eGuide
Website
User Experience

Website user experience: why it is important to you
Usability247 provides usability testing, expert review and user research services when you need them, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

We’re changing the world, one interface at a time. So that everything is usable, everywhere, for everyone, all the time.

It would be better for consumers and better for business.

Come and change the world with us.

www.usability247.com

call us FREE on +44(0)800 0246 247

e-mail: info@usability247.com
Contents

Introduction: Website user experience: why it’s important to you 4
Section 1: User experience 5
Section 2: UX design and testing 9
Section 3: Common issues affecting user experience 12
Section 4: The changing face of website user experience 16
Section 5: Give your customers what they want 22
Website user experience: why it’s important to you

A seismic shift has taken place upon the digital landscape, and a new land rush is underway. Everywhere you look, businesses of all shapes and sizes are aiming to stake a claim to a prime slice of mobile real estate.

The revolution is in full swing, and organisations don’t want to get left behind, optimising their websites to offer user friendly and consistent experiences across handheld devices.

Indeed, mobile is the both the future, and very much the present, but its pursuit shouldn’t come at the expense of what’s gone before.

As of Q3 2013, 75% of website traffic to e-commerce sites was channelled through traditional methods (PC/Notebook). This figure will almost certainly decrease throughout the course of 2014, as more and more eschew the PC in favour of the tablet, but it's nevertheless a salient reminder that your primary website remains a powerful tool, and, so far as user experience is concerned, shouldn't be neglected in the quest for mobile supremacy.

Website user experience: this eGuide

This eGuide aims to tell you what website user experience is, and why it shouldn’t be ignored by your organisation.

The distinction

For the purposes of this eGuide, we make the following distinction:

- **Website user experience** – Pertaining to the factors that create a better user experience for a website viewed via traditional methods (PC/Notebook)

- **Mobile user experience** – Pertaining to the factors that create a better user experience for a website viewed via handheld methods (Smartphone/Tablet)

Also, when we talk about optimising a website for usability, and a greater user experience, we’re not discussing SEO (Search Engine Optimisation). Our interest lies in what happens once the end user has arrived at the website.
Section 1

User Experience
User Experience

What is user experience optimisation?
Simply put, user experience (UX) optimisation is the understanding of how a product is used— in this instance, a website— and applying that knowledge to ensure the consumer enjoys an easily accessible, and trouble-free path to achieving their goal.
User experience encapsulates everything from interface design to navigation, through to usability and how a consumer interacts with a website.

Why is user experience important?
Your website represents both your organisation and your brand. It isn’t simply a place to sell your products or services, but a window into which the consumer can peer and make a qualified decision on whether to place their trust in you.

As a single point of contact between business and customer it is second to none, with the potential to open up your market to a global audience; something a physical premises can only dream of. Therefore, it is essential that every potential customer that lands upon your website has a pleasant and stress-free user experience, from the first click, to conversion, and beyond.

Right from the off, the user is looking to accomplish a specific task. Whether this is to make a purchase, read an article, or find information, it matters not; it’s the journey that counts.

They’ll be asking questions, looking for recognisable features— trying to figure out the path of least resistance, all in the blink of eye. A website designed and optimised with the user experience in mind, will successfully drive this traffic to the pages they need, and onwards to a sale.

With your website being an extension of your business, and often the first opportunity a customer has to engage with your brand, it should provide the same level of service that you would personally, ensuring a great lasting impression for all your visitors.

www.usability247.com
Section 2

UX design and testing
UX design and testing

We've established that a good user experience provides a higher value to the customer, by offering a confusion-free passage to their goal. Conversely, a bad user experience will only frustrate and see potential customers fleeing in their droves, leading, ultimately, to a loss in revenue.

So how do you go about improving the website user experience for your customers?

UX Design

It all comes down to planning.

A good user experience is something that happens effortlessly, such is the smoothness of the user journey. However, a bad user experience is like a stop-start road trip, complete with flashing red warning signs that will fire into life the next time a customer (briefly) considers visiting your site.

Creating the former involves an understanding of human behaviour, and the relationship between your business requirements and a customer’s needs.

This is where UX design comes in; designing a website via a user-centric approach. It permeates all aspects of the design process, from initial concept, through to delivery and ongoing improvement.

