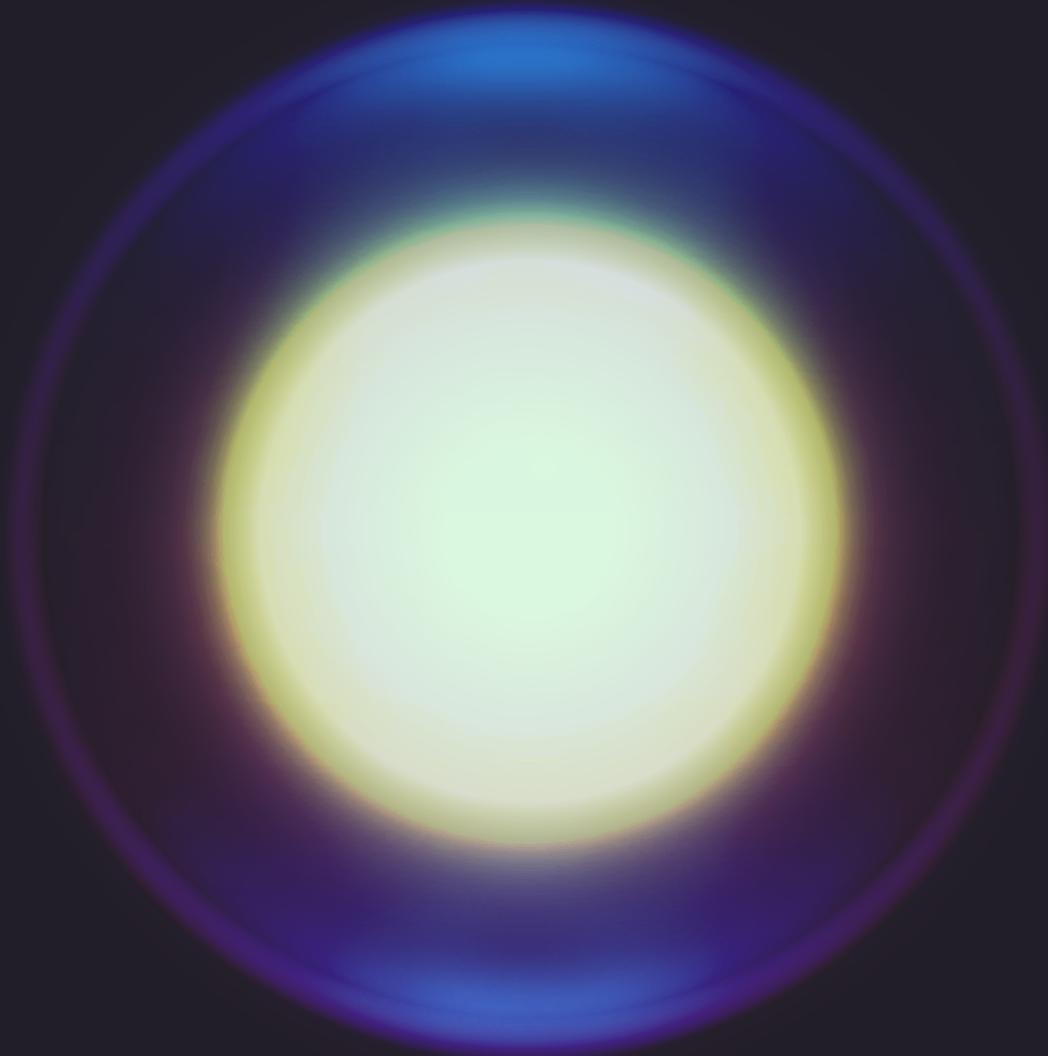


UXPin

# The State of Web Design

## 2016 Edition





# The State of Web Design

## 2016 Edition

Copyright © 2015 by UXPin Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication text may be uploaded or posted online without the prior written permission of the publisher.

For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed  
“Attention: Permissions Request,” to [hello@uxpin.com](mailto:hello@uxpin.com).

# **Index**

<b>A Few Quick Words</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Web Service Design</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Reimagining Pixels</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Mobile-First Spreads</b>	<b>14</b>
The Mobile-first Approach	15
The Guardian	16
Takeaway	17
<b>Modular UI Design</b>	<b>18</b>
Thinking About Space and Time	19
Modular UI Design Patterns	19
Atomic Design	20

<b>Adaptive &amp; Responsive Design</b>	<b>22</b>
The Difference is in the Reaction	23
Best Practice, When Appropriate	24
A Decision That Won't Go Away	24
<b>The Rise of Flexbox</b>	<b>26</b>
The Basics	27
Shuffling the Deck	28
Going Deeper	29
Browser Support	30
<b>Responsive Images</b>	<b>31</b>
JPG: Optimizing for Detail-Rich Photos	32
PNG: Optimizing for Flat Illustrations	33
SVG: Graphics That Grow	34
Code Considerations	34
Bottom Line	35

<b>Even Bigger Video and Cinematography</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Interactions Everywhere</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Full-Screen Navigation</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Card-Style Interfaces</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Split-Screen Layouts</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Precise Personalization</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Bigger Typography</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Return of the Scroll</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Continued Flat Evolution</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Tiny Animations</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Takeaway</b>	<b>59</b>

## Authors



Ben Gremillion is a Content Designer at UXPin specializing in responsive design. Previously, he was a Design Writer at ZURB. He has earned an Adobe Certification and knows CSS, HTML, regex, PHP, MySQL, and other impressive-sounding acronyms. He also builds and maintains a CMS for [webcomic artists](#), and participates in bi-annual NaNoWriMo challenges.



Carrie Cousins has more than 10 years experience in the media industry, including design, editing, and writing for print and online publications. Carrie is also a sports fanatic and spends way too much time planning football and basketball trips and obsessing over stats.

[Follow me on Twitter](#)

# A Few Quick Words

It's time to look ahead to a new year in website design.

Access to better internet connections and design tools are giving designers more flexibility to use techniques – such as video, custom typography and animation – that were off-limits a few years ago. We are already starting to see some of the things that are likely to dominate the design scene, and the themes are oversized elements and mobile-inspired concepts that bridge the gap between devices.

At the same time, the nature of the medium is changing. As we'll see, pixels are no longer discrete dots, but can comprise sub-pixels — or not, depending on browsers' capabilities. Our layouts can flex and change as users require. To adapt to these changes we have new techniques like Flexbox, modular design patterns, and responsive images. At least, we will soon.

From tactics to technology, let's take a look at what is to come so that you can be prepared in 2016.

For the love of design,  
Ben Gremillion & Carrie Cousins

# Web Service Design

2015 was a turning point in web design, with mobile browsing stealing the show, new technologies for better images and faster internet, and of course the general maturation of the industry.

In 2016, the gap between web design and UX design will continue to shrink. Websites are only part of the overall customer experience. Web interface designers must think outside the page if they want to remain competitive in today's commoditized world of [TemplateMonster](#) and [The Grid](#).

Luckily, we can already see some great examples of industry best practices.

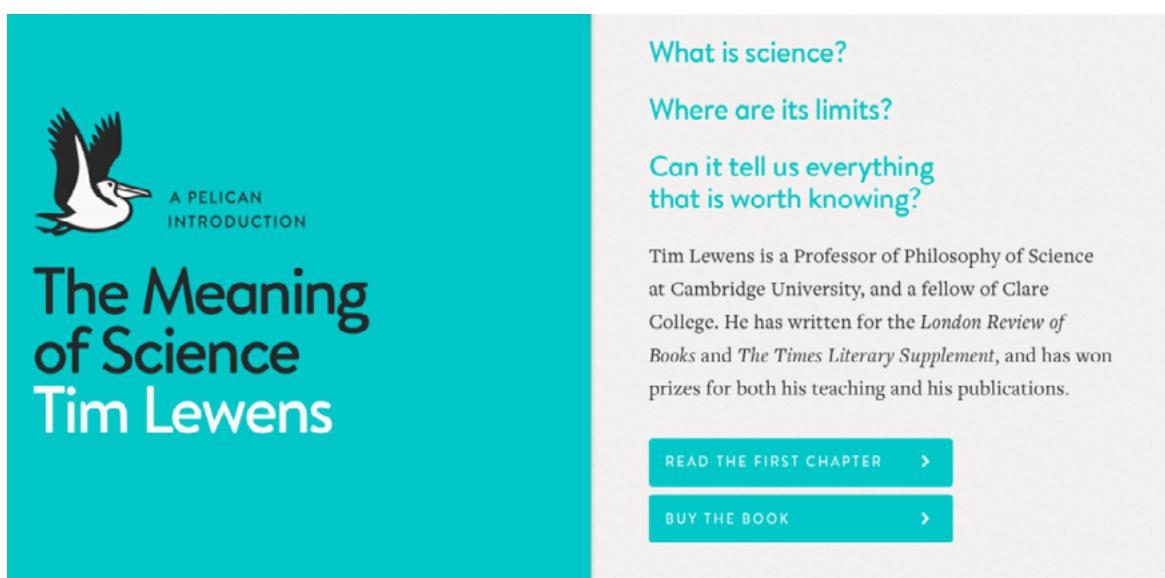
For example, [Pelican Books](#) new "Penguin Reader" is equal parts website and equal parts web app. The navigation functions like a traditional website, yet the experience feels more like a web app.

Does the distinction matter? Not really, for the users at least.

By visiting the site, you can preview chapters in a Medium-like minimalist format. Once you're ready, you can then buy the book to read in-browser on any device. The experience is smooth, elegant, and context-friendly thanks to the typography, contrast, and media queries.

The medium of web content is less important than the service provided. Traditionally, we may have redirected users from the Penguin marketing website to download an app or buy the ebook formats.

[Penguin Reader](#), however, shatters those silos. They determined the service that best suited users, then designed the technology accordingly. You visit the site, you preview content in an immersive format, then you can purchase the content without thinking twice about devices or formats.



*Photo credit: [www.pelicanbooks.com](http://www.pelicanbooks.com)*

Web design is no longer a downstream discipline of UX. As the Penguin Reader example demonstrates, web design is merely an expression of experience design.

Sites are no longer thought of a collection of pages with different content. Today's websites are mostly thought of as services, and independent services at that.

For example, [Netflix](#) dedicates individual pages for each movie and TV episode, but users don't think "I'm going to the Ghostbusters page." They think, "I'm using a movie-watching site to watch Ghostbusters."

