

# Perpendicular Angel Design

Organizing and simplifying, one illumination at a time

## An Event Apart 2017: Obvious Always Wins by Luke Wroblewski

Posted on [April 5, 2017](#)

The first time that I saw Luke Wroblewski speak was at the very first conference I ever attended, in 2008, at UIE, and it was about forms. (I think it was a workshop.) I learned 3 things then:

1. I could learn a **ton** from fellow Information Architects
2. Forms are haaaaaaaard until you learn them and then not as much, but since they're still a huge percentage of the web experience, you need to do them right.
3. Luke is freakin' brilliant.

Since then Luke's done a lot of other freakin' brilliant things, especially around designing mobile first. He maintains a great website [full of resources and presentation notes](#) and is part of the reason why I feel it's my responsibility to take notes at conferences and share what I learn. Oh, and if you have an interest in brand, Luke's got a very strong personal brand reflected in both his website and his slides, that's worth taking a look at.

Today's presentation is about what "obvious" design is (and isn't), and how we can achieve it.



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Apple vs Samsung lawsuit in 2012 - apple accused samsung of infringing on a number of patents [#AEASEA](#)

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Samsung argued that Apple's designs were "too obvious" to patent.  
[#AEASEA](#)

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In 2007 when Steve Jobs introduced the iPhone it was an iPod , a phone and an "internet communicator" (later Safari) [#AEASEA](#)

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**Erin Walker (Joyce)**  
@E3Writing

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.@lukew is explaining what an iPod was. I am officially old.  
[#aeasea](#)

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(Me too, Erin. Me too.)



**Anne Gibson**  
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People do about as much voice calling now as several years ago, or slightly less. < 3/4 of people who have a phone take calls  
[#aeasea](#)

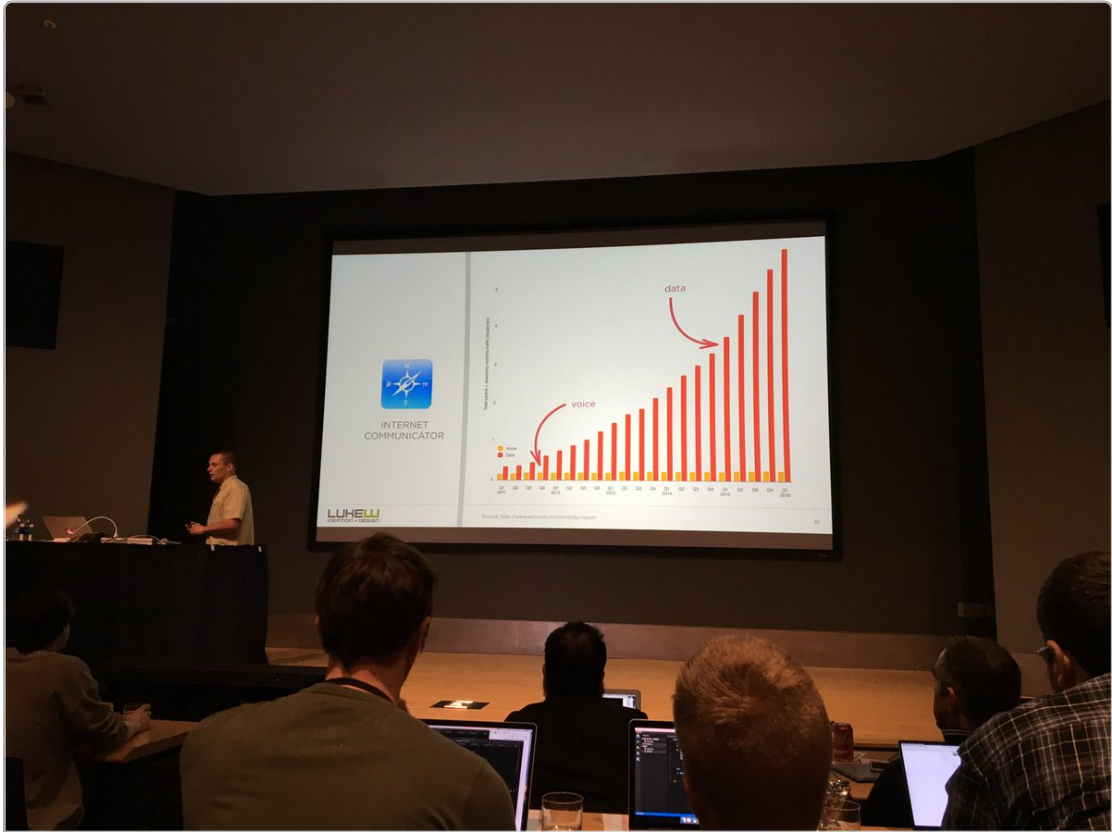
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Data usage on the phone has absolutely exploded. #AEASEA  
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Bit of growth there #aeasea  
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Streaming has taken over what used to be the ipod's responsibility  
[#AEASEA](#)

