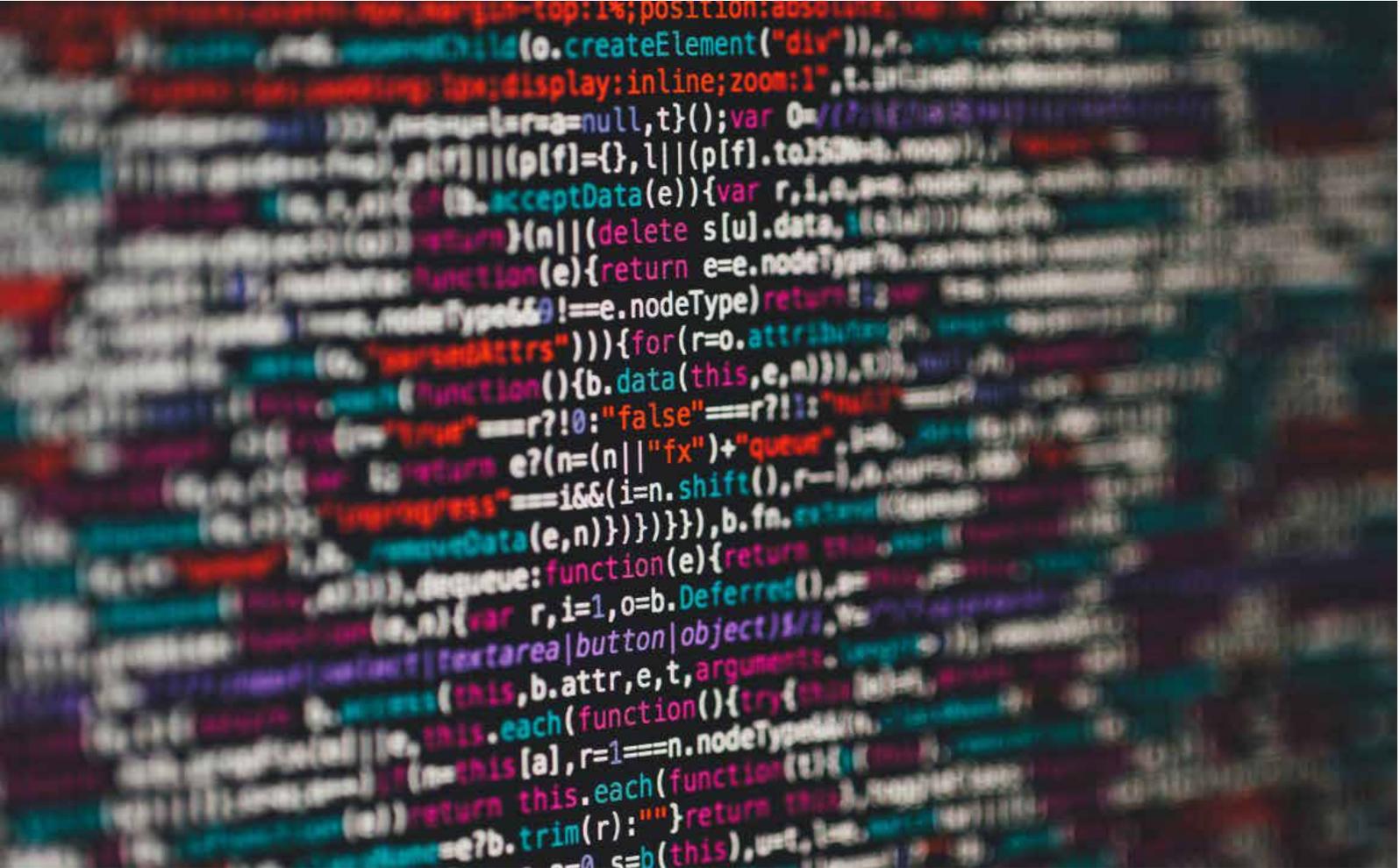


ALPHA



Thought Piece

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# Why the User eXperience is dominating software development

*From function and feel to experience*

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Industry sectors, especially newer ones, evolve in phases that are not always planned or predictable. Great leaps and small steps bring about change, as we have seen in the software development sector.

This sector was originally all about functionality. Developers came up with great software solutions, but they were unwieldy and cumbersome. Anyone who remembers the clunky word processors of the 1980s won't need much persuading of this point. Navigation was never intuitive, and it seemed like developers expected their customers to have a degree in engineering to use their products.

But, in the later 1980s and 1990s, the user interface began to take on an increasing importance in the process of software development. The designer look and feel of the Apple Macintosh operating system made it appeal to users the world over. And the intuitive ease of Microsoft Windows made it a global standard in offices and homes. Software engineers now morphed into designers, creating products that looked attractive and colourful.

