Understanding
the Power of Lean UX

A non-technical design guide for development professionals
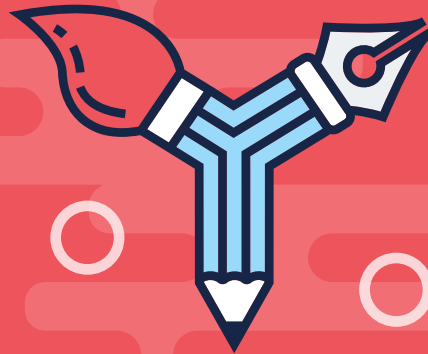
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Lean UX 101

Doing more with less

Any faithful gym-goer jumps at the chance to be lean with the same if not less time spent on the elliptical. The same is true of software projects from Android or iOS mobile apps to multi-tenant SaaS solutions. We're all searching for ways to do more with less. Attain the formerly unachievable with a smarter budget. Race from idea to software in six weeks.

You can with lean UX. Lean UX is the secret that any rapid mobile app development agency knows but none want to give away. Whether you're working with a development partner who is a practitioner of lean UX methodology or thinks the process might hold merit for your internal software or product team, the purpose of lean UX is simple: Increase collaboration during the design process and potentially shave weeks off your schedule.
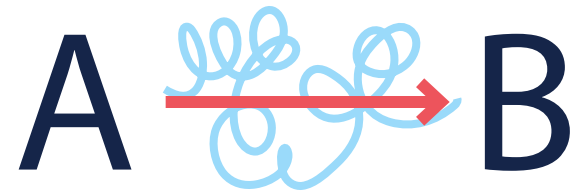
Trim down your development process with lean UX

The mobile and web app design and development process of the past (read less than five years ago) was bloated. It might have involved discovery and requirement gathering spanning four or, for the unlucky ones, as many as six months. It might have included multiple designers wireframing each possible feature and annotating them after a series of in-depth design reviews only to find out developing all the possible features landed outside scope. Think of lean UX as the more evolved cousin of the traditional design process requiring fewer deliverables, thereby saving clients or teams time and money. Lean UX also provides faster meaningful discovery — a happy byproduct of getting ideas in front of development teams and stakeholders more quickly.

Lean UX is especially good for startups strapped for precious investment dollars or for those scrambling to assemble a product to demo for their next investment pitch.

"When faced with the question, 'How can we increase our speed to market with less time?' Lean UX paired with Agile Development, is the answer we give."

Jay Miller, MentorMate Chief Engagement Officer

Users know and expect quality

Lean UX was born out of necessity to create more value for the end users without increasing hour allocations or project spend. Ten years ago showing a client a notebook sketch was abhorrent — considered "beneath" designers who took pride in every aspect of their work even the intermediary steps. Lean UX removes designers from the "deliverables business" updating scores on scores of wireframes between internal and external design reviews. Instead, it encourages collaboration and includes clients as partners rather than passive judges. With lean UX, clients are involved, validating progress and decisions along the way. This translates into a vastly improved user experience starting with the first release.

