

UXPin

# Interaction Design Trends 2015 & 2016





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# Invisible Design

When you examine the most successful interaction designs of recent years, the clear winners are those who execute fundamentals flawlessly. They feed off natural human behavior, then quietly remove barriers without us ever noticing.

When we talk about invisible design, we aren't just describing minimalism. Minimalist interfaces are certainly a means to achieving invisible design, but they are not the goal.

The goal is to create an interaction system that naturally aligns with the user mental models. Simple user flows, clear visual design, and forgiving design all create the illusion that any success is due completely to the user's abilities.

Remove any sign of your ego from the interface and the user will start to feel like the hero.

## Simplifying User Flows

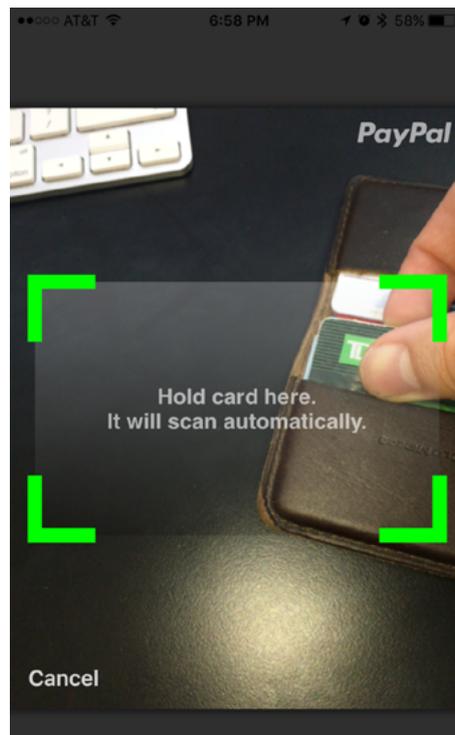
A simple user flow doesn't always show off your design skills, but it does help users achieve their goal. Here are some ways to get users to their goals faster:

- **Less steps** – List out the steps required to complete a task, then remove redundancies. For example, to log in a user (1.) clicks in the username field, (2.) types their username, (3.) clicks in the password form field, etc. You can see how, if you make the default cursor position start in the username field, you shave off an unnecessary step. Try listing them out backwards for a fresh, goal-focused perspective.
- **Simpler steps** – The goal is not to make the least steps possible, but the simplest. Make an interface that's self-explanatory, and [don't bog down users with too many decisions](#). Don't obsess over [the 3-click rule](#), but recognize the spirit behind it.
- **Map user flow** – [Jessica Downey's method](#) for mapping user creates a visual aid to help designers understand and organize the task steps, and their screens. Ryan Singer of Basecamp has a similar but faster [shorthand approach](#).
- **User testing** – Guesswork is unreliable. Test users to see how they instinctively try to complete a task. This gives you more informed data when applying the other steps above.

Let's look at three examples of simplified user flows in action:

## 1. Uber

Credit cards are notoriously tedious to enter, especially on a mobile phone, but Uber lets users snap a photo of their card to capture all of the information.



*Photo credit: Drew Thomas*

They've shortened the payment user flow from:

1. Type in First Name
2. Type in Last Name
3. Type in all digits of credit card
4. Type in security number

to simply:

1. Take photo of credit card

For a user, the experience isn't just useful – it's nearly magical.

## 2. Dropbox

Dropbox's entire service is a simplified user flow of the otherwise tedious task of uploading and downloading a large amount of files individually.

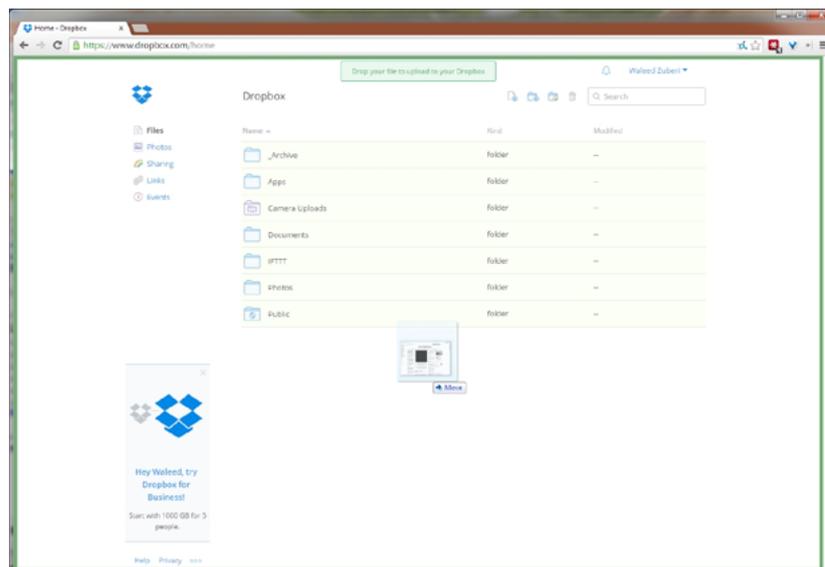


Photo credit: [Dropbox](#)

Dropbox created a much faster shortcut by introducing system folders.

Going in, most users are already familiar with how folders work, so this is simpler for them. But more importantly, they can upload/download all their documents in one or two folders. Add to that their simple drag-and-drop functionality, and it's easy to see their success.

## 3. Oscar Insurance

Other insurance sites typically have multiple form fields with information that's not always relevant. [Oscar Insurance](#) brings the industry up-to-date with their modern – and simple – form entry.

Let's get you a quote—it only takes a few seconds.

My zip code is

\* Zip code is required to get a quote.

Let's get you a quote—it only takes a few seconds.

My zip code is  and I'd like to cover  .

I'm  years old and my spouse is

*Photo credit: Oscar Insurance*

Other form fields aren't revealed until the current one is answered.

This prevents too many fields from overwhelming the user, and clearly shows them the next step. But the entire process is simplified with the use of the “Mad Libs” UI pattern – this makes getting an insurance quote almost fun, something no one would have ever guessed was possible.

The semantic forms match the way users think, making the design feel invisible. The barrier between the user wanting a quote and completing the process is dramatically reduced.

## Clear Communication

Every time a user is confused, it adds friction. Clear communication is the ultimate goal of invisible design.

Everything in an interface is communicating something – spacing and size communicate importance, colors communicate mood, styles communicate atmosphere, etc.

All the individual messages must combine to communicate in sync. With as little thought as possible, a user must know what a site or app does and why they should care.

Follow this checklist to make sure your meaning is clear, and therefore the design invisible:

- **Interactions rooted in reality** – Whenever possible, use human mental models from everyday life. For example, increasing volume is often represented in images moving upwards or getting bigger. This just feels “right.”
- **Legibility** – For clear communication, all text must be readable. Stick to the proper guidelines for [spacing between lines/letters](#), and use [Color Safe](#) to determine the ideal font colors to contrast clearly against the background.
- **Consistent mood** – You wouldn’t use a casual typeface for the subtitle to a tragic photograph. Keep a unifying theme for all imagery, typefaces, and colors to set the mood you want, and tie everything

together nicely. This includes content, like the subjects of images and the tone of the copy.

- **Signifiers** – Easily recognizable UI patterns are automatically understood from the user’s previous experience on the web. Signifiers, like a play button over an image to signify video, send a universally understood message without wasting time.
- **Microinteractions** – Small design choices, like an interactive element changing color when hovered over, can fill in the cracks in how your interface works. These subtle cues often communicate without the user even realizing it.

Let’s see how these principles are applied in the examples below:

### 1. **Integrated Podiatry Clinic**

Long scrolling sites must immediately communicate their method of navigation, otherwise users might be confused by a lack of menus.

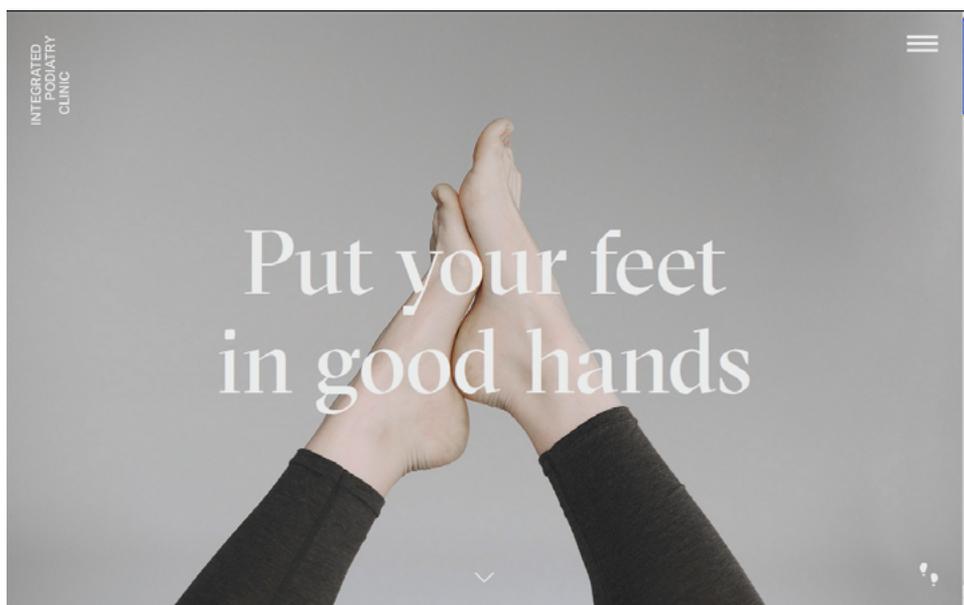


Photo credit: [Integrated Podiatry Clinic](#)

The [Integrated Podiatry Clinic](#) solves this problem using signifiers and users' own mental modes. The door arrow at the center bottom is enough to suggest scrolling, especially with the minimal design preventing distraction, and some users may even recognize it from other sites.

Notice what the visuals say about the site and the company: the gray color has the appropriate professionalism of a clinic, while the fun feet image and clever tagline make it feel deeply human at the same time. The step lego in the bottom right keeps with the podiatry theme.

From the clever copy to the soft tones, the interface clearly communicates that the clinic is staffed with experts who care about their patients.

## 2. [Future Water City](#)

[Future Water City](#) uses microinteractions and signifiers to explain what would be an otherwise confusing interface.

Because the circled numbers aren't a strong enough signifier on their own, they periodically pulse with color to show interactivity.

Microinteractions with the cursor also show how the site works: when it hovers the map, it turns to an open hand (signifying click-and-pull navigation), when it hovers over a number it turns to a single finger (signifying clickability).



Photo credit: *Future Water City via Awwwards*

From a user flow standpoint, the interaction design also shortens the perception of distance to desired content. For instance, when you click on a numbered bubble, a slideout appears on the same page, which you can click to trigger another slide-out that explains the product.

You don't move from page to page. You move between frames on the same page.

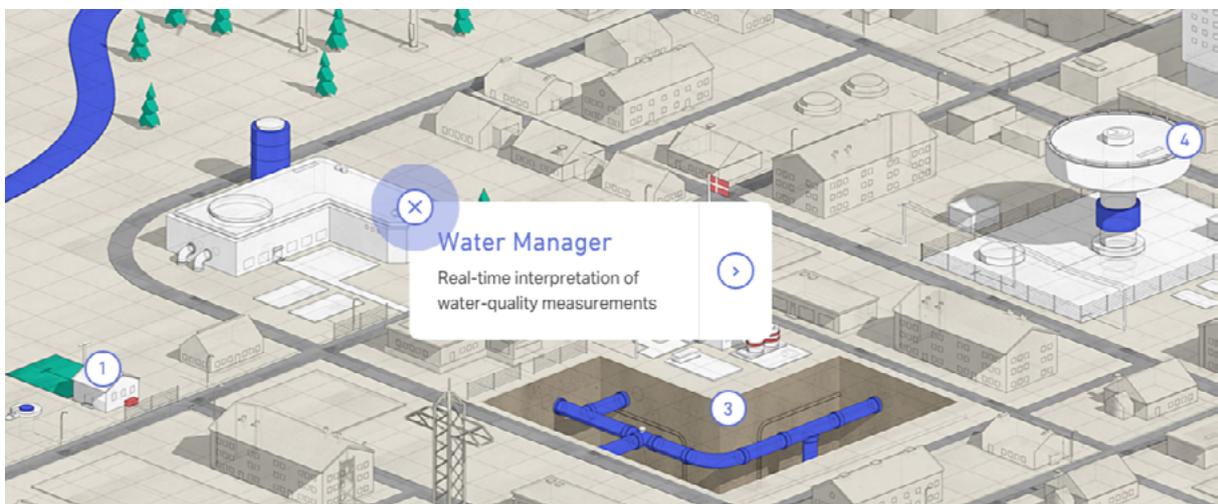


Photo credit: *Future Water City via Awwwards*

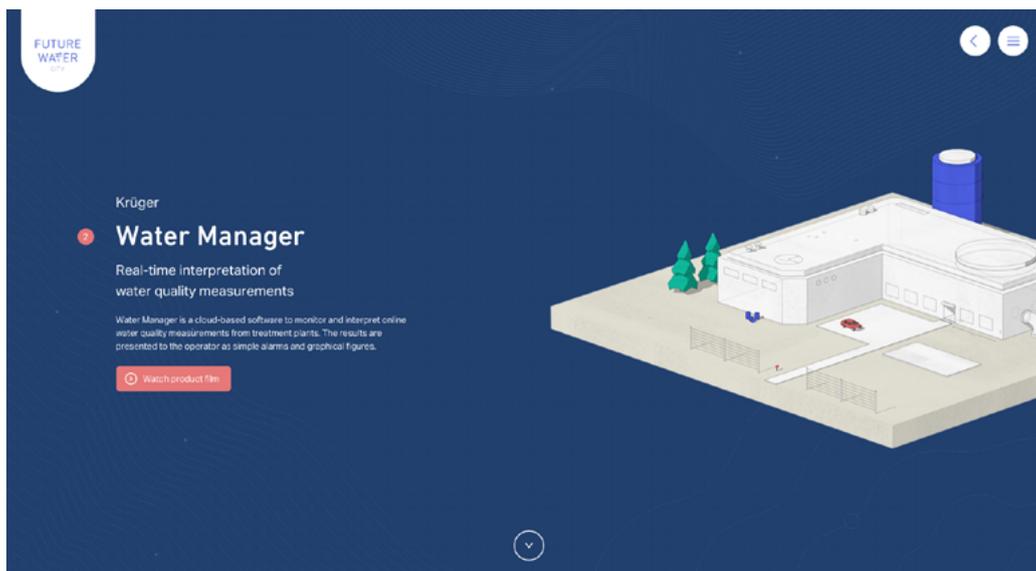


Photo credit: [Future Water City](#) via [Awwwards](#)

Technically, the content is presented in the same number of steps, but the smooth transitions between frames create a certain weightlessness.

