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UXPin

Timeless UX Design Trends:

Web UX Design

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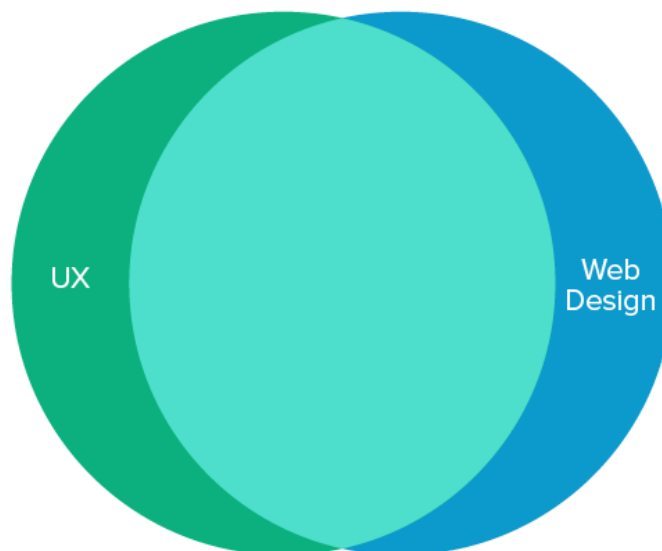
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Introduction

One of the most noticed UX trends – and arguably the most important – is the rise of UX within web design.



Since the web was freed from the desktop, designers can no longer just build web pages.

All designers must know how to design a fluid experience to flow into any device. Web design is simply an expression of UX design. Know your user's motivation and goals, then create an experience that empowers them while remaining true to the brand.

In this pocket guide, we'll explore the evolution of web design, tactics to perfect your UX, and analyze examples of great web experience design from notable companies.

Web Design Is More Than Skin Deep

Not all modern advances in web design encourage a UX-centric design over traditional silos.

The removal of technical hindrances means a lot more practitioners at a professional level. This influx brings with it an amount of superficiality, as designers easily fall into the trap of using aesthetics as a shortcut to stand out (beware [your own ego](#)).

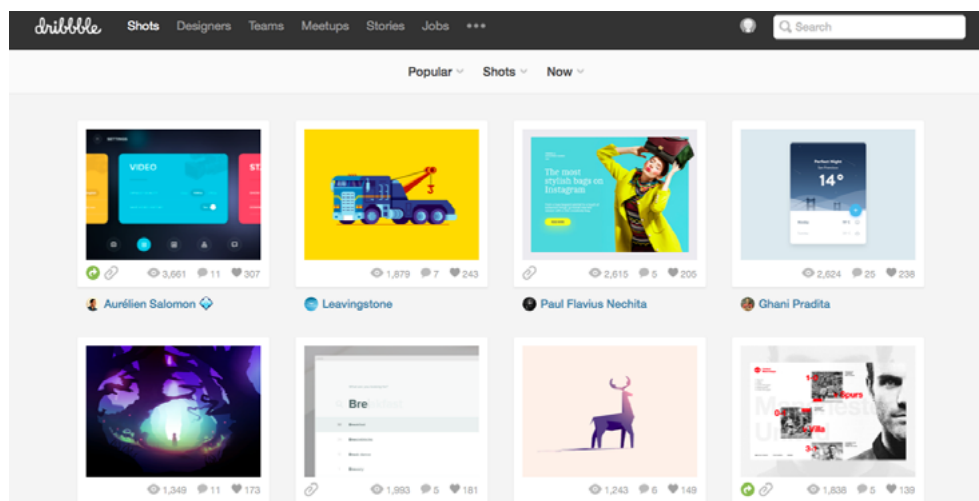


Photo credit: [Dribbble](#)

[Intercom](#) calls it the [Dribbbilisation of Design](#). Communities like Dribbble (which is a good site with some unfortunate side effects) reward

and promote visual; designs only, with little reference to how they fit into the design as a whole. It's like analyzing a portion of a painting without taking a step back to appreciate the big picture.

The important thing to remember when confronted with this rival trend is that praise on Dribbble from other designers does not make a design successful with the user. Design only succeeds when it solves a user problem appropriately.

Remember that only good UX can assure that.

Understanding UI vs. UX

Of course, it helps to understand the distinction between great UI and great UX. UI and UX are not in competition – they are two elements of a design that always work together.

- **UI is the user interface.** This comprises everything a user can see and touch, such as menu options, buttons, text, layouts, navigation elements, sharing options, etc. In short, if you choose to abandon text links for a slider navigation, that's a UI change.
- **UX is *why* you made that change to affect how the user feels and behaves.** The user experience is an umbrella term for the user's overall experience with the product: what they liked about it, how easily they accomplished their goals, moments of delight and frustration, etc.

The UI is the paint, the canvas, the types of strokes and colors. The UX is the wonder you feel when you see the girl in the pearl earring.

Let's break it down to an easy-to-understand example: iTunes – as well as many other music players – allows a drag-and-drop interface to create playlists and arrange the song in any order they like.

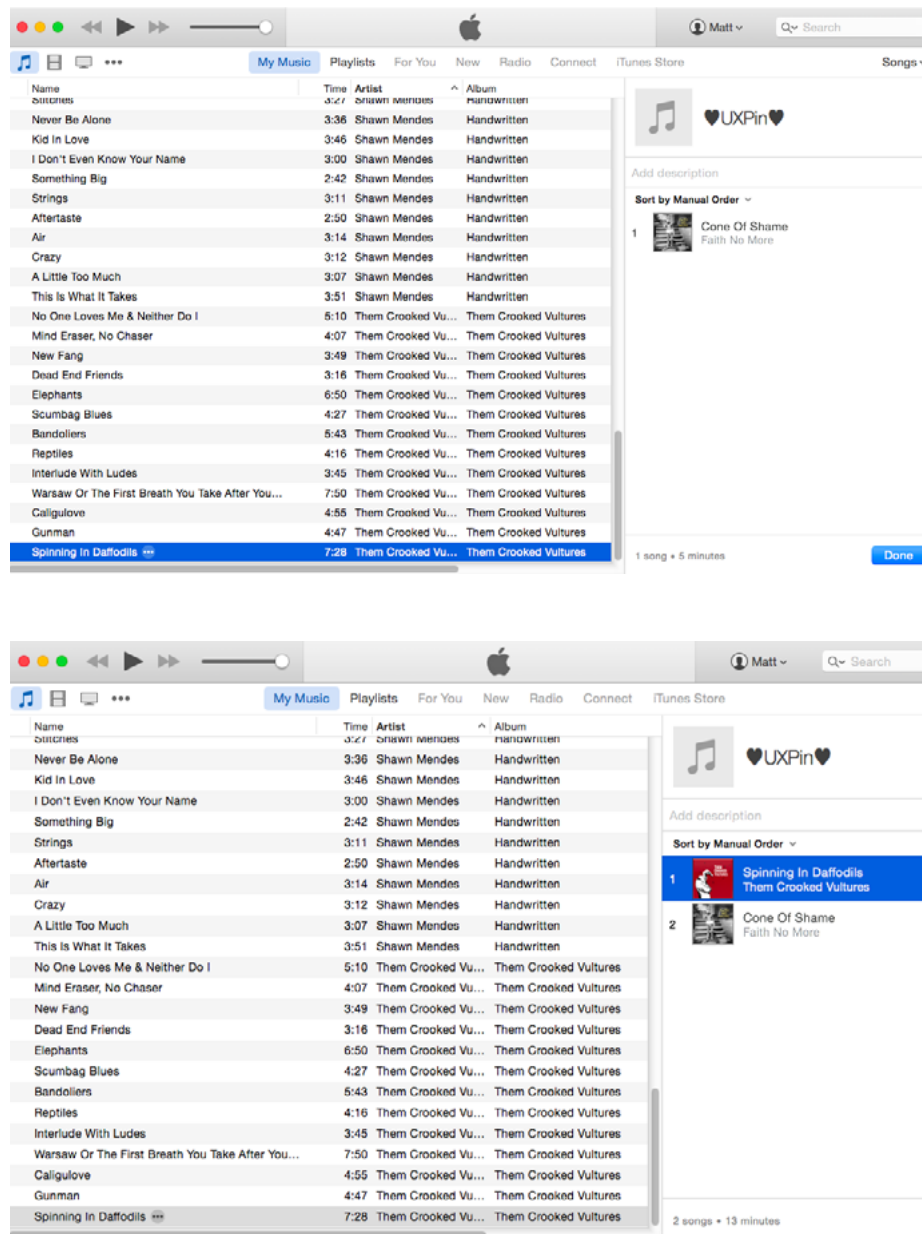


Photo credit: [iTunes](#)

