure to get great results this second time around too so you can begin upcharging since this takes more time to do.)
4. Repurposable Content Marketing Strategy 2, which includes:
 - a. 1 blog strategy or editorial calendar
 - b. 1 social media strategy
 - c. 1 SEO strategy
 - d. 1 email marketing strategy
 - i. **\$597 to create** (This will be super simple for me because all I need to do is customize my pre-made template, but my customer doesn't have to know that!)
 - ii. **\$997/mo. to execute** (I would make sure to get great results this second time around too so I can begin upcharging next time since this takes more time to do.)

Customers pay an additional cost for resources, including: website hosting, domain name and theme purchase. The only resource I would foot the bill for is the graphics, which I would build into my cost structure.

Not only am I looking at a quick and easy \$500 and \$1000 one-time payment, but I am also looking at potential recurring revenue, which I'll very likely get because it's affordable and small businesses don't have the time and/or do not want to handle this themselves.

JOB SECURITY: Multiple Repeat Clients Vs. One Full Time Job

By now, I have money in the bank, happy clients a.k.a killer references, loads of proven experience, amazing soft skills, such as: innovative, hard working and

creative and a gorgeous showcasing of all of this via my website.

Finally, I am in control of my destiny, and so like anyone with valuable experience, I have options! (Woohoo!)

Option 1: I could apply (and land) a full-time job.

Option 2: I could keep freelancing,

- On a project-by-project basis,
- by keeping a few clients on retainers OR
- work part-time for two companies.

All are good and viable options, and in fact, I'd pick all of the above. Basically, I would freelance, picking my favorite projects to work on 80% of the time, and the other 20% of the time, I would dedicate to the job hunt.

. . .

“Sometimes life hits you in the head with a brick. Don't lose faith. I'm convinced that the only thing that kept me going was that I loved what I did. You've got to find what you love. And that is as true for your work as it is for your lovers. Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle. As with all matters of the heart, you'll know when you find it. And, like any great relationship, it just gets better and better as the years roll on. So keep looking until you find it. Don't settle.”

-Steve Jobs, Stanford Commencement Speech

. . .

Don't settle, but also, don't take Jobs' quote the wrong way. It takes time to find the perfect career, if there is such a thing. You have to take on these less exciting gigs before you make it to Oz. If you don't then you may never get there.

Keep testing your different career paths and skillsets by freelancing. Apply to jobs for interview experience, but if it's a job you won't be happy at or don't feel right about (assuming you're making money freelancing) then don't accept the offer—even if it is for more money.

Don't settle for a full-time job you hate. Hack freelancing until you know what it is that you want out of a career, which may not turn out to be an actual full-time, in-office gig.

Don't settle. Experiment. Diversify. Keep testing until you find what works for you. It won't be long until you find it... if you listen to my advice.

. . .



freelanship

freelanship.com - the experience marketplace

Freelanships are simply project-based work experiences.

These are different than traditional internships because they are focused on deliverables instead of time frames.

They can be virtual or in-office.

Freelanships are focused on the experience obtained and nothing else. We don't care if it's an uncool small business looking to hire a marketing freelern or Facebook.

All that matters is if the experience or project is valuable.



Marc Eglon
9 min read



**I built, launched, and got
paying customers for my
side project in 3 hours**
Here's what I learned

Note. Baratunde (capital B) is Baratunde Thuston, the man. baratun.de is the url and working name for this product. It'll all make sense as you read through the article.

I'd just sat down to my butter coffee and my morning skim through twitter when I came across this tweet from @Jason.



Baratunde Thurstun had posted his *ad libbed* rendition of an article by Jason Calacanis about the new Twitter CEO.



In the ensuing thread, somebody mentioned they'd pay for this as a service—to have essays read aloud.

I'm still not sure why (it just felt right) but I was compelled to drop everything for the morning and turn this into a *thing* . I wanted to get it out quickly because I couldn't afford to let it interfere with my bread-and-butter work.

And I wanted to strike while the iron was still tepid.

The 3 hour launch — here's what I did

1. I bought the domain baratun.de on iwantmyname.com and pointed it to my media temple hosting account.
2. Built a landing page using the [startup framework](#).
3. Added the google analytics tracking code
4. Created a pay-what-you-want subscription in gumroad and linked it up from the website.
5. Waited for the DNS to propagate (an infuriatingly long 3 hours).
6. Posted to Twitter.
7. Posted to Product Hunt.

Here's what I learned from shipping

1. Ask for forgiveness, not for permission

At 9am I'd never heard of Baratunde Thurston but 2 hours later I had built a website and borrowed his name to launch a product that didn't actually exist yet. He still didn't know about me. If I'd asked for permission and approached him first with the idea, I wouldn't have his support because I was just a weird stranger from the internet. Now I was a weird stranger that had moved quickly and made something that might be interesting.

I was well aware of the implications of what I'd taken on and there was a reasonably high risk that Baratunde would be pissed. What would *you* think if you went to bed and woke up to find that a stranger on another continent had turned your half-joke into a product?

So I asked for forgiveness, peppered with a little flattery and gave Baratunde an easy 'out'.

Here's the email I wrote.

☆ Marc Eglon To: baratunde@ [redacted]

18/06/15 15:58     

Hey Baratunde,

I loved your audio piece, reading @jason's twitter email - especially your ad lib.

I thought it might be a cool side-project to test out and see if anybody would subscribe to have essays read out as podcasts.

I thought of a few names but I wanted to credit you as the originator of the idea, so I picked up the domain baratun.de and set up a site.

Anyway, right now there are 2 ways this could go and I just want to let you know I'm cool with whatever you decide:

1. You love it and I / we / you do something with this
2. You get pissed, serve me a cease-and-desist and I take it down / change the name / hand it over to you

Right now the whole thing is just an experiment but I'd love to know what you think.

All the best,
Marc

--

Marc Eglon,
Editor
Hackerpreneur Magazine <http://hackerpreneur.co>

My first email to Baratunde

I was just about to send it when I received a twitter DM from Baratunde, asking for my email address.

I'd got his attention. But sensed I was right about him being pissed.

I sent the email. Here's what happened next.

Hey Marc

I really appreciate this note and it makes me happy I just asked for your email instead of tweeting in anger :)

My gut is that I don't like my name being used for something that isn't really about me (unless it is). I also used to own that domain and lost it years ago to some crap spam company in Germany and that made me sad. It was my custom bitly short url and it made me feel SUPER COOL. I'm in the middle of some renovations to my overall career and image and the timing of this is interesting for me.

All that said the service idea is GREAT and one I already know there's demand for based on my own desires to listen to my Instapaper and longreads accounts, a friend who proposes a similar service, and reaction to last night's posting.

Let me think on it cause it might be kind of cool to have my name on something fun and weird like this. Or it's a service you should run but under a different name and one I could see myself contributing to every once in a while. I just want a little time to contemplate the pros and cons and potential confusion.

Again thanks for writing and getting me past my Twitter-based WTF stage. You move so fast! And you have integrity! More of you in Silicon Valley please

Baratunde

Baratunde's response

2. Cover the downside

The worst that can happen is that you lose everything.

I had no idea how this would play out. If things were bad, I was prepared to pull out and hand over everything to Baratunde. I had nothing to lose, except the \$17 I paid for the baratun.de* domain registration. There was no real downside, apart from possibly irking a stranger. I could see that Baratunde was man enough to handle being irked—I knew he'd get over it.

I also took the risk that I'd disappoint customers by signing them up to a zombie product that never materialised. What if we got paying users but no Baratunde Thurston? I'd just have to read the articles myself. No big deal.

* As it turned out—Baratunde actually used to own that domain. At the very least he'd be reunited with it in some way.

3. Timing helps but it isn't everything

I'd launched a couple of projects on Product Hunt before (last year I started Letterlist there with over 1000 users in 24 hours) so I knew that posting your listing early is key to getting traction. Launching later in the day makes it much trickier to get upvoted because you're competing against products that already have a massive head start. It's a natural filter bubble that polarises the early winners from the rest.

Funnily enough, the top product at the time that I posted was Tim Herbig's Ultimate Product Hunt Launch checklist which reiterated exactly how important it is to time it right. But I decided to *screw it*. I was on a roll and just wanted to get it out there. Waiting for the DNS to propagate was torture, but when it did, I took the gamble and posted anyway.

Carpe diem.

4. Nothing validates a product like paying customers

It's easy to put up a landing page and capture hundreds of emails. Some people can be cagey about spam, but I've found that with the right combination of persuasive copy, most people will enter their email simply to satisfy their curiosity.



Joel's Buffer MVP v2. Image c/o Buffer

It was more important to me to test the hypothesis that some people would actually **pay** for the service. Joel Gascoigne did a great job of validating Buffer and testing pricing, but I wanted to get the ultimate confirmation: **real transactions for real money**.

I used gumroad to collect payments using a pay-what-you-want model with a minimum \$5 contribution. After a couple of hours 2 people had signed up and paid.

Thing is, I'd missed out on a lot of emails so I switched the minimum to \$0 so that users could sign up and then choose to contribute in a true pay-what-you-want model (no minimum).

Some conversion stats from the first 48 hours*

413 visitors from Product hunt

209 clicked through to Gumroad

50 email optins

5 sales (total \$19.65 after fees)

Hardly staggering numbers. But for a quick test and a couple of hours of work—it was enough to confirm that we're onto something interesting.

*I didn't segregate the optins before and after dropping the entry price from \$5 to \$0. But if I were to try this again, I'd collect emails first and use the welcome page to explain more about the product and ask for payments to crowdfund development.

I'd like to test the true \$0 minimum pay-what-you-want model—I suspect both email optins AND total revenue would increase.

5. Feedback + traffic = short iteration cycles

Aside from lighting the kindling, Product Hunt is a great sandbox for field-testing. The feedback loop and traffic surge means you can tweak things in real time as you learn. Move quickly and break things, so to speak.

No formal A/B testing, just a heuristic view of the anecdotal feedback.

For example, a couple of users were confused by the gumroad payment page so I switched it out altogether for a simple optin form—I didn't even style it at first, I just used the raw html from [Active Campaign](#) (my email provider).

By the time I did this, the project was 4 days old and I was already satisfied that the *"would people pay?"* hypothesis was validated.

But there still wasn't really a product so I decided to focus on collecting email and then sell the product when it's ready. The goal now is to get as many email subscribers as possible without the confusing pay-gate.

Users also requested other features like sample tracks and playlists and I've added these to the Trello board I'm using to manage an *ad hoc* product roadmap.

6. You don't know anything until you enter the abyss

I had a hunch that this could be a cool little side-project, or even a real business, but I didn't really know that any of this would work out. Would people want this? Would they pay for it? I had no idea how Baratunde would feel about it, least of all that he'd end up putting his weight behind it, contributing content, and promoting it to his network.

I also had no idea just how big that network would reach. Just 4 days later I received another email from Baratunde. Now he was getting right behind the project and was going to promote it that night on This Week in Tech (one of the biggest podcasts ever). During the show, traffic peaked at 34 visitors on the site which resulted in hundreds more signups.

It's not a strategy, but when it happens serendipity is a powerful ally. And it only kicks in when you enter the abyss.

“Being an entrepreneur is like staring into the abyss and chewing glass.” — Elon Musk

I can't attest to the oral lacerations yet. But the abyss is real. It's the black box of unknown unknowns where you have to trust your instinct and know that the next step will reveal itself once you jump in. You're committing yourself, trusting that you'll figure shit out when you need to.

As it turns out, wasn't actually *that* dark, it was more like looking through frosted glass. People love the project and are already rallying for it to succeed. People really want the convenience of multitasking and listening to essays in an entertaining format.

But I believe that you need to learn to deal with frosted glass before you can think about colonising Mars.

7. Some problems are so obvious, we don't even see them

When I first read about Joel testing the Buffer concept, I just couldn't see that scheduling tweets solved a real problem. It didn't seem to be significant enough to form a product *per se*. I thought the same when I first saw Product Hunt—I didn't see the value in a HackerNews for products. I'm glad I was wrong—the best ideas are sometimes staring us right in the face.

Chris Dixon argues that the incumbents always miss out on the next big thing because it looks like a toy.

And just yesterday, I was chatting with Benedict Evans about this kind of incrementalism on twitter: he reminded me that **“small changes can add up to a huge change.”**



Cutting the boot time for your OS by a second might seem trivial for an individual, but multiplied out over millions of users it saves lifetimes in time and anxiety.

Curating articles and reading them aloud means people can digest content without taking time out of their day to sit and read AND fill up the dead time when they're doing laundry.

8. Great artists steal

There's no need to build anything new when you're experimenting. I didn't write a single line of code. The key to building an MVP (and even a great full-scale product) is hacking together open source software, free trials, existing hosting

accounts, free distribution channels. And if things get too complex, Zapier and IFTTT are the digital duck tape that turn moving parts into a cohesive engine.

Beg, borrow, copy, steal.

—

Truth is though, none of these learnings are actually new. It's more of a list of fundamentals I notice resurfacing whenever I ship something new, a set of principles I've picked up over time.

You can read other articles just like one over and over and the ideas all make sense at face value. But it's when you build things then pause to reflect, that you realise they've become part of your *modus operandi*.

Anyway, if you're too busy / lazy to read articles, you might be interested in having them read to you by awesome people like Baratunde Thurston instead. You can sign up at baratun.de

Finally, massive thanks to Baratunde Thurston for going along with this crazy experiment. You've been an utter gentleman. I'm so glad I followed my gut and started this thing.



Mike Monteiro

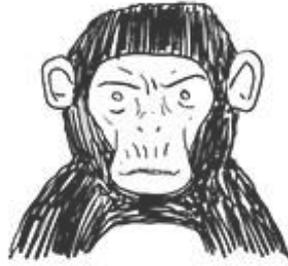
8 min read



Sponsored by  **Workshops**

Q: I graduated from school this year and I've been looking for my first job. After interviewing around, I finally got a job offer at a small startup. How do I decide if it's the right offer to take?

This one is easy. Don't take it. You're just starting your career, and a startup is the absolute *worst* place for you right now. Let me break it down:



Amazing angry monkey animation by Neil Sanders,[who you should totally hire.](#)

1. You don't know how to be a designer yet.

I hate to be the one to tell you this, but I promised I would never lie to you. You have absolutely no idea how to be a designer yet. You might have been the greatest design student at your school, and you still have no idea how to be a designer. At best, you've picked up a very strong set of formal and aesthetic skills which will serve as a foundation to become a designer. But you've never dealt with a client or a boss, you've never had to sell an idea. You've never dealt with having to convince your engineering team of why something was important, you've never learned to say no to a bad request, you've never had to gather requirements, and you've most likely never interviewed a user. Your mileage may vary, depending on where you went to school, of course.

This isn't me being a jerk, either. At this stage, there's no way you *would* know these things. But you want to put yourself in a position where you can learn them. And a startup, where you'll most likely have to do all of these things, probably isn't going to have anyone who can teach you.



2. No one at that startup is going to teach you how to be a better designer.

You will most likely be on a very small team of designers, all of them with the same experience as you. Maybe one will have been there six months longer, which means he's making more money. And in a world where you have to watch your burn

rate, he's getting laid off first. So he's not teaching you anything.

You may be looking at Silicon Valley's new favorite game: Let's hire 200 designers and see who sticks. Which is not unlike when the sea monkey company would send you a thousand sea monkeys, knowing that 900 would die within the first week.

Or, You may be the *only* designer on staff. Which means you're either getting tacked to the marketing team or the dev team. Both of which will see you as a weird "other type" who they'll use to meet their needs. You'll be making buttons and display ads.



3. You need a mentor.

I think I've told you guys about my mom before. She's a seamstress. When she was a teen, her mother (my grandmother) took her to the best seamstress in town. She convinced the seamstress to take her on as an apprentice. Over the years, she taught my mother the trade. She taught her the technical stuff, but she also taught her how to bill, how to properly charge for her work, how to get new clients. In essence, she taught her how to earn a living. And when the day came, the seamstress gave her a few choice clients from her rolodex and told her she was ready to set up shop for herself. This is the kind of relationship you should be looking for.

Humble yourself enough to be an apprentice. Find a mentor. The good ones are hard to find and aren't usually found at startups.



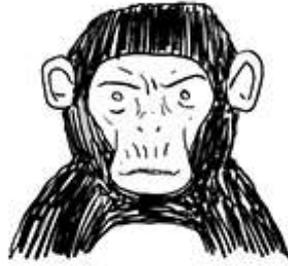
4. You need to be going wider than deep right now.

The only problem you will learn to solve at a startup is that startup's problem. And it may well indeed be a worthy problem to solve. But right now you need to be learning how to solve a wide variety of problems for a wide variety of people. You need to be trying different things. Dealing with different types of clients.



And that mentor we talked about? They'll be an invaluable resource in teaching you how to deal with all of those different people. And reminding you that lessons you learned on a project a year ago are applicable to the current project in a way you hadn't thought of.

I run a design studio, and on any typical day we have about a half dozen different projects running through the job. It's never boring. We learn a little bit about this and a little bit about that. We get to find out about industries we knew nothing about. And we get to design a variety of things. Every once in a while one of our designers enjoys a project so much that she decides she wants to go focus in that area. Which is great. She's put in her time and made her choice. And she can go off and focus in that area knowing that she has a strong general foundation.



5. You are not going to get rich.

Most startups fail. That's just the nature of the business. And as I'm sure someone will point out in a comment, most businesses fail. In fact, if we stretch it out far enough, *all* businesses fail. But startups fail *fast*. Which means they have to move faster than they might fail. So you're taking on more risk. And they'll ask you to share that risk with them. Sometimes that means offering you equity, in lieu of a good salary, but more often than not these days, they'll offer you equity *and* a large salary.

Do the math. You will be asked to work incredibly long hours. You will most likely need to be available to answer your email at any time of day, and you'll probably be expected to work weekends when asked. More insidiously, you'll be made to feel like you're not a "team player" if you don't dedicate yourself heart and soul to the well-being of someone else's company. And god forbid you have a family. So do the math. Take that annual salary and break it down by the actual hours you'll spend working. (Ask a few of the other employees how much time they spend working to get an average.)

And that equity? Yes, you could be one of the very few who cashes in. And I hope you are. Just know that the percentage of those that do are very very small. And you're betting your career on it. If we're in Vegas, I don't take those odds.



6. Unless you thrive in chaos you will not be comfortable.

New companies are making it up as they go. This is not a criticism. This is a fact. And there's a certain level of excitement in that. But you're already busy enough trying to figure out what it means to work as a designer. You've got enough chaos to deal with inside your own little 4' radius. Once your own skillset is robust, then go ahead and put yourself in exciting chaotic environments. But right now you'd just be another person running around in a burning house.

You know that whole thing about making sure your own oxygen mask is secure before you try to help anyone else? That's what this is about. Before you go putting yourself in a chaotic situation, make sure you're the one who can keep their shit together. That means someone who has seen a lot, and knows what to do when something goes crazy. That's not you yet.



7. The world needs fixing, not disrupting.

I hate to tell you this, but right now the startup world, or at least the ones making the majority of the noise, have their heads up their own ass and don't realize it stinks. They're solving problems for the top 5% of the population. How can I get poor people to do my chores? How can I get people to drive me around without having to pay them health insurance? How can a drone deliver my toilet paper within 15 minutes while the person who fulfilled my order sits at her desk crying because she's working a 15-hour day and can't take time off to get that lump in her chest looked at. This is known as the service economy. Where entitled white boys figure out how to replicate their private school dorm experience for life.



The service economy is nothing new. And there's nothing disruptive about the rich getting richer.

Don't play that game. As a newly-minted designer, I want you to consider using your skills for the betterment of society. Go find some real problems to solve. We have enough of them. Check out Code for America, or 18F, or US Digital Services. Our craft is a service that should be used to make people's life easier. And especially those who need us most.



8. Don't be somebody's monkey.

Whatever you choose to do, whether you decide to take this startup job or not, I wish you luck. I commend you on entering the workforce. And I hope you take this article, and everything else you read, with a little grain of salt. Trust in your own abilities. Be confident enough stand by your ideas, and to admit when you are wrong. Look out for your own needs. Learn to say no more than you say yes. Treat people the way you wish they would treat you. And help those that come

after you, like those you came before you are now helping you.



Mike Monteiro is a nice guy or a total asshole depending on your opinion. He is also the Design Director at Mule Design. And the author of Design Is a Job and You're My Favorite Client.

Thanks to Jennifer Daniel.



Mitchell Harper

5 min read

Startup

28 things I'd do differently next time around



Here are the lessons I learned building a company to 500 people and \$7B in transactions while raising \$125M along the way.

. . .

I love reading blogs by founders who try to give back and share what they've learned building their companies, so today I'll try and do the same.

When I look back over the last 15 years building 4 different companies (most recently Bigcommerce), here are some things I'd do different if I was to start another company, as well as a few things I wouldn't change.

If you're just getting started, keep in mind that it's at least a 7–10 year journey so

when the going gets tough I found it can be useful to get some perspective from other founders who have gone down the same path.

Stay focused, be positive and know that even when you “get big” it’s still a roller coaster of ups, downs, highs, lows, fun and fu*ks. That’s why having a big, compelling vision and building a great team around you is so important.

Here’s my list. I hope you find it useful.

Things I’d do differently

- Hire top down after the first 10 people
- Invest in design (team or agency) from day one
- Be tied to your vision and problem statement but not your approach
- Define customer personas up front and segment by pain/needs
- Focus on a single pain point and a single persona first
- Do less, but do it better, especially in product and marketing
- Start competing in a red ocean but try to redefine the market so it becomes a blue ocean
- Don’t rely on a single lead source driven by high demand and limited supply
- See your platform as multiple products not multiple features
- Hire product managers with strong domain experience
- Run a 6 month (minimum) closed beta and nail your USP (Unique Selling Point) before going live
- Go for fewer customers at a much higher ACV
- Tie a good amount of everyone’s bonus to a customer success metric Build an open platform from day one (RESTful API, also consumed internally)

- Be patient and work on a 5/7/10 year timeline—ignore competitors and focus on the market opportunity not feature wars
- Listen to your gut more, especially when it comes to people—assume all resumes are B.S. and back channel at least 5 people who worked with, for and above each candidate
- Listen to the entire organization (especially those in daily contact with clients) in a way that scales as you grow
- Build a customer advisory board who are incentivized to provide valuable feedback often
- Amplify the brand by building and remunerating a team of influencers
- Understand the 4 styles of leadership and use each effectively depending on the person you're leading
- Know which stage your company is in (product market fit, getting ready to scale or scaling) and only read books/blogs related to that stage
- Make sure all senior leaders have their own executive coaches
- Listen to and respect opinions, but realize they're just opinions
- Don't be emotional about the business—balance an intense focus on work with family, friends and fitness
- Realize no one cares as much as you do, and that's OK
- Fire fast and be less forgiving of mistakes, especially in departments that are measured with raw numbers, like sales and marketing
- Don't speak at conferences—they're a massive waste of time
- Don't assume everyone has honest intentions just because you do
- Don't beat yourself up because you make mistakes

Things I'd do again

- Bootstrap to a MSP then raise a round as soon as you achieve product market fit

- Recognize people for their achievements in front of the whole company on a regular basis
- Solve a problem you've personally experienced and that you could work on for the next 7–10 years
- Create a culture that's different, unique and feels like the founder(s) of the company
- Constantly ask yourself "*who is the BEST person in the world to help me solve X?*" and reach out to ask for help—know you can't fix everything on your own
- Negotiate hard on valuation to keep as much equity as possible, all the time—give way on terms before equity
- Early on, raise money from investors who have "been there, done that"—don't take money from "spreadsheet VCs" because they only understand numbers
- Hire the best people, regardless of where they are and incentivize them heavily with equity
- Personally answer as many support inquiries as you can for the first year
- Own the product for the first year or two to make sure your vision is in the team's DNA
- Know who your real competitors are and pay attention but don't let them distract you from your original vision
- Be the face of your company and learn how to speak in front of large crowds
- Be confident hiring people who are twice your age and realize the only place age is a barrier is in your head
- Celebrate the good times but be brutally honest with everyone when things aren't going well—and share your plan to get things back on track fast
- Communicate your vision until you're blue in the face, then keep talking about it

- Do what you're good at and delegate everything else to people who are much, much, much smarter and more experienced than you are
- Know when it's time to hire someone to replace you—get a deep understanding of your skills and passions and hire that person before you top out
- Own the culture and continually shape what it means, reinforce why it's important and fire anyone who breaches your core values
- Have zero optionality—no “side project”, no job to fall back on, no plan B. Put your entire life into the company for 2 years then put your head up to assess where you are, how you're going and decide if it's time to crank it up or call it a day
- Get good at pitching your vision and answering tough questions when you're on the spot
- Be a genuinely caring person and try to change the world from a place of humility, humbleness and honesty

#DoItAll
Hack Your Productivity And Get Anything You Want

[Download My Book, Free](#)



Mitchell Harper

6 min read

Startup

A photograph of a man in a dark suit and jacket standing in a modern office, looking out a large window at a cityscape under a cloudy sky. The man is seen from the side, leaning slightly forward. The office interior is dark with wood paneling and a reflective surface in the foreground.

How to deal with “shit” as a CEO — strategies for managing your psychology

“Psychology is the most under-appreciated, yet most important part of building a company.”

. . .

Building an important company over time has a lot to do with product, capital, team and market.

It has more to do, however, with what you (the CEO) tell yourself every day during those “internal conversations” that play out in your head.

CEO psychology is the most under-appreciated, yet most important part of building a company. It rarely gets any attention because it’s not “sexy”. But man is it important.

Everyone talks about startups being akin to rollercoaster rides. There are high highs and low lows. The highs are easy to deal with—you celebrate with your team, share the victories with your friends and partner and maybe even down a few beers that night.

What’s harder to deal with are the (seemingly constant) lows—when things don’t work out as you expect them to. Examples include having an important employee resign, a potential investor pulling a term sheet at the last minute, a competitor winning a big partnership deal and employees passing away.

All of these have happened to me at some point in the last 10 years. And the only way through all the shit is to make sure you talk to yourself every day—but in the right way. Not out loud, of course, but in your head.

There are also certain ways you can look at problems to quickly figure out if they’re potential “company killers” or if they’re just bumps along the way.

As a CEO, you need to find constant inspiration and rationale to move forward. That’s what I’m hoping to give you in this post.

Here are some “no bullshit” ways to manage your psychology as a CEO.

Everything here comes from my direct experience over the last decade or so building Bigcommerce (\$10B in orders, 100,000 customers, 500 employees, \$125M in VC) and a few other companies.

1. Use best/worst/probable analysis when weighing decisions

Most things we fear never materialize, but we spend so much time stressing over the “what ifs”. An alternate approach is to look at decisions and problems rationally by creating a best/worst/probable case analysis.

It’s easy to do—create a spreadsheet with the following columns:

- Outcome
- Chance (%)
- Stop
- Start Keep
- Doing

... then fill in the spreadsheet with 3 outcomes:

1. Best outcome Worst
2. outcome Probable
3. outcome

Chance (%) is the chance of that outcome happening. It’s a percentage from 1 to 100. In the “stop” column, list the things you’d stop doing if that outcome came to fruition. In the “start” column, list things you’d start doing if that outcome came to fruition. In the “Keep Doing” column, list things you’d keep doing if that outcome came to fruition.

Pretty simple stuff, but writing down each possible outcome and looking at things objectively and rationally can help get the negative, fearful thoughts out of your head extremely quickly, especially when you realize the chance of the worst outcome actually happening is probably tiny.

2. Focus like crazy to make meaningful progress

Progress beats the crap out of fear. Every. Single. Time.

If you feel like shit, commit to spending the next 24 or 48 hours working your ass off to make meaningful progress on something that's important to you—and it does NOT have to be about your business.

You could run 10 miles each day, spend more time with your partner, design a new product, write a 10,000 word blog post. Whatever it is, make sure the effort is rewarded with a legitimate feeling of progress in some area of your professional or personal life.

Feeling like things aren't moving as quickly as they should be is the entrepreneur's curse. You always want things to move faster and it's easy to get frustrated when they don't.

3. Know when to step away

Some days you'll just feel down. It happens to everyone. On those days, don't go into the office. Cancel your meetings. Spend time alone and do whatever takes your mind off things. Read, write, exercise, play video games. It doesn't matter.

One big key to maturing as an entrepreneur is to know when you're just not up to working as you normally would. It might be one day every month or one day every year. But tune in to your thoughts and feelings and don't fight them. When you're forcing yourself to work, it's time to do the opposite.

4. Talk to someone and get advice

As an entrepreneur it's normal to think you're the only person who doesn't know how to solve a problem. But most problems have already been solved by someone else. Instead of beating yourself up for not knowing the answer, talk to someone—ideally a mentor or coach, but if you don't have one, post on Quora or Clarity.fm.

Don't ever be embarrassed to share your problems and ask for help. The best entrepreneurs are the most vulnerable and the most opening to learning and listening to others.

5. Ignore your competition

Your closest competitor just raise \$100M. Or they went public. Or they won a big customer. Or they hired a smart executive. Who cares?

Spending too much time thinking about your competitors will run you into the ground. Instead, dial up the time you spend with your customers. If you're not spending any time with them, now's a great time to start.

Just email a few and ask them to catch up for a chat. Ask about their business, how they use your product and what you can do to make it better. The main thing you'll get out of this is real, authentic feedback from paying customers who LOVE what you do. And that positivity will rub off on you and how you feel. Trust me.

6. Watch Tony Robbins videos on Youtube

He's the master of human psychology, plain and simple. Just go to Youtube, search for "Tony Robbins" and choose a few videos. After an hour you'll feel like a different person and will get more clarity and a better perspective on what's important and your current situation.

7. Compare your life today versus 5 years ago

Another easy one. Write down 5–10 things you have today that you didn't have 5 years ago. This will bring about feelings of gratitude, which will help release dopamine—the "happy chemical" in your brain.

When you write this list, don't list "stuff". Write down things about your business, your family (wife/husband, kids), places you wanted to visit that you've been to, people you've helped, book and people that have changed your life, etc.

8. Realize it takes 7–10 years to make anything truly great

If you're a few years in, you're just getting started. 98% of big, important companies took at LEAST 7–10 years to make their first mark on the world. Building an enduring company is a marathon not a sprint. Step back and put this into perspective whenever short term problems are clouding your long-term view.

9. Go to your vice regularly

What's the one thing you do that excites the hell out of you? It should take 100% of your focus and make you feel amazing when you're done.

It could be exercise, sex, drawing, painting, public speaking, helping someone, volunteering, video games or cooking.

Whatever it is, do it regularly to top up your dopamine levels. If you don't have a (healthy, safe) vice, spend some time to find one. Try a lot of new things and keep the ones that make you come alive.

What's the worst thing that can happen?

Suppose your company fails. What's really the worst thing that can happen? You have to start again? So what. Your lifestyle takes a bit of a hit? So what. Your pride gets crushed? So what. You have to tell investors you've lost their money? That's hard to do, but they've baked your small chance of success into their models.

The odds of everything falling apart are so small that most times it's not even worth considering—and that's from someone whose been so close to the wheels falling off dozens of times in the last decade.

You might come close, but the wheels rarely, if ever, fall off.

The next time you feel down/upset/angry/frustrated/like shit, step back, be aware of how you feel and do whatever it takes to manage your own psychology—because in the end that's really all that matters.

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Mitchell Harper

6 min read

Startup

Entrepreneurs: read this whenever you feel like giving up



Here are 58 powerful quotes that have kept me focused and moving forward as an entrepreneur since 2001.

. . .

- “The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it” —Michaelangelo
- “The biggest challenge you have is to challenge your own self-doubt and your laziness. It is your self-doubt and your laziness that define and limit who you are.

- “If you want to change what you are you must take on your self-doubt and your laziness”—Robert Kiyosaki
- “Your job as an executive is to edit, not write. It’s OK to write once in a while but if you do it often there’s a fundamental problem with the team. Every time you do something ask if you’re writing or editing and get in the mode of editing”—Jack Dorsey
- “The more a person seeks security, the more that person gives up control over their life”—Robert Kiyosaki
- “You’re either an entrepreneur, artist or manager. Spend most of your time in that role and you’ll be fulfilled”
- “A good plan violently executed now is better than a perfect plan executed next week”—George Patton
- “Don’t focus on the victory, focus on the task”—Coach Erik Spoelstra
- “Dreamers dream dreams and rich people create plans and build bridges to their dreams”—Robert Kiyosaki
- “Life is an ongoing process of choosing between safety (out of fear and need for defense) and risk (for the sake of progress and growth): Make the growth choice a dozen times a day”—Abraham Maslow
- “Don’t be afraid to give up the good for the great”—John D Rockefeller
- “It’s a great strength to live knowing that if you lost every material possession, you would still have a life worth living”
- “If you don’t believe in yourself, you don’t take massive action. Instead, you take small action which validates that in fact, you weren’t good enough to achieve something huge.”
- “The only thing standing between you and your goal is the bullshit story you keep telling yourself as to why you can’t achieve it”—Jordan Belfort
- “The neutralizer to fear is self belief”—Mark Bouris
- “It’s never too late to reinvent yourself for the next chapter”

- “One of the huge mistakes people make is that they try to force an interest on themselves. You don’t choose your passions; your passions choose you” —Jeff Bezos
- “Age is not based on chronology, but psychology” —Tony Robbins
- “See it as it is, not worse than it is just so you have a reason not to try” —Tony Robbins
- “It’s not what we get that makes us happy, it’s who we become” —Tony Robbins
- “Live deliberately” —Scott Harris
- “Do what no one else does... follow through”
- “80% of success is mental, 20% is the how” —Scott Harris
- “If you keep moving in the right direction you’ll get your dream or something better”
- “If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will take you there”
- “You feel what you’re focused on” —Tony Robbins
- “Some day your life will flash before your eyes—make sure it’s worth watching”
- “I accept myself unconditionally, right now” —Louise Hay
- “The secret to living is giving” —Tony Robbins
- “When you believe it, it becomes self fulfilling” —Tony Robbins
- “Always have something to look forward to” —Tony Robbins
- “Progress equals happiness” —Tony Robbins
- “Time is the capital of your life, so spend it wisely” —Tony Robbins
- “The how will show up after the commitment to the what” —Tony Robbins
- “If you wait until you feel like doing something, you will likely never accomplish it” —John C Maxwell
- “Passion is the bridge between goals and accomplishment”- Jim Rohn

- “In life you have three options with any situation that is a challenge. Remove yourself from the situation, change it, or accept it” —Dr Phil
- “You do things when the opportunities come along. I’ve had periods in my life when I’ve had a bundle of ideals come along, and I’ve had long dry spells. If I get an ideal next week, I’ll do something. If not, I won’t do a damn thing.” — Warren Buffett
- “The joy is in creating, not maintaining” —Vince Lombardi
- “People who experience negative or stressful emotions on an ongoing basis are less healthy and live shorter lives” —Tony Robbins
- “I make it a personal rule never to do anything that I don’t really care about. It is surprising how much this cuts out” —Richard Koch
- “It’s through our expenses that we become richer or poorer, regardless of how much money we make” —Robert Kiyosaki
- “If a man will devote his time to securing facts in an impartial, objective way, his worries will usually evaporate in the light of knowledge” —Herbert E. Hawkes
- “The more communities in which you are an active participant, the more likely it is that you’ll be happy” —Ted Leonsis
- “Power begins with your own self perception” —Siimon Reynolds
- “All of the answers to your problems are outside your comfort zone” —Keith Cunningham
- “The only way you grow is by being uncomfortable” —Scott Harris
- “You can’t sit at the table of success for too long or you’ll feel bored and dead” —Tony Robbins
- “It doesn’t matter what you achieve, if you don’t keep growing you’ll feel dead”- Tony Robbins
- “To influence yourself, you have to ask better questions” —Tony Robbins
- “Unsuccessful people in life are mood dominated —“I don’t feel like working today” —Siimon Reynolds

- “If you’re bored with life, if you don’t get up every morning with a burning desire to do things—you don’t have enough goals”—Lou Holtz
- “We are kept from our goal not by obstacles but by a clear path to a lesser goal”—Robert Brault
- “Your destiny is determined by your decisions”—Tony Robbins
- “Visualize how you want things to be and then diligently work on a plan to make that your reality”
- “Most people are as happy as they decide to be”—Abraham Lincoln
- “If everything seems under control, you’re just not going fast enough.”—Mario Andretti
- “A man is what he thinks about all day long”—Ralph Waldo Emerson
- “The person who has the guts to ask themselves ‘Why?’ at least once a week, and be totally honest with themselves about the answer, is already twenty steps ahead of their smarter, more experienced rival”—Mark Bouris
- “What you allow is what will continue”
- “Self belief will always push fear away, but you need to always practice self belief otherwise fear will come back and tap you on the shoulder”—Mark Bouris

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Mitchell Harper

6 min read

Startup

How I got \$248,000 in pre-orders before I even had a product



A simple strategy to build a large audience of potential customers that will cost you \$0.

. . .

Today it's easier than ever to launch a new product. Whether it's writing a book, setting up an online store or launching a new fashion label, there are more tools to speed up the creation process than you can imagine.

While creating a new product has gotten easier, it's also gotten a lot harder (and a lot more expensive) to find an audience of potential customers.

With a lower barrier to entry comes more people who see the opportunity to become an entrepreneur and create a product, which increases demand to reach customers. That increase in demand pushes up the cost of most marketing channels which have a limited supply.

It's a typical supply/demand equation.

So if you don't want to (or can't) pay \$7 on Google AdWords for a single web site visitor, then how can you compete and acquire customers at a reasonable price (free or as close to free as possible)?

You need to think differently and think of customers not in the context of marketing spend but relationships. People buy from people they know, like and trust. So how can you get known, liked and trusted by people who are your potential customers, even before launching your product?

You guessed it—you build an audience.

By building an audience of people who will (eventually) be interested in your product, you can:

- Form an emotional connection with them
- Give them something valuable
- Ask them for feedback on your product
- Tell them about your product
- Sell them your product

The best part about building an audience is that it's free—you just need to put in a bit of sweat equity (AKA time).

Most entrepreneurs and founders get this backwards. They build their product and then go out in search of an audience. The problem with their approach is that it either takes too long or is too expensive.

Once you've validated your idea (I've written an entire [step-by-step guide](#) to do that), there's no reason you should wait to build an audience. The sooner you start, the better.

Why not do the work before you launch, so you have a built-in audience of hundreds or even thousands of people who *want* to hear from you when your product is ready?

What do I mean by "build an audience"? Well, it really comes down to creating great content and hustling your butt off to get it in out there.

Here are a few examples:

- Write guest posts for popular blogs
- Record and post tutorial videos on Youtube
- Create helpful presentations on Slideshare
- Write for popular publications on Medium
- Answer questions on Quora and Clarity.fm

But what do you write about? Simple—create content that helps people who might buy your product when it launches. Think about what you know from experience that you could share with them and use that as the foundation for your content.

Building software for designers? Create content that teaches designers where to source the best free icons, stock photos, fonts, etc online. Create "listicles" (posts containing lists) of the best design tools to help them be more productive. Post Photoshop or Illustrator tutorials on Youtube.

You get the idea.

Invest the time to create really useful, educational content. Yes it takes time but I guarantee you, the pay off is worth it. You'll very quickly build a huge email list or twitter following.

For each piece of content you produce, you want to make sure you have one primary outcome in mind which is to build up your audience.

Always include a link at the end of each piece of content to either join your email list, follow you on Twitter or follow you on Medium.

You don't want to reach people once and never again. If they like your content, give them a way to hear from you over and over again. Email should be your number one priority though. Yes it's old school but it still works and cuts through the noise.

The best time to start creating and sharing content is 6 months before you plan to launch. That will give you enough time to get dozens of blog posts, Slideshare presentations, Quora answers, Youtube videos, Periscope sessions, etc created, bringing you an audience of hundreds (if you don't take it too seriously) or hundreds of thousands (if you work your a** off).

When you're a few weeks out from launching your product, you can email your audience with a preview of your product, invite them to try it out, etc.

Once you launch, you can offer them special pricing, priority support, additional resources for free if they tweet about your launch, etc. The possibilities are endless.

Put yourself in the shoes of someone that's been on your email list for 4 months before you launch:

- They've probably read 10–20 pieces of content you've created
- You've probably taught them a bunch of useful stuff
- They probably look forward to your emails, tweets, videos, etc

Put simply, your efforts to create great content for them have led them to form an emotional bond with you. They get *excited* when they read one of your blog posts. They *look forward* to your tweets.

It's very hard for your (future) competitors to break an emotional bond that you've spent months creating. Sure they might have a better or cheaper product, but your audience sees you as a trusted advisor who also happens to have a great product.

I've used this approach twice in the past to launch two companies successfully for very close to \$0.

Back in 2008 I started a blog where I would post about a software product I was building, as I was building it. I would share screenshots, ask for feedback, talk about our launch plans, etc.

In 6 months that blog generated over 100,000 email subscribers and almost \$250,000 in pre-orders before we even had a finished product. That product went on to become Bigcommerce, which today has well over 100,000 paying customers and almost \$10B in orders processed.

More recently, I wrote content on Medium to build an audience before I launched PeopleSpark—software that helps managers get a pulse on their team via weekly check-ins.

Those articles received over 300,000 views, almost 2,000 email subscribers and just under 10,000 followers between Medium and Twitter. All in about 6 weeks.

In a perfect world, I would've started writing on Medium 6 months before we launched PeopleSpark, but I was still happy with the results. The audience I built up was more than sufficient to ensure we had a killer launch with hundreds of sign ups in the first week.

If you're considering launching a new product, I highly recommend building an audience either first or along the way as you're building your product.

Yes it's extra work, but the end result is worth it. Do you want to spend a few hundred dollars for each new customer, or do you want to get them for free? That's really what it comes down to.

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Mitchell Harper

7 min read

Startup

How to become a millionaire — understanding time/capital leverage



What they don't teach you in school about accumulating wealth. There are really only a few ways to become a millionaire:

1. Inherit money
2. Win the lotto or a game show
3. Save/invest your money over a long period of time
4. Be an early employee at a fast-growing company

5. Start a company of your own and grow it

Options 1 and 2 aren't even worth talking about. Option 3 is achievable for almost anyone given the right time frame and asset class. For example, if you invest \$50K per year over 20 years and can at least keep up with inflation, you'll have \$1,000,000 in purchasing power.

But that's the slow game. If you're reading this post, you probably think in months or years, not decades. So how can you become a millionaire?

We're left with options 4 and 5. I was never a good employee, so I can't even pretend to tell you how to find a fast-growing company that you can join early enough to "ride it up" and accrue wealth via stock options.

What I can say about being an employee though, is that you're always trading your time for money, so you have little to no leverage. Each week you trade 40/50/60 hours of your time for a salary and then repeat it the week after that and the week after that.

There's is absolutely nothing wrong with being an employee. But know that it probably won't make you a millionaire unless you can pick the next Google, Uber, Virgin, etc.

When you want to make money, you always have two things you can leverage—time and capital (money). Early in your career when you're just getting started, you leverage your time because that's all you have. You work hard, move up the ladder, get a bigger salary and hopefully start saving or investing some of that money.

Maybe then you think about starting a company using either your savings or money you borrow/raise from investors. That's when you shift from time leverage to capital leverage, which produces exponential results if you leverage your capital properly to grow something of value.

That's also where option 5 comes in—starting a company of your own and growing it from nothing to something.

When it comes to money, or more specifically, accumulating wealth over time

through a company, there's really one rule you need to understand:

Your wealth mirrors the number of people you can help and the speed in which you can help them.

Subscription Revenue & Compounding

Accruing value in a company happens a lot faster if you sell a product or service based on a subscription, as opposed to a one-time purchase. That's because the revenue stream becomes more predictable and you get the amazing benefits of compounding over time.

If you build a business (such as a retail store) that sells items once, it's a lot harder to accrue value in your business because your customers aren't paying you every month or every year.

Subscription businesses are valued relative to their existing customer base and future potential revenue and in all cases, a subscription business will be valued higher than a transactional business with no subscription revenue.

As such, a subscription business with less revenue is worth more than a non-subscription business with more revenue. That's an extremely important rule to remember. Predictability of future revenue is paramount when it comes to valuing any type of asset, including a company.

One of the keys to accruing real value in your company (and therefore personally) is to sell essentially the same thing to the same people every month or every year. Even if it means completely changing your product, it's worth it in the end.

Back in 2009 when we pivoted my previous company from 7 software products that you purchased one time, to 1 subscription product you paid for every month, we gave up \$6M in annual revenue but made tens of millions in revenue over the next few years because we understood the power of subscription businesses and compounding revenue.

Let's look at two examples.

Example #1 — Overview

You love helping people so decide to start a marriage coaching business. You'll meet with couples struggling with their marriage and will teach them how to better communicate, listen to each other, etc. They'll pay you by the hour and you'll grow via word of mouth.

Example #2 — Overview

You love helping people so decide to start a marriage coaching business. You find a technical co-founder and build a platform that matches struggling couples with qualified, experienced relationship coaches online. You also bring on a few dozen relationship coaches as contractors who actually run the coaching sessions.

Couples pay a flat monthly fee of \$99 for unlimited coaching sessions. 70% goes to the coach and 30% goes to you.

The Difference

The two examples above essentially help you accomplish the same thing, but one is slow and limited by your available time, while the other is fast and potentially has an unlimited market, considering 1 in 2 marriages fails.

Starting a company also gives you leverage—eventually you can hire people in exchange for a salary, so instead of just your 40 hours a week, you can have dozens (or hundreds) of other people also contributing 40 hours a week.

If you have 9 other people working for you, then you achieve $9 * 40$ (360) hours per week of output instead of the 40 you would do on your own. Over time that compounds and adds value to your company if you're all working on things that drive growth.

Let's compare the numbers and what you might expect to make over a 5 year period from the two examples above.

Example #1 — Numbers

- Revenue per hour of coaching: \$80
- Hours coached per week: 40
- Revenue per year: $\$80 \times 40 \times 52 = \$166,400$
- Revenue over 5 years: \$832,000
- Business value: \$166,400 (assume 1x revenue)

No doubt a great income for one person, but let's compare that to our second example.

Example #2 — Numbers

- Revenue per customer: \$29 / month (equal to 30% of \$99)
- New customers per month: 1,000
- Revenue per year: $\$29 \times 1,000 \times 12 = \$348,000$
- Revenue over 5 years: \$1,740,000 ($\$348,000 \times 5$)
- Business value: \$3,480,000 (assume 10x revenue)

Obviously the maths above doesn't factor in churn, upsells, net new MRR, customer acquisition costs, etc. I've kept the calculations simple because they're not the focus of this post.

As you can see from the two examples, there are two different ways to spend your time, with two very different outcomes. In the first example you've spent 5 years building a business worth \$166,400. In the second example you've built a business worth \$3,480,000.

Yes you might have a co-founder, investors, etc, but it's not unrealistic to assume you'd still own 30% of the business after 5 years which would be worth \$1,044,000. The key with most subscription businesses is that they are valued on a multiple of REVENUE, not profit.

Remember I said earlier that you want to create and grow value in an asset that can increase over time? With a subscription business, as long as you're adding new customers and your monthly churn rate is sub 3%, you'll continue adding revenue and will keep growing.

As such, the value of your business will be a reflection of your top line revenue. On the low end it will be 3–5x revenue. On the high end it could be 20–50x if you build the next Uber or Airbnb.

The example above is overly simplified and doesn't factor in risk, competition, etc, but it does show how there are really only two ways to think about your time—you can either be a part of someone else's plan or your own.

You'll work hard either way and one will provide you with a high paying job while the other could make you a millionaire and give you choices in life.

Everything comes back to how you value your time. If you can spend the next 5 years *in the game* building a business, as opposed to working for someone else, you could realistically become a millionaire.

If you don't like risk, don't want to learn, are scared to hire people, don't know which product to build, etc, then at least start there. Start learning. Take online courses. Find mentors. Spend the next 1–2 years learning as much as you can and then jump in and take the plunge when you're ready.

Even if you fail, you'll learn a hell of a lot.

I'll leave you with my absolute favorite quote about wealth and building a business, from Mark Cuban:

In business, to be a success, you only have to be right once.

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Mitchell Harper

7 min read

Startup

The exact pitch deck strategy I've used to raise \$125M since 2011



The right way to create a killer pitch deck and get funded—from someone who has raised \$125M since 2011.

. . .

Creating a pitch deck is hard, especially when you've never done it before. If you're a first-time entrepreneur like I was when we raised our

\$15M series A round for Bigcommerce back in 2011, then you're probably excited, nervous and anxious about raising your first round of financing.

The good news is that a pitch deck can (and should be) be almost formulaic. You've got to tell a story, paint a vision, know your metrics and sell, sell sell. Whether you're raising a small seed round or a bigger series A straight off the bat, you need to get a few things right and the rest will fall into place. In this post I want to share with you the 8 ingredients to create the perfect pitch deck.

There's a lot of advice out there about creating pitch decks, so why should you take mine? Well, I've raised 4 rounds of venture financing since 2011, totaling \$125M. I've pitched dozens of investors, including most of the tier one and tier two firms up and down the west and east coasts.

I've also received multiple term sheets—all with strong valuations, great terms and the most important thing: great investors and board members.

Finally, I'm also an investor myself, so have been on both sides of the table, so to speak. I've seen good pitch decks, great pitch decks and terrible pitch decks. Probably 300 in total over the last few years.

Anyway, enough about me. Before we move on—and if you feel so inclined—you can follow me on Twitter [@mitchellharper](#).

Here are the 8 “ingredients” I think are the most important for creating a pitch deck that will make your fundraising experience short, effective and rewarding for you, your co-founders, your employees, your business and your future investors.

#1: Have a big vision — then make it 10x bigger

Having a compelling vision for where you want to take your business is important, but most first-time entrepreneurs think too small . I know I was guilty of this a few years ago. I can tell you now, whatever your vision is, it needs to be bigger and more compelling.

For example, if you have a vision to make it easy for people in a specific country to solve a problem, then expand your vision to help everyone in the world solve that same problem.

How do you know when you're thinking big enough?

When you're uncomfortable and even nervous with the size of the vision you're adding to your pitch deck. Over time you'll get used to the bigger vision and you'll be surprised at how much more aggressive it will make you towards pursuing it.

#2: Explain how you'll use the capital — in detail

“We will invest half in marketing and half in engineering” is not the most articulate way to address how you will spend the hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars you want an investor to trust you with.

Having a detailed financial model (AKA best guess) for at least the next 3 years will paint a picture of not only your operating expenses but also your revenue growth, margins and potential profit over that time as well.

More than anything, know by department and ideally by business case where you will invest the capital and if you already have a marketing machine with a predictable ROI (i.e. \$1 in brings \$5 out) then explain that in detail too.

Having an accurate financial forecast will help mitigate some of the risk potential investors see in your business, especially if you're pre-revenue and/or are a first time entrepreneur. Remember—the more risk you can take away, the better your chances of closing the deal.

#3: Know your metrics better than anyone

For a subscription business it's CAC, LTV, CAC:LTV, nett MRR, conversion rate, churn (both number of clients and percentage of revenue), gross margin, etc. For other businesses the metrics will be similar. You need to know your current and future metrics in exact detail and you should be able to talk to how you will improve the metrics that aren't up to scratch.

David Skok wrote [the ultimate guide to metrics](#) back in 2010 on his great blog For

Entrepreneurs. It's a long and detailed post, but it's foundational to understand if you're raising capital.

#4: Short main deck

This one is simple. Your pitch deck should have two parts: the main deck and an appendix. In the main deck, include slides that are critical to telling your story, showing your metrics, team and vision. Supporting slides should be in the appendix.

How long should your deck be? Generally 30 to 60 slides is about average. The main part of the Bigcommerce series C deck, which we used to raise \$40M from Revolution (founded by Steve Case), was 26 slides and the appendix was 16 slides for a total of 42 slides.

#5: People grow a company, not capital

The best companies are built by amazing and capable people . Devote at least one slide in your deck to outlining your team and what makes them amazing. Are you an amazing engineer? Spell out your talents and how they contributed to your product. Do you have a strong executive team from A-list companies? Include a mini bio on each executive including the companies they've been at and each of their key accomplishments.

For example, has your head of sales built large, high performing sales teams before? If so, call it out. Has your CTO built highly scalable systems that handle tens of millions of users in her previous company? You get the idea.

Investors know you have competitors and generally the strongest team will build the best product and brand and therefore win the market. If you have a strong team, make it known. If your team is just a handful of first-timers then talk to your vision for the team. Who will you hire with the capital and how will you recruit them?

Have ambition to hire and build the best team you can and communicate that ambition in your pitch deck. Be honest about your team's weaknesses and emphasize your strengths.

#6: Talk about pain and how you solve it

All great pitch decks include a story that guides the reader from the initial pain point to the solution to the promise land (a business with excellent metrics that's growing quickly). Be sure to talk about the initial pain point your product solves.

How did you come across it? Why are you solving it? Why is your approach the best one and how can you solve the problem for more people as a result of raising capital?

#7: Traction speaks louder than words

Whether you're generating revenue or not, it's important to show your product already has traction. Again, this reduces the risk in the eyes of potential investors and gives you a better shot at getting a term sheet.

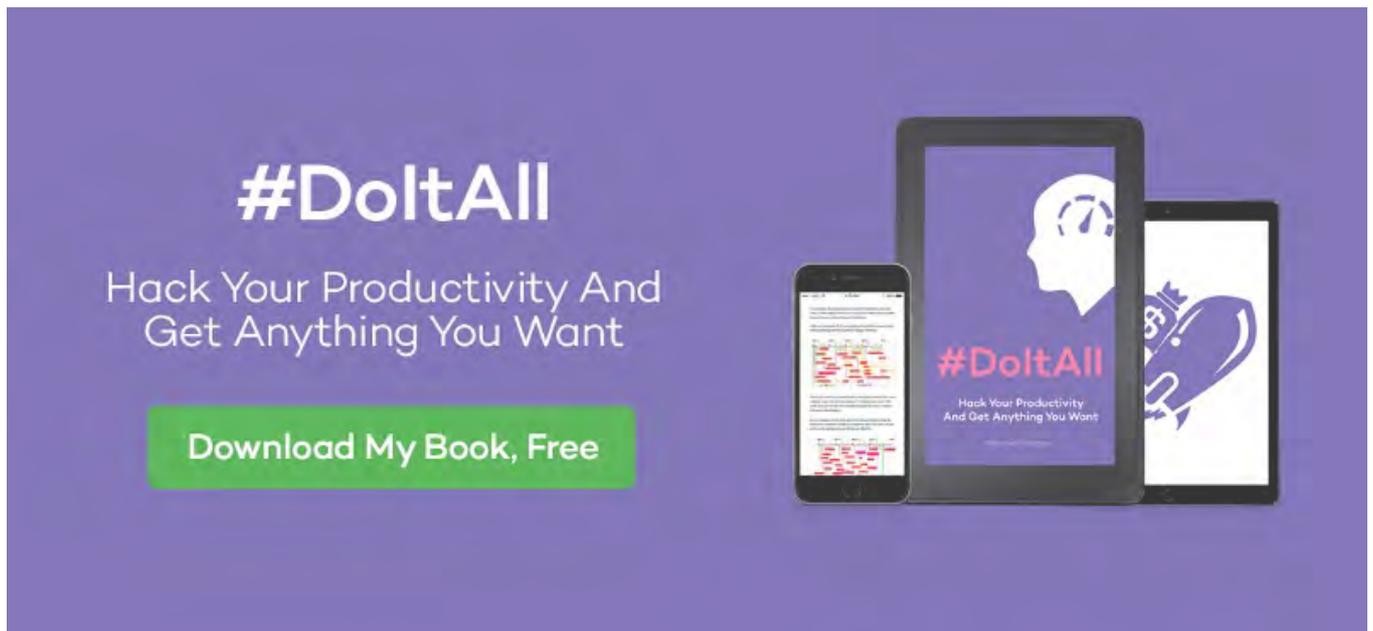
If you're generating revenue and it's accelerating fast, make sure that's a slide in your pitch deck. If not, look at all of your metrics and choose the one that best represents the potential of your business, such as total number of users, total photos uploaded or similar. Ideally this metric should chart "up and to the right" and show that with a little capital you can push this metric even faster, while on your way to revenue and then profit.

#8: Pitch, polish, repeat

As soon as you've wrapped your first pitch, make sure you have a Q&A session at the end. Questions help potential investors get clarity on everything from your numbers to your competitive advantage. Take note of their questions and feedback and use them to tweak your deck before the next pitch.

Repeat this for every pitch you do and after 3 or 4 pitches you should notice you're getting fewer questions about the content in your deck. Because your pitch deck is continually improving, you should get a lot of positive feedback about your presentation—assuming you're a captivating speaker and actually have a business that excites potential investors.

Good luck!



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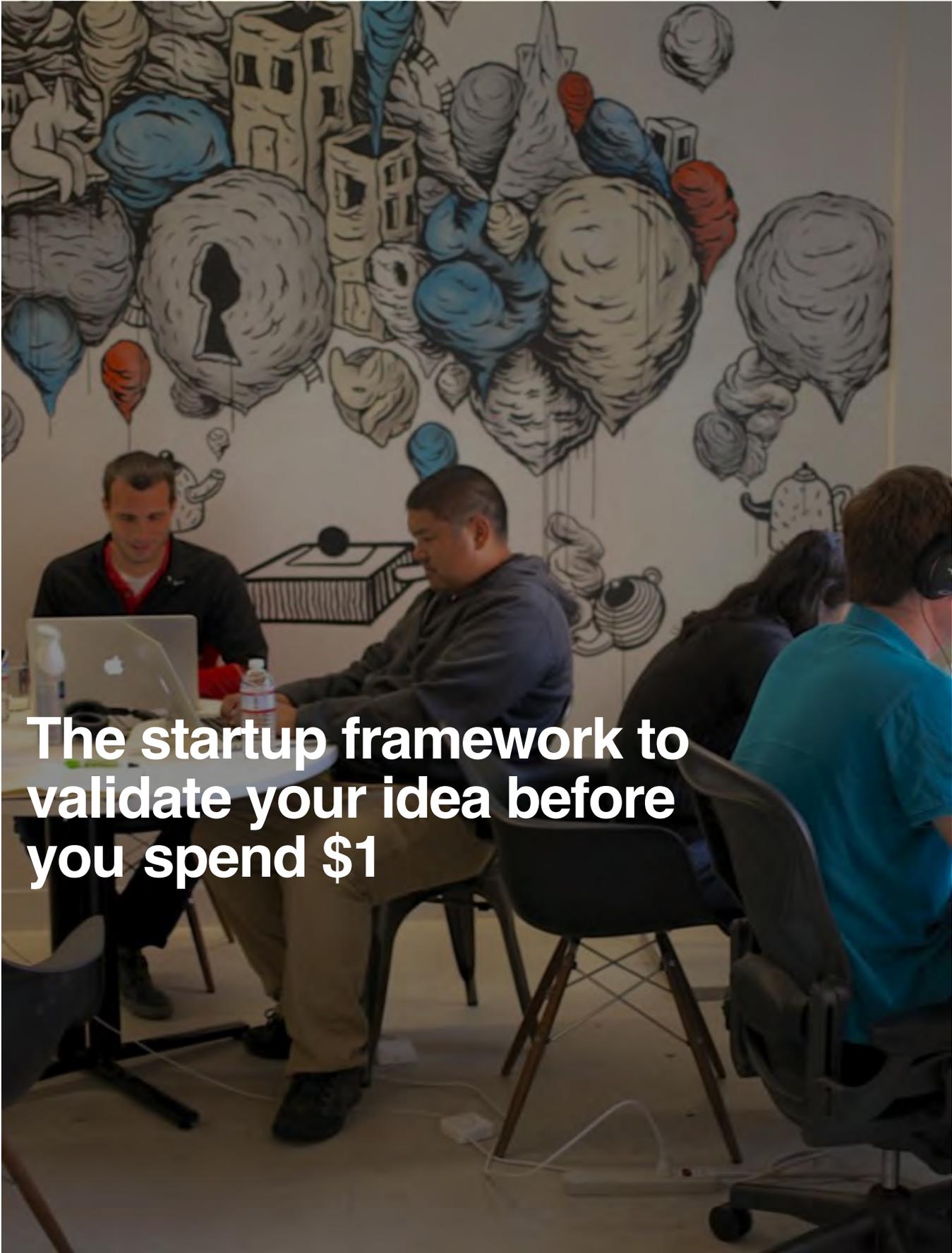
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Mitchell Harper

9 min read



The startup framework to validate your idea before you spend \$1

“If your startup failed, it’s for a large enough audience — here’s how to never make that mistake again.”

. . .

We’ll be launching our first product soon and we’ve essentially spent the last 5 months 1) validating the need for the product and 2) creating the product once we’d validated the demand.

. . .

Today I want to share the simple framework we used to validate our first idea, in the hopes that it will help other entrepreneurs avoid failure.

For reference, this is the exact same framework we used to validate the idea for Bigcommerce (which I co-founded) back in 2009. Today Bigcommerce has over 100,000 paying customers, 500 employees and \$125M in VC raised.

Validating the demand for your product is more important than ANYTHING. More important than features, your team, design, pricing, etc.

Without market validation you’ll have a product that no one will pay for. You’ll burn a lot of time, energy and cash and you’ll end up stressed, probably depressed and definitely burned out.

And that hurts—a lot.

OK so let’s get to it—here’s how to validate your startup idea before you launch. Before you invest or raise \$1. Before you hire anyone.

Step 1 — Write down the problem, not a specific solution

You want to be able to clearly articulate a problem that you or others experience regularly. Notice that you’re only focused on the problem

here, not any specific solution—that comes later.

You want to be able to write down your problem in a simple statement. A few examples:

- It's impossible to follow up with customers once they leave a restaurant
- It's hard to determine which customers will churn before they actually do
- It's too hard to design professional-quality graphics for social media

You get the idea—keep it basic and refine the problem until you can articulate it with one sentence.

Step 2 — Determine if it's a tier 1 problem or not

It's easy to identify problems—they're everywhere. What you're really looking for is what I call a "tier 1 problem"—which means the problem you're looking to solve is one of the top 3 problems your potential customers are experiencing.

Let's say your (eventual) target buyer is the CEO of a small business. Their top 5 problems might look something like this:

1. **Generate more sales**
2. **Get marketing running efficiently (hire a head of marketing)**
3. **Outsource our payroll and benefits**
4. Increase our product selection
5. Get better at social media and invest in Facebook ads

If you're planning to launch a social media tool, you can see that's NOT a tier 1 (top 3) problem for the typical CEO of a small business—it's #5 on their list.

They'll be so focused on solving their first 3 problems that you'll never get a look in —EVEN if you have the best product, EVEN if you have the best support, etc.

They simply won't have time (or budget) for you if you're not solving a problem that's top of mind for them—a tier 1 problem.

This is probably the hardest lesson to learn and the one most startup founders ignore—"But my product is so great, once they use it they'll sign up for SURE!!!".

So how do you validate that your problem is actually a tier 1 problem? First you need to know who might typically buy your product. You want to build a basic profile, like this:

- Company size: 100–500 people
- Role: CEO or VP of Marketing
- Location: North America
- Industry: Retail, Technology & Hospitality

You then want to come up with a list of 20–50 prospects who meet this criteria. The easiest way to get that list is to jump on LinkedIn and research. Then just connect with all of the prospects you find with a message like this:

Hi [name],

We're hoping to spend 15 minutes on the phone with CEOs who are experiencing [problem]. We're doing research and have nothing to sell. Would you be available for a quick call tomorrow at 3pm?

A few pointers here:

- Be short and to the point—don't waste their time
- Include a specific day and time when you want to talk—avoids email ping pong
- Reach out to 3x the number of prospects you actually want to talk to. So if you want to talk to 20, then message 60. Most won't reply and some won't be interested, etc.

Great. Now you've got at least 20 people ready to chat who are experiencing the problem you've identified.

(I realize I've dramatically simplified this step — but you're an entrepreneur, so be creative and put in some hustle. If you don't like talking to people on the phone then maybe this startup thing isn't for you)

Before your first call, you want to come up with about 10 questions to ask them. The entire outcome of the call is to validate:

1. They experience the problem
2. How painful it is for them (i.e. is it a tier 1 problem?)
3. How they solve the problem now
4. Would they pay for a solution to the problem

Collate the answers from all of your calls in a Google document, Evernote, etc. After 5 or so calls you'll start to get a sense of whether this is actually a big problem or just a "nice to have".

Never, ever build a startup that solves a "nice-to-have-fixed" problem. People will use your product but never pay for it.

Step 3 — Properly determine existing solutions

One thing you'll have after your 20+ calls is an idea of how they currently solve the problem. They might talk specific products/companies or might reference a company process, someone they outsource the problem to, etc.

It's really important to drill in here on the call. Don't ask "which product do you use to solve that problem today?" because they might not use a specific product.

Instead, ask "so how do you handle that today?" and just listen. They might use a product or they might hack together a bunch of tools or processes to solve the problem.

Generally speaking, you want to solve a problem where there are already other companies trying to solve that problem too. Most times that verifies you have a large enough market with a tier 1 problem—assuming at least one of the existing competitors is doing well (has traction, has raised money, has been around for a few years and is growing, etc).

Be careful if there are genuinely no companies trying to solve the same problem as you. Most times that means you've got no market or your problem is too specific to too few people. Specificity is good, but you need to counter-balance that with a large enough market.

Step 4— Look for pain in existing solutions

Whether they use an existing product or not, you really want to identify the pain in the current *process* of solving the problem.

If they use a product, what do they dislike about it? What is it missing? What do they need in that product to make their job easier/faster? You never want to launch a “me too” product.

It's OK to have feature parity as a baseline, but that should only be 80% of your product. There should be at least 20% that's better—not different just to be different, but distinctly better.

A clear benefit potential customers can see and understand when comparing your product to others. And one that you can position around after you launch.

If they don't use a product to solve the problem, look at what they do use. Is it a combination of email, outsourcing and Dropbox, for example? Is it a manual process they employ 2 people full time to take care of? Search for the pain (time/complexity/cost/frustration) in that process.

Keep digging in until you can recite it back to them on the call.

OK, so just to recap you now have:

- A clearly articulated problem
- That is being experienced by at least 20 people you've spoken to
- Where there is an opportunity to solve that problem in a better/easier/cheaper way (the 20% better we spoke about above)
- And you can clearly articulate that 20%—which is why your solution will be better for them than existing products or processes

Step 5— Verify there's a budget for a solution

If you have existing competitors aiming to solve the same problem, you can look at their traction. Are they growing fast? Do they have a sufficient volume of customers? Are they (or have they) raising money? Are they hiring? Look for clues of growth.

In most (not all) cases, that's a great sign they not only have a good product, but are generating revenue and finding paying customers. Which means someone has a budget allocated for products like theirs (and yours).

You also want to set a second follow up with at least 10 of the prospects you spoke with on the phone and get their views on pricing. Not specific, "\$5/user/month" pricing, but their initial reaction to paying for a solution to the product they told you they were experiencing.

You would start by recapping the problem and explaining your solution to them (spend extra time talking about the 20%—or why your solution will solve the problem better than anything else).

Next you just come right out with it:

“So if we build something that solved the problem in a way that I just explained, what would your thoughts be around pricing?”

You'll get one of three responses:

1. They'll come right out and say they won't pay for it
2. They'll be somewhere in the middle—non committal, if you like
3. They'll say they would pay for it

If they tell you they won't pay for it or are somewhere in the middle, dig in a bit.

Why won't they pay? Would someone else in the company? Is it budget? Are they on a 100 year contract with IBM for their existing solution? Do they just not like startups? Is the problem not really a tier 1 for them? Is it because it's Monday and that's their moody day?

After talking to at least 10 prospects on the phone about pricing, you want 5 or more to say yes to pricing. Not to a specific price, but yes to actually paying for your solution when it's ready.

The huge caveat here is that having someone tell you they will pay for your product in no way, shape or form means they will. But it's a good start and I guarantee it will stop you in your tracks for at least 50% of your ideas—if you have more than one.

Step 6— Use those prospects to define your roadmap

Assuming you solve a tier 1 problem that enough people will pay for, you now have a somewhat captive audience of 10/20/30/50 people.

If you decide to proceed with your startup (congratulations!) you now have a built-in audience you can talk to about features, wireframes, design, etc as you build out your product.

Eventually some of them might even become your first paying customers.

You have what I call a *short feedback loop*. And the best part? You've spent literally \$0 to get to this point.

Marvelous! . .

Next steps

From here you can proceed where most startup founders START—actually planning out the product and building your MVP.

That’s a whole post in itself, so I won’t talk about that now, but hopefully you can see that by taking a simple, step-by-step approach, you can quickly determine whether your idea has a chance to become a revenue-generating company—well before you write a line of code, hire a designer or raise money.

With the low barriers to entry with technology (and even lower cost), building a product in 2015 is easy. But a product does not make a company.

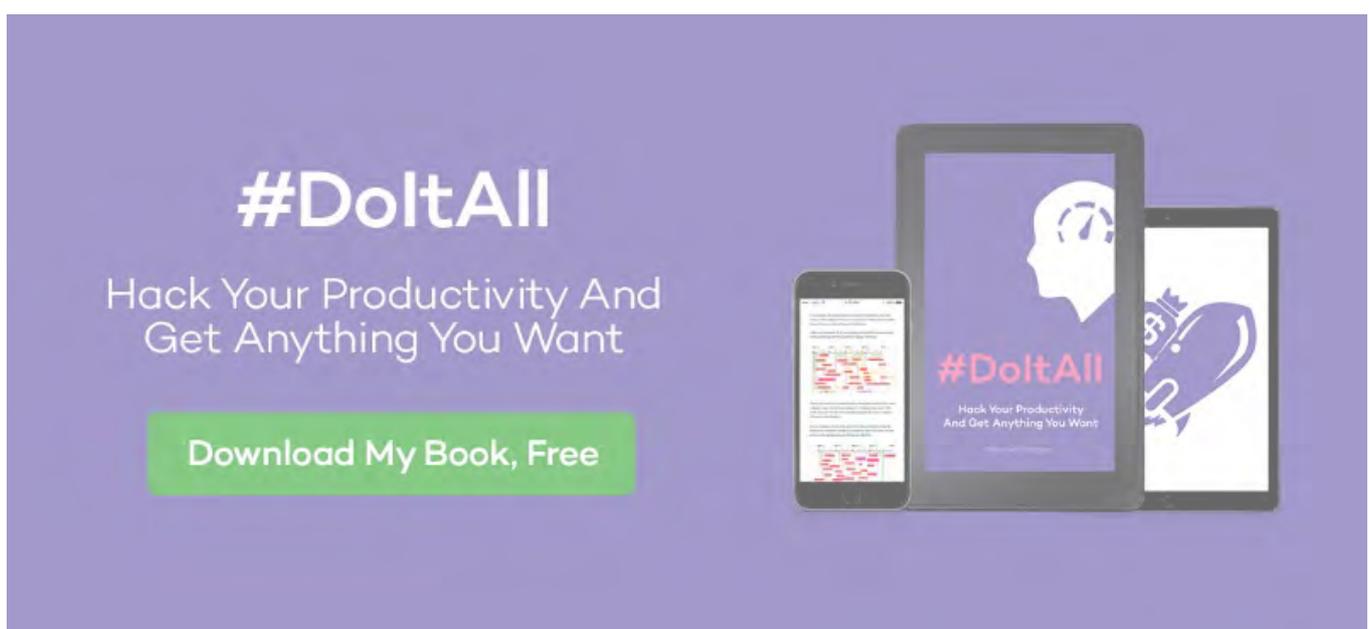
A company is comprised of customers who experience a problem that they will pay you to solve.

Don’t be seduced by the 0.0000000001% chance you can build the next Instagram or Snapchat. You probably can’t and you probably won’t—and that’s OK.

My preference has always been to solve problems for businesses—they are used to paying for software, so it’s a much easier sell when you launch.

Good luck!

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Mitchell Harper

3 min read

Startup

The success habit I wish I knew 18 years ago



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/mattdarbs/14819716835/>

How the top 2% think. Literally.

Most people live in a reactive state. They work on stuff until someone distracts them. Then they react to what the other person needs. That's true at home and in the office. And it's the easiest way to keep spinning your wheels for months or even years on end.

Look at the calendar of most people and you'll find a good assortment of the usual events like team meetings, one-on-ones, lunches, etc. You might also find some personal events scheduled, such as family dinners, soccer games, birthdays, etc.

But what won't you find on 98% of calendars?

Time blocked out to just think. Blocks of 1, 2 or even 3 hours at a time with no agenda. No additional attendees. No anything. Just "thinking time".

Time is our most precious resource. And where you spend your time influences how you do in every area of your life. Want a better body? Spend more time eating right. Want to be a better husband/wife? Spend more time listening. You get the idea.

But how do you know if you're working on the right things? You guessed it, you need to constantly re-visit your goals and strategy. Sometimes it makes sense to do that with people (colleagues, board, partner, family), but you also need some alone time where you can just lay your cards out on the table and think about what's working and what's not.

So what should you "think about" during the time you schedule to think? Here are some ideas:

- How are my important relationships going?
- Which goals aren't I making progress on? Why?
- What's coming up that I need to prepare for?
- What should I do differently?
- What new skill do I need to start learning? Why?
- Am I happy? If not, why not?
- How can I get more done this week?
- Should I take some time off?
- Am I working hard enough?

I'm sure you spend time thinking about these things, but I'd bet it's done in chunks of 10 or 20 minutes here and there, not 1 or 2 hours of solid, sit-in-a-quiet-place thinking that happens week in, week out.

As I was preparing to launch my company PeopleSpark earlier this year, I scheduled 5 hours each week just to think.

During that time I was unavailable and literally unreachable to the outside world. I turned off my phone, closed my email, set my Mac to Do Not Disturb and put a note on my door “Do not disturb until 2pm”.

During my thinking time I focus on not “doing” anything. I don’t try to make progress on anything tangible. I don’t mark off goals on a ToDo list. I just sit in silence and think about things that are important or top of mind.

I learned about this “success habit” from a life coach I had back in 2011 and it’s a common strategy used by everyone from Beyonce to Bill Clinton, Roger Federer, Richard Branson and Tony Robbins.

How much thinking time do you need each week and which day is the best for thinking? Those answers will vary based on how you work, but for me it was Monday morning from 8am until 11am and Friday afternoons from 4pm to 6pm. I simply created two recurring events in my calendar each week at those times with the label “Thinking Time”.

It’s such a simple way to do it, but if you stick with it, it will transform your life. Give it a try and you won’t be disappointed.

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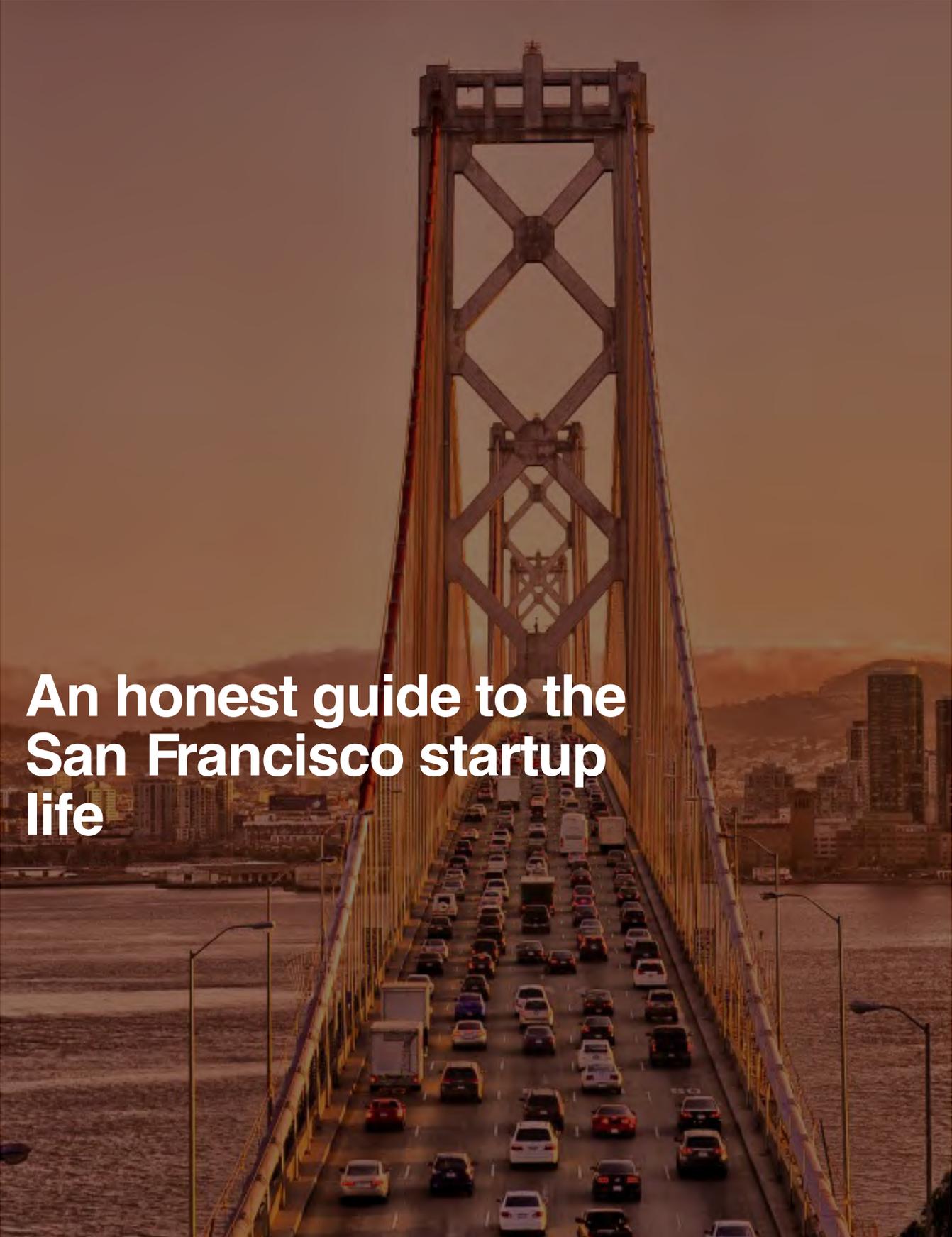
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And Get Anything You Want



Nitesh Goel

8 min read



An honest guide to the San Francisco startup life

Stationed on the West Coast of the United States, flanked by the blue hues of the Pacific Ocean, is a city that's home to some of the greatest companies in the world. 700 miles south of that is San Francisco.

I moved to San Francisco two years ago to work for a startup called Padlet. I love it here. It's like being in Hollywood, but with less-good-looking people. You have the celebs, you have the scandals, you have the media frenzy. My friends back home are full of questions:

Is it fun?"

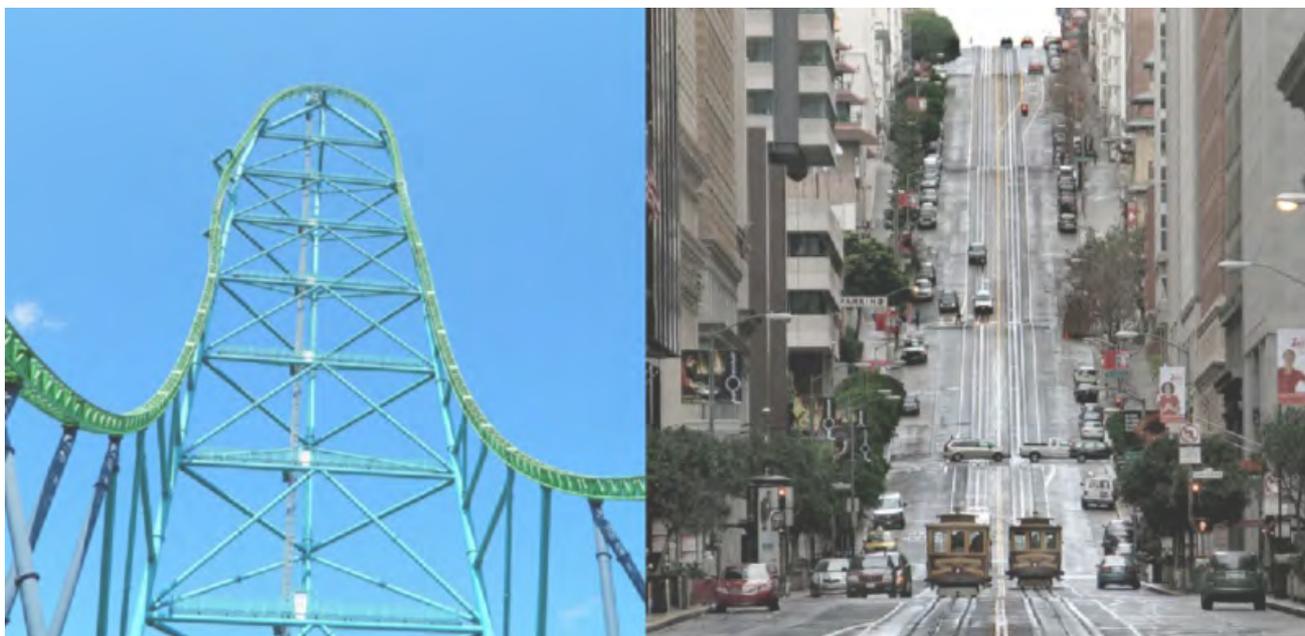
"You think I should look for a job there?" "How far is Vegas?"

So, here is my experience. I hope it brings the readers closer to our little valley where we are building the future*.

My day begins with a 30 minute commute to work. I take the subway. The subway system in SF is called the BART, short for Bay Area Rapid* Transit. I love the BART because it is always full of surprises. E.g. yesterday, I was at the train station and bam! the train came on time.

Many drive to work. Driving in SF is like a theme park ride—the cars move bumper to bumper, the terrain is alpine, and the people around you have the temper of 10-year-olds.

Here is a pop-quiz—Which one's an SF road and which one's a roller-coaster?



Pick the SF road. Original photos [here](#) and [here](#).

Those with a death wish cycle to work. It is easy to spot a cyclist. If you see a guy with one side of his jeans rolled up to the shin, he is a moron; if you see a guy on a bicycle, he is a cyclist.

. . .

My office is in a neighbourhood called SoMa, short for South of Market. Many startup offices are in SoMa. The name is a tribute to the returns that investors in most of these startups will see in the long run.

SoMa is a vibrant area with a variety of establishments like Starbucks, local coffeeshops, grab-and-go coffee kiosks, and coffee trucks. It's a shame I don't drink coffee. It's not that I don't like the beverage. I just prefer not to consume anything at temperatures that would liquify my alimentary canal.

Why is coffee in SF so hot? Are people welding metal with it? The one time I asked a barista (phrased more politely, of course), I was reproached,

“Good coff ee needs to be brewed at 200°F for full flavor.”

Odd! Good bread needs to be baked at 400°F but I don't see any bakeries selling me searing dough bricks.

My company shares its office with two other companies—Buildzoom and Flexport. Judging from their names, Buildzoom manufactures high precision microscopes and Flexport ships fluorine to dentists in China. We all have a common investor named YC. YC is the venture capital arm of the YMCA. They invest in a lot of companies every year, many that seem outrageous on paper. E.g. they invested in a company called Swapbox, which, I believe, is cloud storage for swingers.

Now, you must be thinking—“*Isn’t it stupid to judge a company by its name?*” No. It’s not. Most companies in the Bay Area have obvious names:

- Evernote makes note taking apps
- Optimizely lets you optimize your websites
- Google lets you google anything on the Internet

Our office, like most modern startup offices, has an open floor plan. In an open floor plan, desks are organised like tables in a college cafeteria. However, instead of food and noise, you have computers, food, and noise.

The noise mandates that you wear headphones while working. Be careful, though. Your choice of headphones reveals a lot about your character:

- **Beats headphones:** You are wasting your life’s earnings on fashion, hopelessly trying to look like a cool teenager.
- **Headphones that come with your phone:** You value a simple life. Buddha smiles on you.
- **Giant noise cancelling headphones resembling electric shock equipment:** You are Chuck Norris.

An assorted collection of desks and chairs adorns our office. People reflected on their lack of fitness and concluded that the blame lay squarely on their choice of furniture. So some people have standing desks—desks so high that you have to stand to use them (or as short folks like myself like to call them, any other desks).

Markets are chockablock with these desk+gym hybrids—standing desks, treadmill desks, cycling desks. This is why I feel bullish about my swimming desk idea—a big water tank with an infinity pool and a computer bolted on one side. Noise cancelling scuba masks, snorkels, and fins come as standard equipment.

My favourite mutant furniture, however, is the “balancing ball chair”. This chair has an exercise ball in place of a seat cushion. Let me repeat that: in place of a seat cushion, this chair has, a giant ball. It’s a great way to lose weight*.



Balancing ball chair

. . .

Outside of Chobani, you’d be hard pressed to find a place that talks more about culture than Silicon Valley. We want to create an environment where employees are happy, motivated, healthy, and productive.

Since people are happiest in the company of friends and family, we make sure you have work-life balance. This means you can work-from-home; on weekends. Notable exception is Yahoo. They let you home-from-work by allowing you to bring your infant to the office.

Of course, we realize that not everyone has friends. So we let you bring your dog to work. Our office has a dog too. His name is Moses. He's sensitive to sunlight.



Moses in a train

Unlimited vacation policy is another perk at most good companies. Travelling, after all, is an important part of the human experience. All we ask is that you don't leave at a time when your presence is sacrosanct for the company. It can be hard to judge that at times so here is a handy table to help you decide when you can go on a vacation:

Date	Project Status	Are you needed?	Can you go on vacation?
Jan 5th	Planning and scoping	Yes	No
Feb 5th	Active development	Yes	No
Mar 5th	Quality assurance	Yes	No
Mar 19th	1 week from launch	Yes	No
Mar 26th	1 week from launch	Yes	No
Apr 26th	1 week from launch	Yes	No
Jun 26th	1 week from launch	Yes	No
Dec 26th	1 week from launch	Yes	No

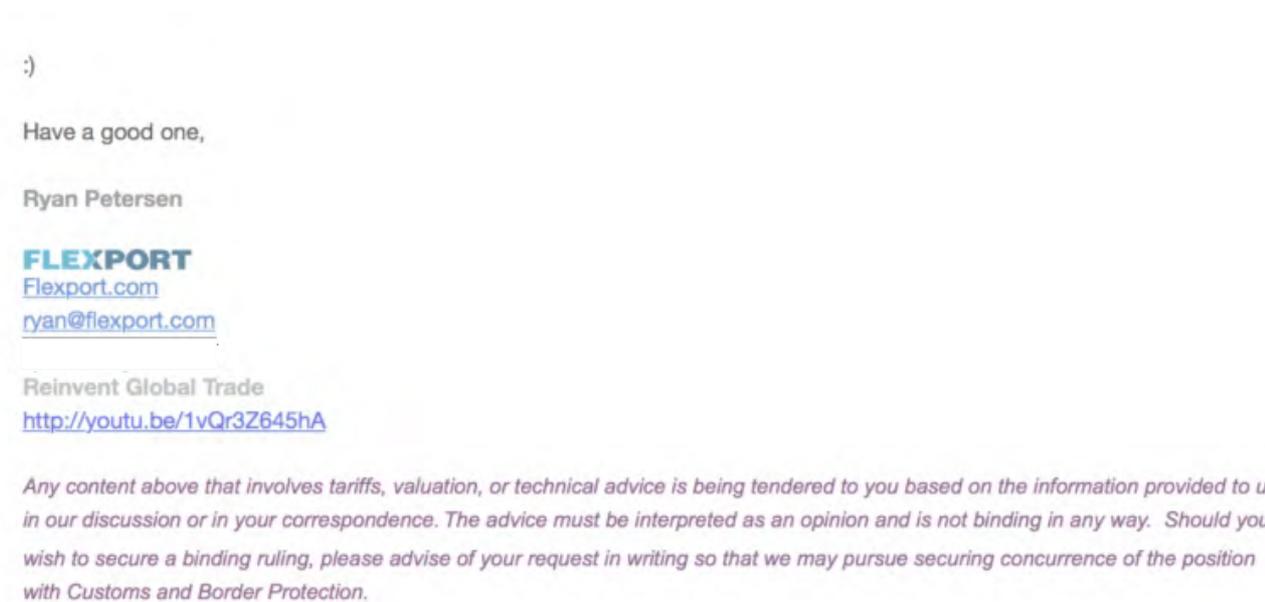
Vacation guide for startup employees.

Most startups provide lunch. Given the wide array of dietary preferences people have in SF, it's a tricky proposition. It is fairly common to have someone who is a vegetarian, a vegan, on gluten-free, on paleo, and on juice detox in an office of 3 people. Allow me to explain these diets:

- **Vegetarians** don't eat meat. I like vegetarians. I take comfort in the fact that if I am stranded with them in the Atlantic, ethically, I am one step closer to eating them than they are to eating me.
- **Vegans** don't use anything that comes from animals—like milk, leather, meat, and Comcast.
- **Gluten-free** people don't eat glue, which is a stupid diet to be on because no rational person eats glue. Based on that logic, I am on a painten-free diet because I don't eat paint.
- People on **paleo** only eat foods available to paleolithic humans, like Mammoths and Megalodon sharks.
- **Juice detoxers** eat other people's neurons because they don't shut up about being on juice detox.

Of course, we can't talk about working in SF without actually talking about how we work.

First rule of working in Silicon Valley—keep your emails short. If the recipient finds them rude, he/she needs a lesson in productivity*. Here is a good email:



Supposedly short email

Ignore the novella length signature; the brevity rule doesn't apply to it. Put anything there—legalese, a call to save trees, a motivational quote. Not many people know that Twitter started out as an email service for Silicon Valley professionals but didn't catch on because it allowed way too many characters.

We don't have meetings; meetings are to startups what kryptonite is to Spiderman—out of place. So we have all-hands*, one-on-ones, stand-ups, and huddles. Same goes for calls—we don't make phonecalls. We sync-up, touch-base, or simply, connect. Make sure you set up the right one, or you may give people the impression that you are wasting their vocabulary.

The most sacred psalm of the startup-bible, though, is —

“Do things that don't scale.”

This is why our first hire was a lousy mountain climber.

. . .

One last thing—the startup life does not stop at work; it affects your personal life too. E.g., if you work at a startup in San Francisco, you are like the guy selling plastic souvenirs at the Eiffel tower. Everyone at the Eiffel tower is selling plastic souvenirs. So you find yourself having the same conversations with similar people. Here is an example:

Alex: I have a startup. We are Yelp for contractors.

Ben: I have a startup too. We are contractors for Yelp.

[Pause]

Together: Business model ... yada yada yada Paul Graham ... Series A ... lorem ipsum Google sucks.

This, in itself, is not a problem; I enjoy these conversations. The problem is that they often render you incapable of any other forms of communication. E.g.:

Girlfriend's dad: Great weather today.

Ben: Yeah. It's beautiful.

[Pause]

[Longer pause]

Ben: So I see you use an iPhone. Android sucks, huh?

. . .

Famous investor Marc Andreessen says:

Software is eating the world.

That explains why software is so shitty. Many things in the world—like Kanye, curling, and kale—are hard to digest.

Still, technology is changing the way we live, the way we love, the way we work. And a lot of that technology is being built here in San Francisco.

If this sounds exciting, come on board; Padlet is hiring, and so are a bazillion other startups. If you don't live here and can't relocate, don't worry; many startups hire remotely. (Reddit isn't anymore, FYI.)

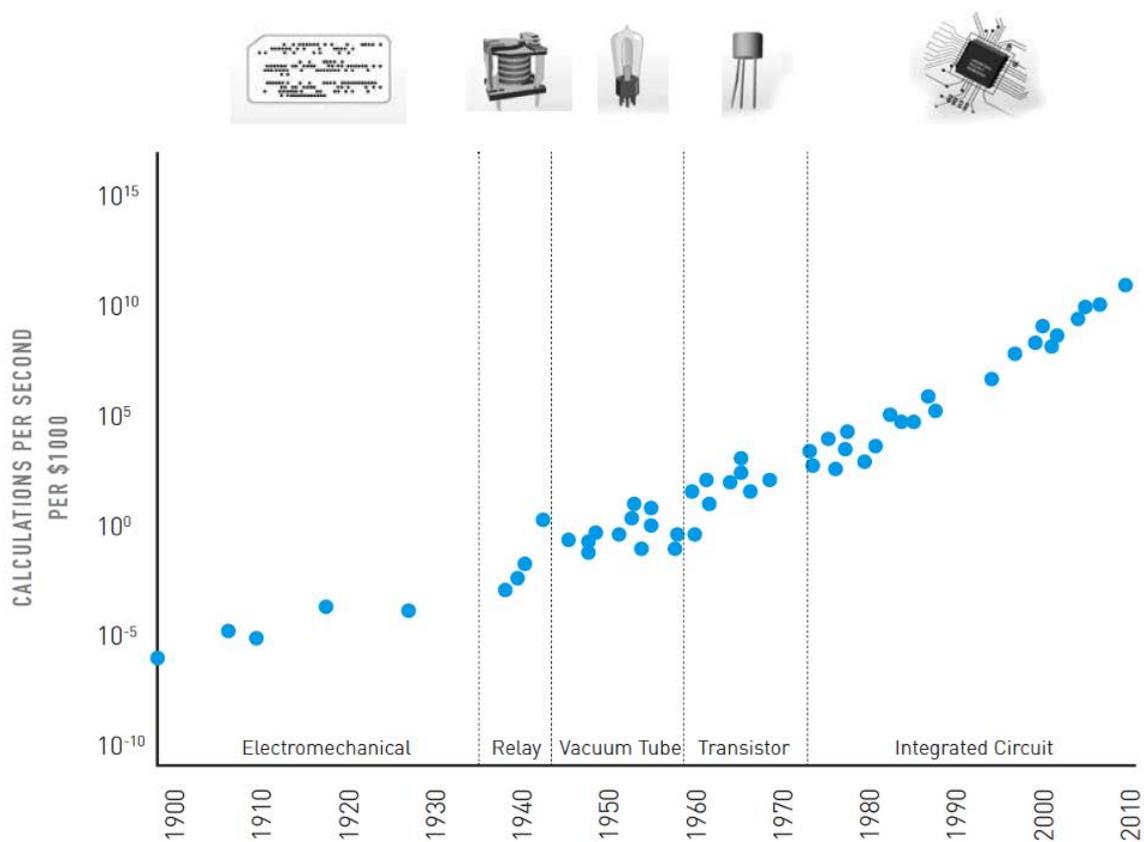
If you are already a part of this world, why did you just waste 8 minutes? Why aren't you working? Stop procrastinating and go ship stuff!

Thanks to sy and Ryan Petersen.



Niv Dror
9 min read

When Exponential Progress Becomes Reality



Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 70 (recent data extrapolated)

“I used to say that this is the most important graph in all the technology business. I’m now of the opinion that this is the most important graph ever graphed.”

—Steve Jurvetson

Moore's Law

The expectation that your iPhone keeps getting thinner and faster every two years. Happy 50th anniversary.



Components get cheaper, computers get smaller, a lot of comparison tweets.



elena silenok

@silenok

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Moore's law visualized through the evolution of Lara Croft

11:07 PM - 30 Jan 2015

6,351 RETWEETS 4,519 FAVORITES



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Moore's law — 1993 to 2013

3:51 PM - 23 Jan 2015

23 RETWEETS 14 FAVORITES



In 1965 Intel co-founder Gordon Moore made his original observation, noticing that over the history of computing hardware, the number of transistors in a dense integrated circuit doubles approximately every two years. The prediction was specific to semiconductors and stretched out for a decade. Its demise has long been predicted, and eventually will come to an end, but continues to be valid to this day.

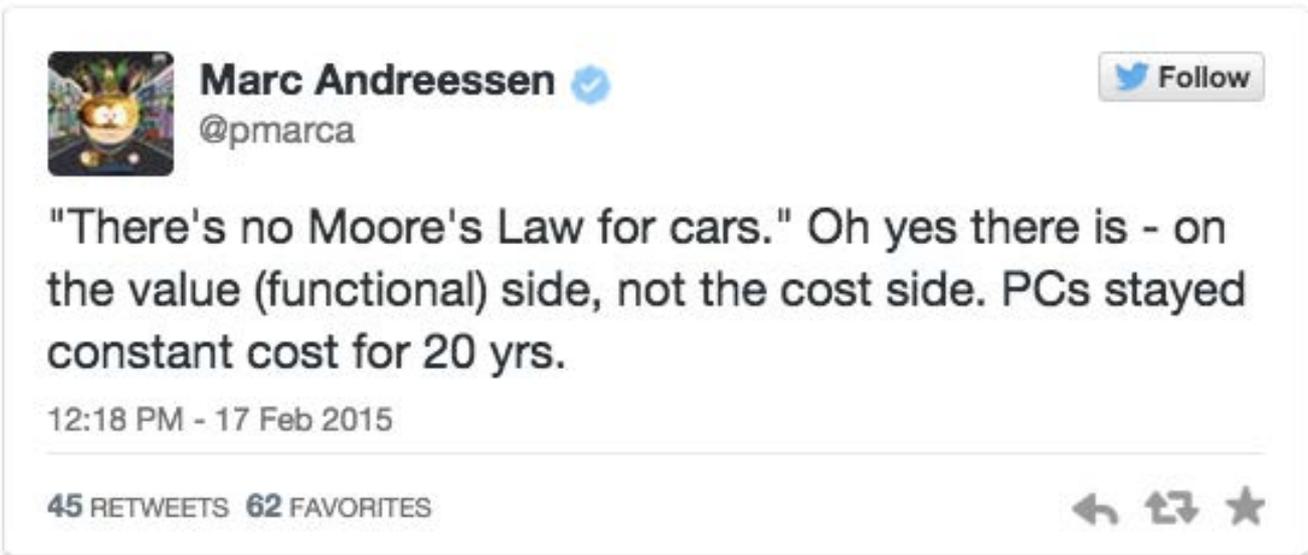


Expanding beyond semiconductors, and reshaping all kinds of businesses, including those not traditionally thought of as *tech*.



Yes, Box co-founder Aaron Levie is the official spokesperson for Moore's Law, and we're all perfectly okay with that. His cloud computing company would not be around without it. He's grateful. We're all grateful. In conversations Moore's Law constantly gets referenced.

It has become both a prediction and an abstraction.



Expanding far beyond its origin as a transistor-centric metric.

INNOVATION INSIGHTS | community content | diamond | electronics | semiconductor | technology

Moore's Law and Moving Beyond Silicon: The Rise of Diamond Technology

BY ADAM KHAN, AKHAN SEMICONDUCTOR 01.29.15 | 12:36 PM | PERMALINK

How Lara Croft's changing face illustrates Moore's law

Updated by Timothy B. Lee on February 1, 2015, 11:00 a.m. ET



Moore's Law for Space-Based Imaging

Posted on March 20, 2014

Hundreds of eyes in the sky, just like this one. Getting better, cheaper, and more numerous every year.

Marc Andreessen (@pmarca) Following

Moore's Law of the late 1800s --> steam power:

The power capable of being exerted by the steam-engines of the world in existence and working in the year 1887 has been estimated by the Bureau of Statistics at Berlin as equivalent to that of 200,000,000 horses, representing approximately 1,000,000,000 men; or at least three times the working population of the earth, whose total number of inhabitants is probably about 1,460,000,000. The application and use of steam alone up to date (1889) has accordingly more than trebled man's working power, and by enabling him to economize his physical strength has given him greater leisure, comfort, and abundance, and also greater opportunity for that mental training which is essential to a higher development. And yet it is certain that four fifths of the steam-engines now working in the world have been constructed during the last quarter of a century, or since 1865.

RETWEETS 163 FAVORITES 152

11:36 PM - 21 Dec 2014

But Moore's Law of integrated circuits is only the most recent paradigm in a much longer and even more profound technological trend.

Compounding Capacity to Compute

Exponential Growth of Computing for 110 Years
 Moore's Law was the fifth, not the first, paradigm to bring exponential growth in computing.

Logarithmic Plot

Moore's Law narrowly refers to the number of transistors on an integrated circuit of fixed size, and sometimes has been expressed even more narrowly in terms of transistor feature size. But rather than feature size (which is only one contributing factor), or even number of transistors, I think the most appropriate measure to track is computational speed per unit cost. This takes into account many levels of "advancement" (i.e., innovation, which is to say, technological evolution). In addition to all of the innovation in integrated circuits, there are multiple layers of innovation in computer design, e.g., pipelining, parallel processing, instruction look-ahead, instruction and memory caching, and many others.

From the above chart, we see that the exponential growth of computing didn't start with integrated circuits (around 1980), or even transistors (around 1947), but goes back to the electromechanical calculators used in the 1890 and 1900 U.S. Census. This chart opens at least five distinct paradigms of computing, of which Moore's Law pertains to only the latest one.

It's obvious what the sixth paradigm will be after Moore's Law runs out of steam during the second decade of this century. Chips today are flat (although it does require up to 20 layers of material to produce one layer of circuitry). Our brain, in contrast, is organized in three dimensions. We live in a three dimensional world, why not use the third dimension? The human brain actually uses a very inefficient electrochemical digital.

Source: [The Harvard Tech Ed in a cone](#)

Niv Dror
 @Nivo0o0

[Follow](#)

Moore's Law was not the first, but the fifth paradigm to provide exponential growth of computing.

9:01 AM - 28 Jan 2015

86 Retweets 80 Likes

Humanity's capacity to compute has been compounding for as long as we could measure it.



5 Computing Paradigms: Electromechanical computer build by IBM for the 1890 U.S. Census → Alan Turing's relay based computer that cracked the Nazi Enigma → Vacuum-tube computer predicted Eisenhower's win in 1952 → Transistor-based machines used in the first space launches → Integrated-circuit-based personal computer

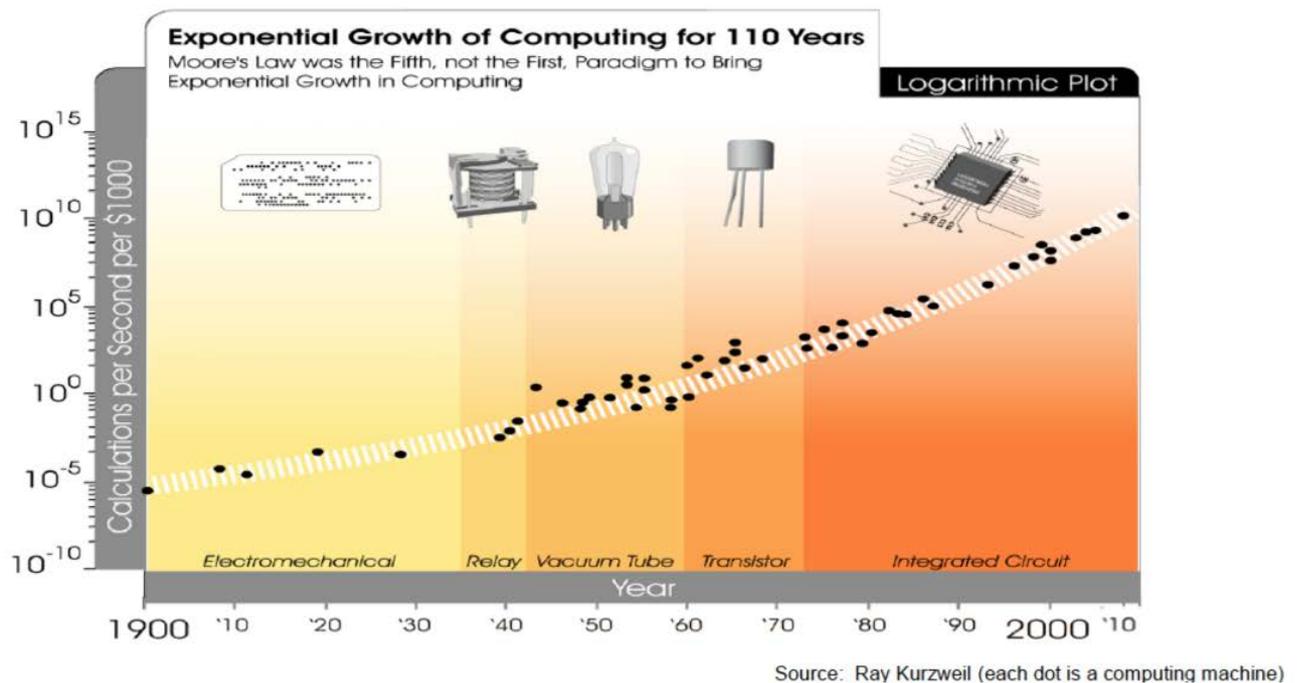
The Law of Accelerating Returns

In his 1999 book *The Age of Spiritual Machines* Google's Director of Engineering, futurist, and author Ray Kurzweil proposed "*The Law of Accelerating Returns*", according to which **the rate of change in a wide variety of evolutionary systems tends to increase exponentially**. A specific paradigm, a method or approach to solving a problem (e.g., shrinking transistors on an integrated circuit as an approach to making more powerful computers) provides exponential growth until the paradigm exhausts its potential. When this happens, a paradigm shift, a fundamental change in the technological approach occurs, enabling the exponential growth to continue.

Kurzweil explains:

*It is important to note that **Moore's Law of Integrated Circuits was not the first, but the fifth paradigm to provide accelerating price-performance. Computing devices have been consistently multiplying in power (per unit of time) from the mechanical calculating devices used in the 1890 U.S. Census, to Turing's relay-based machine that cracked the Nazi enigma code, to the vacuum tube computer that predicted Eisenhower's win in 1952, to the transistor-based machines used in the first space launches, to the integrated-circuit-based personal computer.***

Compounding Capacity to Compute



<http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3164&context=smallsat>

This graph, which venture capitalist Steve Jurvetson describes as the most important concept ever to be graphed, is Kurzweil's 110 year version of Moore's Law. It spans across five paradigm shifts that have contributed to the exponential growth in computing.

Each dot represents the best computational price-performance device of the day, and when plotted on a logarithmic scale, **they fit on the same double exponential curve that spans over a century.** This is a very long lasting and predictable trend. It enables us to plan for a time beyond Moore's Law, without knowing the specifics of the paradigm shift that's ahead. The next paradigm will advance our ability to compute to such a massive scale, it will be beyond our current ability to comprehend.

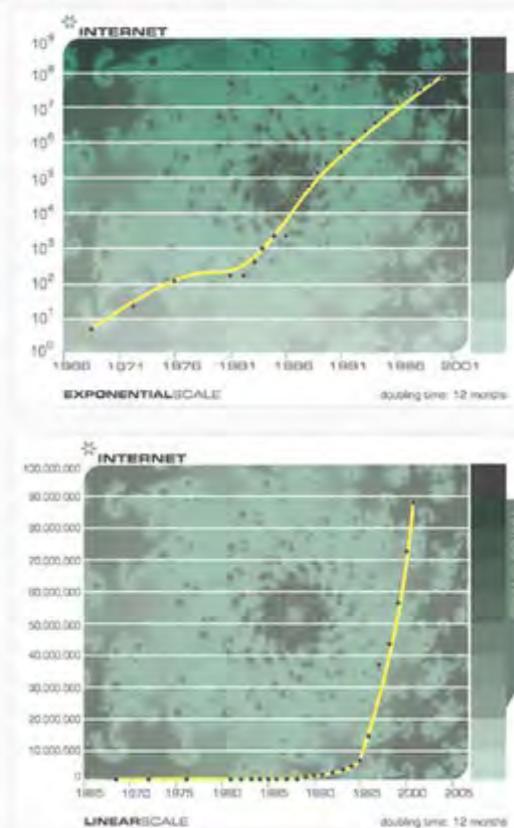
The Power of Exponential Growth



Human perception is linear, technological progress is exponential. Our brains are hardwired to have linear expectations because that has always been the case. Technology today progresses so fast that the past no longer looks like the present, and the present is nowhere near the future ahead. Then *seemingly* out of nowhere, we find ourselves in a reality quite different than what we would expect.

Kurzweil uses the overall growth of the internet as an example. The bottom chart being linear, which makes the internet growth seem sudden and unexpected, whereas the the top chart with the same data graphed on a logarithmic scale tell a very predictable story. On the exponential graph internet growth doesn't come out of nowhere; it's just presented in a way that is more intuitive for us to comprehend.

The following two charts show the overall growth of the Internet based on the number of hosts. These two charts plot the same data, but one is on an exponential axis and the other is linear. As I pointed out earlier, whereas technology progresses in the exponential domain, we experience it in the linear domain. So from the perspective of most observers, nothing was happening until the mid 1990s when seemingly out of nowhere, the world wide web and email exploded into view. But the emergence of the Internet into a worldwide phenomenon was readily predictable much earlier by examining the exponential trend data.



Niv Dror
@Nivo0o0



Technology progresses in the exponential domain, but we experience it in the linear domain. Internet Growth:

7:13 PM - 7 Feb 2015

1 FAVORITE



We are still prone to underestimate the progress that is coming because it's difficult to internalize this reality that we're living in a world of exponential technological change. It is a fairly recent development. And it's important to get an understanding for the massive scale of advancements that the technologies of the future will enable. Particularly now, as we've reached what Kurzweil calls the "Second Half of the Chessboard."

The Story Behind the Chess Board

The true story behind the invention of the chess board has been lost in time. [The story goes](#) that the inventor of chess, a mathematician, showed his creation to his country's ruler. The game introduces the king and queen, knights, bishops, castles and the pawn representing the serfs of the nation. It demonstrated the importance of all members of society.

The emperor was so impressed he offered the inventor a reward of his choosing. The mathematician, asked that one grain of rice be placed on the first square of the board and that he be doubled on each subsequent square. The emperor protests, believing that the reward is too small – but the mathematician persists.

When they reach the 32nd square, the reward amounts to the production from a few acres of rice patties- significant but not unreasonable. By the 64th square, it is estimated that the total amount of rice would amount to a pile the size of Mount Everest. This is a simple but dramatic explanation of a geometric series.

(In the end the emperor realizes that he's been tricked, by exponents, and has the inventor beheaded. In another version of the story the inventor becomes the new emperor).

It's important to note that as the emperor and inventor went through the first half of the chessboard things were fairly uneventful. The inventor was first given spoonfuls of rice, then bowls of rice, then barrels, and by the end of the first half of the chess board the inventor had accumulated one large field's worth—4 billion grains—which is when the emperor started to take notice. It was only as they progressed through the second half of the chessboard that the situation quickly deteriorated.

of Grains on 1st half: 4,294,967,295

of Grains on 2nd half: 18,446,744,069,414,600,000



Niv Dror
@Nivo0o0

 Follow

"The nonlinear gains that Moore predicted are so mind-bending it's no wonder very few were able to bend their minds around it."—@StevenLevy

9:07 AM - 12 Feb 2015

  10  8

Mind-bending nonlinear gains in computing are about to get a lot more realistic in our lifetime, as there have been slightly more than 32 doublings of performance since the first programmable computers were invented.

Kurzweil's Predictions



Niv Dror
@Nivo0o0

 Follow

"When there is software running in our brains (through nanobots), issues of privacy and security will take on a new urgency." —Ray Kurzweil

10:25 AM - 8 Feb 2015

  11  13

Kurzweil is known for making mind-boggling predictions about the future. And his track record is pretty good.

Predictions Ray has gotten right over the last 25 years

In 1990 (twenty-five years ago), he predicted...

...that a computer would defeat a world chess champion by 1998. Then in 1997, IBM's Deep Blue defeated Garry Kasparov.

... that PCs would be capable of answering queries by accessing information wirelessly via the Internet by 2010. He was right, to say the least.

... that by the early 2000s, exoskeletal limbs would let the disabled walk. Companies like Ekso Bionics and others now have technology that does just this, and much more.

In 1999, he predicted...

... that people would be able talk to their computer to give commands by 2009. While still in the early days in 2009, natural language interfaces like Apple's Siri and Google Now have come a long way. I rarely use my keyboard anymore; instead I dictate texts and emails.

... that computer displays would be built into eyeglasses for augmented reality by 2009. Labs and teams were building head mounted displays well before 2009, but Google started experimenting with Google Glass prototypes in 2011. Now, we are seeing an explosion of augmented and virtual reality solutions and HMDs. Microsoft just released the Hololens, and Magic Leap is working on some amazing technology, to name two.

In 2005, he predicted...

... that by the 2010s, virtual solutions would be able to do real-time language translation in which words spoken in a foreign language would be translated into text that would appear as subtitles to a user wearing the glasses. Well, Microsoft (via Skype Translate), Google (Translate), and others have done this and beyond. One app called Word Lens actually uses your camera to find and translate text imagery in real time.



Niv Dror

@Nivo0o0



Predictions Ray Kurzweil has gotten right over the last 25 years:

1:56 AM - 19 Feb 2015

1 RETWEET 1 FAVORITE

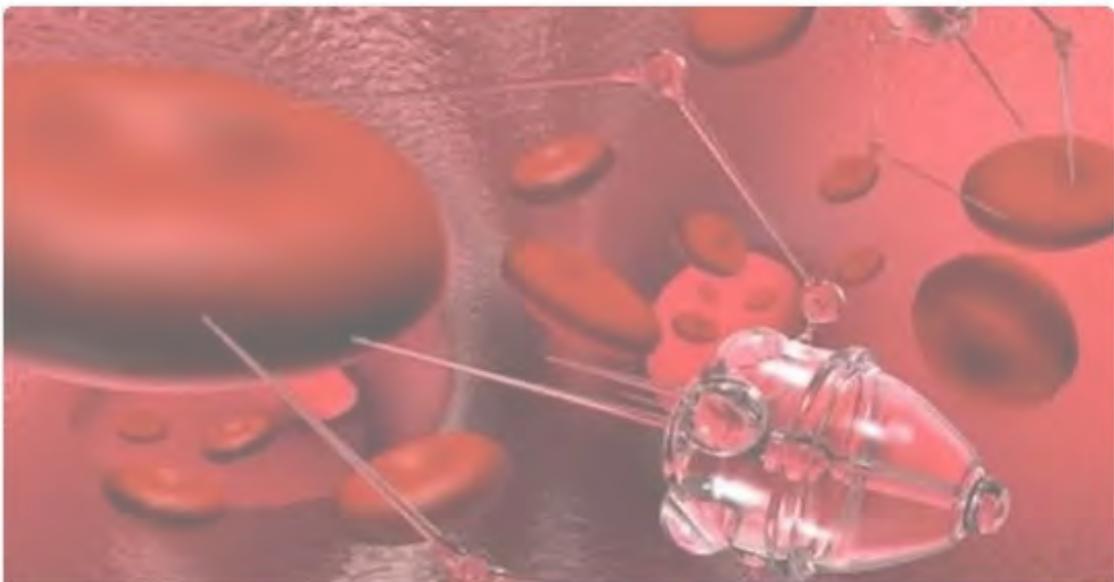


"...Ray is the best person I know at predicting the future of artificial intelligence." —Bill Gates

Ray's prediction for the future may sound crazy (they do sound crazy), but it's important to note that it's not about the specific prediction or the exact year. What's important to focus on is what they represent. These predictions are based on an understanding of Moore's Law and Ray's Law of Accelerating Returns, an awareness for the power of exponential growth, and an appreciation that information technology follows an exponential trend. They may sound crazy, but they are not based out of thin air. And with that being said...

Second Half of the Chessboard Predictions

“By the 2020s, most diseases will go away as nanobots become smarter than current medical technology. Normal human eating can be replaced by nanosystems. The Turing test begins to be passable. Self-driving cars begin to take over the roads, and people won’t be allowed to drive on highways.”



 **Reg Saddler**
@zaibatsu Follow

Nanobots successfully deliver their cargo inside a living animal for the first time: empeopled.com/p/32372 #tech

10:32 AM - 14 Feb 2015

69 RETWEETS 51 FAVORITES ← ↻ ★



“By the 2030s, virtual reality will begin to feel 100% real. We will be able to upload our mind/consciousness by the end of the decade.”



To expand image → <https://twitter.com/nivo0a0/status/564309273480409088>

Not quite there yet...



Keith Peters

@bit101



This is your future, kids. Enjoy it.

1:02 PM - 2 Feb 2015

266 RETWEETS 132 FAVORITES



“By the 2040s, non-biological intelligence will be a billion times more capable than biological intelligence (a.k.a. us). Nanotech foglets will be able to make food out of thin air and create any object in physical world at a whim.”



Steve Jurvetson

@dfjsteve



Clones are so cute! Made in Korea from the same deceased mother, and visiting us @DFJvc
More:facebook.com/photo.php?fbid...

9:04 AM - 3 Dec 2014

3 RETWEETS 8 FAVORITES



These clones are cute.

“By 2045, we will multiply our intelligence a billionfold by linking wirelessly from our neocortex to a synthetic neocortex in the cloud.”

Multiplying our intelligence a billionfold by linking our neocortex to a synthetic neocortex in the cloud—what does that actually mean?

In March 2014 Kurzweil gave an excellent talk at the TED Conference. It was

appropriately called: Get ready for hybrid thinking.



Here is a summary:

To expand image → <https://twitter.com/nivo0o0/status/568686671983570944>

These are the highlights:

Nanobots will connect our neocortex to a synthetic neocortex in the cloud, providing an extension of our neocortex.

Our thinking then will be a hybrid of biological and non-biological thinking (the non-biological portion is subject to the Law of Accelerating Returns and it will grow exponentially).

*The frontal cortex and neocortex are not really qualitatively different, so it's a **quantitative expansion** of the neocortex (like adding processing power).*

*The last time we expanded our neocortex was about two million years ago. That additional quantity of thinking was the enabling factor for us to take a **qualitative leap** and advance language, science, art, technology, etc.*

*We're going to again expand our neocortex, only this time it won't be limited by a fixed architecture of inclosure. **It will be expanded without limits, by connecting our brain directly to the cloud.***

We already carry a supercomputer in our pocket. We have unlimited access to all the world's knowledge at our fingertips. Keeping in mind that we are prone to underestimate technological advancements (and that 2045 is not a hard deadline) is it really that far of a stretch to imagine a future where we're always connected directly from our brain?

Progress is underway. We'll be able to reverse engineering the neural cortex within five years. Kurzweil predicts that by 2030 we'll be able to reverse engineer the entire brain. His latest book is called How to Create a Mind ... This is the reason Google hired Kurzweil.

Hybrid Human Machines

Ray Kurzweil: [Immortality by 2045](#)

We're going to become increasingly non-biological, to the point where the non-biological part predominate and the biological part is not that important anymore. In fact, the non-biological part -- the machine part -- will be so powerful it can completely model and understand the biological part. Even if that biological part went away it wouldn't make any difference, because the non-biological part already understood it completely.

We'll also have non-biological bodies. We can create bodies with nanotechnology and have virtual bodies with virtual reality that will be as realistic as real reality. The virtual bodies will be as convincing and as detailed as real bodies, which we do need, as our intelligence is directed towards a body. But it doesn't have to be this frail biological body that is subject to all kinds of "failure modes."

Research has shown that people actually begin to subjectively identify with their avatar. In the future it's not going to be a little picture in a virtual environment, it will feel like this is your body. You're in that environment and your body is the virtual body. They will be as realistic as real reality.

 **Niv Dror**
@Nivo0o0 [Follow](#)

Ray Kurzweil: Immortality by 2045 [youtube.com/watch?v=f28LPw...](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f28LPw...) "We're going to become increasingly non-biological!"

12:34 PM - 20 Feb 2015

  1  3

To expand image → <https://twitter.com/nivo0o0/status/568686671983570944>

"We're going to become increasingly non-biological..."



Alyssa Milano ✓

@Alyssa_Milano

 Follow

Man gets bionic eye, sees wife for first time in a decade

pic.twitter.com/1AwqfFrKDz kng5.tv/1AI0Vuf /via [@KING5Seattle](https://twitter.com/KING5Seattle)
[@heykim](https://twitter.com/heykim)

9:27 PM - 18 Feb 2015

306 RETWEETS 500 FAVORITES



“We’ll also have non-biological bodies...”



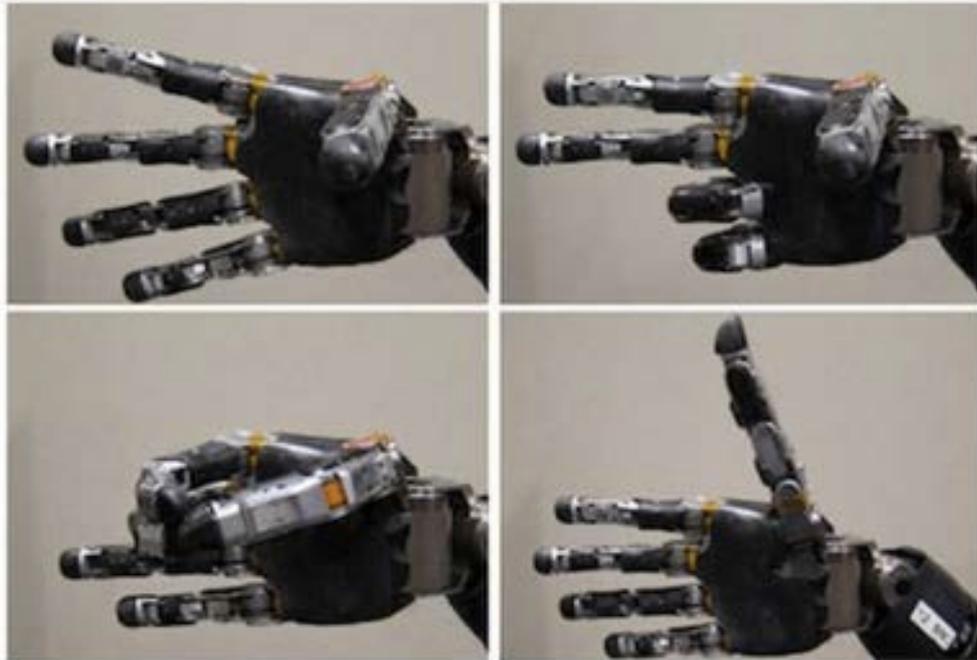
 **Steve Jurvetson**
@dfjsteve Follow

Cyborg Wednesday with @SRI_Intl SuperFlex and then
[@ModBotOfficial](#) [@Siemens:ift.tt/1wN0Ty9](#)

10:38 PM - 29 Oct 2014

31 RETWEETS 8 FAVORITES ← ↻ ★

“If the biological part went away it wouldn’t make any difference...”



 **DARPA** 
@DARPA

 Follow

Neural control of @JHUAPL's prosthetic limb now works even better engt.co/1GQoHkY pic.twitter.com/NjtAMsyg60 via @engadget

5:20 AM - 21 Dec 2014

264 RETWEETS 189 FAVORITES



“They will be as realistic as real reality.”*



 **Steve Jurvetson**
@dfjsteve Follow

Bionic Ballet #TED2014 Photos: ift.tt/1jFYVtK Video:
on.ted.com/tlIC

10:40 PM - 28 Mar 2014

1 FAVORITE ← ↻ ★

Impact on Society

A technological singularity —“the hypothesis that accelerating progress in technologies will cause a runaway effect wherein artificial intelligence will exceed human intellectual capacity and control, thus radically changing civilization”—is beyond the scope of this article, but these advancements will absolutely have an impact on society. Which way is yet to be determined.

There may be some regret...



Politicians will not know who/what to regulate.



 **The Daily Dot** 
@dailydot

 Follow

A robot vacuum tried to eat its sleeping owner's head:
trib.al/v1ANsAE

8:21 AM - 8 Feb 2015

701 RETWEETS 391 FAVORITES



Evolution may take an unexpected twist.



The rich-poor gap will expand.

A screenshot of a tweet from David Wood (@dw2). The tweet text reads: "It just seems so obvious to me technology accelerates the rich-poor gap" @dfjsteve technologyreview.com/featuredstory/... cc Inequality Q&A #BigIdeas15. The tweet is dated 3:24 PM - 10 Dec 2014. Below the text is a link to an article from MIT Tech Review titled "What Role Does Technology Play in Record Levels of Income Inequality? | MIT Technology Review". The article snippet states: "The disparity between the rich and everyone else is larger than ever in the United States and increasing in much of Europe. Why?". To the right of the text is a small image showing a white bar chart with a red vertical line and some red dots on a green background. At the bottom of the tweet are icons for reply, retweet (10), and like (8).

The unimaginable will become reality and society will change.



Benedict Evans
@BenedictEvans

 Follow

Agatha Christie never imagined being rich enough to own a car or poor enough to have no servants. Profound example of tech & social change

7:54 AM - 17 Feb 2015

  232  220



Ryan Sheffer

5 min read



Nobody Wants Your App.

Lessons Launching an App in 2015

We launched Momunt on March 4, 2015. We were lucky enough to debut on a stage in front of thousands of people at LAUNCH Festival, guaranteeing us our first one thousand users. We were on Product Hunt the next day, where we did reasonably well and got a few hundred more. Everything looked great for the first few weeks. Numbers were growing, everything up and to the right. But it quickly became evident that our initial users were leaving, and signing on new users was becoming progressively harder.

Our App Needed Work

I want to start out making it clear that I don't believe Momunt was perfect by any means. I do think it was quite good, but there were lots of issues that inhibited our

growth. With that being said, I think there are some trends that all new apps and tech founders will face.

Window-Shopping Early Adopters

Our initial users were tech fanatic early adopters. Analytics make it seem like they download apps more often to test out the UX than to actually use it. I'm not sure why I expected anything different with Momunt. As a tech company founder, I try out every new app I hear of, but in reality I only use 10–12 apps on my phone. It turns out...I'm not alone.

If Not Early Adopters, Then Who?

If the techie early adopters are deleting your app, you clearly need to find someone else to love it and share it. For us, we found a lot of initial traction with stories that were created through Momunt that displayed all of the visuals from pop concerts.

Views to Downloads

Here's an example that got tens of thousands more views and shares than we had users at the time it was created. When this happened, we got so excited! Yay—people are loving our shit.

VEVO Certified Live: 5SOS

Use Momunt to discover what's happening around you. See every photo and video shared in real-time from nearby, or any...

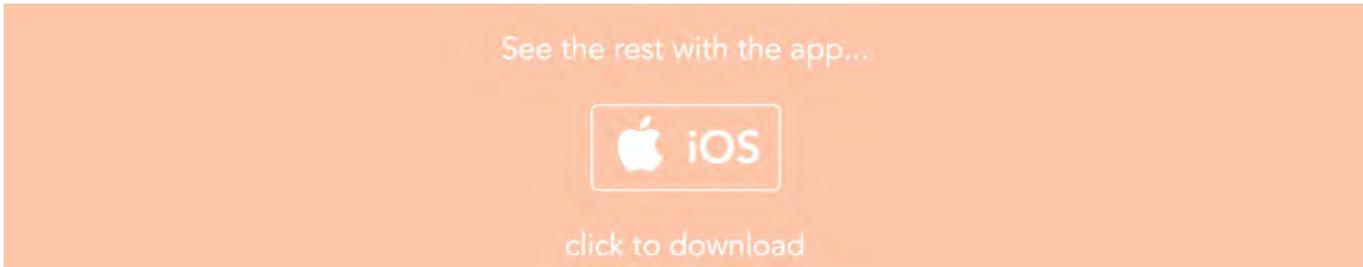
www.momunt.com

The daily stories we created generated thousands of views. However, we weren't getting these views to equate to downloads. It was nuts—for every one thousand eyeballs, we would get roughly one download.

One download for every one thousand web views.

Your Funnel Must Be Broken

We initially believed that this huge disparity between views and downloads must be a design flaw. Maybe our call-to-action wasn't good enough? So we improved that:



This update made zero impact on the rate of downloads. So we assumed we needed a simpler way to find the download button. We put a button on the top right of every page:



Zero impact.

This would make sense if it was harder to get views on the website—but generating thousands of web views felt simple. Why wouldn't ANYONE DOWNLOAD?

Maybe it was the conversion rate on the app store? Nope—that was sitting at 53%. So half of the people who got to the app store downloaded, but only two out of every one thousand would even click!!??!?!?

Peak App?



This tweet got a lot less traction than the average Dave Morin tweet, but I haven't been able to get it out of my head. At the moment I was reading that tweet, I was truly struggling with what I could possibly do to get people to pay attention to what we're doing.

Around the time of the tweet, Morin's company had just released Kong and I was wondering if, despite huge amounts of press, they were also facing more issues than they expected.

At this point, I feel confident that although people will always want services that make their lives better—the appeal of that service coming in the form of an app simply isn't enough.

Word on the Street

To test our theories, we hired a part-time marketer who ran a small street team to ask regular people questions about apps. The overall result was that pretty much no one wanted an app. And absolutely no one wanted a new social media app. This points to the fact that the app world is so bloated, it's overwhelming to the consumer. A consumer doesn't know what they should have, what doesn't matter, or what does matter—they just want everything to be simpler. People want to text message photos or post them to Instagram—they don't need a new solution. Given that Momunt was/is a social media app, we knew we had to make a change.

Brand vs. App

We'll be announcing our official re-launch and re-brand soon, but suffice to say that it will not be based around a social media app—and the success of the company will not be based around app downloads. People simply don't want new apps. They want new and compelling services from brands that are attractive enough to be shared with their friends.

Onward.

As always—you can reach me at team@zeroslant.com



Thomas Oppong

3 min read

Startup

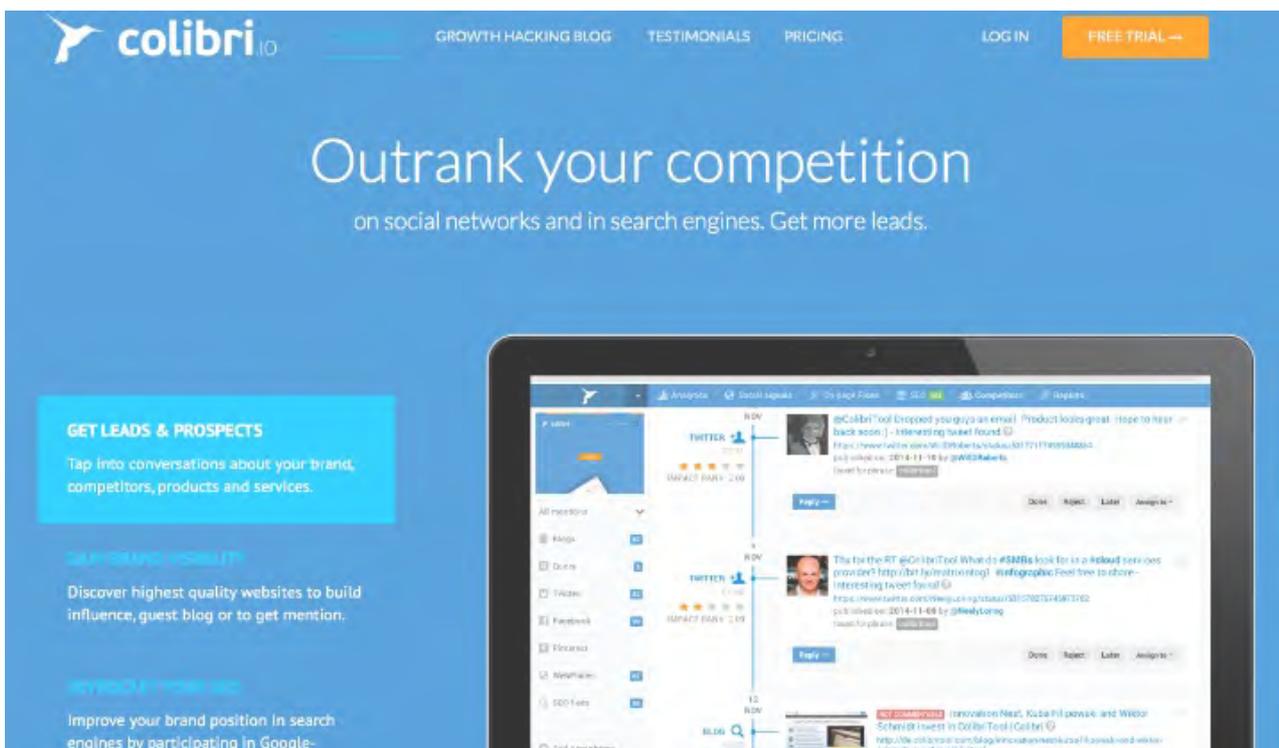
A dark, cluttered workshop or storage area filled with various tools, wood, and ropes. The scene is dimly lit, with a focus on the textures and colors of the materials. A large coil of white rope is prominent in the foreground, and various pieces of wood and metal are scattered throughout the background.

23 of The Best Tools to Hack Your Startup Growth (Starting Today)

For meaningful growth, startups must completely change the rules of traditional marketing and innovate outside of those growth channels. You should be thinking growth when building your app. Companies like Dropbox, Mint and the recently sensational Slack incorporated sharing into their functionalities.

Mailbox used the waiting list to their advantage and it worked. Lot of startups now look beyond AdWords, SEO or popular marketing strategies to find users. These are a collection of products, tools and apps to grow your startup or new business.

- 1/ Crayon—The most comprehensive collection of marketing designs.
- 2/ Pablo by Buffer—Create engaging images for your social media posts in 30s.
- 3/ Hey Press—Free searchable database finds journalists for your startup.
- 4/ Intercom Real-Time -Have live conversations with users inside your apps.
- 5/ Colibri.io—Colibri shows you where your customers are engaging online so that you can insert yourself into relevant conversations.



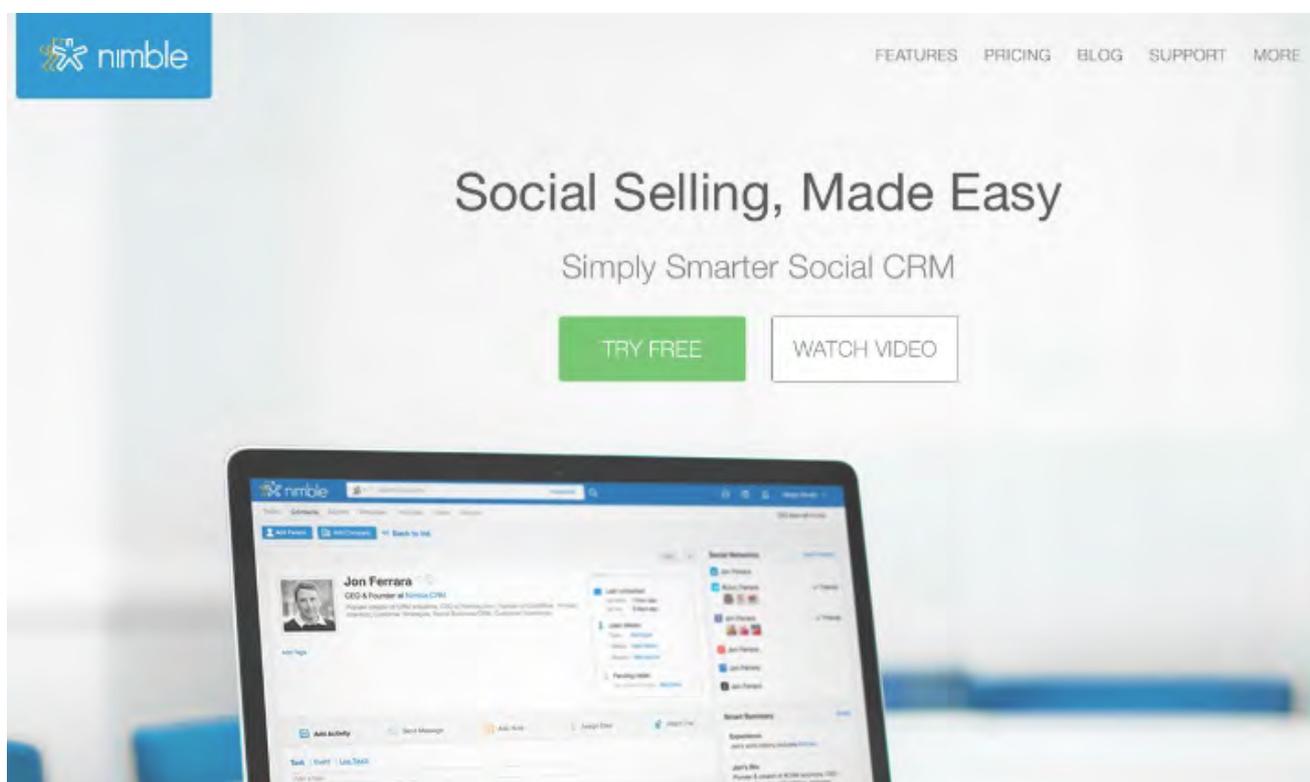
6/ HOKO—Easily set up your apps for mobile search and deep linking.

7/ Summer of Marketing—12 weeks of Marketing. From 0 to 10,000+ visitors/month

8/ Marketing Podcasts—Discover podcasts that can help you become a better marketer.

9/ Unbounce—Build, publish and A/B test landing pages without I.T.

10/ Nimble—combines all your contacts, email, social signals, activities and follow-ups from everywhere you work.



11/ Zapier—Makes it easy to automate tasks between web apps.

12/ BuzzSumo—Research the content your audience really wants.

13/ Mention—Monitor conversations that matter most to your brand.

14/ ArticleBunny—Get fast, professional articles at an affordable price.

15/ Outbrain—Promote your blog post or article in 'From Around the Web'

sections of CNN, FastCompany, Slate, Time etc.

GET YOUR CONTENT DISCOVERED.

Promote your content on premium websites

LEARN MORE >



OUTBRAIN AMPLIFY: GET YOUR CONTENT DISCOVERED

Your content will be promoted on the web's largest and most respected media properties, including CNN.com, Slate and ESPN. We make sure it's seen precisely when people will find it most interesting.

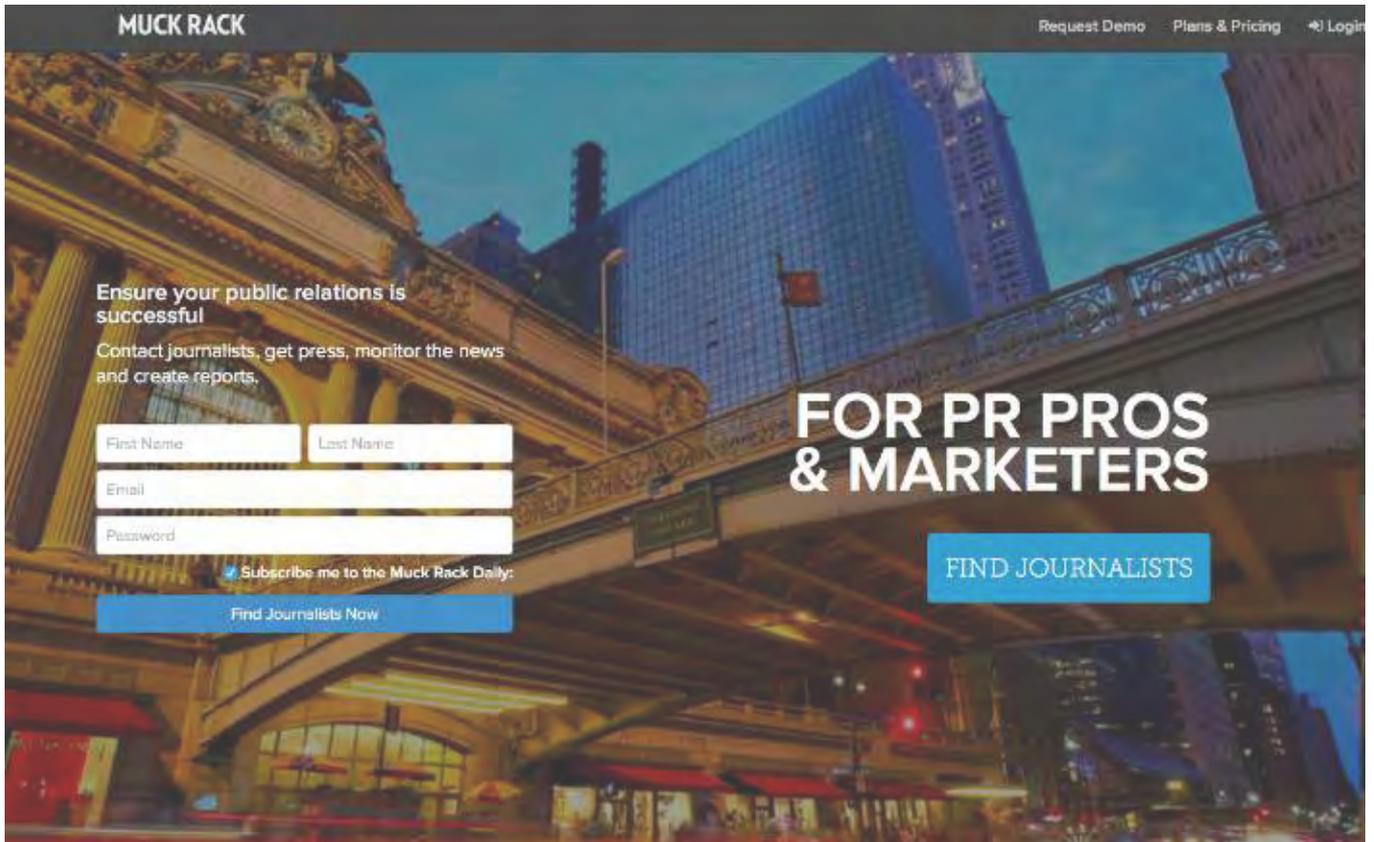
16/ Notify—Get notified in Slack when your startup is mentioned online

17/ SumoMe—Collect the email addresses of your site visitors.

