11 Usability Rules
for IT Developers

UX
{for: IT}

outsystems®

What's Usability?

Building a great application is a task that involves many different concepts which are a bit overwhelming to grasp all at once. One concept that is sometimes misunderstood is User Experience, or UX. Put simply, the main goal of UX is to make sure users have a delightful experience while using a product.

UX

Usability

Visual Design

Context
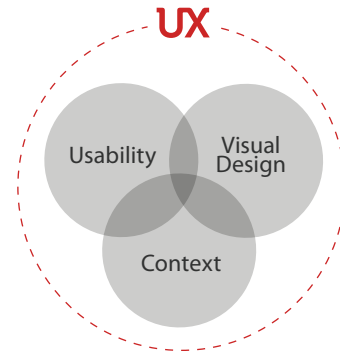
A key component of good UX is usability. While UX is concerned with the generic goal of delighting the user, usability is focused on making sure users can complete their tasks as efficiently as possible. This is far from the traditional IT goals of making an application more reliable and faster – two other characteristics of a great application.

So, why is usability so important today?

- Increased user adoption: Usable apps are faster and more gratifying to learn because they help users instead of getting in the way.

- Decreased user effort: Usable apps require less brain power to use, allowing users to focus their processing resources on business.

- Increased user speed: Usable apps help users perform their common tasks faster, while at the same time decreasing the number of mistakes they make.

In Search of The Great App

Understanding that a shiny new enterprise web application is not much use if employees refuse to adopt it, we are happy to share what we have learned regarding usability. Our emphasis is on helping engineers and developers deliver Great Apps from the moment they start developing new solutions for their businesses.

To do that, there are some usability principles all developers need to know in order to understand what makes an app great!

This book is about the **11 Usability Rules for IT Developers** that we have identified and integrated into the OutSystems® Platform.

They all come down to understanding **USABILITY**.

USABILITY *noun* /ˌjuːzəˈbɪlɪti/

The ease of use and learnability of a human-made object. The object of use can be a software application, website, book, tool, machine, process, or anything a human interacts with.

#1

{ Know Your Users }

A great application helps users succeed in the easiest and fastest way possible.

There are 3 things a developer needs to know about users:

- How users speak: The application needs to speak the same language and use the same terms as its users.

- What motivates usage: The application needs to keep users motivated and help them achieve their goals.

- Common tasks: The application needs to excel in helping users complete repetitive tasks quickly and easily.

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<!--

Using tech lingo is a common mistake made by developers. This can lead
to misunderstandings and user errors. "Transaction" and "Wallpaper"
are examples of words that have different meanings for developers or
for someone working in the stock market…

