Facebook UI Design

The Facebook app is one of the App Store’s most unusual; it is also the most capable client on any platform for the world’s largest social network. If it looks like an iPhone within an iPhone, it’s because the Facebook platform is just as formidable as iOS. Figure 14–1 shows the Facebook app’s iOS-like grid UI.

Figure 14–1. Facebook was the first major platform to reproduce the iOS “grid” UI inside an app.

Usability Priorities

Facebook API projects should have slightly different priorities than Twitter projects. Those priorities should include the following:
Looking people up: Users query other users more frequently on Facebook, and there is more information to surface, so give these tasks primacy.

Contacting and being alerted of contact: The Facebook app sends you a push notification and/or a vibration for up to nine alerts. By contrast, Twitter does two. Facebook is a lean-forward app with a highly active user base. These users are used to being notified promptly and communicating with alacrity. Figure 14–2 shows Facebook’s Push notification options.

Figure 14–2. Facebook’s Push notification preferences are quite granular and let users interact quickly with each other.

Giving users context: Facebook is such a powerful platform that many apps only reproduce select parts of the Web app’s functionality. This may lead users to expect some tasks that aren’t present in your app. You can ameliorate this by picking a descriptive name for your app and by arranging core controls in a way that the user understands its functionality intuitively. This is especially important to posting: users must know where an item is going and who will see it. If you must, use help prompts; however, use them inside the app, not as a pop-up dialog box, as the MyPhone+ does (see Figure 14–3). For the record, we also don’t recommend telling users to reboot after installing.