18/ Canva—Create designs for Web: blog graphics, presentations, Facebook covers, Twitter Covers etc.

19/ Ocho Create eight-second short videos that provide a “window to the world”.

20/ Muckrake—Easily find & build relationships with journalists.



21/ [Really Good Emails](#)—Great email newsletter examples.

22/ [Growth Hacker TV](#)—Interviews with leading growth people.

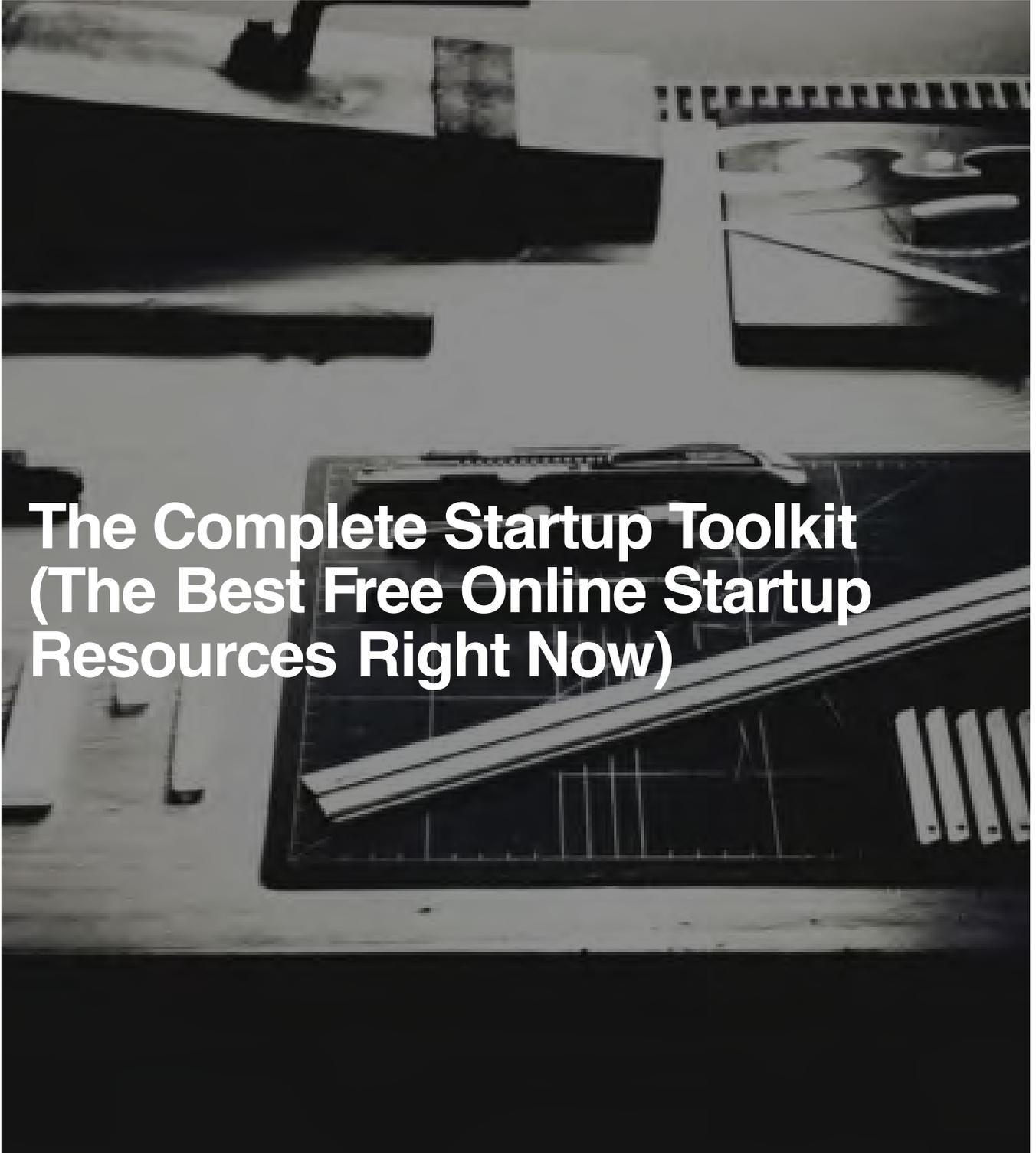
23/ [Anewstip](#)—Find journalists by what they tweet.

The author is the founder at [Alltopstartups](#) (where he shares startup resources) and [Postanly](#) (a free weekly newsletter that delivers the best, most popular and long form posts from top publishers around the web).



Thomas Oppong

3 min read



The Complete Startup Toolkit (The Best Free Online Startup Resources Right Now)

Starting a business is hard. It's even a more difficult when you don't have the right startup resources, tools and business apps to do what needs to be done in time.

Entrepreneurs do everything they can to get their businesses to succeed.

What startup founders really need are the best startup resources and tools to help them get out there to build and sell their products and services.

This is an awesome curation of the best online resources and tools for startups, originally curated by [Ben Tossell](#), Community Manager at [ProductHunt](#)

1. [Startup Stash](#)—A curated directory of 400 resources & tools for startups
2. [Maker book](#)—A directory of the best free resources for creatives
3. [Marketing Stack](#) —A curated directory of marketing resources & tools
4. [Freebie.Supply](#)—Awesome free things for entrepreneurs & startups

The image contains two promotional banners. The top banner has a light gray background and features the text 'ADDED THIS MONTH' in a small, uppercase font. Below it, in a larger, bold, uppercase font, is '-> +100 NEW RESOURCES <-'. At the bottom of this banner is a dark gray button with the white text 'See New Resources'. The bottom banner also has a light gray background and features the text 'NOW: +400 AWESOME FREE THINGS' in a large, bold, uppercase font. To the right of this text is a line-art illustration of an astronaut in a spacesuit holding a flag. At the bottom of this banner is a dark gray button with the white text 'See All Resources'.

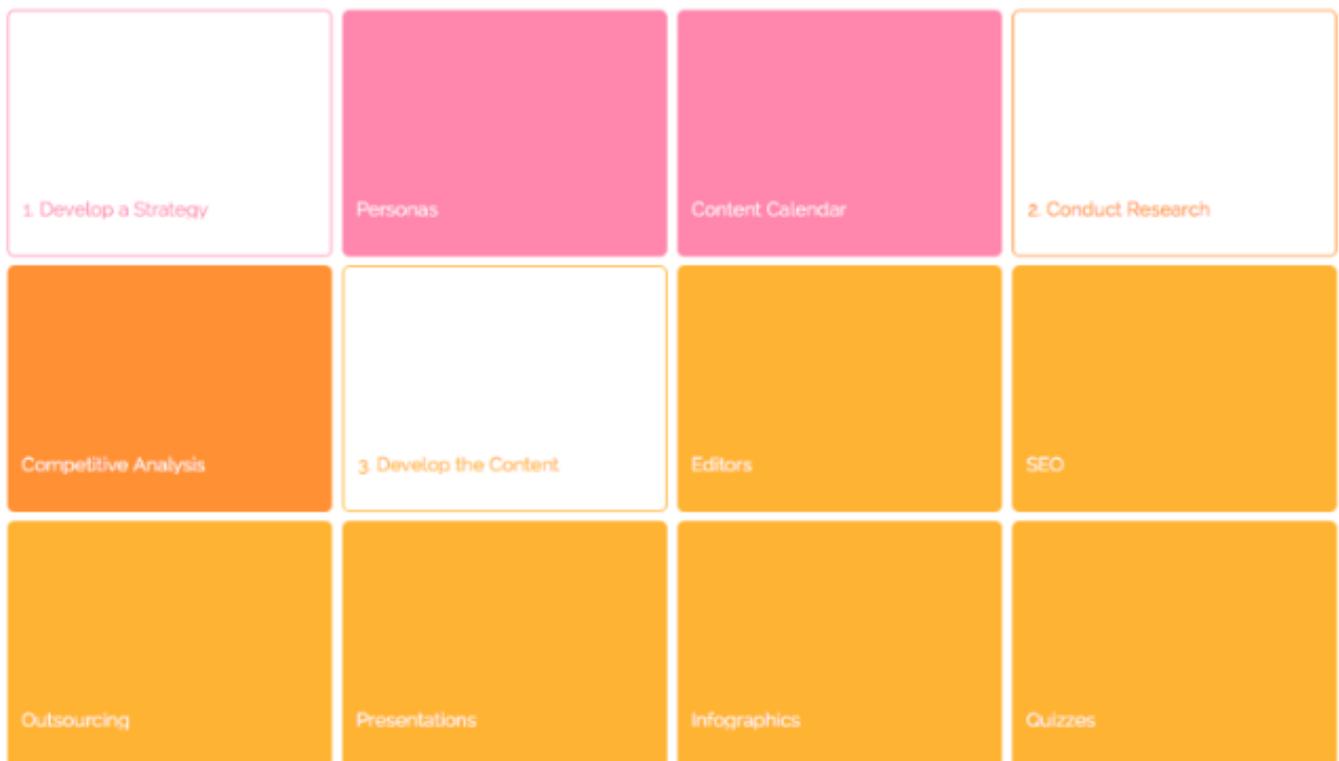
5. [Template Stash](#) —Curated collection of best free themes & website templates
6. [NoDesk](#) —A curated collection of resources for the digital nomad

7. [Always Learning](#) –The best resources for learning programming and design

8. [Content Marketing](#) –Stack A curated directory of content marketing resources

Content Marketing Stack

A curated directory of content marketing resources & tutorials

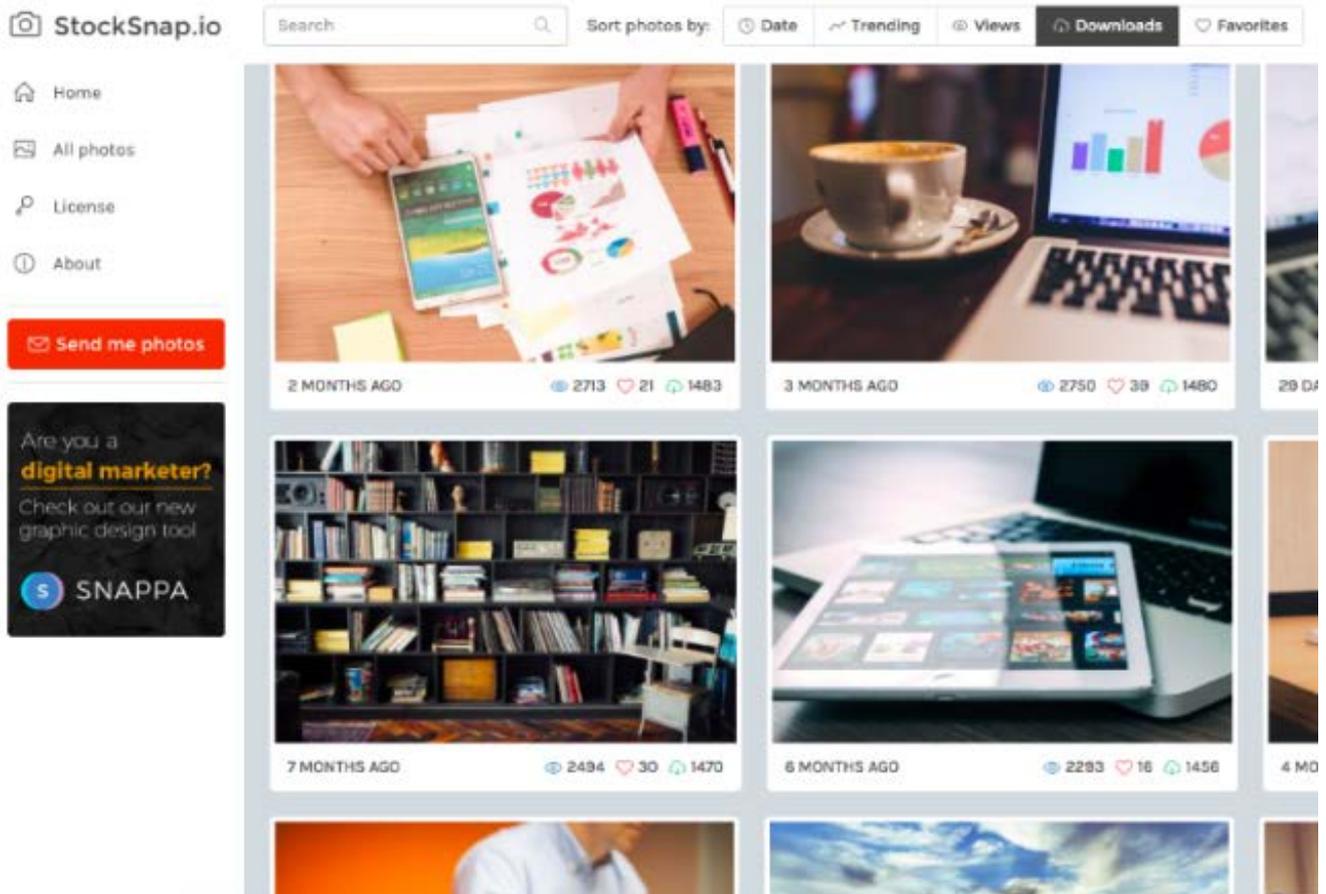


9. [Growtdhverse](#) –An interactive visualization of marketing tech tools

10. [Chats.Directory](#) –A curated list of the best Slack groups for professionals

11. [rrrepo](#) –Curated directories, for everything

12. [StockSnap.io](#) –Search for free stock photos for your startup blog.



13. [FreePik](#) –Free graphic resources for designers and developers

14. [The Starter Kit](#) –Curated resources for web developers and visual designers

15. [Agile Designers](#) –Best Resources for Designers and Developers

16. [Startup{try}](#) –500+ startup resources, organized by 350+ topics.

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startup{ery gathers and organizes the best resources to help you build your business.

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Mark Suster

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Babak Nivi



Brad Feld



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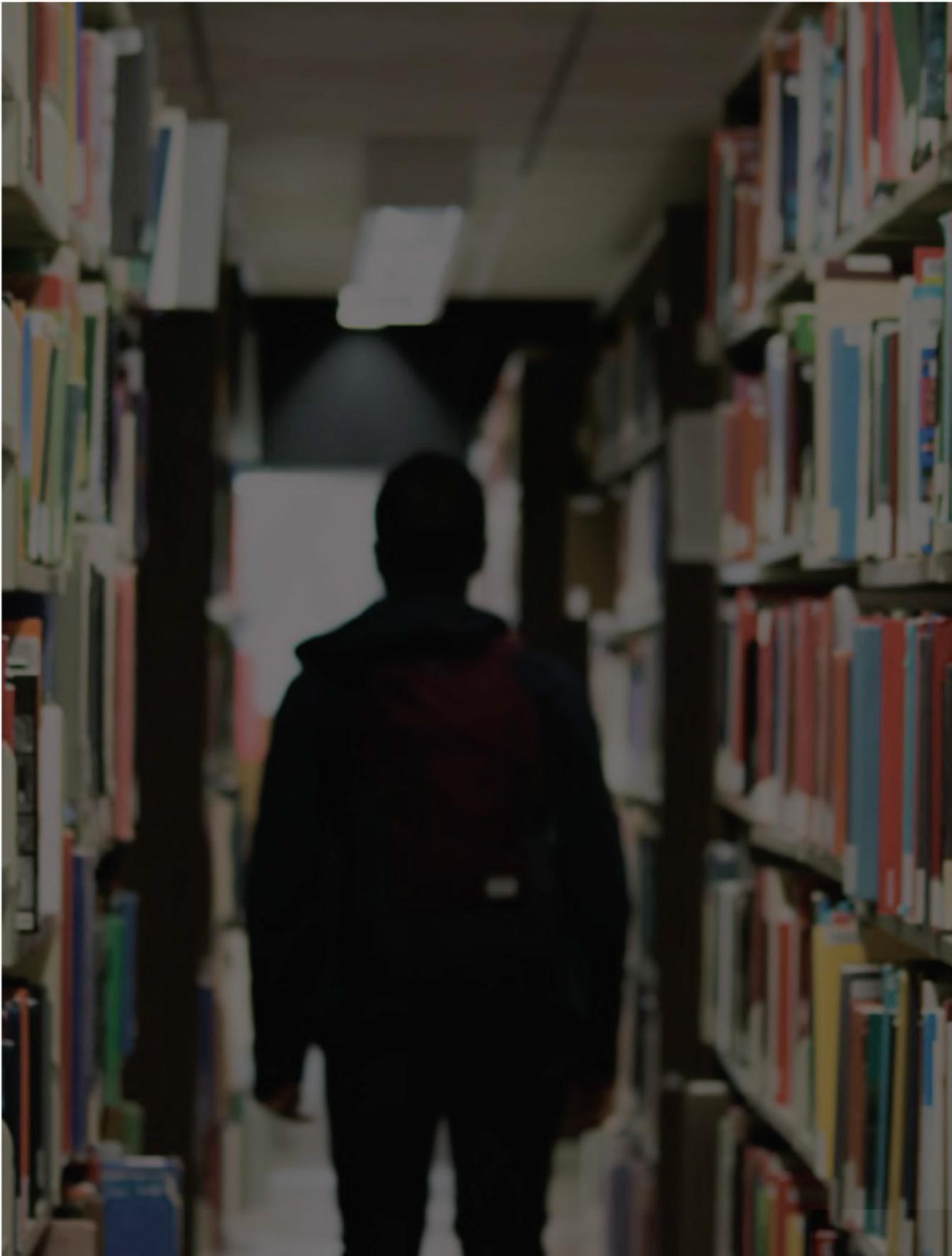
[View all Experts »](#)

17. [Beaqr.in](#) –Front End Vault 270+ Front End resources in one place

The author is the founder at [Alltopstartups](#) (where he shares startup resources) and [Postanly](#) (a free weekly newsletter that delivers the most insightful long form posts from top publishers). Follow him on Twitter [@Alltopstartups](#).



Thomas Oppong
4 min read



Want to be a Better Entrepreneur? Read These Books

These are best sellers. They are very popular with the startup community. You have probably read some of them. Find time to read some of these books this year and your entrepreneurial journey will never be the same again.

There is no better way to continue your personal and business growth in 2015 than to begin in the pages of a great book. These are 8 great additions to your reading list before the year ends.

1. Zero to one

Zero to One: Notes on Startups, or How to Build the Future by venture capitalist, PayPal co-founder, and early Facebook investor Peter Thiel along with Blake Masters. It is a condensed and updated version of a highly popular set of online notes taken by Masters for the CS183 class on startups taught by Thiel at Stanford University in Spring 2012.

“Crisply written, rational and practical, Zero to One should be read not just by aspiring entrepreneurs but by anyone seeking a thoughtful alternative to the current pervasive gloom about the prospects for the world.” – The Economist

2. The Hard Things About Hard Things

In The Hard Thing About Hard Things, Ben Horowitz, cofounder of Andreessen Horowitz and one of Silicon Valley’s most respected and experienced entrepreneurs, draws on his own story of founding, running, selling, buying, managing, and investing in technology companies to offer essential advice and practical wisdom for navigating the toughest problems business schools don’t cover.

“More than any other business book released this year, “Hard Things” gives an insider’s perspective on what it’s like to lead and scale a startup.” (–Business Insider’s Best Business Books of 2014)

3. The Innovators

The Innovators: How a Group of Inventors, Hackers, Geniuses, and Geeks Created the Digital Revolution was written by Walter Isaacson. The book details the history of the digital revolution through several pivotal innovators who created early computer breakthroughs and later larger systems like the Internet.

The author also asserts that many innovators successes throughout history happens often with the help of other contributors via teamwork is a recurring theme.

“...a project whose gestation preceded Steve Jobs and whose vision exceeds it.” (New York Magazine)

4. Thinking, Fast and Slow

Thinking, Fast and Slow is a best-selling book by Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics winner Daniel Kahneman which summarizes research that he conducted over decades, often in collaboration with Amos Tversky. It covers all three phases of his career: his early days working on cognitive biases, his work on prospect theory, and his later work on happiness.

“A major intellectual event . . . The work of Kahneman and Tversky was a crucial pivot point in the way we see ourselves” (David Brooks The New York Times)

5. Hooked

Hooked is a guide to building habit-forming technology, written for product managers, designers, marketers, and startup founders. It provides practical insights to create habits that stick and actionable steps for building products people love and can't put down.

“Hooked gives you the blueprint for the next generation of products. Read Hooked or the company that replaces you will” (Matt Mullenweg, Founder of WordPress)

6. The Power of Habit

The Power of Habit is a book by Charles Duhigg, a New York Times reporter. It explores the science behind habit creation and reformation.

Duhigg takes us to the thrilling edge of scientific discoveries that explain why habits exist and how they can be changed.

“Once you read this book, you’ll never look at yourself, your organisation, or your world quite the same way.” (Daniel H. Pink)

7. Big Bang Disruption

Big Bang Disruption is an alarming look at how quick-to-market innovations are killing established industries. It analyses the origins, economics and anatomy of ‘Big Bang’ disruption. The material draws on research by the Accenture Institute for High Performance, along with interviews with entrepreneurs, investors, and executives from more than 30 industries.

“Everything you need from business school in one very direct book. Big Bang Disruption elegantly and simply identifies why innovation happens in some new companies and how you can embrace and harness this new way of thinking.” (Dick Costolo, CEO Twitter)

8. Choose Yourself

With dozens of case studies, interviews and examples—including the author, investor and entrepreneur James Altucher’s own heartbreaking and inspiring story—Choose Yourself illuminates your personal path to building a bright, new world out of the wreckage of the old.

“Altucher has turned his misfortune into a source of wisdom and comfort for the despondent.” (Business Week)

*The author is the founder and curator at **Postanly**, a free weekly newsletter that delivers the most insightful and popular long-form posts from top publishers.*



Tobias van Schneider

4 min read

Startup

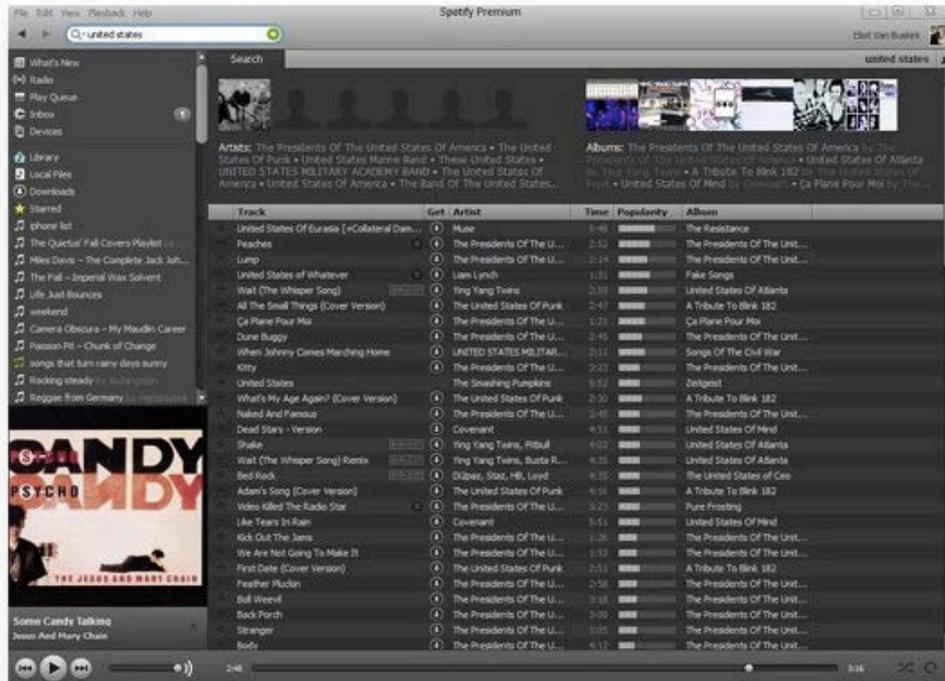
No Struggle, No Change

by Tobias van Schneider

first appeared on my private email list.

As some of you might know, for the past two and a half years I had the honor to work with the fantastic Spotify team in New York. Since then a lot has changed not only for Spotify but also for me.

Today marks the last day as a full time employee at Spotify. (since you're reading this slightly delayed of my original email, today means 4 weeks ago) I will remain as a consultant & a good friend of the team, but my focus will switch onto something new.



This was Spotify, just 2 years ago - A lot has changed.

Spotify has tripled in size (company size & users) during just those two years, and I had the opportunity to work on a range of interesting projects. From helping to establish our product design guidelines to evolving our brand identity, it's been a blast. While some projects launched, others are of course still confidential and have yet to find it's way to the world.

Everytime I look at the Spotify from 2–3 years ago, I'm proud of all the things the design team as accomplished.

As you can imagine, this decision did not come lightly. I loved working with the team. But let me explain:

Understanding security & priorities

You have to know a little bit more about my prior experience before Spotify. I always used to work on my own, I had my own company and always preferred moving at my own pace. I never had a traditional 8h full time job, and if I did, it wasn't for long. I'm terrible at climbing corporate ladders.

I have a different understanding of what security means to me. Getting a monthly salary, running on company insurance, having a company phone contract, free lunch etc. makes me anxious. I feel as I'm locked in a cage, even though it might be a golden one. (yes, first world problems)

All I do, and all I own is not in my hands. While some would see a monthly salary as secure, I see it as the opposite. I'm afraid of getting comfortable, losing control over my own circumstances, not being myself anymore. These things have a big impact on my health & well being.

“The three most harmful addictions are heroin, carbohydrates, and a monthly salary.”

—NASSIM NICHOLAS TALEB

I love freedom, and not getting a monthly salary means freedom to me. I like being forced to constantly stand on my toes, being challenged to survive on my own.

Taking risks (small or big) make you feel alive. They are the pain in your muscles

after you worked out, it's pain but it feels good—Because you're growing.

A couple weeks back I wrote an article called “The Cake Is A Lie” which has been on my mind the last couple months. The article describes everything I've been thinking about recently.

For me, it's time to let go of the cake and try something new. It's time to reset and start over. There is something magical about it.

If you would ask some friends or colleagues, they would tell you I traded everything for nothing. It's a logical response to someone who just left the familiar well paid job, heading towards the unknown.

If you ask me, I'd tell you that I just traded a little something, for everything else. And that's why I consider it exciting news. Rushing into the unknown is exhilarating.

To be more specific, I'm not joining any other company, I don't have a grand plan for a startup, nor am I'm planning to freelance. I imagine something new, which is hard to put in words just yet. And of course, I will invest much more time in Semplice which I founded recently.

But with pressure to pay the bills, you can be sure that I won't get bored. For the next couple months my focus is on building my new company.

Nothing will change with my weekly email (or this blog for that matter), I will continue writing. I also promise you, you are the first to know about new projects and the new company I am working on.

And to finish this email/article, one of my absolut favorite quotes by Jack Kerouac which always helps me to get inspired and push myself.

“The only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars.”

—JACK KEROUAC

I'm terrified, but excited. Onto something new, let's do this!

Feel free to tweet me with questions, always happy to answer.

If you enjoyed this article, make sure to sign up to my email list.

Yours truly,
Tobias



Todd Brison

4 min read



www.pexels.com

The Weird and Wonderful Characteristic Most People Don't Have

"I don't know, man, I'm just not seeing any traction." “

How long have you been at it?"

"I've written a post every day for 3 weeks now!"

This conversation happens way too often.

Maybe you've even had it yourself. (I have)

Maybe you thought, like so many of us, that you deserve to be successful already.

Maybe you wonder what it really takes to be a successful creative person.

There's one thing everybody needs, but few have. It's a big key to running the marathon of life without wanting to stick your head in the oven:

Patience.

It doesn't come easily to most (myself included) because we creative types were born to fly.

We were made to run, not walk.

We were meant to sprint, not wait.

We were created to blaze trails, not follow them.

But Life qualifies you. It does it every day. If you aren't willing to keep writing for 6 months when nobody's reading, are you really going to be willing to do it forever?

When I seriously started making a run at being an "online presence*" in 2015 (after 1 failed blog, 1 hardly successful one, and a failed business), I knew I couldn't fall into the same trap I did before—trying to do everything at once.

Here's a piece of advice I picked up somewhere. Hopefully it will help you as much as it did me:

Do ONE thing.

If you want to be a photographer, take one picture. One good picture. Then do that for two weeks.

After you've got that down, post one of your pictures. JUST one.

There are no "6 easy steps" to learning patience. I'm not even sure I can tell you how to do it. I can just give you my experience and let you learn from it.

My experience is this:

On January 12, 2015 ALL I DID was record one Monday Motivation for around 30 followers on Snapchat. Maybe 12 of them watched the whole thing. Then I did that for the rest of January.

In February of 2015 I started turning those into articles on Medium. I didn't have a Wordpress site, but still wanted to get my work out there.

I did this for several months, getting better at writing, cranking out Monday Motivation quicker each time. Turning each video into a written article a little faster.

I was doing TWO things. ONLY two things.

I wanted to build a site, but I didn't.

I wanted to publish more, but I didn't.

I wanted to *do* more, but I didn't.

Four agonizing months later, when I started getting really comfortable with TWO things, I started writing another post a week.

Three things??! Slow down, Todd!

After another two months that felt like an eternity, I got my blog started and wrote two posts a week there and one original piece for Medium each week.

WOAH!FOUR THINGS.

And that's still pretty much where I am. I do four things. Maybe I'll do more one day, but I don't know. Four things is a lot.

. . .

Something else strange happens when you are patient. A weird addendum that people don't talk about much because it's hard to explain. In fact, I'm guessing I'll lose a lot of you at this point.

When you keep patient long enough, the world starts playing along.

It's beautiful and wonderful and magical and I don't get it. But it's real. This weird cycle emerges.

Action builds momentum. Momentum builds respect. Respect leads to assistance. Assistance leads to inspiration. Inspiration sparks action.

Here are some things that have happened while I've been patient with four or less things (without much other effort on my part):

- I've had 3 top-20 posts in the world on Medium (1 top-10).
- I've grown my Snapchat following, connection with dozens of new people*.
- This guy named Matt built me a website FOR FREE.
- One of the editors for LinkedIn asked me to republish one of my pieces in their network.
- A developer approached me about demo-ing his software (don't tell him I'm not super successful and famous).
- My salary at my "real job" grew by about \$10K. (Turns out when I don't feel guilty about my side-hustle, I do better at work too).
- And I **swear** this just happened when I was editing this post—someone emailed me on behalf of the New York Observer, asking if they could use my content.

**+toddr, in case you want to join the fun*

The whole point of me telling you any of that was to tell you this:

Don't be embarrassed to start small.

Start small and grow big. Be faithful with the little things. Love them. Do them well. Do them a lot. Do them in the way *only you* can do them. Care for them.

And then do another thing.

And then another.

And then another. (maybe)

Rather than spitting out cliches on how every journey starts with a single step, I'll end instead with this question:

If you could skip all the small steps. If you could skip all the climb and the grind and the hustle and the waiting and get what you think you want most...

What on earth would you plan to do for the rest of your life?



Tomas Laurinavicius

8 min read

Startup



Working at the Ketawa Kafe in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Tools I Use To Learn, Work And Travel Anywhere

I often get asked what apps, services and tools I use to learn, plan, track habits, manage time, travel, write, read and more.

I'd like to emphasize one thing, it's not about the tools, it's about your results, personal preference, and efficiency. If you work best with a pen and paper, there is no need to try and adopt a digital tool that doesn't feel right for you, just because your peers or someone you admire uses one or the other tool you shouldn't force yourself to use it just to be cool.

Traveling

I love traveling and try to do it as much as possible. To make my travel experiences more pleasurable, I research and plan a lot. Check out some of the tools and services I use.

Google Flights—a great tool for checking the world map with available flights to numerous destinations and prices.

Momondo—a smart tool for searching cheapest flights.

JetRadar—another great tool to search various airlines and find cheapest tickets.

Nomad List—useful tool for finding where to go next as a digital nomad, find prices of accommodation, weather, community

Agoda—find cheap hotels, a quite good value in Southeast Asia.

Airbnb—find accommodation anywhere in the world, get \$20 credit for your first stay.

Booking—find and book cheap hotels, what I like about Booking is that it allows you to reserve a hotel without payment, you can pay once you arrive.

Google Maps—no introduction needed for this amazing service for finding your way anywhere in the world.

Foursquare—great app for discovering coffee shops, restaurants, gyms, bars and more.

Planning

It's incredibly important to plan things. Your personal life, professional career, holidays, weekends and more. Just having a goal without a plan is just a wish. Even though you will not have a clear plan or the plan will change along the way it's still good to have a direction to go to.

Pen and paper—old school pen and notebook work well for quick sketching or daily planning.

Toggl—simple and easy to use time tracker.

RescueTime—analytics software that tracks everything I do on my laptop and shows a productivity score.

Trello—a great tool for planning your projects and managing tasks with a team.

Apple Calendar—part of OSX operating system, works and synchronizes very well with my MacBook and iPhone.

Apple Notes—another native OSX app that works very well on MacBook and iPhone.

Evernote—a great tool for taking notes, saving PDF's, scanning and saving receipts.

Swipes—to-do list app with intuitive user interface.

iDoneThis—tool for daily progress logging.

Coach.me—organize and track your habits, set goals and find a coach to help you achieve your dreams.

Speedtest—best tool to quickly evaluate if a cafe or restaurant has a fast WiFi for working.

Social Media

Social media has changed the way people interact with each other, discover news and make connections. It certainly has changed my life, I meet new people, have interesting conversations, find jobs and get discovered on social media. Below are some tools I use to analyze, track, create and moderate my social media accounts.

Buffer—a handy tool for scheduling social media updates.

TweetDeck —easily manage multiple Twitter accounts.

Klout—analyze, measure and track your social media presence.

Finances

PayPal—get paid from anywhere in the world and pay for services online like hotels, flights etc.

Wave Accounting—best free accounting and invoicing software.

Scannable—scan and save business cards, documents, receipts and more directly to Evernote.

Learning

I am constantly learning new things, self-development is one of the most interesting fields for me. From design to web development to business to marketing to writing to speaking, most of my learning comes from the following sources.

TED—amazing and inspiring videos on

Duolingo—learn Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, Italian for free. I'm currently learning Spanish.

Skillshare—high-quality courses for creatives and entrepreneurs.

Udemy—thousands of courses on every imaginable subject.

Codecademy—interactive and free coding courses.

Medium—a platform that connects amazing storytellers and readers seeking for inspiring stories.

Books

I've not been a huge reading fan when I was in school, but after I got the right book in my hands, I've made reading my priority. You can follow my reviews and reading list on Goodreads.

How to Win Friends and Influence People by Dale Carnegie—it is mostly common sense but principles in the book work like magic.

The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho—this book transformed my way of thinking about pursuing my dreams.

The 4-Hour Work Week by Timothy Ferriss—a book that will inspire you to take action, start optimizing your work and escape the 9–5 trap.

The \$100 Startup by Chris Guillebeau—Chris shares inspiring stories of people who started a business and redesigned their lifestyle with little to no money.

Start With Why by Simon Sinek—learn how to find clarity in your actions and inspire people.

Start Something That Matters by Blake Mycoskie—a touching story of TOMS Shoes, building a social business and making a positive impact in the world.

Willpower by Roy F. Baumeister—willpower must be the most important factor in making you successful.

Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goleman—being intelligent is not enough, you have to learn to handle your emotions and read people.

The Tipping Point by Malcolm Gladwell—virality is not an accident, there is a well-prepared process behind the big movements.

Blink by Malcolm Gladwell—you might be overthinking in your daily life when making decisions. This book shows the power of thinking without thinking.

Inspiration

Dribbble—a great way to explore how other designers work and learn from most talented designers in the world.

Product Hunt—a powerful tool for discovering hottest products in the world voted by the community of tech experts, investors and general public.

StumbleUpon —a free web-browser extension which acts as an intelligent browsing tool for discovering and sharing websites.

Random Useful Websites—hit the button and get a random useful website, surprisingly works like magic.

Nuzzel—social, real-time platform that allows you to see the news that your friends share.

Prismatic—choose topics you are interested in and get the best content recommendations.

Muzli—an add-on for Google Chrome that provides you inspiration and useful resources for designers every day.

Podcasts

The School of Greatness with Lewis Howes—Lewis interviews bestselling authors, top athletes, successful entrepreneurs and other inspiring individuals.

The Tim Ferriss Show—Tim talks with scientists, authors, entrepreneurs and people who change the world. Topics range from neuroscience to psychology to business and more.

The Jacquesvh Podcast—Jacques interviews inspiring entrepreneurs and creatives, also talks about marketing, entrepreneurship and motivation. Check out an [interview with me](#).

The \$100 MBA Show—real life business lessons in short form episodes with Omar Zenhom and Nicole Baldinu.

The Fizzle Show—fun, actionable and inspiring show for creative entrepreneurs.

The Cubicle Crashing Podcast by Lydia Lee—Lydia interviews creative entrepreneurs and individuals about unconventional lifestyle and escaping 9–5. Check out [my conversation with Lydia](#).

Entrepreneur on Fire—John Lee Dumas interviews most inspiring and successful entrepreneurs.

Communication

Slack—messaging app for teams. Get focused on work and reduce email communication.

Calendly—a tool for scheduling meetings, calls.

Skype—free software for instant messaging and video/audio calls.

Gmail—I use Gmail for personal email and Google for Business for Despreneur. Even though, Google for Business costs \$5/person/month it's definitely worth it.

Blogging

WordPress—a blogging platform that powers 25% of the internet. This blog is built on WordPress too.

Bluehost—affordable and reliable hosting for your blog or small project.

MediaTemple—more powerful hosting for bigger blogs and projects.

ThemeForest—Photoshop and HTML templates, themes for different content management systems (CMS), such as WordPress, Shopify, Drupal and more.

MaxCDN—a content delivery network which makes your website load significantly faster.

Grammarly —a fantastic tool that will make you a better writer. It checks your spelling, grammar and suggests fixes instantly.

MailerLite—email marketing software with super easy to use interface and affordable pricing.

MailChimp—another email marketing software. Good for smaller projects, an account with up to 2,000 subscribers is free.

SumoMe—online software for growing your website's traffic and subscribers.

Creative Market—market for design resources like fonts, templates, themes and more.

Unsplash—high-quality free photos to use for personal and commercial projects.

StockSnap—this tool allows you to search for free stock photos that don't suck.

Plugins

Google Analyticator—an easy way to install Google Analytics on your website.

Search Meter—this plugin tracks what your readers are searching for on your blog.

WP External Links—open external links in a new window or tab, add “no follow”, set link icon, styling, SEO friendly options and more..

Akismet—blocks incoming spam to your blog.

WP Smush—reduce image file sizes, improve performance and boost your SEO.

Yoast SEO—the ultimate all-in-one SEO plugin.

W3 Total Cache—easy web performance optimization using caching: browser, page, object, database, minify and content delivery network support.

Photo & Video

iPhone 6—this powerful device fulfills all my photo/video needs.

Screen Flow -- (for Mac users)—the screen capture software I'm currently using for screencasts.

VSCO Cam—I don't use any other software for editing my photos, this app for iPhone is all I need.

Instagram—a great source of inspiration as well as a medium to share my travels and daily life.

Flickr—great for storing photos online. Flickr gives you 1,000 GB for free.

YouTube—great for watching videos, listening to music but also for storing all videos from my iPhone, upload, set to private and save.

Podcasting

Samson C01U Microphone—affordable USB microphone, quality is quite good if used it properly.

Logic Pro X—professional audio editing software for Mac users.

SoundCloud—great service for storing audio files, discovering new music and listening to podcasts.

iTunes—listen to internet radio, music on your computer and discover new podcasts or submit yours.

Business

Dropbox—easy to use cloud storage for your files. I store my projects on Dropbox.

Google Docs—free online alternative to Microsoft Word, Excel, and Powerpoint. The best part that it allows live collaboration.

Google Analytics—free online software for tracking, measuring and analyzing website content.

Gumroad—great online software for selling anything online.

Focus

Headspace—I recommend this app for everyone who wants to try meditation.

ZenFriend —after my Vipassana experience I no longer use guided meditation, ZenFriend provides a simple timer I need.

StayFocusd —block distracting websites and have a limited time a day to access them. I've blocked Twitter, Facebook, and some news websites.

AdBlock—an add-on for Chrome that blocks ads on the websites, including video ads on YouTube.

Spotify—millions of songs for free. I have different playlists for different moods so I can get into the zone easier.

Subscribe to [my email list](#) for more inspiring stories.

How do you get things done? What tools do you use? Please share your arsena tweet at me [@tomaslau](#).

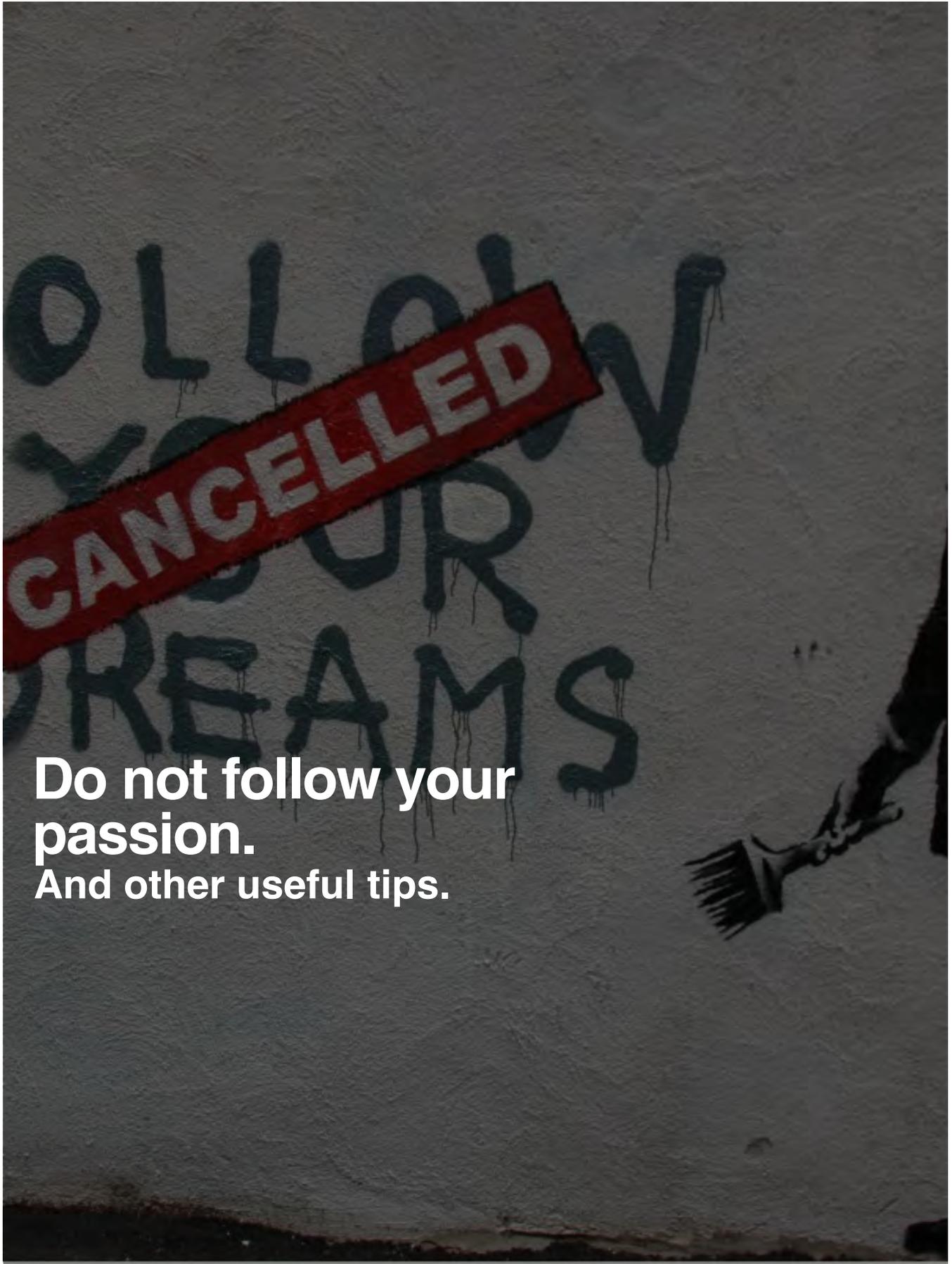
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Originally published at [tomaslau.com](#) on November 12, 2015.



Wojtek Skalski

5 min read



**Do not follow your
passion.
And other useful tips.**

Banksy Street Art.

Ben Horowitz is the cofounder of a16z, one of the most successful VCs in the USA. In May 2015 he gave an inspiring commencement speech at Columbia University.



Speech by Ben Horowitz at Columbia University.

The speech had three powerful conclusions:

- 1. Think for yourself**
- 2. Do not follow your passion**
- 3. You live in the age of opportunities**

Think for yourself

In order to create something incredible:

Think for yourself.

Think different.

Many people prefer to be liked rather than unique.

But being liked is much much less important.

Because if you want to be liked you tend to say things other people want to hear.

And they like hearing stories they:

- know.
- understand.
- feel comfortable with.

So you keep repeating the same stuff.

Complaints about government, news from TV.

Doing this you can easily overlook some groundbreaking ideas. **Concepts which emerged from your unique sets of experiences and connections between them.**

Groundbreaking ideas often sound ridiculous.

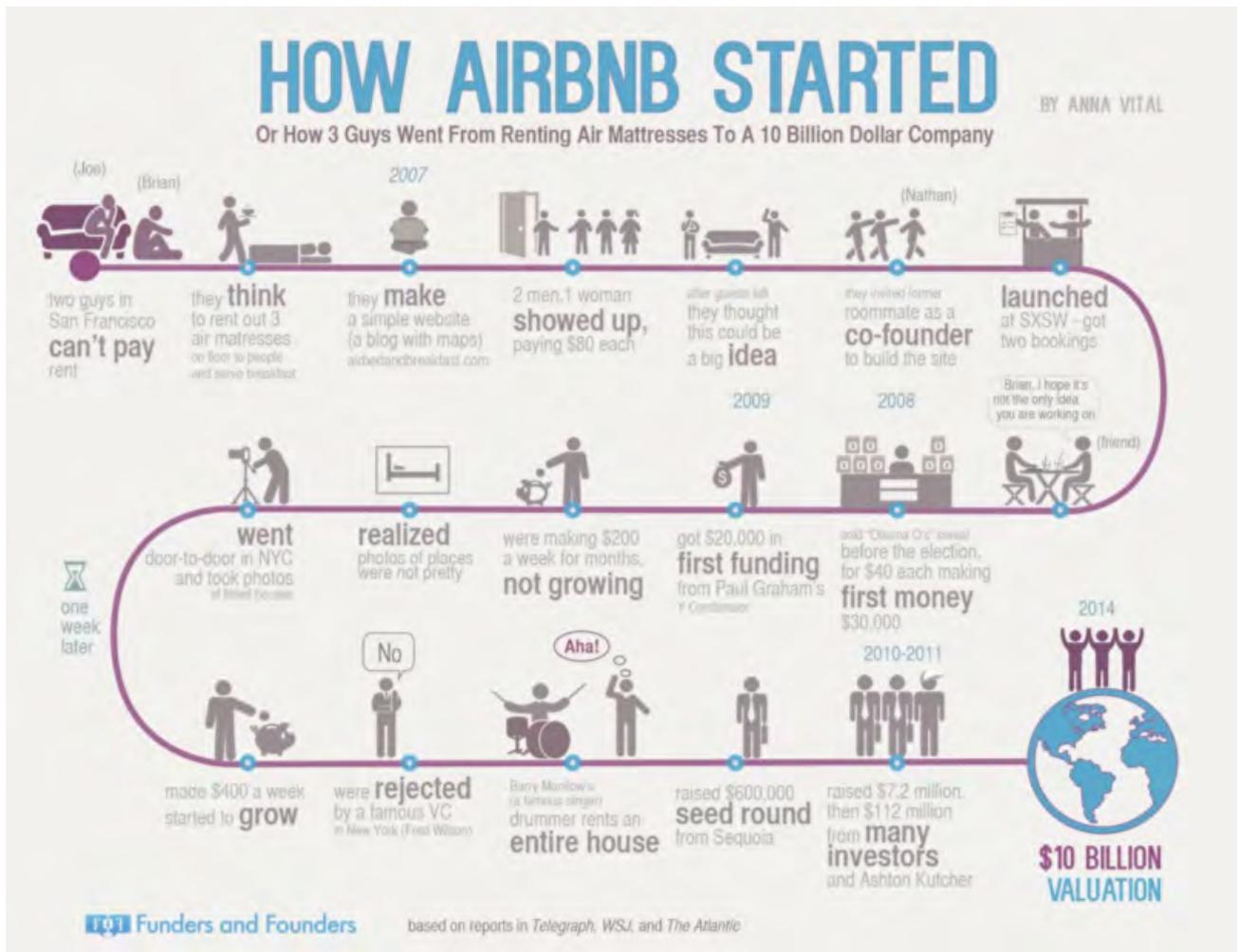
Hard to believe.

But it doesn't make them false.

So the fact that other people do not get them shouldn't discourage you.

The world has its secrets on which you can build awesome things.

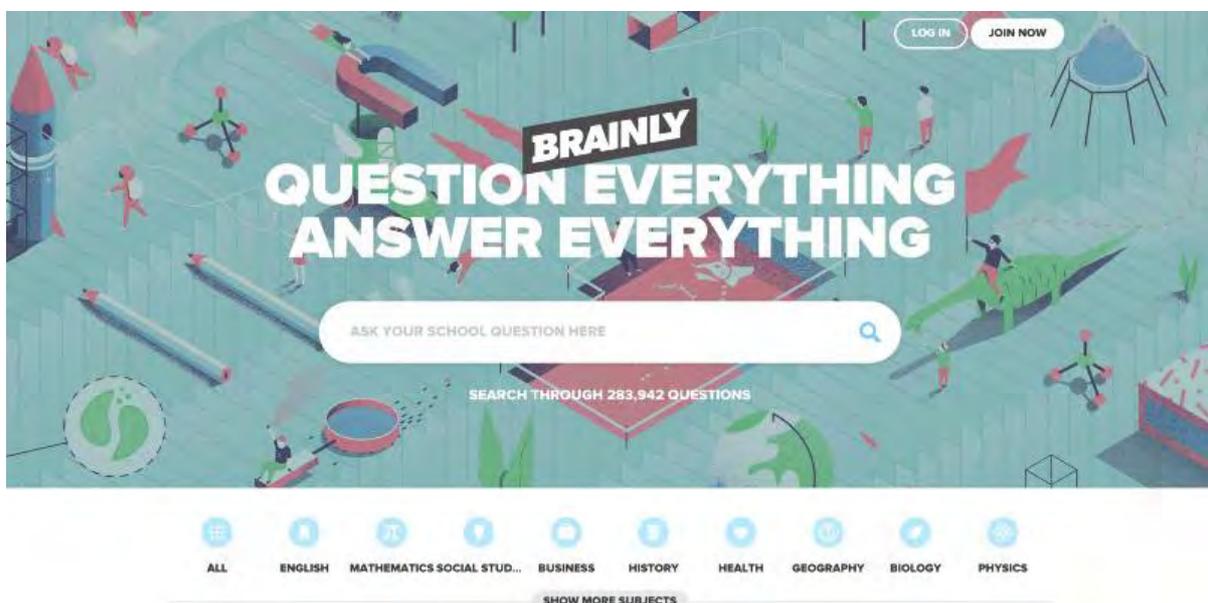
1) Like the fact that people feel pretty comfortable renting entire apartment from a stranger for a weekend ([Airbnb](#)).



Airbnb was built on a unique experience of Joe and Brian, who rented 3 air mattresses to people. 'Surprisingly', people didn't consider them to be serial murderers. Hotel chain is a relatively new invention. In the past people used to sleep in inns or at other people's.

Source: <http://venturebeat.com/2014/06/28/follow-airbnbs-journey-from-scrappy-startup-to-10b-company-video>

2) Students around the world massively search for study help online (Brainly).



Problems with homework and study are common around the entire world. On general Q&As students often do not find satisfying answers to their problems. On the other hands sources like books or Wikipedia do not offer personalised solutions and students find them less useful. Also they lack a community feel that is very tempting for teenagers. Source: <http://brainly.com>.

3) Second hand shopping experience can feel just as shopping at one of the most famous clothing brands (Videdressing).



There is a strong need for exclusive second-hand websites like Videdressing. General platforms like eBay lack community touch, but also great experience and trust of clothing brands and fashion magazines. Source: <http://videdressing.com>.

Your job is to try to figure one of these secrets.
And build on it.

To achieve this you will need to think differently.
Think for yourself.

But those are the things; those are the only things—things that YOU believe, that everybody around you doesn't believe—that when you're right that create real value in the world. Everything else people already know. There is no value created. It's just business as usual. So it's so important to think for yourself.

Ben Horowitz

Do not follow your passion

You may know that doing what you love will make you successful. Sometimes it's true, sometimes not.

There are a lot of success stories.

But also a lot of examples of people who did what they love but haven't ever succeed.

But let's try to play with it for a while and turn it around.

What if I tell you that being successful at something will make you love what you do?

Maybe this is the recipe?

Starting with things that you are successful at and align them with your passions. Rather than focusing too much on your passions.

It may sound counter intuitive, but it's pretty reasonable.

Think about the problems with following your passion:

1. Passions are hard to prioritise

You can have a lot of passions. Which one to follow then?

2. They change with time

What you are passionate about today is not necessary something you will be passionate about in 2, 5 or 10 years.

3. You may be not good at them

If you love doing something it doesn't necessary mean that you are good at doing it.

4. They are very egocentric

It is better to look around and find out how you can contribute to the world.

You should search for contribution instead of passion. Something that you are good at.

More—something that can change peoples' lives for the better. It will make you successful and happy.

Find the thing that you're great at, put that into the world, contribute to others, help the world be better and that is the thing to follow.

Ben Horowitz

You live in the age of opportunities

We are living in a pretty safe world.

Thanks to the Internet we can immediately access information...

Connect with people around the world...

Create and contribute.

Yet there are still a lot of problems.

Choose one of them and attempt to solve it.

Can you imagine any better circumstances?

If you contribute, if you put your contribution into the world, if you think for yourself, then I believe that you will be the greatest generation. Because when we look back 50 years from now, 100 years from now, 500 years from now, you will be the generation that unlocked human potential.

Ben Horowitz

===

Ben is not the only person who says that following passion is not the most important thing:

You've got to put something back into the flow of history that's going to help your community, help other people (...) so that 20, 30, 40 years from now (...) people will say, this person didn't just have a passion, he cared about making something that other people could benefit from.

Steve Jobs

===

This post was originally published on my blog.

Like what you've read? Visit wojtekskalski.com for more posts on startups, innovation and education. Reach out and say hi!

Life / Life Lessons



Andrew Merle

3 min read

Life



Why You Should Do Your Work First, Others' Work Second

I stopped checking my email first thing in the morning several years ago after reading Tim Ferriss' [The 4-Hour Workweek](#) . He said that one simple change would be a life-changer, and it has been for me.

The reason why it works is because it enables proactive work first, reactive work second.

Even when we have clear top priorities for the day, checking email first thing can easily derail those plans by compelling us to react and respond to other people's "urgent" needs. And before you know it, the day has been totally eaten up, and our energy drained, before we can get started on our own projects.

This is why Dan Ariely, James B. Duke Professor of Psychology and Behavioral Economics at Duke University, says “It would probably be best if managers went to the IT department and asked that email not be distributed between 8 and 11 every morning.”

The experts say that it is key to block off time in the morning whenever possible to do the work that is most important to you, including focusing on long-term projects without an immediate payoff. If you don't build big-picture meaningful work right into your daily calendar, it will always get crowded out by the small stuff.

Best-selling author and researcher Tom Rath reinforces this point by saying, “What you will be most proud of a decade from now will not be anything that was a result of you simply responding.” He recommends to, “Manage your communications, online and offline, instead of letting them run your life. If you don't, you will inadvertently spend a majority of your time responding to other people's needs instead of creating anything that lasts.”

We are busier than ever and there are dozens of things every day to divert our attention, so it now seems that that maintaining our focus is actually our biggest competitive advantage. Entrepreneur Scott Branson, named to *Fast Company's* “100 Most Creative People in Business List”, says that “Whatever the future of technology may hold, the greatest leaders will be those most capable of tuning into themselves and harnessing the full power of their own minds.”

It is actually easiest to get sucked into a day of busyness and bouncing from one urgent thing to the next. Perhaps that's why the best leaders and creative minds seem to agree that giving ourselves time to think, and focusing on our top priorities before others' needs, is a key to long-term productivity and success.

In a world filled with distraction, I know that I'll keep looking for ways to harness my attention and preserve more space to focus on the big picture. As Henry David Thoreau said, “It is not enough to be busy. So are the ants. The question is: What are we busy about?”

Now just imagine if there were no meetings and no email before 11am— perhaps that is the way of the future!

Several of the quotes in this post come from a great little book called:

Manage Your Day-to-Day: Build Your Routine, Find Your Focus, and Sharpen Your Creative Mind

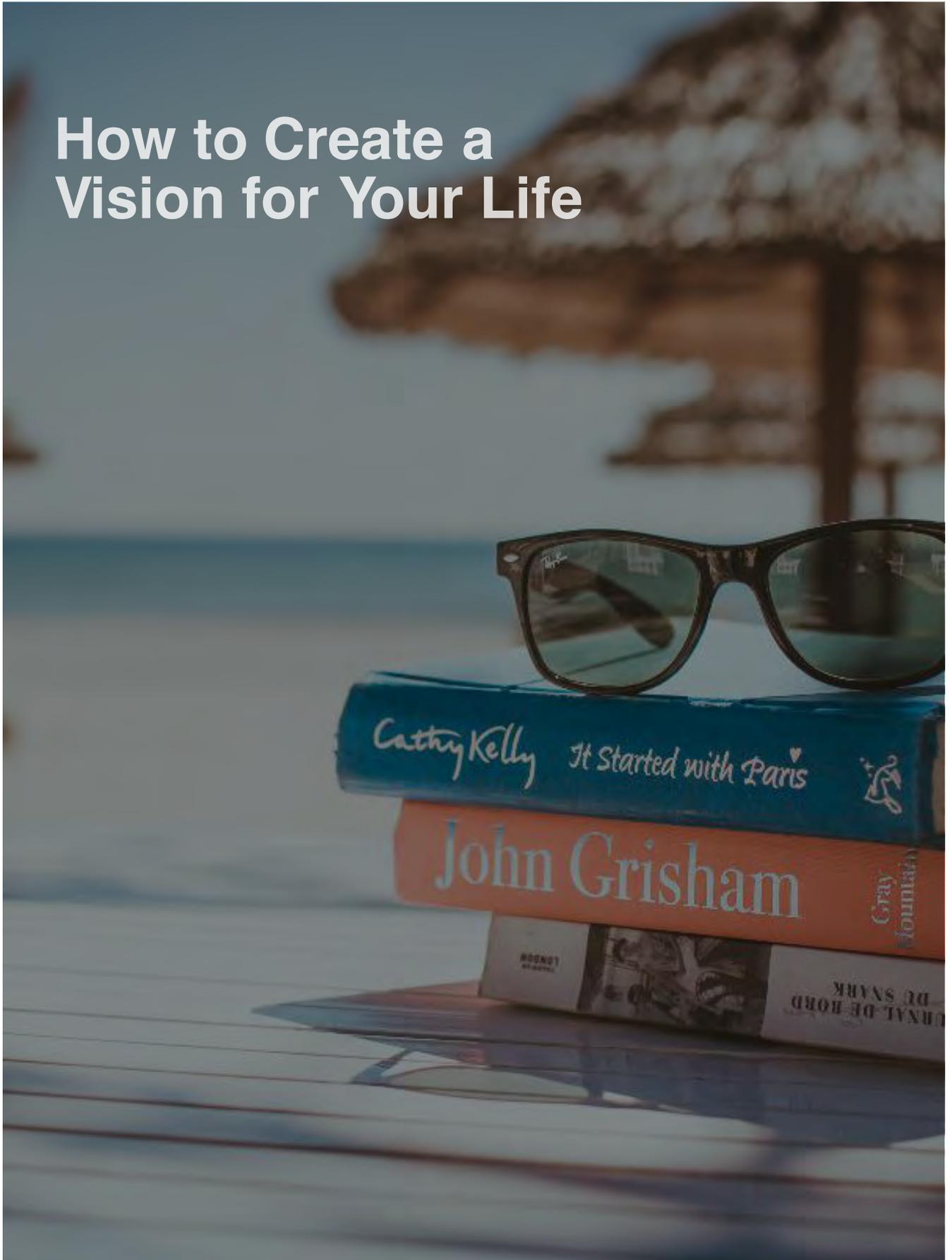
Want to read more stories like this? Read my most recent post [here](#)



Corbett Barr

4 min read

How to Create a Vision for Your Life



“ ” “ ”

I used to think it was a silly waste of time to think about a vision for my life. Who does that? It seems so touchy-feely, too Tony Robbins-ish.

But then, as I started learning how to change my life and my habits, I realized something: people avoid creating a vision for their lives because they believe the exercise is futile. *Why make a vision when it's impossible to accomplish those things anyway?*

I've also noticed something over the past several years: the most interesting, accomplished people I know all have a vision for their lives. They seem to know what comes next, like they've seen the future.

On the other hand, people I meet or know who are stuck and have that hopeless look in their eyes, like *they're just passing time in life* without joy or aspiration, those people don't have a vision. In fact, many of them don't even have long-term goals. This was painfully clear at my recent high school reunion.

Does having a vision make you better able to change your life, or does being able to change your life make having a vision possible?

Being able to change your life and having a vision for it are the yin and yang of living a great life. They're interdependent and complimentary of one another. One will jump-start the other. Find the motivation to change your life, and you'll be able to create a vision for it. Or, create a vision for your life and then learn how to change it.

What's the difference between a life vision and long-term goals?

Goals are individual experiences and accomplishments you strive for. A vision is the bigger picture. Your life's vision defines who you want to be, what you want to be known for and the set of experiences and accomplishments you aim for. Your vision helps define the goals by giving you a framework to evaluate those goals.

Your *vision* becomes your *why*.

Your vision should aim to answer questions like:

- *What life do you want to have lived at age 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70 and 80?*
- *What kinds of people do you want to be surrounded by?*
- *What do you believe you're capable of in life? What are the greatest things you could accomplish, given the right circumstances, resources and motivation?*
- *What do you wish you could change about the world? What could you contribute to the world that would make you feel proud and content?*
- *When you die, what would you want people to say and remember about you?*

In fact, start by answering those questions and your vision should be easy to create.

How to Create Your Life's Vision

First, you need to identify what matters in life. This is where that college philosophy class should come in handy. You need to go deep and existential here. What is the real meaning of life? How should you live your life?

Your answer to “what matters in life” won't be perfect, and that's OK. The point is to put a stake in the ground to work towards, and you can change your answer whenever you review your life's vision.

Regardless of your answer, there will be **things you want to do or be**, and there are **resources needed to support those experiences and accomplishments**.

Next, make a list of the categories of things that matter to you.

Here are the categories currently on my list:

- Health—exercise, diet, mindfulness, perspective
- Ability—skills, knowledge, character
- Relationships—curate and cultivate them

- Time—using what time you have wisely
- Wealth—creating the value necessary to support goals
- Experiences
- Accomplishments
- Contentment—being happy with who you are, perhaps the ultimate goal

Your list can and should look different. It's all about what matters to *you*, and what you want out of your brief time on this planet.

Now, for each of your categories, write down what you want or need from each. Think about the things you want to accomplish or experience, and work backwards to understand how the other categories should support your life's vision.

Finally, craft a statement that describes what your ideal life looks like. I know, it might seem cheesy, but this entire exercise can be incredibly fun and rewarding. I just refreshed my life's vision while on vacation in Hawaii for 10 days. It was the perfect setting to get all introspective.

Your vision statement will consist of an overall description of your ideal life, combined with a list of areas that matter most, and high-level goals for each area.

What's next?

If all you do is this exercise, you will likely see some benefits, as your vision will stick in the back of your mind and you'll unconsciously work towards it.

However, if you want the best chance of making your vision happen, you'll need to go further.

You need to build a system for yourself, where you review your vision and goals regularly, and update your action plan for accomplishing those goals.

Your main priority should be making your system a habit, something that you do no matter what, that you don't have to think about or remind yourself about. Start with

calendar reminders and task list items and build life planning time into your daily and weekly routines until it becomes habit.

When you arise in the morning, think of what a precious privilege it is to be alive — to breathe, to think, to enjoy, to love. —Marcus Aurelius

A version of this article was originally published at corbettbarr.com.

Corbett Barr is co-founder of [Fizzle](#), the roadmap for independent entrepreneurs. Get his **[Lifestyle Business Weekly](#)** curated email of useful links for people interested in lifestyle business and entrepreneurship.



Greg Isenberg

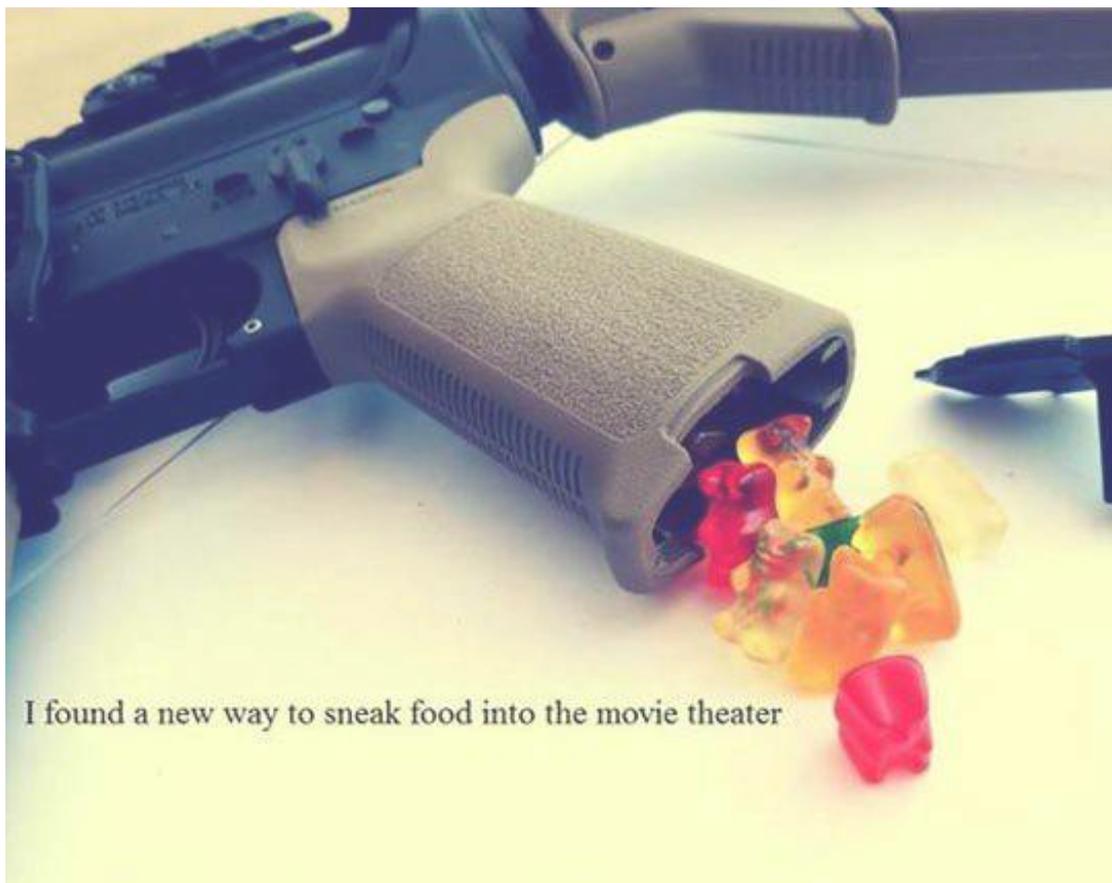
3 min read

Little Lifehacks Guaranteed to Improve your Life

I'm obsessed with lifehacks. Lifehacks can be as helpful as making your day better to helping you sell your company.

life·hack' / līf, hak *houn* / *informal*

Definition: a strategy or technique adopted in order to manage one's time and daily activities in a more efficient way



An example of a lifehack

I always write some of my lifehacks in my notes app on iOS. I wanted to share 10 recent ones I learned.

1. Dress formal when you go on flights. You're more likely to get upgraded to first class, if you ask and you look important. It may be less comfortable to be in a blazer, but overall you'll be more comfortable in first class.
2. Show up to meetings with small gifts. The ROI is massive. I learned this when I got close with several Japanese people. They rarely come empty handed. It means a lot to people and will be memorable. Gifts are super memorable when they are surprises, not when people expect them. Canopy is a good place to find cool stuff.
3. Listen more. By listening more, you are equipping yourself with the most possible information and can negotiate or respond most intelligently. Don't rush into answering. You'll notice people will continue chatting if you just keep silent because people inherently want to fill the awkward silence. H/t to Mark Bartels for this one.
4. Throw dinner parties. Make it a mix of people you know well and want to know well. Great things will happen from it. Do it in multiple major cities (NYC, LA, SF) so you build strong networks in cities that have world influence.
5. Make a list of 10 people who you often forget to keep in touch with but care about. These are people who would go up to bat for you no matter what. Could be high school friends, your grandmother or an old co-worker. Put them on your phones favorites list. Call them when you're walking to places. Try not to uber or drive places that are less than 15 minutes walking distance and use that time to call them. Your quality of life will increase.
6. When you're out with people breaking bread, put your phone on airplane mode.
7. Walk and talk meetings are underrated. With fresh air and exercise, you are more creative. The result = better ideas and more open conversations. Oh and hey, burning calcs is cool too.
8. Schedule 30 minute meetings not 1 hour meetings. You get through just as much. 1 hour meetings are only if you really want to get to know a person and build a trusted bond.
9. Pour people's drinks before yours. People appreciate that.

10. Pretty much everything you read in the media is spun by people like me. When you're reading anything, take it with a massive grain of salt.

Best,

Greg Isenberg

Enjoyed this post? Follow me on Twitter [here](#) for more lifehacks.



Kamil Stanuch

3 min read

Life

When Somebody Steals Your Medium Post

Bad things are happening at Medium. Here's a short story what happened.

UPDATE (Dec 31st): *The whole story got even weirder but I left the update at the end of the article.*

I've met [Yann Girard](#) some time ago and ever since I've been following him on Twitter and Medium. He kept producing a lot of content - some of it pretty good and shareable and some of it just fine.

But what really makes him exceptional was his consistency.

Everyday I saw a tweet, an article or post by Yann and every day he get closer and closer to become an influencer. Even though I'm always sceptical about those LinkedIn or Medium influencers publishing highly spirited stories full of uber-general Brian-Tracy-like wisdom e.g. "What Making a Burger Taught Me About Business Communication"—well, I still respect Yann because he keeps going, because he keeps his integrity.

So what really pissed me off recently?

About 2 weeks ago he published a really nice post "**Everything sucks**" which lists all activities that sucks in the beginning: "your first 100 blog posts will suck, your first 5 books will suck" cause it all takes time, persistence and patience. It got 508 recommendations and made it into Medium's Top Stories.

And he truly deserved it.

But yesterday I stumbled upon trending article published 5 days ago

“You Will Always Suck at What You Do, Until You Do This” by CamMi Pham. Take a look at them:

Everything sucks

by Yann Girard

Your first 100 blog posts will suck.

Your first 5 books will suck.

Your first 30 talks in public will suck.

Your first 50 paintings will suck.

Your first 100 songs will suck.

Your first 40 YouTube videos will suck.

Yes, I made all of those numbers up.

And it doesn't matter.

You Will Always Suck at What You Do, Until You Do This

BY CAMMI PHAM

Your first 100 blog posts will mostly suck.

Your first 100 podcasts will mostly suck too.

Your first 100 talks will not be perfect.

Your first 100 videos will be nightmares.

Nobody can pick up a ball and become a pro basketball player overnight.

Nobody can pick up a pen, then write and win a Pulitzer Prize right away.

Nobody is interesting during their first interview.

Nobody will walk on the stage without saying a few things wrong.

Nobody learns how to walk after the first step.

Yann's original post on the left (published Dec 18th), CamMi's post on the right (published Dec 24th)

Well, let's say CamMi article is "incredibly similar" to Yann's and someone less diplomatic than me would say that it's... a rip-off.

Did anyone notice? Did anyone care? Probably no. Only one person noticed in a comment section but it got lost in the rain of recommendations, likes and cheerful comments.



Christopher Doiron

2 days ago

Made me laugh your post has the same first line.

Yann Girard wrote something like this two weeks ago :

<https://medium.com/thought-pills/everything-sucks-cbca5b55c855#.2vizi6yt1>



The only one who noticed

Will anyone notice? Will anyone care? Nope. Tomorrow another post will make to the Top, I'll open my Medium app in the morning and will start scrolling dozens of new posts, occasionally recommending some of them.

Maybe the whole situation described above is the ultimate proof that Medium finally became an influential platform and authors are desperate to use any means to get publicity? Who knows.

After all I checked CamMi Pham's previous posts and found one that actually proves her consistency: **"If You Want to be Successful, Learn How to Steal"**. Have a good read.

UPDATE (Dec 31st): *I didn't want to push it further but couple of readers on Medium and Twitter noticed that CamMi Pham article was published on her personal blog on Dec 17th (day before Yann's. Well, here's Google cache from Dec 23rd which might indicate that **date on her blog was later changed from Dec 18th to Dec 17th:***

<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:www.cammipham.com/category/ideas/>

Moreover, here's the screenshot proving that Google indexed this post on Dec 18th.



Screenshot of Google results proving that post was published on Dec 18th (language above is Polish).

PS. This is my 4th post at Medium and it probably sucks.



Susie Pan

4 min read

You're only 23. Stop rushing life.

I asked my CEO today “what can I do to be better ” and he responded that it was the fourth time I asked that question in the last month. While he appreciated my efforts to always improve and get better, he told me I needed to give it time. Whenever I've asked him for feedback in the past, he's always told me that I've done a great job and that if I continue to do what I do, I'll be fine.

I thought to myself that that's the worst feedback I can get. I don't want to be “fine.” I want to be great, to be excellent, to be amazing, to be (insert another synonym here). It was almost offensive that I will be “fine” because it sounded like mediocrity.

...

One of my goals has always been to be the stupidest person in the room so I can surround myself with crazy smart people I can learn from. That's how I can grow the fastest. Inadvertently, by doing that, I can't help but compare myself to them.

My CEO sold a multi-million dollar company when he was 28. My Product Manager has founded and sold multiple businesses and he's 25. That's only 2 years older than me. When I work day-in-day-out with these two incredibly smart and talented people, I question myself, what have I done? If I'm only 2–5 years behind them, what will I have accomplished in that time?

The stories about Mark Zuckerberg, Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and other crazy 20-something-years-old founders making a dent in the world has created a sense of urgency in us (the all-too-ambitious-millennial-wantpreneurs). It also doesn't help when there are countless stories telling us that there's no better time than now—when we're young, out of school, with nothing to lose. Don't wait until you have a family, mortgage, responsibilities, etc.

This sensation of now has made me very impatient to grow and create value.

I want to get to my goals faster. I want to be better tomorrow. I want to learn everything I can so I can go create value ASAP. We all have 24 hours in a day and I feel compelled to use every minute in the most productive manner. If I'm eating breakfast, I'm watching a tutorial on Udemy; if I'm in transit, I'm listening to a podcast; if I'm waiting for the bus, I'm reading an article on Pocket. If I don't, it feels like I'm falling behind.

. . .

I remember a few months ago coming back from the Valley where so many people told me that if I wanted to learn as much as I can while working in tech, I needed to move down there. More opportunities, more resources, more talent, more growth. It made sense. Anyone who wanted to do acting should go to LA, anyone who wanted to do tech/startups should go to SF. A friend said to me that because there are more opportunities in the Valley, people learn and grow faster, and if I don't go now, I will be falling behind. That scared me. I don't want to fall behind from my peers. I was almost going to pack my bags and move.

When I came back to Toronto, I thought about it a little more. Why did I really want to move to SF? Is that what I really wanted? And I realized that while my professional ambition is important, so is family, personal development, and balance. But after SF, I almost felt guilty wanting a balance in life. Knowing that these are my golden years, I should be maximizing my output and giving myself the opportunities to lay the foundation for "success."

Once again, I felt guilty that I wanted balance . And that's just wrong.

While no one's ever going to tell me it's wrong to want balance at my age, our productivity-obsessed culture combined with a sense of urgency shaped this judgment. It may be that I work in tech where agile development, speed to market, and scale are always top of focus. In this world, if you don't move fast, you can't compete.

So I treated myself as a startup. Telling myself that I need to be better faster, and that there's a ticking clock to do so.

I just spent the last 3 hours sitting in Indigo after work, pick ed up a book, and read it cover to cover. I don't remember when was the last time I did that. I don't know what prompted me to do this either. But it felt great. I forget what it felt like to be sucked into a good book and have your mind be taken somewhere else. And I forced myself to finish it even though my mind was telling me I had 1000 other things to do and worry about.

And guess what? It was OK.

Was it productive? Debatable. Was it a waste of time? No. Did I sell a company? Nope. Will I sell a company (or create enough value in society to have monetary returns) in the next 2 years? I don't know. But even if I don't, that's OK. As long as I have learned something, and that I've created some value in someone's life, today was a good day.

I'm only 23. And yes, in 1.5 years, I will be 1/4 of a century old. But that gives me 3/4 of a century more to keep learning and creating value. That's 657,000 more hours I have to do whatever else I want to do with my life.

Susie, you're only 23. **Stop rushing life.**



Patagonia, Argentina



Thomas Oppong

4 min read

Life



7 Important Habits That Will Boost Your Intelligence

Everyone has different abilities when it comes to solving problems, thinking logically, and acquiring new knowledge.

Your brain needs exercise just like a muscle. If you use it often and in the right ways, you will become a more skilled thinker and increase your ability to focus.

Changing your daily routine actually enhance your intelligence. These are a few of the many habits that can benefit your brain.

1. Nothing beats a curious mind

"I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious." -Albert Einstein

How curious are you? Don't take things on face value. Go deeper into how things work. Question most things. Be genuinely interested in new subjects.

Start the curious habit of questioning everyday things, products or services. Stretch your brains to get answers to questions you mostly ignore.

Never stop questioning. Curiosity has always been an important trait of a genius. A curious mind can relate and connect ideas better. Maintain an open mind and be willing to learn, unlearn and relearn.

2. Read outside your scope

Don't just read fiction or non-fiction materials. Learn outside your industry. Read a history of human evolution, space travel or on a topic you will not mostly go for. Be curious about other industries. Choose books on different subjects. Read outside your comfort topics.

Read biographies of great inventors. Get out of your comfort zone once a while. You will not only improve and expand your knowledge, but you will also be a better conversationalist.

3. Stick to real-world brain exercises

Activities like testing your recall, figuring out problems without the help of technology, taking up a new hobby have proven to be good for the brain.

They stimulate and boost your brain. Stick to brain activities that involve real-world activities and are challenging.

When you are able to master a brain activity, move to another one. Don't get comfortable. You are not looking for fun. The only way to cognitive improvement is to start doing activities you are worst at. Strive for challenges that will keep you thinking.

Physical exercise is great for your body. And mental exercise is equally important for your brain health. There are no shortage of brain training apps that offer daily

exercises designed to boost your brain power.

Getting smarter is not an easy process. But in the end, you can improve your memory and problem solving skills.

4. Getting in shape builds your mind

Don't just play brain training games on the couch, get physically active. If you want to improve your brain's power, commit to a healthy exercise routine. Mental games are helpful, but they need to be done in combination with other activities to boost your brain muscles.

Physical activity establishes better blood flow to your brain. And it also triggers a surge of proteins that can help stimulate the growth of neural connections in the brain.

5. Choose to learn something new

Exercise your creative genius. Anything new to your brain can stimulate it. Different skills, ideas, cultures, and opinions can have a positive effect on your own views about the world.

Steve Job's calligraphy course in college helped build the first Mac. In his famous 2005 Commencement speech for Stanford University, Jobs said: "If I had never dropped in on that single calligraphy course in college, the Mac would have never had multiple typefaces or proportionally spaced fonts."

You never know what will be useful ahead of time. Try new skills and they will connect with the rest of your skills in the future.

6. Subscribe to blogs that focus on thought-provoking posts

Never stop learning. Subscribe to interesting blogs that share insightful posts that stimulates the mind. There are interesting websites that provide answers to questions you weren't even aware you were asking.

Focus on posts that cultivate and expand your curiosity. If you don't want to subscribe to additional newsletters, Pocket is a super quick and simple way to save the best posts on your favourite sites for later reading.

7. Start reflecting on what you have learned by blogging

Apart from becoming a better writer, blogging can help you organise your thoughts. Blogging encourages deep thinking. When you begin to share what you know with others, your ability to communicate gets better. Blogging helps your brain to stay active. You will also be able to link ideas and pieces of information better.

Once you commit to the habit of reading about your industry and sharing what you know with your audience, you will begin to comprehend and process information faster.

Getting your brain active again requires some amount of effort. Start doing sufficient mental and physical exercises. Plan on getting better sleep. And start eating healthy again.

It's a slow process, but once you commit to it, you can significantly improve your brain power. It's definitely not easy but it's worth your precious time. Change is hard. But it's also beneficial for your mind.

*The author is the founder and curator at **Postanly**, a free weekly newsletter that delivers the most insightful and popular long-form posts from top publishers.*



Tobias van Schneider

4 min read

Life

Be Lazy

by Tobias van Schneider

first appeared on my private email list.

DESK OF VAN SCHNEIDER
EDITION 28

BEING
LAZY



In my last article I talked about being busy. Why I try to stay busy actually doing something and avoid being busy for the sake of being busy. [Make sure to read this first in case you just joined my email list.](#)

I mentioned that being bored or lazy is totally fine, as long as you fully embrace it. **Faking that you are busy rarely leads to happiness, and often to exhaustion, even depression.**

Spending 8 hours a day at work pretending that you are busy is often more exhausting than actually doing the work. You've probably experienced it yourself, being completely tired after a full day of work, even though you haven't done anything.

But then at the same time, I like to describe myself as a very lazy person. Some might not believe it, but trust me, I'm lazy.

Back in school, at the end of each year we all got handed a report with our grades on it. At the bottom of the report there was always a one sentence review written by your main teacher.

Regardless of the school or teacher I had over the years, this review kept being consistent. It said:

“Tobias is a smart kid, but he is unfortunately very lazy.”

At the time I saw it as critique, only later I discovered that this was in fact a compliment.

I remember that I rarely did any of my homework myself. It's not that I couldn't do it, I just didn't want to. By definition I was lazy.

For me it was simple. When given a homework assignment, the task was to return my homework, regardless of how I actually did it. I saw it as a challenge. I usually “hired” other people to do my homework, I automated the shit out of everything teachers asked me for.

I was always a trouble maker in school. Back in Germany when you caused some trouble in class, they made you hand write the “School Rules” as punishment after school. The “School Rules” was a 10 pages document, it took you quite some time to copy it in handwritten format.

I always had at least 5 of these already written in my bag. I hired people to write them for me in advance. I used photo copy machines (not common back then) and experimented with them. I added mistakes and splashes of ink to make the photo copies look more real.

I handed over dozens of these documents over the years, I rarely wrote any of them myself. Of course I always waited 2–3 days to hand them to the teacher, oftentimes asking for deadline extension to make it look more authentic.

Back then, I was told that laziness is a bad thing. But I couldn’t see the benefits just yet.

Looking back at my projects, I believe my laziness has helped me to come up with better ideas and better design better solution.

Laziness in itself is a great driver for innovation. Often times the greatest ideas and innovations are born out of laziness, by people who were too lazy to do a certain task.

Laziness in this case isn’t about sitting around binge watching TV. Browsing Facebook and not doing anything. It’s about finding shortcuts in a system of well established rules.

With laziness as a driver, all we want is maximum productivity with the minimum amount of effort or expense for that matter.

We invented the cellphone because being tied to a land line sucks. We invented the elevator/escalator because we we’re too lazy to walk the stairs. We invented the wheel to carry things we were too lazy to carry on our shoulders. (even the Donkey was too lazy)

We invented the remote, because we are too lazy to always walk to the TV set to change the channel or volume.

Almost everything except for life saving inventions (vaccines,cures etc.) are born out of laziness.

Bill Gates once said:

*“I will always choose a lazy person to do a difficult job...
Because he/she will find an easy way to do it.”*

Necessity has been know to be the mother of innovation, but for the 21st century we can say for sure it's laziness.

The good thing, being lazy is human. It comes for free in everyone of us. The question is just what we do with it.

*“I'm lazy. But it's the lazy people who invented the wheel
and the bicycle, because they didn't like walking or carrying
things.”*

-Lech Walesa

And with that, I wish you a wonderful week.

Be Lazy, but stay busy.

If you enjoyed this article, make sure to sign up to my email list.

Yours truly,
Tobias

—
*Tobias is the Co-Founder of Semplice, a new portfolio platform for designers.
Also host of the show NTMY— Previously Design Lead at Spotify & Board of
Directors AIGA New York.*



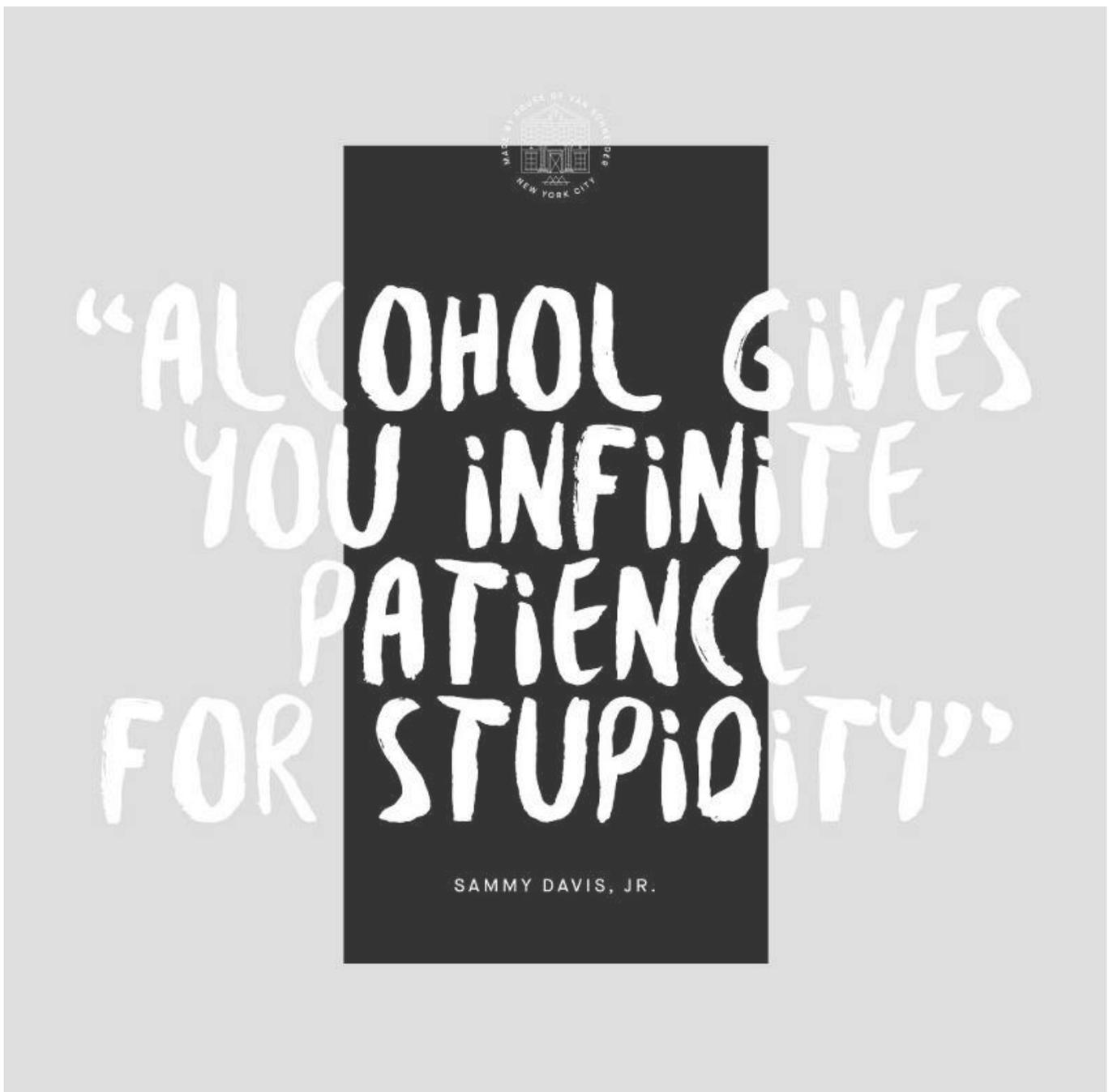
Tobias van Schneider

4 min read

Life

No alcohol, no coffee for 15 months. This is what happened.

by Tobias van Schneider



Exactly today I haven't had a single drop of alcohol or coffee in 15 months. A couple of my friends on Facebook & Twitter asked me to write about my experience, so here it is, in a nutshell.

With over a year of no alcohol & coffee, I did notice some side effects. Here is what I learned.

I save \$1000 every month

After 2 months I noticed that I had \$1000 more on my bank account. Yes, that's a lot, but do the math and you notice it's not that much.

I live in New York. In order to spend \$1000 on alcohol I only have to spend \$33 everyday. Assume that I have 2–3 cocktails every other day (which are \$10 each without tip), including some wine bottles every month for at home I can easily spend \$1000.

Some might think that this is heavy alcoholism, but trust me when I say that having 1–2 drinks everyday in New York is more than normal.

Also, going out drinking means that the occasional dinner & snacks are more frequent. You don't just drink, you get hungry and buy some food. And before you noticed it, you spend \$1000.

Less gossip

If there is one thing I noticed quite early, then it's the lack of social interaction my new diet brought with it. Here is what happened:

1. You don't really go out anymore. It's exhausting to explain again and again why you don't drink and NO also one drink is not okay. When a group of people asks me to join them for drinks, I mostly default to answer with NO because I just don't want to deal with gossip as a sober person.
2. If I do go for drinks, I last max. 1 hour because this is how long my attention span as a sober person lasts in a group of drunk people.

3. While I was never a party animal anyways, completely stopping with alcohol made me go out even less. It's amazing to see the culture of drinking slowly fading away from your life. It made me realize how many friendships are actually based mostly on your drinking habits.

“Let’s go for a drink” is so engraved in our lives, because who says **“Hey, let’s just meet up as sober people and talk about stuff”**— Why the fuck would you do that? “Let’s get a drink” needs no explanation. It’s a thing, everyone knows what happens next.

My sleep quality increased

Removing alcohol from my diet increased my sleep quality drastically. And I’m not talking about “falling asleep” but the actual sleep quality.

You sure do fall asleep easier with 1–2 glasses of beer or wine, but the actual sleep quality might suffer. I sleep better, and I wake up with more energy. Before I always ruined my mornings, even if I only had two beers at night I could feel it in the morning. (if you’re in your early twenties, ignore this, it doesn’t affect you yet)

No coffee, less panic, less stress

This might be something more personal and not related to everyone. But removing coffee from my diet helped me become more relaxed. Coffee always made me stressed out. It increased my chance of having anxiety and also fucked up my digestion. Removing coffee/caffeine from my diet not only made me more relaxed, I also poop like a king.

Besides that, I love the smell and taste of coffee. An occasional decaf will do the trick. In the summer I now drink ice tea, in the winter regular tea. I found out that “Going for a coffee” turned out to be more of a social activity than the actual craving for coffee. Keep the social habit, replace coffee with something else.

—
Overall, I’m very happy about my decision and have no desire to start drinking again. I’m also not telling you to do the same, if you’re happy with how things are

going, don't change anything. I changed my habits out of curiosity and I like how it turned out.

PS: Before someone asks. I do not smoke cigarettes. I also don't smoke weed. I also don't take any drugs whatsoever. (I have Internet, that's addiction enough for me)

Yours truly,
Tobias

If you enjoyed this article, feel free to sign up to my personal weekly email list to get more articles like this.

Tobias is the Co-Founder of Semplice, a new portfolio platform for designers. Also host of the show NTMY — Previously Design Lead at Spotify & Board of Directors AIGA New York.



Tobias van Schneider

3 min read

Life

Staying Busy

by Tobias van Schneider

first appeared on my private email list.

DESK OF VAN SCHNEIDER
EDITION 27

STAY
BUSY



Last week I highlighted one of my five principles when approaching new side projects to ensure continuous learning.

If you've missed the first three, you can read them here:

1. Ignore Everybody
2. A Jack Of All Trades (only in my archive)
3. Trust Your Gut

Today I like to share Nr.4 with you. For those of you who have seen my talk are probably already familiar with it to some extend.

People always ask me, how do you get so much stuff done? While I wish I would get even more done, I do have a strategy that that keeps me productive.

By nature, we humans are lazy. But without trying to generalize, I'm a lazy person if I wouldn't find tactics to get shit done.

My strategy is to stay busy, at all times. Keep the momentum up. The moment I'm not doing something I often fall into this big hole. Once I sit on the couch watching TV, I will stay on the couch—And thats why I try to avoid the couch.

It's important to understand that we're talking about being REAL busy, not fake busy. One will lead to happiness, the other one will lead to depression. Faking it will always backfire.

Being busy is not about pointing out our busyness to other people around us. It's not about impressing others, although it's easy to fall into that trap.

It's a common disease of our generation that whenever someone asks us "How are you?" we often reply with our default answer "Oh man, so busy, so busy".

This is not the "busy" I'm talking about. There is nothing wrong with being bored, but for some reason that's what we think, and thus we call ourselves busy, even if we're not. This article is about getting shit done, it's about being busy in a good way.

“Doing nothing is better than being busy doing nothing.”

~Lao Tzu

I always like to give the following metaphor as an example.

Imagine you're sitting on the couch, and you're thinking about running.

Getting up from that couch and go straight into running will take a lot of energy to overcome the inertia. It seems almost impossible. But if you're already walking, it will be much easier as you are already in motion. My goal is to be walking at all times.

When working on side projects, or any projects for that matter, I always keep myself busy with lots of them. If I'm stuck on one project, I can continue on the next one. Constant momentum makes it easier to start new tasks and ship faster.

If you haven't shipped anything for one year, you will have a hard time doing it in the second year. If you ship something (even something small) every four weeks or less, you have the momentum. You're in the mood of shipping.

I apply the same principle when reading a book. I start 3–5 books at the same time. If I'm stuck on one, I continue on the next. With that strategy, I have no excuse to not finish at least one book a month.

“The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way.” — Marcus Aurelius

I briefly talked about this in the 3rd episode of the [NTMY](#) show with Katie Rodgers.

To gain momentum, you have to do the first step. If you want to run, you have to first start walking.

Katie mentioned that when she wants to paint a new picture, but doesn't know how to start, she sits down and puts one stroke on a piece of paper. After that, another one, and another.

While she doesn't know what to draw, she just gained momentum and i will magically help her to continue drawing.

For me, being in constant motion also helps me with writing. I oftentimes don't know what to write about, but I still sit down, and write whatever is on my mind. Soon enough, I have a little article right in front of me.

Always keep moving.

If you enjoyed this article, make sure to sign up to my email list.

Yours truly,
Tobias

—
Tobias is the Co-Founder of Semplice, a new portfolio platform for designers. Also host of the show NTMY—Previously Design Lead at Spotify & Board of Directors AIGA New York.



Tobias van Schneider

4 min read

Life

The Secret Is The Beginning

by Tobias van Schneider

first appeared on my private email list.



We humans love to celebrate success stories. We get inspired by great companies, successful people and big achievements.

Those are the things that make big headlines and motivate us to push harder everyday. While these stories are motivating and inspiring, they are also intimidating.

Often so intimidating that we question everything we do. We compare our little project with the big ones who are already out there for many years. We put everyone & everything on our imaginary pedestal.

I remember my mother always said this one line that stuck with me until today. (I'll do my best to translate from German to English)

“Tobias, always remember — Everyone sits down when taking a shit, just like you. Your teachers, your mentors, and even the president.” — My Mother

This has always been a gentle reminder for myself when I was busy putting other people on pedestals. It's a reminder that everyone is human, everyone has the same humble beginnings.

Even though we should know better, we still believe in the “Over night success” myth. We want instant gratification and always seek for the secret recipe of success, even if we already know that it does not exist.

For some reason it's deeply unsatisfying for us to not be able to find the perfect answer when asking someone for their secret of success. Still, we keep asking.

One thing that often helps me to put things into perspective is to look at the beginnings. Look at where things started rather than the final outcome.

Often the secret lies right there, in the beginning that looks a lot like your own beginning of a new project. It's the phase we can all identify with, since very few start with a big bang.

We all know about the crazy “overnight success” of Angry birds. But few know that the three founders built 50+ games and almost went bankrupt. Angry Birds was one of their last attempts to save the company. Clearly not an overnight success.

Anyone who wants to sell you overnight success or wealth is not interested in your success; they are interested in your money. — Ben Bennett

I always love to look at some of our favorite websites & services and how they looked & worked just 10–20 years ago. It’s a simply trick that helps me to put things into perspective.

The humble beginnings often tell us more than a refined product many years later. It helps me reflect on where I am right now with my own projects

So let’s have a look:



Use twtr to stay in touch with your friends all the time. If you have a cell and can txt, you’ll never be bored again...EVER!

What your friends are



.timeline

follow along with what your friends are doing throughout the day



txt

(or)

What are you doing?

.what up?

send updates from your cell or from the web about whats in yr head

Sign in.

Mobile number (or email)

Password (or PIN)

Remember me

New? Sign up!

twtr works best when updated from your mobile phone. To verify you are you, we'll need your number.

Mobile number

Twitter

Yes, Twitter looked like this in 2006. Even for 2006 this is absolutely horrible. But this is where it all started, and all that counts is that it's LIVE and not just an imaginary idea in someones head.



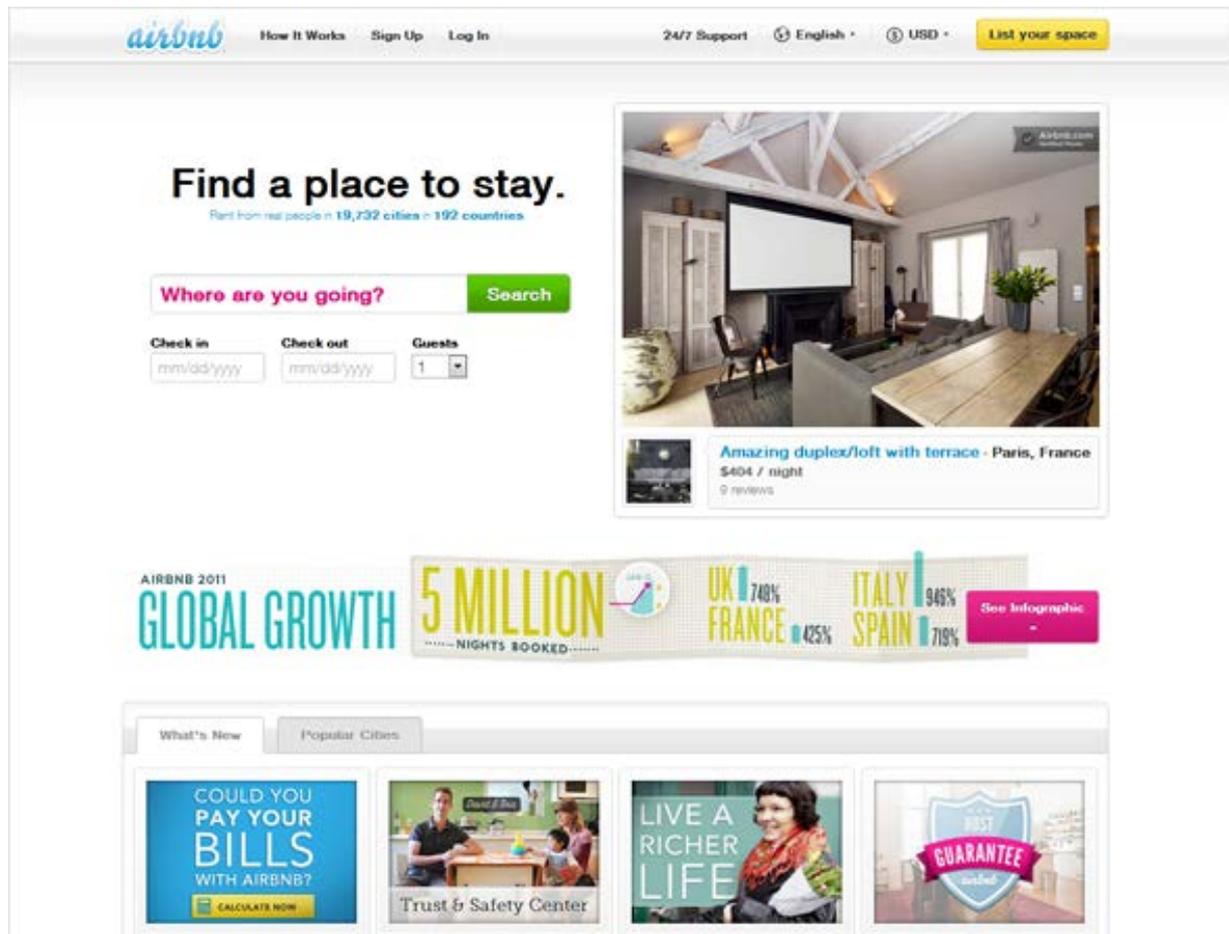
YouTube

While YouTube might be still not famous for it's beautiful design and extraordinary experience, this is how it looked in 2006. It's a small idea about to become something big.



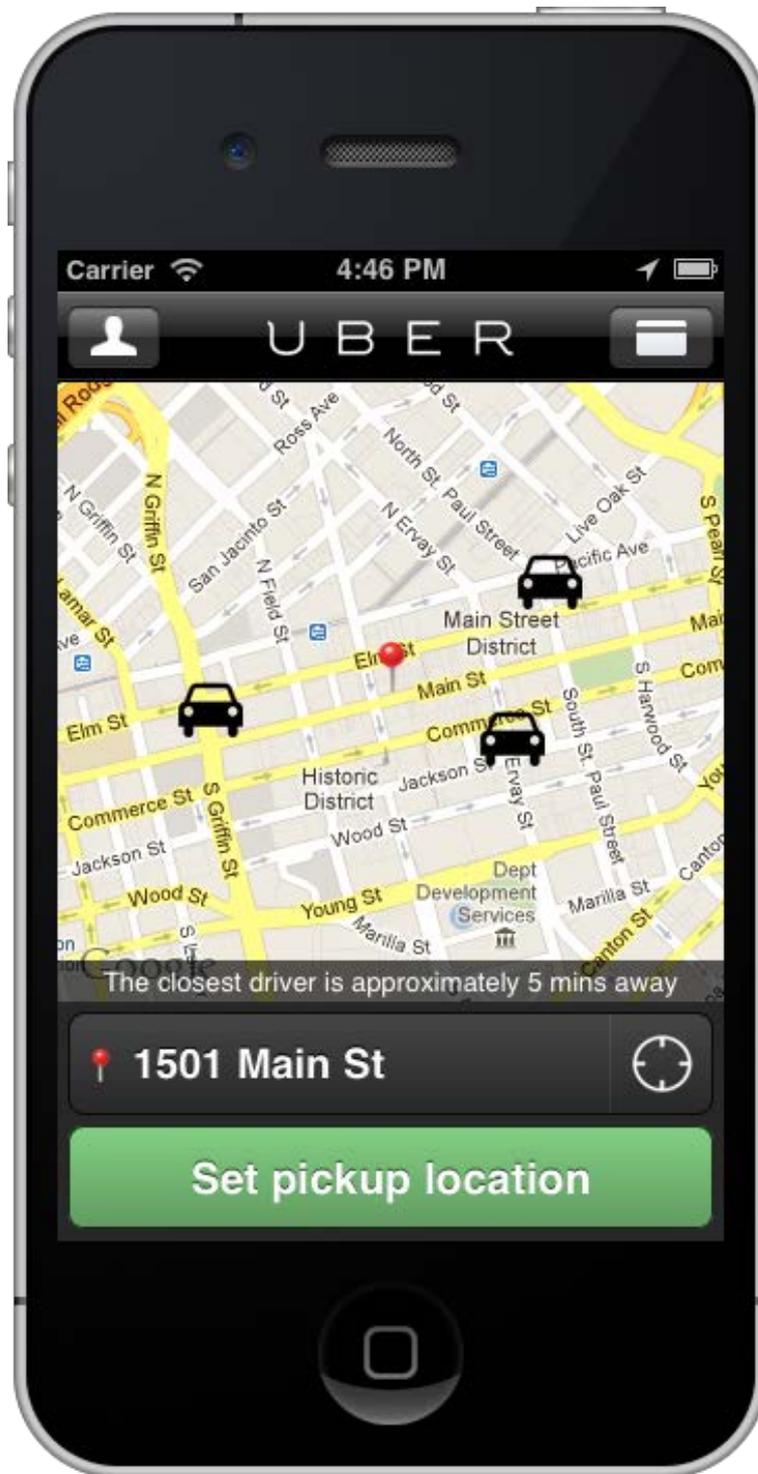
Facebook

This is how the social network looked like in 2004, and it didn't changed for years after. It was a true MVP starting with just the basics. The design of Facebook was definitely not the reason why the service got so popular in the first place.



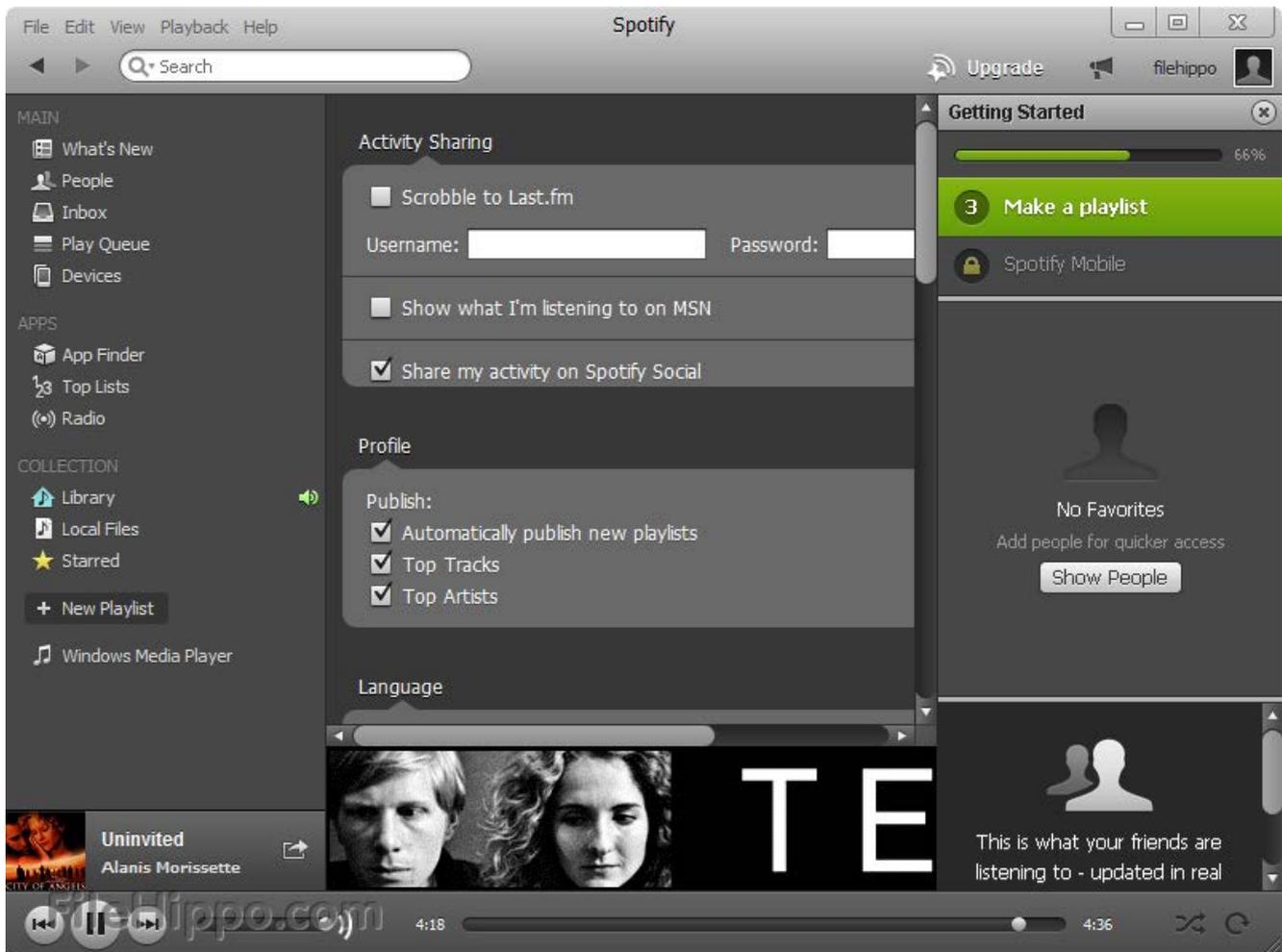
Airbnb

If I'm not mistaken, this is a screenshot from the Airbnb website in 2012. Yes, that's not even four years ago. Things have been very different.



Uber

Uber in 2013—Just three years ago. And to be honest, from a core functionality point of view, it hasn't changed much.



Spotify

Spotify in 2006. Humble beginnings, but on top of it all:
It just worked. People came for the music, not the visuals.

Always remember. The secret is in the humble beginnings we often forget about. Everyone started somewhere. Often these humble beginnings are not portrayed by the press. They're not sexy nor particularly interesting.

No one cares about the 50 games that came before Angry Birds. But it's these 50 games that we need to pay attention to.

If you enjoyed this article, make sure to sign up to my email list.

Yours truly,
Tobias



Todd Brison

4 min read

Life

Shift Your Mindset By Saying Less of These Four Things



The ball rocketed into the air, took a definite left turn, and crashed down into the water with a sickening:

Splash

My dad and I were on the 11th hole, and I was practicing for an upcoming golf tournament. The day's work wasn't exactly going well.

"UGH! I suck!"

I slammed my club into the ground and dad grabbed me by the arm.

“If you say that again, we’re walking off the course.” “But dad, I DO suck! Didn’t you see that?”

He glanced over at the remaining ripples.

“Yep, I sure did. That shot sucked. But you don’t.”

. . .

I used to think actions spoke louder than words, but to tell you the truth, I now think it’s a pretty even split.

Words have enormous power —

the power to make or ruin someone’s day,
the power to encourage or embarrass,
the power to inspire or crush.

Words *broadcast* the person within. An insecure man will tear others down with his words. A fulfilled woman will make others strong.

The inverse is also true. There have been studies showing our external actions can actually change how we feel. Smiling has been shown to make you happier. Certain poses raise testosterone.

More so than smiling or standing like Wonder Woman, the words you let loose have a direct effect on you and everyone around you.

Here are 4 phrases to start farming out of your life for good.

“I always _____”

No you don’t. Maybe you did one time, or you did in the past, but you don’t always. Don’t you *dare* write your future before it happens.

Avoid definite statement. The human condition is always in motion. You aren’t the same person you were last year or last month or probably even yesterday.

If you say “I always smoke” I’ll be floored at your ability to light one up when you

were in the womb.

Don't cast a curse on yourself. You are not "always" anything.

Say instead: "In the past, I have ____" or "I messed up *that time*."

"Oh, it's nothing"

Humans have a weird thing where we long for the approval of others, but we smack it away when it comes.

This phrase usually comes after a compliment. Whenever you *reject your own positive attributes*, you might as well be saying "I'm nothing."

One of the quickest ways to step into your own power is to start accepting the things you are good at. And you are good at things, I promise.

Nothing is nothing. Everything is something. You may as well start accepting credit for your contributions.

When complimented, say instead: "Thank you so much" "I appreciate that" or "I receive that."

"He/She/They started with _____. That's not fair!"

Nope, sorry. Nothing is fair. You weren't born a billionaire, so you might never be one. You weren't born like LeBron, so you might never play professional basketball. That's just the way it is.

The best way to combat the unfairness of life is to find where life is unfair in your favor.

Are you short? Sweet, you can get to places others can't.

Introverted? Awesome, lock yourself away and do what you love most. Not everyone can do that.

Not Creative? No problem. Crunch the crap out of that data and logic your way to the top.

Ugly? Nice, play an iconic role in the Goonies.

Everyone has something. You just have to find your thing and exploit it. **Say instead: “I don’t have that advantage, but I do have _____”**

“If only _____ then I could _____”

Happiness starts from where you are. Period.

This phrase is especially pernicious when there are dollar bills involved.

- “If only I made \$70,000, then I could start my side business.”
- “If only I earned \$120K I would be able to move up in house and be happy.”
- “Whenever I make my first million, then I’ll slow down.”

But money is a moving target, for teenagers and adults and businesses alike. There is always something else to buy.

The second you start appreciating the parts of life that are free is the second you move out of the money mindset.

This one usually walks hand in hand with. “They have _____. If only I had _____.”

Stop making excuses or change your expectations. All you have to work with is the things you have now.

What matters is how you finish.

Say instead: “Since I have _____ I can _____”

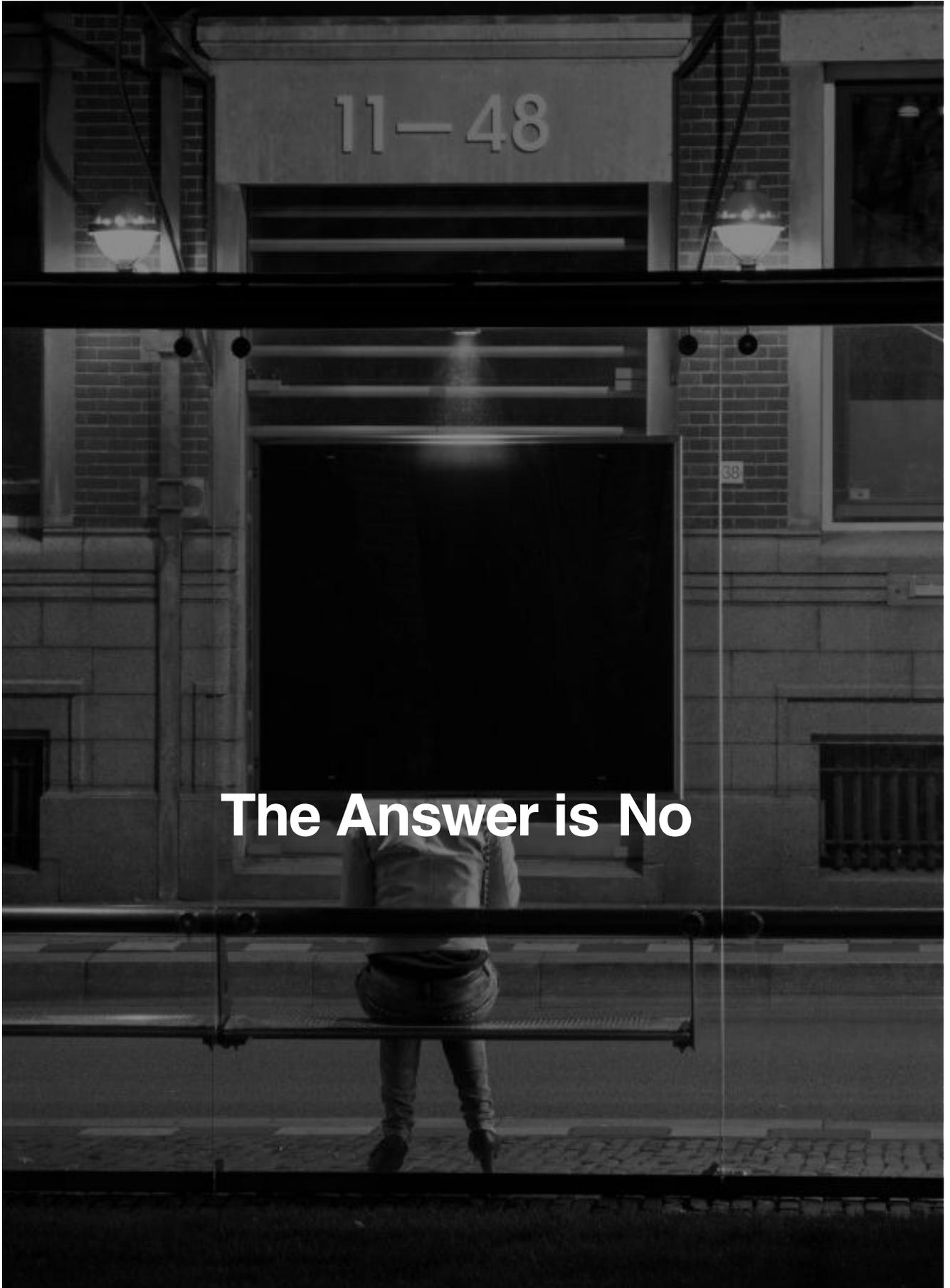
Thanks for making it all the way down here! If you liked this one, you’ll probably also like “4 Ways of Redefining Success”



Todd Brison

2 min read

Life



The Answer is No

To late-night drinks.
To a 90-minute lunch in the middle of the day.
To water cooler gossip*.

To the 2 hours of small talk on the plane.
To the party after the party.
To the meeting you don't have to be in.

The answer is no.

If you want to create things that matter, things that *really* matter, you'll have to get used to saying this.

This isn't about being an aloof artist (which you can't afford to be). This isn't about being the entrepreneur who checks out from all the relationships you have (which is suicide). This is about rejecting those who *want* your physical presence in order to pour into those who *need* your emotional presence.

Because nobody is going to give you time to create.

Nobody is going to say "George*, I heard you're trying to make it as a photographer! Why don't you just take some time between 1 and 3 to leave your desk, go outside, and get some great shots for your portfolio."

Not in this world.

Instead, you'll have to cut out some of the things you're currently saying yes to. This doesn't mean you are a jerk. This means you are conscious about how few minutes there are on this planet. This means you are willing to sacrifice some short-term pleasure for long-term impact.

My coworkers know I don't go out that often. I came in politely declining nearly everything. Now, when I do go out, it's a lot more fun (for me and for them).

Stop complaining about how much of your time is already spoken for and start figuring out a way to get it back.

It doesn't have to be morning, but I'm sure you've got some minutes there. It doesn't have to be lunch, but I'm sure you can sneak away for a bit then. It doesn't have to be at midnight, but you can sure make progress when everyone else is sleeping.

Your hours of quiet are not going to appear suddenly, you have to fight for them. Win the Muse. Gain her respect.

And then speak into the silence.

. . .

P.s. (I wouldn't say no to you checking out my site as well ;)

Productivity / Self Improvement / Time Management



Andrew Merle

3 min read



Why You Should Be A Morning Person

What is one thing most successful people have in common? They get up extra early and make the most of the morning. Here's why:

Waking up early gives you time to think before the buzz of the day begins. To put it simply, the early morning is “you time”—a time to lay out your priorities for the day and make progress against them, before others are demanding your time and attention. It puts you firmly in control of each day.

Of course it is awfully hard to get out of bed, but that's exactly why early risers have the competitive advantage over everyone else. They tackle the day while others hit the snooze button.

Here are just a few examples of ultra-successful early risers:

- Virgin Founder Richard Branson wakes up at 5:45am, even when he's on his

private island, and uses the morning for exercise and breakfast before starting work for the day

- First Lady Michelle Obama starts her day at 4:30am for a workout before her kids wake up
- Apple CEO Tim Cook gets up at 3:45am every day to catch up on email, hit the gym, and make a Starbucks run before heading to the office
- Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz gets up at 4:30am to get a workout in (often a bike ride with his wife)—and of course to make some coffee to get his day going
- Disney CEO Bob Iger rises at 4:30am and uses the early morning to read the paper, exercise, listen to music, catch up on emails, and even watch TV
- Vogue Editor-In-Chief Anna Wintour wakes at 5:45am to play an hour of tennis before work demands hit
- GE CEO Jeff Immelt wakes up at 5:30am and gets in a cardio workout while reading the paper and watching CNBC

Did you notice another consistent trend among all of these ultra-successful people? Everyone's morning ritual includes exercise as a key component.

In addition to the overall health and fitness benefits, studies have shown that moderate-intensity exercise for 20+ minutes produces a mental and emotional boost for the following 12 hours! This means that these business leaders are likely more clear-headed, effective, and productive at work as a direct result of their morning workout. The exercise time also allows them to think and problem-solve without interruption, so they hit the ground running once they get into the office. Morning exercise is an incredibly efficient use of time.

In addition to waking up extra early and exercising, here are a few more morning habits to get your day moving in the right direction:

- Drink 16 oz. of Water Upon Waking—Rehydrate after your 7–8 hours of sleep.

- **Make Your Bed**—Making your bed every morning is correlated with better productivity throughout the day
- **Eat a Healthy Breakfast**—Fuel your body for the demands of the day (led by energy-packed fruits and vegetables)
- **Drink 1–2 Cups of Coffee**—Give yourself a morning boost while reaping the proven health benefits
- **Catch up on the News**—Use the quiet time to know what’s happening in the world around you
- **Prioritize Your Day**—Establish your top priorities and think about how to tackle them

All of this sets you up for success before your “work day” even begins, whatever form that may take for you. Being a morning person isn’t reserved for just C-level execs. Everyone will benefit from implementing these good habits.

Think it’s not possible for you because you need the extra sleep? The experts would say to get to bed earlier the night before to make the early wake-up call tolerable.

These tips and success stories help motivate me to get out of bed when all I want to do is sleep a bit more, and hopefully they also inspire you to make the morning your secret weapon!

For more stories like this one, “Follow” me to see my latest posts.



Bianca Bass

3 min read

5 Apps That Can Improve Your Everyday Writing



Since graduating, I've worked on various projects, from major marketing campaigns to filing financial copy. Being able to write is a skill, and one that's only becoming more sought-after. But with more people creating content than ever, the quality of writing has often deteriorated.

Luckily, I'm going to let you in on a secret. With the right tools, **you** can improve your writing, too. The first step is getting started. Here are five FREE apps that can help better your emails, blog posts, tweets and more.

Keep it simple

I use the [Hemingway](#) app on a daily basis. Think of it as your automated English

teacher. It points out simpler adjectives, uses of the passive voice and sentences that are hard to read. All you need to do is enter your selected text and, in return, you'll receive a score on how 'readable' it is. There's no magic number, but as a rule of thumb I aim for an 8.

Write how you speak

Never put on a telephone voice when you write. If you wouldn't feel comfortable saying it out loud, don't put it down on paper. **Dragon Dictation**, a hands-free, automated transcriber, can help. You've spent your whole life learning how to communicate with that voice. Why change when communicating with text?

Get into grammar

I know. Groan. But grammar does make a significant difference. Picture this sentence—yes, the one you're reading right now—without any punctuation. Crazy, right? We're all time-poor. Add the free **Grammarly** plug-in to your browser and let it do the hard work for you. You even get email updates on how many words, mistakes and improvements you've made each week. Genius.

Back to basics

The more you write, the more consistent you become, and the better a writer you'll be. Yet a big part of actually sitting down and doing said writing is the environment. When I need to focus, I opt for **ZenPen**. It's aesthetically-pleasing and works wonders. Trust me, I wrote this post with its help.

Map it out

Finding your vocabulary a little repetitive? Try **VisuWords**, a modern thesaurus that maps out words and their alternatives. Perfect for lateral thinkers, this graphical tool moves beyond synonyms and finds other kinds of relational connections. What's more, it helps discover new concepts and ideas in ways you can't with traditional materials.

So, there you have it. Let's go and make the internet a better place, one well-written sentence at a time!



David Ams

3 min read



You don't need more than two years

Two years is nothing, but at the same time a lot can be accomplished in two years. You can try a sport you've always wanted to start, and become great at it. You can start a morning routine and affect your mood and stress at a deep level. You can meditate for a few minutes per day, become more self-aware and change the way you react to problems. You can start a business and make it a big success.

Two years is nothing and extremely easy to waste, but with small actions, substantial commitment and consistency, you can make it count, a lot.

Two years being passive is a blink of an eye. Two years moving towards goals every single day is plenty of time, it's just a matter of perspective. There is nothing that cannot be accomplished in two years with enough efforts.

Start something you've always wanted to do.

You're not too old for the things you were dreaming of doing when you were a kid. You can still do extreme sports if you wish to. You can start playing a musical instrument. You can become a photographer. In two years from now, you'll be great at it if you really want to.

Don't let your past dictate who you are, you don't have to be the same person you have always been. Don't let fear control you. Don't let the social standards conform you. Age is just a number, we should all empower our uniqueness and fight against our own limitations.

By doing things you love on a daily basis, even for a few minutes, you'll learn to enjoy the journey. The days will become more than just a mean to an end. You'll see yourself evolving.

Be in control.

If you had the choice between feeling great, energetic and in a positive mood, versus feeling sleepy, moody. What would you choose?

It's just a choice, which combined with small, even tiny actions like reducing meat or alcohol consumption, or simply drinking more water, walking the stairs or biking to the office, can do wonders. It's not about the end goal, it's about daily actions towards it. It's also the reason why morning routines, or ten minutes daily meditation sessions are bringing such great changes in terms of mood, productivity, stress management, etc.

Replace Tv shows and movies by documentaries and books. Monitor your days more, get in control of how you spend your time

Take back the control of your health, mood and time. Practice gratefulness. See the results in two years.

Silence your ego.

Be kind with people. Start with your family, don't go mad one more time. Stop judging, see the good in them and remember that you love them more than anything.

In your working life, being kind and nice can bring you more respect from people who surround you than being bossy and aggressive. Learn to say "No" often (for the right reasons), people will accept it more and value your "Yes" more, because your time's value will increase. You don't need to be scary to be respected. It's about building trust and healthy long term relationships. Try this and in two years from now your reality will be so different.

Silence your ego, love and trust others enough for two years, harvest for ten years or more.

Set long term goals and do small actions every day towards them.

It has a lot to do with setting goals, but goals without actions are just wishes. The easiest way to reach goals is through daily and consistent small (even tiny) actions. It's all about consistency, commitment, and regularity.

Success is not an event, it's a process and a mindset. Small actions are putting you in the position of succeeding.

Small actions make huge differences. Look at yourself in the mirror in two years and you'll think "that was quick!".

EVERY.DAY.COUNTS



DHH

5 min read



Manufacturing quality time

“How do you juggle it all?” is a question I’m asked regularly. Usually with an undertone that I must have some secret. A trick. Is it sleeping just 5 hours per night? Is it working 12 hour days for months on end? What is it!?!

The common lore of Highly Productive People is that they just work harder. Often superhumanly so. They have a singular focus that turns their drive to 11. The media loves to recount these feats of marvelous stamina and determination.

I don't fit that mold. I usually sleep a good 8.5 to 9 hours every night. I take pride in making work fit the traditional 40 hour/week constraint. I have no drive for more, more, more.

If I have a trick, it's a focus on the quality of each individual hour. That doesn't mean Time Management, in the 1990s sense of the term, slicing each hour to the last minute, and squeezing it for every last second of peak productivity. But it does cover a realization that all hours are not created or spent equal.

An hour haunted by stress, interruption, sleep deprivation, or frazzle is not worth the sixty minutes its allotted. It's a low quality hour. You'd be foolish to expect that you can turn such dirty input into clear accomplishments. Garbage in, garbage out.

40 hours of work every week is a king's keep. I contend that almost anything can be accomplished with such a glorious budget. But not if you squander it on meetings, multitasking, or poorly defined problems. There's no limit to the amount of time that can be wasted like that.

Well, there's a physical limit. And I suppose that's where many people find refuge. I gave it everything! You can't blame me, and I can't blame myself, for failing to accomplish when every second was spent. I left nothing for myself, so have mercy, they rationalize.

Covering your ass to yourself or others might give you some temporary comfort, but it won't cover the deficit of ambition in the long run. Resignation is a coping mechanism for the beaten.

What you need is a set of refinement techniques. You need to actively work on increasing the purity and quality of your hours. Here are a few that I use:

Do I really need to be involved in this?

Gluttonous curiosity is the siren song that seeks to loop you into all manners of discussions, decisions, and events that you're likely not a necessary or even important component.

It's hard to accept that while your insight or experience might be useful to other people, it equally might not be nearly useful enough to offset the cost of yet another head at the table.

The value of just skimming that email, turning down that meeting invitation, not depositing your two cents in that chat seems abstract in the moment. But diligently refraining from chiming in and collaborating is what gives room for making more important progress on fewer things.

Could this wait?

Some problems need to be dealt with today, lest they compound tomorrow. Best deal with those right away. But they're in the minority. Most problems and opportunities are just as valuably addressed a day or a week or a month from now.

Putting something on the back burner means it might well have dissipated by the time you give it a second look. Wonderful! That was work that then didn't need to get done. Or just appeared more important than it really was when you first thought about it.

The longer you delay solving a problem, the more you'll know about it. Lots of pains just go away by adding idle time.

Can I bail on this?

The road to a day wasted is paved with heroic attempts of throwing good hours after bad. Mistaking the depth of a problem is a reliable error of working life.

The crime comes when you continue digging after realizing the hole needed is thrice as deep as you anticipated, without confirming that the solution is also worth thrice the effort originally budgeted.

Learning to give up is a critical skill for making your remaining hours count. Sunk cost is a sucker's bet.

Am I ready for this?

Sometimes it's the problem that needs more time to ripen, and sometimes it's you. We are not equally capable or fit to tackle all problems at all times.

If my head is in tune for writing this week, it's a good time to complete the copy for the new website, but it's probably a bad time to organize the work for the next quarter. If my fingers are itching to code, then let's solve that bug that's irked me for a month, not try to redirect the passion to doing 1–1 interviews that week.

Our motivations ebb and flow. Swimming with the tide instead of against it is just so much easier. And as detailed above, most things can wait until the water that needs to carry them comes back up.

. . .

Even with a strong repertoire of techniques for making each hour count for more, you will still fail regularly. Maybe all the work that needs doing this week just doesn't include anything you can muster the motivation for. So it slides and you feel shit.

But there's great comfort in knowing that this happens to everyone. With far more often than most are willing to admit. Despite a finely-honed perception for high quality hours, I still churn through junk frequently. Leaving me with much less than what I had hoped. So it goes!

What matters is increasing the aggregate quality of your hours over the long term. Not to stress when you fail to turn out a perfect batch.

Once you've built an awareness and appreciation of quality time, I doubt you'll feel the same pull to keep chasing more, more, more. The difference between an uninterrupted string of four quality hours versus a few days of crap hours is a revelation.

Even if you squeeze and squeeze to get more hours, maybe you'll get another 20–50%? Refine the ones you already have and you might get 200–500% more value. That's the true 10x.

The trick to juggling it all is to stop juggling.

I spend most of my quality hours for working Basecamp. We just released a brand-new version 3, which has a special Work Can Wait feature designed specifically to increase the quality of your working hours by avoiding interruptions Give it a try!



Gary Vaynerchuk

3 min read

Productivity

4 New Year's Resolutions You Should Make to Improve Your Career



As the year comes to a close, people are naturally going to be talking about their New Year's resolutions. But want to know what I think you should really be focusing on in 2016? Here are four ways to further your career.

1. Become a Deep Practitioner in Something

Whether you do it for your business, or just for yourself as a hobby, practice something on a deep level. One of the reasons my agency VaynerMedia has grown to be such a leader in our industry is because I myself use social media every single day. I understand the trigger points that make things successful in a creative world, and I understand the context of the platforms like Snapchat and Instagram. There hasn't been a single one of my 135k tweets that I haven't sent myself.

So, whether it's Instagram or Snapchat or something emerging like musical.ly, become a practitioner. Stop judging what people are doing or saying it and do it. Engage.

2. Audit Your 7pm to 2am

Back in the days of my first big keynotes, and my first book *Crush It*, I began to get obsessed with the time period between 7pm and 2am. I do not think that there is a more practical way to bring happiness and joy to your life, whether it's financial or creative, than to really audit your 7pm to 2am.

I am quite practical about things; it might not be what people expect from me, but I am. That time between when the traditional work day ends and when you fall asleep is the white space for so many people to do great things around businesses. Whether that's advancing your career by staying in the office late, or going home and building out your cooking blog or SoundCloud account, use that time more wisely in 2016.

3. Practice Self-Awareness

I've been on this kick publicly for the last 18 months and, personally, my entire life. I believe self-awareness is the greatest gift a person can have. I tried to tackle this year [how to find self-awareness](#); out of this entire article, if you make this one your 2016 priority, you will grow happier and more successful. I promise that.

4. Eliminate Complaining

Looking at the negative, seeing the glass as half empty, and complaining are the absolute biggest wastes of time a human being can engage in. I highly recommend, whether it is through therapy or just kicking the habit, cut your complaining in half till you are no longer used to just doing it without thinking.

Systematically. Post-it notes. Listening to positive podcasts. Doing meditation. Whatever helps you do less complaining. It truly is one of the biggest things that can stand in the way of success, both professionally and personally. I would be remiss not to have it on this list.



Jason Fried

4 min read

Basecamp 3: Work Can Wait

This is the first post about the upcoming major release of [Basecamp 3](#).

We've been working on Basecamp 3 for over a year now, and some of the concepts can be traced back to explorations we started a couple of years ago. We're in the home stretch and we're excited to let it loose.

. . .

Over the next month or so I'll be sharing some of the key ideas behind the all-new version of Basecamp, as well as screenshots, design decisions, strategic decisions, and stories of the development of the third complete ground-up rethink and redesign of Basecamp in 12 years.

. . .

The first place I want to start is one of the fundamental pillars of the new product design: Work Can Wait.

If you've used a modern chat, collaboration, or messaging app, you've probably noticed that there's a growing expectation of being available all the time. Someone at work hits you up on a Saturday, you get the notification, and what are you supposed to do? You could ignore them, but what's the expectation? The expectation is "if you're reachable, you should reply." And if you don't reply, you'll likely notice another message from the same tool or a tool switch to try to reach you another way. And then the pressure really mounts to reply. On a Saturday. Or at 9pm on a Wednesday. Or some other time when it's life time, not work time.

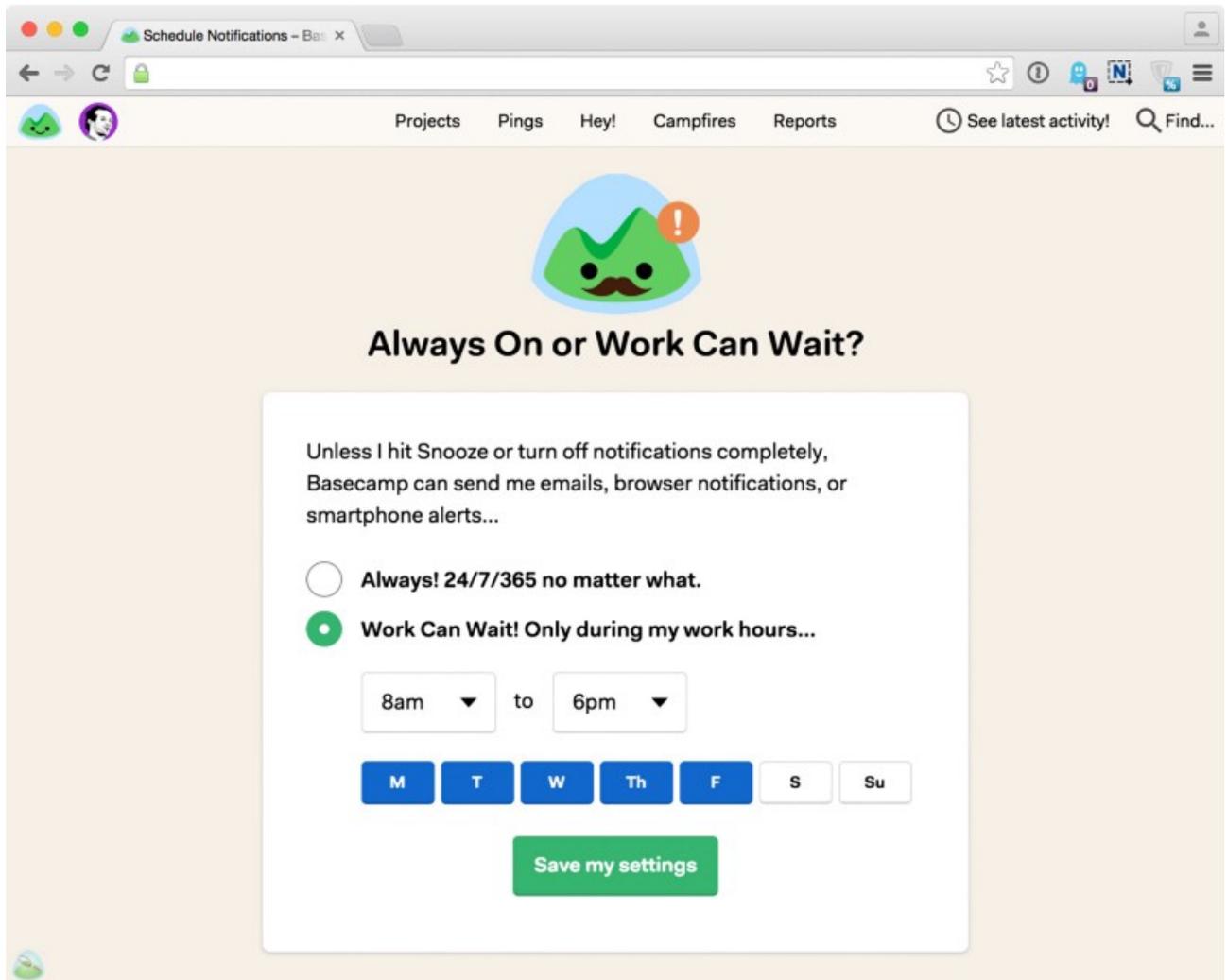
I don't believe tools are at fault for this—tools just do what toolmakers build them to do. But I do believe toolmakers can build tools that help you draw a line between work and life. We've baked these good manners into Basecamp 3 with a feature we're calling **Work Can Wait**.

. . .

Like other modern messaging tools, Basecamp 3 sends notifications in-app, via push notifications on the desktop or via a native mobile app, or via email. Where they show up depends on what you're doing and where you are, but regardless, Basecamp tries to get your attention when someone asks for your attention.

