User Experience Primer

Many professionals wonder how user experience relates to marketing and customer experience. David Armano shared a presentation he did earlier this year on Experience Design as it relates to the digital experience.

The wisdom shared below is from a discussion with Sean Van Tyne, expert in user experience and CEO at Van Tyne Consulting.

USER EXPERIENCE DEFINED

Wikipedia defines User Experience as "a term used to describe the overall experience and satisfaction a user has when using a product or system." It is still a relatively new discipline that is evolving, hence some of the confusion and mystery around it! The term has been used quite a bit in the past with respect to technology, but it now has potential beyond the tech world. Sean defines user experience in the following fashion:

> **"User Experience, also known as UX, can be defined as everything a user sees, hears, smells, or tastes with respect to a product."**

User Experience is used often in the design of enterprise software, where there are two different constituents. The *customer* is the person or group within the organization who decides whether or not to purchase the solution, while the *user* is the individual or group who operates or uses the system.

The customer is interested in finding the best way to bring efficiency to the operation, such as reducing cycle time, improving information, and reducing resource costs. The user, on the other hand, is more likely interested in completing daily tasks and assignments as easily and effectively as possible.

The customer is looking at the overall workflow of the organization and how specific software solutions might improve it, while the user tends to emphasize the software's ease-of-use.

User Experience groups should validate that the workflow meets the customers' business needs. They should also evaluate the tasks with the customers' end-users to ensure the tasks are easy to complete.

THE MANY FACES OF USER EXPERIENCE

User Experience is a broad field and covers many disciplines. It can be broken down into three pieces: *research, design, and testing*. The many faces of User Experience can be viewed as a continuum:

- Information Architect - focuses on labeling, correct terminology, hierarchy of information, and navigation

- Visual Design – works with colors, fonts, graphics, and icons

- Interaction Design and Industrial Designer – designs the users' interaction with technology

- Human Factors and Usability Engineer – This breaks out into the following two sub-types:

    - Ethnographer - conducts research on how people do things

    - Evaluators - runs tests to see if the tasks are easy to complete

"Experience Design" is considered a subset of User Experience in general.

HOW IT'S DONE

User Experience is a bridge between marketing and technology where user-centered design puts people, rather than technology, at the center of the process.

- Marketing kicks off this process by doing research on customer needs.

- Marketing, product development, and user experience work together to design something that will meet those customer needs. If the customer is an enterprise, an extra step is taken here to validate the business needs before moving to the end user needs.

- User Experience tests the design with experts as well as novice users. Paper, foam, and wire-frame mock-ups are used to help test the design.

- A usability evaluation then takes place to see how easy the tasks are to complete, how well the product/service meets the user's way of working, etc.

- The design may be iterated many times before it goes to production!

- Once a basic design is ready, it is time to start bringing in other parts of the design team, such as visual design and interaction design, to help make the products more useful, usable, and desirable.

For more details on the process, Sean has written a great article on defining the user and customer experience for enterprise software (pdf format) which was published in *The Pragmatic Marketer*.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR USER EXPERIENCE

GoodExperience blog – Mark Hurst is one of the experts in the field

Don Norman's site - Don is considered one of the founding fathers of user experience

IBM Ease of Use site - good information on User Engineering

Don't Make Me Think - a book by Steve Krug on web usability

Logic+Emotion - David Armano's blog on experience design

Edward Tufte's site – Called the "Leonardo da Vinci of data" by *The New York Times*

Many thanks to Sean at Van Tyne Consulting for his time and expertise on User Experience.

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