Good UX is Invisible: What it’s Like to Design a World-Class User Experience

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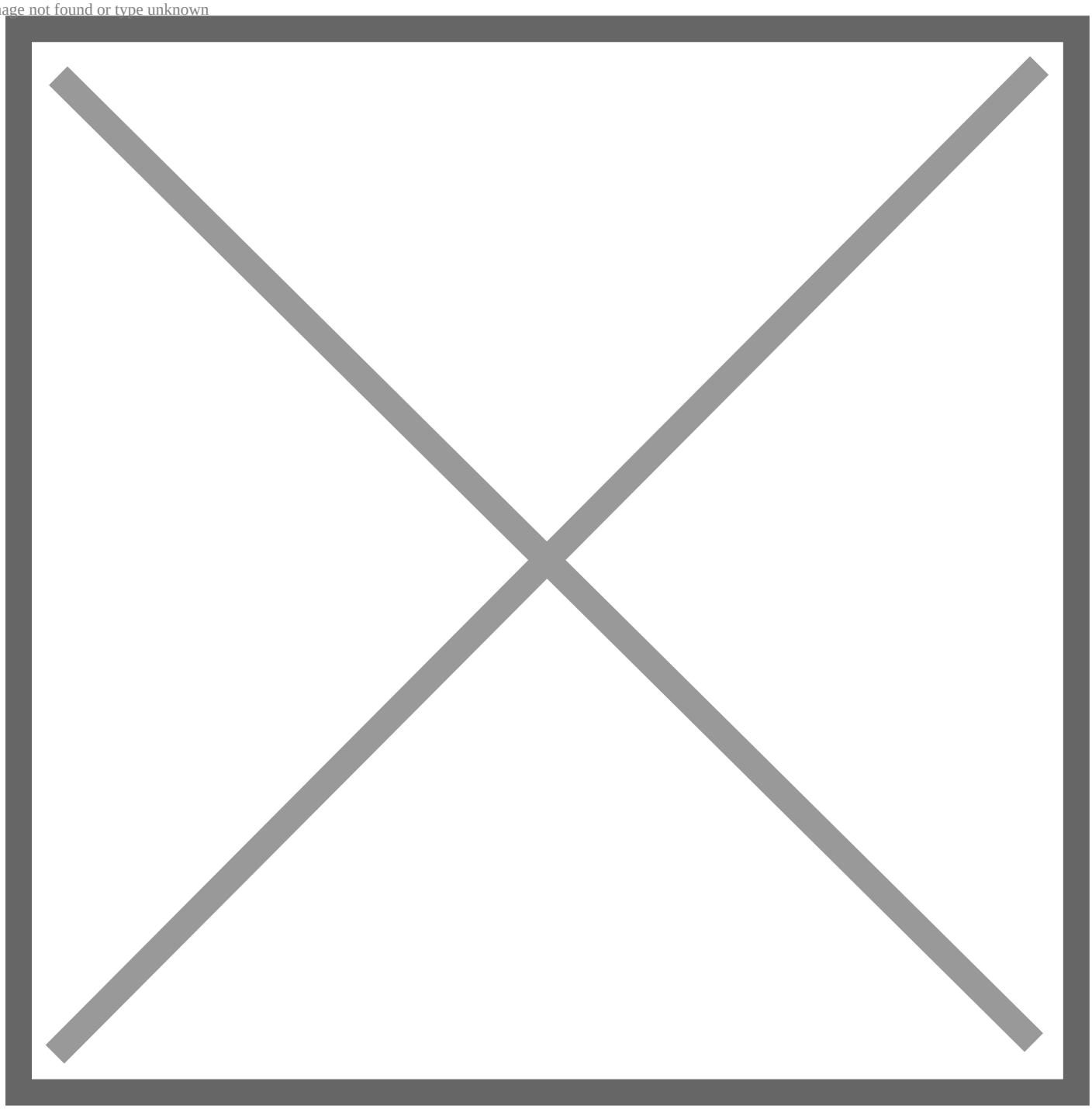


For UX/UI Designers Katie Naiser and Andrew Han, trust is absolutely necessary — trust in their teams, their missions and intuition. In turn, the two designers are among the many people at Toyota Connected North America (TCNA) who help to instill that very same confidence within millions of customers they serve.

