What the heck is DXD

(and do you need it for your business)?

Happy customers spend more and cost less.

But how do you make your existing customers happy?
And how do you grab potential customers' attention to turn them into happy customers?

We are Emakina, the User Agency.

It's our mission to help your business evolve with the user squarely in the centre. Knowing this, it won't come as a big surprise that we've taken the strategy & advisory pillar in our service offering to the next level of user-centricity. How? By adding a brand new Digital eXperience Design (DXD) team. This team focuses solely on designing the branded experience that will make your users happy. But let's not get ahead of ourselves...

First, what exactly is Digital eXperience Design?

It means exactly what it says: **designing the ultimate user experience.** It's a holistic, multi-disciplinary approach to define intentionally how the user will experience your branded services and products. Those are a lot of words, let's break that down a bit further:

Holistic: it looks at the complete experience, as it is embedded in the reality of your user, of your business and of your goals.

Multi-disciplinary: you can't do DXD alone, you need a set of different profiles to work together and build on each other's work.

Approach: it's not a one-size-fits-all workshop format that you can simply duplicate. It's a way of thinking with a bespoke way of working tailored to your brand.

Define: DXD is not executive, we don't build your final experience. We think, research, ideate, prototype and test with you. More on that later.

Intentionally: we identify a specific goal upfront and identify the steps needed to get there. We don't research for the fun of it (though we do love it!) but because we want to get a specific result for your business.

User: yes, we are the user agency, everything the DXD team does will be user-centric. We perform research to get to know your users on a deeper level.

Experience: this is not only about what your users see and how they react. It's also about what they feel and think, how they interact and why. Through our research we know exactly what type of experiences will delight them.

Your branded services and products: although we are advocates for your users, we are aware that you are running a business. The end goal is always to create happy users for your brand so your business does better.

To be clear, the DXD approach encompasses the entire user journey, from the first time a user starts researching the market you are active in, until they are a loyal customer to your brand (and beyond).

Notice that it isn't called experience making or experience thinking. We use the word 'design' on purpose. That's because design is not just about how things look, but the way they work.

DXD is about creating a solution for a specific problem, ideating with a purpose and designing for maximum value.

1 How does the DXD team work?

That's a fair question. You could assume that we send you a couple of our strategists to gather information and observe your users, then sit down and after a couple of days present you with a nice data-based presentation on what your ultimate user experience should look like. First do some legwork, then do some thinking... and voilà, solution found!

If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Gathering some data and then filtering it through one or two brains (no matter how great those brains are) cannot be called a user-centric process. In the example above, only the input is grounded in reality, the process and output aren't. Luckily, the DXD methodology is different. It's a process with the user squarely in the centre from start to finish. Whether the DXD team does research, ideates, builds or tests, the user perspective is always present. And yes, that involves a lot more people and a lot less sitting.

So, what's so special about the way the DXD team works that it's worth going through their 6-to-8-week process? The answer is simple.

> **The DXD team operates in the real world at all times, basing all of their work on real user data and business insights throughout.**

Perhaps the team's way of working starts to sound a little complex by now, so let us reassure you at this point. The DXD process is very clear-cut and has only two phases:

(1) Finding the most relevant problem to solve for your business and your users.

(2) Defining the most meaningful solution for both.

Each phase consists of a set of actions that first broaden the possibilities and then narrow them down to a small set of answers. This is called the Double Diamond Framework, about which you can read more below. Before we dive into that, take a closer look at the contents of these two phases.

Phase 1

There is a famous quote attributed to *Albert Einstein*. It says:

"If I had an hour to solve a problem, I would spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about solutions"

No offense to Einstein, but we think it should be about 50-50. That's because Einstein's work was mainly theoretical. It's rather hard to user-test 'Relativity', isn't it? But your business doesn't sell relativity, it sells products and services created for specific user needs.

Still, we agree with the aforementioned genius that thinking about the problem is vastly important and, in our business, often underestimated. As humans, we love to jump to solutions. Our brains are wired that way; it's how we've made progress as a species. The fact that our society has increasingly focused on output and rewards speed of execution, has only reinforced this behaviour.

> The problem with speeding towards a solution is that it ignores the actual complexity of our world.

Problems do not exist in a vacuum. They are part of a bigger fabric, and you have to understand the full picture in order to solve the problem well.

> This is why the very first thing the DXD team does, is understand and map your business together with the current user experience your brand offers.

