

By

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I happily attended the [User Experience Professionals Association](#) (UXPA) conference a few weeks ago in San Diego. I always get so much out of industry conferences. I learned. I networked. I was inspired. Yes, it was worth the time and money!

Let me share these four helpful lessons learned.



Conference receptions among palm trees, blue skies, and outdoors with views of San Diego Bay and Coronado Bridge. An excellent location for UXPA 2015.

1. Don't forget these participants

As user researchers we aim to evaluate products with participants who are as representative as possible of our intended audience, right? Two sessions reminded me of certain populations to consider.

Did you know 43% of Americans struggle with the reading and writing of everyday tasks? For websites used by the general public, especially health information sites, I learned the importance of including people with limited literacy in usability studies. Stacy Robinson and Sandy Hilfiker of CommunicateHealth presented [How to Make the Web Easier for Users with Limited Literacy Skills](#). They offered tips for web and content design to increase comprehension for this population, but their tips make content easier to read for us all.

In a similar vein, I was persuaded to include those with disabilities in certain usability studies. If we evaluate websites used by the general public, then including people with disabilities would identify problems in how screen readers read and how speech recognition software is interpreted by these sites. The presentation [Why & How to Include People With Disabilities in Your Usability Study](#) by Dana Douglas and Kristen Davis of UserWorks included lots of tips for recruiting and collecting data plus links to great resources. A member of the audience also recommended this web site: [Website Accessibility: Disability Statistics](#) from PowerMapper.com

2. Hamburger icon wars

You know the three-lined icon representing a menu in mobile apps, known as the hamburger icon? Mike Ryan of Liberty Mutual argued that the hamburger icon shouldn't be used in lieu of an actual menu or the word *Menu*.

From Mike Ryan's

From Mike Ryan's "#Hamburger Wars" deck from the Ignite session at UXPA 2015, found at [#HamburgerWars Ignite UXPA International 2015](#)

While the icon is popular because it can serve as consistent navigation in responsive design, his research over multiple studies showed that users consistently failed tasks when they had to rely on that icon. He also demonstrated that in A/B tests a menu button—with *Menu* spelled out—was selected 20% more often than the hamburger icon. Ryan cited companies, such as Redbooth, that have switched from the hamburger icon to tabbed menu and correspondingly increased engagement by 65%. See Ryan's compelling argument in his [#HamburgerWars](#) slides—it should give you some pause before designing your next mobile app with the hamburger icon.

3. Faster & better collaboration

Many sessions and posters explained techniques for incorporating design and evaluation in an agile development process or simply returning field research to the product team more quickly.

Sukhada Jog of Yahoo developed a process for conducting home visits in a lightweight fashion. By conducting home visits one day a week and including members from the product team at each session (including the post-visit analysis session), she got a wide swath of the product team involved. She made the team happy by returning user feedback quickly. In her presentation [Keep it Lightweight, Inspiring and Super-Effective: Home Visits Through the Agile Lens](#) she also advised us to come up with a framework for the data and insights we're gathering. This helps our teams more quickly organize the immense amount of qualitative data we could be collecting.

Another team, TecEd and Google, showcased their data gathering checklist and a model for using images from a site visit to quickly turn around findings.



My photo of a field visits methods poster from a joint effort between TecEd and Google.

While it's necessary that teams come up with ways to turn around field visit insights quickly, I'm wondering how they find themes across multiple weeks of insight gathering. How do they look across all the sessions and provide some comprehensive findings? Are these teams bothering to do so? This is really the same problem as this: How do you look across all your research

activities, perhaps spanning several months, and conclude some overarching findings or principles? There is never time to do this but I believe it can serve as a course correction and bring to light major, enduring themes. I also believe there is some risk that team members will cling to salient findings from one particular week and will miss more prominent trends.

I'd love to hear how other teams are keeping track of the weekly findings so they are incorporating past findings into the newly occurring findings.

4. UX strategy: Getting a seat at the table

Do you face the problem of getting the UX team's input to be heard, have more weight, or to not be circumvented during design decisions? It's happened to me and I heard it from many I talked with at UXPA. Despite a few workshops and sessions on how to elevate UX strategy to the level of business strategy, the UX community continually seeks guidance on how to have a lasting impact on product design.

Russ Willson, one of the keynote speakers, has managed an amazing feat at Microsoft—the design team is an equal peer to engineering and program management in his division. I asked him how he managed that. He explained it was a condition of his joining Microsoft and his team.. Then I asked him, "How do the rest of us get that seat at the table?" I got a very supportive big laugh from the entire room. There is no easy formula. Salesmanship and courage were big parts of his talk, [Career Experiences and How They've Helped Achieve More Success in Design](#). But top-down support of executives is a major part of it. That's the hard part.

Demonstrating UX value to business goals is a necessary step to achieving executive support. ROI on user research and design has been discussed for years. We should continue to discuss it.

Milissa Tarquini showed a powerful statistic in her closing keynote. I found the most recent one from The Design Management Institute: The 10-year returns of design-conscious companies are over 200% higher than the S&P 500 index.



Chart from the Design Management Institute (DMI) showing the profitability of design-conscious companies. The Design Value Index (DVI) comprises 16 companies that had a distinct design organization with design leadership at the senior level throughout this period. Apple makes up a huge part of this success. From [2014 Design Value Index](#)

That's great that good design is proving to be so profitable. We assume that means user-centered design, but that is not necessarily true for all companies. Therefore demonstrating the value of user research, my field is still required. How do we convince management to invest in user research?

It's always helpful to see how teams are measuring ROI and Beth Lingard and Dorianne Rosenberg of AnswerLab were addressing user research in their talk [For Insights to Impact: Demonstrating the ROI of UX Research](#). They point out the real undertaking is effectively *communicating* the value of UX research.

Their steps to impact?

- Aligning the research with business needs and goals
- Demonstrating the value of your insights
- Socializing the ROI of your work

I like their emphasis on repeatedly restating with each stakeholder touchpoint how the research ties to the business goals. Still, the problem is getting the notice and support of higher

management. AnswerLab's other good idea is the UXImpact™

Score they developed: a conversion index, a brand index, and a user experience index. They give examples of how to measure each and how the conversion index and brand index are measured in ways unique to one's industry to align with business goals.

Inspiration all around

Attending this conference among my peers reminded me that we all could be speaking and sharing our good ideas. We all have some wisdom to share. We just need to write about it thoughtfully, put it out there, and see if our lessons learned are interesting to anyone. I encourage us all to articulate tips and ideas. Keep this in mind since both [ConveyUX](#) and the next UXPA conference will be held in our beautiful city of Seattle.

The job board was filled! So many opportunities in user experience.

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Lovely workspace for end-of-day work

Roxane loves conducting user research and, always inquisitive, thrives on learning from others. She could talk about qualitative data analysis, reaching insights, and facilitating sessions zealously with any unsuspecting user experience specialist.