UXPin

Web UI Design for the Human Eye

Principles of Visual Consistency

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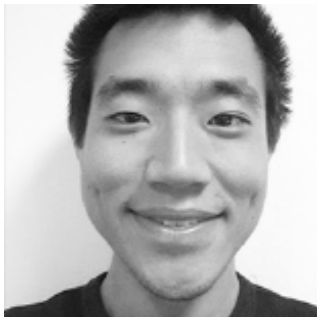

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With a passion for writing and an interest in everything anything related to design or technology, Matt Ellis found freelance writing best suited his skills and allowed him to be paid for his curiosity. Having worked with various design and tech companies in the past, he feels quite at home at UXPin as the go-to writer, researcher, and editor. When he's not writing, Matt loves to travel, another byproduct of curiosity.

Introduction

Since vision is the strongest human sense, your design must reflect a sense of order and logic – otherwise users will just go to your competitors instead.

Visual consistency doesn't just make your interface easier to use and learn, it also creates trust. Designs which are inconsistent with user expectations will feel foreign and difficult to use. Designs which are inconsistent from page to page will feel illogical and chaotic.

Like we've stated before, consistency does not equate to uniformity. Design is not a formula of drag-and-drop templates. You need to know when to follow best practices and when to bend the rules.

The balance between familiarity and originality is undoubtedly one of the most difficult decisions in design. To help you exercise the best creative judgment, we've analyzed examples of visual consistency from companies like **Squarespace**, **Redhat**, **Jukely**, **Wunderlist**, and more. We'll also discuss topics ranging from conducting

research to discover user expectations, reviewing important areas of visual consistency, and applying affordances & UI patterns to create familiarity.

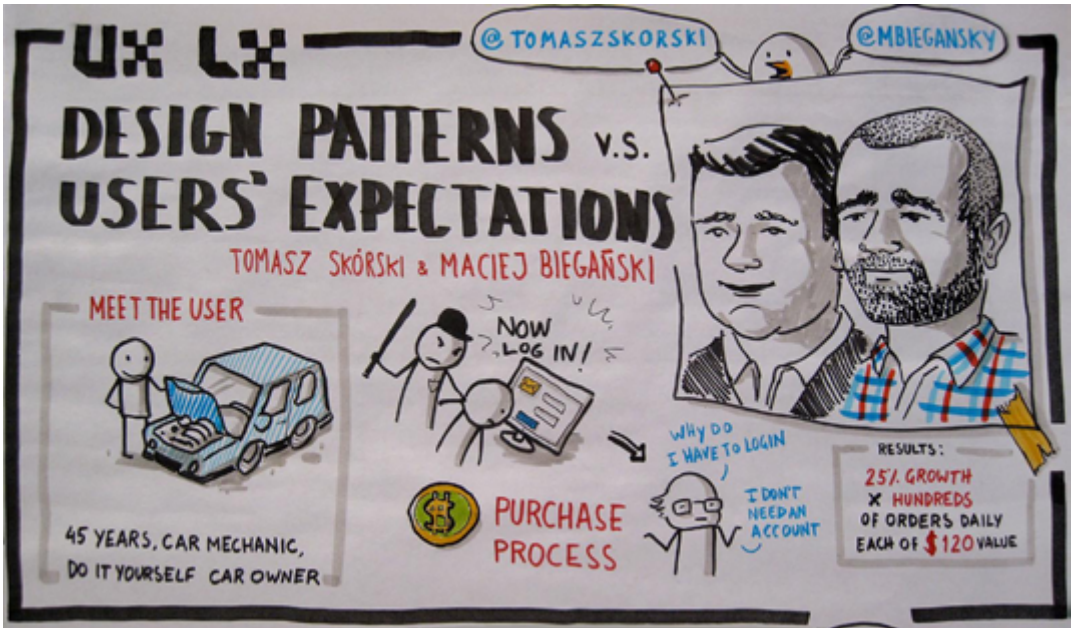
If you find this book helpful, feel free to share with anyone else who might enjoy it.

For the love of UI design,
Jerry Cao
co-written by Kamil Zieba, Krzysztof Stryjewski, and Matt Ellis

Uncovering User Expectations Before Design

As information-age artists, designers enjoy their creative freedom. But concepts like “consistency” and “following patterns” don’t necessarily restrict this freedom. Instead, they provide a foundation of familiarity upon which to layer creative nuances.

Originality helps you cross the chasm into emotional design, but that will all be meaningless unless your design works the way users expect.



Source: “Design Patterns vs. Users’ Expectations...” visualpun.ch. Creative Commons.

In this chapter, we'll talk about how to approach user expectations in terms of consistency, how usability testing can reveal what your users think, and how the use of patterns and clear labels can give your user that feeling of satisfaction.

Consistency creates a foundation of familiarity for designers to layer creative nuances.

Why You Need to Think About Consistency First

Why is it so important that you think about user expectations – and therefore consistency – before even creating a single mockup? Because otherwise you're going to be biased.

If you've already envisioned an interface by the time you start asking yourself, "what does the user expect?" then it's going to be harder to correct your mistakes – if you're even able to notice them. By that point, you'll already have a rough idea of the visual design patterns, so it'll be harder to look at them from a fresh perspective. You'll be desensitized to what a new user might think about during the first interaction with your design.

Empathizing with your user is at the heart of interaction design, and this is a more difficult task with an existing design than one still being formulated. Sure, you could track the behavioral patterns

and modify your UI based on user interactions. But even so, you're better off putting thought into it beforehand so that the later modifications are less extreme.

Source: "Listening (the extended research dept)" Xavier Vergés. Creative Commons.

The time to consider user expectations and consistency is right at the start, when you're working with the team on the rough feature set. At that time, you're closest to the user's mindsets: the design is new to you both.

This applies to both external and internal consistency. Since user expectations carry over from previous experiences, even new designs must follow standard conventions (external consistency). But you also need to keep internal pages consistent with each other, because your users will develop new expectations as they use your site or app.

While intuition might get you part of the way, it's best to build your designs on solid, concrete evidence.

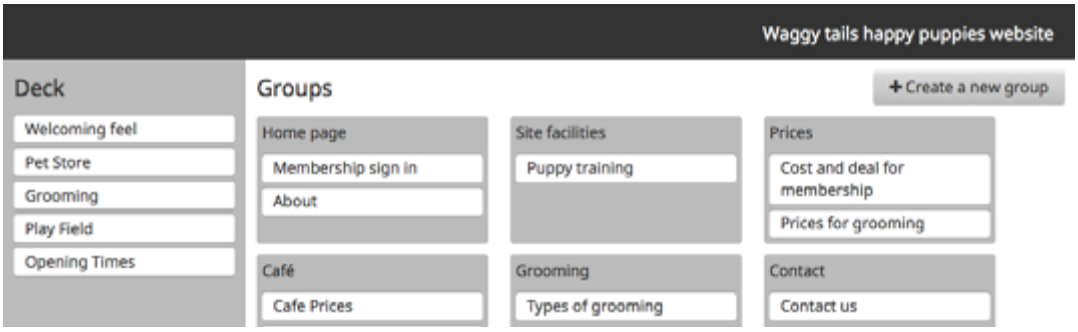
Testing Before Design

Usability testing can help you understand user expectations and validate your assumptions. To ensure consistency in your design, we recommend running usability tests both before and during the design process.

We'll focus here on the tests that you'd want to run before designing, since these can be a little lesser known. Below, we'll talk about the three most helpful pre-design tests: card sorting, user interviews, and heuristics reviews.

1. Card Sorting

Because navigation is a crucial element in user interaction, you'll want to create the information architecture that feels the most natural to your user. The beauty of card sorting is that it helps you design your information architecture according to natural thought patterns.



Source: ConceptCodify

There are two types of card sorts:

- **Open Sorting**: Users are provided only with the labels, and are left to group them however they see fit. Once grouped, users are asked to give names to the groups themselves. This is recommended for generating new ideas since you can work backwards from users' natural thought processes.
- **Closed Sorting**: As with open sorting, users are given the labels; however, they are asked to categorize them into existing groups. This is recommended if you're updating a finalized website structure.

We found closed card sorting to be extremely helpful when redesigning Yelp (as an exercise) to better match user expectations. After we ran the test, we learned that important search filters weren't immediately available, which of course increased friction. For example, users determined that filtering for meals (like "Serves Dinner") should be immediately available, yet the current design buried it under another layer of filters.

