



Whitepaper Dr Zafer Bilda

What is your take on User Experience Design?



Prologue

The aim of this research was to understand and uncover best practice in User Experience Design. To do so, I interviewed 15 expert UX practitioners – highly motivational, experienced and successful people who are leaders in their fields.

What emerged was very interesting. When it came to UX best practice, these 15 leaders did not always agree with each other and yet all made very valid points. My task of consolidating their insights on UX was very thought-provoking and has illustrated that UX design principles and standards are in a constant state of flux.

Executive summary

In August 2010, I had the opportunity to go to UX Week in San Francisco. Touted as one of the largest UX conferences in the world, it attracts speakers who work at the coalface of UX design for some of the leading digital companies around the globe.

Realising that so many experts in this emerging field would be descending on the city during the event, I saw a golden opportunity to pick their brains and hear their thoughts on a topic we are very passionate about at Bialto – the customer experience.

Upon return to Australia, I then arranged interviews with a number of Australian practitioners to obtain a more localised view on the subject.

The interview structure

Every interviewee was presented with a series of 11 controversial statements on the topic of UX design.

I arrived at these statements following consultation with my colleagues at Bialto. Initially, I intended to ask questions, but we then decided to present statements that the experts could respond to, either in favour or against.

My rationale for selecting the series of statements was very much shaped by my own career journey, and is presented at the beginning of each statement's analysis.

In summary, the 11 statements presented to the interviewees included:

- 1 You may design great experiences without any user research
- 2 The ultimate goal of a UX practitioner is to deliver User Centred Design
- 3 UX was invented to stop programmers making important design decisions
- 4 With or without developing Personas you may end up with the same design
- 5 When all clients learn to practice UX, there will be no need for UX practitioners
- 6 Companies promote UX because it is the new trend in marketing
- 7 Companies can only become customer centric if a UX practitioner becomes the CEO
- 8 A higher number of clicks to a site or increased sales of the product show the success of the design
- 9 Non-designers cannot be UX practitioners
- 10 UX practitioners should be involved in all customer service channels
- 11 UX is not a job, it is a way of thinking

Participants

The research involved speaking to UX practitioners in Australia and the US (7 from Australia, 8 from US). All participants are actively practising UX, yet have different interests or specialisations such as design research, strategy, interaction design, service design, production, development, or management.

To ensure that different working environments were represented, participants come from in-house teams, agencies, Government (in AU only) and freelancers.

A full list of participants is included on Page 6.

The main insights from the interviews

Having analysed in detail the responses given by the participants, a number of interesting insights about UX emerged. This section summarises these insights – for more information please see the corresponding or relevant statement.

Statement

Insights

1 You may design great experiences without any user research.

User research is a significant part of the UX design process – despite the fact that Apple claims that it does not conduct user research. It is often the case that businesses cut down on user research activities first to reduce project budgets. UX practitioners passionately emphasised the benefits of doing research, although more than half of them believed that one could design great experiences without conducting research explicitly.

2 The ultimate goal of a UX practitioner is to deliver User Centred Design.

In all the literature about User Centred Design (UCD), it is described as a methodology for creating user-friendly or usable designs. However, UX experts say they do not necessarily stick to it for success, nor they see delivering UCD as their ultimate goal.

3 UX was invented to stop programmers making important design decisions.

Where did UX come from? How did people design before UX was invented? All experts agreed that UX has emerged from a need to position users as the central focus and to engage developers, graphic designers and stakeholders in making design decisions around this central focus.

4 With or without developing Personas you may end up with the same design.

There is still considerable debate around whether Personas are valuable or efficient in UX design. Sceptics see it as extra work, arguing that Personas do not add much to the design outcome; while some other experts will hang these Personas up on the wall and remind the businesses who they are designing for (customers!). For others, creating Personas is an essential part of the design process which helps them fine-tune their designs. It all depends on the UX expert.

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- 5 When all clients learn to practice UX, there will be no need for UX practitioners.** To business executives, the straightforward definition of website success may be ‘conversion’. This is not true for UX practitioners. Rather, their success criteria include fuzzier measures like good and loveable design, the ability to use a design in practice, and emotional attachment.
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- 6 Companies promote UX because it is the new trend in marketing.** UX is a buzzword that is being widely adopted by advertising and marketing companies, because they realise the customer has to become the focus. Is it a new trend that will decline in the near future, or is it going to be integral to their change process to become truly customer-centric? Most UX experts agreed that it is seen as a trend in marketing, but only by ‘bad’ companies – and they all emphasised that UX should be a foundational skill, not the icing on the cake.
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- 7 Companies can only become customer centric if a UX practitioner becomes the CEO.** What is the role of leadership in UX design? Does it work best when it becomes a leadership field, because of the fact that it engages multiple parties to make critical design decisions, and it is informed by the business strategy and customer intentions? Then, do we need to position UX experts as CEOs? Most UX experts disagreed with this view, reasoning that UX practitioners will not make the best CEOs.
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- 8 A higher number of clicks to a site or increased sales of the product show the success of the design.** How do we evaluate the success of a design or customer experience? Is it called success when the design serves for the profitability of the business? UX practitioners did not much agree with this, they consider evaluation is complex and should be looking at longer term and psychological metrics. Success of an experience design needs collaboration of business, marketing, services, technology and design.
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- 9 Non-designers cannot be UX practitioners.** Is UX a design discipline? Or a discipline that can use all different backgrounds and skills? Most UX experts agreed that there are various skills in a UX team, and that not everyone has to actively design. Rather, they see UX as an umbrella term that aligns research, domain knowledge, business strategy and visual communication.
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- 10 UX practitioners should be involved in all customer service channels.** UX design has been predominantly associated with the online channel. Can it be extended/ aligned to design customer service channels? UX experts had mixed reactions to this. More than half agreed that each touchpoint is a design opportunity and UX experts could be involved at each touchpoint, while some did not see a necessity or passion for extension/ expansion of UX.
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- 11 UX is not a job, it is a way of thinking.** Is user experience inherent in some people? Do they have a certain way of thinking different than the others? Majority of the experts agreed with this view, they preferred to see it as an inclination, a core skill, rather than a job.
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Participants

