

THE POWER



OF UX



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

User experience, especially if you operate in the tech space, is becoming increasingly important. We no longer just use technology, we live with it. From the moment we wake up, technology plays a significant role in everything we do, and our interaction with it has become more intimate than ever before.

Creating a great user experience with tech can be a big competitive advantage for your company.

By following some basic UX rules, you can offer an enjoyable product or service, reduce frustration and increase customer retention.

The fast paced and constantly evolving market for mobile devices, brands, manufacturers and operating systems, makes it difficult to stay ahead of the curve, and satisfy all customer needs.

Good software should be available to anyone, despite location or accessibility. User experience is a constantly evolving process and needs to adapt to the needs of the user, fast. It's not about creating new trends as such, but about adapting to the way people work, live and play.

USER EXPERIENCE OVERVIEW

DEFINITION

User Experience is a very generic term to describe the interactions a human can have with an object or an interface. Even though it has no digital implications in its original definition, the term is now predominantly used in the digital space where it has seen a wider adoption over the last few years.

User experience in a software environment can be defined as a set of rules to enhance human-computer interactions in their practical, experimental, affective, meaningful and valuable aspects.

Everything is more or less about user experience. From the first to the last point of contact, every detail, no matter how small influences our interaction and understanding of a product or service. User experience can be determined by design, language, visual elements and performance.

For a company, user experience is where the business goals meet the users' needs. Studies show that every dollar invested in a better user experience returns up to \$100 and that a 10% point improvement in a company's user experience score can translate into more than \$1 billion revenue. By 2020, UX is said to overtake price and product in the key brand differentiator.

83% of users say that a seamless experience across all devices is very important and 90% of them report that they already stopped using an application due to poor performance and functionality

- User -

EXPERIENCE

Facts

EACH **\$1** INVESTED IN UX
RETURNS UP TO **\$100**



95% OF USERS **AGREED** THAT

“Good user experience just makes sense”

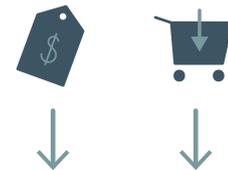
83% SAY A **SEAMLESS EXPERIENCE**
ACROSS ALL DEVICES IS
VERY IMPORTANT



90% OF USERS REPORTED THEY **STOPPED**
USING AN APP DUE TO POOR PERFORMANCE



BY 2020, **USER EXPERIENCE** WILL
OVERTAKE PRICE AND PRODUCT AS
THE KEY **BRAND DIFFERENTIATOR**



A **10% POINT IMPROVEMENT** IN A COMPANY'S
USER EXPERIENCE SCORE CAN TRANSLATE
INTO MORE THAN **\$1 BILLION REVENUE**



94% OF USER'S **FIRST IMPRESSIONS**
ARE **DESIGN-RELATED**



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UX PRINCIPLES

UX is all about mirroring natural human behaviour, how we evolve and interact with the world. A user experience needs to be effective, flexible, learnable and satisfying to use, and although that needs to adapt over time, there are certain neurological effects that always remain the same.

THE GESTALT PRINCIPLES

The Gestalt psychology is a theory of visual perception and is essential in understanding how people organize visual elements in their mind. It has established several principles that help designers build interfaces that follow the way our brains are wired and create an intuitive experience for the user.

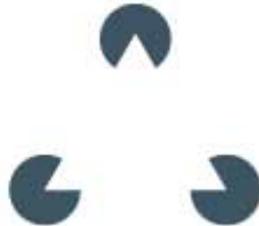
- Similarity: Objects which appear similar in shape, structure, colour or pattern are naturally grouped together as part of a broader story
- Continuation: This occurs when there's a natural movement between one thing and another. The viewer's eye is compelled to see how the shape has travelled, even though it is static.
- Closure: If enough of the global shape is indicated, an incomplete object can still be perceived as a whole by filling in the missing information.
- Proximity: Elements located close to one another tend to be perceived as a group.
- Figure and ground: Differentiation between an object and its surrounding area. A good figure and ground balance help make an image clearer.



Similarity



Continuation



Closure



Proximity



Figure/Ground

All of these principles are applied in design, and it is important to keep these rules in mind so your user experience compliments the natural thought process.

THE UX PROCESS

1. RESEARCH

Before any coding or design work begins, research is the first and a critical step to creating a great product or service.

Depending on the field, products or services that already exist may have set up processes that are now outdated. This is an opportunity to understand the source of frustration of its customers, and implement improvements.

A deep analysis of the target market is also necessary:

- Who are they?
- What are their objectives?
- What are their challenges?
- What are their pain points?

The use of persona is an interesting way of answering most of these questions. Try picturing your target market in the form of a user. Give that user a name and try to define what their life looks like with as many details as you can. What is their gender? How old are they? What do they do for work? How do they use the product or service? This can help you better understand what your customer needs in the product or service.

2. PROTOTYPING AND TESTING

It's time to start developing your product – using the research you've uncovered.

