Your Cheatsheet For Creating Memorable Design

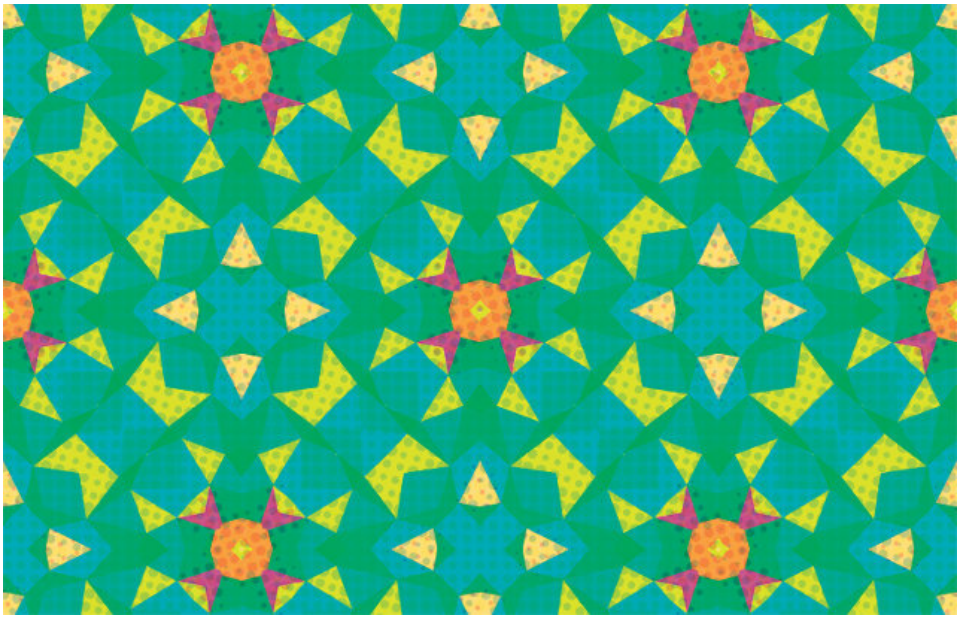
OUR MEMORIES OF EXPERIENCES--MORE THAN THE EXPERIENCES THEMSELVES--DRIVE DECISION-MAKING. JEREMY FINCH OF ALTITUDE EXPLAINS HOW TO INCORPORATE THIS INTO YOUR BUSINESS.

WRITTEN BY Jeremy Finch

What we experience and what we remember about what we've experienced are two totally different things. Most product design efforts are directed towards the former. Research from leading cognitive scientists, however, suggests that we should focus on the latter. That's because our memories of experiences, more than the experiences themselves, drive most of our future decision-making.

Lots of ink has already been spilled on the importance of first impressions. Advertising, packaging, retail display, the unboxing process, etc. But the quest to win a single purchase decision today is no longer sufficient. Winning the elusive lifelong customer requires not just a good first impression, but also a delightful and engaging sign-off moment. And yet there is still comparatively less discussion around creating a great last impression.

While the idea of "sending people off on a high note" is certainly not new to people in service or hospitality businesses (or digital UX design, for that matter), it's relatively overlooked in the world of physical product design. But as the lines between product and service blur, it becomes important to design product experiences that conclude with positive moments,



memories, and associations.

So, what sticks with us? What fades away? (And why?)

Some experiences leave us with vivid memories--others quickly float off into the ether. Leading behavioral economists, such as Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman, have proposed some illuminating answers to this memory paradox. Research has shown that we're made up of two "selves," and these selves care about totally different things. Our "experiencing self" is concerned with what's happening in the immediate moment. And our "remembering self" evaluates and stores each experience and determines whether or not it's worth experiencing again.

"THE EVALUATIVE REMEMBERING SELF DRIVES THE MAJORITY OF OUR DECISION-MAKING."

