



BIO: Eric Reiss has held a wide range of eclectic jobs: piano player, senior copywriter, player-piano repairman, adventure-game creator, and stage director. His experiences have served him admirably as an information architect, although he can't explain exactly how.

In more mundane lives, Eric has been a two-term president of the Information Architecture Institute and Professor of Usability and Design at IE Business School in Madrid, Spain.

Today, Eric is CEO of the FatDUX Group in Copenhagen, Denmark, a leading UX company with offices and associates in over a dozen cities worldwide. He also has several books to his credit.

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Eric Reiss has a keen sense of communicating with executives about how design can impact ROI – Return On Investment. It's no surprise that "Putting People First," significantly improves the outcome. In this interview, I spoke with Eric about Service Design, providing tangible value through user experience, designing useful connections, promoting a brand's personality, and how to build a business case.

- Timecode: 11:11 – [Jan Carlzon](#)'s motto is "Tear down the Pyramids" from his biography [Moments of Truth](#). He said "**We have 50,000 moments of truth each day.**"
- Timecode: 11:11 – World Theatre of Denmark. When I was at university the first show I directed on my own was [Miss Julie by August Strindberg](#)

TRANSCRIPT:

Eric: I remember back in the late 1980's I was going around interviewing people for a magazine that was being produced by a company called Time Manager International in Denmark and they did service design; this was before we called it service design. We had done service design programs for the European Union and for SAS. We turned them into "airline of the year" and then, the next year, we did it for British Airways. I think it's very funny when, a couple years ago, the IA (Information Architecture) community sort of woke up to the fact that there was something called service design. Are you guys kidding? This has been around for a long time. When we had the summit in 2008 in Miami, I did a talk about service design. I said "Guys, people have been talking about this for decades. You've got to understand that there is a body of experience and you can't just throw that out and think that because you coined a term that we didn't happen to use, that it didn't exist." So going around doing these interviews, man I lugged microphones and tape recorders and you've got this little setup that is like, the size of nothing.

Lara: I know and the audio quality is really nice.

Eric: This is very cool. And for you people at home that can't see it she will post a photo on Flickr.

Lara: How did you work with SAS to bring them so much success?

Eric: I was very much on the periphery of this, but SAS got a new chairman by the name of [Jan Carlzon](#), a Swede. His motto is "Tear down the Pyramids." And when he wrote his biography he called it [Moments of Truth](#). He said "**We have 50,000 moments of truth each day.**" That was the number of passengers SAS was flying at the time, SAS, Scandinavian Airline Systems, which was a kind of strange semi-government owned consortium with Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish personnel. That was both something

that made it very good and also something that ultimately was its downfall because every crew had to include all three nationalities. So, you were having pilots deadheading down Copenhagen from Oslo so that they could fly a plane someplace else because they had to have a Norwegian on board. It was kind of a screwball system but it did work and it was a good airline, had always been good, and had always been progressive. They were the first ones to fly over the pole from Copenhagen to Tokyo. But service was really a differentiating factor and Jan Carlzon was very interested in becoming the businessmen's airline. He saw that that was where the profits were to be made and he almost single-handedly invented the idea of business-class, not first class which was all sort of caviar and champagne and very, very poncey, but it was something that was good for people who actually had to arrive at the destination sober and do a job and weren't necessarily interested in having eaten foie gras for eight hours. So we went in and we designed, well I say we, I was very much on the periphery of this, and went in and designed a service design program called "Putting People First" and the idea was to put together mixed crews where the pilots also met the baggage handlers and met the cabin personnel and also the frontline personnel and everybody worked together to understand that the pilots weren't the only ones who were heroes in this and that there were a lot of unsung heroes that made all of this work. Jan Carlzon wanted to fly on time. He saw this is being very important and reasonably enough he said, "Well, we have flight schedules. People are booking extra flights and they're scheduling meetings and so on and they expect us take off on time and to land on time." So we put together a program to train people to think in terms of the customer and it wasn't just a question of throwing free drinks at them in the air in order to elicit better... or to bribe the passengers, but in fact to do what you had promised to do - get their baggage there at the same time they arrived and to make sure they arrived on time. For many years, if a pilot arrived late at a destination, he could be sure that Jan Carlzon was on the telephone in the pilot's room saying, "So, you arrived late. Why?" **And then that "Why?" became a process study.** What can we do differently? I mean sometimes machines breakdown and there are completely legitimate reasons why

