



UX and UI: Build better user experiences

A Guide for SMEs

2023 EDITION



We've all had our fair share of bad website experiences

And when it happens, you're often left feeling annoyed, confused and frustrated at not being able to accomplish what you set out to do. So, what are some of the most common symptoms of poor website experiences?

- ▶ Navigating from page to page is a slow, choppy chore.
- ▶ It's impossible to find the information you need quickly.
- ▶ Performing basic tasks, like filling out a contact form or completing a transaction, are needlessly fussy and complicated.

All these issues can be traced back to website UX and UI.



What is UX and UI?

Both terms sometimes get used interchangeably. But in fact, they are two distinct elements that share a close, almost co-dependent relationship.

Defining UX

UX is short for user experience and can be defined as how a user experiences (or reacts) to your brand's products, services – or website.

UX is reactive and infused with emotion. It can be driven by a whole host of factors (sometimes beyond your control) like a user's past experiences, expectations and biases. Of course, everyone's attitudes and preferences are totally unique! How one person experiences your website is not going to be the same across the board.

Defining UI

If UX is the more emotional, intangible side of things, UI – which is short for user interface – is all about what you can see, touch and feel. It's impacted by a system's physical attributes, like a website's overall navigation, dropdown menus, buttons and more.

In short, UI is the “what,” while UX is the “how.”

A co-dependent relationship

UI drives UX and UX helps to inform UI. How? Think of UI as a comfortable leather saddle and UX as the experience of horse racing.

While they are separate (but related) things, a saddle has no meaningful purpose without a horse or race (UX). But without a comfortable leather saddle (UI), your horse racing experience would be punishing and unpleasant – to say the least.

UI is the
“what”,
UX is the
“how”.

UX, UI and your website

Your website is often the first touchpoint your prospective customer has with your product or service, and their experience with the website will drive their opinion of your brand. In fact, it only **takes the average person 50 milliseconds** to form an opinion on your website/webpage's visual appeal.

That said – when it comes to your business's website, creating a genuinely good user experience can seem overwhelming. Where does one even begin? And what tools and/or specialised skills are required?

This e-book will outline the benefits of effective website UI and outline the steps required to achieve a positive UX through your website design.

After all, your website is like having a dedicated salesperson that works on your behalf 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It's your most dedicated employee, so why not set it up for success?

To ensure you're providing a positive UX, you must:

- ▶ Tailor the digital landscape of your website to your end user/customers' needs.
- ▶ Design the UI with your customer front-of-mind.
- ▶ Provide what the customer is after – be it more information about a product, the ability to make a transaction etc. in the least complicated and uncluttered way possible.
- ▶ Get inside your customers' heads and map out their journey through your website.

Remember: UX also influences just about every design element on your website (UI), including the look and feel of menus and buttons, typography and how your brand is referenced.

How bad design or UI impacts your bottom line:



It drives customers away

Dealing with confusing navigation, broken links, achingly slow page loading speeds etc., only serves to frustrate customers and send them packing... sometimes to a competitor.

- ▶ If customers aren't satisfied with the experience on your site, **13% of them will tell 15 or more people.**
- ▶ If customers are happy with their experience, **72% will tell six or more people.**



It damages your credibility

First impressions matter. If you're trying to project a professional image, but your website is laden with bad, pixelated stock images, typo-laden copy or other amateurish-looking clutter, it sends the wrong message to potential customers.



It makes you appear behind the times

Websites that lack modern features (like mobile responsiveness) give customers the impression that you're out of touch – or worse – don't care. Also – if your website content isn't updated regularly, it can hurt your search engine rankings.

The benefits of good UI



Good UI builds customer trust

Seeing a well thought out, smooth and intuitive site gives customers the confidence that they can shop without any concerns or hassles.



Good UI can increase conversion rates by up to 200%

Your website is often a customer's first impression of your business. Delivering a positive, seamless experience entices customers to spend more time on your site, which leads to a higher chance of converting "browsers" into "buyers".



Increases customer satisfaction

Good UI enhances your customers' sense of satisfaction with your site – as well as your products/services and overall brand.