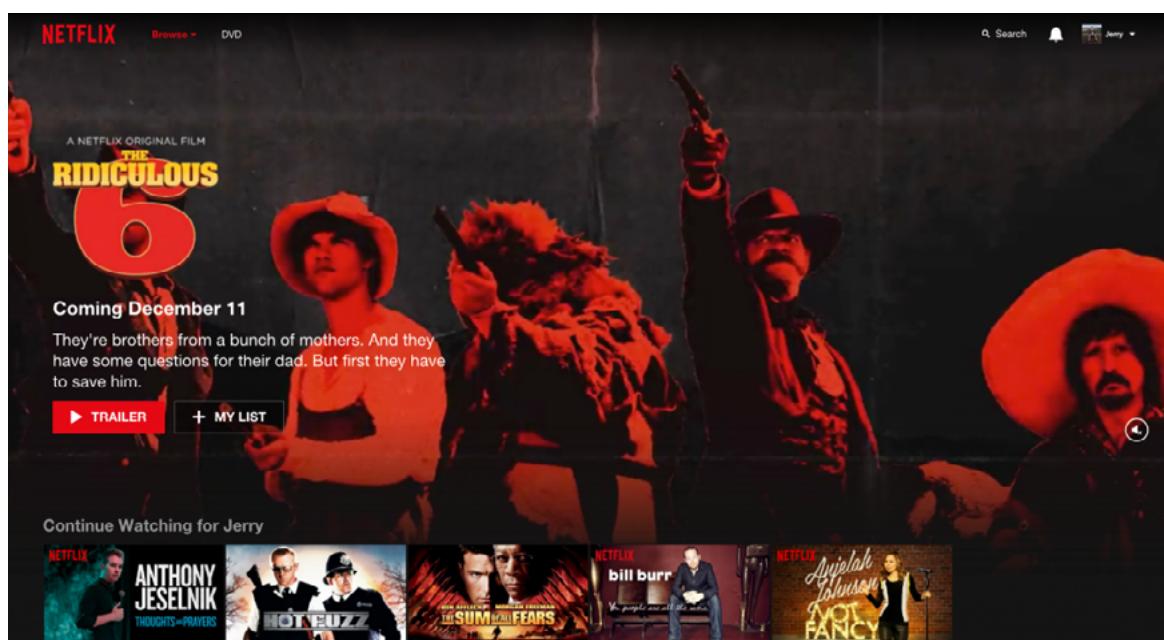


Photo credit: [Netflix](#)

This is objectively a good thing, since it puts content first.

That makes delivering the right content (a desirable service) the main objective of UX, with UI concerns growing outwards. The page system is still deeply ingrained in web design, but the user's perceptions are changing.

In today's climate, [service design](#) makes just as much impact as UI design, and in fact the two often overlap. Users aren't coming to these

sites for specific pages, they're coming for the useful and desirable service.

What happens before and after they use your site? How will that affect your interface decisions? Consider how the website falls into the complete customer journey, not just as its own isolated entity.

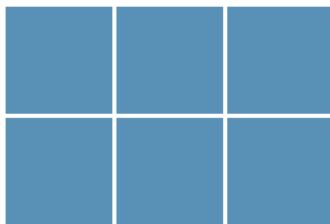
# Reimagining Pixels

As if accounting for many physical screen sizes wasn't enough of a challenge, designers today [need to question](#) what was once a reliable tenet of digital images and layout.

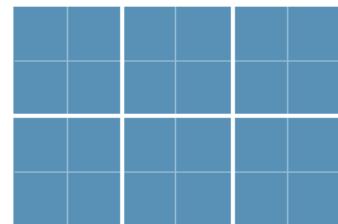
Pixels, the bedrock of bitmaps are no longer discrete dots on a screen. Pixels on some screens today are so tiny that they defy traditional conventions.

The iPhone 5s, for example, packs about 320 pixels into a linear inch on a screen two inches (640px) wide. That means mobile-optimized websites and apps might show their “tablet” – or worse, desktop – layouts on tiny screens because their media queries deliver larger designs for 320 pixels and up.

At least, they would if a pixel was a pixel. *Physical pixels* are the actual dots a screen is capable of displaying. *Device pixels* are how it reports its size. While that helps designers plan for mobile screens, not every screen is high-density.



Six regular pixels



Six high-density pixels

In 2016, vector graphics (which scale well to any resolution or screen size) will become even more popular.

Principles of [Google's Material Design](#), icon fonts and SVGs are terrific – and well-supported – tools that designers can use to keep their graphics looking sharp, now and in the future.

Although the technology is ripe, designers must follow users' needs before adopting cutting-edge techniques. As more conventional screens like iMacs – and newcomers like Samsung tablets – make high-res screens more common, you can expect designers to take graphic quality into greater account.

# **Mobile-First Spreads**

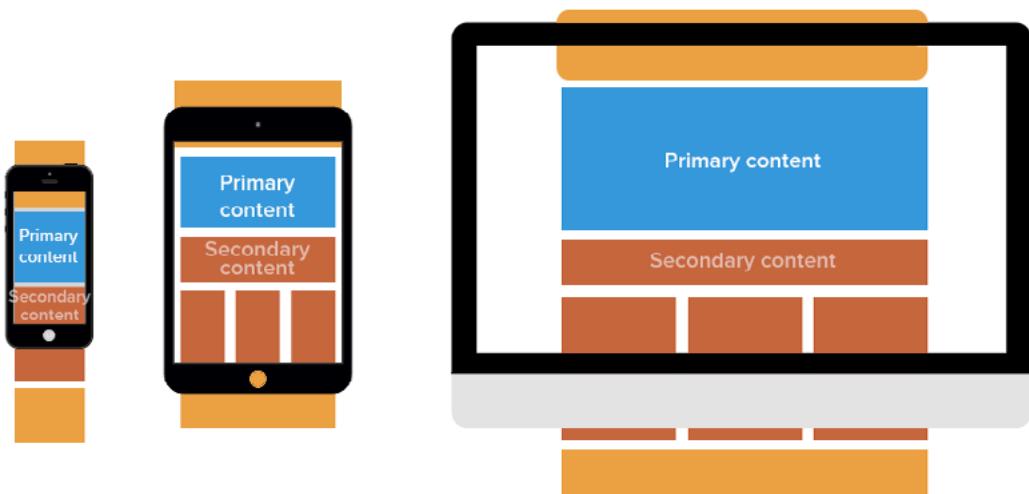
When responsive web design first took hold, most websites were designed for widescreen displays of 960 pixels wide or higher. Retrofitting those sites brought new problems. Deciding what mobile users would and wouldn't see forced us to reevaluate what each page's real value was, and gnash our teeth over what got cut.

Trimming away design elements and content blocks wasn't a happy process. Even worse, it turned out that users on mobile devices were still users, and didn't appreciate a dumbed-down experience.

So instead of shrinking sites, designers began to expand them.

## The Mobile-first Approach

Around the same time that Ethan Marcotte [introduced responsive web design](#), Luke Wroblewski [suggested we design for mobile devices first](#).



The idea: If your site is good on a mobile device, it translates better to all devices. Designing small screens that add information for larger screens – also called progressive enhancement – is easier to handle than cutting back, a process called graceful degradation.

More importantly, though, is that the mobile-first approach is also a content-first approach.

Mobile devices today have the most limitations, screen size and bandwidth to name a few, and so designing within these parameters force you to prioritize content ruthlessly. Small-screen breakpoints can better fit around the content.

As you can see in [our hands-on tutorial](#), the mobile-first approach leads to a design that's more content-focused, and therefore user-focused.

## The Guardian

In 2014, the popular news site [The Guardian](#) launched a new, responsively-designed website. This included rethinking how they approached content. As we examine in the “modular design” section of this book, each view is made of component parts.



*Photo credit: The Guardian*

As they [wrote](#):

*Rather than a traditional classification system, with homepage areas for news, sport, technology, culture and so on, we've been testing a ‘people’ zone and a ‘reviews’ zone which aggregate content from the whole of the Guardian.*

In short, they didn't design around page parameters like pixel width or density, but around what content they felt was appropriate at a given page load. This lent itself naturally to fitting well on small screens

with a single-column layout that expands gracefully on tablets and desktop computers. The shift in thinking certainly paid off as their overall readership increased.

## Takeaway

We've come a long way since the days of broad, fixed-width layouts.

Responsive web design embraces the fact that websites are dynamic. We can't rely on users to have the same browsing ability, and why would we want to? The web is not print. Going forward, we acknowledge that mobile-first means expanding both one's designs and one's mindset.

# **Modular UI Design**

The term “web page” is misleading. Using an analogy from the world of print, it creates the idea that a web-based document is made of fixed chunks that exist within the confines of a browser window.

But each “page” is a collection of components that comprise a whole. Video files and images are embedded. CSS and JavaScript are referenced. Most content management systems call on separate files to create standard headers, navigation bars and footers across the site.

And then there’s design itself.

Many sites take advantage of reusable elements – paragraphs, for example, or input fields and buttons. Once created, designers and developers can reuse the same code in many places. Web apps adapt their interfaces depending on user input, for example, when they tap a button. Search results pages are created on demand. And most importantly, designers and content managers can update parts of a page long after the whole is published.

## Thinking About Space and Time

An object-oriented approach requires us to see the web as a series of components that doesn't stop at the URL level.

For example, an input field and its label comprise a pair. A series of pairings make up a form. And the form is part of, say, the main section of a page.

UX injects a new parameter: time. The form example doesn't stop with visuals; it continues as people enter information and tap the submit button. As anyone who's mapped out a flow with Post-it notes can relate, each step is itself a component of a user's experience.

Like elements in a layout, we can rearrange these moments in the user experience to find the optimal flow from introduction to goal, like from a home page landing to final sale and thank-you page. This allows us to seek out and remove redundant or unnecessary steps that interfere with the user and business goals.

## Modular UI Design Patterns

Designers can take advantage of this thinking by reusing design patterns in their work based off a consolidated pattern library.

As we examined in the free e-book [Web UI Design Best Practices](#), a pattern is a starting point on which to build. Far from static mockups,

designers can tweak patterns to fit their individual needs, even as a site changes over time.

Elements build upon elements like building blocks create whole objects. Once we wrap our heads around that, we realize that web “pages” are anything but.

## Atomic Design

Brad Frost’s [Atomic Design methodology](#) of design exemplifies modular thinking.

His approach breaks components into five levels ranging from individual blocks like input fields and paragraphs to “organisms” – distinct sections such as hero units and sidebars – to entire pages:

- Atoms
- Molecules
- Organisms
- Templates
- Pages

This thinking treats each element as a distinct entity that designers can assemble.



