



## **Library UX: 2021 and beyond**

challenges and  
opportunities in a  
post-COVID world

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Merci de m'avoir invité à vous présenter cette keynote. Je suis très heureux de vous parler aujourd'hui.

I have delivered UX Research workshops in Paris and Metz. And yesterday a UX Design workshop online. I would have loved to visit Lille in person and hope to return to France in the future.

I always feel that UX work is instinctively understood and welcomed by French library staff. It was wonderful to get so many great contributions yesterday and to see so many of you at the 'UXLibs' conference back in 2019.



## À propos de moi

As many of you will already know, I used to be a librarian so I understand your world...

- I worked in University libraries for 20 years and at Cambridge University I led a UX innovation program across all of its 100+ libraries.

## I consult and train in UX globally

- Since 2017 I have been a full-time freelance UX consultant and trainer.
- I have completed consultancies in Sweden, Canada, Australia, Germany and the UK.

## I am passionate about sharing UX knowledge

- I created and chair the UXLibs conference.
- Although I initially lost all my work and income due to the pandemic I did manage to write: 'A Handbook of UX Research & Design in Libraries', which was published earlier this year ([available from amazon.fr](https://www.amazon.fr/dp/1789090000))



## sortie de la crise COVID

Although I will be asking you to take action after today, urging you to utilise UX Research and Design methods more, I recognise that it has been an incredibly tough year. We have been faced with a challenge that has no parallel in peacetime.

As the world becomes more normal again we need to continue be kind to ourselves. And that means looking after ourselves mentally as well as physically.

However I do also think that we should now be starting to look at the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity...







## L'opportunité

We now have the perfect opportunity to stop and rethink and remodel our processes, our systems and our services.

Services should be refocusing in response to library users new and changing needs *and* their new routines, activities and behaviours.

UX (user experience) work is all about defining, analysing and responding to problems – and there have been few more significant problems for libraries than how they might continue to deliver appropriate services to their users in 2021 and beyond.



## Trois scénarios

I see 3 possible scenarios for how users will interact with libraries as we come out of the pandemic...

1. Users choose to principally use the library online because they have got used to it and it is safe and convenient.
2. Users choose to visit physical libraries more because they have missed contact with other people and working in different surroundings. Also, they're tired of online which does not always work as they'd like.
3. Users take a more hybrid approach than before. More deliberately choosing online or physical dependent on the task or the circumstance.



## La théorie de l'intentionnalité

That third option, which I am calling my 'Theory of Intentionality', is my best guess: the idea that people will be more intentional and deliberate in approach.

Previously the choice of library platform (physical or digital) might have been more accidental or chaotic. However, now they have behaviours learned during COVID, they will know what works for them online and what does not.

They will set aside certain tasks for the physical library and other tasks for the electronic library.

Libraries have offered hybrid services for many years but users will now take a more hybrid approach. More people will use both.







## L'UX n'est pas une affaire de hasard

But that is just a theory. It is pure guesswork. And... UX is never about guessing. It is instead always about gathering evidence and testing.

As UX Design pioneer Don Norman said:  
*'you have to know your user.'*

You cannot plan or design services effectively without detailed knowledge of user needs and behaviours.

You cannot deliver user-centred services without understanding user experience.





## **L'UX doit être une priorité maintenant**

Quite understandably, UX work has not been a priority during the pandemic.

Library staff have just been trying to keep their services running.

We might have learned a few things about user behaviour through observation or online correspondence but we now need to find out so much more and focus our attention on the problems that users alert us to, rather than what we consider to be the priorities:

- What is not working for users?
- What are their frustrations?
- Where does the library need to focus its attention?
- How does the library fit into their routines and lives now?

## Aller plus loin que les enquêtes et les statistiques

UX is about going beyond traditional research methods to find out how users are really experiencing services.

### Surveys:

- only a small percentage of users respond
- responses are often superficial & unreliable
- only tell you what people say or think they need and do, not what they actually need and do

### Statistics:

- open to interpretation and misuse
- tell you that someone has used something – a library visit, a loan, a database – but nothing at all about how good or bad that experience was
- involve zero user interaction



## Méthodes de recherche en UX

UX research techniques are more creative, active, evidence-based, detailed and user-focused.

They will ensure you gather invaluable data on user needs AND behaviours.

I would suggest prioritising:

- interviews in person or via Zoom
- usability testing of digital platforms
- observation and behavioural mapping of how users move in library spaces/layouts
- user journey mapping to understand processes and obstacles during tasks
- cultural probes to understand study routines and research behaviours





## Mais la recherche en UX n'est pas suffisante, c'est juste le point de départ

UX research is important but it is only the start of the UX process. After research should come:

- Data Analysis: sorting and analysing your user data to identify key problems and concentrations
- Ideation: generating ideas in response to your data for new or modified services
- Prototyping: devising and testing service prototypes with users that are iterated and revised in response to how they are used



## Le numérique n'est pas la seule solution

Some University commentators are still saying that everything needs to go digital and that it will solve all our problems.

But if the pandemic taught us anything it was that we humans tire of online interaction and remote working far quicker than was previously imagined.

Creating dynamic collaborative online spaces and virtual communities for students sounds great on paper but it's not happening anywhere successfully yet. Digital innovation is important but it's rarely a complete solution. Inevitably some things work better online and others better in person.

