

Emotional Design Elements

A large, stylized, dark red letter 'U' is positioned in the bottom right corner of the page. The background of the entire page is a deep red color, overlaid with a network of white lines and circles, and several large, overlapping, lighter red circular shapes.

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Cover Design: Ricardo Gimenes

PR & Press: Stephan Poppe

eBook Strategy: Andrew Rogerson, Talita Telma Stockle

Technical Editing: Talita Telma Stockle

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About This Book

Whether you're creating a game or a website, a lasting bond with users is more often than not the result of emotional attachment. Knowing the ins and outs of emotional design will enable you to imbue your creation with personality and to shape the user's perception. Find out how to integrate emotional appeal into your website, and how to turn your game into more than a cold, flawless, technical challenge. A personal touch can make all the difference, if you know how to design it.

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Inclusive Design

BY FARUK ATEŞ 🍷

We've come a long way since the days of the first Macintosh and the introduction of graphical user interfaces, going from monochrome colors to millions, from estranged mice to intuitive touchscreens, from scroll bars to pinch, zoom, flick and pan. But while hardware, software and the people who use technology have all advanced dramatically over the past two decades, our approach to designing interfaces has not. Advanced technology is not just *indistinguishable* from magic (as Arthur C. Clarke said); it also *empowers* us and becomes a transparent part of our lives. While our software products have definitely empowered us tremendously, the ways by which we let interfaces integrate with our lives has remained stagnant for all these years.

In the accessibility industry, the word “inclusive” is relatively commonplace; but inclusive design principles should not be reserved for the realm of accessibility alone, because they apply to many more people than “just” the lesser-abled. Interface designers frequently think in binary terms: either all of the interface is in front of you or none of it is. But people are not binary. People aren't either fully disabled or not at all, just like they aren't merely old or young, dumb or smart, tall or short. People sit along a vast spectrum of who they are and what they are like; the same is true when they use interfaces, except that this spectrum is of expertise, familiarity, skill, expectations and so on.

So, why do we keep creating interfaces that ignore all of this? It's time for us to get rid of these binary propositions!

What Is “Inclusive” In The World At Large?

In the world at large—meaning not one particular industry, country or demographic—the term “inclusive” applies to cultures in which, for example, women are as welcome to contribute their opinion as men are; in which a person's race or sexual orientation has no bearing on their acceptance by a group; in which everyone feels safe and comfortable, and no one feels suppressed, stymied or silenced; in other words, a culture of equal opportunity. But when we apply the term to interfaces, it doesn't mean that interfaces should be equal for everyone; rather, it means that they should be **equally accessible** to everyone, and **equally empowering** no matter what the user's skill level or familiarity. When these two aspects are combined, the product gets the best of both worlds: it is accessible to more people, without being compromised for advanced users.



Super Mario Bros. was accessible to play for anyone, and fun (and sometimes frustrating) for all.

An excellent example of software that has done this well is in the video game genre, going back as far as 1985 with Nintendo's Super Mario Bros. It was a game that truly anyone could pick up and play, with an invisible interface that taught you everything you needed to know to get started and become good at it. The screen would only scroll right, so you couldn't walk left. You could jump, but standing on top of special bricks did nothing, so you would try to jump against them from below. Pipes visibly led down, so you'd try your luck with the down arrow on the direction pad. And at the end of the level, the bonus flag was raised high, encouraging competitive players to jump to the very peak for top points. All of the game's mechanics were explained in one level, without a single instruction, tutorial or guiding word.

Many games since 1985 have not featured this principle to any significant degree. Super Mario Bros. truly was a game whose interface was equally empowering; meaning, the interface and product magnified the results of your efforts based on the (skill) level of your input. Put differently, beginners would see good results from their efforts, while advanced users would see far greater results from theirs. These principles aren't limited to video game design either; they apply just as much to software applications and productivity tools, even websites! So, let's start with some simple inclusive design concepts.

Language And Aesthetics

Language has an impact on everything, because it is the primary way we communicate as a species. Its significance is also frequently over-

looked; a Duke University study revealed that gendered language in job listings affects a job's appeal¹, independent of the type of job. There's more: while not a single participant in the study picked up on the gendered language, each of them did find the listings more or less appealing as a result. This raises the question: how much of an impact does the language chosen for our designs have on the number of new users who sign up or the number of customers we convince to purchase our products? No good study in this area seems to exist or be readily available, but one study (of a sort) that is available is the W3C's own resource on people's names around the world² and its effect on form design. Let's call it a good start and do more research into how language shapes the Web.

But language is just one metric that we don't take into consideration as often as we should. Aesthetics play a significant role as well, yet there is a lot more to aesthetics than taste and general appeal. The placement of elements, whether shapes are angular or rounded, and our use of color all affect how different genders, demographics and cultures respond³ to interfaces. Because no one color scheme will please everyone all the world over, the more international our (targeted) audiences are, the more fully designed our localizations will need to be.

INTERFACE DESIGN LEGACIES

In the world of interface design, being inclusive means being accepting and welcoming of the many different cognitive skills and levels of expertise among users. Historically, we have striven for the perfect middle ground between approachable and empowering. Making interfaces more intuitive plays a significant role in that process, but it often demands that we dumb interfaces down (i.e. remove features), which can be undesirable for the advanced user who wants more functionality or control. With more comprehensive interfaces, a frequent "solution" to this problem is to allow users to customize the interface to their needs. But is this truly empowering? When research shows that less than 5% of people adjust default settings⁴, it is highly questionable whether customization and settings are truly empowering in interfaces.

Earlier, I mentioned how most interfaces offer a binary proposition: either the application is open or it isn't. When it's open, the entire user interface (UI) is typically available to you, whether or not you need all of it. This makes sense from a historical perspective—when all we had

1. <http://www.futurity.org/top-stories/wanted-gender-free-job-ads/>

2. <http://www.w3.org/International/questions/qa-personal-names>

3. <http://www.netmagazine.com/features/find-perfect-colour-your-website>

4. <http://www.uie.com/brainsparks/2011/09/14/do-users-change-their-settings/>

were physical interfaces—but it makes little sense with our modern software ones, especially since most software interfaces are far more comprehensive than a typical hardware interface.

When Steve Jobs announced the iPhone at MacWorld in 2007, he compared the yet-to-be-revealed iPhone to popular smartphones of the time, noting their main problem as being “the bottom 40%”—i.e. the hardware buttons on all of those devices. The buttons were there “whether you need them or not.” The solution, according to Apple, was a large touchscreen with fully software-based UI controls. That way, each application’s interface could be optimally designed for its particular purpose.

The point Apple made along the way was that sticking to convention is a bad idea if you want to move an industry forward. Hardware buttons used to be *all* a phone had. Then, they were used to supplement a tiny screen. The iPhone showed that, when it comes to innovation in interfaces, the screen should be the full surface, a blank canvas onto which software could paint any interface. The unparalleled success of the iPhone suggests that Apple has proven their point well.

But as fantastic as the iPhone may have been compared to the smartphones before it, it still suffered from this same binary UI problem. The iPhone merely shifted the problem from being device-wide to being specific to individual applications, and then it masked the remaining issues by removing features or hiding them in drill-down views, until one very elegant, simplified UI remained for each app—one that lacked the ability to become more sophisticated for users who wanted, or needed, more.



To pilots, this is a familiar view. To others, it is a smörgåsbord of buttons. Image Source: Julien Haler⁵

To be clear, removing features is not in itself a negative. Most interfaces get better from the process, because every visible feature, every UI control adds to the overall cognitive load of the user. Think, for instance, of an airplane cockpit and its countless little controls, dials and meters covering every surface. If you are not a pilot, the mere sight of it would overwhelm you. To an experienced pilot, however, it is simply what they need in order to fly the plane. Is this really the best we can do, though? Super Mario Bros. showed us we can do better.

In software, we have a situation that calls for the kind of innovation I'm talking about. As it is, more complicated, advanced and powerful applications feature more complex interfaces, and some can be downright overwhelming to first-time users. But not everyone wants to fly a plane—some of us are just trying to get some simple work done. Application developers try to alleviate this problem with tutorials, guided tours, help screens and overlays that explain each aspect of the UI; a great solution these things are not. What we need are better interfaces, interfaces that understand that we are human beings with different needs. What we need are...

Adaptive Interfaces

For interface designers with an eye on accessibility, most of their efforts have long focused on the *technical* challenges faced by users. Many commentators have encouraged us to consider cognitive (or learning) disabilities as one part of the broader area of (Web) accessibility, but rarely has anyone explained how to do this. Additionally, when someone sees the term “cognitive disability,” they understandably think of the mentally handicapped. But there is a huge range of cognitively able people, and they exist not on a linear scale: a quantum physicist might have a tough time figuring out how to use a feature phone, whereas the average teenager would have no problem with it.

People invest in an application (and, thus, its interface) in varying degrees, depending on how important the product is to their daily lives. This means that your interface should cater to varying degrees of investment in addition to differing levels of expertise and familiarity.

In an interface, each additional UI element increases complexity and asks for a deeper investment on the user's part. This is why invisible interfaces (like the one in Super Mario) are so powerful: an interface that appears only when needed reduces the cognitive load, reduces the investment required to understand the product, and makes it easier for

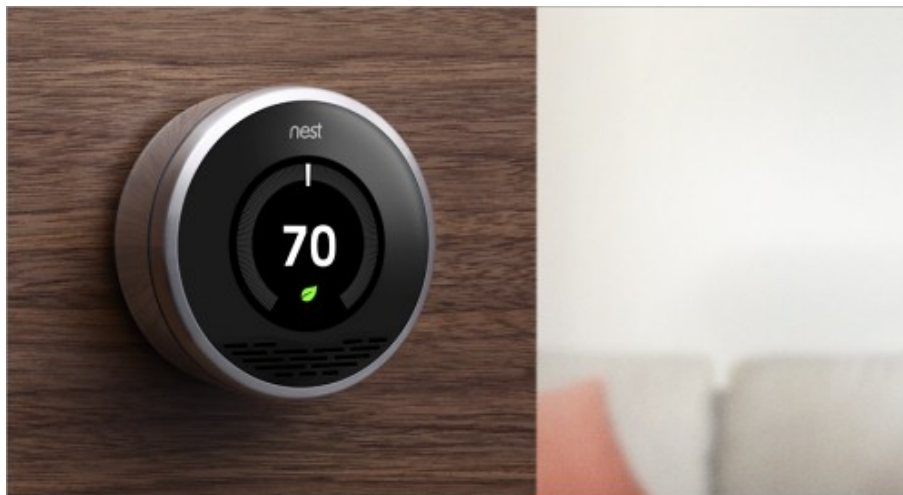
5. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/titlap/2297090390/>

the user to focus on the task at hand. A button that is **relevant** only in certain contexts should be **visible** only in those contexts.

But we can take this principle to a level even beyond that. An interface that is truly inclusive of all kinds of users is one that begins with only the fundamentals and then evolves and adapts **alongside** the user. During this process, the interface can both grow and decay, acquiring more features and controls as the user becomes more fluent in using it, and dropping or reducing the prominence of UI controls that the user does not use much, if at all.

Doing this automatically also makes more sense than offering the user a large number of options to customize the UI, for two reasons: first, users shouldn't be expected to spend a lot of time making an interface usable to them; secondly, people might not always know exactly what they *want*, but their behavior might make clear what they *need*. A system that intelligently measures what the user needs in order to deliver the most efficient, effective yet still understandable interface could allow such a thing. A highly effective interface is one that can be changed not to how each user wants it, but to how each user needs it.

Of course, measuring the cognitive skill of a user is difficult, and even then it can only be approximated. Certain aspects of the user's behavior can be measured, which helps to inform us about how familiar the user is with the interface overall and how fluent they are in using it. The speed with which a user navigates an interface and uses or explores its features is a good metric for how comfortable they are with the interface. The frequency of their use of "Help" and "Undo" features suggests a certain confidence level. Users of keyboard shortcuts are almost certainly looking for more powerful features, and someone who uses quotes and AND and OR in their search queries is likely technically minded. These and many other measurable aspects of people's behavior can help shape your application's interface, which can then be adapted to better suit the needs of users.



The Nest thermostat learns from you.

This is not the end of the story; rather, it is only the beginning. Tony Fadell's new product, Nest, is a great example of an adaptive interface in the real world. The Nest Thermostat⁶ learns from your behavior patterns as you go about your daily and weekly routines, and it becomes predictive, so that you need to adjust the thermostat less frequently the more you use it.

That's but one example. The possibilities open up even more with inclusive and adaptive interfaces. One type of user might need Feature A very frequently, whereas another might need Feature B instead; a truly inclusive interface would adapt to these needs and be equally powerful for these two different types of users.

Conclusion

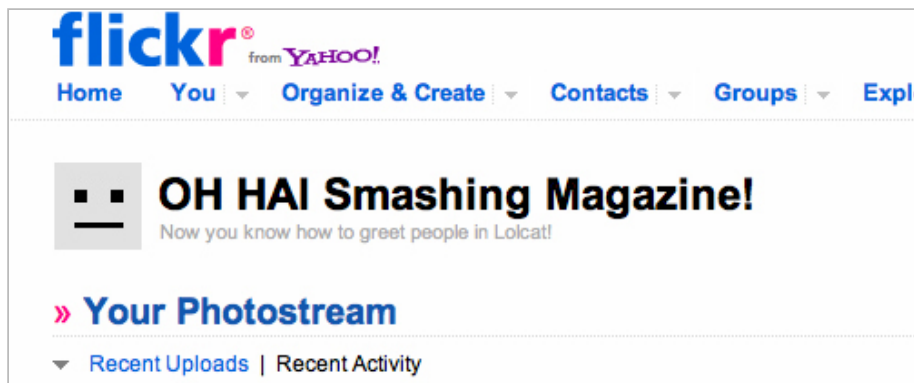
We've overcome the various technical challenges of interfaces and designs through Web standards, accessibility and ARIA, responsive Web design principles and touchscreen devices. But we have focused so much on these technical challenges that we've almost lost sight of innovating the human aspects of interface and design. The next stage of evolution for our industry is to explore how to make our applications and products more inclusive, taking into account the vast spectrum of differences in our audience, and to make our interfaces smarter so that they serve a wider range of people more effectively. Let our exploration of inclusive design begin! 🐼

⁶. <http://www.nest.com/>

The Personality Layer

BY SIMON SCHMID 🐼

“Oh hai Smashing Magazine!” That’s one of the dozen ways that Flickr welcomes its users upon signing in every time. It’s an easily overlooked detail, one that the service would work without flawlessly. Yet this detail is a big part of Flickr’s particular design character that would be missed if it wasn’t there.



This is how Flickr⁷ greets its users, changing the language upon every sign-in.

These easily overlooked details are the ones that I’m particularly interested in because of the reaction they are capable of causing in users. **These details trigger an emotional response**, and if used purposefully and fittingly, they will help to form a personality that people will respond to positively when interacting with the product. This positive attitude will often lead to people sharing and even advocating for your product with their peers. This technique of connecting with users on a personal level is also referred to as “emotional design.”

A Little Theory

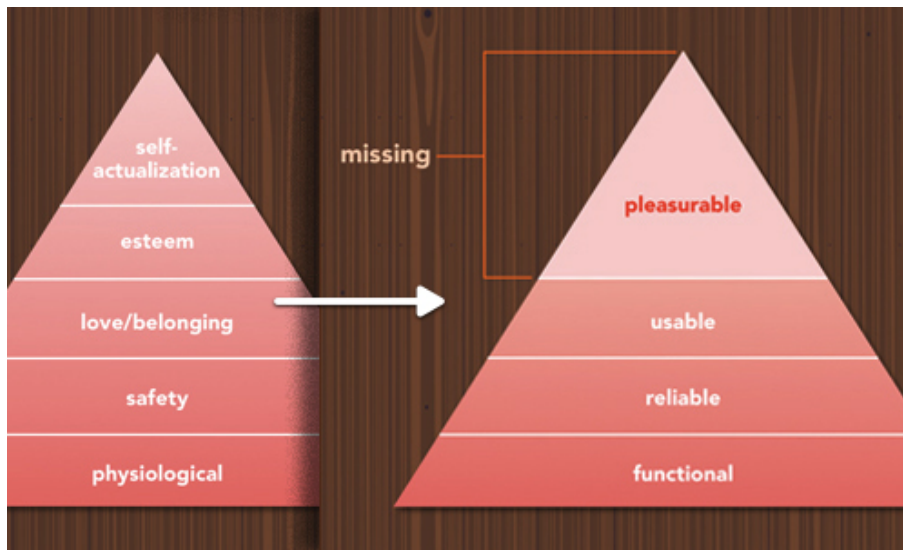
The term “emotional design” was defined by (among others) Aaron Walter⁸. In his book *Designing for Emotion*, he describes emotional design by building on Maslow’s famous hierarchy of human needs⁹, which posits that humans need to achieve elementary states of being, such as health and safety, before they can start thinking about higher-

⁷. <http://www.flickr.com/>

⁸. <http://aaronwalter.com/>

⁹. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow's_hierarchy_of_needs

level needs, such as self-actualization. People who are seriously ill or lack safety would find it difficult to think about self-actualization as expressed, for example, in morality, creativity and problem-solving.



Maslow's hierarchy of human needs (left) and the hierarchy of emotional design (right).
(Image: Aaron Walter¹⁰)

According to this theory, **a product has to be functional, reliable and usable** (in that order) before a layer of pleasure can be applied. Emotional design, then, is the pleasurable layer that you put on top of a functional, reliable and usable product.

An effective emotional design strategy has two aspects:

1. You create something unique that transcends your own style and that evokes a positive response in users;
2. You consistently use that style until it becomes a body of work, a personality layer.

In this article, we will look at some strategies you can follow, as well as some examples found in the wild, plus a few projects in which the consistent use of emotional design results in a great personality.

To learn more about the theory of emotion in design, you might be interested in the article “Not Just Pretty: Building Emotion Into Your Websites”¹¹.

¹⁰. <http://aaronwalter.com/>

¹¹. <http://uxdesign.smashingmagazine.com/2012/04/12/building-emotion-into-your-websites/>

The Elements Of Emotional Design

The goal is to connect with users and evoke positive emotions. Positive emotions¹² instill positive memories and make users want to interact with your product in the future.

There's an additional benefit, though. In pleasant, positive situations, people are much more likely to tolerate minor difficulties and irrelevance¹³. While poor design is never excusable, when people are relaxed, the pleasant and pleasurable aspects of a design will make them more forgiving of problems within the interface.

Below is a non-exhaustive list (based on personal observation¹⁴) of ways to induce these positive emotions. Of course, people will respond to things differently depending on their background, knowledge, etc., but these psychological factors should work in general:

- **Positivity**
See the article “What Are the Top 10 Positive Emotions¹⁵.”
- **Surprise**
Do something unexpected and new.
- **Uniqueness**
Differ from other products in an interesting way¹⁶.
- **Attention**
Offer incentives, or offer help even if you're not obliged to.
- **Attraction**
We all like attractive people, so build an attractive product.
- **Anticipation**
Leak something ahead of the launch.
- **Exclusivity**
Offer something exclusive to a select group.
- **Be responsive**
Show a reaction to your audience, especially when they're not expecting it.

Now, let's see these principles applied to actual products.

¹². <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pleasure>

¹³. http://www.jnd.org/dn.mss/emotion_design_attractive_things_work_better.html

¹⁴. <http://thegodfounder.com>

¹⁵. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kari-henley/what-are-the-top-10-posit_b_203797.html

¹⁶. <http://whittleidea.com/blog/is-your-start-up-idea-already-taken>

Practical Examples Of Emotional Design

Below are some details of emotional design on the Web. We cannot always attribute a particular strategy to it, such as “surprise” or “anticipation.” Sometimes more factors are at play, and people will perceive some things differently.

Remember that just blindly copying these examples will not give your product the personality it needs. Rather, infusing emotional traits into the product thoughtfully will ensure that the personality sticks. Here’s a little test: browse Built With Bootstrap¹⁷ and see which ones you like best.

Mimicking Emotions

SMILE

People who enjoy each other’s company tend to mimic each other’s behavior¹⁸? When someone you like smiles, you generally smile back. This can work on websites, too. The emotional brain is affected by pictures¹⁹, especially of people, and by stories. Let’s look at one design that tells a story and shows pictures of people.



The Highrise²⁰ landing page, with real customers.

17. <http://builtwithbootstrap.com/>

18. <http://www.psychologicalscience.org/index.php/news/releases/people-mimic-each-other-but-we-arent-chameleons.html>

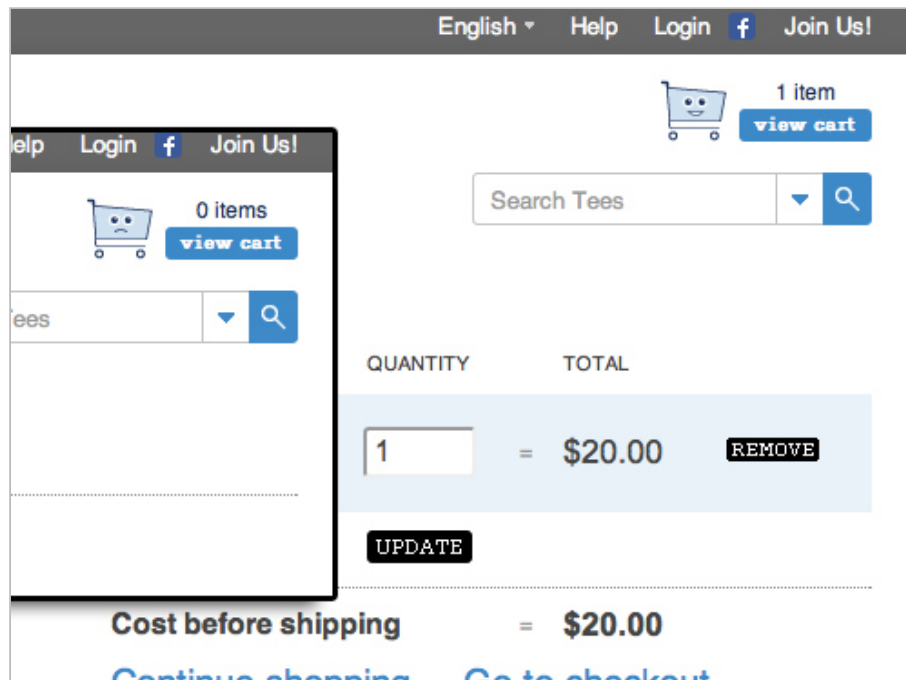
19. <http://uxmag.com/articles/the-psychologists-view-of-ux-design>

20. <http://highrisehq.com/>

Highrise shows happy people, along with stories of them using the product. The smiles and testimonials from existing customers are a powerful combination (for proof, read about the A/B testing²¹ done on Highrise.) Oh, and don't forget to cultivate your *own* personality²².

GENERAL HAPPINESS

Smiles seem to work in highly abstract form as well.



Threadless²³ shopping cart shows emotions.

Threadless' shopping cart is sad when it's empty, but when you feed it, it becomes happy. This detail will probably make you smile; even if you don't end up buying anything, you'll remember it for making you look twice.

User retention

ATTENTION

User retention is another area that requires a lot of attention.

21. <http://37signals.com/svn/posts/2991-behind-the-scenes-ab-testing-part-3-final>

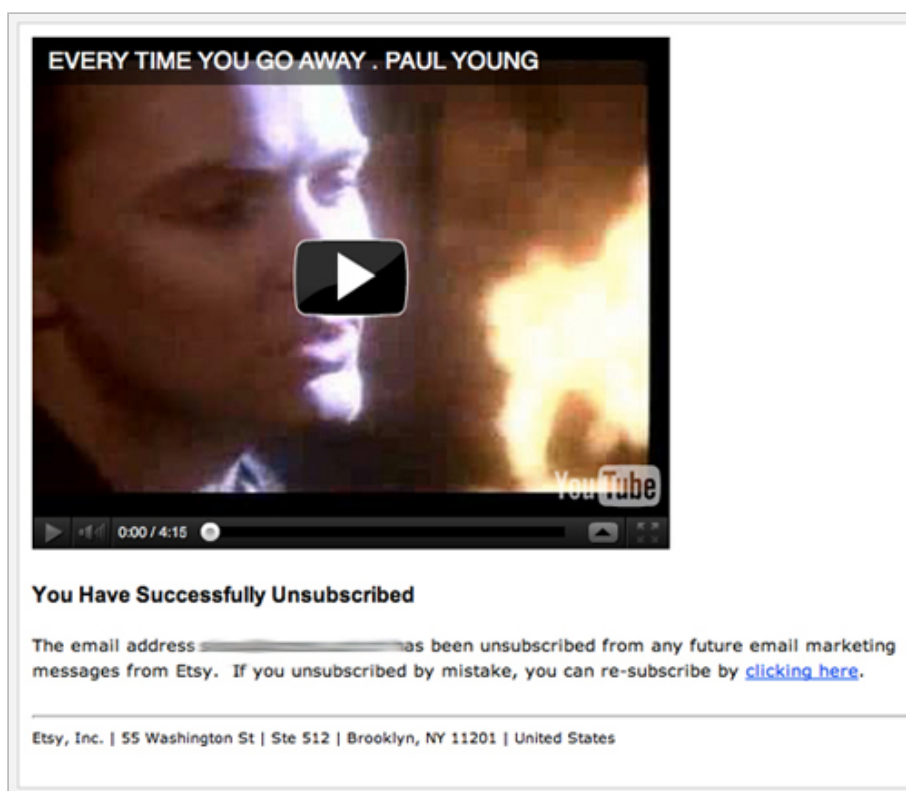
22. <http://venturebeat.com/2012/01/28/cant-look-away/>

23. <http://www.threadless.com/>

A while ago, if you had tried to unsubscribe from Audible and stated that your device wasn't compatible with its service, you would be given a code worth \$100 to buy a compatible device on Amazon. That's a powerful surprise that you'll remember, even if you end up leaving.

MUSIC

Etsy just plays "Every Time You Go Away" by Paul Young if you attempt to unsubscribe from its email newsletter. The song might not stop you from unsubscribing, but you will probably remember it the next time you come across a product on Etsy's platform. Or you might think of Etsy whenever you hear Paul Young.



Etsy²⁴ plays "Every Time You Go Away" by Paul Young when you leave.

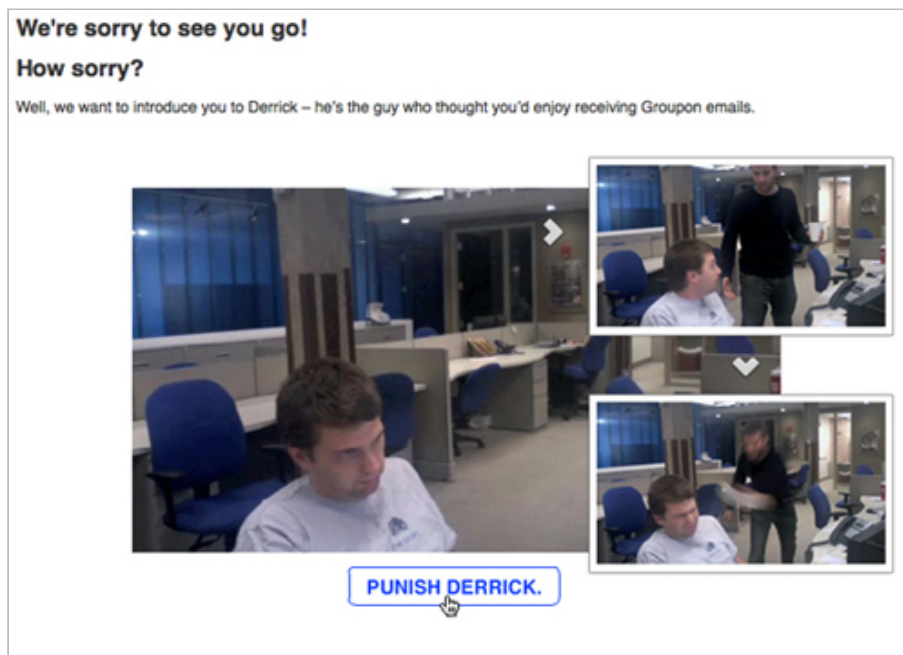
EDGY HUMOR

Groupon probably wouldn't be able to change the mind of someone who is determined to leave its service, but its video²⁵ definitely fits the playful tone²⁶ of Groupon's copy.

²⁴. <http://www.etsy.com/>

²⁵. <http://www.groupon.com/unsubscribe>

²⁶. <http://www.uie.com/brainsparks/2011/01/25/the-public-groupon-voice-guide/>



Groupon²⁷ gets edgy.

