User Research 101: Focus on Product Users

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Hi, I’m Charley Wilhite
UX Researcher

Anthropology
BA – UNM | MA – UCLA | EDAC

Work highlights
Harvard Energy & Environmental Policy Center
Microsoft Innovation Lab
Google ATAP & Daydream
Splunk
Samsung Media Streaming & Mobile

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The UX Research Advantage

Every $1 invested in UX brings $100 in return.

“This is an average figure, but it’s a ROI of an impressive 9,900%”
Visit-to-lead conversions can be 400% higher on websites with a “superior user experience”.
The UX Research Advantage

When organizations invest in UX during a project’s concept phase, they reduce product development cycles by 33 to 50%.

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UX Basics

How the user’s experience reduces business risk
What is User Experience (UX)

How a person experiences... anything
- a product
- a service
- a place
- a system
- an event
- a combination of these

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User Experience (UX)

Internal motivators influence how something is experienced

- learned experiences
- biases
- control needs
- desired outcome
- personal values
- emotions/mood
User Experience (UX)

How UX Research is done

- Qualitative and quantitative methodologies and tools
- Scientific method, systematic investigation + analysis
- In product teams, with cross-functional and vertical impact

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Foundational UX
Exploration of a potential product/service
User needs, user values, opportunity discovery
What’s really going on out there?

Proof of Concept
Demonstration of Technical Performance
Does the thing work under the specified conditions?

Business model feasibility
Where do people want to buy this thing?

Evaluative UX
Refinement of product/service usability
Performance expectations testing
Can this thing be used by users?

Large sample tests that product execution meets Product Requirement Document (PRD) specifications.
Is everything ready to go?
Stages of UX Research
Generative
Foundational UX Research

Formative
Usability Research

Evaluative
Lean UX Research

Includes the users

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Generative: Scanning the Deep Blue Ocean

**Purpose:** Gain a deep understanding from a few users in the product/service space. Inform the Product Requirements Document (PRD)

**Benefit:** Provides a landscape of current practices and values
- Frustrations, joys, aspirations
- product/service selection, adoption, use, and abandonment

**Goals**
- Use cases
- Product/service experience principles
- “User will have the ability to…”
- Guidance on prototype features/behaviors

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Formative: Inductive, then Deductive

Purpose: To understand the most value-laden combination of product features, how they are delivered, and how to optimize desirability.

Benefit: The development phase is intimately informed by user needs and preferences.

Goal: Arrive at one product definition and design for go-to-market.

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Step #1

Generate many ideas (some crazy non-viable)

Brainstorm assumptions and why they seem correct

Consider the user’s needs & wants with combos of business models and features

Step #2

Prototype hypothetical ideas. Test them with potential users

Participatory design: your users contribute

Be brutal with analysis and accepting empirical evidence

Iterate prototypes until MVP

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Evaluative: Refining the product

**Purpose:** Match the product design & execution to the PRD

**Benefit:** The product produces the intended outcomes

**Goal:** A successful product launch - users adopt quickly, keep using it, buy more!

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Product-Solution Fit
“does this product create value for the user/customer”

Product-Market Fit

Scale...
UX Research for Entrepreneurs
Get out of your own head

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<table>
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<th>Stage</th>
<th>Methodology types</th>
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<td>1/ Exploration</td>
<td>Self-reporting, Interviews with exercises</td>
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<td>2/ Value Prop</td>
<td>Self-reporting, Prototype Iteration</td>
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<td>3/ Usability</td>
<td>IRL or “lab” refinement tests</td>
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Exploration

**Self-reporting**

: a diary study in which users track certain behaviors 1+ times per day over a period of days.

**Cheap & easy way to do it**

- Give each person their own copy of a Google Form to fill out for each incident. Results land in a Google Sheet
- Google Forms allow attachments of videos or photos
- Note: participants must use a Gmail account

**Interviews**

: one-on-one friendly interrogation to surface thoughts and feelings about a topic, get examples/stories

**Main activities**

- Semi-structured interview
- Card exercises (digital whiteboards!)
- Diagrams & sketches

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Self-reporting
: a diary study in which users track certain behaviors 1+ times per day over a period of days.
  o Google Docs/Forms, Survey Monkey, Qualtrics

Prototype Iteration
: feature variations & interaction tests

Standard session structure
1) Review value of current items used for a task
   o They get deep into the topic
   o You get elements to refer to
2) Feature walkthrough (storyboard, process, WoOz, interface mockup)
3) Evaluation scales
Usability

Functional and accessible

: In-person, moderated/unmoderated remote, or lab studies that measure users’ abilities to complete key tasks.

Cheap & easy ways to do it

o IP not very confidential? Consider Mechanical Turk (MTurk) for unmoderated tests

o Digital product?
  o Remote: Screen share - give them control, screen recording
  o In-person: Set up screens in browsers or in your design tools

o Material product?
  o Remote: Design Fiction, video conference/body cam sessions
  o In-person: task completion studies, body cam

o Service? Fishfood, Dogfood, Beta test

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What do you need/want to know?
What do you think you already know about that?
How strongly do you feel that you really know it? When/how did you learn it?
What do you assume is true? Where did that assumption come from? (e.g., If/then “logic”, bias)
Think ahead

- What answers might you expect to your questions
- Test each question: why do you need to know this? What does asking this question accomplish?
- What would be a surprise?
- What kinds of customers might give certain answers?
Start with broad questions: current state of things & background
  o Immerse them in themselves
  o Gives you a landscape to refer to in probes for examples & reasons

Train of Thought: cover topics in sets.
  o Each set layers on the previous one.
Pro Tip

When customers say in interviews that they trust authoritative figures more than social media, don't expect them to like your online community idea in a survey.

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- Tell them the purpose is product development (not advertising)
  - Confidential within your company
  - Keep your word
- Customers are free to decline a question
  - You are free to ask a different way to get the data you need
- Customers are free to take a break or drop out
The Learning Session
Inhabit their world for a while

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Team member participation

Avoid introducing mental noise

Remote sessions
- This is a 1:1 session from the customer’s POV. Do not introduce team members.
- DO say that team members are listening.

In-person
- First name and role, no active participation during the session

Fieldnotes
- Fieldnotes are impressions and early reactions. What was it like to talk to this person? What stood out?

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Handling Interviews

- Full answers to your questions may not come at the time you ask
- Do not explain why you are asking a certain question
- You may get a tight quote, but that’s not the goal
- Allow silences - let ‘em think
No judgment

- If everything they say is true, they can say nothing wrong
- Not everyone has the same story to tell
- Be objective -- be interested in whatever they say or do
Be less visible

- Let them talk -- you do <15% of the talking
- Do not say you agree or that you have had a similar thought or experience.
- Deflect everything to them
Willing ignorance

- Understand their points **during** the session. Ask for examples, clarification.
- Offer metaphors (e.g., is it more like this or that)
- Press them to express themselves specifically
Pro Tip

If you or your belongings are in a photo or on video, it’s not data
Sticking the Landing

• Finish by asking if there’s anything else they’d like to tell/ask you.
• Ask if you can follow-up with them if you have other questions.
• Thank them profusely.
• Consider offering a small gift if they are not government-affiliated.

*When it’s over, you and your team debrief.*
The Making Sense Part

- What are the key learnings from this customer?
- Research questions & hypotheses: what can be said about what you set out to learn?
- Resist the urge to make a person and their context a model. Create archetypes from abstract concepts.
  - "As someone who Values X, I want the Ability to Y so that I can Achieve Z."
Thank you!

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