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# Why Now—More than Ever—Market Researchers Should Consider a Transition into UX

Before we begin, it's important to do some level setting... First, as I refer to User Experience (UX) throughout this article, I am not referring to usability. The opportunity for market researchers in UX lies in the strategic side of the practice, not the tactical side that houses usability. Second, UX is being used as a reference point in the article, but really could be interchanged with Customer Experience, User-Centered Design, or derivatives of these department titles. Third, primary qualitative research is happening in UX today, but the people doing that research identify themselves as user researchers, design researchers, or human-centered designers.

I'll refer to these individuals as user researchers throughout this article. And, most important to note, user researchers have very harsh biases against market researchers, most of which are ill informed. Yet, perception is reality...

You see, UX as a discipline is in its infancy. While not a UX historian, I am confident in sharing that UX's existence as a discipline was largely influenced by Don Norman's 1988 work and book, *The Design of Everyday Things*. This work argues that designers must honor the needs of users and consider the principles

of cognitive psychology in order to design things (mainly products) that are understandable, useable, and enjoyable. Norman's work represents a pivot point in the world of design. Rapid advances in technology and the growth of the web that soon followed in the 1990s set the stage for the principles of Norman's book to become the foundational framework on which UX practice began and still continues today.

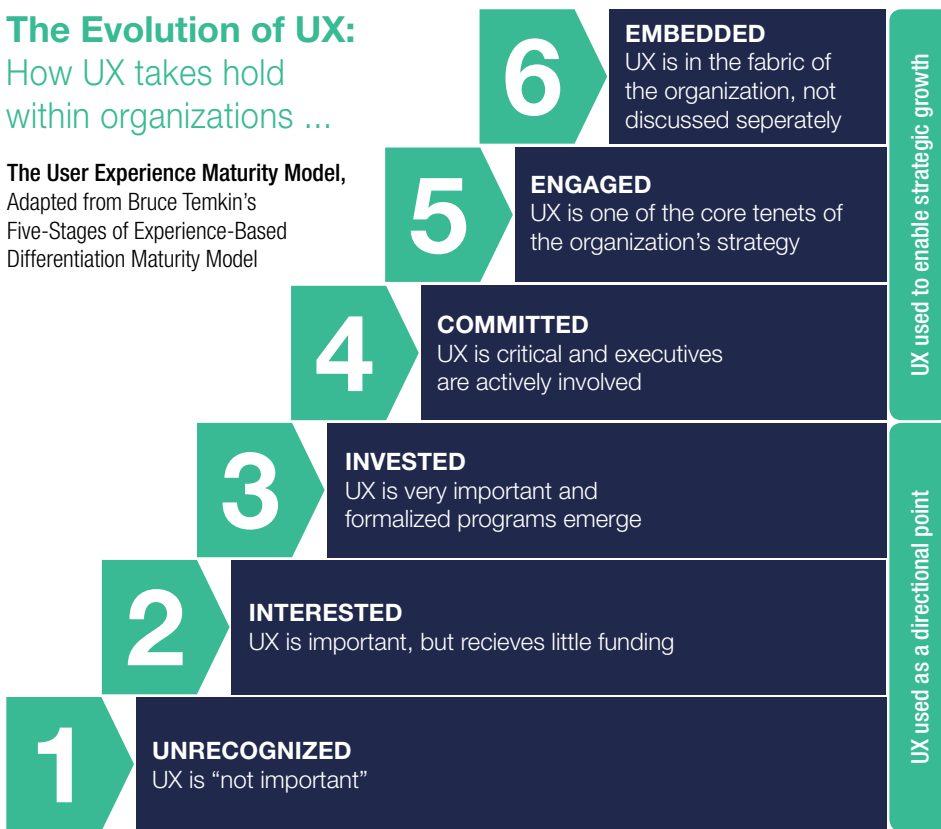
You are now seeing derivatives of UX, such as Customer Experience (CX) or User-Centered Design (UCD) depart-

ments, as these teams want to break away from associations of software development, interface-related design and, in many cases, usability. These slightly broader titles empower teams to reconsider what the design of everyday "things" can be, which often includes services, business models or processes, in addition to physical products. Regardless of title, the focus of these groups is the same—to design "things" that are usable, useful, desirable, and delightful for the end-users.

Market researchers have long been excluded from these experience and design-related teams. You—as a market researcher—are perceived to be one of those people who do "focus groups" (which are thought of as downright awful, because how could you ever learn anything of value without being in context?). If you're a quantitative market researcher, you are considered to only produce numbers with no meaning. After all, numbers don't provide inspiration, stories do, right? Among other biases: market researchers are inflexible with methodology (meaning you always start broad and narrow in understanding and wouldn't consider the alternative) and you are uncomfortable with creative

## The Evolution of UX: How UX takes hold within organizations ...

**The User Experience Maturity Model,**  
Adapted from Bruce Temkin's  
Five-Stages of Experience-Based  
Differentiation Maturity Model



thinking and process. I know...it doesn't feel fair. It's not! But, this is the stigma that the "market researcher" has in the UX world today.

