UX FUNDAMENTALS:
The Concepts, Process and Proving the Value

usabilla

WRITTEN BY
LANA MILLER

Contents

Introduction

There's no denying that companies are starting to pay much more attention to UX and recognizing the impact it can have on long-term business success (we all know that by now, right?)

If you've downloaded this ebook, chances are you're aware of UX but maybe you just want to know a bit more; maybe you want to know why and how to make a case for investing in UX or convince someone else in your organization that they need to; maybe you're already a UX Designer and you want to send this to your mom to explain what you do for a living... or maybe you just want to brush up on the fundamentals yourself.

Whatever the reason, this ebook will give you an overview of the key concepts within UX, the process for effective UX design and how to prove the value of it.

Use it as a reference for your own work, pass it on to colleagues or simply just read and enjoy!

Let's begin with a brief explanation of what UX is:

User Experience, defined in its simplest form, encompasses all aspects of the end-user's interaction with the company, its services, and its products.

> *UX is the totality of end-users' perceptions as they interact with a product or service. These perceptions include effectiveness, efficiency, emotional satisfaction, and the quality of the relationship with the entity that created the product or service.*
>
> – Kuniavsky, 2010

The Concepts

Even though UX is an increasingly expansive discipline, the key concepts remain largely the same. These are the main things that contribute to the User Experience of your site and what you need to think about when implementing a UX strategy.
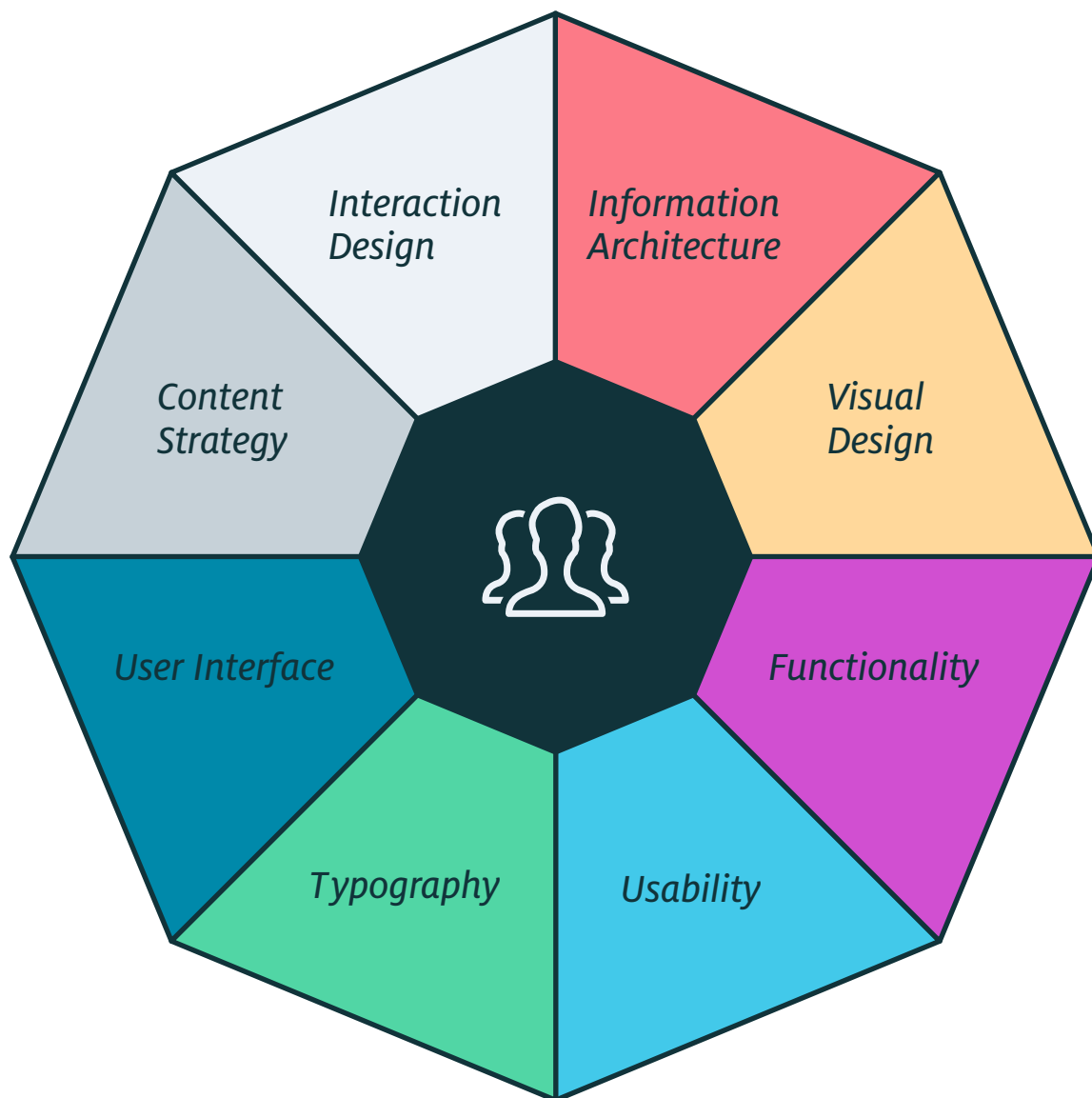
INTERACTION DESIGN

