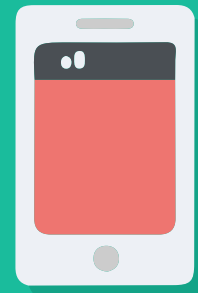


A Beginner's Guide To

Careers in UX Design



Springboard

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Introduction

User Experience Design has become such a buzzword, that, almost every day I encounter someone with interest, questions, or misconceptions about this profession.

In this guide, I try to bring you perspectives on UX Design as a career — why you should do it, how to get started, and advice you'll need along the way — straight from experts who were once in your shoes.

A UX Designer is a curious creature — every company wants one, to help them understand how customers think about their products, and to design and deliver amazing experiences.

But thinking about user experience is not just the job of the designer. At Springboard, we think of UX not just as a profession, but as a way of thinking that should permeate each part of our organization. That's how we can be sure to build things that people love. Whether you are a product manager, engineer or entrepreneur, learning the principles of UX will help you to think critically about your work and deliver better experience to your customers.

As you read this guide, I'm sure you'll have questions and feedback - and I'm counting on you to get in touch. Hit me up via email, or on twitter and let's chat!



Cheers,
RAJIT DASGUPTA (@RAJITDG)
GROWTH LEAD
SPRINGBOARD

Why You Should Become a UX Designer

What is a UX Designer?

Take a moment to think about your favorite website or mobile app or electronic device. What makes you love it? Is it really intuitive to use? Did it feel familiar the first time you used it? Maybe it even has an uncanny way of knowing what you'll want to do next?

Well, odds are, a User Experience (UX) designer spent hours researching and designing it so you can have a seamless experience.

UX design is a combination of tools, methods, and frameworks with which you can solve design problems in a methodical way while focusing on the users of a product or service.

UX designers use a mix of information architecture and graphic design skills to create products that are beautiful and simple to navigate. They think critically about a user's goals and intentions when visiting their website or app, and how they can better serve them through design.

As a UX or UI designer, you might be involved in wireframing and prototyping, conducting user research and A/B testing. You should be an excellent communicator, so that you can walk engineers and product managers through the thought process behind your designs, and help them better execute them.

Why You Should Make This Your Career

As a UX designer, your job is — literally — to learn and help businesses build higher quality experiences for their customers. User research firm Nielsen Norman Group recently [ran a survey](#) of 963 user experience professionals and found that UX design, as a career path, is one that brings high levels of career satisfaction, quality of life, and pay. The survey also pointed out that ‘there is no single defining characteristic of user experience careers.’

The field is relatively new, which means that you help define it and make the career your own.

UX design is a pretty new field that is growing — and will continue to grow -- in importance. As technology becomes more complex, companies will need UX designers to create simple, impactful, and delightful customer experiences. CNN [predicts](#) that UX Design jobs will grow at 22% between now and 2020, with over 2 million new jobs being created.

A Day in the Life

As a UX Designer in almost any industry, you'll work on a range of products, working most closely with product, engineering, and marketing teams.

DAY-TO-DAY, YOU WILL...

- ✓ Create mobile and desktop interfaces
- ✓ Analyze data to identify opportunities and points of friction
- ✓ Conduct user research to explain how people are using your company's products and website
- ✓ Compile your findings into a story
- ✓ Provide direction on new opportunities for your business
- ✓ Collaborate with business stakeholders in product, engineering, and marketing to provide the best user experiences possible

Who Can Become a UX Designer

There is no “traditional background” for UX designers -- they come from a variety of backgrounds, and your design thinking skills and portfolio matter more than your college major. In fact, product and UX design teams welcome a range of skillsets and interests. You could have studied psychology, sociology, math, or the humanities in past lives — all of these perspectives are welcome on UX design teams. Your best assets will be your empathy for your users, hunger for continuous improvement, and desire to learn.

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SECTION 2

Interviews with UX Designers



Jorge's Story
Self-made UX designer

MOST VALUABLE ADVICE

“Landing your first UX job is challenging. Without proper mentorship, you’re completely making leaps of faith. My biggest learnings came from trial and error.”

How did you get into UX design? How did you land your first job?