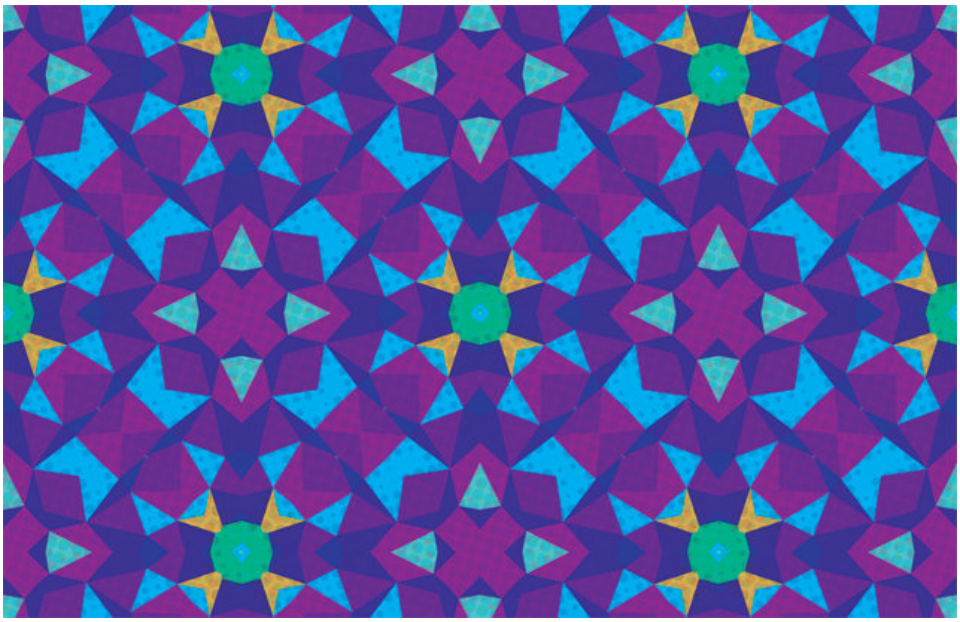
The evaluative "remembering self" drives the majority of our decision-making. And it's primarily concerned with two areas: peaks and ends. In other words: How was an experience at its best or worst moments? And what was the general feeling as the experience came to a close? The influence of the "remembering self" leads us to choose not just between products or experiences, but also between *memories*--both real and anticipated--of those experiences themselves.

So what makes for that especially good memory? And how can designers adapt their approach to product design in order to intentionally create deeply positive associations?

BEWARE DIFFICULT LAST STEPS

If your last touchpoint with a product is a negative one, it can color the entire memory. With many kitchen appliances, in particular, clean up and put-away efforts are easily overlooked. The Acme Juicerator, for example, which requires significant amounts of post-juicing cleaning and disassembly, may get relegated to "below-the-counter" status, despite the fact that the juicing experience itself is effective and enjoyable.

Is it really that bad? After carefully peeling and juicing your fruits and vegetables, and enjoying a glass of the hard-earned elixir, the process concludes with 15 minutes of washing pulp and vegetable shavings off of the internal juicing screen. That's no joy. And because of that, perhaps you'll be hesitant to use that juicer next time.



On the other hand, when a product has been thoughtfully designed to offer a positive ending, the user walks away more satisfied--even happy. For example, automatic cord-winders on vacuums and electric mowers make it easier for users to neatly wrap up and store those devices after use. Similarly, the quick-release valves on the AeroBed make takedown and put-away fast and stress-free. Its reversible valves allow owners to rapidly deflate the mattress and automatically suction out the remaining air before storage.

MAKE IT MULTISENSORY

Think about the signature "whoomp" sound when you slam a car door. It may seem like the result of random acoustics, but it's far from it. Those slams are rigorously studied and tuned by teams of sound designers to produce a signature auditory interaction.

Research suggests that customers perceive higher-frequency ("tinny") door slam sounds as signs of structural weakness and fragility. Deeper, bass-ier "thuds" on the other hand, communicate that the door has been shut successfully and that the car is secure and structurally robust. Potential car buyers seem to associate those deeper sounds with luxury brands, an insight that Lexus and BMW have capitalized on (and legally defended). Sound design is an important part of car design overall, but a good, solid door thud imparts particular confidence, trust, and status--especially after a driver has just parked his or her car and is walking away.

"ANNOYING DETAILS CAN CREATE DEEP WELLS OF USER RESENTMENT."

