


Best Practices in UX Design



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Introduction

The digital era has changed the way not only how we do business but also how we view and experience business. Every product, service or business touchpoint is now a user experience. It has now become critical for businesses, big and small to offer customers a seamless and friction-free digital experience that intuitively aligns with their daily lives. Here's a quick primer for business owners who are considering hiring a UX design team for their products and business touchpoints.



User Experience

User Experience (UX) is defined as a person's emotions and attitudes about using a particular product, system or service. It includes a person's perceptions of the system's utility, ease of use and efficiency.

Optimized user experience is now seen as a basic requirement by most customers. By employing good UX practices, business owners can understand better why customers use a particular product, or website and what they seek. Good UX helps customers engage more with your website, product or application. It improves conversion rates and greatly helps in retaining customer loyalty.

Once you have decided to hire a UX design team on board, they will typically go through a series of tasks in the process of creating a customized user experience suited for your business. These will include the following- Research, Brainstorming, Design and Testing.



UX Research

Designing a great UX involves research from the very start of the project to establish scope, feasibility and user needs. UX researchers may employ many of the following steps to help them get a better understanding of the project. The UX team receives the user requirements from stakeholders to establish the scope. They will then go on to the Data Gathering phase aims to understand the service from a user's perspective and set realistic project expectations. Research helps ensure the product is fully adopted by its users.

Data gathering

Researchers typically use one-on-one and group interviews and ethnography studies to gain a better understanding of domain and users. Directed interviews are typical question-and-answer interviews, where a researcher asks specific questions. This is useful when conducting interviews with a large number of users. Researchers may also use non-directed interviews to explore more sensitive topics which stakeholders and users may not be comfortable addressing directly. Ethnography studies in UX design involves observing people as they perform their tasks in their usual environments. This allows the UX researcher understand the gaps between what people actually do, and what they say they do.

Heuristics Evaluation

This is critical as it tests whether a website is user friendly. Unlike user-testing, where the site is evaluated by end users, a heuristic evaluation has the site being reviewed by usability experts. Heuristic Evaluation also presents a detailed analysis of the product that helps UX designers visualize the existing product's usability, accessibility and effectiveness.

Best Practices in UX Research

- Plan for a balance of strategic and tactical user research.
- Create an overview document to keep teams and stakeholders informed
- Questions to the user group should be clear, open-ended, and focused on the topics.
- Include the right amount of people in the user group. A good focus group should include a variety of perspectives, with a chance for everyone to give their inputs. if using surveys, keep them short.



Brainstorm

Armed with the research, UX teams will brainstorm to generate ideas and solve problems. The process of brainstorming allows the team to visualize a broad range of possible design solutions. As they build on solutions. As they build on the design solutions, the UX team will undertake several steps including building mental models & empathy maps, task flows and journey maps.

The mental model one of the most important concepts in human-computer interaction that UX designers have to keep in mind while creating the user experience. A mental model is what the user believes about the system, product, website or application and is not necessarily fact-based. For example, a user may have a particular idea about how a shopping website should function, based on experience with other shopping websites. Designers then prepare an empathy map to visualize the data on the user. Empathy maps help capture who a user or persona is and communicate that user's needs to others. This helps clients and team members prioritize user needs.

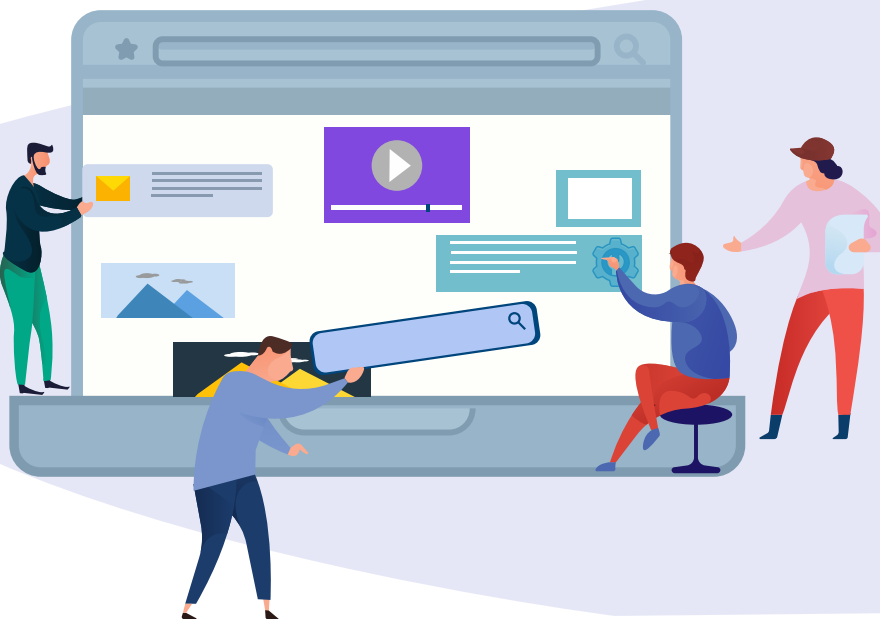
The designers will then sketch out the initial prototypes by hand, followed by concept mapping where they use concept maps to connect a large number of ideas, objects, and events as they relate to a certain domain. As the designers visualize the complexities of the system, they will create task flows. Task flows are created to optimize the user's ability to accomplish a task with reduced friction. This helps clients and designers observe the user journey well before the feature is developed. Task flow is a linear flow that all users will go through to perform a specific action.

