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- Determine your users to create a meaningful experience
- Build information architecture and content strategy
- Embrace testing and metrics to keep your experience relevant

**Donald Chesnut**  
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*Executives with SapientNitro, a leading agency in user experience design*



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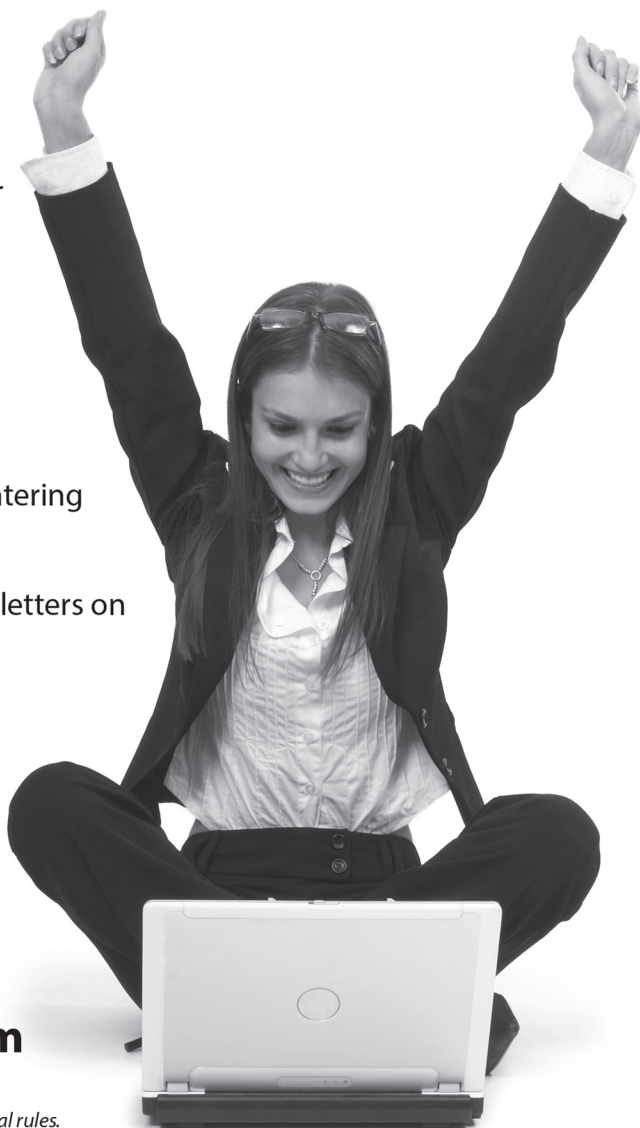
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**by Donald Chesnut  
and  
Kevin Nichols**



## UX For Dummies®

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# Introduction

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**T**he methodology of user experience design shapes many products and services that surround us on a daily basis. It informs the websites we use, the applications on our mobile phones, the software packages that pervade our worlds, and even the physical products and environments in which we live.

How are these experiences designed to ensure they work seamlessly and easily for users? What are the best practices to follow to ensure an product is useful and usable? User experience design can provide the answers.

User experience — or UX for short — is a field growing in popularity and visibility in business today because great user experiences help ensure that products and services are adopted, used, and even enjoyed by their target users. Although a variety of inputs go into UX design, the practice of UX design is not necessarily complicated. This book shows you how easy it is to get started with designing great UX.

## *About This Book*

You can use this book in a variety of ways. Naturally, you can read the book from start to finish, which will give you a broad understanding of the critical components of UX in a linear fashion. Alternatively, you can use this book as a chapter-by-chapter reference guide — a tool that gives you a better understanding of specific topics, themes, and challenges as you encounter them. You may also choose to read just the first few chapters together to get a basic understanding of UX, and then use the remaining chapters as an ongoing support guide.

In general, think of *UX For Dummies* as a basic guidebook to the major components of UX. UX is a commonly misunderstood domain — many people think of UX as just usability, but it is so much more. There are subdomains, such as information architecture, content strategy, visual design, user research, testing (including, naturally usability testing), and many others. The topics, terms, and subjects can be confusing to the newcomer, and the primary objective of this book is to shed some light and help to alleviate some of the confusion.

## *Foolish Assumptions*

The practice of UX is relatively new — only 15 to 20 years old, and it was borne out of the field of Human Computer Interaction (HCI), which focused on how people interacted with early forms of computers and related technology. UX is also continually evolving, expanding, and iterating to address new types of experiences and technologies, such as tablets and smartphones, or new interaction methods, like touch and voice. This book aims to give a broad-brush understanding of the world of UX, but always keep in mind that what is relevant now will change as new technology emerges. New topics and approaches are constantly being developed to address our ever-changing world.

