



Micro-moments: Are you designing for them?

BY MURIEL DOMINGO | 2 DAYS AGO

149
SHARES



Today, we'll start with the rants of a Manhattan restaurant to exemplify the relevance of what Google calls "micro-moments". Why? Because with the pervasive culture that mobile devices have generated, as [UX designers](#), we're needed now more than ever! This is why we need to equip ourselves with methods and tools to research our users' lives *before* moving to the solution space.



Author/Copyright holder: Pixabay. Copyright terms and licence: Free to Use

Mobile devices have changed our lives in many more ways than we can realize. They are just part of us now, and we have lost sight of how we behaved before. As user experience designers, we also have to play the part of anthropologists: well, a little. We need to understand our target users' *culture*. In these fast-paced times, it can be hard to get time to stop, stand back, and look at what's going on in the big picture. However, that's

the point: given that smartphones alone have changed life so much, it might take some effort to stop peering into their screens and see what's happened to us as a species!

Do you *really* need a Cellphone to eat in a restaurant?

craigslist

Author/Copyright holder: CoolKid1993 . Copyright terms and licence: Public Domain.

Not that long ago, a story appeared about a Midtown Manhattan restaurant and its rants on Craigslist about its customers' smartphone use. The restaurant had complaints about the service being slow, so they decided to compare security recordings from *ten* years apart. From this "contextual inquiry" based on observing camera recordings, the restaurant discovered that an average mealtime in 2004 lasted 65 minutes. In 2014, just ten years later, it had increased to 115 minutes.

Who is to blame? The restaurant noticed that it is *customers' obsessive use of cellphones* that lengthens mealtimes (the text on the table is a copy of the rant on Craigslist):

2004 Customers walk in. They get seated and are given menus; out of 45 customers, 3 request to be seated elsewhere. Customers on average spend 8 minutes before closing the menu to show they are ready to order. Waiters show up almost instantly and take the order. Appetizers are served within 6 minutes; obviously, the more complex items take longer. Out of 45 customers, 2 send items back. Waiters keep an eye out for their tables so they can respond quickly if the customer needs something. After guests are done, the checks appear on the table, and within 5 minutes customers leave.

Average time from start to finish: 1:05

2014 Customers walk in. They get seated and are given menus. Out of 45 customers, 18 request to be seated elsewhere. Before even opening the menu, they take their phones out; some are taking photos while others are simply doing something else on their phone (sorry, we have no clue what they are doing and do not monitor customer WIFI activity). Seven out of the 45 customers have waiters come over right away; they show them something on their phone and spend an average of 5 minutes of the waiter's time.

Given that this is recent footage, we asked the waiters about this, and they explained that those customers had a problem connecting to the WIFI and demanded that the waiters try to help them. Finally, the waiters are walking over to the table to see what the customers would like to order. The majority have not even opened the menu and ask the waiter to wait awhile. Customers open the menus, place their hands holding their phones on top of them and continue doing whatever on their phones. The waiter returns to see if they are ready to order or have any questions. The customers ask for *more* time. Finally, they are ready to order....

Total average time from when a customer was seated until he/she placed an order – 21 minutes.

Food starts getting delivered within 6 minutes; obviously, the more complex items take way longer. Out of 45 customers, 26 spend an average of 3 minutes taking photos of the food. Of these 45 customers, 14 take pictures of each other with the food in front of them or as they are eating it. This takes, on average, another 4 minutes as they must review and sometimes retake the photo. Out of 45 customers, 9 send their food back for *reheating*. (Obviously, if they hadn't paused to do whatever on their phone, the food wouldn't have gotten cold.) Out of 45 customers, 27 ask their waiter to take a group photo; 14 of those request the waiter to retake the photo as they are not pleased with the first photo.

