

Episode - DU014 – UX Job Interviews

Hosts: Chris Meirs and Carla Lindarte

00:17 Chris: Hello and welcome to Design Untangled with me, Chris Mears and Carla Lindarte. How is it going?

00:22 Carla: Hello Chris, how are you doing?

00:24 Chris: Yeah, good spring has finally arrived about free months late in the UK.

00:29 Carla: I know, I had given up already. I just thought this is going to be the longest winter ever.

00:35 Carla: Yes. Like Game of Thrones or something that looks like the end is finding the insight saying go and chill out in that depressing park we used to have lunch in? So I'm looking forward to that.

00:46 Carla: Oh yeah. That was really depressing. I'm still sick though. I've been like ill for four weeks now.

00:51 Chris: Yes. You're bringing the NHS down with you.

00:55 Carla: No, it's really, really bad. I don't know what's going on, but anyway, I think I'm just slowly, slowly getting better now. Which is good.

01:01 Chris: Good. So let me ask you a question. Have you ever had a job interview before?

01:09 Carla: Oh yes. I have had many, many interviews before. I think I've interviewed so many times, even though I haven't changed jobs that much. I'm always interviewing. I find it a good practice.

01:23 Chris: What do you mean though? Who are you interviewing with, this yourself?

01:27 Carla: No, no. I just apply for jobs and sometimes even if I'm happy or not very happy in my job, I just go for job interviews just to kind of practice and just to test myself and getting ready for the very important interview for the job that you've always dreamed to have. So I think it's always good to go for interviews.

01:48 Chris: A serial interviewer. That's a pretty unique hobby.

01:52 Carla: Yeah, it is unique.

01:54 Chris: So the reason I'm asking you that is because we're talking about job interviews today.

02:00 Carla: Oh, rarely?

02:01 Chris: Does that come as a surprise?

02:03 Carla: Oh yes, I am very surprised. Wow.

02:04 Chris: Good. So specifically UX job interviews because we probably have more experience of those than like a fork lift truck driver or something. Probably wouldn't be able to add much there. I think it is, it's quite a weird topic because UX interviews can be quite different. Other types of interviews may be, if you're transitioning from a different field, you might be used to just the standard, come in wearing a suit and sit awkwardly in reception for about an hour, until the important person comes to drag you in, gives you a grilling and then send you home sweaty. So the format of them can be a little bit different, I think. And that's a bit of an unknown to people that are new to the world of UX and design.

02:57 Carla: Yeah, it is different as an adult. Also, it depends on the type of UX role that you going for as well. So they're all very different because some of them will require some kind of test, or whiteboard exercise, or something like that. If you go more for design, a UX design role. If you go in for a UX research role, it might be slightly different as well.

03:23 Chris: That's very true. So you touched on one of the things we wanted to talk about today, which is the, the whiteboards challenge, the design challenge, which is a very mysterious little tasks, that are sometimes set in a UX-C type interview. It can take a couple of different formats depending where the place is, but generally the way I've seen it done is, you kind of get given a scenario and then a bit of background about imagine a GP surgery, wants to create a new system to book appointments, something like that. You're then, I've seen it happen this two ways as well actually. So you're either left in the room for a little bit to come up some sketches or ideas or the people stay in the room with you and watch your thought process.

04:16 Carla: Then sometimes Google, for example, they would just give you three different briefs of a design challenge. And they will give you a week to get back to them. You have to specify how long it took you to actually deliver where you've delivered. And then just send the link to whatever you've designed and then they do, skip feedback. So

they're kind of like, as you said, it's like three types. So even if it's face to face, sometimes they with you, sometimes they go away and let you go with it and come back. And you have to present and sometimes they just even give you some time to actually do it, during a week or something like that. And then just explain back to them your thinking.

05:03 Chris: Yeah, I guess it depends on the place, but I think those things where they make you do work before you've even kind of got in front of them, a bit of a piss take to be honest. Especially if, maybe I can understand it, if you're going for quite a senior position at a company like Google, which is obviously very desirable place to work, but when you're seeing these agencies and places making junior UX designers do like weeks worth of work for design challenges. I think it's a bit out of order and I've sometimes seen agencies actually use some of the stuff that's produced in those tasks, in pitches and stuff like that.

05:46 Carla: Yeah, that is true. I've seen that as well happening, which is really wrong.

05:50 Chris: So if we take the more common version which is, the face to face one. So generally, I've been on both sides of the fence. I've interviewed and been interviewed with kind of design challenges and I think what the interviewer is usually looking for is, how you form your questions and interpretation of the brief they've given you. So what kind of questions are you asking? Are you identifying any sort of assumptions or hypotheses, you're making before you get into design? if you just sort of take the brief and start drawing some sketches. That's not normally a great sign for candidate for me.

