

THE ROI OF USER RESEARCH

**Prove Value. Get Buy-In. Drive
Success.**

Carol Barnum, PhD

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Learning objectives

1

Get excited about proving the value of UX research. Master how to align your studies with stakeholder goals, showcase results persuasively, and promote the importance of ongoing research.

2

Make yourself invaluable by confidently managing the opportunities and threats of AI. Learn how to conduct effective small studies, even when working with as few as five users, and **deliver insights that matter.**

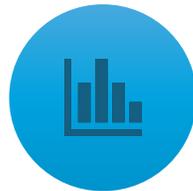
3

Gain confidence and credibility and harness the **democratization of UX research**, engage others in the process, and **position yourself as a trusted voice in your organization.**

Key themes



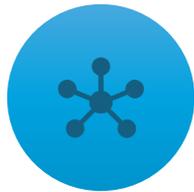
Measure goals
and KPIs



Share visible
progress



Deliver results
in small steps



Democratize
UX research



Manage AI
threats and
opportunities

“Every dollar that an organization invests in user experience results in a return of \$100. That’s an ROI of 9,900%! „

The Six Steps For Justifying Better UX
Report by Forrester

CHALLENGE

How to show the value of UX research



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- **You** know the value of UX research . . .
- But do **your stakeholders** know?

Teams that most need to **prove value** (newer, smaller teams) have the **least capability** to do so, while teams in secure positions (mature, large teams) have adequate infrastructure. Yet these are the teams **facing pressure to justify their existence.**

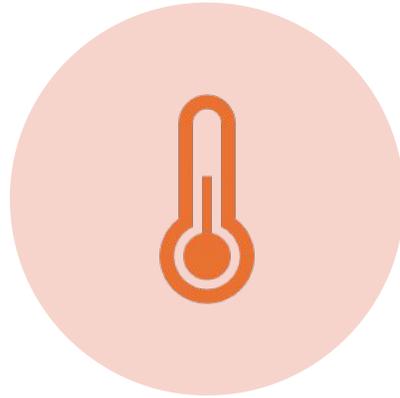
User Interviews 2025 Survey

CHALLENGE

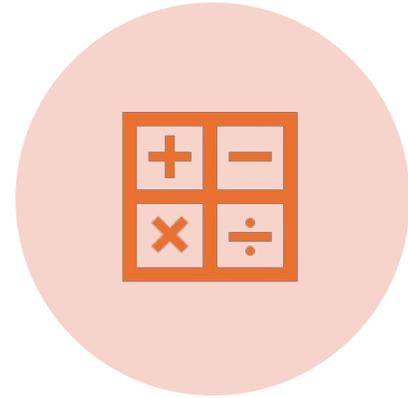
How to show the value of UX research



DEMONSTRATE
IT



MEASURE IT



CALCULATE IT

CHALLENGE

Ways to demonstrate the value



- ✓ **Conversions** (browse to buy)
- ✓ **Return customers** (brand loyalty)
- ✓ **New customers**
- ✓ **User satisfaction**
 - **Reviews!**
 - **Social media!**
 - **Surveys!**
- ✓ **Improved operations & efficiency**
- ✓ **Reduced customer support calls**
- ✓ **Reduced training costs**

