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What is UX Design? Differences Between UX and UI Design

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What is UX Design? Differences Between UX and UI Design

Though they fall under the same umbrella in web design, user experience (UX) and user interface (UI) are two terms that are frequently used interchangeably despite their different purposes and definitions. For aspiring designers, understanding these distinctions are key in establishing general web development knowledge, honing applicable skills, and breaking into the UX/UI design field.

In this guide, we will discuss UX design at length, exploring the primary differences between UI and UX, and what designers do for organizations around the world.

What Is UX Design?

User experience (UX) refers to the users journey when interacting with a product or service. UX design is the process of creating products or services that provide meaningful experiences for users, involving many different areas of product development including branding, usability, function, and design.

One way to think of UX design is to consider the entire process or journey a user experiences when interacting with a product or service. How is the user introduced to the service or product through advertising, blogs, or something else? What kind of interaction does the user have with the brand? How does the user feel after the interaction? All of these questions and more are key considerations within UX design.

A UX designers primary goal is for each user to have a positive interaction with a product or service. Whether the interaction solves a problem, provides entertainment, or helps the user find critical information, the experience should leave the user feeling fulfilled.

What Is UI Design?

UI design, on the other hand, refers to the actual interfaces with which users engage. The UI design process may include buttons or widgets, text, images, sliders, and other interactive elements. UI designers ensure that every visual element, transition, and animation included within a product or service is setting the stage for a fluid, positive experience.

Key Differences Between UX and UI Design

Since UX and UI designers often work closely together, its common for UX and UI to be confused with one another even though they represent different components of a product or services design. While

there is some overlap between the two roles, there are several key differences to consider.

Look vs. Feel

UX and UI design play related, but different roles in a products development. UI design involves the look of a product namely, the visual components and interactive elements that contribute to a strong user experience. Meanwhile, UX design focuses on the overarching feel of the product or service and the components that will lead to a meaningful, relevant experience for users.

Design vs. Prototyping

UX and UI designers might work on the same product, but they have different duties and goals. UX designers often create wireframes and testable prototypes that form the basis of a website or services user flow, while UI designers finalize products and designs that drive user engagement.

High-Level vs. Details

Another difference between UI and UX designers is the level of detail that goes into their work. UI designers work on individual pages, buttons, and interactions; making sure they are polished and functional. UX designers take a more high-level view of a product or service, ensuring the collective user flow of a site, service, or app is fully realized and consistent.

UX and UI Design Together. How Does it Work?

Though they comprise different responsibilities, UX and UI make up a site or applications entire usability design process. In tandem, these professions are complementary contributors to a positive, intuitive user journey. A site or applications UX elements (e.g., client-facing messaging and feel), are built on top of its UI design (e.g., technical, aesthetic structure). Each professions efforts inform those of its counterpart, benefiting the overall product or service and making a lasting impression on users.

What Does a UX Designer Do?

Specifically, UX designer responsibilities include strategy development, testing, implementation, and analysis of products/services and their overall designs.

Content Strategy

Content strategy focuses on the planning, creation, and execution of content which can include text,

images, and multimedia elements on a page or in an application. Content strategy isnt always the responsibility of a UX designer, but more companies are emphasizing content-driven design to deliver a more effective experience.

Tasks involved with UX content strategy include:

Customer analysis

Content auditing and mapping

Competitor analysis

Testing and Prototyping

Testing and prototyping are important parts of the UX design process. Most designs go through multiple iterations before they are finalized, and these changes are backed up along the way. Knowledge of common research methodologies (such as A/B testing) is also an asset to UX design.

Tasks involved with testing and prototyping include:

A/B testing between button placements, text layouts, or other design elements

Wireframing the basic structure of designs

Prototyping designs to test for function

Coordination and Analysis

Typically, UX designers work with a broader design team to create products and services for an organization. This process involves planning, developing strategy, executing, and analyzing projects after implementation. UX designers spend a lot of time planning for future projects, analyzing existing designs, and tracking the performance of their designs.

