

Expanding User Experience in India

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Related Links:

UXINDIA

www.ux-india.org

Instill Design

www.instilldesign.org

TechEase

www.techease.in

iINNOVATE

www.iinnovate.org

UXI Talent

www.talent.ux-india.org

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We would like to share our experience in building an awareness of User Experience (UX) research and design throughout India and helping develop a larger UX talent pool. Until recently there were limited educational opportunities for Indian students interested in UX. However, that is changing. Over the last few years UXINDIA has put together a series of programs to develop the Indian UX community, including programs to inspire college students, mentorship opportunities, innovation challenges, ways to work with start-ups, and creating stronger ties between industry and academia. In this editorial, we describe some of those efforts.

The term "UXINDIA" refers both to a set of programs and a yearly conference. It is the confluence of thought leadership in design from an industry, university, and individual perspective to ignite and inspire them through design-driven social change. Pioneered by UsabilityMatters.Org (UMO), a non-profit organization, it is a platform to propagate design awareness and accelerate customer-centric innovation in India. We, along with a group of design enthusiasts, founded UMO in 2005, in Hyderabad. Since then UMO has been spearheading a "good design for better living" movement through events and several programs. One of those events that began in 2012 is the UXINDIA international conference (formerly named UMO International Conference) on user experience design created to build and sustain the implementation of design thinking for social change by bringing three essential pillars together: industry, academia, and individuals with an entrepreneurial spirit.

Setting the Stage

The phenomenal economic growth of India in recent years has had a profound effect not only within India, but also on the rest of the world. Such effects, already in evidence, are a combination of economic liberalization and reforms leading to new market opportunities, arising from enhanced purchasing power and greater competitiveness.

For example, the reforms undertaken in the telecommunications industry have led to phenomenal adoption of technology, inspiring generations on both ends of the economic spectrum. This has captured the imagination of the young and technically savvy workforce at such an astronomical pace that innovation led entrepreneurship is now a mainstream career choice like never before. This is just the beginning, and has already created many new opportunities for grassroots level innovation in India.

There is no better time for the UX community in India. UX researchers and designers in India have an opportunity to inspire a generation of professionals to create great design and provide thought leadership through strategic business thinking. Despite the tremendous prospects for the Indian UX community, there are still few educational opportunities for those going into the UX field.

India still places a high premium on education. We continue to produce exceptional talent particularly in the domains of engineering and business. But in comparison, the number of design schools we have and the number of UX designers and researchers we produce pale in comparison to places like the US and Western Europe. Even places within Asia such as Japan, China, and Korea are further along than India when it comes to UX education. Fortunately, India is making some progress in this area, specifically through the UXINDIA network.

Inspiring Students

Instill Design is a program designed by UXINDIA to inspire college students through design thinking. It's a movement with a vision to introduce innovation at a grassroots level and help students realize their hidden creativity and potential to innovate. The goal is to help students drive innovation in their careers and ultimately shape global brands of the future by creating products and services that delight customers.

Instill Design has run a series of design related events, workshops, creative activities, and festivals for students across India. The underlying objective is to educate, motivate, and inspire young minds to view the world we live in from a more educated perspective for designing a better future for everyone in every sense.

Initially it was a challenge to convince engineering and management schools to conduct design workshops on their premises, but with the persistent effort of UXINDIA volunteers, many of the schools now understand the value we are bringing to their students as well as the larger professional community. Today we have more than 200 schools signed up for this program. The professors at these schools are engaging with our design mentors to inspire students to embrace the perspective of thinking about design while developing their projects.

The goal of Instill Design is to reach every non-design school in India and provide students with design thinking principles and best practices. This way we aim to bring design awareness to the students so they can make better career choices and leverage design thinking to drive their careers in the domains of their interest. In the future, UXINDIA wants to bring the Instill Design program to the primary school level and turn India into a design-innovation nation.

Mentorship

UXINDIA has established a strong network of mentors from national and international professionals in UX and design. Our mentors are motivated to make a difference for the next generation by mentoring students to think out-of-the-box and improve design-thinking skills. They also help organize Start-up UX Clinics as well as UXINDIA meet-ups in all the major cities of India. Mentors also get a chance to establish themselves as leaders in their own field and improve their speaking and mentoring skills. UXINDIA is aiming to create a mentor network of 10,000 design professionals to create a ripple effect for design education in the country.

