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Book Review: "Designing the Digital Experience: How to Use Experience Design Tools & Techniques to Build Websites Customers Love"

Robert J. Vander Hart

University of Massachusetts Medical School, robert.vanderhart@umassmed.edu

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DESIGNING THE DIGITAL EXPERIENCE: HOW TO USE EXPERIENCE DESIGN TOOLS & TECHNIQUES TO BUILD WEBSITES CUSTOMERS LOVE. King, David Lee. Medford, NJ: Information Today, 2008, 182pp., \$24.95, ISBN 978-0-910965-83-5.

An important part of our interactions in today's economy is the *experience*. Whether one is going on vacation, using a website, or buying a product, the quality of the experience can either drive us away or keep us coming back for more. *Designing the Digital Experience* gives website designers the tools necessary to provide an enhanced digital experience to their customers.

In Chapter 1 King discusses the "experience economy," using three very different examples: using the American Girl website, visiting Silver Dollar City, and buying an Apple laptop. Experiences, says King, are distinct from other economic offerings such as services and goods. They are the result of a company or library making an effort to engage their customers in a personal way.

The remaining twelve chapters are divided into three parts: Structural Focus, Community Focus, and Customer Focus. Structure in digital design is analogous to physical structure. Planning, choosing the right materials, and deciding on infrastructure are all as vital to creating a digital experience as they are to building a house. Chapter 3 discusses three different models of user-focused design: Jesse James Garrett's *User Experience* model, David Armano's *Experience Map*, and 37signal's *Getting Real*. Chapter 4 gives an overview of information architecture and usability as essential elements of experience design.

Part 2, Community Focus, stresses the importance of conversation and sharing ideas, as in a town hall meeting where opinions are expressed and listened to, and community needs are discussed. King cites his own library, where the community participates in frequent meetings and events each year, providing innumerable opportunities for conversations and interactions. The popular "Web 2.0" tools are discussed: RSS feeds, tagging, commenting, mashups, and "friending" others in sites like MySpace, Facebook, and Flickr. Chapter 7 examines building community through invitation. One example of invitation, again from King's library, is having weekly blog posts and asking readers to respond to each post.

Customer Focus is the topic of Part 3. The emphasis is on knowing what is most important to the customer in an experience and making their needs the focal point. One intriguing concept brought out at the end of Chapter 12 ("Customer Focus Ideas") is "merit badging," which involves providing rewards or incentives to users of your website for accomplishing tasks or achieving goals. Examples include eBay and Flickr users getting a badge by their name for being a top seller or a "pro" member.

The author is Digital Branch and Services Manager at the Topeka & Shawnee County (Kansas) Public Library where he works extensively with emerging tech trends. King has spoken at numerous events and has been published in several journals. He blogs at www.davidleeking.com.

Designing the Digital Experience is well-written and includes a recommended reading list and a glossary. Don't expect an in-depth, "how-to" guide to current 2.0 technologies from this book. Any library website manager, however, will find plenty of good material to guide decisions on building effective digital experiences as well as improving existing ones.

Robert J. Vander Hart
Electronic Resources Librarian
Lamar Soutter Library
University of Massachusetts Medical School
Worcester, MA
robert.vanderhart@umassmed.edu