During the pandemic we have had no choice but to operate remotely and this has had serious consequences...





## Le “en ligne” peut être catastrophique pour certaines personnes

I know from the UX research I’ve conducted that many people:

- need the discipline of being in the library to work successfully
- need to be surrounded by other people who are also studying
- primarily come to the library for social reasons
- engage with staff in the library for support that goes beyond books and data

I dread to think what the true picture of student productivity and mental health might be.







## L'être humain est un être social

I agree 100% with Paul Bloom, who said:  
*'Humans are social beings, and we are happier, and better, when connected to others.'*

University life is of course about community and camaraderie as much as it is about education and learning.

And... at most of the 100 plus Universities I have visited since I have been freelancing, the library is usually situated at the heart of the student community.

I believe that students will return to physical library spaces and that they will remain vital.

## Modifications des espaces physiques de la bibliothèque

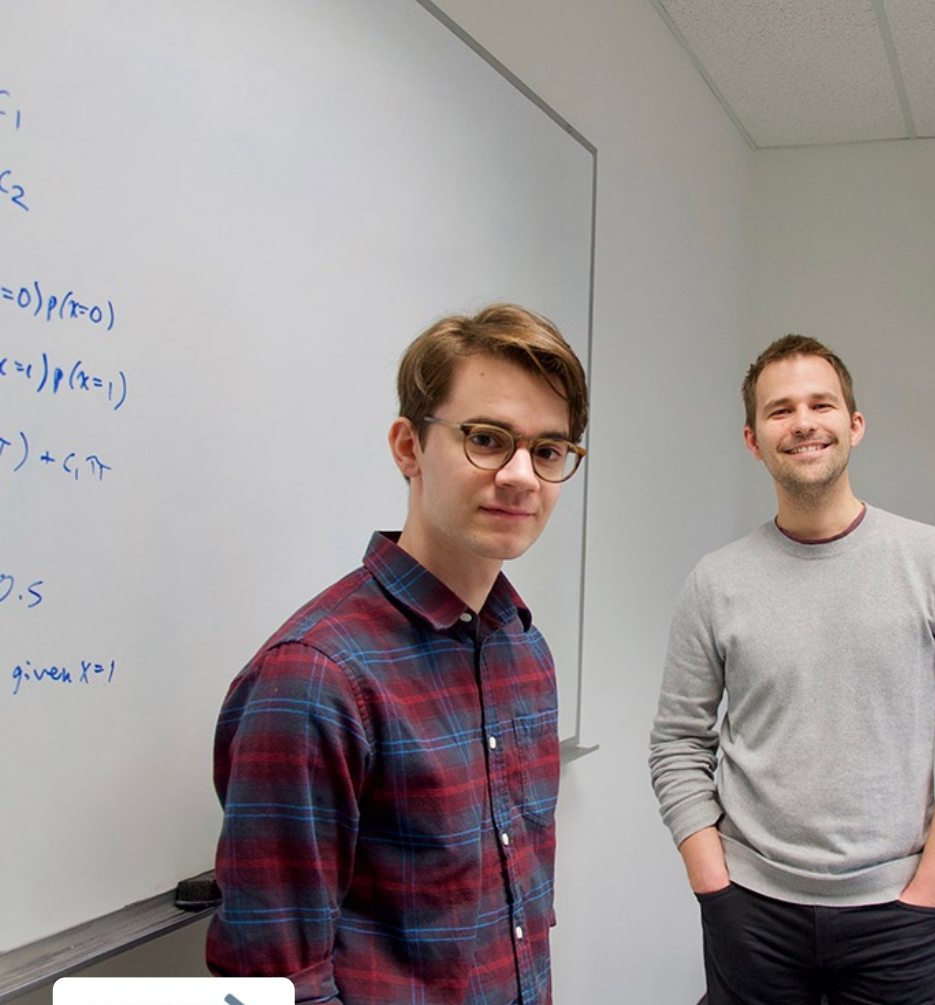
However, this does not mean that physical libraries should not be modified. They absolutely must meet the changing needs of students today. Also, another pandemic is likely, so we should plan for it.

Some possible changes to physical libraries:

- more single study spaces/more flexible furniture
- prioritising study space over collection space
- wider walkways
- improved ventilation
- contactless transactions and self-service
- more outside library areas
- click and collect/scan and deliver
- smaller service desks

But this all needs to be researched, prototyped and tested!





## Changements dans l'accompagnement de l'enseignement et de la recherche

UX research data gathered from faculty and researchers should also be used to inform developments in how library staff should support teaching and research going forwards:

- embedding librarians in the flow of teaching and research work
- supporting online course delivery: identifying research materials and offering copyright support
- lobbying and advocacy for open research, open data and open educational resources







## **L'impact du travail à domicile/à distance sur les personnels des bibliothèques**

I also think there is an important piece of UX research work to be done exploring the impact on library staff of more remote and online working in respect of:

- mental health
- job satisfaction
- work-life balance.

**BUT...** our library users should be the first priority. We should restart our UX research and design work with them.





## **Il n'y a jamais eu de meilleur moment pour faire des recherches sur l'expérience utilisateur en bibliothèque**

The pandemic has changed everything and this is why there has never been a more appropriate time to research the experiences and routines of library users.

We should not rely on how things have been, or focus on how we want things to be, but instead on the new and changing behaviours and needs of the people we support.

**Le moment est venu!**