Like a lot of people before me, I just accidentally became an UX designer. I coded my first website in my undergrads. I then started coding for friends and local businesses. While doing so I used a lot of what I learned in landscape architecture to influence my work. I realized that there wasn't a whole lot of difference between designing for physical and digital spaces. I then started focusing on the usability of the sites I coded and from there started focusing solely on usability.

What have been some unexpected challenges related to landing a job?

Landing your first UX job is challenging. Without proper mentorship, you're completely making leaps of faith. My biggest learnings came from trial and

Quick Facts

Name: Jorge Baltazar

Location: San Francisco

Title: Senior UX Designer

Company: Hotwire

College Major: Geography & Landscape Architecture

Years as a UX Designer:
4 Years

error. I realized early that hiring managers are looking for the complete package.

I realized early on that every gig is a learning experience. Knowing what you're good at and most importantly what you're bad at will save your ass. Never be afraid to tackle something. Ultimately it's that level of tenacity that will determine your success.

What does a typical career path/advancement for a UX designer look like?

There are an infinite number of roads to a career in UX. The traditional route is getting a degree in human-computer interaction or anything similar. More than likely most people come from unrelated backgrounds such as architecture, graphic design, anthropology, and psychology.

Personally, I studied geography and landscape architecture. It wasn't until I

learned front end development that I discovered UX. Since then, I haven't looked back.

What about the 'lifestyle' and pay aspects? What kind of life should a UX designer expect to lead and what is the earning potential?

The lifestyle and pay is great. Actually, it was recently named one of the best careers for work-life balance. A junior designer is expected to earn between \$50-\$70k per year. Senior designers earn well into the six figures.

In terms of lifestyle, there are different types of UX lifestyle, all depending on where you work. Agencies and start-ups will most likely be more demanding. In-house work can be pretty stable. Freelance work is lucrative but very volatile.

How has the UX design landscape evolved? How do you see the future of the field?

The UX field has been evolving and growing rapidly. Companies are starting to value design more. More than ever, designers are at the big kids' table when making big decisions. With this refocus on design, design teams are growing and new specialists are emerging. The future looks great for UX designers.

With more companies investing in design, there will definitely be a need for designers. In terms of the field, companies are focusing more on customer experience. With that said more of User experience design will be beyond the digital space such as physical products and service design.

What lessons have you learned that you wish you knew when just starting out?

I'll give you an abridged version. This can be its own book. I wish I had learned earlier the importance of self-promotion. Your credibility and exposure is something people often don't talk about. In addition, I wish I knew the right questions to ask early on when taking on a new client or job. There are a lot of bad clients and design managers, finding the bad ones early will save you a lot of time and grief.

What are your biggest words of wisdom for newcomers to the field?

Be nice and be curious. Design is a collaborative effort. You want to be the person that people want to work with. Being curious is just a part of being a designer. This means being an avid reader and playing with everything (video games, apps, etc).

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Tim's Story

Building cross-disciplinary UX teams

MOST VALUABLE ADVICE

“Get out and talk to your peers. Get out and do things in the community (like meetups). Hackathons and startup weekends are immensely valuable for people starting out”

What led you to the field of UX?

I've been in the industry for almost 20 years. I started out as a front-end developer in 1995. I was lucky enough to work with an early web shop that really understood and put a value on user experience — back when websites were advertising or brochure/marketing based.

Our team strove to build strong customer relationships. I was interested in these UX related business challenges and started talking to interaction designers on some of our projects. I dug deeper and deeper and have been 'learning by doing' ever since.

What inspires you about the field?

There's a real person on the other side of the screen, who I'm aiming to reach with my work. What I'm doing is materially affecting others, and there is heightened pressure for me to do a great job.

In your opinion, what is the biggest way that the field of UX is evolving?

I like the direction the field is going in

Quick Facts

Name: Tim McCoy

Location: San Francisco

Title: Director of UX Design

Company: Pivotal Labs

College Major: Engineering

Years in the Industry:

20 Years as an Engineer & UX Designer

terms of being an inclusive discipline. The field isn't just for design specialists -- it's for everyone involved in the creation of a product.

UX isn't about creating experts who are the luminaries in their fields. It's cross-disciplinary. People can jump in from a variety of backgrounds -- and these varied perspectives are essential for yielding great results.

What are the most important personality traits you seek out when looking to hire a UX designer?