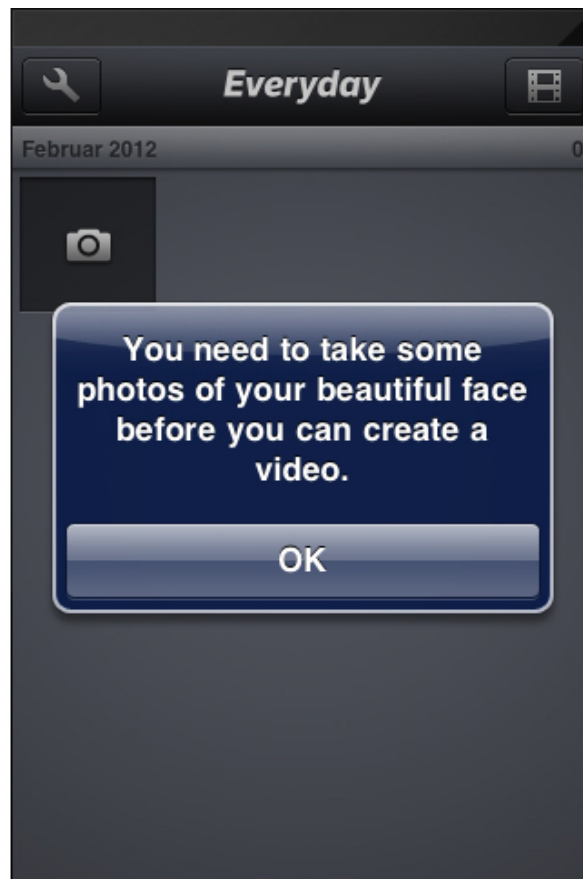
Copy

Copy is the easiest way to introduce and play with personality. Your website probably has text everywhere, and words communicate a personality very well. Do you want your brand to be playful, stern, comical, hip? Copy can go a long way in defining who you are and who you appeal to.

LEVITY

In the Everyday app, if you haven't put images in the library (which are needed in order to play a video), you will get this friendly reminder to take some pictures of your "beautiful" face—one word that completely changes the tone of the message.

²⁷. <http://www.groupon.com/>

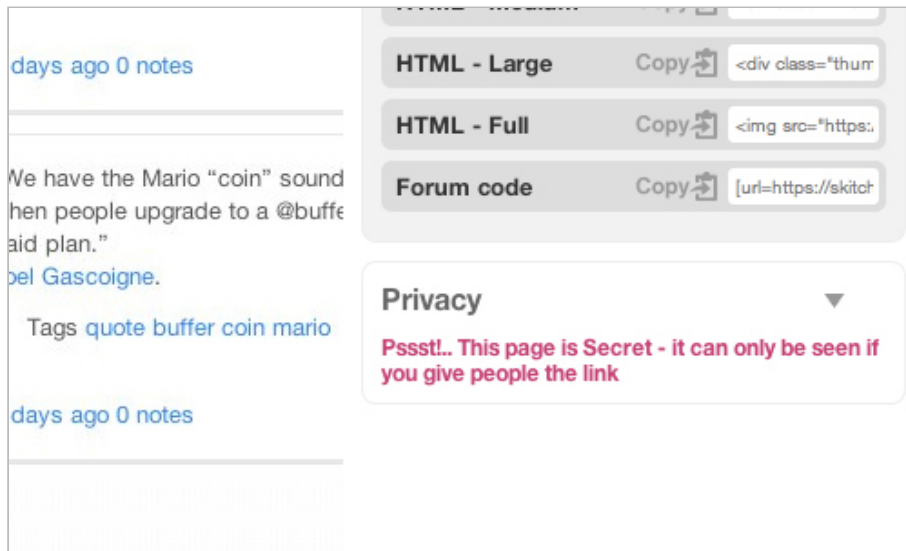


Everyday's²⁸ onboarding process

CONTRAST

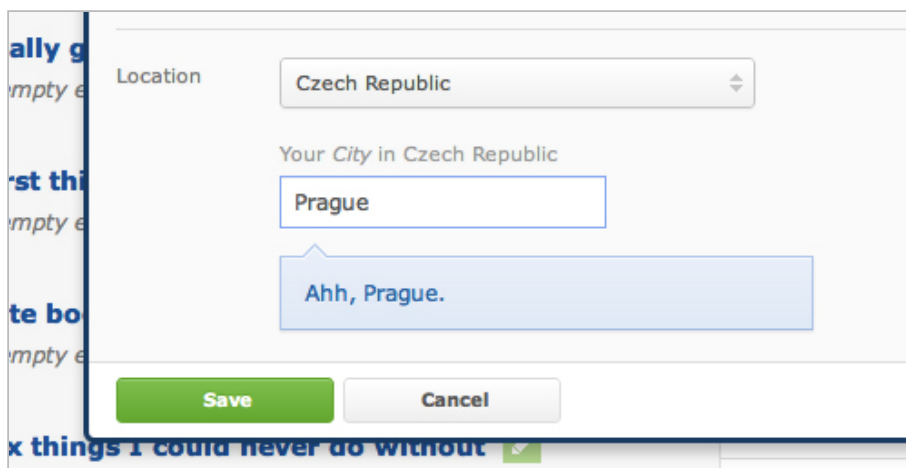
The “Pssst!...” here says it really well—not only visually with all of the “s”-es and the contrasting color, but also aurally when read.

²⁸. <http://everyday-app.com/>



Skitch's²⁹ privacy copy

We find the same nice detail on OK Cupid's website when you specify your location. "Ahh" could mean both "How wonderful" and "Yes, we understand now. Welcome."



"Ahh, Prague"

MICROCOPY

Hunch says something you are probably not used to reading. This difference alone could persuade you to go along with them. First, it communicates that the email will be of interest to the user; secondly, it recognizes that spam is evil.

²⁹. <http://skitch.com/>

Create a new account

If you already have a Hunch account, [sign in](#).

Hunch Username

Username already taken. Please choose a different one.

Email

Spam is evil and you'll never see any from us.

Password

Confirm Password

Passwords do not match.



Get periodic Hunch updates.

It will be an email worth reading. And it won't come too often.



I agree to Hunch's [Terms of Service](#)

Cancel

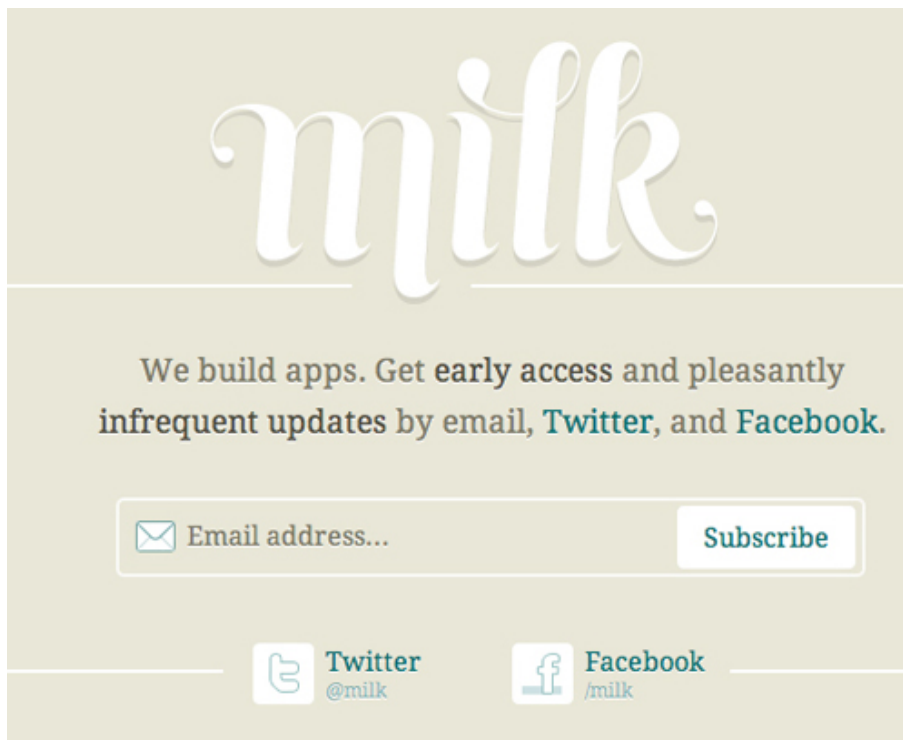
Create my account

Hunch's³⁰ way of assuring prospective users of the safety of their data.

MICROCOPY 2

Milk's detail here makes you much more open to subscribing to the newsletter. The approach is the same as the one above; assuring people that they will be contacted only when it really matters. (Note that Milk was recently acquired by Google and so has been shut down.)

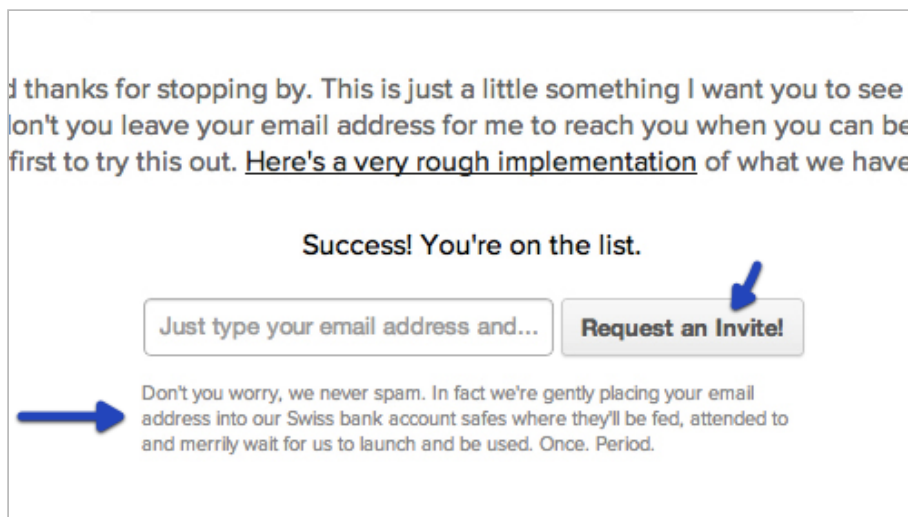
³⁰. <http://hunch.com/>



Milk promises infrequent emails and teases with early access.

MICROCOPY 3

Here is another approach from an as-yet-unreleased project of mine. The branding is lighthearted, so I've crafted this microcopy³¹ to accompany the invitation form. Hopefully, people will be more at ease submitting their address.



This says that your email address is secure with us.

³¹. <http://current.li/>

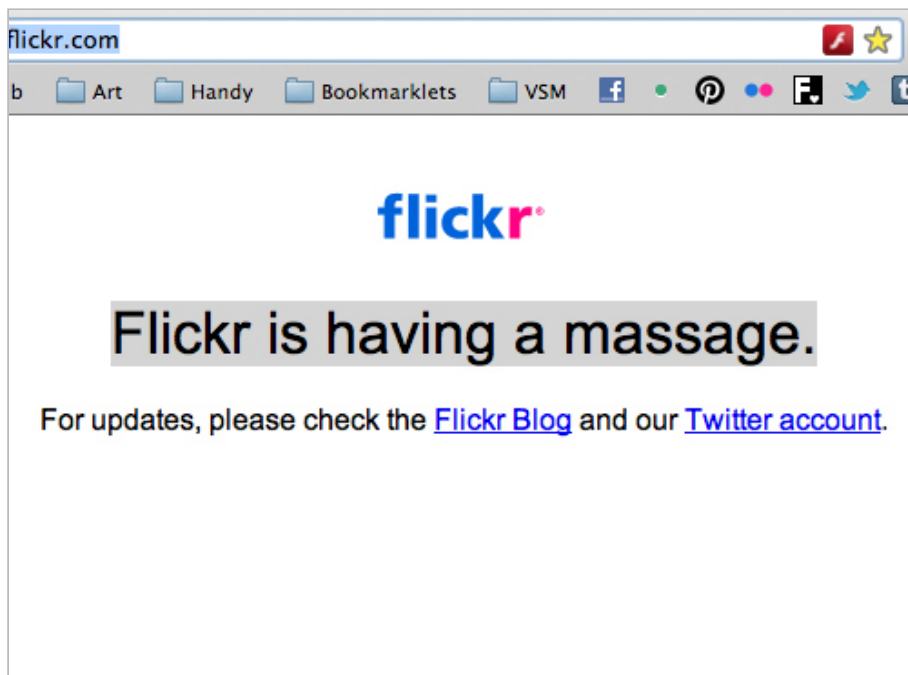
Also, note how the button doesn't just say "Submit," but rather "Request an Invite." This adds a touch of exclusivity to the sign-up form. If you're interested in this sort of thing, read about Pinterest's sign-up process³².

Error Pages and Downtime

Not many situations are more annoying for a Web user than downtime. It can make users rather upset, especially if they depend on your product. Emotional design helps you steer clear of such offenses. Below are some examples.

SIMPLE CHANGE IN COPY

Flickr says it's having a massage. It's not brilliant, but it's better than an annoying error message.



Flickr³³ is having a massage (Image: Luke Beard³⁴)

SAY SORRY AND OFFER A TREAT

Here's a better approach from Flickr. When it experiences more serious problems, it puts up this splash page saying that its tubes are clogged

³². <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-secret-to-pinterests-astounding-success-a-brilliant-sign-up-process-you-should-copy-2012-1?op=1>

³³. <http://www.flickr.com/>

³⁴. <http://twitter.com/#!/LukesBeard/status/120071272397934592>

and that it is sorry. But instead of leaving it at that, it set users to a task and offers the winning contestant a valuable pro account.



The competition when Flickr's³⁵ tubes are clogged.

SORRY BUT...

... there are more important things in life. When Tumblr went down recently, it told users that it was already hard at work on resolving the problem. In the next paragraph, it reminded users that there are bigger problems out there than a brief outage and that you could actually do something about them.

³⁵. <http://www.flickr.com/>

We're very sorry

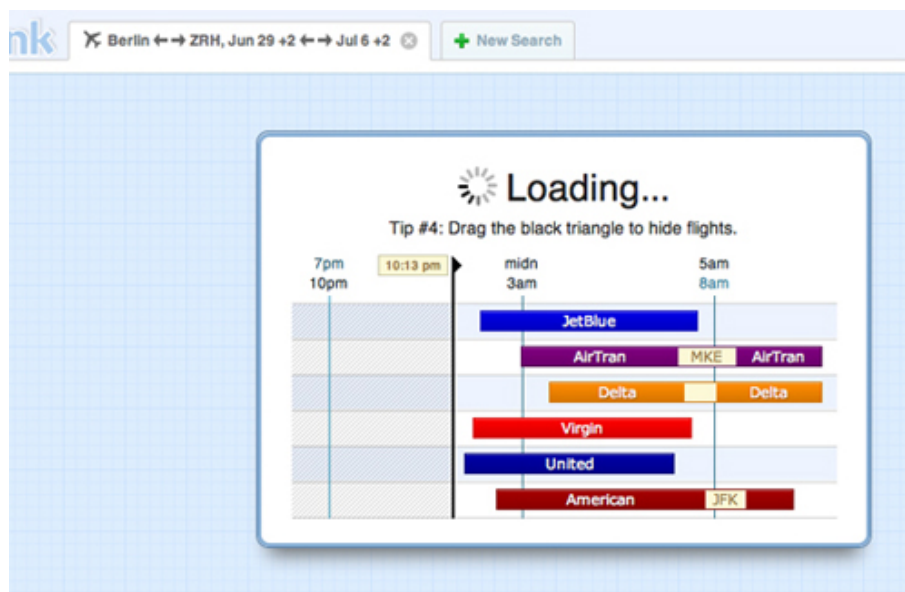
Our servers are over capacity and certain pages may be temporarily unavailable. We're working quickly to resolve the issue.

In the meantime, please consider [donating to the Red Cross](#) to help those in Japan who are in need of support.

Tumblr supports people in need.

Annoyances

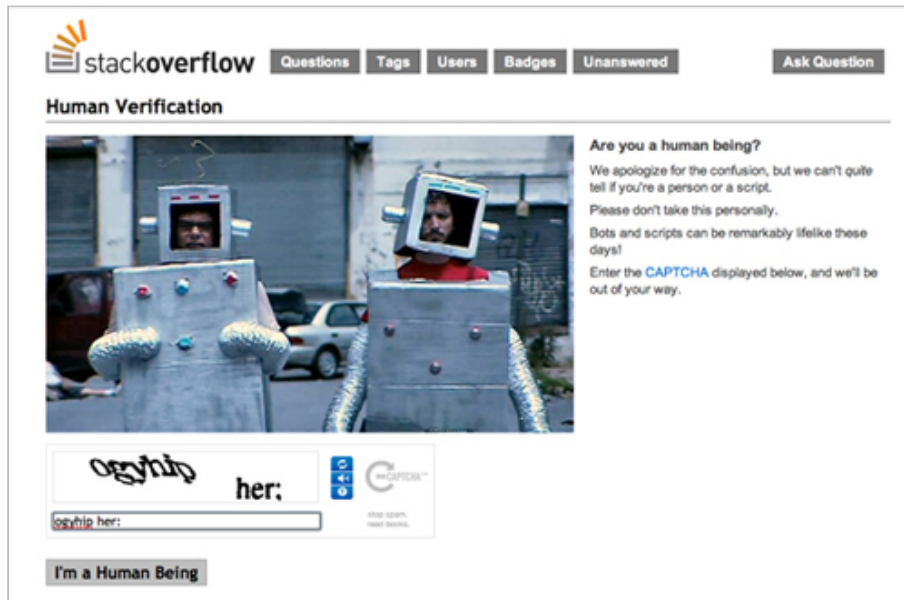
Other online annoyances include waiting for a screen to load. But some screens just need time to load. When your app is busy gathering information, consider doing something on the screen, such as displaying a tip.



Hipmunk³⁶ bridges screens with helpful information.

HUMOR

CAPTCHAs are a reality in many places today, but that doesn't mean users have to like them. Heck, they're an incredible annoyance. Stack Overflow at least explains with a funny graphic why it has to annoy visitors.



Stack Overflow³⁷ explains why it has to annoy you with a CAPTCHA.

Personalization

Another emotional strategy is to respond to the user's input. I love when something responds to me without my having to disclose personal details.

The landing page of the Thermo³⁸ app detects your location and updates the graphics on the left, telling you the temperature of your location.

³⁶. <http://www.hipmunk.com/>

³⁷. <http://stackoverflow.com/>

³⁸. <http://thermo.me/>



Thermo detects your location and turns it into something valuable.

You don't even need that much information about visitors. 37signals³⁹ demonstrates a simple way to be attentive to visitors, without any knowledge of them whatsoever.



37signals wishes you a happy whatever-day-of-the-week-it-is.

Email Design

Newsletters can be a great tool, but most people want to cut down on noise and get only the most informative and well-produced ones.


³⁹. <http://37signals.com/>

Newsletters can be worth subscribing to for various reasons: information, exclusive offers, humor, etc.

TELLING A STORY

Zaarly highlights the most interesting “classifieds” in its newsletter. It’ll make you wonder what people come up with on the website and challenge you to use the service more often.

Most Creative Zaarly: Weird and Cool Apartment Furnishings



Apartment defibrillation: A necessary service, now apparently available on Zaarly...

"Roommate moved out and took my apartment's soul with him. He took the essence of what made MY apartment have a heartbeat. Things like a majestic cheetah paper-mache head and a weird glass bubble lantern that hung from the ceiling. They're gone. I'm sad he took all these great things. My apartment lost its heart and it needs a defibrillator. Please help me defib my apartment."

—

Like a majestic cheetah head, you are the soul of our company. We don't know what we'd do if you left us! So stick around, and let us know what ideas you have for Zaarly by replying to this e-mail. We love hearing from you.

Your friends,

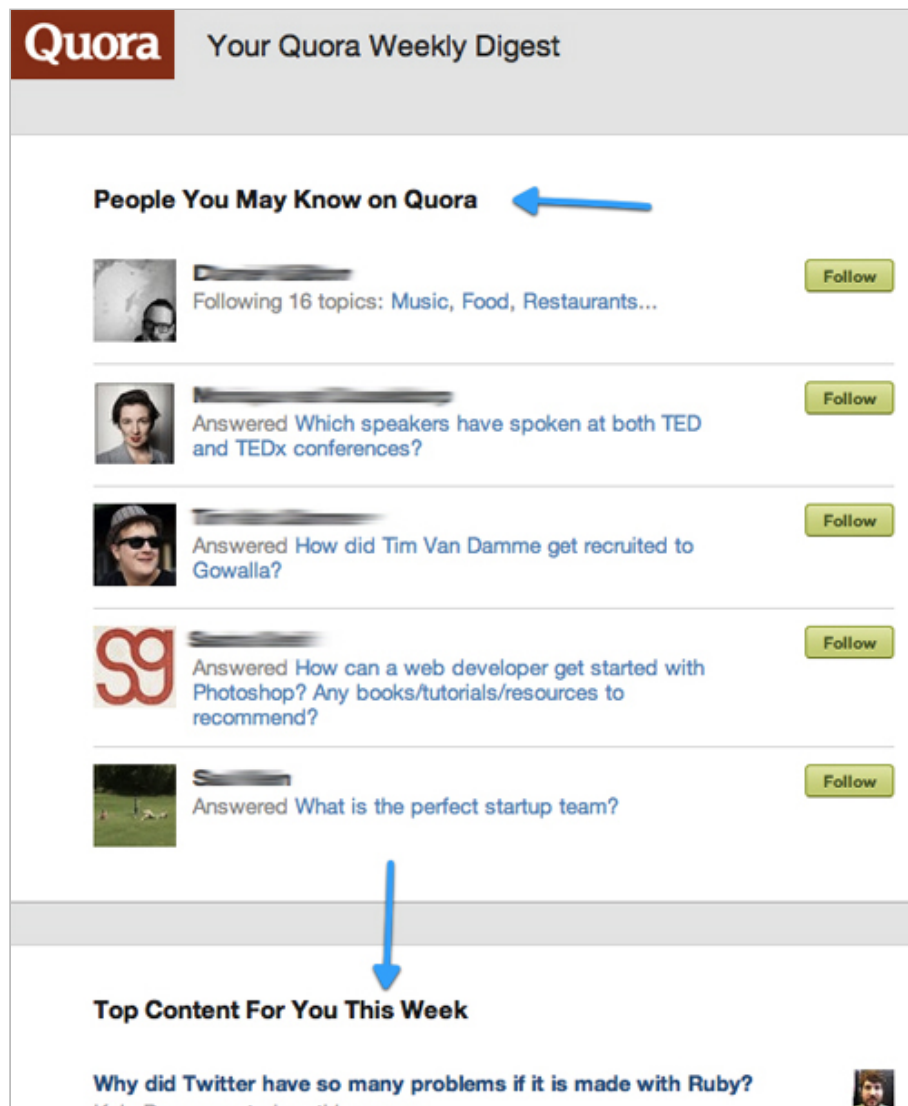
The Zaarly Team

Zaarly⁴⁰ highlights its favorite happenings on the website.

⁴⁰. <http://www.zaarly.com/>

PERSONALIZATION

Not that this is especially innovative, but Quora has enough data to show me stuff that I would enjoy reading. If you have the data, then do your users a service. Speaking of personalization, check out how adding the recipient's name to an email's subject line increases conversions⁴¹.



Quora⁴² extends your social graph and suggests reading tailored to you.

SURPRISE COPY

Notification emails are usually all business. But when someone takes time to make something a bit more special⁴³, as the notification email below from CD Baby shows, people will go to great lengths to tell others

⁴¹. <http://estromberg.com/post/17714739482/emailengagement>

⁴². <http://www.quora.com/>

⁴³. <http://www.fourhourworkweek.com/blog/2012/05/31/the-most-successful-e-mail-i-ever-wrote/>

about it. The string “private CD Baby jet” yields over 20,000 results on Google. That’s powerful word of mouth for just a tiny detail.

Your CD has been gently taken from our CD Baby shelves with sterilized contamination-free gloves and placed onto a satin pillow.

A team of 50 employees inspected your CD and polished it to make sure it was in the best possible condition before mailing.

Our packing specialist from Japan lit a candle and a hush fell over the crowd as he put your CD into the finest gold-lined box that money can buy.

We all had a wonderful celebration afterwards and the whole party marched down the street to the post office where the entire town of Portland waved "Bon Voyage!" to your package, on its way to you, in our private CD Baby jet on this day, Thursday, July 5th.

I hope you had a wonderful time shopping at CD Baby. We sure did. Your picture is on our wall as "Customer of the Year." We're all exhausted but can't wait for you to come back to CDBABY.COM!!

Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Sigh...

--

Derek Sivers, president, CD Baby
the little store with the best new independent music
<http://cdbaby.com> cdbaby@cdbaby.com (503)595-3000

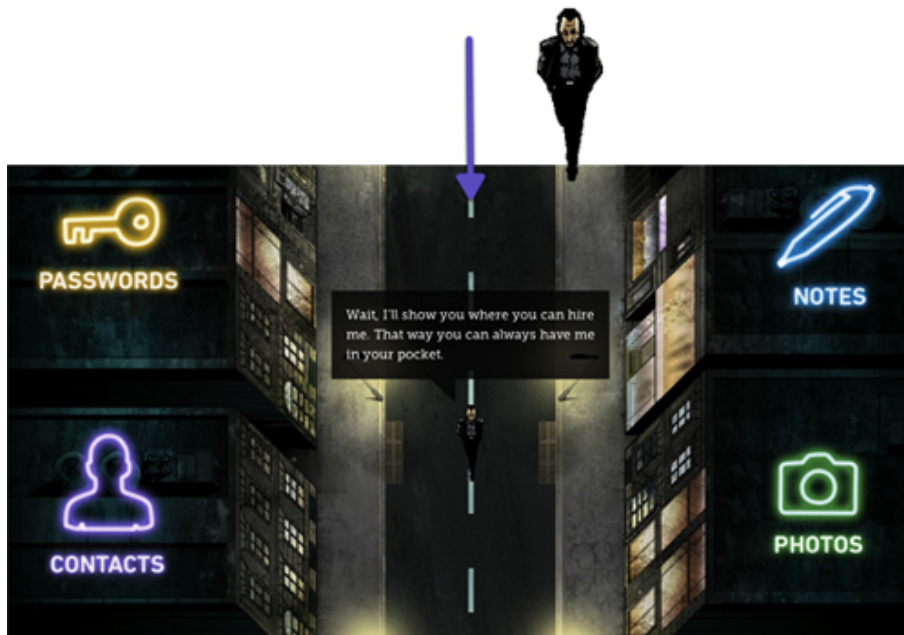
The copy for CD Baby's notification email. (Image: The Shifted Librarian⁴⁴)

Storytelling

We all know that **stories get people to listen**. Some compelling examples are out there of product stories, one of which is Ben the Bodyguard. It's an iPhone app that protects the personal data on your phone. The app is designed around the character of Ben. Way before it launched, the developer put up a website on which Ben walked the streets as you scrolled down⁴⁵, telling you that he'll protect your data soon.

⁴⁴. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/shifted/732312273/>

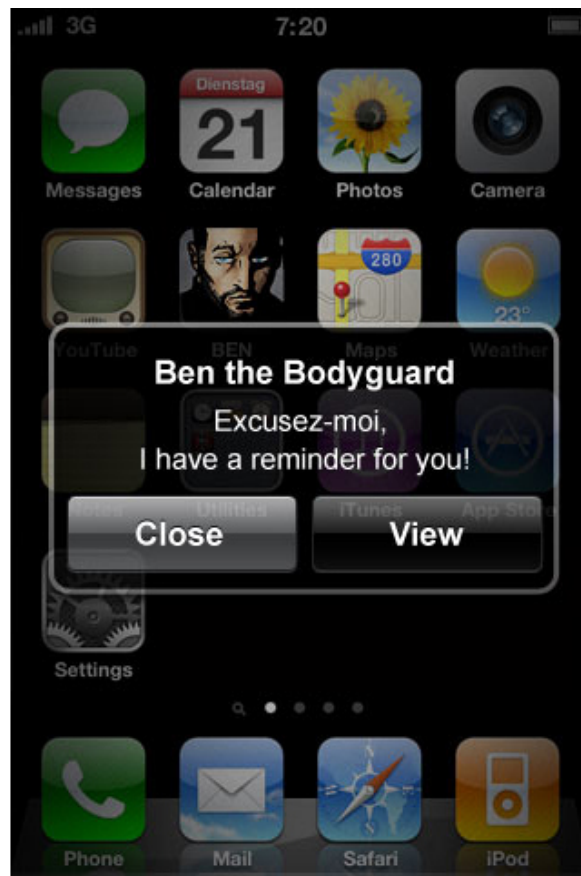
⁴⁵. <http://benthebodyguard.com/index.php>



Ben the Bodyguard⁴⁶ on the teaser page.

This character of Ben, the French bodyguard, is weaved into every bit of the application consistently. It's almost as if you were entrusting your data to a personal bodyguard.

