

# What I learned interning at Facebook



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Ever since I was in middle school, I've wanted to work for Facebook. Seeing how people interact online has always been fascinating to me. Whether it be through social media channels like Facebook, virtual worlds like IMVU, or games like Club Penguin. I grew up in a generation that lived on the internet, and now we're finally starting to build it.

This summer, I had the pleasure of working at Facebook as a Product Design Intern. In addition to all the friends I made, the food I ate, and the places I visited, I learned a lot about what it means to build valuable products.

This wasn't my first job as a designer, but this was my first experience building products at such a large scale. Designing something that could potentially be in front of 2 billion people is no easy task.

These are a few lessons I learned building products for the largest social media company in the world.

## **Learn to let go**

As a designer, it's important to know when to let go of a design direction. It's easy to get caught up in your work, and be defensive towards suggestions or critique. After spending so long building something, it's easy to get attached. If someone comes up with a better way for the product to behave, don't be afraid to admit it. In order to design the best experience, it's important to always put the people who will be using the product first and set your ego aside.

## **Lean into criticism**

Constructive criticism is your best friend as a designer. At a large company, design is very much a collaborative process. Every day is spent working cross-functionally, which might come as a surprise to freelance designers and people at smaller companies. Weekly critiques can be a great opportunity to show what you've been working on. At Facebook, I had work to show every week so I could iterate on my designs in a meaningful way for the next critique. When I learned to accept criticism instead of fight it, I found myself building better products. Instead of holding onto an original direction I had, I built upon feedback and created a higher quality product.

## **Take advantage of the network**

I can honestly say I met some of the most talented, driven people in my life during my internship. Coming from a small town in Oklahoma, I wasn't used to being surrounded by so many people interested in technology, entrepreneurship, and design. Talking to the other interns and full time employees was motivating. I'm grateful for Facebook's culture that encourages people to reach out to others at the company. Even in my first week there, I was chatting with someone whose blog posts I had been reading for the past year. Luckily, this doesn't just apply to Facebook. Take advantage of the network around you. Whether it's meetups, Twitter, or other designers in the office, you're sure to meet some amazing people.

## **Don't compete, collaborate**

At Facebook, I was lucky enough to have a highly collaborative intern group. We all leaned on each other throughout the internship on questions about design tools, how to have tough conversations with our managers, and how to navigate such a huge campus. It never felt like we were competing for spots or recognition. We were a team. We held weekly hangouts with our intern group to share insights from the past week. Everyone grew together. When you learn to collaborate with those around you, you have the opportunity to grow much faster than you do on your own. Suddenly, in a company of over 25,000 people, I felt like more than just another employee. It's more fun when everyone succeeds.

## **Socialize your work**

I always thought good work spoke for itself. It was during my internship that I realized how important sharing your work is. If you don't socialize your work and share it among different teams, there's little chance it will be seen by people outside your immediate network. Promoting your work can also allow for it to have a bigger impact at the company. If you're working on a similar design problem as someone in another department, it's possible that they will take aspects of your design and implement them in different areas of the product. You can socialize your work by setting up meetings with people working on similar problems, sharing your designs on internal platforms, and simply having conversations with people around the company about what you're working on.

## **Embrace the unexpected**

You won't know how to do everything. If the point of an internship is to learn, you'll have to accept the fact that you don't know how to do certain things that will be asked of you. Perhaps one of the most important things I learned was to embrace the unexpected. As long as you have a desire to learn, you will figure out what you need to know. There will more than likely be unexpected changes to a design, to a deadline, or even to a product direction. Embrace them, adapt to them. You'll learn faster this way.

## **Have fun!**

Internships can be stressful. It's important to de-compress and take time for yourself. This means going out with friends, reading a book, and forgetting about work. I found that I was much more productive the next day if I took time to exercise, spend time with others, and do something creative after work. If you're a Silicon Valley intern, take advantage of the location. The Bay Area is beautiful and there's always something going on. You may be working, but it's still summer. Take some time to enjoy it.

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Overall, I had an unforgettable summer working as a design intern at Facebook. I designed products, made lifelong friendships, and learned some important lessons along the way.

If you're a student, I highly recommend interning at a large tech company. If you have any questions on how to get started in design or how to find an internship in tech, email me at [mar@marianoavila.com](mailto:mar@marianoavila.com) or find me on twitter.



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