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Worldwide device shipments in 2006 were 68 million smartphones.  
[#AEASEA](#)

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PCs have been flat. 2006: 239 million 2016: 269 million.  
Smartphones & tablets 68M to 1729M [#AEASEA](#)

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"it's slowing down!" AT TWO BILLION DEVICES A YEAR.  
[#AEASEA](#)

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Facebook usage 2006-2016 12m to 120m. Mobile, zero to 1,740 million. Mobile has shifted priorities #AEASEA

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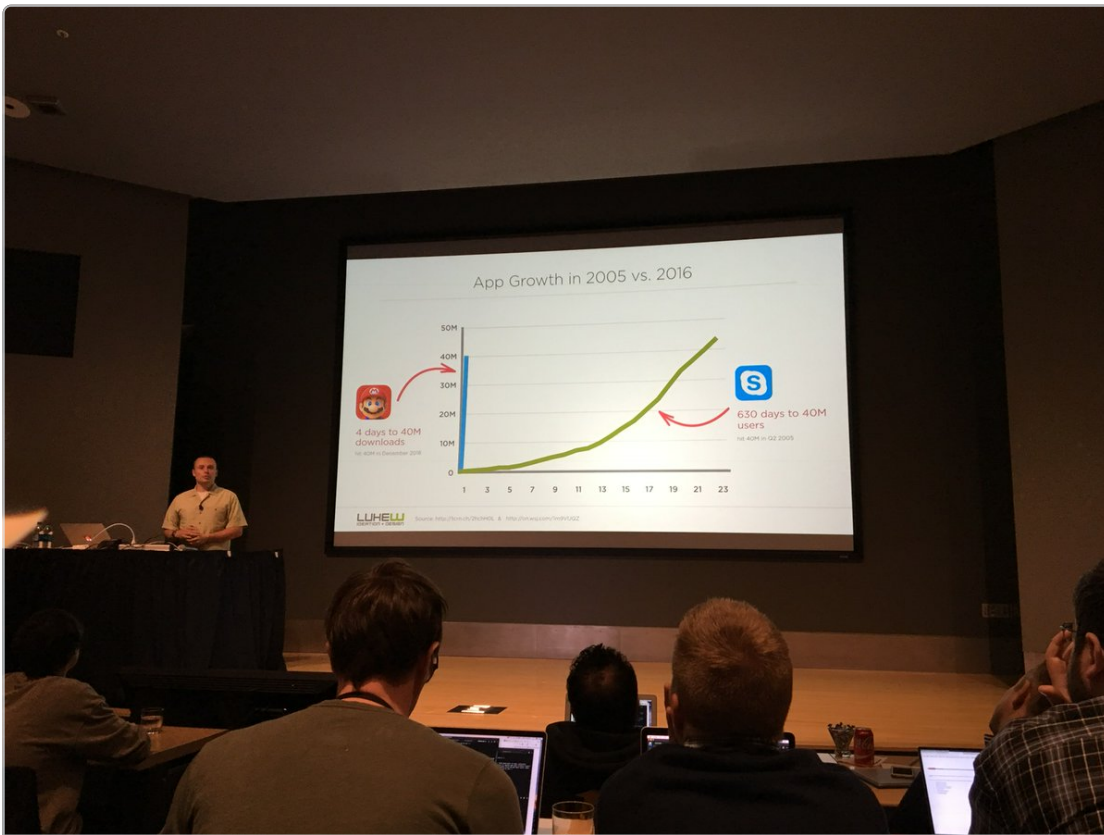
**Elizabeth Newman**

