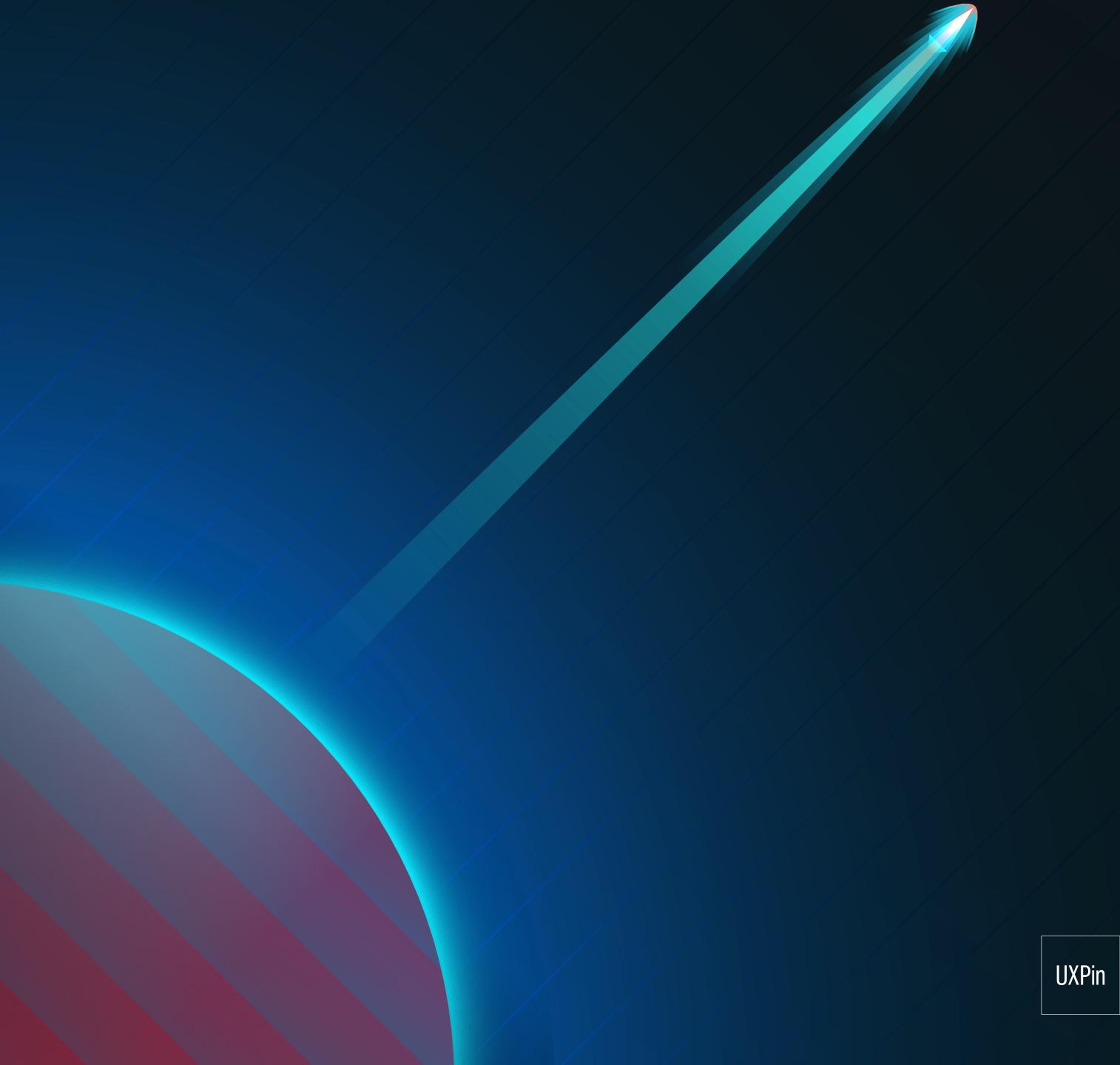


Web Design Book of Trends

2015-2016





Web Design Book of Trends

2015-2016

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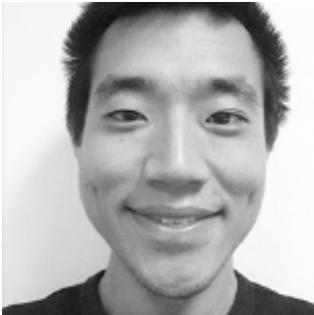
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[Follow me on Twitter @ziebak](#)

Flat Design Evolved

The iconic design style of the 2010s isn't going anywhere... but it is evolving.

The flat design revolution has been gaining momentum with surprising speed over the last few years. Considering its inherent simplicity, it's not hard to see why: it makes any interface feel a little more intuitive, it works well with responsive design and modern framework, and, of course, it looks amazing (when done right).

But the flat design style won't stay stagnant, even if it does stay popular. In the next year or so we can expect it to adapt to shifting needs and new creative insights. How exactly will it change? Let's take a look.

The New Flat Design

Starting as a rebellion against the dominating [skeumorphic style](#), flat design has since come into its own and is not more than just the "option B" that it used to be. Today, and in the near future, the style

is expanding and maturing into what Ryan Allen calls “[Flat 2.0](#).” “Flat 2.0 is an evolution, not a revolution,” Allen wrote. “Where flat design was a radical departure from the rampant skeuomorphism of days gone by, flat 2.0 is a playful branch off the flat tree. Flat design is the Christmas tree, Flat 2.0 is the ornaments and candy canes. And presents. No tinsel though, that stuff is a mess to clean up.”



Photo credits: Left image- [iPhone iOS 6](#). Manesh Mohan. Creative Commons. Rotated and cropped from original. Photo credits: Right image- [iPhone 6 Apps](#). Microservicios Geek Crew. Creative Commons. Rotated and cropped from original.

Originally flat design was rigorously flat, with little accentuation and a heavy emphasis on minimalism. The new flat, however, is enjoying some more playful flourishes that make it “almost flat.” Lately, we see more eye-catching elements, like hints of shadows and coloration, that flat purists would refute, but the design community embraces for its cohesiveness with [other popular design patterns](#).

You can virtually see the flat design style evolve in the three examples below:

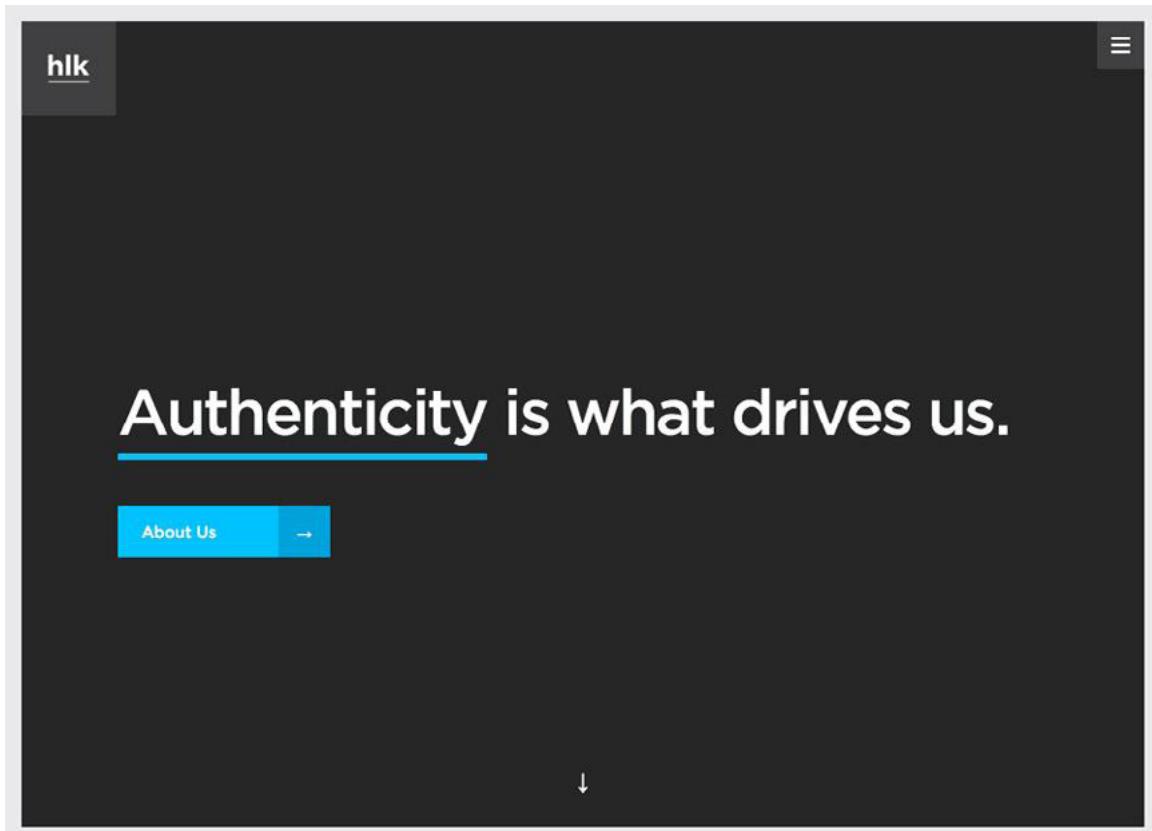


Photo credits: <http://hlkagency.com/>

The [HLK Agency](#) is strictly flat to further its minimalist atmosphere. No flourishes, no distracting visuals – no nonsense.



Photo credits: <http://agencysurvivalkit.com/>

The [Agency Survival kit](#), on the other hand, takes a few liberties like shading and texture, while still remaining predominantly flat.

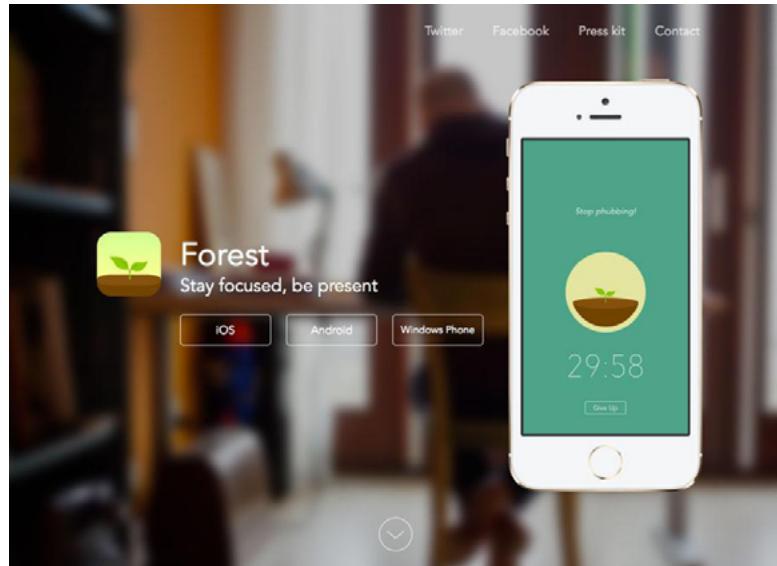


Photo credits: <http://www.forestapp.cc/>

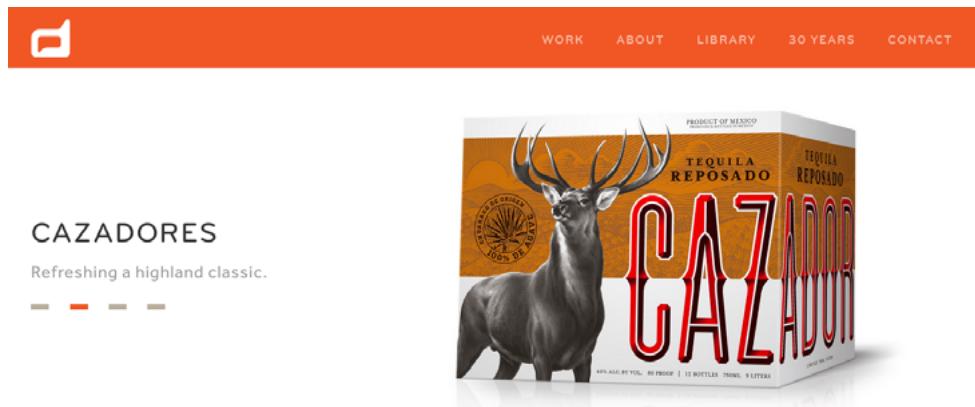
Last, the [Forest App](#) site is more like a flat hybrid, combining the simplistic elements of flat design with photo realism.

5 Characteristic Components of Flat Design

Influenced by [Swiss/international design](#) and artistic minimalism, flat design utilizes techniques from various mediums and eras and draws them together in something all its own. Here are the five most recognizable techniques the new flat design uses to set itself apart from competing styles, including its origins.

1. Long shadows

Part of Flat 2.0, [long shadows](#) add a depth and complexity without sacrificing the minimalist elements that make flat design appealing.

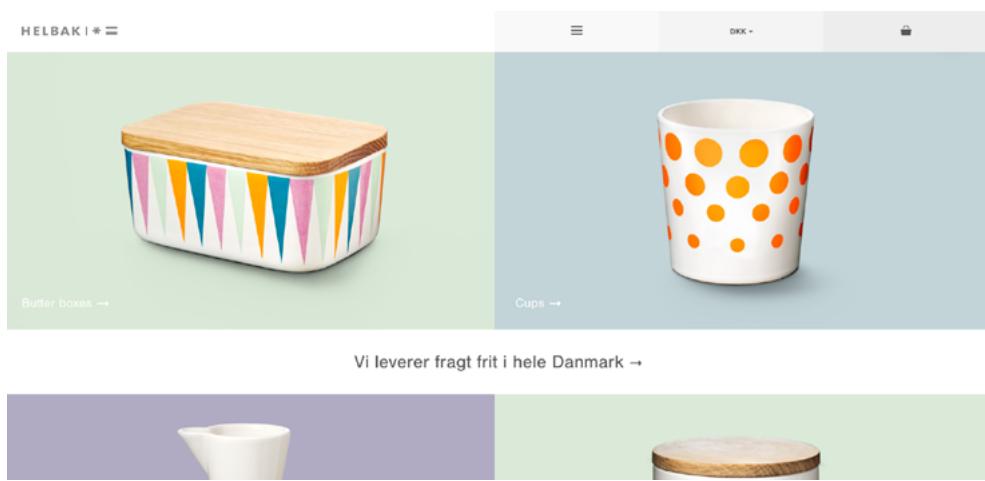


Source: [Duffy & Partners](#)

While last year saw the trend of longer, more noir-ish shadows, lately the trend has been moving towards subtlety. In the above example from [Duffy & Partners](#), the product's shadow (and reflection) are slight and unobtrusive, but still add a little extra visual interest.

2. Dynamic Colors

To make up for the sparse visual effects, flat design implements a dynamic usage of color, especially bright hues. The energizing colors contrasted with one another keep a page of few elements from appearing dull.

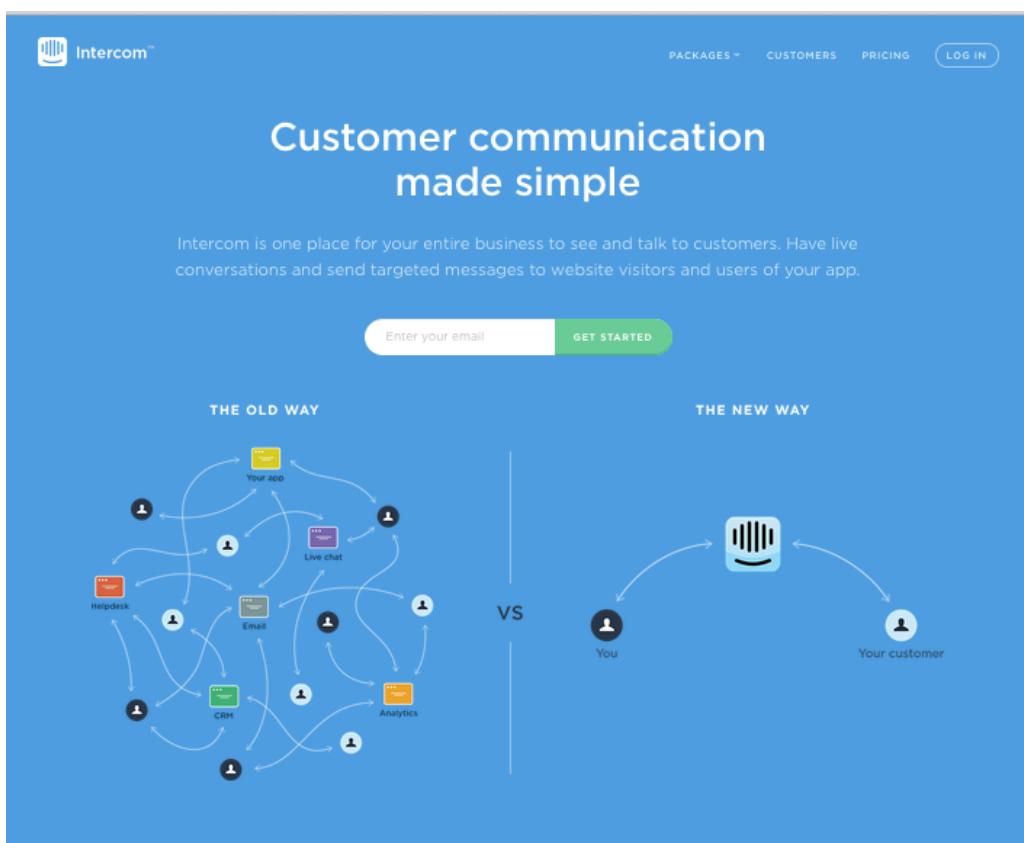


Source: [Helbak](#)

Because color usage is so crucial in flat design, the site [Flat UI Colors](#) collected some of the most effective of these patterns.

3. Simple Typography

True to form, the [typography](#) in flat design stays simple and easy to read – which usually equates to sans serif and a uniform stroke width.



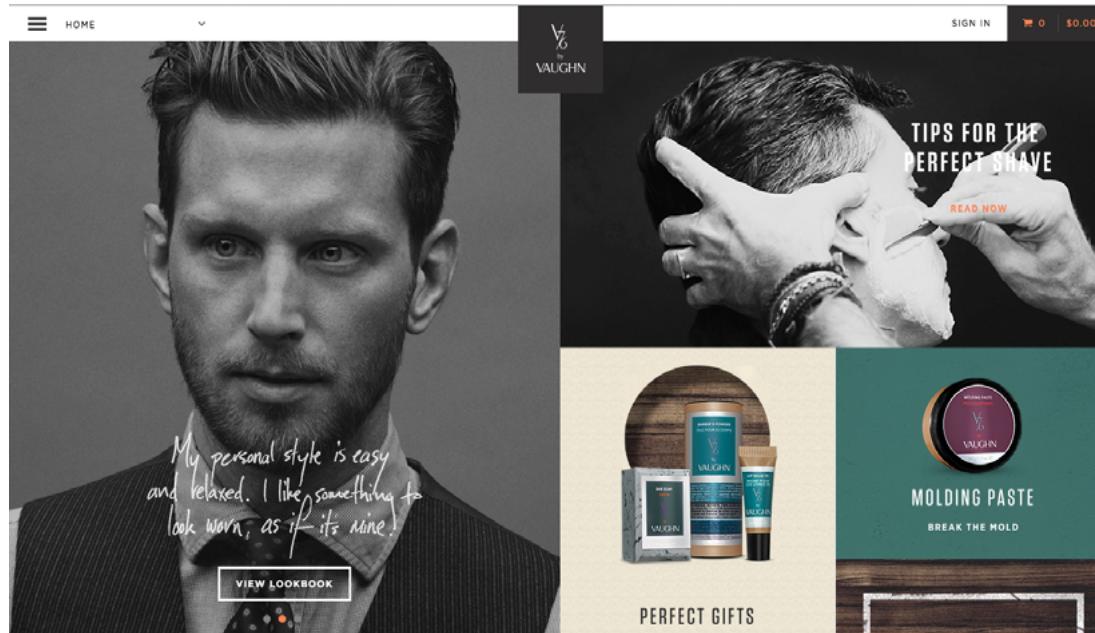
Source: [Intercom](#)

With its emphasis on readability, the popularization of flat typography is even infiltrating other, less minimalist styles of design.

4. Ghost Buttons

One of the trendiest elements in web design lately, the [ghost button](#) fits in equally well with the photo hero backgrounds as it does

with flat design, and for the same reason: it doesn't draw too much attention to itself, but it is still recognizable as a button.



Source: [Vaughn Shave](#)

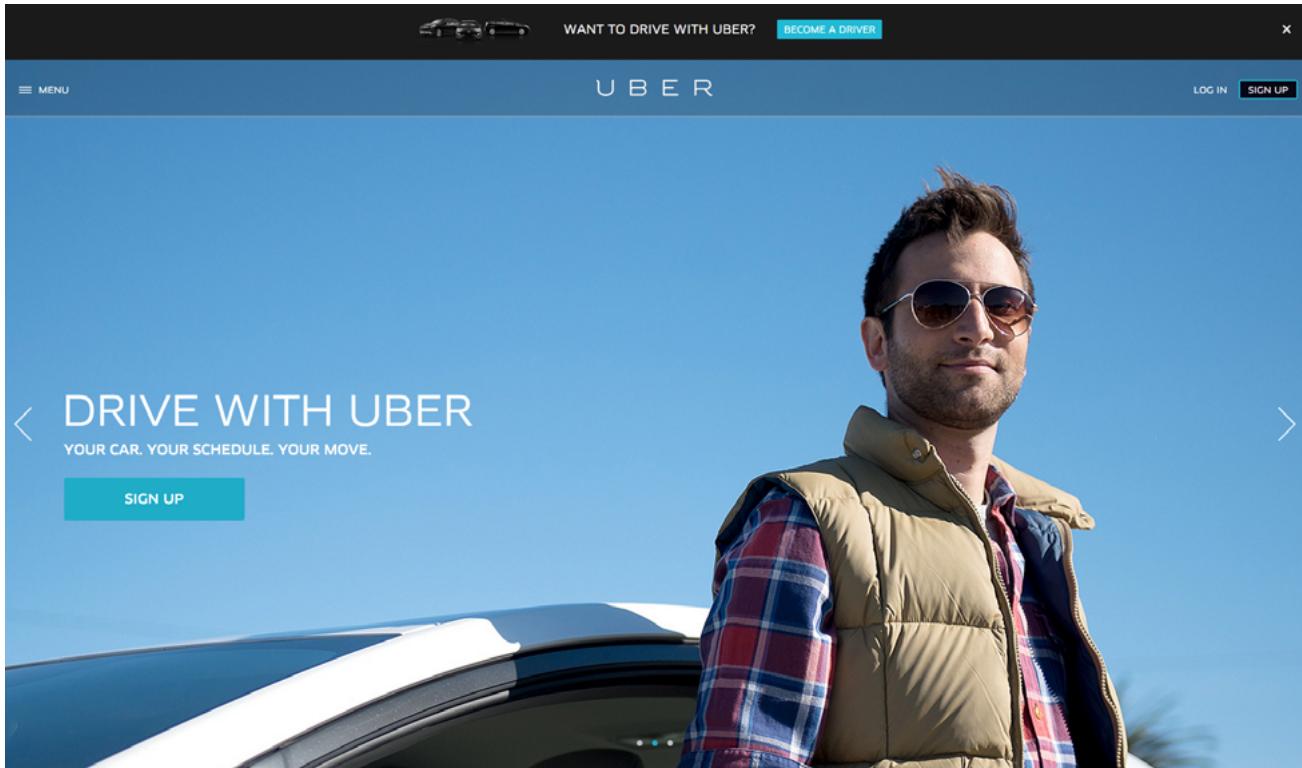
A screenshot of the IndieGoGo website. At the top, there are two circular icons: one with a heart and hands, and another with two pink arrows pointing in opposite directions. Below them are sections titled 'Customer Focused' and 'Flexible'. The 'Customer Focused' section includes a quote about the Customer Happiness Team's 24-hour response time and a link to a 'fundraising guide'. The 'Flexible' section discusses funding models and payment options. The bottom half of the page features a large grid of small thumbnail images representing various successful campaigns, with a central call-to-action button that says 'Make something happen.' and two buttons labeled 'EXPLORE CAMPAIGNS' and 'START A CAMPAIGN'.

Source: [IndieGoGo](#)

The simple typography within the buttons furthers the effects of deflecting too much attention.

5. Minimalism

Flat design and **minimalism** go hand-in-hand, sharing many of the same principles like simplicity and content-focused design.



Source: *Uber*

While it may seem like the easy way out, minimalism is actually harder to do well. Fewer elements mean you have to use the available ones with more care. We'll discuss minimalism in more detail in the next chapter.

Advantages and Disadvantages

No matter how great flat design is, what matters most is if it will work with your site. Take a look at the advantages and disadvantages below and see how it can mesh with your site.

Advantages

- Conducive to responsive design
- Easy for users to learn the system and navigate
- Structured layout and blunt visuals present a logical atmosphere
- Speedy loading times
- Simple typography promotes **readability**

Disadvantages

- Deceptively difficult to do well
- Simplistic style weakens the **signifiers**
- High risk of appearing boring
- Lack of individuality due to its popularity
- No distinct visual hierarchy

Flat design is inherently simple and minimalistic, so it's more difficult for conveying visually complex messages. Think carefully about what your site needs to communicate before diving in head-first.

Prevailing Trends in Flat Design

In the evolution of flat design, we're starting to pinpoint the characteristics that are gaining strength in the near future. For the rest of 2015 and 2016, expect to see a prevalence of these features:

1. Creative Iconography

With only the essential elements on the screen, icons need more detail and flair to keep things interesting.

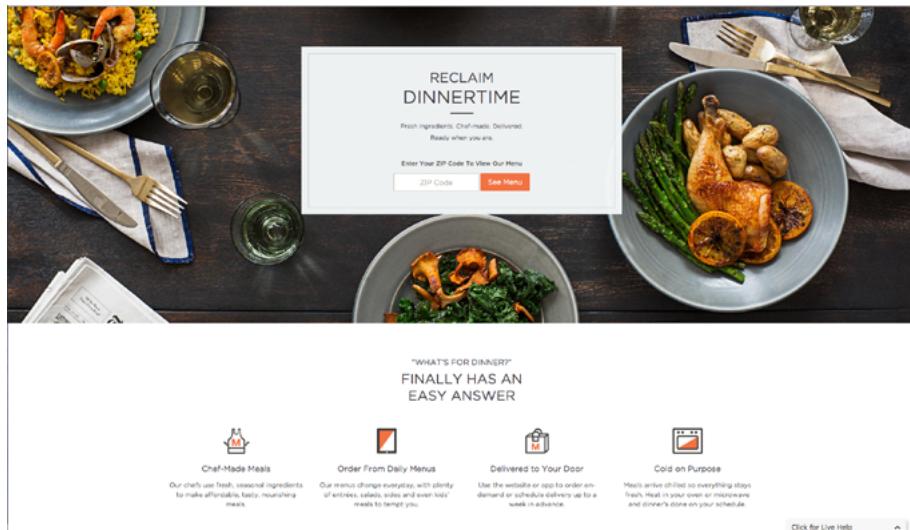


Photo credits: Munchery

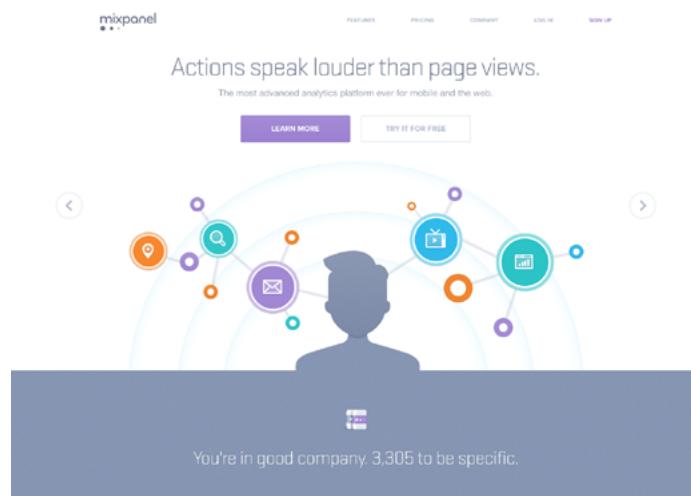


Photo credits: Mixpanel

Icons are growing in size to incorporate more detail, and as such are becoming more of a mainstay artistic element for a site's expression.

2. Dramatic Typography

While we discuss the future of typography in our free *Typography Trends Present & Future*, here we'll mention the increasing usage of pleasing typography, custom typefaces, purposeful lettering.

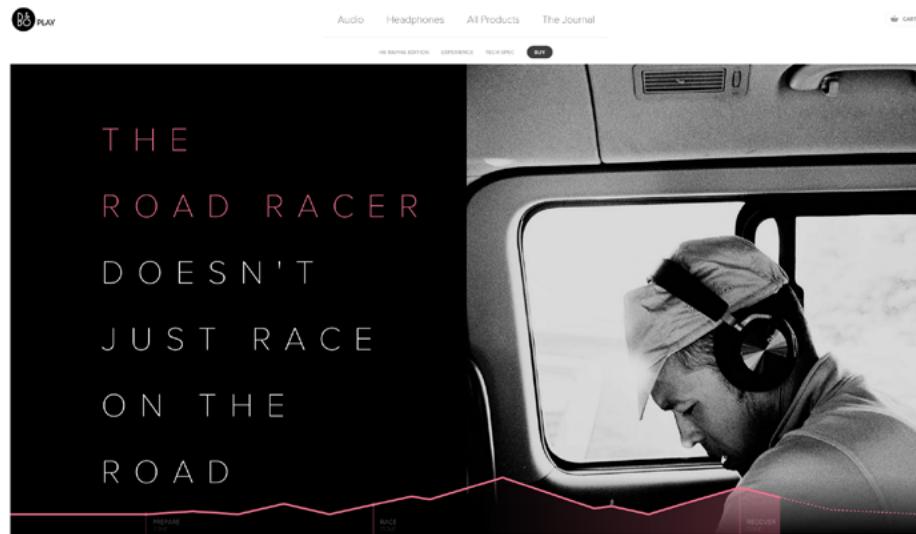


Photo credit: Beoplay

The typography popularized by flat design is now being employed by other trends like **hero headers**, **oversized typography** or **type-on-only websites**.

3. Accented Colors

The characteristic bright color palettes of flat design will never fully go out of style. However, the trend seems to be shifting to more stand color palettes with bright colors used only as accents.



Photo credits: Infographic Arte

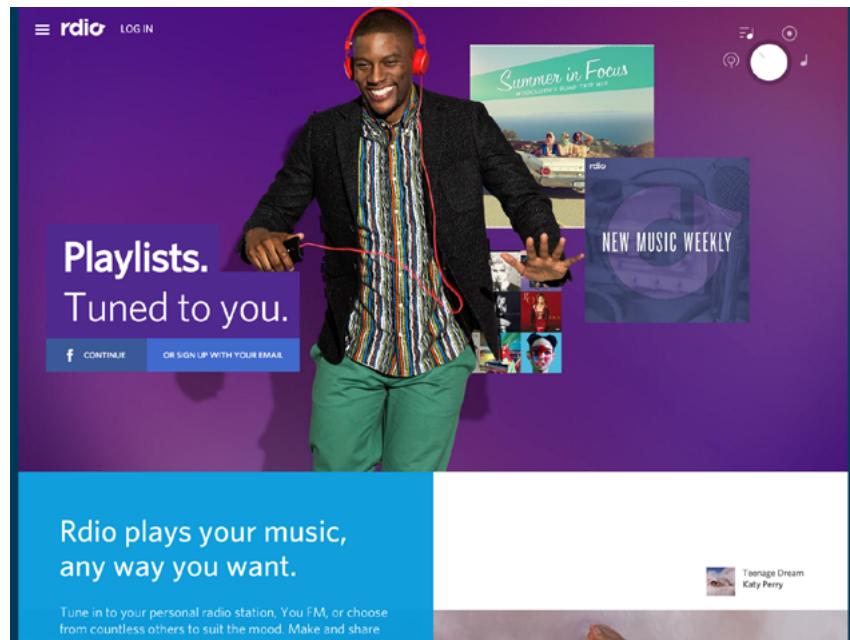


Photo credits: Rdio

Contrasting the bright colors against dryer backgrounds and surrounding elements gives the designer more control over what's seen and what's not.

4. One Design, One Font

With the exception of logos for brand identity, most text in flat design shares the same or similar font.

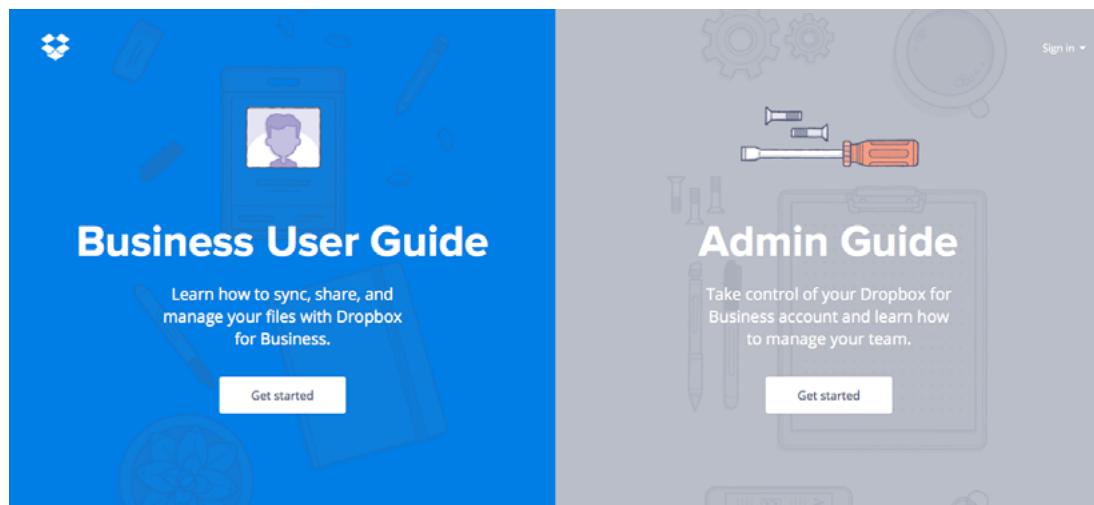


Photo credits: Dropbox Guide

And because these fonts are typically simple and unassuming, using the same one throughout ensures the focus remains on the content and not the look of the letters.

5. Minimalism

Minimalism may be “trending” right now, but for good reason. Its simplicity is both easy-on-the-eyes as well as functional, making it a popular choice for landing pages.



Photo credits: <http://www.micelistudios.com/>

The benefits of minimalism on responsive design, too, are obvious, as the lightweight designs translate much easier across different screen sizes.

Flat Design and Material Design

Flat & Material are more compatible than you might think.

Google's [Material Design](#) follows three core principles:

- Realistic visual cues
- Design theory fundamentals
- Motion that conveys meaning

These greatly coincide with the ideals of flat design, but with some major differences: material design places a greater emphasis on motion, animation, and layering of design elements. Aesthetically, material design is a more paper-like version of flat design with subtle textures and full use of the Z-axis.

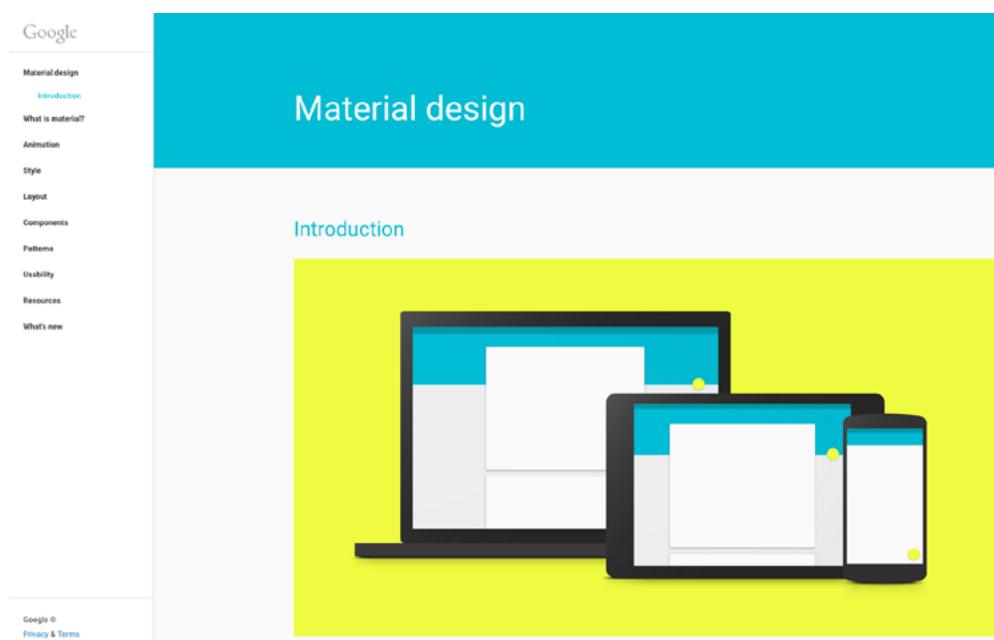


Photo credit: Google Material Design Principles

The one constant is the uniformity of visuals: colors, shapes, and overall structure tend to be simplistic and oriented with the fun

atmosphere we discussed above. Even material design's layering effects – a seeming opposite of flat design's single layer – displays a simplicity that's easy to confuse with flat design.

Considering the bold images, crisp edges, and vibrant look, you can see how the older flat design has influenced the up-and-coming material design.

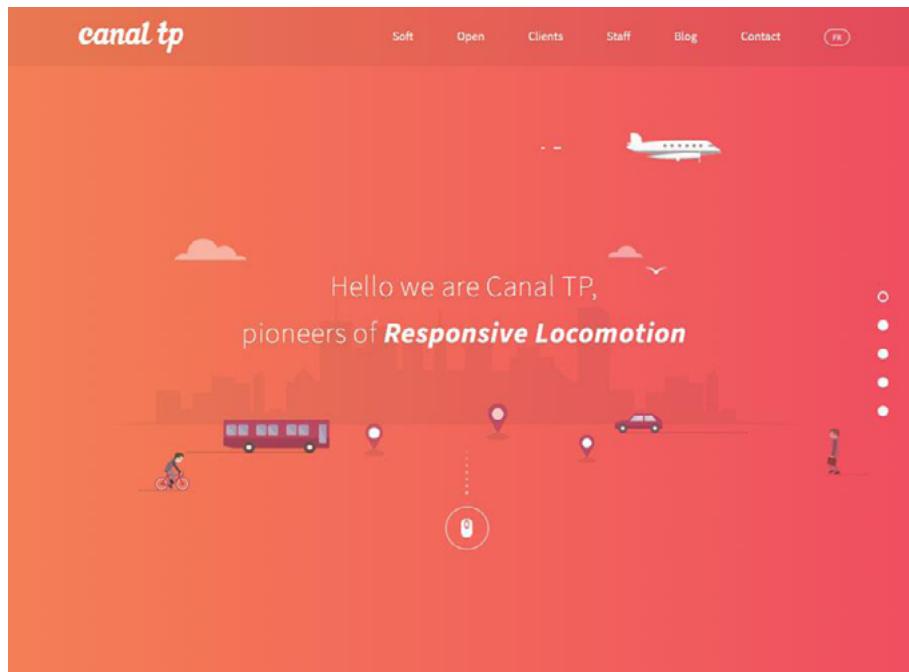
If anything, material design is favoring practicality over simplicity. Its layering effect allows more leeway in visual hierarchy and incorporating more elements by readily differentiating each. At the same time, its lax visual rules allow for more skeuomorphic signifiers and all the practical benefits of animation.

Thinking Beyond the Present

Flat design has already had a profound influence of design culture, and its current widespread use is deepening that impact.

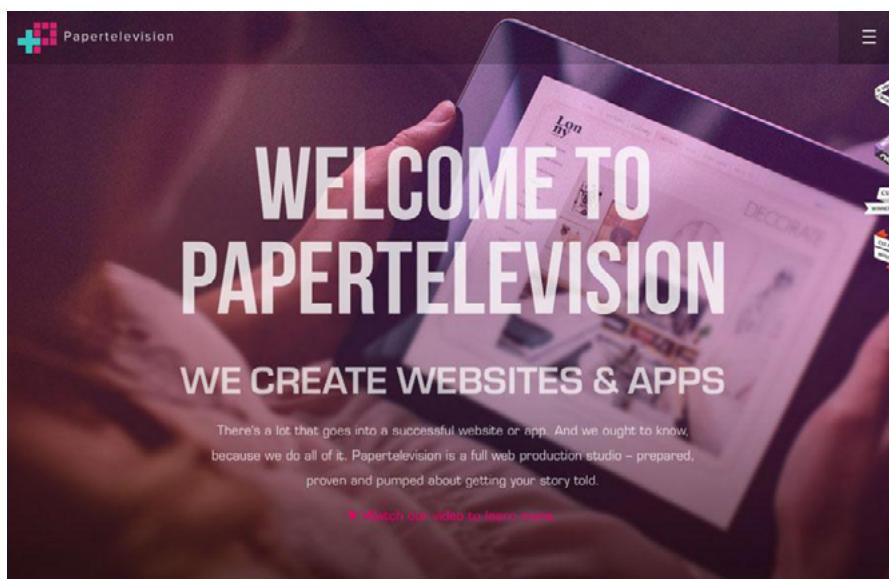
In the near future, expect flat design elements to merge with and be incorporated into other styles. For instance, the light visual load and fun ambience make it a nice fit for [parallax scrolling](#).

Canal TP combines flat's simple visuals and typography with more complex animation and parallax scrolling to create something that's a happy medium.



<http://www.canaltp.fr/>

Flat design continues to integrate animation and other interactive elements. While this may detract from the simplicity, these advancements will be done in such a style to maintain the minimalist aesthetic.



<http://www.papertelevision.com/>

Papertelevision seems like a simple enough site, but the flashy animations on certain actions give it a competitively modern feel.

The heart of flat design is stupidly simple usability. The obvious visuals improve learnability since users intuitively know how the site works. We predict that flat design bold icons and elegant button styles will seep into other design philosophies.



<http://www.emilianobarri.com/>

Another growing trend is the prominence of imagery, and we'll likely see this and flat design start to intertwine. While early flat sites didn't use much photography, today's (and tomorrow's) evolved flat design is doing wonderfully creative things with realistic imagery.

Emilio Barri (above) combines easy-to-use flat elements for the navigation and minimal aesthetic, but uses a highly stylized and stimulating image as its centerpiece. The result of this hybrid is something that takes advantage of the best of both styles.

Even though flat design grew out of an opposition to skeuomorphism, today there's no reason the two can't coexist. As long as flat design can bend slightly on the rigidity of its "flatness," it can – and will – freely incorporate more intricate and realistic elements of skeuomorphism.

Create Flat Design projects with UXPin!

10 Free Resources and Tools

1. **Flat UI Colors:** Detailed color and hue information for implementing the traditional flat design color palette.
2. **"The Ultimate Guide to Flat Design":** WebdesignerDepot's collection of flat UI kits, icons, tools, fonts, and WordPress themes.
3. **Flat Design 2.0:** A site analyzing the differences between modern and traditional flat design.
4. **Flat Design Website Inspiration from Awwwards:** A gallery of the best flat design websites, updated regularly.
5. **Flat UI Typography:** A tool that allows you to preview typography against a flat design screen before you implement it.
6. **Google Material Design Guide:** Google's "living document" outlines the concepts and themes the Internet king is using.
7. **"The History of Flat Design: How Efficiency and Minimalism**

Turned the Digital World Flat: An article from The Next Web that brings to light the history of flat design and its surprisingly deep roots.

8. **Create a Long Shadow Tutorial**: An instructional guide on how to create a long shadow without use of a tool kit.
9. **50 Flat Icon Sets**: Digital Synopsis's roundup of 50 flat icon sets that are free to use or peruse.
10. **25 Flat Device Mockups**: Templates for creating flat design mockups on a variety of devices.

Functional Minimalism

Rooted in [the post-World War II artistic movement](#), minimalism has re-emerged as a powerful technique in modern web design. Embodying the concept of “less is more,” minimalist sites center around [negative space](#), unadorned typography, and sparse elements. Together with [flat design](#), minimalist sites offer a collection of practical benefits, along with a pleasingly elegant appearance.