## Reversible Mistakes

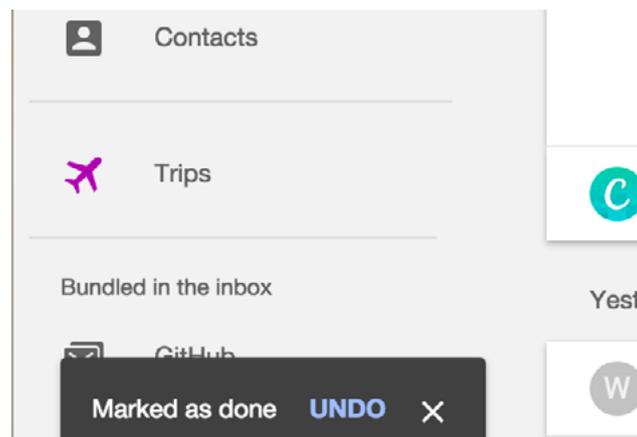
For a truly invisible design, the UI must always forgive user errors. If a user makes a mistake that's easily fixable (or the design prevents such a mistake), the user feels more empowered.

Nevermind the helpful hand of thoughtful design – the illusion feels completely real.

Consider the following tips:

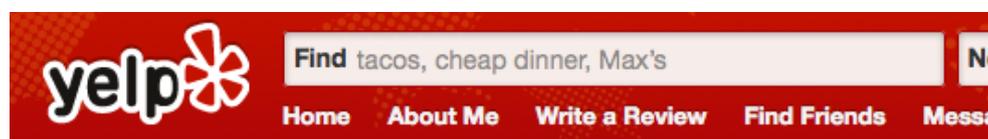
- **Undo vs. Confirm** – Popular opinion is that Undo creates a smoother interface than Confirmations about consequential actions. As [Aza Raskin explains](#), users develop a **habit loop** with popup windows,

where they might click “Okay” before fully understanding what they’re confirming. Moreover, making confirmation windows flashier or with an activity that requires thought (like typing a specific codeword) don’t work either – they only distract the user from their decision, or irritate them to leave the window even faster. An Undo feature accounts for the habit loop instead of challenging it. [There are some exceptions](#), namely when undoing is complicated, as with publishing something publicly, or for critical actions (like deleting a whole email database).



*Photo credit: Inbox*

- **Forgiving format for inputs** – Input forms can be confusing: for example, in [Yelp](#), users may want to search for type of food or a specific restaurant. The [forgiving format UI pattern](#) allows users to type in what they want, they sorts it out in the back end. Announce this feature through input hints, like [Yelp's](#) placeholder text, “tacos, cheap dinner, Max’s.”



*Photo credit: Yelp*

- **Autosaving** – Cheap data storage makes autosaving great protection against users losing data, whether human error or other accidents like browser crashes or power outages. To maximize its effects, give a subtle indicator like [Gmail](#) below – something that doesn't require interaction, so not to distract.



Photo credit: [Gmail](#)

- **Exceptional error feedback** – You can't defend against errors forever. When they do occur, provide feedback in a helpful way to get users back on track. Clearly explain what happened and how to rectify the situation, even providing a call-to-action for their next step. Just keep it succinct, as they'll likely be skimming anyway.

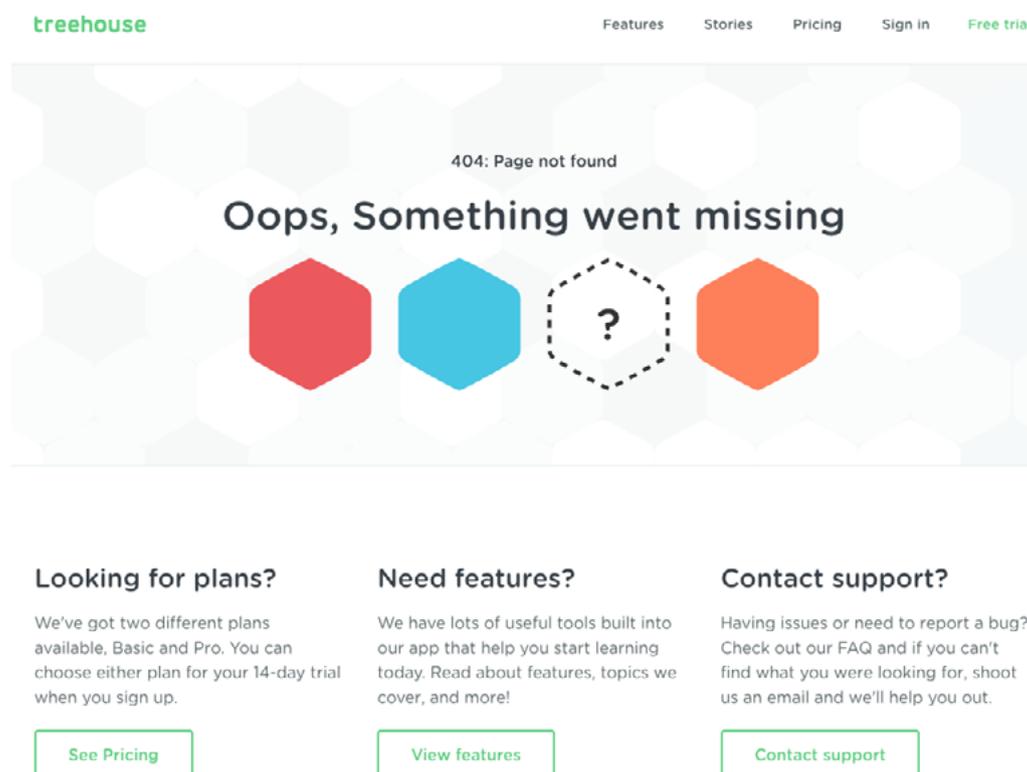


Photo credit: [Team Treehouse](#)

## Conclusion

Don't forget the point of invisible design is to get out of the way as much as possible.

Any elements that threaten to distract the user from their goals should be removed, no matter how much the designer likes them. Learn to separate which aspects are genuinely impressive, and which are only impressive to other designers.

If your users doesn't notice how much effort you put into the design, that means it's working.

## Additional Resources

1. [Invisible Design: Why Is Less More?](#) – Emmet Connolly (Intercom)
2. [What Is Invisible Design](#) – Carrie Cousins (Designmodo)
3. [The Age of Invisible Design](#) – Scott Dadich (Wired)
4. [Dropbox's Android App Is All About Invisible Design](#) – Belinda Lanks (Wired)
5. [10 Reasons Why the Best Design Is Invisible](#) – Carrie Cousins (Designshack)

# Meaningful Delight

In the context of interaction design, delightful designs are those that give us that special feeling that keeps us coming back. While the interface might feel “invisible”, the emotional connection is completely tangible.

In 2015 and 2016, expect to see more emotionally evocative interactions on the web and in mobile apps.

Of course, a product that only offers delight – no substance, just gimmicks and colorful mascots – don’t last long in our minds when the initial glamour fades.

The examples we’ll explain go above and beyond. They serve their purpose first and foremost, and then offer that little something extra. And while no one can really put into words what that “little something extra” actually is, you can get a good idea by looking at the examples below.

## Seeing Delight in Context

Before analyzing the examples, let's talk a little about how “delightful” interactions fit into design as a whole.

[Writing for Treehouse Blog](#), Aaron Walter explains delightful design through Abraham Maslow's [Hierarchy of Needs](#), a classic theory of psychology published in 1943. The theory essentially ranks the priority of human needs, starting with fundamentals like food and oxygen, and topping it off later with inessentials like self-actualization.



*Photo credit: UXPin based on [Emotional Interface Design: The Gateway to Passionate Users](#)*

Converting the idea to web design, Walters proposes a new hierarchy of needs:



*Photo credit: UXPin based on [Emotional Interface Design: The Gateway to Passionate Users](#)*

Delight is not essential for a useful interface. A website can still be successful as long as it's functional, reliable, and usable – even if it has a dry and ugly interface (just look at [Craigslist](#)). But, a site's that's delightful without being functional will, sooner or later, lose its appeal. The most important factors are the more practical ones.

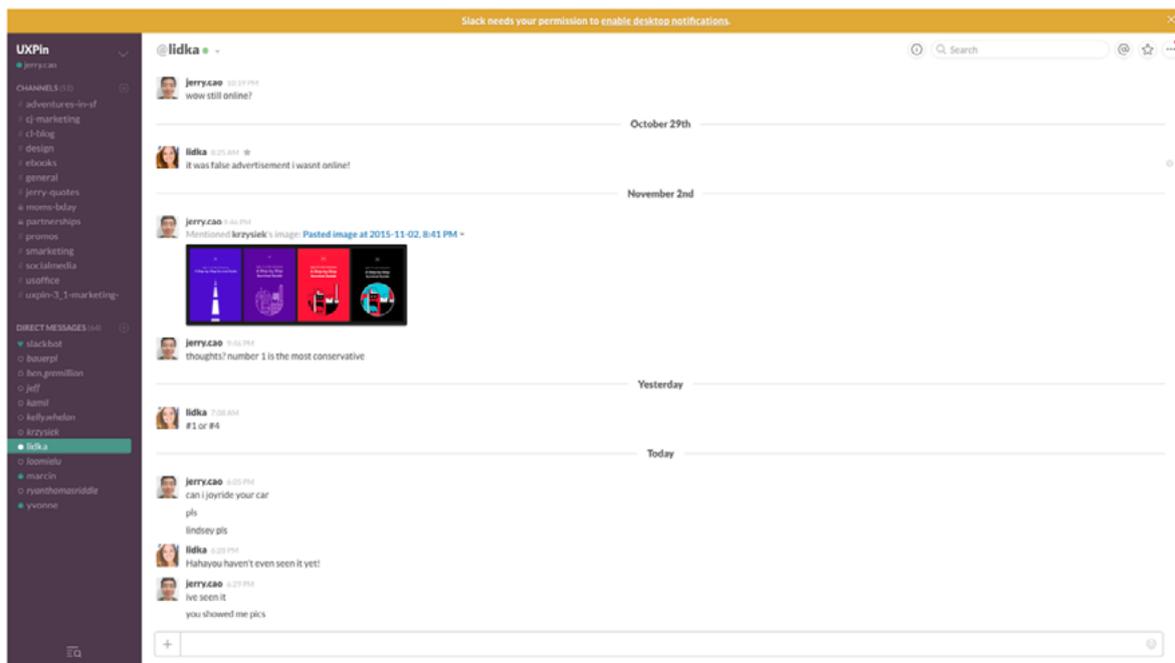
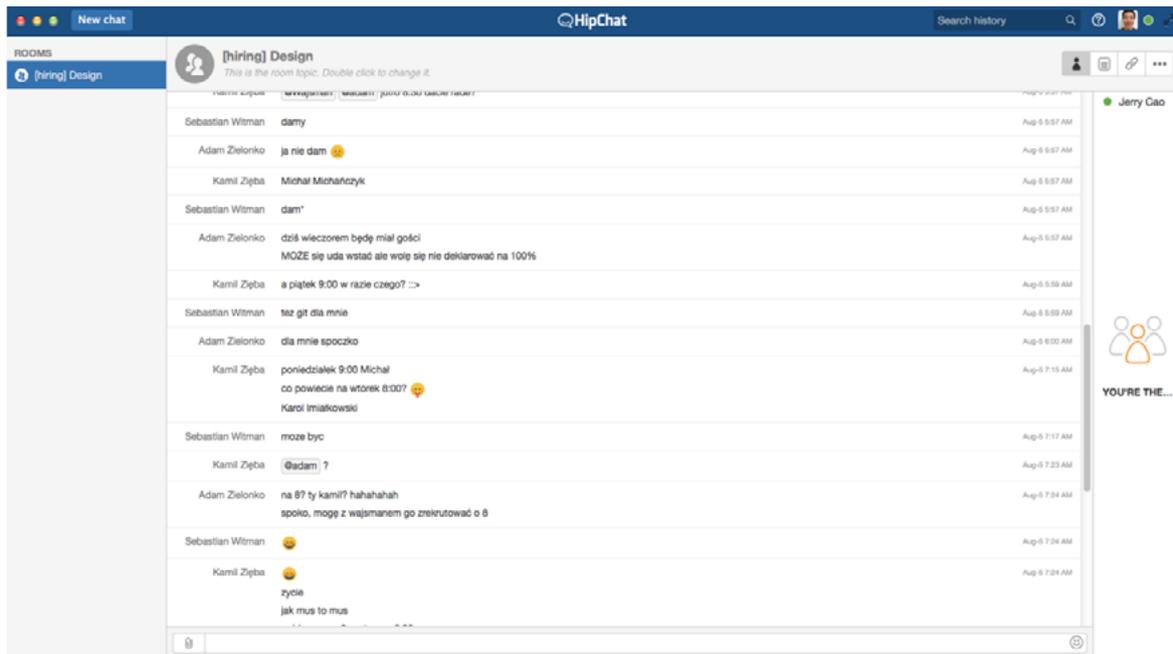
But that's not to say delight isn't important. [As Don Norman explains](#), humans evolved to make decisions based on emotions more-so than logic. In fact, he continues to show that delight can even improve usability – by creating an atmosphere of enjoyment, a product relaxes the user, which in-turn allows their mechanical processes to run smoothly, increasing learnability and ease-of-use.

