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5 Proven UX Strategies

By [Shawn Borsky](#) | Published August 18th, 2011 in [design](#), [Resources](#)



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Whether dealing with large corporations, game developers, small businesses or a sole proprietor, most business goals tend to amount to the same needs. User experience is an area that touches almost every single business problem. While every project comes with its own unique situations, there are a



few tried-and-true user experience techniques that just work well and always produce results. Here are my top five proven UX strategies and techniques:

Focus on key experiences

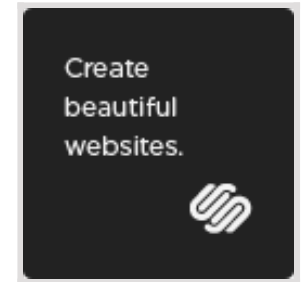
A major tendency of designers and clients alike is to think too much about particular elements and focus on smaller details. Many times it's better to not spend too much time focusing on one specific element. I know this seems counter-productive, but hear me out. Remember, user experience at the end of the day is how the user remembers the experience. It may seem like a minimal differentiation but it's incredibly important. Human memory is a bit flawed in the recollection department. The user's mind is wired to remember experiences in a specific way. In a manner of speaking, people use landmarks in their memory to reconstruct experiences. These landmarks are generally referred to as key experiences. Key experiences is a whole subject in and of itself, but the quick bullet points to focus on are:

- **First Impressions** – The starting point of a memory is often potent and vivid as it marks a transition between the user's simulation or expectation of the experience and the reality.
- **Peaks or "Wow" moments** – These are points of specific unique experiences and points that are consistently delightful to the user. These are often moments when the user's expectations have been exceeded. These moments help bind the user's sense of meaning and enjoyment to the experience. Simply, people enjoy being right or getting more than they planned for.
- **The Ending** – The ending is arguably the most important key experience since it acts as an overall outcome to the previous key experiences. The ending tends to be a major reference point for a person to use because it holds the lasting impression of the experience and in general filters into the other pieces of the memory. Short version: If it ended badly, the user is likely to remember all of it to be bad.

It is easy to get caught up in designing pieces of the puzzle that do not net much return. When you consider how the user will remember your product or service, then details such as the size of the title, what is actually said, or where it was positioned do not amount to much.

Set Expectations

Designing key experiences is often about managing expectations. Expectations frame the whole



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experience. Humans tend to believe that we are fantastic at predicting outcomes, and time has shown that is not quite true. In any case, people do not like to effectively be wrong. It changes comfort to confusion and anticipation to anxiety. The good news is that most products and companies are focused on specific goals and purposes. So it is not impossible to make reasonable approximations about how the user will be thinking about the product or service. The surest way to set up correctly is to immediately and confidently set the expectations for the user. Simply put, tell the user what they will get and how they will get it.

In the example below, 37Signals does not mess around. They immediately tell the user what to expect from using the Backpack product.



MailChimp provides another successful example of setting expectations. Right off the bat, Mailchimp tells the user: "Easy E-mail Newsletters." This tells their users what they will get and how they will get it.

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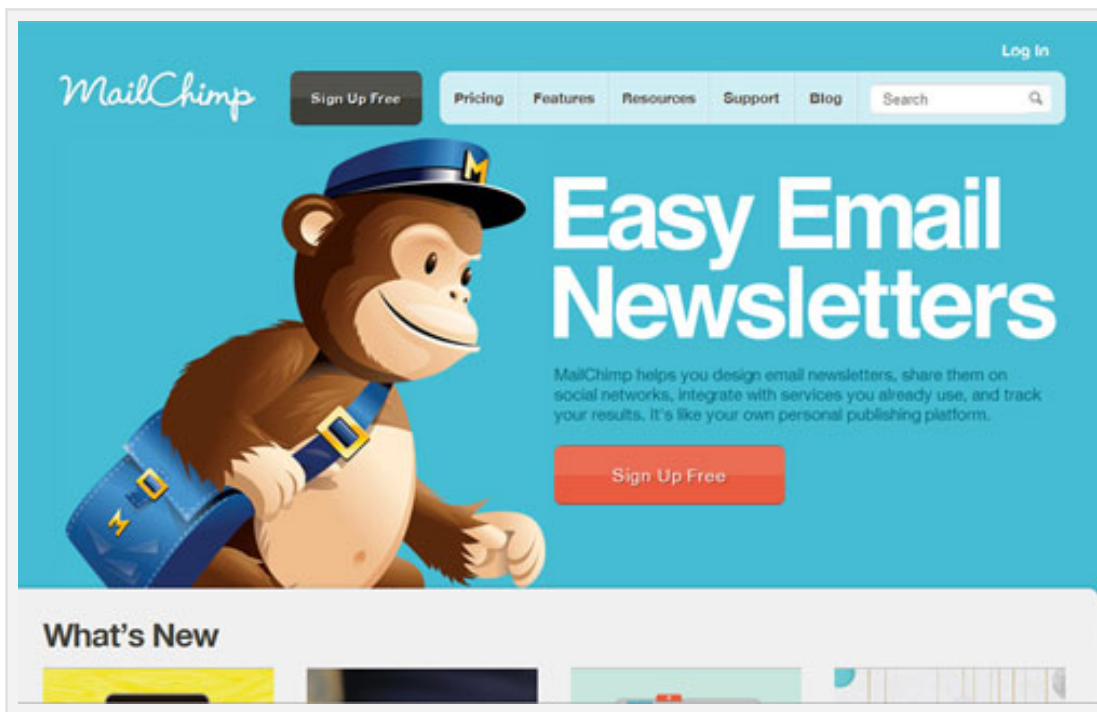
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Words are cheap and users know that. What is not cheap is imbuing those words with meaning. Users don't take meaning lightly, they respect it and most importantly enjoy it. Building words with meaning is easy; just fulfill the promise. Setting expectations does not have to be detailed or complicated. In fact, simple and clear promises are generally easier to keep. Clarity and brevity is also a mark of confidence. Usually, if there is confidence, it's for a good reason.

