box UK

SPOTLIGHT ON...

UX Design Trends

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At a time when it's never been more important for businesses to focus on the experiences they're delivering, increasingly sophisticated technological capabilities are driving a wide range of User Experience and Design (UX&D) trends and opportunities.

In this ebook we'll take a deeper dive into some of the UX&D trends dominating the conversation right now, to ensure you remain ahead of the curve with a clear vision and roadmap focused on measurable, sustainable success.

UX&D has always been important but is now arguably one of the most important parts of your interface.

Designing For Devices
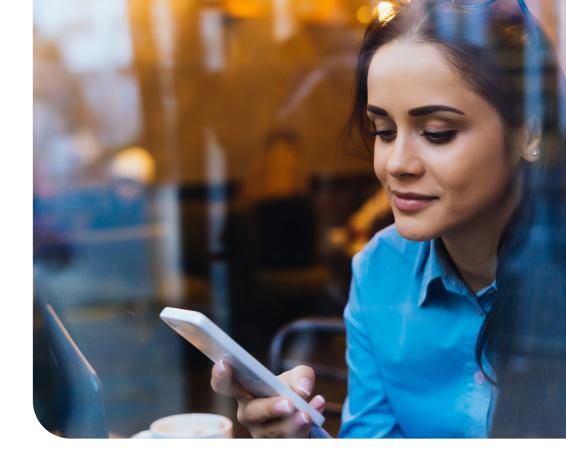
Designing For Devices

While the majority of organisations understand the importance of accommodating a growing volume and variety of devices in their digital plans, implementation can lag as new features take priority. And, as we'll see,time is running out to make these plans a reality...

MOBILE DESIGN

Google's Core Web Vitals (CWV) update of 2021 rewards sites that are quick to load and deliver information to users, with a particular focus on mobile performance. If your site isn't up to scratch, you may find a negative impact on organic visibility, rankings, and traffic.

At the same time, mobile devices are themselves becoming faster and faster, with the rollout of 5G technology delivering the highest levels of speed and performance we've seen. Any design optimisation undertaken for Google's benefit must therefore be balanced with delivering a dynamic and engaging experience - taking advantage of modern technologies and high-quality visuals to reflect mobile's role as the dominant digital channel for a wide variety of tasks.

As audiences become comfortable using mobile devices to complete ever-more complex and sophisticated tasks, attention must be given to areas of the experience that may have been previously overlooked. This includes ID authentication design, which is receiving increased focus particularly as the accessibility of traditional 2-factor authentication comes into question (source: Aydin Kwan).

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More widely, accessibility looks set to be one of the biggest talking points in the coming months and years. At least 1 in 5 people in the UK have a long term illness, impairment or disability (source: GDS / Scope), and 69% of organisations are prioritising digital accessibility now (source: Applause). We'll be taking a deeper dive into this extremely relevant and important trend later in this ebook.

BEYOND THE SCREEN

As organisations are getting to grips with managing a range of device sizes - from smart TVs to smart watches - they also need to look beyond the screen, and consider the various ways that audiences may interact with their brand.

More established trends such as voice-activated devices, out-of-home interactions and virtual and augmented reality are coming together to form disruptive new opportunities. We're seeing the rise of 'Extended Reality' (XR) that draws on these technologies to connect users to each other, to digital devices, and to the environment - providing an immersive experience within a virtual, 3D 'metaverse'.

Hardware innovations are driving the rise of these trends, and leading figures such as Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg are predicting that elements of the metaverse will become embedded within the mainstream in a few short years (source: USA Today Tech). This presents some interesting UX&D implications, including how designers will integrate air gestures and voice commands into their design systems, and how these can be standardised to ensure a consistent and intuitive experience.

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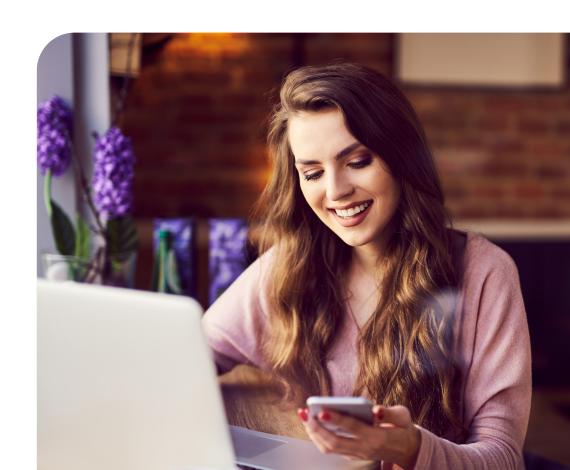
Speaking to Box UK's own UX&D team, it's clear that delivering against these new demands will require the expertise of multiple disciplines and industries; for example, collaborating with architects to understand how people move around free spaces, and with event planners to guide behaviour in these quasi-physical spaces.