planes are delayed but sometimes it's just because people aren't taking their jobs very seriously. And the same thing was true when we worked with British Airways. Margaret Thatcher when she became Prime Minister, immediately privatized a lot of industries and one of them being the airline industry. British Airways was this very uncomfortable alliance between British European Airlines (BEA) and (BOAC) British Overseas Airline Corporation. BEA and BOAC competed for years and really didn't like each other very much and so Maggie Thatcher brought in Lord King who was one of her pals. Lord King was smart enough to go to a company called Norton Simon and Shanghai a fellow by the name of Collin Marshall, who has the honor of being the man who approved the Avis slogan "We try harder." So Collin understood service and he became then CEO of British Airways and understood again that we've got to get people to work together... we've got to get all of our personnel to understand that they're one airline and forget the animosities of the 70s and to try and move forward and see if we can't become a major carrier. In 1988 we had lunch and he told me very frankly "You know, Europe is going to end up having four or five major airlines and they're all going to be consortiums. It's not going to be Lufthansa it's not going to be British Airways, but it's going to be alliances and that is exactly what's happening. We have Flying Blue which is KLM and Air France, we have Star Alliance which is primarily Lufthansa and then smaller airlines such as SAS and then we have One World which is British Airways and Air Berlin and so on. It's very interesting to see how his predictions 25 years ago have turned out to be very, very true. I'm actually calling him Collin, he is Sir Collin Marshall and then he became Lord Marshall of Knightsbridge. Yes, he is a very important person. He retired as chairman, I think, in 2004 but he did a very good job and British Airways I think today is still one of the best airlines in the world. I get very, very huffy about service design and I say really, really snarky things about British Airways not because I don't like them but because I hold them to a higher standard, because I know what they're capable of doing. Collin was also very good about going on walkabout and suddenly he would show up and he would be moving baggage too. He was there. He was part of the system. To move this to web design and what we're doing

now, we have never fully succeeded in talking straight talk to the business community we spend so much time fighting about our own nomenclature or getting involved in turf wars. We're very little community and we keep splitting off into smaller and smaller communities of practice and in the meantime the business community is still saying "Hey, we need to website," and we as consultants say "Why?" And we say, "Well, because everyone else has a website." If you look at traditional change management, if you see this as kind of a target with a bull's-eye in the middle and then concentric rings moving out, the why is in the middle and then you can move to the middle managers and they are responsible for the what. On the periphery you've got the frontline personnel and they are responsible for the how and generally they know how the how works. The middle managers, the people in their 30s early 40s moving up but still middle-management they understand the what, but in our industry they also understand the why and the people who are my age, I'm 58 right now, are basically clueless in terms of the why.

We grew up in a very different kind of world. Happily I have a grey beard and I don't necessarily look 58 but I don't look like I got out of school yesterday either. So I can sit down with CEOs or CFOs or COOs and there's a kinship because I'm their generation. They have a tendency to listen to what I have to say, and has served me very, very well but when the C-levels really start to understand the WHY then we are going to see movement in our industry and unfortunately, I think we're going to have to wait until my generation dies before things really started to move. I think people who were middle managers today... to defer this is the 14th IA Summit, I know it's called IA13 but we started in 2000 so this makes the 14th Summit and I have been to every one of them. It's very interesting to see that we're still discussing many of the same problems that we were doing in April of 2000 and I think that that's good because it indicates that we're interested and that were trying to develop and we're trying to evolve the industry and it's bad because a lot of the energy that's being expended on trying to figure out how to define information architecture whatever we go and talk about is

