

# Top 10 UI Design Trends and Techniques That Will Make Your Products Stand Out

The User Interface (UI) is more than a platform via which your product interacts with its users and shows them all the awesome stuff it can do. It is the main access point to the product's user experience, the outward representation of your brand, and what makes your product stand out from the crowd. Because of the massive amount of different UI design elements and constantly changing best practices, we wanted to provide you an evaluation of which trends dominate today's UI design.



# Flat Design

Flat design has been the dominant UI trend over the years. It uses two-dimensional elements, balanced and bright colors, and simple typography. What it lacks in frills, it makes up in efficiency that gives designers time to focus on other creative aspects. It forms a solid base, but its limitations offer opportunities to those who want to go the extra mile. See, a core mechanism behind the comings and goings of trends is people getting bored of seeing the same thing. If you want to stand out from the crowd, well, there are nine more trends to go that can enhance your current design.

*Flat design is useful in medical equipment. Strong colors, contrasts and simple fonts increase the readability of [Medec's ventilator UI](#).*



## New Skeuomorphism (Neomorphism)

Skeuomorphic design, in short, refers to visual elements that are created in a realistic style to mimic real-life objects. The UI design of the first-generation iPhone in 2007 relied on skeuomorphism and made it commonplace. After a few years, the design trend pendulum swung from the rich, realistic style to the minimalistic flat design. However, flat design has started to feel overly simplified, minimalistic, and a bit too generic. That's why UI designs have been shifting towards adding depth to flat design without changing its main idea. Skeuomorphism returns with a twist!

*Harman International won a Red Dot design award for the [Mini Cooper's digital cockpit design](#), featuring an instrument cluster that follows neomorphic principles.*



These so-called “neomorphic” designs render the main characteristics of an object in exact detail. In contrast, the rest of the item remains stylized. The different design elements support this philosophy, from light color palettes and subtle gradients, soft shapes such as circles or round rectangles, drop shadow or inner style glow effects — everything should draw attention to specific parts of the design.

## Subtle Gradients

In design, gradients are the gradual transition from one color into another. In the hay-day of advertising, they used to be bright and flashy. Nowadays, we understand that bright and flashy attracts attention, but in a way that detracts from the message we're trying to convey. Today's gradients tend to be more subtle, with its role to give volume and depth to design or create an interesting background. They tend to follow minimalistic design principles, with no clashing colors and a definite light source.

*The subtle gradients in the [in-flight infotainment units](#) by [Lufthansa Technik](#) impart the UI a calming, balanced look and feel.*



## 3D Graphics

3D graphics have fascinated designers and users for years. Unsurprisingly, and profiting from VR's and AR's rise in popularity, 3D elements are emerging in the web and mobile interfaces. 3D graphics can improve a product's appeal in multiple ways. Because the real world is three-dimensional, adding depth can create a sense of realism in a design.

*3D graphics can enable certain features and increase the overall appeal of products, like in this [automotive HMI by Mercedes-Benz](#).*



Three-dimensional UI elements can add a premium feel to a product. You can observe this trend in the automotive industry, for example. Manufacturers equip their high-end models with 3D or 2D/3D hybrid HMIs and use 2D-interfaces on their lower-end cars.

## Simplicity

The concept of simplicity has been a constant in design philosophy for decades. Its defining factors are minimalistic color palettes and gradients, plenty of white space, bold typography, and adherence to the Gestalt principles. You might think that a no-frills solution might look insufficient. If done well, however, simplicity can achieve an elegant, high-quality feel.

*Form follows function with [Toon](#), [Quby's smart thermostat](#), without sacrificing any of the visual appeal. Despite the small size of the screen and the relatively large number of elements displayed, the UI doesn't feel crowded.*



Achieving functional simplicity in UI design can be deceptively tricky. You need to know precisely what users need and how they expect to obtain it in order to provide them with the most efficient way to do so. Too few features may not satisfy your users' needs, while too many may cause unnecessary mental effort. Finding the right balance is the first step to achieving true simplicity.

## Micro-interactions

Micro-interactions are all of the brief moments when a product reacts to input in a small way. Think of an icon that highlights when moused over, or the satisfying “shunk” sound effect when a file is transferred to the trash. We may not actively perceive micro-interactions because they’re so discrete, but without them, it feels like something’s missing.

Micro-interactions can confirm that the device recognized your presence or that we want it to do something. That alone feels reassuring! If done in a pleasant way, we will grow to enjoy and repeat those interactions.

So, even though micro-interactions are often simple and nearly unnoticeable, they are essential for creating enjoyable and memorable moments when using a product. That makes them the unsung heroes of your UI’s user experience.

## Unique illustrations

What counts as illustration? A sketch? A doodle? These plus line drawings, cartoons, 3D graphics, collages or even photos can count as illustrations.

Visual communication has evolved from mere decorations to communication tools. They can explain, complement, clarify, and render complex concepts, actions, or information in a way that’s easy to understand. The role of illustrations is to add originality and personality to your UI; to set the mood and increase brand recognition. Unique or compelling illustrations can evoke users’ emotions, causing a memorable “wow-effect.”

## Sound

We've touched on how sound can affect the user experience when we talked about micro-interactions. Sound is an essential part of sensorial design. Its importance, however, is sometimes forgotten.

You can use sounds to trigger a broad range of emotional responses. They can amplify feedback to users, notify them about events, and be a core branding element.

## Animations

If unique illustrations can grab a user's attention, animations have the potential to blow them out of the water. More so than static images, animations increase user engagement and make designs come to life.

Both illustrations and animations support storytelling by helping visualize what a brand or product can offer at a glance. While illustrations require less effort, dynamic animations have all the advantages of illustrations, and are more effective at directing and retaining user focus.



We hope you enjoyed this overview of the world of modern UI design! Did you know all the UIs in the article were built with Qt? Qt is your software development one-stop-shop — from design, to development, to deployment. Make your apps work on any hardware/OS with just a single code base, and [profit from tons of tools that make life easier for developers and designers alike.](#)