

# The 5 Key Steps to Hiring the Best UX Talent

A CLEAR/POINT  
White Paper

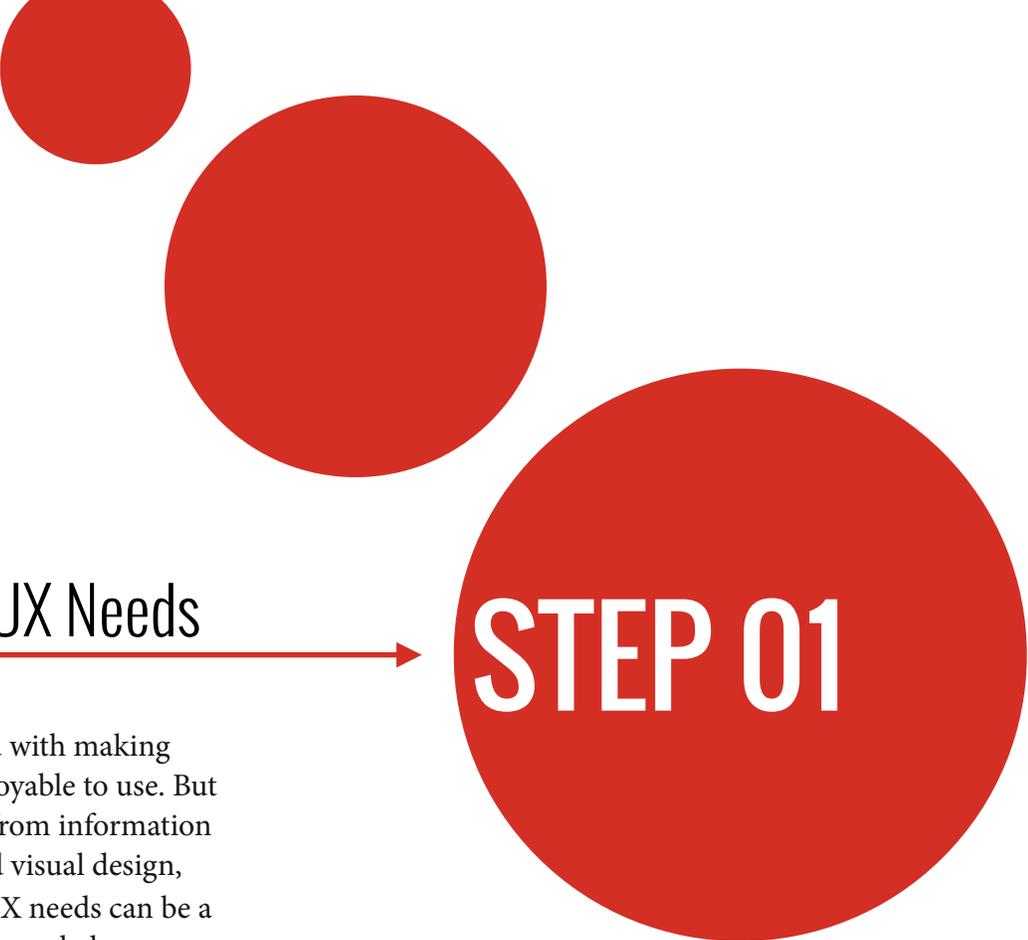
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For over 23 years, Clear Point Consultants has been the agency to contact for staffing solutions in user experience, content management, and blended learning positions. We are the staffing source of choice for both startups and members of the Fortune 500. **At Clear Point, it is our goal to demystify the process of hiring user experience professionals, an incredibly time-consuming endeavor that requires navigating an extremely competitive talent market.** The UX field changes and grows daily and every aspect is shrouded by a tangled web of jargon that can be confusing when trying to find the right UX professional for the job. There is also little margin for trial and error.