energy that would probably be better spent trying to talk to people who were in the late 50s and early 60s, **why what we do provides tangible value to their companies.** I don't think that we've been very good at explaining what we do. I don't think that we've been very good at understanding how they think. Just because they don't understand our industry we say "Well, they are idiots and they're old and whatever and that's kind of too bad because they are not idiots. They didn't get to their jobs because they are stupid; they got there because they were actually very, very good at what they did. They just don't happen to understand our industry. So we have an obligation to help them. I think that though, the people who are middle managers today, the people who were in their 20s and 30s when the first summit came about and who are in their 40s now over the next 10 years are going to be senior management and I'm hoping that things are going to be a little bit different. I saw a very scary statistic in one of the Danish newspapers. I live in Copenhagen, Denmark so you will have to pardon me if I trip over words or I say things that are not grammatically correct. I was born in United States so technically English is my first language, but for 36 years Danish has actually been my working language so I only sound American, I don't necessarily think American. One of the Danish newspapers said that something like 58% of European companies don't even have a website. That's kind of shocking after all these years you would think that somebody would've been able to explain to them why they can actually turn the electronic experience into something that can be quantified on the bottom line but nobody is doing that.

Lara: Do you think it's because, I think you already mentioned that we need to do a better job of educating them but also not belittling them and understanding who they are and how to talk to them. It sounds like just a different approach and a different type of conversation that they can understand.

Eric: You're absolutely right. I think that there are a lot of people in just conversations in the hall where I do hear that they belittle those silly CEOs that want kittens on the

front cover they think the homepage is important and the rest of the stuff that the industry likes to bitch about. That's unfortunate and at the same time when people try to be businessman they don't necessarily understand the term so they use something like ROI, return on investment, as a forward-looking metric but you can't use return on investment as a predictive tool. It is a backward looking metric and if you say, "We predict the ROI of this is going to be..." the CFO is going to throw you out of his office in a snap because that these people do not understand our business. You've got to understand what NPV, net present value, is or IRR, internal rate of return. There are a couple of times that we need to understand but by the same token there's no reason for us to talk baby talk to these people. If we have terms such as metadata or faceted taxonomy or ontology, it's our responsibility to educate people or at least explain things in terms that they can understand. Make them part of the team so they understand why we're doing what we're doing and what value we bring to the table.

Lara: We totally have that opportunity when we're doing the presentation. So when we are in the room with the team, we use that term, we explain or we show we designed this, this way because of this and you're kind of linking it to things that they can understand.

Eric: That's it in a nutshell. You want me to make people feel stupid. I know consultants who can get very snarky and when they are in a bad mood then they throw in a whole bunch of terms the nobody's ever heard of before and this is not a way to win friends. The truth is that your clients are the ones who are paying the bills and if they don't pay you then you can't have fun. It doesn't matter how boring you think the work is; the office parties, the travel, coming to the IA Summit, all these things have to be paid for by somebody and it's often the client. So don't give the client a hard time. I see this happen enough that it concerns me a little bit. It's not as bad as it used to be. There was a period where as long as you had a faded black T-shirt and a new sharpie then your waltz into a room and you can do things but I've seen that the consulting companies

have run into problems where... Accenture, what used to be Arthur Anderson, they would be sending 25 year olds out and they cost \$500 bucks an hour and there going to waltz in there with absolutely no empirical experience whatsoever and it may have been that they went to Harvard or Wharton or the Kellogg School of Business, but I'm sorry experience does count for something. The 25 year olds lecturing 60 year olds on how to run their business doesn't really fly and when they are charging \$500 an hour there's going to be a backlash. In our industry we did the same thing and for a while it was very cool to come in your faded black T-shirt and your brand-new sharpie – I think that's changing and part of that is that the people who were 25 years old at the very first Summit are hitting 40 now and they've got little gray hair and they do have empirical experience and they realize that there is nothing wrong with being aggressive an being a young Turk, but you do learn from experience.