2. User Interviews

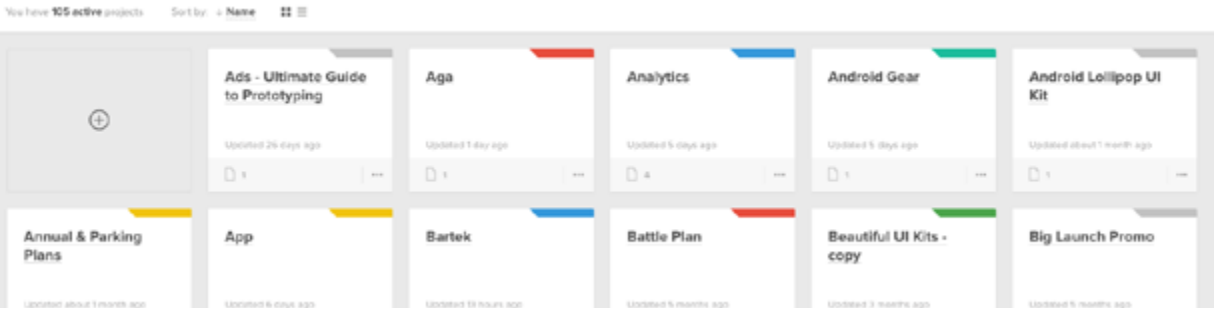
User interviews can be as elaborate or cost-effective as you'd like, whether they come to you, you go to them (or you simply talk through Skype).

Before transitioning UXPin from a paper notepad to a cloud design app, we actually interviewed more than 50 designers. Be-

cause the design market is such a saturated space, we wanted to speak with as many designers as possible so that we could learn about their workflow, processes, inspirations, and expectations from good design tools.

Once we started designing the current UXPin, we frequently referred back to the notes from our interviews to make sure our concepts and mockups aligned with the expectations our users developed from other tools.

For example, in order to satisfy differing expectations, our project layout allows users to choose either a grid or list view – designers had varying preferences based on whether they used Trello, Asana, or other tools to manage projects. We learned that specifically through user interviews.



Source: UXPin

When conducting the actual interviews, remember that you aren't asking users specific design questions like "Do you prefer an infinite scroll or tabs?" You want to ask deeper questions about their habits, behaviors, and needs so that your design takes the path of least resistance.

Let's say you're designing a new blog CMS. By asking something like, "What do you like about your current blog CMS?" you might learn that users enjoy Wordpress's "distraction free" mode because it helps them better focus on writing. You can then infer, for the design of your own blog CMS, that you should give users an option to toggle the appearance of the interface. The interview has therefore revealed that users really enjoy a current design works, so you should keep that preference in mind when designing for consistency.

There are a lot of different strategies to consider for user interviews that we don't have space to cover here, but if you're interested, take a look at these excellent resources:

User Interview Techniques, Liz Danzico
15 Interview Questions for Creating Personas, Steve Mulder
Ask and Ask Again: Critical Interviewing Is an Essential Component of Usability Testing, Kate Lawrence
Getting Better Data from User Studies, Michael Margolis

For some low-cost approaches to user research, we recommend reading Patrick Neeman's advice on creating lightweight personas. All of the tactics he lists will help you uncover the insights you need to deduce the expectations of users.

3. Heuristic Evaluation

Heuristic evaluations are great for ensuring external consistency since you're focusing on competitor designs. While traditionally heuristic evaluations are used to test usability problems or feature audits, before the design they can outline the current state of the market you're getting into.

The process just needs to be modified slightly:

1. Determine what fields to evaluate.

In other words, in what fields will you be competing with your rivals, or in which areas is it possible to excel compared to them? These could be ease of use, how you satisfy user goals, the visual style and atmosphere, and the target users themselves.

You might include the following areas for critique:

- Visual hierarchy
- Visual impact
- Effectiveness of system feedback
- Clarity of copy
- Ease of navigation
- Simplicity of user input

2. Conduct the evaluation with the above criteria.

If you can spare the manpower, try to get 5 people to go through your competitor's interface and assign them scores in the fields

you previously listed. Sometimes it helps to have your evaluators complete the same tasks to keep them focused. If conducting actual moderated tests is outside your means, you can also draw up simple questionnaires or – as a last resort – go through your competitor's sites yourself and give them your own ratings.

3. Diagram the results.

The clearest way to understand the results of the evaluation is to *see* them. Plotting them out of a graph is the most efficient way to organize the data. Michael Hawley uses a very effective "spider-web" method, as you can see in this post. We recommend his method because it's conducive to the final step: comparing.

4. Compare the results for consistencies and inconsistencies.

Looking at your top competitors' scores side-by-side – or even better, overlapping – will give you a solid understanding of your space and what your users may come to expect. You could create them according to this overlapping format created by designer Leigh Howells.

But remember the most important thing: the heuristic evaluations will reveal the consistencies and inconsistencies in your niche, but it's up to you to know when to break away from the norm, and when to fall in line.

For example, let's say none of your competitors use ads. If you choose to break the external consistency and feature ads on your

site, this may irritate users. They are expecting an ad-free experience when using sites or apps of your genre, and not meeting this expectation may worsen their experience.

On the other hand, let's say almost all of your competitors only offer one way to complete a given task. This is the status quo, and what your users would expect… but if you choose to break this consistency and offer multiple ways to complete a given task, you might impress some users and win them over.

In this way, the heuristic review comparison can show you possibilities for getting the better of your competitors, and not simply meeting user expectations, but exceeding them.

Takeaway

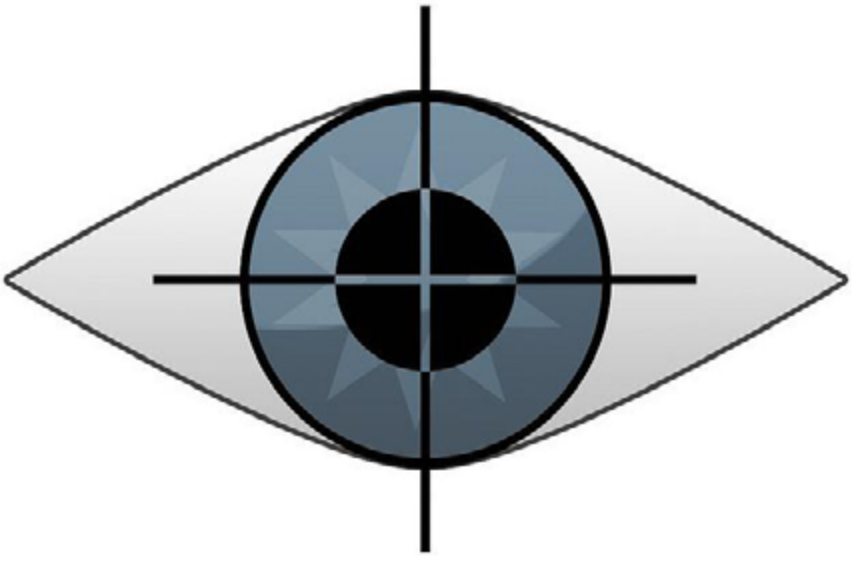
Consistency isn't something you add once the design is finished, it's something you incorporate on the ground level and build around. Consistency will always be tied to user expectations, which is the core to all aspects of design.

Remember that usability tests can help you pinpoint exactly what kind of consistencies your users want and expect most. Scope out the competition, listen to your users, then test early and often.

Practical Approach to Visual Consistency

Humans are visual creatures.

Compared to the rest of the animal kingdom, our other senses are, to put it politely, "lacking." So we rely heavily on our sight to assess, process, and interpret the world around us. Considering that Google determined it only takes about 50 milliseconds for users to judge your website, visual interactions are usually the strongest (and most lasting) interactions.



Source: "ETUX225: Figure 13.13." Rosenfeld Media. Creative Commons.

In this chapter we'll explain exactly why visual consistency is so important, outline a couple criteria for consistency, and tie it all together with live design examples.

Why Visual Consistency Matters for UI Design

Because vision is our dominant sense, the visuals on your interface will have the biggest impact on interaction. Just how much bigger might surprise you. To reiterate some points from *Interaction Design Best Practices*, David McCandless, Data Journalist, explains in a compelling TED Talk that a vast majority of our brain-power goes into sight, though nearly all of it is subconscious.