Reduces costs (and future headaches)

Getting your UI right today will save you the cost of having to scrap everything and do a full redesign in the future.

200%
increase in
conversion rates

Where to start?

Lead with empathy

Put yourself in your customers' shoes and try to anticipate how they would want to navigate through your site's content.

Don't make assumptions

Aim to understand your customer's central pain points, wants, needs, interests and desires by conducting research. This helps remove the guesswork.

How should you go about conducting research?

Interview real people

Have a few trusted friends or loyal customers explore your website and provide feedback to you. This can help you pinpoint straight away any issues or obstacles they may be having.

Create website personas based on what you understand about your customers

These personas are fictional or semi-fictional characters meant to summarise/represent different mindsets, customer insights and motivations for the main segments/cohorts of your audience.

You should also reflect their main pain points, goals and interests. Creating these personas will help you build better, more tailored and meaningful experiences.

Check out our [e-book](#) on this topic.



Surveys and questionnaires

These give you the chance to ask very specific/pointed questions about what your customers are looking to find (or achieve) when visiting your site – and whether your site is actually providing what they want.

Surveys let you gather more specific data – e.g., “yes or no” answers or ratings about specific aspects or features on your site that can be compiled and combed over in more detail.

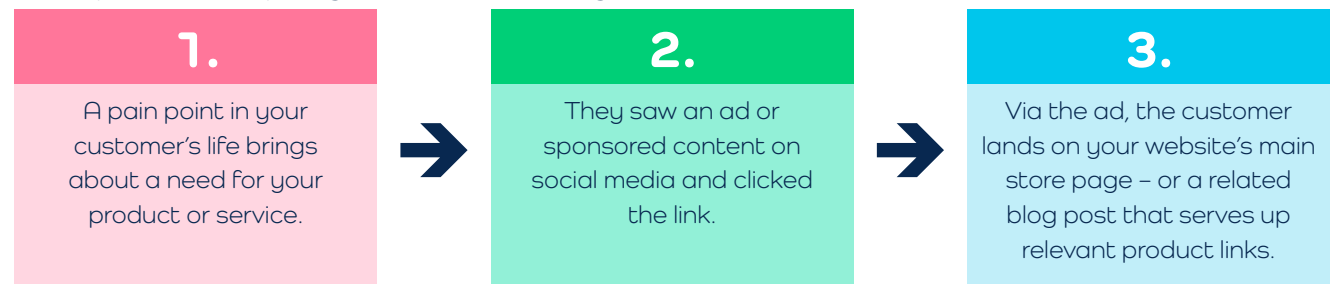
Surveys also provide an opportunity for more qualitative information in the form of blank fields that customers can fill out with their thoughts and opinions.

Create user flow maps

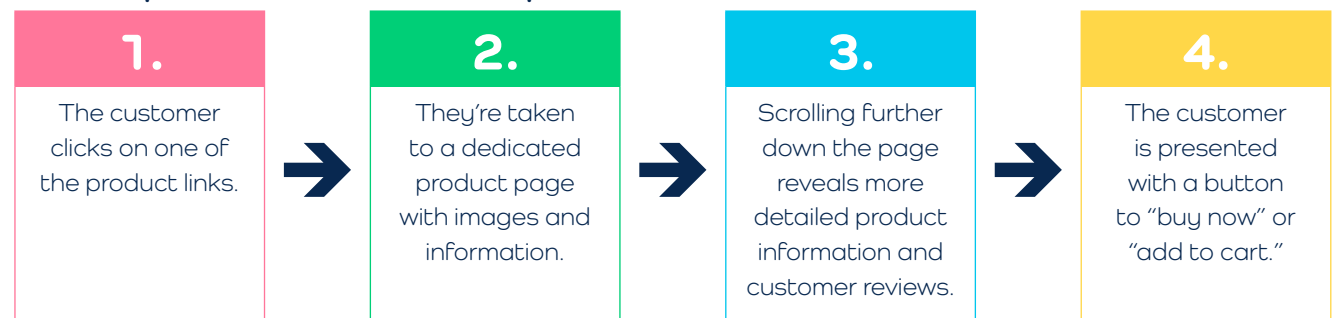
Base these on what you’ve gathered from your research and customer personas. A flow map is basically the blueprint or roadmap that defines what you want people to do on your site and the steps or sequence you would like them to follow. The key here is to keep things as simple and streamlined as possible.

