

Designing Better UX With UI Patterns

UXPin

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Index

A Few Quick Words	6
Understanding UI vs. UX	8
Introduction to Neurodesign	11
Pattern Recognition A Useful Shortcut	13
Examples of Common User Interface Patterns	15
Top-down vs. Bottom-up UX Design Approach	19
Design Implications of Pattern Recognition and Reward	22
The Risk of Breaking Patterns	24
Breaking Patterns for Delight	26
The Power of Prototyping for Testing Patterns	28
Affordances & Signifiers: The Foundation of UI Patterns	32
Different UI Pattern Categories	34
Different Levels of UI Patterns	38
The UI Pattern Selection Process	45
Additional Pattern Resources	49
Conclusion	54



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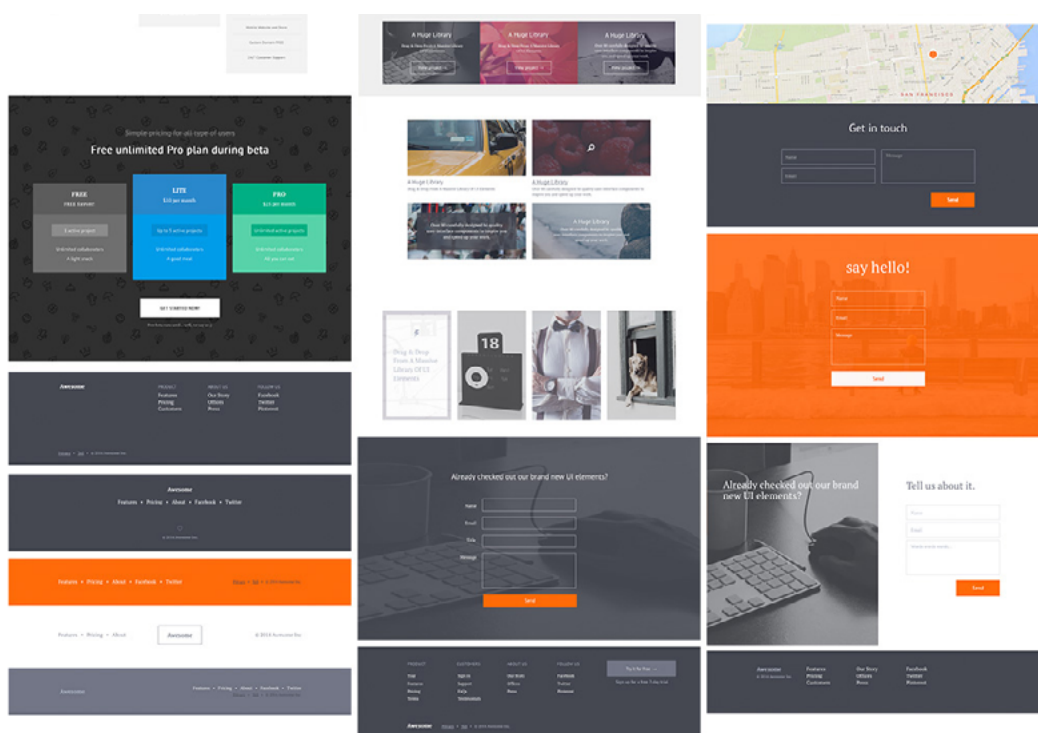
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With a passion for writing and an interest in everything anything related to design or technology, Matt Ellis found freelance writing best suited his skills and allowed him to be paid for his curiosity. Having worked with various design and tech companies in the past, he feels quite at home at UXPin as the go-to writer, researcher, and editor. When he's not writing, Matt loves to travel, another byproduct of curiosity.

A Few Quick Words

Any discussion of UI patterns will eventually return to UI patterns. As described in the free e-book *Web Design for the Human Eye*, UI patterns originate as solutions to common usability problems, and their effectiveness correlates directly with their popularity and adoption. That means the more a certain pattern is used, the more powerful it becomes... which means more sites will start using it.



Source: *Free Web UI Kit*

In this guide, we'll dive into the anatomy of UI patterns and how to select them as shortcuts to meeting user expectations. We hope you'll see UI patterns as not just reusable design best practices, but also as a foundation for you to mold the overall UX.

For the love of UI design,

Ivana McConnell, Jerry Cao, Ben Gremillion, Matt Ellis

Understanding UI vs. UX

Before we start dissecting UI patterns, let's first clarify between two design terms that are often used interchangeably (but shouldn't be). Every detail a website puts forward contributes to its users' experiences and to the memories and impressions they form when using the site – but the site designers can't control that experience directly.

UI Design

UX Result

Consistency – have a single function work the same throughout the entire site, i.e., if you click the red button on one page, it will perform the same action if you click it on another page.

Instructions – if there's any doubt about how something works, explain it.

Sound Effects – adding different sound effects that consistently correspond to different actions.

Color Scheme – the colors you choose for backgrounds, text, and graphics.

Customization Options – allow the user to choose their own avatars, settings, displays, etc.

Your site's controls will have an intuitive feeling, and your user will feel comfortable and confident they understand how it works. Consistency reduces cognitive load, which lowers the learning curve.

The user understands how the site works, and avoids confusion.

For some vague or similar actions, different sound effects signal what just happened, reducing confusion. Plus, the style of the sound effect can help create the desired atmosphere, like futuristic, or cartoony. It all depends on context since it could also become annoying.

Like sound effects, colors create a certain ambiance, allowing you to set the mood for the experience, whether playful or professional. Colors also have cultural and neurobiological meaning. In Western culture, red draws attention, increases alertness, and can increase heart rate (signaling warning).

The user has a personal investment in the site and it feels more "their own," leading to a more positive overall UX.

Photo credit: based on [Web UI Best Practices illustration](#)

As you can see in [this illustration](#), it's easy to get tunnel vision and focus just on the UI because it's tangible (like a spoon) versus crafting the whole experience (like the enjoyment of breakfast).

Likewise, if you're cooking an important dinner, you want to put a lot of thought into it, right? You hand-pick all the best ingredients, choose the best recipes and follow them carefully, and you may even put out a nice centerpiece to create the right atmosphere.

Well, a website is no different. You want to plan everything perfectly so that your visitors have a good time. While you can spend hours – even days – planning and preparing the meal itself, it's only part of the ultimate goal of a fantastic dinner experience. That's why it's only worthwhile to focus on the details of UI if you keep the UX in mind. If a UI is built with thought, attention, and care, then it will show in the UX. If the UI is built haphazardly and with little effort, or if there is a large oversight, then the UX always suffers.

Marcin Treder, CEO of [UXPin](#), believes that a bad UX is only sparingly acceptable if the goals are valid. “Sometimes you will see long and complicated web forms in which labels are left aligned, which creates a worse reading experience,” Treder says. “On the other hand, it can achieve the goal of better data quality by preventing people from mechanically fast form completion.”

Field	Mobile Marketing (19k views)	Engaging Email Marketing (206k views)
First Name	Jerry	Jerry
Last Name	Cao	Cao
Work Email	jerry.cao@uxpin.co	jerry.cao@uxpin.co
Phone	5103317254	
Country	United States	United States
Job Function	Marketing Professi	Other
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Photo credit: [Marketo](#)

The better a UI is, the less you notice it. Just like a good film makes you forget you're in a theater, a solid UI will immerse the user in the experience and not draw attention to itself. Not even noticing the UI produces the best UX.

Don't choose and customize UI patterns based only on aesthetics. While the [Dribbblisation of design](#) is tempting, the only purpose of your UI patterns are to provide the smoothest experience for users as they achieve their goals.

Introduction to Neurodesign

As interaction designers and researchers, we are user advocates first and foremost.

We need to understand what users want versus need before they ever encounter our designs. Once they do encounter it, they must first feel safe and comfortable. This can sometimes contrast with our desire to innovate - which is why we have to align that desire with user goals.

To do this, we need to grasp how our specific users' brains work—the mental models they've created that help them navigate the web. This understanding then gives us a platform from which to create, a process called neurodesign.

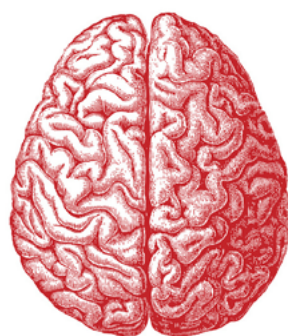


Photo credit: Allan Ajifo. Creative Commons.

From what we can gather, Lori Kirkland first introduced the term back in [this 2012 article](#). Through careful research and usability testing, we can better understand what's going on in the brain when a user or customer interacts with a good (or bad) experience.

We can then use that knowledge to create better experiences. That's neurodesign. This in-depth grasp of user goals ensures that we can apply our creativity in focused, impactful ways.

Pattern Recognition

A Useful Shortcut

Usability is about people and how they understand and use things, not about technology.

Steve Krug, Don't Make Me Think

Pattern recognition is a cognitive process during which we look at a stimulus, and try to match it with what we already know.

It's a form of [heuristic](#), or shortcut that we use to solve a problem. Heuristics make up what Gerd Gigerenzer first called the '[adaptive toolbox](#)'– a set of rules that we use to make decisions in situations that are limited in time, resources, or information.

If a situation is new to us, we'll reach into our adaptive toolbox to see if we've encountered anything similar before.

We learn various patterns through interacting with the web, both as users and as designers. So when we interact with the web, we attempt to match what we see with what we know already– if we're after a

specific item in a store, for example, previous experience tells us that we can (and should) be able to search for it in a very specific way.

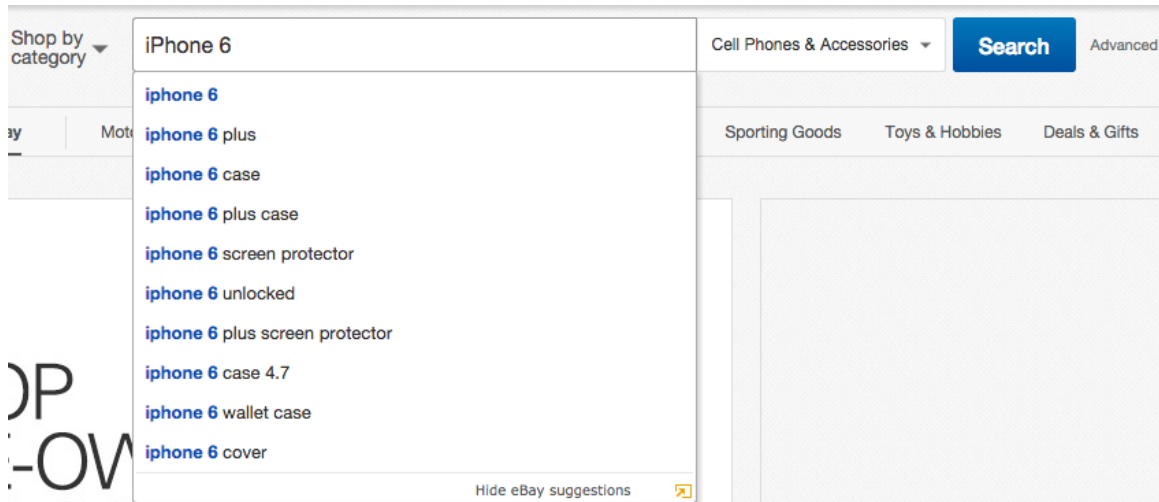


Photo credit: [Ebay](#)

This recognition and learning allows us to navigate the web quickly and efficiently using heuristics, instead of thinking through an interaction from scratch every single time. We look for patterns of interaction that, in the past, have led to success by minimizing time and maximizing reward. If we don't find these patterns, we will often look for another page that will offer us that familiarity and expediency.