Promoting an Inter-Disciplinary Perspective

In 2007, UXINDIA initiated TechEase, a user experience and usability workshop for students. TechEase is a first of its kind workshop in India with the goal to guide science, technology, management, architecture, and design students to see each other's perspective for the purpose of understanding each industry's design thinking and UX to better excel in all industries. The goal of this first workshop was to instill design thinking practices and user experience fundamentals to help students consider how design affects users in different domains. In the first year, TechEase attracted 200 students across India for a three-day design workshop in Hyderabad, India. Students learned design insights from hands-on workshops conducted by UXINDIA mentors. The success of the TechEase workshops showed the UXINDIA team that this should be an annual event. Although TechEase has been well-received and many students have participated in the program, the initial impact of the program was minimal due to the size of the venue that could accommodate only 400 students a year.

In an effort to create more of an impact of design thinking for India's industries, UXINDIA is working to bring the TechEase concept to every engineering and management school in India. The Instill Design program (as mentioned previously) is the program that UXINDIA developed to reach the students in these schools. UXINDIA mentors travel to engineering and management schools throughout India to conduct the two-day workshops. UXINDIA believes that sharing innovative design and UX practices that enhance a user's experience and increase the usability of products and services will guide future engineers and managers to bring creative solutions to innovate in their industry or institution.

Creating Ties Between Industry and Academia

"Industry + Academia Fusion" is an event hosted by UXINDIA to connect ideas from academia to the experience and expertise from industry. At this event, students and professionals from different design schools present their best design projects to professionals from a wide variety of industries.

In addition to showcasing design projects, a panel of invited faculty and industry experts discuss and debate the state of UX in India and how to move forward. By bringing these two groups together to discuss and debate UX, the panel is in a unique position to understand the UX needs from both the sides. One of the main goals of this event is to establish a strong relationship between industry and academia that can go a long way in creating an environment of mutual benefit for each other.

Industry + Academia Fusion was introduced as part of the UXINDIA 2014 conference. The inclusion of the Fusion event into the conference enticed many more design schools to participate to showcase their design projects as well as participate in the panel discussion. Another benefit of bringing these two groups together is that businesses could recruit students for internships and students could impress potential employers by their design projects. Showcasing design talent and innovations at a large event helps bring potential employees and ideas to industry professionals, and the students benefit from the knowledge of experienced professionals and their needs so that all can work together to excel in the world economy.

Supporting the Start-up Community

In recent years, new companies have been using Start-up UX Clinics organized by UXINDIA as a forum to share UX ideas and expertise and also to receive expert guidance. UXINDIA supports start-up companies by providing a forum where UX ideas are evaluated by UX experts. The experts give guidance to these new companies in the hope that their advice will prove invaluable in driving delight and value for the start-ups' target customers.

As part of the UXINDIA international conference 2014, UXINDIA invited key people from these start-up companies to participate in the UX Clinic and shortlisted 10 of their proposals for their products or services on the basis of customer value, industry impact, and business potential. Each selected start-up had a 30-minute closed session with design experts to get in-depth feedback on their product or service. This program helped with the early stage of product or service development. Because these new businesses often cannot afford to hire UX design

consultancy firms, the advice given at these clinics provide valuable direction in designing their products and services with a UX design point of view.

UXINDIA plans to provide regional Start-up UX Clinics in all the major cities of India and also provide virtual clinics to help at least 10,000 start-up companies. By 2020, we hope that our UXINDIA mentors can provide the design expertise to help these new companies give customers the products and services that they want and need because of the innovative design and UX principles that were integrated into those products and services.

UX Innovation

UX India's iINNOVATE is an annual design challenge open to all college students or recent graduates from anywhere in the nation and from any discipline. This design challenge is a great opportunity for colleges and universities to shape students into thought leaders by addressing problems and finding solutions to those problems that could make a difference in their industries. UXINDIA has been running this program for five years and has been successfully providing a great platform for these student innovators to showcase their ideas and make connections with key people in various industries. Some of the design challenge winners are selected to provide design mentorship for students in their colleges and educational institutes through the Instill Design program. So far iINNOVATE has reached more than 10,000 students and citizens of India.

