First Things First 2014

A Manifesto

We, the undersigned, are designers, developers, creative technologists, and multi-disciplinary communicators. We are troubled by the present state of our industry and its effects on cultures and societies across the world.

We have become part of a professional climate that:

- prizes venture capital, profit, and scale over usefulness and resonance;
- demands a debilitating work-life imbalance of its workers;
- lacks critical diversity in gender, race, and age;
- claims to solve problems but favours those of a superficial nature;
- treats consumers' personal information as objects to be monetised instead of as personal property to be supported and protected; and
- refuses to address the need to reform policies affecting the jurisdiction and ownership of data.

Encouraged in these directions, we have applied ourselves toward the creation of trivial, undifferentiated apps; disposable social networks; fantastical gadgets obtainable only by the affluent; products that use emotion as a front for the sale of customer data; products that reinforce broken or dishonest forms of commerce; and insular communities that drive away potential collaborators and well-grounded leaders. Some of us have lent our expertise to initiatives that abuse the law and human rights, defeat critical systems of encryption and privacy, and put lives at risk. We have negated our professions' potential for positive impact, and are using up our time and energy manufacturing demand for things that are redundant at best, destructive at worst.

There are pursuits more worthy of our dedication. Our abilities can benefit areas such as education, medicine, privacy and digital security, public awareness and social campaigns, journalism, information design, and humanitarian aid. They can transform our current systems of finance and commerce, and reinforce human rights and civil liberties.

It is also our responsibility as members of our industry to create positive changes within it. We must work to improve our stances on diversity, inclusion, working conditions, and employees' mental health. Failing to address these issues should no longer be deemed acceptable by any party.

Ultimately, regardless of its area of focus or scale, our work and our mindset must take on a more ethical, critical ethos.

It is not our desire to take the fun out of life. There should always be room for entertainment, personal projects, humour, experimentation, and light-hearted use of our abilities.

Instead, we are calling for a refocusing of priorities, in favour of more lasting, democratic forms of communication. A mind shift away from profit-over-people business models and the placing of corporations before individuals, toward the exploration and production of humble, meaningful work, and beneficial cultural impact.

In 1964, and again in 1999, a dedicated group of practitioners signed their names to earlier iterations of this manifesto, forming a call to put their collective skills to worthwhile use. With the unprecedented growth of technology over the past 15 years, their message has since grown only more urgent. Today, in celebration of its 50th anniversary, we renew and expand the First Things First manifesto, with the hope of catalysing a meaningful revolution in both our industry and the world at large.

Sign it

This manifesto needs your voice. Only by coming together as a community can we affect the kinds of changes that so urgently need to happen within it. You can contribute your signature by providing your information below.

Your name: [Signatory]   Your website or profile: (optional) [http://yourdomain.com]   Your email address[1]:

| you@yourdomain.com | Become a signatory |

[1] Your email address is used only to verify your signature; it will not be shared or sold to anyone.

Colophon

First Things First 2014 is a project lead by Cole Peters, with overwhelming support from the following people and organisations:

- Chris Armstrong
- Aral Balkan
- Nigel Ball
- Jon Gold
- Laura Kalbag
- Steven Langbroek
- André Mooij
- Anna Sobolewska
- Adbusters
- Design and Banter
- Design Week
- Eye

Further reading

On the history of the manifesto:

- First Things First — The original manifesto, penned by Ken Garland and published in 1964
- First Things First 2000 — The first renewal of First Things First, published in 1999 by Adbusters, Eye Magazine, Emigre, and others
- "First Things First Revisited" — Rick Poynor in Emigre, 1999
- Metahaven's "White Night Before a Manifesto" — Page 16, onward, addresses First Things First 2000 specifically
- "Why I'm Renewing the First Things First Manifesto" — Declaration of the 2014 renewal by Cole Peters

Issues raised in the 2014 manifesto:

- "How Designers Destroyed the World" — Powerful and necessary talk given by Mike Monteiro, and a catalyst for First Things First 2014's existence.
- The NSA Files — The Guardian's ongoing coverage of governmental abuses of power and technology
- "When should tech companies be held accountable for facilitating human rights violations?", asks the Electronic Frontier Foundation
- "Out of the Loop in Silicon Valley" — An extensive article detailing the challenges faced by women and minorities in the technology industry
- "The Loneliness of the Female Coder" — by Ciara Byrne on FastCo.Labs
-
- "Death of a City intern: overstressed and overworked?" — Channel 4 on the culture of overworking
- "Path Closes $25 Million Funding, Led by Indonesia's Bakrie Global Group" — "Bakrie's companies — which include mining, drilling, telecom and development — are quite controversial, including figuring in a horrible mudslide disaster several years ago related to its gas drilling."

Thank you for reading.