

The Design Untangled Podcast  
Episode: DU007 – Content first, guy  
Host: Chris Mears and Carla Lindarte  
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[00:17] **Chris:** Hello and welcome to Design Untangled with me, Chris Mears and joining me as always is Carla Lindarte. Hello.

[00:25] **Carla:** Hello Chris. Happy New Year.

[00:27] **Chris:** Happy New Year. Did you have a good hangover on January 1st?

[00:31] **Carla:** I did, actually. Yeah, I couldn't party that much this year though. I think I'm getting old. The latest I could go for was 1:30. That wasn't very good, was it?

[00:42] **Chris:** No, that's a pretty poor showing. I had some like 14% Belgian beer, like one bottle, so I was passed out by about 9:00 PM

[00:53] **Carla:** Well that's even worse. Yeah, I thought it was really boring. I did have some people over and stuff, but I had to go to bed early.

[01:02] **Chris:** Yeah. I used to do it properly and go out clubbing and stuff, but it was such a pain in the ass to get home again afterwards, so you kind of thought, why did I even bother?

[01:12] **Carla:** Yeah. Unless you buy a package or something that somewhere where you can stay or get a taxi back or things like that. That would be nice.

[01:21] **Chris:** Yeah. Like Charing Cross Station. That's where I used to crash out afterwards usually

[01:27] **Carla:** Every year I always say I have to plan New Years' Eve for next year and then never do it, and then you just end up doing random stuff. But anyway, hope this is a good year for everyone. Lots of work. Lots of UX design

[01:42] **Chris:** Lots of learning of course.

[01:43] **Carla:** Yeah. Lots of learning for everyone.

[01:45] **Chris:** Probably not from this podcast though

[01:46] **Carla:** Not this one. Wow! So what we are talking about today, Chris?

[01:54] **Chris:** We're talking about content, Carla. Very key and important topic, which is often overlooked in the UX world.

[02:03] **Carla:** Yeah, and in the design world as a whole and the build world as well. Because I think something that we need to clarify is that content isn't just copywriting or copy. Content is everything else. It is what we design for. Because it's not about designing boxes that then at some point will have some content in them. We need to go the opposite way, which is what's the content, what's the message, what we're trying to achieve with this solution, and then design boxes for it.

[02:36] **Chris:** Yeah. Cause people don't go to your website to look at your navigation. Your bullet point lists are there to get some kind of information or achieve some kind of goal, and your content is usually what delivers that. It's not kind of all the fluff that goes around it.

[02:55] **Carla:** Yeah. And when you talk about content, you do need to think about the types of content that your solution would have. So you could have on a website, you could have more like the educational content. If you are trying to tell people what the solution or your product is about. So you have more in the kind of retail space, it's really common to have a lot of inspirational content, so imagery and copy and blog so things like that that talk about the trends, etcetera, et cetera. Then you could have more like news content, which is what's the latest, so you really need to think about types of content and what your solution is going to contain, and what's the aspiration of the brand and work with content strategists to define that, define the tone of voice and that is really important to inform it.

[03:50] **Chris:** Yeah. And I think it's really important that as a way, as you start with user needs here, you need to understand what is the key thing the user is trying to achieve. What kind of content can best kind of deliver that to them, and often that will vary by the channel they're accessing on, maybe? I've worked on corporate governance report things before and the website was kind of more of a quick overview of the company's performance, stuff like that. But there was kind of a big designed PDF as well, and the key audience for that was sort of the execs who would download that, read it on their laptop on their 14-hour train ride home in the evening, so one type of content may not necessarily fit all types of users that you have accessing your solution, so you need to make sure you're designing for each of those appropriately.

[04:48] **Carla:** And also having that view of the types of content that you're going to have on your website and niche, if you're talking about websites, is that you also need to look

at the accessibility of that content. So if you are going to have videos, how are you going to play them? How are you going to make them accessible for everyone? PDFs as well, like making sure you can have optimized PDFs if you need to get people to download PDFs these days. Still banks do it, by the way so how do you make all of that content accessible as well is really key. I mean, in my experience I've seen a lot of designers and that goes across UX and visual that come back with amazing frameworks of design. But then they use *lorem ipsum* in all the boxes. We're going to have some content here and here. This is going to be like some of the content, but they don't really think about what's going to be in their designs. Have you seen that as well, Chris?

