User Testing®

4 stages of building and scaling a UX team

Contents

User experience is quickly becoming a movement.

Intro

If creating a fantastic user experience were easy, everyone would be doing it. But just one quick search, online purchase, or first-time mobile game experience will prove that's not the case. The user—and customer—experience is a living, breathing organism that requires constant interaction, understanding, and attention.

Several years ago, the idea of building, let alone scaling, a UX team was rare. We were only just beginning to embrace the idea that the user's experience was important. But there's no doubt that the companies that have zeroed in on user-centered design are **reaping the benefits**.

Dedicating an entire team to focus on it probably would've seemed extravagant and unnecessary back then. But things have changed in the past few years, and it's becoming harder and harder to ignore the impact of a good (or bad) user experience.

User experience is quickly becoming more of a movement than just a department or job description. And that's why we started to ask, "Who's responsible for UX?" Is it part of Product? Or maybe Marketing? Do you need a team of all-stars to get it right, or can you groom your UX team based on your organization's unique needs?

And while every company will have its own take on how to incorporate user-centered thinking into its culture, our goal with this eBook is to share our insights on building, developing, and growing a UX practice in any organization. In it, you'll learn about the following:

✓ OPERATING AS A UX TEAM OF ONE
✓ ESTABLISHING YOUR UX TEAM
✓ SCALING YOUR UX TEAM
✓ SUSTAINING AND SUPPORTING YOUR UX TEAM

Stage 1: The UX team of one

Not everyone has a Google-sized budget. And if that's the case for you, that probably means your resources for a UX team are limited. But even if your pockets are deep, you may still be the only person in your organization who's ever even heard of user experience.

The good news is that even a one-person team can inspire a better user experience. If you're currently working in an organization with little or no additional support with user-centered initiatives, you're not alone.

PROMOTING A USER-CENTERED CULTURE

Anyone can be a champion of user-centered design, whether you're the CEO, a project manager, a visual designer, or the receptionist. Framing your work with the user at the center is the key to great user experiences. Here's how to start.

When you're the only UX champion
How we interact with the world around us is constantly evolving. New technologies and schools of thought are constantly percolating, and when something really good is discovered, the early adopters and evangelists grab hold and start trying to win the rest of us over. Remember when you didn't have a mobile phone, and then slowly you started to see them pop up here and there? Maybe you resisted getting one at first, but eventually, the people who had them were able to convince you of their benefits. And now, years later, it's hard to imagine life without one.

UX is a lot like that. We're at that stage where a fair amount of people have heard of it, but not everyone fully understands what it is or why we all need it in our lives. That's where you come in—even if you don't have "UX" in your title.

Somewhere in your organization, there are people (hopefully most of them!) who believe in what your company does and, more importantly, why. At the root of every organization's "why" is the customer—the user.

Start framing your conversations with colleagues in ways that lead back to the user. For example, if you're in a budgeting meeting to discuss staffing levels for the web design team, remind the team how allocating resources will impact customers. If, for example, the company is projecting revenues to increase exponentially over the next few quarters but opts not to allocate additional headcount so that the design team can keep up with increased demands on the website, that revenue figure might be at risk.

Build advocacy within your organization by empowering everyone in the company to take ownership for UX.

As you continue to spread the word of great user experiences, you'll probably find other like-minded people in all sorts of unexpected places. And that's great! Your UX team—even if it's just you—will need the support of the entire company to be successful. Look for UX advocates sprinkled throughout the organization. You may find your UX allies concentrated in specific groups or even among individuals.

If you find that UX tends to live in just one area of the building, so to speak, then it's time to start mingling with the people in that area. Start getting other teams excited about UX by involving them in meetings, sharing results, and asking for feedback.

CHALLENGES FOR A UX TEAM OF ONE

If you're just getting started as the sole (or one of a few) UXers in your organization, there's no doubt that you'll face some challenges. Being your own advocate while thinking strategically about the business can be tough.

Having spent many years doing UX consulting and contract work, Craig Morrison, head of product at RecordSetter, has experienced many of those challenges firsthand:

> " For me, the difficult part about being the sole person on a UX team is that you're both in the trenches and planning the attack at the same time.
>
> On the other hand, [it] means you have complete control over how to interpret the data you collect and how to best apply to it the product strategy. This can be extremely satisfying and also successful."

Craig Morrison, Head of Product, RecordSetter

Stage 2: Establishing your UX team

The good news about user-centered roles is that they're quickly becoming less of a specialty and more of a necessity. For organizations that have caught on to the importance of a user-centered culture, expanding your UX family should be an easier sell. But not everyone in your organization will be on board the UX bandwagon. And the pool of talented candidates available is vast and deep.