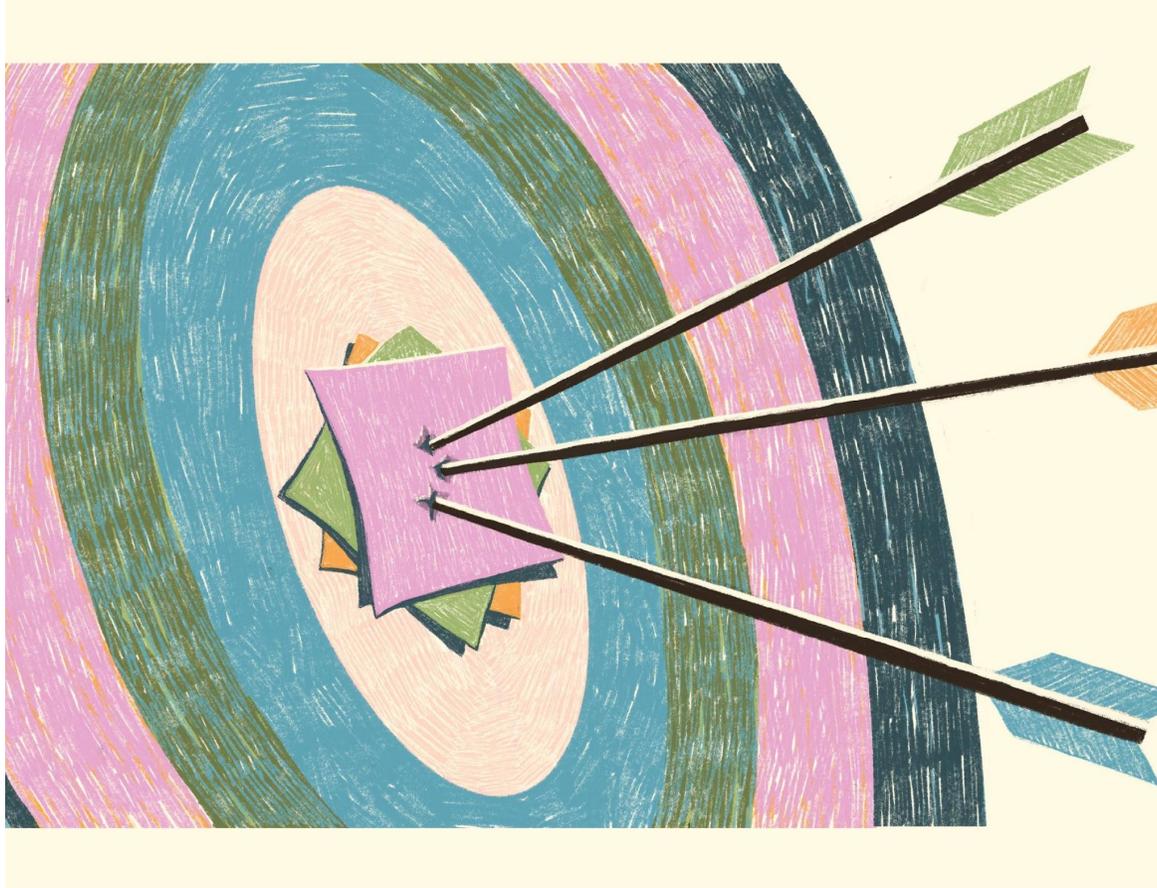
ROI calculation

<https://www.userinterviews.com/ux-roi-calculator>

$$\text{ROI} = \frac{\text{SAVINGS} - \text{COST}}{\text{COST}} \times 100$$

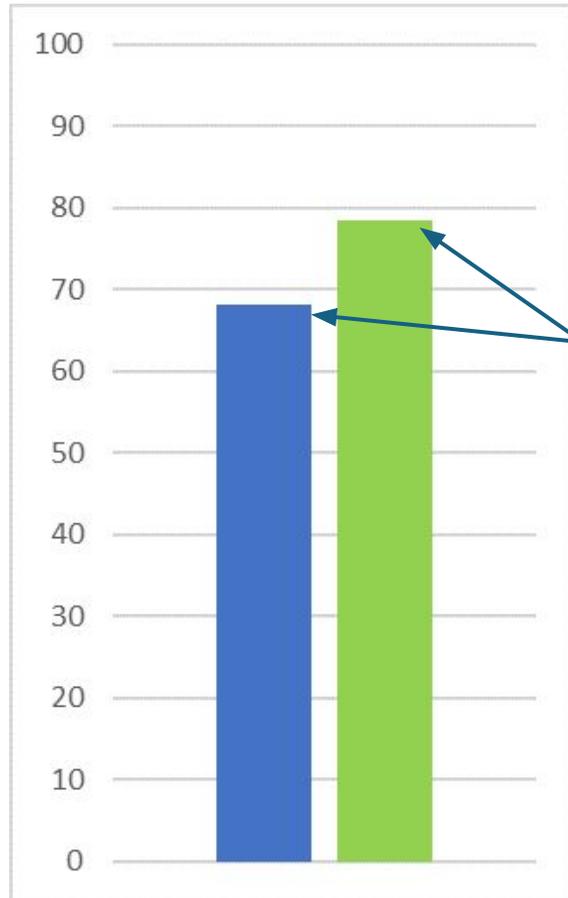
KPIs

Align with stakeholder key performance indicators



- **Time on task efficiency**
- **Error rate reduction**
- **Task rate success**
- **Churn rate reduction**
- **Customer satisfaction**
 - NPS
 - SUS
 - SEQ