-->
```
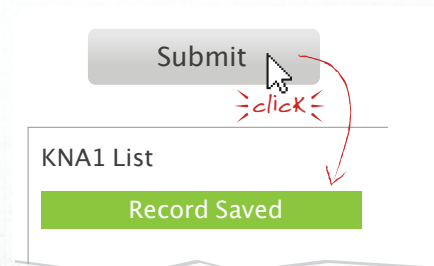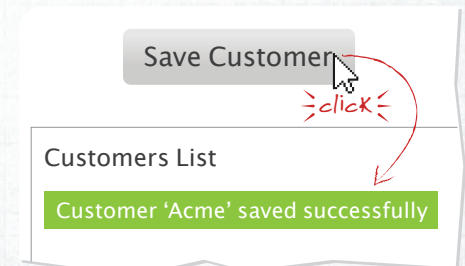
#2

{ Write for Clarity }

Text is a big part of your user interface, and you need to lay it out for usability. The words you use must clearly communicate what the user is looking at, and what will happen when there's interaction. This applies to all written elements, including section and page titles, labels, links, buttons, and feedback messages. Well crafted text eliminates surprises and uncertainty from the application, and is a mandatory step for usability.

Not so good…   Better

| Submit | | Save Customer |

:click: :click:

KNA1 List   Customers List

Record Saved   **Customer 'Acme' saved successfully**

KNA1 is the Customer Master Table in SAP

#3

{ Design with Data }

Data is the main asset of an enterprise application. Displaying it in the most effective way without needless distractions is a mandatory step to building a great app.

Beware that in most situations the best way to show information only surfaces when you experiment with real user data. Designing user experiences with "lorem ipsum" quotes and images of cats will surely lead to poor results.

Name:	Customer1
Email:	sampleEmail
Phone:	12345678
Address:	Somewhere

By using real user data, it becomes obvious that the labels are clutter

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#4

{ Group Related Info }

Grouping related data makes it easier for users to find what they need. Grouping is particularly effective when used with emphasis. Conversely, unrelated items should be separated. The best way to make things stand apart is to put empty space between them. Avoid using lines or boxes for grouping.

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{ Emphasize What Matters }

Everything you place on screen demands your user's attention, so decide what the user must see first. This is particularly important because users don't read pages, they scan through them. Be sure to direct them to the things that matter. To call user's attention you can use things like position, size, color, images, links, or buttons.

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Emphasizing makes it easier to find what matters. Note that what's relevant depends on the user: for a mechanic, the license plate is the key information for a car. But for the insurance agent, it's the policy number.

▼

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{ Remove Clutter }

Every element on a screen is competing for a user's attention, regardless of being content or decorative. If something doesn't add value to what is on the screen it should be removed.

Likewise, you could put all information on the page inside boxes, but are those lines really necessary? The trick is to be sure everything on the screen is there for a reason, and there's nothing else you can remove.

Id	Date	Amount	Accumulated	Created On
1323	2012–02–24	$12,000	$246,000	2012–02–24
2122	2012–02–23	$10,000	$234,000	2012–02–24

▼

Date	Amount	Accumulated
2012–02–24	$12,000	$246,000
2012–02–23	$10,000	$234,000

#7

{ Align for Readability }

It's very hard to scan and read information on applications with poorly aligned content. It doesn't matter if it's a set of fields, a chart, a block of text; information must be positioned with a purpose. Together with grouping and emphasis, alignment plays a key role in making information easier to scan and read.

Not so good...

Better

Transaction Details

Date: 2013–02–23
Amount: $10,000
Notes: Payment related to 34 units sold in January

Transaction Details

Date: 2013–02–23
Amount: $10,000
Notes: Payment related to 34 units sold in January

#8

{ Minimize User Inputs }

Typing information into an enterprise application is painful, so ask for as little input as possible. Whenever possible, guess instead of asking.

If users need to input information, make it completely obvious about what is needed, be tolerant on the input formats you accept, and be helpful when something goes wrong.

Phone: [   ]   →   **Phone:** [(___)-___-___]

Set user expectations about what is needed.

Phone: [555326713]   →   **Phone:** [555326713] ✓
Invalid input

Be tolerant. Accept how users choose to input data.

Phone: [(411)–231–112]   →   **Phone:** [(411)–231–112]
Invalid input   411 is a reserved area code

Be helpful – explain what went wrong.

#9

{ Build Effective Navigation }

In a great application, users know where they are, how to get where they want to be, and what's available to them.

To build great navigation, you need to write the menu entries in user language, emphasize what's important, be clear about the destination of the menu entries, and use navigation consistently throughout the application. Don't forget to highlight where your user is, since every page on a web application is a potential entry page.

Accounts   Contacts   Opportunities

Use the user's language for navigation, and highlight where the user currently is.

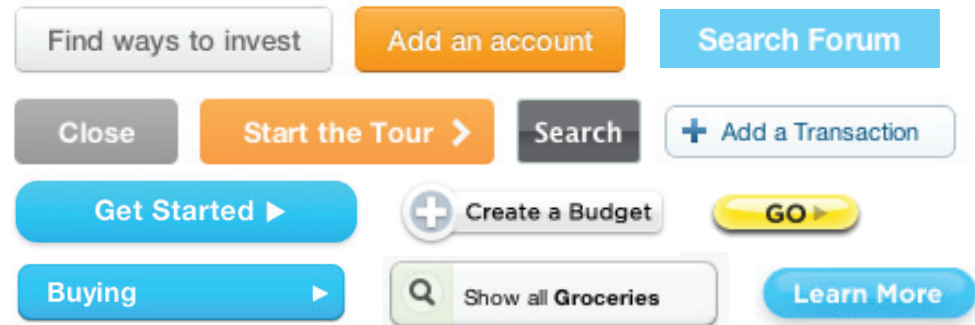myCRM » Reports » Marketing » Lead Status

If your application has many hierarchical levels, breadcrumbs are a good way to show where your user is. Breadcrumbs are a complement to menus, and are not to be used by themselves.

#10

{ Be Consistent }

Great applications provide a consistent and predictable user experience. By using the same visual clues, positions, or lexicon it becomes obvious to a user what will happen next. It also makes it easier for users to find what they are looking for.

For instance, it doesn't matter much if the "Cancel" operation is a link or a button, only make its representation consistent. Being consistent with outside conventions – whether from other applications or the users' context – is also a must. Vocabulary is a good example of a place where you should invest a lot of consistency.

Find ways to invest   Add an account   Search Forum

Close   Start the Tour >   Search   + Add a Transaction

Get Started ▶   Create a Budget   GO ▶

Buying   ▶   Show all Groceries   Learn More

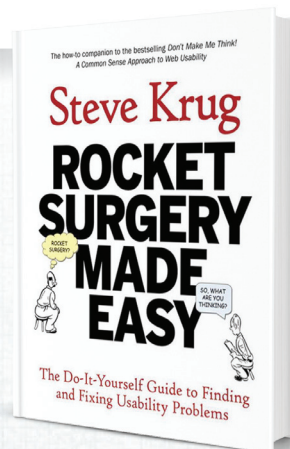*All these buttons belong to the same application. Note the inconsistency on the shape, color, icons, and text!*

#11

{ Test, Test, Test }

You can follow all the rules in the UX book, but you'll still be surprised at how fast your application will fail in the hands of your users. The only way to ensure success is to user test your application. The top 3 rules for successful testing are:

- Make testing as simple and cheap as possible, or else the tests will never get done.

- Test as soon as possible. Remember you'll need time to fix the problems and re-test.

- Make the team watch the tests, it's the best, fastest way to get buy-in on the top issues to fix.

Steve Krug's "Rocket Surgery Made Easy" gives very pragmatic and straight to the point advice on how to make simple and cheap usability tests for your enterprise applications

The how-to companion to the bestselling *Don't Make Me Think!*
A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability

Steve Krug

ROCKET SURGERY MADE EASY

ROCKET SURGERY?

SO, WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?

The Do-It-Yourself Guide to Finding and Fixing Usability Problems

UX {for:IT} Toolkit

In order to deliver great enterprise applications, you need to invest in great UX. At OutSystems we believe that IT is the starting point of usability, and that even small steps towards usable apps can bring big benefits. To help you get started, we built this UX Toolkit with everything you need to build your first highly usable app.

11 Usability Rules for IT Developers

An eBook of core Usability principles developers should remember when building applications with great UX

Vision Document Template

A tool that facilitates team understanding of an application development project. Teams may collaborate with users to reach a common vision

UX Checklist

An easy to use checklist for aligning the build process to best practices

TOOL KIT

DOWNLOAD THE KIT HERE

Share the Toolkit!