These shortcuts do sometimes lead us astray, but more often than not, they work. Interaction designers need to be intimately familiar with these patterns and expectations.

Examples of Common User Interface Patterns

Design patterns are a way of documenting a common solution to a design problem.

There are many excellent pattern libraries out there—[UI Patterns](#), [Yahoo's Pattern Library](#), and [PatternTap](#) to name but a few fantastic resources— but here are a few examples of common design and user interface patterns, and the problems they solve:

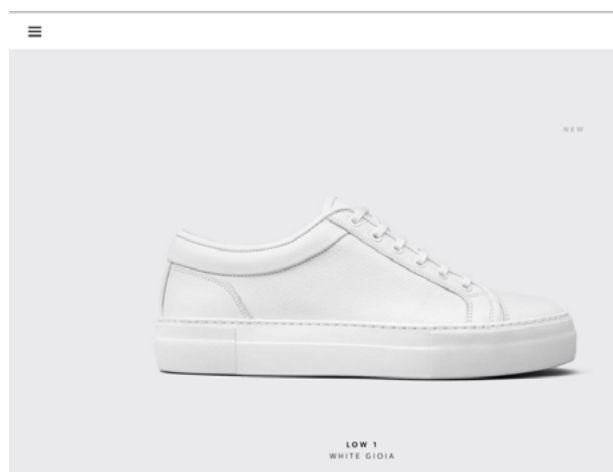


Photo credit: [ETQ Studios](#)

- **The hamburger menu:** It's [controversial](#) these days and people are now questioning whether this is actually a design pattern, or

just bad design. Regardless, it's ubiquitous, and allows for more space on mobile devices.

- **Breadcrumbs:** A way of allowing your users to feel safe and well-oriented when navigating a hierarchical site.

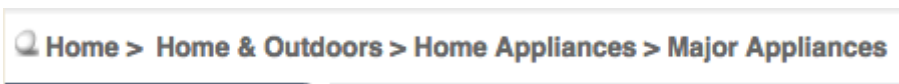


Photo credit: [Newegg](#)

- **Account registration:** A way of gathering information from the user in order to offer them something in return; the opportunity to buy, for example. Patterns might range from a shortened form to a social sign-in.

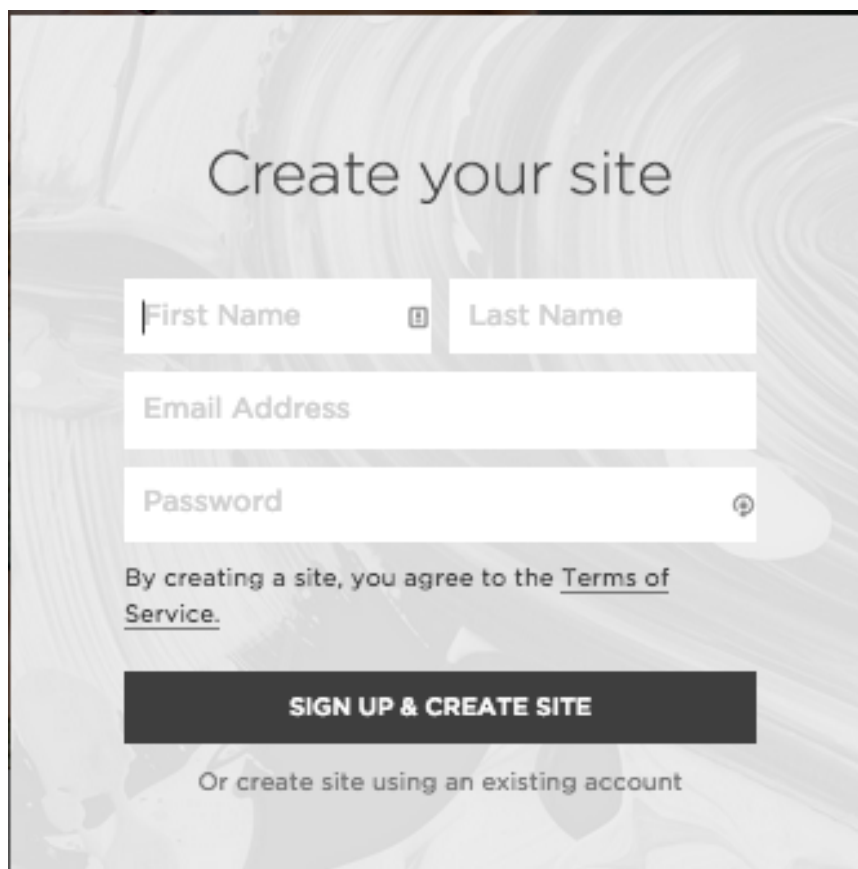
A registration form titled "Create your site". It features four input fields: "First Name" with a person icon, "Last Name", "Email Address", and "Password" with a lock icon. Below the fields is a line of text: "By creating a site, you agree to the [Terms of Service](#)." At the bottom is a large black button with white text that says "SIGN UP & CREATE SITE". Below the button is a link that says "Or create site using an existing account". The background is a light gray with a faint, abstract pattern.

Photo credit: [Squarespace](#)

- **Continuous scroll:** A way of consuming a large amount of content that may not be displayed on a single page right away. Perfect for visual storytelling.

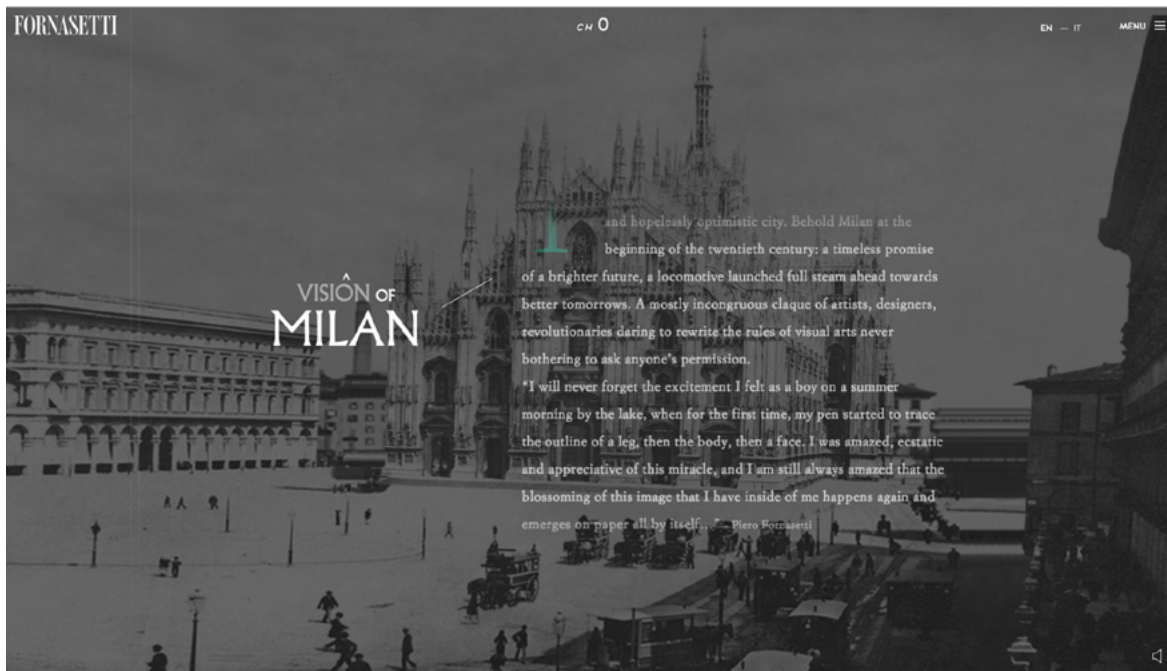


Photo credit: [Fornasetti](#)

- **Availability** (e.g., Skype): Know quickly if someone is available, unavailable, or away with a traffic light system.

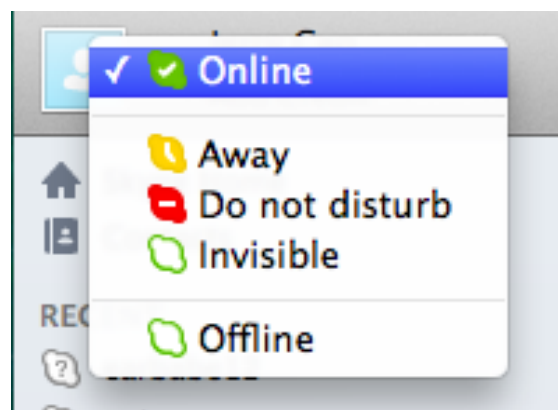


Photo credit: [Skype](#)

- **The FAQ:** Offers the users an easy-to-find space to get answers to common questions.

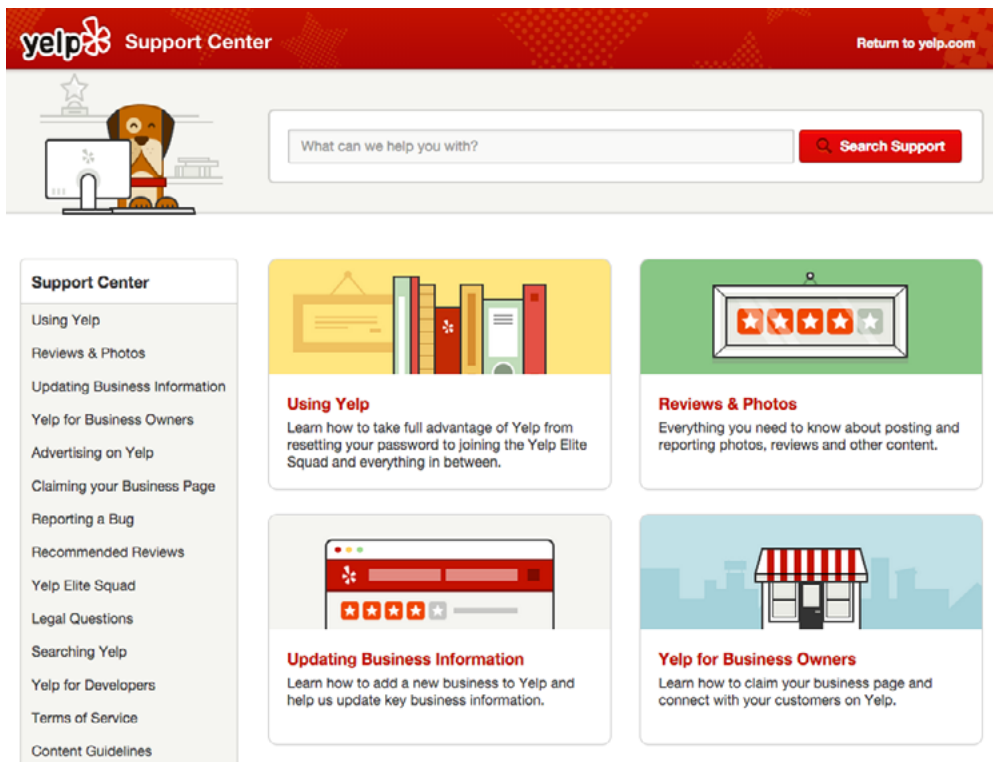


Photo credit: [Yelp](#)

For more examples of UI patterns, check out the free e-book [Web UI Patterns](#) (includes 63 top patterns described in a problem/solution format).