United States

Elizabeth Churchill (Design Research and Corporate Perspective)

- + Vice President at SigCHI (ACM Special Interest Group on Computer Human Interaction)
- + Columnist at Interactions Magazine
- + Principal Research Scientist at Yahoo! Research

Indi Young (Design Research, Developer & Freelancer Perspective)

- + Shareholder at Adaptive Path
- + Author at Rosenfeld Media (author of *Mental Models*)
- + Consultant (Self-employed)

Jamin Hegeman (Interaction Design & Service Design Perspective)

- + Designer at Adaptive Path

Mark Wagner (UX, Manager & Marketing Perspective)

- + Director of Experience Design at Bolin Marketing

Natasha Sant (UX and Corporate perspective)

- + User Experience Designer at Cisco

Steve Cotterill (UX, Developer, Apple Human Interface and Corporate perspective)

- + User Experience Engineer at Apple Inc.

Charles Yiu (UX, Interaction Design and Corporate perspective)

- + User Experience Designer Level 2 at Microsoft Corporation

Anu Ramaswamy (Customer Experience, Product Management, Agile Methodologies and Agency perspectives)

- + Lead Consultant, Customer Experience Design at ThoughtWorks

Participants

Australia

Michelle Gillmore (Customer Experience, Service Design, Agency perspectives)

+ [Co-Director at Neoteny Service Design](#)

Chris Khalil (UX, Manager, Corporate perspectives)

+ [Director of User Experience at News Digital Media](#)

Suze Ingram (UX, Freelance perspectives)

+ [User Experience Architect \(Self-employed\)](#)

Stephen Cox (Design Research, Customer Experience, Corporate perspectives)

+ [Customer Experience Manager Online and ATM at Westpac](#)

Karen Redhead (UX, Government, Manager perspectives)

+ [National Director Design at Australian Taxation Office](#)

Susan Wolfe (UX, Strategy, Research, Agency perspectives)

+ [Managing Director at Optimal Experience](#)

Elizabeth Pek (UX Strategy, Manager, Corporate perspectives)

+ [User Experience Lead at Bupa Australia](#)

Statement 1

You may design great experiences without any user research.

Rationale for this statement

I come from an academic background, and have done a Masters and PhD on human behaviour in design. During my PhD at Sydney University, I sat in a large architectural firm three days a week and observed how the architects design with others in the office and how they collaborate remotely with Dubai and Melbourne. I then helped to design and test efficient collaboration tools to support their design process. I don't believe these tools could have been designed without observing the architects in their real working environments, watching how they communicate and figuring out what tools they need.

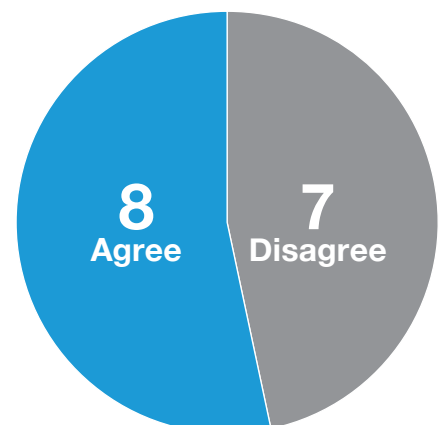
I have always believed that research is essential before any design or user testing occurs. So how can Apple say that it doesn't conduct research? How can the Apple designers – who are not allowed to do user research – create such great experiences? Ever since I became a UX practitioner, this issue has weighed on my mind. I know what I believe, but I also wanted to hear what the UX experts thought.

Summary of responses

This bold statement kicked off the UX debate – with half of the participants concurring that it is possible to design a great experience without research, but that it comes with risk attached.

In general, participants agreed that it is only possible to design great experiences without research on the condition that:

- + You are highly familiar with the domain or product
- + You are an expert or visionary in the product domain
- + You know your users – to the extent that you, as the designer, are the user of the product.



What the respondents said

“I agree. It’s possible if the person who is doing the design has amazing insights and is a great visionary. Just take Apple – they don’t seem to be listening a lot. Sometimes, listening to users may limit thinking outside the box...”

Agree US

“I think there are instances of great designers doing lots of implicit user research. So they see and understand the world and find the opportunities. And possibly design for themselves but in reality when they design for themselves, they in fact design for a particular need. Maybe the question is that when you design for yourself, are you doing user research on yourself? An example might be Steve Jobs, who wakes up and asks, “What do I want?” Is it user research? Possibly. It depends how you define it. But I am not that skilled – I need to analyse stacks of information, process that and work on it in a team to consistently design great experiences. I think you can produce a few great designs but I think inclusion of user or customer research enables you to understand the needs and create a much more repeatable process leading to great design.”

Disagree US

“Great experiences can be built with little user research; these can emerge from someone’s individual understanding of what the problem is. And luckily they happen to represent the larger user group. There is another view – iterative development – where you just go with something that you think is good, and you put it into the wild and let it survive or die or evolve. So it can be a great experience through an iterative or evolutionary development in collaboration with others.”

Agree AU

“I’ve spent the last five years designing things without any user research because I wasn’t allowed to. We cut a lot of corners because we don’t have enough time. We have to follow the schedule and budgets given to us. There are some applications we built for general use (internally) – because we are users ourselves. It gets harder when the application is used by a special small group of people. We don’t know anything about their lives – so we need to talk to them, yet sometimes we don’t get to. We need to pick up all the things they hate and do.”

Disagree US

Concluding comments

Detailed insights into human behaviour are essential.

No clear answer emerged from the interviews. Rather, it depends on the person, and the quality of the designer or decision maker.

It seems that great UX is reached by making great design decisions – and obviously designers are not always the ones making these decisions. You either make an informed decision based on the user research or you go by luck – that is, you gamble based on your intuition or vision.

In my opinion, even if you gamble at the end, user research has to be an essential, foundational part of the design process. Even Apple, which claims it doesn't do user research, is highly likely to have had done vast amounts of user research in the past – and while they don't label it per se, it has given them detailed insights into human behaviour and needs.

