

# EVERYDAY UX

Ten user experience professionals  
share insights into their daily life



Luke Chambers  
& Matthew Magain

UX Mastery



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**Luke Chambers & Matthew Magain**

**UXmastery**  
USER EXPERIENCE DESIGN  
TIPS, TOOLS AND TRAINING

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*With thanks to all the brave, smart, dedicated, adventurous,  
passionate and creative user-centred designers who are making the  
world a better place, one experience at a time.*

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User Experience (UX) manager at [SEEK](#); sci-fi nerd; reluctant coffee snob; fisherman; baseball fanatic.

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Principal and Founder of [Formulate Information Design](#). You'll never look at forms the same way again.

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User experience designer; geek; maker. Loves inclusive design, chocolate, robots, wearable computing; makes geek & science jewellery.

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# Who is this Book For?

If you're new to the field of User Experience (UX), or are curious about how other UX Designers work, this is the book for you. You'll learn:

- what a "day in the life" looks like for a number of UX designers from all over the world;
- which tools the experts are using to do their job;
- the common traits between successful UX designers.

With beautiful portrait photographs of each contributor, *Everyday UX* is a fascinating insight into the lives and minds of 10 prominent designers.

# From the Authors

One of the most popular questions asked by people in the UX Mastery community is:

*What does a day in the life of a user experience designer look like?*

This book is about what user experience designers do each day, but it offers much more than just a snapshot of their calendar.

As you might expect, there is no such thing as a "typical day"; the organisations, people and projects that UXers deal with are as varied and unique as the design challenges they face, and every designer tackles a problem in their own way. This variety is part of what makes our jobs so exciting—we all have our own stories to tell.

Here are ten of those stories, from around the globe. We hope they help you to make your own story worth telling too.

*Luke & Matt.*

## The UX Mastery Newsletter



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# EVERYDAY UX



## Ben Tollady

Ben Tollady is a founder and the UX Director of Melbourne-based user experience design agency *Thirst Studios*. He is originally from Oxford, UK.

[@tollady](https://twitter.com/tollady) | [thirststudios.com.au](http://thirststudios.com.au)

### **How did you get into UX? What other jobs have you had?**

I trained in industrial design in the UK, and have always loved the challenge of designing products that humans interact with. After graduation, I got a job in automotive design, and somehow fell into web design in London during the dot-com bubble days. After several

information architecture and UX jobs, I did a few stints as a freelancer, both here and in London. I finally established Thirst Studios in 2008, with a business partner here in Melbourne.

*"It's like solving a puzzle. It's fun, and I get to do it every day."*



### **What are your favourite parts of the job?**

I really enjoy the problem solving part of my job the most—taking complex interactions and turning them into something intuitive and easy for people to use. It's like solving a puzzle. It's fun, and I get to do it every day. I also really enjoy conducting user tests. It's fascinating, seeing real

people using the designs that you've put together. I never cease to be amazed by the things that you can learn watching somebody else use a website or product.

### **Where does your inspiration come from?**

Most of my inspiration comes from blogs, design websites, from talking to inspiring peers within the industry and attending meet-ups. I also find inspiration in products, architecture and furniture design magazines, and in nature and the environment around us too.

*"Quite regularly we come up against the challenge of explaining our job to our clients ... they tend to think that UX is just nice UI."*



## **What sort of unique challenges might you come across in your job, and how do you overcome them?**

I think the job of UX and the processes involved are very wide-reaching and encompass a lot of unique disciplines, from research through to testing and design. Quite regularly, we come up against the challenge of explaining our job to our clients—what UX means and the many facets involved. They tend to think that UX is just nice UI or simply about putting some wireframes together. We like to support our designs with data collected through research, to make sure that all of the designs are truly user-centred. That means having access to site users to observe them and understand their needs. Unfortunately it's hard to convince all of our clients to let us have access to that kind of data or to invest in the

research phase before we can start designing.

## **What makes a good user experience designer?**

I think a good user experience designer is somebody who's empathetic and open-minded, with a creative, inquisitive brain. Obviously, having a love of technology and an ability to sketch are useful too!

## **Are there any useful websites that you use regularly?**

The first ones that come to mind are *Boxes & Arrows*, *Smashing Magazine* and *Konigi*. We use some of the tools that *Zurb* offer too, and read UX related sites such as *UX Magazine*, *UX Matters* and *UX Mastery* of course.

***"The tasks I do and the responsibilities I have throughout the day are pretty varied—that's what I like most about UX."***



## **Take us through what a typical day looks like for you.**

The tasks I do and the responsibilities I have throughout the day are pretty varied—that's what I like most about UX. I work closely with the team here to sketch out ideas and whiteboard various bits and pieces. Most days usually consist of wireframes and perhaps some user testing and report writing.

I seem to be having lots of meetings at the moment. I've been involved in new business meetings with prospective or new clients, which involves me explaining what we do, what our UX processes are, and how we like to work. Other meetings consist of stakeholder management, focus groups with clients, and meetings with some of the site users so that we understand the requirements for a site or product.

*"Paper, pencil and a Sharpie are my favourite tools. I find sketching to be the fastest, easiest and most tactile way to get ideas out of my head and to start working out solutions for design problems. "*



## **Do you have a favourite set of tools to help you do your job?**

Paper, pencil and a Sharpie are my favourite tools. I find sketching to be the fastest, easiest and most tactile way to get ideas out of my head and to start working out solutions for design problems. We also use a whiteboard a fair bit for thrashing out ideas and approaches to certain problems.

We use OmniGraffle Pro for wireframes, and Adobe Photoshop for all of

our user interface design—I use those tools on an almost daily basis. We're also using Zurb's products, mostly Notable, which is a great tool for sharing designs and gathering feedback from clients.

The more regular applications we use are Word, Dropbox, Basecamp and Harvest. For reminders, I use Apple's Reminders—if it isn't written down I completely forget to do it so I have to keep making long to-do lists.

*"A good user experience designer is somebody who's empathetic and open-minded."*



## **Do you have any favourite mobile apps or software that you use?**

Probably hundreds! There's a calendar app called Tempo that I've been playing with which is cool—it's a variation on the iCal app that comes with my iPhone. I'm also using an app called Pocket, which collects web-based news articles and saves them so you can read them later.

Obviously, I use Twitter and Instagram. There's also an app called IA writer, which enables me to do a bit of writing on my phone on the train.

## **How do you deal with information overload?**

I'm actually not particularly good at it. I've been putting more information straight in to Basecamp and Highrise to keep things out of my email, because I keep losing messages deep in my inbox.

What I tend to do when I first get into the studio is to write down the tasks that I need to get done that day on a piece of paper at my desk. I'm finding that it helps me focus on getting things done.



*"I love my work and I also consider it a hobby, so I would rather work on a UX design challenge than play on an Xbox or watch crap reality TV."*

### **Is that how you manage a work/life balance as well?**

That's something else I'm not very good at! Having spent quite a few years freelancing I'm used to working on the laptop at home. I often find myself slipping back into working at home in the evenings. I'm trying to discipline myself to spend more quality time with the family at home rather than do work.

I love my work and I also consider it a hobby, so I would rather work on a UX design challenge than play on an Xbox or watch crap reality TV. I've

come to realise that, in a way, the work we do is a luxury. I know for a lot of people work is work, and they don't want to do it after hours, but for me it's actually something I love doing. It's the work/life balance that's difficult.

*Interview by L. Chambers. Photos by L. Chambers & B. Tollady.*



- 1) Dotgrid.co graphpaper sketchpad 2) Premium A4 writing pad (grid lined), 3) 15" Macbook Pro, 4) Sennheiser headphones, 5) *Responsive Web Design* by Ethan Marcotte and *Designing for Emotion* by Aaron Walter, 6) Reading glasses, 7) Staedtler Mars Fineline mechanical pencil, blue Mitsubishi Uniball UB157 pen, black Mitsubishi Uniball UB157 pen, Light blue Pantone art pen, Fine point Sharpie marker, Staedtler eraser, 8) Apple iPhone 5 32MB, 9) Flip camera, 10) R2D2 figurine.

#### Ben's Tips:

1. *Ask lots of questions.* Successful UX design solves a problem, and you can't hope to find the solution without first

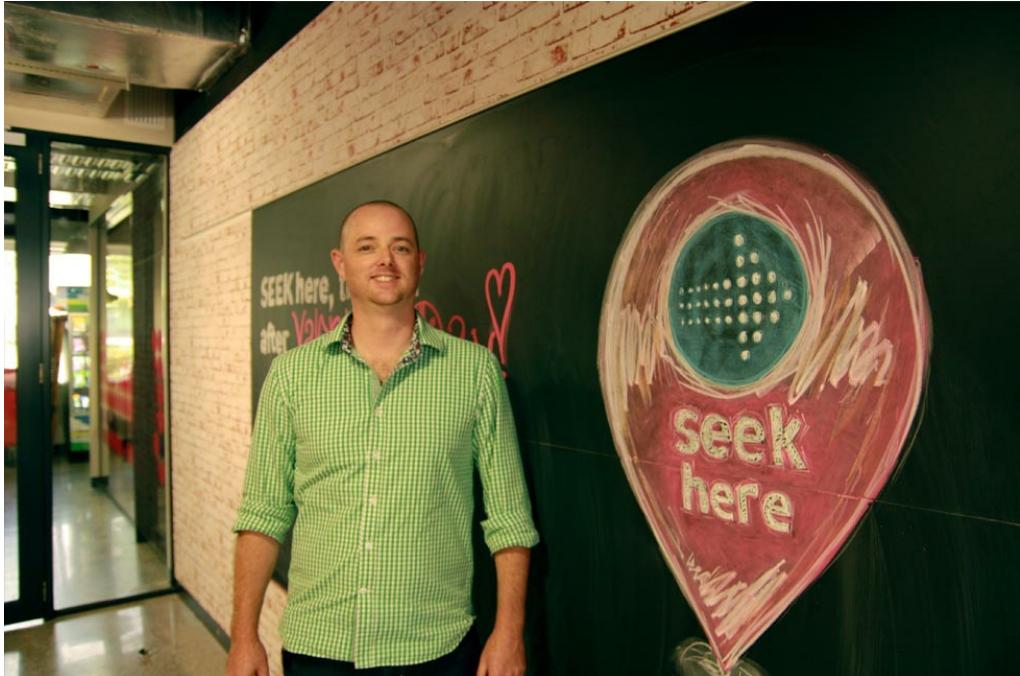
understanding what the problem is. Ask as many questions as you need before you start designing, and don't stop observing, analysing and asking more as the project progresses. There are no silly questions!

2. *Wear someone else's shoes.* Never forget the importance of the 'user' in user experience design. Successful UX design should always be user-centred, so take the time to empathise with them; step into their world and understand their needs of the interface or system you're designing. Also consider additional, external factors such as the environment the person is operating within.
3. *Get away from the computer.* It's tempting to jump straight onto the computer and start designing, but stepping away from your desk can be a great thing to do at the start of a UX project. The first design is rarely the best solution, so rather than narrowing your design approach immediately, get out and talk to representative users of the system. Sketch ideas quickly with a pencil & paper and explore the problem for a while instead. Your designs will be much better for the slower, more considered approach.
4. *Test and iterate.* The best way to check that your designs are going to hit the mark is to test them with real users. There's simply no better alternative. You'll have heard the mantra before but it's worth repeating—test & iterate early and often, throughout the project life-span.
5. *Keep it usable.* I've experienced several beautiful UI designs recently that whilst looking fantastic, have not adhered to ideal usability principles. It's important to remember there are

many facets of user experience (of which UI and usability are just two) and we should ensure that all are given equal attention in any design. Usability is hugely important in UX. If you aren't already aware of them, I'd recommend reading Nielsen's usability heuristics as a general rule of thumb.

## Follow-up: Ben's Reading List

- *Don't Make Me Think* by Steve Krug
- *Interaction Design: Beyond Human-Computer Interaction* by Yvonne Rogers, Helen Sharp and Jenny Preece
- *Designing for Interaction* by Dan Saffer
- *Designing for Web Standards* by Jeffrey Zeldman
- *MTIV: Process, Inspiration and Practice for the New Media Designer* by Hillman Curtis



## Cameron Rogers

Cameron is the Head of User Experience at SEEK, Australia's #1 job and employment site. He's a sci-fi nerd, a reluctant coffee snob, a fisherman, and a baseball fanatic.

[@cameron\\_rogers](https://twitter.com/cameron_rogers)

### **Can you give us a rundown of how you got into UX?**

My interest in UX comes from my psych background. When I was in high school, I was torn between doing graphic design and science. In Year 10, a career advisor told me I couldn't go down both paths and that I'd have to make a choice. At the time I chose to go down the science path and did

a Bachelor of Science at Melbourne University. Most of my classes were in Psychology, though—I was drawn to human behaviour.

I applied for a PhD at Melbourne University, but at the same time the Telstra Research Laboratories were looking for people with psych backgrounds to work with their engineers. I became fascinated with the idea that a large, iconic, Australian brand had a group of engineers playing with technology who needed to understand the human side of things.

*"I became fascinated with the idea that a large, iconic, Australian brand had a group of engineers playing with technology who needed to understand the human side of things."*

During the dot-com boom, interfaces that emerged were much richer and people started to understand that there was a real problem with the way that technology was exposed to people. I ended up bringing graphic design and art (that I really wanted to do back in high school) into the science side of things.



## What's your favorite part of the job?

I love how fast-paced the industry is. The different design movements that occur, even within the space of a year, and the new patterns and paradigms that emerge are amazing.

I had a watershed moment during a conversation with a designer colleague when the iPod first came out. He was enamored with this device that could play music and was, from an industrial design perspective, beautiful and functional. His exact words, while he was showing off this device were, 'I love it so much I want to have it embedded in my chest'. He was glowing. This little piece of disruptive technology had made such a big difference to his life. That's the kind of thing I really enjoy most—seeing those opportunities.

*"This little piece of disruptive technology had made such a big difference to his life. That's the kind of thing I really enjoy most—seeing those opportunities."*

## How does that translate into the way you approach UX projects?

Everything is based on a deep understanding of human behaviour and of the end-user. You need to know what the user's needs and pain points are, and then alleviate those pain-points. I work towards making sure the design decisions are grounded in real knowledge and depth.

During contextual enquiries, I put myself in the shoes of the user and follow them around. I think doing that really gives you those bursts of insight, early on. From that, you can supplement those insights with

whatever is the right tool or technique at the time—whether it is via a direct study or questionnaire, or whether some concept testing needs to occur.

***"Everything is based on a deep understanding of human behaviour and of the end-user ... I work towards making sure the design decisions are grounded in real knowledge and depth."***



In the past, I've witnessed a lot of pushback from key stakeholders around user research. I think, though, that a good UX designer needs to build up that knowledge base and empathy for the end-user. Even if you don't do the full body of research for all projects, every piece of research

that you do is going to feed your knowledge for the next. I really like the idea that accumulating this knowledge is a gradual build-up and that it helps to grow, or reinforce, that empathy.

## **When you're doing a smaller project, do you borrow techniques you already know?**

It depends on the project and what you've got at your fingertips. I think it's nice to scale appropriately to the size of the project. If there are activities that you like to do, there is still value in doing them on a smaller scale. Rather than going out and talking to ten people, perhaps you go out and talk to two or three.

It might be not as rigorous or as formal, but what it does is it allows you to set the scene again, restart, reset, kick your project off with talking to the end-user and getting back into that frame of mind.

***"I believe a good UX designer will constantly evolve his or her thinking as they work on the larger projects."***

On larger projects, it's about revisiting and re-establishing your research. You need to continually re-affirm your understanding of your user base, you need to understand what's changed or whether something has happened that has disrupted what you think you know. I believe a good UX designer will constantly evolve his or her thinking as they work on the larger projects.

## **Can you think of any examples of how last month's changes might**

## **happen within market space?**

I think there are little things that happen that disrupt thinking, for example, the launch of a new device, a Facebook app or, an upgrade to a proactive service that everybody uses. Each of these instances has the potential to change an interaction paradigm that people are used to or introduce a new way of doing something.

