

The importance of user research

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In this video, we're going to look at why it is important to understand who your users are, how to interact with them during the design process, and how to represent different user groups using personas. The key topics we're going to cover are the importance of user feedback, use of research methods, and creating personas. Let's start with the importance of user feedback.

The first step in the discovery phase is to understand who the users of your product will be. It is a common trap to design for yourself. This may work if the user is just like you, but you're likely to miss out on a huge part of needs or fail to address problems that you haven't seen because you are too close to the issue. Research to try and find out what needs you are fulfilling for your users. What are their pain points right now?

Are they familiar or brand new to the concept? Have they tried this technology before? What age, nationality, hobbies, or activities do they have? Remember, your users may vary, so try to understand any commonalities of differences that they may have so that you can cater for them.

Before you build anything, seek input from representatives of real users. It is by far the easiest and safest way to ensure that you are on the right track. Now, let's move on to the user research methods. There are many ways you can learn about your users. First, try to decide what's important, and then choose which approach is best.

Interviews or focus groups with typical users are a great way to start. This can be with a variety of members of the public, staff from a company, or even your friends. It completely depends on your project. Surveys and questionnaires about what they do right now and how they feel about their interactions with the product gives you direct feedback of what users need so that you and your team can improve their experience.

Market research using reports and statistics can inform you of what most of your users would want and how they would react to similar products. Watching users interact with existing sites or apps can also give you a lot of information. Often what people say they do and what they actually do are very different.

Formal lab based usability studies can track people's eye gaze and emotions as they interact.

You can also gain really useful user insight simply through focus groups. Remember to avoid leading the user into answers with your questions. Try and stay away from things like, wouldn't it be great if the product did this, and go more towards questions that don't lead them to anywhere, such as what are your frustrations? What would you like the product to do?

Now, let's talk about creating personas. You can't have all your users give input, especially if you're marketing to a huge audience base. But there are ways of describing different types of users so you can make sure your design works for them. These are called personas.

These are profile of an example user. A story about who they are, what motivates them, and what brands they like. You can understand what preferences they have, what their pain points are, or any other information to help you characterise them. You can have anywhere between one to a dozen personas depending on your project.

But the more flavour and life you give to your personas the more you can tailor your design to them. Let's go through an example persona. Imagine you're creating a food delivery app. There are things that you would want to discover about your different types of users. Giving your persona a name and a photo can help bring them to life. Take Mohammed, for example.

Mohammed is 25, and he's an IT consultant. He works from home and his schedule is too busy to allow for cooking daily. For Mohammed, it's important to have a healthy cooked meal every day at lunchtime that he can order whilst on work calls. Now, you should understand your persona's points of views and attitudes, and you should also have a back story as to how they use existing products or services.

Characteristics and demographics are also important, along with capturing your user's key goals, such as eating healthily. Trying to find some measures that you can mark on a scale such as how cost sensitive they are. These can be handy to check your design against and make sure you're still fulfilling needs.

If you have less time to research, it is still worth having a summary of different types of users. Think about all the different uses for the food delivery app. This may be office workers, families with small children, everyday users or occasional users. They all have very different characteristics and motivations, and although this example is far less detailed than the previous one, personas are still useful.

User research gives a real understanding of who you are creating for. Understanding who these people are ensures you are building products that users actually want.

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