They do that together with you, the whole process is collaborative. The degree of your involvement varies, of course, depending on the material you already have, the amount of time available to spend with the team, and the amount of conflict the team sees between what you say about your users and your business, and the data they find whilst conducting their research.

Based on what the team finds, they will formulate some hypotheses about the most relevant problems for your users. These hypotheses could be the really obvious ones, or the ones you had a hunch about, or the ones you didn't see coming for miles. Whatever they are, you get to see them and understand why they are a problem.

It stands to reason that a team that prides itself on user-centricity would want to test these hypotheses with actual users.

So that's exactly what the DXD team does next: go out into the world and **involve actual users through user testing**. They use a variety of methods to arrive at data that gives clear insights into the problems from the user perspective and also into the importance of each problem for the user's experience.

Some issues are bigger than others, so with the user data the DXD team gathers **it's easy to prioritise all the issues** and take your pick. It's always a special moment at the end of phase one when you finally know which problem you need to solve to have the most impact on your user experience AND be the most beneficial for your business.

That's the end of phase 1.

Phase 2

No famous quote to kick off the second phase, since it builds logically on what happened in the first phase. Now that you are sure you will be solving the right problem, it is time to figure out what the solutions to that problem will look like. Again, this does not happen in a room with one or two specialists dreaming up A Big Theoretical Solution. On the contrary, it happens by working together and dreaming up solutions, building them, testing them with people from your target audience and tweaking them with their feedback.

It all starts when you and your favourite DXD team take all the information from phase one as a starting point to ideate solutions together. It's a really fun workshop with great creative exercises where everyone can pitch their ideas. Nothing is off limits at this stage, because sometimes that really crazy, out-of-the-box idea leads to that one perfect solution you would never have come up with if you had played it safe.

After these workshops, you have a board full of solutions that could potentially have a great impact on your user and your business. But how do you know which one will actually work? You could pick your favourite idea based on your own gut feeling, but we recommend instead to make fact-based decisions. That's what phase 2 is for.
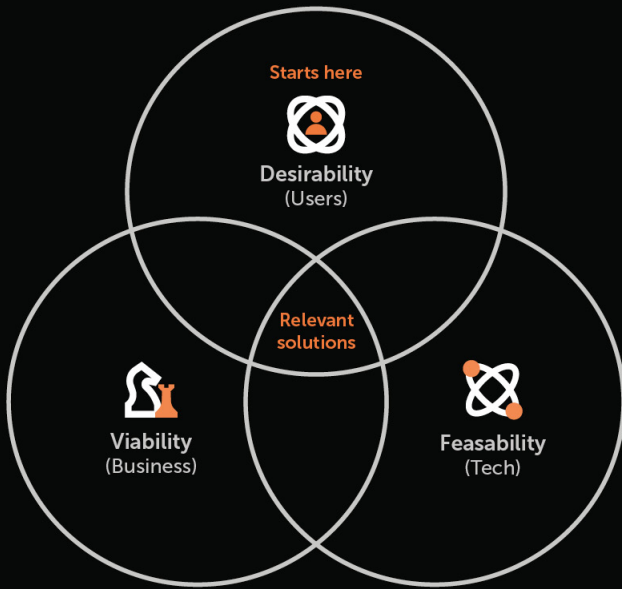
> We build a rough version of the best ideas and then let actual users test them. This way, we quickly discover what works and what doesn't.

This "test and learn" approach is incredibly valuable. Did you know it takes only 5 user tests to figure out about 85% of the problems of a specific solution? That's a really fast way to find out if your favourite idea is more trouble than it's worth. Or if it is as good as you imagined it to be. That's why the DXD team builds prototypes of your top ideas from the ideation session and tests them against each other.

When the data comes in, you look at your prototypes together and select the best one for your users and your business. Then the DXD team goes back and improves that prototype, evolving it a bit further. Then they test it again - as many times as is needed for you to feel confident that the solution will make your users happy and add value to your business.

There is only one step left after this: get the solution built. The DXD team creates a full technical briefing for the builders to make the solution come to life in all its glory (and complexity), so you can finally put it out there.

That's the end of phase 2.

Starts here

Desirability
(Users)

Relevant
solutions

Viability
(Business)

Feasability
(Tech)

The kind of solution that you arrive at when you work with the DXD team, are solutions that are desirable, feasible and viable.

- **Desirable:** they will make your users happy, not frustrated, and add value to their lives. There is no point in creating an amazing journey your users don't want.