UX designers map everything out up front, usually before a line of code has even been written. This way they can get the structure of the website in place, its architecture and navigational aspects. Relevant personas are created, specifically to provide insights into a user’s intent and needs, and prototypes are built. The latter might be in the form of a wireframe, but something as simple as index cards and a pencil will suffice. The purpose is to eliminate any major stumbling blocks that would impact user experience, before actual development begins.

This is the first stage of the iterative design process, which continues with testing to root out further faults, until a finished product providing the best user experience possible is released.

UX Testing

User experience testing is a core attribute of the user-centric design process. Without testing there is no way of proving the various theories and decisions that have been reached during each iteration.

www.usability247.com
of the development cycle. Neglect the testing, and you are releasing your website into an unforgiving world, minus the research and feedback that guarantees your customers a better experience.

Some design teams choose to carry out the testing in-house, placing themselves in the shoes of a potential end user (according to the previously created personas), and tackling potential issues that way.

Although this approach is 100% better than no testing at all, the best results, by far, are produced with real users.

**User experience testing with just 5 users can find 85% of site problems**

Whether in a lab environment, where the test subjects can be observed, eye movements tracked, and their reactions recorded; or remotely, which takes place online with a cross-section of users who then give feedback; user experience testing is a robust method of gauging how your website performs in the field. Major issues can be identified, along with minor ones that might otherwise have been missed, and any glitches, bugs, or anything else that might devalue the experience, ironed out.

**In 2013, only 55% of companies were conducting user experience testing, while 73% of the remainder said they would be doing so in the following 12 months**

**Iterative Design**

Iterative design is a given in product development, and should be the way forward for all organisations, serious about their websites:

![Iterative Design Diagram](design-test-improve-design.png)

... and so on
Iterative design is also known as ‘user centred design’ and more recently ‘human centred design’ which is covered by an ISO standard. ISO 9241-210:2010 is the standard for “Ergonomics of human-system interaction” and part 210 covers “Human-centred design for interactive systems”.

The process builds on the simplified view provided on the previous page and can be illustrated as follows:

The above process delivers a website user experience your customers want; not one your web designer/developer thinks they want.
Section 3

Common issues affecting user experience
Common issue affecting user experience

A hefty 97% of websites are failing when it comes to user experience. That’s a lot of frustrated customers out there looking for somewhere else to spend their money. What’s more, if a user has had a really bad experience with a website, it’s no longer a case of simply taking their custom elsewhere.

Social media has transformed the way in which consumers interact with their favourite brands, offering opportunities for customer engagement that didn’t exist before. This has proved highly advantageous for organisations looking to build brand awareness and expand their customer base. But it can be a two-edged sword.

In the same way that a happy customer may rave about their experience on a social platform such as Twitter, a dissatisfied one may take the opportunity to air a grievance.

51% of 18 – 34 year olds trust the opinions of strangers online, over that of friends and family

Addressing the following issues – common factors that can have a negative effect on website user experience – may prevent your website becoming the focus of a social media meltdown.

**Speed**

Believe it or not, research has shown that 40% of people will abandon a webpage if it takes more than three seconds to load. Speed is clearly of the essence, and in the digital age, the consumer wants their fix yesterday.

Load time can be compromised by elements such as HTTP requests, and image size. There are tools available that will measure the download speed of your website, giving you a heads up on whether it is causing a problem or not. Solutions range from caching, which delivers regularly updated copies of your pages to reduce server load; removing bloated and unnecessary HTML code, which will impede a site’s performance; through to optimising images and compressing their size.

Quick load times are an important factor in website loyalty for 52% of online shoppers
Usability

A website’s usability lies at the heart of a good – or bad – user experience. A badly designed interface, or poorly structured navigation encourages confusion, and feeds into other UX problems, such as length of time – or failure – to complete a task, and user errors.

It is important to get website navigation right, as 70% of users choose it ahead of on-site search facilities in their pursuit of a specific task. There are some pretty universal expectations for you to consider when it comes to navigation:

- **Positioning** – Is your navigation bar located where a user would expect it to be?
- **Clarity** – Does each link clearly communicate whereabouts it will take the user to?
- **Signposting** – Does your navigation signpost the important areas of your website, without overwhelming the user with links?

It is important to always have a clearly marked ‘Home’ link in the navigation bar, so that if a user does become lost, they can easily return to a recognisable starting point.

Other usability issues that can be addressed are simple things such as the inclusion of clearly defined headlines; making textual links blue, underlined, and a different colour once clicked; and ensuring that both the spelling and grammar on your website are of the same high standard you’d employ in any physical communications.

