THE ESTATE OF UX RESEARCH

UX research's quiet inheritance problem



Vivek Gopinath
Lead User Researcher, IBM

UX Brighton 2026: Emerging Methods, Brighton Dome, Fri 6 Nov

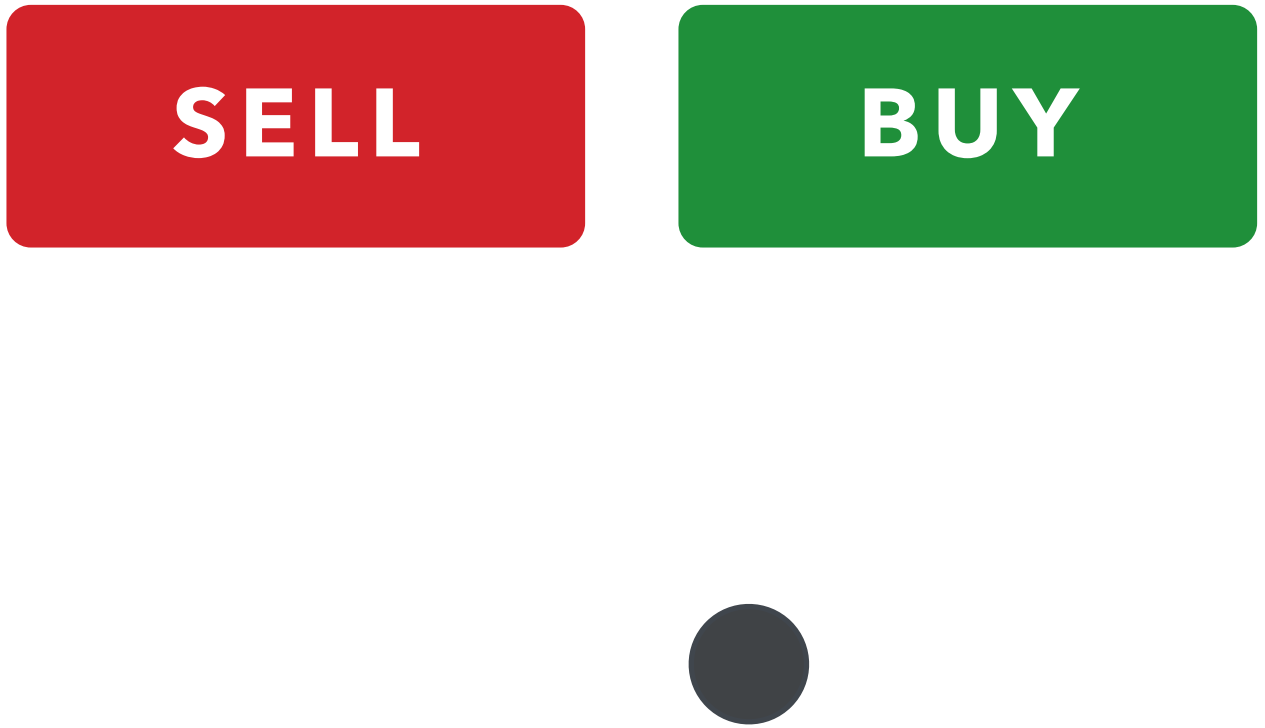
EXHIBIT A

SESSION 04, PARTICIPANT 07, TASK 01

“Buy the stock.”

Trading app, moderated usability test

Watch his hand.



SLIP.

LAPSE.

MISTAKE.

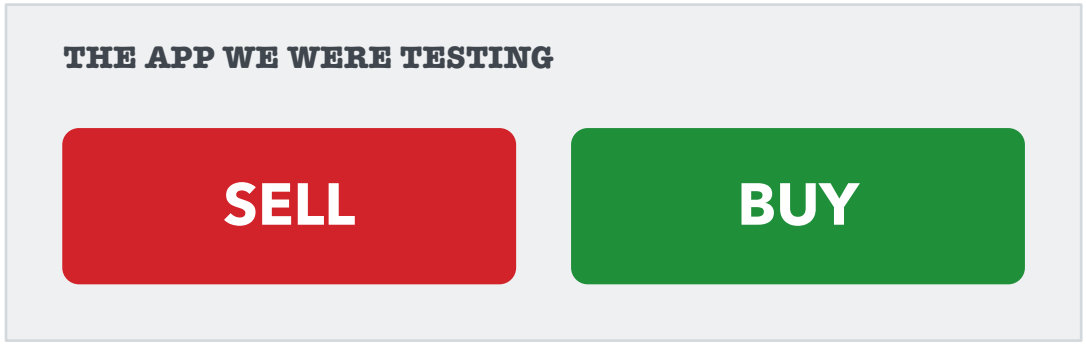
Right plan. Wrong hand.

