

# Designing for Mobile: A Guide for Print Designers Making the Transition

## PART 1: STARTING A MOBILE DESIGN PROJECT

Designing for mobile has all the elements that publication designer's love: numerous elements, need for strong hierarchy, good pacing and flow, short timelines, small budgets, need prove success. And one thing even more exciting: the rules haven't been written yet.

When you pick up a book, you don't have to figure out if it's horizontal or vertical. You know where the front is, the back, you can flip right to the middle. But with mobile, the designer's job is more necessary.

When mobile started, it was much like web. There were companies that immediately wanted a mobile presence, regardless of the experience. Anyone who could create apps had work. Adobe DPS was a great gateway for print designers comfortable with InDesign. DPS and other platforms allowed designers to create without knowing code.

Suddenly there was a demand for UX specialists, UI experts, Information Architects. The titles intimidated many designers. How could you claim to do UX or UI when you couldn't articulate the difference? Fancy titles aside, all those positions are trying to do what any good thinking designer does: create the most effective design solutions.

It all starts with asking the right questions.

### Four questions you need to answer before starting:

1. Who is your audience?
2. What are the desired outcomes?
3. What are the obstacles?
4. How can you help the users get the content they need?

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A firm believer that strong design drives readership, extends brands, and just plain makes a difference, Kat Topaz has redesigned hundreds of publications nationwide and repositioned countless brands to huge critical and financial success. At 6D Global, Kat applies those same principles to the mobile space, working closely with UX and UI teams to design for every type of mobile strategy. With Kat's large network of clients and ability to attract top tier talent, design is not an afterthought at 6D Global. It's a driving force in the mobile experiences we create.

## 1. Who is your audience?

First consideration: Audience. This is the same question you ask when designing for print. Is it for internal folks? External? What tone? Is it a guide, a tool, or meant for marketing?

But unlike print and web, now you need to understand if your audience includes digital natives or digital immigrants. Where do they fall on that curve? You need to create a design that is not dumbed down for the digital natives while being clear and intuitive for the immigrants, herein lies the challenge (and what makes it so fun).

With new "norms" all the time, the trick is to stay up on the ever-changing norms without losing your ability to empathize with digital immigrants?

### Tip: User Testing

When you are first designing for mobile, user testing is a very humbling experience. No matter how obvious you think your design is, users will discover how to navigate in ways that you haven't factored in. It's your job to make sure they don't get lost and are always able to figure out where to go—easily.

## 2. What are the desired outcomes?

What is the goal? Is the app to further the brand? Is it a tool for a salesperson?

Is it a tool to find a piece of information quickly? Or is it meant to be browsed until coming to the topic of interest, then a deep dive?

## 3. What are the obstacles?

Obstacles can be with the aesthetics or the process. For example, the app might need to be used in locations where you can't control your surroundings, thus it needs to work in places that are very bright and very dark. While other apps may need to keep into account how a sales person will be using it. Will they need a linear story or non-linear experience? Will the user have time to dive in, or does it need to compete for their attention?

## 4. How can you help the users get the content they need?

In mobile there is an ongoing tug-of-war between aesthetics and utility. While users were initially willing to travel through bells and whistles to reach their content, more and more users want to reach the info faster, within one or two taps. No matter how striking a design is, if the navigation is unsuccessful, the designer has failed. The navigation is the single most important piece of design in any app.

## PART 2: THE PROCESS

After discovery with the client, the design process often revolves around designer -developer relationship. A strong collaboration between designer and developer will ensure a more effective product.

By mapping out the navigation together (wire framing), the designer/developer combo is a great way to have checks and balances. It is always helpful to have multiple points of view. Different perspectives are healthy at this stage of the process. Constant discussions may include how not to dumb down the app (which insults digital natives), while being clear and intuitive (which is helpful for digital immigrants). Additionally designer-developer teams can address how to build stable apps, while agreeing on how not to slight the aesthetic value. Working together, a duo can better balance utility and aesthetics, giving up a little of each to achieve the other.

A special hint: A user's expectation is based on whatever their last best experience was. Their last best experience is what they are now expecting when they use a mobile device.

Let's now revisit the four questions above. When immersed in client discovery, these four questions will be crucial in determining users, how they will experience and interact with the design/application, and anticipating (and preventing) any problem areas.

### Four questions to ask during every mobile design project:

1. Who is your audience?

2. What are the desired outcomes?

3. What are the obstacles?

4. How can you help the users get what they need?

After working to gain the answers you need, it's time to get to work: wire frame, design, test build part of the app, then assess/user test.

Inevitably, this will require adjustments to the design, test build again, assess, and repeat until identifying the correct design and build. Testing with a thorough QA process is crucial to determining the app is ready for end-users.

### **PART 3: QUICK RULES FOR MOBILE DESIGN**

As designers, it's natural to immediately look for ways to break rules. That said, this list will give you a really solid checklist of things to consider:

**Buttons:** 100 pixels by 100 pixels or larger. You can design the visual button to be as small as you want, as long as the active touchable area is a minimum of 100 x 100.

**Type size:** Never smaller than 18pt.

**Consistency:** Don't use an arrow that means swipe on one page, but means tap on another page. Use icons and other visual cues to mean the same thing each time.

**Landscape vs. Portrait:** First, pick one. Never create one app to be viewed in both, unless there is a good reason, and in that case, there better be different content in each orientation.

Consider the content before choosing the orientation. If you know you will be asking the user to open vertical PDFs or other documents, don't make them turn back and forth. Create in portrait. If you will be using lots of horizontal videos, again, don't ask the user to flip their device back and forth—create in landscape.

**Ergonomics:** How will the phone or tablet be used? A person's thumb can only stretch so far comfortably. Consider buttons across the edges and other user-friendly ways to prevent reaching, straining, and other bouts of user-frustration.

**Test on the Device:** Whether you side load or take screen shots of your designs in progress and email them to your phone or tablet, do this often. Designs look very different on your desktop than they do on mobile.

**Simplicity:** Don't add interactivity for the sake of interactivity. It doesn't matter how cool the effect is: if the interactivity isn't adding – don't add it.

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Our team includes some of the industry's most innovative and sought after minds who have a commitment to technical excellence. Using platforms like Adobe AEM (CQ5), Hybris, Kentico, and Sitecore, we deliver the most optimum user experience.

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