



More Padding, Please!

The power of white space in product design



Patrick J. Condon [Follow](#)

Sep 22, 2017 · 5 min read

If you overhear a design QA session between a product designer and an engineer, odds are you'll hear the product designer say something like this:

"Can you add 8 pixels of padding here and also there? ... Actually, let's make it 16 pixels."

At Wayfair, we are lucky enough to work alongside engineers who are understanding and open to our continuous requests. However, I'm sure some engineers see us as "pixel crazy". And to be fair, a few of us are. But trust me, there is a method to our madness.

*

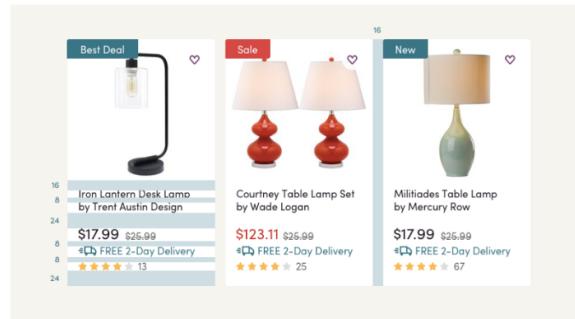
So, why are product designers so picky about padding?

Padding, also known as white space, is the empty space between and around individual elements of a page layout; these elements could be pieces of copy, images, cards, buttons, icons, etc. When used correctly, white space brings visual clarity and balance to a layout.

Think of white space as a breath of fresh air. Just as humans need air to breathe, designs need white space to breathe. Yes, this may sound corny. But I stand by this.

How does Wayfair tackle white space?

As I mentioned earlier, there is a method to our madness. At Wayfair, our product design team follows a strict padding rule to ensure consistency and easy maintenance across site. This rule is embedded into our design toolkit, a collection of user interface design elements that are the building blocks for all of our site designs. The rule states that the spacing between every design element should be a multiple of 8 pixels; this means that the spacing could be 8, 16, 24, 32, 40 pixels and so on. This rule brings intentionality to our use of white space and creates visual consistency across our site experience.

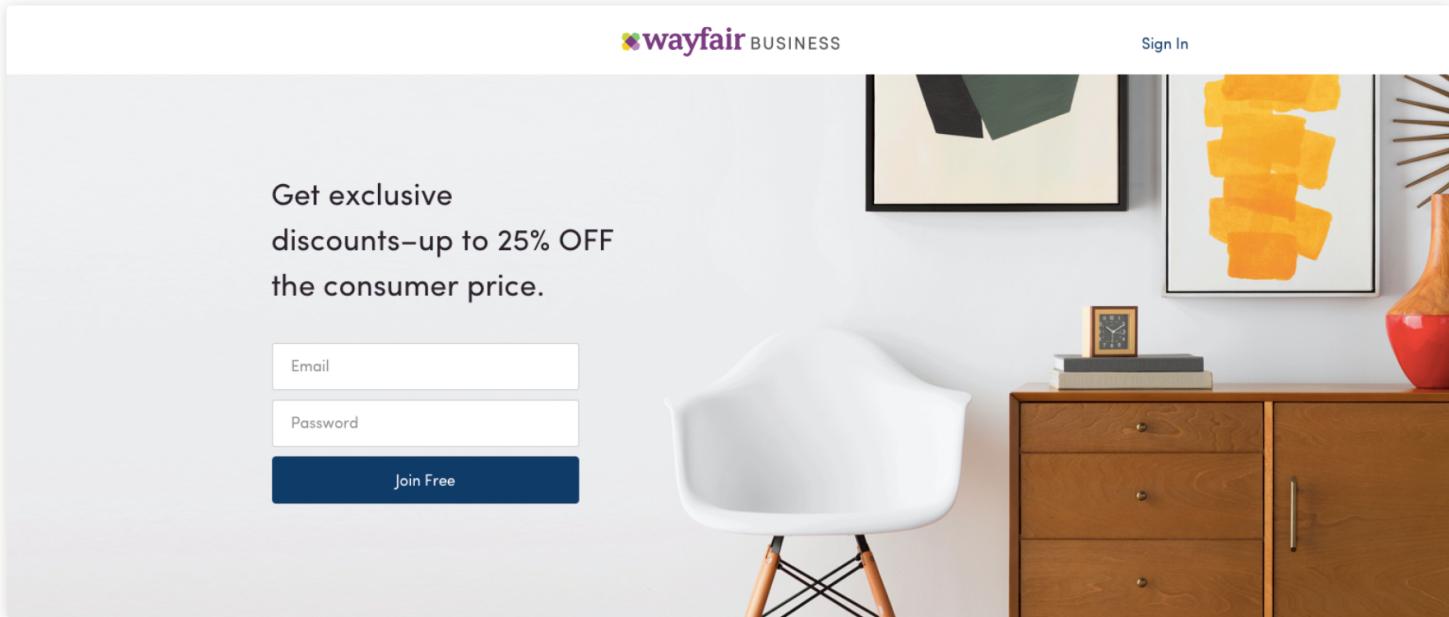


"Rule of 8" in action

How can white space improve the user experience?

