

COLUMNS

Why good product design is a marathon, not a sprint

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By [Ben Jordan](#)

Too often, designers and their teams are sprinting to finish a project before a deadline and then iterating quickly on the next version. But good design especially product design takes time, and it should not be rushed.

Designing for mobile platforms can be likened to preparing for a marathon: it requires discipline, patience and perhaps even defining success on your own terms.

To create meaningful mobile experiences for your users, designers and developers must balance building new features and pushing the boundaries of creativity with tried-and-true best practices to find a winning combination. Here is how:

1. Be disciplined, and do not take shortcuts. We have all heard this before: "If something isn't worth doing right, it's not worth doing at all." That could not be more relevant for product design.

Do not try to repurpose your desktop marketing materials banner ads, Web site creative for mobile.

Phone and tablet screens deserve optimized design to drive engagement and ROI.

In other words, every interaction and element of the design needs to be thought through and compared to all decisions. This is where pattern libraries really come in handy.

Too often designers just build new elements for a design, but each of those are something new for the user to digest, and they should fit in to the big picture.

Shortcuts lead to seemingly unpolished and unsophisticated user experiences.

2. Model yourself after the experts. Why reinvent the wheel or struggle to figure it out on your own?

In product design, as with so many other fields, it makes sense to stand on the shoulders of giants.

Use best practices that others have experienced success with in the past, such as Atomic Web Design, Apple's Human Interface Guidelines, or most of the articles on A List Apart and other design sites.

Built on years of experience, these resources will provide a solid foundation for the problem you are working to solve.

3. Build up your endurance. Designers must fully commit to mobile. It is not a fad that is going away, so prepare to be in it for the long haul.

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invest in user testing and research to inform your design decisions. Do not just arbitrarily choose what to do or how to engage your audience. Instead, take the time to understand what your users need.

Really think through and define the jobs to be done. To make your application and your content beautiful, well designed and easy-to-use, you have to know what problems you are solving.

You must clearly define what you are building before launch, and it will pay off in spades.

4. Take calculated risks. It is important to learn from those before you, but that does not mean you should not experiment and be creative.

Whether it is through layout, gestures or new ways to ask a user for input, good designers will anticipate trends for mobile devices and wearables alike.

It is critical to stay up-to-date on the tech available both today and in the months to come.

Case in point: Apple constantly releases huge new features that require designers to rework their apps.

If you are informed, you can be first to market with support for amazing new features about which your users will be excited.

There are real, new user problems that need to be solved on a daily basis. Find the cutting edge and work to get there.

5. Define your own success. Metrics are always a sticking point, especially when it comes to digital content.

Are you striving for unique visitors, downloads or total views? Remember that the go-to metric for other companies or industries might not make sense for your particular mobile campaign.

Your goals should be realistic, but ambitious.

Above all, find the right balance. Define your own picture of success and measure often.

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