

UX DESIGN PROBLEM SOLVING TACTICS

1. Misconceptions about what you do

One of the most common challenges you'll face as a UX designer is a lack of understanding about what you do.

The multidisciplinary nature of UX is often underestimated; for many people, the term user experience design is synonymous with just "making things look good." At the same time, you might find that the business value of UX is overlooked. While you and your UX friends know there's more to it than sketching wireframes, if key stakeholders don't fully understand what you're there to do, it can become problematic.

How so?

UX design is a highly collaborative role, requiring buy-in from pretty much everyone in the business. You need to meet with company executives to understand their vision, and you may rely on the customer service team for valuable user insights. If it's unclear as to what you do and why it's important, it can be difficult to engage the right people.

Imagine a scenario where you're brought on board to design an app. The company already knows who their users are and what they want; all you need to do is take care of the design. However, during the research phase, you uncover new insights about the user. You now need to take the project in a completely different direction — and you need to convince the CEO and other stakeholders that it's absolutely necessary. If they were simply expecting you to whip up some prototypes, they may not respond well to this revelation.

The solution

As a UX designer, it's important to set expectations very early on. Start each new project with a stakeholder kick-off, explaining what you'll be doing and why. As you move through the project, provide regular updates and opportunities for your colleagues to ask questions.

Most importantly, resist the urge to guard your work. Invite others to learn about what you do — be it through an informal chat at your desk or a lunchtime workshop. By fostering an "open door" culture, you can start to dispel misconceptions about your role.

2. Conducting research under time and budget constraints

At least once in your UX career, you'll find yourself short on time and money for conducting user research. Your client or manager might even ask you to skip the research phase altogether.

It's a common conundrum. The decision-makers are convinced they know all there is to know about their customers. With limited resources, it surely makes sense to start designing right away. As a UX designer, however, you know the opposite to be true. User research is crucial for validating or busting these very assumptions and making sure you're solving a real user problem.

In an ideal world, you'd approach the CEO and convince them that user research is worth the time and money. Skipping user research has been known to cost companies millions, after all. But, in reality, it's not always that simple. Their budgets are set and their minds are made up — so what can you do?

The solution

Bypassing the initial user research phase is not an option, so you'll need to find a workaround. Fortunately, this is a path that many UX designers have trodden before, and there are plenty of tried-and-tested methods for conducting quick yet effective research on a budget.

Focus on pooling the resources you've got and streamlining the process as much as possible. If you need to recruit participants for user interviews, for example, put the word out on social media and conduct interviews over the phone rather than in person. Another increasingly popular technique is guerrilla research, which can be used to scale down almost any research method.

When faced with time and budget constraints, it's important to remember that some research is better than none — even if it's not as thorough as you'd like.

3. Deciding which problem to solve

As a UX designer, you are driven by curiosity and a burning desire to solve problems. The more insights you uncover, the more problems you'll identify — and the harder it becomes to settle on just one.

As Jeffrey Humble, Head of Design at CareerFoundry, explains: "One of the biggest challenges of being a UX designer is deciding which problem to solve. Even projects with a well-defined problem statement can be difficult; as you dive into it, you want to solve every single problem that comes up in user and stakeholder interviews. But there's only so much time, and there are only so many problems that are solvable in the scope of one project."

It's inevitable that you'll uncover new pain-points along the way, but you can't change tack every time this occurs. The challenge lies in staying focused, and your problem statement will

help you.

The solution

In the words of Don Norman, a brilliant solution to the wrong problem can be worse than no solution at all. Good designers never start by trying to solve the problem given to them: they start by trying to understand what the real issues are.

Right at the start of any UX project, take the time to define your problem statement. A good problem statement focuses on the user and their needs (avoid using “we” when framing your problem), and addresses just one or two of those needs. Setting a manageable problem statement will help keep your wandering eye in check when you discover shiny new problems along the way.

If you do find yourself distracted, your problem statement is there to keep you on track. Stick it on the wall above your desk and refer back to it whenever you need to regain focus.

4. Bridging the gap between design and development

Designers and developers have very different yet equally important roles to play in the product development process. It’s often said that without development, design is useless, and without design, development is unusable. Collaboration between the two is paramount, but it sometimes feels like you’re speaking different languages.

One area that can be especially challenging is the design to development handoff. As a UX designer, your approach to solving problems is different to that of your developer colleagues. While you’re thinking about the user and the journey they will take through the product, the developers are concerned with what’s technically feasible.

When designers and developers aren’t aligned, both the process and the product suffer. Lack of communication and knowledge gaps tend to be the main culprits, resulting in excessive (and redundant) feedback loops, different interpretations of the same objectives, and unexpected quality assurance issues.

The solution

The best way to avoid discord between design and development is to communicate early and often. Involve the developers as soon as possible; this way, they’ll be able to identify any potential issues long before the handoff.

Knowledge sharing is also key; while you don’t necessarily need to learn how to code, it’s worth taking the time to understand how the developers work and the challenges they face. Tools like Zeplin, InVision, and Avocode have also been designed to ease the handoff process.

5. Navigating the ever-changing landscape of UX job titles

Another challenge that UX designers grapple with is the seemingly never-ending list of UX job titles.

User experience design is such a broad field; over time, the UX designer role has branched off into many different areas of specialization. Companies are increasingly hiring specialists to focus on certain aspects of UX — such as information architects, UX researchers, UX writers, and usability analysts.

Even when considering the general UX designer job title, there are some potentially confusing new terms to contend with — like the increasingly popular full-stack designer.

Positioning yourself within the industry can, therefore, be tricky. First, there's the question of whether to specialize or generalize, but this isn't something you need to decide right away. Then there's the challenge of inconsistent labels, titles, and terminology surrounding the UX job market.

The solution

Whether you're deciding on your next career move or trying to define your role within your current company, it's important to stay informed. Browse job sites like Indeed for an idea of the kinds of UX roles that companies are currently hiring for. If you search for user experience designer roles in the US, for example, you'll also see positions such as user experience researcher, UI/UX designer and developer, product owner, and brand designer.

As you research, you'll start to get a feel for the skills and responsibilities associated with different job titles. This will help you when it comes to marketing yourself as a UX professional and building your personal brand.

So there you have it: Five common UX challenges and how to overcome them. Now you're aware of these hurdles, you'll be able to identify them as soon as they arise — and take appropriate action! You can learn more about the specifics of working in UX in this day-in-the-life account.