

## Work Shift Episode 15

CHILD 1: When I grow up, I want to be a contractor because I like building stuff.

CHILD 2: When I grow up, I want to be a stunt double.

CHILD 3: I want to be a YouTuber.

RAY HARRIPAUL: Hey Shawne, what's the last thing you did online?

SHAWNE McKEOWN: Okay. Oh, I bought an indoor watering can for my houseplants from a large home improvement retailer.

RAY HARRIPAUL: And how was that?

SHAWNE McKEOWN: It was easy and quick. I didn't really think about it to be honest.

RAY HARRIPAUL: Well, let's think about it now. Imagine all the options and potential paths you could have taken at each step from searching for the product, then reading the reviews below, to adding the product to your cart choosing curbside or delivery, and finally paying for the thing.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: It's interesting when you think about it that way. If systems to complete tasks aren't designed and developed well, it could make completing a relatively simple goal, say like buying a watering can or doing your online banking a lot more complicated and frustrating.

RAY HARRIPAUL: That's where UX designers come in. We're talking to three design professionals who outlined the range of cool career paths available in this field. Welcome to Work Shift.

[ music ]

XAVIER MASSE: UX design is a huge -- it's a huge opportunity and it's growing potentially -- it's growing so much that as I'm saying that now we find a big difference between UX research and UX design, even how people who specialize in only being mappers, like people who only map the systems, process designers, system designers. That's all part of the UX design that is starting to fragment into different specialties, right, within the UX world.

RAY HARRIPAUL: Digital disruption.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: The gig economy.

RAY HARRIPAUL: Artificial intelligence.

[ synthesized voice] Robots.

RAY HARRIPAUL: And now COVID-19. What does it all mean for you?

SHAWNE McKEOWN: I'm Shawne McKeown.

RAY HARRIPAUL: I'm Ray Harripaul.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: We're exploring the future of work and changes you can expect to see at your job.

RAY HARRIPAUL: We'll tell you how this massive digital shift could change your career and what you can do to adapt, evolve, and thrive.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: In this episode, we find out why UX designers are in growing demand in the financial technology sector and in other areas. And we find out why this is a great career path for young design grads just starting out and for the person whose mid-career and looking to make a shift. We are talking to Xavier Masse, a program coordinator and professor at George Brown College of Design. Xavier's career spans 30 years with a focus on design in technology. And we're also speaking with Ana Rita Morais of George Brown School of Design. She holds a Doctorate in communication and culture from Ryerson University, and she's an expert in mobile media. We're also talking to Peter Sicard, partner and founder of TuesdayAfternoon Media, a multidisciplinary design firm in Toronto that specializes in enterprise learning solutions. There were always plenty of online options for well everything. But now that the in-person element of many services is on hold due to the pandemic, you may be paying more attention to how you use systems and services online from buying groceries to reviewing onboarding materials as a new employee. Cue the user experience designer. So what exactly do they do? As Xavier Masse explains, a lot.

XAVIER MASSE: That was a very good question actually that role started a very long time ago, but we didn't call it user experience designer. It started with the need of understanding context. So when you were in front of a client that had a request of either creating a new service to plug into their existing systems or renovating one of their existing systems, the first thing you need to do is understand the context and understand how the system works. And what I mean by system here, I'm not necessarily meaning automatically IT information technology systems, but I'm talking about the different interfaces and touch points. If you are talking to a retailer, you might have some point of sales outside the pandemic that would still be open. Anyway, so you have to take into account all of the different elements. So a UX designer nowadays, their prime mandate is to understand the different connections between the different elements in the system. And then imagine the interfaces to interact with these complex systems. That's why nowadays you have all kinds of different types of UX designers. You have UX researchers that barely do any visualizations of what they discover. They do more actually process design and system design and even a bit of psychology to understand how humans interact with those systems. And then you have mobile design. Then you have UX designers that typically just focus on how to organize those interfaces. We talk a lot about real estate and flow of information from one screen to another. So that would be their focus. Same thing for web design. So it's actually a field in itself, UX design, that from the early days of interacting with technology to nowadays has expanded and there are actually a lot of different types of UX designers out there.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: Let's clarify some of the design terminology you'll hear in this episode. UX, user experience. This is designing how people interact with or navigate a system such as a mobile app. UI, user interface. This is designing how an interface will look

and feel. The aesthetics, an interaction design. It's a term used that incorporates UX, UI, and frontend development. Frontend developers are responsible for creating user facing code.