Humility is an important trait. UX designers are constantly looking for ways to validate and invalidate their assumptions -- which sometimes means being wrong. You can't have an ego in this field.

Being collaborative is huge. When you're not in your office creating designs, you're working with business, technology and user stakeholders to map out your project's direction.

Why do people leave the field? What don't people enjoy?

People leave the field because they are frustrated or they feel like the road isn't as smooth as they would hope. UX is not just about producing great design. It's just as important to be able to demonstrate and advocate for your values.

What's the workload like as a UX designer?

The best UX designers really care about the products that they're designing -- if you love what you do, you'll inevitably take that home with you. You internalize your work as something that you really have an investment in. If you don't have passion for it, you're not going to be successful.

At Pivotal Labs, we have a sustainable pace culture — we're lucky. You do spend time doing things like talking to users at odd hours and going on trips to go to interview users and customers and stakeholders. But you're also one step removed from the "line of fire."

How about the career path?

When you progress past an individual contributor role, you can get involved in the more strategic side of UX, which is matching user goals to business goals and product direction.

Whether you're working in-house or for an agency, there's always a management layer related to any initiative. You're consulting into and across projects

and working more closely with stakeholders to provide direct mentorship to teams. From there, the next steps turn into running a team — an office of designers in-house. There's a strong growth trajectory as well because UX design and product management have a lot of overlap. Many people with UX backgrounds become product VPs.

Can you share details about salaries?

UX designers can afford great lifestyles. Salaries are comparable to engineers.

What advice do you have for a UX designer who is just starting out?

Get out and talk to your peers. Get out and do things in the community (like meetups). Hackathons and startup weekends are immensely valuable for people starting out.

These opportunities will give you a crash course in collaboration and working within constraints. You'll be able to develop a portfolio of work. This is a field where you can get a great formal education, but you can also — absolutely — learn by doing. So much of this stuff, you can really learn on the job. No matter your college major, the field will be welcoming to you.

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How To Prepare For a UX Design Career

Some Tips to Prepare for the Job:

Most important: kickstart a portfolio! Maintain a digital scrapbook (e.g. in Evernote) of products or apps that delight you. Try to think of why they are great. Try to redesign apps you use based on these principles.

Get experience running with an idea and turning it into a product. Start with small freelance projects. If your friend has an idea for an app, design it — even if they never build it, you'll have a portfolio piece.

Learn how to wireframe and prototype — we've got helpful links below. Brush up on your Adobe Creative Suites skills, or pick up Sketch, which is becoming more and more popular with designers.

Learn a little CSS, HTML, and JavaScript. You don't need to be a master coder, but designers who can code (even a little bit) can better understand what goes into converting your prototypes into webpages and apps, and it'll help you work closely with engineers.

Work on your communication skills. UI/UX designers should be able to talk anyone through their proposed designs, as well as do user interviews and field studies to get feedback on their designs.

Hot Links

[What is User Experience Design? Overview, Tools and Resources](#), Smashing Magazine

[UX Design Learning Path](#), Springboard

[A Beginner's Guide To Wireframing](#), Tuts

[6 Steps to Creating a Knock-Out Online Portfolio](#), 99u.com

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All the UXful Advice You Need

**Words of
Wisdom for
people starting
out in UX**

Everyone agrees that you learn best by doing. At the same time, it can really help to have words of wisdom to guide you along the way. We asked 10 of the most influential UX designers for pieces of useful advice for their younger selves. Here we share their top personal and professional advice.

PRO TIP:

Follow them on Twitter for more honest, insightful, thought-provoking, and sometimes funny tidbits.



@iamlucid

Be Hungry

"Be insatiable. Always be present. Don't let a label define you or what you look to accomplish in life. Look to everyone and everything for answers, even when they don't seem to relate to the question at hand. You can be anything and everything you want to be."

- Joshua Garity

FOUNDER, CANDOREM



@boagworld

Be Foolish

"The best way to learn anything is through making mistakes, and I would not want to deny my younger self that opportunity. As Winston Churchill once said, "Success is going from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm." Don't listen to anyone, make your own mistakes, and then when you fail, get up and try again."

- Paul Boag

CO-FOUNDER, HEADSCAPE; WRITER, SPEAKER



@matthamm

Follow A Process...