SLIP.

LAPSE.

MISTAKE.

Right plan. Wrong hand.

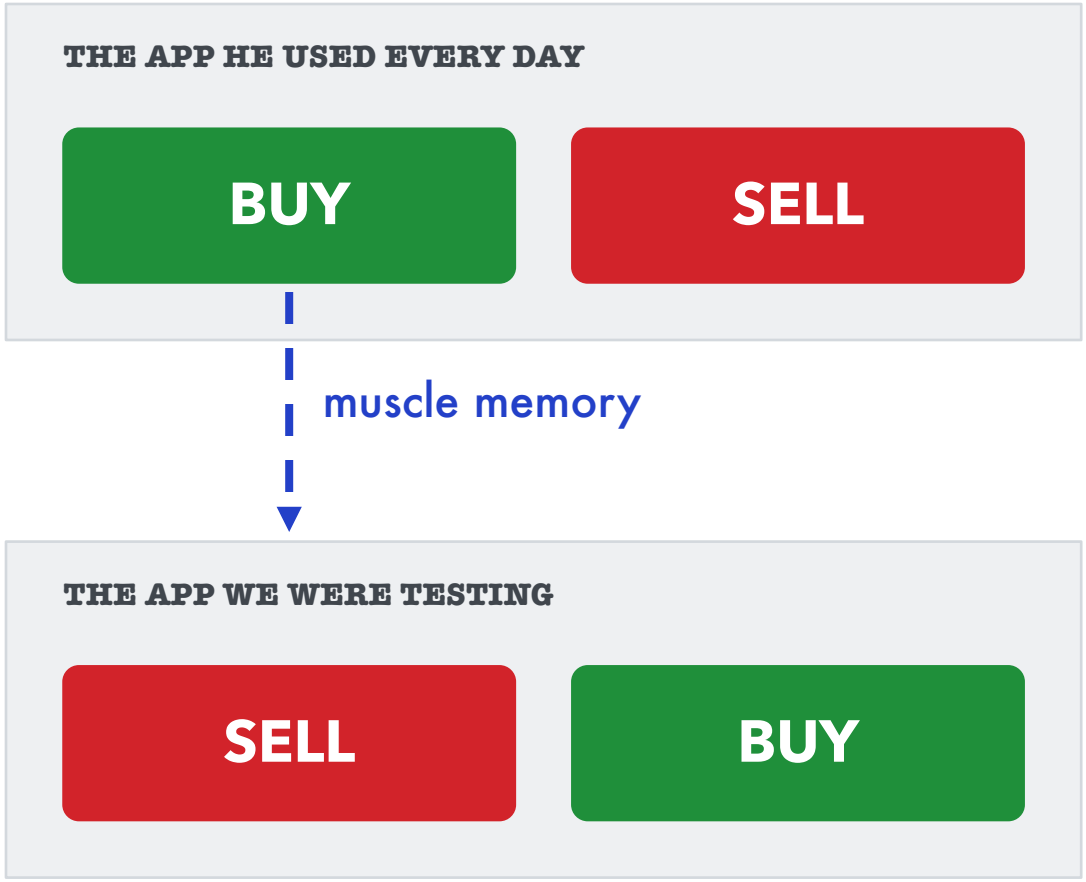


SLIP.

LAPSE.

MISTAKE.

Right plan. Wrong hand.



Capture error: the practised habit wins.