[05:52] **Chris:** Yeah, loads of times. And the problem with that is the content should really drive the design, not the other way round. So you need the most important content to be the most important thing in the design as well. So you can't just say here's a couple of squares, put some stuff in it and they are all equal sizes, but actually one piece of content in one of those squares is far more important than everything else on that page.

[06:19] **Carla:** I remember working for a retail client. We were doing a redesign of their website and for the homepage, we come up with this very nice looking grid, that had some images, some copy here, some kind of call to actions in there, but it was all placeholders, and when we took the designs through the discovery phase, we got them signed off. We didn't consider their content plan, which is really, really, really key, especially in the retail space when you are changing content pretty much every season or every week. So considering the content plan, knowing the type of content that your client is normally likely to publish every month or every week, how that content could change and evolve, and how different types of content you're going to have there. Because the design, for example, we had to change it obviously throughout the project to be able to have all the different options that they were thinking about. So this is really, really key. Any design that you put together in front of your stakeholders, you have to think about the type of content that should be in there, and also how it could evolve as well.

[07:36] **Chris:** Yeah, definitely. And the other thing that I've seen happen is these wireframes are produced, which are let's just say, six boxes or whatever. You pass it over to developers, they build it and then you're like, oh crap, what am I going to put in there? And then you end up just having to put filler content in there, which adds no value. Just because you've got that particular design. You're like, oh, we've only got five boxes worth of useful content. We're going to have to put some random crappy link in the sixth box, and that's not really the right way to do it.

[08:09] **Carla:** Yeah, exactly and the other way around as well, right. When we said, Oh yeah, people have to prioritize messages, but we can't just limit people to say you're only going to have three boxes in there because then you're only allowed to talk about three

different things at the same time, so it's the other way around as well, so that's why it's so important and it's always, always underestimated and always not considered, not just by designers, but by the build teams as well. I've been on projects that have been delayed considerably just because they didn't think about content, and that means not necessarily the strategy around that is how you're going gonna migrate the content that you currently have on the new platform. How is that transition going to be? Are you going to optimize that content? Are you going to change it? How the new design will impact all that content, and people always say, Oh yeah, we just put our copywriters at the end and they will get make it happen and it is definitely not like that. So you, as a UX designer, you always need to be thinking about what is the content strategy. Can't we get content strategists and your teams working really closely with them to make sure things are put in place so otherwise you're gonna get big surprises at the end.

[09:32] **Chris:** Yeah. And just tying back to that, so I've had to do stuff for retail fashion-y type clients before, and quite a common thing is the marketing department. We would need different sort of page layouts and templates depending on what they're trying to push or what message they're trying to get across. So you need to usually work quite closely with them to understand, okay, you're pushing a new line or whatever. This isn't an aspirational thing. Let's work together to design a template that can really put that to the fore, and then it might be the next week. Okay. It's a sale. So the page is just a big whacking, great 50% off sign. You need to understand that that is part of the content plan going forward, and make sure that your design can flex and adapt to those needs.

[10:24] **Carla:** Yeah, definitely. That's what I mentioned before. We're tooling for our client with our content strategies and what we ended up doing was creating what we call content families. There are kind of tiers of content, so if you are going to go with a small product and you want to launch it, so how do you present that? But if it's a premium product, how do you present that? If you say kind of corporate responsibility campaign, how do you present that? And the way we did it was just by analyzing the existing content of the sites and grouping things into kind of families. That's what we call them. So in that way you can optimize the number of templates that you create because you don't want to create too many, and you can standardize it a bit more, but at the same time you can see all the different types of content that you have on the site.

[11:15] **Chris:** Yeah. That kind of brings me to something I wanted to talk about as well, which is probably the most boring but necessary task you may have to do as a UXer, which is the content audit and this is an absolute classic on intranet, so if you ever end up working in one of those where you've just got thousands and thousands and thousands of pieces of content. Before you redesign it, unfortunately you do need to understand what's there already, what's being used, what's not being used and have a bit of a deep dive on that stuff, and that's normally like a 5,000 million row spreadsheet and likely so

there's then a bit of kind of grouping thematically features that sort of stuff. Cross referencing that with analytics to understand if there are any pages people are looking at for one second and dropping off. Are there any pages that have never been viewed once in the last three months? Very common as well. And yeah it is a bit of a pain, a bit of a slog, but it's a really important thing to do when you're working on a project that already has established content on it.

