



Transcription of UX Soup Episode 17: Telework UX

[music]

00:15 Derek Viita: Welcome to UX Soup, a short form podcast that looks beyond the buzzwords to give you the latest on developments that will impact the user experience of personal devices and services in the home, in the car and while mobile. I'm Derek Viita, and with me as usual are my co-hosts, Lisa Cooper.

00:33 Lisa Cooper: Hello.

00:33 DV: And Chris Schreiner.

00:34 Chris Schreiner: Hello.

00:35 DV: As always, UX Soup is presented by Strategy Analytics, a global research and consulting firm, providing our clients all over the world with insights, analysis, and expertise. Today on the podcast, we're going to be talking about something that we all have a lot of experience with, but especially so over the past six to eight months, telework. So let's start by talking about setting up our home office. I've been working remotely for about five or six years, Chris and Lisa had been working remotely for a certain period of time as well. We all clearly have things that work for us and things that do not work for us, not just setting up a desk, deciding where the chair goes, how many monitors do we need, do we need any external monitors? Period. But also just mentally, what do we need in order to be most productive? What harms our productivity? So I'm gonna turn the microphone over to Chris and Lisa to start with, what works for you guys?

01:38 CS: So I've had probably more experience than either of you, I've been working remotely on and off for the better part of 15 years, so I feel like I've had my remote office pretty well set up for myself. I will say that this year has been very difficult for other reasons, because now I have a daughter at home doing remote schooling at home, as we heard in earlier episode, and having the entire family at home now has changed some of my habits. So we now had to cram all into one room, which creates obstacles, creates issues when she's in the middle of a test, I have an important meeting come up, so I've had to re-examine and re-adjust and find some ultimate work spaces.

02:25 LC: What would those be, Chris, with everything being closed down?

02:30 DV: It's a great question.

02:32 CS: The dining room table, a TV tray. When the weather was nice, I had a few days sitting on top of a hill with a nice view in our backyard. That was lovely.

02:45 DV: Oh, wow!

02:46 CS: The WiFi didn't reach as well up there though.

02:47 LC: So basically, you're sat on a hill.

02:48 CS: I'm sat on a hill.

02:50 LC: There was no work being done. [chuckle] You need to do what I do, which is have a cone. I have a cone of silence around me. So I need a cone and I need a good 3- or 4-foot radius around me, and then I'm set, which is very difficult at home for the same reasons. There's just something about the energy of another person being so close. They don't have to say anything, it's just, I can't even explain it. It's just, I like to be... Especially if I need to be focused, then I need somewhere just really, really private and quiet away from everyone, and that's been very challenging, but if I'm doing something that doesn't, just going through emails or doing something that's very



brainless, then I can just sit and swanking up the TV on, or my daughter can be talking to me and interrupt. So, it really depends on what you're doing, so I really can't even imagine people teaching at home right now and trying to put together a curriculum and having their children at home too.

03:52 CS: I found one of the most important things in trying to telework is to have boundaries, to have boundaries between work and home, to have a room that you can set off at the end of the day and not go in there. And again, with everybody working from home, that's been very hard to have those boundaries.

04:08 DV: So back before I worked remotely full-time, I worked in product development at Microsoft, and I shared a space, a design studio, with 20 or 30 other people. And at the time, I did not like it at all because it made it so that any time I had to be heads down on anything, if I was going through results, I was building a end of Agile sprint readout deck, for example, I had to go find some place that was away from these 20 or 30 other people, and sometimes that would end up being at home because it would be quieter than anything else. It was fantastic for being able to collaborate with other people. I could, if I had a question for a PM, or a designer, or the design lead, for example, I could walk over to their desk and ask that question. But for heads down stuff, it was very, very difficult. Telework puts all those pros and cons in reverse.

05:08 LC: I used to work at GM and I would have in the research department, so I've been in an office and I've been in a cubicle situation as well, and I actually preferred the cubicle because it was spacious enough where you had your own space, but you could walk around as well. So the thing I miss is being able to just get up, walk around, see a smiling face, "Hi, how are you doing?" Just to be able to walk around. And when you're at home, unless you have a humongous mansion, which I don't, you basically walk from your chair to the kitchen and the fridge in wintertime. In the summertime, it's okay, but now that we're heading into these colder temperatures, that's where that COVID weight comes on.