Delightful design is the icing on the cake, but only the very best icing – sometimes even the best part of the cake. A dry and bland cake is unappetizing, and if there are better options available (more colorful and sugary options), hungry users will choose them. But, on the other hand, no matter how delicious and tasty your icing is, not many people can stomach eating icing alone.

Let's explain what we mean. These following sites are the whole package: a solid premise, a functional interface, comprehensive usability... and that little something extra.

## 1. [Slack](#)

[Slack](#) is a team chat app that feels more like hangout area. The rich colors, random GIF generator, and soft edges all create a sense of friendliness and fun.



*HipChat on the top vs. Slack on the bottom*

But don't let the delightful elements fool you – Slack is powerful. It's fast, reliable, and undeniably useful. You can pin posts, turning Slack into an information hub for the whole company. You can send complex files to coworkers, then reference those files easily.

Everything works at the speed of thought.

Slack's true success, however, is that it's more than just a workflow tool. It's a social tool that improves workflow at its core by encouraging more interaction between people.

With Slack's success being attributed to an attention to detail and an importance placed on user-focused design, other companies are looking to replicate their success in the same way. Now every new app or web service is required to demonstrate a certain level of interface polish, slick interaction design, and overall humane consideration for the user's emotional and functional needs.

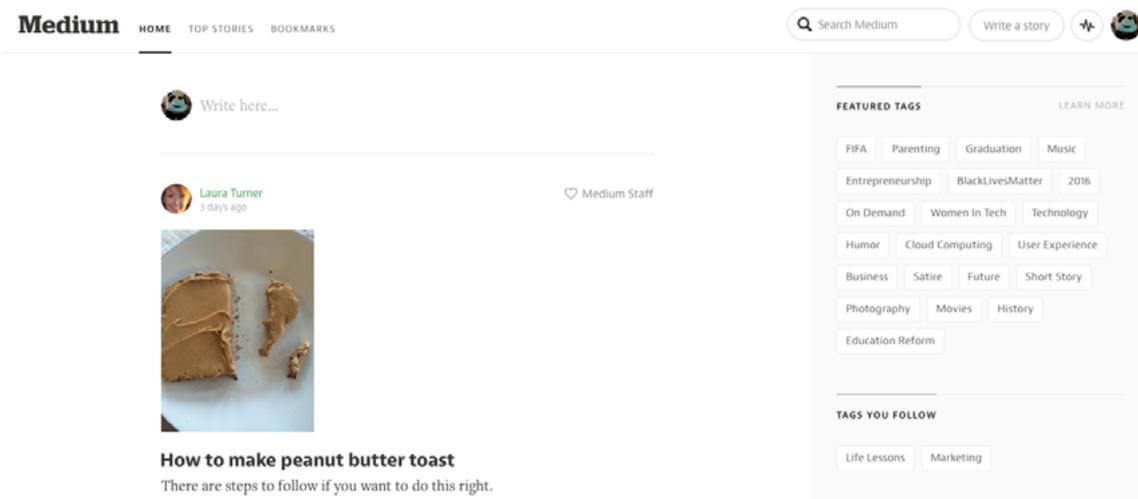
As UX designer Ben Rowe explains, there's **two layers to delightful design**: the surface layer and the deeper layer of flow. In this case, the fun visual design comprise the surface layer, while the "**passively magical**" interaction design forms the much more important layer of experiential flow.

## 2. Medium

Delightful design is not simply fun colors and cartoons. As Rowe was saying, the experience builds a stronger connections, so delightful design relies on empowerment through usability – which requires far more than just a cutesy mascot.

One of the most popular blogging platforms, Medium uses a trademark minimalist style, a heavy dose of white, and no cartoons or wild colors whatsoever. The reason it's on our list of delightful sites is the simple yet powerful experience.

Their minimalism extends beyond looks: by refocusing on the actual experience of writing, the site is naturally easy to use and understand for first-timers. You aren't distracted by widgets, plugins, or any themes to select. That's not to say the style is bland or lacking – the elegant typography, intuitive controls, and infinitely-scrolling news feed all create a visually distinct first impression.



*Photo credit: [Medium](#)*

But beyond the surface layer of visual delight, the simplicity is only a vehicle for the user to concentrate on writing. Medium is the perfect example of invisible design because it provides just enough interface to accomplish the core user goal, then gets out of the way and lets the magic happen on its own.

Through an applaudable use of hover and hidden controls, Medium offers all the essential options to its users (upload images/video, embedding content, etc.) without bogging them down. Unlike a traditional Wordpress experience which feels more like being in “content management mode”, Medium combines the writing and uploading process into one creative flow.

# The Power of Minimalism: A Story of Redesigning Yelp



Design by committee is death by a thousand cuts.

It kills slowly, as more and more people weigh in with their opinions, until the “revised” design looks like a stew of lesser parts. It certainly doesn’t need to be that way, especially for large companies like Yelp.



*Photo credit: [Power of Minimalism](#)*

To take it a step further, the editing interface looks nearly identical to the live interface, which makes users feel like they’re adding their genius to a blank slate instead of switching between states. The paper-like layout entices you with the anticipation of creation, empowering even the most amateur blogger to be like Hemingway in front of a typewriter.

Medium offers extra finishing touches reflecting their ingenuity. Each post shows an average reading time so you know what you’re getting into. On a purely functional level, the interface even allows for users to copy/paste images straight from Google Docs without

drag-and-dropping or re-uploading (a nice surprise for bloggers who have grown use to the tedious task).

First, I absolutely believe that screenshots should be automatically parsed from the main camera roll into a separate...

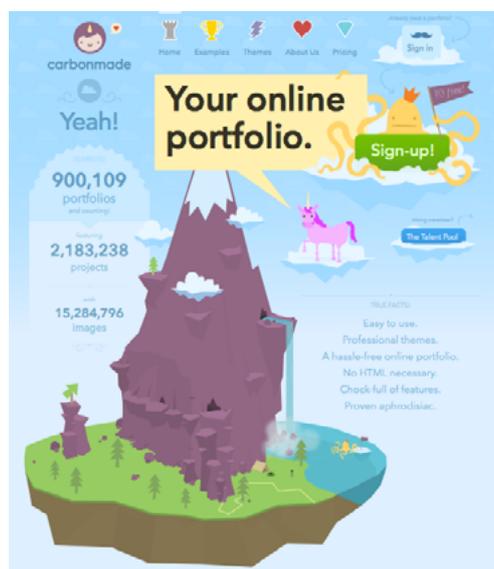
[Continue reading](#) · 2 min read

*Photo credit: Medium*

None of these subtleties are required for a decent blogging platform, but they elevate the design to a delightful level precisely because they are unexpectedly helpful. These features don't just make users smile, they make them better at what they do. If you want to create meaningful delight, always strive to incorporate these “magical discoverables” into your interaction design.

### 3. Carbonmade

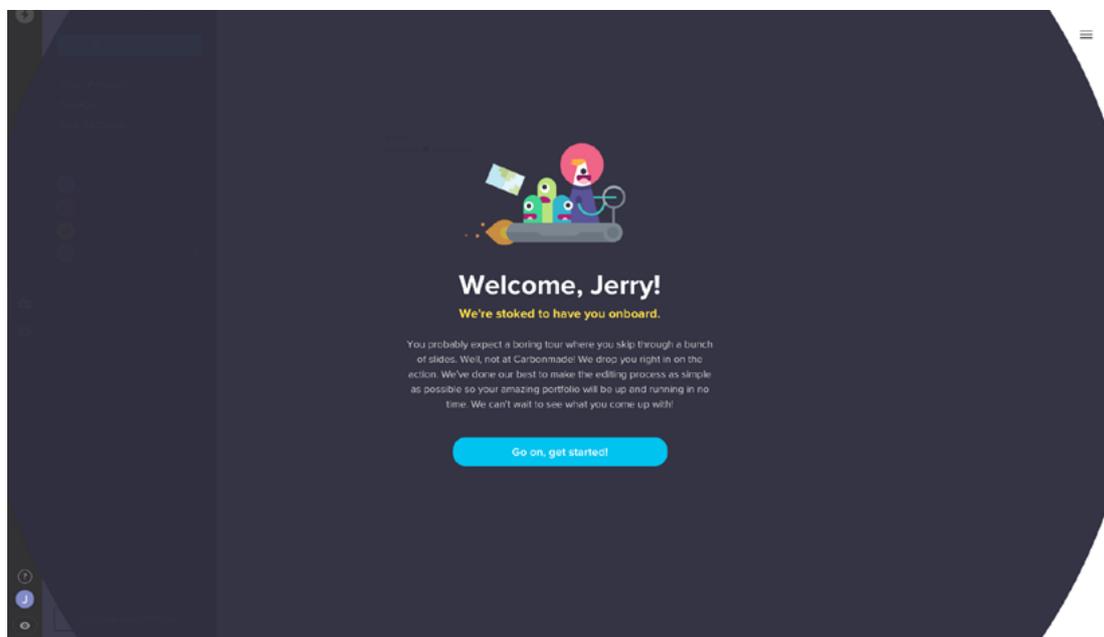
What happens when you mix a solid experience with fun colors and cartoons? You get something like [Carbonmade](#), a site that allows professionals to create online portfolios painlessly.



*Photo credit: Carbonmade*

The deeper level of their delightful experience – the important base of the pyramid – is the ease with which users can create their online portfolios. As the creators explain, the inspiration for the site came from their personal irritation at how expensive or annoying it was posting their own illustrations online.

On first impression, the site certainly fulfills the surface layer of delight with stylized elements appropriate for its designer user base: lighthearted copy, vibrant colors, and generous use of fun animal icons. The visual treatment certainly captures your attention. In fact, the onboarding message even boldly claims that Carbonmade will drop users right into the experience without any boring tutorials or explanations.



*Photo credit: Carbonmade*

As you dive a bit deeper, you'll see they've certainly fulfilled their promise with a smooth experience that feels like the Medium of portfolio sites. Create your project, drag and drop the works you'd

like to show off, type in the text in the left-hand sidebar, and the changes automatically reflect in a true WYSIWYG interface.

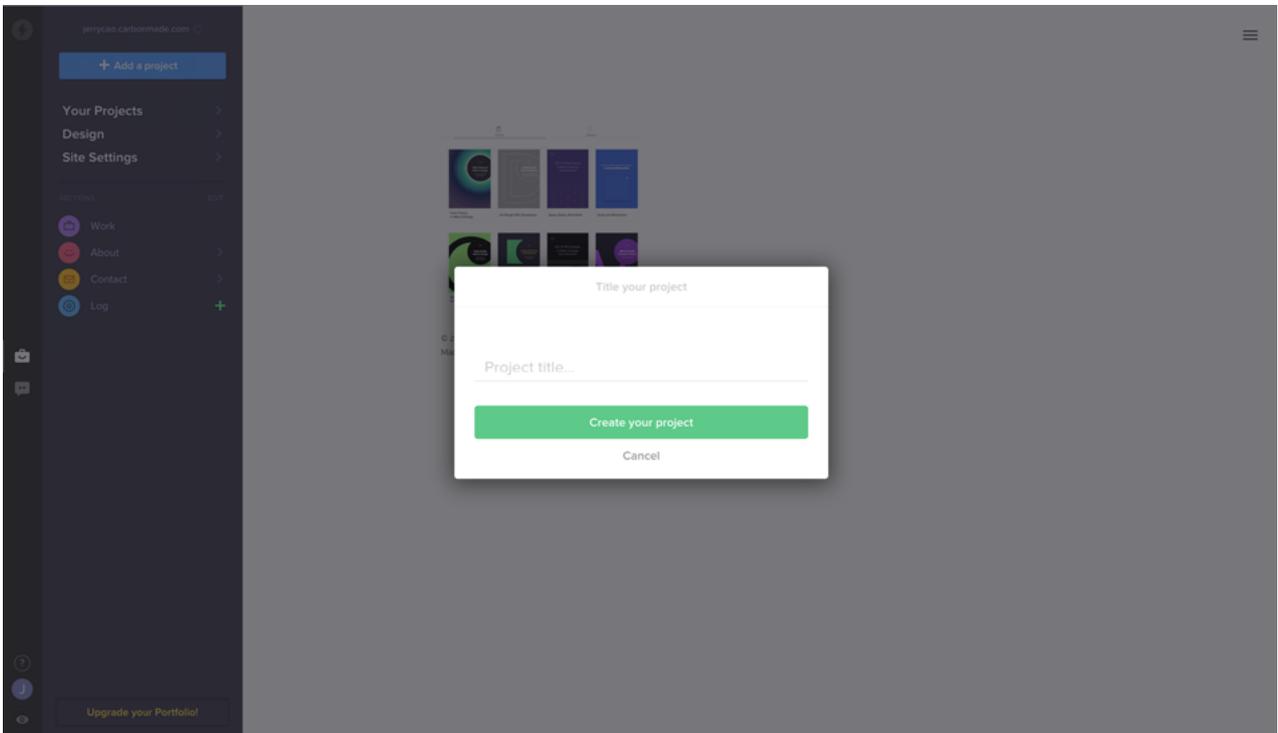


Photo credit: [Carbonmade](#)