Top-down vs. Bottom-up UX Design Approach

This is where we can start thinking about neurodesign: using these neuroscience basics to make our jobs easier (or more complicated, depending on how you see it). We also must remember that users perceive the web differently from those who create it.



Photo credit: Narek Khachatryan.

When we build for the web, we use design patterns along the way as we discover various design problems. We often make this journey from the bottom up: we start with the problem before us and its various elements, and then attempt to create a cohesive experience. As we break an interface into its atomic components, we immerse ourselves in sub-problems, [goals](#), [tasks](#), and information architectures and flows.

This is why, after a while, we become oblivious to problems with our design – we cannot see it as a whole.

However, users don't interact with an interface this way. They do so from the top down.

Users don't see the parts but their sum, and use prior knowledge of rules to guide their interactions. They look for patterns in what we've built that match up to past experience with similar products or sites (known as external consistency), to help them navigate much faster. This method of processing is fast, but sometimes wrong– especially if the interface has somehow deviated from the status quo.

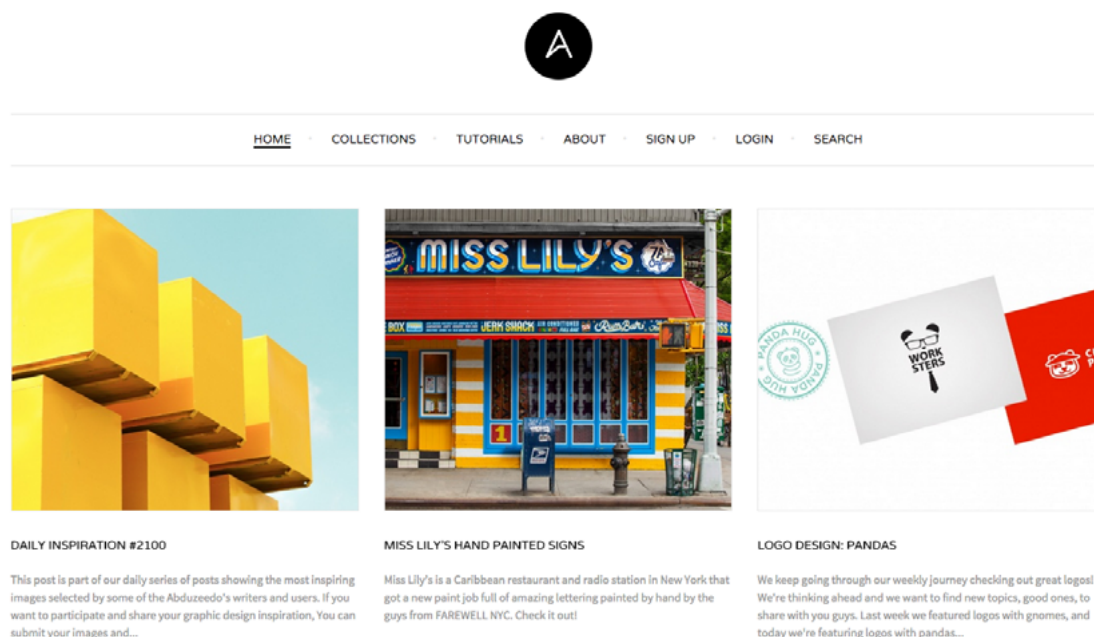


Photo credit: [Abduzeedo](#)

Therefore, we should ensure that the site interface is consistent with user expectations and with itself. For example, if you choose a [cards UI pattern](#), most users know how to navigate the content due to the

pattern's popularity. To prevent confusion, you must also implement the pattern consistently throughout your site.

It's our job to guide the user, to make this processing as easy and as satisfying as possible, and to make sure that they recognize just enough patterns in our interfaces to feel comfortable. External consistency (similarity to competitors or other sites) isn't always necessary, but internal consistency – consistency within the product – is **paramount**.

You'll build user confidence, trust, and safety.

Design Implications of Pattern Recognition and Reward

For every interaction that occurs, there exists an expectation on behalf of the user, no matter how mundane.

Every flick of the eye towards a piece of content, every mouse click, every key press– all of this is guided by previous experience and interaction, and the user will expect a certain outcome from each of them. We like patterns– they make us feel safe and (when we find them) happy.



Photo credit: UXPin

This happiness happens at a neurochemical level. Each time we successfully recognize a pattern, we get a jolt of dopamine– a neu-

rochemical associated with pleasure and reward. And then, when the interaction itself is successful, we get another jolt.

When something is “intuitive,” this essentially means that a pattern has been followed, and the user’s expectation has been met– they were pleased when they saw a pattern, and again when the pattern performed as expected. However, if the pattern is broken, that dopamine never comes and we’re left unsatisfied. The user, of course, then associates this dissatisfaction with the site or product.

In addition to patterns, we need to understand the expectations that are tied to them, in order to maximize dopamine and minimize dissatisfaction. We want to give people what they want and expect. But we also want to be innovators and creators– after all, very few clients come to us asking for a site that “meets expectation,” or looks just like their competitors’. It’s a difficult balance, but all is not lost; we just have to dig a little deeper.

The Risk of Breaking Patterns

In our desire to innovate, we want to develop new and novel ways of doing things. Our attempts, however, can also alienate users.

For example, in a [previous post](#) for UXPin, we mentioned the design of Ello, a social network which aimed to be minimal and innovative, but broke with far too many patterns.



Source

For example, a button should look clickable. If they don't, there had better be an excellent reason (and a way for users to learn it). Every time we break a pattern, we want to be sure that we're asking ourselves a few difficult questions:

- Why are we breaking that pattern?
- Have we created a new one— and is it better?
- Will our users be able (and willing) to learn that new pattern, and quickly?

Those aren't easy questions to answer, so think hard before choosing to break from a well-established pattern – is it worth it?

Handy tip: You know it's time to break out of a pattern when you use the words “unless” or “except.”

More importantly, you might hit the **local maximum** of your design if you just iterate within your patterns. Don't be afraid to radically break a pattern, as Rian van der Merwe **suggests**, as long as you thoroughly research your users beforehand and conduct A/B tests after.

Using UI patterns doesn't mean repeating what's come before. Patterns are a starting point, not an end. You can put your unique twist on a UI pattern – once you know what makes it work.”

Breaking Patterns for Delight

Of course, we shouldn't abandon all innovation and just stick with what we know— design patterns aren't the be-all and end-all. They're simply a baseline for layering your own creativity. People are capable of learning and recognizing new patterns, particularly when those patterns result in rewards.

For example, consider the dopamine reward system we just discussed. We mentioned that if a user expects a reward and gets one, this meets expectations. If they expect a reward and *don't* get one, this breeds dissatisfaction.



Photo credit: [Interaction Design Best Practices](#)

However, what if they don't expect a reward? Even better, what if they don't expect a reward, but we give them one?

Yes, we break from a pattern, but we can do so in a place where the user doesn't necessarily expect it, and we can win them over. We can strengthen new patterns by rewarding when users don't expect it, therefore reinforcing that new method of interaction. This **moment of delight** is, in our opinion, the key to innovation and a successful break from pattern and status quo.

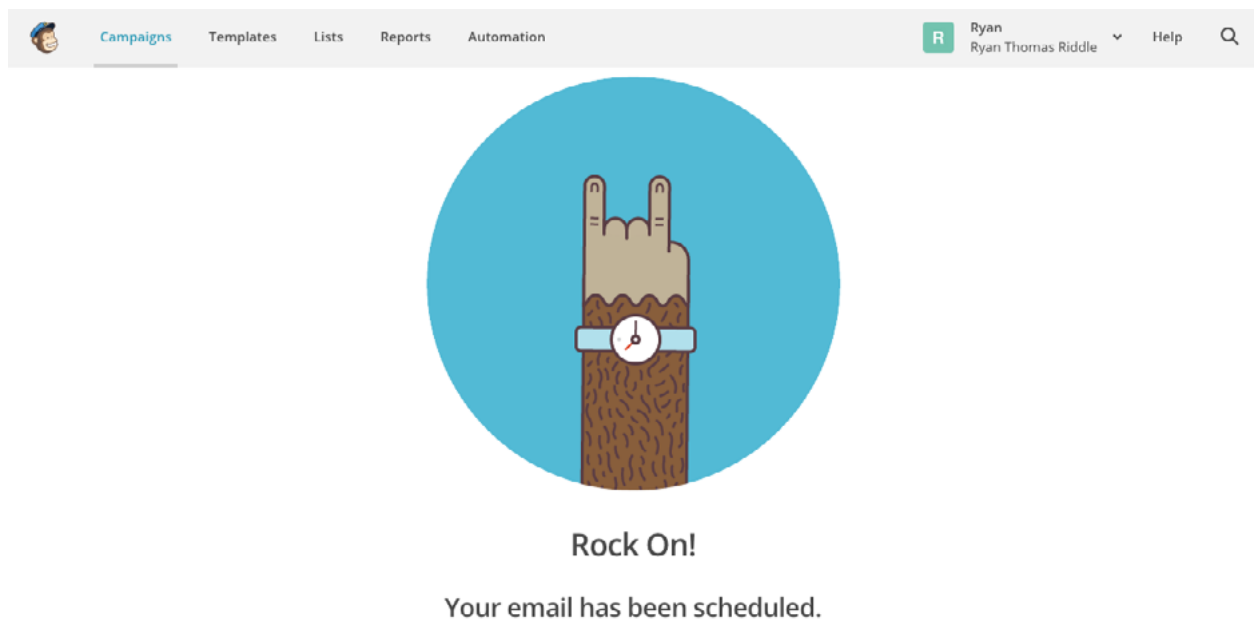


Photo credit: [MailChimp](#)

Of course, it's difficult to find these situations, these opportunities to delight a user when they don't expect it—after all, how are we expected to know when users will be particularly pleased by something if they don't even know it yet? This is where testing comes in.

The Power of Prototyping for Testing Patterns

Design “considerations” beat design patterns. Test and decide, don’t just copy things like the hamburger icon.

Jeffrey Zeldman, [in reference to the hamburger](#).

The only way we can find which patterns to break and when is to try, to experiment and see the results.

These experiments come in the form of thoughtful, well-conceived user tests. We need to be aware of the pattern we’re trying to break and how the user perceives it, why we’re trying to break it, and how. With a prototype, we can tightly control and test the pattern itself, even if the user isn’t aware of that control.