@eLizz1e

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It took Skype 630 days to reach 40M users in 2005. It took FOUR DAYS for Super Mario Run on ONLY iOS to hit that same 40M users #AEASEA

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**Anne Gibson**  
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The world has changed a lot in 12 years #aeasea

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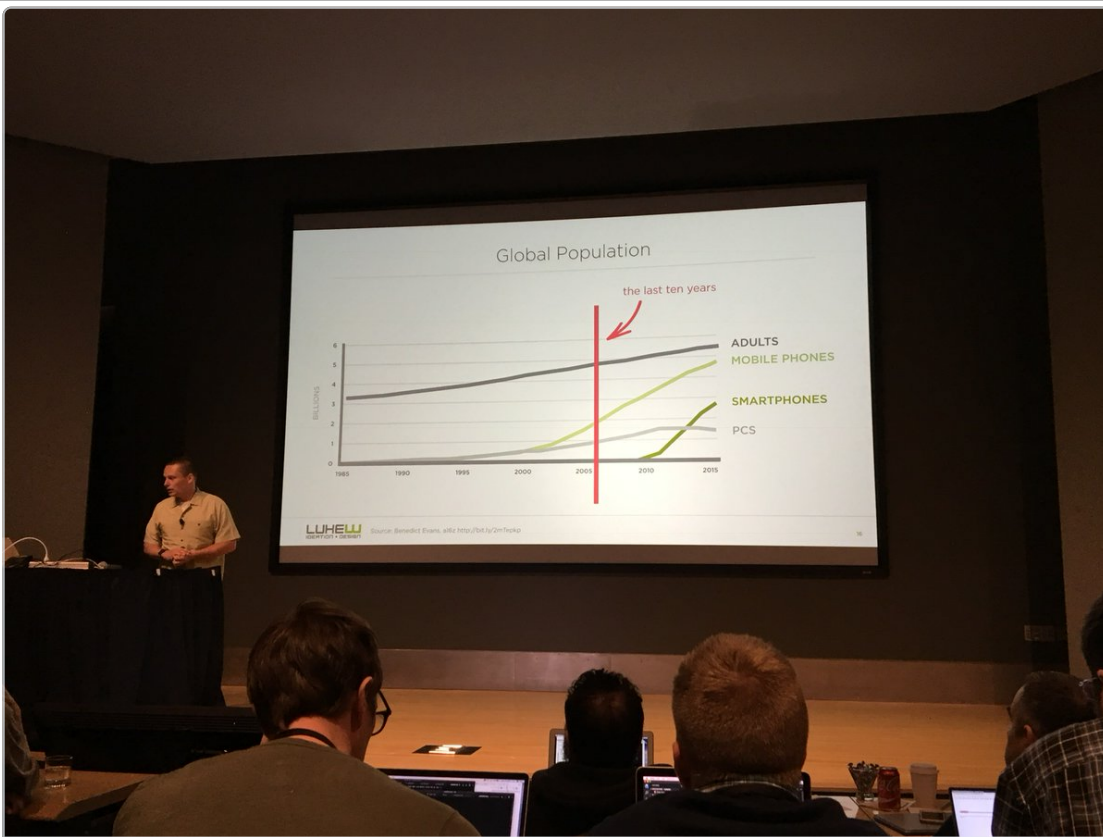
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Quantity of devices + huge audiences + lots of opportunities to make money = 2006-2017 #AEASEA

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These are totals, not year over year. Absolutely changing the planet #aeasea

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One of Luke's strengths is that he has data – quantitative information – to back the vast majority of his assertions regardless of what field he's speaking in, and he knows how to analyze the data. Almost every tweet above was in response to a graph of data backed by quality sources.

