Liz Wegerer

Writing Portfolio

Liz Wegerer

Writer • Storyteller • Strategist

Services

- Content Writing
- Content Strategy
- Content Management
- Copywriting

Liz began her career as a litigation attorney where she spent nearly a decade honing her research, analysis, and writing skills in and outside courtrooms in Wisconsin and Washington State. In 2011, she began writing full time after closing her law practice and moving abroad. During her nearly 15-year professional writing career, Liz has helped entrepreneurs, founders, start-ups, and businesses in the B2B and B2C spaces reach their target audiences with engaging and compelling content.

She's lived around the world and worked wiith clients on nearly every continent, helping to elevate their brands with well-crafted copy. She was also the editor-in-chief for a London-based digital magazine focused on consumer trends. She's worked with law firms, SaaS start-ups, marine and yacht builders, luxury brands, entertainment websites, real estate professionals, and tech-focused publications. When she's not writing, Liz is hiking in the Cascade mountains or crewing on the fishing charter boat she co-owns in the Caribbean.

As seen in...

PRIVATE AIR — LUXURY HOMES MAGAZINE — | The Adventures of Island Girl | GO RIVERWALK | F FUSE MAGAZINE | crazyegg | THE EPOCH TIMES | vpnoverview | WOMEN WHO LIVE ON ROCKS

PORTFOLIO CONTENTS

CLIENT FEEDBACK

Jyssica S.

Liz is a fantastic writer, and I was lucky to have her working on several important pieces for my team. She is easy to work with, asks the right questions, always hits deadlines, and is a really good researcher. Liz is always willing to tackle any challenge I can throw at her. I can't wait to work with her again!

Timothy Y.

I strongly recommend Liz for copywriting, copy editing and writing articles. She took the time to learn about me and my business and has been able to capture my ideas and express them in writing in such a way as to engage my readers and motivate them to action. I am extremely pleased with her work and look forward to working with her in the future.

CLIENT FEEDBACK

Jeroen V.

Liz was an absolute dream to work with! All of the articles she wrote for us were research to the point that often she would teach us things about our own industry we did not even know, incredible!! After we asked for a slightly different direction with the writing, she happily changed her style and easily adapted her writing style to our needs. All of the work was delivered on time and to the exact budget set out at the beginning of our contract. We are so happy with the work provided that we are currently working on a second job proposal which we would like Liz to complete for us.

James R.

Liz was a central writer for a content team I worked on for several months, and everyone on the team knew from the first contact with her that she would be a huge asset to our work. Liz is that rare writer who is both a consummate professional and a joy to work with. She has both the wordsmith chops and the fun attitude editors like me love to work with, and she was totally reliable during our entire time together. When I need writers for other projects, she'll be at the top of my list to reach out to.

FOUNDER / BRAND INTERVIEWS

**Triangl Bikinis: The Birth of a Brand,
A Q&A with Craig Ellis, Co-Founder**

FUSE Magazine

ROOTED IN HISTORY

Bikinis are not a modern invention.

Fourth century Greek murals depict girls wearing two-piece outfits, seeming to indicate that even our earliest ancestors were interested in a wardrobe that showed more than just a hint of skin. While the ensuing centuries saw swimsuit styles changed dramatically in step with cultural expectations, consumer desire to sport swimwear that boosts confidence, brings happiness and affirms an aspirational self-image has always been present.

From modest, full-coverage styles popular in the 1800s to "less is more" designs that emerged in the 1920s, consumers from all walks of life (after all, nearly everyone goes swimming) have helped catapult swimwear to a multi-billion dollar global industry. Bikinis, in particular, have played a significant role.

According to a recent industry report from Global Industry Analysts, Inc., worldwide annual swimwear industry revenue is projected to reach $17.6 billion USD in 2015 and exceed $20 billion by 2020. Women's bathing suits make up 70% of overall swimwear market share. In the United States alone the annual spend on women's two-piece bathing suits exceeds $8 billion, and the average American woman owns at least four suits.

The statistics are no surprise, especially when it comes to bikinis. In recent years, women have adopted healthier lifestyles, from more aggressive exercise regimens to cleaner eating, and a two-piece swimsuit is a way to showcase the results of those efforts. Also, as with other items of apparel, consumers stay up-to-date on the latest swimwear trends and update their suits every season. Likewise, the continued mobility of society means that swimsuits are no longer a strictly seasonal product. People travel often and need swimsuits well beyond summer in their own geographic location. Online retailers successfully offer swimwear year-round and readily find consumers searching for the latest styles.

All of these factors combine to keep the swimwear industry on an upward growth trajectory. Manufacturers took notice and have responded, with everyone from luxury designers to sporting good brands offering swimsuits in all shapes, styles and sizes. With all this competition, one may think the market couldn't sustain another entrant.

One would be wrong.

In 2012, a small Australian start-up looked to shake up the swimwear industry by offering a swimsuit that filled a perceived gap between high-end designer bikinis (with luxury price tags to match) and the less fashion-conscious yet affordable offerings of traditional swim brands. Their target audience? Women and girls looking for fashion and quality at an affordable price. Their product? A revolutionary bikini made from neoprene that was both stylish and priced under $100.

But how do you create a new swimsuit brand in this day and age, grow it from just an idea to $50 million in annual sales in three years, and along the way acquire a loyal fan base of more than 2.5 million social media followers? FUSE had a chance to speak with Triangl co-founder Craig Ellis recently to find out how he and his partner Erin Deering grew their brand from a concept to a coveted aspirational product.

THE TRIANGL STORY

In 2012, on a first date at Melbourne's Black Rock beach, the concept for what would become, just three short years later, one of the world's most in-demand consumer products was born.

Like most successful companies, Triangl –which sells only one type of product, a two-piece bikini in varying styles– developed in response to an unmet need. Despite a frantic search throughout Melbourne for a new bikini to wear to that fateful first date, Erin Deering could not find a reasonably priced, high-quality and stylish bikini that fit her budget. Her choices were either high-end, designer swimsuits with price tags well out of reach or inexpensive, lower-quality options that weren't particularly fashionable.

Upon arriving at the beach, she told her date about her fruitless and frustrating search. Her date happened to be Craig Ellis, an entrepreneur with a background in clothing design and manufacturing, who immediately recognized an unfilled niche in the swimwear market. Together, Ellis and Deering focused on the idea of designing a high-quality, stylish bikini that could retail for less than $100.

Since that first date, Ellis and Deering, who has a background in e-commerce and product development, have turned a beachside conversation into a multi-million dollar company that sells their exclusive brand of neoprene bikinis to devoted consumers around the world.

FUSE: You decided to move from your native Australia to Hong Kong to start Triangl. What was the impetus behind that decision?

Ellis: In my past life as a designer for a t-shirt company, I spent a lot of time in China managing all aspects of the manufacturing process. I quickly learned that it is difficult to effectively keep things on track from a remote location. You really need to be hands-on to deal with inevitable issues that arise on a daily basis. So it just made sense to be on the factory floor each day and to be available 24/7 to keep things going smoothly, especially with a start-up.

Being in Hong Kong also allowed me to build solid relationships with our suppliers. An important factor that sets Triangl apart from the competition, and the garment industry as a whole, is our super-efficient supply chain. The typical turnaround time in the industry from design to distribution is 45-60 days, but we've managed to trim that turnaround time to seven days. That means if we come up with a new design, we can have it ready to ship within weeks rather than months. This allows us to maximize on trends and keep our customer base satisfied with the latest and most innovative designs throughout the year.