Lara: So do you think the answer is educating in the presentation or are there other things that we can do differently?

Eric: Well it's empathy. We talk in our industry about empathy. We talk about empathy in terms of the end-users of our products. Who's going to be using our smart TV, who is going to be using this telephone we are designing, who is going to be using the application that we are designing? But the empathy also has to work the other way; we have to have empathy for the stakeholders. That's a critical concept. It was one of those head-slapping moments. I have been in this business for long time. I've done this but I haven't really thought it through in terms of a generic process. I was, light bulb, lights up and I said "Yeah, alright!" Suddenly I can see what I'm doing right but I can also see what I'm doing wrong in places where I can improve what I do. I can't play on the grey beard forever.

Lara: It's almost like you have a persona for the developers, one for marketing, one for sales, one for C-level and all the people on the team that you have to collaborate. It does

back to your airline story. Everybody plays an important role and you can't get there with a couple parts of the whole. You have to go there together.

Eric: Well, it goes back further than that. I started out as a stage director and I came to Denmark as a theater director at the World Theatre of Denmark. When I was at university the first show I directed on my own was [Miss Julie by August Strindberg](#) and the show was a great success. It was really a good show and I used a videotape we made of it to get into grad school although I didn't go to grad school I went to Copenhagen instead but that's another story. The Chairman of the drama department called me in and he said "Look, Eric, you really have talent as a director and you did a very good job but you have to understand there's absolutely nobody on your crew that will ever work with you again because **you are far too demanding, you do not understand where they are coming from and the problems that they are fighting. That was a very important life lesson.** I went home and I was irritated because the show had gotten good reviews and we had done good things. I was feeling quite cocky and very proud of myself but it was true. I realized I didn't speak the language of the lighting director, I didn't speak the language of the sound director, I didn't understand the problems of the stage crew that were dealing with [stenography](#) that I had actually designed. It wasn't that I didn't know how to swing a hammer but I didn't empathize with where they were coming from and their own deadlines and problems in terms of setting up the show. For example, if I rehearsed from 7 o'clock in the evening until 11 when are they going to set their lights, when are they going to paint the set? I'm asking them either to cut class during the day to do this or I'm asking them to pull all-nighters because I am taking up the stage exactly at the same time where they could be doing their work. The result was I took stenography classes, I took lighting design classes

and I worked very, very hard. The next show I did, we all loved each other. It was a terrible show, a disaster but everybody got along very well it was a good learning experience. It served me very well because when people say, "It can't be done," well, it can. Have you considered this? You don't want to say, "NO, it can be done and this is how you do it but instead say let you know I've actually tried something you do it, but instead, say, "Look, I've actually tried some of this.

So I was part of the math club when I was in high school this is like in 1968. We had this horrible big mainframe computer. It couldn't really do a lot of things. You had to feed your programming in on a pink strip of [telex](#) paper I think we got it to play [blackjack](#). Our biggest hurdle was getting the machine to shuffle cards. It was very difficult to do randomization. The things we do today by tweaking clock frequencies and whatever to get sort of pseudo randomness out of things. We had no clue how to do this on this [Univac](#) but I knew enough programming when the microcomputer started to come I'm sorry the late 80s when [Macromedia Director](#) came out and suddenly I was working at an advertising agency I was asked to help write these things and put them together and structure them. Nobody called it information architecture. I said "Well this is really cool because I understand computers.

