

# User Centered Design as a strategy

16 July 2019 | **User Experience** | [Michael Richter](#)

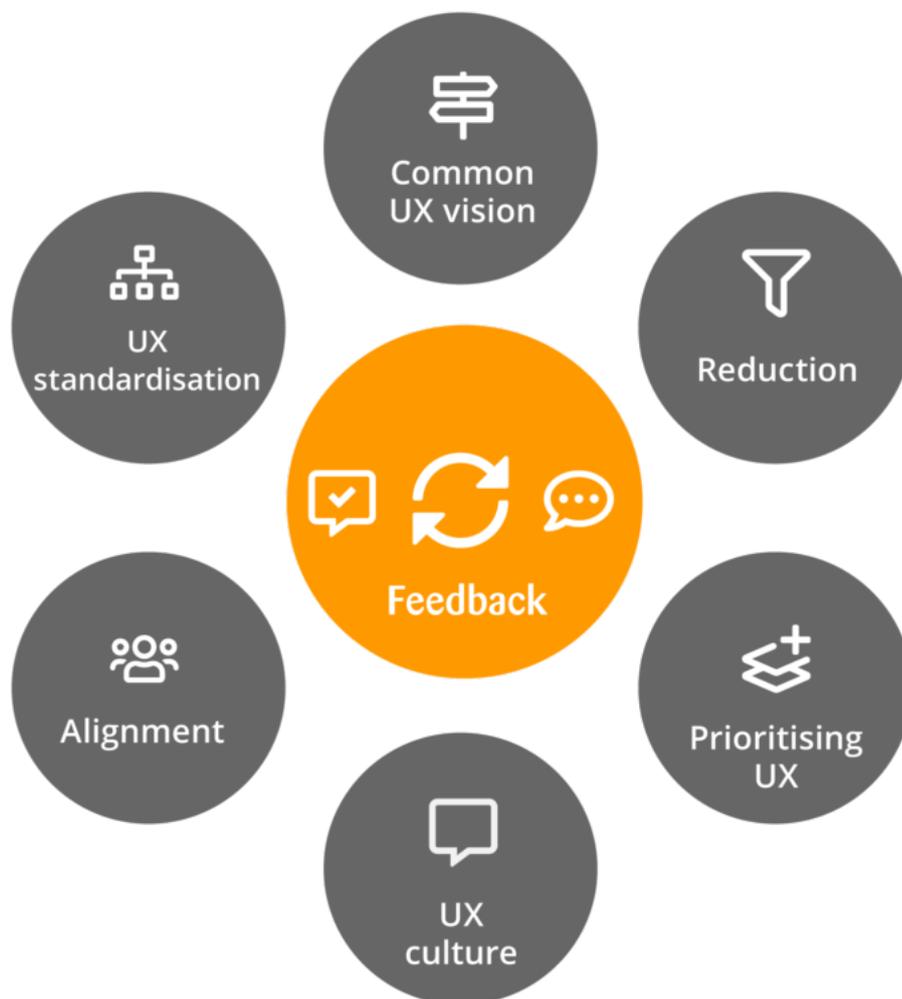
**Reading time:** 7 minutes

**How can a company organise itself so that user experience (UX) becomes a long-term success factor? We have identified seven specific areas where businesses and their strategies have a significant impact on user experience. What about your business?**

Companies like Apple and Amazon are leading the way: products and services that are consistently designed with the user's needs in mind [create a clear strategic advantage in the digital age](#). It is no longer technical USPs that decide the success or failure of a product. Businesses that successfully adapt to the changing needs of their target audiences are the ones that achieve long-term success. Everyone else is overtaken by the competition. Are you ready for the future?

## **Organisational fields of action that support user experience**

[Establishing user-centred design at the company level](#) generally means shattering some deeply ingrained views. Experience tells us that all large companies face similar challenges, regardless of the development process they apply. The following seven areas have a decisive impact on user experience. They create the right conditions for innovations that will attract and retain users over the long term:



Organisational fields of action to improve user experience. (Source: Zühlke)



### The organisational feedback loop

The aim of user-centred design is to develop solutions that best meet the needs of the user. This requires businesses to systematically incorporate information about users and their behaviour, habits, needs and environment into product strategy and development processes. From an organisational perspective, all this really means is having the most efficient feedback loop possible between end users and the relevant responsible departments in the company. Regardless of the exact development process currently in place, businesses might do well to address the following questions:

- What is the length of an iteration, from the idea for a product or a new feature to receiving the first user feedback?
- What appropriate user-centred approaches are we using?
- What organisational barriers are preventing or slowing down the flow of information – for example, intermediaries, distance between operations or methodological gaps?