Statement 2

The ultimate goal of a UX practitioner is to deliver User Centred Design.

Rationale for this statement

After finishing my PhD and working in academia for another two years, I was ready to apply my research skills in the commercial world. UX was the new buzzword, and I was fascinated by the idea. I started out as an experience architect in a methodology-strict UX agency, where User Centred Design (UCD) was like a religion. It felt like we lived and breathed in a UX bubble, learning and applying methodologies, planning intensive research and so on. There, I thought our ultimate goal was to deliver UCD to achieve success. I later learned about business-centric design and how we never get to deliver pure UCD. But it took me a long time to accept this situation.

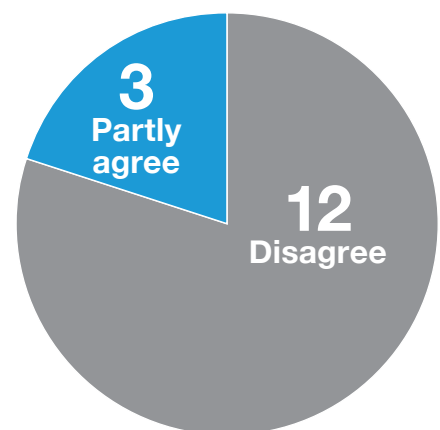
So this statement was intentionally contentious, reflecting an idealist, somewhat naïve vision that UX practitioners should always deliver UCD. I wanted to see how the experts would respond to this purist approach.

Summary of responses

Respondents largely disagreed with this statement, arguing that there is no single ultimate goal, and rather that UCD is just one item on the UX practitioner's task list.

Both Australian and US respondents concurred that the goal of a UX practitioner is to deliver good design, loveable design – design that lends itself to “use in practice”. They argued that UX is not confined to designing for a “user” per se – but designing for groups of people and addressing multiple services.

Many respondents took it a step further, arguing that delivering business value is one of a UX practitioner's key goals; and that their task is to strike a balance between business goals and user goals.



What the respondents said

“Maybe. I don’t have a ‘user centric’ stance – I’m an interaction designer. When I think of our role, yes, we are experts on the human side; however, we can’t be ignorant of the business, engineering technology, and other stakeholders that are not the customers. A purely ‘user centric’ approach focuses it on a single person using a single product, not a bunch of people using multiple services. There are other forces that need to be accounted for in the delivery of ‘human centred’ design.”

Disagree US

“I don’t view it as my goal. My goal is to deliver good design. Our team believes that when you ask people what they want, they won’t be able to tell you. And if it’s good, you shouldn’t follow it. Henry Ford once said: ‘When you ask people what they want, they’ll say ‘A faster horse’. That will never get you the automobile.’ I don’t mean to shut users out – I do want them to get value – but I take inspiration in that Apple doesn’t ask people what they want, ever – we decide what people will like, without ever asking them.”

Disagree US

“I think the ultimate goal of UX practitioner is to deliver a customer experience.”

Partly agree AU

“Disagree. There are other methods (non-user centric) to deliver a project – activity based, systems design, and others. While the UX practitioner is focused on a design that can be implied to be ‘user centric’, it’s not the ultimate goal. UX practitioners have a variety of goals, such as communicating to and educating clients, maintaining relationships, creating value, and efficiently delivering answers.”

Disagree US

“I don’t think it is true. The ultimate goal here is to deliver the business value and better product.”

Disagree AU

“No. The ultimate goal is to enlighten our clients. For the most part, helping people realise what is the problem and helping them to understand the process. Some UX practitioners specialise in research, so UCD would not be their ultimate goal.”

Disagree AU

“For the most part, I agree. It’s how we try to differentiate ourselves from developers, marketers and managers. We are more compassionate towards our users and what they are looking for in a product or its features.”

Partly agree US

Concluding comments

This statement is a myth.

Respondents generally believe this statement to be a myth. None of the practitioners felt that delivering UCD was an ultimate goal – they deliver a design (either user centric or business centric) at the end, but it is the journey that makes a UX practitioner’s position valuable.

A UX practitioner is in a position to convince the business, stand by the customer goals, and also strike a balance or compromise for the business where necessary. It is not only the design but also the politics of design that a UX practitioner has to deal with.

Statement 3

UX was invented to stop programmers making important design decisions.

Rationale for this statement

During my first year with the purist UX agency, I got the impression that UX practitioners were most knowledgeable and powerful, because they knew what people wanted and could thus make the important design decisions. They were like the celebrities of the company, with the visual designers, project managers and developers always seeking their opinion.

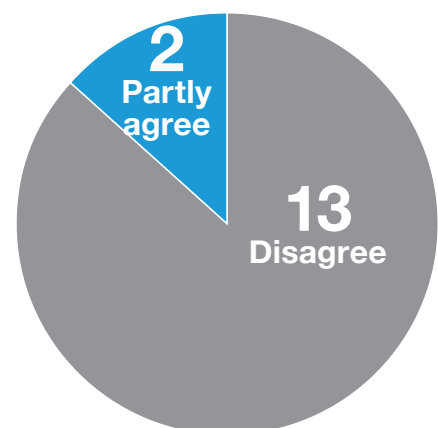
What was so special about being a UX practitioner? In my little bubble, I started thinking that UX was invented to stop visual designers or programmers from making important design decisions – so UX crew could get all the credit. Of course, this was an early observation and soon I realised that so many other parties are involved in making important design decisions. This statement was included as a nod to those early days of my UX journey.

It is significant to note that all the UX practitioners I spoke to had different views about this statement – but they almost came to an agreement on a corrected version of it:

- + UX has emerged to bring users as the central focus and to engage programmers and other stakeholders in making important design decisions.

Summary of responses

Most responses emphasised that UX was not invented but emerged out of a need – that is, to position users as the central focus when designing. UX practitioners also agreed that the design process should aim to involve all those parties who will be influenced by the end design.



