

The influence of company size and industry

Have you always dreamed of working with a close-knit group at a startup? Or landing a job at your favorite company? Depending on where you end up working, your job as a UX designer could be quite different! In this reading, you'll explore how UX design roles can vary depending on the company's size and industry.

Startups and small businesses

Startups are new businesses that want to develop a unique product or service and bring it to market. **Small businesses** are privately owned businesses with few employees. A lot of UX designers are excited to start work at startups or small businesses because they can see the impact of their work more quickly and develop a broader range of skills.

Advantages



- **Team size:** Close-knit team and able to work directly with upper management.
- **Growth:** Opportunity for growth due to taking on many responsibilities (visual design, interaction design, user research, and more).
- **Creativity:** Usually more creative freedom with fewer guidelines and processes.
- **Impact:** Lots of impact on final products, with few people working on a project.

Disadvantages



- **Mentorship:** Fewer mentors to choose from within a smaller company.
- **Responsibility:** Most of the responsibility for a UX project falls solely on you, which can be stressful if you have little UX experience.
- **Speed:** Have to be comfortable working quickly and launching work that isn't perfect, with little oversight.

Big companies

At a big company, like Google, you're likely to work in teams on a specific project. Lots of UX designers want to work at big companies with the people who developed some of the most well-known products in the world. UX teams at larger companies tend to be more compartmentalized by specialization, making it easier for you to become an expert in one particular area of UX.

Advantages



- **Mentorship:** A variety of experienced designers and other UXers to learn from.
- **Growth:** Lots of opportunity for growth because there are many levels of designers and management.
- **Guidelines:** Clearer guidelines to keep products uniform and on brand.
- **Team size:** More people working on one project, which means you're better able to focus on your specific responsibilities.

- **Specialization:** Opportunity to focus on one particular area of design.

Disadvantages



- **Team size:** May feel less impactful or important as a contributor with lots of other designers on the project.
- **Impact:** May feel small at a company with so many features and products.
- **Guidelines:** Defined guidelines can be restrictive to creativity.

Design agencies

A **design agency** is a one-stop-shop for visual brands, products, and services. Working at a design agency can be similar in some ways to working at a small business or startup, except you have multiple companies as your clients. Many agencies tend to work on a broad range of products, so you can explore many kinds of styles and approaches to UX design.

Advantages



- **Impact:** Lots of impact on projects, if you're the only UX designer on the team.
- **Networking:** Opportunity to work with senior stakeholders, different teams, and diverse clients.
- **Exposure:** Exposure to lots of companies and industries with different clients.
- **Resume:** Potential to work with large brands and display that work in your portfolio.

Disadvantages



- **Mentorship:** Lack of mentorship if you are the only UX designer on a project.
- **Monotony:** Depending on the agency, you could work only on the same type of projects.
- **Ownership:** Might not be able to work on a project from start to finish.
- **Finished product:** Products you work on might not launch, depending on client priorities.

Advertising agencies

A lot of UX designers work at **advertising agencies**, which are teams of creatives hired by clients to build marketing campaigns. Sometimes called “creative technologists,” these designers work to create ads for brands using UX principles. This is a great option if you're open to learning some interesting skills outside of a core UX design role.

Advantages



- **Autonomy:** Little to no middle management means more autonomy over your work.
- **Learning:** Opportunity to learn about other disciplines, like branding, marketing, and graphic design.
- **Variety:** Every project is different based on the client.

- **Networking:** Work with a bunch of different brands, clients, and teams.

Disadvantages



- **Specialization:** Wide variation in projects, so you might not be able to hone in on specific skills easily.
- **Relevance:** Work may often involve branding and marketing, and might not focus on UX design.

Freelancers

Freelancers are self-employed UX designers who are hired by clients for their independent services. Being a freelancer gives you a lot of freedom, and it's a great way for new UX designers to gain experience in the field and add work to their portfolio.

Advantages



- **Schedule:** Set your own hours since you're self-employed.
- **Flexibility:** Can freelance while working another job or balancing competing priorities.
- **Autonomy:** Choose the work that you want to do.
- **Experience:** Build your portfolio, especially if you don't have a full-time UX job.

Disadvantages



- **Structure:** No one to report to, which means you have to be responsible for getting work done on time.
- **Stability:** Less stable than working for a company or agency, since work is not always guaranteed.
- **Business:** Manage the logistics of your own business, such as filing taxes, billing clients, and more.
- **Mentorship:** Lack of readily available mentors since you're working by yourself.

Deciding where to work

Everyone's goals as a UX designer are different, so think about what's most important to you when choosing a place to work. Consider questions like:

- Do you enjoy a lot of structure and processes, or do you like to define your own work and schedule?
- Do you value working on a big team, or are you more comfortable working alone?
- Do you want to focus mainly on UX design, or are you interested in broadening your skill set?

Considering your career goals and how you work best will help you start to figure out the kind of company that might be the best fit for you. Good luck!