RAY HARRIPAUL: There's a lot of demand for UX designers across several industries.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: Ana Rita Morais outlines the trends she's seen.

ANA RITA MORAIS: More and more I'm noticing just generally where our students are going to work, and there are a ton of students that are going to in-house design teams, particularly in fin-tech actually. So like all the big banks are hiring, ranging from graphic designers to UX, UI designers, strategic designers, design thinkers, design researchers. So there's quite a few -- I think like, moving more towards in-house as opposed to going to agencies. But I think that's really just contingent on sort of what the corporate initiative and strategy for each of these folks.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: Here's Xavier.

XAVIER MASSE: You have RBC for example like, three or four years ago bought an independent agency right off the bat and integrated it into their corporation. The great thing is they didn't even bring them into a tower, they left them in their funky little Queen Street West studio, Loblaw. The group created their own digital entity called Loblaw Digital and they're hiring hoards of those UX designers. Home Depot has about, I would say, 12 of my students. And the last time I checked, about a year ago, their interactive department was like 75 people. You know why? It's because they discovered that their website is now assigned to create more and generate more revenue than some of the stores combined. So I mean you cannot especially in, you know, COVID-19, as the numbers of transactions online have exploded, we can see that not only it puts a strain on those systems, but also in this day and age of people not being able to give feedback also about their experiences online. You take that into account and then streamline, simplify your services so it's even easier to use than ever before. So yeah, absolutely, UX design is a huge -- it's a huge opportunity and it's growing potentially -- it's growing so much that as I'm saying that now we find a big difference between UX research and UX design, even how people who specialize in only being mappers, like people who only map the systems, process designers, system designers. That's all part of the UX design that is starting to fragment into different specialties, right, within the UX world and field.

RAY HARRIPAUL: Here's Peter Sicard.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: Peter is partner and founder of design firm TuesdayAfternoon Media.

PETER SICARD: And to put it in the industry perspective, I think why some of those teams are growing is the value has gone up. Like the perceived value of UX design. And so when you're looking at a large organization where they used to say, well it's not valuable of us to keep a design team or a design-thinking team on staff. Now they're -- very much have changed that opinion. And so that value is now saying that yes, no it's really good for us to keep and maintain this knowledge internally; to be able to use this knowledge and to use it all the time. And to kind of keep moving it forward within our organization. And I think

that's a real testament to the industry [inaudible] and explaining who we are and kind of teaching people what it is that we do.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: So what makes for a good UX design? The designer takes all of the complicated back-end data and aims to create an easy to use interface. So if a user doesn't notice the process, does that mean a job well done? Peter and Ana Rita explain.

PETER SICARD: That's the basic level. I think when it comes to -- where it gets really interesting about that is that you either want them to notice the process or you don't want them to notice the process. And if you start to think about being able to control that, that gets really exciting, right? So if it's the thing that you don't want them to notice that that's just ubiquitous trying to do a thing, that's great. And then you can -- they're trying to get to the outcome. But there's also the opportunity too that sometimes you want them to feel a thing and you want them to feel a little bit of that process along the way. And I think that's where it starts to get really exciting as well.