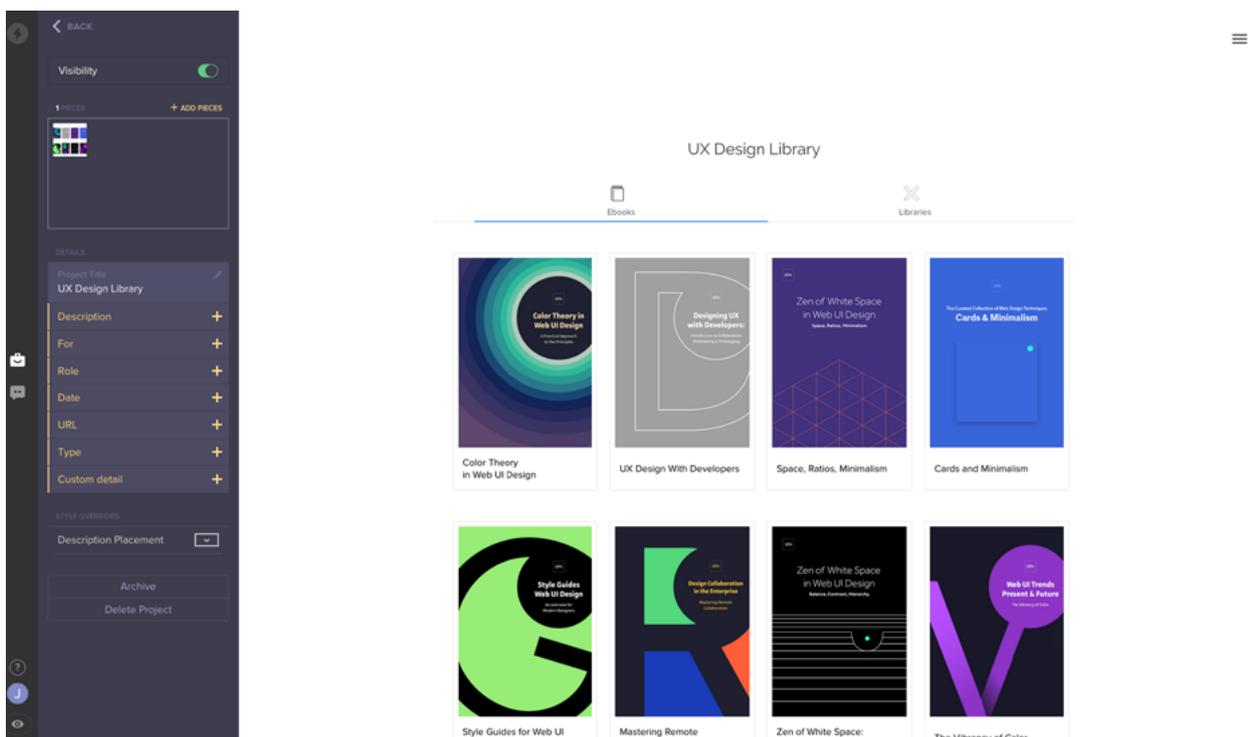


Photo credit: [Carbonmade](#)

Want to update your profile? Just type it in the sidebar, and you'll see the new text exactly as it would look live. Instant gratification.

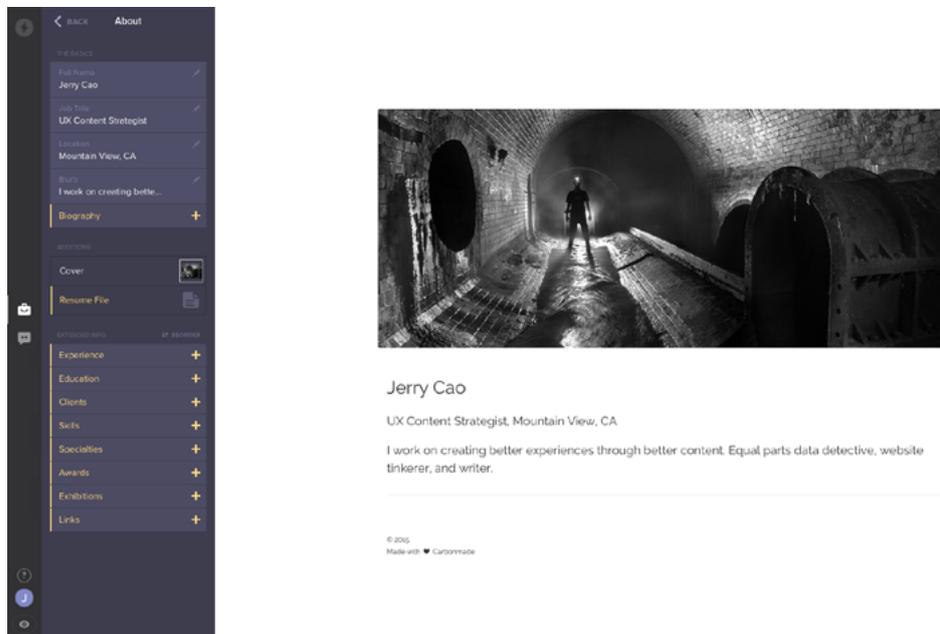


Photo credit: [Carbonmade](#)

While more advanced users will need to upgrade to a paid plan for more personalization, even the free plan has helped the user build a ready-for-primetime portfolio in less than 30 minutes from start to finish.

Like [Rowe suggests](#), that frictionless functionality is what gives the delightful interface its meaning. Users aren't using a tool to build their portfolio, they're *actually* building their portfolio. Carbonmade isn't just simple – it's unexpectedly simple from the welcome message to publication.

The learning curve is virtually nonexistent and users immediately enter a deep flow of accomplishment right from the first click. The slick visuals simply ease the user along that path of empowerment.

## 4. MailChimp

Last but not least is MailChimp, an ideal balance of usefulness and delight. Like Bitly, MailChimp fulfills a fairly technical niche, one so practical they could theoretically survive with a barebones interface. What takes them actually thrive is their smooth functionality wrapped in cheeky humor and visually friendly design.

MailChimp specializes in sending mass-emails, a subject that inherently sounds impersonal and cold, which should explain why they market themselves as putting a more personable face on it. By being a “warmer, friendlier, funner” tool that packs just as much under the hood as its competitors, MailChimp transforms a dry task into an inviting experience.

Their delightful design is good business since it’s a core differentiator in the market.

Choose a type of campaign to send:

<b>Regular Campaign</b> Send a lovely HTML email along with a plain-text alternative version.	Select
<b>Plain-Text Campaign</b> Send a simple plain-text email with no pictures or formatting.	Select
<b>A/B Split Campaign</b> Send to two groups to determine the best subject line, from name, or time/day to send campaigns.	Select
<b>RSS-Driven Campaign</b> Send content from an RSS feed to a list.	Select

### Email Beamer

Did you know you can send campaigns directly from your favorite email client?  
[Learn more](#)

Photo credit: [MailChimp](#)

## To which list shall we send?

- test (0 recipients)
- Send to entire list
- Send to a saved segment
  - You have no saved segments. Would you like to [create one?](#)
- Send to a group or new segment
- Paste emails to build a segment

Photo credit: [MailChimp](#)

The no-clutter interface, straightforward choices, and conversational multiple-choice forms boils down a complex discipline into a simple and emotionally validating experience. MailChimp even generates a fun high-five screen after you send a campaign, an experience that's so memorable that some users [even tweet themselves](#) high-fiving the monkey right back.

But aside from the cute monkey mascot Freddie, the entire site also feels friendly and lively. The sans-serif fonts give a casual air, and the tone of the text is simple and light (certainly [no accident](#)).

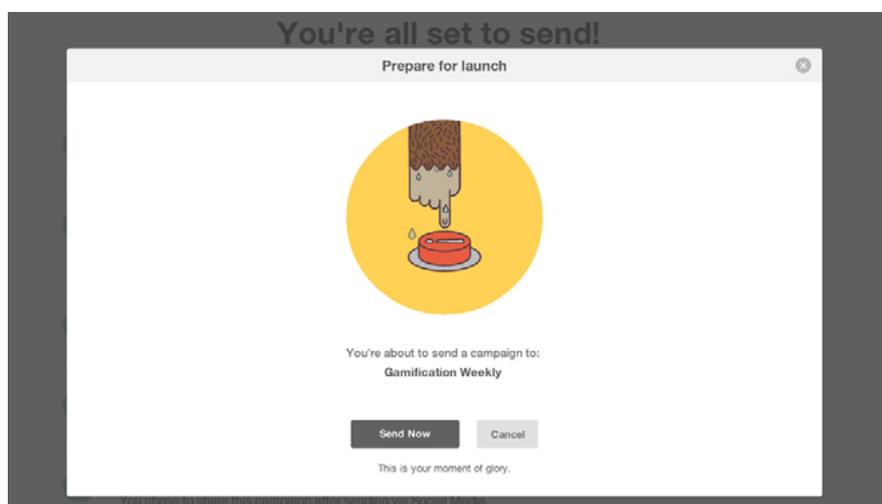


Photo credit: [MailChimp Launch](#)

Combining fun cartoons with tongue-and-cheek messages like “This is your moment of glory,” MailChimp even softens the nervousness of sending your first email campaign. The actions and reactions of the interface feel less like an email marketing app and more like an empathetic instructor that understands you.

The humor and mascot are all part of the surface layer of delight. But when we dive deeper, we see that the conversational feedback and effortless task flow helps MailChimp connect with users on a more intangible level. The product instructs, entertains, and facilitates. As a result, even the most novice email marketer feels like a pro – and that’s a truly unforgettable experience.

## Conclusion

Delightful design can be added to any website, in varying degrees of lightheartedness or elegance. Weave in your elements of delight so that it doesn’t distract from usability, and you’ll create a state of “pleasurable functionality”.

The ultimate goal of delightful design empowering users while creating an invisible emotional connection. It’s not an easy task, but it will absolutely makes your product stand out.

Never forget that “people don’t buy better products, they [buy better versions of themselves](#)”.

## Additional Resources

1. [Little Big Details](#) (library of delightful interaction design)
2. [Is There a Formula for Delight?](#) – Ben Rowe (UX Mastery)
3. [Passive Magic: Design of Delightful UX](#) – Stefan Klocek (Cooper)
4. [More Than Usability](#) – Frank Guo (UX Matters)
5. [Provocation Can Lead to Emotional Design](#) – John Caldwell (UX Magazine)

# Visual Conversations

This year, we've also seen a new surge in sites and apps that treat text as an interaction design element.

Language is what separates man from the beasts. Users naturally scan for words, which makes copy one of the most natural pathways for influencing behavior. Well-written copy presented in the right typography makes your design feel humanly familiar.

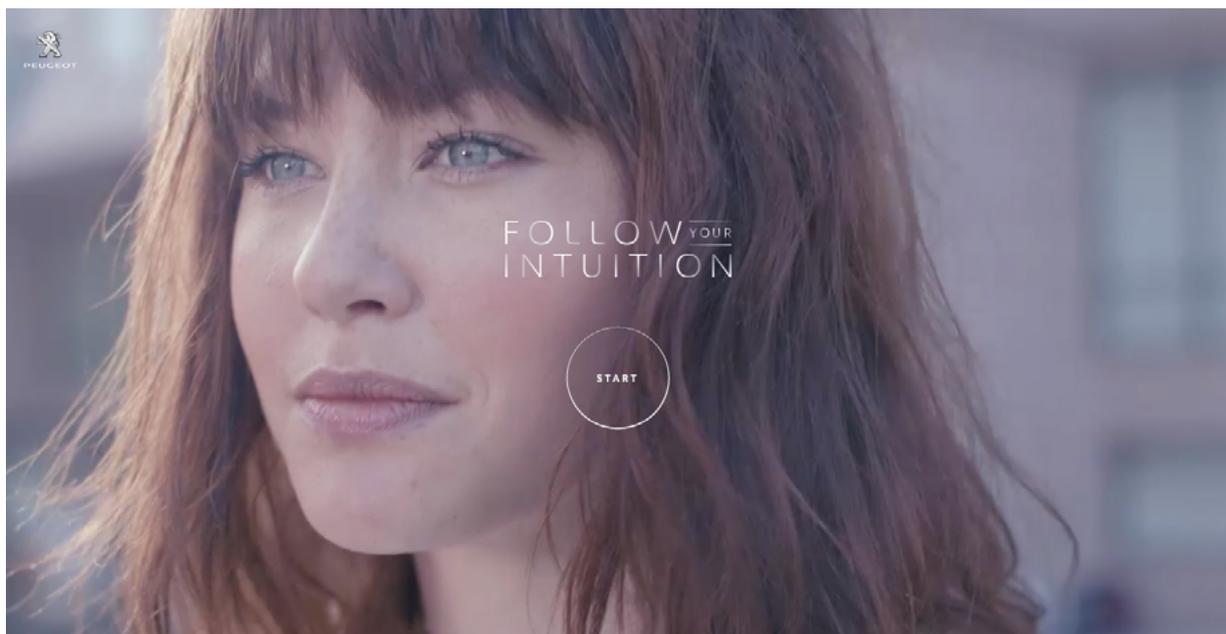
The words you choose in your interface copy, even if the message seems meaningless to you, directly affect the users' impressions of your brand – especially since it only takes users about **10 seconds** to decide if they'll stay on a site.

Your copy as your mouthpiece is a silent but powerful medium. Let's explore the different applications of copy in interaction design.

## Why Copy is Essential in Interaction Design

Interface copy is your side of the dialogue between your product and your user, and you should always approach **interactions as a conversation**. In fact, words are the **first dimension of interaction design**, followed by visuals, space, time, and behavior.

Just like the way you speak in everyday life, your words and how you use them reflect your **personality in design**. This “personality” of words is creates the voice and tone of the design just as much as the images, visual hierarchy, **colors**, icons, and animations.



*Photo credit: Peugeot*

The tone of interface copy creates the context for interactions. After a few words, the user will be able to gauge how serious or casual the interaction will be, whether or not the product is what they’re looking for, and even the overall quality of the company.

