

/website build-off registration pages

Signing up for things online doesn't have to be annoying. Here, three designers work their magic on a registration page

The brief

Mock up a page that includes a registration section. Many sites require you to fill these in, but the user experience can often be frustrating and inaccessible. We'd like you to come up with a simple, clean, attention-grabbing design that's also usable.

Designers



Name Gene Crawford
Company Period Three
URL period-three.com

Gene has been creating simple, user-specific websites and apps for over a decade. He's the founder of Period Three, a web design and development company, and runs the gallery unmatchedstyle.com.



Name Matt Balara
Company Freelance
URL mattbalara.com

Matt is a user experience and web designer based in Sydney. He's worked for Volkswagen, Microsoft and Deutsche Bank, and after 15 years still can't understand why so many sites are ugly and hard to use.



Name Lee Munroe
Company Freelance
URL leemunroe.com

Lee's primary focus is on designing web application interfaces. He's from Belfast and has worked on websites for a number of start-up companies, including Sharethrough, Ecliptic and Lookaly.

Gene Crawford's solution

I'm involved with the website unmatchedstyle.com. Essentially, it's a purveyor of fine front-end design and code, but we're striving to make it more than just a gallery of great websites. We also want to foster an air of constructive criticism for artists and provide inspiration to the web design community. We try to do this by providing articles, interviews and a video podcast.

At the moment, the site is built on WordPress. While this has worked brilliantly so far, we're rapidly outgrowing it from a functional standpoint. We have plans to release a more powerful commenting system and other collaborative design tools to our community. Of course, creating the user sign-up process is the first step in that project. Our registration page needs to be

clean, easy to understand and informative – what can a new user expect to gain by becoming a member?

From both design and function perspectives, two things are important to the form. Firstly, by utilising Facebook's account connection tools, we can enable users to get onto our website quickly. Secondly, if someone chooses to fill out their details anew, we want them to have a visual focus on the field that they're engaged with.

Having helper annotations on the form fields means we don't have to develop a set of instructions or extra pages to explain how each one impacts a user's profile. The design should also include an inline display of any errors and omissions made during the process. ●

Expert info



Gene Crawford's month

What have I been doing?

We're currently working on a redesign for unmatchedstyle.com. We're going to be adding some yet-to-be-announced features and enhancing the gallery a great deal over the next year.

Sites I've visited

Lately, my top site for design inspiration has been dribbble.com. It has a lot of great ideas packed into tiny boxes of previews. I also read thinkvitamin.com. There's always a great article lurking around on that blog.