This means that when you're ready to build out your team, you'll have to be thoughtful and strategic with every hire. How you go about hiring the next addition to your team is just as important as the quality of person you hire.

A NOTE ON "WHERE THEY SIT:" UX roles are unique in that they can be "owned" by just about any team in the organization.

The way we see it, everyone needs UX, which means your UX team could be pretty spread out. You may have one UX generalist sitting with a product team, while another sits with the marketing department. Or you could have your whole team in the same area. UX can live anywhere in your organization, so don't limit yourself to hiring for one specific team or discipline.

USER RESEARCHERS

COMMON TITLES

UX Strategist
UX Researcher
Usability Tester
Usability Engineer

COMMON DELIVERABLES

• Usability tests & findings
• Analytics reports
• Personas
• Scenarios
• Journey maps
• Task analyses
• Survey creation & analyses
• Focus group findings
• Competitive audits

IN SHORT THEY...

Help understand who customers are and what to build to serve their needs

INFORMATION ARCHITECTS / INTERACTION DESIGNERS

COMMON TITLES

UX Designer
UX Architect
Information Designer

COMMON DELIVERABLES

• Workflows
• Wireframes
• Site maps
• Content audits & inventories
• Storyboards
• Journey maps
• Low-fidelity prototypes
• Sketches
• Card sorts
• Taxonomies

IN SHORT THEY...

Define the structure and flow of the user experience

VISUAL DESIGNERS

COMMON TITLES

UX Designer
UI Designer
Interface Designer

COMMON DELIVERABLES

• Comps
• High-fidelity wireframes
• Prototypes
• Pattern libraries (for items like navigation elements, links, calendars, etc.)
• Font selection

IN SHORT THEY...

Design the look and feel

Source: Adapted from "Help I Need to Hire a User Experience Designer," Aquent, 2015

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

Hiring great people is a no-brainer, but finding great people who are right for the job will take some effort. UX folks are a special breed, and that means you'll probably need to search a bit longer to find the right fit.

When you're putting together your team, focus on **individuals who share your organization's passion for creating a great UX**. People who can work well in cross-functional teams and are open to feedback make great candidates.

You'll also want varying degrees of experience on your UX team. While some expertise is ideal, you don't want to load your team with high-level pros in each discipline without balancing them out with junior-level support. More junior team members tend to have more varied experience, which will help keep everyone connected and moving in the right direction. This will help prevent the siloing that can happen when teams get too focused on a specific role or objective.

DON'T GO CHASING UNICORNS

At this stage, it's tempting to seek out **unicorns**. The problem is that unicorns don't really exist. And even if they did, that's probably not what you really need. Instead, focus on finding individuals who share your vision and can work well with diverse teams.
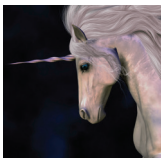
UX UNICORN *u•ni•corn | yõone•korn | noun*
Mythical user experience designer with an advanced and adaptive skill range. Outstanding skills in graphic design, rapid prototyping, front end development, user testing, technical specifications, marketing and branding. It does not have an opinion, it has a process, and will harmonize with any environment.

USERTESTING TIP:

The UX universe is filled with buzzword-worthy titles. One company's user experience content strategist is another's **junior user experience manager**. UX professionals are becoming increasingly fluid with how they define their roles and titles. If you've narrowed your LinkedIn search for "senior UX designers," you might miss a lot of folks who identify as design strategists. If you want to ensure that you're reaching the best and brightest, don't limit yourself with super-specific job titles.

WHAT QUALITIES SHOULD YOU LOOK FOR IN A UX CANDIDATE?

"Passion, the ability to create a shared understanding among teams and stakeholders, and a small ego"

- Tomer Sharon, head of UX at WeWork and former UX researcher at Google

wework.

Stage 3: Scaling your UX team

Once you've established your core team and you've had some time to get into a rhythm, chances are you'll start to think about expanding. There seems to be no shortage of need for UX expertise—especially once everyone in your organization begins to see the value that it can offer.

FILLING THE ROLES

This is your opportunity to start filling out the roles. While generalists worked well when you were getting started, a more mature UX team will benefit by having folks dedicated to a few distinct areas of the UX practice. As we've already discussed, roles and titles can vary widely between individuals and organizations, so it can be helpful to think about roles in the context of what outcomes that individuals will be responsible for, rather than a specific title.

