Mobile Web Design Pattern: Horizontal List

This design pattern is part of the Mobile Web Design Patterns series.

2. Horizontal list

Description

A horizontal list of data which can include text and images. Horizontal lists have a somewhat limited use on the mobile web as they can be difficult to read once they begin to wrap. They are therefore best suited to very short lists.

Figure: This horizontal list is so long that the list items blend together. Selecting distinct elements within this list using cursor navigation could be tricky as the items are so close together.

Use when

- Best suited for lists containing small amounts of copy and a small number of list items.
- A common use is breadcrumbs which are typically short and also rendered in a small font which minimizes wrapping.
- Other common contexts of use are top (high-level) navigation menus, pagination menus, small control groupings and admin navigation.

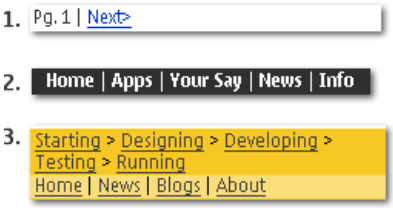

Figure: 1. A horizontal list used to create pagination (YouTube). 2. A Horizontal list with background colour to create a primary navigation bar (Betavine) and 3. A horizontal list of breadcrumbs (Mobiforge).

Figure: This weather banner from the NY Times could easily consist of a horizontal list containing three list items.

Rationale

Horizontal lists have several advantages over other formats:

- They can create a natural page division so are useful if needing to immediately establish a hierarchy (ex. the site's top level navigation).
- They take up less vertical space than other lists.
- If the horizontal aspect of the list is specified entirely using CSS, they degrade naturally into a vertical list on less capable browsers.

Design Tips

- If the list is likely to wrap, test on devices with different screen sizes. Consider adjusting the font size to minimize wrapping and/or increasing the line height to improve legibility.
- Use a background colour to visually separate the list (or list elements) from other elements on the page. This is particularly useful if the list is being used as high level navigation.
- If the page is long and the list is being used for navigation, it's best practice to place a second copy of the list at the bottom of the page and/or include a 'back to top' link.

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- The S60 browser supports sophisticated use of JavaScript™ and Ajax which can be used to create horizontal lists behaviours that show/hide or display list elements gradually.

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