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By [Karen Clark Cole](#)

At Blink, we think and talk a lot about UX. And while each day more people are joining our conversation, there is still a lot of confusion around what UX actually means. I talk about it as a way of thinking and a business approach: User experience is no longer a job title or a service offering, it's a way of thinking about your entire business. You can even go so far as to think about your entire life as a user experience. How do people experience you? What is the affect you have on them?

Over the last ten years, people have seen that an experience with technology can actually be easy, productive, and even enrich their lives. And they now realize that it is not, and never was, their fault that they don't understand how to use a website, online product, computer, remote control, parking meter, GPS, thermostat, you name it. Consumers now realize the responsibility of making something easy to use is on the company making the product or providing the service. In order to stay relevant and competitive, companies are now required to spend the time and money to design and build their products in a user-centered way, for the people actually using it.

What does UX mean?

Services that now live under the umbrella of user experience typically include product strategy, user research, interaction design, user interface design, visual design, usability testing, front-end development, and increasingly, back-end development. This means the entire product team now lives in the UX world and approaches their work through this UX lens.

The difference between UX, UCD, & UI

I often hear people interchanging UX with UI or someone is looking for a UX/UI designer to hire. The important thing to note here is that UI stands for user interface, which is specific to designing software and hardware, while UX is very broad and applies to more than a digital product. While the UI function is very important, it is only one small piece in the UX ecosphere. Below are a few definitions:

User Experience is an **approach**.
UX is the end-to-end experience a customer has with your company. It includes all of your products, services, and communications, and it is not limited to the interface of a digital product, which is the common misconception. The way you answer your phone is part of a customer's user experience with your business.

User-centered Design is a **method**.
UCD is a process that involves end-user input throughout all stages of product development. UCD is an important step towards achieving a successful user experience for your digital product.

User Interface is a **control system**.
The UI of a product refers to how the end user controls the hardware or software product: the buttons, menus, windows, icons, etc., that allow a person to navigate and interact with a system. The goal for a great user experience is always that these controls are intuitive and easy to use, with little or no training.

The [Nielsen Norman Group](#) also talks about the distinction between UX and UI on its website:

> It's important to distinguish the total user experience from the user interface (UI), even though the UI is obviously an extremely important part of the design. As an example, consider a website with movie reviews. Even if the UI for finding a film is perfect, the UX will be poor for a user who wants information about a small independent release if the underlying database only contains movies from the major studios.

What about CX?

Customer Experience is really the grandfather of UX in my mind, with the same definition that UX currently holds. Since the digital product world has evolved so quickly, it's my feeling that UX and CX have morphed together. If you think about it, they actually mean the same thing: "customer" and "user" are both the consumers of a product or service. "User" has more of a software development history and "customer" is more mainstream consumer, but they are both focused on the end user.

Great UX

At **Starbucks** the well-trained baristas are not tasked with brewing coffee but rather serving up "Daily Inspiration" to their customers. **Amazon's** "One-Click" and same-day shipping have changed what we expect of online retailers across the board. When the Xbox **Kinect** first launched, people rejoiced in how easy it was to setup and play their new, super high-tech game console, as though it was made just for them. Then there's buying an **Apple** iPhone. For some it starts with the unique and memorable user experience of being in an Apple store. That in-person experience paves the way for the intuitive and delightful "out of box" experience that comes next with all Apple products.

In all these cases, it's through careful and endless design detail, plus years of user research, that gives them an in-depth understanding of their customers and a product that delights them.

UX across industries

Even the most traditional and conservative businesses are embracing UX. Banks are, in fact, so focused on creating great user experiences for their customers, several are aiming higher to actually revolutionize the entire financial industry through UX. Wow, things have really come a long way! The Spanish Bank BBVA recently acquired a UX firm and stated the following in an issued press release:

> *Human-centered design is key to disruption in the finance industry and BBVA is developing the best end-to-end user experience across all channels.*

This is good news for everyone: UX is taking hold at the highest levels, and Capital One Bank is right next to BBVA with its recent acquisition of Adaptive Path, another UX firm from San Francisco. In an article by Lance Shields of iiD he says the following about the Capital One purchase:

> *It means user-centered design matters on a strategic business level to a company as bottom line-driven as a bank.*

Joel Oxman of *The Financial Brand* talks about the new design focus in banks and says this about UX as an industry trend:

> *Most other legacy service-oriented enterprises are having difficulty making user experience design a priority. Industries like healthcare, transportation, and others are equally disappointing for their digital consumers. But, a shift is occurring and there seems to be a beacon of hope emerging around the principles of user-centric experience design.*

Oxman continues to perfectly sum up why companies and entire industries can't possibly ignore creating meaningful user experiences for their customers:

> *With a return on investment that will be seen in the form of higher customer retention, lower cost customer acquisition, and even lower cost delivery of services, can organizations afford to not move in the same direction?*

UX is not just storming the financial industry; healthcare, travel, and even the government are getting onboard. I recently heard the captain of a cruse ship say, "Booking a cruise should be as easy as buying something on Amazon."

One (or two) click travel is coming and expectations of easy-to-use products are high, as they should be. A great user experience is absolutely possible for every single company and product if made a high priority.

UX is a change-maker

A technology product may start as a remarkable idea, but without a good user experience, even the greatest idea is unlikely to become a change-maker. As humans in a crowded world of choices we want to be able to use products easily, efficiently, and in some cases with delight. The ultimate goal for a great user experience should be to make technology human—to enrich our lives by making the experience so seamless the technology is out of the way. Technology should not be the focus but rather the enabler for new discoveries, more efficient workplaces, deeper relationships, accessibility, education, creativity, and overall richer lives.

When not serving as CEO of Blink UX, you can find Karen organizing events to inspire young girls or training to become a professional kiteboarder.