What the respondents said

“I don’t think UX was invented. I know for myself – I was a software developer in the late 80s and early 90s. It wasn’t that we wanted to stop software designers from doing it. It was more that we had different interests. I was more interested in the human interface than the OS interface. I think it wasn’t invented – it grew.”

Disagree US

“I don’t think that is true. Programmers can make very important designs. Anybody can change a tyre – some people are just better at it than others. Anybody who knows code can sit down and shape a product. But some people have a core competency, and it’s our core competency to know that users think differently.”

Disagree US

“I think UX emerged out of a need for us to label what we have been already doing. And programmers are as important as UX people so they should be involved in the process from the beginning. It is about creating a team who has an understanding of the shared vision and working towards that.”

Disagree AU

“Disagree. The developers in our organisation are avid advocates for UX. They are involved in this process in its early phases, they are invited to participate in the research, to meet the audience and to observe – it is more of a symphony of understanding.”

Disagree AU

“UX is not about stopping programmers from doing great work – there are great designers everywhere, not just in the UX field.”

Disagree AU

“For core features, I definitely want to be involved. There is no way programmers can make decisions themselves. It’s not that they don’t have a say. They are more like a participant. I believe the UX designer has the final say, but that the process involves different stakeholders.”

Partly agree US

Concluding comments

Collaboration is key for more creative outcomes.

All respondents emphasised the value collaboration brings, and that developers also make important design decisions. On the other hand the issue of how to collaborate is a very important one.

The designer and the programmer mostly speak different languages and have difficulty in understanding each other.

Where the role of the developer is solely to implement the concept of the designer, this is an assistant model of collaboration.

Where both parties participate fully in all of the key creative stages, a full partnership results.

This partnership model of co-creativity has a variant, where the designer retains ultimate control of the evaluation of the outcomes.

The third model fits in my model of thinking and working: if I had to collaborate with a developer very early in the process, I would definitely want to be involved in designing the core features, then we would evolve the design together, where I would still have the control of evaluating the design and experience.

Statement 4

With or without developing Personas you may end up with the same design.

Rationale for this statement

I believe Personas are the crux of UCD, because they represent archetypes of your customers/users. On the larger UX projects I worked on, we would spend a month talking to user groups, then weeks analysing what we learned from them, and then more time creating the Personas. These Personas had real personality, a family, a life and many tasks to perform. Two months is a long time in the consulting world.

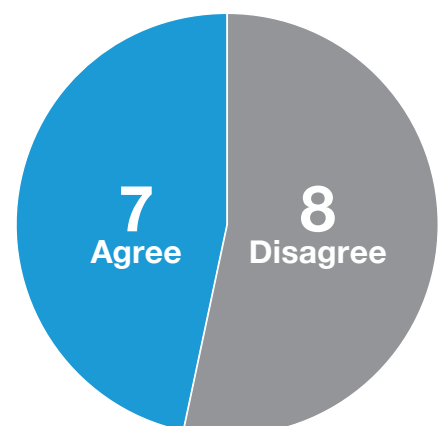
After creating these Personas and their scenarios, we would then get immersed in the design, with little chance to refer back to the Personas. I remember thinking, “How did all that early contextual work change our day-to-day design decisions? Maybe we would have ended up with the same design.”

Apparently Apple doesn't do Personas. Yet they design products that perfectly satisfy people's most significant needs. This statement was intended to get the experts' thinking about this issue.

Summary of responses

Half of the respondents thought that a similar result could be achieved with or without Personas – as long as you have some knowledge about your users.

Yet many respondents reflected on the value that Personas deliver to the design process, stating that they help you keep on track, give you confidence and provide a focus for your design decisions.



What the respondents said

“I don’t think you end up with the same design. Personas may help us challenge the business rules or problem definitions. They help us show how cold hard business rules are translated into or fit into user experiences or not. So Personas may come even before defining the business rules.”

Disagree AU

“Personas often help you customise the design. Without Personas you end up with a generic design, so yes, you end up with a different design.”

Disagree AU

“Sure. I don’t often use Personas in my own work. You are inherently thinking of serving someone. Design is unlike art – the intent is to serve other people and help them do something. You have to have that person in mind to do that successfully. Some people use themselves and that’s fine. But do you need to design a Persona to know who you are designing for? No.”

Agree US

“Contextual stories are important for us. When you put Personas in the different contexts, and when you do research around those contexts, they become very powerful – it is about seeing how those different types of people work in different contexts. Then you actually end up with designs that suit those customers. Design does not use the Personas as such, but uses the research on the Personas. At the end of the day, you would not end up with the same design.”

Disagree AU

“I think it is possible because of your own knowledge of end users, design principles, and past experience. All this may have developed an intuition that works. But if you develop a Persona, you can be more confident about your design, and less likely to go off track. Personas do help to keep you on track.”

Agree US

“I think so. Personas are a cool artefact and work well in some organisations – they put them up on the wall, and say, ‘This is Fred, don’t forget Fred!’ But you may absolutely end up with a similar design, as you are thinking about who the users are.”

Agree AU

Concluding comments

Personas help customise and fine-tune the design.

You do not need to create Personas to understand your user. But is there another, more effective way to remember three or four different behaviours at the same time? Our natural inclination is to keep one personality/behaviour in mind, and design for that person only. Yet that person becomes fuzzy after a while, because he is not real. In my experience, I have to document differences and put them up on the wall so as to keep in mind all those different needs.

Maybe Personas do not fundamentally change the overall design but they help customise and fine-tune the design to support various behaviours. You may not notice the subtleties on the surface of the design representation (e.g. the screen designs you often look at) – the thinking behind different behaviours is usually hidden within the design and only revealed when the different users start interacting with it. This is when the value of Personas in the design process comes to the fore.

Statement 5

When all clients learn to practice UX, there will be no need for UX practitioners.