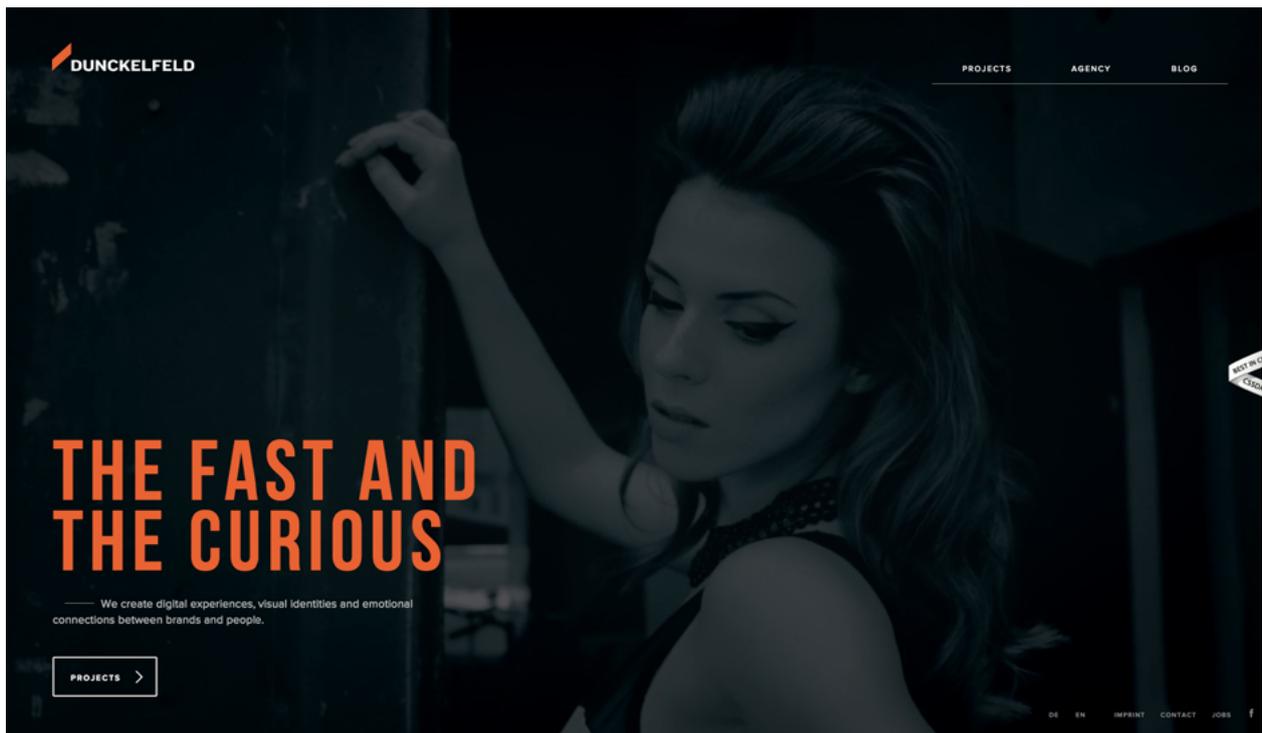


Photo credit: [Dunckelfeld](#)

Words are also themselves interactions as users scan a website. They form mental images, create emotional connections, and suggest next steps.

For example, on the homepage of German design agency [Dunckelfeld](#), you can see how the words “The Fast And the Curious” complements the mesmerizing background showing snippets of life from geometric patterns to camels in a desert. The sharp copy enhances the video’s effect of showing the user that this is an agency who can spot the beauty in everyday moments (and presumably incorporate them into their work).

Now imagine how the design would feel if the headline said something typical like “Better ideas today”. The illusion of wonder is destroyed, and the background video feels meaningless.

It doesn't matter if you sound sophisticated or blunt, if you use big words or small, if you speak the Queen's English or prefer abbreviations...what matters is that your tone matches the visual design – that's what entices people into interacting with the design.

## The Variability of Context

Taking the above point a step further, the context surrounding your product determines the best tone and other language choices you make. The golden rule is that no one rule will apply in every circumstance... but similar contexts will have similar best practices.

When isolating the context you're working with, there's two areas to focus on:

1. **The Medium** – App or website? *Home* page or *About Us* page? Chosen content or pop-up? Each will have different expectations from the users, and so the text will need to be modified appropriately for the best results.
2. **The Audience** – Who is reading the text? Targeting your specific audience is one of the fundamentals of communication since the dawn of time, whether designing an ecommerce website or editing an ancient Greek play.

The rules for a specific medium tend to be pretty common sense – you shouldn't try to fit a paragraph inside a single call-to-action button.

What you don't know by instinct, you can always discover by checking around the Internet with some popular examples.

Writing for a specific audience, on the other hand is one of the hardest skills to learn.

The key element here is knowing who your audience is in the first place. For that, the more you know, the better. Demographics are a good start: age, gender, ethnicity, social/economic status, education level – different tones appeal more and less to each different type.



JONATHAN VIZZIER

*"Design isn't just how it looks, it's how it works."*

Demographics:

- 27 years old
- Masters in Visual Design
- Visual Designer
- Single
- Earns \$85K per year

list [text](#)

Behaviors & Beliefs:

- Obsessive over visual quality
- Hates when product managers use the word "just" before describing last-minute tasks
- Wants to be as involved in the design process as possible
- Loathes jargon, wishes people would get to the point

Characteristics & Attributes (0 to 5)

- Design experience: 3
- Education: 4
- Tech Savviness: 5
- Ambition: 5
- Workload: 5

Goals:

- To build a strong portfolio, regardless of whatever job I'm at
- To start mastering UX design by the end of this year for a career transition
- To rise up in his company and start getting assigned larger-profile projects
- Wants to help the product team see the value of emotional design, not just "core KPIs"

Photo credit: [UXPin](#)

From there, you can get into more personable features.

Are your target users impatient, impulsive, or generally rushed? If so, shorter, independent blocks of text will be better than eloquence and flow. Are they avid readers? If so, you may be able to win their hearts with well-paced paragraphs that tell a story (like what [Blue Bottle coffee does](#)).

## The Different Forms of Copy

It's true that interaction design is a dominantly visual medium.

What we said about tone holds true equally if not more-so for visuals – if your company wants to exhibit a calm and relaxing personality, heavy use of reds is a poor choice. But a site or app can't rely exclusively on visuals.

We can categorize when copy is most essential by the forms it takes. Below we've listed the some common forms of copy for interaction design.

*(Note that we don't discuss actual content, like news articles or blogs. This article is about language in interaction design – language in written content is a topic that could fill a library on its own.)*

### 1. Greeting

All sites and apps welcome their users, even if it's not an explicit "Welcome to our site!". A prominent greeting, even if just one or

two words, can put the user a little more at-ease right from the start, not to mention easily distinguish the home page from the rest.

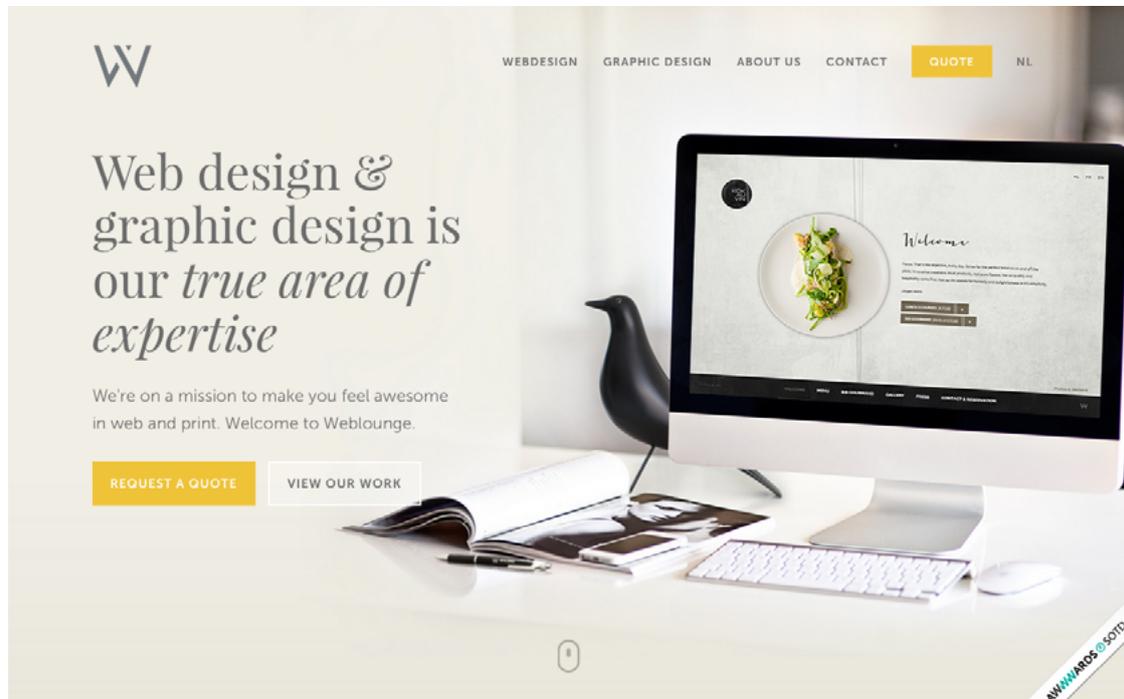


Photo credit: [Webdesign Agency Weblounge](#)

Within moments of landing on Weblounge’s [home page](#), you know who they are and what they do. Even if you know nothing about them going in, you can gauge their style and personality by their language (words like “expertise” and “awesome” are all signals). As a more subversive motive, their greeting even funnels the users’ focus into their calls-to-action, and gives more incentive to click.

Their choice of serif fonts and italic styles in the headline enhances the message with a strong sense of professionalism, although these fall more under visual representation.

Like we said before, your site interface must create a conversation with the user. In this case, the headline explains the agency’s

expertise, so it makes sense that it's presented in a more traditional typeface. The more casual copy beneath, with words like "awesome", is better presented as a serif font. It's the same effect as someone formally introducing themselves, then diving into lighter conversation.

## 2. Navigation

Even the most minimalistic sites use words in their navigation bar and buttons (even if they're triggered on hover). The only other alternatives would be to no buttons or navigation bars at all (which you usually only see on some [single-page sites](#)), or representing each option with an icon metaphor, as with the Facebook example below.

That works in some situations, but would be problematic with abstract pages like "Portfolio" or "Products".



*Photo credit: Facebook*

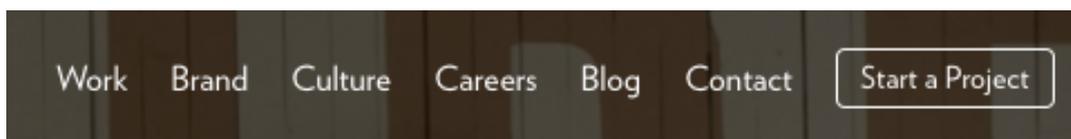
At their core, words *are* symbols, albeit highly stylized ones.

The word "home" represents in sight and sound that place you return to at the end of the day. The idea remains the same whether it's represented by a drawing of a square with a triangle on top, or a string of four specific letters. The advantage that words have over visual metaphors, though, is their range: they're able to express complex concepts like "portfolio" in a way that every

speaker of the same language will immediately comprehend. A drawing of a portfolio, however, is open to interpretation – and misinterpretation.

So most sites choose to simplify things by uses words in their navigation menu. This may seem pretty direct – “home” for home page, “help” for the help page – but it’s the subtleties that matter.

Do you say “My Account,” “Your Account,” or simply “Account.” “Contact,” “Contact Us,” or add some enthusiasm with “Contact Us Now!”



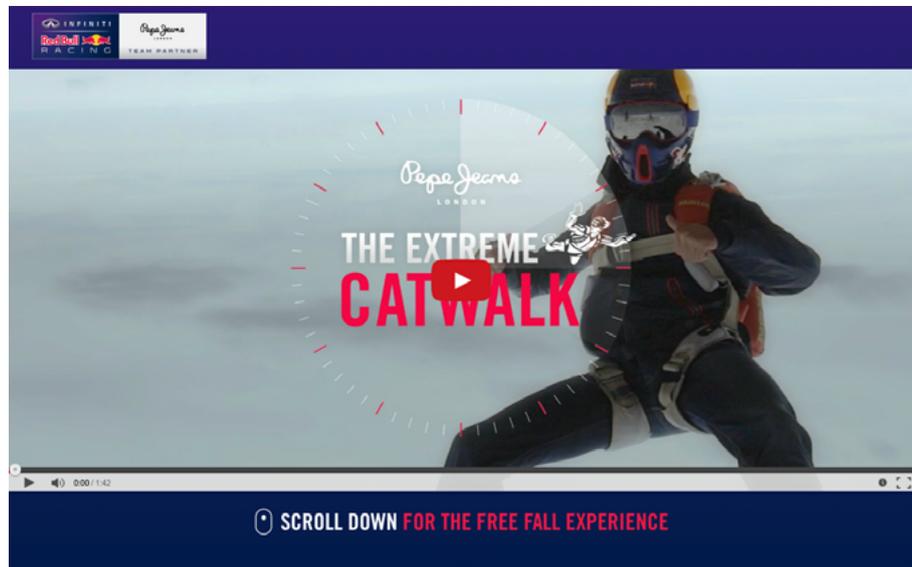
*Photo credit: [Urban Influence](#)*

The site for Urban Influence favors simplicity with one-word navigation hints, then breaking that rhythm with their call-to-action. Remember to choose your words carefully for top navigation and buttons. “Save” is not the same as “Proceed”, and “Let’s go!” isn’t as clear as just simply stating the action.

### 3. Instructions

Sometimes, even the best interfaces aren’t self-explanatory. If a certain procedure risks confusing the user, maybe it’s best to spell it out for them. These explanations can range from short to long, sometimes being a single line, sometimes a step-by-step instructional. They can also be dry or humorous – their primary

purpose is communicating useful information, with personality a secondary concern.