Interactions can be categorized as every click, scroll and action taken by the user while on your site and they form an integral part of the User Experience; if a user can't interact successfully with your site then they're not going to have a positive experience while doing so. Interaction Design seeks to push the boundaries of mere functionality by creating delight with every interaction and ultimately, a desirable and engaging experience for your user.

To learn more about Interaction Design, download our free ebook all about it **here**.

USER INTERFACE

UI and UX are often confused and (wrongly) used interchangeably. The simplest way to distinguish the two is to say that the User Interface is what the user sees and interacts with, while the User Experience is (as mentioned) the all user-focussed aspects of any system but also importantly, related to how the user **feels** when using that system.

UX FUNDAMENTALS:
Interaction Design

GET IT NOW

VISUAL DESIGN

As humans, we are driven by aesthetics and in the case of UX, visual design contributes substantially to building a positive experience. Your average user probably won't see all the nuances of interaction design or information architecture that you've painstakingly crafted but you can be sure they'll notice the visuals. By visual design, we mean anything you see on the page; it incorporates everything from images and layout to typography illustrations and even whitespace. First impressions are **94%** design related and judgments on web site credibility are **75%** based on a website's overall aesthetics, so if your site isn't visually pleasing for your users, they're gonna be put off.

TYPOGRAPHY

Choosing fonts and thinking about how text is displayed may not seem like one of the more vital parts of crafting a positive user experience... but it is. If your users have even the slightest bit of difficulty deciphering the information on your site, it will cause a negative impression and impact their overall experience. Creating a consistent and accessible visual language will help the reader understand your content the way you want them to.

"

As designers, we're essentially the tour guides of an experience, and typography is the path our users take. Thoughtful consideration of type allows the audience to connect with what they're looking at.

- Sam Kapila, *Designer and Director of Instruction at The Iron Yard.*

"

USABILITY

Usability is the bare minimum of UX, if your audience can't use your product, they certainly won't **want** to use it. When it comes down to it, a system's usability should be effortless. The less attention the user has to pay to figure out how to use the system, the easier it will be for them to accomplish the task at hand.

Usability is essential – a system must first be usable before you can work on making it desirable.

INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE

Information architecture is an incredibly important part of UX. It's the creation of a structure for your site; organizing the information in a way that helps users understand where they are as well as what they need to do (or where they need to go) to complete their task. Users need clarity, and IA helps structure and organize your site to achieve this. Without this, your users would be left confused, frustrated, and unlikely to return.

CONTENT

Having clear, concise and engaging content on your site is one of the best ways to deliver meaningful information to your users. Content can help to go beyond creating something that's just informative to building a long-term relationship with your users. Content can be anything from product information, guides, blog posts, podcasts, video or social media. It's a great tool for building thought leadership and showing your expertise; it will also contribute to your users' impression of your brand and in turn, the experience they have while interacting with it. Make sure you have a robust content strategy in place that will contribute positively to the experience your users are looking for.

FUNCTIONALITY

This final concept is a simple one: your product/service/website must allow your users to complete their desired action. In other words, it has to **work**, and it has to work well. If it doesn't have the desired outcome for your users, they will abandon the process. In fact, **88%** of online consumers are less likely to return to a site after a bad experience. Make sure you have processes in place to keep track of bugs, errors or broken functionality.

The Process
The 6 Basic Steps for Effective UX Design

Now you know the key concepts that contribute to building a good User Experience, how do you go about actually achieving it? UX processes may vary depending on industry, team size and goals but the basic elements below should be visible in all UX work.

