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10 UX mistakes to avoid

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According to George Bernard Shaw, “A life spent making mistakes is not only more honourable, but more useful than a life spent doing nothing”. Whilst making mistakes might certainly make you more honourable, avoiding them will make you infinitely smugger so to this end I’ve listed 10 common UX mistakes to avoid and outlined how you might go about side stepping each one.

1. Leaving it too late to get UX onboard

Arrr! Customer feedback has come back saying that the new design is too damn difficult to use, quick get the UX guys and girls on the case to sort it out. Sound familiar? UX designers are often parachuted into a project at the last minute in an attempt to sort out a dog’s dinner of a UI. Unfortunately by this time it’s usually too late to do much and certain too late to get the full benefits of UX design. The ROI (return on investment) for usability and UX is generally greater the earlier it’s spent on a project. Ideally that means getting UX onboard from the very start to undertake such activities as:



What can happen when design isn’t considered from the start...

- Investigating user requirements and carrying out user research.
- Gathering user insights and generating design ideas based on these.
- Testing and gathering feedback for any existing systems.
- Validating requirements and testing possible designs before they are actually built.

2. Assuming that other people give a damn about UX, or even know what it is

I’m assuming that because you’re reading this article you hopefully already know a thing or two about UX and usability (or soon will!). You also hopefully care about delivering a good user experience to your users. Well sadly not everyone knows what UX is and certainly not everyone gives a damn about it. Of course people care about their users (at least I hope they do) and the experience they deliver to them but don’t forget that UX design is a means to an end, not the end itself. People shouldn’t need to care about the process but they should care about the results. This is why it’s so important to sell the benefits of UX design and to educate people so that they know what UX design involves, what the outputs are and why it’s so important. There are loads of good ways to sell UX and to educate and evangelize, from knowledge shares and presentations to blogs, case studies and introductory videos.

3. Leaving it to the last minute to get user feedback

User feedback can sometimes feel a little bit like revision for a big exam. You know that you should be doing it as early and as often as possible, but somehow you end up cramming the night before, when really it's too late to make a lot of difference. Don't make the mistake of thinking that you have to wait for a working version of a design to get user feedback when [paper prototyping](#) and [rapid prototyping](#) allows you to test a design long before it's built.



Arrr... Why didn't we test this design with users earlier?

4. Spreading the UX sauce too thinly

If like me you work as part of an internal UX team you'll probably find that there are a million and one websites and applications that are in urgent need of a bit of UX TLC (tender loving care). The temptation is to try and improve as many as possible but this can often be a mistake as all you end up doing is spreading your resources too thinly and ultimately making little impact across a multitude of websites and applications. Instead it's better to be a bit more selective and to focus your efforts on those websites and applications that must deliver a really good user experience in order to succeed. This allows you to make the most of your limited UX resources and to hopefully get the biggest bang for your UX buck.

5. Creating a UX fiefdom

For those unfamiliar with the term a fiefdom is, "something over which one dominant person or group exercises control" ([The free dictionary](#)). Sometimes internal UX teams can create their own UX fiefdom because they refuse to let go of any UX design work and crush any attempts to open it up outside of the group. Of course having a group overseeing UX design to make sure that it's done properly makes a lot of sense, but UX design should be something that's open to all, not just a select few. There's no reason for example why someone with a bit of assistance and know how can't carry out activities such as usability testing, expert evaluations, user interviews and UI design to name but a few. Opening up UX design to the masses (see what I've done!) not only prevents a fiefdom from forming but also allows the UX experts to better utilise their own time, so really it's a win win situation!



The internal UX team went a step too far to protect their fiefdom

6. Having separate UX researchers and designers

A lot of organisations have separate UX research and design teams, or might send the research and design components of a project out to different suppliers. On one hand this makes a lot of sense because you obviously want those people skilled in research carrying out the research and those skilled in design carrying out the design. However I think that often doing this means that a lot of the important research insight can get lost in translation as one team communicates findings to the other. Research also shouldn't be carried out for its own sake and it's important that any design research is able to feed into and influence the ultimate design. This is why I would advocate having the same team carrying out both the UX research and design. Of course within that team you might have research and design specialists but you want the continuity and know how that having the same team involved throughout can bring.

7. Jumping straight into design

When considering a new product or website, or thinking about how an existing one can be improved it can be very

tempting to start designing straight away. “This is how this screen might work”. “This is what we should have on the homepage”. Whilst it makes sense to certainly start thinking about the design from the start it can be a mistake to jump in too early without first considering the bigger picture and hopefully carrying out a bit of research first. It might turn out for example that a feature you’ve spent considerable time designing isn’t in tune with how users want to work, or even worse might not even be required in the first place!

8. Creating overly elaborate prototypes and wireframes

With increasingly powerful rapid prototyping and wireframing tools out there, such as [Axure](#), [Omnigraffle](#) and [Microsoft Sketchflow](#) it can be tempting to spend lots of time on an elaborate pixel perfect (or close to) version of a prototype (or set of wireframes), getting it really slick and modelling more and more of the intended interactions. This can often be a mistake because you end up spending too much time and effort on a prototype that is only going to be thrown away anyway. Unless the prototype will become the production system (which I think is generally a bad idea anyway) or it really needs to model every interaction in excruciating detail (i.e. it’s bound for the off shore sausage factory) then don’t spend any more time than is necessary on a prototype. Don’t forget that a prototype is only a means to an end, not the end itself so think twice about exactly how much detail and how polished it really needs and produce something that is [good enough, but no better](#).

9. Blindly copying other designs

An all too common UX mistake is to copy another design, assuming that a great deal of thought, research and testing has gone into it. Well of course this might have been the case, but usually it isn’t. By blindly copying another design you might also be copying the same issues, problems and short falls in that design. Whilst of course it makes sense to [utilise design patterns](#) and to borrow the best bits from other designs you need to think long and hard about how that design might perform and ideally put it to the test. Something like [A/B testing](#) is a great way to do this, or simply run the design by some users and see how it fares.

Texto



Be wary of simply ripping off another design

10. Not setting any UX standards and guidelines

In the same way that it’s important to have building standards in place to ensure that a building is built and maintained correctly, it’s also a good idea to have UX standards and guidelines in place to ensure that good UX design principles and practices are followed. Without these it’s all too easy for [bad UX design](#) to proliferate and for lots of [inconsistencies to creep into designs](#). Of course having UX standards and guidelines that are overly prescriptive or too exhaustive is also a mistake but it certainly makes sense to have standards and guidelines that cover areas such as the design process to follow (or at least loosely follow), design patterns to use, design principles to adhere to and user feedback loops to incorporate.

More about UX mistakes to avoid

- [Top Ten UX Mistakes on Consumer Websites \(Bolt | Peters\)](#)
- [The Top Ten Mistakes UX \(User Experience\) Leaders Make \(TibetanTailor\)](#)
- [Top 10 Mistakes in Web Design \(Jakob Nielsen\)](#)
- [10 most common misconceptions about user experience design \(Whitney Hess\)](#)