

# Ten Tips for Designing Mobile UX

As the mobile channel matures and technologies develop, so too does the field of Mobile User Experience. Good UX is what separates successful apps from unsuccessful ones, and lets small startups take on big brands by creating more compelling apps. Below, I'll share ten quick tips that will help you on the way to great mobile design. Even if you're not involved in the actual design process, knowing these concepts will still help you come up with better concepts and give better feedback to those who do the work. (Note: I refer to apps below, but you can generally interchange with mobile websites freely).

## 1. **Go back to the drawing board**

The key point to remember throughout all mobile UX design is that whilst it has some principles in common with web and software design, going top-down by simply shrinking your desktop experience is not going to cut it. To design a good app, start from the bottom with the customer experience you want, and build upwards - enhancing it with the right elements of your existing digital presence where appropriate - to achieve it. Great mobile ideas are uniquely mobile - that is to say, they couldn't be done the same way anywhere else.

## 2. **Identify your users**

Modern mobile users generally tend to fall into one of two camps: hunters (who want to find a specific piece of information or do a specific task quickly) and gatherers (looking to browse around or fill time, and less concerned about a specific outcome).. If your audience are hunters, focus on features which enable them to achieve tasks in the smallest number of steps and minimise any functionality which does not help them. If they are gatherers, look at ways to give them fast access to broad information, then identify ways to keep them in your app. In this way, it's possible to please both, but do be wary of becoming a Jack of all trades - in some instances, you may have a better outcome by picking one type and sticking with it.

## 3. **Remember the 80/20 rule**

Generally, 80% of app users will use just 20% of its functionality. If your service is already online, an easy way to ensure that you cater to this is to look at how your customers interact with your website (particularly your mobile customers - easily done by restricting your analytics to mobile browsers) and identify what functionality is used most, then use that information to cut down your feature set and make sure this vital 20% is as easy and intuitive to use as possible.

## 4. **Use task-based design**

Mobile users want to accomplish tasks, whether broad (like browsing news items) or specific (like checking flight times). Every function of your app should be geared towards helping them to both identify and then complete their task, and everything else should be discarded. Mobile users tend to be time-poor, and the real estate you have to work with is very small - you can't afford to waste time or space. Try to sense their intent, and aim to expose the (relevant!) possibilities available at each stage of the task to the user, so they can swiftly move through to completion yet fluidly react to uncovering data they weren't expecting.

## 5. **Keep it simple**

Mobile users don't expect to read an instruction manual. Brief prompts are fine, as are service- (rather than app-) specific explanations, but if you find yourself having to put a FAQ in your app, you've probably gone wrong somewhere. Bear in mind that mobile simply doesn't have the space for the annotations used in web, so things like clear iconography are a great space saver. In the long run, the simpler the app, the better it will be. It will be easier and cheaper to support and update, and it will probably do what it is supposed to. Remember the mantra: feature rich, user poor.

## 6. **Don't ignore platform UX**

Apple, Google and the rest of the manufacturers have invested billions ensuring that users know exactly what to expect when they press a button, swipe the screen or touch an icon. Developing custom interfaces which do not work in this way might make your branding team happy, but will confuse users, slow down adoption, and put a significant obstacle in the way of engagement. Instead, take the principles of the OS-native interface kit, and subtly style your interface elements without altering the underlying functions. Read up on the platform guidelines to always make sure you're using the correct UI element for the correct job, as well as following guidelines around things like minimum sizing for tappable buttons - they're chosen for a reason. And get hold of the device you are designing for and use it religiously for a month; you'll know more than any guidelines will tell you. After all, you wouldn't hire a web designer that didn't own a computer!

## 7. **Capture more than just touch input**

Human-computer interaction can be described as a lossy process - at any time, the user is generating much more input than the interface is capturing. This data is both a function of the user, and a function of their environment and established behaviour patterns. This includes obvious things like sound and movement, but also more abstract concepts like location, proximity, environmental factors, social networks, and intent. Mobile devices - with a huge array of sensors and communication channels; more than just about any other device - are uniquely placed to capture more of this "ambient" data. Think about how you can improve your user experience with intelligent use of it; using data the user didn't even realise they were giving off is a great way to create surprising, memorable and engrossing outcomes.

## 8. **Design for interruption**

The unfortunate by-product of mobile phones that can go anywhere and do hundreds of things is that invariably, something is going to interrupt the user - either in real life, or from within the phone itself. By keeping your app simple and your interface clean, you help reduce the cognitive load on the user, making them less likely to need to disengage from your app to do other things. But also ensure that it's easy to pick up from where they left off if they are ejected out of your experience by an incoming call or their bus arriving - save states, break larger tasks down into smaller chunks, and put context throughout.

## 9. **Remember your design isn't perfect**

Even the most painstakingly-considered UX will ultimately contain some unseen flaw when put into the real world. This starts even before users have got their hands on it. During development, some ideas will prove technically unfeasible, but don't throw

them out: go back to the drawing board and work out how you can deliver at least an approximation, and in most cases the user won't even realise you've scaled down. And as the mobile marketplace constantly innovates and adjusts, what works today may not work tomorrow (and vice versa). Treat your app as a continuously evolving entity, using data from analytics, user feedback, and new technological breakthroughs to constantly reassess and improve the experience.

#### **10. Above all, follow best practice and your own experience**

Ultimately, the difference between the mobile experience and that of more traditional digital design is that the small, slow hardware and unique external demands placed on the user mean there is little room for overly flabby layout and feature sets that have crept into some parts of the desktop. Even if you have no experience designing mobile, this constraint near enough forces you into following classic design best practices. As tactile objects, classic product design theory and your own experiences of the real world will put you at a natural advantage in designing the mobile user experience - which means more time to spend on truly innovating with the app as a whole.