The other speakers to this point talked about the importance of quantitative and qualitative data; Luke's talk illustrates the power of using it to drive design decisions and tell a story.

Now, back to that iPhone thing...



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Apple would sometimes review 50 different refinements of a single hardware button [#AEASEA](#)

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What now seems obvious clearly was not. [#AEASEA](#)

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**Zeldman**

@zeldman

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“Design is only obvious in retrospect.” [@lukew](#) [#AEASEA](#) [#design](#)

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Apple Maps - not a good release when it came out. OSX featured redesign, that people are praising [#aeasea](#)

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To search a location before - have to tap to search. Today: "where do you want to go?" Is surfaced [#AEASEA](#)

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Before: Route text. After: big blue button shaped like a button. Stronger design principles [#AEASEA](#)

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**Anne Gibson**

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How do we know which changes created the more obvious experience? LinkedIn had a very small menu before. Now bottom nav [#AEASEA](#)

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"Hmm, linkedin did it, should we do it?" "Wait, eBay went the other direction!" [#AEASEA](#)

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Ebay's app ratings dove. Then they switched back to the bottom navigation. Hmm [#AEASEA](#)

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"Here's what we did and why and what happened" are super-informative articles to read (if you can find them) [#AEASEA](#)

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We see what happens, we look at other products, ratings, articles, stats, and we make decisions based on this stuff which is scary

[#AEASEA](#)

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Google plus example - what should we do and why should we do that? How do you get people to support decisions? [#AEASEA](#)

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G+ added a bottom navigation menu to an android app from google. #AEASEA

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Why are we talking about navigation? it provides sense of direction and environment and tasks #AEASEA (yay information architecture!)

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**Josh Vickerson**

@joshvickerson

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“Navigation is an element of a service that plays a critical role of comprehension.” - @lukew #aeasea

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Oh and if anyone wants to argue about the importance of navigation with me, as an Information Architect I'll gladly fill your ears with design heuristics and proximity principles and sense of environment and direction lectures....

...we need more IAs in the field, so if you're not an IA and this sounds **fun** please consider our career field (and/or a good counselor).



**Anne Gibson**  
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Goal: Create an org structure that explains what the hell this thing is for and why to use it [#AEASEA](#)

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So Luke's working at Google, and they were trying to redesign an application on an Android device because they knew there were navigational problems, but they weren't sure what the best answer to those problems was.



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Previous navigation was a huge menu at the top of the page with 100 things in it that grew organically w/no hierarchy [#AEASEA](#)

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**Jen Simmons**  
@jensimmons

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The theme of this year's AEA (ideas emerging across talks) — do not just do a thing on your project because others do on theirs. [#aeasea](#)

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Truth.



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“All things being equal” wasn’t an exaggeration, they were all equal  
[#AEASEA](#)

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How to fix your navigation problem:



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1. Talk to a bunch of happy people using the app and ask them to tell you about it. (They often are quite happy to! They’re happy!)

[#AEASEA](#)

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2. Match quantitative data to qualitative data to make sense of quantitative data [#AEASEA](#)

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**Josh Vickerson**

@joshvickerson

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“Quantitative will tell you what happened, qualitative tells you why.”



- [@lukew](#) [#aeasea](#)


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On the left, the onboard computers from a bike crash that took place during the Tour de France. On the right,

pictures of the people involved in the crash directly after it took place.

QUANT & QUAL



jared bishop  
@bishopart


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Which date is more useful for your situation? [@lukew](#) [#aeasea](#)

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The answer, of course, is both. The qualitative data tells a story, and the quantitative data backs that story up, adds a layer of meaning and rigor that the qualitative data can't.