Common coordination and analysis tasks include:

Design planning

Analyzing designs and updating as needed

Tracking goals and metrics

Consumer Research

The best UX designs are driven by research, which informs UX designers about their problems and what can be solved by a specific design. UX research can involve questionnaires, surveys, focus groups, product testing, or other research methodologies. The specific research methodologies depend on what a company wants to know about a product or its users.

For example, qualitative data from interviews can show an organization how consumers feel about a product or service, while quantitative data from surveys can show how users view or utilize a new feature or redesign. Developing the right type of research can have a major impact on a products performance. Common consumer research tasks include:

Designing research instruments

Conducting focus groups

Analyzing data from questionnaires and surveys

What Does a UI Designer Do?

UI designers oversee the specifics of a product or services interface. Theyre responsible for choosing fonts, creating visual elements, and making sure individual components or pages are visually appealing and fit a products objectives. UI designers are in charge of the overall style and functionality of a product or services design.

Creating and Maintaining Brand Style

Establishing a defined visual brand style is crucial for most modern businesses and, from a usability standpoint, this is a primary component in the UI design process. UI designers are often tasked with

creating products or entities that are aesthetically consistent with an overarching brand.

Tasks involved with maintaining brand style include:

Creating brand style guides

Maintaining accessible design standards

Implementing a brands style consistently across a product or service

Visual Design

UI designers build and optimize the individual elements of a digital entity, including typography, color, button design, and other fields contributing to a strong interface.

Tasks involved with building visual design include:

Designing buttons and other clickable elements

Coloring sections and elements of a website or service

Choosing appropriate fonts and typesetting

Interactive Design

Many UI designers also develop and implement the interactive elements of a website or service. This process could include animations or other interactive elements. For example, a UI designer might create a website animation that triggers after a user clicks a button.

Examples of interactive design tasks in UI design include:

Creating animations for elements on a page

Developing interactive elements that involve visuals like video or photos

Managing how content moves as the user interacts with it

Responsive Design

Modern products and services need to be accessible across a wide variety of devices, including laptops, desktops, tablets, and smartphones. Responsive design refers to the process of creating content that can be viewed on as many types of devices as possible. This is especially important for web design sites should be viewable and usable on everything from a 27-inch monitor to a 5-inch smartphone screen.

Examples of responsive design tasks include:

Developing flexible website or program layouts

Creating easily resizable vector elements

Managing responsive design style guides

Why Is it Important to Know Both UX and UI?

Due to their complementary roles in web development, UI and UX design skills naturally relate to one another. By having a working knowledge of both concentrations, professionals in either discipline can contribute to a more cohesive, transparent design process that leads to a better, more usable final product. Such versatility is also beneficial for those looking to increase their hiring potential in a variety of design-based roles.

Specifically, UX design skills are in high demand globally. According to the UX Design Institute, 70 percent of managers are increasing the size of their design team in 2021. A strong understanding of both UX and UI design can aid those looking to capitalize on this growing demand.

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Highest level of education

Some High School

High School Diploma or GED

Associate's Degree

Bachelor's Degree

Some graduate coursework

Graduate Degree

How soon do you want to start?

How soon do you want to start?

Immediately

Within 6 months

In 6-12 months

In a year or more

Experience in this field

None

Yes, Less than 2 years

Yes, 2 to 5 years

Yes, more than 5 years

Yes, more than 10 years

Which best describes your goal?

Recent graduate, first job

Change my career path

Advance my career

Grow my business

I'm not sure

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Switch career path

Advance current career

Start/Grow business

Prefer not to say

Other

Launch a new career

Change my career path

Further my career

Become an entrepreneur

Recent graduate, First job

Prefer not to say

Other

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UX and UI Designer Salary Expectations

In terms of salary expectations, UX and UI designers typically earn more than the national median wage. According to CareerOneStop, the median salary in 2020 for a digital designer in the U.S. was an above-average $77,200.

