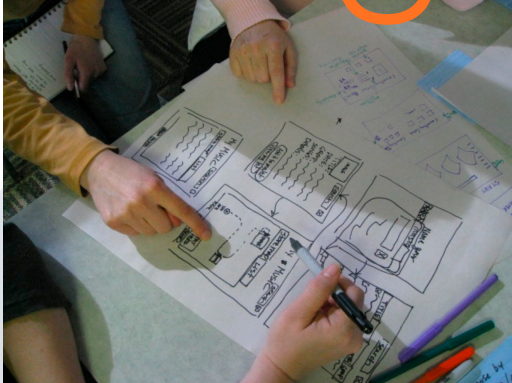


Ideate Collaboratively Using Design Studio



In software development, communicate the product goals and context to the team, then allow team members a short time to sketch their solution ideas. Use a collaborative workshop involving the whole team to critique solution ideas and identify the best elements. Synthesize the best elements into a better product design.

Design Studio was first described as an agile UX technique by Jim Ungar and Jeff White.

A design studio workshop models the approach often used in a design school or design shop where participants work independently on product design ideas, then together as a group critique designs in order to improve them.

Why?

Use a design studio approach to allow the whole product team to consider, sketch, and share their solution ideas. After a design studio exercise the whole team gains:

- Shared understanding of the problems being solved by the software
- A chance to contribute good ideas to the final product
- A chance to help combine and synthesize good ideas into a finished product solution
- Appreciation for how difficult good user interface design can be

Ultimately the product benefits from a simple form of ideation, or considering multiple possible solutions, to a product design problem. The resulting product design is more innovative – better than it would have been otherwise.

Further Reading:

Unger & White, **Agile user centered design: enter the design studio - a case study**, <http://portal.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=1358650>

Patton, **Consider Multiple Solutions**, http://www.agileproductdesign.com/writing/ieee/patton_consider_multiple_solutions.pdf

1 Plan

Identify the product or product area to focus on:

The product area may be the main focus of a next release, or a troublesome part of the existing product. Identify the goals or problems to solve with the new user interface design.

Identify context to provide to the team:

Describe the purpose of the functionality being built. Give information about users such as simple personas that describe typical users of the software, and their goals when using it.

Describe details about the problem to be solved such as useful facts, workflow, or problem scenarios.

Identify details; specifically the kinds of information users will need in the user interface.

Invite the team:

Schedule the design studio workshop as a half to full day event.

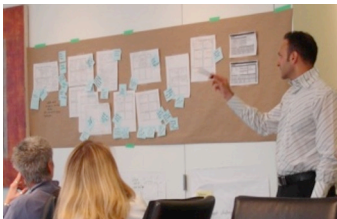
Ideally invite the whole team that will implement the solution. Consider inviting outside stakeholders who want to weigh in on the design.

Communicate the goal for the workshop:

Communicate the details about the context that participants will need to sketch their solutions.

Provide paper, pens, pencils, or other materials participants will need to sketch. Make it quick and easy to participate.

Ask participants to sketch their ideas in advance of the workshop. Tell them to spend no more than an hour sketching their solution ideas.



2 Perform

Setup:

Setup by posting the goals and agenda for the workshop. (Make sure to give short breaks every 60-90 minutes to help keep participant's energy up.) Supply the room with pens, sticky notes, and flip-chart paper.

Kick off:

Describe the goals and the workshop agenda.

Present:

Ask each participant to present his or her sketch – taking no more than two minutes.

It might go a bit like this: "Here's my sketch"; "This is my vision of the solution"; "This is why I made this decision, this is why I made that decision..."; "Team, what do you think?"

Critique:

After each presentation, the whole group quickly discusses the solution.

As a facilitator remind participants that: "It's about critiquing the design, not the designer."

Participants should:

- Point out problems – ideas that won't work
- Point out great ideas
- Recognize new ideas: ideas that come from seeing other's good ideas, or discussing alternatives to less perfect ideas

During the discussion the facilitator captures feedback. Try writing a single idea per sticky note. This makes them easier to organize later on.

Watch time. Try to spend only a few minutes per discussion.

Organize the outcomes:

Cluster ideas that are similar together. Watch out for conflicting ideas – ideas that don't work well if used together.

Vote on best ideas.

Wrap up & celebrate:

Photograph the output from the session.

Take a short (5 minutes or so) movie of someone explaining the workshop results.

Collect takeaways: go around the room asking each participant to say one thing they got out of the day.

3 Synthesize & Design

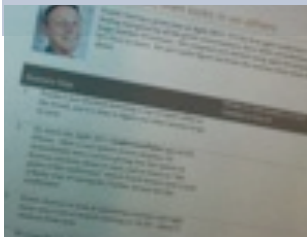
Those responsible for the final design pull the ideas together and create a more detailed design sketch synthesizing the best ideas where possible, and avoiding the problems.

Communicate the design to the rest of the team, along with thanks for participating.

Visualization Techniques

There are a variety of ways to begin imagining the user experience of your software. Try many of them. **Ideate** to identify new ideas. **Iterate** to refine ideas.

Tell a Story



Solution Scenario

What: A user scenario is a textual description of a user, real or fictitious, using a hypothetical product solution to successfully meet their goals. Ideally it's as descriptive as a novel helping the reader imagine the product solution.

Why: User scenarios allow exploration of multiple solutions quickly without the need for drawing skills. Scenarios can include details and describe elements of user experience that can't be described in a UI prototype.