That's fine during the work day. Basecamp 3 lets you snooze notifications any time to give you a break for a few hours, so that's good. But what about if it's 8pm on a Monday night? Or on a weekend? You don't want to have to continually snooze notifications manually. And you don't want to have to manually turn them on or off every day, at least twice a day, to keep work stuff at bay while you're trying to stay away.

So Basecamp 3 lets you set a notifications schedule.

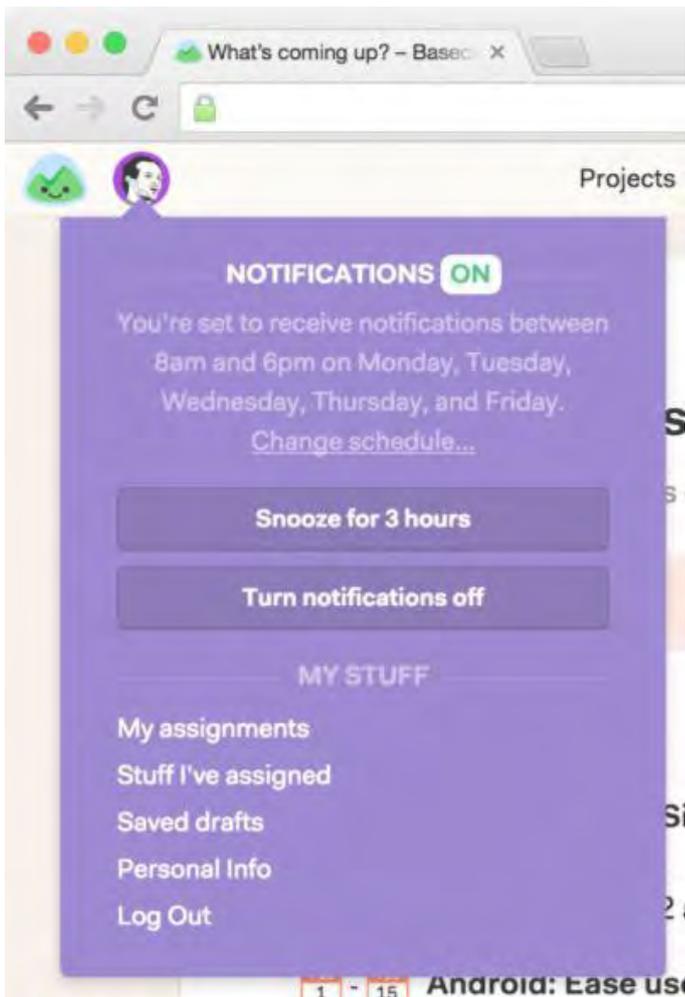


Set up your Work Can Wait schedule

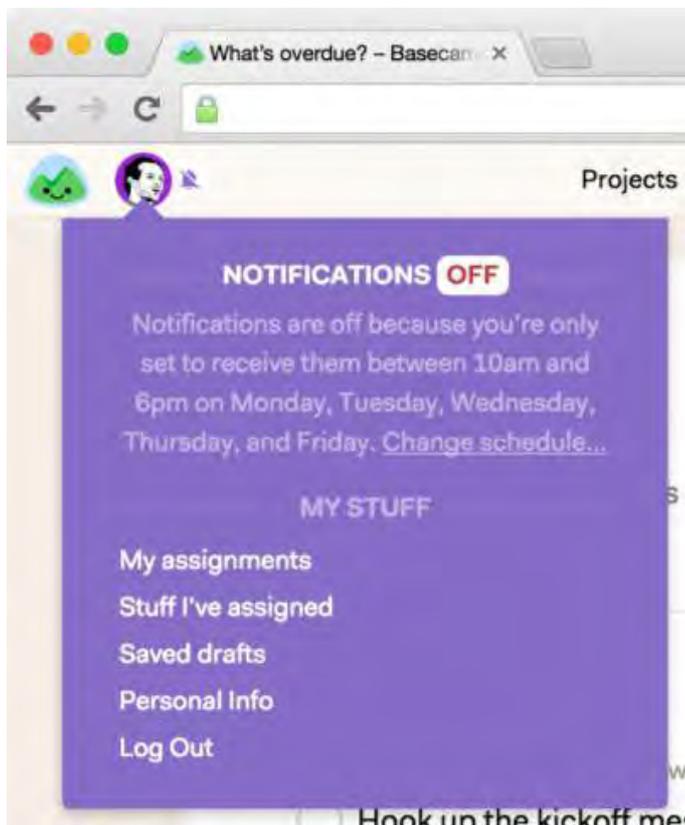
Each person in Basecamp 3 can set up their own work schedule with their own hours. You can of course choose to to receive notifications all the time, 24/7/365, no matter what. Or, you can say Work Can Wait—only send me notifications during my work hours. Then you can set the start time and end time and also mark off which days you work.

The example above are *my* work hours. Monday through Friday from 8am to 6pm in my time zone.

Outside of this range, Basecamp will basically “hold my calls”. Notifications will automatically be silenced until it’s work time again. Once the clock strikes 8am, notifications will start back up again. Of course at any time I can go into the web app or native apps and check my notifications myself, but that’s me making that decision rather than software throwing stuff at me when I’m going for a walk with my son on a Saturday morning.



Notifications Are ON



Notifications are OFF

We also make it really easy to snooze notifications for a few hours, turn notifications off completely, or see/change your schedule quickly.

When you click your picture at the top of the screen you'll see your current notifications settings. In this first example, notifications are ON because I'm on a schedule from 8am—6pm M-F. If I want to change that schedule I can just click the "change schedule..." link and switch to always on or tweak my days/hours.

And while they are on, I can quickly snooze them for 3 hours, or turn them off completely until I turn them back on.

If notifications are off, it'll tell me they are off and then it'll tell me why. In this example they're off because I'm set to receive them between 10am and 6pm, and it was 9:23am when I took this screenshot.

“ ” “ ”

We believe Work Can Wait is an important notion. 9pm on Friday night is not work time. 6am on Wednesday morning is not work time. It may be for you, but it's not for me. And I don't want it to be work time for my employees either.

Every user on Basecamp 3 starts with a default work time from 8am to 6pm in their own time zone. People are free to change it, of course, but we think it's important to encourage Work Can Wait rather than default everyone's notifications on 24/7/365.

We hope more products offer similar abilities to shut themselves off when work is over. “You can get ahold of me about work whenever” will eventually lead to “I don't want to work here anymore”.

Here's to early mornings, evenings, and weekends being free from work. Work Can Wait.



Jonas Ellison

2 min read

Feeling tired? Do more.

(But differently)

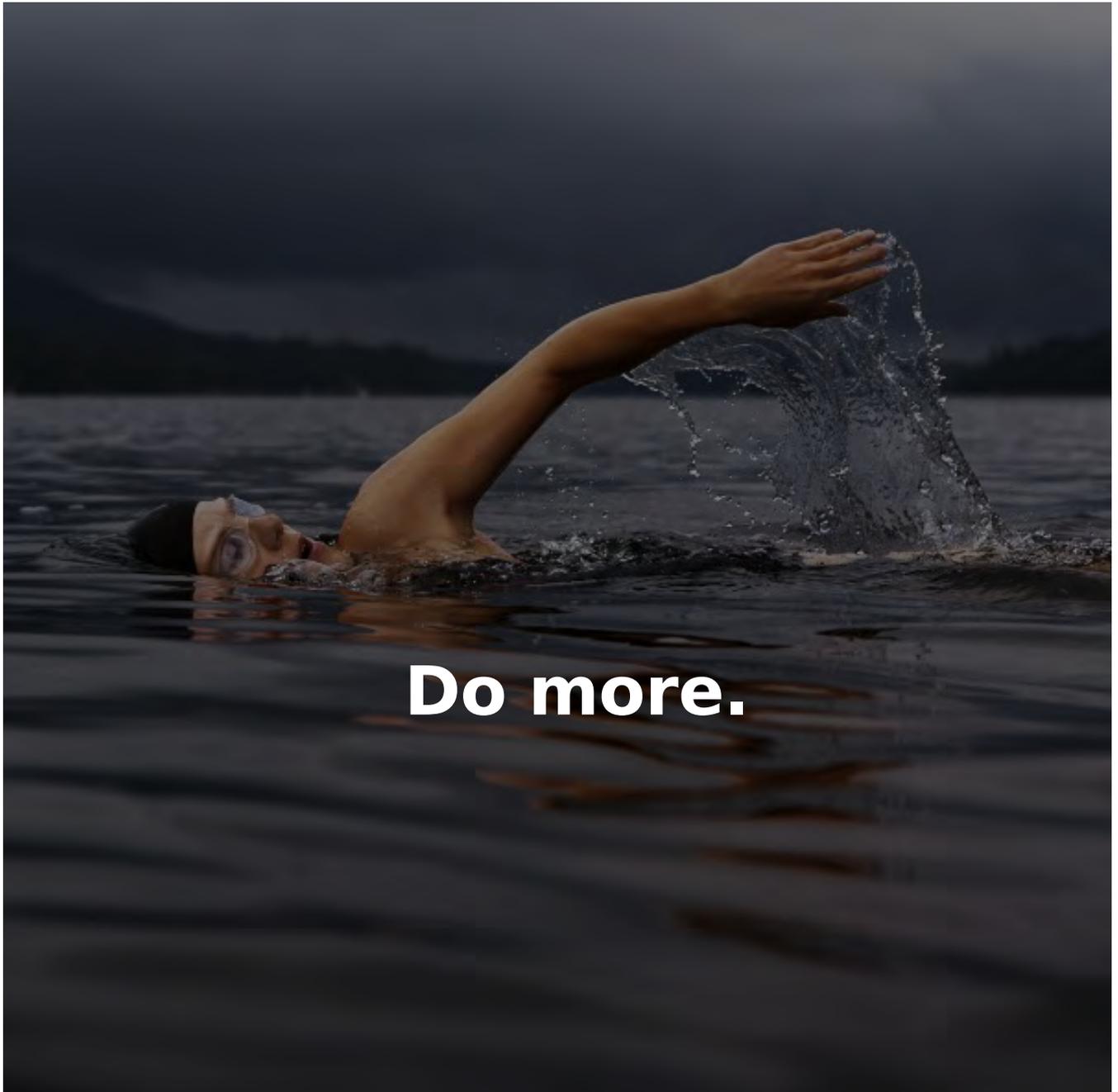
Life is exhausting. No joke.

All we do is work. Or think of work. Or talk about work.

Work, work, work.

It wears on us after awhile. We get burned out. Some of us develop unhealthy addictions (like watching endless reruns of Friends). We even get sick.

Want to know what the best remedy I've found to battle burnout?



<https://unsplash.com/toddquackenbush>

(One of my favorite artists has this tattooed on his arm.)

The reason we burn out isn't because of this thing called 'activity'. Life is action.

Movement.

Stillness is an illusion.

We see the proof in nature itself...

The glassy pond, under a microscope, is anything but still.

Even as we sleep, our hearts beat, our hair grows, and our brain zooms full-speed ahead.

Life never complains. It just goes and goes because that's its nature.

The problem we have is *alignment*. Things go awry when we get out of alignment with what we're doing. This is how things die.

Whether we're just-not-that-into-it or we outright hate it, our intentions are somewhere else while our bodies, brains, and egos are trudging along with a slowly dying battery.

So we do things out of obligation. We feel coerced. Like we have no say in the matter.

We just go through the motions. There's no soul behind it. No presence.

No wonder we're burned out.

Want to turn the ship around?

Get into it.

Start doing as much as you can—even the smallest things like washing dishes, mowing the lawn, or doodling—with your full intent behind it. Like it's the most mindful, enjoyable thing you've ever done.

Move through your day with purpose. With direction.

Soon, things will shift. You'll start happening onto life so it can happen back. You'll feel alive again (and will probably sleep better too).

Align with life and allow it to use you as a jackhammer to obliterate your apathy.

Life is a ping-pong game. You're serving. Until you move, it's just gonna stand there and look at you.

You gonna bring the heat or not?

Jonas writes short daily notes and meditations here at Higher Thoughts. To get them delivered straight to your inbox as soon as they're live, click here.



Lauren Holliday

9 min read

Productivity

You Must Learn How to Write a Damn Good Email

Everyday, I receive emails, LinkedIn smail (spam mail), texts and/or Facebook messages from people looking for resume help. I typically don't respond to them—not because I don't want to help but because they're not listening to me

when I tell them that any resume I create is NOT going to get them a job.

And, let me be straight, it's not because I'm not good at fabricating bullet points for them.

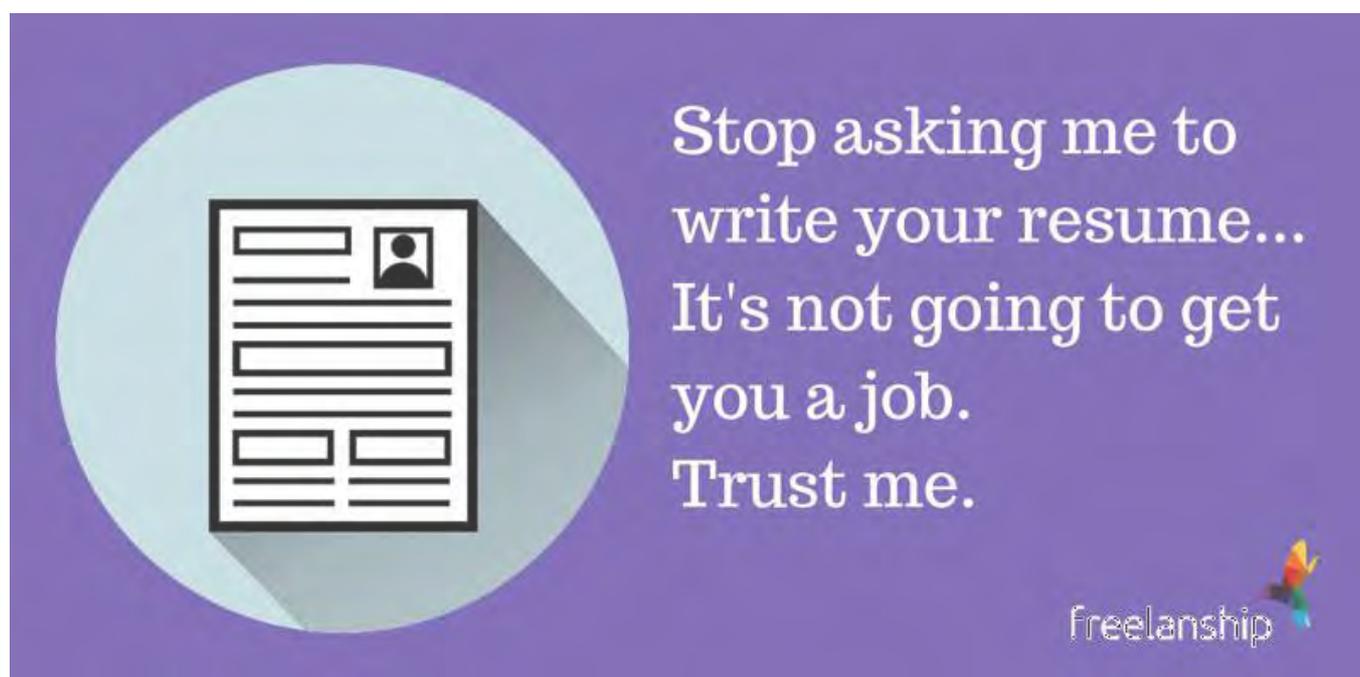
The reason upgrading their resume isn't going to work is because it's not a resume that scores you a job. It's relationships.

Have you ever heard the saying: "It's who you know?"

It's the absolute truth.

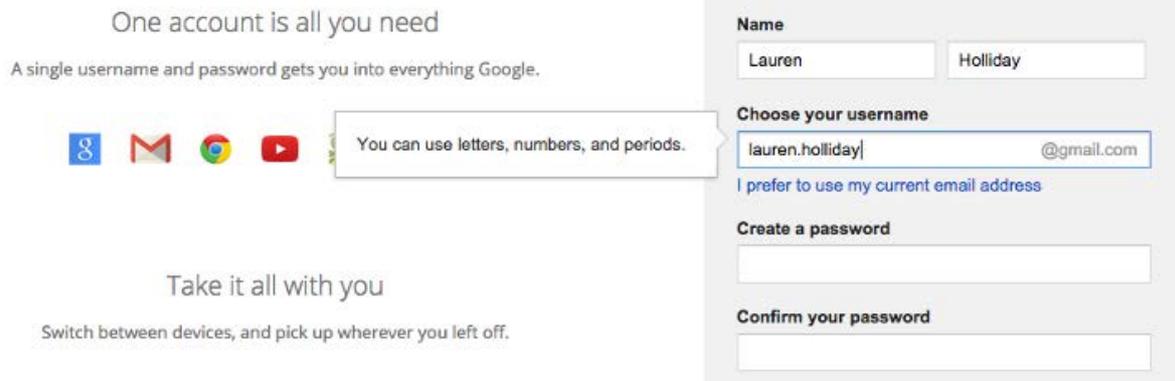
Today, I'm going to detail how you can land a job, and it does NOT involve me (or you) writing or editing your resume.

What it does involve is learning how to navigate your email inbox and woo your way into hiring managers' (or their bosses').



1. Correctly set up your email account.

Create your Google Account



Duh! This is what you're probably thinking.

It's not what I'm thinking though since I receive emails from senders with addresses like "" and ""

Alright, alright, those are extreme examples, but they're not far off, and they're actually REAL humans—not spam bots.

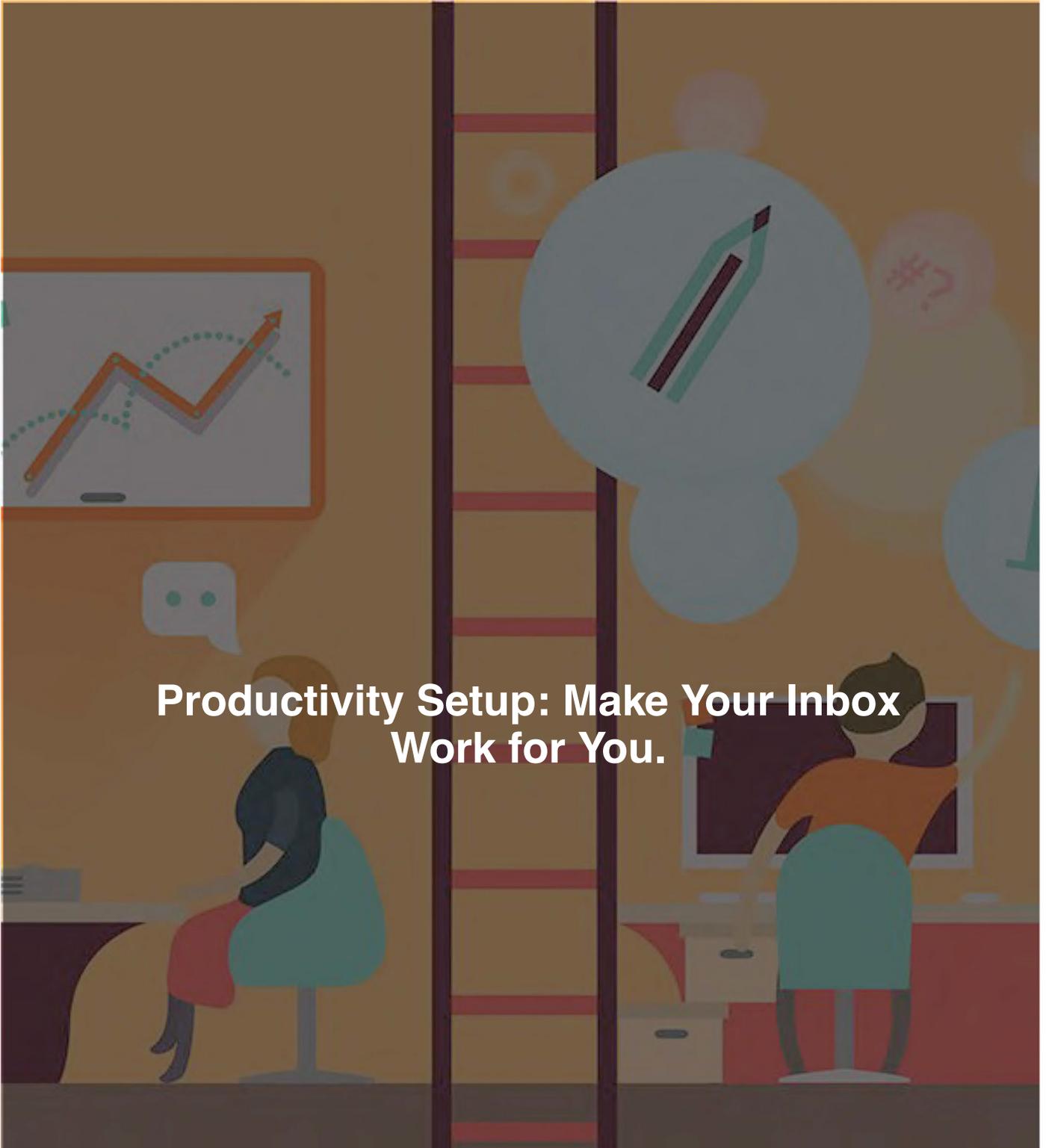
Here's my setup tips. Read them. I bet there's something you forgot!

Basic Setup: How to Set Yourself up for Success:

1. **Choose Gmail.** Always. The only exception to this rule is if you have your own professional domain name that you can use. When I say domain name I mean, for example,
2. **Keep it short and spare the numbers.** If you're creating your email address for the first time and you can use your own domain name, then keep it short. For example, create or instead of Also, don't include numbers. That looks spammy.
3. **Setup your name correctly.** I do NOT want to see anymore emails that come across from a sender whose name is in all lowercase, i.e. "lauren holliday" or from someone who only has a first name, i.e. "lauren." When you send an email, it should show your name in the "from" field. Sometimes people have it set to just show their email address.

The worst setup is when it shows something like “NA.”

4. **Create an email signature.** I prefer to use [WiseStamp](#) for this. [Here's](#) a great post on how to create an effective signature. (Make sure you have different signatures for different addresses.)
5. **You need an email address you own.** DON'T depend on your school email address. When emailing professionals in your field or people you may want to talk to in the future, use your own gmail or domain email address. Remember, you won't be in college forever—hopefully.
6. **Bookmark your compose box.** Great hack right here. Make it quick and easy to write an email by bookmarking your gmail compose box.
7. **For multiple emails, utilize a mail provider.** If you have multiple email accounts to manage then download a mail client. I prefer Mailbox, but there are more—here's a list for [Mac](#) and one for [Windows](#).



Productivity Setup: Make Your Inbox Work for You.

...

Email Signature: Wisestamp—\$4/mo

This is the prettiest email signature solution. Not only is it a better looking option but it is also easy to switch signatures between email accounts.

Email Tracking and Analytics: Yesware—\$12/mo

Yesware reports email opens, link clicks and file attachment downloads. This is valuable because it lets you know if you should follow up with someone or not and when, if you should. It also has a template feature many of you could use. Let's say you're applying to jobs, and you're finding that you're saying basically the same thing every time you email hiring managers. Write and save a template in Yesware then just personalize it from now on. That could knock off a lot of time for you.

Writing Emails: Crystal—FREE

Crystal isn't kidding when it claims to be the biggest improvement to email since spell check. This email extension creates unique personality profiles for every person with an online presence, prepping you to speak or write in someone else's natural, communication style. Crystal not only makes recommendations on which words you should use, but it even generates email templates based on the person you're communicating with.

Stay Smarter Than the People You're Emailing: Ugly Email—FREE

A LOT of emails are being tracked for clicks and opens. Use Ugly Email, a free gmail extension that tells you when an email is being tracked before you open it. This circumvents problems like opening an email and then not responding or opening the email 75 million times, which makes you look unproductive.

If you want to know other email tools I love check out this [article](#).

A stylized illustration featuring several envelopes and a red balloon. The envelopes are in shades of olive green and purple, with some showing their flaps. A large red balloon is partially visible in the upper left corner. The background is a dark blue-grey color with a large, light blue-grey shape that resembles a piece of paper or a folder.

2: Learn How to Write a Damn Good Email.

. . . .

According to Mindtools, the average office worker receives around 80 emails each day.

That makes it REALLY EASY for hiring managers to skip over your email, when it includes an error. Your email has an error if it's:

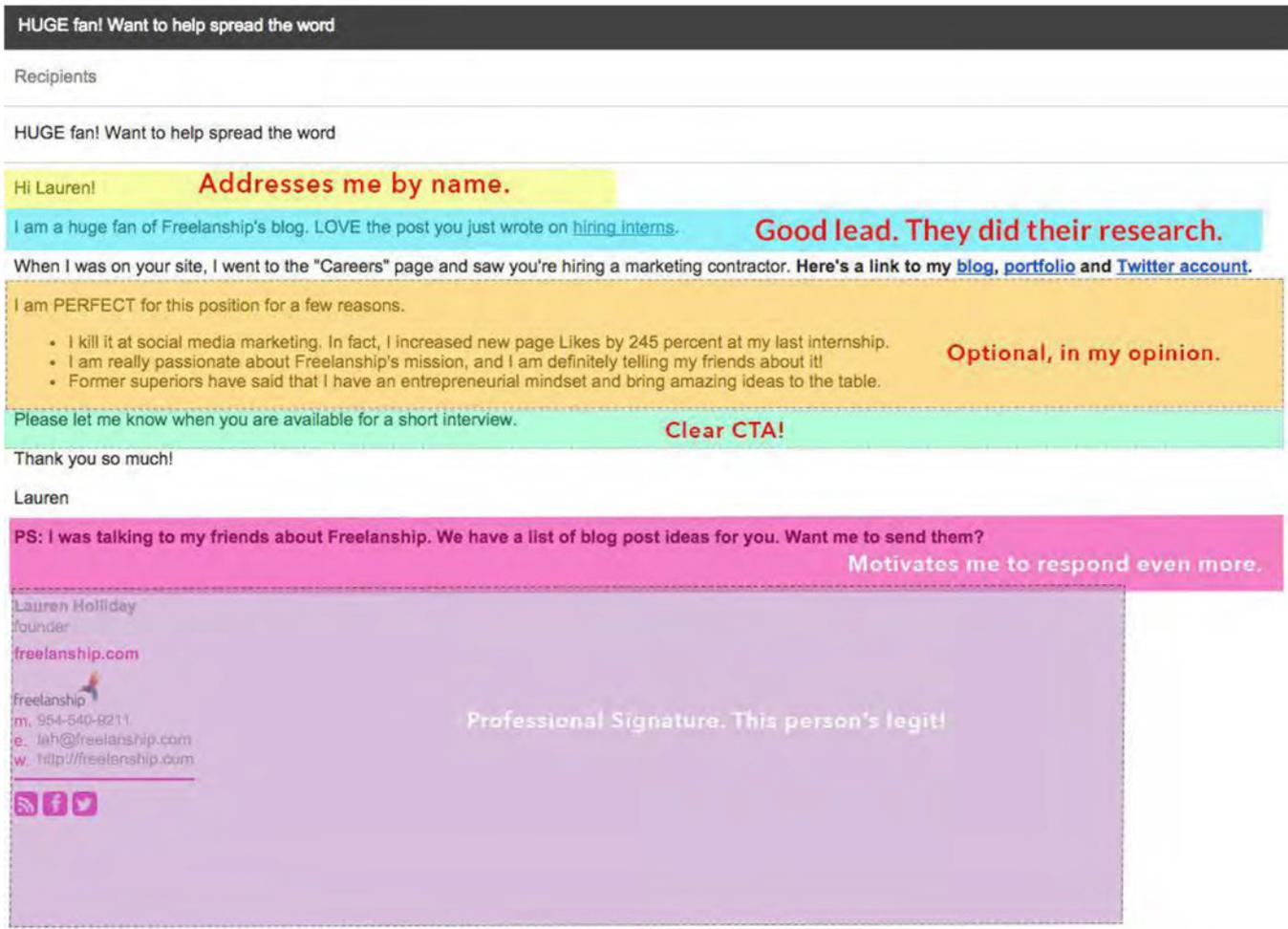
- Ridiculously long
- Has multiple “asks” (Asks are short for saying what you’re asking them for—every time you ask them for something counts as an “ask”)
- Includes grammar errors and misspellings
- Doesn’t address them correctly
- Is not beneficial to them
- Does not tell them what to do or what you want
- Is one, gigantic paragraph (You’re killing my eyes when you do this!!!, for certain, NEVER read emails that are one, large paragraph, unless they’re from someone important—like Ryan Gosling perhaps)

. . .

The perfect email is short, easily scannable and includes a very clear call-to-action (CTA).

. . .

A damn good email looks good.



A damn good email is easy to scan.

If you forget any of my tips, don't forget this one!!! Make your email easily scannable. That means break up paragraphs into one sentence—two, if you must.

A damn good email utilizes rich text.

By this I mean utilize **bold text**, *italics*, and bullet points. This helps make your email easily scannable. Sometimes I even change important text's color to red or highlight important sentences in bright yellow.

A damn good email is timed perfectly.

Send or schedule (if you use Yesware), your emails at optimal times. Think about it for a second. The best time to send a job request/application is most likely not at 1 a.m. on a Saturday night/morning. Monday probably isn't good either because professionals

will be busy playing catch up. I recommend sending between Tuesday and Thursday, in the morning or afternoon, say between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m.

A damn good email has specific elements.

Here are the elements of a damn good email.

Subject Line

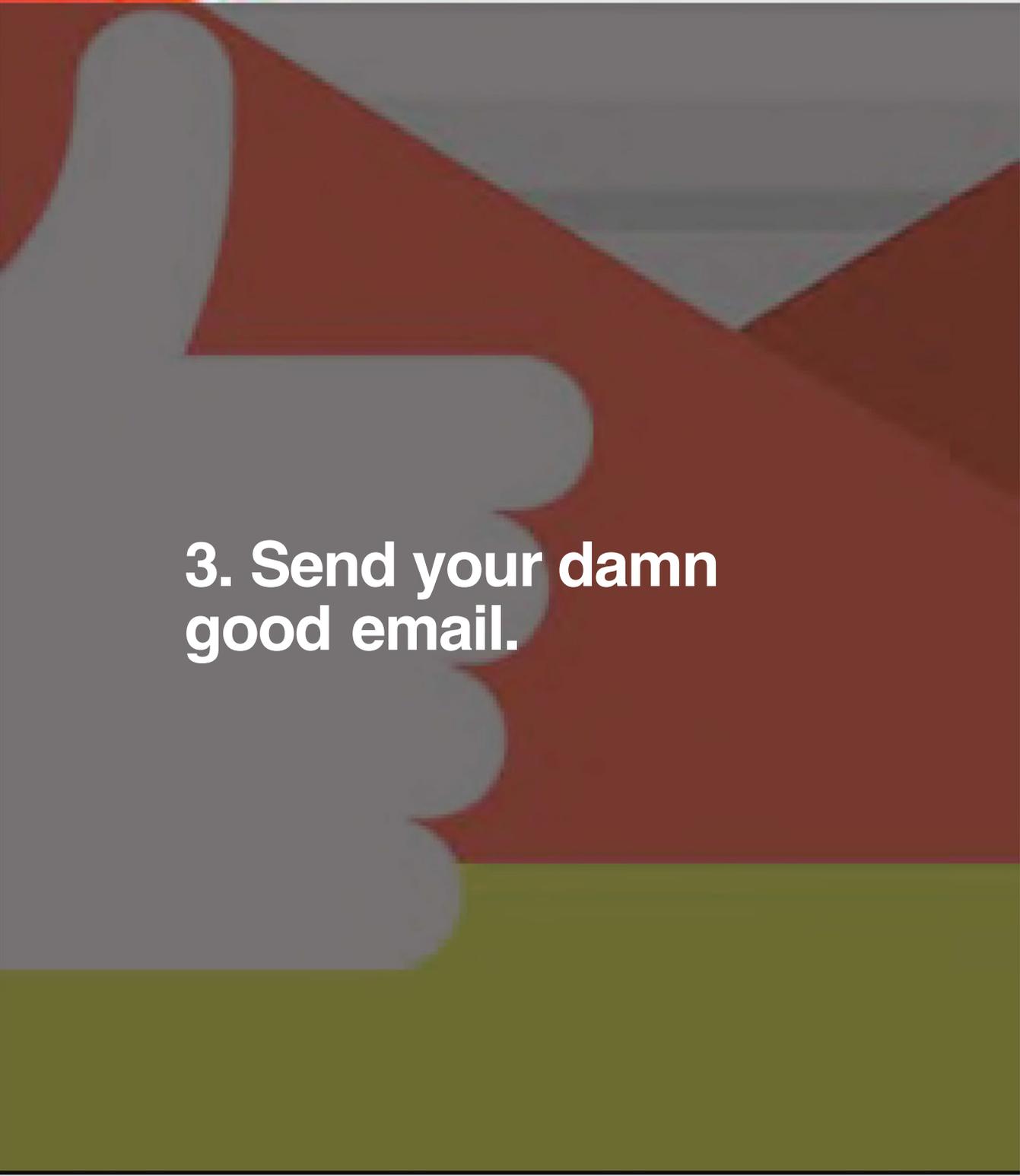
The goal of your subject line is to drive the person you want to read your email to, well, open it to read the damn thing. I like to do this by complimenting the receiver in the subject line and letting them know that I want to provide value to them.

See how I did this in the fictitious example above to myself?

I told them I was a HUGE fan then preceded to tell them I wanted to HELP them do something.

Message

- *Address:* Address the person by name. Don't use "dear." It makes it sound impersonal. Try "Good morning" or "Hi."
- *Lead:* The lead is supposed to make the reader keep reading. Make it good.
- *Body:* Remember, keep it short and easily scannable.
- *CTA:* Tell them what you want them to do.
- *PS:* Motivate them to write you back.
- *Signature:* Keep it short, and include important links for them to learn more about you.



3. Send your damn good email.

...

A mentor once told me to send 50 emails per week to get what I wanted, and our advisor, said he used to send as many as 300 per week to get generate new business.

Emails are how you get what you want from someone you don't know, i.e. hiring managers.

Here's what you got to do.

Send 25 emails per week to be exact.

Yes, 25. That isn't a lot so I don't feel bad assigning you that many.

You may say: But, Lauren, there are not 25 jobs posted that I want.

And I'll say: But, Jimmy, that does not matter at all.

According to ABC, 80 percent of jobs are landed through networking.

Emailing allows you to network with people across the nation, not just those professionals in your city; therefore, if you want a job in NY but live in Idaho, you can simply shoot off an email introducing yourself to someone you admire in New York.

People to send emails to:

- Potential mentors
- Potential superiors
- People working at companies you admire and who have your ideal position
- Blog editors (contribute a guest blog post)
- Hiring managers

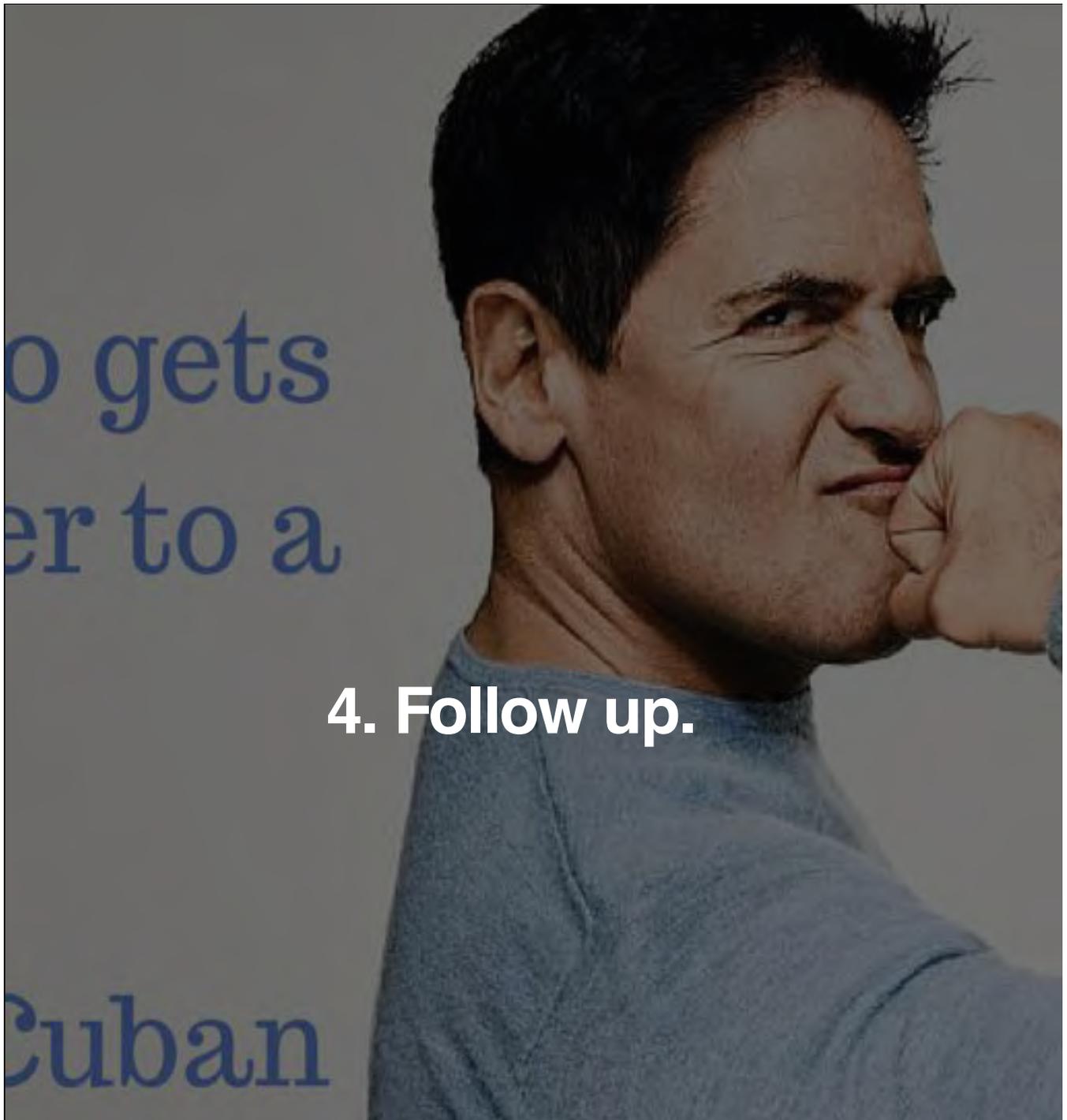
. . .

The goal is to fortify a relationship with someone
BEFORE you need to ASK them for something.

. . .

Reread the email before you send.

This is pretty self-explanatory. I reread my emails nearly five to six times before I hit send... And I still catch errors sometimes. #Embarrassing



. . .

I HATE following up because the last thing I ever want to be to someone I want

something from is annoying. But guess what?! I do. Because if you don't ask for what you want then you'll never get what you want, and sometimes you have to ask for it multiple times.

Like Mark Cuban says, "Every no gets me closer to a yes."

Too many of you give up too easily.

What if a hiring manager only responded to those who had enough gumption to write a follow up to her lack of response the first time?

It could happen. I'm sure there's a manager out there that does this although I'm also sure that it's rare.

Tips for following up a damn good email.

- Follow up four days after you send the first email.
- Keep the follow up shorter.
- Say something like: "Either way, good or bad, please get back to me." Give them a way to politely reject you.
- Include the subject of the original email and the outcome you want from this email.
- Include the request or "ask" again.
- Provide your objective.
- Request they delegate the task/response to someone else.
- Keep it short and to the point.

Follow Up Templates

Neil Patel recommends the template I took a screenshot of and copied below.

[insert their name], I just wanted to follow up to see if you were interested in publishing the guest post I emailed you last week.

Cheers,

[insert your name]

Here's a few templates from this post on The Muse.

- "Help Me Find a Job"
- Refer Me to a Job Job
- Application

Here's an example from when I followed up after a hiring manager had me complete an assignment, but then didn't follow up with me within a week, as he promised.

Following up



Inbox x



Lauren Holliday <lah@freelanship.com>

to Aaron ▾

Hi Aaron!

Hope you had a fantastic weekend.

Wanted to make sure you received my assignment.

Hope you enjoyed it. Even if you didn't would love to hear from you either way.

Thank you!

Basically, just remember keep follow up emails short and to the point and don't forget to provide alternatives for the receiver. Alternatives could include something like them delegating what you want to someone else. This way you always get what you want—a response.

Conclusion

This is how you get a job, my friends,—by creating relationships with people.

I don't receive job offers on the reg because I've sent this perfectly concocted resume to millions of hiring managers.

Job offers come to me because I've invested the time to build a strong, helpful network of influential individuals in my field.

freelanship



Sign-up for freelanship.com—project-based internships.



Thomas Oppong

4 min read



These 12 Habits Are Killing Your Productivity

Habits define our lives. To live a balanced, productive life and engage in a long-term, satisfying career, ridding yourself of your unproductive habits is an important investment.

Are you noticing that you've been really busy this year...but haven't really accomplished most things you set out to do at the beginning of the year?

It's easier to keep going than to take a minute to reflect, plan, and to really look at what needs to change for you to create your version of a productive week, month or year.

Your productivity may be suffering and you may not even know it. It's about time you paid attention to the habits that could be hindering your progress. These twelve habits are literally killing your productivity.

1. **Multi-tasking**

Stop multi-tasking, seriously stop. Of all the bad habits, multitasking is among the worst and most common. Multi-tasking does not necessarily make you more productive as you may think. You can actually achieve more in less time when you single task and focus on getting one thing done well.

It takes about 23 minutes and 15 seconds to fully return to a task after interruption, according to Gloria Mark, Professor at UC Irvine, in Fast Company. So you may be wasting a lot more time than you think.

More is not necessarily better. In fact, in many cases the quality beats the quantity.

Focusing on the things that bring the biggest rewards or achievement is a great strategy.

2. **Working from your inbox**

How many times have you checked your email today? Too many of us spend most of our day in our inbox: reading and answering emails instead of getting real work done. The more emails you send, the more you seem to get. Set boundaries by checking email only for a particular number of times and stick to that.

3. **Not delegating**

Trying to do everything hurts you and your business. You don't have to do everything yourself, get help and outsource if you can and concentrate on what you are good at doing in the day.

4. **Not knowing how to say "No"**

As Warren Buffett put it, "You can't let other people set your agenda in life." Saying "no" means you have time to focus on your own needs, rather than constantly serving other people.

5. Not tracking results

Use an app, there are hundreds of productivity apps out there to keep track of what you're doing each day. These products help you identify areas where you're not at your most efficient and make changes.

6. Working for too long...without breaks

Sometimes you just need a break. Listen to your body and allow yourself to recover from tiredness. You can only focus on tasks for a certain amount of time.(said to be a maximum of 90 minutes). Split your tasks into small chunks and take (10–15 minute) breaks in between.

7. Working without routines

A work routine is essential to getting your mind into productive gear. Without one, you will always be wasting time on getting started when you should be doing actual work.

8. Filling to-do list with too many tasks

Don't be overzealous and fill your to-do list with dozens or more tasks. You will most likely be unable to complete them all by close of the working day and you will be depressed and think you are not being productive enough. And once the overwhelm feeling starts to kick in, you're in for some trouble: stress is just one of them.

9. Your super connected habit

If you can be reached via smartphone, email, Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn, you're way too available and all these outlets are possible connections that can distract you from your purpose. Disconnect and watch as your productivity sores.

Your smartphone might be the biggest productivity killer of all time. Most people just can't put the phone away. If your phone is connected online, the temptation to stay updated about almost everything is very high. If you can, put down that phone (or power it off) for a while when in the office and witness the effect that can have on your level of productivity.

10. The news reading habit

Reserve time slot for reading or watching news. Use critical mind set and think what you see. Use quality media. Stop clicking headlines and reading short news—read quality news articles instead or even blogs of experts you have chosen.

11. Your indecision

The usual problem is that people have long to-do lists, but no idea what they intend to tackle after that extensive meeting. Prioritise on what needs to be accomplished for the day and get to it as soon as possible.

12. Reinventing the wheel

There is always a better and smarter way to get most tasks done. Don't reinvent the wheel. Time is the most important resource you shouldn't be wasting. Find out what works and stick to it. Save time.

*"A man who dares to waste one hour of time has not discovered the value of life."
-Charles Darwin*

*The author is the founder and curator at **Postanly**, a free weekly newsletter that delivers the best and most insightful long-form posts from top publishers.*



Tiago Forte

15 min read

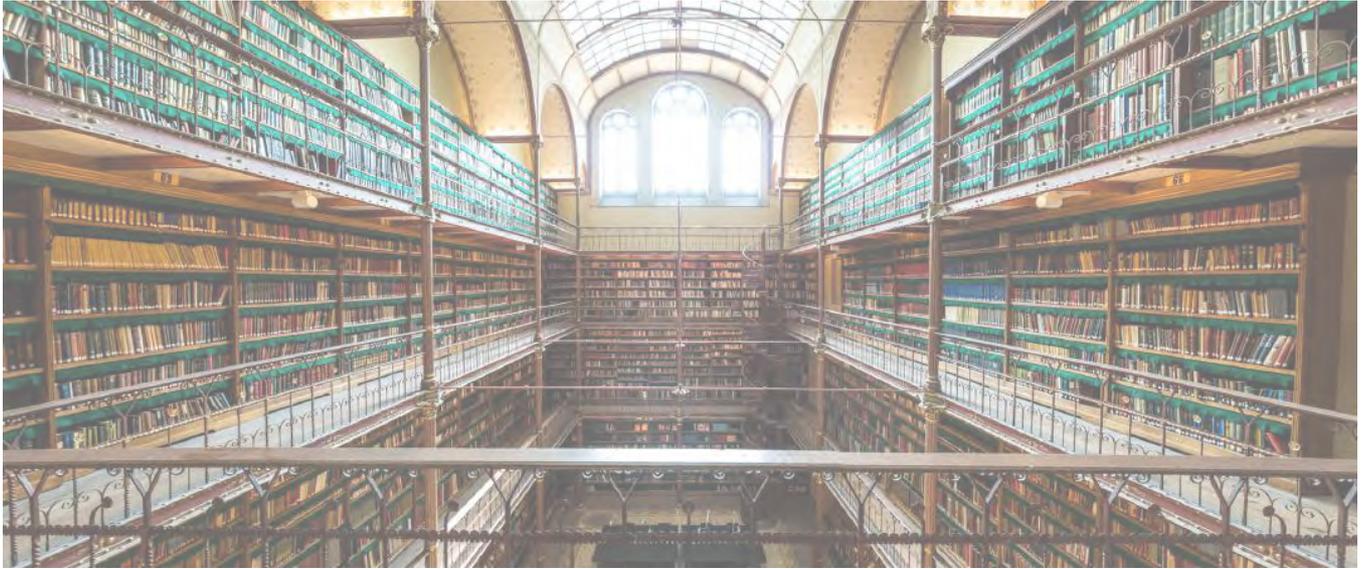


Image via [Nuno Cruz](#)

The Secret Power of ‘Read It Later’ Apps

At the end of 2014 I received an email informing me that I had read over a million words in the ‘read it later’ app Pocket over the course of the year.



This number by itself isn't impressive, considering our daily intake of information is equivalent to 34 gigabytes, 100,000 words, or 174 newspapers, depending on who you ask.

What makes this number significant (in my view) is that it represents 22 books'-worth of long-form reading that would not have happened without a system in place.

We've made a habit of filling those hundred random spaces in our day with glances at Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. But those glances have slowly become stares, and those stares have grown to encompass a major portion of our waking hours.

The end result is the same person who spends 127 hours per year on Instagram (the global average) complains that she has "no time" for reading.

The fact is, **the ability to read is becoming a source of competitive advantage in the world.**

I'm not talking about basic literacy. What has become exceedingly scarce (and therefore, valuable) is the physical, emotional, attentional, and mental capability to sit quietly and direct focused attention for sustained periods of time.

A [recent article](#) in the Harvard Business Review puts a name to this new neurological phenomenon: Attention Deficit Trait. Basically, the terms ADD and ADHD are falling out of use because effectively the entire population fits the diagnostic criteria. It's not a condition anymore, it's a *trait* —the inherent and unavoidable experience of modern life characterized by “distractibility, inner frenzy, and impatience.”

Read It. Later.

Before I explain the massive, under-appreciated benefits these apps provide, and how to use them most effectively, a quick primer in case you're unfamiliar.

So-called “Read It Later” apps give you the ability to “save” content on the web for later consumption. They are essentially advanced bookmarking apps, pulling in the content from a page to be read or viewed in a cleaner, simpler visual layout.

On top of that core function they add features like favoriting, tags, search, cross-platform syncing, recommended content, offline viewing, and archiving. The most popular options are:

- [Instapaper](#)
- [Pocket](#)
- [Readability](#)
- [Send to Kindle](#) (for sending articles to your Kindle)
- [Feedly](#) (for those RSS fans)
- and [Safari's built-in “Add to Reading List” feature](#).

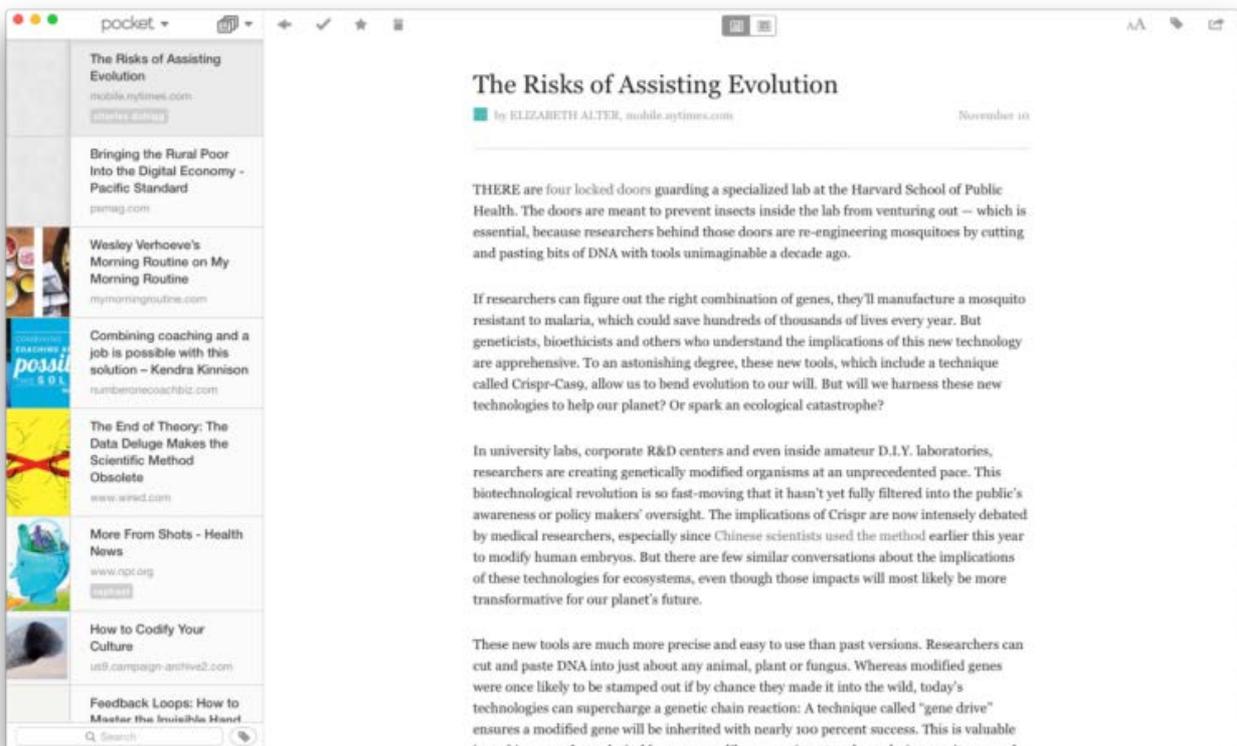
The app I use, Pocket, adds a button to the Chrome toolbar that looks like this:



Chrome toolbar

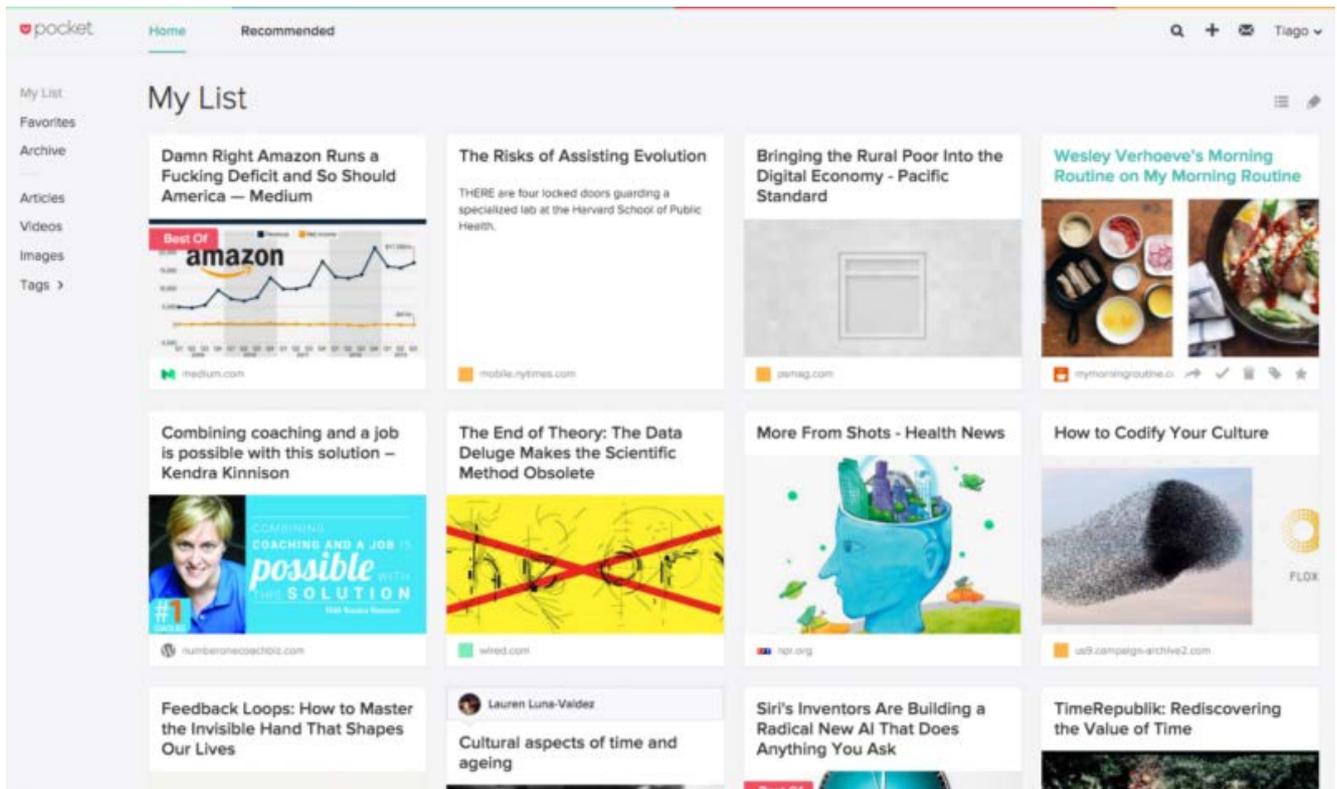
Note: at time of writing, I was using Pocket, but have recently switched to Instapaper because of Pocket's "Share to Evernote" bug mentioned below.

Clicking the button while viewing a webpage turns the button pink, and saves the page to your "list." Navigating to getpocket.com, or opening the Pocket app on your computer or mobile device shows you a list of everything you've saved:



Mac desktop client

You can also view your list in a "tile" layout on the web, making it into essentially a personalized magazine. Personalized, in this case, not by a cold, unfeeling algorithm, but by your past self:



Web browser “tile” view

Marking an item as read in one version of the app will quickly sync across all platforms. It will also save your current progress on one device, so you can continue where you left off on a different device (for those longer pieces).

The highest leverage point in a system is in the intake — the initial assumptions and paradigms that inform its development

I've written previously about how to use Evernote as a general reference filing system, not only to stay organized but to inspire creativity.

But I didn't address a key question when creating any workflow: how and from where does information enter the system? The quality of a workflow's outputs is fundamentally limited by the quality of its inputs. Garbage in, garbage out.

There are A LOT of ways we could talk about to improve the quality of the information you consume. But I want to focus now on the two that Read It Later apps can help with:

1. Increasing consumption of long-form content (which is presumably more substantive)
2. Better filtering

#1 | Increasing Consumption of Long-Form Content

In order to consume good ideas, first you have to consume many ideas.

This is the fundamental flaw in the “information diet” advice from Tim Ferriss and others: strong filters work best on a larger initial flow. Using your friends as your primary filter for new ideas ensures you remain the dumbest person in the room, and contribute nothing to the conversation.

The problem is that our entire digital world is geared toward snackable chunks of low-grade information—photos, tweets, statuses, snaps, feeds, cards, etc. To fight the tide you have to redesign your environment—you have to create affordances.

*Affordance (n.): a relation between an object and an organism that, through a collection of stimuli, **affords the opportunity for that organism to perform an action.***

Let’s look at the 4 main barriers to consuming long-form content, and the affordances that Read It Later apps use to overcome them:

1. App performance

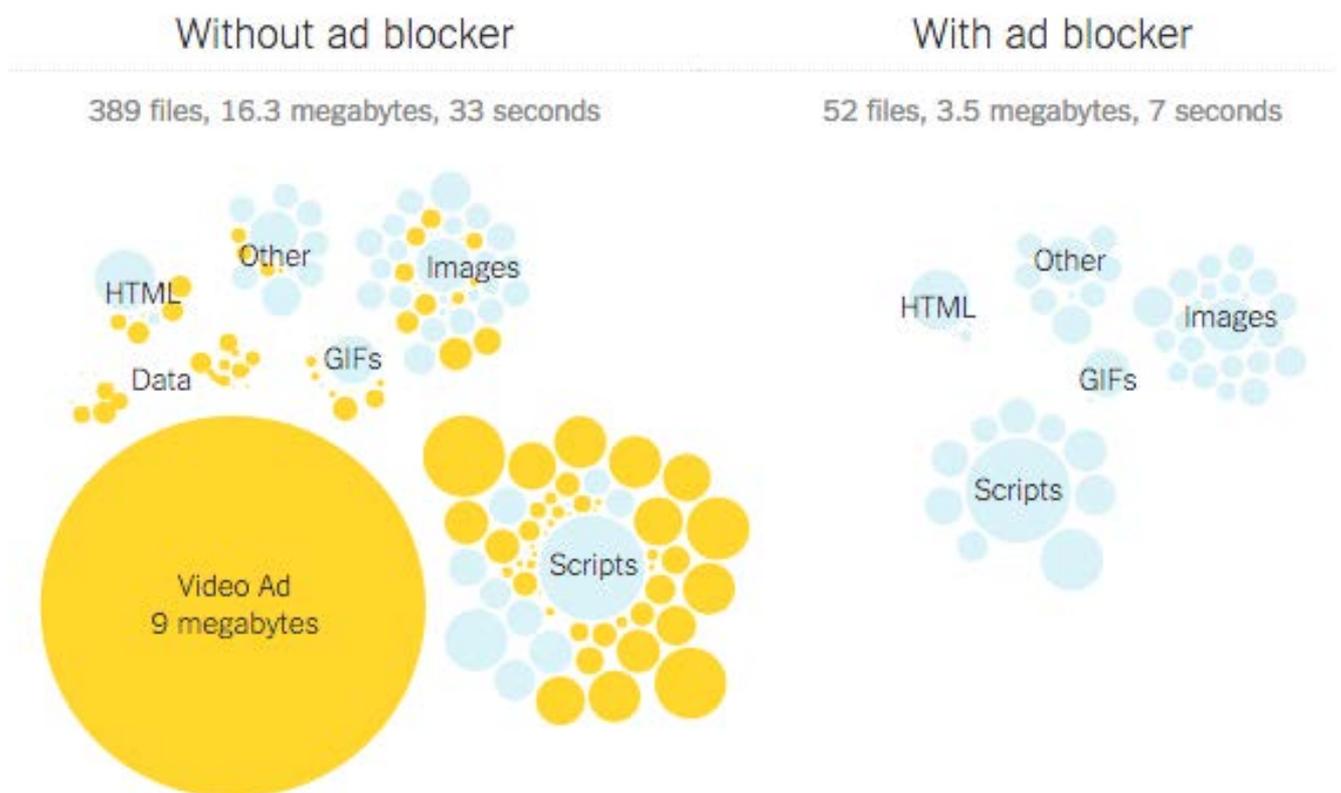
We know that the most infinitesimal delays in the loading time of a webpage will dramatically impact how many people stay on the page. Google found that increasing the number of results per page from 10 to 30 took only half a second longer, but **caused 20% of people to drop off.**

If you think your behavior is not affected by such trivialities, think again. Even on a subconscious level, you will resist even opening apps that don’t reward you with snappy response times. Which is a problem because the apps most people turn to for reading are either ebook apps like iBooks and Kindle, or web browsers like Chrome and Safari. I’m not sure which category is slower, but they’re both abysmal.

Meanwhile, your snaps and instas refresh at precog-like speeds.

Read It Later apps, by slurping in content (articles, videos, slideshows) into a clean interface, eliminate the culprits—ads, site analytics, popups—all the stuff you don't care about.

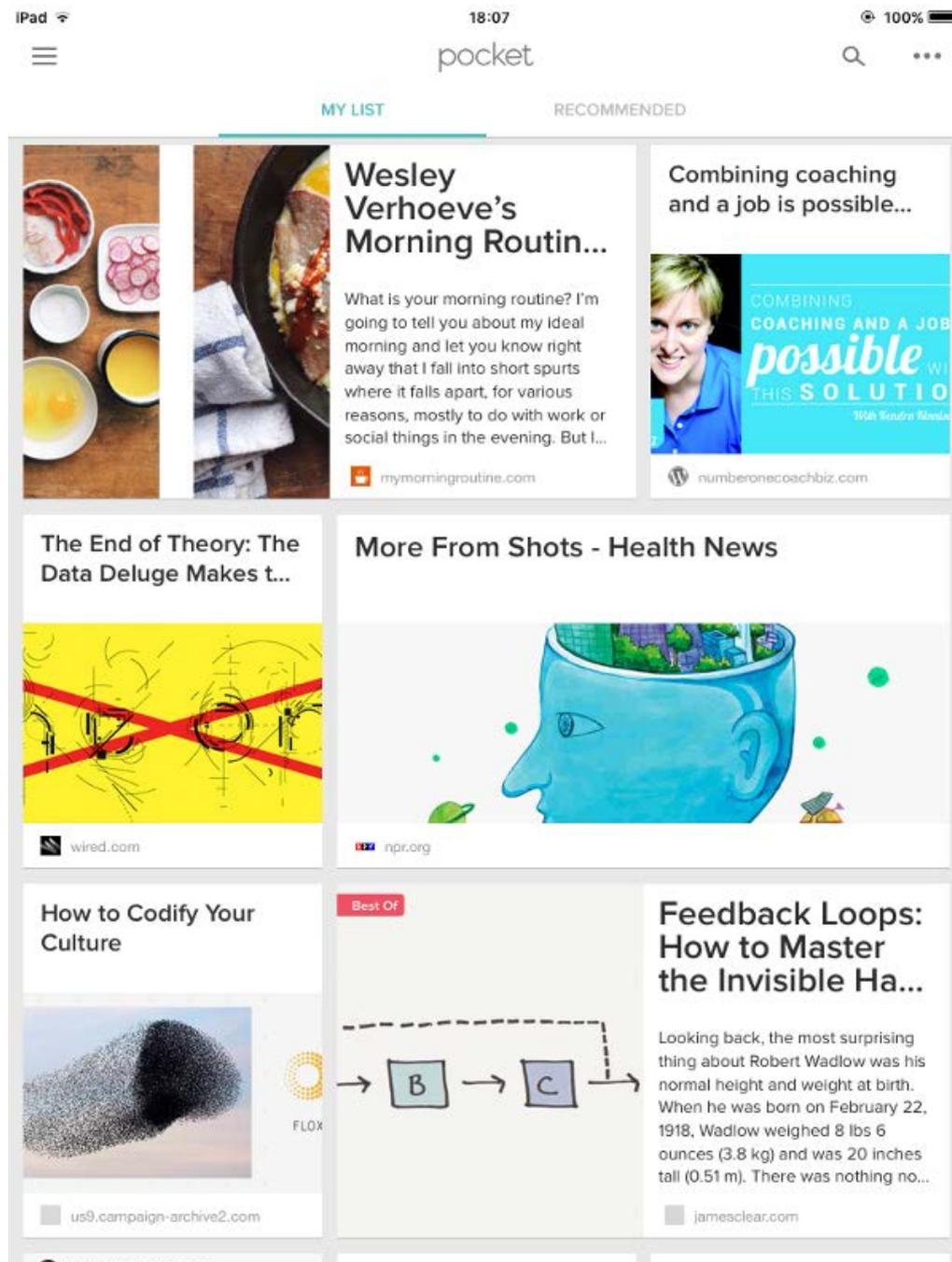
A recent analysis by The New York Times of 3 leading ad-blockers (which have the same effect) measured a **21% increase in battery life**, and in the most egregious case of Boston.com, a drop in loading time **from 33 seconds to 7 seconds**. Many other leading sites were not that far off.



Effect of ad-blocker on loading times of Boston.com, via [NYT](#)

Yeah that's pretty much an eternity in mobile behavior land.

2. Matching content with your context



My Pocket list on iPad

Much of the time when we pull out our phone, we're looking for something to match our mood (or energy, or time available, or other context). We use our constellation of shiny apps as mood regulators and self-soothers, as time-fillers and boredom-suppressors, for better or worse.

So you need a little entertainment, and you open...an ebook? Yeah right. Monochrome pages don't attract you. They don't draw you in.

Pocket gives reading some of this stimulatory pleasure by laying out your list in a pleasing, magazine-style layout (at left). Not only is it generally attractive, but it gives you that same magazine-flipping pleasure of engaging with something that interests you *right in that moment* .

David Allen puts it this way:

*“It’s practical to have organized reading material at hand when you’re on your way to a meeting that may be starting late, a seminar that may have a window of time when nothing is going on, a dentist appointment that may keep you waiting, or, of course, if you’re going to have some time on a train or plane. Those are all great opportunities to browse and work through that kind of reading. People who don’t have their Read/Review material organized can waste a lot of time, since **life is full of weird little windows when it could be used.**”*

You’re not fighting your impulses forcing yourself to read a dense tome after a long work day. Willpower preserved ✓

3. Asynchronous reading

This is one of the least understood barriers to reading in our fragmented timescape.

There is something deeply, deeply unsatisfying about repeatedly starting something and not finishing it. This is what we experience all day at work, being continuously interrupted by a stream of “emergencies.” The last thing we want after a stressful day starved of wins is to fail even at reading an article.

The 2015 revised edition of *Getting Things Done* cites the work of Dr. Roy Baumeister, who has shown that “uncompleted tasks take up room in the mind, which then limits clarity and focus.” The risk of cognitive dissonance at not being able to finish a long article (much less a book) keep us from even beginning it.

Read It Later apps address this by simply saving your progress in a given article, allowing you to pick back up at a different time, or on a different device, and clearly marking items as “read” once you’re finished.

4. Focus

A common response when I recommend people adopt *yet another* category of apps is “Why don’t I just use Evernote?” Or whatever app they’re using for general reference or task management. Evernote even makes a Chrome extension called Clearly for reading online content and Web Clipper for saving it.

It is a question of focus. Why don’t you use your task manager to keep track of content (i.e. “Read this article”)? Because the last thing you want to see when you cuddle up with your hot cocoa for some light reading is the hundreds of tasks you’re not doing.

Likewise, the last thing you want to see when you (finally!) have time to read is the thousands of notes you’ve collected from every corner of the universe, only some of which you haven’t read, only some of which you *want* to read, only some of which are *meant* to be read.

Actionable info ≠ Reference info ≠ To Read pile

Here go,

Task manager ≠ Evernote ≠ Pocket

#2 | Better filtering

Now you’ve got the funnel filled. It’s time to narrow it.

Most advice on this topic focuses on being more selective about your sources. Cutting out the email digests that just throw you off track, unfollowing people posting crap, or even directly replacing ads with quality sources.

The problem is that this assumes you are always at your best, always at 100% self-discipline, totally aligned with your life values, priorities ship shape.

Yeah.

In the moment, with your blood sugar at a negative value and every fiber of your being screaming for a dopamine hit, of course that BuzzFeed article seems like the

best conceivable use of your time. If you think you can permanently seal off your life from the celebrity news, content marketing, and spammy friends that dominate the web, the NSA has a job for you.

Procrastination is the most powerful force in the universe. *It will find a way.*

I have a different approach: **waiting periods**. Every time I come across something I may want to read/watch, I'm totally allowed to. No limits! The only requirement is I have to save it to Pocket, and then choose to consume it at a later time.

I've found that even just clicking a link to open the URL, in order to save it to Pocket, is too much of a temptation. The first glimpse of a cute GIF and I'm off Reddit, completely forgetting my morning email session.

So instead I just **command-click** every link I'm interested in (or **right-click > Open link in new tab**), which opens each link in a separate tab *without taking me to that tab*.

Here's what a typical Monday morning link-fest looks like, just from email:



Then, because I'm still in **collection mode**, not in read mode, I cycle through each tab one at a time (**shift-command-}** or **control-tab**), saving each one to Pocket using the shortcut I set up: **command-p** (chosen for irony and to avoid inadvertent printing).

There's only one rule: **NO READING OR WATCHING!**

Bringing this back to filtering, not only am I saving time and preserving focus by batch processing both the collection and the consumption of new content, I'm **time-shifting the curation process** to a time better

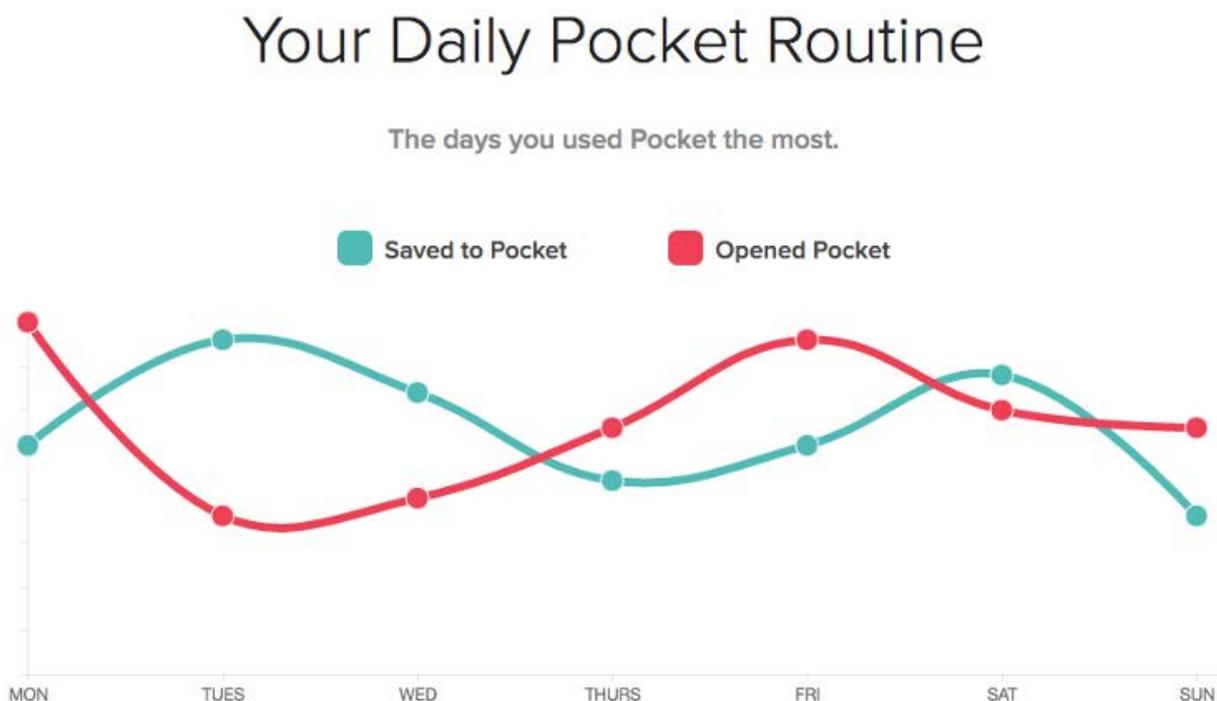
suited for reading, and (most critically) removed from the temptations, stresses, and biopsychosocial hooks that first lured me in.

I am always amazed by what happens: no matter how stringent I was in the original collecting, no matter how certain I was that this thing was worthwhile, I **regularly eliminate 1/3 of my list before reading**. The post that looked SO INTERESTING when compared to that one task I'd been procrastinating on, in retrospect isn't even something I care about.

What I'm essentially doing is creating a buffer. Instead of pushing a new piece of info through from intake to processing to consumption without any scrutiny, I'm creating a pool of options drawn from a longer time period, which allows me to make decisions from a higher perspective, where those decisions are much better aligned with what truly matters to me.

Remove any feature, process, or effort that does not directly contribute to the learning you seek. — Eric Ries, The Leader's Guide

Here's a visual of how this works, from my Pocket analytics:



You can see that I save more things toward the beginning of the week and the

weekend, and then draw down the buffer more towards the end of the week.

/sidebar

Imagine for a second if we could do this with everything. On Saturday morning, well-rested and wise, you retroactively decide everything you *want to have done* during the previous week. Anything you decide was not worthwhile, you *get that time back*.

I experienced this recently with email—after returning from a 10-day meditation course during which I was completely off the grid, I was surprised to notice it took only 1.9 hours to process almost 2 weeks' worth of email (I track these things). I normally spend on average 2.19 hours on email **per week**—*what happened to those extra 2.48 hours?* Besides the gains from batch processing such a large quantity of emails at once, I believe the main factor was that I evaluated my emails from a longer time horizon and higher perspective, more correctly judging whether something was worth responding to or acting on.

If only this method would scale.

/end_sidebar

Mo' apps, mo' problems

There are drawbacks, which I've glossed over until now. The two main ones:

1. Formatting issues

Many sites, including popular ones, aren't presented correctly within the Pocket app (and I imagine others). There's always the option of opening the link in a web browser, but this eliminates all the positive affordances and then some. If there wasn't so much value provided otherwise, this would be a deal breaker.

The worst part is that, sometimes, the article is cut off or links don't appear *without any indication that something is amiss*. On Tim Ferriss' blog, for example, links (of which there are many) are simply removed.

One solution is to tag problematic items with “desktop” so you know that these need to be read/viewed on your computer.

2. Dependence

Every productivity tool eventually becomes a victim of its own success. In this case, I’ve become so dependent on Pocket that bugs really affect me.

For example, the Share to Evernote feature, which I use to highlight and save key passages, has been broken for at least a month. My hysterical tweets to Pocket Support have been answered but not resolved.

You wouldn’t think such a minor feature within one app could be so disruptive, but it has been massively so. This simple workflow:

Highlight > Share > Share to Evernote > Save

...has been replaced with this:

Highlight > Copy > Switch to Evernote > New note > Paste > Switch back to Pocket > Share > More > Copy URL > Switch back to Evernote > Paste URL > Switch back to Pocket

Worse, I often forget to go back and grab the URL, so I have to hunt it down at some later date.

/rant_over

Progress Traps and Paradigms

The amount of information in the world is a progress trap. Too much stuff to read is just as limiting as too little.

As the inimitable Venkatesh Rao has written, we’re moving from a world of **containers** (companies, departments, semesters, packages, silos) to a world of **streams** (social networks, info feeds, main streets of thriving cities, Twitter). Problems and opportunities alike resist having neat little boxes drawn around them. There’s way too much to absorb. Way too much to even guess what you don’t know.

As the pace of change in the world accelerates, we double down on all the methods that created the problems in the first place—more planning, more forecasting, more control and risk management. We're left with massive institutions that nobody trusts, that are simultaneously brittle and too-big-to-fail, creating precarity at every level of the socioeconomic pyramid.

What would it look like instead to solve problems (and explore opportunities) in a way that gets better the faster we go?

I can't do justice to Rao's blog series linked above (it's in 20 parts—may want to save it for later ;), but the first step he proposes is “exposing yourself to as many different diverse streams as possible.”

When you're immersed in a stream, the faster it goes, the more novel perspectives and ideas you're exposed to. You develop an opposable mind—the ability to juggle and play around with different perspectives on any issue, instead of seeing it through one lens.

Increasingly, the only metric that will matter in your journey of personal growth will be **ROL: Rate-of-Learning**. We've heard a lot in recent years about the importance of hands-on learning and practical experimentation. We get it. Burying your head in a book by itself gets you nowhere.

But the pendulum is swinging too far in that direction. Yes, you can be *too* action-oriented. Ideas, while cheap when compared to effective execution, are still more valuable than many of the other things we spend time on.

There's another way to learn faster: assimilate and build on the ideas of others. Sure, you won't understand every tacit lesson their experience gave them, but you can incorporate many of them, and in a fraction of the time it would take you to make every mistake yourself.

Ideas are high leverage agents. They become more so when arranged in highly cross-referenced networks. The only tool we have available that is capable of both creating and accessing these networks on demand is the human brain.

I lied before. There is one form of leverage even more powerful than the initial assumptions and paradigms that inform a system's development: the **ability to transcend paradigms**.

I can't put it any better than Donella Meadows, in her seminal piece on complex systems:

*People who cling to paradigms (which means just about all of us) take one look at the spacious possibility that everything they think is guaranteed to be nonsense and pedal rapidly in the opposite direction. Surely there is no power, no control, no understanding, not even a reason for being, much less acting, in the notion or experience that there is no certainty in any worldview. But, in fact, everyone who has managed to entertain that idea, for a moment or for a lifetime, has found it to be the basis for radical empowerment. **If no paradigm is right, you can choose whatever one will help to achieve your purpose.***

*It is in this space of mastery over paradigms that people throw off addictions, live in constant joy, bring down empires, get locked up or burned at the stake or crucified or shot, and **have impacts that last for millennia***

*In the end, it seems that mastery has less to do with pushing leverage points than it does with **strategically, profoundly madly letting go.***

Reading is the closest thing we have to thinking another's thoughts. It's long and sometimes ponderous, but that work is required to wrap yourself in another person's paradigm. Which is the first step in madly letting go of your own.

The amazing thing about ideas is that it takes zero time for one to change your paradigm. It happens in time, but takes no time, like an inter-dimensional wormhole, one entangled particle in your brain mirroring its twin across a chasm even more vast than the universe—the chasm between two minds.

And that is the secret power of Read It Later apps.

P.S. My latest setup has 2 parts: 1) using [this IFTTT recipe](#) to automatically send “liked” articles in Instapaper to an Evernotebook called “Instapaper favorites” (for things I want to save in general but don’t have any particular notes on), and 2) [this recipe](#) that saves anything I highlight in Instapaper to a new note, and sends it to the Evernote default notebook where I can decide where it belongs later (for when I have specific passages I want to extract)

. . .

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You can also [sign up here](#) for updates on Tiago Forte’s upcoming book on design-driven productivity

Business



Gary Vaynerchuk

3 min read

Business

5 Things Every Employee Should Ask Their CEO



Recently, on my YouTube show, my editor in chief Steve Unwin asked me a question that I thought was very poignant and interesting. Even more so than that, it felt daring. He wasn't nervous to ask it. And it got me thinking about all the

questions I've been asked as CEO of my company VaynerMedia. Some have really provoked me to think. Some have been filled with fluff. But overall, I realized that knowing *what* to ask if you are ever presented with the opportunity is incredibly valuable. So I thought I would put together this list of five questions I think every employee should ask their CEO in their life.

1. “What is your finish line?”

Aka, what does success look like to them? What does their finish line look like? When I tell my employees my end goal is to buy the New York Jets, it allows them to understand that my behavior is long term. It tells them I'm playing for a fifty year narrative. That means I won't cut corners. I don't overvalue the quick dollar. I'm playing for long term keeps. And if the employee really gets that, they'll see that that creates interesting long term stability.

Maybe, if you can get them to be really honest, their answer will be something small, like “We want to be AdAge's agency of the year.” Or “We want to be the number one app in the app store for at least a day.” It's an extremely important question, and if you're good enough at understanding what the underlying message behind the answer is, it will give you insight into where the company is actually going.

2. “What have you learned in the last year that will inform this company in the next year?”

Recent learnings. Knowing what a chief executive pays attention to is crucial. But it's just as important to know how they plan to factor them in. It's a very significant proxy to see where their focus is in the short term and their ability to improve on it.

3. “What's the biggest vulnerability of the company?”

The reason this question is so important is because it's an opportunity for the CEO to bullshit and say “nothing.” And you know that can't be true. But hey: then you know your CEO doesn't have a problem giving you bullshit.

Or, this questions gets you real insight.

My answer to that question is usually pretty intriguing. I reply with “My death.” That speaks to either overconfidence or complete control. You make the call. Either way, I’m being honest with my employees and we usually have a very real discussion about it.

4. “What are your strongest and weakest relationships in your family?”

Family dynamics play out in the business world a lot more than people realize. The way a chief executive, and anyone for that matter, behaves with their family has an enormous impact on how they operate the company and how they treat their employees. The same is probably true for you; this question can give you a glimpse into how the business is managed and why.

5. “What do you want for the employees of this company?”

The one thing I truly want all my employees to know about me is my intent. And my intent is this: to win at all costs, but only if it results in equal benefits for myself and my employees.

I truly mean that. I often wish there was a magic button I could press that would transfer how serious I am about my intent to all the employees of VaynerMedia. Of course, being the owner of the company, there are disproportionate benefits between me and my employees (I’m thinking financially, for example). But I want success for everyone, whatever success might mean at all levels.

I’ll leave you all with this: you know you’ve had a great conversation if you come away convinced of your CEO’s intentions and motivations.

Thanks so much for reading! However, I know a lot can be lost in writing; to really see how serious I am about my intent, would love for you to [check out this video](#) where I answered my employees question on my show.



Gary Vaynerchuk

3 min read

Business

How to be an “Overnight Success”



Every day of my life, I get somewhere between five and twenty emails from people who want to quit.

They're usually coming to me as a last resort. They want me to convince them to stick it out. Often times they've been at it for something like eight or nine months. Or maybe they want me to validate that their instinct is correct, that they *should* quit.

But that's not what I'm going to tell them.

Because in the grand scheme of things, eight or nine months is nothing. Even a year is nothing.

Nothing happens overnight.

When people tell me I'm "lucky", that I've had so much "luck", I get so frustrated. Luck has nothing to do with it. I worked weekends and holidays every day starting at fourteen years old to make this happen. I think back to all the time I put in of real, hard work before I saw any of the benefits.

The first 18 months of WineLibraryTV when nobody was watching.

When I was practically losing money trying to build up Wine Library the first few years.

When VaynerMedia was working out of other company's conference rooms so we could stay scrappy.

Those things weren't perfect, but in the end, they all paid off. They paid off in a big way. And most importantly: they took time.

I bet so many reading this are not happy because they aren't getting what they want in life; they are expecting it too quickly and want all their dreams to come true today. But they fail to comprehend what actually goes into achieving that. Most of the time, their goals are coming at the expense of Netflix or video games. Not money. Actual time.

You need to put in the time and actual work.

Quick example: everyone talks about LeBron, and how he became a success so quickly at such a young age. Well guess what? He had been playing basketball for fifteen years before any of that fame happened. Fifteen.

I was thirty years old before anyone ever saw me. From fifteen to thirty, I was building businesses. I put in actual work.

If you want to tell me that every moment of my life between fifteen and thirty is an “overnight success”, knock yourself out. But it’s just not true.

So when I get those emails, those emails that say they’re not sure if they can make it because it’s been a “few months”, or even two years...I am shocked. If you want it to be the rest of your life, if you want that thing to last forever, then it’s going to take a bit more time than that.

You should be trying for that moment for the rest of your life.

It takes tons and tons of work. It takes some serendipity. It takes a lot time. But it is a huge privilege to do what you love every day.

And the way you do that is by becoming an “overnight success”. Because all those people you call an overnight success? They have the same story as me. They worked. Maybe you don’t see it. But you’re seeing it now.

Put in the work.



Thanks so much for reading! If you enjoyed it, would mean the world to me if you shared it with someone. :)



Jason Fried
3 min read

A reasonable man

I spent half of last week in New York, and the other half in Baltimore. But I only packed enough contact lenses for New York.

I wear daily wear lenses, so I have to replace my lenses every day. I usually over-pack lenses so I have at least twice as many as I'll need, but this time, in a blurry rush to get out of the house on time, I forgot.

I realized this as I was nearing my last day's supply. Shit!

So I called my optometrist back in Chicago to ask them if they could send my prescription to a local Lenscrafters in Baltimore so I could pick up a box when I arrived in town.

They looked up my prescription and discovered it had expired earlier this year. My prescription hadn't changed in 5 years, but it had still technically expired so they couldn't approve it, or send it. The answer was no. Definitely no. No sir. And that was the end of that. Policy ahead of flexibility for a customer in need. I get it, but I didn't like it.

So what to do. Ultimately we decided to run over to a local Target. They have an eye clinic with walk-ins available. I could quickly get a new exam and then buy a box of lenses there. That would tide me over. Perfect!

So we hopped in the car, sped over to Target, and walked into the clinic.

It was empty, other than a fellow named Ron. He ran the clinic there that day. Ron had a very Wilford Brimley look about him. Friendly. Good sign! I could walk right in, put my face against the crazy contraption, read some letters, and get on with it.

I explained the situation to Ron, and he stopped me. He said “That’s ridiculous. There’s no reason to put you through the time and expense of a whole new exam just for a couple days worth of lenses. You’re stuck, let’s get you unstuck. Call your optometrist at home and put me on the phone with them.”

So I did.

Ron didn’t ask them to transfer the prescription. He just asked them to read it out loud. “What was Jason’s last prescription?” They told him. He said, “Got it, thanks!”.

Then he went into the back, pulled a few spare trial lenses, and handed them over with a smile. I asked if I owed him anything, he said no—but there’s a jar over here where you can pop a few bucks in for kids who can’t afford glasses. And that’s exactly what I did.

Ron is a very reasonable man. He considered the situation, considered the risk, and did the reasonable thing. He helped someone out who was stuck in a bind. He imagined what it would be like if he was in my shoes, and I was behind the desk instead. He’d want from me what I asked of him. That’s the best service you can ever give.

It made me think about our business. We should be Ron. **We all should be more like Ron.** Snap out of corporate policy mode, and act under the good neighbor code.

Business lessons are everywhere (I’ve written about that before). You don’t have to seek out famous mentors, attend expensive conferences, or worship the best minds in the industry. Just pay attention and observe everyday dealings between everyday people in everyday situations. School’s in session at every moment. The best lessons are experienced first hand.

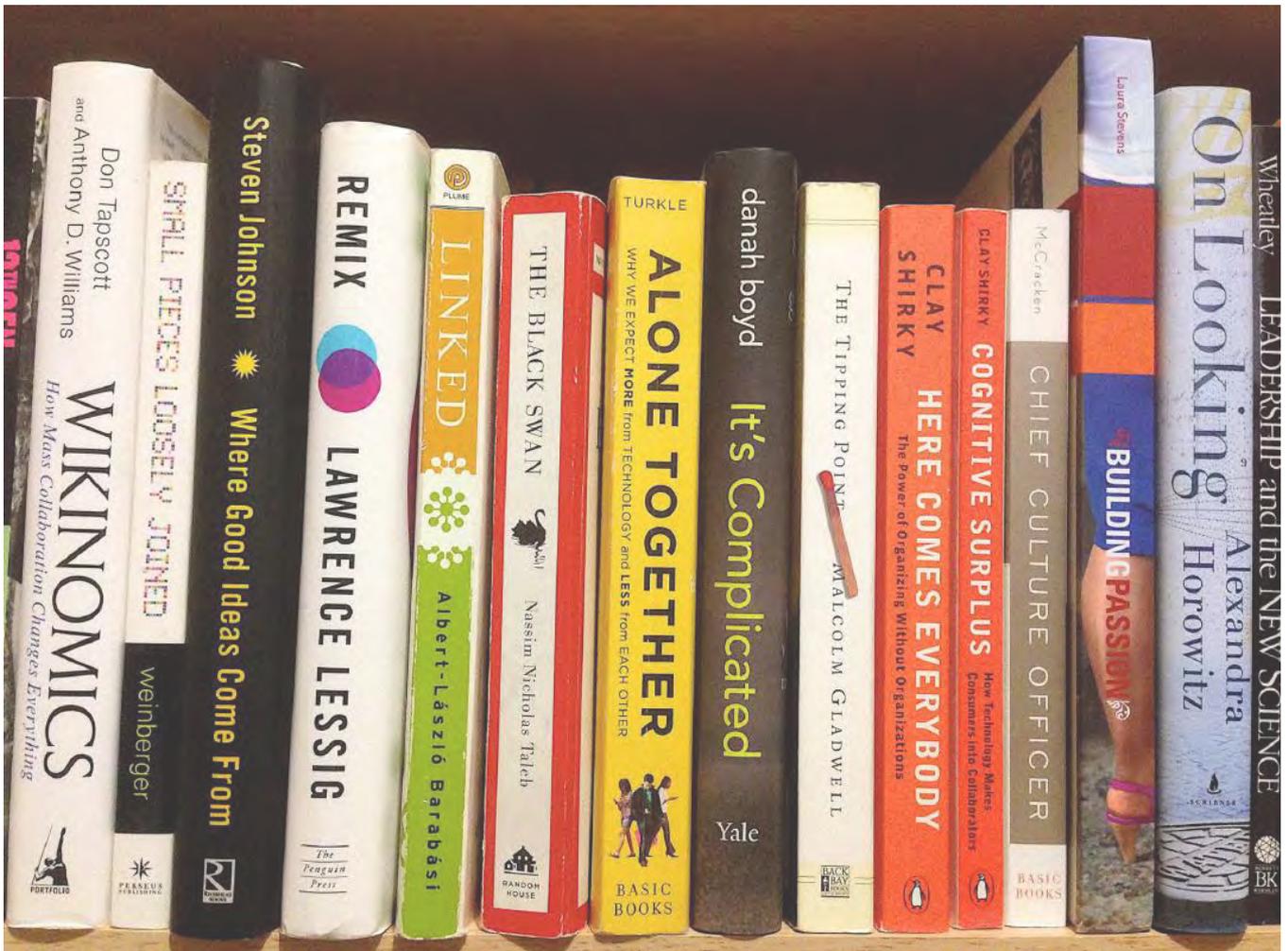
. . .

Are we like Ron? I sure hope so! Put us to the test and check out the all new Basecamp 3.



Mitchell Harper
9 min read

The 17 books that made me a better entrepreneur, father and husband



I've read hundreds of books over the last 2 decades. Here are my favorite 17.

...

I read a lot. Typically I try to get through a book every month or two. I like to re-read

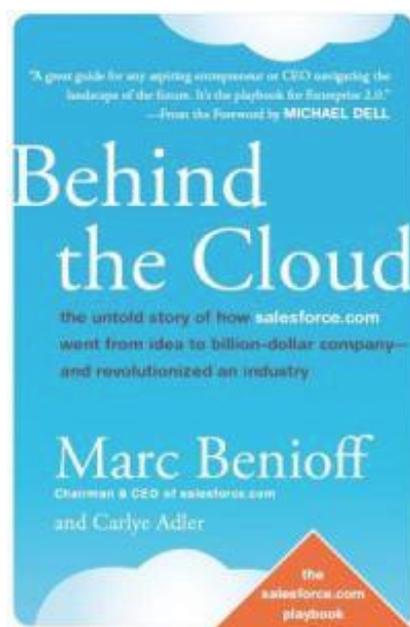
books that have had a significant impact on me in one way or another. I find I get something new out of a book when I re-read it, probably because my frame of reference has changed since I last read it.

Below I've included the 17 books I would consider the most impactful on my life. They all fall within one of three categories: books that have helped me become a better entrepreneur, a better father/husband or just a better person in general.

I hope you find the list useful.

Books that helped me become a better entrepreneur

Behind The Cloud



I learned so many great business lessons from this book that I can't even remember them all. Written by Marc Benioff (founder of Salesforce), it's an excellent primer if you're launching a company where you'll be David going up against Goliath, such as a large, slow incumbent.

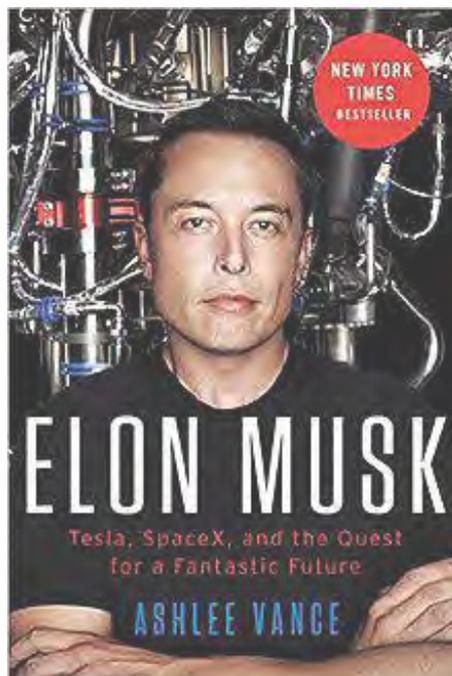
Marc's rules for PR, positioning, dealing with competitors and hiring are legendary. I've read this book at least 10 times—most recently I spent a weekend in February reading it cover-to-cover as I was putting the plan together to launch my latest company, PeopleSpark

The Hard Thing About Hard Things



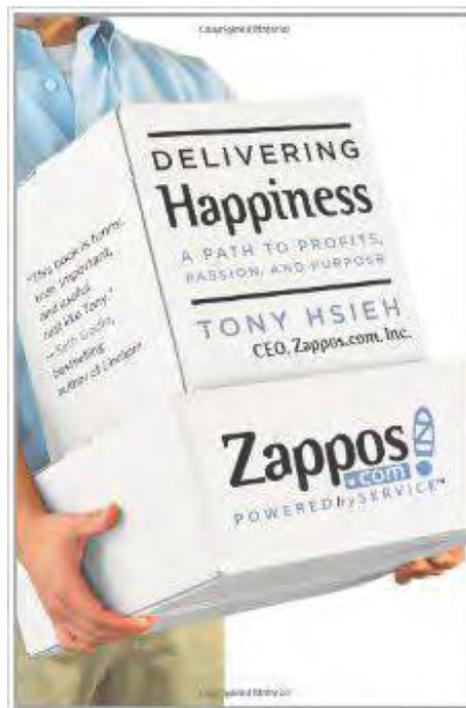
Honest, brutal lessons that all CEOs will experience as they scale their companies from a few people to a few thousand. I found myself nodding almost non-stop as I was reading the book. If you want to know what it's like running a large technology company, read this book.

Elon Musk: Tesla, SpaceX and the Quest for a Fantastic Future



I thought I had a strong work ethic. Then I read this book. Of course Elon Musk is a visionary, but what most impressed me with the book was how involved he continues to remain in the details at Tesla and SpaceX. You need to hire great teams, but this book proves you should never remove yourself from the details that matter to you and your customers.

Delivering Happiness

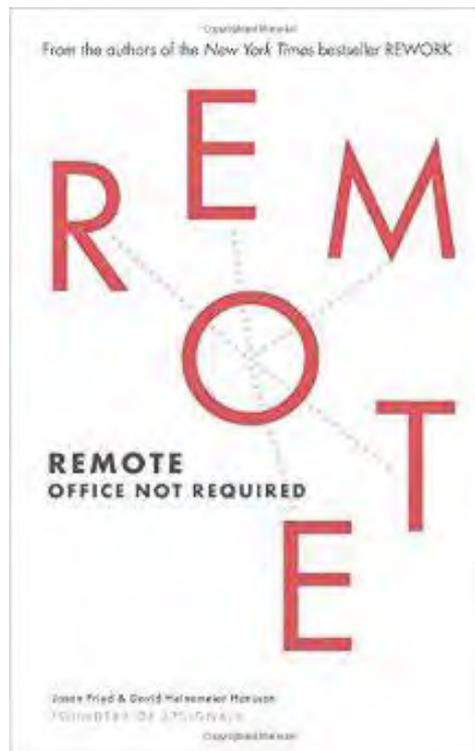


I've always believed you should look at your customer service and support teams as potential profit centers, not just cost centers. No one company does that better than Zappos.

In his book, Tony Hsieh shares details how he implemented his vision for customer happiness at Zappos. Two stories really stood out to me. First, that Zappos would pay you \$2,000 within your first week if you decided to leave. Second, customer service people could send gifts to customers as they saw fit—they simply had to use their best judgement when doing so.

The book shows that Tony clearly knew Zappos was in the business of selling happiness, not shoes. It's a great reminder that your product isn't necessarily what you're selling to customers, especially if it's a commodity

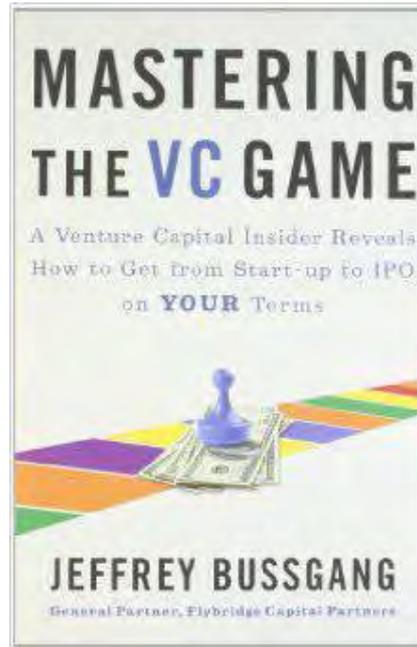
Remote: Office Not Required



When I decided to launch PeopleSpark (my 5th company) earlier this year, Jason and David's book heavily influenced me. I already felt the "old way" of renting an office and restricting our hiring to where I lived wouldn't work and their book just confirmed that even more.

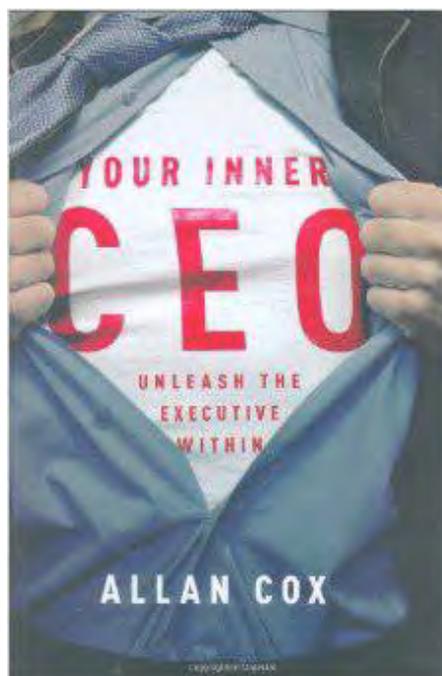
Today, based on the principles outlined in this book, we have a killer team located primarily on the west coast but also spread throughout the world. We don't have an office, live in Slack, see each other twice a year and are building a company that will positively impact millions of people.

Mastering: The VC Game



The only book you need to read when it comes to raising money as an entrepreneur. After reading this book I understood how most investors think as well as the “nitty gritty” details of term sheets including preferences, ratchets, drag and tag along rights, etc. If you want a crash course in venture capital, this is a must-read.

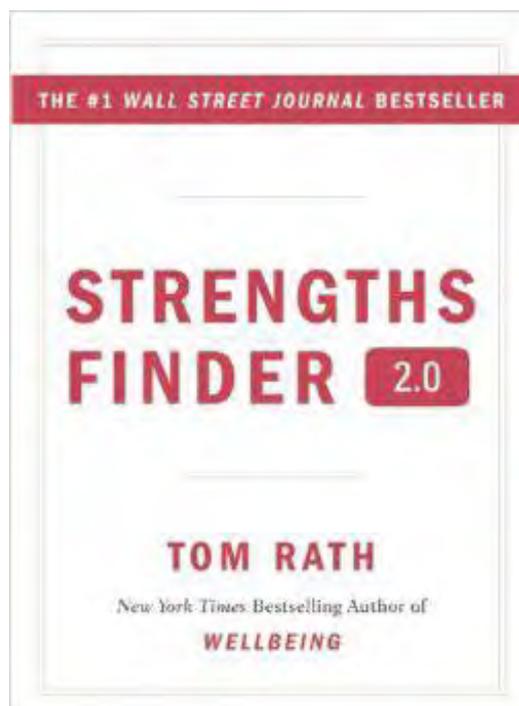
Your Inner CEO



One of the few books you can read that will show you what it takes to be a “real” CEO, which means preparing you for everything the job entails when you scale

past a handful of people.

StrengthsFinder 2.0



I live by the mantra of doing what you're good at and delegating everything else. StrengthsFinder helps you figure that out and explains how your own unique style can help you get more done with less work. It includes access to take the StrengthsFinder test and you'll receive your strengths profile at the end of it.

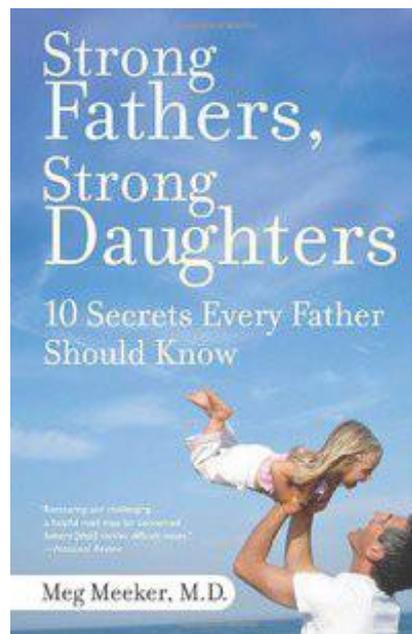
My strengths are thrust+accelerate, which means I'm good at starting from nothing and turning an idea in to something, then propelling it past that initial stage and turning it from a product into a company.

Knowing my strengths, I can build a team around me that compliments, not conflicts, with my style and strengths.

Once I read my profile I realized why I love building and scaling companies so much —because that's where my strengths lie. Definitely worth the investment to understand you own strengths

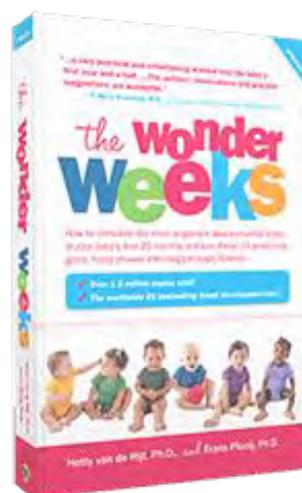
Books that helped me become a better dad/husband

Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters



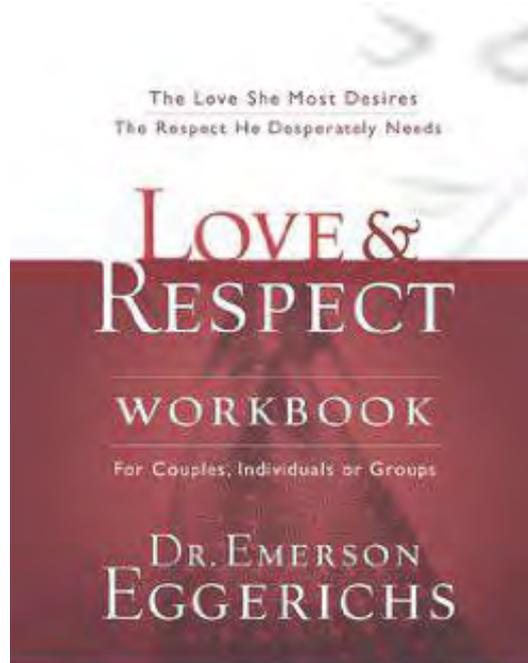
The impact a man can have on his daughter's life is huge. This book helped me understand how girls think and what they need from their father. If you've got girls and want them to grow up feeling strong, confident and in control of their life and emotions, read this book.

The Wonder Weeks



New babies go through a predictable pattern of ups and downs. This book tells you what those patterns are and why they occur. There's also a mobile app which tells you the exact dates when your new baby will be happy (wonder weeks) and when they will be fussy, upset and angry. It also details upcoming physical and mental milestones you can look forward to.

Love & Respect

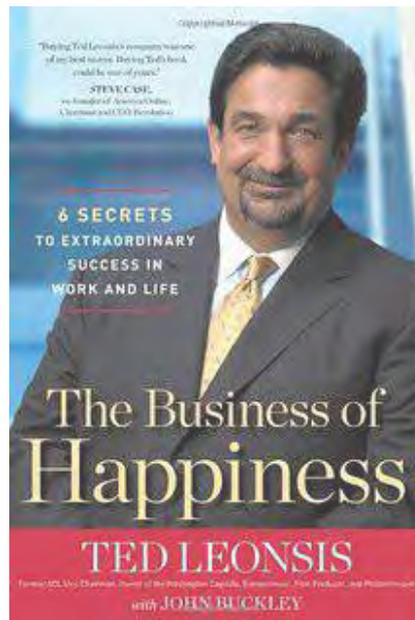


About 50% of marriages end in divorce. 90% end as a result of financial stress. Assuming you're OK financially, this book breaks down the reason most marriages fail and shows you how both men and women think and what they need in a marriage to thrive.

Put simply, women need love and men need respect. The book goes deep in both areas and includes lots of "Do's" and "Don'ts". It helps you understand how your communication style is impacting your marriage and explains changes you can make to satisfy the needs of your husband or wife.

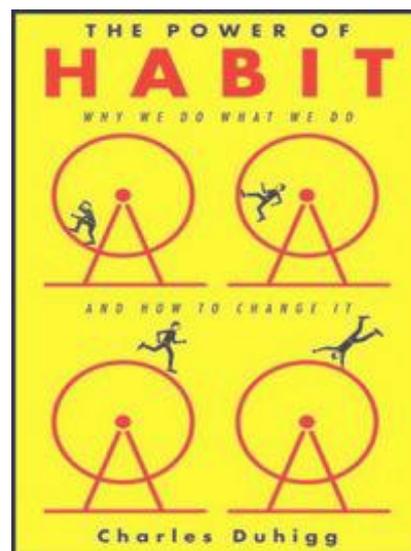
Books that helped me become a better person

The Business Of Happiness



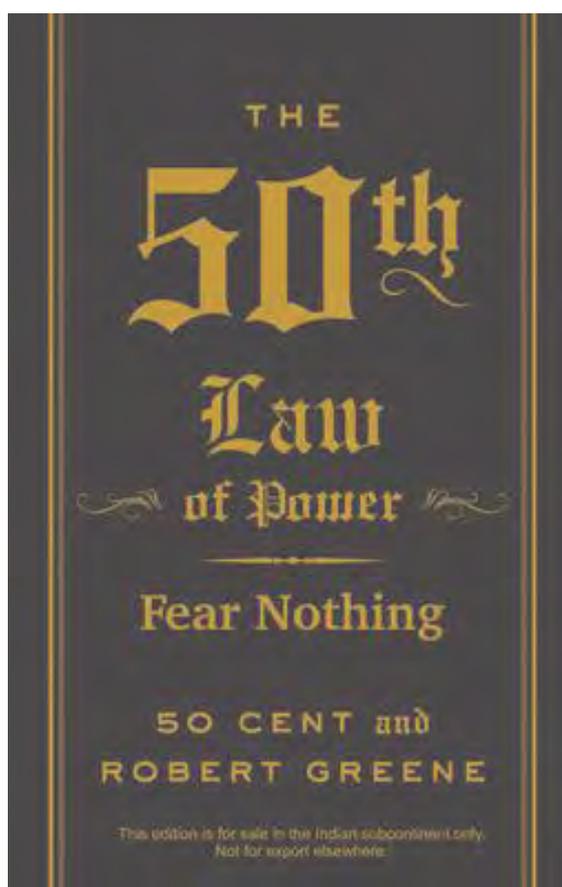
I was lucky enough to meet the author, Ted Leonsis, in the locker room of Washington Wizards game in 2013. A self-made billionaire, Ted does a great job in this book explaining how happiness is the ultimate outcome, not money. He details how happiness has been the core driver in his career and lays out a blueprint to do the same.

The Power Of Habit



I've always believed your habits define who you become over time and this book proves it. It includes dozens of examples, anecdotes and stories about how habits lead to change and improvement both personally and professionally

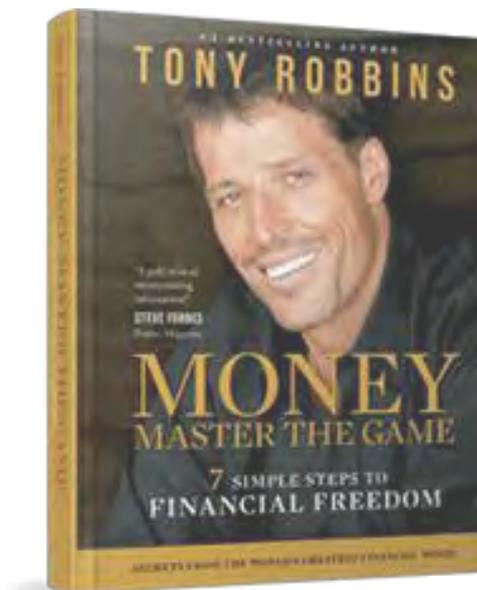
The 50th Law



Written by Curtis “50 Cent” Jackson and Robert Greene, this book details the “rules” 50 Cent used to build up his career as a musician and entertainer.

I specifically love how he details the entire process he used to manufacture drama as a Hip Hop artist to get press coverage and sell more records. He understood better than anyone that the music industry is all about image first and talent second—and used that to become one of the biggest artists of the 2000s, parlaying his music money into a stake in Vitamin Water which he then sold to Coca Cola for \$400M.

MONEY Master The Game

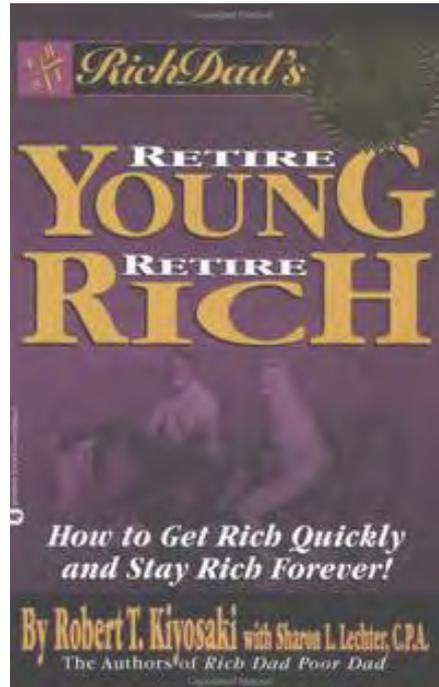


In his latest book, Tony Robbins shares the investment strategies he learned interviewing some of the sharpest financial minds in the world, including hedge fund manager Ray Dalio and vocal investor Carl Icahn.

This is a long book, but if you're doing what most people do—turning your money over to a “professional” money manager, then you should definitely invest the time to read it.

I read the whole book a few times, but was mostly interested in how the investors Tony interviewed think about and mitigating risk even before making their investments or placing a trade, as well as how they use leverage after taking a position in a company to influence change (such as M&A or selling off parts of a company to build up the balance sheet), which ultimately creates more value for everyone.

Retire Young Retire Rich

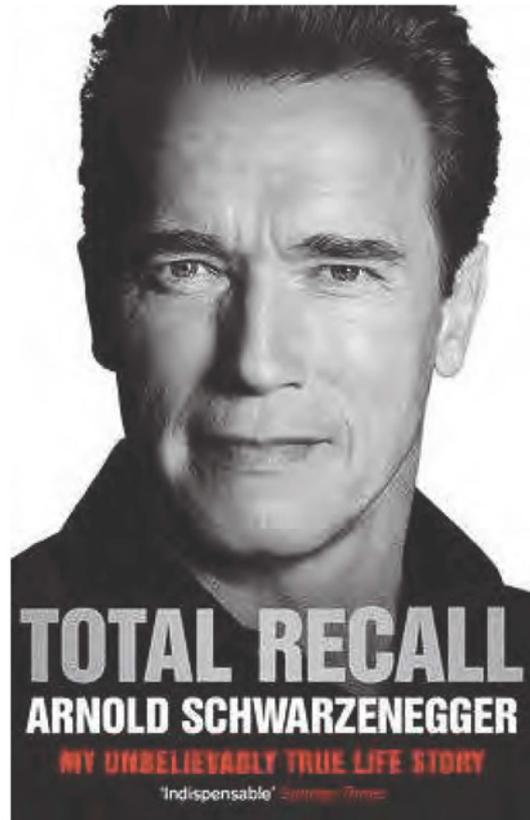


I've read every one of Robert Kiyosaki's books at least 5 times. Retire Young Retire Rich is my favorite because of the way it's written. If you haven't read Rich Dad Poor Dad yet, start there.

This book does an excellent job detailing the numbers and process behind investing in multi-family real estate (apartment buildings and growing your asset base predictably over time through leverage. If you don't understand (or aren't comfortable with using debt for leverage, this book breaks it down in a way most people can understand.

Ultimately the books helps you think beyond your salary and put a plan in place to make sure you'll not just retire comfortably but retire rich, hence the name of the book.

Total Recall



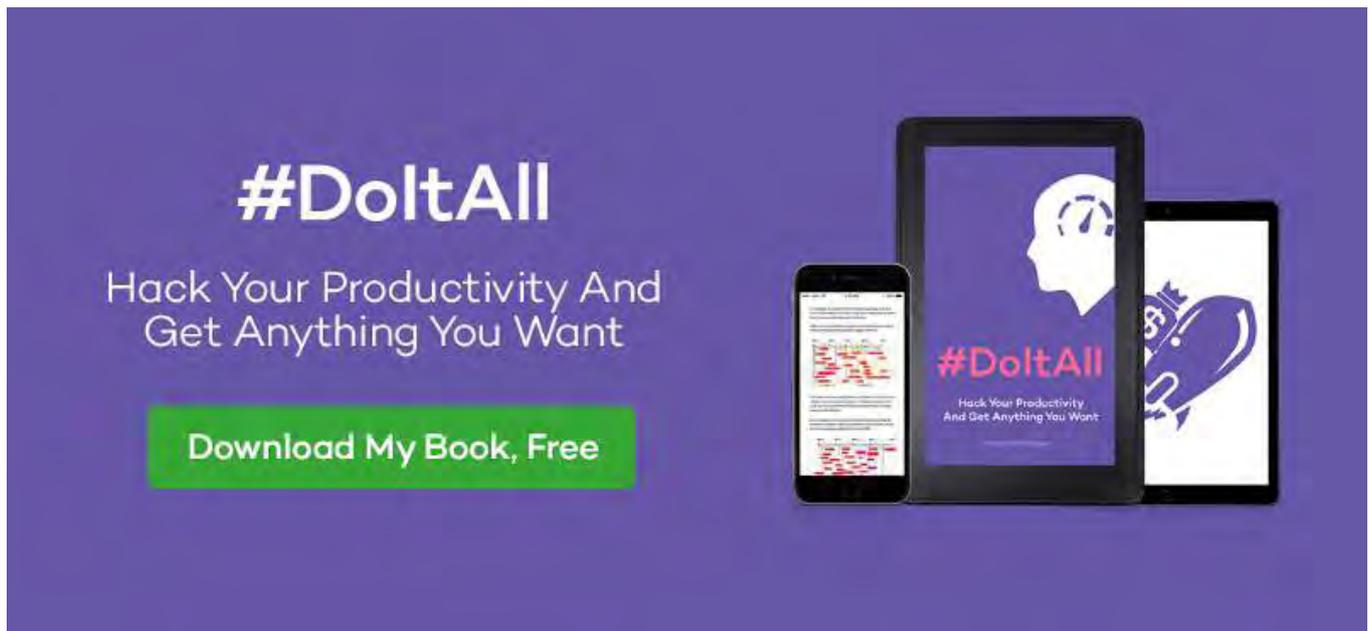
Arnold Schwarzenegger's autobiography. An amazing read that shows what an incredible entrepreneur he was, even before he set foot in the gym.

Did you know, for example, that he is one of the largest real estate owners in Santa Monica? Or that he buys commercial jets (over \$100M each and leases them back to Singapore Airlines?

His investing and business knowledge is incredible and while he doesn't talk much about it publicly, he shares everything in this book. Of course he also talks about the topics you'd expect to see in his autobiography—his career as a bodybuilder, actor and then politician, but I found the chapters about his business ventures a lot more interesting and insightful.

. . .

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#DoItAll
Hack Your Productivity And
Get Anything You Want

[Download My Book, Free](#)

The banner features three devices: a smartphone on the left showing a list of items, a tablet in the center displaying the book cover with a white silhouette of a head and the text '#DoItAll Hack Your Productivity And Get Anything You Want', and a laptop on the right showing a rocket launch graphic.

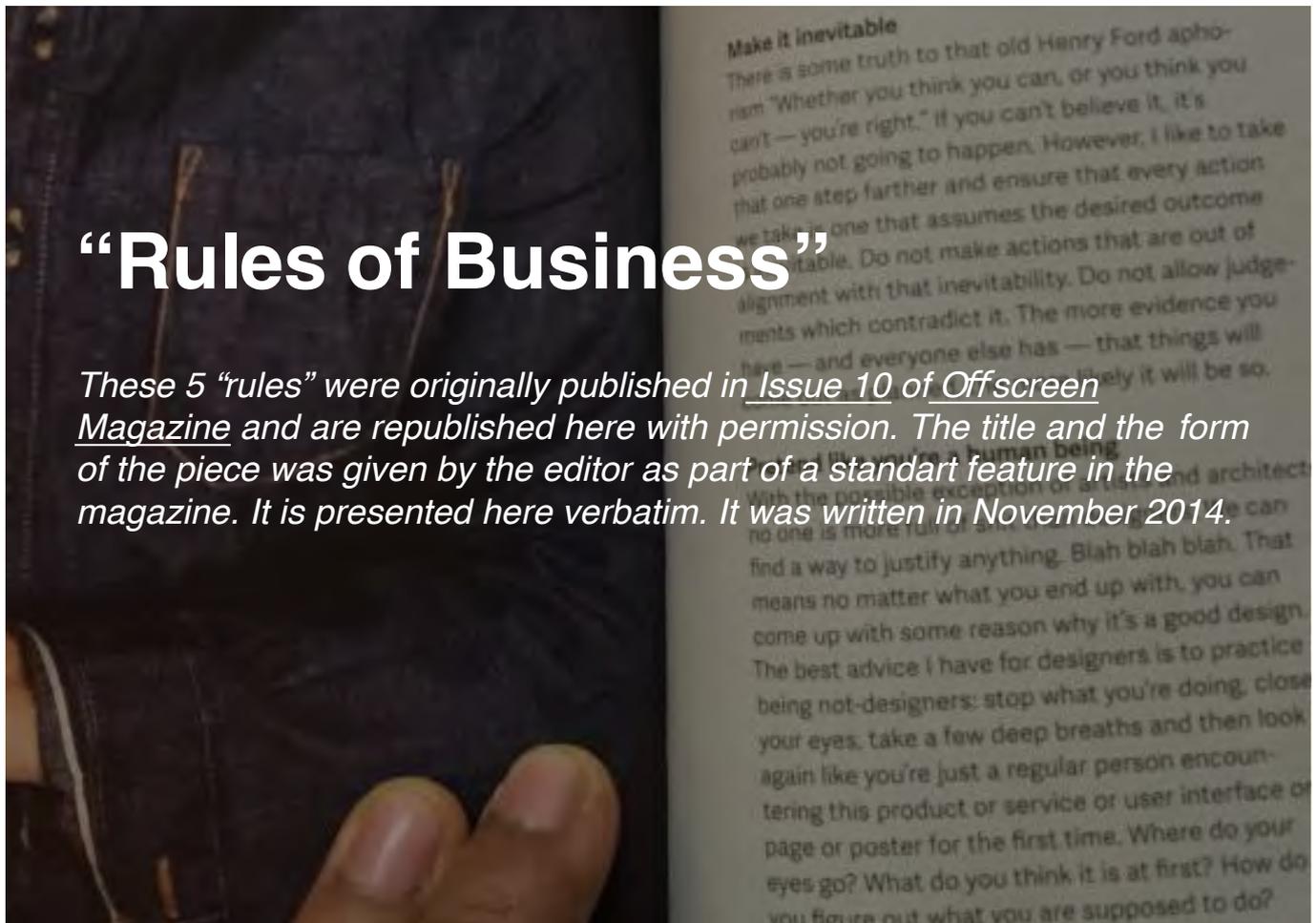
Featured image via [Flickr](#)



Stewart Butterfield

3 min read

Business



Pretend like you're a human being

With the possible exception of artists and architects, no one is more full of shit than designers. We can find a way to justify anything. Blah blah blah. That means no matter what you end up with, you can come up with some reason why it's a good design. The best advice I have for designers is to practice being not-designers: stop what you're doing, close your eyes, take a few deep breaths and then look again like you're just a regular person encountering this product/service/user interface/object/page/poster for the first time. Where do your eyes go? What do you think it *is* at first? How do you figure out what you are

Make it inevitable

There is some truth to that old Henry Ford aphorism “Whether you think you can, or you think you can’t—you’re right.”. If you can’t believe it, it’s probably not going to happen. However, I like to take that one step further and ensure that every action we take is one that assumes the desired outcome is inevitable. Do not make actions that are out of alignment with that inevitability. Do not allow judgements which contradict it. The more evidence you have—and everyone else has—that things will come out as planned, the more likely it will be so.

. . .

Every job you do has your signature on it

When I was around 10 or 11 years old, my father offered me \$10 to move a cord of recently-delivered firewood from the driveway into the garage and stack it up inside (I am old; \$10 was a great deal of money back then). I managed to get all the firewood inside but rather than it being stacked against the wall, it was more or less evenly distributed across the floor of the garage. I expected my payment, but instead got some advice: “Every job you do has your signature on it—do you really want to sign that?” I always remembered that and if I am going to do something, I make every effort to do it right. (I also properly stacked the wood afterwards, even though it took forever, and I got paid in the end.)

Everyone should always be trying to make it easier for everyone

I used to play in a band. Other people might have played team sports, or worked in a well-functioning restaurant. There’s something about working deeply, in real-time, with other people that’s both incredibly satisfying and enormously more effective than working alone. You need to be open for the pass, you need to hear the subtle rhythm shifts, you need to spot when someone else's table reads the check

everyone should be taking account of what everyone else is doing and constantly modifying their own behaviour to better serve the team.

. . .

Know why you're doing it

If you are just out to make money, god bless: I hope you make some money. If you just want awards or recognition or for others to think highly of you, I hope you get that too. But I don't think anyone is really satisfied by fame or fortune. I find it incredibly satisfying (and gratifying, rewarding and pleasant) to honestly have done the best job I could have done on something and I believe that works for everyone else too. Being skillful and exercising your mastery is what you're here to do. Doing anything less undermines the whole point of being alive.



Thomas Opong

4 min read



28 Ideas for Becoming 5 Times More Productive Every Week

You may be doing most things right to get the best of your week but results of your hard work may not so impressive. Maybe it's your focus and planning that need a tune up. Or better still, you need to build a better and smarter plan to get more things done each day. After all, a perfect plan is one of the keys to being productive. Harness your productivity with these ideas.

1. Dedicate time each week to prioritizing big picture goals for the coming week, month, and quarter.
2. Use reminders to notify you of upcoming tasks due throughout the day.
3. Change your default hour long meeting to just 20 minutes and make sure anyone requesting your time knows you'll be leaving early.
4. Follow strict daily routines. Peak productivity's not about luck. It's about devotion.
5. Stay in the moment. If you feel overwhelmed (like pretty much everyone), it might not be because you have *so much to do*, but rather that you are trying to do too much at the same time, says Douglas Merrill founder of ZestFinance.
6. Ignore your email. This probably sounds a lot easier than it is as most people tend to check theirs every 5–10 minutes. But if you add up all of the minutes that it takes to continually check your inbox and then reply, it's easy to see why it's such a time waster.
7. Deal with something only once. Do it now. Then it's off your mind, and you can fully focus on the next matter.
8. Write a stop doing list. Every productive person obsessively sets To Do Lists. But those who play at world-class also record what they commit to stop doing. Steve Jobs said that what made Apple Apple was not so much what they chose to build but all the projects they chose to ignore.
9. Don't say yes to every request. Most of us have a deep need to be liked. That translates into us saying yes to everything—which is the end of your elite productivity.

10. It pays to say no. Don't be so available to everyone. Zero interruptions. Pure focus. Massive results.

11. Multitasking doesn't work. Researchers believe that the human brain only has so much processing capacity—so in trying to carry out several different tasks at once, you're creating a bottleneck, rather than maximizing your efficiency.

12. Keep meetings lean. Meetings can be vital for discussing goals and establishing a forward vision. Left unchecked, they become bloated affairs, eating up hours (or in extreme cases, even days) of your time without anything important being decided.

13. Use task tracking apps like Todoist, Wunderlist, or Asana to get generic tasks done throughout the day when you have a few free minutes.

14. Make it a priority to get everything done that you put on your list done each day. Be religious about not procrastinating.

15. Carry a schedule and record all your thoughts, conversations and activities for a week. This will help you understand how much you can get done during the course of a day and where your precious moments are going.

16. Outsource everything you can't be BIW (Best in the World) at. Focus only on activities within "Your Picasso Zone".

17. In order to make the best use of your time in your business, your day should be made up of a series of goals that have specific milestones.

18. Use your calendar as a "real time" diary of whom you call and what you do in time slots throughout the day. Makes it easier to remember in the future.

19. Use your smartphone technology to dictate reminders, events, and tasks that need to be done as you think about them throughout the day.

20. If you've got a particularly large project that seems overwhelming, break it down into smaller and more manageable chunks. Then tackle each one at a time. Keep a list and feel the sense of achievement when you tick off one of those smaller tasks.

21. Take the first 30 minutes or less of every day to plan your day. Don't start your day until you complete your time plan. The most important time of your day is the time you schedule to schedule time.

22. Follow the 80/20 rule. Did you know that only 20 percent of what you do each day produces 80 percent of your results?

23. Set a time frame and deadline for your most important projects, and be realistic about the length of time they will take.

24. Plan to spend at least 50 percent of your time engaged in the thoughts, activities and conversations that produce most of your results.

25. It's important to organize your day around your body's natural rhythms, says Carson Tate, founder and managing partner of management consultancy, Working Simply. Tackle complex tasks when your energy's at its highest level.

26. The brain also learns and executes complex tasks by lumping together similar items. Tate suggests leveraging this ability by scheduling similar tasks back-to-back. For example, you may make all of your phone calls one after another, or draft and send emails at one time.

27. A good dose of fresh air and daylight, away from the unnatural environment of an office, is good for the soul. Particularly if your office environment is stuffy and dark and relies on air conditioning.

28. It's critical to take breaks and let your brain rest. Take a walk or socialize for a bit to refresh for new tasks. You'll come back recharged and ready to achieve greater efficiency.

*The author is the founder at **Alltopstartups**(where he shares startup resources) and the curator at **Postanly** (a free weekly newsletter that delivers the most insightful long form posts from top publishers).*



Thomas Oppong

5 min read

Business



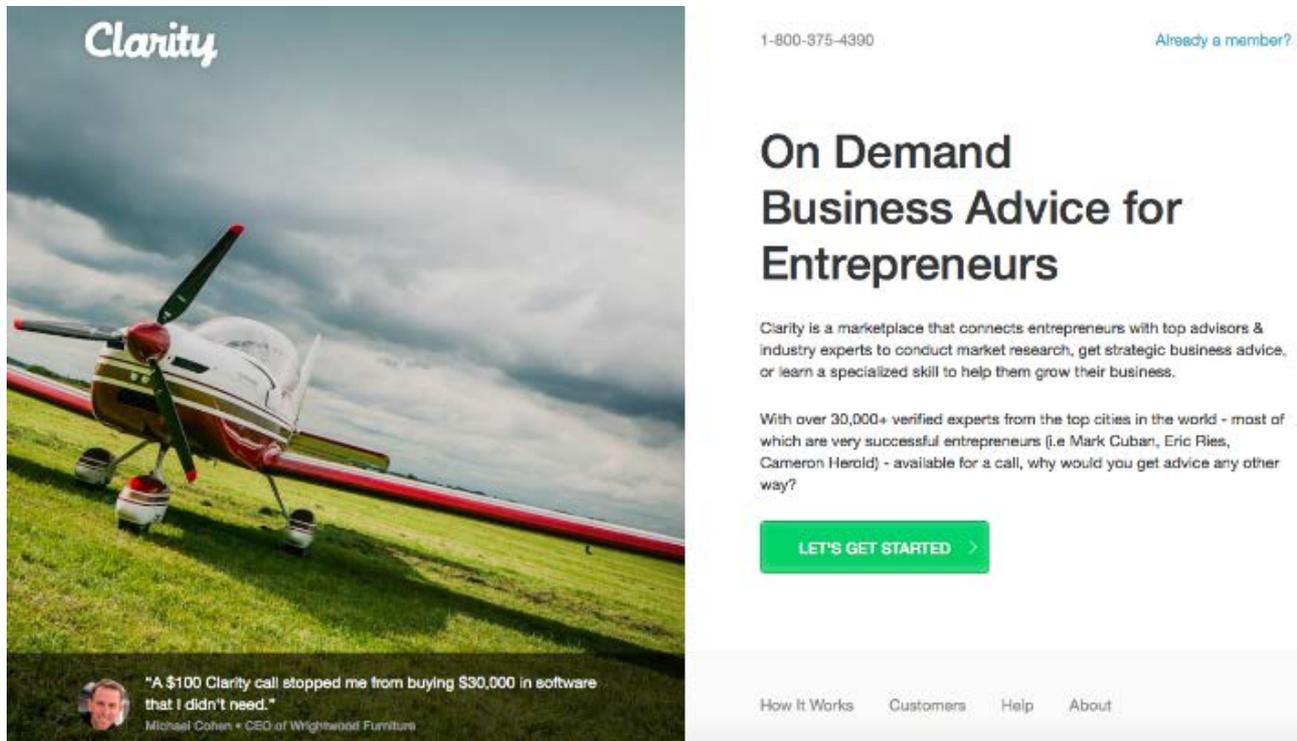
37 Must-Have Apps (and Sites) for Busy Professionals

Technology has changed the world as we know it. Both mobile and web tools allow us to connect, work, improve and leverage our resources beyond what was once imaginable.

Here is a list of apps and sites that can save you time and resources, and ultimately help you become more productive.

Apps that make your life easier

1. [Unroll.me](#)—You know all those email newsletters that you accidentally opted into, but don't really read? Use this site to clear out your inbox.
2. [Canva](#)—Make awesome images without much design knowledge.
3. [Upwork](#)—One of the best online solutions for hiring freelancers.
4. [Google Keep](#)—Save your thoughts on your phone, tablet, or computer.
5. [Clarity](#)—Schedule a call with influencers and experts in your market.



Clarity

1-800-375-4390 [Already a member?](#)

On Demand Business Advice for Entrepreneurs

Clarity is a marketplace that connects entrepreneurs with top advisors & industry experts to conduct market research, get strategic business advice, or learn a specialized skill to help them grow their business.

With over 30,000+ verified experts from the top cities in the world - most of which are very successful entrepreneurs (i.e Mark Cuban, Eric Ries, Cameron Herold) - available for a call, why would you get advice any other way?

[LET'S GET STARTED](#)

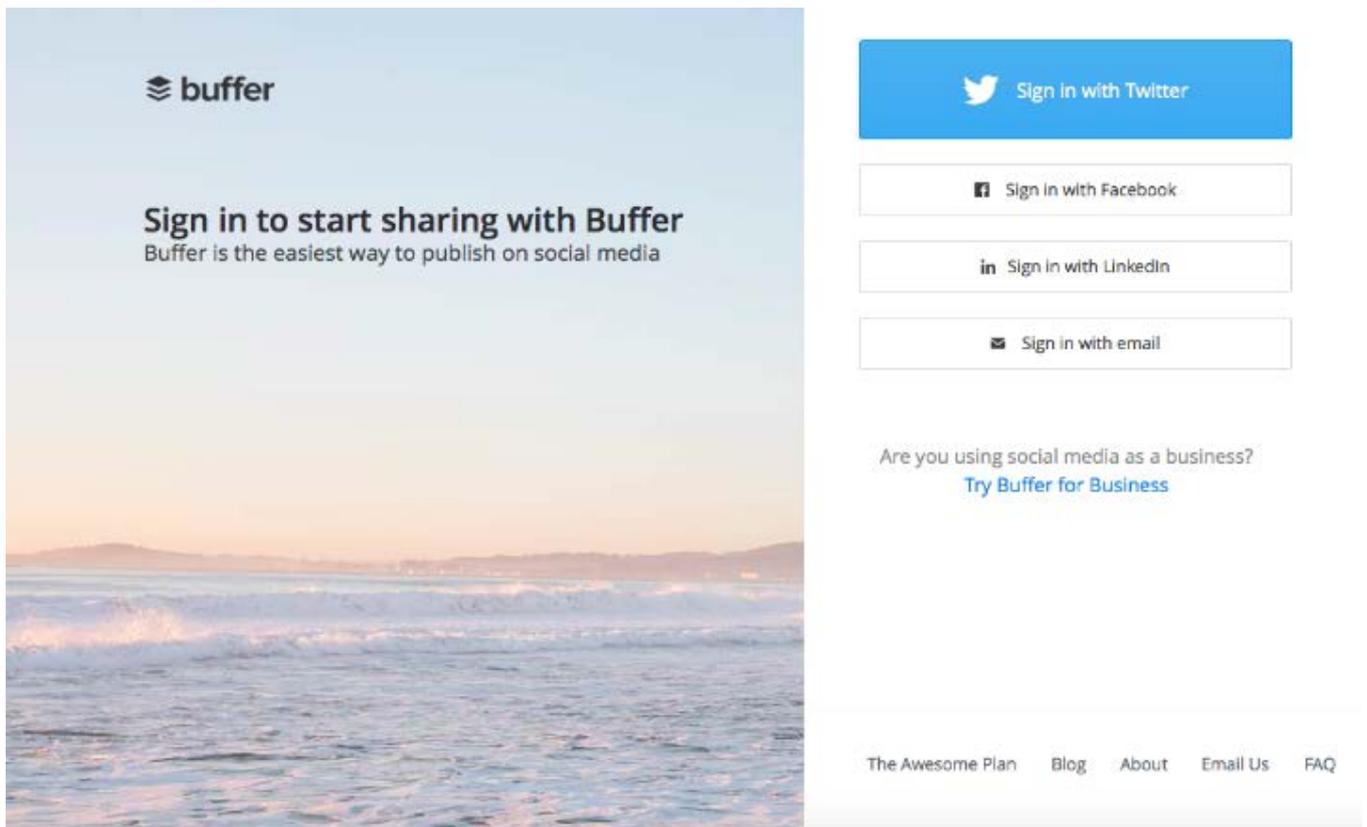
[How It Works](#) [Customers](#) [Help](#) [About](#)

 "A \$100 Clarity call stopped me from buying \$30,000 in software that I didn't need."
Michael Cohen • CEO of Wighwood Furniture

6. [Hemingway Editor](#)—A wonderful tool that makes your writing and spelling mistakes bold and clear.

7. [Fiverr](#)—Find anything you need, starting at just \$5.

8. Focus Booster—This is a great little timer app that helps you track your time.
9. Hootsuite—The only social media dashboard you'll ever need.
10. Buffer—Schedule and share social media content.



11. Slack—Be less busy by having everything in one place.
12. Trello—Organize, plan, and schedule projects as a team.
13. Remember the Milk—A to-do list manager with several key bonuses: You can sync it with your all your devices.
14. Mint—Be good with your money with Mint money manager.

BE GOOD WITH YOUR MONEY
FROM THE BIG PICTURE
TO THE DETAILS THAT MATTER

Effortlessly manage your cash flow, budgets and bills from one place.

SIGN UP FREE

All-in-one? Done
From money and budgeting to customized tips and more—get a clear view of your total financial life.

Bills? Paid
Don't miss a bill again. See and pay your bills in one place.

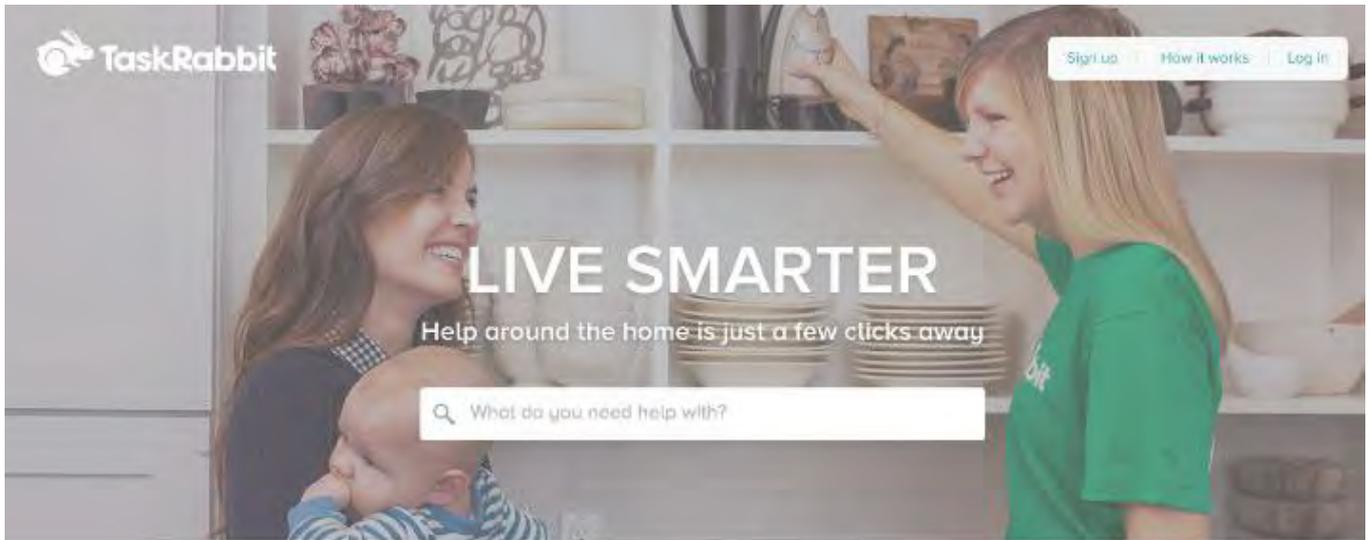
Credit? Checked
Find out yours and learn how you can improve it. It's totally free.

15. Evernote: Not new, but this note-taking/collaboration app continues to be one of the best productivity tools.

16. 1-3-5.com —Simple page that gives you the perfect lay out of things to get done in a day.

17. Carrot—Carrot is a tough love to-do app that gets cranky at you if you don't complete your tasks.

18. TaskRabbit—Connecting you to safe and reliable helpers for home related tasks.



How TaskRabbit Works



19. Google Drive—Get access to files anywhere through secure cloud storage.

Apps for streamlining your life and career

20. Pocket—Don't have time to read great posts? Send them to Pocket where you'll be able to read it later—even offline on your phone while you're commuting home!