Example - Iterative testing using SUS



Iterative testing using
SUS 1st study score
2nd study score

Example - 3 rounds of testing - SUS

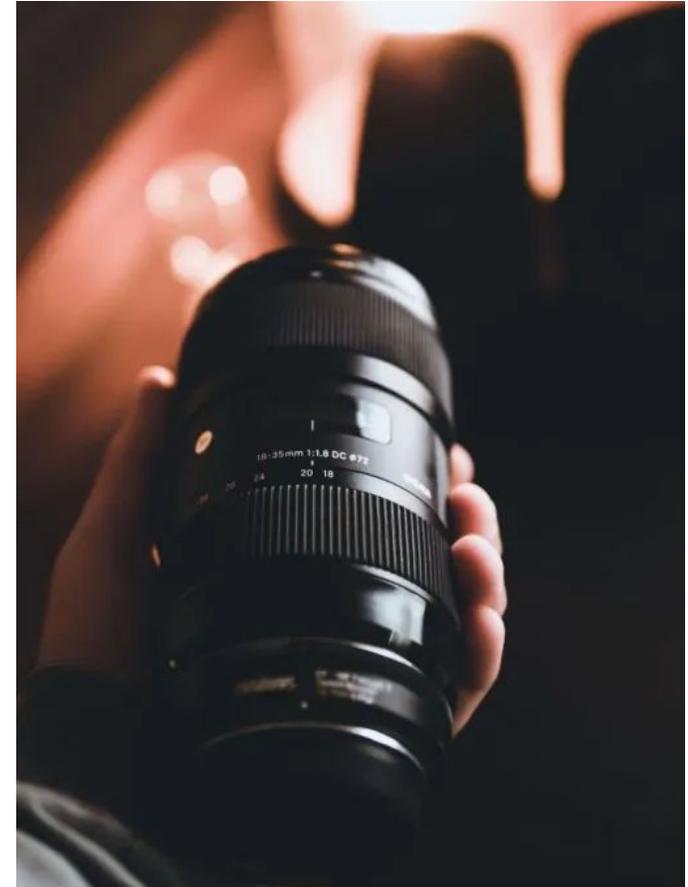


No metrics? Start with a baseline study

Camera buying website -10 participants

- Current customers
- Prospective customers
- Website and mobile app
- SUS score 84.75
- Improvements needed:
 - Search
 - Filters to support browsing

Result – UX insights and marketing insights



How to deal
with the
elephant in the
room?



AI- Friend or foe?



ROI
requirements
increase



AI as a friend

Supports UX activities **at every stage**

▣ **provides high ROI**

1 Data Analysis

Process large datasets quickly to identify patterns and themes

0

2 Transcription & Documentation

Can be done more accurately and efficiently

0

3 Study Planning

Generate research questions and draft protocols

0

4 Synthesis & Reporting

Research findings into actionable insights

AI as a friend –support for UX activities

1

Generate ideas

•Prompt: “How can we . . .”