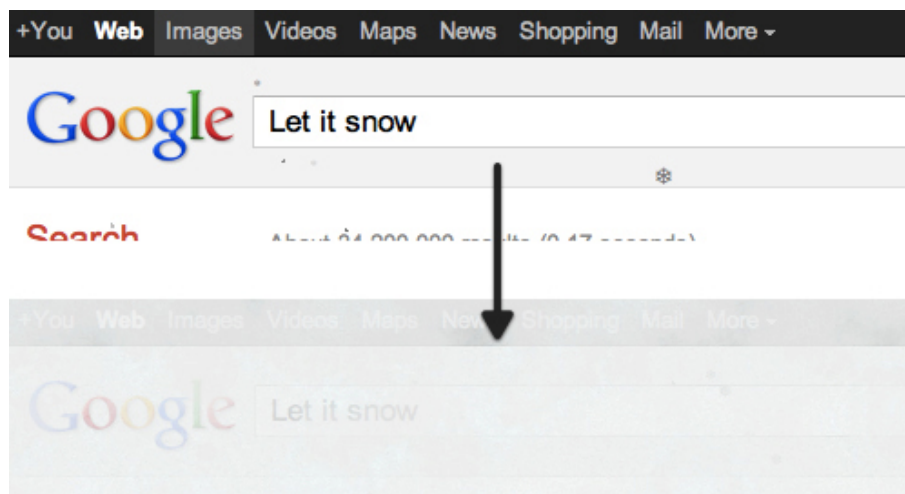
⁴⁶. <http://benthebodyguard.com/index.php>



Notifications from Ben

Easter Eggs

Easter eggs in general are meant to delight users. Even Google, a relatively serious character among online personalities, adds an Easter egg or two to its search engine every now and then.



Google's⁴⁷ "Let it snow" Easter egg

LET IT SNOW

A while back, Google made it snow on its home page. It also let users do a barrel roll⁴⁸.

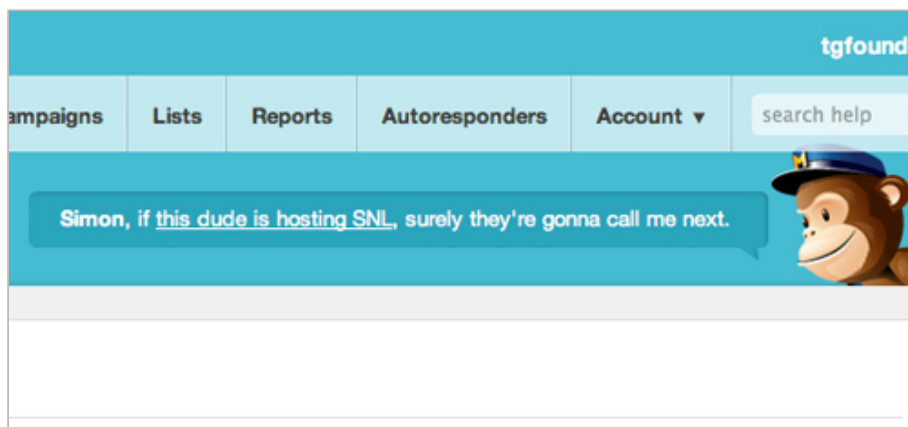
Easter eggs are usually unrelated to the service. They exist merely to delight or surprise users, to give them a treat just to make them happy. And happy users share.

Mascots

MailChimp has a distinct personality that deserves all of the attention⁴⁹ that it has attracted⁵⁰. A few details are worth pointing out.

THE JOKING MASCOT

A distinctive part in MailChimp's emotional design is its chimp, which goes by the name of Freddie. Freddie cheers you up when your profile page loads. And every time you reload, a random joke or link is shown.



One of Freddie the Chimp's random remarks. (Click on the image to see what he's referring to.)

But note that emotional design like this **can be done wrong**. Remember the Microsoft Office paperclip helper that got in the way every time you tried to do something? Freddie the Chimp does not get involved; he stays out of your workflow.

⁴⁷. <https://www.google.com/>

⁴⁸. <http://lmgty.com/?q=do+a+barrel+roll#>

⁴⁹. <http://vimeo.com/34081566>

⁵⁰. <http://blog.thegodfounder.com/tagged/mailchimp>

Log-In Pages

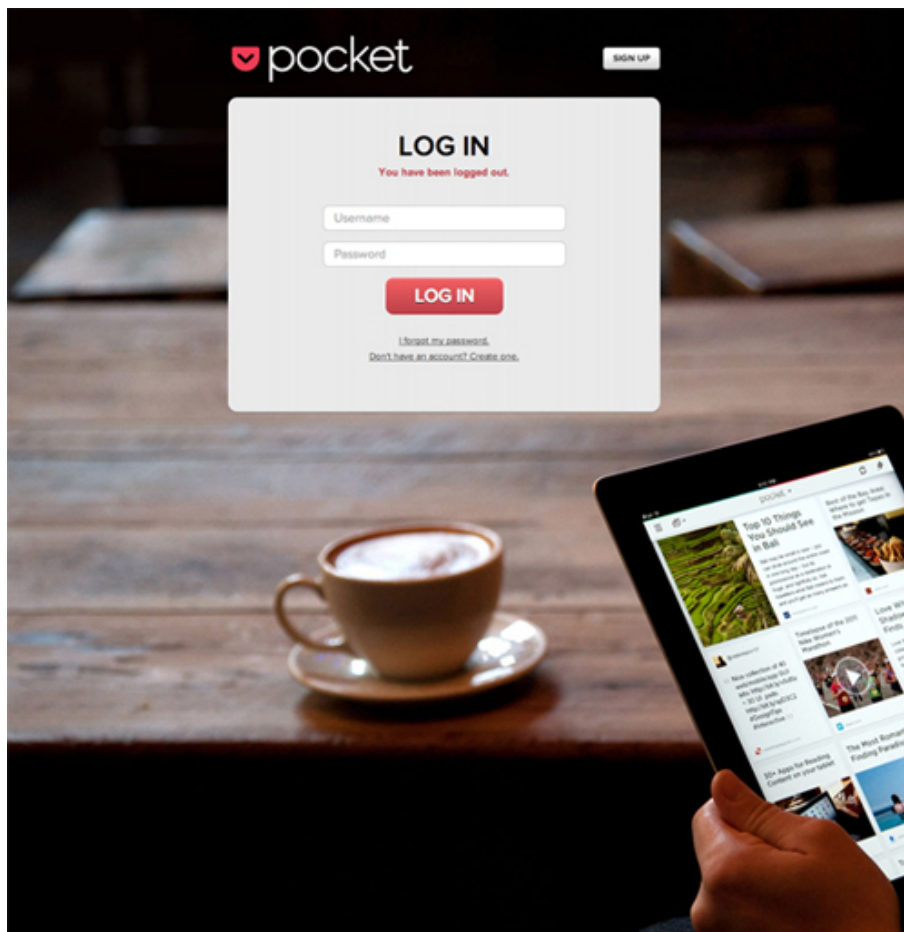
Even log-in pages can be made interesting. MailChimp's changes on special days, like Google's doodle. Check out some of the designs in the dedicated Flickr pool⁵¹.



One of MailChimp's custom log-in screens

You don't even have to do much to be special. Pocket greets you on the log-in screen with a huge background image instead of a dull color.

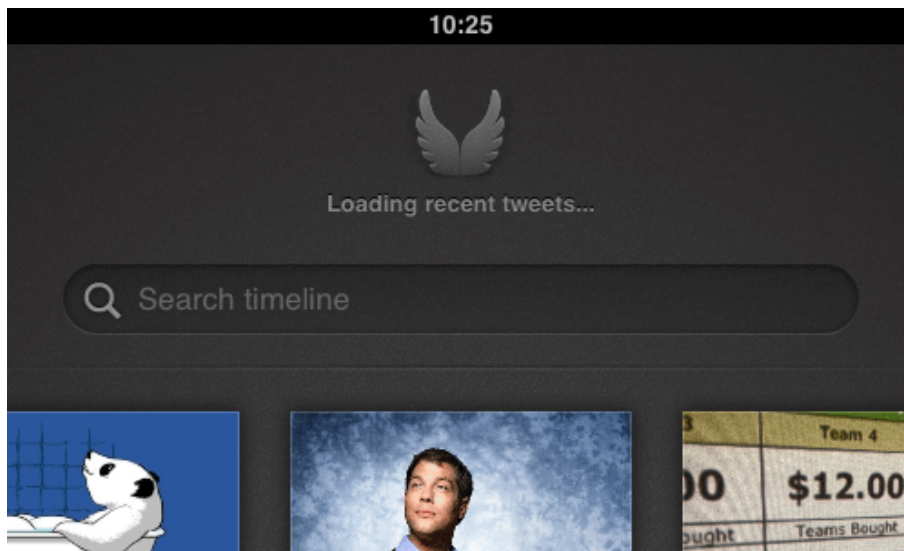
⁵¹. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/freddievonchimp/sets/72157623138750445/with/4541691544/>



Pocket's log-in screen

Attention to Detail and Surprise

Many of the things covered above demonstrate some attention to detail, which is essentially what it all comes down to. The level of attention to detail shows how much you love the product and how much you respect your customers. Check out this spinner in Quip's recently released app.



Quip's loading spinner

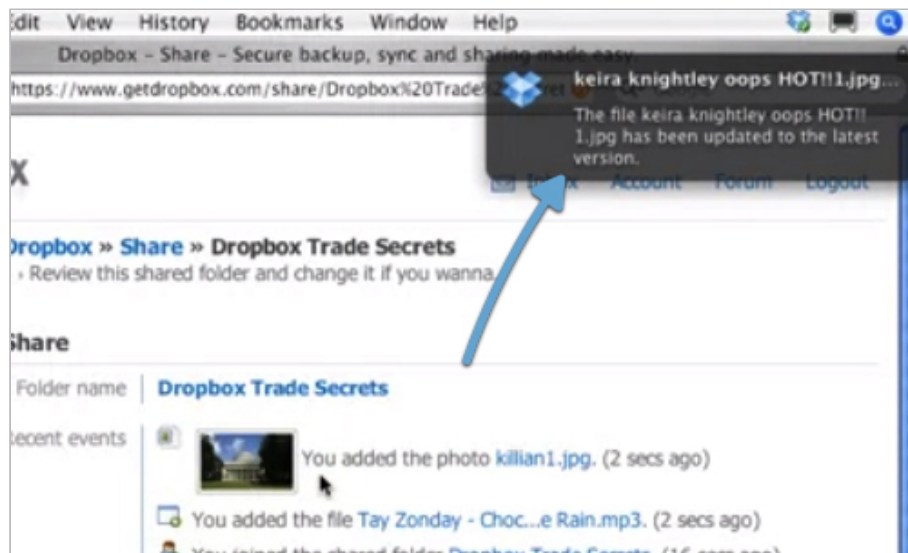
There is no need for the wings to flap, but I keep reloading just to see it. Remember, though, such details should never be at the expense of usability.

Surprises and attention to detail are everywhere. One big reason for Dropbox's early buzz was its video⁵², which it posted to Digg as "Google Drive killer coming from MIT startup⁵³." It was carefully crafted for that audience, with a lot of things left to be discovered (including jokes that Diggers would understand and appreciate). More about that period in Dropbox's growth can be heard in a talk by cofounder Drew Houston⁵⁴.

⁵². http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=7QmCUDHpNzE#!

⁵³. http://digg.com/news/story/Google_Drive_killer_coming_from_MIT_Startup

⁵⁴. <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/authorMaterialInfo.html?mid=2983>



Keira is hot. An “accidental” status message during the Dropbox⁵⁵ demo.

To get inspired with details, check out the great Tumblr Little Big Details⁵⁶.

Three Diverse Examples Of Personality

Up to now, we have looked at various aspects and examples of emotional design. Below are instances of emotional design in different areas: two from websites and one from the app economy.

EXAMPLE 1: GIDSY (A MARKETPLACE FOR THE PUBLIC)

Gidsy⁵⁷ is a marketplace for activities run by users. As such, its developers have to worry about broad appeal.

Gidsy’s main color palette is blue and white, a combination known to be liked and trusted. It is no coincidence⁵⁸ that Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn⁵⁹ and countless other brands use some shade of blue. While you’re at it, have a look at BaseKit’s infographic about the psychology of color⁶⁰.

Gidsy’s personality is defined by a thoughtful use of vintage images, lighthearted copy and surprise elements.

⁵⁵. <https://www.dropbox.com/>

⁵⁶. <http://littlebigdetails.com>

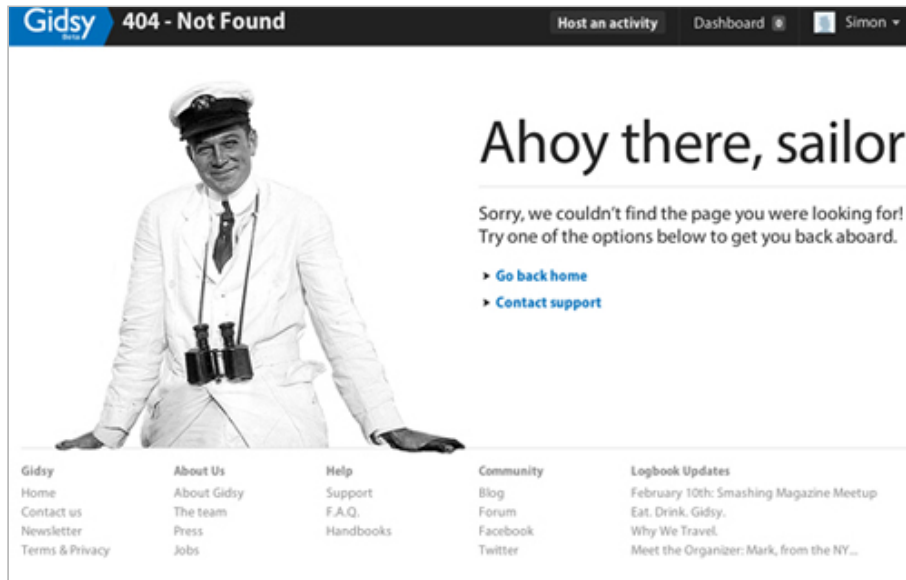
⁵⁷. <http://gidsy.com/>

⁵⁸. <http://karenhaller.co.uk/blog/social-media-branding-the-colour-psychology-of-blue/>

⁵⁹. <http://www.colourlovers.com/business/blog/2010/09/15/the-most-powerful-colors-in-the-world>

⁶⁰. <http://www.basekit.com/the-psychology-of-colour-infographic>

Convey a feeling: Vintage images⁶¹ can be found⁶² all over the website⁶³. They are often used to make a point or emphasize an emotion.



Its vintage-styled 404 page epitomizes Gidsy's⁶⁴ design personality.

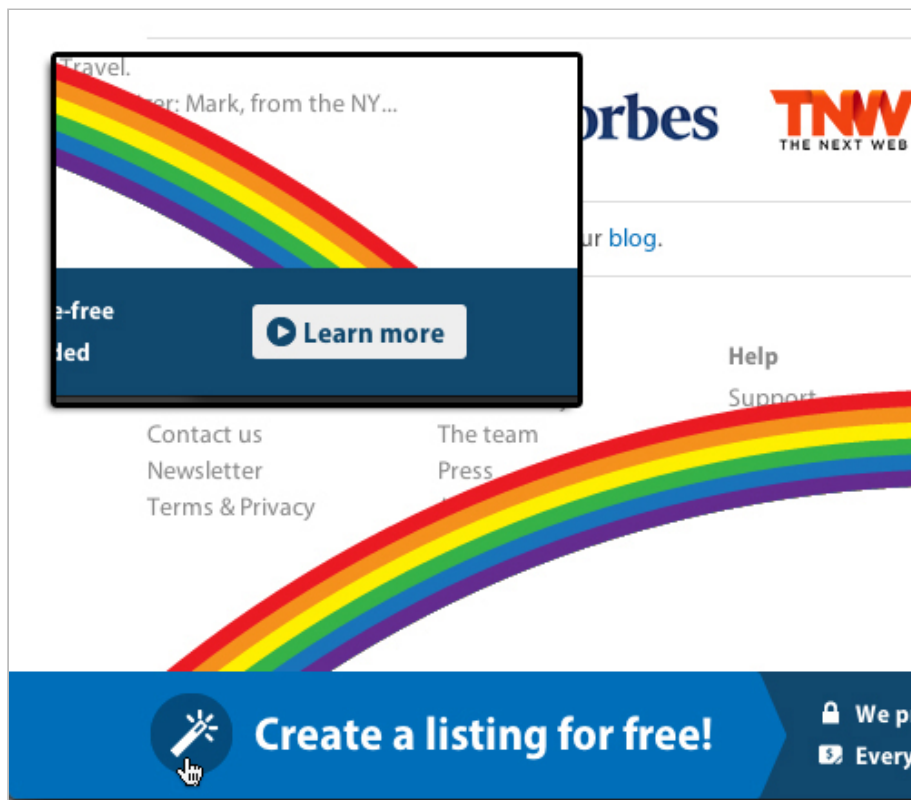
Surprise: On reaching the footer, you'll find a call to action, urging you to create a listing for free. Hovering over the wand will launch a rainbow, pointing you in the right direction and surprising you. Measuring how well that particular detail converts visitors into users would be interesting.

61. <http://gidsy.com/press/>

62. <http://gidsy.com/404>

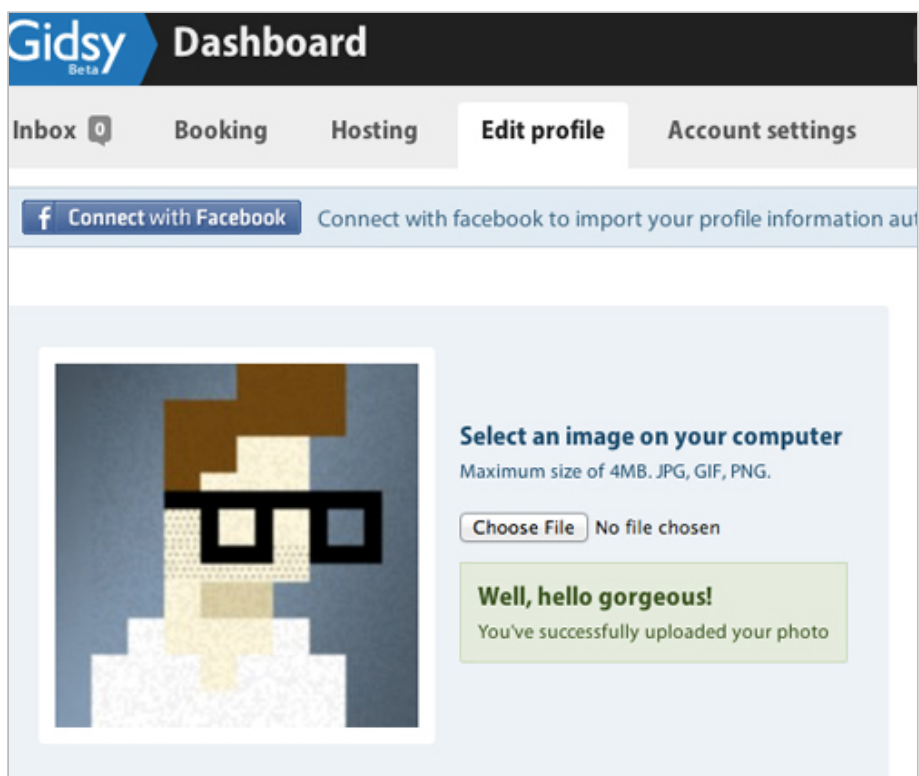
63. <http://gidsy.com/jobs/>

64. <http://gidsy.com/>

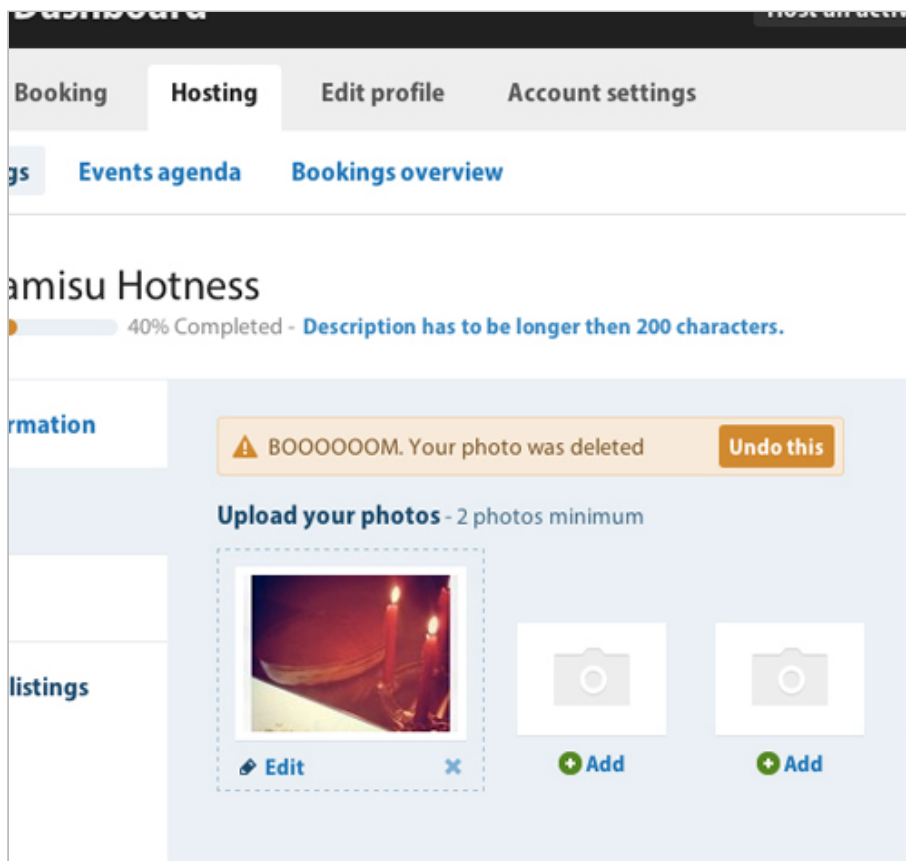


The rainbow playfully guides you to a “Learn more” button.

Copy: Simple copy with a bit of humor: “Well, hello gorgeous!” and “Boooooom. Your photo was deleted.”



The page on which users upload their avatar.



The page on which users delete images.

These details go a long way to giving a product a friendly personality. But you can also rethink large chunks of text, such as handbooks and manuals. Gidsy has done this in its handbooks section⁶⁵. Handbooks usually are a dull experience—but not this one. It has already generated a lot of buzz and links in the design community, so you might have already seen it. Notice the subtle nod to iA's Writer app⁶⁶?

⁶⁵. <http://gidsy.com/handbooks/making-the-perfect-listing/>

⁶⁶. <http://www.iawriter.com/>

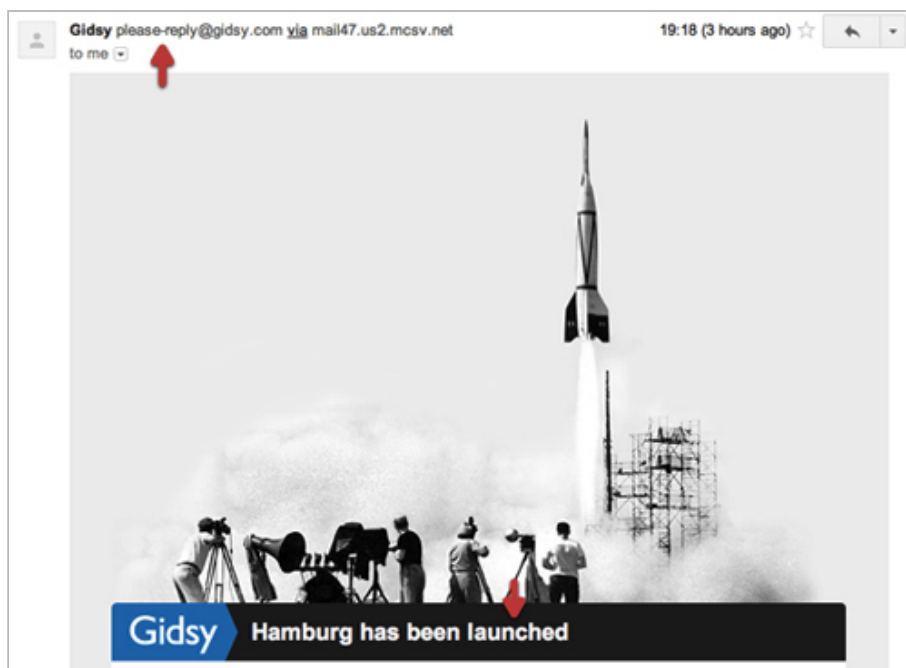
Choosing a Title |

The title for your listing should be short, sweet and to the point. You have a limited number of characters that you can use, so make it catchy. Using special characters, e.g. @!"£\$%^&*~(), can interfere with your message. You're better off avoiding these and sticking to good old letters, spaces and numbers where needed.

No need to put dates or times into your title - these will be dealt with in other sections. Make sure you choose a title that will help people find your listing. One thing you can ask yourself is which words you would use if you were searching for a similar activity.

Gidsy's handbook has made it around the Web.

Newsletter: We'll finish off our look at Gidsy with its recent newsletter, which just hit my inbox as I was about to finish writing this article.

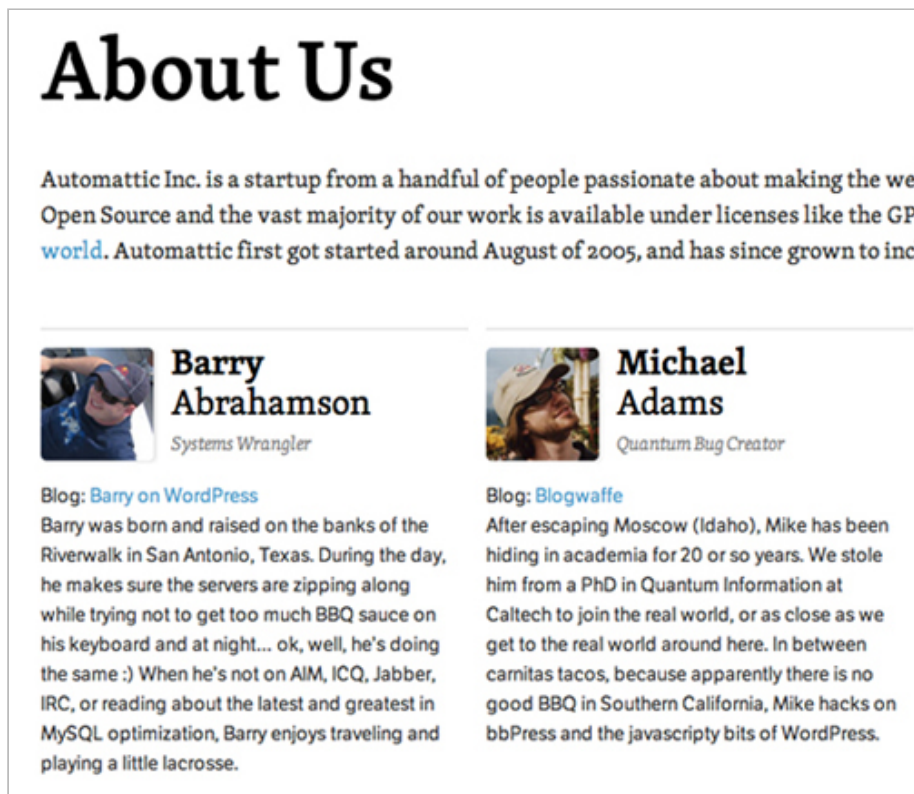


See the tiny "please-reply" email address?

Gidsy has used another vintage shot to emphasize its message. Also, notice the tiny detail of the sender’s email address, `please-reply@gidsy.com`, a friendly reminder that the company is listening and attends to the smallest of details. (I noticed that another Berlin-based startup⁶⁷ started doing it first.)


EXAMPLE 2: AUTOMATTIC (GENERAL WEB HACKERY)

Automattic⁶⁸ needs no introduction to this audience. It is a perfect example of how to integrate humor into a generally humorless environment: coding. It espouses Matt Mullenweg’s early mantra of “Code is poetry” anywhere it can. Let’s look at what it has done with its Web properties.



About Us


Automattic Inc. is a startup from a handful of people passionate about making the web Open Source and the vast majority of our work is available under licenses like the [GPL world](#). Automattic first got started around August of 2005, and has since grown to include



Barry Abrahamson
Systems Wrangler

Blog: [Barry on WordPress](#)

Barry was born and raised on the banks of the Riverwalk in San Antonio, Texas. During the day, he makes sure the servers are zipping along while trying not to get too much BBQ sauce on his keyboard and at night... ok, well, he's doing the same :) When he's not on AIM, ICQ, Jabber, IRC, or reading about the latest and greatest in MySQL optimization, Barry enjoys traveling and playing a little lacrosse.



