

UX People 2012



UX People 2012

Written by Martin Belam

Published by Emblem Digital Consulting Ltd, October 2012

All rights reserved. No part of this ebook may be reproduced or utilised in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing.

currybet.net - @currybet - martin.belam@currybet.net - facebook.com/currybet

Cover star: #B4D333

<i>Foreword by Nick Cochrane</i>	4
<i>"Experience Principles" - Christopher Lee Ball</i>	5
<i>"Test or be damned" - Jonty Sharples</i>	7
<i>"Seeding UX into the DNA of an organisation" - Mel McVeigh</i>	8
<i>"What Comes After UX?" - Cennydd Bowles</i>	10
<i>"Responsive IA: IA in the touchscreen era" - Martin Belam</i>	12

Foreword by Nick Cochrane

UX People is a non-profit making event that celebrates the UK's place at the forefront of the field. User Experience opinion formers give stimulating talks, lead in-depth workshops and share industry insights. The event puts an emphasis on all the amazing work being delivered in Britain and the challenges, solutions and practicalities faced by UX designers. As well as the learning opportunities we want to help gain global recognition for the most creative and inspiring speakers and projects on these shores.

We're delighted the 4th UX People was such a success. It never ceases to delight me how generous the speakers are. Most of the people involved are not being paid for the event. When you consider the effort required I would like to take this opportunity to thank Christopher Lee Ball, Jonty Sharples, Mel McVeigh and Cennyd Bowles for their thought provoking presentations. And then the fantastic workshops in the afternoon delivered by Martin Belam, Mel McVeigh (with only 3 hours notice!), Louise Oakham and Oli Shaw. And of course the attendees, for tackling the discussions and workshop challenges with such enthusiasm.

Nick Cochrane,
Director, Zebra People
nick@zebrapeople.com

“Experience Principles” - Christopher Lee Ball

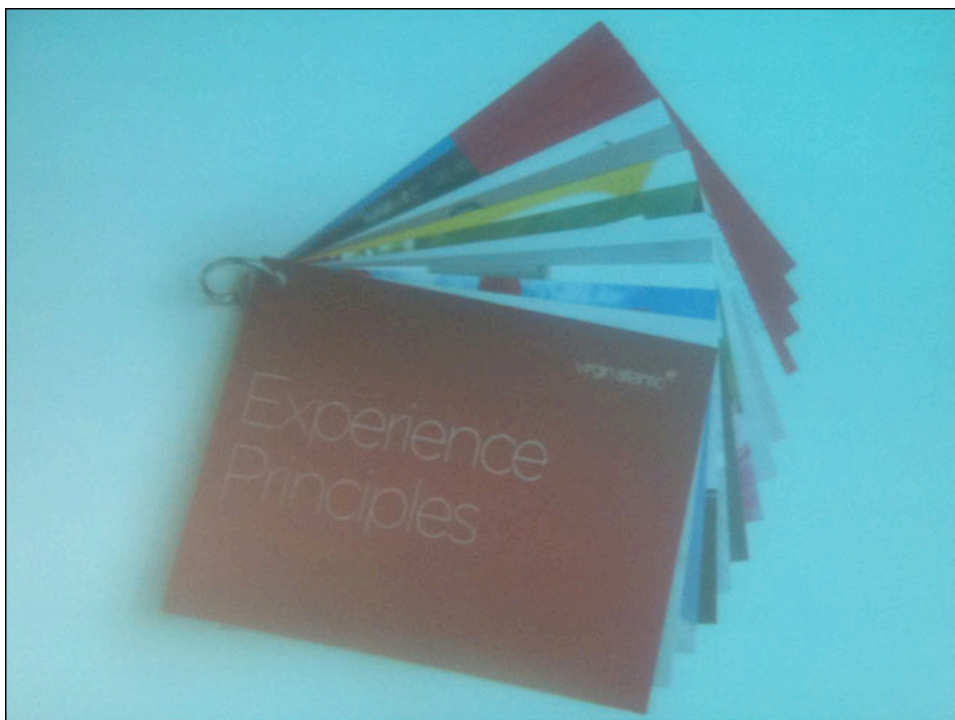
“I had a dream a couple of weeks ago about experience principles. Which is really sad” - Christopher Lee Ball at UX People

Christopher Lee Ball ensured that UX People met the required zombie quota, with a still from “Dawn of the dead”, showing someone’s guts being ripped out. This, he explained, is a lot like the design process when it goes wrong - everybody on the team ends up feeling “exhausted to the point of almost being shot through the head.”