UX design is used for many different experiences, including websites, mobile apps, tablet apps, desktop software, kiosks, game design, and many others. In addition, though, UX methods are sometimes used to design physical products and real-world environments like retail stores or bank branches. However, in most cases, UX refers to the process of designing digital experiences, and that's our focus of this book: to highlight how UX is applied to many types of digital challenges.

This book highlights a variety of types of digital platforms, but the book intentionally does not dig too deeply within any one of these subjects specifically. Naturally, entire books can be written (and have been written!) on the sole topic of web design, software interaction design, or mobile app design. The basic building blocks of UX are applicable to all of these types of challenges, and this book is a guide to UX in its most fundamental form.

Although UX is design practice that was borne out of technology experiences (web, mobile phones, and software), UX is not really a technological field. It deals with technology but is focused on understanding how the user interacts with technology rather than focusing on the technology itself. It is a common misconception that UX is a technology development process. In reality, UX is more aligned with other forms of creative design and production processes, such as advertising or product development.

## *Icons Used in This Book*

Icons are those little pictures that you find in the margins of this book. We use them to grab your attention and steer you toward key bits of information. Here's a list of the icons we use in the book and what each one means:



Some of the points made in this book are things you should consider committing to memory. These are important details that will serve you well in years to come if you remember them.



These are the insider's tips that we have gathered over the years. These can help you ensure success, as well as avoid many of the common pitfalls along the way.



Years of experience in the world of UX has taught us a lot about what works in the world of UX, and what does not. These points help identify the most common mistakes and misconceptions made during a UX project.



The Technical Stuff icon marks information of a highly technical nature that you can normally skip over.

## *Beyond the Book*

To read more on topics related to UX, check out the following things:

In addition to this book, we supply content online that feature the following information:

- ✓ **Cheat Sheet:** The UX cheat sheet is a quick reference guide for some of the primary themes discussed in this book. You can find it at the following [www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/ux](http://www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/ux).
- ✓ **Dummies.com online articles:** We've written some articles about content strategy, information architecture, user research, and testing resources. You can also read "Ten Things to Prepare Your UX for the Future" at [www.dummies.com/extras/ux](http://www.dummies.com/extras/ux).

## *Where to Go from Here*

Welcome to the world of UX. If you are reading this book (and obviously, you are, for which your humble authors thank you deeply) then your curiosity has been awakened into designing experiences with a new and different focus — the user. Our recommendation is you should read Chapter 1 and then take it from there. If after the first chapter you want to focus on a specific topic, then jump right to it. Good luck!



## Part I

# Getting Started with UX



*For Dummies* can help you get started with lots of subjects. Visit <http://www.dummies.com> to learn more and do more with *For Dummies*.

## *In this part . . .*

- ✔ Understand the basics of user experience design and how it's focused on the wants and needs of the user.
- ✔ Recognize the importance of UX and the business value it can bring.
- ✔ Define basic models for understanding users and find out how those models can be used during the UX design project.

# Chapter 1

## Defining UX and the Process

---

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Orienting you to what UX is about and why it's important
  - ▶ Understanding how to use UX
  - ▶ Defining the various components that comprise the world of UX design
- 

*Any darn fool can make something complex; it takes a genius to make something simple.*

— Albert Einstein

**M**aybe you think UX is a high-tech term that applies only to folks who work with computers. And prior to picking up this book, you had no reason to understand anything about UX. Or maybe you develop code for a website and want to learn how to more effectively work with folks in UX. Regardless, it is safe to bet that UX has impacted your life in numerous ways, quite possibly every day or even every hour. If you've ever browsed a website, purchased a product online, checked the weather via an app on a smartphone, used an electronic kiosk at an airport to print a ticket, or interacted with an interface on your television to watch a movie, you have touched on the world of UX. There is a UX that surrounds many types of products, from home appliances such as the interface on microwave ovens to the dashboard of your car. Empowering so many of today's everyday products and digital experiences is the art and science of UX: making our interactions and transactions seamless, effective, and oftentimes invisible for people who use them.