*"I don't think you can pass up the opportunity to sit with the end-user and have a chat."*



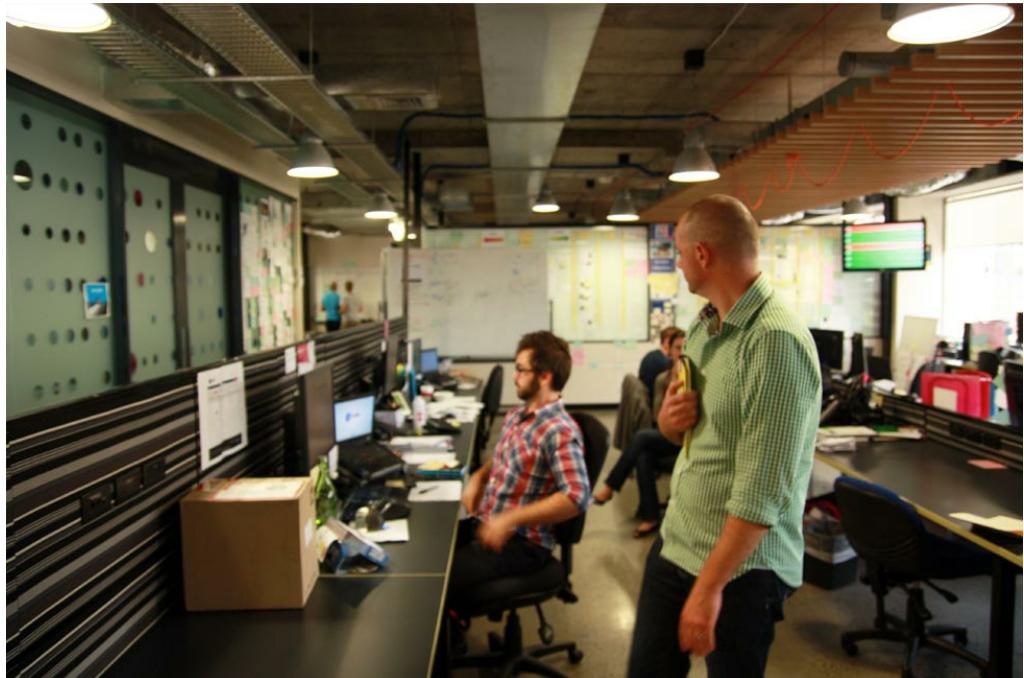
## **Do you use any typical tools, methods or techniques?**

I don't think you can pass up the opportunity to sit with the end-user

and have a chat. I also do what I call a comparative analysis, which is basically looking at similar types of solutions in the marketplace and determining how they may affect the mental model of the end-user.

***"In the very early phase, I think sketching is key—I've worked with great designers in the past who have kicked things off with sketching."***

In the very early phase, I think sketching is key—I've worked with great designers in the past who have kicked things off with sketching. I've also worked with great designers who are happy knocking something up in much higher fidelity, in whatever tool they're most comfortable with. I think getting those ideas down on paper early on and then being able to use them as discussion points is key.



**You mentioned conducting a comparative analysis from a user perspective. How are you matching this from a business or strategy perspective?**

I like to do a quick kick off with the entire stakeholder group. I will identify who the key people are and get them all into a room and have a chat about what we're trying to achieve. I then like to split them off into one-on-ones. Doing this allows you to delve deeper into what the key needs are of each stakeholder group.

*"I will identify who the key people are and get them all into a room and have a chat about what we're trying to achieve. I then like to split them off into one-on-ones."*

When you have that initial burst of stakeholders in one room, I find quite often you don't get the questions or responses that you might get if you follow up with each individual stakeholder. They've had the opportunity to ruminate on what was said and bring their own opinions to the table.

**Many UX people might see a list of techniques and wonder which ones they should be choosing. What do you think of the constant reassessing of techniques?**

I like to queue up a couple of techniques that I'd like to try and then look for the right opportunity. However, I don't like forcing a new technique into a space where I don't have the time or the headspace to do it justice. Having said that, with the way things are moving at the moment, all sorts of tools and opportunities pop up on an almost daily basis.

*"However, I don't like forcing a new technique into a space where I don't have the time or the headspace to do it justice."*

One of the good things about having a high performing team is that, when a new product, service or technique comes up, the team is already talking about it and they're more than willing to bring it to the table and show how it could be worked upon.

**Where else does your inspiration for UX come from?**

I think when you're talking about delivering good experiences there are many different opportunities to critique what people have done in the

past.

There is a gentleman that sits at the front door of the gym that I go to. He's the most phenomenal service person I've ever met. He knows everybody's name, where they work, everything—all off the top of his head.

I love to see the way people react to him, because something similar occurs when someone uses a product or service and they love it. It's that glow in their face, the twinkle in their eye, the fact that they feel important and loved.

*"... something similar occurs when someone uses a product or service and they love it. It's that glow in their face, the twinkle in their eye, the fact that they feel important and loved."*

**What are the sorts of challenges that you come across and how do you solve them?**

Running a UX team where you've got multiple work streams is a challenge, particularly making sure there is cross-pollination of ideas across the various streams. Setting up opportunities for the team to talk to each other is one solution. Making sure that you celebrate your successes is important also—when you've got your head down working towards a deadline, quite often it's easy to lose sight of the little wins that you've had along the way.

*"Making sure that you celebrate your successes is*

*important also—when you've got your head down working towards a deadline, quite often it's easy to lose sight of the little wins that you've had along the way."*

The other challenge is making sure that we think about the big picture work as well as the day-to-day projects. When you have a high performing team working on delivering a product, you also need to make sure that you have enough fat in the schedule to focus on the big picture activities as well. That helps UX designers grow and develop.

### **What do you think makes a really good UXer?**

One of the great things about UX is that you get people from all sorts of backgrounds—people with technical backgrounds, human behavior backgrounds, and those with formal design backgrounds.

I think the core characteristic, irrespective of background, is empathy for the end-user. Empathy allows UXers to make good decisions that will enable the product to be much more engaging, enjoyable and easy to use.

*"Empathy allows UXers to make good decisions that will enable the product to be much more engaging, enjoyable and easy to use."*

### **What does a typical day look like for you?**

I'm a bit of an early bird, I always have been. I think if you get into the office early you either get the chance to leave early, or if there's a lot to

do you don't end up staying too late.

At breakfast, I tend to flick through my emails or get onto Twitter to see what's happening in the world.

Once I get into the office, I work out what my day is going to be like and how I need to prepare for any meetings that are inevitably in my schedule. I usually spend about half an hour going through my RSS feeds and any articles I think might be of value. Each of the streams here has a stand-up meeting at 9.30am, so although I'm not embedded in any of the projects, I like to go and gatecrash a stand-up every day.

At the moment the bulk of my day is taken up with doing design deep dives or trying to get a feel for the design work that the team is doing or the direction they're going in. I also have stakeholder meetings with key people within the Seek organization. I have been spending quite a bit of time establishing networks and getting a big picture view of the organisation and the role that UX plays in it.

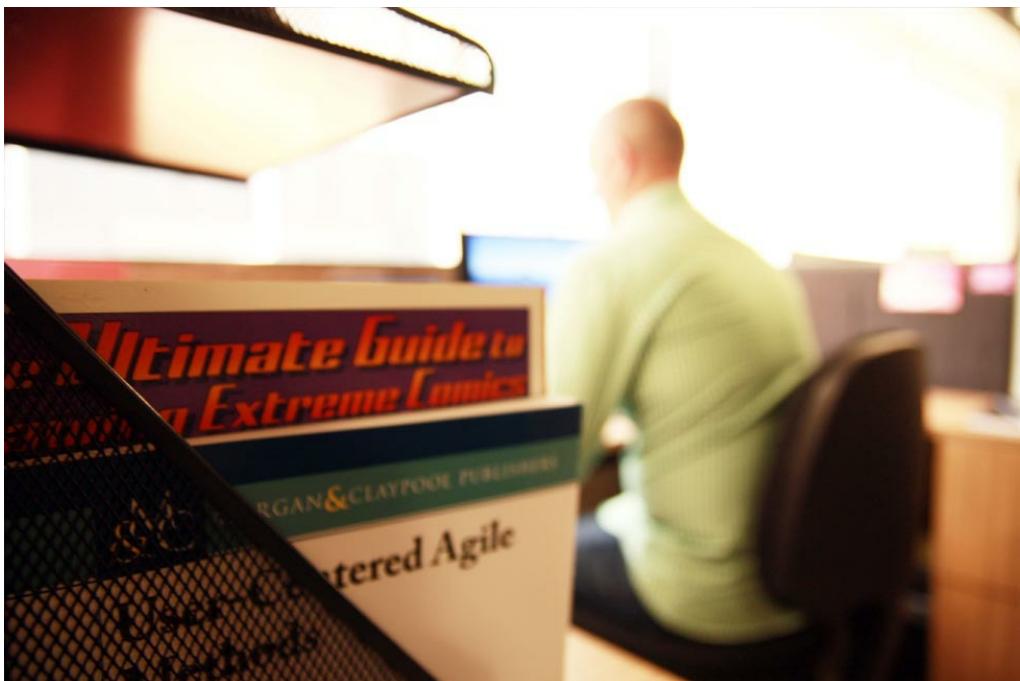
*"I have been spending quite a bit of time establishing networks and getting a big picture view of the organisation and the role that UX plays in it."*

After lunch, I execute the action points that I've queued up in the morning.

When I get home in the evening, I'll have a tablet in my hand again and the lines start to blur at that stage between whether I'm working or doing personal stuff!

## How does UX fit into a company like Seek?

Seek has a UX Lead embedded into every product stream. The people within those product streams reach out to the UX Lead when they need to and incorporate them into every step of the process. I think it's refreshing to not have to come in and do the, 'what is UX?' conversation. Thankfully, it's been really well established.



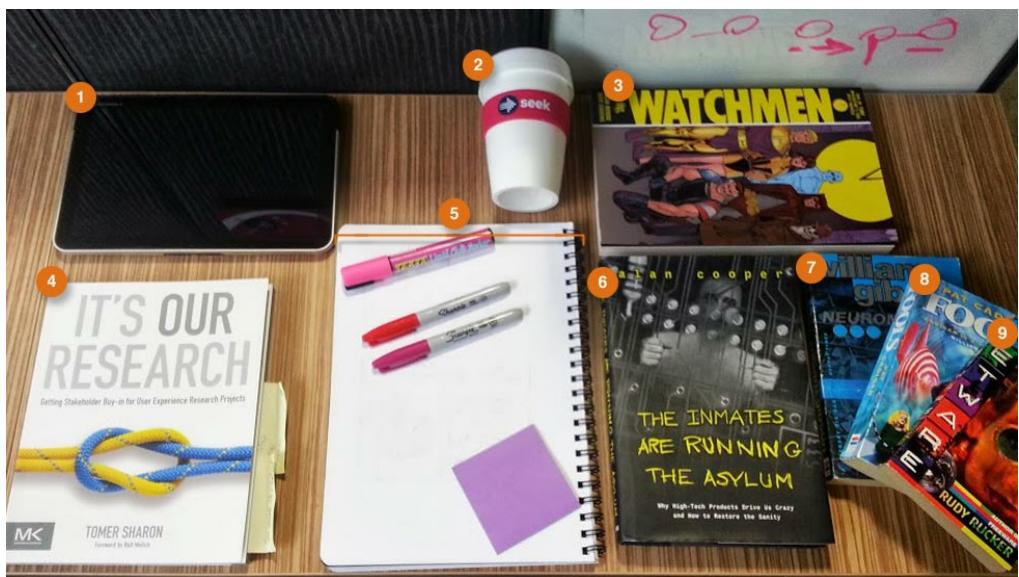
## Anything else?

I think that the supply and demand in Melbourne is extraordinary. There are some big projects that are sucking up a lot of the user experience resource. For me, knowing which UXers are out there, who is ready to move, or who is looking for their next opportunity, are things

that I like to try to keep my finger on as well.

It's not the easiest thing in the world to do, but there's nothing worse than seeing a great UXer move jobs right when you were about to start looking for somebody, and kicking yourself because that's the type of person that you wanted to have into your organisation. I'm fairly picky with who I bring in and Seek is a great company to work in. There are a lot of people who want to come in here, so you need to balance all those things out.

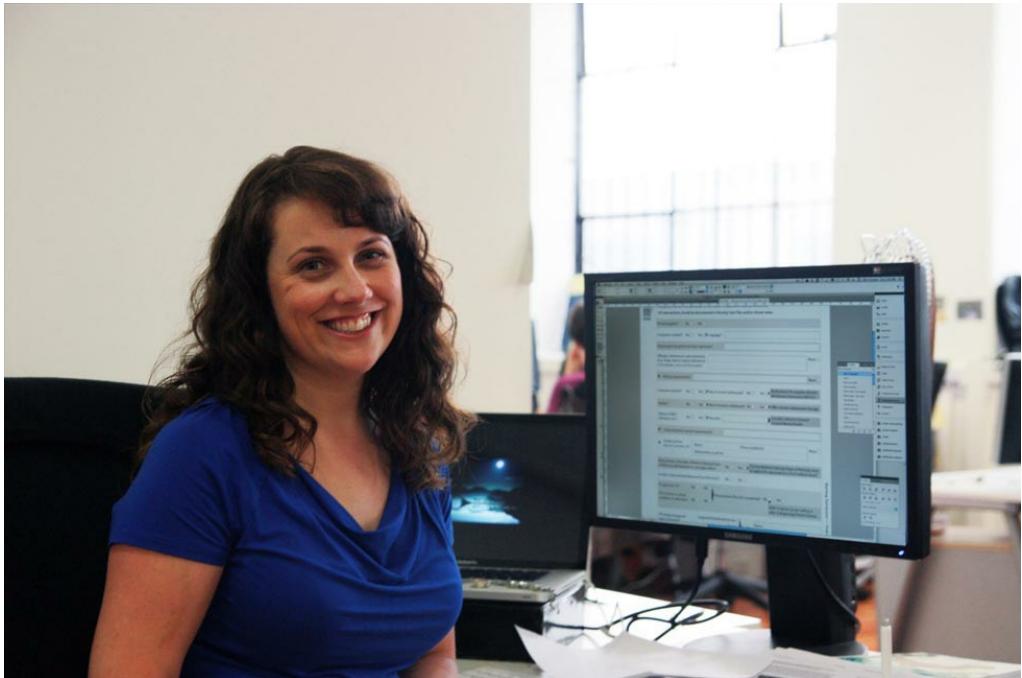
*Interview by L Chambers. Photos by L. Chambers and C. Rogers*



- 1) Apple iPad, 2) Seek KeepCup, 3) *Watchmen* by Alan Moore, 4) *It's Our Research* by Tomer Sharon, 5) Spiral-bound sketchpad, pink highlighter, red Sharpie, pink Sharpie, purple Post-It Notes, 6) *The Inmates Are Running The Asylum* by Alan Cooper, 7) *Neuromancer* by William Gibson 8) *Fools* by Pat Cadigan, 9) *Wetware* by Rudy Rucker.

## Follow-up: Cam's Reading List

- *The Inmates Are Running the Asylum: Why High Tech Products Drive Us Crazy and How to Restore the Sanity* by Alan Cooper
- *It's Our Research* by Tomer Sharon
- *The UX Research Tax* by Shane Morris
- *Neuromancer* by William Gibson
- *Watchmen* by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons



## Jessica Enders

Jessica is principal of Formulate Information Design ([formulate.com.au](http://formulate.com.au)), where she provides specialist form and application design services to public, private and not-for-profit organisations. She has over 17 years of design experience.

[@formulate](https://twitter.com/formulate) | [formulate.com.au](http://formulate.com.au)

### Can you tell us how you got into UX?

I didn't set out to work in user experience. Originally, I was going to be a Math teacher, but my parents convinced me to do a Diploma of Education after my Math degree to keep my options broad. By the time I

finished my Math degree, I was over study, so I got a job in the Australian Bureau of Statistics as a survey methodologist. Then I moved over to the private sector and worked in market research for government and not-for-profits.

***"I didn't set out to work in user experience. Originally, I was going to be a Math teacher."***

About ten years into my working life, I read a book called *I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was*. It had a series of exercises for finding your passion; I did them all over one Saturday and the answer that came out was “forms”. After this I spent a couple of years at the Hiser Group, which was one of Australia’s first usability and interaction design agencies, before starting my own business in 2007.

### **What is it like working with forms?**

When I say forms, I mean any kind of interface where you collect information, for example, a paper-based admission form in a hospital, or an application that runs on your home desktop. I do expert reviews, user research and run training, but my favorite part of the job would definitely be the actual designing. You are trying to fit a certain number of questions and answers in a constrained space, in a way that is understood by everyone. To me it’s like solving a puzzle, so I really love that. Hours pass without me noticing that I’m even doing that sort of work.

**"To me it's like solving a puzzle, so I really love that. Hours pass without me noticing that I'm even doing that sort of work."**



## **How much of your work is paper forms?**

I probably do paper forms about 50% of the time. Many people say, “Oh, everything’s mobile and this is the new age”, but many systems in the real world still require paper for good reasons. Paper is just another technology. It’s transportable, lightweight, low cost and flexible.

**"Many systems in the real world still require paper for good reasons. Paper is just another technology. It's transportable, lightweight, low cost and flexible."**

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## **Can you tell us a little bit about some of the tools that you use in a normal project?**

Adobe InDesign is the first that comes to mind—it's desktop publishing software. I find InDesign handy when designing paper forms, because it can be sub-millimetre perfect and you get alignment beautifully. I also use it for electronic form design because it gives clients a real sense of what a high fidelity form is going to look like.

For situations when I need to give a general sense of how something is going to work, I use Balsamiq or hand-drawn sketches. Aside from that, I have a couple of models that I've developed to describe what makes a good form and what a form comprises. I tend to refer to those if I'm doing an expert review or training.

## **What inspires your form designs?**

I think because forms draw from many different domains, from marketing to psychology to business process engineering, I get a lot of my inspiration from unrelated fields. While I'm always trying to keep on top of the latest trends in form design, I also keep an ear out for what's happening in other design domains.



*"The field of forms is not well known. Clients know they need developers, they know they need marketing and finance, but they don't know that there's such a thing as forms."*

### **What would be some of the unique challenges of your job?**

One of the main challenges is convincing people that it's worth putting effort into the design of their forms. The field of forms is not well known. Clients know they need developers, they know they need marketing and finance, but they don't know that there's such a thing as forms.