His talk focused on a project that [LBI](#) had delivered for [Virgin Atlantic](#) - in which they had tried to live the brand’s values throughout the design process, so that the online look, feel and experience matched the offline one. But he started with an example of when there is a disconnect between online and offline brand. [Miu Miu](#)’s shops, he said, are a tactile and visual assault on the senses, packed with detail. [Their website store](#), by comparison, is stark and arid, and has nothing of the brand experience about it.

He showed us one of the induction videos that Virgin Atlantic show to their staff, explaining the brand values. Or what Christopher described as the “brand onion” - concentric rings of different colours littered with words and phrases. One of the first stages of the design process was to break these aspirational words and phrases down into explanations and comparisons that designers and every other member of the team could internalise. He showed an example for one of the values - “alive” - describing what that meant to the business, and how it impacted on the types of persona they were designing for.

They made these into little sets of cards that everybody carried around with them. I must confess I’m sometimes sceptical about this sort of deliverable, thinking the cost of producing them might outweigh the benefit, but Chris explained they were great on this project. Anytime they were making a tricky decision “these little puppies came out”, and they’d have to align their decision to the brand values.



LBI produced this “keychain” to illustrate Virgin Atlantic’s “Experience Principles”

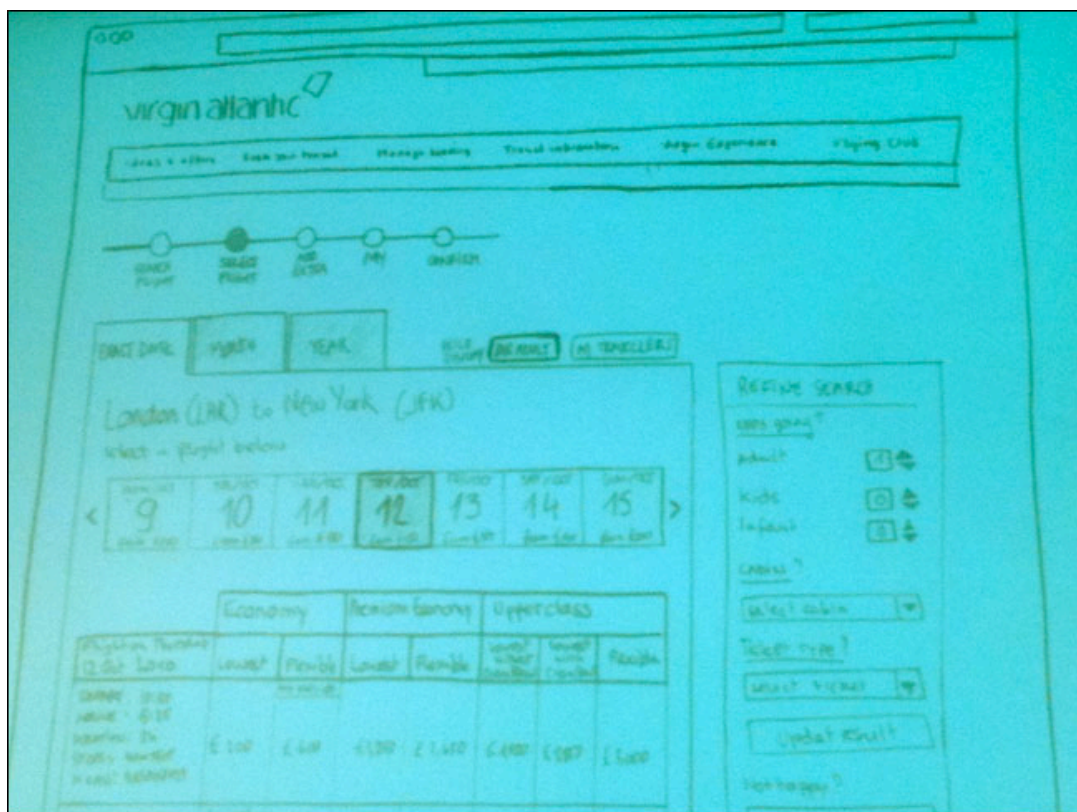
He described at one point standing with his back to the wall where all the business requirements had been stuck up on little pieces of paper. He ignored all that, and instead started thinking “if I was in a perfect world, what would buying a flight be like?”