Rationale for this statement

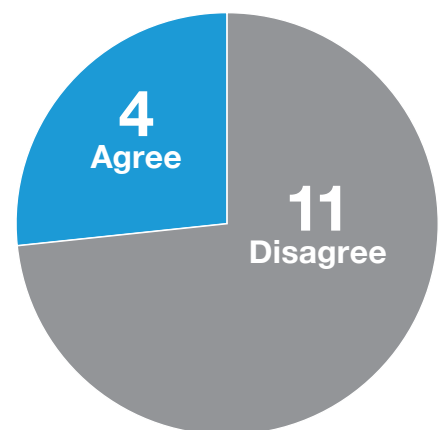
If everyone learns to use 3D architectural software, then there will be no need for architects. Right? Or wrong? While some people would be happy designing their own home, and living there for years without questioning ‘what if I designed this differently?’, there would still be other people wanting an architecturally designed house. These people would recognise architects’ skills in designing an optimally liveable, desirable space designed specifically for their lifestyle.

Is it possible that all clients/businesses may learn UX design? Is it something they could do on their own eventually? Through this statement, I hoped to explore experts’ thoughts about both the ‘learnability’ of UX design and its acceptance as a specific skill within business.

Summary of responses

Both US and Australian respondents agreed that UX practitioners have unique skills that position them as consultants, experts or specialists. Anyone and everyone cannot simply start performing the work at the practitioner’s level of skill and experience.

Australian respondents took the statement a step further, arguing the case for the ‘ideal state’ where UX practitioners may focus on more strategy work if all clients learn to practice UX. And with more clients practicing UX – and by doing so, gaining a greater understanding of the customer – then the organisation as a whole will grow and mature.



What the respondents said

“No. Everyone has a different interest and personality. Certain people are going to be interested in technology or selling things etc.”

Disagree US

“No. UX practitioners are consultants. There are skills and experience inherent in the UX practitioner’s role that everyone doesn’t just ‘take up’.”

Disagree US

“That’s not true. It is a specialised focus, which can engender a culture of eccentricity. Clients won’t have the knowledge – hence the need to be a specialist.”

Disagree US

“I disagree. I think when our clients learn to practice UX, then UX practitioner work will be easier to sell.”

Disagree US

“No. In one sense that would be ideal. But I just don’t think it would happen. Because it is a speciality (like programmers), and there will be always a need for a dedicated person who can inject fresh thinking into the project.”

Disagree AU

“I think there are different levels. The goal is almost to raise corporate maturity. A lot of what we do is not rocket science...I think we found that UX practitioners move into more strategic roles when the company becomes more mature. They deal with experience strategy – not little bugs or layout problems, but what the audience really needs. It becomes more research oriented. UX practitioners can find more time to work on strategic matters if everyone becomes more capable of doing some basic UX tasks related to their job.”

Agree AU

“If we encourage more people in the company to consider the customer and to understand how they can use customer-centric techniques to extract more information and get better value, then we have made a gain by boosting the maturity of the organisation.”

Agree AU

Concluding comments

Encourage more people to learn and use UX methods.

It is absolutely necessary to train our clients or others in the company so that they learn what UX can bring to the table. In doing so, they become more open to UX recommendations and strategies. Even when everyone learns how to make user-friendly sites and products, I believe that UX designers are going to remain in high demand – just like architects are.

Statement 6

Companies promote UX because it is the new trend in marketing.

Rationale for this statement

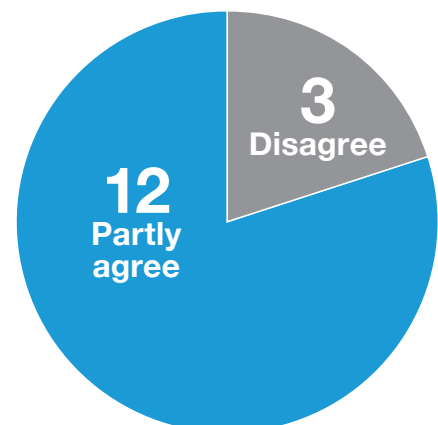
I sometimes question a company's motive in focusing on UX. Do they genuinely want to become customer centric? Do they want to try it out because everyone's talking about it? Or do they think they'll notch up more sales as soon as they are seen to care about the customer experience? I believe there is still a lot of confusion around what to expect from UX.

I believe that great UX design may bring more customers to your site, and generate more desire to buy your products and boost sales, but in my opinion it is not a marketing tool nor should it be aligned with marketing. This statement is intended to explore UX experts' opinions about where and how UX may exist within the company.

Summary of responses

Respondents did not label UX as a trend – but they acknowledge its ascent in the marketing lexicon because of its necessity in the production of good design.

The main argument was that UX is foundational – not a trend – and needs to be given equal, collaborative footing within the marketing function. Both traditional marketing techniques and UX are strategic pillars in the broader marketing function that will deliver business value through enhanced understanding of customers.



What the respondents said

“That is quite possible. It’s a scary thing to be part of a commercial organisation – to stay ahead of the wave is a really tough position to be in. But I don’t care whether it’s a trend or not. When we get that message to them about what difference UX will make, it’s not the trend anymore, it’s a foundational thing.”

Partly agree US

“Bad companies do. Good companies understand that marketing tells you very valuable information. But there is a historical legacy of summarising the market. UX is a different way of summarising what is happening in the market. They need to do traditional marketing as well as having a different way of understanding customers. Both should be seen as strategic pillars. I think UX should be on an equal footing with marketing and it should be intertwined. To get maximum value companies should have a Head of Experience.”

Partly agree US

“There is certainly more interest in the term ‘user experience’. Businesses are realising that whatever they’ve been doing isn’t as successful anymore. To overcome this, they need good design – and to achieve that they are building a capability called UX.”

Disagree US

“Somewhat true. People do like to use buzzwords, without truly understanding what they mean. That’s OK. Over time, they come to understand it. And it is hard to explain the value of UX immediately – it may be OK to look upon it as ‘the new thing’.”

Partly agree US

“We have a close connection with marketing and we are closely aligned. There are no clashes between us. They can investigate the what and we are looking at the why.”

Disagree AU

“Marketing can also be considered as design – it is expert driven design using lots of data. Hence, there are two competing but valid design perspectives – expert driven and user centric design.”

Disagree AU

“It started 15 years ago when we were promoting usability; now we are promoting UX. We were called Interaction Designers, then Information Architects, then UX Designers – which is a sexy label. In couple of years, someone will come up with another label. But it’s all about understanding the philosophy behind that label.”