How:

1. Identify a user of your system.
2. Imagine that user in a situation where they'll need to use your software to solve a problem or perform some work.
3. Imagine your user then proceeding to use your product and tell the story of that use.
4. Include realistic details. Describe the user overcoming common problems. Describe details of the product's user interface where it helps the story.

Imagine you've found a dusty book in the library. Incredibly it's an unpopular work of fiction about your user! You open the book to a random chapter, and there spilled out for you to read is a surprisingly compelling account of the book's hero using your product to successfully overcome a problem.

This is the story you'll write as a scenario.

Explore User Interface



Example 6-up from Adaptive Path

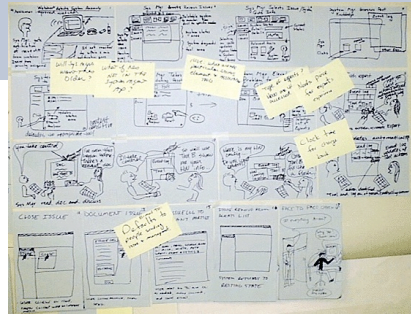
UI Screen Ideation

What: Using paper and pen or electronic tools draw a detailed representation of a screen of your product including detailed information found in the UI. Use annotation and callouts for paper, or animation for electronic prototypes to explore specific complex user interactions.

Why: The old expression "the devil is in the details" applies especially to product user interface design. A rough sketch of a product idea may seem feasible until you begin dealing with all the detailed bits of information that need to be in the UI, or the complex controls a user may need to use to manipulate the screen. A screen exploration allows you to consider these details at a low cost before making implementation decisions.

How:

1. Identify a specific area of the product to focus on. Try thinking of a kind of user and a place in their workflow where they have specific needs.
2. Build lists of details that need to be in the screen and specific actions users need to perform.
3. Using paper and pencil, or your favorite electronic tool, render the screen. Include the detailed information users need. Think through how they'll perform specific actions in the user interface.



UI Storyboard from Margarete Fuss, SAP AG

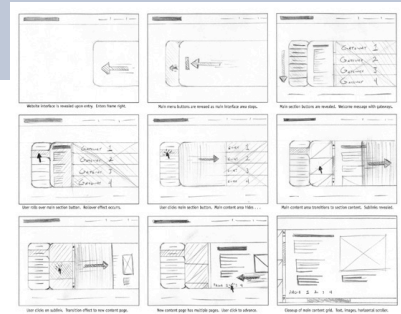
Design Comic

What: A design comic tells the story of a user of your proposed product as they use it to solve a problem. Like a comic book, the story is set to pictures show what users do, think, see, and say as they move through the story.

Why: With very few words and simple pictures, a design comic brings a solution scenario to life. Comics are compelling for the reader, and make it easy for the author to tell a story that includes visualization of the product, the users, and shows complex ideas like the user's emotions.

How:

1. Start by thinking through and writing a quick story about your product's user using your product.
2. Using simple square frames of a comic book page, draw the story scene by scene.
3. Give your character emotion with simple facial expressions.
4. Show what your character thinks or says using thought bubbles or speech balloons.
5. Draw the scene around your character including little bits of your product screen where it's useful.



Example storyboard from Arie Stavchansky,

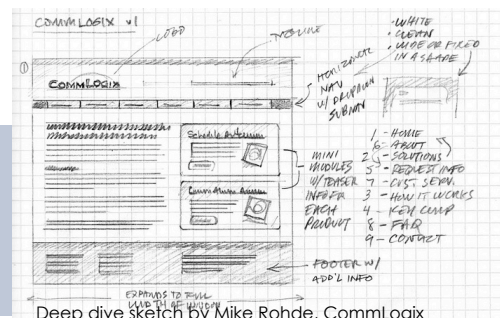
UI Story Board

What: A UI storyboard shows details of your product's user interface as a user uses it to meet a goal. The storyboard looks a bit like a comic book where each frame shows screens of your product in various states as the story progresses.

Why: A UI storyboard allows you to think through tricky aspects of user interface such as the details users need on the screen and how they're organized, and the navigation from screen to screen as the user moves through the steps necessary to reach a goal.

How:

1. Start by thinking through and writing a quick story about your product's user using your product.
2. For each major step of your story, sketch the product screen the user might see.
3. Draw or use annotations to describe the information the user sees on the screen and where it's found.
4. Show the buttons or other mechanisms the user uses to move from one screen to the next.



Deep dive sketch by Mike Rohde, CommLogix

UI Screen Exploration

What: Use screen ideation to focus on a particular screen or area of the product and brainstorm multiple variations of screens a user could use to reach a goal.

Why: Our first solution ideas are seldom our best ideas. Thinking of multiple screen layouts that help a user reach a goal helps identify innovative product solutions.

How:

1. Identify a specific area of the product to focus on. Try thinking of a kind of user and a place in their workflow where they have specific needs.
2. Sketch a version of a product screen that allows a user to reach their goal. Use annotation or call-outs to describe details of the screen.
3. Repeat the process by sketching a different variation of the same screen.
4. Try emphasizing different pieces of information; try removing information; try framing the information using different metaphors – an airplane cockpit, a movie poster...

More info: Schauer, **Sketchboards: Discover Better + Faster UX Solutions**
<http://www.adaptivepath.com/ideas/essays/archives/000863.php>