The new layout shows prices across a seven day range, which is more expensive to implement, but which the design team argued for strongly because it “gave confidence” to the customer - one of Virgin Atlantic’s values. If you are spending thousands of pounds or dollars on flights, Chris said, you want to try and avoid the user having that nagging doubt that there must be a slightly better deal out there somewhere.

They also expose the prices for all classes of cabin on the one page. This is to try and tempt the customer to “be adventurous” - another brand value - and try a higher quality of service for the first time. It helps that the expensive flexible economy ticket prices are right next to the fixed price one class up, making them look better value. It was early days, but Chris said they’d seen an uplift in sales of 17%.

One line in the talk did alarm me, when Chris said “I sit through user testing sessions all the time and I want to jump through the window because people don’t scroll.” The Virgin Atlantic solutions to this were an interaction that folds up the details of the first flight after you’ve picked it, so you can’t *help* but notice the options for your return, and a shopping cart that floats down the page with you.

They had done a lot of testing - eight or nine rounds of it. I asked about the fidelity of the materials used, and Chris explained that their very first round had been with the early sketches and paper prototypes, followed by using clickable prototypes in Axure.



A sketch from the Virgin Atlantic re-design process

“Test or be damned” - Jonty Sharples

“For 25 quid, you could hire Richard Blackwood and Daniel Bedingfield for the afternoon and still have change for an egg sandwich, a Panda Pops and the bus to Lewisham Travelodge. You'd have more fun.” - [Ellie Gibson, Eurogamer](#)

Part of Jonty Sharples' UX People talk felt like therapy for the brutal scarring he had at the hands of games reviewers for a project he worked on in the late 2000s. A “me too” product clone of music-based games, the quote above is about as harsh as it can get.

But Jonty wasn't in purely confessional mood, instead challenging us as designers to stop allowing imperfect and badly-formed products out of the door, by making sure we test them and test them and test them again. “We don't design for ourselves”, he said “but for our users.”

“We want people to love our products and services” he said, so why do we allow testing to happen in a silo in some businesses, where it is taken care of by a “testing team”? It was a challenge I faced at the Guardian, where there was an excellent customer insight department, who could help with some forms of user testing, but they sat tucked away on a different floor. It was all too easy for product managers and editors to get away with not basing their decisions on research.

And Jonty spoke about how bloody-mindedness and jealousy can lead organisations to make bad decisions. The “[Universal Camouflage Pattern](#)” project of the US Army appears to be a classic case of, despite some testing, pursuing a project that isn't fit for purpose because of organisational pride. [Dazzle ships](#) never had this problem.

Testing is vital, he said, when you worry that people are ignoring inconvenient data in order to see a product launch in line with a budget and a roadmap, rather than in line with a user need. Sometimes showing people video of the pain points is a means to an end. It proves quite easily that there are problems, and then you can ask for the money to go ahead and do a more robust series of tests.

“We are responsible for the design of products and services that hundreds of thousands of people use daily” he said, and if we think our job is done when we send off an email to the developers with a load of scribbled annotations then we aren't doing our jobs properly. We need to test, and he showed a video of some interaction testing with a very complex paper prototype.

Jonty talked a little bit about the fidelity of wireframes, prototypes and sketches. He referenced [Andy Budd](#) suggesting that there is no hi-fidelity or lo-fidelity, there is only “appropriate fidelity”. Jonty said that “as soon as you shade it, colour it, or add drop shadow to it” people start making judgements about the aesthetic quality, not the content.

He also quoted John Rheinfrank: “a good part of my work is tricking companies into doing the right thing.”

There was a time, Jonty argued, that people thought because you called yourself “designer” that you were some kind of “seer”. That isn't the case. We all know that designs don't fall perfectly formed out of our heads. Test or be damned.

“Seeding UX into the DNA of an organisation” - Mel McVeigh

I really enjoyed [Mel McVeigh](#)'s talk at UX People. She was describing how she had come to forge a team doing UX and design at [Which?](#) I couldn't help but think of some of the parallels with arriving at the Guardian as their first ever “Information Architect” in the technology team, and going on to try and build out the space where user-centred design work could be done.