At this point you could say, "Well, leave it be then. I'll stay over here in my Market Research world where I don't have to fight unfounded perceptions about my worth and value as a professional." While I certainly would not fault you in that decision, I do know that you would be turning your back on a growing opportunity that you—as a market researcher—have unique and differentiated value to offer within.

The UX discipline is maturing. And with that maturation comes a desire for senior executives within Fortune 1000 organizations to utilize their UX-spirited teams to inform strategic directions endorsed by the organization.

An adapted version of Bruce Temkin's "Five Stages of Experience-Based Differentiation Maturity Model" is a nice reference point to explain how UX as a discipline matures within organizations and why now is the time for market researchers to enter into UX. At Stage 1: Unrecognized, UX (or its derivatives of experience and design) does not exist as a formal discipline

in the organization. It's likely the leaders of the organization have little awareness of the discipline at all. At Stage 2: Interested, the organization has awareness of the UX discipline and is intrigued with its promise of improving end-user experiences and thus making companies more competitive. Hence, the organization funds UX "toe-dippers." This may include hiring one lone UXer, hiring UX consultants to support specific initiatives, or a combination of the two. At Stage 3: Invested, companies become more supportive of UX as a formal discipline, resulting in internal UX teams getting more properly staffed and the department as a whole having objectives it is accountable for. In Stages 2-3, UX work is being used to provide directional points on strategic initiatives (that are being pushed down to them from other areas of the company). Therefore, the rigor with which this UX work is being executed—and particularly the research behind the UX design work being done—is often not questioned. Additionally, much of the work completed is still very tactical in nature.

The need for rigor and strategic thinking elevates as organizations cross into Stage 4 of the UX Maturity Model. At Stage 4: Committed, UX becomes a critical piece of

the organization's competitive strategy. The high-level executives of the organization become actively involved in the UX team and its work. This exposure results in the team offering strategic input into the initiatives of the organization versus tactically executing on the strategy handed to them. As an organization progresses into Stage 5: Engaged, UX is perceived to be a core tenet of the organization's strategy. It is a formal department, equally valued and respected as any other functional role in the organization, such as Sales, Marketing, R&D, etc. And, finally, once an organization reaches Stage 6: Embedded, UX is no longer perceived to be a discipline or functional role on its own. Rather, UX and its user-centric philosophies are a mindset embodied by every employee working within the organization, irrespective of the functional role they personally perform for the organization.

What's happening in the UX discipline right now is that Fortune 1000 companies that have embraced UX as a competitive strategy are making the leap from Stage 3: Invested to Stage 4: Committed. As that jump is occurring, the research practices of UX teams—currently owned by user researchers—are coming into question, particularly related to participant sample, participant quality, and method breadth.

From a participant sample perspective, it's typical for user researchers to advocate for fewer numbers of research participants, stating that the in-depth learning gained via ethnography with eight people, for instance, mitigates the need for collecting a breadth of perspectives on that particular topic. Bottom line, once research starts informing strategic direction, sample sizes of eight no longer cut it. Market researchers have insight into the qualitative and quantitative sample sizes that sufficiently support strategic insight and frankly feel right to company executives.

From a participant quality perspective, it's not uncommon for user researchers, particularly operating in Stage 2 of UX maturity, to use other people in the company or family and friends as their research sample. Market researchers are trained to openly acknowledge and work around sampling biases. This is rarely a conversation had between user researchers operating in Stage 2 and 3 of UX

Figure 1

The philosophy of how the work gets done ...		
	USER Researchers	MARKET Researchers
The role of the insight	<i>A means to an end – meant to instigate action</i>	<i>The end – meant to yield understanding</i>
Project mindset	<i>Problem-solving mindset</i>	<i>Method-focused mindset</i>
Additional roles the researcher assumes	<i>Facilitator, interpreter, advisor</i>	<i>Consultant</i>
How the work is done	<i>It's collaborative and iterative, includes a lot of group work at workshops</i>	<i>More solitary in its execution</i>

maturity. In addition, university programs and professional associations that support the education of market researchers address topics like participant recruiting on a regular basis. This is not a topic that gets airtime at most conferences designed for user researchers.

And, finally, from a method perspective, the “go-to” method for user researchers is ethnography. In some cases, this method is appropriate. In other cases, it forces an orchestration of the experience trying to be studied that makes it inappropriate. Market researchers bring to the table a broader tool set than a typical user researcher and generally are more knowledgeable of when a qualitative, quantitative, or hybrid approach might be best leveraged to address the key research questions with rigor.