Remember: User Experience is the link between business/product goals and user needs; it facilitates the connection between what your users want to do and what you want your users to do. Bear this in mind when moving through the process.

6. REPEAT

1. EMPATHIZE

2. DEFINE

3. IDEATE

4. PROTOTYPE

5. TEST
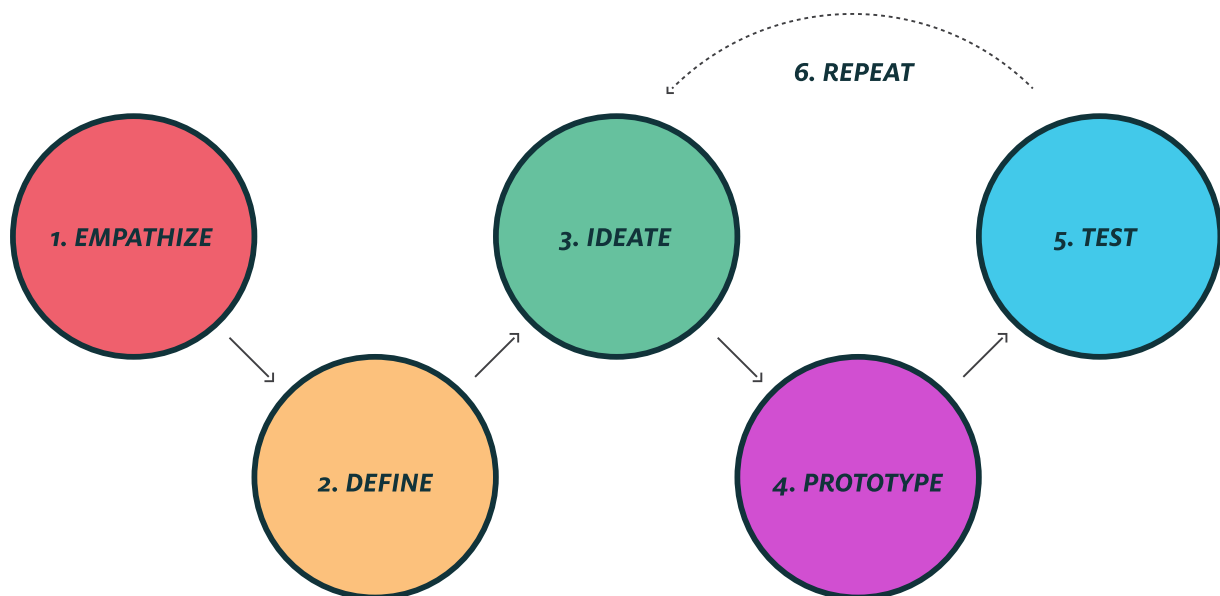
1. RESEARCH

The first step of any UX design process should be to get to know exactly who you're designing for. There are many methods you can use to find a bit more information about the users of your product/service; you should always try to use a combination of quantitative and qualitative data from analytics and user feedback software. Putting your user at the center of the design process is the only way to design successfully for them. By understanding the goals, needs and wants of your users you will be able to effectively empathize with them and in turn, design effectively **for** them. One of the best ways to do this is to create personas that serve as a fictional representation of your users. Who are they? What are they trying to accomplish? What are their pain points? What are their motivations? Get as detailed as you like to build a better understanding of who your user is. This will help you to design with a 'real' person in mind rather than for your users in general; it's easier to empathize with and understand a persona, and greater empathy = greater UX.