Choices like the drag-and-drop interface and the feature to customize the song order are UI decisions. However, they were made with the UX in mind: drag-and-drop gives immediacy, control, and above all convenience, plus the feature to customize the playlist order makes

the ultimate experience of listening to music more enjoyable – they can pick the order they want and then just sit back to enjoy it.

UX concerns itself with abstract elements like emotions, [storytelling](#), and understanding, while UI is the way in which a design handles these. UI is the vehicle, but UX should drive.

When it comes to web design, it's easy to focus purely on the UI. After all, that's what clients and stakeholders can see and touch, so that's where you'll probably hear the most feedback. But always remind them of the UX reasoning, otherwise everyone ends up worrying about the paint when the foundation might be cracked.

The Democratization of UI Design

Focusing on UX has always been the best way to design – the idea has existed since renowned designer Don Norman [popularized the term](#) in the early 90s. However, recent advancements have made this benefit a competitive advantage for designers in the wake of self-serve web design.

In his controversial piece [Why Web Design is Dead](#), Sergio Nouvel explains the current reasons why the old ways of web design are on their way out. While his piece takes a more extreme view of web design, we certainly agree with his reasoning for why web designers must evolve.

1. Commodification from templates

Anyone can create their own site in a matter of hours using templates from a service like WordPress or Templatemonster, or design a shanty site on apps like RapidWeaver. Businesses strapped for cash and time don't need to hire a web UI designer. In order to stay competitive, web designers must now know how to sell the power of experience design.

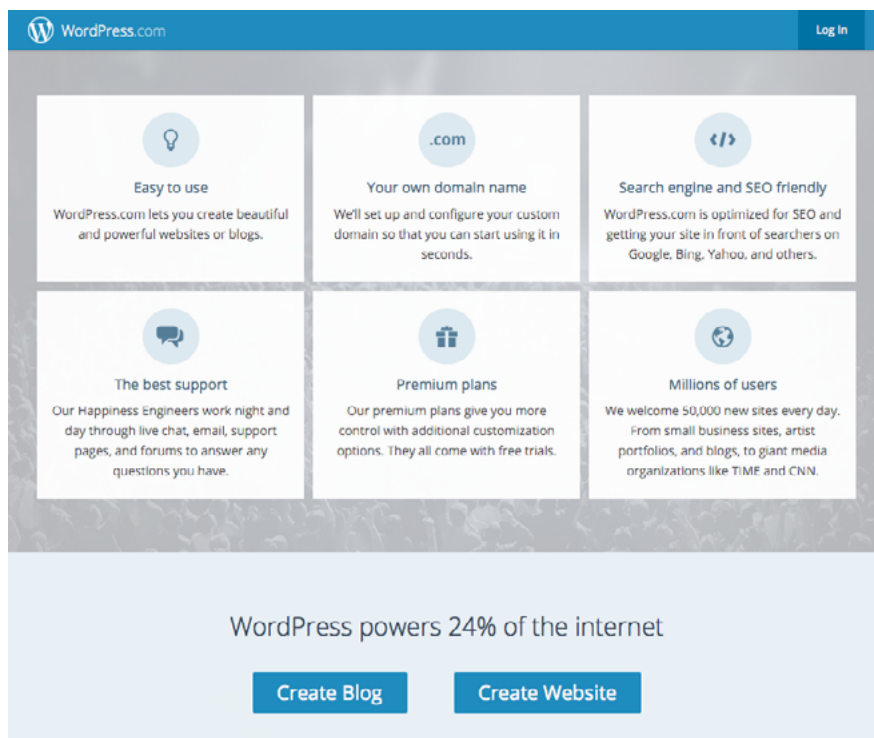


Photo credit: [WordPress](#)

2. Advanced design patterns

In the same vein, established [design patterns](#) take a degree of guesswork out of modern web design. For example, online shopping carts usually feature the same familiar format (i.e., page-by-page setup) so designers don't have to "reinvent the wheel" for each new site. Instead, the tricky part is choosing (and customizing) the patterns for different sites to create the appropriate experience.

For example, the multi-step form pattern makes sense for [Virgin America](#) since the airline must collect more information to book the right flight for users. In that case, multiple steps "chunk out" the process for users who are already motivated to buy. However, that same multi-step form isn't so appropriate for a political campaign site where you want to collect money as quickly as possible. To make that type of judgment call, you must know UX design.

Traveler Alerts: San Francisco, Austin, Los Angeles & JFK [More](#)

BOOK **CHECK IN** **MANAGE** Deals Flying With Us Where We Fly Fees Flight Status Flight Alerts

☐ Round Trip ☐ One Way ☒ Multi City

1 Shop from **San Francisco** to **Select City**

AUSTIN TX (AUS)	BOSTON MA (BOS)	CANCUN MEXICO (CUN)	CHICAGO IL (ORD)	DALLAS TX (DAL)	FT. LAUDERDALE FL (FLL)
HONOLULU HI (HNL)	LAS VEGAS NV (LAS)	LOS ANGELES CA (LAX)	LOS CABOS MEXICO (SJD)	MAUI / KAHULUI HI (OGG)	NEW YORK CITY ALL AIRPORTS (NYC)
NEW YORK/EWR NJ (EWR)	NEW YORK/JFK NY (JFK)	NEW YORK/LGA NY (LGA)	ORLANDO FL (MCO)	PALM SPRINGS CA (PSP)	PORTLAND OR (PDX)
PUERTO VALLARTA MEXICO (PVR)	SAN DIEGO CA (SAN)	SAN FRANCISCO CA (SFO)	SEATTLE WA (SEA)	WASHINGTON DC ALL AIRPORTS (WAS)	WASHINGTON DC/DCA DC (DCA)
WASHINGTON DC/IAD DC (IAD)					

Photo credit: www.virginamerica.com/book

3. Automated design

Sites like [The Grid](#) use artificial intelligence to construct basic (and not-so-basic) UIs. But while this service can generate beautiful UI designs, it can't determine if they're appropriate for the users and business. UX design isn't something a machine can learn (yet), so visual designers should embrace the skillset.