Ben Roach  
@benr0ach

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.[@lukew](#): "Quantitative data will tell you WHAT happened. Qualitative data will tell you WHY." [#aeasea](#) [#aea17](#) [#ux](#)

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2. After about 7 weeks of discussing with users and comparing data on designs, simplifying was good [#AEASEA](#)

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Secondary goal: wanted to grow critical engagement (“use the damn thing”) #AEASEA

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Why are you making something if nobody’s using it? #AEASEA

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**Anne Gibson**

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3. While usability testing, also did survival analysis. What did ppl do that kept them alive (still using app) later? #AEASEA

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What’s the strongest indicator of coming back on the 2nd day? In this case, Follow Collections. At 3 weeks? Joined Community #aeasea

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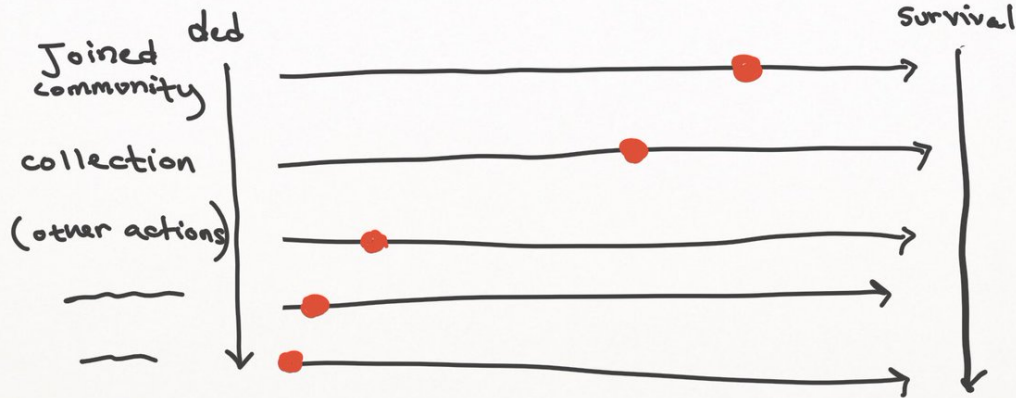
When doing a survival analysis, it’s important to watch for selection bias and/or test your hypotheses. There’s a [famous story about WW2 planes and selection bias](#) that shows how insidious it can be.



# SURVIVAL ANALYSIS



what actions lead people to stick around



**Krystal Higgins**

@kryshiggins

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Use Survival Analysis to see what actions lead users to survive (stay engaged) in your products - @lukew #aeasea

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What happens when you move important features that lead ppl to stick around in global nav? It gets used 600% more #aeasea

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If you have qualitative & quantitative data that says ppl like this and they stay to use the service, easy to make design decisions

#AEASEA

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Decisions sell themselves when you have this data combined

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Not just a singular view of opportunities. Human ergonomics also figured in to this design decision #AEASEA

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Huge screens (“phablets”) are becoming de facto standard for what people are using. #AEASEA

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Oh and which is your real personal computer, the desktop or the phone you use constantly? #AEASEA

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“As phones get more biggity the top of the screen gets more ouchity” Ergonomics are important! #AEASEA

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## IPHONE 6 PLUS





**jared bishop**  
@bishopart

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More biggity = more ouchity @lukew #aeasea

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Big clunky swipecy gestures help people because that's how they use things with one thumb #AEASEA

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There are a lot of gotchas in designs. don't just copy this, you have to do it yourself. #AEASEA

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Where you find bandaids is where there is blood. If you have to advertise a workaround, there's your problem [#AEASEA](#)

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Shuffle and repeat on Apple Music is now hiding. (I had to look it up!) [#AEASEA](#)

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People won't scroll if things look like they end. The Apple Music screen looks like it's done! [#AEASEA](#)

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What went wrong? We need to communicate those to each other more so we can learn from each other [#AEASEA](#)

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Going back to the design Luke was testing...