**Task time**

The time it takes for a user to perform a specific task will also impact upon their perception of the experience. We’ve already mentioned that in the digital age, the consumer wants everything yesterday, and issues such as poor navigation (see above), or vague instructions, might unnecessarily prolong the time it takes for a user to convert.

Forms can be particularly problematic in this instance, with the length of time it takes to register their details increasing a user’s chances of giving up and searching out a less time-consuming competitor.

You should be capturing the minimum amount of information required for the customer to perform a particular task. Whether it’s for a transaction (checkout), or an item of content, decide whether all the fields you’re asking them to fill out are necessary. What can be disposed of without impacting upon your business? Keep it simple – consider the opportunity to purchase without registering – and minimise the frustration factor.
Reliability

Is your site always available when your customers need it? Research conducted in 2012 showed that 73% of businesses had suffered some kind of service interruption in the previous five years.

Although the amount of downtime your website endures is out of your hands, and in that of your hosting provider, you can take steps to minimise disruption, making it less likely that a customer, desperate to buy from you, is left wanting.

- **Shared or dedicated** – Are you using shared or dedicated hosting? With the former, your website will be sharing a server with many others. With the latter, your website will have its own ‘dedicated’ server.

- **Shared hosting** – If your website is on a shared server, find out how many other websites are hosted there. Some hosting firms will crowbar as many different sites onto a single server as they can get away with. This will inevitably increase the chances, and frequency, of your website not responding.

- **Dedicated hosting** – Dedicated hosting will prove to be far more reliable, and better equipped to handle spikes in traffic, and future scalability. The flipside of that coin is it will cost a lot more.

- **Balancing act** – Whether shared or dedicated, it all depends on your budget. There are companies out there offering shared services, who don’t clog up their servers with hundreds of websites. This might be a more affordable option for SMBs. Conduct research before diving in at the deep end via social media and review websites, and find out just what their existing customers think of them.

Remember, you get what you pay for in most walks of life, and web hosting is no exception.
Section 4

The changing face of website user experience
The changing face of website user experience

The business community, and the world of eCommerce, are slowly latching on to the importance of creating a great website user experience for their customers. Although it's still a far from universally accepted philosophy, inroads are being made into changing the attitudes of decision makers and stakeholders, and involving UX practitioners at the earliest stage of a project, whether traditional website or mobile.

And it's not only perceptions of how the consumer achieves their goal that user experience is changing, but also how a website can communicate its message.

Telling a story

The past saw a fairly rigid formula for building a website, with a homepage from which branched all other pages. There were no emotional links between these pages, only representations of different facets of the business.

Today, however, some UX Design is taking one of the oldest traditions known to man, and adapting it to provide a deeper level of engagement for the user.

We’re talking about the craft of storytelling – creating a narrative around the service or product that draws the user in, and encourages them to explore further. For three examples of this type of website, check out design agency clevercherry, Apple’s iPad Air, and Google’s Glass.

As you can see, it’s a style that offers both a richer, and more visual experience; one that opens up new opportunities for interaction. It also offers the possibility of incorporating rich media, or similar on-page features, in exciting and innovative ways that develop the user journey, and provide a more stimulating medium by which to discover a business and its message.

Over-arching narratives and this style of user-centric page is going to be much more prevalent in the websites of the future; after all, as users, who doesn’t love a good story?
Section 5

Give your customers what they want
Give your customers what they want

In this eGuide we have discussed the importance of a good user experience; why testing is imperative; some of the more obvious factors that can sink a website; and how user experience is shaping the future of websites, as we speak.

But, when all's said and done, it's your customers that count. They are the ones looking to spend the money, and looking to do so in as pain-free and engaging a way as possible. A frustrated customer equals:

- **At best** – A reluctant sale, but no repeat business
- **At worst** – A lost sale, plus the potential to muddy your name across the digital speakeasies of social media

With multi-screening now a recognised fact of online life (with 90% using multiple screens sequentially), it is more important than ever that you are offering your customers a great, and seamless, user experience across all platforms.

And if you still need convincing as to why website user experience matters, here's a final statistic to chew over:

"88% of online consumers are less likely to return to a website following a bad experience"

If you have found this eGuide interesting and would like to talk more about how the themes covered can be applied to your business or would like to improve the website user experience of your customers Usability247 can help. Please get in touch by calling free on 0800 0246 247 or by emailing info@usability247.com.