Disagree AU

Concluding comments

Marketing and customer experience should work together.

Without marketing on board, who is going to discover your great user experiences? That said, I don't want marketing to take over UX or UX to take over marketing. I believe marketing should come to UX people for design advice, not compete for the design work.

Should marketing and UX work in the same department? This is not my ideal model. How about experience departments delivering experience and service design? Most likely, there will be a different model for each company, which is arrived at through collaboration, to carry them to success.

Statement 7

Companies can only become customer centric if a UX practitioner becomes the CEO.

Rationale for this statement

My initial question was, “Why is it so difficult for companies to become truly customer centric?” If you look inside any design-driven company, you will find someone called the “Chief Experience Officer”. So would it be easier if a UX practitioner was the CEO? Intentionally, the statement overemphasises the importance of the UX practitioner in disseminating the UX in organisations (and takes it to the extreme the idea that “only if UX is the ultimate leader would being customer centric be possible”).

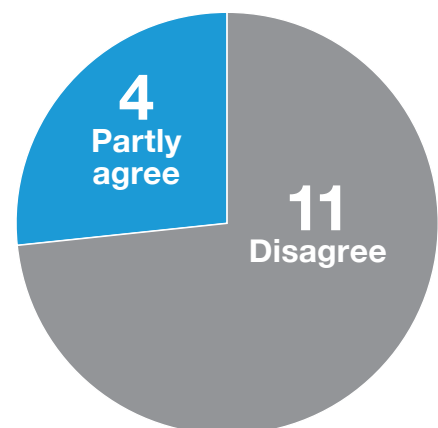
If taken literally, people do argue against this statement, but if taken lightly – as was my motivation – it triggers a discussion on how companies may become customer centric.

Summary of responses

This rather contentious statement brought some considered responses – predominantly in the negative.

Some respondents were cautious, saying that UX is a leadership field and the CEO with a UX background could be quite successful. Yet they concurred that UX is not enough to become customer centric, arguing that it all depends on how much the leaders value design, and how open to change they are.

Then there were those who gave this statement an emphatic “No”. While an understanding of User Centred Design (UCD) is definitely important, it needs to carry weight at all levels of the organisation.



What the respondents said

“No. I don’t believe it. In most instances, a sort of gradual awareness happens, an evolutionary feeling of organisational maturity. Smaller organisations can become user centric quickly, whereas larger ones can be slow and they may need cultural shifts.”

Disagree AU

“No, not at all. You need the vision from the top. But just having the CEO is not going to guarantee anything. It has to be at all levels – from the bottom as well. People who are in the trenches doing the work have to have the appreciation, just as the people managing those people have to have the appreciation. Likewise, the project managers who do the planning have to learn about UCD, as do the product designers.”

Disagree AU

“I think it is a very good idea that a CEO cares and knows about UX, or they have a flair for it. Steve Jobs definitely does. As long as they trust somebody who does UX. More people should have that sensibility.”

Partly agree US

“No, I don’t agree with that. There are smart CEOs who listen to the UX practitioner and understand the needs of people/customers. Companies can become user centric if the CEO places really high value on the customer experience.”

Disagree AU

“I think it definitely helps if there is an understanding of design at the top level. It comes with the knowledge that ‘knowing thy customer’ is not just a marketer’s role, that the customer can be involved in the creation of your business.”

Partly agree US

“It is a leadership field. There are always going to be practitioners showing innovation and leadership, but they can become dull as UX often ends up with processes and procedures. Keeping leadership and UX separate brings a ‘freshness’ to the role. Just as companies come in and talk about new innovations, I think practitioners who are outside and always learning will bring fresh experiences to the organisation. It should be a self-reflective role, changing with the times.”

Partly agree US

Concluding comments

This is obviously a myth.

Although some UX practitioners have started their own companies and become the CEO, it is still too early to predict how successful these companies are going to be.

And of the question, how can companies become customer centric? It almost needs magic at all levels to achieve this feat – which no company has yet truly mastered.

Statement 8

A higher number of clicks to a site or increased sales of the product shows the success of the design.

Rationale for this statement

When I joined Bienalto, I started hearing about analytics a lot. We measure everything – number of visits, clicks to certain areas of the homepage, changes to click rates when we change the colour or location of a button, and so on. It is a scientific way of evaluating a design; and the numbers are quite convincing for our clients.

But in my humble opinion, the success of a design has never been related to numbers. I like some designs and products that the masses don't like; or sometimes I only appreciate a design if I have an emotional connection to it. I like Skype because it lets me to talk to my family overseas for free. And I like the Philippe Starck Lemon Squeezer because it symbolises the sophisticated kitchen of my dreams.

My real question here is how do we determine the success of design? And what are the success metrics?

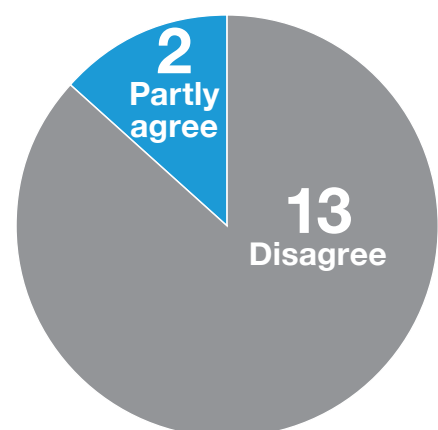
Summary of responses

This statement was deemed too black and white for most respondents. The general perception was that increased sales, clicks or visits are just one part of the story.

Factors beyond the site's control could come into play, including the economy, price and market competition. Yet design plays a role in weathering the influence of these factors – with good design mediating between these factors and the product.

Other criteria could also contribute to success of the design: overall customer satisfaction, comfort of the product, aesthetics, and eco-social responsibility.

Two Australian respondents took it a step further. For them, audience perception metrics were another useful measure of successful design.