*Photo credit: Pepe Jeans: Extreme Catwalk*

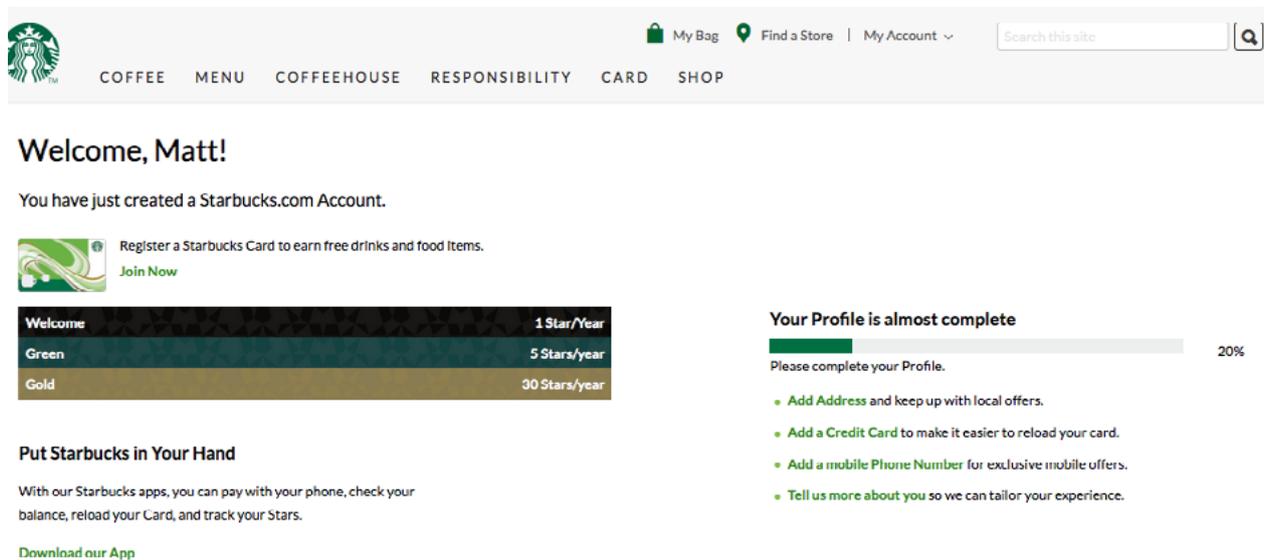
For their [Extreme Catwalk](#) jeans page, Pepe Jeans uses a simple “scroll down for the free fall experience“ to ensure that everyone knows how to use the site. While the mouse icon with the prominent scroll wheel might be enough on its own, the copy actually entices people by telling them the fun experience that’s triggered by scrolling.

#### 4. Feedback

Feedback is how you communicate directly with users in response to their actions.

Feedback is a core aspect of interaction design because it encourages users and provides a sense of security. As UX consultant Joe Napoli suggests, feedback helps [provides four types of answers to users](#):

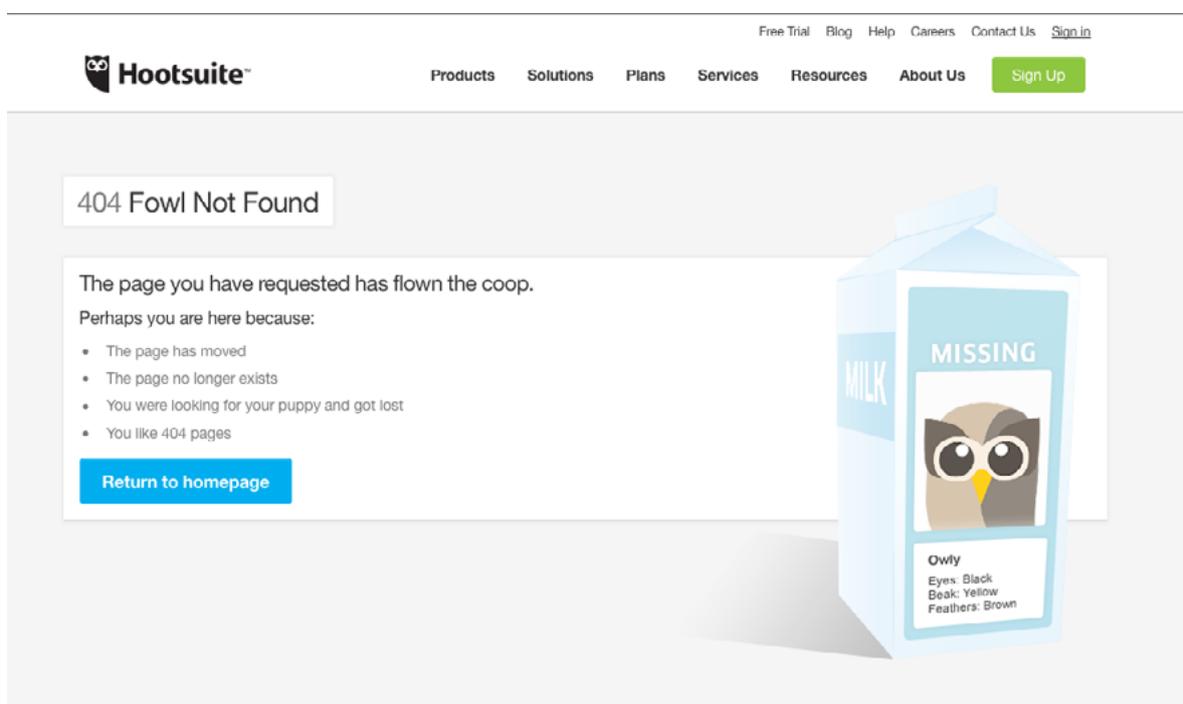
1. **Location** – What page the user is visiting
2. **Current status** – What’s happening on the page, and if the user is any closer to their goal
3. **Next steps** – What will happen next, and how the user can trigger it
4. **Validation** – If any errors were made, or any outstanding actions required



*Photo credit: Starbucks*

One of the most common feedback messages is the confirmation that a signup was successful, as with the Starbucks example above. Not only is it nice to be appreciated with a warm “welcome” or “thank you,” but the feedback message also signals that the signup process is finished so that we can move on. This Starbucks feedback page also allows for furthering ulterior motives – after the signup is a good time to plug buying a Starbucks card, completing the profile, or downloading their app.

Error messages, too, fall under this category, although they would sometimes have equal claim to instructions if they explain how to handle the problem. Language is especially important for error messages, as a means to “soften the blow” of there being an error in the first place. When used with skill (and a bit of humor), word choice can actually turn a bad experience into a good one, as with amusing 404 pages.



*Photo credit: Hootsuite*

Hootsuite adds a little humor and furthers their bird brand identity with their 404 page. Their use of bird-related humor and clever reasons for having arrived there turn what could have been a damaging user experience into a surprisingly positive one.

## 5. Calls-to-Action

Anyone in sales will tell you the importance of wording when closing a deal.

Just as with navigation, the key to language in calls-to-actions subtlety. Because you are limited to only a few words within a button, each one must be weighed and optimized.

## 6. Data

The most basic use of language in a site or app is data: the company's addresses, phone numbers, legal text that's required to be there, etc. There's very little wiggle-room on the data itself (except for visual choices, such as font or size), but the introduction of the data can be adapted to your tone.

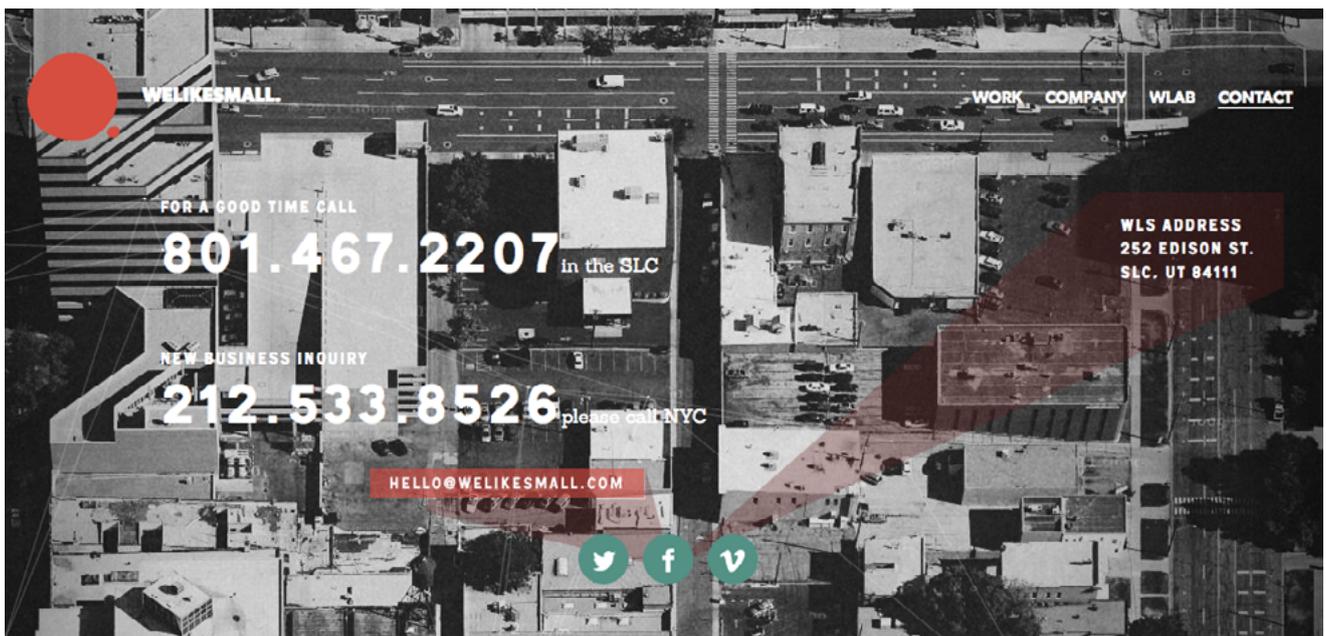


Photo credit: [Welikesmall](#)

The digital agency Welikesmall adds a little spice to an otherwise bland contact page. All the necessary information is there – numbers, address, email, even social media links – but jokes like “for a good time call...” add a little something extra – and memorable, which is good for adding a bit of [delight to the experience](#).

## Conclusion

As Basecamp suggests in their excellent online book [Getting Real](#), “If you think every pixel, every icon, every typeface matters, then you also need to believe every letter matters.”

You can’t separate copy from design because it’s all part of the same interface. Know your user, know your constraints, and make sure you have clear and interesting copy to complement the design.

## Additional Resources

1. [From Google Ventures: 5 Rules for Great Interface Copy](#) – John Zeratsky (Fastco Design)
2. [How to Write Copy for Web Interfaces](#) – Jonas Downey (Basecamp)
3. [The Importance of Copywriting in Web Design](#) – Joshua Johnson (Designshack)
4. [Death to Lorem Ipsum](#) – Luke Wroblewski
5. [7 Rules for Creating Gorgeous UI](#) – Erik Kennedy

# Reflective Space

Your design lives within a finite screen. There is only so much that can be said, done, and offered within that tiny box, and so every last pixel is valuable real estate.



*Photo credit: "bureauhub architecture..." [Forgemind ArchiMedia](#). [Creative Commons](#).*

Of course even amateur designers know not to overload a single page, but when it comes to exactly how much white space to include, sometimes even seasoned designers might draw a blank.

White space, or “**negative space**” as it’s also known – the two terms are used interchangeably – refers to any screen space between existing elements. It doesn’t need to be white, or even blank (if, for example, you’re using a patterned, colored, or textured background). Negative space creates a vacuum of content, which then draws more attention to the existing content.

In this article, we’ll discuss the how to apply one the most powerful tools in a designer’s toolbox: nothing at all.

## Empty Causes

Negative space has been a part of aesthetic theory from the very beginning.

In digital design, though, this emptiness holds more weight, so to speak.

Negative space isn’t just visually appealing, it must fulfill the more practical roles of balancing the **visual hierarchy** and leading the users’ eyes to strategic points of interaction. Moreover, if there is text present, white space must also create the most **legible and readable** environment on top of its other duties.

In general, white space directly affects the following areas:

- **Eye-scanning** – The space between bigger elements (macro white space) affects how the user scans the page, and when used prop-

erly can guide the user's sight to notice whichever elements you want. This is helpful for creating a brand identity and increasing user interactions.



Photo credit: [Technics](#)

- **Legibility** – The space between smaller elements (micro) like letters, lines of texts, list items, and sometimes icons will affect how clearly and quickly each can be read and possibly selected.
- **Aesthetics** – When looking at the big picture, white space plays a big part in the visual organization (and therefore aesthetics) of the interface. For example, random clustering of content rarely looks good.
- **Luxury** – Generous white space infuses your page with an air of elegance and sophistication.

To better understand how to apply it, we can categorize the different types of white space (macro and micro), as well as the different ways to use them (passive and active).

## Macro and Micro

Where and how white space is used on a page will affect its role. To simplify this, we can break these types up into macro and micro.

### 1. Macro White Space

Macro white space refers to the spacing between large elements. This is the spacing used for:

- General composition
- Separating different elements
- Text columns
- Margins
- Padding
- Space within actual graphics/images

Macro white space heavily affects the user's visual flow, either gently nudging or forcefully push their attention where you want. The rule here is that **larger distances push harder**. You want to strike a balance, however, because too much white space violates [Gestalt Principles](#) and weakens the relationships between objects.

Let's look at art director [Tomasz Wysocki](#)'s site for an example of how white space entices user interaction.

The first thing most users will notice is the page's title, "Digital Art & Experiments" in an atypical sans-serif typeface. In conjunction with the text's size, the white space surrounding the title funnels

the users' attention there from both sides. The top and bottom menus, too, also attract attention, though not as much since they only have space on one side. Overall, the white space does its job of drawing attention, but the design is actually deceptively simple.

---

Tomasz Wysocki

Work

Profile

Contact

## Digital Art & Experiments

Recent projects

01

Neanderthal  
Art Direction & Retouching

02

Goverdose - Deck  
Drawing & Retouching

03

Wolf Hybrid  
Art Direction & Retouching

04

Goverdose - Void  
Photography & Retouching

05

Mercedes-Benz Biome  
Art Direction & Design

*Photo credit: [Tomasz Wysocki](#)*

Wysocki actually uses the white space as a blank canvas for surprising us with the richness of his work. Upon hovering over any of the bottom navigation, we are treated to a full-page background image of the work. The effect creates an almost childlike joy of discovery: we stumble into a blank space, only to find that each drawer is filled with visual delight.