2. DEFINE

The next step is to define exactly what it is you (or should we say your users) are trying to achieve based on your research and insights. Map the journey that you want your users to take and highlight any potential barriers along the way. Define as many scenarios as possible and consider the implications on the goals of your product or service. Are there any technical restrictions? Is what you plan to do in line with the product/service vision? Define exactly what is needed and corroborate with what is possible.
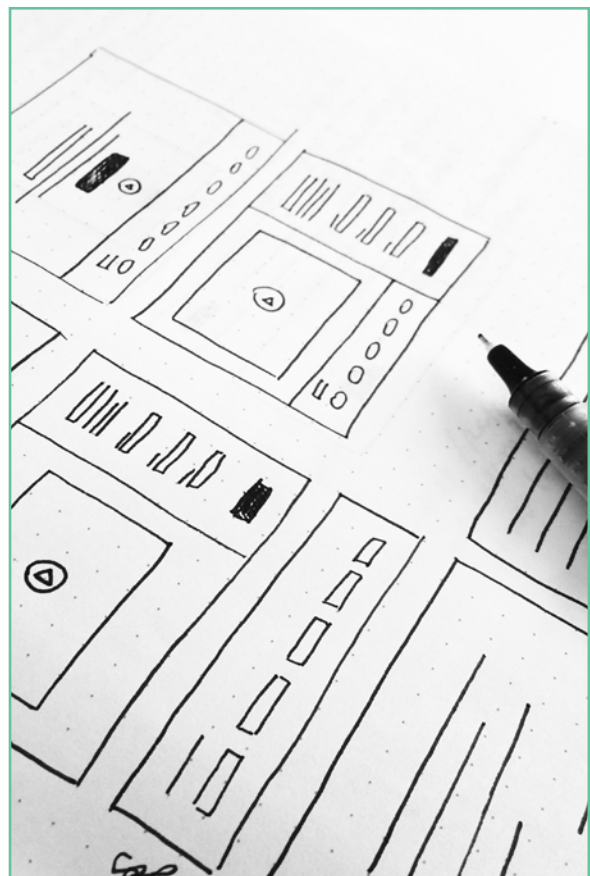
4. PROTOTYPE

Wireframing/prototyping is the most effective way to give life to what you've designed before it reaches the development stage. Draw out the interface on paper with all of the intended functionality, then ask as many people as possible to 'role-play' the interactions. This process will highlight any potential hurdles or unexpected user behavior that you may have overlooked.

3. IDEATE

Now comes the part where you bring together all the information so far to start brainstorming solutions. This could be in the form of storyboards or moodboards to help give a visual reference to the 'problem' you're trying to solve. This is also a great way to show something tangible to stakeholders or other teams involved the decision-making process before you actually create anything.

5. TEST

Testing is vital for UX design because there's an element of the process that relies on intuition and perceived ideas of what the best solution is. The only way to know for sure is to test. It doesn't have to be a long, laborious process; according to the Nielsen Norman Group, **85%** of UX problems can be solved by testing with only 5 users. So ask people within your organization, do remote user testing or even ask some clients to try out the new functionalities before they go live. Whatever the method, just make sure you do it! Test, test, test!
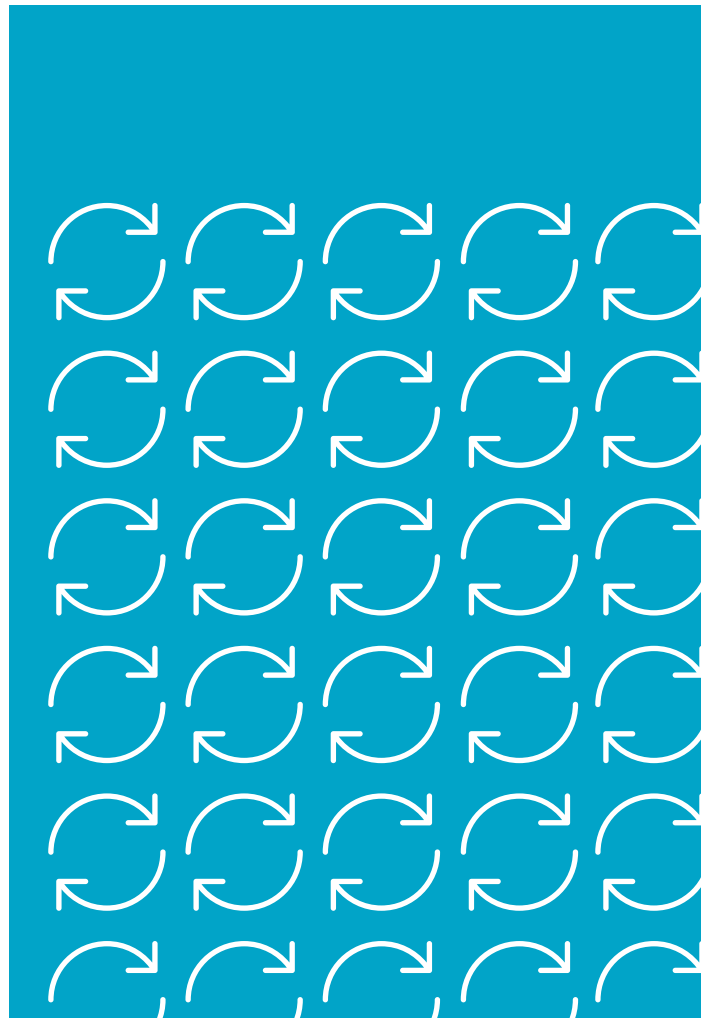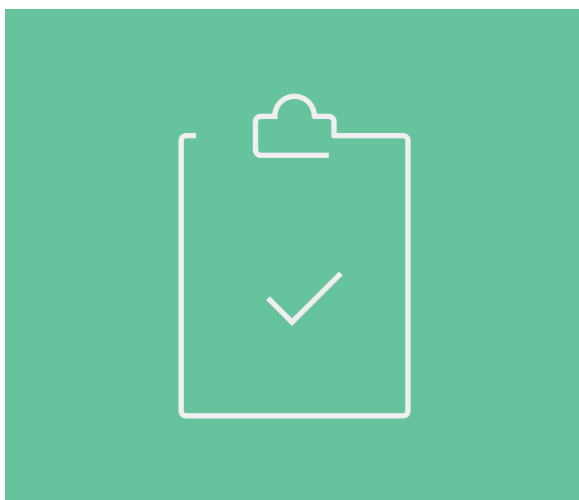
6. REPEAT