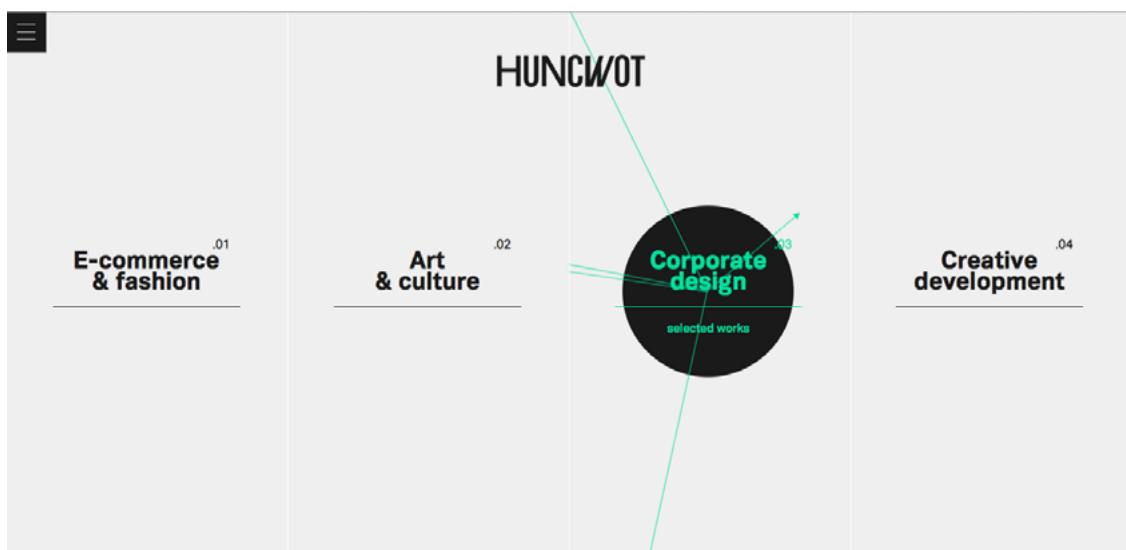


Source: “[Untitled](#).” Lauryn. [Creative Commons](#).

In this piece, we’ll discuss the application of minimalism in web UI design, and how to navigate that thin line between “simplistic” and “boring.”

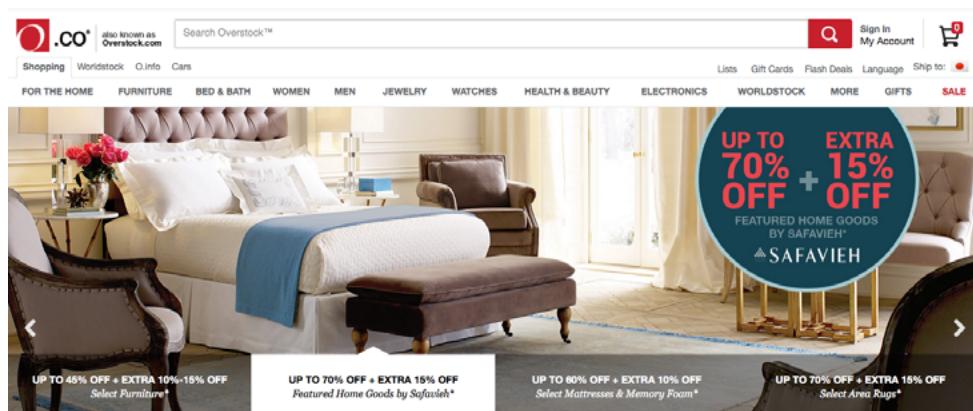
Only the Essentials

The core philosophy of minimalism is that, the less elements on a screen, the more potent the remaining ones becomes. That means if you have only four central elements...



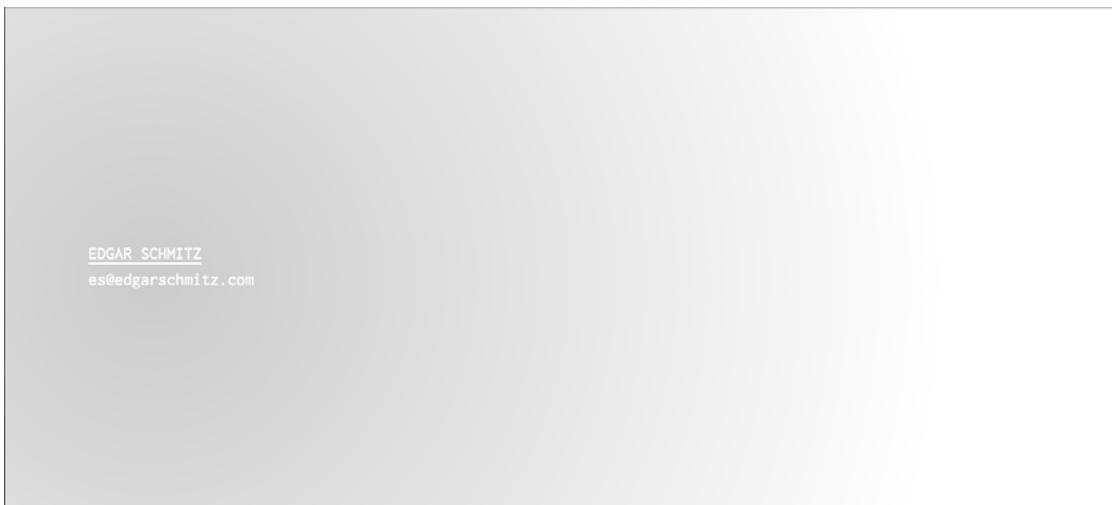
Source: [Huncwot](#)

... each one of them attracts more attention than if you had much more...



Source: [Overstock](#)

By that logic, if you had only a single element on the screen, you could be positive your message was communicated to the user.



Source: [Edgar Schmitz](#)

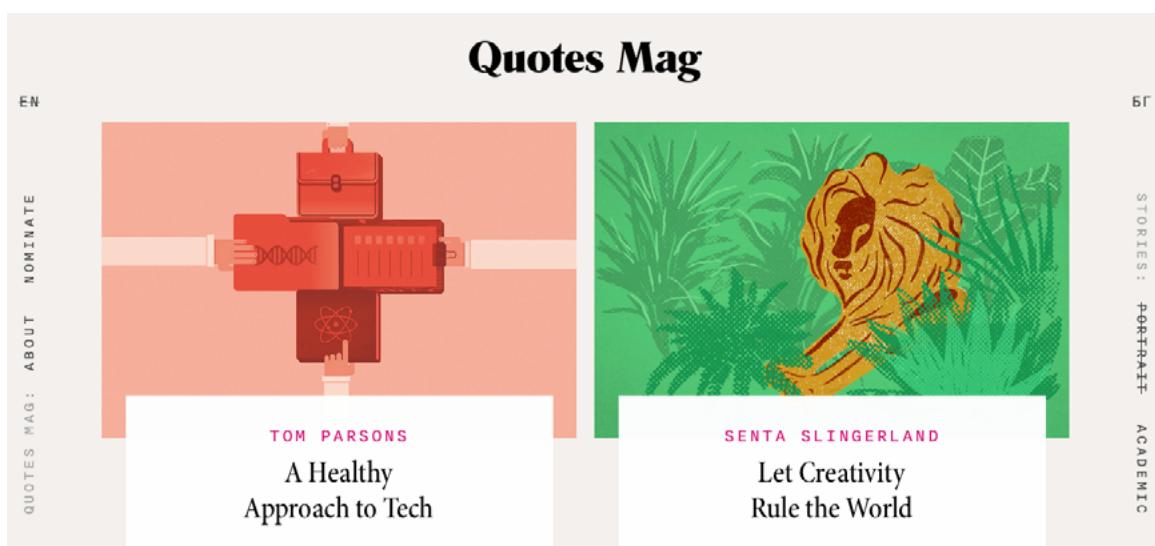
Minimalism is not merely emptiness or scarcity. It is the intentional stripping away of everything that distracts users from content. Design around the content, and leave just enough secondary elements (like navigation, for example) so that users don't get confused.

Combining Minimalism with Other Styles

Part of the beauty of minimalism is how well it complements other styles.

Especially with today's prevalence of mobile devices and heavy-loading animations, minimalism offers a way to reduce a site's maintenance without reducing its quality. For this reason and others, minimalism is often used in conjunction with the techniques below.

1. Flat Design



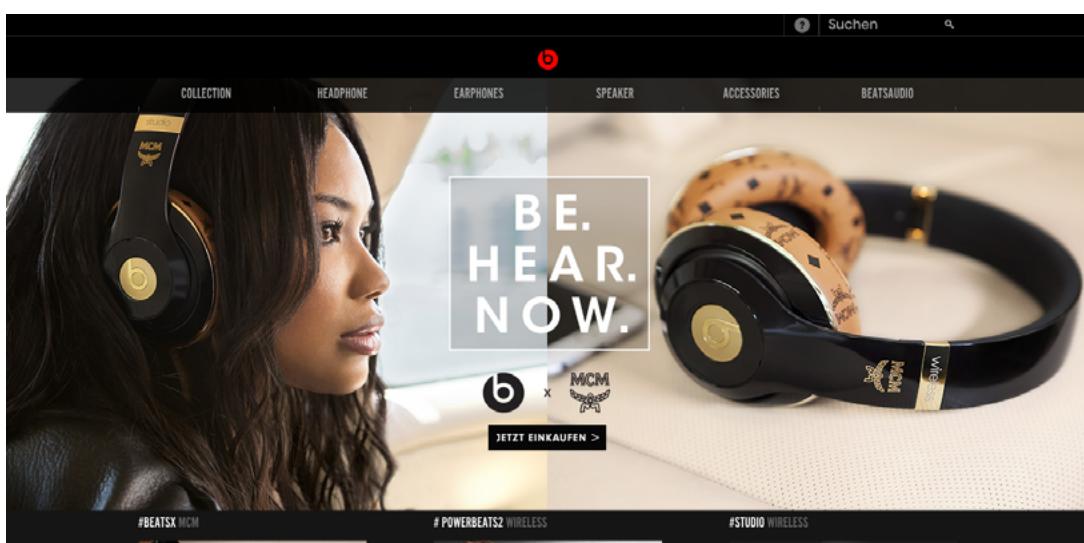
Source: [Quotes Magazine](#)

Minimalism and flat design go exceptionally well together, given their emphasis on simplicity. Both forego design tricks to draw attention to content, and the basic visual style of flat design is inherently minimalist.

2. Hero Headers and Images



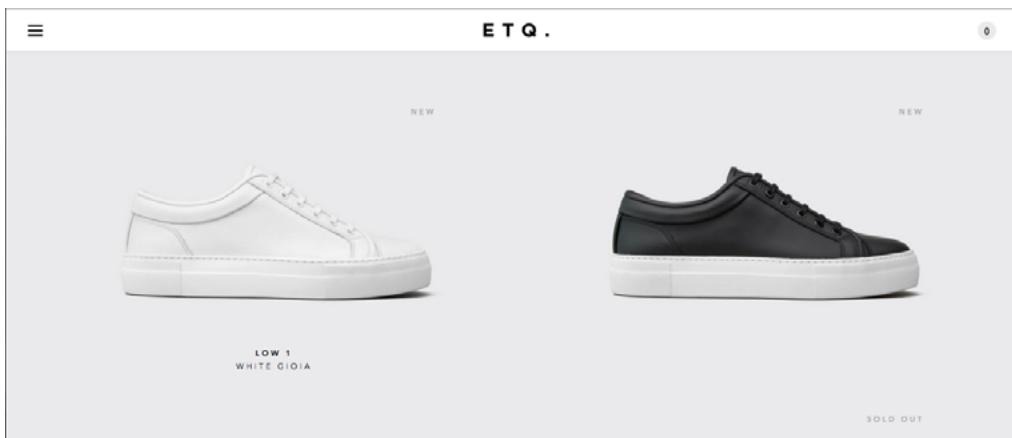
Source: [Apple](#)



Source: [Beats](#)

Large HD images are rising in popularity since they add a touch of realism to flat design interfaces without straying into skeuomorphism. Considering that these images take center stage in most layouts, a minimalist approach helps bring out the visual richness while still making core site elements (like buttons and navigation) highly visible.

3. Simple Navigation



Source: [ETQ](#)

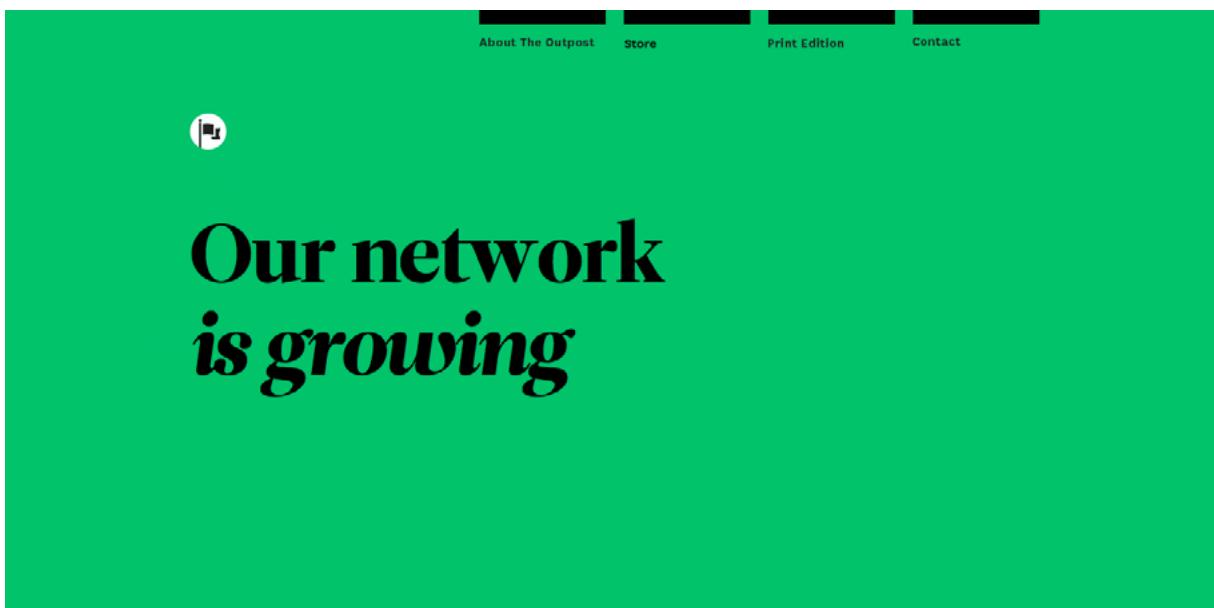
Simple navigation may be represented by icons, a set of simple text labels, or the controversial [hamburger menu](#).

The hamburger menu UI pattern reduces all navigational elements into a single, simplified icon. While the strategy is the fastest way to go full-throttle minimalistic, it's not recommended for every site – such oversimplification reduces the discoverability of navigation items, so you need to [proceed cautiously](#).

As Adobe UX Designer Sandyha Talwalker suggests, make sure you understand the [primary, secondary, and tertiary functions](#) behind the navigation design.

Remember that hamburger menus also result in less discoverability of navigation items, and they can be less clear to people [over 44 years old](#) (as Linn Vizard of Usability Matters points out). Know your users and the context, then decide if the hamburger menu makes sense.

4. Dramatic Typography



Source: *The Outpost*

Typography takes on a whole new importance in minimalist sites that don't use visuals. In that case, it becomes one of the few ways left for a minimalist site to depict its personality and create atmosphere.

For sites that do feature visuals, typography is still a powerful site element.

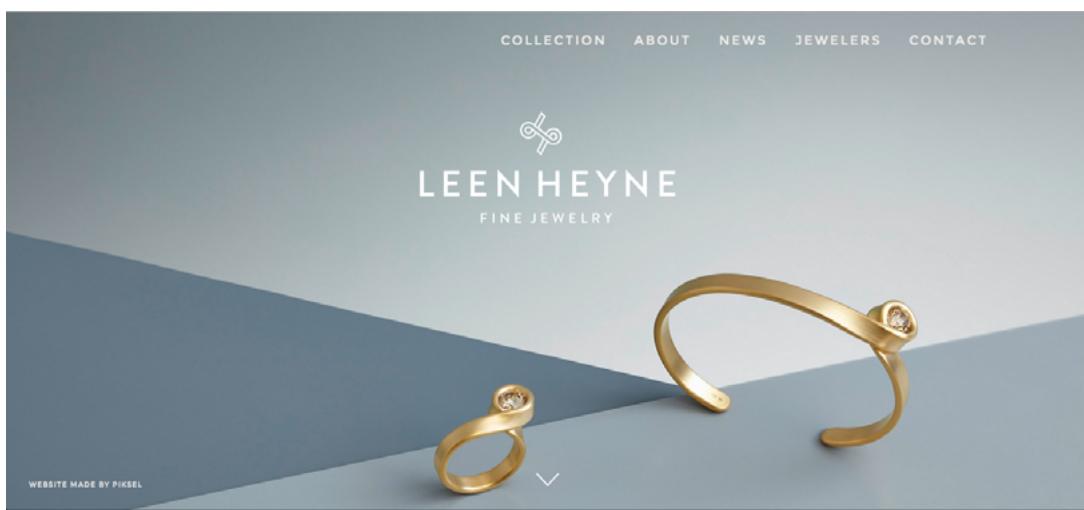
Because minimalism forces us to reduce the number of elements, you must treat each element as its own canvas. Visual styles matter even more when nothing distracts from the subtleties. Like we described in *Interaction Design Best Practices*, words are the foundation of all interactions. Invest your time accordingly, since in a minimalist layout, your copy and typography speaks even louder.

Negative Space

It should be no surprise that the most common element in minimalism is no element at all. Negative space – also known as white space – is the most important feature of minimalism, and what gives it much of its power.

As described in *Web Design for the Human Eye*, the more negative space around an object, the more the eye is drawn to it.

For example, in the [Leen Heyne](#) example below, the monochrome logo and company tag competes with the gold and sparkling gems of the jewelry. Both are surrounding by an expanse of negative space, making it a safe bet the user's eyes will go back-and-forth between the two.



Source: [Leen Heyne](#)

Additionally, negative space [adds an air of elegance](#), making minimalism the preferred style of high-end brands and other companies looking to appear exclusive. Negative space adds confidence to your

site, telling users that you don't need to cram it full of content (or UI elements) to convey the value.

To learn more about negative space techniques for web design, check out the free e-book [*The Zen of White Space*](#).

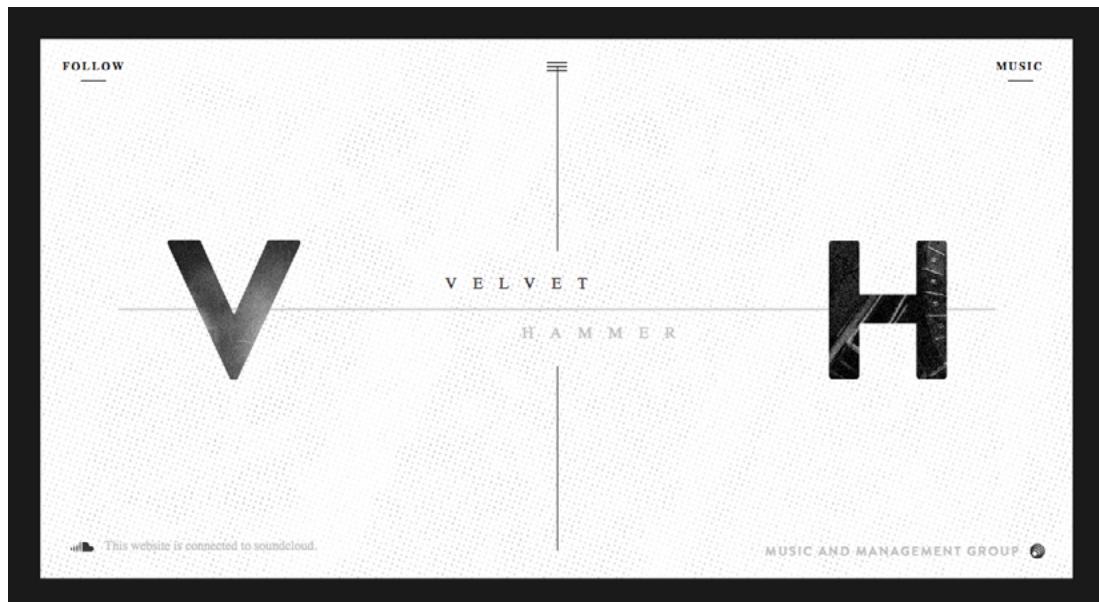
Visual Harmony and Symmetry

In order for a minimal design to be effective, it must be structured effectively. This means a strong grid, visual balance, and carefully constructed alignment.

The standard go-to solution in minimalism is to center the content (a successful and safe strategy, but certainly not the only one). Sometimes the text is then aligned off-center for a more dynamic look, but the most effective way to stay out is to avoid the “center crutch” altogether.

This requires an understanding of the different forms of symmetry, and how to balance the large and small elements on a screen. We can categorize symmetry into four forms:

- 1. Halved symmetry** – The halves of the screen have compositions, mostly horizontally, but occasionally vertically.



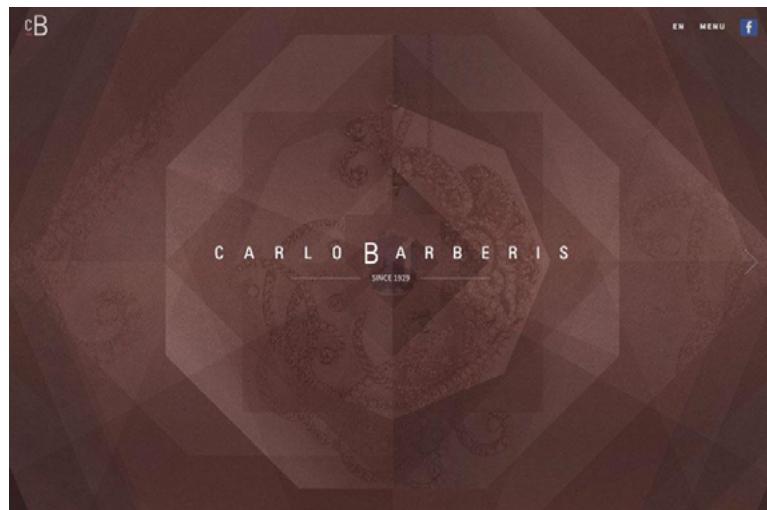
Source: [Velvet Hammer](#)

- 2. Approximate symmetry** – While the composition may be the same, the visual weight is equal on both sides of the screen. For example, one large element balanced by several smaller elements. As you can see below, the large visual on the left is somewhat balanced by the copy and CTA button on the right.



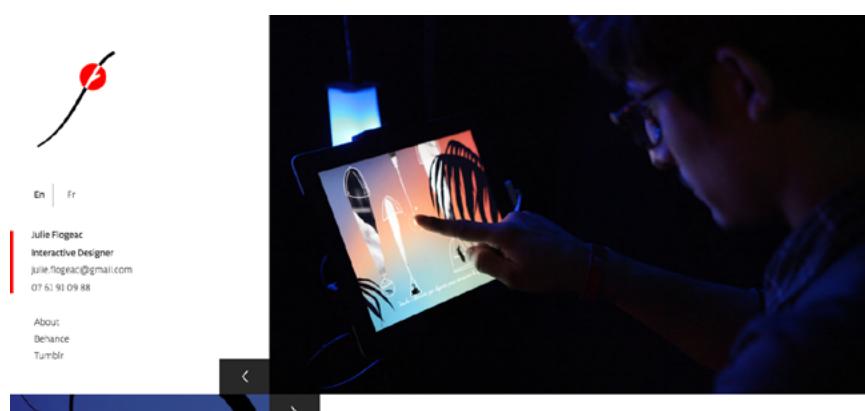
Source: [Squarespace](#)

3. **Radial Symmetry** – Starting at the center point, the elements exist symmetrically in a near-circular pattern.



Source: [Carlo Barberis](#)

4. **Asymmetry** – Organized chaos, so to speak. This risky and difficult-to-apply layout, will give your site a “different” feel compared to others, which might just be what you’re going for. Asymmetry adds liveliness to the interface, making the user “enjoy the view” as they move towards their destination. In our experience, asymmetry requires the most skill to pull off since you’re just as likely to create a lopsided layout.



Source: [Julie Flogeac](#)

Contrast

Because you must design with fewer elements, you need to get creative when it comes to creating a visual hierarchy.

You can create contrast with color, size, shape, and location.



Source: [We Ain't Plastic](#)

In the [We Ain't Plastic](#) example above, you see the staple of minimalism, the white (or white offshoot) background contrasted with the black gemstone. Furthermore, notice the use of scale for the text: the brand name is larger than the “Hire Me” in the corner, though both seem small in relation to the image.

The portfolio site uses contrast to first draw your attention to the gemstone, which certainly leaves a strong impression. As you wonder what it might represent, you scroll downward and see the designer cleverly lists his skills as “gems”, which completes the visual metaphor.

When it comes to single-page sites, a minimalistic layout works well because it helps chunk up content into bite-sized pieces. The right level of contrast then creates clear visual hierarchies for each section, making the scroll-based experience efficient and pleasant.

Is Minimalism Right for Your Site?

Demanding a strong command of design subtlety, minimalism is not for every site.

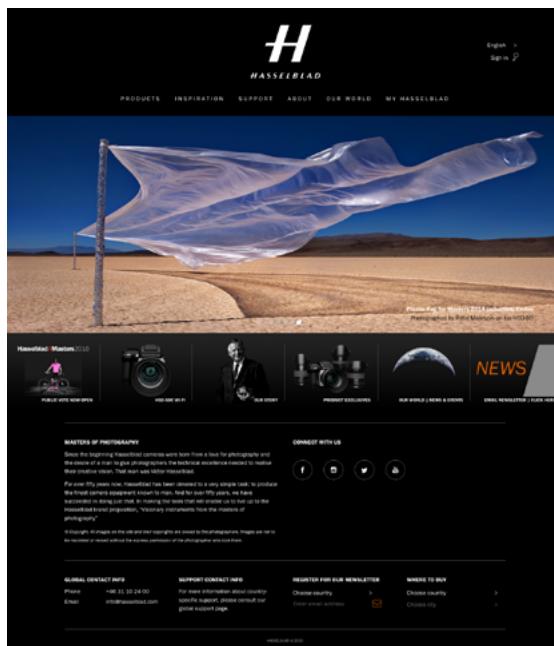


Photo credit: [Hasselblad](#)

Let's look at some common problems sites run into when applying minimalism.

- **Too much content** – Ecommerce sites like [Ebay](#) or [Amazon](#) carry a diverse range of products, so their site design must support complex information architecture. However, even these sites ap-

ply some of the principles of minimalism, such as hiding content until needed, and keeping an unobtrusive layout.

- **Too many ads** – In general, external ads and minimalism do not go well together. Minimalism is precise and meticulous, so if you can't control what's comes from the ad server, your entire design could be upset by something trivial like the ad's color. Even if the ad is preset, it's still one more element in a scheme designed for as few elements as possible.
- **Children and young adult sites** – The short attention spans of younger audiences make minimalism come across as boring; they'd prefer sites with more visual stimulation.

Remember that the minimalist philosophy of content-driven design applies to every site, but the minimalist aesthetic (e.g. tons of white space, sparse elements) might not always be appropriate.

Minimalism Best Practices

Minimalism is not as easy as it may seem, so let's review some guidelines.

1. **Minimalist landing page only** – The lack of elements can be harmful to certain content-rich sites. In these cases, a better option might be in creating a minimalist landing page that leads to a more intricate site.

2. **Crisp copy** – While “omitting needless words” is great writing advice in general, in minimalism it’s even more useful. Channel Hemingway when writing your copy.
3. **Top-heavy** – In accordance to user browsing habits, place high-level content with ample negative space at the top of the screen, then increase the content density as the scroll deepens.

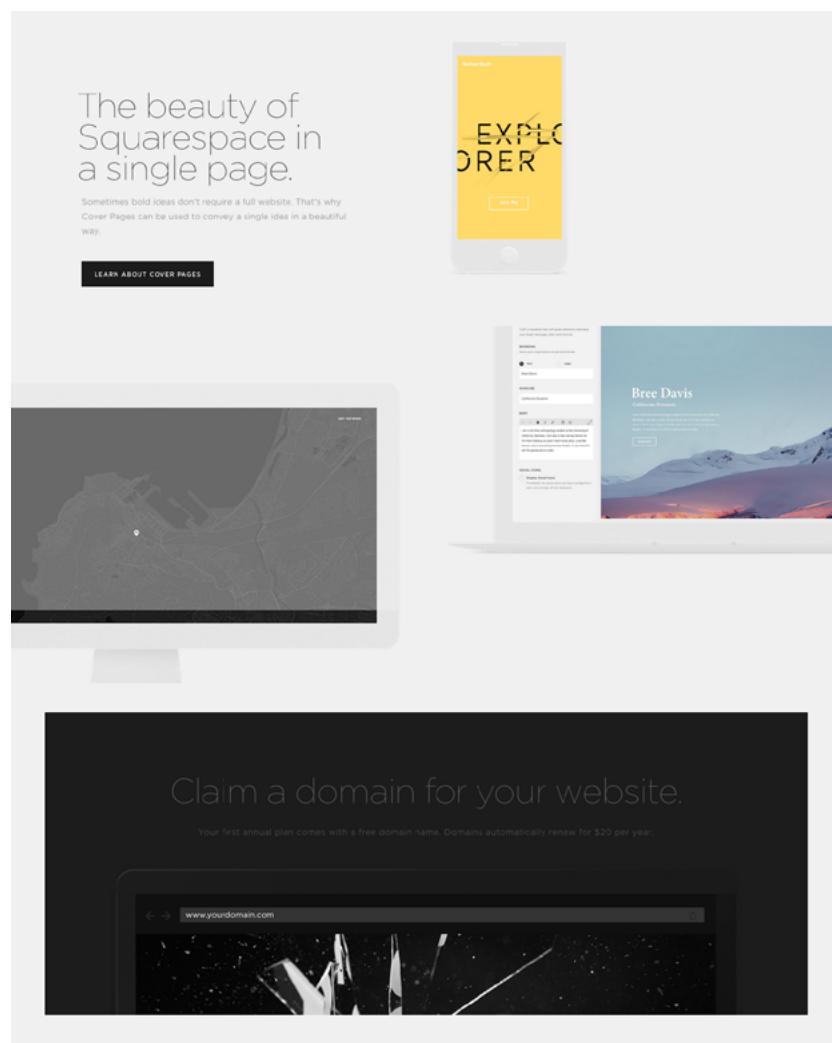


Photo credit: Squarespace

4. **Keep it interesting** – Boring users is a constant threat with minimalism, so change up your layouts just to further engage them. Alternating layouts along the Z-shaped reading pattern can help.

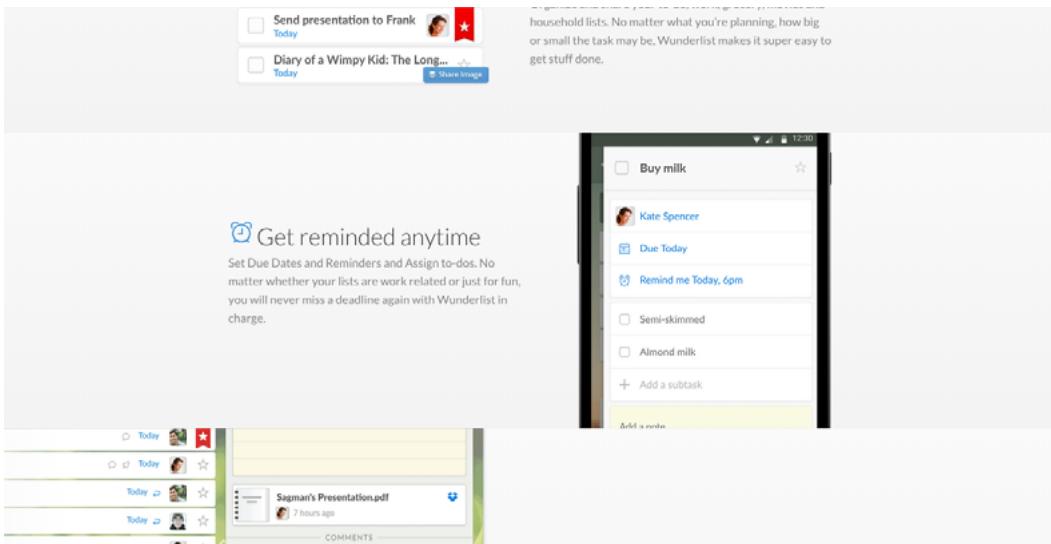


Photo credit: [Wunderlist](#)

5. **One concept per page** – In the spirit of simplicity, each page/screen should focus on only one concept, centered around a single visual.
6. **Start simple** – A helpful way to design is to start with a **black and white wireframe**, then add flourishes like color later. This helps focus your decisions on content first (which is what your users care most about).

If you're new to applying minimalism, it's tough to decide what to keep and what to toss.

Below we've made a quick list for beginners:

- **Essentials** – logo, navigation options, body content, contact information
- **Throw-aways** – social media links/icons, footers, widgets (especially lists, i.e., "Top Posts")

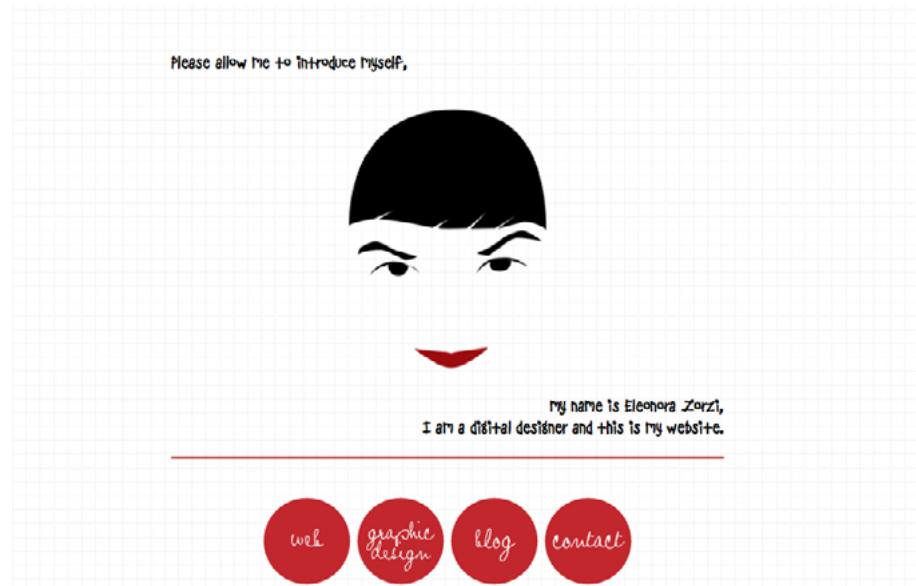
On the bright side, the more you work in minimalism, the more you develop your instincts about what can be cut.

Thinking Beyond the Present

Just like flat design evolving to suit the new needs, so too will minimalism. Like how flat design is evolving into [almost-flat design](#), we'll likely see a similar evolution in minimalist sites.

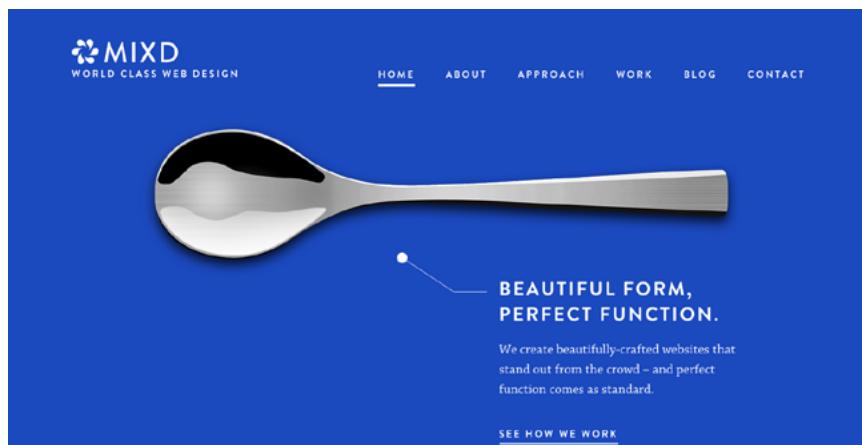
The style will enjoy more diversity and detail, while retaining its core of simplicity and scarcity. On the horizon, pay attention to these changing elements.

1. **Texture** – Backgrounds will be free to include more texture while retaining the ample negative space that shifts focus onto the main content.



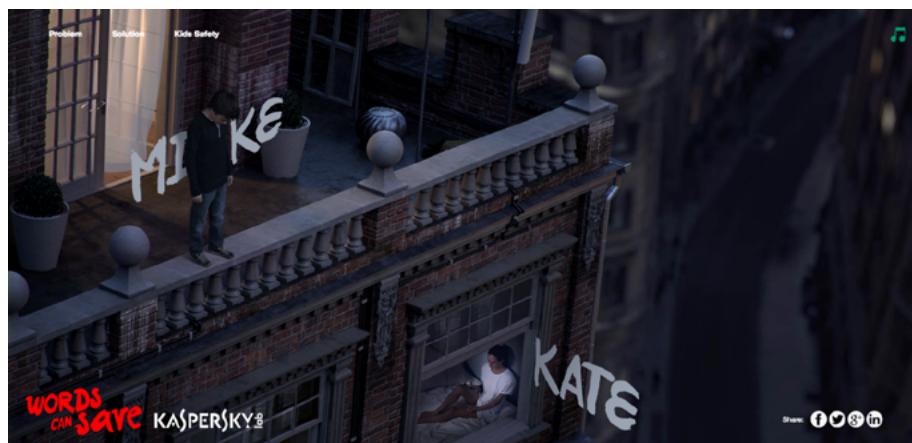
Source: [Leonora Zorzi](#)

2. **Colors** – Designers will embrace colors beyond the traditional black and white backgrounds as they experiment with more unconventional color palettes.



Source: Mixd

3. **Animation** – Animated effects in general are on the rise, so minimalist sites risk falling behind if they don't implement them. However, these new effects will likewise follow the minimalist spirit: simple, and with only what is essential.



Source: Words Can Save

4. **Improved Usability** – In theory, minimalism excels in usability, but it's only a small step from a minimal design and **an interface that's missing some essentials**. Now we're starting to see smaller

additions for the sake of usability, such as clickable elements, calls-to-action, scrolling, and more obvious icons.

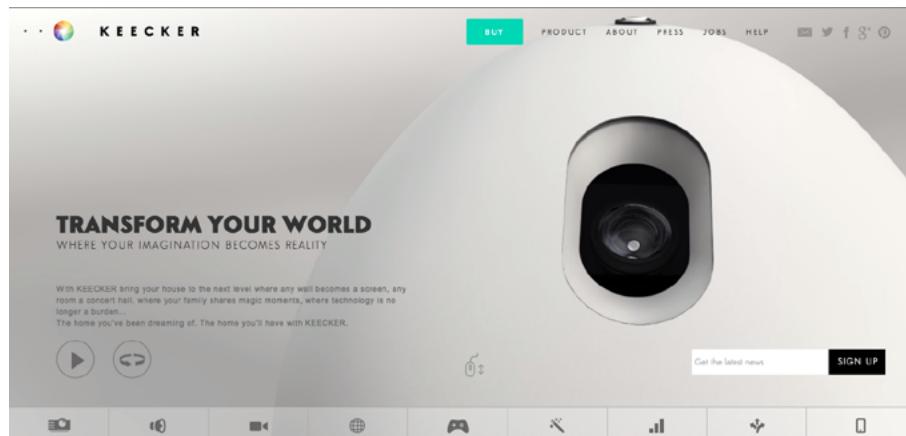


Photo credit: Keecker

Minimalism as a design philosophy is an enduring and timeless concept.

Content-focused design always applies, even if the techniques ebb and flow with what's popularly/practical at any given time. If you can isolate this aspect of minimalism and apply it to your design, you'll never have to worry about falling out of vogue.

Start creating quick Wireframes in UXPin for free

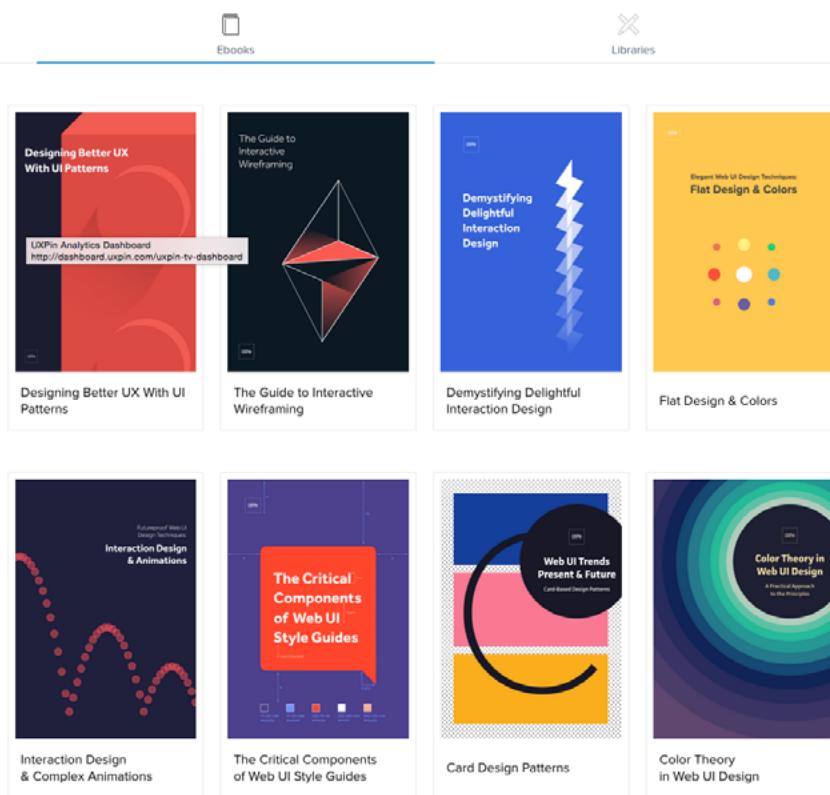
10 Free Resources and Tools

1. **Color Contrast Checker** – Enter your background and foreground colors to calculate the ratio of contrast to create the most dynamic site.

2. “[Design Principles: Connecting and Separating Elements Through Contrast and Similarity](#)” – Smashing Magazine’s piece on the strategies behind the minimalist foundations of contrast and space.
3. [25 Sets of Icons for Minimal Web Design](#) – Icon resources for maintaining the simple and non-distracting aesthetic.
4. [Responsive Grid System](#) – Tool for creating a grid system for between two and 12 columns.
5. “[Get inspired: 50 Awesome Examples of Minimal Typography](#)” – A gallery from 1st Web Designer showcasing excellent examples of minimal typography.
6. [Create a Minimal Portfolio Website Design Tutorial](#) – A beginner’s guide to designing a minimal site in Adobe Photoshop.
7. [Gallery of Minimal One-Page Websites](#) – A site dedicated to featuring the best one-page websites.
8. [Siiimple](#) – A gallery of CSS code for minimalist sites.
9. [Best Minimalist WordPress Themes](#) – A nice launchpad for minimalist templates, though not all are free.
10. [Minimalist Color Palettes](#) – Some common minimalist color schemes deviating from the standard black-on-white.

Card UI Patterns

So far in this ebook, the trends we've talked about have become popular not just for their appealing visual styles, but because of their practicality in mobile design. The success of flat design and minimalism has as much to do with their simplicity facilitating responsive design as it does their aesthetic.



Source: [UXPin](#)

This timing is no coincidence, as [2014 marked the first time mobile internet usage exceeded desktop](#).

The card UI pattern is in the similar vein, though its usefulness extends beyond faster loading times and responsive adaptability. Nurtured by [Pinterest](#) and then popularized by social media sites like [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), card UIs are now one of the fastest growing layouts today, and for good reason.

As we'll explain in this chapter, organizing content into bite-sized, independant containers has benefits for any platform you choose.

Container-style Design

To understand this pattern, you must first understand the card itself.

Cards are, in essence, self-sufficient containers of information, with each card representing its own singular thought. A card can contain a variety of data – images, text, buttons, links, comments, etc. – but all relate to the same concept.

Displaying information in this way creates a cleaner, more comprehensive interface (plus lends itself to gesture controls, as we'll explain below). Let's explore some of the most popular card styles:

1. **Pins** – The most recognizable layout for cards, based on Pinterest. Emulators of this style became so prevalent, Wordpress even

collected several [26 of the best pin-style themes](#). Unfortunately, the style became *too* popular, and lately these sites appear unoriginal.