05:53 DV: To Lisa's point as well earlier about having a different level of energy when you're around other people and doing work, sometimes there's parts of my workload that require that. I find for me in the pre-COVID times, if I had a lot of Excel entry I have to do or something that's just very mindless, I just have to go through it, I love doing that work at a coffee shop or at a... My old neighborhood would have a quiet pub with free Wi-Fi where I would go in the afternoon and just have a beer, but it'd be quiet and I'd be able to go through everything in an hour or two and get up, pet a strange dog that walked in, chat with the bartender, things like that. That's something that I really missed in these COVID times. There's no place for me to go to do that kind of work.

06:44 LC: A change of scene, just for your eyes, be your mental wellness. A change of scene, it really helps.

06:51 CS: Yeah, I think that change is seen or even just commute that people would normally have that they're missing out on now. Back when I used to commute, what I would find is that the commuting time was good coming home for letting go of work and setting work Chris and becoming home Chris, working from home, teleworking, I would work in an office in the basement and the commute up the stairs was never enough to shed that. So work Chris after a really annoying meeting would filter around the rest of the house.

07:24 DV: That's interesting that you mentioned that. Microsoft recently announced the teams plug-in in collaboration with Headspace, and that aims to simulate a commute, it was a virtual commute in which you check on certain tasks for the day or you check them off at the end of the day, you might undertake a guided meditation, something like that, but it's all through the team's plug-in, so a screen. What do you guys think about that?

07:52 CS: I find that what you need to unwind to commute to set off that work persona is to not be on a screen, that's part of what driving allowed you to do. Yes, you'd have to concentrate on the road, but your mind could wander, you could look at scenery, look at other cars, look at the traffic jam in front of you. I don't think that having a set routine on another screen is really going to provide that kind of benefit.

08:19 LC: Okay, so I have a different take on it, because I suppose what they're doing is they're assuming that you will be on the screen that will then initiate some sort of meditation, remind you to go sit so you wouldn't be at the screen. I have an app on my iPad that is also for meditation. Now I'm not sat looking at my iPad, I put the timer on,



and there's guided meditations on there, there's music, the silence, you're not fixated on the screen. I'm guessing what they're trying to do is that's the way they're going to reach you, they're meeting you where you are, and then the idea is to get up, go sit over in a corner while it plays a guided meditation or music, or whatever. So if that's how it works, then I think that could be a good thing, especially if it provides some guidance as to things you can do to get up and around, maybe there's yoga on there or some pose that you can try for five, 10 minutes. Anything that gets you out of the seat and it guides you, you would still be in the room, that would be the issue for me that you'd still be in the room, unless you could take it with you.

09:29 DV: On balance, I'm with Chris in that for me, when I think about the benefits, the benefits, big quotes in there of commuting, none of them are related to screens. Now, obviously, there's research that already exists that talks about the downsides of especially long commutes, they lead to more stress, they can possibly lower lifespans. But there are certain benefits, especially to a short commute, which involve some level of disengagement and reflection, and for me, when I think back to when I commuted, if I drove, I would crank the car radio as loud as I care because I was the only person in the car most of the time; if I biked to work, 'cause I was fortunate to live in an area where I could bike to work, I would bike past the lake and watch the boats and feel the fresh air, it's fantastic. If I bussed to work, I would sit and reflect, perhaps do some email triage, but no more than five or 10 minutes, and that's really the only screen-based interaction that I would have in any of those commuting scenarios, the rest are just being away from screens and being able to breathe and refocus, and as Chris mentioned, transition from that work mindset to that home mindset or vice versa.

10:49 DV: So while I understand the benefits for me personally, I don't know if any sort of screen-based intervention would really make sense. What I would love to see is, especially for designers of teams and Slack, and maybe this is something that exists. Honestly, I'm not terribly Slack proficient is a mandatory admin level shutdown of these communication platforms for certain periods. So starting at the... What's the German word? The feierabend, where there's the end of day, and that period between the end of the workday and the time when you go to bed that no communication is allowed.

