6 considerations
for better UX
in 2024

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It's hard to overstate how important digital customer experience is to the health of a business. PwC puts it starkly in the title of its report on the topic—Experience is Everything—and the statistics they uncover back this up. PwC found that people would pay a premium of 7% to 16% for everything from airline tickets to coffee if they got a great customer experience. But after one bad experience, 32% of customers said they'd walk away from a brand they loved.

Customer experience (CX) encompasses a wide range of interactions with a brand: shopping in physical stores, talking to customer service reps, using the actual product or service, and so on. But increasingly, the dominant CX is digital: customer portals, robust and rich web apps, mobile apps, and more. Modern business operations and customer interactions require digital foundations that provide a superior UX and customer experience.

The following insights summarize our view on how UX and customer experience will evolve in 2024—and where your digital strategy should evolve, too.

1 AI is a powerful tool, but don't get swept away by the hype

AI was already a huge topic before the release of ChatGPT in November 2022, which increased the hype exponentially. If the C-suite or board of directors hasn't inquired about the digital team's AI strategy yet, they most certainly will soon.

But it's important to remember that AI is a tool meant to be used by humans—and it's not an end in itself. Blowtorches are fun to use, and almost everyone looks cool using one, but they're not always the best tool to perform a task or solve a problem. If you need to hammer a nail into a piece of wood, a blowtorch is definitely not going to help. In fact, it will probably melt the nail and set the board on fire. Don't incorporate AI into your digital tools and strategy unless it is the best way to solve a problem and provides business value.

Also, consider that AI applications don't have to be sexy to be very valuable to your UX goals. Certainly, there are the incredible human-like chatbots that are all the rage, but AI can create a ton of value in less exciting, but arguably more practical and valuable use cases, such as:

- **Summarization:** Generative AI can support teams by more quickly analyzing research and then summarizing it succinctly for UX designers, which can help research teams and ultimately lead to a better understanding of users and their needs.

- **Workflow automation:** AI can optimize processes and, via automation, provide surprising efficiencies.

- **Generation of project plans, with top risks noted:** Again, this can save a team lead a great deal of time, even if the plan requires revisions.

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But make sure your technology infrastructure is ready for AI and generative AI well before you begin a deployment. As a client once said to us when discussing their thoughts on AI, "We need to get to clean plates before we start serving caviar and champagne."

AI is a complex, resource-intensive technology, and success requires the following:

- IT infrastructures are streamlined and consolidated

- Data is clean and content is inventoried

- The infrastructure can provide the computing and networking power required for acceptable AI performance

- There are pre-defined expectations and goals to mitigate the massive ethical risks inherent within the technology

Lastly, if it's unclear whether AI is the right solution to a problem and you need more evidence to make a decision, consider pursuing a proof of concept to test out theories and provide more clarity about the way forward.

2 Get on board with inclusive design

Inclusive design has been a topic of conversation among design-minded leaders for years, but it's more important than ever before to think seriously about how inclusive design should influence the future of your digital tools and services. And you are going to need to start making these choices early on rather than waiting to be asked about it by the C-suite—or even your customers.

Inclusive design isn't just a moral imperative—though it is, because we have an obligation to design the digital world for the largest number of people possible—there are strong business reasons to make inclusive design a core consideration in your technology and designed experiences. Anyone implementing AI solutions will have ethical risks to consider, and inaccessible experiences always pose the risk of litigation and the loss of potential revenue. To put it plainly, poor customer experiences will ultimately always harm your reputation.

Inclusive design is ***essential*** to the success of brands that want to ***reach ubiquity***.

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For example, as a company becomes digitally mature and design-led, design can sometimes butt heads with brand teams as they work to retain a strong CX. This can cause inconsistent brand or digital experiences across tools, apps, websites, ads, etc. What's required is a design system with inclusive design captured in the system so that they can better communicate standards to brand teams.

More importantly, many well known brands whose product is software operate in a design system-first and design-forward way, and they've made inclusive design a fundamental part of their digital strategy. This means that they haven't implemented inclusive design as an afterthought—saving them money and time, and mitigating the risk of poor implementation of inclusive design that should have been considered from the very beginning.

