



Understanding **Patterns**



A Hostile Sheep initiative.



XX.

UNDERSTANDING PATTERNS

This is an initiative to bring pattern-based design to experience designers and product design teams around the world. Hostile Sheep, a design firm based in Toronto, Canada, uses pattern-based design to meet user needs.

Hostile Sheep has seen, first-hand, the value of pattern-based design and wants to share its insights with designers everywhere.

Patterns help us understand the world. We believe products should be comprised of established design patterns when possible.

Designing new patterns is usually a high-risk high-reward situation. We hope these cards can be used as a design tool, to help consider alternative patterns and, ultimately, build better products.

00.

MERLOT SERIES: STARTER

The Merlot series includes primary design patterns from the following categories:

1. Navigation Patterns
2. Form Patterns
3. Typographic Patterns
4. Promotional Patterns
5. Evaluative Patterns

This is the first of the Understanding Patterns series of cards and the recommended starting point for those interested in pattern design. A great resource for every skill level. Not an exhaustive set of patterns.

Learn more online:

UnderstandingPatterns.com

01.

NAVIGATION PATTERNS

Primarily about accessing content or functionality from a product. Also known as the product interface, these patterns are usually persistently available while using the product.

Navigation is strongly associated with information architecture and categorization. In many cases, designing a navigational system is as much about the menu items that get left-out, as the ones that get included.

Examples include, a telephone keypad, a website navigation, an applications user interface

01.

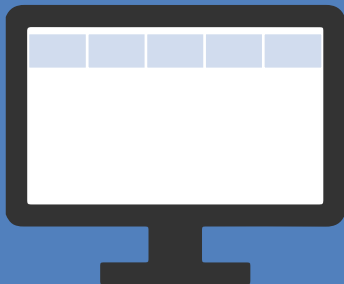
NAVIGATION PATTERNS

1.1 The Static Nav Bar

Displays a fixed number of menu items. Menu items are simple links/buttons that lead users to pages or functions dictated by the information architecture. Menus will typically shrink or drop items on smaller screens. Static nav bars are usually persistently located near the top (occasionally bottom) of each page.

😊 We like it...
when the menu doesn't
need to support more
than 5 items.

😞 We don't like it...
when a good mobile
experience is required or
the menu is complex.



01.

NAVIGATION PATTERNS

1.2 The Priority+ Nav Bar

Displays as many menu items as space allows. Smaller screens will display fewer items, larger screens will display more items. Unless all items are displayed, an ellipsis-button will give users access to 'hidden' menu items. This is an inherently responsive navigation design pattern.



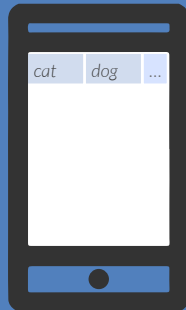
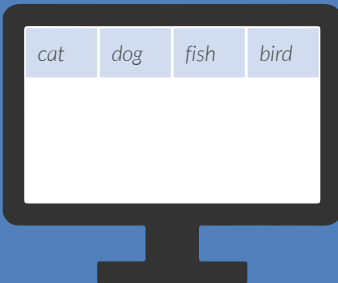
We like it...

when the purpose of a product can be deduced based on navigation



We don't like it...

when a product is task oriented or isn't helped by a visible nav menu.



01.

NAVIGATION PATTERNS

1.3 The Off-Canvas Nav Bar

Displays a menu icon (e.g. hamburger menu icon) users can select to view the off-canvas menu. The menu usually enters the screen from one of the edges of the screen or using a modal window. When the menu is open, the user may select a menu item or hide/close the menu.

😊 We like it...

when users can complete important tasks using intuitive in-page elements.

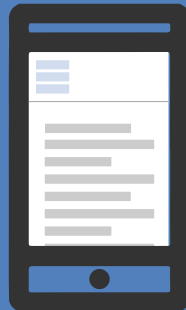
😞 We don't like it...

when users need to frequently use the menu to access required content.

menu open



menu closed



01.

NAVIGATION PATTERNS

1.4 The Dropdown Nav Bar

Dropdown menus, especially mega-dropdown menus, are usable interfaces capable of handling many menu items. Dropdown menus should never be nested or have accordions within them. While capable of displaying many menu items, good information architecture is important for a good user experience. Try to avoid information overload.

😊 We like it...

when there are lots of menu items, especially for eCom websites or apps.

