User, User: Who Art Thou? The Seamless Experience

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I. INTRODUCTION

Until development teams, developers and designers have a fuller level of understanding of the expectations and needs of the audience they are designing for, there will continue to be customer and user frustration, resulting in negative user experiences.

Applying investigative processes, such as contextual inquiry, together with customer journey and experience mapping, as well as surveys and persona creation, are critical steps required to build a better understanding of who users are and what their expectations and needs are.

Development of web sites, applications, products and services based on this investigative approach will ensure that far greater seamless and satisfying experiences are enjoyed by customers and users, who will be able to achieve their needs without frustrations.

II. WHO ARE USERS?

We must find out who our target audience is.

They are people and our customers— who have needs, wants, desires, and frustrations. Often we can’t rely on an organization or company to understand this, as they can lose touch with their customer and user base, and may not even have up to date information about them.

Decisions that companies make end up straying farther and farther away from addressing the actual needs of customers.

We need to find out our customer and user needs— what do they actually want and expect from the websites, applications, products and services we will be designing for them? And why do they have these needs?

How do we discover all this customer specific information and use it to understand our customers and users?

III. CONTEXTUAL INQUIRY

The most valuable asset of a successful design team is the information they have about their users. When teams have the right information, the job of designing a powerful, intuitive, easy-to-use interface becomes tremendously easier. When they don’t, every little design decision becomes a struggle.

One of the most powerful ways to gain insights about users is the field study or Contextual Inquiry. By making direct observations, design teams can identify opportunities they may have never discovered by only conducting usability tests, focus groups, or surveys, applying the conventional usability discovery processes.

That’s why companies need to use tools and processes that reinforce an understanding of actual customer needs.

Qualitative, contextual research, where you’re observing behavior as users interact with a design will give you the best picture of users and their behaviours and habits.

It has the advantage of delivering the development team information they just can’t get in any other way.

Innovation happens when the designers get direct exposure to the users’ context and its subtle variations and accidental similarities. Innovative and successful designs come from paying attention to the little details in the user’s context.

‘Intuitive’ interfaces are easier to build when designers have a deep understanding of the users’ context, terminology, and processes. It’s the combination of these three elements that make an interface seem intuitive, because the familiarity to users is already built in.
By making direct observations, design teams can identify opportunities and gain important insights they may have never discovered if they had only conducted usability tests, focus groups, or surveys.

While traditional discovery techniques can lead to valuable insights, the most powerful tool in the toolbox is the 'field study’. Field studies, or Contextual Inquiry activities, get the team immersed in the environment of their users and allow them to observe critical details for which there is no other way of discovering.

Contextual Inquiry immerses product designers in actual customer data by having designers observe the work of users in their natural environment. Design teams can quickly identify specific problems and needs of their customers. One advantage of this technique is that it provides a framework for designers to synthesize the customer data they collect and use it to produce creative products.

IV. CUSTOMER JOURNEY MAPS

A key tool in this area is an artifact called a Customer Journey Map (also known as a touchpoint map).

A Customer Journey Map details visually the route people usually take as they interact with web sites, applications, products and services. Customer experience journey maps are a tool to help bring the outside world into an organization. They are a tool that can help bring customer stories to life. Not just the piece one silo or function within an organization normally may encounter. But the entire story. We interview, we learn, and we determine who, exactly, these mystery users are. In doing so, we answer the two most important questions of the discovery stage: who are our audiences, and what do they want from our website, applications, products and services?

Customer journey mapping enables us to question why we do the things we do. It makes things visible, which might have been right in front of us, but were so familiar we did not notice them or question them. We need to design and implement systems that will allow our organizations to have meaningful and ongoing conversations with our customers.

A customer journey map in its simplest form could contain the following:

1. **Context or stakeholder map.** List all stakeholders and order the hierarchy in circles of influences around the centre, where you are. When working with customers you’ll have the customer in the centre. Describe all relationships on the map by answering the question: what do we do for them; what do they do for us? This map shows you the landscape or force field you are dealing with. And you can discuss how this influences the quality of your work and how a customer benefits or suffers from it.

2. **Persona.** A rich customer profile or persona is needed. Describe his/her personal and business situation now (present situation) and in the future (ambitions).

3. **Outcomes.** A description of the desired outcome - what are they trying to achieve?

4. **Customer journey.** List all actions (as far as possible) the customer has to take to reach the outcome. Don’t start listing actions when the customer uses your service the first time. Start before the moment they have decided to use your product or service. This way we visualize behavioural patterns.

5. **Touchpoints.** Underneath every action we list all channels and touchpoint services the customer encounters. Not just yours! This way you’ll discover the landscape you are in from the customer’s perception.

6. **Moments of truth.** Then we identify the moments the customer encounters your touch points and channels. We start focus on those most important 'moments of truth'.

7. **Service delivery.** Underneath every touch point, we write down who delivers the service.
Customer journey maps are documents that visually illustrate an individual customer’s needs, the series of interactions that are necessary to fulfill those needs, and the resulting emotional states a customer experiences throughout the process:

- **Need**—what a customer has set out to achieve
- **Interactions**—the necessary steps for a customer to satisfy those needs and achieve the overall goal
- **Emotions**—the customer’s emotional state—including needs, goals accomplished, and satisfaction level—before, during, and after the experience.

With internal and external research in hand, journey-mapping leaders need to distill their findings about how customers interact with the company, what they want from each interaction, and how they feel about each interaction today—the three key elements of a journey map.


**Figure 2. Customer Journey Map—courtesy Joel Flom**

By showing how customers feel throughout their journey, customer journey maps invite stakeholders to enter the world of customers and share in their experience. In turn, stakeholders are better able to convey their story to management, fellow colleagues, and the teams who are responsible for improving the service and product experience.

Journey maps succeed when they’re based on ethnographic research and contextual inquiry that allows researchers to experience a day in the life of a customer.

To breathe life into journey maps, you must base your personas on actual customer behavior and clearly communicate the core tasks that customers perform.

It’s a graphical representation of the service journey of a customer. It shows their perspective from the beginning, middle and end as they engage a service to achieve their goal, showing the range of tangible and quantitative interactions, triggers and touchpoints, as well as the intangible and qualitative motivations, frustrations and meanings.

**V. SUMMARY**

By detailing a customer’s needs throughout an experience and revealing how each interaction negatively or positively impacts the customer’s emotional state, UX professionals can convert volumes of research findings and analysis into a concise, yet visually compelling story, which stakeholders across many levels of an organization can easily understand and interpret.

Customer Journey and Experience Maps make visible the end-to-end experience from the customer’s point of view, showing the significant interactions, pathways or expectations we need to understand.

They enable the design and development team to really understand what it is to be in the customer’s shoes. This insures that the customer’s voice is easily represented and referenced during development and building.

What makes a customer journey map much more powerful than simply delivering personas and scenarios is its ability to highlight the flow of the customer experience—from the ups and downs along the way to those critical pain points where our attention and focus are most essential.

While personas and scenarios put a face to a name and can deliver vivid narratives that communicate a customer’s overall needs, journey maps break a customer’s experience down into individual interactions, making the needs and emotions easier to recognize and more digestible.

The use of Customer Journey and Experience Maps as a major design and analysis tool to provide evidence of what customers actually think, do and use will enhance our ability to design ever increasing pleasing experiences for customers and users, allowing them to achieve their desires when using web sites, applications, products and services we design for them.
REFERENCES


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