

The Design Untangled Podcast

Episode: DU025 - UI vs UX

Host: Chris Mears and Carla Lindarte

Guest: Liam Harberd, Visual Designer and Design Director at Deloitte Digital

(00:17) **Carla:** Hello everyone. Here we are again interviewing another person from the design industry because Chris and I gave up and we do not have anything to talk about. So now we just going and interviewing people. Anyway, so I am here with Liam Harberd, a Visual Designer and currently Design Director at Deloitte Digital. Is that right?

Liam: 00:44 That is correct. Hello.

(00:45) **Carla:** Okay. So today we are going to be talking about visual design. What the hell visual design is, what is the differences between visual UX and all of this stuff. Trying to untangle what visual design or user interface design means, but before we start Liam, can you just introduce yourself, and tell us a little bit more about your experience, and how you got to be a design director at Deloitte Digital?

(01:15) **Liam:** Hello. Yes, I can go for that. I am a visual designer, as you just said. I have been in the industry now, wow, so long, I cannot even remember the amount of years, but I think it is about 17, 18.

(01:31) **Carla:** Oh my god, you are very old!

(01:33) **Liam:** Yes, I am, the gray hair. I started out as, the usual sort of path, went to university, studied design, was lucky enough to get a really good junior role in an agency was doing a lot of stuff for the likes of Pepsi, Bacardi, dot music industry stuff.

(01:54) **Carla:** A lot of flash?

(01:54) **Liam:** A lot flash everywhere, and so I learned my trade there and then worked my way up to midway, and then senior designer, and then was leading sort of accounts for Vodafone, am I allowed to say brand names?

(02:13) **Carla:** Yes.

(02:14) **Liam:** Do I get freebies? Might be off the back of it.

(02:16) **Carla:** And if you get fired after, when did you work for Vodafone? Like 10 years ago, was it, or 18?

(02:23) **Liam:** Oh, about a month ago, that was the last time.

(02:27) **Carla:** I am glad you are not saying anything bad about them.

(02:29) **Liam:** Oh no, it is all good. Anyway, so then I got a role at a bigger agency [inaudible 00:02:37]. So the agency beforehand had been quite boutique, quite small. And it has gone on from there. I worked in Australia for a year, and then I got into more of a design consultancy roles and then I have kind of ended up, now, as design director, with visual design at Deloitte.

(03:00) **Carla:** Great. So you have mentioned a lot of design, design, design, design.

(03:09) **Liam:** Oh did I? I do not think I have [inaudible 00:03:09].

(03:09) **Carla:** So what does a visual designer do? A lot of listeners would potentially know the differences between the UI and UX, but sometimes they get blurred a little bit. And so for example, some of the people we have in the Slack group, who are UX designers, are sometimes thinking, are asking questions about fonts, or padding, or colors. I think we all kind of understand what a visual designer did, but I would like you to try to identify the differences between visual designer and UX.

(03:51) **Liam:** Okay. do I need to untangle the different names?

(03:58) **Carla:** Yes, if you want to, you could do that.

(03:58) **Liam:** Or do your listeners know that already?

(04:02) **Carla:** You can start with that, because that would be great.

(04:03) **Liam:** Because you have used a sort of visual designer, UI and then there is the likes of, art directors and I have said design director, and it is just throwing creative directors, directors everywhere.

(04:20) **Carla:** Director and designers.

(04:20) **Liam:** So yeah, they are all the same, basically.

(04:23) **Carla:** They just do not want to show up.

(04:25) **Liam:** They are just color red. So UI user interface designer is pretty much the same as a visual designer in a digital sort of agency environment. Also can be called creative designers, but then it starts to get a bit messy if we go into more of a hybrid agency. They have got a marketing departments and so advertising departments, because creative means something slightly different in those environments.

(04:58) **Carla:** They are basically the ones coming up with ideas but not solely designs.

(05:01) **Liam:** Right. They do conceptualizing, but they are not doing the interface of an app, per se. So let us, to keep it more simple, I guess, just from a digital design agency point of view. UI and visual designer are the same. Visual design, it depends on the agency, they use different sort of naming conventions. If the designer is doing more than purely designing app interfaces or websites, if they are doing some presentation stuff, maybe some video stuff, maybe, maybe a bit of, I almost said above the line, but I would need to explain that as well. So print advertising and more traditional graphic design, stuff for print again. Yeah, they might be called something different. So let us just keep it simple, UI and visual designer. I might use both, but, I am still speaking about the same thing.