Whats more, future growth in the job market is expected to be strong. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the market for all digital designers is expected to grow by 8 percent by 2029, making the field a promising career path for aspiring designers.

What Skills Are Required for a UX/UI Designer?

Since UX and UI designers oversee the design and implementation process for digital products and services, they must be versed in a variety of applicable skills. Here are several skills that new UX/UI designers will need to build a successful career.

Wireframing/Prototyping

Testing the structure and functionality of applications and services is a critical skill for UX designers. Wireframes act as blueprints for each part of an interface, showcasing how it works not just how it looks. Prototypes allow designers to test functionality for a product or service, and this allows designers to make sure a system works correctly before it goes into production.

User Research

UX designers must understand what users want or expect of a product or service, and the conclusions are reached through extensive user research via mediums like interviews, surveys, questionnaires, and focus groups. Understanding how to build effective research tools can help UX designers make data-driven decisions about the products they design. Some organizations assign these responsibilities to a UX researcher role, but other organizations include UX design and research in the same role.

Visual Design

Most UX/UI designers will use visual design in their daily responsibilities. UI designers use visual design methods to create elements for a website, program, or other entity. Meanwhile, UX designers use design

skills heavily in the creation of functional prototypes. And, as design and usability go hand in hand, having visual design knowledge is important for anyone wanting to get started in UX/UI.

Copywriting

Most products or services rely on some form of copy. Quality copywriting is a key component of successful user interactions, making it important for both UX and UI designers.

Strong copy is an important part of both visual design and a products ease of use. The copys tone of voice is part of a brands visual identity, making it an integral part of the design process.

Information Architecture

Information architecture (IA) is the practice of organizing and structuring content on websites, web and mobile apps, and other pieces of software. Information architecture focuses on organizing, labeling, and structuring content in a way thats effective. The goal is to help users understand where they are, what theyve found, and what to expect from the service theyre using. Understanding IA best practices is an important tool for any UX/UI designer.

How Can I Become a UX/UI Designer?

There are generally three educational paths in UX/UI design: bootcamps, traditional degrees, and self-guided options.

UX/UI Bootcamps

Bootcamps are great for anyone looking to get started quickly with a UX/UI design career; however, getting started can be difficult without hands-on experience. Attending a UX/UI bootcamp can provide you with hands-on training in design, prototyping, and more, while helping you build a professional portfolio demonstrating your abilities. This is a great option for anyone looking to learn new skills and make a career change, even if youre already working full-time.

Whats more, bootcamp learners are being held in increasingly high demand. According to HackerRanks 2020 developer skills index, one in three hiring managers has hired a bootcamp participant. Hiring managers also believe that bootcamp learners are up to the task 72% of hiring managers felt like individuals who have completed bootcamp were equally or better equipped for the job at hand.

Traditional Degrees

Traditional degrees are another great way to learn UX/UI design skills. Completing a traditional degree program typically requires two to four years of full-time study (or longer if youre studying part-time). Degrees offer the chance to learn the theory behind UX/UI, while also sampling a variety of other topics the learner may be interested in .

Self-Guided Options

There are also numerous self-guided resources that teach UX/UI design basics including online courses, educational apps, or videos. These options are a great pathway for those wishing to learn in a less structured, more autonomous manner.

For more information on UX/UI educational pathways, check out our comprehensive guide on how to become a UX designer.

Resources for Learning About UX Design

Do you want to learn more about UX design and becoming a UX designer? Here are some valuable resources that provide more information.

UX Design Portfolio: Best Practices

This resource from UX Planet discusses what makes up a good UX/UI design portfolio. This article covers how to set up a portfolio, what should go in a UX design portfolio, how to display information, and how to promote your work. These skills are crucial for anyone wanting to get started in UX/UI design.

Inclusive Design Principles

Accessibility and inclusivity are important considerations for anyone interested in UX/UI design. This website lays out some people-first design concepts that can help make your designs accessible to a much wider range of users.