Challenges

UXINDIA, through its platform and programs like Instill Design, is making positive progress into the academic systems of India that are often hard to transform given that academic institutions tend to resist change. We are using programs like iINNOVATE to open communication and provide expertise to these widespread and rooted educational systems in order to give Indian college graduates the design background that will help them excel in many industries. An example of a challenge for our students and graduates is that many offshore job prospects force technology and engineering students to focus on tech courses rather than design-related courses. While in fact, an increased number of start-ups in India and offshore UX jobs need more design professionals, but the mindset of Indian youth is still focused on tech-related jobs.

One of the fundamental philosophies that our design education and practice taught us is that with incremental improvement and exposure, the impact of our programs will increase year by year. Working to bring awareness to the Indian population that design is critical for the success of our businesses is a hurdle that we are working hard to clear. Instill Design is the launch pad that has been turning the minds of fresh graduates across tech and business programs to begin to adopt design thinking early on in their careers. This design thinking that we instill in our students through our UXINDIA programs will help them identify problems that consumers face and help provide guidance so that, as product and service designers, they can use technology and good design principles to create products and services that consumers will want to use in their everyday life.

As part of bringing design thinking to academic institutions we are providing companies, especially start-up companies, with talented employees—graduates from institutions that value UX design. Traditional schools produce about 400 design graduates every year; however, the demand is 100 fold or greater. Private institutions offer certification courses, but they are not affordable for most Indians. Design professionals who are already working for multi-national corporations are highly paid which makes it difficult for start-up companies with little resources to be able to afford these professionals even on a consultancy basis. There is a huge employment gap to bring design thinking professionals to businesses, especially new business struggling to gain valuable design expertise. From start-ups to enterprises, businesses are struggling to find good UX talent. Industry is ready to invest in UX design talent but it needs support and guidance on sourcing well-trained UX talent that can help drive user-centric innovation.

Overcoming these challenges are an essential next step for our nation in order to demonstrate the value of our products and services that could transform one of the world's largest democracies into an innovative leader for the world's economy in years to come.

A Few Final Thoughts

UXINDIA hopes to fill the resource gaps by creating more awareness and educational opportunities with programs like Instill Design and virtual design schools. UXINDIA also aims to continue our pledge to connect talent and ideas from industry and academia to capitalize our design talent through the UXI Talent program. UXINDIA has been persistently working to create design awareness at a grassroots level in our academic institutions and start-up companies with the goal to change the tech paradigm to design that values the user's experience. UXINDIA is also partnering with engineering colleges to guide their students with innovative projects. UXINDIA plans to launch a design fund to incubate design driven ideas and encourage them to the next level.

Despite the challenges, the future of UX is very bright in India. We couldn't be happier with how far we have come and have no doubt that India will be a global leader in UX design. We also hope that other countries are able to learn and benefit from the experiences we have shared.

About the Authors



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Mr. Korasala is a Strategic Design Thinker and Information Architect. He is most interested in incubating new business models that deliver social impact, are environmental friendly, and drive economic growth. He has developed products and applications for companies like Microsoft, Sapient, Goldman Sachs, Fidelity, MetLife, Fannie Mae, Chevron, and numerous start-ups. He was one of the first pioneers to bring User Experience Design to India and founded UsabilityMatters.Org (UMO) as well as UXINDIA. He graduated from the Pratt Institute, New York in Design Management and from the Industrial Design Center, Indian Institute of Technology Bombay (IITB) in Design.



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Mr. Duriseti is a user experience lead at Citrix Systems Inc. He's worked with enterprises, online start-ups, and non-profit organizations across various industries to help them grow by adapting to the changing needs and behaviors of users. He has master's degree in Visual Communication Design from the Industrial Design Center, IIT Bombay and is also a graduate of Interaction Design from Interaction Design Institute Ivrea, Italy. His commitment to drive design awareness and education in India for sustained social impact and business development has led to co-founding the platform UX India and launching host of programs like Instill Design, iINNOVATE, TechEase, and Industry + Academia Fusion.