Bad Online Form Design

Case Study: Wasting Time in Resetting Passwords

You know the email alert: "Our database may have been breached and exposed customer logins/password credentials/credit card numbers/email addresses [fill in the blanks]. Since we take your privacy extremely seriously and out of an abundance of caution, we urge you to reset your passwords now."


And there are also those randomly sent email alerts that shame you for not having changed your account password in a while. They urge you to do so now and then make you jump through hoops to comply while delivering a terrible user experience with bad form design that wastes your time.

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I decided to explore how easy it was to change passwords all at once and test the UX/UI of online forms. So, I spent weeks painstakingly resetting all my passwords to complicated, long and unique ones for each account.

The experience was eye-opening and frustrating. A root canal is faster and less painful.

Too many times to count, I landed on sites so poorly designed that I got slowed down

Delete Account
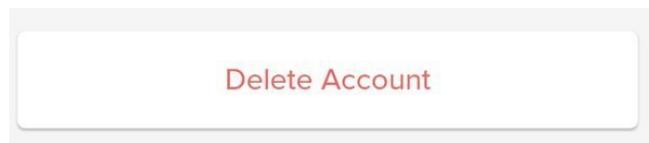
by an inconsistent navigation and site structure and ended up in an endless loop.

From what I encountered, many web designers and developers urgently need a refresher in user-friendly form design to help them create a positive user experience with a helpful interface. The login, sign-up, or registration forms are usually the first elements we see—and the first impression we get from the organization, the service or the brand. The efficiency of your site navigation and online forms will keep users happily engaged—or will prompt them to seek out your competition.

Here is my content + design list of what NOT to do with your online forms and how to improve them—from a frustrated user trying to reset old passwords to strong ones and then getting lost in a virtual maze.

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What NOT to Do

STOP not providing me with your password creation rules (letter combination requirements, length) before I type and retype my new and carefully constructed, long and impossible-to-remember password.

STOP giving me restrictions on the maximum length of my password. Adjust your database rules. A maximum of 8 characters is not enough anymore. It shouldn't be my problem that your database can't handle longer strings.

At right, what not to do: Hiding passwords while typing and restricting their length.
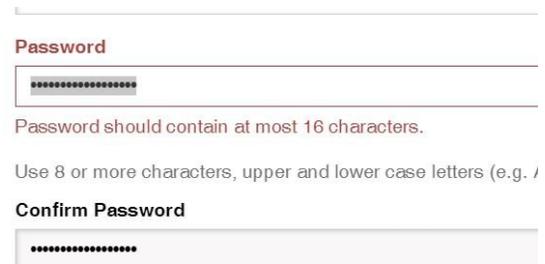
Password

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Password should contain at most 16 characters.

Use 8 or more characters, upper and lower case letters (e.g. /

Confirm Password

••••••••••••••••

STOP not giving me the option to view my long and complicated password while I'm typing it, just to have me retype it, again blindly, to check if it matches and then alert me that the passwords don't match and let me start all over again—blindly. And don't make me count tiny dots to ensure that the password I chose wasn't cut off mid-way through typing because I wasn't made aware of your maximum letter requirements.

STOP locking my account temporarily without prior warning for "my protection" because of too many attempts to reset my password, attempts that I was forced to do because of your poor design. Find better

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ways to secure my account (security questions, a text message with a code, Google Authenticator, an email, to name a few).

STOP not providing me with an option to add 2-step-verification to secure my account or at the very least add a security question. And please let me phrase those questions myself. Anyone can Google my mother's maiden name.

STOP making me reenter my email address on the forgotten password page that I've already provided while trying to sign on. Instead, send a reset password link promptly to my registered address (a link, not a temporary password that I need to change yet again). And alert me immediately if that email address is not in your database.

STOP not providing me a way to log out. Yes, some sites encourage you to choose strong passwords—and then they don't give you an option to log out. I don't want to stay logged in. It is not secure. And, by the way, I don't care for the option to sign in with my social media accounts either. We know how secure that is.

STOP not letting me control my data. It shouldn't matter whether I live in the US or Europe. Don't punish me for where I live and assume my data is fair play. Know that if I can't quickly delete my account, I will enter bogus details and a 10-minute email address. Do you want to clutter your databases with my fake user details? You probably don't even care.

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At right, an alert posted on a US-based site: Lucky you if you're in the EU. You can "request to be forgotten." For the rest of us, our data is a free-for-all. But it is rare to see it so blatantly stated, as in the last bullet point.

privacy is paramount to us. Compliance with legal provisions — such as the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), CAN-SPAM Act and others is a matter of course for us. On this page we want to briefly explain how you can be an active participant in the management of your data and personal preferences. For additional information, please reference IDGC's privacy policy.

On this page you'll be able to:

- Manage your email subscriptions
- Learn more about IDG sponsors and your data
- Request your IDGC Consent audit log
- Request to be Forgotten (EU residents)

STOP signing me up for your newsletter/notifications by default. If you do, I will delete my account, or if that's not possible, I'll give you a bogus email address and never come back.

STOP requesting that I send an email if I want to cancel my account or require that I call you to do so. Why not demand a letter or a message delivered by my owl? Do you think this extra step is a legitimate way to keep me at your side? If a cancellation can't be performed online with one click, you unnecessarily burden your users. Do you want me to jump through hoops to get rid of you? I'll enter bogus user details and never come back.

