



WHITE PAPER

# USER FRICTION: WHAT IT IS AND WHY YOU MUST AVOID IT

# Introduction

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Nearly every organization is moving their services online. To do so, they are creating new digital experiences that connect their users to their digital services and ecosystems. Users expect these experiences to be modern and intuitive to navigate – and they are willing to leave any experience that creates significant friction.

This whitepaper will explore this topic of how to avoid user friction, and how to create the smooth, seamless experiences that today's users expect and demand.

To do so, this whitepaper will explore:

- What user friction is and what problems it creates for organizations
- Where user friction comes from and how organizations can avoid it
- How Portage eliminates user friction in digital services and ecosystems



User friction can appear anywhere, at any time, in any digital experience. And when it does, it can create significant problems for the user, and for the organization that's delivering the digital experience.

## What is User Friction?

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What is User Friction? User friction sounds like a complex topic, but it's easy to understand. It occurs when an element of the user experience slows down or prevents a user from achieving a desired goal within a solution, or otherwise forces them to achieve that goal in a non-intuitive manner.

Examples of user friction include:

- Having to click five different design elements before finding the button that launches a desired function
- Working through a half dozen forms, notifications, and information requests to access a service
- Reloading a page or function multiple times because it is performing slowly or with obvious glitches

There are countless more examples. User friction can appear anywhere, at any time, in any digital experience. And when it does, it can create significant problems for the user, and for the organization that's delivering the digital experience. These include:

- **Reducing user satisfaction and loyalty.** Every experience of friction can waste a user's time, make them feel annoyed with the solution, and produce negative cognitive and emotional associations.
- **Increasing support and help-desk requests from users.** The more friction a user encounters, the more often they will reach out for help – even to accomplish simple use cases within the digital experience.

- **Users producing unintended results within the solution.** Friction can cause users to make wrong requests within a solution, produce inaccurate data, or otherwise create a mess that will eventually need to be cleaned up.
- **Losing users who choose a more intuitive alternative solution.** Ultimately, users will go with the digital experience that provides the most value with the least hassle, and abandon high-friction experiences.

In sum: User friction in digital services and ecosystems creates substantial business and operational risk. To mitigate this risk, organizations must understand where user friction comes from and the best way to avoid it. Here's how.



**User experience problems can be a little more complex and subtle, but are also easy to understand once they are pointed out. A poorly designed user experience can include many different sources of user friction.**

## Where Does User Friction Come From?

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User friction can be created by many different sources. However, most of these sources can be organized into one of two problem sets – technical problems, or user experience problems.

Technical problems are simple and easy to understand. These include bugs in your system, malfunctioning services and ecosystems, and general performance loss within your solution. These technical issues can deliver a sub-optimal experience of your digital services and ecosystem, or prevent users from accessing them entirely – both of which will clearly create friction between your solution and its end users.

User experience problems can be a little more complex and subtle, but are also easy to understand once they are pointed out. A poorly designed user experience can include many different sources of user friction, including:

- **Too many steps to achieve an objective on the solution.** The more steps your users have to take to do something simple – like accessing a service or viewing consent decisions – the more frustrated they will get navigating your solution, and the greater chance they will get lost or give up along the way.
- **Overly complex visual designs.** The more complex your solution's visual design, the harder it will be to navigate. Complex visual designs can hide elements like buttons and menus that users can click, and make users confused about what elements are interactive and how they can advance to their goal.
- **Unclear or inconsistent branding.** Users want to feel you are moving them through a single, unified experience that is being delivered by your brand. If your branding disappears or changes at every step of the user journey, then users can feel unsure if they are still moving through your experience.

- **Legacy visual design.** Users might navigate dozens of different digital experiences every day, most of which will conform to modern visual design principles and offer a similar look and feel. If yours does not, then users will not be able to navigate it as smoothly, seamlessly, and intuitively.
- **Too many features introduced too quickly.** Most of the time, users have simple objectives when they access a digital service or ecosystem, and often have only one thing they want to accomplish. Presenting users with too many features upfront makes it hard to see the specific feature they are looking for.
- **Too much overall complexity.** As a whole, the more complex your solution, the more things that can go wrong or be misunderstood by users, and the more opportunities it has to create user friction.

Any one of these problems and sources can create enough friction to create significant problems between you and your users. Thankfully, each of these problems and sources can be avoided by following modern design and development best practices. Here are the ones that make the biggest impact on user experience.

## How to Avoid User Friction: Key Strategies and Tactics

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First thing's first – avoiding user friction is not a “one and done” activity.