Michael Adams
Quantum Bug Creator

Blog: [Blogwaffe](#)

After escaping Moscow (Idaho), Mike has been hiding in academia for 20 or so years. We stole him from a PhD in Quantum Information at Caltech to join the real world, or as close as we get to the real world around here. In between carnitas tacos, because apparently there is no good BBQ in Southern California, Mike hacks on bbPress and the javascripty bits of WordPress.

Automattic’s⁶⁹ “About” page, packed with humor.

Humor: Automattic’s “About” page is a collection of good-natured bios. Mullenweg’s bio is this:

⁶⁷. <http://thegodfounder.com/post/14263587635/email-readmill-readmill-takes-another-approach>

⁶⁸. <http://automattic.com/>

⁶⁹. <http://automattic.com/>

As the Chief BBQ Taste Tester of Automattic, Matt travels the world sampling cuisine and comparing it to the gold standard of Texas BBQ. Although he originally aspired to be a jazz saxophonist, Matt somehow wound up studying economics which took him to Washington D.C.[...]

Sounds like a fun place to work. Isn't that exactly what most people reading the page would like?

Slogan: Automattic's slogan is, "We're much better at writing code than haiku." This humorous line is what Automattic is all about, and it sets the tone for everything it does.

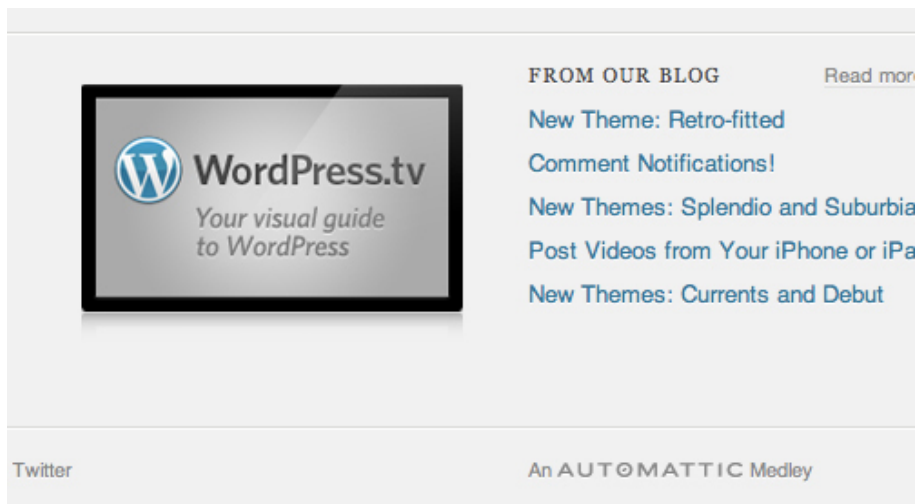


What Automattic⁷⁰ is all about

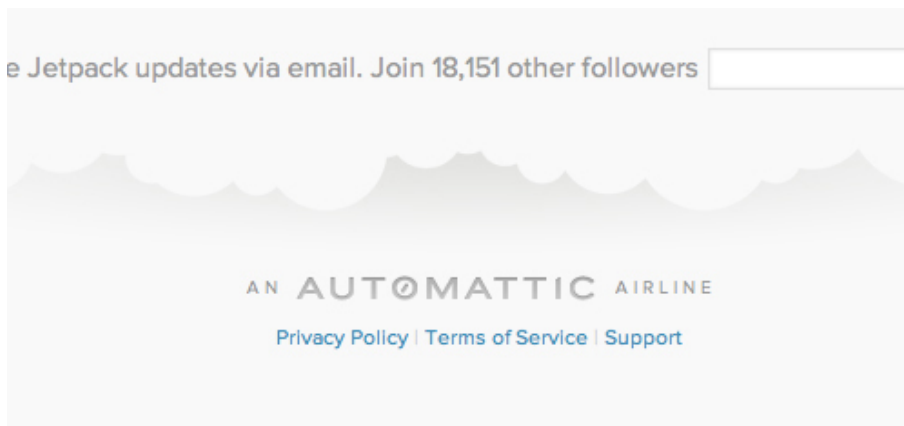
Microcopy: People notice tiny details. For example, in the footer of WordPress⁷¹ home page is a signature that changes every time the page reloads. It says, alternately, that WordPress is "An Automattic [Production]," "An Automattic [Medly]," etc. This little change to the description shows the company's love for its product.

⁷⁰. <http://automattic.com/about/>

⁷¹. <http://wordpress.com/#footer>



WordPress⁷² is “An Automattic Medley.”



Jetpack is “An Automattic Airline.”

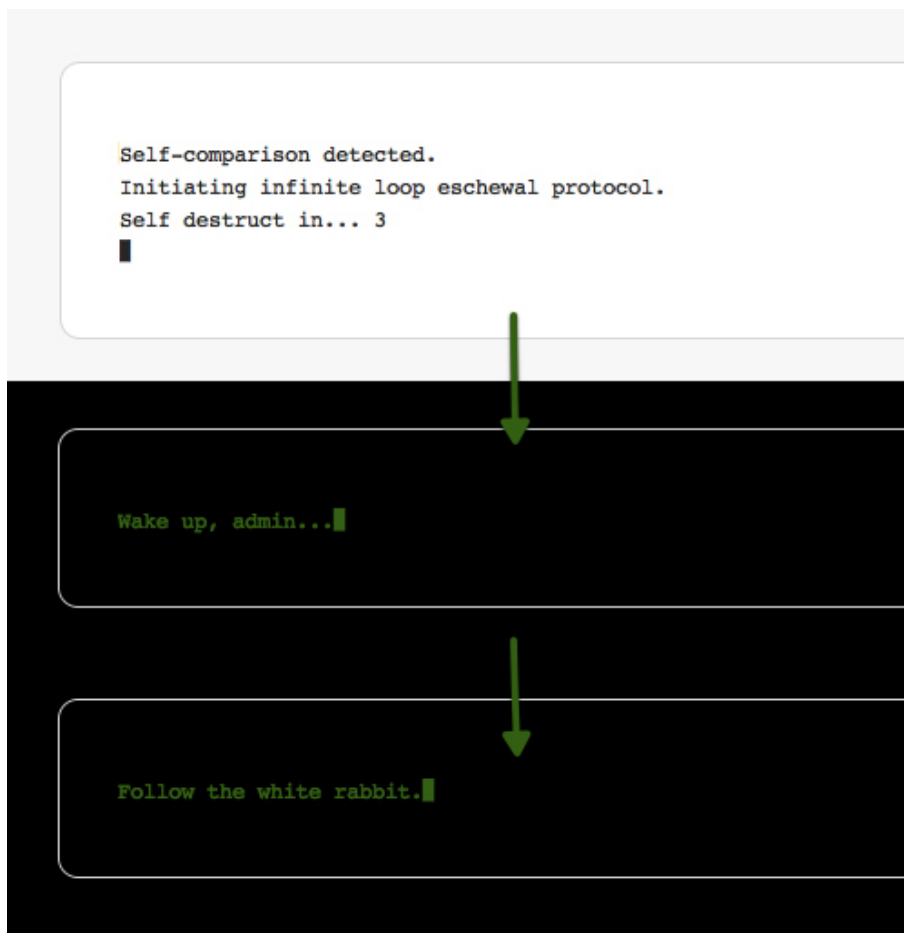
Surprise: On Automattic’s Jetpack website, three jetpacks soar across the screen whenever the page loads, reinforcing the product’s name and exhibiting a love of detail.

⁷². <http://wordpress.com/>



Small jetpacks shoot across the background.

Easter egg: One lovely detail is WordPress’ “self-comparison” Easter egg. Instead of removing the possibility of comparing a post’s version with itself, Automattic has built in a little mechanism that turns the page into a gray and white canvas, creating a Matrix-like effect.



WordPress’s⁷³ self-comparison solution.

So, when you hit that button, accidentally or not, the whole page turns gray and simulates self-destruction mode, Matrix-style. In the end, WordPress reminds you not to let that happen again.

TechFleece has a detailed description of how to find WordPress' Matrix Easter egg⁷⁴.

Automattic is a great example of how to show personality in a hacker-heavy environment.

EXAMPLE 3: CLEAR APP (TO-DO APP FOR DESIGN-SAVVY USERS)

Emotional design can turn users into evangelists who share their positive experience with others. People love sharing interesting stories; you just have to give them one.

Consider the recent success of Realmac Software's to-do app for the iPhone, Clear⁷⁵. It sure isn't the first to-do app out there, but it cleverly targets iPhone users and designers with a sleek, minimal interface and a few interaction and transition patterns that have not been done yet. It's the kind of thing that we iOS geeks just drool over.

Anticipation: Realmac published a video⁷⁶ before the launch that cleverly raises anticipation of the product. The video spread in some parts of the design community⁷⁷ rather quickly.

People's attention was captured not only by the design, but by some creative treats and surprises.

Playful: The app sets the tone for playing around and having fun.

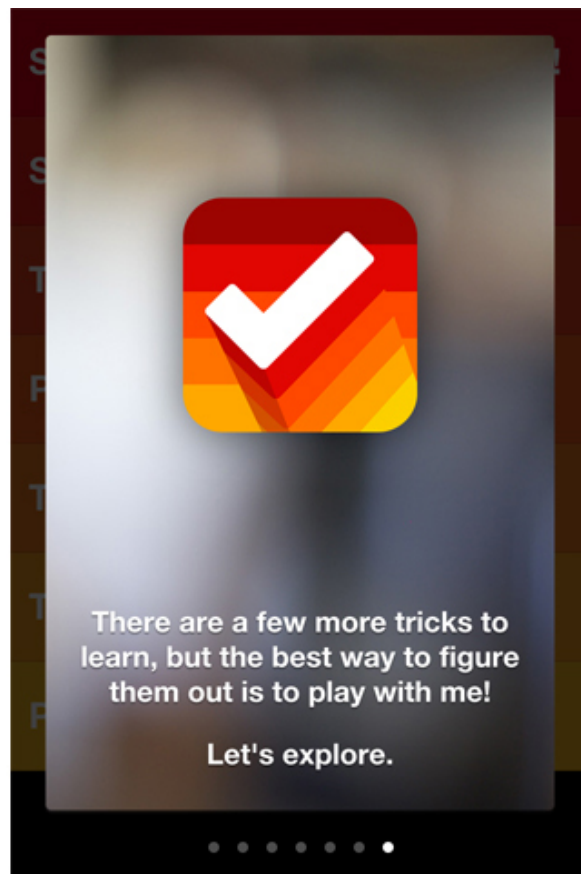
⁷³. <http://wordpress.org/>

⁷⁴. <http://techfleece.com/2011/08/15/how-to-find-the-hidden-matrix-easter-egg-in-wordpress/>

⁷⁵. <http://www.realmacsoftware.com/clear/>

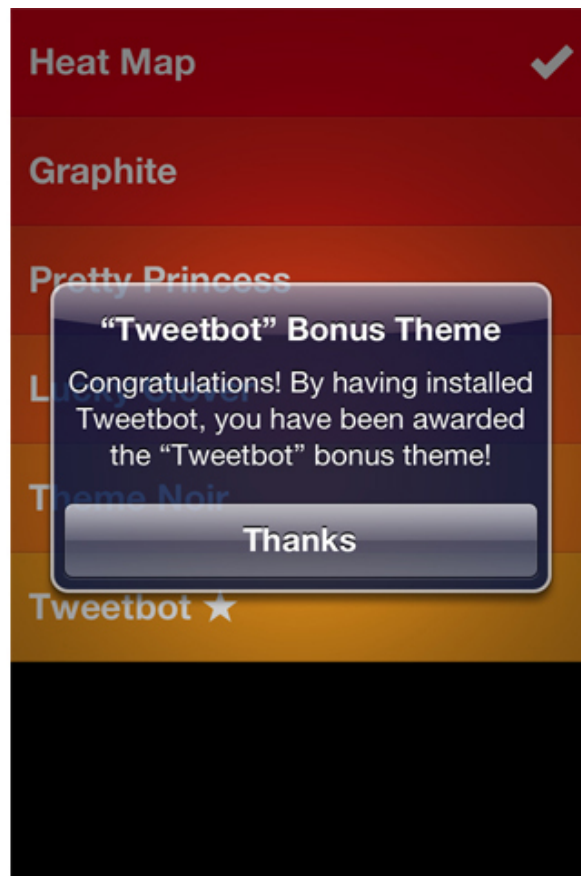
⁷⁶. <http://vimeo.com/35693267>

⁷⁷. <http://dribbble.com/search?q=clear>



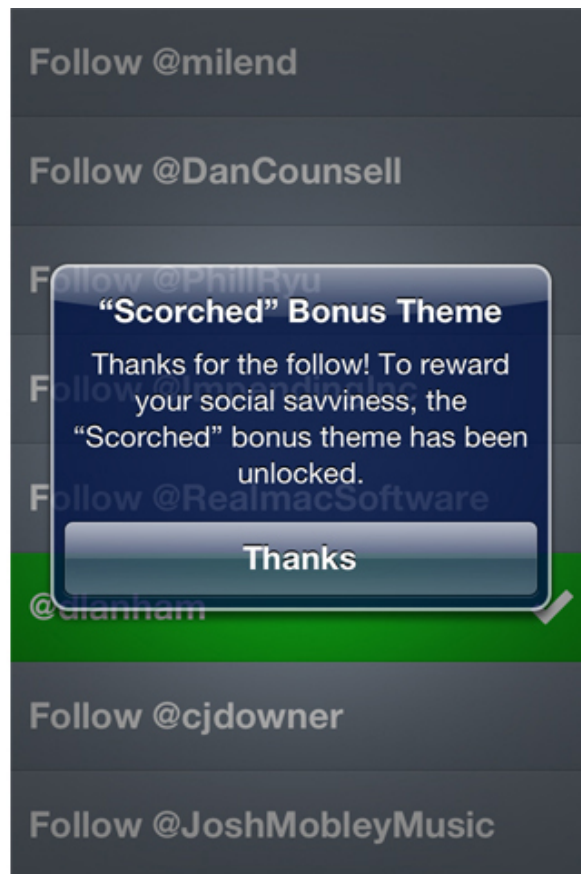
Setting the tone: "Let's explore."

Surprise: On opening the theme settings page, people who have installed the Tweetbot app are greeted with this message and are given an extra Clear theme. Chances are high that people who use Tweetbot love it and would find this to be a welcome surprise.



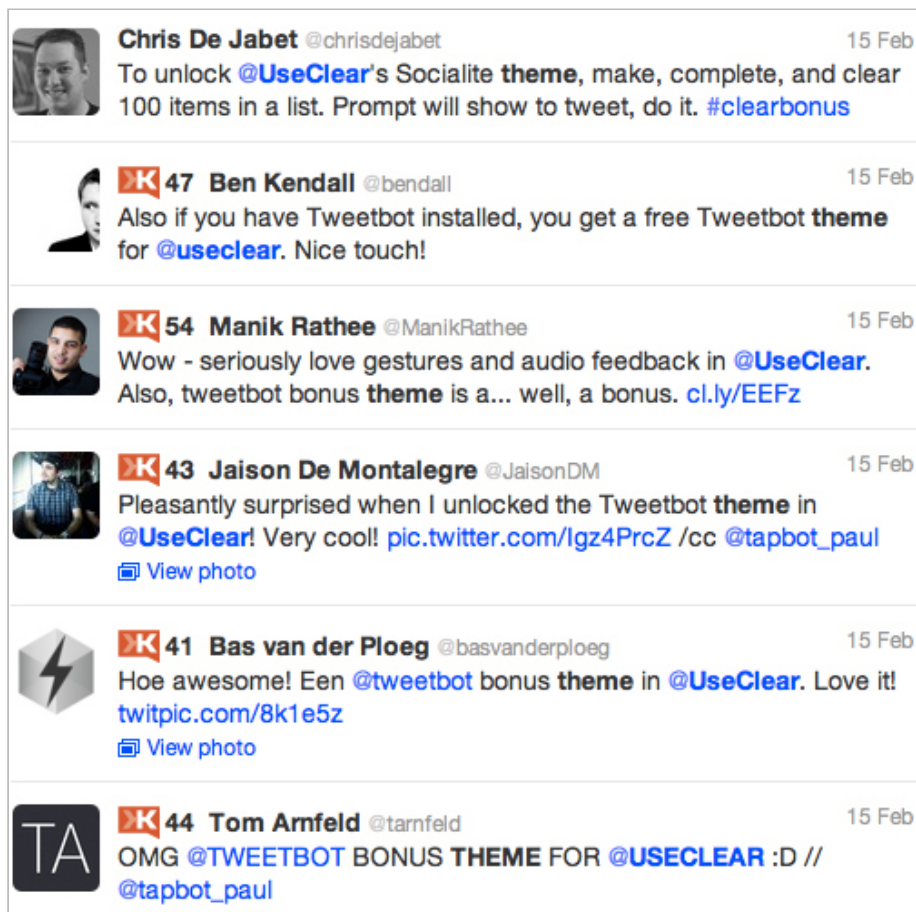
If you have installed the popular Tweetbot app, you'll get a bonus theme.

Treat 2: If you follow the Twitter account of one of Clear's developers, you'll be awarded another theme for your social behavior. It was a cleverly engineered Easter egg hunt, resulting in an outburst of positive response by people on Twitter who shared their enthusiasm and compared which themes they had acquired and missed.



If you follow one of Clear's creators, you are rewarded with a theme.

This is one of the best effects of emotional design. Not only will people enjoy using your product more, but they will share their excitement. And here is the proof on Twitter:



Some of the buzz that the bonus theme alone generated on Twitter.

Surprise detail: When your to-do list is empty, Clear offers a tip on how to fill it up.

“Tap to start. Then, do.”

— Clear

The second time, however, you are shown a motivational quote:

**“Many of life’s failures are
people who did not realize
how close they were to
success when they gave up.”**

— Thomas Edison

Final Words On Benefits And Risks

Emotional design is risky. Adopting a lighthearted tone when apologizing for something going wrong might not sit well with everyone. Don't be afraid, though, to show your personality, as long as it's geared to the right people. You can't and don't want to be everything to everyone.

We haven't covered instances of emotional design gone bad, but here's a word of advice: if you do attempt to be funny or quirky, the most important thing is to listen and monitor your users' reactions. If something doesn't work, you need to be **proactive, apologize** and **improve**. Showing that you're listening and ready to learn exposes your humanity—putting you right back in emotional territory again.

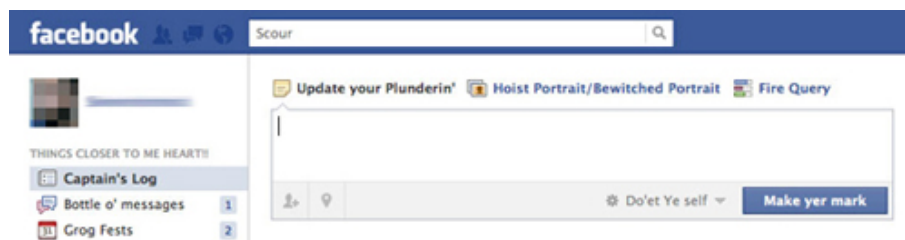
MailChimp handles the risk of turning people off with an off switch, which it calls “party-pooper mode.”



Switch on “party-pooper mode.”

So, if you really don't like the chimp, you can disable him. Apparently, not many do⁷⁸.

Or you could do it the other way and make some quirky behavior the non-default state. Facebook has an Easter egg of its own, letting you change the UI's language to pirate talk. It actually makes me enjoy Facebook a little more.



⁷⁸. <http://speakerdeck.com/u/aaron/p/learning-to-love-humans-emotional-interface-design?slide=81>

This is really what it's all about: **helping users to enjoy something more**—so much that they'll share with friends and strangers.

And if you'd like to learn *even more* about emotional design, check out a good list of further resources on Smashing Magazine⁷⁹. 🐼

⁷⁹. <http://www.smashingmagazine.com/the-personality-layer-related-resources/>

Give Your Website Soul With Emotionally Intelligent Interactions

BY CHUCK LONGANECKER 🍷

What is it that makes us loyal fans of the websites and apps we love? When we sat down to answer this question for ourselves, we found that the websites and apps we truly love have one thing in common: soul. They're humanized. They have emotional intelligence designed into the user experience. And this emotional intelligence is crafted through thoughtful interaction design and feedback mechanisms built into the website.

These elements give the website or app personality and earn a spot in our hearts. In our opinion, it's not going too far to say that giving your website or app soul is the key to earning loyal fans. In this article, we'll look at some of the best examples of these emotionally intelligent interactions and how they infuse personality and soul into the websites and apps where they're found.

What Are Emotionally Intelligent Interactions?

An emotionally intelligent interaction is any state (or change in state) of a website/app where the messaging or functionality includes attention to details that create a user experience that feels organic and human. These interactions can be a big experience (like when an entire website is down), or a very small experience (such as when an error state on a form element appears). They can be derived from different elements, including messaging and copy, color and design, and responsiveness to user inputs and system outputs.

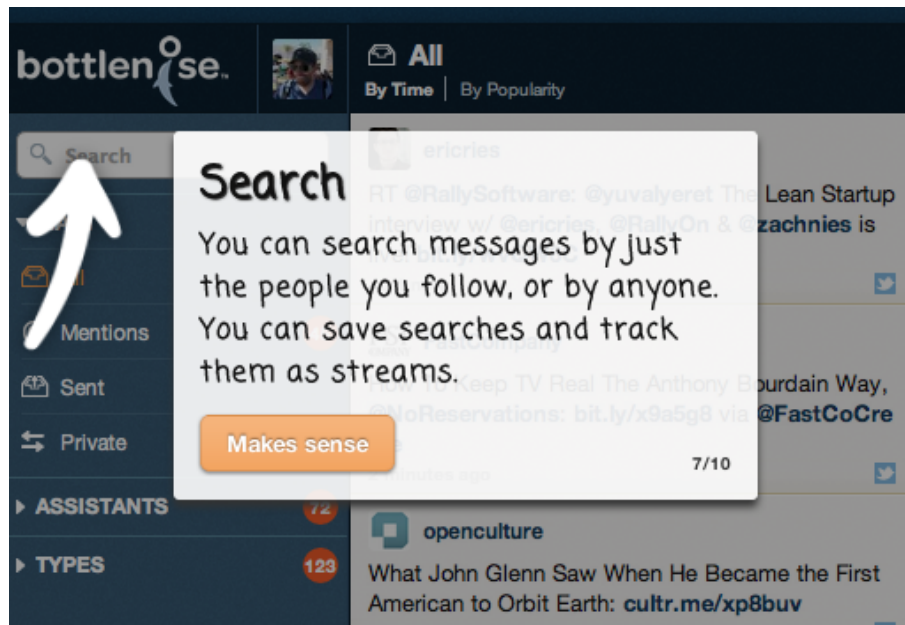
Combining each of these crafted experiences creates soul and personality for a website. And it's that **emotional connection with users** that builds lasting loyalty, and raving fans.

EXAMPLES OF EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT INTERACTIONS

Note: *Several of the examples and images are from this brilliant website: Little Big Details⁸⁰. It's one of the many must-reads and I recommend adding it to your favorites if you haven't done so already.*

Bottlenose⁸¹

A new Web-based Twitter client that gives users a new way to explore and use Twitter. The app does a great job of walking users through the first run with the application, explaining the features in a way that is clear and humorous. The confirmation buttons use phrases like “Makes sense” and “Got it” which create a sense of personality and confidence with the user, a far better choice than the typical “Next.”



Wufoo⁸²

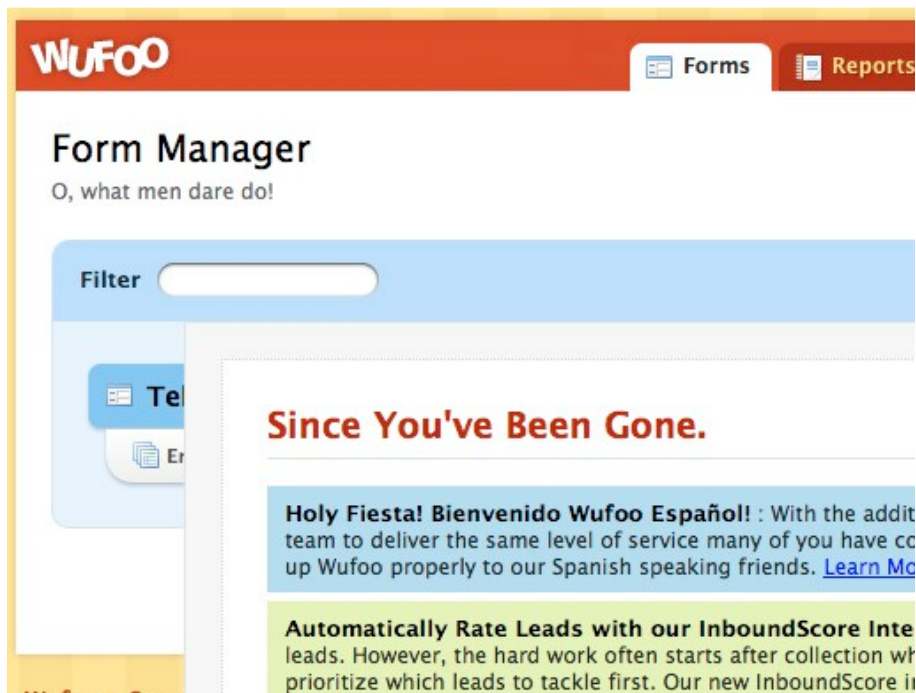
Wufoo uses a combination of smart messaging and subtle touches on UI elements to create a more friendly and personable experience when creating Web forms. Here are just a few:

- Each page title is accompanied by a line of poetry. While it may seem random, the poetry actually reinforces the elegance of the Wufoo solution. It's a unique way to bring personality to an otherwise tedious task (creating forms).

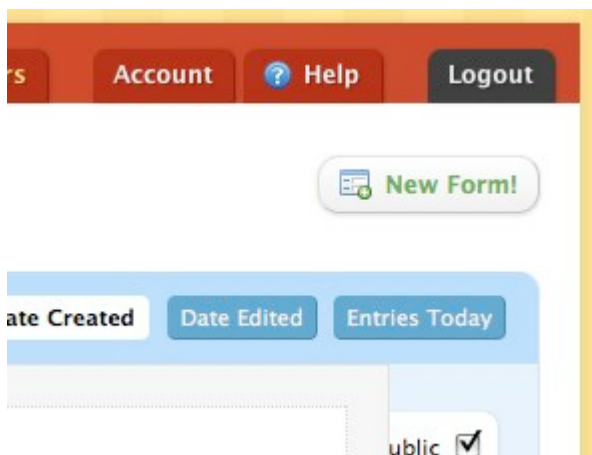
^{80.} <http://www.littlebigdetails.com>

^{81.} <http://bottlenose.com/>

^{82.} <http://wufoo.com/>



- The new report button's punctuation. Think of the word “report”, and you’re next thought is most likely “TPS.” But Wufoo adds an exclamation point to the button. This gives it an element of energy and fun, reinforcing its value as a reporting feature.



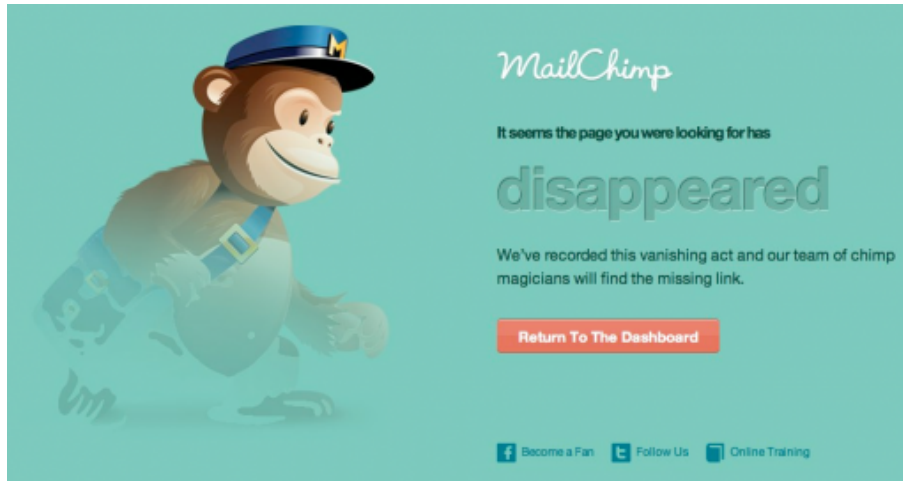
- The reports screen with no reports. Instead of a blank screen, Wufoo takes the opportunity to deliver some true personality through its messaging, and gets you on your way towards building your first report.



MailChimp⁸³

As one of the best examples of emotional intelligence baked into a user experience, MailChimp takes every opportunity to infuse soul into its application, as well as giving you a pitch-perfect way to make it all disappear.

