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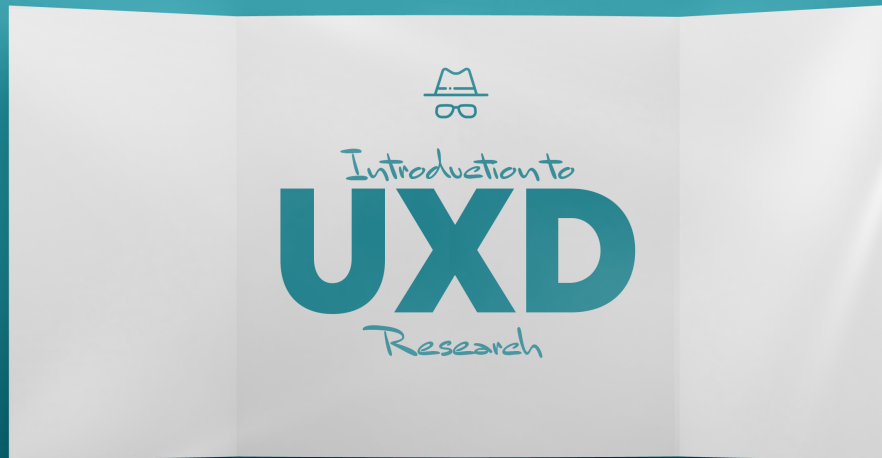
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Intro to UX Research

Posted 3 days ago by Ben Ralph

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–Week 1, part 3–

See Part 1 (Introduction to UXD), Part 2 (Agile & L
Contents.

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"In design, you're solving for user needs and business goals. In research, you're
solving for a lack of information." — Erika Hall

UX Research isn't as scary or intimidating as it may sound at first — we're not writing a
PhD or discovering a cure for cancer! UX Research is about being inquisitive, asking
questions and then following a systematic process to find answers. The stakes are
much lower than with 'pure scientific research' and so too the amount of scientific
rigour expected.

Instead of being a scientist, be a detective.

Detectives need to be thorough, accurate and have evidence to back their claims. They solve their cases not in the lab, but in the field — talking to people, asking questions, understanding motivations and looking for behavioural clues. In UX you won't catch a killer but you might design a killer banking app!?

The process you follow and techniques you use to find your answers depends on what you want to know. Start with your sprint questions.

"Instead of being a scientist, be a detective."

