

The Product Manager's Guide to UX Design

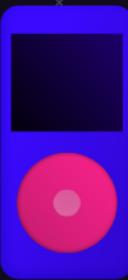
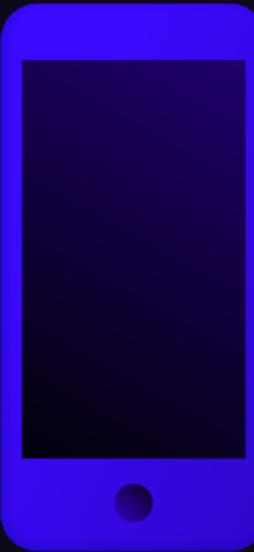
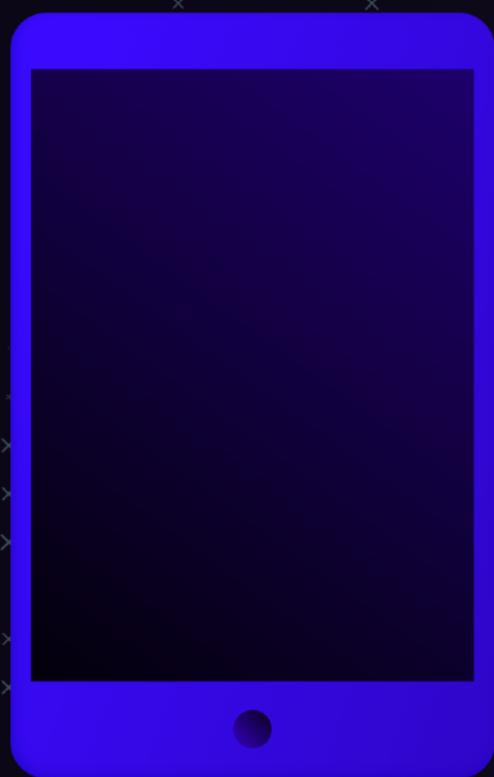


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THE 5 THINGS MANAGERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT DESIGN

If your company develops web or mobile products – be it an application or even your own webshop – this e-book is for you! You might not have recognized yet how many untapped possibilities you have in your interfaces.



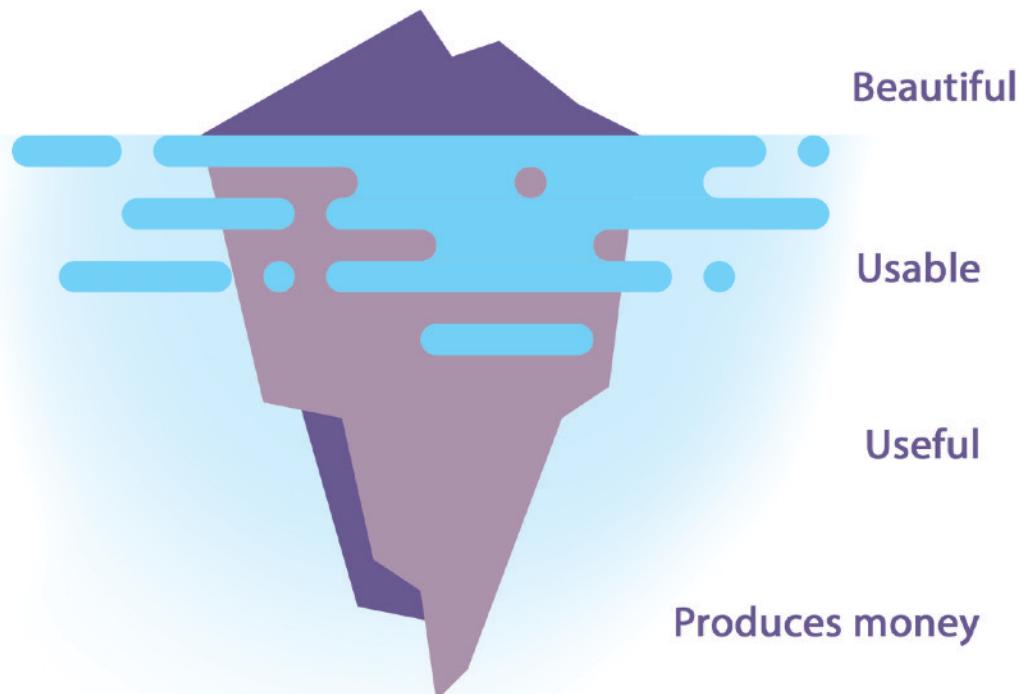
1. Design is not just a pretty skin

When American CEOs echo how important design is, many people think about cool shiny interfaces. But it's more complicated than that. Caution, a Steve Jobs quote is coming!

“Design is not just what it looks like and feels like. Design is how it works.”

So, besides the aesthetic outlook, how the interface works in the users' hands plays an extremely important role in design. What will the users see first, and what will they notice later? What processes will they go through? In what direction do we want to draw their attention? How and why will they understand things? What will they remember us for?

The nice appearance is just the tip of the iceberg; a good UX designer can help in far more profound questions that might turn out to play an important role from a business perspective as well.





2. Good design improves understanding

Most of those who try a SAAS product but don't subscribe do so because they don't exactly understand how the application works and how could they benefit from it in their own lives.

At the first use, we have a maximum of 5-10 minutes to give users answers to those questions. From experience we know of tutorials' futility – no one watches them. We must design the software's real interface in a way that explains how it works.