FUSE: Triangl bikinis are sold exclusively via your company website – www.triangl.com. Tell us about your decision to adopt this distribution model.

Ellis: When Erin and I first started Triangl, we tried the traditional wholesale approach. We quickly ran into the same issues I faced in a previous clothing business venture – retailers who were slow to pay or whose buyers overbought and wanted to return excess product at the end of the season. We found ourselves focusing too much of our limited resources on chasing small invoices of $100 or $200 and dealing with issues that we knew wouldn't be present if we sold directly to our customers.

After a few months of struggling and growing more frustrated, we sat down to come up with a different approach. We determined if we changed our strategy and just sold one bikini a day we could cover our overhead and modest living expenses. Erin's expertise in e-commerce marketing was quite valuable when it came to determining the most effective way to promote our brand and pursue our modest "one bikini a day" goal.

Another reason for developing an exclusive e-commerce distribution model is that we didn't want to lose control of any aspect of our unique product. As a small start-up with limited resources, we knew that once retailers were introduced into the mix we would lose the ability to actively manage how our bikinis were marketed or sold.

We always wanted our bikinis to be perceived as an affordable luxury brand. By tightly controlling all points of the distribution process, we could best ensure Triangl would continue to be seen as an aspirational product. This is also why we never discount our product or offer sales.

FUSE: Tell us about the decision to pursue a marketing strategy that focuses heavily on social media?

Ellis: To be honest, when we first started out we simply didn't have a budget to hire a public relations agent or marketing professional. However, we knew we had a product that had great visual appeal and a target audience of younger women who were savvy social media users. We quickly decided, for pragmatic reasons, to rely exclusively on social media.

We realized that of all the social media options, Instagram offered the most immediately measurable metrics. It also offered the best platform for showcasing photos of the aspirational lifestyle our product suggests. So we went to work trying to figure out the best way to maximize our presence on Instagram.

We knew that any relationships we built on Instagram would have to be mutually beneficial. While our end goal was to get a super-Instagram user to post a photo wearing one of our bikinis, and hopefully influence her followers to want one too, we knew that wasn't going to happen if we simply sent our product to someone like Beyoncé or Miley Cyrus from the start.

Instead we took a more strategic approach. We focused on Instagram bloggers who fit our target demographic and who had more modest but successful follower numbers, similar to our own at the time. Our plan was to work our way up to gaining the attention of more influential Instagram users, and build our brand awareness incrementally. We hoped that once we attracted the attention of a celebrity with millions of Instagram followers, we could break through to the lucrative U.S. market. Kylie Jenner was one of the most significant Instagram users at the time, so we made her our goal.

We carefully researched her circle of friends on Instagram, the people she was following and the people who appeared in photos with her. We developed a core list of approximately 20 girls, and sent each of them a bikini in the hopes that Kylie would notice them wearing our brand and it would generate some interest. We started seeing Instagram pictures of our bikinis on these girls, and realized we were gaining traction. A few weeks later, Erin woke up one morning and had an email from Kylie herself, requesting a bikini. After Kylie posted an Instagram photo wearing one of our styles, U.S. sales went through the roof and other celebrities – from Miley Cyrus to Beyoncé to Ellie Goulding–also wore our designs in public, which just added to the momentum.

FUSE: Describe the Triangl customer experience.

Ellis: It is really about the feeling that a customer has from start to finish. Our primary goal is to make sure that every customer has a positive and rewarding experience when she purchases one of our bikinis. We know that we are selling an aspirational product, and we realize it is more than just an article of clothing to the customer.

We let that understanding guide us in all our decisions, from the photographs we put on social media and our website to how we package our bikinis for shipment to the 24/7 live customer support we offer. We want the customer to feel transformed by their Triangl experience.

FUSE: What are the biggest challenges facing Triangl today?

Ellis: One of the pitfalls of success for anyone who develops an iconic item in the garment or accessory industry, I think, is intellectual property theft. Almost immediately after our brand hit the mainstream, we started to see many copycat swimsuits on the market, all trying to capitalizing on our distinctive designs.

We responded rapidly and built up a strong IP team of lawyers and professional advisors whose primary job is to ensure the integrity of the Triangl brand. They have done a great job of tidying things up and curbing these imitators. It is a never ending battle and one that requires continued vigilance, but one that I think we are winning at the moment.

Another thing we focus on is staying relevant in an ever-changing industry. Our core bikini is a bold, geometric design and has become the signature Triangl look. It is exciting and challenging for me as a designer to experiment with different textures, fabrics and details to keep our iconic style fresh and appealing to both existing and new customers. As an example, this season we took a cue from the 90's influence prevalent on the fashion runways and incorporated crochet detailing on some of our styles.

We understand that our customers don't buy just one bikini. They come back again and again and are looking for variations on the original design they fell in love with. We want to exceed expectations of these repeat customers and also attract new customers who identify with our ever-evolving brand. Our goal is to re-interpret our original design into new and exciting variations, much like Fendi has successfully done with its baguette.

FUSE: What does the future look like for Triangl?

Ellis: We want to keep building our social community and connecting with our customers, whether it is through Instagram or the Triangl Girls initiative or some other way that we haven't come up with yet. Maintaining a relationship with our customers, where they really feel like part of the Triangl story, is key to our continued success.

Breaking into the Brazilian market is also on our radar. It is a huge, untapped resource for us, but one where we believe our unique product will resonate. Right now the U.S. is our biggest market with the UK coming in second. We realize the incredible potential of the South American market, and are looking forward to introducing Triangl to those consumers.

Taconic Builders Sets the Standard for Custom Construction

Private Air Magazine

From a humble start renovating homesteader brownstones in Brooklyn nearly thirty years ago, Taconic Builders has grown into the preeminent custom builder of the country's finest residential and commercial properties. Whether it is a luxurious penthouse in Manhattan, a summer home in the Hamptons, a suptuous oceanfront villa in Palm Beach, or a sprawling coastal estate in California, Taconic's unwavering commitment to client satisfaction and superior quality workmanship puts it solidly above any competition in the luxury construction and renovation market.

With five office locations from New York to California and a sixth set to open shortly in South Florida, Taconic has a versatile portfolio of successful projects as refined and unique as its clientele. Strictly adhering to a corporate philosophy of delivering only the highest quality while simultaneously making the construction process a pleasant experience for the client, Taconic consistently converts architectural designs into tangible works of art that clients are proud to call home.

Taconic co-founder Gerry Holbrook explains that Taconic owes its success to an unwavering focus on quality. "What sets us apart from other builders is our steadfast commitment to providing only superior quality craftsmanship. We never skimp or cut corners and our finished products are enduring proof of that." Holbrook continues, "A Taconic client understands that quality comes at a price and that genuine quality cannot be conjured up with the snap of your fingers."

Taconic's portfolio is replete with dramatic examples of their incomparable work on contemporary penthouses, country estates, and urban townhomes across the country. No matter the tastes and preferences of their clients – from crisp, clean modern lines to traditional, understated elegance to ornate, statement elements – Taconic partners exclusively with a team of highly-skilled artisans hand-picked from around the world to create living spaces unlike any others. No detail is too small to escape the builder's watchful eye, from classically sculpted plaster moldings to intricately carved woodwork to the latest energy-saving green features, the end result is always a living space that is a true reflection of the client's refined and uncompromising taste and style.

Demonstrating Taconic's breadth in construction expertise is a very special project that truly stands out among their vast portfolio of exclusive projects. Located in suburban Wilton, Connecticut, the unique Round House designed by renowned architect Richard T. Foster in 1967, is currently undergoing major renovations, including the addition of a new swimming pool and adjacent pool house.

