UX AUDIT · NORTHWIND CONSOLE · FEBRUARY 2026

# The product works. *The first ten minutes don't.*

A four-journey UX audit of Northwind Console, scored against 40 criteria across eight dimensions, with a prioritised path from finding to shipped change.

| HEALTH SCORE | COVERAGE | ENGAGEMENT |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 62 / 100 | 88% · 141 of 160 | UXA-2026-014 |

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01 · EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# What we found, in one page

Northwind Console is a capable product with a credibility problem at the front door. Users who reach the core task finish it. Most never get there.

| PRODUCT HEALTH | CRITICAL FINDINGS | TOTAL FINDINGS | RECOVERABLE REVENUE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 62 | 2 | 18 | $412k |
| of 100, weighted | severity 4 | 6 shown in this report | annualised, modelled |

## The three sentences that matter

1. **Onboarding loses 62% of users between steps 4 and 5.**
   This is the largest recoverable loss in the product, and it is caused by two screens asking for information the system already has.
2. **Trust is the weakest dimension at 48.**
   Pricing sits behind account creation, permission levels are unexplained, and a plan change confirms before payment clears.
3. **Once users arrive, the product performs.**
   Task completion scores 71 and the export surface is the most trusted part of the console — a pattern worth protecting.

**THE DECISION THIS REPORT SUPPORTS**

Whether to fund three onboarding and trust fixes in the March sprint, ahead of the Q2 launch, rather than the broader visual refresh currently scheduled.

### WHAT IS WORKING

Core task completion, export reliability, and a navigation model users describe as “obvious once you've seen it”.

### WHAT IT COSTS

$412,000 annualised at current conversion, modelled conservatively on half the observed funnel gap.

### WHAT WE DID NOT TEST

No moderated usability testing. Accessibility limited to keyboard and contrast. Both disclosed on page 10.

02 · SCOPE & METHOD

# What we looked at, and how

Four journeys, forty criteria, five evidence sources. The method is fixed and published, so the score can be interrogated rather than simply believed.

| ID | JOURNEY | ENTRY → SUCCESS | EVIDENCE USED |
|---|---|---|---|
| **J1** | Get me to my first result | Confirmation email → one core action completed | Analytics, 3 replays, heuristic |
| **J2** | Make this a team tool | Settings → invitee appears in workspace | Heuristic, 1 replay |
| **J3** | Finish the thing I came for | Dashboard CTA → task saved and retrievable | Analytics, 5 replays, 2 interviews |
| **J4** | Upgrade without fear | Billing → plan changed, invoice understood | Support tickets, heuristic |

## Method

- **40 criteria** across eight weighted dimensions, rated 0–4.
- **Normalised** to a 0–100 dimension score, then weighted to a journey score.
- **Prioritised** by a composite of severity, reach, frequency, impact and confidence.
- **Effort excluded** from priority and applied only to sequencing.
- **Critical override:** any severity-4 finding is reviewed regardless of rank.

## Coverage

| | |
|---|---|
| **Criteria scored** | 141 / 160 |
| **Coverage** | 88% |
| **Provisional ratings** | 6 |
| **Evidence items** | 34 |

Coverage exceeds the 70% gate, so a headline score is published.

**WHAT THIS IS NOT**

This is an expert review supported by behavioural data. It is not moderated usability testing, not a WCAG conformance audit, and not a substitute for either. Where evidence was observational, the finding says so.