Bringing someone onboard whose skills prove not to match those required by the position can have a negative impact on your products. Worse still, the cost of a failed hire can be as much as **20%** of the position's annual salary. The key to any successful hire is to first understand your needs and then to express them in ways that potential candidates can relate to. **In this document, we share our expertise with you and provide steps to help you effectively pair the right UX professional with the right position.**

[ hint: keep reading ] 



## Know Your Specific UX Needs

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# STEP 01

User experience (UX) is concerned with making products and services easy and enjoyable to use. But in a field that includes everything from information architecture to usability testing and visual design, defining your company's specific UX needs can be a challenge. Here are some steps that can help you craft an effectively specific job description:

- › **Determine** what the position needs to accomplish;
- › Clearly **articulate** the user experience professional's place in your company;
- › **Identify** expertise and skill sets required by the user experience candidate;
- › **Define** how success will be measured 30, 60, 90 days, even a year down the road.

# Be Aware of the Qualities Important for all UX Professionals

## / Assess the Intangibles

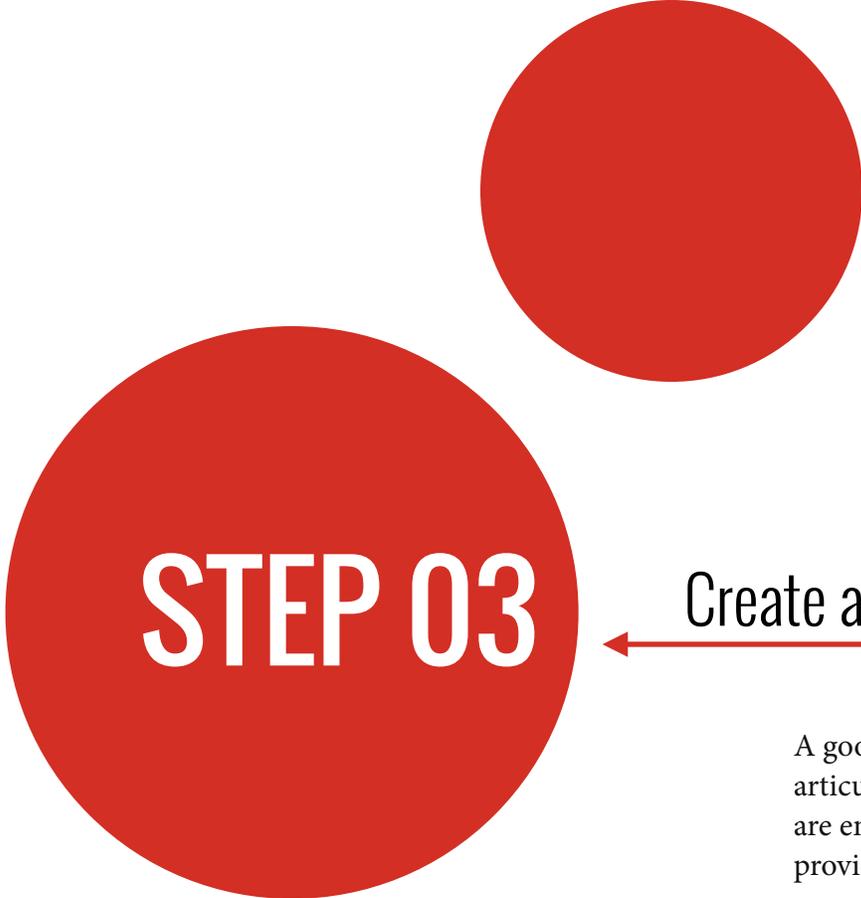
Excellent communication skills are indispensable for UX professionals. Since the practice of UX is based on explaining things to people, top candidates must be able to clearly articulate their design decisions. Of equal value is the understanding that UX design is concerned with the experience of others and not an individual opinion. Top candidates will rarely speak in the first person about their designs, preferring instead to discuss research findings and personas.

**UX, despite its technical characteristics,  
is essentially a humanistic endeavor.  
And so should be your hiring process.**

Look beyond whether candidates can create a wireframe or a site map. Are they natural communicators? Are they capable of selling an idea as well as collaborating and achieving consensus?