3. Design is about experimentation

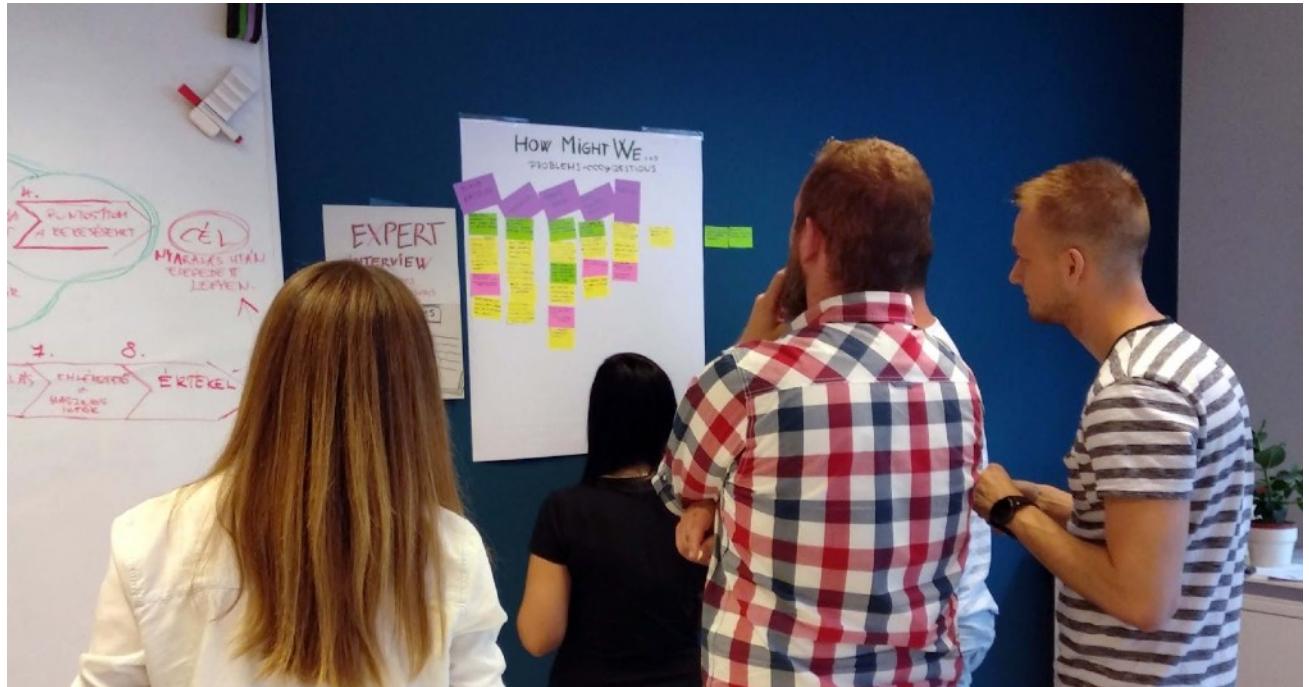
In order to create a successful design, we have to do loads of experimenting. Apple's star designer Jony Ive created 561 prototypes before debuting the final version of the Leica M camera model below. If one of the world's leading designers has to do so much experimenting, how could you expect anyone to create something perfect at the first try?



4. Good design is teamwork – and you have to take part

Many people believe that when they have something to be designed, they just make a deal with a designer and only meet again to receive a wonderfully completed design. Well, bad news: It doesn't work like this. Design is the result of tons of experimenting and testing.

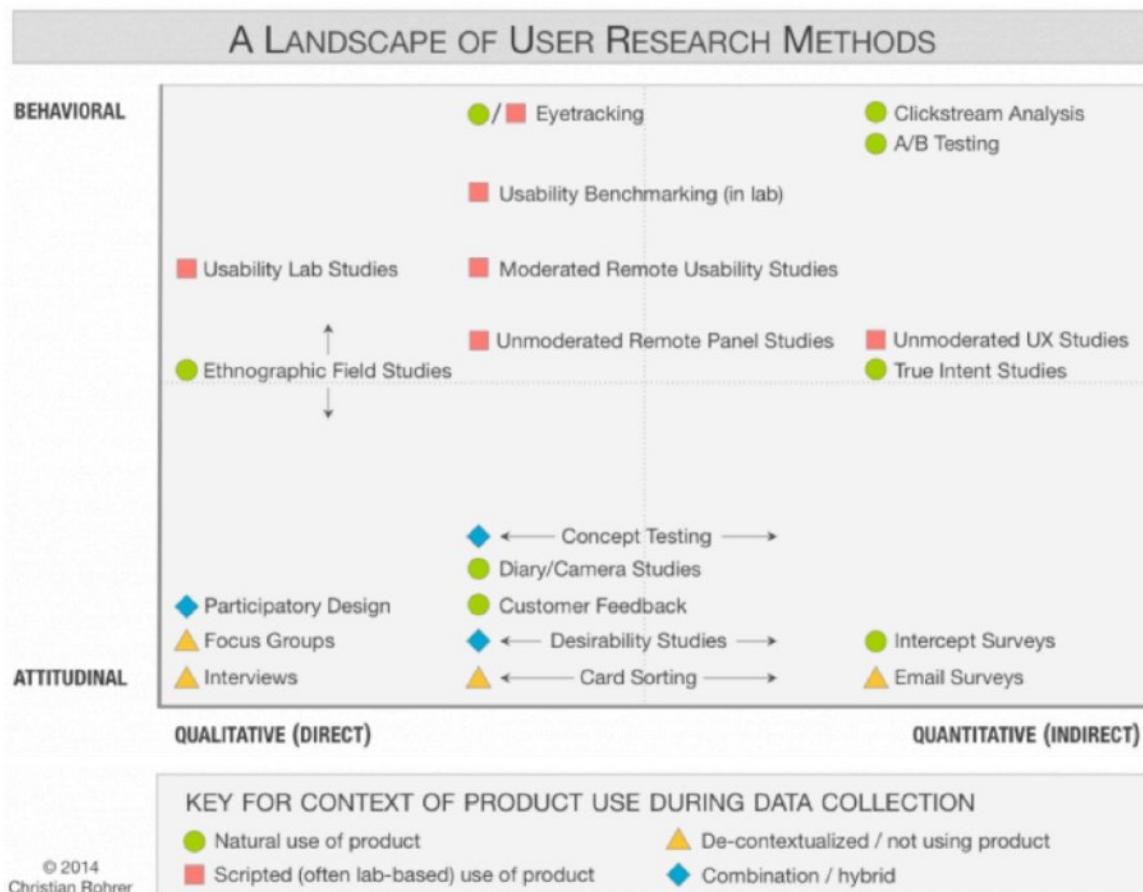
The designer needs constant feedback in order to proceed in the right direction. No one knows your business better than you, so you have to take an active part in the process. The designer leads the process and summarizes the outcomes, but it requires your intellectual capacity just as much!



5. Design must be measured and tested

The design outlines what users understand in your product. It determines what they see and in which direction they proceed. All this makes it obvious that such an important factor requires measurement and testing. Research comprises an inherent part of UX design. On our team, one of two people on a project works solely on testing ideas.