> *"Your sense of sight is the fastest. It has the same bandwidth as a computer network. Then you have touch, which is about the speed of a USB key. And then you have hearing and smell, which has the throughput of a hard disk. And then you have poor old taste, which is like barely the throughput of a pocket calculator. And [then the] naught .7 percent, that's the amount we're actually aware of. So a lot of your vision – the bulk of it is visual, and it's pouring in – it's unconscious."*

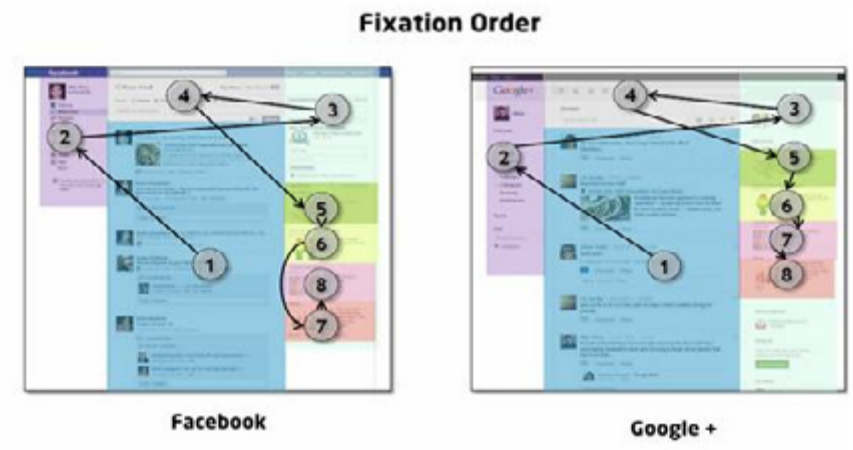
Why does this matter for web UI design?

Because so much of visual design affects the user on a subconscious level, your site must first feel familiar. When users encounter a new design, they are armed only with their prior experiences as they

make a snap judgment. As Google's original research suggests, this gut feeling is influenced exclusively by the visual design: hierarchy, symmetry, line spacing, fonts, etc.

Google found that simpler, familiar websites persuaded users to stay. As the design became more complex, users felt it looked less beautiful, even if the design felt familiar. Likewise, if the design was simple and clean but unfamiliar, users felt the site was also uglier. Externally consistent design helps you pass the user's "gut test" since you meet their expectations. Meanwhile, internal consistency then provides logic to your interface, while slight inconsistencies keeps users curious and engaged.

A clean, visually consistent site gives users feelings of comfort, control, and familiarity, whether consciously or not. Some designers attribute these benefits to properly designed visual flow.



Source: "Eye Tracking." Bernard Goldbach. Creative Commons.

In terms of interaction design, visual flow is the path your users' eyes take as they interact with your site or app. Experienced designers know how to manipulate their users' visual flow through eye-pattern strategies, contrasting colors, varying sizes, and other methods (outlined in our free ebooks, *Web UI Design for the Human Eye I* & *II*).

The goal of visual flow is creating a harmony and rhythm to all the on-screen UI elements. Laura McGuigan, VP of Design at TrackMaven, explains that repeating elements create a pleasant visual pattern – a rhythm – that you can break up with smart variations to capture user interest. This reflects what we said in the previous *Consistency in IxD* book about knowing when to be inconsistent. But if you'll remember, the potency of inconsistency relies on a pre-established, overarching consistency.

Source: neilcarpenter.com

Take, for example, web designer Neil Carpenter's site. You can't tell from the screenshot above, but the colored shapes are in motion from the top-right corner to the bottom-left – literally creating a visual flow for the page. This colorful animation is a deviation from the norm (making it externally inconsistent), which actually sets Carpenter apart.

Take note, though, that he remains externally consistent where necessary. He keeps a top, horizontal navigation bar with the standard "About," "Work," and "Contact" pages you'd expect from a portfolio site. His "brand," in this case his name, is in the upper-left.

Internally, the white text stands out against the black background and color of the animation. This breaking of internal consistency allows the importance message of the text, including links, to be clearly visible even amidst a visually competitive landscape. Other pages retain this black background/white text color scheme, and even play on the basic shape theme with the site's loading icons.

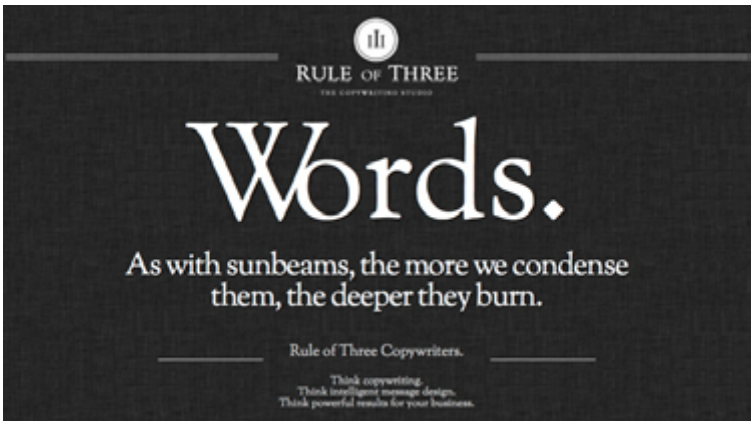
Areas of Visual Consistency

When it comes to visual consistency, there are certain areas warranting extra attention. We can divide them into typography, UI elements, and color.

1. Typography

Feel free to experiment with different fonts and styles – but don't go overboard.

You'll want enough diversity to keep your text interesting, while also differentiating the categories of text (heading, content, links, etc.). While you can select different typefaces, styles, and weights for different categories, your treatment must remain consistent. If you use a bold serif font for all H1 headers, make sure all H1 headers reflect the treatment.



Source: Rule of Three UK

To ensure consistency, you should actually set font properties globally through CSS. Font family, size, color, line height, and weight can all be set as in the following example for body text:

body { font: 1em/1.5em Cambria, Arial, serif; color: #151; }

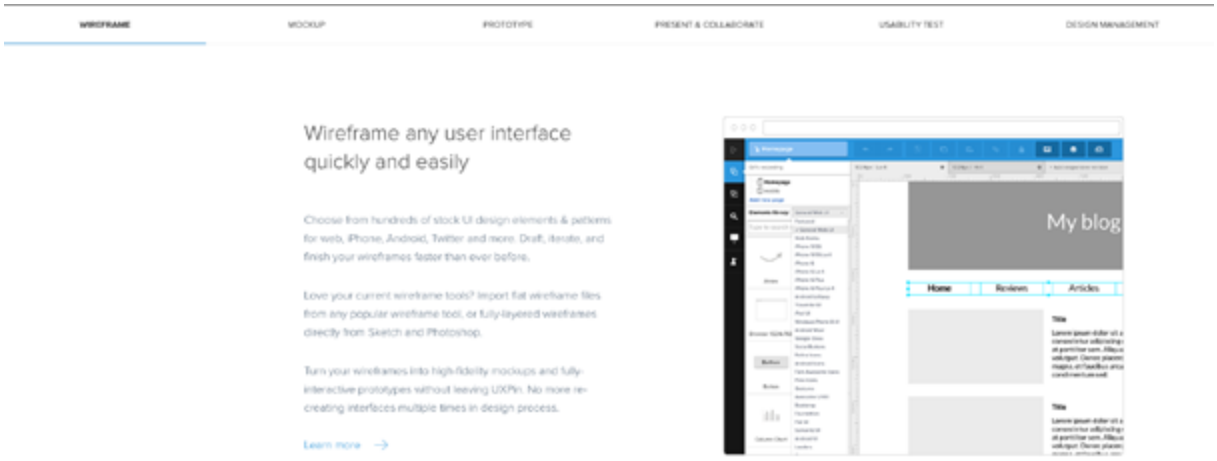
Beyond consistent typefaces, make sure the alignment is consistent and that you've set proper line spacing (roughly 1.4-1.6x your font size). Creating this vertical rhythm instills harmony between all your content, improving readability and familiarity.

Source: UXPin

For one potential redesign of the UXPin website, we decided on a minimalist sans-serif typeface. Let's take a look at the site-wide consistencies:

- **Headers** – Large font size, with bold applied to select words
- **Subhead** – Mixed-case, regular weight
- **Primary Navigation** – Mixed-case, bolded weight
- **Secondary Navigation** – All caps, regular weight

Now let's examine the body copy:



Source: UXPin

For the main content, we've created vertical rhythm through a left-justified, right-ragged alignment and a 1.6x line spacing. To transition the eye smoothly, we also added plenty of white space between the H2 header ("Wireframe any user interface quickly and easily") and body copy.

2. UI Elements

A site's use of graphics, icons, textures, layout spacing, and images all work together to set the visual atmosphere of the interface.

