

UX Strategy



Hi Bob,

Over the past few months, I have come to admire your leadership, and your willingness to embrace new strategies to improve Gamma Airlines. Per your request, I've prepared the following UX strategy that we can turn to as a starting point for all future UX practices. In this plan, you'll find short term goals, long term goals, and overarching practices we can employ to make our products more usable and effective, and ultimately help the company grow.

UX, at its core, revolves around understanding the needs of whoever is using our products, which in our case includes both our customers and our employees, and adapting our products to help serve these needs and achieve their goals in a satisfying, efficient manner. Also, raising awareness and educating the employees about the value of user experience and human-centered design plays a significant role in our long term success. I'm excited about collaborating and educating various departments and instilling UX principles and guidelines throughout the organization.

UX does not exist in a vacuum, and neither does UX Design. I have familiarized myself with some of the data we have about our users, and I have talked to other employees from sales, marketing, and customer service in an effort to familiarize myself with the problem space. In the sections below, I will explain my UX strategy, which I divided into two sections of short term and long term goals.

In my experience, the organizations with the best UX are the ones where the whole company is invested in having a great UX. Did you know that each dollar spent on UX design has an expected return between \$5 and \$100? Did you know that reports by Forrester reveal that implementing a focus on the customers' experience can increase their willingness to pay by 14.4%, increase brand retention by 15.8%, and boosts their likelihood of recommending a product by 16.6%? Granted, this is not the kind of change that happens overnight, but with a proper strategy, and a little organizational support, I believe the business benefits returned from focusing on the user experience would be tremendous.

Short term goals

Conduct initial user research on the booking system

To begin with, I conducted some guerrilla usability testing (rapid usability testing) on the booking section of our website. I conducted informal usability testing and asked a few friends to do a few

tasks using our booking page, such as asking them to browse for flights from point A to point B for a specific date range, and then to book a flight from point A to point B for a specific date range. I chose to test this page for a few reasons. First, the booking page is a vital step in the purchase flow, and an area that could result in lost sales if the customer can't navigate it correctly. Second, data from customer support showed that we have received many complaints about this page.

The guerrilla testing revealed our bookings page has quite a few issues which can be easily corrected now that we are aware of what they are. To name a few, people face issues when they try to search by the name of a city when they don't know the name of the airport. They don't get notified when their flight times are changed, or cancelled altogether. There were also a high number of user drop-offs on the payments page. I found these by looking at our Google Analytics data.

Improving these pages to be more user-friendly would be relatively small in scope, and yet would yield high returns. Compared to a more expansive overhaul or redesign, a project like this will take less time and involve less departments, and starting with an existing product (the booking system) rather than a brand new one will make it easier to measure how the redesign fares in comparison. The way I would seek to start this redesign would be to incorporate some more formal usability testing, which would mean talking to actual users, not just friends or colleagues as part of our product design process. Next, I would like to sit down with the Product Development team and the IT Support team and understand some process related issues and user complaints received by our support department. From there, I would synthesize all the information I learned and start creating some redesigns and come up with some prototypes. We would take these prototypes, get feedback on them from users, refine the design based on their feedback, and repeat this cycle until we have a product we are satisfied with. Depending on the timeframe and available budget, I believe we could plan to launch the redesigned booking system in as early as 6 months.

In effort to make clear the benefits of UX design, I would provide the data gathered from the usability testing sessions, along with recommended changes, to other Gamma Airlines teams. I think this would help our employees and managers to understand our users better and to know that we are working to create a product for our users who might be different from us. This will help us establish the much needed support for our future UX strategy and will show the managers that there are big gains to be achieved from the small changes, which can be discovered through the UX Design process. If this redesign of the booking process is successful, then other processes which have known issues, such as the staff allocation system, could follow.

Long term Goals

Creating Personas and Identifying User Groups

As we instill UX principles into our organization core, there are some benchmarks of progress we can strive to meet. Based on my previous experiences, one of the first steps we need to take is to identify different user groups within our customer base. Identifying different users groups will allow us to address the needs, desires and pain points which are only experienced by some of our customers. For example, the needs of a business woman traveling alone are different than a mother with two small children. Establishing a thorough understanding of the multiple user types that fly with us and use our services will allow us to create a set of personas (a representation of a type of customer) that match our audience. We would use data gathered through past usability testing experiences, and through some additional foundational research to create these personas. Having a set of well-developed personas on hand will help us in the future, and last through many new product development cycles. They are not just created once for a redesign and then forgotten. Detractors may say that as an airline, our user types/ target audience is “everyone who travels”. My belief is that trying to design for such a generalized group is a great way to make a product that is tolerated by many, liked by few and loved by none. Instead, by using these personas as a tool, we help design for the different needs, habits and goals of the people who use our products.