For example, in [UXPin](#), we can create a rapid prototype with the existing UI libraries. We can then validate the effectiveness of those patterns (and the overall design functionality) by starting a remote usability testing session. Write down the core tasks, invite users, then start experiencing the moment of truth.

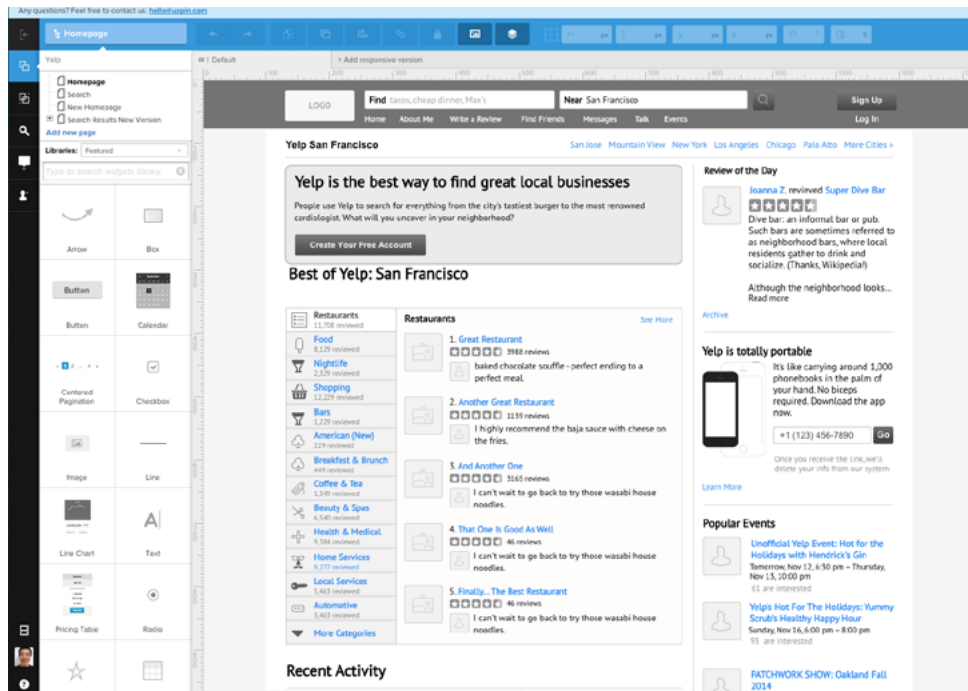


Photo credit: [UXPin](#)

The reason that prototyping (and testing in general) is so useful is because often, people can't articulate what they need. User testing allows them to show us instead. Users behave normally, while we observe and listen to their reactions.

Here's a sample process for improving upon existing patterns:

- **Identify the design problems** – As design thinking dictates, re-search your users (ethnography, interviews, surveys, to name a few) to uncover the main pain points.
- **Study existing design patterns** – Once you know the problems to solve, explore sites or apps with patterns that target the same user issues.
- **Prototype your design** – Start with existing patterns as a baseline, and work from them, or change them completely. Whatever you're

doing, ensure that your assumptions at the start are clear. Create a low fidelity prototype and feel free to add some creative nuances.

- **Test your design with at least 5 users** – Choose whatever [methods](#) make the most sense based on time and budget. Steve Krug's [Rocket Surgery Made Easy](#) provides an excellent starting point. In a pinch, [hallway usability tests](#) involving a couple coworkers is always better than nothing.
- **Learn from the results and iterate** – Since you started in low fidelity, incorporate your learnings as you increase fidelity. If it serves the users, feel free to add elements of delight to make the patterns more interesting. Continue testing and iterating until the design is finalized.

There's no need to try too hard– where the user expects a reward, we should give them one (or at least offer an excellent reason for not doing so). However, we can certainly explore opportunities to break from pattern and create new [delightful methods of interaction](#).

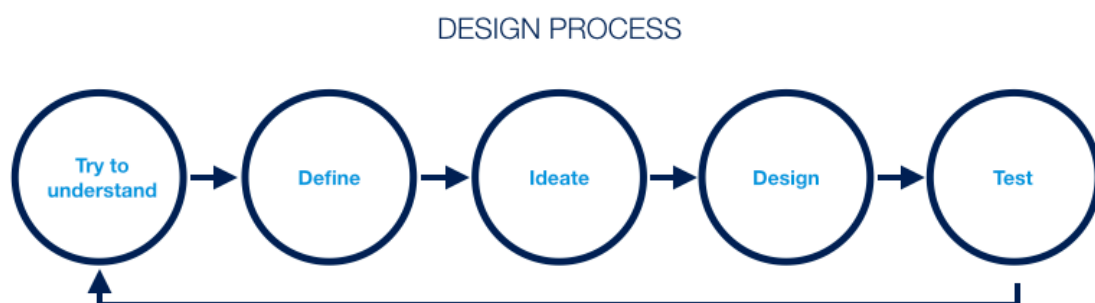


Photo credit: UXPin

When it comes to improving old patterns; study the underlying problem and ask why the pattern is so useful. As Jeffrey Zeldman says above,

consideration beats pattern. Previously-successful design patterns, applied without consideration, will only harm your product.

There's a quote by Henry Ford, likely overused to the point of cliché, but it's true: "If I'd asked my customers what they wanted, they'd have said a faster horse."

When it comes to interaction design, we can and should follow patterns in a considered way. It's perfectly fine and often preferred— for a variety of good reasons. After all, we have accepted it as a pattern for a reason.

But when we make no effort to innovate and stick only to patterns, we're just building the faster horse.

Affordances & Signifiers: The Foundation of UI Patterns

Now that we've explained the power of patterns, let's dive into their anatomy.

Affordances are what a product can do. Signifiers are the visual cues that tell users what it can do. At an atomic level, all UI patterns are composed of signifiers that hint at the interface's affordances.

For a simple example, let's say a page can be saved to favorites on [Dribbble](#).

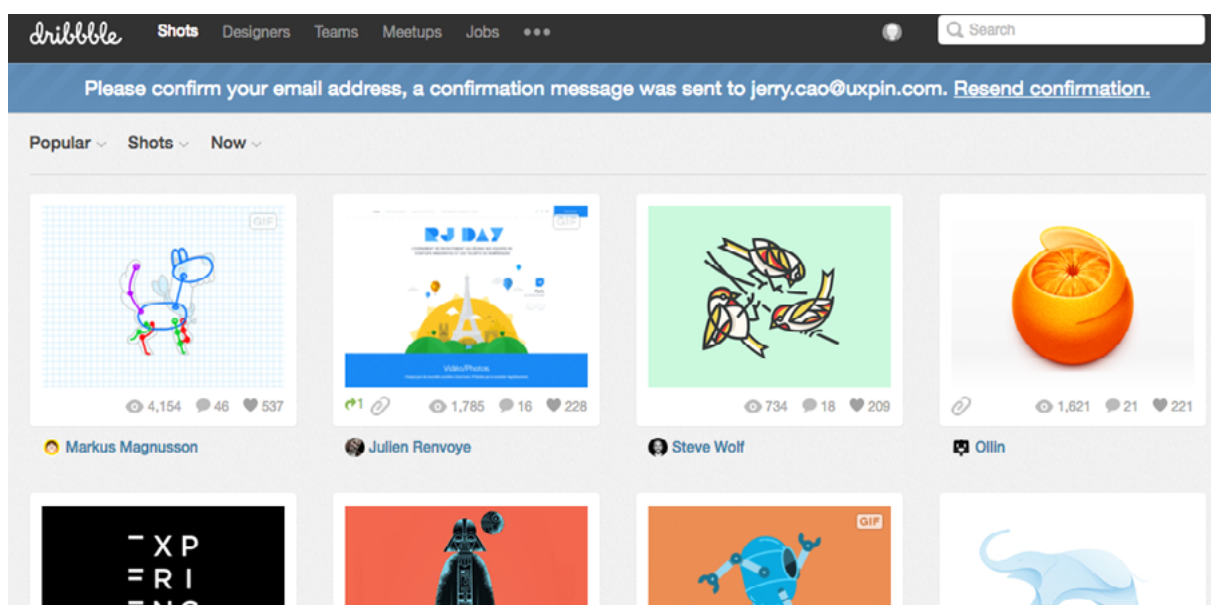


Photo credit: [Dribbble](#)

The page affords being favorited. However, if there are no signifiers, the user will have no idea. Now, if the page does have a signifier – in this case, a heart icon – then the user visually understands the page can be favorited. The [perceived affordance](#), therefore, is what users interpret based on the signifier. Of course, a perceived affordance should always sync with the actual affordance.

The process for signifiers and affordances usually runs the same way. The user sees a signifier (heart icon) and gets an impression what the site can do, a perceived affordance (“I can favorite people’s work on Dribbble”).

Used well, signifiers save time in explaining functions by playing on the user’s pre-existing knowledge. They give the site an intuitive and familiar feel, as if the user has used it before – because in a way they have, or at least some of it.

The important benefit about signifiers that we’d like to shine some light on here is that **consistently used signifiers from other sites and apps will cut down on your own explaining**. Using signifiers that are consistent with other sites will streamline your own design. To learn more about the categories of affordances and signifiers, we recommend [this article](#) on Smashing Magazine as one of the most comprehensive pieces we’ve read.

Different UI Pattern Categories

With thousands of patterns to choose from, selecting the right ones can become overwhelming.

A good first step is to categorize them into different groups depending on their functions. Patterns all have different effects on a design, so dividing them into a few groups (based on the classification used by [UI Patterns](#), one of the best resources on the web) lets you know which ones can help, and which ones you can ignore.

- **Data Interaction** – This type aids in giving and receiving data, and enables deeper interactions. These cover not only how the user sends data to the site, but also how the site responds via feedback.

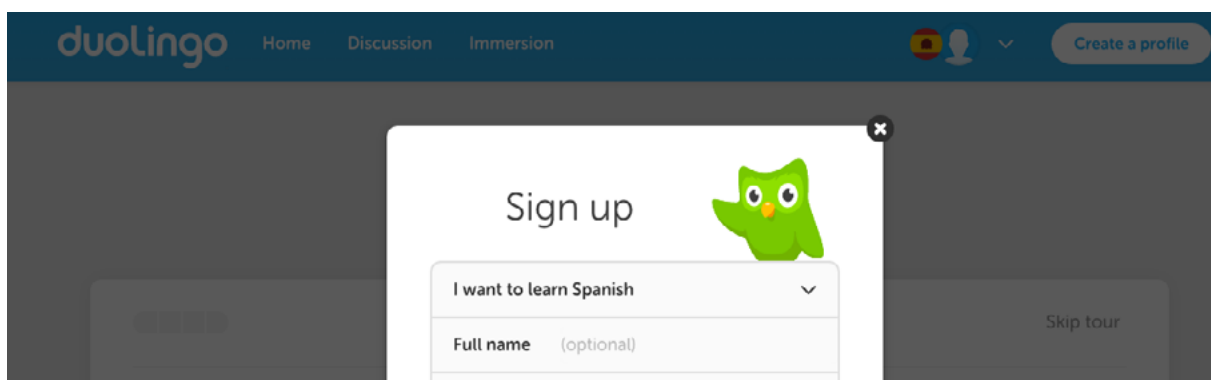


Photo credit: [Duolingo](#)

- **Simplification** – Like the social sign-in shortcut below, these patterns provide quick fixes to possible objections or roadblocks, reducing both **friction** and **cognitive load**. In essence, they streamline the entire UX.