After all, it's impossible to identify every potential source of user friction during the design process. There are some issues that your teams will never see on their own, that will only appear once real users work with your live experiences. In addition, your digital experiences are living, breathing, ever-evolving assets. You are going to constantly tweak them, change their features, and otherwise make continuous adjustments – each of which can accidentally create new friction.

In short: While it's important to identify and avoid as much user friction as possible as you design and develop your digital experiences, you must also continuously look for and eliminate new sources of user friction that appear within your live solutions.

There are a few key strategies and tactics you can follow to do so.



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- **Stay Up-to-Date.** Create a modern user experience that's aligned with current design conventions and expectations. Update this experience regularly as new conventions and expectations emerge. Overall, ensure your solution always looks and feels like the other experiences your users are navigating.
- **Streamline Everything.** Make your digital experience as simple as possible. Only include required features. Only share necessary information, and present it with clear, natural language. And perhaps most important – reduce the number of steps it takes to complete any of its tasks to the bare minimum.

- **Mind Your Branding.** Your digital experiences are probably composed of multiple point solutions stitched together. Keep this fragmentation in the background. Give your users a seamlessly branded experience that maintains its look and feel as it moves them between different activities and tools.
- **Monitor for Experience.** Track your end users' behavior on your digital experience, and continuously perform analytics on this data to identify where users are getting stuck, confused, frustrated, or otherwise seem to be running into friction. Systematically investigate and eliminate any issues that pop up.
- **Maintain Performance.** Maintain your digital experience's technical performance at all times. Keep your uptime near-perfect. Identify and eliminate any bugs or technical errors. Ensure your experience can scale – without service interruption – as you add new users, features, and interactions.

Finally, you must pick tools and services that prioritize creating a smooth and seamless user experience, without sacrificing security or privacy – tools and services like those offered by Portage CyberTech.



We offer end-to-end services for designing, building, evaluating, and improving digital solutions that balance security and privacy with friction-free user experience.

## How Portage Builds Seamless, Friction-Free Digital Solutions

At Portage CyberTech™, we provide a suite of tools and professional services that deliver trust-based digital services and ecosystems. As part of this suite, we offer end-to-end services for designing, building, evaluating, and improving digital solutions that balance security and privacy with friction-free user experience. To do so, we always follow practices and principles that minimize user friction. These include:

- **UX Research, Experience, and Design:** We employ User Experience Professionals (USP) who conduct comprehensive research and deliver insights on how to optimize user experience based on each organization's unique audience, market, competitors and business objectives.
- **Creative and Visual Design:** Our Creative and Visual Design (CVD) services ensure that our designs have the greatest possible impact with their intended audience through a rigorous process that involves strategy, creative, and analytics teams, and includes social listening, analysis, and optimization.
- **Web Analytics & Reporting:** We can set up the monitoring and reporting of key end user behaviors that can identify any ongoing sources of user friction, or any new sources created as the solution is changed and updated – all with an eye towards continuous year-over-year improvement of user experience.
- **Website Development, Migrations, Hosting, and Support:** We can take care of the technical back-end elements of building and managing digital experiences to ensure the continuous scalability, performance, and uptime of the digital services and ecosystems that they host.

Further, our tools deliver smooth user experiences out-of-the-box. We designed them eliminate all unnecessary user friction that could occur during the process of creating, verifying, and managing the digital identities for your end users.

Our low-friction approach offers:

- **Service Cards** that give end users a consolidated view of every digital service that they can access, all within one platform and pane of glass
- **Smooth Risk Mitigation** through single sign on and other modern features
- **Seamless Identification, Verification, and Authentication** that occurs without taking users out of digital solutions
- **Open APIs and Interoperability** with other tools within digital ecosystems, including easy integrations with legacy infrastructure
- **Custom Branding** to create a consistent look and feel across all stages of a digital trust solution
- **Easy-to-Understand and Manage Consent and Data Privacy Policies** delivered through intuitive notifications and self-service management

In sum: With Portage, you gain the tools, expert consultation, and design and development services you need to build digital services and ecosystems that eliminate user friction without sacrificing trust, identity, and privacy and consent.

## Deliver Smooth, Secure User Experiences – Starting Today

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None of this is easy. It's difficult to strike the correct balance between protecting a user's security and privacy, and giving them a seamless and enjoyable experience. But together, we can ensure your digital services and ecosystems get it right.

At Portage, we take this challenge seriously and design our solutions to provide the best possible user experience, while still maintaining consistently high levels of risk mitigation. We begin with this end in mind, and ensure each step of the process is purposeful, transparent, and easy to understand. Your customers expect and deserve a frictionless online experience, and we can help you give it to them.

Reach out today, and schedule your no-obligation consultation and guided walk-through of our solution and the smooth, secure user experiences that we deliver.

[www.portagecybertech.com](http://www.portagecybertech.com)