

## Testing User Experience – Should You Care?

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One day after work, I decided to go to a newly renovated location of my gym to try it out. My objectives were to get a workout in, see where this new gym was and whether I would like working out there as it is closer to my office. Standing at a street intersection, I could see treadmills through a window on the 2nd floor of a building. I then looked for a sign to determine where the entrance was, however, they only had a small board sign in front of the building and the distinguishable gym logo was covered by advertisements / promotions. When I entered the gym, I was welcomed with a warm air of fitness endorphins and shiny exercise equipment. Being a first-timer at this gym, I asked a staff member where the changing room was. The staff member gave me instructions how to find it and the changing room was not only small, but the layout was broken up. Once on the gym floor, I scouted for the equipment and weights that I would normally use. While the gym seemed to have state-of-the-art equipment, it felt like the space was overly cramped. And again, the layout didn't flow well and appeared poorly organized. Finding room to work out was quite a challenge and, when I finally did, I had to drag the weight plates from the other side of the room. Since the layout of the gym I normally go to is more user-friendly and the weight benches are in the same area as the bars and weight plates, I would have gotten more exercise in the same amount of time. It reminded me that some software products may have an impressive technology stack, the

functionality is there but they are hard to get to. Take for example a typical university website; according to Nielsen Norman Group (<http://www.nngroup.com/>), the top information students and visitors look for are academic programs and course listings. However, on a lot of university websites, the user has to click through several menus before they can get to a list of available courses. Adding a course finder on the homepage would make it easier for users to find the information they need immediately. But why do some sites often lack this simple feature? The functionality is there and the requirements might be met, but I suspect that no one really tested the user experience (UX)...

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My gym experience is only one example how UX is affected by design of everyday things. So you ask, what is UX? It is a term for end-users' overall satisfaction when interacting with a product or a system. UX has become one of the most defining factors for successful products, and it includes everything users see, hear or do and their emotional reactions. For most testers, usability testing comes to mind when UX is mentioned however, usability testing is

only one aspect of a full spectrum of user experience. Why should testers care about UX? And why is it important to have UX knowledge?

## **“As testers, we play a role as users’ advocates”**

As testers, we play a role as users’ advocates. And that is why we should care about UX. I take pride and personally feel fulfilled when users enjoy the application I helped test. In a past project, while reviewing mock-ups to develop my test cases, I recognized an opportunity to improve the UX of the application under test (AUT). Typically, there is a lack of defined requirements to validate a UX design from a testing perspective. I think most UX are validated through usability testing and they are usually led by the UX designers. How did I test UX then? Performing exploratory testing led me to discover that the ease of use was difficult and some elements of the layout were making me question what I was supposed to do on a page. One example was the name of the page and the selection buttons that ask the user for input were confusing and didn’t match. So I initiated work with the product manager and business analyst to understand the business driver of certain functionalities, along with the interaction designer to offer suggestions in improving the layout of some pages. The exercise required some role-playing on my end, taking into consideration the different population of users and what would make their experience more enjoyable.

It is also necessary to learn if the suggested improvement is feasible from a technical standpoint. I would say that I quite enjoyed this

part – working with developers. We had brainstorming sessions where we worked together to try to better understand the UX-related issues, and gather solution suggestions that we presented to the product manager. The developers really were talented and I learned so much from them. My understanding of the technical constraints improved greatly through these discussions. In return, the developers found that talking to a tester helped them improve their code design and how their code should handle exception cases. We were working proactively as a team and reducing the possibility of development rework and increasing the product quality by injecting some UX testing in the early phase and not waiting until the end. It was not a smooth process - there were some back and forth in the development but, in a way, it really helped the client refine the product. The product manager was also very appreciative of the extra testing effort to improve the product’s UX.

## **“I believe that the skills necessary to carry out timely UX testing can be developed”**

Of course, the benefits of teamwork described above are not unique to UX testing; the dynamics between testers and developers are similar when performing functional testing. However, UX designers and product owners may need to learn a new appreciation as to why and how testers test UX. I believe that the skills necessary to carry out timely UX testing can be developed. Empathy with product users, your

creativity, the professional relationship with your developers, your communication skills, your knowledge of UX and, most importantly, the delicate balancing act of being a user advocate and a liaison between teams can all be learned. It takes courage to step out of your comfort zone and do UX testing which may not

typically be your primary job, but it is all worth it.

Will I ever go back to that gym again? Maybe I will. It may help to talk with the manager and tell him my experience from a tester's perspective.



#### About The Author

Luiza Abaygar is a senior tester and QA lead with Professional Quality Assurance with over 18 years of combined experience in software development, technical support and quality assurance and testing. Her extensive experience ranges from performing manual testing and test planning to coordinating testing activities in both large and small project teams, remotely and on client sites. She has worked in different industries including financial, insurance, public sectors, oil and gas, gaming, energy and education. Luiza is passionate, pragmatic, curious and always learning.