5x

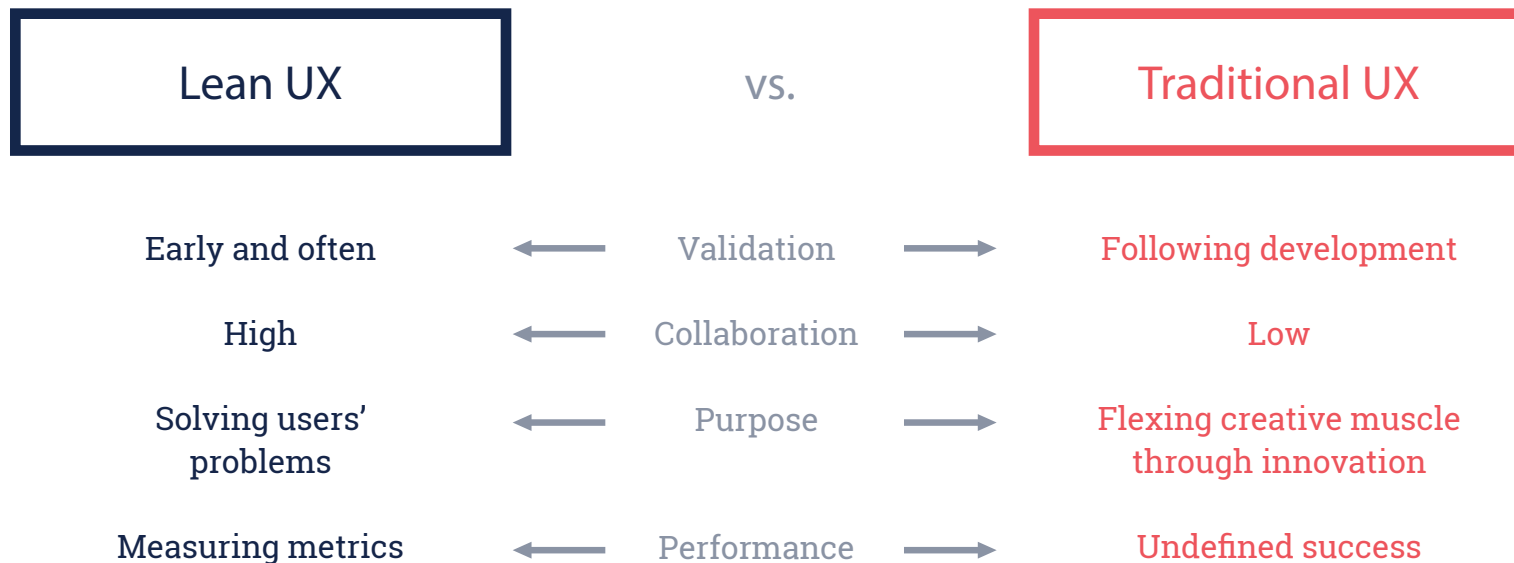The rate users are more likely to abandon if a site isn't optimized for mobile[1]

52%

The portion of users who say a bad mobile experience doesn't just leave a bad taste, it makes them less likely to engage with the brand in the future[2]
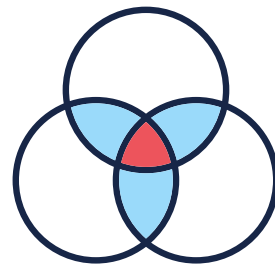
[1]Spillers, Frank. (2015, March 18). 30 UX Statistics You Should Not Ignore! [INFOGRAPHIC]. https://www.experiencedynamics.com/blog/2015/03/30-ux-statistics-you-should-not-ignore-infographic.
[2]See Spillers.

What lean UX is, and what it isn't

Whereas traditional UX was categorized by months of research translated into wireframes, lean UX is differentiated by short cycles of concepting, prototyping, feedback, iteration and feature validation.

| Lean UX	vs.	Traditional UX
Early and often	← Validation →	Following development
High	← Collaboration →	Low
Solving users' problems	← Purpose →	Flexing creative muscle through innovation
Measuring metrics	← Performance →	Undefined success

"Lean UX loops the actual user into the development and testing process right away— gathering feedback and validating ideas based on what they're looking to achieve from the solution."

Annika Seaberg, MentorMate Creative Director

Feedback in lean UX ━━━━━━━━━━
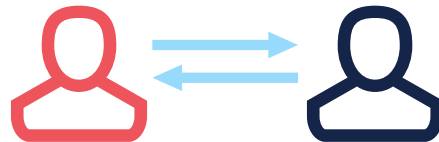
Validation is the key to effectively realizing lean UX. The entire point of the process is to design, gather feedback and iterate based on that feedback — quickly. The ability to conference with key stakeholders or sketch together as new ideas come to light, only make the cycles of intentional action and learning more efficient.

Measuring the success of lean UX ────────

Charting success is as much a part of the lean UX process as the design itself. Success can be measured using a qualitative or quantitative approach.

**Customer validation (qualitative measure)** — Seek customer validation on a continuing basis throughout the design and development lifecycle. Checking assumptions can range from providing input on requirements and interactions to reviewing sketches or low fidelity wireframes. Feedback can come from sample users, true customers, salespeople or other teams closely in tune with the behavior of end users.