Aside from thematic consistency, pay attention to the mechanics of graphics:

- **Spatial Relationships** – Make sure that the padding around elements is consistent, otherwise you'll break the visual flow. Also check that you've purposefully inserted space to separate

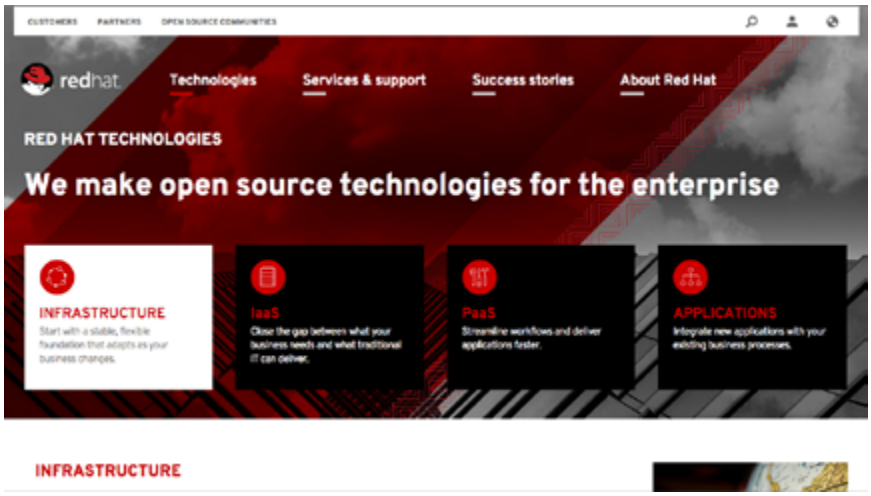
elements with different functions (Fitts' Law as described in *Interaction Design Best Practices*).

- **Images** – Visually, your images should reflect the same look, feel, and texture. In terms of implementation, make sure that you don't make some images open in new tabs while others appear in lightboxes. Pick a style and stick with it.

- **Size** – Related elements should be the same size and look similar (i.e., all circular or all square). According to *Gestalt Principles*, any variation in appearance will suggest a different function. Larger elements appear more important, so if two elements are related, they should be closer in size.

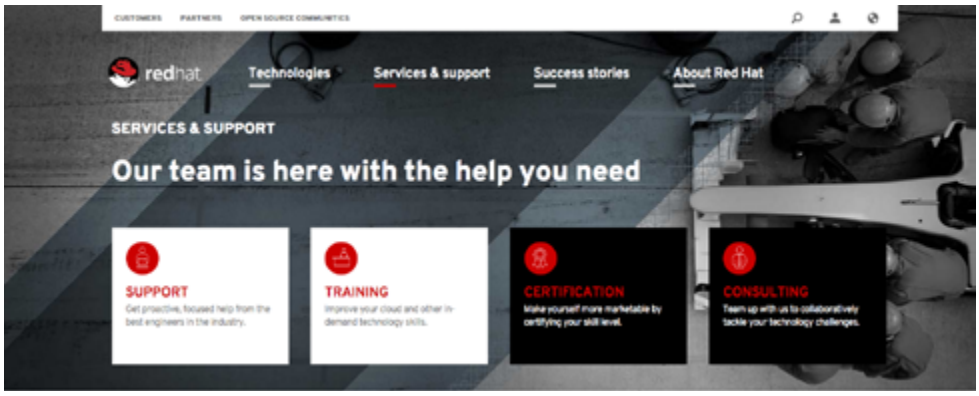
Let's take a look at **Redhat,** which reflects all the best practices for visual consistency of UI elements.

Technology Page



Source: RedHat

Services & Support Page



Source: Redhat

As we described in *Web UI Patterns*, the cards pattern is great for maintaining consistency across different pages. Once you hit a secondary page like *Technologies* or *Services & Support*, the close spacing and identical size of the features pages all suggest that they relate to each other.

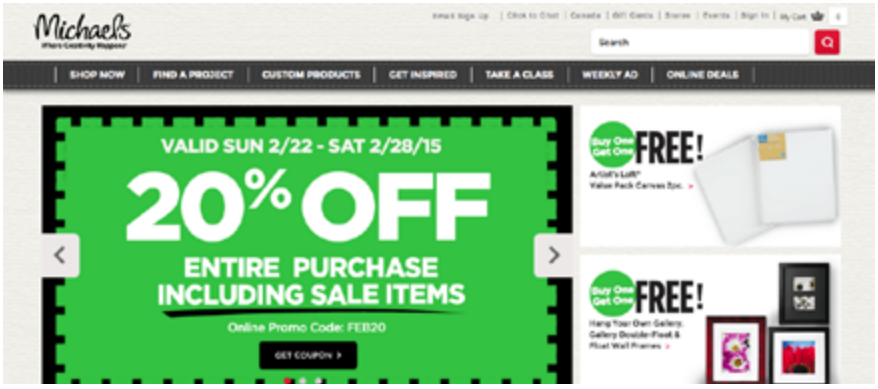
Meanwhile, site search and account settings are shuffled away to the top-right corner, but they are clustered together. This tells the user that these are all a group of secondary actions. Also, notice how the background image has the same industrial feel, but differences in shading and color keep the site from feeling like a template. The circular icons are also consistently designed with their white outlines against a red background.

3. Color

Take great care in choosing your website's colors – each hue, where it appears, and the other colors it interacts with will all have a great emotional impact on your user. We explain each

color and their psychological significance in our *Web UI Design for the Human Eye I*, but suffice to say, different colors evoke different emotions in your users (green suggests prosperity and serenity, blue suggests trust, red suggests passion, etc.).

Select a fixed palette of colors for your site and stay consistent. Which colors you choose are up to you, based on the mood you'd like to set. Unless you're highlighting specific elements, the colors on each page should complement each other.



Source: Michael's

For an example of color consistency, we'll look to the website for the art store **Michael's**.

Their creamy background accents the dominant black for their logo and menus – this repeated use of black itself adhering to color consistency. The simple black-white(ish) color scheme also causes their consistent use of green to really stand out, emphasizing their sales deals. The occasional use of red (the search button, the location of the image carousel) draws attention to itself, but it's sporadic use keeps it mostly in the background.

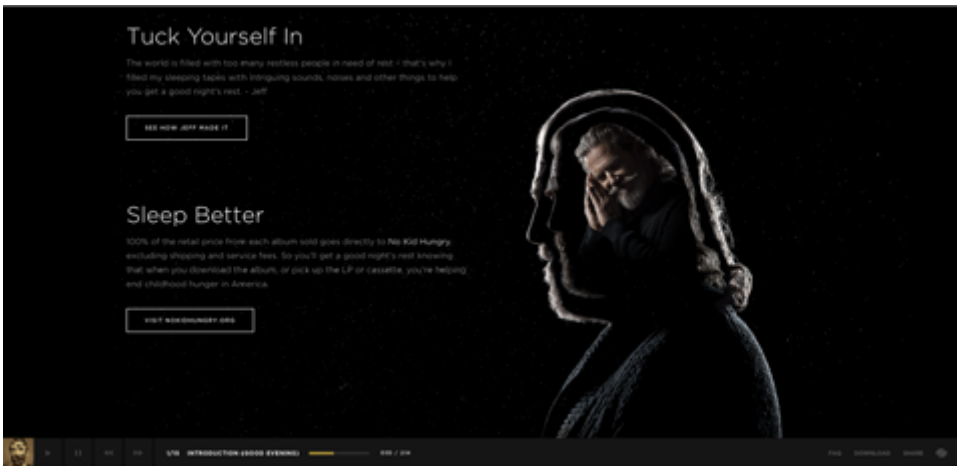
Putting It All Together

Let's take a look at a site that uses visual consistency well across the board. With their fine eye for visuals, the landing page for the website-building firm Squarespace flaunts their skills on the very face of their site.

The microsite for Squarespace's super bowl ad is consistent in its treatment of UI elements, playful typography, and rich colors.

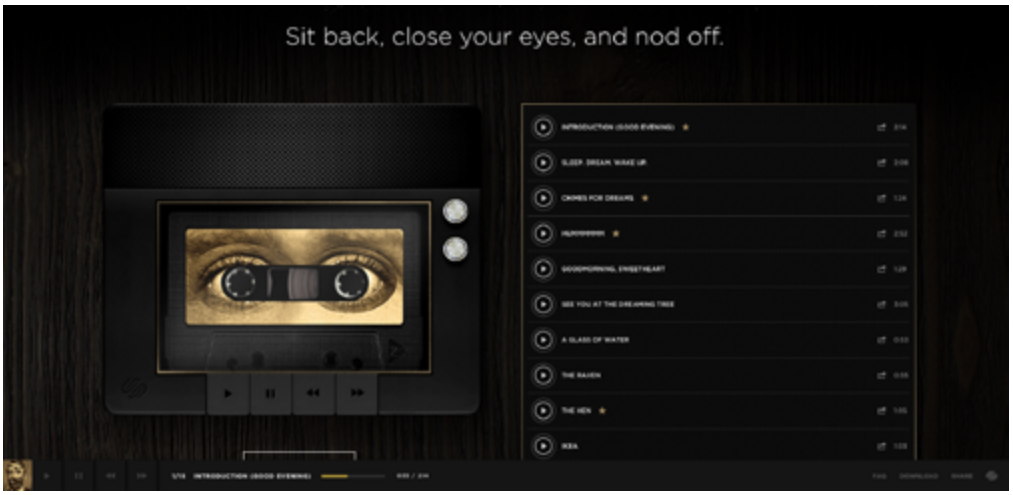
Source: Dreaming With Jeff

Let's start with the top of the page. They only use two typefaces: a decorative font for the header and sans-serif for the rest. To distinguish calls-to-action, all button typefaces are capitalized. Notice how inconsistency is smartly applied to distinguish the two calls-to-action: the primary CTA is filled in white, while the secondary CTA (which redirects you) is muted, but underlined.