If the goal is to get customers to purchase your product and/or book your service, you first need to understand how they got to your website. You can track the main sources of your traffic using Google Analytics.

A simple flow map might look something like this:



An example of a follow-on flow map could be:



Keep in mind: These flow maps are meant to be adaptable over time and are something you can test out and refine as needed.

Where to start? [continued]

Bring the design process to life

Once you've mapped out your desired customer journey, it's time to get into the actual design phase. Here, you can go in several different directions. Build a website from scratch yourself, use a website building platform – like Squarespace, GoDaddy, Wix etc. or hire a web design professional. Our e-book on [How to build a low maintenance website](#) might be useful as a starting point.



Practical ways to improve your website's UI

Not everyone has the time or budget for a fully involved, top to bottom redesign. But in most cases, a few targeted improvements can go a long way towards making your website far more useful.

Embrace white space

You don't have to cover every inch of your website's real estate with imagery, videos and ads. White space plays a big role in drawing your customer's focus into your titles and text. Plus – it gives your website a more airy, uncluttered and modern feel.

Optimise page loading speeds

Just seven seconds of page loading time can cause your bounce rate – people leaving your site – to jump **by more than 32%**.

Users visit an average of **5.6 additional pages when load times are two seconds vs. eight seconds**. Google also ranks pages based on their load time.

Image file size is usually the culprit when it comes to slow page loading speeds. Though, there are several, easy-to-use, free online tools that can compress images while retaining quality. **TinyPNG** and **Compressnow** are two great places to start.

Include clear, enticing calls to action

Having great content is key, but what should visitors to your page do? How do you drive transactions and create excitement? Effective calls to action can sometimes be as simple and direct as "Buy Now," "Read More," "Book Today," or "Get Started."

Craft well-written headlines

Be direct and concise so your visitors know exactly what they're about to read and why it matters to them. This makes your site easily scannable at a quick glance.

As well, including specific keywords within your headlines serves to give your website an SEO (search engine optimisation) boost, as Google will prioritise headings over other content.

Segment key information with bullet points/icons

Break up blocks of text so that your users can get right to the information they want, quickly. Provide short paragraphs of two to four lines, with the keywords highlighted and linked to inner pages for more in-depth content.

Steer clear of auto-play videos and music

Be mindful of not bombarding your customers with auto-playing videos or audio as soon as they navigate to your website. Not only can auto-playing media slow down page load speeds, but it can also be perceived as annoying and disruptive to users.

Ensure a consistent look and feel across all pages

As tempting as it can be, don't get too wild with fonts, styles and colours. Your site should look crisp, professional and consistent. Stick to standard fonts that people are familiar with and make sure there is good colour differentiation between the font and the web page background colour for ease of reading.

Use unique imagery

Good, high-quality images can help you tell a more authentic, personal story about your business. Aim for real-life images rather than defaulting to stock photography. If you have the budget and the time, you might consider hiring a professional photographer (or even a friend that's handy with a camera) to build up your image repository.

Catch and clean up your 404s

404 errors, caused by dead or broken links, serve to irritate your users and disrupts their journey through your content. Going through and periodically checking that all your links work (using [a free broken link checker tool](#)) might seem tedious and time-consuming, but it's an essential part of maintaining positive user experiences.

Be mobile-friendly

Most of your customer base will access your site via a mobile device, so it's important your site is mobile friendly and easily accessible. The good news? Many modern web builder templates include mobile responsiveness as a standard, built-in feature.