KPIs (quantitative measure) — Selecting key performance indicators early on in the process is critically important to understanding the success of the design and creates a benchmark used to measure subsequent iterations. Examples of useful KPIs include time on task, user error rate and the use of search rather than the use of UI within the mobile, web or platform experience.
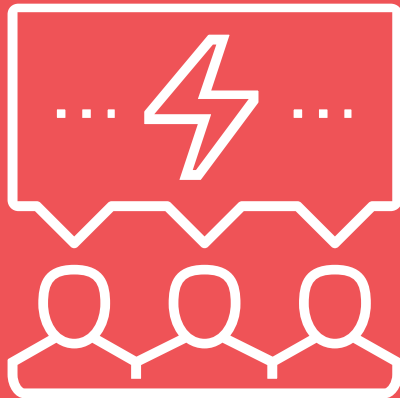
Building out a lean UX methodology
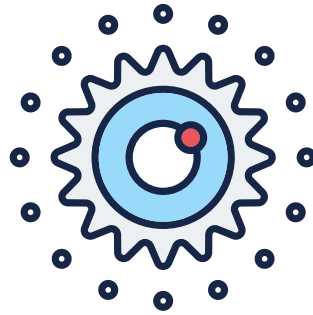
"Lean UX is about adapting your process, based off of lean principles, to work best for the context of the individual project and needs."

Annika Seaberg, MentorMate Creative Director

While various lean UX manifestos have been published,
every company takes a slightly different approach depending on the
project, client or availability of team members to give feedback.

The lifecycle of lean UX

Like reincarnation, lean UX isn't a process that's completed once. It's a cycle that repeats through each phase of the project. For good karma (and results), follow this cycle (at right).

Validation with internal/external resources should occur after every step in the process.
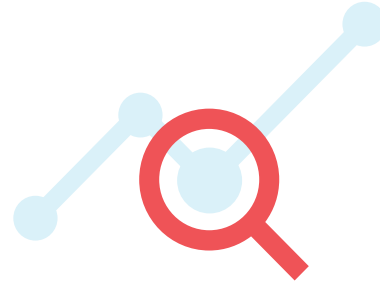
Discover

Define

Learn

Design

Test

Develop
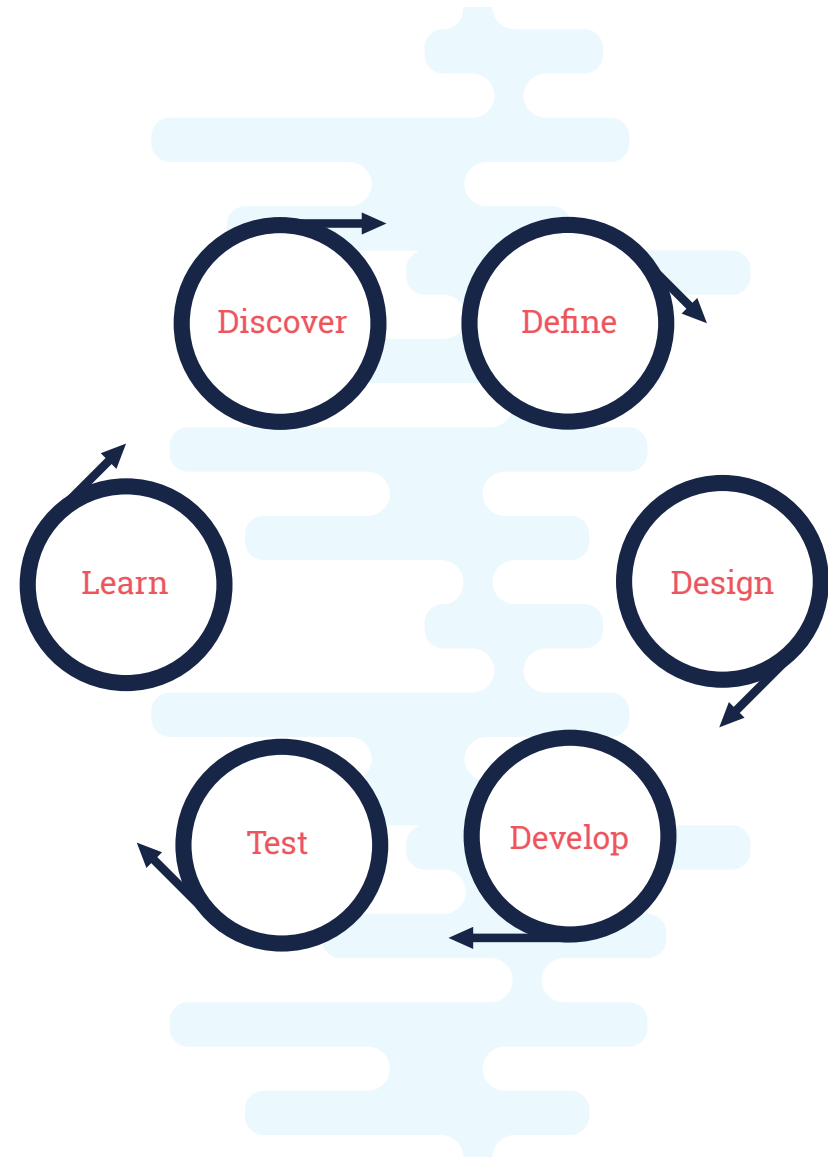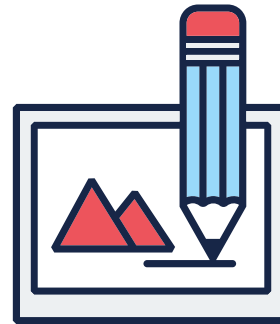
"Validating and testing, then learning and iterating is the cornerstone of building out your lean UX methodology. It's how the clients and builders can assess whether the solution is effective or understand how to improve it."