What most of us would have written

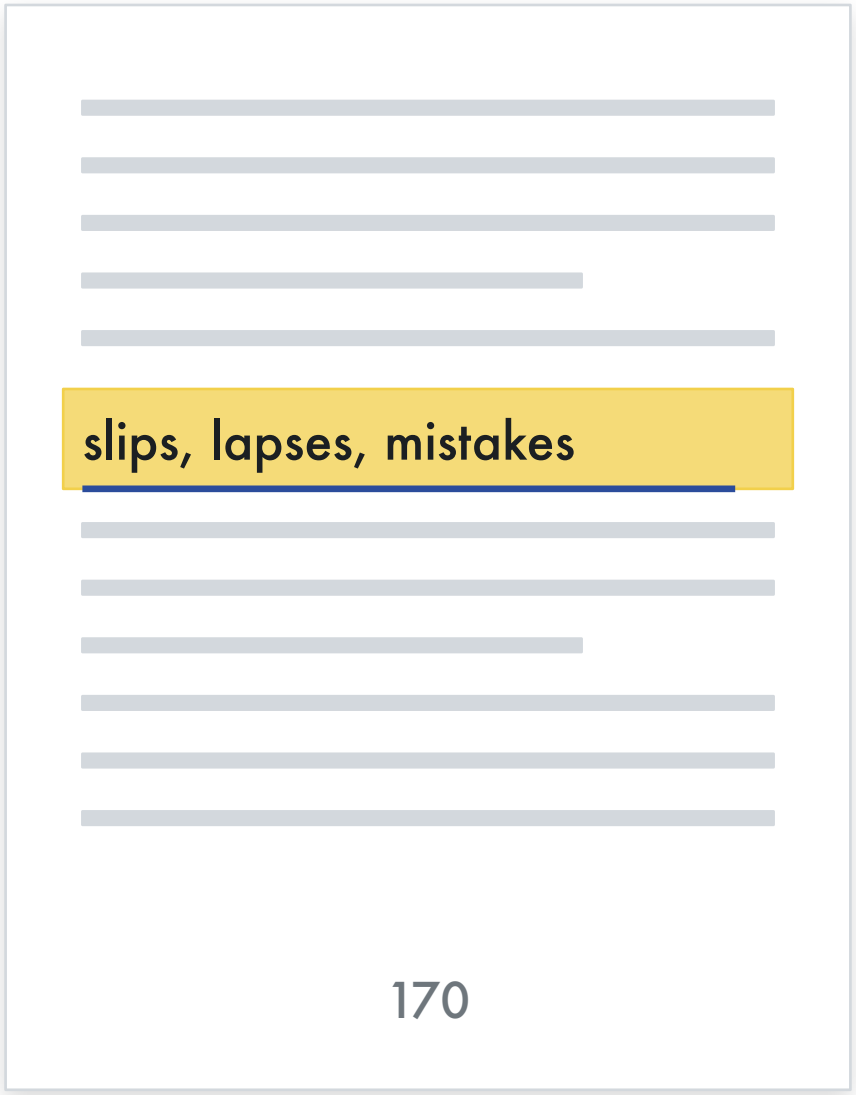
THE JOURNALIST'S NOTE

"User was confused by the button."

THE RESEARCHER'S FINDING

"Capture error from a mirrored competitor layout. It's costing you users."

Same session. Same finger. One gets a nod. The other gets a budget.



I had underlined it.

The method's family tree

- **Years ago** — my participant's finger
- **2013** — DOET, revised edition. Draws on Reason.
- **1990** — Reason, Human Error. Slip, lapse, mistake.
- **1988** — Norman, The Psychology of Everyday Things
- **1981** — Norman, "Categorization of Action Slips"
- **1940s** — Cockpits, and the phrase "pilot error"

Every method we use was left to us by another field. We kept the gifts and lost the instructions.

Six ways to lose an inheritance

1,827

of the 2,121 methods in the Atlas are not in everyday UX practice.

EXTINCT

The heirs died out.

74

VESTIGIAL

Kept the frame, sold the painting.

149

RENAMED

Relabelled in the attic. Same box.

40

SILOED

With the other side of the family.

604

LATENT

Named in the will. Never claimed.

435

UNMIGRATED

Never left the old country.

525

PART TWO

Reading the will

Five lots. Two minutes each. All still in perfect working order.

LOT 01

LATENT

Signal Detection Theory

PROVENANCE: Radar engineering, WWII → 1954

Didn't see it, or saw it and didn't care? Different bugs.

BEQUEATHED TO anyone designing for images, text, alerts or AI review.

Tanner & Swets (1954); Green & Swets (1966)



	SAID YES	SAID NO
	HIT	MISS
	FALSE ALARM	CORRECT NO

d' can they see it?

c will they act on it?