4. Social media homepages

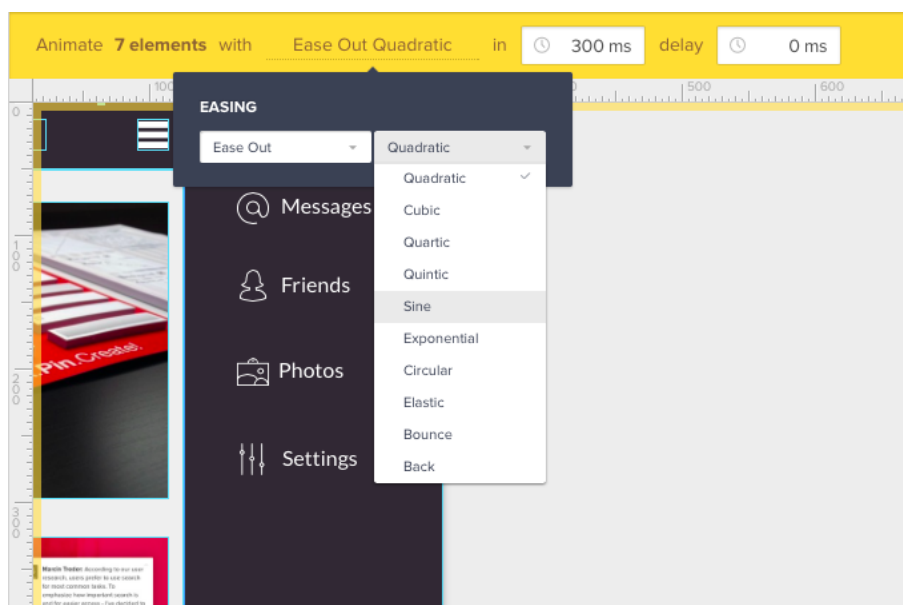
[Echoed by Athlon](#), traditional sites are sometimes overshadowed by social media pages, and small businesses can now get started with a Facebook page alone. Experience design, however, exists on a much higher plane. Designers who know UX are better able to convince companies that different channels deliver different experiences (and business benefits), which still makes websites mandatory.

5. Mobile browsing

Mobile browsing is now the [dominant form](#) of web usage, and designers must know [responsive and adaptive design](#). And in order to design responsively or adaptively, you should follow a [mobile-first process](#). That requires a solid grasp of UX principles since you need to design a scalable experience from the smallest device first.

Notice that the first three reasons revolve around the same point: the visual design and back-end implementation of web design is becoming easier.

On a related note, a big part of the reason why we included so many UI element libraries and interaction libraries in [UXPin](#) is to free up designers to focus more on crafting the UX. When some of the burden is lifted from the UI process, designers are better able to hone their UX skillset (which is becoming more of a competitive advantage each day).



Designing for UX just makes sense – if you spend your time perfecting the UI design for one device, that success won't translate to the others. Your product's UX is far more futureproof than its UI.

The web design silo was good enough in the days of desktop browsing, but the prevalence of mobile forces us to evolve.

Designing Web Services Instead of Web Pages

Perhaps because of mobile's ascent, the way in which people even use the internet has changed. The pull-based system of pages, where the user inputs where they want to go, is surrendering to the push-based system, where content either finds the user (notifications) or the search is drastically reduced.

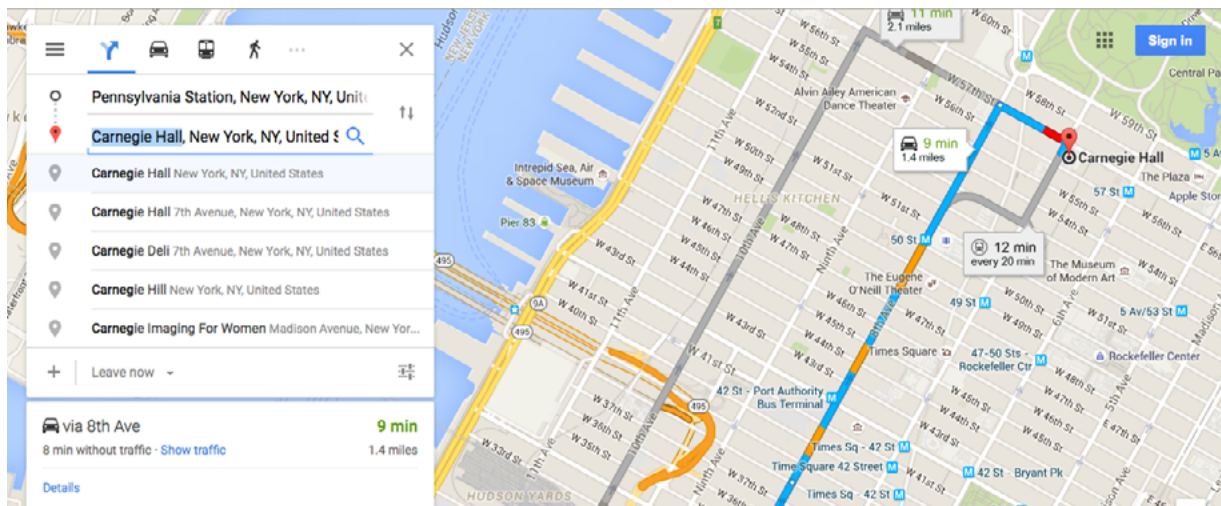


Photo credit: [Google Maps](#)

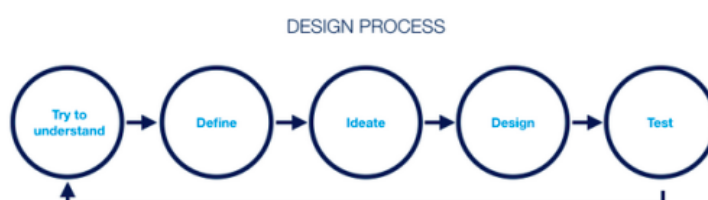
Web design is now service-based. There's too much competition to put UI first: what's on your page matters most, not just how it's arranged. Content is king. And delivering that content in the appropriate context is a UX decision.

This makes [service design](#) more pertinent than ever before. Service design is the science of optimizing how a service is provided, start-to-finish, based on what the user wants. It is a specialization of UX design, since decisions are made to improve the user's experience with the service (and provider). For more information on service design, [Cooper covers the basics well](#).

Moreover, the services should be both self-contained and “bite-sized.” A self-contained service means it only requires the necessary information to function. Google Maps, for example, is technically a website, but its popularity is due to its service design. It is completely self-contained. You input the relevant information, it shows your directions, and then your interaction with the site is over. You complete your goal and feel satisfied.

Bite-sized services are becoming more and more popular. Users today prefer their services to be linked together. Going to a concert might involve one site to find the venue, one site to buy the tickets, one site to plan with friends, and one site to find a ride there. In order for this to work, each service must be as quick and effortless as possible.

The services of these sites are the draw, not the sites themselves. And the only way to design a useful and desirable service (whether that's for web or mobile) is through old-fashioned [UX design thinking](#).



Web Design Can't Survive in a Vacuum

UX is the culmination of every aspect of design – it is the user's impression of everything working together. UX is not something the on-staff UX professional can supply at some phase of the process: EVERYONE on the team must be familiar with UX.



Photo credit: [Design management](#). [Creative Commons](#).

Compartments are now being broken down in favor of collaboration.

To those used to the waterfall method, this may sound strange. But we'll explain the best practices of designing outside of the silo, beginning with the reasons why the alternative won't work anymore.

Waterfalls are Obsolete

You can't really "hand off" UX from one discipline to another. It needs a diverse perspective for team members to "think broad to get narrow".