3 Your CX needs an omnichannel strategy

In many large organizations with complex digital infrastructures, it's common to see siloed user experiences where the left hand often doesn't know what the right hand is doing internally. This is frustrating for users, because if they cross those UX siloes, they experience friction like having to repeat processes that they've already completed.

An omnichannel approach ensures digital experiences are consistent across the brand so that, for instance, a customer interacting via text won't have to start all over when they go to the website.

But enabling omnichannel requires digital maturity, particularly when it comes to data. For example, today, many smart organizations are pursuing digital personalization efforts to solve challenges in customer engagement, step completion, and reducing abandonment rates by recommending next-best steps depending on where someone is in a journey. In order to make all of the disparate parts of this journey feel more cohesive, leaders need a firm grasp on their customer data, the actions customers are taking, and the tools they need to bring all of this information together.
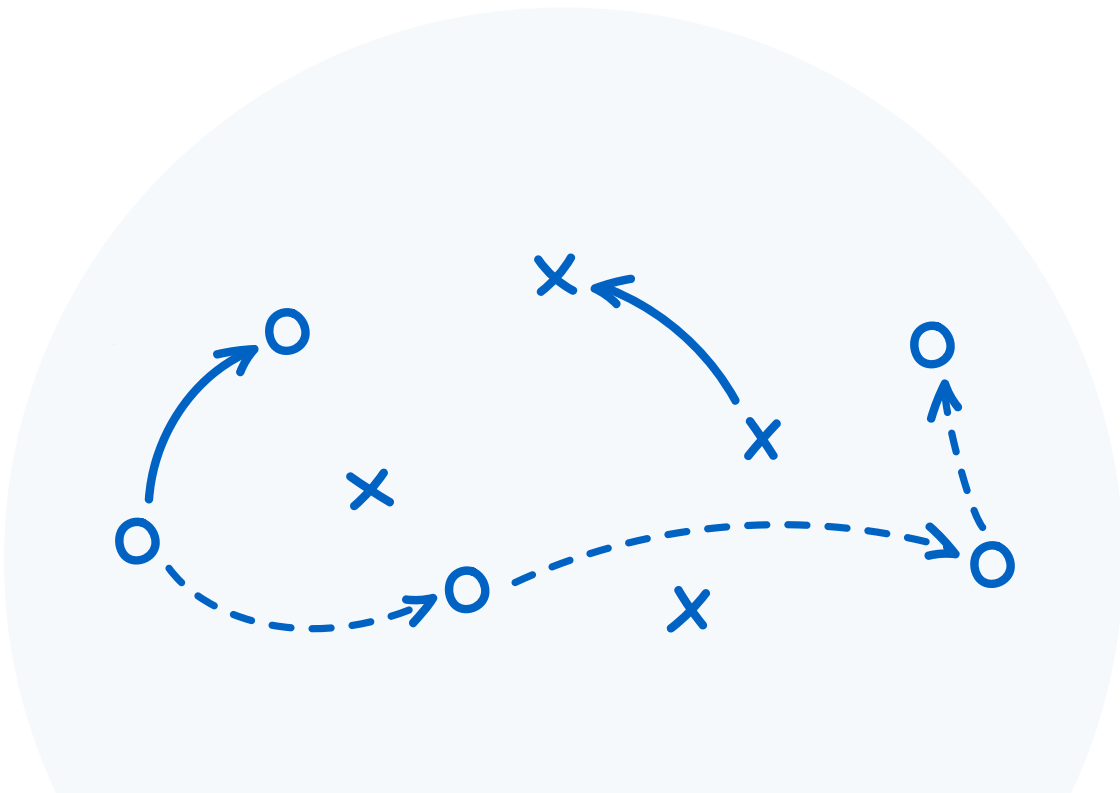
4 Clean up your data act!

We've stated a few times already that clean, well-formatted and organized data is essential for much of where UX is headed, but it's also foundational for simply developing modern applications.