Mel explained that Which? had started from a low base - every digital product had been out-sourced, including the design of it. Which? were, she said, not a “sinking ship” like a lot of publications, but they also weren't a “confident” digital brand. They are under a lot less pressure than other publishers because they have a big subscriber base for their print product, which means they cover their costs despite not having a physical presence in newsstands. But digital is transforming their audience expectations, and their most recent rebrand had only a tiny little bit on the last page about digital.

Mel said that as a team leader she wanted to create an environment “where people can thrive”, and pointed out that people are “a mash-up of all the things that influence us. I take the influence of all my previous jobs to work with me every day.” She also said “If you are bored, then I think you make boring stuff”, which is a sentiment I entirely endorse. My colleague [Karen Loasby](#) used to have as the tag line on her [IA Play](#) blog the brilliant phrase “because bored people make bad decisions.”

Mel's strategy had been to “put making and thinking together” and to try and create a space where there is excitement and buzz about what is being designed and built, rather than making people scared of digital and of change. They had deliberately steered away from tackling the big old redesign of the website, and instead worked on [a new product](#) where they could have the most effective influence. “If we did *that* product right”, Mel said, “we knew that the business would come to us to do more.”

As I said, I was struck by many echoes of what I'd tried to do at the Guardian, where instead of battling to get heard on big projects, at times it was better to concentrate on doing really good work on standalone things, and then wait for the big projects to realise the type of work and insight that they were lacking.

In her talk Mel illustrated some really nice ways of working. Her team do a fortnightly “pop-up pub” in the office. Everybody from the business can drop in, grab a free beer, and then take in some of the work the digital product team are doing. They've found this social element helps break down barriers between marketing, editorial and product. The sketches and wireframes on display also help demonstrate the iterative approach to design, getting the whole business ready for a looser more agile way of working.

They regularly have “product design jams” at Which?, where they spend a couple of hours working up new ideas and preparing to pitch them. This isn't so much to drive new product development, Mel said, but to rehearse the decision making and pitching skills that you need to win with stakeholders. She also suggested that going on a story-telling course is probably more useful (and fun) than going on a standard “how to do presentations” business management style of thing. As she said, with product design, “the craft can be amazing, but if the pitch is poor...”

She also gave us some really good ideas for personal development, and how to get hired. She said that two key questions she always asks in interviews are “what inspires you?” and “what is your hidden talent?”

Often the side activities of someone can be a great clue as to the additional skills and experience they will be bringing into the mix at work. I was reminded of the [“In Praise of Side Projects” talk by Alexander Baxevanis at London IA](#), where it suddenly dawned on me that my entire career was now based on the side project of re-building the website of [the record shop I used to work for](#).

“What Comes After UX?” - Cennydd Bowles

I was in Denver for the IA Summit a couple of years ago when Cennydd was giving the closing keynote address - [“The fall and rise of user experience”](#), which is well worth reading in full as a reference point for his talk at UX People. I’m not going to write up all that Cennydd said, because he is planning to publish an essay version of the UX People talk himself.

I admire Cennydd for the honest way in which he approaches talking at these kinds of event. I very much value getting the chance to hear a senior practitioner talking to address other senior practitioners directly. When Cennydd said the phrase “glass ceiling” I found myself involuntarily nodding in agreement with him. He said that essentially once you’d been doing this kind of digital design role and had got to being a “Head of UX” or “Director of UX”, there wasn’t really anything next in many, many businesses. There are, he said, “a whole heap of roles for the junior to mid-level UXers, but once you hit ten or fifteen years, where do you go?” Roles in strategy and product design seem destined to remain in the hands of those with traditional career routes and qualifications.

The trouble with a deeply personal talk like Cennydd’s though, is to determine the extent to which you can extrapolate possible futures for *the discipline* from the possible futures of *one person*.

When Cennydd talks about needing to push ourselves to have a broader skillset, I think it is easy to underestimate how daunting that is to people who are comfortable that they’ve found a niche doing what they enjoy. Over the years I’ve had to force myself to get better at - or at least have more understanding of - the heritage of print design, the value of typography, and lots of other traditional design craft. They supposedly got thrown out of the window with the invention of Mosaic, when `<H1>`, `<H2>`, `<H3>`, `<p>` and `<a>` were the only information design tools to hand.

But try telling a content strategist knee-deep in spreadsheets, organising a massive website, that they need to start thinking about the drop-shadow on the logo too, and I think you’ll get a lot of withering stares. Or disappointed people trying to get good at design skills and ability that they just are going to always struggle to have.