06:31 Carla: No. Just having a framework or a structure as you're saying, to your response is much better. So if you start by, let's agree what the problem is. Let us think about the type of people, user a profile. So personas, if you wanna call them, [inaudible 00:06:48] we'll be designing for, let's talk about the constraints of that particular, potential solution. And then you start like fleshing out the actual, you know, flow or interaction. So a sketches, I think that would make more sense. But if you start with just the the design it is not very good answer.

07:09 Chris: Exactly. And you have to identify the constraints as well. So that's always a good line of questioning to figure out. Are there any sort of technical constraints, obviously, it is also hypothetical. There are any business constraints that you should be aware of before you start designing. And I find people that have kind of done these UX courses and we've spoken about it before, they come out with their ideal UX process. As soon as they get into an interview and they start meeting these barriers

and these constraints as to why they can't follow that perfect UX process, then it can be a bit of a problem for some of them, to start thinking around that. So I would definitely be prepared to be flexible and adapt your proposed approach based on what the different constraints are.

08:00 Carla: Yes. And also I think it's something related to one of the questions that someone was asking about. What do you do if you don't have any experience or particular experience in something that they're asking to do? I think honesty is the best option. It is okay to say, I don't know the answer for these, but I can tell you how I would get to the answer. And it's okay to just say, if they ask you things like, oh, how would you do, car sourcing, which a lot of people actually, when I've interviewed people in the past, they all talk about cars, but none of them actually know what it is and how to do it. So just don't pretend, just be honest and say, I haven't done that before, but I think you'd be useful for this, and this, and that. If you start making things up, it's not going to go anywhere.

08:51 Carla: I think the other thing to bear in mind is obviously, assuming you haven't made your CV up, but they will have seen that you don't have any direct UX experience in general anyway. If we're talking about just, you've literally never had a UX job before as opposed to you haven't done a particular UX activity. And they still asked you in for an interview. So I wouldn't be scared about that. And as Carla says, just be honest, say you haven't done any direct to UX. But in some of the other work that you've done, maybe you can talk about how you solve problems or how you engage with stakeholders. Did you ever speak to customers? That sort of stuff and just look at ways you can align yourself to the design process.

09:34 Carla: Yeah, definitely use it as much as you can, as a way of explaining your skill sets. Because experience can only, can only get the experience of the job, but it's just showing the way you think, how structured you are in your thinking. How your interpersonal skills, your emotional intelligence is also really, really important and being honest and being humble, which are for me one of the best liked qualities of a designer. I think you should showcase that in the interview.

10:05 Chris: Yes. And if you think about what you're doing as well, you are essentially in the interview, you are doing what the job would be anyway. You're presenting ideas back to a group of state holders who potentially you don't know, you don't necessarily know what they do day to day. So think of the interview just as a way of practicing. Like Carla says, maybe you don't make it a hobby like she does. Which is a bit weird, but it is all about that. Just presenting design ideas and thoughts and process back to a group of people, which ultimately is what you would be doing if you've got the job probably.

10:42 Carla: Exactly. And also what's really, really important as well, just allow yourself to fail. And what I mean with this is that the whole process of design is about learning, trying, learning, and try. And again, if you come up with a solution for a particular design challenge, let's go back to the whiteboard exercise. And then if people come back and start challenging your thinking, don't get defensive over it. Just explain how and why you did it that way. But always recognize what people are telling you. I interviewed one day this girl, and I challenged some of the thinking. She was, presenting it was one of her prototypes and I just said, why didn't you do it this way? Or I had challenged something, I can't remember. And she got so the defensive, and a bit aggressive as well. Then she was asking me, trying to be difficult, asking me difficult questions and stuff and obviously she wasn't selected for the job. Just don't get defensive because as I said, being humble and understanding of other people's opinions and listening really to what are telling you, is really important as a designer.

11:56 Chris: And it goes back to a point that we spoke about in the design workshop episode as well. You have only been given, a limited amount of time, usually for this design challenge, and limited information. In the workshops, one we said that, just making people knock out designs every 30 seconds means that they're less inclined to be super defensive about them. So take that mindset. You haven't been spending six months on these designs, you've been given a brief, just rocked up and got that you've had to produce something. So be open to the feedback, be open to changing it, questioning why you did what you did. They know you're under pressure. That's kind of the whole point that yeah, just listen to what they've got to say. Progress your designs further. If that's the format the design challenge can take, and just relax.

12:50 Carla: Just relax and be yourself because that's what you're going to be doing anyway if you get the job.