Brainstorm

This will be followed by Customer journey mapping which helps business owners see things from the customer's point of view. It helps visualize common customer pain points and define what customers need in order to complete a purchase. This has several benefits for clients/business owners as it allows them to focus on customer needs throughout the buying funnel and lets them concentrate on the areas that will deliver maximum effectiveness.

Best Practices

- Focus on the product category.
- Focus on pain points of real customers Design documentation is important.
- It allows every new iteration to be tracked, revisited and revised if required.
- Consider user emotions along with their actions.
- Test user and task flows. It is crucial to test information architecture to determine if users can easily navigate the product.
- Refine and maintain customer journeys over time.



UX Design

Within the process of design, UX designers will work with Information Architecture (IA) which is also closely connected to good UX and UI design. IA as defined by the IA Institute, is the practice of deciding how to arrange the parts of something to be understandable. Good IA, like good UX, helps people to make sense of the website or application and easily find what they're looking for.

The design process also includes creating Lo-fi and Hi-fi wireframes which will help define the hierarchy of items on the screen. A wireframe is a visual representation of a user interface, almost like a floor plan for the website. Designers usually begin with lo-fidelity wire frames that maps out the shell first, with its screens and basic IA. This helps teams visualize and test concepts in the initial stage. Hi fidelity wireframes are more developed representations of the end product which may show the interface interaction.



Design

During this stage, designers will also work on the prototype which allows business owners to test products to allow them to make informed decisions about whether to invest in the final product. Prototypes are crucial to resolving usability issues before product launch.

UX designers also consider User interface design (UI) or user interface engineering in the creation of the digital experience, working with UI designers. UI is defined as the design of user interfaces for machines and software focused on optimizing usability and the user experience.

Best Practices

- Build wireframes with a prototyping tool that enables integration into advanced designs.
- For Hi-fi prototypes or wireframes, make it as close to the final product as possible. Consider usability testing, user personas to make them as realistic as possible.
- Avoid place holders and use the real content as far as possible.



Usability Testing

Testing the usability takes the guesswork out of your product usability. By measuring the impact that changes have on the key metrics, business owners can ensure that every change produces positive results. Design thinking which emphasizes designing for the user, recommends testing often through the process, and not just at the end to validate ideas. This process of iterating, testing, and implementing the changes as suggested in the feedback help create a user-friendly product. Usability testing insights can help guide design decisions. UX designers will perform a number of tests including usability, A/B testing and visual affordance.

Usability testing is done to check how intuitive a website is and how easy it is for users to reach their goals. A/B testing involves comparing two versions of a webpage or app to check which one performs better. Running an AB test lets business owners and UX designers pursue focused changes to the website or app. Another kind of testing that is used is Visual Affordance which is a rapid fire test that can be done on paper. This allows designers to spot any gaps and missing page elements quickly. Designers may also use Eye Tracking information during the development phase to improve user experience. Eye tracking data allows designers to show business owners the actual user behavior, problem areas and thereby support the designer's UX recommendations.

Usability Testing : Best Practices

- Define the goals of testing
- Choose the right test based on the goals
- Prioritize issues
- Focus on clear task creation
- Keep the scope tight
- Ask for details in feedback
- Check the tech!
- Rehearse!
- Go deep into the results



Conclusion

UX can make or break the success of products and services. Good UX design makes the user experience seamless. Most customers and business owners may not even recognize that they have good UX already built in their business interfaces. On the other hand, you can spot bad UX in an instant. Poorly designed UX can leave the customers or users frustrated enough to consider dropping your business altogether, and they are most likely to go to your competitor.

A good user experience results in loyalty, and therefore is a must for any business owner to consider.