Be Clear

In all the complexity of building a product and providing a service it's easy to accidentally add layers of complexity. In many cases, designers and clients end up adding more confusion by trying to simplify. Over the years, I've heard various tips about using less text, keep clicks to a minimum, and making interactions "intuitive." The fact of the matter is that clicks and amount of time a task takes have little to do with good experiences. Study after study has proven that a user will have a great experience as long as they are able to easily understand what they are doing and enjoy doing it. Choose clear, straight-forward cues even if it may increase amount of time spent, amount of text, clicks or what have you. A user who understands the situation is always happier than a user who is lost.

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In the example below, Starbucks is clear about what their navigation links cover. Each link has a single word that tells you what the section is, but it also has a few keywords under the main link to tell you what that section covers. They answer most user questions while they are scanning the navigation. They kept it simple and clear. More text, better experience.



Speed it up

Users will never complain that something is too fast. That would be the rough equivalent to claiming it was too convenient. People are all about “instant” gratification. The closer to “instant” the better. Products and services are usually about completing a goal or task. Subtext: your user wants to achieve something. As user attention spans are dropping and demand for speed is increasing, one of the most sure-fire ways to produce better experience is to make it faster. If the time or budget allows for speed optimization versus a new feature, speed optimization will almost always net a substantial improvement in retention and user experience. Basically, getting what you want fast is fun.

Not only does speed create happier users but speed guarantees you will have more users right off the bat. You can't create a memory if you don't even start one. People get impatient and they will leave if

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they are frustrated. But why are they frustrated? Back to expectations: the user expected a certain level of speed, when the expectation was not met they reacted negatively. There is no question, speed is one of the most important factors to a user: Gomez and Akamai Survey on Speed. Contrary to what you may be thinking, speed does not make a product easier to use. Faster speeds make it more fun and pleasurable to use, and that is an incredibly important distinction.

Reach beyond usability

As is the case with increased speed, the ability to use something is not the only factor in a positive experience. Usability is a term that tends to come up a fair amount in user experience design. As usability is certainly a factor in good UX, it isn't surprising. But often people interchange usability with user experience, or consider usability to be the most important factor. Usability is focused on providing an easy path to the user's goals. Usability is functional but not inherently enjoyable. However, good experiences are engaging, meaningful and enjoyable. These are factors that reach far beyond the simple ability to complete tasks without difficulty. Working towards delight and happiness in product and service designs goes a long way.

Think about how many products and companies provide the same service but have drastically different experiences associated with them. It is not simply usability that makes an Apple device net better experience than a Blackberry or Microsoft device. Can you achieve your task on both devices? Of course, but Apple makes it enjoyable and fun while Blackberry and Microsoft tend to focus more on the goals of productivity and task completion. A simple visual survey of two of the devices shows you that Apple devices care about more than just the functionality.



Conclusion

I have given you a few overall strategies and techniques that have solid history of success and have insurmountable data to back them up. As a UX designer it is important to remember that there are no magic bullets, especially in user experience. UX is truly the sum of the parts the whole. Every single detail, part, person and approach factors into the minimal memory that forms the user's experience. When we focus on making key elements of usage smooth, expected, engaging and pleasurable than great user experience is a sure-thing. But, if you are in a crunch, whether via limited resources, time or experience these overall strategies are a fantastic place to start.



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Articles: Total of **2 posts**

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