User Experience Basics

This page from Usability.gov showcases some of the basics involved with user experience and how to create meaningful experiences through design. The page also links out to a variety of resources discussing interaction design, UI design, and accessibility in design. Understanding some of these

fundamentalUX concepts can help you develop your skills more quickly.

Presenting Information Architecture

This resource from the Web Style Guide discusses the basics of information architecture and wireframing the basic design of a website. Weve discussed wireframing, planning, and information architecture extensively throughout this article, and this resource discusses the basic process of utilizing these principles on a project.

Frequently Asked Questions About UX design

What does UX design mean?

UX design stands for user experience design. UX design is the process of designing products that are easy and fun to use. UX designers take a high-level view of a users journey throughout their time spent with a product or service and focus on making sure each user finds value from their interactions with a brand, product, or service.

What does UI design mean?

UI stands for user interface, and UI design refers to the creation and design of the elements that a user will interact with when using a website or service. This could include buttons, sliders, graphics, or other interactive elements. UI designers work on specific pages and elements within a product or service.

Is UX design the same as UI design?

UX and UI design are related but not exactly the same. UX design involves managing the user journey as they interact with a product or service, while UI design focuses on the actual construction of that product or services interface. UI design is usually considered part of the UX design process.

Is UX design a good career?

According to the BLS, the digital design industry, which includes UX design, is expected to grow by 11% by 2029. Salary expectations are significant the median pay for a digital designer in 2020 was $77,200, which is higher than the median pay for the average worker in the United States. These factors make UX design a promising career path.
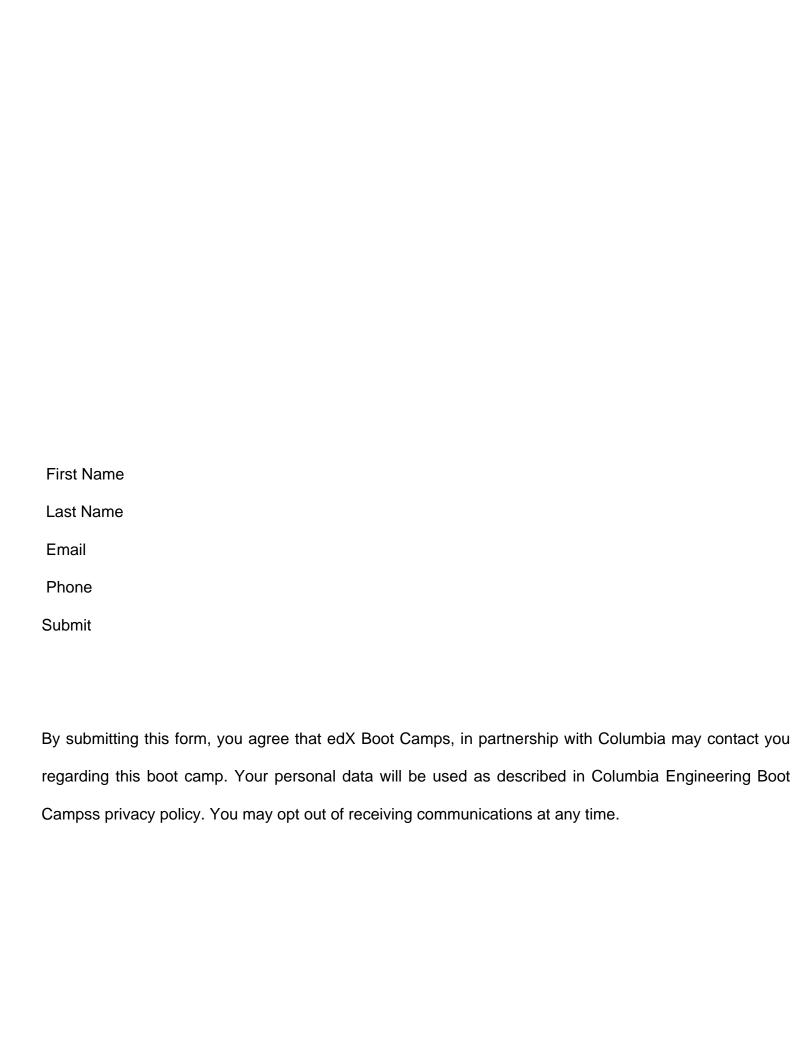
Is UX/UI design hard to learn?

