

Northwestern Michigan College

Benefits of Adding UX or UI Design to
the Visual Communications Program



ENG220 Technical Writing

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Introduction

It is safe to say that the internet has changed everything. More recently the internet has become more available with mobile devices such as smart phones, tablets and laptops. The way people reach out to one another has switched to these mobile outlets, this includes how we buy, sell and entertain. More companies will have to appeal to the forever *plugged-in* market. This market looks for products and information it can interact with, watch, pre-view and mold to fit all their needs and wants. Interactive and user experience design creates the online environment that helps sell these things. Colleges like Northwestern Michigan, need to take consideration about how these trends might affect future curriculums. Students in the visual communication and CIT programs could benefit from having a course about user experience and interface design.

This report details the overview of what UX and UI is and how it is used by web designers. Additionally, this report covers how including these design and tech-skills is important to emerging graphic designers to learn in college courses to help further their chances on getting careers after graduation. The purpose of this report is to persuade NMC faculty to develop a UX or UI course as part of the Visual Communications program. This goal will be met by covering topics such as (1) the importance of UX design, (2) how learning tech-skills are important to graphic designers, and (3) how the changing digital market calls for more of these skills and how it can take a designer's career farther with more benefits.

What is UX and UI? An Overview

User experience (UX) is building user trust and satisfaction by increasing usability and enjoyment of a digital product or service (Lamprecht). When visiting a site, the user will interact with parts of the site or format that best fulfill the user's needs and wants. This exchange maybe hardly noticeable to the user but is a key component to UX design. For one to be successful at UX design one must pay attention to three major factors look, feel, and usability (Siang). This doesn't just apply to whole websites but also to parts like advertisements, navigation, and entertainment. Whatever form of designer, they will most likely design for web so how the user/customer interacts with the elements on websites plays a huge roll. "While User Experience is a conglomeration of tasks focused on optimization of a product for effective and enjoyable use; User Interface Design is its compliment, the look and feel, the presentation and interactivity of a product" (Lamprecht). Unlike UX design, the bridge between User Interface Design (UI) and graphic design is shorter. It is an older field of study and it's hard to defined because it often gets clumped together with other design jobs (Lamprecht). Even with these differences UX and UI design get clumped together or confused with one another. Overall both design components are important to digital marketing.

UX/UI Skills That Every Designer Should Know

The bases of UX and UI design is the same as other design. Principles and elements of design such as composition, color, space and balance are the core ideas to start with. Although UX design takes things a step farther and asks how a user feels about the product. As of right now there is a divide on what skills designers should know, but as time goes on the need for one

to know more tech skills are increasing. Along with web development skills and designers should also learn about building a marketing plan.

Coding

Before the last ten years what would be considered a tech job and a design job would have little to no overlap, today this is much different. Graphic designers do tend to understand some coding language such as HTML, CSS and JavaScript. But other than learning basic HTML just to see how it works is no longer just enough. More graphic designers are bridging out to learn SEO, PHP, and CGI programming to design for the ever-growing App popularity (Kyrnin).

User Personas

A useful skill that anyone planning to work with or around digital marketing is identifying and building a user persona. While most know what a target market is, a user persona is similar but more detailed. Marketing teams will use things such as age, education and income, while UX designers focus on user interviews and observations (Stone). The first step into building a user persona requires a lot of researching. Analysis user's product or site activity, how often do they visit? Are they finding what they are looking for? Are they satisfied with the content (Stone)? After this one can start building scenario or story that the role of the user fits into. UX designers then go on to planning a design around this user and scenario in hopes to develop design patterns that satisfy this type of user (Murphy). It is important to keep in mind that several different users' personas, so each client of the site or product will be satisfied.