User experience and user interface (UX/UI) used to simply mean interior ergonomics. As cars have become more connected, the term has become synonymous with how drivers and passengers interact with in-cabin displays — especially the center-mounted head unit.

Data is a powerful tool. Data is what empowered TCNA and Toyota Motor North America (TMNA) to go out on a limb and propose that the latest Toyota Audio Multimedia and Lexus Interface should be designed for a global audience with region-specific variations, such as what is implemented in North America.

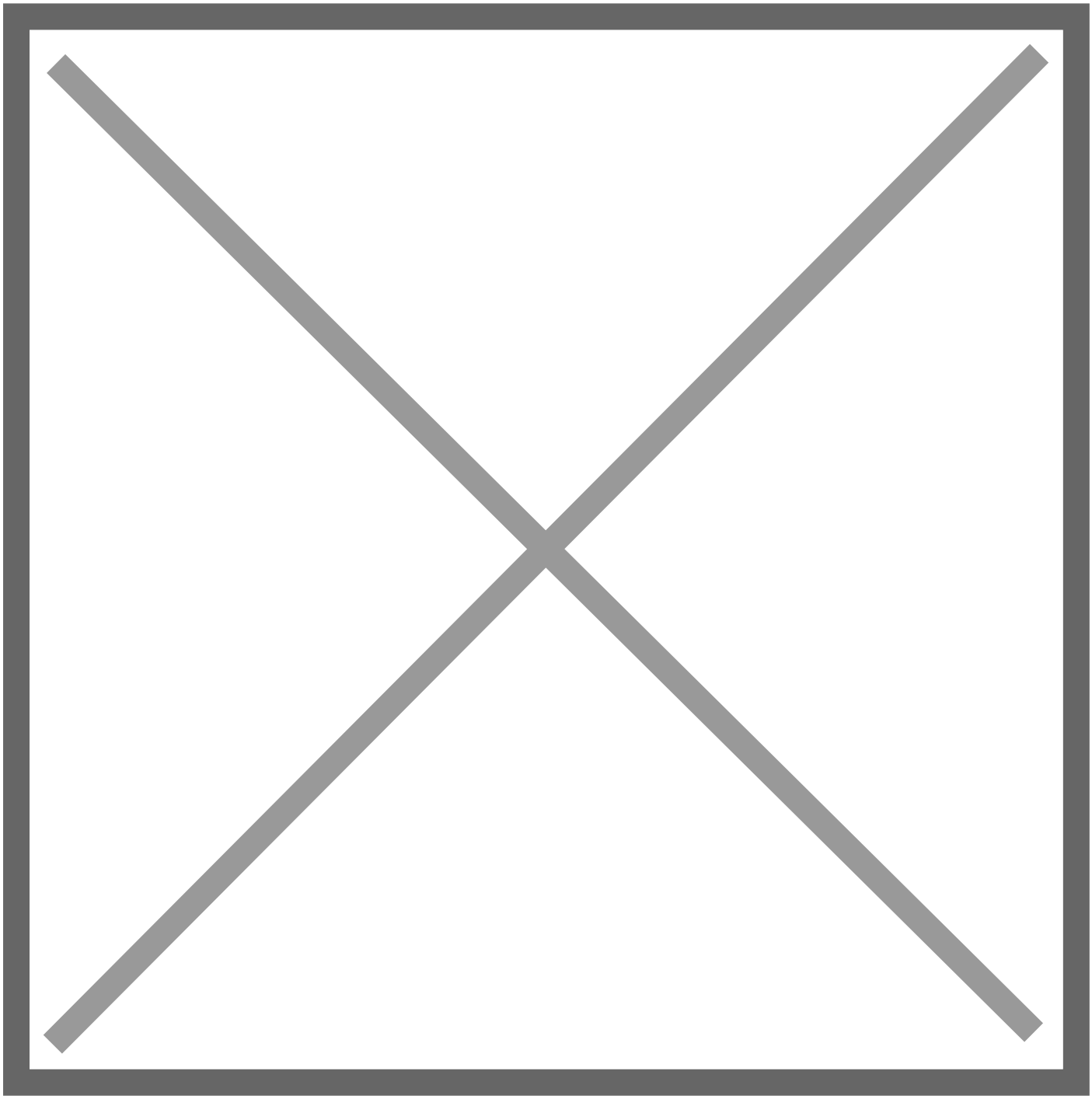
“Our leaders spent a lot of time in Japan,” Naiser said. “We got together because we all had the same goal in mind — to build the best systems for our drivers.”

