Best Practice: Flat Design

What is Flat Design

Design is constantly changing. Something that's considered in style now may not be in style at a later time, but the amazing thing about design is how easily it adapts to the environment. For instance, with the development of mobile devices; mobile devices require a new approach to design because you can't just jam all the information from a full-size desktop site onto a smaller mobile screen. Pictures, text, and navigation had to be revisited so that they were just as functional on mobile devices.

In the past, web designers put a particular focus on showing off their skill and design by packing sites with flashy illustrations and animations that were meant to wow their visitors. That highly detailed style of website making was replaced with flat design, which opposes all of the detailed design techniques in favor of a more simplified look that fits the digital medium.

Flat design is a simple design approach that puts heavy emphasis on the usability of designs and features clean, open space, crisp edges, bright colors, and two-dimensional or flat illustrations. Unlike skeuomorphic design, a design style that tries to mimic real-life objects in digital format, flat design separates technology interface and tactile objects.

Flat design is the term given to the style of design in which elements lose any type of stylistic characters that make them appear as though they lift off the page. What this means to the general person is that stylistic characters such as drop shadows, gradients, textures, and any other type of design elements that are meant to make the object feel three-dimensional are removed. This type of design style can be applied to any kind of digital content.

Easier to Use

In flat design, the meaning of the design is important, especially if this design is also being adapted for mobile devices. If a design element does not attribute anything meaningful to the whole design then it's a distraction from the user experience. Flat design instead uses simple designs that still allow someone to understand the message of the website.

Simple images allow messages to be conveyed more quickly than a detailed illustration. The mind doesn't have to take the time to process all of the details which allows meaning to be determined sooner.

You might think, "Well isn't it going to look boring now without all those extra effects that really allow it to pop?" Although it may seem like taking out all of the stylistic characteristics will make the images boring it actually doesn't. The reason why, is because flat design uses bright contrasting colors to make illustrations and buttons stand out from backgrounds and grab attention.

Key Attributes

The main idea that pulls flat design together is the idea of simplicity. Solid, vivid colors give aspects the emphasis needed to set them apart in place of illustrative detail; sans serif typography provides a clean, crisp supplement to illustrations; the text is concise and to the point; UI elements like buttons and links are clear and noticeable. Everything should be designed with the same goal, to create a cohesive visual and functional web design.

Flat design brings purpose back into design. Instead of designing an amazing and graphic website for the sake of looking nice, flat design makes every piece and part of the design a functional tool whose purpose is to enhance the user experience and guide the user to relevant information without distraction.

This picture illustrates what a cohesive flat design of buttons would generally look like.

Flat Design and Consistency

Not only does flat design look nice on a full-page website, but it also easily translates across different devices. Because of its simple nature, all of the important information is already being

conveyed on the full page, so there is no loss of information when you adjust it for a smaller screen like a smartphone or tablet. One thing that you have to realize about flat design is that it puts a lot of focus on the content.

Material Design

If you still crave a little bit of stylistic characteristics on your website there is actually a design style for that. It combines everything that is great about flat design and everything that is great about detailed design and creates a happy medium in the middle. Material design is probably most similar to the way the Apple iPhone software looks. Many icons have one flat color, but at the same time, there are a couple of elements of gradients and drop shadows.

Summary: Pros and Cons

Pros:
- Extremely easy to navigate
- Functional and remarkable across all media. Including tablets, mobile, and desktop
- The new universal standard of digital design and interaction in the 21st century and beyond
- The website loads faster because of simple graphics

Cons:
- Because the design calls for such a simple display of content many websites that use this style might begin to look alike. Applying variety in website elements can alleviate this.
- This style really emphasizes content, so if you don't have any content the design doesn't look as great.

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