

Windows 8 UX – Navigation Patterns

Few months ago, one of our members, Jasna, got invited to be a speaker at the Macedonian Mobile UG monthly meeting in Skopje, Macedonia. She spoke on a very interesting User Experience topic, the Navigation Patterns in Windows 8 applications. Considering the interest for the topic, we decided to share it with you in the shape of a blog post.

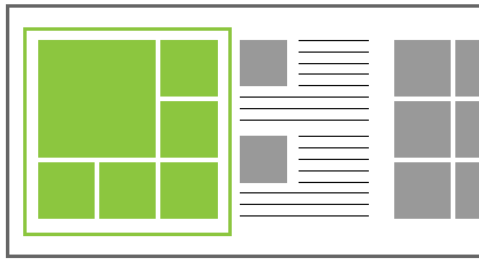
Have you faced the challenges of the new, modern and different navigation presented in Windows 8? We believe you have – both as a user and as a creator of Windows 8 applications. Have taken your time to think how to navigate back to the previous page or how to link pages and yet keep the simplicity? If so, you are at the right place. Keep reading!



Navigation Pattern is a concept in User Experience which revolves around the right usage of navigation for the right User Interface/Design elements in order to avoid unnecessary functionality complications. Knowing about navigation patterns helps in the limitation of controls that are persistently on screen (think: tabs). One important benefit of appropriate navigation patterns in Windows 8 apps is that it lets the user focus on the app content by making use of intuitive navigation.

There are 3 types of navigation patterns in Windows 8: Hierarchical, Flat, and Split Navigation Pattern:

Hierarchical Navigation Pattern



Hub Page



Section Pages



Detail Pages

This is the most used (and also most inappropriately used!) navigation pattern because it comes from the older apps and Windows versions, so a lot of people are used to using this one. Here are some characteristics:

- Also called Hub Design
- Layers in the app hierarchy
- Content is separated into different levels in the layer hierarchy
- Main Hierarchy Layers:
 - Hub Pages – entry point in the app, general content level
 - Section Pages – individual second level items of the app, divisions, blocks, etc.
 - Detail Pages – details of individual items are displayed in the third layer level, i.e. page content

Usage convenience: apps with large collections of content or apps with a lot of different sections

Example: Parcelgenie Windows 8 app

Flat Navigation Pattern

Navigation Bar



Switching



The flat navigation pattern is much simpler than the hierarchical pattern and it makes use of a sequential method of displaying pages and page information within an application, so it therefore very convenient for simple and small apps. Some key points:

- Separates content into different pages
- No layers
- Content is displayed by straight selection of a different page
- Main Navigation Elements:
 - Navigation Bar (or top App bar) – easy way to switch between multiple contents
 - Switching – no Back button – moving between pages is done through direct links

Usage convenience: games, browsers, document-creation apps, etc. where there is a lot of switching between pages of the same level

Example: Bing News Windows 8 App

Split Navigation Pattern

Master List



Item Description Page

In this pattern, there is one app level – and this level is used both for ordering of content and for content display. The Master List shows general content items which are displayed in the Item Description page. As you can notice here, there is no navigation from one page to another – everything happens at the same place. Characteristics:

- Content is shown on the same level with individual items
- Makes use of switching between individual items into the same item description page
- Content is displayed into the *item description page* by selecting an individual item from a *master list*
- Main Navigation Elements:
 - Master List – a list of individual items, usually shown on the left of the page
 - Item Description Page – used to display content from a selected Master List Item

Usage convenience: mail applications and applications with simple content and structure

Example: Twitter app for Windows 8, mailing apps, etc.

Navigation Anatomy

There are a few elements that make up the navigation anatomy of a Windows 8 application. Some of these are already well-known, but some are new and not used properly or at all. In this section, we are going to point to a few of them:

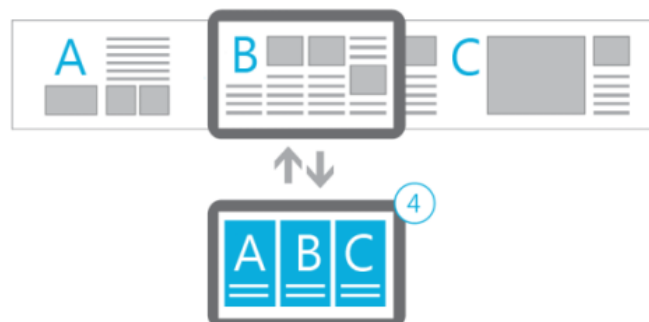


Header and Back button: each Windows 8 application has a Header which most of the time contains a Back button. The location of this button is the top left of the application and it has a shape of a circle with an arrow pointing back.

Content Sections: as the name says, these are the application content holders and they can be displayed in multiple ways (as you can see on the picture above), which as well depends on the type of navigation pattern used.

Hub Page: this is point 2 from the image above. Hub pages consist of content sections where one is given some sort of priority, and the other are organized around it.

Semantic Zoom: this is a navigation element which is new for Windows 8 and not very well understood at all times. Consider having three large content chunks A, B and C which cannot fit on screen at the same time, so to access one, you need to scroll through the application left and right. This is where the use of Semantic Zoom comes to place: zoom out the entire screen to preview full content within the app, and then locate a spot of interest and navigate directly to it (see image below). This feature is also applied on the Windows 8 Start Screen.



Header Menu: this is one of the new Windows 8 navigation elements and it makes use of the header in the function of a menu (in order for it to be available from anywhere in the app). It is mostly used in Flat navigation patterns, but can also be largely noticed in games. The header contains direct links to different pages for easier navigation.

Navigation Bar (Top App Bar): this is part of the standard navigation elements of each Windows 8 app. The navigation bar can contain different navigation links for easy movement from one to another place within the app.

Home Link: it is located at the bottom of the Header Menu and is just a quick link to the application home page.

View/Sort/Filter: these are commands that add functions for changing the way content is displayed on a page. Their location is at the bottom of the application, within the App Bar (most of the time on the right bottom side).

App Bar (Bottom App Bar): the app bar contains access to app commands that are related to a particular application content. Here you can find all the Save, Edit, Delete, Share, Send, etc. kinds of buttons.

Edge: this is a new and handy navigation element in Windows 8. By simple swiping from the app edge, you can see the app bar, navigation bar and charms.

Navigating with Filters, Pivots, Sorts and Views

One last thing before we conclude this post – what is the difference between using a filter, pivot, sort or a view when displaying app content? All of these navigation elements display content in different ways, so it is very important to know exactly how each one works in order to choose the appropriate one at any time.

Term	Definition	Example
Filter	Removing or hiding content within a data set, based on some criteria.	When looking for a game to play, you might choose to view only those games categorized as "adventure."
Pivot	Reorganizing content within a data set, based on some criteria.	When looking at a music collection, you might choose to organize songs by artist, album, or genre.
Sort	Changing the order in which content is displayed within a data set.	When browsing for an article to read in a news app, you might choose to see the most recent articles listed first.
View	Changing the style or method in which content is displayed.	When browsing for a place to eat in a restaurant-finding app, you might choose to view restaurants on a map instead of in a list.