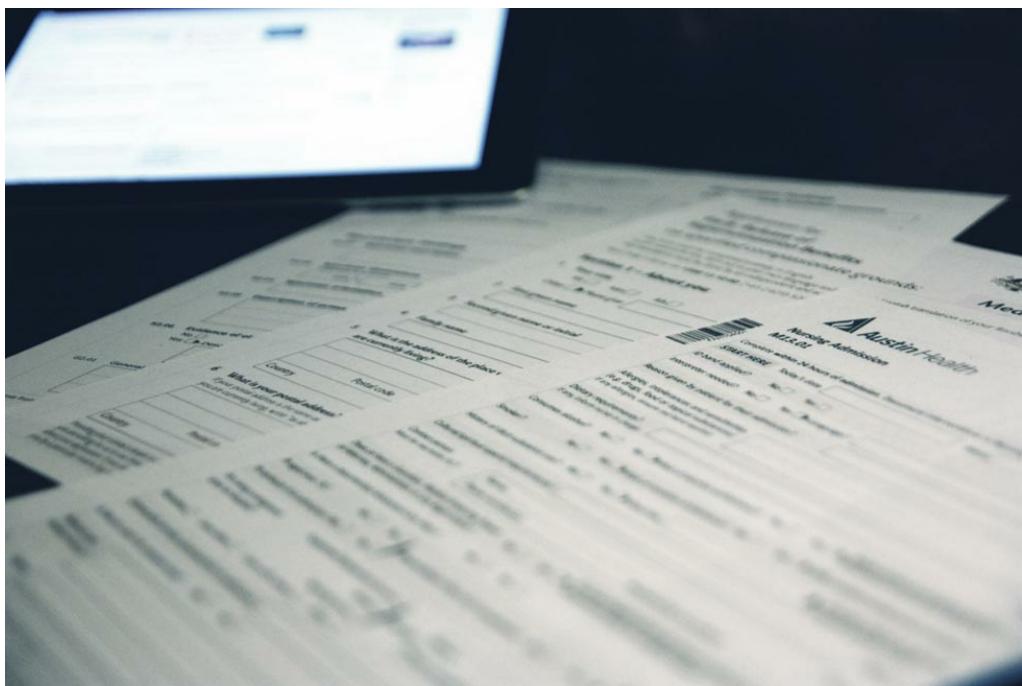
What has also become more difficult is designing for a broad range of platforms or screens, which isn't necessarily specific to forms. Nowadays

there are so many different devices; you have to get comfortable with letting go of perfection around the finished product.

## **So how does that translate, for example, in design?**

The first thing is to check with my clients what their customers are using. I still think that aside from the most basic of forms, it's a real pain to fill out a form on a small device.

I tend to get involved in designing big complex forms for clients and find that they struggle getting their users all the way to the end. In one way, these forms can be a little easier to design because we can assume that most people will be using a desktop or at least a laptop with a moderate size screen.



Some research came out from Google last year about just how much people work with multiple devices and how we move between channels. In my experience, people who start on smaller screens often switch to bigger screens for dense forms. I think that might be the way for the next couple of years, at least. I'm terrible at predictions, but I'm watching with interest.

*"In my experience, people who start on smaller screens often switch to bigger screens for dense forms. I think that might be the way for the next couple of years, at least. I'm terrible at predictions, but I'm watching with interest."*

### **What makes a good user experience designer?**

The first thing that comes to mind is empathy—being able to put yourself in someone else's shoes. It's a real skill to imagine what it's like for the user and therefore what preferences they might have, what things are going to frustrate them and the demands on their time and attention. I keep being surprised by people and I think that's a healthy thing, to never feel like you have totally worked out the human condition.

Also, understanding that there are different devices. We need to know who's using what to ensure the design suits the context.

I think the rest can be taught or learned. I haven't done a university degree in user experience, everything I learnt was through on-the-job training, going to courses, reading sites and keeping an open and curious mind.

*"I haven't done a university degree in user experience, everything I learnt was through on-the-job training, going to courses, reading sites and keeping an open and curious mind."*

## Many people are contributing to the body of knowledge online. Is it the same in form publishing?

Not really. You'll occasionally get an article about forms popping up in a specialist publication, but in terms of sites that are solely about form design, I think my site ([formulate.com.au](http://formulate.com.au)) and Jarrett & Gaffney's *Forms That Work* are almost the only ones.



Can you sketch out what your day looks like?

First thing in the morning, on the train, I usually check Twitter and read my emails on the phone. At work, I will often get absorbed in one major task and I will solidly do that for a good portion of the day. I usually try and tweet something relevant about form design (@formulate) sometime in the afternoon. That way, it catches the people in Europe as well as people here.

**What would be your main advice to new user experience designers who are just getting started?**

I think you need to force yourself to notice ways in which something or someone is different from yourself. We tend to be biased towards our own experience, which makes sense because it's our experience, but the more you can counteract that with knowledge about other people, the better.

I also think you should try to get a breadth of experience, for example, try not to work just on banking sites or just on mobile apps, unless you know that that's where you want to specialise. I believe that exposure and diversity is good for you in every way, because it helps you to be more creative. There are known ways to solve problems, but every context is different and so you need to be able to think laterally and be open-minded.



## **Do you have a couple of tips that people could bear in mind about good form design?**

Using the principle of minimising the burden is an effective approach. For example, you would only ask the user questions that are relevant to them. Also, it's better to spend more time explaining clearly what you need so that you get it right the first time, rather than triggering an error and having to come back around. The experience of triggering an error reduces people's self belief about their ability to get through the form, so any way you can avoid that, the better.

*Interview and photos by L. Chambers*

**Jessica's Tips:**

1. Explore whether the form can be eliminated altogether. With data sharing, smart systems etc, this is increasingly possible.
2. Forms are not for decorating your house, they are for filling in. If your form looks pretty but can't be completed, it's a failure.
3. Never blindly copy design from another form. Just because it's been done before doesn't mean it will work in your form, or even work at all.
4. Understand the principles behind conventions. Knowing why something works, as a rule, will mean you know when the rule can be broken.
5. Forms are usually the last thing people want to do, so minimise instruction, cater for distraction, and be nice!



1) Apple MacBook Pro 15", 2) Green physio ball, 3) Wacom tablet pen and holder, 4) *Collins Australian Dictionary*, 5) glass jar, 6) *Forms for People* by Robert Barnett, 7) *Forms That Work* by Caroline Jarrett and Gerry Gaffney , 8) *Web Form Design* by Luke Wroblewski, 9) A5 Wacom Graphire4 Classic White Tablet, 10) Canberra BusinessPoint 2009 Emerging Entrepreneur Award, 11) *I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was* by Barbara Sher, 12) *Collins Gem French Dictionary*, 13) Lolly jar with Malteasers, Sherbert Bombs and Fantales, 14) Pantone Universe 3272C Mug, 15) *Otros Aires* tango CD, 16) Notebook, 17) Formulate Information Design business card.

## Follow-up: Jessica's Reading List

- *Design of Everyday Things* by Donald Norman
- *Forms that Work* by Caroline Jarrett & Gerry Gaffney
- *Web Form Design* by Luke Wroblewski
- *Forms for People: Designing Forms That People Can Use* by Rob Barnett (aka the father of Australian forms)



## Ruth Ellison

Ruth is a user experience designer at Stamford Interactive. She lives in Canberra, Australia, and is passionate about accessibility, making science-themed jewellery with her laser and robots.

[@ruthellison | ruthellison.com](https://ruthellison.com)



## How did you get into UX?

I got into UX by accident. I was working as a business analyst in a government department, designing screens and processes for mainframes—very old school. I happened to be seated next to the usability team. They would always talk about the really interesting things they were working on, and one day I popped my head over the partition and asked what they did. That's how I started. I transferred to that team about 11 years ago.

Before the job in government, I worked at a call centre. That was really interesting because it gave me an appreciation for people who work in such places.

## What's your favourite part of the job?

My favourite part of the job is the people, and the fact that I get to learn something new every day. I love working out what the actual problem is, and then trying to find interesting ways to solve it.

*"I love working out the actual problem is, and then trying to find interesting ways to solve it."*



## Do you have any favourite tools that you use for doing user experience tasks?

This sounds a bit old school, but I really love pencil, paper and post-it notes. I love to scribble. I also love things like sketchbooks and markers because they help highlight ideas and thinking. One of my preferred digital tools at the moment is [Optimal Workshop](#), a terrific suite of research, testing and question tools that you can use both face-to-face and remotely.

*"This sounds a bit old school, but I really love pencil, paper and post-it notes."*

## Where do you find inspiration for design tasks?

It's a combination of things. Some of it's it is from my workmates—we do a lot of design brainstorming together—and from our users and clients. We discuss what interests them, what language they're using and how they describe things.

Inspiration also comes from physically going outside, and having a look at the environment and being inspired by the things around us. Is there something in an art gallery that might be useful, for example? I also find other areas such as psychology, computers, computer programmers and hacking quite inspirational. It really depends on what I'm doing at the time.



**Are there particular challenges that you come across in your day-to-day work, and if so, how do you get around them?**

Because I'm a UX consultant, one of the key challenges is the really short amount of time to get my head around a domain when I first begin a project. I love that, because you have to go really deep, as fast as you can.

*"When you start a project, you're trying to work out what the political landscape is and how that may affect the design."*

The other challenge is trying to balance multiple stakeholders' agendas and views. When you start a project, you're trying to work out what the

political landscape is and how that may affect the design. Often people have different agendas to you, or to your users, or to each other, so I try to work out how I can best bring them along the journey so everyone hopefully understands the design process and the outcome that we're trying to achieve.

*"A great user experience designer is somebody that has a great sense of curiosity and empathy."*

### **What makes a really good user experience designer?**

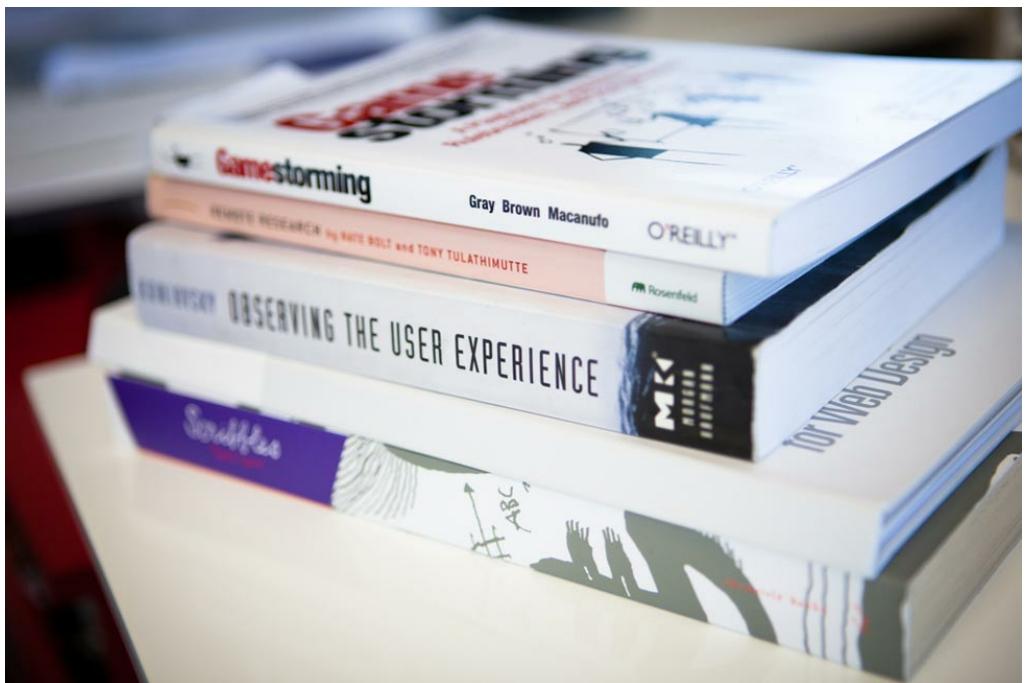
A great user experience designer is somebody that has a great sense of curiosity and empathy. I'm a bit of a busybody who likes to find out why things work a certain way. I also think it's really important for people to clearly articulate what the problem is that they're trying to solve.

*"I also think it's really important for people to clearly articulate what the problem is that they're trying to solve."*

### **Do you have any web sites you regularly visit?**

I love [UX Mastery](#) of course. I also love sites that look at different psychology and sciences such as [brainpickings.org](#), [UX Matters](#), [UX Magazine](#)—they are all great resources.

I'm also a big fan of [chartporn.org](#). It's a website about infographics that informs its audience how to communicate information visually. Another blog I follow is [Paciello Group](#)—they produce very useful accessibility information.



## What does a typical day look like for you?

Every day is very different and depends on whether I'm doing an accessibility job, a strategy job or a research job. I head into work after catching up on emails and Twitter. Because we've got three offices in different states and cities, I like to be a busybody and see what interesting things people at work are sharing.

My day may also include meeting with clients, research and testing with users, particularly people with disabilities. And when I can, I love to do contextual enquiries, particularly guerrilla style, where you're testing in coffee shops and building foyers—all that kind of stuff—and try to get as much research done wherever we can.

## **What would be your main advice to user experience designers who are just getting started?**

My main advice is to get as involved as you can in the UX community. There are a lot of interesting people out there willing to help. I had a mentor who helped set me in the right direction—they can be a person you can bounce ideas off. I am also a mentor myself.

***"My main advice is to get as involved as you can in the UX community."***

## **What tips would you give someone for including accessibility in the user experience process?**

Most people tend to wait until the very end to consider accessibility, but by then it's too late. My advice is to do it right from the start: when you're conducting your research and interviewing people, make sure to include people with disabilities. The statistics in Australia say almost one in five people has a disability of some sort, so that should be reflected in the research and design process.

***"Most people tend to wait until the very end to consider accessibility, but by then it's too late."***



**Ruth's Tips:**

1. Articulate and test your assumptions—one of my favourite ways of doing this is using the 5 Whys technique.
2. Diverge then converge when research and designing—don't be afraid to explore many different options.
3. Try using the 'So What?' technique when writing UX reports. After each key statement, ask 'So what?' If you cannot answer that question in a clear, distinct way, edit your work so that the reader can understand the implications of the statement.
4. It's okay not to know everything (who does?), so just say when you don't know something.
5. Make time to listen and to think.

Interview by L. Chambers. Photos by R. Ellison.



- 1) Mini Moleskine notebook
- 2) Evernote Smart Notebook by Moleskine
- 3) *Accessibility Attitude Adjuster* cards by Stamford Interactive
- 4) Accessibility simulation paper glasses
- 5) Google Nexus 4 phone
- 6) Lilac Post-It notes
- 7) Sugru self-setting rubber
- 8) Stabilo yellow highlighter, black fine point Sharpie, red Sharpie, Prismacolor grey markers
- 9) Ruth's handmade white chocolate (theobromine) Crankybot jewellery
- 10) Lego custom-made minifig
- 11) Tin robot

## Follow-up: Ruth's Reading List

- *The Design of Everyday Things* by Donald Norman
- *The Invisible Gorilla: How Our Intuitions Deceive Us* by Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons
- *Observing the User Experience: A Practitioner's Guide to User Research* by Elizabeth Goodman, Mike Kuniavsky, and Andrea Mood
- *Communicating Design: Developing Web Site Documentation for Design and Planning* by Daniel M. Brown





## Shane Morris

Shane Morris is a Melbourne-based interaction designer. After stints at Hiser Group and Microsoft, he founded Automatic Studio, a small agency that provides user experience services for clients such as Qantas, Cochlear and NAB.

[@shanemo](https://twitter.com/shanemo) | [automaticstudio.com.au](http://automaticstudio.com.au)

**You've been working in this field for quite a while. Can you give us a run down on how you got into interaction design?**

In the '80s, I did a Computer Science degree at Melbourne University. Back then, expert systems were all the rage so I took an interest in them.

The premise of expert systems was that you could make computers reason and solve problems like humans do. For that reason, I went to Sydney and completed a Masters degree in Cognitive Science, so I could better understand how people reason and solve problems.

*"Sarah was one of the few people in the world who was actively working in the human computer interaction/usability field at the time, so I was lucky to meet her and discover that this other career existed."*

I worked on expert systems for about a year and about the same time I met a woman called Sarah Bloomer from the United States. Sarah was one of the few people in the world who was actively working in the human computer interaction/usability field at the time, so I was lucky to meet her and discover that this other career existed. It seemed to be a perfect fit for my mix of technical interests and my interest in how humans behave. What was missing at the time was an understanding of design and how design works. A large part of my career journey has been working out how design fits into this bigger picture.



*"A large part of my career journey has been working out how design fits into this bigger picture."*

### **Do you travel much for work?**

It's been relatively quiet from a travel perspective, but in the past I've spent a lot of time commuting around Australia, including a lot of time in Brisbane and Sydney.

**Some people might say early computing came from engineers and accountants. Computers were seen as a bit geeky. Can bringing in a human and empathetic perspective save IT from itself by making user-friendly software?**

I think that the entire industry is growing and changing, and people who provide an emphasis on the human aspects can help prod that along. But I think it's arrogant to say we're here to save computing. There are plenty of traditional technologists who could point out plenty of problems with what these hand-waving user-centred people do. I don't think we should regret the first twenty years of the industry that were focused solely on technology and engineering, because we had to get those things right first.