What the respondents said

"I agree. I believe that design has to be tied to business strategy, or at least designing towards a business strategy. Design is for a purpose. It's not just art – it's business. Users are not always customers. My hypothesis: only give users a system that they enjoy using, as happy employees create happy customers. All these are intangibles, yet culture and environment convert to tangible results."

Agree US

"I think numbers show you part of the story but not the entire story. You need to hear a person talk back, and you need to know the whole story, understand audience segments and find out their intent. If you ask someone A, B or C, they're going to give you A, B or C. This is why surveys suck – 'I'm really Z.1 but it's close to B so I'll pick B'."

Disagree US

"I think it's just one element that shows the success of the design. There are other elements – it could be brand awareness, how many people are talking about this design, or its social currency."

Disagree AU

"You can add some other things too. For instance, engagement or changing meaning. There is a big shift in how the banks portray themselves. Being there for customers, they are becoming more customer-centric. So it really depends on what is valuable for the organisation. There are also brand aspects, which might be included in here."

Disagree AU

"Customers may buy the product, but they may not use it. The UX metrics should be whether it is useful, usable and desirable. After that, it is profit. So it is dangerous to define success with such a high level goal. It is also affected by marketing, engineering and management."

Disagree US

"It is hard to measure the value of the user experience and how successful the design is post-UX enhancement. I don't think there are any specific guidelines of measuring. There are a lot of other factors that might contribute to the success of the design – but it is hard to rate satisfaction."

Disagree US

Concluding comments

Design is successful when it is taken up by the people.

I really resonated with most responses to this statement. It seems most UX practitioners share my views that the success of a design is based on complex and psychological metrics that are hard to measure. I think the common theme here is “user experience”, and the goal is the achievement of a seamless, pleasurable, fun experience.

The responses reiterated that there are so many ways to measure the success of a design. It is not one-dimensional – rather, business, marketing, services, technology and design must collaborate to come up with a reasonable definition and evaluation of what the successful user experience should be.

Statement 9

Non-designers cannot be UX practitioners¹

¹ In this instance, a “designer” is a person who was educated as a designer at University or has learned design by designing professionally over time.

Rationale for this statement

Just like any other design discipline, I believe we learn UX design only by doing. When I first looked at those website wireframes, it seemed to me that anyone could design them. But there are only a few who are good designers.

Now, I regard design skills and UX skills as being very much aligned. A designer has to do research and understand the context, empathise, converge and diverge his/her thoughts and ideas, collaborate and develop designs by re-iterations. In my opinion, if they don't develop these skills they will not be good UX practitioners.

Summary of responses

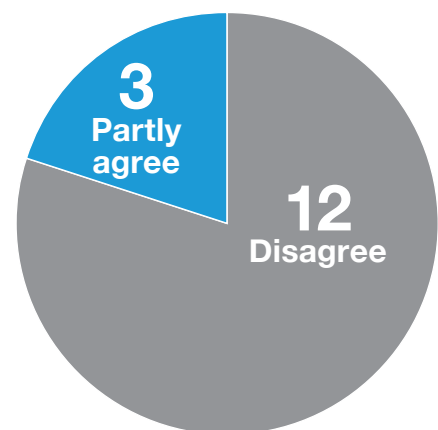
This statement brought two views to the table.

The first view was that non-designers can be UX practitioners, because UX involves research and design, and needs different skill sets such as problem solving, imagination, observation, and ideation.

Some respondents believed that people who have great ideas, are observant and are problem solvers can be UX practitioners.

For larger companies in particular, the ability to bring more skill sets to the UX project is beneficial – psychologists, anthropologists, artists or musicians can be UX practitioners, as long as they work together and collaborate.

The second view was that UX is ‘aptitude built’ (similar to design). The argument here is that it takes a certain type of person to be able to do UX – that the specialty of UX runs deep. You can't take anybody and turn them into a UX person, because design and creativity are innate. Creativity cannot be taught, learned and built.



What the respondents said

“Everybody has the potential to be a designer. It is a fundamental human activity – we all design. Most people can write, but not everyone is a journalist.”

Disagree US

“I have seen instances where developers have come up with better solution than I have. Just because I am wearing UX hat and title doesn't mean other people can't do it.”

Disagree US

“We can be UX designers but this can be number of things – doing the mock ups, doing the visual design, doing usability testing, doing the user research. So it's wrong – non-designers are actually UX practitioners.”

Disagree AU

“We are not one dimensional, and I know UX people who are not designers. It doesn't mean that they can't have some great observations. Certainly they can have great ideas. So, to be a UX practitioner, do you need to know about design? I don't agree – all you need is an elastic mind that enables you to explore new avenues. To me, it's just imagination and openness.”

Disagree US

“We need diverse skill sets. At the end, you need to put stuff on the screen, which needs some sort of design intuition. Non-designers should take more courses to brush up on these skills.”

Partly agree AU

“It is something you gain by experience, but practically, non-designers often struggle. I end up having to do both research and design – figure out what customers want, and translate that to a design. A researcher is very passionate about what users want, and are all over the transfer of knowledge, but should stop there. I wouldn't call them UX 'practitioners'.”

Partly agree AU

“Designers think differently to solve problems. Critical thinking is important and non-designers may lack this skill. For example, visual designers are more like artists than designers. I think they are not UX practitioners. They could be UX practitioners if they changed the way they think...over time they could learn.”

Partly agree AU

Concluding comments

UX is versatile.

It seems that the respondents generally regard this statement as a myth. So I would conclude that UX is a large discipline that accommodates various skills and backgrounds, and that even if a UX practitioner has not trained as a designer, they can acquire design skills over time.

Statement 10

UX practitioners should be involved in all customer service channels.

Rationale for this statement

My first service design experience was for Guzman Y Gomez, a Mexican take away store. The brief: reduce the queues and sell more burritos. We looked at the whole customer experience, from entering the shop, to ordering, waiting and taking the food. I was behind the counter and in front, observing and asking questions of customers to see how we could improve their experience. We re-thought customer-staff dialogues, menu boards, even how people should move in and out of the store.

There are many obvious overlaps between UX methods and service design. UX practitioners seem to be the right people to enter to this domain, by extending their interest areas and diving into designing services as well as online channels. This statement – which emphasises an ideal situation – thus sought to explore opinions on service design.

