



\* Q&amp;A

# JANE PORTMAN

The UI and UX consultant on why effective copywriting is more important than design



**Job:** UI and UX consultant  
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**net:** You're a UI and UX consultant. Day-to-day, what does that involve?

**JP:** I help software companies build focused, profitable products with good design. That includes audits, product strategy, wireframes, and sometimes high-fidelity design and branding. Consulting only takes about 20 per cent of my time – everything else is product and content creation. Travel also happens quite often: I fly out to do on-site training for teams, and speak at conferences.

**net:** Which UI flaws do you find most frustrating?

**JP:** Overuse of dashboards is the most popular one. Dashboards are great if you run a mission-critical service, but most times users just prefer to access their work immediately. The other one is the lack of headlines. If everyone just took an extra minute to title their screens accurately, the world would be a much better place!

**net:** What prompted you to write *The UI Audit*?

**JP:** The purpose of the book is to help founders who can't afford expensive consultants find their way with UI and UX. I'm creating a logical framework that can help them make design decisions. The book advocates a top-down approach to web app

design: we start with product strategy, work through navigation and dashboards, and audit key screens to make sure they're easy to use.

**net:** Prior to going freelance you worked as creative director at an agency. Why did you decide to make this career change?

**JP:** In 2012 my first son was born, and suddenly all priorities shifted. After spending three months at home, I realised I wanted to go back to work – but not to the huge responsibility and hustle of the agency. I still miss the big exciting projects and vast resources we had at hand. But I don't regret my decision for a second – the freedom to do your best work at your own pace is invaluable.

**net:** Have you learned anything surprising since you became an independent consultant?

**JP:** Being a consultant was nothing new, but the business side of things – products and marketing – was exciting. For example, I learned that copy trumps design in most cases. Learning to write (especially sales copy) has been the most useful achievement for me.

**net:** You also host the UI Breakfast Podcast. Who has been your favourite guest?

**JP:** They're all awesome. Episode success usually depends on the 'hotness' of its topic. The episode on UX leadership with Danny Setiawan seems to be a real hit, and I also enjoyed talking about professional design writing with Ben Gremillion from UXPin. Podcast popularity soared when I started focusing on specific design topics, so the common 'niche down' advice works great here.

**net:** Do you have anything exciting you're working on you can tell us about?

**JP:** My video teardowns ([netm.ag/teardown-288](http://netm.ag/teardown-288)) are really well received, so I'm looking to explore this format further. Maybe it will be a detailed, practical video course expanding the ideas from *The UI Audit*.

**net:** You're based in Russia. What's the web scene like there?

**JP:** Our local IT market is full of amazing talent, but the budgets are minuscule and the culture of consulting is quite immature. So I primarily work with clients from the US. It's truly amazing how many opportunities we have, thanks to the internet and modern technology. I wish all the readers to have courage and stamina in pursuing them. **■**

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