



**SMASHING**  
MAGAZINE PRINT



# Ethics & Privacy

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Designing For Addiction  
by *Trine Falbe*

This One Weird Trick Tells Us  
Everything About You  
by *Laura Kalbag*

Advertising Is Not The Problem  
by *Cennydd Bowles*



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# CONTENTS

## Designing For Addiction

by Trine Falbe

### Editor's Note

by Rachel Andrew

6

17

8

28

### Towards Ethics By Default, One Step At A Time

by Vitaly Friedman

### It's Not About You

by Heather Burns and  
Morten Rand-Hendriksen

**This One Weird Trick  
Tells Us Everything  
About You**

by Laura Kalbag

35

**Advertising Is Not  
The Problem**

by Cennydd Bowles

53

46

**Quieting Disquiet**

by Stuart Langridge

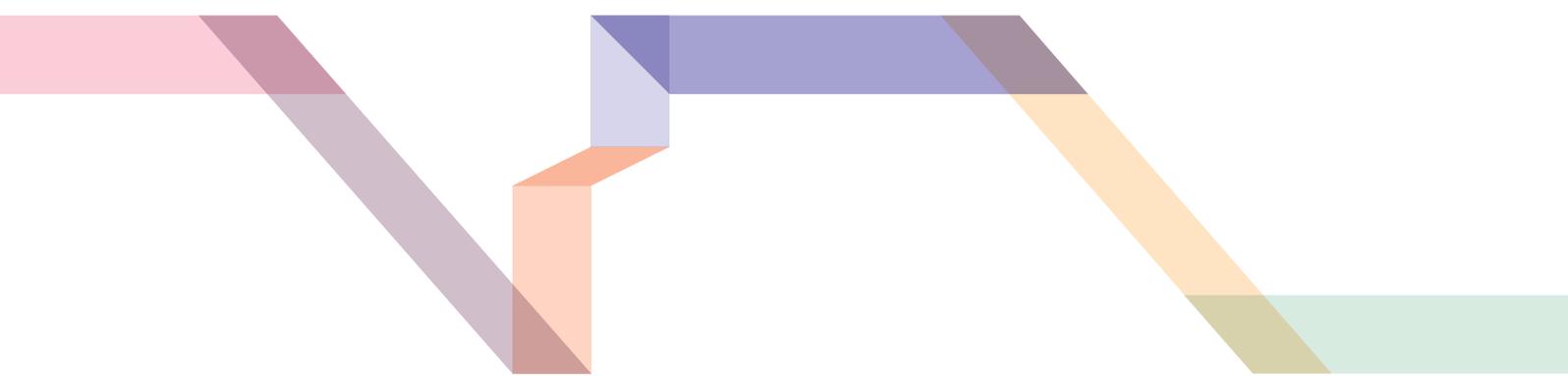
# Editor's Note



## **WELCOME TO THE VERY FIRST SMASHING MAGAZINE PRINT.**

This is the initial pilot issue of a magazine we intend to publish twice a year, each time following a different theme. We intend the print magazine to cover themes with perhaps more longevity than some of the topics we cover in the online magazine, covering some of the big picture issues that we all deal with as people who work on the web. We kick off with an issue covering themes of ethics, privacy, and security, because these issues reach into all our lives, from our personal use of the internet, through to the applications we develop.

Rather than ask the contributing authors for this issue to write on a very specific topic, I asked them to tell me what they felt they could contribute to a collection of thinking on the subjects of ethics, privacy, and security. What follows is a collection of essays which sit very well together, yet tackle different aspects of the issues at hand. You may not agree with all of them, but I hope they make you think.