The rough pattern above combines three of the five levels: atoms (dark gray), organisms (medium gray) and a template (white). Individual bits of information like single paragraphs, navigation links or list items – atoms – fill out the main areas. Those areas – organisms – are interchangeable.

For example, we could move the thin sidebar to the left of the main content without affecting the rest of the page. All of these parts comprise a template that puts its contents into context.

Another advantage of modular design is reusability. Since elements are object-oriented chunks, it stands to reason that designers can copy/paste components – or variations on them – within a project. Navigation bars, for example, appear on most pages throughout a website, highlighting the current page as necessary.

That's just a few basic ideas. Get inspired with more examples at [the Pattern Lab](#).

# Adaptive & Responsive Design

Adaptive and responsive web design are more than two approaches to digital product design. They're two philosophies vying for dominance in web design circles.

One size doesn't fit all, however, and we've found that there's a time for each.

Considering a variety of screen sizes is nothing new. Users are getting accustomed to sites that work on many devices to their benefit. And it's noteworthy that Google has long recommended that designers create sites which work well across a variety of devices.

But "works well" doesn't necessarily mean the responsive approach. Adaptive web design also has its merits.

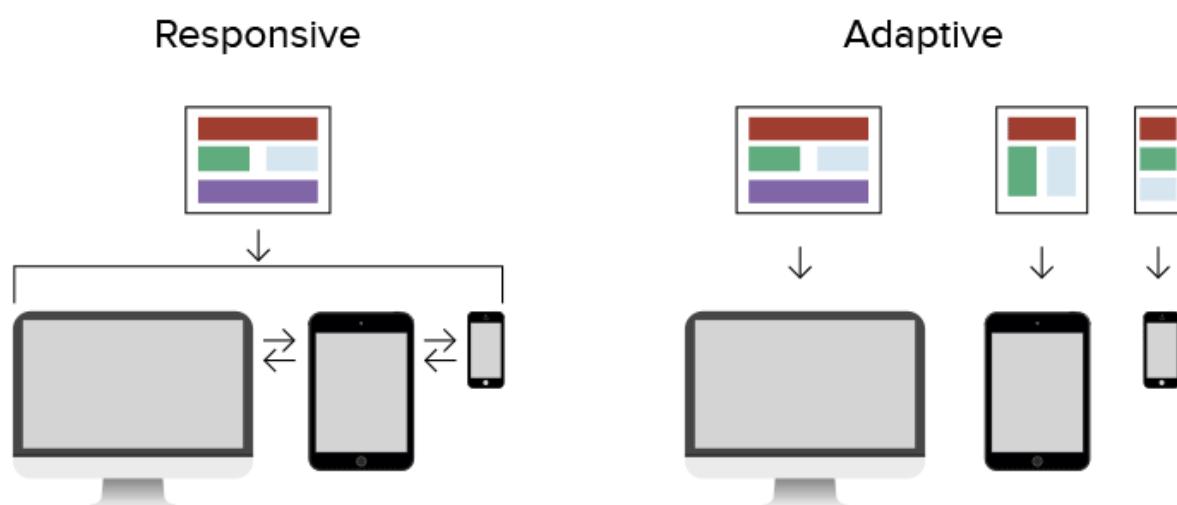
There's no winner here. Nor is there a loser. Choosing which to use requires considering each project's needs, past and future.

## The Difference is in the Reaction

Responsive design's fluid approach works across a spectrum of device sizes and capabilities. That means designers can target certain breakpoints, like 320 and 768 pixels wide, and rely on the design to fill in the gaps.

On the other hand, adaptive design creates specific screen sizes. On the plus side, that means designers don't have to worry about how their designs flex beyond their control. However, it also means designs leave extra space for designs that don't hit exact measurements.

So while both approaches work well with mobile devices (and Google's recommendation), responsive design is more flexible and less predictable. Adaptive design is the opposite.



As seen above, responsive web design spans the gaps between devices, while adaptive targets them.

## Best Practice, When Appropriate

Both adaptive and responsive design depend heavily on the information they present, but do so in different ways.

We've found that responsively-designed products require more work beforehand, but offer the best long-term benefits. That's because we can't predict what size screens and device capabilities the future will bring.

It's especially effective with a mobile-first approach, which focuses products to their essentials rather than cutting back from more elaborate visuals. Nothing forces one to consider an information hierarchy like planning for mobile screens, then adding secondary information for wider devices and browsers.

Adaptively-designed products are generally easier to implement, as they require a few fixed layouts – essentially a series of non-responsive layouts that present the same content. That makes them ideal when retrofitting older projects with content that was created with a specific design in mind.

## A Decision That Won't Go Away

The funny thing about choosing one over the other is that we can't just choose one and go. Some sites are better suited for adaptive design; others respond well to the responsive way.

We have some thoughts on the decision-making process:

- **Was the content created with a specific size in mind?** Images in particular may conform to a certain screen width.
- **How mobile is your audience?** If analytics shows that most of your users visit on a certain class of device, you may only need a few slight adaptive variations on your design.
- **How long until the next redesign?** Responsive designs hold up well to varying conditions and processes as yet unforeseen.
- **How long do you have?** Developing a few specific – adaptive – designs is faster than accounting for everything in between. But if you're starting from scratch, a responsive and mobile-first approach often isn't much slower.

In short, each project is unique. Smart designers will choose the right approach the for the occasion.

Either way, users win.

# The Rise of Flexbox

Since we abandoned tables for designs, floats and clears have formed the foundation of CSS grid systems, both formal and custom. But they're not perfect. In fact, they're cumbersome for interactive web apps or sites with modern, semantic ways of thinking.

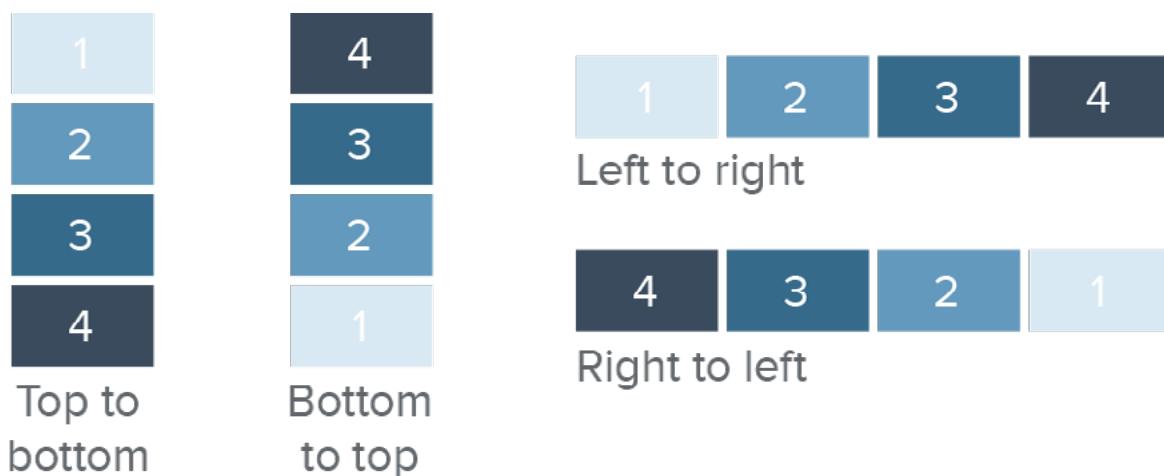
[Flexbox, a new CSS methodology](#), brings us a more versatile layout tool than traditional means have. We can arrange HTML in almost any order regardless of its final appearance. We can fit a wide range of devices and screens. And we can fix select elements while letting others scroll.

Unfortunately, adopting Flexbox means is sacrificing decades of traditional floats and clears. Fortunately, it's worth the effort.

## The Basics

Flexbox is a powerful set of CSS properties that can bewilder newcomers. But the basics are easy to grasp and cover most of what we need today.

Within a rectangular container, Flexbox arranges HTML elements along one of two axes: horizontal or vertical, depending on what the design calls for. These elements can run left to right, as with traditional floats and clears – or right to left with a single change in CSS. They can also run from top to bottom, or bottom to top, again with only one line of code in CSS and no changes in HTML.

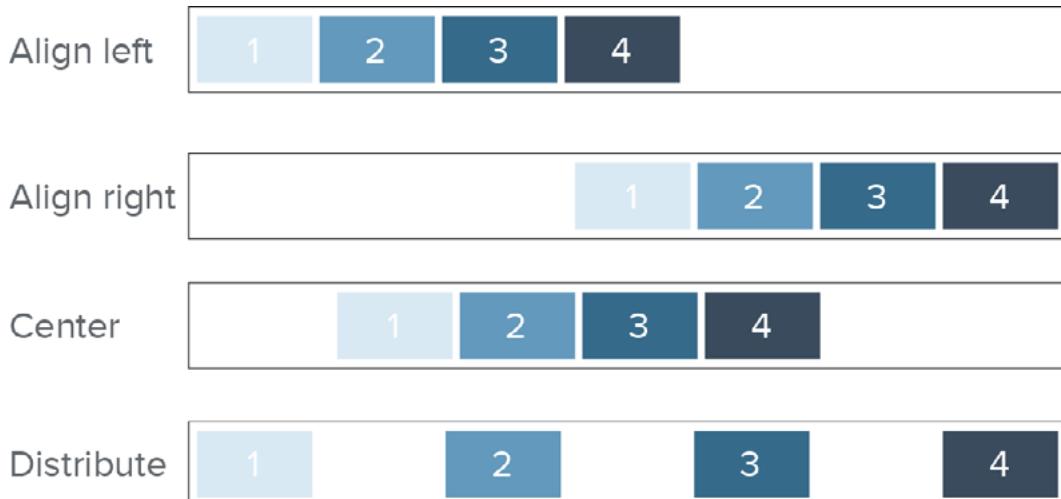


*Photo credit: UXPin*

That's a huge advantage for designers who want to keep their code orderly while changing their layouts on a whim.