21. Habit List—Create good habits. Break unhealthy ones. Build a better you.



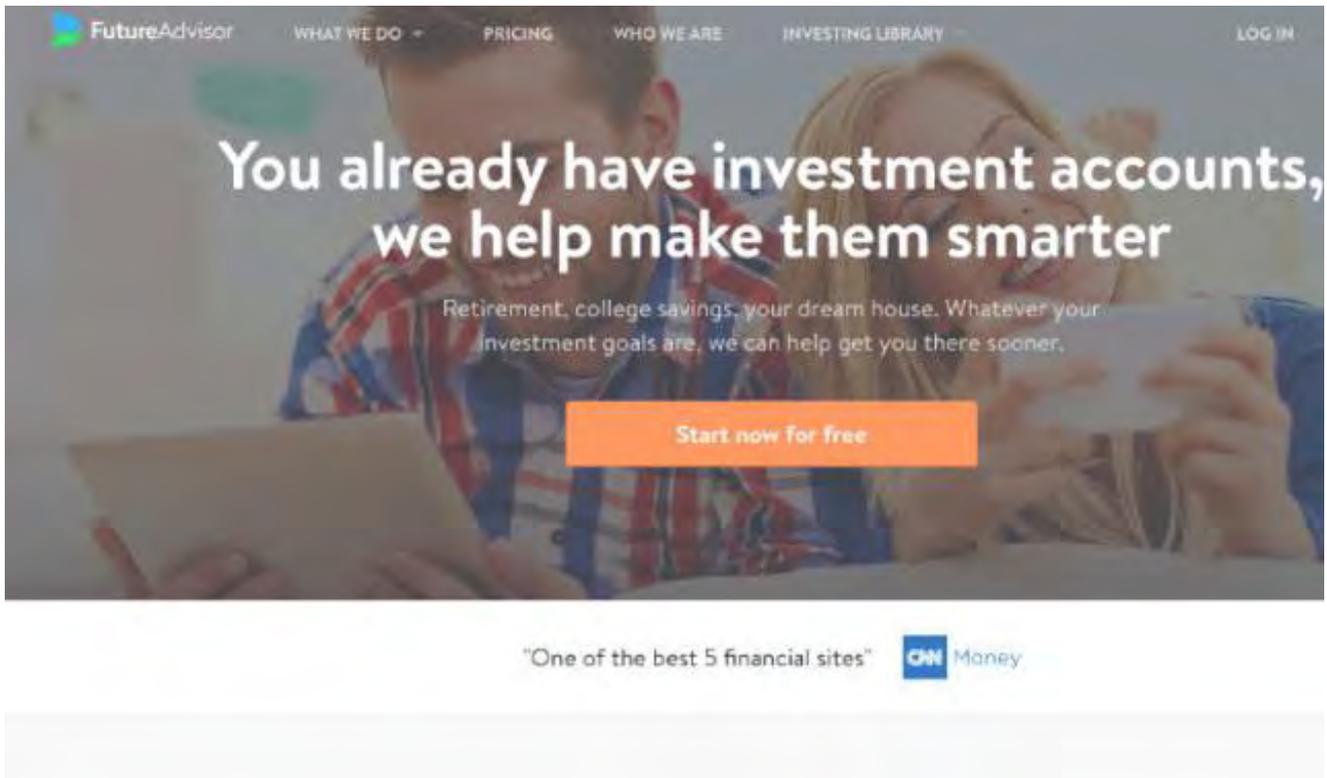
22. [Mailbox](#)—If you're drowning in email, Mailbox will take care of that for you. This app neatly organizes email so that you can read it at a set time.

23. [Hive](#)—Collect and share your digital life.

24. [About.me](#)—The absolute easiest way to get a personal website up and running in minutes.

25. [LearnVest](#)—Go for the smart, savvy financial advice, stay for the awesome and (very) reasonably priced personal financial planning services.

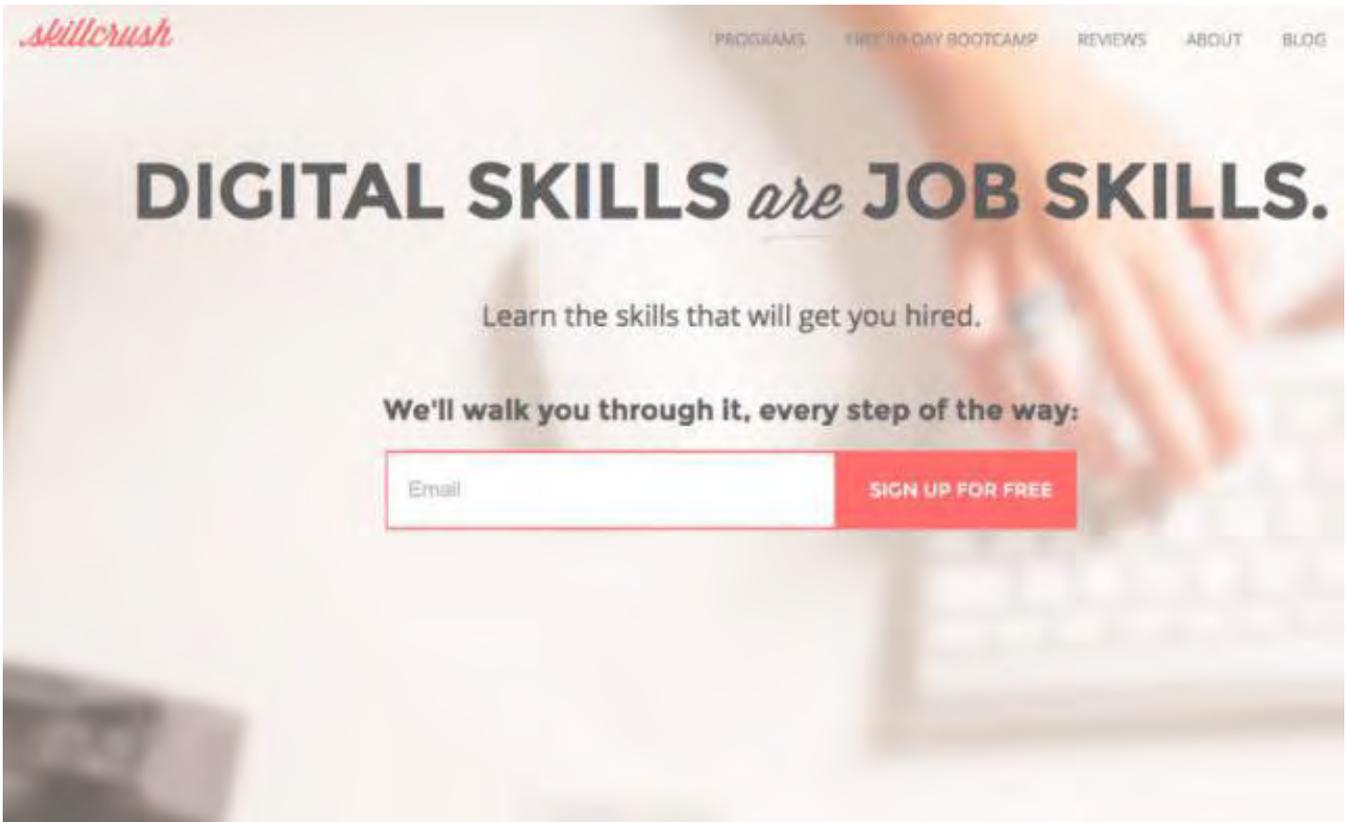
26. [FutureAdvisor](#)—FutureAdvisor not only helps you set up your portfolio, it reviews and rebalances your investments to help you achieve your goals.



27. [Zapier](#)—Connect apps you use, automate tasks, get more out of your data.
28. [CNMoney](#)—The most complete site for everything money-related on the web, from markets and investing to your personal spending.
29. [Docady](#)—Manage Life’s Most Important Paperwork
30. [Around Me](#)—From bars to cinemas, petrol stations and hospitals, it’s handy if you’re travelling, or if you don’t want to waste your time googling everything.

Sites for learning something new

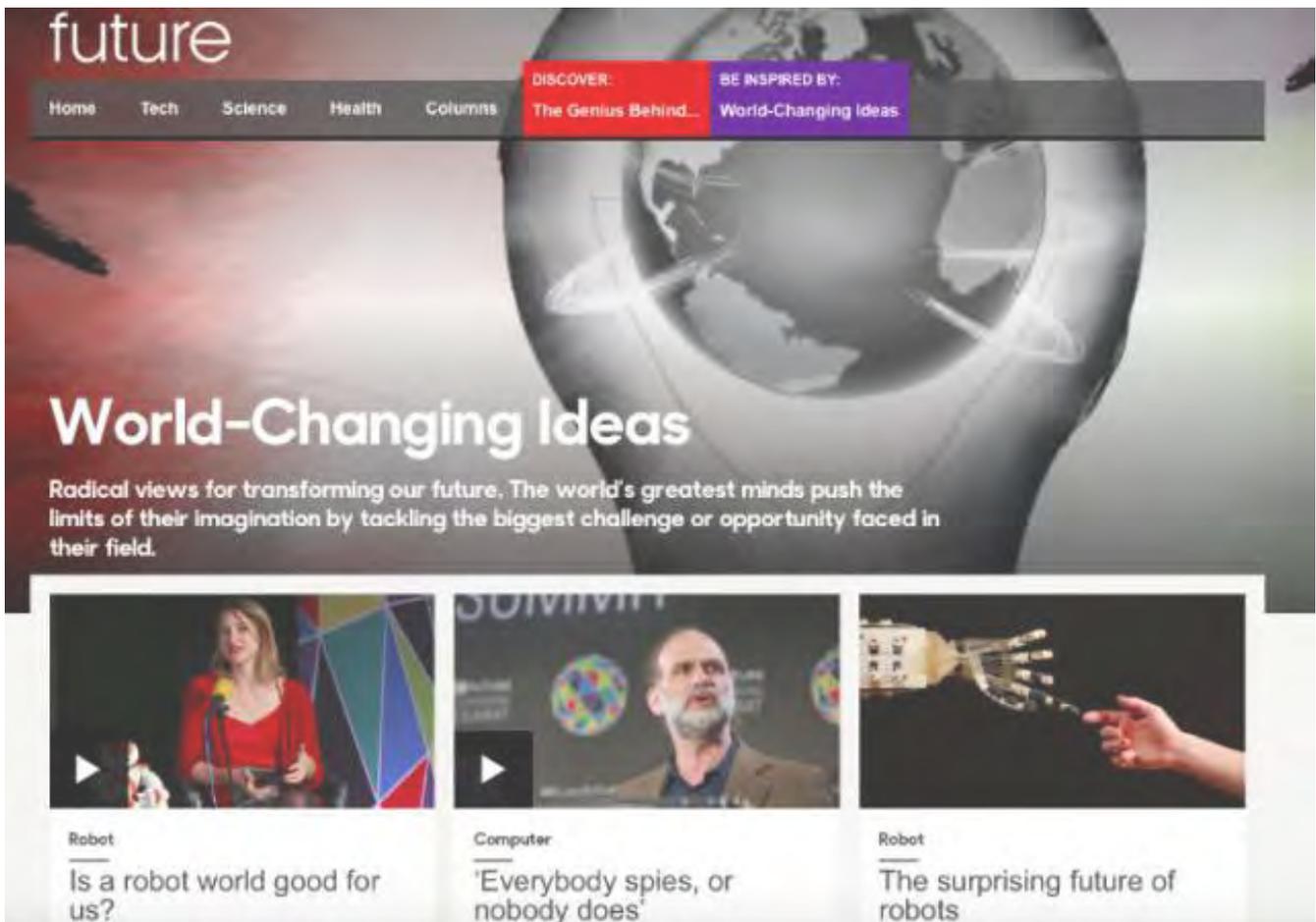
31. [CreativeLive](#)—Whether you’re trying to pick up a new creative hobby or boost your creative career, this site broadcasts live classes by accomplished professionals in each field.
32. [Skill crush](#)—Skillcrush is dead-on with its philosophy that digital skills will help you no matter what you do. The site’s free email bootcamp is a great way to polish your tech skills.



33. Muse University—Helps you find out what you want to do with your life, and then be awesome at it. Free classes for professionals at every stage delivered straight to your inbox.

34. Mental Floss—Every day, Mental Floss publishes articles with the most interesting facts and information about things you didn't even know you wanted to know.

35. BBC Future—Making you smarter, every day.



36. [99U](#)—Head over to 99U for great strategies for turning your ideas into action. From a daily stream of articles to videos of talks from the site's annual conference.

37. [The Creativity Post](#)—Want to expand your creative mind? The Creativity Post has high-quality articles on innovation, creativity, and imagination.

The author is the founder at [Alltopstartups](#) (where he shares startup resources) and [Postanly](#) (a free weekly newsletter that delivers the most insightful long form posts from top publishers).

Careers / Future of Work /
Job Hunting / Recruiting /
Work



ayasin

7 min read

The One Method I've Used to Eliminate Bad Tech Hires

This article is the first in the Tech Hiring & Team Building series. You can find [the second installment here](#).



Let's be real. Interviews are a terrible way to hire tech candidates. Not only do you not get a real sense of the candidate, they often weed out good candidates in favor of bad ones.

In this [fantastic article on Medium by Eric Elliott](#), he talks about many of the techniques that work and don't work for interviewing engineers.

In regards to what works the best, I found that these 2 ideas work the best when combined.

- *PAID Sample project assignment (err on the side of paying fairly — say \$100+/hour for estimated completion time — if the problem should require 2 hours to complete, offer \$200)*
- *Bring the candidate in and discuss the solution. Let the candidate talk about their design decisions, challenge them as you would any team member and let them provide their reasoning.*

Paying candidates to work on a simple project and then discuss it with our team has almost single handedly eliminated any bad hiring decisions. Paying a

candidate that gives you a terrible solution (or no solution) is FAR cheaper (both financially and emotionally) than hiring the wrong person, going through a 3 month performance improvement plan to try to make them the right person and eventually firing them.

We have gone from “This candidate is exactly what we need” to “I have serious doubts about working with this candidate long term” and we’ve had candidates change our bad perception of them using this technique. It’s very easy for someone to embellish (to put it generously) their resume, and coding trivia can be memorized, but it’s really hard for someone to fake actual skill.

Here’s why paying candidates to solve problems works

For the Employer

- Since the candidate is getting paid, the candidate treats it as a legit consulting session and therefore gives her best effort in solving the problem.
- It’s an indication to the candidate how they will be treated in the near future if they decide to join.
- It allows a mock work interaction with the candidate at a very low risk cost to you. After the project is complete, you can bring the candidate in and ask them questions about their actual design/coding decisions. This lets you get a sense of how they communicate, take criticism/questioning and if they are able to provide solid reasoning behind their choices.

For the Candidate

- It gives the candidate a real life sense of how you interact with people on the team
- Allows them to showcase some of the skills that are on their resume, but may not pop from just reading it
- Allows them to give you a sense of what they feel is important in a non-judgemental way. For example, did the person write a test for every line of code? No? Maybe that’s not really important to them and maybe that’s totally valid.

You'd never get that from just asking them do you do TDD? Everyone will say tests are important...and they are. The thing most people disagree about is how important, this will show that.

I have 6 rules when giving this interview method

RULE #1 — Give them the weekend to solve the problem.

This is where I and Eric slightly disagree. 2 hours just isn't enough time to see how well someone can come up with an appropriate solution.

What I like to do is invite them to the office on a Friday and go over the problem at hand and how I would like for them to solve it. Then I'll hand it off to them and set up time on Monday to review their solution.

I'll provide them with certain technologies that should be used for the solution and let them use other tools or technologies at their discretion. For example, I may say please use functional reactive principles in JS to solve this problem, but the decision of using Kefir, Bacon, or RX is left up to them.

RULE #2 — DON'T use a real problem because of tribe knowledge needed to fix.

This goes hand in hand with Rule #1, but unless you're hiring a customer service rep, it's almost impossible to hand someone a computer and say OK, Fix this issue happening in our proprietary system using the tools that normally everyone gets properly trained on.

Give a problem that is very self contained.

RULE #3 — The solution you're expecting should be clear, but open for improvement.

For example. If I'm interviewing a web developer, I'll give him a sample clear scenario:

Create a single page app that lets me enter movies in my home movie collection, store them in offline storage and search through them. I want to search by Genre, Title & Actors.

I actually don't tell them further directions like use web storage vs cookies, or make it responsive on multiple platforms and use a custom stylesheet. I leave that up to them. Some choose to do what we asked, and some do much more.

In the end, what matters is that we like the end result.

I don't say "I like movies, create me a nice movie website", or "How would you architect IMDB if you had to create it from scratch." I want the task to be simple enough that the engineer can provide a solution and challenging enough so they can use their skills to create something special.

RULE #4 – Let them present their solution to a group on Monday.

The biggest issue I have seen with tech hires is that they can become very defensive over their solution. I will purposely challenge their solution to see how they react.

If they get defensive, it's an immediate no-go. Remember, there's a difference between defending which is good and being defensive which is bad. The difference is that the former is based on rational facts, the other is based on emotion.

A key aspect of this is that everyone in the group **MUST** come prepared, having looked through the solution.

RULE #5 – Write the problem down for them to take home.

Be clear about what technologies, tools and look you're after, and the standards being judged. At the same time, leave the final solution open enough that the candidate can add their own flair. Let them ask you any questions they have on Friday, and make sure to be available for their questions via email over the weekend. The goal is to create an environment of success (hopefully like you would for an employee).

RULE #6 — Pay them immediately on Monday

Hire them or not, something about giving them a check after they present their solution is the best way to start or end a relationship.

Another way to do this is to use June [disclaimer: I'm a co-founder there] to facilitate the interview and payment.

To hire or not to hire that is the question

Indicators you should hire this person:

- During the meeting on Friday they asked a lot of clarifying questions
- The questions were thought out and made sure that nothing was misunderstood
- The solution addressed your problem using the technologies and techniques you prescribed
- They read the entire problem and followed the instructions correctly (i.e. if the problem said use PostgreSQL, they didn't give you queries that only work on Oracle DBs).

Indicators you shouldn't hire this person:

- They refuse to do the project because "someone will hire me without it".
- Didn't complete the project correctly
- They can't articulate their design/coding decisions and why they were made.
- They get defensive when presenting their solution

In Summary

Your mileage may vary, but I found this technique to work wonders for hiring talented tech talent. While my sample size may not be huge, I've yet to have it lead to a bad hire.

About Me

I'm Amir Yasin, the CTO and Co-Founder of [June](#). Get Paid to speak with the best IT recruiters in the world.

I'm a polyglot developer deeply interested in high performance, scalability, software architecture and generally solving hard problems. You can [follow me on Medium](#) where I blog about software engineering, [follow me on Twitter](#) where I occasionally say interesting things, or check out [my contributions to the FOSS community on GitHub](#).



Christophe Limpalair

6 min read



Why the founder of Rails automatically rejects 80% of Software Engineer applicants

I recently sat down with David Heinemeier Hansson to ask him why he hired certain Software Engineers over others.

If you don't know him, David is the founder of Ruby on Rails and CTO of Basecamp.

His answers outright shocked me.

Not because of the methods he uses, but because of the **mistakes 80% of applicants make** that automatically cuts them out of the pool.

The remaining 20% gets cut for reasons that are even more shocking.

(I know 80+20 is 100%. I'm rounding up assuming 1 person out of 150+ gets accepted)

The good news? These mistakes are easily avoidable once you know about them. This means you can easily get through the first 2 steps of Basecamp's hiring process (for Software Engineers, at least).

Sure, the third and last step is more challenging (as you'll see), but you drastically increase your odds if you get past the first 2 steps.

I *had* to write this article, because it almost feels like I have insider information that could give me an advantage over the majority of other applicants.

Sharing information is my mission for ScaleYourCode in the first place—to give you access to information from experts, no matter where you live or what your financial means are.

Let's get to it.

Resume and Cover Letter — 80% fail this



I'm sure you've seen a *ton* of resume and cover letter advice on the internet.

Yet, 80% of people get cut out of the selection process just because of their resume and cover letter. So obviously, this still needs to be mentioned.

The crazy part is that I've had multiple "technical recruiters" give me advice in the past to "improve my resume", and their advice is the opposite of what David looks for.

Things like:

- Education should be at the top
- Add your GPA
- List places you've worked at in reverse chronological order

If you want a job at Basecamp, that's not going to cut it.

First of all, David has not found education indicators to be helpful when hiring programmers. The same goes for people who have worked at prestigious firms.

Second of all, none of those things provide actionable information.

"What am I going to use that for? I think resumes in the general sense are pretty worthless when they come to assessing the capabilities of a programmer."

Before you wave your fists at me and tell me this is wrong because company X wants GPAs listed, or company Y wants education on top, read this next paragraph.

With cover letters, the main reason for rejection comes from the fact that people just send generic resumes. They don't show an interest in the company itself. *The same thing goes for your resume.* It needs to be tailored to the company

How is what you are listing on your resume relevant to the company you are applying for? Do your research on the company and figure out what they are doing, then highlight how your experiences and interests align with that.

Your code looks terrible! — 20% fail this

You can usually make an opinion of someone's skill after seeing a substantial amount of their work.

- How much does the person care about the presentation of their code?
- How diligent is the person with the quality of their code?

“A lot of people fail that test”

A lot of code is poorly indented, poorly named, and poorly scoped. They've even had people submit files with commented out lines of code!

```
module InstanceMethods
  def auth(unencrypted_pwd)
    // pwd_digest == encr_pwd(unencrypted_pwd)
    pwd_digest == encr_pwd(unencrypted_pwd) ? self : false
  end

  def pwd=(unencrypted_pwd)
    @pwd = unencrypted_pwd
    self.pwd_digest = encr_pwd(unencrypted_pwd)
  end
end
```

Example of bad naming, poor indentation, and commented out code

```

module InstanceMethods
  # Returns self if the password is correct, otherwise false.
  def authenticate(unencrypted_password)
    password_digest == encrypt_password(unencrypted_password) ? self : false
  end

  # Encrypts the password into the password_digest attribute.
  def password=(unencrypted_password)
    @password = unencrypted_password
    self.password_digest = encrypt_password(unencrypted_password)
  end
end
end

```

Example of better naming, proper indentation, and cleaning out unused code

“They submit a piece of code without cleaning it up. It’s kind of like inviting your prospective employer over to your house and you didn’t fucking even clean up. You had some people over last night and there’s all sorts of crap all over the floor.”

This one really blew my mind. I even tried to make excuses for this by asking if he had just pulled up someone’s GitHub account randomly, but he assured me that these files were *submitted* to them.

Your Code is Clean, But Not Great

“What do you mean my code isn’t great?”

It’s impossible to answer this question in an email. Think of it like a short story, and the author asks why you think it sucks. You can’t really point to a paragraph, because the entire story doesn’t sound right.

Improve your code.

How bad would I be if I just left it at that ;?

I would never do that... I’ll just charge you \$100 if you want to know

what I mean by bad code ;

Alright, alright, enough joking around...

Bad code' is mostly just basic level stuff, like:

- Having methods that are 15 lines long and do 5 different things
- Tons of global variables
- Poorly named variables
- Poor commenting

So how do you learn and improve your code?

Practice, practice, practice. And read.

David personally recommends [Smalltalk: Best Practice Patterns](#). I recommend [Clean Code](#) by Robert C. Martin. Here's another one: [Refactoring: Improving the Design of Existing Code](#).

A [reader](#) also recommended [Practical Object-Oriented Design in Ruby](#) by Sandi Metz.

These books are kind of like books that teach you how to write well. They talk about proper naming, and proper composition, for example. This means going through lots of code examples, not just theory.

Bonus: Open Source Contributions

While David emphasized that you do *not* need to have contributed to open source projects, it can be very beneficial. Not only does it give you extra practice at making your code better, but you also make connections:

Example:

For the last test of their hiring process, Basecamp makes you write code for them. They pay you to work on a side project so they can judge you on your skillset.

Once you go through that process with a number of candidates, it's very clear who you need to hire. You get to see how they work, think, and solve problems.s.

Some people, however, have been hired straight from the Rails core group of contributors. This makes sense, because David can easily judge someone's skills if they've contributed to Rails.

Actions to take now

Before you send your resume and cover letter, ask yourself this: How does this information relate to the company/job I'm applying to/for.

Before you show off code to an employer, go through it line by line and clean it up: Have more meaningful names, delete commented out lines of code, leave meaningful comments but don't overdo it.

To improve your code: Obviously, code more. But don't just blindly code more... follow standards even if it takes more time and slows you down. Read books like Smalltalk: Best Practice Patterns, Clean Code by Robert C. Martin, Refactoring: Improving the Design of Existing Code.

If you have any other book recommendations, I'd love to hear about them.

What do you think? Is education a helpful indicator when hiring Software Engineers?

. . .

If you enjoyed this article, you may also enjoy my podcast and other articles.



Jacob Laukaitis

6 min read

What I Learned When I Gave Up the '9 to 5'

...

Presented by **Upwork**TM



My grandparents, who were born and raised in the Soviet Union, had a very simple idea of success. They wanted to find one job, and do it for the rest of their lives. For them, this was ideal because it allowed them to stay firmly inside their comfort zones.

They wanted life to be uncomplicated and predictable: Go to the office at 9 am, make sure you look like you're busy all day, stay under the radar, and leave at 5 pm.

Two generations and a few decades later, much has changed. I hate simple and predictable; I dislike offices; I don't want to stay under the radar; and I *love* being outside my comfort zone.

Concurrently, 50 years ago, companies needed their employees to be gathered under a single roof to enable industrial production at scale. But today, they've begun to understand that as long as employees deliver results, their physical location and work hours don't matter.

As a result, a new class of employees has emerged: people whose work is completely location and time independent. Digital nomads spend their time traveling while working—taking freelance assignments from Bali, running their own businesses from Barcelona or working for an employer in San Francisco from Singapore.

There are thousands of us around the world. And I couldn't imagine living any other way.

It's become increasingly clear that time spent in the office and productivity aren't necessarily related. What one employee can achieve in four hours may take another one eight. Some are more efficient in the morning, and others work better in the evening; some like working in an office, while others don't.

At the company I co-founded, ChameleonJohn.com, we actually encourage employees to spend time away from the office. We're confused when somebody asks if they can go to their friend's graduation party or their mother's birthday. As long as they're delivering results, they are free to do whatever they like.

From a superficial perspective, it might seem as though digital nomads are terrible employees. They're constantly flying around and are rarely reachable on demand. (Because nobody takes their phone diving or surfing.)

But as crazy as it sounds, I'd argue that the contrary is true.

People are *much* happier when they're living where they want and spending their time doing things they're passionate about. As a digital nomad, you can architect the life you want. If you like to surf, you can move to a surf town; if you're into motorbiking long distances, you can go on a six-week-long trip through Vietnam.

A wonderful example of a company that had successfully hired hundreds of remote workers is MySQL. I've had quite a few discussions with their long-time CEO Marten Mickos who sold the company for \$1B in 2008. At its peak the company employed 500 people full-time from 36 countries and didn't have a single office. He told me:

"It is very easy to look busy in the office by attending meetings, answering e-mails and drinking coffee. But when you work remotely, the question you will be asked time and time again is: 'Where are the results?' Not only that, if we hired people only in the Bay Area, we would not have had the access to the best talent in the world, whereas now we can hire a person from literally anywhere. And we save tons of money on office rent."

The happier your employees are, the more they'll love their jobs, the more innovative they'll be, and the better they'll treat your users/customers. It's an undeniable cause and effect relationship—one that'll eventually lead to more sales and greater profit.

Of No Fixed Address

I've been living this nomadic lifestyle for a little less than two years now. During that time I've traveled to 25 countries. I've motorbiked through islands in Thailand and the Philippines, hiked an active volcano in Indonesia, learned how to surf, gotten my deep-sea diver's license in the Gili Islands, explored new cultures and met dozens of wonderful people.

All through this time, my only possessions have fit into a small backpack.
(Incidentally, it's the same backpack that I used to carry to school back in the day).



Our society is obsessed with the idea of “ownership.” A quote by Dave Ramsay perfectly describes this phenomenon:

“People buy things they don’t need with money they don’t have to impress people they don’t like”.

But I’ve found that owning things is simply impractical: You need to take care of it; it attaches you to a specific location; and it’s usually more expensive than renting.

I also haven’t had a fixed address in the past two years because I rarely spend more than a month in a single country. This means that I’m free to go anywhere I want whenever I want. I can hop from Thailand to Japan to Indonesia without spending months selling my things and renting out my apartment.

I simply buy a flight ticket and leave.

As the idea of nomadism catches on, though, long-held attitudes towards the concept of ownership are also changing. Companies like [AirBnb](#) (house/room short-term rent), [Vinted](#) (selling and swapping used clothes), [RelayRides](#) (peer-to-peer car rent) are growing in popularity. Their benefits are manifold: from convenience for users to reducing the planet's collective carbon footprint.

A Thousand Perspectives

After every one of my adventures I give a lot of thought to what I've seen, learned and taken away. In Japan I learned the value of selflessness and of caring deeply about the wellbeing of those around me. In Myanmar I learned that happiness is in no way defined by the money you have. In Vietnam I understood the importance of family.

These experiences certainly go a long way in shaping the way I approach my life, but they're also becoming the basis of my professional thinking. They help me see opportunities outside the west, and create products for underserved societies.

For example, I now know that Indonesia has the fourth largest population on the planet with 250M people. But these people are distributed between 17,000 islands, presenting a massive logistical challenge for new products entering the country. In Myanmar, I can see a very big market of 65M people with huge potential. The Internet is extremely slow, and public transport is practically nonexistent.

The country is ready for some big innovation after decades of oppression under the military junta.

Digital nomadism has the potential to make the world a little smaller, and digital innovation a little more inclusive.

There's Never A Better Time

Steve Jobs once said:

“Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. There is no reason not to follow your heart.”

It’s the guiding principle I use while making important life decisions. It’s why I became a nomad.

If you’ve ever dreamed of exploring the world, this is the time to do it. It won’t require sacrificing your career. There are thousands of us ready to help you, tons of ways to make a living, and countless things to experience and places to see.

More tips on [how to become a digital nomad](#) by e-mail [More about me at \[JacobLaukaitis.com\]\(#\)](#)

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Jason Fried

The Person They'll Become

One of the biggest challenges when hiring someone is trying to envision their potential.

Sometimes someone's a sure bet. They're the perfect person for the perfect project at the perfect time. Their pedigree is exceptional, their portfolio is stocked with amazing work, their experience is vast, they're a confident interview, and everything just feels right.

It happens, but that's not how it usually works. There are very few perfect people.

Instead there's a lot of future perfect people. People who have the potential to become the perfect person in the perfect role if just given the right opportunity.

When I hire designers, I look for future perfect people. Some people have the potential, but they haven't had the opportunities. Their portfolios are full of mediocre work, but it's not because they're mediocre designers. It's because they've been given mediocre opportunities.

A lot of future perfect people are stuck in current mediocre positions. They just haven't had the chance to do their best work.

While it's a bonus to find that perfect person today, I find more it more rewarding (for me and them) to pluck the future perfect person out of their mediocre job today. I love betting on people with potential. When they finally get that chance to do their best work, they blossom in such a special way.

And as the owner of a company, few things make me prouder than seeing someone excelling in a way that their resume/portfolio/references wouldn't have suggested they could.



Raghav Haran

8 min read

How to Get Any Job You Want (even if you're unqualified)

By Raghav Haran, originally shared with my private email list

If I had to describe 3 things about New Yorkers, I'd say:

- 1) they hate tourists
- 2) they hate every other city on the planet
- 3) THEY ALL look good.

Maybe it's just because I'm from the Midwest. But to me, everybody in NYC looks like they go to the gym.

I had tried a bunch of times to gain weight previously, but to no avail. Being around all these jacked guys made me want to give it another shot.

But I needed to try something different. So last summer, I hired a personal trainer in NYC.



This is what I miss most about New York City. No, not the Empire State Building. The Equinox gym.

And I was *super* happy with the results. So happy that I was thinking about maybe getting another trainer in my hometown after I went back.

I told my NYC trainer about this. He asked, “Are they professionally certified in strength training and nutrition?”

I had no idea.

How many people do you know who say “I want to get ripped. I need advice from someone who has certifications in nutrition and strength training!”

The only people who say that are the people who have those fancy credentials.

The buyers don't care!

They just find the most ripped person they know, and ask THEM what to do.

. . .

Years ago, I was interviewing for an internship at a startup. I had a good resume, and the people at the company knew I went to a good school. I thought I had the offer in the bag.

But I never heard back from them.

I found out later that they hired some guy from a random community college in a city I'd never heard of. He didn't have as much related experience either.

How's that possible?

It turns out that people *applying* for a job care more about their own credentials than the people who are *hiring* them.

This is very counterintuitive.

Average applicants obsess over getting the right credentials and being “qualified” on paper. Meanwhile behind the scenes, companies are playing a totally different game.

Here's what goes on behind closed doors

Credentials and paper qualifications DO matter for some (mainly academic) industries like medicine or law, but for most other fields, job requirements are surprisingly negotiable.

Companies can sometimes get over a hundred applications for a *single position*, so they need to have some way of weeding people out to keep that number manageable. The best way of doing that is by saying “graduate degree required”, “5+ years of experience required”, etc.

What they're REALLY thinking is “we don't want to go through a bunch of applications of people who don't know what they're doing—a person with 5+ years of experience could most likely do a good job”.

If you can *prove* to them that you can solve their problem, you instantly decommo-ditize yourself, and none of those things on paper matter as much.

This is exactly how I've gotten interviews and job offers for positions that require masters degrees, MBAs, degrees in subjects I've never studied, and more years of experience than I have.

So how do you prove to them that you can solve their problem?

Do the job before you get the job.

I call this the “pre-interview project”.

For example, if you're applying for a sales/marketing role, a good pre-interview project could be selling some of the company's products and writing a document about it. If you're applying for a design related role, you can mockup some new designs for the company and tell them why you made those decisions.

Today, I'm going to show you exactly how to choose the perfect pre-interview project (including real life examples), who to send it to within the company you're applying to, and how to structure the email to so that it's well received (I'll even give you sample email templates to use).

Let's get started.

Step 1: Narrow in on a few existing jobs

This process is not as quick as sending your resume out a bunch of times, but it is more effective.

While everyone else is spamming their resume to a hundred companies just to get a few interviews (if any), you'll pick just a handful of jobs to apply to and crush them all.

First, go on some job boards, and choose 3–5 jobs you'd like to have.

Here are some good rules to keep in mind when you're looking at the requirements on job descriptions:

- It's OK if you're a few years below the minimum experience level, but not TOO far below. If you're just a college grad, don't go for senior level jobs that require 7–10+ years of experience. But you CAN go for jobs that require, say, 3–5 years of experience even if you only have 1.
- It's OK if your education level is a little below the required amount, but again, not too much below. For example—even though I never went to grad school, I've been able to get interviews for internships that required an MBA, and full time jobs that required a masters, but jobs that require PhDs are out of my league.

Make sure that you can actually DO the job. You might not need credentials, but you do need the skills to get results.

Once you have your 3-5 jobs, move on to step 2.

Step 2: Outline what you'll be doing on the job

By getting a good understanding of what you'll be doing everyday on the job, you'll know *exactly* what the perfect pre-interview project should be to prove that you'd be the right fit.

The only thing you really need at hand to figure this out is the job description.

Make a special note of the day to day tasks you can do right away. For example, “analyzing churn data” isn’t something you can immediately do (because you need a good amount of internal information for that) but “form partnerships with local businesses” definitely is something you can help do without already being at the company. Once you have your 3–5 jobs, move on to step 2.

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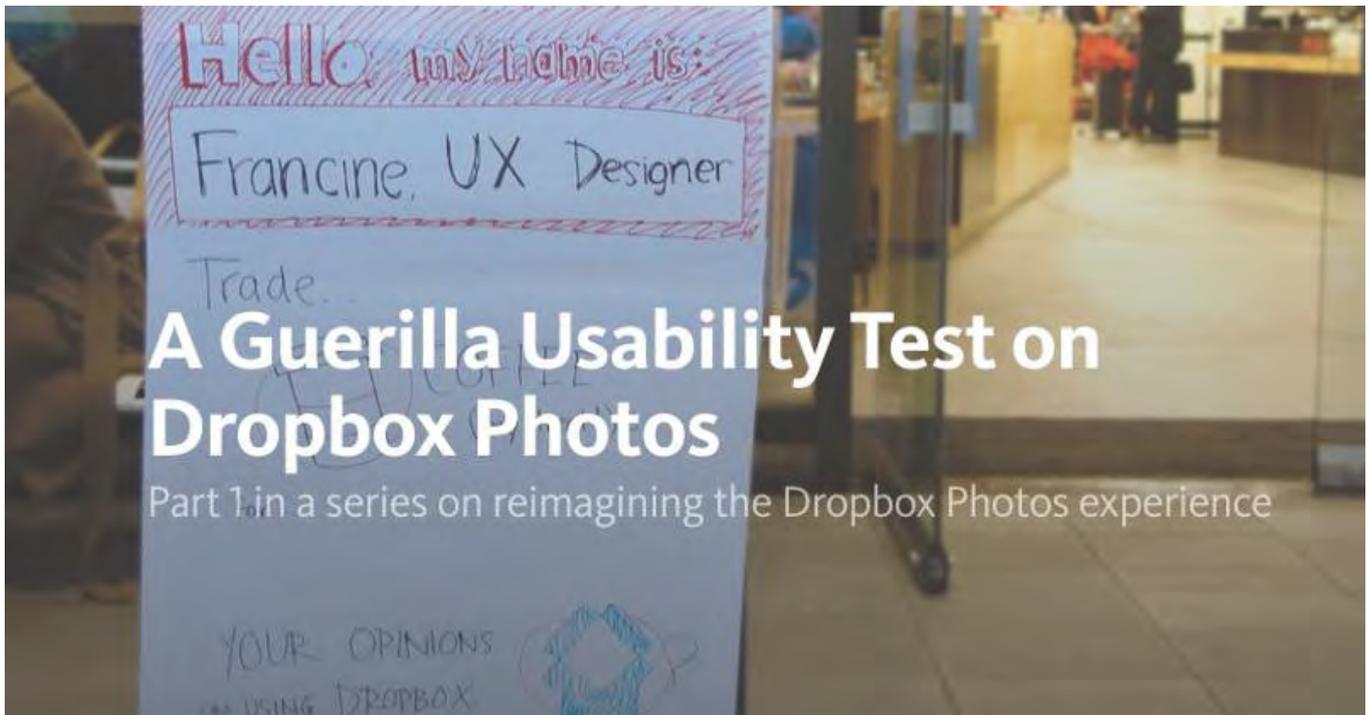
Step 3: Do one pre-interview project per company

Now that you know what the company expects you to do day to day, you can *actually do it* ahead of time and prove to them that you can solve their problems.

When I was applying for a business development role for [Kiip](#), I pitched a few companies on forming partnerships with them, and introduced them to the biz dev team. I ended up getting an offer.

When I was applying for product development related positions, I ran quick usability tests on companies’ products, documented my process, created some design suggestions and sent it to the head of each design team. [Here’s an example of what I did for Airbnb.](#)

This sort of thing got me interviews at major tech companies like Quora, and it even led to Shutterstock creating a position specifically for me.



Francine did a usability test on Dropbox Photos and posted an article about it on Medium.

My friend Francine Lee did something similar (but MUCH more in depth for Dropbox, and then got a job there. David Rogier wanted a product management position at Evernote, so he interviewed 23 customers and wrote 10 slides about how he could improve the product and sent it to the CEO—the CEO emailed him back in 30 minutes and asked him to come in.

Doing a pre-interview project makes you stand out because the secret sauce is hard work. So most people will never do it.

Step 4: Send your project in

Next, you want to find the *right* person within the company to send your project to so that it actually gets noticed.

If you're applying to a smaller company, this is pretty straightforward—you can send it to the head of the department you're interviewing for, or even the CEO. Most people have a personal page online you can reach out through—if not, you can easily guess their work email (it's usually or something like that).

Here's a sample email template you can use:

Hi [name],

I'm [your name] and I noticed you're hiring a [position], and I'm interested. I thought it would be helpful for me to [insert a good description of your pre-interview project] to both show my interest and the value I could bring to [company].

[Present the project here — if you just did a writeup (i.e. a design suggestion) then a link or image would do. If you pitched businesses for partnerships, ask if the person you're emailing would like to be introduced, etc]

Quick background on me: [insert a quick 2–3 sentence summary of your background as it relates to this job]

Thanks so much for your time — hope to hear from you regarding next steps!

Best,

[your name]

If it's a big company (like Microsoft, Amazon, etc), it gets a bit trickier because not everyone in the same department will know each other (so your doc might not get shared with the right person). In cases like this, I'd suggest waiting until you get an interview, *then* do your project, and send it to all your interviewers before the interview date. Here's a sample email script you can use for this situation:

Hi [name],

[Employee name] mentioned that I'd be chatting with you on [date] as part of my interview for the [position] at [company]

[Present the project here (insert link, ask if they'd like to be introduced to a potential partner, etc)]

Just thought I'd sent it over now in case you'd like to chat about it during the interview (if you think it would be appropriate, of course).

Best,

[your name]

Every time I've done this, my interviews have gone SUPER smoothly and I usually end up getting an offer.

“But this won't work in my field. MY field is different!”

No. It's not.

It's just human behavior. People want their problems solved, and they're *much more likely* to hire someone who's already working on solving them than someone who MIGHT solve them.

Try it. It works. And if you *are* proactive, do a project specifically for a company, and they STILL don't respond, what does that say about their culture? Then you know that company is not the one you want to work for.

It's a win-win.

—
Like this post? In my private email list, I share specific strategies to help you:

- *Figure out what your dream job is*
- *Make the right connections without coming off as “salesy” (even if you live in the middle of nowhere)*
- *Craft your application in such a way that the hiring manager can’t say no (even if you’re unqualified)*
- *Crush every interview*
- *And much more*

[Sign up here](#)

Originally posted on [Land Any Job You Want](#).



Sarah Knight

7 min read

**I Quit My Job Today.
(And so can you!)**

Today was my last day as a senior editor at a major publishing company, a little over five years after starting in this particular job and fifteen years into a career I once thought I wanted more than anything else.

As it turns out, what I really want more than anything else is to be happy.

When I was fifteen, I tried to quit my summer job at a local surf & turf restaurant. My prickly, crazy-eyed manager was always hitting on my boyfriend, who also worked there. The owner was a squirrely Jehovah's Witness who made me uncomfortable every time he showed up on site. I was tired of sloshing pepperoncini into the salad bar every day for a bunch of ungrateful Canadian tourists who never tipped. (Sorry, Canadians, but this was an epidemic in Southern Maine beach towns in the mid-nineties.) It was the tail end of the season and my boyfriend convinced me we should both just quit and enjoy our Labor Day weekend—far from the reeking bus bins and the scallop-scented fry batter that clung like barnacles to our Gap khakis.

Look, I was young and in love and this was the first time I had ever even *considered* railing against The Man. It was terrifying but also, liberating! I would march into my boss's office, untie my dirty green apron, and announce that he could take his chewed-up Bic pen and cross me off the schedule. Permanently.

I plotted, I schemed, I rehearsed my quitting speech. I mustered my cojones.

When our four-minute conversation was over I was near tears and shaking with what my thirty-six-year-old self recognizes as panic, but at the time felt like imminent death. To add insult to injury, my mother was waiting in the parking lot to pick me up from my shift. Heaving my *cojones* wordlessly into her minivan, I couldn't bring myself to tell her right away that I'd quit. Somehow I instinctively felt like it had been the wrong thing to do—even though my boss was a jackass and even though my manager was totally inappropriate and even though I really *hated* smelling like the bottom of a Fryolator every day when I got home.

The next morning, my parents were waiting for me on the couch. My boss had called to inform them of my “rash” decision and asked them to intervene, saying I was too important to the successful operation of the restaurant to lose at this critical juncture. Lots of Canadians, it seemed, would be clamoring for the soggy, overpriced lobster rolls that only I could serve them.

Let me be clear: this is like saying that a single fifteen-year-old in the Zhengzhou factory is critical to Apple making its quarterly numbers.

I knew, my parents knew, and my boss knew that my presence or absence was not likely to alter the fate of his glorified-Applebee’s establishment during the dog days of August. I think he was just pissed off, suddenly down not one, but two able-bodied minimum wage employees, and he knew that he could ruin the paltry remains of my summer by pulling “parent rank.” And given my anxiety-laced speech the night before, he probably also suspected that he’d be outing me before I’d had a chance to let mom and dad know I was not the future valedictorian they thought they’d raised, but rather a sniveling little quitter.

They calmly told me I had to suck it up and go back. I cried and fumbled to assert myself. This was so unfair! They held firm. I had made a commitment to this job, they said, and we do not just renege on our commitments when the going gets tough. Or fishy.



I didn't have a solid argument. I wasn't leaving for a better gig or more money. I wasn't building a career in food service that necessitated a move up the ladder to Mike's Clam Shack. I wasn't moving to New Hampshire, nor had I been diagnosed with a severe shellfish allergy. I just wasn't happy, and I didn't want to show up. Another. Single. God. Damn. Day.

But of course I went back, apron strings between my legs. Neither my life nor my summer was ruined (though I did break up with my newly unemployed boyfriend), but that incident drilled something into me that's been impossible to shake until very recently: the idea that happiness should not take precedence over some amorphous sense of commitment.

Now, I'm not talking about happiness over responsible decision-making. This was a summer job, earning pin money—it's not like I was walking out on the source of my entire family's grocery bill or jeopardizing my college fund. Two dollars and forty cents an hour, plus tips from non-Canadians, was not going to send me to Harvard. I'm talking about feeling like it was "wrong" to quit this job for no other reason than because I was unhappy.

I felt awful while I was doing it, and not greatly relieved when it was done. And when I got called out by my parents and had to go back, those feelings were reinforced. I was the bad guy in this scenario, and I never wanted to feel like that again.

I've had a number of jobs since then that I wanted to quit. Like at the bookstore where I was routinely derided by my manager for "being a know-it-all" (also known as "having read the books I was recommending to the customers"). But I had signed on to work through the fall rush—students at the nearby college bought their textbooks from this shop—and I kept my commitment, even when I got a career-track offer to work for a prestigious literary agent. I pulled sixteen-hour weekends at the store while starting my new gig as an agent's assistant during the week.

Nearly a year into that job and I was developing emphysema from being confined to a townhouse all day with a two pack-a-day smoker who also turned out to be verbally abusive, probably alcoholic, and very, very cheap. Did I want to quit? Almost every day. But did I responsibly seek out a new job and then magnanimously offer my soon-to-be-ex boss a full month's notice—*during the holidays*— before leaving? Yes to that, too.

(And still, when I showed up a couple months later to pay my respects at her mother's wake, she introduced me to the gathered crowd as, "My assistant who abandoned me when my mother was dying," ensuring that even after doing everything above board, I now felt retroactively bad about quitting.)

Today, as a fifteen-year veteran of the publishing industry, I can say that I have left jobs for better jobs and to claw my way up the corporate ladder, but I never, ever quit anything again just for the sake of happiness.

Until now.

I quit my job today.

I quit because I felt trapped.

I quit because life is getting shorter every day.

I quit because I fucking *hate* riding the subway twice a day during commuting hours.

But mostly I quit because I was really, really unhappy.

Look, it wasn't all bad. I had a supportive boss and smart colleagues and the freedom to work on truly excellent books; but over time I realized that the business of publishing wasn't perfectly conducive to the business of "me remaining sane."

So . . . I quit.

Are people disappointed in me? Well, I've accumulated many sleepless nights, intermittent bouts of nausea, and a lovely pink rash worrying about precisely this issue. But I've determined that those who are, will ultimately carry on just fine without me. I mean, I like to think I'm a pretty valuable asset, but it's not as though I abandoned my post as the only doctor in town during a smallpox outbreak.

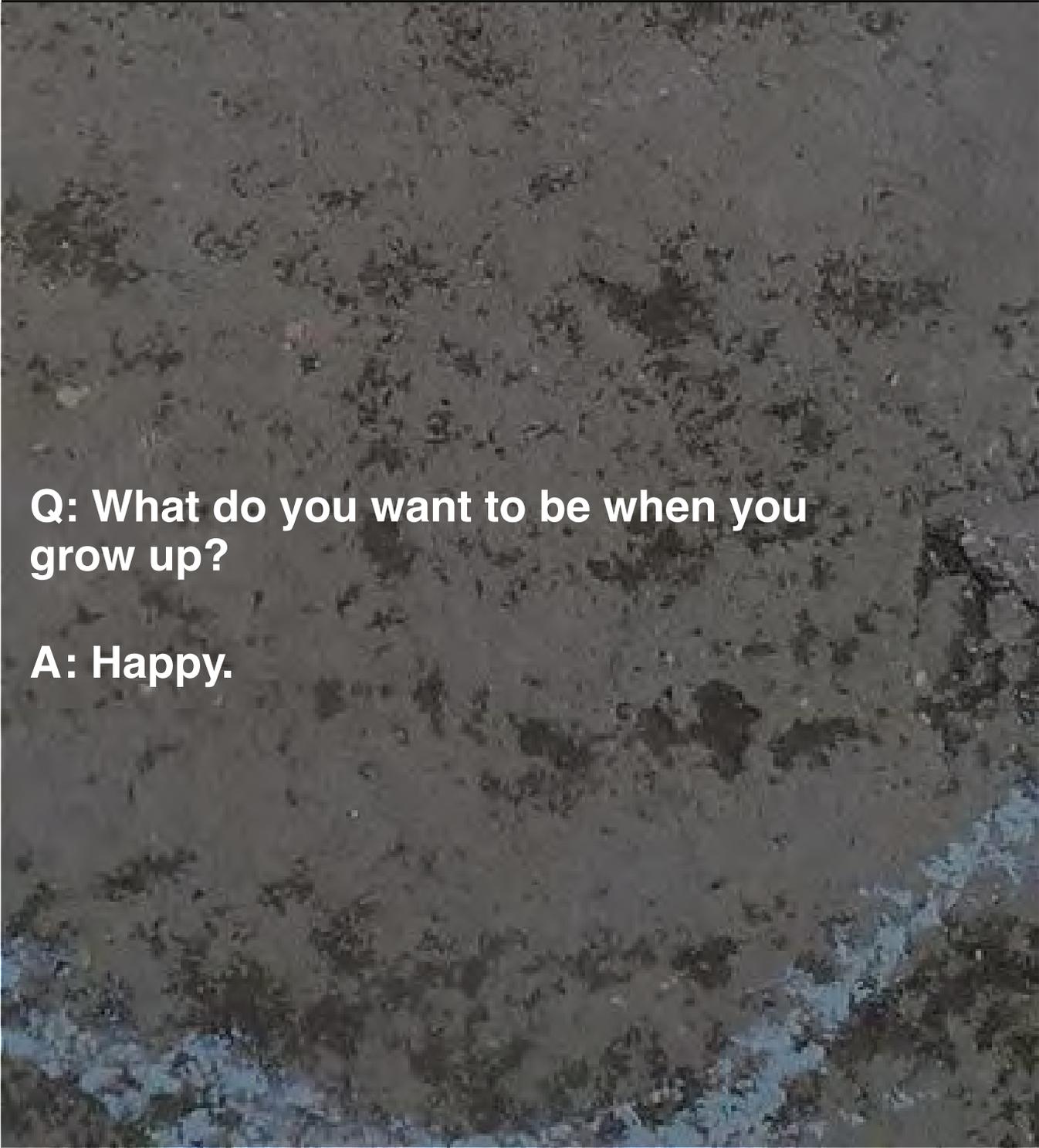
Okay, but did I have a competing offer, you ask? Nope.

Did I win the lottery? Sadly, also nope.

I just wanted to be happier, and in order to achieve that, I had to become someone I've always looked down on: a quitter.

Yes, I have some savings, and a husband who does well, and I have a plan for the next phase of my working life. I'm not trying to peddle the notion that everyone should walk out on his or her job without giving it careful consideration from many angles. But, it's like how we always ask little kids: "What do you want to be when you grow up?" and the answer we expect is something like: "A doctor." "A hairdresser." "A pilot." "A ballerina."

Maybe the answer we should be looking for is much more simple, and universal.



Q: What do you want to be when you grow up?

A: Happy.

Twenty-two years into my working life, from two dollars-an-hour to a six-figure salary, I finally came to the realization that my happiness is contingent upon a number of things, including spending more time with my husband, avoiding a soul-crushing commute, not working traditional 9–5 hours, and being my own boss. And I realized that it was eminently possible for me to have all of these things—not some, but ALL—if I left my current job.

But still, there was this little voice in the back of my head that said, *You can't just . . . just . . . QUIT. Can you?*

Well, as it turns out, you can.

And I did.

And I'm pretty happy about it.

Blacklivesmarter / Race / Racism



Aaron Z. Lewis

5 min read



Photo credit: [Yale Daily News](#)

What's Really Going On at Yale

By now, you've probably seen the video of a Yale student yelling at a professor, the Facebook post about a "white girls only" party, or the email about offensive Halloween costumes. Unfortunately, the short YouTube clips and articles I've seen don't even come close to painting an accurate picture of what's happening at Yale. I'm a senior here, and I've experienced the controversy firsthand over the past week (and years). I want to tell a more complete story and set a few facts straight.

For starters: the protests are not really about Halloween costumes or a frat party. They're about a mismatch between the Yale we find in admissions brochures and the Yale we experience every day. They're about real experiences with racism on this campus that have gone unacknowledged for far too long. The university sells itself as a welcoming and inclusive place for people of all backgrounds. Unfortunately, it often isn't.

On Friday, November 6th, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education published an [article](#) that made it seem like Yale students are only rallying because of an [email](#) sent by Professor Erika Christakis, which suggested that people should feel free to wear culturally insensitive costumes on Halloween. The reality is that students at Yale have been speaking up about serious racial issues on campus for many, many years—long before Erika Christakis even set foot here. But chronic racism isn't newsworthy. It quietly whittles away at the hearts and minds of people who feel like they're not being heard.

I sat in the Afro-American Cultural Center last week with several hundred students and listened to people of color share their stories. For three hours, my friends spoke out about the racial discrimination they've experienced at Yale—in and out of the classroom. Many people (especially women of color) said they feel physically and psychologically unsafe here. Several women said they were turned away from a Halloween party at SAE because it was for “white girls only.” Some news outlets have tried to turn this into a debate about what *exactly* happened at the door of SAE on Halloween. But that's not the point. For students of color, the incident is a symbol of the kind of racism that they deal with far too often on this campus. [UPDATE: The truth about what happened at SAE is certainly important, but the frat party is not at all the focus of students' protests.]

Last year, there were swastikas found outside a freshman dorm. The Yale College Dean, Jonathan Holloway, sent an email to the entire student body condemning this “shameful defacement” within *one day*.

It took almost a full week for Yale's president to formally acknowledge students' legitimate concerns about racism and the incident at SAE. Here's what happened while we waited for a sign of support from the administration.

Monday, November 2nd: Students were forced to reschedule an open forum about “cultural appropriation and the power of language” due to threats. The president remained silent.

Tuesday, November 3rd: Holloway [declined to comment](#) on the SAE incident, but the Dean of Student Engagement began an investigation.

The president remained silent.

Wednesday, November 4th : Students shared hours and hours worth of stories about discrimination they've experienced on this campus at the rescheduled open forum. The president remained silent.

Thursday, November 5th : Hundreds of students gathered in the middle of campus to share their experiences with Holloway, who was eventually moved to tears.



Dean Jonathan Holloway listens to students' stories outside the university's main library. Photo credit: Razvan Azamfirei

Not even one hour after this huge gathering, Yale's president sent an email to the entire student body announcing the launch of a completely unrelated initiative. He remained silent on the topic of race. At night, 50 students met with the administration in the president's office to discuss the issue of systematic racism at Yale. The president remained silent.

Friday, November 6th: We finally received a letter from the administration.

Dean Jonathan Holloway in his own words:

I write too late for too many of you, I freely admit, to make it clear that I heard every word that was spoken and I watched every tear that was shed, whether on Cross Campus or in Woodbridge Hall ... This week's conversations don't affect only some of us; they affect and include us all. As you talk to one another, listen to one another, and sometimes disagree, do this knowing that I will uphold your right to speak and be heard and that I will enforce the community standards that safeguard you as members of this community. I do this as I hold us all, including myself, accountable to give what we seek: respect.

Students should not have to become community organizers just to receive acknowledgement and respect from their administrators. It's disheartening to feel like so few people in power have your back. Yes, we are angry. We are tired. We are emotionally drained. We feel like we have to yell in order to make our voices heard. While the stories in the press are about this one particular week at Yale, we've been working toward solutions for years.

I've heard a lot of people dismiss this situation out of hand because Yale is a "place of privilege." But if racial discrimination of any kind can happen at a place like this, then it's certainly happening elsewhere in this country.

I hope it's obvious now that Yale students are concerned about far more than just an email or a frat party. In the petty debates about these two specific incidents, people have lost sight of the larger issue: systemic racism on campus. There's absolutely no reason why we can't acknowledge both the value of free speech *and* the reality of the prejudice that students of color face every day. It saddens me that this has gotten to the point where people feel like they have to take sides. We should all strive for a future where, at the very least, people feel physically safe and confident in their own humanity. Let's focus on the goals we share, not the unproductive debates that divide us.



Cheri Winterberg

5 min read

Race

The Day My Daughter Discovered I'm White



My youngest daughter was adopted from the Massachusetts foster care system. She's a beautiful, African American girl with huge brown eyes that smile 90% of the time—except when she's being sarcastic, and even then she makes me laugh.

I remember clearly the day she joined our family in 2003. The social worker told me that, whenever possible, the system tries to place children in homes where the parents are the same race as the child, as they believe that's in the child's best

interest. My husband and I were open to whatever child fate sent our way.

And so, on a stormy November night, baby Ayla was delivered to our doorstep. Literally the power in our house flickered as the social worker rang our doorbell and dropped her off with just a small duffle bag containing four onesies that no longer fit and an empty canister of formula.

Although we had already raised two other children through the baby stage, the moment the doorbell rang, I felt weak inside. My confidence in our parenting abilities was only as strong as is typical of parents with young children (which is to say, it varied by the hour). That night I questioned my sanity, my capabilities as a mother and if this child would learn to love me—for at the moment she was a helpless baby who had no choice or ability to affect her circumstances.

(As a side note, I still get tears in my eyes when I think about how, within 24 hours, our friends threw a spontaneous baby shower and delivered everything we needed—from clothes to a car seat to an ExerSaucer—to our doorstep. We hadn't anticipated that our foster child would be a baby, and so we no longer had those items on hand. This was before the days of Facebook and I'm amazed at how quickly word spread and people rallied to support us.)

While I loved Ayla from the moment I met her—as did all of our relatives, neighbors and random people in the grocery store, the girl is seriously adorable—I wondered as she got older how she would feel about being raised in a white family.

My fears were cast aside one day when Ayla was 5 years old. We were in the bathroom together, taking turns using the toilet. “Mom—your butt is white,” Ayla observed. “Yes,” I replied, wondering where this conversation was headed. “And my butt is brown,” she said. “Yes,” I replied again. I could see her brain processing this information.

It occurred to me that, **even though she had been staring at my face every day for the past 5 years, until that moment, she never realized we were a different race.** She never saw skin color looking in my eyes.

I held my breath as I waited for her next question. I began crafting long, philosophical conversations in my head about how I would simultaneously explain the birds and the bees, the construction of our family, and race relations in the United States.

“What time will Daddy be home? What’s for dinner?” she asked. That was it. She had moved on. Skin color was of no concern or consequence to this kindergartener.

Denis Leary famously said in 1992 (and then recently tweeted): “Racism isn’t born, folks, it’s taught. I have a two-year-old son. You know what he hates? Naps! End of list.”

As the confederate flag was lowered this month in South Carolina, I can’t help but reflect on Ayla joining our life. Fifteen years ago, my husband and I were living in Oregon. As we started having children, I had a strong desire to get back to the east coast to be within driving distance of our extended family. My husband interviewed for a job in Columbia, SC. Oddly enough, that year South Carolina was also considering the removal of the confederate flag. When we went to look at houses, this was the top news story and I remember seeing news vans everywhere.

Ultimately, my husband chose a job in Massachusetts. It’s crazy for me to think that, if we had moved to Columbia, Ayla wouldn’t have joined our lives. So many specific puzzle pieces had to fall into place for her to become my daughter—and they did. And now I know it was for a reason.

A quick Google News search on “foster children” shows that there continues to be a significant shortage in available homes for the more than 100,000 children currently in the system. There are also just as many (or more) instances of children being abused in foster care as there were so many years ago when my husband and I first decided we had heard enough and that we had the time and resources to provide for another child.

While my husband and I have shared our family story privately with friends over dinner, we’ve never before discussed it publicly. Now that Ayla is old enough to give her permission, I wanted to share the “butt” story in the hopes that it may inspire someone who has considered becoming a foster parent to take the next step.

While nature vs. nurture continues to be a hot debate in terms of what has the greatest impact on a child, I can tell you that Ayla has inherited my husband's love of Star Wars, her brother's love of soccer, her sister's love of reading and my love of dogs. When I asked Ayla her thoughts on being adopted, she told me she likes that it makes her unique and it's been a "strange, but cool experience."

In a recent school project where she had to create her biography, she wrote "Ayla wonders what her birth parents are like, but she knows she would never love them as much as the ones she loves now. Ayla has so many dreams, she can't list them all! In the future, she will move to Hollywood and take college courses in fashion and design."

Whatever the future holds, I will be at her side.

. . .



Diogenes Brito

5 min read

Race

Just a Brown Hand

On August 25th, Slack unveiled a new way for developers to connect to Slack, the "Add to Slack" button. It was the culmination of a great deal of work from many Slack employees, and just the beginning of what we have in store for Slack in the near future. Today, though, I want to talk about a seemingly small detail that has been more important to me than I would have expected: the skin color of the hand in the launch graphics.

Slack's people of color group (#earth-tones) was the first to say something.

earth-tones ▾ I can tell you are going to fit right in

August 25th



Erica Baker 10:53 AM ★

i really appreciate that the hand holding the "Add to Slack" button is brown. is that your doing @dio?



Rodney Urquhart 10:54 AM

I know right!



Duretti Hirpa 10:54 AM

It was totally Dio



Rodney Urquhart 10:54 AM

I just reacted to it with lol



Jason Stewart 10:54 AM

lol yeah I was loving that too (edited)



Duretti Hirpa 10:54 AM

it used to not be a brown hand and I remember being like

Featuring EricaJoy, Rodney, Duretti, and Jason.

But, it wasn't just Slack employees who noticed:



Bianca L. St.Louis

@beLaurie

Follow

When slack uses a brown hand for their add to slack button.

I'm SOOOO here for this. 🙌🙌🙌 twitter.com/SlackHQ/status...

12:37 AM - 26 Aug 2015

↩️ ↻ 76 ❤️ 163



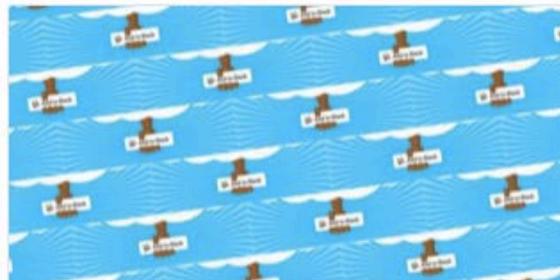
J.J. McCorvey

@jjmccorvey

Follow

Peeping @SlackHQ's game, using a brown hand to promote the Add to Slack button. #iseeyou #littlethings fastcompany.com/3050351/slack-...

11:12 PM - 25 Aug 2015



Slack Just Made It Easier To Unify Your Online Work Life

Soon you'll start seeing an "Add to Slack" button on websites and apps. This is a good thing for your fractured digital work life.

fastcompany.com

↩️ ↻ 8 ❤️ 9



Kaya Thomas

@kthomas901

Follow

really appreciate the brown hand in this graphic, I'm so used to seeing 'flesh' colored hands in graphics @SlackHQ

11:53 PM - 25 Aug 2015

↩️ ↻ 56 ❤️ 128

Why was the choice an important one, and why did it matter to the people of color who saw it? The simple answer is that they rarely see something like that. These people saw the image and *immediately noticed how unusual it was*. They were appreciative of being represented in a world where American media has the bad habit of portraying white people as the default, and everyone else as deviations from the norm.



Kaya Thomas

@kthomas901

 Follow

it may seem like a small thing but when you see graphics over and over excluding your skin color, it matters

11:54 PM - 25 Aug 2015

  13  20

The result of that American tendency is the telling and retelling of what Chimamanda Adichie would call a single story, one that reinforces people of color as “culturally other.” And boy, do we feel it:

I'm a black person who has been successful in tech by anyone's standards. I felt fortunate, and I've rarely felt any overt obstacles to my progress. But there was a point when I realized that there was a reason behind this. I've made sacrifices to be accepted into an industry where people who look like me are woefully underrepresented. I've become distant from my culture, my heritage and my own personal history, in order to be more palatable to a white standard. This leaves me feeling stuck between 2 worlds. Obviously not able to pass for white (and not wanting to), but also not “black enough” for those who look like me. I want to try to convey this sacrifice and its consequences in hopes that others in my position feel some solidarity. —Marco Rogers on Conforming to Succeed and What it Means For People of Color

Behind The Scenes: Slack HQ

I was the designer working with the platform team on the Add to Slack project. When launch day began to loom and we didn't have any marketing images, it fell to me to quickly whip assets together for our blog and social media accounts. The venerable Matt Hodgins previously made a sweet little chunky hand for a banner on our API site, so I decided to use that as a main element. The hand vector file was made of many distinct overlapping pieces, so I asked him to make the change to save time.



Matt Hodgins 2:17 PM

but ya i can get you a new hand
just more of a neutral tone?



Diógenes Brito 2:18 PM

dark neutral



Matt Hodgins 2:18 PM

whatchu want

coo



Diógenes Brito 2:18 PM

Dio color or darker 🖐️

But I'll let you choose palm side or back of my hand 😁



Matt Hodgins 2:22 PM

haha

You really can't get wrong with Hatt Modgins.

A few iterations later—and some discussion about whether my visual metaphor of the button coming from the cloud was too...“and glob said, let there be Slack button”—I sent off what I needed, and we were ready for launch.

Behind the Scenes: My Brain

Having decided to use the hand but needing to ask Matt to change the color, I was first torn about whether it was okay to ask him, then upset at myself for hesitating so much. The internal dialogue went something like this:

Diógenes, Brown Person: This hand should totally be brown. I'm brown.

Diogenes, Person: I'm trying to get good design work done and get this project out, not become an activist and start a movement or something.

Diógenes, Brown Person: It's not a big deal, you're the designer, you get to make it brown.

Diogenes, Person: Yea but, I'm going to ask Matt to do it, that's like, making a thing of it.

Diógenes, Brown Person: So what? You should make a thing of it, you never see this sort of thing.

Diogenes, Person: True. Dang. Now I feel bad about thinking so much about whether this is okay. This is okay right? I mean, no one's gonna say anything. What could they say? Saying something about it would be racist.

Diógenes, Brown Person: Dude, even if *he* was the designer on this project he should make it brown. It's like, affirmative design action. **Diogenes, Person:** Yea!

Diógenes, Brown Person: Yea!

Diogenes, Person: Good talk, bro.

These Little Things Matter

After the announcements, I surprised myself by staying on edge until I saw that folks had responded positively to the image. [This thread by @belaurie on Twitter](#) in particular, put me at ease:

It may not mean much to y'all but it signifies..

1. POC work at slack.. making visual decisions that are seen by millions (impact)

2. Visuals matter.... specifically around product users and what a "technologist" looks like. Seeing a brown hand is HUGE — icons matter. 3. slack is serious about elevating POC in my opinion not just through press releases but through business decisions..

This content is going to be on a lot of blogs, posts and shared to a global audience..having imagery that highlights an "anomaly" — — HUGE

In a world that highlights "white is right" and "optimal" brings me great joy to see some melanin on the page. :)

You da best Slack team.

I couldn't have said it better myself. These small choices matter, so make them whenever you can. People will notice, and they'll feel good. Things will be better.

I mean this: White Americans can care about more than just themselves. They really can. And the rest of us? We are DYING to see ourselves anywhere. — Mira Jacob

You too, white people. Don't be afraid to mix it up and use images depicting non-white people. There is certainly enough imagery of white people to go around. If you do so mindfully and with intent to avoid an ignorant caricature of a whole people, then things will work out and you will have made a small but important difference. Our choices as creators matter.

As system designers, we have a responsibility (and opportunity) to design systems with stronger values. They may not change us (we are old), but our children will see the values in these systems as normal. That is both scary and exciting.

—Buster Benson on Eric Meyer's XOXO 2015 Conference Talk

. . .

Now watch some great talks and gain some empathy:





P.S. Follow me on Twitter [@uxdiogenes](https://twitter.com/uxdiogenes).

Thanks to sean rose



John Metta

12 min read

I, RACIST



What follows is the text of a “sermon” that I gave as a “congregational reflection” to an all White audience at the Bethel Congregational United Church of Christ on Sunday, June 28th. The sermon was begun with a reading of The Good Samaritan story, and this wonderful quote from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Americanah.

Credit for this speech goes to Chaédria LaBouvier, whose “Why We Left” inspired me to speak out about racism; to Robin DiAngelo, whose “White Fragility” gave me an understanding of the topic; and to Reni Eddo-Lodge who said “Why I’m no longer talking to white people about race” long before I had the courage to start doing it again.

. . .

A

couple weeks ago, I was debating what I was going to talk about in this sermon. I told Pastor Kelly Ryan I had great reservations talking about the one topic that I think about every single day.

Then, a terrorist massacred nine innocent people in a church that I went to, in a city that I still think of as home. At that point, I knew that despite any misgivings, I needed to talk about race.

You see, I don't talk about race with White people.

. . .

To illustrate why, I'll tell a story:

It was probably about 15 years ago when a conversation took place between my aunt, who is White and lives in New York State, and my sister, who is Black and lives in North Carolina. This conversation can be distilled to a single sentence, said by my Black sister:

“The only difference between people in the North and people in the South is that down here, at least people are honest about being racist.”

There was a lot more to that conversation, obviously, but I suggest that it can be distilled into that one sentence because it has been, by my White aunt. Over a decade later, this sentence is still what she talks about. It has become the single most important aspect of my aunt's relationship with my Black family. She is still hurt by the suggestion that people in New York, that she, a northerner, a liberal, a good person who has Black family members, is a racist.

This perfectly illustrates why I don't talk about race with White people. Even—or rather, especially—my own family.



love my aunt. She's actually my favorite aunt, and believe me, I have *a lot* of awesome aunts to choose from. But the facts are actually quite in my sister's favor on this one.

New York State is one of the most segregated states in the country. Buffalo, New York, where my aunt lives, is one of the 10 most segregated school systems in the country. The racial inequality of the area she inhabits is so bad that it has been the subject of reports by the Civil Rights Action Network and the NAACP.

Those, however, are facts that my aunt does not need to know. She does not need to live with the racial segregation and oppression of her home. As a white person with upward mobility, she has continued to improve her situation. She moved out of the area I grew up in— she moved to an area with better schools. She doesn't have to experience racism, and so it is not real to her.

Nor does it dawn on her that the very fact that she moved away from an increasingly Black neighborhood to live in a White suburb might itself be a aspect of racism. She doesn't need to realize that “better schools” exclusively means “whiter schools.”

I don't talk about race with White people because I have so often seen it go nowhere. When I was younger, I thought it was because all white people are racist. Recently, I've begun to understand that it's more nuanced than that.

. . .

To understand, you have to know that Black people think in terms of *Blackpeople* .

We don't see a shooting of an innocent Black child in another state as something separate from us because we know viscerally that it could be our child, our parent, or us, that is shot.

The shooting of Walter Scott in North Charleston resonated with me because Walter Scott was portrayed in the media as a deadbeat and a criminal—but when you look at the facts about the actual man, he was nearly indistinguishable from my own father.

Racism affects us directly because the fact that it happened at a geographically remote location or to another Black person is only a coincidence, an accident. It could just as easily happen to us—right here right now.

Black people think in terms of we because we live in a society where the social and political structures interact with us as Black people.

White people do not think in terms of *we*. White people have the privilege to interact with the social and political structures of our society *as individuals*. You are “you,” I am “one of them.” Whites are often not directly affected by racial oppression even in their own community, so what does not affect them locally has little chance of affecting them regionally or nationally. They have no need, nor often any real desire, to think in terms of a group. They are supported by the system, and so are mostly unaffected by it.

What they are affected by are attacks on their own character. To my aunt, the suggestion that “people in The North are racist” is an attack on her *as a racist*. She is unable to differentiate her participation *within* a racist system (upwardly mobile, not racially profiled, able to move to White suburbs, etc.) from an accusation that she, individually, is *a racist*. Without being able to make that differentiation, White people in general decide to vigorously defend their own personal non-racism, or point out that it doesn't exist because they don't see it.

The result of this is an incessantly repeating argument where a Black person says “Racism still exists. It is real,” and a white person argues “You're wrong, I'm not racist at all. I don't even see any racism.” My aunt's immediate response is not “that is wrong, we should do better.” No, her response is self-protection: “That's not my fault, I didn't do anything. You are wrong.”

Racism is not slavery. As President Obama said, it's not avoiding the use of the word Nigger. Racism is not white water fountains and the back of the bus. Martin Luther King did not end racism. Racism is a cop severing the spine of an innocent man. It is a 12 year old child being shot for playing with a toy gun in a state where it is legal to openly carry firearms.

But racism is even more subtle than that. It's more nuanced. Racism is the fact that "White" means "normal" and that anything else is different. Racism is our acceptance of an all white Lord of the Rings cast because of "historical accuracy," ignoring the fact that this is a world with an *entirely fictionalized history*.

Even when we make shit up, we want it to be white.

And racism is the fact that we all *accept* that it *is* white. Benedict Cumberbatch playing Khan in Star Trek. Khan, who is from India. Is there anyone Whiter than Benedict fucking Cumberbatch? What? They needed a "less racial" cast because they already had the Black Uhura character?

That is racism. Once you let yourself see it, it's there all the time.

Black children learn this when their parents give them "The Talk." When they are sat down at the age of 5 or so and told that their best friend's father is not sick, and not in a bad mood—he just doesn't want his son playing with you. Black children grow up early to life in The Matrix. We're not given a choice of the red or blue pill. Most white people, like my aunt, never have to choose. The system was made for White people, so White people don't have to think about living in it.

But we can't point this out.

Living every single day with institutionalized racism and then having to argue its very existence, is tiring, and saddening, and angering. Yet if we express any emotion while talking about it, we're tone policed, told we're being angry. In fact, a key element in any racial argument in America is the Angry Black person, and racial discussions shut down when that person speaks.

The Angry Black person invalidates any arguments about racism because they are “just being overly sensitive,” or “too emotional,” or— playing the race card. Or even worse, we're told that *we* are being racist (Does any intelligent person actually believe a systematically oppressed demographic has the ability to oppress those in power?)

But here is the irony, here's the thing that all the angry Black people know, and no calmly debating White people want to admit: **The entire discussion of race in America centers around the protection of White feelings.**

Ask any Black person and they'll tell you the same thing. The reality of thousands of innocent people raped, shot, imprisoned, and systematically disenfranchised are less important than the suggestion that a single White person might be complicit in a racist system.

This is the country we live in. Millions of Black lives are valued less than a single White person's hurt feelings.

White people and Black people are not having a discussion about race. Black people, thinking as a group, are talking about *living in a racist system*. White people, thinking as individuals, refuse to talk about “I, racist” and instead protect their own individual and personal goodness. In doing so, they reject the existence of racism.

But arguing about personal non-racism is missing the point.

Despite what the Charleston Massacre makes things look like, people are dying not because individuals are racist, but because individuals are helping support a racist system by wanting to protect their own non-racist self beliefs.

People are dying because we are supporting a racist system that justifies White people killing Black people.

WE

see this in how one Muslim killer is Islamic terror; how one Mexican thief points to the need for border security; in one innocent, unarmed Black man shot in the back by a cop, then sullied in the media as a thug and criminal.

And in the way a white racist in a state that still flies the confederate flag is seen as “troubling” and “unnerving.” In the way people “can't understand why he would do such a thing.”

A white person smoking pot is a “hippie” and a Black person doing it is a “criminal.” It's evident in the school to prison pipeline and the fact that there are close to 20 people of color in prison for every white person.

There's a headline from The Independent that sums this up quite nicely: “Charleston shooting: Black and Muslim killers are ‘terrorists’ and ‘thugs’. Why are white shooters called ‘mentally ill’?”

I'm gonna read that again: “Black and Muslim killers are ‘terrorists’ and ‘thugs’. Why are white shooters called ‘mentally ill’?”

Did you catch that? It's beautifully subtle. This is an article talking specifically about the different way we treat people of color in this nation and even in this article's headline, the white people are “shooters” and the Black and Muslim people are “killers.”

Even when we're talking about racism, we're using racist language to make people of color look dangerous and make White people come out as not so bad.

Just let that sink in for a minute, then ask yourself why Black people are angry when they talk about race.

The reality of America is that White people are fundamentally good, and so when a white person commits a crime, it is a sign that they, *as an individual*, are bad. Their actions as a person are not indicative of any broader social construct. Even the fact that America has a growing number of violent hate groups, populated mostly by white men, and that nearly **all** serial killers are white men can not shadow the fundamental truth of white male goodness. In fact, we like White serial killers so much, we make mini-series about them.

White people are good as a whole, and only act badly as individuals.

People of color, especially Black people (but boy we can talk about “The Mexicans” in this community) are seen as fundamentally bad. There might be a good one—and we are always quick to point them out to our friends, show them off as our Academy Award for “Best Non-Racist in a White Role”—but when we see a bad one, it’s just proof that the rest are, as a rule, bad.

This, all of this, expectation, treatment, thought, the underlying social system that puts White in the position of Normal and good, and Black in the position of “other” and “bad,” all of this, is racism.

And White people, every single one of you, are complicit in this racism because *you benefit directly from it*.

This is why I don't like the story of the good samaritan. Everyone likes to think of themselves as the person who sees someone beaten and bloodied and helps him out.

That’s too easy.

If I could re-write that story, I'd rewrite it from the perspective of Black America. What if the person wasn't beaten and bloody? What if it wasn't so obvious? What if they were just systematically challenged in a thousand small ways *that actually made it easier for you to succeed in life?*

Would you be so quick to help then?
Or would you, like most White people, stay silent and
let it happen?

Here's what I want to say to you: Racism is so deeply embedded in this country not because of the racist right-wing radicals who practice it openly, it exists because of the silence and hurt feelings of liberal America.

That's what I want to say, but really, I can't. I can't say that because I've spent my life not talking about race to White people. In a big way, it's my fault. Racism exists because I, as a Black person, don't challenge you to look at it.

Racism exists because I, not you, am silent.

But I'm caught in the perfect Catch 22, because when I start pointing out racism, I become the Angry Black Person, and the discussion shuts down again. So I'm stuck.

All the Black voices in the world speaking about racism all the time do not move White people to think about it— but one White John Stewart talking about Charleston has a whole lot of White people talking about it. That's the world we live in. Black people can't change it while White people are silent and deaf to our words.

White people are in a position of power in this country *because of racism*. The question is: Are they brave enough to use that power to speak against the system that gave it to them?

So I'm asking you to help me. Notice this. Speak up. Don't let it slide. Don't stand watching in silence. Help build a world where it never gets to the point where the Samaritan has to see someone bloodied and broken.

As for me, I will no longer be silent.

I'm going to *try* to speak kindly, and softly, but that's gonna be hard. Because it's getting harder and harder for me to think about the protection of White people's feelings when White people don't seem to care at all about the loss of so many Black lives.



Nora Levinson

9 min read

What happens after you're arrested at a protest in New York.

I just got back from 12 hours in NYPD holding. If I can get arrested (with all of my white privilege and generally perceived non-threatening stature), so can anybody. In total over 1,000 people protested yesterday in New York, and over 120 were arrested. Here's what that experience entailed for me:

1 — Protest: Freddie Gray protestors passed our office, marching on Broadway. I decided I should put my money where my mouth is and go out and join them.



View of the protests from my office window before I came down to join.

2 — Arrests: There had been police along the side of the street watching as we marched, but we soon came upon a head-on police blockade. Police started randomly singling people out to arrest. An officer pointed at me and another grabbed my arms and told me not to resist. My arrest was fairly uneventful—nobody slammed me into the ground or a car, but that was happening to most everyone else except me.

3 — Patrol Wagon: Those who were arrested were cuffed and piled into large armored patrol wagons. In our vehicle, men were all together in the back. Women were in single cells or double cells. We waited in the vehicle for over 2 hours without moving until they had filled it to their liking (we ended up with 12 people). The last two people who were arrested were not even part of the protests, they were just walking alongside. Several people had been slammed hard and were feeling faint-headed, or had cuffs tightened to the point of loss of circulation and swelling/color change in their hands.

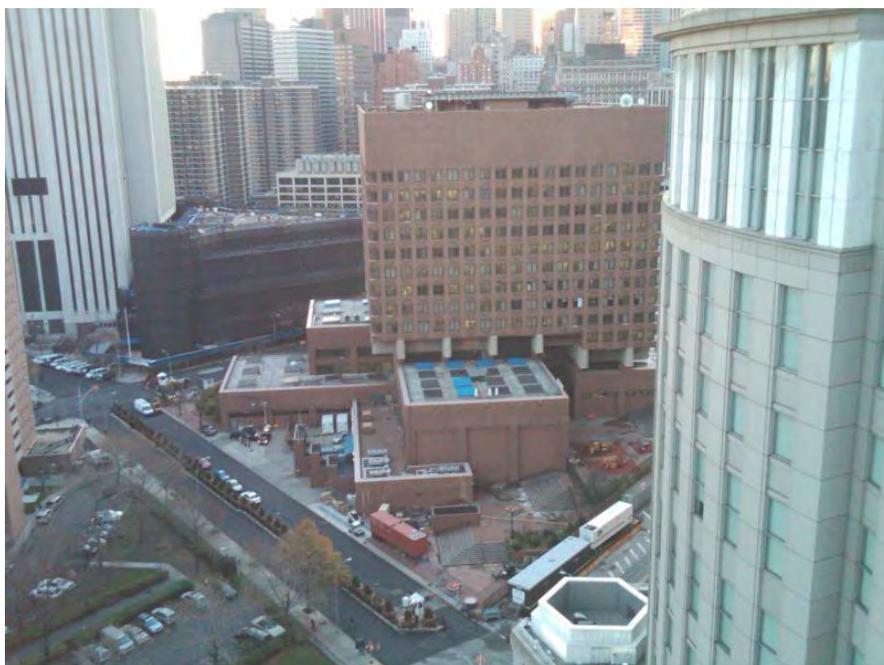
Technology side-story: My phone was confiscated, but it was being held nearby. I was wearing an Apple Watch for product testing, and was able to send Lian a text message over the watch (the whole time we were held I was not allowed a phone call or any contact otherwise). I somehow doubt that this particular use case is one that Apple will promote, but it was the most compelling one I've found so far...



This is the closest image I could find to the type of patrol wagon we were in.

4 — Rough Riding / Police Snapchat: They raced the patrol wagons down the West Side Highway with a full police escort to 1 Police Plaza. There were several unnecessary U-turns and other sharp turns along the way. We were not belted in, and couldn't brace ourselves against anything because our hands were cuffed. The police officers in the front of the wagon were taking selfie videos of the crazy race-car style driving and posting to Snapchat stories that they shared with each other and boasted about openly in front of us, laughing

5 — Intake: Through talking with my arresting officer I learned that they had called in officers from all precincts to cover the protests, and that all of the “perps” (as we were referred to) were to be held at 1 Police Plaza instead of the officers’ normal precincts. At 1 Police Plaza, we were uncuffed and our belongings taken. We waited in line outside in the cold for them to fill out some rudimentary paperwork (name, address, birthdate). We were then shuffled over to take the world’s most awkward couples’ photo—this involved each person who had been arrested standing side by side very closely next to their arresting officer. I hope I am able to gain access to a copy of this photo someday, as it was truly a gem.



Aerial view of 1 Police Plaza. I believe we were held in the single story area here at the left edge of the building, but not sure. Image via [Civic Center Residents Coalition](#).

6 — Holding Area: After intake, we were processed into two different holding areas. The mens’ holding area was one giant pen with at least 80 men all crammed together and limited seating. The women’s holding area consisted of a row of small cells each about 5' x 8' in size with a metal bench and a toilet. Each cell had 4–5 women in it. I’ll also note that everyone was sorted based on the gender on their ID, so there was at least one transgender woman in the men’s pen, and at least two transgender men in the women’s cells. Before we went into the cells they invasively patted each of us down and made us remove all strings from our clothing (including shoelaces, as well as the decorative laces on my jacket).



This is a similar layout to the holding cell we were in. Ours was about 20% bigger, and held 4–5 people. I wasn't able to find any images of real NYPD holding cells. Image via [SDM](#).

7 — Waiting Game: By this point it had been over 3 hours since I had been arrested. I didn't see my arresting officer or get any explanation of the next steps at this point, or for the next 7 hours. I was not read my rights, was not allowed to make a phone call, and was not told what I was being charged with. The same for all of the other people in the women's cells. Luckily, one of the people in my cell was a Legal Observer with a lot of knowledge of the system, and they gave us a bit of an understanding of what might happen (although it was their first time being arrested personally). Eventually we were offered stale cheese sandwiches, milk, and water. Nobody was really able to finish their sandwiches, but we found that the cheese stuck really well to the walls of the cell. To kill time, we made up a game where we would guess how long a particular piece of cheese would take before it fell off the wall. We also tried to take turns sleeping on the bench but that didn't go very well as it was super loud, very chilly, starkly bright, and the metal bench was designed to be cold and uncomfortable. There was a lot of singing and some nice conversations, but there were also some very distressed people and a lot of shouting. We all resolved to stay in touch over social media via the hashtag #drycrustnypd . I don't think anyone has used it yet, but who knows when people are actually getting their belongings back and arriving home.

8 — Charges: Everyone was pretty much there for the same reason (pulled randomly from the protest), but the charges were very different. We started to figure out that the two options were either that you received a desk appearance ticket for a "violation" and released, or that you will be charged with a crime, processed (fingerprinted and have a mugshot taken), and sent to Central Booking.

Obviously I don't know what happened in each person's actual arrest, but I do know that the criminal charges overwhelmingly fell to people of color and those with more masculine gender presentations. If you are sent to Central Booking, not only did that mean you were facing criminal charges and you could also expect another 6+ hours going through the system that day, but it also meant that all of your belongings that were taken when you arrived would be entered into the system and you would not be able to retrieve them until a later date. This was super distressing for a lot of people, as those belongings usually included wallet, phone, and keys. So after you are done at Central Booking, you are basically left with no possessions or money, and no way to get into your home or contact anyone.



Intake at Central Booking, where people with a criminal charge are sent after holding. Image via nychinatown.org

9 – Bizarre Buddy System: What I also didn't realize is that each person's arresting officer had to personally stay and oversee their paperwork processing. So basically for every one of the 120+ of us in holding, there was also a cop who was waiting there too, being paid overtime and trying to get our paperwork processed so that they could go home. Once I realized this I started to get a bit nervous, as one of the processing officers had said something to my arresting officer about it being OK for her to go after I was in the cell, and I had not seen her for about 7 hours since. Was anyone in the station still aware I was there?

This fear was compounded by the fact that another officer came by to do a headcount based on a huge hand-written list she had, and was not able to find my name for a few minutes—in the end it turned out she was just spelling it wrong. Finally I got someone’s attention to ask for my arresting officer, and to my relief she came to the cell about an hour later. She told me that she was almost done with my paperwork, but that the entire time we’d been there they had been processing the paperwork through their manual system for the other 100+ people who had been arrested and gone through intake before me. Of course sitting in the patrol wagon for 3 hours before we arrived hadn’t helped with our order in the queue.

10 — Release: After about 11 hours total from my arrest, my arresting officer came back to the cell to start my release procedure, which took about another hour of paperwork and waiting in lines. Almost all of the men I was brought in with were still in the pen when I passed by; I think they would have at least had another few hours on top of the processing time for the women. I finally saw some paperwork with what they were charging me with—I was given a desk appearance ticket for a traffic obstruction violation, and thankfully not any criminal charges. My arresting officer walked me out the door and down the street past the barricade, where there were volunteers from New York Lawyers Guild waiting to provide information on legal resources, as well as donuts and coffee. After 12 hours from my arrest I was finally out the door of the facility. I was never read my rights, or given any access to communication to inform the outside world where I was. I took a cab home.

Final Thoughts:

Going through this process shows me just how disruptive it could be to the life of someone without my level of privilege. Based on the discretion of a police officer in the moment they are making the arrest, people are detained with no access to outside communication and without a clear explanation of what they are being charged with and what the next steps will be. They are held in what can be a very dehumanizing environment. You are forced to use the restroom in very close proximity to your cellmates and in front of an open hallway. There is no comfortable way to sit or stand for any period of time in the small space. Some officers make derogatory comments about “perps” and their physical appearance or gender presentation, or just generally ignore you and talk amongst themselves while boasting on social media about the arrests they just made . If you have medicine in your bag they will not allow you to take it—

if you want to take medicine you have to be sent to a correctional facility hospital, as they don't trust the labelled contents of your medication to be accurate. And that's not even getting into situations in which people are interrogated without access to a lawyer, which thankfully did not happen to any of us as far as I'm aware. Apparently holding people this way (without having their rights read, access to a phone call, or being charged with anything) is legal for up to 24 hours.

Can you imagine getting randomly nabbed by a cop and just completely dropping off the face of the earth for a full day without anyone knowing what's up? What consequences would this have for school, a job, or a job search? For childcare or other dependents? What if you are sent to Central Booking with criminal charges, and in all of the anxiety you feel from being held you are willing to take a plea deal just to get out of the system's clutches and get home? That's how people end up with criminal records over negligible incidents, and makes it harder for them to climb out of a cycle of poverty and incarceration that's prevalent in a lot of communities.

For someone like me, an arrest like this is one night of inconvenience and discomfort. For the people who are the ones *usually* getting arrested, it can destroy hard-earned progress in building their lives, and it can paint that person with the stigma of criminalization. And once someone is branded as a criminal, it's a lot easier to justify treating them as less than human. History and current events make that alarmingly clear.

(Reposted from my [Facebook status](#) that I wrote just after getting out yesterday.)

Tech / Technology



Illustration by [Jean Jullien](#)

Stop Saying Technology is Causing Social Isolation

A group of friends checking their smartphones while hanging out. Almost everyone on the subway with their eyes fixed on their gadget's screens. A couple laying together in bed with their iPhones in their hands. People with their devices up in the air taking pictures of a concert. And I could go on. Technology, and especially smartphones, is ruining society, making us disconnected from others, interacting with our devices instead of with each other.

Except, fuck that.



if this is what you are seeing



you are not seeing
enough.

Illustration by [Rosangela Ludovico](#)

People like to criticize current society. Not necessarily the current society relative to us, but the contemporary society of the time they live in. It's just so cool to romanticize the past even if it makes us feel bad about the present. Past times were always better. And in this age of information and technology, in which the smartphone is so ubiquitous, it's only obvious to blame them for some of society's problems. Of course, it's perfectly reasonable to stop and reflect on the use we give to technology and to criticize the bad behaviors associated. But I believe that accusing technology (and, again, especially smartphones) of ruining social

interaction and even all kinds of experiences is, to say the least, quite wrong and misguided. Some people would even qualify that as pretentious, but I'll refrain from that.

If you have used the internet in the last years (and I suspect you have), you have probably seen a picture on your Facebook feed or on your Tumblr dashboard or nearly everywhere pointing out, with a sense of superiority, how people are slaves of technology nowadays, always using their electronic devices in public. I'm talking about illustrations like [these](#). Or comics like [these](#). Or short films like [these](#). Or articles like [these](#) or [these](#). Or photographic projects like [these](#). Again, I could go on. The world wide web is filled with all kinds of expressive works related to this issue, probably because it's something people care about. But I feel that most of that content treats it using the same premise: smartphones are ruining our lives (at least to some extent).

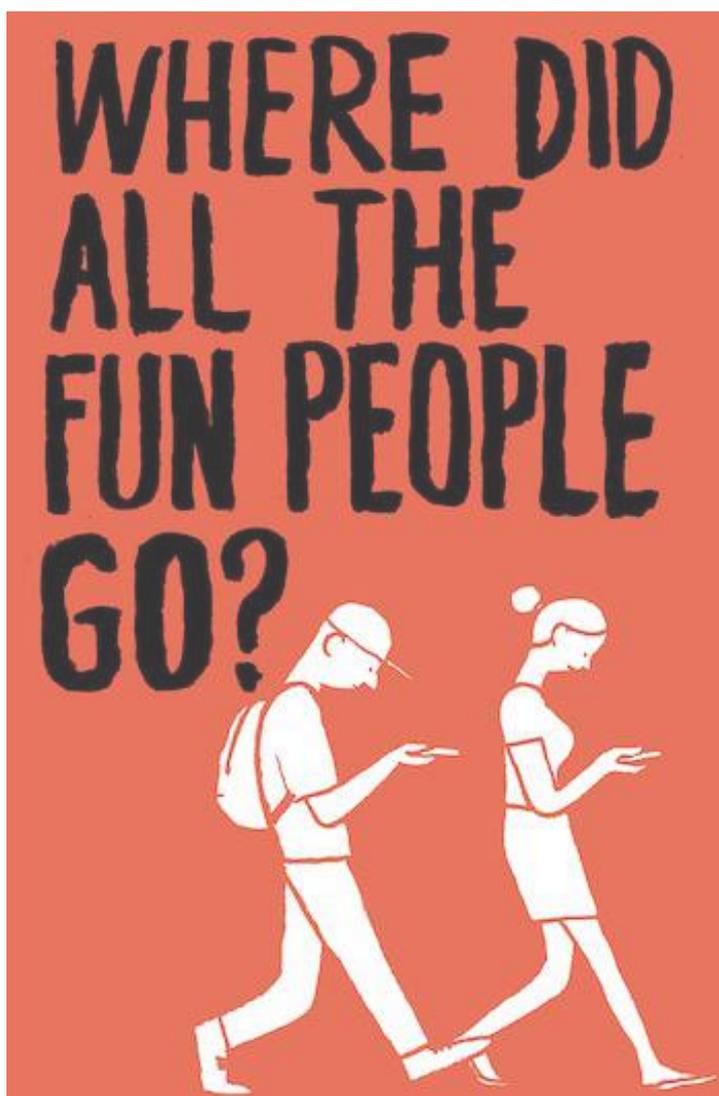


Illustration by Jean Jullien. The fun people didn't go away—they're here and everywhere

Everytime I see content like that, I feel the need to express my profound disagreement, for which I usually resort to Twitter, always ending up wanting to say more than I could, so I decided to write this piece. Of course, this expresses my views (and, I hope, the views of many others) just like those authors whose works I'm commenting on, so you may disagree with me and find that they are right and I'm not.

My main premise is that I don't think smartphones are isolating us, destroying our social lives or ruining interactions. I see smartphones as instruments for communication. Instruments that enable interaction on ways that just weren't possible before, connecting us with people all around the world, via Twitter, instant messaging or other services. Some may say that if you want to interact with people, you should interact with the ones around you, and that is probably true on certain occasions. But, on other occasions, I'm just not able to comprehend why should we be forced to interact with those physically close to us instead of with the people that we really want to interact with.

Is it so bad to prefer talking with a long-distance partner using a smartphone than with someone who does not interest me but happens to be next to me? To prefer reading how the people you've followed by years on Twitter are doing instead of making smalltalk with that friend of a friend sitting across the subway car? Maybe you think that yes, it is bad, that people should always prioritize physical interaction to digital one. I disagree. Except for obvious occasions (a work meeting, an actual conversation that is taking place between you and someone, etc.), I think people should be able to interact with whomever they please without being judged by people for using a smartphone to do so.

It all boils down to letting people connect freely using the medium they feel the most comfortable with at the moment. Maybe that acquaintance of yours hasn't gone talk to you because she has had a bad day and just wants to relax checking her Instagram feed or listening to some music. Maybe your friend has taken his smartphone out of his pocket because he has gotten a message that he needs to reply now. Or maybe it's just that he feels a bit uncomfortable and is using his phone to try and avoid the awkwardness of the moment because he has social anxiety and you should respect that. And yes, maybe, maybe some people are using their smartphones while they objectively shouldn't without any possible

excuses and they're jerks (or they just made a mistake and didn't realize taking their phone out would make someone upset), but I think it's really unfair to assume everyone or nearly everyone who uses a smartphone in public does that.



Photo by [John Blanding](#) tweeted by [Wayne Dahlberg](#). It's trying to convey the idea that this woman is enjoying the experience more than the other people taking photos or recording. I'm not sure those people are really enjoying it less because of their smartphones

Part of the commentaries I've seen criticizing this whole issue also touch on social media, since it is so integrated with our usual smartphone usage. For example, I see lots of people complaining about people who take pictures of the food they order at restaurants for posting them on Instagram or wherever. I don't get that. Is it wrong to create a permanent memento of an otherwise temporary experience, to capture in a photo the work of the people back in the kitchen who made an effort to make the food look attractive? To me, those complaints allude to a lack of understanding of how modern social media works.

I think Tumblr user [zmizet](#) expresses this very accurately in their [comments](#) on the Jean Jullien illustrations that I've used here. On that exact topic of taking photos of food, [zmizet](#) expressed the following:

*I'm happy **seeing my friends take photos of their food** I like taking photos of my food. Because there is a chef in the back of the kitchen who works hard to plate things beautifully and in any other situation, people dive in immediately and ruin that image. We take photos to preserve that image and who the fuck knows, if I was the chef I would be digging through instagram hoping to see my plate on there. We're **celebrating someones hard work**, work that is **generally temporary**.*

And I agree with that. zmizet concludes:

Technology isn't bad. You're just upset with yourselves for having a lack of self-control. You hate that people connect through technology. And maybe, you just don't like seeing people love themselves, enjoy life, and feel joy. That's your problem, not technology's.

Social media itself is also not bad. It doesn't make us more socially isolated. Quite the contrary, it expands our social network, as shown in [this report](#) by Pew Research Center which concludes:

Compared to those who do not use the internet, most people who use the internet and use a social networking service, such as Facebook, MySpace, or LinkedIn, have social networks that are about 20% more diverse.

It dates back to 2009, when social media wasn't as big as it is now, but I firmly believe it still stands correct today. I'd also like to point out this key paragraph:

Newer information and communication technologies provide new settings and a means of communication that independently contribute to the diversity of people's social networks.

Social media, and smartphones for that matter, only contributes to make our social experiences richer by connecting us with people in new ways. I'm sure many of you have met lots of interesting people. I sure have. Thanks to social media, I've been able to meet people that are now close friends of mine.

And when I'm out, I like to open Twitter and check how they are, what they are doing, if I have something to say that may interest them. Heck, I even met my girlfriend on Twitter years ago. And I'm absolutely certain that my experience is not an isolated one, as the research above shows.



Vignette of a comic by [Gavin Aung Than](#)



Popular image of nearly everyone on the train reading the newspaper instead of talking with each other decades ago

Other frequent topic appears to be one I've already mentioned. People using their smartphones on the subway, the bus or the train. This is shown in the illustration used at the beginning of this writing or in the comic I referenced above. This is probably the one I get the least. What else could people do? What would they do if smartphones didn't exist? Talking to each other? Let's not fool ourselves. People in general do not like to interact with strangers in these contexts. They didn't when smartphones were far from existing; they just used another object instead, like a newspaper. In response to the vignette next to this paragraph, Tumblr user bogleech commented the following:

*OH MAN look at those ignorant, pathetic people of various ages, sexes and ethnic groups all doing **internet shit** on their phones while they ride on a subway! HOLY SHIT THEY'RE ALL DOING IT! EVEN THE GUY IN THE **TURBAN** FROM WHATEVER THE HELL VAGUE COUNTRY HE'S SUPPOSED TO BE FROM THAT HAS TURBANS!*

WHY ARE THEY MESSAGING ESTABLISHED FRIENDS AND FAMILY ON A PHOENEZ WHEN THEY COULD BE INTERACTING WITH COMPLETE AND UTTER STRANGERS ON A GROSS FUCKING SUBWAY CAR

HOW DARE THEY HAVE PERSONAL OUTLETS AND PRIVATE SPACE AND SHIT

The person who wrote that was clearly really passionate about this topic. And well, I think that, although violently, they deliver the message I'm trying to convey here.

They also went on to say:

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY OVER JUST THE PAST DECADE HAS CONNECTED AND EDUCATED MORE HUMAN MINDS THAN PROBABLY THE ENTIRE SUM OF OUR PLANET'S HISTORY

IT'S ALSO A MIRACULOUS FIRST-WORLD PRIVILEGE THAT ALLOWS YOU TO MAKE FRIENDS, SHARE YOUR IDEAS, LEARN NEW THINGS, HEAL EMOTIONAL WOUNDS THROUGH SOCIAL INTERACTION, FIND ESCAPE FROM ABUSIVE SITUATIONS, FIND NEW LIVING SITUATIONS, APPLY FOR JOBS, CREATE YOUR OWN PERSONAL OUTLETS AND GENERALLY PURSUE HAPPINESS AT THE TOUCH OF A DAMN BUTTON

You don't have to take their word for it. There are studies that back up all of that like [this one](#) or [this one](#).

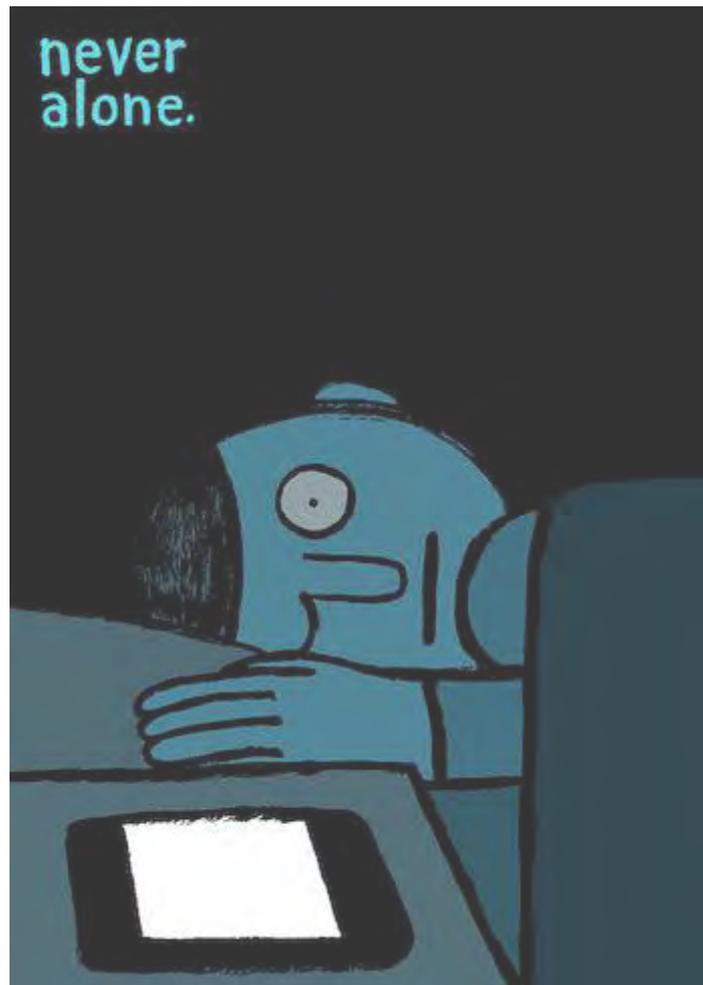


Illustration by [Jean Jullien](#). Is it so bad to have the ability to not be alone using our phones?

In conclusion, I think we need to stop thinking technology is ruining everything, making us a slave to it, mindlessly using our smartphones all the time. It is not. It is enriching our lives, connecting us to the people that matter the most to us regardless of how far away they are, connecting us to all kinds of people whom we wouldn't have met otherwise. So, stop feeling superior for making fun of other people because they're using their smartphones,

stop pretending our lives and society would be better without them, stop blaming technology for natural human behaviors. If you see an image like the ones I referenced here, the ones trying to show how we are “letting technology ruin social interactions and pleasant experiences”, stop and reflect on *why* people are actually using their electronic devices. Furthermore, stop romanticizing the past, believing life was better without all of this ubiquitous technology like in some form of “neo-ludism”. Consumer technology is good. It enables us to connect in amazing ways as humans. It is not replacing real interaction. It is augmenting it. **Embrace it.**

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Jason Fried
3 min read

Why I stopped paying attention to industry news

A couple of years ago, I did an experiment: I kicked sugar for three months. I'd have whatever naturally occurred in foods, but I wouldn't eat anything with added sugar. The goal wasn't to eat like this forever. I just wanted to know what it felt like to get all that sugar out of my diet. How would I react? What would be different? Would I like it?

The short answer: I felt great. I had way more energy, more balanced days, better mental clarity. But the most surprising outcome came when I reintroduced extra sugar into my diet. During the sugar fast, I wasn't eating apples, but I tried an apple again. And wow, did I feel it. A sugar high from an apple? That was an eye opener. Even today, with my just-a-tad-of-sugar diet, I can feel the effects of the sweetener in ways I never could before.

I realize this isn't a health magazine—so why am I talking about sugar? The food detox inadvertently got me to try cutting back on something else I was unknowingly overdosing on: industry news.

Up until about a year ago, I read industry news religiously. I'd load up Hacker News a few times a day, clicking away on the top-voted stories. I'd head over to Reddit and do the same thing on its tech-news subreddit. If I saw something on Twitter linking up a tech-news story, I'd be all over it. Clickity, click click click. I was a tech-news binger.

Then, last summer, I stopped. Cold turkey—just like when I stopped sugar. I had just reached the point at which I could feel an unhealthy level of toxicity piling up inside of me. I felt myself getting too involved, too absorbed, and a bit too anxious about what I was missing, and about what I knew or didn't know, but thought I should know. I was checking Twitter too often and reloading sites too often. If someone told me about something I hadn't heard of, I felt like I should have already known about it. Industry news was becoming an addiction.

The first couple of weeks after I cut the cord were challenging. My mind was craving the latest on tech as if it were a substance. While I could steer clear of the tech-news sites, it was difficult not to get hit by friendly fire. I was still on Twitter reading non-tech banter, but then a tech story would suddenly appear in my stream and that uneasy feeling would strike.

Finally, after a few weeks, I began not to miss the news. Whenever I'd see a headline on Twitter, or see people I follow chatting about some new company or technology, I felt a little disgust. It was similar to how I had felt when I saw people gorging on decadent desserts after I'd kicked sugar: It made me sick. So I came up with a new ritual. Every time friends tweeted about tech, I'd use Tweetbot to mute them for 30 days. Eventually my stream was cleansed of all the content I was trying to avoid.

The incredible thing is that a few months into the industry-news detox, I felt better not only mentally, but physically, too. My mind wasn't on edge, waiting for the next big thing to hit. I was calmer, I found myself with more time, and I was far more focused on stuff I could control, like my product, my company, my person, rather than stuff I couldn't, like the next "Basecamp killer" or some hot new startup.

It's now a year later and I still don't read industry news. Sometimes I'll accidentally run into it. Sometimes someone will mention something to me wondering whether I've heard of it. I'll often say no and ask for details. And then he or she will tell me about it in a way that's actually useful, not sensationalized, as most coverage of new things is. I don't feel disconnected. In fact, it's quite the opposite. It's no longer just empty calories: I eventually hear about what's really important.

Originally published in Inc. Magazine.

Be sure to check out what we're up to over at Basecamp.



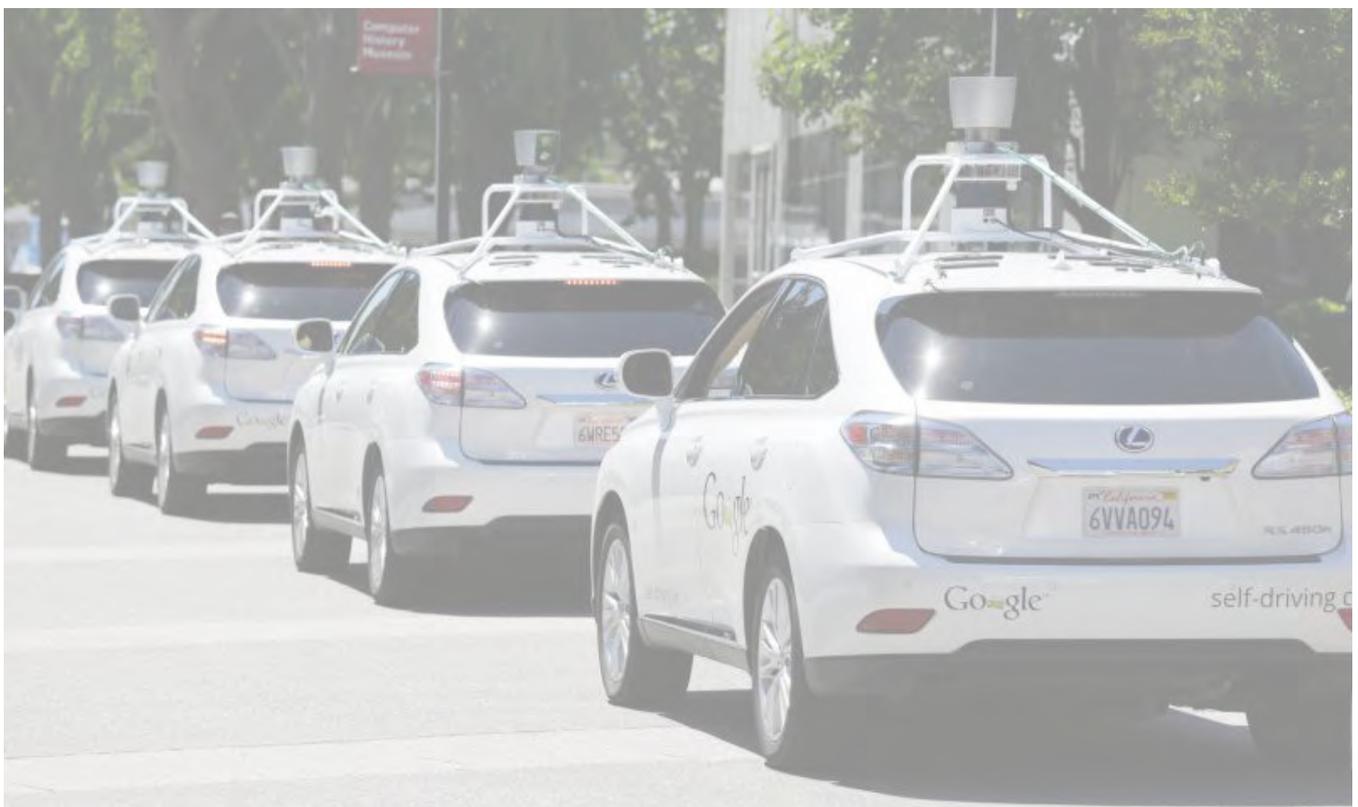
Noah Weiss

5 min read

Tech

Manage your time like Google invests its resources: 70/20/10

Spend 30% of your time living in the future



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There are many great definitions of product management. There's universal agreement that the best PMs are utility players who have a range of skills that lets them jump into almost any role so they can do whatever it takes to ship products faster. Between diving into details and reacting to incoming requests—from engineering, design, sales, marketing, support, PR, legal, and more—it's easy to get sucked into spending 100% of your time with a time-horizon of the release date two-weeks out.

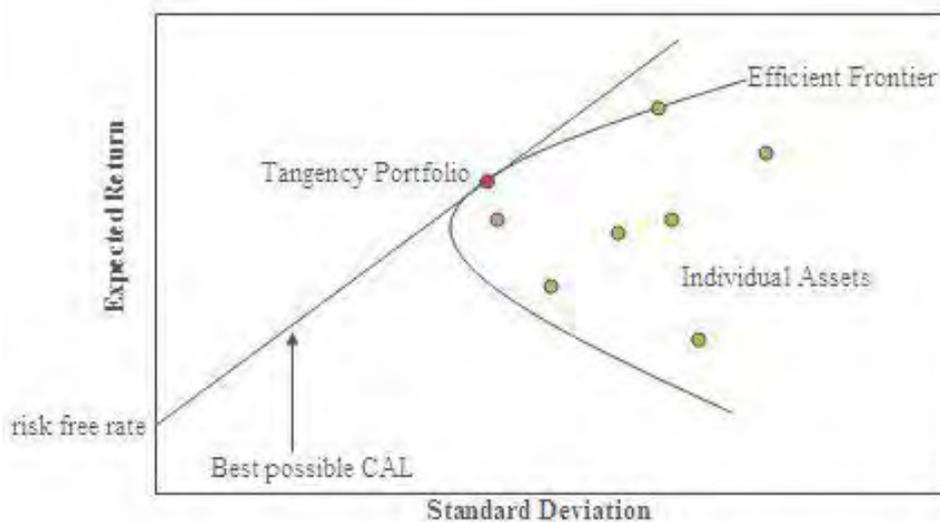
It's a trap.

Google's investment approach

Take a lesson from Google. Back in 2005, just post IPO and with their core search and AdWords businesses growing at a tremendous pace, Google realized that all their resources could easily get sucked into the vortex of refining their core products. They could get lulled into the monotony of continuous iteration. So Schmidt, Page, and Brin forced Google to invest outside the core.

We spend 70 percent of our time on core search and ads. We spend 20 percent on adjacent businesses: Google News, Google Earth, and Google Local. And then 10 percent of our time should be on things that are truly new.
- Eric Schmidt, 2005

While this is somewhat related to Google's notorious "20% time" for engineers, Schmidt's point was broader. Google wanted to invest 20% of its resources on new businesses built off the strong foundation of search/ads, and 10% of its time on completely new ideas that could seem crazy.



The Efficient Frontier, which illustrates the connection between risk and expected return.

Schmidt was forcing Google to think about where to deploy its resources like investors think about allocating assets. The mix of investments depends on risk profile and time horizon. With its monopoly-like profits and founder-friendly share class structure,

Schmidt knew Google had an abundance of capital and time. He wanted to make sure Google took advantage by investing in high risk, high expected return projects to optimize for its long-term success.

A Product Manager's 70/20/10

While Google likely has a longer time horizon than your company, its allocation approach makes sense if you just compress the timespan.

I think the ideal mix of a PM's time is 70% on the coming weeks, 20% on up to a quarter out, and 10% further out than that. This maps neatly to my post on [roadmaps: 70/20/10 on #now/#next/#later](#).

Avoid the trap of spending 95% of your time on reactive tasks. You will never leave room to come up with, nurture, and develop the big new ideas that change the trajectory of your product.

Steady vs. Spurts

Many PMs shift their time allocations around lumpily. It's easy to go all the way to 20/80/0 for one week of the quarter when you are putting together a roadmap. Everyone loves a week dedicated to brainstorming.

Consistency works better here, however. It allows more time for ideas to marinate and to bounce them off other people. It allows time to prototype and figure out engineering costs before having to commit to building a feature.

And it will produce better ideas, because it gives you time to observe. It is easier to come up with one new idea every week than 10 ideas in a one-week sprint.

Paul Graham's great essay on [How to Get Startup Ideas](#) explains this well:

*Since what you need to do here is loosen up your own mind, it may be best not to make too much of a direct frontal attack on the problem—i.e. to sit down and try to think of ideas. The best plan may be just to **keep a background process running, looking for things that seem to be missing**. Work on hard problems, driven mainly by curiosity, but have a second self watching over your shoulder, taking note of gaps and anomalies.*

- Paul Graham, 2012

There's a silver lining to the 70%: your everyday job as a PM should be filled with clues for new ideas if you start looking for them. The results of that Hive query you ran, the surprising A/B experiment result you analyzed, the user research session you sat in on, the sales meeting you presented at, the competitor product you tried, the whiteboard session you designed in—all these short-term tasks are filled with seeds for future feature ideas. Open your eyes and write them down.

How about other roles?

I cannot say for sure, but I suspect many other roles could benefit from taking a similarly structured approach. For example:

- Designers: 70% on the visual specs for upcoming features, 20% exploring new features, and 10% on wireframes for entirely new concepts/styles.
- Engineers: 70% building features and fixing bugs, 20% on prototyping fledgling ideas or exploratory data analysis, and 10% on speculative initiatives like a 10x performance improvement.
- Sales: 70% on closing deals, 20% on bigger I/Os for the next quarter, and 10% on long-term relationships with agencies and big advertisers.

Maybe those percentages are not quite right or the tasks are a bit off, but it does seem like a potentially useful approach.

While you probably don't have the luxury of building a self-driving car for 10+ years out, you also cannot afford to only focus on two weeks out.

You are completely responsible for shipping products fast, above a minimum quality bar, and with the right scope. But your job doesn't end there. Clean up your calendar, shut off your email occasionally, keep track of insightful observations, and set aside time to think further ahead.

You need to live in the future and bring great ideas back.



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Thanks to Jon Steinback.



Scott Santens

14 min read

Tech



Photo of the Freightliner Inspiration Truck by eMercedesMenz

Self-Driving Trucks Are Going to Hit Us Like a Human-Driven Truck

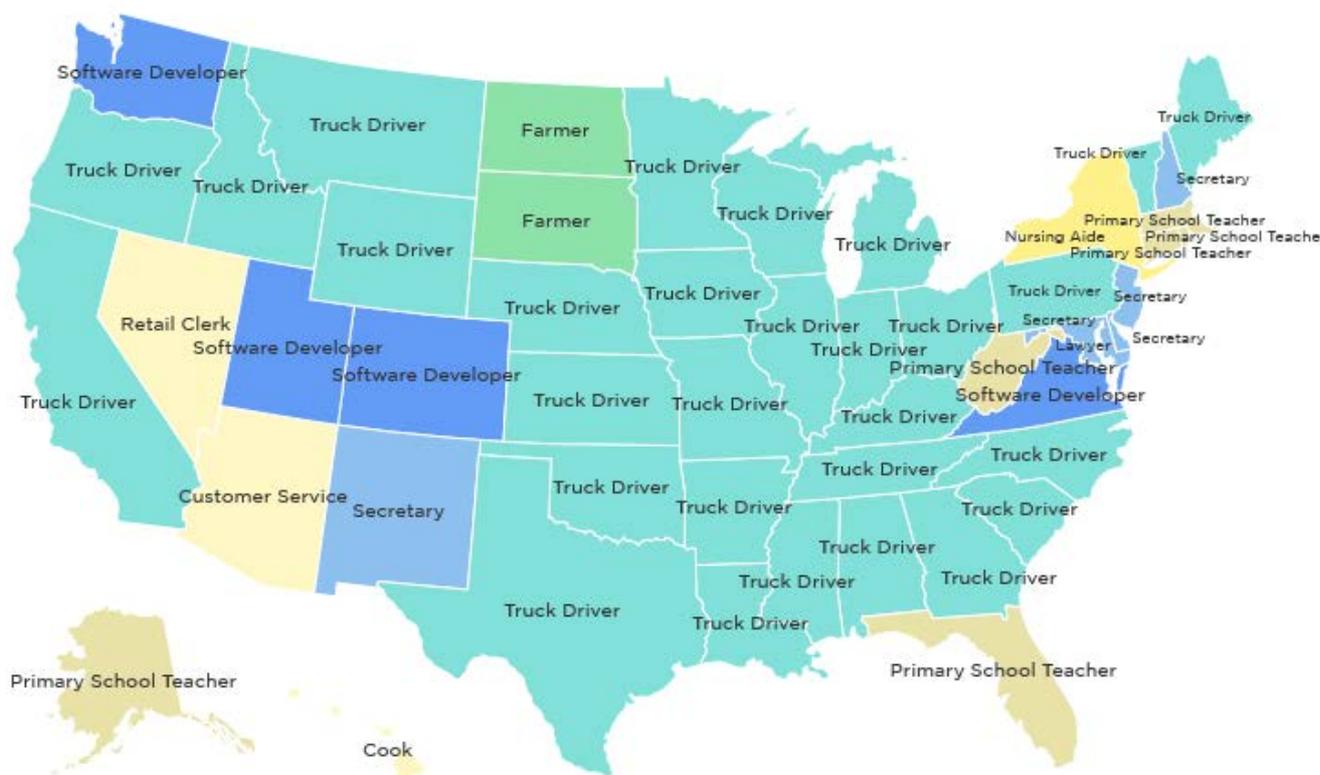
The imminent need for basic income in recognition of our machine-driven future

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Late last year, I took a road trip with my partner from our home in New Orleans,

Louisiana to Orlando, Florida and as we drove by town after town, we got to talking about the potential effects self-driving vehicle technology would have not only on truckers themselves, but on all the local economies dependent on trucker salaries. Once one starts wondering about this kind of one-two punch to America's gut, one sees the prospects aren't pretty.

We are facing the decimation of entire small town economies, a disruption the likes of which we haven't seen since the construction of the interstate highway system itself bypassed entire towns. If you think this may be a bit of hyperbole... let me back up a bit and start with this:



Source: [NPR](#)

This is a map of the most common job in each US state in 2014.

It should be clear at a glance just how dependent the American economy is on truck drivers. According to the American Trucker Association, there are 3.5 million professional truck drivers in the US, and an additional 5.2 million people employed within the truck-driving industry who don't drive the trucks. That's 8.7 million trucking-related jobs.

We can't stop there though, because the incomes received by these 8.2 million

people create the jobs of others. Those 3.5 million truck drivers driving all over the country stop regularly to eat, drink, rest, and sleep. Entire businesses have been built around serving their wants and needs. Think restaurants and motels as just two examples. So now we're talking about millions more whose employment depends on the employment of truck drivers. But we still can't even stop there.

Those working in these restaurants and motels along truck-driving routes are also consumers within their own local economies. Think about what a server spends her paycheck and tips on in her own community, and what a motel maid spends from her earnings into the same community. That spending creates other paychecks in turn. So now we're not only talking about millions more who depend on those who depend on truck drivers, but we're also talking about entire small town communities full of people who depend on all of the above in more rural areas. With any amount of reduced consumer spending, these local economies will shrink.

One further important detail to consider is that truck drivers are well-paid. They provide a middle class income of about \$40,000 per year. That's a higher income than just about half (46%) of all tax filers, including those of married households. They are also greatly comprised by those without college educations. Truck driving is just about the last job in the country to provide a solid middle class salary without requiring a post-secondary degree. Truckers are essentially the last remnant of an increasingly impoverished population once gainfully employed in manufacturing before those middle income jobs were mostly all shipped overseas.

If we now step back and look at the big national picture, we are potentially looking at well over 10 million American workers and their families whose incomes depend entirely or at least partially on the incomes of truck drivers, all of whom markedly comprise what is left of the American middle class.

So as long as the outlook for US trucking is rosy, we're fine, right?

The Short-Term Job Outlook of the American Trucker

The trucking industry expects to see 21% more truck driving jobs by 2020. They also expect to see an increasing shortfall in drivers, with over 100,000 jobs open and unable to find drivers to fill them. Higher demand than supply of truckers also

points to higher pay, so for at least the next five years, the future is looking great for truck drivers. The only thing that could put a damper on this would be if the demand for truck drivers were to say... drive off a sharp cliff.

That cliff is the self-driving truck.

The technology already exists to enable trucks to drive themselves. Google shocked the world when it announced its self-driving car it had already driven over 100,000 miles without accident. These cars have since driven over 1.7 million miles and have only been involved in 11 accidents, all caused by humans and not the computers. And this is *mostly within* metropolitan areas.

“And as you might expect, we see more accidents per mile driven on city streets than on freeways; we were hit 8 times in many fewer miles of city driving.” — Chris Urmson, director of Google’s self-driving car program

So according to Google’s experience, the greater danger lies within cities and not freeways, and driving *between* cities involves even fewer technological barriers than within them. Therefore, it’s probably pretty safe to say driverless freeway travel is even closer to our future horizon of driverless transportation. How much closer? It has *already* happened.

On May 6, 2015, the first self-driving truck hit the American road in the state of Nevada.



Self-driving trucks are no longer the future. They are the present. They're here.

“AU 010.” License plates are rarely an object of attention, but this one’s special—the funky number is the giveaway. That’s why Daimler bigwig Wolfgang Bernhard and Nevada governor Brian Sandoval are sharing a stage, mugging for the phalanx of cameras, together holding the metal rectangle that will, in just a minute, be slapped onto the world’s first officially recognized self-driving truck.

According to Daimler, these trucks will be in a decade-long testing phase, racking up over a million miles before being deemed fit for adoption, but the technology isn’t even anything all that new. There’s no laser-radar or LIDAR like in Google’s self-driving car. It’s just ordinary radar and cameras. The hardware itself is already yesterday’s news. They’re just the first ones to throw them into a truck and allow truckers to sit back and enjoy the ride, while the truck itself does all the driving.

If the truck needs help, it’ll alert the driver. If the driver doesn’t respond, it’ll slowly pull over and wait for further instructions. This is nothing fancy. This is not a truck version of KITT from Knight Rider. This is just an example of a company and a state government getting out of the way of technology and letting it do what it was built to do—enable us to do more with less. In the case of self-driving trucks, one big improvement in particular is fewer accidents.

In 2012 in the US, 330,000 large trucks were involved in crashes that killed nearly 4,000 people, most of them in passenger cars. About 90 percent of those were caused by driver error.

That's like one and a half 9/11s yearly. Human-driven trucks kill people.

Robot trucks will kill far fewer people, if any, because machines don't get tired. Machines don't get distracted. Machines don't look at phones instead of the road. Machines don't drink alcohol or do any kind of drugs or involve any number of things that somehow contribute to the total number of accidents every year involving trucks. For this same reasoning, pilots too are bound to be removed from airplanes.

Humans are dangerous behind the wheel of anything.

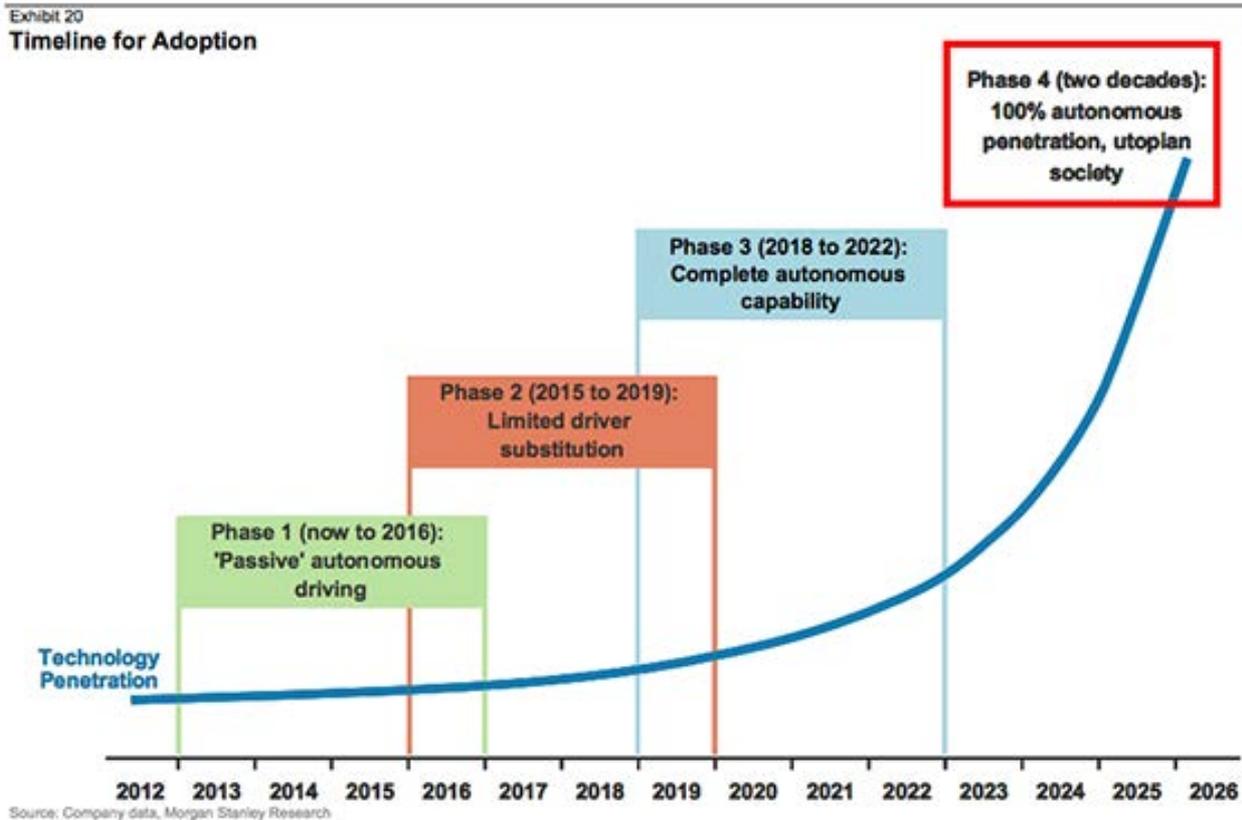
Robot trucks also don't need salaries—salaries that stand to go up because fewer and fewer people want to be truckers. A company can buy a fleet of self-driving trucks and never pay another human salary for driving. The only costs will be upkeep of the machinery. No more need for health insurance either. Self-driving trucks will also never need to stop to rest, for any reason. Routes will take less time to complete.

All of this means the replacement of truckers is inevitable. It is not a matter of “if”, it's only a matter of “when.” So the question then becomes, how long until millions of truckers are freshly unemployed and what happens to them and all the rest of us as a result?

The Long-Term Job Outlook of the American Trucker

First, let's look at the potential time horizons for self-driving cars. Tesla intends to release a software update *next month* that will turn on “autopilot” mode, immediately allowing all Tesla Model S drivers to be driven between “San Francisco and Seattle without the driver doing anything”, in Elon Musk's own words. The cars actually already have the technology to even drive from “parking lot to parking lot”, but that ability will remain unactivated by software.

Tesla-driven humans won't be able to legally let their cars do all the driving, but who are we kidding? There will be Teslas driving themselves, saving lives in the process, and governments will need to catch up to make that driving legal. This process is already here in 2015. So when will the process end? When will self-driving cars conquer our roads?



Source: [Morgan Stanley](#)

According to Morgan Stanley, complete autonomous capability will be here by 2022, followed by massive market penetration **by 2026** and the cars we know and love today then entirely extinct in another 20 years thereafter.

Granted, this is only one estimate of many and it's all educated guesswork. So here are some other estimates:

- Navigant Research: "By 2035, sales of autonomous vehicles will reach 95.4 million annually, representing 75% of all light-duty vehicle sales."
- IHS Automotive: "There should be nearly 54 million self-driving cars in use globally by 2035."

- ABI Research: “Half of new vehicles shipping in North America to have driverless, robotic capabilities by 2032.”
- Nissan: “In 2020 we’re talking more autonomous drive capability. It’s going to be an evolutionary process and 2020 will be the first year to truly see some of these capabilities start to be introduced in the vehicle.”

Take all of these estimates together, and we’re looking at a window of massive disruption starting somewhere between 2020 and 2030.

There is no turning the wheel in prevention of driving off this cliff either. Capitalism itself has the wheel now, and what the market wants, the market gets. Competition will make sure of it. Tesla and Google are not the only companies looking to develop autonomous vehicles. There are others.

A company named **Vevo Systems** is developing vehicles as small as 2-seaters to as large as 70-seat buses, and will be testing them in 30 US cities by the end of 2016.

At 25 to 40 percent cheaper, the cost to ride the driverless public transit vehicles will be significantly less expensive than traditional buses and trains... The vehicles are electric, rechargeable and could cost as low as \$1 to \$3 to run per day.

Apple is also developing its own self-driving car.

The project is code-named Titan and the vehicle design resembles a minivan, the Wall Street Journal reported... Apple already has technology that may lend itself to an electric car and expertise managing a vast supply chain. The company has long researched battery technology for use in its iPhones, iPads and Macs. The mapping system it debuted in 2012 can be used for navigation...

And Uber is developing its own self-driving car.

Uber said it will develop “key long-term technologies that advance Uber’s mission of bringing safe, reliable transportation to everyone, everywhere,” including driverless cars, vehicle safety and mapping services.

It’s this last one that fully intends to transform the transportation landscape. Uber is going all-in on self-driving vehicles to the point it wants to entirely eliminate car ownership as a 20th century relic.

*Travis Kalanick, the CEO and founder of Uber, said at a conference last year that he’d replace human Uber drivers with a fleet of self-driving cars in a second. “You’re not just paying for the car—you’re paying for the other dude in the car,” he said. “When there’s no other dude in the car, the cost of taking an Uber anywhere becomes cheaper than owning a vehicle.” That, he said, will “bring the cost below the cost of ownership for everybody, and then **car ownership goes away.**”*

That’s the potential of self-driving cars—the outright extinction of car ownership. And with that, the elimination of entire industries built up around the existence of car ownership like: mechanics, car washes, parking, valets, body shops, rental companies, car insurance, car loans, and on and on. Even hugely expensive and capital intensive mass-transit infrastructure projects like streetcars and light rail can be dropped in favor of vastly cheaper on demand robotic “transportation clouds”, and all those construction and maintenance jobs right along with it.

Big players are already in the game. There are huge savings to be found, huge profits to be created. Higher quality and safety is assured. Driverless vehicles are coming, and they are coming fast.

But again, what about **trucks** specifically?

Any realistic time horizon for self-driving trucks needs to look at horizons for cars and shift those even further towards the present. Trucks only need to be self-driven on highways. They do not need warehouse-to-store autonomy to be disruptive. City-to-city is sufficient. At the same time, trucks are almost entirely corporate driven. There are market forces above and beyond private cars operating for trucks. If there are savings to be found in eliminating truckers from drivers seats, *which there are, these savings will be sought. It’s actually really easy to find these savings right now.*

Wirelessly linked truck platoons are as simple as having a human driver drive a truck, with multiple trucks without drivers following closely behind. This not only saves on gas money (7% for only two trucks together), but can immediately eliminate half of all truckers if for example 2-truck convoys became the norm. There's no real technical obstacles to this option. It's a very simple use of present technology.

Basically, the only real barrier to the immediate adoption of self-driven trucks is purely legal in nature, not technical or economic. With self-driving vehicles currently only road legal in a few states, many more states need to follow suit unless autonomous vehicles are made legal at the national level. And Sergey Brin of Google has estimated this could happen **as soon as 2017**. Therefore...

The answer to the big question of “When?” for self-driving trucks is that they can essentially hit our economy at any time.

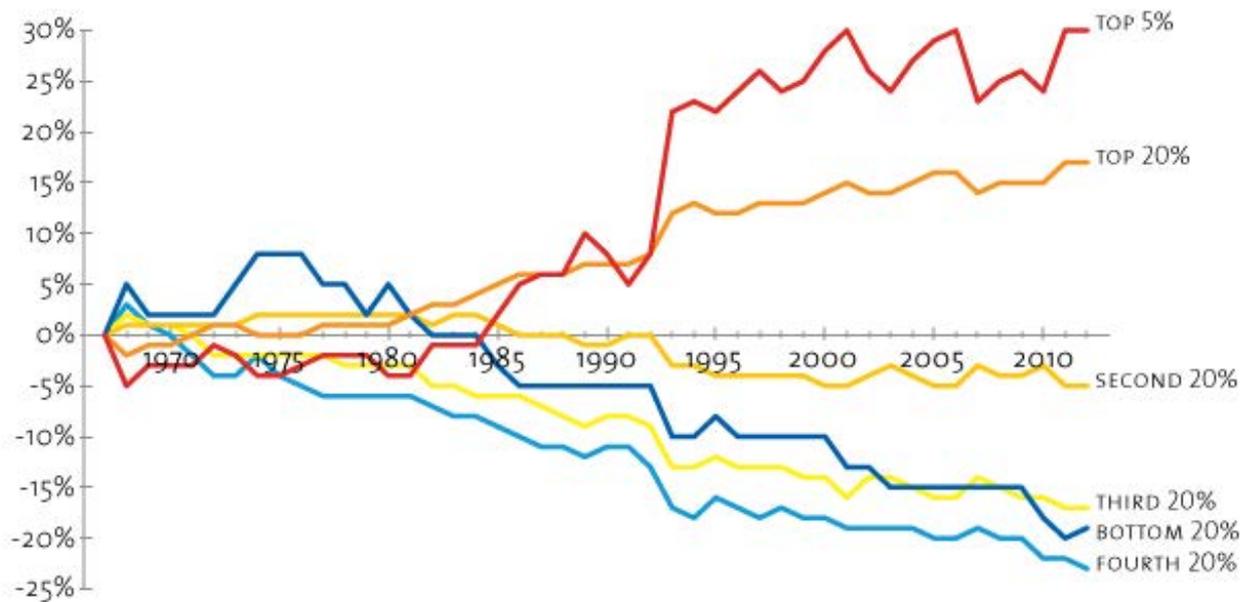
The Eve of Massive Social and Economic Disruption

Main Street USA has already taken a big hit, and increasingly so, over the past few decades. Manufacturing has been shipped overseas to areas where labor is far cheaper because costs of living are far cheaper. Companies like Walmart have spread everywhere, concentrating a reduced labor force into one-stop shopping facilities requiring fewer total workers than what was needed with smaller, more numerous, and more widely spread Mom & Pop type stores. Companies like Amazon have even further concentrated this even further reduced labor force into automated warehouse centers capable of obviating stores entirely and shipping directly to consumers.

All of the above means fewer ways of securing employment in fewer places, while commerce has become more geographically concentrated and access to money has become increasingly shifted away from the bottom and middle of the income spectrum towards the top.

Change in Share of Total Income, 1967-2012

relative to 1967, by percentile



SOURCE: CENSUS BUREAU

Mother Jones

Source: [Mother Jones](#)

This is what happens when good-paying jobs are eliminated, and that money not spent on wages and salaries instead stays in the hands of owners of capital, or is given in smaller amounts to lower-paid employees in lower-wage jobs. Inequality grows more and more extreme and our land of opportunity vanishes. **Economic growth slows to a crawl.**

This is where we're at and this is what we face as we look towards a quickly approaching horizon of **over 3 million unemployed truckers** and millions more unemployed service industry workers in small towns all over the country dependent on truckers as consumers of their services.



Glenrio, TX—Source: [Reader's Digest](#)

The removal of truckers from freeways will have an effect on today's towns similar to the effects the freeways themselves had on towns decades ago that had sprung up around bypassed stretches of early highways. When the construction of the interstate highway system replaced [Route 66](#), things changed as drivers drove right on past these once thriving towns. The result was **ghost towns** like [Glenrio, Texas](#).

With the patience that carved the Grand Canyon over eons, nature reclaims Glenrio, where the clock stopped with the bypass of Route 66. The replacement of Route 66 with a four-lane superhighway that allowed motorists to zip past rather than wander through ultimately allowed Glenrio to decline.

With self-driving cars and trucks, here again we face the prospect of town after town being zipped past by people (if even present) choosing to instead just sleep in their computer-driven vehicles. Except this time, there is no new highway being made for businesses to relocate closer to and new towns to emerge along. This time, as is true of the effect of technology on jobs, it's different. This time, there's no need for entire towns to even exist *at all*.

The Road Left to Take

As close as 2025—that is in a mere 10 years—our advancing state of technology will begin disrupting our economy in ways we can't even yet imagine. Human labor is increasingly unnecessary and even economically unviable compared to machine labor. And yet we still insist on money to pay for what our machines are making for us. As long as this remains true, we must begin providing ourselves the money required to purchase what the machines are producing.

Without a **technological dividend**, the engine that is our economy will seize, or we will fight against technological progress itself in the same way some once destroyed their machine replacements. Without non-work income, we will actually fight to keep from being replaced by the technology we built to replace us.

Just as our roads a decade from now will be full of machine drivers instead of human drivers, a 21st century economy shall be driven by human *consumers*, not human workers, and these consumers must be freely given their purchasing power. If we refuse, if we don't provide ourselves **a universal and unconditional basic income** soon, the future is going to hit us like a truck—a truck driven solely by ourselves.