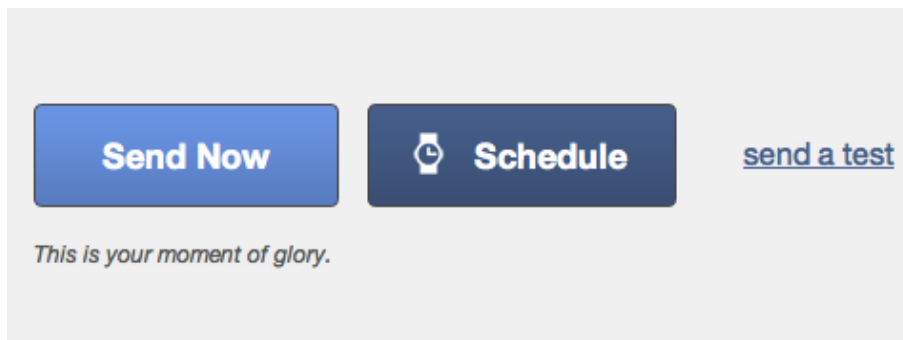
- *404 Page:*
MailChimp's 404 page is brilliant: excellent copy, empathetic design, and a prominent call to action to get users on their way. It's clever, functional, and takes the sting out of 404'ing. Current MailChimp 404 Page⁸⁴.



- *Send Campaign:*
MailChimp celebrates and encourages the user just as they send out an email campaign. The copy "This is your moment of glory" is a perfect encapsulation of the fear and anticipation that goes into deploying this.

⁸³. <http://mailchimp.com/>

⁸⁴. <http://media.smashingmagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/mailchimp-404.jpg>

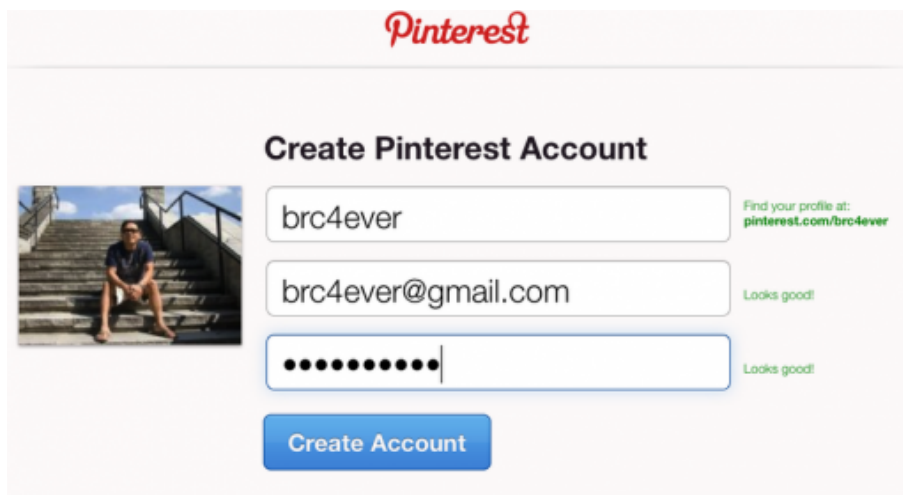


- *Twitter Page:*

Recently when MailChimp went down, they deployed a special background on their Twitter page that showed a sad chimp working furiously to fix the problem. Because people naturally turn to Twitter to learn about why things are broken, the background extended the personality of that service to their Twitter account, creating an emotionally intelligent experience for the user.

Pinterest⁸⁵

This red-hot social network infuses personality into its website with a thoughtful interaction during account creation. Instead of using the typical password confirmation patterns, the app responds with “Looks good!” as passwords meet their requirements and match. It’s a small touch, but one that humanizes the sign-up experience, and empathizes with the user who is creating their account.



Path⁸⁶

On Path’s original website, the icon for the sign-up button arrow changed to a smiley face when it was clicked on. This small change created a personal and welcoming moment during one of the first interac-

⁸⁵. <http://pinterest.com/>

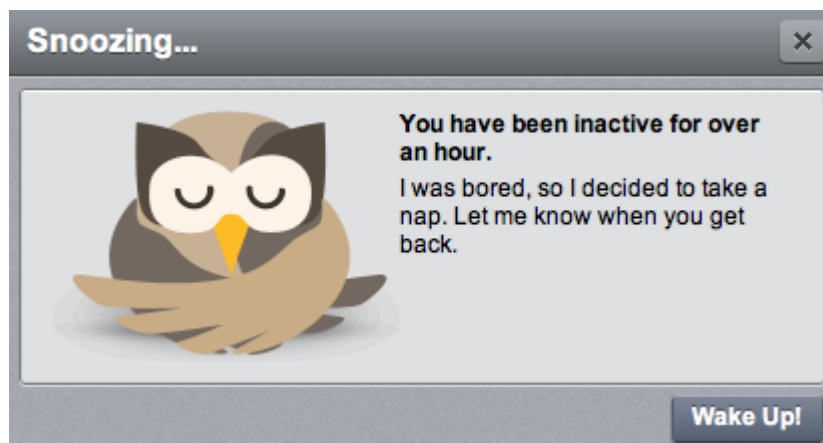
⁸⁶. <http://path.com/>

tions a user had with the application. It's a thoughtful detail added to a step that is often overlooked by designers and users alike, and it set the tone for the rest of the user's onboarding experience.



Hootsuite⁸⁷

The friendly owl mascot for Hootsuite is more than a cute face—the mascot is the representation of the service itself, much like the chimp from MailChimp. Hootsuite taps the Twitter API to pull data into its app, and because Twitter has API limits, Hootsuite intelligently stops making requests after long periods of user inactivity. When this occurs, the Owl lets you know that he has taken a nap, and will wake up when you need him again. It's a clever way to turn a potential negative experience (non-continuous updates) into a positive one that brands the company, while providing the app with personality and soul.



Feedburner⁸⁸

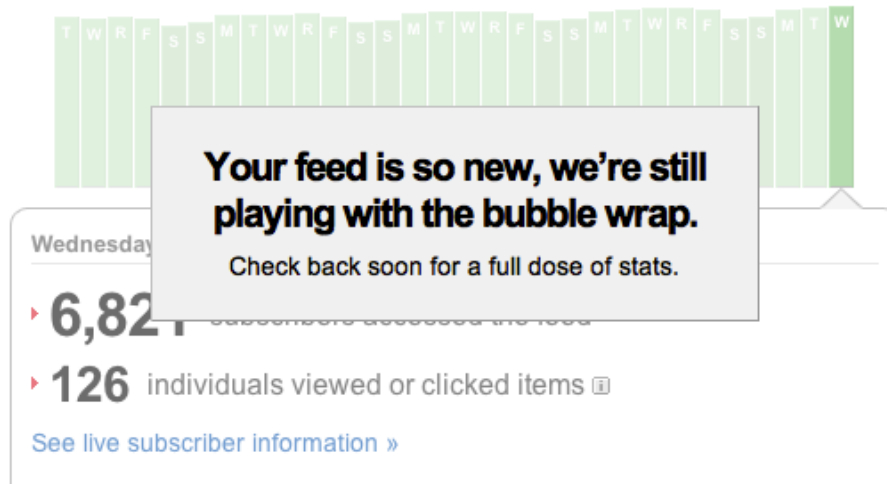
For newly created RSS feeds in Feedburner, the stats page takes the lack of stats to create a personal interaction with the user. Many websites miss these opportunities because they feel this state isn't core to the experience. But Feedburner knows that most new users are interested in

⁸⁷. <http://hootsuite.com/>

⁸⁸. <http://feedburner.com/>

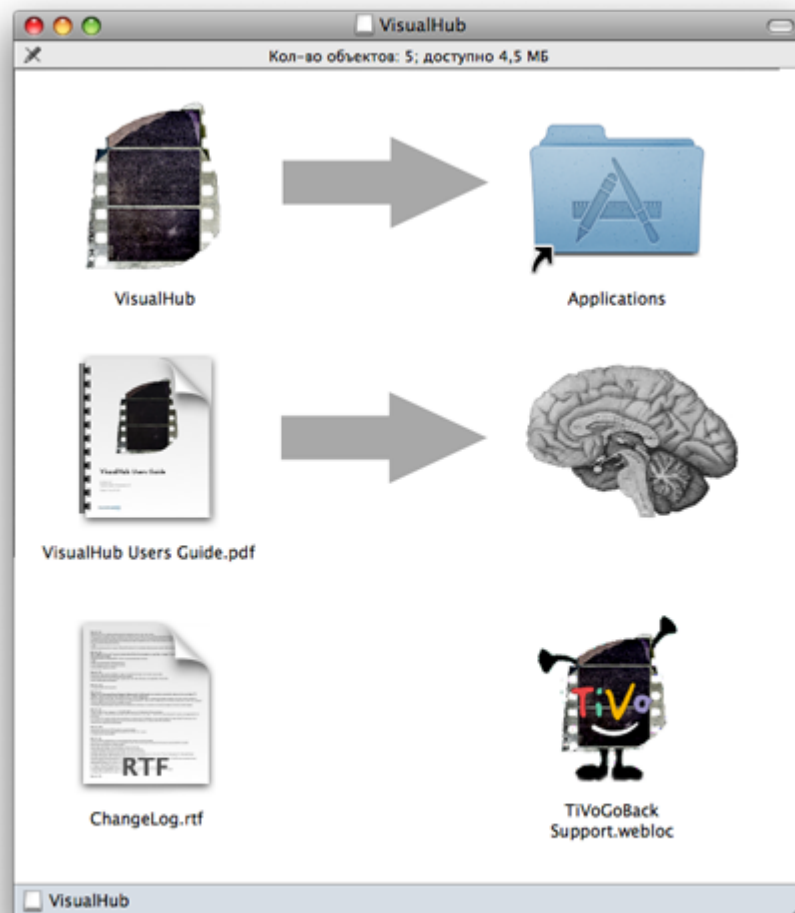
seeing their stats right off the bat—stats that don't exist yet. So when a user visits the page Feedburner has fun letting them know that stats aren't quite ready yet, while creating an emotional connection with the user in this process. It's a huge win for the company in light of the alternative: a lifeless, blank page with no data.

Feed Stats Dashboard



VisualHub

VisualHub takes advantage of the Mac installation screen for user interaction, encouraging users to get acquainted with their user manual. Move the app to the Applications folder, and move the manual to your brain. So often this install process is written, a necessary evil to get to the application. But as we've seen, smart developers leverage these initial interactions to set the tone with the user experience moving things forward.



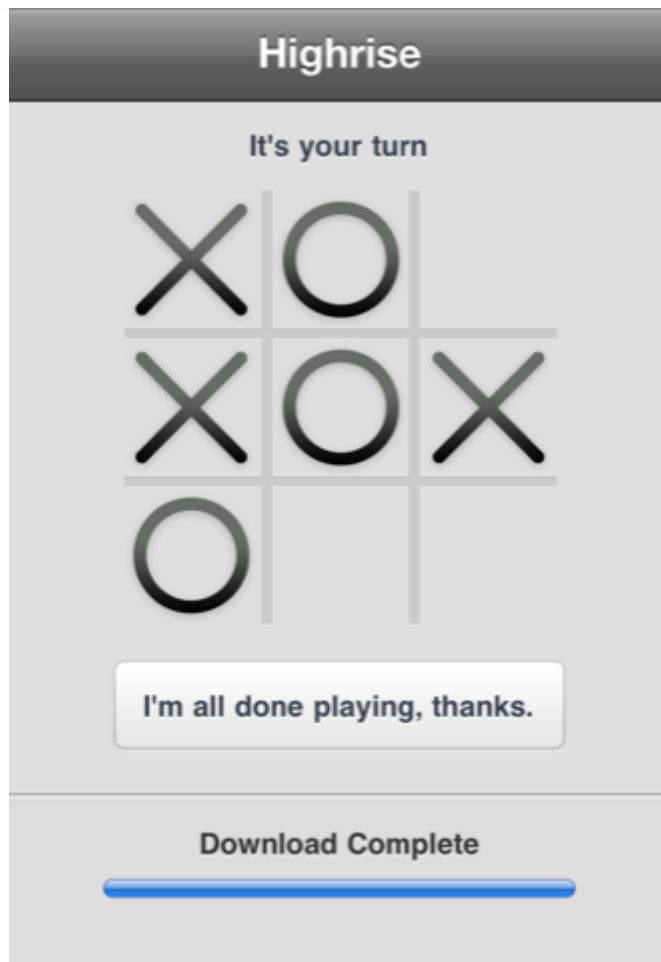
OS X

Apple has long been about attention to details, but typically the details are in refinement (not necessarily emotional intelligence). But the Text Edit icon contains a small Easter Egg for Apple fans—the words of the “Think Different” manifesto are inscribed on the notepad. It pays homage to their legendary founder, and reminds people why they love Apple. It’s a small touch that makes Apple what it is.



Highrise iOS

During the install of 37Signals Highrise iOS app, you can play a game of Tic Tac Toe against the computer. Not only is this a thoughtful way to give users something to do while the app undergoes the necessary evil of being installed, but it's also an homage to the film War Games, a hacker classic. It's a simple and effective way to display emotional intelligence during a typically "dead" point of an app's user experience.



Mint.com⁸⁹

Mint's website maintenance page creates a charming experience for users during what could be a stressful time. Not being able to access your finances can create anxiety, and Mint uses that opportunity to create a fun yet effective notice that lets you know that your money and information is safe, even if the website isn't accessible.

⁸⁹. <https://www.mint.com/>

We'll be Right Back!
say MINT'S ENGINEERS



“Keeping your money safe?” “Of course,” according to Mint’s engineering team — working hard and making constant improvements. The site is down for maintenance and will be back shortly. Sorry for the inconvenience.



Refreshing money management...
and personal finance that works for you!

Mint Software, Inc. KEEPING YOU MINTY SINCE 2007

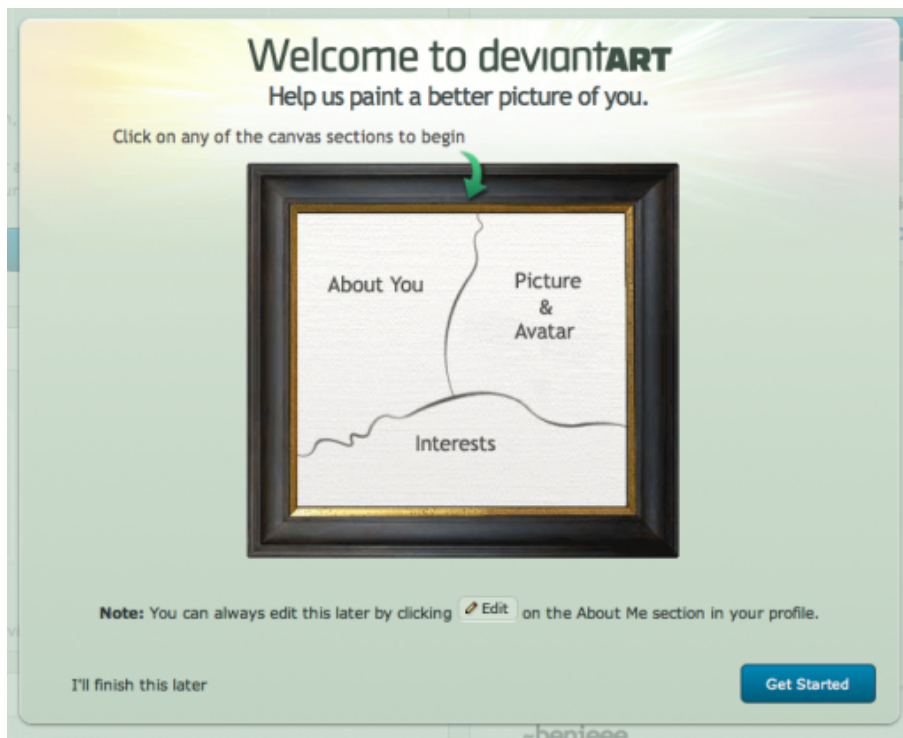
Image via Sean Percival⁹⁰.

Deviant Art⁹¹

Deviant Art uses the portrait metaphor as part of the interaction in setting up your Deviant Art profile. Not only does it tie in with the theme of the website (and connect with its artist community), but it also is a compelling metaphor and mechanic that encourages new users to complete their profile.

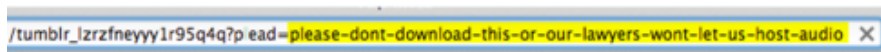
⁹⁰. <http://www.seanpercival.com/>

⁹¹. <http://www.deviantart.com/>



Tumblr⁹²

When listening to an audio file on Tumblr, the URL is appended with an appeal to its users **not** to download the audio file, so that they can continue to offer this type of content on their website. It's a clever way for communicating to its users without the typical JavaScript pop-up warning.



Adding Soul To Your Website

Giving your website soul comes down to the interactions and the intentional craft you put into the design of those interactions. By being intentional about user experience in those small moments that are typically neglected, you can showcase the personality of your app, as well as building loyalty among users. Taking cues from websites and applications like those mentioned above will help you look for ways to infuse your project with emotional intelligence.

These services and developers have created loyal user bases due to their willingness to sweat out the details, and infuse their projects with emotional intelligence. The small things can really make a difference in the success of your website or application. Taking the time to create

⁹². <https://www.tumblr.com/>

these well-crafted experiences is one of the most potent ways we know of to create fans, and bring your website to life with soul. 🍷

Not Just Pretty: Building Emotion Into Your Websites

BY SABINA IDLER 🐼

Emotional design has become a powerful tool in creating exceptional user experiences for websites. However, emotions did not use to play such an important role on the Web. Actually, they did not use to play any role at all; rather, they were drowned by a flood of rational functionality and efficiency.

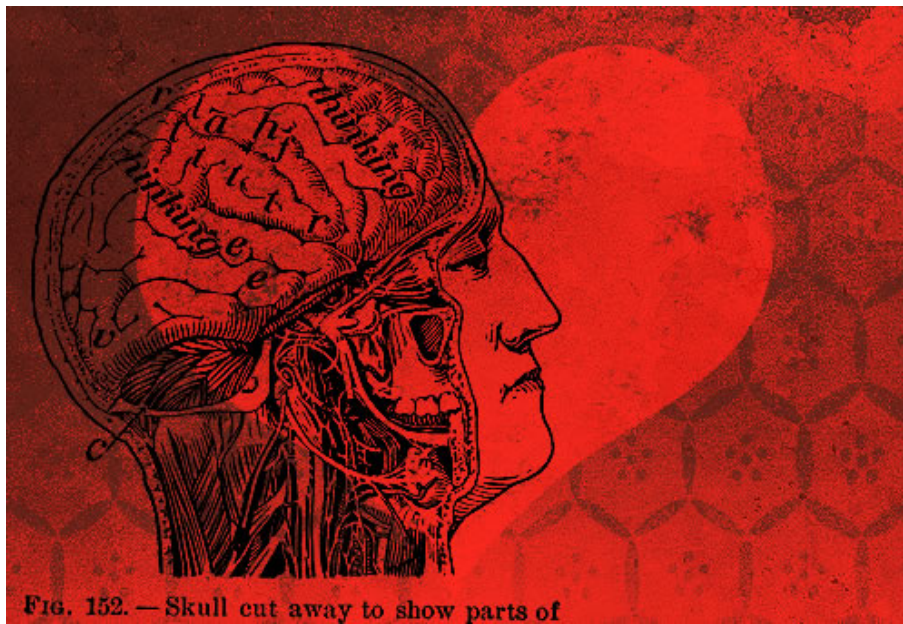
We were so busy trying to adapt to the World Wide Web as a new medium that we lost sight of its full potential. Instead of using the Internet on our terms, we adapted to its technical and, at first, impersonal nature. If it wasn't for visionary contemporaries such as Don Norman or Aarron Walter, we might still be focusing on improving processes, neglecting the potential of emotional design.

In his book *Emotional Design*, Norman describes why “attractive things work better.” He explains how attractive products trigger our creativity and ultimately expand our mental processes, making us more tolerant of minor difficulties. What he is saying is that attractive products make problem-solving easier, which makes them absolutely essential. *Emotional Design* is Norman's reaction to critics who said that if they followed his rules, their designs would be only functional but ugly. So, he conducted the necessary research and came up with three levels of visual design that all need to be considered in order for a design to be both usable and pretty.

User experience designer Aarron Walter contributed another great book to this new era of design: *Designing for Emotion*. In this book, he defines emotions as the “lingua franca of humanity,” the native tongue that every human is born with. He describes **how important emotional experiences** are because they make a profound imprint on our long-term memory and create “an experience for users that makes them feel like there's a person, not a machine, at the other end of the connection”.

Norman and Walter have recognized that emotions are key to the full potential of contemporary Web design. Let's follow their example and learn how we can contribute to a more personal, more targeted and more emotional World Wide Web.

In this article, we'll recap the foundation of a good design, take a look at Norman's three levels of visual design and introduce **practical ways to build emotion** into a website.



(Image credits: perpetualplum⁹³. and geishaboy500⁹⁴)

Foundation Of Good Design

A couple of things form the foundation of any good design, whether the design is emotional or not. Why are we talking about the foundation of a design here? Think of the construction of a house. First, you need a solid foundation; then, you can start to plan the division of space and build walls. In Web design it's the same; you need to know your internal design goals, who your users are and in what context they will use your website. Once this groundwork is done, you can get started on the design.

INTERNAL DESIGN GOALS

Before you get started on anything, ask yourself what your own goals are. This does not mean you should put yourself at the center of attention for the rest of the process, but it is important to know what image you want to communicate, what your values and visions are, and how you want others to see you. With this knowledge at hand, you are armed to be very clear and consistent not only in your actions, but also in your appearance. A certain amount of continuity and predictability **adds to your reliability**, which is important for getting people to commit to a relationship with you.

93. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/perpetualplum/3995210073/sizes/z/in/photostream/>

94. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/geishaboy500/95973880/sizes/o/in/photostream/>

PROSPECTIVE USERS

Know who you are designing for. Your future users will be the people who purchase and use your product or website, so make sure you know what they want. General demographics will give you a rough picture of who you are targeting. By drawing a clear picture of their goals, how they are going to use your website, and what matters and doesn't matter to them, you will learn how to target your users. Without knowing your prospective users, designing something relevant that is **both usable and pleasurable** will be quite tricky.

CONTEXT OF USE

Finally, think about the context of use. Knowing the situations and circumstances in which users will be visiting your website is valuable. Consider possible emotions that might be involved, and find out which role you and your users play. Be aware that knowing the context of use will make it **easier for you to understand** your users the moment they visit your website. It will help you reach out to your customers and to communicate with them more effectively.

Norman's Three Levels Of Visual Design

Norman has identified three levels of visual design that designers can apply to build emotions into their products. These three levels are based on the way our brains function and can be seen as guide to a more appealing, effective, pleasurable and memorable design.

In a study on emotion that Norman conducted together with two colleagues from Northwestern University, they were able to show that different levels in our brain result in very specific and advanced human attributes. Those levels are the reason why we are able to accomplish and create things; why we can be artists, musicians and writers; why we have culture with language, art, humor and music; why we are conscious of our role in the world, a consciousness that enables us to reflect on our experiences. The **three cognitive levels** Norman has defined and applied to visual design are the visceral, behavioral and reflective levels. Let's look at them one by one.

VISCERAL LEVEL

The first and also lowest level is visceral. This is the level of preconsciousness, where emotional signals from our environment get interpreted automatically. The visceral level works instinctively, and both our personality and cultural values can influence how we perceive something. Impressions at this level have an immediate emotional im-

pact on us. Norman calls activities that are initiated from the visceral level “bottom-up behavior.”

For a visual design, this means that the visceral level has to do with the initial impact of the appearance, touch and feel. The visceral quality of a design can be studied by observing people’s **first impression**. A good visceral design makes us feel at least something, hopefully making us happy and ideally getting us excited.



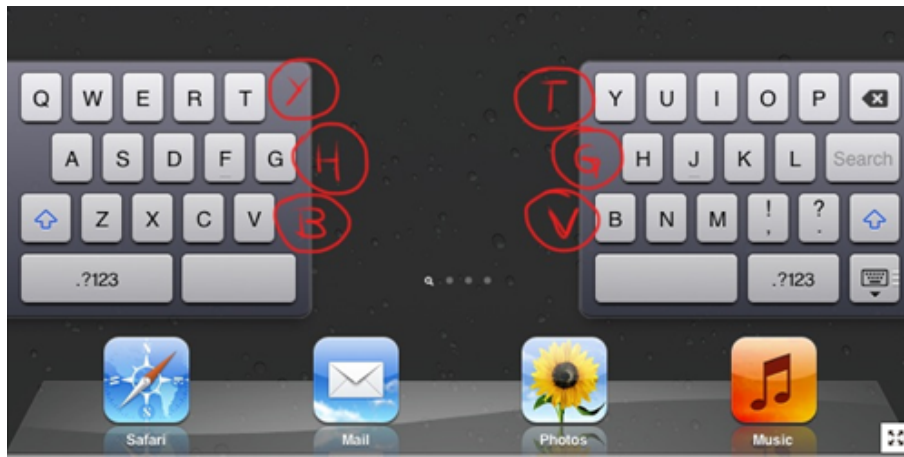
Vimeo has an appealing footer. The design has no other function than to catch people’s attention. (Image: mattyschreck⁹⁵)

BEHAVIORAL LEVEL

The behavioral level is all about how things work and how we use and experience them. What matters on this level is function, performance and the physical feel of something.

A visual design would need to **feature relevant functions** that fulfill actual needs. Behavioral design needs to be understandable and usable. While confusion and frustration lead to negative emotions, fun, ease of use and effectiveness trigger positive emotions. To ensure a good behavioral design, you have to really know your user’s needs—for example, by observing how they interact with the design in the field.

⁹⁵. <http://discover.usabilla.com/discovery/4f478e460a18e7952b00000c>



The iPad's split keyboard has phantom buttons. This way, if you are used to typing the letter Y with your left hand, you can still do it. (Image: Finer Things in iOS⁹⁶)

REFLECTIVE LEVEL

The reflective level represents the highest level of our cognitive thought processes. Norman calls activities that come from this level “top-down behavior.” This level is conscious and capable of a high level of feelings, emotions and cognition. On the reflective level, we interpret and understand things, we reason about the world, and we reflect on ourselves. The reflective level sets in after having been exercised, and it dominates the other two levels, which means that through extensive reasoning, we can overrule both automated behavior and emotional impact.

In visual design, expertise enables us to respond differently to a design than if we had no idea what we are looking at. The reflective design **defines our overall impression** of a product, since we reflect on all aspects of it: messages sent, cultural aspects, the meaning of the product and whether it's worth remembering.

⁹⁶. <http://ios.finerthingsin.com/post/16982049392/ipad-keyboard-phantom-buttons>



US highways mapped like a subway system. This infographic has a great reflective design. (Image: Cameron Booth⁹⁷).

In every good design, all three levels work together. The need not be equally weighted, but because we perceive a visual design on all three cognitive levels, they should all at least be addressed. These different levels of visual design might conflict, though. For example, our opinion of a design after having thought about it might diverge from our initial impression of it. Also, people interpret designs differently and have different preferences for the visceral, behavioral and reflective qualities of a design.

So, the appearance of a design makes up only one level of visual design—the visceral design. The behavioral level relates to how the product works, and the reflective level relates to the long-term impact of the design. Combining these three levels in the right way, you can make a design...

- **Appealing**

Grab the user's attention and influence their perception.

- **Effective**

Guide the user's attention and make sure they find what they are looking for.

⁹⁷. <http://www.fastcodesign.com/1669003/ingenious-infographic-us-highways-mapped-like-a-subway-system>

- **Pleasurable**

Allow the user to appreciate your website and have fun.

- **Memorable**

Build a relationship with the user and ensure a positive memory of you.

Implement Emotion In Your Visual Design

How can Web designers apply this knowledge? And how can we build emotions into our designs? A website usually includes several elements that can make a design more personal and that can be regarded as “emotion carriers.” Some of these are obvious, such as colors, images and shapes. Others are not so obvious, such as humor, recognition, dissonance, tone of voice and engagement. Let’s look at the less obvious ones.

HUMOR

Humor is an effective way to connect with people. A good laugh or even a little smile can break the ice and **make people feel comfortable**, whether it’s on the street, in the company of friends or on your website. However, humor is also a delicate matter because it is extremely difficult to generalize. What’s hilarious for one person might be ridiculous, embarrassing or even insulting to someone else.

When using humor on your website, think a couple of things through before launching. The foundation of design that was discussed earlier is important here. Knowing your users and the context of use will help you determine whether people will actually share your sense of funny. Also, keep in mind that you will probably not manage to make everyone smile, but avoid making people feel uncomfortable and especially offending them by any means. And don’t forget that the extent of humor on your website will influence the way users perceive you.