Taconic was selected as the builder for this comprehensive renovation because of their proven commitment to exacting detail and complete client satisfaction. Their challenge is to seamlessly integrate new design elements into the existing infrastructure, while respecting the unique characteristics that make this a one-of-a-kind home that is both memorable and architecturally significant. The fully renovated property will emerge as a contemporary example of the intricate care and attention to detail upon which Taconic has built its unassailable reputation.

Creating exceptional results doesn't come without its challenges, of course. Holbrook notes that there is an unrelenting tension between time, cost, and quality. "The old saying goes 'pick any two and the third will fall by the wayside'," he notes, "and this is as true in the luxury construction market as anywhere else." To avoid client disappointment and maintain the utmost in quality standards, Taconic carefully considers available budgets and client expectations before accepting any project.

Holbrook is clear when it comes to living up to Taconic's high standards. "If it will be impossible to deliver the quality we demand due to unrealistic budgets or crammed schedules, Taconic will take a pass." He cautions that there will always be someone out there who promises the impossible. "*Caveat emptor,*" he warns.

The commitment Taconic demonstrates to quality construction is equally evident in their dedication to the industry. Taconic has sponsored scholarships in conjunction with the Institute of Classical Architecture and Arts (Beaux-Arts Atelier) and The Decorators Club (visiting lecture series). Taconic has also sponsored lectures and exhibitions at the Museum of the City of New York.

In addition to providing scholarship opportunities, Taconic principals also teach at the prestigious New York School of Interior Design. Mr. Holbrook believes that the best way to inspire future architects, designers, and builders is to lead by example and share his firm's nearly three decades of knowledge.

Taconic Builders is truly one of the few builders in the nation that is as comfortable building in a suburban environment as they are renovating a city penthouse. Taconic's unreleting commitment to quality combined with their commitment to future developments in the design and building industry, makes Taconic Builders a truly unique entity in the world of luxury construction.

BUSINESS JOURNALISM

Luxe in Flux

FUSE Magazine

Sitting in the lap of luxury.

The phrase conjures up images of a life of comfortable excess, privilege and affluence, a world away from the masses. The very idea of opulence as a rarefied concept is what helped drive the long-term success of traditional luxury companies like Hermès and Rolls-Royce.

But does the word luxury still symbolize what it once did? Do conventional brands historically associated with it still have the cachet they enjoyed in past generations? Does the definition of luxury change depending on who you ask? Today, when everyone from the housekeeper to the teenager next door is wearing the latest Gucci accessory or carrying a Dior handbag (genuine or not), it is difficult to categorize luxury in the traditional sense.

This raises an interesting question - is luxury still luxury if it's accessible to all?

No matter how contemporary luxury is defined, no one can argue that it remains a lucrative sector of the consumer goods market. In 2014, the luxury market, defined as apparel, cosmetics, watches and jewelry, exceeded $337 billion in annual sales, according to Euromonitor. That represented more than a 6% year-on-year real value gain over the previous year.

This growth was driven primarily by strong sales in emerging markets, and came despite profit warnings and disappointing results from many leading high-end brands, instability in the Eurozone and challenging conditions in markets such as Hong Kong and Russia. Euromonitor notes that designer apparel led global sales with a market share of 40%, but predicts that luxury accessories, jewelry and timepieces will show the most dynamic growth in the future.

Euromonitor also notes that significant market polarization occurred between 2009-2014, with many luxury brands attempting to reach a broader range of consumers through "affordable luxury" offerings –entry-level products designed to be purchased by aspirational, middle-class consumers. This trend is just one way the definition of luxury is changing and creating an industry in flux.

Luxury – A Definition

Perhaps to better understand what luxury is today, it is appropriate to begin by defining what it is not. According to Erica Corbellini, a Bocconi University professor who teaches about luxury in her course "The Management of Fashion and Luxury Companies," true luxury doesn't possess any of the following characteristics:

- Luxury is not just an object - it is the whole experience, including the service surrounding the sale, as well as the actual item that is acquired.
- Luxury is not readily available – it takes advantage of our evolutionary desire to obtain objects in limited supply, particularly when they are signifiers of wealth and status. Luxury requires waiting. As an example, the Hermès Birkin bag which retails from $10,000 to upwards of $200,000 can take up to two years to obtain.
- Luxury is not simply expensive – although most luxury items are costly, they must also provide desire and pleasure and offer an appropriate value proposition for the price that is charged.
- Luxury is not fast – it needs time. It will never be mass-produced or quickly delivered to the market. Neither will it be fast in how it is bought, consumed or interpreted.

Professor Corbellini believes that the idea of traditional luxury began to change in the beginning of the 90s, when exclusive luxury brands began a democratization process wherein they began to offer more accessible price points. Following that was the growth of "aspirational luxury" where luxury brands started extending into new product categories. Luxury companies also began an internationalization process where they entered new markets for the first time, rather than selling exclusively in the United States, Europe and Japan. All of these moves helped usher in a new sort of luxury for everyone.

She notes that the financial crisis of 2008 really reshaped attitudes and opinions about luxury, followed quickly by the introduction of millennials as adult consumers. She believes the millennial approach and attitude toward luxury is vastly different than the generations that preceded them. These changes, and others, have brought about a new understanding of modern luxury.

Accessible Luxury

When luxury came to the masses, it brought with it the risk of brand degradation. Where once the sole province of the elite, luxury today is affordable to the middle-class. This idea has surely raised more than a few eyebrows of the old aristocracy who may likely be asking themselves, "What good is it to own a Louis Vuitton handbag if everyone has one?" But it is precisely the refusal to adhere to that outdated way of thinking that has helped established luxury brands meet the evolving demands of consumers and attract a whole new set of "gateway consumers" along the way. When Louis Vuitton began marketing its small monogrammed leather goods at relatively modest price points, a new wave of consumers – young, aspirational and brand-conscious – flocked to their stores.

This strategy may have worked too well. The brand became so popular, its entry-level Speedy bag became known as the "three-second bag" in South Korea precisely because of its ubiquitous appearance. The goal, of course, was to establish brand loyalty and convert these consumers to the more expensive products as their incomes increased. The risk was that the brand would lose its cachet.

This trend toward luxury for the masses has allowed brands like Tory Burch, Kate Spade and Michael Kors to establish themselves in the luxury arena. An aspirational consumer can acquire a Michael Kors handbag complete with the familiar M.K. logo charm dangling from the handle or a pair of Tory Burch flats with the signature double-T logo glittering on the toe for less than $300 each. This represents a very low barrier to entry as compared to more traditional luxury brands such as Chanel or Hermès.

While these are hardly the items considered traditional luxury, for the new class of aspirational luxury consumers the brand recognition is enough. And just like their exclusive counterparts, these companies hope to guide their aspirational customers to purchase items from their higher-priced lines down the road.

Experience Is The New Black

Perhaps spurred on by the years of austerity following the financial crash of 2008 or by the changing desires of millennials or a combination of both, today's luxury consumption is more about experiences than products. A recent

study by Boston Consulting Group revealed that consumers spent nearly $1 trillion in luxury experiences in 2014, compared to less than $400 billion on luxury products. Consumers at all levels are moving from a "stuff" to an "experience" mentality. It seems the late George Carlin had it right when he said, "Trying to be happy by accumulating possessions is like trying to satisfy hunger by taping sandwiches all over your body."

