Social Change UK

Research and
marketing that matters

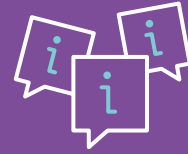# People first:

How to lead from the front and
put the user experience at the
heart of everything you do.

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Introduction.

Public and third sector organisations provide vital services to millions of people every day. In your own organisation, thousands of people a day are connecting with you in many different ways. As key messengers within the community you serve, the information you deliver must be relevant, timely, effective and accessible.

You know better than anyone that public service is evolving fast. Services are adapting and becoming more digitally focussed to support easy access, improve efficiency and deliver effectively. But the challenge lies with the ability of digital services to support people online in a way that is equal to, or better than the level of service they're currently receiving in person.

Regardless of whether the service is offline or online, it is important that users have a positive, seamless experience when accessing your services. There should be no barriers to accessing public services. The best way to do this is to make sure the design of your digital service focuses on a person's wants and needs. After all, that's what public service is — to serve people and communities.

Digital design for people.

When designing digital services, it is important to consider the touchpoints – this is where the person [your service user] comes into contact with your service, such as via a website.

When it comes to websites, good practice suggests it's counterproductive to host large amounts of information for your user to access and expect them to navigate their way to their desired goal. You might have a lot to say and communicate, but having lots of fantastic content that a user can't navigate or understand will result in a poor experience for them and the outcomes will be poor. The last thing you want is for your audience to form a negative association with your service, and not return.

The best way to avoid this, is to guide your user around the website using 'nudges' and prompts, directing them to the correct place. Crucially, carrying out user research can help you to find out exactly what your audience is looking for when they approach the service or website. This research will then lead you to design the best journeys or pathways to get people to where you need them to be.

Understanding your user is incredibly important for creating a positive experience on a website. It is also incredibly important if you wish to retain them as regular website users.

What is UX?
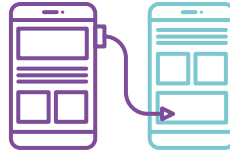
A well thought-out, effortless user experience can have a significant bearing on whether someone decides to return to your website, sign up for a support service, or continue to interact with your organisation.

User experience (UX) embraces all the stages of an individual's interaction with an organisation, its services and its website. This includes branding, design, usability and function of a system or service.

More often than not, your user knows what they want to achieve when accessing your website. By providing a clear way for them to do this, you are helping them to solve their problem quickly and efficiently.

What is UI?

User interface (UI) refers to the visual elements of a user's interaction with an organisation's website, such as layout, typography and stylings — basically what the user 'sees'.

A website's interface or appearance can essentially 'make' or 'break' your audience's perception of an organisation. The more intuitive your design, layout and stylings are, the easier your user will understand how to use the website. This can all help with retention or successful completion of their goal — booking an appointment, signing up to a service or programme or downloading an important guide.

By embedding both UX and UI effectively, you can create meaningful and positive experiences for anyone interacting with your organisation, helping to reinforce the relationship they have with your organisation or service.

Good user experience can be achieved by undertaking thorough user research, testing and journey planning research. Essentially, the better you know your user, the better you can cater for their needs and make sure the right information is in front of them.
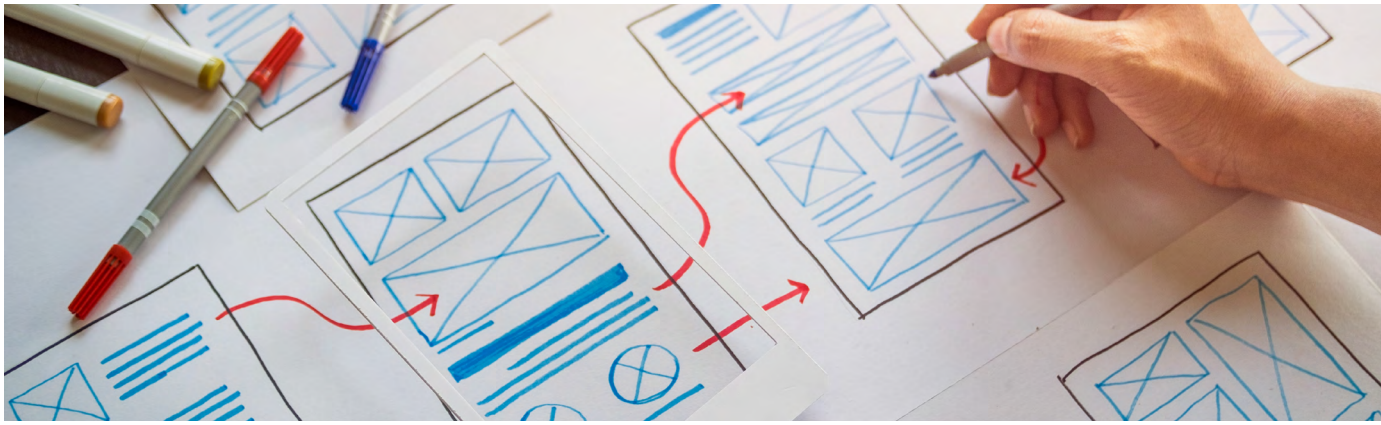
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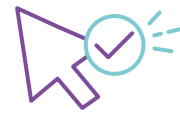
Understanding the importance of user experience and user interface is great, but how do we put this into practice? When designing a website, there are a few key things you need to consider:

- Ease of use – intuitive navigation and effortless usability is key. You don't want your audience to find using a website a huge effort, as this creates a barrier for them using it again or making a recommendation. If the website is too complex, your user is more likely to default back to their previous behaviour of contacting public services directly, or not at all. So much for reducing the number of telephone calls to your offices...

