

By [Tom Satwicz, Ph.D.](#)

UX and operations cannot succeed without each other. The right operation gives rise to great UX, yet a great UX is necessary to build a business operation that is profitable, sustainable, and growing.

In the past week two events have made this ever so apparent for me:

1. [Peach delivery](#) moved its drop-off point for our Seattle office.
2. Apple announced new details about [Watch](#).

Peach delivery

Peach delivers lunches daily to offices in Seattle. If you subscribe to Peach, you will get a daily text with details about your office's available lunch. To have the food delivered you just need to reply by 11:00 am and lunch is delivered. At its best, Peach is a great experience: good food, delivered at a consistent time, with minimal effort. However, the service only works if enough people within an office opt to both sign up for it and regularly have a lunch delivered. When too few people choose to have lunch delivered on a regular basis, Peach's business model begins to fail, and consequently so does the user experience.

This last week our Peach service was downgraded. For whatever reason, the number of Blinkers ordering lunch from Peach fell to a point that the service moved the drop off point to an office one floor up. While the difference in distance is seemingly negligible (a short elevator ride), the change in experience has been dramatic. Now, rather than having lunch waiting in our kitchen,

on a busy day one needs to cross the chasm into a strange space, navigate her way into a stranger's kitchen, and hope that someone hasn't mistakenly taken her lunch.

Needless to say, fewer people in our office now find Peach a compelling service. They'd rather run out of the building, pack their own lunches, or make do on peanut M&Ms and granola bars. The link between Peach's operations and its UX becomes obvious: A business dependent on both scale and UX begins to lose both once one is downgraded, and a downward spiral is set in motion.

Apple watch

I know it is more than redundant to write about how Apple provides a great user experience, however I think what gets little attention is how the seemingly less interesting side of its business (i.e., boring business operations) works with the company's more press-worthy side (i.e., cool new products). While the Peach example above highlights how UX and operations can tie themselves into a downward spiral, Apple Watch appears to be the result of UX and operations moving together in an upward motion. This upward motion is evidenced by Apple's growing ecosystem of users, apps, devices, and its own business operations.

The case, or promise, of Apple Watch is that it will do for interactions in our physical world what iPhone did for online interactions. However, this promise is dependent on a sustainable ecosystem. [Ben Thompson](#) articulated this well on episode 37 of the podcast [Exponent](#):

A wearable is incredibly powerful. It's just like the iPhone is to the virtual world, it brings the entire world of the Internet to us wherever we are, [Apple Watch] connects us to our physical environment, no matter where we are, in a very fundamental way¹. And if that world were to exist, you can see that's a killer use case for the Watch...

To have that writ large, it's an ecosystem play. You have to have one part before you have the other parts and vice versa. No one is going to build things that work with a wearable that's not widely sold and to build the key that works with other stuff isn't going to work—you need to break that chicken and egg.

For Apple Watch to have a great user experience, a large ecosystem must develop that includes both technologies (i.e., apps and connected devices) and users (customers). The presence of both creates an upward spiral—if either begins to degrade, both suffer, and the premise of the entire product begins to fail. To Apple's credit it has spent a long time building an ecosystem, including its own operations, that makes this sort of device possible.

Comparing apples & peaches

Achieving the upward spiral of both scale and UX is a fundamental problem any developing technology faces. For any team this raises a series of questions:

- How do you build a growing ecosystem?
- How do you use it for new opportunities?
- How do you leverage the ecosystems built by other firms?

These are questions that won't be addressed only through wireframes or [usability tests](#), but are essential to creating the ever-necessary great user experience that customers now expect.

Answering them requires careful analysis of the issues people face and their own personal contexts.

One of the less emphasized messages of Clayton Christensen's work on [Disruption Theory](#) is that business models are technologies themselves that have [user experiences](#) tied to them. Figuring out how to make that combination work is challenging, but necessary.

Tom is a member of the research team at Blink UX. On his days off he loves to reminisce about his days as a bus driver at the University of Michigan and figure out ways to make eating healthy easy.

1 Thompson's articulation of what he meant by fundamental ways: "Apply it to your car lock, apply it to your badge at work— everyone has to carry a badge around and badge-in and stuff like that. Apply it to payments, Apple Pay is great, it's that much greater when your arm's right there by the terminal where you have to pay. All of these places where you have any sort of identity or you want light to turn on. There is all this stuff, we do mechanical stuff that seems obvious to now, what's the value? But there's a scenario where it's made way better by knowing that you're around and knowing who you are and has an identity function."