Source: Dreaming With Jeff

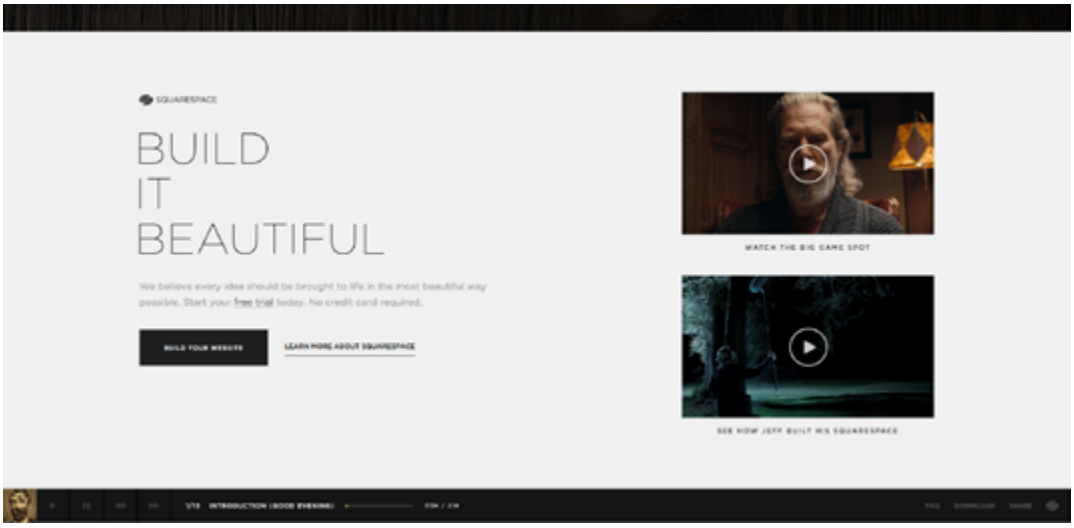
As you scroll down the page, secondary actions appear in the bottom-right corner, capitalized to signal interactivity, but more subdued in color. The generous line spacing and paragraph spacing create a nice vertical rhythm, while the white typeface accents the grayish outline of Jeff Bridges.



Source: Dreaming With Jeff

In the middle of the page, the design transitions to more of a skeuomorphic look to reflect a dark table. But it's applied tastefully, so the design still feels dark and bold without feeling tacky. We still feel a part of the nocturnal experience.

The play buttons are all the same, and the color yellow is used consistently: the yellow border around the playlist complements the other yellow elements like the cassette border, play progress bar, and bottom-left logo.



Source: Dreaming With Jeff

Once you scroll to the bottom, the transition to white immediately communicates this section is different from the rest. And it certainly is – Squarespace is now providing their value propositions.

The background, however, is the only area of inconsistency. The video players are the same size, while the call-to-action treatment is the same as the rest of the site. The shade of white is also the same as the white accents used in previous sections, making the design feel different yet still familiar. Instead of feeling out of place, this section feels more like a separate dimension of the same site thanks to the consistent elements.

Takeaway

As we explained, the sense of sight largely governs how humans interact with their world, even more-so on a subconscious level. Any interaction design that hopes to be successful must prioritize visual interaction, especially in the three main fields we outlined.

Just because a user isn't clicking on your site elements doesn't mean they aren't interacting. Run through the visual consistency checklist – typography, UI elements, and colors – to give your interactions a visible sensibility that your users will appreciate, whether they're aware of it or not.

Mastering UI Patterns for Visual Consistency

Any discussion of visual consistency in interaction design will always return to UI patterns.

UI patterns originate as solutions to common usability problems, and their effectiveness correlates directly with their popularity and adoption. The most successful are ingrained in the minds of even inexperienced users, generating a self-perpetuating cycle as more sites and apps reuse them.

Source: Web UI Kit

In this chapter, we'll dive into the anatomy of UI patterns and how to select them as shortcuts to meeting user explanations.

Affordances & Signifiers: The Foundation of UI Patterns

Affordances are what a product can do. Signifiers are the visual cues that hint at the function. At its most atomic level, all UI patterns are composed of signifiers that hint at the interface's affordances.

For instance, an email service affords sending messages back-and-forth online. But how does the user know that function is possible? A perceived affordance is therefore how the user thinks the interface object might work, which of course should match the actual affordance. This perceived affordance is judged based on signifiers – small hints or cues that signify what the product might be used for.

Source: "Subscribe to The Propagandist Email Alerts." Jonathon Narvey. Creative Commons.

If the user sees a logo that looks like an envelope (signifier), they might get the impression that the site offers email services (perceived affordance). If the site actually belongs to a bank with a logo that accidentally resembles an envelope, then the perceived affordance and the actual affordance are unfortunately inconsistent.

When signifiers are used properly, the product feels intuitive and familiar, as if the user already knows what the feature is for. A signifier can be anything that suggests meaning, whether a word, a shape, a color, or a movement.

The important benefit about signifiers that we'd like to shine some light on here is that **consistently used signifiers from other sites and apps will cut down on your own explaining**. Using signifiers that are consistent with other sites will streamline your own design.

To learn more about the categories of affordances and signifiers, we recommend this article on Smashing Magazine as one of the most comprehensive pieces we've read.

Pattern Classifications

Patterns come in a lot of forms and serve an assortment of uses. As a good first step to keep you from being overwhelmed, it helps to classify them into six main categories based on their core site functions (which you can actually see on the excellent site UI Patterns):

- **Input and Output** – These patterns deal with how the user interacts with or submits input to the site, and likewise of how the site responds, or submits feedback.
- **Navigating** – These help guide the user around the site, ensuring they are properly oriented and know how to find their way if lost.

- **Content Structuring** – Is your content accessible and easy to access? These patterns help you organize your content in a way that reflects logic and hierarchy.
- **Reducing Friction** – How does your site present content without friction or cognitive load? As described in *Interaction Design Best Practices*, these patterns help you guide users through your site at a comfortable pace.
- **Incentivizing** – These are the patterns that motivate your users to interact, like progress bars or other methods of gamification. These design patterns exploit the brain's habit loop to hook users onto the product.
- **Social Sharing** – These are the patterns that allow, promote, and facilitate the sharing of your site on any social media venue you prefer. You could also use social proof patterns to increase trust with users.

Of course, design patterns are just blueprints for your creativity. Because they represent popular interaction design best practices, starting with a UI pattern allows you to be innovative without alienating users.

Treat UI patterns as blueprints for your own creativity.

Implementing UI Patterns

Beyond their function, patterns can further be classified by how they're used on a site. As we'll discuss below, some patterns can be interpretive and used different ways, while others are very precise and keep only one method of implementation. We define patterns as tactical, strategic, and site-specific, based upon Anders Toxboe's UI Pattern Pyramid.

1. **Tactical**

   Tactical patterns are the most direct and strict patterns, and the rules tend to be black-and-white: the logo remains in the upper--left on every page, all textual links use a blue font color, etc.

   Tactical implementation relies heavily on both external and internal consistency: external because, as patterns, their strength comes from the familiarity of their use on other sites; internal because their implementation remains the same on every page within your site. For example, you'd want to place the search bar in the top right since it's become so commonplace (external consistency). Once you've done so on one page, you'd want to make that search bar a pattern so that it happens on *all* pages (internal consistency).

Source: Yelp Style Guide

Front-end style guides document mostly implementation patterns, since these atomic details affect how developers code designs and how designs are reproduced sitewide.

2. **Strategic**

   A step above tactical patterns are patterns that are chosen as part of the UX strategy. At this level, patterns become more advanced, and are concerned with how they help the user move through the site to achieve their goals.

