THE **ELEMENTS** OF
USER EXPERIENCE

SECOND EDITION

USER-CENTERED DESIGN
FOR THE WEB AND BEYOND

Jesse James Garrett

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perception of their brand, which is why communicating brand identity is a very common product objective. Branding isn't just for commercial entities either—every organization with a Web site, from nonprofit foundations to government agencies to individuals, creates an impression through user experience. By codifying the specific qualities of that impression as an explicit objective, you increase your chances that it will be a positive impression.

Success Metrics

Races have finish lines. An important part of understanding your objectives is understanding how you will know when you have reached them.

These are known as **success metrics**: indicators we can track after the product has been launched to see whether it is meeting our own objectives and our users' needs. Defining good success metrics not only influences decisions made over the course of the project; achieving them provides concrete evidence of the value of user experience efforts if you find yourself facing a skeptical audience when seeking budget approval for your next user experience project.

Sometimes these metrics are related to the product itself and how it is used. How much time does the average user spend on your site during each visit? (Analytics tools can help you determine this.) If you want to encourage your users to feel comfortable with the site, hang out, and explore what you have to offer, you'll want to see the time per visit increase. On the other hand, if you want to provide quick, get-in-get-out access to information and functionality, you may want to decrease the time per visit.

Success metrics are concrete indicators of how effectively the user experience is meeting strategic goals. In this example, measuring the number of visits per registered user per month indicates how valuable the site is to its core audience.

visits per month (registered users only)
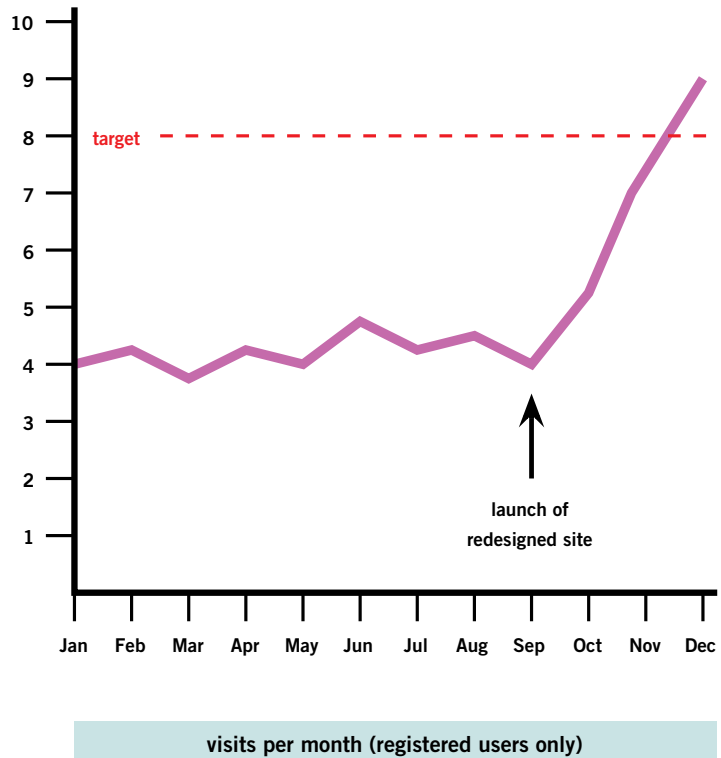
For sites that depend on advertising revenue, impressions—the number of times each day an ad is served to a user—is an incredibly important metric. But you have to be careful to balance your objectives and the needs of your users. Adding several layers of navigational pages between the home page and the content users want will definitely increase your ad impressions, but is it serving user needs? Probably not. And in the long run, it will show: As your users get frustrated and decide not to come back, your impressions will drop from that initial high and will probably end up lower than they were when you started.

Not all success metrics have to be derived directly from your site. You can measure the indirect effects of the site as well. If your site provides solutions to common problems people encounter with your product, the number of phone calls coming into your customer support lines should go down. An effective intranet can provide ready access to tools and resources that can cut down on the time it takes for your salespeople to close a sale—which, in turn, translates directly into increased revenue.

For success metrics to meaningfully drive user experience decisions, those metrics must be clearly tied to aspects of user behavior that can be shaped by our design choices. Of course, when a redesign launches and daily revenue from online transactions jumps 40 percent, it's easy to see the relationship between cause and effect. But for changes that happen over a longer period of time, it can be difficult to identify whether those changes stem from the user experience or from other factors.

For example, the user experience of your site can't do much by itself to bring new users to your site—you'll have to rely upon word-of-mouth or your marketing efforts for that. But the user experience has a whole lot of influence on whether those visitors come back. Measuring return visits can be a great way to assess whether you're meeting user needs, but be careful: Sometimes those users don't come back because your competitor launched a gigantic advertising campaign or because your company just got some bad press. Any metric viewed in isolation can be misleading; be sure to take a step back and look at what's going on beyond the Web site to make sure you're getting the whole story.