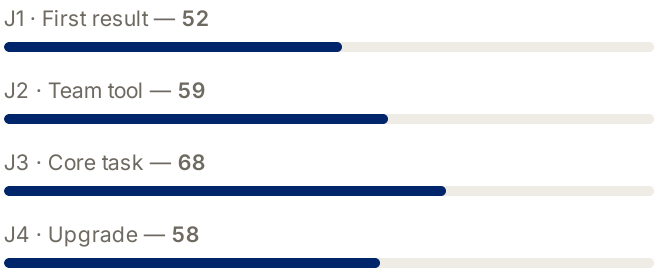
03 · UX HEALTH

# 62 out of 100 — and where it comes from

A single number is only useful if you can take it apart. Below is the arithmetic, dimension by dimension, journey by journey.

| DIMENSION | WEIGHT | J1 | J2 | J3 | J4 | READING |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Usability** | 20% | 54 | 61 | 72 | 66 | Strong once inside; weak at the front door |
| **Information architecture** | 15% | 63 | 58 | 74 | 70 | Sound model, poor signposting |
| **Accessibility** | 15% | 49 | 44 | 58 | 52 | Focus management is the main gap |
| **Task completion** | 15% | 47 | 65 | 71 | 60 | Onboarding steps break the flow |
| **Onboarding** | 10% | 38 | 55 | 62 | — | Weakest journey in the product |
| **Trust** | 10% | 46 | 52 | 58 | 41 | Pricing and permissions unexplained |
| **Conversion** | 10% | 44 | — | 60 | 55 | Commitment asked before value shown |
| **Visual craft** | 5% | 78 | 76 | 80 | 74 | The strongest dimension, consistently |

## Journey scores




**READ THE SHAPE, NOT THE NUMBER**

Every journey scores lower at the entry than at the exit. That pattern — good product, bad threshold — is consistent across all four journeys and is the single most useful thing in this report.

04 · DIMENSION PERFORMANCE

# Two dimensions are carrying the score down

Onboarding and trust account for 20% of the weight but 61% of the gap between the current score and a target of 80.

38

**ONBOARDING**

First meaningful value arrives after eleven configuration steps. There is no sample workspace, no template, and no resume point for returning users.

CRITICAL J1

41

**TRUST · J4**

Price is hidden until an account exists, permission levels are unexplained, and the plan-change confirmation fires before payment clears.

CRITICAL J4

## What the evidence says, in the users' words

> *"I filled the whole thing in twice because it lost my progress when I went to find the VAT number. After that I just left it."*
>
> INTERVIEW 02 · OPERATIONS MANAGER · J1

> *"I keep a spreadsheet because I don't trust the export. I've never told anyone that."*
>
> INTERVIEW 05 · FINANCE LEAD · J3

**PROTECT WHAT WORKS**

Visual craft scores 78 and is the only dimension above 75 in every journey. Whatever changes, the type hierarchy and spacing system should not be touched in this cycle — they are doing real work.

05 · CRITICAL FINDINGS

# Two findings qualify as blockers

Severity 4 means a user cannot complete the task, or completes it believing something false. Both are reviewed regardless of their composite priority.

## F02 · Onboarding loses 62% of users between steps 4 and 5

SEVERITY 4

**Observed.** The funnel drops from 71% to 9% completion across two consecutive screens. Step 4 asks for company details the system already holds from signup; step 5 requires a VAT number with no format guidance and no save.

**Why it happens.** Steps 4 and 5 were added for billing compliance in November and were inserted into the flow rather than merged into it.

**Evidence.** `E02 · funnel-j3.csv`, `E06 · J1-04.mp4`, `E07 · int-02.md`

## F06 · Dialog traps keyboard focus; Escape does not close it

SEVERITY 4

**Observed.** The invite dialog moves focus to the first field but does not return it on close, and Escape is unbound. Keyboard users cannot leave the dialog without tabbing through nine elements and activating a cancel link that is visually hidden.

**Why it happens.** The dialog is a custom implementation rather than the design system's modal component, which already handles focus return.

**Evidence.** `E04 · J2-invite.png`, manual keyboard pass, 2026-02-06

### WHY THESE TWO, AND NOT THE LOUDEST COMPLAINT

Support tickets mention the export more often than either of these. Volume is not severity. A user who abandons onboarding never files a ticket — which is precisely why the funnel, not the inbox, is the source of truth here.