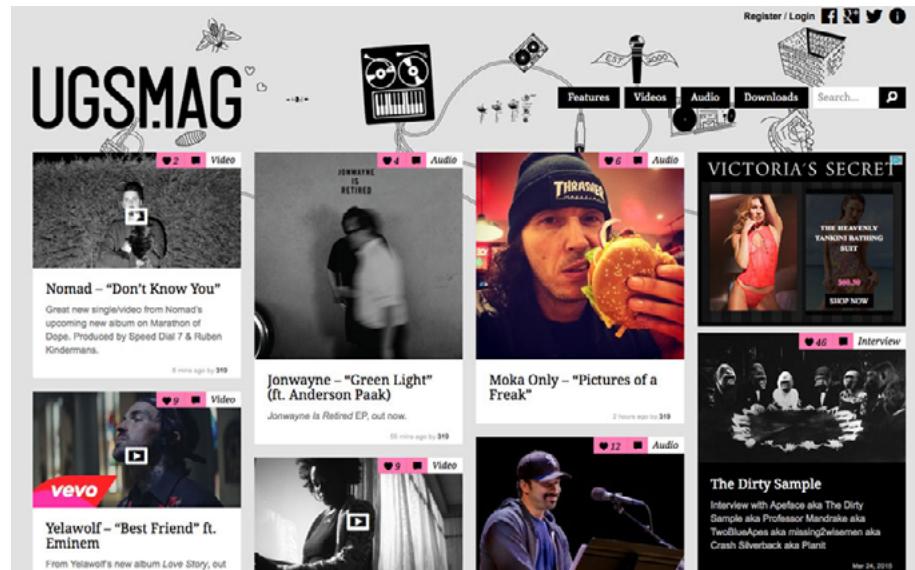
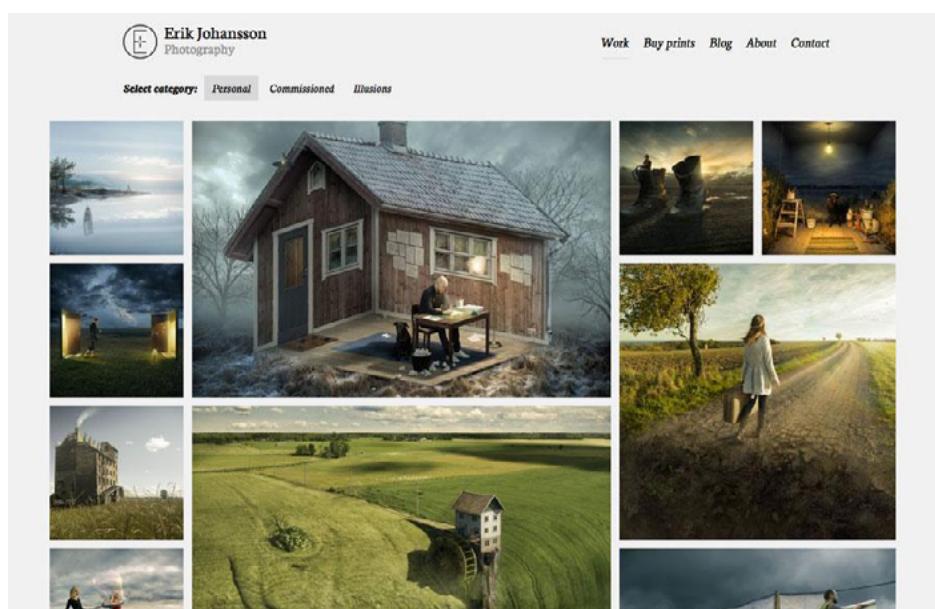


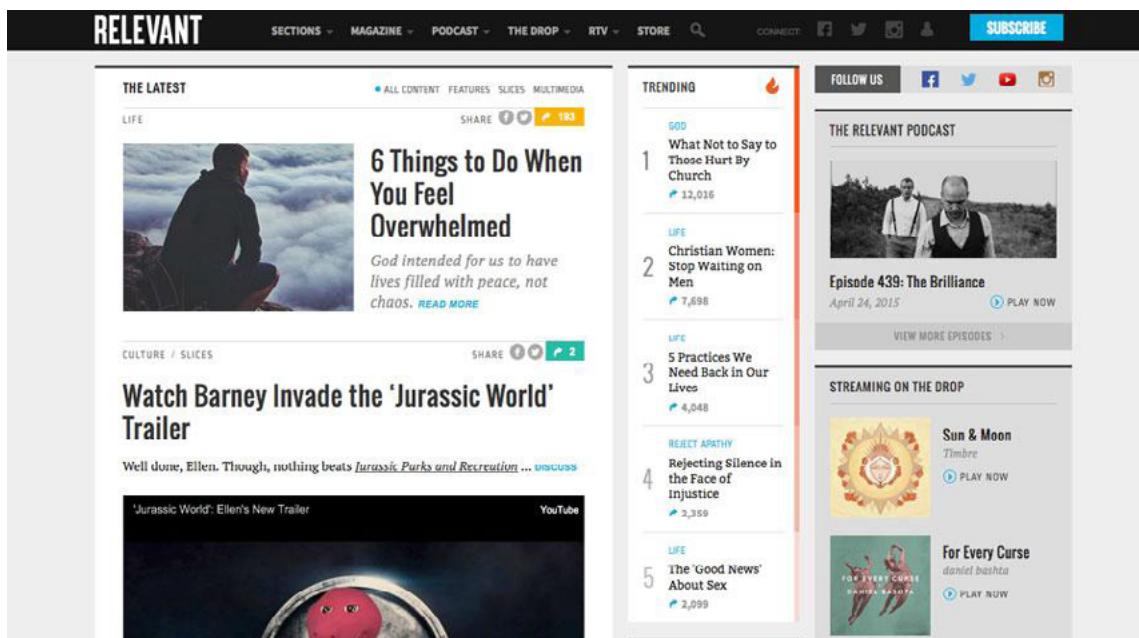
Photo credit: <http://ugsmag.com/>

2. **Masonry (Grid)** – The [masonry-style framework](#) features cards structured logically with grids of equal spacing. This makes the content both easy to understand and easy to browse.



Source: [Erik Johansson](#)

3. Magazine Style – Originating for news and [magazine websites](#), this style is now spilling over to other content-heavy sites like blogs or portfolios. The characteristic of this layout is a teaser image or text tag, linking out to the full article elsewhere.

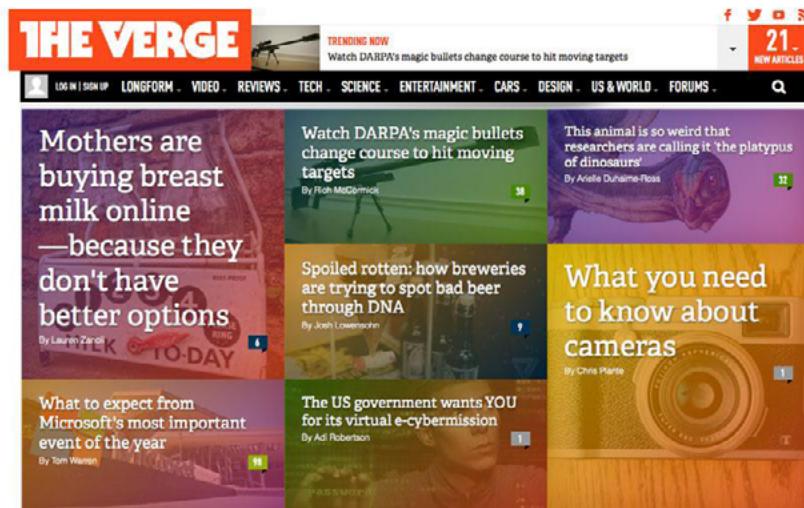


Source: [Relevant Magazine](#)

In all cases, the container style of design works well as a way to showcase a lot of content without overwhelming the user.

Cards in Mobile and Responsive Design

As mentioned above, cards offer excellent [compatibility with responsive frameworks](#). In frameworks that expand and contract, card grids can restructure themselves to fit any [breakpoint](#) or screen size.



Source: [The Verge](#)

Designers have a lot of flexibility regarding the aspect ratio of the card itself (plus how groups of cards fit together). A common strategy is to maintain a fixed-width with a variable height, with consistent spacing between cards.

Cards also allow for a consistent experience across devices – a card always functions the same way, no matter if it's on a phone, tablet, or desktop. Just think of Apple's AirDrop function, which helps to consolidate a user's information across multiple Apple devices. When there's incoming data, a notification card appears with the options to either Accept or Decline. This card appears on all the devices and functions in the same manner, so there's no confusion about what to do whenever it appears.

Another application is how the card-style fits in with gesture controls. On touch screens, the cards instantaneously become buttons with no extra effort. Clearing spaced and with obvious functionality (touch the relevant card to interact with its central idea), cards transfer usability to mobile devices rather than lose it.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Cards may serve a broad range of industries, but that doesn't mean they work for every site. Take a look at the advantages and disadvantages below.

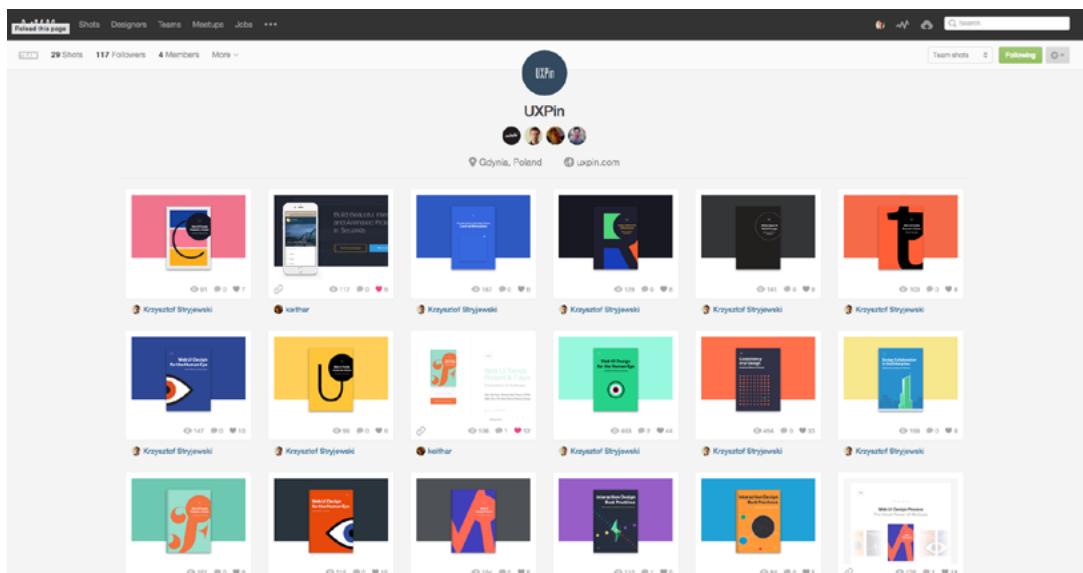


Photo credit: [dribbble.com](#)

1. Advantages:

- Intuitive understanding of how to use them
- Ideal for **aggregated content** (a single website featuring content from multiple external sites)
- Easy to browse

- Shareable – design cards are like the digital equivalent of a business card (which explains their popularity with social media)
- Versatile – cards can be adapted to almost any style, from minimalist to complex interfaces

2. Disadvantages

- A bit played out, especially for clones of Pinterest or Facebook
- Require heavy creative UX design, as interaction is a key component of their success
- Risk of producing a cluttered feel
- Require even more attention to visual design since each card can only display a few types of information

Cards are easy to add to a design, but difficult to master. Since they are so common nowadays, it takes real finesse to make the pattern feel original without sacrificing its inherent usability.

Best Practices

In her article, [*The Complete Guide to an Effective Card-Style Interface Design*](#), Carrie Cousins outlines the seven essential practices for designing with cards.

1. **Negative space** – Use sufficient borders and padding to avoid clutter.
2. **One card, one concept** – The nature of cards is in how they simplify your site's structure. Don't undercut that by making each card too complex.
3. **Suitable images** – Because card images tend to be small, make sure you use clear pictures and crop them in relation to where they'll be used.
4. **Simple typography** – Like images, text tends to be small, so simple typography is more legible. Choose simple and elegant typefaces. Avoid decorative typefaces.
5. **Get creative** – Since this is such a popular style, make an extra effort to stand out, whether an animated effect, video, round frame, or new color scheme.
6. **Use an open grid** – A standard grid helps maintain the same spacing while respecting various sizes and breakpoints.

7. **Implement Fitt's Law** – As we described in *Interaction Design Best Practices*, Fitt's Law, as applied to cards, suggests that the entire card be clickable, not just the text or the image. This makes it easier for the user to interact.

With cards, you have only a small area to accomplish all that card's goals. That means you'll have to properly apply all the design fundamentals to get your point across.

Cards in Action

You can't really say that cards are a strictly visual style, nor can you say they are strictly an interface element. Rather, cards form a balanced union between the two – usability principles applied and manifested visually.

Below, we'll explore two sites that exemplify the pattern.

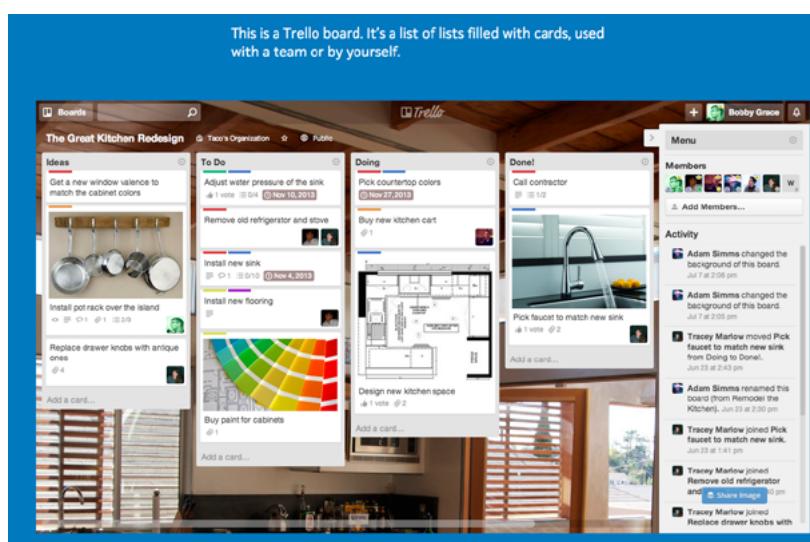


Photo credit: <https://trello.com/>

The task management app **Trello** puts the power of cards into the hands of the user.

Anyone can create “to-do” cards and organize them into card stacks against a customized background. Not only does this illustrate the card’s utility in web and app design, it also demonstrates how useful they are as an organizational tool in general. Users can fit pictures, links, colored tags, and prioritization to each task represented by a card. The reason Trello is a success is because their card format outperforms tradition “list”-style task managers.

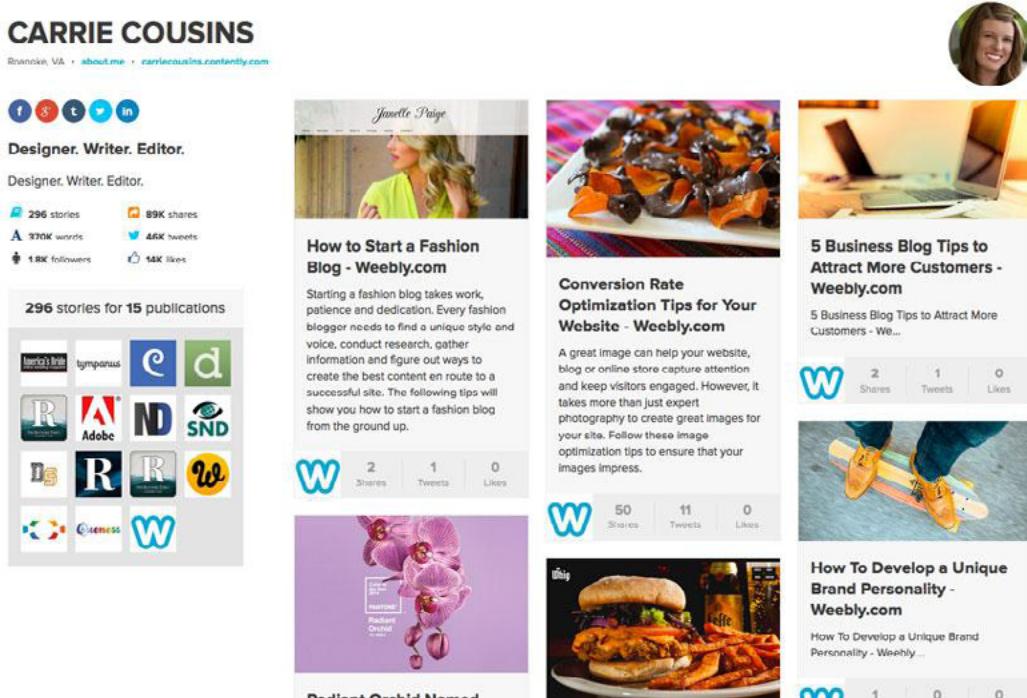


Photo credit: <https://carriecousins.contently.com/>

Contently, a platform for publishing portfolios, organizes what would otherwise be an unruly jumble of links. Each card represents an article and contains the necessary preview information like images and descriptions, plus a link. Moreover, it features bits of micro-information – Shares, Tweets, Likes – within the card.

Contently demonstrates how to compact the right amount of information into each card container. Considering that freelance employers are a good part of their audience, Contently chose the perfect UI pattern to help people make quicker hiring decisions.

Cards and Material Design

Material Design relies heavily on cards, and their thorough analysis of the technique holds a lot of weight. [Their entry for cards](#) in the material design guide is worth checking up if you're looking for a meticulous deconstruction.

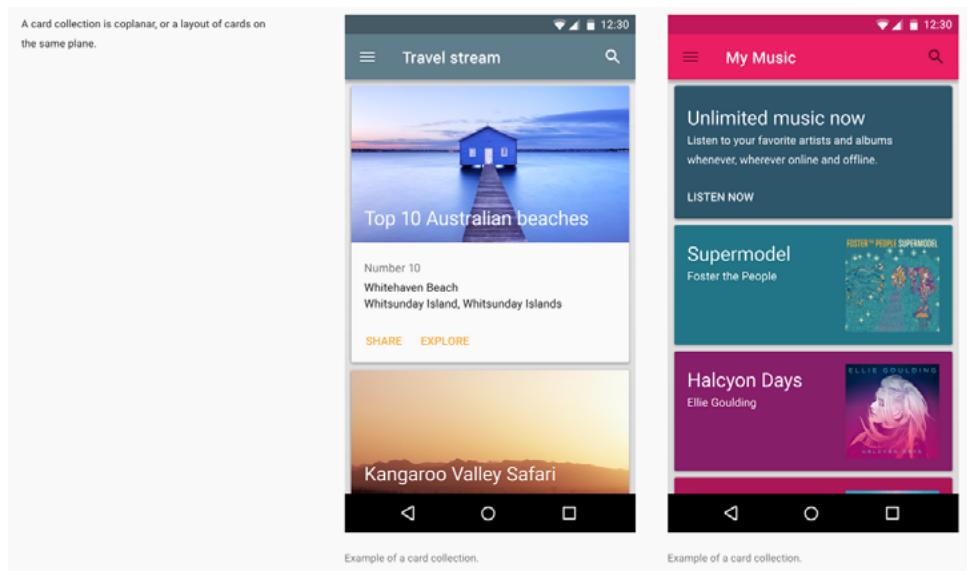


Photo credit: <http://www.google.com/design/spec/components/cards.html>

Google's documentation for [Material Design](#) offers an elaborate explanation of the topic of cards, defining them as “a piece of paper with unique related data that serves as an entry point to more detailed information. For example, a card could contain a photo, text, and a link about a single subject.”

Their entry on cards further explains rules on usage, content, and even suggestions on the layout itself. The principles certainly apply beyond just Google's own design philosophy.

Thinking Beyond the Present

While card UI is constantly reshaping itself to fit new challenges, for now we'll likely see most of the changes take place with responsive and app design. This is at least somewhat related to the paper-like influence [Material Design](#) is having over Android apps.

1. Technological Improvements

Cards in their current state will only remain as long as the technology permits. As the internet becomes more advanced, so too will card design. This means, amongst other things, more intricate elements. Videos replacing images, an idea that some designers have been flirting with for years, might start to become more of the norm. In a similar vein, the next iteration of cards might also start featuring auto-updating content.

2. Deeper Interaction

In the near future, cards may also expand beyond their role of simply linking to other areas. As we see with Material Design, cards can display information as [individual interactions](#) occur, whether that's automatic sorting or real-time updates (i.e., weather forecasts).

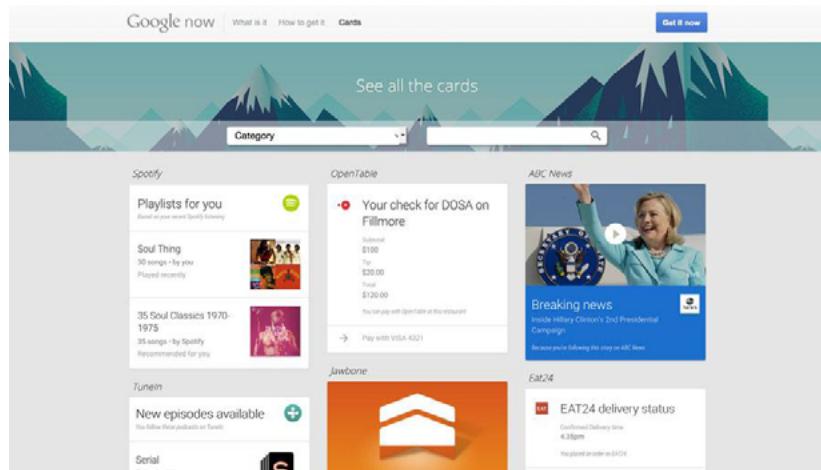


Photo credit: <https://www.google.com/landing/now/#cards>

These automatic features have already been implemented by Windows Phone, but have the potential to infiltrate the larger Android base.

3. Size

Side-by-side with the trend of hero images, cards, too, are adopting a “bigger is better” policy. Big cards allow for more detail and intricate typography, which means more opportunity for delightful design instead of the bare-bones necessities. When combined with smaller cards, bigger cards also allow more freedom for designers to establish a visual hierarchy.

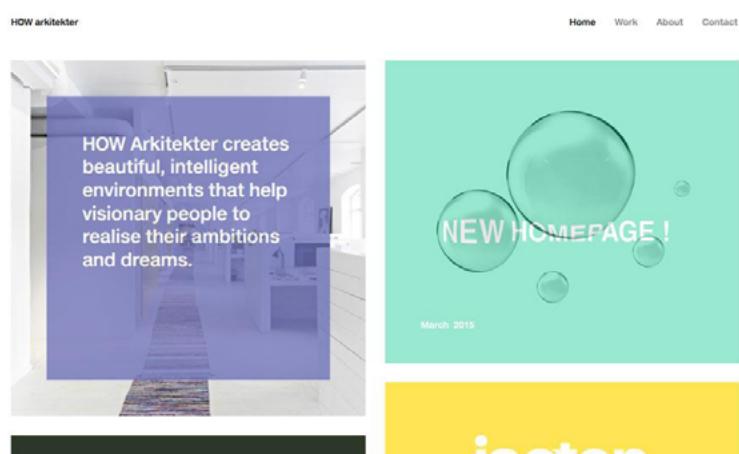


Photo credit: <http://www.howarkitekter.se/>

HOW arkitekter (above) mixes large- and medium-sized cards to influence how users navigate the site. Some cards act as links, while other give direct information. The large size of the cards is complemented by the wide gutters, which give the site a slightly minimalist feel, and functionally provide breathing room so as not to overcrowd the screen.

4. Wearables

Thanks to Google Glass, we now see how cards can serve as the UI foundation for wearables.

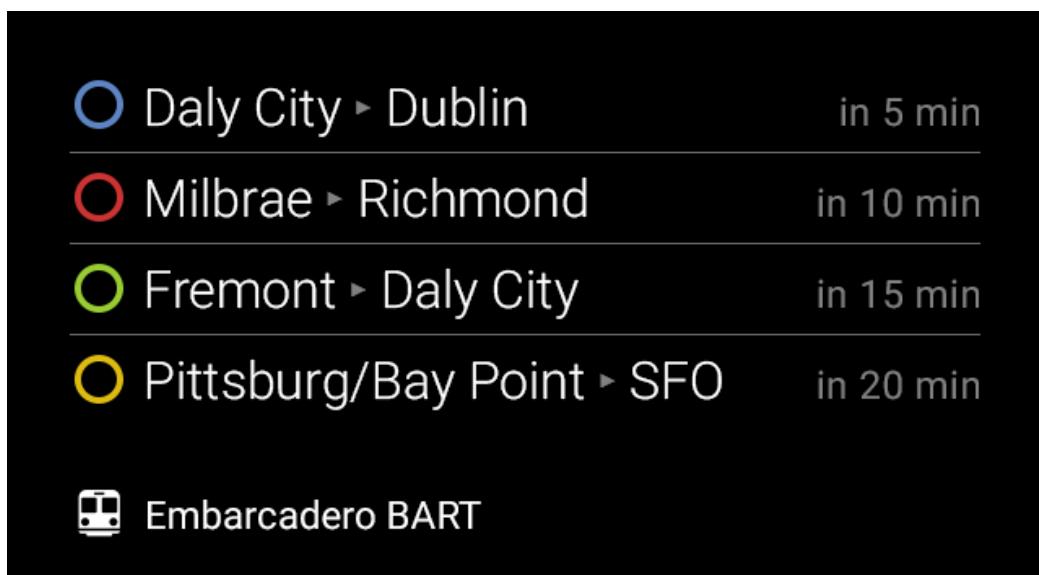


Photo credit: <https://developers.google.com/glass/design/style>

While critics may consider Google Glass a [commercial flop](#), others think it has a change in the [professional market](#). Regardless, the idea of wearables is not going away, and from our viewpoint in the present future iterations will also be dependant on cards for their UI. Even to a further degree than mobile devices, wearables must make efficient use of space. Cards, then, are the most practical choice.

Across all mediums and devices, cards will continue to evolve as far as technology will allow. After all, these digitized squares are hardly the first form. Don't forget that, not too long ago, cards were just small pieces of paper that served the same purpose – containing bits of information for fast browsing.

[Start a free trial and use Cards & Tiles in UXPin](#)

10 Free Resources and Tools

1. [“How to Build a Card Interface with Sketch App 3”](#) – A tutorial on how to make simple cards using Sketch (an up-and-coming design app).
2. [“Implementing the Card Ui Pattern in Phone/HTML5 Applications”](#) – DZone's instructional on coding for cards.
3. [“Getting Started with jQuery Masonry”](#) – CreativeBloq explains how to use jQuery plugin for seamlessly creating card- and grid-based layouts.
4. [CardStack](#) – An open-source runtime of embeddable HTML5/CSS/JS cards.
5. [10 Material Design Cards for Web in CSS and HTML](#) – A resource for designing cards for Google's Material Design.

6. **Polymer** – Downloadable Web Component builder.
7. **Masonry** – A JS grid layout library that, after you select a theme, will optimize the position of your elements based on vertical space.
8. **“Patterns of Card UI Design”** – A Speaker Deck presentation on the why and how of card-based user interfaces, by Chris Tse.
9. **Bootcards** – A card-based UI built on top of Bootstrap for both mobile and desktop capability.
10. **“Why Cards Are the Future of Ads On The Web”** – Dan Ucko’s article on the advantages of card layouts with paid content.

Immersive Interactions

Good interaction design is about attending to every moment between a person and the device (or system, or service) with which he or she is interacting. These moments can be explicit, as with gestures, taps, a button-click, or the completion of a form field. Or, these moments may be more elusive, such as a pause while you try and understand what is being asked of you or how to answer. It's these internal conversations that users have at any given moment that often get overlooked.

Stephen P. Anderson

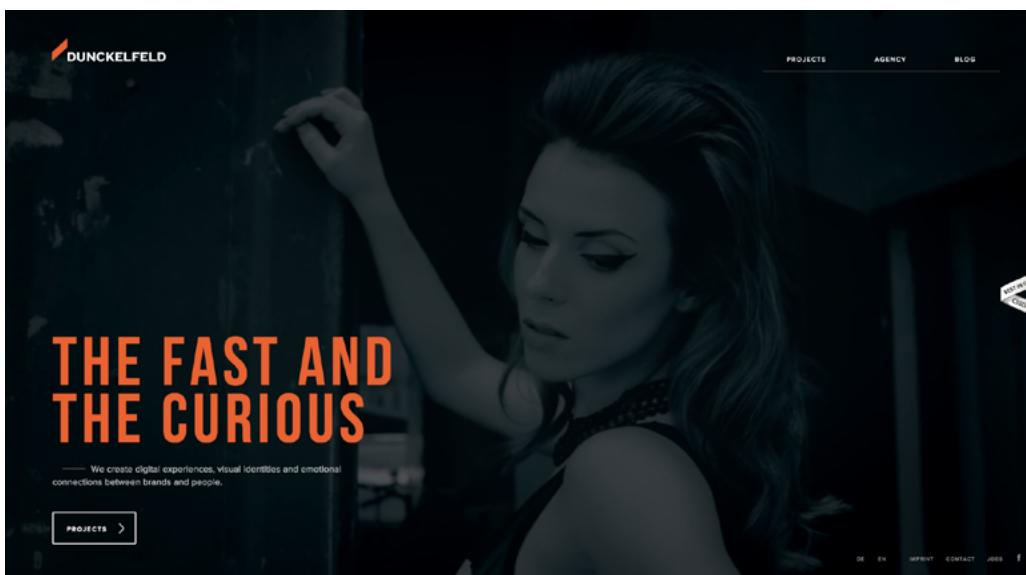


Photo credit: Dunckelfeld

Interaction design is mostly abstract: UX and UI professionals deal with the intangible connection between the interface and the user's mind.

This chapter brings to light the design techniques that help create the “[passive magic](#)” of unforgettable experiences. In addition to web design knowledge, IxD requires a bit of psychology, storytelling, visual artistry, and a good amount of delightful surprises.

The Power of Interactivity

Interactivity is the best way to reach to your user. That's no longer speculation: researchers at Penn State proved that users are [more influenced by messages on highly interactive sites](#). As Jeeyun Oh explains:

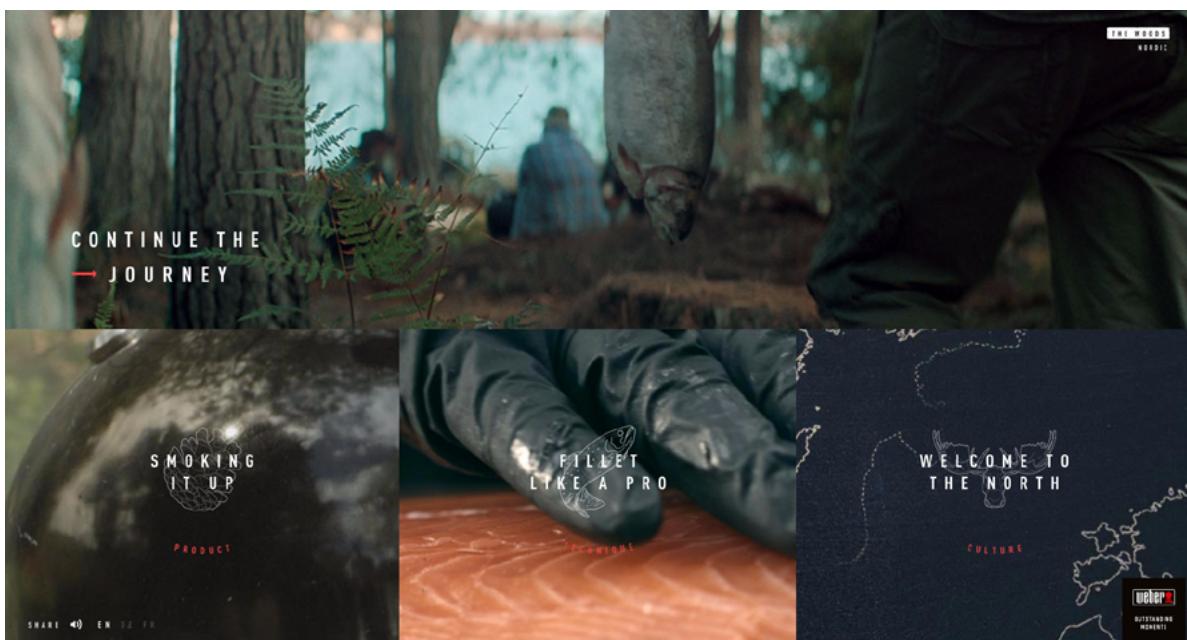


Photo credit: [BBQ Cultures](#)

"Interactivity persuades people because they are having more fun browsing the website, which absorbs them, and creates more positive attitudes toward the message as well."

While a few years ago web interaction was limited, the expansion of HTML5, CSS, Javascript, and jQuery allows for greater creativity with less strain on implementation. In fact, many of the techniques outlined in this book are part of the greater shift towards interactivity:

- Long scroll and [parallax scrolling](#)
- [Card UI](#)
- Video and animation
- Swiping and clicking
- [Microinteractions](#)
- Push notifications
- Personalization and location tools (for building a [contextual UX](#))
- Control over hiding/revealing content
- [Transitions](#) and loop functions

5 Pillars of Interaction Design

To better understand how interaction leads to a better UX, let's examine the 5 pillars described in [Interaction Design Best Practices](#):

1. **Goal-driven design** – Site interactions must help users progress towards accomplishing their goals. Get to know your users through personas, user scenarios, and [experience maps](#).

2. **Usability** – A feature must first function reliably before it can satisfy users emotionally.
3. **Signifiers** – Visual cues like a mailbox icon or navigation pattern intuitively suggest function, making them useful as usability shortcuts.
4. **Learnability** – Consistent interfaces are more predictable, which are naturally more learnable. As learnability improves, overall usability increases since users don't need to think as much.
5. **Feedback and response time** – Feedback represents your role in the conversation, so it must feel responsive, human, and humane.

To see these points in practice, let's examine Net+'s **MixPlus**. Basically, the site allows users to create online playlists with classic mixtape themes.

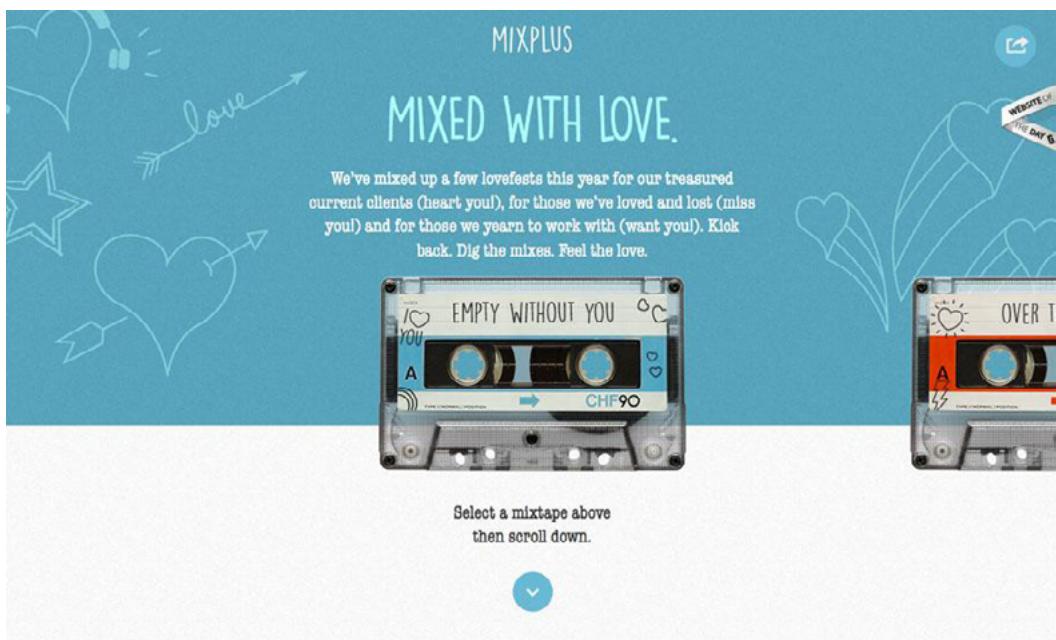


Photo credit: <http://mixpl.us/withoutyou>

For starters, users can successfully create online playlists, which satisfies the goal-driven design and usability.

The arrow at the bottom and the half-image on the right border of the screen are both signifiers that show the user can either scroll down or click right. Because they show function instantly, the site's learnability is improved. Last, in scrolling down, the fun animations (which include headphones and a tape sliding into an old-fashioned walkman) provide enjoyable feedback that encourages further engagement.

The Evolution of Interaction

Not too long ago, the design community, the rule of “[above the scroll](#)” was indisputable. Designers focused most of their attention on that, all-encompassing screen on top of a page.

Luckily, we now know that’s not true. In fact, “[66% of attention on a normal media page is spent below the fold.](#)”

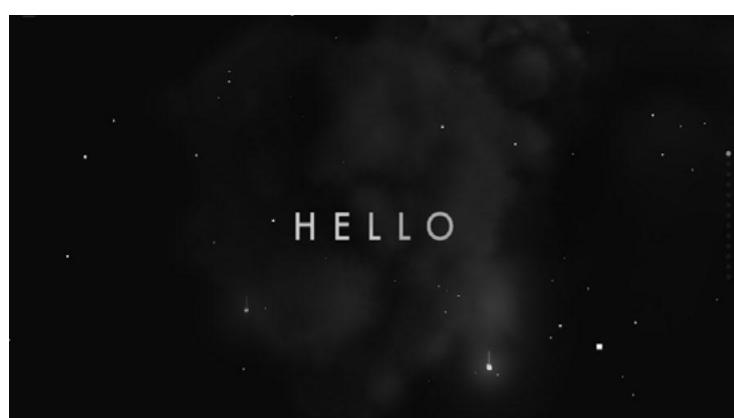


Photo credit: <http://vaalentin.github.io/2015/>

Today, designing above the scroll is archaic. Many sites – like [Valentin Marmonier's project](#) above – actually limit the information above the scroll, enticing the user to deepen their investment by scrolling to see more.

The shift of focus from above the scroll to below is just one example of how interactivity is evolving. Mobile design, still new in the grand scheme of things, is at the forefront of new interaction design patterns. Originally, mobile sites tried to mimic the mouse-click style of desktop navigation. But now that designers have caught on to the full potency of gesture controls, it's desktop sites that are trying to mimic the ease of mobile interactions like swiping.

The difficulty lies in adapting the same interactions across different devices. What works on one device may not translate to another. This incongruity lead to the methodology of designing a [device-agnostic experience](#).

“Webgraphics”

Webgraphics, [a term coined by VentureBeat](#), are essentially interactive infographics. Using tools like HTML5, CSS3 and jQuery, webgraphics deliver the same information as infographics, but in a more stimulating manner. Typically webgraphics require some action from the user to reveal more information.

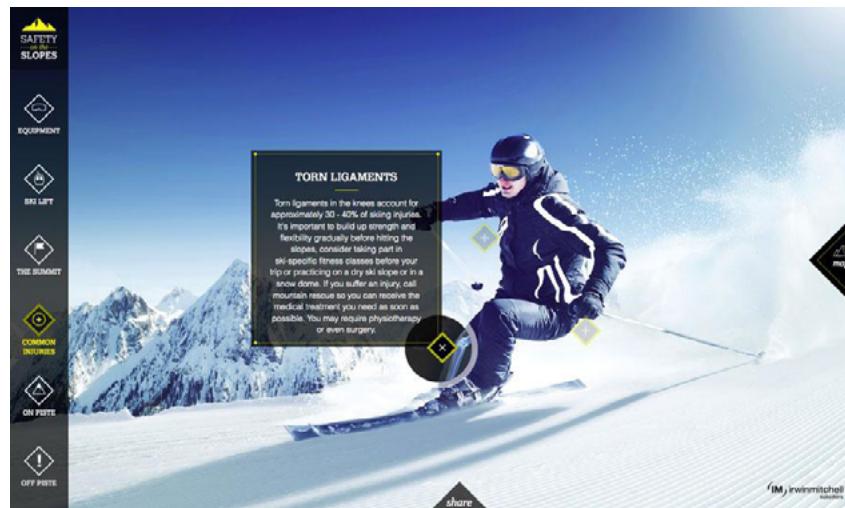


Photo credit: <http://www.irwinmitchell.com/safety-on-the-slopes.html>

Safety on the Slopes (above) creates a “site within a site” experience as an interactive webgraphic. This engagement also better serves its initial purpose of conveying information – the interactive format makes the information seem less like a boring lecture.

Even if you have no facts or figures to display, you can take a lesson from webgraphics and apply the same interactive techniques to make any site more engaging.

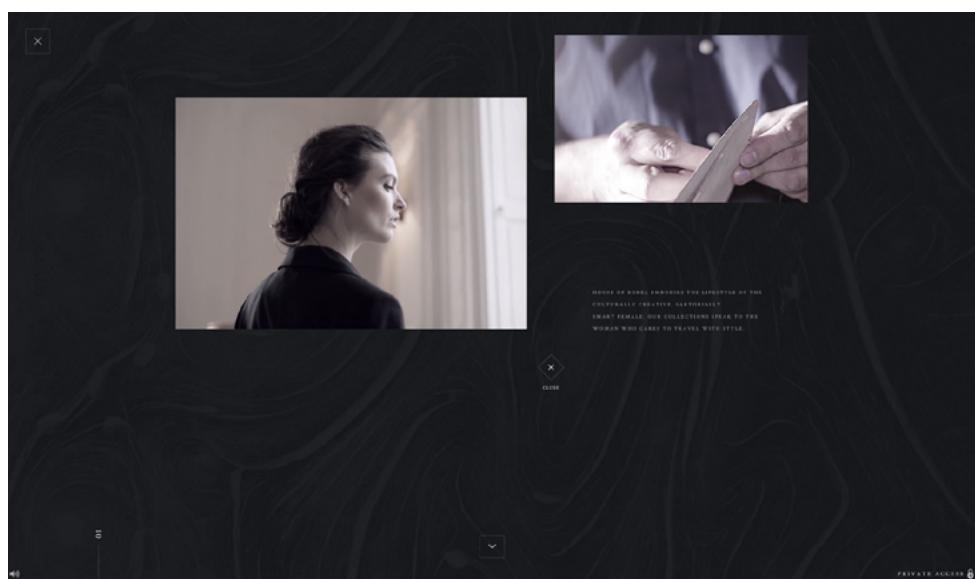


Photo Credit: <http://houseofborel.com/#/secret>

For example, the luxury fashion brand [House of Borel](#) foregoes convention and creates an interactive story with their site.

They implement several interactive elements, such as videos triggered by scroll, to create a narrative that expresses the culture of their brand on a far more emotional level than your average “About Us” page. The treatment certainly makes sense for an elegant brand that wants you to feel the lifestyle first before revealing its products.

Microinteractions

Much like music notes within a song, microinteractions are the momentary events that all add up to create the final experience. These can be either active (entering a password or clicking the Like button) or passive (a “ding” sound for a new message).

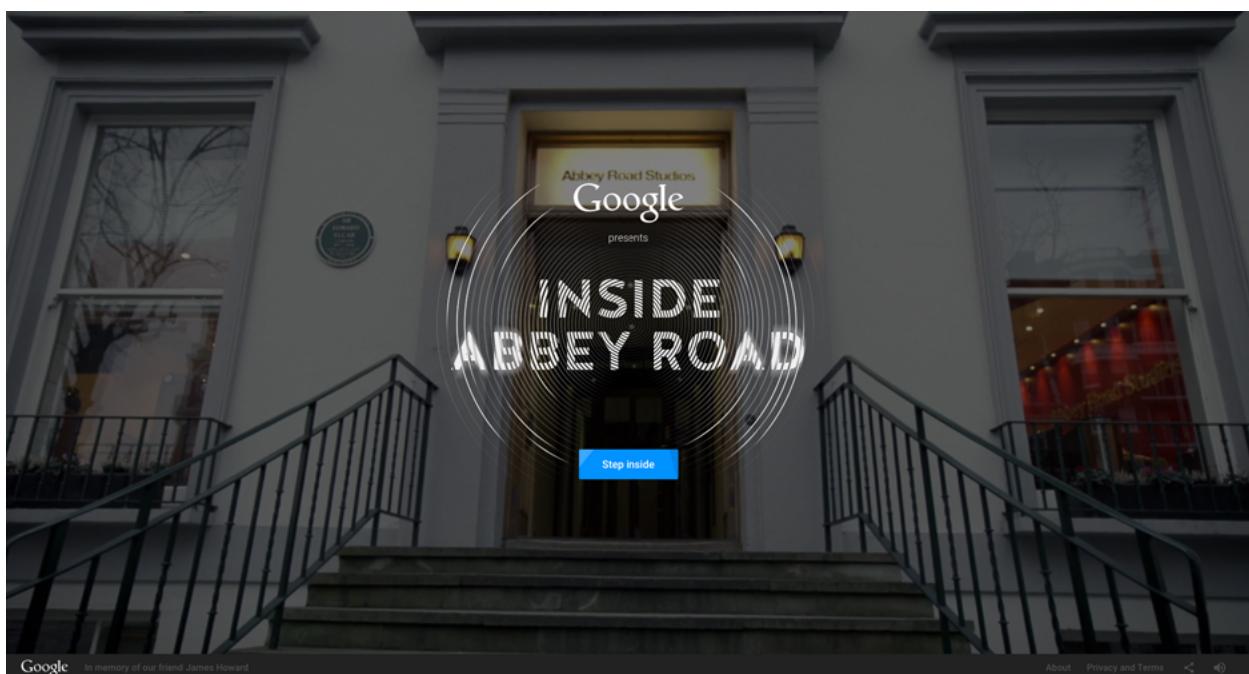


Photo credit: [Google](#)

While these may seem inconsequential, [some consider them the future of design](#). Think about all the trivial, minor annoyances that cause you – and users like you – to leave a website never to return.