Diving with hammerhead sharks, embarking on exotic holidays or enjoying ultra-deluxe gourmet meals, each considered experiential luxury, all share a commonality – they shift a consumer's luxury experience from ownership to participation. These luxury experiences can also be customized to the consumer's precise interests and needs, meaning the discerning consumer gets exactly what he or she wants, every time.

Yet these luxury experiences are not limited to special occasions nor do they need to be ultra-expensive. While a 10-course meal in a Michelin-starred restaurant or white-glove safari in Tanzania may be out of reach of the masses, other experiential luxury opportunities are not. These days almost anyone can do things once considered unobtainable. Elective cosmetic procedures can be completed over a lunch hour. The hoi polloi can exercise alongside celebrities at places like SoulCycle or Barry's Boot Camp.

The key to turning these activities into experiential luxury is creating an atmosphere where demand outstrips supply and the cost is above-average for the experience itself. While the super affluent consumer may not care about getting sweaty next to Katie Holmes, the aspirational consumer does.

Likewise, the shift towards experiential luxury has also infiltrated high-end hotel chains. Where once sophisticated hospitality relied on Italian marble and Egyptian cotton to enhance the experience, these hotels are now shifting their focus toward curating unique opportunities for their guests. Today's discerning consumer no longer considers the purchase of a Rolex or pair of Louboutins to be brag-worthy. Instead, they want to talk about the sunrise they viewed across an Arctic snowfield on their dogsled trip to the North Pole.

Mobile Luxury

More than two billion consumers worldwide will have smartphones by 2016 and more than one-half of all mobile phone

users globally will have smartphones by 2018, according to global research firm eMarketer. This figure represents more than one-third of global consumers. As consumers embrace technology to streamline more and more daily functions, shopping for luxury products is no exception.

With so many potential shoppers enjoying technology at their fingertips, luxury brands would be remiss to ignore this powerful group of tech-savvy consumers. Erik Pavelka, CEO of Martini Media, recently predicted, "Luxury brands are going to expand their digital presence very considerably, including video and multimedia production, where they can really leave a lasting impression on consumers."

This move towards a digital presence is something new for most luxury brands that have historically shied away from selling their wares – or even promoting them – on any channel other than traditional bricks-and-mortar or print media. However, now that today's savvy, affluent consumer can easily access data related to high-ticket purchases, it is essential for luxury brands to maintain an interactive and meaningful presence on the web.

Especially in the case of the affluent millennial. A recent survey completed by Ipsos MediaCT reveals that the majority of affluent (household income of at least $75,000 per year) and hyper-affluent (at least $250,000 in annual household income) millennials first turn to online resources to conduct research prior to purchasing a luxury item. This flies in the face of traditional marketing approaches long-adhered to by luxury marketers relative to the relationship between digital media and luxury goods.

Recognizing that nearly 40% of survey respondents identified as "very comfortable" making a luxury purchase online, many luxury brands must strengthen their online presence to capture these consumers. While some luxury brands have dabbled in having a simple online presence in the past, few have made the move to offer their goods for sale online.

While a few luxury brands have experimented with online sales partnerships through channels such as Net-A-Porter, many have not. Yet with changing demographics and the introduction of technology as a daily necessity, even the most reluctant brands are moving in that direction. Hermès just launched its own Hermesistible website, offering a limited selection of accessories, and Chanel joined the ranks by announcing plans to launch their own e-commerce site by the end of 2015.

The world of luxury continues its evolution.

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

A Class A Investment:
South Florida 'Aquasitions'

Go Riverwalk Magazine

Despite many economic sectors contracting because of the global pandemic, Florida real estate – South Florida, in particular – is stronger than ever before. Since we emerged from the statewide lockdown last year, property sales have soared to historic highs, boosted by unprecedented demand across all property types in both the residential and commercial markets.

Many well-known factors contribute to this demand, including South Florida's hospitable weather, its abundant waterways, and the area's welcoming business climate. Newcomers continue to flock to our region, particularly Broward County, to enjoy a sunnier and more relaxed lifestyle. Many also seek out solid real estate investments.

A big part of this success is supported by the marine industry. Our industry is intricately woven into the fabric of the overall South Florida experience, from the marinas that dot our local waterways and the number of registered boat owners in our state (the highest in the nation) to the boat yards and dealerships that sell and service boats of all sizes.

It is undeniable that the South Florida marine industry plays a major role in the strength and success of the overall economy and the commercial and residential real estate here.

Commercial Real Estate

In the past 19 months, commercial marine industry acquisitions – or as we like to call them "aquasitions" – have topped $1.6 billion. There is no mistaking that private equity firms, family offices, and individual investors from around the world view the South Florida marine industry as a Class A investment.

The most recent big deal was the purchase of Yacht Haven Park & Marina for $58 million by a group led by Gary Cioffi and Christopher Hein. This transaction highlights how a marine industry deal trickles down to benefit the overall economy. As part of the sale, the buyers acquired an $81.7 million purchase and renovation loan, and plan significant improvements to the existing facilities. These renovations will generate opportunities across the economic spectrum – both within and outside the marine industry.

Other high-profile marine industry transactions in the past year and a half, like Roscioli, Rybovich, Nautical Structures, Boat Owners Warehouse, and Maverick Boat Group, are further proof of just how appealing South Florida's marine industry is as an investment. One that is capable of delivering solid returns even in uncertain economic times.

Residential Real Estate

But it isn't just commercial real estate that is booming. South Florida is currently enjoying the strongest residential real estate market in decades. Residential real estate sales have consistently hit record highs in recent months, up well over 60% from the same time last year, according to local real estate experts.

One of the biggest segments of this market is waterfront, single-family homes. This makes sense because boat sales have also increased dramatically since the pandemic started, as families seek out safe ways to enjoy time together. Once the new boat is purchased, many buyers take the next step and want a home where they can keep their new boat conveniently accessible in their own backyard.

Of course, the marine industry contributes to robust residential home sales in other ways, too. Workers in our industry – and there are over 120,000 thousand marine industry employees in Broward County alone – also buy homes here. From Parkland to Pompano Beach to Miramar to Hollywood and all communities in between, those working in the marine industry are ready and willing buyers of residential real estate in the area.

Whether it is a commercial "aquasition" or the purchase of a waterfront home with dockage space or a convenient condo close to the job, the marine industry is a proud contributor to the South Florida real estate market. We are excited to see the continued interest and growth in the area and look forward to playing our part well into the future.

TECHNOLOGY / SAAS

SaaS

Beyond Security Awareness: Safer Apps through Education

Security Journey Website

The past decade has seen security awareness go from a new concept to a security strategy embedded in most organizations. Several regulations recommend security training but do so in very broad terms. Most organizations choose security awareness programs to meet these recommendations. And this approach is effective for most employees. These programs deliver communications, training, and motivation across the board. No matter the role, employees have access to the information they need to stay informed about the latest cybersecurity threats, like social engineering attacks.

But is awareness enough for security-critical roles, like software developers? While compliance regulations like PCI do call for secure coding training, there is little guidance about how to satisfy this requirement. Many organizations offer developers video or computer-based training that covers the basics of the latest OWASP Top 10, then call it a day.

At best, these efforts to meet the minimum secure coding training compliance requirements result in a "tick the box" exercise. Developers watch the video or complete the module, mark their "training" complete, and wait to repeat the exercise again next year.

While this approach is right for the level of security knowledge needed by general employees, the people who build the software need deeper education on application security practices. Without it, software engineers and developers end up writing less secure code which introduces vulnerabilities.

And what about all the other roles in the software development lifecycle SDLC? From product and UX managers to QA and scrum masters, the people responsible for delivering safe applications need training that goes beyond a "check the box" approach. As the saying goes, "you don't know what you don't know," and that is especially true with non-developer roles in the SDLC.

