Identifying & Understanding Users:

Part one

2.009
Fall 2021

Laura McKee & Rebecca Thorndike-Breeze
Today We’ll Discuss:

- Importance of User Outreach Early & Throughout Design Process
- Why Stories Matter
- Tips for Reaching out
- Strategize Your Team’s User Outreach Plan & Interview Questions
Where Are You Now?

Moving from 3-Ideas to Sketch Models

Currently, you likely:

- Perceive a potential user has a problem, need, or want
- Have a vague design concept that might benefit them
- Have only a partial or incomplete understanding of this problem
- Need more robust, meaningful information (and evidence): FNAP!
- Are Developing a User Story and Persona
Elevate, Green Team, 2018
EASY LOAD BLUE A
Faster Loading Reduces Injury

Adjustable bridge, motorized rollers
Baggage Handlers
$20 billion

Uplift, Blue Team, 2019
Otto, Red Team, 2014
Reach Out to Users **Early**!

- What users have talked to so far in the ideation and concept development phases??

- What would keep you from reaching out tomorrow?

2.009 Theme Association Map, D. Wallace, 2021
Stories Matter in Understanding Users

“One of the most powerful, and least discussed ways, that narrative structures design process and outcomes is in the scoping stage.”

–Sasha Constanza-Chock, Design Justice
You can use stories to frame work in many technical fields

1. Announcing importance of field; 2. Overview of subject; 3. Indicating gap/raising a question;
4. Stating goal of study; 5. Describing procedures; 6. Detailing equipment;
7. Justifying procedures or methodology; 8. Stating results or findings; 9. Suggesting further research
Right now, you are beginning to tell a story

- This story shapes your “user persona.”

- At a basic level, a story is a way of organizing information with a human at its center.

- A story can help define a technical problem or user need.

- You’ll use stories to communicate your concept at various stages of design; these stories will change/evolve as you learn more!

- Seek out and listen carefully to as many user stories as you can throughout the design process.

Activity 1: Reflect

1) Right now, what is the story (or stories) your team uses to understand users? Talk it out or write it down. Is there consensus or differences between stories among team members? (2 mn)

2) What do you need to learn more about? What parts of your story rely on assumptions or assertions rather than evidence/ facts (FNAP) grounded in user interaction? (2 mn)

3) Opportunities for greater inclusivity? Greater kindness and empathy? How could you deepen and diversify your understanding of user experiences and needs by reaching out to users with different backgrounds, identities, abilities, life experiences, resources, geographic locations, kinds of knowledge etc.? (2 mn)

4) Keeping your responses to the above questions in mind, brainstorm questions you need to ask a user (4 mn)
Michelle’s London Bike Commute
Activity 2: Prepare Interview Questions with Your Team

**Write 5-7 questions you could ask a user to deepen your understanding of their experiences.**

- Focus on user’s experiences and opinions, don’t try to offer solutions or ask whether certain solutions might work
- Focus on listening to the user and their problem or need and trying to learn more about their experience
- Ask open-ended questions vs. leading or yes/no questions
- Ask questions that will encourage users to tell you a story about their experience(s). You can learn a lot from the details that emerge!
- Write down questions to share with team later. (You can use jamboard or make your own Google doc etc.)
About Surveys

High quantity, less guided, less nuance, no opportunity for follow-up questions.

Larger surveys more useful for later stages of design.

Get in touch with your CI before sending out any survey—sometimes questions can be confusing for users and very MIT-insidery….we can help a lot with this process!
Tips for Reaching Out for the First Time

● Brainstorm Where to Find Users (your personal connections, MIT community, Boston community, Outside of Boston, organizations that serve your user community etc.)
  ○ Be creative and flexible in your thinking. Reflect on your notes from Activity 2 to generate ideas.

● Once you identify specific individuals, see if anyone in your network can make a personal introduction. If not, then still reach out!

● Send an Email. Send a follow-up if you don’t hear back. (A few days later is appropriate. Another reason to start early! Don’t bombard with email, however)

● Cold-call (leave a friendly voicemail if they don’t answer, then follow up by email.)
Strategies for Reaching Out
Users can be a great resource to find other users!

Ask those you speak with if they can put you in touch with others. Build your network of users!
What to Say?

Be yourself. Be kind. Be grateful for a user’s time.

One example of a first email:

Dear ______,

My name is Laura McKee and I’m a Lecturer at MIT teaching with 2.009, a product design course in Mechanical Engineering. I am working on a guide to help students prepare user testing plans during the pandemic, when meeting in person might be difficult.

From my colleague Rebecca Thorndike-Breeze, I understand your team has been working with users remotely during the product design process. I’d love to learn more about your experiences in that process over the last few months. Would you be open to chatting briefly over the phone or in Zoom sometime this week? Or if there a time (or conference tool you prefer), I’m happy to talk on other platforms.

I’m also happy to answer any questions over email too. I know it is a complicated time and that your time is valuable. If you’d be able to chat, we’d be so grateful.

Sincerely,
Laura
Dear ________,

My name is Laura McKee and I’m a Lecturer at MIT teaching with 2.009, a product design course in Mechanical Engineering. I am working on a guide to help students prepare user testing plans during the pandemic, when meeting in person might be difficult.

From my colleague Rebecca Thorndike-Breeze, I understand your team has been working with users remotely in Zoom during the product design process. I’d love to learn more about your experiences in that process over last several months to develop my teaching materials. Would you be open to chatting briefly over the phone or in Zoom sometime this week? Or if there a time (or conference tool you prefer), I’m happy to talk on other platforms.

I’m also happy to answer any questions over email too.

I know it is a complicated time and that your time is valuable. If you’d be able to chat, we’d be so grateful.

Sincerely,
Laura
Next Steps

Share Today’s Notes with Your Team

Be an Advocate for User Outreach Now & Throughout Design Process

When considering user experiences and stories in design decisions, discuss whether you have “facts” verified by multiple users. (FNAP!)

Get User Outreach on Meeting Agendas
Reach out to your Team’s CI at any point during this process.

We’re here to help!

**Reaching Out to Users Part 2: Nov. 4, 7:30-9 PM, 3-370**