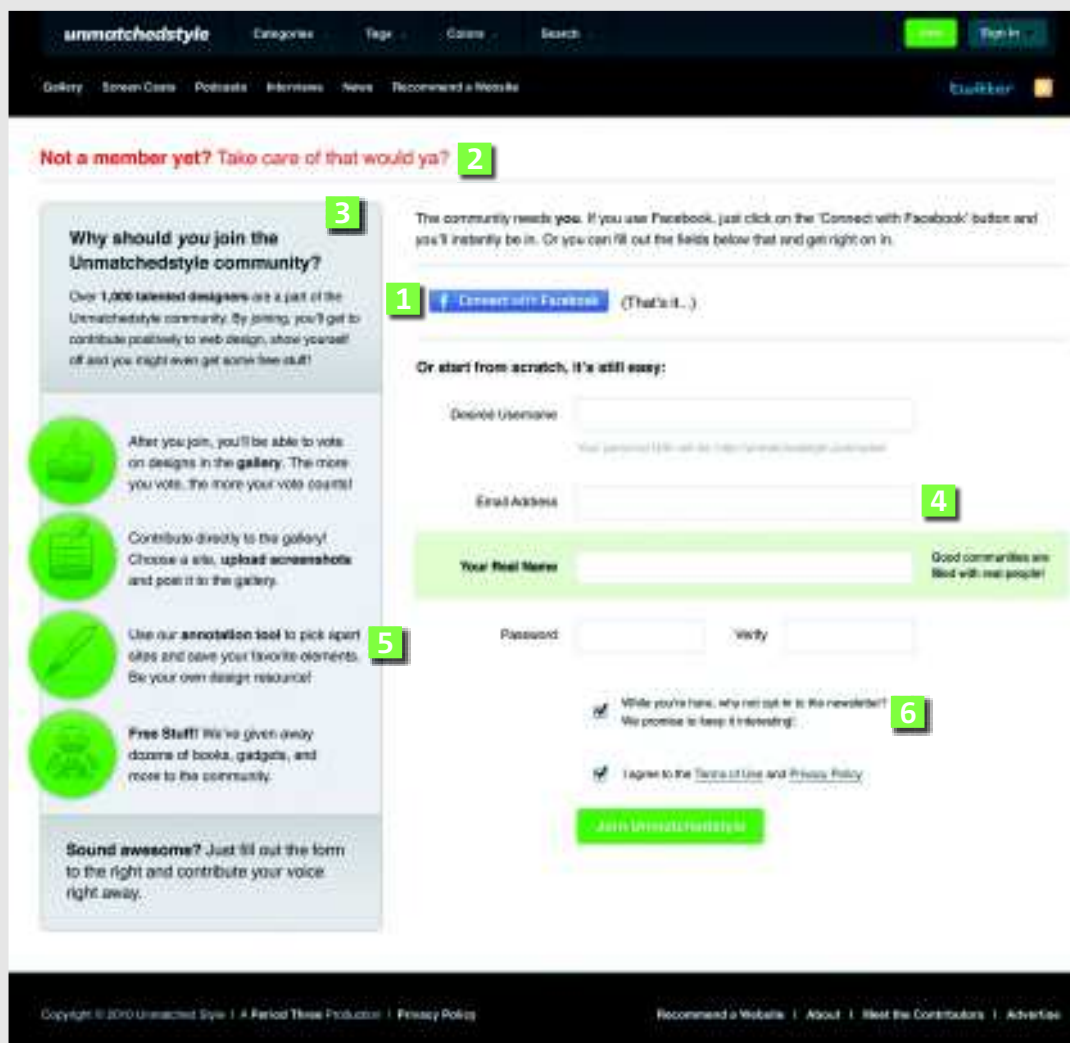
What have I been watching?

Now that *Lost* is over, there isn't much left on television to keep me interested. If I had to pick something else, I'd have to say that keeping up with *The Daily Show* is a favourite pastime.

What have I been listening to?

Normally, I listen to a podcast or two, but if it's music, it's Tom Petty.

Close up



1 Facebook

First and foremost, we want sign-up to be as fast as possible. Facebook does all the heavy lifting for you when you use its connection tools, so why not make the most of that?

2 The copy

The tone should be open and laid back, and we've tried to hook people with phrases such as "your vote counts". We all want to see our name in lights. We mention free stuff, too.

3 Community benefits

We wanted a box on the page that explains the benefits of joining our community. Some ad-hoc testing has shown that people notice this more when it's on the left.

4 Field labels

People enter details more precisely if these are on the right. This may take slightly longer, but accuracy means a better experience later on and ensures data integrity.

5 Two-column layout

Simplifying the sign-up page makes it cleaner and less cluttered. This means that the user is less likely to click on something distracting and cancel the registration process.

6 Newsletter

This is a good time to get people to opt-in to the newsletter, since we're already getting them to fill out forms and give us their details. We want our email list to grow as well.

Turn over to see solutions from [Matt Balara](#) and [Lee Munroe](#) >>

Expert info



Matt Balara's month

What have I been doing?

I've currently got the worst client in the world: myself. Since I moved back to Australia, I've been doing client work constantly, so I've had little time to set up my own stuff. I need a nice logo, business cards, a new site and, most importantly, an online portfolio. I had to book myself this month to get these things done.

Sites I've visited

For inspiration, I've been studying the sites of the designers and agencies I admire the most: Jason Santa Maria (jasonsantamaria.com) and Clearleft (clearleft.com) are the stand-out examples for me.

What have I been watching?

I'm wired, so I've got to watch any superhero movie that comes out. That unfortunately means I saw Iron Man 2 recently. The armour looked nice, at least.

What have I been listening to?

I started learning to play guitar a few weeks ago, so I've been digging into the folk and blues I'd like to be able to play one day.