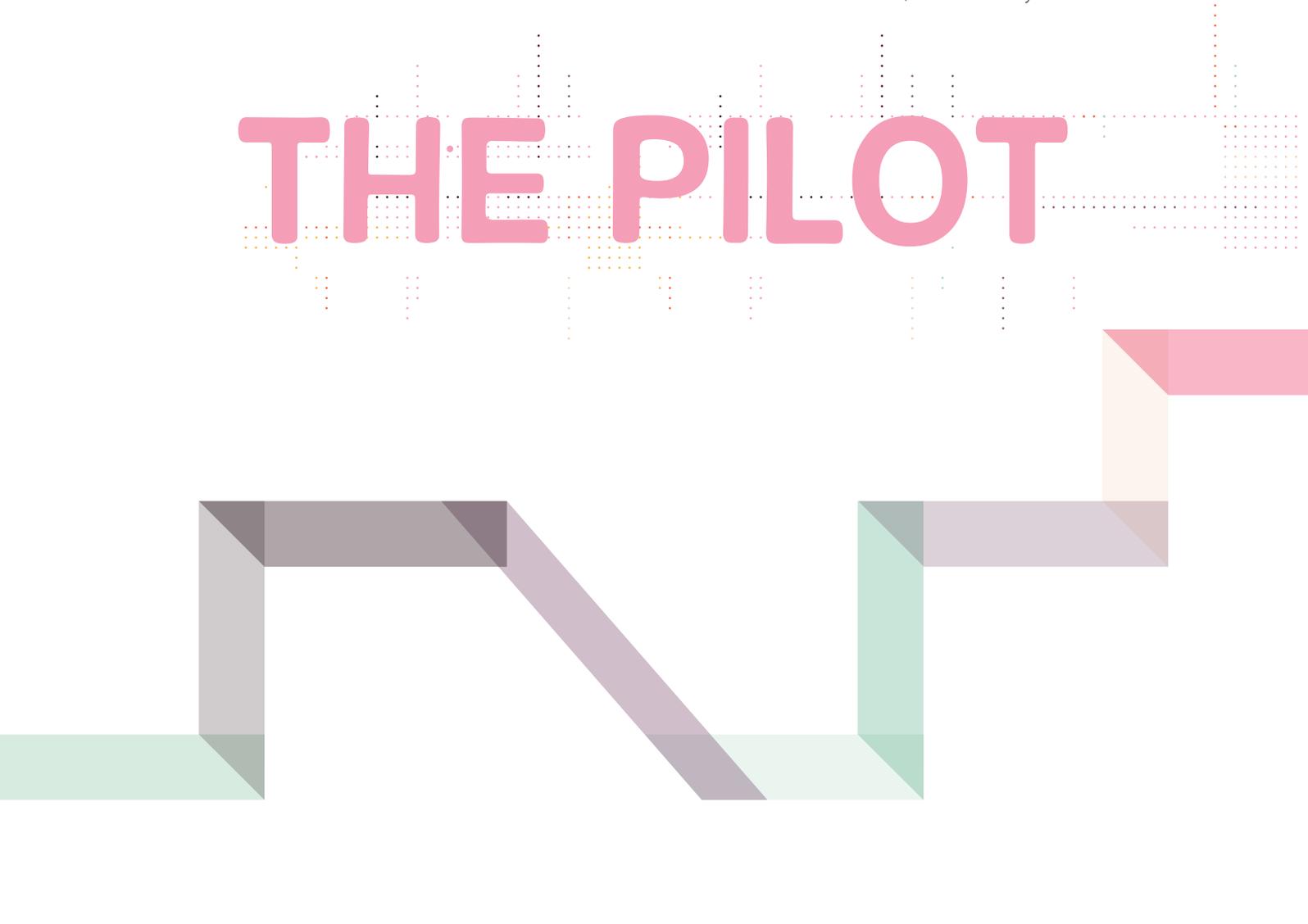
Editing a print publication isn't something I had in mind when I became editor-in-chief of Smashing Magazine. It has been a very different sort of challenge selecting the pieces for this first publication.

Along with the themed essays, we have included some little insights into the world of Smashing Magazine, pieces about our conferences, books, and membership. Smashing Magazine is brought to you by a tiny team of people who care. They care about Smashing, and care about the people who read the magazine, join as members, and come to the conferences. They care a lot about the web. I hope that shines through in everything we do.

My personal thanks must go to everyone who has been involved in making this issue what it is. The design of the magazine is by Veerle Pieters, with additional illustration provided by Ricardo Gimenes and copy-editing by Owen Gregory.

