Signal iOS App Redesign Exercise
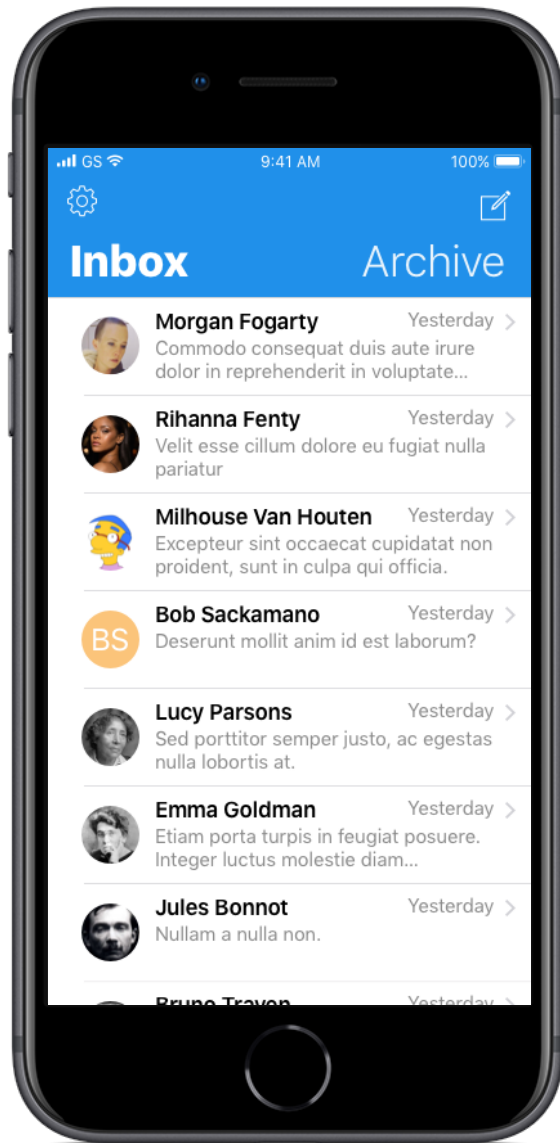
By Shane Becker

2017-11-14
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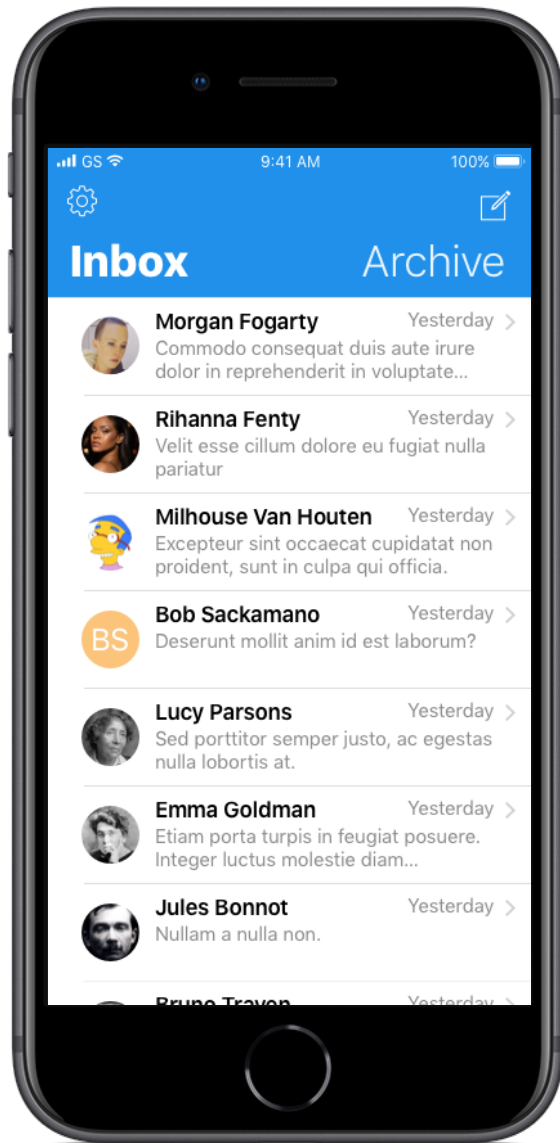
Introduction

The purpose of this redesign exercise is to demonstrate my UI design know how. My résumé shows mostly Rails development and engineering management. My portfolio doesn't have a ton of iOS app design in it, so this is to show that I can do that.