Thousands of methods and tricks help do this: user tests, fieldwork, A/B tests, interviews, remote tests, guerrilla tests, five-second tests, ghetto tests, grandma tests, etc. Then there are the analytics and statistics. Without applying these, you are just whistling in the dark. Choose a designer or a team who are constantly aware of these areas.



+ 1 Extra: Design is not a project – it is an ongoing process

Lastly, a trivial mistake: to take design as a single project. A company that produces digital products needs constant programming, marketing, sales – but it needs constant design just as much!

There is no such thing as a finished design. New functions are always on the rise and old ones always need improvement. We mostly work in a subscription-based model with our clients because they have recognized their need for constant support in design.

A developer team without designers is a few bricks short of a load. Sometimes they just cannot see yet how to “get the missing bricks”...



THE UX DESIGN PROCESS

The thing most of our clients love is our design process, the way we approach and solve problems. A few sentences should give a clear picture of what we do at UX studio.



1. Personas and analytics

We always start with putting together personas to get to know who we design for. We also look into your data to analyze how people use your product. How are they moving on your site or app and what are their favorite contents? We also collect basic demographic information about them.

Personas
created for an
online fashion
store

Eva RATIONAL

She's 45 years old and married. She's a finance manager and she has an above-average salary.

Goals

- Self-expression
- Stay loyal to her own style (even if it means that she's not following every trend)
- Be sophisticated

Quote
"I have my own style."

Background

- Educated,
- A little bit traditional
- Likes classic styles
- Likes extra quality

Lara IDEALIST

Lara is 33 years old. She's a marketing manager at a great company. She has an above-average salary.

Goals

- Self-expression
- Differentiate herself from the crowd
- Wear recognizable items (well-known brands)
- Support local designers by buying their items
- Maintain her unique lifestyle (valuable for her)
- Own high-quality clothes and accessories

Quote
"Express yourself with clothes. Appearance tells a lot about who you are."

Bianca ARTISAN

She's 23 years old and single. She's still studying, but also has a job: she's an assistant in a fashion store. She has an average salary.

Goals

- Self-expression
- Differentiate herself from the crowd
- Wear recognizable items (well-known brands)
- Buying from local designers
- Have a unique lifestyle

Context

Mainly browses on mobile and saves items for later. She usually makes the purchases on desktop or goes to a physical store to try on the items first and then she goes online again to actually pay for them if they're cheaper there.

Motivations

- Be unique
- Stand out of the crowd
- Express her personality

Frustrations

- Someone else wearing the same clothes as she is
- Outdated items
- Slow customer service
- No place for searching and buying designer items

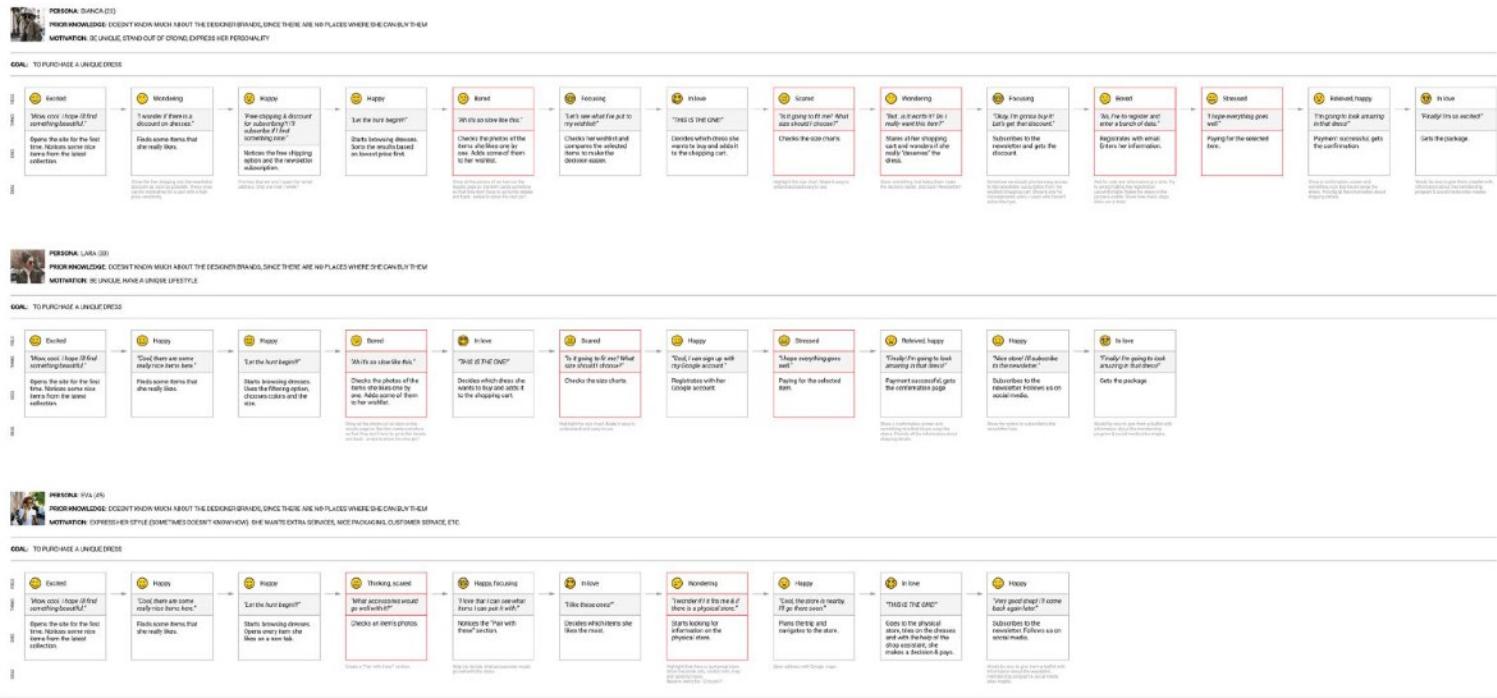
Technology & social media

She uses Android and Windows devices.

