JAMES SCHLOTZSKY
LEAD UX DESIGNER @ STRATOS CLOUD

TAGLINE

"The universe is a pretty big place. If it's just us, seems like an awful waste of space." ~ Carl Sagan

CHARACTER CUES

PET PEEVE
"I hate complexity. I can't count the number of times management asked me to use tools that only slow us down. Keep it simple and remove the complexity or we won't use it. period. …unless management tells me to"

OTHER PEOPLE SAY
"an absolute expert, but sometimes his cynicism gets in the way and he'll just throw in the towel or give a my way or the highway explanation, which is none at all"

"basically, a rocket scientist UX guy. I'm sure web dev is a walk in the park for him. I'm not sure why he's doing it"

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Occupation: Lead UX Designer
Location: Austin, TX
Age: 46
Sex: Male
Highest Edu: MA from Carnegie Mellon
Study: Human-Computer Interaction

HARDWARE/SOFTWARE

PC: HP EliteBook i7 8gb Ram 512gb SDD
Phone: iPhone 6s with ∞ data
Tablet: "don't own one, don't want one"

GROKKABILITY

Fav Books: Apollo 8, Art of Happiness
Most Opened App: Messenger
Hobbies: Vacationing, Tee Ball Coaching

BUSINESS DOMAIN INFO

James is a no BS UX designer. He learned HCI at Carnegie Melon and carried that knowledge into his career in the aerospace industry before going into the world of web app UX. His time in aerospace has made him a hardened UX designer. He has little tolerance for fanciful designs that serve no purpose or promote a poor experience and this likely stems from his time in aerospace where an inefficient UX could mean the difference between life and death. For James, engineers are the problem. Too many times engineers come to him with design ideas after the fact, almost as if they don't understand he's the one designing the darn app, not the developers. And even when they do agree with the designs, they can never just build it without coming back with question after question. He would love it if he could just do his job and them do theirs.

IN JAMES' OWN WORDS

I've been doing user interaction design for the last 20 long years. Am I an expert? Sure. Do I feel like and expert? No. Engineers and developers are constantly questioning my designs, my mockups, and my reasoning and methods. It's like I'm the new guy here. Anyway, I used to create incredible user experiences but my process evolved a bit over my career. I've learned UX design is really two daunting tasks in one. The first task is researching and designing then creating the user experience. The second task is convincing all the engineers that this is how it needs to be done. That's not a joke.

Over 20 years I've created UXs for 6 companies. I worked at Lockheed Martin right out of graduate school and created a few interfaces that are still being used in space travel today. Despite that, I still find myself in heated debates with web developers regarding why we need a dropdown here instead of a radio button, or why this should be a modal instead of a separate view. With the way it's done around dev shops nowadays, you'd think all engineers are natural UX designers and that I'm the silly one for going to graduate school for this.

Speaking of graduate school, I learned UX design in Carnegie Mellon's Human-Computer Interaction program. Actually, I was part of the first ever of its kind HCI graduating class in '97. From there I went into the aerospace industry and created some interesting ground-based user interfaces before being put into a lead design role creating a few UX designs for appliances used in outer space. It was an incredible experience; the environmental constraints were fascinating to weasel my designs around and the challenge was out of this world (literally). But it was stressful, so after sometime I went in to web development UX/UI and now I'm a lead UX designer for a small team at Stratos Cloud. It's boring sometimes, but it pays the bills and is rarely ever stressful.

I've worked with a few other web development shops and noticed an ever-present issue that I call the "one barrier to design." It's the engineers. I know it sounds harsh but it's true. I just can't seem to get the engineers on the same page design wise. They're the ones on the ground level writing the code so often times I find development at a standstill as engineers try to open dialogs with me and my team in an effort to change designs to what they think is better when often times it's not. I know they mean well but they see it from a system design perspective, not a user interaction perspective.

Often times our designs are built and shared behind closed doors with my design team and our PM. After that our designs are stored on Box.com where we access them to translate the designs into task requirements for our project management software during our agile scrubbing meeting. A lot of the empathy gets stripped away right there as the design docs and user understanding is replaced by cards with lists of tasks and checkboxes. How can you empathize with lists and checkboxes? You can't, so you better make sure those lists are spot on because whatever the engineer fills in on the fly won't be empathetic toward the user. I guarantee that.

Oh, you asked about my hardware. I really don't care what hardware or software I have or am issued as long as it works and isn't slow. It needs to work and work fast, none of those loading screens, I have things to do.