*"I think it's arrogant to say we're here to save computing... I don't think we should regret the first twenty years of the industry that were focused solely on technology and engineering, because we had to get those things right first."*

### **What's your favourite part of this kind of work?**

I like the opportunity to learn about different fields. We learn about retail, we learn about sewage processing, we learn about how to maintain a fleet of fighter jets. You don't get proficient at any of them but you can transfer something from each of those experiences to your subsequent experiences.

What I've also noticed over the last couple of years is that I'm taking a lot more interest in mentoring and sharing my skills and experiences with others.



## **Where does your inspiration come from when you're working on projects?**

Sometimes the best inspiration comes from time constraints or technical constraints—those are the things that get you thinking creatively. Also, because I've been doing this for quite a while I'm much more relaxed about my customer having the fantastic idea.

It's easy when you're starting out to feel that you must be right. The customer is paying you a lot of money, and so you must demonstrate how right you are. You get backed into a corner and have to defend your solution to the death. The best consultants I have worked with are comfortable with the idea that part of their role is to tease out the brilliant idea that already exists inside the clients' collective minds, or to

take a germ of an idea and direct that idea in a practical way.

*"It's easy when you're starting out to feel that you must be right... The best consultants I have worked with are comfortable with the idea that part of their role is to tease out the brilliant idea that already exists inside the clients' collective minds."*

### **Do you have favourite tools or techniques that you apply regularly across projects?**

While we do usability testing, contextual enquiry, desk research and affinity diagrams—the standard grab bag of UX tools and techniques—it actually depends on the customer.

One of the most effective techniques that we rely on in the ideation phase is activity scenarios or “a day in the life” scenarios. Occasionally I use personas, but I would prefer to write a story—we are designing the experience when we write a story about a person who has a problem and how they’ve used a digital product or service to solve that problem. We might write five or six scenarios on a project. By being very user-centred in describing those scenarios, we’ve designed the ideal experience, and we can align the features and functions of the product to support the experience that we initially envisaged.

*"By being very user-centred in describing those scenarios, we've designed the ideal experience, and we can align the features and functions of the product to support the*

*"experience that we initially envisaged."*



## **How do you get the information that you use in a scenario?**

It depends on the client. We've been doing a lot of mobile app projects lately, and one thing that's noticeable is that they often work on tight timelines and budgets, so we aren't doing as much up-front research as we might have on other projects that have more time and budget.

Sometimes the data for the research input for those mobile apps is based on introspection, informal discussions with colleagues and friends and a little bit of desk research. I think that's okay because the saving grace of mobile apps, for example a large bank or airline, is that they are designed for the general public to solve typical, or universal, problems.

If we're asked to do something that's more arcane, for example, the work we're doing with Cochlear at the moment, we have no choice but to do a whole bunch more research. We need to understand how an audiologist diagnoses hearing problems in a child with hearing impairment.

**You mentioned that constraints can be a way of generating creative tension for inspiration. What sort of unique challenges do you feel your job involves?**

There's no single answer to that. Every project has its own unique challenges and that's what's fun about teasing out where the challenges and opportunities lie.

*"Every project has its own unique challenges and that's what's fun about teasing out where the challenges and opportunities lie."*

We still have clients who we need to bring along on the "journey of understanding". One of the constraints here is trying to gauge how transparent we need to make the process for a particular client—how much do they need to understand the journey that we've gone on in order for them to be comfortable with the final result? That is an interesting constraint in itself, which changes the way you approach design.

On the other hand, a client who is more confident in what we're doing doesn't need to see the rigorous steps of the journey and therefore our activities tend to be a lot more fluid.



## What skills or traits do you think make a good UX practitioner?

My glib answer is that you must have a fascination with, or curiosity for, what people do and why they do it. I think a good UXer is also someone who can be introspective and is comfortable with examining his or her own thought processes.

I think there is a risk that UXers who are more obsessive about design or technology, without a genuine interest in what humans are likely to do, produce work that is elegant but not necessarily engaging for users.

***"UXers who are more obsessive about design or technology, without a genuine interest in what humans are likely to do, produce work that is elegant but not***

*"necessarily engaging for users."*

**You mentioned that in the early days of user-centred design there was an emphasis on rigour, so people might describe UX as a pseudo-scientific field. Is there a need to balance that analytical perspective with something softer and more design-based?**

I think that's exactly what we've been doing over the past 10 years. We had to start with a very scientific approach just to gain credibility. In the early days of the Hiser Group, we invented a methodology called "The Hiser Element", and we spent a lot of time documenting it and promoting its rigour.

The design focus of the last ten years has meant that more of our customers and colleagues have become comfortable with the value of design. The benefit for us is that we don't have to be as rigorous, and we can get away with doing softer, more "hand-wavy", activities. Some of our most enjoyable clients are those who are on their own design journey and are excited about design thinking and design processes.



## What constitutes a typical day in the life of Shane Morris?

There's no typical day. At the moment we've got two main projects running—one in Sydney and a phone project in Melbourne. My job at the moment is smeared across active projects as well as working on prospective clients and servicing previous clients.

*"My job at the moment is smeared across active projects as well as working on prospective clients and servicing previous clients."*

I work mostly from the home office. In the morning, I discuss an informal plan for the day with my colleague Steve, at my kitchen table.

During the day, I do Skype brainstorming with interstate clients, triage my emails, conduct workshops, and visit local clients to discuss things like analysis-phase results and wireframes.

At the end of the day, I would produce a “To do” list for us to action the following morning.

### **Is work life balance a problem for you?**

Yeah. Working for yourself is a double-edged sword. The beauty is that even though I am working hard, I can tell myself that it’s my choice. For me personally, that’s an important part of my work psychology. When I have worked for a boss, my personal motivation becomes a problem because I feel like I’m working to someone else’s plan.

### **What advice do you have for UX people who are just getting started?**

I think the most useful thing beginners can do to build their skills as a UX designer is to get involved in as much usability testing as they can. I think it builds your base knowledge of what people do and how people think. When you’re doing a usability test you’re improving that particular product but you’re also investing in your ability to solve other problems in the future.

*“I think the most useful thing beginners can do to build their skills as a UX designer is to get involved in as much usability testing as they can.”*

People talk about genius design and I don’t necessarily believe in it. I

don't consider myself to be a genius designer. I do, however, consider myself to have the benefit of having done so much design and having observed so many people dealing with my designs that, subconsciously I have an armoury of experience. It makes it so much easier to generate potential design solutions.

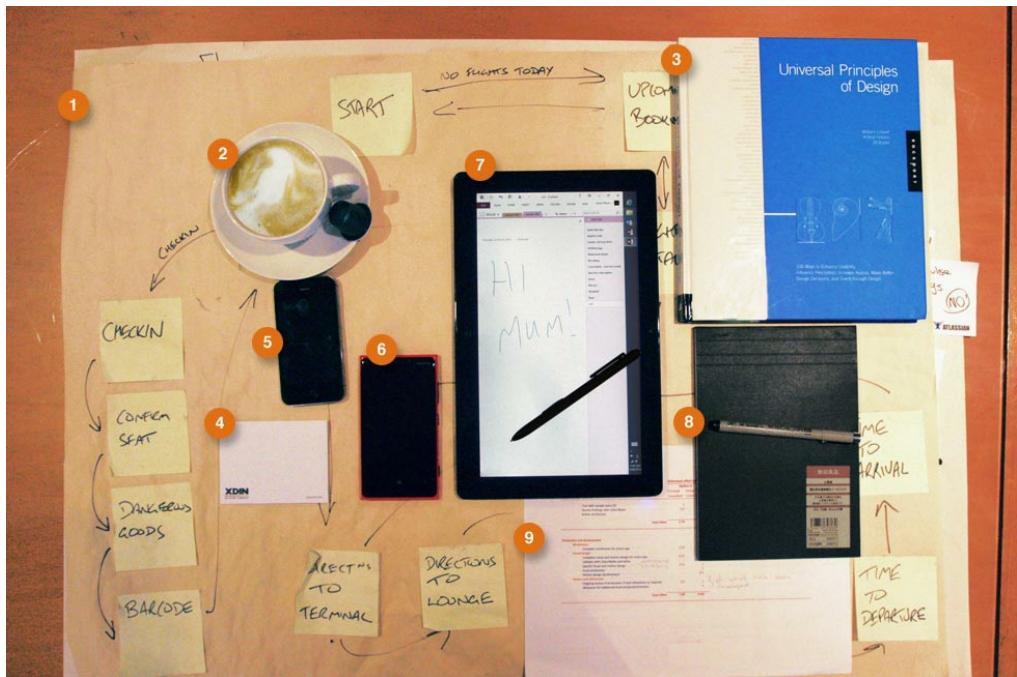


*Interview and photos by L. Chambers*

### **Shane's Tips**

1. Scenarios are your first design—they are a design for the experience people will have with your product.
2. Scenarios start with a mini persona. Who is the actor, what is their context and what are they trying to achieve?

3. Capture emotion, not just action, in your scenarios. Also, capture people's inner monolog. What are their goals and how do they respond at each step?
4. Don't describe the user interface when writing scenarios—that's for later.
5. Prose scenarios paint a richer picture than just bullet points.



- 1) Butchers' paper with process flow sketch for an airline project, 2) Nescafe U coffee mug (with pod), 3) *Universal Principles of Design*, 4) Sticky-note pad from XDIN (an engineering and IT consulting company), 5) iPhone4, 6) Nokia Lumia 720, 7) Microsoft Surface Pro 128GB tablet (Windows 8) & stylus (Hi Mum!), 8) notebook and Sakura Pigma Micron 05 archival pen, 9) project estimation and budget.

## Follow-up: Shane's Reading List

- [Universal Principles of Design](#) by William Lidwell, Kritina Holden and Jill Butler



## Richard O'Brien

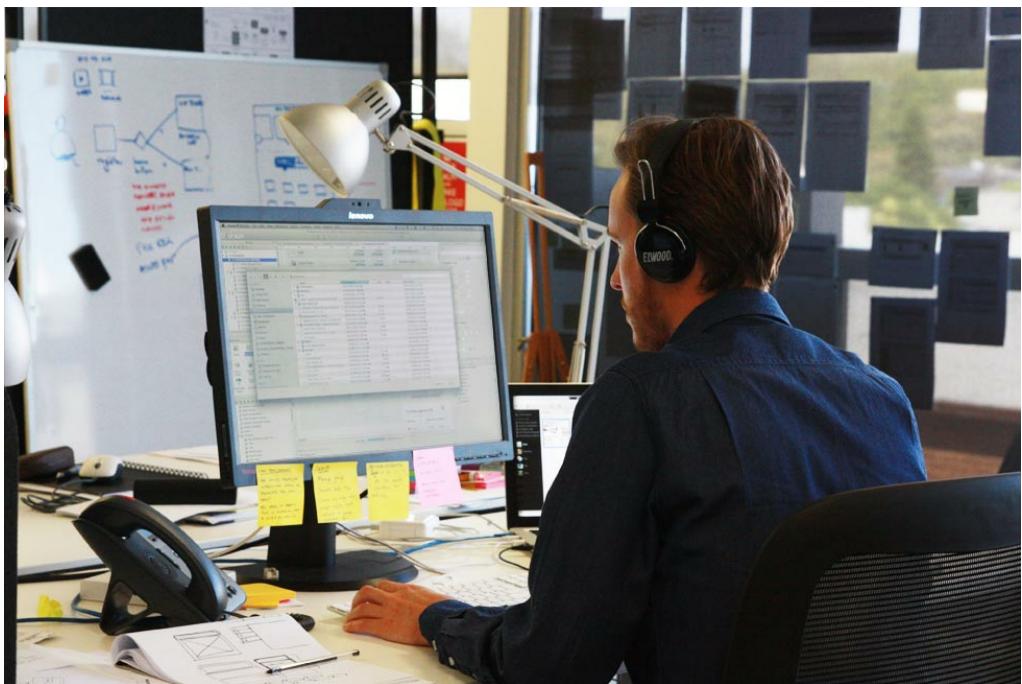
Richard O'Brien is a Melbourne-based freelance user experience designer who has worked for many years creating digital experiences for clients in Australia, Asia, and Europe. He previously worked for HeathWallace, and now works with clients ranging from small tech start-ups through to brands such as American Express, Virgin Atlantic, and Australia Post to implement simple, intuitive and effective interfaces for their customers.

[@richard\\_obrien](#)

*We spoke with Richard while he was working at HeathWallace.*

## **How did you get into UX?**

I went down a bit of a weird route—I studied Computer Science and Software Engineering at university and was a developer for a while. I went to the UK and moved into digital production for an ad agency. I then worked on a lot of UX projects and made the leap into doing freelance UX. When I returned to Australia I just kept on the UX path.



## **What are your favourite parts of UX?**

I think it depends on the project. I really enjoy the initial ideation and UX strategy creation and carrying that through the design concept stage. I like sitting down with people from across the business to understand what it is they're trying to achieve, be it via a communication, a tool or

application, or a website that they're developing. I also try to understand what they know about the customer and really drill down into who their customers are. I find that internal stakeholders are usually experts on a very specific aspect of their customer's engagement with their company, so we can learn a huge amount by talking to them. By taking this information and combining it we can develop a much broader view of the customer.

*"I find that internal stakeholders are usually experts on a very specific aspect of their customer's engagement with their company, so we can learn a huge amount by talking to them."*

I have also been working with a few start-ups recently, which I love. I think businesses, especially smaller ones, have their nose so close to the technology or the application that it can be helpful for a UX person to provide a new perspective and teach them how to talk to real customers.



## **Do you have a particular set of tools or techniques that you use regularly?**

I don't have a specific approach but the Lean UX philosophy underpins everything I do. I approach UX by trying to define the underlying problem that needs to be solved. If there are time constraints, this is usually done through desktop research. When the time is available I'll get out of the office and talk to customers, stakeholders, salespeople, anyone involved in the customer journey. I will then look at what competitors are doing and collect as much inspiration as possible before taking it to the sketching stage.

***"I don't have a specific approach but the Lean UX***

## ***philosophy underpins everything I do."***

I spend most of my time sketching and drawing with just pen and paper. I find pen and paper an easier medium to facilitate the flow of ideas as opposed to using a software tool such as Photoshop or Axure. I do use Axure, but recently I've been dabbling in HTML and CSS and learning about frameworks like Bootstrap or Foundation. I think it's getting a lot simpler to go straight into code. The necessity of design in a high fidelity prototype is becoming less and less relevant when you can actually build the product, so I feel like that's a bit of a gap in my skillset. That said, you can't skip the sketching stage—I find it invaluable to help me solidify what it is we're trying to achieve. It's much easier to throw away a bad sketch than a bad design.

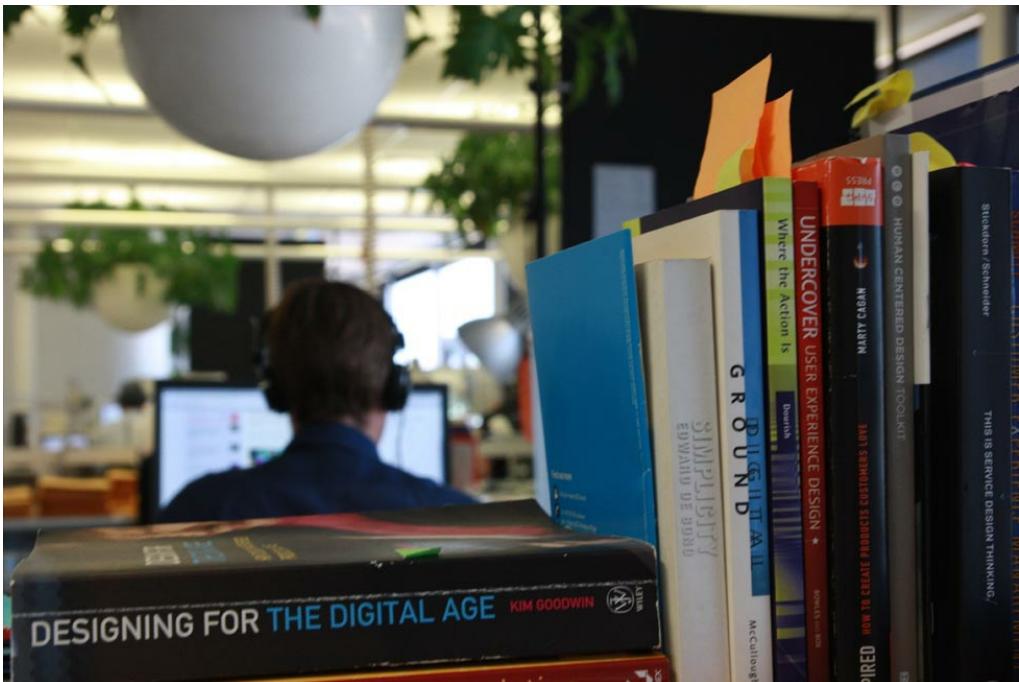
***"You can't skip the sketching stage—I find it invaluable to help me solidify what it is we're trying to achieve. It's much easier to throw away a bad sketch than a bad design."***

I use Dropbox a lot, and Evernote is fantastic for research. I use apps like Bamboo Paper on the iPad. I feel most comfortable sketching things out on paper, so Bamboo Paper is a terrific app. I also find it really useful when we're working remotely—with the team in Asia for example—to share design concepts by sketching on the iPad.

