



\* Q&amp;A

# TIMONI WEST

The Foursquare and Flickr veteran on how design can influence user habits, data sharing and privacy



## INFO

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### Why don't you introduce yourself?

**TW:** My name is Timoni West, and I head up design on Unity's Labs team, where we're working on VR development and creation tools. Over the years I've worked with over 30 different tech startups and companies, doing all kinds of design.

### Where does UX end and UI design begin?

**TW:** I do both myself, and I find it awkward to draw a line in the sand where you pass off unfinished ideas for someone else to refine or reskin. Additionally, so much of design now includes animating behaviours ... so where does that live? Theoretically, it's the heart of user experience, but in reality, most people don't animate wireframes.

### You've spent a lot of time making interfaces that encourage people to put data online, like Foursquare, Flickr and Scribd. What's the secret?

**TW:** I'm glad you asked! In order to create a social network that makes you feel good, you need three things: a way to easily make stuff, a way to easily see and react to other people's stuff, and a way to see how people have reacted to your stuff.

Social networks like Myspace or Friendster had these components, sort of. But then better social networks came along that made it easier and faster to make, respond, and see feedback, and so everyone migrated. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are obviously killing it on all three points.

### Will designers feel pressured into making interfaces that dupe people into sharing too much?

**TW:** Only if their company found a profit model around duping people into sharing, I suppose. I just installed Secret recently and people are certainly sharing things they wouldn't share otherwise, but they're not being duped. The real concern is how secure Secret's codebase is.

### Is responsive design really just about the size of the screen? What about the internet bandwidth?

**TW:** I think cards are an attempt to address this, but your point is well-taken. When talking about design, people [optimise] for the worst-case scenario.

At Foursquare, we had artificial throttles in place to simulate different layers of slow data connections – so it was certainly something we thought about. But most startups in America do not expect their primary use case to be populations in a second or third-world country, so it's essentially a non-issue.

My guess is that data will improve in those countries before Western startups start targeting them. As for startups in Africa and Central Asia, I'm sure it's top of their minds.

### How useful are habits in UX design?

**TW:** Habits are neutral in UX; whether or not your product needs habits, what kind, and at what point, is entirely dependent on what you're building and what you want your users to do.

iOS designers stick to a strict UX pattern library so that the habits you form have the same result every time: there are no surprises, and you never make crucial mistakes. Car interface designers have similar sets of equally thoughtless, easy patterns: being able to turn on headlights and windshield wipers without taking one's concentration off the road is paramount.

But when the interface looks the same, but behaves differently, it's annoying. I've tried to tap or swipe my Classic Kindle screen a dozen times, even though it's not a touchscreen. It's not Amazon's fault – the Kindle has been around almost as long as the iPhone – but when one new interface is great, people will want that level of interaction in other devices, too.

The way to create habits in UX is to make sure the same thing happens every time you perform an action. That's easy. The hard part is getting people to get into the habit of using your app or site. ■