ANA RITA MORAIS: Yeah, I think this is sort of the interesting one for me because I taught a couple of interaction design classes. And, you know, there's all of these sort of catch-all rules on like if a user can't find something on your website within three clicks, then, you know, there's a problem. And so there's all these sort of like little tidbits, but I kind of think that, you know, having this sort of like range of users and being able to find things in your own time, and also being able to understand where things would be. So like, are things well laid out? Does the sort of architecture of things make sense? Obviously, that all plays into the experience. But it's interesting to watch user experience as a sort of terminology and sort of like as a catch-all phrase be appended to things that it wouldn't necessarily fit into. I went to a virtual walk-in clinic this morning, which was a, in total, a 23-minute experience between like making the appointment, seeing the doctor, and getting the prescription to the pharmacy, which I thought, this never happens. This is like, why can't everything be like this? So I thought that that was like pretty incredible. But, you know, it's kind of like we're taking things around like customer service and like services, and generally talking about them, you know, as a user experience. And because my experience was virtual, there is sort of some level of like, well, I was a user appended to a website. And so you kind of start to use this terminology thereafter. But I think something that's interesting that comes up quite a bit like, just like for me and my own research, but generally with the interactions of my students as well as is like, you kind of want the interface to become invisible. And if it does that, you know, in a seamless way, then you've kind of succeeded. And I think that gets really interesting when you start to talk about sort of trends in VR and augmented reality and sort of just generally, you know, how we sort of perceive the device and what it allows us to do, takes on this really interesting idea when what you want it to do is sort of become invisible and vanish. So I think that this idea around, you know, the positive user experience, and, you know, it ranges everything from sort of like the ergonomics of something to the dexterity, and, you know, how well you can kind of fumble through and find information. But it's becoming, I think, more and more prominent and probably more so now that folks are working from home and learning from home, and really doing everything from going to the doctor to sort of attending events and exhibitions online. So it seems like it's really a part of our everyday vocabulary.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: Here's Xavier.

XAVIER MASSE: And the last thing you want is you want this complexity to be visible to your users. You want your users to think that, wow, that was painless. I mean, that was so easy to use. And a good experience like that will actually create retention and will have a business value to those corporations. So that's why they want those people, they want those designers to be able to look at those systems and say if there's something that doesn't work here, we could do a shortcut here. Actually, there's a rabbit hole here that's going to be too deep, so we need to simplify this. So that's what UX designer does.

RAY HARRIPAUL: Being forced to move completely online resulted in some positive developments in the industry including improved tools for prototyping and collaboration. Ana Rita, Peter, and Xavier outlined disrupters and developments that have staying power in a post-COVID world.

ANA RITA MORAIS: Just thinking a little bit about those sort of areas of 3D and AR and VR, so you know, I think that 3D has sort of experienced quite an interesting boom with the pandemic. Just generally, lots of cultural heritage institutions, sort of scanning their collections so folks could visit them virtually, which I think is great. VR is a bit more challenging. You know, I think a lot of VR is tough because one, it's expensive to own your own device at home, and then also right now, I think that, there's obviously not a lot of folks going out into public and going to these sort of arcade-style places or the VR places where you can go and experience something. So I think a lot of that is just generally contingent on what the market is allowing. Augmented reality is seeing, like a super impressive boom, obviously since Pokémon Go. But also, you know, some of these like, augmented reality kits are like, super easy for like, generally like, for students, we find that students already kind of have some knowledge of tinkering with AR systems because they can do a lot of that work from home. And, you know, there's a lot of just very simple tutorials on how to run some of these filters and effects in Instagram, etc. So I think that's kind of, you know, becoming a bit more popular. And as you have folks kind of tinkering with this and talking about this and understanding the scope of how it works, I think it kind of makes things move a lot quicker. And I think it makes the role of the sort of UX designer and the experience designer a bit more interesting and a bit more robust because they tend to have more of these tools in their tool kit, right? And so one of the things that we've really noticed, again with the pandemic, is that students have an access -- like way more access to different kinds of tools, methodologies, and approaches. Because now they're learning, you know, how to work remotely, how to work collaboratively in a remote environment, and just generally, you know, what the shortcomings of that can be. And also what the sort of upsides are. So that's something that definitely we've noticed.