As the building blocks of UX, microinteractions are fitted to serving a variety of purposes:

- **Accomplishing a task** – each menial step in logging in, posting a status update, or sending an email
- **Connecting elements** – synchronization between two devices, websites, or apps
- **Adjusting settings** – changes to the initial settings, such as volume adjustments, and the corresponding feedback
- **Changing in state** – entering and exiting a site or app, or putting one into sleep mode
- **Data feedback** – real-time data in response to a request (such as checking a weather app)

What all these have in common is that they're all initiated by user actions. Microinteractions are integral to any designer, so we recommend visiting [the site of Dan Saffer](#), who coined the term.

Interaction Design Examples

No one IxD technique on its own will be enough to accomplish your goals as a designer. You must weave together different techniques to build the UX you desire – and therein lies the challenge.

Let's take a look at three sites that integrate multiple methods to create a singular experience:

- AIGA 100 Years of Design** – Animations and visual signifiers (arrows, hamburger menu) support the scroll-heavy navigation of this site.

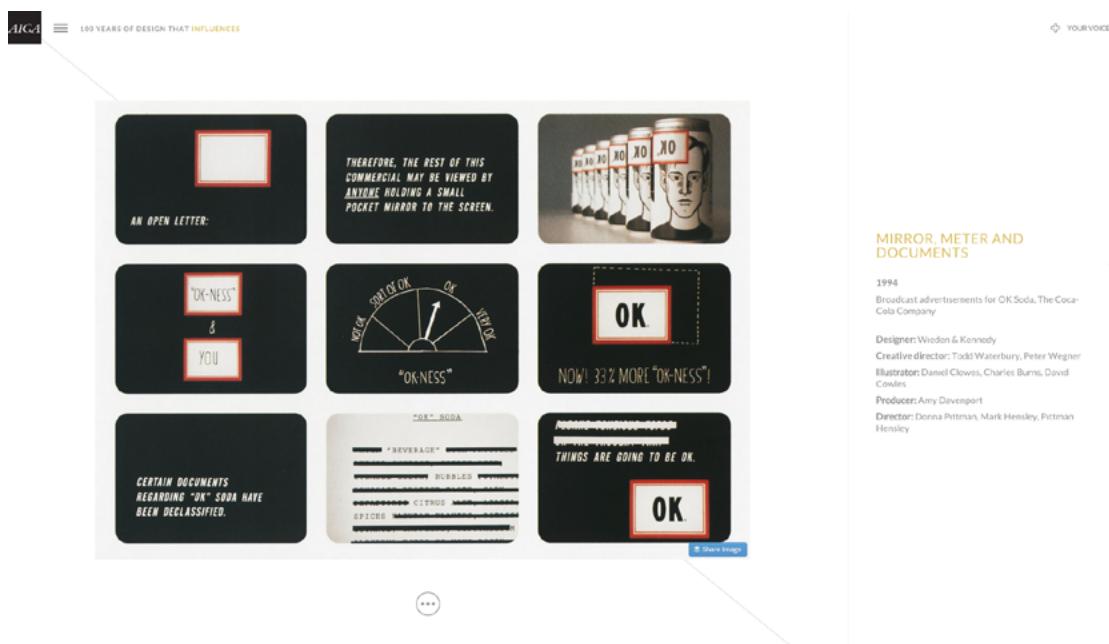
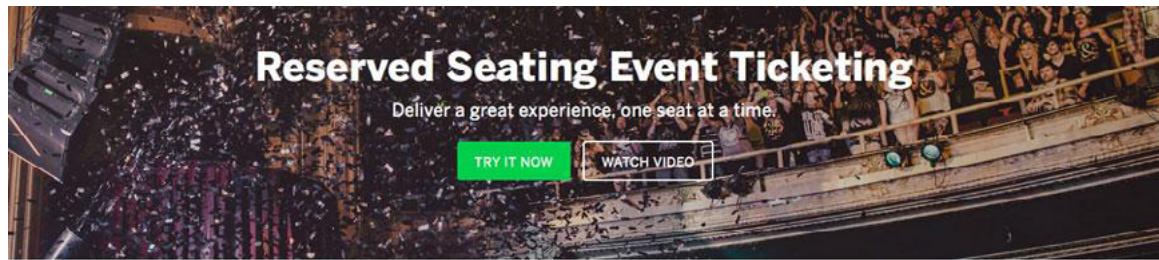


Photo credit: <http://celebratedesign.org/>

- Eventbrite Seat Designer** – By using an easy-to-understand flat design interface, simple menus, and smooth-loading transitions, this tool allows users to make custom seating charts for specific venues – something once exclusive only to large venues.



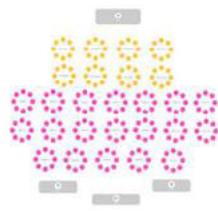
Visualize Your Space

Easily customize your seat map to reflect your unique event space. Click on examples below.

Auditorium



Gala



Open Venue

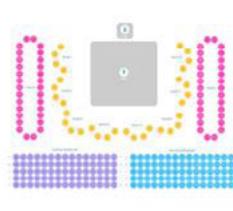


Photo credit: <https://www.eventbrite.com/l/reserved-seating/>

3. **Sonoran's Valley** – The site creates a game-like experience by combining user input with phenomenal animation and video effects, all the while using a standard hamburger style navigation.

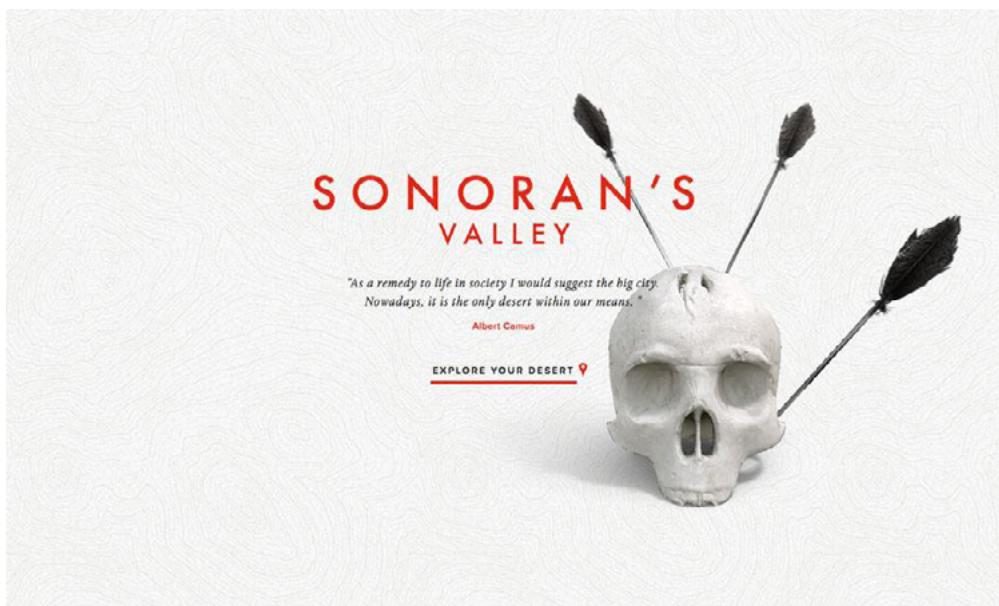


Photo credit: <http://sonorans-valley.com/>

Thinking Beyond 2015

The future of IxD relies on the future of technology. After all, most of the interaction designer's duty lies in making the unfamiliar seem familiar.

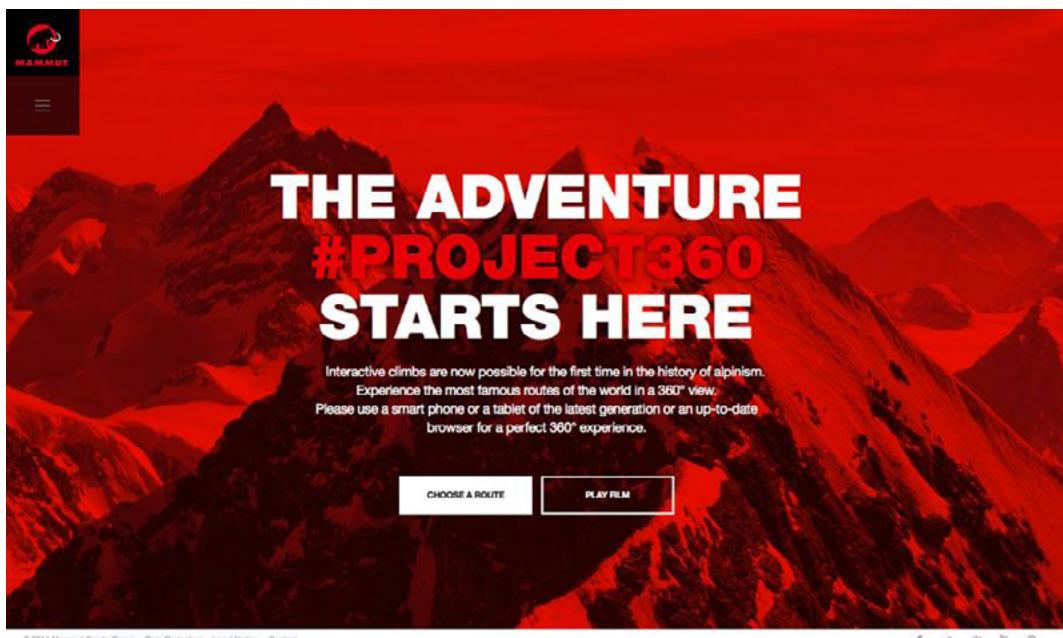


Photo credit: <http://project360.mammut.ch/#home>

Wearables such as the Apple Watch may be the new smartphones in terms of influential technology of the future. Like the gesture controls introduced by smartphones, the new interactions between humans and their wearables will bleed over into all devices, changing design across the board.

In the case with wearables, the microinteractions will become even more subtle, with less reliance on visuals. We may see increased interest in how a device feels on the skin, which could conceivably have an impact on all mobile devices. (This brings to mind the [Fitbit recall](#) caused by skin irritation.) Another potential shift might be an

increase in audio or even vibration notifications, since wearables have minimal screen space.

No matter the device, the concept of interactive storytelling is gaining steam. This is when user actions and decision propel a somewhat linear journey through the site. While this tactic would be counter-productive for sites like ecommerce or banking, they definitely draw the user in more than the orthodox page-by-page layout.

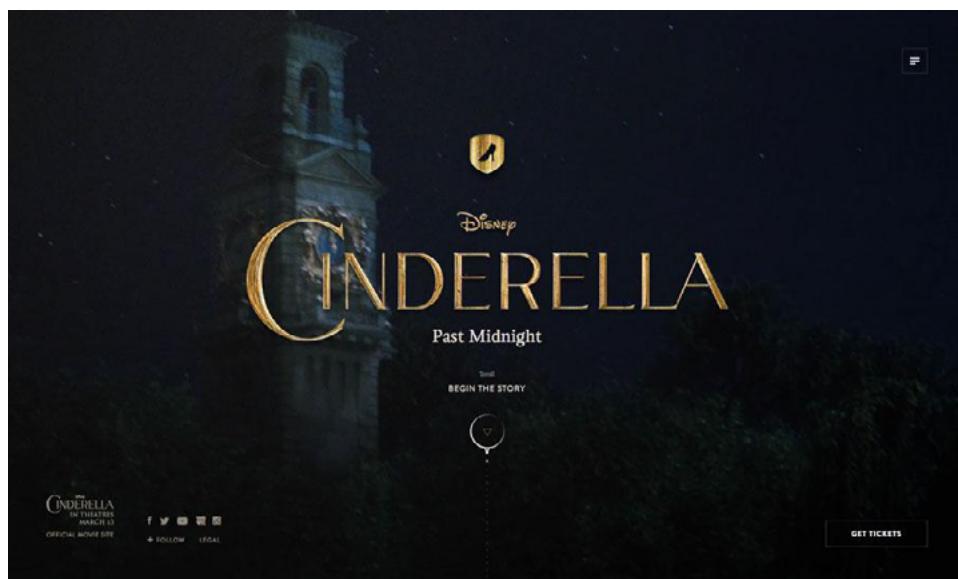


Photo credit: <http://cinderellapastmidnight.tumblr.com/>

For example, take the [Cinderella: Past Midnight](#) site above. This loosely retells the all-to-familiar plot of Cinderella (featuring images from the latest movie) through user scrolling, with prominent calls-to-action for posting specific content related to the movie on their Tumblr page. Fun for the user, and promotional for the movie.

Personalization will deepen its role in IxD the more technology affords it. Just look at how geolocation technology is being implemented more and more, where at one point it was useful only for map-related sites.

The fact remains that users simply love that personal feel. Look at the success of sites like **Blossom Type** (below), which generates a personalized movie from user input.



Photo credit: <http://blossomtype.com/#>

Immersive interactions are one of the most human of all design elements. IxD shares with humans the great potential for emotional connections – but also the instability. The future IxD will twist and turn right alongside the tastes of the greater population, and the only thing we can predict with certainty is that these tastes won't stay the same for long.

Start building Interactive Prototypes in UXPin for free

10 Free Resources and Tools

1. **Interaction Design Basics** – A nice beginner's guide to interaction design by for aspiring UI/UX professionals, presented by Usability.gov.
2. **"How Do You Design Interaction?"** – A how-to guide that looks at IxD as a conversation between the system and user.
3. **“Smart Transitions in User Experience Design”** – Smashing Magazine’s analysis of how to use animation to smooth transitions.
4. ***Interaction Design Best Practices: Mastering Words, Visuals, and Space*** – Our free, 115-page guide compiling the most useful theory and advice on language/text, images, and space in IxD.
5. ***Interaction Design Best Practices: Mastering Time, Responsiveness, and Behavior*** – This 106-page companion piece to the above covers timing, animation, and user behavior and decision-making.
6. **Origins of Famous Microinteractions** – A history lesson in the most popular microinteractions, from the Facebook Like to “You’ve got mail.”
7. **Interaction Design Experiments** – A free tool that allows you to build and experiment with different interaction options to pick the best one for your project.

8. “**Making and Breaking UX Best Practices**” – UX Booth’s guidelines on the roots of UX design and the ideas behind the practices.
9. **iOS Human Interface Guidelines** – Apple’s own advice for how to apply IxD specifically for mobile.
10. **2016 IxD Awards** – Interaction Awards’s best picks for IxD, a good resource for inspiration and new ideas.

Beautiful Animations

Web animation was once thought of as frivolous ornamentation, but as technology advances and internet connections accelerate, almost all designers are coming to understand the [practical benefits](#). Those that ignore animation altogether will soon be left behind.

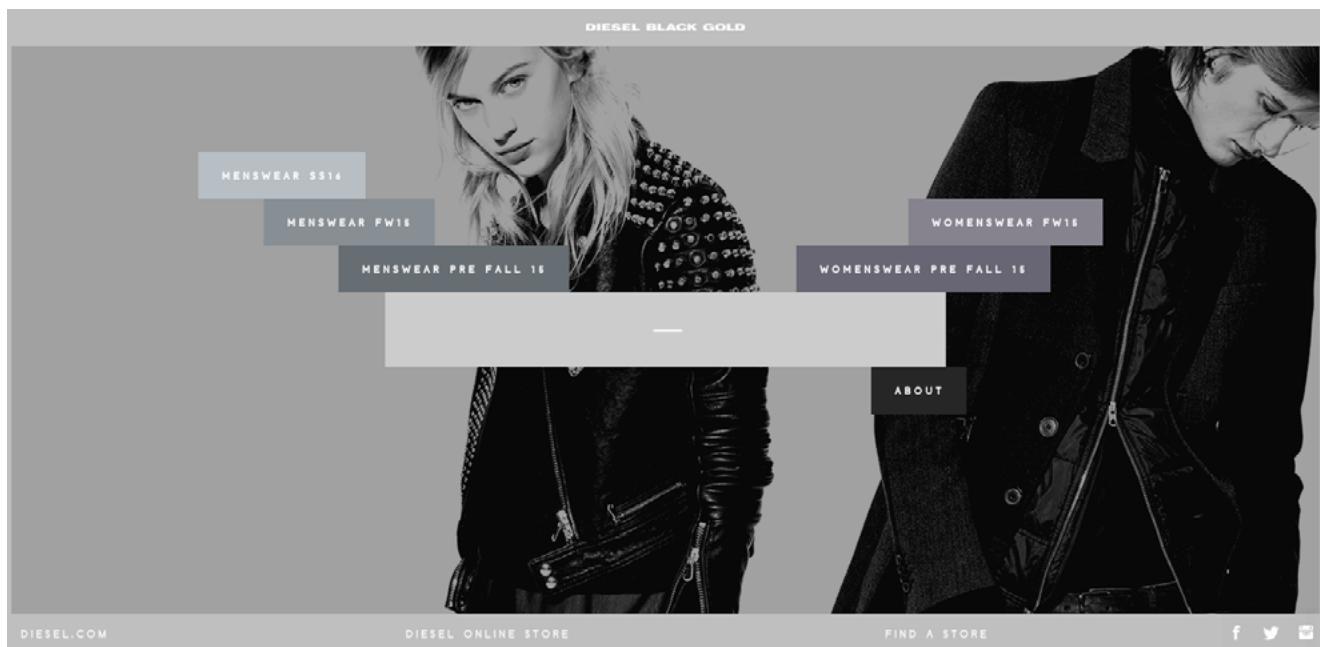


Photo credit: Diesel Black Gold

Useful and delightful, animation is becoming more and more of a web staple every day. In the near future, it will no longer be optional, so the sooner you recognize its full potency, the more ready you will be.

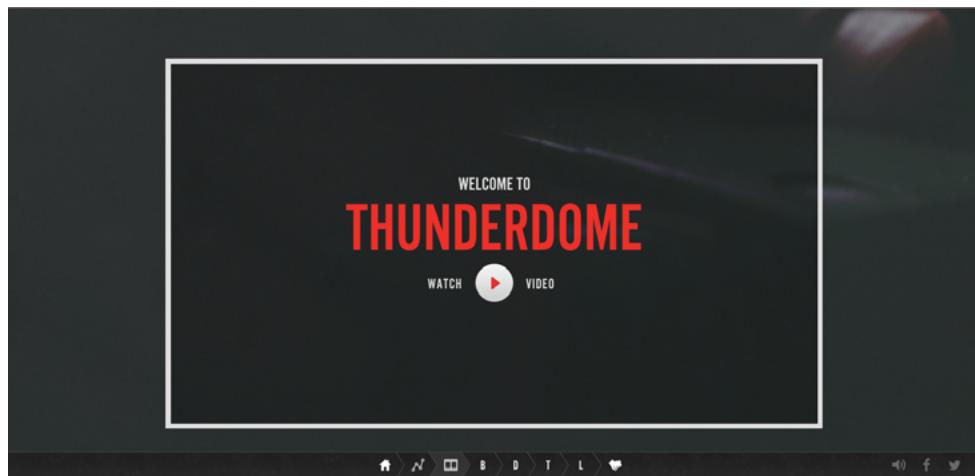


Photo credit: Riot Games

Pre-Internet Roots

Like [cards and minimalism](#), animation has a rich history reaching far back before the Internet was invented.

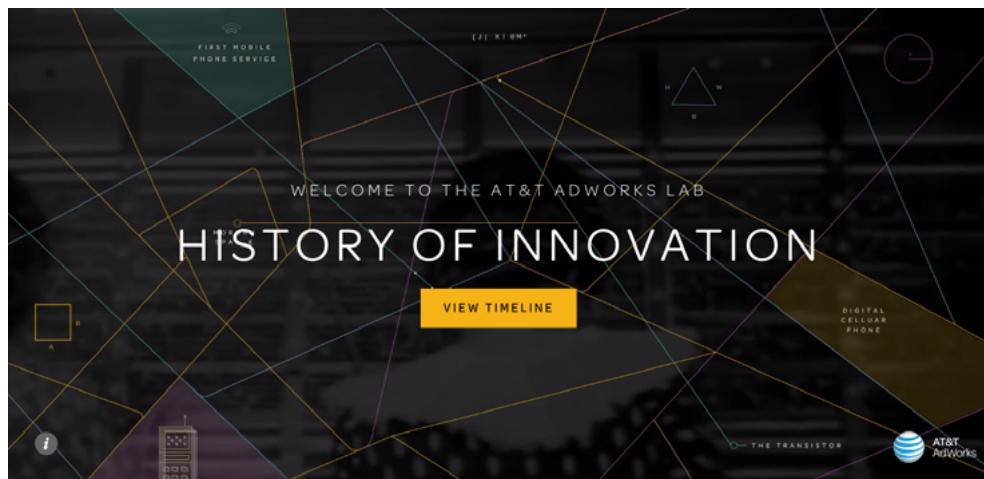


Photo credit: AT&T

Two Disney animators, Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston, published one of the best go-to books on the subject, [*Illusion of Life: Disney Animation*](#). The 12 principles outlined in this book still hold true today, and – with slight modifications – apply just as well to animation for the web as for film.

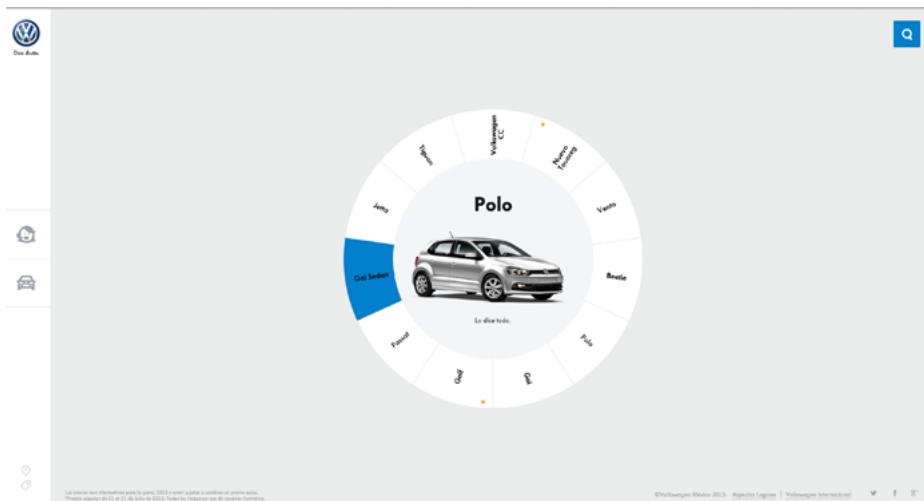


Photo credit: Volkswagen

While we explore each of these 12 principles in greater detail in *Interaction Design Best Practices: Mastering the Intangibles*, for now we'll just list the points:

- 1. Squash and stretch**
- 2. Anticipation**
- 3. Staging**
- 4. Straight Ahead Action and Pose to Pose**
- 5. Follow Through and Overlapping Action**
- 6. Slow In and Slow Out**
- 7. Arc**
- 8. Secondary Action**
- 9. Timing**
- 10. Exaggeration**
- 11. Solid Drawing**
- 12. Appeal**

To see these principles in action, animator [Cento Lodigiani](#) recreated each one as a GIF using simple shapes.

Attributes of Web Animation

Animation is not a UI pattern. It's not something you can just stick in your site anywhere. In application, animation is closer to color: it can exist everywhere and its effects permeate through the entire site.



Photo credit: Tannbach

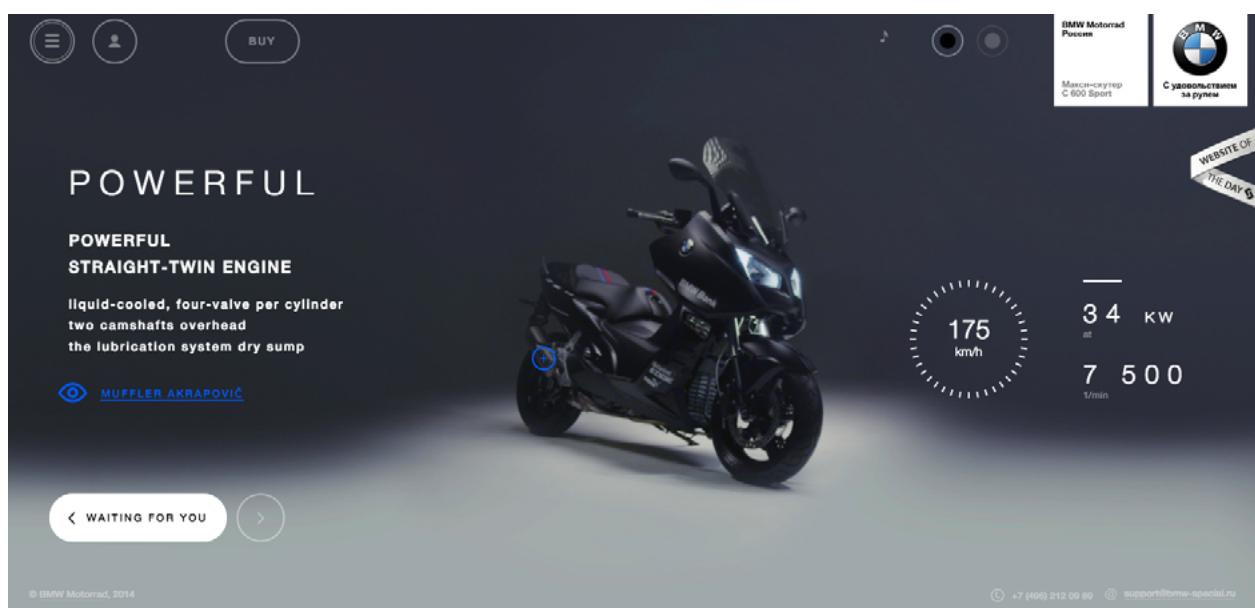


Photo credit: BMW

For starters, we can break web animation up into two groups, depending on the size of its role:

- In a [tiny format](#), animations like spinners, loading bars, counters, or hover tools require little to no user input.
- Animations as a primary interaction tool, such as [parallax scrolling](#) and popup notifications, take a more central role, and their impact is more directly noticeable to users.

What both groups have in common is the entertainment value they bring to an interface (we'll explain the practical value in a moment). The storytelling potential of animations, whether blatant or subtle, can add an emotional connection to an otherwise dull interface.

For example, [Humaan](#) uses animated backgrounds, scroll-activated motion, and hover-revealed text (in conjunction with the content) to add personality and humanity to what would otherwise be another dull “About Us” page.



Photo credit: <http://humaan.com/about/>

One key component to all animation is **timing**. For animations triggered by the user, you generally want the effect to occur **within 0.1 seconds** of activation to make the interface feel responsive. We follow this rule ourselves, as you can see in [this preview](#) of a UXPin project.

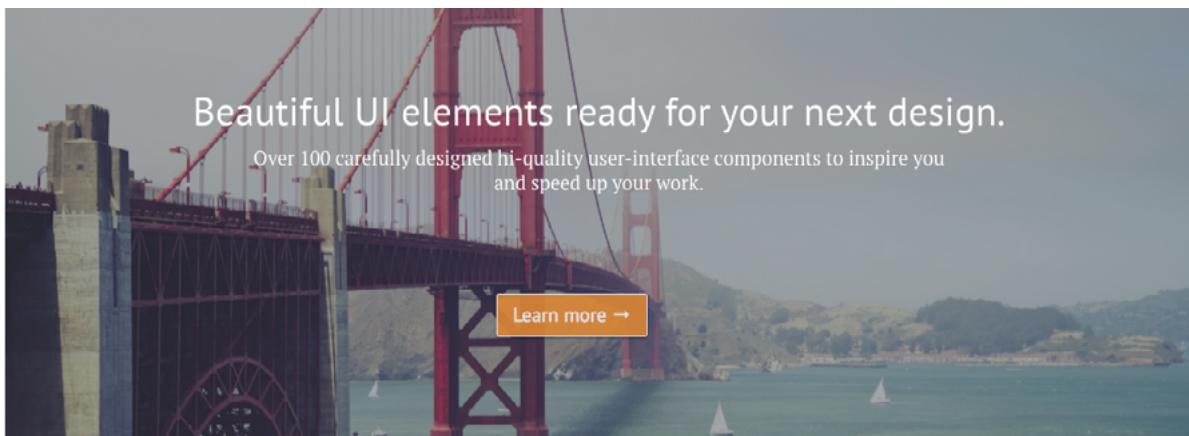


Photo credit: UXPin

After scrolling to the next screen, the signup form appears within 300 ms. We didn't set a delay on the scroll itself since that's directly triggered by the user action, but we added additional time to the subsequent transition animation to prevent a jarring effect.

8 Popular Web Animation Techniques

For the purposes of this book, we'll break up the areas of web animation into eight fields, and explain the best practices for each.

1. Loading Animations

One of the oldest uses of animation for the web is to distract the user from loading times. As we said in [Interaction Design Best Practices: Book 2](#):

Best case scenario, the animation influences your users' perception of your product's technology, making it seem better than it actually is. Worst case scenario, your users have something fun to watch while they wait, improving the overall experience.

Even if the loading time is short, such animations still add a little sophistication or at least entertainment during waiting periods. For this, loading animations are popular for flat design, minimalism, portfolios, and one-page sites – all of which are inherently simple and could use a boost in stimulation.

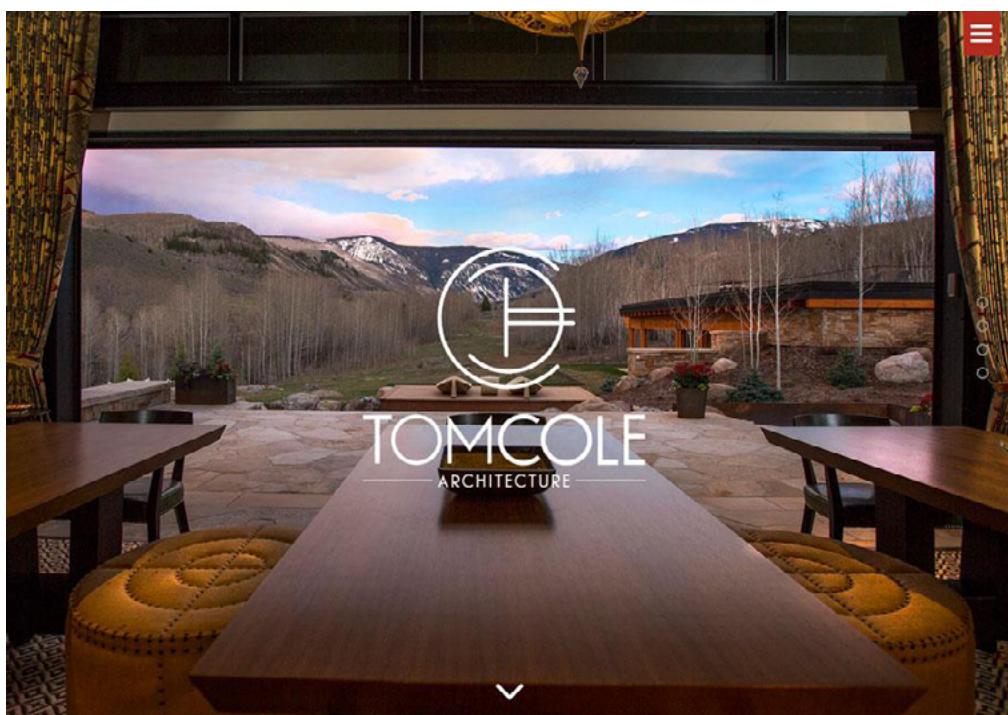


Photo credit: <http://tomcolearchitect.com/>

Visiting the [Tom Cole Architecture](#) site, the user lands on a black screen and in a moment multiple white lines start to move and “write” the logo and brand name. After another moment, the background photo comes into view and the user is free to navigate. The site itself is simple and doesn’t necessitate a loading animation;

however, this quick moment aesthetically pleases the user as a first impression and entices them to use the site.

Remember that loading animation are best when simple. Extraneous effects like sound or aren't necessary. Animations should match the personality of the site itself, whether minimal, colorful, elegant, etc.

2. Navigation and Menus (Nonscrolling)

In order to save screen space, a recent trend is hidden navigation menus that reveal themselves upon clicking on buttons like the hamburger icon. For these, animation is essential in establishing a connection between the two, and preventing a jarring transition.

Click on the circular arrow button on [Brian Hoff Design](#) and an oversized menu box pops out from the right. The “pop out” animation makes the menu appear as if it slides in from offscreen and makes the whole interaction run smoothly.

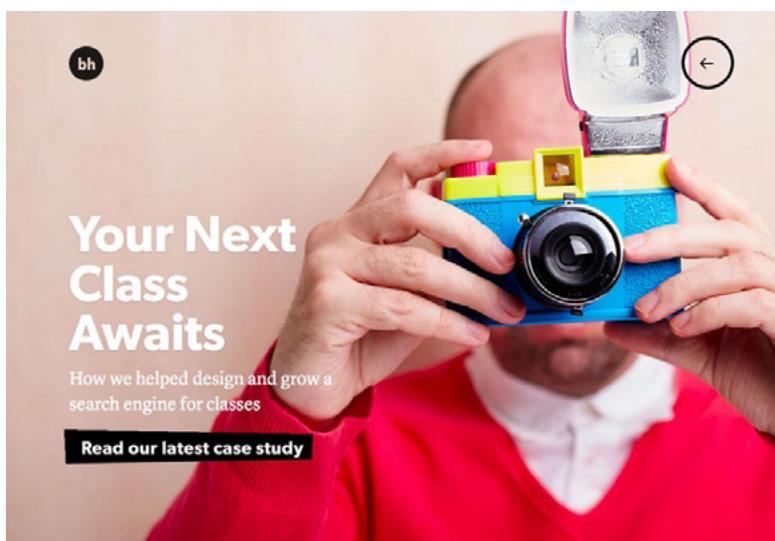


Photo credits: <http://www.brianhoffdesign.com/>

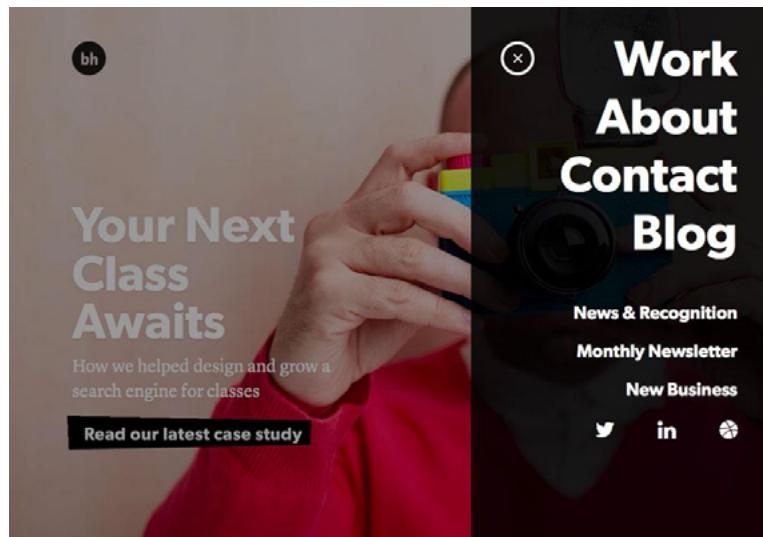


Photo credits: <http://www.brianhoffdesign.com/>

Hamburger animations aren't the only option, though – creative designers are applying navigational elements like sliders and sticky bars to set themselves apart.

Animations can indicate change as well. As described in [Web UI Patterns](#), the hover state is actually one of the most popular subtle animation patterns to show change in an interface object.

A button or image may appear one way when the website loads, but will look another way when the user interacts with it, such as sliding the mouse over the element. This subtle change helps users better understand how to use a website by revealing related actions without needing to occupy additional space.

3. Hover

As a means to show an element is interactive, hover effects are one of the most pragmatic uses of animation. In most cases, this is the only sign a button or piece of text is clickable. When a user

is in doubt over a feature's function, they tend to move the mouse over it anyway, giving hover animations an intuitive appeal.

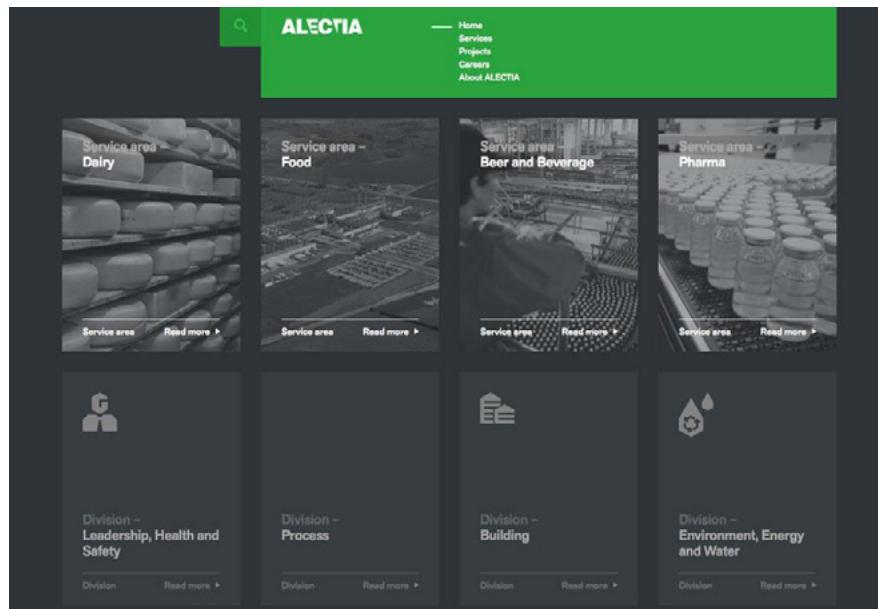
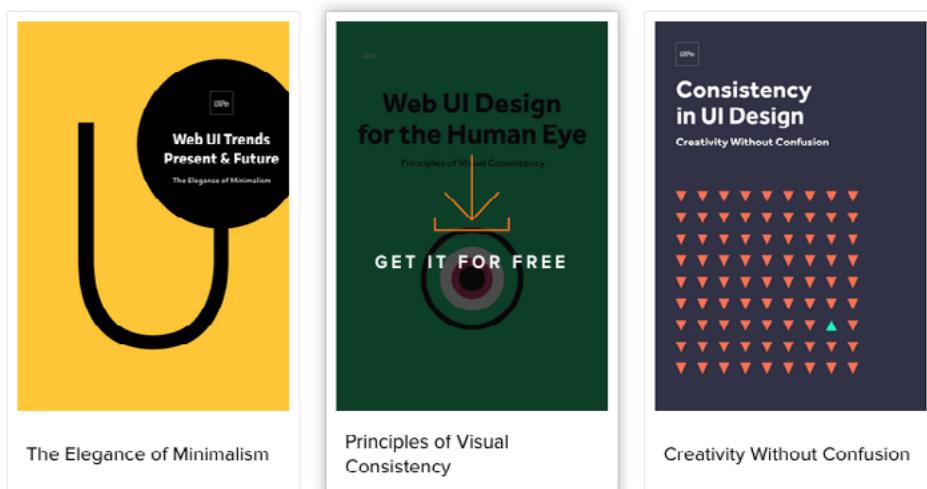


Photo credit: <http://www.alectia.com/en/>

Hovering over any card on the Alectia site above triggers an animation within that card. The animation is small – the title text slides out and identical text slides in to replace it (and the same happens with the “read more” arrow) – however it is enough to show the card’s function.



Source: [UXPin](#)

We use this ourselves for our [Free eBook Library](#), where a hover triggers the download image falling from the top and the “get it for free” text rising from the bottom. This serves several functions – it shows you only need to click the card to initiate the download process, it acts as an attention-grabbing call-to-action, and it has a nice aesthetic feel that makes the make fun to interact with.

4. Galleries and Slideshows

The slideshow and/or animated gallery pattern is one of the most common uses of web animation, but is nonetheless effective at showcasing multiple images of content without overburdening the user.

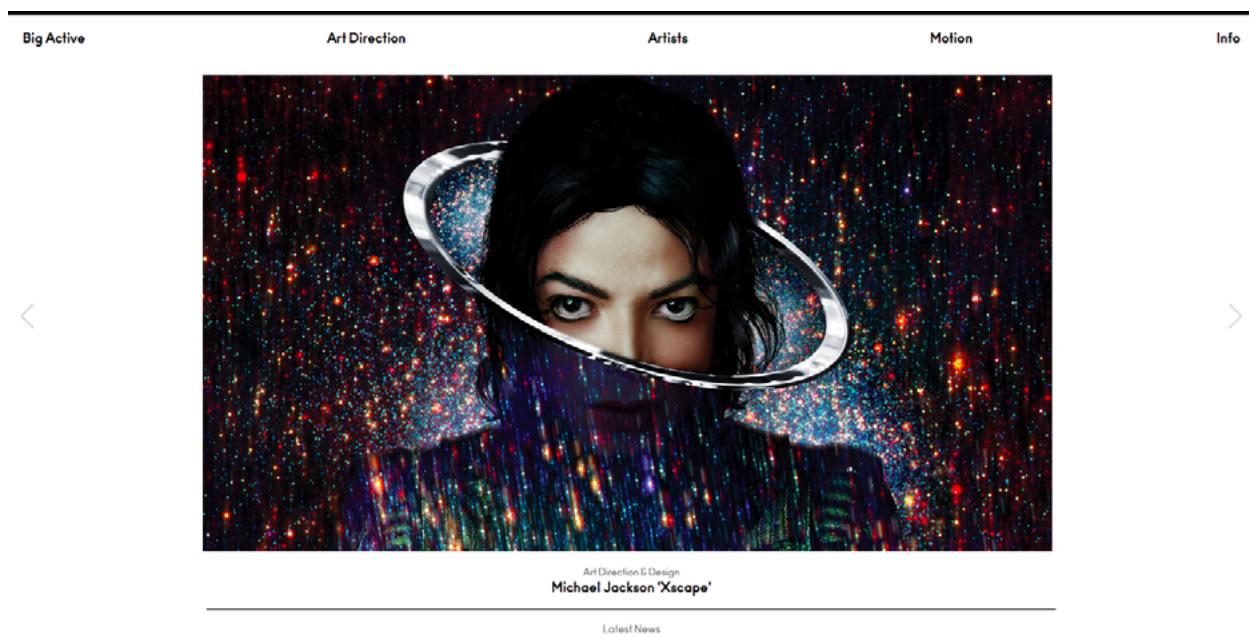


Photo credit: <http://www.bigactive.com/>

How fast and how many images cycle are up to the designer, but these decisions should not be taken lightly – even slightly hastening the rate at which images change could give the site an unwanted “rushed” feel.

Another consideration is how much to implement **skeuomorphism**. This pattern inherently imitates browsing of pages in a photo album – the question is how much do you want to draw attention to that.

5. Attracting Attention

Any biologist will tell you that **the human eye is attracted to motion**. This makes animation the perfect tool for drawing attention and controlling your visual hierarchy, especially against a site only static images.

Animations are a great way to add intrigue to **forms**, calls-to-action, or even menu items. To see its potential, look at John Iacoviello's **MY/STATIC/SELF**:



Photo credit: <http://mystaticself.com/>

The cube in the center softly bounces and flickers, clearly the most interesting item on the grayscale screen. Each of the layers of the centerpiece represent a link to the different pages – the same pages clearly and blandly displayed in the top navigation menu.

Which set of navigation links do you think users prefer to use?

6. Scrolling

While we'll discuss scrolling in greater detail in a later chapter, it's worth mentioning here its reliance on animation. Smooth scrolling simply cannot exist without it. One of the main advantages of scrolling is the control it gives to the user, and for that, animation determines the pace they can go.

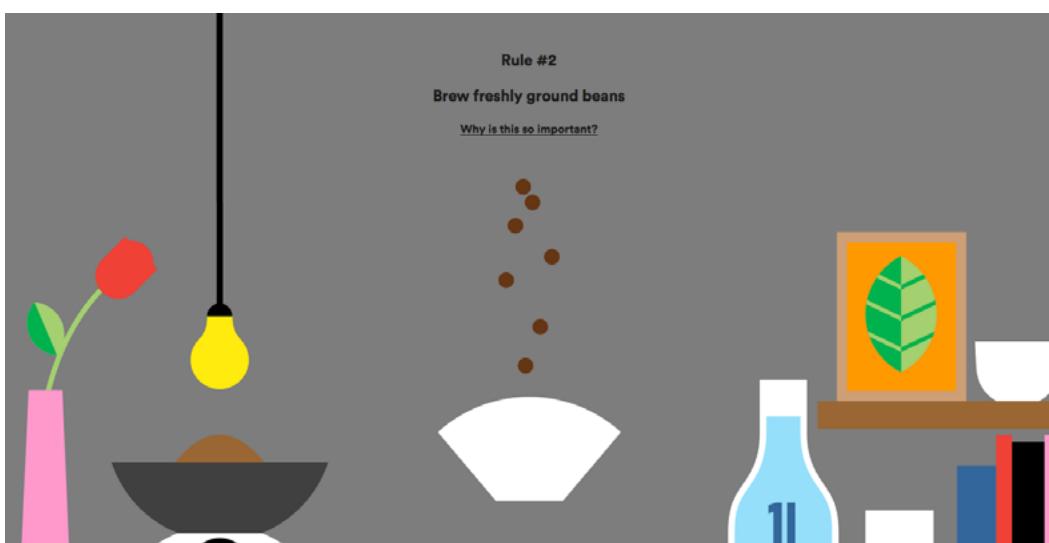


Photo credit: <http://forbetter.coffee/>

The webgraphic [For Better Coffee](#) uses parallax scrolling to list out advice for making better coffee while simultaneously entertaining the user with an interactive visual journey of a bean made into coffee (in a pleasing flat design style).