(06:03) **Carla:** So what about these like people who, going back to my previous question, these people who call themselves UIUX?

(06:10) **Liam:** Oh, sorry. Yeah, I am making my own questions up.

(06:16) **Carla:** This is my interview.

(06:20) **Liam:** I will take your questions, but I am going to ask myself my own questions, if that is all right?

(06:24) **Carla:** I get it.

(06:26) **Liam:** So, UI, UX. I guess from my point of view, keeping it super simple, a UX person, they interpret the quality of quantitative data, the business needs and they translate that into what could become a digital product, based off of that data. And they think very user centric. So thinking about the flows for the site, and the sort of the functionality side of things. I am sure you have explained that side of things. Have I missed anything, no?

(07:06) **Carla:** No.

(07:07) **Liam:** I mean, research can be part of that.

(07:10) **Carla:** We also, are very strategic and no more better looking than the designers, the visual designers. I am joking. Anyway, you can continue.

(07:22) **Liam:** And a visual designer. They interpret the brand side of things, and say, it is very, very much informed by the research and what the UX team done. And they should work very collaboratively with those people. But it is very much a visual

interpretation of the brand. It is what it looks like. It is about the font, the spacing, the padding, the colors and the typography and how they all work together. But I said that is very informed, by what has happened within the UX. But it should feel like a byproduct of that brand and tell the brand story from its core.

(08:09) **Carla:** So do you think that the concept of having a designer who can do both, UI and UX, because if you look into LinkedIn or when you are looking for jobs, not that I am looking for jobs, but when you look for jobs, it is a lot of there is a lot of UI, UX roles being advertised.

08:32 **Liam:** You have LinkedIn on your screen?

(08:32) **Carla:** And as I said before, a lot of people because they are probably from a small company, or because they are part of a startup, or maybe because they are just running their own business, they have to do a bit of both. So what is, first of all, what is your opinion about that? And second of all, what is your advice for these people?

(08:55) **Liam:** I will answer that question.

(08:59) **Carla:** If you remember.

(09:04) **Liam:** Because I cannot think of one [inaudible 00:09:04] So yeah, I appreciate that there is people out there, people listening, that either work by themselves, so they need to do a bit of both. They are going out to clients themselves, they are freelancing, or they work in smaller agencies, small to medium sized agencies. And I said, I have done that myself, and it is more hands on. So I have worked by myself and I have worked for small agencies, and I was doing a bit both. I have spent, sat there for weeks doing wire frames even though from day one, I saw myself as a visual designer. But, I mean, if you can afford the luxury of it, I think if you work in a bigger agency or consultancy and you have got kind of the individual skill sets within the wider design team. For me, to kind of the best work I have done, or the best projects I have been involved with have been when there is been a real tight collaboration between a very sort of good UX person, who really knows the UX side of things inside out.

(10:13) **Carla:** Like Chris Mears, because you worked with him, did you not?

(10:15) **Liam:** People like... that was what I was going to say, people like Chris Mears. And so you get a really good UX person and a really good UI person. They should work together, and there should be crossover, and when they are working together, that the kind of the roles, all smashed together, they would start doing a bit of each. But you just cannot beat that kind of real specialism, for me. But I said, I appreciate that there is people out there who do not have that option. So it is good, it can work.

(10:52) **Carla:** I do not know, if it works with you. I still have not met the designer who can do both in a brilliant way. I have met a lot of visual designers, including yourself, not because you are here in this interview. I am trying to do advertising for you. But people who can like do visual design or are thinkers as well, can think about the experience, can think about the users, can think about the business problems, but not necessarily doing both jobs brilliantly. However, on the other side, I have been on projects where when you have UX designers potentially collaborating or not with visual designers, but it gets to the point where, for example, I was in a project where the UX is, where like wire framing the visual design, because the visual designer was the big, the head of the UX. So are you wire framing something that has already been designed, and is being built, just because you want to do some annotations in that, or so I also feel that, and going back to your point about collaboration, sometimes having two people doing different things. Unless you achieve that collaboration, there is a lot of work and time wasted.