Cennydd was very strident about the need for UXers to be able to code, and I’m 100% with him on that. I think if you are designing things to go in the browser, yet aren’t the least bit curious about *how* they get in the browser, then, frankly, you are doing it wrong. I’m not suggesting you need to be able to code end-to-end applications, but the ability to wrangle a basic set of HTML, CSS and JavaScript feels like a bare minimum requirement. Especially as we hit a more responsive future.

In my “Responsive IA” workshop I usually demo some prototypes I’ve put together using Twitter Bootstrap and by nicking CSS via the Google Chrome “Inspect element” function. Using Bootstrap, once I’ve laid out one screen, the responsive template means I start to get the other screen sizes for free - or at least a version of them to get started with.

But then that is a *very* personal reflection.

I’m comfortable with spreadsheets and coding and sketching and diagram software. *I’m* less comfortable given a creative brief and the pressure to make choices about colour,

texture, style and all the other visual elements that also go to making up a “user experience”. And so it is easy for *me* to be on a soap-box beating the drum for coding, whilst shying away from originating colour swatches.

What Cennydd did say though, which I thought was extremely important for the audience to hear, was that the trend amongst the bigger players in Silicon Valley was not to hire specialist UX people, but to want to hire people who had more of a “UI/UX thing”, and could do the research *and* the interaction *and* design *and* code the damned thing.

Cennydd urged us to consider “user-centred design” as just *one* of the ways to get products designed, not the *only* way. He said “self design” and “genius design” could also be appropriate at times, and we shouldn’t ignore that they exist as tools. He also said that as a profession “we are curious people, but we need a bit more bravery. I’d like to see more of us taking stupid risks and making beginner’s mistakes again.”

He worries that the UX discipline has become a bit stale, a bit too comfortable. He urged the audience to go out and “do something scary” - like sign up for a course in a related discipline you are not confident in, or go to a really techie conference where you feel out of your depth. He said we’d all benefit from dedicating 100 hours to learning a new skill that we weren’t great at, like coding or typographical design, than spending 100 hours refining our understanding of UCD. Cennydd published [a reading list to go with the talk](#) with suggestions for books to get you started on another area of craft.

He finished with a challenge that he had tweeted out a few days previously: “What do you want your Twitter bio to say in three years? What are you doing about that?”

“Responsive IA: IA in the touchscreen era” - Martin Belam

This is an essay version of a talk I gave at EuroIA in Rome. It echoes many of the themes I explored in my “Responsive IA” workshop at UX People.



I thought I'd start with Punch and Judy. It is appropriate to Rome, as [Punch's origins are in Italy](#). Essentially a puppet show for children, in the UK Punch is a weird mixture of hero and anti-hero. He beats his wife, throws the baby down the stairs, gets arrested, escapes jail, then in an inexplicable plot twist he saves some sausages from a crocodile. Finally the devil comes to drag him to hell, and the audience are encouraged to be on Punch's side. To me: a horrifying mix of domestic abuse and religious imagery. To my daughter: the best fun ever. She absolutely loved the first Punch and Judy show she saw, and pestered me for days “Daddy! Daddy! Do a muppet show! Do Punch and Judy!”

Being a geek, I naturally immediately wondered if there was an app for that. And of course there is a Punch and Judy app in the iTunes store, with listings of shows from a particular festival, image galleries and a history of Punch. Exactly what I wanted, so I downloaded it. The first thing it did was ask for my location. I didn't know the app, or the makers, or what it wanted to do with the location, so I said no. I got to the app's home screen, and tapped on the “History” navigation. Uh-oh, a dialogue box “You have to let this app know your location”. The same with anything else I tried to access. So, reluctantly, I thought “Oh well, I'll give it permission”

I could not find a way to do so.

Tapping every single tappable thing in the app just bought up the dialogue box. I couldn't believe they'd developed an app with no return path from initially saying no to location data, or that Apple had let that through the app store review process. So I tried the app listing in the general settings of the phone. I tapped everything that looked even remotely tappable. Eventually I gave up.

And I took it personally.

Why?

Because touchscreen devices are personal.

Because to be tactile is to be human.

Because I'd wanted to share it with my daughter, and rekindle the magical smile on her face when she was watching Punch and Judy for the first time.



My daughter watching Punch and Judy for the very first time.