I programmed and wrote the first Danish language adventure game and that's kind of cool. This is for the ZX Spectrum, which was an English machine. But see Danish has three extra letters like that "O" with a slash through it and the ae combined together. The thing looks like the a in an angstrom unit. Where are those on the spectrum keyboard? If you're going to write a text adventure game, how to people type? I figured out how to use keyboard interrupts and I could write something that didn't require any Q's, X's and one other letter and so I

moved these things over to the other letters and used keyboard interrupts. It was kind of cool that it could be done. So I understood how computers thought because I've been working with them for actually a long time at this point. Computers are pretty dumb. They don't do a whole lot. They can add, subtract, multiply, divide and remember things. That's about it and if you've understood that and that there are very severe limitations then it's pretty easy to figure out, "Okay, this is how I need to think in terms of creating a programming concept for what we're doing. Macromedia suddenly is combining the computer and it was a pretty stiff program at that time. It looked like Basic and Basic looked like [Fortran](#) and Fortran is what I learned back in 1968.

Then there was communication and I worked in the theater and that was hard-core user experience. We are trying to get your audience to understand our message. That was the job of the director. That is what I did for a living. All of these things are starting to come together understanding of computers and communication and user experience.

So learning what I learned at university in getting people to work together the fact that I had learned about the disciplines that were suddenly relevant in terms of producing interactive media have served me very well. I'm not a programmer. I haven't programmed anything since the mid-80s and there was a time when I got on a terrible fight on some list serve and it said "Well Eric, I would never dream of hiring an information architect that couldn't program!" So I said "Good, would you hire me?" "Oh well, yes." "Why, I can't program. I don't do HTML. I can read it but I don't program and there are others who are much better at it. but the point is I know what it can do and what it can't do. That's the key. I have programed, I've programed in some weird languages is like Fourth

which kind of looks like the hyper stack model. I did some [Pascal](#), and Fortran and Basic and Visual Basic and it gave me enough of a balance that I understand what's going on but I'm not a programmer but I can talk to programmers or developers. I have done enough art direction even though I don't draw very well that I can speak reasonably with art directors and we can have a good discussion about visual design and so on. I didn't go to library school but man; I've been sorting things all my life. I started with my baseball card collection back in the late 50s trying to figure out how many different ways can I organize it? I mean usually you put everything just in groups of teams. You went and for a nickel (5 cents) we got five cards and a piece of chewing gum from the [Topps Company](#) and so these were the St. Louis Cardinals and these were the San Diego Padres or the Houston 45's, I guess they were called at that time, and the Milwaukee Braves... I'm really old, and the Orioles have always been in Baltimore.

My friends would arrange things in teams and then I would say “All right, I will put all of the pictures in one pile and I'll put all the shortstops in another pile and I'll put the centerfielders here. Ooo! That's [Curt Flood](#) from the Cardinals then I got this screwy idea that well maybe they were all wearing caps. How did they wear their caps, are they tilted to one side or the other? There were all kinds of goofy ways to organize a baseball card collection. I had great fun with this and all of my friends thought I was crazy. I've done this all of my life, looked at ways, alternative ways of sorting things and for me and I'm not trying to define it but a working definition of information architecture for myself is simply that **we create useful connections; connections that provide value** and we do this often by putting things into useful categories. Calling them something that people will recognize and then putting the stuff someplace where people are likely to find it. I don't think it needs to be more complicated than that.

Lara: When you are trying to create a website to really sit down and understand why you're creating it and what is the value that you want to give the user and so then adding the content instead of just throwing a whole bunch of stuff in there and then having to go sort of clean it up. I always think about when my mom said "Clean your room," and I just shoved everything under the bed and so I feel like some of the sites that I worked on are kind of like that and you've got to pull it back out and you put the stuff in [Goodwill](#) or you throw it away in the trashcan and then you just keep the good stuff.

