

Fantastical — Making the Obvious the Standard

Posted on November 29, 2012 by Shawn Wilkins



It's difficult to find apps that possess a flawless blend of usability, design, and function, but sometimes you stumble upon that perfect combination. Apps like Tweetie of yesteryear, the newly reborn Facebook app, and even the slow rebuilding of Instagram all show that app creation doesn't have to fit into a predetermined mold. In defying that mold, we now have something that takes those three important traits — usability, design, and functionality — to the highest possible cliff and lets it fly.

The app is Fantastical, known as possibly the greatest app to ever grace the menubar of Mac computers since, well... nothing. The problem with typical calendar apps is the time it takes to enter an event. It's a hassle to find the date, set the time, and pretend that these tasks seamlessly integrate with your lifestyle. It brings nothing but tediousness to the table. Because of that, Fantastical translates simple snippets of speech into reminders and notifications for your calendar. Flexibits, makers of Fantastical, have rethought the whole idea of a calendar and its archaic way of scheduling things. They've made it easier and more efficient.

If I type that I have to "Meet Andrew for lunch at Chipotle at 1:30," my calendar should automatically create an event to reflect that. The Fantastical iPhone app does just that, making this process so much closer to home by seamlessly integrating with my phone and my lifestyle.



My phone acts as an extension of me because a large portion of my life is spent on the Internet. From talking on Twitter, networking through email, trying to catch up with friends on Facebook, it's all done via my phone or my computer. The way we all use our phones is an extension of our bodies. We aren't "power users," we're simply people who have adapted to the 21st century. Fantastical understands that the entire process of fiddling with your phone should be easier. Creating calendar events and making sure that they can be created with ease is important to them. They understand that the more time you struggle with something, the less you enjoy it.

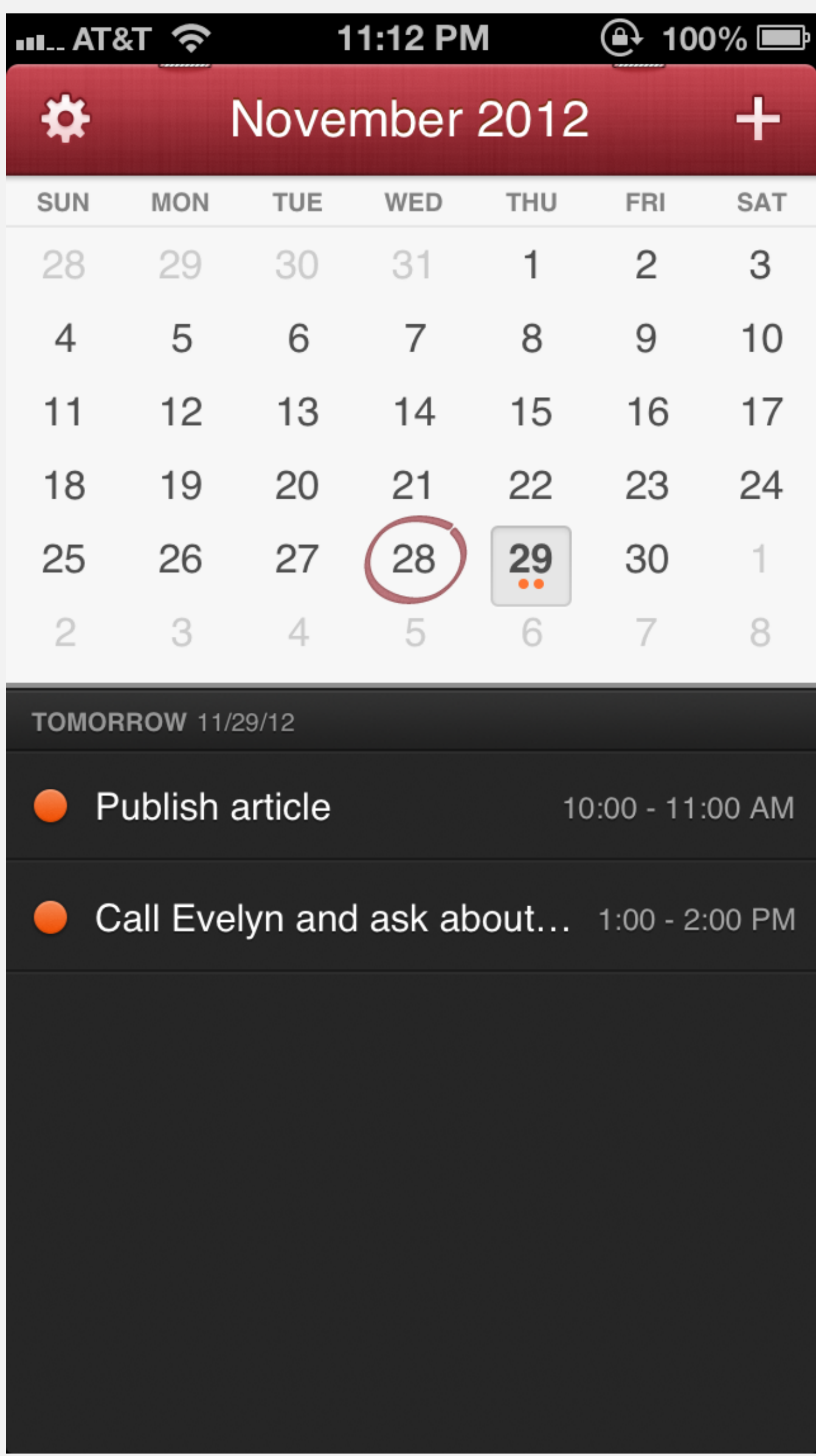
Fantastical looks wondrous in ways that should be more than obvious, and their use of skeuomorphism is top-notch. Some people are against it as a whole because of Apple's abusive use of linen, but the idea behind skeuomorphism is to bring a physical object's appearance to your electronic device in a tasteful manner. That's exactly what Flexibits does. They've taken the leathery, classy texture of a legal calendar and implemented it into their app's look. They've mimicked the sound of gentle marker strokes circling a date to signify the current placement. They've added the swift rips of paper to the app to show the connection between real life and the one you control in your hand.