You can see below how dramatically the screen transforms upon hover:

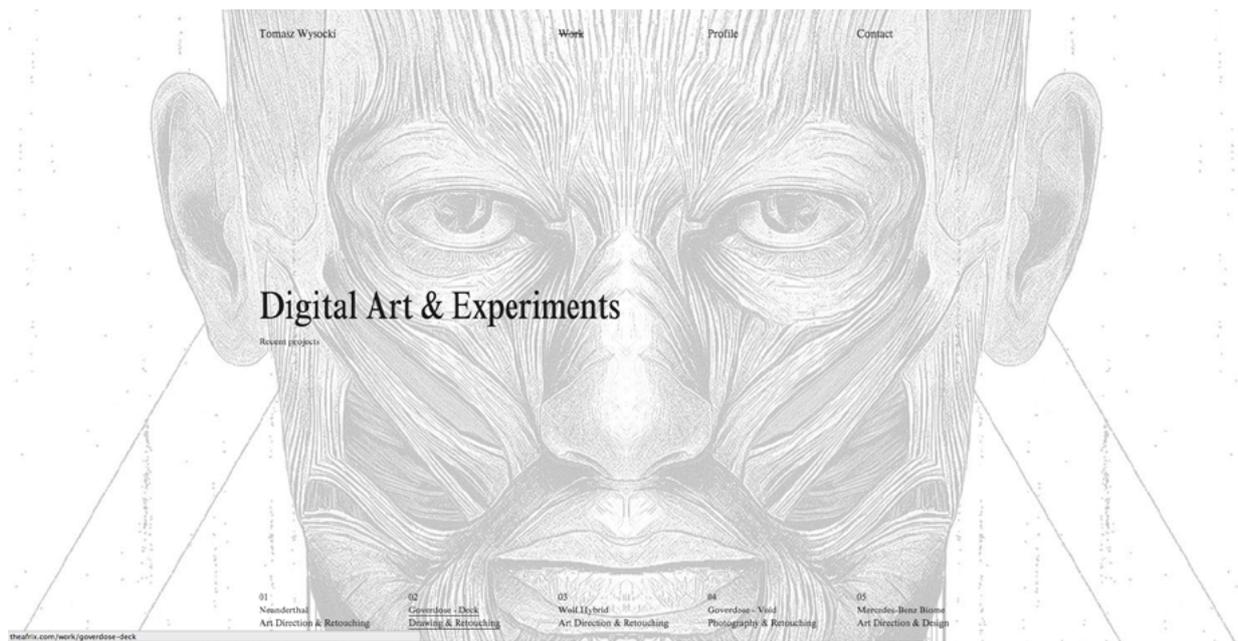


Photo credit: [Tomasz Wysocki](#)

By using white space as a tool for luring users into his work, Wysocki creates an experience that is strangely addictive. After the first work appears, we want to see what else he's hidden from us – it feels counterintuitive from a [discoverability standpoint](#) (since you'd want to reveal the most important content), but it works because it's executed with the perfect level of intrigue.

## 2. Micro White Space

On the other hand, when designers mention micro white space, they are referring to the space between smaller elements, or the elements within greater elements. These include:

- Letters
- Lines of Text
- Paragraphs
- List Items
- Buttons & Icons

Micro white space is used mostly for the overall clarity of the site, specifically legibility of typography (how clearly you can distinguish each letter). When adding space in and around text, you'll want to strike the balance between just enough to aid clarity, but not so much that it distracts from more important elements. It's usually a good idea to set the line height (vertical space between lines) to around 1.5x your type size.

As we mentioned when discussing the Gestalt principles in our [Web UI Design for the Human Eye](#), putting elements in close proximity also suggests they function similarly. Micro white space can help suggest a relationship between buttons or links, and mimicking this spacing elsewhere reinforces a pattern, which increases recognition (and [learnability](#)) with use.

While macro and micro are the types of white space, each can be used either passively or actively, which we'll explain now.

## Passive and Active Space

The application of white space all depends upon context.

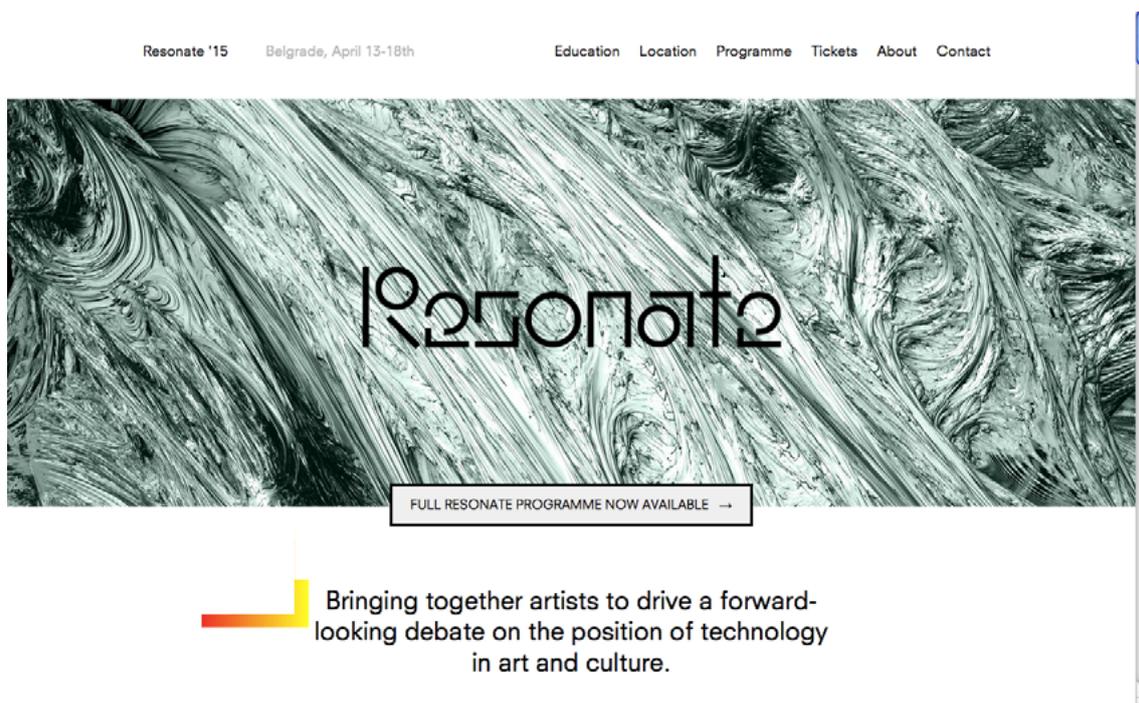
As we said above, the more space used, the stronger the pull. But you don't always want the strongest pull possible for every element on a page, not to mention how much screen real estate that would consume.

Let's look at how passive and active space help create balance in negative space.

## 1. Passive Space

Think of **passive white space** as the bare minimum.

Without enough white space, a site becomes illegible and frustrating to navigate, as effort is required to make sense of the jumble. Passive white space is however much white space is required to make the site comprehensible.



*Photo credit: [Resonate '15](#)*

In the above example, take a look at the spacing between the words/links at the top navigation bar. Also, look at the text at the bottom and the spacing between the letters, words, and lines. Do you notice anything out of the ordinary? You shouldn't, they're all spaced so as not to draw attention. That's passive spacing.

For macro white space, passive spacing means adding enough borders and margins to clarify the distinctions between elements and avoid confusion. For example, putting enough space between a login navigation bar and a site navigation bar at the top of the screen.

For micro white space, this means spacing out letters, lines of text, and paragraphs to maximize readability, and spacing items in a list or menu to make them individually easy to spot when scanning (in other words, removing clutter).

Passive applications should feel organic and natural. In fact, **the main purpose of passive white space is that it goes unnoticed.** What makes it passive is that it doesn't draw attention to itself. It simply looks "normal."

The moment when enough space is used that it starts to stand out, then it becomes active.

## 2. Active Space

Using white space actively is attempting to influence your user's visual flow. Surrounding an element with a large amount of white space is a great way to get it noticed.

There are actually a lot of elements on the above page: navigation tabs, social media links, even legal information. However, the most prominent is clearly the interactive "1000" graphic that's dead center. By shrinking and pushing the other elements to the

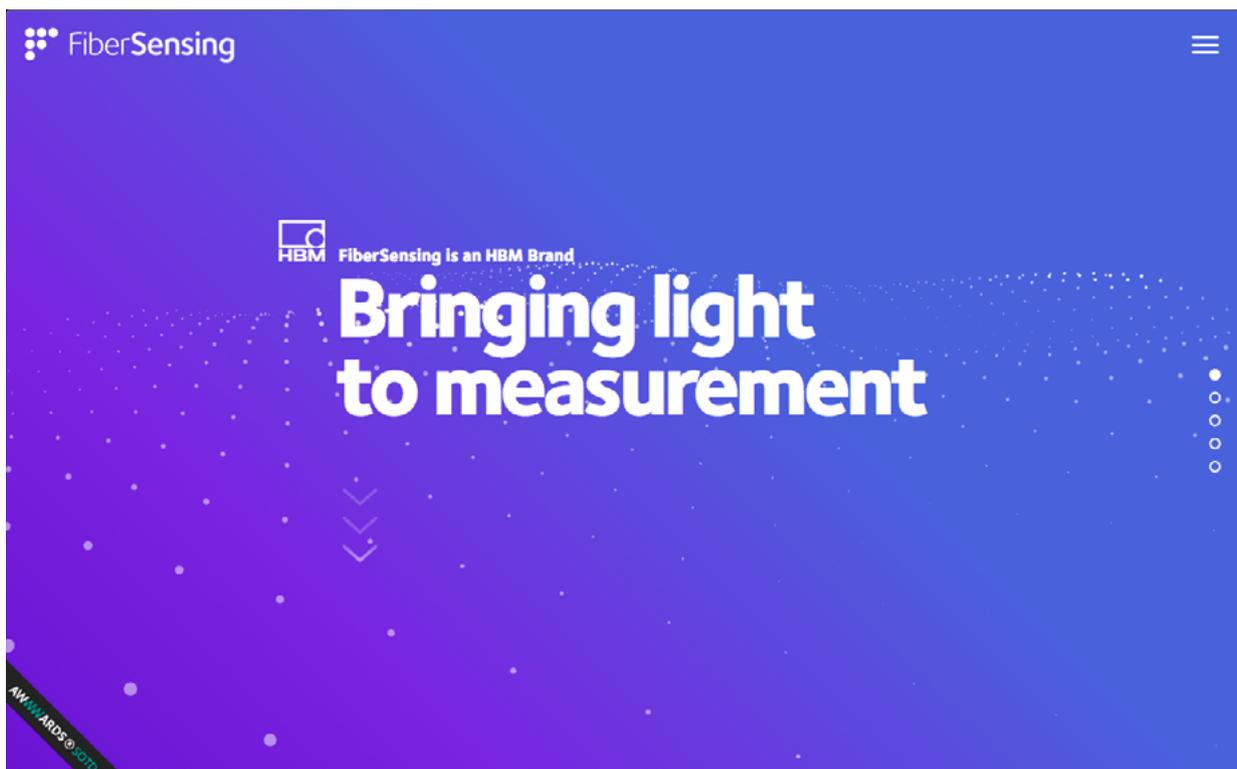
corners, the designers at [Chrome Experiments](#) actively maximize the space around the element they want the users to interact with most.



*Photo credit: [1000: Chrome Experiments](#)*

Likewise, minimizing the amount of space between a smaller line and the one proceeding may be a good way to “hide” it, as is often seen with legal requirements or copyright information. See how, below, the line “FiberSensing is an HBM Brand” is displayed without drawing too much attention.

Macro white space is often used actively to draw attention to the page’s single main focus, or to separate more important elements from the pack.



*Photo credit: HBM FiberSensing*

However, it can also be used with micro white space. [Mark Boulton explains in an A List Apart piece](#) that he sometimes applies active spacing around a particular quote or paragraph within a block of text in order to draw attention to it. This is great way to emphasize the most useful points of your content to users who are just scanning.

At this point, we're getting into the strategic use of varying amounts of white space. This could be thought of as different degrees of minimalism, which we'll explain below.

## Minimalism

The more white space you use, the more minimalistic your page becomes since you'll need to remove elements to prevent clutter.

Minimalism is a design philosophy that's neither good nor bad – it simply states that you remove any noise so users can focus on the content. As you trim away the bells and whistles, the remaining content stands proud amidst the elegance of space.

Like we described in *The Zen of White Space in Web Design*, minimalism affects your site in a couple ways: the amount of elements present, and the perception of luxury.

### 1. Amount of Elements

The less elements you have on your page, the more powerful each individual element becomes.

If you have only one thing on your page, even tucked away in the corner, it will become the sole focus of your user. If you have a hundred tiny things, your users will either begrudgingly sift through them for their point of interest, or more realistically, just give up from [choice paralysis](#).

This is relevant because the easiest way to increase the white space at your disposal is reducing the number of elements on the page. But we know that's much easier said than done. Minimalism as a philosophy applies to any site – you never want to fill the screen

with anything the user doesn't need. Minimalism as an *aesthetic*, however, is not appropriate for every site since content-heavy sites won't be able to support the bare look.

When it comes to minimalism, remember that the aesthetic is the byproduct and not the goal. The only way you'll achieve the right level of minimalism is to subtract just enough interface objects until the design almost fails, then test the design with users, stopping when you hit the tipping point.



Photo credit: [voghi](#)

The site for the Italian fashion brand [voghi](#) keeps it simple and beautiful. There are only two clickable elements on the screen: the hamburger menu at the side and the arrow at the bottom. With the contact information minimized at the right, the lack of com-

peting visuals focus the attention on the gorgeous graphic, which then leads attention to the arrow.

How you balance the significance of your items is up to you. Some pages have only one clickable link to ensure the user goes where the designer wants. Other sites have many menus of pulldown submenus to ensure that the user chooses exactly the option they want. As [Kayla Knight suggests](#), you could consider removing taglines, “Featured Content”, and simplifying your navigation. Of course, that all depends on your brand and product.

## 2. Perception of Luxury

Minimalism has become synonymous with luxury, and its use immediately conjures an atmosphere of sophistication, fashion, and elegance. Fashion websites are notorious users of minimalism in their digital designs – but it’s rare to find those same designs for bargain or mass-market firms.