Eric: That's absolutely right I think there are our industry has an interesting... well there are two dilemmas right now as I see it. I was jabbering about service design back 2007, 2008 I also tried to explain the difference between a concept as viewed from a programmer's point of view and from an information architect's point of view or an interaction designer's and from a visual designer's is point of view and these are three very different things and I realize that when I facilitated the meeting at one point everybody went away from and everybody was happy and on my way home, it dawned on me that everybody that meeting went away with a **completely different idea as to what concept meant**. To the interaction designers, concept is a question of function it's what it can do, but to a traditional art director from an advertising agency, concept is a question of

CONCEPT

Interaction design – concept is function

Agency – concept is look and feel

look and feel. The things that make advertising successful don't work very well on the web or in interactive media we don't like to be preached to. There is a model called

[AIDA](#) (Awareness Interest Desire Action) and if you've got 1.7 seconds to catch peoples attention while they are leafing through a magazine you've got this headline that's going to play metaphorically off of some kind of an image and

hopefully people will stop up and say “Well, that's kind of cool,” who wrote this and then if you're lucky they will actually start reading your body copy. So you have this winter season and you have the snow draped pine trees and it's all idyllic and you glue on a headline that says “Scene of the Crime” people are going to stop and say “What was that?” **The headline is a tease, but on the web link is a promise;** if you click here this is what you're going to get. So the headline or the link for the same snowy picture of the idyllic pine trees drenched in snow, the same headline would be “Winter Landscape,” so the links are very different I think that's why advertising agencies consistently over 20 years now have not understood what it is we do and why information architects and designers who work in our industry are so frustrated working for traditional off-line agencies.

So that's one of the problems. The other is that we have for many, many years been talking about findability and usability and a lot of other abilities. This is all well and good it's all important but it also means that ultimately all websites should look alike. We're talking about **retroductive inference** – we learned something one place we expect to use someplace else. You land at an airport you've never visited before the chances are pretty good you will get your luggage you will figure out how where baggage claim is because it's called “Baggage Claim” everywhere in the world; that's retroductive inference. We learn something in Baltimore or at BWI that we can use when we get to LHR in London.

We need to watch out because suddenly if all sites look alike... just imagine if you take all of the sign signage off of the stores in the mall? Ann Taylor looks like the Gap looks like Banana Republic. I think that **the differentiating factor is going to be personality** and our industry we need to think about personality.

When I started out doing what we call information architecture the idea well you sort of wanted to make the whole website accessible from any page within the site and the truth is what we do is make decisions on behalf of the users and I think that we do need to impart our own opinion in this. **We say, “This path is more important than that path.”** In that way we can instill a certain degree of personality because we are guiding the users. I don’t necessarily think that’s a bad thing. We have big data and we are enamored with big data right now and we have huge websites but it could be that maybe websites should go back to being 30, 40, 50 pages. It’s [Feng Shui](#). **If you eliminate the irrelevant what's left comes to light.** It’s easier to see if you, separating wheat from chaff or whatever cliché you want to choose. I have a client now who site had several thousand pages they got a new webmaster and she was smart enough to say, “Most of this is junk.” She cut it down to about 600 pages if you look at the statistics there are probably only about 50-80 pages on the site ever been viewed by a human. The only visits have been through search engine robots. So there's a lot to indicate that if she could cut the site down to 50 or 80 pages they would have a better return on investment because people would find what they are looking for. The user statistics and the user interviews are appalling for this and everybody knows it but it's a little difficult because it is not being communicated up. Now we are back to empathy moving up to the stakeholders.

Lara: Analytics are much better and easier for people to read and understand and it's easier to go into a corporation and use that data to make different decisions and say nobody's ever looked at this page, it is not useful, take it out.