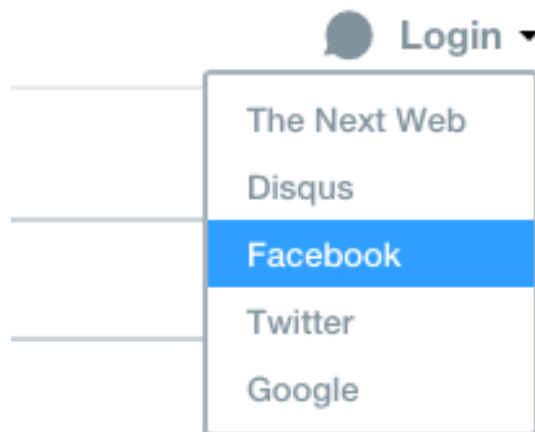


Photo credit: [The Next Web](#)

- **Navigation** – As a site is no good if everyone gets lost, these patterns help the user orient themselves and find their next destination effortlessly.

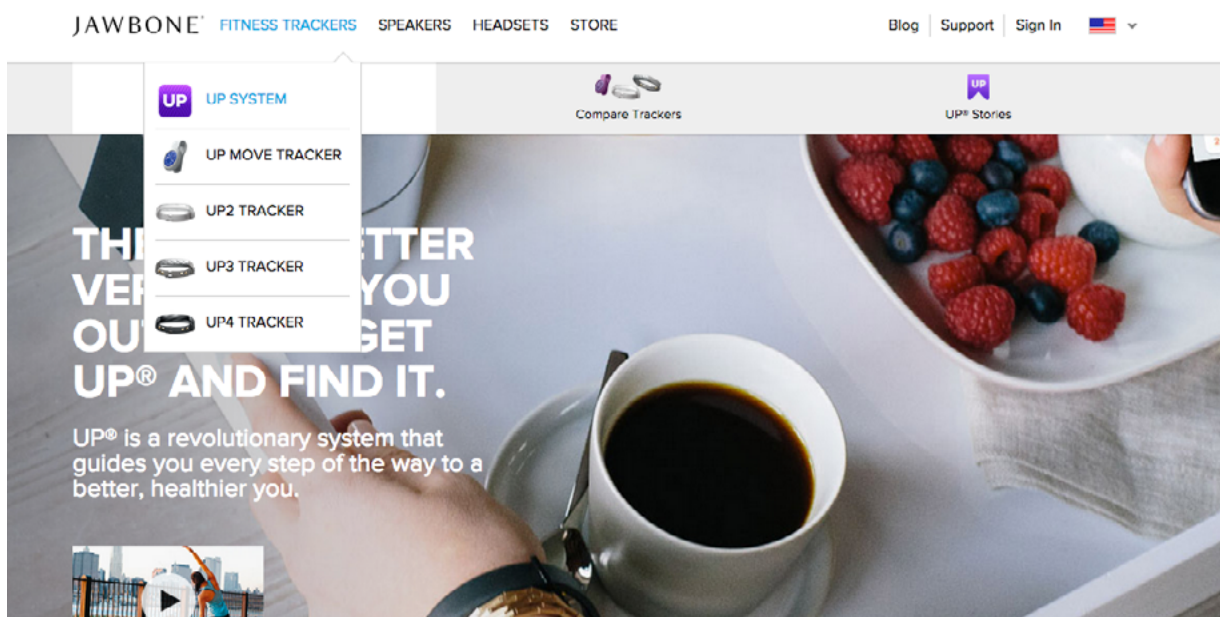


Photo credit: [Jawbone](#)

- **Incentivization** – Sometimes your users need a little push to interact with certain features. These patterns incentivize your user to perform certain actions (or at least don't give up), sometimes with a small reward-system to explore the brain's [habit loop](#).

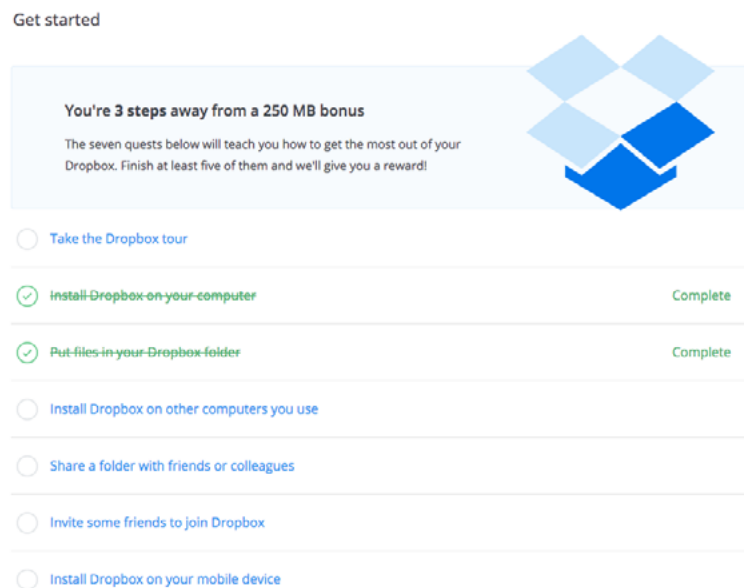


Image credit: [Dropbox](#)

- **Hierarchy** – These patterns establish a visual hierarchy, so your users understand logically, which elements are more important than others. For example, do you section out your site or lay everything out on an equal plane with a [cards layout](#)?

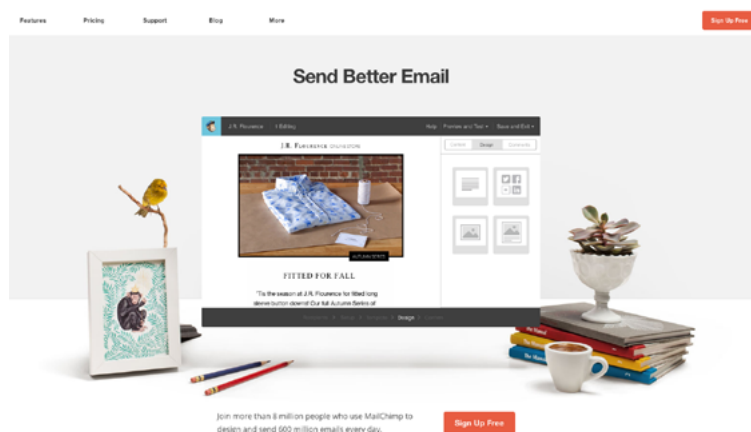


Photo credit: [MailChimp](#)

- **Social Media** – These patterns not only facilitate users sharing content from your site, but also provide a feeling of trust.

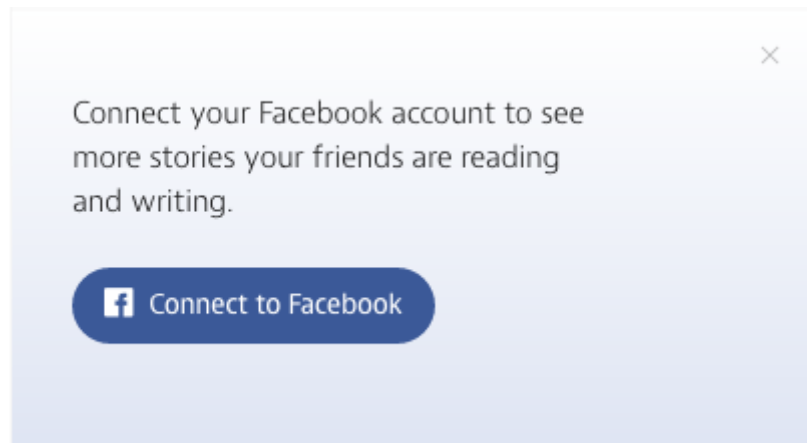


Photo credit: [Medium](#)

These six options are just some of the many ways to organize patterns. Below, we'll explain a classification system that applies to each of these categories.

Different Levels of UI Patterns

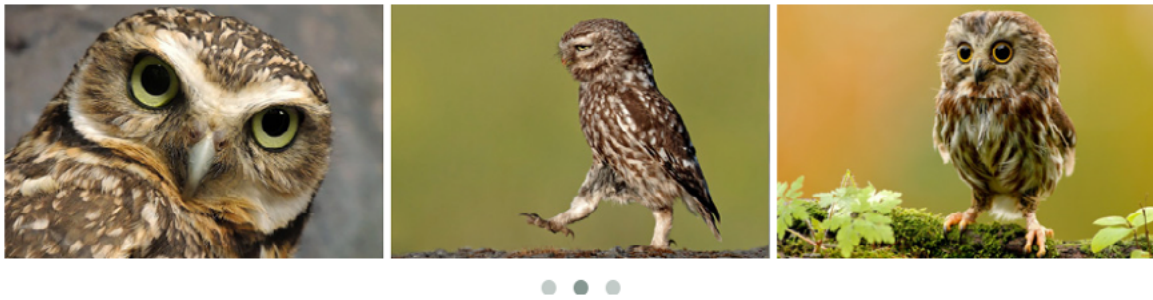
Anders Toxboe, founder of the exhaustively thorough [UI Patterns.com](#), explains that patterns can be [used on different levels, in different ways](#). Extending beyond the classifications based on *what they do*, patterns can be further classified by *how they're used*. For example, some patterns are flexible and change depending on the type of site, while others are stagnant no matter where they appear.

We'll describe these patterns based on Toxboe's [UI Pattern Pyramid](#) (perhaps the best analogy for understanding patterns).

1. Design Consistency

Patterns of consistency are created for a more logical experience across your site.

For example, while you might get a bit creative with how you design a photo carousel on your site, consistency patterns ensure that the 3 dots are always centered on the middle image. If the position were to change from page to page, friction increases because users need to relearn the interface.



Source: *OWL Carousel*

It's worth noting that there is some room for customization – the location of the dots varies, sometimes outside the pictures, sometimes superimposed over them. The key is to pick a style and stick with it.

As we described in the free e-book *Consistency in UI Design*, you first want to design the UI pattern in a way that feels familiar to users based on their existing knowledge (external consistency). When it comes time to then build those patterns on your site, you want to make sure the patterns are internally consistent as well.

Patterns

Design and mark-up patterns unique to this site.

Pagination

Used to navigate between pages of search results.

Previous 1 2 3 4 Next

Notification Message

Used to highlight a particular message or action.

I'm running the Brighton Marathon on Sunday, April 15th 2012

By doing so, I hope to raise £500 for Action for Children. Sponsorship will not only motivate me on the big day, but help thousands of children across the UK reach their full potential.

[Sponsor my run on Just Giving >](#)

Source: *Paul Robert Lloyd*

It's hard to track how to balance personalization with consistency, so we recommend creating a [front-end style guide](#). This is a global, quick-reference guide so all team members know the guidelines for each pattern. In the [style guide for his website](#), Paul Robert Lloyd (above) lists all the patterns choices unique to his site. For more examples of style guides, check out the free pocket guide [An Overview of Style Guides for Modern Designers](#).