To allow this to happen would be truly foolish, for what is the entire purpose of technology but to free us to pursue all we wish to pursue? Fearing the loss of jobs shouldn't be a fear at all. It should be welcomed. It should be freeing.

No one should be asking what we're going to do *if* computers *take* our jobs.

We should all be asking what we *get* to do once *freed* from them.

Without basic income:
“Oh shit self-driving
trucks are here”
With basic income:
“Shit yeah! Self-driving
trucks are here!”

patreon.com/scottsantens

. . . .

Scott Santens writes about basic income on [his blog](#). You can also follow him here on [Medium](#), on [Twitter](#), on [Facebook](#), or on [Reddit](#) where he is a moderator for the [/r/BasicIncome](#) community of over 26,000 subscribers.

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Thomas Oppong

3 min read

Tech



These 39 Sites Have Amazing Stock Photos You Can Use For Free

It can be insanely hard to find high quality, high-res free stock photos for personal and commercial use. A growing number of websites have amazing photos you can use for your work. Some of them cost money. Not everybody can afford those high quality photos. Fortunately most of these sites have images you can use for free.

I've curated a list of awesome sites that have great stock images you can use for free. You may have seen some of them already on other stock photos lists. But you will still find this list useful.

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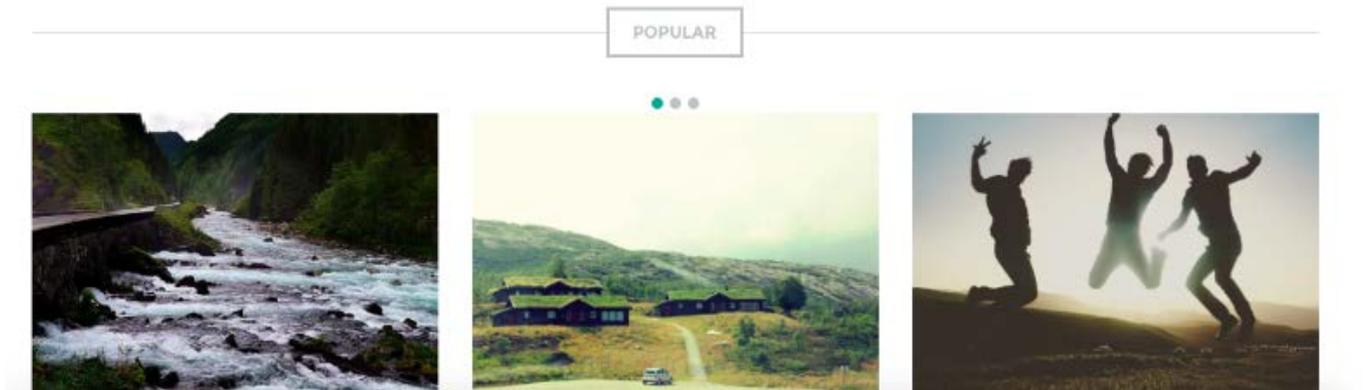
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The author is the founder at [Alltopstartups](#) (where he shares startup resources) and [Postanly](#) (a free weekly newsletter that delivers the best, most popular and long form posts from top publishers around the web). Follow him on Twitter [@Alltopstartups](#).

Writing / Writing Tips



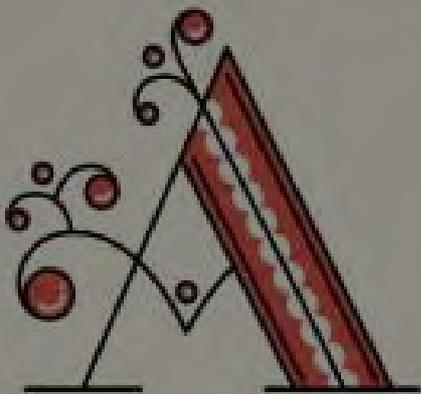
Courtney Symons

9 min read

Wait out the seasons. / They will always call it quits / Long before you do.

I THANK YOU, KIND STRANGER / WHO TOLD ME MY DRESS WAS CAUGHT / IN MY UNDERWEAR.

What I Learned Writing a Haiku Every Day for 100 Days



IF TIME IS LIKE SAND / THEN LIFE TRULY IS A BEACH. / AS SUCH, I WILL BASK.

Another ending / So something else can begin. / But what will it be?



SUMMER SINGALONG; /
SOLOS SHIFT SHAPE TO
CHOIRS / OF YOU, ME, AND
US.



WTF's a haiku?

I've heard some variation of this question many times over the past couple of months. You likely know that a haiku is a form of poetry; you might even know that it's composed of three lines—the first containing five syllables, the second with seven, and the third with five.

But even I didn't know that it's considered a "mood poem" and that similes and metaphors aren't technically allowed, according to some sources. Well, I messed that part up, but we'll get to that.

The reason why my brain has been so haiku happy is because I took part in the 100 Day Project,

spearheaded by Elle Luna and The Great Discontent. She challenged anyone and everyone to do something, anything, every day for 100 days straight. My friend Cassie was the one who planted the seed—she planned to do 100 days of lettering (and you should take a look at her awesome results [here](#)). I'm not a designer, however. And I like to doodle, but I wasn't sure I'd make time for it every day for 100 days.

I do pride myself on being a writer though. When I was a community and then a business journalist, I wrote every day. And even when I was writing objective, clinical journalistic pieces, there was still room for creativity and a clever turn of phrase. I came up with some of the cheesiest headlines you've ever heard, but at least it was a creative outlet.

Now, I'm at Shopify as a marketer, and I still write every day, and I love what I do. But I'm not writing creatively as often as I'd like. It's like that old screwhead. Leave it alone and it'll get all rusty. Worst metaphor ever, and didn't I just call myself a writer? But whatever; I've been training myself not to rely on metaphors because of my haikus, so let's move on.

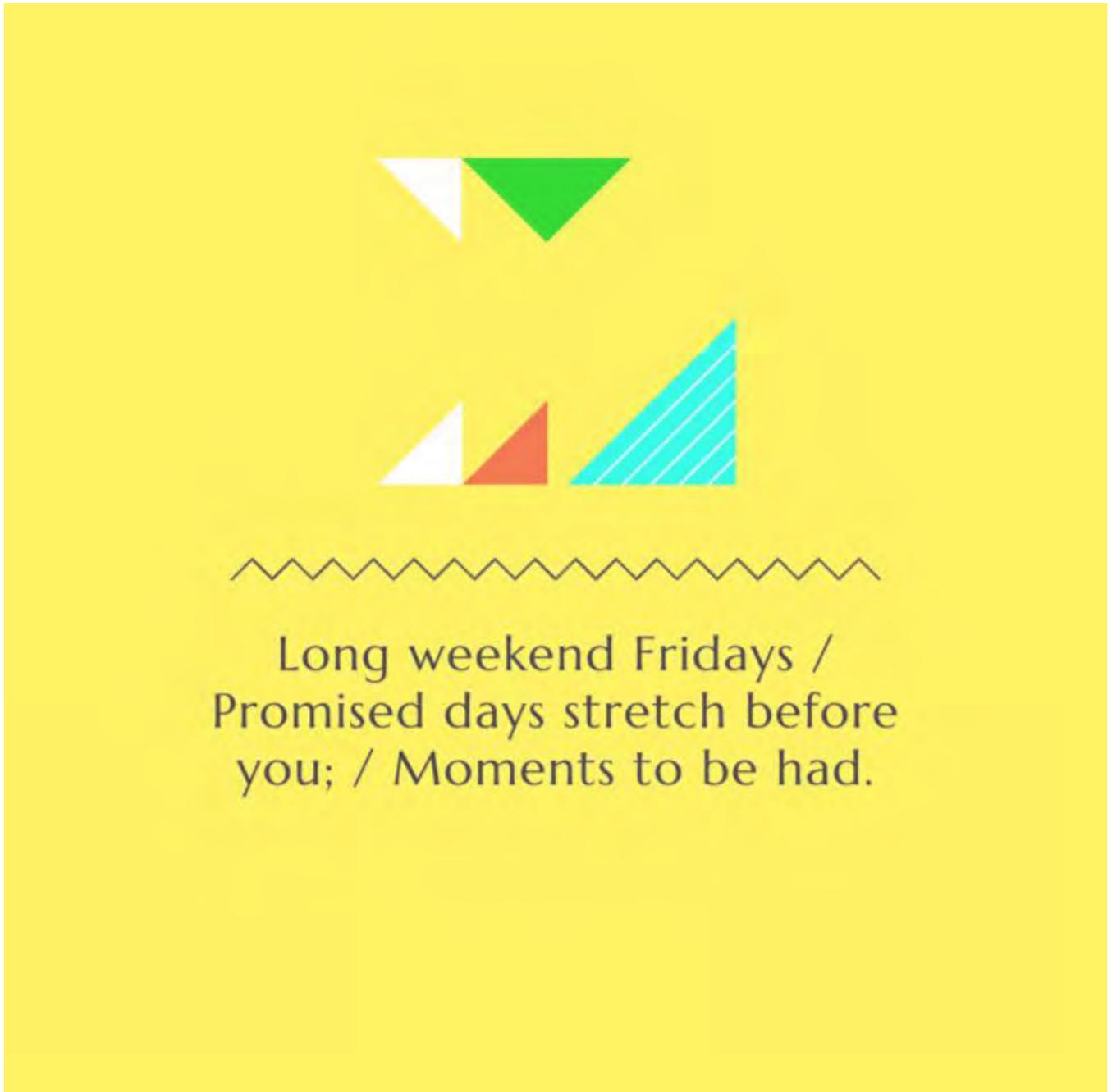
Why haikus?

I decided I would do something that involved writing, every day. I wanted to be realistic. I couldn't commit to a short story each day for 100 whole days; writing a chapter of a novel per day was even more daunting; keeping it as generic as "writing" wasn't something I thought I'd be able to hold myself accountable to. Thus, haikus. They're short! A total of 17 syllables for god's sake; easy as pie.

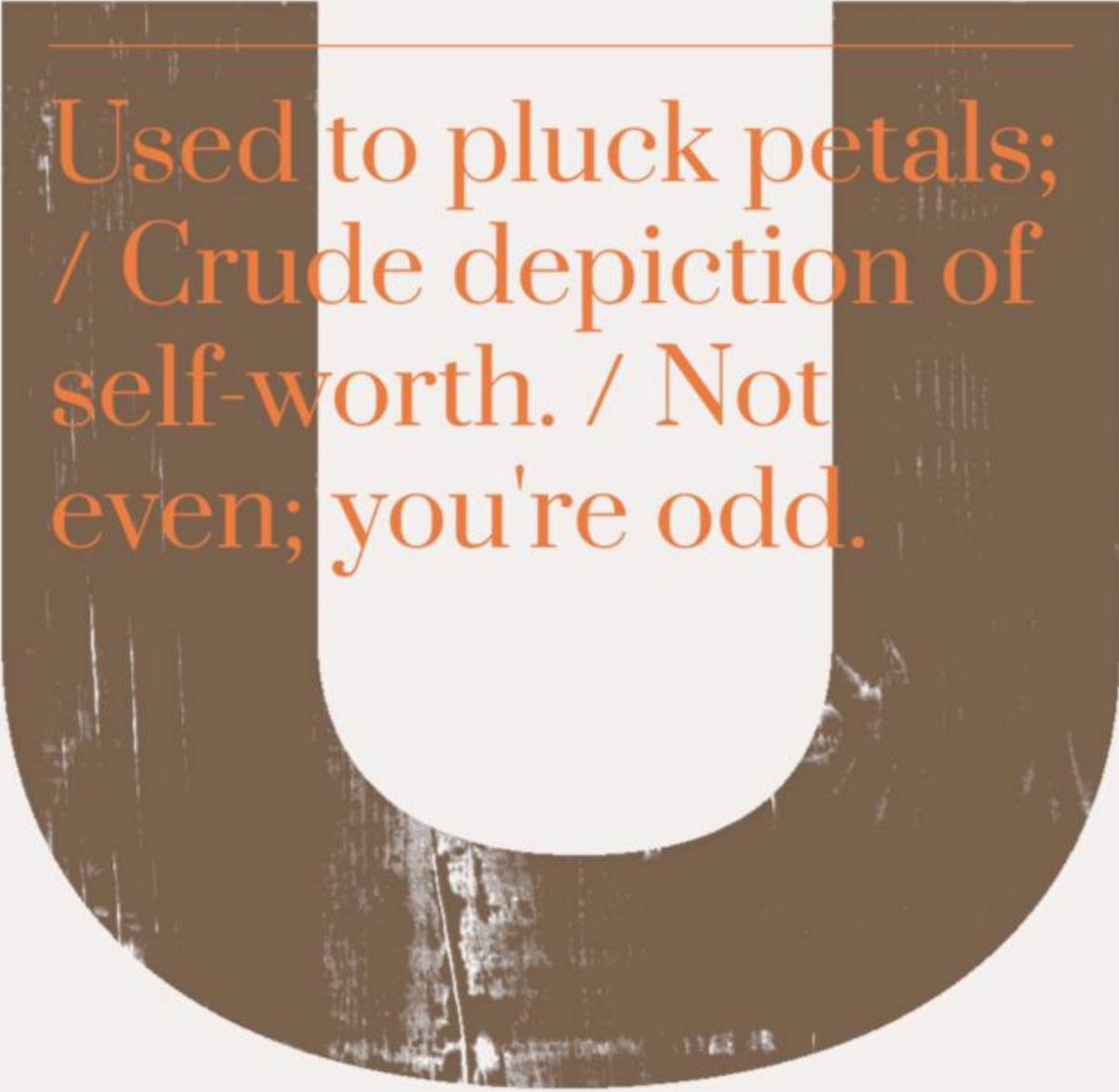
Let me tell you something. It wasn't easy as pie, but it was as satisfying. I love pie.

Picture this: you lie down in bed after a long day, after consuming what may or may not have been way too many glasses of red wine, and you're in that beautiful, hazy state where your eyelids and body feel extra heavy with the sense that any moment you're about to slip under into a state of oblivion. And then it hits you. You haven't written a haiku yet. Shiiiiit.

Or when you're having a not so creative day. They happen! And more often than I'd like to admit, at least in my case. Sometimes you're drained of your ability to produce intelligent thoughts, and so I'd put out something like this:



But then there were days, really good days, where I was proud of what I'd accomplished, even though it was only a simple poem on an Instagram feed with a relatively small audience, like this:



Used to pluck petals;
/ Crude depiction of
self-worth. / Not
even; you're odd.

I should note that I'm not clever enough to have come up with the design. I used an awesome app called [Notegrphy](#) to help format these babies. So many variant themes that I could use a different layout each and every day if I chose.

The process

Do you remember being in grade school, and the teacher handing you back a test, and you were afraid to look at the mark because it might not be good? And you kept it upside down for as long as possible before peeking at the mark? No, just me? Well, I kinda feel that way about my work even as an adult. Oftentimes I'll write something and then hide it away for a long time before coming back to it.

To this day, I still haven't reread my self-published book because I'm so embarrassed for myself. I'm proud of it; don't get me wrong, but it makes my insides crawl a bit to read it. Like actors who can't watch their own movies.

Okay, so what does this have to do with haikus? It's really effing hard to share your work. Especially when it's not polished, or even particularly well thought out. There were some haikus that I churned out in under a minute. The moment you hit publish, it's out of your hands. I can't tell you how many times I thought to myself, after rereading a haiku an hour (or even a minute) later, "Well, damn. Why didn't I choose this word instead?" Here's one example:



IF TIME IS LIKE SAND /
THEN LIFE TRULY IS A
BEACH. / AS SUCH, I
WILL BASK.

“As such, I **shall** bask” is so much stronger!

But that’s also what I loved about this challenge. You come up with some tiny kernel of an idea, and you throw it out to the universe. And at first, it really mattered to me what people thought—whether they liked it, or even better, commented on it. But when you have a small following, you can’t get too down if you don’t have dozens of likes.

I quickly learned that it wasn’t about what people thought about them. It was that I was perfecting my craft, sometimes painfully, sometimes effortlessly, and I was allowing others to watch.

As I said, that’s not easy to do. But it got easier.

I started off simple. I’m a Canadian; we love to talk about weather. And this project kicked off on one of the very first days of spring. Here was my first haiku:

Wait out the
seasons. / They
will always call it
quits / Long
before you do.

Some were fun, casual and anecdotal; about something interesting that happened that day:



DUSK DRIVE, WINDOWS DOWN.
/ HEAVY AIR THROUGH TANGLED
HAIR. / A LONG DAY'S REWARD.



I

**THANK YOU, KIND
STRANGER / WHO
TOLD ME MY DRESS
WAS CAUGHT / IN MY
UNDERWEAR.**

Others were less surface level; less mood-based (breaking all the rules!), and about some thought that had crossed my mind that day.

The background is a teal color with scattered, multi-colored confetti in shades of red, yellow, blue, and grey. The text is arranged in several overlapping white rectangular boxes.

I WON'T CLING TO

YOUTH / BUT I'LL

NEVER LET GO OF

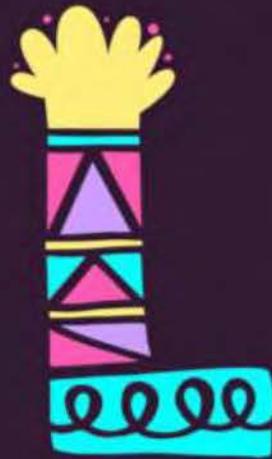
THOSE I WAS
/ THOSE I WAS

YOUNG WITH.
YOUNG WITH.



**THE GRASS IS GREEN
HERE. / I DON'T CARE
WHAT SHADE IT IS / ON
THE OTHER SIDE.**

Speaking of breaking the rules, caved and used a couple of metaphors (and personifications) along the way.



LARGE METALLIC BIRD /
SLICING THROUGH THE
ATMOSPHERE / GIVING
HUMANS WINGS.



RAIN ON THE
ROOFTOP / THOSE
CASCADING
CRESCENDOS /
THUNDER
APPLAUDING.

There were some haikus that (I thought) were reasonably good:

A large, white, serif letter 'N' is centered at the top. A thick, red diagonal stroke runs from the top left of the letter down to the bottom right, crossing through the middle of the 'N'.

New home for old things /
Blank walls and long halls to
fill / With life and laughter.





We pine for newness
/ No matter how
good the old. /
Slaves to novelty.



Things are blooming now / And
it's me who feels reborn / Air
thick like a salve.

Some were bad:

L

LOVE FEEDS ON MUSIC /
SHAKESPEARE TOLD US
LONG AGO / WHY FILL
SONGS WITH HATE?



UNEXPECTED
GUESTS / RECEIVE
UNEXPECTED VIEWS. /
(WHO WEARS PANTS AT
HOME?)



And some were downright ugly.

M

MY BATTERY DIED / AND I
DIDN'T RECHARGE IT /
FOR TWO FULL HOURS.



Like a lullaby / The weight of a long,
full day / Soothes me to slumber.

But they were mine.

What I learned

100 days is a long time. Seasons changed. I changed. I lost 20 pounds as a result of another personal challenge I took on. Some things fell apart, and some things fell into place. I'm not the same person as I was when I began.

I learned that really and truly, done is better than perfect. If I had spent time agonizing over every syllable, I would have grown to hate the challenge.

Sometimes, you just have to put it out there, even when there are mistakes, like this:



**YOU ARE A FEATHER /AND YOU CAN'T BE
TOGETHER / AS HE IS A STONE.**

That damn missing space.

I was impressed that I never miscounted my syllables, even while writing and posting under the influence. There were a couple of judgment calls I had to make, because some words have syllables that are hard to count. That sounds stupid, but what about the word “actually”—three or four syllables?

Or this one:



THERE'S SPACE IN MY
MIND; / JUST ENOUGH
TO DEVOUR / ONE
BOOK EVERY DAY.

Every: Is it two or three syllables?! My Google searches yielded conflicting results. Also, to be clear, I wrote this one while I was on vacation. I don't normally have time to read a book a day, but I wish I did.

More than anything, I learned that it's important to practice your passions. You can't spend your life telling people you're a writer if you don't write. Which is what I was coming dangerously close to doing. I can confidently say that I am a writer. I refrain from adding any form of qualifier, because on some days I'm a good writer; on very rare days I'm a great writer; and more often than not I'm a hack. But I'm a writer, and it feels good to own that part of my identity again.

Gone are the days when I lived on the beach in Australia and did nothing but write my novel all day. But I'm still a writer. Even if that means writing down a phrase that strikes me on a semi-used napkin while I'm out for dinner. Or if I make use of that notepad next to my bed with a particular rhythm of words that just feels right. Or if I open up my laptop at 11 PM on a Saturday night and write this post like the wild thing I am.

Something powerful happens when you hit publish. There are poems, stories, pages galore of things I've written that no one has ever seen. But it's like the proverb about whether a tree falling in the forest when no one is around actually makes a sound. Someone has to see that shit. You have to hit publish. And that doesn't apply only for writing. A lot of friends participated in the 100 Day Challenge by lettering, drawing, writing postcards or taking photos. They hit publish and became creators. It was pretty inspiring to watch.

What's next?

I still find myself tapping my fingers against my thighs as I count out syllables. I find myself writing haikus even when I don't mean to. I'm sure I'll continue to post haikus every now and again, but the pressure's off. And I won't miss those late night panic attacks where I realize I better think of something semi-interesting, and fast, because I haven't published yet. But my brain is forever changed by the rhythms I've written for these 100 days. It was a phase that I will remember fondly.

Here was my final haiku:



**Another ending / So something else
can begin. / But what will it be?**

Who knows what the next challenge will be. Perhaps some more smaller projects; maybe I'll finally grow the lady balls to write the next novel that's been pinballing around in my brain for the past couple of years. But I now feel that I can write; that I'm capable; and that a busy life and day job isn't an excuse to fail to pursue the things you're most passionate about.

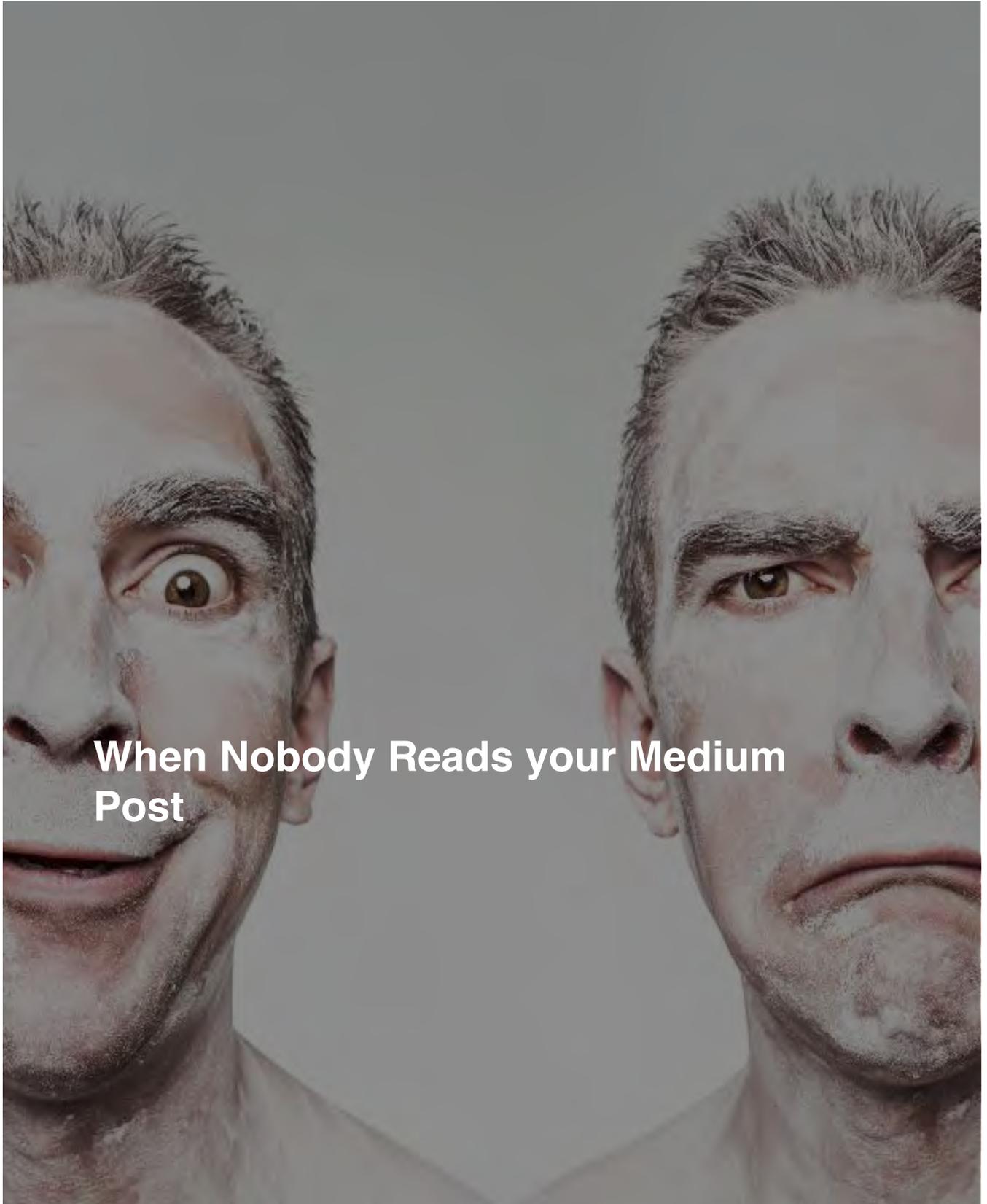
You know that hobby you love that you haven't picked up in awhile? Or that thing you used to be really good at, and that made you feel really good, that just doesn't get prioritized anymore? Prioritize it. You won't regret it.

To read more of my haikus, you can find them on [Instagram](#).



Ignatius N
4 min read

Writing



When Nobody Reads your Medium Post

• • •

You finally finish writing your article. *That* article. The one you researched for a whole day. The one you spent hours rereading, making sure that every little grammar flaw was exterminated. The one you spent just as much time weighing your word choices, arguing over whether “angry” or “frustrated” would best convey your intense emotions.

You finally sit back, and whisper, “I’m done.”

You select three tags, having already spent thirty minutes weighing the pros and cons of each, and click publish.

As your computer slowly stutters from the draft page to the article view of your now-published masterpiece, you sit back and whisper “This is the one.”

“This will be the article that everybody will send to their friends, posting on Facebook how it changed their lives.”

“This will be the article to make it the top of that ‘Top Stories on Medium’ box that has mocked me and my writing for months.”

“This will be the article that makes me famous.”

As you lounge back in your chair, daydreaming about giving interviews to Vice (“you know, sometimes inspiration just strikes you, and you have to share it online or else you’ll be failing every human on earth) and coming home to an inbox of book deals, you click the little outline of a heart and recommend your own article.

You then relax, spend a few minutes checking social media (you’re not viral yet) and the news (you’re not in it yet).

You then go back to Medium.

You click “stats.”

1 view.

0 reads.

1 recommend.

You gasp. You start freaking out, wondering what you did wrong.

You then calmly remember that you forgot to share your post on Twitter and Facebook. You do that.

You leave to get something to drink (anything with caffeine). You come back and scroll around the internet for a bit. But you're not focused on the BuzzFeed quiz saying that the anime character that embodies your inner spirit most is Sasuke Uchiha. You're not focused on that gif your friend sent you with the dog jumping into a swimming pool filled with chocolate sauce.

All you can think about is your article.

Figuring that you've given yourself enough time (it's been ten minutes), you reopen the "stats" tab. You click "refresh."

4 views.

1 read.

1 recommend.

Something is wrong.

You check the tweet you posted: 0 favorites, 0 retweets.

You check the facebook post: 0 likes, 0 shares.

You reopen "stats." You click "refresh" again.

No difference.

Again, you click "refresh."

The same.

"Something must be wrong with Medium's stats page," you tell yourself.

You get up and pace around your apartment. Your roommate yells at you; you tell him to shut up. You're busy.

You run back to your computer. Refresh. Refresh. Refresh.

6 views.

1 read.

1 recommend.

You panic. You send your article to all your friends. You email it to your mom. You post it on Reddit. You post it on Stumbleupon. You google "places to post articles" and post it on every recommendation site that comes up.

By now it's been an hour.

10 views.

2 reads.

1 recommend.

You tell yourself that you're acting silly. You just need to give the article some time. It's late. People aren't reading Medium right now (they are). Your post will get more views in the morning (it won't). You just need to go to bed and you'll wake up an internet hero (you won't).

So you go to bed. Six hours later you wake up. You don't get dressed. You don't take a shower. You don't even turn on the lights.

You rush to your computer. The "stats" page is still open. You slam your finger down on that F5 key faster than you've ever moved in your life.

13 views.

2 reads.

1 recommend.

You step back. You trip on the empty Doritos bag on the floor, which you couldn't see because the lights are still off. You lay on the ground. You keep laying there.

"I am a failure."

"My writing is complete garbage."

"I have no future."

You get up and turn on a light. You pour yourself a bowl of Lucky Charms. You whisper, "I hope these charms really are lucky." You chuckle at your unfunny joke, then start crying because you know just how unfunny it was. This is why you suck at writing.

Your roommate walks in, sees you bawling over soggy cereal, and goes back to bed.

You leave the apartment. You think about what you wrote. You think about every point you made; every reference you cited; every word you typed.

You think about what you could have done differently, what you did right, and why your article didn't break out.

You think a lot.

Then you come home, and you open a new tab on your computer.

You open Medium, click "New Story," and start writing again.

. . .

IgnatiusN exists to write various things that you may enjoy reading.

Feel free to follow me on Medium, as well as check out my Twitter and my Tumblr.

This collection is sister to The Curious Cat Project (CCP), a website that connects writers from all over the world. Follow CCP on Facebook.



Jonas Ellison

4 min read

Writing

What I learned after 30 straight days of blogging

I once was lost but now... I'm still lost... And it feels great

. . .

30 days ago, I was creatively stuck. The combination of—a) growing bored of writing about my previous vocation and b) being immersed in some deep philosophical and spiritual studies—resulted in a creative upheaval followed by doldrums.

I felt lost. Like I didn't have a 'thing' to write about. For the longest time, I wrote mostly about copywriting and content marketing.

And then, 30 days ago, I decided I frankly didn't want to write about that any longer.

So, in taking the advice of creative coach Julia Cameron, I started writing morning pages—a daily 3-page stream of consciousness written upon waking.

As I started writing, I had no idea what would come out. But when I was finished, something had emerged. Every day.

These entries weren't pretty. I guess you could say they were beautifully disastrous. Genuinely mangled and messy.

But I loved this exercise.

Out of those pages came blog posts (in the form of Medium stories) where I carefully shaped each morning's ramblings into something comprehensible for public consumption.

As much as I always write for the reader, I must admit, this exercise was almost entirely selfish. It was my reward after being a writer mercenary for the last three years.

It felt great to be loose with my subject matter. One day, I'd write a photo narrative. The next, a prayer. The next, a stream of consciousness. And on and on for 30 days.

Well, today is day #30 in a row. And I wanted to share a couple of the biggest lessons I learned.

1. Being lost is miserable. Until it isn't.

On day one of this exercise, I was incredibly frustrated. I wanted to find my 'thing'. I've always had a 'thing' to write about and now I didn't.

I was lost. And I was of the mindset that being lost sucks.

But now I realize something. On day 30, I'm still lost. But I'm good with it.

Being lost is actually quite enjoyable if you can just accept it.

If we always knew the answers, what would be the use? Isn't life about the hunt? Isn't it about the adventure?

Sure, it's exhausting, but we can sleep when we're dead.

"Finding yourself" sounds quite boring when you think of it that way, doesn't it?

What I've learned is that there's nothing to be found. Trying to find one "X" on the treasure map is a fool's journey. Because as soon as you find that "X" an infinite number of other "X's" pop up.

Find peace in the fact that the journey is never over. Be forgiving to yourself when you leave the trail of one “X” to find another. The ego will hate you for it. It likes predictability and certainty. Which are illusions in themselves. But that’s for another post.

2. Creating something every day for public consumption is like mental steroids

Seth Godin has been preaching this for the longest time.

Blog every day. (Or create and share something every day.)

Blogging every day clarifies my thoughts — it helps me notice things. It’s one of the most important practices of my profession.” — Seth Godin

I’ve actually been writing every day for the last couple years. But I haven’t shared something every day. I’ve gone on these 30-day benders before and they always feel amazing. I’m not sure why I don’t keep them up. Maybe I will this time.

Sharing something daily takes your psyche to whole new levels. Because when you share with others, it has to make (somewhat) sense. Or at least look cool. Like Seth says, it pushes you to get extremely clear on your thoughts.

Sure, whatever you put out there may suck for awhile. But the worst that can happen is that people will ignore you.

Big deal. You’d be ignored if you didn’t have this daily ritual in the first place (and you wouldn’t be getting good at something).

But if you do it every day, soon enough, they’ll become really good. People might not ignore you then.

3. The mind is bottomless. There’s always more.

A concern I always have when I go on these runners is—how the heck am I gonna come up with new ideas?

Here's the thing. The mind is deeper than you can ever imagine. It's only when you get it circulating that you start to see its true potential. And for 30 days, I'm merely skimming the top.

Creativity is infinite possibilities. An infinite number of ideas all playing together in an open field.

The only one who can put a limit on it... is you. And the best way to do that is by not tapping into it. Our idea muscle atrophies when we don't use it.

But when you do use it, stand back. It's amazing what comes out.

And never be stingy with your ideas. Don't say you'll save them for another post, another story, another day. Put it out there. Circulate your ideas freely so your mind can generate new. Like a broken muscle that grows back stronger or a samurai sword that becomes steeled by every blow by the hammer thingy they use (sorry, it's late and I don't feel like looking up the word) and the hot and cold tempering.

Don't worry....

Creativity is inexhaustible if it's consciously activated.

Like I said, I've done these 30-day stints of daily blogging before. And every time I do them, I experience hyper-growth in both writing and thinking.

I think I may keep them up this time.

Thanks for sticking with me through them. If you're still subscribed, you're a gem.

[Click here to get Jonas' stories and meditations delivered straight to your inbox as soon as they're live here on Medium.](#)



Nick Jack Pappas

5 min read

Writing

What All Writers Can Learn From Mitch Hedberg



When I first started performing stand up comedy, I emulated larger than life characters. I wanted to carry on full conversations alone on stage. I wanted to bounce off walls like Robin Williams or make an audience howl like a young Eddie Murphy. It didn't work. I bombed, and bombed often.

I took improv classes at UCB to develop my acting skills, but teachers always gave me the same note:

“You've got the game down. You know how to play. But you need to have fun.. You need to learn how to act and embrace the persona.”

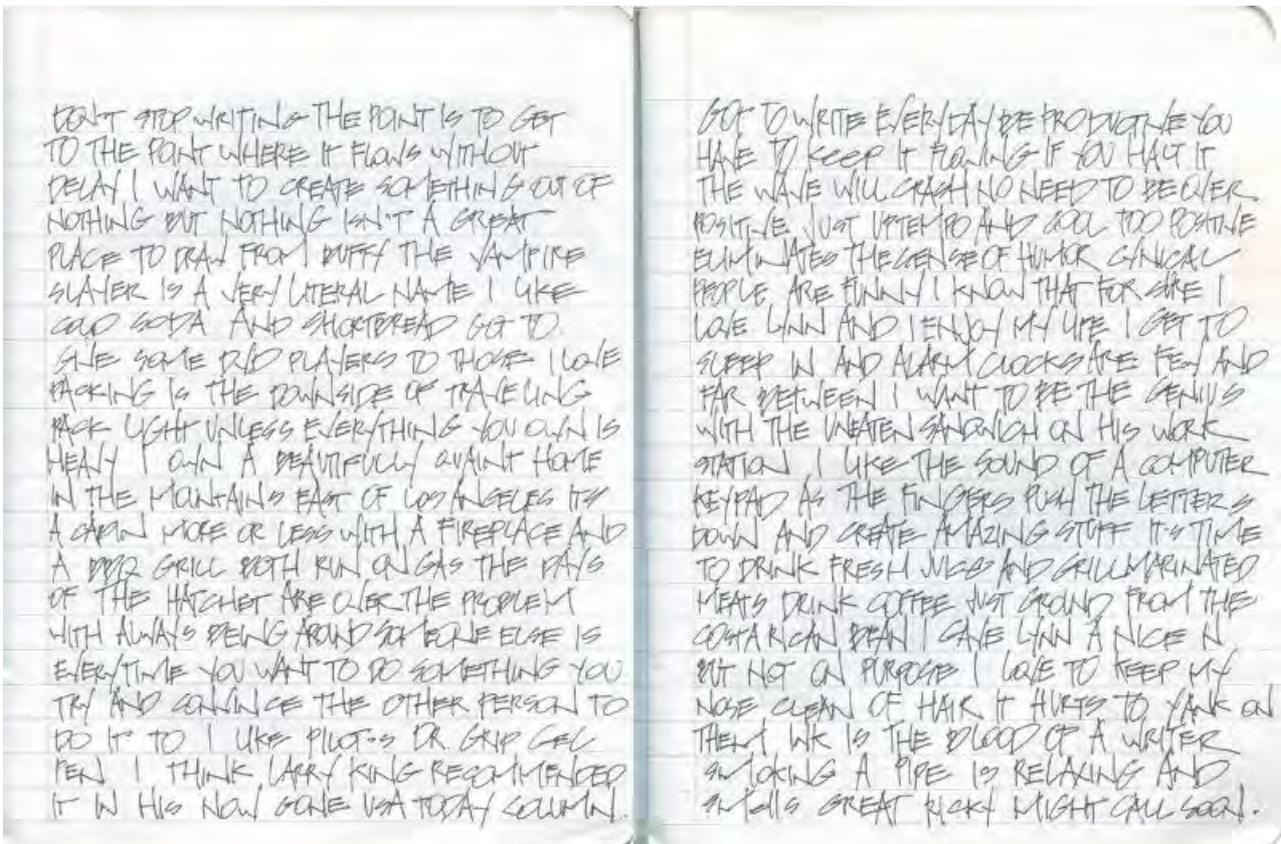
There's the rub. I'm not an actor. I'm a writer. I wanted to find someone to play that larger than life role on stage while I whispered jokes behind a curtain. That is, until I discovered Mitch.

Of course, I knew of Mitch Hedberg. His surreal one-liner comedy is legendary. Anyone who went to college has turned on one of his routines late at night and listened to his “whoa dude” musings. He developed a cult following and, like too many legends, died young.

“I used to do drugs. I still do, but I used to, too”

When I say I discovered Mitch, I mean I discovered how he did it. Many believe he created a persona onstage, but, deep down, it was mostly him. He proved you could be yourself and still own the room. You could relax and let the writing speak for you.

And he wrote. A hell of a lot.



Mitch Hedberg's widow, Lynn Shawcroft, released pages from his notebooks in 2013. He always carried a notebook. He once lost a notebook and offered a handful of money to a college kid to get it back. This was a man who was on the road 300 nights a year. With an audience who would yell out the punchlines of his jokes before he finished them, Mitch had to constantly write to stay ahead of the crowd.

The example above is “free writing”—putting pen to page and writing whatever comes to your mind. It didn’t have to be great, it simply had to be. As Mitch wrote in the pages above, “...you have to keep it flowing. If you halt it, the wave will crash.”

Since finding Mitch’s method, I’ve written in my own notebook every day and discovered some great words hidden in those pages. On days where ideas aren’t flowing, I’ll listen to great comedians and transcribe. It doesn’t have to be a comedian, either. You could rewrite your favorite novel or play. You’ll find as you write, you start to feel the author’s cadence and style.

I learned a lot from Mitch. Here are just three of his lessons.

1. Buy a nice pen and bring it everywhere.

“I bought a seven-dollar pen because I always lose pens and I got sick of not caring.”

This is your weapon. The world is a different place than even a decade ago when Mitch was still here. For one thing, we all have tiny computers in our pockets at all times. It’s easy to say that pens are obsolete—a notebook app will do.

But numerous studies say otherwise. A 2009 study from the University of Washington found that students who wrote essays with a pen not only wrote more, but also faster, in complete, well-thought out sentences.

More importantly, pens don’t have a Facebook app. There isn’t a button on your Uni-ball to start a YouTube video. Typing on your phone or laptop is a gateway to distractions. The minute you look away, the wave will crash.

So, the least you can do is spend a few dollars and get a nice pen that you won’t leave behind.

2. Don’t make excuses. Get creative.

“I wanted to buy a candle holder, but the store didn’t have one. So I got a cake.”

The treasure trove of Mitch Hedberg's writing revealed that he didn't only write in notebooks. He wrote on everything, wherever he was. When an idea came to him, he wrote it on napkins or coasters. He wrote it on the back of donut receipts.

Perhaps no one is paying you to write. Not yet. That means your life is busy and there are a million reasons why you could put it off. Don't. If you want to be a great writer, the most important thing you can do is simply write. Give yourself constant reminders. Actively think of ideas on subway rides and during gym workouts.

If you don't have paper, buy a cake and write on the box.

3. Don't write what you think is popular. Write what you know.

"I'm sick of following my dreams. I'm just going to ask them where they're goin', and hook up with them later."

Everyone dreams of writing the next great novel or the joke that will bring about world peace. Chances are, you won't. And you definitely won't by listening too closely to the crowd. If you want to connect to an audience, the only way you can do it is by being yourself.

This was the most important lesson I learned from Mitch. The minute I stopped being someone I wasn't is the minute I started getting laughs. Robin Williams was the kind of person who bounced off walls. I'm not, and Mitch wasn't either.

Being yourself doesn't mean you can't write outlandish science fiction or stories about dragons. What it does mean is that, somewhere in that crazy world, you have to write your own stories. Maybe the dragon is having trouble getting a date. Actually, that's not a bad idea. Steal it if you want. Just thank me in the dedication.

Stop following your dreams. You'll never catch up. Instead, write what you know and you might find that you and your dreams end up in the same place anyway. Mitch's notebooks weren't perfect. There wasn't a mind altering joke on every page. But that's what free writing is. It's hundreds of odd thoughts that will generate one good joke. Your writing could be a hundred drab pages and one beautiful chapter. Here's the thing—you won't write that chapter without writing a hundred drab pages.

So write. Write often. Write every day. Mitch Hedberg is the reason that I used to write every day in my notebook.

I still do, but I used to, too.

. . .

Nick Jack Pappas is a storyteller, stand up, and screenwriter in New York City. He was chosen for the NBC Late Night Writers Workshop 2015 and works as the Content Manager on Comedywire.com. Follow him on Comedywire and he'll probably follow you back.



Tobias van Schneider

2 min read

Writing

Doing It Wrong

by Tobias van Schneider

This article first appeared on my private email list.

. . .

As you might have read in one of my earlier emails, I dropped out of high school when I was 15 and started working as a apprentice for computer science, which left me with very little traditional education.

Because of that, one of the things I always struggled with was writing. It was hard for me not only in my first language (german) but also in my second language (english) which I never really learned during the few years I visited high school.

In a world where making a typo or grammatical error seems almost on the same level as committing a crime, I felt intimidated by even considering putting some words on a page.

For me writing was especially hard because it seemed like I had to follow established rules that everyone else knew, but I did not.

I believe that the reason why I personally got attracted towards the creative industry (working as a designer), is because “doing it wrong” wasn’t something you got punished for. There was no one who knew better at the time—**The rules weren’t yet established, and they hopefully never will.**

When it comes to writing, things are different. Our written language follows strict rules (which are hundreds of years old) and people love to call you out on it. But these people are really the only obstacle to overcome, nothing else.

I essentially didn't know how to write, but I still did it. I didn't know how to design, but I tried it. I was doing it "wrong" for many years (I still do) but I'm doing it—And that's what counts for me.

Every time someone complains about your writing (or any other) skills you have to understand one thing:

While others are complaining, you just created something out of nothing — You are one step ahead.

For me, doing it wrong is a gift and there are not many people who have the courage to do it the wrong way. The moment we understand that "the wrong way" just means "our own way" we know we're on the right path.

As Albert Einstein already said: "The only source of knowledge is experience" — So instead of doing nothing, do it *wrong*.

Happy Wednesday,

Tobias

PS: If you like to receive these kind of articles (and more) via email, you can simply join my private email list. . Pssccht!

IMHO



Danah Boyd

5 min read

IMHO

An Old Fogey's Analysis of a Teenager's View on Social Media

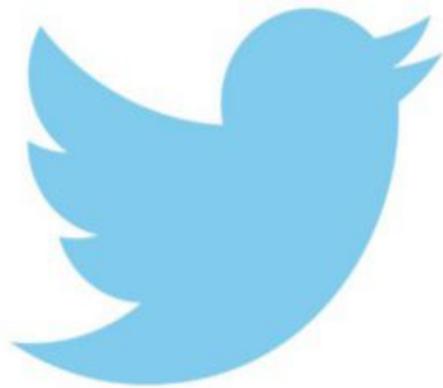
Over the last few days, dozens of people have sent me a link to Andrew Watts' "A Teenager's View on Social Media written by an actual teen." Increasingly, I'm getting uncomfortable and angry by the folks who are pointing me to this. I feel the need to offer my perspective as someone who is not a teenager but who has thought about these issues extensively for years.

Almost all of them work in the tech industry and many of them are tech executives or venture capitalists. The general sentiment has been: "Look! Here's an interesting kid who's captured what kids these days are doing with social media!" Most don't even ask for my interpretation, sending it to me as though it is gospel.

We've been down this path before. Andrew is not the first teen to speak as an "actual" teen and have his story picked up. Every few years, a (typically white male) teen with an interest in technology writes about technology among his peers on a popular tech platform and gets traction. Tons of conferences host teen panels, usually drawing on privileged teens in the community or related to the organizers. I'm not bothered by these teens' comments; I'm bothered by the way they are interpreted and treated by the tech press and the digerati.

I'm a researcher. I've been studying American teens' engagement with social media for over a decade. I wrote a book on the topic. **I don't speak on behalf of teens, but I do amplify their voices and try to make sense of the diversity of experiences teens have.** I work hard to account for the biases in whose voices I have access to because I'm painfully aware that it's hard to generalize about a population that's roughly 16 million people strong. They are very diverse and, yet, journalists and entrepreneurs want to label them under one category and describe them as one thing.

Andrew is a very lucid writer and I completely trust his depiction of his peer group's use of social media. He wrote a brilliant post about his life, his experiences, and his interpretations. His voice should be heard. And his candor is delightful to read. But his analysis cannot and should not be used to make claims about all teenagers. I don't blame Andrew for this; I blame the readers—and especially tech elites and journalists—for their interpretation of Andrew's post because they should know better by now. What he's sharing is not indicative of all teens. More significantly, what he's sharing reinforces existing biases in the tech industry and journalism that worry me tremendously.



His coverage of Twitter should raise a big red flag to anyone who has spent an iota of time paying attention to the news. Over the last six months, we've seen a phenomenal uptick in serious US-based activism by many youth in light of what took place in Ferguson. It's hard to ignore Twitter's role in this phenomenon, with

hashtags like #blacklivesmatter and #IfTheyGunnedMeDown not only flowing from Twitter onto other social media platforms, but also getting serious coverage from major media. Andrew's statement that "a lot of us simply do not understand the point of Twitter" should raise eyebrows, but it's the rest of his description of Twitter that should serve as a stark reminder of Andrew's position within the social media landscape.

Let me put this bluntly: teens' use of social media is significantly shaped by race and class, geography and cultural background. Let me repeat that for emphasis.

Teens' use of social media is significantly shaped by race and class, geography and cultural background.

The world of Twitter is many things and what journalists and tech elites see from Twitter is not even remotely similar to what many of the teens that I study see, especially black and brown urban youth. For starters, their Twitter feed doesn't have links; this is often shocking to journalists and digerati whose entire stream is filled with URLs. But I'm also bothered by Andrew's depiction of Twitter users as first and foremost doing so to "complain/express themselves." While he offers other professional categorizations, it's hard not to read this depiction in light of what I see in low-status communities and the ways that privileged folks interpret the types of expression that exists in these communities. When black and brown teens offer their perspective on the world using the language of their community, it is often derided as a complaint or dismissed as self-expression. I doubt that Andrew is trying to make an explicitly racist comment here, but I want to caution every reader out there that critiques of youth use of Twitter are often seen in a negative light because of the heavy use by low-status black and brown youth.

Andrew's depiction of his peers' use of social media is a depiction of a segment of the population, notably the segment most like those in the tech industry. In other words, what the tech elite are seeing and sharing is what people like them would've been doing with social media X years ago. It resonates. But it is not a full portrait of today's youth. And its uptake and interpretation by journalists and the tech elite whitewashes teens practices in deeply problematic ways.

I'm not saying he's wrong; I'm saying his story is incomplete and the incompleteness is important. His commentary on Facebook is probably the most generalizable, if we're talking about urban and suburban American youth. Of course, his comments shouldn't be shocking to anyone at this point (as Andrew himself points out). Somehow, though, declarations of Facebook's lack of emotional weight with teens continues to be front page news. All that said, this does render invisible the cultural work of Facebook in rural areas and outside of the US.

Andrew is very visible about where he stands. He's very clear about his passion for technology (and his love of blogging on Medium should be a big ole hint to anyone who missed his byline). He's also a college student and talks about his peers as being obviously on path to college. But as readers, let's not forget that only about half of US 19-year-olds are in college. He talks about WhatsApp being interesting when you go abroad, the practice of "going abroad" is itself privileged, with less

than 1/3 of US citizens even holding passports. Furthermore, this renders invisible the ways in which many US-based youth use WhatsApp to communicate with family and friends who live outside of the US. Immigration isn't part of his narrative.

I don't for a second fault Andrew for not having a perspective beyond his peer group. But **I do fault both the tech elite and journalists for not thinking critically through what he posted** and presuming that a single person's experience can speak on behalf of an entire generation. There's a reason why researchers and organizations like Pew Research are doing the work that they do—they do so to make sure that we don't forget about the populations that aren't already in our networks. The fact that professionals prefer anecdotes from people like us over concerted efforts to understand a demographic as a whole is shameful. More importantly, it's downright dangerous. It shapes what the tech industry builds and invests in, what gets promoted by journalists, and what gets legitimized by institutions of power. This is precisely why and how the tech industry is complicit in the increasing structural inequality that is plaguing our society.

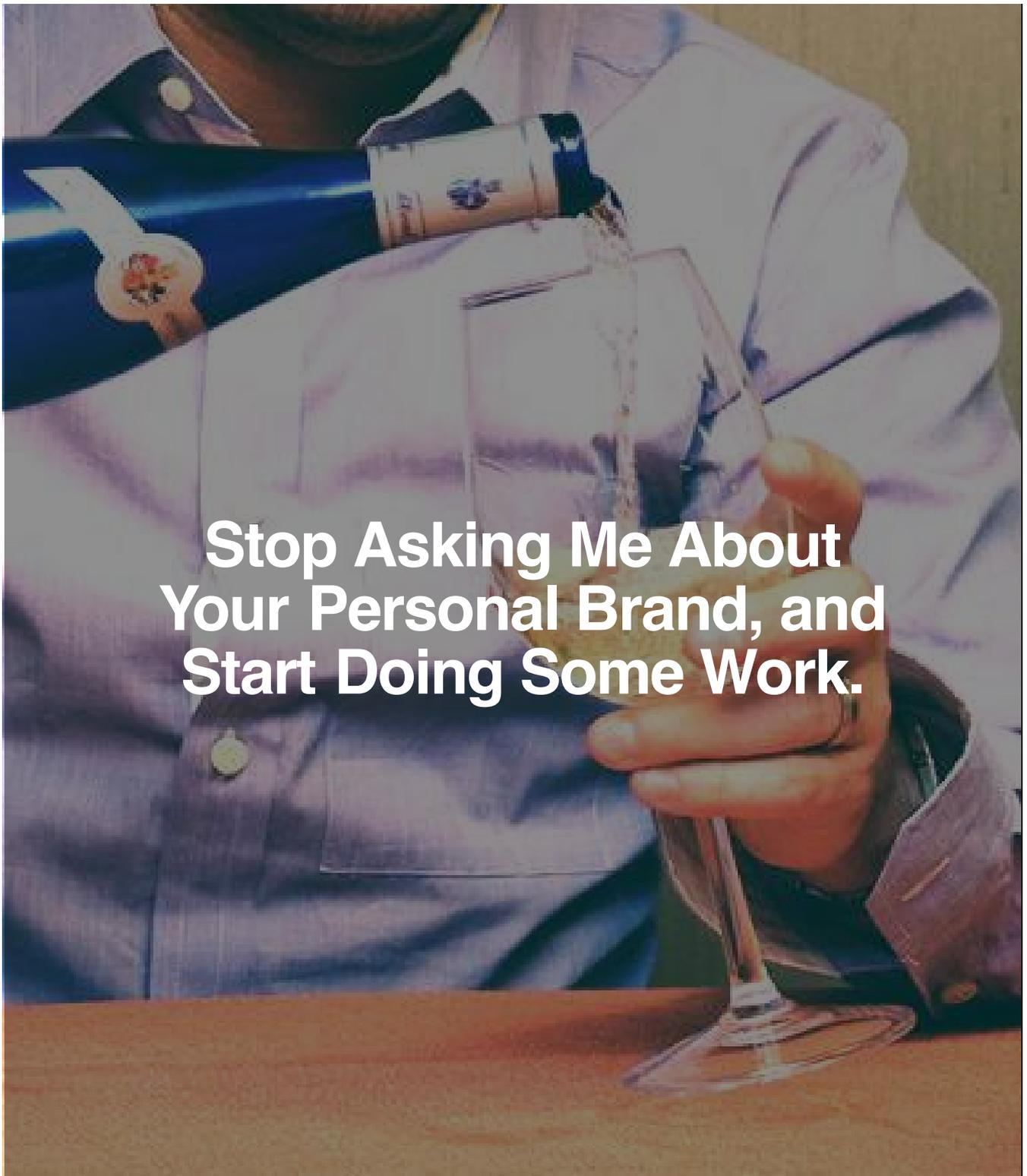
Thanks to Jessaymn West, Clive Thompson and Craig Mod.



Gary Vaynerchuk

2 min read

IMHO



For the first decade of my professional career, I kept my damn mouth shut.

Seriously, go and Google it. You won't find a single piece of content from me that pre-dates WLTV.

So what the hell was I doing?

I was *working*. It stuns me that people keep asking about how to start a personal brand; how to be a "YouTube personality" without having a clear understanding of what comes before that, which is actually knowing something about something. It's this notion that is so prevalent right now, which is that you can just come out of nowhere and build your brand through various tactics. To position yourself as an expert is difficult, but most people aren't asking the first important question, which is: expert in *what*? What do you want to provide people with? What are you great at? What do you love? What is your legacy going to be (because legacy is always above currency)?

People argue on this with me. Some say "Look at football coaches", and what they mean by that is: coaches aren't football players. You don't have to be a great player to be a great coach. And to that I say: seriously? Have you looked at every football coach? Ignoring the fact that they are entirely different skill sets (because that's another whole conversation), there is no football coach that comes out of nowhere at twenty-three and wins Super Bowls.

So this new quick hack of using social media and modern tech to build up your brand isn't enough. It just isn't. **There is no substitute for honest hard work.** You have to earn the privilege of building a "personal brand", and the only way to do that is to actually execute.

Now, if you've met all those requirements above, if you're really a business badass and your legacy is strong, here are some tips I have for getting your brand out there:

1. decide if you're ready to put yourself out there use
2. email marketing to its full advantage make video
3. content (the right way)
4. in fact, create as much content as possible

5. never automate
6. keep scaling your content
7. hustle

Yep, it's a lot. But you're gonna have to get used to that. Once you become a brand, the work never stops. And if you truly love your legacy and respect it, it'll be the best decision you ever make.



Karim Boubker

9 min read

IMHO



Ten More Reasons Why You Should Quit Your Job And Work For Yourself

Disclaimer: This article is currently going viral on Medium (featured on the first page baby!). So I just wanted to thank everyone who read it and hope it inspires you to be awesome and give yourself a chance at success 😊.

. . .

Last year I wrote an article titled 'Ten Reasons Why You Should Work For Yourself'.

It was one of my most popular articles, getting over 6,000 views on Medium in a short period of time and a ton of shares on different social media platforms.

This was during a time when I had just quit my job due to a complete lack of meaning and purpose, something that many people can relate to—and since then a lot has changed. I still work for myself—but my perspective is a little different.

First of all, I don't believe that getting a job is necessarily a bad thing anymore. Everyone has bills to pay, and hard work is a respectable trait.

The thing I have come to realise is that I mostly have a problem with the lack of freedom that comes with the job—being tied down to a very specific place.

I want to live a free range life, and having a job really doesn't allow that.

Sure—not having a monthly income is scary and there is no guarantee of making enough money to support yourself and family, but what's the point of living a life where you spend your days sitting in an office doing work that doesn't matter?

I want to live.

To pursue the things that make my heart beat faster.

The things that get me excited at night and motivate me to push all boundaries. I want to be free.

To have the luxury of exploring my passions and doing more of the things I love. It's not an easy thing to do.

And yes, it involves big risk and a lot of uncertainty.

But still—it is possible and do-able in every single way.

And because of that, I decided to write ten more reasons why you should quit your job and work for yourself instead. Whether or not you decide to do so is up to you.

Here we go.

1—You'll get excited about life again:

Whenever i'm in a rut, feeling down and seemingly unable to break free from my inner demons—coming up with ideas to test is always the things that gets me excited the most, and this is something that you just can't do if you have a job.

Want to start a Youtube channel where you review books every week? Build a software company for designers? Or maybe you just want to paint all day?

Not having a job would give you the freedom to try all of these ideas.

And you'll find that your excitement for life will be at an all-time high.

2—You'll understand the true value of a dollar:

Working for yourself is really difficult, especially when you're just starting out—and because of this, every dollar matters. Eating out, going on vacation or buying small luxuries is money that you should be putting back into your business.

And when you learn how to start making money from nothing but your own ideas and skills, you'll really start to appreciate every single dollar you make.

This is a good thing because:

A—You'll stop spending money on useless things that don't matter.

And.

B—It'll teach you to start saving up—the real key to riches.

3—You'll become more empathetic towards people:

Because at some point you'll realise just how lucky you are to be able to make a living working for yourself, and that sense of gratitude will shine through all that you do.

A happy person is a blessing, and when you are content with the work that you do—it's easier to be at peace with yourself... and as a result, the people you meet daily.

4—You'll have more respect for doers & makers:

It's not until you work for yourself that you realise just how hard it is.

From my own experience, most people believe that they have the next big idea on their hands, but it's not until they start working on it do they realise just how hard it is to get people to give a damn about you or your product.

Getting people to care about your business is really hard work, and being in this position will give you a new found respect for the people who overcame this obstacle.

Why is this important?

Because it will humble you.

And humility will make you more aware of the realities of doing business, will keep you grounded and help you focus more on the things that really matter.

In other words, it'll help you go from being all talk to being all action.

5—You'll question how things work

When I first started corporate work I thought that there was only one way to live life. I thought that you had to get a job, work hard and maybe get promoted.

It's not until I went at it on my own did I realise that there are no rules out there. That every single rule imposed on us is made by other men no smarter than you. And this made me question everything!

There's no such thing as a set way of doing things, and working for yourself will give you the opportunity to really explore and understand this concept more deeply.

As an example, I am currently partner at a clothing label.

The normal way of doing business in this industry is to have a bunch of products on your website or in retail and to get enough traffic so people can buy your stuff.

Since we realised that most of the sales come from our email list—we decided to change the business strategy to one where we focus exclusively on building our email list even if we don't make any sales the first time around (long term thinking).

And instead of creating a set amount of products we decided to take pre-orders for our product launches in order to be able to sell to anyone who wants to buy our product (instead of just supplying the amount we make).

This way we get to sell more (since we're not limiting our products to a certain quantity), don't have to keep extra stock (that might not sell) and whenever we want to create a new product the production cost is already paid for (pre-order magic).

Working for yourself will allow you to question how things work as well as to make improvements on old models that might not necessarily work for what you do.

6—You'll start to depend on yourself more

When you work for yourself there really is no one else you can depend on.

Everything is on you.

And even if there are other partners, mentors and helpers along the way—the fact is that you alone are in charge (and will be the blame) of everything that happens within your business whether you like it or not. This is a huge responsibility.

One that will equip you to rely more on your own instincts rather than having a superior you need to clear things with before moving forward with your decisions. And learning to depend on yourself will propel you into becoming one of the few people who have what it takes to get things done with or without anyone's help.

7—You'll know who your real friends are

Especially if financial success happens later rather than sooner.

We all know the type.

They come to you when you have prestige or success, but when you're struggling or going through a time where things seem bleak they are completely out of sight.

And working for yourself will help you filter out your real friends from the fake.

Because let's be honest here, it will take a long time before you see any real financial success—and until then only your true friends will be the ones standing by your side.

Why is this important?

Because chances are your friends will be with you for a long time to come—and it's best to be surrounded by the right people with your best intentions at heart.

8—You'll be in control of your own path

One of my readers mentioned in a comment that the reason why she loves working for herself is because it allows her to be in control of her own destiny. And I agree.

Because when you work for someone else, you are very easily replaceable.

And it can happen at any time, with or without your consent.

The moment they find a cheaper, faster and more efficient way to do your job (yay robots) you'll be out of there. And then you'll be left with nothing. Nada. Ouch.

I believe that it's better to invest your time in building many different assets (businesses, relationships, investments) so that if one fails you'll have many other to fall back on. This way you get to be the one who is in control of your life.

9—You'll become a lot smarter

I often get told that working for yourself isn't a smart thing to do.

That it's better to work for someone else get experience, then work for yourself. And my answer is almost always the same.

The best way to learn how to start a business is to try and run a business.

Sure, experience working with someone else might help with some things—but the truth is that when you're working for an organisation you are not gaining the type of skills necessary to work for yourself or run a business. Far from it actually.

Working for someone else means that you'll have a very specific job, a thing that you'll end up doing every single day for the next however many years you're there.

Working for yourself means that you'll have to do everything for the first few years, from accounting to marketing to sales to distribution and so on... and there's no better way to learn how to do all of these things than to just start as early as you can.

You'll become smarter and more knowledgeable in terms of how things work.

10—You'll no longer conform or be comfortable

And that's the best thing you can do for yourself.

If you were to go out and ask a group of people why they go to work every morning, chances are—the majority would admit they do it because everyone else does it.

There's no logic behind it.

Many studies have proven that working less hours can prove to be a lot more productive for business—but yet go to work and don't even question why we do what we do or why we have to work eight hours a day instead of two or four.

This is conforming—when you just accept things as they are.

These systems have been built for us by fat men with deep corporate pockets, but we weren't built to dedicate our lives to companies. That's a man-made concept.

We were built to live.

To praise God and live out our true purpose in life.

To help our fellow humans and do good.

To nourish, support and play an active role in our community.

But conformity leads to comfort.

And too much comfort can paralyse you from ever taking any action.

During one of my jobs at a fancy marketing agency I overheard one of my colleagues talking about how he was thinking of doing his own thing—but he quickly countered that statement with this: *but I'm British — we're just too comfortable*'.

How very sad.

A bright young man letting conformity control his fate.

No matter who you are—black, white, jew, muslim, asian... if you're reading this please don't let stereotypes mislead you into believing that you can't achieve. There are no rules out there and you can do anything you want to do. Break free from the conformity, work hard and embrace patience.

No one said you have to be a success overnight.

One day at a time soldier, one step at a time.

And start marching to the beat of your greatest dreams and desires.

. . .

And if you'd like to get more articles like this one, get my [VIP Newsletter](#).

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Originally published at karimboubker.com on January 25, 2015.



Tobias van Schneider

3 min read

IMHO

WHY THE CAKE IS A

The cake is a lie

There is something interesting happening to us as we grow older, something that hinders us from personal growth, or limits the ability companies ensure constant innovation. Let me explain.

Protecting the Cake

Think of all the things you own as “your cake”—The money you make, your nice apartment with all that great furniture and all the cool gadgets you might own. Even your personal image to a certain degree, not just physical goods.

Those things make up your personal cake . It’s a great feeling having this big tasty cake in your life right in front of you—You worked for it, so you deserve a big cake-- Right?

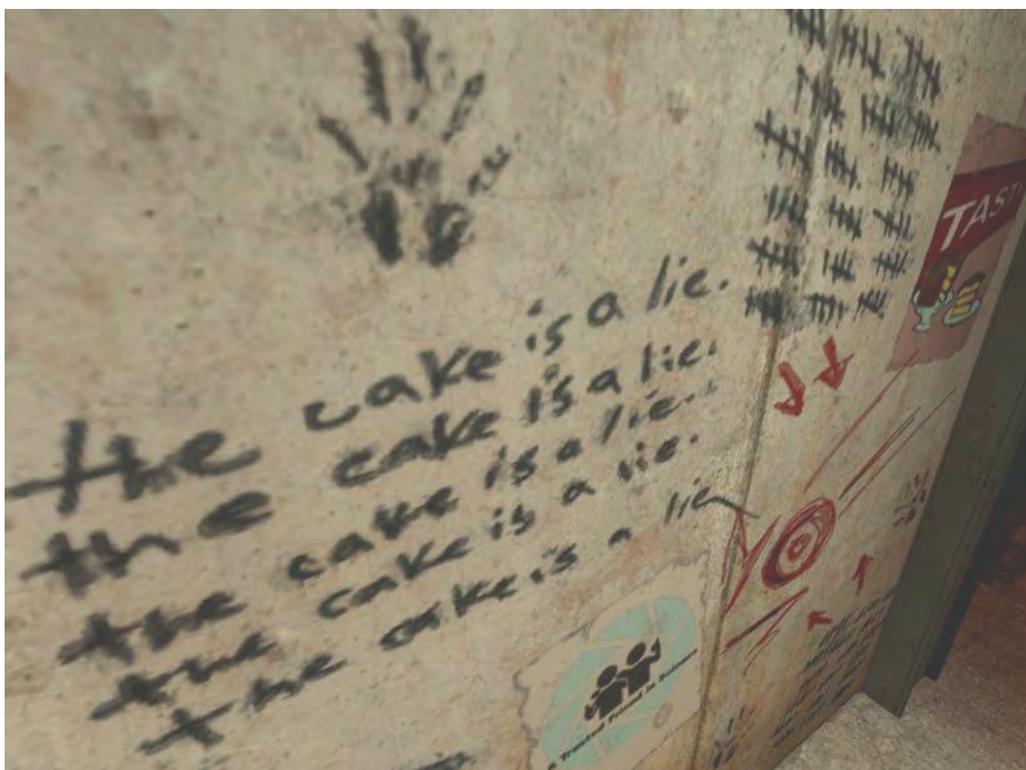
Most of our time is now devoted to protect all those things. Because who likes to take a pay cut or move from a bigger apartment into a smaller one, or risk no place to stay at all? The older we get and the bigger our cake grows, the more we get used to a certain standard.

Personal development stagnates & becomes less relevant as our eyes are completely focused on the cake. And the fear of losing it is just too big to take any risks or try something new.

You can even see this happening in big organizations. Most of the time is devoted to protect the cake, innovation stagnates as every eye focuses on the cake, while a new wave of small companies (some might call them startups) are taking over, beating big established brands with a “Nothing to lose” attitude.

The cake is a lie

We’ve all been in those situations where all we wanted is change. Move across the world, start a new career or pivot the product into a much needed new direction.



THE CAKE IS A LIE—Roughly translates to “your promised reward is merely a fictitious motivator”. Popularized by the game “Portal” via Urban Dictionary

Every time I'm stuck, I like to imagine this big cake right in front of me. **Then I ask my self:**

Am I protecting the cake again? Or are there any real reasons for me not to make the change?

In most cases the real reason is because I absolutely protect the cake. Every argument I have (even with myself) is based only around protecting what I have, not thinking about what I could have instead.

Every time I do this exercise I picture my self building walls around my little cake, protecting it with everything I have. Every minute, every thought and every idea I have resolves around protection, rather than new exciting opportunities.

I'm completely occupied with doing just that. Isn't this absurd? In the end, the cake is a lie. The cake is just an embodiment of what we believe is important to us. There is no value in protecting a cake no one can eat. Happiness will either result out of eating the cake, or baking a cake but never by protecting it.



I'm Tobias, a Product Design Lead at Spotify NYC. Founder of [Authentic Weather & Semplice](#), Advisor & UX at [memomi](#)— www.vanschneider.com

Apple / iOS



Dan Edwards

3 min read

Apple



Image courtesy of tapbots.com

What's worse than paid app updates?

Recently Tweetbot 4 was released as a cross-platform update that'll work on iPad & iPhone. Right now (at 50% off), it's a \$4.99/£3.99 app. Regardless of whether you bought the old Tweetbot recently, or at all.

Some people were pretty angry about this:

[@tapbots](#) really you're having us pay again for this? And it's normally \$10? Great way to get rid of customers...

—[@vaekuplays](#)



Vinnie

@VinnieSens

Follow

[@tapbots](#) [@tweetbot](#) it's disappointing you are charging existing tweetbot 3 subscribers to upgrade. Already paid going from 2 to 3.

9:03 PM - 1 Oct 2015

3



Hamma

@CDLHamma

Follow

[@tapbots](#) wow, really? You make almost no feature improvements to TweetBot 3 and then you release Tweetbot 4 and charge me for it?

7:31 PM - 1 Oct 2015

1 5



Hasan Ahmad

@hasanahmad80

Follow

[@_JeRD_](#) [@markjardine](#) [@tapbots](#) the App is NOT worth \$10. Its not worth \$5, its not even worth 0.99 For those who have purchased it twice

5:15 AM - 2 Oct 2015

2 1



bad meme boy

@zzap

Follow

Hate this revenue generation model of publishing a new app instead of update.

RT @tapbots: Say hello to Tweetbot

[4.itunes.apple.com/us/app/tweetbo...](https://4.itunes.apple.com/us/app/tweetbot)

4:31 AM - 2 Oct 2015 · Melbourne, Victoria, Australia



Tweetbot 4 for Twitter

Tweetbot is a wonderful Twitter client that's powerful and a joy to use. Sync your timeline across your iPhone, iPad, and Mac (Tweetbot for Mac also 4.0/5.0 stars – 1,579 ratings)

1 2



Rich Seidel — Founder of Blue Stripe Creative

Another paid upgrade?? Tweetbot is my go to but it's draining my pockets. But yes finally an iPad update. Been waiting for that

▲ 5 REPLY

Image via ProductHunt

It goes on, just do a Twitter search .

. . .

Mark Jardine, designer at Tapbots was quick to compare the cost of his iced coffee to the cost of the upgrade:



We've all seen this, and although perhaps overused to compare app value, it's safe to say it's a fair argument. A large majority of people who would consider buying Tweetbot would also regularly spend \$5 on a coffee, a craft beer, a quick lunch or much much more on pretty much any new version of a console game.

So why are people attacking indie developers for this?

Let's put it into perspective.

This new update/upgrade took **8 months** of work by a team of 3.

Scenario: An existing client approaches you for a re-design and build of their website. You worked on their first one, they paid you for it and you get a small fee that just about covers your costs for regular maintenance of their existing site. You also have several hundred emails and tweets per week about the current site, asking you for support and not paying extra for it.

After several meetings, phone calls and back and forths you realise the scale of the project. You'll need to bring in 2 further developers to help you build this thing and it'll take **8 months**.

Ok, so let's get to work.

One *slight* problem.

The client doesn't want to pay you for this work.

Shit.

They're happy to carry on with the retainer, but you'll need to do the new one for free to continue getting it.

What would you do? Would you work for free?

In this scenario I've used web design as a comparison, but you could equally be a builder, mechanic or just about anyone who provides services to clients.

. . .

So, what's worse than paid app updates?

People who complain about paid app updates.

. . .

Let's make this very clear—This is not about greed.

As Mark quite clearly states, there are free alternatives. If it bothers you that much, don't buy it.

If you want an in-depth look at what Tweetbot 4 offers you, read this blog post on MacStories.

So next time you feel the urge to complain about a paid upgrade, consider the people behind it and support them, and if you don't want to, don't. But there's no need to call them greedy assholes, because they're not.

To end this post, I'll leave you with this:

“When people hope it's going to be a free update, basically they are hoping Tapbots dies as a company and we go find separate day jobs.”

- Mark Jardine, Designer of Tweetbot ([link](#))



Support Indie Developers.



Kushal Dave

8 min read

Apple

Apple's App Store review process is hurting users, but we're not allowed to talk about it.

It's time we had a conversation about Apple's app review process.

Apple reviews apps to “ensure they are reliable, perform as expected, and are free of offensive material.” But in practice the process is both slow and arbitrary. Reviews regularly take over 7 days and sometimes take weeks. It can take even longer if there's any back and forth over the rules, a common outcome given the ambiguity and wide scope of the rules. Apps that seem totally reasonable are summarily rejected. The slow speed and poor quality of app review is hurting users.

. . .

The speed of review matters for two big reasons.

Slow reviews hurt reliability. It's impossible for developers to anticipate all of the edge cases that may cause our apps to crash in the real world. Luckily, once an app is live, we get reports of bugs from real users. But when we go to fix them, the fix waits in the queue for a week or more. Users are dealing with bugs for weeks, the fixes for which have already been written and submitted and which Apple is holding up...in the name of reliability. Apple offers a process for expediting fixes, but it also strongly discourages their use, and even expedited review takes more than a day.

The counterargument is that developers will be more careful the first time around if they know bugs are hard to patch. This may be true, but there is no such thing as bug-free software. Needing to be more cautious about releases only intensifies the second issue....

Slow reviews impede the pace of innovation. Almost every web site you use releases a handful of small updates on a daily basis or twice-daily basis, making changes, measuring their effect, and adapting. Apple, by contrast, drags every company that builds apps into its 90's-style big-release development model, diminishing their ability to iterate quickly. Where would your favorite websites be today if they had only evolved 1/7th or 1/14th as quickly?

. . .

The particulars of the rules make this situation even more frustrating.

Apple has appointed itself arbiter of taste and speech. Imagine buying a car that refused to drive to strip clubs, or a TV that refused to show Fox News. Now recognize that we accept this behavior from a product with 40% market share. Suddenly picking a phone because of its great camera means you're locked in to a whole moral point of view. We have a government, we have parents, we have the ability to vote with our feet, but Apple supercedes all of that in the name of protecting users, blocking apps that ridicule public figures or that show too much skin, or apps with Jobs themes, legal marijuana information, gun images, search engines, or drones. Steve Jobs once argued he was actually offering us freedom, freedom from porn. Apple says, "If you want to criticize a religion, write a book." But apps are a powerful form of communication, and developers should be free to express all points of view.

App rules prioritize Apple over users. The best example of this are the restrictions on in-app purchases. Already awash in cash, Apple prohibits in-app purchases it can't get its 30% cut of, leading to a situation where users cannot buy books in their Kindle app or videos in their YouTube app or comics in their comics app, even though they can on Android. In the early days of the app store, Apple rejected apps just for competing with their own built-in apps. It says a lot about Apple's attitude that it describes the money earned from from apps as Apple magnanimously "paying developers" instead of "developers earning money and Apple taking a cut."

The rules are subjective and poorly enforced. Stories abound of minor bug fix releases being flagged for issues that have been true of an application since version 1 or that are present in other apps. Out of the blue, someone trying to get a bug fix

is stuck making user accounts optional. Or maybe a reviewer fails to understand what an app does. Or suddenly new disclaimers are required. Or unwritten rules about TouchID are suddenly being broken. The rules are so broad—an app must be totally bug-free, cannot have hidden features (sorry a/b testing!), must have lasting value— pretty much anything can be caught up in this net. The appeal process is slow and byzantine, leaving developers to wait and pray. A lot of apps already in the store already seem to be buggy and unusable. Where is the line? Apple says, “we know it when we see it.”

. . .

Apple exists because its creators grew up in a world where any developer anywhere could write software that any user anywhere could run without having to go through an intermediary. It lauded itself as the voice of freedom in its famous 1984 commercial. But now it stands on the side of control, enforcing a totalitarian view of how its devices can be used. Anybody who has been to a hackathon and seen Android users download an app that day and iOS users be told the app will be available in a week, maybe, has seen the dark path that we are going down in the name of thin, shiny boxes with smooth animation.

. . .

There should be outrage.

Think about how much ink has been spilled over Amazon vs. Hachette, TimeWarner vs CBS, Verizon vs. net neutrality, Google vs. Yelp. Here we have a gatekeeper, *which also has lock-in*, and it has found the only reasons to close the gates that could be worse than profit: paternalism and complacency.

Many of us are afraid of retribution for speaking out too loudly. Apple has, unbelievably, made a threat explicitly in writing: “If your App is rejected, we have a Review Board that you can appeal to. If you run to the press and trash us, it never helps.” If Apple made good on its promise to penalize developers who complain in public, who would we appeal to?

. . .

Others of us are so caught up in Apple's beautiful products that we forgive them any offense. (This line of thinking is particularly pernicious. It does Apple and its users a disservice when we buy into Apple's FUD about Android, or support their self-aggrandizing stories of innovation, or apologize for their avoidable design flaws and hardware limitations, or overlook their anticompetitive obsession with lock-in and value extraction. Even if we love Apple, everything they do merits clear-eyed criticism and hands-on comparison with Android.)

. . .

It would not be that hard for Apple to use its vast resources to make its review process faster through automation and hiring. (Google is able to review Android apps in near real-time and the world has not ended).

Even better would be if Apple loosened the restrictions on app contents. Why not let users decide what's objectionable, what's useful, what's too buggy, instead of trying to be our nanny? Apple could even whitelist apps that pass its bar to be easy-to-discover in the store, while letting users find objectionable apps via search or direct links.

And Apple should also supplement TestFlight, which purports to make it easier to share pre-release software but still involves waiting for a review, with a way for users to install apps outside of the store without intermediaries, the same as has existed without incident on Android since the beginning.

. . .

I don't know how we get there. Sometimes I wish the biggest app developers would get together and delist their apps for a day, just to show how much pain this process causes. It's a testament to the crazy dystopia we're in that I've been waiting to write this post until I was unemployed so there wouldn't be blowback to anybody I worked for. But there is strength in numbers. It's time to start talking about this.

. . .

Postscript

I got a lot of interesting replies on Twitter, and there were a few general themes that seemed worth talking about in more than 140 characters.

1. **“Apple’s App Store is very helpful, just look at the ugly crashing malware copycats on the Play store”**

Apple’s process does get credit for doing a good job protecting users and developers, but

- At least in my experience, the rumors of malware and poor app quality on Android are greatly overstated.
- It’s hard to say with credibility which platform has the most stable apps.
- It’s much more plausible that Apple’s store has prettier apps and generates more revenue because it has the wealthiest, most tech-elite users than the review process itself.
- The weight of the current process far exceeds what would be needed to keep the store clean and polished, versus, say, relying on automation and whitelisting.
- There is certainly no reason to threaten developers who complain about the specifics of the process in the public.

2. **“Users choose to use Apple products. Nobody is making anybody do anything.”**

How many users do we think choose iPhones because they won’t encounter apps that make fun of political figures, and how many do we think choose iPhones because they work well as smartphones? As I discuss above, users are locked in to much more than what they are trying to buy.

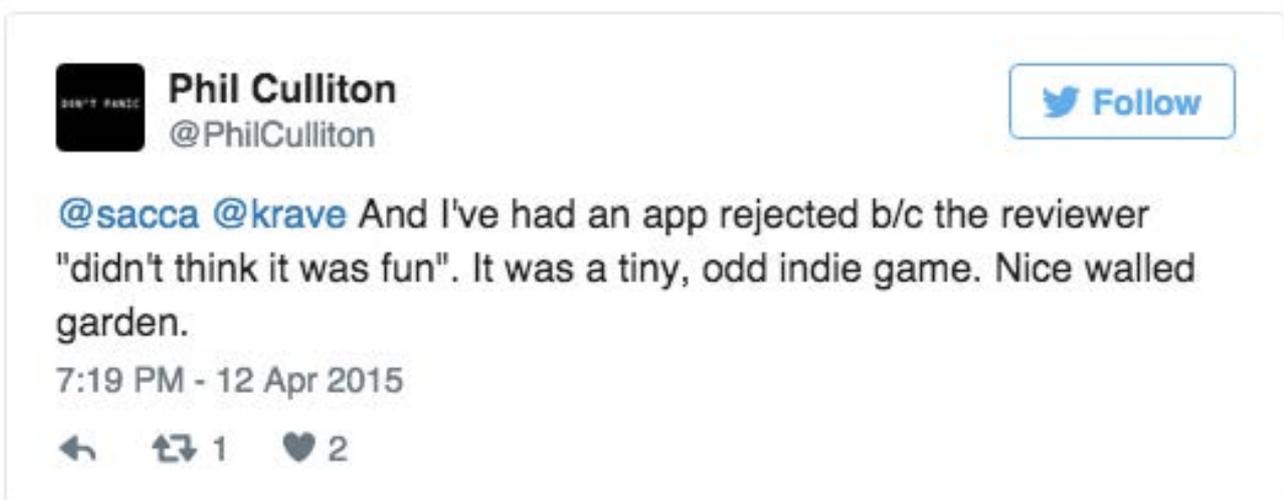
Users are also not aware of the obstacles they put in front of developers making apps for them when they choose an iPhone, even though this ends up impacting the quality of the apps they use.

The situation is a little bit analogous to having the government pass a law you dislike. Yes, technically, you can leave the country, but that's not an especially viable option, and you're more likely to try to have the law changed.

3. "You sound like just one guy who doesn't know anything about what really happens."

Nothing could be further from the truth. This post comes from repeated experiences developing popular apps, talking to developers at some of the largest companies in the industry, and from hearing from indie developers.

If there was any doubt, look at the number of people who have recommended this post, tweeted about it, commented above, or even shared their own experiences on Twitter.



A screenshot of a tweet from Phil Culliton (@PhilCulliton). The tweet is addressed to @sacca and @krave. The text of the tweet reads: "And I've had an app rejected b/c the reviewer 'didn't think it was fun'. It was a tiny, odd indie game. Nice walled garden." The tweet was posted at 7:19 PM on April 12, 2015. Below the text are icons for reply, retweet (1), and like (2). A "Follow" button is visible in the top right corner.



A screenshot of a tweet from Phil Culliton (@PhilCulliton). The tweet is addressed to @sacca and @krave. The text of the tweet reads: "I spent nearly a month wading through sandbox 'issues' (which had passed inspection a dozen times) to deliver an ASAP bug fix." The tweet was posted at 7:15 PM on April 12, 2015. Below the text are icons for reply, retweet (1), and like (1). A "Follow" button is visible in the top right corner.

[@sacca](#) [@krave](#) Going through the headache of a process currently.

—[@ericasteussie](#)



Daniel Nelson
[@daniel_b_nelson](#)

Follow

[@sacca](#) [@krave](#) I had an app approved that crashed if you click the settings button...and a 7 day bottleneck to update code is ridiculous

4:53 PM - 12 Apr 2015 · Massachusetts, USA, United States

1 2



Jonathan Hart
[@jonathanhartsf](#)

Follow

[@krave](#) [@hunterwalk](#) we've been waiting almost 2 wks for a screenshot to get approved. A metadata screenshot!!

1:29 AM - 12 Apr 2015

1



Jitender Sharma
[@jaykaysharma](#)

Follow

[@krave](#) [@hunterwalk](#) completely agree with you! Same terrible experience - every time! We delay our Android release till the Apple Gods smile!

1:45 AM - 12 Apr 2015

2



Kevin Wimer

@kevinace

 Follow

@adrianholovaty @krave Completely agree. We build in a 25 day window (3 submissions / reviews) for apps we submit. Ridiculous.

3:34 AM - 12 Apr 2015

  1  2

After writing this, I was sent a recent post also about how developers are cowed into not criticizing Apple. The top of the Hacker News thread about it is heartbreaking, “I’m 17 years old and a developer on the app store. The App Store feels opaque and like a black box where I submit builds with little to no feedback or control. I get paid when Apple decides, and could be eradicated from the App Store at a moment’s notice.”

4. “You should just be glad Apple built this platform that lets you reach all these people.”

Just because something is useful does not mean it is beyond reproach. And in this case we have so many points of comparison with Android and the web which also let developers reach so many people without as much control, it’s worth asking what is appropriate and necessary.

Thanks to Neil Sanchala.



Paweł Białecki

13 min read

Apple



27 iOS open source libraries to skyrocket your development.

You don't want to miss them. Really.

. . .

I love open source.

And I love the developers, who spend their valuable private time creating amazing things, which then they share with other people and don't want anything in return. **Open source authors and contributors, you are awesome people.** Thank you for all your work.

. . .

So, as I'm a big fan of curation, here I've selected favorites from my favorites iOS open source libraries. Order of these projects is totally random, all of them are simply awesome.

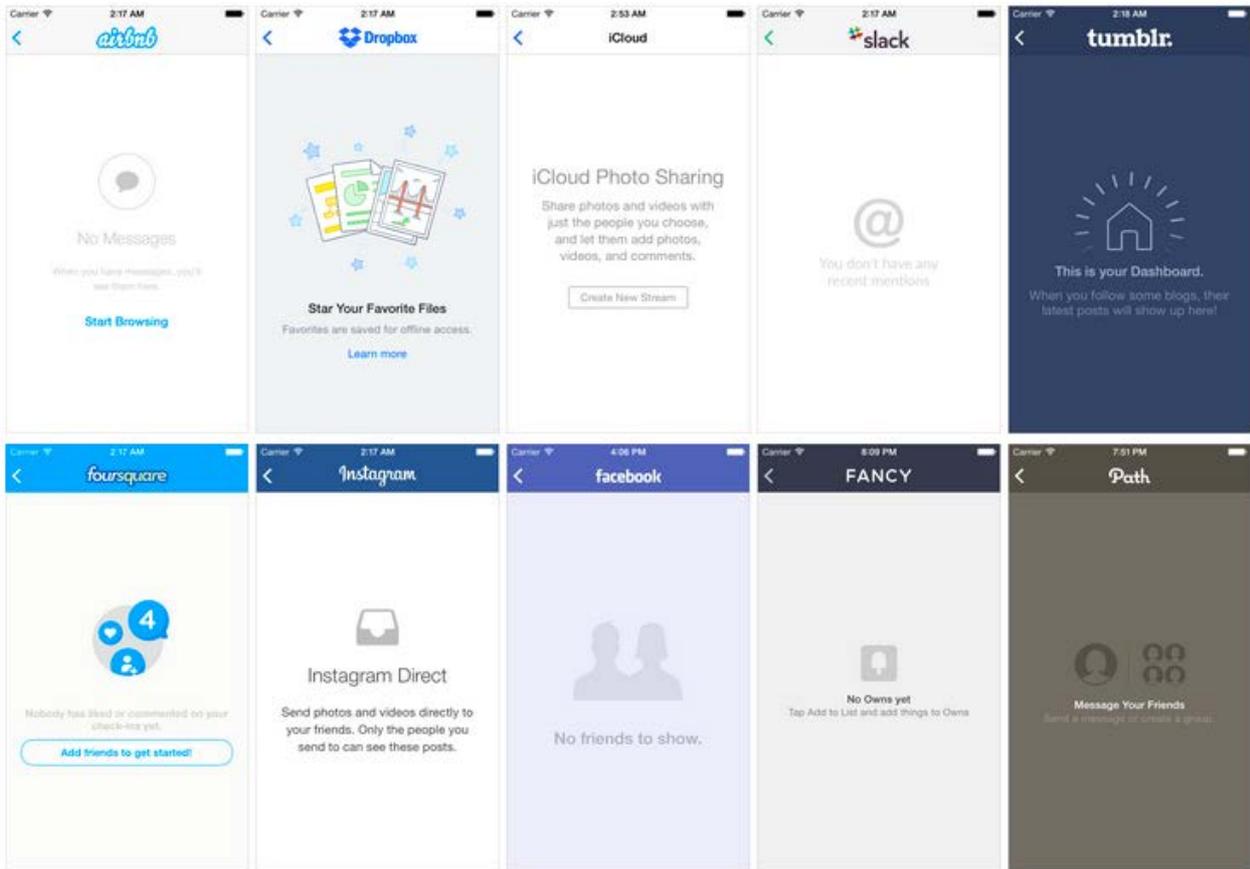
The overwhelming majority of the libraries support CocoaPods, so adding them to your Xcode project is a breeze.

On the bottom of the article you will find a TL;DR version—a simple list with only titles and links to the projects. If you'll find this article useful, **share it with your iOS dev buddies. Good things need to spread.**

1. DZNEmptyDataSet

This should be a standard, built-in into iOS way of dealing with empty table and collection views. By default if your table view is empty, the screen is empty. It's not the best user experience you can have.

With this library you just need to conform to a few protocols and iOS will beautifully take care of your collection view and display proper, good looking to user messages. No brainer for every iOS project.



It's truly customizable.

CocoaPods:

```
pod 'DZNEmptyDataSet'
```

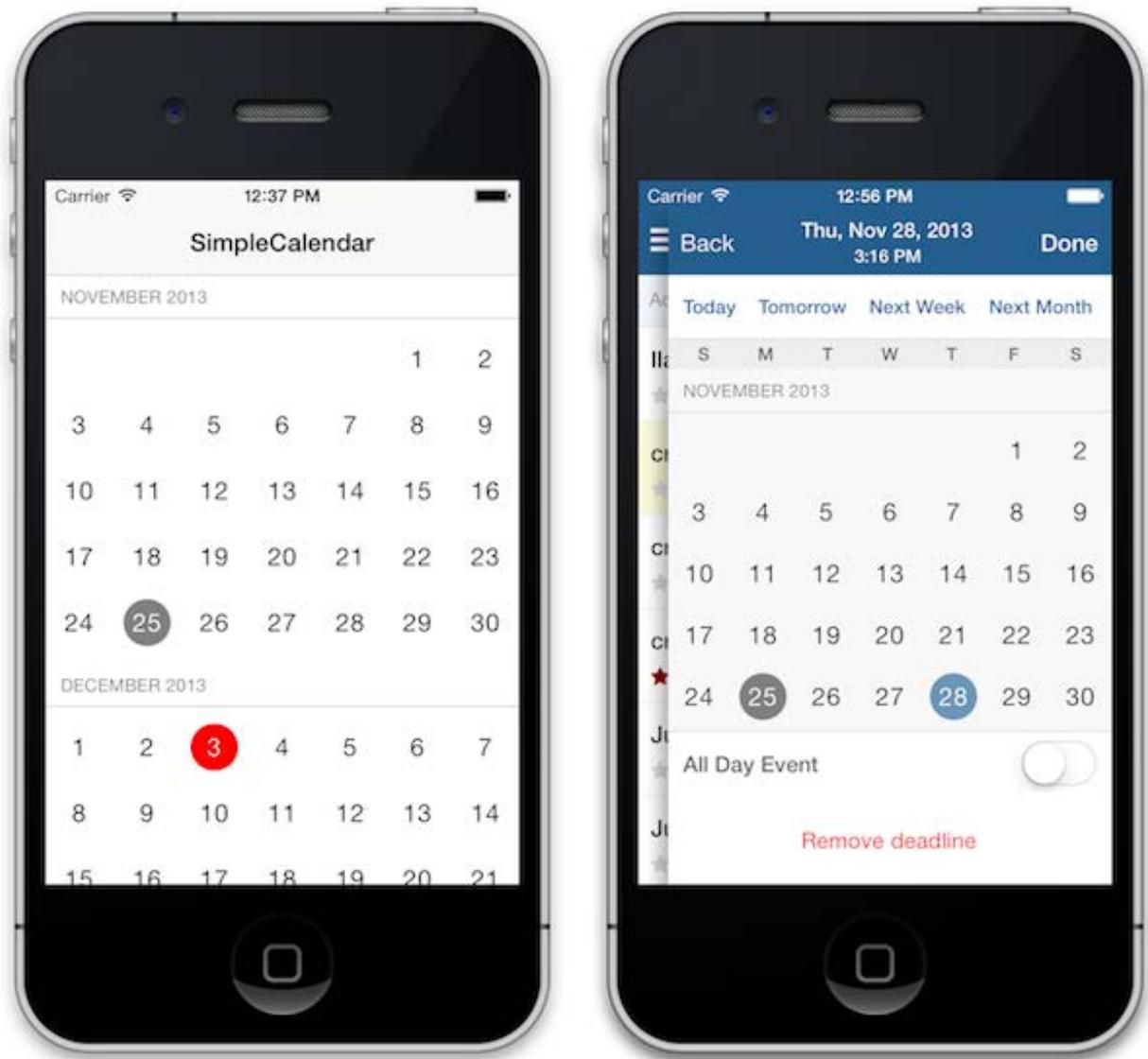
DZNEmptyDataSet

DZNEmptyDataSet - A drop-in UITableView/UICollectionview superclass category for showing empty datasets whenever the...

github.

2. PDTSimpleCalendar

Need a simple, nice looking and working calendar component for your app? Now you have—PDTSimpleCalendar is probably the best calendar component for iOS. You can customize it in many ways, both working logic and looking.



CocoaPods:

```
pod 'PDTSimpleCalendar'
```

jivesoftware/PDTSimpleCalendar

PDTSimpleCalendar - A simple Calendar / Date Picker for iOS using UICollectionView

github.com

3. Magical Record

Core Data is simple, they said. *It's nice and simple*, they said. Huh, really, Apple? A ton of boilerplate code added to each project isn't very elegant and simple. Not to mention adding, removing and updating a lot of entities, saving context, creating different Core Data stacks for different environments etc, etc. I like Core Data very much of course, but Apple *really* could simplify it in a little better way— **the MagicalRecord way**.

MagicalRecord works like a wrapper for Core Data and hides from developer all non-relevant stuff. If you've ever worked with active record pattern (e.g. Ruby on Rails), you're in home. Really, really recommended library if you are using Core Data in your app.

CocoaPods:

```
pod 'MagicalRecord'
```

magicalpanda/MagicalRecord

MagicalRecord - Super Awesome Easy Fetching for Core Data 1!!!11!!!!1!github.com

4. Chameleon

If you are reading this, odds that you're a better programmer than a designer are very high. This is something for you.



Chameleon is a color framework for iOS. It extends UIColor with beautiful, modern flat colors. It also gives us ability to create color palletes from color defined by us. It can do many other things, explore readme. If you want beautiful application, definitely add this library to your project.



Chameleon basic flat colors.

CocoaPods:

```
pod 'ChameleonFramework'
```

ViccAlexander/Chameleon

Chameleon - Flat Color Framework for iOS (Obj-C & Swift)

github.com

5. Alamofire

Alamofire is an elegant networking library written in Swift. Have you ever been using AFNetworking? Alamofire is it's younger brother. Younger and more stylish, of course (AFNetworking is written in Objective-C).

The logo for Alamofire, featuring the word "ALAMOFIRE" in a bold, orange, sans-serif font. The letters are filled with a pattern of small, repeating "ALAMOFIRE" text, creating a textured effect.

Elegant Networking in Swift

Need to do networking stuff like downloading, uploading, getting JSONs etc.? Alamofire is for you. 8000 people on GitHub cannot be wrong.

CocoaPods:

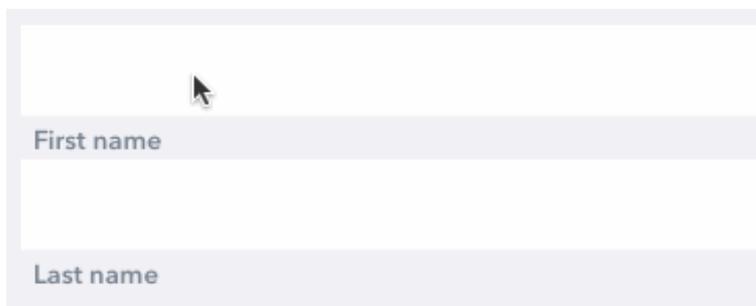
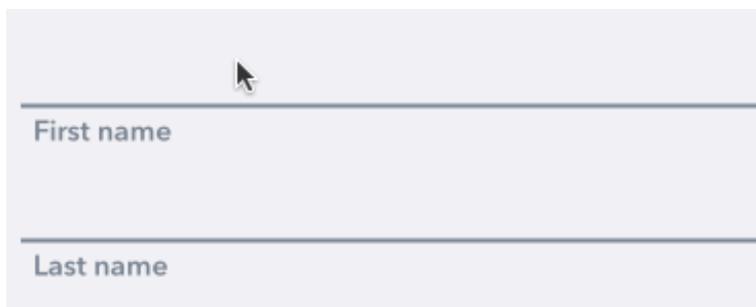
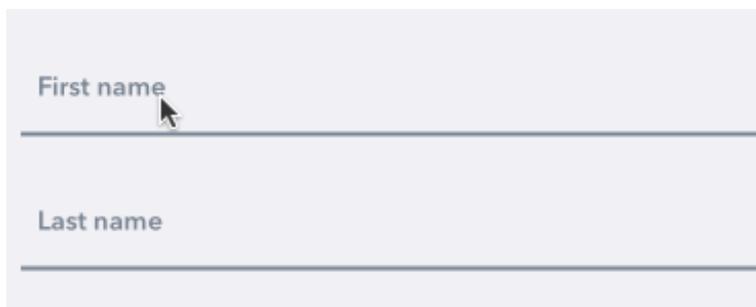
```
pod 'Alamofire'
```

Alamofire/Alamofire

Alamofire - Elegant HTTP Networking in Swift
github.com

6. TextFieldEffects

Don't you think that standard UITextField is a little boring? Me too—so **say hello to TextFieldEffects!** I won't write too much, I'll just show you a few examples what this library can do:



Yep, **these are simple drop-in controllers.** You can even make use from IBDesignables in storyboard!

Unfortunately this library doesn't support CocoaPods (if you are coming from the

future and this has changed some time ago, [please let me know at Twitter](#)), but it supports Carthage. You can also simply download the project from GitHub and add it to your workspace.

Carthage:

```
github "raulriera/TextFieldEffects"
```

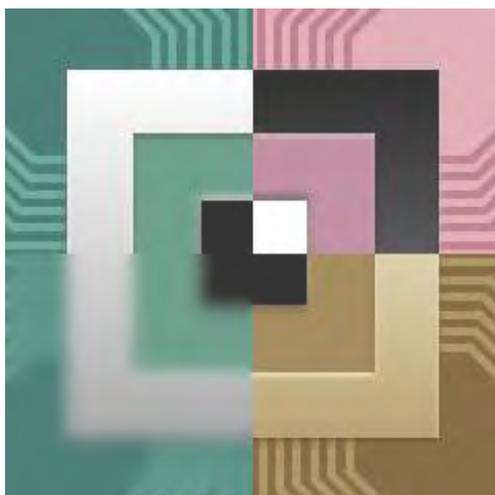
raulriera/TextFieldEffects

TextFieldEffects - Custom UITextField effects inspired by Codrops, built using Swift

github.com

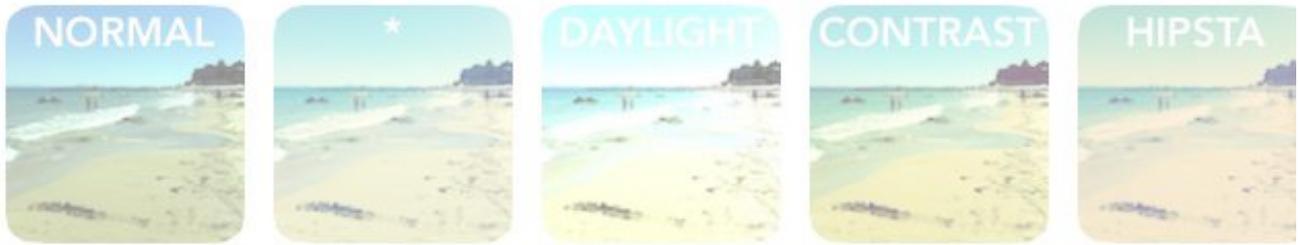
7. GPUImage

Have you ever created a camera app? **If not, you surely will after meeting this library.**



GPUImage possibilities.

GPUImage provides us a GPU-accelerated camera effects (both images and video) with blazing speed. There are hundreds of apps in the App Store that use this library—and one mine's too:



GPUImage in use in one of my apps.

8869 stars on GitHub and still counting.

CocoaPods:

```
pod 'GPUImage'
```

BradLarson/GPUImage

GPUImage - An open source iOS framework for GPU-based image and video processing

github.com

8. iRate

What's the best way to get more reviews in the App Store? I don't have hard data to answer that question, but if I had to guess, I would say that **simple asking the user**. Maybe it's a little oldschool way to do this—most developers now create custom in-app alerts—but if you don't have time or you don't want to implement everything from scratch, it's better to use iRate than not to. And this is iRate exactly — **a small library that you include in your project and forget about asking users for review — iRate will do it for you, at proper time.**

CocoaPods:

```
pod 'iRate'
```

nicklockwood/iRate

iRate - A handy class that prompts users of your iPhone or Mac App Store app to rate your application after using it...

github.com

9. GameCenterManager

Love or hate singletons, but in this case managing Game Center is **just easier** with a little help of our best known anti-pattern (you *have only one Game Center* in your game, right?).



To be honest, *vanilla-managing* Game Center in iOS isn't that hard, **but with this library is just simple and fast.** And better is the enemy of the good.



I'm using this in one of my games and it's a pleasure experience.

CocoaPods:

```
pod 'GameCenterManager'
```

nihalahmed/GameCenterManager

GameCenterManager - iOS Game Center helper singleton

github.com

10. PKRevealController 2

This is a real gem here, **one of my most favorited iOS control**.

PKRevealController is a slideable side menu (left, right or both), which slides with a help of your finger (or just by pressing the button, but it's not as much cool as sliding).



pkluz/PKRevealController

Introducing PKRevealController 2 - The second version of one of the most popular view controller containers for iOS...

github.com

11. SlackTextViewController

Have you ever used Slack iOS app? If you are working in a bigger software company, probably yes. For these people who haven't—Slack rocks. And Slack's iOS app too, especially for the great, custom text input control... which here you have—a code ready for use in your app!

Self growing text area? Check. Gestures recognizing, autocompletion, multimedia pasting? Check. Easy drop-in solution? Check. What else can you possibly need?

CocoaPods:

```
pod 'SlackTextViewController'
```

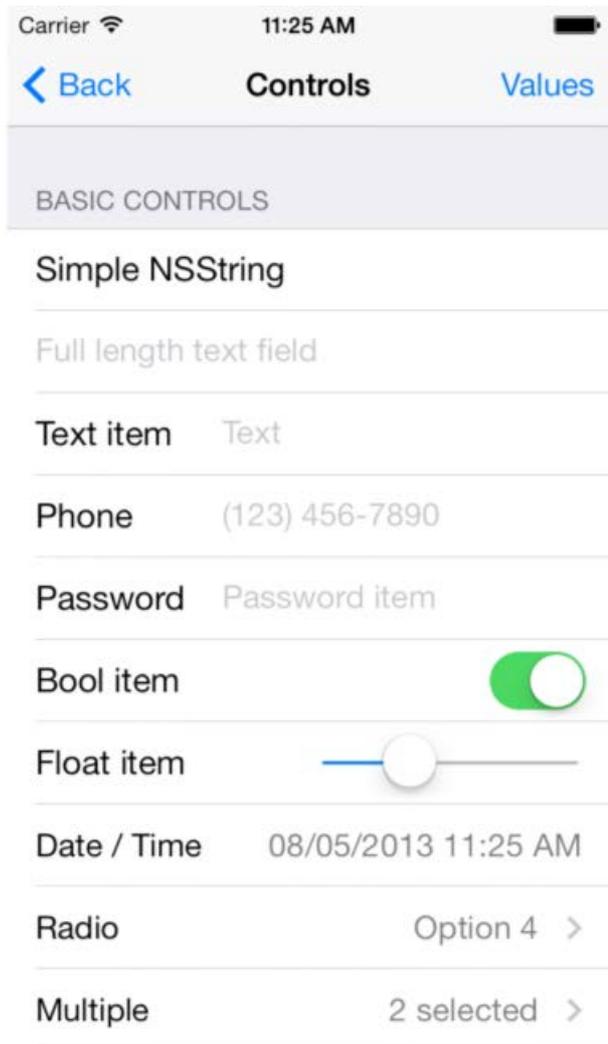
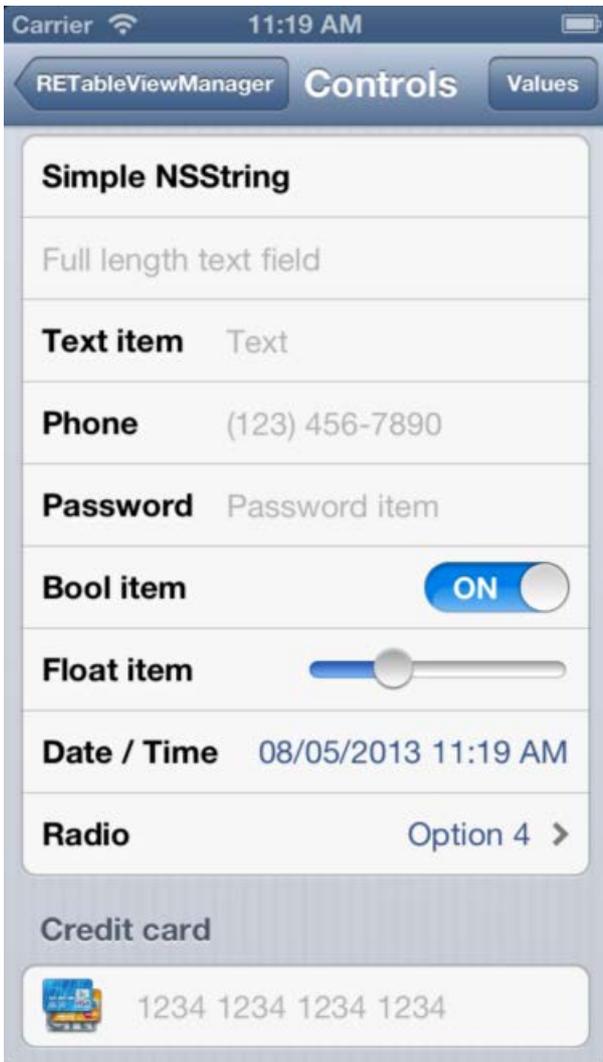
slackhq/SlackTextViewController

SlackTextViewController - A drop-in UIViewController subclass with a growing text input view and other useful messaging...

github.com

12. RETableViewManager

RETableViewManager will help you with dynamically creating and managing your table views, everything in code. It deliver us predefined cells (for bools, texts, dates etc.—check screenshots below), but you can also create your custom views and use them along with the default ones.



Left screenshot is so oldschool!

All of this stuff you can do in storyboard without help of this library but sometimes code is simply better than visual editor.

CocoaPods:

```
pod 'RETableViewManager'
```

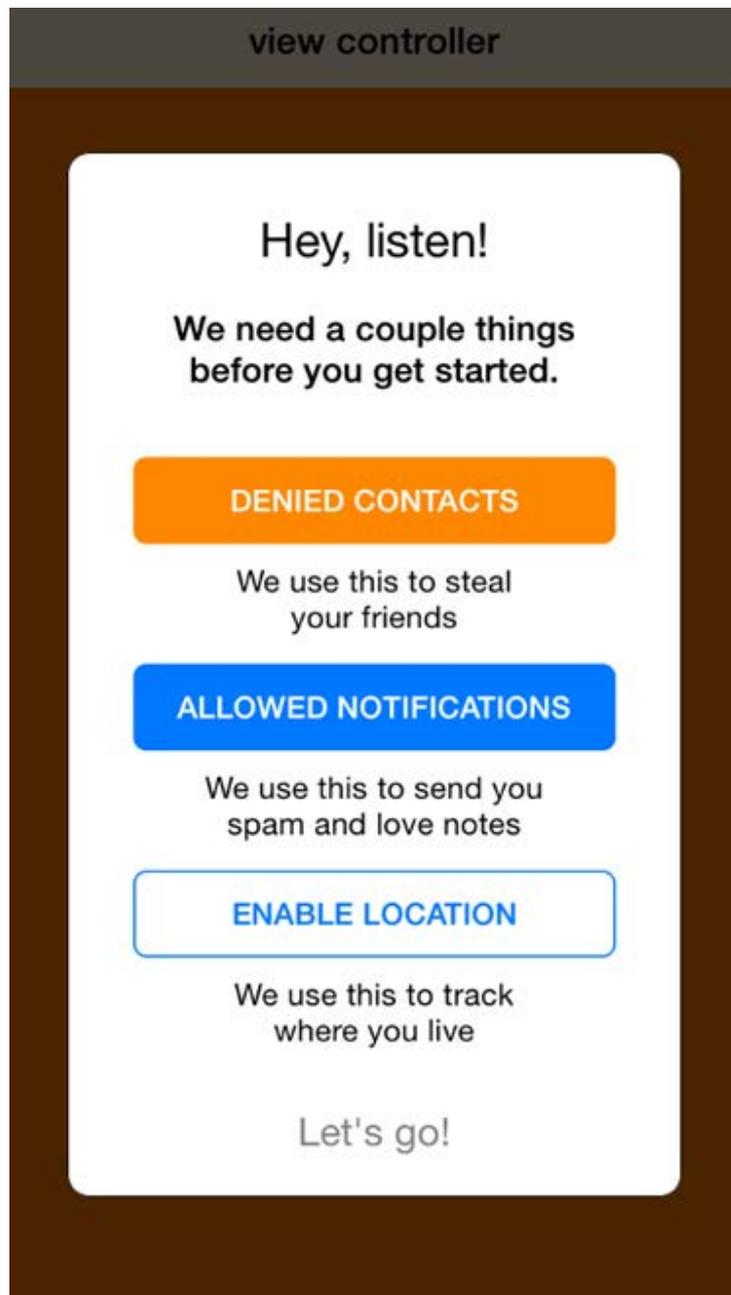
romaonthego/RETableViewManager

RETableViewManager - Powerful data driven content manager for UITableView.

github.com

13. PermissionScope

Useful library to deliver better user experience by informing user about needed system permissions **before** asking user for them. Higher acceptance rate -> more users actively using the app -> better retention -> better stats -> more downloads. Highly recommended pod.



CocoaPods:

```
pod 'PermissionScope'
```

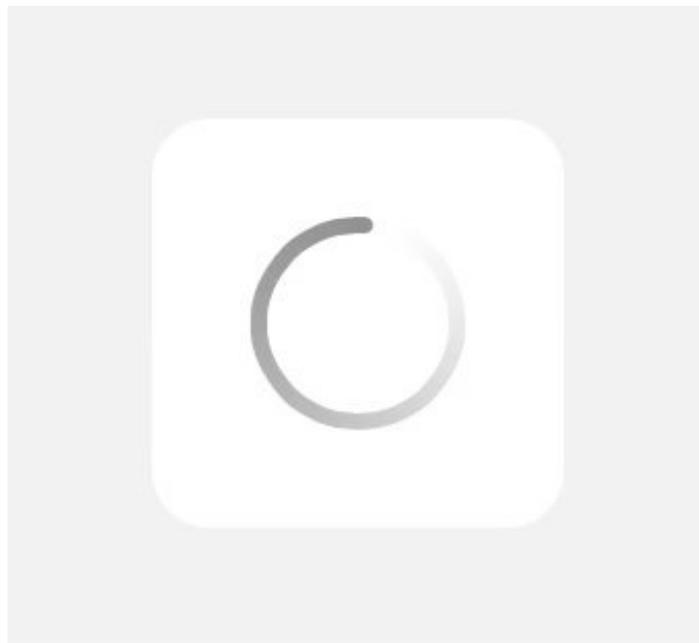
nickoneill/PermissionScope

PermissionScope - A Periscope-inspired way to ask for iOS permissions

github.com

14. SVProgressHUD

This image **is** loaded properly, don't wait longer and don't refresh the page. **This is exactly how SVProgressHUD looks like in your app.** If you need custom waiting indicator, here you have (the best probably) one.



CocoaPods:

```
pod 'SVProgressHUD'
```

TransitApp/SVProgressHUD

SVProgressHUD - A clean and lightweight progress HUD for your iOS app.

github.com

15. FontAwesomeKit

Font Awesome is awesome and with this library you can easily add the font to your project and use it in many ways.



CocoaPods:

```
pod 'FontAwesomeKit'
```

PrideChung/FontAwesomeKit

FontAwesomeKit - Icon font library for iOS. Currently supports Font-Awesome, Foundation icons, Zocial, and ionicons.

github.com

16. SnapKit

Love auto layout? You should!

At least when creating it in storyboards.

Creating constraints in code is painful without some help, but luckily SnapKit is here and with it on board you can code your constraints in easy, declarative way.

Check it out.



CocoaPods:

```
pod 'SnapKit'
```

SnapKit/SnapKit

SnapKit - A Swift Autolayout DSL for iOS & OS X

github.com

17. MGSwipeTableCell

Another UI component, that is so often seen in many apps that Apple should probably think about including something similar in standard iOS SDK. **Swipeable table cell**, this is the best description of this pod. The best one.

3 left, 2 right, border transition
Not expandable

3 left, 2 right, border transition
Expandable

3 left, 2 right, clip transition
Not expandable

3 left, 2 right, clip transition
Expandable

3 left, 2 right, 3D transition
Not expandable

3 left, 2 right, 3D transition
Expandable

These are just 3 animation types, there are more of them. Explore readme.

CocoaPods:

```
pod 'MGSwipeTableCell'
```

MortimerGoro/MGSwipeTableCell

MGSwipeTableCell - An easy to use UITableViewCell subclass that allows to display swippable buttons with a variety of...

github.com

18. Quick

Unit testing in Swift, for Swift (ok, for Objective-C too), integrated with Xcode. If you are Objective-C fan, I would recommend [Specta](#) instead of this, but for Swift Quick will be probably the best shot.

QUICK

```
1 //
2 // DolphinSpec.swift
3 //
4 import Quick
5 import Nimble
6 import Sea
7
8
9 class DolphinSpec: QuickSpec {
10     override func spec() {
11
12         describe("a dolphin") {
13
14             var dolphin: Dolphin!
15             beforeEach {
16                 let position = Position(longitude: 78.304129, latitude: 28.291769, depth: 20.6)
17                 dolphin = Dolphin(position: position)
18                 Ocean.sharedOcean.add(dolphin)
19             }
20
21             describe("click") {
22                 context("when it's not near anything interesting") {
23                     it("emits only one click") {
24                         expect(dolphin.click()).to(equal("Click!"))
25                     }
26                 }
27
28                 context("when it's near something interesting") {
29                     beforeEach {
30                         let position = Position(longitude: 78.304129, latitude: 28.291769, depth: 20.6)
31                         Ocean.sharedOcean.add(SunkenShip(position: position))
32                     }
33                     it("emits a series of clicks") {
34                         expect(dolphin.click()).to(equal("Click, click, click!"))
35                     }
36                 }
37             }
38         }
39     }
40 }
```

CocoaPods:

```
pod 'Quick'
```

Quick/Quick

Quick - The Swift (and Objective-C) testing framework.

github.com

19. IAPHelper

In-app purchases brings us a lot of boilerplate code, which this library get rid of and give us a simple wrapper for most common tasks related to money transfer from iOS user to your (or your company) wallet.

CocoaPods:

```
pod 'IAPHelper'
```

[saturngod/IAPHelper](#) IAPHelper - in

app purchases helper for iOS github.com

20. ReactiveCocoa

OK, here we have a little monster.

The logo for ReactiveCocoa, with 'Reactive' in orange, 'Cocoa' in green, and 'Cocoa' in blue.

ReactiveCocoa isn't a rather small, drop-in project like the others on this list. **ReactiveCocoa brings us a totally different programming style/architecture**

based on signals and streams of values. It's totally mind blowing and first you need unlearn what you've learned to understand how this work. It's not an easy task, but rewarding.

This isn't a proper place to teach you ReactiveCocoa, but I'll give you good resources if you are interested:

Getting Started with ReactiveCocoa

Note: This is going to be a slightly more technical post geared toward our friends in the iOS developer community. In...

www.teehanlax.com

ReactiveCocoa

Languages are living works. They are nudged and challenged and bastardized and mashed-up in a perpetual cycle of...

nshipster.com

ReactiveCocoa Tutorial - The Definitive Introduction: Part 1/2

As an iOS developer, nearly every line of code you write is in reaction to some event; a button tap, a received network...

www.raywenderlich.com

CocoaPods:

```
pod 'ReactiveCocoa'
```

ReactiveCocoa/ReactiveCocoa

ReactiveCocoa - A framework for composing and transforming streams of values

github.com

21. SwiftyJSON

JSON parsing in Swift made easy.

CocoaPods:

```
pod 'SwiftyJSON'
```

SwiftyJSON/SwiftyJSON

SwiftyJSON - The better way to deal with JSON data in Swift

github.com

22. Spring

Animations made easy, chainable and declarative.



CocoaPods:

```
pod 'Spring'
```

MengTo/Spring

Spring - A library to simplify iOS animations in Swift.

github.com

23. FontBlaster

Load custom fonts to your app easily.

CocoaPods:

```
pod 'FontBlaster'
```

ArtSabintsev/FontBlaster

FontBlaster - Programmatically load custom fonts into your iOS app.

github.com

24. TAPromotee

Cross promoting your apps is one of the best marketing strategies you can implement in them for free. And with this library it's so easy that you can't longer justify not doing it—add TAPromotee to your podfile, configure and enjoy more downloads for free.



CocoaPods:

```
pod 'TAPromotee'
```

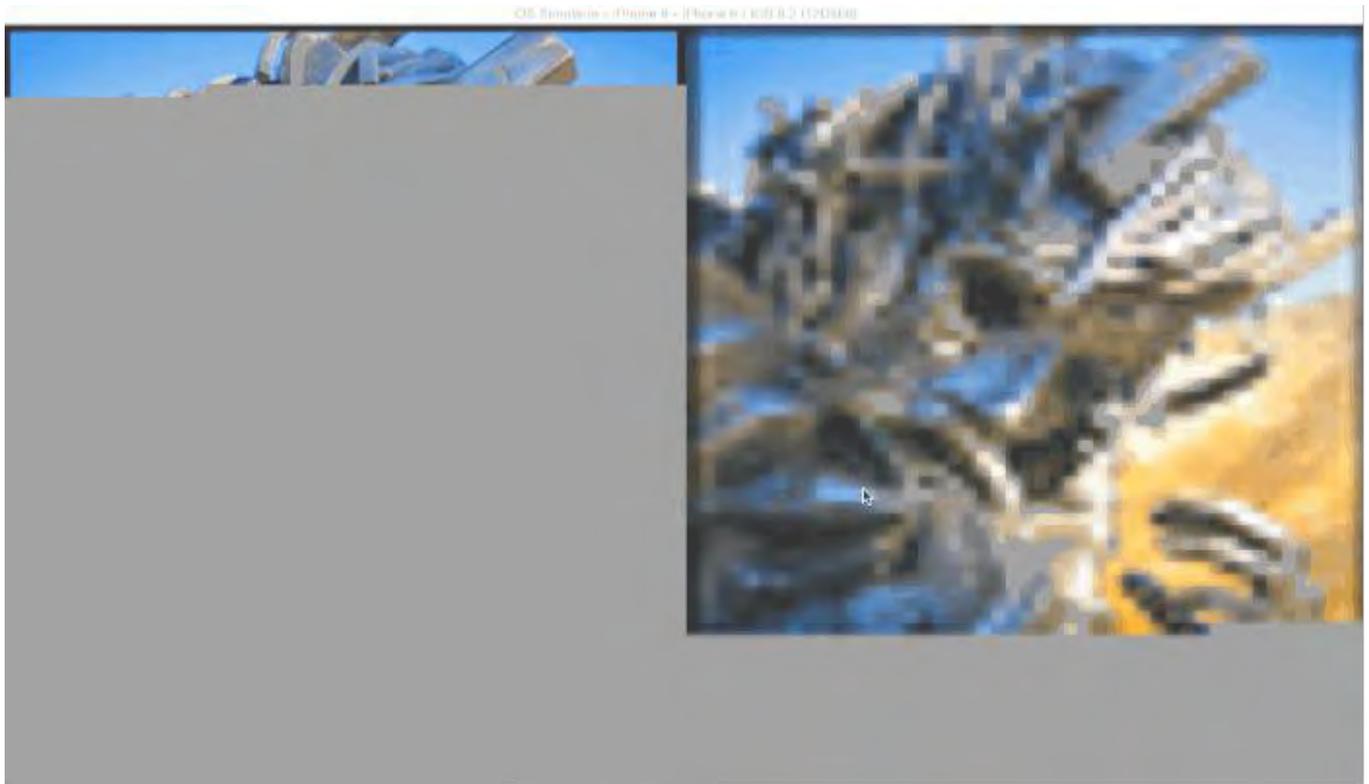
JanC/TAPromotee

TAPromotee - Objective-C library to cross promote iOS apps

github.com

25. Concorde

Do you load a lot of JPEGs in your app? With Concorde you can do it in a bit better looking way. A progressive way.



CocoaPods:

```
pod 'Concorde'
```

contentful-labs/Concorde

Concorde - Download and decode progressive JPEGs on iOS.

github.com

26. KeychainAccess

Little helper library to manage Keychain access.

Carrier 

5:24 PM



Keychain Access



GITHUB.COM

kishikawakatsumi

1234567-89ab

honeylemon

111-222-333

TWITTER.COM

k_katsumi

abcd1234

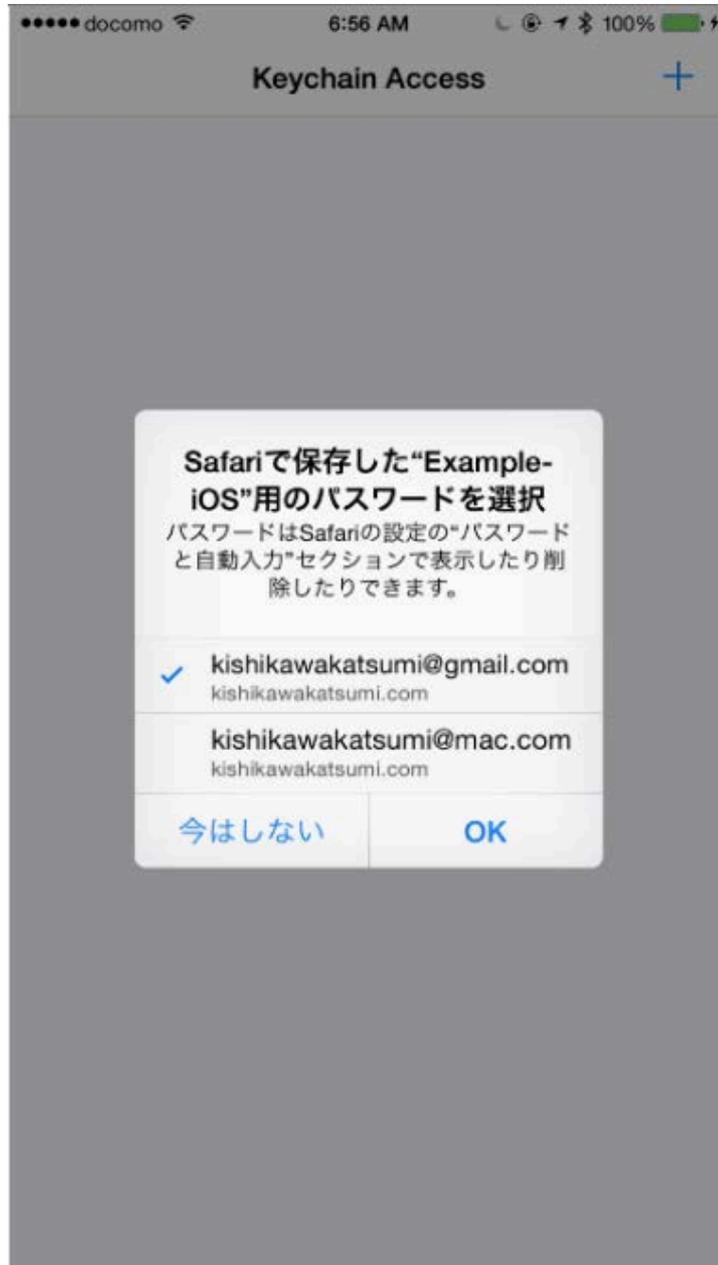
Keychain Access




Touch ID for "Example-iOS"
Authenticate to login to server

[Enter Passcode](#)

[Cancel](#)



CocoaPods:

```
pod 'KeychainAccess'
```

kishikawakatsumi/KeychainAccess

KeychainAccess - Simple Swift wrapper for Keychain that works on iOS and OS X

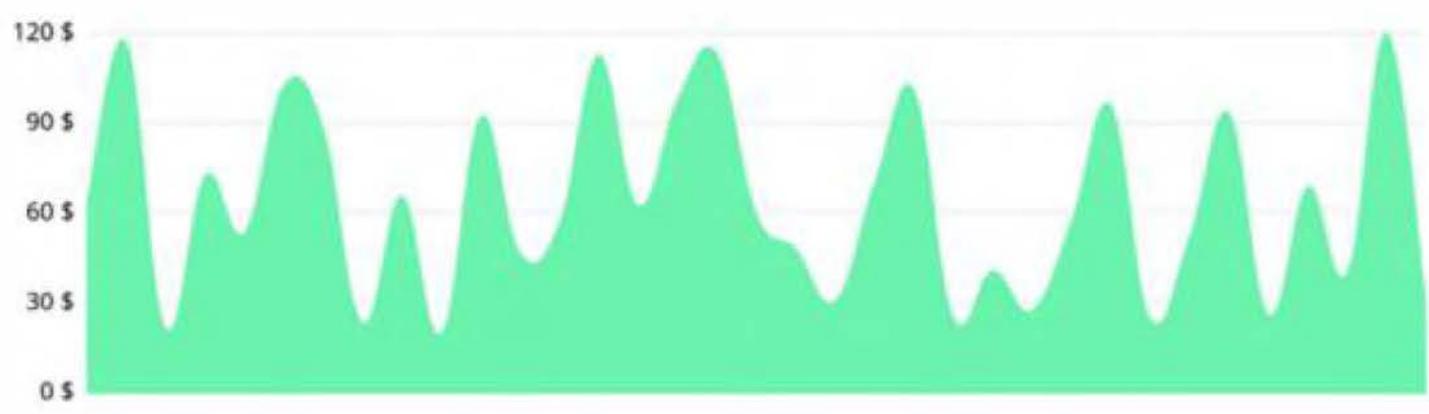
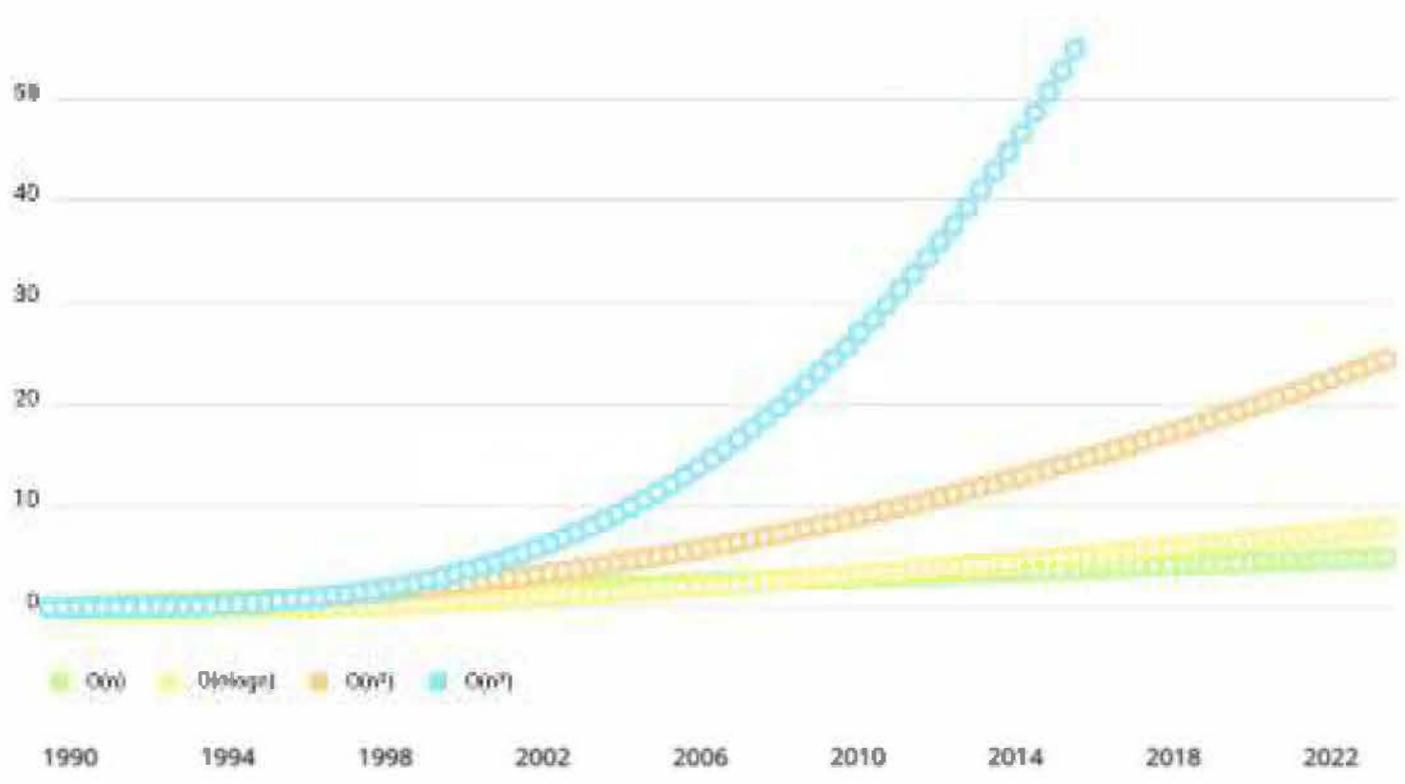
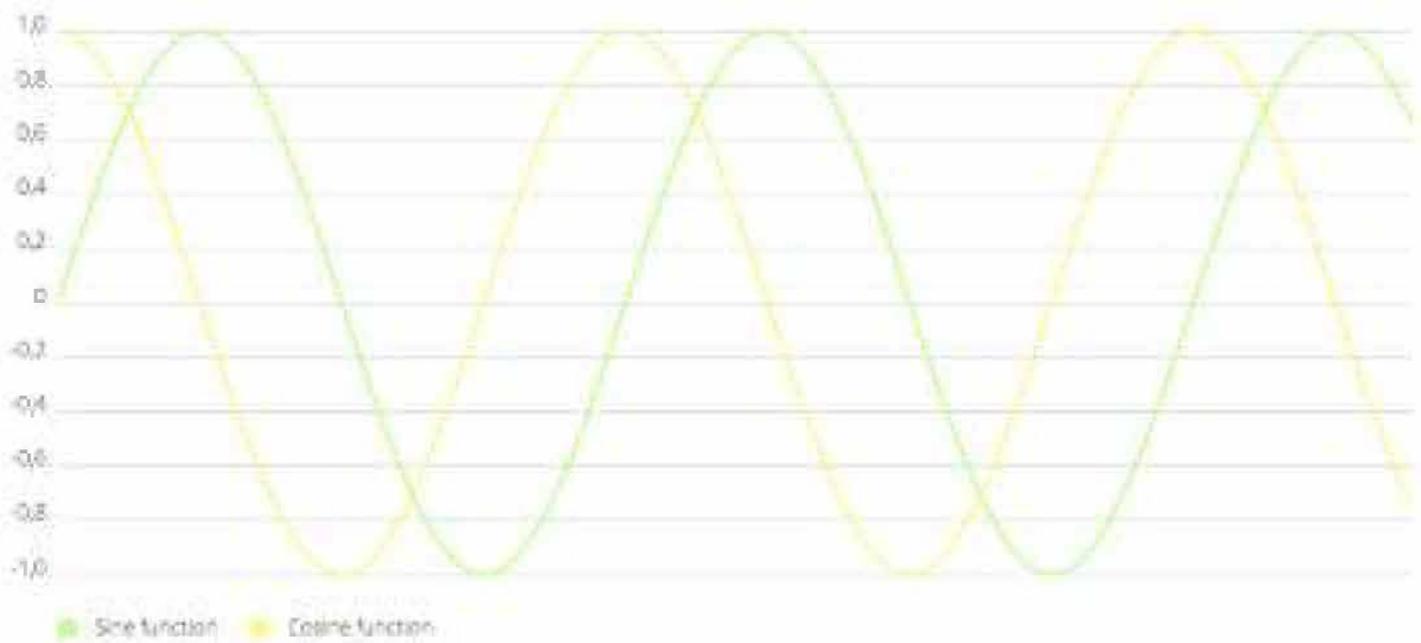
github.com

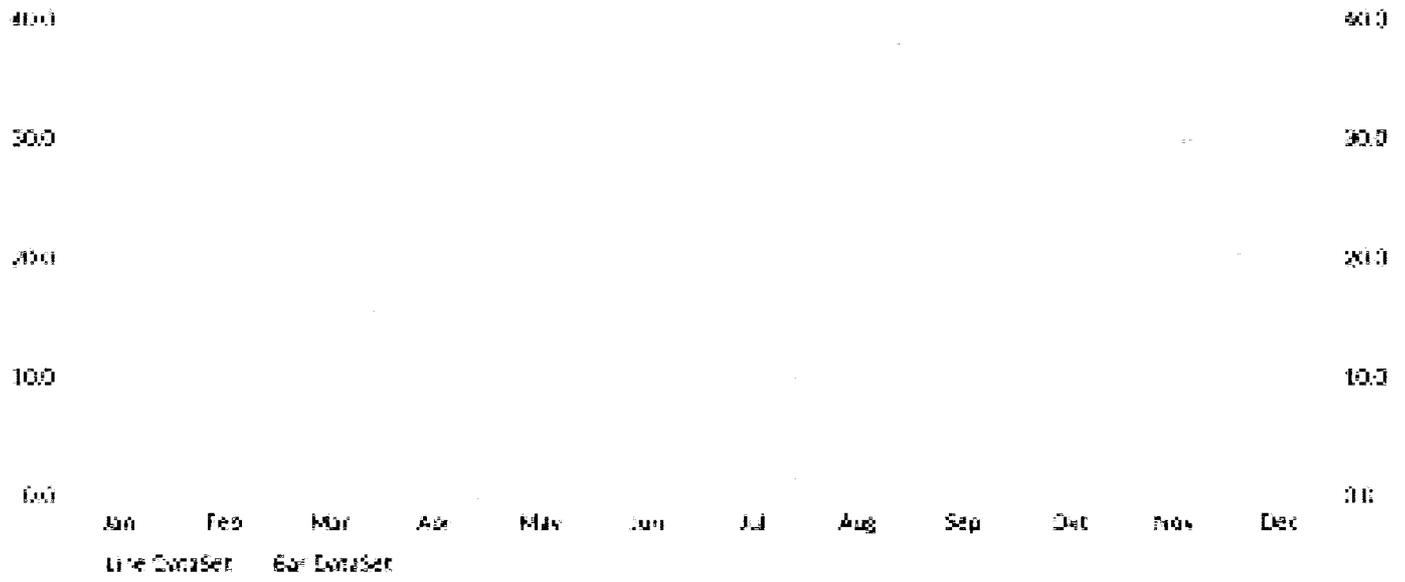
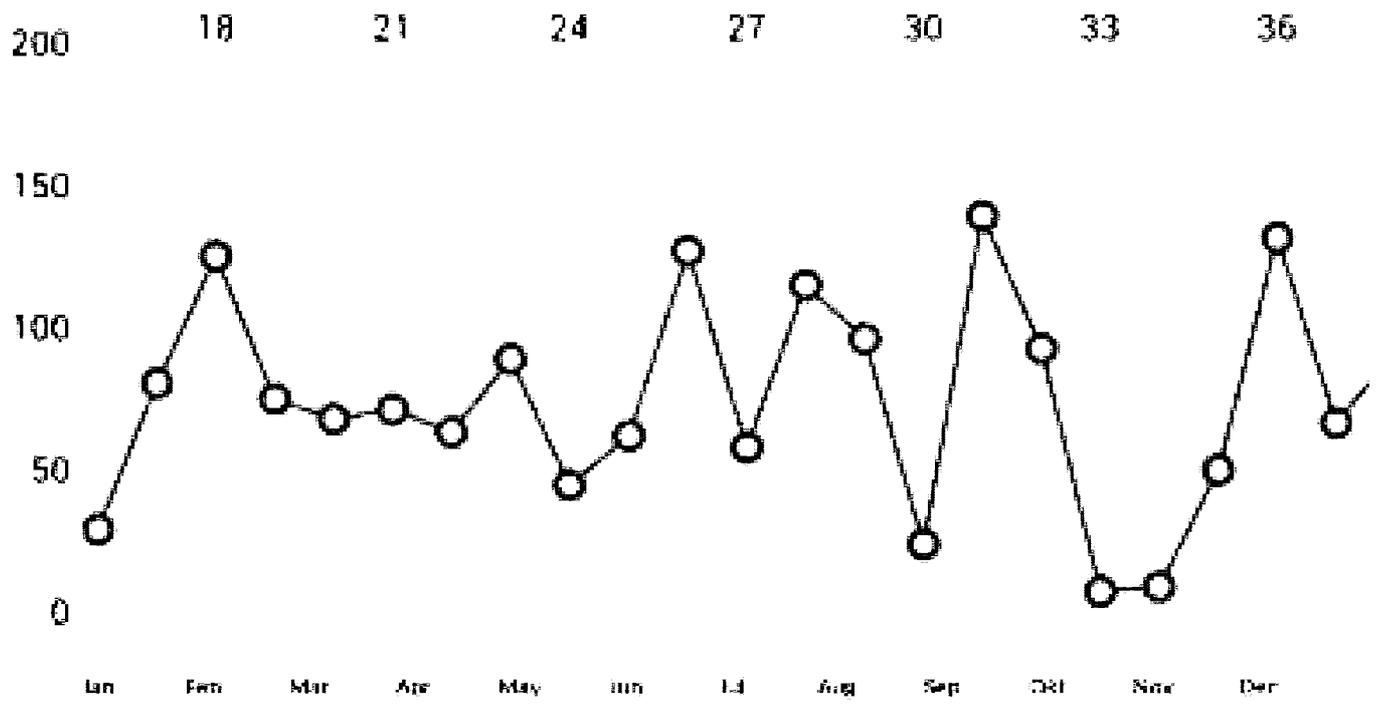
27. iOS-charts

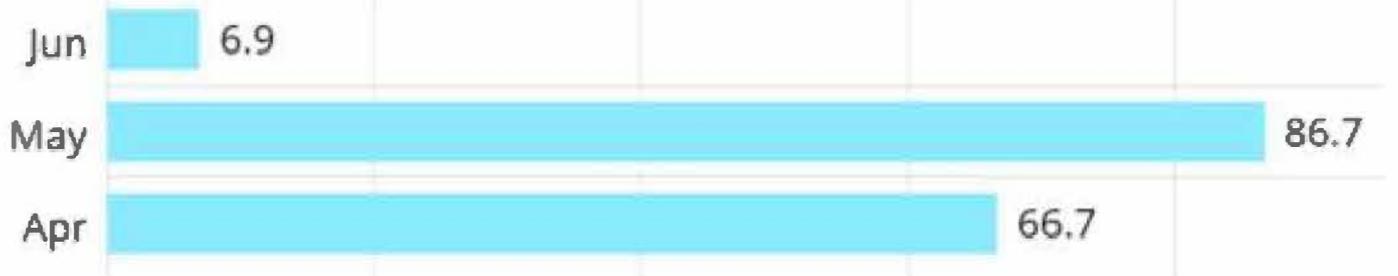
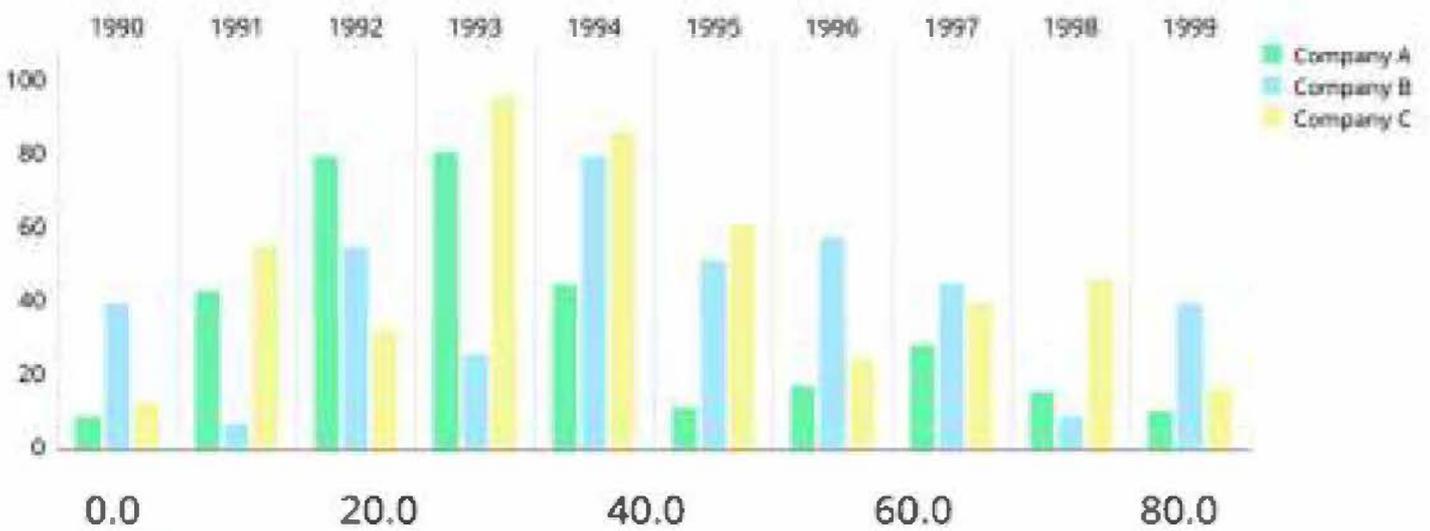
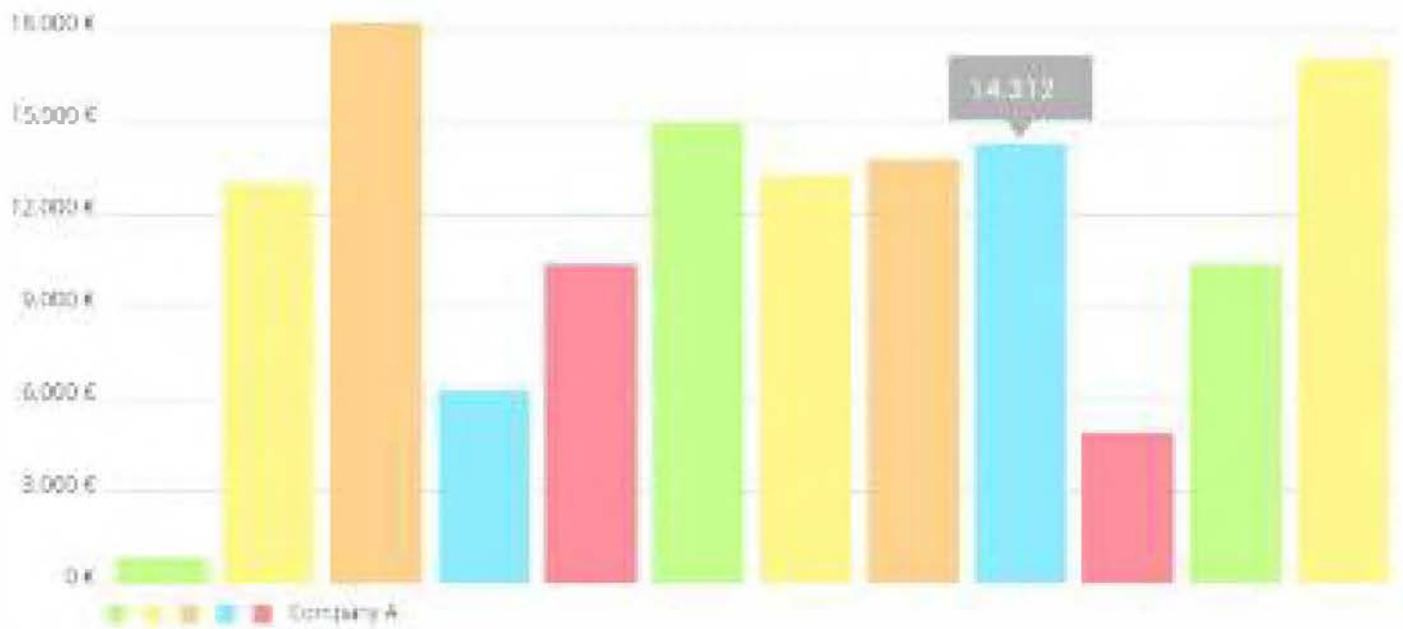
And last but not least—the iOS charts library! It's so useful and beautiful, that I won't write here too much— **just scroll below and see what you can do in your app with this project.**

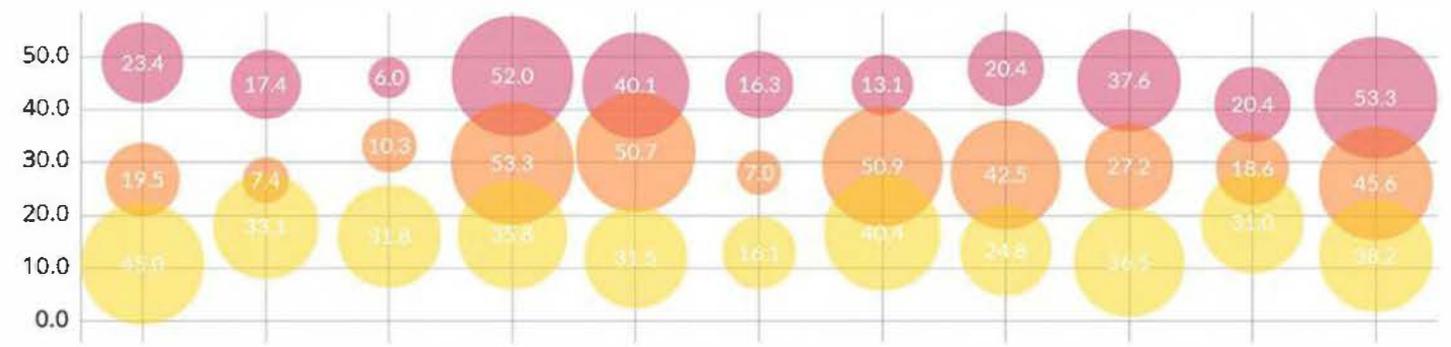
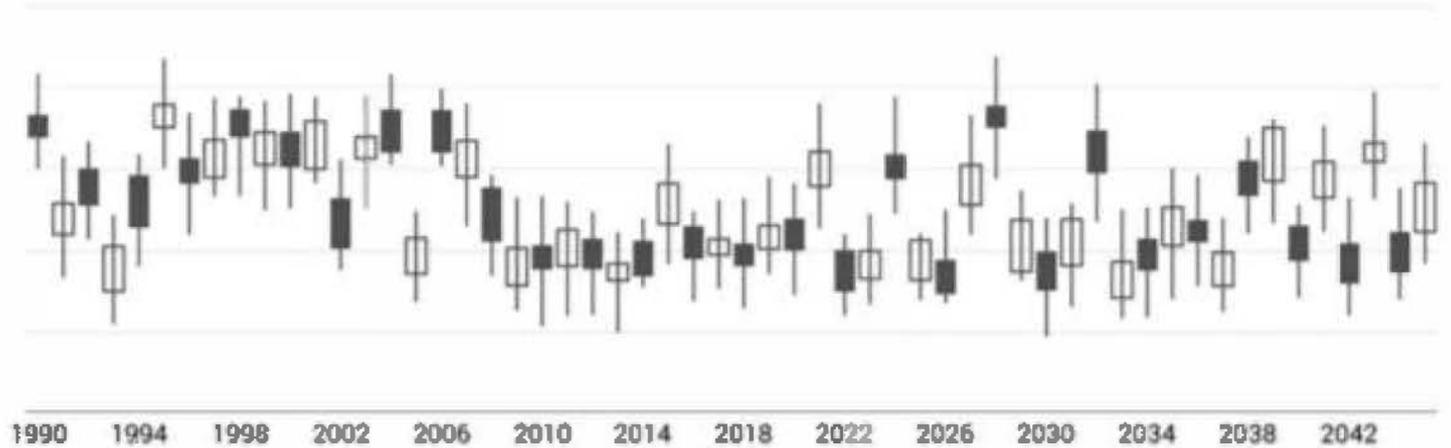
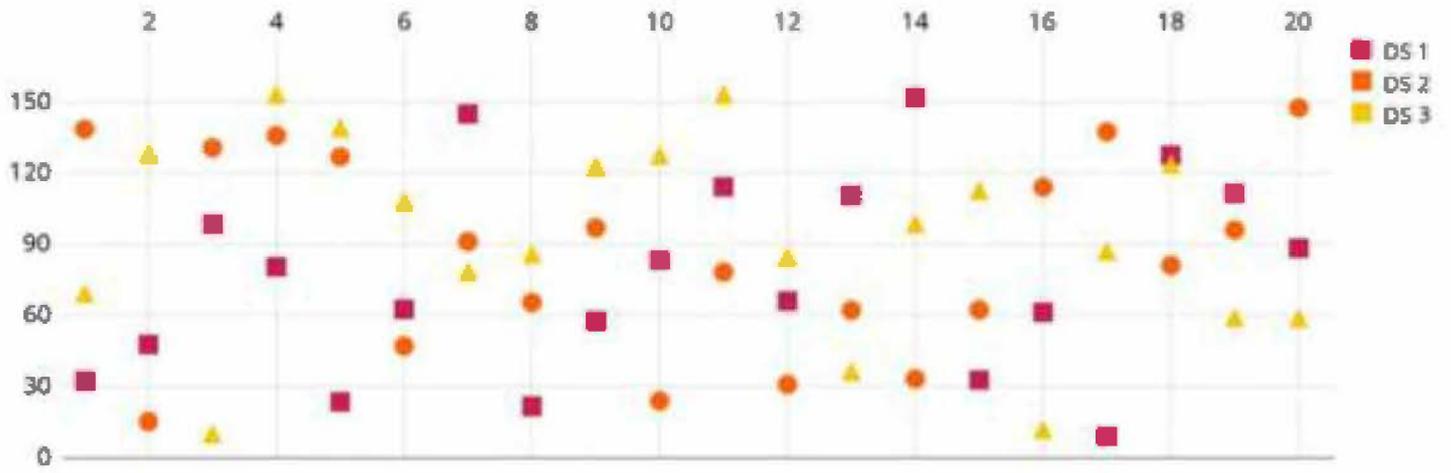
The logo for 'ios-charts' features the text 'ios-charts' in a lowercase, sans-serif font. The letter 'o' in 'ios' is a solid light green circle, and the letter 'a' in 'charts' is a solid light yellow circle. The hyphen is a simple horizontal line.