We are incredibly attached to our touchscreen devices. I read a survey once *[which I can't now find to cite the exact figure]* that said something like 90% of Europeans are always within a metre of their mobile phone, i.e. they carry it with them all day, and then pop it on their bedside at night. And people use them all the time, to do all sorts of things. It isn't all about running for the bus.

OK, sometimes it *is* about running for the bus.

It feels like for all of my adult life people have been promising that next year will be the breakthrough year for mobile. I got really excited the first time I heard this. Which was probably 2002. I even taught myself WML so I could start building my own mini-pages for

the mini-web I could now get on my phone. [I wrote a script that scraped BBC RSS feeds to deliver a personalised headline feed](#). Because I wanted to snack on the news whilst running for a bus - I was a walking mobile use case cliché.

Now we are just as likely to be using our phone at home, precisely because it is in our pocket all the time, rather than the desktop computer over across the room. [Amy Buckner and Pamela Walshe gave a talk at UPA in Atlanta](#) about how Wells Fargo got people to take pictures of where they used their mobile banking application - and discovered that a significant proportion of them were within reach of a computer where they could have opted to use a more fully featured desktop version.

People love their touchscreen and mobile devices, and the statistics from the London 2012 Olympics suggest we really have finally reached a place where mobile *is* “the next big thing” According to [a fantastic set of slides](#) published by the head of new media for the Games in London Alex Balfour, 60% of people who visited london2012.com during the Olympics did so from a mobile device. They can’t all have been running for buses.

And now we expect touch everywhere. My daughter expects to be able to pinch and zoom photos on any device, because she has seen it work on the iPhone. And I never looked more like a tourist in Rome for my EuroIA visit than when I was repeatedly jabbing my fat English fingers at the screen of the Metro ticket machine, oblivious to the ATM-style buttons set beside it.

These devices worry publishers. They have introduced a whole new set of intermediaries in the market, not just in the form of telcos or app ecosystems like iTunes or Google Play, but in allowing organisations like the IOC or the British Olympic Team to reach consumers directly on a device that is always on, and always in their pocket. People fiddle with their phones whilst consuming other media, diminishing the already scare amount of attention they have available for traditional publishers and broadcasters. Most successful apps do one thing, and do it really well, but publishers often can’t resist the temptation to try and provide mobile, small screen and touchscreen services that showcase the *breadth* of what they do - leading to cluttered and difficult interfaces, and products that lack consumer appeal.

Responsive has changed the way I work.

Working on projects that require responsive design to target the small screen has changed some of the ways I’ve worked over the last couple of years, and I wanted to share some of that.

Prioritise your use cases.

Firstly, I’ve learned to try and prioritise use cases ruthlessly. Take a typical hotel desktop website homepage, it probably has a form to allow you to make a booking, some links to help you if you have a booking, some glamorous photos in case you are thinking about making a booking, and some info if you are trying to hire it for a conference or a wedding. Plus a search box, some flags of different countries, loads of links put in by the lawyers, a city travel guide, and so on and so on.

Design it for mobile, and I’d probably be inclined to have one big fat button at the top that says “I’ve already made a booking”, to direct people off to a whole other IA serving those

use cases, so that each page is able to really concentrate on one core task or one core audience.

The thing is, once you start to think responsively, you begin to wonder why you wouldn't have that really easy visible path off to manage your booking on the desktop. Why bury those use cases behind registration and sign in? Once you've simplified for one platform, the temptation is to simplify for all platforms.

Prototype. Prototype. Prototype.

Secondly, I've learned to love prototypes.

For a start, users can touch prototypes on devices, get that tactile feel for them, in a way that sketches and wireframes don't allow for.

I swear by HTML prototypes now. [Twitter Bootstrap](#) is your friend. If you are a UXer or an IA and can't code any HTML or CSS, then put this essay down and go and learn that instead of reading this. I always feel that designing web pages when you don't know how to put them together is akin to designing cars when you can't drive. Sure, you *can* do it, but you'll never really appreciate what is easy and what is hard to build, what is elegant, and what feels good.

Twitter Bootstrap let's you get started really quickly with a solid grid, and decent enough styling, and the responsive version comes for free.

OK, so a responsive version comes for free. The ["simple marketing or informational website" demo](#) gives you a couple of responsive versions from the same set of code. You'll almost certainly want to tweak it, but using the responsive basis of Bootstrap gets you a lot of the way there much faster than producing mock-ups for lots of different screen sizes and orientations.