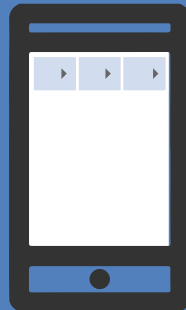
😞 We don't like it...

when the menus are being used to support promotional material.

menu open



menu closed



02.

FORM PATTERNS

Like their paper counterpart, forms are designed for users to input information.

Websites and apps often request users to complete a form to register; especially eCom websites that typically need shipping and payment information.

Users are often wary of entering personal information into a product. Security and SPAM concerns are very common.

Forms are typically validated in real-time or by submitting the form. Easy error recovery is critical to successful forms.

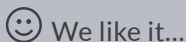
Examples include, Amazon checkout, Netflix Login, Typeform survey

02.

FORM PATTERNS

2.1 The 2-Step Address Entry

The user is asked for an identifying regional code, such as a postal code or ZIP code, with a field before any of the other address fields. Once entered, the system will look-up and display the address associated with the code. Users may adjust the address input to correct for errors.



We like it...

when an accurate address database is reliable and performs well.



We don't like it...

when the technology causes errors or acts as a barrier.



02.

FORM PATTERNS

2.2 The In-field Phone Entry

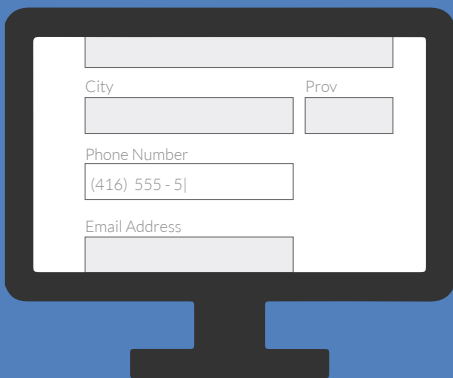
Users are able to enter their phone number without having to navigate to multiple fields. This 'smart' field automatically formats the input as the user types. Depending on unique product requirements, this pattern can be used to request a 7, 10, 11, or 13 digit phone number.

😊 We like it...

when all phone numbers are expected to be in the same format from the same region.

😞 We don't like it...

when users are expected to enter phone numbers from various regions or in various formats.

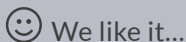


02.

FORM PATTERNS

2.3 The Opt-in

In many regions around the world, opt-ins are legally required patterns that indicate a user agrees to certain terms and conditions. In many cases, several opt-ins are used together to collect 'explicit consent' regarding liability releases related to marketing communication, product use, or security.



We like it...

when used in the context of an action the user is trying to accomplish



We don't like it...

when used as a blanket-barrier before anyone can interact with the product

Terms and Conditions

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis aute in ut dolor in reprehenderit in

I have read and accept the terms and conditions.

I would like to receive emails

Submit Form

02.

FORM PATTERNS

2.4 The Simple Error Message

Simple forms can effectively use the simple error message pattern without suffering usability issues. If form validation returns an error, the field or fields with an error will be highlighted. Error messages appear contextually close to each field. The field resets when the user makes a change to entry.



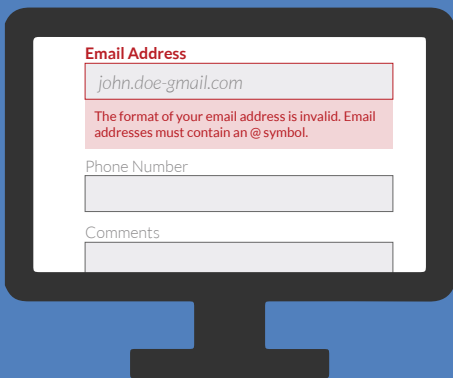
We like it...

when the entire form is less than 6 individual fields.



We don't like it...

when forms are complex or are asking for complex information.



03.

TYPOGRAPHIC PATTERNS

Type is the foundation of many digital products, sites, and apps. Users must be able to read and understand the type being used within a product. These patterns are not content patterns; they do not consider the message, merely the form.

Users are often able to infer meaning from type without reading the copy. For instance hyperlinks are blue, underlined type in the minds of most users.

Examples include, www.uber.design, the Medium blogging platform, nest Thermostat, Samsung S8, the Apple website product pages

03.