Look, Feel and Usability

When one asks a UX designer what it is they focus on when it comes to design they will probably say something along the lines of the look, feel and usability of a product (see Figure 1). The *look* of a product is about creating a product that is visual appealing to the users' needs and wants (Siang). When the look of a product or site is on point it creates more creditably and trust with the user. The *feel* is all about user satisfaction. Products and services should provide an enjoyable experience and not just a functional one (Siang). The last factor to consider is the usability of the product or service. If a consumer can't effectively use product then the design is a dud (Siang). Keeping in mind how a consumer uses the product or site will aid it how it is designed. Will the user be able access this on mobile just as effectively as on computer? Does the site function right? These are just a couple questions a designer will want to ask themselves to make sure users are having a useful experience.



Figure 1 3 Factors of User Experience

Image provided by <https://goo.gl/images/Dix4TY>

The Bridge Between Graphic and UX/UI Designers

To better understand what UX skills graphic designers should adapt, one should examine their differences and similarities. All designers understand the elements of design such as color, composition and unity. These elements of design are often used to create a visual consistency in a product. Both designers are considered to be emotional designers. Graphic designers tend to be concerned with creating an emotional tone within the design itself, while UX designers focus on the emotional connection that the user is having (Siang). Another thing that designers have in common are they are trained to be creative thinkers. Graphic designers use their creative skills to come up with designs that are unique and are effective in sending a message. UX designers use their creative thinking to put themselves into the user's shoes and outline a solution to any of the user's problems (Siang).

When looking at how these designers differ, it becomes more apparent that UX skills could hold more weight in the future market. Graphic designers tend to focus on pixel perfection, meaning conforming to color guidelines, strong emphasis typography and what prints will look like (Murphy; Siang). With the growth of mobile media this method is seen as outdated. UX designers focus more on the users wants and needs, so the design is based on an overall mood or aesthetic. To reach this goal UX designers will create user story mapping, mood-boards, and usability testing (Siang). Another difference between these two designers is how they problem

solve. UX designers will research how the users interact with the designers before the finished product (Siang). Graphic designers usually solve problems such as what does a single client want to communicate to their consumers. Figure 2 details more of the differences and similarities of both designers.

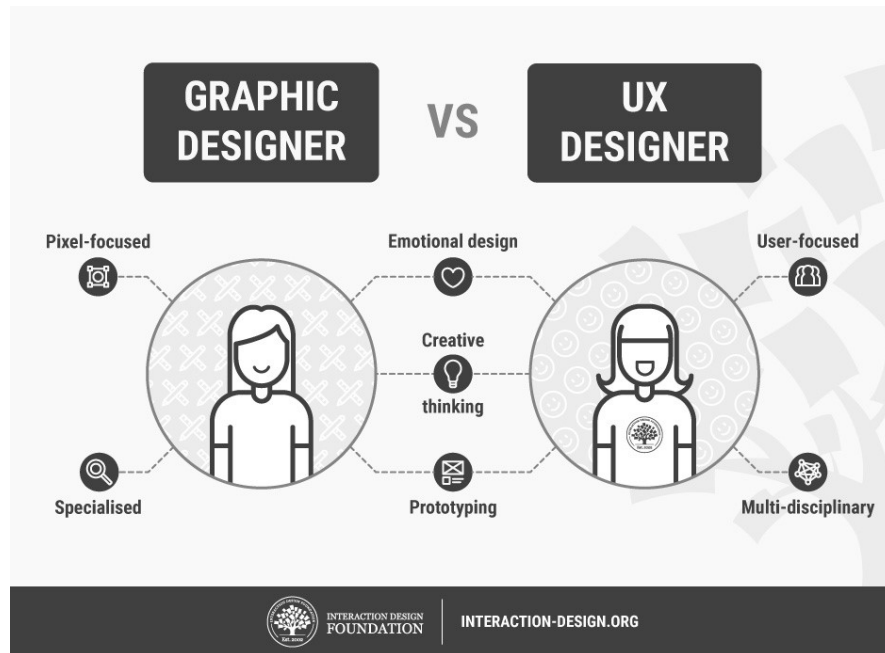


Figure 2 Graphic Designer Vs. UX Designer,

Image provided by Public-Media.Interaction-Design.org a non-profit initiative.