(12:16) **Liam:** I think that the problem of what you explained, where the wire frames are kind of, always gets to the point where they are chasing the visual design. I think, that hopefully, I am sure it still happens actually, but I think we spent many years trying to convince clients of the value of UX, and they eventually started to get it, and they wanted to see for their money what they were getting for this new whole new industry that had kind of appeared. When I started out, again show my age, UX did not exist as a discipline. Especially, in the agency that I was involved with. And as a web designer you had to do both. You had to be a hybrid. So again, that is kind of probably why, you said I sit quite well somewhere in between, and that is why, just because that is what I did at the beginning. And then suddenly UX grew and it got big and it kind of came a separate discipline. And I think as I said, like clients wanted to see something for their money. So all these wire frames were being produced.

(13:29) **Carla:** Deliverables.

(13:30) **Liam:** Yes. Deliverables, exactly. So they could tick a box and say, yeah, all this money over here went towards that, and that equals this. But in practice, it does not work as well. You need that kind of at the beginning, to get the idea in the sense of the kind of the hierarchy in the structure of the site. But it will get to the point when the visual design will kind of take over. So again, this is always evolving and that used to be the way of things, not that long ago, and aside from shorts still happening. But now, I think it is changed slightly and back to collaboration, everyone who is involved in that project, at least the kind of the leads in the project, even the front end developer, lead strategy, lead UX, lead UI even content people, copy, should be involved from day one, at least in the initial meetings that kick off.

(14:30) **Liam:** So they can truly own the problem together, not passing the train. And

then you can, if you do it right, and you have got the right people in the room, you can go from whiteboard sketches, straight into sort of the high fidelity, which is the actual visual design side of things. And the client, it is not as easy for a client to say, I am paying all this money and what am I getting for that? Actually, as a way to work, it is a lot more efficient and you get better results from it. You can get to prototype in a lot quicker.

(15:09) **Carla:** Prototype is based on another thing, right? If you think about Google for example, when they look for designers and they look for interaction designers, or UX designers, they expect these UX designers and visual interaction designers to know about visual design. Because as you would expect, obviously Google design system has already been created. So there is not much visual design to do. So, again, things like the traditional work done by a visual designer, could be done by a UX designer and vice versa. Before prototyping was a thing that UXs, would do. I used to spend hours in Axure doing prototypes. Showing my age again. It is really good. I still love Axure.

(16:01) **Liam:** I used to use Axure.

(16:01) **Carla:** Yes, it is really good. Exactly. But now, visual designers are the ones saying no, but we do the interactions, we do the prototyping, we do this. So, it is hard is it not? Because everything is becoming blurry.

(16:19) **Liam:** Another problem I find, going back to the client side of things and the way it was, is, you spend hours, and days, a months doing wire frames, and put them in front of the client, explain them, show all your annotations, and they say, yeah, that is brilliant. And then as a visual designer, not always the case, but if you can kind of almost completely replicate it, that wire frame, but with some fidelity, some photography, some coloring in.

(16:51) **Carla:** Some coloring.

(16:51) **Liam:** I did not say that. Some carefully thought out crafted visual design.

Carla: 16:59 Yes, some coloring.

(16:59) **Liam:** The client would then start making changes and saying, why is that there? Why is that there? Because they had to see the visual design to really understand it. They did not really get wire framed. So again, it is another reason to kind of...

(17:13) **Carla:** Exactly. And the more I think about it and I have run projects where you do wire frames, and then visual design and blah, blah, blah. It is a very waterfall view?

(17:24) **Liam:** Yes, I was just going to say that.

(17:24) **Carla:** It is a very like, okay we do a wire frame then, I color it in. I think the world is changing, design is changing so much, and with the proliferation of design systems and so, it is easier now. I am not saying the UX designers, I am going to not have a job, but it is easier now to work together, going visual first, if you already have a design language, if you already got it and you do not have to waste time doing lots of wireframes.

(17:56) **Liam:** I think UX is definitely, definitely, still needed. And that is me, as a visual designer, saying that. Because I can do UX, I can sit there and do wire frames of sketches, if I need to. But I am never going to do them. Well, I do not ever do them, and I have not really got the interest to do them to the level of the good UX people I work with. The way they think and the detail they go in to that, yeah. And I think the same is true for a good, good UX designer. They can probably, some of them can do visual design, and it looks okay, but they do not think about it to the level and obsess over the tiny, tiny detail, like a true, visual designer would.

(18:44) **Carla:** The reality is, as we said before, that not a lot have had the luxury of doing that right? Is there any...

(18:52) **Liam:** And there are people out there that, I call them unicorns, that I have met, just a couple of unicorns, probably in my 18 year career, who can just do it all.