Matt Balara's solution

After all the furore over Facebook's apparent disdain for our privacy, I was happy to see four talented kids from NYU get the funding they need to build an alternative site. Their project, Diaspora, will hopefully be the privacy-aware, personally controlled, do-it-all, distributed open source social network we've all been waiting for.

The design below is pure speculation on what could be the first-run registration screen – the software's only an idea at the moment. The boys at NYU are furiously coding and were understandably unavailable to collaborate on this, but they were generous enough to allow me to use their logo and make up whatever I want. The look, content and functionality are all my guesses, and the real thing will no doubt be quite different.

I'm a fan of get-in-quick design and I've imagined as simple a set-up process as possible: just whack in your name and password, add a social network or two and get started. I'm certain that Diaspora will be more complex than this, but the excitement of installing a new toy shouldn't be ruined by having to answer a million questions and fiddle with endless settings before you're allowed to play. All the non-essential details can be dealt with later.

The other goal here was to avoid the feeling of a technical set-up and give the user a welcoming, and perhaps slightly mysterious, introductory experience. The large image, minimal input and overall mood aim to inspire curiosity and excitement and get people using Diaspora as quickly as possible.

Close up



1 Welcome

The welcome text conveys how easy it is to get started. It reassures the user that they can't make any mistakes here, and that they'll be able to go into more detail later.

4 Authenticate

This button sends you to the relevant network so that you can log in and authorise Diaspora through its API. No dastardly password anti-pattern necessary.

2 Profile

In the interests of getting people started, these boxes ask for the bare necessities. Just give your name, email address and password before moving on.

5 Add more

Authenticated networks (Facebook here) display feedback. As more sites are chosen, the Add Another selector moves down the screen, allowing more to be picked.

3 Social networks

To connect to one of their social networks, all a user needs to do is select it from the dropdown menu. They'll then be presented with an Authenticate button.

6 Next

By clicking Next, people can progress to a new page where they add contacts. To make this as simple as possible, suggestions will be made based on friends in other networks.

Lee Munroe's solution

Eggible is a fictional social network that enables people to set up profiles and share photos, recipes, events, videos and comments associated with eggs.

Here, the sign-up page is the key to letting people in, as it is with any website. Unfortunately, it's also a barrier to actual activity. As such, it should be made as simple as possible for people to get through.

This mock-up aims to address the issue by making the registration form as trim as possible. People only have to enter the essential information before getting a profile. Any other details that we'd like to have – location and real name, for example – we can ask for at a later stage. In this way, we get the user through the door straight away.

To make things even easier, people can log in with Facebook and link that account with their Eggible one. This also enables us to extend our network by linking the user up with their existing friends and publishing updates on other social network sites.

People will also need some enticement to sign up, and they'll want to be reminded about what it is they're signing up for. What does the site do? Who else uses it? These are questions they'll be asking themselves as they look at the registration form. Instead of making them go back to your homepage to find out the answers, provide them with some reminders.

Don't forget that any existing users will have to have a separate login section and that, legally, you should provide a link to your terms of service and privacy policy. ●

Expert info



Lee Munroe's month

What have I been doing?

I'm dividing my time between client work and personal work at the moment. One of the sites I've been working on is Lookaly.com, a user review site for restaurants, cafes, bars and businesses that's specific to Northern Ireland.

Sites I've visited

www.tumblr.com

This popular blogging platform is so simple and self-explanatory. I love this sign-up process on this site.

37signals.com

Renowned for their web apps and user experience, this agency's sign-up pages tick all the right boxes.