The reality is that the leap into Stage 4: Committed changes the playing field for research dramatically and instantly within

UX teams. Once executives determine—with certainty—that a UX mindset can support them in setting company strategy, the need for rigor in the research intended to support that activity becomes non-negotiable. This is the moment the doors of UX fly open to accept market researchers as having this knowledge of what makes a sound and rigorous study. To date, universities and professional associations supporting the education of user researchers have not kept pace with what the new strategic research requirements of these departments will soon become.

So, now you might be thinking, “Well, move on out user researchers. We market researchers are coming in to save the day.” Not so fast!

To be successful in UX, you need a reframe—of how you do your work as a market researcher and the roles that you play in the development process. The dia-

gram in figure 1 shares the key differences between how a user researcher approaches his/her work from a philosophical perspective versus a market researcher. These mindsets and roles, embodied by the user researcher, are core tenets of UX philosophy, equally as non-negotiable as the research rigor being demanded as organizations leap from Stage 3: Invested to Stage 4: Committed in the UX Maturity Model.

If you as a market researcher wish to position yourself to support UX practices within organizations, then it's highly important that you come to personally embody these philosophies of how user researchers work. More than likely, continuing education will be required. To support you on that journey of self-exploration, an extensive side bar of resources has been included.

Having operated my career with one foot in market research and one foot in UX, it was my intention with this article to inspire collaboration and action. Consolidation of user research and market research functions within organizations is inevitable (I've actually begun to see this consolidation occurring amongst my own client-base this past year). It's now up to you, as a market researcher, to check in personally to assess if you want to be positioned as a market researcher who can successfully integrate into UX teams, as more and more organizations cross the UX chasm of Stage 3: Invested to Stage 4: Committed. 🇺🇸

## User Experience RESOURCE LIST

Prepared by Brianna Sylver in connection with her QRCA 2015 Conference talk entitled —

“How to Expand Your Business into User Experience.”

### IDEAL TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

#### Adaptive Path's UX Intensives —

A four-day workshop series designed to build skills in Strategy, Research, Service Design and Interaction Design.  
<http://www.adaptivepath.com/events-training/>

#### Adaptive Path's UX Week —

A premiere user experience design conference. Four days of inspiration and skills building, delivering new tools you can put to use immediately.  
<http://www.adaptivepath.com/events-training/>

#### IIT, Institute of Design, Design Camp —

A five-day immersive experience into the problem-solving mindset of the user-centered design process.  
<https://www.id.iit.edu/programs-admissions/executive-short-courses/design-summer-camp>

#### General Assembly —

Offers education at varying lengths and scopes (from 90-minutes to full-time courses) to help transform thinkers into creators through education and opportunities in technology, business and design.

<https://generalassemb.ly/>

EXCELLENT GRADUATE PROGRAMS RELATED TO THE INTERSECTION OF RESEARCH AND DESIGN:

#### MDes or Masters of Design Methods —

at IIT, Institute of Design in Chicago, IL.  
<https://www.id.iit.edu/programs-admissions>

#### Master of Design (MDes) in Design for Interactions —

at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, PA.  
<http://design.cmu.edu/content/master-design/>

### BOOKS TO GET STARTED WITH

#### 101 Design Methods: A Structured Approach for Driving Innovation in Your Organization

by Vijay Kumar (2012)

#### Communicating The New:

*Methods to Shape and Accelerate Innovation*  
by Kim Erwin (2013)

#### Ten Types of Innovation:

*The Discipline of Building Breakthroughs*  
by Larry Keeley, Helen Walter, Ryan Pikkell, and Brian Quinn (2013)

#### Well-Designed:

*How to Use Empathy to Create Products People Love*  
by John Kolko (2014)

### RECOMMENDED WEBSITE

#### Adaptive Path's blog —

provides great thought leadership on everything UX.  
<http://www.adaptivepath.com/ideas/>

### SUPPORTIVE PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

#### Anthrodesign —

A yahoo list-serve group dedicated to a conversation about ethnographic methods applied to business challenges. Members of the group are mainly anthropologists, user/design researchers and designers. Topics of discussion vary in scope from best methods to address specific problems to how best to deliver results and encourage digestion of content within different corporate cultures.  
<http://anthrodesign.com/join-us/>

#### Interaction Design Association (IXDA) —

IXDA has a great local presence in major metro markets and is again a great resource for understanding UX process and context and the role of User/Design Research within that.  
[ixda.org](http://ixda.org)

#### User Experience Professionals Association (UXPA) —

UXPA is an organization that serves all careers within the UX field. Participation would support gaining a foundational understanding of the UX industry and a broader understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a user/design researcher within UX departments.  
[uxpa.org](http://uxpa.org)