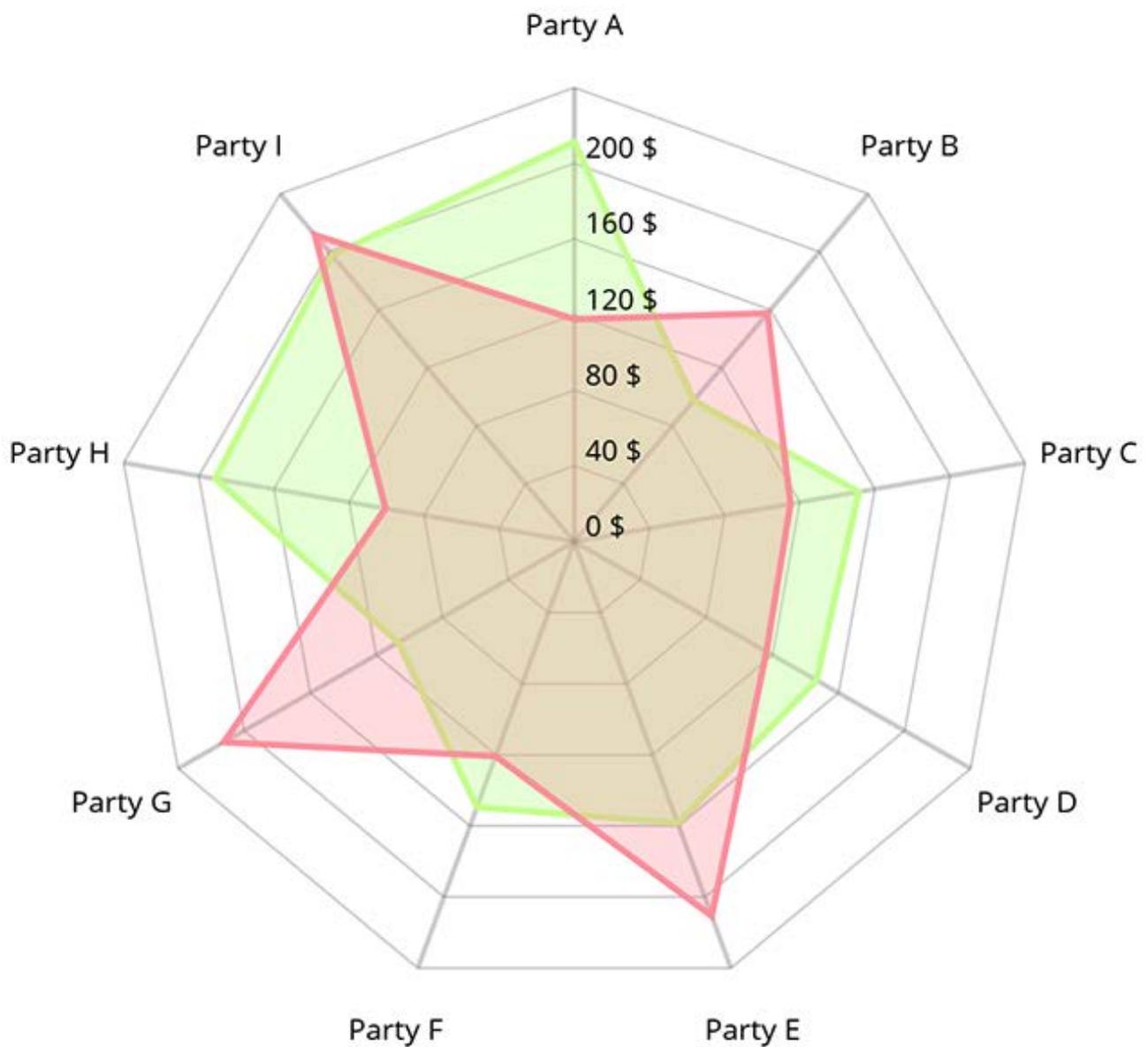
created by Daniel Cohen Gindi, inspired by Philipp Jahoda











Yes, everything is available as a drop-in (ok, maybe “code-in”) component.

Unfortunately there is no CocoaPods support yet, so you need to manually drag the project to your Xcode workspace.

TL;DR list of all these libraries for quick access:

1. [DZNEmptyDataSet](#) [UI, empty table view solver]
2. [PDTSimpleCalendar](#) [UI, drop-in calendar component]
3. [MagicalRecord](#) [Core Data helper implementing active record pattern]
4. [Chameleon](#) [UI, color framework]
5. [Alamofire](#) [Swift networking]
6. [TextFieldEffects](#) [UI, custom looking text fields]
7. [GPUImage](#) [fast image processing]
8. [iRate](#) [getting user ratings]
9. [GameCenterManager](#) [easily manage Game Center]
10. [PKRevealController](#) [UI, slide side menu]
11. [SlackTextViewController](#) [UI, highly customizable custom text field]
12. [RETableViewManager](#) [create table views dynamically from code]
13. [PermissionScope](#) [UI, nicely pre-asking user for system permissions]
14. [SVProgressHUD](#) [UI, custom waiting spinner]
15. [FontAwesomeKit](#) [easily add Font Awesome to your project]
16. [SnapKit](#) [easy auto layout in code]
17. [MGSwipeTableViewCell](#) [UI, swipeable table view cells]
18. [Quick](#) [Swift unit testing framework]
19. [IAPHelper](#) [In-App Purchases helper wrapper]
20. [ReactiveCocoa](#) [FRP framework]
21. [SwiftyJSON](#) [Swift JSON library]
22. [Spring](#) [Animation framework]

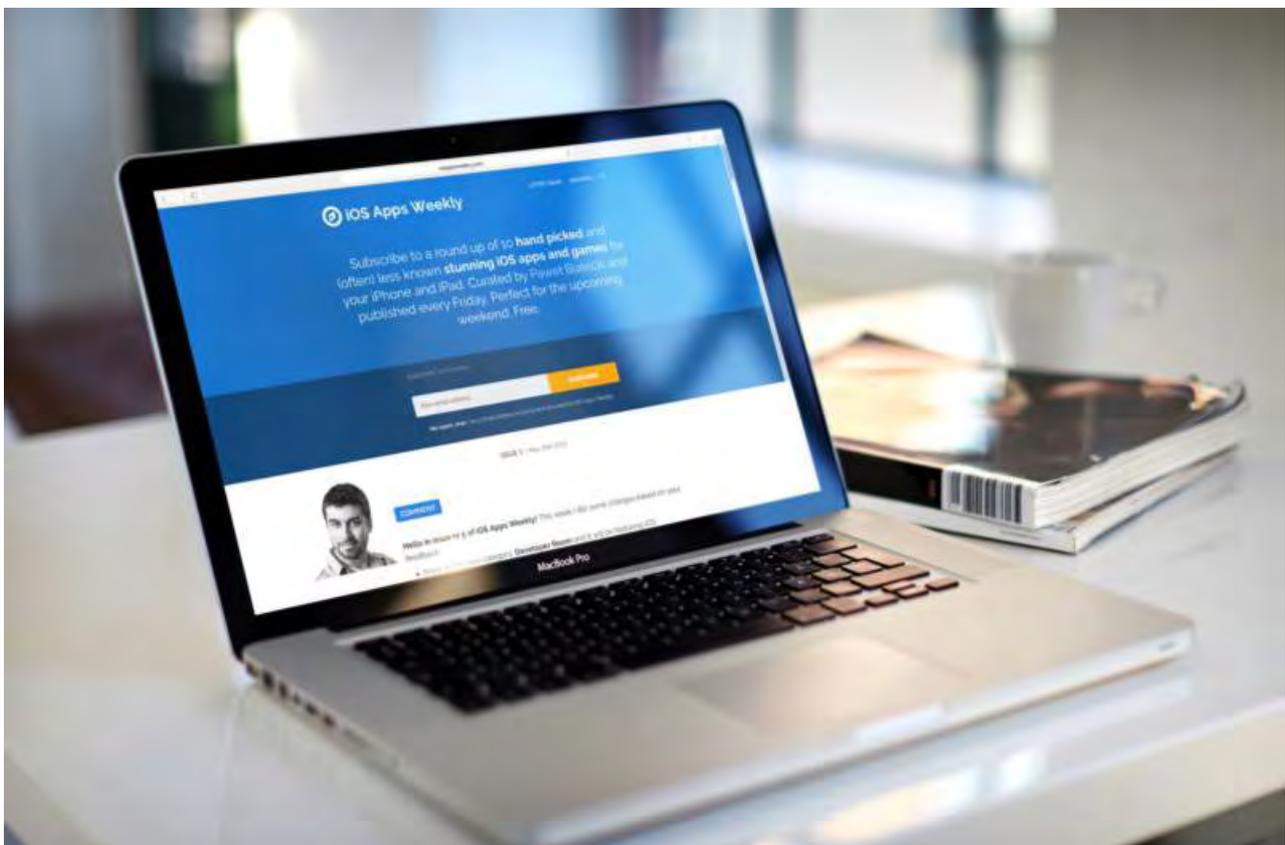
23. [FontBlaster](#) [easily load custom fonts into your app]
24. [TAPromotee](#) [cross promote your apps with drop-in view]
25. [Concorde](#) [download and decode progressive JPEGs]
26. [KeychainAccess](#) [manage keychain easily]
27. [iOS-charts](#) [beautiful charts library]

. . .

Thanks for reading, it was a long list!

One more thing—if you are reading this, you are probably an **iOS developer**. And many iOS developers are also iPhone users—so I have something you may be interested in.

I run a weekly round up of hand-picked best iOS apps and games — check it out, I care about high quality and I pick only awesome apps. It would be cool to connect!



You can also **follow me on Twitter**, where I mostly talk about iOS development.

Recommended reads:

27 places to learn iOS development. Best ones.

And not only for beginners.

[medium.com](#)

52 people every iOS developer should follow on Twitter.

And they are not only programmers.

[medium.com](#)

Culture



Jason Zook

5 min read



Yep, my coffee has lots of butter in it.

My Weird Morning Ritual and Why You Need One Too

Changing my morning ritual has made the biggest impact on my overall happiness and productivity. Before I share my new ritual, I think it's important to share my old one because I'm willing to bet the shirt off my back yours is eerily similar.

Wake up: Whether to an alarm or not, grab iPhone and swipe open. Immediately check any application showing a red notification (Twitter, Facebook, and email).

While reading email: Find out that I forgot to do something or someone wrote me an angry email. Fight the urge to write an angry reply, especially because I'm still lying in bed.

While scrolling through Facebook: See a post from someone bashing Obama, or a rant about taxes, or a puppy that's in need of help, or a post about how Obama invented taxes on puppies.

While skimming Twitter: Read a tweet from someone complaining about how awful <insert any cable, Internet, or phone provider's> customer service is. Or a similar message about Obama/taxes/puppies.

Get up: Grumpy, sulking, and forcing myself to do some sort of "work" before anything else. Still thinking about how I'm mad at the stuff I read, and how much I disagree with it.

You get the point.

Believe or it not, you're experiencing the same thing if you have a similar morning ritual. Even if you have the most highly curated feeds and friend lists, negativity will always slither its way through the cracks of our digital lives.

Here's where I took control back. I decided to make a change and quit starting my day with negative things. I decided to remove all opportunities for the boa constrictor of negativity to make his way around my neck. I decided to start spending the first 10–15 minutes of my day with positive experiences.

So what did I do? Meditation? Yoga? Deep breathing? Hide my iPhone in another part of my house? Get a puppy that can do taxes? Nope. I instituted *InstaCoffeeHobbes*. (And yes, that's a terrible name I just made up.)

Insta = Instagram: I keep my phone next to my bed, that wasn't going to change. But I removed the Facebook and Twitter apps and moved the mail app to the second page. When I open my phone, one of the only app icons I click is Instagram. Why Instagram? Because it's a selective feed of photos of friends, family, beautiful people, cars, landscapes, and more. I can't remember the last time something showed up in my Instagram feed that was negative.

I spend between 5–15 minutes on Instagram. I get caught up on new photos from people I follow and check out the Instagram explore page to find interesting new stuff. After that, I close my phone and get out of bed.

Coffee = Coffee: I do own a Chemex and French press, but I don't have the patience for them in the morning. I throw a couple scoops of Bulletproof Coffee in my automatic coffee maker and hit brew.

If you aren't familiar with Bulletproof Coffee I invite you to watch this video. It's an adjustment and weirds some people out, but I swear by it these days. And hey, Jimmy Fallon and Queen Latifah enjoy it, too.

Hobbes = Calvin and Hobbes: While my coffee is brewing, I grab one of the twelve (not kidding) Calvin and Hobbes books I own. Why Calvin and Hobbes? First, it takes me back to a happy place in my childhood. I remember flipping through the Sunday paper with my mom to find the newest comic from Bill Watterson. I remember pretending I was Calvin and living out his adventures in my mind. I also remember re-reading the books in the attic of my grandparents house later in life (it was a finished attic, they didn't force me up there or anything weird). Second, Calvin and Hobbes has some of the greatest writing about life you will ever read. Don't believe me? Go read a few comics right now and tell me I'm wrong.

Instead of looking at my phone or firing up my laptop (where I could find negativity) while my coffee is brewing, I smile and conjure up feelings of happiness by reading a handful of comic strips.



By the time my coffee is finished brewing, I've spent 10–15 minutes doing only things that make me happy. My day has started with positivity —positivity that will be a shield of armor from the rigors of the rest of my day. If I were to start with negative influences first, the rest of the day is an uphill battle to reach positivity.

I'd rather start at the top of Mount Positivity each day, wouldn't you?

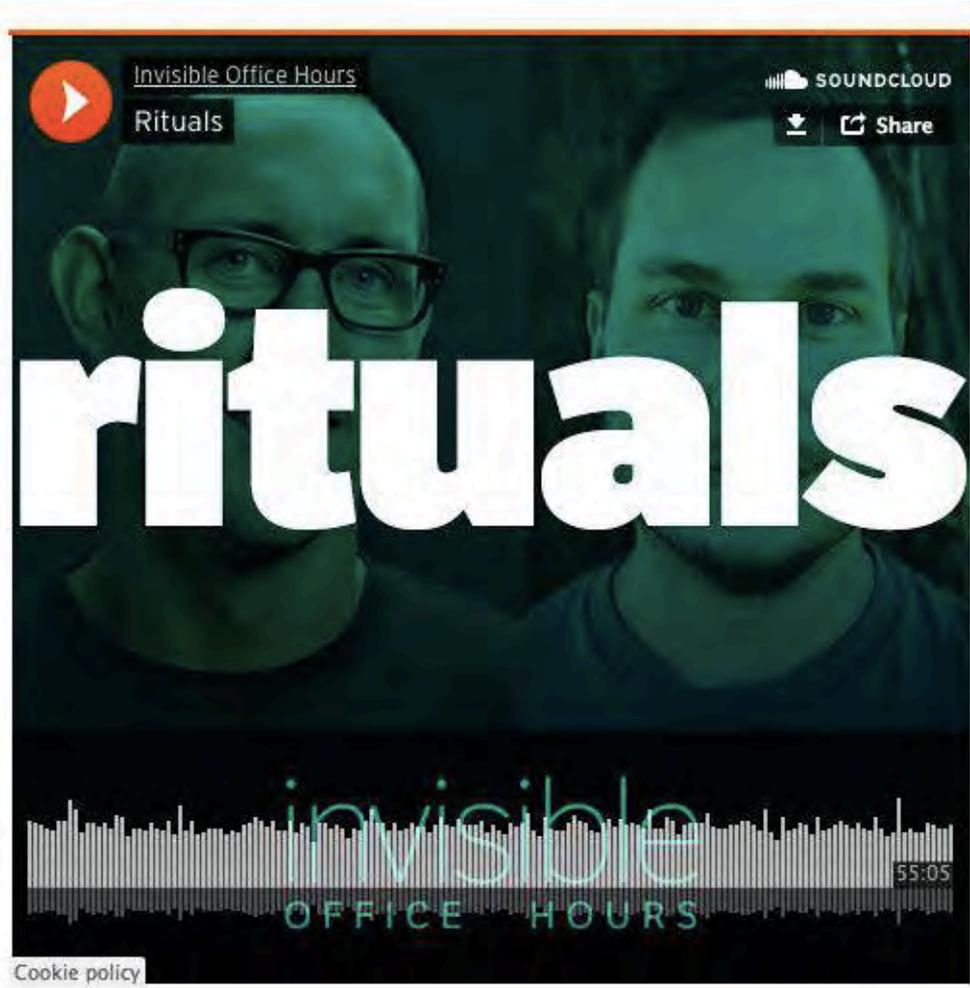
You may not be a big kid at heart and want to read Calvin and Hobbes. You may despise coffee. You may not have an Instagram account. But I guarantee you can replace InstaCoffeeHobbes with your own thing(s).

Maybe that's sitting cross-legged and breathing deeply in a dimly lit corner of your house while videos of puppies play in the background? I don't know. If that takes you to the peak of Mount Positivity each morning, then do that! I know how important starting my day off without negativity has been for me, and I want that for you as well.

It doesn't matter if you work from home or work a 9-to-5 job and have a commute; invest some time finding a morning ritual that makes you happy.

Take control of how you start your day — don't let the start of your day control you.

. . .



After posting this Medium article my friend @pjrvs and I talked more about “rituals” so I included that conversation here...

. . .

If you enjoyed this article I think you'll enjoy joining The Action Army.





Kasey Studdard

7 min read



It's Time to Stop Using The Word "Retard"

From Special Ed to starter in the National Football League, I'm 6-foot-3, 300 pounds, and learning disabled —and I dare you to call me retarded. **By Kasey Studdard**

. . .

By virtually any measure, I have been blessed with an amazing life. I have both supporting and loving parents and a sister, a wonderful (pregnant!) wife great friends, and a rare gift of athletic ability that has allowed me to experience life in a way that only a very select group of people ever will.

Only, before I played six seasons in the NFL; before I was a three-year starter and captain of the University of Texas football team; and before I earned high school varsity letters in football, basketball, and track and field, I was just another learning-disabled special education student.

I was teased, ridiculed, and isolated. And I was not alone.

Though I was never given an official diagnosis—which isn't to say I wasn't tested; they subjected me to every test under the sun—my issues initially manifested themselves as early as first grade. It wasn't for a lack of intelligence, but I simply couldn't comprehend things in the same ways the other kids did. Not only was I slow to process information, but I found even the simplest of lessons to be overwhelming. While most of my classmates were able to grasp concepts after a first or second explanation, I needed things read back to me multiple times, and even then, though I often nodded my head to signal that I understood, I did *not*.

It wasn't long before parent-teacher meetings were scheduled, and soon after, I was placed in classes with the other learning-disabled kids in my school. It was traumatic at that age, especially considering the merciless teasing that came along with it. Kids can be very mean, and not only was I “slow,” but I also was short and ... stout, which made a prime target.

“Ha-ha, you're in the RETARD class now!” they mocked.

*“Kasey's so stupid, they had to kick him out of our class,”
they teased.*

It didn't matter that my dad was Dave Studdard—he of the Denver Broncos, starting offensive tackle whose responsibility it was to protect the legendary John Elway. No one cared that the great Earl Campell often had dinner at our house. The fact that Rhonda Kubiak—wife of now-Broncos head coach Gary Kubiak—had changed my diapers as a baby was irrelevant.

To the bullies who saw me as different, I was just a whipping boy, someone who was far more deserving of their scorn than their sympathy or understanding.

Now, many years later, I realize that those kids weren't really the problem. We all are the problem, and things haven't really changed.



(AP)

. . .

It's been over two decades since anyone thought of me as a slow, little, fat kid wallowing in a lack of self-confidence, wishing he could just be like everybody else. In my early teens, I went through a major growth spurt, and to my surprise, I found that I could do things on the court and on the field that *other kids could not* .

Sports became my salvation. When I stepped inside the white lines, all my insecurities and fears melted away. There, I no longer needed to worry about not being able to understand everything, I just needed to let my God-given talent take over. There, my classmates and friends still looked at me as "special," only not because I couldn't keep up, but because they were having trouble keeping up with me. Unfortunately, I couldn't live solely on the ballfields, and to survive in the "real" world growing up, I needed (and got) phenomenal family support.

If my dad was the rock star of the family, my mom, Cecilia, was the rock. She was a teacher at my middle school (she still is, in fact), and she made it very clear early on that despite my learning disability (and my aptitude for sports), I would be expected to achieve my full educational potential. That meant years and years of remedial coursework, time spent before and after school, and countless late nights just to keep up. My mother *always* made sure the work got done—and for that I will be eternally grateful.

Later, as captain of the Texas Longhorns, and, eventually, as a member of the Houston Texans, my learning disability stood as a significant impediment to being the best I could be on the field. To say that NFL playbooks are complicated would be to put it very, very lightly.

Ultimately, being strong as an ox and maintaining perfect technique isn't that useful if you have no clue which direction your teammates are headed or where the ball is supposed to be. It literally took me years to master the plays, and even after I considered them memorized, I still made sure to go back to my diagrams, to stay late to ask questions of the coaching staff, and to sit for extra video sessions. It's what I needed to do to keep up.



That's me—with the PRESIDENT(S)!!! (AP)

Looking back on it, though, it wasn't the hard work that impacted me most growing up. It was the other students, my special education classmates—the ones with severe mental and physical disabilities who had it far worse than I did—who taught me more about life than any lesson plan ever could. For them, the struggle wasn't just about self-esteem or fitting in or being “normal,” it was about survival itself. They faced daily challenges the vast majority of us will never understand, let alone experience ourselves.

That's why I have always stood up for the less-fortunate. When bullies used to throw pennies on the floor of our high school cafeteria, and laugh as my disabled classmates scurried to collect them, I grabbed them by the shirt collars and told them *exactly* what would be coming to them if I ever caught wind of them acting that way again. Whenever I saw a disabled or disadvantaged child at one of our training camps, I would always take time to greet them with a smile and a hug, and to ask how they were doing—knowing the impact a small gesture like that can make.

It's also why my wife and I are launching a foundation to allow children to experience the joys of the outdoors. Not all kids are capable of using sports as an outlet as I did, so it's incumbent upon me to help provide a way for those in need. In this case, I want them to be able to explore their world and experience nature in safe and stimulating ways, without fear of being singled out on account of being disabled, or slow, or poor ...or different.

Understanding my background, you can guess that education and opportunity initiatives mean a lot to me, and as excited as I am about how the foundation will be able to help a select number of children, we still have so much work to do. Nationwide, we need to make sure our education system can meet the needs of all types of students, but we have even more progress to make in Texas, my adopted home state. While showing some recent improvements in overall education funding, Texas currently ranks 46th out of the 50 states, and it's dead last in funding for special education programs, per a 2014 study. This in a state with the country's second-largest population and three of America's 10 fastest growing cities.

Quite simply, we are not doing enough.

I know my future would have been markedly worse had it not been for the dedicated teachers and support network I had growing up who helped me manage and work through my learning disabilities. I want others who are in similar shoes to have the chance to reach their full potential, whether or not that includes athletic ability that helps them fit in.

That brings me back to my grander point—one of acceptance. Bullying remains a major issue in our education system, and while it may or may not be “worse” than when I was in school, it's definitely more out in the open thanks to the Internet and social media. Nowadays, with so many more ways for children to connect with each other and be defined (good and bad), their differences and disabilities which make it harder to fit in become magnified—and oftentimes, the spotlight can be hurtful.

Children—and their parents, from whom kids learn their early behavior—have very powerful voices in their social circles. Words can, and do, hurt. Learning more about the way to talk about your peers is an important part to promoting the acceptance I, and others in my situation, craved.



Warning: PSA audio uses numerous racial epithets and may be NSFW.

Together, we can do this, *but that means all of us*, from parents and teachers on down. I was one of the lucky ones—with sports providing salvation just in time—but *everyone* deserves an opportunity to shine, and all the funding in the world won't be enough unless we make acceptance and understanding more common than bullying and labels.



Tiago Forte

11 min read

Culture



Artwork by [Antifan-Real](#)

What I Learned About the Future by Reading 100 Science Fiction Books

Now available in [Russian](#), [Portuguese](#), and [Chinese](#).

Over the past two years I've read 100 sci-fi novels, averaging about one per week. See the full list [here](#), with my favorites.

I started reading sci-fi to pass the time. I had good memories of reading *Jurassic Park* as a kid. I continued because I noticed that it gave me something: a stronger imagination, a disrespect for the merely possible.

I started noticing I had different ideas, ideas you can't find by reading the same TechCrunch articles, Medium posts, and Hacker News digests as everyone else in Silicon Valley. I am in the business of selling ideas, and found these books both a treasure trove and a toolkit.

As futurist Jason Silva says, "Imagination allows us to conceive of delightful future possibilities, pick the most amazing one, and pull the present forward to meet it." I believe reading these books has helped me both in the conceiving and the pulling.

Every good sci-fi story is, at its core, a thought experiment, and I'd like to run one of my own now:

What if these books represented a fair guess at what the future will be like?

It's not so far-fetched. Reading the early classics by Jules Verne and H.G. Wells, what strikes me is not how much they got wrong, but how much they got right. I drew my selections mostly from this [list](#) of the top 100 sci-fi works of all time, so these books represent what we consider the best (or at least the most interesting) ideas out there.

Here is the future we are headed for, as predicted by our greatest sci-fi writers.

1. In order to save humanity, we must lose it

We all know that the long-term survival of our species is dependent on colonizing other planets, and eventually other solar systems. It is not a question of *if* our planet will become unsuitable for life, it's a question of *when*.

But looking at the distances and timescales involved, it's clear that as soon as we begin this process, we will start to drift apart.

It will start with language and culture. Settlements on the outer planets, separated by millions of miles and hours of transmission time, will start to develop their own dialects, their own slang, their own music, their own trends.

Looking at just the variation within the English language, between highland Scotsmen and California surfers, South African boers and Caribbean creole, gives you just a hint of the cultural drift we will see.

Next will be political and economic drift. Just as the emerging American cultural identity reinforced and was reinforced by the American Revolution, the colonies will begin to see themselves as different because they *are* different, and demand a government that represents their interests. With the distances involved, we will be able to put down the first few rebellions, but it is only a matter of time before they break away.

Economic integration will expand, but far slower than our speed of colonization and exploration. By the time we are able to fully integrate these colonies into our economy, they will long have developed self-sufficient economic systems.

Finally, we will begin to see genetic drift. It is remarkable to think that, despite our huge diversity here on Earth, we are all one species, which means any individual could reproduce with any other individual of the opposite sex, going all the way back for 160,000 years.

But this is just a historical accident. For much of pre-history, at least a few hominid species roamed the planet, and it was only the rapid emergence and expansion of *homo sapiens sapiens* out of Africa and around the world that unified us.

The moment some of us leave the planet, our DNA will begin to diverge again. Starting with a limited gene pool and subject to different pressures, different sources of mortality, different levels of radiation and mutation, the spacefarers will embark on a new evolutionary path.

Eventually, whether it takes hundreds of years or thousands, one fateful mutation in one distant, isolated colony will make reproduction impossible, cutting off that branch forever.

In order to save humanity we must colonize the stars, and in doing so the unified definition of humanity as we know it will be lost.

2. Time will be our greatest enemy

As we conquer the 3 dimensions of space, the 4th dimension of time will increasingly become the greatest challenge we face.

The first reason is time dilation, a proven consequence of relativity most recently explored in the movie *Interstellar*, but which plays a major part in dozens of sci-fi stories going back decades. Time dilation is the phenomenon of time passing at different speeds depending on how fast you are moving, which means someone traveling at a significant fraction of the speed of light will age more slowly than someone still on Earth.

The human consequences of this one phenomenon are staggering. Long-term space travelers will return to their home planet with everyone they knew dead and gone. Families will be stretched across centuries, with people outliving their great-great-grandchildren. Historical figures will emerge from space capsules still young. Those who want to see the future will be sent off on a long, high-speed roundtrip, arriving at a time they specify. It will be like having a time machine with only a forward setting.

The second reason is the immense distances involved in interstellar space travel. It is likely that the first to embark on an interstellar voyage will not be the first to arrive—as they are in transit, new technology will be developed allowing later expeditions to overtake them. Imagine going into cryogenic sleep as the first group of interstellar explorers, only to wake up and find your target system has been colonized for hundreds of years.

A third reason is technology differentials. Technology will be so important to every aspect of spacefaring civilizations, and will be improving so quickly, that even small differences will have profound consequences:

- Two systems with slightly different speeds of technological development will find a huge gap between them after a few decades or centuries. Their societies may be so fundamentally different that communication and exchange between them is difficult.

- Technology sent to distant systems will be obsolete by the time it gets there. Even sending information at the speed of light may not be fast enough for systems that are light-years apart. This will make trade based on anything but raw materials extremely difficult.
- War across vast distances will be futile, because any attack force sent at sub-light speeds will be obsolete by the time it arrives. But this could also mean a never-ending war that no side can win, as Joe Haldeman describes in *Forever War*.

We are already experiencing the limitations of time in space travel. In a recent documentary on the Rosetta spacecraft launched by the European Space Agency to land on a comet, they reveal that the probe's Osiris camera is only 4 megapixels, which was the most advanced technology available when it was launched in 2004. Today it wouldn't even make it into a smartphone.

The Philae lander that emerged from Rosetta to land on the comet was equipped with thoroughly tested harpoons and drills for the ice we thought it would be landing on. But in the intervening years we've discovered that the comet's surface is actually a mixture of dust, gravel, and ice, making this equipment less than ideal for the job.

As the years go by, our common experience of time will break down, and we will find that the 4th dimension presents us with far greater challenges than the 3 physical dimensions ever did.

3. The future will be weird

If I had to pick one word to describe the future, as seen by the stories I found most compelling and believable, it would be *weird*. Let me explain.

Writers like Ray Kurzweil have done a good job of explaining why it is so difficult for us to envision the future that we're headed toward. He argues that all of our ancestral heuristics are *linear*—tracking an antelope running across a savannah, estimating how much time a store of food will last—but that due to Moore's Law, we are entering a phase of *exponential* change that these heuristics are ill prepared to handle.

In other words, we look at the rate of change from the recent past, and extrapolate to the near future. But now that we are hitting the exponential part of the graph, this kind of extrapolation doesn't apply.

I find this argument compelling, but what is most interesting to me is not just the *speed* of change, but the *unpredictability* of its direction. The stories I've read have led me to believe that we are barely aware of the smallest implications of some of the technologies we are developing, and that these implications are downright strange.

Take dating for example. What will dating be like in a world of highly advanced anti-aging treatments? Imagine a man and a woman on a date. They both look about 25, but their appearance means nothing. They have to play an intricate game of testing and probing each others' pop culture knowledge to try and determine each others' age, without giving away their own. There will be whole industries and schools of thought around how (why?) to date people who are decades (centures?) older or younger than you.

The area where we'll see this weirdness the soonest is virtual reality. It's funny to me that most portrayals of advanced virtual reality assume it will be like normal reality, with lifelike human bodies in lifelike worlds. But I think that we will very quickly realize that reality is a bug, not a feature.

What form would you take if you could take *any* form? There will be vast industries dedicated to helping us experience life as other people, as animals, as inanimate objects, as aliens. Other industries will be dedicated to designing environments, laws of physics, mental states, personalities, memories, and many other things we will have control over. Robin Wright's 2013 independent film *The Congress* does a great job of envisioning such a world.

But the best example of how the future will be weird is artificial intelligence.

The very idea behind the technological singularity is that there is a point in our future beyond which we cannot see. Presumably this point is when human-level artificial intelligence gets access to its own source code, setting off an exponential intelligence explosion.

But what exactly does it mean to have “super-human” intelligence? What could we expect from a computer that has, say, a million times the computing capacity of all the humans that ever lived?

We presume that it would fill its time with “difficult” tasks, like solving world hunger, modeling the Earth’s climate, unraveling the structure of the brain, etc. But this is our anthropomorphic, linear thinking acting up again.

We can explore this through an analogy: imagine an ant observing the behavior of a human. From the ant’s point of view, the human doesn’t spend its time “solving hard ant-centric problems.” Virtually nothing the human does is remotely comprehensible, nor even observable, since the scale and complexity of the human’s simplest action is far beyond the ant’s conception. From what it can observe, I think the word this ant would most likely use to describe the human is “weird.”

And this is how we will describe the actions and thinking of super-human AI. If the intelligence explosion really does happen, it will very quickly become as superior to us as we are to the ant, and beyond.

Who knows what path they would take? Maybe they invent a new logic system incompatible with human neurology. Maybe they discover that our universe is a simulation and make contact with our creators, negotiating a cultural exchange. Maybe they use pure math to deconstruct dark matter and shift our reality into alternate quantum states where *they* are the creators, and *we* are artificial. Most probably, they will do things we don’t even have the language to describe.

Why It Matters

There’s many other interesting ideas I picked up from my reading, but since this post is getting long, I’ll wrap it up. I may continue in another post.

When I started reading sci-fi, I thought it was just a fun way of envisioning the future for my own personal enjoyment. But I’ve started to learn about a whole range of methods that rely on the principles of science fiction, if not the stories themselves, to make things in the real world. Storytelling and science are two of the most powerful tools we have access to—combining them has great potential.

I started with a book called Science Fiction Prototyping: Designing the Future with Science Fiction. It was recommended to me by a senior executive at the firm I worked for at the time, as the most important book he could recommend for innovation, and my curiosity was piqued.

It describes a loose process of using the common elements of sci-fi stories to conceive and test the implications of new technologies. Just as storytelling mirrors human experience, SF prototyping uses fiction to explore the potential experience of new technologies.

One of my favorite futurists, Thomas Frey, uses a process he calls “situational futuring” to rapidly generate and examine plausible future scenarios, which can be used for everything from geopolitical strategy to product development. The sheer volume of fascinating scenarios he comes up with on his blog is convincing proof of the method.

I’ve even recently learned about Appreciative Inquiry, a model created at Case Western Reserve University as an answer to our obsession with problem solving (which, it claims, focuses on problems instead of solutions). It is based on the “anticipatory principle,” which posits that “what we do today is guided by our image of the future.” Appreciative Inquiry “uses artful creation of positive imagery on a collective basis to refashion anticipatory reality.”

I’m not sure how that translates into practice, but do think it’s worth noting that someone is working to make sci-fi prototyping into a more rigorous approach.

The bottom line is, the line between science and science fiction is becoming very blurry. Every single day seems to bring news of a mind-boggling discovery, advancement, or invention that wasn’t supposed to happen for years. The ability to create purely imagined future scenarios, and to work out the subtle implications of radically new capabilities, is not of use only to novelists anymore—it is becoming a key skill for creating those capabilities in the first place.

Author Nassim Taleb in his book *Antifragile* discusses a rule of thumb he uses to estimate how long something will be around: the longer it’s been around, the longer it’s likely to remain.

By this measure, even as the specific technologies come and go, even as we experiment with virtually every aspect of our environment and consciousness, the storytelling instinct will continue to be a fundamental human trait.

I suggest we learn how to use it to tell stories about a future worth creating.

Read Part II here

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Family



Beth Steinberg

9 min read

Family

Losing Amy

The heartbreaking loss of my sister to mental illness

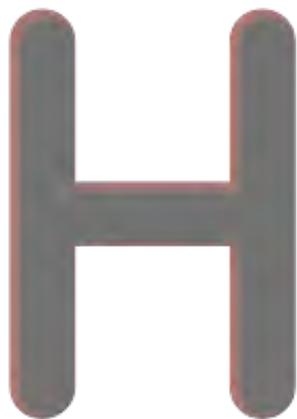


I am so sorry. Please forgive me. I love you all so much.

The note was simple, the handwriting was clear, uniform, not erratic. I asked the Detective how she looked. Was she put together, or did it look like she woke up and did not know what she was doing?

She answered me very calmly, “She was very put together, hair brushed, clean, dressed.” Did it look like she tried to stop herself? Again, calmly, the Detective answered, “No, she could have stopped herself and did not.” It was hard for me to imagine that this was an intentional act, but the facts were clear. My sister, a devoted wife, and mother of three beautiful children had hanged herself. That was two years ago, May 31st, 2013.

...



How she got to this point remains a source of frustration and pain for everyone who knew her. Amy was a wonderful mother, daughter, wife and sister. She volunteered at the children’s school, attended every function, baked cookies for the neighbors. She was an avid crocheter and taught children

how to knit at her son’s elementary school. She was an accomplished nurse and worked up until the time she had her third child. She was a generous person and was always willing to help those around her. I spoke to Amy every day, if not more than once a day since I moved away to go to college. She had been married for over 15 years and her husband adored her.

While Amy always had many people who wanted to be her friend, she held few people close. In spite of her tremendous beauty, she was terribly insecure about her appearance. She had her ups and downs like most people; but nothing that caused too much alarm. Life’s usual challenges and bouts of frustration with life, but not more.

• • •

However, the two years that preceded her death were different. Amy became a completely different person. The trigger for this is difficult to know. I was living in California, and my family in Omaha, Nebraska. Our mother, who was 85 at the time, had increasing health issues. Amy's children were getting older and less reliant on her. Amy seemed to become more withdrawn from people. She stopped returning phone calls and refused to engage in any social activities. In spite of barely leaving the house, she became increasingly preoccupied with her looks, specifically with her face and the quality of her skin. She began to get laser treatments for red spots and other minor defects that no one could see but Amy and the doctors who readily took her money.

Instead of feeling like the lasers were making her look better, Amy was convinced the treatments were leaving scars on her face. She then went to other doctors to treat the "scars" that again, no one else could see. I would talk to my brother-in-law and nephews regularly, whose feelings, understandably, went from sympathetic, to angry to sad in trying to figure out how to deal with the situation. Our pleading with Amy to go talk with a therapist was unsuccessful. She did not think anything was wrong with her and refused to go. She said once her skin was taken care of, everything would be fine.

At this point, the situation went from bad to worse. Our mother passed away, and Amy became obsessed with a single spot on her face. No one else could see it, but she was convinced it was not only there, but very disfiguring to her.

Amy would stare in a mirror for 8 to 10 hours a day. I would never have believed it, had I not witnessed it for myself. It was unimaginable. At this point, it became clear to me that we were dealing with a very serious mental health situation.

Continual pleadings with Amy to see a psychiatrist finally resulted in her seeing a specialist in Obsessive Compulsive Disorders. She went to several doctors, who did not understand the situation, others which she did not like. Then, finally, she found one she would agree to see with some regularity. My brother-in-law and I would call her psychiatrist repeatedly to get them to understand the facts. Amy would only tell them what she wanted them to hear. Since Amy was a nurse, she understood what to say and what not to say.

Over a year went by of a menial existence for Amy and her family. I went from talking to Amy nearly every day of my life, to barely talking to her. She wouldn't take my calls. She stopped attending school events, stopped cooking meals, and laid on the couch all day. At this point, her psychiatrist put her on a combination of Prozac, Zoloft, Lexapro and other antidepressants. We all thought this was shocking given the gravity of the situation. As an adult, you cannot make someone get help if they don't want it. If someone is mentally ill, they likely will not understand they need treatment. It is a frustrating situation designed to help protect people but ends up hurting people when you cannot force them to get treatment. Amy's "treatment" consisted of talking to her doctor for 15 minutes a month to get her medication. That's it. No cognitive therapy. No deeper intervention.

Fifteen minutes a month.

It was clear Amy was terribly ill. The drugs made her a zombie, but it was a better state than staring in the mirror for eight hours a day. In doing our research, her husband and I concluded that she had Body Dysmorphic Disorder coupled with depression. When you read the literature, it seems fairly obvious. We tried to talk with her doctor about this with no success. I was desperate, leaving messages for her doctor, writing letters to Amy, trying to breakthrough. Nothing worked.

Finally, Amy's husband convinced her to check into an inpatient treatment center. Amy reluctantly packed a small bag and got in the car. Half way during the drive, Amy lost her nerve and jumped out of the moving car. As dangerous as the situation was, this was finally our opportunity to get Amy committed, so she could receive a proper evaluation. The police came to the house, a report was filed, and Amy's husband officially was able to get her "committed against her will". However, our hope was short lived. Amy was "committed" for a 72-hour hold but convinced the doctors she was fine. I was livid.

She was a mother of three who jumped out of a moving car, and you think she is fine?

Amy was also completely embarrassed to be in the medical center. As a nurse, she knew many of the nurses and doctors in the facility and the stigma of being mentally ill was shattering to her already fragile self. They released her, added an antipsychotic, Risperdal, and had her see a psychiatrist once a month to obtain the medication.

Months passed, and Amy seemed to get slightly better. She did a few activities and went to a few school functions. She was an avid knitter and began to knit again. She knitted hats and gave them away to the homeless. She started to leave the kids notes, send me letters and presents and let everyone know that she loved them. Now, I understand, this is when she must have decided it was time. Like many people who decide to end their life, she began to give some things away, but nothing so noticeable that anyone caught on. Only now, as we piece everything together, do we understand what she was doing.

• • •

Even in her death, Amy was thoughtful. Although I know her pain was tremendous, she waited until the last day of school to do it. I know she must have planned to do it before, but waited, not wanting to ruin the kids' school year or jeopardize their grades.

Amy had a severe mental illness that went undiagnosed and was not treated properly. She had insurance, and there were no financial barriers to her treatment. Still, she could not get the treatment she deserved to save her.

Maybe she didn't want to be saved. It is hard to know, but when you are in the depths of such despair, you must rely on others to help get you out of it. Not a day goes by where I don't think about what I could have done differently, should have done differently to save her. Anyone who has dealt with this knows the guilt you feel is tremendous. There have been many stories in the news lately about suicide, Students in Palo Alto, Madison Holleran, Robin Williams. All complicated in their own way. The hardest thing about suicide is there are so many questions that you can never get answered. You go back and trace every conversation over and over.

What could you have done? In the end, it doesn't matter. What's done is done and you have to find a way to make peace with it. It is nearly impossible to do so, but you have to try. For Amy's children, every day, I try.

At her funeral, the Cantor said that Amy was ill, and her illness was no different than her dying from cancer. I agree. It is unfortunate that mental illness is still treated with such little care and has such a stigma. If it weren't for that, maybe Amy and many others would be alive today. I am telling her story because too many people keep mental illness a secret. I'm not judging this decision; I understand.

I decided to tell the truth to try to lessen the stigma of mental illness and maybe, in a very small way help change the system.

Undoubtedly, when I told people the truth about how my sister died, some looked at me differently. I know some people thought my sister was weak and selfish. Instead of showing compassion, they stood in judgment. However, far more people, very successful people, came to me and expressed their fragility, bouts with depression, and even their own thoughts of suicide. In spite of what people project on the outside, you never know what is going on inside. I understand this now more than ever. I hope she is in peace now. I believe she is.

A note read at Amy's funeral, written by her eldest son ...

Initially I was beside myself with such sadness I could barely continue. The thought of you not being physically here to give me advice, listen to me when I needed it most, or receiving your daily “good morning” text messages brought me such joy that will never be replaced. But as I continue writing, I can’t help but smile in how the last 4 years we became closer than ever before, and how you taught me to listen like you always did for me.

I then realized what all you’ve given me could not be measured. The kindness you radiated onto all people was something that everyone felt, and something I can only aspire to. Whether it was taxi-ing generations of children and their friends, to going out of your way every single time to give the homeless person all the money you had in your pocket, to organizing every school party I’ve ever had, or making my first girlfriend welcome into your home like she was a member of the family, are memories I will never forget.

Not even days before you passed away, you told me you stopped at a group of girls in the neighborhood’s lemonade stand, like you always would. Just to make them happy and smile. Things you’ve always done so well. I hope somewhere now you can finally smile for yourself, in return for all the smiles you’ve brought to me and so many others. I will always buy an extra for now and at every lemonade stand, thinking of you.

Some Stats from the CDC

- Suicide was the tenth leading cause of death for all ages in 2010.
- There were 38,364 suicides in 2010 in the United States—an average of 105 each day.
- Suicide is the third leading cause of death among persons aged 15–24 years, the second among persons aged 25–34 years, the fourth among person aged 35–54 years, and the eighth among person 55–64 years.
- Among 15- to 24-year olds, suicide accounts for 20% of all deaths annually.
- Suicide rates for females are highest among those aged 45–54 (rate 9 per 100,000 population).
- The prevalence of suicidal thoughts, suicide planning, and suicide attempts is significantly higher among young adults aged 18–29 years than among adults aged ≥ 30 years

1 (800) 273-8255
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

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Amy's sons and husband. Doing well and moving forward.



Katja Bak
4 min read

Dear Mother — It's not okay.

Family can be toxic.

Dear Mother,

It's been well over a year, almost two in fact, since I've actually *conversed* with you. I mean, there's been the occasions where I've had to speak with my brother and subsequently heard you swearing at or about me. Or the seemingly endless text message rallies where I would plead with you to understand, and you would taunt me and bait me to kill myself.

I know how and what you're thinking and feeling. You make it very clear. I can see you in my mind's eye, sitting sideways on the couch in a shroud of cigarette ash. A fortress of tinnies and smugness. I know you're shaking your head, raising your eyebrows, pursed lips—full of self-righteousness. I know you think of me as a black hole; taking, taking, taking. A selfish entity, as you put it. I am not going to contest that anymore—I'm too tired. You are blind to any perspective but your own. Reality isn't your friend. At least, you don't want to be friends with it.

You need to acknowledge that you broke your child, though. Just because you brought me into this world, doesn't make you infallible in my eyes. Just as a mother isn't infallible in any child's eyes. You *can* fuck it up—you can fuck *them* up. As much as bringing a child into the world is part of parenthood, it is more importantly the role you take in that child's life.

The old saying goes;

The blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb.

And it's constantly cropped down, altered, and consequently misinterpreted as the notion that the blood of your family is a stronger bond than any other. Aka "Blood is thicker than water". In actuality it tells us that the blood shed in battle with your allies is a stronger bond than that of simple genetics.

Simple genetics is all you've allowed yourself to be to me. The death of our relationship is a direct result of what you did, or didn't do. I know, you are sick. I know, you have had some horrible moments in your life. But the mother you were to me is not okay. It's not okay. It is not okay.

It is not okay to silence your curious, affectionate, inquisitive child for years to please your partner.

It is not okay to then, after such silence and distance, lean on your Primary School aged child for emotional support and protection from that same abusive partner.

It is not okay that your child, who still didn't know how to tie their shoes, had to stand between you and that same abusive knife wielding partner.

It is not okay that for more nights than she can remember she went without sleep before school because you were drunk and blaring heartbreak ballads to the universe at maximum volume.

It is not okay that you willingly allowed her to fortnightly spend weekends in the care of two drug addicts and their criminal friends.

It is not okay that she would go whole days without seeing or interacting with you because you were in bed—morning until night.

It is not okay for you to hear your child's pains and issues, and to diminish them and belittle them by one-upping them.

It is not okay to ignore your problems for so long, and then to make them your child's problems in an attempt to make them go away.

It is not okay to emotionally manipulate your child into taking on a mortgage because of gambling debt your abusive partner left you with.

It is not okay to tell your child to wait until the death of your mother before they can start their own life.

It is not okay to use your child's sexuality to insult them. It's not okay to use their sexuality to turn other members of their family against them, either.

It is not okay to encourage and manipulate your child to lie, cheat and steal. It's not okay for you to abandon them with police when they got caught stealing for you, either.

That is just the beginning of what is not okay. I cannot bear the anguish of trying to document your neglect and manipulation further. It's not okay to push your child away for so long, then try to pull them back and use them as a rock when needed. Then, when they can't cope with the weight of the world you have put on them, it's not okay to treat them like they never did anything for you. They did everything they could, and then they had nothing left. Nothing. At the very edge of existence. And you spat in their face. And it's not okay.

. . .

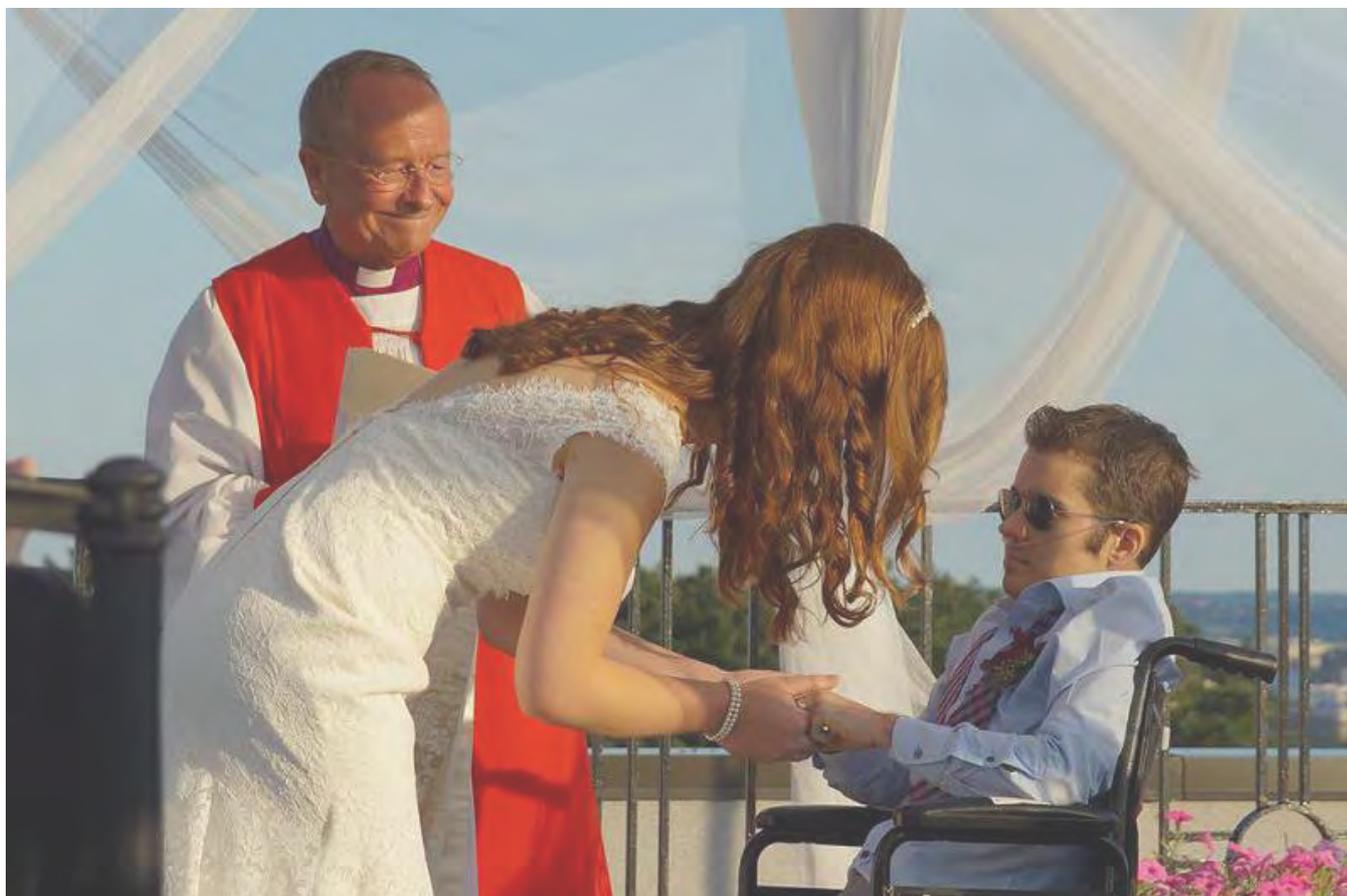
For those of you reading: it's okay to let go of your family. Society tells us that family is number one in your life—they come first. Civilisations and countries are built on the notion of the strength of the family unit. They would do anything for you, and you would do anything for them. It's not always the case. The truth is, they are just people. They are not infallible. They are not perfect. They can be bad, and cruel, and toxic—despite being *your blood*. And it's okay to walk away. It's okay. It is okay.



Sarah McBride

21 min read

Family



Forever and Ever: Losing My Husband at 24

“If it turns out that this is incurable, would you marry me?” is not your traditional marriage proposal, but then again, Andy and I haven’t lived traditional lives.

“My Big Bean”

Andy and I first met after literally running into each other at a White House reception honoring the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community in June of 2012. I was fortunate enough to have been invited after coming out publicly as a transgender woman while serving as student body president at American University just a month before.

Andrew, 26 at the time, had come out as a transgender man several years prior and was now a leading LGBT health policy advocate in Washington, DC.

I hadn't given our clumsy "meeting" at the White House much thought until I received a charming and suave Facebook message from that handsome guy two months later. His friends now tell me that he spent hours writing and re-writing the short message, in which he asked me out for coffee or drinks. After several online conversations and a few more chance encounters while I interned at the White House, we finally managed to find some time to go out for dinner.



We quickly found that we had far more in common than our transgender history, no doubt an important component of our identities, but still only one part. We both had a passion for law and politics, a love of "trash television" as he would call it, a desire to travel, and an incessant need to be right. We both got involved in politics after an intense interest in film. We both loved Star Wars, although his love dwarfed anything I could muster.

And we both had an obnoxious affinity for baby-talk and nicknames, he was the "big bean," to my "little bean." I still maintain that I certainly had the better deal: he was generous, loving, smart, funny, and enjoyed just the perfect mix of hard work and play. Many of the traits I'd find common in people from his beloved home state of Wisconsin.

In no time we were attached at the hip. Just a few weeks into our relationship he accompanied my family and me on a trip to Barbados. I quickly became part of his family and he quickly became part of mine. In no time, he was my partner and my best friend. To top it off, we even ended up becoming colleagues, when I joined him to work at the Center for American Progress.

We began to talk about our future together, believing that it stretched far beyond anything we could imagine.

Our relationship took on a whole new dimension when Andrew was diagnosed with oral cancer in his tongue in September of 2013. I thought and hoped that the succeeding few months would be the toughest that we would have to endure for some time. In October, Andy underwent a twelve-hour surgery to remove part of his tongue and reconstruct it with a graft from his arm. Just as he relearned how to talk and eat, he had to undergo an intense regimen of radiation and chemotherapy that left him in so much pain that he could barely breath without a stabbing sensation in his mouth.

And then in April, he was proclaimed “cancer free!” As frightening and as stressful as that experience was, it gave us a bond that few couples our age develop so quickly. When we received the positive results in April, we knew we were not totally out of the woods yet, but we began to start to plan for our lives ahead.



But then the world that he had rebuilt after his first diagnosis came crashing back down in July of 2014 when he developed a mild, but persistent cough and chest pain. After several tests and a short hospital stay, the news came back like a punch in the gut: Andy's cancer had returned and had spread to the lungs.

It was in the 24 hours after this news that Andy asked me, "If it turns out that this is incurable, would you marry me?" Of course the answer was yes. Andy had always wanted to get married, but prior to this new diagnosis, there was never any rush. He was only 28 and I was just out of college.

When we got the news that the illness was "life shortening," as doctors say, his soul was understandably crushed. At the time, we were told that with treatment, he would probably have about a year left.

The next two weeks were a blur of silence, disbelief, and crying. Lots and lots of crying. Crying about the fear of death. Crying because he wouldn't be able to see his family and friends grow up. Crying because, as he said, "he wouldn't be around to say 'I love you, bean,' or 'I'm proud of you, bean.'"

And as the crying gave way to determination—determination to both live as long as possible and as much as possible—we decided to move forward with a wedding.

Andy was scheduled to start chemotherapy in the next few weeks in order to perpetuate his life. Because we thought we were operating with a year left, we tentatively set our wedding for mid-October. Both of us had always wanted a fall wedding anyway; the colors, the temperatures, and, for a DC couple, the lack of humidity were all appealing.

"Two weeks? I'm not ready for this 'A Walk To Remember' shit." But on Thursday, August 14th, the third full day of Andrew's second stay at our local hospital and two weeks before he was supposed to start treatment, one doctor threw a wrench into our plans and cold water on Andy's hopes.

"I'm saying you might not make it to treatment," the doctor said.

Those were the first words I heard as I walked into Andy's hospital room after taking a shower back at our apartment. As I came around the corner, I saw the stunned look on Andy's face.

“So you think I may only have two weeks?” Andy asked, his face as white as the Wisconsin snow he may never see again.

“Yes,” the doctor continued and then paused. There was silence. I wasn’t quite sure where he was going next. He seemed to be deep in concentration, which would make sense given the gravity of the news he had just delivered.

“Hold on, there is a fly. Let me kill it.” He lifted his hands up, getting ready to smack the fly to death. The silence continued, only broken by a loud clap.

The body of the fly fell to the floor. The doctor paused again, saying “hold on, let me pick it up,” as he slowly bent over, lifted the fly’s body, and threw it in the trash.

I wanted to scream at the doctor’s coldness, but I was stunned into silence by both the news and the indifference with which it was delivered.

After 45 seconds, which naturally felt like an hour, Andy, who couldn’t bare awkwardness, finally broke the silence and said to the doctor, “nice job.”

Eventually, the doctor continued. He instructed us that one of Andy’s lungs was failing at a rapid rate. “You need to decide whether you will want to go on a respirator. Just know, though, given your condition, if you go on a respirator, you will likely never be able to be taken off. And to put you on a respirator, you will have to be sedated, and, given your condition, you will likely never wake up.”

Moments later, another doctor came in and apologized profusely. It seemed she had over-hydrated Andy after thinking his heart was racing from a lack of fluids. The doctor who had just delivered Andy’s “two-weeks notice,” seemed surprised and slightly relieved that there was a potentially reversible reason for the episode. The cardiologist prescribed some medications and reduced his fluid intake. Sure enough, Andy rebounded and by that afternoon was better than he had been since being admitted to the hospital in the first place.

As the two doctors left his room, we were confused. Did Andy have two weeks left or was his rapid decline of this morning merely a temporary problem that was easily fixed? Unsure, Andy turned to me and said, “Two weeks? I’m not ready for this ‘A Walk To Remember’ shit.” He had been fighting to live, but now it seemed he was

merely fighting for a year.

Over the next few hours, neither doctor returned to our room with any more information. We asked any medical professional who entered our room for an update, from the nurses, to the palliative care team, to the young hospitalist. No one could provide much clarity as to what we were looking at in that moment. The general consensus was that Andy didn't look like someone with two weeks left. In fact, by that evening, he was stable enough that the decision was made to discharge Andy in the next few days.

The next day, after Andy's mother had suggested moving up the wedding, I broached the subject with him.

He seemed to receive the idea well, although with concern that moving the date meant something about his prognosis. I explained that we weren't moving the date because his prognosis had changed, but rather that the chemotherapy would take more out of him than we anticipated. Determined to reach the wedding, he said, "Let's do it."

“Forever and ever, forever and ever, forever and ever...”

The first full day back at the apartment, our friend and colleague Bishop Gene Robinson, the first openly gay bishop in any major Christian denomination, came by our apartment to discuss the possibility of a wedding. After talking with Bishop Gene for about an hour, we decided to move forward with a wedding that weekend, then just five days away.

Bishop Gene, as well as several close friends, offered to do all the planning, logistics, and organizing for the wedding. All we had to do was to get the marriage certificate, for me to buy my dress, and to make the occasional decision. Given Andy's limitations, we decided that we would host the wedding on the roof of our apartment building, a beautiful space for about fifty that has magnificent 360 degree views of Washington, DC.

Over the next several days, as preparations for the wedding continued, Andy's situation deteriorated. With each passing day, he could walk less and required a little more oxygen. He slept more and more. Daily tasks that once took five minutes for Andy, now took thirty minutes or an hour with the help of multiple people

Eventually, eating became a labor for him, taking him four hours to down fifteen spoonfuls of an ice-cream/medicine mix.

The only respite from the constant struggle to keep him nourished and hydrated came when I would talk with him about the wedding. You could tell he was trying his hardest to stay awake and alert for those conversations.

A few days earlier, Bishop Gene had sent us a draft of the wedding ceremony based on the Episcopal Church's service. With Andy's permission, I went through and edited it for us. I removed any mention of death in the ceremony and replaced it with "forever and ever." Given his condition, I also reduced the amount of lines we had to speak to three simple sentences:

"I do."

"That is my solemn vow."

And, "Please accept this ring as a symbol of my abiding love."

I knew he would not be able to remember those lines, so I wrote them out, as well as the last sentences before them. After working on the service for about an hour, I came out of our bedroom and asked him if we could go over it.

By this time, Andy was sleeping most of the day. His activities were looking less like someone with ten or even two months left, and more like someone who had a week or two. I tried reading the entire service to him, but he fell asleep pretty quickly.

When he awoke, I decided to only read to him his parts and the sentences before his lines, including the line, "Will you honor and love her forever and ever?"

After I asked him if he was okay with that and told him that I had made a cheat sheet so he didn't have to memorize anything, he started to drift off to sleep again. As his head began to fall back and his dreams came again, I heard him mumbling. I wasn't sure if he needed something, so I walked over to his chair and leaned in.

He kept mumbling the same thing over and over again. I leaned in further to hear him more clearly, "forever and ever, forever and ever, forever and ever..."

“My wedding day.”

The morning of our wedding—August 24, 2014—came without incident. No shortness of breath. His eating had marginally improved. The weather, which had initially been forecast to be rainy, turned out to be the nicest day of the month. Mid-80s, sunny, just the right amount of breeze. Our families had come in from out of town. Old friends and new friends were ready and excited. It was turning out to be a beautiful, albeit bittersweet day.

I was getting ready in our neighbor’s apartment across the hall when about an hour before the ceremony one of Andy’s best friends knocked on the door. He was out of breath and clearly shaken.

“Andy just had an episode. He started to collapse and go unconscious when he was moving from his recliner to his wheelchair. He is awake and his vitals are okay right now, but we called the police and the EMT’s are on their way.” Luckily, my brother, a radiation oncologist, had offered to be with Andy while he got dressed for the wedding and was there to help.

With my hair up and my wedding dress still hanging on the wall, I ran over to our apartment. I found Andy in the recliner with my brother and our friends around him. I walked up and he apologized, “I’m sorry, are you mad at me?”

“Of course not, beanie,” my nickname for him, “Of course I’m not mad at you.”

As we heard the sirens approaching our building from the outside, my brother asked Andy several questions to ensure he hadn’t had a stroke.

“What is your name?”

“Andrew Cray.”

“Where are we?”

“My apartment in Washington, DC.”

“What is today?”

He got the date wrong by a few days, but also answered, “my wedding day.”

The EMT’s entered the apartment and made their way through the medical equipment and wedding supplies. With the caterer preparing the small amount of food for our wedding in the next room, the EMTs performed an EKG and consulted with my brother. Andy was adamant that he did not want to go into the hospital, knowing what that would mean for our wedding and for his chances at chemotherapy. With his vitals normal, the EMT’s acquiesced.

As they left, I asked Andy if he wanted to move the wedding into the apartment or to cancel it all together. He shook his head and said, “No, this is happening.”

As I walked back across the hall, my brother informed me that he wasn’t sure Andy could make it up to the roof in his wheelchair, but that we would see how he did over the next half an hour.

But my Andy rallied. With the help of three people, Andy was able to get into his dress clothes and, with oxygen in tow, he made it up to the roof.

I exited the elevator just as Andy was being wheeled onto the rooftop patio. As the elevator door slid open, I could see the back of Andy’s wheelchair moving down the narrow path to the opening on our roof where our wedding was to be held. As he approached the fifty family members, both blood and chosen, they started to applaud for him, unaware that just an hour earlier, EMT’s were in our apartment ready to take him to the hospital.

Clearly feeling as though he had conquered the world, Andy lifted his arm in triumph and gave the group a big thumbs up, his trademark. After they quickly switched Andy from the portable to stationary oxygen supply, I made my way out to the roof on my father’s arm.

I had no idea what my wedding was going to look like. Our friends had put it all together for us in five days with hardly anything more than a color preference from us. And it was beautiful. The bouquets included my favorite flowers—purple orchids and blue hydrangeas—a fact that was unknown by the friend who ordered them.

Andy was stationed under a white tent surrounded by flowers and sitting in front of our dream officiate, Bishop Gene Robinson.

As I approached Andy, I could see him starting to choke up. We had always talked about getting married and he had asked me several times if I thought we would some day.

My mother says that it was clear Andy loved me from the first time we met and clearly always wanted to spend the rest of his life with me. I don't know about that, but what I do know is that we were committed to each other for life long before we got married. Our ceremony on that day merely formalized, before family and by the state, what was already a reality between us. We had been through so much together. We were already bound together by both the superficial, like our love of reality television, and the deep, like our mutual commitment to equality and social justice. We had each walked beside the other during some of the most trying times in our lives.



Fortunately, we got through the ceremony without any problems. We exchanged our rings and committed ourselves to one another. He had forgotten the cheat sheet downstairs, so he improvised his lines. Shortening them so they wouldn't make him short of breath or cause him to cough.

After taking a few pictures and receiving a few hugs, Andy was exhausted and decided to go back to our apartment with a few of his friends. I remained on the roof with our remaining guests for another hour and then went back downstairs to be with my new husband.

The first thirty-six hours of our marriage were a lot like the previous thirty-six. There was nagging over his food intake, a lot of sleeping, and a boatload of comforting reality television.

What was different was that Andy had three more episodes like the one he had just an hour before the wedding. Each time, he was about to move from his recliner to his wheelchair or from his wheelchair to the recliner. Andy was a nervous person and would clearly get anxious before these moves. As he got anxious, he was unable to adjust his breathing, would get light-headed, and begin to pass out. As we would temporarily up his oxygen and call his name, he would return to us. Within seconds, he would shake himself out of it and look at me. In typical Andy fashion, he would say, "I'm so sorry, love, are you mad at me?"

"No beanie, I'm not mad at you at all. I love you so much," I would reply each time

"I love you, too."

The next morning, by the grace of God, Andy was able to make it down to the car for the forty-minute drive to Johns Hopkins Hospital with me and his ex-girlfriend, Heather, to begin treatment that was meant to perpetuate his life.

We arrived at Hopkins to first meet with his oncologist prior to starting chemotherapy. As the doctor walked into the exam room, we knew things had changed. He hadn't yet known about Andy's episodes, but the blood work that was done the previous week showed some concerning numbers. The doctor warned us that we may not be able to proceed with chemotherapy today, but that he would send Andy up to the infusion room for some liquid, since he was, despite my attempts to prevent it, clearly dehydrated.

After a few hours, he would re-evaluate Andy and determine what, if any treatment, he could give him. He also ordered more blood work and told us that he would come meet with us in the infusion center after the tests came back.

As we waited in the center for more information, it was clear that Andy's situation was getting worse. In just a matter of a few hours, his oxygen hunger had increased dramatically. I heard rumblings from the nurses outside our station that one of the patients would need to be admitted.

I stepped outside and approached his infusion nurse and asked her what was happening. She said that they were going to have to admit Andy today. Both of us had been told that being admitted would make it highly unlikely that he was healthy enough for any life-perpetuating medical care.

I offered to tell him the news that I knew would shatter him. As I walked back, I opened the curtain with the nurse following behind. I tried as gently as possible to tell him that they were going to admit him. Ever the optimist, he knew what that meant, but he didn't give up hope. He talked about how they could try to stabilize him again so that he could be ready for chemotherapy. Just as he gave me a wink of assurance, the medical oncologist returned and informed us that some of the tests had come back and the concerning numbers had jumped higher.

A few minutes later, I met with the oncologist outside of Andy's station. He said that intubation, or the process of putting Andy on a respirator, was possibly imminent. He asked if he had any wishes on that front. He didn't have to say what that meant as the fly-killing doctor from two weeks ago had already painted the grim picture: if intubated, Andy would never be able to be weaned off, nor would he likely ever wake up. I asked the oncologist how long we had to have the conversation. After all, he had just been given the news that he was being admitted. Couldn't I give him some time? "Unfortunately, no."

After Andy had been "upgraded rooms," as I had jokingly put it to him during the admittance process, I said that for "precautionary reasons," we needed to talk about the question of intubation. The nurse brought us a blank advance directive and we sat down for the first extended conversation since our wedding: whether or not he would want his life continued in a persistent vegetative state.

He stared at the paper for a good ten minutes. He asked if we had to talk about it now, but Heather and I informed him that the doctor said we needed to, again “as a precaution.” He sat with his pen for another few minutes and finally marked the box that said, “If my doctors certify that I am in a persistent vegetative state... and there is no reasonable expectation that I will ever regain consciousness...Keep me comfortable and allow natural death to occur.”

I called our family and friends to ask them to travel to Baltimore to be with us. His mother, step-father, father, and my mother came immediately. For the next two days, a rotating group of ten to twenty people stuck by our side at the hospital. The same group, which had organized our celebration of love just three days before, stood by in a circle of love in his hospital room as he slept more and more.

A day after he was admitted, he was unconscious nearly all the time. Every once in a while, he would regain consciousness, smile at us, squeeze our hands, and ask that his oxygen be turned up. He would rotate his fingers with a look of urgency in his eyes signaling his desire for more oxygen. Each time, we would have to inform him that the oxygen was as high as it could go.

Wednesday the 27th was the last day Andrew was awake. Just before he went back to sleep for the final time, I told him, “I love you.” He raised his eyebrows and mustered the energy to say four words back. These words would be the only words he would speak that day and the last words he would physically speak ever. “I love you, too.”

We were told the next morning it was probably only a matter of time. And echoing a conversation I had the night before with one of our best friends, the nurse said that sometimes you have to lean in and tell the person that it is “okay to go” because they are afraid of disappointing people. The group of five people in his room looked at each other and all thought, “that is so Andy.” So one by one we all leaned in and told Andy that it was “okay to go.”

I was both the first and last person to convey this message to him. I leaned in both times and said, “I love you, beanie, I’m going to miss you every day, but it’s okay for you to go. No one is going to be mad at you.” I then slipped a handwritten note into his clenched fist, which by then had become fairly cold. “You are loved,” it read.



Three hours later, his vitals began to drop. I called for everyone in the lounge to come in. We all stood there as his oxygenation level—the key stat for someone battling cancer in the lungs—dropped from a reasonably healthy 95 to 85. Then to 75. Then to 65. His numbers were reaching fatal levels.

Crying, we gathered around Andy in that circle of love which remained constant throughout his final stay in the hospital. A rainbow of family—gay and straight, trans and cisgender—held tightly onto him. His breathing diminished.

His heart rate slowed. And at 3:30 PM on Thursday the 28th, with the gifts from our wedding five days earlier still unwrapped back in our apartment, Andy passed away.

That night, the group, which gathered to plan our wedding, gathered to plan his funeral. Bishop Gene, who had officiated at our wedding, would preside. Those who had stood at his bedside with me would eulogize him. The family of relatives and friends would join together again to mourn his passing.

“’Tis strange how men find time to hate,
When life is all too short for love.”

His service was held at St. Thomas’ Episcopal Church in Washington, DC on Saturday. Bishop Gene wore the same frocks that he wore at the wedding the weekend before; he explained that Sunday’s wedding was a celebration of life and love, and so too was today.

Tributes from all around the country began to flow in. From the Mayor of DC, officials at the White House, state and national equality organizations, and from friends, relatives, acquaintances, and total strangers around the world who had been touched by Andy’s story and his work.

Andy was one of the amazing few who could draw upon their own life to help others without actually talking about himself. He worked tirelessly to bring joy, meaning, health, and fulfillment to others' lives. He had stood up to the intolerance and prejudice in the world to live authentically, only to have cancer end his life a few years after he began to live true to himself.

There are many lessons I take from his passing, but the biggest is that though we may feel invincible, we never know how much time we have left. Life is too short for outdated dogmas to impede our own pursuit of happiness. Despite growing up in a progressive family and with open-minded friends, the expectation from the outside world that we must live, love, and identify based on one fact at birth, kept Andrew inside of himself for too long.

In his early twenties he finally had the courage to be happy and complete. Getting cancer was not a choice. There was nothing that he could have done to avoid his ending. But our society's prejudice that kept him from being complete for most of his life is a choice. For Andrew, and for all the people who simply want to make the most of their lives, let us make the choice to stop the hate and to let love, light, and authenticity flourish.

And yet despite this tragic end, it's clear that Andy lived with more purpose and realness in 28 years than most find in 60 or 80 years. He loved and was loved. He befriended and mentored without regard for status or interest in gain. He gave others courage through the bravery he demonstrated; not just throughout his struggle with cancer over the last year, but also through the authenticity with which he lived his own life every day.

Through his work, he helped open up health care to hundreds of thousands of LGBT Americans and spearheaded the national effort to ensure that transgender people can access the care they desperately need, but are too often denied.

Few, if any, have ever taught me as much as Andy did. He taught me about life, perseverance, compassion, optimism, fidelity, and passion. He was one of the most impressive people I've ever met, yet one of the humblest (it's amazing he could tolerate me). Even in his final weeks, he cried less about his own luck or plight, but about the things he would no longer be able to do for others. That was Andy.

So thank you for coming into my life, my bean. So many medical professionals said, given your state, you shouldn't have made it to the wedding. But you did. I don't know if you held on for me or for you. But, in the end, you gave me the best gift anyone could ever ask for. Thank you for sending me that first Facebook message in August of 2012 and thank you for marrying me one year ago. But most of all, thank you for being you.

'Tis strange how men find time to hate, When life is all too short for love; But we, away from our own kind, A different life can live and prove. And early on a summer's morn, As I go walking out with you, We'll help the sun with our warm breath To clear away the dew, My love, To clear away the morning dew.



Humor



Matt Sydeworks

4 min read

Humor

How Product Hunt Helped Me Grow A List Of 12,989,483,288+ Valuable Subscribers And Generate 220k+ In Sales In Less Than 20 Minutes Without Having To Write A Single Line Of Code And Also Taught Me These 5+ Startup Lessons From My Mistakes About Being A Product Manager in 2016 on Meerkat

****Update:** I've decided this blog post has sufficient traffic to begin monetizing its user base. I will slowly begin rolling out sponsored ads every 3–4 sentences. Thank you.—Matt, Founder of this article

The Idea

I looked down at my Apple SmartWatch. It was 3:32pm—Pacific time...because I live in Silicon Valley.

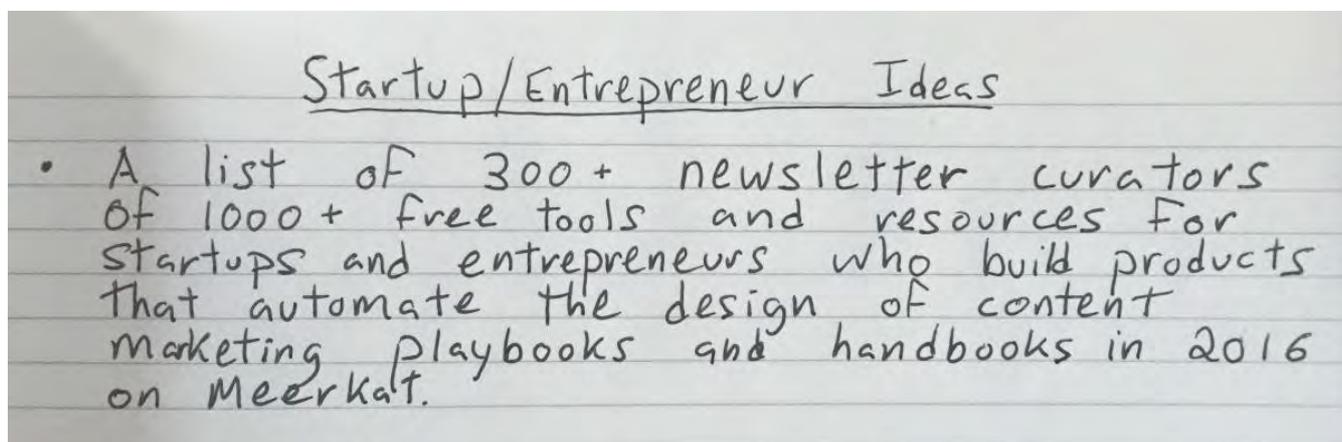
I thought to myself:

What can I do in the next 20 minutes that'll bring me exponential ROI and bring those around me exponential value without having to worry about KPIs or APIs or PHPs or getting a real job.

And then it hit me:

I'll partake in an extremely successful coding Hackathon in my quaint apartment in Silicon Valley where I live with 7 other serial entrepreneurs such as myself.

I dug into my Moleskine and grabbed the latest idea I'd written down:



Disrupting verticals.

The Name

Before I could hack this together, I needed a name.

I read 83 articles saved on Pocket for inspiration. But for some reason, articles such as *17 And A Half Ways To Become A Morning Person* didn't help me think of a name.

So I drank a lot of coffee and thought. The name had to be simple. Something people can wrap their heads around. Something that has nothing to do with the product but everything to do with how cool it is.

And then it hit me:

Water

Nearly everyone knows what water is. And it's one word. Perfect.

But then I realized that **there are way too many vowels in the word water, and not enough R's.**

And then it hit me:

Watrrr

The MVP

Now that I had the name figured out I was pretty much done. All I had to do was buy the domain and email some friends about my new startup:

Hi!

Just wanted to let you know that **Watrrr** (<http://watrrr.com/>) is now live! It's got a lot of amazing features but also looks really simple and clean as if it has no features but I promise there's like 1000+ of them. Would love it if you wanted to share it on Facebook and Twitter and Pinterest and Vine and LinkedIn and Snapchat and Rapchat and Quora and also Meerkat.

Would love to hear your feedback too but first share it ok? Share it.

And we're also probably on Product Hunt! :)

Best,

--

Matt

Co-Founder at **Watrrr**

Everyone shared **Watrrr** on Rapchat which was nice

The Results

The next 72 hours were crazy.

Watrrr got a lot of tweets and retweets and mentions and re-mentions. This resulted in tons of unique and one-of-kind pageviews to the site, which resulted in 12,989,483,288+ subscribers. Here's a screenshot of **Watrrr**'s traffic on Google Analytics:



And it's still going up.

The Lessons Learned

This was an amazing experience that not only brought me a lot of money and success and new friends, but also taught me a lot of lessons about how to be a startup entrepreneur....

Lesson #1: Culture = people

Ping pong tables and bean chairs will only get you so far. You need to have real people to build culture. You can't just buy a ping pong table and some rackets and a few cool chairs. You need actual human beings. Table tennis and a bunch of comfy seating just isn't enough.

Lesson #2: Execution matters

Ideas are great. But we all have ideas. Without executing them, your idea won't become a startup. Do you think Uber became Uber because the co-founder of

Uber and the other co-founder of Uber said “*We have a great idea and it’s called Uber!*”. No, they actually went and did Uber. And that’s why Uber exists now.

Lesson #3: Fail, and fail often

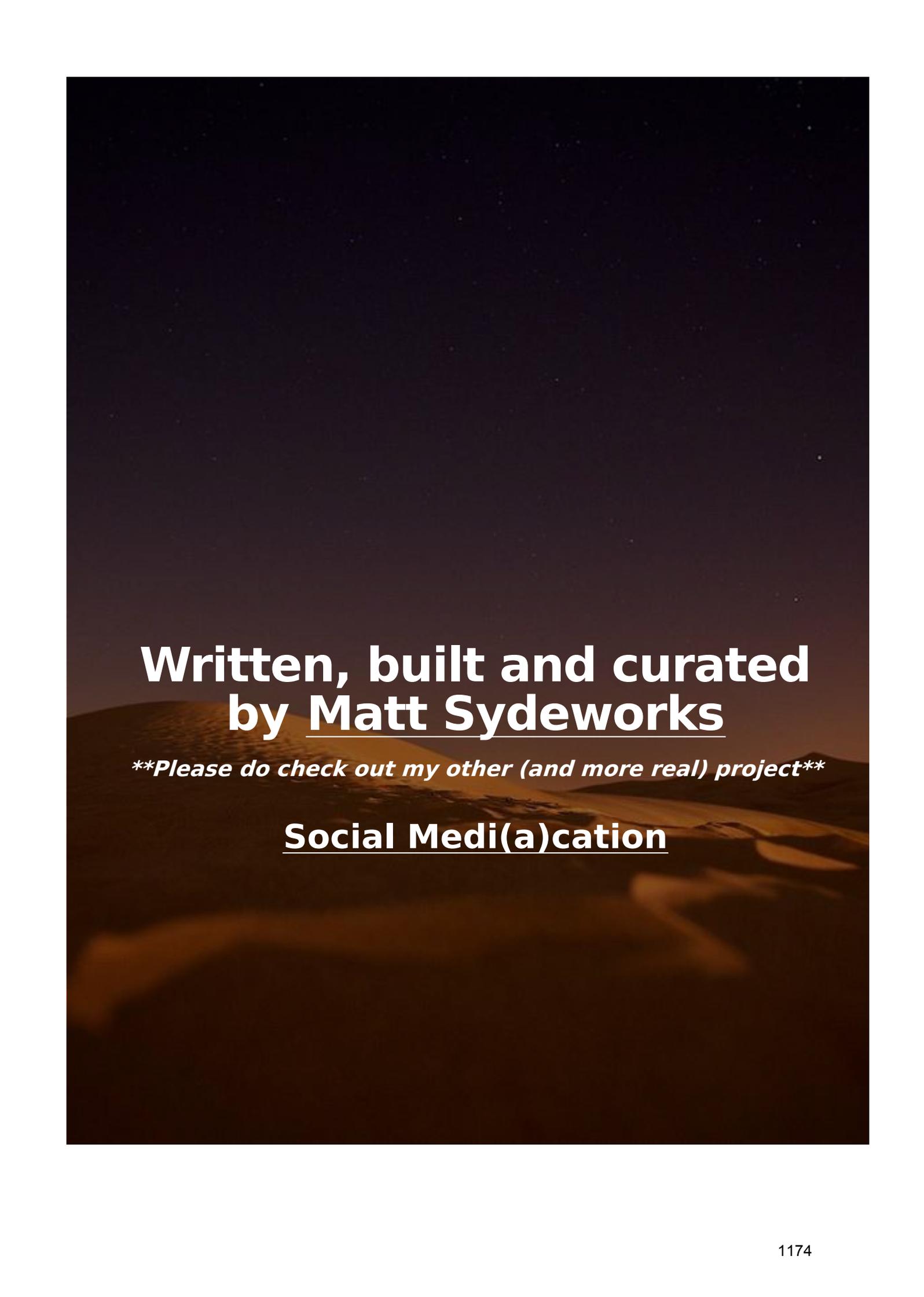
Failing is really good. Because the more you fail, the more people will know you’re a serial entrepreneur who does startups. And then you can write Medium blog posts about your mistakes and that’s how you become successful.

Lesson #4: Drop out of school

If you drop out of school, people will know you’re a serial entrepreneur who does startups. And then you can write Medium blog posts about dropping out of school and that’s how you become successful.

Lesson #5: Do what you love

Watch a lot of motivational videos and read a lot of motivational blog posts that tell you to do what you love. Then write your own blog posts about doing what you love. On Medium. And That’s how you become successful.



**Written, built and curated
by Matt Sydeworks**

*****Please do check out my other (and more real) project*****

Social Medi(a)cation



Sam Grittner

8 min read

Humor



A Funny Thing Happened When I Was Typing My Suicide Note...

I was going to kill myself two and a half weeks ago. Calm down, it's cool; I didn't. I'm sure most of you who follow me have seen me post about how long it's been since I quit alcohol. It's coming up on 21 months now and that's pretty incredible for someone who was addicted to crack and heroin in their mid-20's. But I had a secret (not just the dolls buried underneath old man Wiggins' abandoned cabin). I never said I was sober. I went out of my way never to use that word, because I wasn't. I've been smoking pot since I was 18 and never stopped. Today, I have 15 days completely sober and I don't think I should write these words which is exactly why I'm going to.

I've battled depression since I was a teenager. I've had two suicide attempts in my life. This last time was different. Before I get into that, let me talk about pot. Rather, here's what pot did to me (instead of making sweeping generalizations): it slowly choked to death every good quality about me.

The last three years I have been a terrible human being. I didn't remember people's birthdays and, much like Janice in accounting, I just didn't give a fuck. I stopped going out of my way to make drawings or music mixes for my friends. I started three different screenplays that I got two pages into then stopped. I was *that guy* that would post things like, "BIG THINGS HAPPENING!" "JUST YOU WAIT!" "HONK IF YOU'RE HORNY AND A VIETNAM VET!" (okay... maybe not that last one). I lost weight, which was scary because on a good day I weighed as much as a scarecrow full of wheat, because I was always worried. Worried about being found out as a fraud. My older brother and his amazing wife had a daughter and last week, after two years, I bought the first present I've ever gotten for her. That's simultaneously pathetic and awesome (the fact, not the gift. The gift was a dope construction doo-hickey that she loves).

I started therapy today and am going to meetings again. I feel like my life has meaning and I have worth. I have an amazing job where I get paid to write jokes. When I first got it, I thought I deserved it and believed it would make all my self-hate magically disappear. To my surprise, there are no magic hats in which to stuff rabbits of arrogance, jealousy, or denial into another dimension where they disappear. Maybe there are turbans or bowlers, but I didn't look around much. Every night I would come home and smoke. That was my reward for making it through the day. I stopped thinking about anything more than two hours out. I stopped caring about my future. I'm not saying if you smoke pot this will happen to you, this is my experience. I had a pot delivery guy (yes!they're real, like in, "Half-Baked" haha, remember those cool guys in their 20's/30's who all lived together and couldn't make coherent sentences, those cool cats! 420! Blaze it! Ignore the bills man. Bills are just pieces of paper asking for better pieces of paper. Bills are williams, man) and I was a regular. "My guy" texted me one Christmas to make sure I was okay because he hadn't heard from me in three days. Typing that sentence makes me want to vomit every liquid out of every orifice simultaneously. I was 33-years-old going on 15. Pot was my escape. I didn't have to face how much I hated myself.

I didn't move out to New York and sacrifice as much as I have to become a full-time loser, yet. That's exactly what happened. Every time I turned on social media I was jealous. Why was everyone else in my circle of friends getting better at writing? Why were they going up the comedy food chain? Why in the fuck were they posting pictures with famous people and I was still recounting the time I held an Oscar when I was 11 (still a cool story but, c'mon dude). It was because they were getting up early and doing hard work. Poor little Sam. Poor little privileged white male whose only real problem in life has been his ego. I hated myself and for somewhat justifiable reasons: I was boring, always grumpy, never not tired. I felt like the picture in "Back To The Future" where everyone slowly faded out. I felt like Ben Carson's eyes look like.

So I made a plan. I saved up two months worth of pain pills and then bought another 50 of something that, when combined with alcohol, would kill me. I had done research. My Google history was hilarious, in the most macabre manner. I had manic days where I felt good, followed by the lowest of lows. So my Google search read something along the lines of:

"How much Xanax does it take to kill a human or like a scarecrow-thingy?"

"When is 'Nathan For You' on?"

"Best painless ways to die?? Are they sure-fire? How long will I feel it if I drown myself?"

"How to make a blueberry pie in only an hour."

"Nearest artisanal noose stores in Williamsburg."

"Are cuddlefish regular fish, just hornier?"

"How much alcohol do I need to mix with sleeping pills in order to never wake up again?"

"When is 'Nathan For You' on?" (I was STONED out my skeleton, people!)

And so on and so forth.

I finally picked a date, after Facebook memories brought up the only picture I hadn't deleted of the only woman I've ever cared for, it pushed my mental car into overdrive off a cliff. I've been alone for the last two years. No sex, no touching. I kissed two women in the last two years. Because I was convinced I was worthless, ugly, stupid and, to be perfectly honest, I was most of those things, but only because I let myself become them.

So I sat down and started writing out a note but that was taking too long and I wanted to leave a nice one that was pithy, at least, so I went to my computer and that's when shit got weird.

What font do you choose when you're writing your suicide note? Times new roman is too formal. Wingdings is non-sensical. I ended up going with Comic Sans because soon the world would be sans another comic (clever boy, don't I know it). I printed it out and started googling hotels. I live with four roommates and I'm not a complete dick, I didn't want one of them to have to find me and be like, really? You couldn't have done the dishes first, dude? So I decided I would treat myself. I would go to the Waldorf. I found out that was out of my price range. Do you know how depressing it is to be completely depressed and not have the money to at least off yourself in a classy joint? I ended up going down a rabbit hole of hotel reviews on Orbitz and found a bunch of nice B&B's upstate. I can give you recommendations next time I see you.

I said fuck it. I'll just do it here. I went and took the bottle of vodka I'd had stashed behind my bed for three weeks out and I looked into the mirror one last time. I saw the ghost of the man I was.

But then the strangest thing happened. When I quit drinking, I made up my mind I would never do it again. I rarely attended meetings because I would have been a hypocrite and felt even worse, at least in my mind. I put 30 pills inside my mouth and- my body refused to let me drink alcohol. If I didn't mix them, I would possibly die, but more likely than not I would live and have brain or body damage. I learned enough through my research to know that and what time 'Nathan For You' is on. I didn't want to do that to my family and what few friends I had left.

Make them take care of me because I took the easy way out.

I called a friend. They know who they are. They talked me down that night and I literally owe them my life.

Why am I writing all this? Is it self-serving? You betcha. Can it help anyone else? God I fucking hope so. You might have noticed over the past two weeks I've been even more emotional than usual and that's because I've wanted to tell this story. I've learned that people look up to me (not a lot, but some) and people care about me, I had just pushed so many of them away with my behavior that I couldn't see it.

So here we are. I promised myself I would wait 30 days before I would write this but I had to get it out of me. I've told a few people and been shocked that people who I love and respect and look up to because they have their shit together have told me they feel the same way too. A lot.

But you deal with it by being honest.

People have told me they would have never guessed I was going through this, which brings me back to why I'm writing this. Too often we put on a display for the world, many people have said this sentiment before and much more eloquently than I'll ever be able to, but it's so fucking true.

Don't feel sorry for me for a moment. I'm alive and more so than I've felt in years. I have a job, a small circle of friends that are borderline angels, a family that would do most anything for me. I'm the luckiest guy on Earth. I won't tell you about any plans I have, if I do, they'll reveal themselves when they're supposed to (good plans, for the future).

My DM and email will always be open for the rest of my time I'm lucky enough to have. I have been in touch with strangers and friends and want anyone, ANYONE who is feeling isolated and worthless to know, you matter. I will answer any message I get.

I'm so thankful that I'm typing this right now (is this Times New Roman? I'm not sure). Reach out. There is light at the very bottom of the tunnel you've buried yourself under, or maybe had fallen on you inadvertently.

There is no problem worth killing yourself over. I wish I hadn't done drugs but maybe that's why I'm here now. I don't recommend almost dying multiple times in order to feel worthy of life but my path led me here so who am I to second-guess any of it? All I can do now is take it one day at a time and enjoy every precious second that I get going forward.

I love you.

You matter.

More than anything in the world, remember that.

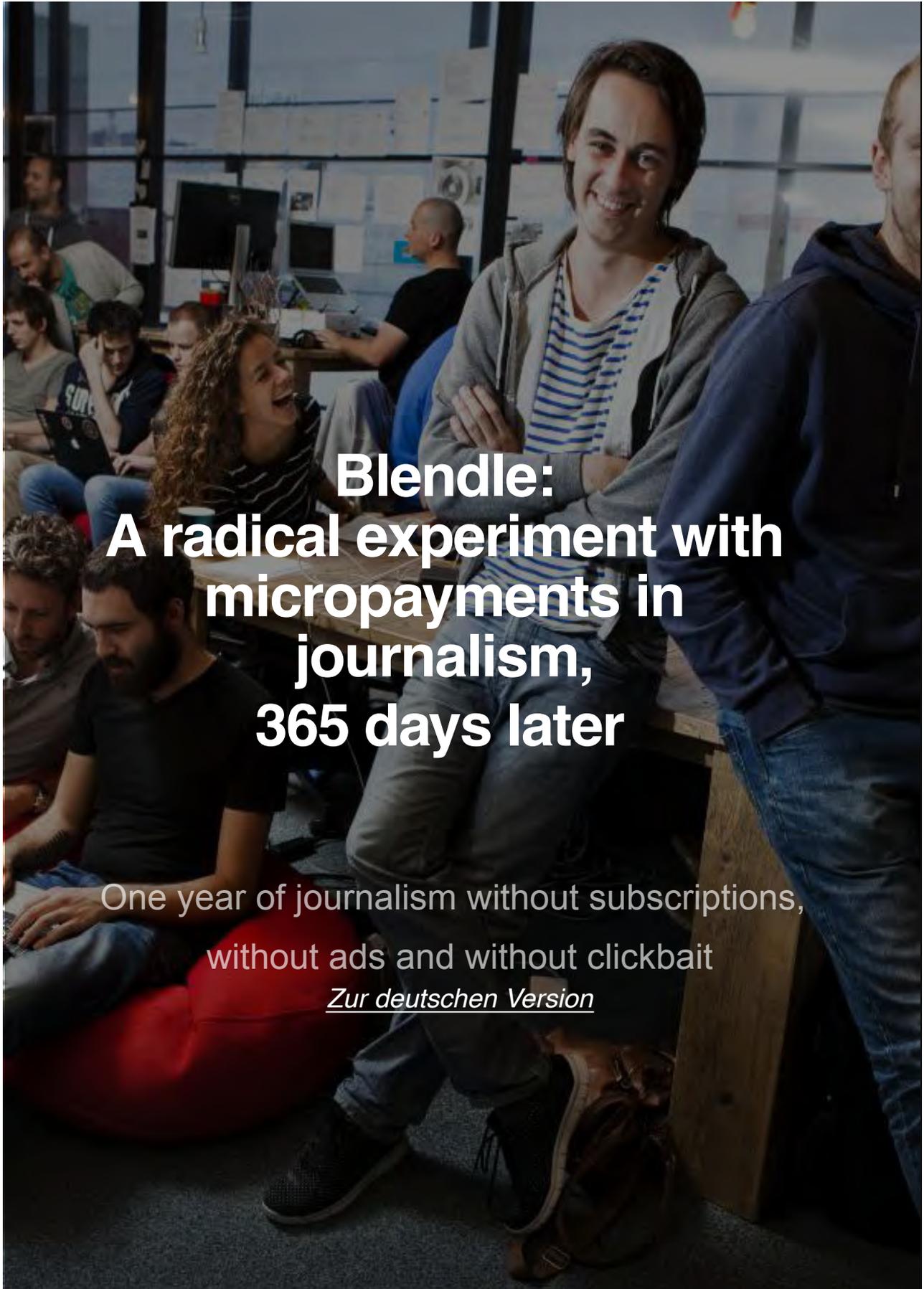
"Nathan For You" is on at 10:00pm Eastern.



Journalism



Alexander Klöpping
8 min read



Blendle: A radical experiment with micropayments in journalism, 365 days later

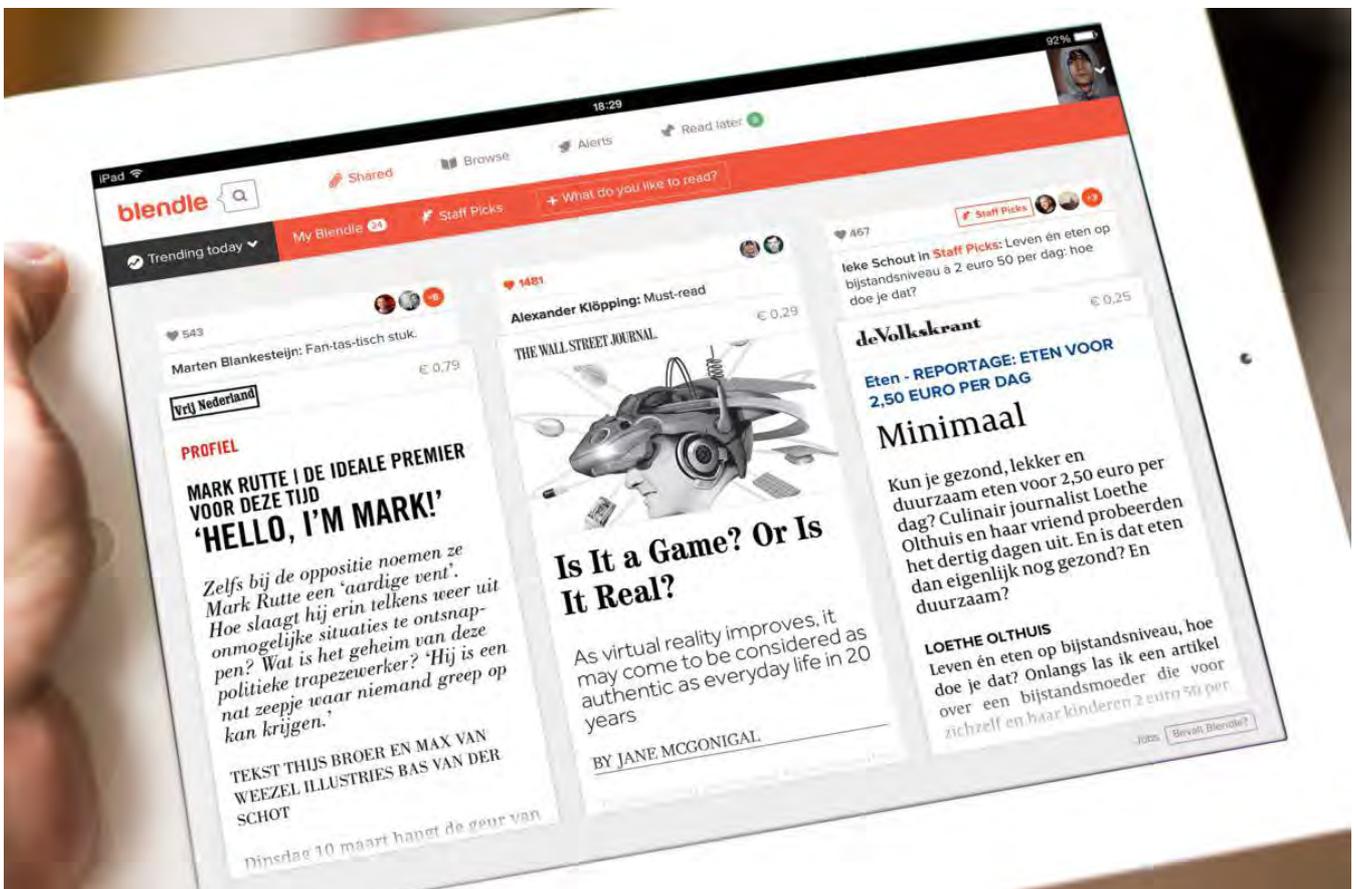
One year of journalism without subscriptions,
without ads and without clickbait

[Zur deutschen Version](#)

Today exactly one year ago we launched our pay-per-article startup Blendle in the Netherlands. The goal: put all newspapers and magazines in the country behind one (quite sexy) paywall, and make it so easy to use that young people start paying for journalism again.

Back then most newspapers and magazines in our tiny little country assumed we wouldn't make it until today. After so many failed attempts by publishers worldwide to make money online, a lot of them thought there was no other online future for journalism but clickbait and cat videos. Why would people pay for journalism when there is so much free stuff on the web?

But here we are. With over **250,000 users** (that's almost everybody in the Netherlands) of which the vast majority is under 35 years old, we're proving that people do want to pay for great journalism (even though we like cat videos too). And we're hoping that our second year will be an even crazier rollercoaster ride, with recently signed global licenses to sell The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal and The Washington Post, and many more to come.



Blendle.com

Why weren't—or aren't—people paying for great journalism on the web?

For publishers, it's a struggle for attention. And because of that, many newspapers and magazines publish their best stories for free. Free stories get you a lot of traffic, and traffic can be monetized through advertising. But more and more publishers realize they can't build their business on that model. Income from advertising is declining, the competition of Facebook and Google is very strong, 41% of the younger people are already using ad-blocking plugins, more and more kids are browsing in incognito mode, leaving no cookies at all, and native advertising makes readers and journalists alike very uncomfortable.

As The Economist's Tom Standage said:

"The Economist has taken the view that advertising is nice, and we'll certainly take money where we can get it, but we're pretty much expecting it to go away. I have nothing against advertising as a source of revenue as part of the mix, but I'm kind of amazed that people are trying to do that."

For that reason publishers all over the world are pulling up paywalls, to diversify their sources of income. Most of them end up with one of these three models:

1. **A paywall called "The meter"**

Every month the newspaper gives away a couple of articles for free. After that, you'll have to pay up. A screen will notify you that you'll need to take a subscription if you want to continue reading. This is what The New York Times has been doing since 2011.

For them the model has been working reasonably well. That's why a lot of publishers are copying this model. The thing is: it might work for a huge newspaper (like the Times) in a huge market, but it won't for smaller papers in smaller markets. Only a small percentage of people bump to the paywall and an even smaller subset of this group takes a subscription. You need tens of millions of visitors to make this worthwhile.

2. The “freemium model”

The good stuff is available for free. But to see the really good stuff, you need a subscription. German newspaper Bild uses this: some articles are marked with a “Bild+”-logo, and you need to subscribe, in this case for 5 euros per month, if you want to read them.

3. The hard paywall

Every link you click, you’ll see something like this: Pay up now! Or leave! The best examples are the Financial Times and The Times in the United Kingdom. It works if you really, really want to read content from one of these (great) newspapers. Most people just leave the site after three seconds.

Those models have one thing in common: they all try to get people to subscribe. And that makes sense from the publisher’s perspective—if you have a lot of subscribers as a publisher, everything is awesome. But on the web, most people don’t want to be forced to buy bundles anymore. And that means that a lot of people don’t want to subscribe. Still, publishers are moving to paywalls that get ever more restricted. A pattern is starting to emerge:

The screenshot shows a paywall for the Financial Times. It prompts the user to sign up for quick access to 3 articles per month, including the article "Election housing promises come under fire". The user is asked to enter their email address (example@example.com) and select an access level. The access levels are: Premium online (€8.65 per week), Standard online (€5.89 per week), Online trial (€1 for 4 weeks), and Registration (Free). The table below compares the features of each access level.

Price	Monthly	Annual	Premium online Full FT.com subscription	Standard online Full news & archive	Online trial Try Premium online	Registration 3 articles per month
FT Alphaville plus selected FT blogs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
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China Readies Fresh Easing to Tackle Specter of Debt

Central bank's shift will allow banks to swap local-government bailout bonds for loans

By LINGLING WEI
Updated April 28, 2015 3:37 a.m. ET

BEIJING—China's central bank is planning to launch its own version of innovative credit-easing programs adopted by its counterparts in developed countries, according to officials with knowledge of the matter, as Beijing's flagship plan to restructure trillions of dollars of local-government debts is hitting snags.

Under the plan, which could be put in place in the next couple of months, the People's Bank of China will allow Chinese banks to swap local-government bailout bonds for loans

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In the Line of Fire

In The Latest Issue

From Trayvon Martin to Walter Scott: Cases in the Spotlight

Truth and Consequences in North Charleston

Debating the meaning—and potential impact—of a damning video

Bye-Bye Great Satan

A deal with the U.S. undermines Iranian hardliners, and gives reformers hope

The Relentless Tennessee Dealmaker

Demanding a role for Congress, former Chattanooga mayor Bob Corker is now a key player in the Iran talks

The Business of Pot

National brands, Franchise stores. Entrepreneurs are plotting a future for American pot that looks quite different from what voters may have bargained for

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Debating the meaning—and potential impact—of a damning video

ATTORNEY BENJAMIN CRUMP

Will America Now Challenge the Standard Police Narrative?

What started out as a routine traffic stop quickly escalated into the death of Walter Scott. The city of North Charleston, S.C., was all too willing to accept the officer's version of events, even though the physical evidence clearly showed that the officer had fired eight shots, with four of the eight hitting Scott in the back.

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Cookie Consent

Time Magazine paywall

Many people hate paywalls. They make us register again and again at every newspaper or magazine we want to read. And they make us pay monthly fees

for entire websites, while there's all kinds of stuff on there we don't actually read.

So, we started thinking.

Journalism needs a great user experience

What if:

- You could read all the journalism you care for in one place
- You would only need to register once to read it all
- You would only pay for the articles you actually read
- You'd get your money back if you didn't like the story
- No subscriptions
- No ads

That's what we launched in The Netherlands exactly one year ago.

At the time, we used to pitch Blendle as "the iTunes of journalism". But Blendle is not only about paying little if you don't consume a lot. It's also about the convenience of reading and paying with only one click. It's about our focus on the very best user experience (with our instant refund policy being a good example). And it's about the way we help users to find the premium journalism that they find most interesting.

Over the past 12 months we've proven in the Netherlands that there's a new market for publishers, next to selling subscriptions, full issues and advertising. Without spending a single euro on marketing, we gathered over a quarter of a million users. We generate a very decent amount of money (I can't say how much, unfortunately, only that it's more than Apple generates for publishers) in our short existence. But more importantly: it's money from people who weren't paying for journalism before. My friends have never paid for music and movies, until Spotify and Netflix. And with Blendle, they're paying for journalism, often for the first time in their lives.

These are some lessons we learned in the first year of our existence.

#1

Micropayments for journalism can work

I might have made that point before.

But it doesn't work for news

We don't sell a lot of news in Blendle. People apparently don't want to spend money on something they can get everywhere for free now. People do spend money on background pieces. Great analysis. Opinion pieces. Long interviews. Stuff like that. In other words: people don't want to spend money on the 'what', they want to spend money on the 'why'.

#2

Our users punish clickbait by refunding

In 2015, sometimes it feels like the best example of modern journalism is BuzzFeed. Go to any journalism conference, and their logo will be on many, many slides. As a journalist today you might feel that it's more valued to write clickbaity headlines than to write pieces of well-researched journalism. But, BuzzFeed doesn't work if people need to pay per article.

At Blendle we see this every day. Gossip magazines, for example, get much higher refund percentages than average (some up to 50% of purchases), as some of them are basically clickbait in print. People will only pay for content they find worth their money. So in Blendle, only quality journalism starts trending.

It might actually be so that micropayments will result in better journalism. As a publisher, you have to invest in incredible journalism to be able to sell them on a per-article basis. Luckily, a lot of incredible journalism is being produced every day.

#3

Micropayments and refunds create a great metric for quality

For 20 years, publishers have been chasing pageviews, the metric that counts the number of times people load a web page. As the CEO of analytics firm Chartbeat wrote:

“The more pageviews a site gets, the more people are reading, the more successful the site. Or so we thought. Chartbeat looked at deep user behavior across 2 billion visits across the web over the course of a month and found that most people who click don’t read. In fact, a stunning 55% spent fewer than 15 seconds actively on a page.”

More and more publishers started looking at engagement time instead of pageviews. It matters more to measure engagement in minutes and seconds than links clicked.

In The Netherlands, journalists now have access to two important extra metrics for their stories:

1. **How much revenue** did the stories generate in micropayments?
2. **How many people asked for a refund** after reading the stories?

If one goes up and one goes down, a publisher is doing great. *(On average, in only 5% of the cases a user asks for a refund.)*

#4

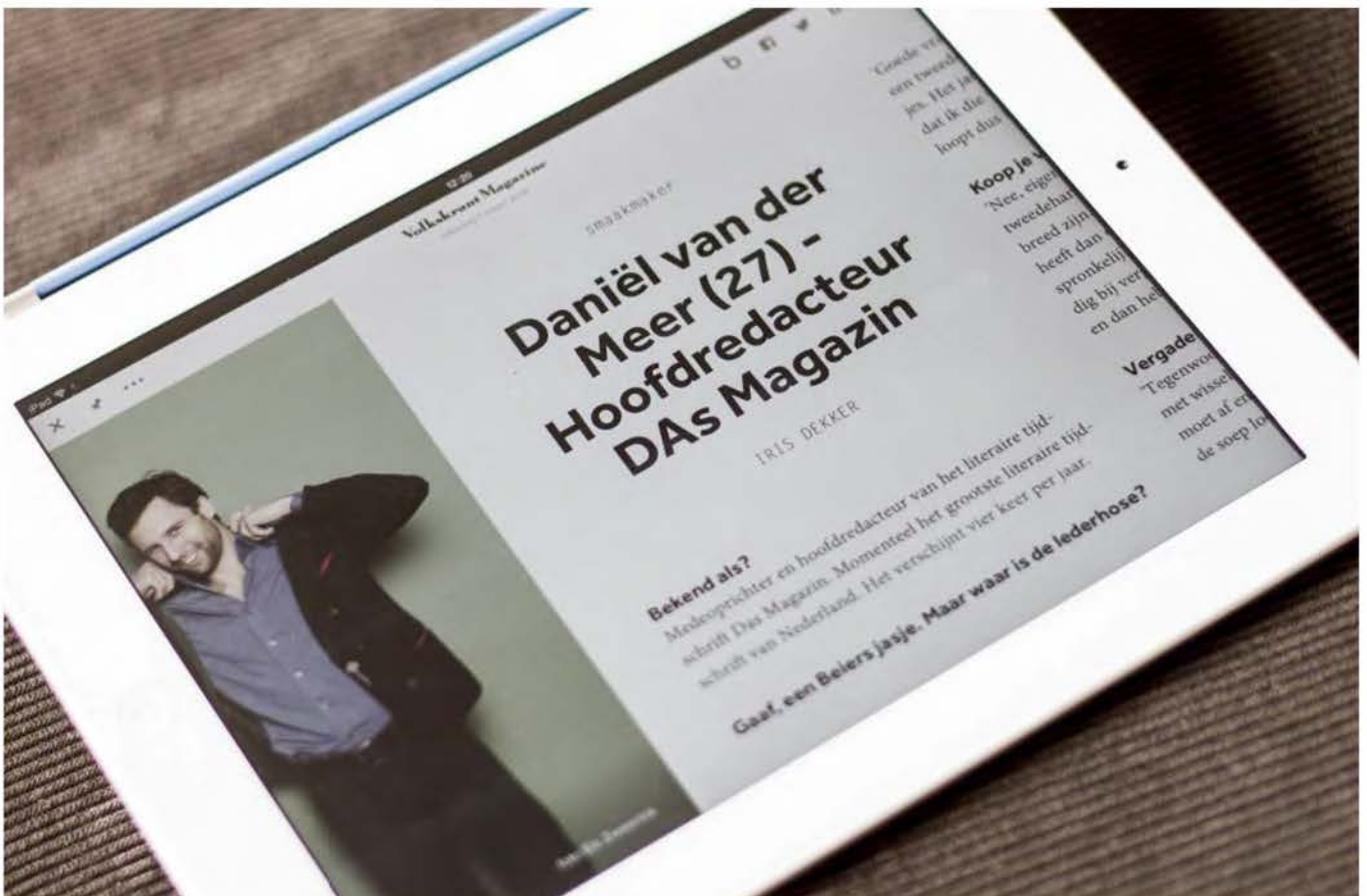
The revenue from micropayments is additional

One year ago, some publishers in the Netherlands were pretty scared: would the launch of Blendle result in cancelled subscriptions? Some even put questions about Blendle in their phone scripts, for when people called to cancel their subscription. We do now know for a fact that Blendle doesn't attract their current customers, but a new group that's currently not paying. And now we've figured that out, we can do some great stuff the coming year. Trying to stay ahead of the curve for micropayments in journalism. We'll be working with publishers to integrate Blendle in their apps and websites.

Our second year will be about expanding internationally.

We'll see if Dutch people are just crazy, or if we're really on to something with this micropayments model. Hopefully it will grow out to become a viable alternative for the models of the past. With less reliance on advertising. And more support for great journalism.







Emma Kelly

3 min read

The media did cover attacks on *insert country here*. You just weren't reading it.

On Friday night, terrorists stormed a rock concert and a restaurant in Paris, as well as detonating bombs outside the Stade de France.

At the time of writing, 132 people have died from the horrific attacks, with hundreds more injured, some critically.

Landmarks across the world, including Tower Bridge and the Sydney Opera House, lit up in the colours of the French flag in solidarity, with countries across Europe today falling silent at 11am to pay respects.

I was working on a national newspaper website, the Daily Star Online, over the weekend, and it was the biggest story of the year. People in their thousands were reading every single update, with every news website shunning all other stories for blanket coverage of the atrocities.

But in the aftermath of the Paris attacks, many people have taken to Twitter and Facebook to complain about why 147 people being killed by militant gunmen at Garissa University College in Kenya didn't get as much coverage as Paris.

"Why isn't the media covering this?" I saw several Facebook posts exclaim, while sharing a link to a BBC News story on the tragedy.

a) The media did cover this. You are sharing a BBC News link to the story.

b) A quick Google search will show that it wasn't just the BBC who covered it. Al Jazeera, CNN, New York Times, USA Today and Washington Post are among the publications who wrote about it at length.

c) You obviously just didn't click on the story to read it. Even when sharing it, because if you had read it, you'd have realised the college massacre happened in April.

“Why didn't the media cover *insert country here*?” appears to actually be shorthand for “Why wasn't this story shared extensively on my Facebook feed?”

Yes, foreign affairs stories aren't covered as much as stories closer for home. This needs to be worked on by the media, and is a big issue. But this is not because an innocent person being killed in Beirut or Iran is less important than a white European being killed. It's because less people read about it.

Everyone seems to have got up on their high horses after Paris saying how horrible the media is for belittling tragedies outside of Europe and the US, but as anybody with access to their news site's analytics will tell you, people don't care as much.

A story about a town being blown to pieces in, let's say, Lebanon may get a couple of thousand hits. The Paris attacks got thousands of hits every minute.

Unless it's local in proximity or culture (like the States), people just won't click. A lot of people assume that a bombing in the Middle East happens every day but woah— if it has happened in Paris, it could happen to us.

I have noticed several stories on sites, including national news site Metro, asking why Mark Zuckerberg didn't offer a Lebanon flag profile pic filter after 47 people were killed in ISIS suicide bombings in Beirut last week.

But be 100% honest with yourself—would you have used it? Of course not. Because unless the story is presented to you on Facebook alongside a string of sad face and broken heart emojis, you probably didn't hear about it. And even if you did, you wouldn't be publicly showing your support for Lebanon.

Read international sites. Follow an assortment of news outlets. Don't complain that the media didn't tell you about a tragedy on the other side of the world. They did. You just didn't click.

Personal Development / Personal Growth



Gary Vaynerchuk

3 min read

Personal Dev.

How I Finally Got Serious About My Health

It's About Religion, Not Tactics



In June of last year, I wasn't paying any attention to my health. At all.

I was working eighteen hour days, taking every meeting I could, running an agency, investing, and spending time with my family. But I wasn't making any time

for my health. It wasn't a priority.

And this baffled me. I couldn't understand why I attacked every other thing in my life with such vigor, but not this. Why not my health?

The more I thought about it, the more I realized something when it comes to our well-being. **With health and wellness, you're either accountable...or you're not.** And in every other part of my life at that time, I felt accountable.

The things I am best at are things where I am accountable to someone else.

The sense of responsibility, for example, that I have for my businesses, for the 550 people of my agency VaynerMedia, is greater than my own well-being. My sense of accountability comes from the fact that I feel that I owe it to them.

I tried to do the same thing with my health. "What's the matter with me?" was something I thought a lot back then. If I don't fix this, I'm going to die. **I'm going to lose.**

All the terrible things that could happen were by-products of the process I was living. As a practitioner, I needed to find accountability in the trenches of that world. I was accountable to my employees in business. I needed to find someone who could hold me to those standards in health as well. I needed the same drive that I had in business.

So, what happened? How did I make the switch?

I introduced a person to hold me accountable. I hired a full time trainer. Mike. The reason I work out every day is because I don't want to let Mike down. I have to be ready to go at 5:45am because Mike will be upset if I'm not.

I hacked away at what made me tick till I discovered, within myself, what would force me to get healthy.

So that worked for me. I succeeded at finding a way for myself to make it work.

But so often these narratives can be frustrating because they leave us with tactics and hacks and ideas...and that's it. And you've probably read a bunch of articles on the best stretches, the best fifteen minute workouts, the best smoothies.

The thing is, there is something we aren't addressing enough in this space.

Here is the real lesson in my narrative that applies to everyone: **it's all about religion, not tactics.**

It's not about P90X, or CrossFit, or a juice cleanse. It's about an enormous mental shift. It's about believing in what you do.

That's what happened to me. Before I even decided what kind of routine I was going to get myself into, I took a big step back and self-evaluated. I asked myself questions and tried to become as self-aware as possible. I realized my whole accountability thing. I made a switch. I refocused.

The tactic was accountability. But it became a religion over the first sixteen months, when I changed my entire thinking.

I figured out exactly what I needed by being brutally honest with myself: I needed someone to babysit me. Now all I ask is that you're equally honest with yourself when you answer: What will it really take for you to make the change?

For some, money still may be the bottleneck. To that I say this: Nothing is more important than your health. So before you buy that next 42-inch TV, go on an extra vacation, or buy season tickets to your favorite sports team, it might be worth taking a step back and seeing how you can make a strong financial commitment to your health. I am the extreme. It's not practical for everybody to go out and hire a personal trainer, but gym memberships are becoming more affordable, fresh produce is attainable, and YouTube has hundreds of free workouts.

Starting now could mean 20 extra years of doing what you love. Isn't that reason enough? Definitely was for me.



Gary Vaynerchuk

3 min read

Personal Dev.

Six Minutes Now For the Next Sixty Years of Your Life



I want to talk about something that I think isn't addressed enough. It has to do with everyone who is in the later years of their life and feeling like they're in the wrong place.

Maybe you're reading this and you're 45. Or 54. Maybe you had one goal in life, one set dream, and you're starting to think it's too late. You missed your chance.

I am writing this with one sole purpose: to tell you that it is not.

If you have it in you, if you have the fire, the drive, the want...it's not over.

I want this article to give you the audacity to just go and do it.

Maybe this isn't the time to take up golf. Or settle down into an easier routine. Maybe now is the time to triple down and focus on your 7pm to 2am. Don't lose momentum.

Look, I get it. Life happens. Things change. And maybe more importantly, so many people have great entrepreneurial DNA, but they just weren't lucky enough to be born during an era in which that lifestyle seemed practical. It is incredibly difficult for someone who for years has gone along with a certain blueprint to understand that this is possible. It's not a young man's sport. I know it seems like it is, but it isn't.

If you have the DNA, and you're a 72 year old female, you have the exact same tools that a 25 year old man has. The drive. The motivation. The desire. Use that as hard as you can.

Stop making excuses. Nobody cares how old you are if you dominate, if you show that you have what it takes.

And the best part? Technology.

Because of that phone that I know is somewhere near you right this instant, you have so many more opportunities open to you. That phone, the apps in it, the power of social media, changed everything. And it can change things for you too. Use it to create something for yourself. Please.

Start putting in the work today.

Don't let the 18 to 34 year olds take all the slices of this pie.

Because you know what you have on them? Years. Years of experience. Youth brings confidence, but you have time. You have the work to show.

I'm desperate to give you the push you need.

Instead of watching Netflix tonight, I want you to make something for yourself. The kids are out of the house, start the candle business you always wanted to start. Download Snapchat and figure it out. Do something that feels new but exciting.

Don't let this era pass. The upside of entrepreneurship is so huge right now, you will regret it forever if you don't at least *try* .

I want to inspire this generation that so deserves it.

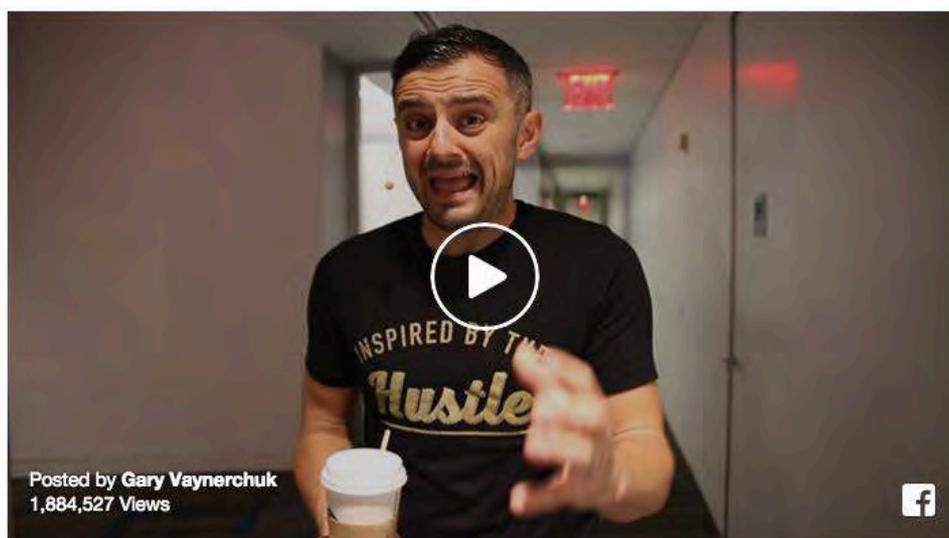
Being 40, I feel caught in the middle. I understand the hesitation. I recognize that I had to be insane to pursue the path I did. Today, if a kid is failing classes but can sell a ton of shit on the internet, people say he's the next Zuckerberg. Not the case when I was a kid. People said I was a fuck up.

So I get it, I do.

But you just have to try.

I'll say it one last time: I want this to be the push you need.

Got it? Good. Now go make something awesome. You owe it to yourself, and more importantly, you deserve it.



Others



Camille Seaman

5 min read



The Bones of Bamsebu, Svalbard, June 2009. All photos by Camille Seaman.

We've Already Reached the Tipping Point on Global Warming. I've Seen It.

When I left the Arctic after my last photographic expedition there in August 2011, I knew—I could feel it, I could see it—that the “tipping point” we’d all been talking about had been breached. I knew it was no longer about whether we could avoid it: humanity was already living within a new paradigm.

We were fewer than 500 miles from the North Pole. There was no snow. It was, most days, 60 degrees Fahrenheit. There was no ice, so polar bears roamed the land, so hungry that they just went from nest to nest eating the eggs of birds that had traveled thousands of miles to lay their eggs and raise their chicks. I watched as one bear, in a couple of hours, destroyed an entire generation of eggs. Glaucous gulls, kitty wakes, eider ducks, king eider ducks. It was a devastating scene.



Polar Bear Invades Bird Colony IV, Svalbard, June 2010

When I got home, I was so distraught and overwhelmed that I had trouble getting out of bed. No one seemed to be able to comprehend what we were losing, what was at stake. I felt I had failed as a photographer. I had to face the fact that my

images alone were not enough to convey the urgency of the situation. I said to my daughter, who was 11 at the time, “Just tell me you won’t have children, and we’ll just have a grand ol’ time with what’s left of our world.”

In her great wisdom, she said, “Mom! I am 11 years old. How can I possibly know if I’ll have children or not?” “Besides,” she said, “you have to try.” It was that last bit that got me up. It reminded me of what I already knew.



Stranded Polar Bear, Lower Savage Islands, Canadian Arctic, August 2008

When I was a child, my grandfather would take me into the woods around our house. He’d introduce me to each tree. “This is your relative,” he would say, “in the same way that I am your relative. You must respect this tree.”

My grandfather had many lessons. He told me something that I later taught my daughter. He said, “You are billions of years in the making; you are born of this time for this time. You have survived slavery, genocide and disease. You carry the wisdom of your ancestors with you, yet there is no one like you.”

Today, as world leaders negotiate the fate of the planet at the Paris Climate Summit, I have my grandfather's words in my ears. As a species, we stand at a precipice, and the choices we make in this moment—individually, as a collective—determine a great many things. It can be hard letting go of habits, especially the ones that are not good for us. It will be harder still to live on a dead planet.



Siberian Drifters, Svalbard, July 2008

But what can we do? I have accepted that my images were not enough on their own, that I was required to do more, to dig deeper. I asked myself: What kind of world do I want to live in? Is this it? If not, what am I willing to do to shape it into a world with greater equity not only among humans, but all living things? What kind of world do I want to leave to my daughter and her children? Is this it? What choices can I make to help shift humanity onto a healthier, more sustainable track?

We do not often stop long enough to really think about what we are doing, let alone where these choices are leading us. We blindly plow towards a future that we have authored. Then we wonder, "How did we get here?" It has been too easy to be apathetic, to say "It's not my job." Too easy to say, "I am only one person, what

could I possibly do?" My grandfather said it: You are born for this time. Each one of us plays an important significant part in the shaping of our future, whether actively or passively. It's time to grieve for what is already lost in order to make space for a vision of what is possible.

I got up out of bed. I made time to think about the world I want to live in. I began speaking publicly, writing books and even making films, putting forth a vision of a world not steeped in fear and scarcity mentality. The world I want is a world that does not subjugate, does not separate, does not monger fear and inadequacy in order to control. The world I dream of has clean air, clean water, does not poison its people. Instead it educates them, gives them room and space to dream. It respects the plants and animals that share our planet, does not see them as resources to be exploited but as sacred things to be exalted and protected.



Breaching Iceberg, Greenland, August 8, 2008

I do continue to photograph the beauty and wonder of this planet, but with no expectation that my images alone can or will change anything. I have increased my

vocabulary of communication. I have expanded my definition of what it means to be a citizen of Earth—this place that gives us everything and asks for so little. Each one of us has a personal decision to make. What does it mean to be an Earthling? What duty or responsibility do we hold ourselves to in service of this planet?

To those of you actively building a world that is more peaceful and equitable, I say thank you. To those of you still standing by the sidelines, unsure, I say this: We need you. Life is not a spectator sport. We are all participants, and now more than ever we need every hand on deck to right this ship and chart a better course. Choose one thing you love about life on this planet, and make that your thing.



The TED Fellows program hand-picks young innovators from around the world to raise international awareness of their work and maximize their impact.



Addy Osmani

8 min read

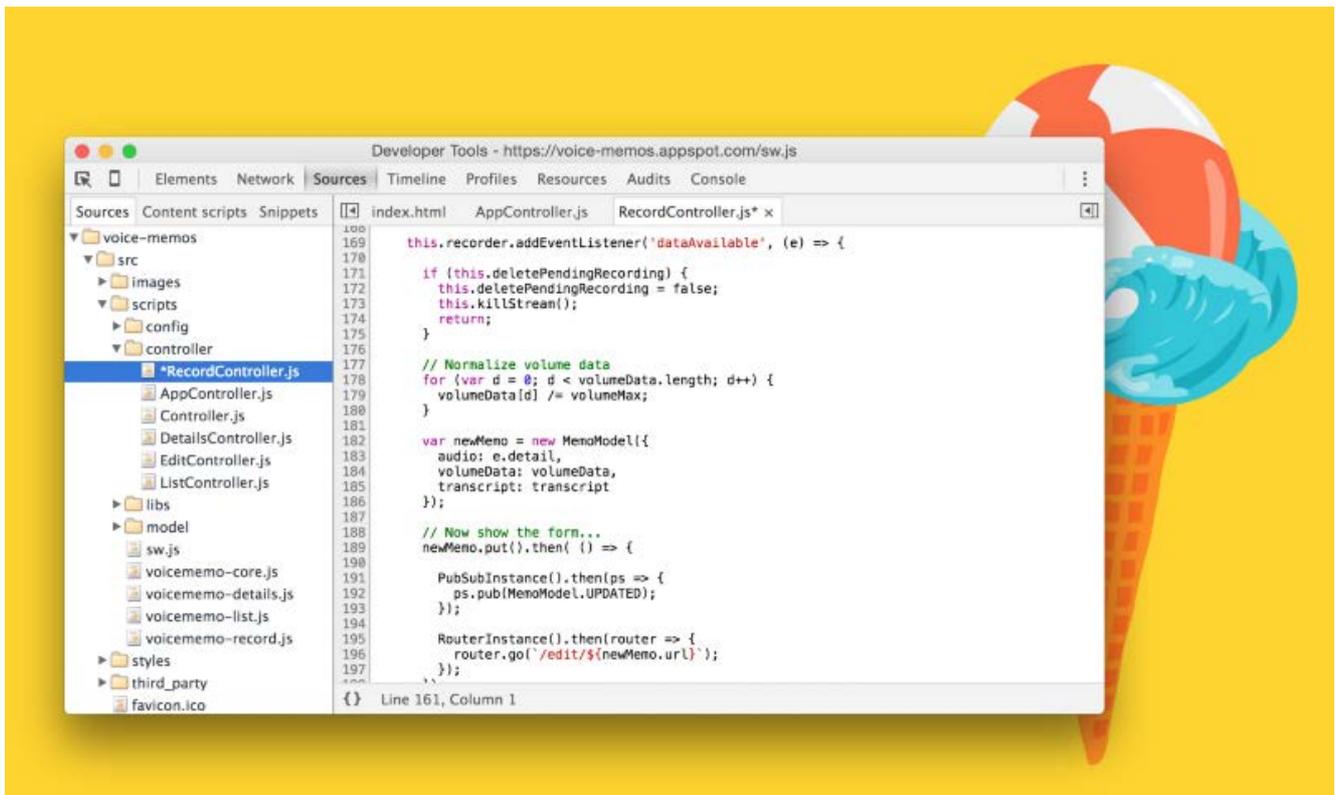
DevTools Tips For Sublime Text Users

Introduction

In this quick write-up, we'll cover how to take advantage of your existing knowledge of features in **Sublime Text** and apply them to another powerful tool in your arsenal—the Chrome DevTools.

