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Design to Non-Designers

Shawn Wilkins · December 16th

I'm not a designer, nor have I ever been. I used to dabble in Fireworks to create forum signatures, and that's the height of my expertise. However, when it comes to design, I'm one who can safely say I have a good design for design. Design isn't necessarily all about looks; it's more about the entire package. If you were to think about design being a person, design would be someone who is pleasing to look at, overall smart, and a joy to talk to. Design needs to blend well in all facets and not just approach something to make it look better.

The majority of what I see in design is great and pleasing, but the problem behind it is its UX. When UX started to become a factor, many companies and sites decided to take a route that made it brain dead simple by going for an extra minimalistic look, but this doesn't work most of the time. When companies (namely Microsoft) take this route, it shows a lack of trial, a lack of adventure, a lack of effort. Branding things with glyphs, making text the main factor, and putting things in locations and justifying it by saying "it makes sense" doesn't mean it's a good design. I'm not a designer. This is what I notice.

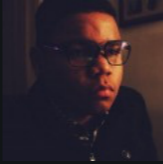
You have to take your design, put it first, and figure out how you're going to make it work. You can't simply brand something that has squares evenly spaced above a large square as good design. That's common sense. You can't say that text being on top of the squares to label it is good design. Again, that's common sense. There is so much wrong in the idea of minimalistic design now that we're forgetting what made minimalism what it is. The simple tone background, the beautiful font, the placement of words themselves, the use of glyphs and their sizes, the spacing between things and how they blend together, the whole idea is either lost of being overlooked.

To someone who isn't a designer, the lack of design speaks more than the product itself. A designer will look at something, notice its flaws in kerning, its lacking feature-set incorporation, or how poorly the app was put together. However, someone who isn't a designer will notice the simplicity and not familiarize themselves with it. The reasons we have glyphs to label things is because they're relatable to real life objects. The floppy disc (we're all old now) for saving, the printer for printing, the open folder for opening files, the blank document for new documents; it's all relatable. The problem with this new absence of design is that it doesn't speak to anyone other than those who understand the lack of it. When you replace meaningful design with squares and rectangles, no one can feel any emotion for it or label it as good and beautiful.

On the opposite side, there are things that are designed beautifully, but take the idea of simplicity and put it first. OS X has been known for catering to those who don't know much about computers, but know exactly what they want to do. Apple has gained this identity because the world of PCs before them had been so difficult and required you to be "good at computers" to function within it. The gap was subsequently closed when Apple started to prevail as the leader and Windows slowly started to transform into something reminiscent of a grandmother who is stuck in her ways. If we bridge the gap between useful design and lacking design, we'll have a great product. Some thing's are over designed and confusing, yet some are painless and easy to remember. Creating a simple design in squares, rectangles, and blocks doesn't mean you're doing something minimalistic — it means you're doing something lazy.

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Shawn Wilkins



As creator of Culture Milk, I bring excellence and creativity to a site that's bred in thought and intelligence. Being able to have full articles that discuss popular topics here on Stemmings, I plan to show what the tech world is like to your average person and what your average person is missing. It's a race with multiple finish lines.

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I truly love my job—sitting on my exercise ball in front of my colossal monitor designing logos and sketching letterforms for book titles, package designs or even the occasional tattoo. I love the creation process, my creative community here in Chicago and beyond, and the rich legacy I'm fortunate to hold as a designer. Nevertheless, I've found many of my favorite things are...

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I have no idea if kids still learn the Dewey Decimal system. For those of you who didn't spend your childhood losing muscle mass in libraries, the Dewey Decimal system is a book classification system invented in 1876. It divides books into ten classes according to subject and organizes them alphabetically. It gave librarians a...

