

## Incorporating User Centered Design in Your Organization

by Maria Isabel Espino, Usability Expert

---

Usability. These days that isn't an uncommon term in the information technology world. Trying to make it more than just another word to managers, business owners, and development teams is a challenging task. Good usability in any web or software design can generate exponential revenue, increase customer retention, promote strategic brand value, and provide proven results to business processes. However, even with dozens of case studies, research, and expert documentations that support these findings, business owners, managers, and developers still have a hard time absorbing and implementing usability as a business standard.



**Maria Espino, Usability Expert**

The challenge to instill usability as a business standard isn't that key personnel do not see the benefit of such a process; they see the reports, they hear your presentations, they know the logical value... the challenge however is that they have to realize that to implement user-centered design isn't a project-based initiative, its an organizational one. That is certainly a much more complicated endeavor, since it would require a complete rework of all processes and procedures from the top down. It is virtually impossible to achieve success in its delivery if the goal is to just apply it to just one project. The decision to do so includes much more than the logical benefits I've described above.

When approaching a company that has never considered usability as a part of their development process, it is easy to get boxed into usability testing for every project. When it seems that all you are doing is patching up what has already been erroneously done, that's the time to re-evaluate exactly what value are you bringing to the company and how limiting it is for you to remain a part of it. You can ask yourself, "But how do I change this way of thinking?"

What you want to do is involve yourself with high-visibility projects that have key business sponsors. They key questions, according to David Travis, a leading usability expert in Europe, that will help you define such projects early on are:

- How important is good usability to this project?
- How important is this project to the company?
- How likely is it that you can measure the before and after benefits of good usability?
- How supportive are the decision makers of the project?

It is imperative that as an usability expert, your involvement start near the beginning of a project, where most of your work is devoted to understanding the customers that will use the product and conceptualizing designs. To effectively deliver user centric functionality and presentation, you should insist on being part of the full life cycle from beginning to end. Never accept a project that just wants you to checklist a design that is already in place based on your expertise. Mr. Travis calls this "rubber stamping", and he advices to just say "NO!" Projects that leave no time to analyze and revise the design against user feedback are really a waste of your time and your client's money.

## Incorporating User Centered Design in Your Organization

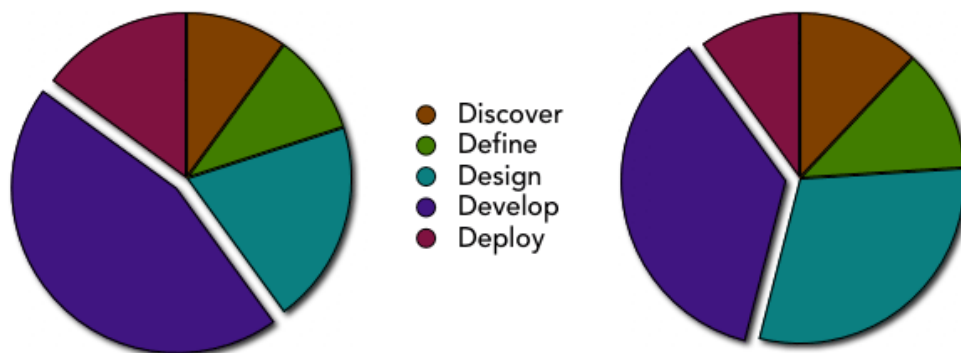
by Maria Isabel Espino, Usability Expert

The most common rationale that project managers or other key personnel often push back on you as their primary challenge is that your approach will take too long to accomplish within reasonable timelines. Well any usability expert worth the pretty penny they charge knows that it's not really in the quantity, but in the quality of the time spent that the differences will stand out. Web or software development projects go through the usual five phases: Discover, Define, Design, Develop, and Deploy. Known as the "Five D's", these fundamental steps in the software development life cycle (SDLC) will always remain a permanent stay in any project, however its often the case to spend insufficient time in the discovery, definition, and design of a project. Almost always this ensures that unfavorable user feedback during beta testing extends the development and deployment of a product.

By addressing the needs of the user in the early stages through user-centered design, we determine to change this outcome. Usability bugs and needless features are flushed out in these early stages, before the core development is commenced, therefore speeding up the process through to deployment. The following charts help to visualize how a traditional design approach compares to a user centered design.

### Traditional Design Approach

### User Centred Design Approach



Here you can clearly see how using the same project timeline we can allocate time wisely to be able to meet the deadlines of the project and at the same time incorporating a user centered design approach. By spending more time in the discovery, definition, and design phases of a project, less time is needed to fix costly usability problems later.

In order to thoroughly integrate user centered design throughout your organization, you will need to find a key board-level resource that will help you promote usability as a business standard. Keep an active record of reports, highlight videos, best practice guidelines, usability in the spotlight presentations and newsletters, and links to articles that support your theories and ideas. Demonstrating relevant examples of ROI (return on investment) within your company or industry will gain further advocacy of your work from high level officials on a reoccurring basis. This will show that their retention of your services set against the savings on development, increased sales, reduced need of training and support is an investment that paid itself over and over again.

Charts and certain text excerpts provided by David Travis.