This dethrones the waterfall method of each department working in isolation on their respective duty:

1. Product manager defines the product
2. Marketing checks product for viability
3. Developers check for feasibility and ship product
4. Web design creates the product pages

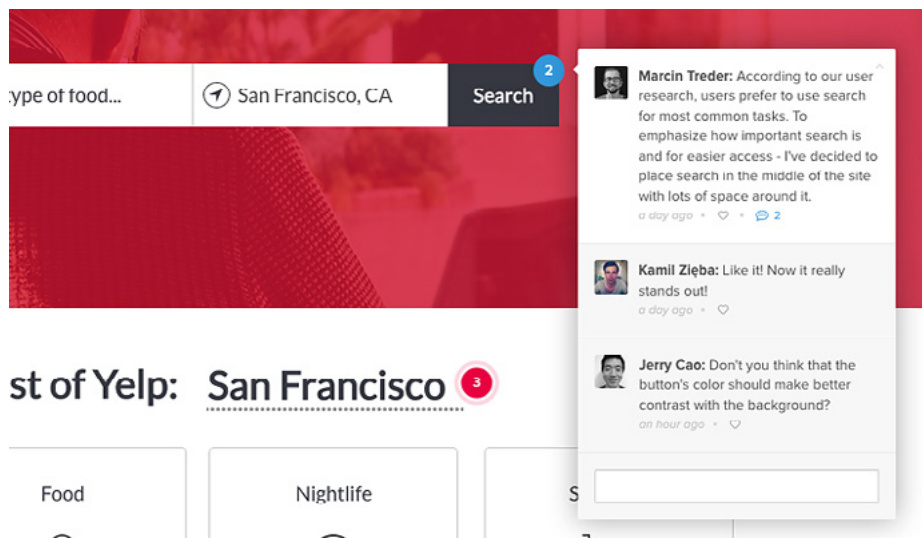
We know the above is an oversimplification, but you get a rough idea of how such a linear process works. Such a method may have been adequate for product design years ago, but now websites are becoming part of the overall service. Even offline products might be supported by a unique mobile app and website experience, combining into an entire UX ecosystem. In order to design that integrated experience, your team needs to integrate with each other.

Take the use of visuals, for example, as [Dave Feldman points out in this Smashing Magazine article](#). If visuals are created outside the scope of UX – i.e., for the sake of looking good alone – the product will be ineffective. It doesn't matter how the visuals look on their own. What matters is how they work with the other aspects.

Thinking Broad to Get Narrow

For this, your entire mode of thinking needs to shift. Instead of involving people piecemeal, you get everyone together in the beginning of design projects and slowly filter them out. It's a practice that we've refined over the years at [UXPin](#):

1. **Invite everyone to design studio exercises** – The website must solve the right user problems. You need product managers, visual designers, interaction designers, sales, and just about anyone else to align to a definition of the problem. Once you've determined that, get everyone to sketch ideas.
2. **Switch to convergent thinking** – Once you've gathered up all the ideas, it's time for designers to iterate and refine. At this point, everyone else needs to understand that they're free to give feedback, but the final decision rests with the product team. For example, a marketer might provide lots of great ideas for messaging, but have nothing valuable to contribute in terms of implementing the design.



3. **Validate ideas with your sales and customer service team**– These folks are on the front line with your customers. They’ll tell you whether those ideas align with what customers want to accomplish. You can also involve them as you get closer to implementation to see if your solution is the right one for the customer’s problems. Does the site provide the right level of service?
4. **Bring developers in before implementation** – Work alongside your developers to see if what you’ve designed is technically possible. Don’t just hand in your designs at the end and expect developers to make it happen.

Welcoming T-Shaped Thinking

UX design becomes an exercise in collaboration as much as web design, and requires its own skills and mindset. Basically, everyone benefits from developing a T-shaped way of thinking.

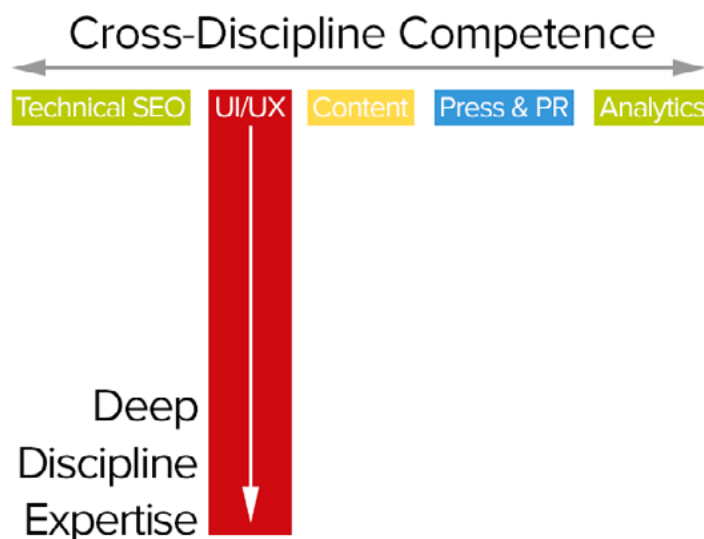


Photo credit: UXPin based on [Distilled](#)

While having a depth of expertise in a particular area (vertical stroke) is commonplace for any industry (e.g. web designers might be more familiar with UI nuances), it's the horizontal stroke that supports the collaborative environment of UX design. Empathize with other members of the team, and understand how your actions affect their decisions.

For more advice on collaborating, our [free design library](#) offers the following ebooks:

- *[The Designer's Guide to Collaborating with Developers](#)*
- *[Design Collaboration in the Enterprise](#)*
- *[Mastering Remote Collaboration](#)*
- *[Building UI Mockups Developers Won't Hate](#)*

Best Practices for Web UX Design

To focus more on UX design, we provide these four best practices for breaking the silo:

Obsess over the user

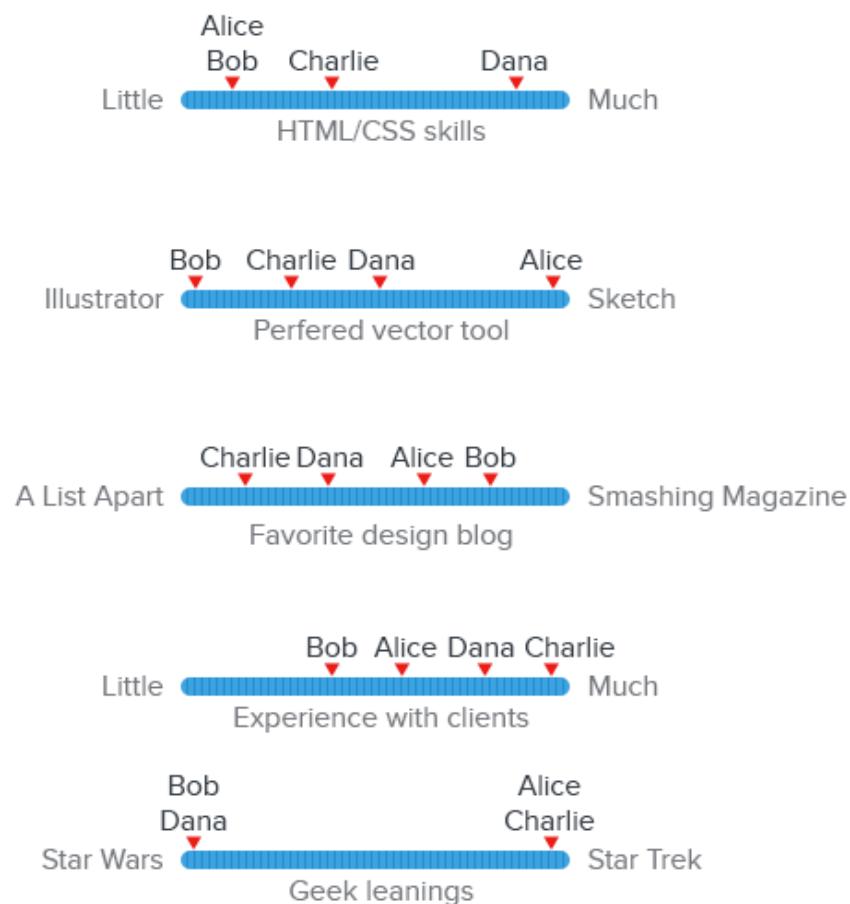
Remember that UX is about understanding your user: what they want, what they know, and **what they don't know they want**. Pinpoint their shared frustrations, behaviors, and modes of thinking.