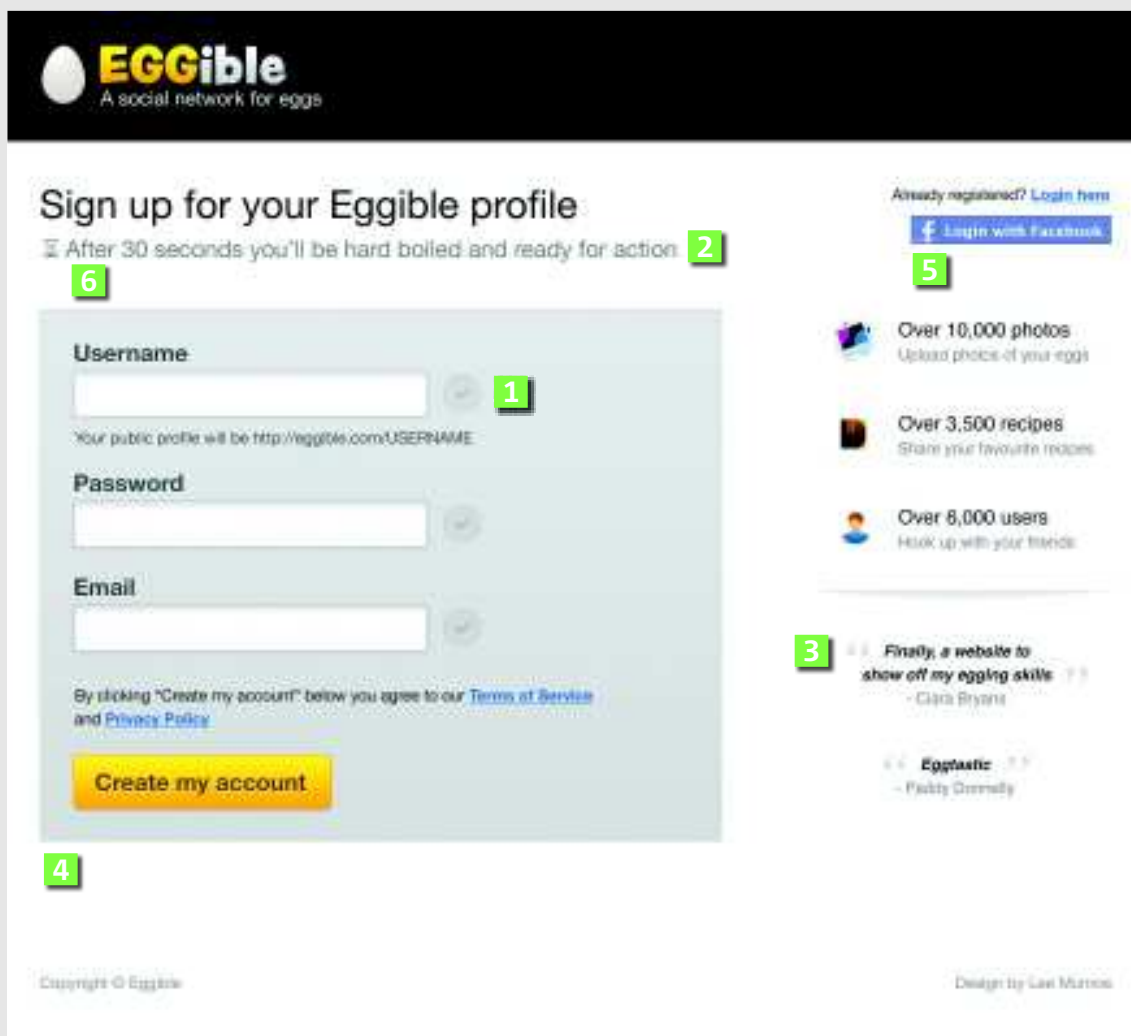
What have I been watching?

Now that the final seasons of *Lost* and *24* have come and gone it's been all about the World Cup.

What have I been listening to?

We No Speak Americano by Yolanda Be Cool and DCUP – pump it up.

Close up



1 Experience

Only asking for the absolutely essential details means people can get access to a site within 30 seconds. After all, they want to get through the sign-up process as quickly as possible.

4 Layout

The page is simply structured so that the main focus is on the form. Everything else is there to support or entice visitors. Top-level navigation is removed.

2 Information recap

Remind the user what it is they're signing up for. This tagline sums up the social network, and the site's key features are listed in the column on the right to draw people in.

5 Facebook

It's also a social network, so it makes sense to ease the login process and link the user's Eggible account with their Facebook account, if they want you to.

3 Quotes

People are more likely to sign up to a service that's widely used. Showcasing key numbers and using testimonials from other account-holders will help promote a site's image.

6 Clarity

How long it will take to complete the registration process is made clear. Inline validation means any errors are clear to the user before they submit their details.

Have your say ...

Got a suggestion for a new site build-off? Let us know at netmag@futurenet.com