Eric: That's right. There's a lot of stuff done because of somebody in legal thinks this is important and I think that this is one of the reasons why apps have become so popular because **I see apps as being deconstructed websites**, they are a sort of little corner that has some functionality that's useful. Right now we're sitting in Baltimore, Maryland well I haven't been to Baltimore, Maryland in 10 years but my telephone now tells me how cold, or how warm, or how rainy it is outside. That is useful information. Now I live in Copenhagen, Denmark in the truth is today I could care less whether it's raining in Copenhagen, Denmark; this is not useful information to me I don't need an application that's going to tell me what the weather is. If I go to weather.com or whatever it's called you I can type in the name my city and all of this and it works fine but the truth is I need an app that's going to tell me what the weather is like where I am. That's all I'm interested in. I could care less what's happening in Shanghai or someplace else. Somebody in Shanghai doesn't care what's happening in Baltimore so apps are really good and I think that perhaps the successive apps will get people to start to rethink websites that have a tendency to grow bigger and bigger in a horribly organic way. At the very first IA Summit there was a woman from Sonoma, California by the name of Alison Head who had been responsible for the redesign of the Microsoft Intranet and they had something like 39 million pages including... it had become the filing cabinet of the repository of strange semi historical documents from the history of Microsoft. So the badminton team that Bill Gates put together when they opened their offices in Albuquerque, this is still this is still on the Internet, and Allison Head came in she threw a lot of this stuff out, cut it down, and there were still millions of pages but she cleaned it up. This is now 14 years ago and we've got the same problems. We have a lot of sites that have grown organically and I'd like to see it thrown out. Apps may encourage people to deal with.

Lara: You talked about adding personality and you mentioned that you can do that through the path what other ways can you add personality to the site?

Eric: Well certainly through content we talk a lot of content strategy right now I'm delighted that content strategy is gaining so much momentum. It's not information architecture information. **Content strategy is very much about the boxes. Information architectures very much about the paths, the arrows that connect these.** I don't see these as competing industries and a lot of the people who are thought leaders within the content strategy community actually come from an information architecture background or it may not have been called that but they were certainly doing site maps and wireframes and whatever. **One of the things that content strategists are not talking about is the tone or voice,** some do. I don't mean to make violently blanket statements but I think tone of voice is something that we tend to overlook. If you were doing a website for medical school you want to express we know what we're doing, we're solid, we're sober we're very serious, we are very good, we also understand your needs as a patient.

That's a very different tone than my organization, which is called FatDUX, not ducks but DUX, design of user experience. We do you have quacking ducks on our business cards and the whole thing is kind of quirky and it's good for a couple reasons we get to tell a story people say why are you called FatDUX and we get to jabber away about that but it also means that if we adopted the same tone as a medical school people would say, well you know, these people are kind of boring. They're supposed to be cutting edge and innovative they should be

cool and they've got ducks painted like hot rods for goodness sakes. We expect a different vocabulary.

Lara: Well your tone on FatDUX is fun and intelligent.

Eric: Well thank you. Our [404 page](#) our "file not found" page is a classic. As a matter of fact it is the most visited page on the site. And when this first started to happen we were kind of shocked because how many dead links can we have? We are getting all these hits on our file not found page, the 404 error. It turned out that is the fellow, a Dane, who was head of user experience for Yahoo had blogged about it and said "These people understand how to write a 404 page," and so everybody is going to our 404 page to see the 404 page. Its computer skewed our statistics and now I mean even 6-7 years later it's still the most popular page on our site, which is really a very depressing thought when you think about it.

Lara: Well before we wrap up why don't you tell the listeners a little bit about your book Usable Usability.

Eric: Usable Usability came about years ago when a client came to us they had bought a software application that was Austrian and then they had brought to Denmark and worked on it and developed it and they had Polish developers that were adding new features and functionality. It was something that was designed to help architects work out the energy value of new dwellings and there's a lot of certification of the things, a lot of documentation that needs to be sent in to government agencies to make sure that new builds are not wasting energy. So that's what this program