2

Draft screeners

3

Create personas

4

Design survey questions

5

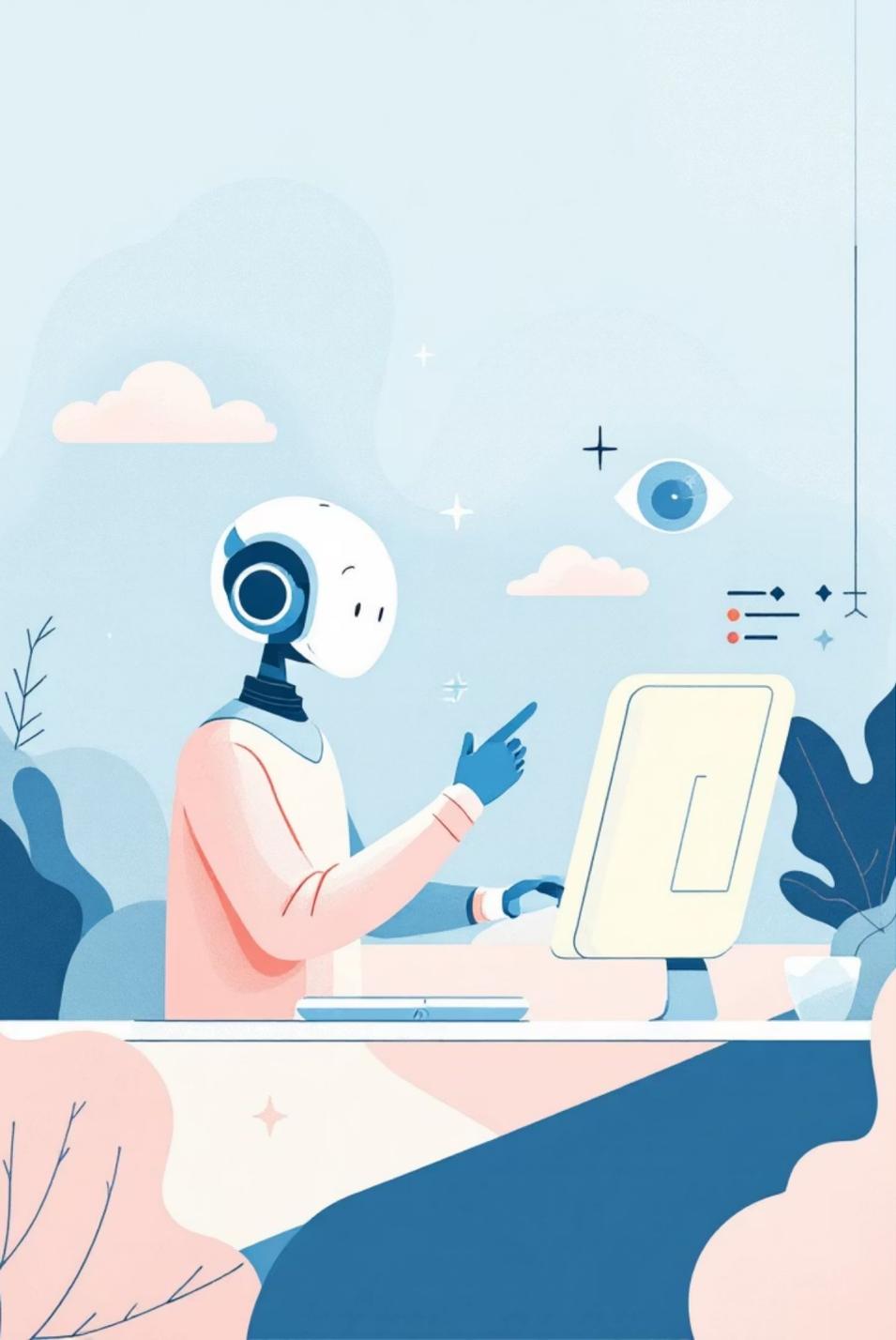
Develop interview guides based on your research questions

