

Introduction:

A user experience map is an incredibly useful tool to understand and improve your user experience. A great user experience map documents your user experience from your user's eyes, helping you to understand not only how users interact with you today, but also identifies improvement opportunities.

Unfortunately, there is no standard for a user experience map. You can build it following high-quality design principles, or use smiley faces. You can make it a work of art, or something that looks like it belongs on a napkin.

The user experience map may go by a different name, such as user experience map, experience map, touch point map, etc. The map provides a visual representation of how your user uses your product or services, or how potential users go through the shopping process.

The 10 Critical Components of an effective User Experience Map:

1. Represent your User's perspective. The user experience map needs to represent the interactions as your user experiences it. It often includes interactions that happen outside of your control, such as a social media interaction or a web search. When developing educational content with a large retailer, we discovered that most of the shopper education was complete before they ever visited that retailer's website.

2. Use research. Do not use internal staff to build these – that just makes a process slow. Depending on the scope, the user experience map process can involve interviews or ethnographies, possibly combined with surveys. Some companies bring in users and build them interactively with internal staff. Ethnographies can create a very powerful experience, although the small sample size can create bias. Better to do the research first, then bring in your users to build your final map.

3. Represent User segments. Your different segments typically have very different user experiences. In a pre-sales project for a service company we found that one segment typically spent two hours researching the category, while another consistently spent more than six weeks doing the same, using very different tools. Imagine trying to represent these very different experiences as one.

4. Include User goals. A great user experience map shows your user's goals at each stage of the process. Goals can change as the process unfolds.

5. Focus on emotions. Emotions are critical to any experience, whether B2B or B2C, and a great user experience map communicates these emotions. But I'm not an advocate of the smiley and frowny faces prevalent in many experience maps.

6. Represent touch points. The user experience map is often built to communicate the order and type of touch points – including those not in your control.

7. Highlight moments of truth. Some interactions have more impact than others. Great experience maps separate those critical moments of truth from the rest. For example, when visiting a

hospital, a bad check-in taints the rest of the patient experience.

8. Measure your brand promise. A critical outcome of a great user experience map is measuring how your experience supports your brand promise. If your brand promise is to be either effortless, highly customized, or unique, then your experience map is an excellent way to document whether your user feels you are meeting that goal.

9. Include time. Experience length provides important context. Does the typical call last 30 seconds or 10 minutes? Did shoppers spend 20 minutes or 40 hours deciding on a product?

10. Ditch the PowerPoint. Most user experience maps are created by and for PowerPoint. But PowerPoint is built to communicate basic information on-screen, usually by bullet points. Why limit yourself to such a tool for something as important as your user experience? Use a desktop publishing application to communicate the richness of the experience.

Some optional criteria to consider:

1. Break the experience into phases. In a longer experience, users are accomplishing different things at different times. For example, early shopping phases typically involve trying to figure out what questions to ask, whereas later phases are more transactional. By understanding the user's mindset at each phase, you can customize the experience around relevant needs.

2. Bring in User Verbatims. While not strictly required, verbatims bring the user experience to life.

3. Include Users and Non-Users. A pre-sales user experience map should always include non-users, as they may follow a different path to make a decision. One user research project showed how non-users were far more likely to use in-person meetings to make a purchase decision – which our client did not offer. This realization was critical to their improvement efforts.

4. Use your other Voice of the User components. Rather than being a one-off project, the experience map should incorporate components of your Voice of the User program (NPS, Satisfaction, the User Effort Score) to link it to your other efforts.