did. It was very sophisticated; the problem was it was very unusable. I mean you could learn to use and when you learned to use it, it was incredibly powerful but it was kind of difficult. And so they came and said “Look, Eric can you put together a PowerPoint presentation for us that we can go out so we can evangelize within our organization, go down to Poland, talk to the developers get them to understand usability. They had not very much money for this particular project. I said, “I will do it because I think it’s fun and I have some ideas as to how it could be done but I want to retain the intellectual property rights. You can use it but I get to repurpose this as I see fit and they agreed to that. So I wrote this and one of the things that struck me was I had read someplace, and I know it's certainly on Wikipedia, is that there are two sides usability. One is ease-of-use but the second side of the coin is elegance and clarity. I thought about that for a while and I said “Isn’t that interesting because of ease-of-use is really talking about the physical aspects of a thing and elegance and clarity is talking about the psychological aspects of a thing.” As an information architect if I were going to cut these down into categories, how would I do it? So I ended up with 10 things. If we looking at ease-of-use, things have to be functional, you click on a button and it’s got to work, it should be responsive, ergonomic and so on and at the same token elegance and clarity, well, things have to be visible and we can talk to the developers about the fold. You can talk about under understandable that we have to build a shared frame of reference with people. You can't get people to buy a pig in a poke. They’ve got to understand what it is they're getting. So if we are using language that they don't understand or we have a product that’s very quirky, we talked about the microphone earlier, it's kind of cool thing a picture in this case is probably worth 1000 words, it

would help people a lot to understand what it is we were talking about in terms of your little microphone and recorder sitting on the table here. We don't have a shared reference with listeners to this program because they haven't seen that microphone and it would be very difficult to explain. Ease-of-use, elegance and clarity and I wrote this up and it actually worked quite well for them and I gave some talks internally for our clients about usability. At one point I was approached by John Wiley & Sons and they wanted a book on usability because Jacob Nielsen was working for Morgan Kaufman and Steve Krug was published for Pearson New Riders they wanted a usability book. I didn't want to write a usability book I want to write a user experience book. They didn't want that at all. So I ended up writing a user experience book but I the usability in the title so everybody is happy. I outlined the 10 things that I think are another way of cutting things up. [Rolf Molich](#), [Jakob Nielsen](#) have an excellent set of heuristics, they cut things up a little differently. I am not claiming that this is the be-all and end-all, you can slice and dice this anyway you want but this happens to work for me very well and it's worked very well for our clients and they understand it.

The cool thing about the book is at the end of each chapter is a list of 10 things that you can look for and some of it is really low hanging fruit. If you are looking for functionality and you're designing forms maybe you don't want to make State, Region, Providence a required field because there's no European that will ever be able to use your site. Just removing the asterisk or changing the business rules or allowing the answer "none" makes your form much more usable. **Forms are where the conversions take place.** If the forms don't work it doesn't matter how pretty the

homepage is. The homepage is not where you're supposed to be putting your money. At the end of each chapter 10 things that you can look at, so what I ask for at the end of the book, I say "If you are really trying to do quick and dirty work and you don't have a budget and nobody in your organization has the least idea what you do or why you're there take one thing from each chapter, look at whatever problem or website or device you're working on, you can be designing a chair, you could be designing trashcans. An overfilled trashcan doesn't work because you can't more trash in it. Okay, is this a design problem is too small? Or maybe it's a service design problem that it's not being emptied often enough. So that's how user experience and usability sort of get put together. One thing from every chapter and then sort them. Sort them in order of what is most mission-critical. What, it doesn't work, you can't do your job the things that are not really very important and then take that same list and rank it again in terms of this is really cheap and easy to do and this is really difficult and it's going to require a lot of development time. Anything that ends up near the top of both lists is what you do tomorrow. It's as simple as that. If you can change one thing and you've established a baseline and you've kept your statistics then you can actually go to the C-levels and say "Look, I removed a little asterisk and I changed one menu item here and look at how much more money we're making!" wouldn't it be an idea to spend a portion of that money to let us investigate the rest of our offering? **Then you start building a business case and business cases are what sell.** The fact that we're passionate about what we do doesn't really cut it.

Lara: Thank you so much for your time today

Eric: It's been a pleasure, thank you very much for having me.