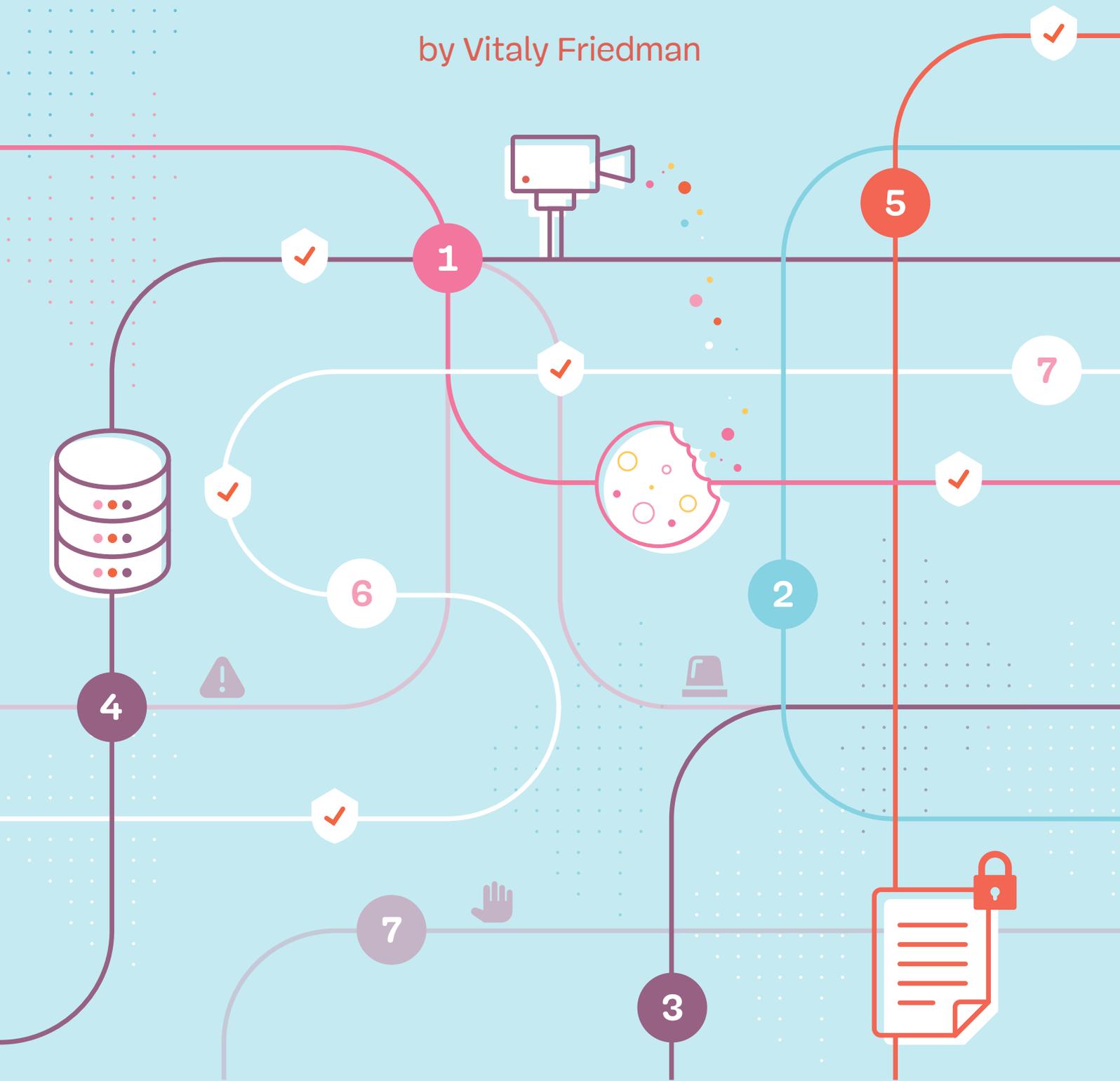
*—Rachel Andrew, editor-in-chief*

# THE PILOT



# Towards Ethics By Default, One Step At A Time

by Vitaly Friedman





### **MANY CONVERSATIONS IN OUR INDUSTRY TEND TO CIRCLE**

around strong opinions and universal answers. Choosing a shiny new technical stack or sticking to an old-school paradigm; betting on a trendy framework or building a custom light framework of your own; using an attention-grabbing pop-up or sticking to calmer, less annoying solutions.

