

## It all comes down to "UX"

UX is the internet wonk word for "user experience" or the measurement of how easy or how hard it is to use a given website for its stated purpose. The object, of course, is to provide a good UX.

The concept has started to come under some scrutiny, particularly as it applies to banks. Change Sciences, which specializes in measuring UX across a variety of industries, recently saw fit to issue a white paper titled "OWS and Community Banks: A Manifesto."

OWS refers to that other emerging social force, Occupy Wall Street, which over the past six months has spread far and wide. "Much has been made of the Occupy Wall Street movement being digitally connected," the paper says. "It might only occur to people inside the banking industry that such young, digitally connected citizens are also highly likely to be regular users of online banking."

Change Sciences also brings in last year's popular backlash against big-bank debit card fees. "Now a few months after Bank Transfer Day, we wonder how happy the switchers are with the online services of their new community bank. Does it have an iPhone app? Is it easy to use? How about its web-based online banking? How far does making a statement by bailing on a big bad bank get you if the bank you switched to starts annoying you? How long will the love last?"

How long indeed. There has been plenty of research in this area, which surely has merited much study. Forrester, in 2010, evaluated the UX at four leading United Kingdom banks, which presumably were capable of developing the best of the best, considering that country's highly digitalized society. Not so. "No site passed our review," Forrester says. "The most common usability flaws we uncovered were landing pages that failed to point to value on the site, missing privacy and security policies, inadequate search functionality, and poor site performance."

Ouch. But not all that uncommon.

Last fall, Web Site magazine published an article where Usabilla conducted a study on the UX of some of the largest retail banking websites in the United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Again, the results indicated poor UX. Some of the conclusions:

- Often, information is based not on the user's priorities but on what the bank wants to sell.

- A user's site acceptance is based largely on visual factors. A padlock icon is good, since it indicates security; too many ads cluttering up the page is bad, since that conveys a less trustworthy approach.

- Too much information on a given page makes it difficult to find desired content.

Of course, there are UX consultants available. One such is Frontend, which provides "Five rules for better bank websites":

1. Understand your users. While each has his or her own reason for going to a bank site, it's possible to group users with like interests, and thus, on a homepage, each can be directed to different areas.
2. The visual design is crucial. Strike a balance between corporate and jazzy, providing a look and feel appropriate to the bank's own identity.
3. Provide relevant content. Customers see a bank site as an information resource, where they can get quick and up-front details on charges, rates, and product descriptions.
4. Users need to feel secure. Security reminders are important, but not with overly alarming language and presentation.
5. Online banking needs to have easy access. The homepage should make it clear and simple how users can access their accounts online.

Here's another example, this time all the way from Denmark. A UX blogger, Janus Boye, recently wrote about the website transformation of Jyske Bank, the largest Danish bank headquartered outside of Copenhagen. The bank recently retooled its technical platform. In conjunction with that, it wanted to make its online presence more useful for customers.

An analysis of website traffic found that the number of mobile banking users was increasing, while the site—designed for a desktop computer—did not work so well on a handheld device.

The solution: Design a site that works well no matter what the end user uses. As a result, the new Jyske Bank website looks, acts, and feels “nice”; no matter how it’s accessed, says Boye.

All of which circles back to Change Science’s manifesto for community banks. On the down side, it points out that both community banks and the vendors they’re likely to use in general have poor UX competency. Also, they are stuck with legacy core systems that can be difficult to retrofit.

On the plus side, because they are smaller, community banks can be more nimble. And, of course, they absolutely know the ins and outs of banking—which potential disintermediators from Silicon Valley do not.

From this hash, Change Sciences concludes: “Humans have a higher tolerance for pain if they are working toward a goal. And for now the goal for many consumers is to use community banking services. How long this will last is anybody’s guess, but it is surely community banks’ opportunity to lose.”

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Sources for this report came from:

[OWS and Community Banks: A Manifesto](#)

[Web Site User Experience 2010: UK Banks](#)

[How Jyske Bank pulled off responsive web design](#)

[Report Studies User Experience of Financial Websites](#)

[Five Rules For Better Bank Websites](#)

About the Author

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