Cleaning and reformatting data can be a tricky process, especially when you have critical legacy apps that require this data. Legacy technology may require data to be viewed and presented in a very specific way, and changing data formats without accounting for these older apps can break them.

For example, Think Company works with a client that uses a digital ordering system at its retail locations. The company relies on broad data to manage customer-facing options, but they needed to create location-specific options to support better inventory management. To make this possible, the data set had to be cleaned and formatted first to support customizations in a scalable way—setting them up for less headache later.

The work of looking internally at your data, information, and systems seems like an impossibly challenging effort, but doing this work will ultimately set you up for success while saving time and money.

As mentioned above, clean data is closely related to your chances of success in other areas of modern UX. In AI implementation, good data will be the crux of your effort and must be step one on your roadmap. In the context of inclusive design, it's important to remember that data can be biased—and biased data produces biased results. For omnichannel CX efforts, bad data will ultimately produce bad personalization.

5 Now is the time to invest in highly-strategic UX research

Far too many companies use the wrong tools to solve the wrong problem. We've always recommended that before starting a large UX effort or overhaul, leaders should conduct research into the voice of the customer (VoC) to make sure you're understanding the real issue. After all, it could be that unexpected issues, like service design or logistics, are the real cause of customer unhappiness.

If you're already investing in research, you're well on your way to getting ahead of your competition. In today's business environment, it's important to dial in an approach to conducting research so that the results yield specifics for improvement—which in turn proves out better ROI and leads to more research investment.

More specifically, investments in research on employee-facing tools/processes are an often-underlooked but essential part of understanding how to improve customer experience. But these efforts are usually delayed in favor of priorities that are understood to immediately create revenue: the launch of new products, client-facing technologies, new ad campaigns, and so on. And all too often, the people in leadership who sign off for a research project assume they know best (because many have held these roles before) and that the organization doesn't need the investment. The ROI of improving the employee experience (EX) can be harder to justify to executives than are CX improvements, especially in tough economies, but internal research often produces hard data that points to EX as the most valuable place to invest.

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For example, here's how situations can play out when a customer comes to us for help. The company's customer acquisition KPIs are down, and management is sure the problem is a lack of personalization in its UX. Leadership invests in an expensive personalization project, complete with an AI deployment, but even after the new capabilities go live, KPIs remain down. When the company conducts more targeted internal research to understand their systems better, they realize the problem stems from a business process issue creating delays in acting on leads.

It's also true that most companies lack a background in research. They don't understand how to approach sourcing feedback and identifying bias or ensure a representative mix and quantity of participants. Conducting research today requires the right skill set to produce useful, representative data. Doing so without a targeted and strategic approach will simply reinforce your own biases or, just as bad, produce results that don't reflect reality.

Also, remember that research isn't done once implementation begins. Ongoing research will continue to identify how the implementation is affecting roles, processes, and other key aspects of the business.

6 UX is now a senior-level function

In years past, UX has often been embedded in execution teams, especially at larger, more complex organizations that rely on the strength of their digital tools to serve customers. Savvy organizations are coming to see that UX is now a broader, more essential function in their business. It's no longer just a plug-and-play resource.

Today, UX is also not limited to design or technology. Often, we'll see a company that has a UX function, but the development side isn't required to follow the UX team's lead, and so other pressures (budget, time, etc.) result in their insights going unimplemented. Achieving a high-quality, research-based UX that's consistent across the brand and incorporates inclusive design requires support and direction from the top.

What this all means is that modern UX requires someone with power and influence to drive best practices throughout the entire organization. A VP or C-level person needs to own UX and care about it deeply enough to insist on excellence and consistency.

Leaders can no longer think of UX as a way to make everything "easy" or as simply a support function that makes processes more intuitive. Business is inherently complex and will only get more complex. UX strategy is best suited to address these kinds of challenges.

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UX is critical to business success, but in 2024, don't let hype or gut feelings drive your decisions. Keep the focus on the user, identify where UX can be improved, and apply the right solutions to make sure you're addressing the needs of all users.

If you're ready to tackle your UX and product design challenges with a modern approach, we'd love to talk. **Set up a conversation today**!

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