Annika Seaberg, MentorMate Creative Director

Now let's break it down. ➡

Discovery

Regardless of the tweaks made along the way, each project should begin by identifying the needs of the business. This will later inform the requirements of your solution and the priority they are developed.
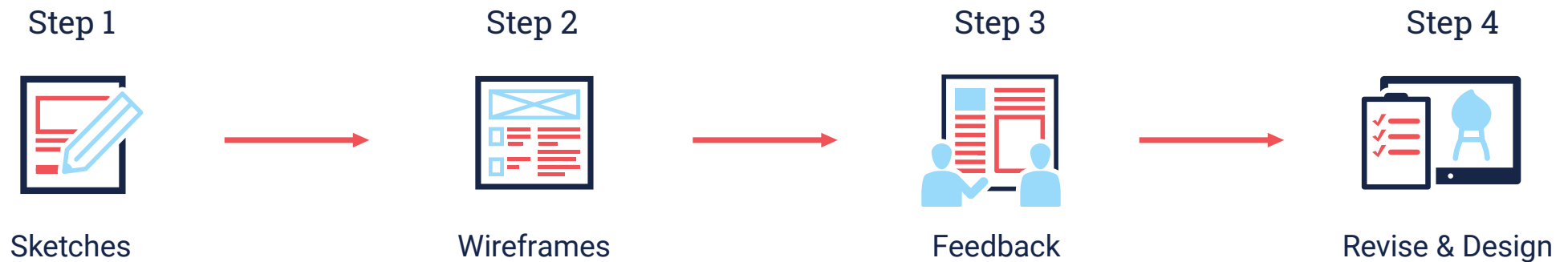
Speed to market is everything. Businesses use a combination of the following methods, depending on their timetables and budgets. ➔

Talk with your target audience.
Or those who know them best. ▬▬▬▬▬

Gathering clients or members of your target audience in a focus group to understand their unique problems and talk through key features of your solution is considered one of the best ways to vet your idea. It allows you to hear their thoughts and see reactions firsthand.

Customer service representatives or sale representatives who interface with your target audience or clients on a near regular basis provide another repository of worthy insight. They keenly understand your customers' current challenges, which should inform the requirements of your solution.

Discovery extra credit

Use these methods to dig a layer deeper.
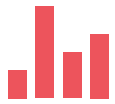
Website analytics

Taking a close look at how visitors are moving through your website using techniques like heat mapping can give you clues to the problems users are hoping to solve and how.