12:55 Chris: Exactly. And we had some other questions around different formats of interviews. I think, to be honest, it varies completely on the company. I have had interviews which are just meeting in the Starbucks in Liverpool Street Station, where we recorded one of our episodes. And so it was literally just a coffee and a chat and that was the interview. I've had other ones which are kind of telephone interview and then you meet someone else and then you have another face to face and it just drags on for weeks. So there is no one size fits all really. If you're going for your recruiter, which is generally the case, there'll be able to outline what the sort of interview process is when you apply.

13:40 Carla: I think [inaudible 00:13:41] as you said, that like phone, face to face, hangouts as well. I had a lot of video calls in the past, as an interview, which are very awkward to be honest, but they happen as well. I think formats or all sorts of formats.

It's really important that you, you talk to your recruiter or if you didn't have a recruiter directly, read the position description really well. I'm not saying you should lie, but you should try to tailor your experience to the job you're applying for. Sometimes they're slightly different in terms of level of seniority or the industry or, the actual skill set. So sometimes say if you, for example, have a variety of skills within the UX space. You can maybe tailor what you're talking about, depending on the job. So reading their position description, making sure you have examples, and even just write them down on a piece of paper, before the interview as well. They're going to ask you about your experience, they're going to ask you about what you like. They are going to ask you about, I have been asked what's your favorite app, what's your favorite website and why? So, cause they be, trying to figure out what, how you think about design, et cetera. So, just tailoring your space and the job spec, as well as the recruitment process, if you have a recruiter is the best option.

15:14 Chris: Definitely. And that brings me to another point, sort of, doesn't really but, you said the word recruiter, so I'm going to talk about it anyway. Say we had someone ask on our UX Mentor Me Slack Channel about, so they'd had an interview essentially and they hadn't heard back and they wanted to know if they should get in touch with the person that interviewed them directly, versus going through the recruiter. Definitely do not do that. The recruiters there as a sometimes unfortunate middle man or woman and you should always kind of get feedback via them. If you start LinkedIn-ing or Twittering the person that interviewed you, it doesn't generally go down very well.

16:00 Carla: Yeah, no, that's why you have, especially if you talking about, a head of UX or UX lead or someone who were really busy and they actually, that's why they getting recruiters for. Because, you know, give out BCG, go interview people when their recruiters would need to be communicating back, any feedback to the candidate. So yeah, don't do that.

16:22 Chris: Unfortunately, recruiters don't always get back to you, so make sure that you've got plenty of eggs and plenty of baskets. If a trail goes cold, it's fine to follow up with a crew or a few days later if you haven't heard anything. Definitely don't go chasing the people that interviewed you.

16:42 Carla: Yeah, no, that's not a good move.

16:44 Chris: I guess if you have actually got an interview, you may be interviewed by any number of different types of people. I've found it quite often the case actually though I get interviewed by people that are sort of UX knowledgeable, particularly very often they are recruiting because they need that experience in the company itself. So it can be the case that you are interviewed by people like tech leads or developers, stuff like

that. And it kind of goes back to the point that you've just got to tailor what you're talking about to the audience. So it may actually be that you end up educating them a little bit about the design process, which is fine as well. That's a very common thing you have to do in any UX job I found.

17:33 Carla: Yes, definitely. Especially if you start talking about research and, they might just confused UX designer with front end development or review to IAA. They don't know what IAA means to just try to use, try to avoid using jargon and acronyms. People might not get it. That's absolutely right. I've been interviewed by people who have no idea about UX. Then you still need to explain what you do and how you do it, in plain English to them as well. So just make sure that yes, as you said, you tailor your language as well, based on your audience.

18:13 Chris: Exactly. And have you got anything else to talk about? I think this might be a bit of a short one.

18:19 Chris: No, I guess the only thing that to add is that, obviously the interview process and because I don't really interview for, contract roles versus permanent roles. There might be slightly different as well. So when you go for a permanent role, which are the roles that I've been interviewing for, here in the UK. They tend to be longer processes as well. And, they would have people from all the parts of the design teams as well. So I've been interviewed by, head of UX or do UX director. Then I have another interview with the head of visual design as well. Perhaps I have someone from HR or from someone left from account management. You just need to make sure that whatever role you're going for, you also need to think about all these different people who, working with.

19:19 Carla: If you don't have much experience or you don't have any UX experience, as well, is basically the same as we said before, you need to just tailor what you need to say to all these people. Just making sure you communicate how you say you'd be working with them. And just explaining your own thinking around the design processes and how you see yourself working within, that team, because not always you're going to have, especially for feminine roles, you're going to have to interview with a lot more people.