Accelerate your career: Get industry-trusted Course Certificates

BEGINNER UX COURSES STARTING SOON

-
- Starts in 8 days—21% booked: [User Experience: The Beginner's Guide](#)

INTERMEDIATE UX COURSES STARTING SOON

-
- Starts in 1 days—85% booked: [Gamification – Creating Addictive User Experiences](#)

On average, this entire process — between the chit-chatting and reviewing the photo taken — adds another five minutes and obviously causes the waiter *not* to be able to take care of other tables he/she was serving. Given that in most cases the customers are constantly busy on their phones, it takes an average of 20 minutes more from when they are done eating until they request a check. Furthermore, once the check appears before them, it takes 15 minutes *longer* than 10 years ago for them to pay and leave. Out of 45 customers, 8 bump into other customers, or in one case a waiter as they are either walking in or out of the restaurant, *texting*.

Average time from start to finish: 1:55

Does this sound like a familiar experience? Think about the last time you went out to a bar or a restaurant with some friends. Was it similar to the recounting you just read? Or, even better, the *next* time you go out, put your anthropologist glasses on, and check out what other people are doing. Where is their focus? In what is in front of them? Or, is it on the other side of the screens in their palms?

Although this post will soon be an urban legend (or perhaps it was from the onset!), the constant use of cellphones obviously affects our everyday lives.

Chopping reality into micro-moments?

Early in 2015, Google released a set of articles on what they call “micro-moments”. The restaurant story is full of **micro-moments** during which the users get hold of their phones to accomplish a specific task. Most of these can be categorized under the “I-want-to-share” title that currently takes up so much of our everyday lives. Let’s see the categories defined by Google, even if (like we have just seen), as a product or service designer, we’re sure that you’ll probably be able to add new types.

I-want-to-know moments

You’re at home with a nice free evening. What shall you do now? Ah! You feel like watching something. So, you want to get to the position where you can choose *which* movie to watch. You want to know the answer more than anything! So, you’ve just gone online to see. Here, you’re thinking with “the Google initiative”—that is, you’re *searching* or *browsing* to find out what’s hot, perhaps seeing what’s not-so-hot as you go down the reviews. You want to know which movie would be the best fit tonight.

I-want-to-

You’ve decided on seeing the latest action blockbuster movie, but where? This is when you want to see what’s “Near me”.

go

moments

I-want-to-do moments You may want to learn about a process, service, or product. If you've ever gone on YouTube to see what others say about products, or just wanted to see how to do a job (e.g., DIY); that is where to learn. If your motorcycle won't start and you "sort of" know what's wrong, YouTube can show what you need. We'll worry about *which* company's motorcycle part in the next micro-moment!

I-want-to-buy moments Your "final micro-moment" might have you start by watching any of over 1 million YouTube videos as you zero-in on *which* motorcycle part is the most reliable/best value *before* making the buy. If we've gone to the movie theater, maybe a friend shows us the trailer of another movie. Finding it better, you're "sold" on seeing that instead. Congratulations, you've completed the process

On a similar note, Josh Clark, the author of *Tapworthy - Designing Great iPhone Apps*, offers three categories for mobile web access:

1. **Microtasking:** When users interact with their devices for brief but frenzied periods of activity. For example, an author gets hit by a lightning bolt of [creativity](#) while standing up on a train... Quick! He needs to get his idea down. He looks at his smartphone: it's too noisy to dictate on the voice recorder, but he can jot down some notes in his sub-folder marked "Eureka", save them, and keep the app open for the next idea that he can already feel coming.
2. **Local:** When the users want to know what's going on around them. An smartphone is a *very smart* radar. It knows your likes and needs. If you're hungry but you're not a hamburger person, your apps will nicely narrow down the options as to what's nearby where you can grab a bite.
3. **Bored:** When the user has nothing better to do and is looking to be entertained or otherwise diverted. For instance, Mike's wife has just gone into the changing room of the department store; he sits down and knows that it will take a long time. Out comes the smartphone, and he starts exercising his thumb as the game begins. Ten minutes later, he's become bored, so he checks out the latest piece of strange news from a bizarre news resource on a [social media](#) site.

There is a nice overlap with both classifications, even if Google focuses more on the intent of the task and Josh Clark on the context.

When UX becomes even more relevant

As UX designers we try to bridge several worlds, connecting those of the target users with the business goals and all this mediated by technology. Therefore, we need to be able to look at *both sides of the screen*: what users are doing and what the company wants to offer them. With the idea of micro-moments, we have new touchpoints to consider, understand and design for during the customer journey map.