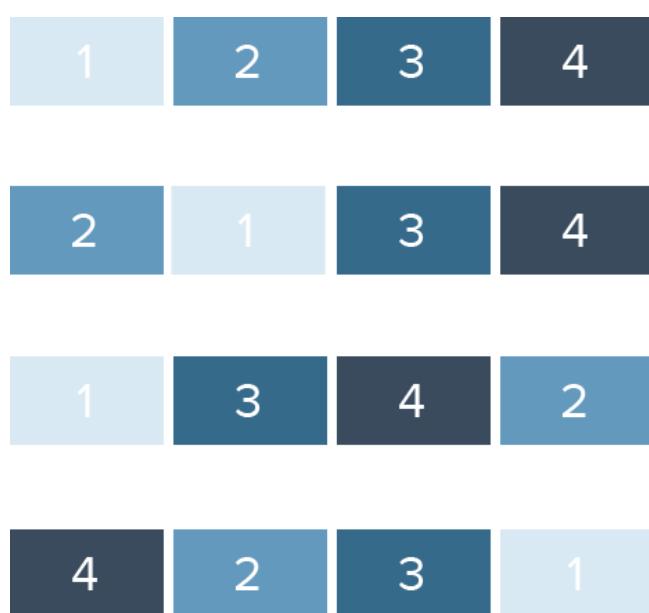
## Shuffling the Deck

By aligning elements along an axis, we can push them back and forth, or evenly space them, on the invisible line. For example:



*Photo credit: UXPin*

Elements can move to either end of their container, move to the center, or evenly distribute themselves along a line. And as if that wasn't enough, they can also change order...



*Photo credit: UXPin*

... without a single change in HTML. The advantage is especially clear for sites based on CMSes like WordPress or Drupal, whose themes often use intricate doses of nested divs, headers, footers, sections and other HTML5 elements.

## Going Deeper

Earlier, we mentioned how every set of Flexbox elements fits inside a container. It turns out that those inner elements can also be containers. This plus [media queries](#) lets us create almost any app-like layout imaginable. For example:

- Fixed-position marketing sites with sidebars that collapse on small screens
- Blog posts that push headers, footers and other metadata to the end of a long document instead of competing for space at the top
- Email-like content readers with levels of messaging
- Interactive carousels that react on scroll without JavaScript

## Browser Support

As of 2015, [almost every modern browser works with Flexbox](#). Almost.

Internet Explorer 10 and 11 offer limited support, excluding more advanced properties like flex-wrap and flex-flow... plus a few rendering bugs. Today's versions of Chrome, Firefox, Safari, Opera and Android Browser all recognize and use Flexbox layouts, however, making it a viable alternative for future use.

# Responsive Images

Web UI design is more than looking good: it's about making great user experience. Helpful cues, clear messaging, inspiring visuals all contribute to making users click that all-important call to action. Yet, as recent reports on [page bloat](#) show, many designers neglect speed when designing websites and web apps.

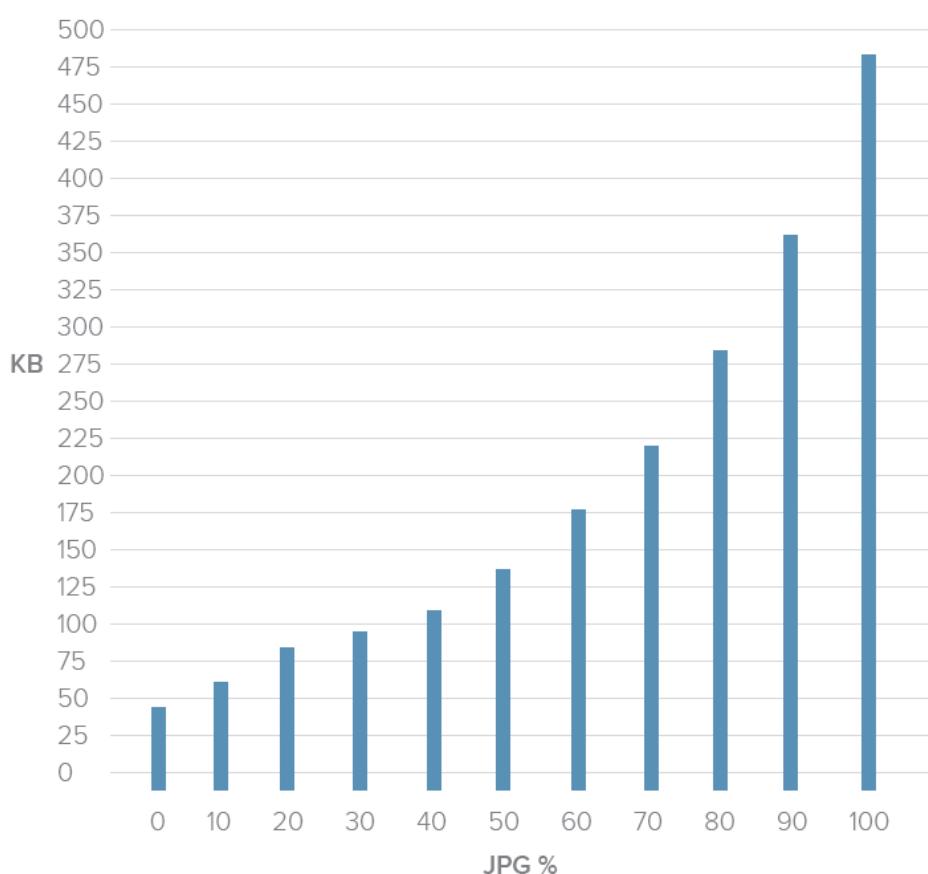
Of all the assets that a user must download per page view, images are by far the heaviest today. Kilobytes approaching megabytes of pixels make sites sluggish and users impatient, causing businesses to lose potential customers.

Compressing images isn't about sacrificing quality. It's about finding the best quality in as few bytes as possible.

But how much? Is there a sweet spot for compression?

## JPG: Optimizing for Detail-Rich Photos

To seek the optimal quality for JPG in general we saved a photo with increments of JPG compression. Results ranged from 45KB at 0% compression to 479KB at 100%.

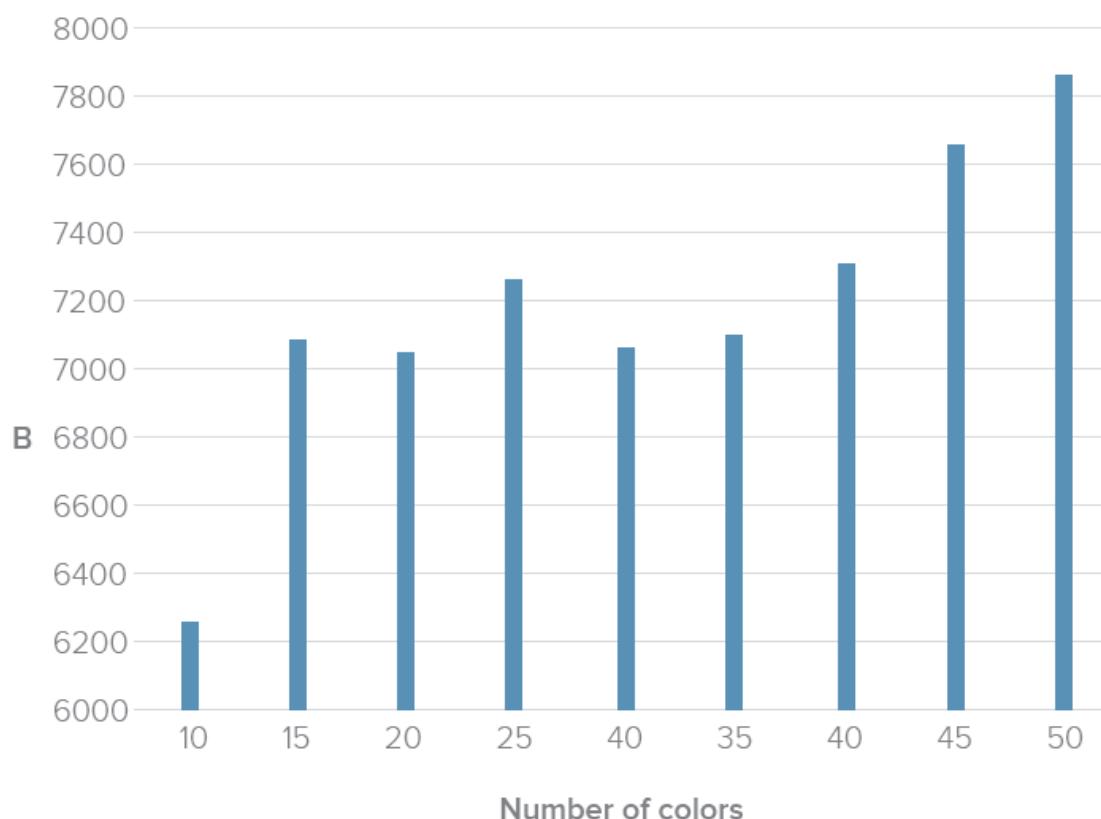


Just dropping the quality from 100% to 70% reduced the file size by almost half – a real bargain. The lower compression percentages, though, didn't see as much of a difference. Although bytes fell from 0 – 20%, we saw quality drop too quickly to be worth the savings.

## PNG: Optimizing for Flat Illustrations

The story gets more complicated when we look at PNG files. Unlike JPG, PNG compression doesn't use percentages. Instead it uses a certain number of colors – a palette, if you will – to color every pixel it contains. The larger that palette, officially called a color table, the larger the file tends to be. But not always.

We ran the same experiment on a graphic with subtle gradients. The results varied as Photoshop adjusted the file's color table to preserve quality.



Your best bet with PNG files is to use flat colors, few or no gradients, and test different color tables to find the optimal fit.

## SVG: Graphics That Grow

Scalable Vector Graphics uses lines instead of individual pixels. Their advantages are two-fold: first, they don't get pixelated as they increase in dimensions, making them look sharp on screens of any size or resolution. Second, they're tiny – as long as they're simple.

SVGs' file size increase steadily with complexity. That makes them awful for photo-like images, but fine for line art with or without gradients.

## Code Considerations

Aside from image files themselves, we can do lots with code to make pixels respond well to different situations. One of the most common solutions is to set a bit of CSS:

```
img { max-width: 100%; }
```

This selector and property makes most images fit into their containers. For example, if a media query sets a wrapper to 300 pixels in width, then no image inside that wrapper will exceed 300 pixels.

## Bottom Line

Possibly the best of the best practices is also the simplest: if users don't need pixels, don't send them. But applying that rule gets tricky. Every case varies, and as long as you keep the goal in mind, you're sure to create speedier websites that translates to happier end users.

# Even Bigger Video and Cinematography

High definition video is the new hero header. And we're not talking about simple loops. The new video "it" technique is full-on cinema-style with a video that includes a story.

As explained in the free [\*Web Design Book of Trends 2016\*](#), this trend would have been impossible even just two years ago, but better compression methods for video, high-quality recording options with almost any mobile phone and faster internet connections are making it possible. HD video only works when it streams flawlessly.

Let's look at two different approaches. The examples below each showcase this cinematography style in different ways.