Without proper training, product managers don't know how to prioritize security-enhancing features. QA folks aren't aware of the best ways to test for security issues. DevOps doesn't understand the impact of including the correct tools into the build pipeline to lower production vulnerabilities or even which tools to incorporate.

As Professor Jason I. Hong from the School of Computer Science at Carnegie Mellon University noted in a recent roundtable discussion, "Compliance regulations are generally a good thing, but they need to move beyond being procedurally oriented, like the tick the box approach we have now, and instead focus on measurable outcomes to be effective."

So, what is an organization to do?

To build safer applications, organizations must move beyond awareness and begin educating security-critical roles. The results of this education must be measurable, too. The first step to any successful education program is understanding the difference between awareness and education as it relates to security-critical roles.

Security Awareness

The goal of any security awareness program is to teach users how to recognize common security threats. Upon completion, users understand the basics of cybersecurity threats against the organization. For many roles, this type of training is enough. But not for security-critical roles, like developers.

Developers often refer to the act of recognizing threats as "code smell" – the ability to identify something in source code that indicates a bigger, underlying issue. But recognition is often where things hit a wall. Developers can recognize threats but often lack insight into how to fix – or, better yet, avoid – common application security risks. They might master code smell, but they do not know how to resolve it.

Chances are developers have not had the necessary education to solve the risks they identify. A recent Forrester report notes that none of the top 50 colleges and universities even require courses in secure coding or secure application design in their computer science programs.

Organizations that build software are obligated to fill this knowledge gap with security education for everyone involved in software creation.

Security Education

Good security education programs teach developers the necessary skills to problem-solve security threats. The best security education programs teach development teams theory, then ensure that developers develop the necessary skills to proactively secure applications during the development phase.

When developers have both knowledge and skills, they can scale to new environments and manage unfamiliar problems. This is a valuable ability since the threat landscape is always evolving. The vulnerabilities of today will not be the vulnerabilities of tomorrow.

As John Campbell, Director of Content Engineering at Security Journey, advises, "Good security education takes developers beyond code smell and empowers them to fix problems and, even better, code to avoid those problems in the first place."

Ready to follow John's advice and move beyond awareness to build more secure applications through proven application security education? Check out our recent webinar on How to Start an Effective Secure Coding Training Program, and get started today!

Russia Bans VyprVPN and Opera VPN

VPN Overview

Russia's telecommunications watchdog agency, Roskomnadzor, banned the use of Opera VPN and VyprVPN last week, classifying the services as threats.

"In accordance with the regulation on responding to threats to circumvent restrictions on access to child pornography, suicidal, pro-narcotic and other prohibited content, restrictions on the use of VPN services VyprVPN and Opera VPN will be introduced from June 17, 2021," the Roskomnadzor noted in an official statement.

The agency cited regulations recently introduced by the Russian government as the basis for its actions. Decree No. 127 went into effect on February 12.

Immediately following news of the ban, Opera VPN suspended support for VPN services in Russia. Senior Public Relations Manager, Yulia Sindzelorts told the Russian news agency TASS, "Opera endeavors to provide its Russian users with the excellent experience in using browsers. We decided to suspend support for VPN services in our browsers on the Russian territory in the form it was provided earlier."

Not Everyone in Russia Impacted by the Ban

Despite the ban, select Russian companies were given a window of opportunity to avoid losing access to the VPN services. Shortly after Decree No. 127 went into effect, the Russian government took steps to carve out exceptions to the ban by creating a "whitelist" of companies permitted to bypass the ban on the two VPN providers.

The need for such a list, according to the agency in its May 14 statement, was to "ensure the operation of technological processes of enterprises and organizations." At the time, companies were invited to apply for inclusion on the whitelist. To date, 130 Russian companies have been added.

Russia's History of Enforcement Efforts Against VPNs

Russia's crackdown on the free flow of information within the country began when President Vladimir Putin signed a bill banning VPNs, proxies, and Tor into law in July 2017. The law made Russia the first country to issue an outright ban on all such services. Despite making the services illegal, Russia showed little appetite for enforcing the law until 2019.

On March 28, 2019, the owners of ten VPN services, including NordVPN, Hide My Ass !, Hola VPN, Openvpn, VyprVPN, ExpressVPN, TorGuard, IPVanish, Kaspersky Secure Connection, and VPN Unlimted, received demands from the Russian government to connect to the Federal State Information System (FSIS) and automatically prevent their users' access to blocked sites. The FSIS houses the government's regularly-updated list of banned sites.

Of the ten, only Kaspersky complied with the order. Avast, another cybersecurity provider, elected to exit the Russian VPN market. VyprVPN immediately stated it would not cooperate with the Russian government's attempts to censor VPN services.

Other VPN Service Providers Blocked

It took another nine months for the Russian government to take action again. In January 2020, Roskomnadzor blocked the ProtonVPN service and end-to-end encryption ProtonMail email service. The move was widely seen as a response to Proton's failure to register their services with FSIS and their refusal to provide mailbox owner information upon demand of the Russian government. Russia claimed Proton's email service was used by cybercriminals to send fake bomb threats. At the time, ProtonMail **condemned the move**.

The latest developments mark renewed efforts by Russia to limit the free flow of information to Russian citizens and others living within the country's borders.

**The GitHub Supply Chain Threat:
What You Need to Know Today**

Security Journey Blog

If you're a GitHub developer that relies on open source repositories in your code (that would be everyone), Tuesday night's Tweet storm started by Stephen Lacy no doubt caught your attention.

While Lacy quickly walked back his original claim that 35,000 GitHub repositories were infected with malware, the actual issue he brought to the collective attention of software development teams everywhere – the impact a typosquatting attack can have – is something we should all care about. It also points to the larger issue of the vulnerability of software supply chains.

The Typosquatting Threat

Typosquatting is successful because human beings are not infallible creatures - not even developers. The reality is that in the day-to-day world of coding, it is inevitable that a developer will mis-type something in the countless lines of code they write.

Malicious actors know this and prey on the likelihood of such mistakes by creating forks of popular code with nearly identical names. They then infect these misnamed packages with malicious code that can exfiltrate data or conduct remote execution.

An unsuspecting developer can insert these malicious forks into their code with a simple typo in a file name. They are trying to use the original packages, but the typo grabs the malicious code instead.

Typosquatting is, unfortunately, a very popular - and very effective - way for malicious actors to infiltrate apps. It is a point of weakness in the software supply chain, one that relies heavily on human error.

How You Can Protect Your Software Supply Chain

Reducing the likelihood of a typosquatting event is the first step in protecting your apps from software supply chain vulnerabilities. Here are some tips on how to do that.

Vet and curate all packages

To avoid a typosquatting event, it is critical that you examine all the packages you plan to use before they're incorporated into your code. Asking five questions helps determine whether the package is worth the potential risk.

1. Is the package necessary? Ask yourself whether this package provides actual value, or if you are just including it because everyone else does.
2. Is the package documented? Check GitHub to find out more about the package via a 'readme' file. Packages without documentation should raise a red flag.
3. Is the package tested? You can find out by checking the Repo for the package.
4. Is the package maintained? Any package that hasn't been updated in more than a year should be cause for further scrutiny.
5. Is the package respected? Stick to using packages that other developers currently use and trust.

Asking these questions helps weed out old or maliciously cloned packages before they have a chance to infiltrate your code. Sure you can ask the questions after the fact (when you're trying to undo damage from malicious code), but you achieve more security savings when you ask the questions beforehand.