Now here we are in 2020, and it feels like we've gone full circle. The focus is back on functionality, and how the user interacts with the software. But this time there's a new slant: the User eXperience (UX).

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## Always online

In many ways this is understandable. It is a well-documented fact that Millennials prize experience over objects. According to a study by Harris, 78% of millennials would choose to spend money on an experience rather than something material<sup>1</sup>. If an entire generation favours how something makes them feel over simply possessing it, you can't afford to ignore their opinions.

But it's not just about keeping the younger segment of your audience happy; as software and technology have developed so have all our tastes, whatever our age. We expect rich content to load quickly onto our mobile devices. To be able to check whether jeans in our size are available online when our high-street retailer is out of stock. To be able to send money to a friend who's bought us a theatre ticket while we're on the bus.

Patience is a thing of the past. As consumers in the digital age, we expect everything to be available online and to be able to interact with it at any time of the day or night.

And software developers are responding to that.

<sup>1</sup> [http://eventbrite-s3.s3.amazonaws.com/marketing/Millennials\\_Research/Gen\\_PR\\_Final.pdf](http://eventbrite-s3.s3.amazonaws.com/marketing/Millennials_Research/Gen_PR_Final.pdf)

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## Avoiding UX traps

The thing about the UX is that it's user-centric. You can't create a great UX if you don't know exactly what customers want from your product: what they want it to do and how they want to use it.

You need to talk to them and do in-depth market research. You need to know what they're looking for, what they think of your competitors, and what makes them leave your website or stop using your app.

It's not just about making a product that works well on a laptop. Your software has to offer the same features on a range of devices, including mobiles and tablets.

The key thing about UX is that it encompasses everything: the UI, the content, the design, the functionality. A poor design that takes a long time to load will cost you money: 40% of consumers abandon a website if it takes longer than three seconds to load<sup>2</sup>. Three seconds. For software developers, it's a window of opportunity that can close almost as soon as it opens.

But designing a great UX is like a digital magnet. Users keep coming back. And they tell other users too.

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## Worth its weight in gold

So how do you integrate UX into your software design process? That really depends on what your software is aiming to do.

If your software is an integral part of an eCommerce website, your goal is to get people to purchase things from you. If the purchase doesn't go through straight away, or the process is too complex, or the shipping costs too high, they will abandon their basket. No business can afford to lose customers who want to make a purchase but are put off by an unwieldy or inefficient UX. But it happens all the time. In fact, in 2019 the average cart abandonment rate was 77.13% worldwide<sup>3</sup>.

As you build your software, you need to make sure you define those customer use cases that lead to success. And then simplify those uses. If people who use your fitness tracker app tend to use it to map their jogging routes, you need to make sure that the map UX is simpler than tying your shoelaces. And looking cooler than a pair of Nike Airs will help too.

A great UX is an incredibly powerful tool for building brand loyalty. Even companies that sell physical goods understand that the UX they offer customers via websites and apps plays a huge role in how their brand is perceived. Those who invest time and talent in developing the UX almost invariably reap the rewards in both sales and brand engagement.

2 <https://neilpatel.com/blog/loading-time/>

3 <https://www.barilliance.com/cart-abandonment-rate-statistics/>

And don't forget the visual content either. An app that's easy to navigate does well with users. But it also needs to look good. Studies show that we can remember 65% of information we receive as a visual three days later, compared with just 10% of written content<sup>4</sup>.

## UX: the golden rules

If you create a product that is useful, comprehensive and engaging, you will increase audience engagement, conversions and revenue. It's about boosting customer satisfaction, converting that satisfaction into sales, and leaving them so satisfied that they will return again and again.

Your software needs to be easy to navigate, laid out clearly, and intuitive to use. You can create the best product in the world, but if your users have to wade through 300 pages of documentation to understand how it works, they won't continue to use it.

A positive user experience creates long-lasting relationships with users who not only want to buy your service but also promote it for you. Users love to be the first to recommend a hot new product or share a great experience on social media.

And that is what you're aiming for. Because more than anything else, social media is where products and websites can take off or, alternatively, drift into irrelevance. The power of social media is something that every company tries to harness. And if you manage to get positive user feedback onto social media without actually doing any of the work behind it, you will have saved yourself money on marketing.

## Start as you mean to go on

Shifting your focus onto UX at the start of product development might seem like a huge step, or a big risk. But the dividends can be colossal. If you use your UX research to come up with an optimized UX design right from the off, you'll minimize the money spent on sales, marketing and app or version updates in the future.

For most of us in the digital world, the days of weighty user manuals, unintelligible interfaces and interminable download times are hopefully gone. But new challenges are ahead. For businesses wishing to attract and retain customers who have a world of choice at their fingertips, prioritising UX is not just a good idea. It's a strategic essential.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.brainrules.net/vision>

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