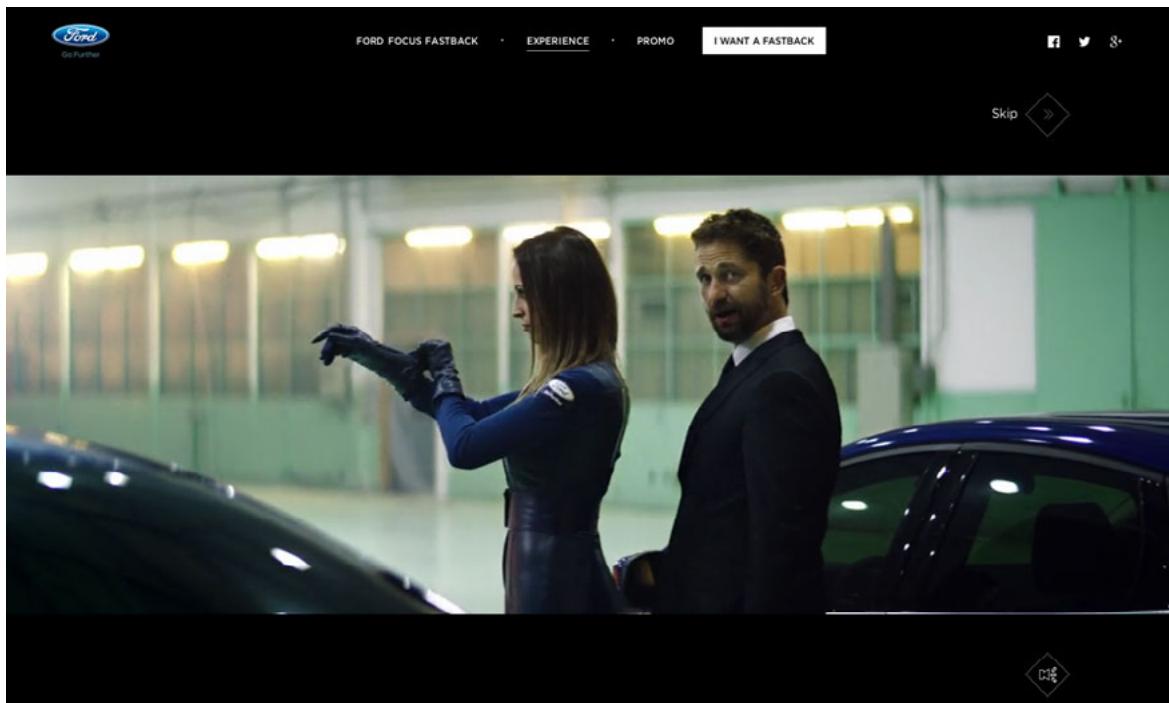
[Sons of Gallipoli](#) allows you to start the video on your own and move through the site.

Here the viewer is given complete control of the viewing experience. Viewers have the ability to skip chapters through a off-canvas navbar, play or pause the current chapter, or explore the archive.



*Photo credit: Sons of Gallipoli*

Here the experience isn't dictated completely by the design, but rather how the viewer wants to consume the content.



*Photo credit: Ford Focus Fastback*

Ford, however, takes their viewers for more traditional ride. They use a movie-style format that automatically plays once the site is loaded.

Once the brief video ends, menu options pop up asking viewers which track would they prefer to explore. However, viewers are given the option to skip the video – which is a good option for those who visit the site more than once. Other sites opt away from sound because it can be tricky to pull off without frustrating users. (Sound should always, at a minimum come with a toggle off/on switch.)

In any case, video will continue to improve in the coming year and will be an integral part of the user experience.

But videos and large images come at a cost: file size. As we discussed, smaller images improve user experience because they take less time to download. Balancing that ideal with the need for larger images requires some strategy.

- **Don't compress JPGs higher than 70%.** Anything higher has a significant rise in bytes for very little quality gain.
- **Aim for photos with limited color palettes.** The fewer variations in hue and value, the smaller your files will be in bytes. Think low-contrast, if possible.
- **Compress in other places.** Compensate for byte-heavy photos by giving people smaller CSS files, less JavaScript, fewer files overall (a.k.a. HTTP requests), or anything else that shrinks the overall page load. After all, it's not just the pics that people receive. Try running your content pages – not just the home page – through [Google PageSpeed](#) to see where you can shore up.

- **Squeeze bytes with a third-party service.** Photoshop's JPGs aren't always ideal. Wash your web images through [CompressJPEG](#) or [TinyPNG](#) and see if you get better results. (Fair warning: you might not, but it's worth a shot.)

# Interactions Everywhere

Users want to engage with websites. And websites want users to engage with content. This symbiotic relationship is resulting in more useful gamification and micro-interactions between websites, apps and users.

The trick to this trend is making it seamless. Designers are creating games that don't look like games at all, where the lines between micro-interactions and gamification are blurred. One thing to remember about micro-interaction is the best ones are tiny, simple and become part of a user's everyday life.

Let's look at one example.

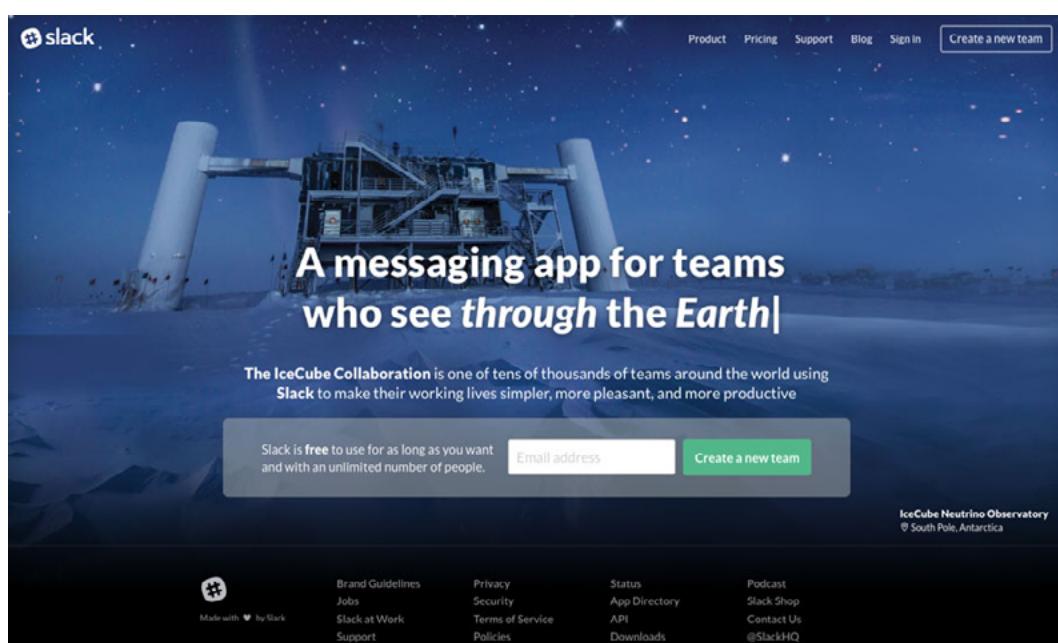
[Star Wars Lightsaber Escape](#) is a game that's more movie than game. And it's a perfect example of where gamification and micro-interactions mix. Before playing the game, you're instructed to log into the site on phone. You have to use your phone in combination with the site to play the game. The Force is in your hands, as your phone

controls the lightsaber on screen. Integrated scrolling features and fun imagery and typography add to the movie experience.



*Photo credit: Star Wars Lightsaber Escape*

On the other hand, there are others that are blending micro-interactions more into the way we interact with other people.



*Photo credit: Slack*

Slack has mastered the art of the micro-interaction. The messaging app and website helps users communicate across teams and devices. Slack has developed a pretty substantial following – so much they recently launched a Slack Shop to buy everything from stickers to socks – that relies on tiny notifications, file sharing and more for work and play.

But what makes them popular is that they keep the lines of communication open amongst your team. With both desktop and mobile apps, you can connect with coworkers easily on a variety of projects regardless of whether you're in the office. Notifications help bring you back into the application, becoming as common in our daily lives as text messages.

Interactions have and will continue to be just part of how we interact – pun fully intended – with the world.

# Full-Screen Navigation

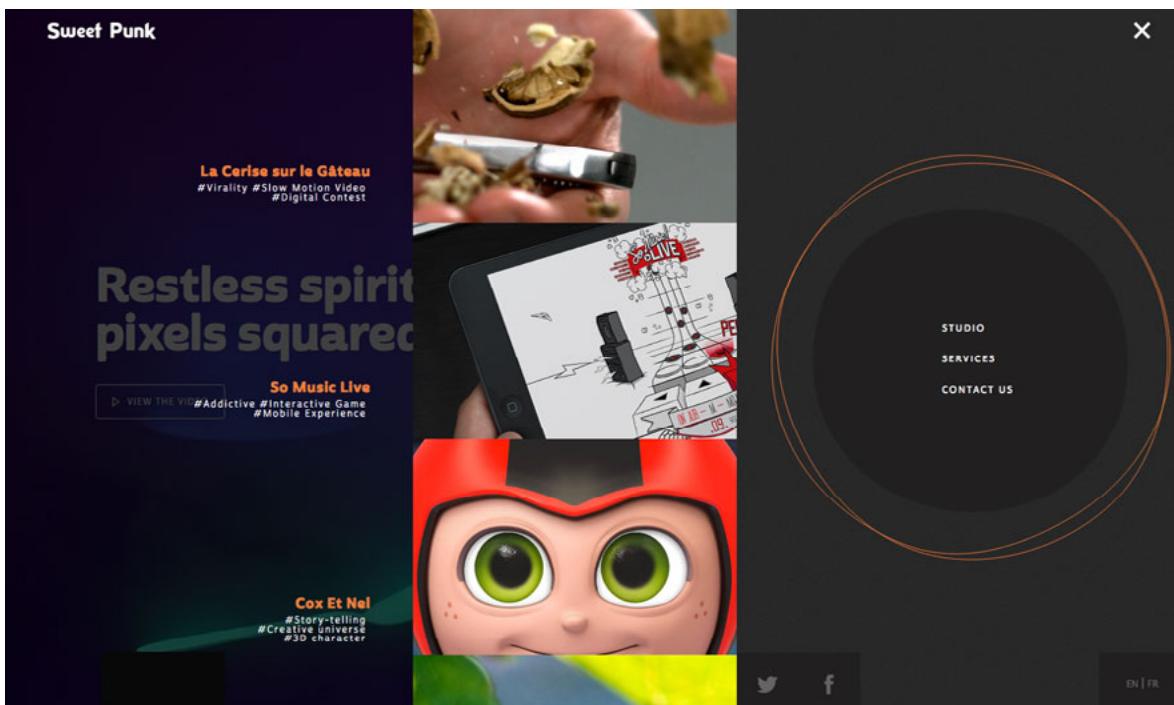
It seems like a logical evolution for websites thanks to the popularity of pop-out menus.