(19:02) **Carla:** And they are brilliant.

(19:02) **Liam:** And you are just like, you are like a one man agency.

(19:07) **Carla:** But then, for these people who are currently in these jobs, where they try to juggle the two, is there any other advice in terms of like tools, or books, or things, that they can do to actually improve their visual design skills, and perhaps in the future, become just the visual designer or just specialize in visual design?

(19:31) **Liam:** It is a hard one of visual design, in terms of, for me, I [inaudible 00:19:34].

(19:35) **Carla:** Oh well how do you get inspiration? How do you get better at it?

(19:39) **Liam:** Yes, exactly. Oh, I was told many, many, many years ago when I was up in college and that is a time, if you want to be at designer, a visual designer, or graphic designer, or whatever it is. If you appreciate time, if you see something that you think, oh, that is beautiful, do not just stop there. Kind of take it and pick it apart, pull it apart, and work out why you think that is beautiful,, compared to something that looks sort of

similar but just does not do it for you. And you can learn a lot from that. And I still do that now, I find it interesting just to say, oh, that is an amazing app, that does this and that. And you use every day, and you kind of become blind to it, but just to stop and say, why is this amazing? And just sort of critique it. Not to say, it is bad, but just pull it apart and try and understand why that is working? And you are going to learn so much from that.

(20:43) **Liam:** And then it is say hard to recommend books necessarily for a visual designer, because I get just as much inspiration just walking down the street, from the visual design point of view and inspired. I love to just, if I have got time and I am not running for the train, which is quite rare. But if I have got the time, just to like go down a street, I have never been down, especially in London or City, wherever is New York, or Barcelona, just to, the amount of kind of visual inspiration. Not every time, but quite often, just a walk somewhere different. And to look at the posters, the billboards, and to the desk to that. And it is nothing to do of an app necessarily, but visually you are just stimulated, and you are learning things all the time.

(21:39) **Carla:** It is like Pinterest, for example, as well. Do you use a lot of Pinterest, and get like a mood board?

(21:42) **Liam:** Yes. I mean in terms of tools and then bringing it back, yes.. I mean there is great books to read, in terms of the board at design and understanding design as a whole. But yeah, for visual design, yes, I use Pinterest. I think Pinterest is quite often seen as something that you are decorating your house, and you want, what is a nice chair for my kitchen. But I use it differently to that. It is also, just as good. I use it kind of as a visual bookmarking tool. So on my board I have got a board for typography, and mobile design, and web design, and print design, and just like color gradients, just lots of different boards. And then if I am starting a new project, I need some inspiration, I can pull it from some of these boards. I mean a lot of the stuff that is on the likes of Behance and Dribbble and bits, we saw that which are sites, a lot of people use. I kind of sucked into the Pinterest boards, anyway because so many people are pinning the stuff on there. Yeah. So I find that really useful, visually. There are books I have read, and lots of podcasts I listen to, including this one. This is my favorite one.

(23:07) **Carla:** Of course. So just to rap up and think about the future. Let us think about the future. With automation and machine learning, everyone talks about that, by the way. And the proliferation of voice as well, where there is a lot of things happening right now, in voice. A lot of the key tasks for users have been done by the likes of Alexa or Google Assistant. So it makes me think that visual interfaces are either going to disappear, user interfaces or they are going to change. I think there is a lot of challenges, that the visual designers and overall design, including UX design is facing at the moment, because it is kind of like machine has taking our world, our jobs. And there

is not going to be interfaces. What is your opinion about that? And what do you think the designers should be doing these days to face this change that is happening?

(24:20) **Liam:** I think it is really exciting. And that is why I love the job we do, because it is always changing, and you have to adapt and evolve. When I got into the industry, I was designing stuff that I would never design, you would never design that now, mainly because trends change, but technology is always, always changing, you know? I mean, I used to design wap sites, which nobody, probably none of the listeners will know what that is.

(24:48) **Carla:** No, I think they are too young for it.

(24:50) **Liam:** So just Google that. So for one, I do not think interfaces are going to disappear. Yes, voice is going to take care of some of the things that visual is doing at the moment, and that has needed to do. Things like, what is the weather going to be like? You had to search on Google or BBC to find that out and you got some kind of visual feedback for that. Now you can just do it through voice and you get the same information and that is fine.

(25:21) **Carla:** It is mostly wrong.