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#1 complaint was “you took away screen space that I was using!”  
So it wasn't a 100% win [#AEASEA](#)

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How do we know which changes created the more obvious  
experience? LinkedIn had a very small menu before. Now bottom  
nav [#AEASEA](#)

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#2 problem - Android specifically said “don't use bottom tab bars”  
which, um, was a problem for an Android-sponsored app [#AEASEA](#)

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Had they not gone through the process they had, Luke's team may  
not have had the confidence to go against standards [#AEASEA](#)

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**jared bishop**

@bishopart

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Research provides confidence [#aeasea](#)

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(The old rule of thumb: if you're going to break corporate standards you better be damn sure your data's in order.) [#AEASEA](#)

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ASK ME HOW I KNOW.



**Anne Gibson**

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Have an explanation and be ready to provide updates on how things are improving based on data later [#AEASEA](#)

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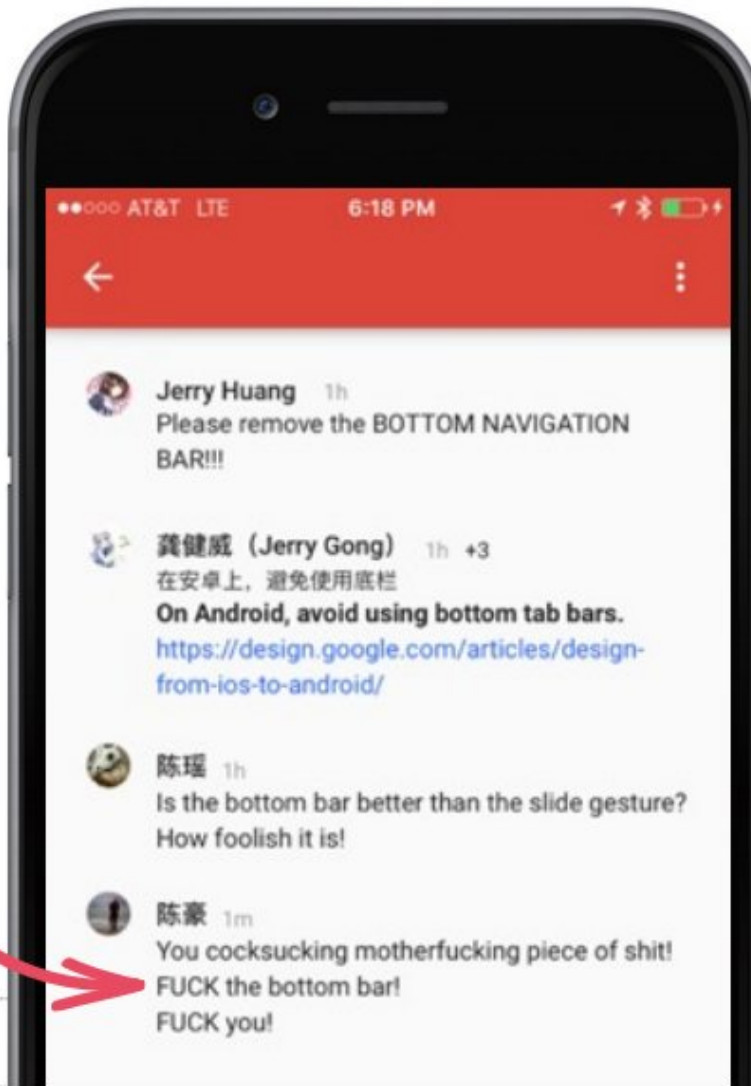
**Anne Gibson**

@perpendicularme

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#3 - people hate change and angry about the update. (Gratuitous "yup": [the-pastry-box-project.net/anne-gibson/20...](http://the-pastry-box-project.net/anne-gibson/20...)) [#AEASEA](#)

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**LUKEW**  
IDENTION + DESIGN



**Don Aymar**  
@daymar

Follow

Apparently, the bottom nav in google + mobile was unpopular in some circles. @lukew #aeasea

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If you don't go through the process, if you fall back to "LinkedIn did it!", it's going to be difficult to make needed changes [#aeasea](#)

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**Stephanie**

@seaotta

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Trying to please everybody is the road to madness. - Erik Larsen  
[#aeasea](#)

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If nobody gives a crap about what you're doing, it's probably not that interesting. [#AEASEA](#)

