**UI/UX Fundamentals**

Many people have heard the term “user experience” but not everyone knows what this means. [User experience (UX)](https://generalassemb.ly/education/user-experience-design-immersive/) is rapidly growing and revolutionizing how people interact with the world around them. UX is why Google is so easy to use and how Facebook knows what article to suggest to you next. It’s why the internet evolved from GeoCities homepages with blinking “Under Construction” signs to the sophisticated interfaces we use every day. User experience is practiced by [UX designers](https://generalassemb.ly/education/user-experience-design-immersive) — but also [product managers](https://generalassemb.ly/education/product-management), product designers, [entrepreneurs](https://generalassemb.ly/business), startups, and forward-thinking organizations.

But what does [UX](https://generalassemb.ly/education/user-experience-design-immersive/) actually mean? Let’s break it down.

For starters, if you have ever purchased a product or benefitted from a service, you are a user. When you interact with a product, service, or company, you are having an experience. Ultimately, most companies want you to have a good experience using their product or services. In order to understand what makes an experience good, we need to define what that means from the perspective of the user.

What makes an experience “good” hinges on whether it was successful at solving a real problem or provided users with actual value. This is the core distinction between art and design: Whereas art can be aesthetically pleasing, [good design](https://generalassemb.ly/education/visual-design) must have utility. Beauty alone isn’t enough. Thus, a good user experience is one that enables the user’s interaction to be effective.

For example, let’s say you wanted to find a restaurant for dinner with friends. You know that several people in the group are vegetarians, so you’d like to find a convenient location where everyone has options. In this situation, you might use a restaurant recommendation platform to narrow down options, identify some potential locations, and share them with friends. The conditions for success in this situation would be an app that enables you to do exactly that. Anything more is considered “delight” and anything less is problematic.

**THE five KEY ELEMENTS OF THE UX DESIGN PROCESS**

There are many important principles within UX design but to simplify things a bit, we’ve broken them down into five main concepts: Empathy, strategy, usability, inclusivity, and validation.

### **Empathy**

Quality UX design puts users’ needs at the forefront of product development. To understand the user and what obstacles they face, UX designers must practice [**empathic design**](https://careerfoundry.com/en/blog/ux-design/what-is-empathy-in-design-thinking/). With empathy, designers are able to put themselves in the user’s shoes and learn about their daily life, what problems they need solved, what expectations they have when interacting with certain products, and what a good experience looks like to them.

### **Strategy**

Designing effective solutions to difficult problems can be a complex process. Therefore, a crucial part of UX design is having a well-defined plan and set of goals before starting any project. Many designers will [**craft a UX strategy**](https://careerfoundry.com/en/blog/ux-design/what-is-ux-strategy/) that outlines a variety of UX objectives including chosen research methods, preferred design and testing systems, and what success looks like for both the user and the business. While an important guideline to follow, a UX strategy is not unchangeable and may be amended as designers move through the design process.

### **Usability**

In a world of rapidly advancing and sometimes confusing technology, consumers often lean towards products that take little brain power to operate. The last thing a user wants is to feel like ordering food delivery on their phone is equivalent to completing a 1000-piece puzzle. A big part of UX design is making products and services that are simple and intuitive to use for people of all ages and abilities. To do this, designers take into account things like behavioral psychology, accessibility, [**affordances**](https://careerfoundry.com/en/blog/ux-design/affordances-ux-design/), and [**mental models**](https://careerfoundry.com/en/blog/ux-design/mental-models-ux-design/) when designing for optimal and effortless usability.

### **Inclusivity**

A common phrase you may hear in the UX industry is “design for all”—meaning that our design efforts should take into account the needs of people of all races, ages, genders, backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, and more. UX designers have the ability to shape the world around them through their designs and the power to solve complex problems that affect a wide range of individuals.

**Note: Exemplary UX design incorporates the experience and needs of under-represented or oppressed groups of people and can even find solutions for their unique problems.**

### **Validation**

However impressive a design may seem, it would mean nothing if not validated by [**user testing**](https://careerfoundry.com/en/blog/ux-design/user-testing-design-thinking/). One of the most crucial aspects of UX design is to test proposed solutions with the people who will actually be using them in real life. User feedback guides and informs the design process and helps ensure that the products being made are ones’ people will happily want to use. Even after products are released, designers are constantly using methods to assess their success and where improvements can be made.

## **Benefits of UX design (and UX designers)**

UX designers are an invaluable addition to a wide range of industries in product development and beyond. So why does UX matter and what do UX designers really accomplish? We’ve narrowed it down to these five major points.

### **Attention to UX design boosts customer acquisition and retention**

A valuable and enjoyable user experience does a lot for attracting and keeping loyal customers. UX design can help a company’s products, mobile apps, and websites operating with minimal friction and ensure they appear modern, trustworthy, and on par with current trends—all things that help bring customers in and keep them engaged.

### **Good UX maximizes revenue**

When a user is satisfied with their experience with a brand, not only will they continue to use it or purchase more, they may also share their positive experience with their peers. Organic engagement and word-of-mouth advertisement can do wonders for a company’s profit margin. UX designers are trained to figure out what user’s want and how to design for higher conversion rates making the potential for increased sales quite high.

### **Great UX designers help keeps development costs in check**

UX designers are trained to find optimal solutions for both the user and the business. Their approach to problem solving and design is carefully planned and backed by evidence from user research. Therefore, with a UX designer on board, many companies can keep development costs low and minimize wasted resources as there is less need for re-design and troubleshooting.

### **UX designers can help increase company productivity**

Sometimes the user a designer is creating for isn’t a customer but rather company employees. Businesses may hire UX designers to help streamline business processes, optimize company policy, or re-design employee software that’s easier and more efficient to use. Smoother workflow often leads to increased employee productivity, motivation, and overall better company function.

### **UX improves users’ quality of life**

UX design has the potential to solve complex problems that plague underserved populations, troubled societies, or people in high stress careers. UX designers have been called upon for improving individuals access to healthcare, education, housing, food, and more. The ability to make a positive, meaningful, and long-lasting impact on people’s lives is a big part of what makes UX design such an attractive career choice.