Though UX/UI design generally involves prerequisite skill-building in applicable fields, anyone can learn it with the right preparation. Educational pathways like UX design bootcamps, for instance, allow aspiring designers of all skill levels to learn in a practical, flexible setting aimed at simulating real-world UX experience.

Can I get a UX/UI job with no experience?

There are many ways to get started with a career in UX/UI design. Some professionals start through freelance work, building a portfolio that can be shown to potential employers. Others might try working with existing UX/UI design teams at their current organization to build the skills to get started. Having hands-on experience and examples of your work can certainly help you stand out in the job market.

Should I focus on UI design or UX design?

Having an understanding of both UI and UX design is important for anyone wanting to work in the field. However, your specialization depends on your skill set and the kind of work you want to do. Design skills are important for both fields, but UI design is very design-focused and a great option for artistic individuals. UX design is great for anyone who wants to solve problems and implement creative solutions.

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Highest level of education

Highest level of education

Some High School

High School Diploma or GED

Associate's Degree

Bachelor's Degree

Some graduate coursework

Graduate Degree

How soon do you want to start?

How soon do you want to start?

Immediately

Within 6 months

In 6-12 months

In a year or more

Experience in this field

None

Yes, Less than 2 years

Yes, 2 to 5 years

Yes, more than 5 years

Yes, more than 10 years

Which best describes your goal?

Recent graduate, first job

Change my career path

Advance my career

Grow my business

I'm not sure

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South Dakota

Tennessee

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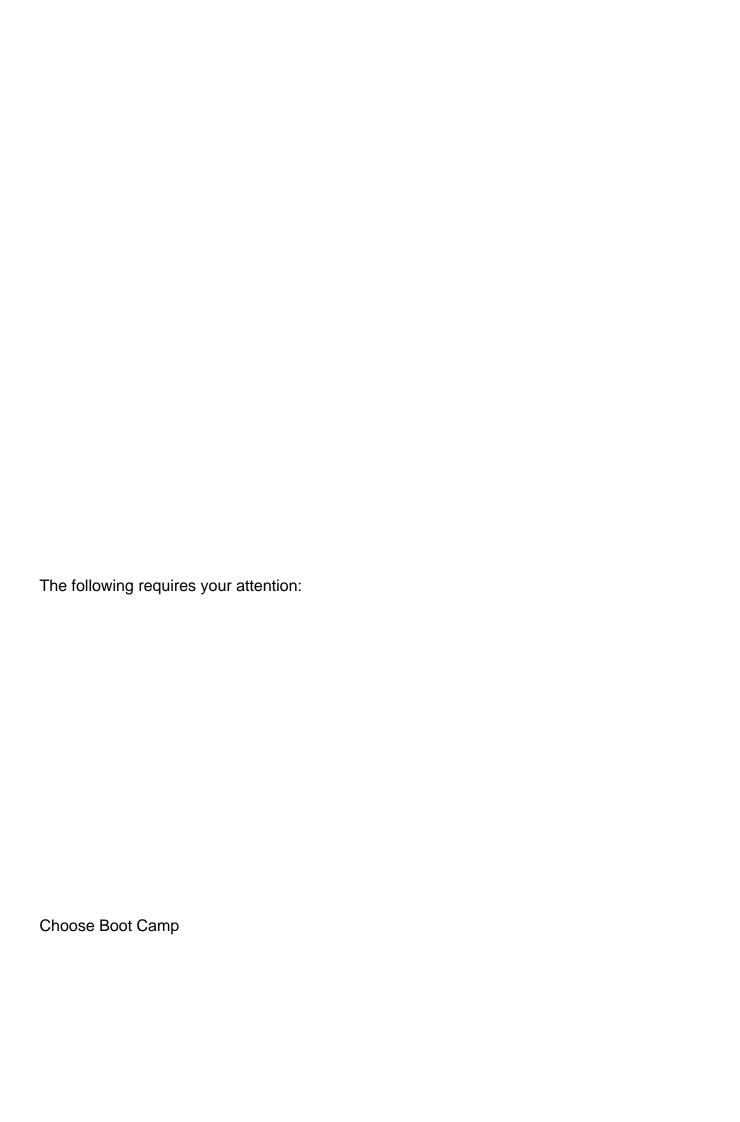Prince Edward Island