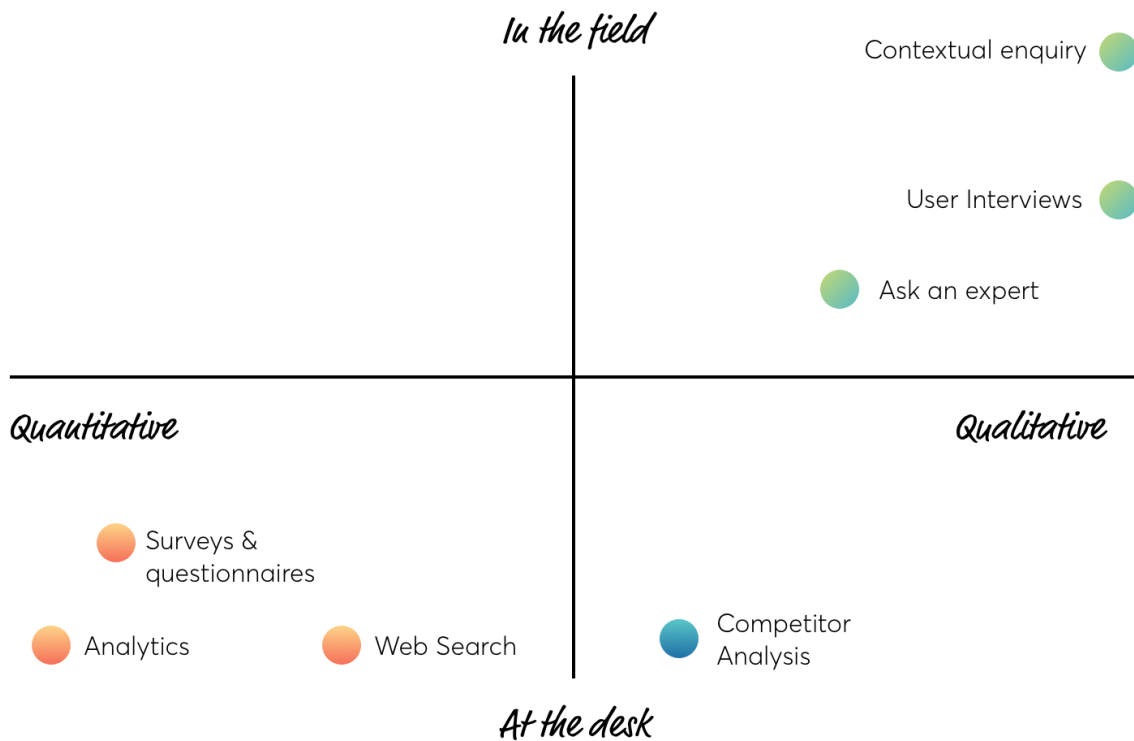### Define the research problem clearly

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A large problem with UX Research is knowing whe[...] problem statement clearly will help with the issue [...]

Try to rewrite your sprint questions using a verb such as describe, evaluate or identify. Avoid using more open-ended worlds like understand or explore. It is much easier to know when you have finished describing something than when you have finished exploring it.

"A large problem with UX Research is knowing when to stop."

In the field

Contextual enquiry ●

User Interviews ●

● Ask an expert

Quantitative   **Qualitative**

● Surveys &
  questionnaires

● Analytics   ● Web Search   ● Competitor
                                          Analysis

At the desk

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Selecting the right techniques

Now that you know what you want to know, it is time to go and find the answers. Below is a list of common UX research techniques and resources to get you started.

1. Contextual Enquiry

Contextual Enquiry is a structured approach for interviewing and observing users while they use your product (or a stand-in for your product) in the context of their everyday life. Interviewing a user about buying health insurance in a quiet meeting room is very different from watching a user trying to navigate your many pop-ups and terms of service screens while they are at home holding a screaming child. This is by far the most valuable type of UX research because it gives you the best approximation of how real users will encounter and use your product in the real world.

Interviewing Users – Rosenfeld Media

Interviewing is a foundational user research tool that people assume they already possess.

2. User Interviews

Although not as effective as a contextual enquiry, there is still a place for User Interviews. A User Interview is not the same as a focus group and should be conducted one-on-one to avoid more dominant members of a group crowding out everyone else.

Interviewing Users

Interviewing is a foundational user research tool that people assume they already possess.

Focus Groups in UX Research: Article by Jakob Nielsen

A paper by Jakob Nielsen about the purpose and to understand users and guide the...

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Surveys & Questionnaires

When you're not sure where to start, try a survey or questionnaire. They are quick, relatively inexpensive and can give you an idea of where you should target your more in-depth qualitative research. They won't give you the full picture but can be a fantastic diagnostic tool.

"When you're not sure where to start, try a survey or questionnaire."

7 aspects of successful usability questionnaires

This week in HCI we've been thinking about questionnaires. They can be an important usability tool, although there are…

Better User Research Through Surveys – UX Mastery

Online surveys are commonly used by marketers, product managers, strategists and others to gather feedback. You've…

Strengths and Weaknesses of Quantitative and Qualitative Research

Qualitative research studies can provide you with details about human behavior, emotion, and personality…

4. Competitor analysis

When deciding who your competitors are, think broadly. Ask yourself 'what user problems does my product solve?' and 'what othe that problem?'

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The answers aren't always obvious.

If you own a shop that sells milkshakes, the problem you might be solving is (a) 'quenching a thirst', but equally, you might be solving the problem of (b) 'where can two friends who don't drink coffee can go to catch up'.

In Option A your competitors are coffee shops, service stations, vending machines and any business that sells milky drinks, but in Option B your competitors are gyms, restaurants, parks and all other places two friends might go to have a chat.

If you were in the business of selling DVDs a decade ago, your competitors weren't only other DVD rental shops, they were Netflix, pay TV and YouTube. Users weren't buying DVDs somewhere else?—?they were choosing to consume content differently.

Sometimes the best inspiration comes from businesses in other industries that solve similar user problems.