User Needs

It can be easy to fall into the trap of thinking that we are designing our product or service for one idealized user—someone exactly like us. But we aren't designing for ourselves; we're designing for other people, and if those other people are going to like and use what we create, we need to understand who they are and what they need. By spending time researching those needs, we can break out of our own limited perspective and see the site from the point of view of the users.

Identifying user needs is complicated because users can be quite diverse. Even if we're creating a Web site for use inside our organization, we still may have to address a wide range of needs. If we are creating a mobile app intended for a consumer audience, the possibilities increase exponentially.

To get to the bottom of those needs, we have to define just who our users are. Once we know whom we're trying to reach, we can conduct research with them—in other words, ask them questions and observe their behavior. That research can help us define and prioritize what people need when they use our product.

User Segmentation

We can break this mass of user needs down into manageable chunks through **user segmentation**. We divide our audience into smaller groups (or segments) consisting of users with certain key characteristics in common. There are nearly as many ways to segment user groups as there are types of users, but here are a couple of the most common approaches.
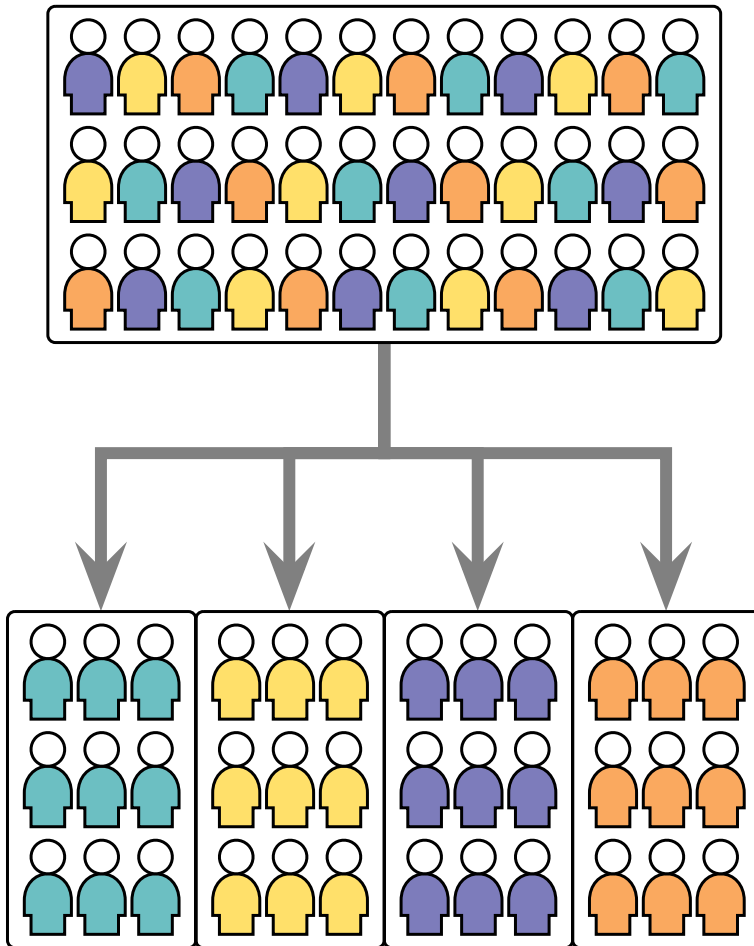
User segmentation helps us understand user needs better by dividing the entire audience into smaller groups of people with shared needs.

Market researchers commonly create audience segments based on **demographic** criteria: gender, age, education level, marital status, income, and so on. These demographic profiles can be quite general (men 18–49) or very specific (unmarried, college-educated women 25–34 making over $50,000 a year).

Demographics aren't the only way you can look at your users. **Psychographic** profiles describe the attitudes and perceptions that your users have about the world or about the subject matter of your site in particular. Psychographics often correlate strongly with demographics: People in the same age group, location, and income level often have similar attitudes. But in many cases, demographically identical people have very different ways of seeing and interacting with the world. (Just think of everybody you went to high school with.) That's why uncovering the psychographics of your users can give you insights you can't get from demographics.

When developing a Web site or any technology product, there's another very important set of attitudes to consider: the users' attitudes toward the Web and technology itself. How much time do your users spend using the Web every week? Is technology a part of their daily lives? Do they like working with technology products? Do they always have the latest and greatest products, or do they only upgrade when they have to? Technophobes and power users approach Web sites in very different ways, and our designs need to accommodate them. Answers to questions like these can help us do just that.

In addition to understanding our users' familiarity and comfort level with technology, we need to understand what and how much they know about the subject matter of our site. Selling cookware to people just learning their way around a kitchen must be handled very differently from selling to professional cooks. Similarly, a stock-trading application used by those unfamiliar with the stock market will require a different approach from one for seasoned investors. These differences in experience or expertise can form the basis for segmenting our audience.