### **Where do you go to get inspiration?**

I love [littlebigdetails.com](http://littlebigdetails.com) for the features that you can bake into your

designs. There is also a good site called [ux.stackexchange.com](http://ux.stackexchange.com), which is a spinoff of stackexchange.com for UX professionals. It's a fantastic question and answer resource, with a highly engaged community. Also, sites like [siteinspire.com](http://siteinspire.com) and design communities like [Behance](http://Behance) and [dribbble.com](http://dribbble.com) are great resources—people are doing some really creative work out there.



*"One of the biggest challenges in the UX job is a client who thinks they're the target user for the product you're developing."*

**What are some common challenges that you've come up against, and how do you deal with those?**

One of the biggest challenges in the UX job is a client who thinks they're the target user for the product you're developing. The client inevitably ends up judging any solution you put in front of them based on whether it works for them personally. They find it very difficult to put themselves into the position of the other personas you're trying to design for. I find the best way to work with this sort of stakeholder is to make sure that your design decisions are insight or hypothesis-based. You need to try to ensure that everything you do has a thorough rationale, because a design without a rationale is much harder to justify.

Another significant challenge can be the politics of working with teams or in large organisations. I wouldn't say I'm the best politician when it comes to this sort of thing, but I have found that the earlier you engage stakeholders and team members in your design process, the better. Engaging people early allows them to feel a sense of ownership for the end product, and turns them into advocates, not just for the design, but also for you as a skilled UXer.

*"Engaging people early allows them to feel a sense of ownership for the end product, and turns them into advocates, not just for the design, but also for you as a skilled UXer."*



## What traits make a good UXer?

Flexibility and having empathy for the end user is vital—you want your users to have the best experience possible. You need to be a good communicator and a people person, because it's not the sort of job where you work by yourself to create something and then hand it over. The best results I've seen have been when there's joint involvement by us, the people within the business and those within the tech team.

*"It's not the sort of job where you work by yourself to create something and then hand it over."*

You need to be a mix of tech-geek, business/marketing nerd,

psychologist and designer. If you put those bits together, you'll have a pretty good skillset.

## **How does the team work here?**

It varies depending on the project but there will usually be a significant research component that some of the team will do. I generally lead the design aspect and work with a few of our designers in house. Our work is usually split into two streams—a research and testing stream, and an interaction design and execution stream. We've also got development teams in Guangzhou, China.

## **Which blogs or Twitter feeds do you turn to for inspiration?**

From a UX point of view, I follow [Luke Wroblewski \(@lukew\)](#)—he's always got good stuff. I'm also a fan of [Jeff Gothelf \(@jboogie\)](#) and his Lean UX approach.



## **What is a typical day for you?**

As soon as I get to the office I check my emails to see what has happened overnight, particularly with our people in the UK and Hong Kong. After that I tend to close my work email because I find it distracting. I then may have a scheduled talk with a client—I tend to have one or two meetings a day.

For the rest of the morning I'll jump into some design, depending on what I'm working on. It could be coming up with some initial concepts or user flows. At the moment I'm working on an internet banking application based on an out-of-the-box platform. A lot of work is going into finding out how things work in that platform as well as what opportunities there are to alter the experience to better match what we

learnt during the research phase.

If I'm in the more advanced stages of a project, I generally spend my time creating functional prototypes in Axure or documenting wireframes.

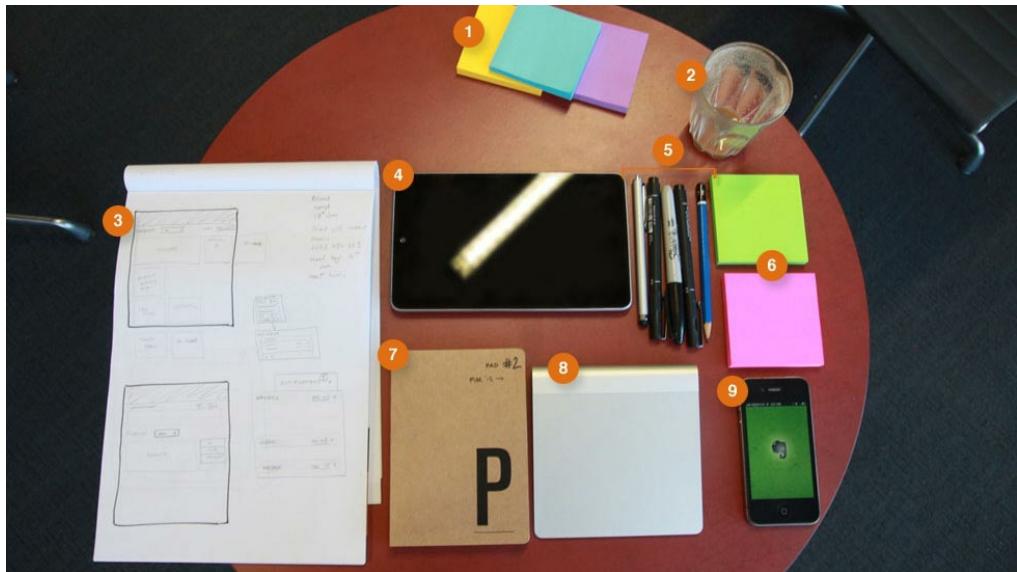
If I'm working with Hong Kong they tend to come back online after lunch, around 2pm. I usually get two solid chunks of time to design each day, depending on meetings.

I usually head home around 6pm. Occasionally I go to meet-ups such as [HeadStart](#), [Silicon Beach](#), [UX Melbourne](#) or [Lean Startup](#). I'm very interested in the startup space so I enjoy being out there and networking.



**Richard's Tips:**

1. *Lose the Lorem Ipsum filler text.* If you can't think of what the copy will say, then chances are it's not essential to your interface. Avoiding the use of *Loem Ipsum* will not only help simplify your design but also help to better communicate your design to stakeholders.
2. *Consider your audience when using icons.* Do they know that the 3 lines above each other is a menu, or that an arrow jumping out of a box means, "share"? If they don't use Facebook, maybe not.
3. *Avoid gesture discrimination.* Gestures are good, but what if the user isn't in on the joke? Hiding key interactions behind gestures can quickly render your interface unusable for the uninitiated.
4. *Talk to people, often.* As designers it's unavoidable to get too close to our solution. Whether it's user testing or just showing a colleague what you've done; the more you expose your design to the big bad world, the better your final solution will be. There's nothing like a fresh set of eyes to highlight any glaring oversights you've made.
5. *Tell a story:* As UXers our job is communication, whether it is with end-users or stakeholders. If you want to get that great design to see the light of day you need to take the decision makers on a journey and bring those drab wireframes to life so the stakeholder can experience them in the intended context.



1) Yellow, blue and purple Post-It notes 2) Café Latte in a glass (empty), 3) Unruled paper pad with sketches, 4) iPad Mini, 5) stylus for tablet, felt-tip pen, Sharpie fine point marker, felt-tip pen and 2B pencil, 6) Fluoro green and pink Post-It notes, 7) 'Pad' notepad (from migools.com.au, a great Melbourne startup), 8) Apple Magic Trackpad, 9) iPhone4 with Evernote.

## Follow-up: Richard's Reading List

- [\*The Design of Everyday Things\* by Don Norman](#)
- [\*Gamestorming: A Playbook for Innovators, Rulebreakers, and Changemakers\* by Dave Gray, Sunni Brown and James Macanufo](#)
- [\*Everyware: The Dawning Age of Ubiquitous Computing\* by Adam Greenfield](#)
- [\*The Icarus Deception: How High Will You Fly?\* by Seth Godin](#)
- [\*The Lean Startup\* by Eric Ries](#)
- [\*Lean UX: Applying Lean Principles To Improve User Experience\* by Jeff Gothelf with Josh Seiden](#)



## Sarah Bloomer

Sarah Bloomer is principal of Sarah Bloomer & Co, a Boston-based design research, strategy and training consultancy. She has nearly 30 years experience in the field of experience design and usability.

@boolie | [sarahbloomer.com](http://sarahbloomer.com)

### **Can you give us a rundown of how you began in user experience design, and what lead you there?**

Being a viola player, I studied music at university and ended up with a job in music production. The company I worked for composed and produced music for commercials using a Synclavier, one of the first music

computers. I became interested in finding a way to enable people to be musically creative using computers.

My first design job was at Citicorp in New York City in 1986. I was in a group designing banking for the future. I've been in this field since 1986, focusing on design when Human Computer Interaction (HCI) was more about analysis and testing. Even then, my primary interest was in the interaction design. I love the fact that our field is constantly changing, both in concepts—HCI, usability, user-centred design, user experience and service design—and devices: from IBM PS/2s to iPads.

*"I love the fact that our field is constantly changing, both in concepts—HCI, usability, user-centred design, user experience and service design—and devices: from IBM PS/2s to iPads."*

### **What part of the job do you most enjoy?**

I love learning about how other people work and visiting new environments while doing customer research.

I also love problem solving, which can be applied to all aspects of UX design. I might try to figure out the best concept for a UI, or perhaps I'll design a strategy for a nascent UX team. I design and teach commercial courses, and enjoy finding the best way to enable people to develop new skills and knowledge.

The current emergence of service design from user experience is interesting. When I worked in Australia, our clients were banks,

insurance companies, telcos, retail and the government. I was fond of saying, "When you're designing your software, you're designing your business", because it was part of the whole system. It really was service design in that we advised our clients about experiences beyond simply screen design.



## **Which tools/techniques/approaches do you find yourself regularly using in a UX project?**

My regular tools are collaboration, facilitation, paper and pencils. Oh, and sticky notes. I'm also a believer in being a good listener and observer. We do a lot of customer research to inform our design. We keep the design fluid and sketchy before committing anything to a polished look and feel. Collaboration, facilitation, paper and sticky notes are handy when

coaching, teaching and just plain thinking.

***"Stories are the secret to good experience design. In fact, it's the first tool a designer should use to think about the design problem."***

Stories are the secret to good experience design. In fact, it's the first tool a designer should use to think about the design problem. I've used stories, or "user narratives", since the early 90's to describe a persona doing a series of activities within a specific context. It's a powerful, efficient way to think about the experience you want to create, and to communicate that experience.

### **When you need to think outside the box, where do you look for inspiration?**

I find inspiration in observing people and in non-computerised design. For example, architecture is a good place to think about experience design; how people navigate, designing for specific needs, how space and design impact usefulness. I like to take the time to think about the design problem – is the client identifying the right problem, or is it actually something else?

### **What are some of the unique challenges your job involves?**

My primary challenge is juggling radically different types of projects. I am not the most organised, which makes juggling even more challenging.



## What traits do you think make a great UXer?

The ability to collaborate and listen with an open mind is key, as are keen observation skills.

*"I worry that people don't spend enough time doing the analysis and synthesis, and jump too quickly into creating screen designs and using standard techniques before seeing whether it actually works."*

You also need to be analytical—I worry that people don't spend enough time doing the analysis and synthesis, and jump too quickly into creating screen designs and using standard techniques before seeing whether it

actually works.

Minimising your ego is key as well! It's critical that you don't get attached to an idea or design, and thus close yourself off from feedback and iteration.

## **What does an average weekday usually look like for you?**

As a consultant, I work on several different types of projects, so I don't have a typical day. Some of the things I've worked on in the past week include:

- Monday, I went to see a client—a mid-size research company. I'm helping improve the UX design of their website. I then drove to Olin College, where I co-teach User Oriented Collaborative Design to the sophomore class. We're teaching engineering students how to do design research and design thinking.
- Tuesday, I did some design work for a startup—I have a colleague working there with me. My role is in both design and project management. We ran walkthroughs using WebEx and Join.me.
- Wednesday, I split my time between the research company and a startup. I'm also the account manager/mentor on a project for the research company.
- Thursday morning I visited one or two clients, and was back at Olin College in the afternoon. I drive my car between them—luckily they are not far from each other.

At night, after my kids go to bed, I often check my email, do marketing activities to promote my courses and events, or administration such as invoicing.

## **How do you deal with email and information overload?**

I don't think I handle it very well at all! Because I'm a consultant, I check email regularly. I try to split personal from work email, and focus on work during the day.

*"Minimising your ego is key as well! It's critical that you don't get attached to an idea or design, and thus close yourself off from feedback and iteration."*

## How about work/life balance?

Right now I'm in the FEAST mode for a consultant, largely because a project I expected to end continued and in the meantime I set up other work. When the new work was accepted, I took it on, and then the first client continued with us. I'm looking forward to getting that equilibrium back soon.

## What tools and techniques do you use most?

Most of my time is spent using Visio, Word and Google Docs. I also use Evernote to store ideas and all of the photos I take—I take a ton of photos of whiteboards. Much of what I do is facilitation; design sessions, strategy workshops and the like.

### Vegetable Peelers and UX

I have a growing collection of vegetable peelers, which I use to illustrate user experience during a facilitation session.

I will bring out three peelers but won't let anyone hold them at first. We talk about the features of each of the peelers. Only two, for example, have the potato eye remover. One has a guard that keeps peelings from flying.

Then I hand each peeler to one person along with one carrot, and they peel the carrot and describe the experience. Do you peel toward or away from your body? Are you right-handed or left-handed?

We then add context. Which peeler would you use if you had 5 kilograms of potatoes to peel? Which would you use to peel something delicately? Which would be most suited if you have arthritis?

We can then agree that there are multiple ways to design for the same set of functionality. You need to actually use them to have an experience—you cannot predict all experiences by just looking at them. It's a very effective, hands-on way to describe UX.

*Interview by L. Chambers. Photos by S. Bloomer.*



1) 30 x Sharpie fine point markers for collaborative design sessions, 2) Paper prototyping kit with Post-It notes, glue-sticks, crayons, yellow highlighters, scissors, sticky-tape, 3) Sketch notebook with mechanical pencil, 4) Red, green and blue sticky-dots, 5) Post-It notes, 6) more Post-It notes, 7) Prismacolor grayscale markers for sketching, 8) blue tape, 9) zip-case containing cultural probe materials, 10) even more Post-it notes, 11) zip-case containing sketching tools, 12) pocket notebook, 13) case containing Livescribe pen for field study notetaking, 14) roll of brown paper for journey mapping or sketchboarding or training.

## Follow-up: Resources

- [The Design of Everyday Things](#) by Donald Norman
- [Simple and Usable](#) by Giles Colborne
- [Subject To Change: Creating Great Products & Services for an Uncertain World: Adaptive](#)

[Path on Design](#) by Peter Merholz, Todd Wilkens, Brandon Schauer and David Verba



## Jeff Gothelf

Jeff Gothelf is a Principal at Neo Innovation Labs. He's the author of Lean UX ([www.leanuxbook.com](http://www.leanuxbook.com)), a frequent speaker, dad, husband and musician. He lives in New Jersey, a place he calls the Left Bank of New York City.

[@jboogie](https://twitter.com/jboogie) | [jeffgothelf.com](http://jeffgothelf.com)

### How did you come into the field of “user experience”?

I graduated from university in 1995, the year that Mosaic came out. At school we were using Gopher and terminal based interfaces. There was email and an online world but there was nothing visual until Mosaic

came out. I was intent on becoming a rock star (i.e. paid musician), actually. I noticed that some of the more successful bands had started building websites. I began to de-construct other bands' websites to see how they'd built them. I taught myself HTML by removing chunks of the mark up and seeing what disappeared from the page.

*"I taught myself HTML by removing chunks of the mark up and seeing what disappeared from the page."*

I started building websites for my band and for a couple of other small bands and businesses. I had crappy day jobs to pay the bills and I would practise my HTML and graphic design skills at night. In late 1999 I was tired of being a broke musician. During the first Dot-com boom I met the woman who would eventually become my wife and I figured it was time to get a proper job. At that point in time if you wanted to get a job in web all you had to essentially do was be able to spell "HTML".

I got a job at a company called IXL, which became one of the biggest web services companies in the world. It was a terrific time to be employed because there was a tremendous opportunity to learn and grow—unfortunately at the client's expense.

One day our boss came in with Morville & Rosenfeld's *Information Architecture for the World Wide Web*, and he said, "Who wants to be an IA?" All of us looked at each other and said, "What's an IA?" I said, "I'll read the book" and I took it home and I read it over the weekend and it made a lot of sense to me. It was about logic and organisation.

All of a sudden, instead of being the designer who got handed a bunch of specs to implement, I was being consulted about how we were going to organise the information.

*"All of a sudden, instead of being the designer who got handed a bunch of specs to implement, I was being consulted about how we were going to organise the information."*

I've had jobs both in-house and in agencies that were related to UX—  
Customer Experience Analyst, UI designer and UX designer.

Jeff Gothelf



## Do you think that the career progression for someone who comes into user experience is to swim upstream?

I think UX designers today come from a far more diverse and varied pool than that of the mid-'90s, primarily because no one had ever heard of UX back then. People who naturally gravitated to it were people who came from Library Sciences or Instructional Design. I think there's more interest in the profession now—UX folks are coming from Graphic Design, they're coming from engineering, business analysis, product management, research, psychology and anthropology.