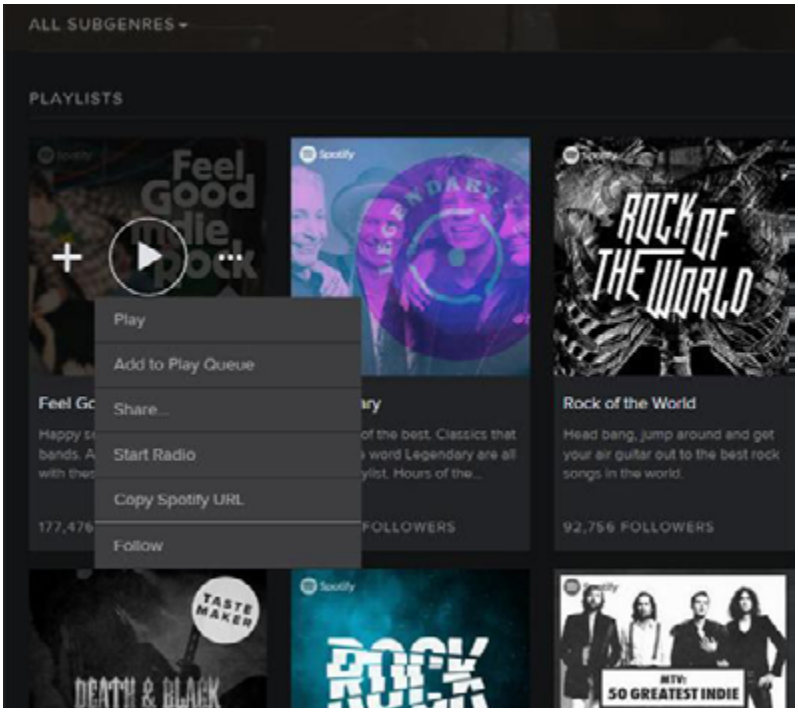
   Would a Jump-To or Sticky Navigation work better to help users access additional content? Given your user and the type of website, what's the best way to ask for input without overwhelming the user?

   Strategic choices later lead to tactical choices.

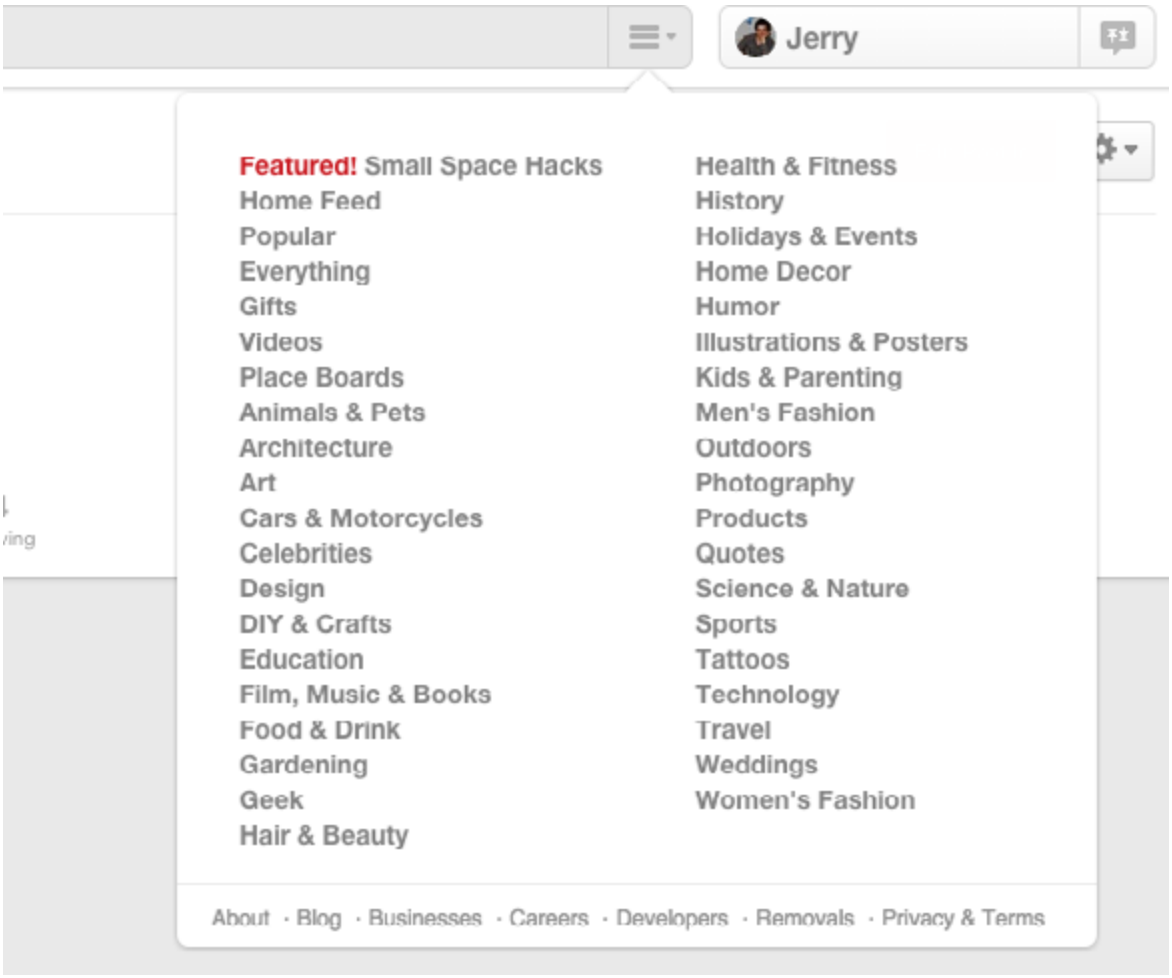
For example, you might select a single-page site instead of tabs or multiple pages because you want to craft a stronger narrative – that's a strategic implementation of a pattern. Once you've made that decision, you need to then make a series of tactical decisions, such as what kind of scroll bar you'll use, how the text is broken up, etc.

Let's take a look at **Spotify** and **Pinterest** for an example of how the same pattern, hidden controls, can have two different strategic implementations.

Both sites need to give their users quick access to additional options or actions on the site, without paralyzing them with too many choices. The hidden controls UI pattern is the solution by tucking away additional options in an expandable menu.



Source: Spotify



Source: Pinterest

But the difference isn't in the *what*, it's in the *how*. Spotify has a short-and-sweet menu that appears over the selection, while Pinterest has an all-inclusive menu that's hidden inside of a hamburger icon (another pattern in and of itself).

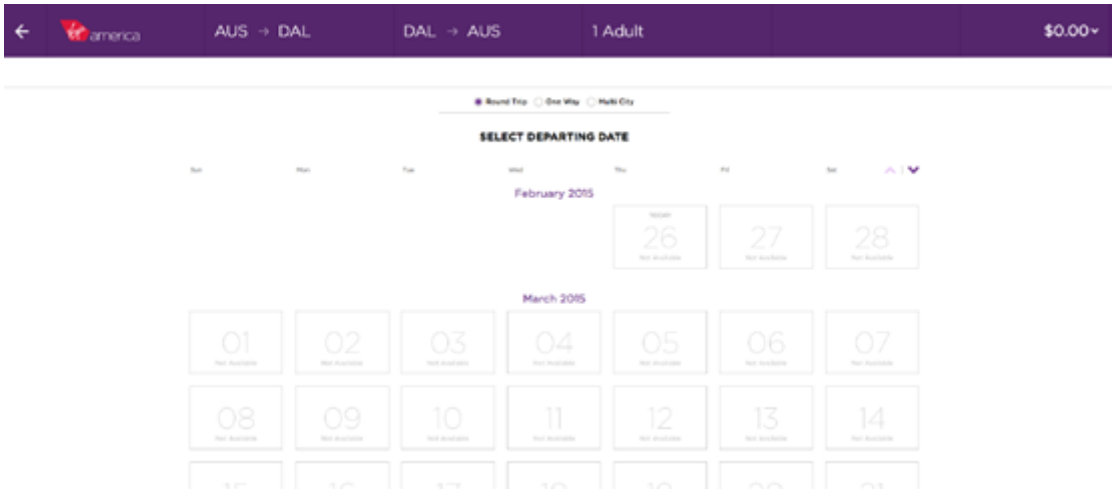
Strategic patterns are influenced by external consistency. You can see in the example that the overflow menu is not a groundbreaking UI pattern. Most designers will follow the spirit of the pattern, then apply different visual or interactive elements to make the pattern consistent with the look/feel of the site.

3. Site-specific

Some patterns only work on certain types of sites, or have different versions depending on the site. These distinctions are made first and foremost, before either strategic and tactical implementations are decided.