In *Designing for Emotion* Walter discusses an illustrative example of humor on the Web: Freddie von Chimpenheimer, the cartoon mascot of MailChimp⁹⁸. Walter describes Freddie as a friendly mascot who “welcomes users and makes them feel at home.” Freddie perfectly mirrors the brand’s traits, such as trustworthiness, simplicity and informality, without making the whole website look goofy. The mascot works because Freddie cracks jokes that “you can share with your mama,” but at the same time he never gets in the way of your workflow. This is im-

⁹⁸. <http://mailchimp.com/>

portant. Humor can get people involved, but it should never annoy visitors.



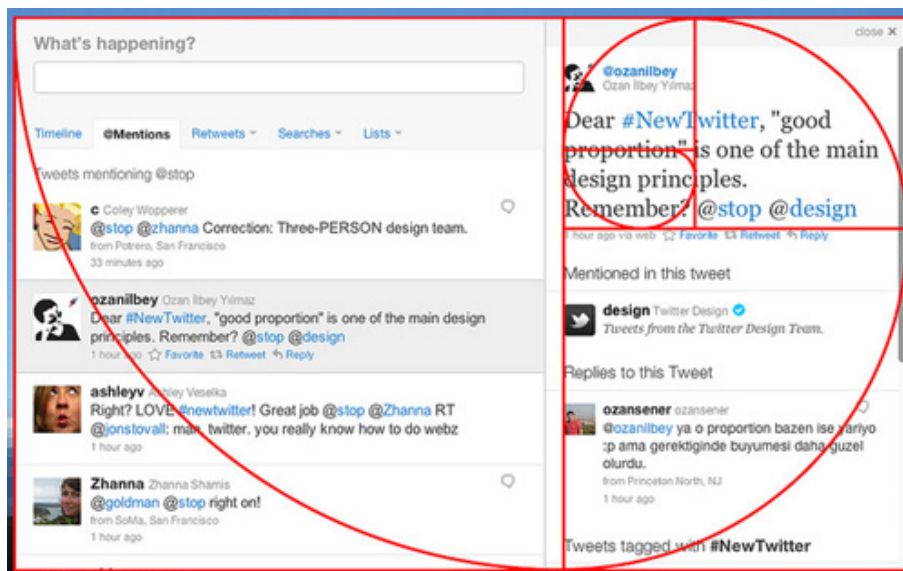
Freddie, the cartoon mascot of MailChimp, is a great emotion carrier for humor.

RECOGNITION

By nature, we constantly seek emotional connections with others. That's why we like to see images of faces on websites, and why we appreciate somehow recognizing ourselves. When we see a face, we are automatically triggered to feel something or to empathize with that person. If we recognize content on a website—such as a problem, dilemma, habit or whatever else—we feel connected and understood.

Walter explains in his book that we know ourselves so well that **we try to relate everything we see** to ourselves. We can even relate to a Web design that does not directly show human features. The recognition of our body's proportions in a design is enough for us to perceive the design as being familiar and harmonic. This reason for this is the golden ratio, which helps us feel connected to a design because we link the abstract concept of proportion to our own body.

By recognizing ourselves in a design, we sense that there is more than just a screen with a bunch of code and images. We perceive human presence, which makes us feel comfortable and connected. Walter describes the personality of a website as the key to making a design more human.



Twitter based its redesign entirely on the golden ratio. (Image: Doug Bowman⁹⁹)

DISSONANCE

Another trait that characterizes us as humans is that we try to **fit the world into patterns**. Patterns help us understand and learn how things work, and they give us an idea of what to expect—and we love to know what to expect, because it makes us feel comfortable. In his article “Brains Agree: The Case for Website Usability Guidelines¹⁰⁰,” Todd Follansbee offers a great explanation of why we love patterns so much and of how we look for them on the Web just like everywhere else.

Usability guidelines are based on a deep understanding of how information is processed in our brains. Following these guidelines in Web design helps us offer users a consistent structure that they can fit into their mental models. As long as users recognize patterns on a website and find that everything matches their expectations, they can focus on the content and quickly achieve their goals.

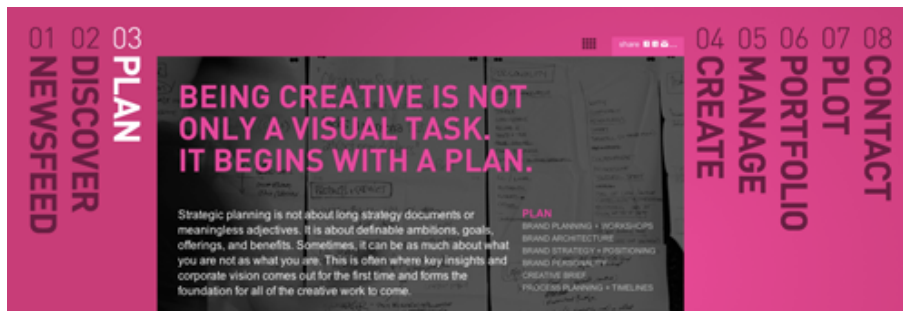
However, if we build a website that doesn’t fit these patterns, we can expect two things to happen. Either users will become irritated because they can’t find what they are looking for; this might lead to frustration, which you want to avoid by any means. Or else users won’t mind being pulled out of their habits and would welcome some distraction; they might see the dissonance with their expectations as a positive or fun experience.

Again, how people react depends strongly on who they are and the context in which they use your website. If you know that visitors intend to find certain information, make sure to meet their expectations

⁹⁹. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/twitteroffice/5034817688/>

¹⁰⁰. <http://www.wilsonweb.com/design/follansbee-brain-usability.htm>

and stick with patterns they are familiar with. If you expect users to have the time and desire to explore, you can definitely play with some dissonance to get their attention and get them involved.



The branding firm Subplot¹⁰¹ has a clear layout for its website, but the navigation is fun and out of the ordinary; it engages people, while still being easy to use.

TONE OF VOICE

The tone of voice you use on your website is an important emotional factor. How you communicate with users says a lot **about your relationship** with them. While you communicate certain messages through words, your tone of voice reveals what you think of them and also what you want them to think of you. The psychologist Friedemann Schulz von Thun illustrated these different layers of a message in his “four-sides” model of communication¹⁰².

Your tone of voice strongly determines your first impression. If you wrap a serious message in a humorous story, users might not take you seriously. On the other hand, if you try to sell something fun and your tone of voice is too serious, users might not take you seriously either.

For your own website, know what you are selling, who is buying it and the context in which you are delivering the message.

¹⁰¹. <http://www.subplot.com/#plan/>

¹⁰². <http://blog.usabilla.com/better-content-with-communication-theory-models/>



Wufoo¹⁰³ creates a distinctive environment for conducting surveys through its tone of voice.

ENGAGEMENT

A perfectly usable and accessible website could still have a high bounce rate, a low number of sign-ups, or no characteristics worth remembering. In his presentation on “The Art and Science of Seductive Interactions¹⁰⁴,” Stephen Anderson shows how engaging people helps us build relationships and positive user experiences. The World Wide Web has been around long enough that we take it for granted; we don’t notice good usability, and we are hardly surprised to find the content we are looking for.

Now is the time for something more than passive consumption of the expected. We want to **be engaged**, have fun and be entertained. This engagement could take the form of playing, interaction or personalization of content. We love customizing things; we can spend hours playing social games online; and we welcome any entertaining video that crosses our path, right?

Of course, as with all of the above, your users and their context should determine how you engage them. If users are simply looking for the most efficient way to interact with your website, then make that interaction as straightforward as possible. The more time your users have and the more curious they are, the more you will be able to draw them in.

¹⁰³. <http://wufoo.com/>

¹⁰⁴. <http://www.slideshare.net/stephenpa/the-art-science-of-seductive-interactions>



On Slavery Footprint¹⁰⁵, users can learn about their impact on slavery in an interactive and engaging way.

Conclusion

Emotional design turns casual users into fanatics, ready to tell others about their positive experience. — Aaron Walter

Emotional design has many qualities. We become more creative if we are confronted with something attractive. This creativity helps us solve problems more easily. Emotions also **give us positive experiences**, making us happier and giving us better recall. Norman came up with three levels of visual design based on different levels of our cognitive processing: the visceral level (appearance), the behavioral level (usability), and the reflective level (personal satisfaction, self-image and remembrance). Internal design goals as well as the needs, expectations and context of users will determine how the designer should balance those three levels and what to emphasize in order to get the most out of the design. 🐦

RECOMMENDED READING

- *Emotional Design*¹⁰⁶, Don Norman
- *Designing for Emotion*¹⁰⁷, Aaron Walter

¹⁰⁵. http://slaveryfootprint.org/survey/#whats_under_your_roof

¹⁰⁶. <http://www.amazon.com/Emotional-Design-Love-Everyday-Things/dp/0465051359>

¹⁰⁷. http://www.amazon.com/Designing-Emotion-Aaron-Walter/dp/1937557006/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1331637956&sr=1-1

Playful UX Design: Building A Better Game

BY JOHN FERRARA 🍷

I sincerely believe that the user experience community should add game design to its toolbox of competencies. If we're truly committed to creating satisfying user experiences, then there's no reason why games, which can satisfy people so richly, should be excluded.

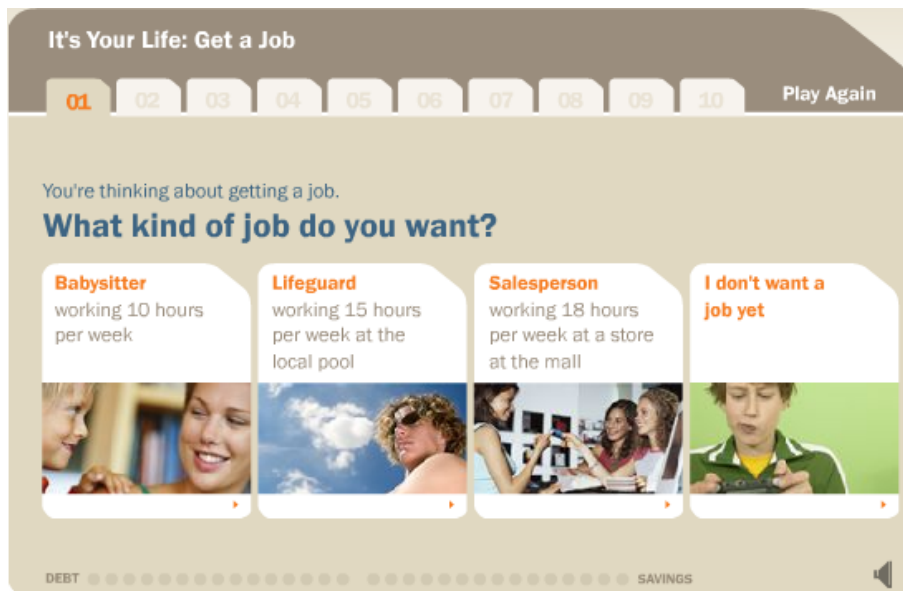
Operating successfully in the games domain means learning a new set of competencies, and I don't want to oversimplify the challenges of designing high-quality game experiences. However, if you're in a position to jump in and start designing, then I can at least offer a primer to help you steer clear of some of the most common mistakes.

1. Games Should Be Games First

Trading off the quality of the player experience in favor of some real-world objective is always self-defeating. This is the recurring problem with "gamified" designs, which too often just cynically tack points and leaderboards onto a product that is fundamentally gameless. First and foremost, **a game needs to be enjoyed.**

Schwab MoneyWise's It's Your Life¹⁰⁸ game has a noble mission: to convince people to save more money for retirement and other long-term objectives. *It's Your Life* presents players with a number of choices between spending and saving money over the course of a simulated lifetime. At the end, players get a letter grade on how well they did.

¹⁰⁸. http://www.schwabmoneywise.com/public/moneywise/parents_educators/activities/its_your_life_game



At each step in Schwab's *It's Your Life*¹⁰⁹ game, the choice that will lead to a winning outcome is pretty obvious.

The problem is that the designers were much more interested in hammering home their message than creating an actual game experience. If you want to win the game, then the right choice each step of the way is to save your money and not spend any of it. Ever. On anything. You can earn an A+, the highest possible score, if you:

- Skip college,
- Never move out of your parents' house,
- Never get married,
- Never have children,
- Never travel or take any vacations,
- Work indefinitely past the age of 65,
- Die alone with a lot of money and no one to leave it to.

I'm sure the designers reasoned that someone playing through the scenarios would elect to do meaningful things with their life, but they set up the scenarios so that doing nothing with one's life while saving vigorously would be the surest way to win. Even though *It's Your Life* is packaged as a game, the designers didn't commit to it being experienced as a game.

¹⁰⁹. http://www.schwabmoneywise.com/public/moneywise/parents_educators/activities/its_your_life_game

2. *Play Test, Play Test, Play Test*

Games are highly dynamic experiences. The flow of events changes from moment to moment, and each decision a player makes can lead to a multiplicity of outcomes. Most games are also programmed with an element of randomness, so a player never has quite the same experience twice. Multiplayer games throw even more unpredictability into the mix.

As a result, the designer directly controls not the gameplay, but rather the underlying system in which play unfolds. Without actually seeing the game in action, you cannot reliably anticipate how it will work. Mike Ambinder, an experimental psychologist at game developer Valve, puts it in scientific terms:

“Every game design is a hypothesis, and every instance of play is an experiment.

”—Interview with Mike Ambinder of Valve Software¹¹⁰.

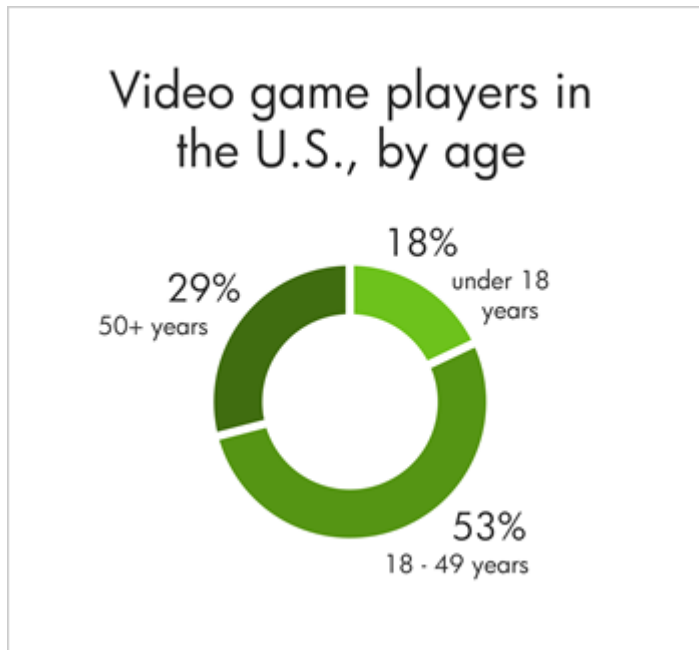
Be prepared to put your game under the microscope again and again, and to adapt the design to make it more enjoyable.

3. *Games Don't Have To Be For Kids*

With a large market catering to them, kids have the latitude to be very discerning consumers of games. Marketing campaigns pushing big-budget titles already crowd out one another, so you'll find that just getting a young gamer's attention is a tremendous challenge. You can't assume that kids will want to play your game just because it's a game.

And these days, kids are the minority of people who play video games. Eighty-two percent of gamers are over the age of 18, and 29% are 50 and older. Grown-ups are sometimes more receptive to playing games outside of the mainstream, and they have more disposable income to spend on games (i.e. if you plan to sell your game).

¹¹⁰. http://rosenfeldmedia.com/books/game-design/blog/interview_with_mike_ambinder_o/



Kids under 18 represent a small minority of game players.

This is not to say that kids cannot make up a portion of your audience. But if your game is clearly intended for young children—as announced in breathless starbursts, reading “Hey, kids!” and “Super-cool!”—then you will turn off the larger segment of gamers. So, consider targeting your game to an older age group while keeping it accessible to a broad range of ages.

4. Action Can Be Boring

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3 is an amazing action game. It also took years to make and a team comprising dozens of designers, artists and engineers at a cost of many millions of dollars. You’re probably not making Call of Duty.

It’s very difficult to sustain adrenaline-pumping excitement for long. If you do choose to make an action-based game on a small scale, you’ll find that you’re limited to very simple and short-lived scenarios, such as racing a car, throwing a basketball or shooting a spaceship. Taken on their own, these types of experiences tend to grow tiresome quickly.

You’ll find a lot of creative opportunity in games that make the player think through interesting choices instead of executing twitch responses. The card game *Hearts*, for example, is all about choices. Which three cards should I pass to my opponent? Should I play a high card or a low card? If I play clubs one more time, will someone else stick me with the queen of spades? Should I shoot for the moon, or will that prove self-destructive?



Hearts creates excitement by presenting players with a lot of interesting choices.

Each choice is evaluated from one trick to the next, depending on the changing conditions of your hand and on new information about what other players have done. Even though *Hearts* can be a fairly long game, it holds the players' interest without any laser blasters or lava levels.

5. Fit The Game Into The Player's Lifestyle

Think about the real-life contexts in which people will play the game. Start the design process by asking:

- Who are your players?
- How much time do players have to give to the game, and how much of that time will your players actually be willing to give?
- Will your players need to take a break from the game and continue it later?
- Where will your players be when they're playing the game?
- What kind of hardware, software and Internet access will be available to your players?

Unisys developed a series of online games for the company's sales team to send to customers as holiday greetings. A customer would receive a link by email to an online holiday card with a personal message from the salesperson. The card would then open into the game, branded with *Unisys*' logo.

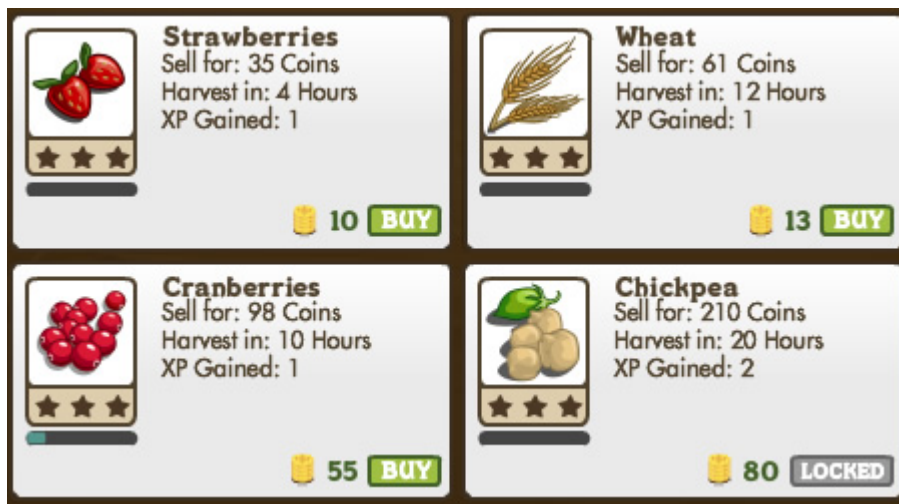


Unisys' mini-golf game¹¹¹ was designed to be a quick, nonintrusive diversion from the workday.

Because the players were receiving these emails at work, the games couldn't require a significant investment of time to reach the end, so all of them were designed to last less than five minutes. And because many players would be accessing the game while sitting in a cubicle, with their computer speakers probably turned off, the few sounds in the games were not made essential to the experience.

FarmVille cleverly makes itself adaptable to the player's lifestyle. Players need to dedicate only a few minutes at a time, during which they can plant seeds for crops that take different amounts of real-world time to harvest. Raspberries take just two hours, so they're useful when the player is able to check in several times a day. Eight-hour pumpkins fit in well just before and after a workday. Artichokes take four days to harvest—better for players who are able to check in only now and then. These staggered growth rates allow the time commitment to be made on the player's own terms.

111. http://tothepointonline.com/design_portfolio/interactive_design/2002_holiday_card/index.html



The staggered harvest times for crops in FarmVille¹¹² allow players to decide how much gameplay they can fit into their lives.

6. Create Meaningful Experience

Players have to invest their time, concentration and problem-solving abilities to the challenges that a game throws at them. There should be a point to these efforts, a payoff for their investment. When the game ends, players should come away feeling that the experience was meaningful.

A great example is the card game Killer Bunnies¹¹³, in which success is ultimately determined by a card picked randomly from the deck. The player who holds the match for that card (the “magic carrot”) is declared the winner. No player has any control over which card is picked; the selection is completely random. But the gameplay does give players some control over which matching cards they hold.

¹¹². <http://www.farmville.com>

¹¹³. <http://killerbunnies.com/>



Players exercise some control over the outcome of Killer Bunnies by acquiring carrot cards, increasing the probability that they'll capture the randomly selected magic carrot.

Players compete for carrot cards over the course of the game, and shrewd players will work to hold the greatest number of them before the game is over. The game says a lot about the players' mastery of the strategy, tolerance for risk and skill at reading other people. Players come away from the game knowing that they had control over their chances of success, which makes the experience meaningful.

7. Don't Cheat

Because video game rules are enforced inside the black box of the computer's circuitry, there's a temptation among designers to take shortcuts by letting the game cheat. Don't give in to that temptation. Players will be able to tell when a game is cheating, and they will resent it.

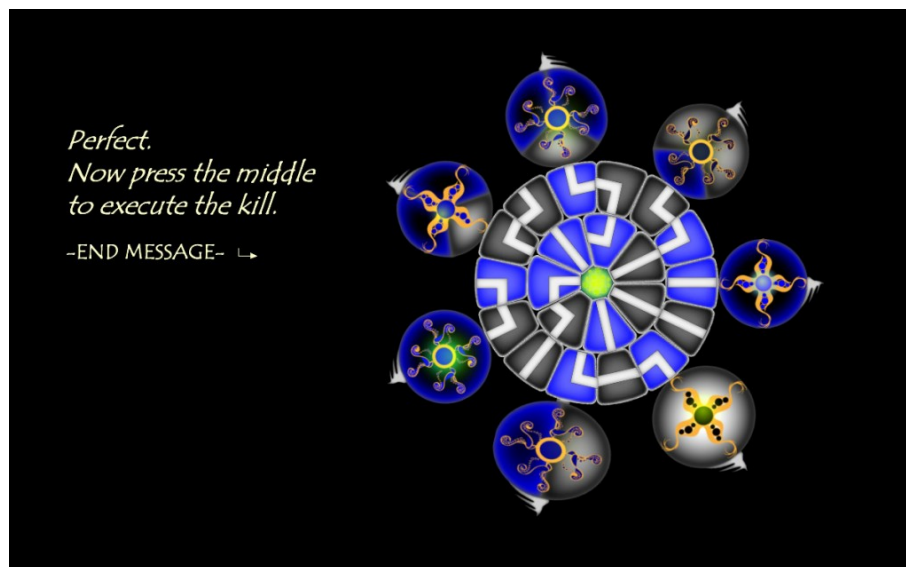
Suppose you're designing a blackjack game that matches a player against a computerized dealer. As the designer, you need to write a script to control the dealer's actions. You want the dealer to be a little hard to beat but not impossible. One easy way to create challenge would be to let the script choose which card from the deck is drawn next. You would then program the dealer to pick a card that either wins or loses, and put in a randomizing function so that two out of every three times it picks a winning card. This also creates an easy way to allow players to change the difficulty, so that on a harder setting the dealer will pick a winning card four out of every five times, while on an easier setting it will win just one out of every three. How would anyone even know you're cheating?

After playing the game a few times, you'll see how. The dealer will do seemingly irrational things, such as hitting on 20 and magically drawing an ace. The deck will not seem random, because certain cards will tend to show up early and others will show up only after those preferred cards have been drawn. After several play-throughs, these patterns will become obvious. When players realize that a game is cheating, they'll make the ultimate winning move by turning it off.

8. Skip The Manual

The best way to convince people that a game is worth playing is by letting them **jump in and try it out for themselves**. Presenting written instructions at the beginning of every new game merely creates a barrier to entry at the very time when you want to be most accommodating of players. Instructions can also become a crutch, used to justify unconventional and unintuitive choices in the interface.

The best place to teach people how to play a game is right there in the game itself. Tutorials have become one of the most familiar patterns in games. Ask yourself, "What's the smallest amount of information the player needs to make the first move?" Then provide nothing more than that; you can get to the second move when the time comes. Playing is learning. If people are interested in the game, they'll be motivated to fill in the blanks themselves by playing it.



In Bri Lance's game Kanyu, step-by-step instructions on how to play are cleverly incorporated into the game's storyline.

9. Make The Game Make Sense

Players need to understand *why* things happen in the game in order to feel that they're in control. In game design, a sensible experience relies on some mutual understanding between the designer and the player:

- When the player loses, the reason they lost should be clear. If it's not, then the player won't be able to get better at the game by avoiding the same mistake in future.
- When the player wins, the reason they won should be clear. If not, then replicating the victory will be hard.
- Every effect should have a clear cause. When something happens, the player should be able to see why it happened.
- The object of the game should be clear. The player needs to know what they're working toward.
- The player should always know what actions may be performed. At every moment, visible or aural cues should be provided to let the player know what they can do.

10. Make It Easy To Try Again

Step back and think about the game as a discontinuous and iterative experience. When a player loses, cycling back into the game to try again should be instant and effortless. Even large commercial games with multimillion-dollar development budgets make the mistake of forcing a lengthy loading screen into that anxious period between a player's loss and a second attempt.

Stretching that space of time to the second, third or twentieth go-round inevitably tries the player's patience. Games such as *Braid*¹¹⁴ and *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*¹¹⁵ take a clever route around this problem by allowing players to rewind time to a safe point before their losing moment.

Playing To Your Strengths

These 10 guidelines will help you get started, but plenty of challenges lie ahead as you set about designing and developing your game, and you'll need to learn how to manage them as they come up. **One last**

¹¹⁴. <http://braid-game.com/>

¹¹⁵. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5XaqjHPPVQ>

piece of advice is to play to your strengths. If you have a background in designing conventional user interfaces, by all means use the skills and techniques that you gained from it.

Wireframing, user testing, rapid prototyping, storyboarding, flow diagramming and other core skills all translate well to game design and can help you pull through the inevitable rough patches. When a game design issue confounds you, trust your instincts and ask how you would handle a similar problem outside of the context of the game. More often than not, you'll point yourself in the right direction. 🐼

Gamification And UX: Where Users Win Or Lose

BY PETER STEEN HØGENHAUG 🐉

The gaming industry is huge, and it can keep its audience consumed for hours, days and even weeks. Some play the same game over and over again—and occasionally, they even get out their 15-year-old Nintendo 64 to play some Zelda.

Now, I am not a game designer. I actually don't even play games that often. I am, though, very interested in finding out why a game can keep people occupied for a long period of time, often without their even noticing that they've been sitting in front of the screen for hours. I want my apps and products to affect my visitors in the same way.



(Image credit: Axel Pfaender¹¹⁶)

So, what do games have that we miss in UX and Web design? Games have stunning graphics, missions, high scores, etc.. But adding any of those to our designs does not necessarily provide a better user experience—in many cases they're frippery. What we are really looking for is what those elements bring to the games.

¹¹⁶. <http://www.axelpfaender.com>

Using game theories in areas not otherwise associated with games is **often referred to as gamification**. This term, however, has gotten a rather negative air recently, because people tend to use it for the wrong purposes. A common issue with gamification is that it is used in marketing with no other goal than to sell products. I don't think gamification should be used this way—in the long run, it does nothing good for the company trying to sell. Instead, gamification should be used to **improve the experience** of buying and using a product.

In this article, we'll explore how and when to use gamification to improve the user experience of websites and apps, and also when not to use it.

Definition Of A Game

Sid Meier, creator of the Civilization series, once said that a game is “a series of interesting choices¹¹⁷.” I believe there's more to a game than that. For me, the interesting part of a game is what happens in between the choices: exploring new areas, learning how to control your character, pulling people out cars for fun, etc.

In their book *Andrew Rollings and Ernest Adams on Game Design*, Rollings and Adams speak of four actions related to games: **play, pretending, rules and goals**.

PLAY

Playing is usually a recreational activity, and your actions are often nonessential to the game. A game is more of a participatory form of entertainment, whereas books and movies, for example, are mainly presentational. In a game, you decide the storyline.

In Danish and many other languages, the word “play” can be translated as two words, “lege” and “spille.” Lege is like when children are playing. Spille is like when you're playing a game. The difference is small but present. When children are playing, there are usually no initial goals or rules—they are playing **simply because they want to play**.

Originally introduced in the Amsterdam International Airport, the urinal fly is a great example of a usable yet fun product. Its intent is to keep the bathroom floor clean; when you aim for the fly, you're less likely to spill. You can urinate without trying to hit the fly, but for a lot of people trying to hit it is a better and more fun experience.

¹¹⁷ <http://www.half-real.net/dictionary/#interestingchoices>



The urinal fly is proven to reduce spillage. (Image: Sustainable Sanitation Alliance¹¹⁸)

Another example is Danish gas station F24. In December 2011, it introduced new multimedia pumps at its stations. Customers can play games while filling gas, with a 10% chance of winning a prize. They don't *have* to play the game while filling their cars, but the chance of being able to drive away without having to pay for the gas is enticing. It's a great idea because people talk about the game with their friends, and the next time their friends need to fill up, they will go to F24 to try it for themselves.