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2. User journeys

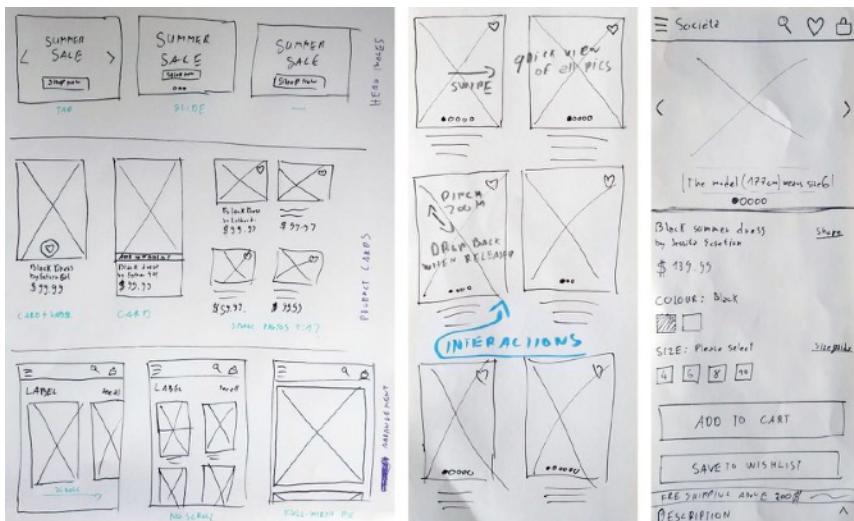
A user journey is one of the most interesting parts of the whole process. It helps us see the big picture and define the steps the users will go through. We can design a better experience if we think in processes instead of screens.



User journeys of the different personas in the online fashion store

3. Wireframes and prototypes

Once we have the journeys, we design the interface layout. We put the elements in place, and define the proportions, copy and navigation. With clickable prototypes, we can test the UI on real users at an early stage, before putting too much effort into development.



First sketches of online fashion store Société

A clickable Axure prototype of the product listing page of the fashion store

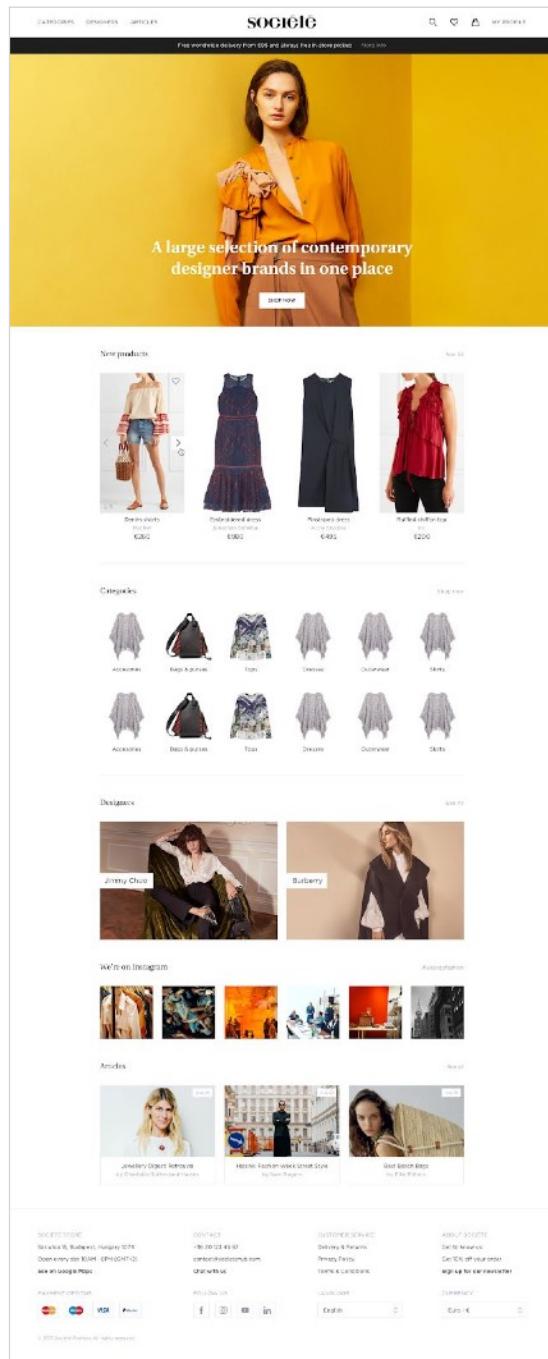
4. User testing

User testing is a key to understanding how real users think about the app and how they use it. We find out what is unclear and why. We also find the points where users get stuck. You get videos of the tests and a written report with a list of problems and suggestions. We iterate on the prototype until everything works well.