The hamburger icon has evolved from a swing down, traditional form of navigation to a full-screen navigation tool. What's especially nice about this is that websites can truly design the navigation so that it looks less like an afterthought.



*Photo credit: Mario Frigerio*

The one caveat to this trend is making sure users understand where and how to find the navigational elements, because this concept may not feel familiar to everyone. Add a little animation or splash of color to bring focus to the click (or tap) action.

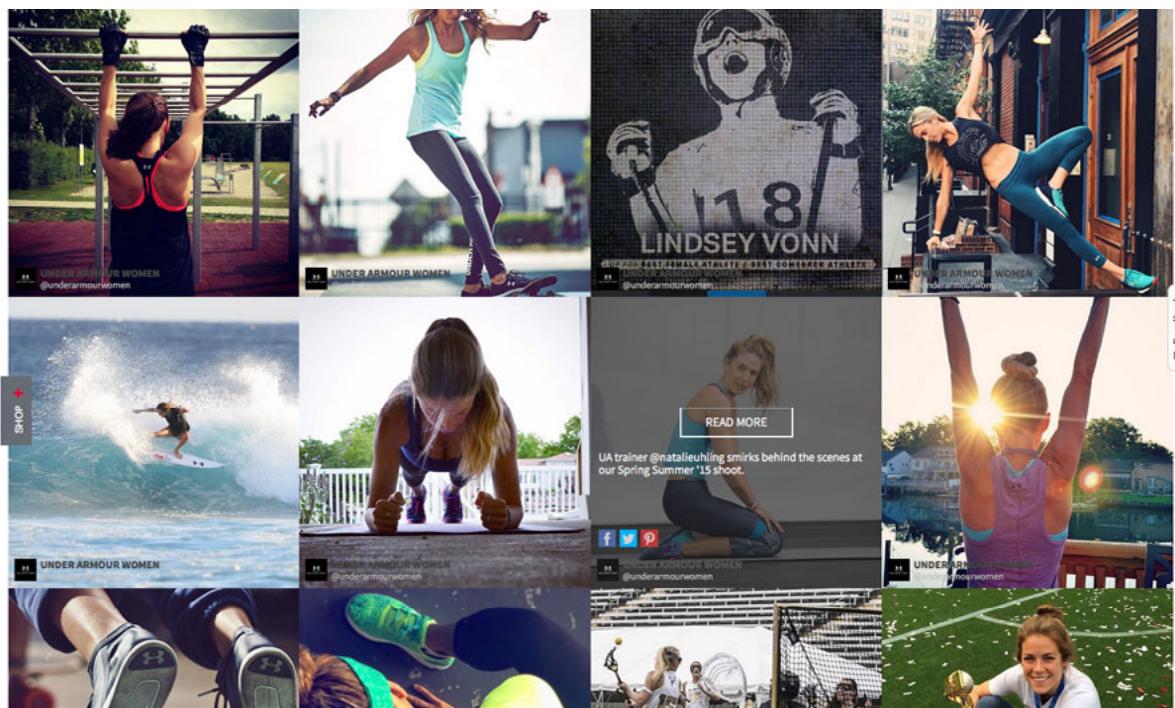


*Photo credit: Sweet Punk*

The sites of [Mario Frigerio](#) and [Sweet Punk](#) each use pull screen navigation styles that are bold and fun. The look is almost an evolution of the smaller mega navigation design that was popular before touch-based interfaces became a must-have. The simple designs and focus on visuals makes users want to click deeper into the sites.

# Card-Style Interfaces

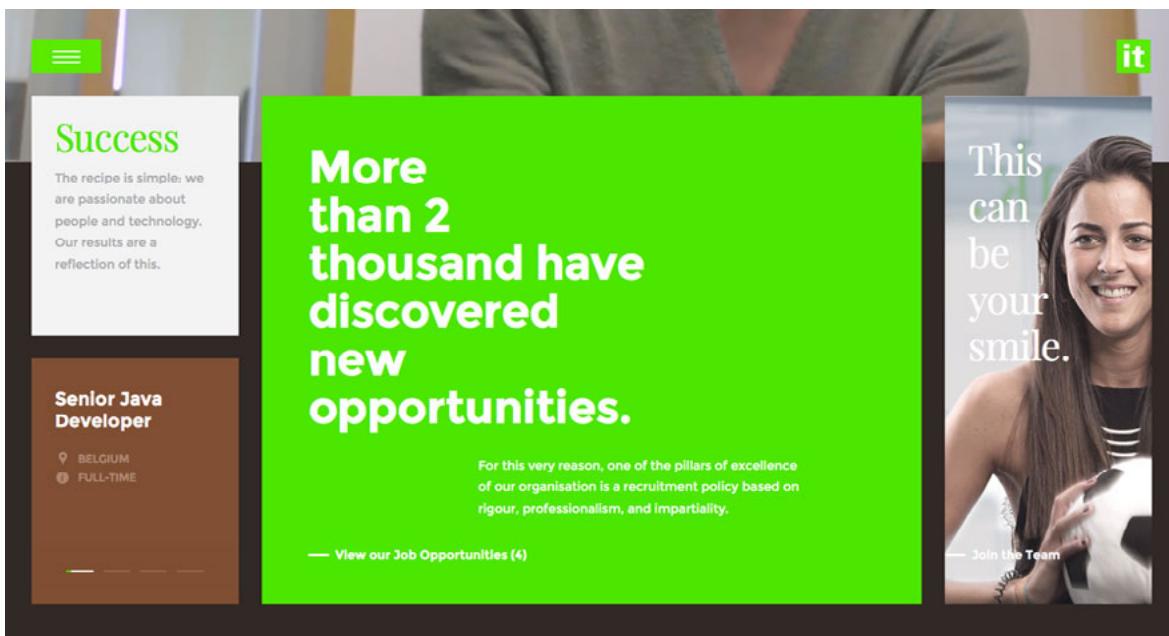
Cards were one of the biggest trends of 2015 and will continue to grow and evolve. What makes cards so popular is that they are easy for users to understand.



*Photo credit: [Under Armour Women](#)*

Every element is created in a container that relates to a specific action, such as activating a link, filling out a form, sharing on social media or watching a video. While the first cards looked very much

like playing cards in terms of design, newer card-style interfaces are much sleeker, such as [Under Armour Women](#) (above) and [Prime It](#) (below).



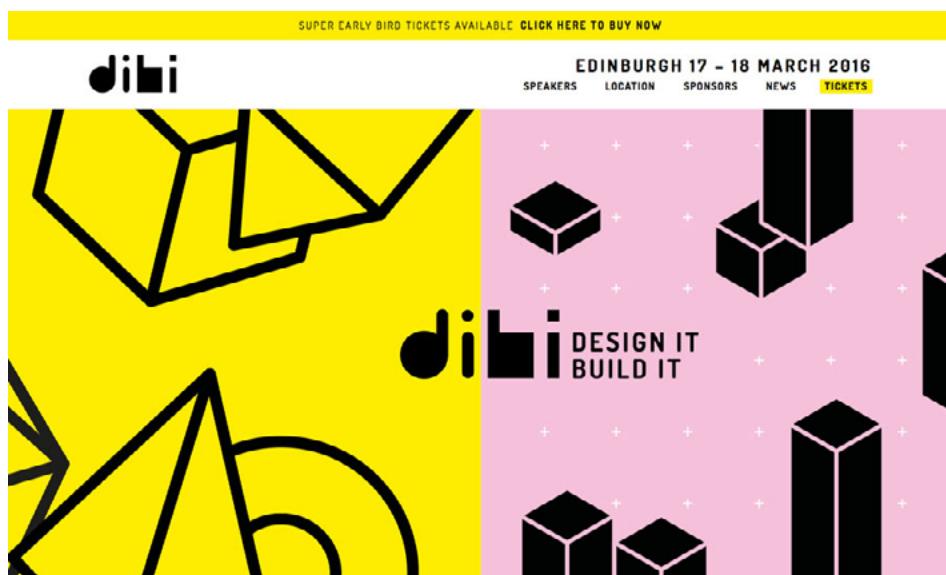
*Photo credit: Prime It*

Cards are digestible chunks of information. They work best when each one is a single thought, or primary action. And they work well with any form of content. You can use cards to create narrative or aide in discovery (like in the examples above).

If you want to learn more about using cards, check out the free [2016 Web Design Book of Trends](#).

# Split-Screen Layouts

One of the quickest emerging trends is split-screen design. In most cases this split screen falls into vertical panels for smaller devices, making it a good fit for responsive frameworks.



*Photo credit: Dibi Conference*

Think of split screens as an expansion of the card concept. Instead of many containers, the screen is divided into two content containers, each associated with a user action. But the trend can be purely aesthetic as well (and that's ok) with a split screen visual, such as [Dibi Conference](#) above.



*Photo credit: Si le Soleil*

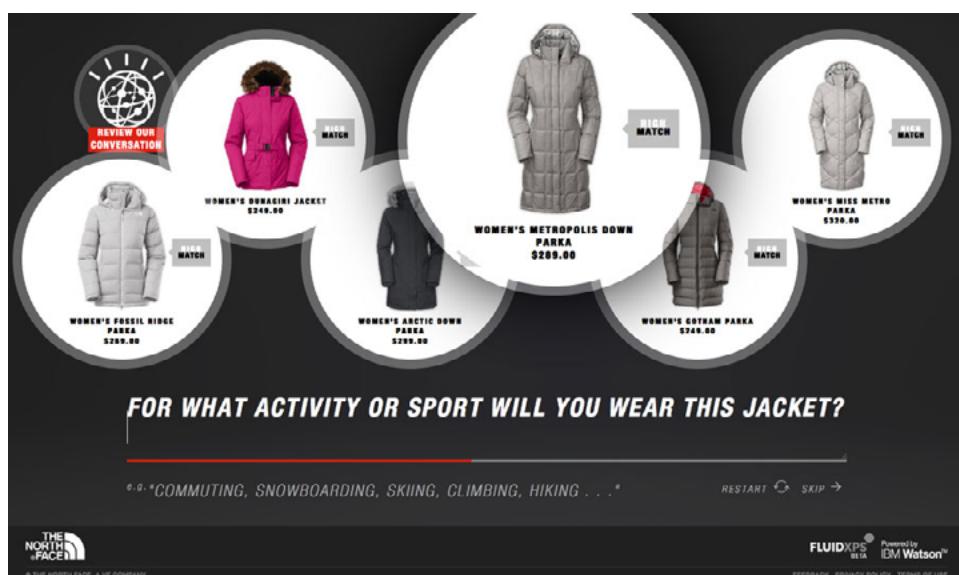
[Si le Soleil](#) uses split panels in the vein of cards. Each box is a clickable element that takes the users to a new bit of information. The design uses a variation of the split screen concept with a vertical divide with one panel facing a pair of panels. Breaking up the two-by-two split screen default creates even more visual interest.