19:50 Chris: I'd say that's generally the rule of thumb as a contractor. The interview process does tend to be a bit shorter with fewer rounds. Where that is are not always the case and the sort of questions are a lot more project focused. So they'll want to know how you did different projects with different clients. It's less about the sort of where do you see yourself in 10 years kind of questions because you're a contractor and the chances are in 10 years you're not going to be with that same client. So it's less

of that kind of stuff generally. But of course it's still about identifying that you're someone that can work with their team and their existing kind of set up.

20:34 Carla: You know, I also like think that another thing to add and make, perhaps this is another episode as a whole, because portfolios are a big topic and we all have a lot, always have people asking what's the best portfolio. It is important to have one, whatever it is. Always bring your folio. Just think about, enter an Internet connection, which is also a very good point. Um, if you bring your iPad or whatever, but they might not have, Wifi, just make sure you have a way to connect so you can show your folio. And I'm telling you because this happened to me many years ago. Also if you can, which I have seen as well, when I was at my previous job, I interviewed a carload of junior people who didn't have much UX experience, they actually put a presentation together.

21:25 Carla: They didn't have a particular website because it didn't have a lot of experience, or like, you know, projects to put on there. But they created a presentation, like a tech basically, and telling the story about who they are and what they like it, where they get spied from and stuff like that. I think it also helps telling a story of who you are. Just creating a Leader Deck that talks about yourself. So just having, some visual prompts when you're talking about you and your work and your experience, even if it's more like educational. As I said, we can talk about portfolios in another episode, but if you didn't have much projects, you can also make them up, not make them up in the sense of making them up. Just maybe doing some app, web critics and just put them on a presentation or something or creating a prototype. So how would you redesign, for example, I don't know, Spotify or Google maps or Citymapper. Just shows your thinking, and shows how you think about things and the process that you follow as well.

22:33 Chris: I think that is some good tips there. I know my portfolio, obviously I'm not new to the industry, so I do have some projects to talk about, but it is really quite lightweight and it is just a couple of, visual weight to talk around. Nobody wants to be given a PowerPoint presentation in an interview. That's not gonna be a good start if you're just literally reading through your PowerPoint and, but it's good to just have a few things to show and to speak around, towards them asking about stuff.

23:07 Carla: Yes, definitely. And if you have got any kind of real life experience, talk about, obviously the project, how you did it, your design thinking, how you, the actual things that you dis as part of the team, which is really, really important. When I interview people, they'd like, oh yes so we designed this and I just looked at it and I was what was your role? What did you do in that role? Then talk about your learning. So what would you do differently next time? So again, going back to the learn, improve and iterrate. How would actually improve that design, as well if you, are showing a prototype of

something. So just some tips that just make it really clear what was your role, what you actually did and how you would do it better next time.

24:00 Chris: And outcomes as well. So you have those very valuable. Data is exactly, if you did something and it reduced call center queries by whatever percent, definitely talk about that. Yeah. Um, proving that your design work has had sort of actual business impact, is a very good thing to bring out in an interview

24:21 Carla: And only pick one or two. I don't think you should do, if you have more than that, I would add sometimes just focus on one project, that kind of talks more like an end to end story, from the discovery phase until delivery. So just try to pick a couple, max. Because you don't want to spend too much time showing your folio either.

24:49 Chris: Exactly. okay. You got anything else?

24:52 Carla: No, I think that's it.

24:55 Chris: Cool. I think we have now guaranteed every listener a successful job interview.

25:00 Carla: Yes. They are all going to get jobs. So yeah. Also if you have more questions, just contact us on the normal channels and we happy to give you more info if you need.

25:12 Chris: And let us say what those normal channels are then. And so Twitter is @DesignUntangled. You can get Carla @Carla Lindarte, @Chris_Mears_UX. We are on the way about designuntangle.co.uk. If you want to ask questions about the podcast or kind of give us ideas for future episodes, you can do that in two ways. You can go on to iTunes, leave us a review, good or bad, all helps. Or you can join our Slack community on UXmentor.me, which is where we're getting a lot of the kind of topic ideas and questions for these episodes at the moment. And this one is give a shout out as well to the people that came to our first ever real life meet-up coffee the other day, in London. So it was me and Christina and we had three others from the Slack group, who came along to drink bad coffee at Starbucks and have a chat. So that was cool. Hopefully we'll do some more of those in future

26:17 Carla: People are going to think that you love Starbucks, Chris.

26:19 Chris: Yeah. I seem to be name dropping quite a lot. Yeah.

26:22 Carla: Yeah. They're not paying any advertising.

26:26 Chris: Well, yeah. The real reason was, cause it's literally about five meters from mine and Christina's office at the moment. So purely down to our laziness spur. There we go.

26:37 Carla: Okay.

26:37 Chris: All right. See you next time.

26:39 Carla: See you next time. Bye.