Problem

Signal is great at simple, encrypted communication. As a user, the UI/UX has felt a little off to me — a little un-iOSy. I've also witnessed others struggle to use it because of UI issues. I think improved design and usability could lead to increased adoption and usage. I expect that there have been internal conversations about UI, but since I can't imagine them I tried to work though the UI myself.
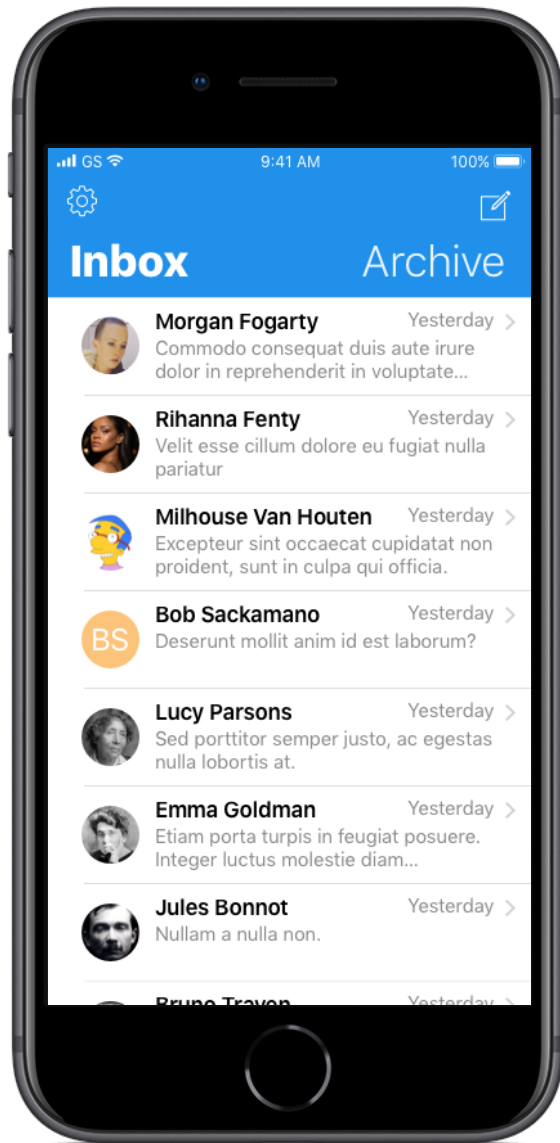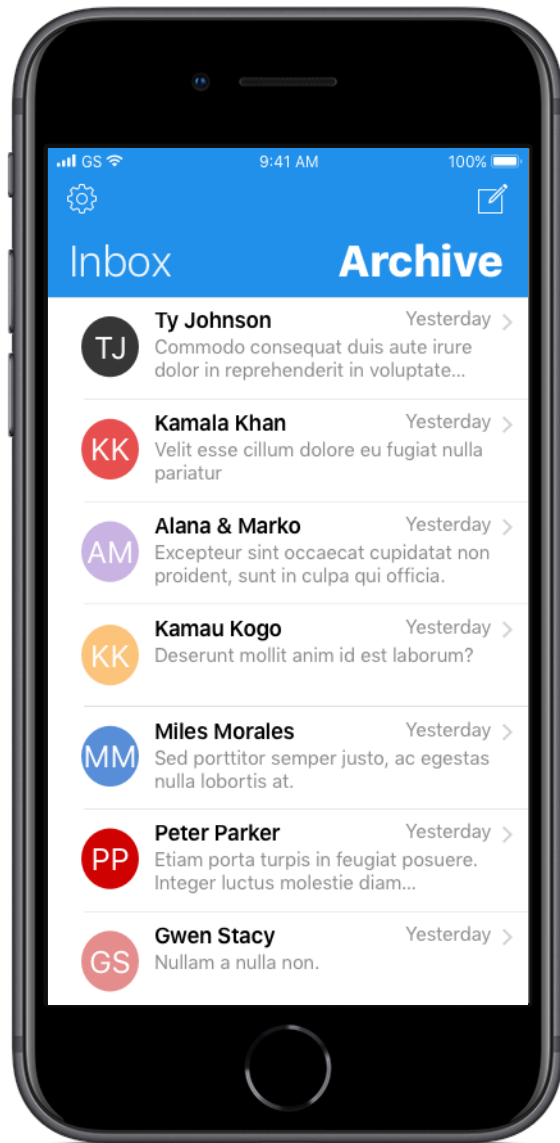
Inbox