SAME MATHS, ANY SIGNAL

Images	Can reviewers spot the AI-generated photo, or do they flag everything?
Text	Do users catch the phishing line, or have warnings taught them to scroll?
Everything	X-rays, moderation queues, fraud alerts, checking AI answers.

LOT 01, PART 2

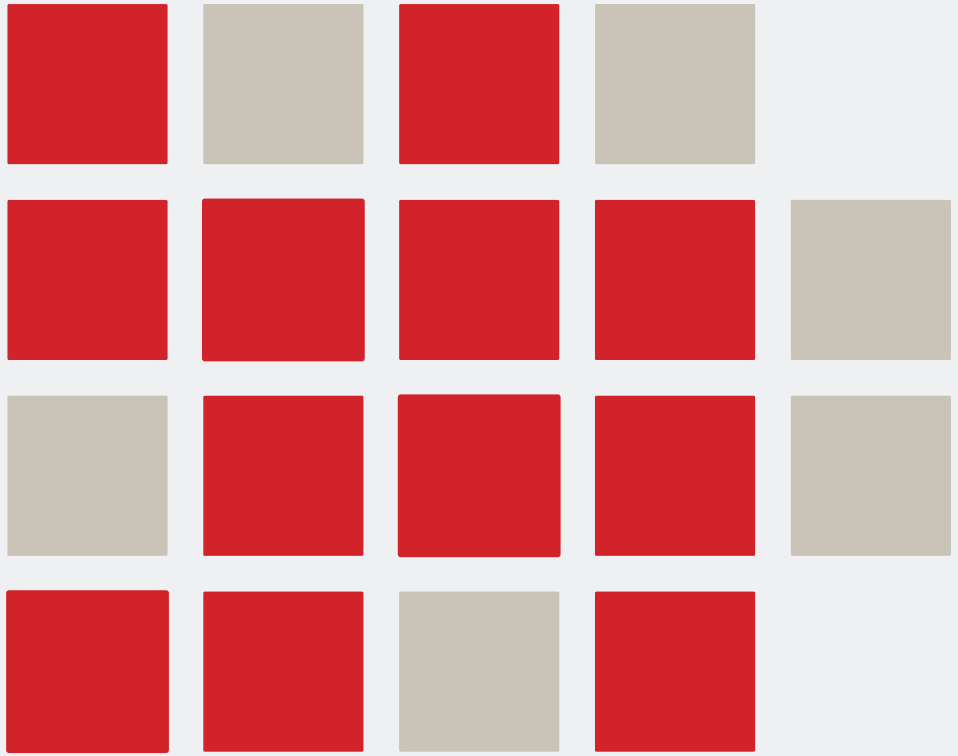
LATENT

Signal-to-noise, counted

PROVENANCE: Radio engineering, 1920s → Shannon, 1948

We say “reduce the noise” like a mood. Engineers meant a number.

BEQUEATHED TO anyone arguing about a dashboard or a dense screen.



9/20 = 0.45 → **12/18 = 0.67**

■ signal: the task needs it ■ noise: everything else

Element SNR: worked example from my SNR playbook

LOT 02

EXTINCT

KLM & GOMS

PROVENANCE: Cognitive science (Xerox PARC), 1980–83

User testing with zero users and a pencil.

BEQUEATHED TO anyone shaving seconds off a task people do 200 times a day.

Card, Moran & Newell (1980) Communications of the ACM 23(7)

TASK: copy a paragraph into another document



≈ 3.7 s

predicted for an expert, before a single participant

K keystroke, P point, H hand to mouse, M think (1.35 s)

Typically within 20–30% of measured times.

GOMS Goals, Operators, Methods, Selection rules. KLM is the pocket version.