(25:21) **Liam:** You do not need this... So what is wrong? They still cannot sort that bit out, but you do not necessarily need to see the little picture of the sun and a cloud, and to be told that it is going to be sunny and cloudy. And I also think that there is some things that voice alone cannot do, in terms of I am thinking, e-commerce. You would not just say, Alexia, I need a pair of blue jeans. Yes, I need them by tomorrow, and that is it. Everyone needs to see what the jeans are like, and yeah, they need to spin around them.

(25:59) **Carla:** It reminds of like functional shoppers, like Chris Mears, he would just buy jeans without seeing them.

(26:03) **Liam:** Does he just buy the same jeans all the time? Okay, that could work.

(26:07) **Carla:** Sorry Chris.

(26:08) **Liam:** And it works, to order a Hawaiian pizza from Domino's and the size you want and know you are going to deliver in 30 minutes. You do not necessarily need to see a visual, some visual feedback for that. But if you are ordering a new iPhone X, just dropping all the names I can, here, hoping for some free merchandise.

(26:32) **Carla:** Just say a wedding dress or something.

(26:34) **Liam:** A wedding dress?

(26:36) **Carla:** No, I am joking, something really expensive.

(26:37) **Liam:** I thought at one point, I was... An iPhone X, I did a project, if someone is ordering a thousand pound handset on a 24 month contract, and stuff like that, then I think they need some kind of visual stimulation on that journey, to know that ordering the right thing, and especially with the contract, and the months, and the price. And so I am just like thinking about that, just different scenarios. I think that is one, the higher the price, like a car, you would never order that through Alexa. And hope it is right, and it has got the right wheel was on it, and stuff. And also, I know we are running out of time, I think interfaces on things that do not have interfaces will, appear, your bathroom mirror will have an interface, your fridge will have an interface, your reading glasses are going to have that kind of, I know Google tried to do it few years ago, a Google glass and it was maybe a bit ahead of its time, but I think before long, normal looking glasses are going to have some kind of, sort of interface within them.

(27:55) **Carla:** So they basically are going to evolve to something different.

(27:59) **Liam:** It is just going to evolve. And that is what happens in this industry. Yes, things change, new technologies come in, and we just adapt and we move on. And that is what makes it exciting. I think the next five years, in particular, it is going to be insane, in terms of how much the technology advances, with the connected world and IOT and AI and all that stuff. So I think it is going to go off the scale, but I am looking forward to it.

(28:31) **Carla:** Yes. What do you do when you [inaudible 00:28:31].

(28:33) **Liam:** I might not have a job at the end of it.

(28:36) **Carla:** Basically you try to kill yourself with a joke. What I did, just like move away from back to the designer interface and tried to plan design thinking, to something completely different. A designer should evolve also.

(28:50) **Liam:** Yes. And I think the role of the designer is always adapting as well, not because of the technology, or the trends, but just of because of that place within business now, they have got a lot more respect and there, you know, there is designers sitting in boardroom level now making decisions.

(29:10) **Carla:** We have seat at the table.

(29:10) **Liam:** Yes, we do. So I think, designers as a whole, visual designers, UX and all the others, they need to start growing more rounded, and they need to think more

about the business, and the strategy, and not just have a sort of a silo view of the world in their particular discipline.

(29:34) **Carla:** Move your head away from Photoshop.

(29:35) **Liam:** Sketch.

(29:37) **Carla:** And Sketch now.

(29:38) **Liam:** Yes, Sketch.

(29:38) **Carla:** Well thank you so much for being with us Liam. We actually have great news for this group because Liam, is going to be our next mentor, not mental. Mentor.

(29:55) **Liam:** Mental?

(29:55) **Carla:** So Liam is going to be answering any questions you might have in terms of visual design for the people in our Slack group. So yeah, so we were missing, Chris and I was desperately looking for a visual designer to do this amazing job of mentoring.

(30:16) **Liam:** You could not get the ones you wanted? So you have ended up with me.

(30:16) **Carla:** So we reached out to you, of course, and because you are very kind person, you have said yes. And I know you can help all these designers around the world. Because we have people around the world.

(30:29) **Liam:** You did not explain that bit.

(30:29) **Carla:** Chris biggest fans. are actually in America.

(30:33) **Liam:** Chris' biggest fans? Are you here to help Chris' fans?

(30:36) **Carla:** Yes, exactly. So thank you so much. So we are going to be hearing about Liam, and read in his posts and subscribe as well. So yeah. Thank you very much, again.

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