PETER SICARD: Those digital tools have become very important and the collaborative digital tools are one, fantastic, and it's interesting because I don't think it'll go away like that -- this is just the thing that tipped us into it, and now we just have to use it, so we had to learn them. And now we're using them. So. And we're seeing the benefits, and it works really well for that.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: Are you inherently curious? Interested in how people interact with tech and the patterns in those behaviours? Love to problem-solve? These are just a few of the traits our experts say make for a great UX designer.

XAVIER MASSE: I'll give you an example. Two years ago I had somebody who was a teacher in the public system, and now she is a curriculum designer for a digital company that delivers curriculum online. So, yeah. So they learn a new skill, transform it, and then apply it to their first career that they had. So -- and then some people will do it with a total different mindset of changing entirely their career. So for these people, what I would say is I would say that, you know, keep an open mind, be very curious.

ANA RITA MORAIS: I would say that there's a lot of students in interaction design that come back as sort of Second Career. Not necessarily that, you know, they've worked a ton, and then they're coming back. Sometimes that is the case, but often we have students that have done, you know, like a psychology or sociology Bachelor, and then they come in to sort of get a bit more specialized. And I think for a lot of folks, you know, that want to get into interaction design or user experience design, a lot of them really like to work with people or they're generally curious about patterns around human usage. And so I think for me that one is definitely really paramount. I think someone that is, you know, willing to pay attention to the details but also the bigger picture like, doesn't lose sight of the bigger picture is really important in this area. Having a sort of well-versed idea around design principles doesn't hurt, but that's also stuff that you can learn, right? And that's stuff that the program teaches. But generally, yeah, for me, it's really about someone who has some empathy, really wants to understand why users engage, and why technology can be used as a sort of tool to help make things a bit better.

PETER SICARD: It's that curiosity, that mindset of curiosity. You mentioned that there's people coming in that are coming in from behavioural sciences, and then just like that, it's amazing that's exactly what we're looking for, right? That's where it kind of -- we attach to people -- you have to be curious about the people. You also mentioned the word empathy in there. And so when we were talking about like just creating an interface that works, it's kind of like a universal design kind of situation and that kind of empathy to get to know your neighbour and every single format and every single way that we can kind of imagine the human experience to be. We start to get into -- where there's problems that we can actually be of service, right, in interaction design.

[ music ]

SHAWNE McKEOWN: It's time to take a look at the future want ads.

[children cheering].

RAY HARRIPAUL: Yes, kids, listen up because these could be the jobs you'll be applying for when you grow up.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: In this segment, we ask a guest to outline a job they think should exist in the future. Okay, Xavier Masse, what have you got for us?

XAVIER MASSE: How about a tech healer, a tech therapist?

RAY HARRIPAUL: What will this person do?

XAVIER MASSE: When I started in this field, I could still open a computer and tell you exactly what the different parts of the computer were. I could tell you how they were functioning. I could still tell you how an interface was made, and how a system was built. Now for students to be at that level of knowledge that I was 30 years ago, it's a whole new ballgame with AI and complex data flows and data sets that are getting bigger and bigger and data transfers that are actually more complex. It's another thing. So I hope that future designers will be able to keep up with this level of complexity and at the same time develop a healthy relationship with technology, which I think we need to teach. [ laughter ] Not just within the world of design, but as a general practice, I think we need to teach healthy relationship with technology.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: What kind of education would be required for this job?

XAVIER MASSE: Because I think you need to understand sociology, you need to understand psychology, and you need to understand technology. So those are three skillsets that are quite important to have. I don't think that you will find them in one normal career right now -- career path.

[ music ]

SHAWNE McKEOWN: That's a wrap on this episode of Work Shift. What did you think?

RAY HARRIPAUL: Want to share your thoughts on this episode?

SHAWNE McKEOWN: Email us at [workshift@georgebrown.ca](mailto:workshift@georgebrown.ca).

RAY HARRIPAUL: Get in touch and we might share your thoughts during our next episode.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: This podcast is brought to you by the fine folks at George Brown College. We want to thank Xavier Masse, Ana Rita Morais, and Peter Sicard for sharing their thoughts with us.

RAY HARRIPAUL: It's the end of your Work Shift. Thanks for listening.

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