The main screen is, of course, the Inbox of messages. I embiggened the message preview text, changed the Settings gear icon to an outline to match the weight of the new message icon, and changed the segmented control to two large headings that would still act as a toggle between Inbox and Archive messages. Segmented controls in a navigation bar have always felt clumsy to me as a user (and not very pretty).
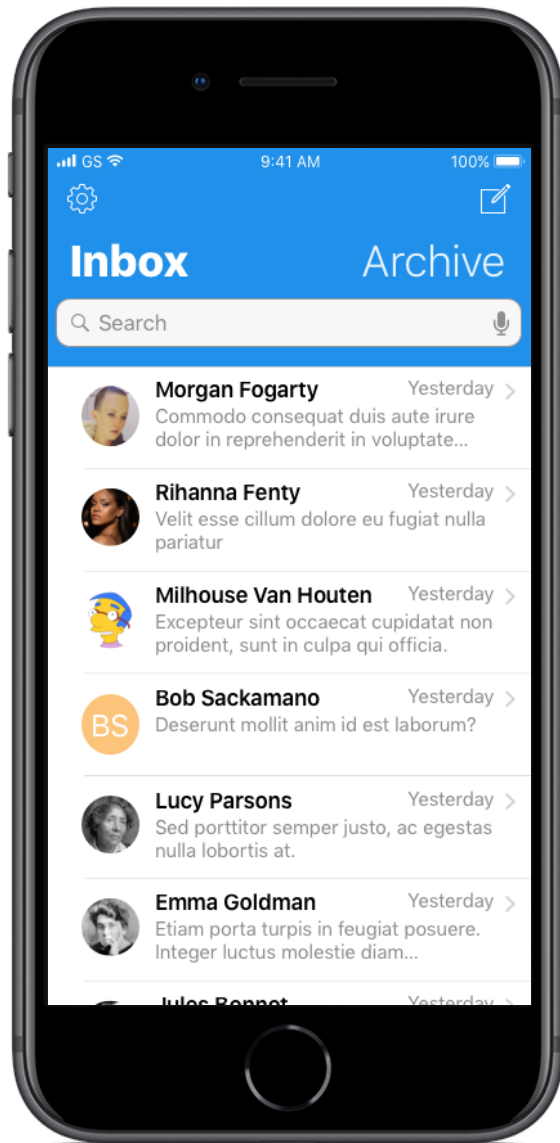
Inbox + Search

In this imagination of what Signal could be, I added a search box to be able to filter your Inbox or Archive. Like many iOS apps, it would be hidden by default and then exposed by pulling the main content down. When swiping up, it would hide back under the navigation bar.

Archive

The messages Archive is navigated to by tapping the Archive title in the navigation bar. Tapping the Inbox title takes you back to the Inbox. I imagine that there would be an animation of the messages between Inbox and Archive to clearly illustrate the changed state.

