Debunking User Experience
A Short, Cynical Dictionary of Misunderstood Words

Archetype
User stereotype. E.g., 20-something male who would rather frequent poker or porn sites than your site.

Breadcrumb
An interface element reflexively inserted into most websites.

Card Sorting
Sufficiently randomizing a deck of playing cards.

Cognitive Factors
Your profoundly infallible thoughts.

Copy
Material received from the client hours before the site is set to go live.

CSS
Nothing interesting *ever* happened before this came along.

Customers
The people who walk all over you.

Design
A mundane discipline. Everyone with a pulse possesses complete mastery.

Emotional Design
When clients spontaneously weep at the sight of your brilliant portfolio.

End Users
Programmers.

Ethnography
Field of study that determines why the Irish aren't overly fond of Italians.

Experience Design
Snobs use this term in place of **User Experience**.

Eye Tracking
Cite this vague process whenever justifying **layout** to your client.

Field Research
Ignore this. As a rule, no one does it.

Findability
Why staff biographies must always be positioned dominantly on your site.

Flash
HTML 5 Beta.

Fold
An imaginary line above which you must stay (lest you break your mother's back).

Greyboxing
When a designer creates **wireframes**.

GUI
The thing that makes your app pretty.

Haptics
Field of study involving touch that [redacted by Steve Jobs].

Heuristic
Any over-the-counter medicine that fights nasal congestion.

HTML 5
Vital standard that will achieve mass acceptance by 2015. Maybe.

Human Computer Interaction (HCI)
Doomed relationship type, *a la* Dave and Hal of Discovery One.

Human Factors
The personal likes or dislikes of your client's daughter's little cousin.

Idiot Proof
Something made precisely as the designer wanted in the first place.

Information Architecture (IA)
Can't design? Can't program? We've got a job for you.

Information Design
Design for PowerPoint.

Interaction Design (iXD)
A term derived completely from its hip acronym.

Interactive
The new **New Media**.

Interactive Design
The process of turning a print ad into a website.

Intuitive
Apparently, only CEOs can define this esoteric term.

Jakob Nielson
Usability curmudgeon who will stab you with a rusty fork if you employ more than one link color on a site.

jQuery
Flash for dummies.

Layout
Nothing is more important. Nothing.

Look and Feel
How your client describes the sum of everything you do.

Metrics
Fabricated goals or statistics.

Mobile
Another damn thing we have to design for.

Mood Board
Procrastination in collage form.

MUI
"Multi-media user interface." Hoping for a comeback using "mobile."

Multi-Media
Term used by traditional designers to describe anything not made of paper.

Napkin Sketch
You'll fight for this original idea no matter what you learn later.

New Media
What traditional designers can't or won't do.

Persona
Complex, demographic user profile that your team completely makes up.

Portal
The entrance to a new dimension in space time. Always includes stock quotes and weather.

Prototype (Paper)
Napkin sketch of a Web application.

Purpose
Getting **users** to return to your site.

Quality Assurance Testing
Purely optional.

Qualitative Testing
A type of usability testing completely different from **Quantitative testing**.

Quantitative Testing
A type of usability testing completely different from **Qualitative testing**.

Richard Saul Wurman
Know-nothing who can't do anything.

Rails
Programming language that allows you, using one line of code, to do anything ever conceived by humankind.

Scenario
Hannibal Smith's run-down of the A-Team's latest predicament.

Shell
Your gloriously brilliant, completely unique site design, consisting only of a logo, banner, footer, navigation bar and stock photo.

Site Map
Flowchart. Don't make it. Your client will be happy to do it for you.

Skin
A beautiful, sublime variant of a **shell**.

Storyboarding
George Lucas' cheap substitute for good storytelling.

Task
Any onerous, tedious assignment given to you by the damned project manager.

Taxonomy
Managing or measuring taxes.

Template
A term that means something different to every single member of your project team, every piece of software you own and every client you've ever had.

Trigger
The last bit of user stupidity that pushes you over the brink and prompts a rabid search for your bottle of hydrocodone.