2. Design Strategy

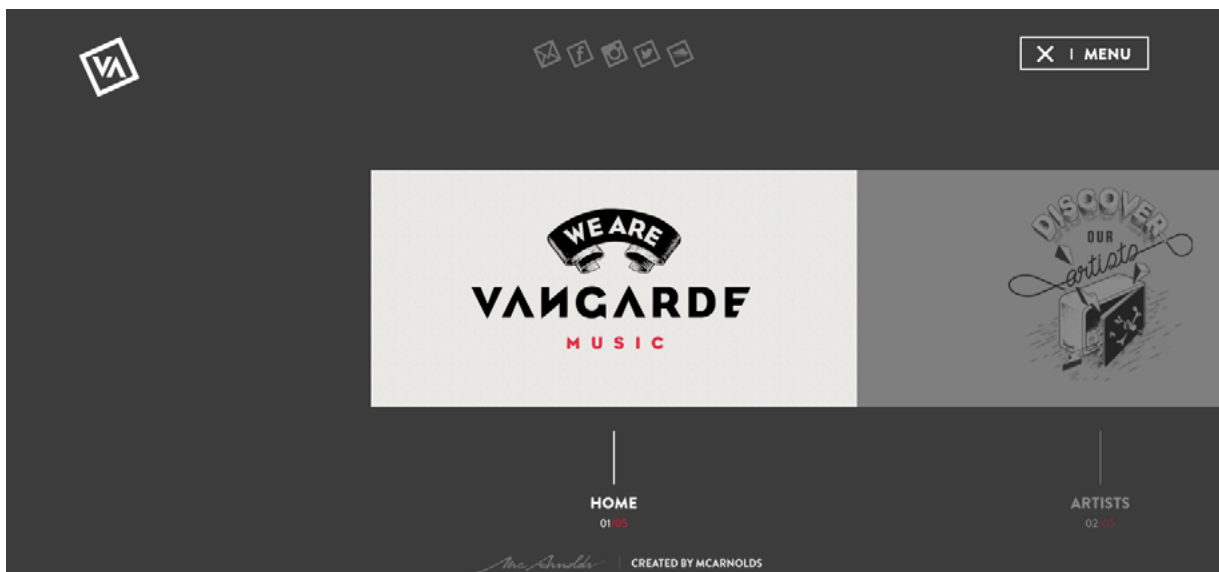
Consistency patterns are purely tactical, while strategic patterns are where you make the most important decisions.

As [Toxboe suggests](#), these strategic patterns (which he refers to as “patterns of flow”) help users flow through your site. For example, both the sidebar and controversial hamburger menu are patterns of flow – they are both different ways of helping users navigate through a site.

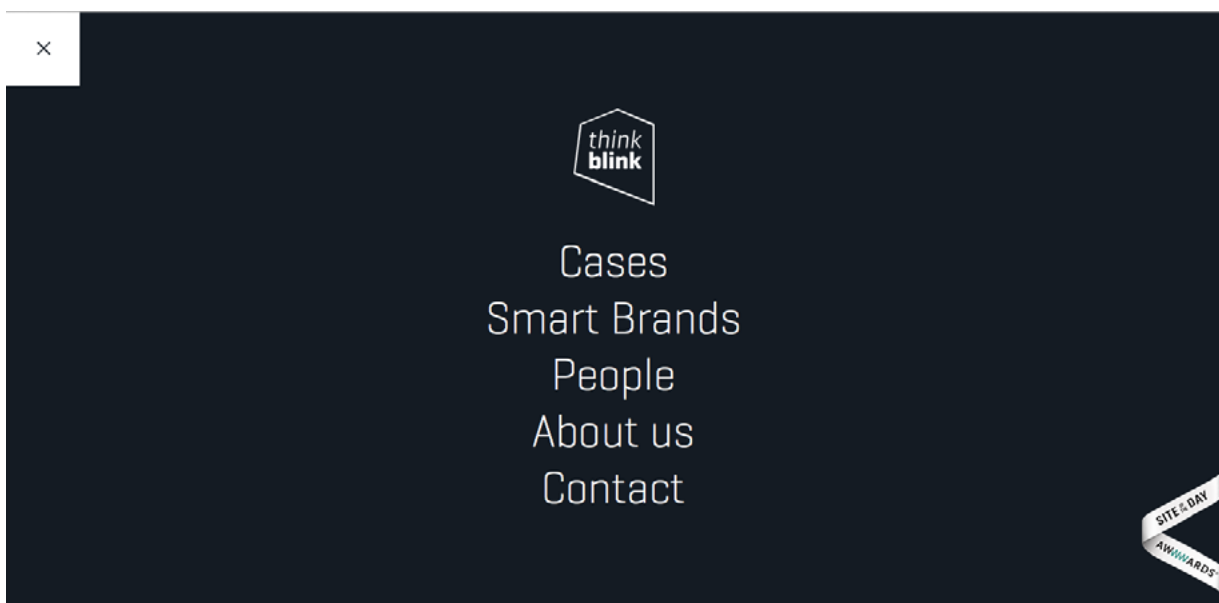
Aside from choosing between different strategic patterns, you can also execute each pattern in different ways.

Let's take, for example, the [controversial](#) hamburger icon. Love it or hate it, the fact is that it's a popular pattern today. It's also fairly versatile. Let's compare the different treatments on the award-winning sites [Vangarde Music](#) and [ThinkBlink](#).

Once you click the menu on both sites, the differences are quite apparent.



Source: [Vangarde Music](#)



Source: [ThinkBlink](#)

As before, Vangarde chooses a more stylistic, flashy approach, opening an unconventional side-scrolling menu with grab-and-scroll functionality, and featuring more of its artistic flair, at the cost of presenting all menu options at once. ThinkBlink keeps it simpler, opening up a standard, five-item menu of text-only labels, set against a monochrome background. Navigation is more

traditional on ThinkBlink (which makes sense for an audience of potential clients), and more unconventional for Vangarde (which might suit their artistic audience).

However, both sites keep the essentials the same. The look of the icon – a signifier – is nearly identical, and once clicked the icon turns to a *X* for cancelling on both sites. The heart of the flow pattern is the same, but sites are able to customize the look or interactivity to suit their users.

3. Design Context

Last are patterns only applicable to specific types of sites. These are appropriate only for certain situations, and so fit the narrow margin at the top of the pyramid. Further, while their application is very precise, their functions tend to be broad – think of the pattern for step-by-step checkout, which is only applicable to ecommerce sites, but is open to a broad range of variations.

For this reason, context patterns are often chosen early in the design process since it's immediately obvious that ecommerce sites need a checkout pattern and portfolio sites need a gallery pattern.



Source: [Amazon](#)

Amazon did not invent the step-by-step checkout process, but they utilize it because it's practical. The pattern breaks up the otherwise

complicated checkout process into individual steps, so as not to overwhelm the shopper and scare them off at the crucial moment. As a pattern, the step-by-step checkout is used often... however only with ecommerce sites. Free-to-use sites like Facebook or Google have no use for such a pattern.

4. Putting It All Together

[Toxboe's Pattern Pyramid](#) was not simply a creative choice. It realistically reflects the pattern selection process.

You start at the top, selecting only a few contextual patterns depending on your site. These often shape the layout and/or information architecture.

For example, if you're building a portfolio site, you know you'll need a page for samples of your work, which will affect the navigation of the entire site. That's why these are selected early on, generally in the wireframing phase (you can learn more about making structural design decisions in our free [Guide to Wireframing](#)).

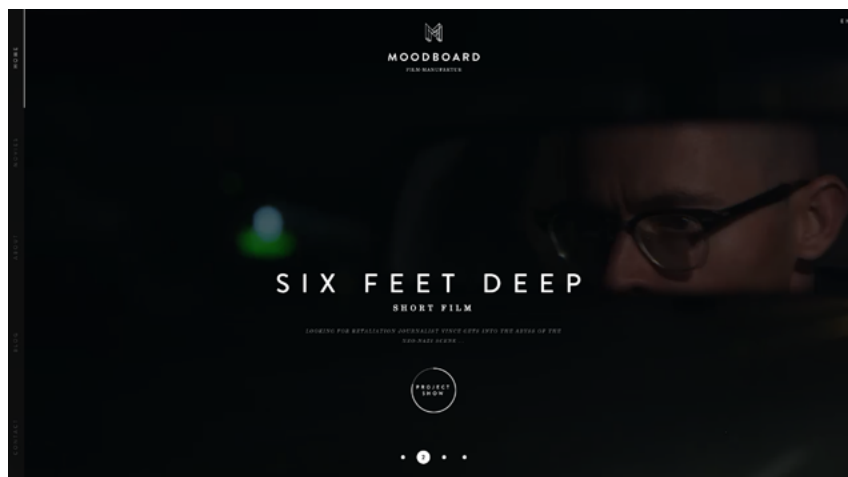
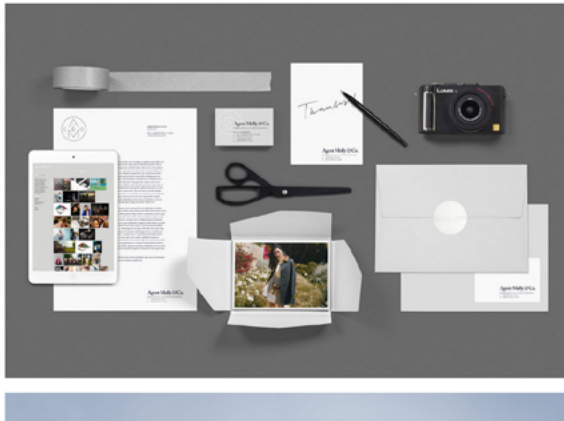


Photo credit: Duncckelfeld via [awwwards](#)



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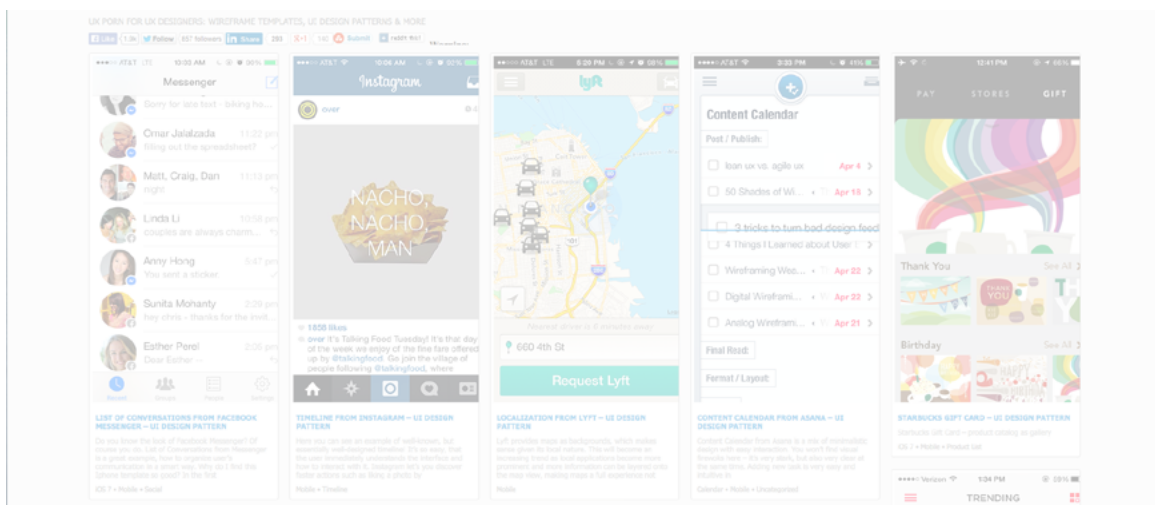
Photo credit: AH via [awwwards](#)

You then move to the middle phase, where you choose more patterns that you personalize to help users move through your site. For example, if you're building an agency portfolio site, do you select a [cards-based design pattern](#) or an animated slider? The bulk of design work usually focuses on wireframing, prototyping, and then testing decisions made during this middle stage of UI design.