Conversation

The conversation messages view stayed largely unchanged, with the exception of embiggened emoji. I rounded the input field and improved the weight of the icons. In the navigation bar, I added the recipient's photo and removed the call icon, instead putting it on the Contact screen. I moved the phone icon, because I've accidentally tapped it countless times calling someone I didn't mean to. I replaced it with an info button.
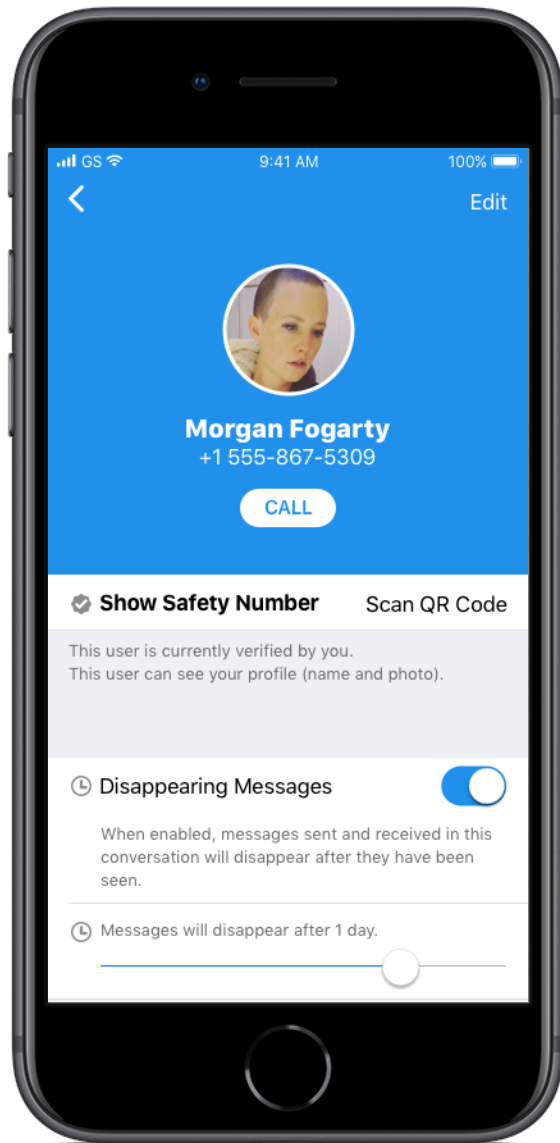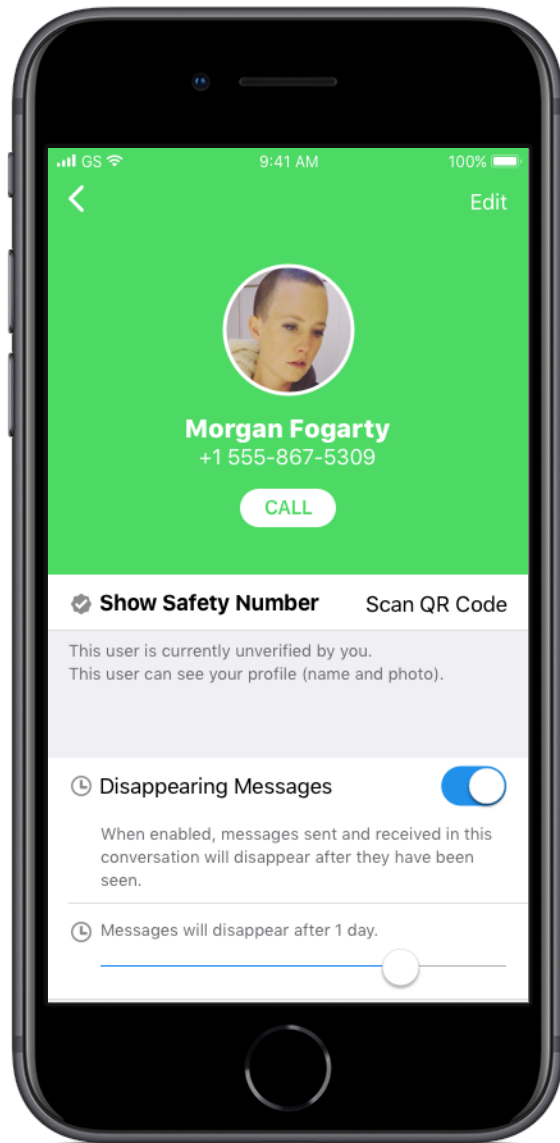
Contact: 1