5. Look & feel drafts

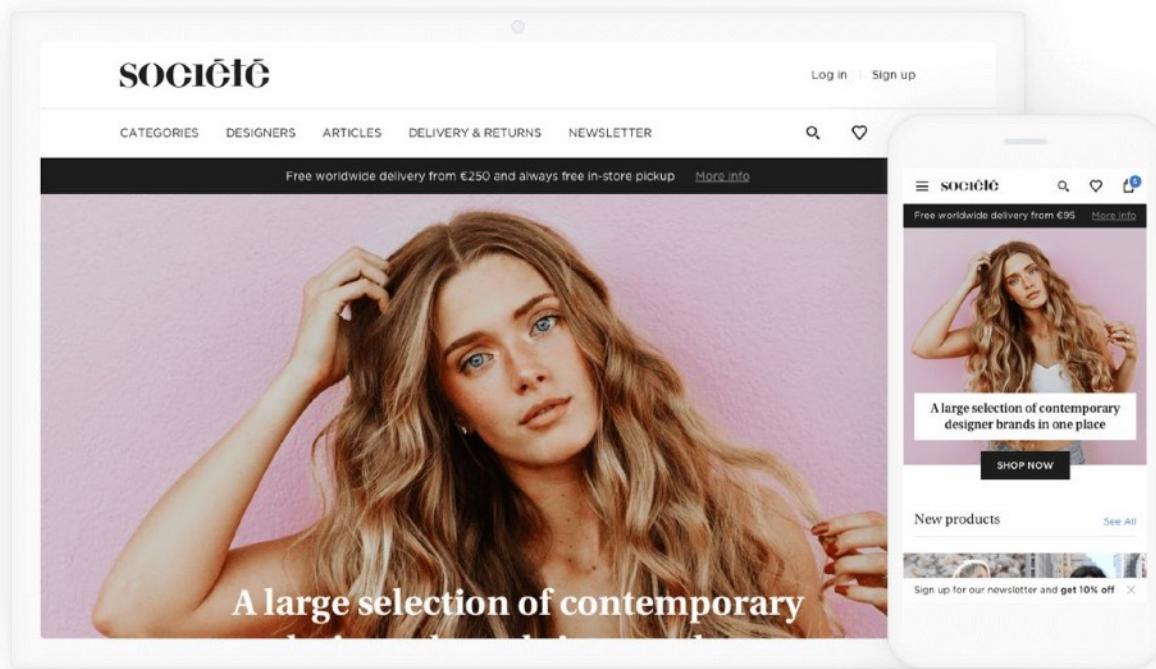
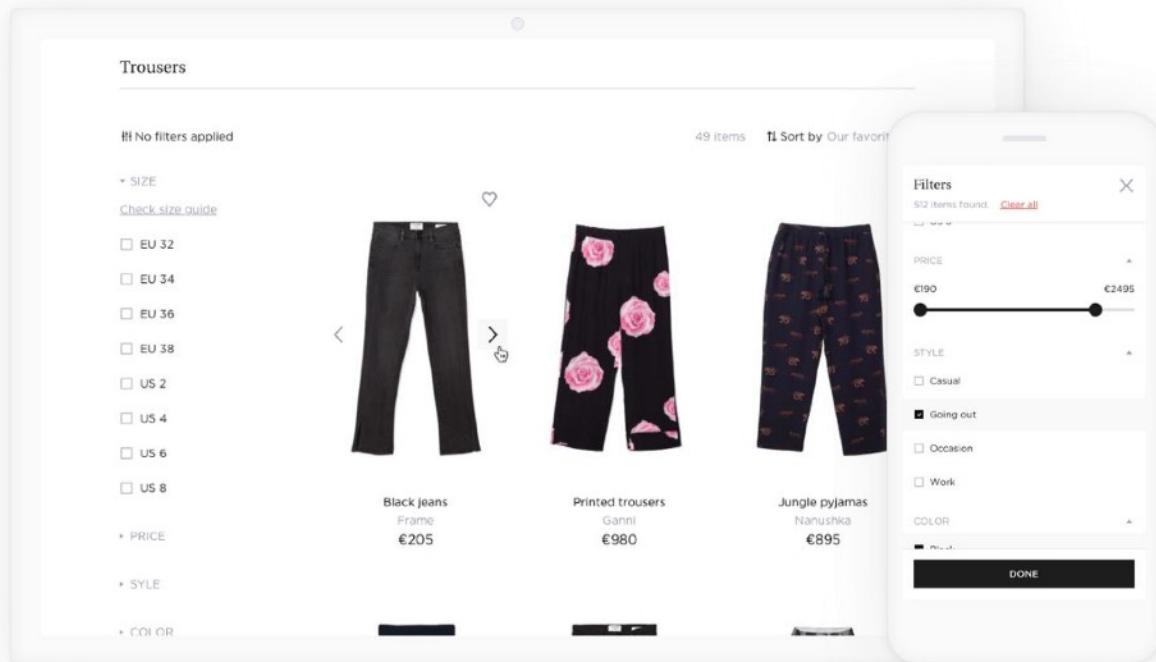
This phase explores different styles based on the target group and defines the character and the atmosphere of the product. We create a collection of inspirations to different styles – links, images from other apps and sites and deliver two or three look & feel drafts to a specific screen from the wireframes.



Look and feel design for the homepage of the online fashion store

6. Detailed designs

Finally, we make detailed design for one screen first, then for all, every screen and state – we prepare PSD files, fonts, icons, style guide and documentation for developers.



7. A/B testing

To optimize the design and find the best solutions with the highest conversion or task completion rate, we advise on what to test. We recommend different variants from the most important texts that we can test (value proposition, call to action) and several design solutions to test.



How can we do all these things in an agile way?

In our case, we delegate a talented designer and a UX researcher to your product. They work closely together with your team in week-long design sprints. At the beginning of each week, we design and then make user tests or do other research. This method delivers tested design inputs that your developers can build in their next sprint.

4 WAYS UX HELPS FOSTER BETTER COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

As a product manager, you may know that each part of a company speaks different languages. Sometimes, they just have different interests. You bridge the gap between your teams along these interests. Here, we have compiled some useful tools to become a perfect bridge constructor.



1. Workshops get everyone on the same page

At UX studio, we organize workshops on personas, customer journey and the look and feel at the beginning of the design or developing process.

Who has to attend? Every person who has even a tiny bit responsibility of for the product – like you as a product manager, as well as a marketer, developer, designer and someone from the business strategy department. This serves to get everyone to know each other better and to put the same picture about the product, features, goals, etc. in everyone's mind.

We start every client collaboration with workshops after the kick-off meeting. In our experience, they love those workshops. Of course, motivating everyone to take part in every task requires creativity. Pay attention to the number of attendees and the length of time as well.



Luca and Zoli doing a card-sorting workshop at our client's Barcelona office

2. Weekly design meetings

Someone from each department must attend these meetings. This means a member each from the UX design and the developer teams, as well as someone from the business or marketing departments.

In these meetings, talk about what happened the previous week and who's going to do what next. Also, speak about challenges and difficulties. This is one of the best ways for everyone to understand the others and represent their own interests.

At UX studio, we organize design meetings for our clients every week. There we show the results of the UX research, what we have done about design and what we are going to do next. Our experience strongly recommends not having more than five people and for no longer than ninety minutes.