Surveys

Surveying is one of the least expensive, hands-off approaches to gain the insight you need to successfully complete Discovery. Simply buy or use an existing list, write the questions, send and analyze.

Subject matter experts

If you can't go straight to the source or talk with your sales force, talk with others one level removed. Professors, academics or journalists also make great subject matter experts.

Empathy mapping

This method involves thinking as the user to determine the context they would use your solution and what they are attempting to accomplish. Though really, this mindset should be assumed throughout the Discovery process.
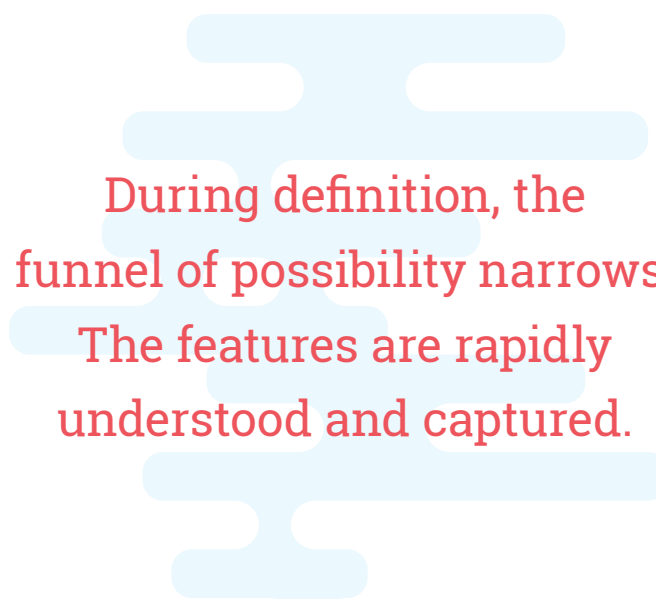
Define

During this phase the needs and requirements defined in the Discovery phase are formalized as your project team determines how the user will interact with each feature.

Artifacts created during Definition:

- Low-fidelity wireframes
- Sitemaps
- User flows

During this project phase, all technical assumptions should be validated with a liaison from the development team.

During definition, the funnel of possibility narrows. The features are rapidly understood and captured.

Definition do's and don'ts

Do

- Use low-fidelity wireframing techniques.

- Wireframe only what you need for the feature set you are developing for the first release, not the entire application or solution. This is a key way lean UX differs from its more document-heavy predecessor.

Don't

- Annotate wireframes if unnecessary. This eats up time and budget. Determine whether your project calls for a hard copy sketch, annotated medium-fidelity wireframes or high-fidelity wireframes complete with finalized typography.

Unnecessary work is the enemy of the efficient.

Design

Once your project has moved to the design phase, use these techniques to save time and truly be lean.

Use the same designer for UX and UI. This eliminates the need to onboard new team members and allows your designer to be more fully allocated to the project.

Research and rely on patterns for efficient, adoptable design. Don't reinvent the wheel if the one you have already turns. Patterns. They're a lean UX designer's best friend. Make sure your team understands the power of leveraging interaction patterns users already understand. Don't needlessly innovate. Instead, focus your innovation to create the cleanest, most intuitive experience possible.

So, you choose to take your chances and redesign the back button experience in iOS. What's the worst that can happen? Abandonment. Poor user experience. Not to mention the time wasted implementing it. Enough said.

Q:

Where do designers look for UX patterns?

A:

- Pattrns.com
- Pinterest
- Dribbbles
- PatternTap
- Mobile Patterns
- Designers List
- Material Design
- The iOS Design Guidelines

Words for a wise designer

Patterns are great, but...

We are beginning to see an upheaval
due as cross-platform development tools
like PhoneGap become more common.
Monitor the industry and adjust to new
patterns as they develop.