Both the Contact and Settings screens are now more like a profile, focused on large prominent photo, name and phone number. This is also where I moved the phone call button to.

Because this screen has more to it than can be shown in the crop of an iPhone, additional content is on the next page.
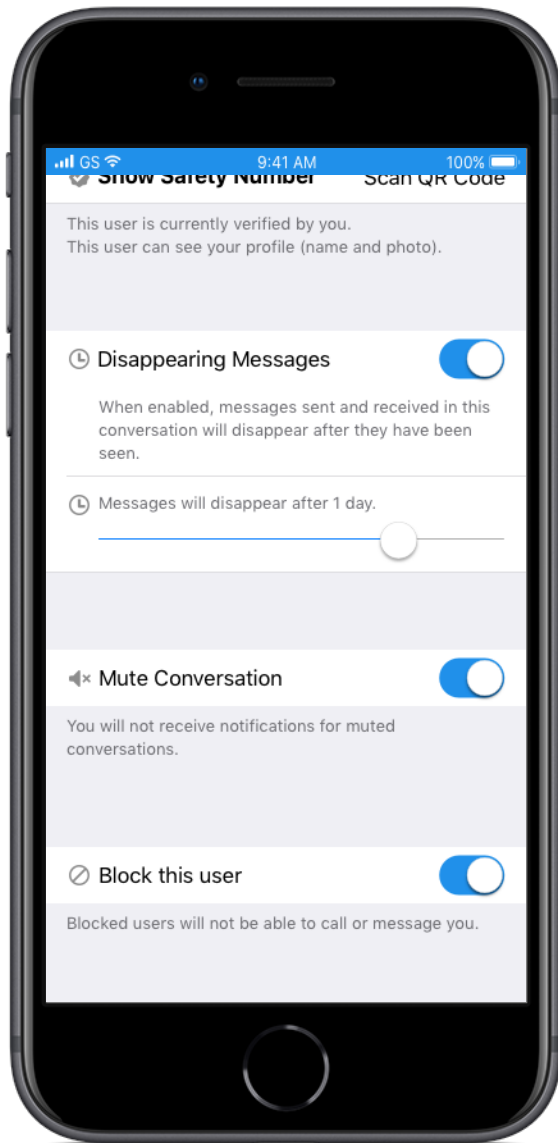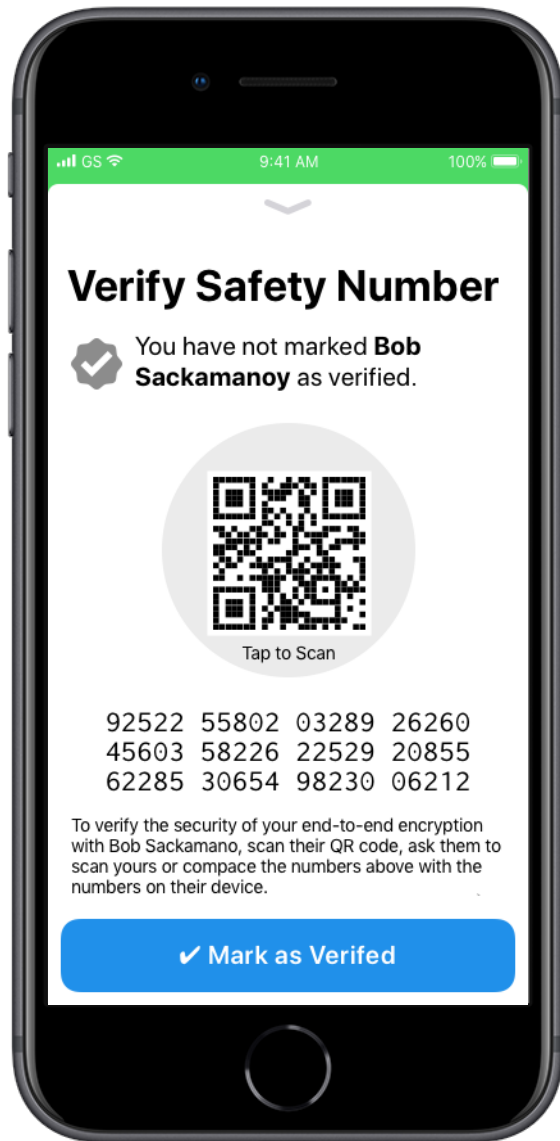
Contact: 2