Photo credit: “[User Experience Treasure Map](#).” Peter Morville. [Creative Commons](#).

To design a successful cross-platform experience, you must research your users:

1. **Conduct [user interviews](#)** – What pains your user, and how are they currently trying to relieve that pain? Pay attention to how they describe when and where certain devices come into play.
2. **Develop [personas](#)** – Once you’ve finished your interviews (we recommend at least 5), plot out all the characteristics on a [spectrum graph](#) so you can see patterns emerge. You can combine people with similar characteristics into the same persona. Just like your user interviews, focus on their psychology, behavior, and current devices/tools used.



3. **Create user stories and scenarios** – For your product, develop common use cases and add context with backstories for each one (creating scenarios). Of course, the scenarios should account for devices. (e.g. “It’s 9PM and Tom is checking his Domino’s order on his phone 30 minutes after ordering on the site. He’s hungry and tired from a full day, and wants to know when the food will arrive since he wants to see if he can finish the latest House of Cards episode beforehand.)

As a...	I want to...	So that...	Scenario 1
Marketer	Quickly offer feedback on designs	Everyone can see the possible revisions and I can get back to my daily non-design work	It's 7:30PM on a Friday night. John should be home already, but he's staying late wrapping up the copy for a new landing page set to go live next week. He sees an email from the designer on another project asking for some emergency copy since they just realized the header and first paragraph is still in Lorem Ipsum. He feels frustrated because he asked the designers to insert some rough copy as a starting point. John's already clocked in 50 hours for the week, so he wants a smooth way to give his feedback as easily and quickly as possible so he can head home.

4. **Map out the customer journey** – A customer journey map can be simple or complex, but it focuses on all the major touchpoints before, during, and after service. This gives you a stronger idea of user expectations (and emotions) as they engage with the company across multiple devices and scenarios. That informs you of the right experience to serve at the right time.

See beyond the surface

Web design was never purely aesthetic, but it's requiring an even broader skillset as UX techniques mature. Here's just a few checkpoints for great web UX design:

- **Does the information architecture make sense?** For example, consistency is required in labeling for top-level and secondary navigation items.
- **Does the website elicit emotional response?** The colors, visuals, and interaction design all must add up to hook the user into exploring the site deeper.
- **Is accessibility addressed correctly?** Even though it might seem like a nice-to-have, accessible sites have real business value: they rank better in Google, access larger audiences, and require less maintenance cost. Check out this helpful [accessibility resource center](#).
- **Is there harmony between text and visual content?** A site's design includes all content. If the tone of the copy doesn't match the visual style, the entire experience starts to dissolve.

Remember that everything is intertwined.

Understand that interactions are the root of all UX

Interactions don't just happen when a user clicks something on your site. From the moment a user sees your design, their brain processes visual interactions at the speed of thought.

Here's some tips for designing all the moments shared between the interface and the user:

- **Create flows before pages** – Flows refer to the different paths users take to accomplish their goals. Your interface might be beautiful and usable on a page level, but it doesn't matter unless the path created by pages is efficient. To optimize a site for flow, follow either the [writing-first approach](#) or Ryan Singer's [shorthand approach](#).
- **Design an ongoing conversation** – Your interface needs to speak to users and react in a way that feels human. Visual feedback must be prompt (ideally within 0.1 seconds of user actions) and text feedback must be friendly, helpful, and even humorous (in the right context). Doing so adds a layer of delight to the experience, which makes the design much more memorable.

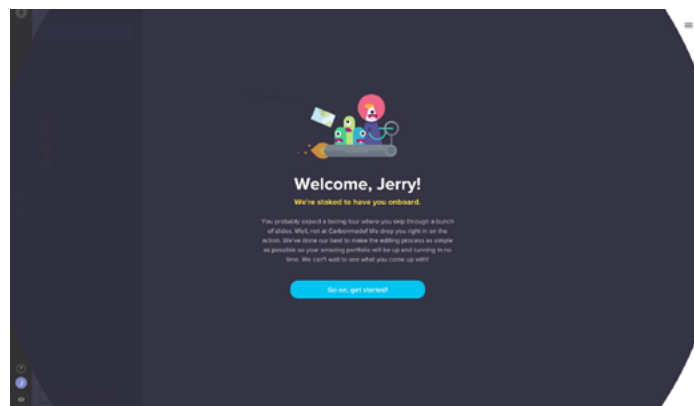


Photo credit: [Carbonmade](#)

- **Sweat the details** – Even if you’re not an interaction designer, know the power of [microinteractions](#) as a design tool. Microinteractions occur whenever a user interacts with a design to accomplish a single task, like how the heart button fills with color and bounces when someone favorites a post on Instagram. Well-crafted microinteractions don’t just provide instant feedback, they also make a design feel more alive and enticing.
- **Minimize friction** – Friction weighs down interactions, making even the most beautiful interfaces a nightmare to use. Inconsistency, clutter, and confusing functionalities all create friction. Luckily, creating user flows helps you minimize friction since you’re working on smoothing out each step of the experience (as well as minimizing the number of steps). On a visual level, chunk out content and use familiar UI patterns to make the design digestible.

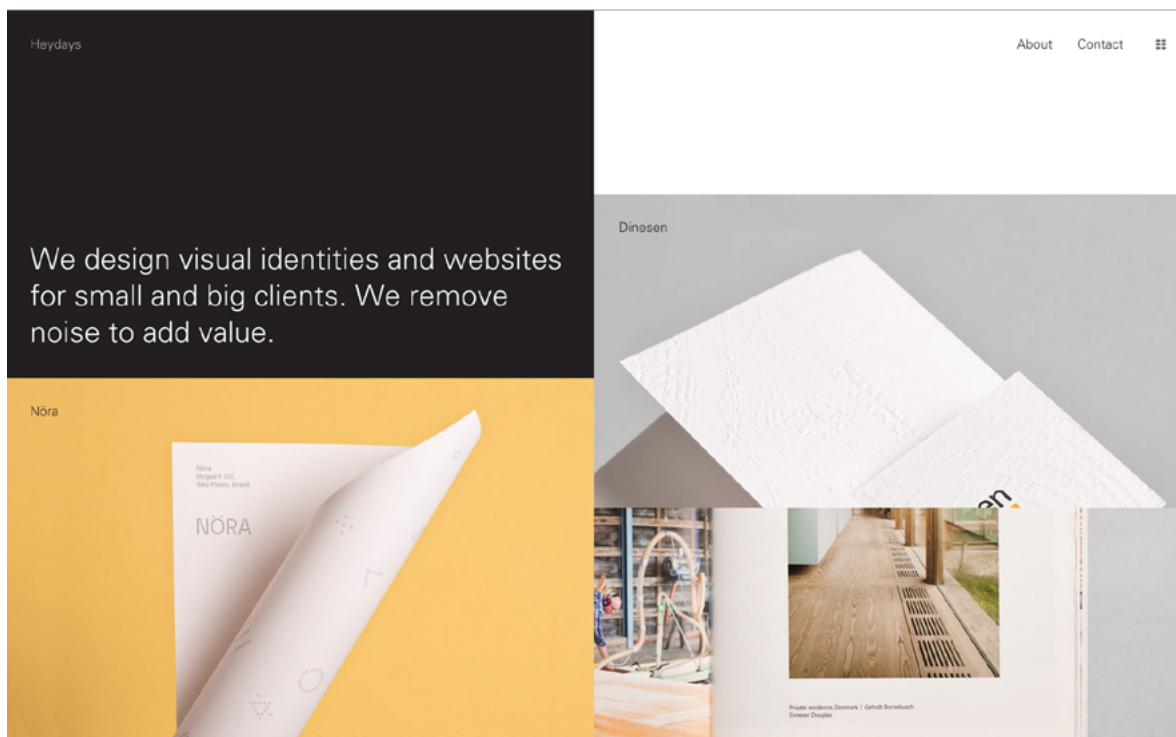


Photo credit: [HeyDays](#)