### Shared user experience vision



‘What do we want the user experience for our products and digital channels to look like in five years’ time? Who are our primary user groups, and what added value are we delivering to these users?’

It is astonishing how varied the responses to these questions can be. However, a shared vision of the intended user experience is essential if teams are to work to maximum effect. This vision must be made visible and tangible, both at the strategic level and at the product development and service design level.

- Have all the various user groups been identified? Have the benefits of the new solutions been demonstrated and prioritised for these target groups?
- Is there a common understanding of the intended user experience throughout the entire user journey – from the end user’s perspective – based on realistic usage scenarios?



### Standardisation of user experience within a company

In order to deliver appropriate solutions, it is essential for business units, specialist departments and developers to have a common understanding of user needs. Standards, methods and tools can be established to support user-centred activities and ensure that teams do not keep having to start from scratch.

- Are there helpful design guidelines, style guides and patterns to ensure a consistent user experience? Do these resources help to create potential solutions more quickly and easily?

- Appropriate tools can be useful when creating informal, visual deliverables based on prototypes. How can the company take advantage of existing tools, and what additional tools does it need?
- Have user-centred approaches been implemented that deliver the greatest added value in the various phases of the product development cycle?
- What UX training is there for employees, and what are typical UX career paths?

### **Reduction instead of feature pressure**



Every new solution should give users the best possible support to achieve their goals, and should be designed with precisely that in mind. This means being strict about making decisions and prioritising new offerings and functions during the process from initial idea to implementation. Reducing things down to the essentials does not happen on its own, and a lot of work and coordination generally goes into making decisions about which functions to keep and which to drop.

- How does the business make decisions about choosing and prioritising new functions and features for products and services in development? Is the business performing a systematic cost-benefit analysis when making those decisions?
- Is it systematically prioritising new offerings, projects and updates from the perspective of customers and users?

### **Alignment of involved parties**



Knowledge about customers and users – and the impact on user experience – is often highly fragmented and scattered among many employees. The more successfully a business manages to integrate, expand and share existing knowledge, the more successful its solutions will be over the long term.

- Which departments and individuals influence the user experience and new solutions? Are these key influencers cooperating or – worst-case scenario – are they working against

one another?

- How is knowledge about users consolidated and shared?
- Which areas of the company are important hubs of UX-related activity? How does collaboration between UX experts and other business units, especially specialist departments and development teams, work?
- What strategies are used to drive motivation in the relevant departments? Are there incentives to develop user-centred solutions?



### **Prioritising user experience strategy**

Deciding to pursue a user-centred strategy and creating a corresponding business are basic requirements if a company is going to implement user-centred activities and prioritise them appropriately. Only then can usability and UX contribute to the success of a company, consistently wow customers, and lay the foundations for creating effective applications. Management can give user experience strategic weight and prioritise quality of use over other interests such as innovation strategies that are excessively technology-driven or short-sighted business goals.

- Have the business benefits of the intended user experience been identified? For example, have business cases been developed based on the number of expected new customers, reduced support cases, or diminishing user attrition to other channels or competitor products?
- Are the goals surrounding user experience integrated into the overall strategy of the business?
- Has knowledge about user needs been linked to business objectives and the company's strategy?



### **A true UX culture**

Moving to a user-centred culture often means letting go of entrenched structures and practices. And replacing a critical approach with a constructive one: user feedback becomes

a crucial building block for continuous improvement. Companies that view user-centred activities in this way free themselves from regarding data gathering, user interface design and usability testing as isolated processes. A proactive culture of feedback and learning creates value for customers and users.

- Are the findings from user research processed and made available within the business in a clear and understandable manner?
- Is there an active community of practice? Are there regular company-wide events where employees can share knowledge and experience? How is UX knowledge shared with stakeholders and relevant parties?
- How does the business ensure that those involved in UX are aware of their responsibilities, impact and role?

### **What about your business?**

The following questions will help get you thinking about UX in your company:

- Are your products and services designed to meet actual user needs? How do you know?
- How is information about users incorporated into product strategy and development processes? What departments, processes and tools are involved?
- Does your corporate vision reflect the primary needs of your customers?
- Where could you make improvements by consciously building user-centred activities into the fabric of your business?

Tailored, expert advice can help you better assess your organisation's strengths and weaknesses, devise appropriate measures, and implement them in an iterative manner. Professional coaching for relevant managers and teams, combined with methodical support for targeted implementation projects, will provide you with the security you need.