



Thoughts and perspectives from the UX Foundry

The Art and Science of User Experience

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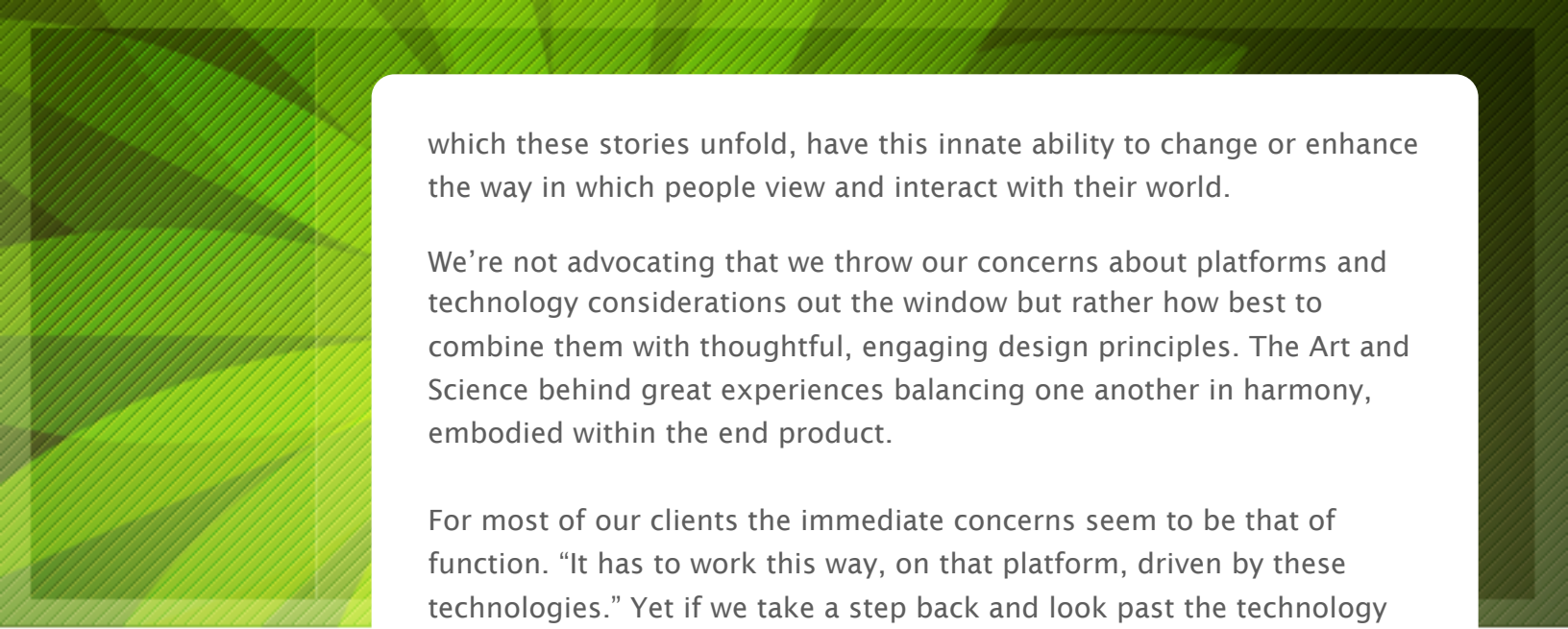
Great experiences have this innate ability to change or enhance the way in which we view and interact with our world.

As we look back at the last year in the Rich Internet Application (RIA) market we begin to see some patterns emerge. Patterns and languages circling around the idea that true change has, and always will, come from the delicate balance between Art and Science. Not “form vs. function” but rather “form and function.”

This idea that “design and development” are the propagators of change. Existing, not in separate spaces, but rather living and breathing as one. Each feeding off of the other to foster new thoughts and experiences that ultimately have the ability to change the course of a business or even the mindset of a generation in motion.

We’ve noticed something interesting, not only within our client base but within the marketplace in general. We’ve noticed that business are becoming less and less concerned about the delivery method (platform) of the end product and are becoming much more aware of how they’re connecting with their users. What types of stories are we telling about ourselves or our products. And in which ways are we letting the users unpack these stories (the experience).

Businesses that historically have approached things in a purely scientific manner are now trying to engage their users at a more fundamental level. Through great experiences. And great experiences, the way in



which these stories unfold, have this innate ability to change or enhance the way in which people view and interact with their world.