Usability
A term you must use repeatedly on your website. Its meaning, implication, process or actual value are irrelevant.

Use Case
The script you write for **users**, ensuring perfect, flawless **usability**.

Users
Idiots. Morons, all.

User Centered Design (UCD)
Designer Centered Design

User Error
Every problem that occurs with your website.

User Experience (UX or UXP)
If **usability** feels too trendy, this term will do nicely.

User Friendly
Any pretty website.

User Interface (UI)
Something created by programmers, now ready for your design and content.

User Testing
Confirms that **users** are mortifyingly stupid.

UX
A prefix attached to nearly every Web job description.

Visual Design
The multiple design concepts delivered with the project proposal.

Web 2.0
Created by God on the First Day.

Web Design
The process of creating a kick-ass **shell** that can house miscellaneous content.

Wireframe
What happens when **information architects** try their hand at graphic design.

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Required Reading
These books are easy-to-read. Most are short. Some are downright fun. You need to read them. No Excuses.

Defensive Design for the Web
37 Signals
The best book you'll find on Web form usability and error handling. Simply outstanding.

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People
Stephen Covey
Just about the best business book ever written. Delve into the essentials of intentionality and understanding.

Content Strategy for the Web
Kristina Halvorson
The ideal introduction to a complex, often frustrating, chronically neglected topic.

Don't Make Me Think
Rocket Surgery Made Easy
Steve Krug
Essential primers on usability and design testing. If you only read two books on the list, make it these.

Orbiting the Giant Hairball
Gordon Mackenzie
The Hippy of Hallmark will help you thrive creatively in a corporate culture.

Information Architecture for the World Wide Web
Peter Moreville and Louis Rosenfeld
Seminal work on the subject.

Designing Web Usability
Prioritizing Web Usability
Eye-Tracking Web Usability
Jacob Nielsen
Disagree if you must. Ignore at your peril.

The Design of Everyday Things
Don Norman
A classic. Buy it right now. Seriously.

Handbook of Usability Testing: How to Plan, Design, and Conduct Effective Tests
Jeffrey Rubin, Dana Chisnell
Obligingly easy to read and digest. All you need to know.

Envisioning Information
The Visual Display of Quantitative Information
Visual Explanations
Beautiful Evidence
Edward Tufte
Learn to display information wonderfully. These books are a bit academic, but truly a delight and worth your effort.

Access Paris (Or *Access New York*)
Richard Saul Wurman
The guru of Information Architecture exhibits flawless mastery here.

Down with Users!
You can't relate to faceless, ill-defined users. But you can understand **real people** and observe what they really do. Bonus: It's quite easy.

Find at least five errors with each statement:

1 - "How a person reacts to a Web site determines that user's experience with the product and can determine a return visit. The usability of a Web site, which usually refers to the elegance, flow-of-content & clarity with which the site is designed, can ensure a positive user experience."
Source: Bloomberg.com (Business Exchange)

- People are called users, a lazy term at best, demeaning at worst.
- Reactions are only one tiny aspect of experience.
- "Return Visit" is hailed as the raison d'être for having a website.
- Uselessly subjective words/phrases: "elegance," "flow-of-content,""clarity"
- Usability cannot ensure a "positive" experience. It just helps a lot.

2 - "[User Experience is] the judicious application of certain user-centered design practices, a highly contextual design mentality, and use of certain methods and techniques that are applied through process management to produce cohesive, predictable, and desirable effects in a specific person, or persona (archetype comprised of target audience habits and characteristics)."
http://uxdesign.com/ux-defined

- Only an academic could love this horridly obtuse, vague sentence.
- Who decides what is and is not judicious? (Academics, we guess.)
- We triple-dog dare you to define the phrases "highly contextual design mentality," or "process management."
- We're apparently producing "certain" effects in a person. Say what?
- We've reduced people to habits and characteristics. Uncool. But what about the basics: behavior and use? (Insert chirping crickets here.)