The best part about the site isn't the coffee advice, it's watching the animations that bring the bean from one stage to another. As the user who controls the scroll, you feel completely immersed in the storytelling experience.

7. Page Motion

From [AJAX loading](#) options to simple shakes or cartoons, full-page motion is certainly a captivating effect. Page motion is a bit trickier to implement, but works well for making static content feel a bit more dynamic.



Photo credit: <http://www.hungercrunch.com/>

On the site for [Hunger Crunch](#), each tiny movement of the mouse shifts the background image, and when combined with the separation of layers, creates a fun effect that makes sense for a game site.

When applying this tactic, be careful of using too many loading items – they may cause the site to render slowly.

8. Background Animations

While distracting if excessive, a modest animated background can add a certain vitality to a website. The key though is moderation – individual sections at a time, or perhaps a gentle movement of the entire image.

Let's take a look at [Terna](#). Choosing an animated background to showcase the urban bustle that's their business, sections throughout the image move at different intervals. This creates that "busy" atmosphere, without overstimulating the user.

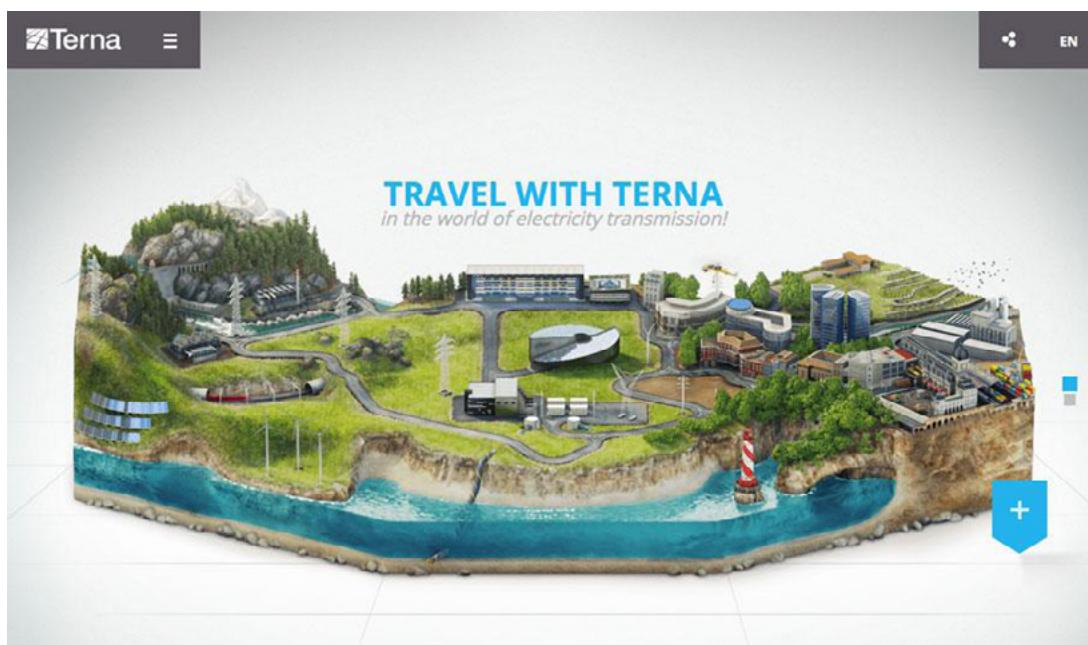


Photo credit: <http://trasmissione-energia.terna.it/>

As with other areas of animation, simplicity is advised. Remember that every motion on the screen will attract attention, so too much animation at the same time creates chaos.

Thinking Beyond the Present

As we mentioned at the start, soon animation will no longer be optional. While clever animation is the bread-and-butter for web designer portfolios – a means to demonstrate their talent – in the near future we will see animation implemented in more “traditional” businesses as well.

Animation is no longer synonymous with cartoons, so more professional industries like financial or medical institutions are using a more refined style.

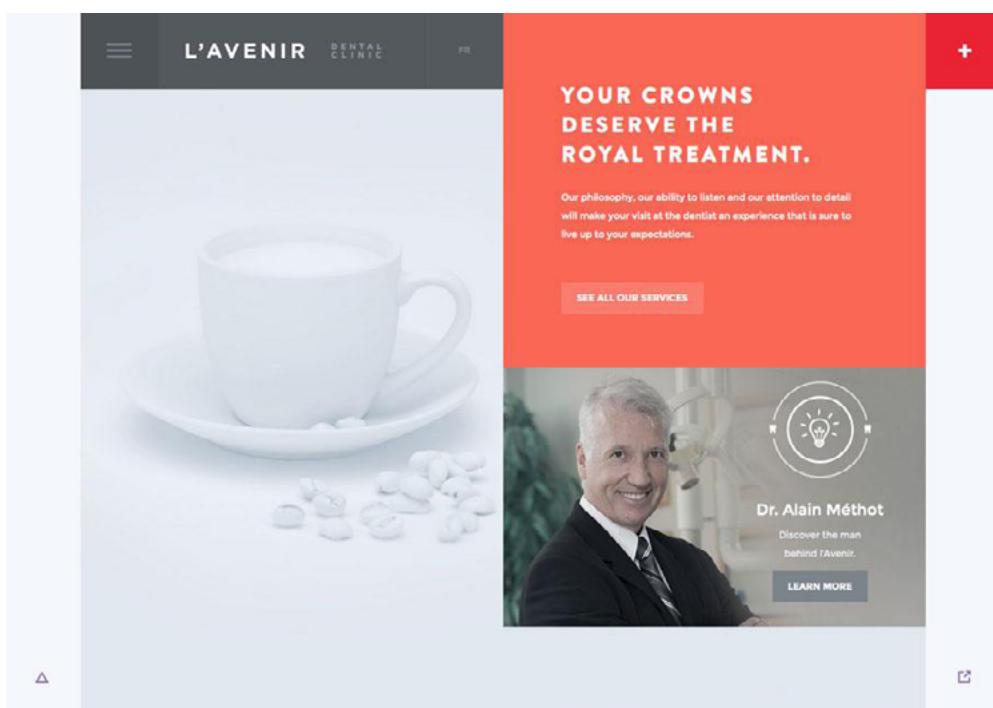


Photo credit: <http://avenirclinic.com/>

Dentistry is historically an industry that takes itself seriously, so **L'Avenir Dental Clinic** uses conservative animated effects: scrolling activates new windows to slide open. No need for bouncy icons or whimsical moving text.

Ecommerce, too, can take advantage of animation for practical purposes – namely the 360-degree rotation of products pictures. This gives the user more of a showroom experience when shopping online, one less advantage in-person shopping has left.

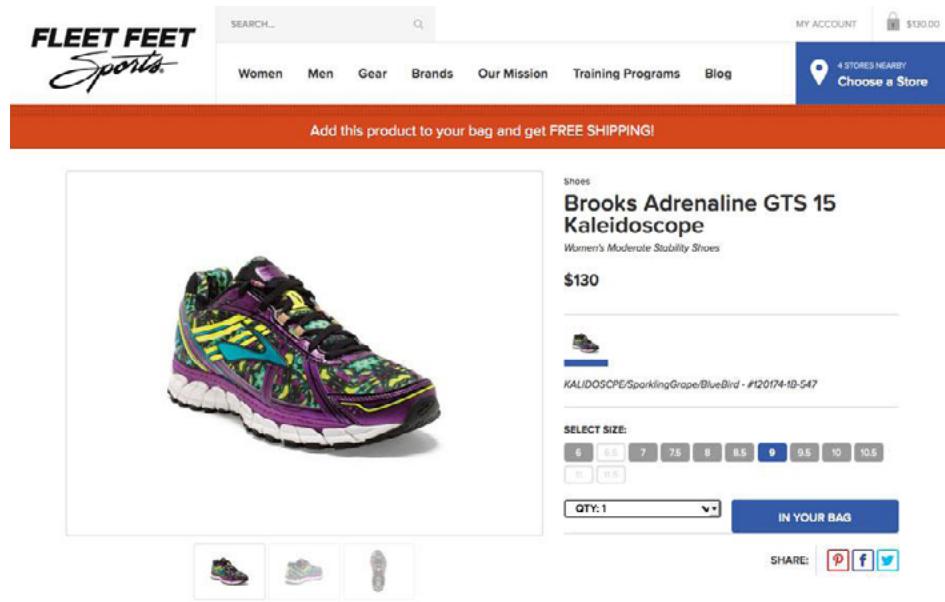


Photo credit: <https://www.fleetfeetsports.com/>

Ecommerce sites can also take advantage of conventional web animation. When you buy a product at **Fleet Feet Sports**, a fun animation shrinks the product photo and moves it into your shopping cart. This makes the interface feel responsive, and also adds to the shopper's gratification of having selected a product.

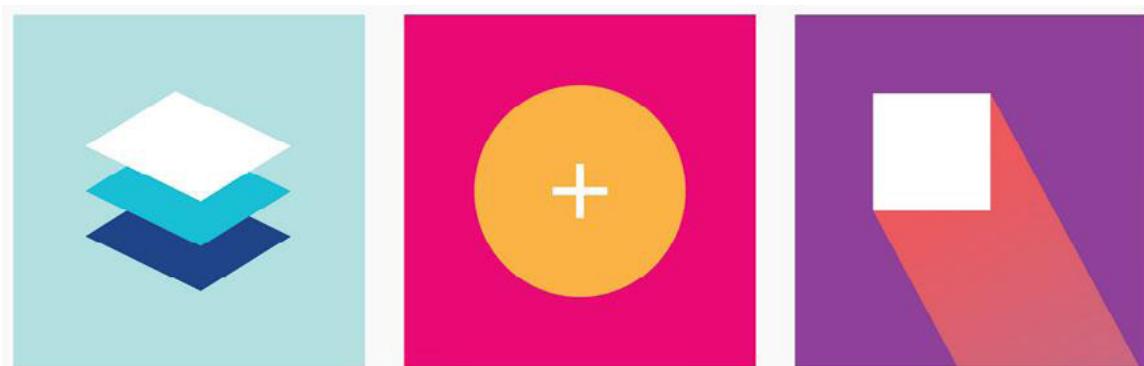


Photo credit: <http://www.google.com/design/spec/material-design/introduction.html#>

As more designers embrace [Google's Material Design](#) philosophy, their take on the technique will become more prominent. Their documentation describes animation in this way:

Just as the shape of an object indicates how it might behave, watching an object move demonstrates whether it's light or heavy, flexible or rigid, small or large. In the world of material design, motion describes spatial relationships, functionality, and intention with beauty and fluidity.

Not only is animation expanding its range of industries, it's also evolving in its application. As a means to combine animation with realism, animated photography is emerging as an up-and-coming trend.

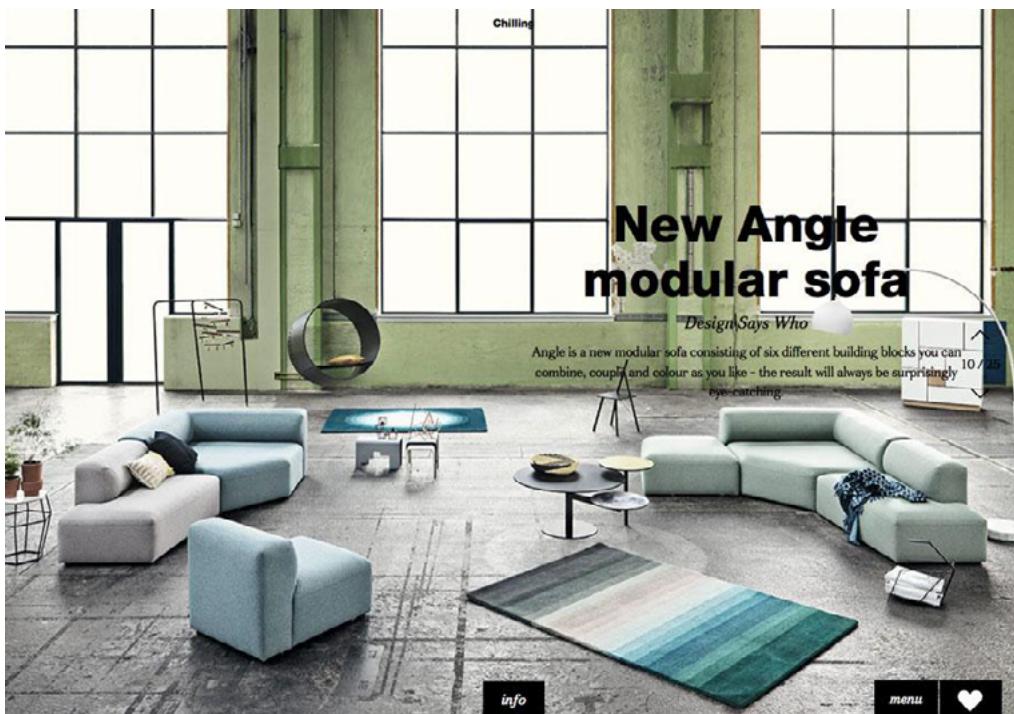


Photo credit: <http://lookbook.bolia.com/chilling/>

[Bolia](#) blends real photography and scrolling animation to immerse their users in their online experience. This blurring of the lines of reality is only going to become more popularity as technology allows it.

By now, animation has proved its staying power in mediums far older than web design. Due to its permanence, it will continue to ingrain itself into the design industry – the only difference is what new technologies will allow it to do.

Use Advanced Animations in your design with UXPin

10 Free Resources and Tools

1. [12 Principles of Animation Video](#) – A video by animator [Cento Lodigiani](#) illustrating the 12 principles from *Illusion of Life: Disney Animation*.
2. [CSS3 Animation Cheat Sheet](#) – This useful collection of ready-made, plug-and-play animations lets you apply premade CSS classes to any element you wish.
3. [Web Animation](#) – A frequently updated guide to synchronization and timing for animation in web pages and APIs.
4. [“Mythbusting: CSS Animations vs. JavaScript”](#) – CSS Trick’s discussion over the best method for web animation.
5. [“Web Animation at Work”](#) – An article from A List Apart explaining how animation is theoretically a further extension of other design techniques.

6. “[15 Animation Tutorials](#)” – A guide on web animation by UltraLinx aimed at beginners.
7. [Elastic SVG Elements](#) – A helpful instructional for creating SVG shape animations.
8. [Top Tools to Create Animations With](#) – A list and analysis of 15 popular animation tools.
9. [Transit](#) – A downloadable jQuery plugin for improving CSS transitions and transformations.
10. [Material Design Animation Examples Gallery](#) – A gallery of worthwhile animations in material design for some possible inspiration.

[f](#)[in](#)[tw](#)[g+](#)

Dramatic Typography

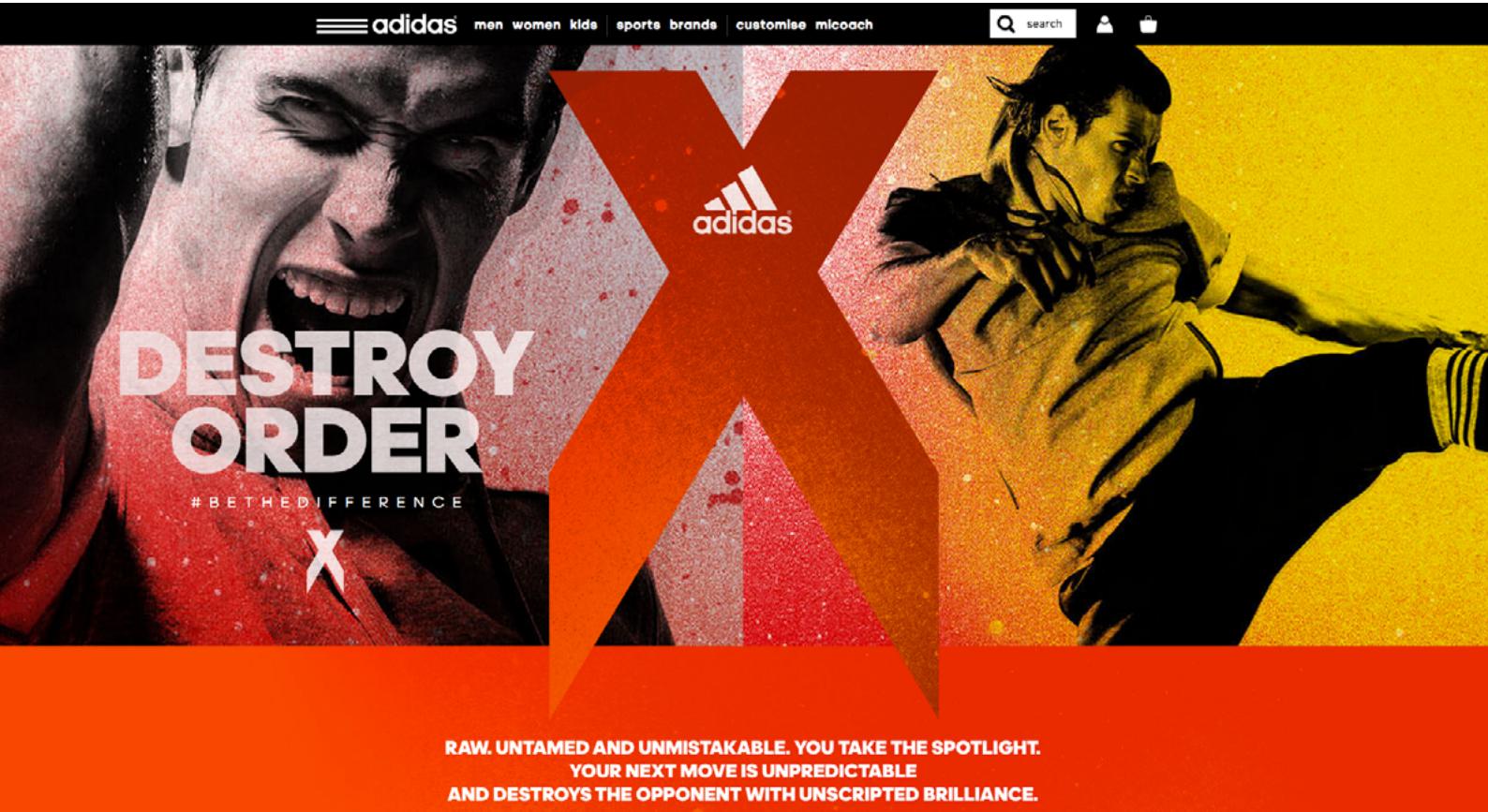


Photo credit: [Adidas via awwwards](#)

Dramatic typography – fonts, sizes, and effects that act as a stylistic element on their own – is quickly becoming a staple of web interfaces.

Typography is being used for more than just legibility. Whether simple or elaborate, big or small, the words on today's sites are being read

in a whole new light. In this chapter, we'll explore how to design typography effectively, what's popular and why, and what to avoid when choosing the look of your words.

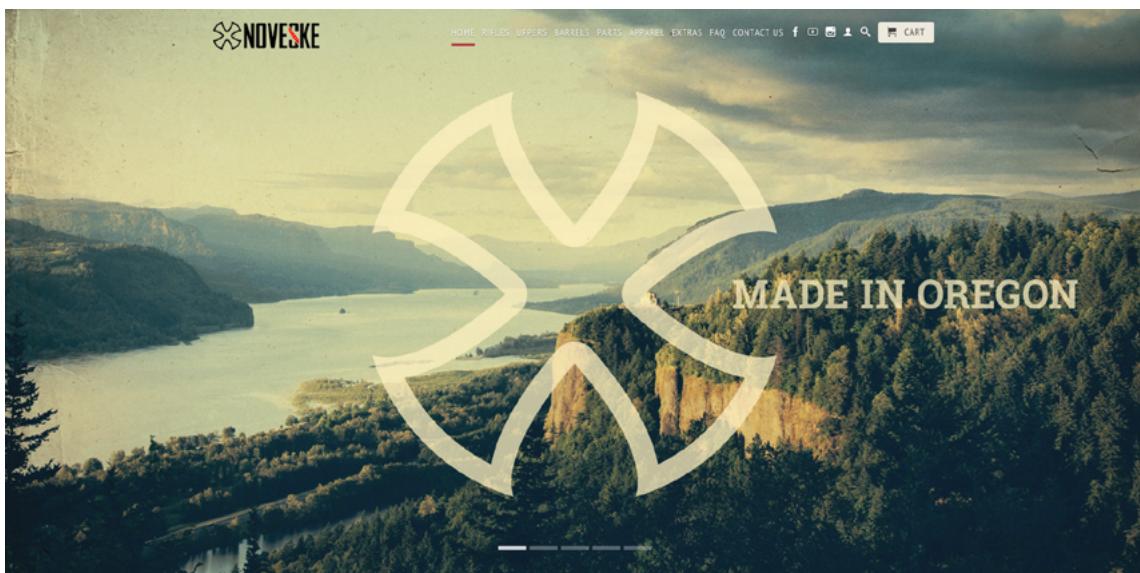


Photo credit: Noveske

Defining Dramatic Typography

For starters, let's make clear that dramatic typography and simple typography are not mutually exclusive. In fact, simplified typography is one of the most popular forms of dramatic typography at moment. To define dramatic typography, we'll just say it's typography that stands out – for whatever reason.

As a trend, we can narrow down the current elements most currently reflected in dramatic typography:

- Extreme size (large and small)
- Superimposed on images

- Creative use of simple typefaces
- Custom typeface
- Artistic fonts

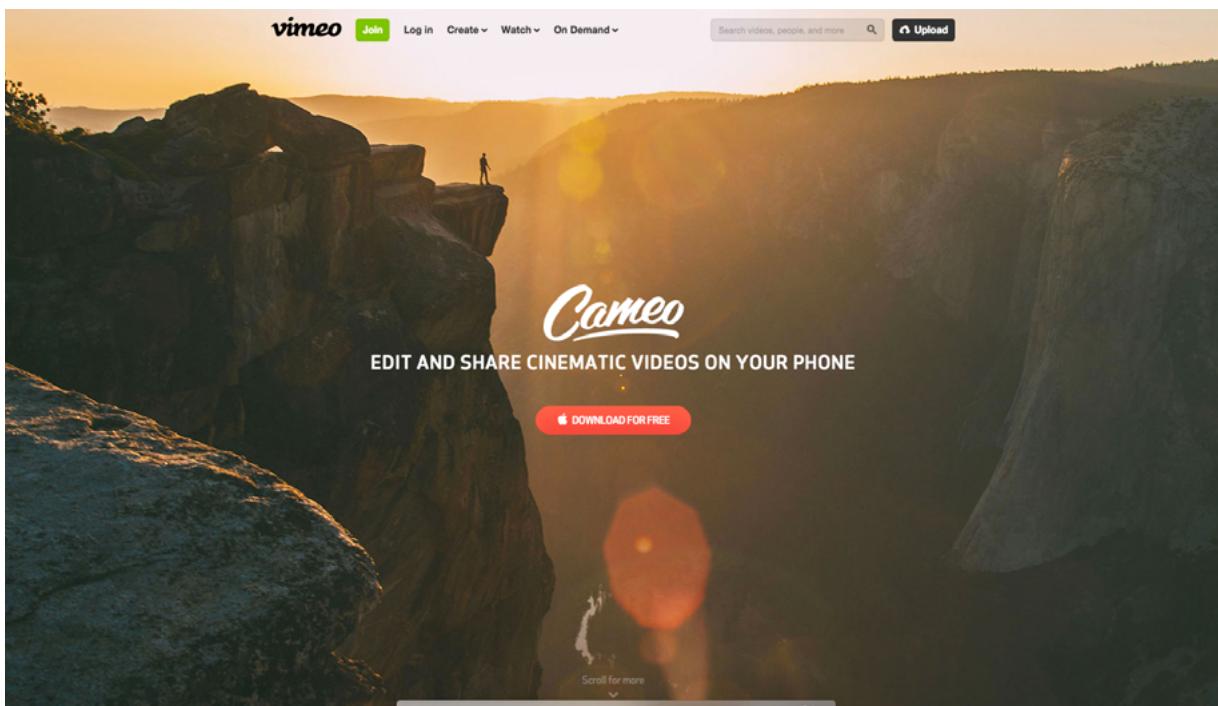


Photo credit: Vimeo

Note that these styles are usually combined with each other for a nearly endless visual palette.

Typography Basics

Typography is about how it's used just as much as how it looks. This should explain why we're recently seeing simple and seemingly boring typefaces do well in capturing our attention.

The best place to start is [with the basics](#): first, become acquainted with terms like type categories, type families, and letterform strokes.



Photo credit: White Frontier Brewery via awwwards

Type categories are divided by mood, structure and the impact of the lettering. The greatest divide is between serif or sans serif, with sans serif being the current favorite with the trend of simplicity. *Serifs* are those extra embellishes on the edge of certain letter lines, and *sans* means “without.”



Source: "I shot the serif." Tom Gabor. Creative Commons.

A type family is simply all variations of the chosen font. The different forms include regular, bold italics, condensed, black, and sometimes others.

In the context of typography, the stroke refers to the width of each line. Sharing a uniform stroke within the same family seems to be the trend recently, as uniform strokes are more legible across different settings and contrast.

For more advice on applying the basics of typography, including some expert rules and guidelines, download the free *Web Design for the Human Eye, Book 2*.

Font Availability

The driving force behind dramatic typography is the increased availability of typefaces for mass use.

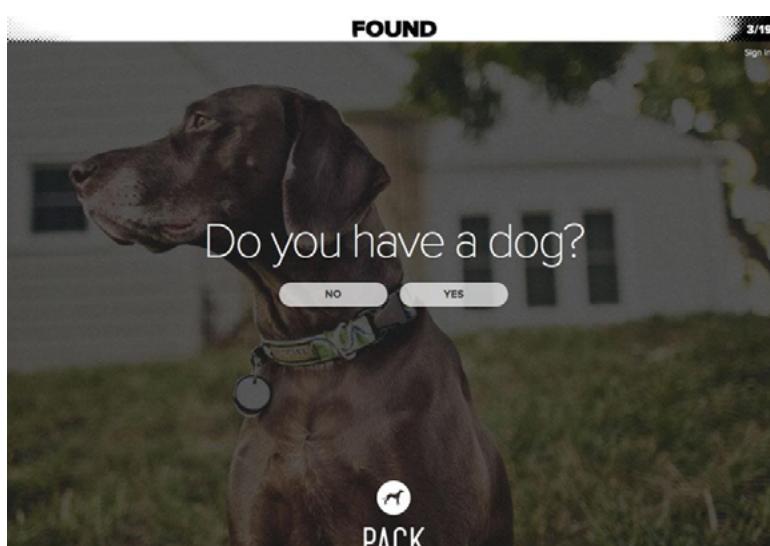


Photo credit <http://packdog.com/>

More fonts are available for less money – or no money through [Google Fonts](#). In all of Adobe's Creative Cloud plans, they include their [Typekit](#) service.

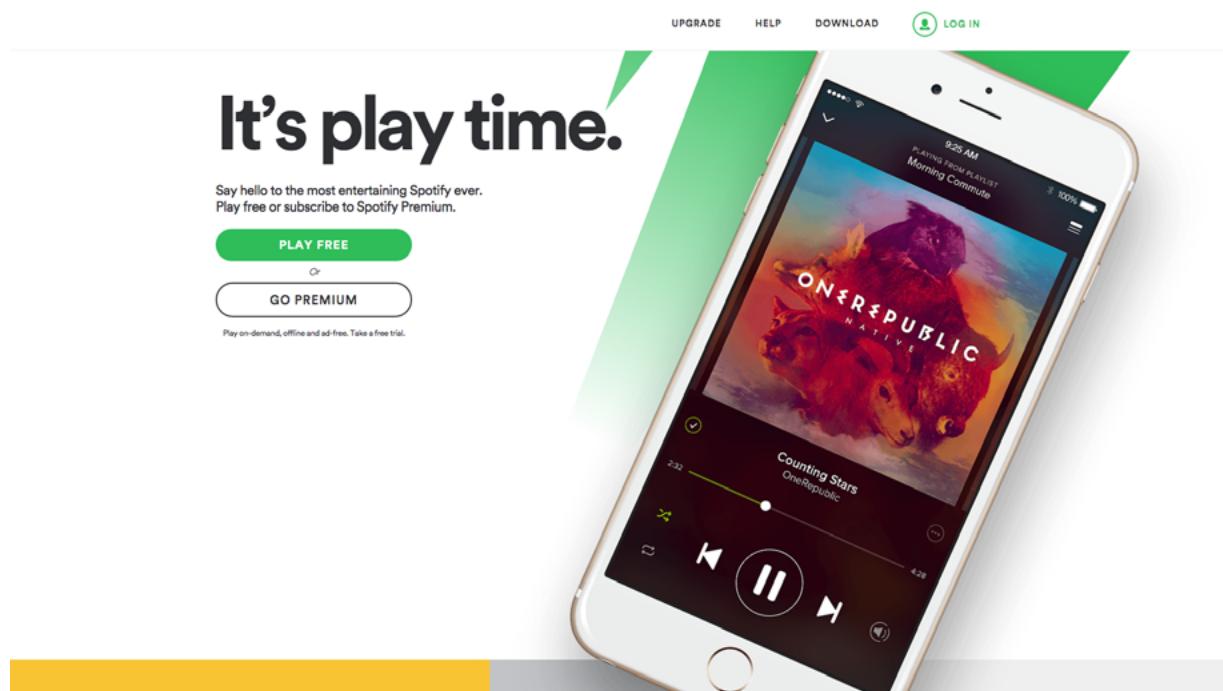


Photo credit: [Spotify](#)

This availability also allows for theme-based design as WordPress users can access the same amount of options as home-grown websites. As for font rendering, the advancements of modern browsers and interfaces are making that a thing of the past.

While using a box or [web-safe typeface](#) from a kit is a fine option, you don't always need to choose the most mainstream typefaces. So far, the most common fonts include:

Sans serif fonts:

- Proxima Nova
- Futura

- Avenir
- Open Sans
- Helvetica Neue

Serif fonts:

- Caslon
- Garamond
- Freight Text
- Minion
- FF Meta Serif

For more advice on how to focus your efforts in selecting a preexisting font, read Smashing Magazine's [How to Choose a Typeface](#) by Douglas Bonneville.

With the basics out of the way, let's look at the ways in which typography is currently making its mark.

Extreme Sizes

Once you select a type family to work with, size is the first consideration. The trend lately is going to extremes, both large and small.

1. Large Typography

Large typefaces send a powerful and assertive message when coupled with large hero images.



Photo credit <http://www.getzeroapp.com/>

This style typically follows the same guidelines:

- A larger proportion and weight compared to the other screen elements
- Characters larger than 85 points.
- Caps or extremely thick strokes

We're also noticing some trends within this trend.

Often, the words are expanded to fill the entire screen. The color of the words is usually white – which contrasts well against an image or brightly colored background. Additionally, sometimes thin serifs are added to create a dynamic contrast to the thick strokes. We also see words alternating in size, though always big.



Photo credit: Squarespace

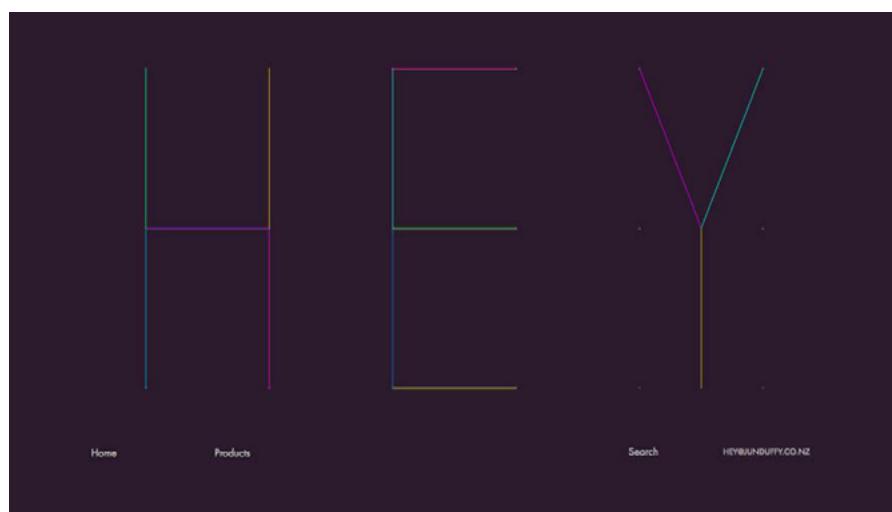


Photo credit <http://junduffy.co.nz/>

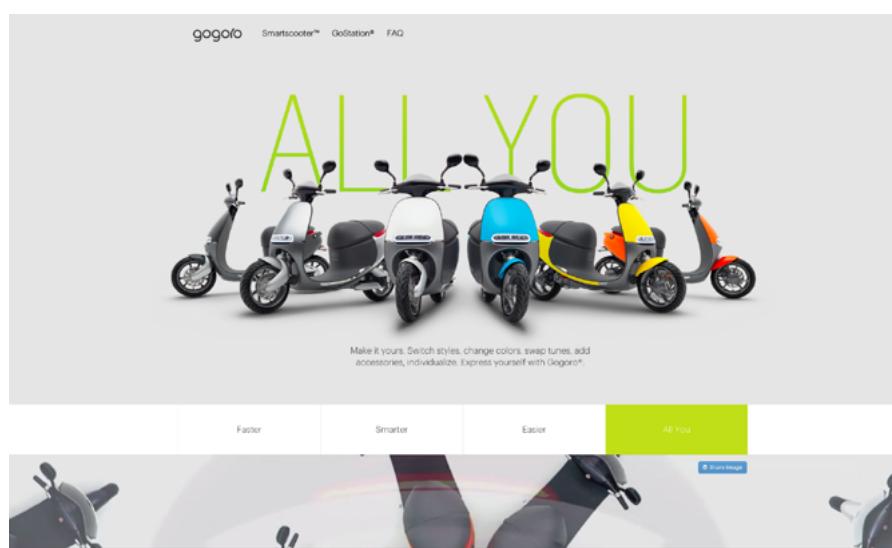


Photo credit: gogoro

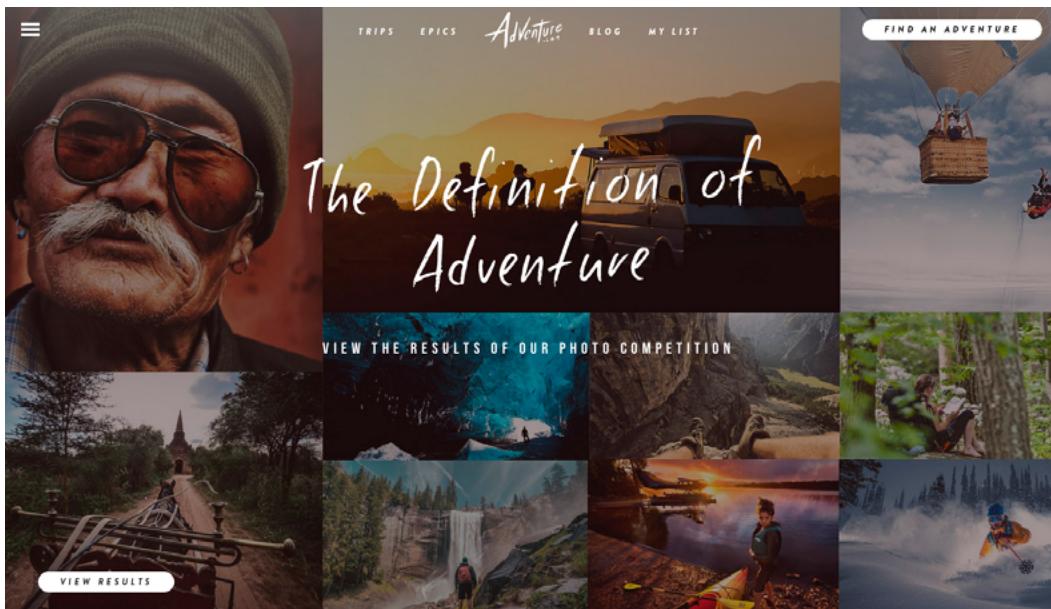


Photo credit: Adventure via awwwards

Because this trend is so popular, don't be afraid to get a little creative. Try using different alignments, such as to the right or left, to avoid the centered crutch. At this size, your message will surely be bold, so caps aren't necessarily required. Last, a customized use of colors can give your site a unique personality.

One technique we found useful for designing with oversized type – begin with uncomfortably large, then continue scaling it back until you find the size that works. By starting big and working backwards, you may find yourself choosing a size bigger than you would have guessed.

2. Small Typography

For a softer voice that speaks just as loudly, some designers are turning to extremely small typography. As long as the other elements on the screens don't overshadow it, small words can stand out just as much as large ones.



Photo credit: <http://www.mikiyakobayashi.com/>

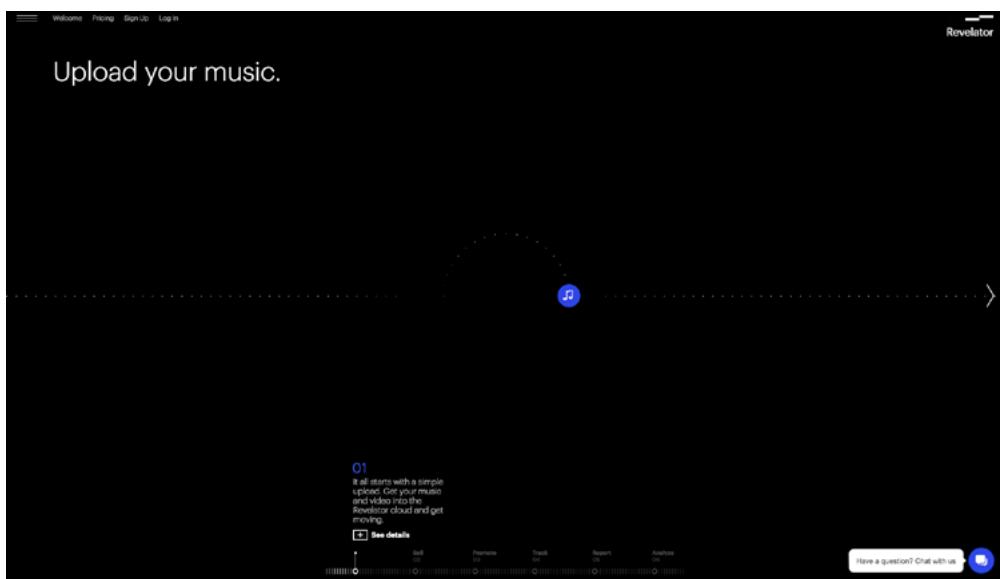


Photo credit: Revelator

The strategies behind large and small type are a little different. Small type is often in black, and is used in conjunction with excessive negative space. Both, however, typically use thick strokes.

Small typography works well over a **hero-style image**, as the contrast creates intrigue, and the minimal space taken up by text allows better appreciation of the image's content.

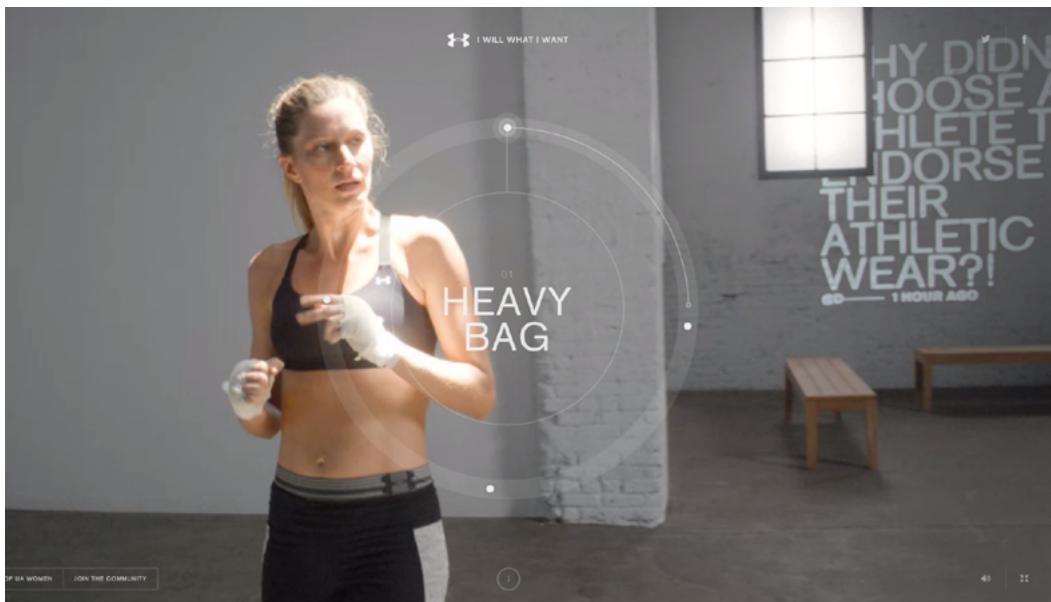


Photo credit: Under Armor

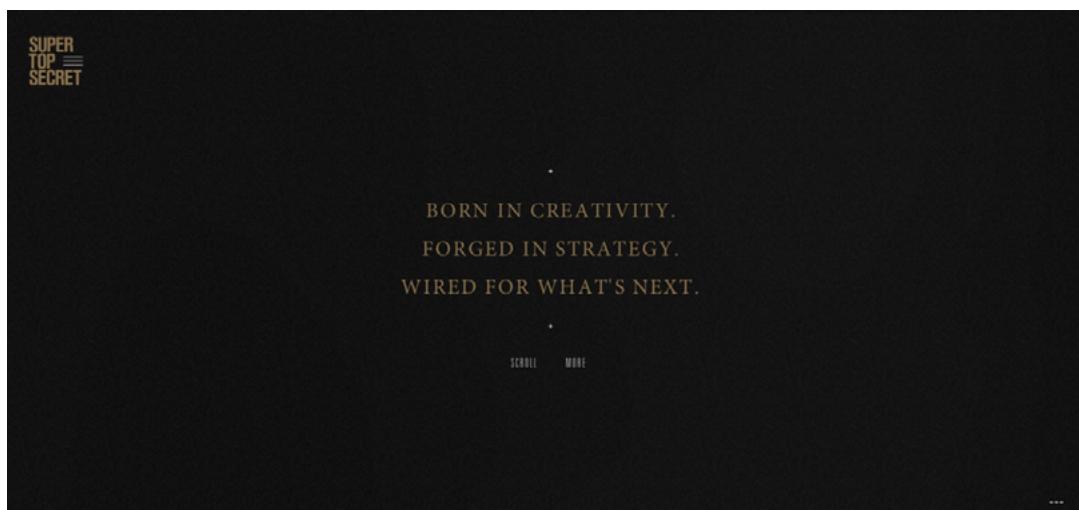


Photo credit: <http://www.wearetopsecret.com/>

Sometimes small type needs a little extra embellishment to be noticed. A flourish like contrasting color or a simple animation (like Under Armor's [storytelling site](#)) can ensure that it's seen. Surrounding the text with negative space also works quite well.

Superimposed Over Images

The days of images and text being two separate entities are over. Today, superimposing text over images can make both more powerful.

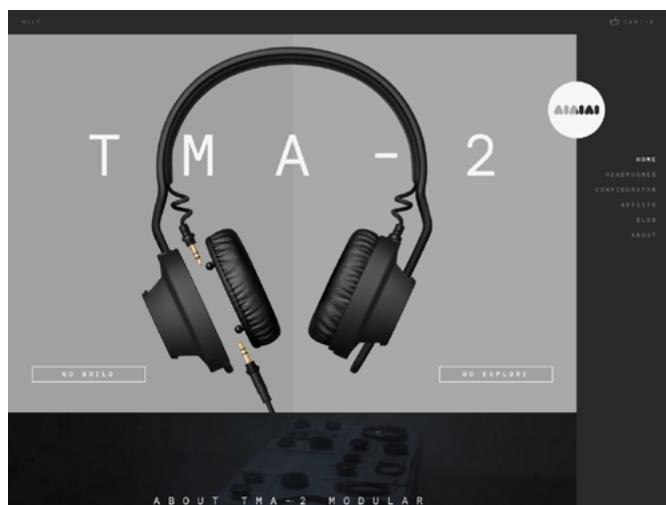


Photo credit: <http://aiaiai.dk/>

The two major considerations with this style are contrast and legibility. Where on the image the text appears will impact both, and a designer must be sensitive about breakpoints on various devices. Test out locations to determine where the text is most visible without obscuring the most important parts of the image, like faces or product / brand placement.