Here is the bottom half of the Contact screen. The changes from the current design are minor: different icons (for weight consistency) and slight copy changes.

Contact: Unverified

Another change that I made is to make the distinction more obvious between people that you have verified and those that you have not. In iOS/macOS land, green bubble messages are non-iMessage. Blue ones are iMessage. In Signal, green could mean unverified. Blue would mean verified. It could help encourage people to verify their friends and contacts more.

Contact: Verify

Tapping the "Show Safety Number / Scan QR Code" table cell would slide up this popover, similar to the current one. The content changes are largely cosmetic, but bring this screen more inline with current iOS style.
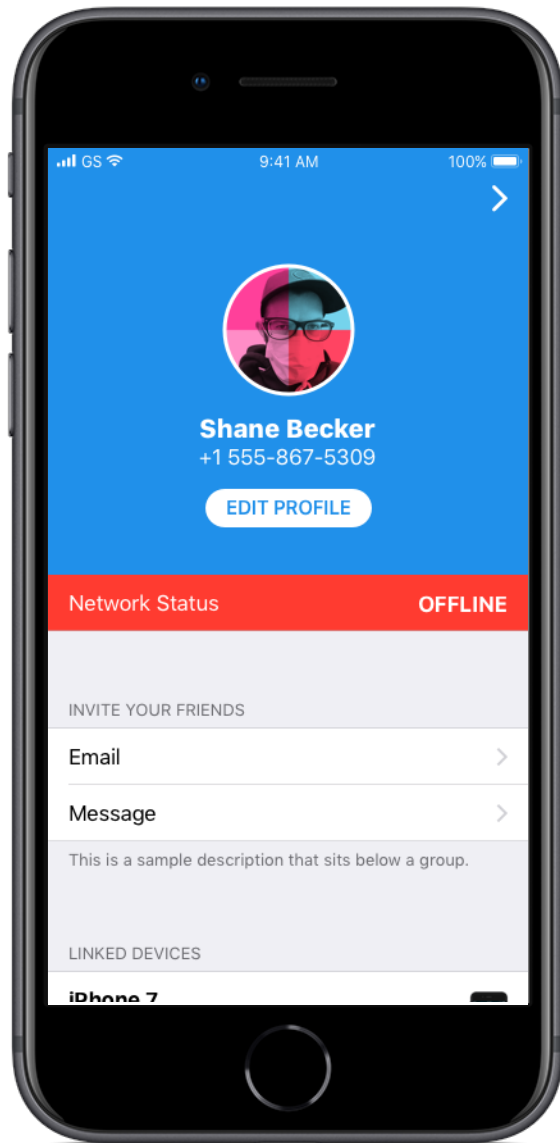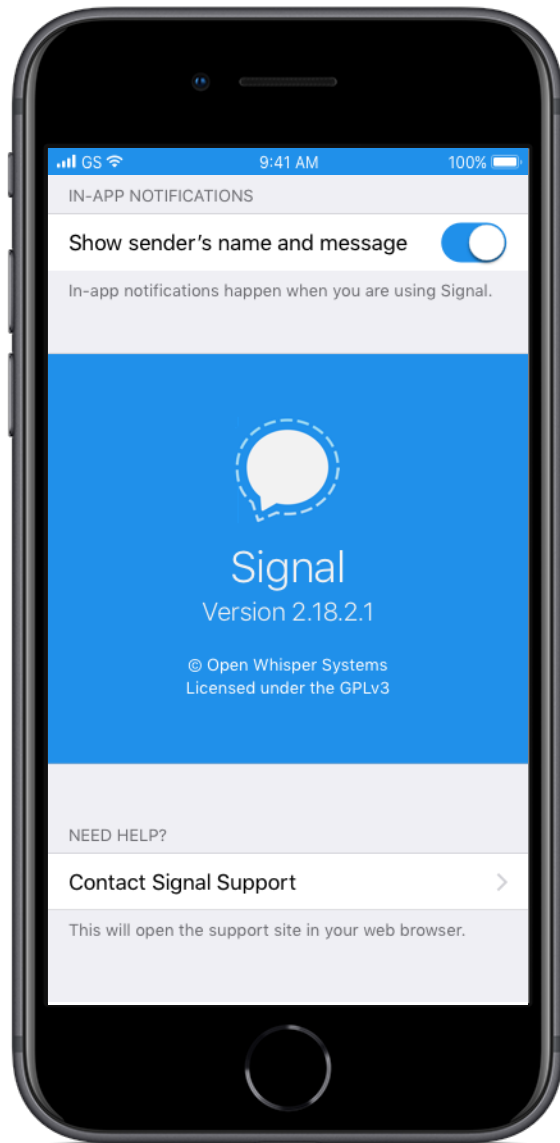
Settings: 1