Use a proxy server for dependencies

Reduce the risk of developers grabbing malicious code by creating policies around which web packages they can download. Proxy servers give companies the power to create safe lists for developers to use.

These safe lists can be external packages pre-approved by the company or packages written internally by the company. Either way, proxy servers greatly reduce the possibility that developers will inadvertently grab infected packages from external sources.

Implement a scoped namespace

While proxy servers are a great way to reduce external package vulnerability for code, they are not foolproof since they still allow for searching in the public domain. To further reduce the chance that malicious, spoofed code will make its way into your apps, you can mitigate dependency confusion with a scoped namespace.

When you incorporate package scope, you lock the namespace and map it to specific users and organizations. Developers cannot grab spoofed packages, because they are permitted to only grab code from the named domains that you choose.

Leverage the Power of SBOMs

Although not directly related to typosquatting, this strategy strengthens your software supply chain security as a whole. A Software Bill of Materials (SBOM) is a key part of risk management and security for your applications.

When you use an SBOM, you enhance visibility into the software supply chain and can quickly gauge and verify code provenance and the relationships between components. In turn, this helps your teams quickly identify malicious attacks at all stages of the development lifecycle.

The security of the software supply chain is something we take very seriously at Security Journey. We cover it extensively, from our lessons on typosquatting and other common threats to our advanced module on software supply chain security.

The vulnerability Lacy put in the spotlight with his late-night Twitter post is yet another example of how important it is for organizations to understand and take steps to mitigate typosquatting and similar vulnerabilities, while also maintaining focus on the strength and security of their software supply chains overall.

ENTERTAINMENT / LIFESTYLE

It's the Bugs' Island, I'm Just Visiting

Women Who Live on Rocks Website

Anyone who knows me knows one unassailable fact: I hate bugs.

I don't mean I just don't care for them. I am fairly certain that most people don't like bugs. Well, except for maybe entomologists.

What I mean is I have an irrational and oversized fear of anything small that crawls, flies, or – horror of horrors – can do both. This fear has put me in precarious positions in the past – nearly wrecking my car once, then actually breaking my wrist another time.

Which of course begs one serious question to be asked: Why did I ever, in a million years, think moving to a Caribbean island would be a good idea?

Yes, there is endless sunshine. Sure, the soul warming temperatures are enjoyable. Of course, it is nice to wear shorts and tank tops 365 days a year. But therein lies the problem. The whole "endless summer" idea also means that all the little things that fly, crawl, or scurry never seem to die.

It appears that unless an insect falls victim to a can of bug spray or aggressive flip flop, they are free to live la dolce vita until, eventually, they succumb to old age. And while they enjoy the good life, they simultaneously grow to gargantuan proportions.

Of course, it isn't like I hadn't dealt with bugs before. I grew up in the Midwestern United States. There, I was surrounded by bees, hornets, spiders, beetles, and other assorted creatures. For the most part though, I could pretend they simply did not exist. At least until one bold bug or another mistakenly entered my carefully climate-controlled universe. At which point he or she would be quickly and efficiently dispatched to seek eternal salvation.

The other saving grace about bugs in the Midwest is summed up with one word: WINTER. Besides a few wily spiders who moved inside for the season, nary was there a hornet, mosquito, or beetle to be seen between December and April. I don't know if they all died, hibernated, or went on a long vacation, nor did I ever care. All I knew was that I was relatively bug-free for a few blissful months.

And although I'm not a huge fan of winter, I do have to give it props for keeping a lid on the bug situation. The climate-induced hiatus that arrived in late November meant Midwestern bugs never had time to grow into terrorizingly larger or faster versions of themselves. Mother Nature's version of Midwestern USA insect population control was greatly appreciated by this bug-fearing lady.

But things aren't quite so convenient in the tropics. Oh, no. Here there is no seasonal reprieve from insect torment. They hang around all year and usually present themselves as mutantly exaggerated versions of their mainland counterparts.

With luck on their side, island bugs have 365 days to figure out evolution and morph into some kind of insect transformers. If you're not familiar with the flying cockroach and never wish to be, I suggest staying away from any Caribbean island.

Which brings me to my present predicament. Every morning I wake up and mentally prepare myself for the unplanned encounters I am sure to experience. Grabbing that clean laundry off the line? Say hello to the black and white bug with the pincers from hell hiding in the bath towel. Doing a little furniture re-arranging? Mind the scorpions tucked away under your favorite chair. Grabbing that item in the back of the dark, cool cupboard? Be ready to do the drop and dash when something unidentifiable scurries behind the neighboring can of beans.

I could go on, but you get the idea.

It doesn't matter how vigilant you are at insect control, either. Perpetually opened doors and poorly installed windows are simply an invitation to the bug world to come on in and cohabitate. And even if you do manage to screen off every opening and caulk every crack, don't gloat quite yet. Scientists have proven that cockroaches can flatten themselves like pancakes to slide through millimeter thin gaps, then resume their former shape.

Understanding this, you have to ask yourself, Really, what's the use? As the Borg would say, resistance is futile. You might eradicate a few unwanted guests and win that day's battle, but they will win the war. They. Will. Always. Win. The. War. This, my friends, is an island truth.

And so, with no feasible alternatives in sight and with a relocation off the rock completely out of the question, I have learned to become more at peace with my uninvited housemates. I am slowly accepting that they are as much a part of Caribbean island life as pretty sunsets and beach days. You have to take the bad with the good, right?

That isn't to say I don't let out involuntary screams when I flick on the bedroom light and see a fat black roach meandering along the baseboard. Or that after seeing said roach, I relocate to the guest bedroom for the night. Because they couldn't possibly be in there too, could they?

But I'm trying hard to take a more measured approach to my insect encounters. Less screaming, more zen. After all, I'm not getting any younger, and those frenzied reactions of my youth can't possibly be good for my heart.

Plus, I'm feeling more compassionate as the years go by. I even rescued a drowning cockroach from the swimming pool a few weeks ago. Literally with a ten-foot pole (aka the pool skimmer net). But still, I relocated him to the far corner of our garden rather than letting him die a watery death. Or worse, giving him hope by fishing him out only to decisively squash him with a flip flop. I'd say that's progress.

After all, this really is the bugs' island. I'm just visiting. I may as well be a decent guest.

How to Plant a Thriving Herb Garden

The Epoch Times

Whether it's for their beauty or deliciousness in recipes, homegrown herbs have soared in popularity in recent years. Long the go-to for chefs seeking to infuse their dishes with a dash of fresh flavor, today you'll find people from all walks of life growing herb gardens in all shapes and sizes, indoors and out. From tasty mojitos mulled with mint from a pot on your terrace or fresh-cut lavender infusing your home with its fragrant scent, herbs are exceptionally popular and functional plants.

But what exactly is an herb?

An herb is considered any plant whose roots, leaves, green stems, or flowers are harvested and used for cooking, medicine, or cosmetics. From the most well-known like oregano and basil to the more obscure such as pennyroyal, herbs are found in every facet of modern daily life.

Types of Herbs

Herbs fall into two broad categories — annuals and perennials.

Annuals last only one season. They give it all they've got all summer long, but when cold weather arrives, they die off. Some of the most common annual herbs include basil, cilantro, dill, and parsley.

Perennials, once established, come back year after year. While they will die back in the cold months, their root system remains winter hearty. Once the warmer temperatures of spring return, perennial herbs start growing again. Popular perennial herbs include tarragon and lemon grass.

There is also a sub-category of perennial herbs known as evergreen herbs. They have woody stems and maintain their green color throughout the colder months, even though the plants are dormant. Popular as landscape elements, herbs in this category include lavender and rosemary.