Before coding your product, ask yourself what the objectives are. The structure should be set up by defining the ideal user behaviour.

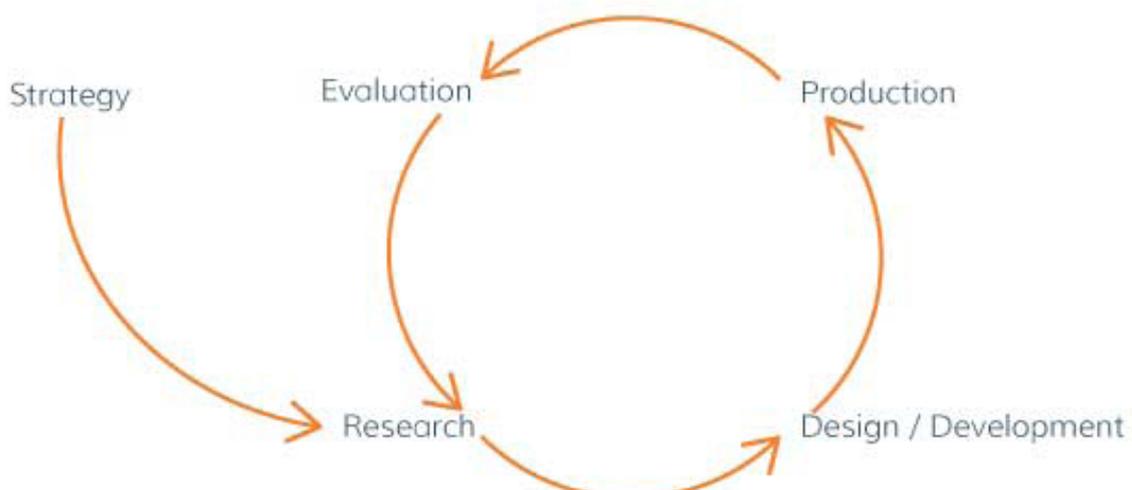
From then, a number of tools are available to create and test your mock ups. You can, for example use eye-tracking software to measure efficiency and identify tracks of improvements.

Each time you are planning to develop a new product or to make significant changes to an existing one, go back to the user persona you developed in the research phase, confront your hypotheses and ensure that you're still meeting their needs and offering a good user experience.

3. ITERATIONS

Once you've launched your product, the user experience process doesn't stop. To stay relevant, you need to adapt. Keep searching for flaws and never stop trying to fix them. If you're improving on your own product, you're not giving competitors the power to overtake you. Heatmaps, cookie tracking and other tools can help you understand your users' behaviour.

The user experience process looks something like this:



USER EXPERIENCE VS USER INTERFACE

User experience and user interface are often mixed up or grouped together. Both are essential to a great product and involve very unique processes and people to make them effective.

User experience is about the functionality of a product or service and how someone interacts with it. User interface is the look and feel. UX can be seen as the canvas, the structure that UI will build upon. It creates a path to follow, an ideal flow that will be highlighted with the different UI choices.

UI is usually a part of the UX process that starts during the prototyping phase.

To have the best interface, UX and UI have to be tightly linked and complement one another:

- A good user interface without a great user experience makes beautiful services that are difficult to use
- A good user experience without an effective user interface makes for a practical, but ugly service

Nonetheless, a bad looking user interface can also be a UX choice, to reflect affordable or second hand product for example. The most important point being that UX and UI are consistent to reflect the brand and business choices.

USER EXPERIENCE	USER INTERFACE
Analytics	Creative
User focused	Brand focused
Conceptual	Visual
Context	Content

EMAIL UX

From the first commercial packages in 1976, email has evolved to become a basic need in private and professional life.

For many years, some major players have dominated the email market, and set an expectation for how email is used and how it is designed to function.

While email functionality has been adapted and updated to meet the needs of how people work, the user experience has hardly been addressed in as much detail.

WEBMAIL VS DESKTOP

There are 2 main categories of email clients: webmail or desktop.

- Webmail: a webmail is an online interface. Users can access it through a web browser.
- Desktop: a desktop client is downloaded software that lives on a desktop.

There's a difference between webmail and desktop email software and the client expectations, both in the visual and functional sense. Webmail runs on a webpage, and is generally expected to perform lightly and fast. On the contrary, a desktop email is commonly heavier with its own features. It is also expected for a desktop email client to reuse the UX codes of the operating system it is installed on. These can be:

- Colors
- Icons
- Buttons
- Shortcuts
- Vocabulary
- Settings
- Etc.

Icons wording and animations are extremely important in clearly representing how an email software works, and how users can interact with it.

THE CASE OF MOBILE

MOBILE EMAIL

In 2015, 2.05 billion people are expected to have a smartphone. That is a 16% increase from 2014 alone.

When it comes to email, mobile is now the first device used in many countries around the world, even more so than webmail and desktop email. In the U.S. 48% of people read their email on their mobile devices, vs just 27% on webmail and 25% on desktop. Email is also the most popular or frequent activity on mobile devices, more so than browsing the web, using Facebook, maps or playing games. The advent of the smart watch will even increase this phenomenon further.