For example, let's say you're building a site for a design agency: you know you'll need to create pages for a portfolio, gallery, biographies, and testimonials or social proof. You know that you need to include these pages because of the type of site – these are the patterns the typical user expects based on the type of site they're on. Only afterwards do you decide the strategy for implementing them, and then the tactics.

Of course, if you're making a ecommerce site, your users won't expect a portfolio page. And given the different context, a cards pattern may be more appropriate for displaying images of products on sale.



Source: Virgin America

Virgin America requires a UI pattern for its booking form (an advanced user input pattern) because it's in the airline business. Obviously, users would never expect this type of pattern on a site like Netflix or CNN.

Because users expect specific functionalities from certain types of sites, site-specific patterns are influenced purely by external consistency.

4. **Bringing It All Together**

   Let's say you're a photographer, and you're building a website to promote yourself, specifically the homepage. You'll select your patterns by following the three steps we outlined above.

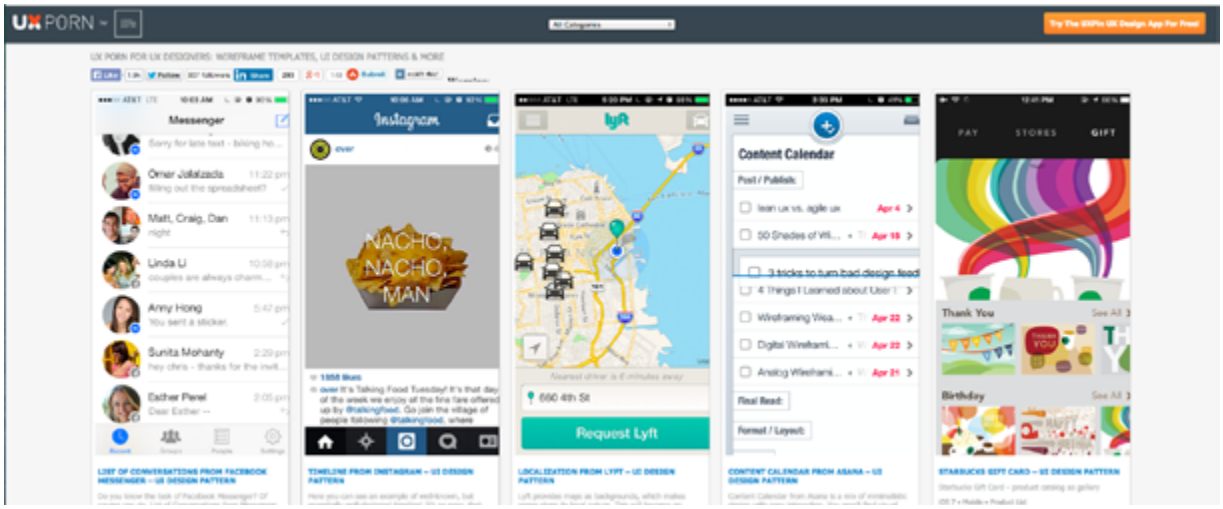
   First, you'll decide which site-specific patterns your users are expecting. Because you're a photographer, you'll need to showcase your samples.

   Next you decide the how to showcase them – this is a question of strategy. You could use an old fashioned grid view, but instead you opt for an image carousel.

   Last, you decide which tactics to use for the image carousel. Foregoing the dot locators at the bottom, you take a minimalist approach with only two very basic arrows on each end. Finally, you implement this pattern consistently across the entire site.

Selecting the Right UI Pattern for You

There are thousands of established patterns, with more and more being created everyday – but not all of them will work for you.



Source: UXPorn

The selection process for UI patterns can be simplified to four basic steps:

1. Determine the problems that need to be solved.
2. Explore how others have solved the same problem.
3. Examine the solution's use on other sites.
4. Detail the patterns proper usage so you can recreate it.

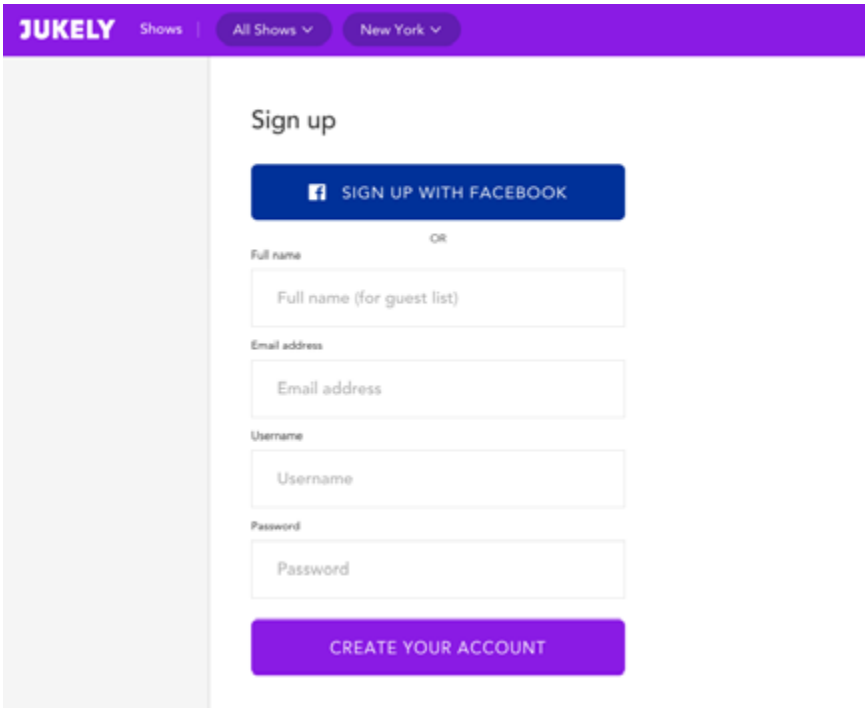
Let's see the process at work with an example: you notice that a lot of your users aren't signing in when browsing your site.

1. *Determine the problems that need to be solved.* Because the users are still coming to your page and spending an appropriate amount of time there, you can deduce that the problem stems

from the login and signup processes. The solution, then, would be a way to simplify both processes so that your users don't mind doing them.

2. *Explore how others have solved the same problem.* You decide to do a little detective work and **visit some popular sites similar to yours**. Some use a lazy signup, but that doesn't solve your problem of enticing your users to signup or login. Some others use incentives like extra features or more content, but that doesn't fit in with the style of your particular site.

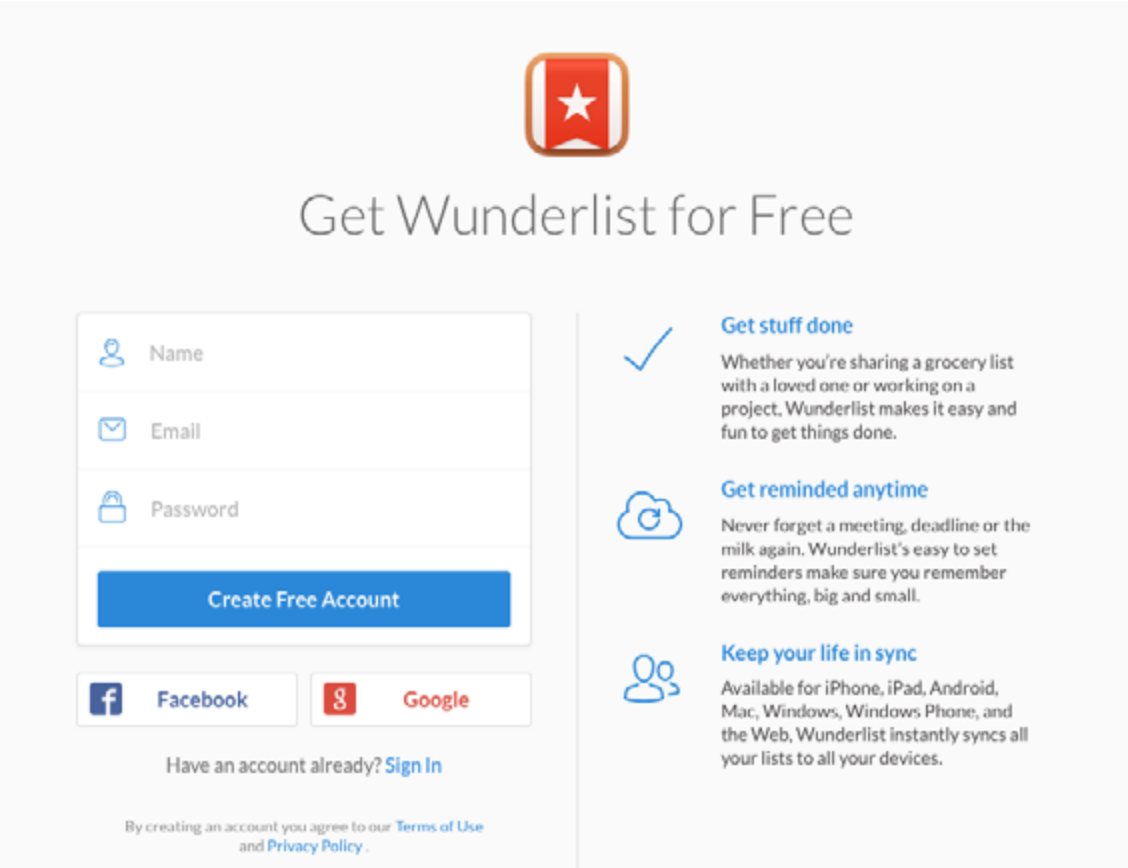
   Finally, you notice that some sites use a social login, which allows them to login or signup with their preexisting social media accounts. This sounds like a good solution for your problem and fits the site's easygoing style.



