



## MODULE 6: DESIGN

### LESSON 2: DESIGNER'S SECRET WEAPON: USER EXPERIENCE RESEARCH

Your clients have hired you because you (supposedly) are the design expert. If they could do it themselves, they would. That's why it's crucial that you value the trust they've placed in you by staying up-to-date on the latest User-Experience (UX) research to inform your design decisions.

Keeping up with the latest UX research helps me and the New Tricks team design websites that achieve our clients' goals. I regularly read up on UX reports from Neilson. Keeping up on this readily-available information gives us a competitive advantage that sets us apart from all the other website design firms who aren't doing it.

Supported by data on how various design elements are perceived, we guide clients to make the best choices for their website—and steer them away from the well-meaning, but cockamamie, ideas they may come up with.

If or when the time comes for you to explain to your client why an idea they have may not be in their best interest, you can support your rationale with hard data. Nothing works better than the latest user experience (UX) research to squash a hare-brained idea.

Everyone has an opinion on user-experience. It's the cumulative body of knowledge born of the frustrations of being online. There you are, searching online... you finally find a site that seems to



have just what you need...so you click. Then, you sit there and watch it load ... and load ...and load....until ugh. It never gets there.

Or, maybe the site comes up but you have no idea how to find what you're seeking once it does.

Or the text is too light or too small to read.

Or (one of my big pet peeves), a site shows up with so many moving parts that it should come with a Dramamine tablet.

What do we do when these things happen? We leave. Immediately. Because a better site is always just one click away.

Here are ten examples from user experience research that ensure that the sites you build keep people engaged and give them an effective online experience.

**1. Site users want a sense of place:** People coming to a website need to know immediately the name of the business and what it does. Your logo, tagline, and headlines above the fold must make that instantly clear.

**2. Consistency across a site maintains that sense of location:** Sticking with the same navigation, header, color palette, and fonts throughout the site signals to the user that, no matter how many pages they visit, they're still on your site.

**3. Users are impatient on websites:** Make sure all your important elements are easy to find and that they jump out. Sometimes designers get so “designy” that the call-to-action fades into the woodwork.

Visitors won't scrutinize your site and read all your words, so make sure they can take in the main points of the site by glancing and scanning. Avoid the densely-packed text known as the “wall of words.”



And please... make reading easy by choosing a dark-color font on a light background that's at least 16-18 pixels. It was common in the past to see a font size of 12 px; used now, it makes a website look like old news.

**4. Page speed matters:** Your site *must* load quickly. Lab research shows that a speed of 0.1 – 0.3 seconds gives users the feeling of instantaneous response. One (1) second keeps the user's flow of thought seamless, and 10 seconds keeps the user's attention. After 10 seconds, whether people keep waiting depends on their motivation.

You have many options for improving the loading time of your site. Start with running your website through a page speed test. There are many, such as: Google Page Speed Insights (<https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights> ) to test your site and clean up outstanding issues on your site, such as optimizing your large images or minifying your CSS. Run the test for a full list. You don't need to worry about getting a 100/100 score. It may not even be possible given your theme and development situation. What is the most important is the perceived performance of your site by your visitors.

**5. Don't reinvent the wheel:** Build on proven conventions. You want people to be able to quickly navigate your site based on their previous experience with websites. Unless you have a really good reason, don't use idiosyncratic names for your navigation buttons or decide that your site is going to be really different in some other way. Be creative with your imagery, graphics, or event (by using great content) - but not with user experience. Don't make your visitors work too hard because we won't. We'll just leave.

**6. Users shouldn't have to search for the search bar:** I am one of "those people" who don't use online search until I absolutely can't navigate further on my own. It was important for me learn from UX research that there are people who actually use search instead of the navigation buttons! Who knew? Remember: it's important to have an easy-to-find search bar.



**7. Provide a visual hierarchy:** The size and placement of your text and images act as guides for your users' eyes, pointing them to what you want them to see and do. If you show images of people, have their eyes look at the text you want people to see, rather than gazing off the page. Make liberal use of headers, lists, and paragraphs. A wall of words is typically a complete waste because most people skip large blocks of type.

**8. Most stock images don't connect:** At best, your site visitors will ignore stock images. At worst, they'll regard them as cheap filler and think less of you. People like information-rich images with authentic subjects that capture the story of you and your business. Investing in professional images that show what you're uniquely capable of will prove one of the biggest boosts to the quality of your website.

If you think your business isn't visually interesting, I guarantee a professional photographer will change your mind. UX testing tells us that people want to see companies behind-the-scenes. They *want* authentic. So, instead of showing another image of a cupcake on the About page of your bakery site, show the baker mixing up the dough.

