

## DISCOVERABILITY DRIVES CHOICE, ADOPTION AND LOYALTY IN THE DIGITAL MARKET

By Simon Pulman-Jones

Pleasure for its own sake is becoming as crucial to the effectiveness of digital operating systems as the fundamentals of UX design. We are seeing a new dimension for UX: discoverability - the joy of discovery for its own sake. Discoverability is about three key success factors: personalized discovery; game-like engagement and viral appeal. This new dimension is about understanding how to engage digital consumers – encouraging them in exploring, finding, trying out – ‘experiencing’ new digital stuff.

User Experience – or UX – has historically been the discipline that has kept technology design honest. When all around them are losing their heads about the next shiny new technology feature, the UX experts are there, soberly insisting that any new design must first and foremost be seen from the user’s point of view. Is it usable? Is it useful?

So when one of the founding fathers of UX starts getting carried away about the intimate sensuality of a user experience, we might be forgiven for thinking that we’ve reached a watershed in the evolution of technology. That’s what the iPhone did for Don Norman<sup>1</sup>: “the iPhone felt like a piece of delight. It really is neat to go from one page to the other not by pushing a button but by swiping your hand across the page. The correct word is intimacy; it is more intimate. Think of it not as a swipe, think of it as a caress.”<sup>2</sup>

Norman is not losing his sober UX grip. He’s recognizing the fact that pleasure for its own sake is becoming as crucial to the effectiveness of digital operating systems as the basic UX fundamentals. We love to do that caressing swipe so much that we take every opportunity to turn the page, to flick the button – to find out what delight is hiding around the next corner of the digital interface.

What we are seeing is a new dimension being added to one of the core principles of UX: discoverability. Discoverability has always been a fundamental requirement for effective user experience: “the ability for a user of a design to locate something that they need, in order to complete a certain task.”<sup>3</sup> First you have to be able to discover that a piece of functionality exists, and then you have to be able to discover how to use it. But a new twist on discoverability is rapidly becoming one of the defining characteristics and key success factors for digital user experiences. This is the joy of discovery for its own sake – the pleasure of trying out an intriguing new App or widget, seeing if it’s enjoyable or useful, and either adopting it as part of your repertoire, or throwing it away.

In the increasingly mature market for digital experiences, with intensifying competition between the main digital ecosystem offerings (Apple, Android, Blackberry, Windows), the ability to drive exploration and trial of new functionality and services is vital. ‘Discoverability’ is the new user experience phenomenon providing this ability, combining Amazon-style, pleasurable, personalized discovery of new product and service options, the engaging and immersive experience delivered by the gaming industry, and the ‘viral’ infectiousness of quirky personal discoveries typified by YouTube.

.....

‘Discoverability’ is the new user experience phenomenon providing the ability to drive exploration and trial of new functionality and services

.....



Video clip: Volkswagen, *The Fun Theory, piano stairs*

The incremental enhancements intended to lock customers into a given digital ecosystem – whether it's Apple's Siri, or a television service provider's 3D TV offer – depend for their success on customers being tempted into exploring and discovering them. How can companies foster the necessary urge to discover?

One powerful tool is fun. Volkswagen recognized this with their Thefuntheory.com initiative ("This site is dedicated to the thought that something as simple as fun is the easiest way to change people's behaviour for the better"). The Piano Stairs commercial shows commuters exiting Odenplan underground station in Stockholm and being seduced into using the stairs rather than the escalator when they discover that the stairs have been converted into a giant electronic piano keyboard that plays when they walk up or down.

Many digital experiences have reached a stage of maturity at which usability barriers about how to use functionality have been largely overcome. At the same time, however, we are confronted by a new set of challenges – challenges to do with choice: what to use? - Which App to use? Which combination of Cloud and connectivity solutions to adopt so that it's possible to enjoy valued content wherever and whenever it's wanted? Which device should become the dominant 'home' or 'hub' device amongst our ecosystem of larger- and smaller-screened devices?

This new dimension of discoverability comes to the rescue of both consumers and companies. It can enable consumers, confused by too many options, to make choices that feel like happy, 'meant to be' discoveries rather than random or forced choices. And it can provide brands with a vital way to engage consumers and lead them towards new products and services.