Driving speeds and display languages can vary from region to region.

This is where Naiser’s expertise comes into play improving the Cloud Navigation experience. By studying third-party surveys, customer clinics, supplier feedback and forums, she’s able to better understand the needs and expectations of Toyota and Lexus customers.

Case in point: While testing the Cloud Navigation system in the Lexus NX, Naiser and her team noticed some of the more nuanced colors could wash out. So, they changed it.

“We were able to push that out without even having to do an over-the-air update,” she said. “That was really cool. That allowed us to create a better mapping experience that was more accessible.”



Simple and Seamless —User experience and user interface (UX/UI) has become synonymous with how drivers and passengers interact with in-cabin displays — especially the center-mounted head unit.

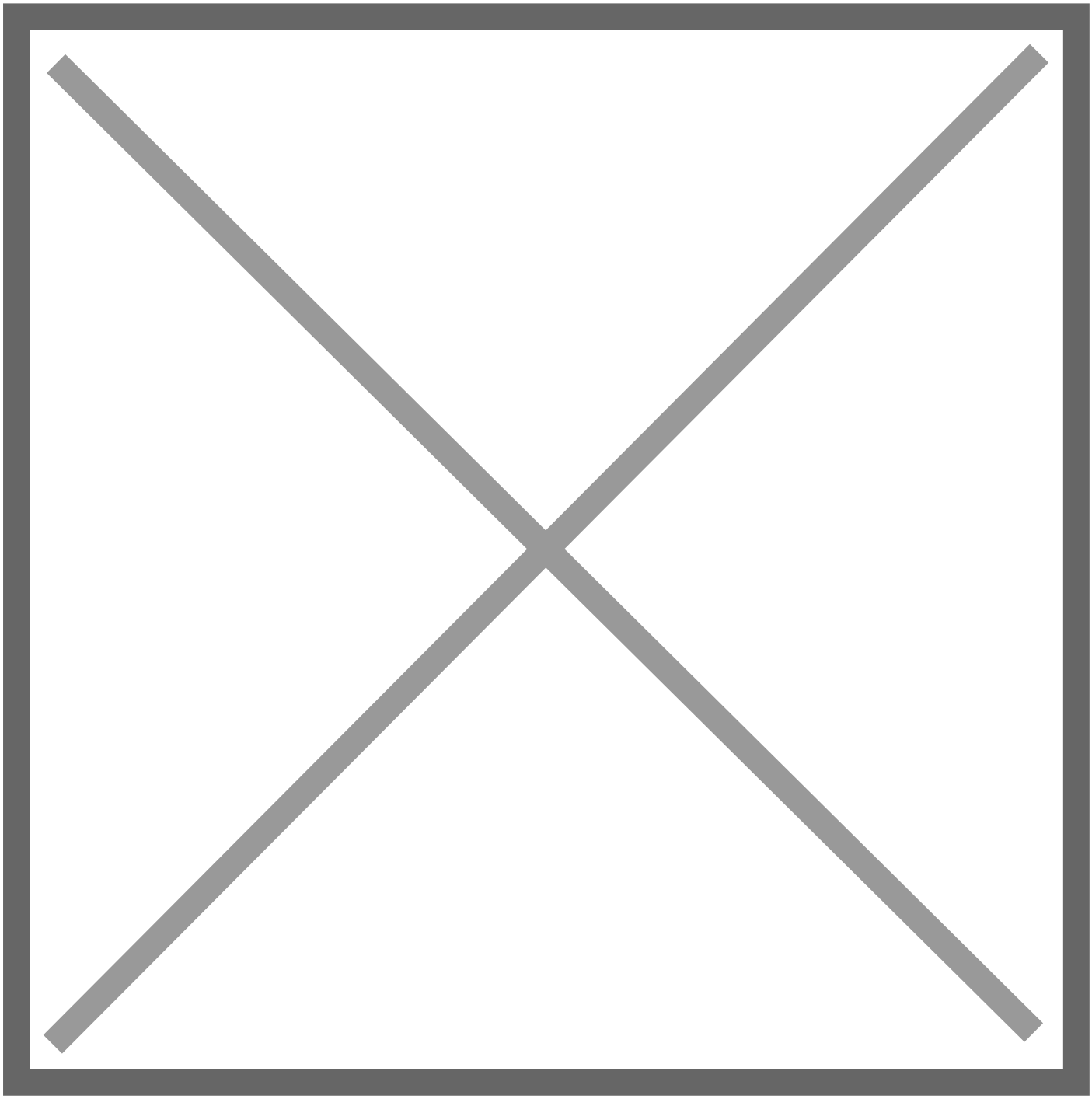
Trust in Intuition

Then, there’s the “heart” side to data.

“You can base decisions strictly on in-the-moment data and research, but it’s important to broaden your perspective by understanding things like the product landscape, previous learnings and behavioral patterns,” said Han, a senior UX/UI designer working on next-generation technologies. “This adjacent information helps us build more empathy and design intuition. From there, it’s easier to piece a story together that supports the customer and business initiatives.”

Echoing those sentiments, Naiser said that ultimately customers just want features to work.

“Good design comes from our usability testing, and from recruiting a wide variety of users,” she said. “It’s easy to get bogged down with functional requirements, legal requirements, technical specs and other limitations. I always think back to what my manager taught me: ‘What is the most human decision to make here?’ ”



Best Experience — Naiser and Han strive to make a cohesive, intuitive and valuable digital cockpit experience that millions of Toyota and Lexus drivers and passengers can enjoy.