Thanks to several modern tools including DevTools, [JSBin](#) and [Codepen](#) relying on the excellent [CodeMirror](#) editor, keyboard bindings like those in Sublime Text are more readily available elsewhere than they have been.

Let's assume for the rest of this write-up that we'll primarily be working inside the DevTools Sources panel — a feature which, when paired with [Workspaces](#) gives you a powerful in-browser editor.

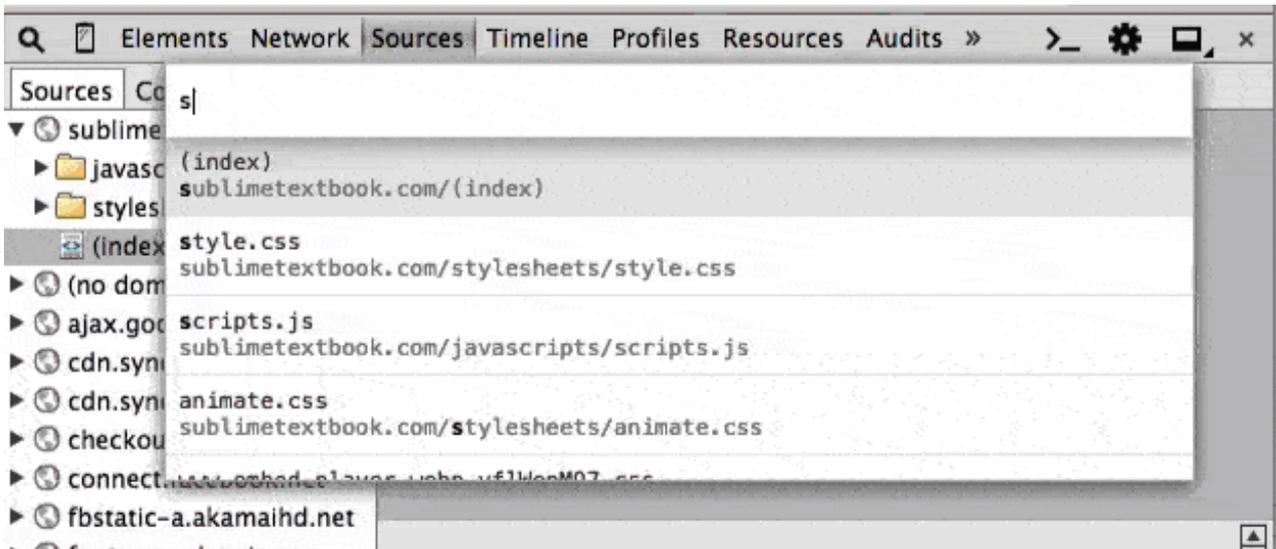


The Sources panel in Chrome DevTools can be used as a powerful editor and companion during debugging

Keyboard Shortcuts

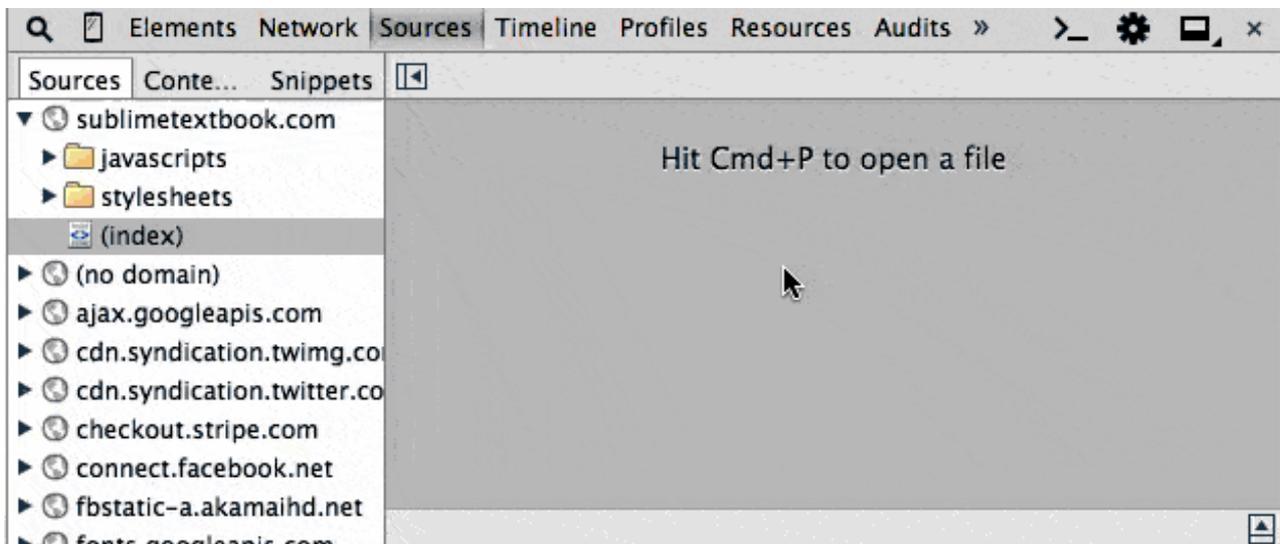
Goto Anything

Very similar to Sublime, DevTools has a Goto “Anything” dialog. This can take you to a specific file, a line number or a method definition. You can bring up the Goto “Anything” search using Ctrl/Cmd + P. This lets you search/filter through files just by starting to type in the files name. To search for a **method** — such as a **JavaScript method** or a **CSS selector**, use Ctrl/Cmd + Shift + P and start typing in the method name.



Goto Line in file

`Ctrl` + `G` will toggle a dialog allowing you to jump to a specific line in a file. If you wish to go to a line in the current file, bring up the dialog and type in a colon followed by the line number you are interested in. For example, `:25` will take you to line 25. If you wish to go to a line in a different file, type in the file name, a colon and then the line number (e.g `app.js:25`).



Go to the start or end of a line

Go to end of a line: `Alt` + `Right` or `Cmd` + `Right` **Go to the start of a line:** `Alt` + `Left` or `Cmd` + `Left`

Go to start or end of a file

Go to the start of a file: `Alt` + `Up` or `Cmd` + `Up` **Go to the end of a file:** `Alt` + `Down` or `Cmd` + `Down`

Go one word left or right

Go one word left: `Ctrl` + `Left` or `Alt` + `Left`

Go one word right: `Ctrl` + `Right` or `Alt` + `Right`

Go up or down a line

Go up a line: `Up`

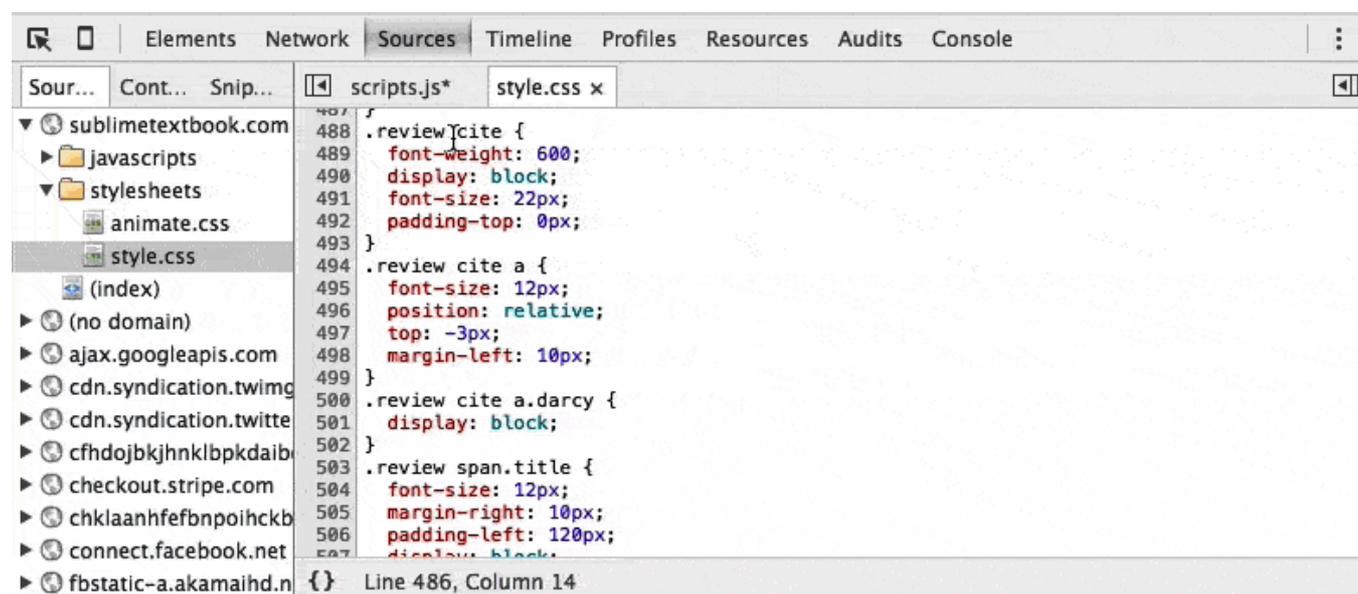
Go down a line: `Down`

Using Carets / Multiple Cursors

A caret is that blinking line that indicates where you're typing at the moment. Similar to Sublime Text, DevTools can have as many carets as you want.

Adding multiple Carets

You can start playing with carets by opening any supported file in Sources, then selecting each line by holding down `Cmd`/`Alt` and clicking wherever you would like to add a new caret.



For example, if you have multi-line JavaScript that needs to be prefixed, edited or wrapped in quotes, multiple carets can make this a breeze.

The following steps will quickly get every line selected:

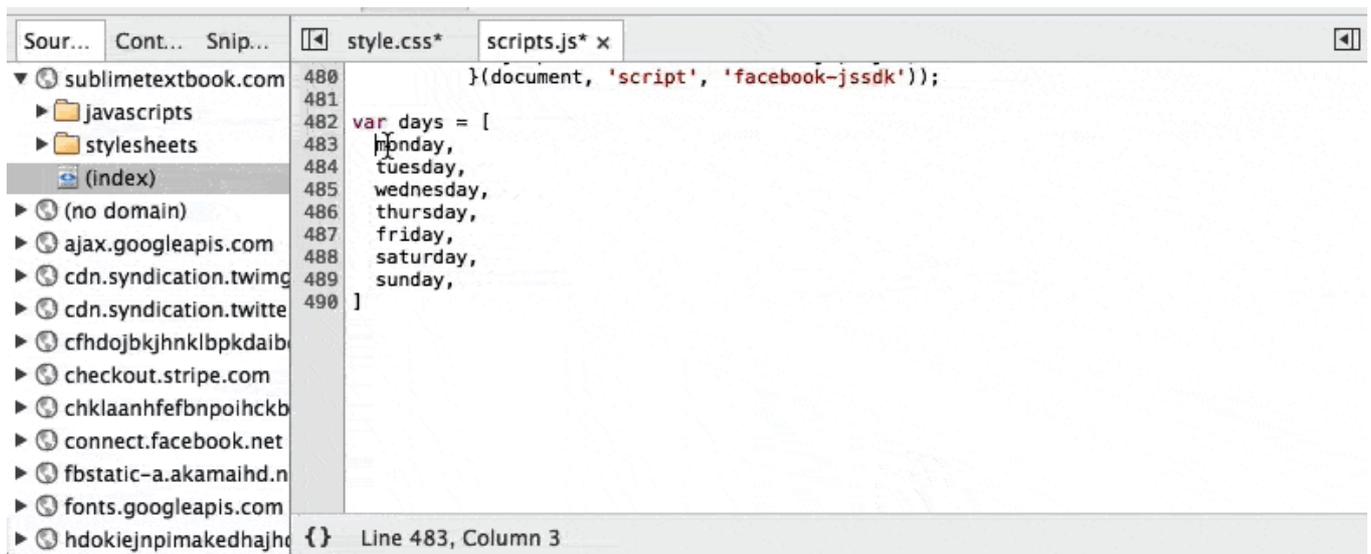
1. Click on the first line
2. While holding down `⌘` and `Option`

3. Drag your mouse through the rest of the lines

You should now have a cursor somewhere on each line.

Use multiple carets from the front of a line

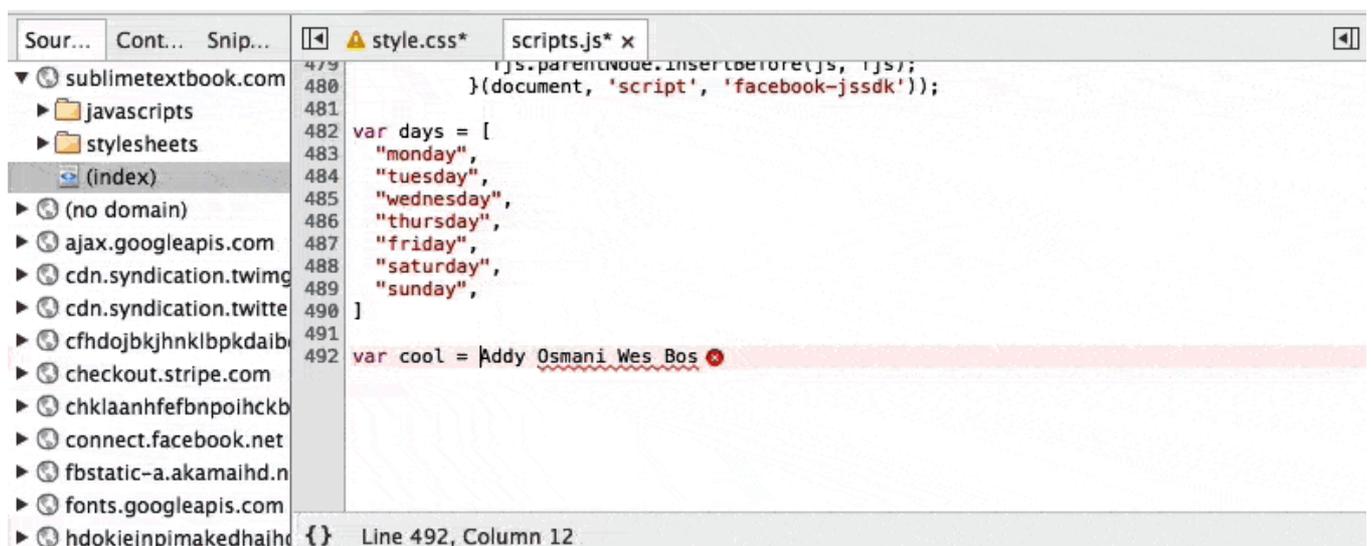
Use `Cmd` + `←` (`Alt` + `←` for Windows/Linux) to bring all cursors to the front of the line, and then hold down `Option` while using the arrow keys to jump by word. When in front of the file name, simply type in your prefix and you're done!



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hdokiejnpimakedhajhe { } Line 483, Column 3
```

Wrap with Quotes or Brackets

Highlight the words with `Cmd` + `Shift` + `←` (`Ctrl` + `Shift` + `←` for Windows/Linux) and type an opening quote or bracket. Dev tools will wrap each word in the selected quote or bracket.



```
Sour... Cont... Snip... style.css* scripts.js* x
sublimetextbook.com 479      i.js.parentNode.insertBefore(i.js, i.js);
  javascripts        480      }(document, 'script', 'facebook-jssdk'));
  stylesheets       481
(index)             482 var days = [
(no domain)        483   "monday",
ajax.googleapis.com 484   "tuesday",
cdn.syndication.twimg 485   "wednesday",
cdn.syndication.twitter 486   "thursday",
cfhdojbkjhnlbpbkdaib 487   "friday",
checkout.stripe.com 488   "saturday",
chklaanhfefbnpoihckb 489   "sunday",
connect.facebook.net 490 ]
fbstatic-a.akamaihd.net 491
fonts.googleapis.com 492 var cool = Addy Osmani Wes Bos
hdokiejnpimakedhajhe { } Line 492, Column 12
```

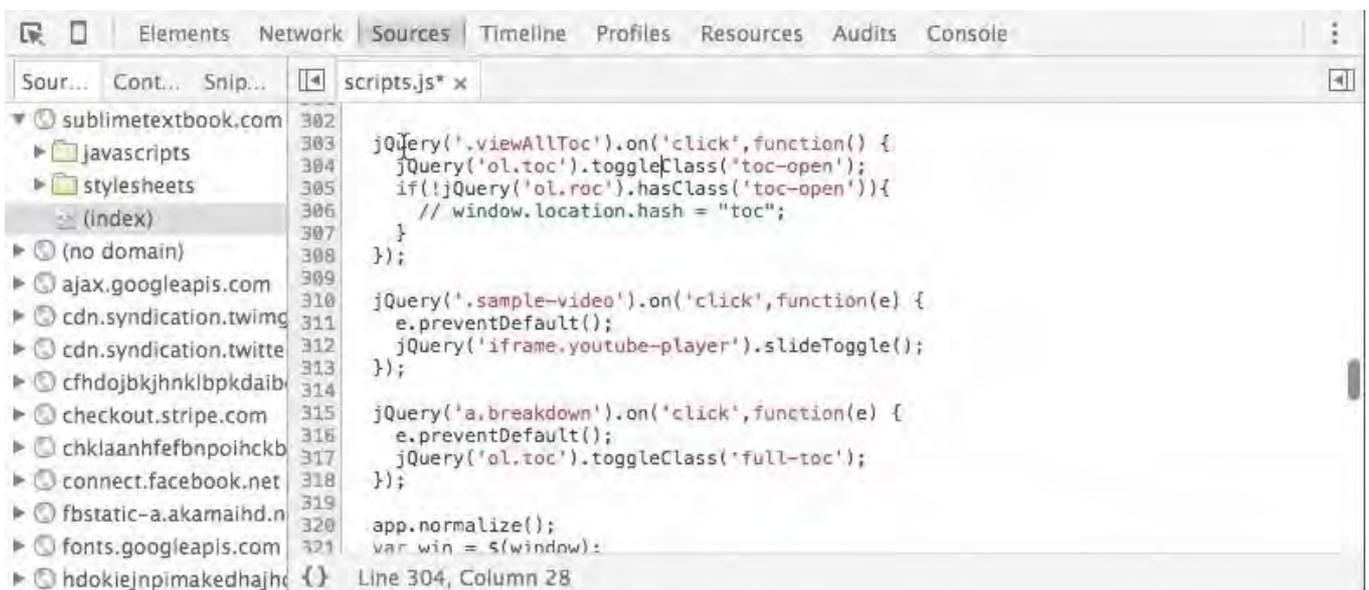
Column selection

Carets can similarly be used for selecting custom columns of text. Hold down `Alt` and then click and drag over the region of text you would like to select. DevTools will highlight the area and you can now copy or edit it as needed.

Carets and matching words

Carets can also be used for highlighting specific words. Select a word in your editor (it can be a variable, method, or anything really). DevTools will highlight other instances of this word with a border around them.

Now use `Cmd` + `D` (or `Alt` + `D`) and DevTools will highlight and place multiple cursors on the matching words. This is particularly useful during batch rename operations. Hitting D a few more time while still holding ⌘ selects the next instance of the selection found. By hitting ⌘, then D three times, you can select three iterations of the text.



Jump to matching brackets

When working with non-complex pieces of code, you might find it tricky to find corresponding opening and closing brackets with your naked eye. `Ctrl` + `M` allows you to instantly move your cursor there. Using it twice will jump to its opening or closing counterpart.

```
307     }
308   });
309
310
311   $('sample-video').on('click',function(e) {
312     e.preventDefault();
313     $('iframe.youtube-player').slideToggle();
314   });
315
316
317   $('a.breakdown').on('click',function(e) {
318     e.preventDefault();
319     $('ol.toc').toggleClass('full-toc');
320   });
321
```

{ } Line 314, Column 5

Indentation

We know the importance of indentation. It helps keep our code readable and easy to understand. To increase or decrease the current line's indent, use the shortcuts below:

Indent text: `Tab`

Unindent text: `Shift` + `Tab`

```
479     fjs.parentNode.insertBefore(js, fjs);
480   }(document, 'script', 'facebook-jssdk'));
481
482   var days = [
483     "monday",
484     "tuesday",
485     "wednesday",
486     "thursday",
487     "friday",
488     "saturday",
489     "sunday"
490   ]
491
492
```

{ } Line 483, Column 1

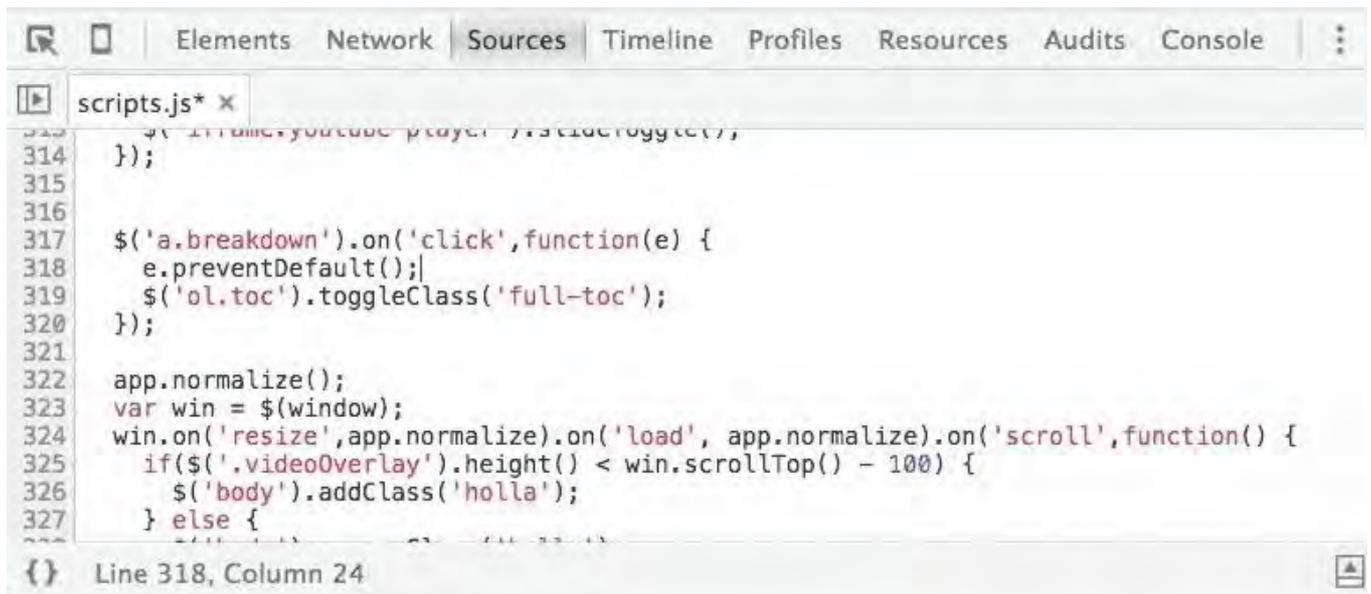
Quickly comment your code

If you need to comment/uncomment a piece of code, the same shortcuts you would use for this in Sublime Text also apply:

Comment text: `Cmd`/`Ctrl` + `/'`

Uncomment text: `Cmd`/`Ctrl` + `/'` on the same section of text.

This works across all languages and works pretty well with lines or whole selections.



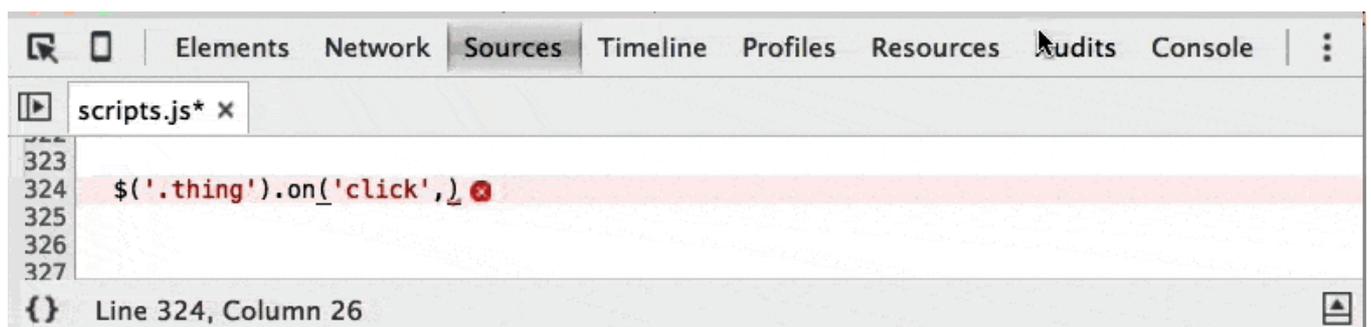
The screenshot shows the Chrome DevTools Sources panel with the 'Sources' tab selected. The file 'scripts.js*' is open, and the code is displayed with line numbers from 314 to 327. A selection is made on line 318, covering the text `e.preventDefault();|`. The status bar at the bottom indicates 'Line 318, Column 24'.

```
314 });  
315  
316  
317 $('a.breakdown').on('click',function(e) {  
318   e.preventDefault();|  
319   $('ol.toc').toggleClass('full-toc');  
320 });  
321  
322 app.normalize();  
323 var win = $(window);  
324 win.on('resize',app.normalize).on('load', app.normalize).on('scroll',function() {  
325   if($('.videoOverlay').height() < win.scrollTop() - 100) {  
326     $('body').addClass('holla');  
327   } else {
```

Toggle Autocompletion

When typing values in the DevTools Sources panel, you're presented with autocompletions as you type. If however you dismiss these and would like to manually toggle autocompletion, you can do so with:

``Ctrl` + `Space``



The screenshot shows the Chrome DevTools Sources panel with the 'Sources' tab selected. The file 'scripts.js*' is open, and the code is displayed with line numbers from 323 to 327. The code on line 324 is `$('.thing').on('click',)`. A red highlight is visible under the closing parenthesis, and a small red 'x' icon is present to the right of the code, indicating that autocompletion is disabled. The status bar at the bottom indicates 'Line 324, Column 26'.

```
323  
324 $('.thing').on('click',) x  
325  
326  
327
```

Cut/Copy/Paste/Undo/Redo

You can cut, copy and paste text using the same shortcuts you're used to in other editors:

Cut: ``Cmd` + `X``

Copy: ``Cmd` + `C``

Paste: ``Cmd` + `V``

Undo: ``Cmd` + `Z``

Soft undo: `Cmd` + `U`

Redo: `Cmd` + `Y`

Increment and Decrement values

Note: ⌘ and ⇧ are page up and page down. On an Apple keyboard, you can page up/down by holding **fn** + ↑/↓

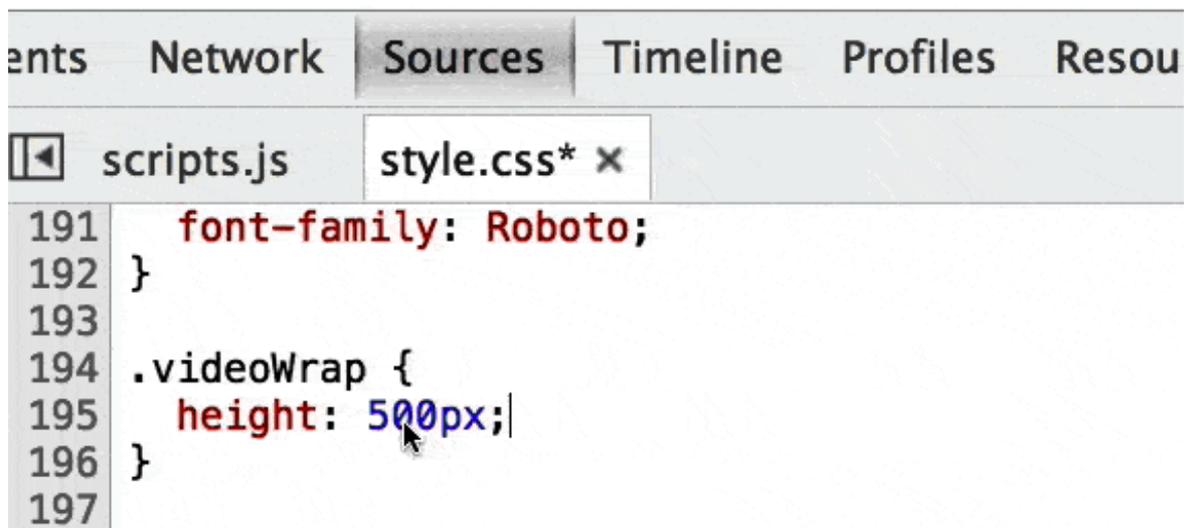
In the Sources pane, you can select a numeric value and easily increment or decrement the value using your keyboard. Highlight the value and then:

Increment CSS unit by 1: `Option` + `↑`

Decrement CSS unit by 1: `Option` + `↓`

Increment CSS unit by 10: `Option` + `⇧`

Decrement CSS unit by 10: `Option` + `⇩`



The Styles pane also supports shortcuts for incrementing/decrementing values.

Increment value: ↑

Decrement value: ↓

Increment by 10: ⌘ or ⌥ ↑

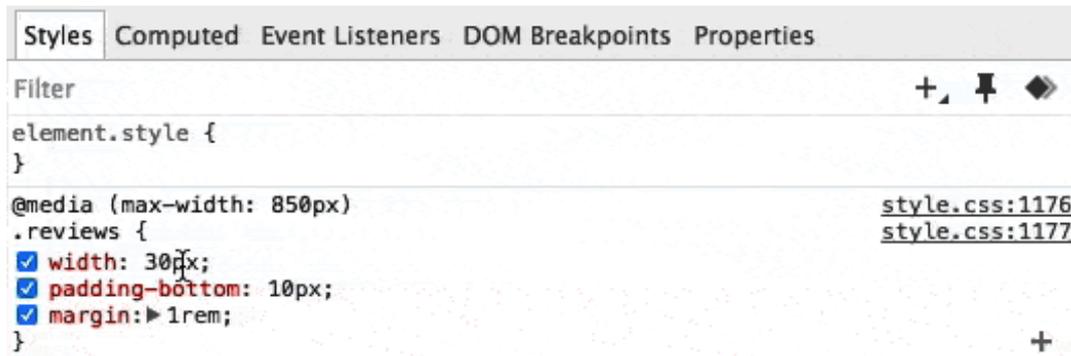
Decrement by 10: ⇧ or ⌥ ↓

Increment by 100: ⌥ ⌘

Decrement by 100: ⌥ ⇧

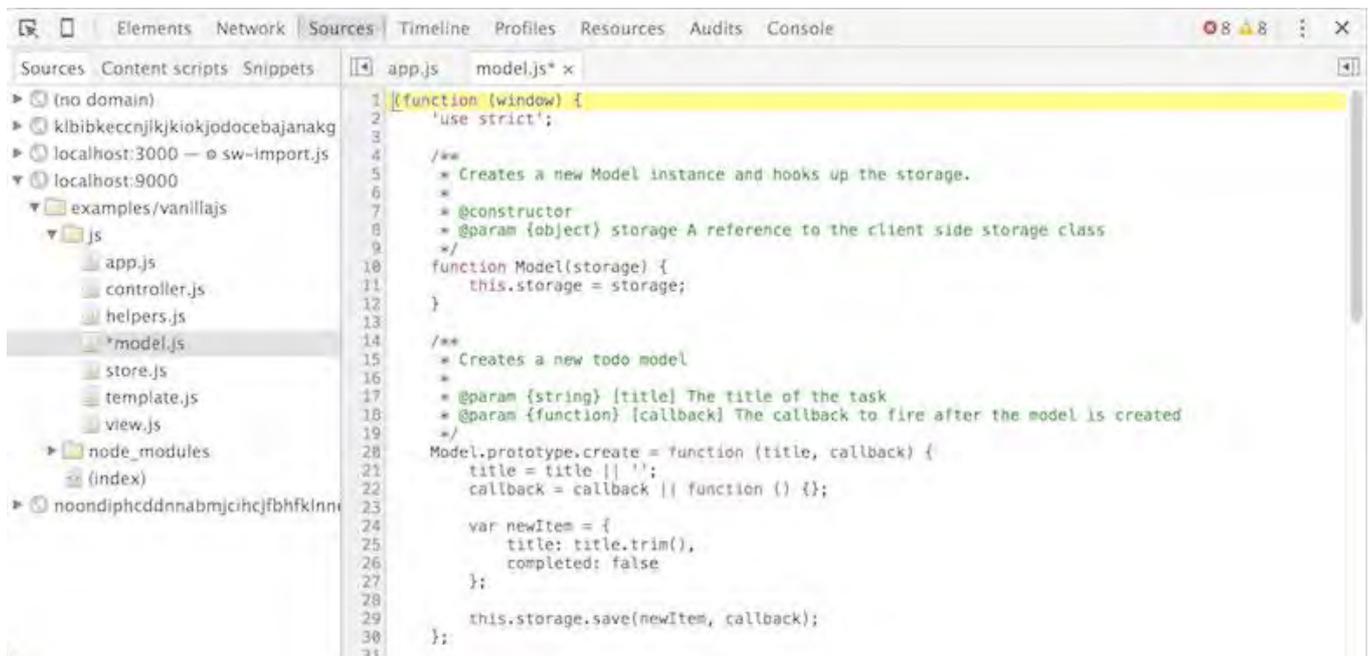
Increment by 0.1: ⌘ ↑

Decrement by 0.1: ⌘ ↓



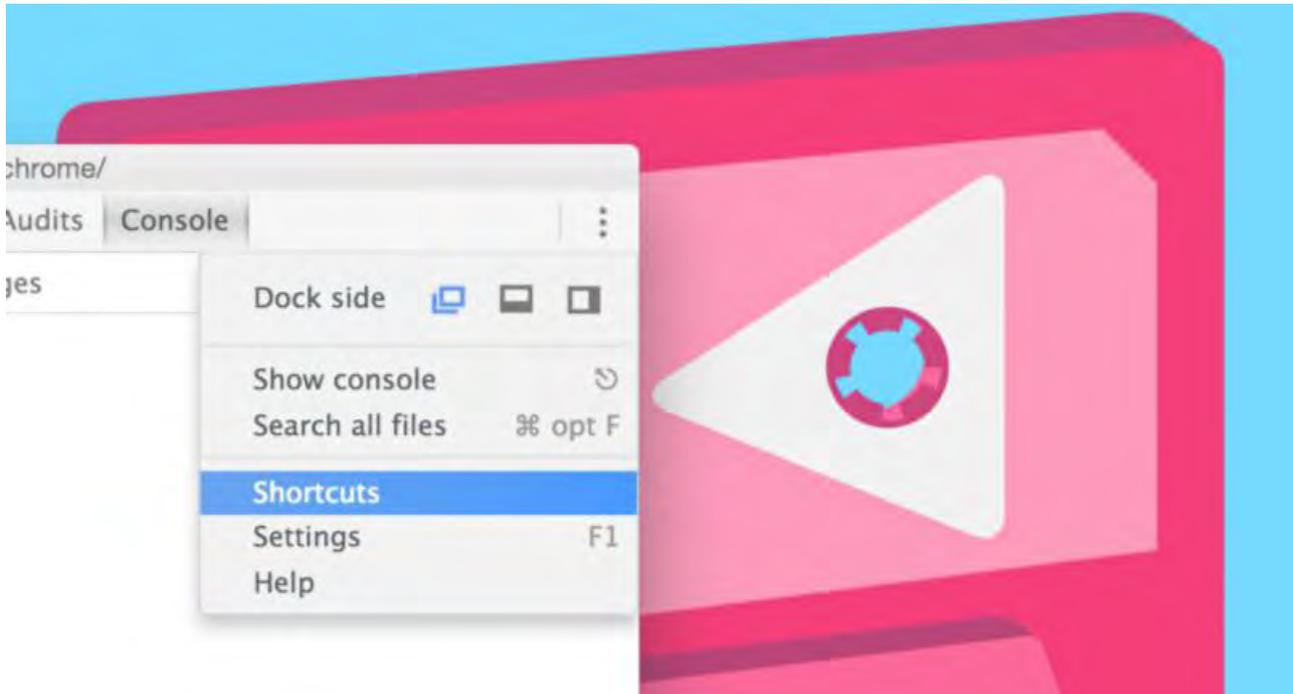
Cycle through editing locations

DevTools can now also preserve your position cursor history in Sources. This lets you cycle through your previous editing locations using **Alt-** and **Alt+**:



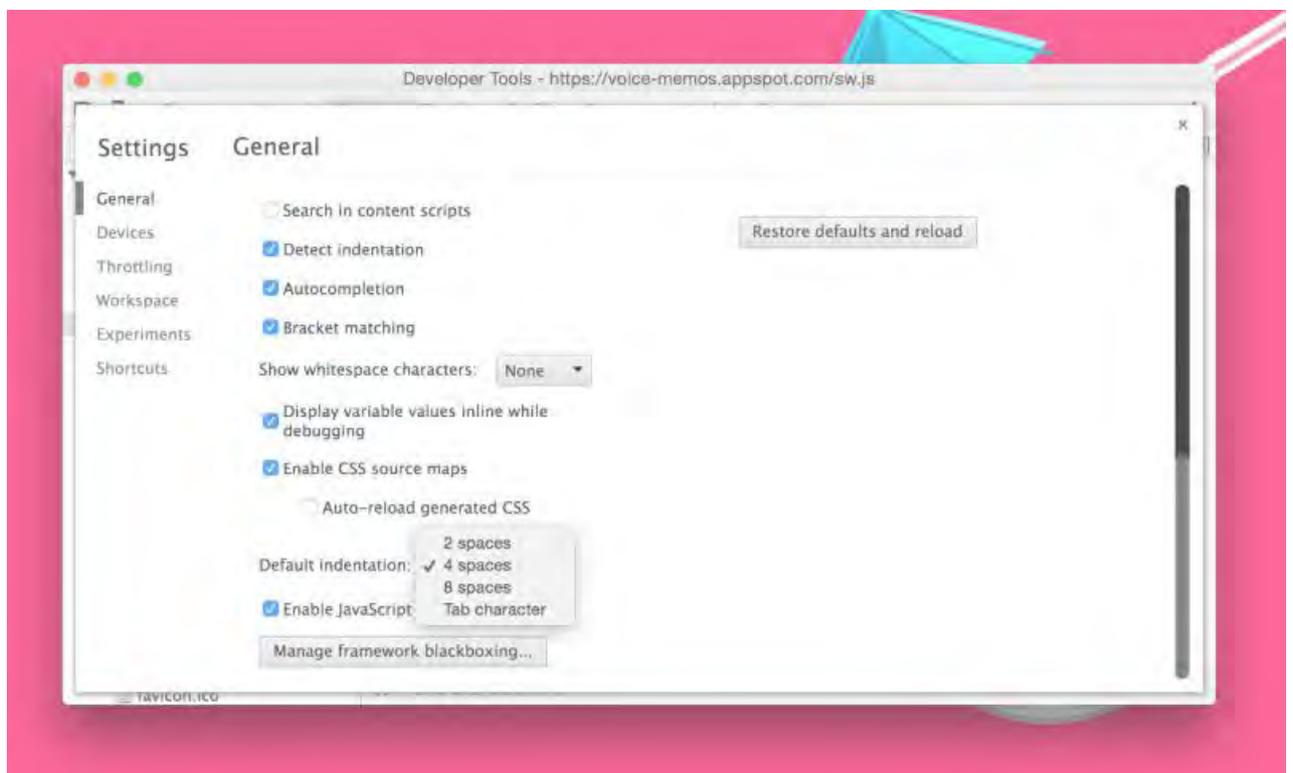
Shortcuts page

If you've found the above shortcuts helpful, you can pull most of them up via the DevTools settings menu. It looks a little like this:



Source Settings

The Settings page also allows you to configure how the editor behaves. This includes customizing the default **indentation**, toggling bracket matching, autocompletion and the display of whitespace characters.

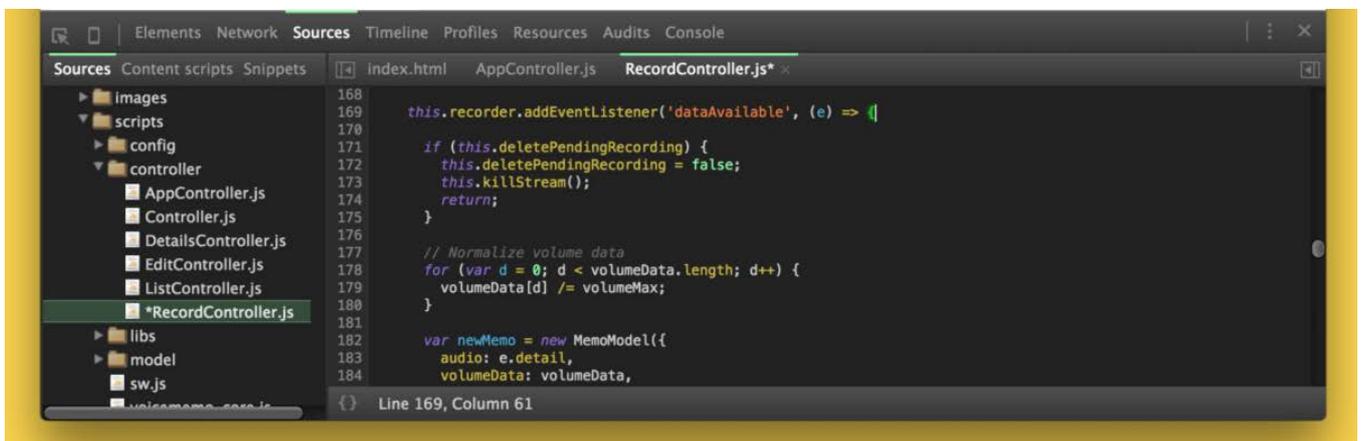


Themes

Similar to your editor, the DevTools UI can also be customized (the theming for the syntax highlighting, the colors across each of the panels, the look of UI elements like tabs). Some of these themes make intelligent use of color to highlight the key pieces of UI in DevTools without taking your focus away from the code.

Some of our choice picks for DevTools themes are the following:

- <https://github.com/mauricecruz/chrome-devtools-zero-dark-matrix-theme>
- <https://github.com/xero/greybeard-devtools>



The ZeroDarkMatrix theme

To install a theme:

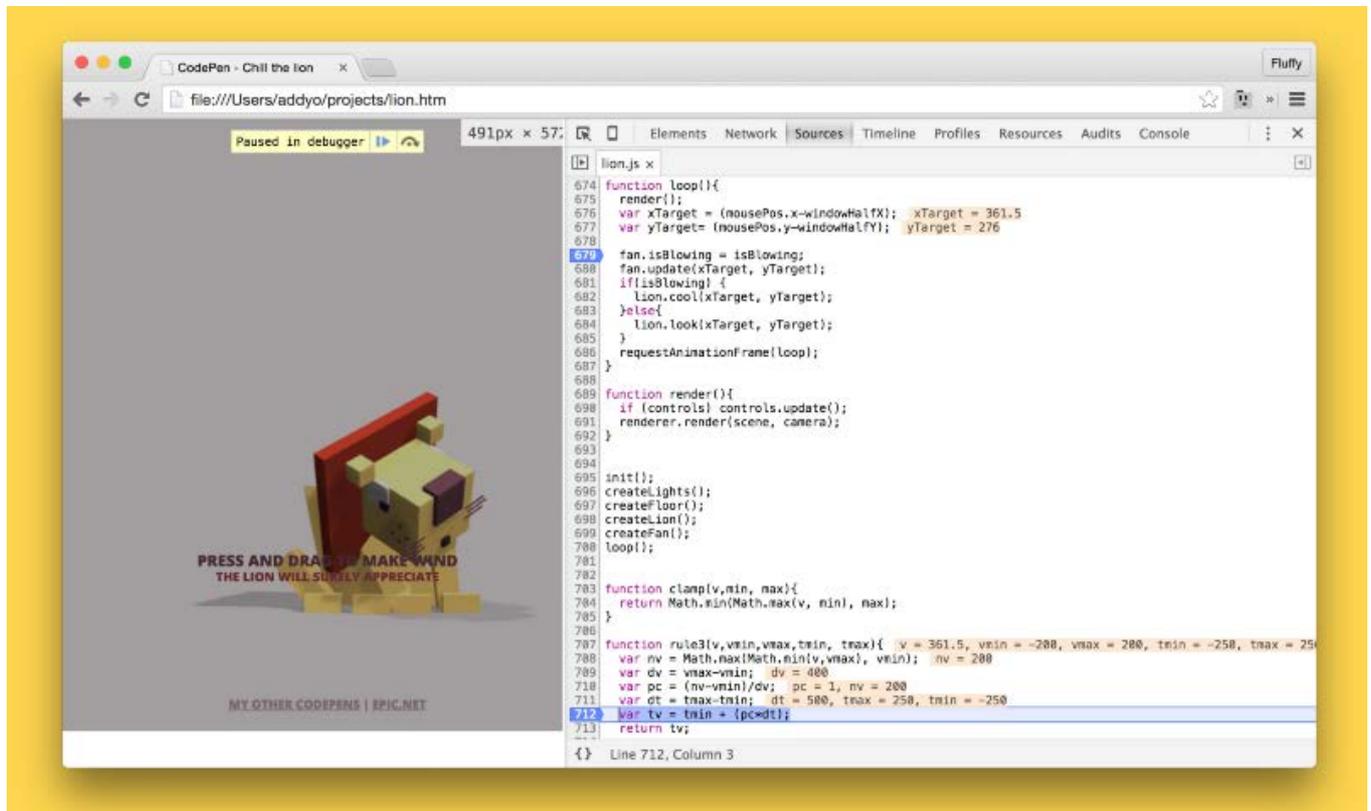
- Install it from the [Chrome Web Store](#)
- Open `chrome://flags` ► Enable Developer Tools experiments and click “Relaunch Now” at the bottom.
- Open developer tools settings ► Experiments ► [✓] Allow custom UI themes.

Boom. You should be good to go. Themes can be found in a number of places, including the Web Store, [DevThemez.com](#) and GitHub.

Quick bonus tip

DevTools also supports a few nice debugging helpers that can further augment

your daily editing & debugging workflow. For instance, while debugging you can preview the **inline values of JavaScript variables at the current point in time**. Super powerful.



Display values inline while you're debugging (see the blocks highlighted in orange). Enabled via Settings > Sources > Display variable values inline while debugging

Wrapping up

We hope you've found these DevTools tips helpful!

Many of the SublimeText equivalents we've covered here work equally as well in other editors and we encourage you to spend time learning about the shortcuts in apps you use regularly. They're powerful stuff and can make a HUUUGE difference to your workflow.

If you're hungry for more and want to continue improving your workflow, grab [Wes' Sublime Text Book + Videos](#)—use the code **DEVTOOLS** for \$11 off. You can also check-out the first episode of [Totally Tooling Tips](#) for a look at Sublime Text plugins.

Heartz ♥

[Addy Osmani](#) and [Wes Bos](#)



Gary Vaynerchuk

3 min read

Why Everybody Has Permission to Make All Kinds of Content



You might have heard recently that Jon Stewart signed a contract to produce a series of short-form, daily pieces of content for HBO PR. The pieces will be airing on HBO Now and HBO Go.

Maybe you skimmed the headline and thought “Oh, that’s cool” and moved on.

But for me, this felt like part of a much bigger trend. Up until now, big, old companies like HBO have looked at short form content primarily as a way to disseminate their longform stuff, or as special features to accompany it. The fact that they're now treating short-form as the main event points to some major shifts. This is another signal towards short form becoming the primary form of content. We've seen comedians go into this territory before (just look at Jerry Seinfeld's Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee), but this is HBO making a very public and conscious buy into short form video as more than just a trend. We lived through the two hour movie and the thirty minute sitcom; now short form video is becoming on par with those two previous trends. It is a standard format.

That being said, I want to take this discussion a bit further.

The length of the video needs to correspond to how long it takes to tell the story. Seems like an obvious statement, right? But not to everyone. We are currently in an age of content where all the "gurus" out there are preaching the need to be fast. Quick. The six second Vine. The ten second Snapchat. The "keep all your videos under one minute" fake-best-practices article that you read.

But there will be pillars for three minute, six minute and eleven minute content. There will be an *enormous* amount of videos made between three and twenty minutes that I will still consider short form because, for so long now, we have lived in a world wherein video requires at the very least twenty-two minutes (thirty, with commercials). That has been the standard for a while now.

Over the top networks are continuing to triple down on content, and with that comes the need to diversify their offerings. Video content has enormous upside at the moment, and it's smart for HBO to recognize the trend of short form. It's not too dissimilar from their decision to bring on Sesame Street, in fact. They're continuing to find content producers that have real brand equity in different genres—Like Jon Stewart, for example.

What does this mean for businesses? Go in the opposite direction. Now that HBO is leaning towards content that is more associated with brands and small businesses, companies should embrace the other side of the spectrum. Fortune 500 companies absolutely have the financial means to produce something like Game of Thrones or House of Cards. I'm talking about allocating tens of millions

of dollars to producing unbelievable quality content that integrates their brands in a way that will actually engage consumers. HBO is going down into the realm of where brands were and still are. This should be an indicator, maybe a weird one, but an indicator nonetheless, that brands are capable of competing with HBO too.

Let's not forget: HBO is hiring people to produce this stuff. The dollars that these Fortune 500 companies have allocated to TV commercials currently could be put towards making something you actually want to watch.

Geeks vs. Writers

Daily performance analyzed



We love data and we track everything here at [.io](#). So couple of weeks ago we decided to track our team performance in terms of keyboard and mouse activity during the working day.

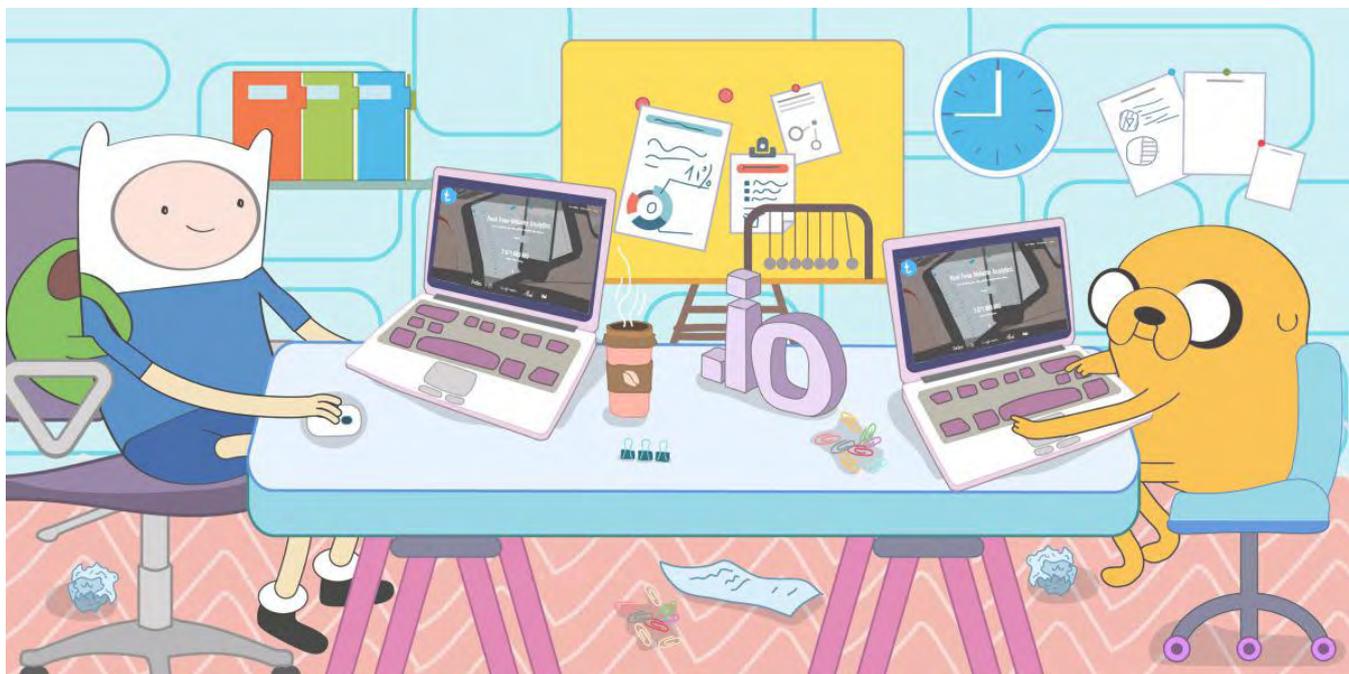
Our team is small—1 designer, 2 developers and 2 content editors. And a couple of management guys of course. Our office is at the floor 23, so apart from staring in the window we work a lot here.

We installed simple Chrome plugin on every macbook and collected some statistics within a week with our event tracking system [t.onthe.io](#).

Developers showed pretty unexpected figures. They have less keypresses than editors and managers—around 4k every day.

Developers type 3 times less than other team members.

The most popular key is Command (on Macs)—20% of all keys. The least popular is Spacebar. They use Tab key 5 times more frequently than all the rest team members together.



Their activity during the day (and night) is the less predictable and the activity graphs have lots of smooth areas and jumps. That's because they walk around, think a lot and after a “eureka” moment sit down and write tons of code.

Managers are total winners in terms of amount of pressed keys—3 times more than developers and even 1.5 times more than editors!

A manager types more than 23k characters per day.

They press a key every 3 seconds in average. Emails take a lot.



Managers' activity during the day is quite stable—they write and receive letters all day long. An average amount of keys pressed during the day is 23k and more. Spammers.

Editors are typing twice as much as developers and make less mistakes. Backspace usage is less than for all the rest team.

Editors make 2 times less spelling mistakes, than all the team members together.

And the most popular key is... the space—10% of all keypresses.



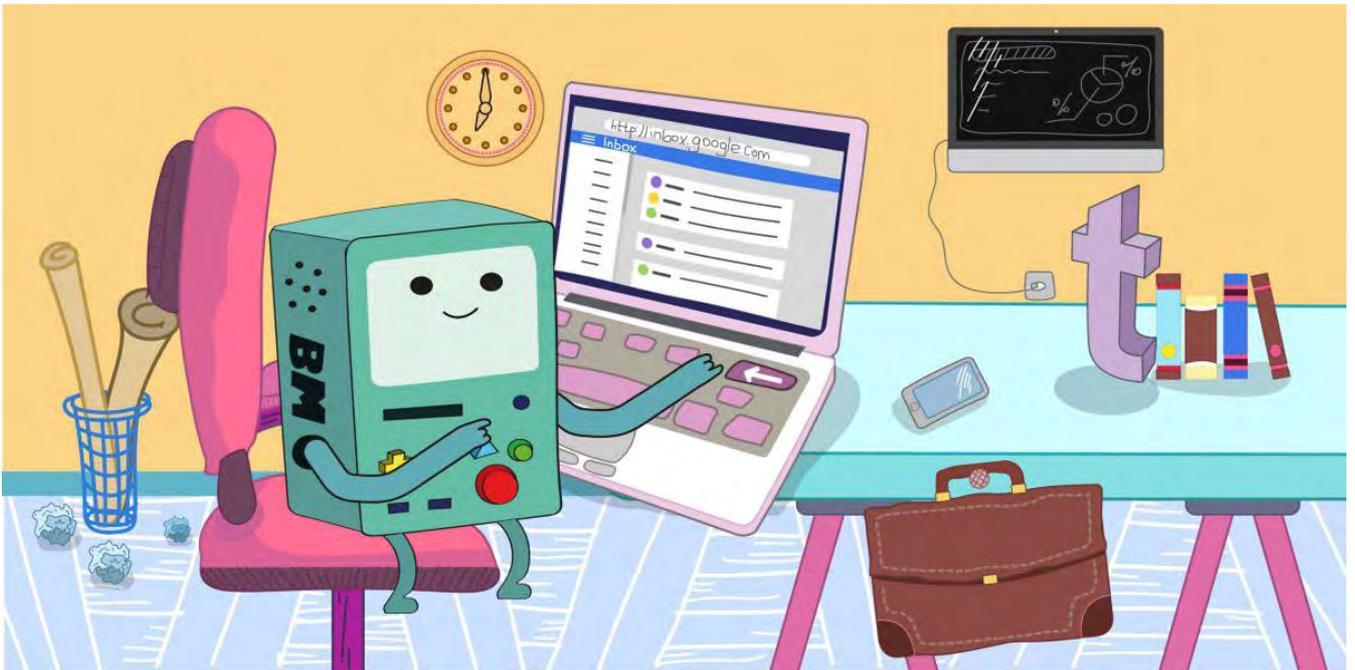
Editors' activity is not stable but pretty predictable. Activity peaks fall on the beginning of the day—when all the articles are written. For the rest of the day they read them through, replace the words, read again and again, and then post.

Designer is pretty predictable—Command and Backspace are two buttons that he presses 20% of all. He does more mouse moves than developers and content editors together. His mouse travels **1 kilometer every day**.

Designer's mouse may travel 20km per month.



Office manager is the least active, making only 2k keypresses per day. That's 5 times less than managers. 11% of all used keys is Space.



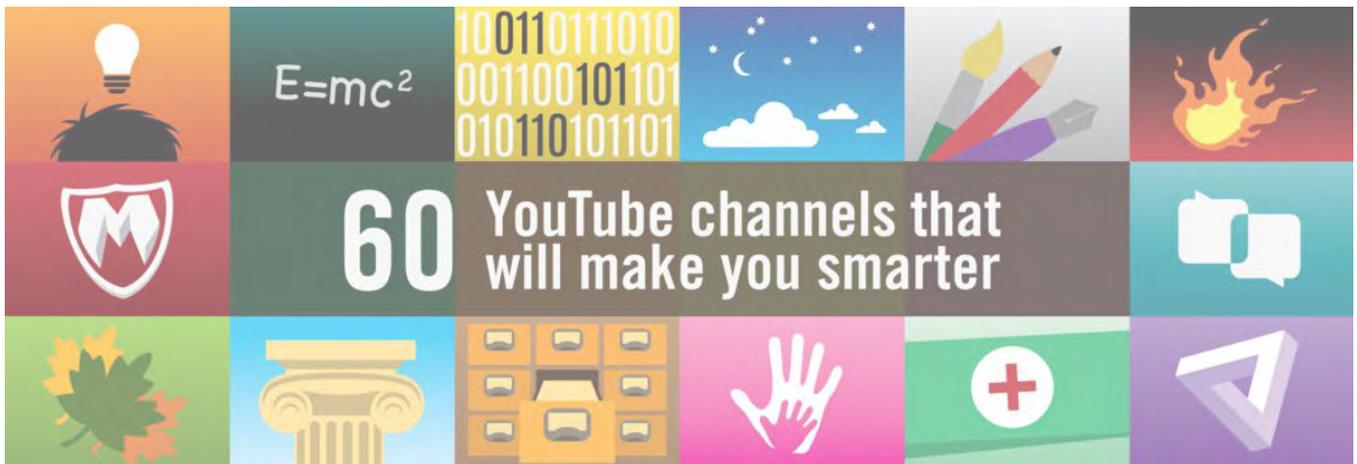
What's curious—the least popular keys are **Capslock** and **Right Mouse Button**. Somewhere around 0.1% of all keypresses together. It's time to make some changes to keyboards.



So we have managers who are keypress leaders. Designer who is a mouse movement champion. And editors who are doing 2 times less errors than the team average.



Now we are wondering what we should track next. Ideas?



60 YouTube channels that will make you smarter

Time is finite. Social media and Netflix can all too easily swallow our precious hours. So why not put them to better use on YouTube? Beyond the music, virals and gaming videos, YouTube has many great channels that can teach anyone practically anything.

Here are the sharpest brains. Press play and become smarter!



Spark your curiosity

Vsauce — Amazing answers to questions about our world

In a Nutshell — Animations that make learning beautiful

C. G. P. Grey—Entertaining explanations of politics, geography and culture

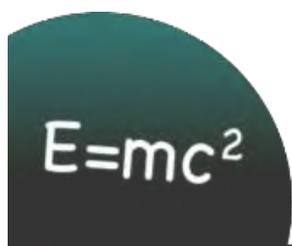
Crash Course—Bite-sized science and learning across many subjects

Scishow—Indispensable science news, history and concepts

HowStuffWorks—Your daily curiosity dose that explains the world

Brit Lab—Smart-ass ammunition that's guaranteed to astound

THNKR—People, stories and ideas that change perspectives



Experiment with the sciences

MinutePhysics — Simple explanations of physics and other sciences

MinuteEarth—Science and stories about our awesome planet

Veritasium—Science and engineering videos by Derek Muller

Numberphile—Maths Mecca that sums up all things numerical

SmarterEveryDay—Exploring the world of science with Destin Sandlin

Periodic Videos—Videos of each element and other chemistry stuff

Sixty Symbols—A physics and astronomy cornucopia of cool

AsapSCIENCE—Weekly doses of fun and intriguing science clips

It's Okay To Be Smart—We agree!

PatrickJMT—Straight-to-the-point maths know-how

Bozeman Science—A popular high school teacher explains science



Connect with technology

Computerphile—An array of computing and tech videos

The Game Theorists—Over-analysing video games

Extra Credits—Video game design to start your developer career

The New Boston—Tons of great web development tutorials



Expand your mind

The School of Life—Ideas for life through many lenses

BrainCraft—Weekly videos on psychology and neuroscience

Wisecrack—Learn your ass off with witty sketches

PBS Idea Channel—A cultural critique of pop, technology and art

Philosophy Tube—Oliver Lennard “gives away a philosophy degree”



Inspire your creativity

[Mark Crilley](#) —How-to-draw videos on almost every topic you can imagine

[Draw With Jazza](#)—Tutorials on all forms of visual expression

[JustinGuitar](#) —Guitar courses for various styles, techniques and abilities

[HDpiano](#)—Learn to play the piano with easy to follow tutorials

[Every Frame a Painting](#)—Top-notch and truly fascinating analysis of film

[Photo Exposed](#)—Photography tips, techniques and tutorials

[The Art Assignment](#) —Artist talks and challenging assignments for yourself

[Film Riot](#) —A how-to trip through all aspects of film making



Avoid burning your house down

[Grant Thompson](#)—Caution advised with these experiments and life hacks

[Crazy Russian Hacker](#)—The daddy of all science experiment channels



Get closer to nature

Earth Unplugged —BBC-produced channel about the natural world

BBC Earth —Jump in and meet your planet

The Brain Scoop—A private tour of The Field Museum in Chicago



Roll with the big boys

ouLearn—The Open University's rich and engaging learning channel

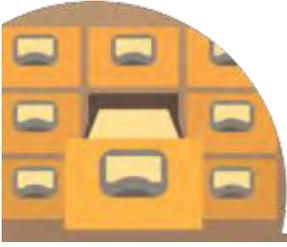
The RSA—The Royal Society of Arts sets new standards in its field

TED Talks —No list would be complete without TED's main collection

TED-Ed—Carefully curated and crafted educational videos and animations

Smithsonian—The mighty institution explores the grand questions

Big Think—Exploring big ideas that define knowledge in the 21st century



Access the archives

British Pathé —Famous newsreels shown within carefully chosen topics

ITN Source —One of the largest historic collections of news footage

AP Archive —The Associated Press, the world’s largest and oldest agency



Nurture the youngsters

Crash Course Kids —For 5th grade scientists, engineers and astronomers

SciShow Kids —Experiments, experts and answers for kids aged 8 to 88

HooplaKidz —Arts and crafts for little 'uns



Dose up on medicine

Sexplanations —Honest answers about sexuality by Lindsey Doe

Healthcare Triage—Answering questions about medicine and healthcare

Kenhub—An engaging and different way to learn human anatomy



Enjoy the unusual

Vi Hart—A “recreational mathemusician” like no other

ElectroBOOM—Successfully discovering the craziness in engineering

Closing words

These channels have been chosen based on a range of factors, such as production value, impact, quality, variety and quantity. In many categories, great channels and incredible niches have been left out, but such is the burden of any editor. **See the entire list of 134 nominees here.**

This list was compiled by **Biblio**, the default librarian for millions of quality digital learning materials. If this list is helpful to you, please recommend it so that others can benefit too!

More juicy posts by Biblio:

Trees vs Networks

Education vs Learning

Search vs Discovery





Eric Clemmons

4 min read

JavaScript Fatigue

A few days ago, I met up with a friend & peer over coffee.

Saul: "How's it going?" Me:

"Fatigued."

Saul: "Family?"

Me: "No, JavaScript."

More accurately, I meant *React* and the JavaScript ecosystem that comes with it.

. . .

For starters, consider that Pete Hunt asked why React is overwhelming for beginners:



Pete Hunt
@floydophone

Follow

Too many newbies getting overwhelmed by react's learning curve.
Why?

5:18 AM - 25 Dec 2015 · Topsfield, MA, United States

44 103

If you use React, you probably share the same experiences with Vjeux:



Vjeux
@Vjeux

Follow

@dan_abramov @floydophone this is killing me that setting up a js project is so damn hard. Took me an entire evening last time

5:58 AM - 25 Dec 2015

↩️ ↻ 13 ❤️ 57

There is a major problem in the React community that cripples beginners and hinders experts alike.

Too Many Tools.

At work this past quarter, we **painstakingly** started three new projects at work. I say “painstakingly” because *every* project required decisions to be made around tooling depending on the scope & needs.

Ultimately, the problem is that **by choosing React (and inherently JSX), you’ve unwittingly opted into a confusing nest of build tools, boilerplate, linters, & time-sinks to deal with before you ever get to *create* anything.**

Boilerplates & Generators Are Not The Answer.



Yeoman & Plop can alleviate the amount of copy & pasting you do between projects.

However, generated is *never* a one-to-one match, nor can it be.

At scale with enough projects, it is exceedingly difficult to back-port features & improvements from one application to the rest, since **the common code is not abstracted into an independently updatable dependency.**

When a generator is good solution for repetitious code, a better solution is to abstract it into a simpler API.

Otherwise, the generator becomes a confusing, logic-riddled application itself due to permutations of possible use-cases, forever in a race to stay relevant with the applications it created.

I've experienced this first-hand with several generators, including my own evolution/wordpress.

Too Many APIs. Too Much Configuration.

```
import { getPrefetchedData } from 'react-fetcher';
import React from 'react';
import { renderToString } from 'react-dom/server';
import createMemoryHistory from 'history/lib/createMemoryHistory';
import useQueries from 'history/lib/useQueries';
import { RoutingContext, match } from 'react-router';
import { createStore, applyMiddleware } from 'redux';
import { Provider } from 'react-redux';
import thunk from 'redux-thunk';

// Your app's reducer and routes:
import reducer from './reducer';
import routes from './routes';

// Render the app server-side for a given path:
export default path => new Promise((resolve, reject) => {
  // Set up Redux:
  const createStoreWithMiddleware = applyMiddleware(thunk)(createStore);
  const store = createStoreWithMiddleware(reducer);
  const { dispatch } = store;

  // Set up history for router:
  const history = useQueries(createMemoryHistory());
  const location = history.createLocation(path);

  // Match routes based on location object:
  match({ routes, location }, (routerError, redirectLocation, renderProps) => {
    // Get array of route components:
    const components = renderProps.routes.map(route => route.component);

    // Define locals to be provided to all fetcher functions:
    const locals = {
      path: renderProps.location.pathname,
      query: renderProps.location.query,
      params: renderProps.params,