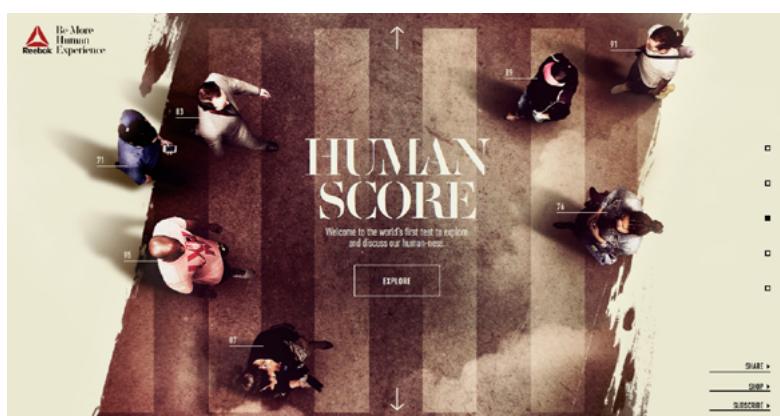


Photo credit: Reebok via awwwards

Another concern is that the two together don't confuse the meaning. If a sports photographer superimposes his name over his best photo – a picture of Tom Brady – you can understand the confusion.

Creative Use of Simple Typefaces

As with other design elements, experimenting with text and typography can yield some great benefits if you're up for the risk. For example, we just talked about text in images, but what about images in text:



Photo credit: <http://anjarubik.mohito.com/en/>

You don't have to follow the trends to use typography in a memorable way. In fact, inventing your own creative usage is the best way to ensure standing out, as long as your idea is sound and you test the usability with users. Just remember that readability is the ultimate goal, so don't do anything to jeopardize the words' meaning coming across.

menu

An art project

fb

Photo credit: <http://hotelmoscow.info/>

Creative typography is, by nature, interesting on its own. That's why it's best to combine it with a simple and unobtrusive background, such as a single-color blanket as in the examples above. You don't want to clutter your screen with too many catchy elements competing for your user's attention.

Custom Typeface

A custom typeface can have the same effect as creatively using simple type – better, even, considering the potential for furthering brand identity and character. Designing your own font system is one failsafe way to ensure that you set yourself apart.

However, you'll find implementing your own typeface is harder than it may seem.



Photo credit: <http://studiokraftwerk.com/>

For starters, there's the actual look of your font: it must match the personality of your brand and the atmosphere of the site – otherwise, what's the point? Next, it should only be used sparingly. To overuse a custom font is to dilute it: trying limiting it to titles, **value propositions**, slogans, etc., and avoid heavy blocks of text. Last, keep in mind compatibility: a custom typeface must work across different browsers and devices.

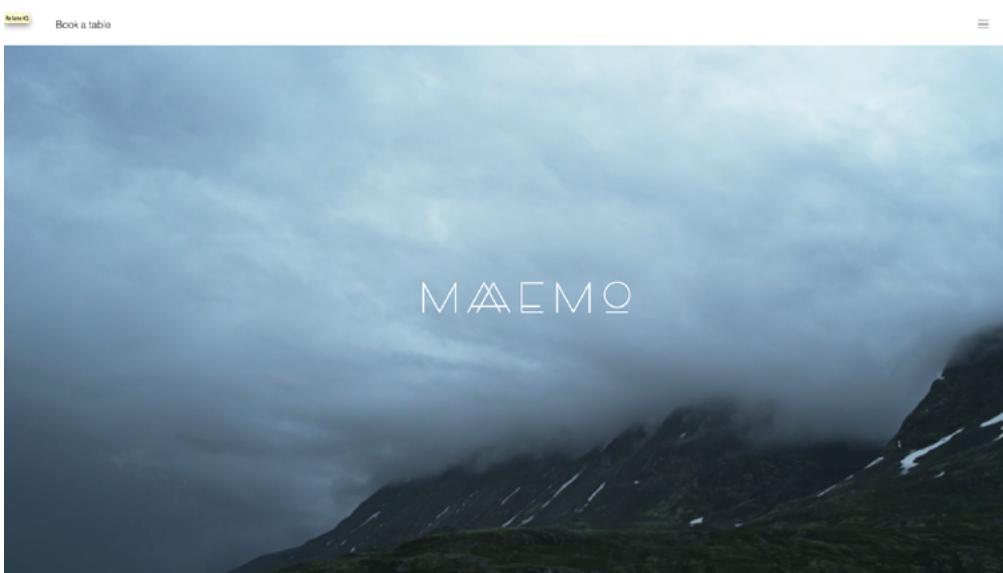


Photo credit: [Maaemo via awwwards](#)

Artistic Fonts

Some fonts are designed solely for looks. Blocks of text written in such fonts act more as graphic elements in a web layout than they do as text. For some sites, though, this could be exactly what's needed.



Photo credit: <http://rsq.com/>

This strategy is a classic one for typography, one that's been used in advertising posters for decades. The cost for such a look is legibility and the deemphasis of the message of the words. However, for aesthetic gains, this embellishment could be worth the price.

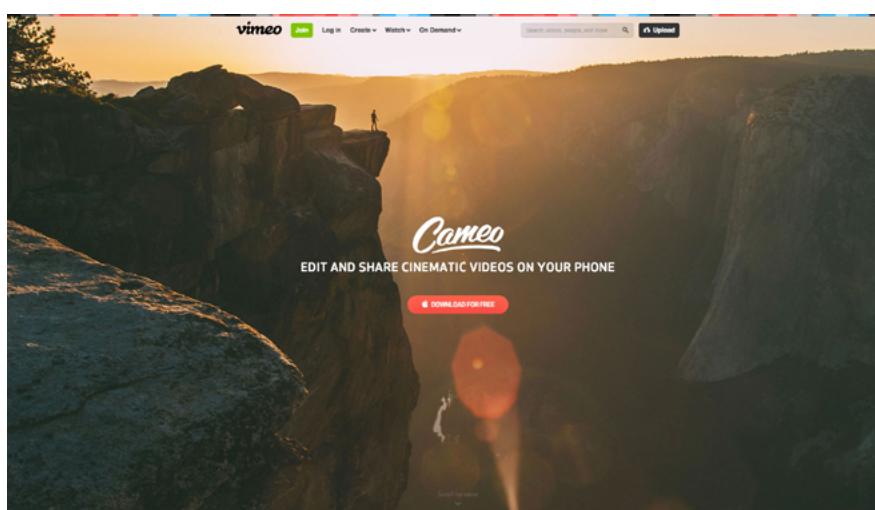


Photo credit: [Vimeo](#)

As a nice compromise, you could use a typeface that is equally legible, readable, and decorative (like how Vimeo treats the words "Cameo").

Try to avoid the commonly used artistic fonts, such as word clouds or the word etched in the shape of what it means. These clichés will undercut what you're trying to accomplish, and because artistic fonts have their drawbacks, you must do everything to ensure that their usage is worth it.

Combining Techniques

The techniques we listed above aren't mutually exclusive. If you know how to properly combine certain techniques, you can pile up the advantages of each or use one's strengths to mitigate another's weakness.



Photo credit: <http://www.vintagehope.co.uk/>

A lot of combining techniques falls on common sense. For example, if you're placing an image inside your text, try some high-contrast text (or else the image might drown out the text).

Likewise, think about which techniques would not go well together. For example, artistic fonts, are inherently flamboyant, so they're best used in a straightforward way. Don't try to use images in decorative typefaces. Imagine the difficulty of reading the headline for [Anja Rubik's](#) site if the main headline was in cursive and filled with the same image of a model.



Photo credit: <http://sendamessage.to/>

[Send a Message](#) (above) combines techniques in a practical way. It starts with small, simple text to draw attention away from itself and onto the image. After interacting with the site, though, the text message that is the point of the site appears. This is written in a large typeface, and superimposed over the image – two strategies for grabbing attention back from the image.

Thinking Beyond the Present

Dramatic typography is less of a trend, and more of a strategy that reinvents itself every few years. The techniques described above are simply the current iteration of how many designers are using typography.

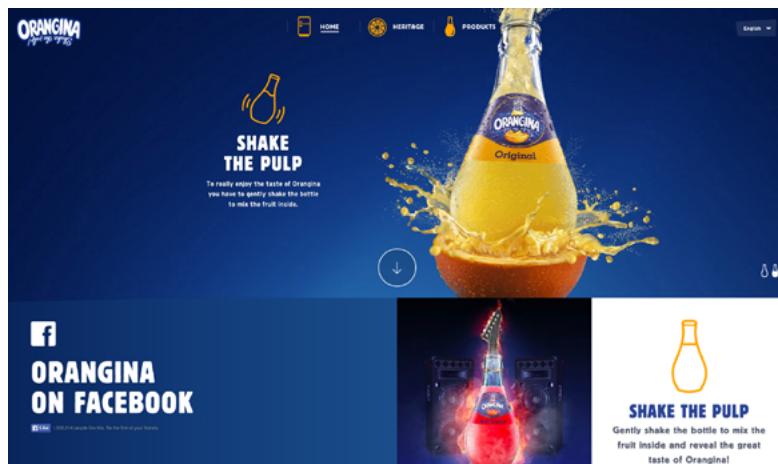


Photo credit: Orangina

In general, good typography will always fulfill these goals:

- Communicates message of the text
- Works in conjunction with other design tactics
- Suits technological requirements (i.e., browser compatibility and responsive design)
- Creates a memorable impression

Today's typography trends accomplish these goals, but how will they adapt to suit the next era of design?

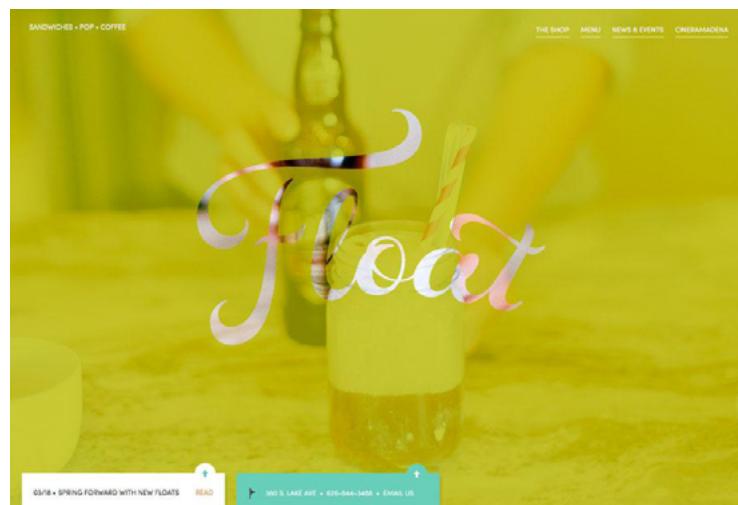


Photo credit: <http://floatpasadena.com/>

It is almost certain that designers will continue to use high-drama text. They may, however, dial back parts of the trend that are starting to feel overdone.

For example, we may begin to see more color and less white type. More designers may opt for transparencies or 3D effects in the creation of dramatic letterforms. A shift from uber-thin to thicker stroke widths in letterforms could take place. Letterforms may also include more basic or simple animations or work as part of a larger scheme of scrolling or other user interface elements.

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10 Free Resources and Tools

1. **WhatFont** – A online tool that tells you which font a chosen site uses.
2. **“Choosing Web Fonts 15 Expert Tips”** – Creative Bloq’s advice on selecting the best font for your site.
3. **Typewolf** – A site dedicated to web fonts, with featured sites, analysis, and articles from experts.
4. **“Eight Tips for Type on the Web”** – Tips on selecting your site’s font from Font.com.

5. **FFFFFallback** – A useful tool that tests the compatibility of your chosen fonts and even suggests alternatives.
6. “**Going Bigger with Typography**” – A guide from Designmodo specifically on using oversized typography, with examples.
7. **Awwwards Typography in Web Design Gallery** – Awwward-winning sites selected for their typography – updated regularly.
8. “**25 Awesome Typography Tutorials**” – A collection of tutorials from Top Design Mag to show you how to recreate your trickier font selections.
9. **Beautiful Web Type** – A list of live examples of stellar typography from Google Fonts.
10. “**41 Best Free Web Fonts of 2015**” – Instead of browsing through thousands of options, Elegant Theme’s list hand-picks the best from this year.

Vibrant Colors

You can't design without color – even a black-and-white site might use different hues, contrasts, and balances.

With the lingering presence of [flat design 2.0](#), color holds even more prominence in web design today. Rainbows of bright colors span the Internet, whether it's minimalist sites or intricate web interfaces.

We're seeing a lot more of these brighter, happier tones, making vibrant colors one of the most noticeable trends in recent months.

Influences from Fashion and Interior Design

These bright colors aren't just a trend online; [they seem to be universal across all industries](#) – especially fashion and interior design, two visually dominant fields that have more than a little in common with web design.



Photo credit: Versace

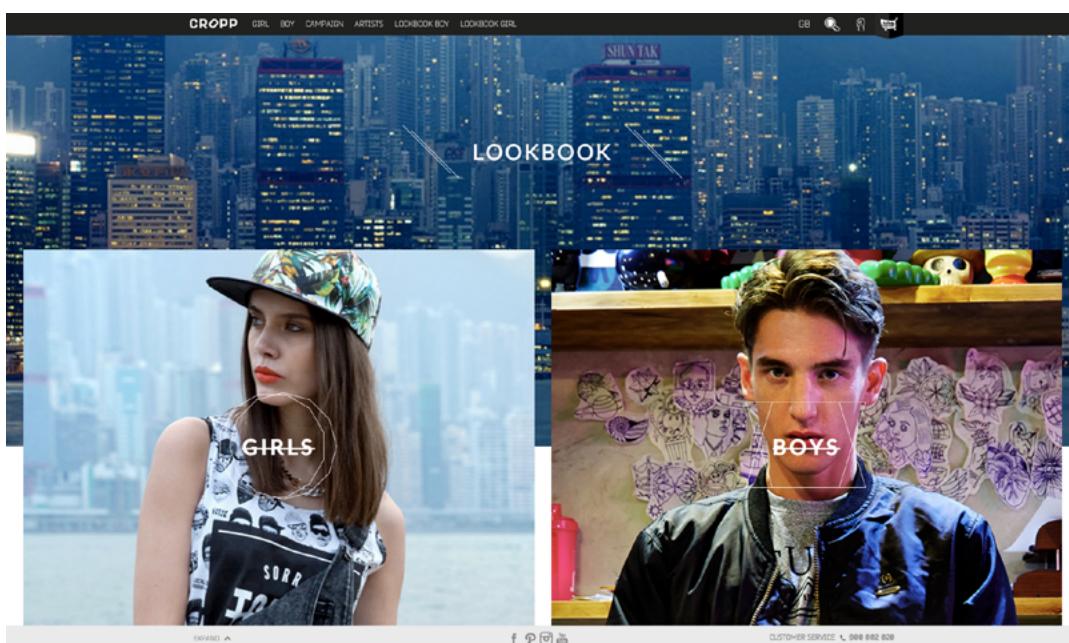


Photo credit: Cropp

The takeaway is that, by keeping tabs on the happenings in these industries, you'll have a better understanding of what's going on in web design. The same colors people want to wear on themselves or see in their homes are oftentimes similar to the colors they'll enjoy when browsing the web.

After all, the end result of using color is the same across all industries: connecting with the user. Color has the ability to create a sturdy emotional link with people, whether on a handbag or a home page.

Why Now?

It's no coincidence that vibrant colors are becoming popular today. In fact, we can trace the trend's popularity to two major developments: [high definition](#) and [flat design](#).

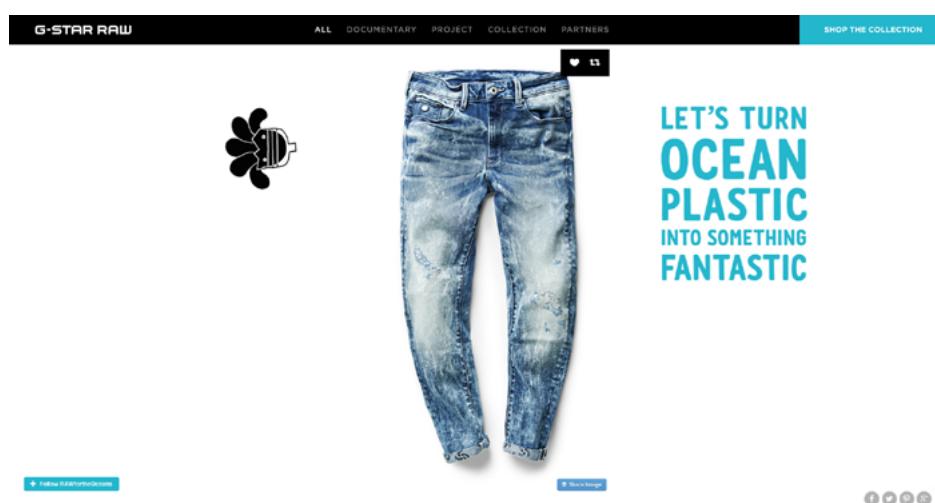


Photo credit: G-Star

The more pixels per inch on high definition displays allows for more distinct colors. While in the past designers could use only 216 [web safe colors](#), today's technology allows millions, and over 98% of users have personal access to such technology ([according to a W3Schools study](#)).

As [Retina](#) and other high definition displays were becoming more readily available, flat design was also growing in popularity. This

was no coincidence either. Flat design, too, is a product of newer technological options, but it also resulted as a backlash against the skeuomorphism that dominated the web design scene prior.

However, the roots of the current vibrant color trends by no means makes it stagnant. Let's take a look at the different ways color is being used in web design today.

Monochromatic Schemes

In fitting with minimalist sensibilities, monochromatic schemes – sites that uses varying shades of the same color – are now common. These schemes suit the vibrant color, as they provide less distraction and contrast among colors, allowing the designer to make more bold and experimental color choices.



Photo credit: <http://www.linequality.com/>

The [Line Equality](#) example above demonstrates this, as lime green is a color that typically does not play well with others. This pages accents

– not competes with – the color of the main subject (a familiar Muppet). In conjunction with other minimalist styles like bold, white lettering and **ghost buttons**, the monochromatic scheme controls the visual dominance of the page and makes it usable and aesthetically pleasing.

Vibrant colors, by nature, are flashy and eye-catching, which means too many together will create a chaotic or “busy” screen. The monochromatic scheme solves this problem before it starts.

Accents

One of the most effective uses of color is in emphasizing or de-emphasizing elements through accents. Bright colors stand out more against backgrounds with more dull colors, and a designer who knows how to use this can establish their own visual hierarchy with only color choices. Even as an aesthetic choice alone, accents keeps a screen from appearing stale – a constant concern with minimalist designs.



CASE STUDIES

Photo credit: <http://hega.tv/#/home>

As seen in the [Hega](#) example above, the red call-to-action grabs attention amidst the black and white throughout the rest of the site. The only splash of color is the most attractive element on the screen, thus the one with the most urgency to interact with.

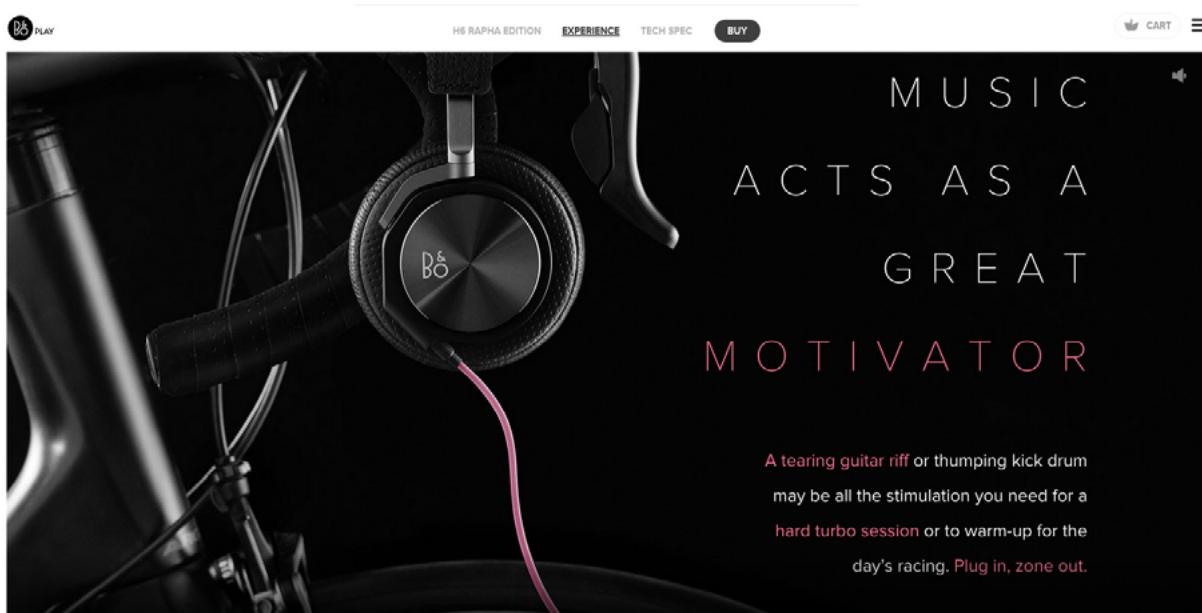


Photo credit: <http://www.beoplay.com/products/h6-rapha-edition>

Accenting can be done in several areas, as [Beoplay](#) clearly demonstrates. The repetition of pink in letters and the images strengthens it, especially against the otherwise overpowering black background.

Blocking and Hovering

Especially with [card-style interfaces](#), the trends of blocking and hovering are popular if not for their appearance, then for their usability.

Blocking refers to a grid-based layout in which the blocks and cards are differentiated with dramatic colors. Hovering refers to an element

– particularly cards – that change color when hovered over. While blocking and hovering can be used on their own, they are often used together because they work so well with one another.

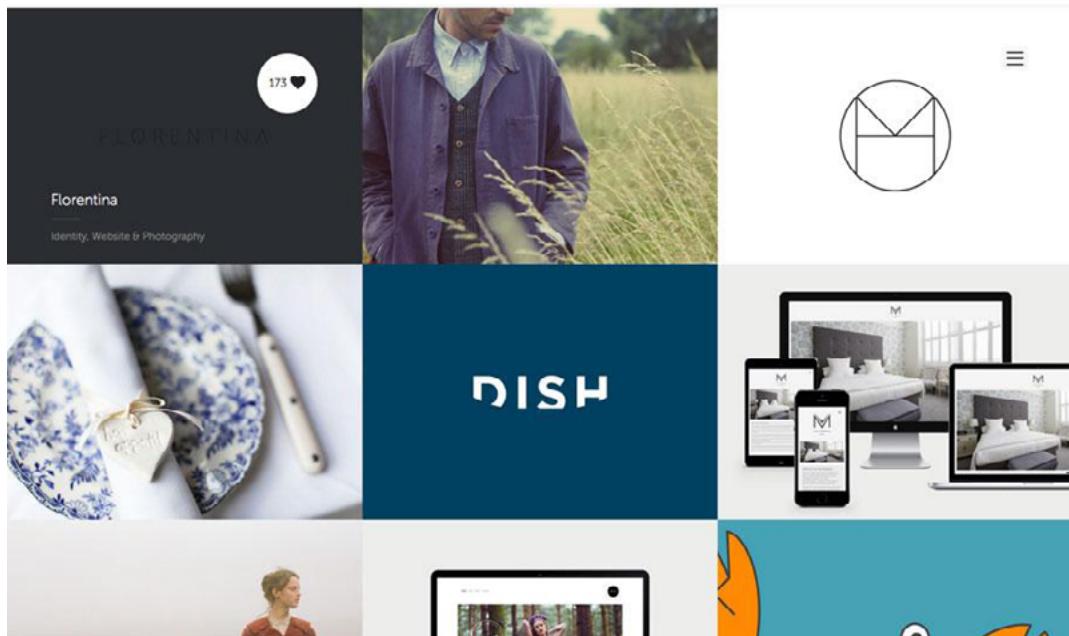


Photo credit: <http://madebypfd.com/>

PFD (above) shows how both trends are used together. The bright colors of some cards stand out against the white backgrounds of others. On hovering, the card becomes tinted (as the upper-left card in the example) and displays the number of hearts. This functions as a shortcut to explaining usability, since a change on hovering is a cue that the object is clickable.

This makes blocking and hovering a practical choice as well as a stylish one. The colorful blocks create a layout that entices interaction, then the hovering displays support this by making interaction fun.

Color and Texture

While texture is most common in neutral backgrounds, under the right circumstances it can be combined with bright colors for exceptional results. To simplify this, let's divide vibrant colors and texture into two main groups:

- 1. A background or image as a whole**
- 2. An accent to a background or image**



Photo credit: <http://www.tacospillet.no/?lang=en>

The site [Tacospillet](#) uses the first type, with full background and foreground images with texture. The softens the bright colors slightly, calming the site and keeping it from overwhelming. The texture also gives the graphics a unique appearance, setting it apart from other sites.

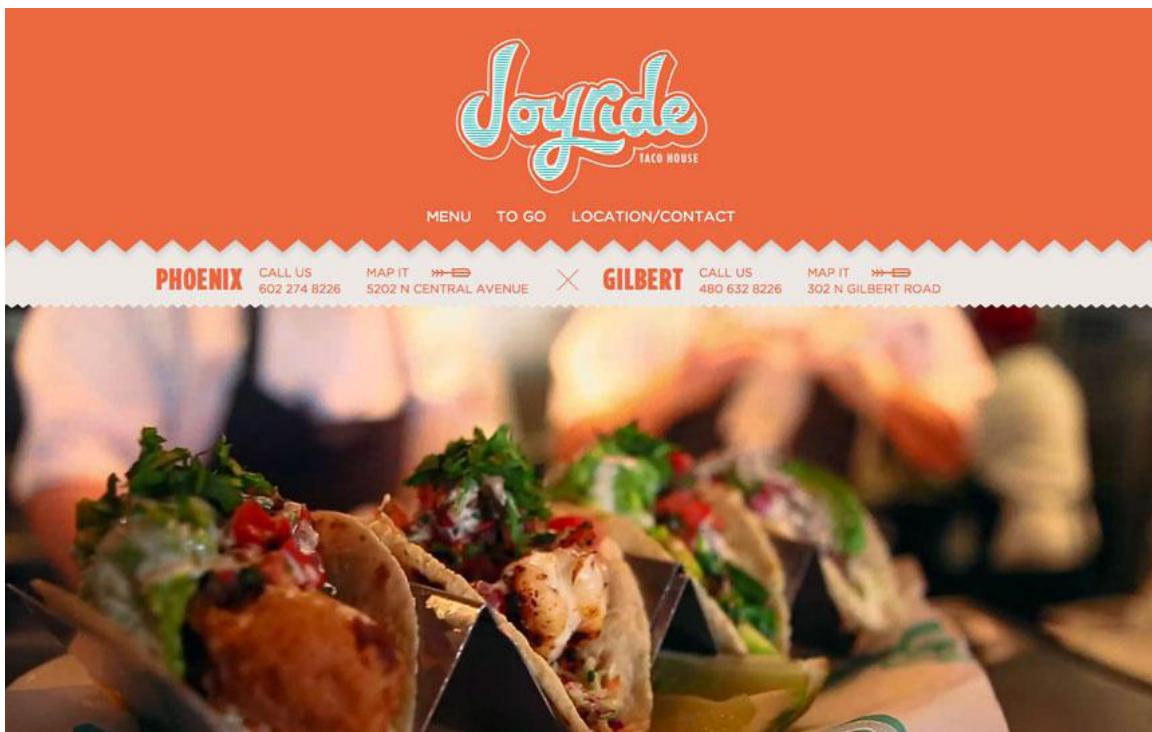


Photo credit: <http://joyridetacohouse.com/>

Ironically, another taco site [Joyride Taco House](#) shows us the second type with its textured accents. The slight shadow under the main header adds a bit of separation with some depth, while the blue-green lines in the logo draw most of the initial attention. The use of texturing is light and fun, which presumably reflects the atmosphere of the restaurant itself.

Best Practices

The appeal of the vibrant color trend is because it can be applied in many different ways and styles to many different elements. With their diversity and versatility, today's bright color patterns are burying the "template" look of the plug-and-play site themes that had been popular before.

What started as a trend for only creative sites like artist portfolios and/or designers is being implemented in more mainstream and traditional industries like news and weather sites. It's even seeping into ecommerce, an industry that's historically known for being visually conservative. The implication of this is bright colors are losing their stigma of silliness and are starting to be accepted more as professional.

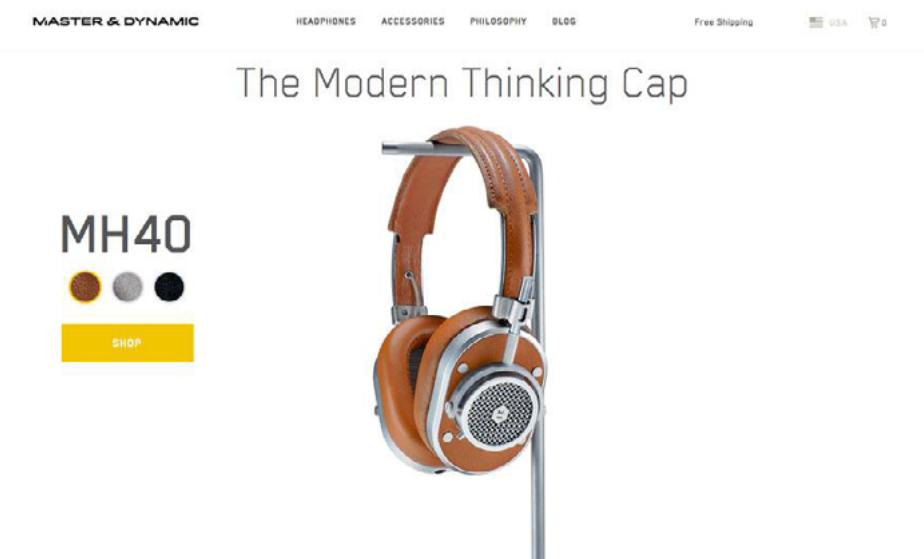


Photo credit: <http://www.masterdynamic.com/>

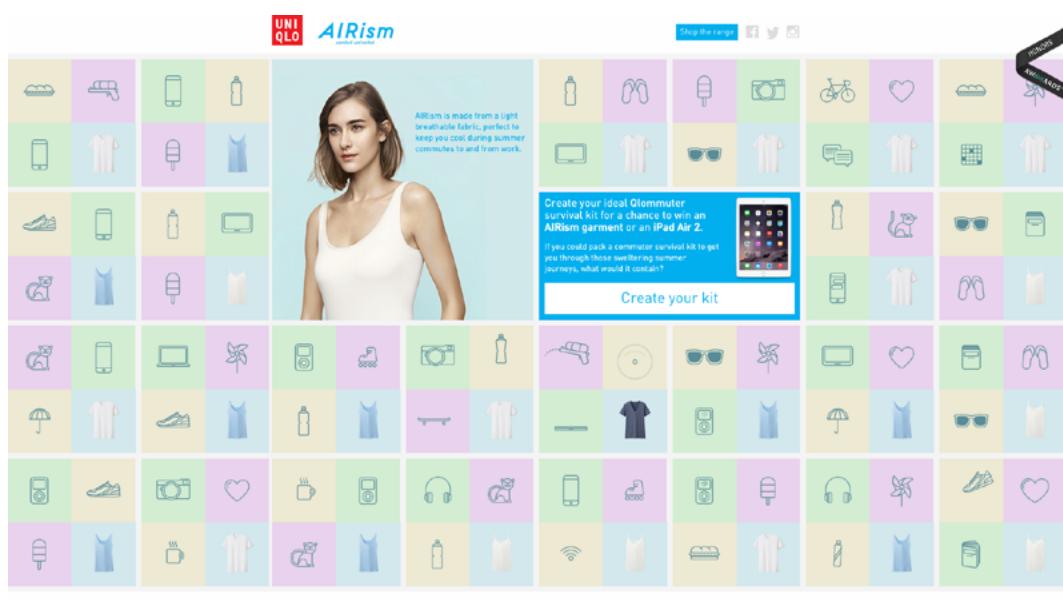


Photo credit: <http://airism.graphitedigital.com/#home>

Let's look at the best practices for taking advantage of vibrant colors in three different fields:

1. Highlighting Certain Text

The attention-grabbing qualities of bright colors make them useful in highlighting certain words within a block of text – especially against a dark background. This adds a natural emphasis and affects how the message comes across.

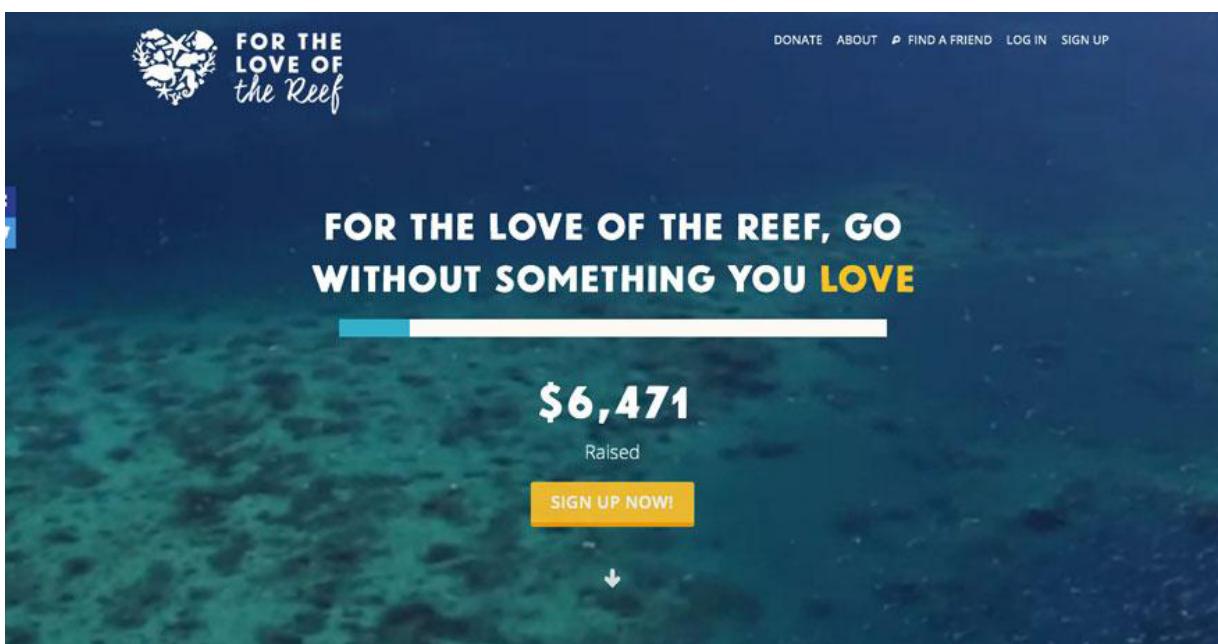


Photo credit: <https://fortheloveof.org.au/#/>

For the Love of the Reef, above, accents only the word “love,” and only in its second appearance. This not only strengthens the impact of the word and its meaning, but it also helps with brand identify, as “love” is a key word in the company name.

2. Buttons/UI Elements

Just like with words, bright colors can emphasize buttons or other UI features, whether to draw attention or to ease usability.

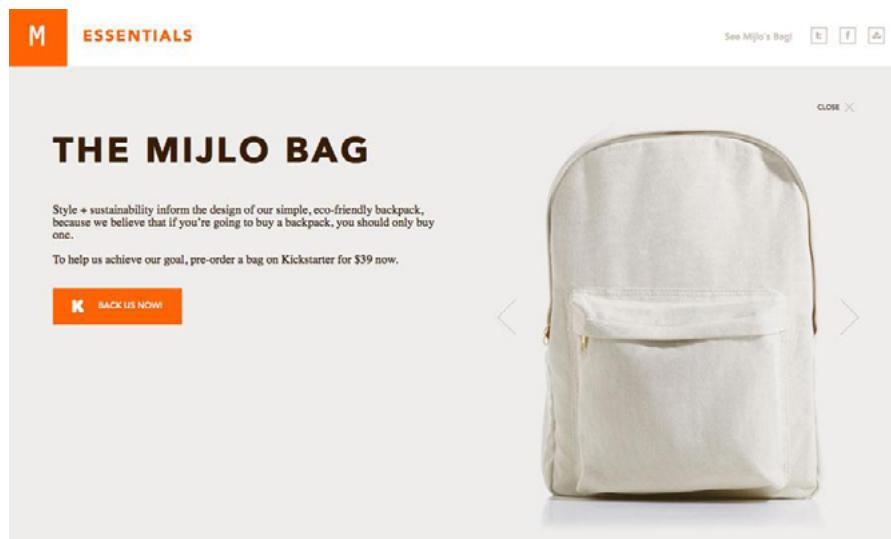


Photo credit: <http://essentials.mijlo.com/>

The bright orange call-to-action on the [Mijlo](#) site above stands out against the plain background and equally plain product image. The combination of muted colors in the background and product work together to make the bright call-to-action that much more appealing.

3. Navigation

Color's organizational power has been known for a long time, and can be seen in the colored tabs of books and filing cabinets. Its application to web navigation seems like the logical progression, as the different colors easily separate the different sections. This becomes especially useful for content-heavy sites, where every effort must be made to simplify navigation.

For example, [Colored Lines](#) above uses the rainbow spectrum to partition the eight separate pages of their site. Not only does this simplify an otherwise bulky navigation system, it also promotes brand identity, considering the company's name.

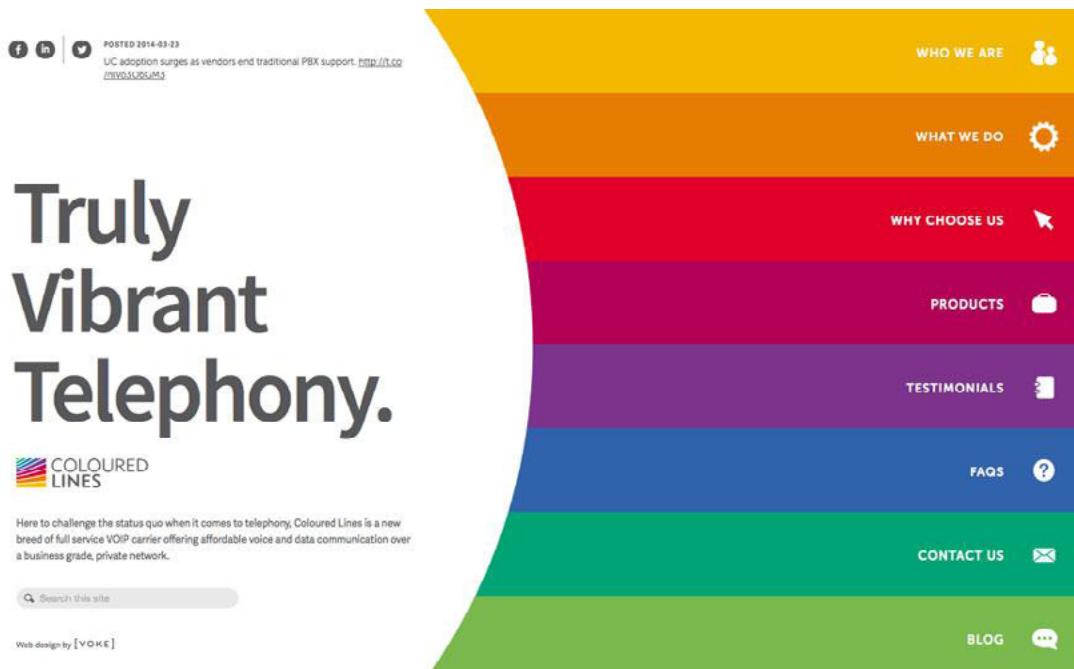


Photo credit: <http://colouredlines.com.au/>



Photo credit: Frame Collections

In [parallax-scrolling effects](#), too, colors play an important role in navigation. Because page/screen distinctions aren't so clear in long-scrolling single pages, colors are the easiest way to separate

sections. This creates more structure in a very open-ended format, which helps the story-telling aspects and allows for variations on different calls-to-action.

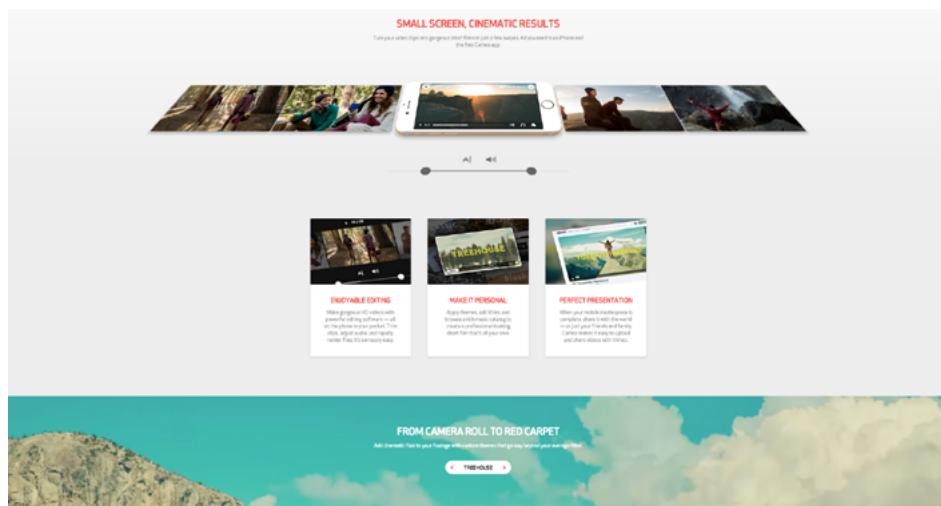


Photo credit: Vimeo

Thinking Beyond the Present

Color will always be married to web design practices, however the popularity of vibrant colors specifically will ebb and flow as trends change. As such techniques are cyclical, we'll likely see a return of some older techniques that have been reinvented. For example, perhaps gradients will make a comeback and breathe new life into the bright color trend.

With only bright blues, [Zample+me](#) uses a gradient effect on its background without falling into darker shades. This easy style fits comfortably with the minimalist layout of the site, and the flat design attributes of the interactive icons. On this site, we can see the trend evolving, not fading away.

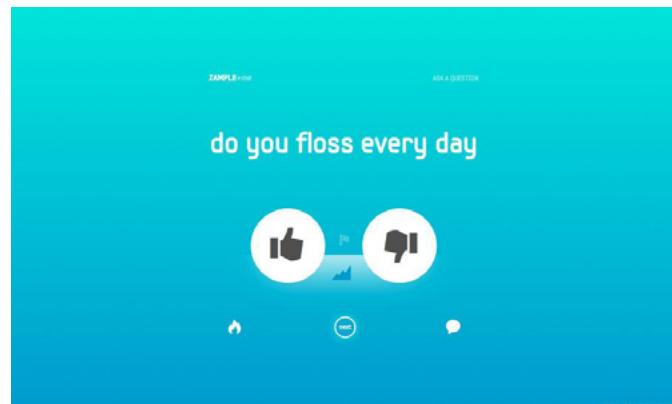


Photo credit: <http://zample.me/do-you-floss-every-day/>



Photo credit: <http://www.piccsy.com/everything-design/>

Bold color combines well with the dramatic typography we discussed in the last chapter. As you can see in the [Piccsy Playground](#) example above, the two intensify each other to send a powerful message, whatever that may be. This look is so intense, though, one must be careful not to detract from the single message with other competing elements.

Another trend we're starting to see more and more of is color overlays – filtering an image through a colored "lens." This allows you to inject any image with the emotional attributes of any color. For example, an otherwise sad photography can be made happy by using a yellow-tinted filter.

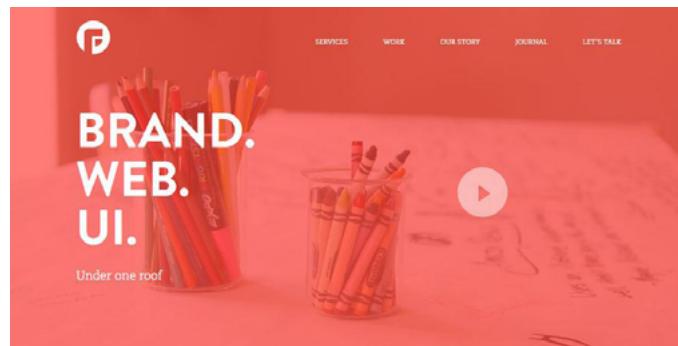


Photo credit: <http://focuslabllc.com/>

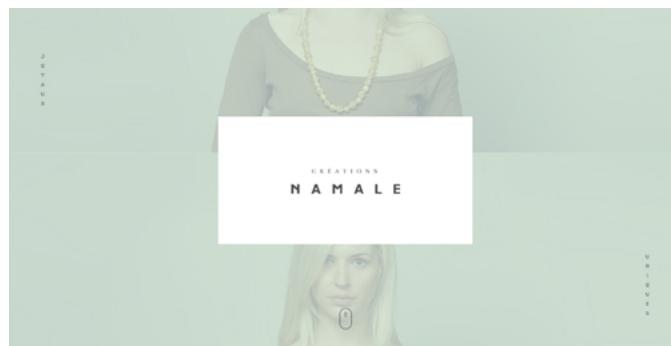


Photo credit: <http://creationsnamale.com/>

For a more thorough analysis of color theory in web design – including every color's emotional and psychological attributes, the most popular options for color schemes, and examples of color use from top companies – download our free *[Color Theory in Web UI Design](#)*.