Digital Trends that Influence Skill Change

Once there was a clear separation between graphic designers and web developers. A designer's job was to make things look good, consistent and convey a message. The techs job is to build the structure in which one can manipulate. The careers looked as different as art vs. math. What once was this separation is now blurred and designers with skills in both fields are looking more appealing to companies (Stinson). This seems to be the age of crossover and overlap, where the more skills one has the more valuable that person becomes. Many companies want to branch out into the world of eCommerce and many are looking into UX design to help them (Hardy). This change has been brought on by many trends in social media. The most common trends that web sites are developing are computer to mobile consistency, video and user navigation (Hardy).

Projected Salaries and Job Market

When most people think of design, the career they would name will be graphic designer. Those that are not in the design world would assume that graphic designers design logos, brands,

packaging, but when it comes to web, most would say graphic designers have nothing to do with web design. There obviously nothing wrong with being a graphic designer but it is safe to say that the skills in the digital world would be beneficial to have. According to PayScale the national average salary for a graphic designer is \$40,000 while those in the UX designer field gets \$74,000 (Siang; PayScale). Figure 3 details the range of average U.S. salaries in several design careers. Graphic design has become an umbrella term for entry level design jobs. Many graphic designers end up branching out into different careers, usually with more skills and benefits. Graphic designers that take up basic web design skills typically increase salary by 2% (PayScale). Those who know UX and graphic design earn \$70,000 (PayScale). If a company needs someone that can build a brand identity and write some lines of JavaScript, why hire two separate people when one knows how to do both well (Stinson).

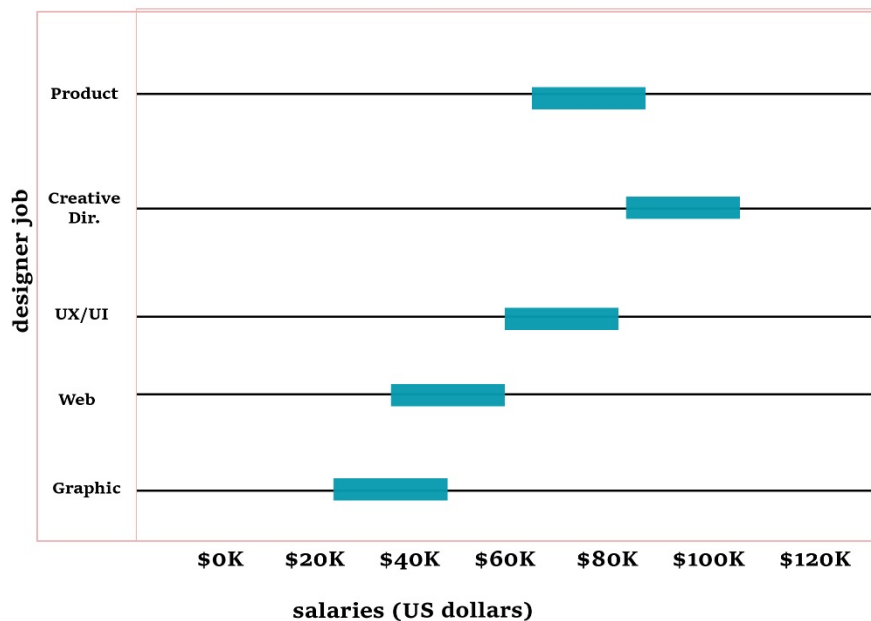


Figure 3 Designer and Salaries

data compiled from PayScale.com

Gaps in NMC program

This report so far highlights the subject of UX/UI design, and how these skills are useful to digital marketing. This also shows that colleges like NMC could benefit from including a course on UX design to the Visual Communications and CIT programs. Cheryl Myers who is an Adjunct Instructor at NMC and User Experience professional, says that "when it comes to web-related (design), there is a separation-students are either designers or technically-focused-there is no overlap". The classes in the visual communications primarily focus on teaching the elements and principles of design from print to digital mediums. In later classes students work with clients to design logos, brand identities and advertisements that will help the client sell its service or product. The CIT program focuses on teaching code to program software and hardware as well as learning some web development. In either field, students will have to work with web and learn eCommerce at some time. Learning how to appeal to users is a useful insight to employers. The