We tend to have strong opinions about design and development, and so we agree and disagree, and argue endlessly, trying to protect and explain our views. Sometimes (and maybe a bit too often) to the point that conversations escalate and result in annoyingly disgruntled camps not agreeing on *anything*.

It's not the stubbornness that brings us there though. It's the simple fact that we all have different backgrounds, expectations, and experiences when dealing with a problem. But sometimes we end up debating answers that are all acceptable and seeking the ultimate truth in a place where it really can't exist.

This pattern shows up for the usual suspects: accessibility, performance, tooling, workflows, and naming conventions. It also repeats itself with topics that are often considered to be ephemeral: ethics and privacy.

In the past, these areas could be spotted sporadically on the remote fringes of Twitter threads and blog posts; these days we've become very aware of the frightening dimensions that collection and use of personal data have silently gained. So we've started fighting back. Fighting back by publicly complaining about privacy-related dark patterns, unsolicited emails, shady practices, strict legal regulations, and ad-blocker wars against disruptive ads from hell.

1

Don't get me wrong; these are all important conversations to have and raising awareness matters. But perhaps we are missing an applicable, pragmatic approach for designing and building ethical and respectful interfaces within our existing, well-established processes.

If we ask ourselves why "honest" interfaces haven't made a breakthrough yet, bypassing and pushing away all the culprits out there, it might not be easy to find an answer at first. It's not that designers want to manipulate customers, or that developers want to make experiences slower, or that marketing people want to achieve quick wins at the costs of disrupting and annoying users' experience. It's that we know too well what solutions used to work in the past, yet we have no idea what might work even better.

**“ What we are missing is a clear, affordable strategy for meeting business requirements without resorting to questionable practices that proved to be effective in the past.**

In fact, we tend to rely on predictable A/B tests that give us clear answers for measurable, quantifiable insights. But when it comes to ethics and the long-term impact of an interface on loyalty, we are out there in the blue.

What we are missing is a clear, affordable strategy for meeting business requirements without

resorting to questionable practices that proved to be effective in the past.

In most conversations I've had with marketing teams over the years, the main backlash against all the UX-focused, customer-protective changes in marketing was the simple fact that marketing teams didn't believe for a second that they could be as competitive as good ol' workhorse techniques.

So while, of course, calm, ethical and privacy-aware interfaces would benefit the user, moving away from the status quo would massively hurt business and make companies less competitive. Sadly enough, they might be right. Most of us use well-known services and websites that have all the despicable practices we so love to hate.

Tracking, collection and manipulation of data are at the very core of their business models, which allow them to capitalize on it for advertising and selling purposes. In fact, they succeed, and for many users, trading privacy is an acceptable cost for all the benefits that all those giants provide for nothing.

Beyond that, moving away from these benefits is remarkably hard, time-consuming, and just plain painful, so unless a company hurts its users on a level that goes way beyond gathering and selling data, they are unlikely to leave.

Many of you might remember the golden days when the first mobile interfaces were clunky and weird and slow, and when everything seemed to be out of place, and we were desperately trying to fill all those magical rectangles on shiny new mobile phones with adaptive and pixel-perfect layouts.

Despite good intentions and wondrous ideas, many of our first interfaces weren't great; they just weren't good executions of potentially great ideas.

**“ I strongly believe that taking good care of users' data might be a competitive advantage and a unique selling proposition that no other company in your niche has.**

As time passed, these interfaces slowly disappeared, replaced by solutions that were designed better — slowly carved out of thorough efforts in research, testing, and gradual, ongoing refinements. It's rare that we see and regularly use some of those old interfaces today. Sometimes they remained locked up in app ecosystems, never updated or redesigned, but the competition pushed them away hastily. They just aren't competitive enough. Just because they weren't comfortable enough to enable users to reach their goals.

