



By
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A friend of mine recently called me up and asked if she should [go to ConveyUX](#). She's a Project Manager, but she does just enough user experience (UX) work to be dangerous. She feels she should hone her UX sword rather than chopping with it like a machete.

I thought about it for a few minutes. Should she go? These sorts of conferences can end up being the industry talking to itself. Certainly some of ConveyUX will be for the more hardcore UXers, but some speakers are talking about UX issues for everyone. So I asked myself what do people on the fringe of the UX world do to prepare for going to this sort of event, and what advice do we Blinkers have for those who want to learn more?

#1 - Read books

[The Design of Everyday Things](#) I'd say that if this book doesn't touch some part of you, then you won't be excited by much else in the UX field. It takes a look at why things are designed the way they are. It breaks down the fundamentals of the user experience field through observation of what we all have taken for granted in object designs we see all around us. The biggest take away I reference all the time is this: If you can't figure something out about a design, it's not you, it's the design.

[Understanding Comics](#) What? I want to know about UX, not comics! I recommend this book to everyone involved in any sort of work in graphics. It examines how humans have evolved sequential artwork (aka comics). Wireframes are actually a type of sequential artwork. If you are in the UX field, you will undoubtedly need to communicate the different states of a system. And

you will do this through some sort of sequential artwork, whether it's PowerPoint slides, wireframes, or even straight-up comics.

Information Architecture for the World Wide Web Admittedly, this book is a little out of date. But that makes it interesting as it can give a bit of a historical perspective. At the same time, it can still teach fundamentals about how websites should be structured. Some references might make you chuckle a bit. But as Peter Morville puts it, [IA is "medium-independent"](#) and hence is still very relevant today.

Additional books

- [Don't Make Me Think](#) by Steve Krug
- [The Elements of User Experience](#) by Jesse James Garrett
- [The Inmates Are Running the Asylum](#) by Alan Cooper
- [Envisioning Information](#) by Edward Tufte
- [Prioritizing Web Usability](#) by Jakob Nielsen
- [Emotional Design](#) by Donald Norman
- [Content Strategy for the Web](#) by Kristina Halvorson and Melissa Rach

#2 - Check out websites

Okay, you've read some books and feel you know some basics. But how do you know what's going on right now? It's an evolving field, and it's moved past these books. Time to do some surfing! There are quite a few places you can check-in online to regularly to see what's going on. Here's a few:

- <http://www.fastcompany.com/> - Not strictly UX, but all of the UX practitioners I know are looking here regularly, and have to actively pull themselves away from the articles.
- <https://www.lukew.com/ff/> - Luke not only posts his own thoughts, but also notes he has taken at various conferences capturing some excellent talks.
- <http://www.nngroup.com/articles/> - Some excellent, scientifically-minded UX articles from a very smart group of people.
- <https://uxmag.com/> - I think the name says it all.
- <https://alistapart.com/> - Articles for "people who make websites."
- <https://medium.com/> - You don't know Medium? Go check out Medium!
- <https://boxesandarrows.com/> - Articles focused around design, with a nice reference to wireframes in its title. Gotta love that.
- <http://ux.stackexchange.com/> - Got a UX problem and looking for some answers? Go ask this community.

#3 - Go to meetups and conferences

For me, the best way to learn a language is to be in the country that speaks it and be engulfed in it. I'd suggest you take that approach to the user experience field. Go somewhere you know there will be experts and just soak up any information you can. Whether this is a large conference or a local meetup, surround yourself with knowledgeable people and just ask questions.

My friend mentioned above lives in Florida and was telling me that there weren't any UX meetups around that area. So I did a quick search, and not only did I find a bunch, but I found one that actually was about going to ConveyUX last year! So give it a try. If you really don't have anything near you, then try starting a meetup. I have a friend that did exactly that for Content Strategy and he now is a Content Strategist.

Conclusion

If you didn't guess from that last section, I advised my friend to come to ConveyUX. Hopefully she'll read this article and know what she can do to start honing that UX sword of hers. She should come to this conference and absorb what she can, which is what I would suggest to all of you. Read, explore, observe, listen: These are key skills to being a UX professional, and in just trying to discover more about UX, you will take yourself out of the fringe and into the world of helping the users.

Jonathan is both an Interaction Design and User Research pro, as well as the semi-official tie-wearing Blink UX mascot. When not considering switching to a modeling career, Jonathan can be seen playing with his ridiculously cute family.