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10 Free Resources and Tools

1. **[Color Wheel Primer](#)** – A primer designer for interior design that's a good gateway into color theory.

2. **ColourLovers** – A global community showcasing their own clever palettes and discussing color theory across all mediums.
3. **How to Use CSS Hover Effect in Color** – A tutorial for creating a hover state color change.
4. **Adobe Color CC** – A great tool for experimenting with different shades with different schemes. Simply modify one color, and the tool will show the other relevant colors or hues.
5. “**An Introduction to Color Theory for Web Designers**” – The Tuts+ guide to color theory, covering everything from the significance of hues to compatible colors.
6. **Tint UI** – A color picker for copying hexadecimal codes. Allows for browsing by platform (Material Design, iOS, etc.), brands (Twitter, Firefox, etc.), or current trends.
7. **Text on Background** – A simple but useful tool for previewing how certain colored text looks on certain colored backgrounds.
8. **Pantone Color of the Year** – The color authority for any industry suggest and analyzes their selection for best color every year.
9. **How to Add a Hue Filter in Photoshop** – Adobe’s own tutorial on creating a color overlay for images.
10. **Color Website Design Gallery from Awwwards** – The best Awwward-winning sites for their use of color.

Captivating Photography

As stunning photography continues as a timeless technique, especially as browsers improve rendering capabilities and HD monitors become more affordable. In this chapter, we'll take a look at web photography as a trend, the different options available, and which one will work best for you.

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SHOP NOW

Photo credit: Jawbone

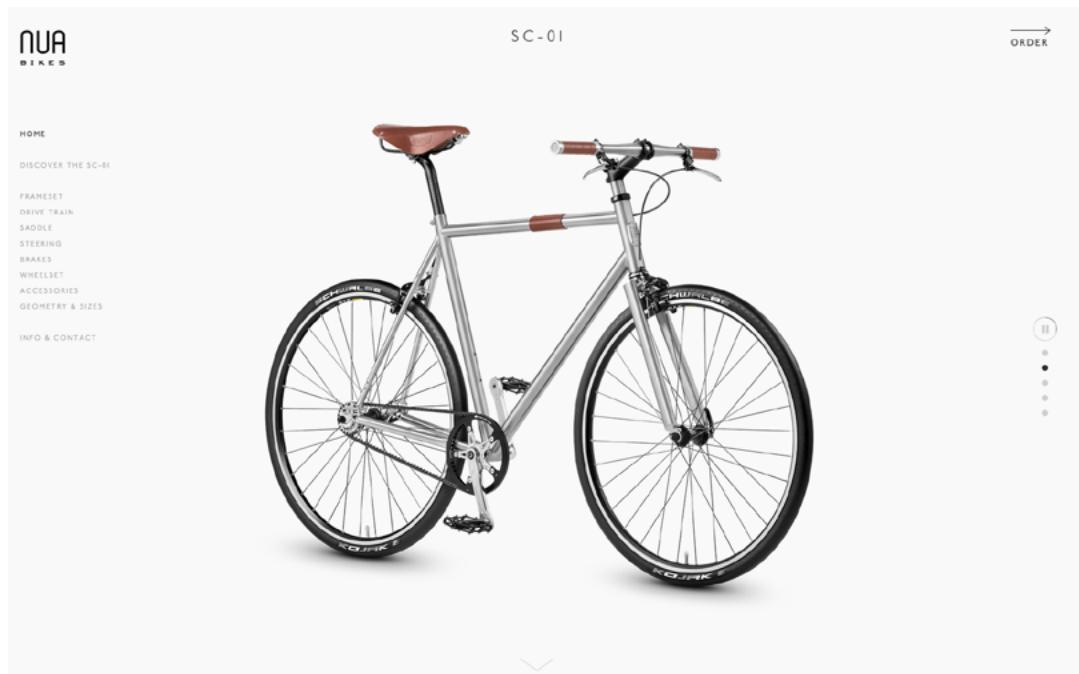


Photo credit: <http://nuabikes.com/#/home>

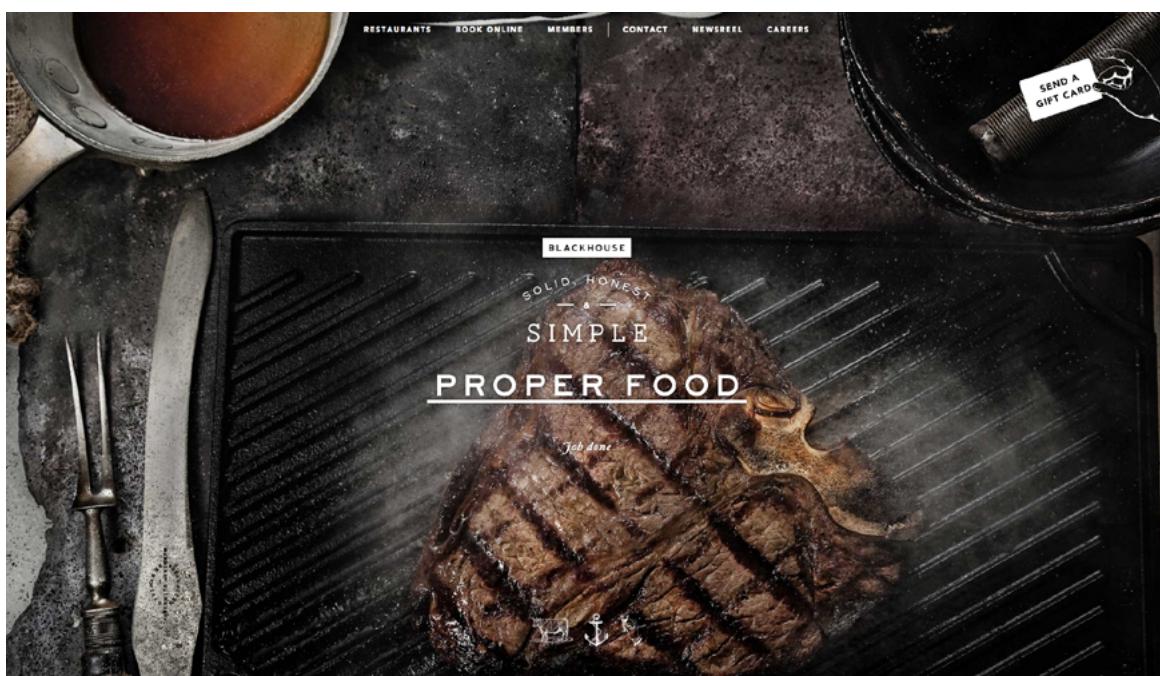


Photo credit: [Blackhouse](#)

Trends in Modern Web Photography

Not only does the art of photography itself go through trends every few years, how it's applied to web design also changes with tastes. For example, those stock images with smiling models looking directly at the camera were used frequently in the 1990s, but now they look cheesy and outdated.

Let's examine four trends in web photography with real staying power.

1. Hero Images

Full-screen images, usually with a [hero header](#), are a big trend, and they don't appear to be leaving anytime soon. Their value lies in creating an immersive experience right away, drawing the user in with a photo that claims all attention before leading their sightline to a hero header and/or call-to-action.

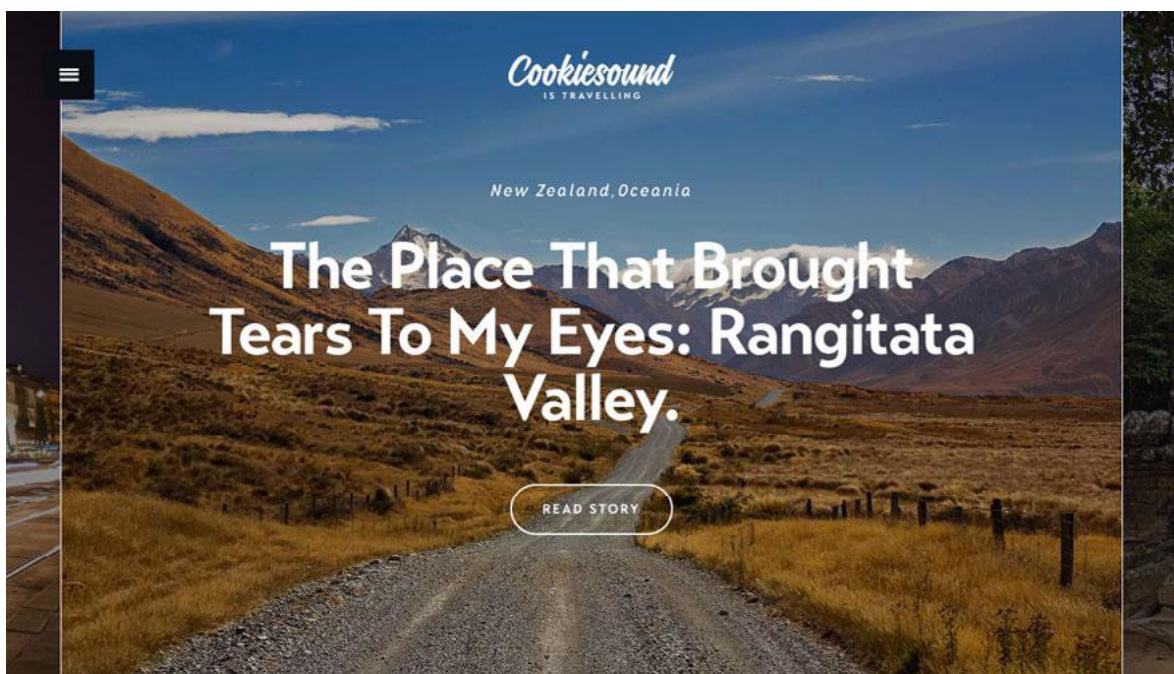


Photo credit: <http://www.cookiesound.com/>

Above, [Cookiesound](#), speaks volumes with a single photo. Rustic nature, no hustle-and-bustle, and of course the long open road: these are all images – and feelings – a travel blog would want to associate with itself. The size of the picture simply maximizes the effects, as anything small would weaken them.

2. Objects in a Natural Environment

Showing objects in context is not a bad sales strategy, considering that such photos have proven to [boost conversion rates](#). They've always been a popular strategy for ecommerce sites, but the ones who do it best give the image an artistic twist (like an extreme closeup or alternative angle – head on seems too contrived). As this is a popular trend, avoid the desk-and-computer photos, since they're overused at this point.

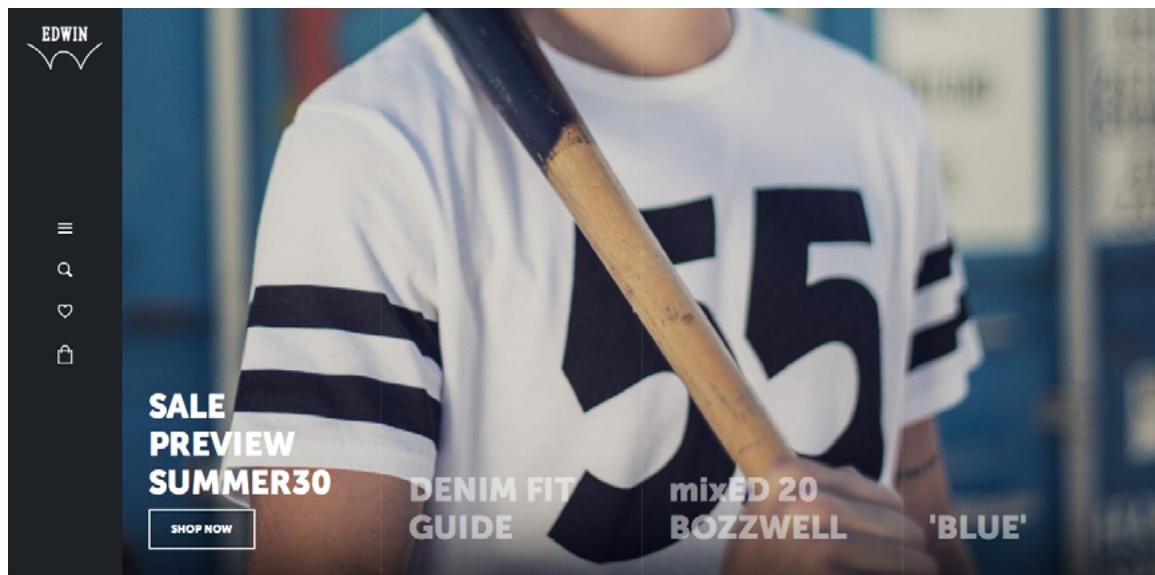


Photo credit: <https://edwin-europe.com/>

Clothing brand [Edwin](#) avoids the cliché of smiling children modeling close and goes for a more realistic and artistic photo to showcase their products in action. The hero background shows the shirt in

a situation it might be used – a children playing baseball. With the shirt large in the foreground and no head to distract from it, the product is displayed creatively and efficiently.

3. Black and White

Black-and-white photographs are the shortcut to professionalism and sophistication. If that's what your site is going for, there are few better options. To see what we mean, check out [designer Chris Spooner's gallery of 20 black-and-white sites](#).

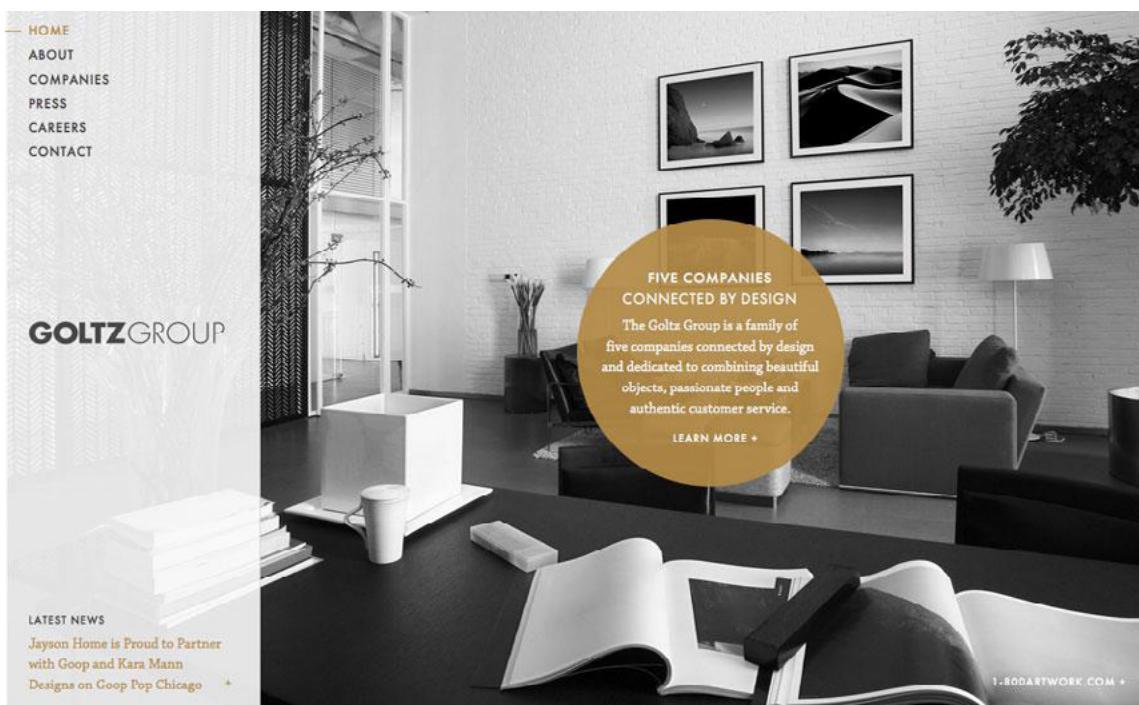


Photo credit: <http://goltzgroup.com/>

The site for [Goltz Group](#) combine the above two strategies with black and white to add an air of refinement. As you'll remember from the last chapter on color, a black-and-white photo background amplifies colorful accents, as you can see above.

4. Color Overlays

Color overlays can modify images to suit more specific goals such as brand identity (using the brand's characteristic color) or emotional response (for instance, a red overlay might give an otherwise calm photo a sense of urgency).

In a way similar to black-and-white backgrounds, color overlays can also intensify the power of colorful accents. However, this only works well if the colors are chosen correctly, i.e., the right contrasting pairs.

If you're interested, here are tutorials for creating them [in CSS](#) or [in Photoshop](#).

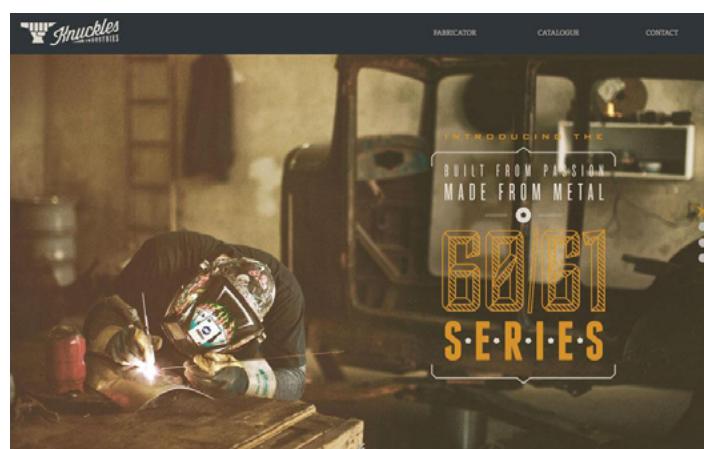


Photo credit: <http://www.knucklesindustries.com/>

The tinted background of the site for [Knuckles Industries](#) creates a unique visual hierarchy that highlights the heading text and top navigational menu, despite the attention-grabbing image.

On a more intangible level, the color overlay creates a raw yet refined feel appropriate for the metal fabrication shop. The vintage

treatment makes a lot of sense since it immerses the user in old-world craftsmanship and industrial muscle.

Web Photography Options

As far as where your web photography comes from, there are four main options:

- **Custom Photography** – Photography taken specifically for your site, whether by you, someone on your team, or someone you hire. These are tailored to fit your site, both thematically and content-wise.
- **Stock Photography** – These are existing photos that you pay to use. If you're skilled at selecting them, you can foster the idea that they were custom-made. Because anyone can buy them, be careful the same photos don't exist on too many other sites.
- **Royalty-Free Stock Photography** – A type of stock photography that is free-to-use. The selection is somewhat limited, and there are often restrictions on commercial use. You get what you pay for.
- **Semi-Custom Stock Photography** – One of the newer and up-and-coming options for web photography, these are photo kits similar to existing photos with customizable options. For example, a stock image of a desk where you can arrange the elements as you like.

Each option has its own advantages and disadvantages, and different situations may call for different strategies.

Custom Photography

We can boil the discussion down to custom or stock – and sometimes a mixture of the two. Here we'll explain the considerations behind each.

To oversimplify, custom photography is almost always better (and mandatory for physical products), however may not be viable with time or resource constraints. With custom photography, you have the most control over what your photos are expressing, and can be properly tuned to your brand and personality.

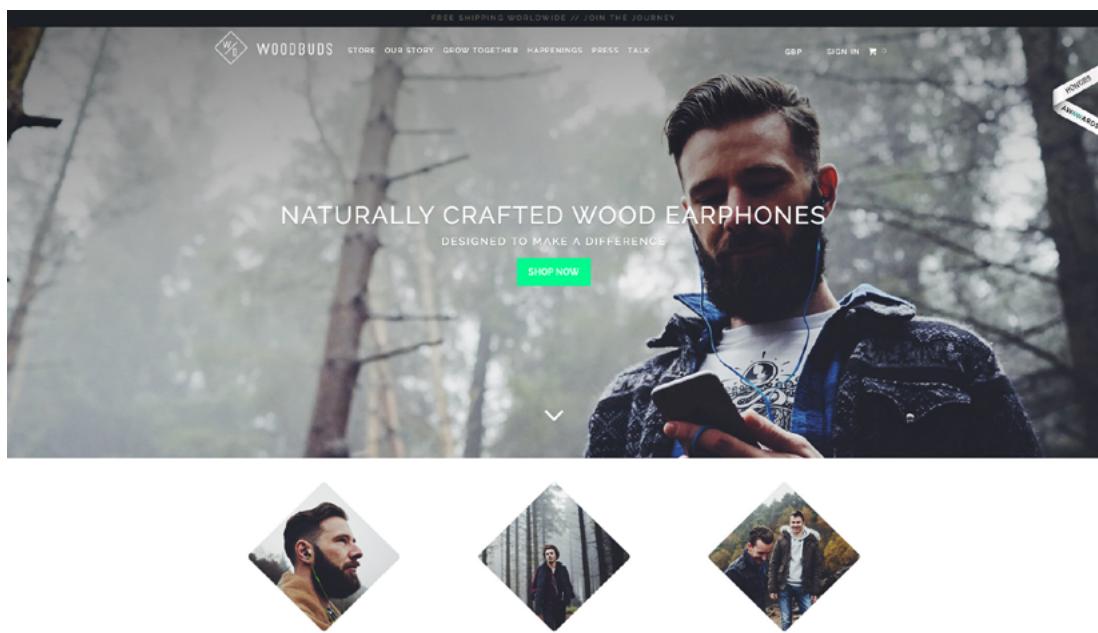


Photo credit: <http://woodbuds.com/>

The drawback is price and time. A general timeframe is about several weeks for going from proposal to finished product – longer if you're hiring a new photographer. Professional photographers are always preferred, but doing it yourself or having someone else on the team do it can save some hassle if the skill level is adequate. Either way,

the designer and the photographer must be clear on the art direction and overall goals before starting.

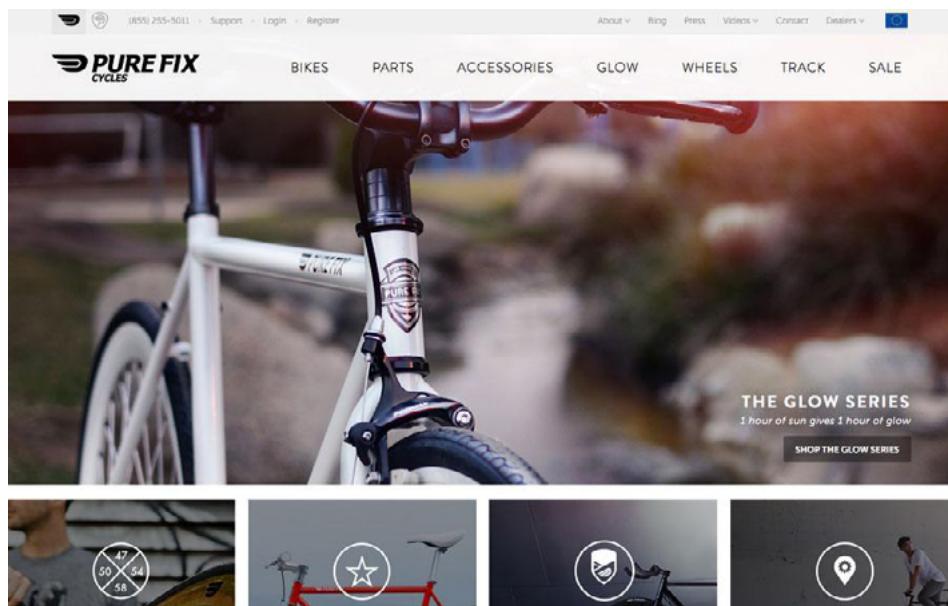


Photo credit: <https://www.purefixcycles.com/>

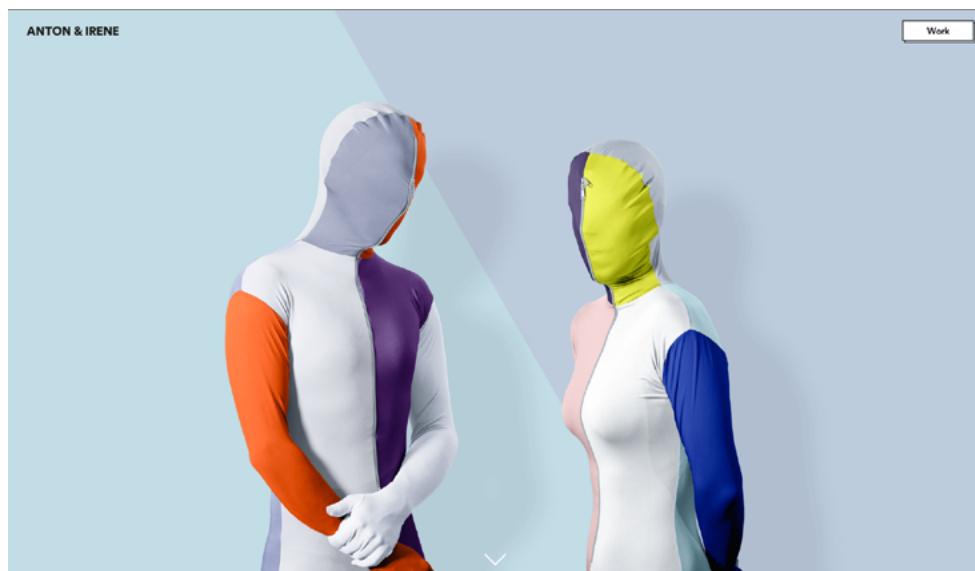


Photo credit: <http://antonandirene.com/>

Pros:

- control over content and project
- tailored to your needs
- images are owned by company

- a long-term brand investment because the pictures can be used over and over

Cons:

- expensive (photographer, equipment, setting up shoots, etc.)
- setting up shoots can troublesome
- results may not match expectations
- outside photographers might be difficult to work with

Stock Photography

Stock photography may have a bad reputation (probably because of [pictures like these](#)), but in recent years it's matured into an increasingly viable and useful industry. Today's stock images cover a wider range, and the good ones leave behind that generic cheesiness that they're typically known for. Take a look at the [Nu School's list of their 50 favorite stock photography sites](#), organized by quality, to see the diversity.

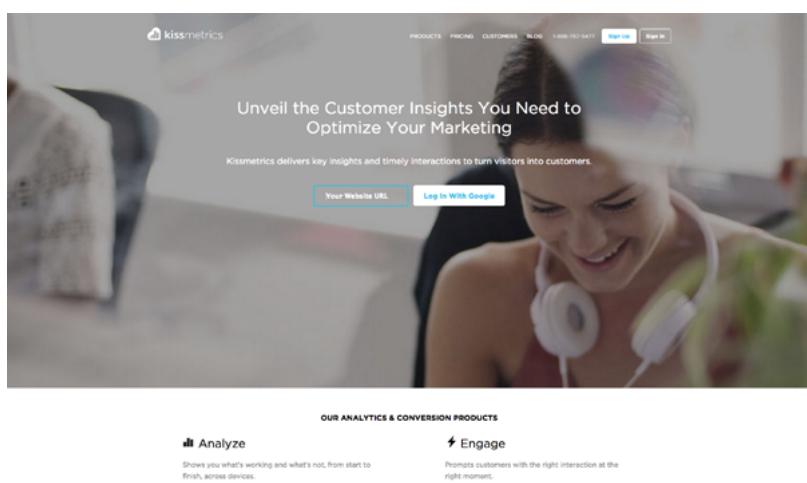


Photo credit: <https://www.kissmetrics.com/>

While stock photography is cheaper and less involved than custom photography, it still requires some effort – namely in searching for the right picture. If you dedicate your time and skill towards digging through hundreds of images, you may find one that's just as effective as a custom photograph.

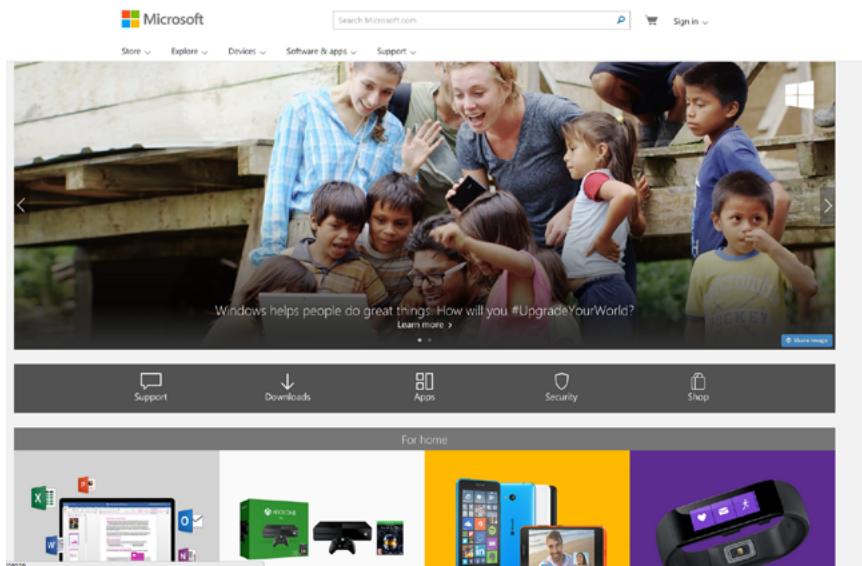


Photo credit: <http://microsoft.com>

Pros:

- inexpensive (or even free)
- fast turnaround (images are ready after downloading)
- sometimes the search inspires new ideas

Cons:

- available to anyone, and may find duplicates elsewhere online
- finding quality images is difficult
- consistency difficult if using more than one

There are ways to mitigate the risks of stock photography. For starters, you'll want to check that the license is what you need. Some royal-

ty-free photos don't allow modifications and reposting images from a Google search is usually illegal for commercial sites. Definitely read and know the [differences in photo licenses](#).

Editing effects like cropping, rotating, or color overlays can effectively add enough personalization to remove the "generic" feel. Recomposing the shot with a cropping tool can make different elements stand out, not to mention differentiate it from the same image used elsewhere.

Combining Custom and Stock

You can find the best of both worlds in combining the two. The main appeal is that, if you manage to set the right pattern, stock photos seem custom. Users won't put too much thought into where photos came from, so if you can suggest all are custom early on, any stock photos won't seem like stock.

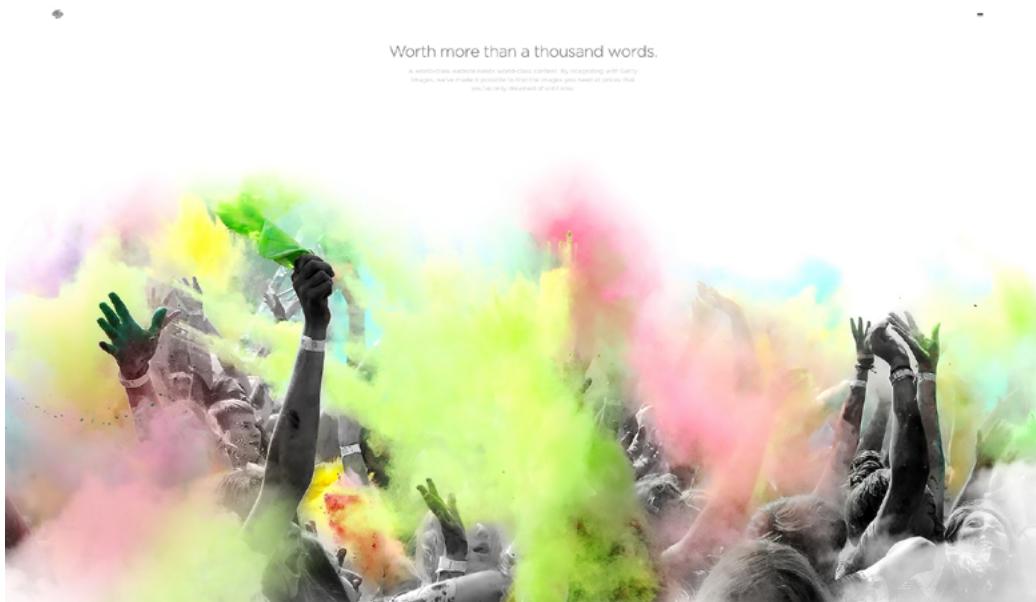


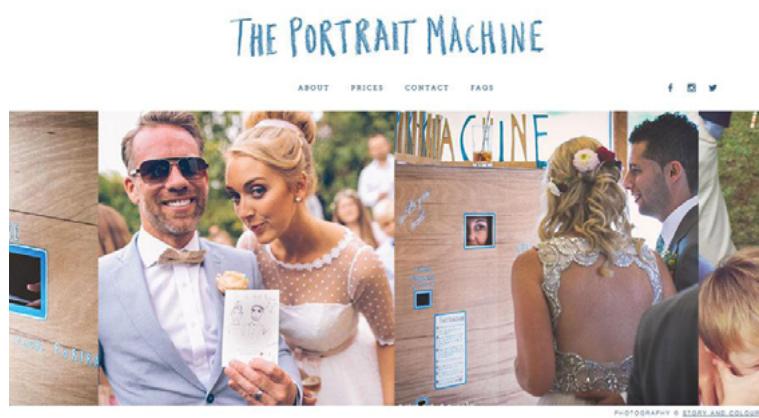
Photo credit: [Squarespace](#)

The trick is to intersperse stock photos with images that are obviously custom – for example, featuring the product or logo. When choosing stock photos, try not to be generic: select content based on a theme or that distinguishes itself on its own. You can even thread together some dissimilar stock photos with a few custom ones that establish a pattern.

Thinking Beyond the PresentPhotos will remain a cornerstone of web design until technology advances to allow video to replace it – and even then photos might still persist for their retro look. In the near future, the trends we discussed above will shift in favor of the following new techniques:

1. Smaller Custom Images

Perhaps as an alternative to the hero image trend, or perhaps to coincide with the popularity of cards, smaller photos are gaining steam as a web trend in the near future. To state the obvious, smaller images allow sites to showcase more content on the screen.



THE PORTRAIT MACHINE IS A TRAVELLING ARTIST THAT
DRAWS AND VENDS PORTRAITS OF YOUR GUESTS. AVAILABLE
FOR WEDDINGS, FESTIVALS OR CORPORATE EVENTS.

Photo credit: <http://theportraitmachine.co.uk/>

The Portrait Machine – an event portrait artist for-hire – uses a slider of smaller images to illustrate what she brings to an event by showing context (as we explained above). Because her style is a bit experimental, the more images help flesh out why people should hire her.

2. Photo Manipulation

The availability of better photo-editing equipments naturally means better photo manipulation. While techniques like color overlays are still pretty basic, more complex trends will grow more popular as more people figure out to use these programs. This can also do wonders in personalizing stock photos, even to the point of adding a logo.

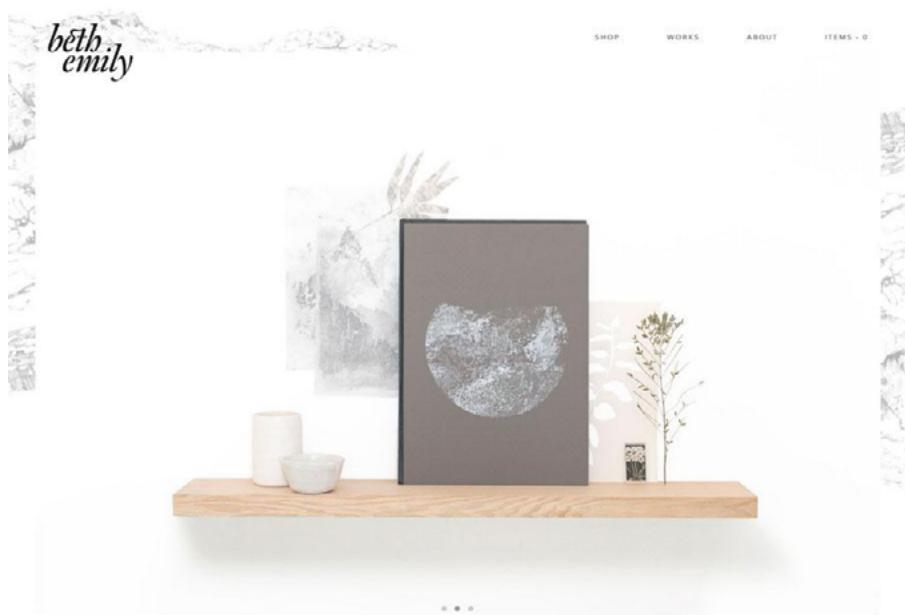


Photo credit: <https://beth-emily.com/>

Beth-Emily doesn't let minimalism stop her creative photo manipulation. Some of the graphics behind the shelf have been fabricated to add a little something extra to the image.

3. Paired with Custom Typography

If you'll remember from Chapter 6, custom typography, like custom photography, can enhance or even single-handedly create your brand's personality. When combined, the effects are quite powerful.

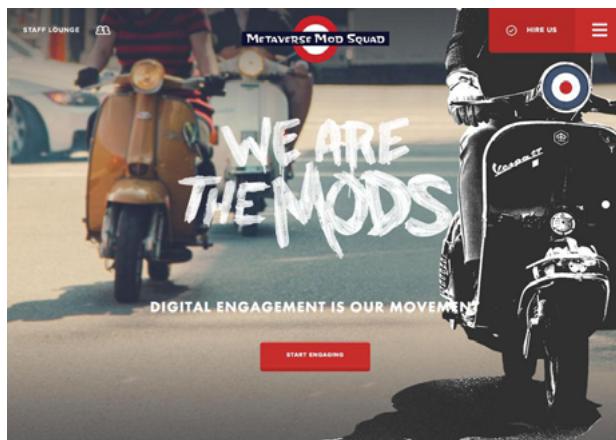


Photo credit: <http://metaverse modsquad.com/>

Just look at [Metaverse Mod Squad](#) – the immediate image communicates so much about the brands personality. The faux-sloppy painted font draws out the rebellious aspects of the photo of the scooter gang, and vice-versa. Combining a custom font with a custom photo helps determine how the user interprets each.

Build High Fidelity prototypes in UXPin

10 Free Resources and Tools

1. [“10 Pitfalls to Avoid When Using Stock Photography”](#) – An article from Design Shack warning against ten common mistakes

with stock photography.

2. **TinEye Reverse Image Search** – A great tool for stock photography that reveals all of a photo's locations on the Internet.
3. **"The Ultimate Guide to Beautiful DIY Photography** – A beginner's guide to taking your own web photography.
4. **StockPhotoRights.com FAQ** – All the common areas of confusion around stock photography cleared up.
5. **"16 Places to Find the Best Free Stock Photos"** – Designmodo's list of small but free websites that offer stock photography.
6. **Time and costs for professional photographers** – A professional photographer breaks down the pricing by time you can expect to pay when hiring a freelancer.
7. **"Should You Use Stock or Free Images for Blog Posts?"** – A post by CoSchedule Blog debating the pros and cons of stock photography, and which option is best for your particular situation.
8. **Creative Commons** – A library of open source photography (as well as music and videos), with some licenses allowing for modification.
9. **"Top 10 Reasons to Hire a Professional Photographer"** – Rob Korb Photography lists some compelling reasons to hire an expert instead of doing it yourself.
10. **Things to Ask When Hiring a Photographer** – A beginner's guide to finding the right photography, written by the Professional Photographers of America.

Long Scrolls

Prompted by [the domination of mobile](#) and supported by the trend of card UIs, the long-scrolling site is quickly gaining popularity.

To explain the popularity of the long scroll in a nutshell, we can look to the increased usage of mobile screens. Simply put, the smaller the screen, the longer the scroll. This interaction design guideline revitalized long and infinite-scrolling sites, challenging designers to get more creative in their storytelling techniques.



Photo credit: [Jack Daniels](#)

But mobile screens alone can't explain the newfound success of the long scroll, only the foundation behind it. The long-scrolling technique encompasses more than a few different design elements, and in this chapter we'll discuss how they all weigh in.

A Short History of Long Scrolling

Long-scrolling sites tend to have one lengthy home page that links to other, smaller pages, or the [entire site can just exist on a single long page](#).

Designers focus on storytelling with clever tactics like parallax scrolling or Ajax jQuery methods to allow for more dynamic animations and interactions.

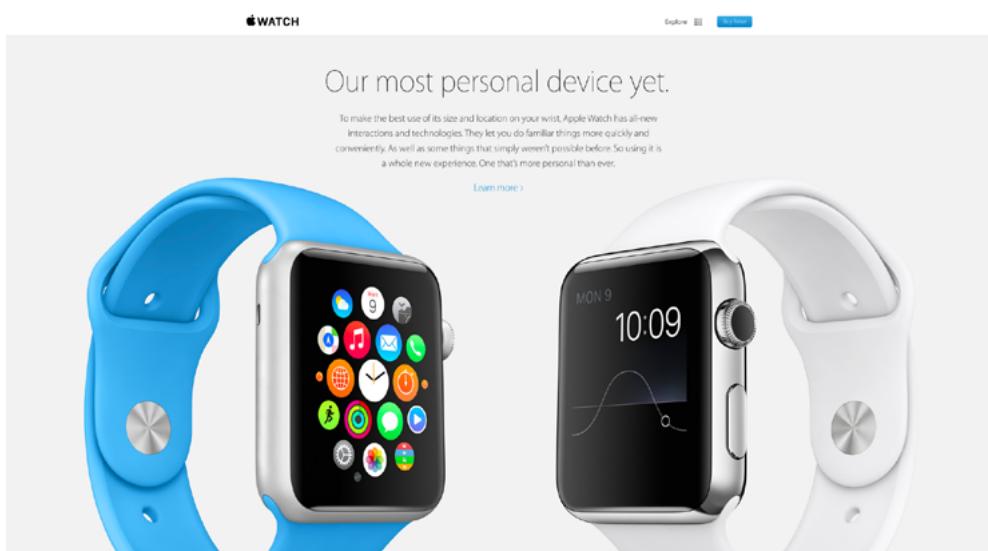


Photo credit: [Apple](#)

In the infancy of the Internet, scrolling was considered taboo. The [myth that users didn't like scrolling](#) was perhaps a vestigial relic

from the print industry's "above the fold" mandate: newspapers needed to get their reader's attention from only the top area above the front page's halfway fold. This made enough sense for websites, too – whatever's on the first screen will be what influences the user's first impression.

Moreover, old websites, like print, were mostly text, which cannot sustain an interesting long scrolling site. However, when advances in Javascript/CSS/HTML5 opened up more options and sites like Facebook and Twitter broke the ice, designers found that users actually do scroll. In fact, [studies have been conducted to back this up](#): they found 66% of user's attention on a normal media page was spent "below the fold."

Now, with high speed Internet available in more places than ever before and social media sites setting the bar (scrolling is the best way to display their expansive user-generated content), scrolling just seems right. Considering all the dynamic landscape of web design today, long scrolling can act as the centerpiece that ties everything together.

Impact of Screen Size

Screen size limits the amount of information that can fit “above the fold,” making designers choose between scrolling or shrinking everything to fit. Luckily, the gesture controls of mobile devices make scrolling intuitive and fun.

The popularity of long-scrolling is even paying back the mobile industry by enabling yet smaller screens than before.



Photo credit: Shinya Suzuki. Creative Commons.

The ambitious Apple Watch relies on scrolling, as seen by the built-in crown for that purpose. The [Apple Watch Developer Library guidelines](#) themselves state: “Keep the total number of pages as small as possible to simplify navigation.”

Even on non-mobile devices, screens are shrinking – just look at new MacBook’s [12-inch Retina display](#). The trend for laptops is leading towards smaller and lighter, so when you consider they are now incorporating gesture controls, you see how long-scrolling benefits most users in general.

Storytelling

Long scrolling offers unique opportunities for storytelling that page-by-page navigation just can't match. That's why [Hoa Loranger of the Nielsen Norman Group](#) claims the tactic suits open-ended sites geared towards discoverability, rather than goal-driven sites like ecommerce.



Photo credit: Frame Collections

Long-scrolling sites, such as Frame Collections "[One to See, One to Kill](#)" above, creates a linear structure that allows for rich stories to unfold naturally. Different layouts and animation patterns builds a rhythm that gets the user wondering "what will happen next." When done right, this can be an immersive experience that the user won't want to leave.

1. Advantages and Disadvantages

Long scrolling isn't a flawless technique, though, even with the limitations of mobile devices. Let's take a look at its advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages

- Allows creative storytelling and visuals
- Aids simple navigation
- Promotes interaction
- [Infinite scrolling](#) entices users to stay longer
- Works well with touch controls
- Opens the door for more app or game-like experiences

Disadvantages

- There will always be people who simply refuse to scroll
- Negative effect on SEO (to learn how to combat this drawback, read this [Moz piece](#) and this [Quicksprout piece](#).)
- Can be confusing and disorienting to people who prefer traditional navigation
- Difficulty in returning to previous “page” (a persistent top navigation bar circumvents this)
- May slow site speed, especially with video content or parallax effects ([this tutorial](#) explains how to use parallax scrolling without slowing down the site)

In general, the combination of long scrolling’s advantages and disadvantages make the style most suited for sites that:

- Anticipate a lot of mobile users
- Frequently update content
- Carry a heavy amount of inalienable content
- Do *not* have heavy media like videos that will slow the site down

[This article](#) from Smashing Magazine further explores the pros and cons of long scrolling.