- **Feasible:** they can be done technologically speaking. The team won't propose something you can't do with your current architecture and company set-up, there won't be a full overhaul of your company (unless you want to, in which case you'll make our Service Designers really happy - see later in our whitepaper).

- **Viable:** they will help your business grow and evolve. The team knows you are running a business and creating a seamless, useful and delightful user experience should be at the service of your company's goals.

Shape by our client's brand purpose

Users' problems
What are they trying to achieve?

User-centered solutions
How can we help them to make progress?

Scope of the challenge
Situation to improve

Divergent

Convergent thinking process

Empathy
Understand the users

Define
Maps the problems

Design
Brief & criteria
Reframe problems

Choose the problems where to focus

Ideate
Produce ideas

Prototype
Build ideas

Test

Choose the ideas to prototype & test

Define together
Solution(s)
to be built

Did you say "double diamond" framework?

Yes we did. No, we didn't come up with it by ourselves. It's an existing methodology from the world of Design Thinking - you can google it. As the name suggests, it consists of 2 diamond shapes (which sounds better than '2 sideways squares', doesn't it?).

They encompass the 2 phases we shared before: the first diamond helps you to identify the right problem, the second diamond helps you to identify the right solution. Each diamond has a side that starts small and opens wide, and an opposite side that starts wide and then ends small. **This open-and-close movement is not an accident.** It exemplifies what happens when you go through the process.

Each diamond starts by gathering more and more data. In the first diamond the data is information about the user and your business. In the second diamond the data is ideas to solve your problem. The amount of information / ideas gets bigger and bigger over time, picking up speed.

If you've carefully read this whitepaper so far, you know that our minds are built for rapid solutions. That means that at some point during this amplification, you're going to get restless. You start to feel like you have so much information / so many ideas that you'll never get to the point. Believe us, that's a perfectly normal feeling. And if you weren't in the hands of a set of professionals, this kind of situation would be worrisome. Luckily, your favourite DXD team will make a hard stop at one point and direct the process into the 'close' phase. All you have to do is breathe and trust in the process.

This 'close' phase is where the gold is, because it's where you narrow down what's in front of you until you arrive at a very concrete result. For phase 1 you end up with the concrete problem to solve that will make a difference to your users and your business. In phase 2 you end up with the concrete solution you need to build without having to worry you might get it wrong. This has led to a much-used motto in the world of Experience Design to describe what the double diamond is for:

Design the right thing, design the thing right.

2 I get it, but how does that help my business grow?

Great question! There are 3 things the DXD team helps you with:

1 Helping you to identify what is currently wrong in the user experience you offer.

2 Making sure your product or service works in a way that will delight your users.

3 Helping you improve and innovate at a rapid pace and with a purpose.

Let's dig into these 3 options a little deeper.

Firstly, **a bad user experience obstructs lead generation and diminishes brand loyalty.** When users don't like how you make them feel, your funnel dries up faster than a wet towel in a heatwave. If that is the case, you need to find the issues and fix them, fast. You can't afford to guess, build a solution that may or may not work and pray for a good outcome when you go live. Yes, your internal team that built the original journey could get it right. But they could also get it wrong, costing you time, money and potential customers now lost forever. With the DXD methodology, we test your journey and your potential solutions with actual people using your services or products. You know exactly what the problem is and what to do about it.

Secondly, **a badly functioning product or service costs you clients and money**. When users get frustrated with what you sold them, they aren't going to sit in a corner and cry silently. They go online and let the world know of their dissatisfaction. Handling complaints and massive amounts of aftersales troubleshooting are costly for your company as well. If only there was a way to test your product or service with real users so you could discover the majority of issues before you went live. Wait... That's exactly what your favourite DXD team does! With their methodology you launch your product or service knowing it will work.

Lastly, we can't pretend there hasn't been a massive shift in user behaviour the past months. We clearly saw that **a business that isn't ready to adapt fast to change, will die.** Innovation at a rapid pace can be daunting for some businesses. With the DXD framework, we collaborate to identify opportunities, come up with answers, test and iterate solutions in a matter of weeks (about 8 weeks, to be precise). It doesn't take up a massive amount of time, and what you put out is user-tested.

3 Great! So... who is in my favourite DXD team?

We're so glad you asked! As we mentioned before, this is a cross-functional team of professionals. The team consists of:

- **Design Strategists:** they are captains of the process, adapting it to the needs of your company and making sure the diamonds close into actual, useful output for your business.