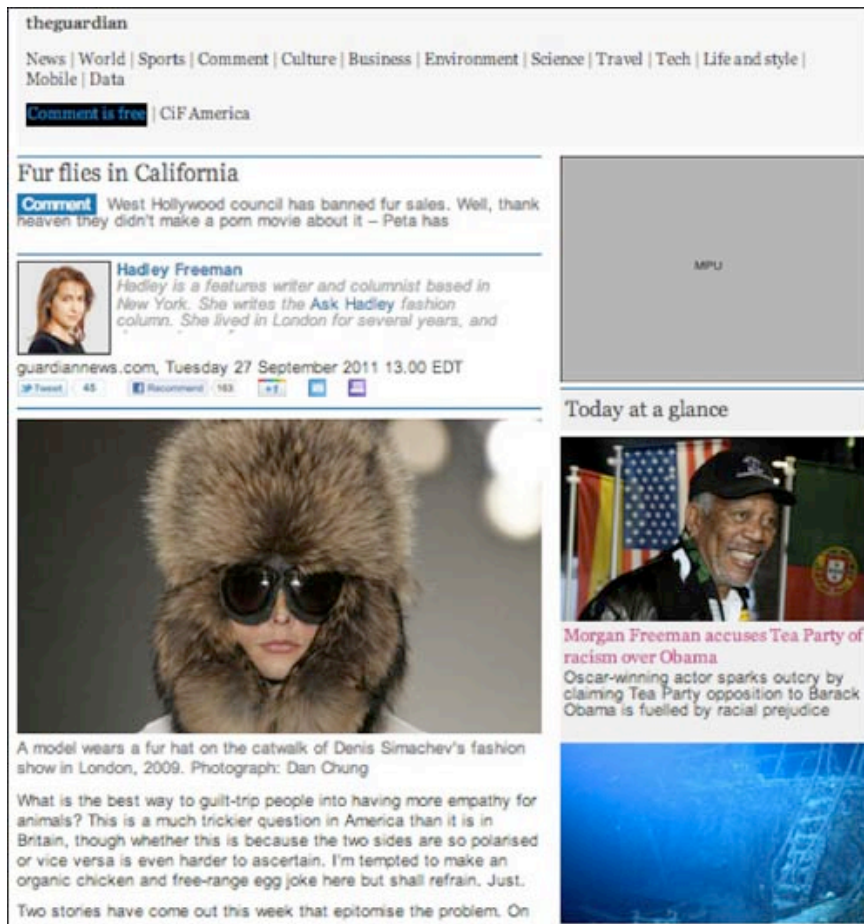
The first time I really used it in earnest was when I was doing a two-day design and rebuild spike on the Guardian's Facebook app with a couple of developers. Having wrestled the Bootstrap CSS into a shape that looked like the app, I produced something like 35 prototype pages of different bits of the app and different bits of functionality in a few hours. I think it was the most productive I'd been for years, and I swore I would never work any other way again.

How to wrestle the CSS to look like the app?

Well, [Chrome's Inspect Element](#) is also your friend. We all know that developers are lazy in the good way, which means that they make shortcuts for everything. Look at a webpage in Google Chrome. Select some text from a bit of the page you like the look of. Get the right-click or context menu, and click "Inspect element". Expand the panel in the bottom right corner that says "Computed style". Et voila! The exact CSS you need to make something look like that, which you can easily add to the default Twitter Bootstrap CSS file.

Getting the fidelity of prototypes is important. I found that by building pages that looked enough like the final product at the Guardian I avoided both the trap of giving editorial staff things that looked full of placeholders that were difficult to grasp, and avoided it looking like I was trying to do final visual designs. A typical prototype, like these ideas for changes to Guardian Comment articles, looked *enough* like the site to be recognisable, but not so

much like I had slaved over every pixel. With the basic CSS set up right, I could build these very quickly.



A prototype of new features for the Guardian's Comment pages

But be pragmatic.

The intricacies of coding can be hard, especially for complex interactions. It is a waste of the IA's time to be fiddling around trying to get some nested floating CSS with gnarly inheritance rules working, when you can draw the thing quicker.

Which brings me to [the Omnigraffle stencil version of Twitter Bootstrap](#).