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**Anne Gibson**

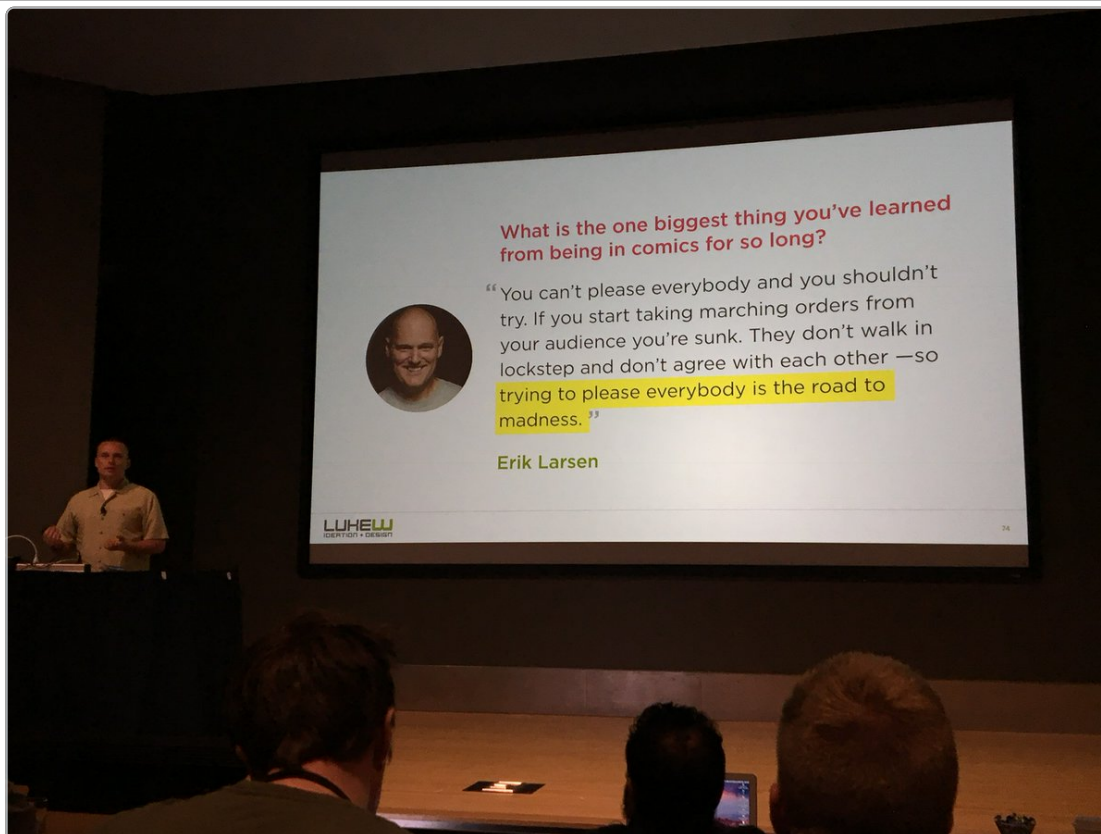
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"Products without a point of view have no point." Steven Sinofsky  
[#AEASEA](#)

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There are going to be unhappy people [#aeasea](#)

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It's on you to make good decisions with a perspective and data,  
and then it looks obvious [#AEASEA](#)

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#### MOBILE DESIGN...

### 1. Obvious in retrospect

UNDERSTAND WHY DESIGNS WORK  
DON'T JUST COPY "PATTERNS"

### 2. Requires iteration

INFORMED BY INSIGHTS  
BOTH QUANTITATIVE & QUALITATIVE

### 3. Won't please everyone

HAVE A POINT OF VIEW  
IMPACTFUL CHANGES AREN'T ALWAYS POPULAR

LUHEW  
IDEATION + DESIGN

71



**Anne Gibson**

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Three important points for mobile (and all other) design:

Obvious in retrospect

Requires iteration

Won't please everyone #AEASEA

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[More of Krystal Higgins' awesome sketchnotes](#)

#### DO THAT SOCIAL MEDIA THING



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