

WHITEPAPER

Balancing UI and UX

A Guide to Budgeting & Planning for a Successful
User-Centered Design Project



Balancing UI and UX

Chances are, you started building your product right off the bat without focusing too much on user experience, and for a good reason: time-to-value.

Your product has been out in the market, and it's getting traction. But now that you're getting serious about scaling, you may be receiving backlash from users and investors regarding the user experience.

Maybe over the years, you've "bulked up" the product, and it's become a bit clunky with extra features. Or perhaps the navigation bar has gotten out of control. Still, these seem like minor issues; you've poured a ton of engineering resources into developing great functionality.

At this point, it may feel like updating or modernizing the UI will be the easiest and quickest fix to help you improve the user experience.

But we are here to tell you (honestly and respectfully): It won't.

Instead of wasting time figuring out how to beautify your product, you should be asking bigger questions. Questions that will help you figure out if you have a product that can dominate your market.

We'll dig into these a little further down. But first, let's explore the relationship between UI and UX.

Is it a UI or UX Problem? That's a Trick Question

When we look at the differences between UI and UX, the first and most important thing to note is that there are no pure user interface problems. Everything exists in the context of user experience.

So it's not about UX vs. UI, but rather about learning to take a broader perspective on your product challenges. Rather than hoping that "making everything pretty" will fix the user experience, it's about digging deeper with your users to identify the root cause of — for example — low conversion rates.

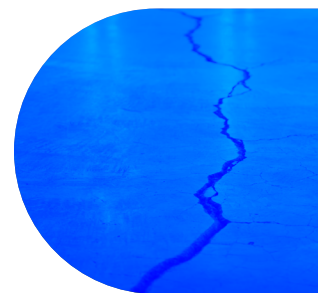
Don't waste time painting over a crack

Here's an analogy. Imagine you have a visible crack in one of your walls at home. You don't want to treat the symptom, i.e., paint the wall so the crack is no longer visible. That would be silly, right? But imagine you do. You slap some topcoat over the crack. Only to realize a few days later the crack has spread across the room and is now also visible on the adjacent wall.

When user engagement is lacking in a product, it seems like the simplest fix will be to redo the branding/user interface; "pretty up" the look and feel. Add some bells and whistles. But a few months later, you'll find that user experience problems persist. Engagement has not improved. And now you need to throw more money and time at the problem to go deeper and figure out where the leak actually is. This is where user experience comes in.

Unfortunately, we see many companies "painting over cracks" or, in other words, looking for a surface-level solution to their UX challenges.

Often, they'll wind up in an engagement with an agency or freelance consultant who doesn't have the experience to understand that a short-term, "visual-focused" UI solution will not be a long-term fix.



Questions to diagnose the root cause of your UX challenge

Instead of asking how quickly your product can be modernized, here's what we ask to dig in and diagnose what's going on:

- How much of the market share do you currently have?
- How much unconquered territory is left in the market? How many users are not using your product?
- Who are your best competitors, and why are people using their products more than yours?

If you aren't (yet!) the market leader

Perhaps only a niche group of users are using your product. It may be time to consider why the rest of the market is not. And why they're using your competitor's product.

Consider the following questions:

- How well do you know your users? Their pain points? Their journeys?
- Are you making decisions based on user insights?
- Are you actively user-testing to validate your solutions?

If you aren't 100% sure about your users: their needs, pain points, and journeys then you may be having UX problems. Why?

User needs are about understanding *what they're ultimately trying to accomplish*, regardless of the solution they're using today. For example:

User need: "I need to listen to music to feel motivated during my workout."

In short, a user need explains why a user wants to go on a journey in the first place.

User experience is shaped by a multitude of interactions, and a user journey illustrates this flow, providing a comprehensive, chronological recording of all the interactions, and accompanying emotional states. For example:

User journey: “I download and open the Spotify mobile app, create an account, search for a playlist that looks right, select the “pump up” playlist and start playing it.”

A user journey will help uncover what users are doing today and their highs and lows regarding current processes. These insights around user journey and needs are invaluable as you seek to diagnose the root cause of your challenge.

If you haven’t engaged directly with users to validate their needs and challenges, you may not fully understand the problem you are solving for. And if you aren’t actively testing your solution on users, it’s unlikely you have a handle on what a good solution would look like. When we take the time to immerse ourselves in the user’s perspective, this is when we can begin to extract valuable insights to deepen our empathy for the user.

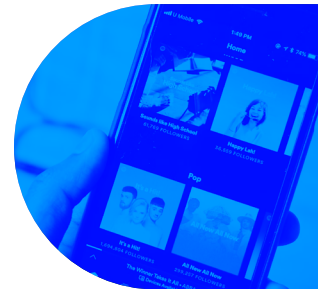
At UXReactor, we use research methods like in-depth user interviews, ethnographic studies, competitive benchmarking, etc., to gather these insights. We then apply those insights to evaluate the quality of the current user experience.

A few years back, we collaborated with two ex-Telsa technology executives to develop a UX-first enterprise application for auto dealerships. Our partner, Tekion co-founder Guru Sankararaman shared:

“User experience is not given a lot of thought in enterprise software. Whereas, at Tekion, we were determined to build our platform in the most intuitive way possible.”

– Guru Sankararaman, Tekion Co-Founder

If you want to go global with your product, taking the user interface route will not help you if you don’t have answers to the most important questions we’ve outlined above.



So, now what?

By now, you may be beginning to see that what seemed like a user interface problem actually has deeper roots in the user experience and may require a more in-depth solution.

This is good news! Because when a much bigger issue is just under the surface, any money you spend on UI projects will be 100% wasted.