- **Know persuasive design** – Tactics like salience (highlighting objects to appear more important than others), anchoring (placing higher price items first so others feel more affordable), and loss aversion (highlighting savings and time limits) all help improve the business value of web designs.

For more tips and tricks, check out these two free e-books:

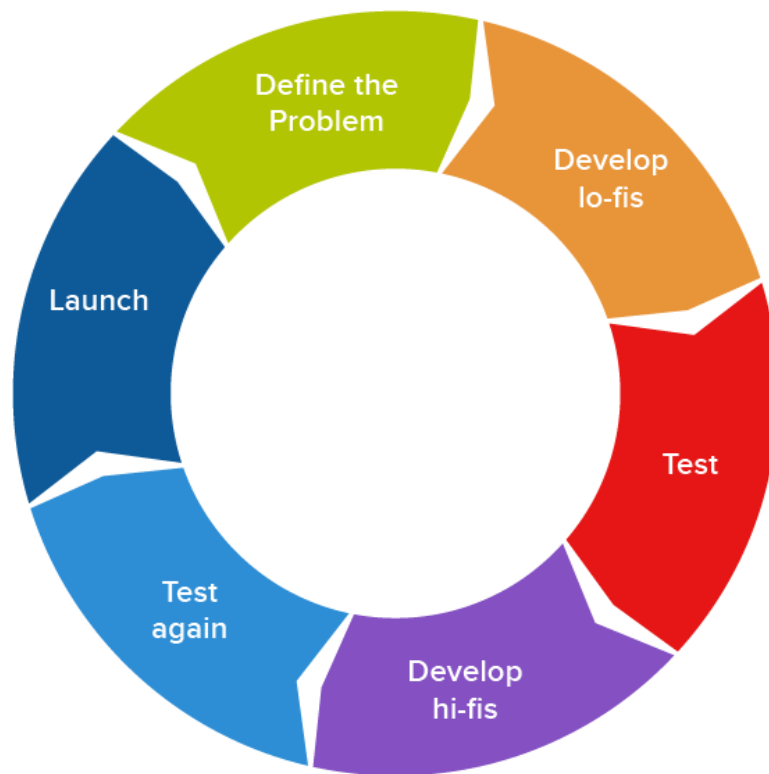
1. [*Interaction Design Best Practices: Mastering the Tangibles*](#)
2. [*Interaction Design Best Practices: Mastering the Intangibles*](#)

Prototype early and often

UX is not an exact science, and you should understand that from the start.

Sometimes the users respond universally to certain elements with no rhyme or reason. This blind thinking of their being a “right” and “wrong” way to design lead to the dominance of UI-centric thinking; but in the end it fell. The true strength in web design is in knowing that you don’t know.

That’s why prototyping is essential – prototyping is the only sure way to gauge success. Usability tests at every iteration – at least – will let you know whether you’re on the right track, and what you need to change.



Thanks to technological advancement, we are in our current state able to test and reiterate faster than ever. That's why we recommend rapid prototyping:

- Prototype your site design quickly and roughly, focusing on content structure and [user flow](#) more than visual details.
- Test your digital prototype with at least 5 users. Record the testing sessions and send to the team for shared understanding and analysis.
- Refine the visuals with a mid-fi or hi-fi mockup, then create a hi-fi prototype and repeat the test. It's worth mentioning that UXPin [integrates with Photoshop and Sketch](#) so you can import mockups for prototyping (no layers flattened).

The above process prevents you from getting married to one design.

4 Websites That Go Beyond Web Design

Now that we've described helpful approaches to more holistic web design, let's examine a few companies who embody the principles.

1. Vine

Our first example is one that not only epitomizes the points from this chapter, but also a model UX that any site can learn from.

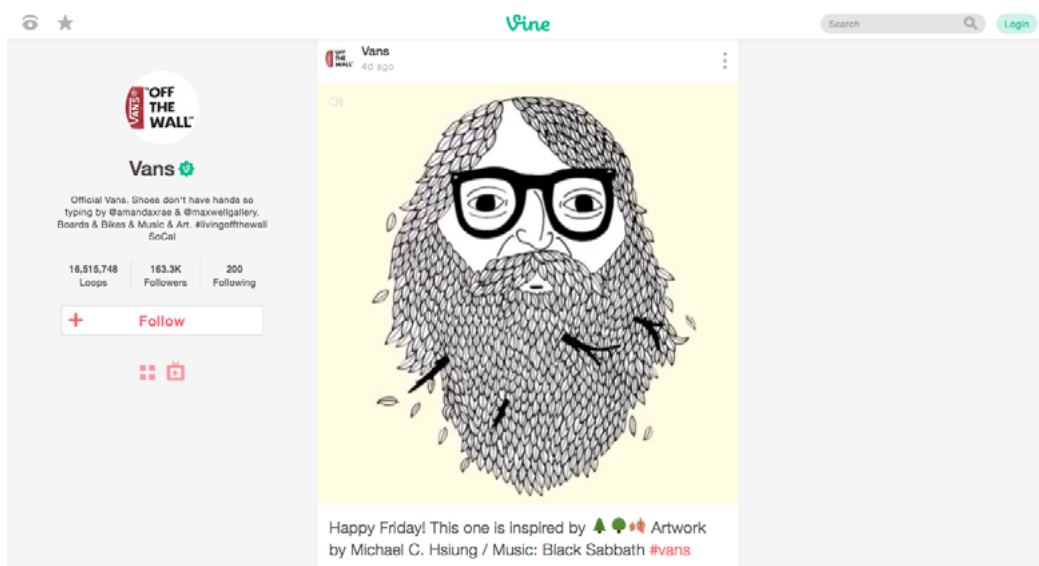


Photo credit: [Vine](#)

[Vine](#) has reinvented the online video market. Where YouTube once had a monopoly, Vine created a new niche for itself by con-

densing the format into short loops of 7-second video snacks. The idea caught on because, let's face it, appealing to shorter attention spans is the direction the internet was already moving.

The service is both self-contained and bite-sized – users can spend as much or as little time on the site or app as they want.

But the service is just the ground floor. The site works equally well on desktop and mobile. While we talk about the significance of a consistent experience across devices in the next chapter (device agnosticism), it's worth mentioning that Vine's UX driving power is not slowed down by the changing UI.



Photo credit: [Vine \(mobile\)](#)

The Vine mobile app allows you connect with other users the same way as the desktop site. This seamless transition between app and site experience offers a complete package:

- As you browse the site, you're served more of the familiar YouTube experience. Search for content, find the channels you like, then subscribe.
- If you sign into your account, all subscriptions transfer over to the mobile app for viewing on the go.
- The opposite is also true.

