

Falling Flat

Posted on October 17, 2013 by Shawn Wilkins



With iOS 7 comes a new way to design apps and make them appeal to an audience. The overall scheme, as of now, is to simply make everything flat and basic. While this model works well for certain apps (such as Twitterrific and Facebook), it doesn't work well for others. The idea behind iOS 7 is to not only break down design elements to their essentials but to also surpass the inherent simplicity through creativity and innovation. Unfortunately, that's not what's happening. It's worth talking about, and even as someone who isn't a designer, it's something that's obvious in the overall user experience of an app.

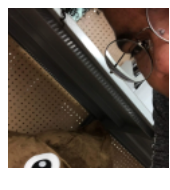
Recently, I downloaded an app (that I'll leave unnamed for the sake of their business), and its biggest flaw was that it tried to change too much. iOS 7 reinstates this newness and freshness to the OS, but like years past, its apps are not meant to be *entirely* rethought. For example, a music app should not take it upon itself to change how music is played on the device. The general UI and UX of music apps have been the same for many, many years. You could argue that it's time for a change, but that's akin to saying you've been sleeping lying down your entire life, and now you want to try dangling from the ceiling. It's odd. iOS versions 1 through 6 have laid down stepping stones to guide us, but when you take an innovative idea and destroy the basic fundamentals, you instill a learning curve, not an intuitive app experience.

Another problem with iOS 7 is that many apps are gunning for such blatant simplicity that their ideas become more complex along the way. I've always had the notion that if your app must teach me how to use it, something's wrong. There are obvious exceptions to this rule if the basics of an app are still in-tune with what iOS users have come to expect — namely Tweetbot with its slew of features. At its essence, Tweetbot works just like any other Twitter app. If you want to compose a tweet, you know how to do it. Following, unfollowing someone — same thing. The idea of innovation comes into play when new features are added in a behind the scenes sense; you can tap and hold an icon to get this to happen, swipe here for that. It's fundamentally the same. App creators for iOS 7 have yet to master this for the most part, and it's creating a less than desirable atmosphere for users.

Thanks to iOS 7, developers are also being difficultly challenged, and everyone understands that. Just because the OS looks different, though, doesn't make it a brand new, easily tweakable thing. For instance, the idea of sliding from the sides of the screen to trigger actions is not new and is baked into the OS. Using that is perfectly fine, and no one is stopping anyone from doing that. However, when your app depends solely on sliding for basic functionality and ignores the core of what it is — an on-screen interactive, tappable element, it stops being an app I want to use. You shouldn't create an app that forces me to learn how to use it.

In the end, I think the majority of apps deserve a fair shot in the App Store, and if you want to try and push the envelope to create something new, go for it. My biggest problem is that iOS 7 has given people the impression that the creation of all apps must be new and different. That apps that do the most basic things must be done in a different, "easier" way that arguably does nothing but confuse the end-user. While you can bring newness to an app, you can't expect people to like the way it works. When you create a music app, don't mess with how music is found, selected, and played. When you make a browser, don't mess with the way URLs are typed in. Of course, there are better ways to do certain things, but I assure you that someone would have found a more effective way to do these basic tasks within the past six years if they were truly problematic in the first place.

iOS 7 certainly brings a slew of new challenges to developers and designers alike. Finding the right groove will be tough. Placing yourself outside of the normal scope of reality and into your own imagination will also be tough. However, there's an easy way to at least help you cross that bridge: think fundamentally. That doesn't mean to follow the crowd or copy whatever you saw in another app. It means that you need to at least adhere to the ways people have been doing things for so many years. If you release a Twitter app that loads cards, and you have to shift from right to left to view them, people will run away quicker than something quick. *Look at how people use things*. Create new trends within that usage. Be the next new thing, but don't be the next thing that tried and failed.



About Shawn Wilkins

An enthusiastic writer who values quality over quantity. The abundance of posts shouldn't make the site, but rather, the quality of them. Aiming for perfection is the goal and anything less isn't acceptable. Long walks on the beach are accepted, however.

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