**STEP 02**



## STEP 03

### Create a Compelling Job Description

A good job description serves two main purposes. It articulates the position in such a way that applicants are encouraged to self-select before applying, and it provides prospective candidates with insight into your organization and what the experience of working there might be like. Avoid being overly formulaic—the job description should give an honest view of your workplace and the culture the new team member would be joining.

This strong and hyper-competitive talent market is inundated with potential job opportunities. Initially, you need to create as deep a pool of creative and talented candidates as possible. It is your job description that will distinguish you from the pack and position you as a desirable employer offering growth opportunities and a challenging, rewarding, creative environment.

How do you make that happen? Start by sketching your job description with broad strokes such as “Senior User Experience Design Professional.” Leave the field wide open to qualified candidates. Secondly, address applicants’ desires. For user experience professionals, there is no draw stronger than the opportunity to learn or do something new. Offer a chance to learn mobile design or broaden their experience in highly sought after areas.

It can be helpful to think of the job description as a conversation starter while still addressing the main points that should be covered:

- ▶ **YOUR COMPANY** / This is your opportunity to sell the candidate on your company. Tell them why they would be happier on your team than on your competitor's.
- ▶ **ROLE** / Outline what actually needs to be done within your company. Be as specific as you can, and if the role is still not well-defined or subject to change depending on who you hire, mention that, too.
- ▶ **RESPONSIBILITIES** / How will you know that your new UX designer was a good hire? It's important to establish common metrics of success, and this is the place to do so. Include all the core responsibilities of the position. While a degree of flexibility should be expected, you want to avoid a situation in which your new employee is expected to complete tasks not mentioned in the job description.
- ▶ **QUALIFICATIONS** / Education, years of experience, expertise in a particular domain, software skills, knowledge of certain methodologies: they all go here. This section can be used as a filter when evaluating candidate packets. However, be realistic! Do you really care about that advanced degree if someone can demonstrate expertise with a solid portfolio and years of experience under their belt?

Now that the position has been defined, let's review and evaluate candidates and locate



the  
best match.

## Focus on Talent, Not Skill Set

# STEP 04

Any UX professional worth hiring will have strong skills in user research, usability, wireframes, and navigation flow. At Clear Point, we have learned that the best employees have more than just skills—they have talent. Competitive advantages are gained by identifying applicants who can exceed their skill sets and contribute to a project in various unexpected ways. Résumés will only reveal part of the picture. Talent is discovered by reviewing an applicant's work, whether in a portfolio or by having them complete a UX exercise.

Of course, it's crucial that UX professionals be proficient in core competences, but there is another set of qualities that will differentiate an outstanding UX professional from a merely adequate one:

### Creativity

Your product is unique and any UX designers you hire are likely to face challenges they have never encountered before. A creative approach to problem-solving, the ability to look at an issue from a new perspective, and continuous innovation are all required for success in the field. Good designers follow the rules. Great designers understand how to bend the rules to improve products and services in ways previously unimagined.

### Communication, engagement, collaboration

UX professionals never work in isolation—their stakeholders include engineers, product managers, peer designers and researchers, executives, and of course the end-users. They need to be able to communicate their ideas to a diverse audience and receive buy-in for their proposals across multiple functions. Moreover, they often facilitate discussions and visualize ideas from other team members. Successful UX professionals are proactive in forging strong alliances and collaborating with stakeholders in other disciplines.

### User advocacy and leadership

Within a team, UX professionals are the experts on your users and their needs. Designers and researchers should be fearless user advocates, and it is their primary responsibility to build a shared understanding of users that helps guide product development. This requires self-confidence, the ability to rally support, and an intuitive sense of how to pick the right battles. In many organizations, UX professionals also need to educate others on the value of their discipline and on processes that facilitate UX engagement.