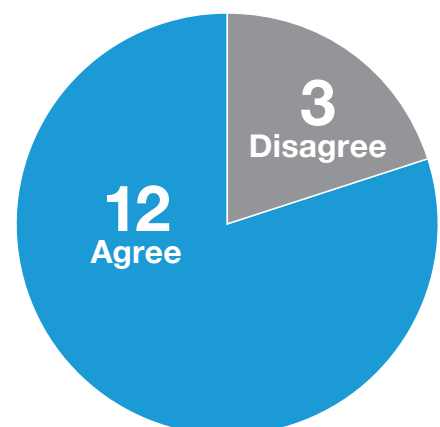
Summary of responses

Three main views emerged – the first and second concurred with the statement, but in different ways; while the third view disagreed.

The first view was that UX cannot stop with one channel, because it encapsulates the overall experience for the product. The argument here is that UX should go where the product goes.

The second view was that every touchpoint is a design opportunity and UX can be a resource at any of these touchpoints. Yet it is not about replacing people – rather, about having a presence and working together to resolve customer service issues.

The third, negative view was that most UX practitioners do not understand what customer service means, and thus may not bring value to the company at a strategic level. Despite this, it was acknowledged that UX practitioners will deliver valuable offerings and observations to other customer service teams.



What the respondents said

"I think almost everything would benefit from a UX practitioner. I think customer service and UX should work together – not a take-over, though. I do think there is benefit in information sharing, as customer satisfaction is part of UX."

Agree US

"I agree. Customer experience cannot stop with one channel. It is the overall experience for the product. You go where the product goes."

Agree US

"Yes. They should be involved with all touchpoints. It is important to understand the holistic engagement of the user experience, and to become a consultant resource at any touchpoint."

Agree US

"Certainly not. Most UX practitioners I know do not understand what it really means to engage in customer service, or to maintain a customer relationship and add value to the company at a strategic level."

Disagree US

"I think there is a growing understanding in the industry that the problem should be solved as a whole. In most cases, customers come and say, 'Design this!' However, the problem may not be related to the part of the business they want us to design. We need to challenge it and try to frame the problem but you need to convince the customer."

Agree AU

"Yes. Every touchpoint is a design opportunity, and each should be coherent and support each other. That is the goal."

Agree US

"I don't think so. Customer service is part of operations, not part of design."

Disagree US

"There needs to be a degree of knowledge of customer experience to help you design customer service channels. Yet there might be some cases where co-practitioners can design customer service channels and still be successful. I think UX practitioners can do it faster, and there is a defined methodology, but UX practitioners do not have to be involved in designing all channels."

Disagree AU

Concluding comments

UX should go where the product goes.

As a UX practitioner, I know I want to be involved in service design – if the opportunity arises. And I think I would do a good job because I have the right skills, methodologies and passion. Of course, it is a personal preference whether to transition to service design or not. If we want to contribute to creating great experiences, then service design must become part of what we do.

Statement 11

UX is not a job, it is a way of thinking.

Rationale for this statement

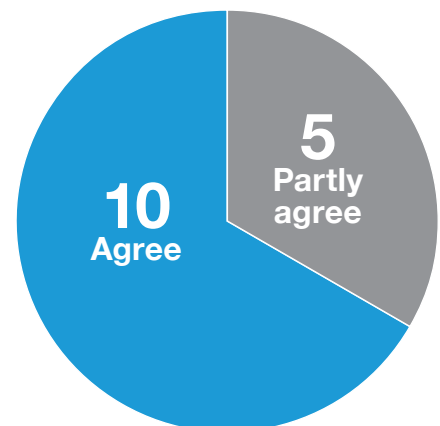
This is somewhat a philosophical statement, as I believe UX becomes a way of thinking as we practice it more and more. I wanted to hear what other experts thought about it.

Summary of responses

10 agreed it is a way of thinking (more than a job), 5 agreed that it is both a job and a way of thinking. Opinions were divided in the responses.

The first view saw it as a frame of mind, a passion, a concept. UX people have questions, orientations and involvement that leads to problem solving.

The second view recognised it as a job too – because it is a job to solve design problems, and UX expert does this job. However only thinking like a UX practitioner will not be enough to solve problems.



What the respondents said

“Yes. UX is in a bucket that seems to have no boundaries. You don’t need to be a designer to think in the same way. So it is a way of thinking, not really a job.”

Agree US

“Yes. It’s a frame of mind. If customer eccentricity is not a vision, it should be part of the way they approach empathy for customers/ patients/ educators.”

Agree US

“It is slightly Zen – a way of being, about living for and understanding others. It is a core skill for managing the customer experience and trying to make things right for other people.”

Agree AU

“For most people, it is a passion – they have questions, orientations and involvement that leads to methods (or a job). So for me, it is a passion, being embodied in the world.”

Agree US

“Completely agree. A friend of mine, a non-UX person, was dating somebody who is UX person –she said it was a nightmare because she was always commenting on the usability of door handles, restaurant menus, everything. It’s a way of thinking. You do it for your job, but you can’t disconnect from it. It is all about thinking about the why, and how useful it is to me?”

Agree AU

“I think we are the problem solvers in the UX domain. This is just a terminology choice. A job is to make users happy and solve problems.”

Partly agree US

“Yes. I think UX is a way of thinking, and just happens to also be working very well with the job called UX design. So it is both a way of thinking and a job.”

Partly agree AU

“Yes. The way we think is what differentiates us and shapes the way we think. Yet we still have to deliver things at the end of it. We have to build products, help sales, and boost the overall vision and goals of the business.”

Partly agree US

Concluding comments

UX is part of our everyday life.

In all we do, we are experiencing the world, with its products, services and lifestyles. I think every designer is concerned about creating experiences, whether they be an architect, or a product, fashion or stage designer. As a member of the design research and UX communities, I like to think that I contribute to creating better user experiences by observing and understanding users, and applying design thinking to the many problems at hand. This becomes a way of thinking – luckily it's a job as well.