

**“WHOSE PROFESSION IS USER EXPERIENCE (UX)?”** This provocative question seems to invite a turf battle in which various UX stakeholders such as information architects, usability consultants, and designers seek to claim their rightful ownership and ultimate glory.

Of course, the simple answer is that these folks and many others all have much to bring to the UX table. The problem with the question is its underlying assumption of a business context in which funding levels for UX work remain static and a zero-sum game ensues, in which the usability expert’s gain is the IA’s loss and vice versa.

In fact, the rising UX tide has the potential to lift all boats. Breakthrough products such as the iPod are creating a UX-friendly business climate. UX professionals should play a much greater role in the design of user experiences than they do today, throughout product development lifecycles. If we can more effectively communicate the true value of UX to decision makers in the business community, they will increase their levels of funding for UX.

To overcome cultural barriers to the adoption of UX, perhaps we should approach selling UX as a user experience challenge, endeavor to understand the business context and the perceptions of decision makers, and consider how to make UX process an engaging experience.

***A Toolkit for User Understanding.*** Rather than classifying UX as a profession, I prefer to think of UX as an approach to product design and development, in which achieving success goes beyond the realm of the digital product, extending into human psychology and cognition.

# Making UX an Engaging Process for Prospective User Experience Adopters

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**REFERENCE 1.** Gelernter, David. *Mirror Worlds: Or the Day Software Puts the Universe in a Shoebox: How It Will Happen and What It Will Mean.* Oxford University Press, Inc.: New York, New York, 1992.



Design solutions achieve true value when users interact with digital products and enjoy the experience. UX ultimately takes place in the minds of the people using products.

The UX approach offers the best toolkit for understanding human perception and behavior and putting that understanding into action. Open the UX toolkit, and you'll find tools for:

- designing models that users can try
- observing and talking with users as they interact with these models
- optimizing these models based on users' responses to them

Iterative, progressive modeling and usability testing quickly and effectively close the gaps between designer intent and user reality. UX practices shape a shared vision for a product team and provide a tremendous opportunity for innovation early in a product development lifecycle. By investing in user experience, companies can solve many problems that occur in design and development today.

**Requirements-Gathering Purgatory.** Requirements gathering can prove to be a painful process in which it is difficult to prioritize findings and visualize a coherent direction. The UX approach can solve this problem by helping the product team to understand users' needs, distilling a shared context for design, visualizing interaction models, and prototyping possible solutions.

**Marketplace Mismatch.** Most products fail to offer sufficient innovation to inspire users to change the way they work. By creating visual, textual, or tactile models of new products, then observing and listening to users as they interact with these models, the UX approach offers great opportunities for discovering innovative solutions.

UX practices offer a strategic path to achieving topsight. "Topsight"—a term that computer scientist David Gelernter coined in his 1991 book, *Mirror Worlds*—is an informed vantage point that provides parallel insights into both the big picture and the way its component parts fit together to form the whole [1]. In a time when information is abundant and insight is scarce, topsight represents a powerful competitive business advantage.

**A Roadmap for UX Success?** It can be difficult for would-be clients to know how the UX approach fits into their existing organizations and processes. On the technology side, how does UX fit into an enterprise architecture? On the marketing side, what role does UX play in brand architecture? On the operational side, how does UX support a platform for business strategy?

Across disciplines, UX practitioners can provide a roadmap showing the role of UX within each of these contexts. Rather than quarreling among ourselves over small patches of turf, the UX community can survey the landscape and look at ways to enhance communication with business decision makers about the nature and benefits of UX-related services. It's up to all of us to tell the UX story in a way that connects with potential adopters of the UX approach.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR** Bob Goodman is a writer, designer, information architect, and usability consultant. He is principal of the UX design and consulting business, BobGoodman.Net, Inc., focused on integrating the disciplines of business strategy, brand building, and the user experience to help companies connect with their business partners, customers, and employees. He serves as Boston Ambassador for the User Experience Network (UXNet.org), and writes about technology and culture at his blog, [www.uxculture.com](http://www.uxculture.com). His business Web site is located at [www.bobgoodman.net](http://www.bobgoodman.net).

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