As we'll see reflected throughout this ebook, it's becoming clear that organisations cannot afford to ignore the user experience, or hand it off to a single team. It must factor into every stage of decision-making, supported by a culture of user-centred and data-driven design that is embedded within every level of the business.

WEB3: THE FUTURE OF THE WEB?
What the web is, and what it delivers, is a fluid concept, and is constantly shifting and evolving. From the early 'Web1' days of self-published websites to the curated experiences of 'Web2' driven by media giants such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, we're now seeing a shift towards collectively-owned experiences, underpinned by innovations like blockchain, cryptocurrencies and NFTs.

While we wouldn't want to predict exactly what Web3 will look like and how it will impact businesses and consumers, it does reinforce the need to ensure your platforms can respond to new trends, and underpin design decisions with a clear strategy. The questions being raised by Web3 - What does design for these new technologies look like? What opportunities does it open for us? What does it not open for us? What extra or different responsibilities are there? - are questions that should always be front-of-mind when assessing new technologies, to keep the focus on delivery value rather than innovation for innovation's sake.

Designing For The User

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Good design can make a world of difference to how users perceive and interact with your digital services. 50% of consumers agree that website design is crucial to a business's overall brand, while 42% of people will leave a website because of poor functionality (source: MarTech Series).

As always, different design approaches can rise and fall in popularity, from the growth of 'neomorphism' (balancing previous trends for flat / minimal design with the added texture of skeuomorphism), to a rise in nostalgic 90s retro design.

Beneath this however the fundamental design principles of user-centred design, accessibility and inclusivity will remain, although they will no doubt be shaped as tools and capabilities continue to evolve.

ADAPTING TO USER BEHAVIOURS

Just as we're seeing with the growing range of connected devices, user demand for higher levels of flexibility and customisation mean that designers no longer have complete control over how their designs are consumed.

Enabled by frameworks such as the new Material Design 3 design system, users can today set if they want hard or soft edges, dark mode or light mode, high or low-contrast, large icons or small icons, and much much more. Designers must therefore ensure their designs work within this system, and respect their design choices as well as their functional settings.

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(It's also worth noting that Material Design 3 brings more physical user interface elements into its design patterns, supporting the idea that extended reality and the metaverse will play a bigger role in the digital ecosystem as we move forward.)

Additionally, it's important to respect user behaviours and design services that accommodate these, rather than forcing users to adapt their behaviours. When considering digital services specifically, this includes understanding how users consume information - people do not read on the internet, they scan (source: NN Group) - and making appropriate decisions from typography and font size to content layout and even the words being used.

Of course, there is still space to engage and delight audiences in addition to serving their needs, with recent years seeing an increased focus on 'microinteractions' (little moments that stick in users' memories) as well as a growing use of animations and 2D / 3D visuals, to add interest and drive greater customer loyalty and satisfaction.

A NOTE ON TOOLING
There has always been debate in the UX community about what tools to use, whether flat visuals or interactive designs, or the current hot topic of code vs no code tools. However, this debate also reminds us that we should perhaps be focusing less on tools, and more on ensuring we deliver

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the right solutions for the specific situation (a point nicely summarised by this analogy of 'Designing with ketchup'). This is how we frame design projects at Box UK - particularly as we often deal with complex challenges that require bespoke solutions, and can't always be serviced by the same single tool.

ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSIVITY
Most organisations today are educated on the basics of accessibility - alt text, captions, colour contrast, support for screen readers - and accessibility is now understood as the right thing to do, rather than simply a box to be ticked.

Demand for accessible products and services is certain to only grow in the coming months and years as the human element of accessibility, and the real-world impact exclusion can have on people, is recognised. Sites not meeting the standard will be called out not just by those who need to see those features, but by anyone with an interest in accessibility - particularly if those sites are also claiming inclusivity, without putting in the effort.