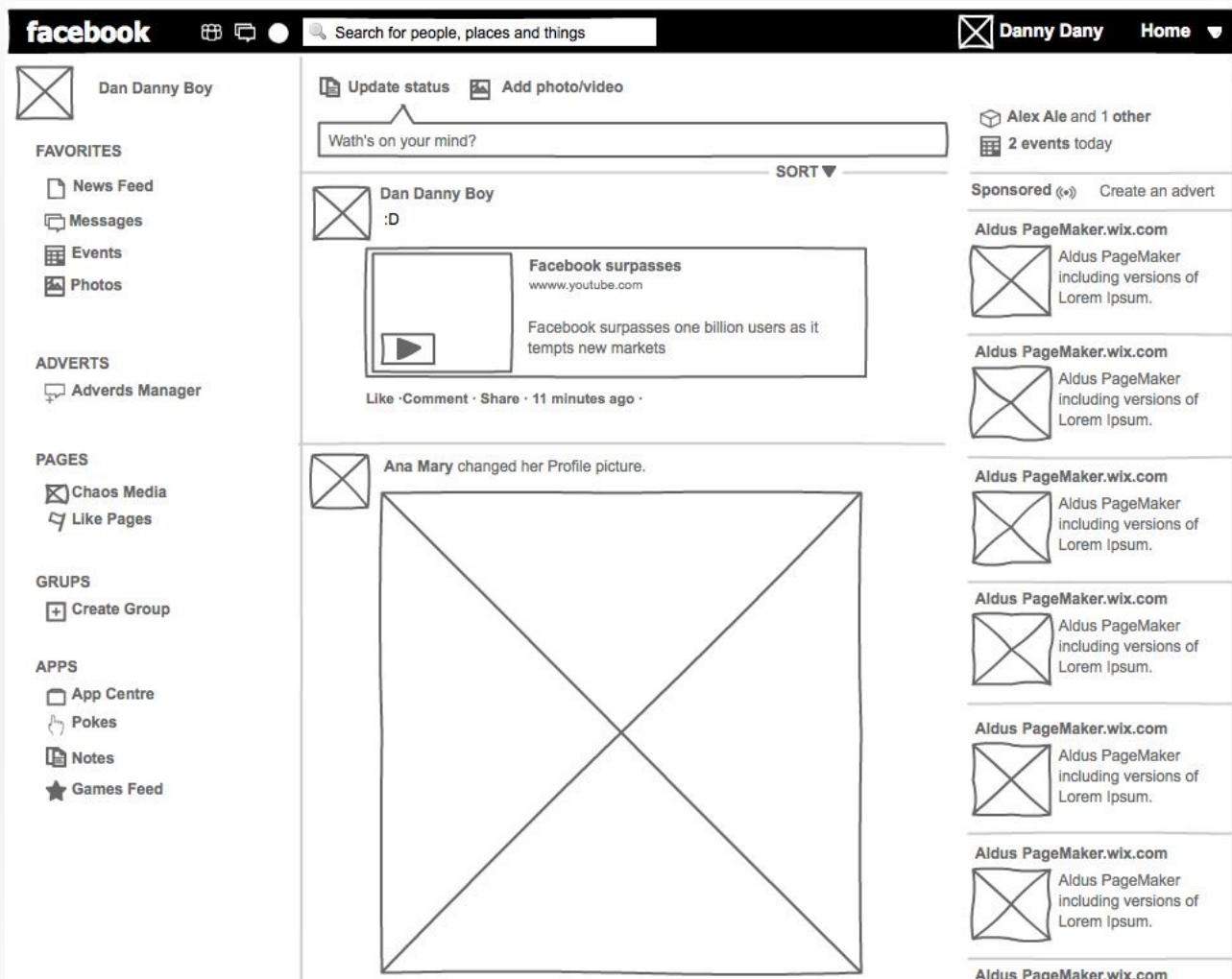
The way we see it, this is the best way to explain everything to everyone. This is one of the most efficient ways we use a communication platform. A good wireframe is worth more than a thousand pages. It can present features, pages, flows and even movements to the business person, a user and the developer as well. They are going to see the product from the same viewpoint, as it will look in the future. A good wireframe serves not just as the best communication platform but the best validation tool as well.

We create most of the user tests we perform at UX studio in prototypes. All the details and questions you haven't thought about before are going to come up for the first time there.



3. Wireframes discover hidden problems

Old fixtures in the business may remember a time when everything existed on paper. Diagrams and descriptions of specifications filled bales of paper. Who likes that? I'll tell you: no one. Why? Because no one likes to read. More importantly, it caused so many misunderstandings. But time passes and now we have several options for building clickable wireframes.



4. User research answers controversial questions

Is it a communication tool? Of course, user research is more than just a communication tool. But it has a communication aspect as well. Ever had a meeting when every participant had a different opinion to an important question? How did you decide? Or an even worse question: Who decided? Why not let the users answer these questions? Doing some user tests will provide some specific data behind the question. And boom! Question answered. User research can give an objective picture instead of subjective opinions, leading to easy decisions in very divisive situations. It shares information with everyone best because it shows how users use the product. Need better communication? At UX studio, we record every user test and present the key elements to our clients. Do we have to say that they love watching these videos?



BUILD A KILLER PRODUCT DESIGN TEAM

A good product design team can contribute greatly to making a product successful. They can make a product easier to understand and use. UX research can deliver essential customer insights. Design workshops and prototyping can improve communication within a team and help in building an agile environment. A good product design team can make the lives of POs and PMs much easier. How can you build one?



The three most important ingredients

Most fundamentally, have designers and researchers with the right skill set. It has three major components (yes, we will simplify things a little bit here):

- UI design: to draw the pixel-perfect, beautiful screen
- UX design: to build wireframes and prototypes, and define the most important structures and flows, communicate with other players, brainstorm and run
- UX research: to test your designs with real users, validate feature ideas, do interviews, evaluate analytics, build personas, and deliver the necessary customer feedback.



This doesn't mean you need three people. Many startups are one-man shows, quite a risky thing. Research consumes a lot of time, so if just one person is doing everything, they are probably too busy to do it. Thus, the most important part is missing from the machine: the feedback from the end users.

At UX studio, we have product designers who can go through the whole design process from UX to UI design, and they work alongside a UX researcher who helps them with user feedback.

