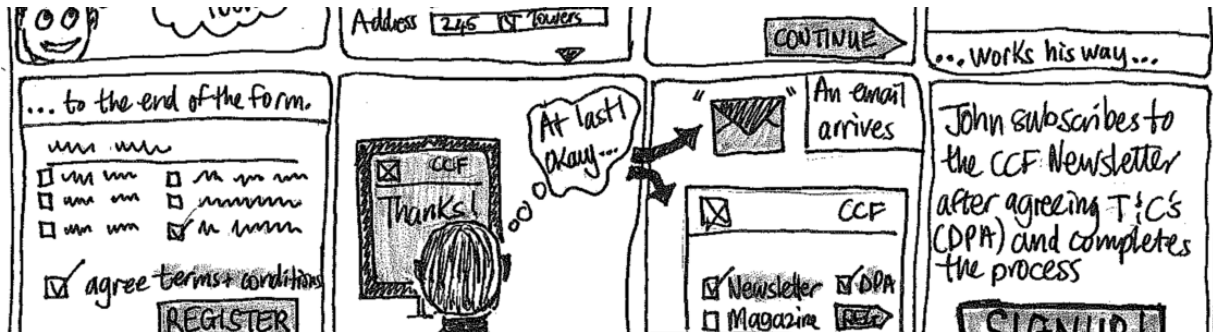# User Experience Maps
– the Beginner's Guide

What is a user experience?

A user experience is a series of steps (typically 4-12) which represent a scenario in which a user might interact with the thing you are designing.

They can be used for 2 main things:

- Demonstrating the way users **currently** interact with the service / website / product
- Demonstrating the way users **could** interact with the service / website / product

Why should I use a user experience?

There are many benefits to investing time into user experiences:

- ***Demonstrating the vision for the project*** – user experiences are a great way to communicate what you are trying to achieve with stakeholders. They show an example of what the future state of whatever it is you are designing could be. Along with personas they can be one of the key outputs from the requirements gathering stage at the beginning of a project.
- ***They help us understand user behaviour*** – User experiences can help you work out how users are going to interact with your system and what they expect from it.
- ***They help identify possible functionality at a high level*** – by understanding the key tasks they will want to do to you can start to understand what sort of functional requirements will help enable those tasks.
- ***They help you define your taxonomy and interface*** – By understanding the 'flow' of the various tasks the user will want to undertake you can start to think about what sort of taxonomy can help support those tasks and what kind of interface the user will be needing to accomplish them.
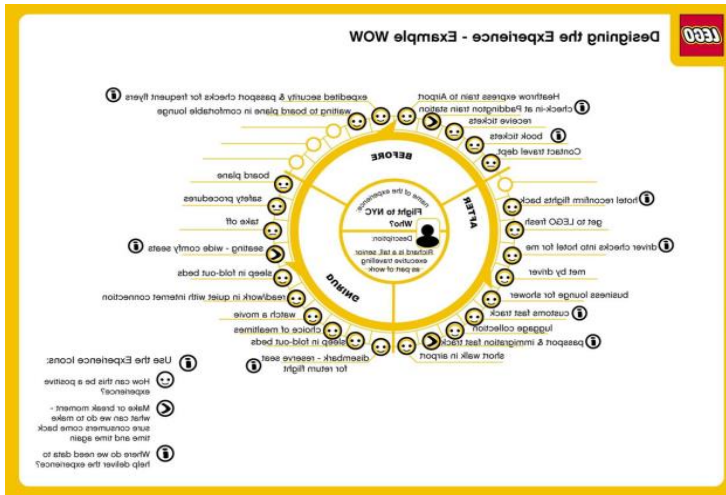
A different way to show a experience – Experience map of an executive visiting Lego

When do I create a user experience?

User experiences typically come towards the beginning of a project in the discovery or requirements gathering phase, normally after personas. This is both to visualise the user requirements and help feed into other design activities such outline storyboard. However, they can also be used further down the line when scoping out pieces of functionality in more detail.

How do I create a user experience?

