

Happiness is good design

STEPHEN TRUEX

Case Studies

<https://stephentrux.com> | hello@stephentrux.com

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Case Study: Schoolio

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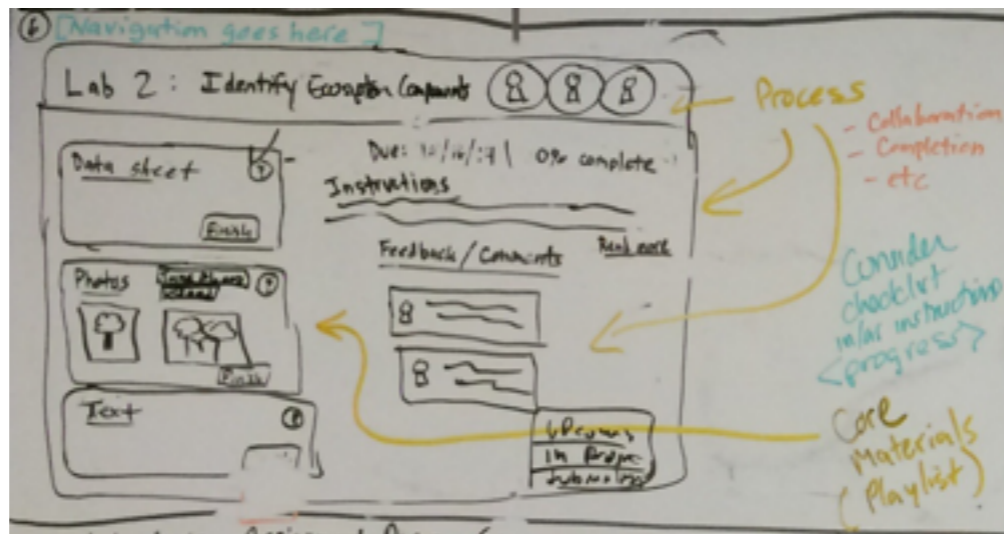
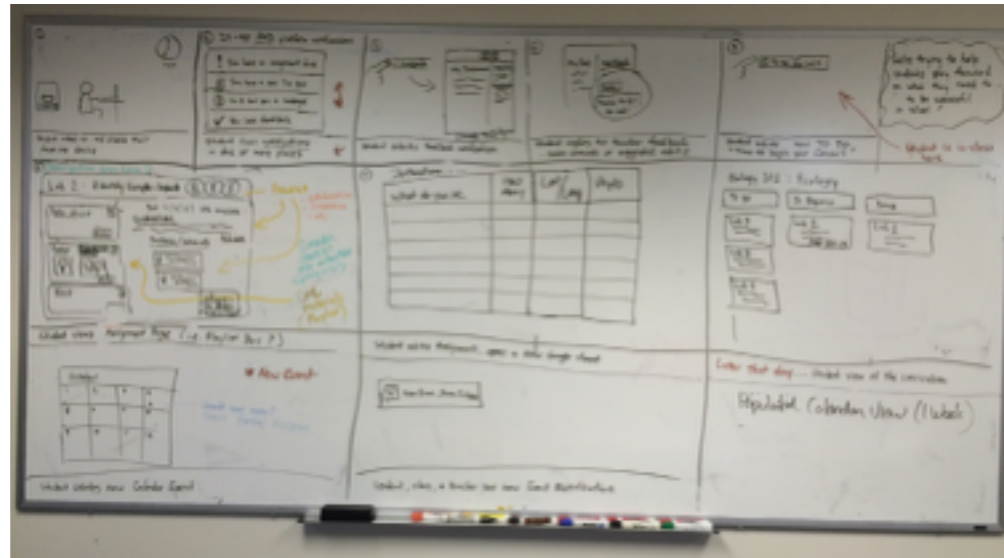
Who: NCAR/UCAR

What: Schoolio App

Facilitated Google Design Sprint with a cross-functional team.

Created sketches, storyboards, mockups, and prototypes.

How: Google Design Sprint, Sketches, Mockups, Prototypes



User Journey Map from Google Design Sprint

CHALLENGE

For this project, the challenge was to reinvent an outdated curriculum customization platform so that it would meet the real needs of K-12 teachers and students. It was old, cluttered with features, had poor usability, and was difficult to change because of legacy code and infrastructure. It also didn't integrate well with Google Apps, which had been adopted by our school district partners.

The product owner and stakeholders wanted to modernize the design and functionality of the platform. It was still too confusing for teachers, and the big push was to make it useful for students as well. After some team discussions and analysis of products in the same space, it became clear that we needed to leverage and integrate with existing ecosystems such as Google Apps.

APPROACH

I recommended using the Google Design Sprint methodology to develop a concept and prototype for the new product. I was convinced of the value of the focused, rapid design iteration and prototyping process, and it didn't take long for the P.O. and team to agree to it as an "experiment."

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Mockups for Design Sprint Prototype

APPROACH (CONT.)