Establish a database to track user behavior & insights

Another benchmark we can aim to achieve in the long term is to establish a database that records design and behavior insights. One inspiration of implementing this kind of database is WeWork. Their “UX nugget” system allows the team to document any observation and the corresponding evidence, and allows them to think broadly about problems and fundamental questions their organization may be having. The benefit being, that when there is a myriad of different design directions possible, it helps focus in on one specific way to improve the user experience. I believe that adopting a similar database of knowledge would be beneficial for a variety of reasons. First, in addition to helping inform future design decisions, a database like this would cut down on future research costs. Imagine a future scenario where we are looking to improve the way people check bags online through our website. With a database of knowledge and insights available to us, we may be able to ascertain how users feel about the current process, or how they feel about bag-checking in general. This will allow our research to be more focused and problem-specific. Second, if this database is routinely updated and maintained, it will allow us to track our company and brand perception over time. Lastly, this database is not just a resource for the UX team; the marketing team, product team, and sales team would all be able to collaborate as well. I envision this database to also be a conversation driver between departments, as the same “insight” could have different implications for the marketing team than it does for the product team.

I believe the above mentioned resources are big aspirations, and the fruits of these labors may not be fully realized for 5 years or more. Databases, especially those starting virtually from scratch, take time to develop. These personas also will take some time to realize their full potential, because personas are most impactful when they are used consistently during the production cycle. With that said, I believe that if we start tracking the insights, we hear from users now, we could start to see the beginnings of these personas within 2-3 years.

Incorporating a Design Process in the Organization

In order to create a sustainable, effective, and long term UX strategy, it is important that, as a company, we follow a consistent user-centered design process. When I say user-centered design, what I mean is a process of ideating, designing, developing, and testing our products in accordance with the user's needs, rather than our needs. We are not our users; their needs differ from ours, and therefore it is imperative to include them in the design process. A user-centered design process would also be iterative, doing additional research periodically to ensure that our products continue to meet our user's needs. And if they aren't, then we would iterate upon them, redesigning, redeveloping, and retesting them as necessary until we obtained the user experience goals we have set. The specific details of our design process can be adapted as we go, but in some of my previous roles, we segmented the process into stages, such as:

1. Uncovering problems
2. Defining how we approach these problems
3. Ideating as a team
4. Designing the solution
5. Testing the solution
6. Iterate as necessary

Following a user-centered design process will ensure that each and every product we create is based on real user needs, and has a real impact on helping them achieve their goals. By establishing a design process used by the whole team working on a project, we are more likely to achieve a unified vision and clear purpose from all parties. We could expect to see increased efficiency, as meetings and discussions which amounted to nothing actionable, instead now have the framework of a design process to fall back on and guide the next steps.

One of the biggest factors in making the adoption of this design process successful is to get buy in from all the parties that would follow this process. People can be defensive about their processes and resistant to change in general, so it is important to be patient when introducing a new process. I believe the best way to go about implementing this, while maintaining team chemistry, would be to let my UX work speak for itself for a year or two, and then slowly, piece by piece, begin to introduce elements of this process. My goal would be to have a process like this fully operating in 4-5 years.

Reliability & Personalization

As we reach our targeted goals in 4-5 years, I aim for our organization's UX team to be well developed and mature. I believe at this point, it would be possible to reinforce a brand perception as a reliable and personable airline through UX design. Data gathered industry-wide shows that one of the most prevalent complaints travelers have about airlines is the lack of reliability from airlines regarding delays and cancellations to flights. If we emphasize reliability as part of our brand, and in our core values and processes, it will help to reap gains in the long

term. Once we have increased our business revenue and gained more profits from the initial short term goals, we will be able to hire more staff (flight attendants, pilots et cetera) to make sure that there are enough staffers to take care of passengers during peak travel times like Christmas, Thanksgiving holidays, and summer vacations. Also, after redesigning the staff allocation section of our product, we will be in a better position to notify managers of upcoming leaves for their staff and the managers in turn will be able to better manage their staff and allocate extra staff for peak travel times.

Another way to make our brand stronger is to use the principle of personalization. For example, if one of our registered users has taken a trip this time last year to Florida, then we could use that data to remind them of their beach vacation and encourage them to book tickets for another trip the same time this year. In doing so customers would begin to attribute positive experiences and emotions of their trip with our brand, and drive future purchasing decisions. This would help build brand loyalty and be a positive boost to our brand image in the customer's eyes.

Conclusion

Once again, I wanted to thank you for your willingness to embrace UX as a major piece of Gamma Airline's growth strategy over the next few years. While the amount we have to accomplish is great, I believe the return on investment will be even greater, and I look forward to getting started working towards our goals. To summarize our UX strategy, goals and the overarching principles, I would like to quickly mention that although these are specific to our situation and organizational needs, the underlying key principles are universal to establishing a good working UX strategy in the practical sense. The main tenets of the strategy include:

- Begin with a short term goal
- Establish buy-in from other teams in the organization, using the ROI data and customer testimonials present from achieving our short term goal
- Create personas to understand and serve our users in a way specific to their needs
- Track user behavior and insights to understand user pain points and define the UX problems that can be tackled in the long term
- Establish a design process that is flexible yet well defined and cohesive to be incorporated in different project across the organization
- Incorporate the brand values in the UX Design process, and allow Human-centered design to become a key aspect of what makes your brand successful