Once you're done designing, try to break it...
Continue to validate your design with
stakeholders to avoid complacency.
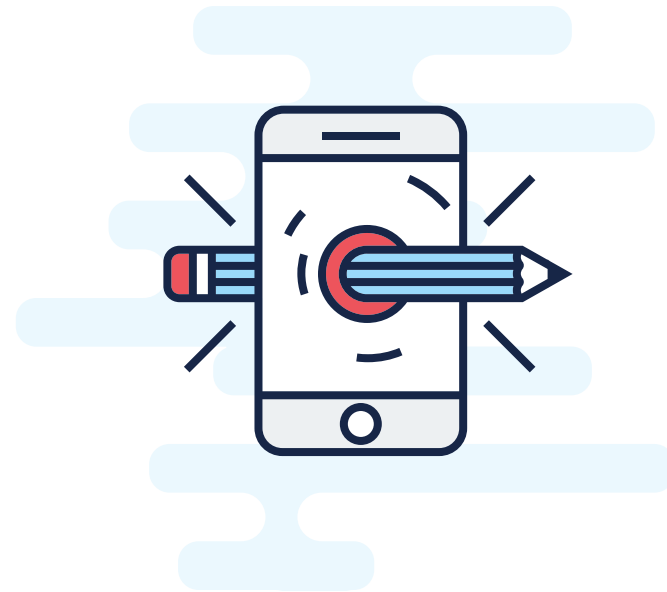
Develop and test

As with the previous steps in the process, the Develop and Test phases aren't static. They overlap.

For more on our unique Agile development methodology, download our eBook.

3 Mobile App Development Disasters and How to Avoid Them

DOWNLOAD

Empathy mapping is one way to test the usability of your app. Gather 2-5 stakeholders, designers, developers and strategists together. Have them assess the product of your lean UX cycle whether it's a series of user flows, wireframes, design mocks, a clickable prototype or working software.

Testing isn't the final step in the process. Perhaps the most important is learning. This learning can come from analytics, feedback or a new phase of discovery after the release is launched. Then the process begins anew.
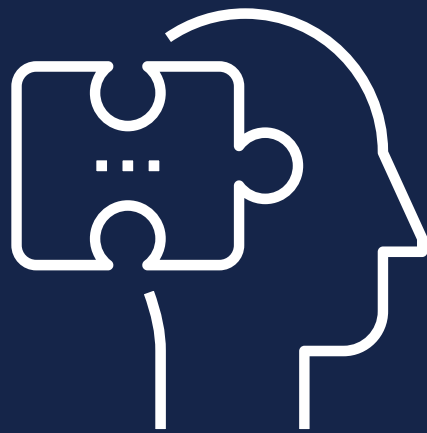
Using lean UX to maintain scope and sanity

"At its core, Lean UX is a focus on moving away from producing deliverables and trading it for a process that gets you to clickable or workable software faster."

Jay Miller, MentorMate Chief Engagement Officer

Benefits of lean UX: Innovation & budget

Innovation

Designer be nimble, designer be innovative. Lean UX rearranges the time designers spend ideating versus documenting. While it doesn't necessarily shrink the project time table (it may), the methodology lessens the burden on designers to maintain deliverables and frees them to spend more time thinking through real solutions. It's a process predicated on ideation and validation. Lean UX frees designers to be efficient artists rather than production machines.

Budget

Budgetary considerations are one of the core reasons businesses or design teams adopt a lean model. The results translate into rapid mobile app development by putting ideas into the hands of your technology team sooner rather than fully designing a concept only to find out its feasibility of playing nice with existing infrastructure is close to zero. Validating concepts with developers along the way saves time and money. By keeping budgets small, any business regardless of its size can have a professionally-designed product.

Benefits of lean UX: Function & iteration

Function

Since the lean UX methodology places an emphasis on leveraging pre-existing patterns that have stood the test of time, functional software is a core output. Design today is less about inventing a "new way" and more about creating the highest quality experience.