There's also a hint that Google may start to weight accessibility in its rankings, similar to how the CWV update has prioritised performance, as it already measures sites against a range of accessibility criteria via its Lighthouse tool (source: Deque). If this does indeed go ahead, those businesses that have yet to prioritise accessibility may find themselves struggling to keep up.

Alongside the need to cover fundamental accessibility considerations, there's a growing understanding that organisations can go much further to deliver truly accessible products and services. In moving towards inclusive design, more focus is being paid to the situational needs of audiences, such as the level of cognition, associated feelings and emotions, and contextual constraints (such as poor internet connection, or operating hands-free).

All of these considerations could be filed under the banner of 'accessibility', and have consequences for how designers create solutions that meet accessibility requirements while still standing out from the competition. This may be achieved by balancing familiar functionality - in the words of Steve Krug, 'Don't Make Me Think' - with more innovative design flourishes such as the animations and visuals mentioned previously, and we'll likely see more services following these principles.

Within the UX&D profession itself, we're also seeing more discussions around ethics and responsibility, addressing questions such as how to deal with bias and inclusivity, and reporting on the right data to deliver focused solutions to accessibility and inclusivity challenges.

EBOOK | SPOTLIGHT ON UX DESIGN TRENDS

Can You Afford
To Ignore UX&D?

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There are always going to be new User Experience and Design trends, driven by changes in technology, audiences and the marketplace. While it's important to stay on top of these, it's easy to become distracted chasing after every latest fashion, and lose sight of the wider picture.

Instead, we'd recommend focusing on the fundamentals, and on keeping UX&D at the forefront of your decision-making; it has always been important but is now arguably one of the most important parts of your interface. With the rise of Amazon, Facebook and Google, people's expectations have grown, and as is becoming increasingly clear, user experience is about more than just your websites. So think bigger, and involve UX consultants and designers in more of your conversations.

Ultimately, all these discussions come back to really understanding who your user is, what situation they're in and what they want to achieve, and providing them with the tools they need to do so. This means putting user research, user experience design and user testing at the heart of your strategy - fail to do so, and you could find yourself in a very difficult space in terms of performance, usability and inclusiveness.

Want to learn more? At Box UK we've helped global organisations design digital experiences with a measurable impact on business performance and customer satisfaction. To learn more about what we can do for you, get in touch by calling +44 (0) 20 7439 1900 or emailing info@boxuk.com, and visit www.boxuk.com/our-work/ to find out more about the work we've delivered for our clients.

How we've helped...

ALL WALES THERAPEUTICS AND TOXICOLOGY CENTRE (AWTTC)

Box UK gave AWTTC the understanding and outputs required to create an effective new website centred around the needs and journeys of their core user groups; presenting what is often highly complex information and terminology in a way that ensures users can easily find what they need to achieve their goals.

The new site plays a crucial role in supporting AWTTC's vision, as well as driving significant efficiencies for the organisation through a consolidated approach to digital delivery.

"Box UK really understood what we wanted to achieve with our new website and had the expertise and experience to deliver."

Clare Elliott, Senior Appraisal Scientist, AWTTC

TBC BANK

Over the years, TBC Bank has relied upon Box UK to deliver a number of UX design projects that support them in their aim of providing the best multi-channel experience in the region.

Working closely with the financial institution, the team implemented a programme of strategic UX&D activity that delivered a measurable, positive impact – including increasing the number of banking clients by a staggering 275%, and growing mobile penetration from 20% to 80% in just two years.

"Box UK's user experience and design expertise is priceless."

Vazha Beriashvili, Deputy Retail Director, TBC Bank

To learn more about our range of User Experience and Design services, get in touch with our experts.

box UK

Box UK specialises in the design, development and delivery of large-scale digital platforms that are relied upon by millions worldwide, with a track record of success spanning more than twenty years.

Our multidisciplinary team act as partners to global clients including Jaguar Land Rover, Sodexo, the British Medical Journal and RS Components, delivering impressive programmes of work that elevate and accelerate their digital growth.

Across hundreds of high-profile projects, we've gained a reputation for quality that's recognised at the highest levels – with a host of awards from leading industry bodies, including the Webbys, Communicators and UK Digital Experience Awards.