

Flits: UI / UX Development and Design
Culminating Experience - Reflective Essay

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Berklee Valencia Campus
June 2015

***Flits*: A mobile application**

Summary

Concert navigation made easier. From its conception, *Flits* was designed as a mobile-based application dedicated to the facilitation of live music events based on the user's location. Although the team quickly recognized and identified the competition, we still saw a need for a better interface, a better service, and a much better experience overall.

We want to become the go-to app by providing a high-quality service and accurate and trusted information regarding the latest concerts and live music events taking place in our users' corresponding cities. *Flits* understands that elements such as proximity and immediacy are staples in these types of applications. But we want to take it even further. When we talk about creating a better experience we imply a full transformation of product to persona. We want the app to feel like you, the user, are interacting with a friend, connecting with another concert-lover. We want it to have a personality.

By adding different real-time features, implementing contextual UX navigational elements, and making the most of micro-interactions, *Flits* wants to connect you to your local music scene. Only thing left is for you to enjoy the night.

Results

Different significant efforts have been taking place since the beginning, and expectations were definitely on the bright side. *Flits* is not just another school project. The company truly sees a future as a viable and successful platform in the tech/live music industry. The team has approached different investors, specialists, designers, programmers, venues, artists, music-lovers, and consumers trying to gain their insights on the matter. *How*

do you find live music in your city? What do you look for when browsing for live music events? What are your expectations? We know what we want as a team and as live-music consumers ourselves. But, as a general rule of design taught us, we are not designing just for ourselves. We want to find a balance where our vision aligns with people's wants and needs - even if they don't even know what those needs are yet.

We went through a long process of brainstorming. Although the app design and creation was already underway, we were constantly looking for new features and elements that could give us a significant competitive advantage. We want *Flits* to be fun and informative, cool and trust-worthy.

Good results were seen after months working on the application. *Flits* saw good progress at Primavera Sound in Barcelona and continues to participate in startup competitions. We officially launched in Valencia during Berklee's Eclipse Day Event, and this proved to be very fruitful in terms of feedback and introspective analysis. After this, we proceeded to make significant modifications to our navigational structure and design. We are currently still working on refining these by conducting additional focus group sessions.

Process

I came in late in this project. I knew from early on back in September what this project was about. It was initially called *What's On* but for branding purposes this name was abandoned and their whole image, including the name, was redesigned early this year. That's when I joined the team.

One of my first tasks was to provide assistance with the logo and the name of the company. After several brainstorming sessions we settled on *Flits* and we proceeded with re-working the logo. Though for the moment we have settled on the mirrored Fs currently on

display on the app and all social media outlets, we knew that we wanted to make it very bold and graphic, simple and minimalist but still attractive and memorable enough. A1 in the Business Plan Appendix shows a sample of some of the most relevant examples we had in this area of the design process.

Another important factor in such process was not only the collaborative assistance of both Martin Erler and Matej Zak in my specific role in the Technical and Design Department, but also the advice of faculty members and project supervisors Pablo Langa, Alexandre Perrin, Gwen Alston, and Javier Sánchez who provided meaningful insight in all departments such as Finance, Programming, and Research and Development while also acting as coordinators overseeing the project as a whole. This partnership of professionals at the university introduced us to real industry practices that can translate into approachable results while still maintaining the creative freedom that made *Flits* a feasible idea since its inception.

My specific role in the company was one that proved very challenging. As User Interface / User Experience researcher and designer, I struggled a lot to find reach a middle ground between my specific likes and aesthetic wants, and the ones of the rest of the team and potential users. I knew right away that I shouldn't be designing for myself, yet it was easier said than done. I still do believe that I should be designing something that I would want (and love) to use, but it definitely took me a while to do this in a way where I'm not the only one left enjoying and understanding the product.

As it has been thoroughly described in the Business Plan/UI-UX Design and Development section, the main focus is to create a function-based, content-focused application that maintains the standards of flat design, clean and minimalist, but attractive enough with a great amount of boldness in textures and design in order to capture our users'

attention. We place significant value in this area, for the design as a whole will greatly affect and impact the way users consume this product and actively engage in it.

After defining the type of navigational structure we wanted to achieve, I proceeded to work on the individual pages and coming up with the right color schemes. We tested a variety of options until the three of us agreed on a combination of 5 main colors: mint green, magenta, black, white, and light grey. Although we see many more colors on the icons, those 5 are the ones defining *Flits*' general look and feel. Once again, it's about keeping it bold. Using a lot of darker backgrounds we highlight important elements (like icons) and we guide the user's eye in a certain direction, thus teaching him/her how to navigate the app without being explicit or obtrusive about it.