Author/Copyright holder: Ahihler. Copyright terms and licence: CC BY-SA 4.0

Most often, the journey starts at the moment the user starts to consider a category or a product. This earliest stage *determines* what the user wants or needs. Perhaps he's hungry and asks himself if it's a pizza night. Perhaps she's heard about a sale and wonders if it includes luxury scent plug-ins. Then, the journey takes the users to where they're *evaluating* and *making comparisons* among available options. The third stage is when users *actually buy* something. Last comes the *after-purchase* period; which some call the: the Ultimate **Moment Of Truth**. This moment can then be defined as the instant when a customer creates content based on an experience with a product or service and publishes it in their community for others to find.

Throughout this journey, there are lots of touchpoints that we can translate as micro-moments. If we – as designers – can identify them, we will be catering for the particular types of needs of our users. It's about creating the content or tools to enable people to accomplish whatever they want in that particular moment. To do so, Google suggests the following activities:

1. Make a moments map.
2. Understand customer needs in-the-moment.
3. Use context to deliver the right experience.
4. Optimize across the journey.
5. Measure every moment that matters.

What do these suggestions recall for you? As always, it's about placing user experience approaches up-front in the business strategy. It's about starting with the users' needs and contexts and moving from there, iteratively and always with "reality checks".

The Take Away

In the last decade, the ever-increasing influence of handheld electronic devices has dramatically changed the way many of us live our lives. Smartphones have especially attached themselves to many aspects of the human condition, so much so that millions of folks have separation anxiety with their phones. Much of the world around us “happens” in an electronic rectangle smaller than our hands. Smartphone use has partially changed *how* we process reality. Where before, the stream of conscious living may have flowed in longer sections, many of us now break up our interpretation of reality into micro-moments, or fast, task-oriented *engagements with reality*.

Google identified the concept of [micro-moments](#) early in 2015, pinpointing that, smartphones are most often the “first-screen-at-hand” that users turn to. Specifically, Google defined four micro-moments:

As UX designers, we have plenty of touchpoints on the road where the user considers a product/service, evaluates and compares like items, chooses and buys one, and then uses it happily ever after. Under these phases, we need to consider how micro-moments play a role in the user experiences. To achieve this, use [customer journey maps](#) to understand your users, their needs in-the-moment, and use context to deliver the right experience, make every part of their journey as best as it can be, and measure every important moment.

The sociological impact of handheld electronic devices is far-reaching. In some cases, it can be perilous (people bumping into things), in others comical (many companies may have to rethink how much time they allow for lunch breaks at this rate!). However, one thing is certain. The new reality is one we can divide into these all-important snippets of time, where a need or desire is pressing enough to spur a user to stop what he or she is doing and engage with a palm-sized screen. As long as we design for that and work out what users want in exactitude, we’ll be able to make sure that we provide them with what they’re looking for.

Where to Learn More

- Distractify Staff (2014). “Restaurant Watches Old Surveillance And Shares Shocking Results On Craigslist”. Retrieved from: <http://distractify.com/old-school/2014/07/11/craigslist-surveillance-restaurant-1197775635>
- Zurcher, A. (2014). “Smartphone use in restaurants prompts Craigslist rant”. Echo Chambers Blog for BBC News. Retrieved from: <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-echochambers-2827238...>
- Ramaswamy, S. (2015). “The Wall Street Journal article on micro-moments”. CMO Today – *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from: <http://blogs.wsj.com/cmo/2015/04/08/outside-voices...>

- All about micro-moments according to Google: <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/collections/micromoments.html>
- A short interview article with interesting examples: <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/interviews/identifying-micro-moments-within-customer-journey.html>
- The IDF chapter on [Contextual Design](https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/book...): <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/book...>

References

Hero Image: Author/Copyright holder: Marc Muller. Copyright terms and licence: CC BY-SA 3.0

Topics in this article:

[Micro-Moments](#)[User Experience \(UX\) Design](#)[Moment of Truth](#)

Make design better: share this article



WHAT YOU SHOULD READ NEXT

How to Change Your Career from Graphic Design to UX Design

If there's an occupation that is 100% linked with the public's idea of what design is all about, it's graphic design. From the familiar golden arches of the McDonald's brand to the typography and colors of movie posters, graphic designers create some of the most iconic and ubiquitous designs around us. So why would a graphi...