Last are the consistency patterns. These are the most granular, but also the easiest to incorporate, since there's little room for variation. If you dictate that each card on the portfolio site is 400x400 pixels, then you need to build every card to that spec. You can specify these patterns during later stages of design, whether as the result of usability testing insights, or as you start increasing fidelity.

The UI Pattern Selection Process

Now that you know the waters, it's time to dive in. The effectiveness of a pattern depends on the site – the perfect pattern for one might do more harm than good on another.



Source: [UXPin](#)

Our preferred method of pattern selection involves four distinct steps to help you identify which patterns will work best, and how to implement them:

1. Isolate the problem.
2. Examine which patterns other sites used to solve the problem.

3. Analyze how these sites used the patterns.
4. Customize the pattern in the way it's right for you.

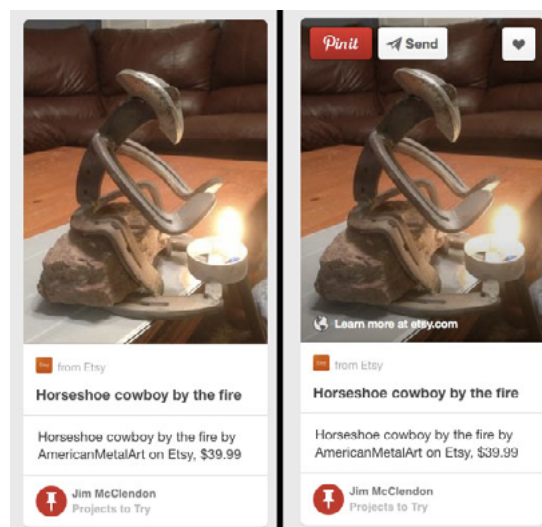
Let's explain how this process works with an example: site testing has revealed that users find your interface too cluttered.

1. Isolate the problem.

You take a critical look at your interface and realize that, yes, it is too cluttered. After analyzing the qualitative and quantitative user feedback, you realize the controls are the issue. There's too many options available, but at the same time, users value these options and use each at different times (so none are expandable). Your problem is clear: how do you save screen space without sacrificing user options?

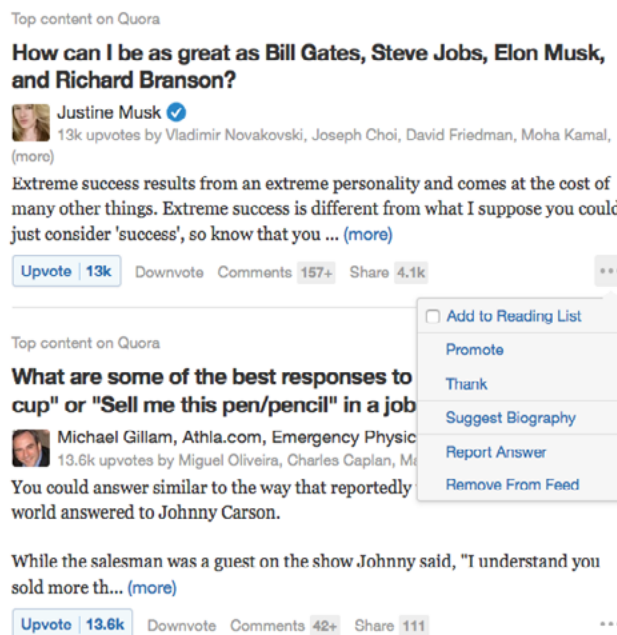
2. Examine how other sites solve the problem.

You visit sites similar to your own, and see how they solved the problem. You go to sites like [Pinterest](#) and [Quora](#).



Source: [Pinterest](#)

On [Pinterest](#), you notice they use the pattern of Discoverable Controls. By hovering the mouse over the relevant card, the controls appear, but when you don't interact with the card, the controls disappear. This allows the user to focus mostly on content, and only see controls when they're needed.



Source: [Quora](#)

[Quora](#) takes a similar approach, but with notable exceptions. Instead of hovering over the relevant card, the user must click the icon to open the collapsible menu. These present their interaction options, with word links instead of Pinterest's icons.

3. Analyze how these sites used the patterns.

After taking good looks at each, you realize the major differences. First, Pinterest has the controls appear by hovering, while Quora involves a click. Second, the Pinterest controls are icons, while the Quora controls are words.

4. Customize the pattern for your site.

You decide to mix-and-match the elements to get the best of both worlds. Because there are only a few relevant cards per screen, you decide on the clickable icon to reveal more options, as opposed to the hover controls. However, your options are simple and fun, so you decide to represent them with icons, rather than labels.

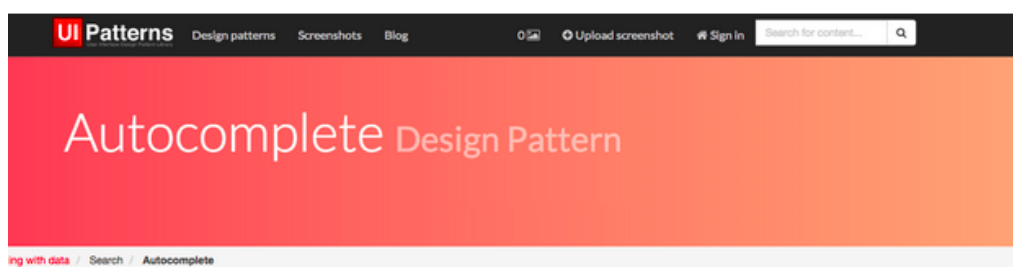
This process gives you a familiar and recognizable pattern that requires no explanation when your user sees it, but is still personalized enough that it feels unique to you.

Additional Pattern Resources

To get started, we've listed a few of our favorites below.

1. UI Patterns

One of the best organized pattern libraries, which makes it easy to find what you're looking for. Certainly one of the favorites among our team of UI designers.



91%
of 108 votes
liked this

Problem summary

The user needs to enter information into a text box which is prone to be mis-typed, hard to remember, or ambiguous.

Example



* The autocomplete pattern is used to suggest locations at the travel aggregator momondo.com

Photo credit: [UI Patterns](#)

2. Pattern Tap

This community run by prestigious design agency [ZURB](#) features patterns organized as cards with quick explanations of the rationale and use case for each pattern.

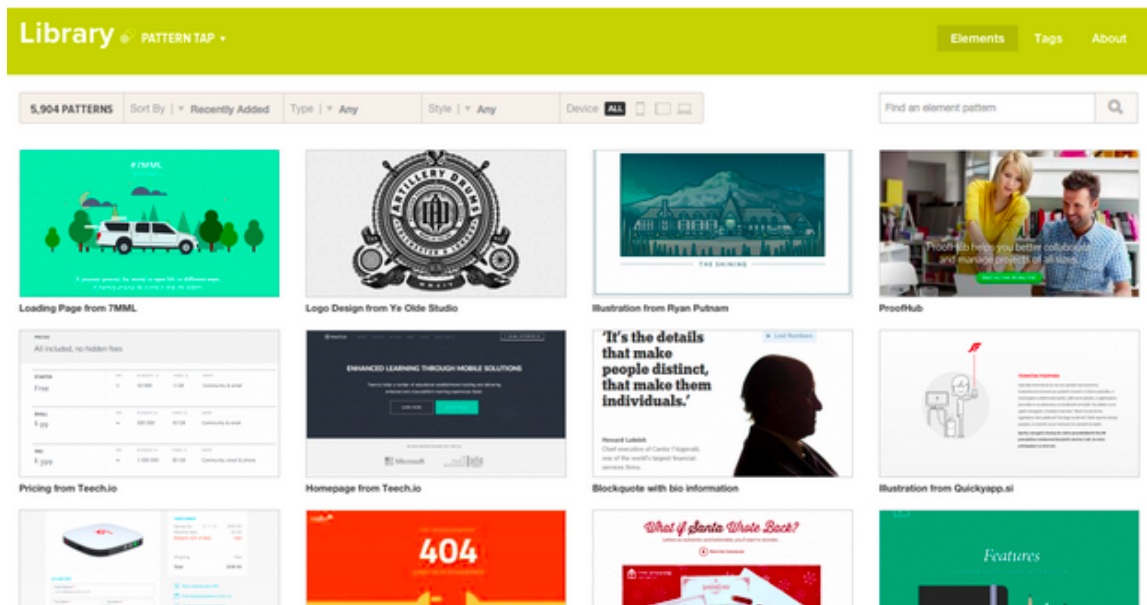


Photo credit: [PatternTap](#)

3. UseYourInterface

See plenty of mobile UI patterns in action with libraries of GIFs.