At this stage, you can also begin to develop or hire for more specialized roles, as well. Depending on your organization or product's needs, you may find that you need to invest more attention in one area than you originally expected. You might need to hire several folks with slightly different job descriptions to take on new challenges.

As your company grows and develops new product lines, you might need to hire people to specialize in specific products.

> **Hire based on the order of needs. In early stages, that may be more more towards growth, and once that becomes consistent, can expand towards user experience."**
>
> *Ugur Kaner, Memebox*

We suggest breaking your team out into six categories.
As you're building your team, look for candidates that fit into these disciplines:

UX strategy	Visual design	Interaction design	Coding and development	Content strategy	User research

TO CONTRACT, OR NOT TO CONTRACT?

When you're expanding your team, it's natural to want to just hire someone for every role. Of course, you need a designer (maybe even a few), but do you need one in your headcount? The beauty of having so many talented designers out there is that many are available on a contract basis. Whether it's long-term or for a one-off project, you can pick and choose the designers you need without committing to a full-time headcount.

ATTRACTING TOP TALENT

Once you've determined the type of person your team needs, it's time to start the hunt. Not so long ago, you could post a basic ad on a job board, and just kick back while hundreds of applications flooded your inbox. And chances were good that you'd find a great fit after sifting through all of those candidates.

But that's not the case anymore. Employees have a lot more choice when it comes to their employers, which means that you need to be strategic about everything from the title of the role to the job description and, of course, the interview.

Just think about it like you would for any great user experience, except now you're **designing one for an employee**. Ideally, you'd do this for any employee, but folks in the UX field are especially adept at recognizing—and appreciating—a good experience. Which is exactly what you want for someone on your team, right?
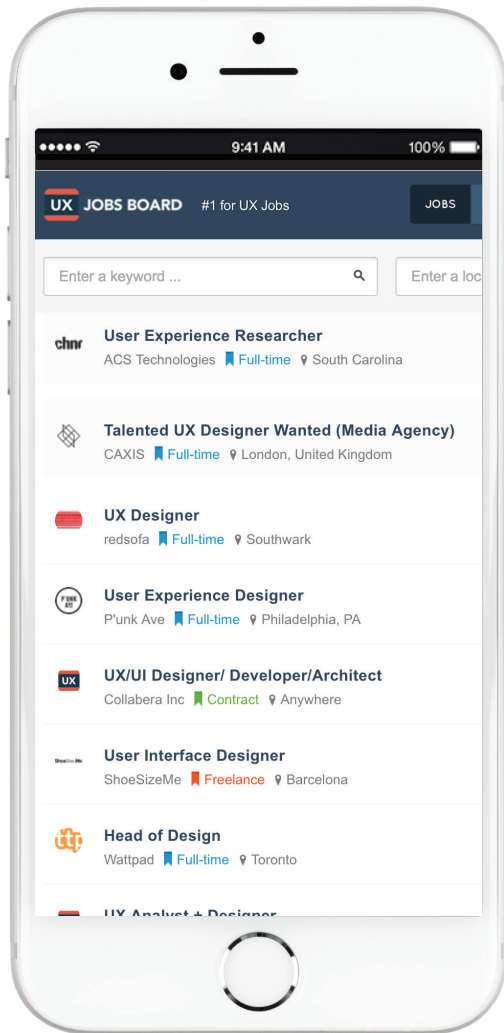
THE JOB DESCRIPTION

Attracting UX professionals is more art than science, so try to nix all your old habits and templates when it comes to writing a job listing. Simply listing off years of experience required, skills needed, and responsibilities isn't going to knock anyone's socks off. Instead, appeal to their inner UX champion. Start with what you know. Share what drives you and everyone at your organization to go to work every day. Share your company's mission, and lay out how this role will contribute to that goal.

And don't be afraid to share the challenges you're facing, too. You don't need to get specific (we don't want your competition taking advantage of this intel), but if there's a key goal that your team is working toward, let applicants know this.

Last but not least, be honest and be you. Your personality as an organization is one of the most important characteristics that will determine who will (or won't) succeed on your team. Like attracts like, so if your company's brand and voice would never use the word "ninja" in your daily conversations, don't use it your job descriptions.

A NOTE ON EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE

The popularity of user-centered design and thinking has skyrocketed in recent years, which has led to a plethora of educational and certification programs. And while they may offer real opportunities for anyone interested in beefing up their UX expertise, are they the mark of a great UXer?