The number of native apps dedicated to email has exploded over the last few years, each trying to find the best way to provide a unique experience to email users.

SPECIFICITIES

1. Web app vs native app

The hardest part about a mobile user experience is being able to satisfy every need, in a market with so many devices.. The great diversity of brands and manufacturers creates a real challenge when trying to create a product that satisfies all users at once.

If you decide to settle for a web app for example, you won't be able to create versions for to fit each device's screen size, or operating system used. That is why a native app is often a better choice. It does require more work and is a larger investment at first but it will also allow you to follow the main design principles and the expected behaviour of a given operating system.

2. Everything is touch friendly

Since the democratisation of smartphones and tablets, the UX and UI codes have changed a lot to fit the new behaviours and trends. For example, mobile interfaces on touch screen devices consider the screen size and position of the thumb. More applications now offer a quick access to their main function through a circular button in the bottom right corner of the screen, which is the easiest access for the right thumb.

3. Font readability

Font can make or break a mobile interface, particularly for email platforms where most activities involve reading or writing

The challenge here is finding the perfect balance between choosing a font that offers enough space to read or write an email from a smaller device, and is also easy to read.

4. Portrait vs landscape

A mobile user can generally decide to use their device in landscape or portrait view. When considering mobile user experience, your interface needs to adapt to both landscape and portrait view, and appear consistent if switched from one to the other.

5. Notification

Most users now expect every app they install to send them notifications about incoming activity. This is especially true for email. Users have tens if not hundreds of apps on their mobile devices, and checking every single one for incoming messages or important updates is extremely time consuming. Having the option to receive notifications from apps, particularly from email, is standard practice. The way these are going to be handled depend greatly on the operating system the user has and thus has to be taken into account when designing the app.

Mobile UX good practices:

- Mobile email is not to be overlooked as it is the first platform for email consultation
- If possible go with a native app to make sure you fit users' habits
- Make sure your buttons and links are big enough to be touch friendly
- Make sure the font you are using is easily readable no matter what the device is
- Make sure your app is usable in both landscape and portrait mode
- Choose how you want to handle notifications and allow some customisation for your users so that you are not seen as intrusive nor invisible.

ACCESSIBILITY

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCESSIBILITY IN SOFTWARE UX

Different people have different needs, and it is important to consider these needs when creating your interface and the way it functions.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR IMPAIRMENTS

There are four main families of impairments that can affect the way a person interacts with your software:

- Deaf and hearing-impaired
- Blind and vision impaired
- Mobility-impaired
- Learning-disabled

Blind and vision impaired

Using a computer was initially difficult for the blind or vision impaired, but with advancements in technology and the introduction of accessibility laws, software has been updated to suit the vision impaired.

Coders must use proper semantical coding to allow screen reader to render the page or software as precisely as possible. This is also very important for images as they will be described using the "alt" attribute for example.

Small changes can make a big difference to help the color blind digest the information accurately and be able to navigate through the page. Clickable elements for example should not just be indicated with the use of color, but by some stylistic definition like underlining, or bolding of text.

Deaf and hearing-impaired

Even though sound isn't critical in alerting users, it is often used to facilitate the understanding of an interface or to provide notifications.

For email, you can't entirely rely on sounds to indicate that a new email has arrived, in case the user is out of range. Adding visual indications is also important.

Mobility-impaired

The mobility-impaired tend to use external tools and devices to help them use computers. Accuracy is often the issue here and it can be solved, for example, by providing an easy-to-access clicking area. This means they have to be big enough with sufficient spacing in between.

Learning-disabled

Learning disabilities such as dyslexia can also affect the understanding of an interface. Having icons next to labels on buttons and tabs helps users make sense of the software.

TECHNOLOGIC ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility makes the product or service easy to interact with for everyone. A slow or unstable connection is part of what can create poor accessibility conditions. This is especially true for a service like email where people expect to just work no matter where they are. It can often be critical for a user to access messages from anywhere and at any time. A technical accessibility and good performance is non-negotiable for a good user experience.

ACCESSIBILITY IS FOR EVERYONE

Accessibility should be a major focus when building high tech solutions, whether that's software or hardware.

When you use your smartphone without looking, you can't see visual notifications, and thus rely on other signals to inform you, like sound or vibration. This is an example of acting as impaired even if you are not. Hence, the universality of accessibility concerns.

HOW TO ENSURE GOOD ACCESSIBILITY

Several associations around the world provide their own guidelines and standards for software to be recognised as accessible.

The ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) has a list of criteria that helps companies have their services or products certified. In some cases the ADA is a requirement in selling a product or service to the mass market.

As a general rule, you should not rely on one type of signal to indicate an action. As we've seen with notifications for example, a sound notification can easily be missed. The combination of sound, visuals, and vibration are more reliable and help build a better user experience.



IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS
OUR INBOX IS **ALWAYS OPEN.**



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