TYPOGRAPHIC PATTERNS

3.1 The Simple Headline

Headlines are clear visual-fixations that can be used to help parse long pages of content. Headlines are also used by search engines to help determine the content on a page. They are usually at the same outline level as the accompanying paragraph. They also have greater padding between the preceding paragraph, than the accompanying paragraph.

😊 We like it...

when it's a heavier font-weight and is in title-case.

😞 We don't like it...

when it's in all caps or blends into the paragraph.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas et erat a ex placerat vestibulum.

This Is Where a Headline Would Go.

Morbi a vestibulum diam. Nullam vestibulum pretium nisi, eget aliquam sem auctor sit amet. tincidunt magna. justo consequat mattis.

03.

TYPOGRAPHIC PATTERNS

3.2 The Readable Body

Users tend to prefer less copy when reading on typical displays. When large amounts of copy is necessary, it's important to have shorter line-lengths. This can be achieved by increasing the font-size or by using a multi-column layout. Users tend to like paragraphs with clearly identifiable line start and end points.



We like it...

when shorter copy can not be used and space is not a concern.



We don't like it...

when its compensating for poor writing or associated design.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur
 adipiscing elit. Maecenas et erat a ex placerat
 vestibulum.

Morbi a vestibulum diam. Nullam vestibulum
 pretium nisi, eget aliquam sem auctor sit
 amet. tincidunt magna. justo consequat mattis.



03.

TYPOGRAPHIC PATTERNS

3.3 The Link

Also known as the hyperlink, the link is a fundamental design pattern used since early incarnations of the Internet. Users tend to recognize blue text as being a link, but the true hallmark of a link is its underline. Underlined text is often clicked on regardless of the colour. Note: buttons and contextual tool-tip links are separate design patterns.



We like it...

when the classic blue, underlined pattern is used.



We don't like it...

when other underlined text is used elsewhere, but isn't a link.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur [this is an interesting link title](#) adipiscing elit. Maecenas et erat a ex placerat vestibulum.

03.

TYPOGRAPHIC PATTERNS

3.4 The Single-Level Bulleted List

Bulleted lists are commonly used online and in apps because they summarize longer-form copy into point-form. The bullet is typically round or a dash and is aligned to the left margin. The text associated with each bullet is inset from the bullet. Bulleted text is has the same right margin as the rest of the text.

Bulleted lists should be limited to 12 items; if possible strive for 5-7 items.



We like it...

when used to summarize longer copy as point form.



We don't like it...

when formatting breaks a users reading flow.

Morbi a vestibulum diam. Nullam vestibulum pretium nisi, eget aliquam sem auctor sit amet. tincidunt magna. justo consequat mattis.



- Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit.



- Maecenas et erat a ex placerat vestibulum.



04.

PROMOTIONAL PATTERNS

Unlike navigation, that help users find content, promotional patterns help make users aware of content or features. As such, promotional patterns must provide more context than navigation.

When someone is made-aware of new/interesting content, they enter a conversion funnel. The typical AIDA (awareness, interest, desire, action) conversion funnel suggests promotional patterns should facilitate awareness and create interest and desire.

Examples include, iTunes Carousel, Amazon related content, iOS notifications.

04.

PROMOTIONAL PATTERNS

4.1 The Carousel

Displays a single 'hero' promotional tile with smaller preview tiles below. These tiles tell the user the total number of items in the carousel, as well as way-finding. Carousels are most effective when displaying multiple items related to one topic or product. For instance an image-carousel on the product page of an eCommerce website.



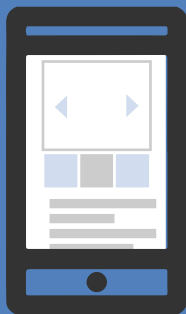
We like it...

when a control or preview bar indicates how many items in the carousel.



We don't like it...

when it auto-advances through the items in the carousel.



04.

PROMOTIONAL PATTERNS

4.2 The Tout

Promotional touts are often used as 'internal' product advertising or marketing. These touts are content affordances that are usually filled by a content/promotional calendar. Users returning to a website or app will often see new promotional touts. The promotional tout is an awareness-building tool that take users deeper to additional content.



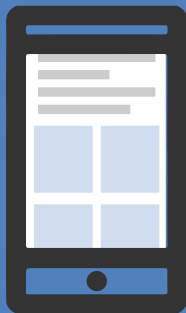
We like it...

when used to promote features/novelties of the product they appear on.



We don't like it...

when it distracts users from the desired outcomes they're seeking.



04.