Depending on the results of your testing, you may have to go back to the ideate stage and come up with some alternative solutions. The UX design process should be iterative. Having to repeat some stages of the process shouldn't be discouraging, because you'll ultimately achieve a better-designed end product.

Proving the Value

If you have an understanding of UX and its importance to long-term business success, that's great... but what if your CEO or upper management doesn't feel the same way? Before you can make a case for investing more time, money or resources in UX, it's important to first assess the level of UX maturity that your company is currently at i.e. how willing are they to adopt UX practices and make it an integral part of the business function? The following model is commonly used for measuring UX maturity. Where does your company fit?

> ## *To optimally integrate experience design in an organization, it's helpful to first map out its maturity level.*
>
> *- Juan Manuel Carraro, Customer Experience & Experience Planning at IBM Interactive Experience. Author, Speaker & Coach.*

UX MATURITY MODEL

Where does your company fit?

1 - UNRECOGNIZED
UX is viewed as unimportant and an unnecessary effort within the business. You need to work hard to convince management that it's worth their while.

2 - INTERESTED
Your organization is aware of what UX is and why it's important but there are other barriers like time, resources & budget stopping full investment.

3 - INVESTED
UX is an important part of the business and user-centered processes are formalized across teams; start making a case for adopting UX company-wide.

4 - COMMITTED
UX is critical to the company and executives/upper management are actively involved.

5 - ENGAGED
UX is one of the core components of your overall business strategy.

6 - EMBEDDED
UX is weaved into the fabric of everything the company does. *You live and breath UX!*

If your company isn't on the level you think it should be or you simply want to progress to the next one, it might just be a case of giving management more reason to invest in UX. Read on for some information you can use to do just that.

Why Invest in UX?

BRAND LOYALTY

It doesn't matter whether you make SaaS tools or own an ecommerce site, people are interacting with you to accomplish something.

Better usability will ensure that users can accomplish their tasks with ease and minimal frustration. Better design that caters to your users and their needs can help make a product both more effective and more efficient.
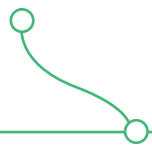
If users are satisfied with the experience they have with your product, they're more likely to continue using it and recommend your business to others; better UX builds brand advocates.

INCREASED REVENUE AND CONVERSION

This next one is simple. Better UX = More $$$.

One of the best ways to get people to buy into your offering is to make it as easy as possible for them to do so. UX is about facilitating the end goal of your user, and if that goal coincides with purchasing something from you then it simply makes financial sense to invest in a positive user exerience. In the case of an ecommerce store, good UX translates to a smooth browsing experience and a quicker checkout process for the shopper. So better UX means more transactions and in turn, increased revenue.

As Jakob Nielsen said:

> " _It is not unusual that a user-centered approach doubles the conversion rate and revenues_ "

SAVING TIME, MONEY AND RESOURCES

Redesigning is expensive. Developers are hired to create and innovate your digital products and websites; ideally they would spend much of their time working on projects to continuously improve your company. However, there is often an obstacle that takes resources away from development teams, and that is correcting errors. If you create a product without the user in mind, it will result in very low adoption rates. If your product lacks usability, then your product will also have even lower retention rates. This will mean you will need to do an overhaul of the product and spend much more money on a redesign; whereas a user-centred approach can save you time and money from the start. In fact, according to usability expert Dr. David Tavis, changes can cost 60-100 times as much once the product has become hard-coded.

