Give it the Craigslist test

Wireframing kit by Erica Heinz (forked from Impakt) for the upcoming book Think in 4D: Design brilliant user experiences and valuable user experiences (launching fall 2023!)
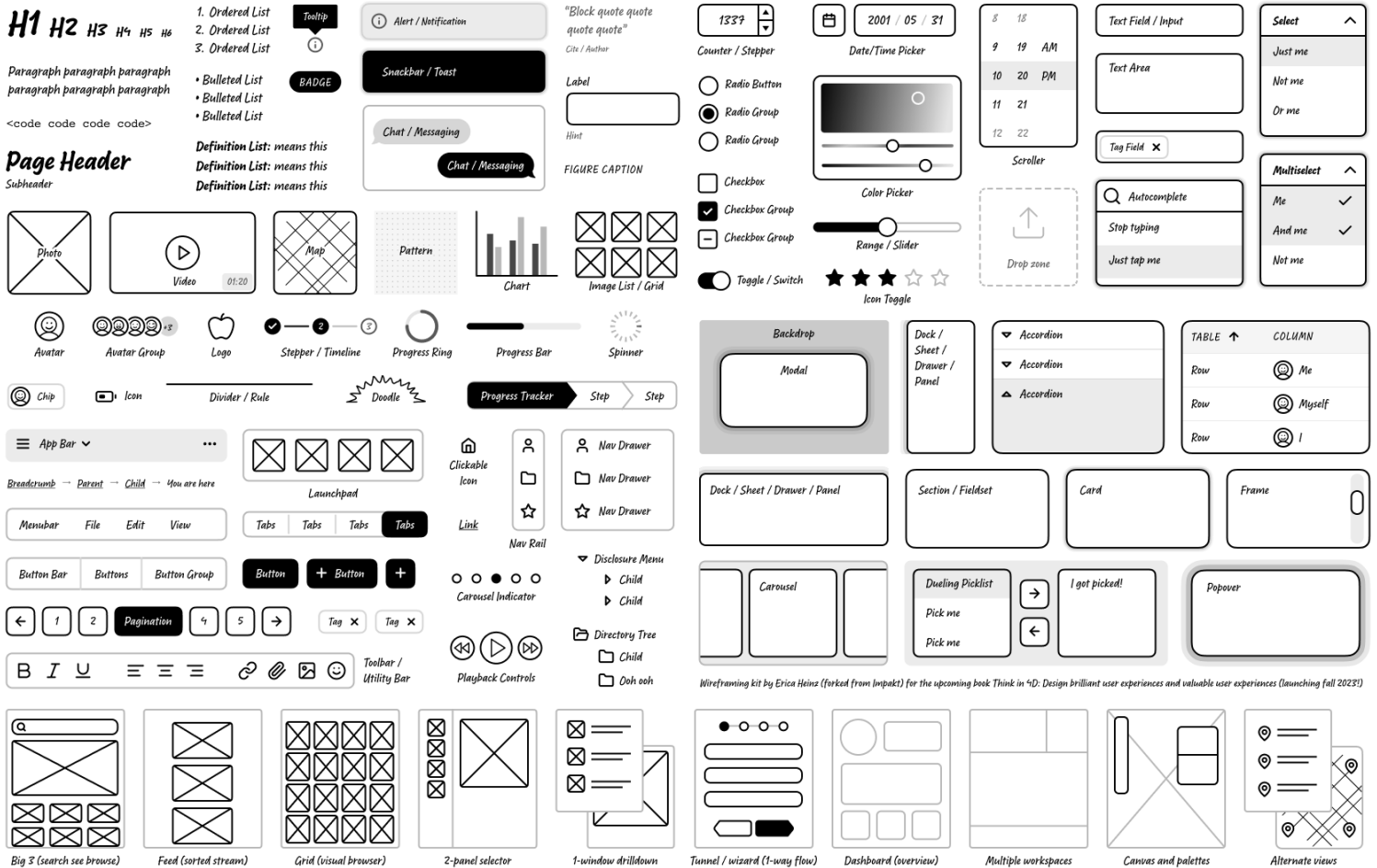
It's never been so easy to create incredibly polished mockups — from design software upgrades to AI assistants, we're seeing usable user interfaces come to life in seconds.

But there are some major business risks in this approach. They can burn you even if you're a team who makes time for user research.

1. *The aesthetic-usability effect* — People perceive more aesthetically pleasing interfaces as more intuitive or usable (whether they are or not). User research participants will pick the prettiest option, or tell you they love a beautiful mockup even if it's difficult or low-value.

2. *Parkinson's law of triviality* — People get overwhelmed by big decisions, and so they spend disproportionate time on small ones. User research participants (and designers) love to focus on

fun elements like colors and interactions, and don't get around to the larger questions of why and when the product is needed.

Look at Maybe, a gorgeous financial services dashboard that announced a big pivot today because "six weeks after launch, we only had 50 paying customers, out of a waiting list of 10,000+ people."

So. If you're designing a new product or service, give it the Craigslist test — start with low-fidelity options that see if people would love it even if it looked like Craigslist.

Low-fidelity (shown in my UX sketching kit image above) means:

- NO: styling, photographs, illustrations, colors, or fonts (besides a default one)

- YES: real text (not lorem ipsum), symbolic images, and symbolic UI

Focus on content and functionality when you're designing new products; that's the validation that will build a business.

This post draws from the ideas in my upcoming book Think in 4D, launching in fall 2023. Subscribe for updates at thinkin4d.substack.com

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