Three dimensions of discoverability are increasingly becoming key success factors for products, services and consumer experiences in the new digital ecosystem:

Personalized discovery: Amazon-style data- or profile-driven surfacing of possibilities

- » Game-like engagement: making the discovery of new options feel like the pleasurable result of a consumer's own skill rather than something forced upon them
- » Viral appeal: the magic 'I found it' quality which drives YouTube-style selection and sharing

As a result, discoverability is becoming an increasingly significant factor in some key business issues for providers of digital products and services:

- » As the cross-platform media ecosystem battle intensifies, each ecosystem's array of Apps and Cloud services grows richer and more complex. Making new

### Discoverability is becoming an increasingly significant factor in some key business issues for providers of digital products and services

products and services within your ecosystem easy and pleasurable to discover and adopt is becoming a key driver of loyalty, and a barrier to switching to other ecosystems.

- » As seamless shifting of valued personal content between TV, PC, tablet and smartphones becomes an accessible, mainstream proposition, consumers are faced with the challenge of accessing familiar content experiences on new devices, via new interfaces. Pleasurable exploration and experimentation with new options is becoming a key factor in driving trial and adoption.
- » As smaller, personal screens increasingly become the dominant device amongst people's interconnected mobile and home device ecosystems, an increasing user experience interaction burden is placed on limited screen real estate. Where complex options cannot be laid out for consumers to view as easily as on larger screens, discoverability provides the onward drive to engage consumers and guide them through possible options.

So, increasingly, UX is about more than ensuring that we are able to execute desired tasks and functions via digital interfaces. The new dimension is about helping us feel that we are being engaged digital consumers – doing well at our job of exploring, finding, trying out – 'experiencing' new digital stuff.

Tom Chatfield, an expert and commentator on Gamification, and author of Fun Inc.<sup>4</sup>, talks about nurture as a fundamental aspect of people's new relationship to digital media: "Nurture is the killer App."<sup>5</sup> By this he means that we are increasingly drawn to look after our digital tools and devices – hoping that they will develop and thrive. He quotes a teenage girl who said that she sees her Facebook profile, "as a little person I send out into the world – and I really hope it doesn't get hurt!" It's this urge towards

nurture that is being exploited when we are offered frequent updates to the Apps that we've downloaded. Somewhere in the recent past, software updates have shifted from being about periodic step-changes in the level of functionality being offered, to being near-constant incremental adaptations in the evolution of our digital experiences. So we are encouraged to be constantly discovering new ways to improve our digital fitness via new enhancements to operating systems, or new Apps. In this way, the smartphone ownership experience is like that of a Tamagochi – the little electronic pets that require constant care. Our instinct to nurture our devices is a key element of discoverability – driving us to try new stuff that might help our devices thrive – and, by extension, us with them.

Discoverability will become increasingly important in driving acquisition and retention of customers within fast-evolving new digital ecosystems. Many are looking to the games industry for know-how about delivering the fun, onward exploratory drive, and engagement required. This is a reflection of just how much the UX stakes have risen in the new world of digital experiences – where success depends not just on the effective and delightful delivery of core features and functionality, but also on the elusive magic ingredient that generates fun and engagement. As Rovio, the creators of Angry Birds have admitted, "for every Angry Birds, there are a hundred dead birds!"<sup>7</sup> Coming up with captivating and intriguing digital experiences is no simple matter, and the success of future digital user experiences will increasingly depend on high-quality creative talent alongside the user-focus and disciplined logic of traditional UX design.

#### Sources

- 1) *Just Noticeable Difference: the website of Don Norman* ([www.jnd.org](http://www.jnd.org))
- 2) "Why do some people really hate Apple?" Charles Arthur, *The Guardian*, Tuesday 6th October 2011 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2011/oct/06/why-do-people-hate-apple>)
- 3) "The myth of discoverability", Scott Berkun (<http://www.scottberkun.com/essays/26-the-myth-of-discoverability/>)
- 4) [www.thefuntheory.com](http://www.thefuntheory.com); <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IXh2n0aPyw>
- 5) "Fun Inc.: Why games are the 21st Century's most serious business", Tom Chatfield, London 2010
- 6) "The irresistible power of digital play - Why Brands Need to Wake Up to Gaming," Tom Chatfield, *Games for Brands conference*, London, October 2011
- 7) "Let's Get Started - Games as the Fastest-growing Media Category of the Age: how can brands harness this explosive growth?" Ville Heijari, Rovio Mobile Ltd, *Games for Brands conference*, London, October 2011