Education and hiring seem to go hand in hand. But these days, a degree is less and less important, and experience and softer skills are becoming more important. But it's not easy to vet candidates in this way. While some higher education certifications may truly be the mark of a talented UX professional, the absence of such accreditation is by no means a sign of a lesser candidate. And don't forget that the UX field is incredibly diverse. Many talented UXers were educated well before UX had caught on in the education system. And many might not have any formal higher education at all. The UX field is changing constantly, so remember that a certification from a few years ago might not be as relevant as real world experience now.

The true test will come during interviews and portfolio reviews, so until then, consider education and certifications as a topic of discussion, rather than a qualification for consideration.

THE INTERVIEW

Chances are you've been through your fair share of interviews, and you've probably conducted a few yourself. For the most part, the same rules apply to interviewing your UX team as they would for any other position. But as you know, folks who obsess over UX are a special breed, and there are a few things you should watch out for when you're interviewing:

Problem-solving ability. Great UX is all about solving problems. When you're interviewing, be sure to ask candidates about challenging situations and how they approached the situation. Whether they resolved the issue isn't as important as how they handled it. Candidates who were able to show that they considered their organization, team, stakeholders, and user's needs while addressing an issue are ones to watch.

Ego. Leaving your own opinions and preferences aside to consider those of others isn't easy. No one has all of the answers, so look for people who are willing to admit that they don't know—but that are equally eager to ask the right questions to find the answer.

Empathy. Empathy is at the core of any great experience. Look for this when you're interviewing. Does a candidate look you in the eyes? Does he or she listen and try to absorb and understand what you're saying? Pay attention to how you feel after meeting with each candidate because, if hired, your users are going to be in that exact position.

A great UXer is all of the things you'd hope for in a star employee and then some. Look for individuals who aren't afraid to recognize and support the efforts of everyone on their team. When you find people who care more about your user than themselves, you're on the right track.

Stage 4: Sustaining and supporting the team

Remember back when you were a UX team of one? A lot has happened between then and now, but as you can probably guess, that doesn't mean your team-building work is done. Establishing and building your UX team is by far the toughest part, so if you've made it this far, great work!

And just like with any user experience, the product is never truly "finished." Your team will constantly be growing and evolving. Here are a few things you can do to make sure you're providing the best experience possible for them, so they can build the best possible experience for your users.

IT'S ALWAYS ABOUT THE USER (HINT: YOUR EMPLOYEES ARE USERS, TOO)

Getting your entire company on board with user-centered thinking is one of the most powerful ways to support your team.

And part of the way that you can do that is by continuing to focus on your internal users—your team. Just like with users, run regular, iterative tests to see how you're doing both from a management perspective and from the perspective of the company as a whole. Solicit regular feedback from your team, and be sure to share it with them, too.

SHARE THE UX LOVE

One of the best things about being in the UX field is the community. It's an active, inclusive, and curious group. If you want your team to learn and grow, encourage them to participate in local events, online forums, guest posting, and participation on internal and external committees.

If you're not sure where to start, here are a few great resources to inspire you:

UX Community on Slack   UXPA   XX + UX

UX Design Meetups   UX Night (San Francisco)   UX Mastery Forums

Conclusion

As user experience continues to evolve into simply the way that we do business, the construction of your team becomes even more important. But it's not just who you have on your team--it's how they interact with the rest of the organization, too.

A great UX team is one that transcends roles, locations, and departments. UX isn't about a title; it's about a mission—it belongs to everyone in the organization, and your team members are its champions.

Focus on the outcomes that your organization is striving to accomplish, and hire your team based on those goals. By always asking, "How does this satisfy the outcome?" it will be easier to gain executive buy-in on UX initiatives, and that will help translate the importance of good user experience to cross-functional teams across the organization.

User experience is no longer a niche title or industry. Even non UX-related roles are beginning to require working knowledge of user experience as part of the job requirements. From marketers to project managers to copywriters, knowledge of user and customer experience is quickly becoming a must for any role.

Consumers have quickly learned that they don't need to tolerate a bad experience. If they're not satisfied with a product or service, they know there's probably a competitor that's more than willing to give them what they need.

Soon good UX will no longer be a luxury. It'll be an expectation—just like listed phone numbers and a website with all of your company's relevant information. And in the not-too-distant future, the best UXers will perhaps be the ones you'd never recognize. UXers will become invisible—because they're everyone.

Create great experiences

UserTesting is the fastest and most advanced user experience research platform on the market. We give marketers, product managers, and UX teams on-demand access to people in their target audience who deliver audio, video, and written feedback on websites, mobile apps, prototypes, and even physical products and locations.

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