And opting to “paint over the crack” rather than deal with the root cause will result in lost revenue and business momentum. You’ll just be giving your competition more time to catch up and lure your customers away.

Think of undertaking a UX project as an investment that will set your business up for success in the long haul.

Determining a budget for a UX project

How much of an investment? Prospects often come to us thinking that taking the UX route will always require a huge investment of time and capital to update all parts of the product for all users.

UX projects can indeed be time-consuming and a significant investment. But when done right, this approach will yield greater results and ROI.

If budget is an obstacle, we can gradually update the product over time, which breaks down the project investment a bit. Many of our clients opt to take this iterative approach.

If you are looking to determine a budget for your UX project, consider:

- **The value of lost opportunities.** What problem are you trying to solve that is leading to lost revenue? Do you have a user churn problem? Are you losing users and money? How much is that costing you?
- **The value of new opportunities.** Think about the growth this investment will facilitate. What is the value of new opportunities that will enable you to capitalize on?
- **The value across your organization.** Which teams will get value out of this investment? Can they contribute to the budget?

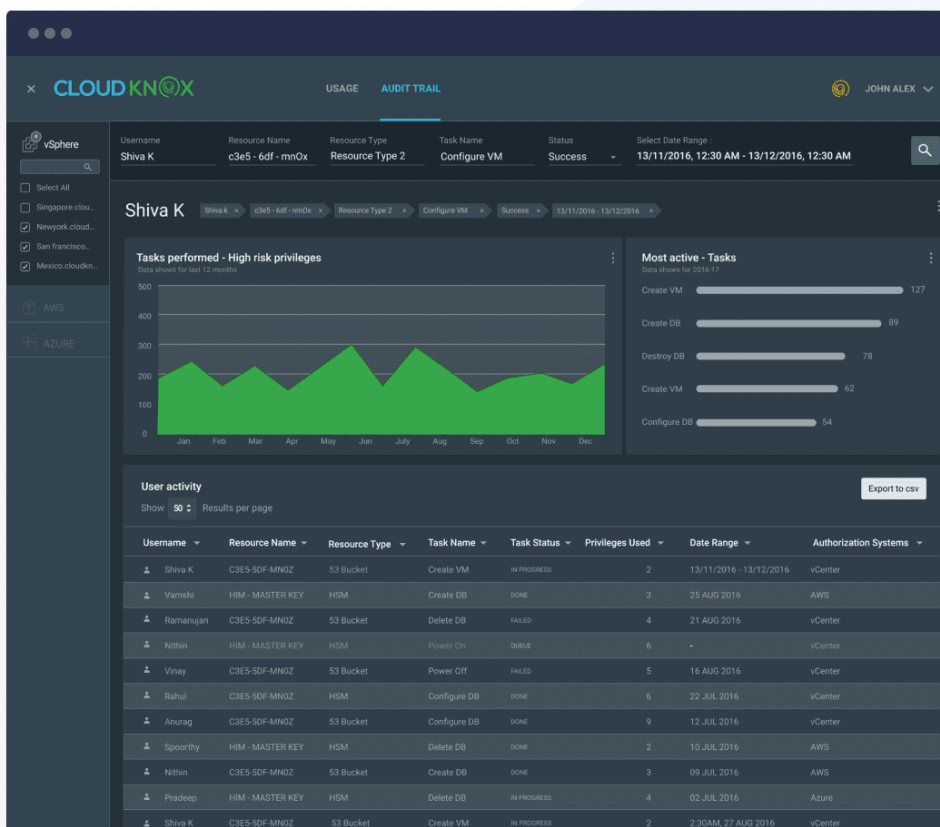
Considering revenues lost due to churn versus revenue growth, PLUS the long-term competitive advantage of a complete product transformation, a \$100,000 monthly investment, for example, becomes much easier to justify.

How a UX advantage earned this cybersecurity startup an acquisition deal with Microsoft

One of our cybersecurity clients—CloudKnox—proved the ROI of UX by winning an acquisition deal with Microsoft. In 2016, Balaji Parimi partnered with us on venture design for his cybersecurity startup.

We collaborated with the CloudKnox team to prototype an innovative product concept. We then validated the concept with advisors and customers. When we went to raise venture funds, we already had a proven prototype to showcase.

As the startup grew, our initial venture design stood the test of time: the system and brand remained essentially unchanged. And within just five years, Balaji's CIEM was [acquired by Microsoft](#).



Determining a timeline for a UX project

How long will a UX project take vs. a UI project? Well, you've heard it before, Rome was not built in a day. With a UX project, you will invest about 150% more up-front time than a UI project, but that will pay dividends with greater efficiencies down the line.

In that timeframe, we can use our UX approach to develop an enhanced most valuable product (MVP). We'd start by conducting research, benchmarking, and validation with your users. This step is crucial because it will reveal the real problems we're tackling and a clear path to success.

Once we are clear on the project goals and have accurately diagnosed the problem, we use the next phase to solve this problem.

Rushing things can result in messy shortcuts. But doing it right from the beginning can save you headaches down the road. In short, it's a smarter investment to spend the necessary time to reach your goal rather than putting bandaids on the problem.

In conclusion, the issue is rarely just UI... or features, for that matter. Best-in-class products and services are designed by teams who put users and experience at the center of everything they do.

Ready to get to the root cause of your product challenges?

[Request a consultation, and we'll start exploring your product challenges together.](#)



UXReactor far exceeded our expectations. They went beyond the user interface and vastly improved the user workflows while crafting a new and much-improved user experience for our complex enterprise application."

Wendy Kastner
Head of Design
Extreme Networks



UXReactor specializes in eXperience design for B2B software companies. We help teams and organizations of all maturity optimize their user- centered focus to deliver useful, usable, and desirable products.

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