I'm still not convinced whether the person who built this had a stroke of genius, or a *really* weird idea. Because surely the time it took to carefully imitate all of the elements could have been spent becoming a ninja with actually using Bootstrap? But I'm grateful to them, and have actually used it on projects where I can tell the complex things I am trying to design are going to be beyond my coding fu.

So I still make sketches and wireframes and user flows.

I find designing for swipe can be quite a frustrating experience. On paper I always seem to add chevrons to the end of elements to indicate that they are swipeable. Which opens the question as to whether the design should have something to indicate swipeability? For touch I think not, but of course, if the design is also going to be on mouse-driven desktop displays, then some indication of scrollability *is* necessary.

This issue can get especially vexed if you do classical usability testing on a product. Mark Porter and Andy Brockie did a fantastic job of designing a truly beautiful reading experience for the Guardian iPad app. But one detail *really* annoys me. Because a few people in user testing didn't discover the ability to swipe side-to-side between articles, the solution was deemed to be two tiny chevrons indicating the possibility of movement. It really does strike me as odd that just because a couple of people out of a small sample, introduced to a product for the first time, didn't use one of the features, that every single user gets the chevrons on every single article they ever read for ever. Imagine if they'd user tested bound printed books as they replaced the scroll. We'd have ended up with little "Please turn me over" labels on every page.

Do as little as possible.

When I'm approaching a responsive project I try to design as few screens as possible. I'm aware this isn't always possible, especially if you are out-sourcing development, but for me the conversations about the general principles of layout with designers and developers are more important than producing reams of documentation. I'll usually start by setting out a navigation framework for different sizes and orientations, and then focus on design interactions for the small screen. For pages that will have a lot of content, I try to design the hierarchy of content divorced from screen-size or orientation, and let the visual design work flow from that.

Oh, and don't forget to specify design "Zing!" where it is needed. A little cluster of stars on a wireframe should be a standard part of any information architect's toolkit.



Don't forget content producers.

Don't forget the content producers in all this. We talk about how much "people" love their phones and their touchscreen devices. Well, the people *making* the content do too.

When I was at the Guardian, we were aware that fashion bloggers could often publish their photos from the catwalk faster than our fashion editors, who had to go through a clunky VPN and publishing workflow. For the London Fashion Week they were issued with iPhones and the Tumblr app, and they published directly to the [Guardian Fashion Tumblr](#).

[Dan Catt](#) built widgets that pulled the Tumblr content into the main site, and so we used that path, and touchscreen publishing, to circumvent the limitations of the CMS.

On a rebuild of the live blogging CMS, the developers built the journalist interface using Twitter Bootstrap. It meant having standards compliant code that worked cross-browser, and cross-device. Seeing the product manager Sharath Bulusu be able to pull the “one more thing” trick of “it already works on phones and iPads” about the new CMS was a joy to behold.

Know your devices

I really urge IAs to use as many different mobile and tablet devices as possible.

Let’s be honest - designers tend to love Apple. If you only use iOS, it isn’t unreasonable to position some kind of back function in the top left of the screen like a lot of apps. but that isn’t a natural place for it for Windows Phone and Android users.

When working on projects designing specifically for those platforms, I always tried to use one of the machines as my day-to-day phone for a while, to get a feel for what seems natural on the device. How else can you judge whether a design is well integrated or not?

The back button, search, and the way social services are integrated are three areas that differ greatly across these platforms. A HTML5 one-size-fits-all future needs to think a little bit harder about the hardware buttons on various devices, as well as getting excited about be able to share a common codebase across them.

Is responsive design appropriate for everything?

On stage at EuroIA we had a swear jar for anyone trying to “define the damn thing”, or anyone saying “it depends”. I had to put money in at this point.

Is responsive design appropriate for everything?

Well, it depends.

If you are building an enterprise tool that people are only going to use at their desks, then no. If your transaction is so complex that it simply can’t be achieved in a tiny amount of pixels, then no.

But ask me if responsive **IA** is appropriate for everything? Well then I’m all for it.

The discipline of imagining how every project could be configured for the small screen is in some ways incredibly liberating. It helps you focus on your core proposition. It allows you to concentrate on the key tasks the user needs to achieve quickly, rather than get distracted by supporting “tiny tasks” and edge use cases. It makes you consider how your pages and services will appear in the hands of someone with a touchscreen device. It helps you make good stuff.