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Prefer not to say

Other

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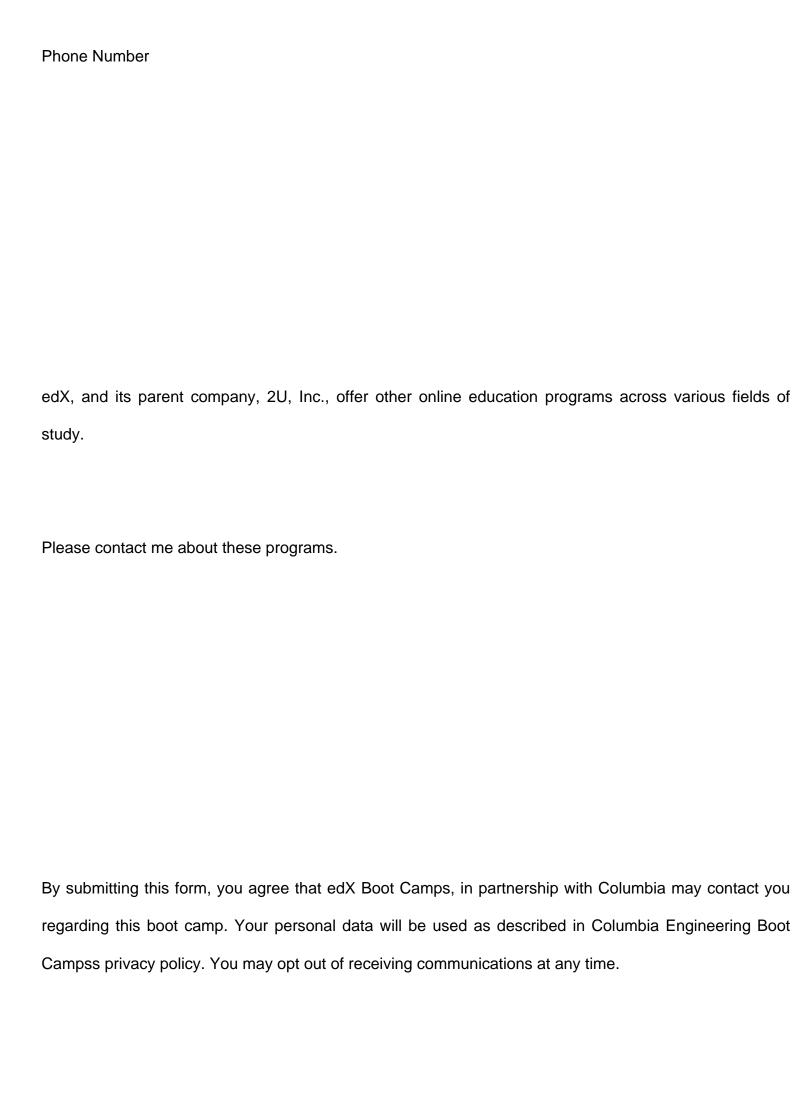Choose Start Date

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Pennsylvania

Rhode Island

South Carolina

South Dakota

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