I wonder if the same will happen with the new wave of privacy- and ethics-aware applications that we see appearing today. Well-designed, small applications that do small tasks very well, with a strong focus on ethical, respectful, and honest pixels, without shady backdoors and psychological tricks. We can't expect giants to change overnight, but once these alternative solutions start succeeding, they might be forced to refine their models in response. I strongly believe that taking

good care of users' data might be a competitive advantage and a unique selling proposition that no other company in your niche has.

For that to happen, though, we need to understand common pain points that users might have, and establish interface patterns that designers and developers could easily use. It could be a growing repository of inclusive, ethical patterns and components for various frameworks, with solutions and checklists to use on a daily basis. Privacy By Design<sup>1</sup> is one of the frameworks that goes in the right direction.

We might not agree on many things in the industry, but when it comes to ethics and privacy, we all have the same goals: produce respectful, honest interfaces while solving business requirements well and efficiently. To get there, rather than complaining about poor examples of infected, ignorant, and disrespectful interfaces, we need to explore all the little touchpoints that make up a wonderful, honest experience:

- Inclusivity and accessibility baked in by default, with components not getting broken by heavy inaccessible frameworks.
- Best practices for designing notifications UX, permissions UX, location tracking UX and not-so-notorious pop-ups.
- Best practices for designing interactions for GDPR/cookie-consent pop-ups as well as appropriate off-the-shelf tooling.
- Techniques for providing and adjusting privacy settings, with smart defaults, presets, labels and iconography.

1. <http://smashi.ng/privacybydesign>

**“ We just need to start shifting the conversations from universal, all-or-nothing approaches towards practical strategies for making interfaces more honest and ethical, one step at a time.**

- Practices for designing offboarding experience: that is, experiences customers have when leaving a site or a service. It would involve dealing with users’ data, exporting data, and deleting data.
- Strategies for dealing with sensitive private information such as gender, age, birthday, and phone number, and how to request even more sensitive data, such as passport number or social security number (if needed for verification purposes).
- Best practices to design interfaces that require access to geolocation and camera, and how to enable users to revoke and adjust the settings later on.
- Guidelines for designing integration with third-party services and how to explain to customers what will happen to their data.
- Design patterns to create better UIs for children, older people, and disadvantaged users while respecting and protecting them and their data. That alone isn’t enough, though.

We also need to explore how we can make honest interfaces the default in most projects, legacy and brand-new alike, and that means figuring out how to integrate ethical considerations into existing processes and frameworks. As the industry, at this point, we have to consider:

- How ethical approaches can meet and drive business requirements, while keeping the product competitive on the market.
- How we can integrate ethical design patterns into widely spread content management systems and frameworks.
- How browsers could adapt their behavior to protect users’ privacy.
- How to measure the long-term impact of ethical and privacy-aware practices, and what metrics to use to quantify them.
- How to transition legacy projects and business logic from gray practices to a new ethical framework while not ruining the business along the way.
- Successful case studies that highlight the financial and engagement-related long-term benefits of ethical designs.

Big changes usually happen from small, continuous refinements. Of course, our goal is to create interfaces that hit all the right marks in terms of ethics and privacy, but the way there is a long one, and it's not just a switch you can flick easily. It's a process that would require years to complete.

We've done it before. We've done it with the rise of remarkably smart and beautiful interfaces in the last decade. We've learned how to design breathtaking buttons and gorgeous tables and glorious animations, and we've learned how to build accessible, performant, and reliable applications. So we can do it again. We just need to start shifting the conversations from universal, all-or-nothing approaches towards practical strategies for making interfaces more honest and ethical, one step at a time.

On the following pages, we'll try to pave the path for a more considerate and respectful landscape on the web; we'll try to find answers to at least some of the questions raised above.

We will need your help to turn it into something much bigger, though — something that would shape how the web will evolve over the years to come.