Herb Basics

Herbs are hearty, easygoing plants to grow. Most are as happy in pots as they are in a spacious garden.

Of course, if you're planning an indoor, potted herb garden, keep in mind that most herbs still like room to branch out. While those herb planter sets with mini pots look cute on your windowsill, the reality is your herbs will need bigger pots to grow into their full glory.

Most herbs are also content to grow indoors, so long as they have enough natural light exposure. Six hours of sunlight is the usual recommendation. If you don't have that much indoor sunlight, there are also herbs that don't mind a little shade. The variety of herbs and the diverse growing conditions they require, make herbs an ideal choice for almost anyone, whether you live in an urban high-rise or country house.

Herb Planting Tips

Herbs require four basic things to flourish. Adequate sunlight, properly prepared soil, regular watering with good drainage, and periodic maintenance.

Soil – unlike many other plants and flowers, herbs do not require enhanced soil to thrive. Just the opposite, in fact. Herbs don't need extra fertilizer or rich soil. They develop stronger flavor and scent when planted in average soil. The only exception is when you're growing your herbs for their flowers. Those herbs appreciate rich soil and regular fertilization.

Sunlight – Most herbs require at least six hours of sunshine to grow their best. Some herbs, like lavender, appreciate full sun all day long. However, most common kitchen herbs are fine growing in an indoor location, so long as they receive good natural light throughout the day. Do you have a shady location that doesn't get much sun? Fear not. There are many herbs that don't mind relaxing in the shade. Some of these include parsley, cilantro, and mint.

Water – Just like any other plant, herbs do best when they are regularly watered. Good drainage is essential to avoid root rot and other plant diseases. No plant, not even a hearty herb, likes to sit around with its feet in diseases. No plant, not even a hearty herb, likes to sit around with its feet in a pool of water.

Maintenance – Herbs do best when they're regularly trimmed. If you're growing herbs to use in recipes, this usually isn't an issue. Other herbs will need to be periodically tended. They will naturally bush out and become fuller with regular pruning. If you don't make it a point to trim your herbs, they will become tall and thin. Annual herbs will quickly go to seed. Even perennial evergreen herbs, like lavender, should be regularly pruned to avoid weak, dead stems and branches and encourage bushy growth.

Herb Pairings for Optimal Growth

If you're planning to plant a variety of herbs, either in pots or in your garden, it is good to know which herbs naturally pair well together. Generally speaking, herbs that like the same growing conditions do best when planted together. It pays to do a little bit of research into what each herb's preferred environmental requirements are, so you can create a cohesive collection of thriving herbs.

General category combinations, include:

Dry Soil/Lots of Sun – plants like rosemary, sage, oregano, marjoram, lavender, and thyme all prefer this combination, and do well when planted together.

Moist Soil/Sun – there are herbs that don't tolerate drought particularly well, including basil, parsley, cilantro, and tarragon. These do best when planted together.

Invasive Herbs – there are certain herbs, especially those in the mint family, that tend to take over wherever they're planted. They just don't play well with others. The good news is that different varieties within the mint family, including spearmint, peppermint, and lemon balm, do grow well together, as long as they have enough space to spread out. To avoid a mint takeover in your outdoor space, it is best to keep mint in its own pot or in a well-bordered area outside.

Many Uses for Herbs

Besides featuring as an ingredient in tonight's dinner or your favorite bar of soap, herbs serve other purposes, too. Lavender's pale green leaves and bright purple flowers add a pop of color in any landscaping plan.

Herbs even provide additional services beyond their looks or taste. A number of herbs, including rosemary, lemon grass, and mint, are all known to repel mosquitos and other unwanted insects. Other herbs, like sage, deter common pests that plague gardens, offering protection to your growing vegetables.

You can even use herbs to form a protective barrier. Wormwood, when planted around your garden's entire perimeter, is a deterrent to keep unwanted critters from venturing into your carefully tended vegetable patch.

Easy to grow, tasty, beautiful, fragrant, and useful, herbs are a wonderful thing to grow. Indoors or out, in pots or sprawling gardens, adding herbs to your life makes every day more pleasant.

BLOG POSTS

What is User Experience (UX)?

Crazy Egg

Google user experience and the definition you'll find is "the overall experience of a person using a product like a website or computer application, especially in terms of how easy or pleasing it is to use." Sounds straightforward enough.

In the real world, though, real humans are involved with all the quirkiness they bring to the table. They don't always use sites, apps, or services as designed. We researched what top experts in the field have to say about the user experience, and offer tips to help you navigate along the way.

User Experience Encompasses All Interaction With a Brand

Don Norman & Jakob Nielsen are the co-founders of Nielsen Norman Group, a renowned user experience consulting firm founded in 1998. Both Norman and Nielsen have written some of the most influential books about user experience and design, including "The Design of Everyday Things" and "Designing Web Usability: The Practice of Simplicity."

According to Norman and Nielsen, the definition of UX is broad and it extends beyond websites or apps.

"User experience' encompasses all aspects of the end-user's interaction with the company, its services, and its products."

The pair originally coined the phrase when computers were the primary way users interacted with a brand. But as technology evolved, and consumers began interacting digitally with brands in myriad ways, some in the UX world began referring to this user-brand relationship as the "customer journey."

Norman and Nielsen believe that whatever you want to call it, the main point is the same. There are multiple levels of experience and each is equally important in delivering a good experience to your user.

They break things down into three levels:

- Interaction level – the single transaction a user has with a brand. This is where most UX work is done, including things like website and app interfaces using channel-specific strategies.
- Journey level – a multi-step process a user completes to reach a goal. The UX here should tie together the steps a user must take, ensuring consistency and cohesiveness across all steps, channels and interactions.
- Relationship level – the overall, lifetime experience a user has with a brand. Great design means that every user touchpoint is woven together to create a unified, connected, and personalized experience from initial contact to post-sale help.

This means UX shouldn't be viewed in a vacuum. It doesn't stop with designing an app that users like. UX teams should be working closely with every team responsible for each customer touchpoint. The end goal is to deliver a seamless, cohesive, on-brand experience no matter where in the journey the user is.

Great UX is Equal Parts Business and Design

Jared Spool has worked in the field of design and usability testing since 1978. He is a writer, researcher, and a former adjunct professor at Tufts University, teaching Experience Design Management. He also co-authored "Web Site Usability: A Designer's Guide (Interactive Technologies." He is the co-founder of the Center Centre–a bricks-and-mortar education center for UX designers.

Spool believes that to be successful, UX design cannot exist in a corporate vacuum. UX leaders must build relationships all the way up the ladder to achieve optimal effectiveness.

"No one will buy into your UX design ideas if they can't see how those ideas matter to them.
This is especially true for your organization's leadership. They need to see how all those great UX design ideas will push forward their top priority, helping the organization. If they can't see it, they won't get behind your great ideas."

According to Spool, without executive buy-in, even the best design ideas are doomed to fail. He offers underline three strategies to get C-level support.

- Don't seek permission, beg forgiveness. Go ahead, design away and hope executive leadership doesn't notice. This strategy is moderately successful when design teams are small and can fly under the radar. It's not successful at all when UX scales.
- Don the cloak of a design evangelist. There's one goal here and that's to educate executives on great design. It's usually done with slide decks showing proof of how design has helped other organizations succeed. This approach is rarely successful, as execs are quick to argue their organizations are different.
- Show executives how UX helps the corporate bottom line. Winner winner, chicken dinner. This is the way to the C-suite's heart. Executives are driven by numbers and money is their love language. When UX leaders talk in dollars to explain the value of design, they can effectively get leadership to see how great design helps the bottom line.