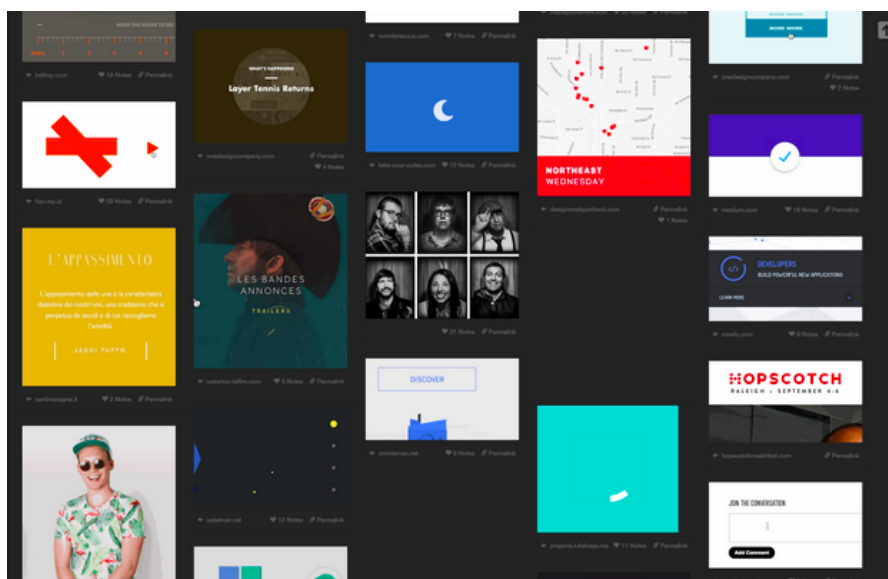
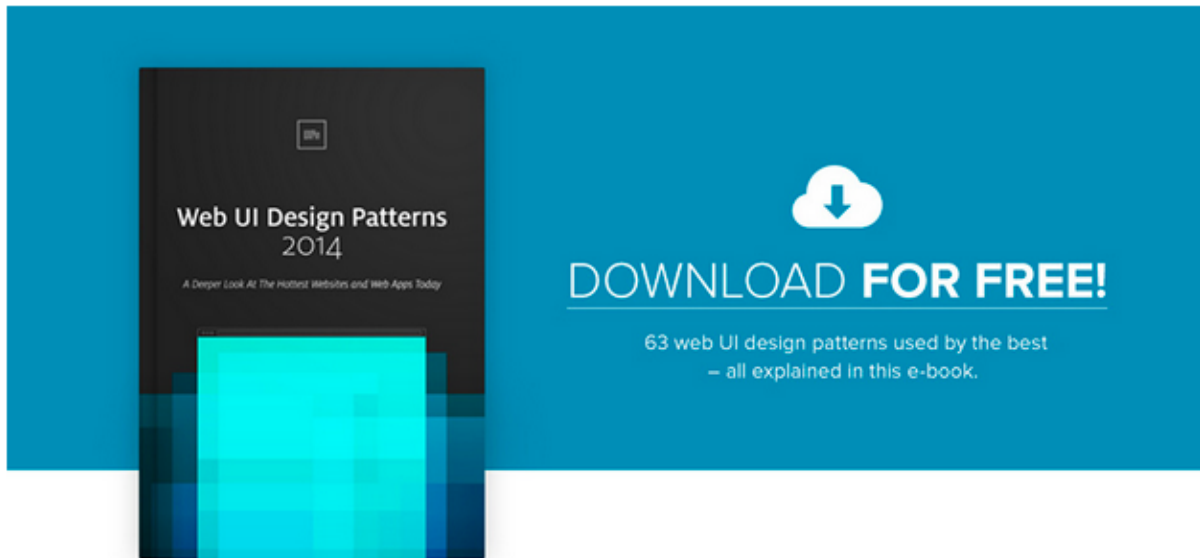


Photo credit: [UserYourInterface](#)

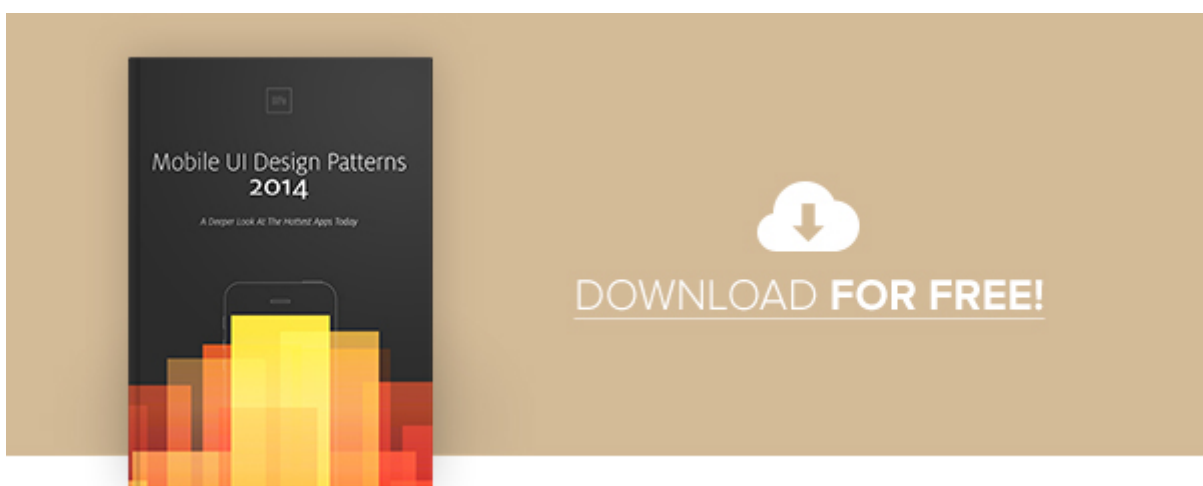
4. Web UI Design Patterns

Free 100+ page ebook compiling a list of the 63 most popular patterns, organized by function.



5. Mobile UI Design Patterns

Like the first pattern ebook, this master collection explains 46 of the most effective UI patterns for mobile devices.



6. Capptivate

A kinetic pattern library for iOS animations, Capptivate features simple categories for easy browsing. Definitely worth checking out.

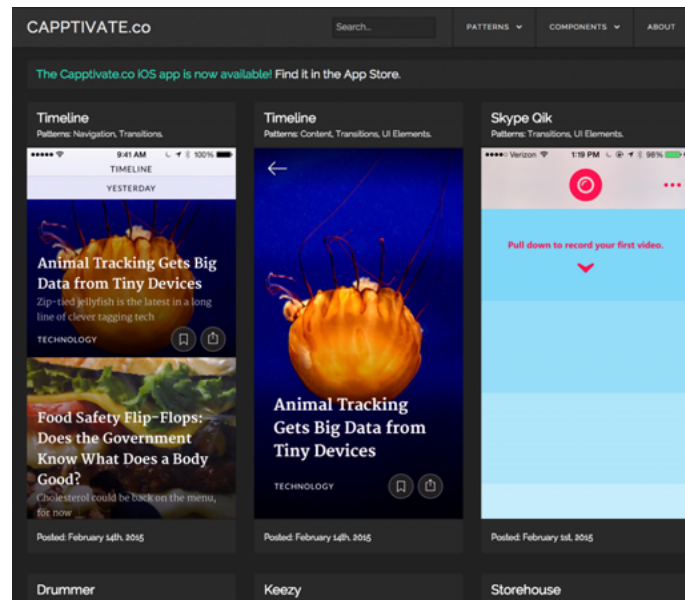


Photo credit: [Capptivate](#)

7. Pptrns

Featuring a clean minimalist interface, Pptrns allows you to find mobile UI patterns by category, year, and device (iPhone, Android, iPad, Apple Watch).

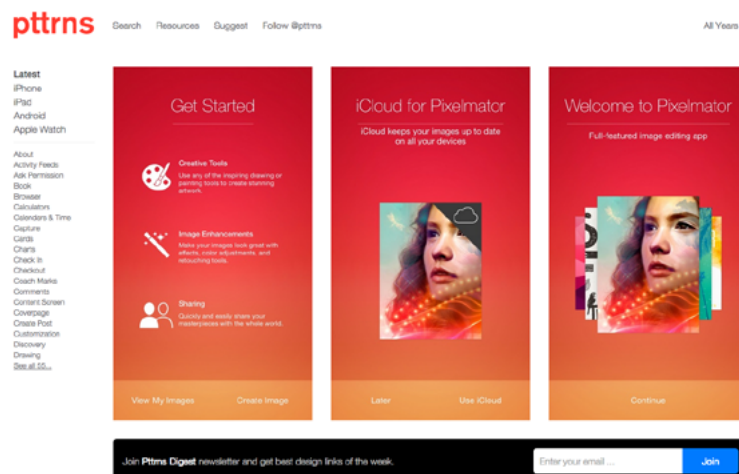


Photo credit: [Pptrns](#)

8. Dark Patterns

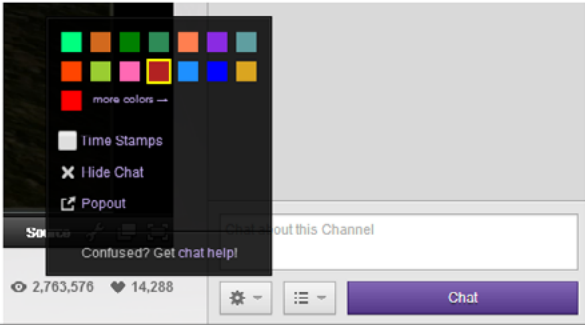
Showing examples of the dark side of UI design, this site is the perfect reminder of how not to design patterns. Plenty of cautionary examples from high-profile companies.

Dark Patterns
Browse Library ▾
Submit a Pattern ▾
About Us

At twitch.tv, “more colors” means “give us money”

Posted April 8, 2015 & filed under [Bait and Switch](#).

The twitch.tv chat allows you to pick a nickname color, but clicking “more colors” navigates you away from the current page to a payment page for the premium service.



The screenshot shows a Twitch chat interface. A color selection menu is open, displaying a grid of colored squares. The 'more colors' option is highlighted in red. Below the grid are options for 'Time Stamps', 'Hide Chat', and 'Popout'. The chat input area shows a message: 'Confused? Get chat help!'. At the bottom, there are viewer and subscriber counts (2,763,576 and 14,288 respectively) and a 'Chat' button.

Recent Uploaded Patterns

- [AMD Catalyst Software tries to sneak unwanted software onto your system](#) April 8, 2015
- [At twitch.tv, “more colors” means “give us money”](#) April 8, 2015
- [Active.com sneaks a recurring premium subscription into their small print](#) April 6, 2015
- [Skype Accounts, Impossible to Delete](#) April 5, 2015
- [Royal Mail’s Marketing Consent](#) April 5, 2015

Comments are closed.

Photo credit: [Dark Patterns](#)

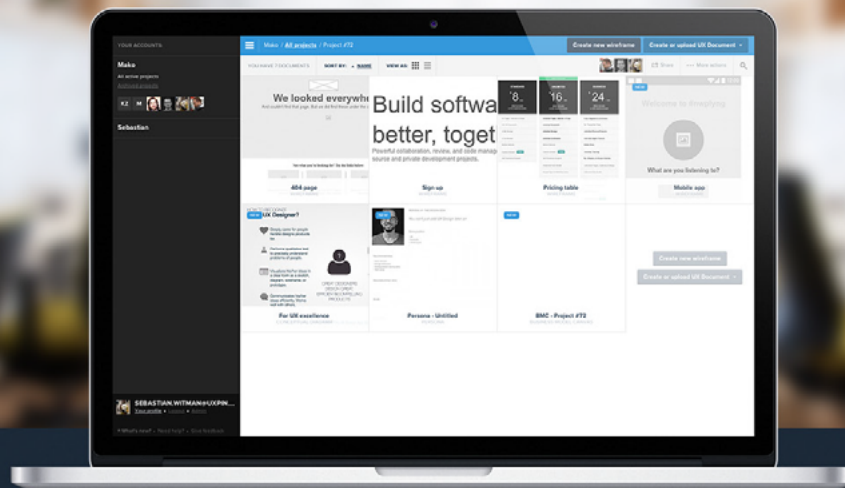
These are simply our favorite resources, but Smashing Magazine released this [list of over 40 pattern libraries](#), in case you haven’t found what you’re looking for.

Conclusion

By taking advantage of generally understood knowledge, patterns save your users time in learning new interface systems, while also solving any number of problems for you at the designing end.

In fact, patterns are just creative design solutions that were so effective, more and more sites started using them until they became commonplace. That's what makes patterns such a valuable design tool... as long as you know enough about them to choose the right one for the right job.

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