If you have already done personas then congratulations, you already have a lot of the input you need to create a user experience. Before attempting a user experience, you should understand:

- **Your user's goals**
- **Their motivations**
- **Their current pain points**
- **Their overall character**
- **The main tasks they want to achieve**

User experiences tie back to personas and real people. You will want to create at least one experience for each of your primary personas at a bare minimum.
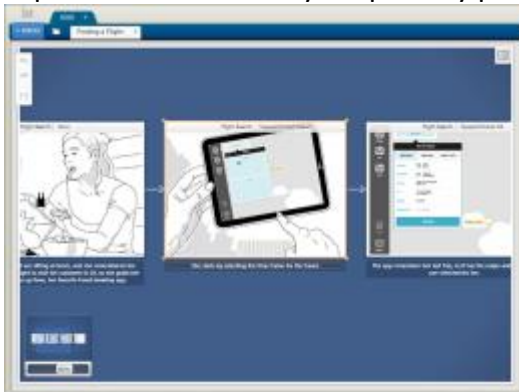
What should a user experience contain?

The main thing a user experience should contain is a series of steps. It is up to you to decide how many you need to best represent the experience.

You will want to think broadly in each step about things such as:

- **Context** – Where is the user? What is around them? Are there any external factors which may be distracting them? *Further reading: Contextual product backlogs*
- **Progression** – How does each step enable them to get to the next?
- **Devices** – what device are they using? Are they a novice or expert? What features does the device have?
- **Functionality** – What type of functionality are they expecting? Is it achievable?
- **Emotion** – What is their emotional state in each step? Are they engaged, bored, annoyed?

If the purpose of your user experience is to show the current state of affairs then make sure to highlight any changes to pain points which a future solution will solve. If it is to show the future state then think of ways which an ideal world could look, highlighting the benefits to the user and the business.

Depending on the project you may wish to go totally blue sky on this, however it is generally best to at least speak to your development team when creating your user experiences to ensure things are at least feasible (if not optimistic!).

What should a user experience look like?
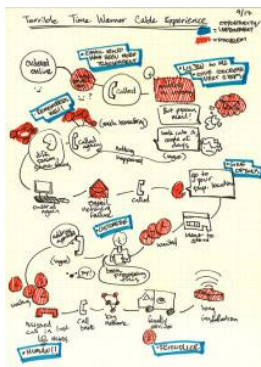
A more conceptual user experience

There is no set template, and a lot can depend on who the audience for the user experience is. If it is to communicate to developers, they may be happy enough with a purely text based experience. If it is for an executive committee then you may want to think about adding illustrations to each step (think comic book). Really the only limit to the presentation is your own imagination, and what will communicate what you need to get across in the most effective fashion.

Whichever layout or presentation style you choose you may want to include the following in some way:

- **A picture of the persona the experience relates to**
- **A title summarising the experience e.g *'Cleaning process of the family microwave'***
- **A series of steps in short, concise text**

- **An illustration of what's happening in the step (if deemed necessary) And then per step:**
- **The device used**
- **Changes to the current experience (if future state)**
- **Benefits to the user and/or business**
- **Any functionality being demonstrated**
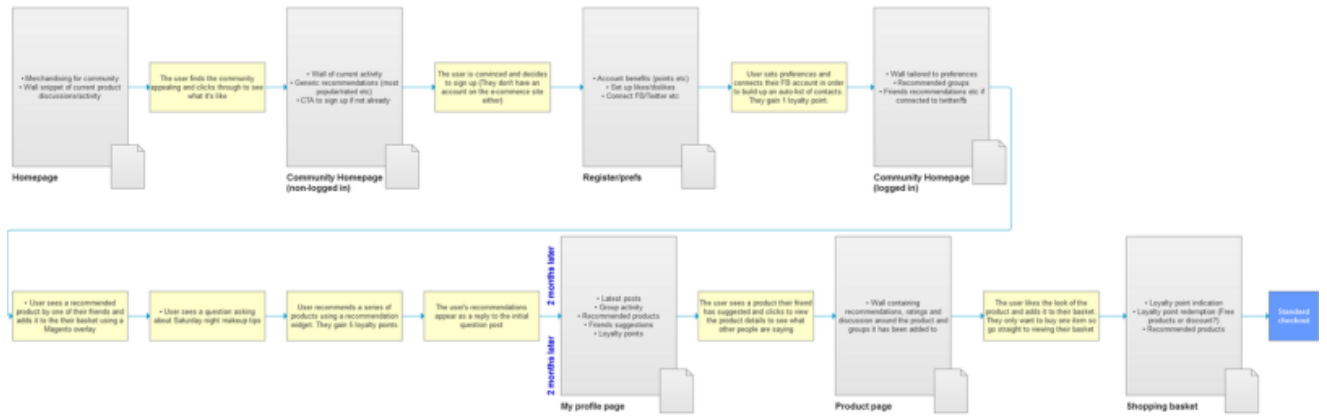
A simple text based experience can be sufficient for some audiences