Serve up a more direct journey

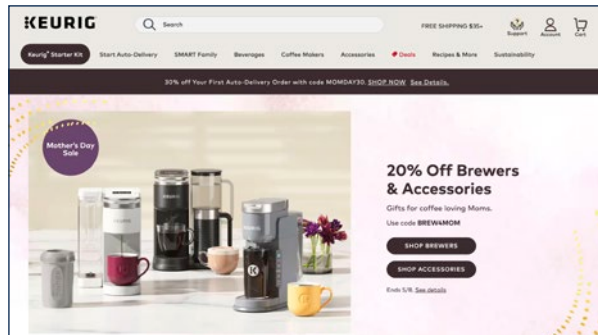
Many customers or prospects using mobile will come from other channels, like a social media, or a link from a product ad. For a smoother user experience, it's important that these users are taken directly to the specific product page or landing page.

Run usability tests before launch

Have friends or colleagues look over every page of your site and provide honest feedback about the design, content and overall experience. It can be extremely helpful to gather other outside perspectives and address issues you might have overlooked.

Examples of good website design and experiences to get you inspired

Keurig

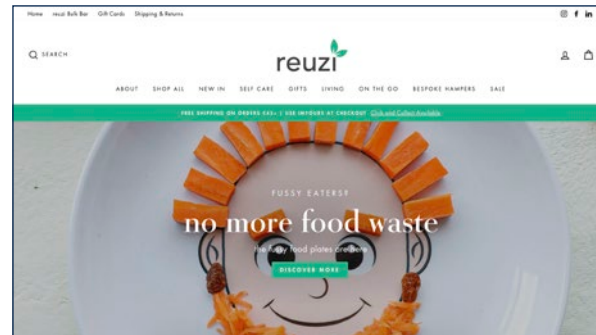


Their website provides easy navigation, and is filled with bold, attractive visuals. As well – Keurig employs a clever, layered approach to product information where customers can get a concise summary or delve deeper into the technical details if they choose.

What we like:

- ▶ Customers can quickly and easily explore (and compare) Keurig's complete line of coffee machines.
- ▶ Product information is broken up into easily digestible and understandable chunks, so as not to overwhelm.
- ▶ Product details tend to focus mainly on the coffee drinking experience, rather than technical information.

Reuzi



Clean, uncluttered design, a simplified navigational experience and vibrant product imagery are what rule the day on Reuzi's website.

What we like:

- ▶ Main navigation buttons are within easy reach and clearly categorised.
- ▶ The company's compelling mission statement and story appears just beneath the main header image.
- ▶ Scrolling further takes you to a colourful display of products by category.
- ▶ Clear calls to action take you directly to product pages. From there, adding items to your cart and purchasing happens within a couple of clicks.

Apple

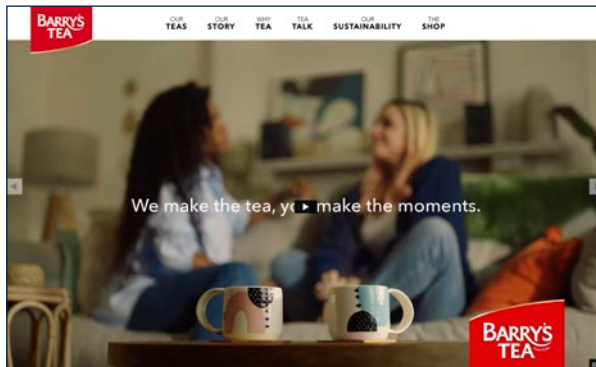


It's probably no big shock that Apple's website shares much of the same elegant design as their technology. Everything – from the choice and placement of navigational buttons and images – to the fonts – contributes to an easy-to-navigate, accessible and satisfying experience.

What we like:

- ▶ The top navigation bar clearly (and visually) lays out all the different categories and subcategories of products – from iPads to iMacs and everything in between.
- ▶ Apple's choice of font and imagery help promote maximum readability and keep the user focused with minimal distractions.
- ▶ Visuals and language found throughout the site pique interest, promote a sense of wonder and funnel customers towards a purchase without overwhelming them with dense, intimidating technical information.

Barry's Tea



The overall experience on the Barry's Tea site elicits a feeling of coziness and familiarity as you enjoy a hot cuppa with loved ones. This experience is aided by warm visuals, inviting language and straightforward navigation.

