

Do you know what makes an Interface Designer? Felipe Memoria explains.

1. Basically, what makes an Interface Designer?

FM - This issue of function terminology is not very standardized in the marketplace. In some companies, the Interface area is related to technology and implementation, in others, it is incorporated with the Information Architecture area. At Globo.com, the Interface is part of the Product Design team, which includes professionals from different areas of expertise. The Interface Designer is a person with a background in Design who is concerned with the Usability and Human-Computer Interaction in everything that is designed in Creation. Therefore, he or she is partly responsible for user-friendliness, learning-friendliness, memorization, treatment of errors, and even the pleasantness, that subjective satisfaction when using the product. The Interface Designer is the “mid-field” between the Information Architecture and Branding persons. In more complex products, he or she designs the wireframes (known over here simply as “Interface”), which are like the blueprint for a site, forecasting every detail and functionality to be used. It is the person who is concerned with the weight and positioning of elements within the page, the consistency between all the site areas, how navigation should be, and so on.

2. As to the formation, are there any specific courses? In your site, we can see you have just taken your Masters Degree. Is the field of A.I. in Brazil beginning to take off?

FM - Yes, there are courses on the Usability issue. Before my Masters, I attended an extension course at the CCE in PUC-Rio, where I learned a lot, met many good people and started to get used to academic language. Recently, that course has been made into a 1-year long post-graduation course.

I believe that in the medium term this field will take off. Within a few years, people will be aware of the importance not only of the **Information Architecture** process, but also of all this area related to **Usability** and **Human-Computer Interaction**. In Europe and the USA, this has been a reality for some time. Last year, I presented one of my articles at a congress on **Cognitive Ergonomics** in England. One of the organizers mentioned that we are about 5 years behind in relation to valuing this area here in Brazil. I do not think it is that much, but we still have to evolve a lot.

3. Still on formation: what profile to aim for, what books to look for? Or even: what would you suggest to those who are starting now in the area of Interface Design, Usability, and related areas?

FM - I think people should decide what their focus is and place themselves in the marketplace correctly. Some people send me emails asking about Tableless. Since I am not, nor intend to be, a programmer, I know only the basics for subsistence. I would love to learn about it, but it is not my focus, so I would rather use my time to read authors in

my area. Those who choose the Usability path should pay a lot of attention to users and the target public for the product they are designing. They should study a lot, attend congresses whenever possible, read all the books they find, and try to apply what they learn in practice, but with discretion. It is no easy task and, in my opinion, good sense is the key issue. As to bibliographical references, I think a good start is Don't Make Me Think! by Steve Krug. Then, I always suggest reading Designing Web Usability, by the Great Jakob. One other excellent book, albeit a bit boring, is Homepage Usability: 50 Websites Deconstructed, again by Jakob Nielsen.

4. The internet is made of people who produce content. Is this thought correct? How does the I.D. work fit into this perspective?

FM - The most famous and controversial usability consultant in the world, Jakob Nielsen, advocates that "content is king". I tend to agree with him, but advocate that what really matters is the "work as a whole". The whole experience must be pleasant. Thus, it is important that during the design, professionals from other areas and with different skills have a say in making the decisions. I believe projects for the web are necessarily multidisciplinary.

5. In a general plan, when is the presence of this type of professional required? Is it to put out fires or right from the start, to develop a more consistent work?

FM - I believe most companies that employ a full time Interface Designer designate the professional at the start of the projects. Because it is better that they follow all the stages, from the first brainstorming sessions up to the launch and – whenever possible – go through the usability tests, one of the best sources to map user behavior and define standards for future use. But of course it can happen that the Interface Designer be called on as a consultant for some project that has problems, improve some details, or "hammer in" some issues. However, it is not the ideal.

6. Talking about the Interface Designer solo career. Does this profile adjust to a freelance life? What about you, have you done much freelance work?

FM - I do not know how feasible it is to be a freelancer offering only Interface Design for sites. Perhaps the marketplace is not ready for that. I believe the opportunities might appear from companies that work with this methodology, or from people who know of and value this method. I worked as a freelance before joining Globo.com, but always creating layouts as well. At present, I do not do any freelancing.

7. Today, is there a "professional" freelance, that is, has the market level improved?

FM - I believe the market level is a bit better, but I have the impression that, on average, the level is still not very good. Whenever we seek new professionals, we have a hard time in the selection process. Of the last 10 professionals hired to work in Creation at Globo.com, only 2 were from Rio de Janeiro. That is not a good sign. As to "professional freelancers", I know few of them. The best professionals I know usually choose to work full time for a company. But, of course, that is a personal decision.

8. What do you believe is the best way to search for clients?

FM - Good personal relationships and the social life environment are very important. I believe in the old formula of serving and creating. Being in charge of finding clients, making price estimates and dealing with people is a tough task that takes up a lot of time. I think designers should concentrate on what they do best, that is, designing. The ideal situation is to have partners capable of searching for clients and serving them. The problem is to find those partners.

9. We could not miss out on one question: are there freelancers working at Globo.com today?

FM - In Creation, at present, no.

10. Indications with closed eyes

FM - I can indicate many people, each one in their own area. In my area of Interface and Usability: Mauro Pinheiro, Marcelo Gluz, Lula Rocha, Bruno Maggioni, and Marcia Maia. They are close acquaintances of mine and very competent. I think we have a very high demand for good professionals in this area, people with more practical experience, who show quality and appropriate work.

11. Now you have the word, Felipe. Speak out, please.

FM - I think the work for the web is essentially multidisciplinary, and specialization is very important. On the other hand, I think it is great that people have an idea of the whole, that they know a bit about each area providing a more macro view of the product. From what I have seen, most designers lack basic knowledge of usability. They need to think a bit more on the people who will be using all that. In general, I like working with people who enjoy the internet, know the medium, and breath hypertext. I like people who get home after an intense day of work and turn the computer on. Those are the best.