- Reducing the number of steps – the longer it takes your user to find what they are looking for, the more likely they are to 'drop off', lose interest or become frustrated. Your user usually has an outcome in mind and by placing content where they would look for it, you keep them happy and they are more likely to consult for information in the future.

- Clear call to action – this means making sure your website does exactly what it says. If a button says 'contact us', then that's exactly what it should allow a user to do. They don't want to be redirected to a page on how the service has been running for 20 years or to a long content page where the contact details are not clearly communicated.

- Review and refine - you need to make sure you are continuing to test, review and refine your website design, usability and pathways. The danger of not embedding a constant review process is that you can lose touch with what your audience are looking for when interacting with your organisation, or the 'impression' you leave on them. In short, you risk losing the engagement of your audience – the very people you serve - resulting in them going elsewhere for their information or using other means of contact such as telephone, or in person visits – a more intensive strain on resources where a 'self service' aproach could have been taken.

User experience in real life.

So how can we apply user experience to everyday tasks? Below are a few examples where considering the person first can demonstrate how service change could help, but also hinder a person's journey of using a service.

The Car Key Conundrum – overcomplicating an action

The end goal for good user experience and effective pathway design, is to provide the user with the simplest method to achieve their goal. Let's use an example of an activity that a lot of people carry out every day – unlocking your car with a key and starting the car. A simple action with few steps and a clear outcome.

Take key out of pocket ······> Press button on the key ····

····> Unlock the door ····> Put key in the ignition ·····> Start car ⊘

What if a digital alternative is developed to replace the car key, which is an app to unlock your car for you. The steps look like this:

Take phone out ·····> Unlock phone ·····> Open app ·····

····> Open menu ·····> Find button to open the car ·········

····> Unlock the door ·····> Put phone away ·····> Find key ····

····> Put key in the ignition ·····> Start car ⊘

This shows that the introduction of the app is actually a longer process, with double the amount of actions to achieve the same outcome. The digitisation of this action offers no benefit to the user and is actually a more complex pathway, so a user is unlikely to adopt this new behaviour. The only way a user would transfer to the new behaviour would be if the alternative offered a benefit or a quicker process to complete the action.

Removing GP booking frustration

Another example of a regularly occurring user pathway is booking an appointment to see the GP. With this, the user has a very clear outcome in mind - the quickest way to secure an appointment, in the fewest steps.

It might be that their 'default' approach is to ring the doctor's surgery and join the queue of 20 other people trying to book an appointment at the same time – often a frustrating, time intensive experience and a pressure point to the service dealing with the wave of incoming appointment requests.

So how could we improve this, with our user in mind? The goal is to remove frustration and get your user to their goal in the fewest steps. Introducing an alternative booking pathway, such as an online booking system, would remove the wait time and also decrease the time spent answering the phone by the GP practice.

However, the thing to bear in mind is that the user will only change their behaviour if the alternative approach is of benefit to them. A user is unlikely to use a booking service if it is over complicated, requests too much information, or has too many actions to complete the task. When providing a service alternative, simple, easy to understand pathways offer a benefit to your user, making them more likely to change their behaviour and adopt the new method – in this case booking an appointment online.

Digital services in the public/third sector – what does the future look like?

By taking a user focussed approach to designing digital public services or how they are interacted with, you can improve the quality, timeliness and effectiveness of an intervention. Ultimately this can save public money in the long run, by reducing unnecessary extended support time and reducing instances of users accessing the wrong service through a lack of understanding. The aim is to provide the user with the best solution with the fewest steps in the quickest time.

Taking the time to understand a user's journey and how they interact with different elements of your website increases their perception of your website or digital service, helping you to become an enabler for finding the information they need quickly, and removing barriers which may prevent them from accessing resources or support.

How we can help.

Our team of experts have dedicated more than two decades to people and behaviour, understanding why people do what they do, and understanding attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours, wants and needs.

We have helped many public and third sector organisations to develop innovative solutions to 'better' public service products and services online and offline with our 'people first' approach to design and delivery.

If you would like support to 'better' your public services, or perhaps you know what to do but just lack the time and resource to do it, you can **get in touch with a member of our team.**

We only work with organisations that want to bring about positive social change, and people who want to do good. This is you… let's work together.

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