Can I Do *that?*
Yes, You Can Become
A Web (UX/UI) Designer.

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CONTINUING AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

THE WEB TODAY

In the 27 or so years since its inception by Sir Tim Berners-Lee, the Web has evolved to be more than merely a linkable publishing hub or suite of online storefronts. Today, in what is considered its 3rd iteration (Web 3.0) with its use of artificial intelligence and semantics [in part via Content Management Systems (CMS) and search engines], it's now a smart Web — a kind of personal assistant to make life more efficient and better, one that predicts content a user wants and how they want to see it. Arguably, this new Web is what it is because it combines semantics, artificially intelligent algorithms, its virtual nature and, of course, being an ever-present experience thanks to mobile and wearable technology, as well as augmented and virtual reality.

THE IoT & THE INDUSTRIAL WEB

As these technologies continue to emerge, the Web takes its next evolutionary step into the Internet of Things (IoT). Smart devices, using technologies that allow both wireless and wired systems, use machine-to-machine communication (M2M) to accomplish tasks without human input. We already have the infrastructure with improving WiFi and automated Internet-connected systems via all those devices. In his brilliant TED talk, "Welcome to the Age of the Industrial Internet," economist Marco Annunziata discusses how this is happening now, describing how these systems and devices are "transforming the industrial sector, creating machines that can see, feel, sense and react — so they can be operated far more efficiently. Think: airplane parts that send an alert when they need to be serviced or wind turbines that communicate with one another to generate more electricity."

HOW CAN WEB (UX/UI) DESIGNERS FIT IN TO THIS?

Part of the beauty is we don't know everything that will materialize in the next adaptation of the Web. Founder Berners-Lee recently said: "If we end up building all the things I can imagine, we'll have failed;" we cannot know where the imagination will take us. Knowing would mean we have limited its potential. So then, how can we practically design user interfaces (UI) — like Web sites,
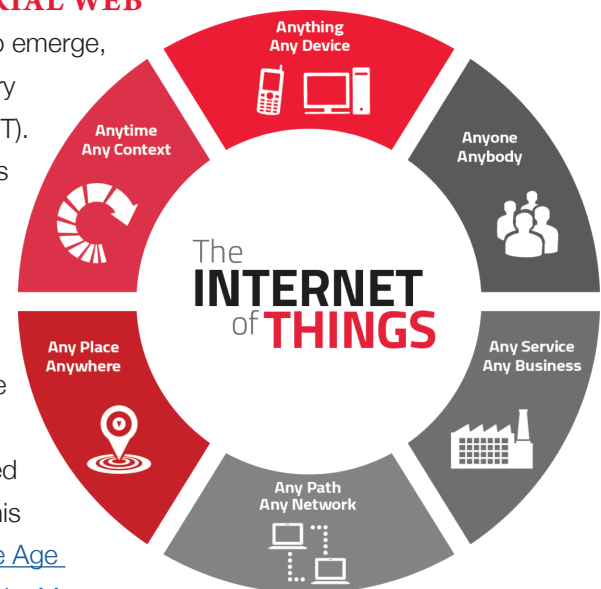
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HTML emails, eBooks, apps — if we don't know where the IoT is going?

WE KNOW THESE THINGS

• Like with the Industrial Revolution before the Information Age, lawmakers will continue to grapple about managing and benefitting from it. Berners-Lee fears governments and corporations will aim to control its access for their own gain.

• We'll have to decide if access to it is a human right. The W3C and Nicholas Negroponte, founder of the One Laptop Per Child project, argues all people should have equal access for education, information and communication.

• Net neutrality is heatedly debated; landmark decisions are being set now. Lawyer Marvin Ammori defends the need to keep the Internet "as one unified, neutral and free network."

• The next stage of monetizing content will greatly impact users. Contextual advertising (ads selected and served via automation based on content) and behavioral targeting (capturing data based on user choices) are becoming potently sophisticated. Sponsored content is seamlessly blended with news. In an effort to find the right mix, news sources, aggregators and blogs are charging subscription fees to allow users to view deeper content and using affiliate partnering (like with Amazon.com) for a piece of a sale delivered in site content.

SO, BACK TO YOU AND THE CHALLENGE

The user experience (UX) will continue to push technology to reach more optimal goals. Designers will need to tie all these pieces together to best plan and execute effective digital environments for a global, diversified and complex market. Given how expansive, complicated and all-encompassing this must seem to you, can you learn enough at a reasonable cost and amount of time to truly become a competitive Web (UX/UI) Designer? The answer is simply a resounding **YES!** There's a very sound equation to make that a reality for you.

Define the Difference:

THE INTERNET is a system of interconnected networks that use the TCP/IP protocol to link billions of devices worldwide. It developed out from independent efforts in the late 1950's through early 1970's by DARPA in the U.S., the NPL in the U.K. and the French network CYCLADES.

THE WEB uses or operates over the Internet; it is an information space where documents and other online resources are identified by URIs/URLs connected by hypertext links. Sir Tim Berners-Lee is sited as the founder of the Web. He remains president of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3), which is a global standards organization for Web technology.