What we like:

- ▶ An uncluttered homepage provides easy navigation to all major parts of the website, such as the tea shop, company history etc.
- ▶ A playable (but not auto-playing) video on the homepage provides an emotional hook and helps set the brand's tone and feel.
- ▶ Tea shop product pages are informative – with flavour information, helpful preparation instructions and a clear call to purchase.

Tayto Crisps



This website takes the user experience (and user interface) in a slightly more fun and whimsical direction based around the character of Mr. Tayto. While the focus is on funnelling customers towards purchasing crisps, the site provides other compelling reasons to keep exploring – including games, a social media feed – and more.

What we like:

- ▶ Homepage navigation is straightforward and puts the most popular Tayto Crisps flavours and products front and centre.
- ▶ An eye-catching, vibrant colour palette perfectly channel the “fun” around the Tayto Crisps brand and character.

Excellent tools to improve both UI and UX



Hotjar Feedback

Allows you to collect instant feedback from users on what exactly they like (or dislike) about your website. Users can rate their satisfaction with specific website elements (features, layout etc.), and provide more detailed feedback.



Google Analytics

Measure various website traffic metrics, including time on page, user demographics and the sources of your web traffic. Google Analytics helps give you a better picture of who's visiting your website and how they're behaving during their visits. This information can help you create customer personas and map potential customer journeys.



Google Optimize

This free tool allows you to create "A" and "B" versions of your webpages, so you can experiment with different ways of delivering content to your customers. Google Optimize uses your Google Analytics data to pinpoint which of your web pages could benefit from further attention and improvement.



Lucidchart

An intuitive, easy to use flowchart and diagramming application that helps you easily plot out user flow maps for customers visiting your website.



Lucky Orange

This app creates visual heat maps that show exactly which sections of your website are drawing the most attention. Lucky Orange also helps identify what is causing customers to convert and what's standing in their way.

Quick recap: What does good UI do?

- Helps your customer do what they came to do.
- Responds and adapts to your customers behaviour and changing needs.
- Eliminates needless barriers, clutter and sources of confusion.
- Provides a visually appealing and inviting design/user interface.
- Lets your customers have their voices heard by facilitating feedback.

What about bad UI?

- It's more concerned with form over function and usability.
- Never changes with the times or your customer's needs.
- Confuses and overwhelms customers with poorly organised information and a muddled layout.
- Discourages users or customers from ever returning to your site.

UX and UI is an ongoing process!

When it comes to what's considered a good versus bad user experience, keep in mind that behaviours, attitudes and aesthetics are always changing. For example, mobile responsiveness would have never been considered 15 to 20 years ago, but now, it's a non-negotiable requirement.

Above all else, it's important that you continually listen to feedback, keep an eye on what's current, revisit and reevaluate the user experience you're providing so you can make meaningful adjustments.

Unlock the power of the internet with a trusted Irish .ie online identity

It's trusted

Every **.ie** applicant's identity is checked and validated at the point of registration. Consumers will have confidence in your business as **.ie** is a well-established and trusted domain. 77% of Irish consumers prefer a **.ie** website when buying online, instead of a **.com**.¹

It's unique to Ireland

The official Internet country code for Ireland is **.ie** and is the only online address that is Irish. A **.ie** tells the global community that you are Irish and tells the Irish community that you are local. You can even register an Irish language name if required, fadas and all.

It's more likely to be available

There is a wider choice of available **.ie** domain names compared to **.com**, as significantly more of those names are already registered.

It lets your customers find you online

.ie addresses rank higher than **.com** addresses on Irish based search engines like Google.ie. Irish consumers are more likely to click on local website addresses.

It's the preferred online address for business in Ireland

91% of Irish consumers associate **.ie** websites with Irish businesses over other websites like **.com**.¹ The **.ie** domain accounts for the majority of hosted domains in Ireland.²

It protects your brand

Securing your **.ie** online address strengthens your brand and protects your online identity. All **.ie** domains are registered on a first-come, first-served basis.

¹ .ie Consumer Trust 2020

² HosterStats

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