**slide 1**

Hi everyone

My name is Sarah Kahn, and I’m the User Experience Engineer at Adzerk. I’ve been working on User Experience ever since I got my master’s in information science 4 years ago, and I am here today to tell you why you should care about user experience.

I feel like UX is having sort of a moment right now. You hear a lot of terms thrown around as though they were interchangeable- interaction design, information architecture, look and feel, user experience, usability. It’s a growing field for sure, and a fairly young one, but not actually as young as you might think. We’ll touch on some history in a minute here.

**slide 2**

I’d like to start defining user experience by telling you what it is NOT.

User experience is not whether or not something is pretty.

It is not colors and images.

It is not restricted to just the user interface of a website or application, so it’s not the theme or skin on an application or website.

User Experience, as a whole can encompass all of those things, but it’s actually a much bigger idea.

**slide 3**

Here’s a formal definition:

“User Experience is the way a person feels about using a [product](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Product_(business)), [system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/System) or service.” that’s a summary of a formal definition provided by the usability professional’s association.

In a nutshell, people have an experience when they use something. Whether that something is a physical artifact, a software application, or a website. User experience design is the art and science of making that experience effective and satisfying.

That applies to every aspect of the user’s interaction with your product.

**slide 4**

So it does include visual appeal, ease of workflow, logical organization of content. But it also includes how well the backend technologies are working, how well the platform it’s built on is working, and even other factors that may or may not be beyond your control.

Maybe you’re designing a mobile app, and you’re contending with the fact that your users are all angrily driving minivans. I don’t know why they’re doing this, but let’s just say as a weird example that this is case.

Other aspects of your users experience become your problem as well when those factors are influencing how the users feel about and interact with your product. Maybe you can get your product to play soothing sounds and be done in shades of calming blue or something to make them less angry. But you could use this knowledge to avoid having your app make loud startling noises and flash seizure inducing colors. The noises in another context might be construed as entertaining, but to your angry minivan driving customers, it’s going to get them killed.

**slide 5**

The study of human computer interaction first came about in the late 70s with the advent of the GUI- or, the graphic user interface. Before then, most computer people were computer scientists, programmers, enthusiasts. They were the sorts of people who didn’t mind that computers weren’t easy to use. They used the command line to do what they needed to do. Those people are obviously still around, I’m not saying that they went extinct in the 70s, by the way. I’m one of them, I use VI every day.

**slide 6**

With the GUI, there was a rise in the idea of “PCs” or Personal Computers. That meant anyone could have and use a computer. That began to mean that a computer should be ideally easy enough to use so that anyone \*could\* have and use one. In the early days, UXers were mostly known as Human-Computer Interaction designers, and they worked with enterprise level software on big industrial systems. The field has grown and evolved from there. The goal remains the same- making computers easy to use for humans.

**slide 7**

So, now we know how the field came to be, but I still haven’t shown you why should you care. Why do we care about the user experience?

**slide 8**

Think about any object that you use on a daily basis.

I’m going to pick on my company’s coffee maker for a moment. It has 2 separate on switches, it beeps before it’s done, somewhere between 15-30 minutes after its done (for reasons best known to itself), and basically people have a hard time figuring out how to use it. On more than one occasion there have been 4 or 5 highly educated professionals gathered around this thing trying to figure out if it’s brewing, and that’s just on the carafe side. I’ve never even attempted to boil hot water on the tea side. James seems to have that one figured out, but I think he’s the only one. He’s got some sort of CEO juju.

**slide 10**

How this makes me feel.

**slide 11**

Now, let us contrast that with my 100% stainless steel french press. It has only 2 parts, the carafe and the lever. It’s completely dishwasher safe. You can get it at frieling’s website. I am not at all biased, I am completely objective on this matter.

To operate, pour in hot water and coffee grounds. Let it sit until it smells like coffee, press down the lever. And there was coffee. And it was wonderful.

These two objects are accomplishing the same thing, brewing coffee. They are doing it very differently, and the user (in this case, me) has a different reaction when using each product.

The stakes are pretty high when you’re talking about user experience.

In the very best cases, users will experience satisfaction or even outright happiness through interaction.

The worst case on the other hand, can be frustration, confusion, or even the user making the decision to stop using the object. If they’re unhappy enough, they might tell their friends. If they love it enough, they also might tell their friends.

**slide 12**

Customer loyalty is often inversely proportional to how easy your product is to use. An easy to use product or website results in more money- whether you’re counting in signups, conversions, or impressions. It’s really that simple. If you have any doubts, think about Apple. This is a company that has staked their entire business model on making beautiful, easy to use things.

They might not always have the most features, or even be the best quality on the market. But the Apple product will always be the sleekest and the simplest, and that translates to market share.

**slide 13**

This is all well and good, but how does it apply to my website, you say?

Websites are just like any other artifact that people need to have interactions with. If it’s difficult and unpleasant, they won’t come back. Your website is competing not only with the websites of your direct competitors, but with search engines, news aggregators, social media sites, video sites, photo gallery sites, the procatinator. . . the list goes on and on. In short, you’ve got approximately 6 seconds to prove to your users that your site is easy to use and will help them achieve their end goal with a minimum of resources. Therefore, the time of your users is their most precious resource. Designing a good user experience is proving to your user that you respect that resource.

**slide 14**

A pretty website is not always a usable website.

Consider the following:

[craigslist.com](http://craigslist.com/)

highly usable, ugly as anything. Craigslist has a cult-like following of extremely enthusiastic users. They tried to redesign this site on multiple occasions and the community rose up in outrage. Now, no one will probably ever look at this and say, ‘this craigslist sure is a beautiful website’

But these linked categories are so consistent, and the search is so robust, that it allows an extremely efficient user experience. Users want to find a 2003 VW TDI (well, actually, that’s just me. If you know of one that’s for sale, let me know), and craigslist lets them search quickly and easily.

**slide 15**

Now here’s another example.

<http://tntrailsandbyways.com/>

Not to pick on the Tennessee board of whoever put this little gem together, but this site was featured in a few showcases on prominent web design sites as an example to be admired and emulated, so I think a little constructive criticism is only fair.

This site features pretty graphics, the parallax javascript animations, and I personally find it a bit confusing. I don’t think anyone would dispute that this is a visually attractive website, but if you need to give your users a pictograph on how to use your site before the page loads, you might have a problem.

**slide 16**

Ok, so let’s say I’ve convinced you, and you’re ready to get some UX up in your organization. How should you start?

Just start talking to your users. There are some basic elements of human pyschology that you have going in your favor here.

First, people have opinions, and they love to share them. Particularly people love to tell you how they think you could do your job better.

Second, giving your customers a real voice in your process helps build trust and give a sense that you know what you’re doing and you care how they feel about it.

You don’t have to start out with big usability tests or surveys, just start out with a couple of phone calls and emails.

**slide 17**

For some more concrete tips on getting started, I recommend the book, ‘Rocket Surgery Made Easy’ by Steve Krug. Also check out ‘Don’t make me think’ if you haven’t already, I know that book has been making the rounds for a few years now.

**slide 18**

questions?