future of design will call for more of these hybrid designers "not quite pure engineers, not quite pure designers" (Stinson).

Why We Should Include a UX and UI design course

To help students better prepare for the future of the digital design market should we include a UX and UI design course to the visual communications programs? When Cheryl Myers, NMC web design instructor, was asked this question, she stated "Yes, I think it would be valuable to the student's future job prospected to learn more UX and UI". She goes on to say she does include her experience with UX into the courses she teaches. Having more crossovers in the two fields of study could attract more students. This could also lead to interaction and internship opportunities from the outside community. Myers agrees saying that "Many of the students in the design classes are very new to school and don't often have a sense of the potential is for learning web design".

Challenges

If some classes have overlap in the program already when why have a separate class for UX design? When adding a class to a curriculum one must question the need for it and well as cost. It is important to consider who could be teaching this course and what fields of study might adapt it into their program. Another question is if the class should be required for graduation or extracurricular.

Solutions

Some solutions to adding this course is to look at if a current course can be changed or combined to make this course. It is important to consider how beneficial a class like this could be, it is a topic that could help students not only design but the CIT and business programs as well. Many instructors have the potential to teach this subject and many have touched upon it in other courses. Many teachers and students see the desire for course that reflects new online markets and *real-world* experiences.

Conclusion

Although education tries to prepare students for the real world by offering skill building and experience, it can only keep up so fast with the current market. For graphic designers to have a complete edge in the future they will have to learn more skills for web. These skills include more coding like JavaScript and interactive programming. Students will need develop user personas and stories to help identify their needs/wants. Students will use these user stories and research to develop a skeleton of a site, product, or app. They then will test the final products usability based on user feedback. NMC can help with this problem by adding an UX/UI design class. This class will help bridge the gap between graphic and web designers at this college. UX design covers many useful topics that could range from business, marketing, design and computers.

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Myers, Cheryl. Adjunct Instructor at NMC and User Experience professional. Personal interview, 20 Apr. 2018

Appendix A.

Cheryl Myers Interview

Q:1. Do you feel like there is a separation between Vis Comm and CIT programs?

A: I can't speak for the program in its entirety but when it comes to web-related, there is a separation—students are either designers or technically-focused—there's no overlap.

Q:2 Would it be beneficial to add a UX and UI design class to the Vis Comm programs?

A: Yes. My background is web development and UX/UI so I tend to teach the vis comm web design 147 & 247 from the aspect of UX/UI design. I think it would be valuable to the student's future job prospected to learn more UX and UI. I challenge you to look for a job posting for a web designer, a UI designer and a web developer; there's a lot of cross over at entry level. Money is very lucrative in any of the fields for those who have the design and the technical chops.

Q:3 How is social media currently affecting the graphic design industry?

A: Social media is affecting every industry. The biggest opportunity for designers specifically is to be able to put presence out there that is on par with a designer from anywhere in the world. It used to be you had to leave home/northern Michigan to get exposure; now you can gain the same jobs and exposure as anyone else in the world if you have the talent and put in the work.

Q:4 Do you feel like anything is missing from the current programs?

A: See below.

Q:5 If there a problem with the status quo -- the way things are currently being done -- what would be the solution?

A: I would say more crossovers in the programs. Many of the students in the web design classes are very new to school and don't often have a sense of what the potential is for learning web design. I feel like the web design classes need to have access to real-world assignments and an understanding of the opportunity.