Even though the whole process was consulted with all supervisors, I specifically sought the advice of Javier Sánchez. He was my Mobile App Writing teacher and also the main programmer during this initial phase. Many of my questions and much of my insecurity were clarified and appeased by Javier. We talked a lot about the kind of features that I wanted to include and the type of image that I was looking to design. He steered me in the right direction in terms of logistics and he encouraged me to work on alternative designs if I wanted to even though I was not going to be able to see the results by the time we had to present this project. Having the advice of some of my close friends who are professional designers also helped incredibly. Even though they are not mobile app designers, their work inspired me to follow this 'flat design' look and to look for ways to work around a minimalist, yet highly functional and smart look.

I think there is still much to do and re-work, but I do believe we are in the right path.

Next Steps

In terms of future developments, I believe that app should still maintain and work towards a content-focused interface that makes information and navigation “more readable, accessible and usable” (Yadav 2015). In order to do this we have to test *Flits* with as many people - and devices - as possible. Right now we are only working on iOS, but if we want to reach a wider audience we should definitely consider building the interface for Android devices as well. Maybe even transfer it to iPad/tablet devices in the future given the amount of people that bring them to live music events as well.

Whether usage is sequential or simultaneous, designing applications and user experiences that function seamlessly across devices is essential to ensuring that users remain engaged as they shift from one to another...to another, and back again (Fontaine 2015)

By conducting these field research / usability tests the team will be able to identify the difficult or tricky aspects of the UI that we may be blind to (Fontaine 2015). These test include the many various design elements present in our current interface: buttons, text, images, font, even choice of colors. We have to study our users and by doing so we will “define exactly all of the necessary data that [we] need to collect from them” in order to create a better UX (Cao 2015).

Some of the already anticipated modifications include the signup page. Studies show that this is a tedious step that takes the user away from the experience itself and it becomes cumbersome (Cao 2015). Instead we want to create ways in which the user can still navigate the interface without logging in, but also enabling the system to study and log usage patterns

in order to provide accurate contextual UX information that will facilitate a better app immersion.

Such immersion also comes from the idea of mobile design being “more centered around looking and touching, and less around just reading, as we move into the future” (Stewart 2015). This means icons, graphic and bold design choices that I believe we have already achieved to a certain extent. Though many of these graphic elements may not seem natural or native, we have to think of the newer generations, “the very young and not yet literate, which are becoming a common [smartphone/tablet] audience” (Mesibov 2014). We want it to keep it inclusive, universal, smart.

Another important development to consider regarding such traits is building a notification system. By implementing push notifications - to be customized in the Settings menu - the device and the app becomes “useful without being too intrusive in this increasingly congested space,” while also helping build a relationship with the user by understanding his/her wants and needs (Hodge 2015).

If we stop thinking of the interfaces we design as dumb control panels, and think of them as the people our target audience wants to interact with, we can craft emotionally engaging experiences that make a lasting impression (Walter 2011)

Contribution to the discipline and profession

We have been working tirelessly to build this app and to develop *Flits* as a truly functional and beautiful interface to interact with. My involvement in this project forced me to get out of my comfort zone in different ways, from learning how to work with non-design oriented people, to being more receptive to showing my work and receiving feedback from

strangers and friends. It was not always easy, but I have learned so much in the field of design and technical mobile development by simply doing it by myself, researching by myself, making mistakes and figuring out how to fix them.

One of the greatest contributions obtained from working in this project was definitely learning how to trust my instincts and developing a thicker skin. Although rewarding and eye-opening, it was not always easy trying to work with all of the team including mentors and coming up with drafts that we all agreed on. We all have different styles and likes and it showed when it came to designing the platform and giving it personality. How to do this when all of our personalities are already so varied and different? In addition, there's the fact that we, as students, are not truly exposed to this specific field or industry. I was not taught any of this information, any of this process at the university. And that was really frustrating.

There is so much to do and explore in the field of music, tech, and design, and we are not really being exposed to that, not as much as we could. I'm not talking about the MTI program - their work and their tech research encompasses other areas of innovation and learning. But being a Business graduate I wish there were more opportunities for professional growth in this type of industry coming from the established and existing programs at the university. Nevertheless, practice and trial and error were my teachers. I don't think our project is perfect. Not at all. But we are getting close to finding our true character and our persona; the one we want to project and the one we want our users to get to know.

Conclusion: Impact upon completion

This project has been a true challenge, both personally and professionally. It has been hard work from the very beginning and, even though the academic year is coming to an end,

there is still much more to do. Academic completion ends here, but *Flits* is still young and looking forward to many more months and years of professional development and growth.

We have to think of *Flits* as a living thing, as an opportunity for interaction, as someone “with whom our audience can have an inspired conversation. Products are people, too” (Walter 2011). We are creating a journey and an experience to be shared with our users. Throughout this year we were always putting ourselves in our users’ shoes, trying to build an exciting and beautiful interface thus making it as frictionless as possible to navigate and to have a conversation with the application; engaging and building a social web.

We want to build emotional bonds, we want to become a trusted and friendly source of information. Let us take you to the music.

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