

How to design the ultimate mobile application



By [Juanita Pienaar](#)

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[Heavy Chef](#) recently invited Jacques Oberholzer, co-founder of international UI / UX design agency, Now Boarding, to unpack how one goes about creating the ultimate mobile application. He shared interesting tips and insights that he has gathered over the years with a group of entrepreneurs and creatives who attended the talk at Workshop17 at the V&A Waterfront about a week ago.



Jacques Oberholzer, co-founder of Now Boarding

Oberholzer said that he was blown away by the amount of media that all of us are currently consuming on a daily basis. From social to news, across all platforms and all devices, he said it was clear that we were drowning in it.



26% of media consumption will be mobile in 2019

7 Jun 2017



He said that it's a designer's job to help brands communicate and stand out and it's never been harder in all the clutter we are exposed to. This begs the question: What does it take to get noticed in this time?

He told us that designers, businesses and tech producers often aspire to the large tech giants of the world, such as the Googles, the Facebooks and the Amazons, that have been using data incredibly well. They've even been creating their own frameworks that they're willing to share with the world as best practice and create applications that are really easy to use and quicker to build.



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From this, they've become these trendsetters. But, Oberholzer says, it feels like everyone has got access to it these days.

"We are all getting the same information back, and this puts us at risk of all offering very similar products, very similar services and very similar looking applications. No longer is big data or sticking to best practice enough to stand out from the crowd."

Creating memorable experiences

“ *It's all about creating something that is different, that can engage users in a different way.* ”

He says that designers need to go back to more tactile things, of how they can surprise and delight users as opposed to just keeping them based on what the information and data is telling them. "We need to engage them in a way that they actually remember us. If we achieve that, they'll actually tell the next person about it."

Design beyond tools

He continued and told us that when designers study design, they learn about "the good things of design". The space, the composition, the typography - they learn how to communicate visually, and then along came the digital revolution and designers got hit from the side by search engine optimisation (SEO), data, conversion optimisation, A/B Testing, etc. All these amazing, powerful tools designers had to learn and embrace. So they did, and it actually made them better at what they were doing.

Oberholzer took us through a few of these tools and how they can be of help to designers:

Data

Oberholzer says the thing you have to remember about data is that it is being measured in the sequence you asked to measure it in, and it's not taking into account a lot of the other things needed when looking at the user journey or an experience online. Things like: "What were the feelings and emotions within that user before they even came on to that website?"; "What about their occurring connection to this brand?". He said that we are bombarded by pure statistics and numbers, and that users just want a truer connection.



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SEO

Designers would create beautiful landing pages for our clients and incorporate this knowledge they had of conversion optimisation. Then they would be told by the SEO team: "We need 300 words of keyword copy to go on the same page." But Oberholzer says the more important question is: "What are we creating? Are we creating applications that Google's bots can read, or are we creating applications for humans?"

He said that it is important for the products to be searchable, but designers need to get smarter. They've got to be able to create these applications that don't need to bombard users with additional information that they don't need. "Think about it, if you meet up at a bar with someone, you don't give them a full biography of yourself, you start with the basics, with an introduction or a drink." Users don't need all the information all at once, they want to learn that information step by step.

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Operating systems or frameworks

"We got human design from Apple and we got material design from Google." Oberholzer said he studied both and found them incredibly well thought out, thorough and very useful tools for designers. But at what risk? He asked.

"We hold these in such high regards so we follow suit, and we need to remember that they are guidelines. We need to understand, as designers and business entrepreneurs, that we can break that norm. We can use it as a starting point, but we should depart and go further than that," he said.



App composition is king

27 Oct 2016



Create valuable experiences

Designers need to take into consideration that:

- users have emotions around certain products and services that the brand offers,
- the influencers that may persuade them to buy the product or not,
- and lastly just natural desire.

They need to be more sensitive to the emotional side of what businesses and applications have to offer.

So, Oberholzer says what he believes is a simplified approach to creating experiences: when designers look at MVPs or business challenges, they need to make sure that they understand the business goals; and then put it to the side and look at the users' point of view.

"What you get when you strike a balance between these two - the business goals and the user's point of view - is very powerful. It's called a valuable experience," he says. You want to create value for both the business and for the user. "The ability to understand those two at the same time empowers you to create more meaningful experiences."

The business goals + the user goals = valuable experience

Creating experiences

Oberholzer shared a few ideas that he's gathered over the years, creating these experiences in a digital environment.

Trust - This should be your starting point. Understand what the company/brand stands for. Also, remember that privacy is a huge point of concern and that how you use your data and what your intentions are, are going to be very important as we go forward in the digital age.

Transparency - People will ask more questions as we go further and further into digital applications. People feel better when they feel that you're not trying to take advantage of them.

Gamification - This will become more and more integrated into experiences. It's all about creating habit. We create more interest and excitement out of what could be very mundane processes. Users should be excited and feel that the process is tailored for them.

Storytelling - User journeys are stories. These can be more real and interesting. Oberholzer says we shouldn't let go of the power that a story can create. Look for the nuances and the interesting points that you can build on to tell a good story.

Uniqueness - Look at ways to stand out. Take the Tinder app as an example: They did something incredibly powerful; they focused on one feature within the app, and then they invented a new way to navigate. This was their starting point, and they were brave enough to start with something so different.

Data - Designers need to use the data and learn from it. But Oberholzer says that designers must not let it stump their creativity. Use it as a guideline but also challenge yourself. Steve Jobs said: "A lot of times people don't know what they want until you show it to them." He was the type of person who was willing to use the data, but to also break away when he wanted to push the envelope.

As a call to action for businesses, designers and engineers, Oberholzer urges them to not just build products, but to build experiences, and I think he gave great insight as to where one can start to achieve this.

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ABOUT JUANITA PIENAAR

Juanita is the editor of the marketing & media portal on the Bizcommunity website. She is also a contributing writer.

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