11:32 LC: I was thinking about Mr. Rogers. I didn't grow up with Mr. Rogers, but as I understand it, he used to come home, take off his work clothes and put on a red cardigan and put his slippers on, and that for him was a transition enough from work to home. And I was also thinking about when I was at school, I used to wear a uniform, and I know a lot of people are against uniforms for schools, but actually in my experience, it was very good because you would take off your uniform and you would put on your home clothes. And it was a big deal because I remember seeing American kids for the first time, they'd go to school in their home clothes, I thought it was really weird, there was no transition, there was no line, it wasn't delineated in any way.

12:22 CS: I think that there are a lot of individual differences in terms of what's going to work for everyone, but I think that everybody needs some sort of routine to start work and to end work, just like you were talking about Mr. Rogers, whether it's as simple as putting on different clothes, whether it's blasting some music and singing out to it, whether it's hopping on the treadmill for half an hour, find a routine that works for you both at the beginning and the end of the day, that can give you the same things that that commute would normally give you.

12:53 DV: And there's research that proves that these short disengagements at beginning and the end of day can actually lead to better mental health as well.

13:01 CS: So in between the two commuting times, we have the time that we're actually at work, and one of the elements of telework that I've always struggled with is being able to have those water cooler moments, being able to collaborate with teammates. I have yet to find any kind of platform that can replicate that.

13:22 DV: No, my partner, for example, works for a major company in the US, and they work on Slack, that's the only way work gets done, and it gives me a lot of anxiety because it's just this constant thread of communication and some of it's work-related, some of it's not work-related, and she feels somewhat connected with her co-workers, I feel like. But it just all sits on the same layer.



13:49 LC: That sort of speaks to conferences, virtual conferences. I've sat in on a couple of those, and it's so intense because not only do you have the Zoom fatigue of sitting and watching presentations, you have the Slack conversation going on at the side as well, and people networking on LinkedIn and things like that, and you're having to pay attention to so many things that it was absolutely exhausting.

14:18 DV: So one question that's been on my mind as everybody's been teleworking is the element of privilege in a lot of this. A lot of people, if they work in a workplace where they are allowed to telework, but they don't necessarily live in a place where the internet or the video feed is reliable, or they don't live in a space where they can sit somewhere with a background that's "professional" and they have to rely on a digital background, things like that. To what extent has telework exposed some of these and aggravated a lot of these privilege issues?

15:02 CS: Definitely our privilege issues, I live out in a rural area, and as luck would have it, at about the time that everybody had to work from home, we finally got fiber, but prior to that, our max download speed was 7 megs, so you could have one stream going barely but if two people needed something, it wasn't gonna happen. And if you have a multi-generational family, you have a lot of background noise that may be difficult to have a separate room to have those boundaries. It is definitely a big privilege issue, and one that I don't think there have been sufficient solutions for.

15:47 LC: Well, I think, if you remember in a previous podcast, I spoke to two educators and they were talking about that, that students aren't compelled to have their video on for that reason.

16:02 CS: I think that if telework is going to be something that companies promote permanently... So Microsoft recently announced that all of their employees would be able to work from home if they wanted to, all of these companies are gonna be saving a lot of money in terms of corporate real estate. I know that the initial instinct will be to pocket that money, but the right thing to do would be to invest that money in their workers to provide them with the types of work environments that will be most productive.

16:38 DV: I struggle with this because of all of the individual differences that go into this, each of us have just talked about. I work best in this scenario, except for certain types of work, and then I work best in this scenario, sometimes I like to work on top of the hill where there's no Wi-Fi and things like that. So an ideal scenario from a worker perspective is to give me the tools that I need to make that choice that will allow me to be maximally productive for the company, but what sort of incentives do you need to have at the company level other than just, well, it's best for the workers because some companies are gonna be okay with that, but some companies are gonna be like, no, whatever. As an example, just to throw it out there, Facebook has announced that you can work remotely. What is it? Till the end of 2021 or forever? But you're subject to pay cuts if you leave the Bay Area and don't come back. So is telework here to stay on some level?

17:35 CS: I definitely think telework is here to stay. There was a period of growth followed by a bit of a correction, but I think the pandemic, and I think the resulting... I think what they found is that productivity hasn't been hit as much as they expected it to be. So I think at a minimum, at least to try and attract the types of workers that you want, you have to allow them to live wherever they want, 'cause you don't want to just recruit from your particular region.

