INSIGHT

UX Research & Design

GET A ROOM! Securing a physical space for UX

For the first 20 years of my library career any user research I conducted was hidden away in emails, Excel files, Word documents and survey programmes. I only ever engaged with, and shared, this data via my desktop and as such the activity was essentially private and one way. It wasn't until I started to work with designers from outside the world of libraries that a whole other approach to engaging with data was revealed to me: an entirely opposite method that prioritises both the visibility and accessibility of the data. It ensures your research becomes tangible and interconnected, truly bringing the experience of your library users to life.

In essence this approach involves securing a physical space for UX activities. A place where you can organise and map your data, display all of the user research artefacts you gather, invite users and stakeholders for workshops, and become fully immersed in the work of exploring and understanding user needs and behaviours. I now consider the securing of such a space to be such a crucial component of this work that I always stipulate this provision in my consultancy contracts. In effect, I am setting up what the design industry terms a 'design lab', a place designated for research and design which fulfils multiple significant purposes and always has the effect of enriching, furthering and advocating for your process.

Powerful message

Perhaps most importantly, the creation of a UX research and design lab sends a powerful message. It is saying that this work is important, that it is a strategic priority, an established part of how you work. To the team of people conducting UX it enhances identity and purpose and to those outside of the work a highly visible location that can be visited at any time in order to keep abreast of developments.

Visibly documenting the user voice and behaviour is essential to UX: you should be transcribing user quotes, activities, problems, and suggestions for improvements on to colour-coded sticky notes and arranging them on the lab walls by theme (affinity mapping). In this way those conducting the research, and those simply visiting, can quickly identify key problem areas and opportunities. In my experience, even the most cynical of stakeholders cannot fail to be impressed by the quantity, immediacy and visibility of user voice and behaviour data when you invite them into such a space.

Generating ideas

To maximise the effectiveness of the lab and your process it is essential that you get into the habit of continually transcribing the data you gather onto the walls, and when you get on to generating ideas and possible prototype services and products that you are testing, that this information goes up too – on sticky notes, as sketches, or as brief summaries on paper. Drawings and letters produced by users and behavioural maps showing user routes through spaces should also be added to the walls. When arranging the data, you need to think inclusively, ensuring that anyone visiting the room would be able to navigate the data and grasp the fundamental findings thus far regardless of your presence.

For those engaged in the UX work the room will quickly become a welcoming and inspiration-inducing haven with ready reminders all the way around it of what you are doing, how far you have come, and why you are doing this work. The motivational and collaborative energy such a room

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inevitably generates is also a huge part of the value of these spaces. Which incidentally is also why, once these rooms are set-up, they make a perfect location for workshops with your users. They will immediately see that you are taking this research seriously, that there is tangible output and they too are contributing in a concrete way – as you gather the data they produce and add it to the walls in front of their eyes.

If you are struggling to gain support for UX in your institution, if you need to make progress and create some momentum, if you are lacking in motivation or direction, I can think of no better practical advice to offer than getting a room. **IP**