We're not advocating that we throw our concerns about platforms and technology considerations out the window but rather how best to combine them with thoughtful, engaging design principles. The Art and Science behind great experiences balancing one another in harmony, embodied within the end product.

For most of our clients the immediate concerns seem to be that of function. "It has to work this way, on that platform, driven by these technologies." Yet if we take a step back and look past the technology we see that the end user (the people actually using our applications) are all about the experience. How quickly and efficiently can I get done what I need to. What's the experience that makes this better than it was before. And for the most part they don't, nor should they, care about the technology driving the experience. Technology should be looked at as the enabler to great design.

Up until recently the tension that existed between the art and science of user centric design has always been one of great misunderstanding. On one hand you had the community of developers (computer scientists) wrapping their success around the functionality of the end product while, on the other hand, designers embraced success through its beauty. But the left hand didn't really care what the right hand was doing. As long as nothing was broken, it looked beautiful, and the client was happy then life itself was good.

But ever so slowly the larger community of users began to beg for something more. Applications were becoming sterile, lifeless, familiar, and painfully lacking in an kind of emotional attachment. The "Art and Science" was missing out on the experience side of things. Then suddenly everything collapsed and the lights went out.

We all woke up to the realization that things were never going to be the same. Users wanted to be inspired, engaged, and connected in ways like never before. And suddenly experience mattered!

In 1998 Apple introduced the "Bondi Blue" imac into a marketplace that was saturated with iron clad gray boxes. And the market let out a deep

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sigh of relief. Thoughts and perceptions about the future of computing were profoundly changed. The way its always been done was radically reborn as design and development began to blur the lines.

We no longer had Art and Science surviving within their respective corners but rather embraced and accepted as instigators of change. One entity working together. One experience! And Apple continues to lead the way with the mindset that true change comes from great experiences. And only great experiences can occur when these two worlds (art and science) are intimately connected.



So as we've begun to unpack the importance of experience here are some guiding thoughts we consider as we begin building and designing a user centric experience.

1. **Who's the audience?** Seems relatively simple but every audience has different needs and if you don't understand your audience then you can't accurately invite them into a story that makes sense to them.
2. **How can recent advancements in technology enhance the experience?** How the user moves through the story really is the building blocks for the experience.
 - a. How are things hidden from the user
 - b. How are things revealed to the user
 - c. What transitional elements move the user through the story
3. **How can recent advancements in technology be a hinderance to the experience?** The old adage "just because you have whitespace doesn't mean you have to fill it up" holds true for technology as well. Just because there's something new on the market doesn't necessarily mean that it will be right solution for every project.
4. **What's the users end-goal?** Understanding the users priorities, what needs to be accomplished, is the quickest way to begin uncovering the story that needs to be told.
5. **Constantly ask yourself if there's a better way!** Challenging current perceptions will undoubtedly reveal new paths which will ultimately reveal new perceptions that will be challenged.

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6. **Are we following current trends or creating our own?** Looking at external influencers such as cultural, technological, design, and business trends gives us a great springboard to launch from.

So what does User Experience (UX) mean at Universal Mind? Simply answered we have Technologists who crave beauty and Artists who embrace the bits and bytes of a world constantly under the influence of change. **We are intimately aware that one does not exist without the other.** And no matter how much time or energy we've taken to develop a thoughtful engaging interaction its ultimately the users who dictate and control the experience.

In a world that is overly saturated with technology and the ever so present visual clutter of messages trying to vie for our attention we, as Designers and Technologists, must come to the realization that, generally speaking, (consumers) don't understand the intricacies of our world, nor do they care to. For the most part they don't understand the specialized world to which we are submersed within. They don't understand what went into making that car look good or making that application work a certain way. For the most part they don't understand the time, energy, and cost that goes into making their lives simpler, more organized, more productive, and in some cases more disruptive. But what they do know is a good experience from a bad one! When compromises have been made the story ceases to exist and loyalty of brand, product, and services slowly begin to evaporate. Be it a consumer, financial analyst, teenager, or business owner, Experience matters!

At Universal Mind we're seeing this shift in the marketplace from high-end technology solutions to high-end brand experiences wrapped around best-in-breed technologies. Technology is no longer leading and likewise design no longer carries its own weight. Its the experience that matters! And to survive one must have a firm grasp that great experiences are enabled through a thoughtful relationship between Art and Science.

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