We customized Google's process a little bit, shrinking the design activity itself to just 2 days instead of 5 (largely due to the difficulty of getting the whole team in a room for 5 days), yet otherwise we followed it closely. We had one facilitator, and a diverse team to collaborate on design which included Cognitive Psychologists, Educators, and Software Engineers.

Having already "set the stage" and done the "unpacking," we were able to focus our formal "sprint" time over 2 days to the Sketching and Deciding part of the process. Based on that work, I designed and built a prototype (with lots of feedback along the way from team members). Finally, we tested our prototype with both students and teachers we'd recruited for that purpose.

RESULTS

The response from teachers and students was overwhelmingly positive. While a few of our team members tested it with their K-8 aged children, the rest of us took it to a digital educators conference for ad hoc testing with teachers. The prototype product was seen to be a massive improvement over the existing product, very clear and easy-to-use, and something that would be incredibly useful.

This project was a lot of fun and a great learning experience for myself and the entire team. It laid the foundation for what could become a tremendously useful product in the K-12 classroom. The Product Owner had a vision, and by using the Google Design Sprint methodology we were able to really bring it to life. I would highly recommend the Google Design Sprint Process to any product team, and hope to participate in many more Google Design Sprints in my career.

Case Study: NOAA Sea Ice Index

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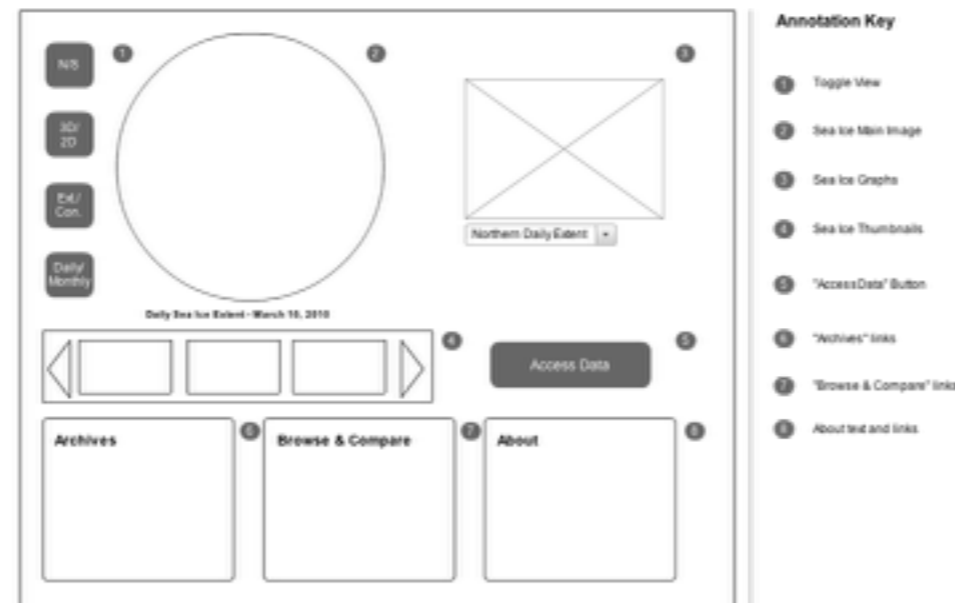
Who: NSIDC/NOAA

What: Sea Ice Index App

Facilitated UCD process with cross-functional team to define user audiences and goals.

Created sketches, wireframes, mockups, and prototypes.

How: User-Centered Design, Sketches, Mockups, Prototypes



CHALLENGE

The NOAA Sea Ice Index website received lots of views, but had an extremely high bounce rate. It had loyal users because of the high quality content, including compelling data imagery and deeply researched writing. However, many visitors were leaving the site because it was so poorly organized.

The Product Manager for NOAA wanted to present the Sea Ice data in a way that was clear, easy-to-use, that would scale well over time, and was easy to maintain. She envisioned something that would provide timely information at-a-glance for both laypeople and researchers.

APPROACH

I recommended an iterative User-Centered Design process for reinventing the Sea Ice Index. I worked closely with the Product Manager, SMEs, and Software Engineers to define the goals and audiences for the product. After this initial definition, and creating Personas based on past research, we were almost ready to start generating design solutions.

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APPROACH (CONT.)

I suggested dramatically simplifying the user experience of the Sea Ice Index by making it a more visual interface, rather than a massive list of categories, images, and links. I started by sketching and later wireframing the concept, and put each iteration in front of our users and the team for feedback.

After a number of iterations, I developed a functional prototype that we tested with our user group, and they invariably loved the new presentation.

I also created a concept and prototype for a mobile version of the application called Sea Ice Watch. According to analytics data, there were quite a few visitors to the site who used mobile devices. The Product Manager also thought a mobile version would be appealing to certain audiences such as journalists. Although this concept wasn't put into production, it communicated a possible direction for future efforts.

RESULTS

We launched the new application with a high level of confidence in the product. The team received lots of positive feedback from the user community, and the bounce rate went down dramatically. The new Sea Ice Index was easy to understand, simple to use, and users were able to quickly find the data they wanted.

The End

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