The iPhone app Clear¹¹⁹ was extremely popular when it launched recently. The app has a simple concept: keeping lists of tasks. But the way you interact with the tasks is different from what we've seen before. Some people even said they made up tasks just to be able to mark them as complete. **Very few products are able to make their users do that**, but we should try to accomplish it with everything we create.

With websites, a recent trend is parallax scrolling. Nike showed what single-page designs could be with its Better World¹²⁰ and We Run Mexico¹²¹ websites. A lot of people scrolled up and down those websites just to watch the effects over and over again. We were intrigued because they were different from other single-page websites.

¹¹⁸. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/23116228@N07>

¹¹⁹. <http://www.realmacsoftware.com/clear/>

¹²⁰. <http://www.nikebetterworld.com/>

¹²¹. <http://www.werunmexico.com/>

PRETENDING

Games often allow a player to be another person. They give the player a different reality. People tend to behave differently if no one knows who they are.

This could very well be the reason why people love social networks, forums and chat rooms. You get to create your own identity, or at least choose which parts of you others get to see.

RULES

Any game has rules—rules that define what players can and cannot do. Adams and Rollings refer to six functions defined by game rules: semiotics, gameplay, sequence of play, goal(s) of the game, termination condition and meta rules.

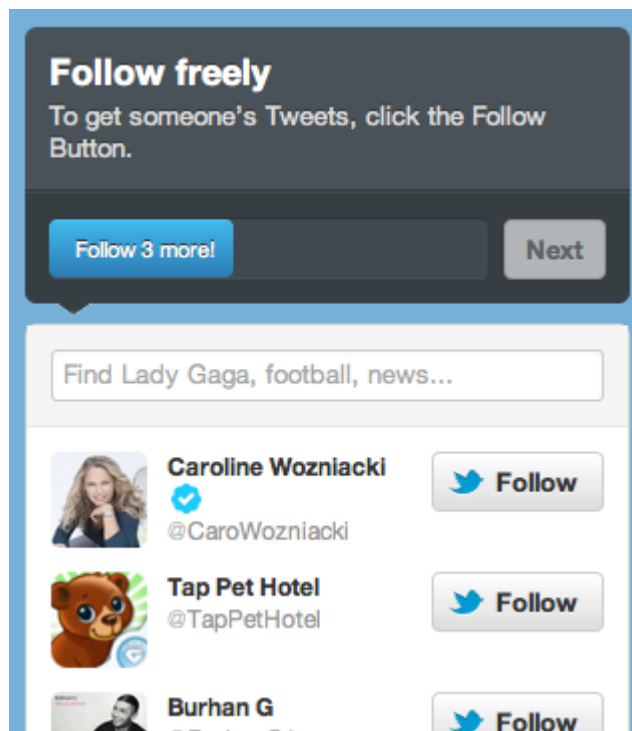
- The **semiotics** of a game are the symbols that are used and how those symbols are interpreted. In Web design, we can look at icons as semiotics. Our users need to understand the icons that we use, otherwise the icons have no reason for being. Always consider whether to use an icon, text or both—you wouldn't want to frustrate users just by choosing the wrong visual representation of a function.
- **Gameplay is a combination of challenges** (i.e. what the player has to overcome) and actions (i.e. what the player has to do in order to overcome the challenges). The challenges have to suit the player, which is why games often let players choose the difficulty level. This, however, probably wouldn't work on a website.
- The **sequence of play** can be thought of as the progression of the game. In Super Mario Bros., the simple sequence of play is, "Run through the level, collect stuff, defeat enemies and hit the flag." On the next level, the same (or a slightly different) sequence starts anew. On a shopping website, the sequence of play could be *Search for product* → *Read reviews* → *Click "Buy"* → *Check out*. If you have a good experience, you are likely to return to the website to buy again.
- While a game often **has a main goal** (in Angry Birds, it's to defeat the pigs), players are often motivated to set their own goals as well (such as to get three stars in all levels). We'll come back to goals shortly.
- The **termination condition** defines when the game ends. In terms of Web design, the termination condition could define when the user has completed a task; for instance, checking out of a store. We have to ensure that the visitor has had a great experience up to this point, otherwise they will not come back.

- We should be careful about **meta rules** in Web design. They are exceptions to the rules, defining when the rules do not apply. On websites, we need to stick to the rules to ensure that we don't confuse users.

GOALS

Everyone loves completing a task. Achieving a goal is one of my favorite things—whether it's to deliver a website to a client, running a certain distance or learning something new.

Even a **small goal can bring great satisfaction**. A while back, Ryan Carson of Carsonified posted a screenshot¹²² of one of the steps in Twitter's incredibly clever sign-up process. It has changed a bit since, but the concept is the same: while teaching you how to use the service, Twitter makes you feel like you're accomplishing a goal by reaching the end of the progress bar.



Twitter's¹²³ sign-up process uses gamification to teach users how to use the service.

When I (very occasionally) pull myself together to go for a run, and I'm almost at my goal, the lady on the Nike+ app on my iPhone says, "You're almost at your goal. Keep it up!" This always pushes me a little harder. In its app, Nike takes advantage of our desire to compete—be it

¹²². <http://thinkvitamin.com/user-science/twitter-using-gamification-to-increase-followers/>

¹²³. <http://twitter.com/>

against friends or ourselves. Most importantly, Nike **motivates and encourages** its users.

When you encourage users to complete a task, they are more likely to try to do it. On websites, such a task could be registering, filling out a profile, signing up for a newsletter or simply buying a product. Give the user a sense of success; again, the good experience will satisfy customers and, thus, make them return.

Not all games have a quantifiable outcome or an achievable goal, though. Take Sin City, Space Invaders and fLOW¹²⁴. If you haven't tried fLOW, I encourage you to do so. In the game, "players with differing skill levels can intuitively customize their experiences in the zone and enjoy the game at their own pace."

The process is often a goal in itself. A goal on a website is often to find information or to buy a product, and so the user has to be able to actually find this information—and enjoy doing it.

These are, according to Adams and Rollings, the four main components of a game. Let's try to expand on them.

COOPERATION AND COMPETITION

Games are more fun when you have someone to play them with. You can fight against an opponent or collaborate on completing a task. Remember when you could connect two Game Boys to trade Pokémons?

In these days of social networking, we have the ideal conditions for cooperating with friends. Social networking is probably way more about marketing than we realize. Companies know that if they show us products that our friends are buying, we're more likely to buy them, too. Take Spotify; your Facebook stream is filled with music being listened to by your friends. You can listen to it yourself, comment, like and so on. Spotify engages you in its product—even if you don't even use Spotify.

Services such as FourSquare and Facebook Places rely heavily on social relationships. When your friend ousts you as mayor of Starbucks, you of course have to go to Starbucks to reclaim the title. The process is simple, but it actually involves three of the four actions mentioned above. You're playing a game with your friend **with the goal** of being the mayor of Starbucks, and the game is more or less **defined by rules**, a set of steps you have to go through to complete your turn.

¹²⁴. <http://www.jenovachen.com/flowinggames/flowing.htm>

How To Use Gamification In UX Design

Why should we make our websites usable? Why even spend time on UX? It's rather simple, actually. Usability expert Jakob Nielsen explains it well¹²⁵:

On the Web, usability is a necessary condition for survival. If a website is difficult to use, people leave. If the homepage fails to clearly state what a company offers and what users can do on the site, people leave. If users get lost on a website, they leave. If a website's information is hard to read or doesn't answer users' key questions, they leave. Note a pattern here? There's no such thing as a user reading a website manual or otherwise spending much time trying to figure out an interface. There are plenty of other websites available; leaving is the first line of defense when users encounter a difficulty.

This is why we spend so much time on usability and UX design. If we scare off our visitors before they have even had a chance to look at what we're selling, then we won't sell anything.

We are not looking to transform our products into games. Instead, we are trying to learn from an industry with an **extremely engaged audience**. We shouldn't blindly use these theories; rather, we should adapt them to our needs and to the platforms on which we deliver our products, without compromising with the quality of our products.

Gamification shouldn't be something you apply after designing and building your product. Gamification is a part of the design process itself. But how do we put this into practice? While the process will be shaped by your product and audience, here are some areas to consider when applying game theories to your product or website, along with some good resources on implementing them.

TANGIBLE USER INTERFACES

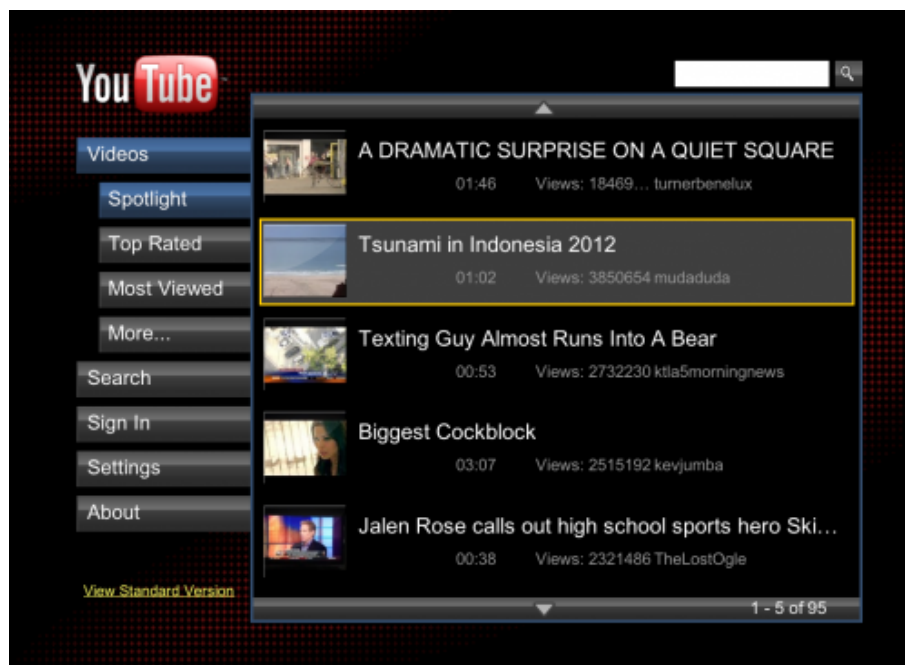
Since the birth of the personal computer, we've been accustomed to using a mouse and keyboard. However, in the world of games, the physical controls change with the platform. On a PlayStation, you have the geometric buttons and a couple of joys. On an iPhone, you have a touchscreen and an accelerometer. You might have a tennis racket for the Wii. One game can be controlled differently on two platforms; for example, you might steer a car with the keyboard arrows on a PC but tilt on an iPhone.

¹²⁵. <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/20030825.html>

With the mobile market ever expanding, we need to make sure that our users have a good experience, whatever platform they use to visit our websites. **We need to adapt our products** to the platform they are being served on.

If you own an iPhone, try visiting Google Images¹²⁶, and compare the mobile to the desktop version. Swiping through the result pages is a great experience because you're used to that gesture on the iOS platform. Visit YouTube from a PlayStation 3, and you will be greeted by a design suited to a media center.

When I got my first iPhone, I spent a lot of time playing with the interface. But the interface was still limited to a set of predefined gestures. With the iPhone 4S came Siri, which enabled us to interact with the device in a completely new way, and it took mobile devices to the next level in accessibility.



When you visit YouTube from a PlayStation 3, you are redirected to YouTube XL¹²⁷.

For further reading, make sure to check the following resources:

- “Responsive Web Design¹²⁸,” Ethan Marcotte
- “Redirect Mobile Devices¹²⁹,” Chris Coyier
- “List of User Agent Strings¹³⁰,” UserAgentString.com

¹²⁶. <http://images.google.com/>

¹²⁷. <http://www.youtube.com/xl>

¹²⁸. <http://www.abookapart.com/products/responsive-web-design>

¹²⁹. <http://css-tricks.com/snippets/javascript/redirect-mobile-devices/>

LOCATION-BASED WEBSITES

Popular games are often location-based—i.e. the location of the player affects the game. Can we benefit from this in Web and UX design?

Heck, yeah!

I live in Denmark. I recently visited Amazon's US website and was greeted with this message:



Amazon¹³¹ uses location to direct you to the store for your area.

Amazon detects where I live and points me to Amazon UK. Checking my location may be a simple technical task, but it makes it feel almost as if they know me.

Social networks are taking advantage of our urge to play and the fact that we almost always have a GPS-enabled gadget with us. To get a discount, someone can check in at H&M, and at the same time tell the entire world that they're shopping at H&M. That is *extremely* cheap advertising.

For further reading, make sure to check the following resources:

- “Geolocation¹³²,” Mark Pilgrim
- Geolocation¹³³,” HTML5 Demos and Examples

CONSTRUCTIVE AND HELPFUL FEEDBACK

In games, we often see direct feedback to our actions. For instance, your guide might interrupt a game that's not going so well to help you remember how to use some skills that you learned earlier in the game.

Providing feedback to your users, especially when something goes wrong, is crucial. Be honest with your users, and help them move on.

There are many ways to give users direct visual feedback in a design: show them what page they are on, use consistent colors for links, create a helpful 404 page, give useful information when a field isn't filled in correctly in a contact form.

One of my favorite features of Google is its “Did you mean?” suggestions. Many people are poor spellers, but that shouldn't prevent them from buying your product. Adding a “Did you mean?” feature to your

¹³⁰. <http://www.useragentstring.com/pages/useragentstring.php>

¹³¹. <http://www.amazon.com/>

¹³². <http://diveintohtml5.info/geolocation.html>

¹³³. <http://html5demos.com/geo>

Web store’s search engine can help these users find the product they’re looking for.

Feedback is not only about responding to the visitor’s actions, but also about **foreseeing their actions**. Olark¹³⁴ is a great example. Olark is a customer-support service that puts chat functionality on your website. When you visit Olark’s website and you’ve been there for 10 seconds doing nothing but scrolling, the chat window appears with the message, “Thanks for stopping by! May I help you?” Even though the message is automated for all users, it gives them the impression that they’re chatting with a real person. When a visitor replies to the automated message, they’re connected to an Olark employee, who then answers their questions.

Be careful not to annoy visitors, though. Remember Clippy? Respect your users—if they close the chat window, don’t reopen it when they visit another page on your website.

For further reading, make sure to check the following resources:

- “Did you mean...? in PHP¹³⁵,” Alejandro Urbano
- AutoSuggest jQuery plugin¹³⁶, Drew Wilson

DON’T IGNORE THE CONTENT

I won’t get into this argument—I’m simply stating that I *believe* that content is still the most important part of any product. Your candy might be wrapped in pretty paper, but **people won’t buy it twice if it tastes like junk**. This, of course, doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t wrap it nicely; pretty paper certainly has its advantages.

As Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman assert in *Rules of Play*¹³⁷, “Context shapes interpretation” (pages 44–46). Visiting a business website for which the designer chose Comic Sans as the font really takes the focus off of the content. Make sure that your design represents the content—use the design to substantiate your message.

In “Gamification Is Not Game Design¹³⁸,” Adam Loving has this to say:

You cannot increase the intrinsic value of something by adding game mechanics. You CAN make the value more visible. You CAN change

¹³⁴. <http://olark.com>

¹³⁵. <http://urbanoalvarez.es/blog/2008/05/30/did-you-mean-in-php/>

¹³⁶. <http://code.drewwilson.com/entry/autosuggest-jquery-plugin>

¹³⁷. <http://books.google.com/books?id=UM-xy-czrZuQC&lpg=PP1&hl=en&pg=PT28#v=onepage&q&f=false>

¹³⁸. <http://adamloving.com/internet-programming/gamification>

the paradigm and context of your site visitor from user to player—increasing their engagement.

Gamification is just a tool to serve content more digestibly. Don't overuse it; your website or app will not improve from the application of game theories. The product needs to be great, otherwise it won't matter. Gamification can improve the user experience, but by no means can it create it alone—the user experience is also created by logical structure, good writing, motivation, flow, etc.

In his much debated blog post “Design Is Horseshit¹³⁹”, yongfook tells us: “Focus on value creation. Design enhances value, it does not create it.” And as Joshua Porter mentions in his response post¹⁴⁰, this statement is entirely true “when you believe that design is just making things look good.”

The same could be said of gamification. A point system and badges are not what make a product good, but rather the experience they provide *combined* with the product itself. Gamification really can create value—it **depends entirely on the user**. School teachers know this; to be effective, they have to look at the student, not the class. Not everyone learns the same way. Two times two might equal four, but there are a million ways to learn that. For instance, Treehouse¹⁴¹ has a great product not because you can earn badges; that's fun and all, but the value lies in the high quality of the teaching material.



On Treehouse¹⁴², you can unlock badges by taking quizzes and completing code challenges.

STORYTELLING

Vitaly Friedman, editor in chief of this very magazine, said at the Frontend conference¹⁴³ (video) in Oslo in 2011 that we should be better at

¹³⁹. <http://yongfook.com/post/14295124427/design-is-horseshit>

¹⁴⁰. <http://bokardo.com/archives/design-is-not-horsepoop/>

¹⁴¹. <http://teamtreehouse.com/>

¹⁴². <http://teamtreehouse.com/>

storytelling in Web design. **The Web is not a static medium**—why don't we embrace that? The possibilities for creating beautiful, useful and helpful interfaces and products are endless, but we rarely take advantage of them. We need to experiment in order to create better interfaces. As Vitaly said, we need to tailor our designs to the particular needs of the client. We need to stop focusing on selling products; we don't have to trick people into buying. No one will buy a product that they don't know something about; tell the user what your product does and why it does it the best before even attempting to sell it.

In October 2011, ZURB posted an article advocating for hiding the sign-up button in order to get more sign-ups¹⁴⁴. On the home page of a client's website, ZURB replaced the sign-up button with a "Let's go" button, inviting the visitor to learn more about the product, before even mentioning anything about signing up or buying a product. Sign-ups actually increased by—wait for it—350%!

ENGAGE YOUR USERS

In Angry Birds you can earn badges for completing various tasks throughout the game. I don't know about you, but I've played the same levels over and over again until I got three stars. We want to be best.

Other than getting badges for ranking high, you also get badges for playing longer, hitting a certain number of pigs, etc.

When I visit one of my local bakeries to buy bread, I get a stamp on a card. The next time I visit the bakery, I get another stamp. When I have 10 stamps, I get free bread. Simple but effective. I would never visit another bakery. Research by Joseph Nunes and Xavier Drèze¹⁴⁵ shows that prestamping such cards is effective. It makes customers feel as if they have begun collecting stamps; as a result, **they feel more motivated** to complete the card than those whose cards are not prestamped. In a Web store, you could give customers double the value on their first purchase or increase the discount they get according to how often they buy from you.

There are many ways to engage users. Ask them for feedback—and listen. Create a Facebook page or Twitter profile, and be active. If you can afford it, giving away free stuff also helps to spread the word about your company. Competitions are often a great way to engage users. This Easter, WOW HD¹⁴⁶ held a competition in which users had to browse its Web store to find Easter eggs. For each egg found, the visitor

¹⁴³. <http://www.frontend2011.com/video/vitaly-friedman.html>

¹⁴⁴. <http://www.zurb.com/article/816/why-burying-sign-up-buttons-helps-get-more>

¹⁴⁵. <http://smashed.by/sedintdesign>

¹⁴⁶. <http://www.wowhd.com>

got a coupon code. In the process, the visitor would come upon a lot of products on which they could spend their coupons. Create fun competitions instead of asking basic questions.

BE PERSONAL AND FUN

My wife and I visited Las Vegas a couple of years ago. I handed a waitress my credit card to pay for our dinner, and she handed it back to me and said, “Thank you, Peter.” I thought to myself, “How does she know my name?!” only to realize that she’d seen my name on the credit card. But it felt like she knew me. **It felt like she cared.**



Merhaba pshoeg!

Now you know how to greet people in Turkish!

Flickr¹⁴⁷ greets you in different languages.

This is easy to do when the user has registered an account on your website. Whenever they’re logged in, address them by name to make them feel like you’re speaking directly to them. When you log into Flickr, you’re greeted with the word “Hi” in one of many languages, followed by your name. On Amazon, you get personalized recommendations when you’re logged in, based on items recently bought and viewed.

EASTER EGGS

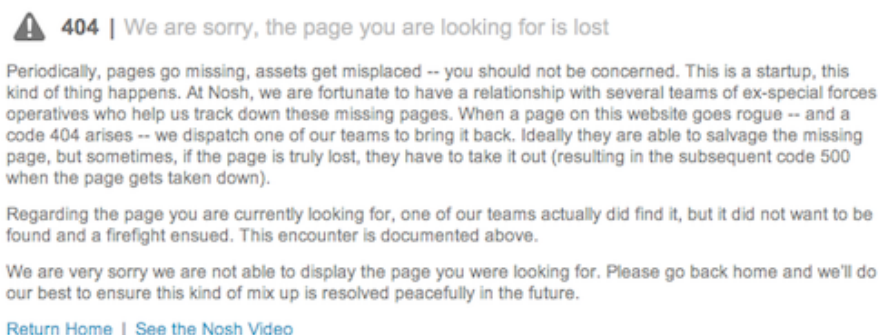
Ever since I got my first computer, I’ve loved Easter eggs—hidden details like the “Here’s to the crazy ones” speech in the TextEdit icon on Mac OS X, and even hidden games like Snake in Terminal. Many websites also have Easter eggs. Most of the time, they’re just developers having fun, but why not let your users have some fun, too.

There are several ways to include Easter eggs in your application or website. One of my favorites is the Konami Code¹⁴⁸. The Konami Code appeared by mistake in the 1985 arcade game Gradius. It is entered by pressing certain buttons in a certain order: up, up, down, down, left, right, left, right, B, A, Start, and it is probably relevant only to websites related to games and technology.

¹⁴⁷. <http://www.flickr.com/>

¹⁴⁸. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Konami_Code

Another way to use Easter eggs is by placing them on your 404 page. Of course, you don't want visitors to end up there, but having something fun there might lighten the mood. Check out Fab404¹⁵¹ for great 404 inspiration.



For further reading, make sure to check the following resources:

- Konami-JS¹⁵³, George Mandis

149. <http://www.geekandhype.com/>
150. <http://paulirish.com>
151. <http://fab404.com/>
152. <http://nosh.me/404/>
153. <http://snaptortoise.com/konami-js/>

When Not To Use Gamification In UX design

Don't rush out to add badges and point systems to your designs, though. Gamification certainly has its limits.

SELL THE PRODUCT, NOT THE EXPERIENCE

Of course, we all know that we're selling a product. When you visit a physical store, you get an experience. Music comes out of the speakers, and pictures are hung with beautiful people wearing clothes that you're going to buy because you want to look like them. The store assistant offers your girlfriend or boyfriend a cup of coffee, telling them that they look gorgeous in that sweater. And you leave the store with a good experience.

We want to give our visitors a good experience. But our product is still the website, with all its content, be it a Web store, a restaurant menu or our own portfolio. A great experience **doesn't give visitors much if that's all there is**. Focus on creating a great product before making it look pretty.

As mentioned earlier, gamification doesn't sell the product. It can make the experience more fun, which will hopefully bring the customer back. But to be honest, if you don't have a great product, you should probably be spending your time on that instead.

WEBSITES SHOULDN'T HAVE DIFFICULTY LEVELS

Games always have to have difficulty levels; completing a game without at least failing a couple of times is no fun. On a website, however, users should find what they're looking for as quickly as possible; if they get annoyed, they will hit the "Back" button and you won't sell anything. This doesn't mean you can't experiment with navigation and effects. But, to quote Steve Krug, just don't make your users think—at least not too much.

DON'T SPAM. EVER.

So, you want to promote this shiny new product of yours. What do you do? Perhaps you think to offer a discount if customers tell at least 150 of their friends on Facebook about it. The problem is that everyone hates spam, and the saying "Bad publicity is better than no publicity" is not really true.

Your Twitter followers probably don't care that you've checked into McDonald's for the fourth time this week on Foursquare—and if they do, they'll follow you on Foursquare. The main reason I don't use location-based social networks such as Facebook Places and Foursquare

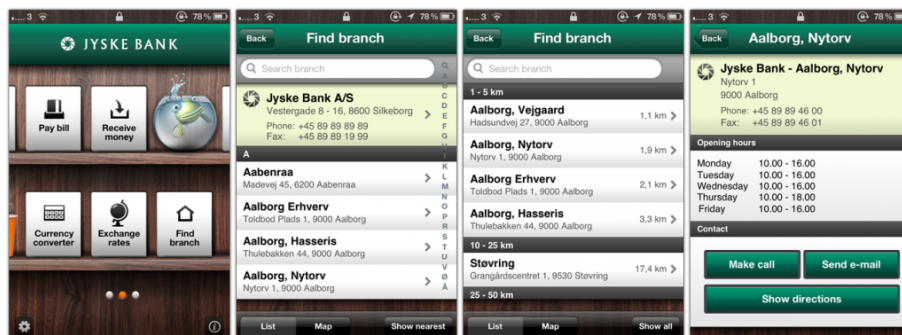
is that they were introduced to me as spam in my Twitter stream. Even though users can opt out of sharing their location, consider whether you should give them the option at all. Doing so could come back to haunt you.

NEVER FORCE VISITORS TO PLAY

Don't make it a requirement to play your game. Not everyone wants to collect badges, and you should respect that. Giving discounts to those who want to play is one thing, but don't exclude anyone from buying.

GAMIFICATION IS A BALANCE

Before even thinking about using gamification, **consider how it might affect your reputation**. For instance, websites for law firms and banks probably shouldn't be "fun" to use. Some aspects of gamification just aren't suitable for companies that want to be taken seriously. Imagine getting a 10% discount from your lawyer for liking them on Facebook. I would have a hard time taking that lawyer seriously.



The iPhone app of Jyske Bank¹⁵⁴ (a Danish bank) finds your closest branch by using GPS.

By contrast, helping visitors find the closest branch when visiting your bank website on a mobile device will show them that you care. Figure out how you want your company to be seen before using gamification.

Conclusion

Gamification is here to stay, and unfortunately many people will continue to use it the wrong way. We've covered a few ways to use gamifi-

154. http://jyskebank.com/wps/portal/jbpb_COM/

cation wisely. The goal is to enhance the experience of using your product, without punishing users who just want to buy the product and move on.

People love **having unique experiences**. Experiences are what brings people back. But don't let the experience get in their way of buying your product. 🐾

Reading List

GAMIFICATION

To learn more about gamification, have a look at these articles and books:

- “Gamification Is Bullshit¹⁵⁵,” Ian Bogost
- “Gamification Is(n’t) Bull*hit¹⁵⁶,” Adena DeMonte, Badgeville
- “Gamification Is Not Game Design¹⁵⁷,” Adam Loving
- “Gamification: Hype or Game-Changer¹⁵⁸,” Nicholas Lovell, Wall Street Journal
- “Gamification¹⁵⁹,” Jon Radoff
- “How Gamification Plays a Role in Social Media?¹⁶⁰,” Profileness
- “The ‘Gamification’ of Education¹⁶¹,” Elizabeth Corcoran, Forbes
- *Gamification by Design: Implementing Game Mechanics in Web and Mobile Apps*¹⁶², Gabe Zichermann and Christopher Cunningham
- *Andrew Rollings and Ernest Adams on Game Design*¹⁶³, Andrew Rollings and Ernest Adams

¹⁵⁵. http://www.bogost.com/blog/gamification_is_bullshit.shtml

¹⁵⁶. <http://blog.badgeville.com/index.php/2011/08/11/gamification-isnt-bullhit/>

¹⁵⁷. <http://adamloving.com/internet-programming/gamification>

¹⁵⁸. <http://blogs.wsj.com/tech-europe/2011/05/04/gamification-hype-or-game-changer/>

¹⁵⁹. <http://radoff.com/blog/2011/02/16/gamification/>

¹⁶⁰. <http://profileness.com/how-gamification-plays-a-role-in-social-media>

¹⁶¹. <http://www.forbes.com/2010/10/28/education-internet-scratch-technology-gamification.html?boxes=Homepagechannels>

¹⁶². <http://www.amazon.com/Gamification-Design-Implementing-Mechanics-Mobile/dp/1449397670>

¹⁶³. <http://www.amazon.com/Andrew-Rollings-Ernest-Adams-Design/dp/1592730019>

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

In addition to the above, be sure to check out these articles and books.

