

Art in the palm of your hand

CHELSEY WILEY,
USER EXPERIENCE ARCHITECT, BOTTLE ROCKET



Have you ever taken a moment away from scrolling to take in the beauty of the app thumbnails on your phone? If not, pause reading for a moment and look at them. They're truly amazing miniature pieces of art. Yes, I know they're mostly just logos, but they're also tiny pieces of creativity, vision, function, and value all wrapped into 180 pixels.

This first occurred to me while being stuck somewhere without a signal. I was absent minded staring at my phone when it hit me just how similar the Google photos icon and the iOS photos icon are. But the more I really looked at the icons, the more I was reminded of the sunflower that used to represent "photos" back on my first iPhone.

So, I started looking more. I was surprised to find that even the apps I use every day had hidden beauty. TikTok is a Music note. Lucid is a book with an 'L'. Even the little ghost on SnapChat infers that something may disappear! I use some of these apps multiple times a day and I never took a minute to appreciate them.

The more I looked, the more I saw the creativity in each one. There are "collections" or styles of icons that are the same across a product suite, like Google with its distinct color palate. Or Amazon Products and the A-Z arrow/smiles. Apps supporting the great outdoors (from REI to the Hiking Project) all represent a mountain, yet they

all vary. I noticed that apps that move things tend to have a feeling of movement associated with them. The stretched the 'D' for Doordash, or the green lines of the Frontier Airlines 'F' that look like wings. Even the Postmates icon uses, what looks like a flying bicycle, to get something from point A to point B. Even if that thing is a taco.

I started looking into apps that are more nuanced, standing alone, not falling into a particular category. With many of these thumbnails I experienced what is known as a "Gestalt Switch." Much like the "Rabbit-duck illusion" made famous by Ludwig Wittgenstein, or the "Eskimo-Face illusion" by Elizabeth Douglass, these kinds of images allow you to see one thing in multiple ways. I first noticed the concept with Instacart. If I were to ask you what the Instacart logo is, odds are you'd say, "it's a carrot" and you wouldn't be wrong. However, Instacart's logo is more than a carrot to me. For me, through the Gestalt Switch, I can see the original carrot, true to its roots (pun intended), but I can also see an arrow pointing to a pin (like that you would see on a map)

The more I looked the more I became aware of my own unique point of view, and the impact it has on my day-to-day creativity. I started to challenge myself to see things differently. Is there the sound coming out of a book representing "Audible" or is that the action of pages turning? The LG logo seems to encompass three things in one: a smiley face, what looks like a sideways PacMan, PLUS the company name. Are those bike pedals that make up the 'P' for Peloton? When I tap to stream Formula 1, am I clicking on "F1" or on a racetrack with a finish line? Is the Discord logo not in fact a happy Robot but a game controller?

This new outlook has led me down a path of mindfulness. Even as I write this, I realize that Grammarly is both a refresh symbol and the letter 'G'. I can't seem to unsee the beauty that has gone into the digital world around me. What's even better is the realization that seeing these nuances has helped me be intentional in my own creativity and communication. So, the next time you're in a waiting room stuck without a signal, take a minute and appreciate your phone and the art within. You never know what might inspire you. EXP

"I can't seem to unsee the beauty that has gone into the digital world around me."