[12:26] **Carla:** Yeah. It has to be done, and you also can by working with a copywriter or content strategist, ideally content strategist going through that audit. You can also look at the quality of the content and the possibilities of the content to be placed somewhere else, which obviously has an impact on information architecture as well. So for example, I worked for a bank before where there was a lot of content about the bank, about why to bank with them and all the benefits and all that stuff, and that was hidden under some kind of random section that talked about us, and rather than us keeping that section and all that content in there, what we did was we componentized the contents. We created components that talked about why banking with the bank and we kind of spread them across the whole site. So by doing the audit, it will help you understand how you could get rid of a lot of stuff that no one is looking at, but also looking at the content and see how that could be better placed somewhere else. So it is painful but has to be done, especially if you're doing website redesigns.

[13:41] **Chris:** Yeah, definitely. Just going back to your accessibility point as well, I think it's a quote I heard somewhere, I can't quite remember, but it's basically that good content is inherently accessible. So just the fact that it's written, clearly, it gets to the point, it meets the user needs, that is accessible content.

[14:03] **Carla:** And that's why more and more, you see that UX writing and micro copy is a skill set that copywriters have had to develop, or sometimes UX designers are very good at that, which I think that is really key, especially when you like designing or building an app for example. If you decide that your app is going to have some type of personality and you know all the different tasks and kind of flows that you have throughout the app, the tone of voice of your call to actions doesn't represent the personality at the same time, it confuses the user. You are not doing the right thing. So I've seen a lot of times that we have UX designers that said, oh, the copy, we can change it later, but it's so important to have the right words for the call to actions that you are using, as well as the functional copy that you use in your forms or sign up forms and things like that. So if you don't have good writing skills, it is really important you find a copywriter who can write what I call the functional copy, and help you identify the best call to actions for your solution.

[15:22] **Chris:** Yeah. Because the worst thing is when the tone of voice of the brand kind of seeps into places it shouldn't really be. So I've especially seen it on error validation

messages. So you put the email address in the wrong format, you want the user to complete the form. So basically you want to get that point across, getting to put the @ sign in or whatever it is. But I've seen examples where it's like, hey, that looks a bit wrong. Why don't you try typing it again, guy? And if you want someone to complete your form, you can be humorous in a different place. Just get them to do what you need them to do and don't confuse them with loads of banter.

[16:05] **Carla:** Yeah, exactly. I work in a big agency and I've seen a lot of copywriters. There's very, very good copywriters out there, but when you work with traditional copywriters, they actually make everything longer. Like their sentences are very long. They're obviously fun to read, but as you said, when you are just designing a form, you just want the key words to be always first so people know what they are actually doing. So I've had to give a lot of feedback to copywriters on that because they try obviously to make it more interesting and fun and kind of more marketing-ish, but sometimes you just need to be functional. So being able to write that in an interesting way is a big challenge.

[16:57] **Chris:** Yeah. Long form copy is a very different art form to this kind of functional UI copy, I think, and it is possible to do be able to do both, but generally I've seen people kind of specialize in one or the other.

[17:13] **Carla:** Yeah, true. I mean they're very good examples of how to do that. Mark and Manzo is really good at that. Mail Chimp's also very good at that. How they can make messages that's very functional and kind of boring a bit more interesting, but you really need to have the skills for that.

[17:31] **Chris:** Yeah. Mail Chimp's a funny one actually, because I use that and the way it's designed makes you think, oh this is super simple to use, but then when you actually start using it, I've got no idea what I'm doing. So confusing.