*"I think there's more interest in the profession now—UX folks are coming from Graphic Design, they're coming from engineering, business analysis, product management, research, psychology and anthropology."*

## Tell me about Lean UX.

Lean UX is not a shortcut. I believe that you have to have grounding in the fundamentals of design (all flavours of it) and research and you have to understand layout and workflow. You have to understand priorities, hierarchies, information architecture and customer needs and business goals. All the things that make up successful designers today are still relevant. It's taking that process and saying, "now you know all these things, instead of doing them by yourself, let's take the tactics and techniques that you're using and bring the rest of the team into the creation process".



**You're an advocate for making UX and Agile processes work together in harmony. Why is that traditionally so hard and how can we fix it?**

Traditionally it's hard because Agile comes from an engineering background and many trainers don't understand UX or design. There is tremendous momentum in the engineering community around Agile, but less momentum up until recently in the design and product management world around Agile. The way traditional design works and the way that Agile works is incompatible. The pace, the need for prioritisation and the need to be agile doesn't work with Waterfall software design practices. Those are siloed and lengthy and no one really gets to peek into them until the design process is complete and you have a set of deliverables to

hand over to the team.

*"The way traditional design works and the way that Agile works is incompatible. The pace, the need for prioritisation and the need to be agile doesn't work with Waterfall software design practices."*

The way that UX was being done was incompatible with the pace and needs of Agile teams, so we had to re-examine the way that we do user experience design by creating a more inclusive and transparent process. One effective way to do this is to bring non-designers into the fold. They get to start doing their work sooner without waiting for the deliverables to come down. It's an efficiency tactic that forces teams to work differently together.

The other issue is that UX folks don't feel welcome participating in the rituals of the Agile team. If they don't feel welcome, or their priorities and needs aren't factored into the way the team is working, then the team is going to break down. Teams need to be inclusive and talk as much about engineering challenges as design challenges.

### **What do you say to someone who faces those challenges?**

The ideal Lean UX situation is with a dedicated team (i.e., one that works on only one project) that is co-located, small and self-sufficient. In an ideal world you would have a team of ten people or less that sits in the same office and has all the skill sets that allows it to do whatever it needs to do—design, development, ops, testing, marketing. Now, the real world

is not ideal, so there are going to be situations where resources are split and/or not co-located.

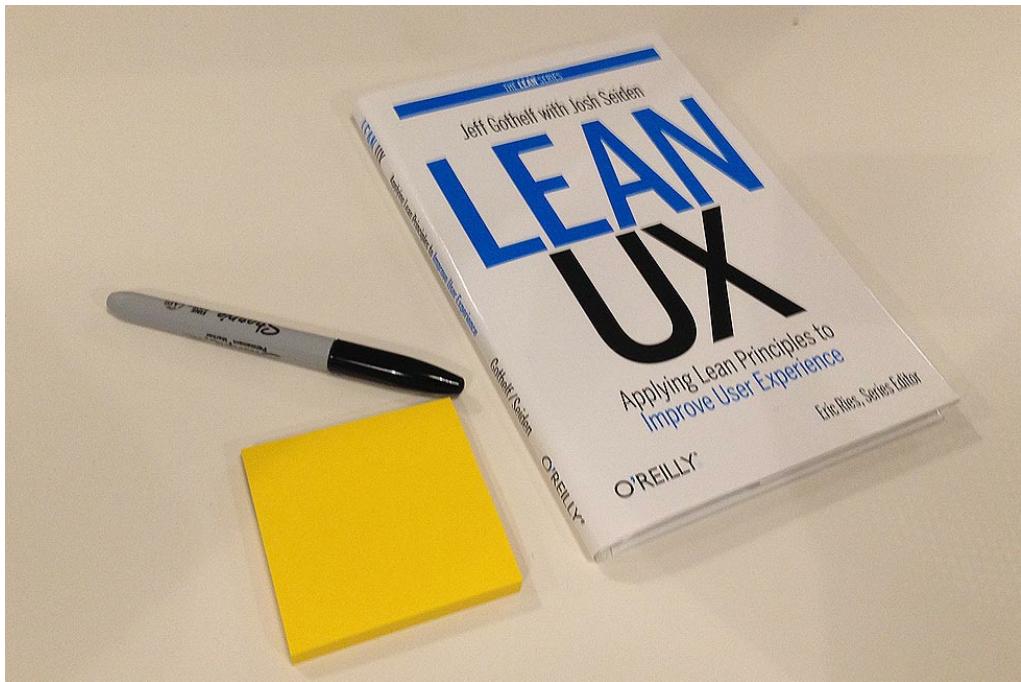
*"The ideal Lean UX situation is with a dedicated team (i.e., one that works on only one project) that is co-located, small and self-sufficient."*

You have to, at the very least, share some hours of the day together for the Lean UX process to work. You can then use tools like Skype, Google Hangouts, Google Draw, stand-up meetings—you can pretty much do anything with remote teams this way.

At the beginning of any initiative I would suggest flying in all the team members and have them spend a week together to kick off the project, because the bonds that build during that week will last the lifetime of the project.

### **Tell us about how the Lean UX book came about.**

The book came about when I was trying to figure out how to merge UX and Agile. I realised that the process of doing UX work had to change. There was no way we were just going to mash these two things together and make them work. We adjusted the process and came up with this idea of Lean UX, which was a lighter form of the process but a faster, more integrative and more inclusive form. I started writing blog posts and speaking publicly about it. People were asking for a cure to the Agile UX problem and this was something that worked.



*"Some people are not going to be good facilitators—they're introverts. They don't feel comfortable in front of crowds, but it's a skill set that we need to have."*

## **Do you see your role more as a design facilitator than a designer?**

I think that's the evolution of the practice. Some people are not going to be good facilitators—they're introverts. They don't feel comfortable in front of crowds, but it's a skill set that we need to have. I think we can be more strategic but we have to start speaking the language of business and start taking the processes that make us successful as designers and empowering our colleagues to use the same techniques. I think that's where facilitation comes in. If you can lead your colleagues through a

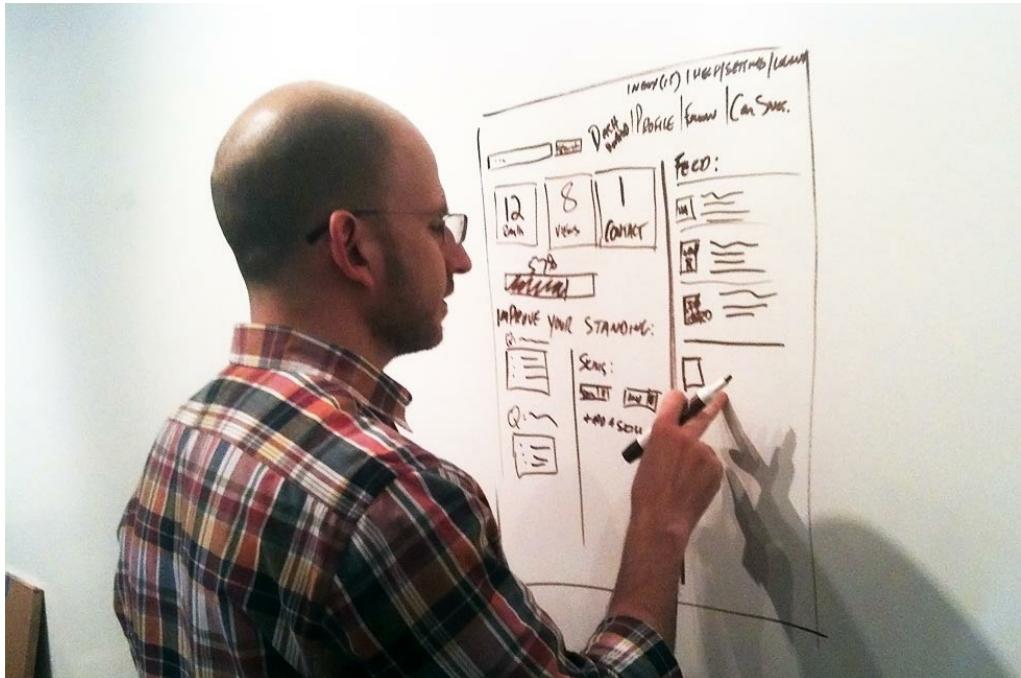
series of exercises and help them clarify their thinking and bring alignment to their teams and build better products, ultimately, the strategic value of what we do will become self-evident.

*"If you can lead your colleagues through a series of exercises and help them clarify their thinking and bring alignment to their teams and build better products, ultimately, the strategic value of what we do will become self-evident."*

It's fascinating when people start the process and realise how hard design is—they start to value the actual design process far more than ever. They end up contributing ideas and get an opportunity to voice their opinion and it's our job to facilitate the extraction of those ideas. If you synthesise it down into a vision for an experience or a design, it captures that insight and that input.

**Design has always been both an art and a science. Is this starting to turn it into more of a science than an art?**

I don't think so. I think there is an opportunity to be creative and innovative, but we have to ground ourselves in the realities of the businesses that we work for. That doesn't mean that we can't try innovative ways to achieve those business goals—let's be creative but let's not own creativity.



## What set of tools do you use as a UX designer?

Pen and paper. I do a lot of whiteboarding and I like Balsamiq because it's super fast, easy to use and uncomplicated. If you're using it to build a robust experience it's limited, but for quick digital sketching, quick tappable or clickable PDF prototypes, nothing can beat it.

Axure is something that I'm getting into for more robust prototypes and anything interactive. I like the idea that you can publish those things to the Web and load them up on a mobile device and all of a sudden you've got a clickable or tappable prototype on your mobile device.

Some designers in our office are using Sketch a lot more these days—it's \$50 and it's great.

## What does a typical day look like to you?

I spend a good chunk of my day on phone calls, on Skype and in spreadsheets, putting together proposals, staffing models, pitches or selling work. I also teach Lean UX courses and workshops.

When we're working on projects, a typical day is coming in for stand-up meetings and collaborating with the client we're working with through a series of exercises. We will try to get at least two customer conversations happening every week so that we can ensure that our thinking is grounded in reality.

*"We will try to get at least two customer conversations happening every week so that we can ensure that our thinking is grounded in reality."*



## What advice would you give someone who was looking to get started in the User Experience field?

"Do it", because it's a terrific time to get into this field. There is an increasing realisation of the value that we bring and the field is constantly evolving.

*"It's a terrific time to get into this field. There is an increasing realisation of the value that we bring and the field is constantly evolving."*

You should understand graphic design, technology and code. You don't have to necessarily write code, but it's important to understand the

constraints, the limitations, and the way it works and then to dive into the Interaction design.

**Do you know how someone might go about finding a mentor in UX?**

IxDA, the Interaction Design Association, has a mentorship programme—it's a really good resource for finding mentors. Go to meet-ups if you can, depending on where you're located.

**Do you have any favourite websites or bloggers?**

I do try to read outside of design, but in the UX world the Google Ventures Blog Design Staff and Paul Adams of Intercom write great stuff. Twitter—it is my main source of news and inspiration. I read *A List Apart* regularly, *Fast Company*, *UXMag*, *Smashing Magazine*, the *New York Times*—there are some really great resources out there.



### Jeff's Tips:

1. My first tip is: *do it*. It's a great time to get into the field.
2. *Teach yourself*. Network with others who are also learning. Find a good mentor. There are a lot of smart people in UX these days that would be happy to provide support on an ongoing basis. Look at the IxDA mentor program.
3. Every designer needs to *understand the medium* in which they work—get a solid grounding in design skills, technology, code. Recognise that your design ideas are just hypotheses, no matter how much you like them. The sooner you can validate them, the sooner you can begin adjusting them.
4. *Lean UX isn't a shortcut*. To be a good Lean UX designer you

need to be a good UX designer first.

5. Have the humility to say that you understand the customer, you think you have the right answer, but that you're not 100% sure. Let's find out by taking it back to the users.
6. *We are not heroes/ninjas/rockstars.* We are teammates. Be transparent and inclusive about your work. Make sure everyone else in your team is involved in the process so they can see what is and isn't working.

*Interview by M. Magain. Photos by J. Gothelf.*



1) Grid paper for sketching and planning, 2) Sharpie fine point marker , 3) Sharpie extra

fine point marker, 4) Olive Urbanears Plattan headphones, 5) Plain paper sheets for sketching, 6) Field Notes 48 page memo book, 7) Post it notes, 8) Scissors.

## Follow-up: Jeff's Reading List

- *The Design of Everyday Things* by Don Norman
- *Lean UX: Applying Lean Principles to Improve User Experience* by Jeff Gothelf

## Follow-up: Resources

- Google Ventures Blog: [gv.com](http://gv.com)
- Intercom Blog: [insideintercom.io](http://insideintercom.io)
- A List Apart: [alistapart.com](http://alistapart.com)
- Fast Company Design: [fastcodesign.com](http://fastcodesign.com)
- UX Magazine: [uxmag.com](http://uxmag.com)
- Smashing Magazine: [uxdesign.smashingmagazine.com](http://uxdesign.smashingmagazine.com)
- IxDA: [ixda.org](http://ixda.org)



## Gerry Gaffney

Gerry Gaffney runs UX consultancy Information and Design, and is the host of the User Experience Podcast. He is also the Director of Publications at UXPA (User Experience Professionals Association). He enjoys UX, books, bicycles and music.

[@gerrygaffney](https://twitter.com/gerrygaffney) | [infodesign.com.au](http://infodesign.com.au)

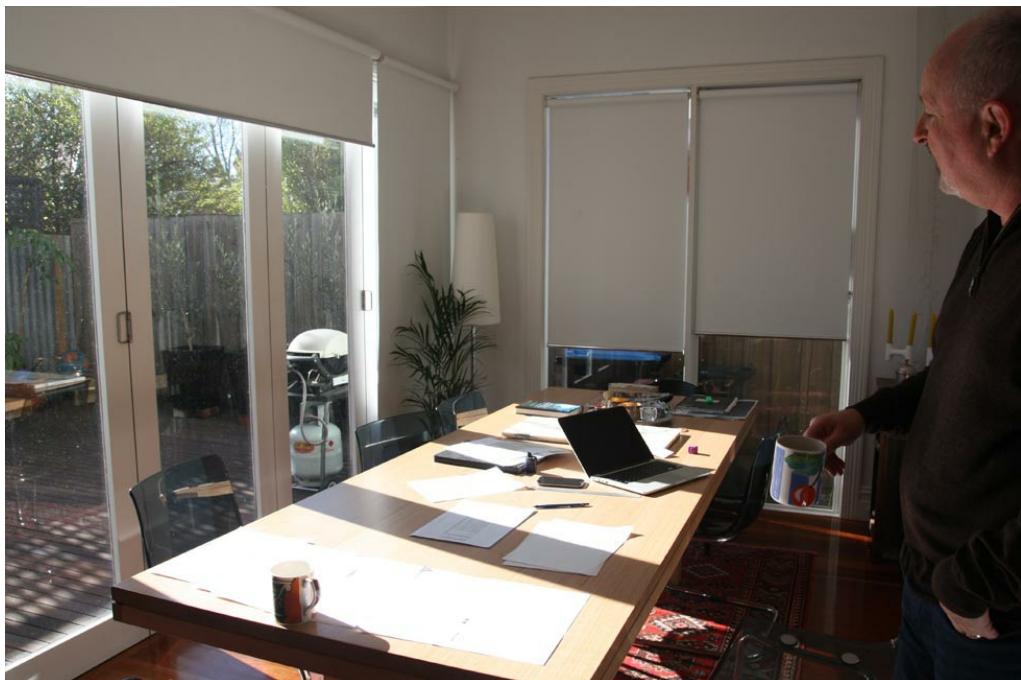
### **How did you get into UX?**

I initially worked as an electronics technician in Dublin and got into technical support roles. From there I became interested in the user side of things.

I set up my company 21 years ago to do technical documentation and online help but I always seemed to be fixing UI problems. I found that I always had to explain how to use something and felt as though I wanted to have an impact earlier on in the process.

*"I found that I always had to explain how to use something and felt as though I wanted to have an impact earlier on in the process."*

I gradually moved into the usability area and have been working exclusively in user experience and usability for the past twelve years.



**What is it about usability that appeals to you?**

It's a philosophical thing. The purpose of technology is to improve our lives—it's the only reason we have technology.

During the technological revolution of the last thirty years, we've made people subservient to technology and I think that's the wrong way round. The concept of trying to make sure that the technology we design is built for the user is something that drives me. I'm not a subscriber to the idea that we can delight people with technology. If I'm using online banking, it's highly unlikely that I'm going to be delighted by the interaction. The most I can hope for is that it's going to be friction free and effective—if it achieves that then it's really good.

*"I'm not a subscriber to the idea that we can delight people with technology. If I'm using online banking, it's highly unlikely that I'm going to be delighted by the interaction. The most I can hope for is that it's going to be friction free and effective."*

I'm currently working on a couple of projects where our client says, "Okay, we want to do this and this is the technology we're using" and I think, "Whoa, how did you get to that decision?" They got to that decision because they've been sold this technology as being a solution for the problem, so it's a solution, but often it's a solution for the wrong problem.



