Flat Design: In-Depth

Flat Design or Flat UI has been one of the most talked about trends in web and user interface design this year. It has frequently been compared with skeuomorphic design, because of its completely opposite principles and style.

Designers have voiced questions over whether this is a lasting trend or just another passing fad. Regardless of the future and the voices against flat, most designers have been tempted to try implementing this trend in some of their work. Here we'll delve a little deeper into the style, its historical roots and how to start designing in the flat style right away.

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Flat design examples

flat design can be used to create really beautiful, simple interfaces, but it's not necessarily appropriate for every project. Be mindful of what you're trying to achieve visually and └what you want to communicate.

What is Flat Design?

As the name indicates, flat design is defined by flatness of style: simplifying an interface by removing extra elements └such as shadows, bevels, textures and gradients that create a 3D look.

The idea is to create a finished design that lives in only two dimensions, without losing any of the functionality that a "regular" interface └provides. This creates a new challenge for the designer, because by stripping an interface of its decorations and effects, └it becomes harder to define the main actions and elements in a design.

Buttons

When creating a button, using a border, gradient and drop-shadow will make the element stand out against the background and content. This makes it easily identifiable as a clickable element.

When creating a flat button, you can't use these details, so the focus should be put on grid organization and color contrast. You can use bevel and shadow as long as you keep the flat look of the button, but you'll want to make these controls as simple as possible.

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Evolution of Flat Design

Historically, in design as in fashion, trends tend to shift continually
between the complex and the simple.
This is becoming more obvious in the visual design field, especially in
web and multimedia, where designs are more
ephemeral and don't last as long as in traditional print supports.

The term "Flat Design" was coined and popularised by Allan Grinshtein,
from LayerVault,a Version Control for Designers. In his post "The Flat
Design Era", Allan explains that "elegant interfaces are ones that have
the most impact with the fewest elements". The idea is that a minimalistic
interface can be better suited to its function when compared to a more
embellished, complex one. The community took this on board, having
being bombarded with skeuomorphic interfaces over the past year. Since
then, flat design has come on in leaps and bounds. Most flat design
schemes have five characteristics – no added effects, simple design and
UI elements, a focus on typography, a focus on color and an overall
minimalist approach. You can find out more about these characteristics in
Designmodo's post on the Principles of Flat Design. You might also want
to check out the Flat UI Free Interface Kit.

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