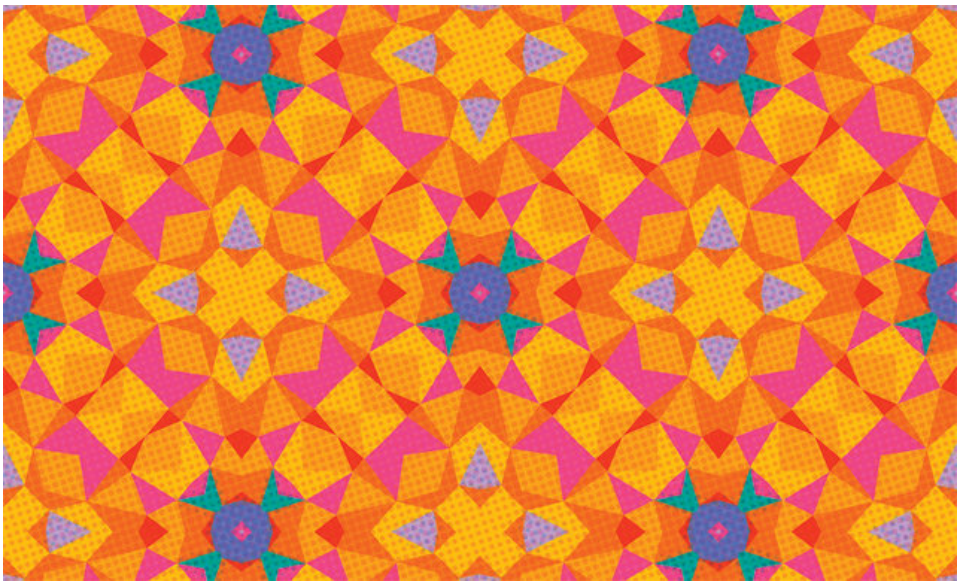
Annoying little details (like irksome noises) can create deep wells of user resentment, especially in recurring product interactions. Take ATMs, for example. Bank of America's machines create shrill

beeping sounds when printing receipts, creating a unrelenting cacophony of noises while customers finish their regular deposits and withdrawals.

PROVIDE POSITIVE FEEDBACK

Every product sign-off moment is an opportunity to provide feedback, on both emotional and functional levels. The (recently beleaguered) Nest Protect, for example, tried to disrupt the smoke detector market by creating an intelligent, interactive product (rather than just another cylindrical safety commodity). Nest's designers realized that the Protect could alert users to the presence of danger while also providing emotional reassurance when everything was normal.

So when a Nest owner turns off her lights, the Protect gently pulses green before going dark, signaling to the home's inhabitants that it'll remain present and attentive, even while they rest. It's not too dissimilar from the way the MacBook Air's lights fade and "breathe" after being put into sleep mode.



Dashboard car interfaces engage on more functional levels: Hybrid car customers, in particular, are especially interested in fuel savings (for both economic and environmental reasons). Because of this, the Ford

Fusion Hybrid's dashboard includes the "EcoGuide," which provides suggestions on energy-saving driving strategies and efficient regenerative braking techniques. When in "tutorial mode," the display reveals animated green plants and vines, which grow additional leaves while the driver is operating the vehicle most efficiently. When drivers conclude the trip, they can assess their performance by looking at the number of green leaves that they've added to their plant. This instills a sense of pride and satisfaction while providing concrete feedback on operating the vehicle more efficiently.

Ultimately, when I think of my own experiences with great endings, my mind lands on yoga class: After working and stretching and twisting for an hour, my favorite yoga classes end with shavasana (a fancy name for socially sanctioned adult nap time). Class participants lie quiet and motionless while the teacher covers them in blankets and massages their temples. No matter how difficult the first 50 minutes of class were, the last 10 minutes are the same: easy, effortless, calm, and relaxed. And as I walk out of class--dazed and floating on a post-shavasana cloud--I always want to go back and do it again. Our approach to product design should be the same.

[Image: Abstract via Shutterstock]

JEREMY FINCH

Jeremy Finch is a strategist at the award-wining design and innovation consultancy Altitude, which creates b... Continued

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