

Building UX Foundations

by starting at the beginning.

Simon Lewis – Conceptual Simplicity

Where does great User Experience come from?

- Great UX springs from **CLARITY** about the planned product.
- You cannot deliver great UX if the product concept is **CONFUSED**.
- Therefore, great UX has
 - its roots in **PRODUCT MANAGEMENT** when the product is conceived;
 - its leaves and branches in **DEVELOPMENT** as the product is designed, refined and grown.
- It's about asking (and answering) the right **QUESTIONS** early on
 - and using the answers as a consistent guide throughout product development.
- It's just about **THINKING** before you act.



The User Experience hierarchy

Don't start up here!



Start down here & work upwards..

What are the key questions to clarify a product concept?

- What fundamental **NEEDS** will the product satisfy?
- **WHO** (specifically) will be the product's main users?
- What are the typical usage **SCENARIOS**?
- What are the main user-level **CONCEPTS**?
- What UX design **PRINCIPLES** are we going to hold dear?
- **HOW** will we develop the product (from a UX POV)?



What fundamental NEEDS will the product satisfy?

- What **key business problem** (or problems), will this new product solve?
 - This is not the same as “*what will the software DO?*”, because that’s HOW the business problem gets solved. Before then, we want to know WHAT the customer’s business problem is.
 - Sometimes there isn’t a business problem, but rather a business opportunity that we can enable for the customer. That’s OK.
- What are the **benefits** of solving the problem (enabling the opportunity)?
 - In other words, how will life get better for the customer after they get our software?
 - The UX needs to reveal and operate in terms of these benefits.
- **How much** is a solution to that problem (or opportunity) worth?
 - We might answer this by asking “*what’s the problem costing today?*” “*what’s the opportunity worth?*”, and assuming that a solution would be worth some significant fraction of that cost.
 - We only need a rough estimate, but we DO NEED an estimate, because it SIZES the problem and so **defines the UX** we can offer. Is it a £1000 or a £1,000,000 problem for the customer?

WHO (specifically) will be the product's main users?

- What are their **jobs** (or roles if they're consumers)?
 - What are they trying to achieve? What are they measured on? How will our product help make them successful and feel empowered? The UX needs to reveal this help.
 - How do they spend their days, and where? Are they in an office, part of a team, or out and about, working alone? The UX needs to fit in with this reality.
 - Or are they consumers, in which case, what role are they in when they use the product?
- **How often** and for **how long** will they typically use the product?
 - Will they “live” in our software all day? Will they use it everyday but only for a few minutes? Or will they use it less frequently (once a week, month, year)?
 - This tells us whether we're designing a UX for ease and speed of use, or for ease of understanding and learning, or a combination of both.
- Sometimes it helps to create **personas** for the product's users
 - Imaginary real people, with names, roles, problems, attitudes, and so on...
 - There might be two, three or more different personas that capture different types of user.

What are the typical usage SCENARIOS?

- Which **imaginary use cases** should we design the system against?
 - There should be a small number of key anchor scenarios. These can be augmented by a large number of smaller scale “stories”.
- Do **different users** have different (even competing) scenarios?
 - The answer to this question can sometimes reveal whether we're really trying to build two different products in one. If so, it's worth considering how to deal with that, perhaps even by splitting the product.
- Is there a **flow** or **logic** to the scenarios?
 - Do some occur first, and others later? Are some frequent, and others rare? How do they interrelate with each other?
- Are there any **practical factors** that interfere with the ideal scenario?
 - Is the user talking on the phone at the same time as using the product?
 - Are they trying to access it on a low-bandwidth connection?
 - Is there sensitive or confidential information involved, perhaps that mustn't be seen by others?

What are the main user-level CONCEPTS?

- Are there **existing concepts** from the user's world which the UX can replicate?
 - What are the key data objects (from a user POV) and how do they relate?
 - What are the key operations (again, from a user POV) and how do they relate?
- Will the UX be focussed primarily around **data** or around **operations**?
 - How will the nouns and verbs interrelate?
- Does the UX need to support **communication/co-operation** between users?
 - Or is each user an island unto themselves?

What DESIGN PRINCIPLES do we hold dear?

- Are there any **similar** or **competing** products that we should be inspired by?
 - Or that we need to be differentiated from?
- What **underlying technology** or platform will we use to deliver the product?
 - Is it a stand-alone application? A web site? A smart phone or tablet app? A device?
- How important or valuable is **delight** in the UX?
 - How important is it to build something that is **pleasing** to use as well as functional?

HOW will we develop the product (from a UX POV)?

- Will we use an **AGILE** process, or will we work in a **SINGLE PASS**?
 - Can we **iterate** towards a final UX, or do we need to design (and test) the UX **fully in advance**?
 - (If using a single pass approach, it could be risky to start building before the design is complete.)
- At what **STAGES** will we involve prospective users?
 - Feasibility? Foundation? Construction? Release?
- **HOW** will we involve prospective users?
 - Focus / user groups, work observation, prototype testing?
- Could we recruit a team of **lead users**, and work with them throughout?
 - Some products are almost **co-designed** by, with, and for their users.
- Who, ultimately, will be the **design authority** for the UX?
 - Great UX springs from a coherent point-of-view and consistent execution. But this is not necessarily of one person. It can be of a single-minded team who **share** a common ambition.