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The Re:Evolution of Scrolling

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By [Claire Carlson](#)

Clients regularly ask me “Do users scroll?” A recent inquiry reminded me that it’s been a few years since [my last post about scrolling](#) and I thought I’d write an update based on some recent studies at Blink. First off, all that I once wrote still stands: users scroll much more than originally thought and “the fold” is essentially a myth if users see hints of additional content at the bottom of their screen. Since we discovered that scrolling was no longer a barrier, long web pages, or “one-pagers,” have become extremely popular, which has pushed the boundaries of what qualifies as a good user experience. In the last few Blink studies on long scrolling pages (i.e. pages longer than about three screen heights), all participants were able to easily understand that they could scroll beyond the visible area when they saw content cut off at the bottom of their screen. None of the participants commented on the pages being too long, rather it was the content and design that weakened their user experience. We need to remember that design revolves around content.

“People got to the end of the page and when there was nothing there they had to scroll all the way back up to the top to do anything else,” explained Blinker Layne Foit about a study he recently conducted for a professional sports team. There is a missed opportunity to keep users

engaged when they take the time to scroll all the way to the bottom of a page and reach a dead end instead of links to related content. The [Google Material Design site](#) and [NPR.org](#) both do a great job of guiding users to related content at the bottom of a long page.

☰ Components > Cards

Card collection filtering, sorting, and reorganization

Card collections can be programmatically sorted or filtered by date, file size, alphabetical order, or other parameters. The first item in the collection is positioned at the top left of the collection, and the order proceeds left to right and top to bottom.

Scrolling

Card collections scroll vertically only. Card content that exceeds the maximum card height is truncated and does not scroll.

Cards with truncated content can be expanded, in which case the card height may exceed the maximum of the view. In this case, the card will scroll with the card collection.

Card focus

For interfaces dependent upon sequential focus traversal for navigation (D PAD, keyboard), individual cards should either have only a primary action or open a new view with the primary and supplemental actions available.

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Google Material Design website guides users towards viewing other content in a series using “Previous” and “Next” links.



An overview of the Berkeley Adventure Playground, where children and their parents can paint, hammer, saw and run free.

David Gilkey/NPR

For one thing, he says, play behavior is remarkably similar across species. Rats, monkeys and children all abide by similar rules that require participants to take turns, play fair and not inflict pain. Play also helps both people and animals become more adept socially, Pellis says.

And in people, he says, an added bonus is that the skills associated with play ultimately lead to better grades. In one [study](#), researchers found that the best predictor of academic performance in eighth grade was a child's social skills in third grade.

Another hint that play matters, Pellis says, is that “countries where they actually have more recess tend to have higher academic performance than countries where recess is less.”

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brain candy

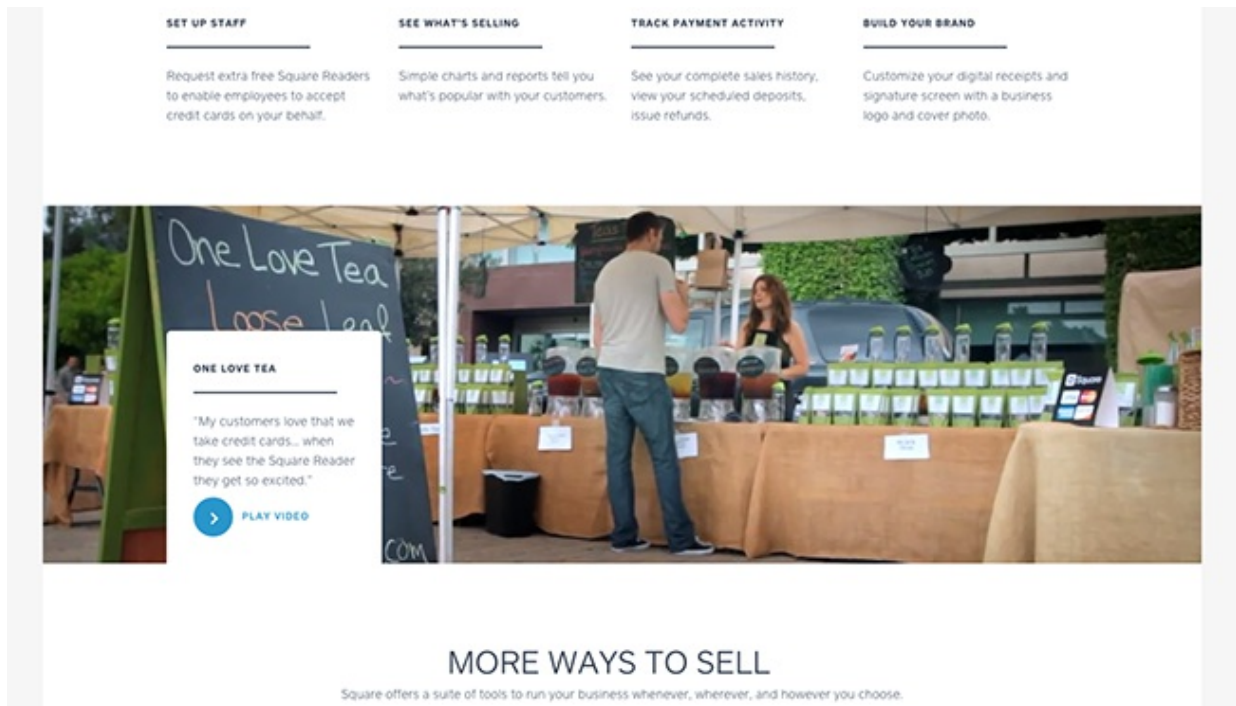
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NPR.org shows a link to a related article at the bottom of a long page.

Often, pages become long when content elements take up a lot of screen real estate. The Tablet First movement has spurred on the use of oversized screen elements. While this may be an elegant solution, it can be an unusable solution on desktops and for highly interactive websites where the user is trying to complete a task. A study that I conducted for a travel company in April revealed that oversized screen elements can be disorienting—it was hard for participants to complete a task when information they relied on scrolled out of view when they were focused on the main content area.



Square shows a customer testimonial while key headings are visible both above and below the content in focus.

Long pages can work well for informational websites where it's important to tell a story. The size of page elements on [Squareup.com](https://squareup.com) shows just enough content to see what's above and below what you're currently looking at and the user doesn't need to reference information in non-visible areas of the page to complete a task. As an added bonus, it's responsive.

In January, Blinker Tom Satwicz conducted a study on different tech-focused product pages. Tom discovered that participants were able to find product information more easily when it was displayed on a few short screens rather than one long screen. It turned out that to find answers to their immediate questions, participants were only focused on one type of product information at a time, making long scrolling pages overwhelming. It begs the question, are designers making pages longer because it's trendy or because it provides the best user experience?

So what's changed in the world of scrolling in the last few years? Pages are getting longer, and not always for the right reasons. Approach long page design differently than you would standard page design. Include links to related information at the bottom of the page, use oversized page elements only when it's not important for users to see information above or below the screen boundaries to complete a task, and finally, ask yourself why the content should be displayed on one page rather than a few pages. Regardless of page length, it's always important to first consider how users will want to consume content and design accordingly.

Claire is part of the interaction design team at Blink. She loves being

one of the first people in the office each morning except Friday, when you will find her at Mighty O Donuts.