Trust in People

For all the research, education, observations, and intuition that go into designing a modern infotainment system, none of it would be possible without team members trusting one another. TCNA and TMNA share approximately 40 designers who are dedicated to working on both current and future generations of Toyota and

Lexus infotainment interfaces. That's a small fraction of the hundreds of TCNA engineers, and TMNA Connected Technologies engineers involved, including those around the globe who collaborate daily with TCNA.

"When you're working with a team, you have to understand people's communication styles, so keeping mental notes of those communication styles is really important," Naiser said.

Han takes a similar approach when working with designers and engineers from all different backgrounds.

"I'm always practicing communicating things in a way that anyone can understand," Han said, when discussing talking to people who may not speak the language of a UX designer.

Conversely, when speaking with technical engineers, Han said, "I'm not afraid to say, 'Hey, I don't know.' I like asking every question possible. That helps me take an open-minded approach and learn how to communicate back to others as simply as possible to it makes sense."

Naiser and Han don't want to simply make another infotainment system; they want to make a cohesive, intuitive, and valuable digital cockpit experience that millions of Toyota and Lexus drivers and passengers can enjoy.

"It's always the dream to work on something that's going to make an impact on a large number of people using it," Han said. "When it comes to working on something, do you want to work on something that you love? And that's interesting to you? I think that all plays a role into that for me."

Naiser added: "Good UX is invisible. Drivers shouldn't have to think about it. It's something that they can just do. They get in and drive, and it's seamless. That, to me, is a good measure of success."

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