PROMOTIONAL PATTERNS

4.3 The Landing Page

A flexible pattern that lives outside of core-products as stand-alone pages. These pages can have a unique design of their own, but should always connect users to the core-product. Landing pages are often created to provide more context to users accessing a product from an advertising source; such as a banner or search ad.



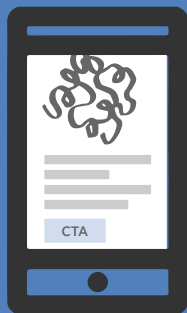
We like it...

when it provides context to users in the conversion funnel.



We don't like it...

when landing pages begin cluttering the information architecture.



04.

PROMOTIONAL PATTERNS

4.4 The Sidebar

A two-column layout that makes use of the popular 16:9 display ratio. The sidebar typically uses static touts or text to promote content related to the main-stage content. Users are able to achieve the results they want while being exposed to secondary messages in the sidebar.



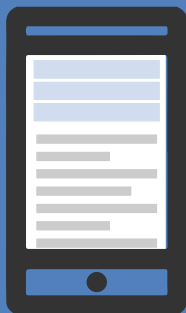
We like it...

when used on larger screens, especially wide-screens such as TVs.



We don't like it...

when used to house banner advertising, due to banner-blindness.



05.

EVALUATIVE PATTERNS

People often use products to evaluate content; usually seeking satisfactory content, occasionally seeking the best content. It's easy to image shoppers evaluating different books on Amazon, cars on AutoTrader, or news articles on the New York Times app. The information and patterns must support the unique needs of the user; book-shoppers may find different patterns to be helpful, compared to car-shoppers.

Examples include, Amazon search results, CNN app home page, Netflix, Crate & Barrel catalog pages, McDonalds Self-Order Kiosk

05.

EVALUATIVE PATTERNS

5.1 The Grid or List

Grids and lists are two of the most flexible evaluative patterns. Most digital products will use some form of grid or list. eCommerce websites use these patterns to display products, music apps use them to display songs or albums. Grids and lists display select evaluative criteria in each grid/list item. This allows users to evaluate the list or grid, simply, by scrolling.



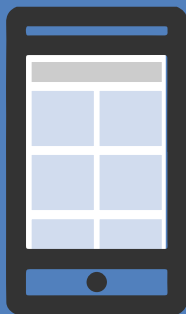
We like it...

when actions, such as buy or save, can be taken directly from the list/grid.



We don't like it...

when it has more than 20 items and can't be filtered or sorted.



05.

EVALUATIVE PATTERNS

5.2 The Accordion or Drawer

Accordions and drawers are space-saving patterns; they allow larger amounts of content to be displayed in a smaller area. Accordions are essentially a series of connected drawers. The first one can be open by default, they can all be closed, or they can all be open. They typically use the plus/minus pattern to indicate the state of the drawer or accordion-segment.



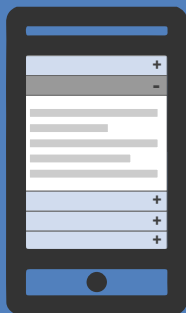
We like it...

when space is an issue,
especially useful on
smaller screens



We don't like it...

when it's used to hide
desirable content that
should be displayed.



05.

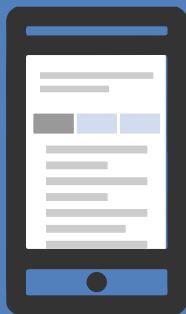
EVALUATIVE PATTERNS

5.3 The Tab

Tabs have a lower cognitive barrier than buttons because users expect to access tabs without leaving the page. Tabs can be displayed vertically, but are most commonly displayed horizontally. Each tab must have a succinct label, no greater than 2 or 3 words. There should never be more than one tab-area on a given page. A tab-area should strive to have as few tabs as possible, ideally 3 or 4.

😊 We like it...
when its being used on
larger screens.

😞 We don't like it...
and believe the pattern
has limited usefulness.



05.

EVALUATIVE PATTERNS

5.4 The Pricing Table

When organizations have different tiers/classes of the same product, a pricing table is a persuasive method of comparing them. Pricing tables work best when there's a high-medium-low pricing structure. Users must be able to compare apples-with-apples across each row in the pricing table. Once they've processed the content, they should be able to click-through to buy or learn more.



We like it...

when it has a clear call-to-action



We don't like it...

when it compares more than four prices/packages