# STEP 05

## Choose Your Creative Assessment Strategy

The ideal candidate will possess many if not all of the following: hands on UX work experience, an excellent portfolio, solid references and personal connections, some technical background, industry experience, professional affiliations, and great communication skills. Create an evaluation grid so you can rate what is most important to you and easily compare candidates.

### Request a portfolio

Most UX professionals will have an online portfolio or website to showcase their work, although some projects might only be shared via a secure portal or in a webex one-on-one due to confidentiality agreements. With a careful review of candidate portfolios, you'll gain insight into the breadth and quality of your candidates' work. How many projects are presented? Do they show a wealth of skills and demonstrate the ability to work within a variety of domains on different UX problems? Which would you be proud to have represent your company?

In addition to completed projects, a good portfolio will detail some of the processes that led to the final results. Ideally, for design projects you'll see a project brief, sketches, or wireframes that led to final design decisions, and a note on timelines. If a portfolio only

shows final screenshots it becomes difficult to evaluate individual contributions, group dynamics, or the creative problem-solving that guided the project's development. Remember, UX designers never work alone! You need to know whether your candidate was a key player in the project or had only tangential involvement. If impressed by a portfolio that features only final results, ask the candidate to walk you through a couple of projects, detailing both the projects and their role within them.

Understanding real-world constraints of the projects is critical in assessing the outcomes. School projects will often have a high degree of flexibility, relatively large teams, and semester-long timelines. Out in the field, UX professionals don't always enjoy such luxuries due to time or budgetary limits. In other cases, regulatory constraints will inhibit design choices and mask the true ability of the designer. The portfolio itself should be considered as an example of the candidate's ability and UX preferences. Does the candidate use type, color, and space to create an online presence that is elegant and eminently usable? Do research findings engage audiences otherwise unfamiliar with the project? Is the site easy to navigate?

### Phone screening

Interviewing candidates on the phone is a fast and easy way to get a feel for their personality and experience and the likelihood that they will fit in with your existing company culture. It's also a good opportunity to tell them more about the role and sell them on the opportunity. Phone interviews work best for questions that are easily answered without any reference to visuals. Delve into a candidate's design process, teamwork, and past experiences—this is your chance to figure out the role they played in the projects presented in their portfolio.

### Create a design exercise

Ask your candidates to complete a design exercise after the phone screen and get a live test of their design skills. The formula for useful design exercises is quite simple. You want to give all your candidates the same prompt (or a choice of two or three prompts) a few days before the on-site interview. In the interest of fairness, limit the time they spend on the exercise—three hours is usually enough.

### Working session

For both interviewers and interviewees, the best way to judge a candidate is to hold a working session in which the candidate is given a problem to solve and asked to brainstorm potential solutions through discussions with the team. You'll quickly be able to ascertain whether the candidate will fit with your team and whether they have the necessary analytical and presentation skills.

### Take a test drive

Consider hiring your new UX hires as contractors if you still are not 100% sure that they are the right fit. The best way to determine how good a person is at their job is to see them doing it firsthand.

## Your goal is to understand a candidate's approach to design, their ability to focus on the user, and their level of expertise across interaction design, visual design, and technical skill.

Outline the deliverables you are looking for in your prompt. Provide a description of the process and an interactive prototype, depending on the role you are hiring for. Have them present the exercise to a small group along with some of their other work. Design exercises are also a great way for your interviewers to calibrate themselves—over time they will see multiple candidates present solutions to the same problem.

# CONCLUSION

Recruiting and hiring great UX professionals is a challenging task. Expect a 3-4 month (or longer) window from sourcing to hiring. Quite often, the person you hire will be wildly different than the person you initially expected to hire. You'll need skill, sound judgment, and intuition in order to pick them out. One thing is for sure, though: UX skills are in high demand and short supply.

**It's a candidate's market, and companies need to do more now than ever to attract and retain top talent.**

[ For more insights contact **CLEAR/POINT CONSULTANTS** ]