STOP not giving me a prominent "forgot password" link on your login form to help me recover my password with one click.

STOP placing your cancel/back/previous button to the right of the submit/OK/next button. We intuitively go/swap right when we want to advance (like reading a book). How often have I mistakenly hit back/cancel when I wanted to proceed because of your poor design?

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At right: Just don't. Faux checkboxes instead of bullet points. Thank you, @faundez_alex, for pointing this out.
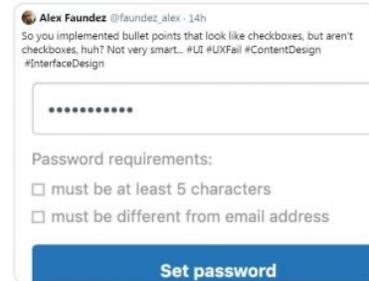
STOP using checkboxes instead of bullet points for elements that can't be checked.

What You Should Do Instead

To prevent poor user experience, you need to streamline your online forms. Here are key points to consider to improve the UX/UI of your forms:

- Less design adds more functionality to your form. The form should be intuitive and clean, with clear instructions and expectations on how to proceed.
- Every login form has to be mobile-friendly.
- Minimize the steps a user has to take to the bare minimum.
- Visually distinguish between sign-up and login forms. Provide both but not together on the same page. Password managers won't

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always differentiate between the two and attempt to fill out/submit both, which leads to errors and wasted time.

- Provide ample white space between input fields since users might fill out your form on their mobile devices.
- Center or align your labels, place them above or within the fields, but whatever you choose, be consistent.
- Label each field clearly and autofocus (highlight) the first field the user has to fill out in longer forms.

The login form at right uses a simple and effective design that works well. And yet, missing is a "delete my account" link.
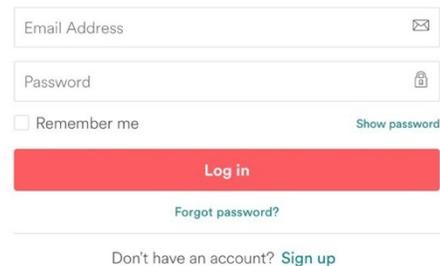
- Use sticky forms, so when a user has to go back, s/he will not have to start all over again.
- Clearly mark all fields that users need to fill in with an asterisk. Don't mark optional fields with an asterisk. Don't wait until the users hit submit to let them know what they've missed. Don't rely on tiny letters or whimsical colored clues to hint at what your users have to input.

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*Confusing design: Required fields are usually indicated with an asterisk. Here, the optional fields are marked instead; only after a user inputs details the *optional alert pops up.*

Email Address

First Name*

T|

*optional

Last Name*

Subscribe to newsletter

- Show clearly defined error messages that help solve any problems with the submitted form.
- Only ask for the minimum information needed. No, that shouldn't include my birth date, complete address, gender or title (Mrs. or Ms. or maybe Miss? Seriously?).
- Don't use pop-up login forms that first ask for a username/email and then a new pop-up for the password; many password managers can't handle those dual steps.
- Clearly indicate password requirements upfront: minimum of 8— but don't set a maximum length limit. Clearly indicate letter sequence/symbols/numbers/upper case and lower case rules.
- Always give the option to view/hide what the user types by providing a checkbox or toggle option to "show password."
- Alert the user if caps lock is on while typing the password.

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- Use an email address as a username. Chances are that we remember our email address better than any user name. An email address is unique and eliminates the "forgot username?" link.

- Place a prominent link under the login form to reset the password ("forgot/reset your password," not "lost your password?". I didn't lose it. I forgot it). And if the username/email is not in your database, let users know immediately rather than having them refresh their inbox for the next hour.

- Provide a prominent link under the login form "delete my account" or at the very least on the account settings page.

- The submit/next/OK button should be on the bottom right of the form and more prominently colored. The cancel/back/previous button should be placed to its left, colored in a lighter hue. We intuitively click/swap right when we want to advance and click/swap left when we want to go back or cancel (like reading a book).

  At right, an example of bad design: If you have required fields, clearly mark those before the user fills out the form.

Contact Information

First Name | Last Name

Email

Job Title

DOWNLOAD NOW

Contact Information

First Name | Last Name

Please complete this required field. | Please complete this required field.

o13061807@nwytg.net

Job Title

Please select an option from the dropdown menu.

- Please complete all required fields.

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At right, good design: While the user types, password requirements are simultaneously vetted until all boxes are checked green. This is a visual guide that is very effective.

Create your account

Email address

Your email address will be used as your account username.

Confirm email

Enter password

Confirm password

Password requirements:

- ✓ Must be between 8 and 20 characters
- ✓ Must contain both upper and lower case letters
- ✓ Must contain at least 1 number
- ✓ Must contain at least one of these special characters: ! @ $ * + -
- ✓ Cannot contain any other special characters beside those listed above
- ✓ Cannot contain more than 2 repeating characters
- ✓ Cannot contain the username
- ✓ Cannot contain 9 or more consecutive numbers
- ✓ Cannot contain spaces

Every security breach is on the companies and is directly related to their poorly designed submission forms and databases.

At the very least, consumers should expect to be compensated for the inconvenience when dealing with these frequent security hacks repeatedly.

Provide your site visitors with a streamlined, intuitive, aesthetic and efficient user experience that will make submitting your online forms a breeze.

Good UX & UI in form design matters.

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