[17:47] **Carla:** Well there you go. Maybe it's not that good then. Another thing that is really, really important, especially when you are going getting closer to the fidelity into your design solution, whether it's a website or an app, is making sure that you have good copy when you do user testing. I've had experiences before where we are user testing something and we said, oh we don't care too much about the copy. We just put any placeholder copy, but the fidelity of the design is actually quite high fidelity, and what users, obviously if you're in a lab and you're looking at something, you're more likely to read and when they start reading, they get really confused, and the feedback I would say most of the time is around the content that you use, which is a lesson learned for UX and visual designers that they have to get the copywriter involved if they are not very good at copy, because otherwise the feedback from user testing is always going to go negative

to you guys, and people are not going to be able to understand what you're trying to achieve. So that is really, really key and important.

[19:03] **Chris:** Yeah, I think I spoke about it before. I gave an example a few episodes ago that we were doing some user testing on legal professionals and there were a few typos or missing punctuation or whatever in some of the sentences, and the whole lab session was basically focused on those typos rather than getting the information you actually wanted to get out of the lab. So yeah, it's really important to just check and double check before you take a prototype into the lab and make sure it's as good as you can get it.

[19:35] **Carla:** Yeah, exactly and ideally you want to have a copywriter with you. We might be able to interview a content strategist for one of our following episodes. Going to be very good to highlight a little bit more about the differences between obviously content strategies and talking about information architecture versus what we do as UX designers and how they can work with us UX designers and how we complement each other. I've seen a lot of places where there is a lot of crossover between what a content strategist does and UX designer does, especially if you're talking about a website redesign. So I would like to talk to a content strategist. One of my friends are at work and see if we can get an interview with her.

[20:23] **Chris:** Yeah, that'd be good. Going back to the lab stuff as well. So one of the projects I'm working on, a lot of the content and information is actually outside of a website or an app. It's information that would go out to participants kind of a few weeks before, stuff like that. So when you're thinking about content, make sure that you're not thinking just about the digital channel if your service does cover kind of other offline touch points and points of interaction with the users.

[20:57] **Carla:** Yeah, definitely. I think content is a fundamental part of, and tone of voice, fundamental part of the brand. If you have ever been to Virgin Media... sorry, a Virgin Airplane, their tone of voice is very similar when you go on the website and very similar to when you get newsletters from them. It's all very consistent because it's part of their brand. So obviously we work in completely different projects and different types of approaches. But as you said, the more we think about how the marketing tone of voice is and how the call center tone of voice is and everything else, just to make sure it is consistent across all different channels. That's a very good point. So I think that's all we have to say about content today.

[21:51] **Chris:** Yeah, I'm good. Anything else? I got no more content to give on content.

[21:56] **Carla:** So if you guys have any questions or anything that you would like more information about, please let us know and Chris can tell us what are the channels that people can use, apart from LinkedIn.

[22:09] **Chris:** Oh yeah. Before I do that though, I just give a shout out to my friend Josh, who's moving to Barcelona in a few days. So good luck with that. Hopefully they like your Kim Jong Un hairstyle over there as much as we did here. Have you seen that kind of poster with the 14 or whatever different hairstyles North Koreans are allowed to have?

[22:35] **Carla:** No, I haven't seen it.

[22:37] **Chris:** They are just really bad variations on Kim Jong Un's hairstyle.

[22:42] **Carla:** That's good.

[22:42] **Chris:** But anyway, so good luck. Keep in touch and my voice will be pumping into your ears via this podcast. Okay, so how you can contact us? First of all, write reviews on iTunes, good or bad. That helps us get discovered, helps us know what you like hearing about and don't like hearing about. You can get to us on Twitter at @designuntangled or individually on @Chris\_mears\_ux and Carla, it's just your name, isn't it? @carlalindarte

[23:14] **Carla:** Yep

[23:17] **Chris:** We've got email [contact@designuntangled.co.uk](mailto:contact@designuntangled.co.uk) We have got...What else have we got?

[23:25] **Carla:** We've got LinkedIn, and what about the UX mentorship Slack channel?

[23:31] **Chris:** Yep. That's a good point. Haven't plugged that for a while. So if you go to the [UXreview.co.uk/something...](http://UXreview.co.uk/something...) it's in the menu anyway. We run a mentorship program on Slack so you can meet a whole bunch of other people who are learning UX at the moment. We try and answer questions on there. So get involved in that if you want to. Talk about the podcasts on there. I think that's all my plugs. I have no more plugging.

[23:57] **Carla:** You have a lot of plugging. So thank you very much and we'll see you next time.