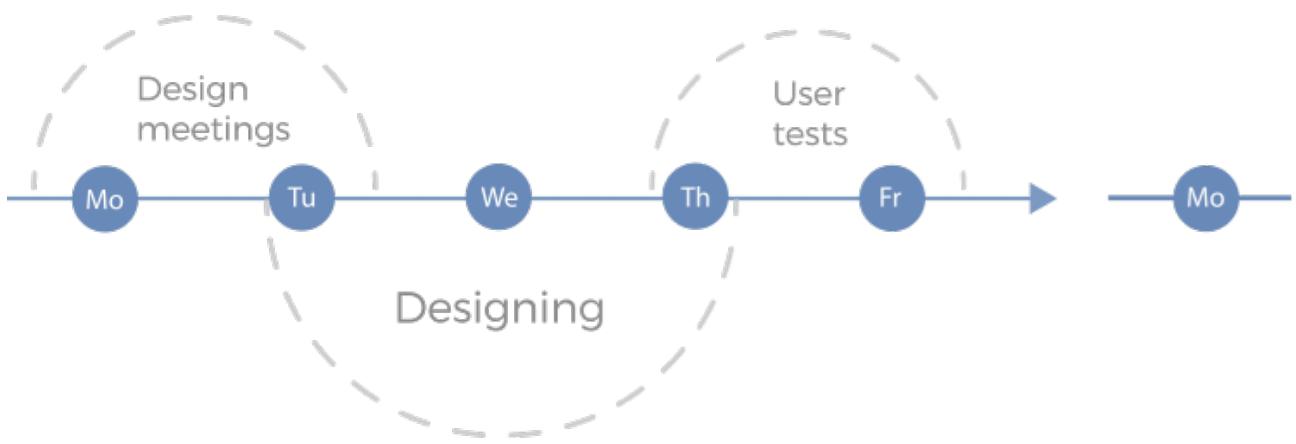
The magic is in the design methods

So now you have got the right ingredients, but the directions are also very important. The team must use the best methods available. A design process will enable the team to deliver the results.

Establishing a design team with the right methods can improve the performance of your product sprint by sprint. That makes the difference between junior and senior guys.

Senior people know these methods. They have real-life experience and know what to do on your specific project. Hiring a junior as a one-man show will probably do more harm than good. Hiring a senior guy with a junior to help might work.

At UX studio, we do nine different things to help our designers to improve themselves. Our intense training program teaches these methods. We invite designers from other companies to give a talk every other Friday. We have mentoring, common sketching sessions, and every designer gets weekly feedback from three different sources (research, the designing partner and our clients). Unsurprisingly, they learn very fast in this environment. As a studio, we have experience with many different products and clients, so we know what works best in each case.



Put the pieces together

Finally, a good product manager can put all the pieces together. Most importantly, they emphasize the business goals, give feedback and make sure the design team will get whatever they need to do their job. Stakeholder buy-in is also important, so in many cases, the product manager has to convince top management to hire and run a product design team.

At UX studio, we work in week-long design sprints. It lets us move fast and iterate. We start every sprint with a design meeting where our designer and researcher meet with the business leader and the technical leader of the product. In these meetings, we show the designs we have made and the research results we have gotten. We also make the important design decisions together and agree on the tasks for the next sprint.

If you need help

Building a killer design team is not easy, and it is totally different from building development teams. It's not something to do in a few weeks. We can help out with an experienced product design team working just on your product. They can work closely together with your team and establish a design culture in your company. Even companies with in-house design teams hire us when they don't have enough resources or they want their teams to see the best methods in action.

CASE STUDIES



1. How we made call-centers' life happier with heavy user research

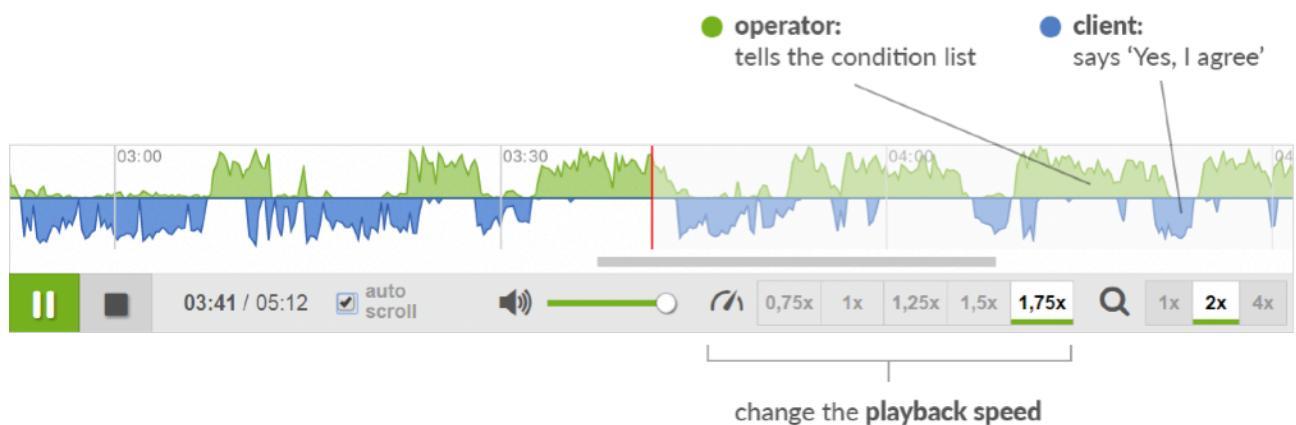
We often hear: "This call is recorded for quality assurance". And they really do quality assurance. A person at the call-center goes through all the calls and replays them to check if the operator spoke politely enough, informed the customer sufficiently about options, etc.

Put yourself in the place of this person for a minute. Evaluate 100 calls averaging three minutes, not much in a call-center where they make thousands of calls daily. Listening to all 100 calls takes 100 times three minutes – five hours! That is five hours, listening to them immediately one after the other, with no lunch break or coffee break. That is a strenuous job to do all day.

We worked with Calgo Call Center, one of the market leaders in call-center software, visiting many call centers and watching how people work there.

Our user interviews found that quality assurance specialists do not always listen to the complete call. They search for the critical points. Did the operator inform the client about conditions properly? Did the client reply "yes" unambiguously? Did the operator note the arranged appointment accurately?

Experienced QA specialists know when to expect these critical points – e.g. clients usually say "yes" 45 seconds before the end of the call. So, a QA specialist would subtract that from the length of the call, click there on the progress bar, and if it's not what they are looking for, they make another guess and click again.



Player showing a typical call.

Based on these findings, we agreed with the Calgo team on two new features.

1) Sound visualization of the operator and the client. This way the QA specialist can see instantly when the operator was reciting a long "condition list", or when the client replied, so QA specialists can go straight to the critical points.