A lesson in function

School your team on existing lean UX patterns by studying the platform specific guidelines created by and

Iteration

Due to its continuously cyclical nature, lean UX takes the perfection out of the design process. Practitioners of lean UX know that regardless of their affinity for particular aspects of the design, it can and should change. Listen to your users and finesse the features where abandonment occurs or are well trafficked.
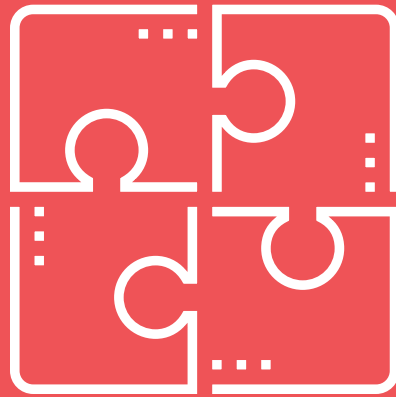
What your team needs to realize lean UX

Go lean or go home
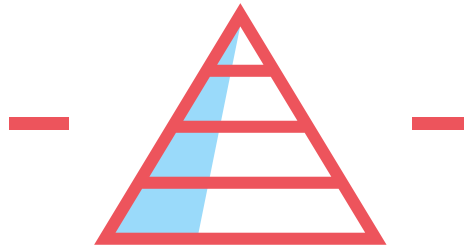
The success of lean UX projects rest on the ability of leaders to limit the scope, otherwise called a minimum viable product (MVP). An MVP is essentially a model of your concept to test the effectiveness of the solution. Your MVP could be sketched in a notebook or built with code. Either way, you're creating a more concrete concept to validate and test with users or stakeholders. Creating an MVP allows your team to solidify the design and experience before investing heavily in development. The MVP can be small or it can be large. Both are less bloated than other methodologies would produce.

Lean UX and startups

The answer for "I needed visuals for an investor meeting yesterday"

We have evolved our process to use aspects of lean UX with all our clients, though it works especially well with startups. That's how we originally created our unique "spin" on the lean UX process — through working with entrepreneurs. Startup owners regularly need to make new ideas tangible with limited time and budget. We call this process rapid prototyping. Rapid prototyping can result in a paper, digital or clickable model to demo at the high impact meetings where ideas aren't enough.

Lean UX benefits startups by:

• Reducing the timeline from ideation to delivery
• Outputting professional products of defined scale
• Saving on budget
• Enabling quick pivots and adjustments due
   to the limited scope of each release

Investors buy with their eyes, not just their wallets

Design matters. When seeking funding for an app, visual presentation is everything. It shows investors you have thought through your brand identity and the interactions that comprise your solution. It demonstrates follow-through and commitment. Besides the human fact that people respond well — really well — to visuals.

Take social media as a litmus test. Data has shown tweets with a corresponding visual incite more action, approximately 18% more clicks, 89% more favorites and 150% more retweets.[3] Now imagine that success applied to seeking and managing investor relations.

Studies have also found 65% of the population learns more effectively with visual aids.[4] The output of a lean UX engagement can also help investors better understand your idea. Visuals have been linked to better information retention in long-term memory, faster message absorption and the ability to create an emotional response that motivates action.

18%
More Clicks

89%
More Favorites

150%
More Retweets

[3]Cooper, Belle Beth. (2013, November 13). How Twitter's Expanded Images Increase Clicks, Retweets and Favorites [New Data].
https://blog.bufferapp.com/the-power-of-twitters-new-expanded-images-and-how-to-make-the-most-of-it
[4]Gutierrez, Karla. (2014, July 8). Studies Confirm the Power of Visuals in eLearning.
http://info.shiftelearning.com/blog/bid/350326/Studies-Confirm-the-Power-of-Visuals-in-eLearning

Everyone's hunting. Design, development and product teams seek quicker ways to create, validate and revise. Entrepreneurs need low-budget ways to impress investors. Lean UX offers rapid, professionally designed solutions by limiting the scope to save everyone a little time, money and sanity.

Want to learn more about our design process?
Contact us at 855-473-1556 or info@mentormate.com.
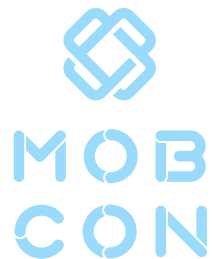
MobCon developed by MentorMate

MentorMate has designed, delivered and staffed digital experiences since 2001. Along the way, we've learned a lot. Now it's time to share. That's why we founded MobCon in 2012 and MobCon Digital Health in 2015. Each year we host conferences nationwide for the top minds in mobile and digital strategy. Register for our next event at mobcon.com.