Scrolling Options

Here we'll elaborate on the new opportunities long scrolling allows for designers. Below are three methods that even alone can be worth implementing scrolling.

1. Parallax

Known to the video game industry for decades, parallax refers to the background and the foreground (or differing layers of the background) moving at different speeds. This technique creates a three-dimensional effect to enhance otherwise stagnant two-dimensional graphics.

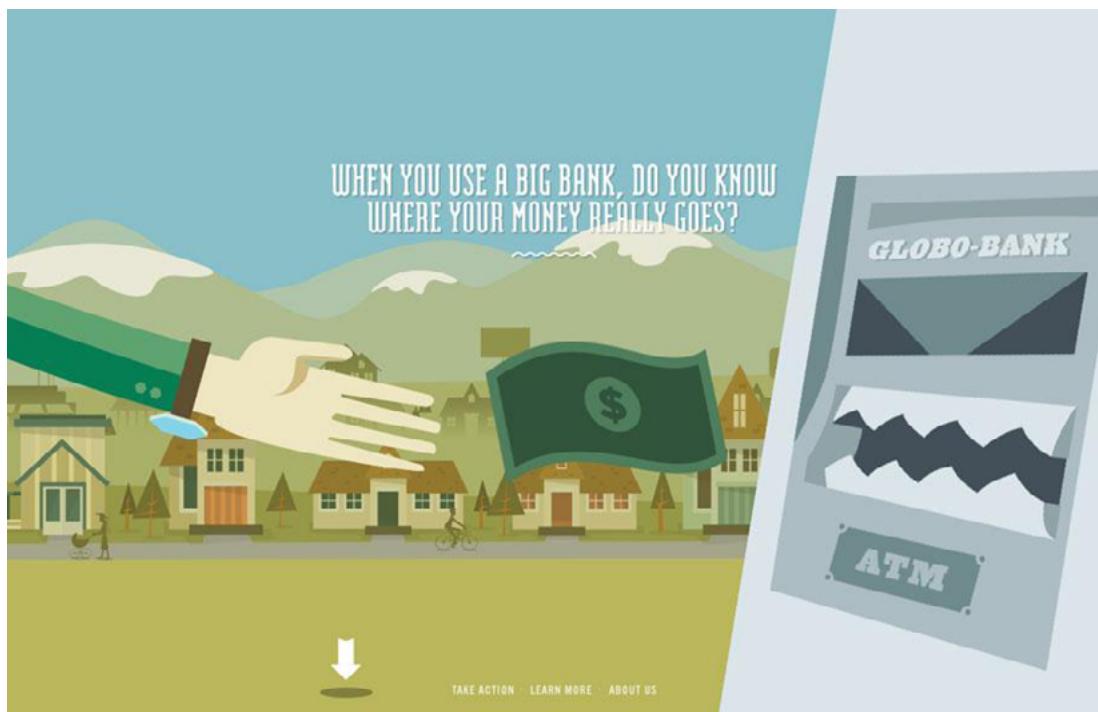


Photo credit: <http://makeyourmoneymatter.org/>

Parallax scrolling lets [Make Your Money Matter](#) (above) illustrate some basic economics without boring people in a way that's fun, interactive, visually stimulating, and beneficial to the company.

2. Screens as Pages

To alleviate some of the disorienting drawbacks to scrolling, it helps to think of screens as pages. Each new screen can be sectioned off with a different background, style, typography, etc., to properly divide one page into several.



Photo credit: [Jumo](#)

Jumo is a great example of tastefully balancing parallax scroll with the “screens as pages” long-scrolling technique. At the top of the page, notice how the lamp comes to life as you first scroll downwards, but then the site smoothly transitions to a more standard layout. The clever interaction technique shows off how the device works in real life and adds a bit of delight to draw in the user. By applying parallax effects and card layouts in different parts of the scroll, the site creates a lively experience that doesn’t overload the senses.

3. Animations

User-triggered interactivity makes the animations feel more connected, while the animations breathe life and fun into the scroll, enticing and rewarding the users.

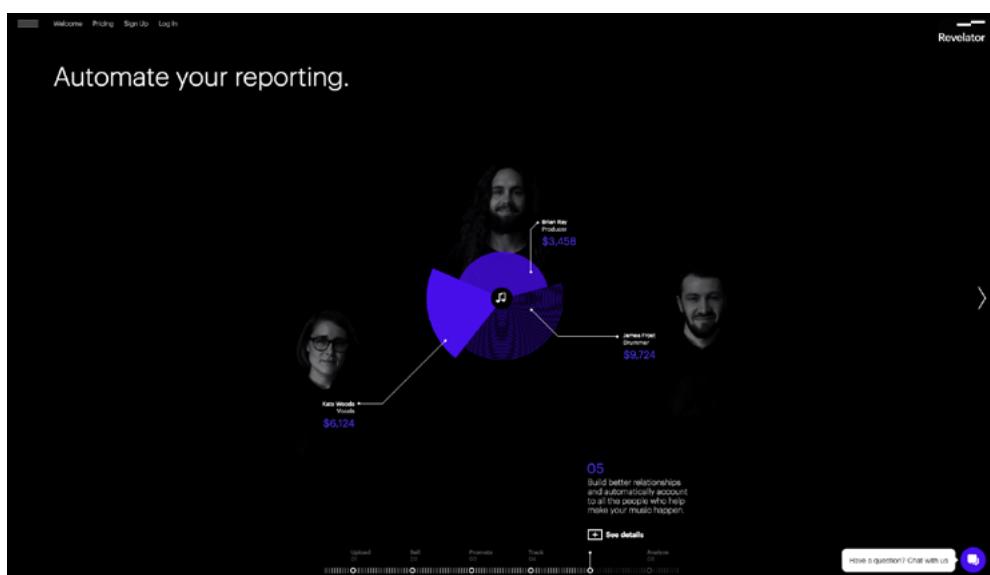


Photo credit: <http://revelator.com/tour/sell>

Revelator (a music promotion platform) walks the user through each of its 5 steps in a left-to-right narrative triggered by scrolling. As you scroll, animations transition you to the next screen while creating a path of content for you to follow. It's a useful way to tell users "Here's the flow of content" while keeping them interested in what's next. Of course, users can also click ahead if they don't want to scroll through the content.

Revelator's clever navigation pattern and meaningful interactive design turns a standard Features page into a rich story that guides users through uploading, promoting, and analyzing music sales.

Best Practices

If you've decided that long scrolling can help your site, keep the following best practices in mind during the designing:

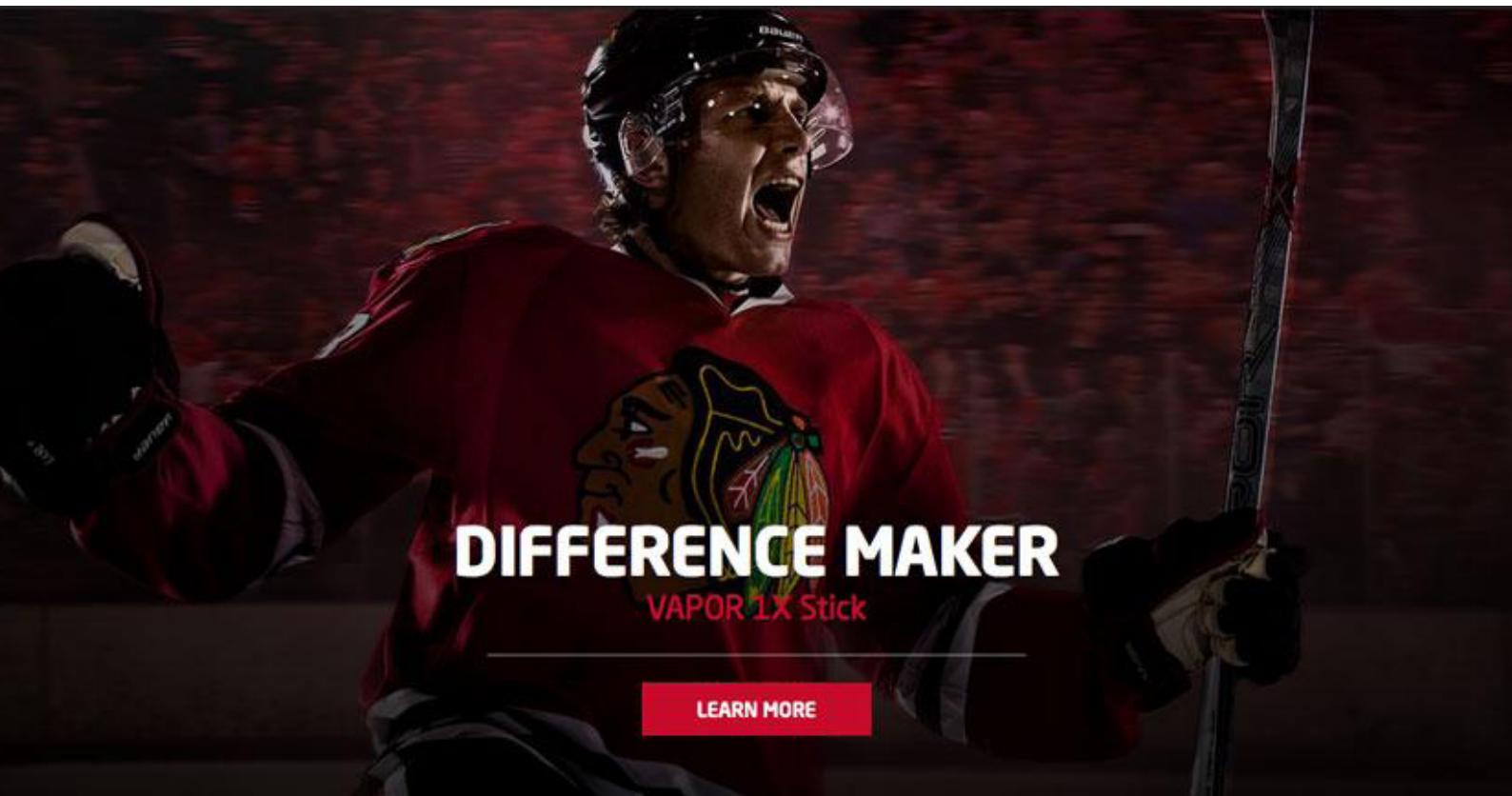


Photo credit: <http://bauer.com/>

- Differentiate the scrolling navigation controls from other calls-to-actions and links
- If you're not designing a single-page site, the home or landing page should be in a long-scrolling format, with splinter pages in a shorter format
- Sticky navigation – where navigation controls and menus are stagnant while the content moves – helps with a lot of the orientation issues from long scrolling (see [Grovemade](#) below)



FEATURED

*Photo credit: Grovemade*

- Include visual cues to orient users in the scroll “like a “Scroll down” note at the top of the page, and a dotted path to show their position in the scroll.

*Photo credit: Jumo*

- Conduct usability testing and behavior analysis (like in Google Analytics) to see how your design is actually working
- Don’t overdo it with too many screens. Even infinite-scrolling pages shouldn’t go on infinitely.

Thinking Beyond the Present

As long as small screens stay in fashion (and they will for the foreseeable future), then long scrolling will continue to evolve and expand in what it can offer.

The most likely trend of the future is that the more advanced effects will become translated to mobile devices. While parallax is mainly a desktop effect now, in the future it will surely become more mobile-friendly. Using Ajax and other auto-loading strategies will clear the path for these advances in mobile.



Photo credit: The Boat

Digital Telepathy is calling pageless design the [future of the web](#), and we're inclined to agree. Rethinking what a site should be, designers are starting to realize that a page-by-page structure is not really necessary.

Similarly, today interaction design is starting to finally get the credit it deserves. As IxD is granted more power, so too will long-scrolling

styles. These allow for better user interactions and offer better rewards, and this style is primed to become the next interaction design staple.

As it grows in popularity, long scrolling will also incorporate other trends. While not typically associated with minimalism, giving a minimalist site a scrolling navigation could increase the amount of user interaction – minimalism’s natural weakness.

Long scrolling sites are incredibly adaptable, allowing modifications to include a wide range of attributes – even video, like the [Beaterate Band](#) site below.

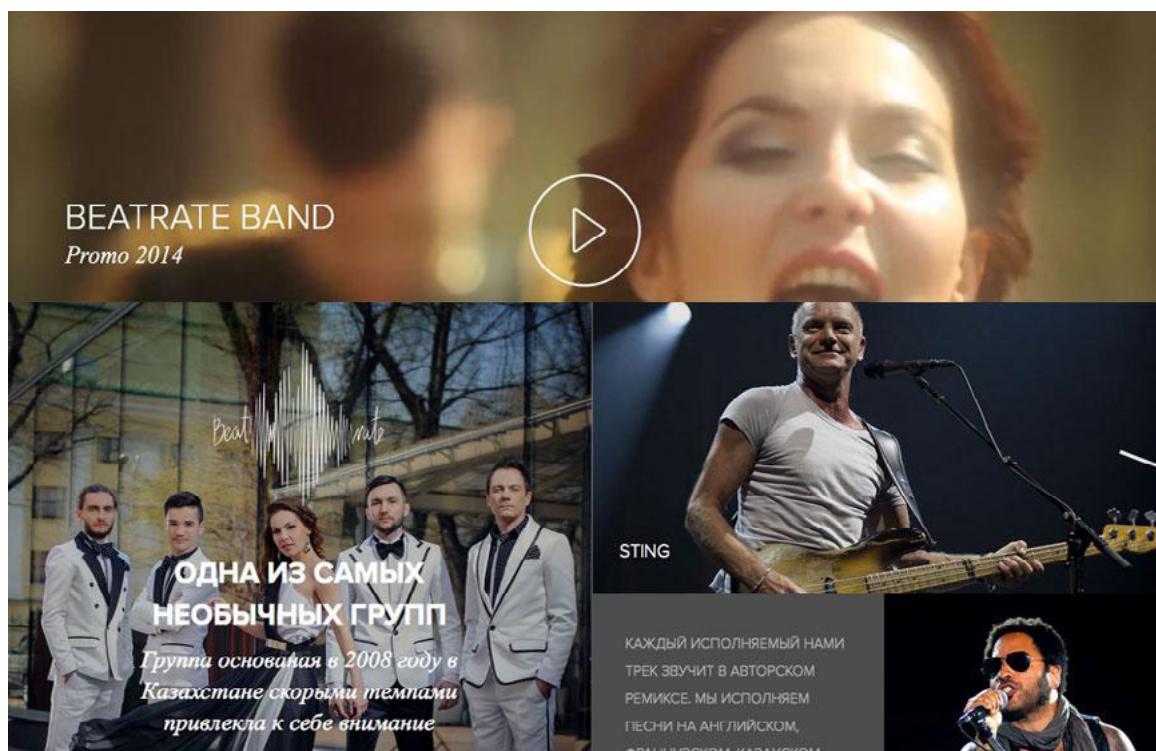


Photo credit: <http://www.beatrate.org/>

People visit sites for content first, with everything else secondary. Because long scrolling provides a linear platform for narrative design, it will continue to be reinvented over and over to fulfill new needs.

Consider everything we said in this chapter before taking the plunge into long scrolling. Review the necessary criteria and make sure your site meets it. Otherwise, adopting long scrolling for the sake of trendiness may actually [do more harm than good](#).

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10 Free Resources and Tools

1. [Ajax jQuery Learning Center](#) – A guide to using Ajax techniques on various apps.
2. “[Build a Parallax Scrolling Website: 10 Pro Tips](#)” – Josh Chan of Chormatix gives Creative Bloq his ten best tips for parallax scrolling.
3. [Parallax.js](#) – A tool for testing how your pages render to different screen orientations.
4. “[How to Create an SEO Friendly Infinite Scrolling Page](#)” – One of the biggest disadvantages to scrolling sites is SEO, so Quick-sprout explains how to sidestep the problem.
5. [Adobe Muse CC Scroll Effects](#) – An Adobe software release with tools for various scrolling effects.
6. [One Page Love](#) – A gallery of the best single-page websites, up-

dated regularly.

7. [“Apple Resurrects the Scroll Wheel”](#) – A TechCrunch article analyzing how the Apple Watch will breath new life into scrolling websites.
8. [How to Create a Parallax Website](#) – A two-part tutorial that teaches the fundamentals, including coding, for parallax design.
9. [Scrolling Controls for HTML5 Video](#) – Ollie Rogers offers a great bit of code and interaction on CodePen.
10. [How to Create a Horizontally Scrolling Site](#) – A tutorial from CSS Tricks on how to orient your scroll side-to-side.

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HD Backgrounds

High definition displays are steadily becoming the norm rather than the exception. As HD displays grow more affordable, so too do HD backgrounds grow in popularity. Videos, photos, or animations and graphics – each have their own strengths and weaknesses, but the one thing they all share is the crisper, more engaging visuals.

The screenshot shows a website for 'WONDERFULLY Wild'. The header includes a logo with a house and tree, weather information (cloudy, 11°C), and navigation links for ABOUT & GALLERY, 2015 PRICES, ACTIVITIES, NEWS, FAQS, and CONTACT, along with social media icons for Facebook, Google+, and Twitter. The main image is a scenic view of rolling green hills under a blue sky. A dark overlay box contains the text 'NATURE RIGHT ON YOUR DOORSTEP'. Below the image is a wooden fence decorated with white, intricate floral and leaf patterns. At the bottom, there are four colored boxes labeled 'CASTAN LODGE' (brown), 'ONNEN LODGE' (teal), 'JACMOR LODGE' (pink), and 'DERW LODGE' (yellow). To the right of these boxes is a 'BOOKINGS' button.

Photo credit: <http://www.wonderfullywild.co.uk/>

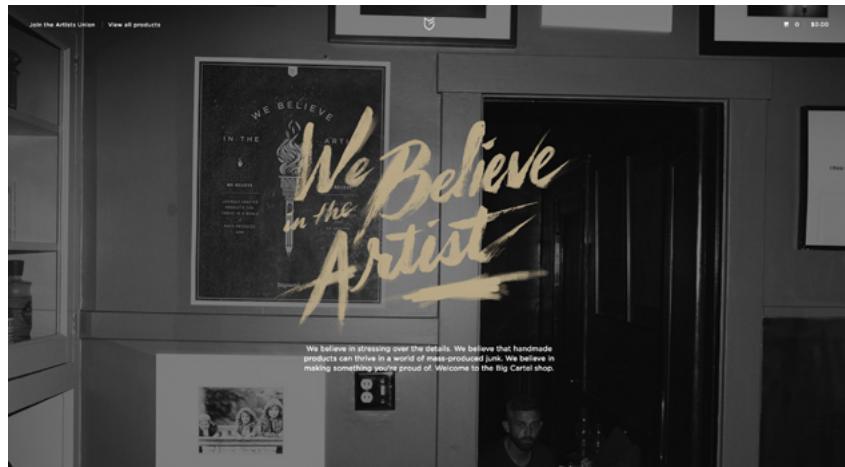


Photo credit: [Big Cartel](#)

This chapter will explore the types and best practices for HD backgrounds, including tips for getting around the common problems. But first, we'll start with a little background...

Some Background on HD Backgrounds

When we talk about HD, we refer a device that contains more than twice as many pixels as one with standard definition. Resolution is measured in how many pixels exist within an inch of screen – this unit is interchangeably referred to as dots per inch (DPI) or pixels per inch (PPI). To put things in perspective, a typical standard definition screen boasts a 72 ppi, while high definition screens are anything more than 200 ppi. ([The current highest definition PC is the iMac 27" at 217 PPI.](#))

The rise of HD displays impacts more than just the popularity of HD backgrounds, but the way we think about design altogether, specifically between uploading images in [raster or vector formats](#).

Before, raster formats like .jpg, .gif, and .png were preferred as a way to compress images and hasten loading times. These simply translated the image to the screen pixel-for-pixel. But with HD displays, these images appear blurry, with the same amount of image pixels displayed on twice as many screen pixels.

The shift is leaning towards scalable vector formats (SVG), which allows the same image to appear at its best on different screen resolutions. By using connected points and lines instead of pixel-for-pixel, vector formats allow the image to accommodate various resolutions without changing the file.

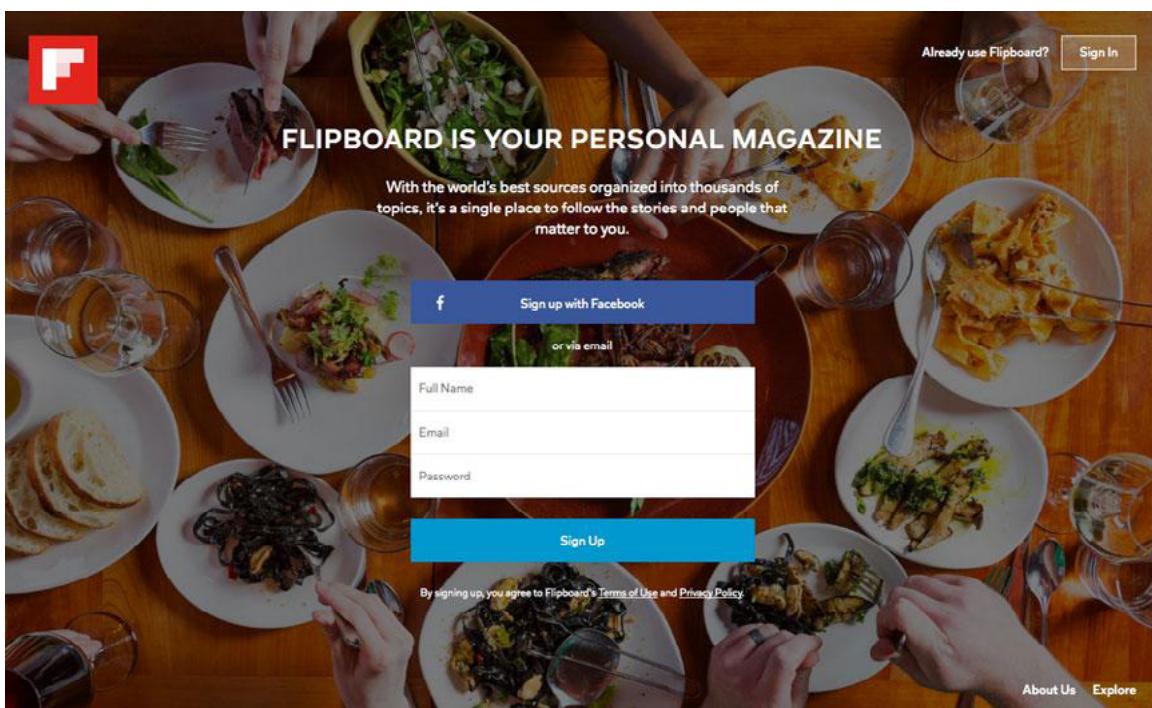


Photo credit: <https://flipboard.com/>

HD web design requires rethinking and using vector formats, which is a newer concept when it comes to the internet. (Coincidentally, print designers have been doing it for ages.) That's where the Scalable Vector Format, or SVG, comes in. As with other vector graphic formats,

SVG graphics use connected points and lines, rather than pixels, to create images that can be scaled to any size without a loss of quality.

But that doesn't make vectors a cure-all solution. Photographs, for example, are limited only to the resolution they were taken in, so vectors won't change how they're rendered on larger or smaller screens. For that reason, we recommend the following guidelines:

- Use vector for original graphics
- Use raster for photographs and graphics whose pixels can't be changed

With this in mind, use the highest resolution possible when selecting or taking photographs for your site.

3 Trends in HD Backgrounds

With the prevalence of HD displays, three trends with HD backgrounds have become popular: images, videos, and animation. We'll discuss each below, including best practices.

1. HD Images

Usually given a full-screen or hero placement, HD images better emphasize texture, colors, and of course the color. This does wonders for that split-second, all-important [first impression](#).



Photo credit: Bose

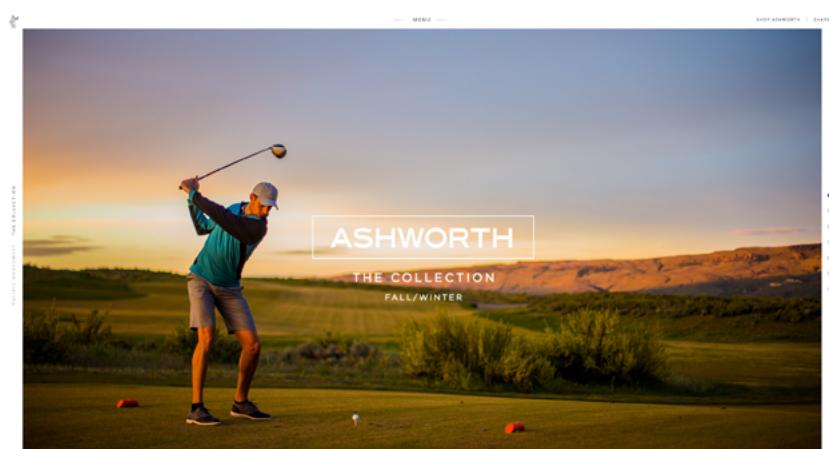


Photo credit: Ashworth

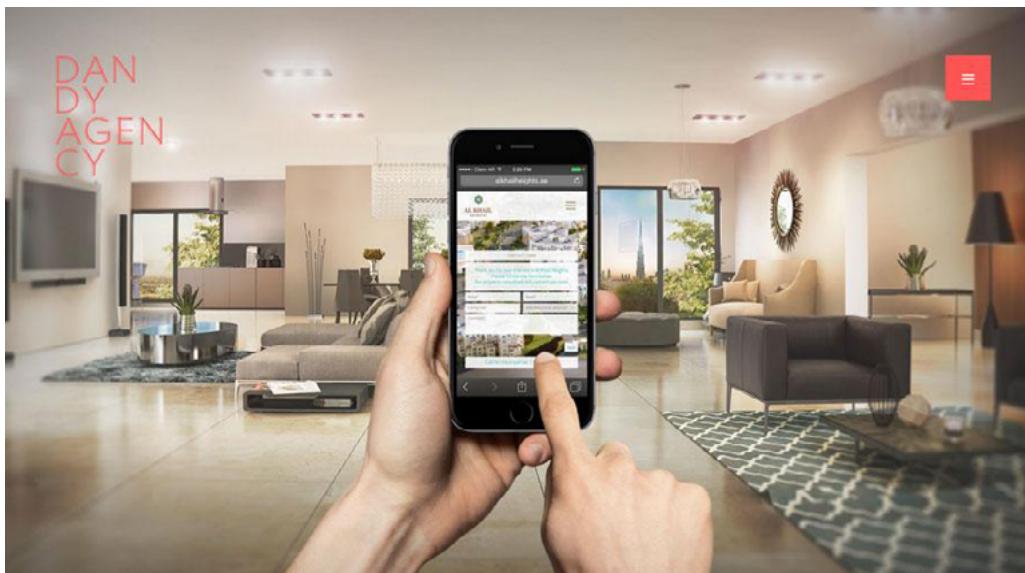


Photo credit: <http://www.wearedandy.com/>

If you know just the image to best represent your brand as the first thing your user sees, here are five suggestions to implementing it:

- **Don't compete** – The HD background will naturally attract a lot of attention, so other elements will only distract the user and complicate the visual hierarchy. Try pairing this background with a minimalist interface.
- **Sliders or collages** – Multiple images obviously give you more options in what you can show, so sliders or collages are acceptable strategies if you have more than one image.
- **Image effects** – Blurs, color overlays, integrating graphics and photography – some effects can achieve more goals in ways the image alone cannot.
- **Consider screen size differences** – Where your elements fall on the background image can change on different device screen sizes, so keep all variations in mind.

- **Cropping** – Photo backgrounds rarely conform to the 1 to 1.5 aspect ratio of cameras, so use cropping to your advantage to get the best possible end result.

2. HD Videos

Despite the potentially heavy loading times, HD video backgrounds can take still images a step further with their ability to create emotional connections. Classic cinematic techniques can be applied to web design for moving images that captivate the user.

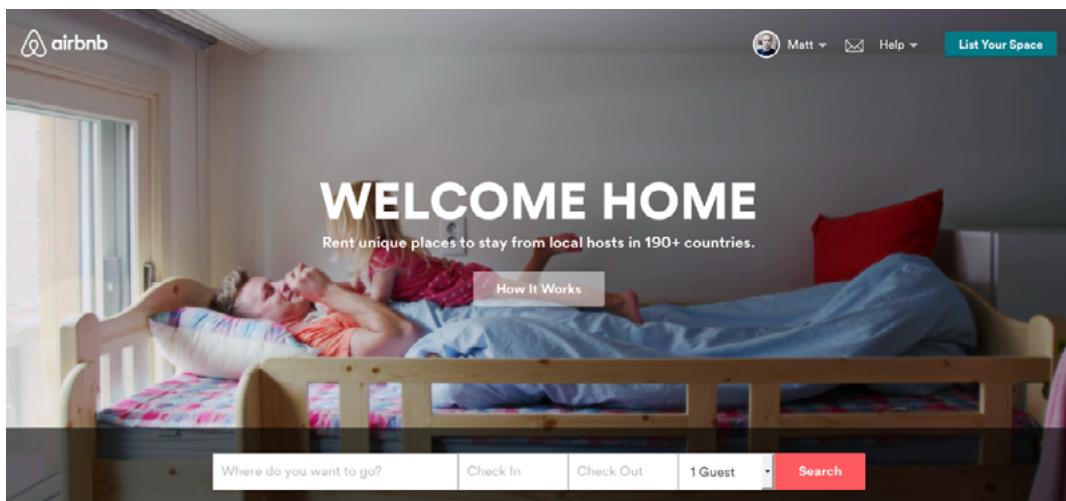


Photo credit: <https://www.airbnb.com/>

AirBnB uses video backgrounds to illustrate the emotional context of their service (a concept we mentioned in the photography chapter). Paired with friendly headlines, the crisp videos depicting the human side of traveling helps prime users to book a destination.

Until the introduction of [HTML5](#), video backgrounds just weren't something most browsers and internet connections could handle, but now that most smartphones are equipped to handle it, designers are starting to mine HD video's potential.



Photo credit: <http://www.brindisatapaskitchens.com/>

The benefits of HD video are the same as the benefits of film itself. If you'd like to explore a cinematic background, consider these tips:

- **Between 10–30 second loops** – Aim for this range to keep loading times down and keep your users attention, all without sacrificing coherence.
- **Sound off** – Automatic sound can be an annoyance, so set the default to off with the option to turn it on. – Sound is still a polarizing autoplay element for most users. If you're going to play sound, allow users to turn it on (and make sure it's not obnoxiously loud or annoying).
- **Minimize loading** – The biggest drawback of HD video is loading time, so minimize this as much as possible. Your video will be worthless if your users get bored and leave before it loads.

- **Backup for devices that can't render video** – Set a backup for devices where your video can't be rendered – Google Analytics will show you which devices your site is used on most.
- **Quality** – Don't forget the advantage of HD is the quality, so select the best possible quality, whether filming it yourself or using stock.

Simply having a video clip in the background is not enough. Respect the medium and draw on decades of film theory to maximize the gains of HD video.

3. HD Animations

Somewhere between images and video are animations, sharing elements of both. While the principles of animation we discussed earlier remain the same, what's different is the quality brought by HD.

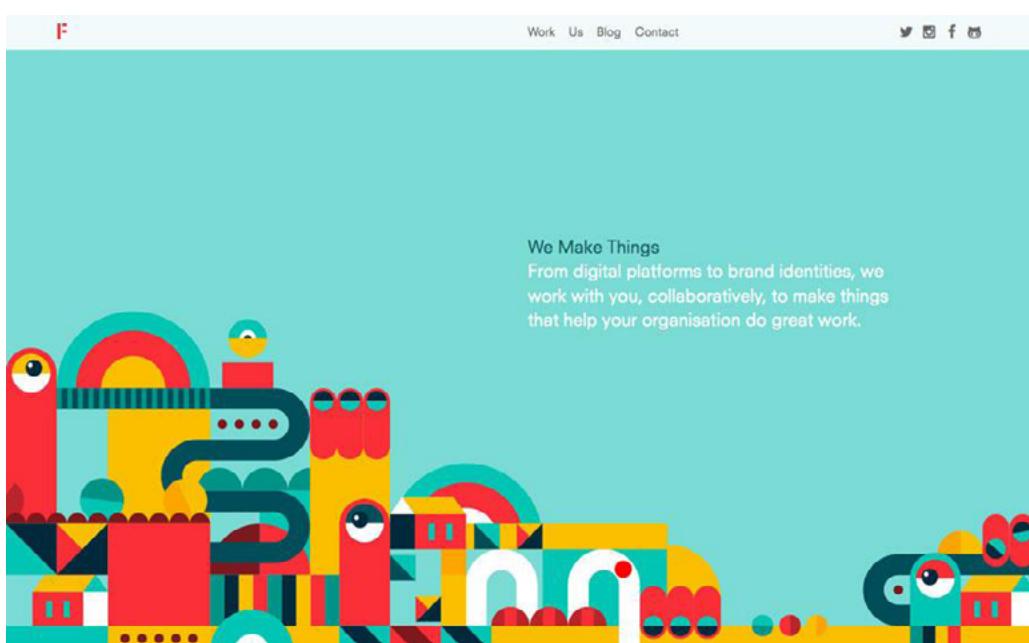


Photo credit: <http://madebyfieldwork.com/>

The biggest concern here is in transitions, which should be as seamless and unnoticeable as possible. Whether your animations are looped or triggered by interaction, they should have an organic feel that doesn't draw attention to itself. In HD, this is more important, as flaws or loading stutters are even more noticeable.

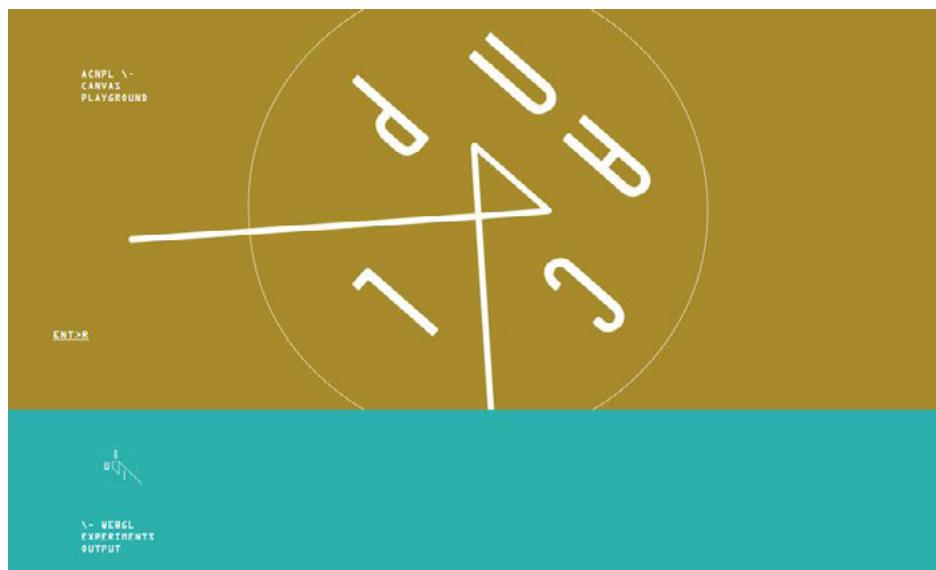


Photo credit: <http://www.acnplwgl.com/>

For HD animation, remember these five tips:

- **Keep it simple** – The limitless potential of animation makes it easy to go overboard. Don't convolute your site with unnecessary complications.
- **Connect animations to the interface** – Using signifiers like key colors or suggestive cues, you can use animations to show functionality or draw attention.
- **Vectors** – Use scalable image formats so you don't have to worry about animations performing on different screens or resolutions.

- **Use rules of video** – Think of animation as an extension of video, so the same rules apply.
- **Design for target audience** – Different animations styles suit different types of users, so use the one that hits your target audience.

Review our chapter on animation for more guidelines.

Thinking Beyond the Present

As the future of web design (and TV, for that matter), HD designs will only increase in prominence over time. In fact, what we see now is only the beginning: for example, the looping format of HD videos is a consequence of technological limitation; as loading times improve, these “loops” will get longer and more involved.



Photo credit: <http://wagamama.yoani.co.jp/#>

HD backgrounds are and always will be an instrument of visual prowess. As such an artistic tool, in the future we will see more creative, even experimental, uses of HD visuals.

Above, the trendsetters [Wagamama](#) bend the rules without straying from the familiar – the loading screen’s animated hero illustration with a bright color overlay sets the stage for the remainder of the site.



Photo credit: <http://bellroy.com/live-life-outside>

Similarly, “still” HD video combines effects and utilizes the stimulation of video with the easy loading and relative calm of photo. Bellroy (above), a wallet cover manufacturer, shows off their products durability in a slow-paced video where the only motion is in the softly falling snow. The imagery is stunning with full HD effects, but still relaxing and with a quick loading time.

Layers are another attribute with a lot of creative potential. Effects like blurs and color overlays open a lot of new doors.

The blurred background, especially, is an effective layering tool. By prodding the user's curiosity, it entices them to interact with the site, sometimes with the promise of the background becoming clearer. This technique not only shares the user's attention with other elements, it also makes for quicker loading.

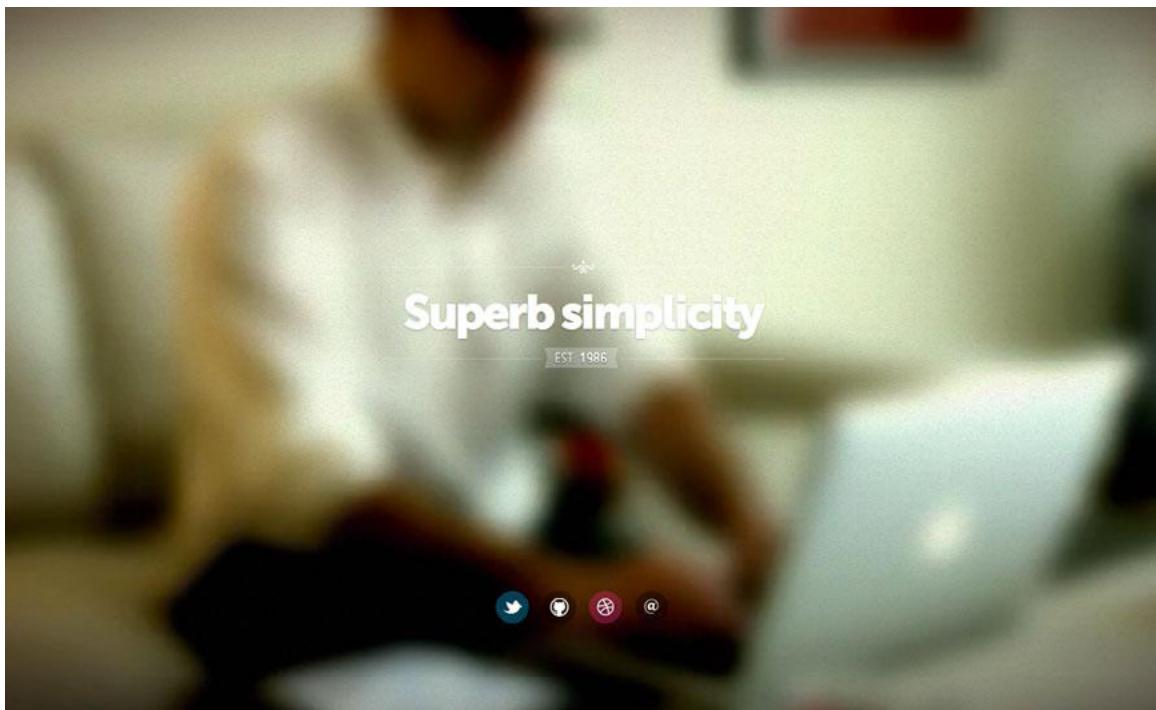


Photo credit: <http://fernando.is/all-about/>

By living up to its “superb simplicity,” [Fernando Maclen’s site](#) brings focus to the external portfolio links by repelling focus from the background. More ambitious sites can feature a call-to-action that reveals the video in full-clarity when activated.

Another visual element we see on the horizon is [3D effects](#), made possible by HD displays and proper layering. By playing with concepts that make use of layering effects – like parallax scrolling – designers can create an illusion of 3D. This immersive technique is only enhanced by HD’s powerful visual capabilities.

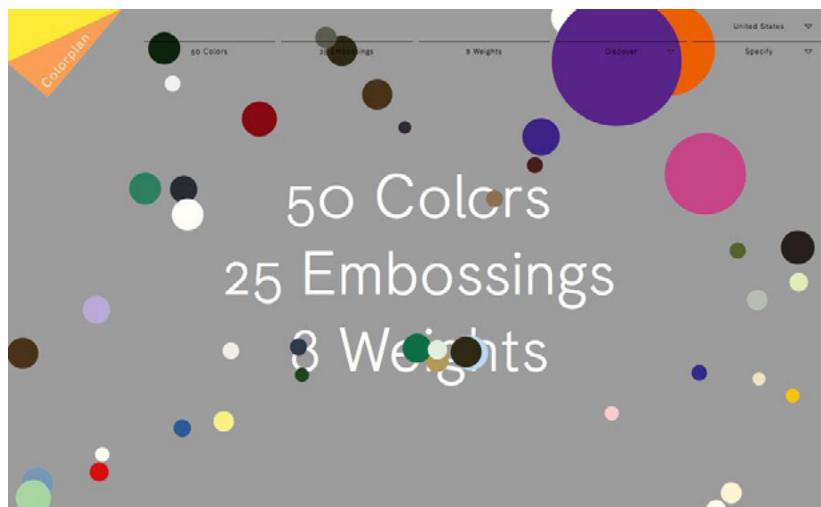


Photo credit: <http://www.colorplanpapers.com/>

On the site for [Color Plan Papers](#) above, the floating circles create a 3D hierarchy of their own by superimposing one another. The more layers created by this effect, the more 3D the page seems. Combine that with a fun animated effect – each circle expands cartoonishly on hover – and you have a site that's engaging in both visuals and interactivity.

The transition to HD might seem scary to some designers who are set in their ways, but those who embrace the new opportunities will better position themselves in the future. Just like when sound and then color was added to movies, there is an adjustment period followed by one of experimentation, and ultimately a renaissance. The heightened visuals of HD will, in the end, give the designers more power, not less. The key is to get in on this fantastic new movement while it's still in its early phases.

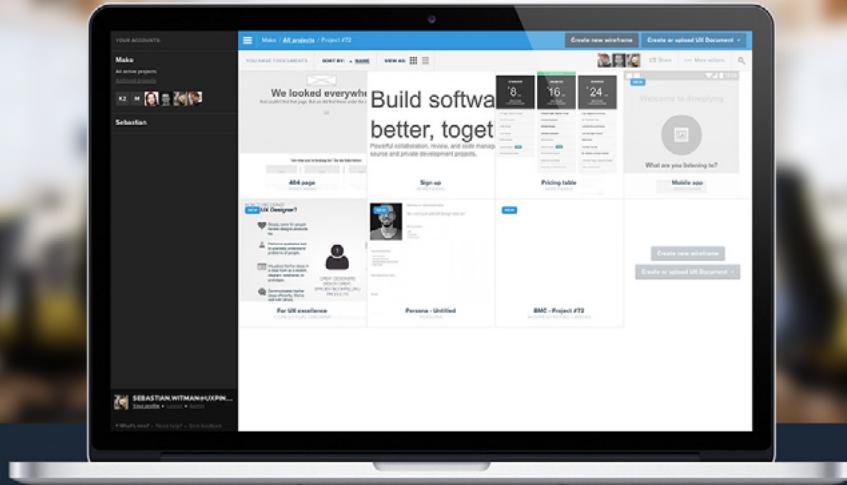
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10 Free Resources and Tools

1. **“Using SVG for Flexible, Scalable and Fun Backgrounds, Part I”** – The first part of A List Apart’s comprehensive guide on everything you need to know about SVG.
2. **Designer’s Guide to DPI** – For beginner to intermediate designers, this guide from Sebastien Gabriel teaches cross-DPI and cross-platform design.
3. **“How to Design the Web in a High-Def World”** – Six Revisions presents a case study that shows the step-by-step process of building a full-screen HD website, including resolution, large files, and some coding.
4. **Videezy Stock Video** – A collection of free HD stock video.
5. **Creative Commons** – A collection of free HD stock photos.
6. **“Backgrounds and Web Design: Examples and Best Practices”** – Smashing Magazine’s coveral on the basics of website backgrounds.
7. **Tutorial Export SVG for the Web with Adobe Illustrator** – A quick tutorial on exporting vector files to SVG with Illustrator.
8. **Improving Image Quality on the Retina Display** – Tuts+’s tips on tackling HD displays, including the usage of CSS media queries.
9. **Browser Shots** – An online tool for testing your site’s screen res-

solutions and browser capabilities.

10. **20 HD Blurred Background Sets** – A collection of free blurry HD backgrounds.



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