The key to using the split screen is taking the use of space into account. It's not as easy as drawing a line down the middle. You must consider the relationship of the elements and text with each other. The rules of good visual design should still apply. If you want to explore space in more depth, check out the e-book [Web UI Design for the Human Eye](#).

# Precise Personalization

Users want to visit websites that “get them.”

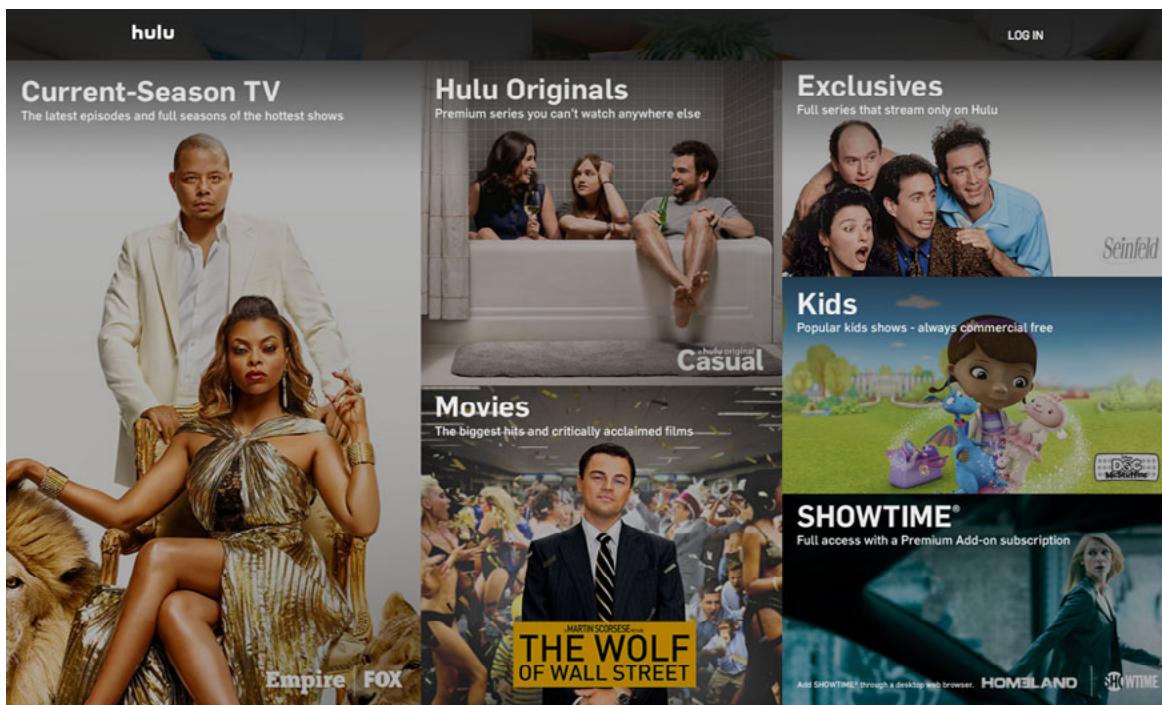
Amazon has been using this concept for years with personalized shopping options, lists and suggestions. More sites, particularly retail, are using personalization to appeal to customers.



*Photo credit: The North Face*

Personalization options can be something as simple as remembering a customer's name, preferences or cart or as intuitive as helping someone make a decision. [The North Face](#) has a tool powered by IBM's

smart computer that will help you buy items based on how you will use them. Watson, as the super-computer is named, helped me pick out a jacket based on my location, season of the year and style in a matter of minutes.



*Photo credit: Hulu*

Music and video streaming are in the middle of personalization. Sites such as [Hulu](#) (above), Netflix, Pandora and Spotify live off delivering custom preferences to users. The sites with the most robust personalization tools do this without the user even really knowing it. Hulu tracks the shows you watch to make recommendations, so users don't get stuck in long loops of forms.

More and more, we're going to see products that tailor to us as individuals than to all of us collectively.

# Bigger Typography

From increased body copy to oversized headlines, this will be the year of bigger typography. Growing type sizes is a carryover from mobile, where readability standards require fewer characters per line and greater space between lines of text. As users have grown more accustomed to this look, it is becoming more common on other devices as well. (And it sure does make reading easier!)

The website features a large, bold, black, sans-serif font for the main title "HABIT FORM HABITATS". The text is rotated diagonally and positioned over a photograph of a woman with long dark hair, sitting at a desk in a study filled with books. The website's navigation bar includes "FIVE PERSPECTIVES", "ISLAND BAY HOUSE", "APARTMENT RETREAT", "ASB SPORTS VENUE", "UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND", "RONA", "ALL", "STUDIO & CONTACT", and "LOGIN". On the left side, there is a sidebar with "01" and "ISLAND BAY HOUSE". The right side contains descriptive text about the house's design and its connection to the surrounding landscape.

Connection and separation are themes that run throughout this house. Inspired by the eroding channels in the rocks and cliffs far below the house, the interior has been thought of like carved lines through the topography. Clefts and cliffs are etched into the plan of the house like in the separation of the upstairs bedrooms, and sun is grabbed wherever it can be.

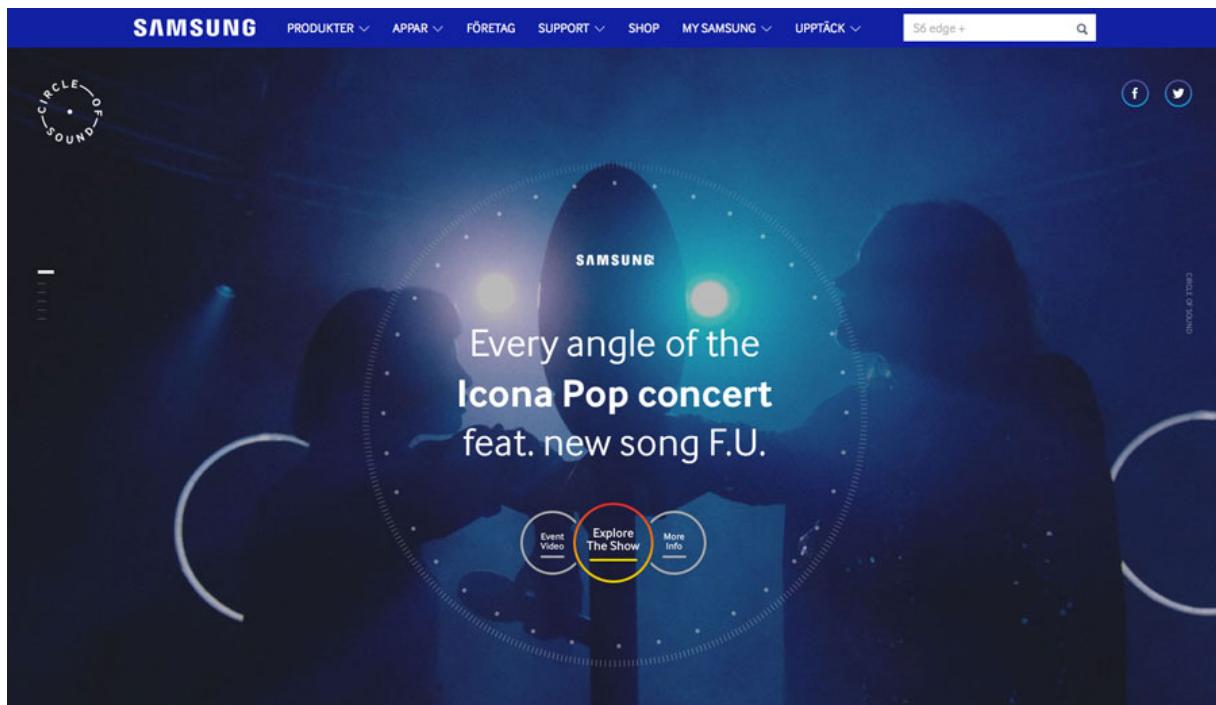
At the top of the stairs, just outside Rona's room, is an anteroom with a deep window seat. It is one of those spaces that would be labelled sketchily on the plans with some vague notation of 'nook' or alcove'. It, like the adjoining hall-cum-sitting space, is flexible, neither bedroom nor lounge nor study, and yet is all of those things.

Matt's large study is on the lowest floor and Alyson had reservations about this 'man cave' being so separated from the rest of the house. She was gratified then, when she found Hugh had understood her concerns and designed the edge of the stairs to be open, allowing Alyson to call down from her own study and the two to talk comfortably while still being in their own spaces.

The site sits on the edge of a 45m cliff facing south over Taputeranga Island in Island Bay with magnificent views of the harbour entrance, Cook Strait and the South Island Kaikouras. The clients desired a large family home that responded to the dramatic views, was spacious, low maintenance, warm and able to accommodate their large collection of New Zealand paintings and ceramics.

*Photo credit: Tennent Brown*

Tennent Brown uses huge type styles to draw users in, but look closely at the body copy as well. It is bolder and larger than you might find for other blogs or sites with large text blocks. The result is highly readable; something users of all ages will like.



*Photo credit: Samsung*

While Samsung's [Circle of Sound](#) site is not all that text heavy, all of the lettering is a little larger than you might expect. Note the site of navigational elements and secondary text. Here's a design tip to takeaway from this site: Close editing and a well-organized structure make it easier to do more with fewer words.

# Return of the Scroll

After years of discussing the demise of the scroll, user are embracing scroll in a major way thanks to effects such as parallax, animation and familiarity because of mobile usage. The trick to making scroll work is that it has to be more than just function, it needs to be visually intriguing and include some type of delight for users.



*Photo credit: 99 Properties of Power Movie*

The scroll effects for [99 Properties of Power](#) is just fun, which helps to keep users engaged. Each flick of the mouse wheel takes users to a new profile of a character from the movie. The “screens” are perfectly proportioned and contain just enough information to read quickly and move to the next page.