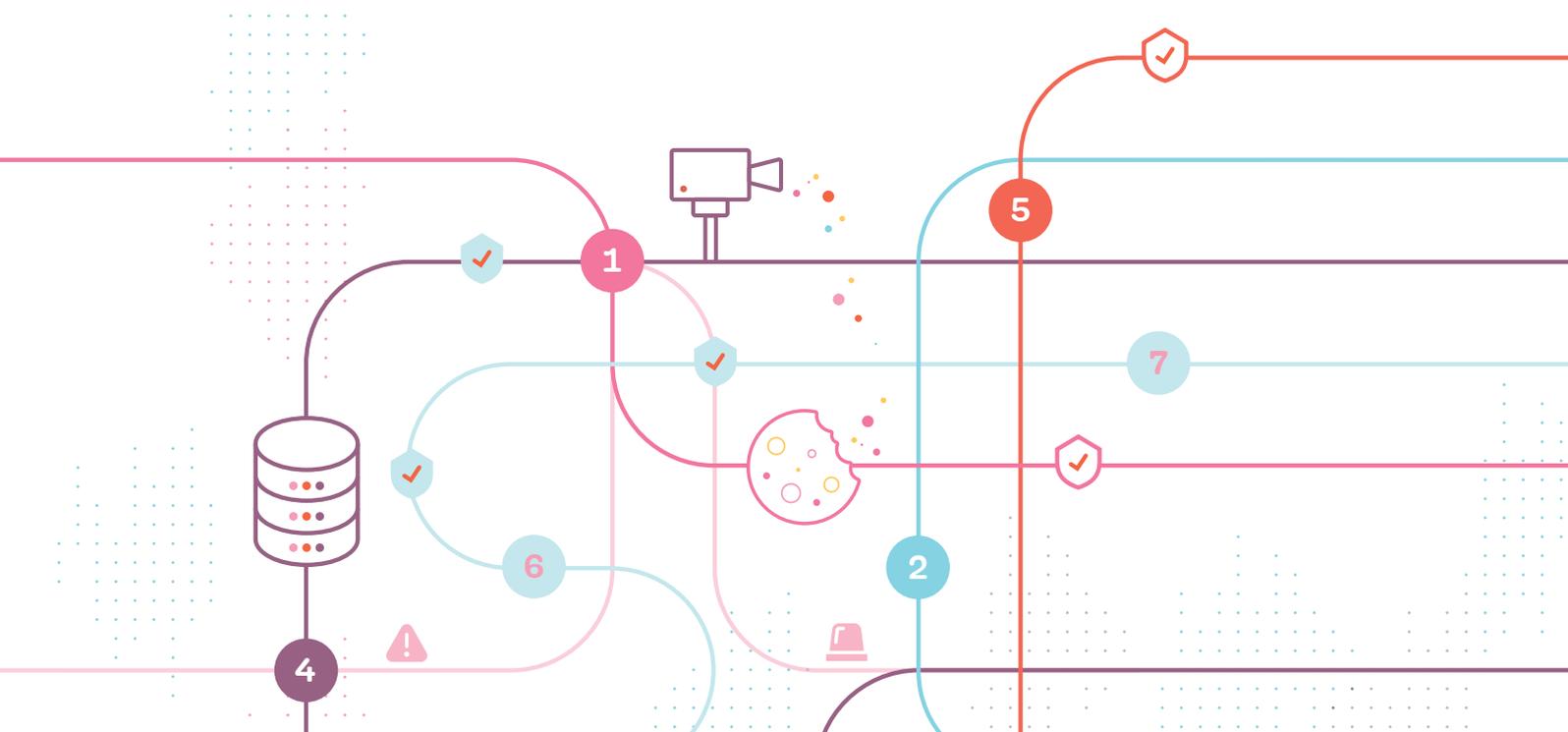
It's an exciting time to figure out a solution to a problem that is ubiquitous and desperately needs solving. Personally, I can't wait to contribute and be involved in these conversations.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Vitaly Friedman**

Vitaly Friedman loves beautiful content and doesn't like to give in easily. When he is not writing or speaking at a conference, he's most probably running front-end/UX workshops and webinars. He loves solving complex UX, front-end and performance problems.





## A Look Back At 2018

**2018 WAS A GOOD YEAR FOR SMASHINGCONE**, where we organized five great events. These conferences took place in London, San Francisco, Toronto, Freiburg and New York. It was also very much a year where we thought about what we were doing and how we were doing it. And we're trying to make it even better in 2019. Toronto was a special one last year. It was the first time in this

new city, which is always exciting and scary at the same time. To make matters even more interesting it was also the first time we used the *no-slides* format. *No-slides* means a lot of live designing and coding sessions on stage, so all sessions are live and interactive. This turned out to be a huge success, both attendees and speakers really loved it, so we decided to keep on using the format.