6

Produce interview transcriptions and summaries

7

Provide thematic analysis – patterns, key concepts, insights



AI as a foe

0

1

UX job losses

Entry level – harder to get hired

0

Senior level – harder to show value

2

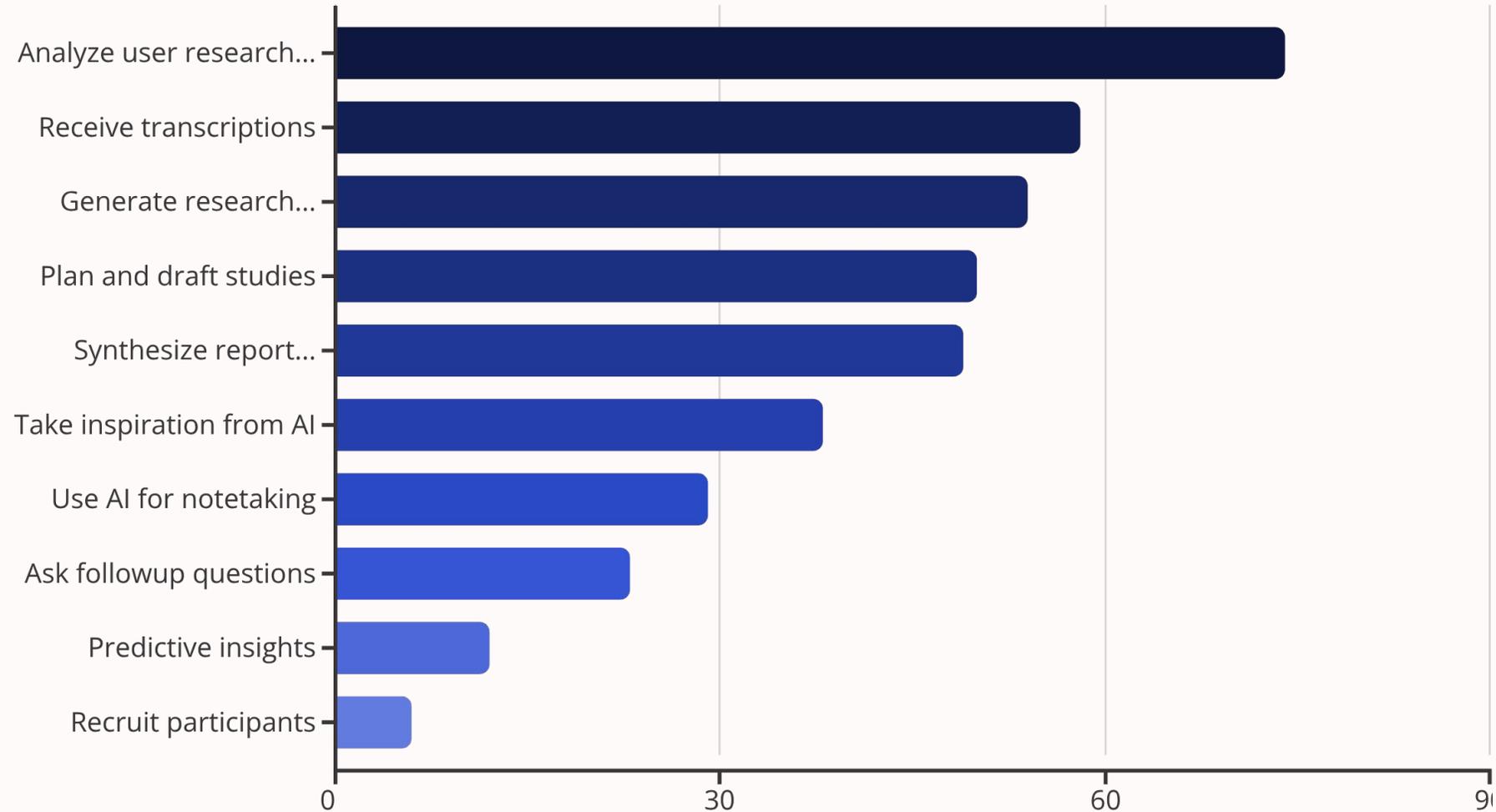
Stakeholder mindset

Convenience trumps complexity

Simulated users (and interviewers!) are cheaper than real users and interviewers

How companies are adopting AI

A 2025 Maze survey of 800 UX researchers worldwide reveals widespread AI adoption across research activities.



Step up to your strategic role with AI

- ✓ Review, question, **challenge AI** responses
- ✓ Engage in higher-level **critical and strategic thinking**
- ✓ Free up time for more planning, executing studies
- ✓ “Sell” more UX – become a **UX advocate**
- ✓ **Democratize research** to spread knowledge of user experience

Make the case: Don't trade complexity for convenience.
Don't underestimate the importance of ***empathy***.