**You've put out a couple of books over the years about usability ...**

The first was “The Usability Kit” with Daniel Szuc. I then did a forms design book—“Forms That Work”—with Caroline Jarrett in the UK. At the time I was working with Telstra and considered many of their forms to be shockingly bad. The problem with their forms was simply lack of usability. It’s important to speak the user’s language and provide some navigation but there wasn’t a book I could find that covered the basics. Caroline Jarrett responded to an online query of mine and we ended up collaborating on that book. Caroline is one of those people who gets terribly excited about forms and surveys, but I’ve got a real fear of them. I hate opening any big envelope because you know it’s got forms inside it.

Forms are fascinating, though, because they tend to expose an organisation's dysfunction. When you look at an organisation from the outside, it's manicured and contrived and polished and then you look at one of their forms and it's like peeling back a layer of something and saying, "Oh this is what it's really like"!

*"Forms are fascinating, though, because they tend to expose an organisation's dysfunction. You look at one of their forms and it's like peeling back a layer of something and saying, 'Oh this is what it's really like'!"*

The thing I most love about UX is spending time with the users and watching what's going on in the real world. Visual design is not my strength—going out and spending time with users to see where they're at is always an eye opener, though.

With regard to UX design, there is certainly an interpretive element, it's not purely mechanical, but a lot of it is process. If you want to design something, you go out into the field and talk to the users. You get to understand what their aspirations are, you understand what it is they're trying to achieve with their work and just get as close to them as you can to understand as much as possible. Then you can start the design process.

For me the design process is bringing in the organisation. I do a lot of design partnering with other people to get the initial concepts and subsequent touch points. There is art in it but if you get bright people together who are committed and you go through the process then you're

outcomes will be reasonably good.

I feel that a lot of what I do is simply pedestrian. UX is a craft and there are elements of mystery to it but I do try to keep it as much about process as possible. At the end of the day it has to be process driven—that sounds very unromantic.

I think it's also comforting for people to know that UX design can be learned and if you follow the process, you'll get a good result.

Being close to the users is fundamental. I was discussing a project with a chap who said, "Well the users want this", and I said, "it doesn't really matter what the users want". In a way that's heresy but at the same time it's not. You have to be very careful to ensure that your design is user-centred and not user-led.

***"Being close to the users is fundamental... You have to be very careful to ensure that your design is user-centred and not user-led."***



## **What happens during a participative design session?**

Typically about ten people are involved, consisting of at least one technical person, one business person, a marketing person, a project leader and ideally a couple of users, although some companies are against having users.

Prior to the session I will have already done a lot of research, so I'm able to get into the session informed about what's going on in the organisation.

We start by outlining what it is we are hoping to achieve and what the issues are with the current system or the system we're trying to design. We use post it notes and affinity diagramming during this stage, to get

people thinking individually. After that we bring everyone's ideas together to a shared space on a wall.

I'll usually have some stories or scenarios that I've prepared before the session and we talk about them as a group and decide whether they are realistic. The scenarios are based upon what I've seen in the field. I think it's important that they be based on what you're building, so I'll say "Here's a typical story of what people are trying to achieve, what they're trying to do, and let's describe in a simple story what the ideal process is without focusing on the technology too much".

We then split up into a couple of groups and get each group to design one of those scenarios. They then come together and compare what they've done and determine whether they have the correct design direction and whether it meets the goals discussed earlier on in the process.

This cycle continues throughout the day. At the end of the day you have this suite of draft designs on paper, a general agreement about what the design goals for the system need to be and agreement on what the key scenarios are. It's really about just getting buy-in.



## **Tell me about the UXPA.**

The User Experience Professionals Association (UXPA) was set up in 1991 (then the Usability Professionals' Association). I was on the editorial board of User Experience magazine, which is the quarterly print magazine. Authors submit a proposal and outline for an article and a number of people will review the outline. The author then submits a draft and the article goes through several iterations to get to the generally high quality product that appears in the magazine.

We are in the process of publishing the magazine online as [uxpamagazine.org](http://uxpamagazine.org). When each new issue comes out it is member-only until the subsequent issue and then it is completely open.

We also have another purely online publication, issued quarterly, called the “Journal of Usability Studies”.

We are about to launch a new membership model to make it a bit more accessible to people who can’t afford the current membership fees. We also run conferences—the 2013 conference was in Washington DC and the theme was ‘collaboration’.

### **Why should I join the UXPA? What’s in it for me, from a selfish point of view?**

To me, the fundamental thing is about being part of that community. It does depend where you are located though—some chapters are really vibrant and have regular meetings whereas others are not. Some locations such as Melbourne or Sydney have the UX Book club, meet-ups, mobile groups etc.

### **We got the impression that some professional associations had their noses put out of joint when the name change happened - that it felt like a land grab or something.**

I wasn’t involved in the decision but someone rang me and said, “We’re thinking of changing the name from “Usability Professionals’ Association” to “User Experience Professionals Association” and my first response was that it made sense, that it was a more accurate description of what the people in the association do. There was a lot of positive response but there were negative responses also, including the ‘land grab’ remark.

I don’t really think it’s a land grab—certainly that wasn’t the intent.

Usability is a word that's been deprecated to some extent and it's not out there in the way that UX is. UX is out there in the business world whereas 'usability' isn't.

*"'Usability' is a word that's been deprecated to some extent and it's not out there in the way that 'UX' is."*

**What advice would you give to someone who was interested in getting started in user experience?**

It's difficult. You need to get a portfolio together and to be doing some sort of usability work. I think it's very unlikely as a newcomer that you're going to get a job as a user experience person. It's more likely you're going to get a job as either a developer or business analyst that has a user experience element to it.



## Rather than reading books to learn UX, is it better to just do it?

Yeah, I think doing it is important, but reading is also critical. I do like getting my teeth into a meaty book on user experience. I also think embracing the philosophy is really important. Sometimes you see people who say they are really into user experience but when you dig deeper, what they're really interested in is the interaction design or in an aspect that's not about user centric design.

*"Sometimes you see people who say they are really into user experience but when you dig deeper, what they're really interested in is the interaction design or in an aspect that's not about user centric design."*



**Gerry's Tips:**

1. *Observe:* Watching how people interact with devices, products and services will teach you as much as any other activity. Do this formally (for example, in usability testing or interviews), but also informally in your day-to-day life. Try to observe the widest possible range of people.
2. *Know your weaknesses:* UX is a broad field. Recognise the areas in which you are weaker. You can work to improve them, engage other people to help you with them, or even avoid them altogether if they sap your passion.
3. *Manage your ego:* It's inevitable that we become emotionally engaged with our own work, but it's also necessary to be dispassionate. Working collaboratively is a good way to achieve

this, by sharing credit and jointly reviewing your own, and others' work.

4. *Read:* There are dozens of brilliant books, and hundreds of brilliant online resources. Make a habit of reading. Make sure at least some of them are in-depth enough to make you think and rethink.
5. *Be passionate:* Remember why you got into UX in the first place, and return to that lodestone to maintain or reignite your passion.

*Interview by M. Magain. Photos by L. Chambers and G. Gaffney.*



1) Drawing (normally on the office door) by Gerry's younger son, 2) Sketch of user flow for

current project, 3) Guitar tablature for Hallelujah by Jeff Buckley, 4) Myki travel card, 5) Electronics snips, 6) Samsung Galaxy S4, 7) Steel rule, 8) Clutch pencils, 9) Magic Trackpad, 10) Apple MacBook Pro, 11) Sunglasses, 12) Pink eraser (fail early!), 13) Guitar pick, 14) Raspberry Pi, 15) Amazon Kindle (since lost), 16) Overton low D whistle

## Follow-up: Gerry's Reading List

- [Measuring the User Experience: Collecting, Analyzing, and Presenting Usability Metrics](#) by William Albert and Thomas Tullis
- [Practical Speech User Interface Design](#) by James R. Lewis
- [Make it So: Interaction Design Lessons from Science Fiction](#) by Nathan Shedroff and Chris Noessel
- [Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability](#) by Steve Krug
- [Human Error](#) by James Reason

## Follow-up: Resources

- Information & Design: [infodesign.com.au](http://infodesign.com.au)
- [Forms that Work: Designing Web Forms for Usability](#) by Caroline Jarrett and Gerry Gaffney
- User Experience Professionals Association: [uxpa.org](http://uxpa.org)
- Journal of Usability Studies:  
[usabilityprofessionals.org/upa\\_publications/jus/jus\\_home.html](http://usabilityprofessionals.org/upa_publications/jus/jus_home.html)
- User Experience podcast: [www.uxpod.com](http://www.uxpod.com)
- User Experience magazine: [uxpamagazine.org](http://uxpamagazine.org)



## Jodie Moule

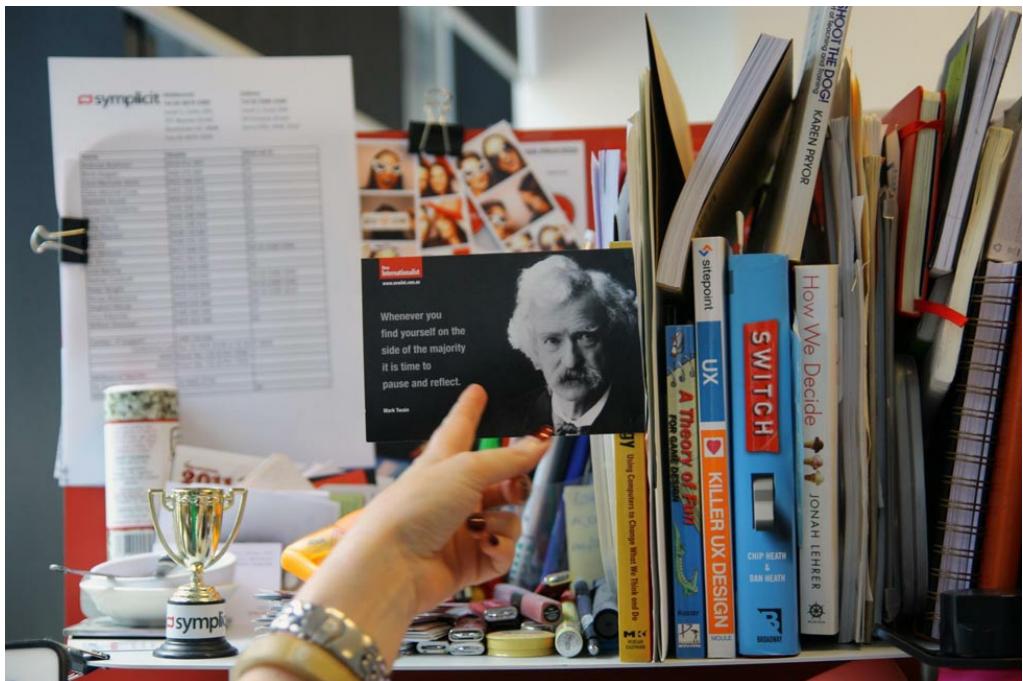
Jodie is one of the co-founding Directors of Symplicit, an Experience Design Consultancy with offices in Melbourne and Sydney.

[@jodiemoule](mailto:@jodiemoule) | [symplicit.com.au](http://symplicit.com.au)

### **Tell us a bit about yourself, Jodie. What's your background and how did you come to work in user experience design?**

I started out doing psychology at university and stayed in academia for as long as possible! During my time at University, like every starry-eyed graduate, I wanted to be a clinical psychologist. I did a lot of work experience early on in my degree, including some hairy stuff in drug and

alcohol rehabilitation, and in a hospital for the mentally ill. Those experiences basically helped me decide that clinical psychology wasn't going to be what I wanted for a future career.



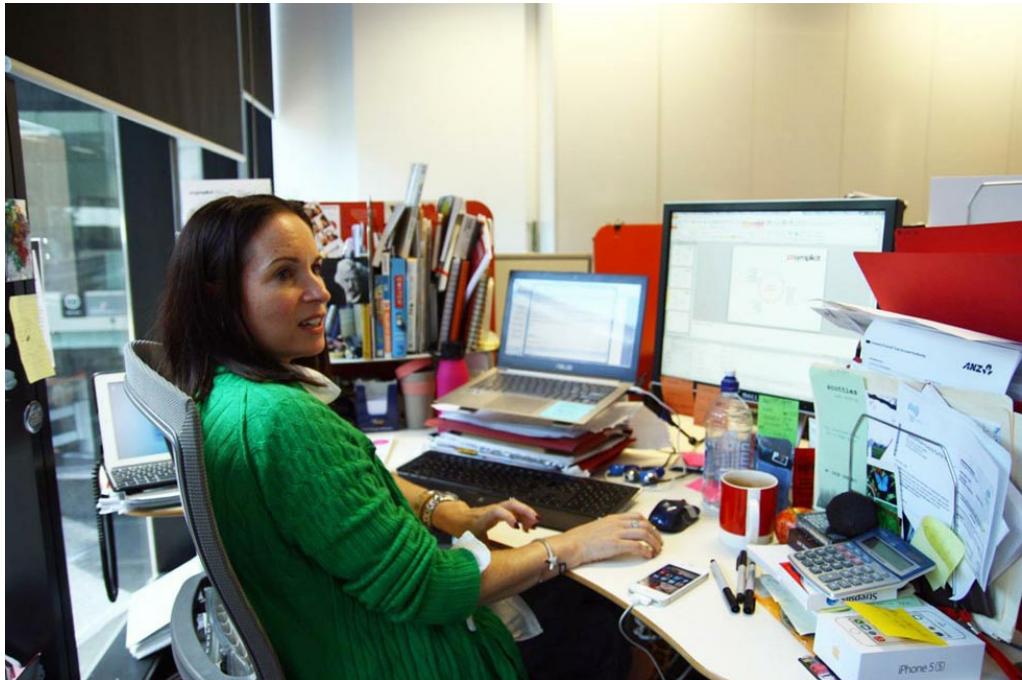
I then moved into Organisational Psychology and that was really interesting for a couple of years. I did large-scale recruitment, selection and leadership programs, including assessment centres, where personality testing, organisational change and profiling were commonplace. After a couple of years, though, I found myself thinking, "Wow, I'm just not into this." This was frustrating at the time—I was concerned I had been wasting my time with Psychology.

***"I was concerned I had been wasting my time with Psychology."***

Coincidentally, a friend of mine, Oli, mentioned that he knew a guy who wanted people with assessment centre experience to do work in the ‘HCI’, or as it was known then, ‘usability’, space. I wasn’t really into technology at the time, but I gave it a go and just loved it!

That company was PTG, and it was my first formal foray into the world of usability. PTG predominantly did digital and business strategy work. I did a lot of user testing, set the plan for website design and development processes, and focused on delivering the overall framework (mostly IA and interaction design). At that time—this was 14 years ago—you really had to fight for this stuff to be relevant. They were great times because it was a whole new discipline for me. Places like Hiser had been around for a little while—they were one of the first organisations in Australia to really pave the way—PTG was another.

After about five years, my co-founder Stephen and I made the move into our own business with Symplicit and the rest is history!



## **How do you differentiate yourself in the market place from other agencies?**

Stephen's background being in Industrial Design and mine being in Psychology meant that we focused on understanding behaviour as defining the experience. We then carried this through to the design of products, services and systems. We created a lot of interactive prototypes in the early days, which surprisingly wasn't that common. We did this mainly to help us make sense of the design problems as early as possible, and we went from strength to strength from there. We've always had the philosophy that research should lead into the design rather than just starting the design without any research.

*"Stephen's background being in Industrial Design and mine being in Psychology meant that we focused on understanding behaviour as defining the experience."*

I think one of our key differentiators was the fact that we took a 'design thinking' approach to the design of products and services—human centered, prototype driven and design focused—before this was even the standard to do so.



**Does running a business get in the way of doing the design stuff that you love?**

Yes, probably. However, I really enjoy helping solve a client's problem in the early stages of any engagement. I get a lot of energy from defining

what it is that we are trying to achieve to set the scene, which is usually when the design process starts. I really enjoy helping nut out what the method and process should be to solve that problem, or the direction research should take.

There are times when Symplicit has worked on some really interesting projects that I would have loved to be more involved in. We did one for Ambulance Australia, where the team drove around in the back of ambulances and then redesigned an in-car system that is now used Australia wide. I had to hold myself back on that project; after all, it was a once in a lifetime kind of job! However, as a business owner you need to be focused on opportunities that come in to sustain the business, managing the day-to-day and so on.

I enjoy doing user research and I still get my hands dirty every now and then. It really depends on the size and scale of the project as to whether I can justify involvement. I think doing the hands-on research keeps you fresh and grounded, so it is always a great thing to try to do semi-regularly, no matter what your role is.

***"I think doing the hands-on research keeps you fresh and grounded, so it is always a great thing to try to do semi-regularly, no matter what your role is."***



**What percentage of your time do you spend being hands on like that?**

It's pretty small. In the past I would have spent 60-70% of my time on research and a smaller amount of time focusing on generating business. Now it's probably more like 30-40% on research.

**I'd still consider that to be quite high for a business owner.**

I'm not necessarily doing the grunt work, but I am across projects at a high level, constantly dipping in and out, and helping to guide the team. I sometimes act as a sounding board for stories that come back from research. I'm there to ask questions of our team like: "Well, so what? Why is that interesting"? It's a bit of a shift from a pure research role, but like any business owner, the reality for me nowadays is that I have to do

everything. Depending on how busy we are, I dip in and out and do what I need to do to help the team out with delivery.