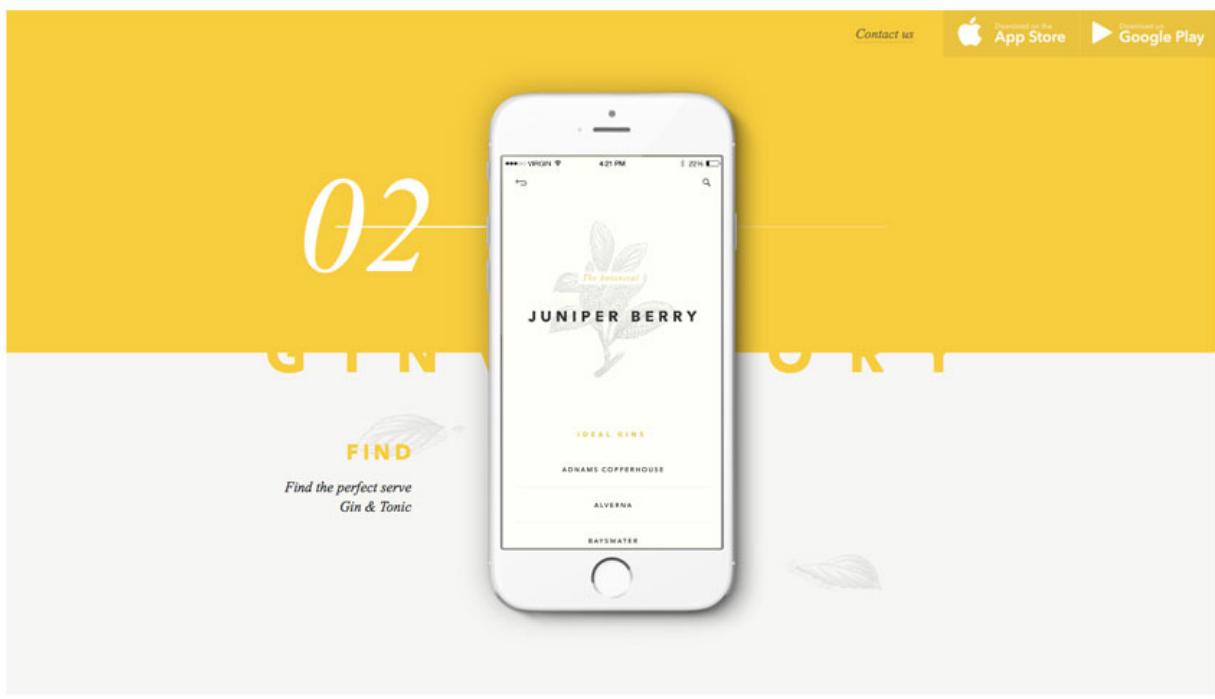
*Photo credit: Panache*

Panache uses parallax scrolling to create a fun kaleidoscope of patterns and text. The site works because it mixes bold color and scrolling with simple, subdued pages in the scroll. This helps users know when to keep moving and when to pause and look more closely at the content.

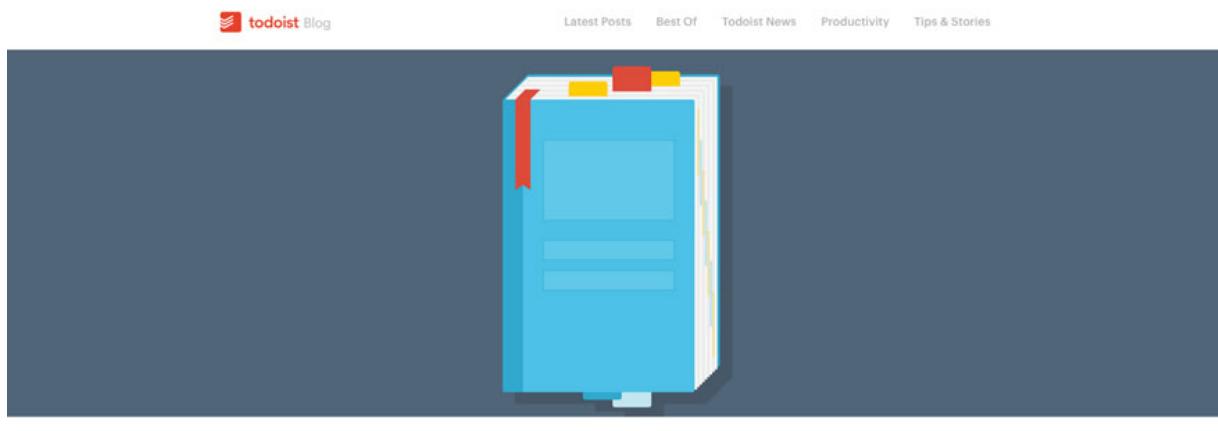
Engagement is the key here. If the scroll isn't entertaining, frustrated users will bounce from the page.

# Continued Flat Evolution

Flat design will stick around for yet another year. Whether you prefer to call it Almost Flat, Flat 2.0 or something else, this simple style is the mainstay of plenty of designers. The biggest steps in the evolution of flat will come in the form of [Material Design](#), thanks to the large adoption rate of the Google-based design pattern.



*Photo credit: [Ginventory](#)*



## The Ultimate Guide to Personal Productivity Methods

by TRICINA ELLIKER | NOVEMBER 30, 2015 | PRODUCTIVITY

The right productivity method can make a huge difference in your work. A friction-less workflow can take you from feeling overwhelmed, unfocused, and unproductive to feeling calm, in control, and prepared to take on even the biggest projects.

*Photo credit: Todoist*

Sites, such as [Ginventory](#) and [Todoist](#), have embraced the flat/material style across platforms. The key difference between simply flat and material is mostly in the way a site or app works. Interfaces with more physical interactions are closer to material, while more limited usage as a whole of effects is mostly flat.

While Material Design initially started as a Google/Android design interface, it is being embraced across the Android-iOS divide.

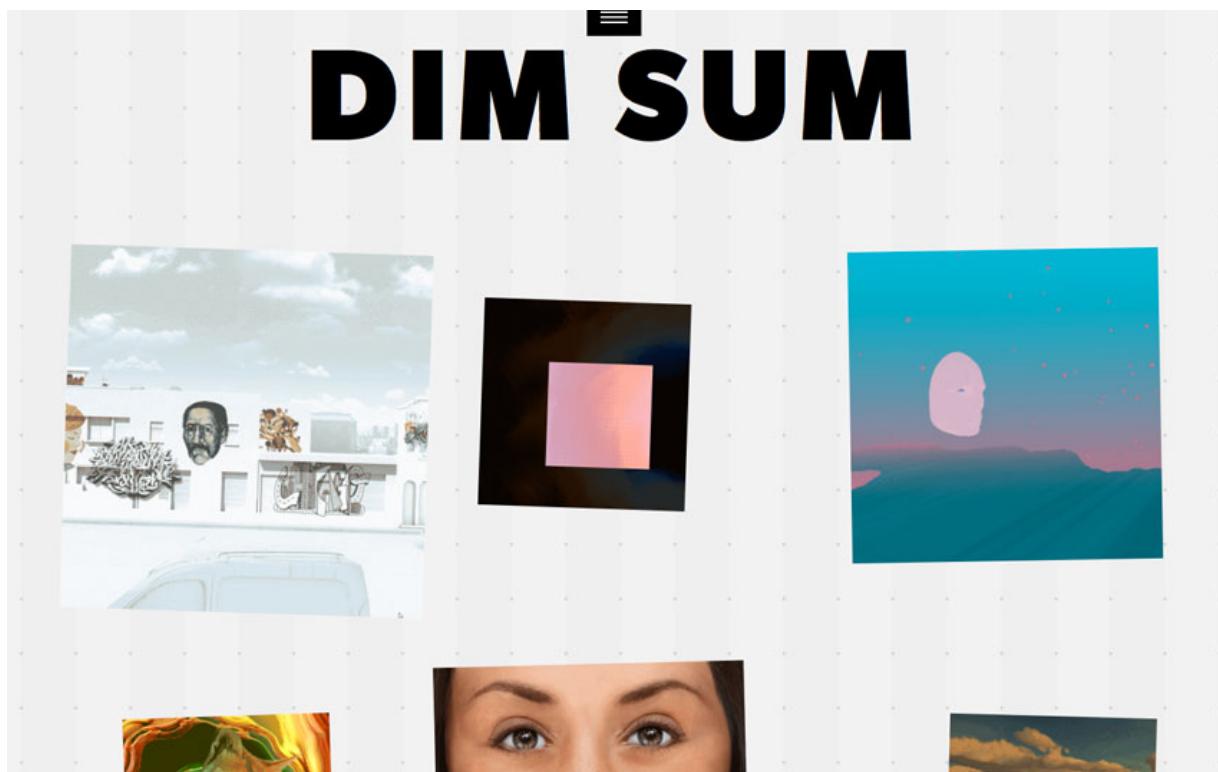
# Tiny Animations

Animation is a big deal. Tiny animation is an even bigger deal.

Successful movement in website design does not have to be in your face. Subtle actions are the best uses of movement in design. Think things like hover states, loading animations or just plain surprises hidden in hero imagery.



Photo credit: [Keep Portland Weird](#)



*Photo credit: Dim Sum*

Keep Portland Weird and Dim Sum use animation in quite different ways. Portland's illustrated page includes little bits of movement throughout to help users focus on specific bits of content. Dim Sum uses animated containers to encourage clicks for new bits of information, in what is otherwise a super-simple design.

Animations don't need to be grandiose to make an impact. Sometimes the tinier, the better.

# Takeaway

2016 is the year in which the line between apps and websites dissolves.

Early indicators show that more designers are pulling concepts from apps and small-screen website design into all of their projects.

Perhaps the biggest change, however, will take place between our ears. New ways of thinking will lead us to innovative solutions that this year's design challenges present. Responsive design in particular forces us to think of products as conversations in which users have some say in the final outcome.

Design will be bigger, bolder and more app-like across devices. Better technology will make it possible for more users to have greater access to higher quality, more bandwidth-intensive designs. And they seem to like it.

[Design faster website prototypes in UXPin \(free trial\)](#)

# Everything you ever wanted in a **UX Design Platform**

- ✓ Complete prototyping framework for web and mobile
- ✓ Collaboration and feedback for any team size
- ✓ Lo-fi to hi-fi design in a single tool
- ✓ Integration with Photoshop and Sketch

**Start using it now!**