Sliding back on the world map to the left of the Inbox/Archive, this is the Settings screen re-imagined. Like the Contact screen, it's presented more like a profile. The network status indicator is red when it's offline to make it more obvious. It would stay white with green text when it's connected. The Settings groups have been flattened to avoid sliding the navigation around so much.
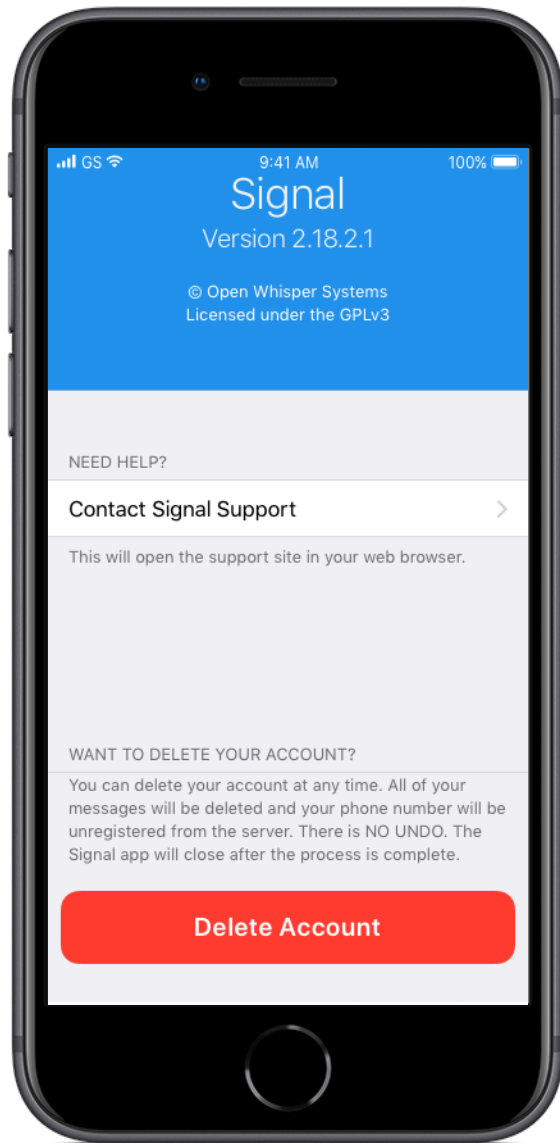
Settings: 2