"Document everything! Having an extensive reference of well-ordered UX design to browse through helps you learn and also find solutions to problems as your reference builds. Remember to document real-world experiences as well, because these patterns can be referenced too."

- Matt Hamm

CO-FOUNDER, SUPEREIGHT STUDIO



@mikekus

...But Don't Be Afraid To Buck The Trend

"Learn to separate UI trends from practical or useful UI design conventions. Just because a current trend is widely used doesn't necessarily mean it's the best way."

- Mike Kus

GRAPHIC AND WEB DESIGNER



@pavel_macek

It's All About The User

"Don't get lost in myriad design methodologies and patterns. It's important to learn about design frameworks and have a rigid design process, but the start is always very simple: Who am I designing this for? What does he need to achieve? How can I help him to achieve that? Then it's just a matter of iteration and learning what works and what doesn't."

- Pavel Macek

LEAD DESIGNER, SCREENHERO



@jackzerby

"Always consider the final outcome and context for the user/customer. What do they need to accomplish AND in which context. For example. If I am trying to install a bike rack on my car, and I go to the manufacturers website. The goal is to successfully install my bike rack and get on the road as quickly as possible. The context is, I'm standing outside my car in the hot sun with my kids crying because they want to go to the park NOW. Design with those parameters in mind. KNOW THY USER. Just like with successful marketing, understand their pains, problems, frustrations, and use their language to communicate. Don't guess and fall prey to designer arrogance (which we all do from time to time)."

- Jack Zerby

CO-FOUNDER OF FLAVORS.ME & GOODSIE; DESIGN DIRECTOR AT VIMEO



@kaniasty

People Are More Important Than Skills....

"Understand that in a collaborative profession like UX, people are more important than skills. If you have an aptitude for research or design, you'll master those skills in time, but having the right relationships can make or break your career. When I made my initial career change into high tech, I knew very few people who did the same thing I did. When I went back to school for Human Factors at Bentley University, it was like a whole new world opened up for me. Of course, a big part of it was the learning, but the network of people I ended up meeting was just as valuable. So meet as many people as you can who are as excited about UX as you are, and ask them for advice."

- Eva Kaniasty

FOUNDER, RED PILL UX; PRESIDENT, UXPA



@lishubert

...Even If They Don't Always "Get It"

"Chill out, for starters! We designers know the importance of what we do, and we want everyone else to 'get it'. So we find ourselves fighting to get the message out there, which can lead to exhaustion and deflation. I've realized that working so hard to imbue my knowledge into those outside the field is not the point. It doesn't matter if the business or technology team 'gets' what I do. What matters is that you are passionate about what you can control, do what you are responsible for (and more) to see that passion come to life, and enjoy the ride!"

- Lis Hubert

EXPERIENCE DESIGN CONSULTANT, SPEAKER AND WRITER

So, Get A Mentor. Or Two



@lauraklein

"Get two mentors. The first one should be somebody older and influential in the field you care about. They will help by giving you perspective and teaching you the sorts of skills you need to get hired by somebody like them. The second mentor should be somebody a couple years older than you. They will tell you what you really need to know to do the job you're likely to get. I don't know what life is like for somebody who is just starting out in tech these days, but somebody who's only been doing it for a couple of years will have really good insight. So, find two people: someone to help you get your next job and somebody to help you do your next job."

- Laura Klein

AUTHOR OF UX FOR LEAN STARTUPS

And Most Importantly, Live Your Life Well!



@kevinmhoffman

"Hey, younger self! You will spend some time idealizing long term goals, and that's a good exercise. You'll think about your ideal job, employer, lifestyle, family, and more. But in reality, you'll get very little satisfaction chasing those things, so you should never wait around for them. Spend life living. The most fun is in charting the actual, sometimes smaller (sometimes not) decisions that will confront you whether you want them to or not. Your goal should be to get better at making decisions when they can have the greatest impact on your life.

Also, as much as you can, realize that self-doubt may help you with humility, but not much else. Also, don't take yourself too seriously. Also, exercise more. Also, don't overuse the word 'also'."

- Kevin M. Hoffman

FOUNDER, SEVEN HEADS DESIGN

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Considering A Career In UX Design? Check out these additional resources.

[UX Learning Path](#)

A free curriculum to get started in UX

[UX Design Workshop](#)

Learn UX with a mentor, and build a portfolio

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