Nothing is lost by switching devices – in fact, users are only given more maneuverability to use the service as they want.



Photo credit: [Vine](#) (website)

And the UI itself isn't too shabby. The flat design and casual text set the tone, the long-scrolling format facilitates the appropriate multi-device experience, and the card UI pattern makes everything snackable.

Vine is a fun service, delivering the appropriate experience across web and mobile.

2. VW

Most car sites are nothing more than “glorified car brochures,” according to VW’s project description for the [2014 UX Awards](#), in which it took the Gold Prize. The new [VW](#) page, however, wanted to do something completely different.

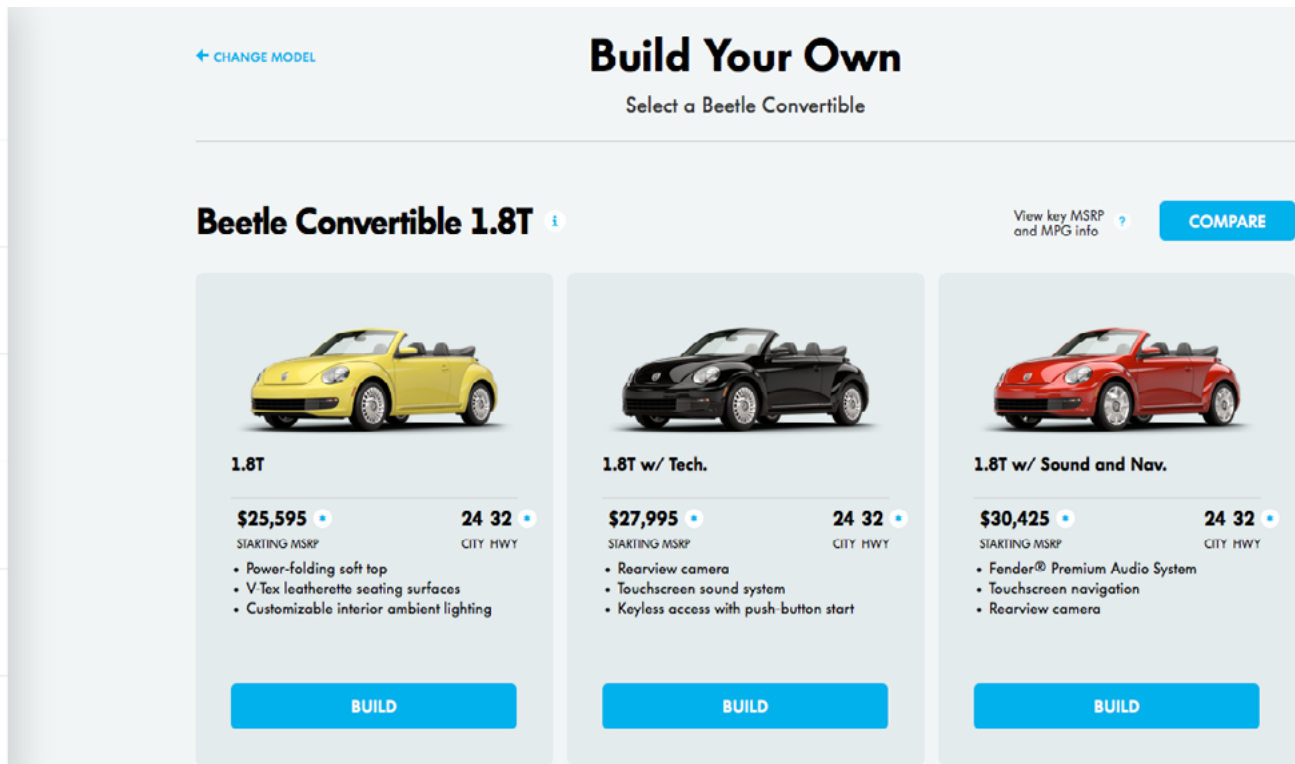


Photo credit: [VW](#)

VW allows people to customize their VW car, inside and out, and then find a dealership where the closest match exists – even a used car! This takes full advantage of what the internet offers, as no car brochures (and even competitor sites) can match it.

Again, a new, better service is the backbone of the site, not just sharp UI design. Service is, and always will be, the cornerstone to a good UX. They thought about user goals and designed a website around it, also accounting for offline touchpoints.

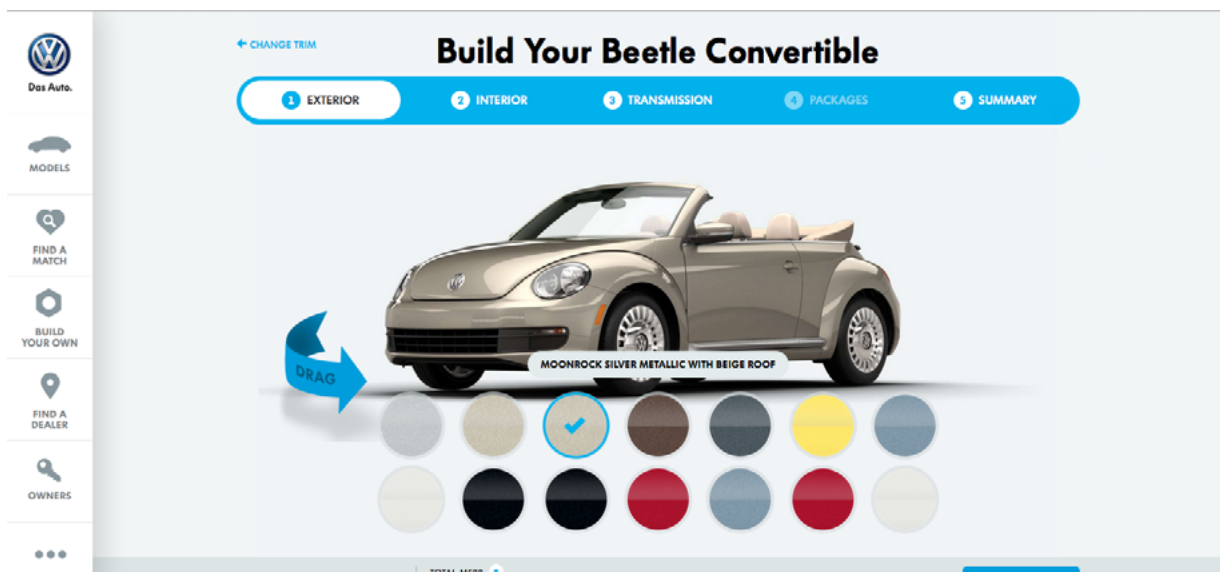


Photo credit: [VW](#)

And, also like Vine, the UI is quite sleek. While other car sites features only flashy car configurator widgets, VW offers something just as fun, but with real practical value.

1. Virgin America

[Virgin America](#), too, improved the service they offered in relation to their competitors, and the notable difference was well-received.