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The field for front-end work (Web design, content development and management, digital marketing, etc.) is flooded with those I affectionately call the "Swiss Cheese Hole People." These are people who have worked hard to self-teach from desperate need in order to know something that must be done urgently. Maybe that's you! Many have learned their potpourri of skills this way. So, inevitably, they end up with lots of holes in their skills and knowledge and not a great sense of a larger conceptual framework. That's very stressful and hard on a career. In fact, there's a low bar for hiring because there's really not a clear standard about what most people need to know. Yet, employment of Web designers is projected to grow 20% through 2022, faster than average for all occupations. Every company, product, even individuals need an effective Web presence. Most companies subcontract or hire in-house at least one designer to ensure that this presence is strong and their message is getting out there effectively.

I've taught these subjects for more than a decade, and I have hundreds of graduates whose careers shoot off like a rocket once they comprehensively learn what I call "The Big Ideas." It's made them incredibly confident and competitive because they know more than many already working in their field.

THE BIG IDEAS

1. You have to learn the open-source Web technologies the W3C has established as the standard for all clients (browsers we use for all those many devices). Those technologies are: HTML (the 4.01 standard and the 5 standard on top of that); CSS (the 2.1 standard and the 3 standard on top of that); JavaScript (1.8.5, plus jQuery, a JavaScript library). These are not programming languages, they are scripting languages. You can learn these (I did!) **When you do, you find they are the keys to the kingdom.**

A great idea for a front-end designer is to also learn a little server-side technology (Apache, PHP, MySQL). No need to be a savant, but learning enough to be able to customize a CMS theme like that of WordPress, Joomla or Drupal can give you a significant edge in a burgeoning specialty!

**2. There are several apps front-end designers must learn.**
The important things to know confidently: editing in a bitmap environment (like PhotoShop); creating art in a vector environment (like Illustrator); using a vector environment for wireframing, production and prototyping; hard coding the above client-side technologies (using an authoring tool like the editor Dreamweaver to do so).

3. You must know how to manage a project. Over many years, I've heard creatives say they are "burned-out." I don't buy it. Creativity is limitless. One can poorly manage themselves, their client, teams, budgets and timelines. Do that enough, you won't make money, you'll work long, frustrating hours, you'll have lousy results. Learn the industry project management process then, from concept through launch and maintenance, your projects will be on time, within budget, will be effective and consistently improving, and you'll never burn out.

4. You must learn and remain on top of state-of-the-art strategies. To develop UI for this broad, complex, diverse, global market of countless devices and wearables, unknown apps and future technologies, you have to know well how to design and code **responsively** to ensure your digital products will render in varied device screen sizes. And you must plan intensively how to develop this
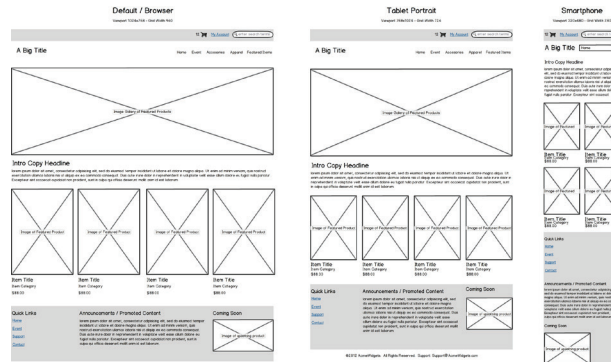
responsive UI with an effective UX, which means you must design for a target audience. With whom are you having this compelling "conversation" your design and content represents? How will you capture, engage, relate and convert them? Who is the competition? Who else is out there who can help you determine this? Stakeholders? Influencers?

YOU CAN LEARN THIS
You can do this then develop a portfolio and hit the ground running. You can do this relatively quickly and effectively for an immense return. When I meet new students, no matter their age, prior career or where otherwise their lives have taken them, as long as they have a fervent desire to learn and grow, they soon discover the designer they are becoming. I always believe in them. Once they believe in themselves, the rest is the joy of learning, doing and creating.

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Mary Zimnik, Studio-MZ

For more than two decades, Mary Zimnik has worked in creative communications as an educator, designer, writer and photographer; in public relations, brand development and marketing; and on-location for major feature film, documentary and commercial projects.

At Southern Methodist University CAPE for 3 years and Emory University Continuing Education for 10 years, Mary teaches in the Graphic Design and Web certificates programs. With Studio-MZ for more than 16 years, Mary serves clients in higher education, as well as the corporate and commercial sectors, for a variety of media and marketing-communications needs.

Prior to that, she managed creative services for Agnes Scott College, just outside Atlanta, and was also a location agent representing universities for filming projects, including feature films such as *Scream 2* and *Stroke of Genius*, as well as documentary, television and corporate work. In addition to creating and managing hundreds of print and digital projects, she's judged national design contests and film festivals, won national contests, taught design in national conferences and taught English as a Second Language to students from all over the world.