"Ask yourself 'what user problems does my product solve?'"

Competitive Analysis: Understanding the Market Context

While user-centered design focuses on user needs/tasks, and information architecture focuses on content, these two...

Competitive Analysis Example – Adventures in UX

UX, Competitive Analysis

5. Ask an Expert and Stakeholder interviews

While getting out into the field is incredibly import
a business or organisation have daily interactions with users, and so also have
valuable user insights to share.

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The best colleagues to tap on the shoulder are salespeople, customer service, call centre representatives, the technical support team, social media teams and the complaints department.

A Stakeholder Interview Checklist

This is an excerpt from from Kim Goodwin's excellent Designing for the Digital Age. It is quite long, so we've broken...

Stakeholder Interview Template : UX Apprentice
Learn the Basics of UX Design.

Learn the Basics of UX Design.

Better Stakeholder Interviews
Learn the Basics of UX Design.

Remember the childhood game of " Telephone "? One person whispers a message into the ear of their friend, and that…

6. Analytics

If you already have a website and you are looking to update or upgrade, then analytics software (like Google Analytics) can be a source of great user insight.

Beyond Goals: Site Search Analytics from the Bottom Up

Top-down analytics are great for creating measurable goals you can use to benchmark and evaluate the performance of…

UX Metrics for Noobs and Skeptics: An Interview With Richard Dalton

They say, if it moves measure it. I've been finding
to measure UX lately – mainly to…

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How A/B Testing And Analytics Can Make You A Better Designer – Smashing Magazine

Metrics can be a touchy subject in design. When I say things like, "Designers should embrace A/B testing" or "Metrics…

Document your findings
What good is all this research if you have no way of sharing it?
Personas and Journey Maps are just two of the most popular ways to distil your research. Convert those hundreds of sticky notes, multiple hours and countless user insights into a format that is easily shared, quickly understood and look damn good on the walls of your office.

Personas

Introduction to User Personas

From all over the techniques and tools related to design process and User experience, only personas appears as a...

Personas: The Foundation of a Great User Experience

This round of research validates the persona characteristics and fills in any gaps from the first round of research...

Defining And Applying Personas to UX Design

Personas have long been integrated with UX documentation. They help us create fictional users, representative of our...

Imperfect Personas

Personas are great. No seriously, they are the be: think of any...

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Getting the most out of personas

Personas are fictional, archetypal characters that represent the users of a site or product. Personas can be...

Journey Mapping

Tom Wujec
Got a wicked problem? First, tell me how you make toast

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When and How to Create Customer Journey M

Journey maps combine two powerful instruments—storytelling and visualization
—in order to help teams understand and...

Customer Journey Map

Building a customer journey implies the observation of the user experience and
the representation of that experience...

How to Create a Customer Journey Map

Despite best intentions and mountains of data, many organizations continue to
offer lackluster experiences for their...

Task Analysis a UX Designer's Best Friend

Task analysis is a critical part of any design project and one that is all too often skipped in favour of other…

General UX Resources / Books

A Book Apart – Just Enough Research

Good research is about asking more and better questions, and thinking critically about the answers. It's something…

This post was originally published on Ben's Medium profile.

Ben Ralph

UX teacher, writer and designer. Founder of F
Medium and Twitt

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Floating Labels Are Problematic

Adam Silver

After writing Placeholders are Problematic some people suggested the floating label pattern. We are often seduced by novel patterns that save space but this pattern is problematic. Here's why: 1. There is no space for a hint Floating labels start inside the text box leaving no space for an additional hint. 2. They are hard-to-read Floating labels typically have small text,… Read More

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How to Approach Product Management for Bots

Romy Misra

In each entry in this "conversation" series, I talk to a designer/product manager/engineer on a topic. I want to make basic practical skills education transparent and free. Today I'm talking to Veronica Belmont, a product manager at Growbot. Growbot helps you appreciate your colleagues and is specifically for teams which use Slack and Microsoft teams for … Read More

Read more

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Design principle: Organizing information

👤 Anton Nikolov

It is essential for our designs to show well-organized information, so the user can understand easily what is shown. It is a key to providing good UX. A has stood the test of time and proves to be efficient eve The concept of the "Five Hat Racks"... Read More →

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