UX is known by several other names, such as UXD (user experience design), user-centered design, human-computer interaction (HCI), and experience design. Although there are subtle differences in these expressions, regardless of what you call it, UX plays a critical role in making our physical and digital lives frictionless and enjoyable. When good UX practices are not deployed, the result is interactions that are frustrating, confusing, ineffective, or just plain useless or ugly. If you have ever used a website and walked away from the experience so frustrated that you wanted to throw your monitor out a window, you know what it means to encounter bad UX design.

Perhaps you are thinking of launching your own website, designing a blog, or maybe you just want to better understand the basic design considerations of the world of digital media. Maybe you have a website but it is not accomplishing your intended goals. Or you have to ramp up quickly on UX so that you can work with a UX professional. Regardless of your starting point, taking a look at UX will help you think differently about the digital phenomenon that is changing our world. This chapter helps you get started on the UX journey.

## What Is UX, Really?

UX, simply put, stands for user experience. You may be asking, “Why not UE?” But in the world of user interaction, *X* takes precedence over the letter *E*. *User experience* is the design practice that focuses on creating experiences — typically digital experiences like websites, for example — that are easy to use and satisfying for users. It focuses on a design practice that puts the user at the center of all considerations, so that the eventual experience provides interactions that are intuitive, helpful, and even enjoyable.

Although user experience can apply to many different types of products and designs, the scope of this work is to focus primarily on digital interfaces. In this context, user experience design is changing all parts of our world, including:

- ✔ **Websites:** Content sites, social media, and e-commerce
- ✔ **Mobile apps:** Smartphone applications
- ✔ **Tablet experiences:** Apps for tablets
- ✔ **Kiosks:** Seen in airports, shopping malls, and so forth
- ✔ **Software:** Standard software applications such as spreadsheets and word processing
- ✔ **Product Interfaces:** GPS systems, interfaces in automobiles to control audio and climate, digital interfaces to common household appliances such as TVs, and microwaves

From a business standpoint, UX best practices help to define how your brand or business will be experienced by customers through digital media.

Good UX can ensure that customers use and actually enjoy the experiences you design. If you’ve ever used a website, software application, or product interface that confused you, you’ve probably experienced a design process that did not leverage UX best practices. In addition, UX can be a key component in establishing customer loyalty and goodwill.



## The Promise of Good UX Design

Good UX design has three fundamental measurements, and they are widely known throughout the UX digital design industry. Any UX design should embody all the following components:

- ✔ **Useful:** The solution provides content, features, or functions that meet common user needs; in short, the experience must be useful in all aspects. As an example, an e-commerce website could include the capability to see if a specific product is in stock or not — a simply useful feature.
- ✔ **Usable:** The solution provides functionality that is easy to use and intuitive, for which basic functions do not require much active concentration to accomplish. Given the e-commerce example just used, this could mean that the process to purchase a product is simple and quick.
- ✔ **Desirable:** Good UX designs enable experiences that are desirable, or even delightful. So not only does the solution provide useful features that are easy to use, but it also does so in a way that engages the user — often through great visual design, content, and copy. To continue with the e-commerce example, the capability to purchase a product online should be so compelling and enjoyable that users are likely to come back again sometime soon or even share the experience with others within their friends and family.



If the user experience is not all these things — useful, usable, and desirable — it is very possible the shopper will find other ways to purchase your product or will purchase a similar product from another source. For example, if a user gets frustrated because your website makes her do all sorts of things she does not or cannot understand, she will quite likely jump to a competitor's website to purchase a similar product. And if you are really unfortunate, she might post her experience in social media, such as on Yelp.com, Twitter, or Facebook, adding further insult to injury and informing others to not use your experience!

## UX Components

UX design is a particularly multidisciplinary practice that integrates a number of components. The following sections highlight these components to help you better understand what makes up UX. In later chapters, you find out more about each of these areas.

## Information architecture

*Information architecture* is one of the most fundamental components to good UX design and refers to breaking down a solution, website, or screen into the most basic contents, including these:

- ✓ **Navigation:** How a user navigates on a site
- ✓ **Content organization:** How information is organized, into which modules or “containers” it is placed, and where the modules go
- ✓ **Visual priority of page elements:** Where things fall or reside on the screen
- ✓ **Interaction design:** What the interaction model is (defined later)

Information architecture is most often brought to life during the design process through a *wireframe*: a black-and-white sketch of a web page or an application screen, much like an architectural blueprint that provides a basic illustration of a house under construction. Wireframes and information architecture also typically include technology and functional requirements, which help to define how the experience will change (or not) when a user interacts with it.