It helps maintain focus

White space is a tool that helps guide the user experience. We use white space to create focus points for our users drawing their attention to certain elements. The greater the padding around a particular element on a page, the greater the emphasis on that element. In the example below, focus is clearly maintained on the call to action and the primary messaging.



Aaaah, drink in all that white space

Unfortunately, we do not always have the luxury of this kind of white space. This is a rarity, so enjoy it while it lasts. On a typical e-commerce page, a product designer is faced with the challenge of balancing multiple calls to action, secondary links, imagery, pieces of copy—the list goes on. The example below showcases our product details page (PDP), a page that demands a lot from our user. Strategically placed white space helps our user navigate the visual noise on this page and potentially increases conversion.

The image displays two side-by-side screenshots of the Wayfair product detail page for a "Kinder Chevron White/Black Area Rug".

Left Screenshot (Poor White Space Usage): This version has a very cluttered appearance. It features a large central image of the rug with a potted plant on it. Below the image is a red promotional banner for "14% off". To the left of the banner are several dropdown menus for "Select Color" (Black & White), "Select Size" (8' x 10'), and "Quantity" (1). To the right of the banner are two prominent buttons: a dark blue "Add to Cart" button and a light blue "Save to Idea Board" button.

Right Screenshot (Good White Space Usage): This version is much cleaner. It has a similar layout but with more negative space. The central image of the rug is larger and more prominent. The promotional banner for "14% off" is smaller and positioned lower. The dropdown menus for color, size, and quantity are aligned to the left of the banner. The "Add to Cart" and "Save to Idea Board" buttons are also present but appear less crowded due to the surrounding white space.

It improves visual organization

In addition to highlighting areas of focus, white space plays a huge role in the visual organization of a page. White space is essential to clarifying relationships and separating sections with different purposes; it is also the driving force behind the Gestalt Principle of Proximity, which states:

Objects or shapes that are close to one another appear to form groups.

Clearly defining different parts of a page increases our user's confidence in the site experience; forcing our user to think through a confusing layout is something every product designer wants to avoid. The following example showcases Wayfair's homepage, a page that could easily appear overwhelming if white space was not used properly.

This version of the Wayfair homepage lacks effective white space. The 'Recently Viewed' and 'Limited-Time Deals' sections are placed directly next to each other without any visual separation, making the layout feel cramped and disorganized.

This version of the Wayfair homepage demonstrates improved white space organization. The 'Recently Viewed' and 'Limited-Time Deals' sections are clearly separated by vertical white space, creating a more balanced and readable layout.



White space clearly defines the different sections on Wayfair's homepage

It increases readability

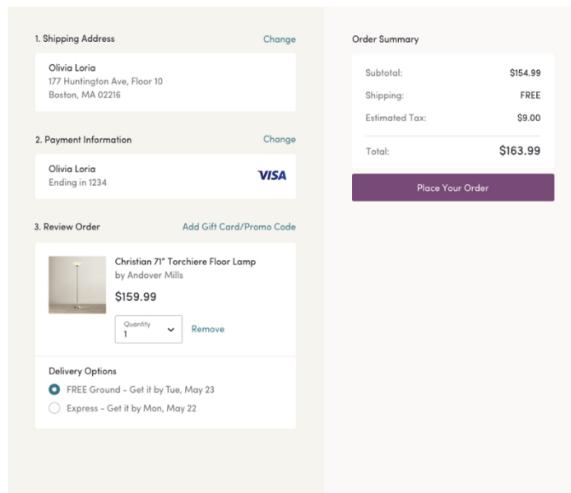
In addition to defining the organization of a page, white space can greatly improve the readability of a page. It's important to be mindful about the spacing between lines of copy—and even letters—as thoughtful spacing will make it easier for the user to digest. More spacing is generally better, but too much could potentially make lines of copy feel disconnected. It's all about finding the right balance.

Medium (yes, this site) does a great job of considering white space in its copy settings. If you're reading this article on a larger screen, check out the vastness of white space in the margins. *Medium* knows what's up.

What are common concerns around white space?

"White space is wasted space!"

This is a myth. White space is not wasted space. There is a tendency for some of our stakeholders to fill white space with more content when it is not always necessary. Everyone has heard the saying "less is more". This applies to content on any given page, where less visual noise makes for a better user experience. On Wayfair's checkout flow (seen below), the white space underneath the main call to action may be vast but it beautifully balances and supports the elements on this page.