- **Design Researchers:** they are the champions of your users, tailoring their research according to the needs of your project and making sure your user's voice is present throughout the whole process.

- **Content Designers:** they are called in whenever your project requires content that has to serve your business goals and simultaneously make your users happy.

- **UX Designers:** they are the defenders of the user perspective in your digital prototypes and the main drivers behind your user tests.

- **Service Designers:** they come in to align your internal structures and processes so you can deliver the wonderful solutions you've come up with during the DXD process.
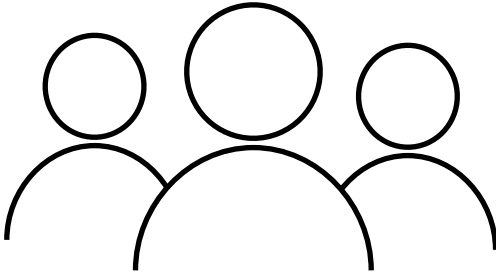
Whenever needed, other profiles can be integrated within the team. If your branding is unclear, a brand strategist can come in and help you to solidify your brand essence. If your assets lack a spark, our creative director can come to the rescue with his team of creatives and designers. If you need a rebrand, our head of design can do his magic.

Perhaps you are understaffed in the technical department and you need help identifying the right platform to work with, or you need extra hands to develop your digital infrastructure? We have plenty of technical profiles to help you out. And if we don't have them in Brussels, we borrow them from the other agencies in our network - a perk that comes from working with a group as big as Emakina.

You could ask yourself if you really need that many profiles. The answer is yes. Each team member brings their own specific expertise that will benefit your user and therefore your business. On the other hand, we know budget can be a constraint. That's why you need to know that we only involve the profiles you really need to reach the results you have in mind.

4 So...do you need DXD for your business?

Having read this whitepaper, this is probably your final question. We have given you lots of information about the way the DXD team works, and now you're wondering if DXD is something that could benefit your company in a big way? If that's the case, we are more than happy to help. For your convenience, we have created a small but useful decision tree.

Just answer the questions and you'll find out soon if we need to have a chat!

Had you heard about Experience Design before you read this whitepaper?

NO
You should give us a call so we can find out together how this approach could help improve your user experience! :-D

YES
Did you already put some of what we mentioned in this whitepaper into practice?

YES
Are you using it to identify problems in your user journey?

NO
Is it because you don't have the right people in your organisation to help with this?

NO
That's a pity! It's such a strong tool to identify gaps in your current user experience. Why don't we have a chat about it?

YES
Are you using it to identify the best solutions for your users and your business?

YES
We do, if you want you can use ours! :-)

NO
You have the right people but maybe you don't have the time because you're busy trying to survive?

NO
That's a pity! It's such a strong tool to identify the best solution for your users and your business. Why don't we have a chat about it?

YES
Are you using it to keep on innovating?

NO
You have the right people and the time, but you don't do it because there are budget constraints?

YES
Well, offering a better user experience will benefit your business and we know how, so maybe we should have a talk?

NO
Is it because you already have other mechanisms in place to innovate on a daily basis?

YES
We worship you! Can we work together please?

YES
We get it, times are tough! We hope you can get through this period (so we can maybe work together in the future?).

NO
If you have the time, people and budget to do it and you don't, maybe you have a secret formula to creating memorable user experiences. We'd love to hear about it!

NO
Then we urge you to reconsider! Let's have a call to discuss...

YES
Great! Get in touch please as you're a like-minded user-centric soul.

5 In conclusion

If there is one thing we want you to remember from this whitepaper, it is this: Emakina's DXD team uses Design Thinking to help you identify the most relevant problem for your user and business, and to come up with the most relevant solution for that problem.

It may be a problem you were all-too aware of, or it may be a problem that has been silently damaging your user experience and brand reputation without you knowing.

Either way, this way of working is practical, user-centred and always delivers real and measurable benefits.

Want to find out exactly how this team can help you grow your business? Give us a call!

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Vicky combines a passion for user research with an interest in business and digital strategy to guide organizations through the DXD process. She supports innovation efforts by connecting organizations with their audience to identify design challenges and create value by delivering integrated solutions.

EMAKINA

The User Agency

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Welcome to Emakina

Team up with our marketing, technology and DXD experts to grow your business and brand value.

Let's join forces, to develop highly effective strategies and creations, from cutting-edge applications and websites to impactful e-commerce projects, content and campaigns.

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Take the next step

Learn more at

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