Moving down in the Settings, I added a device image to Linked Devices (maybe that's not possible to know?). I flattened the Settings hierarchy, promoting the Notifications choices to the top level of Settings. I also added some copy to explain the difference between background and in-app notifications.
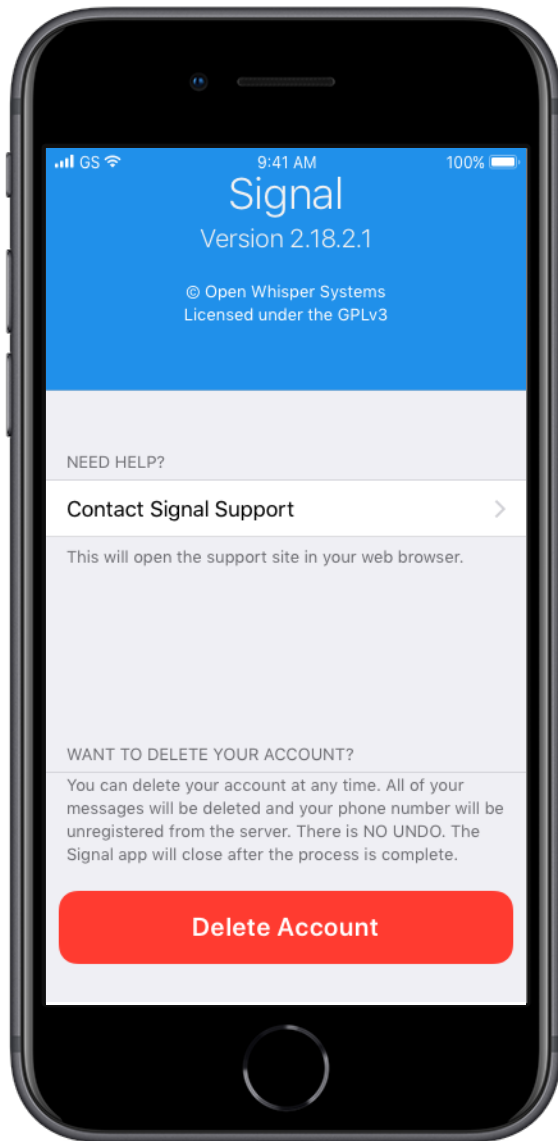
Settings: 3

Like the other sections, I promoted the About Signal item to the top of Settings. I added a little branding to the presentation of the version and license information. Aside from being a little prettier, it could make help docs clearer: "scroll down to the Signal logo, underneath it is your app's version". I added a little bit of copy explaining that the Support button will take them out of the app. (Better yet, it would launch an in-app Webkit view.)

Settings: 4

Finally, I promoted the Delete Account button to the top level of Settings. Because it's destructive, I added extra space between it and the previous section. Tapping it would still pop open a modal dialog confirming your decision. I used a standard iOS button.

Settings: 5

Missing from this mockup is the Privacy section of Settings. Because it's big and gnarly, I left it out only for the sake of brevity. I had to put some scope on this exercise to avoid redesigning the entire app.

Settings: Link Device

Tapping the "Link New Device / Scan QR Code" table cell would slide up this popover instead of sliding sideways (which I think is confusing hierarchy and sense of place in the app). I added the QR code image to this screen as another gentle reminder of what you're looking to scan.

Everything Else...

That's all there is to this exercise. I left out a metric ton of things, again simply for the sake of brevity. Profile editing. Adding and viewing attachments. New messages. Group messages. And so on. I would love to work on those things too. Of course, I didn't even touch Android or Desktop, both of which I have ideas about.

— *Shane Becker*