2) Option to change the playback speed (without affecting the voice pitch). As it turns out, calls are still understandable at 1.25x speed, and experienced QA specialists can even go up to 1.75x and still follow the call.

All in all, these two features halved the time necessary to do the work. Call-centers are happy because QA now works much more efficiently. QA specialists are happy because they don't have to do arithmetic and guesswork when listening to a call.

Client feedback after the project: “The new player is f**n great! Awesome! I am in love with it. It saves me hours. Every day.”

2. “If I can’t do it right here, I will just close your app.” - RisingStack case study

Sometimes designers get so busy designing a navigation structure, they forget that most people won't even try the menu. They will just leave your app if they can't do what they want on the screen where they are. In our recent project with Trace, we found this problem twice.

Trace is a web application for developers working with microservices, which itself is a simple concept, developed by RisingStack. Instead of building huge multipurpose software, developers like to break their apps down into smaller chunks which run individually in the background.

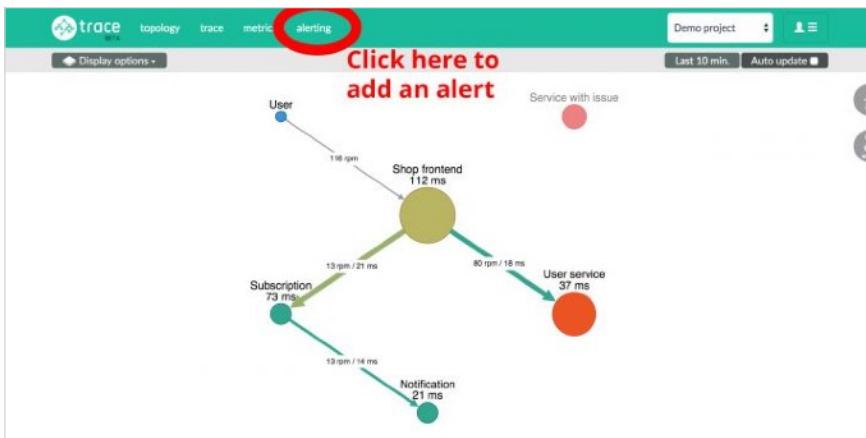
Facebook might seem like one app, but on the servers, in the background, it comprises many smaller services working together. One microservice can handle the chat, another can put together a news feed, and a third manages events. If one breaks down, the rest will still work, as it is a more flexible infrastructure. With Trace, developers can monitor those services and see how they communicate with each other.

We tested it with real developers working with microservices. One of their tasks was to add a new service to monitor. See the old design here. If you want to add a service, you have to click on the menu button with a profile icon in the top right corner of the page. Nobody found it.



In our new design, we introduced a new vertical menu. It takes up less space so we can put the important functions on the top. So now it's easy to add a new service.

Developers can also add custom alerts to each service so they receive a notification when something goes wrong. It is an important function because they don't want to check the services all the time – they will just come back when there's an issue. In the old version, they had to click on the Alert menu, hit the Create a New Alert button and fill out a form.



During our tests, developers usually clicked on the services in the diagram when they wanted to do something with them. They didn't look for alerts in the menu at all, so we added a Setup Alert button into the service details model. Now people can add alerts when they click on a service.

Developers set up alerts based on the values they see on the graph. With this new solution, they don't have to go back and forth between the alerts page and the graph view to check the data. They can now set up an alert faster and more conveniently.

Don't hide important functions in the menu. They have to appear on the screen when the users need them.

A screenshot of the trace UI showing the 'Alert list' and 'Incidents' sections. The 'Alert list' section displays three existing alerts: 'High memory usage', 'High error rate', and 'Extreme CPU load'. Each alert has columns for 'ALERT NAME', 'SERVICES', 'NOTIFICATIONS', 'ENABLED', and 'ACTIONS'. The 'Create a new alert' button is highlighted with a red circle. The 'Incidents' section shows two ongoing incidents: one for 'Subscription' with the issue 'memory is over 300 megabytes' and another for 'Shop frontend' with the issue 'wrongStatusCode is over 10 percentage'. Each incident has columns for 'LEVEL', 'SERVICE', 'ISSUE', 'STARTED AT', and 'ACTIONS'.

3. How to build trust in self-driving cars?

Fleets of self-driving cars will hit the roads in a few years. One day we'll wake up to find these new machines everywhere. Solving the technical challenges is one thing, but how will we deal with the human side? Will we feel safe surrounded by robo-cars?



Autonomous cars resemble airplanes. We know they are safer than normal cars, but still, we retain some reservations. Building trust is not an easy thing. When we face a challenge like this at UX studio, we usually start by observing how people behave and test different ideas with quick prototypes.

People look at the driver's face when they want to make sure that they are in control and aware of everything. This instinctive human behavior won't disappear because of some new technology, so we must adapt to it. We imagine self-driving cars with one display in the center. Everyone in the car can see it showing the state of the car all the time. This will be the "face" of the driver to check.

So, we designed a UI where the car always shows what it is doing at that exact moment and what it sees around us. We have a schematic view of all the cars, bikes and pedestrians, which proved easily understandable during our user tests. It assures us that the car is noting every obstacle. We also display the route so you can predict the car's moves.

 Say 'Hey Car'

12:05

18°C 



We don't think people will watch this display all the time, but when a risky situation arises, it's always there in the same place in the middle, ready for a quick check. We also experimented with different signs for the objects that need special attention, like bikers or people crossing the street.

We trust machines when we know how they work and can predict what they will do. Humanoid robots are scary because their bodies suggest more power than they actually have. Big machinery in a factory is scary because you don't know what it will do after you touch that big red button. Unless you are one of the few trained professionals, of course. On the other hand, a vacuum cleaner bot is not scary because you know how it works and what it does.

First, we highlighted the important obstacles in red. When we tested this interface with people, we realized that it does more harm than good. The red sign indicates danger and people want to do something to prevent the problem although it is not possible in a fully autonomous car, and they became stressed.



In our next iteration, we drew red lines instead of the red boxes. The lines separate the car from the people like a fence and ensure that the car notes those pedestrians and bikers. People understood the concept, and this design performed much better on the tests.



Watch the video!

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN...

Start using these methods and techniques in your business. If you need any help or just want to share your success, please contact us!



Bettina Bércesi

hello@uxstudio.hu

+36 20 367 42 88

