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WEB DESIGN TRENDS 2018

It's easy to get a little snobby about trends in creative disciplines. After all, there's nothing creative or innovative about keeping tabs on "what's hot" — unless maybe you're doing so just to continuously buck the trends. Trends are just the main threads in that sprawling, chaotic, polyphonous conversation. Whether we choose to adopt or resist them, our creative choices exist alongside these trends.

Broken grid layouts. In designers' neverending quest for more creative and engaging layouts, the grid we've always relied on to bring harmony and logic to our layouts has itself become a kind of constraint. Which isn't to say that broken grid layouts ditch the concept of the grid altogether — instead, they allow images and text elements to drift into and across the gutters that usually serve as hard stops in more sober layouts. Here, the usual discreet boxes of images and text begin to overlap and converge, often creating beautifully unexpected juxtapositions of bitmap and letterform.

Illustrations take cent. One of the more interesting challenges I've witnessed in the world of marketing digital products is that of image selection. I've watched whole design teams mull over the debate, usually ending up in one of two places: product UI shots and GIFs, editorial/lifestyle photographyer stage. The former emphasizes the in-product experience, features, and functionality, while the latter tries to emphasize the product's human dimension: the effect it has on people's lives. But heading into 2018, we're seeing — and will continue to see — the work of illustrators attain an all-new prominence in both marketing and product design.

More organic and oblique shapes. Both web and mobile design have been dominated by card-based UIs for several years now. Until recently, most of those cards were (mostly) sharp-edged and right-angled, exposing the geometry of their underlying divs in an almost modernist concern for the materials of web design. That's changed in a big, big way in 2017. Now, every app from Google Now to Twitter to Facebook boasts almost aggressively rounded corners on their cards, input boxes, profile avatars, and more.

The emergence of maximalism. For years now, it's seemed like the most powerful and coveted bit of design feedback you could get was: "it's clean." That was the design world in the era of minimalism. Deeply influenced by Dieter Rams' principles of good design, as well as the influential essay on typography, "The Crystal Goblet," visual designers have long sought to get out of users' way by offering as few choices and visual distractions as possible. And for a world where living within the digital was a new and rare experience, that choice made a lot of sense. We need to be eased into this strange new world.

Floating navigation menus. Fixed navigation has become a mainstay of sites that are either conversion-focused (because the core CTA can stick with you as you scroll) or have sprawling menus. It's a nice way to simplify the experience of a site by keeping navigational controls constantly at the user's fingertips. Lately, we're seeing designers take the idea a step further by visually detaching the nav from the rest of the site design, and moving it a bit below the browser's chrome. This reinforces the feeling that the navigation is a global object, not necessarily a part of any one page, but there to follow you reassuringly through the site.

The video element. When you're trying to convey complex information in a visual format, a static image often just won't do. After all, complexity tends to unfold over time — a still image of a UI only tells you what's in it, not how to use it. This is powerful for several reasons: It can slip seamlessly into the design, without the intrusive chrome of an embedded YouTube or Vimeo video; It remains extremely high quality, even with lots of colors, gradients, and detail in the image — something GIFs struggle to do without exponentially ballooning in size; It can

be looped to ensure the details of the copy and those of the image remain in sync, and repeat for those who need it.

Variable fonts. Looking at the web today, it's hard to believe that just a few years ago, we were forced to rely on a sparse handful of typefaces to deliver all our textual content. Today, the web abounds with a massive diversity of gorgeous typefaces, leading to revolutionary levels of interest in typography, typeface design, and good ole conspicuous consumption — of fonts. And it's only going to get better with the release of variable fonts. A joint project between the biggest names in tech (and typography) — Apple, Google, Microsoft, and Adobe — the variable font project enables a whole new form of typeface design.

There are many more trends that could be added to this list (for example, floating navigation menus, bold typography, inventive use of colors, biometric authentication) but many make these lists every year. The main thing to remember is that modern web design isn't focused on websites anymore, whether they're accessed on mobile or desktop. Designers now have to see the bigger picture, and make decisions on what trends to follow — or take inspiration from — and what kind of techniques to apply based on how they affect the experience (and the brand) as a whole.

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