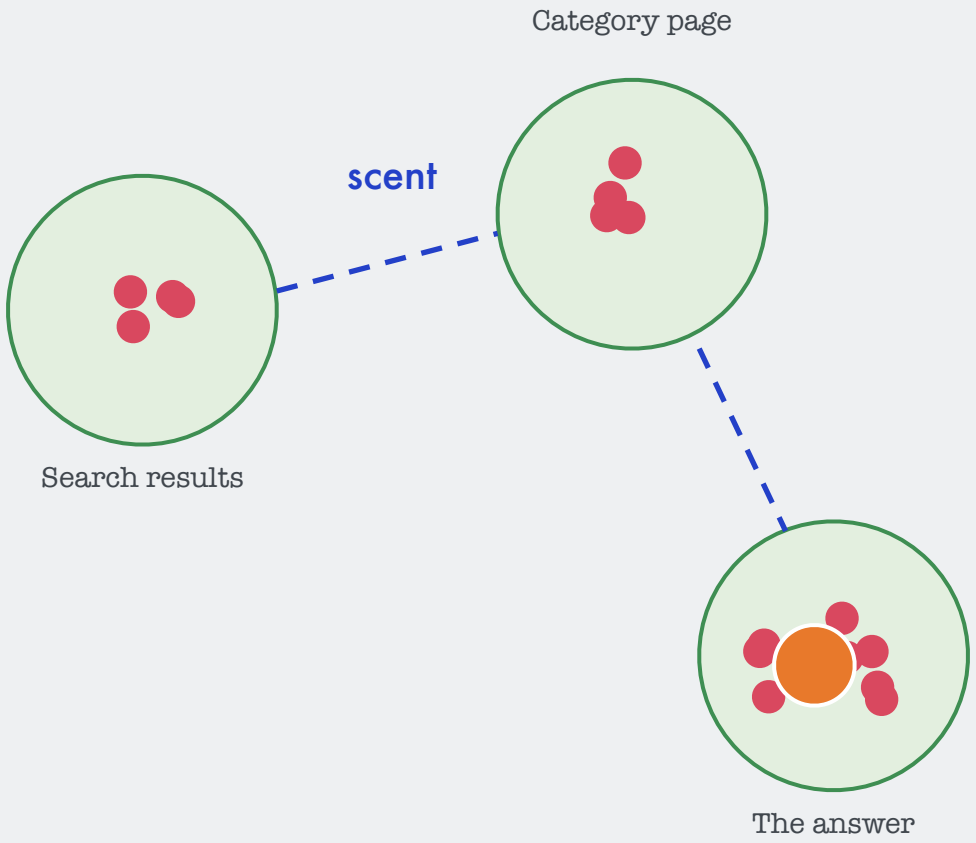
LOT 03

VESTIGIAL

Information Foraging

PROVENANCE: Behavioural ecology → Xerox PARC, 1999

Your users are foxes. Your nav labels are smells.



BEQUEATHED TO anyone fixing navigation, search or documentation.

Leave the patch when it pays less than the walk to the next one.

Pirolli & Card (1999) Psychological Review 106(4); Charnov (1976)

Who's done this?

Interviews. Stickies on a wall.
Group them. Name the groups.
Done.



LOT 04

ACTIVE IN NAME

Thematic analysis (the real one)

PROVENANCE: Psychology, Braun & Clarke, 2006

That was affinity mapping. Great for alignment. It isn't how you code.

BEQUEATHED TO every interview study you will run this year.

1. Familiarise: read it all, twice
2. Code every extract
3. Search for themes
4. Review themes against the data
5. Define and name each theme
6. Write it up with the quotes

Can each theme survive a table of its quotes?

Braun & Clarke (2006) Qualitative Research in Psychology 3(2)

LOT 05

UNMIGRATED

Bradford Hill criteria

PROVENANCE: Epidemiology, 1965

Ask these before the word “caused” leaves the room.

BEQUEATHED TO anyone presenting a number to an executive.

Hill (1965) Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine 58(5)

THE QBR DECK, SLIDE 4

The redesign ~~caused~~ coincided with a 12% lift.

Strength
Is the effect big enough to believe?

Temporality
Did the change come before the lift?

Consistency
Does it hold across segments?

Plausibility
Is there a mechanism?

Unclaimed lots

Six more from the estate, very fast

EXTINCT

Repertory Grid

Clinical psychology, Kelly, 1955

Let users name the dimensions. They'll beat yours.

SILOED

Q Methodology

Psychology, Stephenson, 1935

Correlate people, not questions. Find the viewpoints.

UNMIGRATED

Nash Equilibrium

Game theory, Nash, 1950

Why every app sends more notifications and nobody wins.

EXTINCT

Lag Sequential Analysis

Dev. psychology, Sackett, 1979

Is that session-replay pattern real, or a story?

