Mobile Design Pattern: Sorting

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

Description

A means of re-ordering a list based on a chosen parameter.

Advantages

- Increases findability of distinct items within long lists.

Disadvantages

- Providing an easily discoverable and intuitive sort command can be tricky on small screens.

Use when

- When a list contains a large number of items.
- When list items contain complex data and/or multiple associated metadata.

Use how

Provide users with a contextual series of sorting options. On mobile, these are most often presented in the following way:

- A drop-down menu or toggle located at the top of a table column (primarily used in HTML).

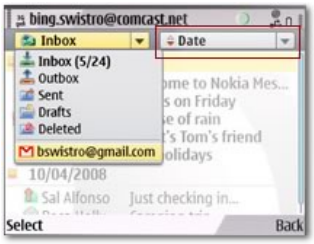

Figure: Nokia Messaging provides a drop down menu enabling mail sorting by date, subject and sender (open menu not shown). The above list is sorted chronologically by Date.

- A 'Sort' or 'Sort by' command within the Options menu.

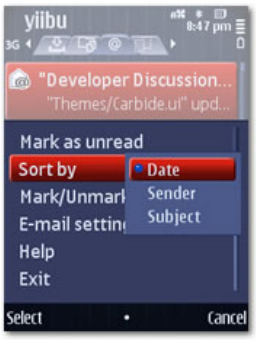

Figure: The S60 sort command is available within the Options menu. The active sort method is indicated using a submenu indicator.

Design Tips

- Where possible, provide an indication of the active sort method. This indicator should ideally be on-screen however this may not always be possible due to limited screen real estate. In S60, the active sort parameter is commonly indicated using a sub-menu indicator.
- Provide the user with an easily discoverable means to revert the list to its default sort order.

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