248 SHARES 2 WEEKS AGO

Apple's Product Development Process – Inside the World's Greatest Design Organization

Apple's Product Development Process may be one of the most successful design process ever implemented. With the company verging on becoming the world's first \$1 trillion business organization – there's a lot that designers can learn from Apple and introduce into their own design environments. Apple is a notoriously...

357 SHARES 2 WEEKS AGO

Shneiderman's Eight Golden Rules Will Help You Design Better Interfaces

Follow Ben Shneiderman's 'Eight Golden Rules of Interface Design' if you want to design great, productive and frustration-free user interfaces. Apple, Google and Microsoft are among some of the highly successful companies whose well-designed products reflect Shneiderman's rules. The characteristics derived from...

413 SHARES 1 MONTH AGO

A Simple Introduction to Lean UX

Lean UX is an incredibly useful technique when working on projects where the Agile development method is used. Traditional UX techniques often don't work when development is conducted in rapid bursts – there's not enough time to deliver UX in the same way. Fundamentally Lean UX and other forms of UX all have the...

133 SHARES 3 WEEKS AGO

Adaptive vs. Responsive Design

The differences between responsive and adaptive design approaches spotlight important options for us as web and app designers. Choosing with insight can

empower you to plan and execute your designs with better aim, purpose and results. With the pervasiveness and diversity of mobile devices, as designers we need...

126 SHARES 4 WEEKS AGO

The Principles of Service Design Thinking - Building Better Services

Service design is all about taking a service and making it meet the user's and customer's needs for that service. It can be used to improve an existing service or to create a new service from scratch. In order to adapt to service design, a UX designer will need to understand the basic principles of service design thinking and b...

269 SHARES 4 DAYS AGO

What is Interaction Design?

Interaction design is an important component within the giant umbrella of user experience (UX) design. In this article, we'll explain what interaction design is, some useful models of interaction design, as well as briefly describe what an interaction designer usually does. A simple and useful understanding of interaction...

204 SHARES 3 WEEKS AGO

9 Free to Use Wireframing Tools

We all know that wireframing is a great way to test ideas in our UX projects but we also know that there are a ton of wireframing tools available to do it with. It can be hard to choose the right tool but one of the easiest ways to get an idea – is to get hands on with the tool and have a play with it. The wireframing tools in this...

137 SHARES 1 MONTH AGO

Dieter Rams: 10 Timeless Commandments for Good Design

Let's pay a virtual visit to a famous industrial designer's workshop. By examining the principles of his winning approach, we can incorporate vital elements into our designs in the "less is more" age. As user experience practitioners, most of us have worked with Nielsen and Molich's 10 heuristics or rules of thumb and the Eig...

238 SHARES 4 WEEKS AGO

The 7 Factors that Influence User Experience

User Experience (UX) is critical to the success or failure of a product in the market but what do we mean by UX? All too often UX is confused with usability which describes to some extent how easy a product is to use and it is true that UX as a discipline began with usability – however, UX has grown to accommodate rather...

156 SHARES 1 DAY AGO

TOP ARTICLES

5 Stages in the Design Thinking Process

113 SHARES



10 Great Sites for UI Design Patterns

159 SHARES



How to Change Your Career from Graphic Design to UX Design

248 SHARES



Bad Design vs. Good Design: 5 Examples We can Learn From

253 SHARES



Apple's Product Development Process – Inside the World's Greatest Design Organization

357 SHARES



TOP TOPICS

User Experience (UX) Design



Human-Computer Interaction (HCI)



User Interface (UI) Design



Usability



Mobile User Experience (UX) Design



GET WEEKLY UX INSIGHTS

Subscribe to our newsletter for useful UX tips and resources.