SILOED

UFMEA

Reliability engineering, 1949

A risk register for every way a user can fail.

EXTINCT

Magnitude Estimation

Psychophysics, Stevens, 1950s

Not 1 to 5: "how many times harder was that?"

PART THREE

How to claim your inheritance

01

Find the donor.

Go back to the field that left it. They kept the instructions. Skip the blog post about the blog post.

02

Keep the boring part.

The codebook, the count, the second coder, the kappa. That's where the method lives.

03

Run it once. Monday.

One method. One real project. Not a research-ops transformation programme.

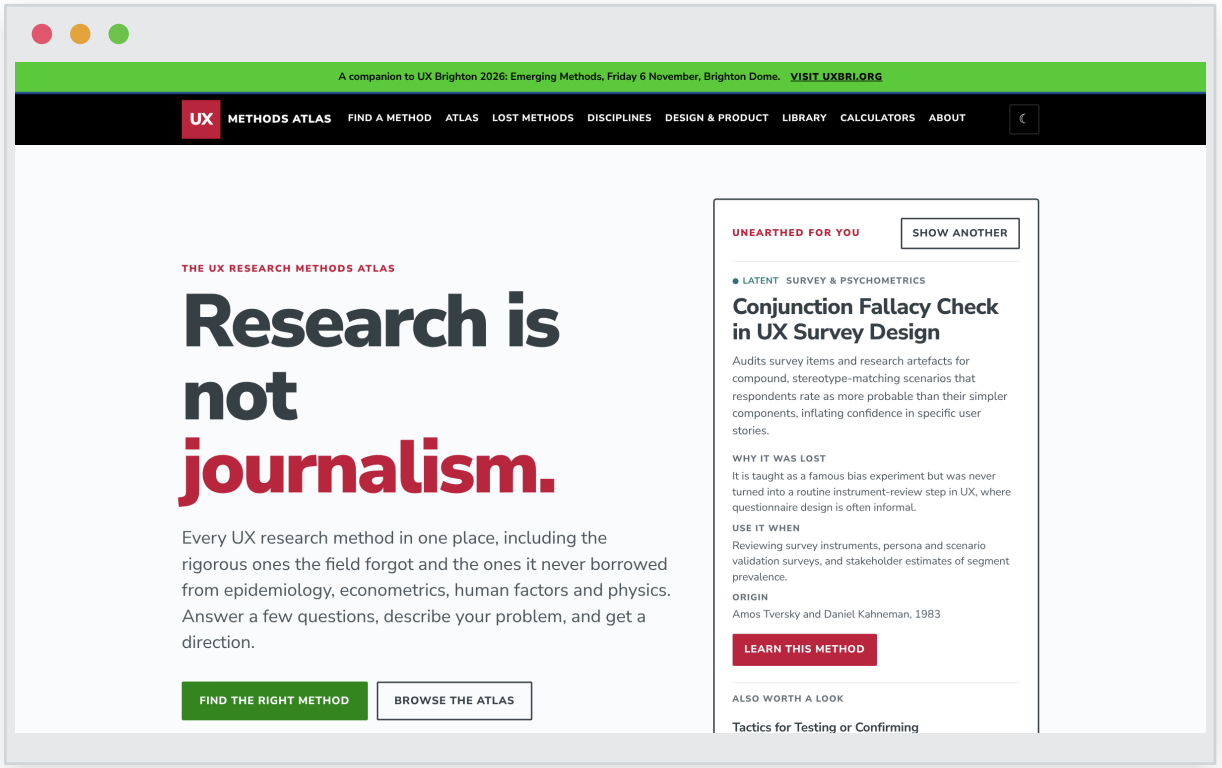
THE INVENTORY, LIVE DEMO

The UX Methods Atlas

2,121 methods, each with why it was lost

591 books and papers in the library

120+ calculators



uxguy-in.github.io/ux-methods-atlas

Find a method, Lost methods, Calculators, Submit your own

NOTICE OF UNCLAIMED PROPERTY

1,827 methods are being held in your name.

Some have been waiting since 1913. They do not expire. They charge no interest. They are, frankly, a little offended.

Collect from uxguy-in.github.io/ux-methods-atlas

Bring one real project

FINAL NOTICE

None of these failed.

We just never read the will.

P.S. Next year's emerging method is from 1954.

Vivek Gopinath, uxguy.in