“ I’m now seriously considering this format as a way I do talks at other conferences.<sup>2</sup>

— Dan Mall

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2. <http://smashi.ng/smashingconfdan>

We organized SmashingConf Toronto in the movie theatre TIFF Bell Lightbox, which is a lovely theatre that could hold 400 people yet still felt cosy. When we look for SmashingConf venues, we want them to have character and be interesting.

At the same time they must check a number of boxes such as the number of seats, the right location with great lunch options nearby, all the right audio-visual equipment, and so on.

**“ From an attendance point of view: I think this was the best conference learning experience.”<sup>3</sup>**

— Sara Soueidan

## Team

Every conference is led by one person who takes care of the big things such as locations and catering. That also means the person who leads the conference is doing field research. During the year, quite often the team covers all time zones, which is inconvenient and useful at the same time. A good conference organization relies heavily on coffee and spreadsheets, supported by communication tools such as Slack and Skype. Good preparation in the months before the conference is absolutely vital, combined with proper teamwork just before and during the conference itself.

Most of the team members fly in a few days before the conference. We have breakfast together when we discuss last minute details, and even brainstorm for the next conference. These meetings tend to happen at a nice coffee place, because Vitaly likes fancy coffee places and the

rest of the team don't mind at all. And then we go and do our duties: checking the venue, meeting with volunteers, and sending a lot of last-minute emails. The days before the conference are quite hectic, when we get everything ready for the workshops, our speakers arrive and we do final checks on a lot of details. The evening before the conference we run the preconference warmup, and just a little later the speakers' dinner starts.

On the day itself, everybody has their own role: You will find Vitaly standing on stage, or just right next it. He has an overview of the whole operations and stage management. Besides that, he generally comes up with new ideas all of the time.

Amanda is our AV resident, sitting in the back behind a laptop, making sure everything displayed on the screen looks perfect. She also produces our Toronto and New York events.

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<sup>3</sup>. <http://smashi.ng/smashingconfsara>

If you see a woman running around with a smile on her face, it's likely to be Mariona. Probably that's because she is having fun, but possibly also because she just drank too much matcha tea. She takes good care of the sponsors and knows her way around in San Francisco, too!

It's quite likely you'll find Jan behind badges. He is a Freiburg resident and has been with SmashingConf for a long time.

Charis is the newest kid on the block. You'll find her taking care of the social media and website. But she is also quite likely the last woman standing at the after party, as someone has to make sure we all leave, right? And if you see somebody running around and taking photos,

that's Marc, who is our house photographer. Don't forget to smile.

Once the conference is properly running and everybody is in, AV and Wi-Fi works, sponsors are properly set up and the catering has prepared us with coffee, tea and snacks, we all get a bit more relaxed. We still don't sleep very much during those days, but at least we can usually enjoy the atmosphere, interacting with the speakers and attendees.

Once the conference is over, and we have a little bit of time left, we try to squeeze in a touristy trip, such as visiting the Niagara Falls, museums or go to a concert. Once we get home, we sleep a lot! And then we move on to the next one.





The world is a miracle. So are you.  
**Thanks for being smashing.**



The web is wonderfully diverse and unpredictable because of the wonderfully diverse people shaping it. Behind each lifeless dot in our analytics stats is an actual person, so every single dot matters.

Humility and kindness are all too rare on the web. But each of us deserves to be respected and valued, and how companies treat our data is fundamental to achieving that. So the first edition of our new printed magazine is dedicated to an issue very close to our hearts: ethics and privacy.

With Smashing Magazine Print we want to provide a place for topics that cover the bigger picture, and offer practical and actionable contributions and insights shared by the community with the community. We hope you will find it both relevant and worth collecting for years to come.

Of course, the print edition is and always will be free for Smashing Members. Without them, this magazine wouldn't exist. So thank you from the very bottom of our hearts! ❤️

– Vitaly