If you're a UX design leader, learn to talk about your efforts and goals in terms of money and especially profit. It is the only proven strategy to get the executive buy-in you need to succeed and scale.

Use Unconscious Bias for Good

With a UX career spanning more than twenty years, David Dylan Thomas has made it his mission to advocate for inclusive designs and help others understand how bias impacts the design process.

He's written about it in depth in his book "Design for Cognitive Bias." As the host of The Cognitive Bias Podcast, he explores the irrational things people do, why they do it, and how to leverage this knowledge for good in UX design.

"We like to think that we walk into a situation, look at it, and decide which frame to use to think about it. Like we're choosing a pair of glasses to put on. Here's the problem: what we don't realize. What we don't know we don't know about ourselves. The glasses were on our face before we even walked into the room."

One example of bias, according to Thomas, is cognitive bias. It occurs when designers and developers create a solution and inherently believe it is the best solution. They put too much weight on their solution while downplaying any data that might indicate there are better alternatives. This can lead to solutions going to market with big flaws or even harmful outcomes.

Similarly, other biases like notational bias can also lead to potentially negative outcomes. For example, if you build a form with a gender field that is limited to male/female, you risk alienating a lot of identities. They may choose to opt out altogether.

Can bias be used for good? Thomas says yes, but only if you're aware of them. Things like cognitive fluency and cultural bias, once you recognize them and their potential impacts, can help you design solutions that amplify or avoid certain outcomes.

UX professionals can use Thomas' insights to improve the design process. Understanding the different types of bias out there, then incorporating solutions based on that information, leads to more inclusive, persuasive, and effective designs.

UX is a Team Sport

Irene Au's robust UX experience comes from creating and scaling UX teams at Google and Yahoo!. In her current role as Design Partner at Khosla Ventures, she works with start-ups to strengthen design capabilities. She's also an Adjunct Professor at Stanford University, teaching about advanced product design.

Au's experience at Google, where user research was completely separate from the design process when she joined, was the catalyst for her to adopt a more integrated approach. As she noted on the GameThinking podcast,

"I felt like it created too much of a waterfall process. There wasn't enough generative research being done to help inform and inspire what was being built and designed and why. I wanted to bring research and design closer together." Her approach was to decentralize the research component, and bake it into the UX teams. It was a successful strategy.

Bringing design and research teams together is a wise move for any brand. It eliminates information silos, helps design teams make more educated decisions, and gets products to market faster with fewer needs to go back and fix things.

Great UX Requires Minimal Effort from Users

Stephen Krug is the author of "Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability," which has sold more than 700,000 copies. The book is based on Krug's experience as a usability consultant who worked with Apple, Bloomberg, Lexus, NPR, and the International Monetary Fund during his 30+ year career. Today he runs the consulting firm, Advanced Common Sense, based in Chestnut Hill, MA.

When it comes to UX, Krug's premise is to keep things simple.

"If something requires a large investment of time — or looks like it will — it's less likely to be used."

His belief is that every website or app should make things as obvious and easy as possible. To do otherwise diminishes the user's confidence in not just the site but the business behind it.
Some of Krug's key strategies to make this happen include:

- Design for scanning, not reading. Users don't want to weed through paragraphs of text. Put the most important information first. Use headers and subheaders to make it even easier to understand. Leverage bullet points (short ones) whenever possible. Use bold (sparingly) for emphasis.
- Use simple and concise language. Skip the $0.50 words and go for basics instead. This strategy and other copywriting techniqueswill keep things simplified and your user satisfied they can find what they need with minimal effort.
- Organize information in a clear and logical way. Don't make users work too hard to find what they need. Make their ability to choose a mindless experience.
- Minimize the number of required clicks. This is something you can easily measure. The more clicks, the more likely a user is going to become frustrated. If they get too frustrated, they'll abandon the site altogether.

Every UX professional should focus on incorporating these tips into every design. The goal is to reduce cognitive load to the bare minimum. Solid user testing strategies will help you pinpoint trouble spots, so you can quickly correct them.

If a user has to work too hard to navigate your site, they're going to abandon ship fast.

Know Your Internal Audience

Jen Romano, Ph.D. built her UX career at Google, Meta and Goldman Sachs. She's won awards for her work in UX research, is a past-president of the User Experience Professionals Association (UXPA), and today consults, coaches, and trains individuals and businesses. She also teaches courses at UC Berkeley, University of Maryland, and University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

According to Romano, when it comes to disseminating findings "the most important thing is that your audience actually consumes it."

This is true for any research, whether longer-term foundational investigations (who is your audience? What are their pain points?) or more precise analysis (gathering feedback from existing users).

UX teams must be prepared to deliver findings in a way that resonates with their intended audience. Which, according to Romano, means knowing your audience.

You can ask yourself some questions to help guide your approach.

- Who is my audience? This is always step one. Is it the C-suite? The design team? Each audience has its own unique needs.
- What information do they need to make a decision? This helps define how detailed your information dump will be. For example, top leadership wants concise, data-driven bullet points. Designers, on the other hand, want to dive deep into the nuances of each finding.
- How quickly do they need research results? Designers and developers need real-time research information to help guide their work. The faster you can get the results to them, the faster they can pivot and make changes.
- How do they like to get information? Present your results in a way that your audience is most likely to digest quickly and easily. This means both format and delivery channel. Slide decks, bullet point lists, executive summaries. Slack channels, emails, video calls. All are on the table and useful in the right scenario.

The point is to meet your audience where they are and make it as easy as possible for them to digest the research findings you put so much work into gathering. And do this as fast as possible.

UX is Just One Piece of the Puzzle

David Hamill has been working as a UX professional for more than twenty years. During that time he's worked with a variety of clients, from startups to global organizations including Skyscanner, Gartner, Trustpilot, BBC, ITV, and Standard Life.

Hamill often shares his thoughts on the state of UX via LinkedIn, including top things most UX professionals overlook.

"UX professionals often write cheques with their mouths that their work can't actually cash. I used to do this too. SEO is one of the areas where I see and hear it happening."

He notes that all too often, UX professionals lose sight of the forest for the trees when it comes to design. They argue that improving page usability outweighs any search ranking loss. The problem is they can't prove it and it usually isn't true, according to Hamill.

His point is that UX and SEO exist in tandem. One doesn't trump the other. They're both there to boost performance. At the end of the day, it's a matter of balance while keeping the bigger picture in focus.

What this means for UX professionals is to keep the bigger picture in mind. Sometimes you have to settle for a design you don't 100% love in favor of preserving other established performance indicators.

WEBSITE COPY

Website Design, Copywriting & Performance Optimization

Calypso Charters Bonaire

CALYPSOBONAIRE.COM

@CALYPSOBONAIRE

Built this self-hosted WordPress site for a start-up fishing charter business on the island of Bonaire. Added on-site booking functionality via the Bokun platform.

Optimized on-page SEO and wrote all site and booking platform copy. Crafted a mix of organic social and paid ads (Google + Facebook/IG) to build brand awareness and drive bookings.

Key outcomes:

- Revenue doubled month-over-month for the three consecutive months after launch.
- Brand appeared in Google AI summary within four months of launch.
- Organic social engagement rate is consistently between 5-7%.
- Google paid search ad engagement rate is consistently between 6-8%.

GET IN TOUCH WITH LIZ

Ready to work together?
Reach out and and share some details about what you need.
Let's exceed your goals!

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