## Content strategy

*Content strategy* determines how, why, where, and when content will go into an experience. Content refers to any type of information that is recorded (video, images, copy, text, information). The content for the experience is another of the basic components to defining the user’s overall experience. Content strategy is similar to the overall editorial strategy for the experience, outlining the objectives and defining characteristics of all the content, whether that is written content or functionality. All content within an experience should have a purpose and must be meaningful in helping a user achieve a task. Digital content must be written for “scanability,” understanding that most users digest written content on a screen quickly, and oftentimes without reading the full page.

## Interaction design

*Interaction design* defines the rules for how a user interacts with an experience: what happens when users navigate, choose buttons, and follow links, for instance. Interaction design helps to define the journey a user goes through to accomplish a task. Say a user wants to interact with online support on a website. What does the user do before, during, and after that

experience? What types of interaction should the website include so that all the user's needs are met? The area of interaction design is growing as the types of interactions with digital products increases. For example, most smartphones allow for touchscreen interactions, providing new models of interaction design that include touch, swipe, and pinch.

## Usability

*Usability* refers to how well the experience performs against users' interactions with it. For example, if Sheila wants to check on her prescription using a digital kiosk in her local pharmacy, can she quickly find the status of whether the pharmacist has filled it? Is the kiosk useful to her, or is it just an oversized gizmo unnecessarily taking up store real estate? Is the experience clear and intuitive to users, or does it require active concentration to complete basic functions or needs? Poor usability is an experience killer in today's world of digital media. And an experience killer can mean a death in the relationship between you and your user.



You should know your users — those who interact with your product, service, brand, company, or all of the above via a digital interface — as well as you know your best friends (or even better). This means you need to get into their minds and understand how they think, act, look, and behave. This book explores how you begin to understand your users, generally through user interviews, usability testing, and other techniques that are explored later in the book. You also have to stay on top of your users' needs. Just as with friendships, user needs and behaviors change. The better you know your users, the more likely the experience you build will resonate with them, which translates into success for your business.

## Visual design

The visual aspects to any user's experience are the most visible components of the solution. *Visual design* not only helps to ensure a solution is aesthetically pleasing, but it also helps ensure that the solution follows brand consistency. In addition, though, visual design helps a user digest all the content on any screen, so it's a key contributor to the usability of an experience.

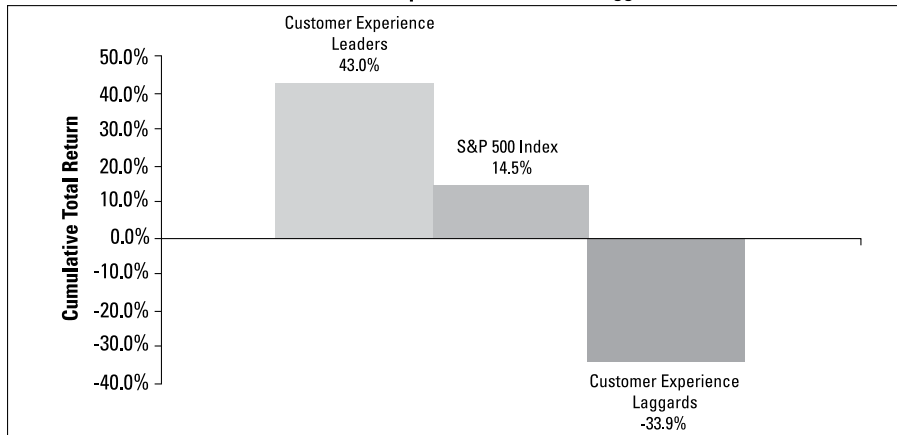


Of course anyone who pays a professional to build an interface wants it to look good. But sometimes, this becomes the main priority — color and imagery take the front seat to all other design decisions. Although visual design is the final icing on top of an effective UX, it's imperative that the other aspects of UX are also represented in any final solution. A beautiful website that contains difficult or unintuitive navigation will impress no one and may ultimately compromise a business's goals.

## UX Is a Big Deal

Simply put, good user experience is good business. Many companies — as big as GE and as small as your local web design shop — are now focusing on the discipline of UX. It's just as important for Tom's Tavern in Eliva, Wisconsin, to embody good usability so customers can easily order food for takeout as it is for a Fortune 100 company to have a robust user experience to sell products online. Apple, for example, is known for simplicity in the UX of its products and software. Just how important is UX to the business bottom line? As shown in Figure 1-1, companies that provide an outstanding customer experience outperform in the S&P.