- “Design Is Horseshit!”¹⁶⁴, yongfook
- “Design Is Not Horsepoop”¹⁶⁵, Joshua Porter
- “Why You Should Bury Your Sign-Up Button”¹⁶⁶, Joshua Porter
- “Why Burying Sign-Up Buttons Helps Get More Sign Ups”¹⁶⁷, Dmitry at ZURBlog
- *Seductive Interaction Design: Creating Playful, Fun, and Effective User Experiences*¹⁶⁸, Stephen P. Andersen

¹⁶⁴. <http://yongfook.com/post/14295124427/design-is-horseshit>

¹⁶⁵. <http://bokardo.com/archives/design-is-not-horsepoop/>

¹⁶⁶. <http://bokardo.com/archives/why-you-should-bury-your-sign-up-button/>

¹⁶⁷. <http://www.zurb.com/article/816/why-burying-sign-up-buttons-helps-get-mor>

¹⁶⁸. <http://smashed.by/sedintdesign>

Adding A Personal Touch To Your Web Design

BY SABINA IDLER 

The Web is technical by nature. Different scripts and pieces of code are linked together through hyperlinks, forming an endless net of interwoven, encrypted information—data that is accessible only through technical interfaces, such as Web browsers, or applications. Yet, Web professionals have made it their calling to tame the “wild” Web and turn it into an accessible, user-friendly and, most of all, personal medium.

Personality will set your brand apart from competitors and help you connect with a passionate audience.

— Aaron Walter¹⁶⁹

Designers can do plenty of things to counteract the technical appearance of the Web. One very effective way is simply to make it look less technical, by using a more human, personal style.

In this article, we will discuss different aspects of freehand drawing and writing in Web design and how they can enhance the user experience of your website.

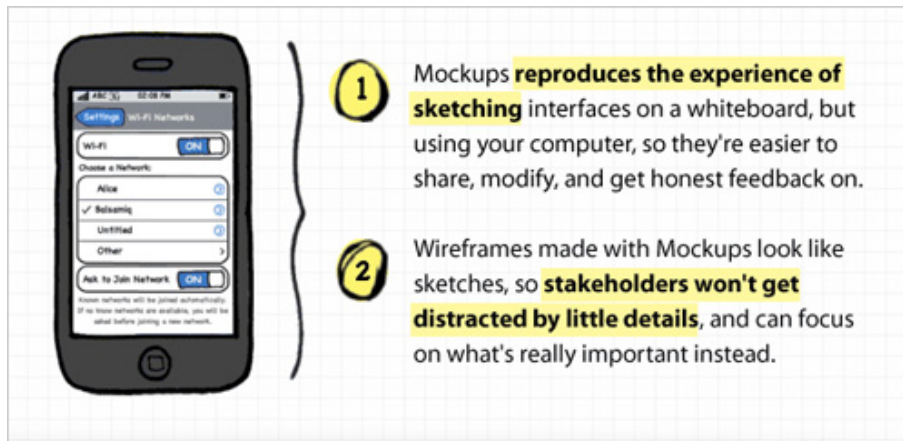
Identity And Authenticity

Freehand drawings and other sketched elements are a great way to show personality and convey a feeling of authenticity. Imagine getting a letter or greeting card from someone you cherish. Do you expect the text to be typed or handwritten? A handwritten note is way more personal than a computer-written one, right? On the Web, it’s similar. It might be a different medium, but content that obviously comes directly from a human is more authentic and more trustworthy. Let’s look at three examples of how freehand drawings can help you create an identity and stay authentic.

¹⁶⁹. <http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2012/03/27/redesigning-with-personality/>

LOOK AND FEEL

First of all, hand-drawn content has a unique look and feel. Compare it to handwriting. **Creating a personality and unique appearance** for your brand or product is important.



The look and feel of Balsamiq is authentic and distinctive.

Balsamiq¹⁷⁰ does a great job here. It offers a mockup and wireframing tool. While its features are quite advanced, its look and feel is basic, recalling pen and paper sketches from way back. The low fidelity helps us focus on the essential functionality while also making the product authentic and distinctive.

RECOGNITION

Freehand drawings have character. Through the touch of human imperfection, they gain a certain tension that is hard to recreate digitally. This special touch draws attention and allows **people to pause to appreciate and process the hand-drawn content**, more so than they might appreciate any old perfectly illustrated image.



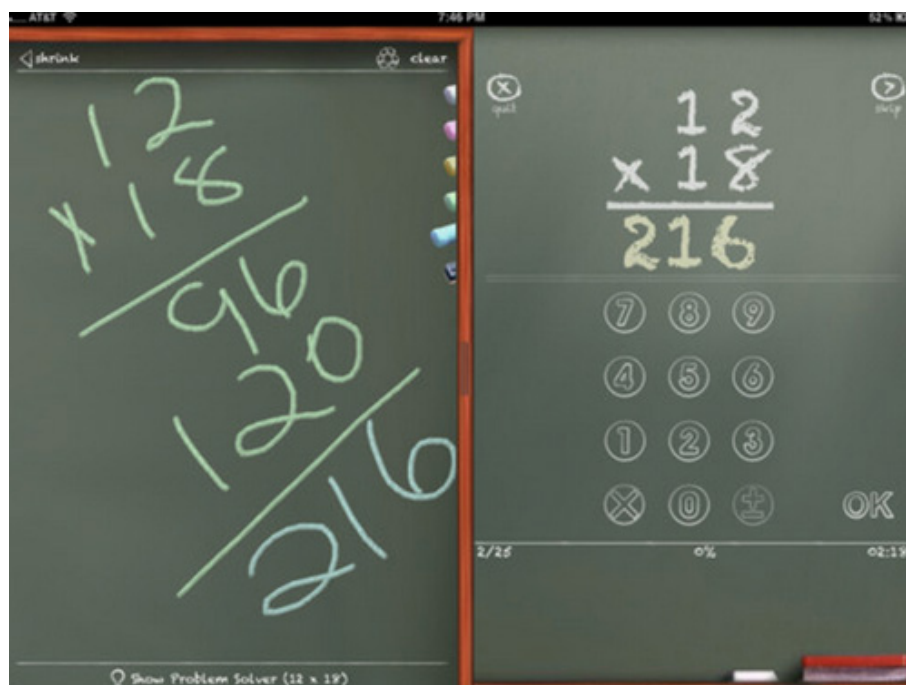
Notepad++'s logo is distinctive and easy to remember.

¹⁷⁰. <http://www.balsamiq.com/>

The source-code editor Notepad++¹⁷¹ has a distinctive hand-drawn logo. The little chameleon not only reflects the functionality of the program (the transformation of code), but is also cute and draws attention. The sketched style reflects the creative nature of what you can do with Notepad++ and makes sure you don't confuse it with other editing tools.

PERSONALITY

Obviously, freehand drawings carry personality. They are authentic and help users to connect with your website or app. Hand-drawn content **confirms that real people are behind the content**, people who have put thought and effort into the design to make it usable and trustworthy.



Mathboard looks personal and easy to use.

MathBoard¹⁷² is an iPad app that help kids practice their arithmetic skills. The app has a classic chalkboard look, freshening up the dry and precise character of arithmetic. The whole app is set up in quiz form, and kids can actually write on the board to do rough work if needed. The personal appearance of the app makes it easy and attractive to use.

¹⁷¹. <http://notepad-plus-plus.org/>

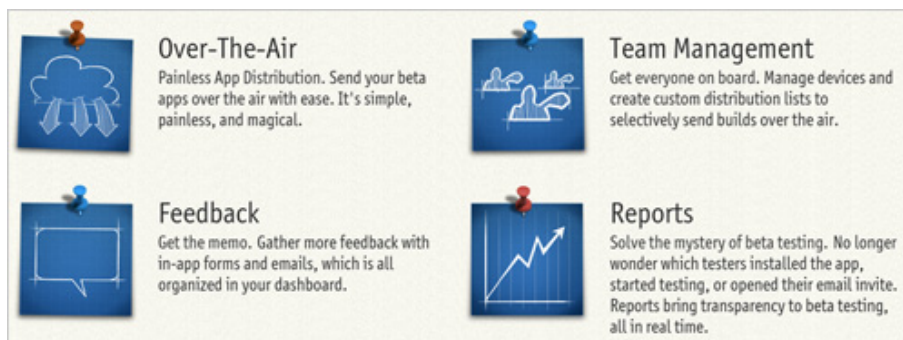
¹⁷². <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/mathboard/id373909837?mt=8&ls=1>

Information And Content

The way you present information on your website determines whether people will see it and, even still, understand it. Draw attention to your content at the right time in the user's visit to your website. The content should look attractive and promising enough to involve the visitor. Information must be clear, relevant and actionable in order to be effective. Below are three examples of ways in which freehand styles can make the presentation of your content more effective.

EXPLAIN FEATURES

You can use freehand drawings to explain your product, such as its features. Creatives often use simple sketches to explain a concept or present an idea that might otherwise take ages to put into words. With your website, you encounter a similar situation. You'll have a product, concept or idea that you want to get across to visitors. By using hand-drawn icons or simple sketches, **you create an intimate atmosphere, as if you were speaking to your visitors directly.**



Stickies conjures the idea of presentations. (Image: TestFlight)

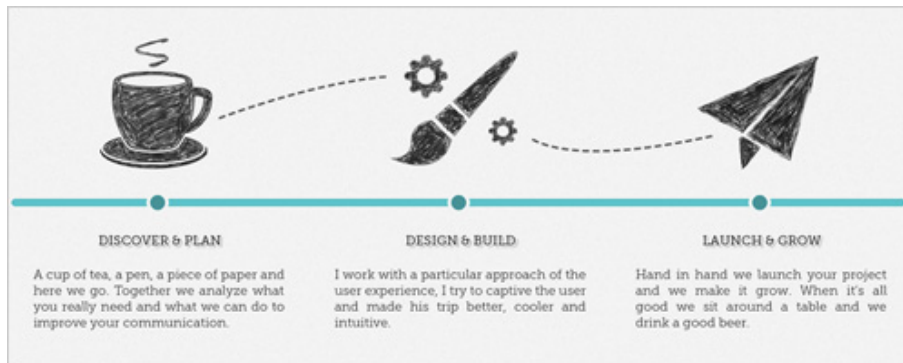
Online service TestFlight¹⁷³ makes use of just this effect. In addition to the many other hand-drawn elements on its website, the company points out its main features with simple sketched sticky notes, accompanied only by a few brief lines of text. This conjures the idea of presentations, drawing attention to the features one by one to make them more clear.

VISUALIZE WORKFLOWS

Freehand style is also a great way to familiarize visitors with your workflows. No one expects you to come up with the perfect solution

¹⁷³. <https://testflightapp.com/>

out of thin air. The fact that you admit that a process is involved and that this process can be rough and bumpy only makes you human and likeable. It demonstrates that **you try out different directions before deciding on the right track.**



This hand-drawn workflow conveys creativity and a thorough working process. (Image: Alex Faure¹⁷⁴)

Designer and front-end developer Alex Faure¹⁷⁵ demonstrates well how a hand-drawn visualization of a workflow can educate visitors and build trust. He seems to not only know what he is doing, but also thinks things through and involves his clients in the process.

GUIDE USERS

Whether you are designing a website or an app, keeping your users in mind and guiding them towards the various goals they might have is always important. Hand-drawn icons can be a good way to do so. It's no secret that icons are helpful when navigating a website or app. Why would hand-drawn icons be any different? While perfectly illustrated icons might be more detailed and clearer, they are computer-made and can easily look sterile and technical. Hand-drawn icons are personal, and **we are more inclined to accept guidance from another human than from a machine.**

¹⁷⁴. <http://aleksfaure.com/>

¹⁷⁵. <http://aleksfaure.com/>



We are more inclined to accept guidance from humans. (Image: Spamped)

The iPhone app Stamped¹⁷⁶ uses very nice, meaningful icons to guide users. The app enables you to stamp and share your favorite things, such as places, books and movies. The hand-drawn style perfectly matches the personal nature of the app, encouraging users to keep stamping.

Team Presentation

The importance of team pages increases continually. While we used to accept a certain level of anonymity on the Web, we are now eager to know who is behind a website, service or product. Also, having the hypothetical option to contact someone is not enough; we want to know exactly who we would be contacting. The more personal your team presentation, the more likely your visitors will trust you. Here are some suggestions on how to enhance your team presentation with hand-drawn elements.

BE LIKEABLE

Being perceived as likeable is important. Even if you offer a ton of information on yourself, if people think you are arrogant or too extravagant, it will do no good. **We are much more willing to trust someone we like** than someone whose character we cannot assess. Hand-drawn

¹⁷⁶. <http://www.stamped.com/>

elements can make you more likeable by making you look creative, spontaneous and easy-going.



We are more willing to trust people we like. (Image: Knock Knock Factory)

The Knock Knock Factory¹⁷⁷ welcomes its visitors with a personal and likeable presentation of its team. The pictograms sketched on the chalkboard in the background say a lot about Keith, the “fearless leader.” The company obviously considers it important to give visitors a clear picture of who they are about to deal with. It’s catchy and gives visitors a positive feeling, before they have even looked around the rest of the website. It creates an immediate personal connection and makes the visitor feel welcome to the website.

BE TRUSTWORTHY

Besides likability, trustworthiness is also important. At the end of the day, anyone can hide behind a website, pretending to be someone they are not. Showing authenticity is a great way to make sure visitors take you for who you are. Only **if people trust you will they open up to what you have to say** or engage in your desired actions, such as buying the product. Hand-drawn elements are usually not the easiest content to produce for a design; they require skills such as creativity and passion—skills we associate with honest and trustworthy people.

¹⁷⁷. <http://knockknockfactory.com/>



We feel more comfortable around people we trust. (Image: Polecat)

The software agency Polecat¹⁷⁸ has found a trustworthy way to introduce itself. Instead of realistic photographs, it has put thought and passion in its team presentation, using abstract yet creative illustrations. The illustrations have a rough and sketchy look to them, making them even more human. And only first names are disclosed, giving an easy-going, familiar feeling.

BE REAL

An important aspect of trustworthiness is authenticity. Your **visitors must not doubt that you really exist** and that you exist in the way that you present yourself on your website. The Web can be a scary place, especially considering that users will probably never meet the people behind websites in person. Anyone can use a Web font, but handwriting and hand-drawn elements reveal something about your person, making you look more real.

¹⁷⁸. <http://www.ipolecat.com/#home>



The authenticity of a team is important. (Image: Grove)

The people at Grove¹⁷⁹ found the perfect balance between creative, carefree and authentic for their team presentation. Snapshots of all team members are neatly arranged as Polaroids, with the names looking handwritten. It looks as if someone walked through their work space, taking Polaroids of everyone, including the team's dog. Does it get more real than that?

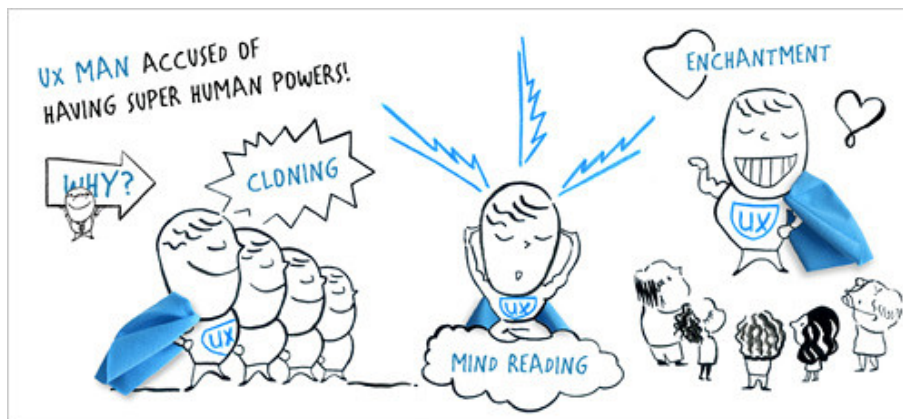
Storytelling

Freehand drawings are a great way to tell stories. Storytelling is extremely personal, an ancient means of communication, mediated at most (back then) by a cave wall. This basic method of exchanging information transcends all technical advances and gives us a comforting, human feeling. Sketches help us ignore the impersonal nature of the Web and put a face to the humans behind it.

ENTERTAIN

Entertainment entails emotional involvement—something that is much easier to achieve when humans are involved, rather than mindless machines. On the Web, **hand drawings are a great way to establish a familiar and human experience**, one that helps visitors to relax and enjoy themselves.

¹⁷⁹. <http://www.grovmade.com/>

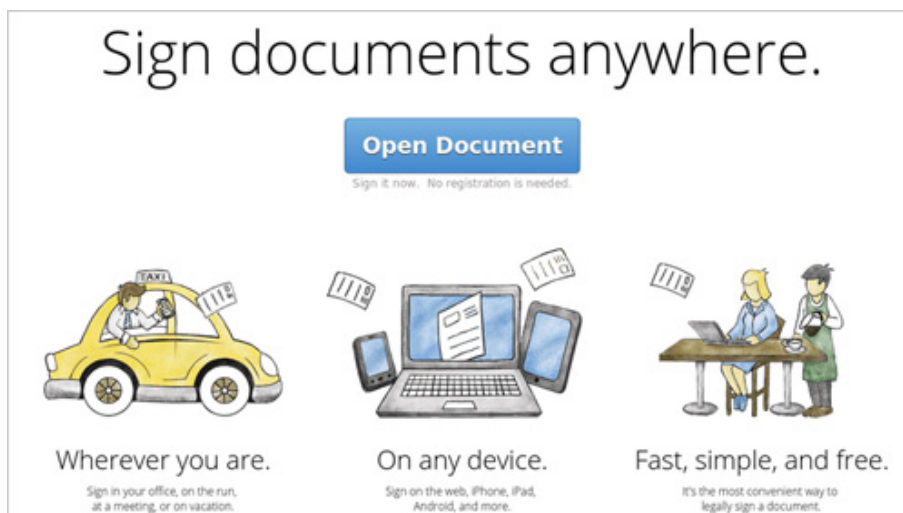


Drawings create a familiar and human experience. (Image: Axure)

The prototyping tool Axure¹⁸⁰ welcomes visitors to its home page with an amusing yet informative story about UX Man, who is “accused of having superhuman powers.” The freehand style of the drawing is eye-catching. There is no reason to doubt that a lot of thought has gone into this fun and inviting landing page.

EXPLAIN

Hand-drawn stories grab our attention because we like to recognize human elements on the Web. Whereas a too-clean Photoshopped image might not gain our trust, **hand drawings appeal directly to our emotions**, making us more attentive and receptive to information.



Hand drawings appeal directly to our emotions. (Image: SignNow)

¹⁸⁰. <http://www.axure.com/>

The app SignNow¹⁸¹ uses hand-drawn images to explain its main benefits right on the home page. The way it lines up the benefits, connected by the “flying” documents, creates a narrative. You can almost hear someone explaining the images as you read the descriptions below. The story draws visitors in, making it easy to follow.

ENGAGE

Personalized elements such as freehand drawings also engage visitors. Along with user experience, “user engagement” has also become a hot topic. Once engaged, we are interested and willing to perceive and process the information given to us. So, **a website that manages to engage us has already made a big step towards a positive user experience.**



A website that manages to engage us has made a big step towards a positive user experience. (Image: TouristEye)

Travel app TouristEye¹⁸² engages effectively with a good story. The step-by-step introduction to its product is turned into a small adventure story, a treasure hunt waiting to be solved. Even without the text, the drawings are meaningful and reflect the free spirit of a trip.

Attention-Grabbers

Freehand elements, such as handwriting, are just not what we expect in a technical medium like the Web. They go against the straight lines and symmetry that we associate with the Web. Thus, a perfect opportunity to grab the visitor’s attention. Handwritten comments and instructions feel human and make us feel like we are being addressed directly.

¹⁸¹. <https://signnow.com/>

¹⁸². <http://www.touristeye.com/>

INVITE

You can use this personal method of communication for different things. First, you could easily invite visitors to perform certain actions, such as liking you on various social media platforms or sharing your content. We are more likely to respond to messages that appear to concern only us, not the general public. Even though the message is on your website for everyone to see, you can **create a feeling of connect- edness by addressing visitors directly**.

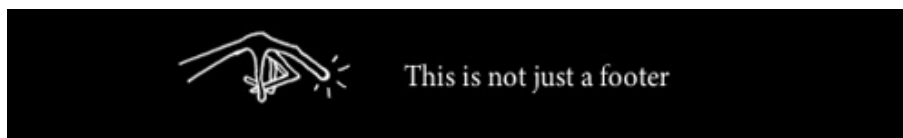


We respond more likely to personal messages. (Image: Weezbe)

Weezbe¹⁸³ use a handwritten message on its landing page, together with a happy smiley and an arrow that guides the visitor's eye to the green button. The header is simple yet effective, drawing attention to the call-to-action button without being intrusive or annoying.

MAKE CURIOUS

You can also **use hand-drawn elements to make visitors curious** and, in doing so, to guide their line of vision and trigger certain actions. For example, arrows are a great way to guide the attention of visitors.



Hand-drawn elements can make visitors curious. (Image: Radley Yeldar)

The creative agency Radley Yeldar¹⁸⁴ shows a minimalist drawing of a hand that appears to be tapping on the screen, along with the line “This

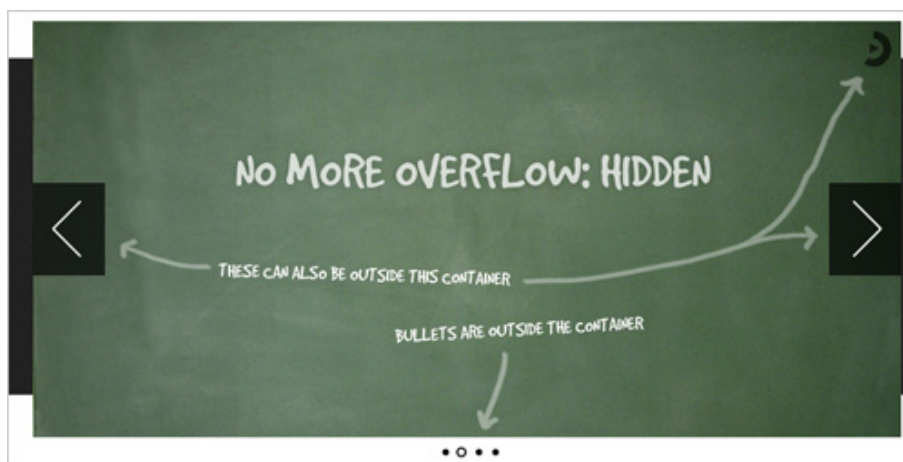
¹⁸³. <http://www.weezbe.com/>

¹⁸⁴. <http://ry.com>

is not just a footer.” The visitor is motivated to mimic the gesture of the hand and click on the screen, if only to find out what happens. This is a great subtle way to bring the footer to the visitor’s attention.

POINT OUT DETAILS

Last but not least, hand-drawn elements can be handy for pointing out details. Again, it’s all about grabbing the visitor’s attention and drawing it to the relevant area. Just as you use arrows and other marks to highlight content in a book or other offline medium, these elements work great on your Website. After all, **highlighted elements bear a certain importance that makes them worth checking out.**



Highlighted elements are expected to be important. (Image: Orbit)

Orbit¹⁸⁵ uses hand-drawn arrows to point out adjustable elements of its image slider plugin. The hand-drawn quality of the arrows draws attention to the defined areas of the slider, and it also stands out, obviously not being part of the slider itself.

Don't Overdo It

Sometimes, freehand drawing doesn’t suit the nature of a website. Make sure not to overdo it and that visitors would truly appreciate a more personal design. Don’t hesitate to ask visitors if you are not sure how far to go; for example, by conducting a live survey¹⁸⁶ on your website.

While certainly many examples are out there of how *not* to use hand-drawings on a website, let’s look at only one. The aim of this arti-

¹⁸⁵. <http://www.zurb.com/playground/orbit-jquery-image-slider>

¹⁸⁶. <http://usabilla.com/products>

cle is to point out positive examples and offer ideas on how a freehand style can improve the user experience, but it is also important to be aware that it's not always effective and that you should use hand-drawn elements within reason.



The overdone hand drawings make the buttons look obtrusive and pushy. (Image: Joshua Keenes)

For example, designer Joshua Keenes¹⁸⁷ uses hand-drawings to draw attention to his social media buttons. While the concept might work, the fact that he overdoes it has two side effects. First, so much is going on that your attention gets lost before even getting to the actual target, making you lose focus before taking any action. Secondly, the invitation to hit one of the buttons becomes quite obtrusive and pushy, likely scaring people away, rather than welcoming them to the social community.

Conclusion

Having a personal experience on the Web is becoming increasingly important. We no longer want to visit cold, formal and anonymous websites. Rather, we want to feel comfortable surfing the Web and to meet the people behind a website, and we need to trust them before we are willing to interact with their website.

Freehand drawings have a human quality, the perfect bridge over the gap between the technical, impersonal Web and the accessible, user-friendly and personal experience that we expect today. 🐼

¹⁸⁷. <http://www.joshuakeenes.co.uk/>

About The Authors

Chuck Longanecker

Chuck Longanecker is the CEO and co-founder of *digital-telepathy*, a user-experience design company¹⁸⁸ passionate about creating products, like SlideDeck¹⁸⁹, Hello Bar¹⁹⁰ and Impress¹⁹¹, that make the Web more intuitive and compelling.

Faruk Ateş

Faruk Ateş does creative things on the Web, like Modernizr¹⁹². He is a designer, developer and an entrepreneur. Faruk previously worked as Product Designer at Apture and UI Engineer at Apple, and is currently working on an exciting new venture of his own. Read more on his site, farukat.es¹⁹³.

John Ferrara

John Ferrara is a user experience designer at Vanguard and the author of the new book, "Playful Design: Creating Game Experiences in Everyday Interfaces¹⁹⁴," published by Rosenfeld Media¹⁹⁵. John has worked in UX design for over thirteen years, designing web sites, desktop software, and video games. In 2010 he co-founded Megazoid Games, which focuses on creating mobile, social, and educational player experiences. John's nutrition education game "Fitter Critters" was a top prizewinner in the 2010 Apps for Healthy Kids contest, awarded by Michelle Obama's "Let's Move!" campaign. He lives in the Philadelphia area with his wonderful wife and superhero daughter.

¹⁸⁸. <http://www.dtelepathy.com/>

¹⁸⁹. <http://www.slidedeck.com/>

¹⁹⁰. <http://www.hellobar.com/>

¹⁹¹. <http://impress.dtelepathy.com/>

¹⁹². <http://www.modernizr.com/>

¹⁹³. <http://farukat.es/>

¹⁹⁴. <http://rosenfeldmedia.com/books/game-design/>

¹⁹⁵. <http://rosenfeldmedia.com/books/>

Peter Steen Høgenhaug

Peter is a web/interface designer based in Aalborg Denmark. He studied Medialogy at Aalborg University, and is currently working at FlexDanmark¹⁹⁶. You can connect with him on Twitter: @pshoeg¹⁹⁷

Sabina Idler

Sabina¹⁹⁸ is community and content manager, technical writer, and UXer @ Usabilla¹⁹⁹. Her education focussed on usability, her passion is the user experience and design is her key to both of them. For the designers among you, check out Usabilla's new tool at discover.usabilla.com²⁰⁰ and collect, rate, and share design elements on the entire web.

Simon Schmid

Simon is the editor of the UI/marketing blog TheGodfounder²⁰¹ with a not so secret love for bootstrapping. Personal Site²⁰², Twitter²⁰³, Tumblr²⁰⁴.

¹⁹⁶. <http://flexdanmark.dk/>

¹⁹⁷. <http://twitter.com/#!/pshoeg>

¹⁹⁸. <http://plus.google.com/u/0/115496882129062393450>

¹⁹⁹. <http://usabilla.com/>

²⁰⁰. <http://discover.usabilla.com/>

²⁰¹. <http://thegodfounder.com/>

²⁰². <http://simonschmid.me/>

²⁰³. <http://twitter.com/izimone/>

²⁰⁴. <http://simonschmid.tumblr.com/>

About Smashing Magazine

Smashing Magazine²⁰⁵ is an online magazine dedicated to Web designers and developers worldwide. Its rigorous quality control and thorough editorial work has gathered a devoted community exceeding half a million subscribers, followers and fans. Each and every published article is carefully prepared, edited, reviewed and curated according to the high quality standards set in Smashing Magazine's own publishing policy.²⁰⁶

Smashing Magazine publishes articles on a daily basis with topics ranging from business, visual design, typography, front-end as well as back-end development, all the way to usability and user experience design. The magazine is—and always has been—a professional and independent online publication neither controlled nor influenced by any third parties, delivering content in the best interest of its readers. These guidelines are continually revised and updated to assure that the quality of the published content is never compromised.

About Smashing Media GmbH

Smashing Media GmbH²⁰⁷ is one of the world's leading online publishing companies in the field of Web design. Founded in 2009 by Sven Lennartz and Vitaly Friedman, the company's headquarters is situated in southern Germany, in the sunny city of Freiburg im Breisgau. Smashing Media's lead publication, Smashing Magazine, has gained worldwide attention since its emergence back in 2006, and is supported by the vast, global Smashing community and readership. Smashing Magazine had proven to be a trustworthy online source containing high quality articles on progressive design and coding techniques as well as recent developments in the Web design industry. 🐼

²⁰⁵. <http://www.smashingmagazine.com>

²⁰⁶. <http://www.smashingmagazine.com/publishing-policy/>

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