      // Allow fetcher functions to dispatch Redux actions:
      dispatch
    };
  });
});
```

An example of this can be seen in Mark Dalgleish's excellent [react-fetcher](#), libraries such as [Redux](#), [React Router](#), [Webpack](#), and the React ecosystem have, largely, opted for discrete modularization at the cost of terse APIs by **offloading their architectural underpinnings to the user and, as a result, worsen the developer experience in aggregate.**

Alone, the APIs are small, but even less than a handful yield a nearly incomprehensible mess of code to each new set of eyes.

Even if contained in a “boilerplate” project, scaffolded by a generator, or tucked away in a *finalCreateStorev3SeriousThisTime.js* file, we've created a rat's nest of wiring that would make WordPress plugins blush.

More Abstractions. Less Code.

Of course, these APIs are a requirement for having smaller, decoupled, testable, and therefore, *high-quality* libraries.

However, we **need an abstract middle-ground between wiring dependencies and generating boilerplates**

Abstractions are necessary to reduce the cognitive load of how things work so you can focus on creating.

Fight Against Lines of Code.

Any significantly-scoped project will already have a substantial amount of code behind it.

Application developers should not have to become experts in the underpinnings of the library just to use it.

Therefore, instrumenting tooling should aim to be *as minimal as possible*.

Consider this **hastily-compiled list of alternatives:**

- Provide an opinionated, *author-endorsed* wrapper API or library for the theoretical 90% of use-cases.
(*Cutting the boilerplate for React + Router + Redux alone would be a **huge** improvement for many.*)
- Publish use-case *presets* akin to Babel's (e.g. [es2015](#), [react](#), etc.) presets.
- Leverage folder & file-naming conventions for automatically discovering application-specific routes, actions, tests, and more.
(*This is already common-place for testing (e.g. [Mocha](#)) & serving public assets, but somehow every project magically requires a unicorn-configuration.*)
- Community-driven Rapid Application Development (RAD) tooling to significantly delay the need for explicit configuration until scope is solidified.

Until a large part of the ecosystem adopts terse APIs, conventions, and strives for significantly reducing implementation details for end-users, abstract tooling may be our only outlet.

RAD Tooling

Following the Twitter threads above, many rightfully concede that there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

However, if we start with the intent to just build a prototype, the underlying abstractions don't matter.

Related, [Vjeux](#) challenged the community to devise tooling for quick prototyping, even at the cost of customization.

In the meantime, I'm aware of a few options you can use **today** to jumpstart your next project:

- [budō](#)
- [nwb](#)
- [prot](#)

- [rackt-cli](#)
- [rwb](#)

The Javascript pendulum has swung from restrictive, monolithic frameworks to modular, boilerplate-hindered libraries.

Soon enough, I'm confident it will settle in the middle between rapid development and customization.

In fact, a friend of mine senses the same pattern emerging:

2016 will likely involve a serious, focused conjoining of projects, tools, and language features to merge the best and brightest packages/tools/boilerplates into more formalized projects. — Matt Keas in [State of the Union.js](#)

Here's to an exciting 2016! :)

Thanks to Matt Keas.



Jason Fried

Some advice from Jeff Bezos

A few years ago Jeff Bezos stopped by our office and spent about 90 minutes with us talking product strategy. Before he left, he spent about 45 minutes taking general Q&A from everyone at the office.

During one of his answers, he shared an enlightened observation about people who are “right a lot”.

He said people who were right a lot of the time were people who often changed their minds. He doesn't think consistency of thought is a particularly positive trait. It's perfectly healthy—encouraged, even—to have an idea tomorrow that contradicted your idea today.

He's observed that the smartest people are constantly revising their understanding, reconsidering a problem they thought they'd already solved. They're open to new points of view, new information, new ideas, contradictions, and challenges to their own way of thinking.

This doesn't mean you shouldn't have a well formed point of view, but it means you should consider your point of view as temporary.

What trait signified someone who was *wrong* a lot of the time? Someone obsessed with details that only support one point of view. If someone can't climb out of the details, and see the bigger picture from multiple angles, they're often wrong most of the time.

Great advice.



Rafael Zoehler

9 min read

Letters

When I'm Gone

Death is always a surprise. No one expects it. Not even terminal patients think they are going to die in a day or two. In a week, maybe. But only when this particular week is the next week.

We are never ready. It is never the right time. By the time it comes, you will not have done all the things that we wanted to. The end always comes as a surprise, and it's a tearful moment for widows and a bore for the children who don't really understand what a funeral is (thank God).

It was no different with my father. In fact, his death was even more unexpected. He was gone at age 27. The same age that claimed the lives of several famous musicians. He was young. Way too young. My father was not a musician and neither a famous person. Cancer doesn't pick its victims. He was gone when I was young, and I learned what a funeral was because of him. I was 8 and half, old enough to miss him for a lifetime. Had he died before, I wouldn't have memories. I would feel no pain. But I wouldn't have a father in my life. And I had a father.

I had a father who was both firm and fun. Someone who would tell a joke before grounding me. That way, I wouldn't feel so bad. Someone who kissed me on the forehead before I went to sleep. A habit which I passed on to my children. Someone who forced me to support the same football team he supported, and who explained things better than my mother. Do you know what I mean? A father like that is someone to be missed.

He never told me he was going to die. Even when he was lying on a hospital bed with tubes all over him, he didn't say a word. My father made plans for the next year even though he knew he wouldn't be around in the next month. Next year, we would go fishing, we would travel, we would visit places we've never been. Next year would be an amazing year. We lived the same dream.

I believe—actually I'm sure—he thought this should bring luck. He was a superstitious man. Thinking about the future was the way he found to keep hope alive. The bastard made me laugh until the very end. He knew about it. He didn't tell me. He didn't see me crying.

And suddenly, the next year was over before it even started.

My mother picked me up at school and we went to the hospital. The doctor told the news with all the sensitivity that doctors lose over the years. My mother cried. She did have a tiny bit of hope. As I said before, everyone does. I felt the blow. What does it mean? Wasn't it just a regular disease, the kind of disease doctors heal with a shot? I hated you, dad. I felt betrayed. I screamed with anger in the hospital, until I realized my father was not around to ground me. I cried.

Then, my father was once again a father to me. With a shoebox under her arm, a nurse came by to comfort me. The box was full of sealed envelopes, with sentences where the address should be. I couldn't understand exactly what was going on. The nurse then handed me a letter. The only letter that was out of the box.

"Your dad asked me to give you this letter. He spent the whole week writing these, and he wants you read it. Be strong." the nurse said, holding me.

The envelope read WHEN I'M GONE. I opened it.

Son,

If you're reading this, I'm dead. I'm sorry. I knew I was going to die.

I didn't want to tell you what was going to happen, I didn't want to see you crying. Well, it looks like I've made it. I think that a man who's about to die has the right to act a little bit selfish.

Well, as you can see, I still have a lot to teach you. After all, you don't know crap about anything. So I wrote these letters for you. You must not open them before the right moment, OK? This is our deal.

I love you. Take care of your mom. You're the man of the house now.

Love, dad.

PS: I didn't write letters to your mom. She's got my car.

He made me stop crying with his bad handwriting. Printing was not easy back then. His ugly writing, which I barely understood, made me feel calm. It made me smile. That's how my father did things. Like the joke before the grounding.

That box became the most important thing in the world for me. I told my mother not to open it. Those letters were mine and no one else could read them. I knew all the life moments written on the envelopes by heart. But it took a while for these moments to happen. And I forgot about it.

Seven years later, after we moved to a new place, I had no idea where I put the box. I couldn't remember it. And when we don't remember something, we usually don't care about it. If something goes lost in your memory, it doesn't mean you lost it. It simply doesn't exist anymore. It's like change in the pockets of your trousers.

And so it happened. My teenage years and my mother's new boyfriend triggered what my father had anticipated a long time before. My mother had several boyfriends, and I always understood it. She never married again. I don't know why, but I like to believe that my father had been the love of her life. This boyfriend, however, was worthless. I thought she was humiliating herself by dating him. He had no respect for her. She deserved something a lot better than a guy she met at a bar.

I still remember the slap she gave me after I pronounced the word "bar". I'll admit that I deserved it. I learned that over the years. At the time, when my skin was still burning from the slap, I remembered the box and the letters. I remembered a specific letter, which read "WHEN YOU HAVE THE WORST FIGHT EVER WITH YOUR MOM".

I ransacked my bedroom looking for it, which earned me another slap in the face. I found the box inside a suitcase lying on top of the wardrobe. The limbo. I looked through the letters, and realized that I had forgotten to open WHEN YOU HAVE YOUR FIRST KISS.

I hated myself for doing that, and I decided that would be the next letter I'd open. WHEN YOU LOSE YOUR VIRGINITY came right next in the pack, a letter I was hoping to open really soon. Eventually I found what I was looking for.

Now apologize to her.

I don't know why you're fighting and I don't know who's right. But I know your mother. So a humble apology is the best way to get over this. I'm talking about a down-on-your-knees apology.

She's your mother, kid. She loves you more than anything in this world. Do you know that she went through natural birth because someone told her that it would be the best for you?

Have you ever seen a woman giving birth? Do you need a bigger proof of love than that?

Apologize. She'll forgive you.

Love, dad.

My father was not a great writer, he was just a bank clerk. But his words had a great impact on me. They were words that carried more wisdom than all of my 15 years of age at the time. (That wasn't very hard to achieve, though).

I rushed to my mother's room and opened the door. I was crying when she turned her head to look me in the eyes. She was also crying. I don't remember what she yelled at me. Probably something like "What do you want?" What I do remember is that I walked towards her holding the letter my father wrote. I held her in my arms, while my hands crumpled the old paper. She hugged me, and we both stood in silence.

My father's letter made her laugh a few minutes later. We made peace and talked a little about him. She told me about some of his most eccentric habits, such as eating salami with strawberries. Somehow, I felt he was sitting right next to us.

Me, my mother and a piece of my father, a piece he left for us, on a piece of paper. It felt good.

It didn't take long before I read WHEN YOU LOSE YOUR VIRGINITY

Congratulations, son.

Don't worry, it gets better with time. It always sucks the first time. Mine happened with an ugly woman...who was also a prostitute.

My biggest fear is that you'd ask your mother what virginity is after reading what's on the letter. Or even worse, reading what I just wrote without knowing what jerking off is (you know what it is, right?). But that's none of my business.

Love, dad.

My father followed me through my entire life. He was with me, even though he was not near me. His words did what no one else could: they gave me strength to overcome countless challenging moments in my life. He would always find a way to put a smile on my face when things looked grim, or clear my mind during those angry moments.

WHEN YOU GET MARRIED made me feel very emotional. But not so much as WHEN YOU BECOME A FATHER.

Now you'll understand what real love is, son. You'll realize how much you love her, but real love is something you'll feel for this little thing over there. I don't know if it's a boy or a girl. I'm just a corpse, I'm not a fortune teller.

Have fun. It's a great thing. Time is gonna fly now, so make sure you'll be around. Never miss a moment, they never come back. Change diapers, bathe the baby, be a role model to this child. I think you have what it takes to be an amazing father, just like me.

The most painful letter I read in my entire life was also the shortest letter my father wrote. While he wrote those four words, I believe he suffered just as much as I did living through that moment.

It took a while, but eventually I had to open WHEN YOUR MOTHER IS GONE.

She is mine now.

A joke. A sad clown hiding his sadness with a smile on his makeup. It was the only letter that didn't make me smile, but I could see the reason.

I always kept the deal I had made with my father. I never read letters before their time. With the exception of WHEN YOU REALIZE YOU'RE GAY. Since I never thought I'd have to open this one, I decided to read it. It was one of the funniest letters, by the way.

What can I say? I'm glad I'm dead.

Now, all joking aside, being half-dead made me realize that we care too much about things that don't matter much. Do you think that changes anything, son?

Don't be silly. Be happy.

I would always wait for the next moment, the next letter. The next lesson my father would teach me. It's amazing what a 27 year old man can teach to an 85 year old senior like me.

Now that I am lying on a hospital bed, with tubes in my nose and my throat thanks to this damn cancer, I run my fingers on the faded paper of the only letter I didn't open. The sentence WHEN YOUR TIME COMES is barely visible on the envelope.

I don't want to open it. I'm scared. I don't want to believe that my time is near. It's a matter of hope, you know? No one believes they're gonna die.

I take a deep breath, opening the envelope.

Hello, son. I hope you're an old man now.

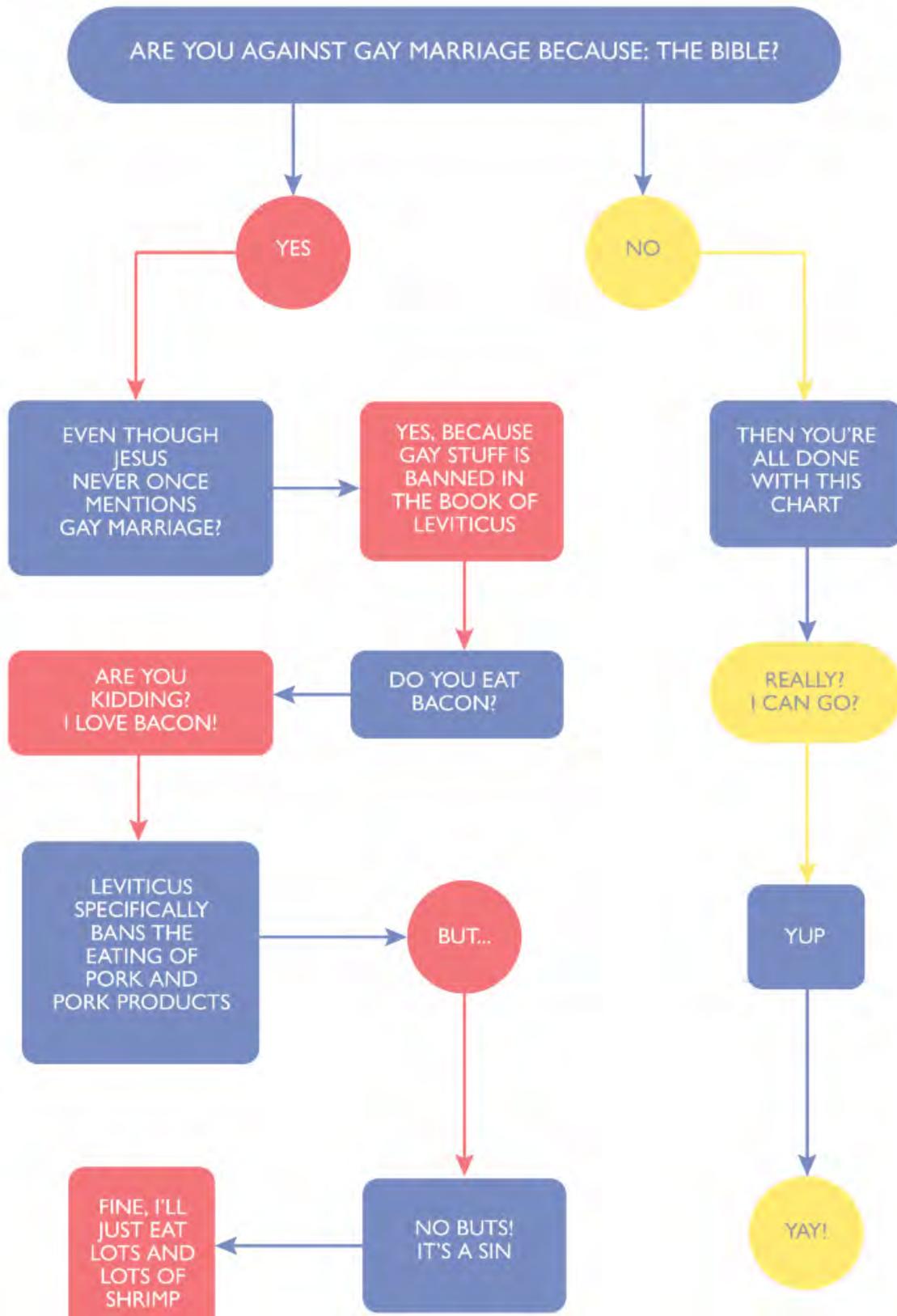
You know, this letter was the easiest to write, and the first I wrote. It was the letter that set me free from the pain of losing you. I think your mind becomes clearer when you're this close to the end. It's easier to talk about it.

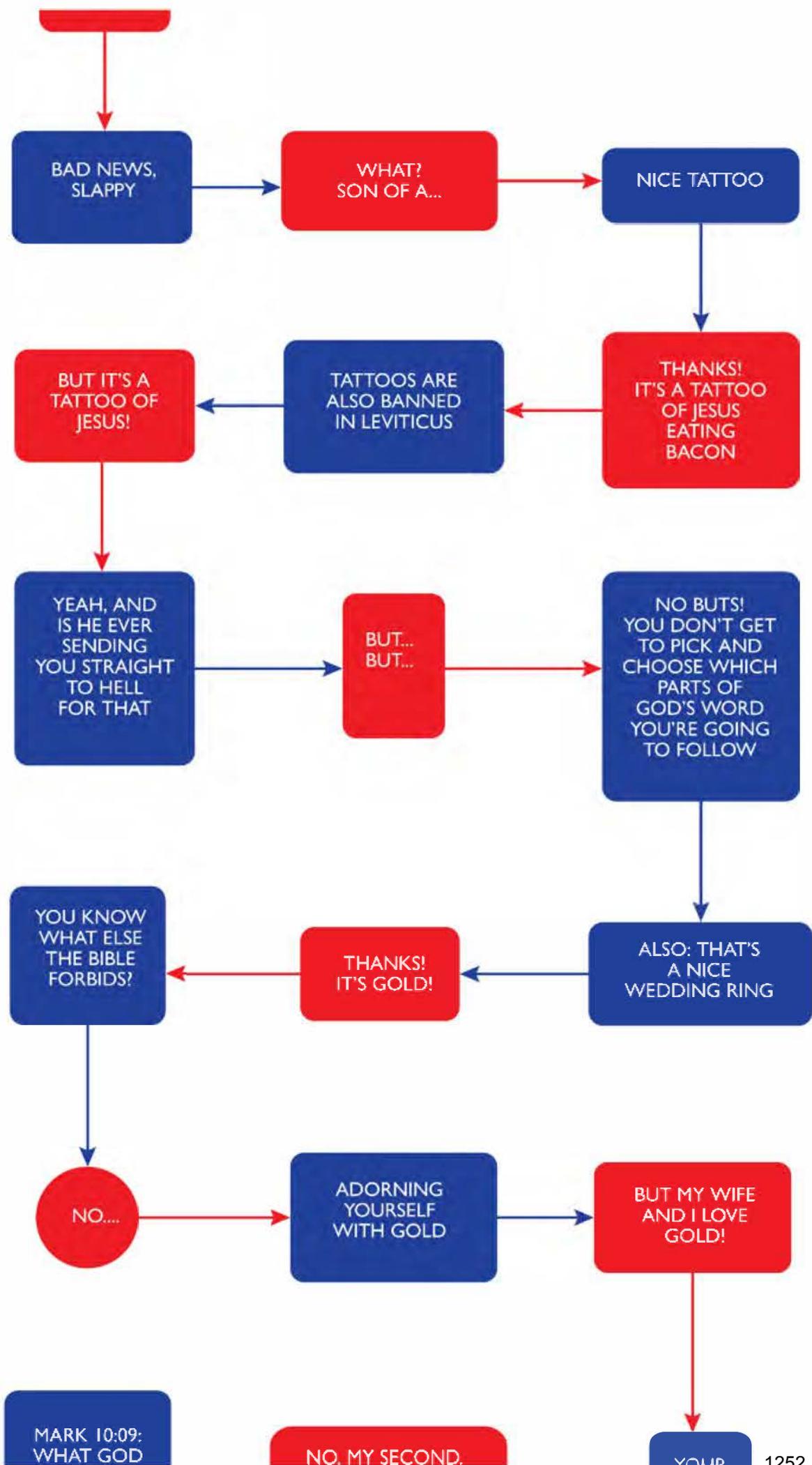
In my last days here I thought about the life I had. I had a brief life, but a very happy one. I was your father and the husband of your mother. What else could I ask for? It gave me peace of mind. Now you do the same.

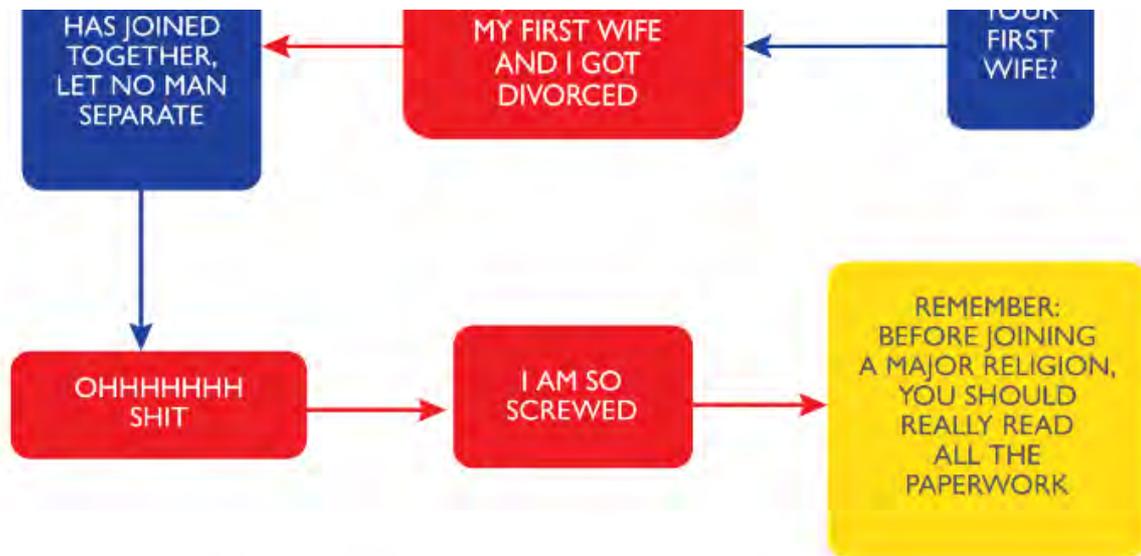
My advice for you: you don't have to be afraid

PS: I miss you

Translated from original by Rafael Zoehler.







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Gary Vaynerchuk

2 min read

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a black Canon camera lens. The lens is the central focus, with the Canon logo and some technical markings visible. The background is blurred, showing more of the hand and the camera body.

The Business Model Behind The #AskGaryVee Show

It shocks me that so many people still fundamentally misunderstand YouTube. They look at my show, and they ask me things like “wait why aren’t you monetizing? Where’s the ROI? WHATS YOUR BUSINESS MODEL!?!?”

exposure = leverage

The business model behind The #AskGaryVee Show is pretty simple. It's a 100% broad awareness game. I just want more exposure. Why? Because exposure is leverage, my friends.

I use The #AskGaryVee Show to show that I've got chops. The more people who know that I'm not just charisma, hyperbole, bullshit, and hype; the more people who know that I actually have depth the better off my brand is. It's incredibly important. Look, I know that my personality might initially cause some people to think I have zero depth, so anything that puts me in a position to show off what I know and educate those people to the contrary is going to be massively, massively valuable to me.

So what does that leverage get me? A LOT. Let's just take a look at the short term results:

1. I get paid more for public speaking
2. I sell more books
3. I get asked to do more TV spots
4. I end up on stuff like 40 Under 40 lists
5. I get more employees coming into VaynerMedia
6. I get more users coming to WineDeals
7. I get to scale my POV more efficiently to my existing employees
(shoutout to the VM lurkers!)
8. My mom gets to see me every day (she'll watch an episode twice if AJ is in it)

So as you can see there is ENORMOUS ROI in putting out content. Just because I'm not slapping pre-roll ads on The #AskGaryVee Show doesn't mean there is no business model. It just means that I do my business differently, and it's an even more dramatic example of the fact that everybody should be putting out content. Putting out content is ALWAYS a good idea.



DHH

7 min read

The day I became a millionaire

I grew up lower-middle class on the outskirts of Copenhagen. Anywhere outside of Scandinavia, the socioeconomic label would probably have been 'poor', but Danish safety nets and support systems did their best to suspend the facts and offer better.



Me in the middle in home-made clothing to go with home-made ninja weapons... oh yeah!

But don't worry: This isn't a rags-to-riches story. I loathe the I-did-it-all-by-myself heroic myth mongering. I got where I am thanks to government-sponsored maternity leave, child care, health care, education, and even cash assistance.

I grew up in housing provided by AAB, a union-founded affordable housing association. And my mother was a damn magician at making impossible ends meet without belaboring her tricks (like biking an extra 15 minutes to find the lowest price on milk).

I took two important lessons away from this upbringing. First, as long as your basic needs are met, the quality of your lived experience is only vaguely related to the trappings of material success. While it wasn't all roses and butter cookies, I had a great childhood. Second, I wouldn't learn to appreciate the truth of the first lesson until I saw the other side of the golden fence. More on that in a bit.



Commodore 64: One of the original crazy dreams

I remember playing the “What would you do if you won a million kroner?” game with my brother many times. We could spend eons making fantasy purchases.

Comparing and contrasting choices and possibilities. Could you imagine not having to save up a whole year to buy a Commodore 64? Or to fly away on a foreign-country vacation every year? Or to—let's go crazy here—buy a car for the family? (The sky setting those limits was barely higher than the Eiffel tower).

The underlying premise to these imaginary indulgences was how much better life would be if we were free from the constraints of our humble weekly allowance. Man, everything would just be so great if only I could...

As I grew older, this game was always at the back of my mind. There were always

more things I wanted to do than money to buy them. It wasn't that working towards certain material goals was really a chore or a struggle. My good fortune of being born in Denmark provided for the basics, and selling pirate software CDs through my Elite BBS contacts provided some modest splendor.



Electronic Confusion BBS ASCII from 1995

But there's always an appetite for more, and a belief that just a little extra was going to be the tipping point for eternal bliss. Dreaming of an Amiga 1200, making it happen, and then thinking that, oh, what I really needed was that Amiga 4000. Somehow the repeated treadmill never seemed to bare its underlying truth, no matter how many times I took it for a run.

. . .

Then in 2006, it suddenly happened from one day to the next. Jeff Bezos had taken an interest in Basecamp, and Jason and I each sold him a minority, no-control stake of our share of the company for a few million dollars each (Basecamp had been self-funded and profitable from the start, so didn't need any capital for the venture). I was a millionaire!

I remember the weeks leading up to that day when the numbers in my checking account suddenly swelled dramatically. They were anxious. I stood at the doorsteps of *The Dream*. A lifetime of expectations about how totally, utterly awesome it would be to be a millionaire. I'd be able to buy all the computers and cameras I ever wanted and any car I desired!

One of the other underlying pillars of this dream was the concept of *Never Having To Work Again* . Like somehow an eternity of leisure was going to provide the existential bliss I had been longing for all along. I thought about that a lot. I did all the math: Hey, if I stuff all the money in a prudent mix of stock and bonds, I should be able to live a comfortable, if not extravagant, lifestyle until the end of my days without lifting another finger.

The euphoria I felt when it was finally real lasted the rest of that day. The inner smile remained super wide for at least the rest of the week.

. . .

Then a mild crisis of faith ensued. Is this it? Why isn't the world any different now? **shake, shake ** Is this thing even working!?

Now don't get me wrong, there is an enduring and very real satisfaction and comfort in never having to look at the price of a meal in a restaurant again (even though you still do). It's just that like a good movie that's been hyped to the hills, it's almost impossible not to be let down when you finally see it. Expectations, not outcomes, govern the happiness of your perceived reality.

For the first few months, I barely touched any of the money. Sure, I bought a big screen TV and more DVD boxsets than I could hope to consume, but it wasn't like I couldn't have done that anyway. It wasn't until near the end of that year I finally drew down on the account of cliched purchases: A yellow Lamborghini! While all very nice, very wonderful, it didn't, as we say, really move the needle of deep satisfaction.



Common fallacy of wealth: “I’ve never seen an unhappy person driving a Lamborghini”

What kept moving the needle, though, was programming Ruby, building Basecamp, writing for Signal v Noise, taking pictures, and enjoying all the same avenues of learning and entertainment my already privileged lifestyle had afforded me for years in advance.

If anything, I began to appreciate even more intently that flow and tranquility were the true sources of happiness for me all along. It was like I had pulled back the curtain on that millionaire’s dream and found, to my surprise, that most of the things on the other side were things I already had. Equal parts shock and awe, but ultimately deeply reassuring. Chiefly because I couldn’t lose those things.

Barring any grand calamity, I could afford to fall off the puffy pink cloud of cash, and I'd land where I started. Back in that small 450 sq feet apartment in Copenhagen. My interests and curiosity intact. My passions as fit as ever. I traveled across a broad swath of the first world spectrum of wealth, and both ends were not only livable, but enjoyable. That was a revelation.

It's funny, though, because I remember rich people trying to tell me this before I was rich. Not necessarily in person, but through clever or modest-profound quotes and interviews. And I remember always thinking "yeah, that's easy for you to say now—you got yours". It's not lost on me that most people reading this will probably feel the same. It's just the natural, instinctual reaction.

Primarily because I think it's scary to think This Is It. This is what I got. Changing the numbers on my bank account or the size of TV or the make of the car in the garage or the zip code isn't going to complete me. I have to figure that shit out on my own.

. . .

Again, I get that even having the pretext to contemplate such disillusion is an incredible privilege, beyond sympathy or even empathy of many in this world. I never went hungry to bed. I never feared getting shot. I never worried whether the end of my future prospects would be as a store clerk working minimum wage. The Danish experience shielded me from all those concerns of basic safety and comfort. So I won't even pretend to know that struggle.

I can only speak to the experience I did have. The one I do share with millions of people who have the basics taken care of, but who still yearn for the treasure perceived to be behind the curtain. For those who might contemplate giving up all manners of integrity, dignity, or even humanity to pull it back.

We humans acclimate to our surroundings incredibly quickly. The buzz is not going to last. Until you realize the next rung of the ladder isn't where salvation hides, the siren song will keep playing.

The best things in life are free. The second best things are very, very expensive — Coco Chanel

While the quote above rings true, I'd add that the difference between the best things and the second best things is far, far greater than the difference between the second best things and the twentieth best things. It's not a linear scale.

Once you've taken care of the basics, there's very little in this world for which your life is worth deferring. You've likely already found or at least seen the very best things (whether you know it or not). Make them count.

. . .

My life's work is Basecamp. I've been at it for more than twelve years. See the latest fruits of that labor in our all-new version 3.



Ross Hsu

6 min read

Music



The World's Most Popular Genre is Cannibalizing Itself, and You Didn't Even Notice

Predicting the “EDM bubble” will soon pop?
You're too late, it already has.

The most followed artist on Spotify is David Guetta. I'd cite a Huffington Post article, but anyone can find the statistic. It's right there on Spotify's website and app. The 47-year-old DJ and producer clocks in at 6.9 million followers, beating modern R&B superstar Rihanna by about 1.5 million people. The implication, it would seem, is that electronic dance music, or EDM, reigns supreme.

But David Guetta, as genre-defining D.J. Deadmau5 pointed out in his 2012 Rolling Stone cover story,

“isn’t doing anything too technical. He has a laptop and a MIDI recorder, and he’s just playing his shit. People are, thank God, smartening up about who does what—but there’s still button-pushers getting paid half a million. And not to say I’m not a button-pusher. I’m just pushing a lot more buttons.”

Ironically, in this cover story that marked the peak of the EDM craze, Deadmau5 addressed many of the problems with a bubble in which he and Guetta are central players.

And EDM *is* a bubble, not just a fad. Countless financial and arts publications have noted as much. D.J. Pangburn of *Death and Taxes* magazine compared it to Holland’s infamous tulip bubble, saying “corporate interests, who three years ago couldn’t have given two shits about electronic music, are now tripping over themselves to cash in on the phenomenon.” Like the tulip bubble, Pangburn fears that the fervor could die suddenly thanks to the weight of speculation that businessmen have put on the genre. Whatever the initial interest in electronic music, EDM’s perceived popularity is now being fueled more by corporations than by fans. And like all bubbles, it will burst, but probably not in a way you’d recognize.

The Fat Cats Invented EDM

Modern EDM is made by altering and synthesizing recorded sounds and music. The term “DJ,” short for “disk jockey,” suggests someone spinning and scratching records at a turntable, but most modern DJ’s play packed stadiums behind laptops and soundboards. With a sound that evolved from the house, techno and electronica trends of the 1990s, modern EDM is a style that is focused on being as infectiously danceable and energetic as possible. Artists are always ratcheting up musical tension in anticipation for the “drop,” where the structure of a song changes and heavy distortion blasts through as the DJ “drops the bass,” in what has become EDM’s response to the traditional chorus.

The central corporate interest in EDM is in the way it differs from other genres in producing revenue. It's not the "E" or the "M" that moguls are interested in—it's the "D." The dancing element of electronic dance music is what makes the genre so lucrative to businessmen. EDM is meant to be played and danced to at parties, clubs and festivals. In a music industry where record sales have reached an all time low, tickets for concerts and festivals are the main source of revenue for almost all artists. EDM happens to be a genre that demands live attention.

Speculators and investors love this so much that they put it right in the name—*electronicdance* music.

"Two years back, no one would have called electronic dance music 'EDM.' Admittedly, the term has been around for awhile [sic], but who the fuck ever used it? ...It's a branding procedure,"

writes Pangburn. Ask any electronic fan, they'll tell you that EDM is an unfortunate catch-all term encompassing dubstep, house, trance, trap house, drum and bass, et cetera. But the genre wasn't an umbrella term before the millionaires got their fingers in the pie. The fat cats invented EDM.

The commodities these feline moguls trade in are promoters and event organizers, the groups behind music festivals and club residencies. Their genius lies in their setting up countless EDM festivals around the world, from Electric Daisy Carnival to Tomorrowland to Ultra Music Festival. Tickets to these festivals run in the hundreds of dollars, with hundreds of thousands of fans attending—165,000 people went to the Ultra Music Festival in Miami in 2012, according to The New York Times.

In the same Times article, Ben Sisario writes that "top DJ's can earn well over \$1 million for a festival appearance and \$10 million for a Las Vegas nightclub residency, talent agents say." According to Forbes, the top earner of this past year was DJ Calvin Harris, raking in a massive \$66 million, surpassing genuine kingpins like Jay-Z and Taylor Swift. He owes part of his success to his two-year deal with America's biggest nightclub, Hakkasan in Las Vegas.

This highlights another element unique to EDM—since the genre focuses on live performance and remixing and a constant output of content artists play most of

their shows in clubs, not concert halls, and it is perfectly acceptable to play in the same club for months at a time. A DJ can sign a single contract, go to the same club every night, play a mix of music only slightly altered by said DJ's whim, never worry about making it to the next venue or paying for food or gas, and make millions of dollars doing so.

In short, EDM makes a ridiculous amount of money, and no other genre can compete.

Too Close to the Sun

Commentators like Sisario and Pangburn are convinced that the massive monetary explosion will be the death of EDM, that people will stop buying tickets for massive spectacles that will only get pricier, and that investors will be left scrambling. Amy Thompson, manager of the EDM group Swedish House Mafia, said:

“What you don’t want is some big fucking massive city sale and everyone’s fucking cheering, and then in three years time you’re declared bankrupt and you’re a stigma for 20 years when you’ve just finally been accepted and legitamised [sic].”

Thompson's last six words strike me more than any of the dollar signs or massive figures. They remind me of how quickly I've stopped hearing about the newest brostep or witch house or the latest mashup or remix. My Facebook and Twitter feeds haven't touted a new single from Tiësto or Deadmau5 for months, maybe years. Her words remind me of disco.

People like to say disco died on July 12, 1979, when rock fans gathered by the thousands in Chicago to burn and explode countless disco records between games at a White Sox double header. Nothing so dramatic has happened with EDM, but the drop in popular interest is undeniable.

Breakout artists of the past few years like Disclosure, CHVRCHES, James Blake and Lorde all playfully use and depend on synthesizers to define their sounds, but can make no claim to be a part of EDM. They aren't purely electronic, nor are they purely for dancing. Fewer and fewer purely electronic hits are emerging each

year. “Where Are U Now” and “Hey Mama,” by Skrillex & Diplo and David Guetta, respectively, are the only two electronic songs currently in the Billboard Top 10. They don’t sound like towering electronic bangers. Both lean heavily on the vocals of standard pop stars Justin Bieber and Nicki Minaj. “Hey Mama” is so dominated by Minaj’s swaggering verses that one wonders why David Guetta receives any mention at all.

And now we’ve returned to David Guetta, the paramount pasty whitehead on the buttock of overhyped and overpaid EDM artists. Critics and artists alike have bemoaned Guetta’s lack of substance as a musician and a performer. The man is more of a great producer than anything. Guetta has no defining style, no album of paramount cultural significance. There is no aesthetic you can define and point to and say, “that’s David Guetta’s sound.”

In many ways, EDM might be the first successful bubble, the bubble that never pops. Like country and metal before it, EDM is being laid to the wayside by popular opinion only to remain popular enough to fill stadiums and canyons at countless festivals around the world.

But in plenty of other, more important ways, EDM’s bubble has long since popped. In a span of less than five years, the genre was invented, coined, shoehorned, suckled until its teats were dry and cracking, and then cast out. By commodifying an entire subculture, the live music business has turned EDM into a punchline; Skrillex t-shirts aren’t any cooler than that “Master of Puppets” shirt your friend Cody used to wear twice a week in middle school.

It isn’t 2012 anymore, and neither Deadmau5 nor his colleagues will be on the cover of *Rolling Stone* any time soon. Pop culture has moved on. Maybe Spotify numbers will, too, but I’m not holding my breath.

NERVO Rallies Against the Sync Button

With their new album in stores this month, the sibling DJ duo say “no” to automated mixing

medium.com



Sarah Jameel

7 min read

Peace

A love letter to Beirut, Paris and beyond from Sri Lanka



Dear fellow human,

I know it's 2015 and we don't write love letters anymore, but this one is a little different—it's for the world. It's not coming to you on a pigeon or via a postman, but directly to your computer or phone screen. And if you agree with Dumbledore when he said,

"Happiness can be found, even in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light."

Then read along.

. . .

We don't choose which part of the world we are born into. It's not a decision we get to make until we are years out of utero. And sometimes this decision may be already made for us; if you end up becoming a refugee and have to take an unsafe boat and be in the mercy of the hands of smugglers, because

"no one leaves home, unless home is the mouth of a shark, you only run from the border, when you see the whole city running as well. You have to understand, that no one puts their children on a boat, unless the water is safer than the land."

But whatever the reason may be, humans like you and I are strong, we are courageous and we wait it out until enough is enough.

They (neuroscience research) say that humans are the only creatures who are able to empathize with other fellow humans because of the cognitive functions bestowed in our grey matter. We have evolved, or being made this way—which ever truth you believe in, to be able to feel the pain of another human's struggle, to be able to rejoice in joy of another human's triumph, and this is to me is truly what makes us human even when we are miles away from them and just watching events unfold through a TV screen or a twitter feed. Today was an excellent example of this cognitive phenomena. A massacre in Paris, a car bomb in Beirut, an earthquake in Japan, and countless other attacks where we humans have given into aggression (which is controlled by a very primitive part of the brain, and not one where higher cognitive functions such as analysis or thought processing and

social responsibility take place) makes me wonder if we are turning the evolutionary clock backwards and becoming less human. But the good news is that the neuroscience is in our favour, we can be trained to be more peaceful, to be more compassionate, and to be kind. And this is what we need to prime on.

So let me tell you a story of this science in action. I was born in Sri Lanka, a country that has a written history dating back 2500 years. A country that has embraced the philosophy of Buddhism for millennia. It was known by Marco Polo centuries ago as *“undoubtedly one of the finest islands of its size in the world”* and by Sir Arthur C. Clarke who said that *“The island of Ceylon (former name) is a small universe. It contains as many variations of culture, scenery, and climate as some countries a dozen its size.”* So what could possibly go wrong on this paradise island, right? But after centuries of colonization by the Portuguese, Dutch and then the British (who undoubtedly added vibrance to the mosaic of culture and heritage we have in Sri Lanka today), also came the downside of colonialism and an era of *“divide and conquer”*. This political culture alongside numerous bad and questionable policy decisions on part of the existing leadership at the time and the state of civil dismal, led to a 30 year old civil war, which only ended when I turned 18.

So I was part of a generation that was born and raised during a war, and although I may not have lived on the frontline, the effects of this mass atrocity of three decades will forever be part of my childhood. Living in the cosmopolitan capital city of Colombo didn't mean I was safe, so I know what it is like to go to school every day and not know if I would make it back home safe, or if my parents would get back in one piece from work. The common occurrence of suicide bombs (especially since those responsible invented the suicide vest itself) in urban areas made me grow up to have what I call a *“bomb sound reflex”*, which is why even today if I hear a loud bomb-like sound, my first instinct makes me question if it was a bomb.

The first time I witnessed the catastrophic effect of this type of bloodshed was when I was five and in kindergarten. My nanny and driver picked me up from a scene of a horror movie; what looked like to me at that time the largest traffic jam of cars and people filled in red blood stains on their clothes that I had seen. That day, my headmistress lost her husband in this bomb that blew up the Central Bank and the World Trade Centre in my capital city. So humans from America, I know what 9/11 must have been like for you; we had our World Trade Centre also torn apart.

Many years and explosions later, when I was Prefect in senior school (the student leadership that in-charge of the discipline of the school, much like in Harry Potter), I had to deal with, what is to date was the most challenging leadership role I have had to ever encounter. As the country was in a very volatile position of ending the civil war through military means, so was the use of innocent civilians as human shields in the war zone and those out of the war zone as collateral damage. And therefore being given training on how to act during a bomb or explosion was something we were taught even as Prefects in school, and checking the bags of students as they entered school every morning for anything suspicious became a routine procedure. But much like fire alarms and drills, you always wish you never had to use what you learned on how to deal with it because you didn't want it to ever happen. But one day it did, there was a loud explosion, a suicide attack targeting a high ranking official, and myself together with my fellow Prefects had to follow what we were taught, and more importantly keep my classmates calm and safe until the chaos ceased.

So I may not have been in Paris with you or in Beirut or in Baghdad or wherever else your dignity was shattered through fear, and you may not have had the training I was given on how to deal with such a situation, but if you came out of this experience stronger than you were before, I salute you. There comes a day when these type of conflicts see their natural demise or an intervention that does the same job, and until then you need to be hopeful but never hateful.

Sri Lanka is and will always be the beautiful island I grew up in, regardless of which ever part of the world I decide to ever reside in the future. And even when time and again, we occasionally have to deal the distress of people driving wedges among communities; may it be through a political agenda or otherwise, I will always voice my opinion on how we need to stick together as that stunning mosaic—as serendipity.

Because our differences make us beautiful and our similarities make us one, and both in conjunction is an unstoppable formula for success in every facet of life and development. So if you're a peacemaker, never give up on that role because the world needs more of you.

So myself, together with millions of others around the world who believe in peace over conflict, love over hate, and kindness above all are with you every step of the way as you put your life back together. Let me just tell you that it is in our biology to grow stronger and more resilient after every adversity, so as it is for a bone to grow back to be much stronger after a fracture. If you don't trust me on that, just google how bone remodelling works, and you will get your answer.

So today and tomorrow and until our days are numbered as inhabitants of this planet we call home; a planet we are renting from nature and must thus not destroy, I hope you remember two songs, "We Are The World" (not just **je suis paris** but **nous sommes le monde**) and "We Are Family". Because every life matters, whether it is reported in the media or not, or whether Facebook decides to have a "Marked Safe" feature for a specific catastrophe or not. Because if you cut any of us open, you will see the same red blood flowing through our veins—it's biology. And don't let society or anyone else tell you otherwise. I hope the results of the recent events don't shut your doors to those who may not even have what you have, a home. I hope it only strengthens you to open your doors wider to create an army of kindness. Like the way countless Sri Lankans opened their doors to strangers and friends who were targeted because of race, ethnicity, political beliefs or as a result of any other human-made social construct.

Choose love. In war, choose love. In despair, choose love. When the good and bad becomes relative concepts and appear to be grey, choose love. When you don't know whom to blame about the magnitude of atrocities around you, choose love.

This is my love letter to you, and I hope it will open your heart to transcend borders and reinvigorate what humanity is all about.

Ayubowan. Wannakkam. Assalamu alaikum . These are all just different ways we say, may peace be with you and good vibes all the way.

From where there's sunshine 365 days (aka Sri Lanka),

Love only,

SJ



Paul Malan

9 min read

Pornography

The Naked People In Your iPod

A glimpse into the conversation with my son about pornography.

via [Educate Empower Kids](#)

. . .

The first time you saw them, by accident, you were too young to feel embarrassed.

I answered every question you asked, and hoped you couldn't tell I was embarrassed. We've both grown up some and talked a lot about them since, hoping to make the naked people in your iPod just another thing in your world, like jealousy in school, blood in video games, and sugar in soda.

But you're older now, more likely to find them on purpose, and less likely to talk to me about them when you do. So while I still have your attention, before you're too old to hug me in front of your friends, let's talk some more about pornography.

But first, let's talk about bacon.

Mmmm... Bacon



Every day, you feel hungry. It isn't something you choose, it's just part of being alive. It's physiology.

When you feel hungry, you get to choose what to do about it. You could skip a meal, fry up some bacon, or steal a Snickers bar from the corner

store. That is morality.

Since you're being raised Mormon, you probably wouldn't order coffee with your breakfast. (We aren't alone: If we were Jewish, you might never taste a cheeseburger.) Every culture has shared values that reinforce its identity. As a shortcut, let's call this religion.

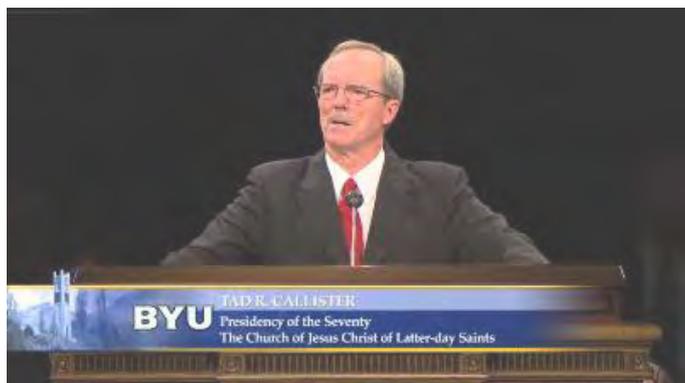
Mmmm... Porn

Just like your appetite reacts to the smell of cooking bacon, evolution wired clever primates, like you and me, to react to sexual stories, pictures, and videos. It's that simple. That's pretty much the only reason porn is even a thing.

But for a lot of people, porn isn't just a thing—it's a Very Scary Thing. In our culture, a lot of those people spend their Sunday afternoons in the same buildings we do.

same building we do. Don't make too much of this—I think religions do some things really well. But conservative religions, like ours, suck at porn.

“Pornography is any picture or narrative that feeds the carnal man within.” — Elder Tad Callister



Elder Callister just told you, and your friends, and your youth group leaders, that anything that turns you on is pornographic. Porn is a problem, and being aroused is porn. His message? *Arousal is a problem.*

Like too many people, he's confusing morality and physiology. Would it make sense to apply the same logic to your appetite? *Hunger is a problem.* You won't have a healthy relationship with food if you believe that.

Getting turned on is not a problem. Getting turned on is physiology. What we choose to do about being turned on is morality. Whether our choices align with our cultural values is religion. If you can keep these three ideas straight, pornography (and sexuality in general) becomes a lot less complicated.

What Pornography Is

I don't love the way our conservative culture talks about porn, but I am certainly not advocating for it. There are plenty of practical reasons you might choose to avoid porn. The porn industry tends to exploit its performers. It depicts women, in particular, as mere objects for sexual gratification. It distorts reality and wastes time.

But when they apply the label "pornography" to anything that excites any person, we give up the ability to talk about it in a meaningful way. If your youth group leader thinks bare shoulders and bikinis at the beach are pornographic, you're going to get confused. When I talk to you about pornography, I mean pictures and videos of sex. I mean the business of exploiting our hardwired response to sexuality—producing pictures and videos that reduce sexual relationships to a series of camera-friendly stunts.

Mark Wahlberg Fails Driver's Education

In *The Italian Job*, Mark Wahlberg and his friends race Mini Coopers across a crowded city, darting in and out of traffic, down concrete steps into subway tunnels, even jumping their cars out of a tunnel into the Los Angeles River.



Justanothersuperrealisticcommute.

You're not old enough to drive, but you've been riding in cars since you were two days old, so you understand the fantasy of a great car chase movie. It's fun to imagine, but you know it isn't what driving in a crowded city is really like.

You don't have that kind of context when you watch pornography. You don't have any way of understanding if what you're watching is what healthy sexual relationships are really like or if it's the sexual equivalent of a Mini Cooper racing through a subway station. Ideally, our culture would help you gain that perspective, but porn makes us so uncomfortable we end up making it harder, not easier, for you to understand.

"Hey, Mom," you might say. "I watched a movie last night. Would it really work to drive a car in the subway?"

“Hey, Mom,” you might say. “I watched a movie last night. Would it really work to drive a car in the subway?”

That’s an easy question to ask. How about this one?

“Hey, Mom, I watched some porn last night. Does sex really end like that?”

Not such an easy question. How come?

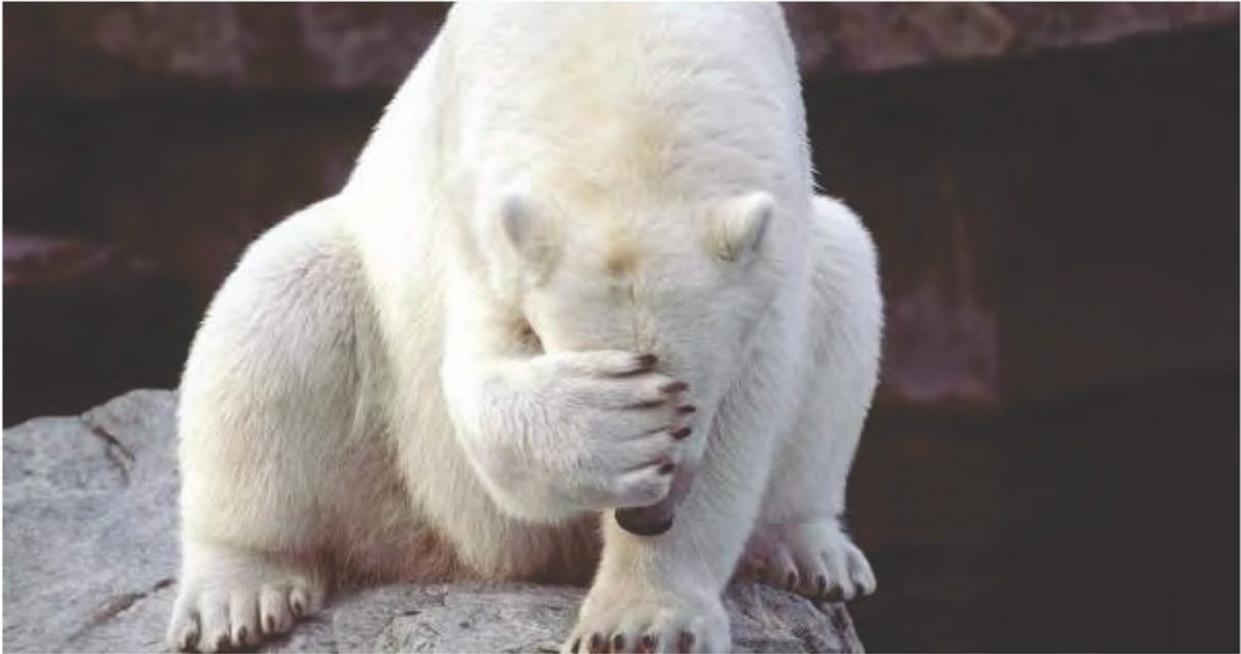
Pornography Is Not the Enemy

Sexuality makes everyone anxious—there’s a lot of natural curiosity, physical motivation, and cultural shame. We don’t usually ask our parents questions about porn because we’re ashamed of what we know and confused by what we don’t.

Too often, people who condemn pornography rely on fear to motivate us. They call pornography “the new drug” and frame it as if it were more damaging than alcoholism and more addictive than heroin. They mean well, but their message (“Looking at porn dooms you to a life of crippling addiction and miserable loneliness!”) is unproductive. It gives pornography more power than it needs to have.

They have made pornography the enemy—the representation of everything “wrong” about human sexuality. If you’ve seen it, you’re damaged goods. If you didn’t hate seeing it, you’re probably an addict already. You should feel terrible.

But pornography is not the enemy. Shame is the enemy. Shame is fear, personalized: *If they knew this about me, they would reject me* . Fear feeds shame, and shame feeds pornography.



Polar bear is ashamed.

Shame On Us

Don't confuse shame and guilt. Guilt is healthy—it says “Something I did is not ok.” Shame is destructive—it says “*I* am not ok.”

When things don't feel ok inside, we try to replace the bad feeling with something else. Some psychologists call this self-soothing, and we all do it. Some people run five miles. Some people eat a pint of ice cream or watch Netflix for hours. Some people drink wine, or shop, or stare at their cell phone, or sleep, or take drugs, or read, or play video games. And some people look at porn.

Most of the time, a five-mile run is just a five-mile run and ice cream is just ice cream. But when we're trying to escape inner turmoil, the motivation a person feels to escape into pornography is not much different from the motivation her friend feels to escape into a pint of ice cream, which isn't much different from his neighbor's motivation to escape into a 5-mile run.



We humans have a remarkably counterproductive habit of trying to numb shame by going back to the thing that triggered our shame. If I'm feeling bad about myself for looking at porn, I'm more likely to bury the feeling by looking for more porn. It can create an unhealthy cycle that acts like addiction.

The Shortcut to Wisdom

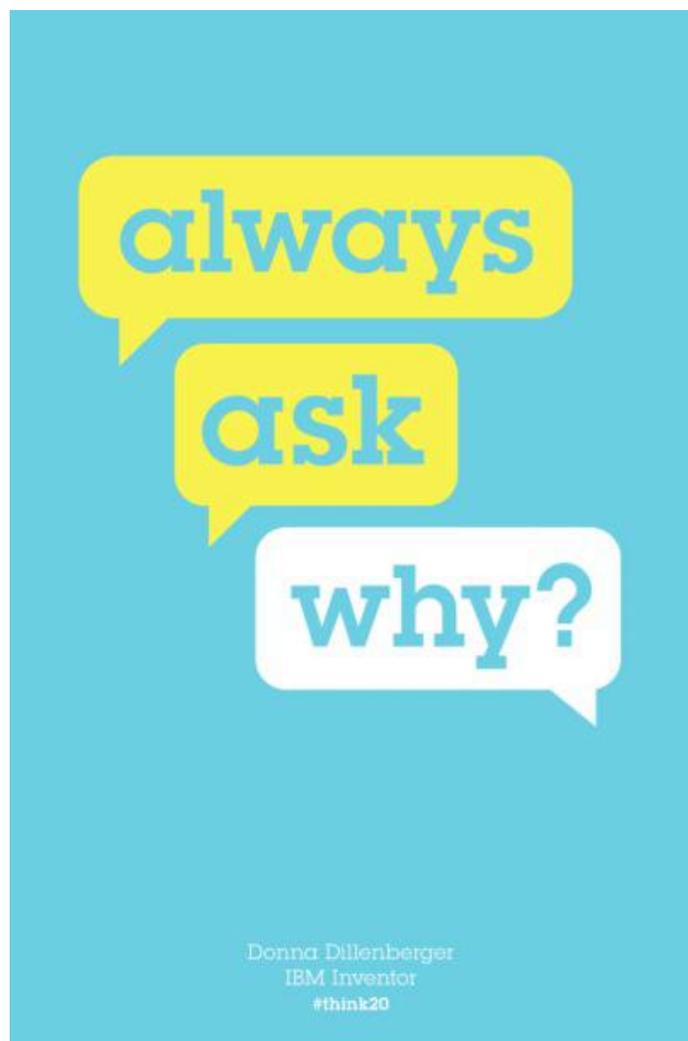
There is nothing wrong with self soothing—in fact, it's an important part of mental health. So how can we learn to do it well? My suggestion is going to seem familiar, because it starts with the same two words I tell you all the time: *Ask why*.

Why are you reaching for that ice cream? Why are you staring at your phone instead of interacting with the real world? Why are you about to go incognito in your web browser?

If you have the courage to follow your answers to their root, they can help you understand what you're really after. Sometimes I eat ice cream because I like ice cream, and sometimes I eat ice cream because I feel like I was a lousy parent that day.

That doesn't have to mean I shouldn't eat ice cream. It isn't a matter of "should" or "shouldn't"—it's simply a matter of awareness. It isn't going to kill me to eat a pint of ice cream after a hard day, but it isn't going to teach me anything, either, unless I'm aware of why I'm eating it.

Once I'm aware, I get to make a choice. I can choose to respond to life on purpose instead of reacting to life out of habit.



Try it. Not as a way of talking yourself out of anything—just as a way of practicing awareness. Next time you catch yourself killing time on your phone, or looking for porn, or chasing some other escape that feels heavy, ask why.

Sometimes, you'll realize you're looking for porn because you're hiding from a negative emotion like shame or embarrassment or frustration. When you realize that, ask yourself if porn is going to make it better or worse.

Other times, you're going to realize you're just looking for porn because you're horny.

(Sorry. My dad used the word "honey"

one time and I nearly died from embarrassment.) There's nothing too complicated about that motivation, but it does still present a moral choice.

If you found out your favorite bakery was dumping harmful chemicals into a community park, what would you do? The more donuts they sell, the more damage they do to your community. Would you still buy their donuts? (What if you waited until the end of the day when they give away donuts that didn't sell? Would it feel like you weren't part of the problem because no money changed hands?)

It's a sloppy comparison, I know, but there are real downsides to pornography as a business. Whether we pay for it or not, watching porn creates demand in the market and perpetuates some pretty damaging dynamics. While you're deciding

if porn aligns with your moral compass, do some research about the way it impacts the people who work in the business.



coryosterberg

Just Another Thing In Your World

Our conservative culture tries to make it scarier than it needs to be, but ultimately porn is just another thing in your world. I know you're going to bump into right way to blend your physiology, morality, and religion. It's something you get to decide for yourself. Sometimes you'll handle it well, and sometimes you'll act in ways that don't line up with who you are. When that happens, learn from the guilt, but don't buy in to the shame.

You are a clever primate, and you are wired to get turned on by porn. That's simple physiology. But that doesn't mean porn makes your world a better place, and it doesn't mean porn will help you feel connected to others. And that's really what a meaningful life is about.

...

If you enjoyed reading this, follow me here on Medium, where I share new content every month. You can also find me on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.



Ryan Hoover

6 min read

Let's continue to build Product Hunt, together



Last week was difficult.

A Medium article was published, criticizing [Product Hunt](#). The suggestion of nefarious activity and personal attacks that followed the article, hurt me and everyone on the team. Especially when the claims are counter to our culture and everything Product Hunt stands for. While difficult to hear, the feedback from the post will help us make Product Hunt even better.

Product Hunt has always been about creating a community where people can share what they've made, get constructive feedback, and inspire one another.

[Ben's response](#) to a disappointed community member is a great example of the authenticity and encouragement that comes from the Product Hunt community.



Pete — Front-end engineer

I was working on the same exact app... kinda depressed right now. :(

▲ 13 ← REPLY



Ben Rubin — Co-founder of Air.

@httpete PETE! What makes you think you are not capable of doing something better/different? It would be a very sad world if people just give up on ideas. I can tell you that live video space is still broken in terms of distribution mechanism, and that obviously Meerkat is not perfect. there's a very good chance that anyone in the world would come up with a better product / perspective. Please, go back to code. that's how we all build better things together, even when we work separately. -- we learn from eachother.

▲ 173 ← REPLY

Interactions like these make me smile. .

What started as a newsletter curated by a few dozen people, Product Hunt is now a global community of people that love to geek out about new products. It's a place to discover new things made from people around the world, from a Dutch 17-year-old developer to a small startup in St. Louis.

It's a place to chat directly with the makers—the designer, engineer, marketer, author, founder, etc.—and a community of excited people. This happens online and IRL. In the past year, the Product Hunt community has self-organized meetups across the globe in over 60 cities. We love seeing the photos and videos on Twitter from afar.

We believe products and makers should earn the attention they deserve by making something awesome, whether they're a celebrated artist or an independent app creator. Makers of all types need a place to discuss, learn, and inspire each other to continue to build things (and they do).

It's my responsibility to make this clear and clarify how Product Hunt works.

How Product Hunt Has Evolved

Every great product evolves.

Late 2013

After the email newsletter (the “MVP”) gained traction, I reached out to my buddy Nathan and we launched producthunt.co (yes, we didn't have the .com yet). It looked like this:

Get the best new product discoveries in your inbox daily! [Join the Hunt](#)

 WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 1ST

-   **Give It 100**  Learn something for 100 days · [14 comments](#)
-   **Mapbox** Design and publish beautiful maps · [6 comments](#)
-   **Cycloramic** New way to take panoramic photos and videos, HANDSFREE! · [3 comments](#)
-   **Copenhagen Wheel** Regenerative Energy for Cyclists · [3 comments](#)
-   **Kickit** Quit Smoking, Incentivized · [1 comment](#)
-   **POP** iPhone prototyping made easy. · [1 comment](#)
-   **TheQ camera** World's first social camera · [2 comments](#)
-   **Leo the Maker Prince** A Kids' Book Where Every Character Can Be 3-D Printed · [2 comments](#)
-   **Wishplz** Bookmark any product and get alerts when the price drops. · [4 comments](#)

So nostalgic :)

Although anyone that signed up could upvote, we made the decision to limit who could post to the site, inviting our initial newsletter contributors to share cool, new products. We knew that if it was open to anyone that signed up, it might be filled with spam, self-promoters, or just too many posts.

The first group of people who were given access to post were from 7 different countries. At the time, the bulk of these few dozen people were from the US, but we already had early adopters from around the world—Argentina, the UK, Japan and South Africa.

Early 2014

As new things were posted to the site, makers of those products noticed and wanted to join the conversation. So, we invited them to comment and share new products with the community.

We continued to give more people access to contribute, so I reached out to some of our most engaged community members, asking if they knew anyone that might be interested. It was very unscalable but an effective way to grow the community (fun fact: I sent over 20,000 emails and tweets in the first quarter of 2014).

Mid 2014

We continued to extend invites to makers of products featured on the site and those recommended by other active community members, but we quickly encountered a problem.

There were too many submissions. As the one and only community manager at this point in time, I remember waking up every morning at 5:30 am, nervous to discover typos, bad links, or duplicate posts, on the homepage.

With more submissions coming in, many complained that the homepage was getting too busy. So, we stopped giving people the ability to post products directly to the homepage and introduced an invite system to empower the community to recommend new curators.

Early 2015

As Product Hunt grew in popularity, we wanted to give more people an opportunity to submit products. So, we introduced an Upcoming feed to manage the “firehose” of submissions without overpopulating the homepage. Quickly, we started to see more submissions, but too few people were upvoting products from this feed to promote products to the homepage in an algorithmic and automated way. So, we began moving products to the homepage that we thought the community might like. Many of those submissions remained at the bottom of the feed. Many rose to the top.

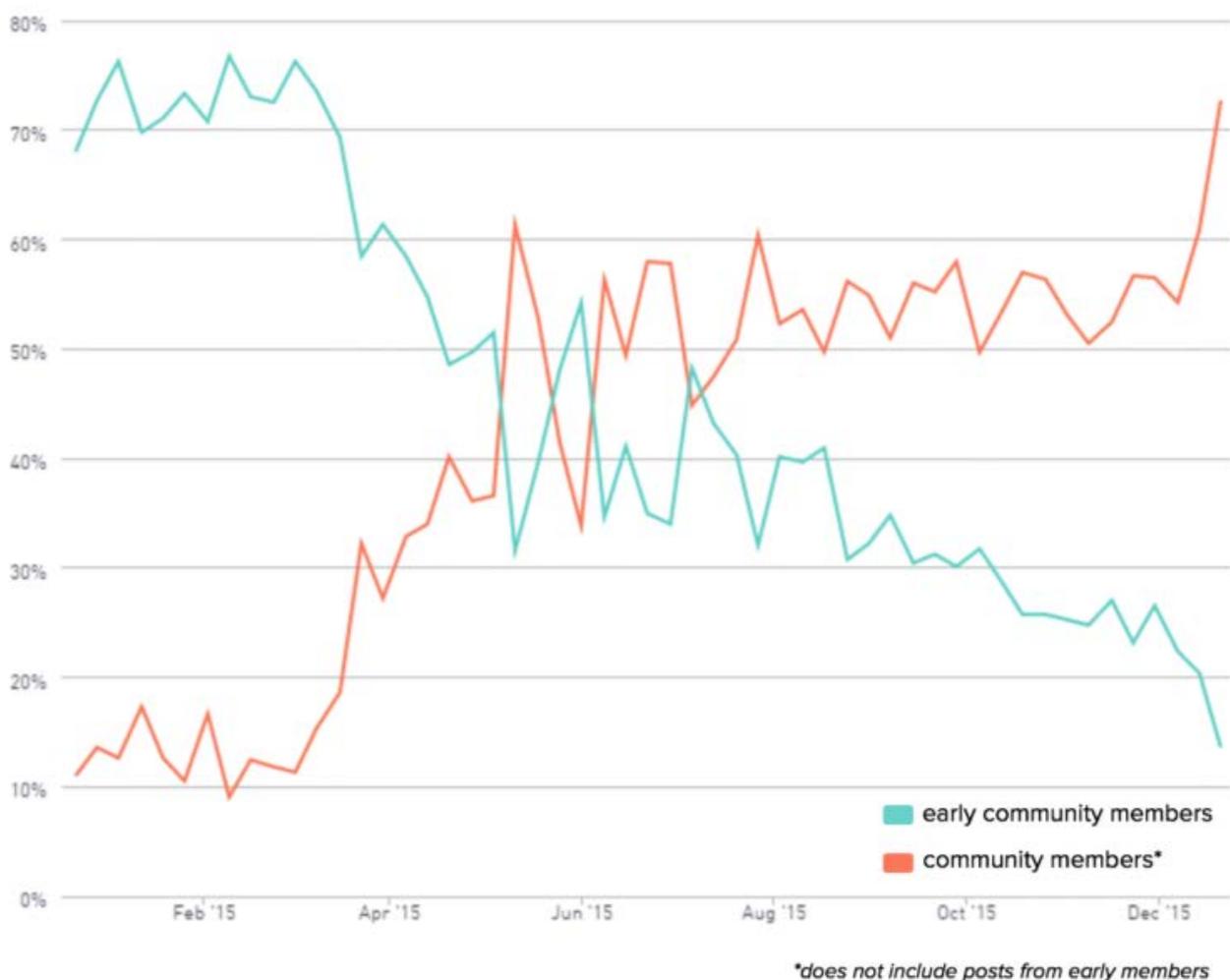
Today

Unless you're one of the early members of the community (those that helped get Product Hunt off the ground and continue to be instrumental in curating great products), all posts submitted to Tech first start in Upcoming. Once the product has received a significant number of credible upvotes (those that aren't manipulated by voting rings) from the community, will be promoted to the homepage within 48 hours. Anyone that signs up can upvote and we encourage everyone to explore the Upcoming feed to help surface great products onto the homepage.

Note that if a product posted in Upcoming never makes it to the homepage and has undergone significant updates, makers can request to have it resubmitted by emailing us at [\[hello@producthunt.com\]](mailto:hello@producthunt.com) with a link to the post and details of what has changed since it was originally submitted. We understand products evolve and deserve another look.

The Data

As the community's opened up to more people, contributions have shifted from a small group of early members to broader, global community in over 100 countries and territories. Today, only 15% of posts on the homepage come from early community members, down from 75% earlier this year, as shown here:



Percentage of posts featured on the homepage by early community members

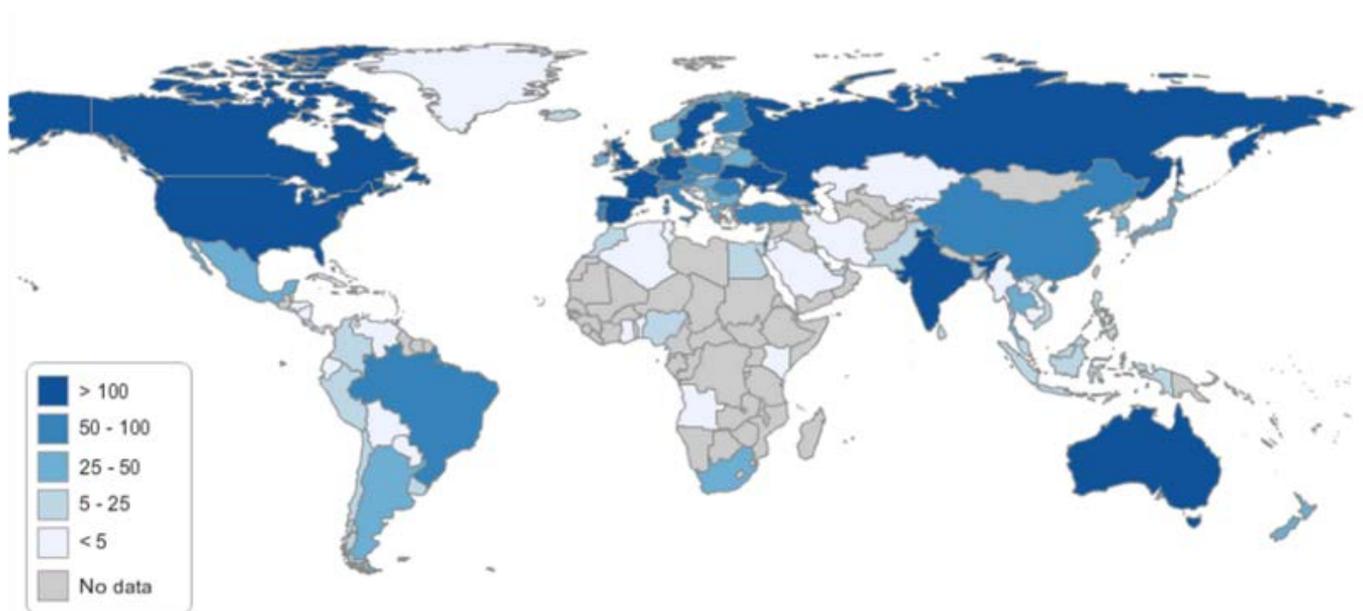
This change is intentional in an effort to diversify the community as it continues to grow.

Ultimately upvotes determine what reaches the top of Product Hunt and everyone can upvote. Today, only 2% of total upvotes come from those early community members.

Over 50% of the people upvoting and 50% of the total upvotes come from people who live outside the U.S.—Canada, United Kingdom, Amsterdam, Japan, India, France, etc.

Everyone’s upvote is equal — my upvote counts the same as yours — and ultimately upvotes determine what rises to the top of Product Hunt.

It’s also interesting to see where these products come from. Here’s a map of makers that have had products on the homepage of Product Hunt, spanning across 115 countries:



Let’s make the whole world blue

Although not perfect, I’m incredibly proud of the impact Product Hunt has made on so many people and thankful to have a team and enthusiastic community working everyday to build a better Product Hunt.

What’s Next

Some people have expressed frustration in understanding how products surface on the homepage. I completely understand and it’s in our best interest to create a more open Product Hunt while maintaining high-quality curation.

It's a difficult challenge but 100% solvable. Every few months we introduce significant changes (some of which aren't publicly obvious) as the community grows and new ideas are suggested across the team and community.

So, here's what we're doing. We've updated our [FAQ](#) to clarify some things, including how products are promoted from Upcoming to the homepage, our stance on disclosing conflicts of interest, and details on how community invites work. If you think something is missing, please let us know at [\[hello@producthunt.com\]](mailto:hello@producthunt.com).

As the community grows, so will the product.



Nathan Creswell

4 min read

A Product Manager's Musings

A Product Manager is a strange occupation in Silicon Valley.

You're the mini CEO. But not really.

You're the jack of all trades but master of none.

You're the one with all the power and yet none at the very same time.

You're the one with all the responsibility and yet have none at the very same time.

And truthfully, all of these are true, and none of them are true.

Seriously, being a product manager sometimes feels like you're in some awful Zen koan riddle that you think you found the answer to, but really never do. Ever.

So I've been a SaaS product manager on the Enterprise side now for five years. And I thought it was a good time to reflect on what I've learnt (some stuff), what I didn't (a lot of stuff) and where I screwed up (many times). It's interesting that when I first started, I often saw ads for product management that said "must have five years experience", "must have ten years experience".

And at the five year mark, I think I finally understand why.

Don't worry if Engineering hates you. Everyone hates you. Get used to it.

I can't imagine a relationship more setup from the start to be naturally antagonistic. You have to tell Engineering what to do, but have no authority, and apparently have to convince them via some reality distortion field (well, Steve Jobs had it and wasn't he the best PM ever? And hey, wasn't he such a nice guy?).

Engineering automatically see you as the enemy.

Why? Because you make them do work. And sometimes it's not always on the stuff they would prefer to be working on.

If you have an Engineering background they see you as meddlesome and annoying.

If you don't, they see you as useless and incompetent.

If you give them too much work, they outright refuse to do it: "That's 1 user point over our velocity for this sprint, sorry you have to cut something." What?!?

If you don't give them enough, then **you** didn't have enough "vision" to motivate the team.

Which is when other PMs start poaching your resources, always fun.

And it's not just Engineering. Everyone's going to blame you for everything, most of it out of your direct control.

"Where's my feature request I asked for three years ago?"

"Why is the release late? YOU committed this date, didn't you?"

"Why am I finding this bug after your release? Do you not even QA?"

"The customer wants to speak to the product manager, they aren't happy with the product"

Everybody is going to hate you at one point or another. Customers, Engineers, Services. Other PMs. Everyone.

But that's okay, because if you're good, sometimes, just sometimes, you ship good product. And it makes those people that hate you, well some of them, like you a little bit more.

Never inherit another product manager's product

Because with it, you get all their design mistakes, all the things they deferred till later because it was too hard, all the issues that they never got around to fixing from the previous PM before them. Congratulations! These are your issues now.

I sometimes feel PMs must have some of the highest attrition rates in the industry. How can you not feel demotivated when being handed a lump of coal and told to turn it into a diamond?

It's very rare you ever get a chance to build something from the ground up that's yours. I myself only ever got that chance twice, in the last five years, and only once did it actually see light of day to get used by customers.

If you get the chance to build something new, take it. Because you will never feel a rush like something you got to build yourself and see it become successful.

Attend scrum calls and sit with your engineers

I don't know why some product managers feel it's okay not to attend scrum.

How else would you know what your guys are working on? How else would you know what might be blocking them and delaying your release? How else would your team start to trust you and maybe not even hate you when they see you're trying your best, just as they are.

Embedding yourself with the engineers is key. A 5 minute conversation is worth a 20 page email. I don't see how some companies think slide decks are an adequate replacement for conversations.

You're the everything

In the early days, you are the Sales Engineer, the CSM, the Support guy and anythingelsethatneedsdoing. In fact, probably the only two roles I never had were pure Engineering and pure Sales.

And honestly, in those days, you're just trying to get to the next customer, not trying to sit in some ivory tower and dream up product strategy.

Then there's the other end of the spectrum. Big company, lots of people to do everything where you do have the luxury to sit around and dream up product strategy.

But the problem is you're no longer on the front line. You're no longer on every sales call pushing product. And you can lose touch.

Never lose touch. A good PM welcomes every customer interaction he can get (yes, even the abusive ones). Because that's the only way to know what's going on. Who are you losing deals to? What do customers think of your product? Where do they need help? Are they even using it?

One of the most surprising things I found were the customers who paid, but then never used the product. Of course they churned, but they sure wasted a lot of money doing so.

So, I don't know that I've become any better a product manager over the past five years, but I sure know now a whole lot of things that would have made me a better PM than when I started.

And if I was to answer my Zen koan now, I'd say:

ship product and make happy customers.

That's all you have to do. Everything else falls into place after that.



Hugh McGuire

11 min read

Why can't we read anymore?

Or, can books save us from what digital does to our brains?

Last year, I read four books.

The reasons for that low number are, I guess, the same as your reasons for

reading fewer books than you think you should have read last year: I've been finding it harder and harder to concentrate on words, sentences, paragraphs. Let alone chapters. Chapters often have page after page of paragraphs. It just seems such an awful lot of words to concentrate on, on their own, without something else happening. And once you've finished one chapter, you have to get through another one. And usually a whole bunch more, before you can say *finished*, and get to the next. The next book. The next thing. The next possibility. Next next next.

I am an optimist

Still, I am an optimist. Most nights last year, I got into bed with a book—paper or e—and started. Reading. Read. Ing. One word after the next. A sentence. Two sentences.

Maybe three.

And then ... I needed just a *little* something else. Something to tide me over. Something to scratch that little itch at the back of my mind— just a quick look at email on my iPhone; to write, and erase, a response to a funny Tweet from William Gibson; to find, and follow, a link to a good, really good, article in the *New Yorker*, or, better, the *New York Review of Books* (which I might even read most of, if it is that good). Email again, just to be sure.

I'd read another sentence. That's four sentences.

Smokers who are the most optimistic about their ability to resist temptation are the most likely to relapse four months later, and overoptimistic dieters are the least likely to lose weight. (Kelly McGonigal: The Willpower Instinct)

It takes a long time to read a book at four sentences per day.

And it's exhausting. I was usually asleep halfway through sentence number five.

I've noticed this pattern of behaviour for a while now, but I think last year's completed book tally was as low as it has ever been. It was dispiriting, most deeply so because my professional life revolves around books: I started [LibriVox](#) (free public domain audiobooks), and [Pressbooks](#) (an online platform for making print and ebooks), and I co-edited a [book about the future of books](#).

I've dedicated my life one way or another to books, I *believe* in them, yet, I wasn't able to read them.

I'm not alone.

When the people at the New Yorker can't concentrate long enough to listen to a song all the way through, how are books to survive?

I heard an interview on the [New Yorker podcast recently](#), the host was interviewing writer and photographer, Teju Cole.

Host:

One of the challenges in culture now is to, say, listen to a song all the way through, we're all so distracted, are you still able to kind of give deep attention to things, are you able to sort of engage in culture that way?"

Teju Cole:

"Yes, very much so."

When I heard this, I felt like hugging the host. He couldn't even listen to a song all the way through, before getting distracted. Imagine what his bedside pile of books does to him.

I also felt like hugging Teju Cole. It's people like Mr. Cole who give us hope that someone will be left to teach our children how to read books.

Dancing to distraction

What was true of my problems reading books—the unavoidable siren call of the digital hit of new information—was true in the rest of my life as well.

My two-year old daughter, dance recital. Pink tutu. Cat ears on her head. Along with five other two-year-olds, in front of a crowd of 75 parents and grandparents, these little toddlers put on a show. You can imagine the rest. You've seen these videos on Youtube, maybe I have shown you my videos. The cuteness level was extreme, a moment that defines a certain kind of parental pride. My daughter didn't even dance, she just wandered around the stage, looking at the audience with eyes as wide as a two-year old's eyes staring at a bunch of strangers. It didn't matter that she didn't dance, I was so proud. I took photos, and video, with my phone.

And, just in case, I checked my email. Twitter. You never know.

I find myself in these kinds of situations often, checking email or Twitter, or Facebook, with nothing to gain except the stress of a work-related message that I can't answer right now in any case.

It makes me feel vaguely dirty, reading my phone with my daughter doing something wonderful right next to me, like I'm sneaking a cigarette.

Or a crack pipe.

One time I was reading on my phone while my older daughter, the four-year-old, was trying to talk to me. I didn't quite hear what she had said, and in any case, I was reading an article about North Korea. She grabbed my face in her two hands, pulled me towards her. "Look at me," she said, "when I'm talking to you."

She is right. I should.

. .

Spending time with friends, or family, I often feel a soul-deep throb coming from that perfectly engineered wafer of stainless steel and glass and rare earth metals in my pocket. Touch me. Look at me. You might find something marvellous.

This sickness is not limited to when I am trying to read, or once-in-a-lifetime events with my daughter.

At work, my concentration is constantly broken: finishing writing an article (this one, actually), answering that client's request, reviewing and commenting on the new designs, cleaning up the copy on the About page. Contacting so and so. Taxes.

All these tasks critical to my livelihood, get bumped more often than I should admit by a quick look at Twitter (for work), or Facebook (also for work), or an article about Mandelbrot sets (which, just this minute, I read).

Email, of course, is the worst, because email is where work happens, and even if it's not the *work you should be doing right now* it may well be work that's easier to do than what you are doing now, and that means somehow you end up doing that work instead of whatever you are supposed to be working on now. And only then do you get back to what you should have been focusing on all along.

Dopamine and digital

It turns out that digital devices and software are finely tuned to train us to pay attention to them, no matter what else we should be doing. The mechanism, borne out by recent neuroscience studies, is something like this:

- *New information creates a rush of dopamine to the brain, a neurotransmitter that makes you feel good.*
- *The promise of new information compels your brain to seek out that dopamine rush.*

With fMRIs, you can see the brain's pleasure centres light up with activity when new emails arrive.

So, every new email you get gives you a little flood of dopamine. Every little flood of dopamine reinforces your brain's memory that checking email gives a flood of dopamine. And our brains are programmed to seek out things that will give us little floods of dopamine.

Further, these patterns of behaviour start creating neural pathways, so that they become unconscious habits: Work on something important, brain itch, check email, *dopamine*, refresh, *dopamine*, check Twitter, *dopamine*, back to work. Over and over, and each time the habit becomes more ingrained in the actual structures of our brains.

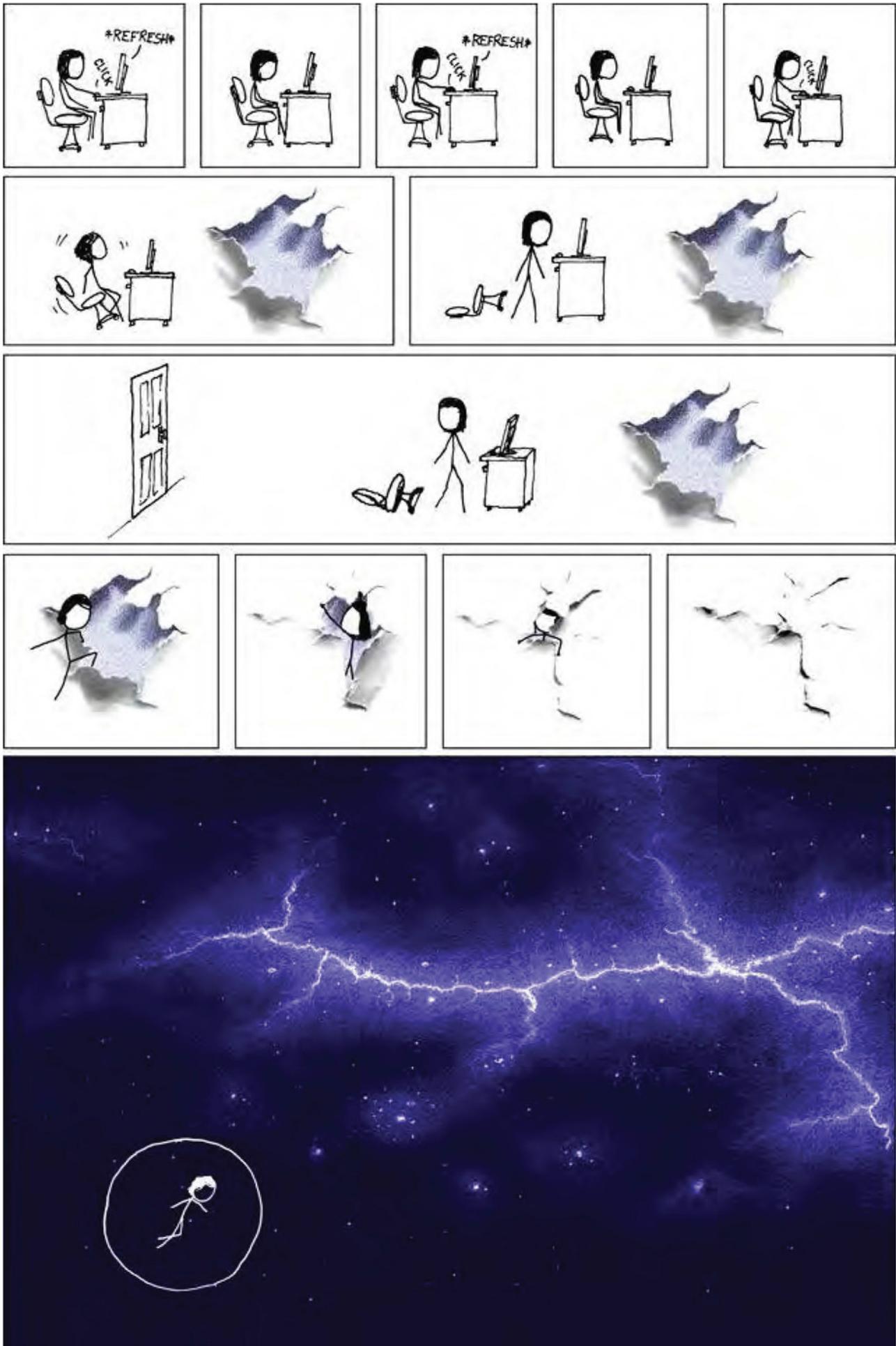
How can books compete?

Pleasing ourselves to death

There is a famous study of rats, wired up with electrodes on their brains. When the rats press a lever, a little charge gets released in part of their brain that stimulates dopamine release. A pleasure lever.

Given a choice between food and dopamine, they'll take the dopamine, often up to the point of exhaustion and starvation. They'll take the dopamine over sex. Some studies see the rats pressing the dopamine lever 700 times in an hour.

We do the same things with our email. Refresh. Refresh.



Choices: Part 1 (xkcd)

There is no beautiful universe on the other side of the email refresh button, and yet it's the call of that button that keeps pulling me out of the work I am doing, out of reading books I want to read.

Why are books important?

When I think back on my life, I can define a set of books that shaped me—intellectually, emotionally, spiritually. Books have always been an escape, a learning experience, a saviour, but beyond this, greater than this, certain books became, over time, a kind of glue that holds together my understanding of the world. I think of them as nodes of knowledge and emotion, nodes that knot together the fabric my self. Books, for me anyway, hold together who I am.

Books, in ways that are different to visual art, to music, to radio, to love even, force us to walk through another's thoughts, one word at a time, over hours and days. We share our minds for that time with the writer's. There is a slowness, a forced reflection required by the medium that is unique. Books recreate someone else's thoughts inside our own minds, and maybe it is this one-to-one mapping of someone else's words, on their own, without external stimuli, that give books their power. Books force us to let someone else's thoughts inhabit our minds completely.

Books are not just transferrers of knowledge and emotion, but a special kind of tool that flattens one self into another, that enable the trying-on of foreign ideas and emotions.

This suppressing of the self is a kind of meditation too—and while books have always been important to me on their own (pre-digital) merits, it started to occur to me that “learning how to read books again,” might also be a way to start weaning my mind away from this dopamine-soaked digital detritus, this meaningless wash of digital information, which would have a double benefit: I would be reading books again, and I would get my mind back.

And, there are, often, beautiful universes to be found on the other side of the cover of a book.

The problems with digital stuff

Recent neuroscience confirms many of the things we sufferers of digital overload know innately. That successful multi-tasking is a myth. Multi-tasking makes us stupider. According to psychologist Glenn Wilson, the cognitive losses from multitasking are equivalent to smoking pot.

(UPDATE: thanks to Liza Daly for pointing out that Glenn Wilson has publicly stated that this study was part of a paid PR gig, and misrepresented in the media. See: http://www.drglennwilson.com/Infomania_experiment_for_HP.doc)

This is bad for so many reasons: it makes us less effective at work, which means either we get less done, or have less time to spend doing other things, or both.

Being in a situation where you are trying to concentrate on a task, and an e-mail is sitting unread in your inbox, can reduce your effective IQ by 10 points. (The Organized Mind, by Daniel J Levitin)

It's worse than that though, because this constant hopping from one thing to another is also exhausting.

My least productive days, the days when I have spent the most time jumping between projects and emails and Twitter and whatever else, are also my most exhausting days. I used to think that my exhaustion was the cause of this lack of focus, but it turns out the opposite might be true.

It takes more energy to shift your attention from task to task. It takes less energy to focus. That means that people who organize their time in a way that allows them to focus are not only going to get more done, but they'll be less tired and less neurochemically depleted after doing it. (The Organized Mind, by Daniel J Levitin)

The problem defined

And so, the problem, more or less, is identified:

1. I cannot read books because my brain has been trained to want a constant hit of dopamine, which a digital interruption will provide
2. This digital dopamine addiction means I have trouble focusing: on books, work, family and friends

Problem identified, or most of it. There is more.

Oh, and don't forget about television

We live in a golden age of television, there is no doubt. The stuff being produced these days is very good. And there is a lot of it.

For the past couple of years, my evening routine has been a variation on: get home from work, exhausted. Make sure the girls have eaten. Make sure I eat. Get the girls to bed. Feel exhausted. Turn on the computer to watch some (neo-golden-age-era) television. Fiddle with work emails, and generally piddle around while that golden-age-era TV consumes 57% of my attention. Be bad at watching TV and bad at getting emails done. Go to bed. Try to read. Check email. Try to read again. Fall asleep.

Those who read own the world, and those who watch television lose it. (Werner Herzog)

I don't know if Werner Herzog is right, but I do know that I would never say about television—even the great stuff, of which there is plenty—what I say about books. There are no television shows that exist as nodes holding together my understanding of the world. My relationship to television is just not the same as it is to books.

And, so, a change

And so, starting in January, I started making some changes. The key ones are:

1. No more Twitter, Facebook, or article reading during the work day (hard)
2. No reading of random news articles (hard)

3. No smartphones or computers in the bedroom (easy)
4. No TV after dinner (it turns out, easy)
5. Instead, go straight to bed and start reading a book—usually on an eink ereader (it turns out, easy)

The shocking thing was how quickly my mind adapted to accommodate reading books again. I had expected to fight for that concentration—but I didn't have to fight. With less digital input (no pre-bed TV, especially), extra time (no TV, again), and without a tempting digital device near at hand ... there was time and space for my mind to settle into a book.

What a wonderful feeling it was.

I am reading books now more than I have in years. I have more energy, and more focus than I've had for ages. I have not fully conquered my digital dopamine addiction, though, but it's getting there. I think reading books is helping me retrain my mind for focus.

And books, it turns out, are still the same wonderful things they used to be. I can read them again.

Workday email, however, remains a problem. If you have suggestions for that, please let me know.

*(By the way, I am starting a little email newsletter about books, reading and the technology that surrounds them both. I'll aim to have something new every week or two. You can [**sign up here**](#)).*



David Barnes

5 min read

Steve Ballmer



How to be like Steve Ballmer

Can you believe it? Plug “How to be Steve Jobs” or “Steve Jobs lessons” into Google and you’ll get page after page of tips. One trite homily after another explains how to imitate a few of the great dictator’s tics. Switch “Jobs” for “Ballmer” and you get almost nothing.

I bet you could learn a lot from Steve Ballmer. More than you can learn from Jobs. You’re not like Jobs. Jobs was a handsome lustrous-haired genius who hooked up with another genius in his early 20s and formed a new, globally important (and immediately successful) company. Ballmer was a funny looking bald non-genius who joined a growing company as employee 30. *Which is more like you?*

Jobs’ net worth at death was \$10 billion. Ballmer today is worth \$22 billion. He worked at Microsoft for 34 years solid. He wasn’t fired once.

If you're a non genius who hasn't formed a globally important company in your early 20s—and especially if you're funny looking—you'll probably learn more from Ballmer than you can from Jobs.

Go big or go home.

I loved learning how Ballmer got such a big share of Microsoft. [A 2014 Forbes story](#) by [george.anders](#) explains how. It also includes this remarkable photograph:

Long-Ago Twist Yields Ballmer A Fortune In Microsoft Stock

As employee No. 30 at Microsoft, Steve Ballmer negotiated a sweet deal in the early 1980s that eventually left him with...

www.forbes.com

Go and read the whole article. But also look at that photo. I mean, wow. Who's in charge there? The genius founder, or the confident, ruthless, ambitious employee number 30? Staring straight at you, 35 years ago.

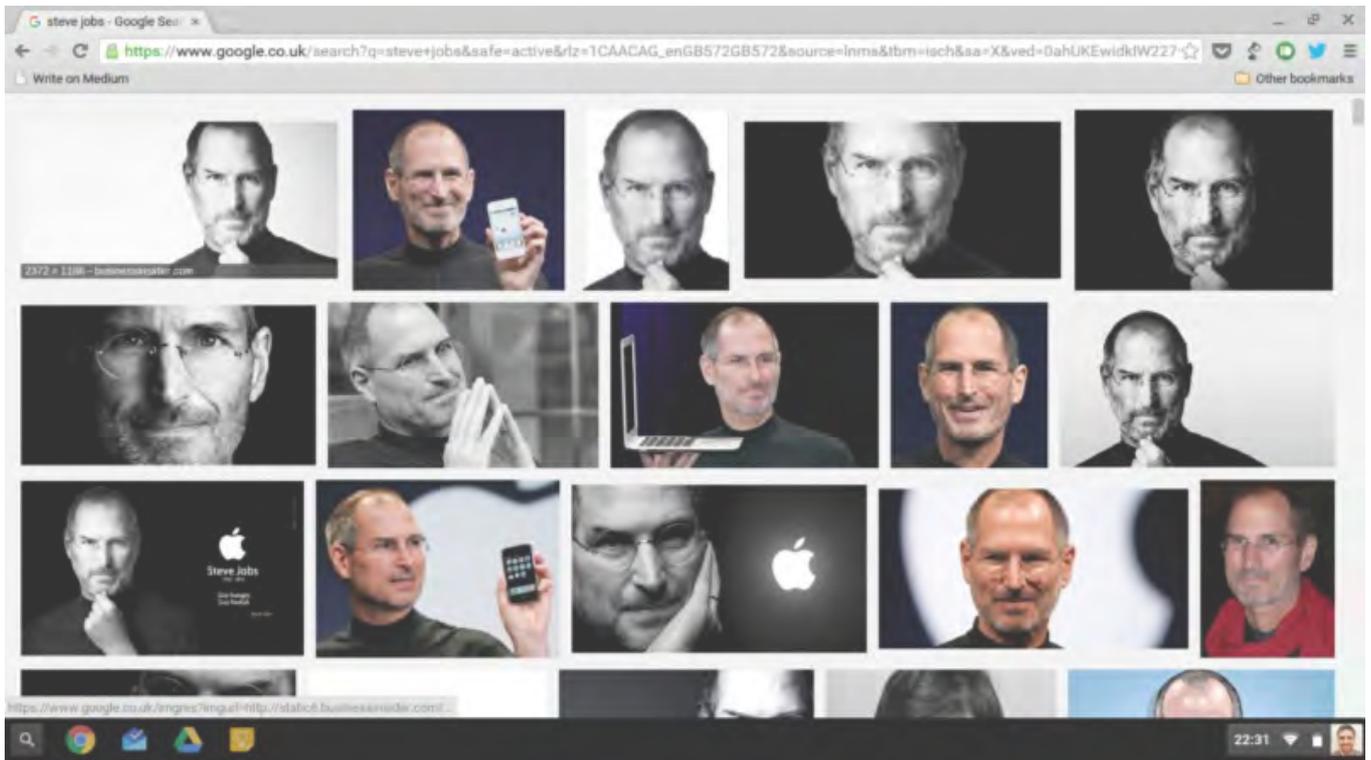
To be Ballmer be big, even if you're not.

Whatever cards you're dealt play them with gusto. Microsoft employee number 30 is a bum hand—you get the hard work of founding a business but little reward. Unless you're Ballmer. Then you get 8% and end up one of the richest men in the world.

I don't know what he said to engineer that 10% deal. But somehow he turned the tables. He went in as a grad looking for a job opportunity, he came out as the man who could save Microsoft. I bet at some point he said "*I'm giving you the opportunity.*" To be Ballmer, *be the opportunity.*

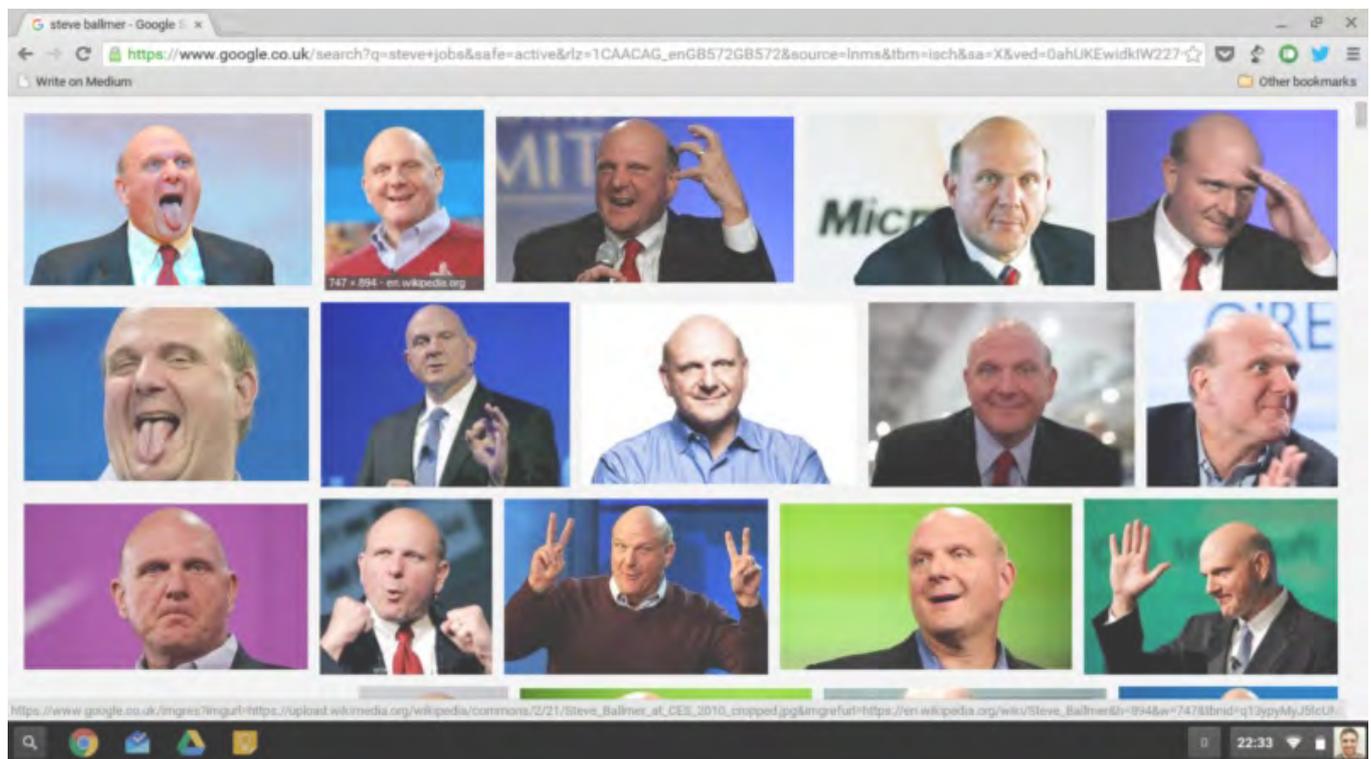
Let's talk about that face for a bit.

Google Image Search Steve Jobs and you'll get a lot of photos all basically the same:



Thoughtful. Solemn. Disappointed with us. Better than you. Pleased with himself. Even the color photos look black and white. He's pretty old in all these shots but he basically wore that same face his whole professional life.

Now Ballmer:



There's a face. The world is full of people who go around with a narrow

palette of expressions like Steve Jobs. **Go to the mirror and practice these faces.** Widen your palette and use your ridiculous face to cheer, energize, and amuse the people around you. Big man, big ambitions, big expressions.

What would Steve Ballmer do?

Imagine a tech CEO gatecrashes your party.

Timeline 1, you're gatecrashed by Steve Jobs. He'll come in. Everybody will think he's cool. He'll put better music on the sound system. He'll ask for, and perhaps bring, some much better drinks than you had. Everybody leaves thinking he was the coolest guest in the room, and they all feel a little less cool as a result.

Timeline 2, it's Bill Gates. He'll be friendly but awkward. He makes good conversation but somehow the party is a bit limper because he's there. He apologizes because he forgot to bring anything, but he doesn't really know the party etiquette.

Timeline 3, Steve Ballmer. You open the door to his enormous grinning face, and before you know it he's in the hall handing over a bottle of something cheap (but with such confidence you don't notice) and he's giving you the handshake of your life. Then he's in. Loving it. Loving the music. Loving the food and drink. He's going up to everyone, saying hello. And after a while you realize he's started balling "thanks for coming, great to see you man!" to *your guests*. By the end of the evening it's his party and everybody had a great time. *That's Steve Ballmer.*

It's easy to mock Ballmer. You see videos. The Windows TV ad. The "developers developers developers". What a *loser*. What a *goofball*. But that's the point. Here's somebody who'll wear their mediocrity with such energy, with such boundless enthusiasm and unbridled passion, that nobody else even tries to compete.

You're not Steve Jobs. You're mediocre, like me. You're reading shabby online articles about how to be like somebody else. Do you think Steve Jobs did that?

The world is full of Steve Jobs wannabes. Nobody's trying to be like Steve Ballmer. Except me. And now you. Give it a try. Let me know how you get on.

Steve Ballmer mission pack.

Ready to be more like Steve Ballmer? Here are 5 specific things to do today:

1. In your next conversation with a colleague make a conscious effort to use these physical expressions: huge smile; tongue out; salute; claw.
2. Next time you give a presentation, repeat the same key word or phrase at least 5 times. Preferably 10. Find a rhythm. Rap it.
3. Imagine you are—or be—the tallest person in the room.(Create situations where you're standing and they're sitting?)
4. When you sense a gap that's closing push yourself in with full energy. Love the party, get into it, then make it your own.
5. Find a chance to turn the tables. To go from the person receiving an opportunity to the person giving one. Say "I'm giving you the opportunity..." at least once.

Good luck! There's only once piece of advice I could find direct from Steve Ballmer. It's what he said to Satya Nadella as he took over as Microsoft CEO:

Be bold. But be right.

Did this help ya?

Untagged



Dave Pell

2 min read

Untagged



Just Admit It, Part One

OK, this will feel good, I promise:

1. Just admit you really don't give two fucks about Harper Lee's *new* novel.
2. Reddit without the trolls is a blank web page with an empty submit form.
3. You wouldn't have noticed Neil Young was missing from your streaming service if he didn't mention it.
4. Sometimes, you tweet something heartfelt about the need for gender equality in the tech industry and then go to Pornhub right after.

5. While you fully support the boost that Caitlyn Jenner is giving to the transgender community, you have a sneaking suspicion she's as much of a jackass as Bruce Jenner was.
6. You marvel at the achievement of the scientists who sent a camera 3 billion miles to get photos of Pluto. But when given the choice, you clicked through to an article on how to brew perfect coffee every time.
7. Though you've been given countless opportunities to understand the ins and outs of the Greek/Euro bailout deal (some of which have been boiled down to a single chart), if you were put on the spot, the best you could probably come up with would be, "Yeah, Greece. Wow, huh?"
8. You yelled at your kids while reading an article on limiting kids' screen times.
9. You went back and watched Ariana Grande licking donuts a few more times, even after you had completed your thinkpiece on the subject.
10. You'd be reasonably happy if the earth burst into flames just to get a chance to say "I told you so" to climate change deniers.
11. You once called for a soda tax while drinking a bowl of cheese dip.

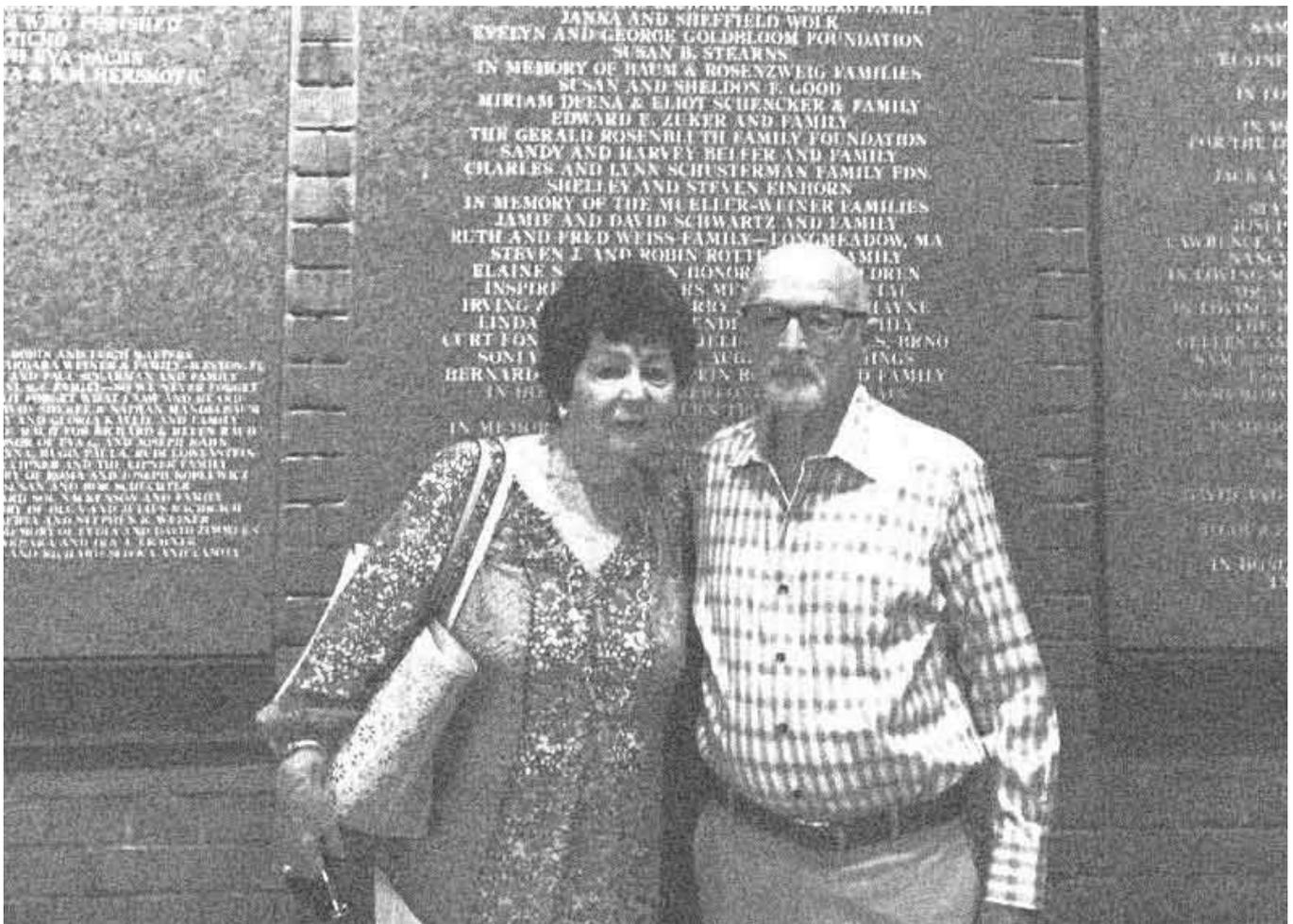
And like me, you often publish funny lists as a way to self-promote your other site, NextDraft, The Day's Most Fascinating News.



Dave Pell

3 min read

Untagged



My Mom Has a Question

My parents and I just got back from the Holocaust Museum in DC. We didn't get past the entryway where they both wanted to see the plaque they had mounted in honor of their families. Didn't need to go in. They'd already seen the rest. Know the story.

Right before we got to the plaque, my dad got checked and rechecked by a security guard. He's 91, a Holocaust survivor, fought with the Partisans; could've taken the guy with an arm tied behind his back. He gets checked wherever we go. Airports, federal buildings, Holocaust museums. After the war, he was a smuggler for a few years. Used to climb out the windows of trains and ride on the roof. Addicted to risk maybe. I suppose that's why he still gets checked by security. Maybe once you're on the list, you're on the list.

After the plaque we moved to the building with offices where my parents got around security (probably means they donated a lot) on the way to meet with a group of the museum's historians and executives.

That's why we were there. My mom had a question. Nearly eight decades after a friend told her in her backyard that they couldn't be friends anymore because my mom was Jewish, after hearing the crunch of breaking glass under her shoes the morning after Kristallnacht, after a Sophie's Choice moment that sent her and her sister on a train with a fake passport, after years in an ever-threatened children's home (they wouldn't call it an orphanage even though they knew that's what it was), after all the news and the lack of news (both of which meant someone in her family was dead); after years of donating money to museums and universities, scholars and schools; after decades of working with professors to develop courses on the Holocaust and the Spanish Inquisition and anything else that could provide a clue to the answer she sought; she still had a question.

"Why is it still happening? We're supposed to be such smart people. So why can't we stop antisemitism?" She's an autodidact. Reads everything. Never forgets. Saw it all firsthand and has been studying it ever since. Maybe even a genius. But she underestimates herself and overestimates academics. So she rattled off examples from history they hadn't thought about and asked them. "We're doing a lot. But are we doing the right thing? What more could we be doing to stop this?"

They didn't have much. You wouldn't expect them to. It was an impossible question; an 87 year old museum donor who lost much of her family, along with her 91 year old husband who lost all of his, wanted a meeting. So you take the meeting.

And they ask why the hate isn't gone yet. What are you going to say?

What are you going to say when a woman who's been asking the same question for all of her life asks you if you have the answer. "Why would anyone want to kill my parents? They were such wonderful people."

The answer's not satisfying. Never will be. But this is about the question.

She's seen the worst in humanity. Still studies the crimes of humans, the worst of history.

Still cries when she asks that question about her parents. But she hasn't given up on the idea that good has a shot in this world. That maybe, if we try one more thing, antisemitism can be cornered and killed.

Reminds me of a question I've had all of my life. How can you experience the worst of humanity but still have faith in the goodness of people? How the hell can you go on, start a new life, raise a family, still believe in anything?

I don't know the answer. But my mom has somehow managed to pull it off. And that makes it all the more sad she lost her parents so soon. They would have been as proud of her as her kids are.

. . .

Dave Pell writes NextDraft: The Day's Most Fascinating News.



Dave Pell

11 min read

Untagged

Obama's Eulogy for Beau Biden

I saw a Google Doc version of this and I'm sharing it here because it's one of the most amazing and thoughtful remembrances I've ever seen. It seriously makes me want to be better.

. . .

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT IN EULOGY IN HONOR OF BEAU BIDEN

St. Anthony of Padua Church
Wilmington, Delaware

12:08 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: "A man," wrote an Irish poet, "is original when he speaks the truth that has always been known to all good men." Beau Biden was an original. He was a good man. A man of character. A man who loved deeply, and was loved in return.

Your Eminences, your Excellencies, General Odierno, distinguished guests; to Hallie, Natalie and Hunter; to Hunter, Kathleen, Ashley, Howard; the rest of Beau's beautiful family, friends, colleagues; to Jill and to Joe—we are here to grieve with you, but more importantly, we are here because we love you.

Without love, life can be cold and it can be cruel. Sometimes cruelty is deliberate — the action of bullies or bigots, or the inaction of those indifferent to another's pain. But often, cruelty is simply born of life, a matter of fate or God's will, beyond our mortal powers to comprehend. To suffer such faceless, seemingly random cruelty can harden the softest hearts, or shrink the sturdiest. It can make one mean, or bitter, or full of self-pity. Or, to paraphrase an old proverb, it can make you beg for a lighter burden.

But if you're strong enough, it can also make you ask God for broader shoulders; shoulders broad enough to bear not only your own burdens, but the burdens of others; shoulders broad enough to shield those who need shelter the most.

To know Beau Biden is to know which choice he made in his life. To know Joe and the rest of the Biden family is to understand why Beau lived the life he did. For Beau, a cruel twist of fate came early — the car accident that took his mom and his sister, and confined Beau and Hunter, then still toddlers, to hospital beds at Christmastime.

But Beau was a Biden. And he learned early the Biden family rule: If you have to ask for help, it's too late. It meant you were never alone; you don't even have to ask, because someone is always there for you when you need them.

And so, after the accident, Aunt Valerie rushed in to care for the boys, and remained to help raise them. Joe continued public service, but shunned the parlor games of Washington, choosing instead the daily commute home, maintained for decades, that would let him meet his most cherished duty — to see his kids off to school, to kiss them at night, to let them know that the world was stable and that there was firm ground under their feet.

As Joe himself confessed to me, he did not just do this because the kids needed him. He did it because he needed those kids. And somehow, Beau sensed that — how understandably and deeply hurt his family and his father was. And so, rather than use his childhood trauma as justification for a life of self-pity or self-centeredness, that very young boy made a very grown-up decision: He would live a life of meaning. He would live a life for others. He would ask God for broader shoulders.

Beau would guide and look out for his younger brother. He would embrace his new mom — apparently, the two boys sheepishly asking their father when they could all marry Jill — and throughout his life, no one would make Jill laugh harder. He would look after their baby sister, Ashley. He would forever be the one to do the right thing, careful not to give his family or his friends cause for concern.

It's no secret that a lot of what made Beau the way he was was just how much he loved and admired his dad. He studied law, like his dad, even choosing the same law school. He chased public service, like his dad, believing it to be a noble and important pursuit. From his dad, he learned how to get back up when life knocked him down. He learned that he was no higher than anybody else, and no lower than anybody else —something Joe got from his mom, by the way. And he learned how to make everybody else feel like we matter, because his dad taught him that everybody matters.

He even looked and sounded like Joe, although I think Joe would be first to acknowledge that Beau was an upgrade—Joe 2.0. (Laughter.) But as much as Beau reminded folks of Joe, he was very much his own man. He was an original.

Here was a scion of an incredible family who brushed away the possibility of privilege for the harder, better reward of earning his own way. Here was a soldier who dodged glory, and exuded true humility. A prosecutor who defended the defenseless. The rare politician who collected more fans than foes, and the rarer public figure who prioritized his private life above all else.

Beau didn't cut corners. He turned down an appointment to be Delaware's attorney general so he could win it fair and square. When the field was clear for him to run for the Senate, he chose to finish his job as A.G. instead. He didn't do these things to gain favor with a cynical public — it's just who he was. In his twenties, he and a friend were stopped for speeding outside Scranton. And the officer recognized the name on the license, and because he was a fan of Joe's work with law enforcement he wanted to let Beau off with a warning. But Beau made him write that ticket. Beau didn't trade on his name.

After 9/11, he joined the National Guard. He felt it was his obligation —part of what those broader shoulders are for. He did his duty to his country and deployed to Iraq, and General Odierno eloquently spoke to Major Biden's service. What I can tell you is when he was loading up to ship out at Dover, there was a lot of press that wanted to interview him. Beau refused. He was just another soldier.

I saw him when I visited Iraq; he conducted himself the same way. His deployment was hard on Hallie and the kids, like it was for so many families over the last 14

years. It was hard on Joe, hard on Jill. That's partly why Jill threw herself into her work with military families with so much intensity. That's how you know when Joe thunders "may God protect our troops" in every speech he does, he means it so deeply.

Like his father, Beau did not have a mean bone in his body. The cruelty he'd endured in his life didn't make him hard, it made him compassionate, empathetic. But it did make him abhor bullies.

Beau's grandfather, Joe's father, believed that the most egregious sin was to abuse your power to inflict pain on another. So Beau squared his broad shoulders to protect people from that kind of abuse. He fought for homeowners who were cheated, seniors who were scammed. He even went after bullying itself. He set up a Child Protector—Predator Task Force, convicted more than 200 of those who targeted vulnerable children. And in all this, he did it in a way that was alive to the suffering of others, bringing in experts to help spare both the children and their parents further trauma.

That's who Beau was. Someone who cared. Someone who charmed you, and disarmed you, and put you at ease. When he'd have to attend a fancy fundraiser with people who took themselves way too seriously, he'd walk over to you and whisper something wildly inappropriate in your ear. (Laughter.) The son of a senator, a Major in the Army, the most popular elected official in Delaware — I'm sorry, Joe — (laughter)—but he was not above dancing in nothing but a sombrero and shorts at Thanksgiving if it would shake loose a laugh from the people he loved. And through it all, he was the consummate public servant, a notebook in his back pocket at all times so he could write down the problems of everyone he met and go back to the office to get them fixed.

Because he was a Biden, the titles that come with family — husband, father, son, brother, uncle — those were the ones Beau valued above any other. This was a man who, at the Democratic National Convention, didn't spend all his time in backrooms with donors or glad-handing. Instead, he rode the escalators in the arena with his son, up and down, up and down, again and again, knowing, just like Joe had learned, what ultimately mattered in life.

You know, anyone can make a name for themselves in this reality TV age,

especially in today's politics. If you're loud enough or controversial enough, you can get some attention. But to make that name mean something, to have it associated with dignity and integrity — that is rare. There's no shortcut to get it. It's not something you can buy. But if you do right by your children, maybe you can pass it on. And what greater inheritance is there? What greater inheritance than to be part of a family that passes on the values of what it means to be a great parent; that passes on the values of what it means to be a true citizen; that passes on the values of what it means to give back, fully and freely, without expecting anything in return?

That's what our country was built on — men like Beau. That's who built it — families like this. We don't have kings or queens or lords. We don't have to be born into money to have an impact. We don't have to step on one another to be successful. We have this remarkable privilege of being able to earn what we get out of life, with the knowledge that we are no higher than anybody else, or lower than anybody else. We know this not just because it is in our founding documents, but because families like the Bidens have made it so, because people like Beau have made it so.

He did in 46 years what most of us couldn't do in 146. He left nothing in the tank. He was a man who led a life where the means were as important as the ends. And the example he set made you want to be a better dad, or a better son, or a better brother or sister, better at your job, the better soldier. He made you want to be a better person. Isn't that finally the measure of a man — the way he lives, how he treats others, no matter what life may throw at him?

We do not know how long we've got here. We don't know when fate will intervene. We cannot discern God's plan. What we do know is that with every minute that we've got, we can live our lives in a way that takes nothing for granted. We can love deeply. We can help people who need help. We can teach our children what matters, and pass on empathy and compassion and selflessness. We can teach them to have broad shoulders.

To the Biden family, this sprawling, intimate clan — I know that Beau's passing has left a gaping void in the world. Hallie, I can only imagine the burdens that you've been carrying on your shoulders these past couple of years. And it's because you gave him everything that he could give everything to us. And just as you were there for him, we'll be there for you.

To Natalie and Hunter — there aren't words big enough to describe how much your dad loved you, how much he loved your mom. But I will tell you what, Michelle and I and Sasha and Malia, we've become part of the Biden clan. We're honorary members now. And the Biden family rule applies. We're always here for you, we always will be—my word as a Biden. (Laughter.)

To Joe and Jill — just like everybody else here, Michelle and I thank God you are in our lives. Taking this ride with you is one of the great pleasures of our lives. Joe, you are my brother. And I'm grateful every day that you've got such a big heart, and a big soul, and those broad shoulders. I couldn't admire you more.

I got to know Joe's mom, Catherine Eugenia Finnegan Biden, before she passed away. She was on stage with us when we were first elected. And I know she told Joe once that out of everything bad that happens to you, something good will come if you look hard enough. And I suppose she was channeling that same Irish poet with whom I began today, Patrick Kavanagh, when he wrote, "And I said, let grief be a fallen leaf at the dawning of the day."

As hard as it is right now, through all the heartache and through all the tears, it is our obligation to Beau to think not about what was and what might have been, but instead to think about what is, because of him. Think about the day that dawns for children who are safer because of Beau, whose lives are fuller, because of him. Think about the day that dawns for parents who rest easier, and families who are freer, because of him. Some folks may never know that their lives are better because of Beau Biden. But that's okay. Certainly for Beau, acclaim was never the point of public service.

But the lines of well-wishers who've been here all week—they know. The White House mailroom that's been overflowing with letters from people—those folks know. The soldiers who served with Beau, who joined the National Guard because of him. The workers at Verdi's who still have their home because of him, and who thanked him for helping them bus tables one busy night. The students in Newark who remember the time he talked with them for hours, inexhaustible, even after giving a speech, even after taking his National Guard fitness test. The Rehoboth woman who's saved a kind voicemail from him for five years, and wrote to say "I loved the way he loved his family." And the stranger who wrote from halfway across this great country just to say,

“The only thing we can hope for is that our children make us proud by making a difference in the world. Beau has done that and then some. The world noticed.”

Jill, Joe, Hallie, Hunter and Natalie—the world noticed. They noticed. They felt it, his presence. And Beau lives on in the lives of others. And isn't that the whole point of our time here? To make this country we love fairer and more just, not just for Natalie and Hunter, or Naomi, or Finnegan, or Maisy, or Malia, or Sasha, but for every child? Isn't that what this amazing journey we've been on is all about — to make life better for the next generation?

Beau figured that out so early in life. What an inheritance Beau left us. What an example he set.

“Through our great good fortune, in our youth our hearts were touched with fire.” said Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. “But, above all, we have learned that whether a man accepts from Fortune her spade, and will look downward and dig, or from Aspiration her axe and cord, and will scale the ice, the one and only success which it is his to command is to bring to his work a mighty heart.”

Beau Biden brought to his work a mighty heart. He brought to his family a mighty heart. What a good man. What an original.

May God bless his memory, and the lives of all he touched.



Eden Wiedemann
3 min read

Untagged

This fucking dick is also mine!

The case is true, I was there and I can confirm. At a meeting between managers of a certain company one partner came out with a suggestion:

- Let's buy a huge stuffed dick.

The others didn't take it seriously; after all, the one who presented the idea had the habit of making fun suggestions, usually as a humorous form of criticism.



- I mean it! Let's buy a huge stuffed dick. A huge, you know, almost the size of a person.

- Really?

- Yes, and every employee will get to take a picture embracing it.

- What for?

- Because this will be our policy: this fucking dick is also mine.

And that makes sense.

One of the greatest Problems of Managing an Operation it's just a culture of "I did my part" or " ah, this isn't my concern". Nothing explains best this culture then a little story that's has usually been count in the Business Environment of São Paulo used to " adjust" mostly the Idealists.

You know when you have a lot of flying dicks? Every type and size? A loggerhead and veiny, some lopsided, as a thick arm, others with a huge clapper and everything? Well, when you have a lot of dicks ahead, you run, picks up the smaller and sits on top. Because if you do not just choose it, your cock will end up with the one that was left for you... and may be the biggest of all.

It has a hint of corporate wisdom, I won't deny. I even dealt with situations like this in Sao Paulo. Arriving in a new job I had the misfortune to attend a meeting with about 12 people who spent about 2 hours discussing who was to blame for a failure in a campaign. Tired, I raised my hand and let go "oops , it's my fault , we can go back to work ? " . I took a nice kick for having "assumed" a guilt that couldn't be mine; after all I had just arrived. Well, it seemed to me obvious, clearly it wasn't my fault, I really wanted to end the discussion and show how much that scene was unproductive. And expensive. I wanted to prove a point and only one. Interestingly, most of the people at the meeting found my action something satisfactory, pretending not to have noticed the dig, also being happy to be rid of that "dick".

We need to change this policy. Everyone needs to be Responsible for the ending results, everyone needs to worry about resolving and delivering. I recently read Creativity S.A a book written by Edwin Catmull, cofounder of Pixar. In the book he talks about how things get better in the company when he was able to deploy a

culture where everyone was responsible for quality control, where anyone, regardless of rank, could point out flaws or make suggestions. A culture for quality, solution, responsibility to the whole. Detail, that before Disney. And speaking of Disney, this is a culture they cherish so much there , see this case that I learned this week, narrated by Claudio Nasajon .

Once I was with my children, visiting Disneyworld in Orlando, when we realized that my oldest son , then seven, had lost a newly bought cap. We asked a gardener who was near if he knew where the session "lost and found " was. The man stopped to clean the garden and led us to one of the nearby shops selling caps. Getting there he asked my son to show his cap model that was lost. My son showed him. The clerk pulled a Disney coupons notepad from his back pocket and bought a new shirt for my son. "A Mickey gift. You are here to spend a good time, then do it", he told us with a smiling face.

In technical jargon, this is called "empowerment" that a horrible translation means "to give powers" of front-line. How many managers (not gardeners, managers) do you know who have this autonomy? Now is the account: a cap costs \$ 2, \$ 3 and they sell for \$ 9.99. Pav off? No doubt!

I have told this story to at least 100,000 people in lectures, articles and seminars over the past 15 years (my son now has 22). The question is how to hire that kind of employee? How to train it? How to ensure that it will not sell the coupons for some exchanger and end the stock caps? Well, Disney has some interesting processes for this.

Recently, a person, a friend of an acquaintance of mine, applied to compose the Disney team in Brazil and was called for an interview. A few days later she received a very kind letter, in short, saying: you demonstrated many important skills for this position and performance in the technical evaluation was above average, which

certainly guarantees you a good chance of job placement, but not at Disney. You did not greet most people who passed by you, including janitors, messengers and other candidates who crossed paths with you in the waiting room, and this is something that we give more value than the technical skills. Good luck!

What about you? Do you "choose the smallest and sits on top "or believes that" this fucking dick is also yours"?



Gary Vaynerchuk

3 min read



3 Things That Will Always Stand in the Way of Your Goals

There are a lot of things that get in the way of a dream. Maybe you don't have the money right now to start the business you really want to run. Or maybe you can't seem to hire the right person to work with to achieve a goal.

But both those things can seem annoyingly simple when you realize that the real forces keeping you from reaching your objective are within you.

These are only three of those things. There are definitely more. Maybe you've even run into others already on your path. But right now, take a look at this list and see if maybe one of these is the thing that has been standing in your way. I hope I can help you start to overcome it.

1. Complaining

I genuinely feel that there is no real value in complaining.

To me, the only things anybody has a right to complain about are things like their health. Short of the death of a loved one, or a terminal illness, or some other horrible tragedy, everything feels controllable. If you're in control of it, you have the ability to fix it. Where is the value in complaining? Instead of complaining, my process is this: Assess the problem, find the solution, and get on the offense. I'm an offensive player; complaining is playing defense.

2. Waiting for the big moments

When people give keynotes, particularly in business, they will talk a lot about "that one moment" where they knew they made it. I don't like to do that. I think it's unfair. It's unfair for them to tell you about those things because it sets an expectation. It says that you should know when those moments happen in your own life. It may seem helpful or even "cool" for them to bring them up, but in truth, it's not. It's just not. They have the hindsight, the perspective, to pick out the moments.

Trying to figure out whether this is the moment that you "made it" will keep you from moving forward. Just don't think about those things. Please.

Because really, there are only two ways to approach the question of "when have you made it". One: it's the moment you decided to do **anything**. Or two: it hasn't happened yet. And that is where you need to focus. That in-between space the time between starting and stopping —is where you need to worry less and execute more.

3. Lack of optimism

There are a million reasons why not, but there is one good reason why, which is this: you just have to persevere.

No matter what happens, it's the way it is, and you have to keep going. And that is where the optimism lives. If you truly believe that you can do it no matter what, you've got this. The only reason you might bring up any of the previous excuses we talked about is because you don't believe, right? Do not let that kind of thinking ever get in the way.

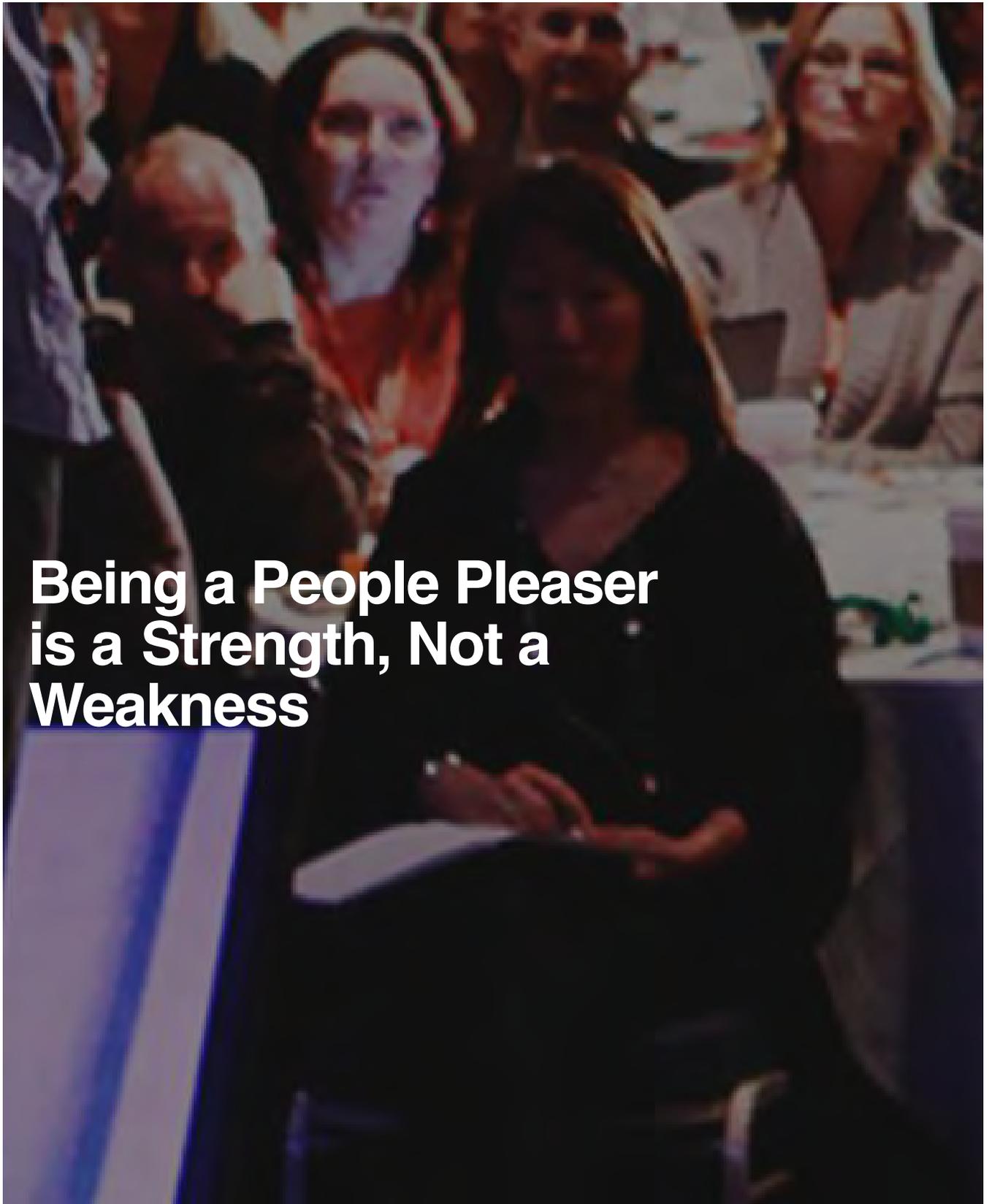
Get thicker skin. Build up your self esteem. To be able to get through, you need to have optimism. Every day is hard, and all you have to fight it in the end is yourself.



Gary Vaynerchuk

2 min read

Untagged



“I’m a people pleaser” is not something you expect for someone to say with much pride.

Am I wrong? When you think, “He’s a people pleaser”, what kind of person do you think I’m talking about? A push over? Someone who is too eager?

The truth is, many people see a desire to please people as a weakness. But I don’t see it that way at all. **It’s time to start thinking about it as a strength.**

We’ve been told by society that it is a negative trait, that it’s a flaw. It’s been perceived that way and reinforced for so long that it’ll take a long time to change that perception. But I truly believe that it can be one of your greatest strengths.

What is wrong with wanting to give? Being positive? Making sure everyone around you is happy? To me, these sound like the furthest things from a “weakness” and it blows my mind why people would want to label it as such. However, it can become a problem, but not in any of the ways I just listed.

When does it become a problem?

When you don’t know how to ask for something in return.

You can give give give all you want, but if you never step up and ask for something back, you’re not going to win. Life is about making connections, finding opportunities, and working hard. When you give someone something they need, when you make a dream a reality for them, they, in a sense, owe you. And they will be much more willing to do something for you because of it. It’s a give and receive scenario, and it’s as old as time. **But you have to ask.** Nothing will ever happen if you don’t just step up and *ask* .

So stop trying to overcome the people pleasing part of yourself. You don’t want to, and you shouldn’t let people tell you otherwise. Truly wanting to be able to make others happy is a tremendous personality trait. But you can’t forget to look out for yourself. Be vocal about what you need. You can’t forget your right hooks with your jabs.



Gary Vaynerchuk

3 min read



If Someone Has All Three
of These Things,
Hire Them

So, look: there are things I talk about that I just like talking about: Wine, investing, the Jets, etc. But then... there are other things. **Things that I want to force feed everyone until they *get it*.** No, seriously. I mean it. If I could magically make

everyone feel these things as strongly as I do, I would. So here are three things that are very dear to me. If you get them, you're one step closer to understanding me.

Patience

You know how I talk about giving back? Paying it forward? Do good things for other people and good things will come to you? Well, I mean all of it. But the other side of the coin that I don't often talk about is the patience that has to come with that. Nothing is going to happen all of a sudden. There is no instant gratification when it comes to business. And that's a really tough pill for some people to swallow. When you give back or do a favor for someone, you're going to have to chill out and relax for a moment. You can be go go go, working and hustling twenty four seven, but things still take time. Lack of patience keeps people from achieving their greatest aspirations. I've known so many people who never got the upside they deserved because they couldn't be patient. It's a tremendous loss.

Word is bond

My dad taught this to me, and I'll never forget how important it is. When I walked into his business at age fourteen, I was a bit of a bullshit artist. I thought I knew everything, and I was dead wrong. I would not be where I am without my dad's correction of that. He repeated this "word is bond" lesson to me over and over till I understood that delivering on a promise is the most important thing you can do in a relationship, personal or business. When you make a commitment, no matter what, you stick to it. If you take the time to learn the goals and hopes of people around you, you can work to get them there. Even if it's just a small step, they'll appreciate that you were there, that you listened, and delivered on it. The best part? Now you have one more person who may deliver on what *you* want in the future.

Empathy

This is the big one for me. I rely on this for success in both of my businesses, and I hire for it because I know it's what makes a great leader. When you're in charge of a project, the last thing you need to be is authoritative. What you truly need is empathy. It's amazing that people still can't understand this. When your team runs into problems, you need to become empathetic.

Straight up. Listen, don't talk. Like I said above, be patient. Don't try to talk your way out of a problem. Ever. Just shut up and listen. How can you solve the problem if you don't even know what's going on?



Gary Vaynerchuk
2 min read

Untagged



Specialist or Jack-of-All-Trades? The Answer's Obvious to Me

ANALYST

When deciding who to hire, it often comes down to the decision of jack of all trades or specialist. I believe there is one that will help your business far more, and that's jack of all trades.

Let me explain.

I run a five hundred person agency called VaynerMedia, where we take a lot of things into consideration when hiring (here are a few). When you have a company that has grown so large so quickly, it is of course important to balance all the different types of people who work there. You need to have specialists but you also need the jack of all trades. When you strike a balance within the company, it's beneficial for the task at hand. Both personality types work. I'm not denying that.

But I never think that you should focus on one particular skill. Never limit yourself to that.

Many people would argue that if you try to know a little bit of everything, you'll never get to the point of mastering anything. My argument? Bullshit. I don't buy it. I don't believe in trying to strengthen weaknesses, but I do believe in working hard to be good at many things. In life you will be required to take on many different tasks. You might be really good at something now, but don't let that stop you from finding out what else you can dominate. Because I know it's not just one thing. You're better than that.

We adapt and evolve our skill-sets depending on our particular situation in life. We do it all the time, so to consider yourself a specialist is limiting. And no excuses. When I hear people make the excuse that they can't do other things because they've gone so deep in one focus, it bothers me.

There's always room to get better in as many things as possible. Expand your arsenal because you'll never know when you'll need to tap into more than one skill. It'll speak to your agility and your ability to offer a number of benefits to a certain situation when the time calls for it. You can always get better. Start moving. I know you can do this.



Gary Vaynerchuk

3 min read

Untagged



. . .

Contrary to popular belief, you don't need to be an extrovert in order to be a successful entrepreneur.

Don't believe me?

Take a look at the huge amount of successful entrepreneurs that people talk about every day. Zuckerberg. Ev Williams. Kevin Systrom. David Karp. If those names aren't familiar to you, maybe you'll recognize these: Facebook. Twitter. Tumblr. Pinterest. Instagram. Ringing some bells now? I thought so. While I can't personally speak to each of them self-identifying as introverts, I do know they're absolutely not the kind of people who might run up to you at a party and just start talking (like me, for instance). In the past, things like networking events or conferences were where

a large amount of connections were made. Or your connection would set up a meeting for you. Those scenarios absolutely made it necessary for young entrepreneurs to put themselves out there in an outgoing way. If they weren't outgoing, maybe they found it necessary to bring someone on board who was. But now, it's different. **We are in the glory days of the introverted entrepreneur.** Because of technology, there are so many ways to build a company now, talk to people and make connections in the business world; all without leaving your desk.

Now, face to face is no longer the standard. While it eventually will happen when you're building a big business, the persona you put out there can be determined by your online interactions and presence.

Technology has changed the game.

I am an extroverted entrepreneur. That is no secret. My energy levels usually go far beyond entire crowds when I give keynotes or speeches. I put myself out there and surround myself with a lot of people.

But because of all that, I would never try to fake another side of myself. You will never find me sitting behind a computer all day and doing it all online, because I know my strengths. I know that a meeting will benefit me because I can get my points across and bring that energy to the table.

Introverted entrepreneurs need to think the same way. Don't fake it. Bet on your strengths. If you need to sit down all day at your desk and focus, do that. If that is working for you, make it happen that way. But never think that you need to be louder, more outgoing, a bigger personality; like yours truly for instance. This is a tremendous time for you to be building a company, and the ball is in your court.

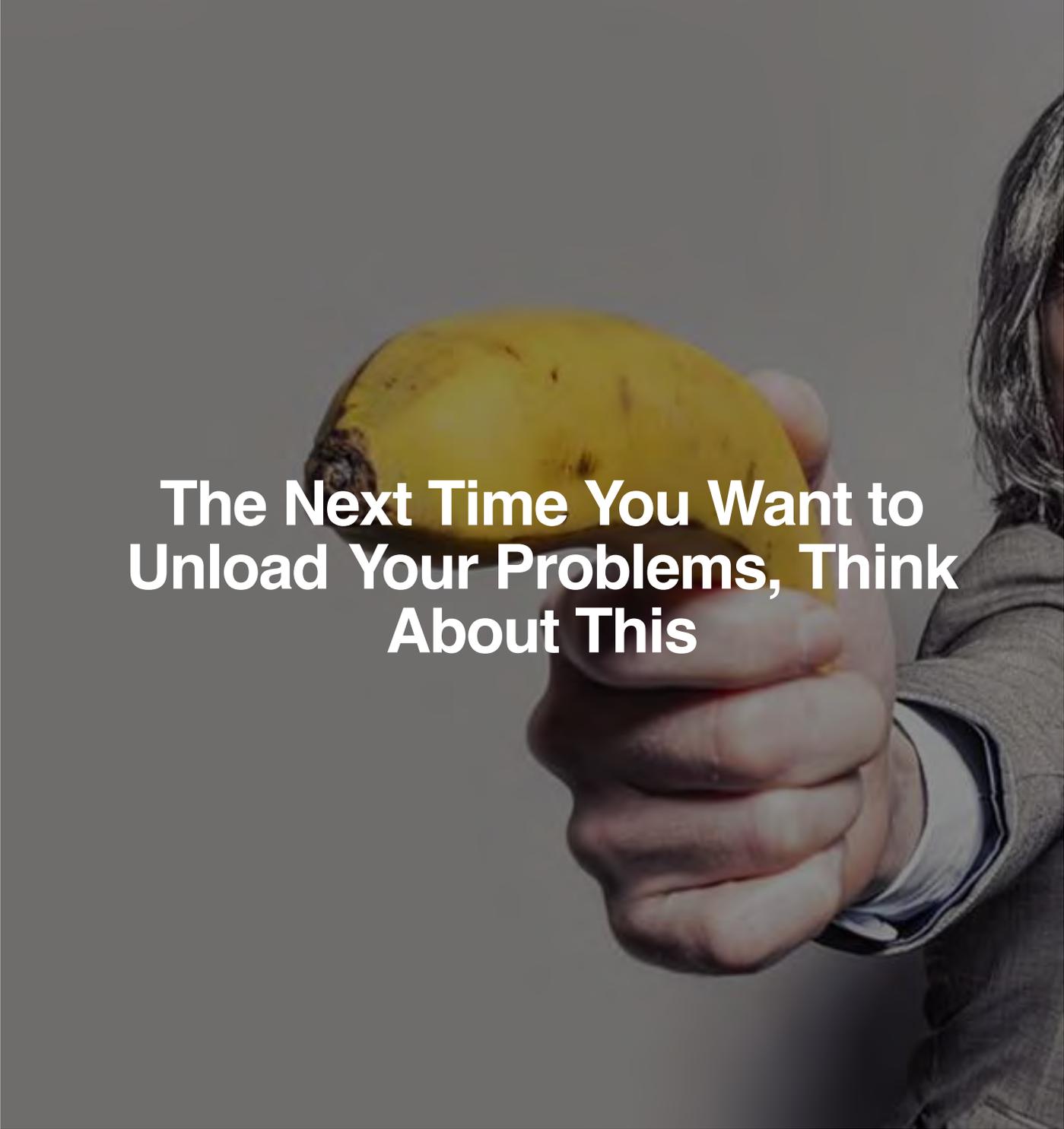
Social media, technology and the current precedent being set all put things in your favor. The scale is tipped. Bet on your personality. Don't fake it.



Gary Vaynerchuk

3 min read

Untagged



The Next Time You Want to Unload Your Problems, Think About This

. . .

I'm convinced there are two kinds of people in the world: people that need somebody else to dump their headaches on, and people that collect the headaches of others.

When I say headaches, I mean the small battles you fight that feel like a big deal in the moment, but in the larger scheme of life become insignificant. Lost a client. Didn't get that deal. All these things are real and intense, but in a month's time, you've bounced back. You've adapted. **You've moved on.**

So when you give these headaches to someone else, just keep that in mind. It's not that you should feel that you can't talk to someone when you need to; it's just a matter of being considerate, and self aware. How many times have you taken out a problem on someone through your mood or actions, and regretted it later? How many times has it happened to you?

I have always had the ability to come home after a long day and leave it all behind for my family. My dad did not have that ability, and maybe that's why it has affected me so much. But while my dad couldn't do it, my mother could. Tremendously. She collects everybody's headaches. Maybe you have someone like that in your family as well. Sort of a keeper of the peace.

But at the end of the day, there is one big reason that I separate these things from my family life: because they are the ones that have allowed me to work so hard. My wife, especially, has given me the freedom to have this life. Without her love, I would have none of this. **It's completely inappropriate to disrespect that love, to then carry over my headaches home.**

Complaining is something I have no tolerance for. **If you're in control of it, you have the ability to fix it.** Where is the value in complaining? Assess the problem, find the solution, and get on the offense.

There have been numerous times I want to complain when I came home. When we couldn't ship to Texas anymore on WineLibrary.com and lost so many customers. When we didn't get a really potentially strong client at Vayner. They were huge issues. But the second I walk in that door, **I need to repay my amazing family that has given me the opportunity to do my thing by shutting that all off and turning on a different gear.**

I listen to other people. I'm thrilled to hear your headaches, and to try and come up with a solution. But I have no interest in giving you mine. And I truly believe this is something that can be developed in a person. Listen more than you talk. Make a

conscious effort to ask more questions of the people around you. Make sure the buck stops with you. Remember what others have done with you. These are all places you can start; and you'll only move forward from there, I promise.



Gary Vaynerchuk

3 min read

Untagged

This is the Biggest Mistake a Young Entrepreneur Can Make



A common question I get all the time: what is the biggest mistake young entrepreneurs are making?

They're building businesses that only work during the best-case market scenarios.

Let me back up and explain a bit.

There are also so many incredible young entrepreneurs out there right now. I don't want to sit up here and be that old dude who preaches about back in the day, or kids these days. That guy sucks. Nobody likes him or listens to him for advice on business problems.

But I do want to make sure young entrepreneurs have everything they need to succeed. And for that, we need to talk about the "biggest mistake" you are all currently making.

Quite simply, **market conditions right now are not allowing for young entrepreneurs of today to cultivate strong business discipline.**

So I guess in a sense, it's more about what they're *not* doing, rather than what they *are* doing.

The fact that it is so easy to create a startup right now and raise money to get it started is, in part, an enormous cause of this. Think about it. When you are twenty-one years old today, the last real hardcore economic issue was in 2008...when you were fourteen. That, to me, is insane.

This is the reality of the market right now.

But you can be on the offense with this. I always preach that being defensive in business is the wrong way to go; you need to pinpoint this issue of business discipline now, and work on it before it affects you.

Because when you get down to it, the weakness is this: you are all peace-time generals. This is a great time to be starting a business and trying to sell it, but what happens when the bad times eventually roll around again? To be a great business person, you can't just be a peace-time general. You need to be a wartime general too.

Look forward in time to all the possibilities of what could happen: stock market collapse. Money is not flowing and some geo political event is changing the landscape. In those situations, a huge amount of people aren't thinking about investing in the next Facebook and Uber.

They want to be more careful with investments. Without all the opportunities, only the true entrepreneurs with the grit and ability to build businesses will rise to the top.

So what is my advice? Well, there are three key things young entrepreneurs should focus on to weather every storm.

#1: Building teams.

This should be a no-brainer, but you may not realize in the middle of rapid growth that a team isn't being formed for longevity. Set up your team for success by listening and taking the time to celebrate victories. I wrote more on how to be a good boss and build your team successfully [in this article here](#) and [another article here](#). Check them out.

#2: Building good products.

The question I ask young entrepreneurs: are you building a business, or a toy? [Here is what I mean by that.](#)

#3: Salesmanship.

You can make the best cup of coffee in the world, but if you can't sell it, you're out of luck. Cash is oxygen. Money is what will take you to the next level, so if you can't get it, you won't move on. Be a good salesperson and curate your sales department with great care.

These three things that have been thematic for a long time now. They may sound very familiar, but really evaluate where you are with each of them. Really self audit.

Young entrepreneurs need to come out this mistake by realizing that they are currently operating in a very specific moment of time. Don't let your skillset be limited by it.

Because bad times are coming. Then there will be good times again. Then bad. Then good. Get it?

Be ready for every possible outcome. Don't lose sight of what is ahead.



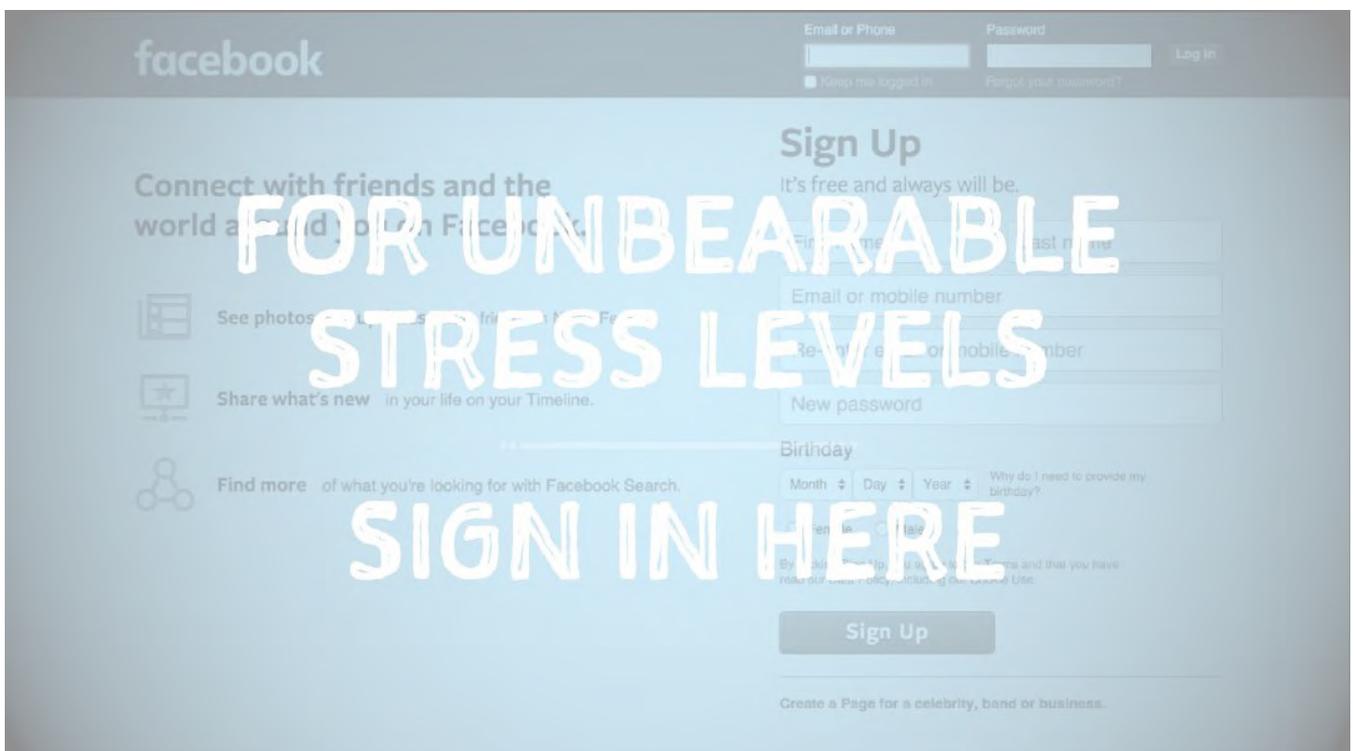
Kati Krause

11 min read

Untagged

Facebook's Mental Health Problem

The most important thing I learned in 2015? That depression and social media do not go well together at all.



The first time I deleted the Facebook app from my phone was in October 2014. It wasn't a considered decision. Rather, it felt like dumping a half-eaten tub of ice cream before I could gobble down the whole thing and feel sick, or deleting the number of a man who clearly doesn't have my best interests at heart: a panicked intervention by reason to prevent my out-of-control animal instinct from doing further harm to myself.

That October I suffered my first bout of depression in over 10 years.

Once I realised what was going (it took me a while), I swiftly pulled out of all work projects and withdrew to the care of very close friends and the quiet safety of my home. I tried to read books and failed; I tried to watch films and couldn't focus for more than a few minutes at a time. My attention span, never a soldier, had shrivelled up. So I found myself clutching my phone and switching between the Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter apps for hours at a time. Not to post—I couldn't think of anything—but to consume. Yet with every double-tap on the home button, with every pull-to-refresh motion, things got worse.

Every receding wave left a despair more profound than the one before — yet every time I wanted nothing more than the comforting waters to return. Pull to refresh.

It was a sensation like nothing I'd known before, like consuming a particularly vile drug: A quickening of the heartbeat, a wave of warmth and comfort, then a bleak, sickly, and tense emptiness, like the tide withdrawing from the shore and leaving nothing but loneliness in its damp wake. No matter how desperately I clutched at it, the water ran through my fingers, and every receding wave left a despair more profound than the one before— yet every time I wanted nothing more than the comforting waters to return. Pull to refresh.

It was a nauseating vicious cycle, and I had to get out. There was no one there to help me because I wouldn't have known how to explain it. All I had were brief instances when the fog lifted a little and I was able to see that something bad was going on. I waited for one of those instances, then mustered all available energy and made what seemed, at the time, one of the most important decisions of my life: I deleted the Facebook app. Then Instagram. Then Twitter. I turned off all notifications, of which there'd been many. Except for text messages and calls from close friends and family, my phone was now silent. The world was suddenly much smaller, much more manageable, much more intimate. It allowed me to get better. And a few weeks later, without much thinking about it, I was back on social media.

. . .

The story might have ended there—had my depression not returned with a vengeance in the spring, plunging me right back into that horrible, horrible vicious cycle. Off the social apps went. But this time, maybe because I needed something to hold on to and pseudo-scientific inquiry felt like a good enough straw, I set out to understand what exactly was going on here.

It quickly turned out that it wasn't just me. The friends and acquaintances I spoke to who had been through episodes of depression all told similar stories: during depression, social media was off limits. Some had taken breaks. Others had deleted their accounts. One had been ordered by his therapist to get off Facebook. Nobody had given it much thought. Most considered it simply another of the many mysteries surrounding depression, this weird disease of which not very much is known except common symptoms and general statistics.

Common symptoms: You're *very* low on energy. You can't concentrate. You can't deal with people. You can't deal with stress. You may suffer headaches, back pain, sleeping disorders, and wildly varying appetite. Most of the time, you are not so much sad but catatonic. You just don't feel anything. Except like a loser. And you can't escape it. As Sylvia Plath wrote: "[W]herever I sat—on the deck of a ship or at a street café in Paris or Bangkok—I would be sitting under the same glass bell jar, stewing in my own sour air."

General statistics: The German Ministry for Education and Research states that the probability of experiencing major depression once in your life lies between 16 and 20 percent in Germany, where I live. The U.S. National Institute of Mental Health says that in 2012, an estimated 16 million adults in the US, or 6.9 percent of the adult population, had suffered at least one major depressive episode in the past year. The World Health Organisation estimates there are 350 million people suffering from depression globally, and that by 2020 it will be the second most widespread disease in the world.

This is shoddy statistics, but: 350 million people is one quarter of Facebook's global user base.

There is no scientific research to back up my claim or explain this link between depression and social media use—or at least I haven't been able to find any. There are plenty of studies into how social media may *cause* depression, but the evidence is thin: For every study claiming proof that social media is harmful, there's another saying it isn't. (One study from the University of Missouri from February 2015 basically tried to settle the debate by saying it all depends on how you use it. Stalk acquaintances and compare your life to theirs, and bang, here comes depression. Dotingly check on your friends and family, and you'll be happy. Which begs the question: Have the researchers ever actually used Facebook?)

“Oh yes, I see that a lot,” my psychiatrist said matter-of-factly when I asked her whether her other depressive patients were also unable to use social media. “One even dumped her phone recently.”

Yet while there may be no research into the effect social media may have on an already existing depression, to specialists that effect appears so obvious that it isn't even particularly noteworthy. “Oh yes, I see that a lot,” my psychiatrist at the Psychiatric University Clinic of Berlin's Charité hospital said matter-of-factly when I asked her whether her other depressive patients were also unable to use social media. “One even dumped her phone recently.” That's because social media and constant availability cause stress, she explained. “Also, when you're suffering from depression, you don't usually want to see other people's amazing lives.”

Seeking more explanations, I went all the way up the food chain to Professor Isabella Heuser, director of the Charité's Clinic for Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, who swiftly confirmed my psychiatrist's assessment of the incompatibility of depression and social media. (While nearly all patients she's seen stay off social media altogether, she did concede that some patients go on Facebook when they can't sleep at night, although she says they generally don't, or can't, talk about their depression on the platform and don't get anything positive out of the experience).

I laid out to her what I'd found out through self-observation.

1. That I wasn't able to perform for social media anymore. I used to go through life mentally composing tweets and spotting photo opportunities for Instagram. That was unthinkable now. The mere thought caused so much anxiety that I could barely unclench my jaws.
2. That I now consciously suffered from comparing my life to others', which was also new.
3. That I was experiencing a powerful craving for instant gratification that also felt incredibly harmful—remember the receding waters—and that wreaked further havoc to my already suffering attention span.

“Well, it's easy to explain *that* physiologically,” Professor Heuser said when she heard the last point. “Through your daily engagement with social media your brain has learned that when you log on in the morning, a pleasant feeling will follow. Escapism, a positive world. That's dopamine, anticipation, and you can still experience that. However, the positive feeling that usually follows—your organism can't mount that response anymore. That's a classic symptom of depression. You can't feel joy or connection to others anymore.” And because my brain knows what joy used to feel like, she explained, its absence, that emptiness, is experienced subconsciously as painful. The fact that I found it so hard to resist the lure of said dopamine release was also easy to explain, she said: “Will has to do with energy. And depression is characterised precisely by a lack of energy.” And as far as my attention span went, well, if it had been low before, depression may now simply have pushed it below a threshold that I considered tolerable.

I took to my Facebook feed in search of material and the further I went back, the more jealous I felt at my own life as I had portrayed it.

So far, so medically straightforward. But what about the sudden sense of inferiority? I told Professor Heuser of one particularly crass example: Shortly before my second break-down, an artist friend had asked me to participate in a video

participate in a video examining the way we portray ourselves and our accomplishments, both online and off. I was to read out a few of my own social media posts. I took to my Facebook feed in search of material and the further I went back, the more jealous I felt *at my own life* as I had portrayed it. There they were, my glowing posts from Istanbul, Tokyo, and New York City, my tales of adventures in the West Bank and the Baltic Sea, the stories I'd written and magazines I'd edited, my clever commentary on current affairs, all rounded off by likes and comments from people I'd met (or not) at some point in my life—irrevocable proof that I'd once been successful, popular, joyful, happy even. At roughly 12 months into the past I was so overcome by self-pity that I had to break the whole thing off.

Professor Heuser thought for a moment. “That’s only indirectly related to social media,” she finally said. “People suffering from depression are incredibly creative at convincing themselves they are losers. But we live in a world that’s hyper-communicative—not really communicative, but narcissistic. Everybody is always ‘sharing’ something, only that it isn’t really sharing, it’s posting something to a wall in the hope that as many people as possible will come past and ‘like’ it. The purpose is to feed our narcissism. It is a many-voiced monologue, a cacophony. Everybody is posting something, but we aren’t talking to each other.”

This isn’t novel criticism to be levelled at either social media or contemporary culture, and under any other circumstance, I would have waved it away as Luddite. However, now for the first time in over 10 years of social media use did I actually understand it, feel the truth of it in my guts—and I realised to what extent I had happily played along. I was reminded of that famous quote by Carl Gustav Jung, the founder of analytical psychology: “Loneliness does not come from having no people about one, but from being unable to communicate the things that seem important to oneself.” To a healthy person, some phoney dialogue might appear tedious at worst. But to someone suffering from depression, the superficiality of social media may just be outrightly harmful.

. . .



That's an issue the media technologist and writer Deanna Zandt addressed in a [talk she gave at Personal Democracy Forum](#) in June 2015. Zandt presented the audience with a sample of photos from her social media feeds. In all of them she was all smiles; she was also, she revealed, at the time spiralling into the worst depressive period of her life. "The dissonance that was created for me by what was actually happening in my life versus what I thought I should be publicly sharing with my community made my condition that much worse."

"All of this is leading us down this dangerous path of alienation. And not just from each other, but from our own selves. We're walking down a technological thrust into collective depressive dissonance."

Zandt blames digital culture's focus on purity for blowing up the scale at which how we present ourselves in public differs from how we actually feel. "All of this is leading us down this dangerous path of alienation. And not just from each other, but from our own selves. We're walking down a technological thrust into collective depressive dissonance." Instead of building tools for "silly human mammals" who are "easily trained by positive reinforcement," she argues, technologists should embrace the messiness of human life and put it into the core of the products they

build. She doesn't purport to know what this would look like, but her demand is clear: Digital culture should allow for that space between authenticity, connection, and vulnerability—in other words, intimacy.

Deanna Zandt, I hear you. But I am no media technologist. My solution to the problem posed by the incompatibility of depression and social media didn't aim to change anyone's life but my own. Yet maybe it was no less radical: Ruthlessly dispose of all fake intimacy and superficial interactions and focus what little energy I had on real connection. Take my feeble attention span and put it into the equivalent of an incubator. Learn to consider myself a worthy human being without the positive reinforcement of Twitter favs.

Which reminds me: Do people still call them favs?

I have been mostly off social media for seven months now. I have also deleted all non-social apps that trigger dopamine release and lure with escapism, like shopping apps and games. When I want to escape, I read a novel, and when I can't concentrate, I go for a walk. I often leave the house without my phone. I have sworn off multitasking to the extent that for a while, I've even stopped listening to music while I work. And it made me feel *a lot* better. Sometimes I wish I were strong enough to delete my account on Facebook, which I now regard as the most dangerous of all social networks. As it is, I'll keep my URL blocker on, limiting my daily dispense of methadone to 10 minutes and appreciating that they've made a separate Messenger app.

. . .

This wasn't an easy article for me to write, and an even harder one to publish. I have become a much more private person in recent months and anyway, writing about depression does not fit with the professional version of myself I used to present online.

But while I'm worried about exposure, I also believe depression should be something we talk about more openly—everything else just feels ridiculous at this point. Ultimately I, like many other people, will have to find a way to cope with social media, just like I've had to learn to cope with the ready availability of sugary foods: through awareness and self-control. I don't expect Twitter or Facebook to help me, just like I don't expect Kraft Foods to do so. But I'd like to at least be aware of the risk factors—be they a propensity for diabetes, or depression.

Thanks to Mark Lotto.



Mattan Griffel

7 min read



How to Develop a Daily Writing Habit

A Guide to Keeping Your New Year's Resolution

One of my New Year's resolutions for 2014 was to write daily. I'm happy to report that I only missed a total of three days in 2014. I'm currently on a 250-day writing streak, and it's become kind of addictive.

Here's some of what I learned about cultivating a writing habit.

Why write daily?

The idea came from a book called *The Artist's Way* (which admittedly I haven't read—but I've heard it's good). They call it morning pages, which consist of three pages of writing done every day. It can be about anything that pops into your head—and it's important that you get it all out of your head without editing or censoring in any way.

If you can get in the habit of writing daily, it will help clear your mind and get your ideas flowing for the rest of the day.

I initially started writing every day because I eventually want to write a book, but it's become so much more than that. I use my daily writing as a way to think out loud, troubleshooting problems, thoughts, and anxieties I have. It gives me something to look forward to in the morning and actually puts me in a really good mood.

As my friend Dev says, "Developing a daily writing practice is about deepening a conversation with oneself."

A really tangible benefit is that I've written way more blog posts since I've started writing every day.

Before, writing was something that I often needed to do—whether it was writing an email, a blog post, or a letter I'd been meaning to write—but never really found the time for.

Figure out why you personally want to write more often. Is it to start a blog, to build a following, to become known as a thought leader, to connect with your inner voice, to develop a creative outlet, or to write a book? These are ALL good reasons, but it's good to know which ones are most important to you and which ones aren't. These will be your guiding forces that propel you forward when things are tough.

Pick some accountability metrics

It's easy to say "I want to start writing more" and then fudge it at the end of the year. It's tempting to come up with a loose goal—one that isn't tied to a specific number or action—because it doesn't require much thought and is almost impossible to fail. (Because what does "write more" even mean? Does sitting down to write once or twice count?)

But goals like that are almost meaningless and unlikely to help you create meaningful change in your life.

Instead, come up with one or two trackable goals. My trackable goal this year was to write 750 words every day. Seven hundred and fifty words is about three pages handwritten (or one page typed single space). But there's another reason I picked that number which will become more obvious in a second.

Specificity matters. If you want to change your behavior, you have to know how to measure it.

Make it a regular practice

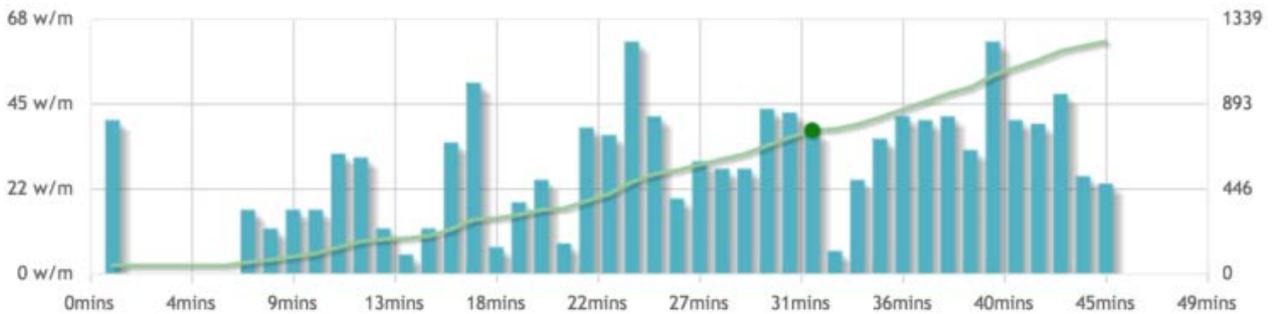
This is the really hard part, but in order to hit a big goal you have to develop regular habits in your life. When a friend introduced me to 750words.com, I was blown away. It's a simple site where you go to do your daily writing. 750words isn't a publishing platform, it's a personal tracking tool. It keeps track of your writing streak and gives you some really cool daily stats on your writing as well as badges for your accomplishments that keep things fun.



Keeping track of streaks is a very powerful tactic for developing any new habit. Jerry Seinfeld used to keep a big calendar by his desk and mark an X for every day that he sat down and worked on his routine. Eventually his streak became so long that he kept going just because he didn't want to break it

(**edit:** this is a misattribution—see note). Like I mentioned before, I'm currently on a 250-day writing streak and the thought of breaking it pains me.

Writing started at 7:34am and proceeded thusly



About this entry

Words today:	Time to 750:	Total time:	Words per minute:	# distractions:
1,218	00:32 00:40 actually typing	00:44 00:40 actually typing	24 30 wpm when typing	1 Breaks over 3 minutes

At first I started by writing whenever I had time during the day. Sometimes it was in the morning, sometimes it was at night, journal-style, just before going to bed. The problem with this haphazard approach was that a whole day would pass by without me finding any time to write. Indeed, those three days of writing that I missed, I didn't even realize I missed them. I thought I had written on those days.

Eventually I settled on writing my 750 words first thing in the morning every morning.

Do you feel like you don't have time to accomplish your goals every day? Make time.

Lao Tzu says, "Time is a created thing. To say 'I don't have time,' is like saying 'I don't want to.'"

The best thing I ever did for writing and habit development in general was start waking up earlier. Recently there has been some research saying that seven hours of sleep per night might be better than eight. So now I try to be in bed by 11:30pm and wake up at around 6:30am every morning.

Find ways to make it fun & easy

On top of the badges and stats that 750words.com gives me, I've had to find other ways to make it fun and kill the tediousness I sometimes feel.



Some of the badges I've collected on 750words.com

Initially I started by writing in different styles every day. One day would be murder mystery, then science fiction, then romance. Sometimes I write letters to my parents or my friends. They really appreciate those.

It might sound weird to write in a different genre or style than you're used to, but three pages goes by pretty quickly, and then you get to never look at it again if you don't like it.

Find a friend to keep you accountable and make it more fun.

For a while, my friend Mathias and I sent each other prompts to kick start our daily writing. One person would send the other a single sentence of a story to use as the first sentence and also a style to write the story in (to push us out of our comfort zone). Then the other person had to finish it in that style. Here's an example:

Pippa eyed the watermelon two over from the end on the left because it reminded her of her ex-boyfriend. "This one will be perfect," she thought.

Style: Realism

Though most of the time I just write in free-form every morning. I've been able to get the total time it takes to write 750 words down to about 10–15 minutes.

Keep a notebook of prompts for later days

I've started keeping a notebook of writing prompts in Evernote in case I've run out of ideas or I want to finish a blog post (this is actually one of them). During the day, I come up with ideas, add them to Evernote, and then I write about those in the morning.

Right now, the list includes “What I've learned so far in 2014,” “There's no expectation of privacy on the Internet,” “On people holding subway doors,” and other random thoughts I have on the subway.

One Month is sending out a daily writing prompt for 30 days to help encourage a daily writing habit. If you want to join in, [click here to sign up](#) to get an email reminder every day for 30 days.

Don't worry about editing

It will take you forever (about an hour) to write 750 words if you worry about format and editing while doing the creative stuff too. Most people recommend separating the two actions.

Ernest Hemingway said, “Write drunk; edit sober”

Get comfortable with having tons of typos and your writing being mostly nonsense. If you want, you can edit it later.

This can be hard so a trick I've learned to accomplish this is to turn the brightness down on your computer screen so that you can't read what you're writing.

A lot of times, I'll pick an idea from my Evernote notebook of blog post ideas and write about it for 750 words. Then I'll take that writing and upload it to Medium for editing. I usually do one round of personal editing and then send it around to a few friends (using the “share draft” feature) before publishing. Some of my most successful blog posts have been developed in this way (including [How to get a busy person to respond to your email](#) and [How to never forget anything ever again](#))

Want to write more? So do we. Join One Month for 30 days of free writing prompts. You'll get a new one-sentence prompt by email every day for one month.

Do you have any other tips for developing a daily writing practice? Have you read anything about techniques famous authors used to write every day? Post a comment! I'm going to compile a list of best practices.

Thanks to Sarah Kathleen Peck, Dan Dzombak, Justin Mares and Kate Lee.



Mike Monteiro

5 min read

Untagged



This is about the time I chose not to die.

I've waited two years to write this story.

I waited two years because I needed to cycle clients and employees through the shop. I needed to see that everyone who I was working with back then is ok now. I needed to know my clients were enjoying the fruits of the work we did for them, and I needed to know the employees who left are happy at their new jobs. I needed to know everyone had moved on.

I also waited until the people surrounding me now have a good sense of what a healthy me is like. And for myself, I needed to wait until I was sure I had both some distance and some victories under my belt. In the past two years I've done a bunch of work, written a bunch of articles and a book, traveled the world doing talks and workshops. I'm not listing this out to boast. I'm listing these out as proof of life.

But if we're being *really* honest, and I hope we are, I waited because it's a shit thing to write about. I don't like reliving it. I'm still unsure whether it's any of your business. And I don't want people in my life affected by the stigma so many idiots put on it.

But in the end, it's the stigma that brings me back here.

Two years ago depression almost killed me. This is the story of how I got help. And the story of people who helped me.

Depression runs in my family. It was never acknowledged. Or spoken of. My father wasn't a man to talk about his feelings. And the closest my mother ever came to happiness was denying it to others. Beyond them, the limbs on the family tree did some heavy lifting every few generations. They are part of a culture that doesn't admit to depression. It's a weakness. And immigrants don't get depressed. It gets in the way of work. This is how I grew up. This is how a ton of people grow up.

Let me take a moment here to make sure you understand that I know absolutely jack shit about what I'm talking about. This is not meant to be a comprehensive article about depression. This is one person's story. This is what it's like for me. This is how I understand it. And this is how *I* deal with the defect in my own brain.

You are NOT your depression. Your depression is not you!

There are two parts to depression.

The first is a thing that happens in my brain. It's chemical. It's a thing my brain does. And it's like having a really fucking shitty relative living in your own head. Telling you what you're not capable of all the time. Let me tell you a story about the kind of shit it does.

Two years ago, we were having a particularly bad year. Business sucked. We were fighting to make every payroll, sometimes borrowing money from friends to do so. I wasn't sleeping. As shitty a situation as this is, it happens. But when you throw depression into the mix it becomes a perfect storm of bad things. One particular morning I'm sitting in the office, trying to figure out where that week's payroll is coming from. And an employee tells me there's mold in the bathroom. Normally, that's a slightly annoying thing to have to deal with. But in the midst of depression that problem was the exact same size as the payroll problem.

I'd lost the ability to size things up. Every problem was exactly the same size and, having lost the ability to problem-solve, every problem was as insurmountable.

Eventually your brain believes that your problems are too insurmountable to get out of bed. And beyond that it starts looking for other escapes. This is not a mood. This is not something you shake off. This is your brain being broken. It's lost the ability to process so it wants to shut itself off.

This is a problem that, luckily for me, science was able to solve. Let me reiterate the *for me* part. But hold on to this thread for a second, we need to deal with problem number two. Which may be worse.



Cheer up! Depressed people just need a make-over! (...and 300mg of Zoloft a day.)

Problem number two is the stigma that keeps you from getting help. Like I said, I didn't grow up in an environment that dealt with mental issues very well. Turns out very few of us did. I was encouraged to shake it off, man up, get over myself, etc. And even when you grow up trying to distance yourself from how you were raised there is stuff that is *so* ingrained, *so* deep, *so* embedded in your soul that it becomes your own personal original sin. And you don't even realize you're still carrying it. Even after I admitted to myself that I suffered from depression I allowed it to define me. I convinced myself that if I sought treatment I wouldn't be *me* anymore. I wouldn't be as creative as I wanted to be. I wouldn't be able to write as me. It would take away my *edge*. My personality was tied to my depression.

This was stupid. And, as much as I cannot diagnose any of you or tell you how to deal with your own problems, I am absolutely confident in telling you this: *You are NOT your depression. And your depression is not you!* It is a thing that is killing you slowly. It is keeping you from being who you actually are. Which is a happier version of yourself.

So two years ago, I was sitting on a bench in the park. I had one decision left in me. You don't need to know the details. Just know that I made the decision to get help.* And I did. I did it with the help of a great therapist, and a little science. The pills allowed me the breathing room I needed to let the therapy work. And we worked our asses off, since I had to establish a baseline of happiness that I never received growing up. I'm not blaming anyone, by the way. My parents grew up surrounded by the stigma that didn't allow them to seek help, even if they wanted it.

So here's the lesson I promised you: I am still me. Better yet, I think I am *finally* me. I'm not living with some shit demon in my head all the time. I still have good days. And I have bad days. I get sad. I have a full range of emotions. Including happiness. I write more than ever. I'm just as creative as ever. I still get angry! Boy, do I get angry. But I tend to get angry at the things that deserve that anger. (That's the therapy working.)

So if you're out there living with this shit, know I love you. Know other people love you. Let them help you.

You don't have to be your depression. Go be you.



Philip Kaplan

3 min read

Untagged

Founder/Product Fit

The other night I was at a small restaurant for dinner. I overheard a conversation at the next table.

(prepare for a total san francisco eavesdrop)

This woman was trying to convince her friend to start a company that compiles user tokens across banner ad publishers that asdf fidffj oueritjlfgdjkl
erkgjdfkdfkkgjgddfkjg [insert really boring adtech thing here].

I wanted to jump to their table and yell “FOR THE LOVE OF GOD, SAVE YOURSELVES.”

I founded a big ad network. I spent years on it, had 125 employees and we generated more than \$100 million in revenue.

But I didn't care about ads.

Oh, there are people who do. And there are people who are passionate about different aspects of the online ad business—big data, behavioral science, design and consumer psychology.

But I wasn't one of them.

(Many of them worked at AdBrite and were/are awesome.)

But we hear that entrepreneurs need to be passionate. My justification was that I'd always been passionate about building things, getting users, and seeing people use my stuff.

But by that definition, any entrepreneur can be passionate about anything.

Truth is, I wasn't particularly interested in sending email either. Or "social shopping." Or writing about failed internet companies.

Some of those things did well, some didn't. But none reached their potential or got as big as their biggest competitors.

I would dread going to adtech conferences.

I'd hang out with entrepreneurs who were *super* into the biz who later sold their companies for much more than I did.

Then there were guys like me, who were all "I built a thing. Check it out."

For the past two years, I've been running a service for musicians called DistroKid. We help musicians get their music into iTunes, Spotify and other places. This year we'll generate over \$5 million in royalties for 50,000 artists and bootstrap past \$1 million yearly recurring revenue run-rate.

And people love it. Check out these Unsolicited Tweets O' Love.

And not just people.

This one.

Me.

Back in 2007, the mighty Marc Andreessen wrote about "Product/Market Fit." You've achieved Product/Market Fit when the thing you've been building (and pivoting, tweaking and changing...) finally becomes useful to people.

Chris Dixon talks about Founder/Market Fit. He says it's important to know your market well.

I agree.

But you can build something great for a market—a market you know well—that you don't give a shit about.

Most entrepreneurs do.

You've heard musicians say they can't pick a favorite song they've written, because it'd be like picking a favorite child.

Why didn't I feel like that about any of my previous companies?

Now that I've found it, I realize how important "**Product/Founder Fit**" is to the success of a business. At least for me.

This is likely obvious to other entrepreneurs.

Evan Williams loves making it easy for people to publish their writing (he founded Blogger, Twitter, and Medium—different takes on the same thing?). Bryan and Jeff from TypeKit love design. As a musician, I obsess over my drumming. Great surgeons, physicists and scholars can't get enough of that stuff.

Yet there I was, building an ad network.

I'm not sure what the takeaway is.

But I'm pretty sure if you aren't **totally into the thing you're building**—and not just **totally into *that you're building a thing***—you're gonna have a hard time.



Ryan Hoover

Untagged

“The world doesn’t need another blogging platform. But I did.”

This morning, Drew Wilson launched his new blogging platform, Buffalo. As someone who sees dozens of new products every day, I immediately drew connections to Medium, Svbtile, Tumblr, and others that no longer exist. Playing devil’s advocate, I asked:

Do we need another blogging platform?

Humbly and thoughtfully, Drew replied with:



Drew Wilson M Stay at home dad

@rrhoover The world certainly does not need another blogging platform/service. But I did :) So that's why I made it. I don't want to blog on Medium because it doesn't look like the way I want it, and also other people's content is in my post (And a few other reasons). In contrast Buffalo gives you a custom domain for free and enables you to remove all the Buffalo branding. So if you're like me and wouldn't want Medium as your primary blog, I hope Buffalo will work splendidly for you :)

▲ 2 ← Reply

Perfect response. 😊

It’s a good reminder that not everything needs to be a business and that it’s OK to simply build for yourself.

I’m sick of armchair entrepreneurs, judging others for simply building. Would you criticize the 16-year-old banging on the drums in his parents’ garage? The music might sound terrible but he’s learning and even more importantly, trying.

Thanks, Drew.

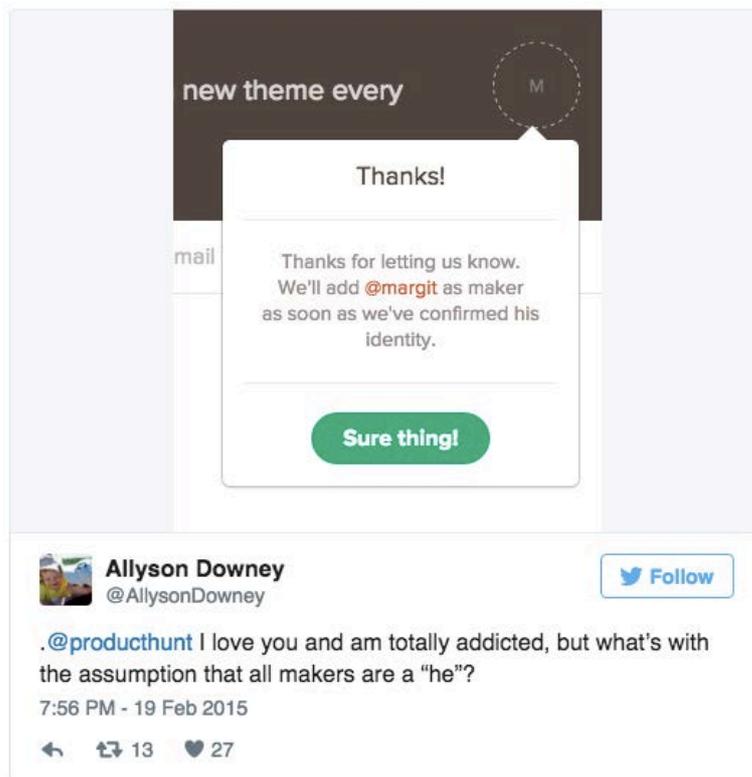


Ryan Hoover

Untagged

We fucked up

A few hours ago this tweet surfaced on my feed:



Fuck. I felt terrible.

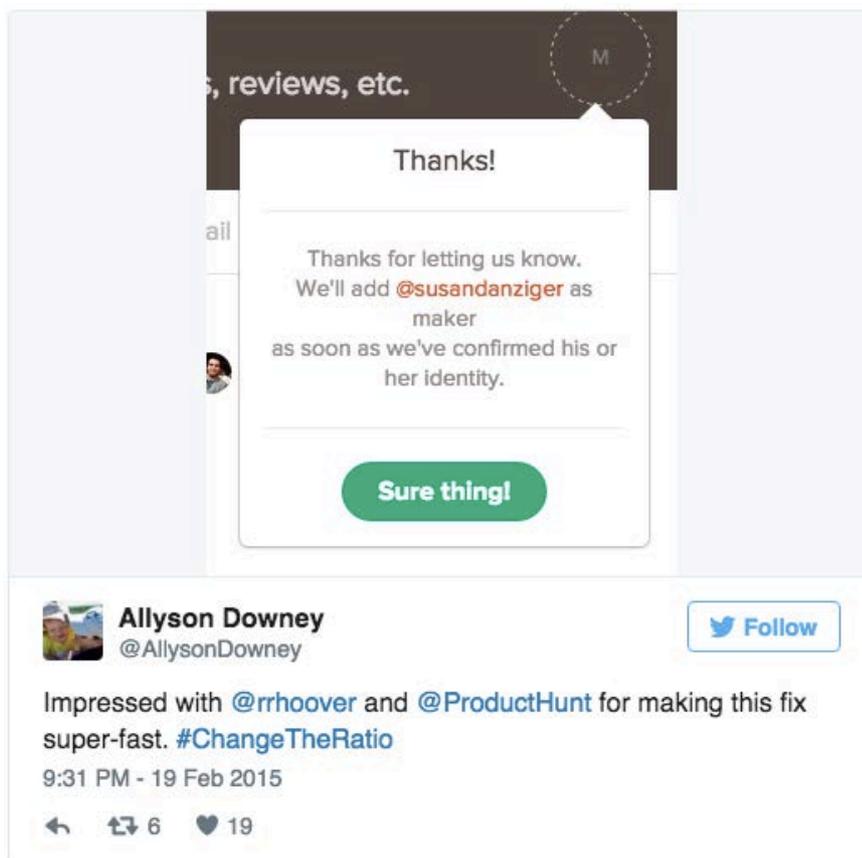


In the past year I've become increasingly aware of gender inequality and more empathetic of what many women have gone through, thanks to events like YC's Female Founders, stories shared by women, and private conversations with female friends of mine.

We made a big mistake. It may appear like a small typo, but the pronoun “his” subtly shouts disregard for women makers, particularly to those that have been mistreated because of their gender. Going forward we’ll be even more careful in how we communicate and hopefully this is a reminder to others of how important it is to be thoughtful and empathetic when crafting copy.



Again, I’m sorry. Thanks Allyson for bringing this to our attention and Ayrton for quickly fixing our flub:



EDIT: We updated the copy to be gender neutral, avoiding “his or her” as shown above.



Tobias van Schneider

5 min read

Untagged

Avoid these 5 things when building your design portfolio — Part 1

For some reason when working on our own design portfolio, all the things we usually praise about good design seem to be forgotten as we work on our portfolio in perfect isolation.

While reviewing many portfolios myself through [Semplice](#), I'd like to share the 5 most common mistakes designers make when designing their portfolios. Keep in mind, these things are always relative depending on what you want to achieve. Pick the ones that are relevant to you.

1. The generic bullshit intro

As with everything you design—Question every single element and ask yourself is it really needed? While reviewing hundreds of portfolios, one of the most common things I discovered are headlines such as: “I craft meaningful experiences” or “I push perfect pixels.” combined with a random stock photo of a macbook sitting on a desk.



These intros not only take up a lot of space, but are also used by 90% of other designers and do not contribute anything to your uniqueness as a designer.

Simply remove the intro, or replace it with simple facts about who you are or your title instead of wishy washy marketing speech. I'm not saying this to bash anyone, but simply because I want you to have the best portfolio possible.

PS: Let's make the reverse test in case you believe it works: If a client chooses you just based on an empty intro, I might also ask myself if I even want to work with that kind of client.

2. Showing too much work

There are many reasons for avoiding too much work in your portfolio, but here are some reasons you might have not thought about.

a.) Wanting to show too much work is the main reason why most designers never finish their portfolio in the first place. Limiting yourself is actually a good design exercise, it makes you focus on the essentials.

b.) No one will go through all of your work, I promise.

c.) Showing too much work basically means **“I have no opinion about my work, here is all the shit I did since year 1999, just sort it out for yourself.”**

The process of editing your selection is the most important aspect of creating your portfolio, and it's the process itself that will make you a better designer. Analyzing your work and thoughtfully removing projects from your portfolio is painful but also the best way to grow as a designer.

3. Unsolicited Redesigns for Fortune500 companies

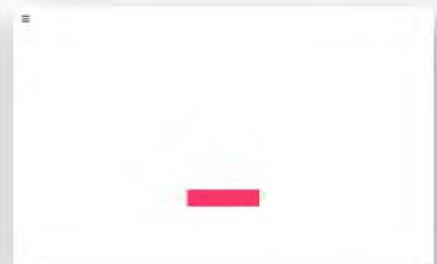
You know, I love unsolicited redesigns because they are not only a great tool for exercising your design sensibilities when just starting out, but they are also a good way to generate hype & attention in the design community. If the only reason you do them is to generate attention, keep doing them.



Your stunning Nike re-design.



Your stunning Nike re-design without the imagery you found online & that wasn't yours.



Your stunning Nike re-design without generic use of Helvetica.

The point is, as a designer we shine when solving hard problems, or at least attempting to solve them. But doing a quick visual re-design of nike.com,

or any other Fortune500 company is not only lazy but also easy because you're doing it for a company that is already very successful and has fantastic assets/products to work with in the first place.

I always love to see unsolicited redesigns that are focused on real problems, companies that aren't yet successful, products that are struggling and are neither hip or cool.

Being a good (product) designer means being a good problem solver. Cherry picking the problem is of course totally up to you, but it also reveals a lot about you and your work ethics. Unsolicited redesigns are a fantastic source to practice your skills, but focus your motivation on the problem and not the shiny brand (unless your only goal is to work for company xyz).

Please keep doing Unsolicited redesigns as an exercise because they are fun & quick to do, but in the context of building a strong portfolio I recommend avoiding it, especially if 90% of your work ends up being unsolicited redesigns.

4. Hiding your responsibilities

Let me give you a real life example: I remember reviewing a couple portfolios for a Senior Designer role. While going through some designers I found at least 6 portfolios who showcased exactly the same work for Nike.

Neither of them outlined what they actually did on the project, which of course caused trust issues immediately. Who did what? Did any one of them actually worked on it? How many more designers worked on this?

When working for bigger clients this is a common issue, but it can be solved easily by adding a detailed description about your responsibilities on each project, plus the people you collaborated with. Handle it the way movies do, with a list of detailed credits at the end.

Leaving out the details about a project usually makes the viewer suspicious, especially if I spot inconsistencies when comparing it to other projects in your portfolio which seem to differ in quality.

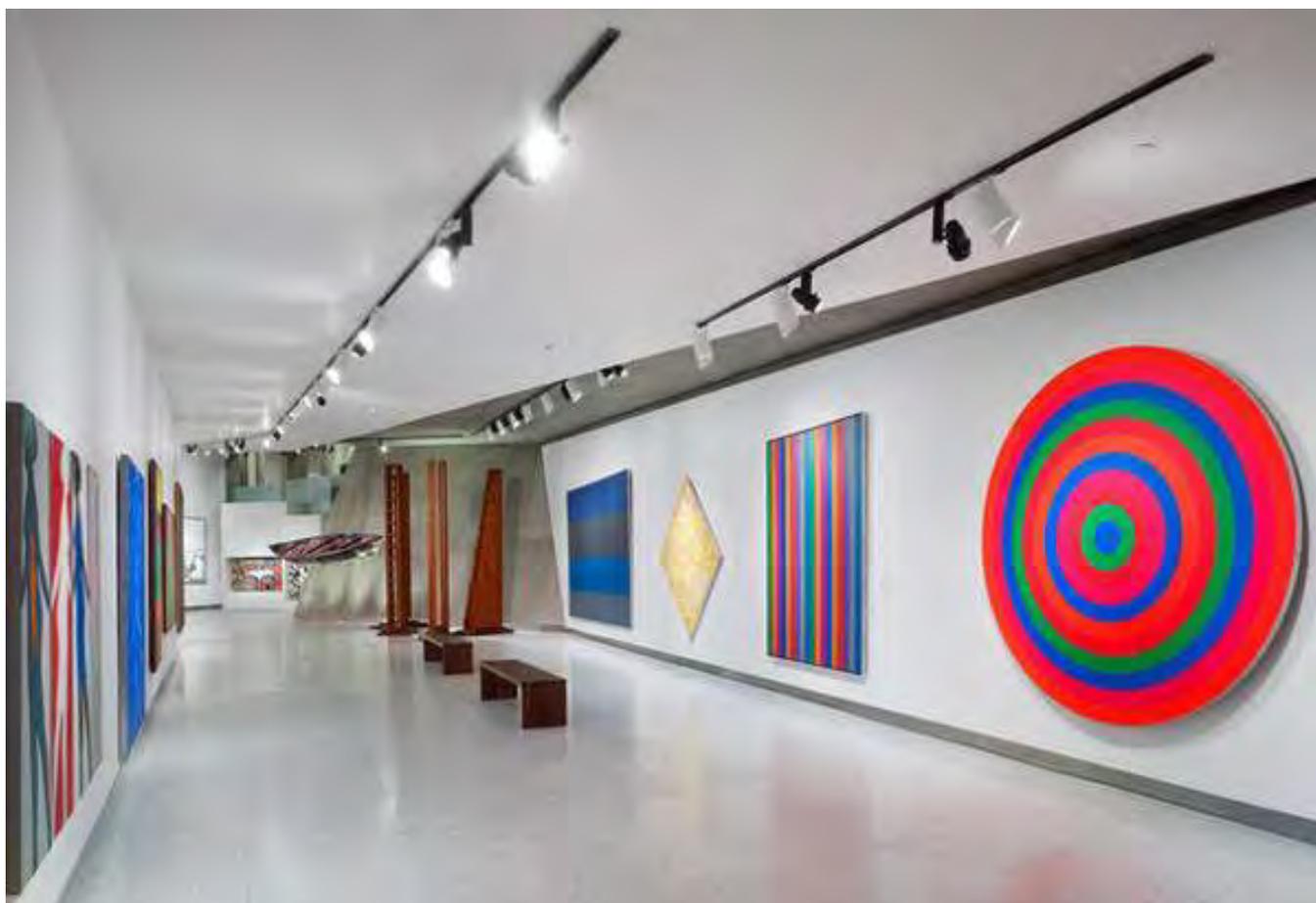
5. Making your portfolio a piece of art

Often we use our own website as a creative outlet. We think of it as our own creative playground where we can finally express ourselves, after all these limiting client projects. In general, there is nothing wrong with that.

We treat it as our personal experiment & without noticing it first, we created a piece of art. What we end up with is a website that is slow and playful to an extent that it becomes un-useable. If you like to get hired by certain companies, imagine the people who **have** to review your portfolio. Their time is usually limited and the amount of portfolios to review is a draining task.

If I need to complete a puzzle first just to find the navigation, I'm very likely to dismiss a portfolio immediately, even if the work is outstanding.

Think of your portfolio as the space in a museum. Clean, easy to navigate & with full focus on the work itself.



Focusing on the usability of your portfolio is as much as important as the work you like to showcase.

While this sounds almost too obvious, it's still one of the main reasons why so many portfolios get rejected during the review process.

Conclusion

If you avoid these 5 things above you're probably on a pretty good way to build a fantastic & effective showcase of your work.

Please reach out to me on Twitter if you have any questions or comments, which I'm sure you have. (:

Keep on rocking,
Tobias

I'm Tobias, a Product Design Lead at Spotify NYC. Founder of Semplice, Advisor & UX at memomi — www.vanschneider.com

Thanks to Lu Yu.



Tobias van Schneider

6 min read

Untagged

My Top11 essential tools I could not live without.

A week ago I asked you on Twitter which Mac or web apps you use that I might have not heard about. Today I share with you my list of apps, some of them you might not know.



No 1 — f.lux

Easily one of the best apps I ever downloaded. f.lux makes the color of your computer's display adapt to the time of day, warm at night and like sunlight during the day. Trust me, use it for a couple days and then turn it off to see the difference, your eyes will thank you.

For all designers out there: If you need color accuracy, you can turn f.lux off or tell the app that it should ignore certain apps. (such as Photoshop)

Cost: FREE

[Download for Mac](#)



№ 2 — Evernote

It took me a while to find the real value of Evernote but it slowly became an extension of my brain. I use it daily for taking notes, storing inspiration or even keeping track of random ToDos or travel plans. It's a must have and it just syncs beautifully across all devices. If it's not Evernote, you will probably use another note taking app, but there is no way around one.

Cost: FREE (with subscription model)

[Download for Mac](#)



№ 3 — CloudApp



I just can't imagine working without CloudApp anymore. CloudApp lives in your Mac tool bar and basically monitors if you take a screenshot and then automatically uploads it to the

cloud and puts a shareable link in your clipboard—All you have to do is just paste the link, done.

I use it at least 20 times a day for sharing work in progress screenshots or other small files. It's an essential tool for me to communicate fast and effective with my team.

Cost: FREE (with subscription model)

[Download for Mac](#)



№ 4 — Transmit

Easily the best FTP app for Mac. I've been using it since the very first version to organize the files on my web server. It's one of those essential apps you just can't get around.

Cost: \$34

[Download for Mac](#)



№ 5 — Noiz.io

Noiz.io is a little tool that let's you play relaxed ambient sounds, from rain to coffee house ambient sounds. It works like magic for your productivity and helps

you to stay focused. I also highly recommend using it in combination with Spotify to produce some original and relaxed sounds.

You might also like to check out [Noisli](#) which is pretty much the same but runs in your browser.

Cost: FREE

[Download for Mac](#)



No 6— Headspace

Not really a Mac or web app but Headspace has to be on this list. Headspace has not only introduced me to meditation but also helped me to create a habit of meditating every single day. Headspace had a huge impact on my overall health & well being. It's a must have.

Cost: FREE (with Subscription model)

[Download for iPhone](#)

H.

№ 7 — Hemmingway

A little app that helps me become a better writer. I use it every time I compose a new article. Hemmingway encourages me to write simple, short & easy to understand with no fluffy words or buzzword bullshit. You can try it for free on [their website](#) and see the benefits immediately. It's pretty smart.

Cost: FREE on web, \$6.99 on Mac

[Try it now](#)



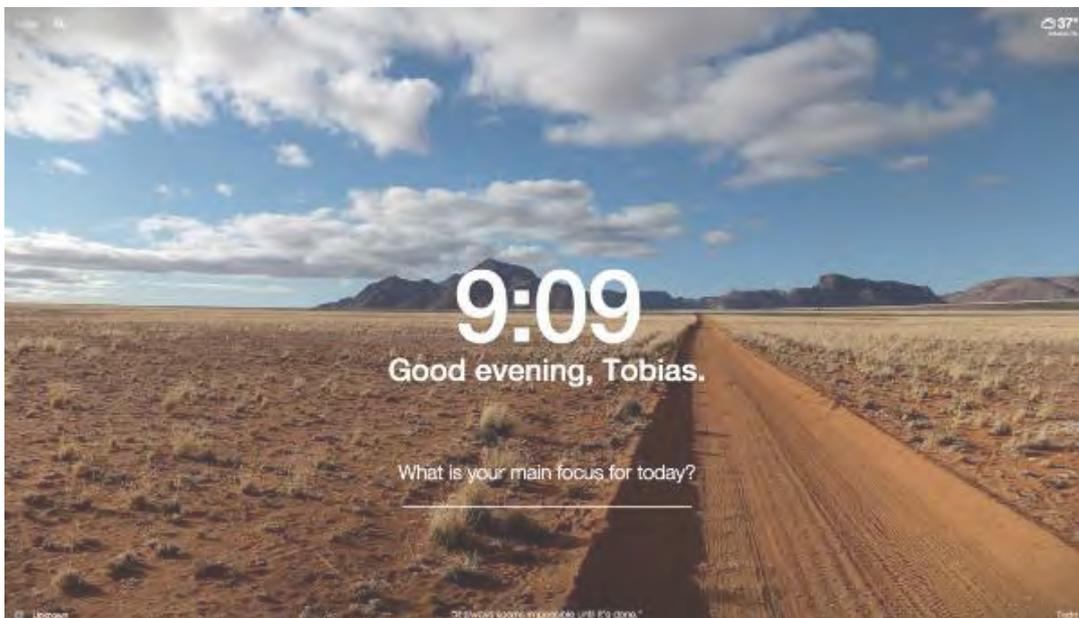
№ 8 — Screenflick

Screenflick is one of those subtle apps that I always forget to mention, even though I use it a ton. On most of my projects where I collaborate with someone, especially across time zones I record quick screen recording and share it with my team. It's a completely underestimated way of communicating and saves hundreds of emails or meetings.

Cost: \$29 Download
for Mac _____



No 9 — Momentum



Momentum is a personal dashboard designed to eliminate distraction and provide inspiration, focus, and productivity.

It's essentially a Chrome plugin that replaces your "New Tab" page whenever you open a new tab. I love looking at a new beautiful picture everyday, followed by an inspirational quote and the simple question of: "What is your main focus today?". Momentum also supports a basic ToDo list feature.

Cost: FREE

[Get your shit together and install it already](#)



№ 10 — Skitch

Skitch used to be amazing before they joined Evernote. Since then things have changed a bit but it's still one of the tools I can't live without, especially in combination with CloudApp it's a killer.

You quickly take a screenshot with Skitch, draw something on it or add notes, and then drag it onto your CloudApp icon in your toolbar which uploads it and generates a link that you can instantly share. It's perfect for quick back and forth feedback sessions online.

Cost: FREE

[Download Skitch](#)



№ 11 — Mindmeister



Mindmeister is a web app for creating mind maps right in your browser. I use mind maps to paint the bigger picture of big projects which helps me to make sense of everything in the most easiest and fastest way possible.

In addition, mind maps are amazing for quick brainstorm sessions. You can collaborate together on one mind map at the same time while keeping the big

picture right in front of you. As I'm more the visual guy, creating a mind map helps me understand the big picture much easier than drafting a Google doc.

Cost: FREE basic version, then paid

[Visit Mindmeister](#)

What are yours?

Of course I have not mentioned the ones that you probably know already, ranging from Spotify, Adobe Creative Suite, Dropbox, Twitter, Slack to 1Password. Would love to hear your Top3 or Top10 essential apps.

Tobias is a Product Design Lead at Spotify NYC. Founder of [Authentic Weather & Semplice](#), Advisor & UX at [memomi](#) — www.vanschneider.com



Tobias van Schneider

4 min read

Untagged



The agency is dead. Long live the agency.

We've been watching it since a couple years now. Design studios or agencies such as [8020](#), [Sofa](#), [Smart Design](#), [Adaptive Path](#), [Hot Studio](#), [Gecko Design](#) and most recently [Teehan+Lax](#) joining the ranks of larger product organizations such as Facebook, Google or Microsoft. The same happens on an individual talent level everyday.

The traditional agency model is dead, that's the message.
But nothing is dead and nothing is going away.

While I do like to agree with it, there is a difference between physically dead and mentally dead. The traditional agency model is physically more than alive on a small scale, but mentally has been stagnating.

There is always enough work

The problem is not that there is not enough work, nor is it about the short term business growth of most small agencies. (which is excellent, I don't think anyone can complain, yet...)

Though, most agencies will struggle to scale and create a high-margin business over time in case it keeps on operating the way it did in the past. There will always be enough low-margin work, the question is just if this matches up with your ambitions.

The reason why great talent is moving into more product focused environments is because most designers or engineers want to work on meaningful projects. Solving meaningful challenges and work on something they believe in with greater impact. Of course this is relative to each individual.

Most big challenges are solved in-house and it is extremely hard for service design agencies to tap into all the data & history needed to do their work properly.

But what's exciting is that exactly here the shift is happening. Agencies are now tasked to find their own voice, build their own brand and craft their own vision. There has been always a lack of vision in most digital agencies because all they offered was their craft and expertise of execution. It's like painting a car, but not building it.

Even if they tried to own more of the process it is almost impossible without becoming an integral part of the product organization. As long as great talent gets attracted by more meaningful work, the current agency model will have difficulties keeping them inside their system in the long run.

As a result agencies will experience high turnover, therefore a lack of consistent culture and ultimately will struggle to answer the simple question of "Where are we actually going?"

And isn't this what we all want to know? Where are we going? What is our purpose? Why are we doing this?

I have many friends in agencies that I respect and I honestly believe they're the most talented people I know. I believe in the agency model but I do see a shift happening. This article is not about what is better, agency or product company. It's about where do you see yourself in the future.

Some people like to fuck around, some like to get married once in a while and some might have an open relationship.

It is hard because service design simply just says "Our purpose is our clients purpose" while pitching and jumping from one client brief to another. Now you would say, what's wrong with having exactly the same purpose as the client? Nothing, but why are you not working directly with the client then?

There is no shortage for work in the service design industry, the question is just what kind of work do you want to do everyday? The challenge for digital agencies will be somewhere between finding their own voice and a solution of providing more meaningful work to keep the extraordinary talent.

There is no right or wrong here, it's all just a matter of where you personally want to go in the future and what will help you getting there.

In the end we're all just humans and depending on your priorities it will either come down to money, or personal fulfillment. Both can be found in product companies (which also can be your own) as well as agencies. It's just a matter of managing expectations.

Some opt to take the golden parachute into big existing product companies and some chose to adjust the sails to get ready for a shift, while others create their own products.

PS: And the reason I'm writing this is not only because I experienced both agency & product myself, but also because I do like & see the value in both of them.



Tobias van Schneider

5 min read

Untagged

The Real Story Of How To Become A Designer.

The Real Story Of How To Become A Designer.

This article was originally published through my personal email list.

One of the questions I get the most is how you become a designer. Most people then expect some sort of romantic answer from my side, but let me tell you a little personal story I rarely told anyone.

At 15 I dropped out of high school. I was a troublemaker in school and constantly at the edge of repeating the class due to bad grades.

At the time I didn't really know what to do. My main interest was skateboarding and being outside. I grew up in a family with very little money & my single mother was

mostly busy with feeding us 4 kids. We even struggled to pay for the books we needed for school, so you can imagine going to a more fancy school wasn't an option for me.

A couple of friends of mine went to a college highly recommended by my high school teachers, otherwise "I wouldn't be able to make it in life" they said.

Since my grades were too bad I had to do a test, which I failed at and of course got declined from that particular school.

My only alternative was to join a special school made for the so called "trouble maker kids". The school seemed promising with the hope to find a job after just a year or two—At least that's what I thought.

After about 4 weeks at this school I just stopped going, it was horrible and I felt like a criminal for just being there. The teacher told me that if I drop out now, I will never be able to make it and won't find a job in the future.

At the time I had a high interest in everything technical, I loved taking computers or other devices apart or repairing them.

My new goal: Find a job as a technician, some sort of apprenticeship maybe? At the time there were only about 2–3 companies in my country who hired apprentices for these kind of positions. I sent an application to each company.

I never heard back from any of them, or got instantly declined. I was devastated.

After I did some research, I found out that there is a program by the government that hires you as a "fake apprentice". It pays you about \$150 a month and basically bridges the time while you're looking for a job.

Most of the people who end up there come from troubled backgrounds, kids on drugs or with really serious family issues. I was certainly not one of them, and I didn't understand why I ended up there. My plan was to get out as soon as possible.

After about a year in the program I found a company that would "transfer" me, and take me on as a real apprentice in the field of computer science & engineering.

After two years I was almost at the end of finishing my apprenticeship. To successfully finish your apprenticeship you have to do one final test, otherwise it's not official. I failed the test and decided to not repeat it. (you had to pay for the test, and I simply couldn't afford it)

My old boss told me that if I don't repeat the test, everything is for nothing and I won't be able to find a new job.

At the time the company I worked for threatened to let me go because I was such a horrible engineer. (it was the truth) But because I was already teaching myself on the side how to design, they agreed to find a role in Marketing for me. (my interest was mostly print & web design)

Fast Forward 3–4 months, I decided to take a huge risk and quit the job anyway. I had this feeling that I don't want to work there anymore and pursue my new interest: Design. What a stupid kid, who the fuck would do that?

I had very little savings left and needed to apply to welfare for the time being. If you would have asked some of my non-existent friends, they would have told you that I'm crazy for quitting my job and going on welfare.

Because everyone told me I won't be able to make it as a designer without proper education, I tried to apply at a university to study design. As you can already guess, I got declined because my work wasn't good enough and my portfolio was lacking traditional drawings. Phew.

So I started to apply at some more companies, no one got back to me. It was a hard time for me, I essentially had zero education on paper, no portfolio and just quit my job.

Then I found an educational program provided by the government which would cost me about \$2000 but promise to train me as a designer.

I took all my savings and joined the program. Everyone around me told me that I NEED to do this for my CV, otherwise I can not prove that I'm a certified designer.

The program lasted 10 months, I barely showed up 3 months which was the minimum required to receive a “Participated” confirmation. When I was there I felt like I was back in school, with arrogant teachers telling me how much I suck and that I will never make it as a designer.

So far everyone always told me what I cant do, but never what I can—I don’t blame anyone, I didn’t know better at the time.

During the 10 months where I was supposed to be at the program I started to work on a lot of side projects to build up a little portfolio. Deep in my gut there was this feeling that I CAN do it, even though everyone else was telling me the opposite.

The moment the program ended I took a big risk and opened up my own little design studio out of my apartment. In reality, this was the only option I had but it turned out to be the beginning of a new chapter in my life.

The reason why I wanted to tell you this story is to show you how I really became a designer. At least for me, there was no perfect way and my path couldn’t be more unromantic.

In the end, everything that counted was that I trusted myself. Or let’s say I was too stupid to know what is right or wrong anyway. For me the obstacle became the way and the art of not knowing how to do things “the right way” helped me think differently.

Thank you for reading.

PS: I share stories like these and other things usually first through my personal email list. Thanks so much for everyone who encouraged me to share it here on Medium.



photo: prodigy139

The 10 Crucial Skills They Won't Teach You At School (And How To Learn Them Anyway)

This post was originally published on the [UnCollege blog](#).

No matter what you major in at university, there will always be lessons that can only be learned in the School of Life. In an increasingly competitive job market, companies are looking for graduates who have learned not only from their textbooks, but from the world around them. If you practice these ten crucial life skills while you're still in school, you'll be well-prepared for the world outside of college.

1) How To Network With Purpose

Networking can get a bad rap: the idea of connecting with others for the express purpose of using them in the future is, admittedly, a bleak way of seeing your friendships. It's also the wrong way to see networking! Building a network doesn't just mean forming relationships that will serve you professionally. Networking is about finding your tribe—people who inspire and challenge you—and forming mutually-beneficial relationships with others.

Teach yourself: Try one-on-one networking with older students, professors, and others in your field. Don't be afraid to reach out with an unsolicited email; remember, they were once in your position! And remember that serving as a connector—being able to link two friends together—is just as important as forging connections for yourself.

2) How To Manage Your Bank Account

In 2015, could there be a more crucial skill than knowing how to manage your money? Surprisingly, schools have done little to prepare students for their financial futures. By failing to require personal finance classes for students, many universities send their graduates out into the world ill-prepared for the realities of adult life.

Teach yourself: Be that impressive 20-something who knows the ins and outs of their bank account, their credit score, and their investments. Create an account at Mint.com and start a realistic budget for yourself. Set aside 10% of every paycheck you get, and look out for free MOOCs about personal finance. Get familiar with helpful money-saving blogs like 20somethingfinance, The Billfold and The Financial Diet.

3) How To Build A Career That's All Your Own

Most universities were founded at a time when graduates pursued one stable career for a lifetime. Today, few graduates will stay in the same job for more than a few years at a time! The reality of the workforce has changed, and universities are still a bit slow to catch up. Today, hyphenated careers are on the rise: the writer-slash-entrepreneur, the nurse-slash-consultant, the investor-slash-filmmaker. Creating a job that's all your own, combining your many passions into one career, and gaining the necessary experiences to forge your unique path: you can't learn these skills in a lecture hall.

Teach yourself: Take time to determine what puts you in “flow.” Take classes outside of your subject, and think creatively about ways that you can make a living. And be sure to check out the [UnCollege blog](#) for more tips about pursuing your passions and building a singular, extraordinary life.

4) When To Trust Your Gut

The ability to trust your instincts is one of the hardest skills to teach and one of the rarest skills to find. You can take eight semesters’ worth of seminars in multiple disciplines without ever having to gauge your gut once. But when it comes to making big, life-changing choices—which job to pursue, which city to move to, which partner to build a life with—a well-honed understanding of your instincts can be invaluable.

Teach yourself: Start by making yourself a person who doesn’t second-guess her choices, even small ones. Have to choose which restaurant to check out for dinner? Go with your first instinct. Don’t know which class to sign up for? Go with the one that “feels right.” And be sure to pay attention to when something feels “off”: trust your gut, and act immediately.

5) How To Avoid Burn-Out

College can be a time when you’re *encouraged* to work yourself to the bone. Don’t fall into this trap! Your early 20s are an important time for setting boundaries with yourself, learning what your body and mind can handle, and preserving your physical and mental health in the process. Remember: if you burn-out now, you won’t be able to achieve as much later. It can seem paradoxical, but knowing how to step back and get proper rest is just as important as knowing how to push yourself and work hard.

Teach yourself: Start practicing meditation for just ten minutes a day. Take advantage of on-campus counseling options. Set boundaries for when you allow yourself to check your inbox, and try to limit your “screen time” in the mornings and evenings. Know how to ask for a “personal day”: professors and employers will respect you for knowing your boundaries.

6) How To Bounce Back, or The Art of Failing With Grace

School is a place that trains us for success, but if there's one reality that you should get used to when you're young, it's failure. The most successful people are those who know how to fail with grace, and how to bounce back refreshed and ready for the next challenge.

Teach yourself: Read the biographies of people you admire, and make note of the ways in which they coped with set-backs. Always remind yourself of the big picture, and learn not to sweat the small stuff.

7) How To Be A Good Partner

Here's something you'll likely never see on a university syllabus: Relationships 101. But choosing the right life partner—and learning how to be a supportive, communicative, and loving partner yourself—are two of the skills that will undoubtedly shape your future happiness. Harvard's 75-year longitudinal psychological study, which followed 268 male Harvard graduates over the course of their respective lifetimes, found that family relationships and strong, loving connections were the most valuable indicator of overall life satisfaction. *Why don't we teach that in school?*

Teach yourself: Remember that time spent on your relationships in your twenties is *not* time wasted, even if those relationships eventually end. Every friendship and relationship you form can teach you how to strike the right balance in a life partnership. Write down the qualities you are looking for in a partner, and focus on the qualities you have to offer. Make sure to protect time each week to spend on your relationships: don't let yourself become a one-sided person.

8) How To Communicate and Negotiate Well

Communication isn't just about being a good partner. It's also about being a good business person, friend, and future leader. Equally important as knowing how to communicate is knowing how to negotiate for what you want. Mastering the art of negotiation can mean hundreds of thousands of dollars, in the long run. And it's one of those superpowers that can take years to hone.

Teach yourself: Start with small negotiations. Your landlord tries to raise your rent? Ask him to meet you half-way. Your part-time job still paying you minimum wage? See if they can up your hourly rate by just a few dollars. Learn to recognize your worth, so that when you get out into the real world, you'll be able to negotiate a healthy starting salary.

9) How To Take Care Of Your Home

This seems like an obvious one, but you might be surprised how many university graduates have no clue how to cook a simple meal, keep an apartment tidy, pay utility bills, and manage a household budget! This is the 21st century, and it's unlikely that your parents are going to be looking after you when you leave school. Back in the day, schools used to teach female students "home economics"; but these days, college dining halls and maid service can keep students from gaining basic and necessary home-making skills.

Teach yourself: Don't rely on house-cleaning apps and food-delivery services! Learn how to whip up basic, affordable meals, and check out blogs like Apartment Therapy and Lifhack for tips on keeping a tidy home.

10) The Importance of Travel

Leaving your comfort zone and seeing other parts of the world is a vital part of growing up. Students who take a year out of school to travel—whether out of the state or out of the country—find that their gap year shapes them even more than college itself. Not sure if you can afford a year of luxury travel? Try volunteering or teaching abroad, or check out programs like WWOOFing. And if you can learn a new language, by all means, do it!

Teach yourself: Whether you leave the country or just leave your town, try to plan at least one trip every six months. Use websites like Student Universe to find affordable deals, and communicate with your university about travel grants. Consider going on a gap year. According to an interview with Dale Stephens, the founder of UnCollege Gap Year, students that take a gap year have higher graduation rates and GPAs than students who opt not to take one.

