

THE CHARACTERISTICS* OF USER EXPERIENCE

*char-ac-ter-is-tic: adj. A feature that helps to distinguish a person or thing; distinctive

In his closing plenary at the 2009 IA Summit in Memphis, Jesse James Garrett challenged the attendees to develop a language of critique for user experience. “Useful, Usable and Desirable” have long been touted as the signs of a “good” user experience, however, they’re too abstract to be useful criteria. This - the second in a three-part diagram - defines the **characteristics** that describe the building blocks of an experience, its DNA. The extent to which an experience chooses to leverage each of these characteristics is entirely dependent on the user needs and business goals.

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Google chooses to be very brief in their search results. Only a page title, brief sentence and URL are shown.		<div>BRIEF</div> <div>INFORMATIONAL</div> <div>THOROUGH</div> <div>What degree of information does the experience provide?</div>	Wikipedia chooses to be very thorough with their entries. Their mission, after all, is to be encyclopedic.	
A research / educational experience like Wikipedia is mostly passive . The actions available are limited to editing, changing language, contacting, etc.		<div>PASSIVE</div> <div>ACTIONABLE</div> <div>ACTIVE</div> <div>To what degree does the experience support taking action?</div>	The goal of an e-commerce experience like Amazon is to actively encourage users to take action. Almost any action related to a product is supported.	
Performing a search on Google is a totally individual experience. No capabilities are provided to interact with other users.		<div>INDIVIDUAL</div> <div>SOCIAL</div> <div>GROUP</div> <div>To what degree does the experience support interaction between users?</div>	A social networking experience like Facebook is full of capabilities to allow users to communicate with each other through groups .	
Wikipedia entries are generic . They are identical to all users and show no personal data.		<div>GENERIC</div> <div>PERSONAL</div> <div>SPECIFIC</div> <div>To what degree does the experience provide data specific to a single user?</div>	Gmail’s “content” is personal and specific to each user - their email, contact lists, etc.	
Basecamp tries to be the “ <i>best product possible with the least number of features</i> ”. Its narrow scope intentionally does “ <i>less than the competition</i> ”.		<div>NARROW</div> <div>SCOPED</div> <div>BROAD</div> <div>What degree of functionality does the experience provide?</div>	Microsoft Project’s “ <i>robust</i> ” approach to project management includes a broad range of almost every PM feature in existence.	
flickr’s organizer tool is optimized for repeated, expert, use by self-directed users.		<div>SELF DIRECTED</div> <div>LEARNABLE</div> <div>HELPFUL</div> <div>To what degree does the experience help inexperienced users?</div>	TurboTax is optimized for infrequent use. It is designed to offer extensive help for users not familiar with the process or terminology.	
CNN.com is a fixed experience. The contents and layout cannot be changed by the user (the single exception is the U.S. vs Int’l edition)		<div>FIXED</div> <div>CONFIGURABLE</div> <div>CHANGEABLE</div> <div>To what degree is the experience customizable by a user?</div>	BBC.com allows the user to change the contents and layout of the experience to suit their needs and preferences.	
Most sites on the web are static and non-adaptive, even those that offer personalized content (see above) like Facebook, Myspace and YouTube.	  	<div>STATIC</div> <div>ADAPTIVE</div> <div>DYNAMIC</div> <div>To what degree does the experience adapt itself for time, context or users?</div>	There are very few examples of highly adaptive, dynamic online experiences. Stephen Anderson, however, talks about it extensively, http://is.gd/1FwiG	
The New York Times is a very serious experience with very limited use of gaming principles or techniques.		<div>SERIOUS</div> <div>PLAYFUL</div> <div>FUN</div> <div>To what degree does the experience encourage play?</div>	Facebook engages users with many fun games, quizzes and activities.	
Edmunds.com strives to be unbiased in its reviews of cars and related products and services.		<div>UNBIASED</div> <div>IMPARTIAL</div> <div>INFLUENTIAL</div> <div>To what degree does the experience seek to influence the user?</div>	E-commerce experiences like fordvehicles.com seek to influence their users in a certain direction (buying the product!)	