*"I sometimes act as a sounding board for stories that come back from research. I'm there to ask questions of our team like: 'Well, so what? Why is that interesting?'"*

**What advice would you give to somebody who's looking to get some more experience or make a name for themselves in the UX world?**

Firstly, I would say to try and work for places that have a CX / UX / Design Thinking philosophy when it comes to the overall design process. I think you need to be across human behaviour in order to design a solution that is, after all, for a human. I think it's a good idea to align with those types of companies.

You could ask for work experience, or just try and apply for a junior role and sell yourself. Passionate people come to us all the time and we are not opposed to accepting people that have had no experience, because they learn a lot once they join our team.

*"Try and work for places that have a CX / UX / Design Thinking philosophy when it comes to the overall design process."*

It also depends on what your skills are. If you're a designer, I think making the transition into this space is a useful one for improving your design skills. In the early days of my career I was just doing user testing,

watching session after session after session. You have to be able to predict the way people think and behave and how they might interact with your designs. Watching lots of user-testing sessions helps you do this.

However, it's not all about what the user says; rather it's about being informed or inspired enough to be a better designer at the end of the day. I think the best way to do that is to go into context with your users upfront to gain an appreciation for their world before you design, rather than rely on user testing at the end to tell you it was wrong.

You can influence the behaviour of your users with your design, but you need to consider that upfront, not as an afterthought. I think that's a real turning point for a designer—when you consider that your design changes behaviour. You may as well focus on your designs evoking a positive change, than a negative one.

*"I think that's a real turning point for a designer—when you consider that your design changes behaviour. You may as well focus on your designs evoking a positive change, than a negative one."*



## What do you think makes a good UXer?

Empathy, communication skills, ability to build rapport and being curious about the world are all-important traits to have. You need to be able to put yourself in other people's shoes and have a genuine interest in people, and why they do what they do.

***"You need to be able to put yourself in other people's shoes and have a genuine interest in people, and why they do what they do."***

If you are a consultant, you need to be a great facilitator and also a good juggler! Communication and interpersonal skills are critical. It's not a

static industry. You've got to keep on top of what the new design paradigms and technologies are, how they affect the way that people react and thus how you design your product.

## **Do you think it's enough to get started if you haven't got visual design skills or coding skills?**

Yes of course! I can't code or do visual design! For many years after I moved into UX I realised that design was something I had to get up to speed with—I simply hadn't looked at the world that way. I'd been all about "rats and stats" and psychology. I put the psychology part of me to one side, not thinking it was useful at all. In fact I thought at the time, "I've wasted all this time on this degree and now I'm changing focus completely." But I got to a point where I had come up to speed with design a little more, and what it meant in this context. Then I could return to psychology and go, "Actually yes, I see where this is really critically important." I think it's about learning as much as you can about the areas you don't know much about, and that interest you. You don't have to be an expert at everything, but you need to know enough to communicate with others effectively.

*"I think it's about learning as much as you can about the areas you don't know much about, and that interest you. You don't have to be an expert at everything, but you need to know enough to communicate with others effectively."*

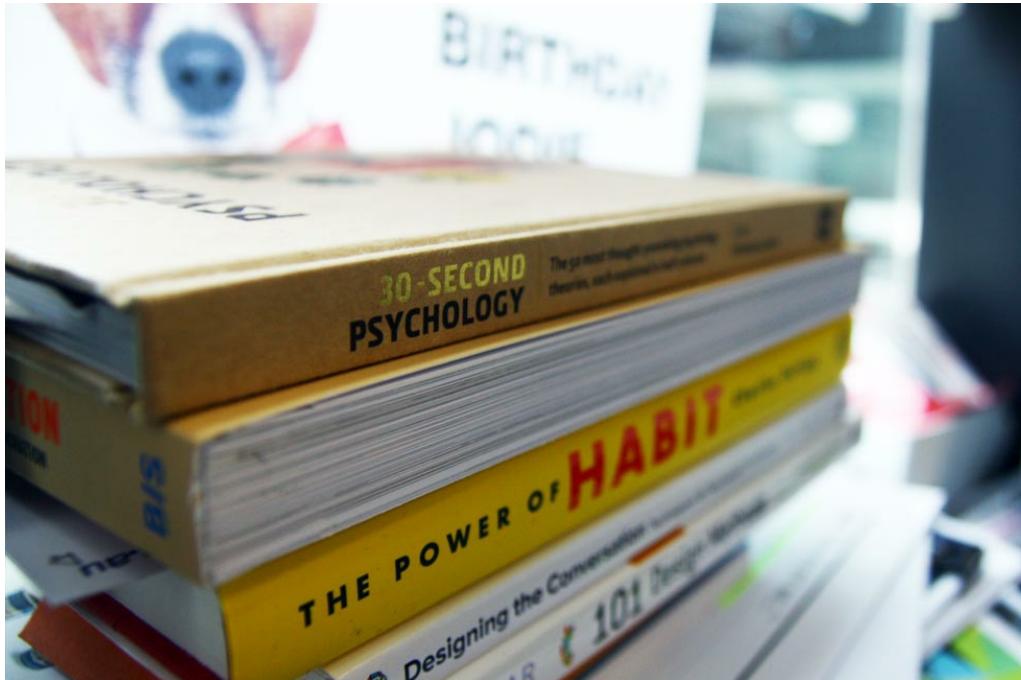
I consider myself a great sketcher and am able to use PowerPoint for

low-fi prototypes of interactions. Analysing how and why someone interacts and behaves, and identifying the design opportunity are my real strengths. I work to my strengths—I'm not a visual designer; I don't tinker in Photoshop. It's true in any industry that you can't do everything yourself—you need to be amongst a group of people who all have very different skills and focus on what you are good at or enjoy the most.

### **What are some of your favorite tools?**

A Symplicit sharpie and notebook! I also regularly use PowerPoint if I want to explore interactions. If I'm out researching, I love to take photos, upload them straight into Evernote and put notes around what's interesting, or compelling while talking to that person, so that it is quickly recorded in that moment.

I use the microphone on my phone sometimes to record my own comments about what I find interesting. That way, I've got a little sound bite to refer to later. When you're performing research and seeing lots of people, you tend to forget information. It can be helpful at the end of each day if you've captured things in this manner. You can forget some really interesting and compelling stuff if you don't. Plus, revisiting hours and hours of recordings is not always effective or practical in a project.



## What's your favourite part of the job?

Setting a framework for how research should be done. When you mix up methods and approaches, you're constructing interesting ways to solve a problem and explore that problem space generally. For instance, which methods will help to answer specific questions—that's the kind of stuff I really like.

I enjoy running workshops and training others—I find it fun and enjoyable. At the end of the day, I enjoy interacting with and meeting people, and helping them to uncover and explore whatever problem it is that they are trying to solve. Those are the times I feel like we're adding real value to our clients, which is very rewarding.

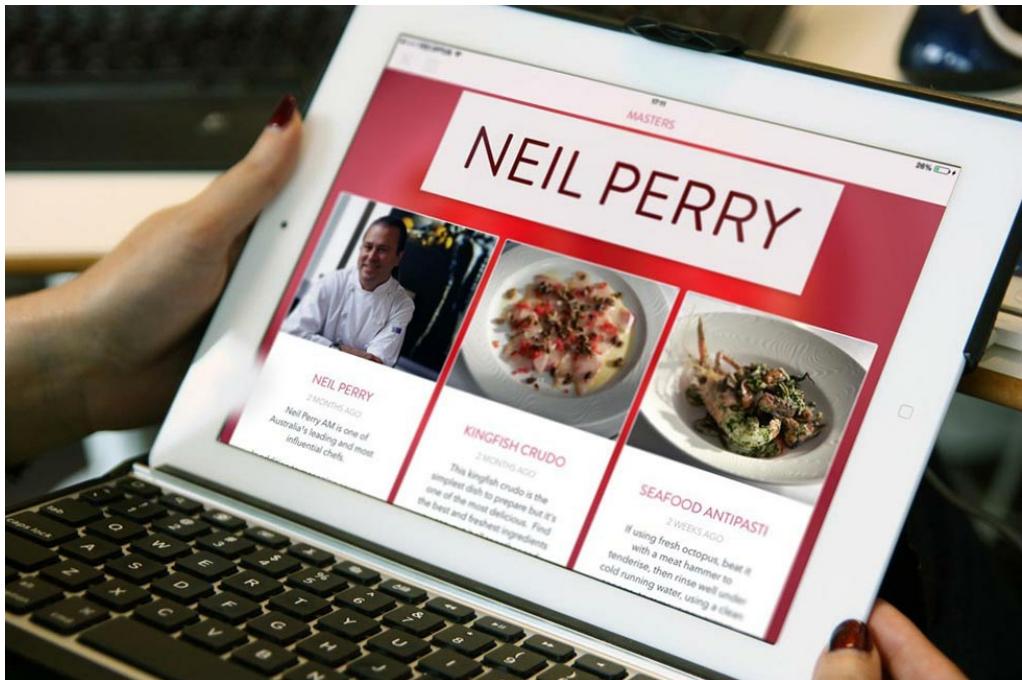
**You and your husband Steven are in the unique position of being business owners, and you're both very involved in the business. Tell us about that.**

We worked together before we were together as a couple, so I think that helped us to set the working relationship. To be honest, to own a business with your husband is the best possible solution for small business owners, because you've got to live and breathe the business to make it successful. It's a 24/7 commitment and we enjoy facing that challenge together. It's rewarding to be involved in a company that's been around for 10 years that we both created together, not that we ever set to achieve a milestone like that. We've just put our head down and focused on working really hard and we have always enjoyed the ride. We have always done everything together—and we like it like that.

Since having kids, balancing work and life is a lot tougher. We can't just work every single weekend and late into the night like we used to, because we have these other little people that need our attention too.

### **How have you managed that?**

To be honest, Steve and I try not to think about it too much. It's best to just get on with it. It's what we've chosen. I've become super-human in my ability to juggle a number of things at once. Writing a book and designing an app at the same time (*Killer UX Design*, published by SitePoint and *Cook* the case study app from the book) was probably the most challenging thing I've ever had to do in my life—even beyond having a business and having kids!



The year I was writing the book was a really tough year, but it taught me to be super-organised. I think that being able to juggle multiple things is a skill that people probably underestimate when they're getting into the UX field, but it's really important. What separates people that I see over the years is those who are able to juggle multiple commitments and context-switch rapidly, and those that can't.

***"Anyone can come up with design genius if they're given six to twelve months to just sit on one project, but the real world doesn't work like that."***

Anyone can come up with design genius if they're given six to twelve months to just sit on one project, but the real world doesn't work like

that. You've got to be able to run, to come up with good ideas, and be on top of your game, and that can be really hard day after day. The rewards are great if you focus your energy wisely, however.

**How do you manage information overload—managing emails and keeping on top of what people are tweeting and RSS feeds and the like?**

I think I just consume as much as I can. I'm one of those people who are addicted to their phone. Email is my biggest distractor, but in my position I have to respond to things quickly.

Information overload from daily emails is probably one thing I need to learn how to manage and categorise better—if you've got any tips, anyone reading or listening—let me know!



*Interview by M. Magain. Photos by L. Chambers.*

**Jodie's Tips:**

1. Don't conduct research without a clear research question or problem that you intend to answer.
2. Recruit users that sit outside the norm (that is, don't just go for "known audience types").
3. Focus on observation and NOT judgement when in context (this is harder than you expect).
4. Research in pairs; conversation and shared experiences help when it comes time to make sense of data.
5. Immediately transfer notes to a visual format you can move

around and discuss with others, during your ‘insight’ process.



- 1) Glasses, 2) water carafe and drinking glass, 3) pencil and eraser, 4) Symplicit Sharpies, 5) White iPhone, 6) Fit Bit, 7) sign here stickers, 8) Lipstick & lip gloss, 9) Apple, 10) Mt Bogong Walkabout Mix, 11) Symplicit Keep Cup with assorted pens, 12) iPad 2 with keyboard, featuring the *Cook* app, 13) PC laptop, 14) *Taste* magazine, 15) *30-Second Psychology*, 16) *Killer UX Design* and 17) *Don't Shoot the Dog*

## Follow-up: Resources

- Pocket app: [getpocket.com](http://getpocket.com)
- Cook app: [www.thecookapp.com](http://www.thecookapp.com) (read the case study in Jodie's book *Killer UX Design* below)

## Follow-up: Jodie's Reading List

- [Killer UX Design: Create User Experiences to Wow Your Visitors](#) by Jodie Moule (including case study of the *Cook* app)
- [30-Second Psychology: The 50 Most Thought-Provoking Psychology Theories, Each Explained in Half a Minute](#) by Christian Jarrett
- [Don't Shoot the Dog!: The New Art of Teaching and Training](#) by Karen Pryor
- [Customers Included: How to Transform Products, Companies, and the World - With a Single Step](#) by Mark Hurst

# A Day in the Life of a UX Designer

Here's a snapshot of how Matt spent one of his days. [How do you spend yours?](#)

6.00am

Wake up.



7.00am

Breakfast. Coffee. Prepare kids for school/childcare.



8.00am

Morning commute.



9.00am

Catch up on email.  
Morning standup meeting.



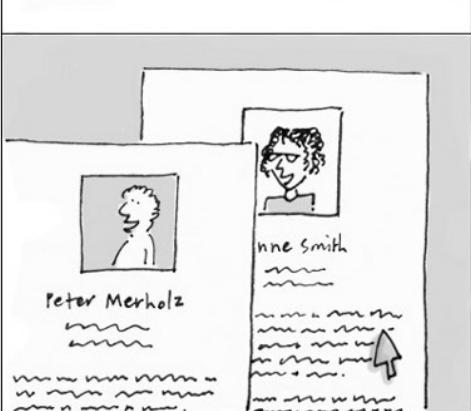
10.00am

Stakeholder meeting.



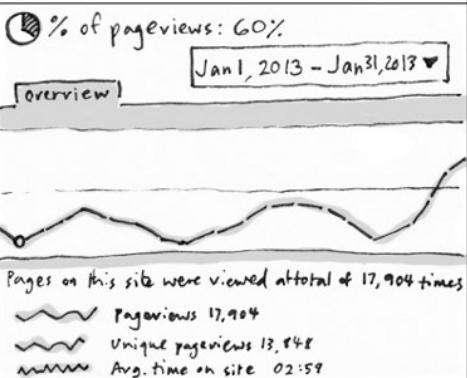
12.00pm

Start creating personas.



11.00am

Review web analytics  
and other data.



1.00pm

Lunch.



# A Day in the Life of a UX Designer

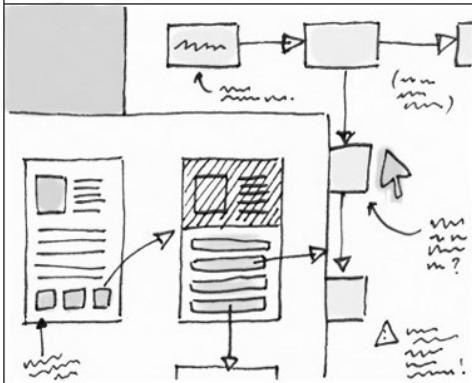
2.00pm Continue work on personas.



3.00pm Creating storyboards & scenarios.



4.00pm Workflow diagrams & wireframes.



5.00pm More wireframing; schedule some user tests for tomorrow.



6.00pm

Evening commute.

7.00pm

Dinner + family time.

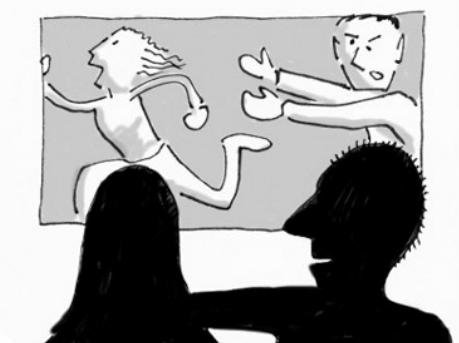


8.00pm

Bathe kids, bedtime routine.

9.00pm

Watch some TV with  
lovely wife.



## A Day in the Life of a UX Designer

**10.00pm** Do some writing/drawing.



**11.00pm** Read until fall asleep.



# About UX Mastery



[UX Mastery](#) is an online resource for aspiring user experience designers.

Founders Luke Chambers and Matthew Magain are passionate about teaching others how to design websites, mobile apps and desktop apps that are both usable and delightful.



## Luke Chambers

General tinkerer, web tailor, user-centred design soldier, tall-ship sailor

and biscuit thief, Luke runs a user experience agency called [Experia Digital](#). Throughout his day he tells stories and explains to people the “why” of the design that happens behind the visuals.

### **Matthew Magain**

Based in Melbourne, Matt works as a freelance designer, illustrator and entrepreneur under the name of [Useractive](#). He enjoys [sketchnoting at conferences](#) and spends his spare time writing and illustrating [children's books](#).

### **Get Involved**

Looking for more? Join the UX Mastery online community:

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[uxmastery.com/newsletter](http://uxmastery.com/newsletter)
- Like us on Facebook: [facebook.com/uxmastery](https://facebook.com/uxmastery)
- Follow us on Twitter: [@uxmastery](https://twitter.com/@uxmastery)