**9. Great hero images require work and planning:** A lot of themes these days show a large-format, [hero image](#) on the front page, which sets the tone for the whole website. Website clients see these themes and decide that they, too, must have a huge hero image for their sites. What they don't understand is what's involved in doing a hero image correctly:

First, the image must be really large and shot in horizontal-landscape orientation.

Next, the subject needs to be positioned low enough in the image so that their head is not cut off when the image is viewed on screens of various sizes.

Finally, any text overlaid on the image must be placed where it's readable and doesn't conflict with the main subject of the photo.



Back to item #7 above: few businesses have the great photos required to pull this off. If your design calls for a gigantic hero image, it better be heroic. To achieve an epic hero image, hire a professional photographer and have your web designer give them direction for the shoot.

**10. Sliders:** Research shows that website visitors don't like slide shows on the Home page.

Sliders are distracting; the speed is usually set either too fast or too slow; and, people report being irritated when the attractive image they liked then disappears. Often, however, businesses will demand a slider in order to present all their important information above the fold.

This strategy doesn't work because visitors will rarely stick around long enough to view your slides. Slideshows work only if you *do* have a stockpile of hero images (unlikely); if you don't care if people miss some of them; and, if your goal is to set a mood.

A website we did for [SteelMart](#) shows an example of hero images working with a slider. You wouldn't think a steel company would have so many great images but their photos prove the power of professional photography—and of a design that rolls flawlessly, like the sheet metal produced by this company. Every image is engaging, and just one or two are enough to convey that SteelMart is a professional enterprise that can be trusted.

## More UX Design Rules

The following is a list of ten UX design rules we recommend you follow when creating websites. If you stick to these rules, you'll be on your way to creating an attractive, effective, website, even if you don't consider yourself a designer.

### #1: NO WALLS OF TEXT

One of the most frequent and annoying problems we see on websites is a wall of words. Keep the columns of text to between 50-75 characters per line, if you want people to read what you write. Wide paragraphs with small font are very hard to read. It's off-putting to read so the reader often decides the text is not worth reading.



There are many ways you can break up a wall of text. Columns are your friend. Add images, line breaks, change font-weights or anything you can do to break up the text.

Paragraphs are much easier to read when you add an image to the left which reduces the line length to a more readability chunk, and you break up the text block using header, sub-header and paragraph text. Headlines create an inviting look on the page.

## **#2: USE HIGH CONTRAST TEXT**

For readability: use dark color text on light backgrounds. Use white text on dark or saturated color backgrounds.

## **#3: BE CONSISTENT WITH ALIGNMENT**

Plan the website elements using a grid to help with alignment. Have a good reason for each alignment choice.

## **#4: CAPITALIZATION CONSISTENCY**

Choose a capitalization style for the various copy elements and stick to it. If you use camel-case for one heading, use it for all of them. If the first item of a list only has the first letter of the sentence capitalized, carry that style throughout the site.

## **#5: LET YOUR CONTENT BREATHE**

Don't cram your content into a space that's too small. Add breathing room so a reader's eye can focus on each section, separate from the next.

## **#6: PICK & STICK WITH A COLOR PALETTE**

Choose a color palette with 2-4 colors and use them consistently. Don't try and wing color matching.



Find the proper HEX codes for your colors and use them.

### **#7: PICK & STICK WITH 2 FONTS**

One of the first design decisions on a website is to choose the fonts. Select a heading font and a body font. There are cheat sheets to use if you need them.

### **#8: USE HIGH-QUALITY IMAGERY**

Make sure your images are crisp & retina ready. Avoid using pictures that scream fake stock image. Choose the right image for the space provided.

### **#9: NO LOOKING OFF THE PAGE**

Photos of people are essential. Make sure they look engaged with the site, having them face towards the content, rather than somewhere off the page.

### **#10: USUALLY, LESS IS MORE**

Don't crowd your web page with too much information and calls to action. If you confuse you lose. Decide what's important and make it compelling.

## **Resources for Further Study:**

**Websites:** These sites are just a few that have a lot of articles on creating great User Experience.

A List Apart Website [A List Apart](#) : This popular site explores the design, development, and meaning of web content, with a special focus on web standards and best practices.

UX Design.cc <https://uxdesign.cc/> : design.

UX Planet: <https://uxplanet.org/>



Nielsen Norman Group: <https://www.nngroup.com/> : One of the most respected user experience firms that provides evidence-based research, articles and reports on all things web.

The UX Crash Course: <http://thehipperelement.com/post/75476711614/ux-crash-course-31-fundamentals>

**User Testing Services** For getting feedback on your website, landing page or designs.

- [Ustertesting](#)
- [Userbob](#)