THE
APP DESIGN
HANDBOOK

BY NATHAN BARRY

Learn to design beautiful iOS Applications.

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INTRODUCTION

So you want to learn to design apps? Well, let's get started then!

INTRODUCTION

Everyone has an idea for an iPhone app. Once friends and family hear that you have any skills or experience in that area you will quickly become the sounding board for their new idea. While they think the idea is the most important thing, you know that it takes skill and time to turn that idea into a great experience for the user.

That's what this book is about: taking an idea from a rough concept to a polished experience that your users will love. Whether you are a developer, project manager, or just a hobbyist who wants to better understand application design, this book will serve as a guide to designing great iOS applications. It is written in a simple, practical manner, so that you don't need a technical or design background in order to follow along.

A truly great experience is often used without notice. It seems effortlessly simple and doesn't call attention to itself. It's the bad experiences that you notice, the times you can't figure out an app or when a task is painstakingly slow. Because of this I will try to showcase a great experience and then contrast it with another way the same features could have been designed.

DEFINING EXPERIENCE

When referring to software I commonly say that the "experience" is the most important thing. That sounds nice, but what does it mean? Think about a trip to the grocery store, from driving to the store to the checkout process at the end. How easy was it to find the food you wanted? Were signs clear and employees helpful? Did the presentation of the food give you confidence in its freshness and quality? How long did you have to wait to check out?

All of these individual elements, whether good or bad, make up the experience you had at the grocery store. Now apply the same ideas to an iOS application. The details of load time, discoverability, features, style, and clarity all add up to form the experience you have while using the app. Are you able to accomplish what you want quickly with a smile or does the app fight you at every turn?

This will help you recognize an experience that needs improvement and know how to take it to the next level.

Looking at great design examples is helpful, but only if you understand the underlying problems they solve. By seeing a few combinations of reverse examples (the good and the bad) you will learn to create great experiences for your own apps.

Then when a friend or co-worker says, "We need an app!" you'll be able to design an experience that transforms that idea into an iOS application that is a joy to use.

Nathan Barry

ABOUT NATHAN BARRY

Hey, I'm Nathan Barry, an interface designer and app developer. I care about designing software that is a joy to use. Previously I led the software design team at a local startup, but in the last year I have been working independently designing and developing my own apps.

I live in Boise, Idaho, but love to travel. You should follow me on Twitter (@nathanbarry) so we can meet up when I come to your city.

NOTES & TERMS

Before we dive into the book I'd like to define a few terms and ideas that will pop up throughout the book.

• When I say iPhone in almost all cases I am referring to the iPod Touch.

• UI stands for User Interface.

• UX stands for User Experience.

• Adobe Photoshop is the standard design tool. Any software-specific tips in this book will reference Photoshop, though many of the same tasks can be performed in other similar programs.

• Design means two different things, and I don't always do the best job differentiating between them. First is the flow and experience of an application. This includes what features should be in the app, how many screens to have, and how the user moves through the application. We'll call this the role of the **designer**. Next is adding the style or polish: the button shine, the drop shadows, and the textures. These elements all contribute to the overall experience, but have little to do with the usability of the app. This is the role of the **stylist**.

YOU ARE A DESIGNER

Too many developers and project managers think that design is someone else's job, thus they shouldn't worry about it. This works out fine if you have dedicated designers on the project, but many apps are built by lone developers. Use the ideas outlined in this book to analyze each screen of your app. Look for excess buttons or elements, text that isn't perfectly clear, and anything else that could cause confusion.

No matter what your training is, if you are creating screens and interfaces for apps, you are a designer. Accept that responsibility and start thinking like one.