18:05 LC: I think we've just been creeping in that direction now for a number of years, and this just basically pushed us over the edge. Shoved us over the edge. It does make more sense. It's bad for the climate. It's more efficient for companies financially. I think with the right tools and the right support, it could be a very great thing, and I think it would allow people from many areas of the world to do things they wouldn't ordinarily be able to in the past. They wouldn't have to get up and move to Seattle.

18:39 DV: I think that humans are social creatures, and so I don't know if 100% or 90% telework is here to stay, but I could see some sort of hybrid model sticking around for a while. A lot of the workplace setup patterns that we've seen have already been driven by cost, that's why as I mentioned, and I worked in the design studio that was just crammed full of 20 or 30 people, some of whom sharing desks, that was a cost-based decision. So, telework can potentially save more on cost. So just for that reason alone, I think a big element of it is here to stay.



19:20 DV: Time once again for our regular segment called, Condensed Soup.

19:25 LC: Woohoo!

19:26 CS: Condensed Soup.

19:27 DV: This week on Condensed Soup, we're going to talk about our best and worst telework experience stories, and I'm sure we have a few. Who would like to start?

19:39 CS: I'll start 'cause I've already talked about mine. My best telework experience is on a nice warm fall day, taking my laptop out on top of a hill looking at the fall colors and watching the birds go by while writing emails. It's a very peaceful Zen workday.

19:58 DV: That's a great one. Lisa?

20:01 LC: I think the hardest part about telework is having children around. We love them dearly, we adore them, but you're at the whim of every drama, every complication that they're having also with distance learning because they're having a lot too, that's not been an easy transition. And we're being pulled into that too, at the same time going, "I have to get to this meeting, I have to get this done, I have to finish this report." I think that's caused a lot of gray hairs for parents.

20:35 CS: I think you need to go find a hill to sit on.

20:39 LC: That's why I have my cone of silence, I take it everywhere with me. So that would be the hardest part, that's the most challenging. It's not a specific story necessarily, but it's been the biggest challenge because you want to be there for your children, but you need to be there in your work hours for work, and you ultimately feel like you're doing both badly.

21:02 DV: Absolutely. I have a brother and sister-in-law who both are working professionally remotely and have two young children, I don't know how they do it. One of them is just starting kindergarten and is getting used to that cadence of, "I have homework now, I need to log in and have it on," things like that, and I don't know how they juggle it. I have no words for how hard that has to be truly. So one thing that I do appreciate is, if I'm talking about my telework experience, I talked in a previous episode about how all remote teleconferencing platforms are terrible. But one thing that I do appreciate, it has gotten easier to mute or end video or maybe I'm just getting more used to it. So a few weeks ago, we had a one-hour call with a client, and I'm walking through the data that I need to walk through, and our dog comes in to talk about how stressed she is, and I was able to very quickly and subtly mute or excuse me, throw it to a colleague and mute, and then suddenly hop back on, so...

22:19 CS: It was seamless.

22:22 DV: Maybe I just have a lot of practice at it now.

22:25 DV: Alright, that's it for now. Thanks very much for joining us. UX Soup is presented, as always, by Strategy Analytics. Check out our latest user-focused insights on mobile, automotive or smart home by visiting sa-ux.com. Please also remember to subscribe to UX Soup on your favorite podcast platform or by visiting our show page, ux-soup.com. You can also visit that show page to follow Chris, Lisa, or myself on LinkedIn or Twitter. Thanks again. Bye for now.

[music]



How Can We Help You?

Strategy Analytics provides strategic and tactical support to global clients through a range of customized solutions:

- Multi-Country [primary research](#) assignments using leading edge tools and techniques
- [User Experience](#) Design and Innovation engagements
- Real Time Mobile Consumer [On-Device Tracking](#) projects
- [B2B](#) Consulting Projects and Whitepapers

Please contact us at Custom@strategyanalytics.com with any questions and for further details and solutions on how we can work with you on creating a custom solution to address your specific needs.

Supporting Clients Across The Planning Lifecycle

STRATEGYANALYTICS