FRIEND OR FOE/

Democratization of UX



- Can (or should) **everyone** do UX research?
- How can you **manage** and support new skill sets?
- What role can (or should) **software** like UserTesting platforms play?

SURVEY RESULTS

The state of user research strategy 2025

userinterviews.com 485 responses



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- ✓ 71% work in companies that support democratization
- ✓ 60% spend up to ¼ time supporting others

“democratization tax”

- ❖ More support for others doing research
- ❖ Less time for your research
- ❖ Potential outcome:
 - Diluted expert research focus
 - Reduced strategic capability

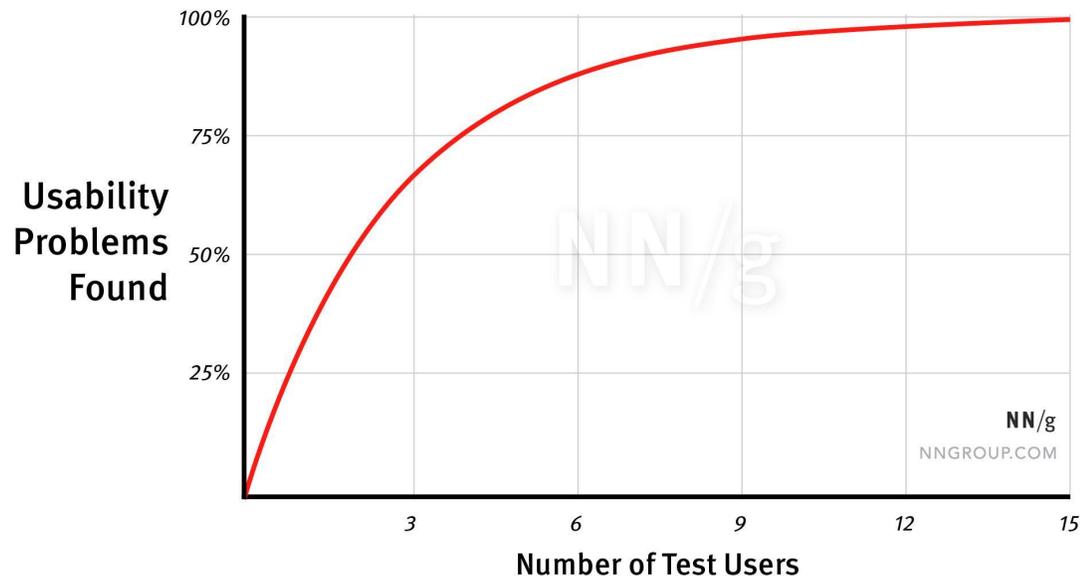
Step up to your strategic role in democratization

- ✓ Support democratization with guardrails in place
- ✓ Train developers, designers, engineers and other stakeholders in research methods
- ✓ Use software platforms to support, not replace, UX expertise
- ✓ Encourage professional growth, mentorship
- ✓ *Increase your job security*

With more UX research, you get **more insights** into user experience. It's a ***win-win*** for your company.

Think small – 5 users is enough, if done right

5 Users: The Optimal Sample Size for Qualitative Usability Studies



Source:
<https://www.nngroup.com/articles/why-you-only-need-to-test-with-5-users/>

- Maximum cost-benefit ratio at **3 – 5** participants
- Small studies, done right, uncover **80 – 85%** of the findings from that study
- *“The most striking truth of the curve is that **zero users give zero insights**. As soon as you collect data from a **single test user**, your insights shoot up and you have already learned almost a third of all there is to know about the usability of the design. The difference between zero and even a little bit of data is astounding.”*

The essential elements to do it right

These studies deliver big insights when you follow proven research fundamentals.



Establish User Profile

Define a specific user group or subgroup with clear characteristics and needs



Create Task-Based Scenarios

Develop scenarios that reflect actual user goals and workflows



Use Think-Aloud Process

Observe real-time thoughts and reactions as users interact with your design



Iterate and Test Again

Make changes based on findings, then validate improvements with another round

For more detailed guidance, watch my YouTube video: <https://www.uxfirm.com/videos>

**Don't blow the budget on one big study.
Test with 5 users; iterate, test with 5 more users.**

