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endless possibilities. endless headaches.

Published by Chelsey Wiley | June 13, 2022

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How Experience Architects Can Lessen Mental Workload to Create Transformative Digital Experiences

If you type "Endless Possibilities" into a search engine you will return endless possibilities for your query. Ironically, though you searched for "endless possibilities" the likelihood that you actually want "endless possibilities" is slim to none. To put it simply: you have a goal and reality says you won't need to explore all the possibilities to attain that goal. Even when the possibilities are literally endless you still self-impose an end.

Information Overload

The human brain is an information engine that can process 11 million bits of information every second. But our conscious mind has a limit, a cognitive load, a maximum amount of information that our working memory can hold at one time. The average person can only handle 40 to 50 bits of

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information per second.[1] Meaning the human brain has to filter out millions of bits of information every second. Pair this with the fact the human brain naturally adds information when thinking creatively, and you have a recipe for a business to over-engineer solutions. "Additive ideas come to mind quickly and easily, but subtractive ideas require more cognitive effort. Because a business is often moving fast and therefore working with the first ideas that come to mind, they end up accepting additive solutions without considering subtraction at all."[2] This is why Experience Architects get involved. They work to bring the value of simplicity to business solutions.

Reducing Analysis Paralysis

Experience Architects work with businesses to reduce the cognitive load of the people using their digital products. Today's users are inundated with digital information leading to choice paralysis, low conversion rates, and general product dissatisfaction. Experience Architects encourage simplicity when creating solutions, reducing information overload. Creating simple and effortless solutions gives back to the users by reducing the amount of information they're processing. This reduction frees up space in the user's mind for new information, which the business can then fill with information specific to the solutions and products they are offering.

The Building Blocks of The Brain

Less truly is more when considering cognitive load. In fact, the most impactful solutions are ones people don't notice. This is because the solution allows the brain to do what it does best, and create assumptions and patterns. If we look at the human mind in its most basic form, it inherently works to keep us safe. Any abrupt change to what we know alerts us to potential danger. What once protected us from a lion in the grass now protects us from following through on an innovative new idea. Each micro decision a user makes has the potential to reduce or increase their mental energy. This is why Experience Architects work so hard to understand the people who will ultimately be using the product.

Embracing Familiarity

Businesses paired with Experience Architects leverage the power of shared experience to reduce the cognitive load of their users. There are thousands upon thousands of other digital experiences, many of which people use every day. Instead of trying to fight against what is, Experience Architects, embrace and encourage familiarity in a way that empowers users to focus on the task at hand, instead of trying to create a new mental model. Embracing what works is simply smart business acumen and allows the business team to focus on the product value instead of reinventing the wheel.

By focusing on simplicity, and a less is more approach businesses can reduce risk by prioritizing known patterns, and smooth clean interactions. This reduces the mental pressures of their users and ultimately makes way for new meaningful experiences that set the business and its products apart from the competition.

1. Emily Kwong, "Understanding Unconscious Bias", National Public Radio, Short Wave, 20202.
2. Benjamin Converse, "Why Our Brains Miss Opportunities to Improve Through Subtraction", The University of Virginia, School of Engineering and Applied Science. News, 2021.

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