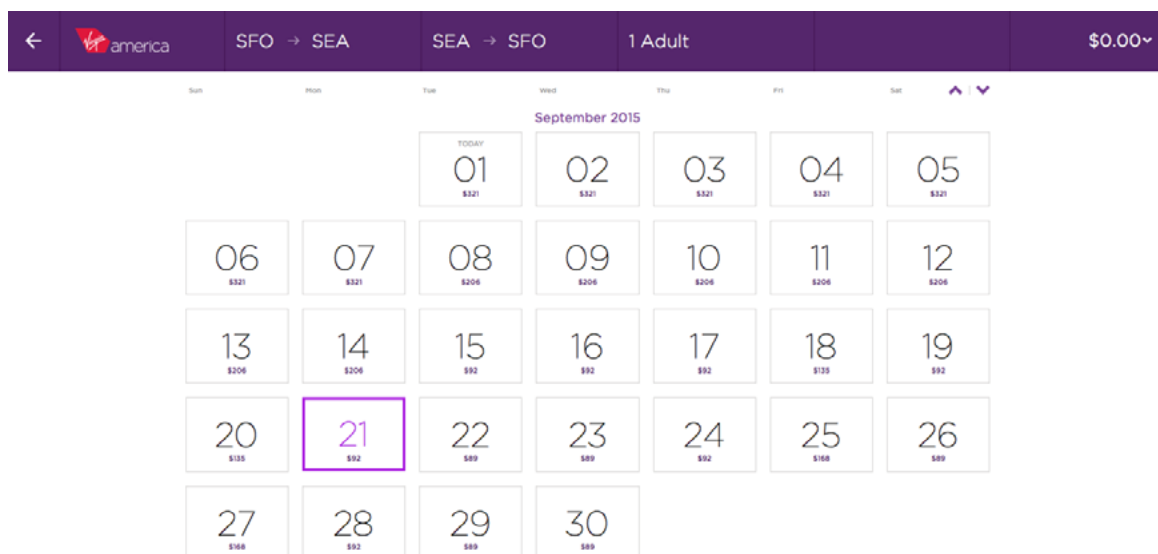


Photo credit: [Virgin America](#)

The site – which actually won the Grand Prize at the [2014 UX Awards](#) – was the first fully responsive major airline website, giving users the correct UX regardless of device when ordering plane tickets (an already stressful ordeal).

The CMO of Virgin America Luanne Calvert says that “the goal of the redesign was to better reflect their needs and how people book and manage travel today,” and that the changes were made based on “listening to what travelers liked and didn’t like.”

This shows that the first step in creating a good UX is in understanding users.

1. Pelican Books

When Pelican Books redesigned their site, they followed a lot of the techniques described in [Web UI Design Trends 2015 & 2016 Trends](#) like bright colors, flat design, and minimalism.

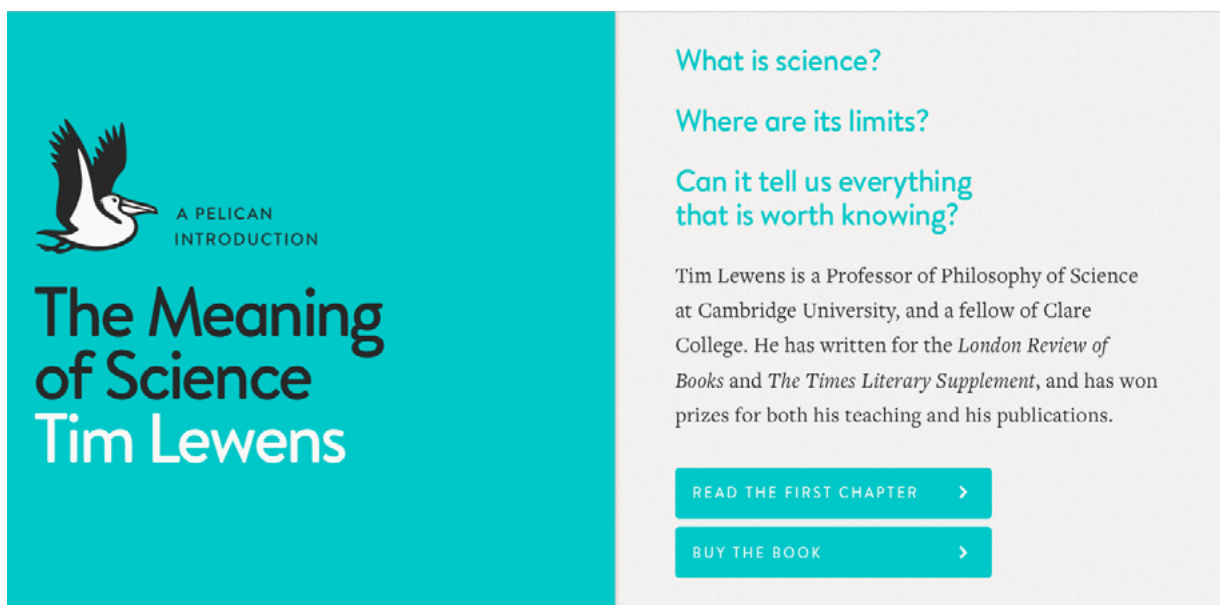


Photo credit: [Pelican Books](#)

This made the site look and feel better. But the changes to the UX are what made the redesign the real success.

The new site allows users to preview entire chapters of books, though this is not a new technique. What's new is how they do it – by transcribing the chapters directly into the site, in an immersive blog format reminiscent of [Medium](#). This makes readability a thousand times easier than, say, the print scans of Amazon's "Look Inside" feature.

Entire books are written in this format, though you'll have to pay to get the whole text. Still, the site is reimagining the world of online reading. Instead of just "previewing a book", you're experiencing the content in a format that feels personal.

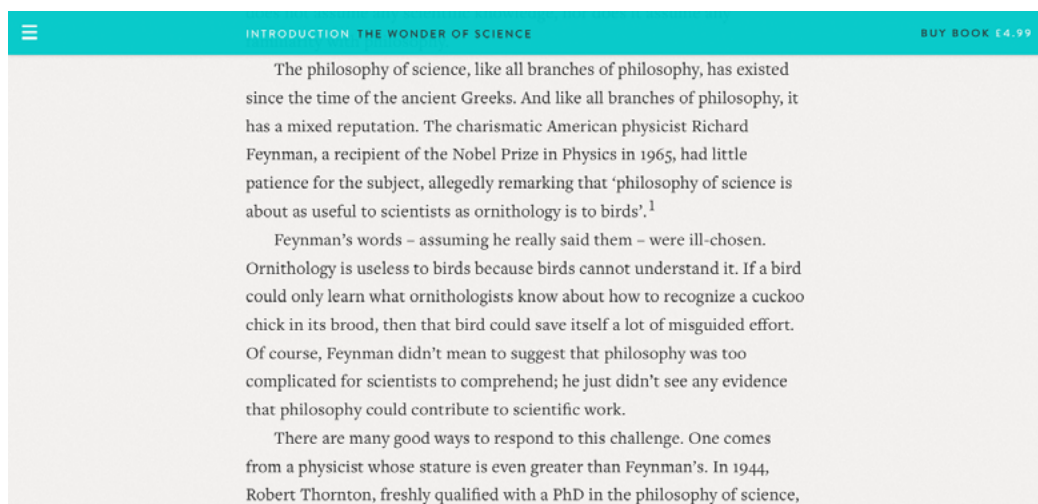


Photo credit: [Pelican Books](#)

Moreover, users can access the preview chapter just as easily on mobile devices. This is a UX decision that not only improves service, but also sales – users get a feel for how to read on their device of choice, further encouraging them to buy.

Conclusion:

Design the UX Ecosystem

Websites are not machines, and so can't be built with the same compartmentalizing of individual parts. Sure, designers can try, and that's where the silo method came from in the first place. But there is a better way.

Think of websites as an ecosystem, in which the mightiest tiger and the tiniest insect play equally important roles. Harming or neglecting one element will damage the entirety of the experience. But since this is a lot for one single person to handle, the best approach is always collaboration.

It's time to live outside the silo, where everyone is together on solid ground.

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