**Customer Experience Leaders Outperform the Market**  
6-Year Stock Performance of Customer Experience Leaders vs. Laggards vs. S&P 500 (2007-2012)



**Figure 1-1:**  
Customer experience leaders outperform the market.

Here are some areas in which good UX can have a significant business impact:

- ✔ **Customer satisfaction and loyalty:** The better the experience with a product or service, the more likely customers are to continue to use it, and to recommend it. The quality of the experience is becoming an increasing factor in overall customer loyalty. If you use online banking and recently switched banks, it's easy to compare which bank has better online banking services, more useful tools and features, and is easier to use. Most consumers feel more loyal to the bank that offers a better user experience.
- ✔ **Revenue:** Clarity and consistency in UX will help ensure shoppers can get through the online purchase process quickly and efficiently. For big box retailers like Walmart, Target, and Amazon, clarity in the UX of the shopping and checkout process can mean the difference in millions of dollars in sales on any given shopping day.

- ✔ **Traffic:** The better the UX on a website, the more likely users will spend more time on the site and are more likely to return at a later date. Increased traffic and dwell time have a direct correlation to rankings in search engines like Google, and the higher the rankings, the more additional traffic that will visit the site. In short, better experiences help deliver more customers.
- ✔ **Brand expression:** and finally, the better the UX, the better the impression of the brand overall. A famous designer, Clement Mok, once was quoted as saying, “the Experience is the Brand.” In his words, the user experience is an active expression of the brand: a bad experience leads to poor brand perception. A good user experience leads to positive brand impressions and higher longer-term brand value.

## *How UX and Usability Work Together*

UX and usability are often confused. Certainly, there is a close relationship between the two, but these two concepts are fundamentally different. In short, UX is a broader design practice that ensures the usability of a solution, but UX is focused on broader objectives, such as usefulness and overall engagement. Usability is an output of the UX, and within UX seeks to test the performance of the solution. The following sections help to clarify how UX differs from usability.

### *The basics of usability*

Usability is an area of research and testing that primarily ensures that any digital solution works, and is easy to use and intuitive. It also tests to make sure that a user can accomplish the goals embodied by the digital solution. For example, a local car dealership may want a website so that a user can locate the shop, identify which cars are currently in stock, schedule service for an existing car purchase, or call the shop to discuss a new car. The usability of a solution can be tested and explored in many ways, and several of those methods are explained in Chapter 12. Consider usability testing to be a primary method of answering the question, “How easy is a solution to use?” Following are some examples of common problems that usability testing can identify in a solution:

- ✔ **Navigation:** How does a solution work, where does a user click to accomplish key tasks, and is the website or application structured to make sense to a user?
- ✔ **Content:** Is the content clear, and is it the right level of content at the right time?

- ✓ **Dead ends:** Are there navigational pathways that don't lead to the completion of a user's task; dead links; nonworking buttons; or links that take users to features they did not expect?
- ✓ **Cognitive overload:** Are you asking the user to digest too much information or complete too many functions or fields, or have you designed a user flow that is too complicated?



The most important measurements for usability are clarity, consistency, and ease of use. Thus, if you build an experience that is clear, concise, and easy to use, then chances are your solution will be effective and you will please your users.

## *Comparing UX to usability*

UX, on the other hand, has a broader set of focus areas beyond just usability. If usability aims to answer the question, “How easy is a solution to use?” the world of UX design also aims to answer the questions, “How useful was the solution?” and “How enjoyable was the solution to use?”

Making a solution easy to use is one of the key objectives behind user experience design, but UX also focuses on making sure a solution contains content, features, and functions that are most useful to a user (not simply features that work well). UX also focuses on how satisfying and engaging a solution is, which is determined by factors other than how simple it is to use. Factors like visual appeal, the tone of written content, and how the website or system responds are all key components to determining how engaging and desirable the final solution will be.

## *Necessary UX Inputs*

One of the goals of UX is to make complex interactions and transactions easy and enjoyable to accomplish. That said, it may not surprise you that many considerations go into designing the experience to ensure that it feels seamless. The building blocks of the UX design process focus on a number of things: business goals, target users, enabling technologies, and content, among others. All these topics become strategic inputs to the UX design process.

Strategic inputs include the following: business objectives, competitive landscape and technical architecture, design, and content input. You should consider all these areas when building a user experience, as each impacts the overall experience. The relationship between each input and user experience is examined in the following sections.