The perception of luxury has a direct correlation to the amount of white space:

- **Heavy white space** is seen as luxurious, high-end, or sophisticated, and as such expensive.
- **Balanced white space** is seen as, well, balanced – affordable but still quality.
- **Little white space** is seen as cheap, low-quality, and the clutter is also displeasing to look at.



Photo credit: [Amazon](#)

Compare the fashion website [voghi](#) we first examined to this screenshot from [Amazon](#).

Amazon is more cluttered and includes more navigation options and promotions. Both sites sell high-end fashion products, but which do you think a typical fashionable user would prefer? What about a reasonable, price-saver type of shopper?

This applies to macro and micro space, but also – and most importantly – to the images used within the site itself. Browsing the photography from fashion websites, you'll notice more artistry applied than the average photography from, say, an electronics website.

Ultimately, you'll always want to start first and foremost with the needs of your users. Research your users, create useful personas, then consider how white space can frame content so they can best accomplish their goals.

## Conclusion

As a visual art, interaction design can't neglect one of its most fundamental artistic principles. Nor should it – the power of white space goes far beyond aesthetics and can be used strategically to further the more business-related goals of interaction design.

At the bare minimum level, its use facilitates the basic functions of a site or app like readability and navigation. But in the hands of an expert, the smart use of white space transforms otherwise plain interfaces into designs that users *want* to interact with.

## Additional Resources

1. [Whitespace](#) – Mark Boulton (A List Apart)
2. [White Space: Designing the Invisible](#) – David Kadavy (Hack Design)
3. [The Characteristics of Minimalism](#) – Kate Meyer (Nielsen Norman Group)
4. [Best Minimal Websites](#) – awwwards
5. [What to Do With Whitespace](#) – Zack Rutherford (awwwards)

# Persuasive Paths

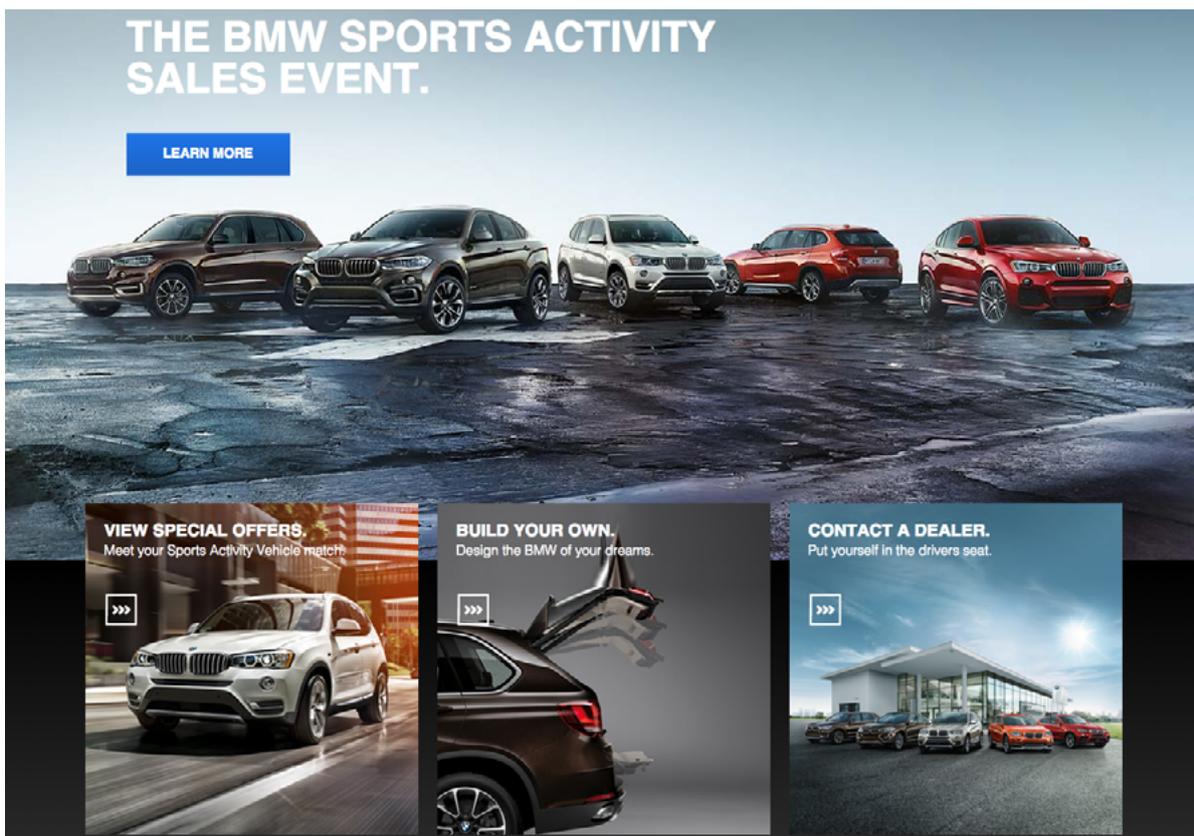
Everyone knows the importance of suggestion. Because your interface is how you directly communicate with the user, you should design it for persuasion.

Colleen Roller, Senior User Researcher at Merrill Lynch, provides [some tips](#) for improving user decisionmaking. Some of these tactics are adapted for digital content from interpersonal communication techniques, so let's dive into more detail below.

## Salience

Our discussion of designing for scanning extends beyond just the F or Z pattern.

Salience refers to when an object appears more important than its surroundings. Both you and the user want to achieve their goals, so why not create a design that satisfies both your needs?



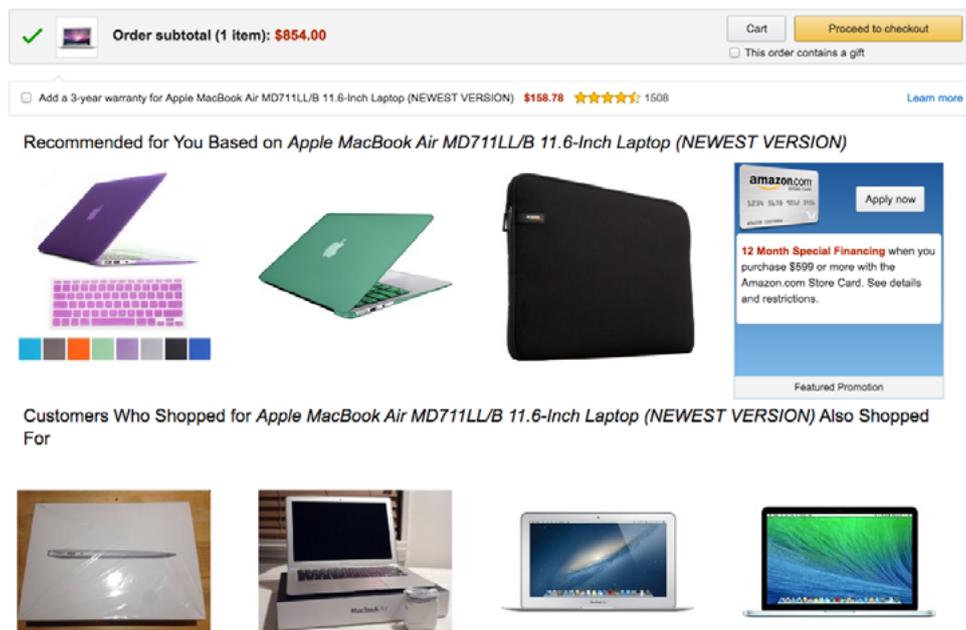
**BMW North America**'s site design makes it easy for users to decide where to go. The blue call to action stands out against the vehicle background, while the three options below it are all strong secondary choices.

If you're interested in a BMW, most of the important decisions are covered here, covering the spectrum of buyer readiness:

- Learn about a seasonal sale (most prominent option)
- Learn about other special offers
- Customize your own BMW
- Contact a dealer

The site presents these options in a clear hierarchy that's easy to interpret thanks to the grid format.

Saliency is enhanced when you present it in the right context. For ecommerce sites, one of the best ways to present sale items or accessories is when someone has already shown interest in a product.



For example, on **Amazon**, once I've placed an item in the cart, the site suggests that you'll also need something to protect the laptop (like the black case). They also suggest a warranty. The checkout stage is a perfect time to remind users about "upsell" products since they've already demonstrated a willingness to buy.

## Anchoring & Ordering

First impressions set the context for the rest of the experience; creating this frame of reference is anchoring. For example, if a user sees an expensive laptop displayed prominently, it will make other laptops on the screen seem cheaper. While it might seem counter-intuitive, this initial "sticker shock" makes other options more attractive.

One of the best ways to use anchoring is with the order you choose to display your content.

In the above example, putting your most expensive laptop at the top of a product list is a subtle way of anchoring it in the user's mind. Whichever laptop you choose to list next will automatically look more affordable.

## Framing

Framing is the language in which an option is presented.

Framing can also complement anchoring and ordering – if you have a surcharge for using credit cards, you can “frame” the cash price as a discount. The credit card price becomes the anchor, and the cash price seems more attractive.

## Context

The design below from **Macy's** includes a higher price, but *feels* like a good deal thanks to the \$75 price anchor.

As Roller explains, this is because decision-making requires the logical brain and the “gut brain” – but the gut leaves the first and strongest impression. The gut brain decides, while the logical brain usually just reviews the decision.

◀ [Back to Results](#) | You are in: [Men](#) > [Shoes](#) > [Sneakers & Athletic](#)

## Madden Denver Hi-Top Sneakers

Web ID: 1585761

★★★★★ [2 reviews](#)

**Limited-Time Special**

Reg. \$75.00  
Was \$64.99  
**Sale \$49.99**

Sale ends 2/16/15 [Pricing Policy](#)



larger view

Color: **Tan**

Size:

8M	8.5M	9M	9.5M
10M	10.5M	11M	11.5M
12M	13M		

Qty: 1

[add to bag](#)

[e-gift it](#)

What's e-gifting?

[groupgift it](#)

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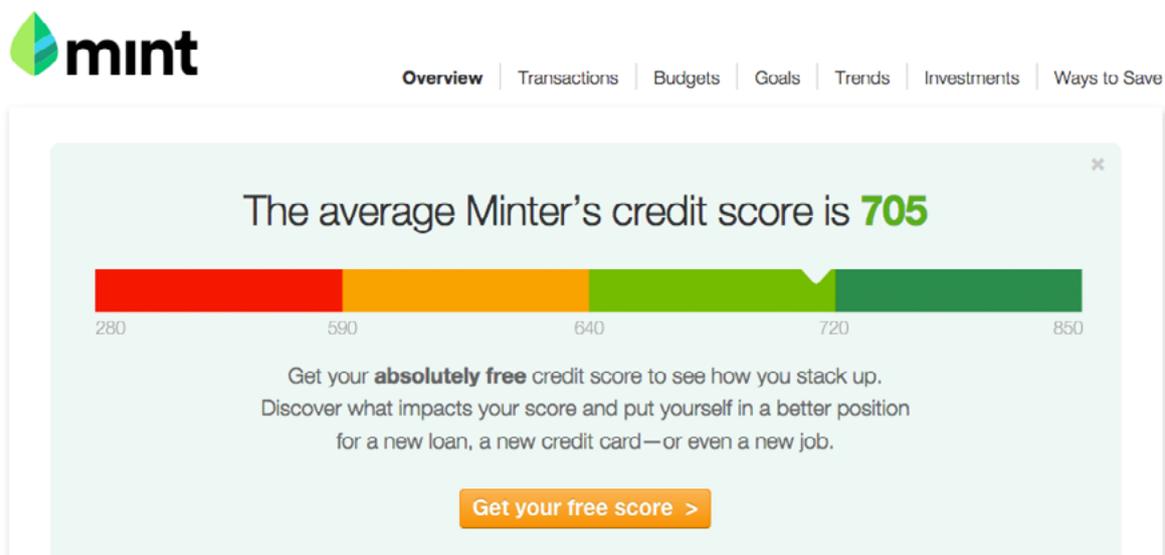
If you wanted to make context even more powerful, combine it with the tactic of ordering. For example, listing a \$109.99 pair of shoes before the one shown above would make the cheaper set more enticing.

To learn more about salience in decision-making, check out this [excellent piece](#) on UXMag.

## Reference

If you want people to do something, show how far they've already come.

This could be something as simple as a progress bar (like the profile completeness meter for **LinkedIn**), or something more complex like **Mint** below.



While this requires some more complex data capability, this tactic provides social reference as a means of incentivizing users to interact deeper. Once users see the average score, they'll actually want to request a free credit report so they can see if they've beaten others.

## Loss Aversion

**Studies show** that people fear loss more than they value gains. “You can save \$30 by signing up,” is weaker than, “You’re losing \$30 if you don’t sign up.”

One of the best uses of the loss aversion for web design is in the **Scarcity Principle** – limiting the availability of time, products, inclusions (membership), or information to make each seem more valuable. The UI pattern of a clock counting down the end of a sale, for example, is a glaring reminder to the user of the loss they could experience if they wait, inciting them to *avert that loss* by buying quickly.

In the example below, **Groupon** makes use of both time limits and product availability in their sales.



FROM  
**\$49.99**

**BUY!** ▾

VALUE	DISCOUNT	YOU SAVE
\$182	73%	\$132.01

 GIVE AS A GIFT

---

LIMITED TIME ONLY!  
**5 days 04:29:29**

---

LIMITED QUANTITY AVAILABLE  
**Over 160 bought**

## Conclusion

While big decisions like buying a expensive product might overshadow the smaller decisions of where to click next; it's the smaller decisions that affect the user's enjoyment of a product.

Identify potential decisions your users could make – big or small – and design accordingly. This means, as we mentioned above, reducing secondary content and menu selections, creating a cohesive layout, and applying some tried-and-true persuasion techniques.

When you think about it, all interaction design is a form of persuasion. Whether we're designing an animated transition or an entire site map, every element must help users enter a state of “flow” in which all the decisions feel subconscious.

Create the right paths, provide the right visual cues, then get out of the way.

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