Having a usable product that demonstrates good UX will also save you money in support costs. If your product is intuitive to users, then there is little need for having user documentation or instruction guides. This can also save your support team some work as they can invest their time more effectively in helping customers with other things.

Still not convinced? Check out these statistics...

ESPN.com revenues jumped **35%** after listening to their community and incorporating suggestions into their homepage redesign.

68% of users give up because they think you don't care about them.

(Source: Smashing Magazine)

Slow-loading websites cost retailers **£1.73bn** in lost sales each year.

38% of people will stop engaging with a website if the content/ layout is unattractive.

(Source: Adobe)

48% of people cited a website's design as the number one factor in deciding the credibility of a business.

(source: Iron Paper)

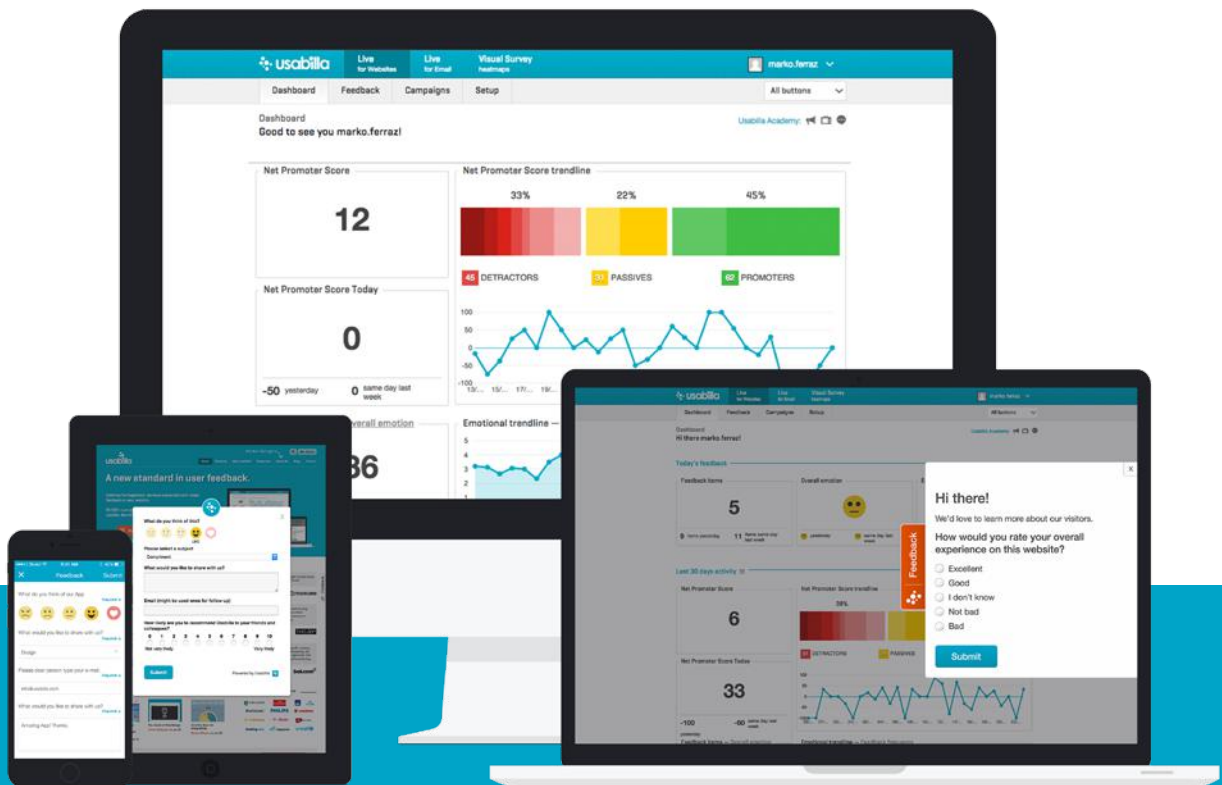Developers spend **50%** of their time fixing avoidable issues.

(Source: SocialMediaToday)

Every **$1** invested in UX can have a return of up to **$100** for your business.

(source: Ultralinx)

Improving UX

The best way to build and maintain a positive user experience is to bring your users into the conversation. Let them tell you what's working and more importantly, what's not, so you know you're always delivering the best possible experience.

REQUEST A DEMO