What UX Is And What Isn't

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Posted by Tomas Laurinavicius on December 22, 2015 - Get free updates of new posts here

What is user experience design? The common misconception comes from the word design. Due to influence of fashion, design is often associated with aesthetics of the product. User Experience Design is much more complex than you think.

It is all about **EXPERIENCE**. It involves all of our senses and get stuck in our memories and more precisely in the limbic system which supports a variety of functions, including emotion, behavior, motivation and long-term memory.

I see lots of young designers and even agencies calling themselves UX experts where all they do is visual design and development. Lets see what UX is and what isn't.

What is UX for me?

It is the ultimate collection of 5 human senses mashed into one product or service. Lets take a New Year's Eve as an example. People love it, talk about it and celebrate it really hard. Because it is an ultimate experience.

New Year's Eve

You wake up in the morning of the New Year's Eve day and you are already excited, you'll meet your best friends, you'll have a nice dinner and some drinks, loud music,

dance-floor and breathtaking fireworks at the end of the night.

Let's break it down.

Sight – your best friends in beautiful dresses and suits, fireworks at the grand finale.
Hearing – energetic music that makes you move your feet.
Taste – mouthwatering bacon topped turkey served with freshly cooked vegetables.
Smell – elegant and solid perfume smoothly blending in with the smell of that expensive champagne you've been saving for months.
Touch – your dance partner, hugs and kisses after the final countdown.

There are many more things to experience on New Year's Eve depending on how crazy you go. It involves all 5 human senses and that is why it is an unforgettable experience. Long lasting memories connected with different senses and uniqueness of the moments will never be experienced the same way taking different people's perspectives.

Now lets look at the UX on the web or mobile.

UX on Web and Mobile

You wake up in the morning of the New Year's Eve and you are already excited but you have some things to do to get prepared for the party. You take your iPhone and open up Safari to search for a suit to rent out for the night.

You find a nice website but it's not responsive, you take your laptop and see how beautiful the website actually is. You trust the website and then start filling out the form to rent that brilliant tuxedo. Form is enormously long and at the end turns out it doesn't work. You are desperate and give them a call on the phone displayed on their website.

Luckily, nice young voice picks up the phone and takes your details and confirms that your tuxedo is on the way and will reach you in 1 h. Quite frustrated but finally succeeded you close the website and go out to the nearest ATM to take some cash because they most likely won't accept your PayPal payment or Visa card.

How many senses you've noticed here?

Sight – beautiful website design (unfortunately not responsive).
Hearing – none on the website, welcoming voice on the phone though.
Smell – none.

Taste – none.

Touch – none, you touched your iPhone and laptop keyboard, but I wouldn't count it.

The Difference

Now I think you see the difference. It is very hard to create a memorable experience on the web or mobile and that is why designers and agencies have to work so damn hard to create that **WOW!** reaction basically incorporating only one of our senses – sight.

But the web and mobile is much more than that. Think about the mysterious 6th sense – intuition. Websites and mobile apps are able to learn your habits, predict what you will be up to and suggest some relevant information that would make user's life easier and would create better overall experience.

I think, digital UX is just a connecting cornerstone that complements the physical experience to create stunning experience of the service or product. We're humans after all and we are operating in the physical environment.

Digital UX

So what is and what isn't digital user experience? According to Jesse James Garrett it consists of 5 planes: strategy, scope, structure, skeleton and surface. Each plane has its tasks and all of the planes are connected with each other creating a consistent end product.

DIGITAL UX *IS*

usability
accessibility
content
sounds
visuals
computer science
psychology
user interface
interaction design
information architecture

DIGITAL UX *IS NOT*

just user interface design

programming language
marketing
job title
the role of one person or department
easy

CONCRETE

ABSTRACT

VISUAL DESIGN

INFORMATION DESIGN, INTERFACE DESIGN, NAVIGATION DESIGN

INTERACTION DESIGN, INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE

FUNCTIONAL SPECIFICATIONS, CONTENT REQUIREMENTS

USER NEEDS, SITE OBJECTIVES

Source: The Elements of User Experience by Jesse James Garrett

Check out the summary of The Elements of User Experience by Jesse James Garrett.

> @tomaslau UX is how it works, feels and looks. If it's only one of the above, it's not UX.
>
> — Mariusz Ciesla (@dotmariusz) February 20, 2014

> @tomaslau UX & Visuals go hand in hand. Design with simple visuals = easier to

parse. User content should be in focus.

— Victor Erixon (@victorerixon) [February 20, 2014](#)

Strong UX is always a unique solution to a unique problem. [@tomaslau](#) [@dotmariusz](#) [@ajlopz](#)

— Lukas Lukoševičius (@lukaslukCOM) [February 20, 2014](#)

[@tomaslau](#) [@edgarascom](#) [@liang](#) [@Pakhaliuk](#) UX is understanding how a user responds to the choices you make when creating a product or service.

— Lewis Flude (@lewisflude) [February 20, 2014](#)

[@tomaslau](#) UX is how you feel when you use an interface. UX design is accurately predicting that feeling through visuals, HCI, functionality.

— Paul Jarvis (@pjrvs) [February 20, 2014](#)

[@tomaslau](#) don't forget that ux is not only limited to web or phones. It's about everyday objets too that either help you or annoy you.

— Paula Borowska (@paulaborowska) [February 20, 2014](#)

[@tomaslau](#) UX encompasses the thoughts and feelings a user experiences while undertaking a task.

— Lee Munroe (@leemunroe) [February 20, 2014](#)

[@tomaslau](#) UX is not making things pretty, however aesthetics are important and can contribute to good UX.

— Lee Munroe (@leemunroe) [February 20, 2014](#)

[@tomaslau](#) UX is the synthesis of research and user needs that gets laid out prior to adding a visual design layer. UX is not UI.

— Liang Shi (@liang) [February 20, 2014](#)

> [@tomaslau](#) UX design is a kind of thinking for making better app<->user interaction. UI is just a top part of "UX iceberg".
>
> — Edgaras Ben (@edgarascom) [February 21, 2014](#)

Conclusion

UX isn't easy to describe and can mean different things to different people. Ultimately UX is a complex set of different variables that help to solve a problem and create a long lasting emotional experience to a user.

Hopefully this article gave you a new perspective on UX that will help you to create amazing products and services.

What are your thoughts and methods on user experience?