Source: Jukely

(Notice that lazy signup, signup incentives, and social login are all different patterns. Which you choose will depend on your site's specific needs.)

3. *Examine the solution's use on other sites.* You take a deeper look at big sites like Spotify, Pinterest, Wunderlist and see how they utilize the social login. You even check sites unrelated to yours to see how they handle the pattern, just in case they inspire you.



Source: Wunderlist

4. *Detail the patterns proper usage so you can recreate it.* You notice that different sites offer different social media outlets like Twitter, Google, or LinkedIn – but every site includes Facebook. Sometimes the options are spelled out with text ("Sign up with

Facebook") while other times they just have the social media's icon situated nearby the login form so you know its purpose.

Remembering the Gestalt principle about how proximity suggests function (which you learned from our *Web UI Design for the Human Eye*), you decide only a button with an icon is enough – after all, social login is a popular pattern and your users will likely know these buttons mean they can login with their social media accounts. You decide to include Facebook, Twitter, and Google because those were the most frequent on the sites you checked, and you put Facebook in the top position as the most popular option.

Once you've found an effective UI pattern, don't feel too attached. While UI patterns are great for consistency, you don't want to be stuck in your local maximum. For example, you might be designing a viral content site and decide that infinite scroll is the best way to make all your content accessible. After all, you've seen plenty of other sites use it to great success.

While infinite scroll may produce a better experience than forcing users to click "Next Page" every ten entries, it may not be the *best* solution. You can only determine that through free-minded brainstorming, wireframing, prototyping, and testing.

Treat UI patterns as a "safe zone" for consistency, then venture outside it one creative step at a time. Know the patterns, respect

the patterns, but start your design with a fresh outlook each time. That will ensure your design remains familiar, but still has room to blossom into something new.

Know the UI patterns, respect the UI patterns,
but start your design with a fresh outlook each time.

UI Pattern Libraries & Resources

Even if you're a hardened UI designer with years of experience, it's hard to keep track of all the patterns at your disposal. Below are several resources that collect and compile all the latest and most useful patterns. These will help you stay up-to-date, and can help you improve upon the patterns with your own creativity.

- UI Patterns – One of the most comprehensive pattern libraries featuring a highly logical layout for easy browsing. Fun fact: it was just recently redesigned and restructured.
- UXPorn – See low-fi to hi-fi transformations of designs from top companies like Lyft, Uber, Pinterest, and others. Click on the patterns to use them for free in UXPin.
- Pattern Tap – This designer community from ZURB posts and updates lots of helpful resources for web design education.
- Patternry – While this is a subscription-based app, it provides a comprehensive library of UI patterns for CSS and HTML. It also

lets you customize them as needed to build your own library.

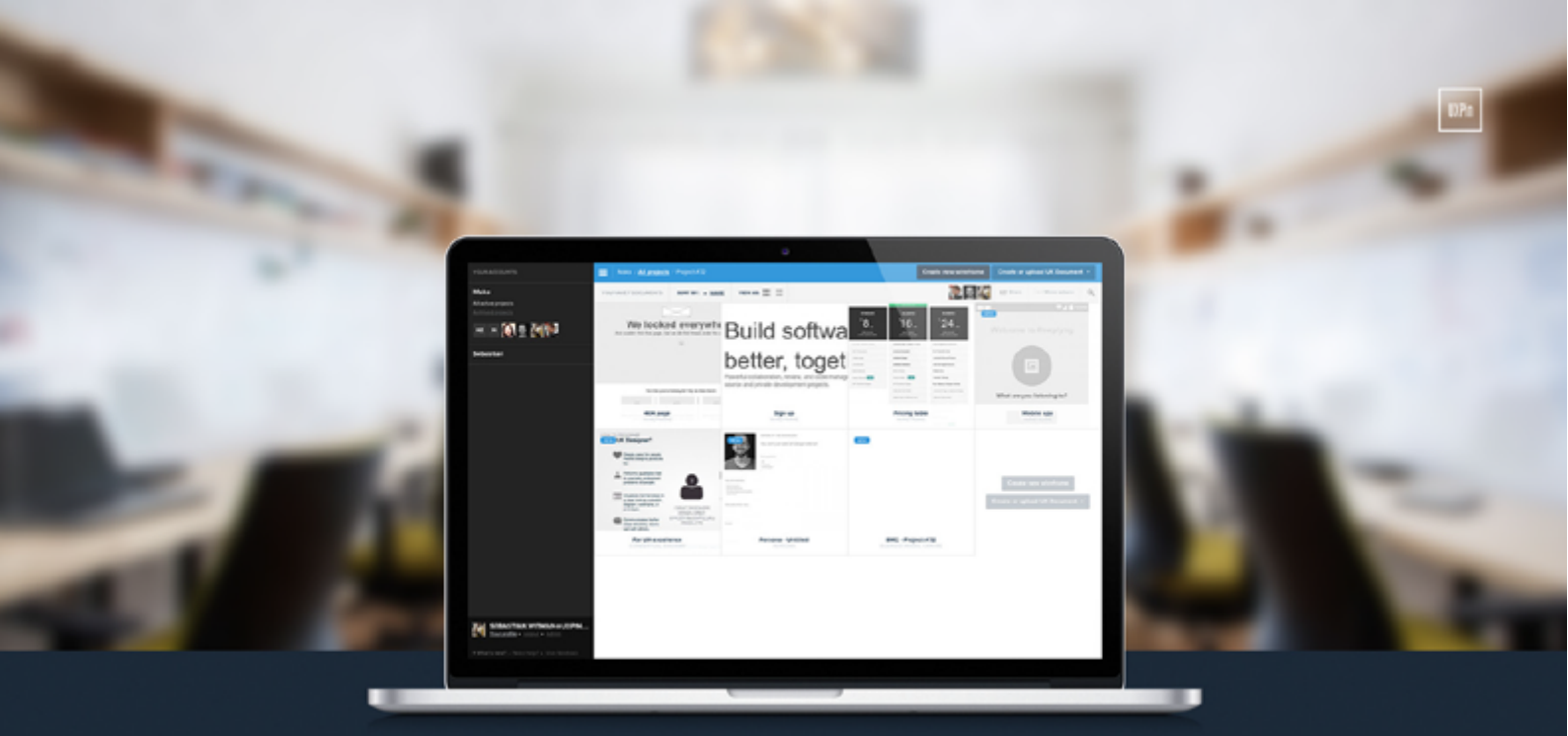
- Capptivate – An exhaustively thorough collection of mobile UI patterns. Almost all of them are animated, so you can see how to layer interactions on top of popular patterns.
- UseYourInterface – A fantastic infinitely-scrolling library of GIFs that show the interactive power of UI patterns.
- Web UI Design Patterns – Our own compilation of effective UI patterns, in which we explain the proper application of the 63 best web UI patterns from sites like Amazon, Facebook, and Pinterest, and many more.
- Mobile UI Design Patterns – The companion piece to our compilation of web patterns, this ebook features 46 of the most successful UI patterns for mobile devices.

For even more detailed listings on UI pattern collections, Smashing Magazine posted a list of over 40 online pattern libraries.

Takeaway

Throughout this ebook we've discussed the proper ways to maintain consistency, but all that knowledge is useless unless you remember why consistency is important. Good design makes your users happy and eager-to-return, gives a feeling of familiarity, and can be used mostly by intuition.

These seemingly natural aspects are anything but – they must be crafted with effort and know-how to give them that "natural" feeling. Maintaining consistency (and knowing when to break it) is the key to creating this feeling and satisfying your users' expectations.



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