The advantages to skeuomorphism work in Fantastical's favor because it's not overpowering. No one will look at this app and be put off by the incredibly elegant mixture of leathery textures. The app utilizes real life aspects where need be and has matched them perfectly with their own brand of incredible design. As Michael Simmons, designer and co-founder of Flexibits puts it:

"This is something we spent a lot of time on and made sure everything 'made sense.' It was important to have an interface that didn't interfere with the functionality of the app, but instead made the experience fast and friendly."

That alone should be the goal for everyone designing iOS apps. When creating an app, you need to tackle its design, but you also need to make sure you can achieve the ease of use and friendly atmosphere that makes your app great in the eyes of the user. There are many different paths you can take in terms of design and function, but the obvious goal is to make them work well together. Fantastical takes something that is plain, old, and boring and makes it exciting through simplicity, ease of use, and design.

Building this app meant looking at how something was once created and learning how to bring it over to the iOS platform. Simply having a smaller, rectangular interface doesn't mean the process of translating it to iOS is simple. You have to reevaluate and determine which pieces go where, learn how to integrate seamless functionality, and focus on how all of that will work together to bring smooth transitions and an overall elegance to the app.



Fantastical does all of these things well. From making it incredibly simple to schedule events to automatically setting times and dates based on keywords, these intricacies make the app seem as if it's a revolutionized idea of something that hasn't changed in decades. All in all, Fantastical brings a wonderful experience to the iPhone. The app isn't something that you can live without. We live in a world with endless possibilities through tech, and Fantastical sets a new standard of reimagination. If something can be done or reimaged, why not do it? Flexibits takes this idea and makes it possible. Then, they bring it to the iPhone so you can always have it with you.

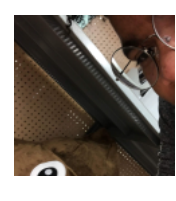
When it comes to the idea of a perfect app, I'd have to say Fantastical is just that. It has a wonderful design, it works exquisitely, it positively changes the way we interact, and it makes it all so painless. The thought of flipping through days, weeks, and months to find the date you need to set a reminder for is gone. You now have a calendar app that does it all for you. If you tell the app to set a date for a certain activity, it'll do it. You simply type it in as you would any note, and the app handles the rest.

Aside from its function, Fantastical is gorgeous and shows how proper skeuomorphism should look. Skeuomorphism is on the rise and fall right now. People have this morphed idea that no matter the instance, it's horrible to incorporate into design. That's plainly wrong. Skeuomorphism is used to connect something you know and feel from the real world with what you're viewing on-screen. Fantastical's design is not gaudy, extreme, or repugnant; it's the opposite. It makes you wonder why no other company has thought of something like this and why they haven't devoted a numerous amount of time into creating a beautiful, lovely, well-functioning app. Everyone should get this app or at the very least, try it. There's no doubt in my mind that you'll enjoy it.

Also, since all of us here at Culture Milk are such fans of Fantastical, we're giving away four (4) copies of the iOS app. We want you to try it because we know you'll love it. So, if you want to win a copy, go ahead and follow @culturemilk on Twitter and retweet the tweet below, or tell us why you Fantastical with the hashtag #emfantastical. We'll be choosing winners this Sunday at 12PM EDT. Good luck!

We're giving away 4 copies of Fantastical. Retweet or write a tweet with #emfantastical for a chance to win! cmilk.co/V7ZhPA

— Culture Milk (@culturemilk) November 29, 2012



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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