Large areas of white space do NOT need to be filled with content

"White space pushes content below the fold and users will not see this content!"

* Top highlight

Users will scroll and scroll some more. I promise you. There is this myth that users will not always scroll to see all the content on a page. Thus, some of our stakeholders request that the majority of a page's content lives above the fold.

Users have evolved and become more comfortable with scrolling. There are definitely certain elements that are best suited above the fold, but it's important not to limit the use of white space to accommodate for the fold.

Conclusion

Every product designer wants to design the best possible user experience; with this in mind, white space is a powerful tool that can help achieve this from a user interface perspective. It should be heavily integrated into the design process.

Think you're using too much white space? There's a good chance you're not. If anything, you're probably not using enough. When in doubt, add more white space...

Special thanks goes out to Connor Doherty. Check out his [article](#) on UX Copywriting.

Interested in joining the Wayfair product design team? [Browse our open positions here](#).

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11.1K claps



35



ooo



Patrick J. Condon
Product Designer @ Wayfair

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Responses

Write a response...

Applause from Patrick J. Condon (author)



Laura Niebel
Sep 27, 2017

Tom, you could use some of the reasons mentioned in this article (and others), when talking to stakeholders. I think if you give logical reasons (and don't just say the app or website looks better with plenty of white space) you might have a chance convincing people. Or do two versions of certain screens to actually also show the difference.



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Applause from Patrick J. Condon (author)



Anthony Fonte
Oct 2, 2017

Users will scroll and scroll some more. I promise you.



5



Applause from Patrick J. Condon (author)



Jan Zheng
Sep 29, 2017

Whitespace can definitely increase usability and readability, but don't forget that it very much depends on what user needs are. Sometimes higher information density is more useful than gobs of whitespace, again depending on application, though clever use of whitespace does help with grouping and our mental processing of information.



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Applause from Patrick J. Condon (author)



Tony Yeung
Sep 27, 2017

White space is important.

I worked with many people who believed "white space is wasted space" and requested to put advertisements spaces. It ended up making my design like a cheap freelancers design, and then came back to me complain how shitty the design is.

I really hope that people understand the trend of design. Less is more. White space is not empty.



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Applause from Patrick J. Condon (author)



Durrant Santeng
Sep 27, 2017

This is definitely justified and executed very well.

7



Patrick J. Condon
Sep 27, 2017 · 1 min read

Tom Adcock

I would suggest sending non-UXer's this article in order to convince them.

Just kidding...

I want to echo what Laura stated. I've also found it really comes down to having a great relationship with your project managers, developers, etc. They should look to you for...

Read more...

6

8

Applause from Patrick J. Condon (author)



Raymond Uphoff
Oct 6, 2017 · 1 min read

Padding, Margin or ways of creating whitespace emphasise the rule of Proximity of the [Gestalt-theory](#). I believe Similarity and Proximity are the most powerful tools of Gestalt for clear appealing and easy to understand GUI's on presentation-level.

Read more...

8

2 responses

8

Applause from Patrick J. Condon (author)



Catherine Reinehr
Oct 7, 2017

Your rule of 8 is fantastic. I've never considered incorporating that specifically into a design/style guide—mostly because the design teams where I've worked have been only one or two people—but it makes so much sense.

8

8

Applause from Patrick J. Condon (author)



Patrik Michalicka
Sep 29, 2017

Great article. Keep it up. :-)

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13

Applause from Patrick J. Condon (author)



Adolfo Jayme
Sep 30, 2017

a method to our madness

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Applause from Patrick J. Condon (author)



Jk Junkyung Kim
Sep 29, 2017

pixel crazy

Pixel Crazy is the word I have never heard

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Conversation between Kristin Currier Ludlow and Patrick J. Condon.



Kristin Currier Ludlow
Nov 14, 2017

One of the best things I've read regarding white space. I find it becomes an element of the design that is just as important as anything else. Your rule of 8s is fantastic and I am going to show this to my ecommerce team.

(We are furniture too ;)

6

1 response

6



Patrick J. Condon
Nov 14, 2017

Much appreciated Kristin!

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Applause from Patrick J. Condon (author)

 Ren Reynolds
Sep 29, 2017

Brilliant – I am always arguing that there isn't enough white space, I always get the same old outdated comments you stated here.

Thanks 

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Applause from Patrick J. Condon (author)

 Fitri Indah Cahyani
Oct 2, 2017

Cool article! Thanks for sharing :)

 5



Applause from Patrick J. Condon (author)

 Manuel Becker
Oct 1, 2017

Great article and something I am telling my customers everyday... :-)

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