Step 4: Prototyping Solutions

Prototyping takes the ideas you've generated and decided to focus on and explore **solutions**. A prototype is like a **demo or a test model**. Sometimes it's even more rudimentary than that. By creating simplified models of your product or service, be it through sketches, cardboard, story boarding or role playing, you are able to quickly test possibilities without having to be overly invested in any one idea.

Prototypes, especially in the first stages, should be **quick** (created in minutes) and **cheap** to make (costing cents). As you gain insight into what ideas are worth pursuing you will evolve your prototyping and they can become more real-life and refined.

You can start out evaluating your prototypes internally, such as having your team test them out, but the goal is to put prototypes in front of your clients.

The benefit of prototyping is that you can fail quickly and cheaply! You'll be able to experiment and learn what works and what doesn't.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

A room big enough to move around in and supplies for creating prototypes, depending on the type of prototypes you'll be making. Supplies could be paper and pens or pencils, post-it notes, tape, paper clips, card board, poster board, or other random objects, based on the type of product or service you are prototyping. You may also need to arrange or construct and environment.

What supplies and resources will you need for your photocopying?

TYPES OF PROTOTYPES:

Sketching: Your team can use drawing as a way to try out possibilities, whether they're sketching out a new product or drawing the dimensions of a room to determine possible placement or an item or flow of traffic.

3D: Your team can build mini models of physical products using anything from paper or cardboard to boxes or metal wire.

Story Boarding: Your team can prototype a process by creating a storyboard that shows the steps in the process, using graphical representations or even words.

Role Playing: Your team can act out scenarios or experiences, or you can role play directly with real users. The more realistic you can make the setting and situation the better. This can be used in the office as a preliminary way of prototyping or you can do real-life role playing in the actual locations in which the experiences would normally take place. At first, quick role playing in the office is great.

Using the Actual Product: Depending on the type of product or service you're working with, you may be able to utilize the actual existing product that you're working to improve.

What type of prototypes will your team be making?

What else may you need in order to be prepared?

HOW TO PROTOTYPE:

- Take out your narrowed down list of ideas. You can generate prototypes for each of the topics at the time, or tackle them separately.
- For each prototype, identify what is being tested—the goals.
- Have everyone work independently at first, or break into small groups. How will you break up into groups?

- Start building! Even if you're not sure yet, just picking up supplies will get your creative juices flowing. In some cases, the prototypes may take advanced planning, but the goal is for this to be rapid. How will you introduce the activity?

- Don't spend too long on any 1 prototype. If it isn't working, start over or make adjustments. Spending too much time on it makes you too emotionally invested in it. Consider setting a timeframe for the first round of prototypes. What timeframe (if any) are you going to ask your team to operate within for each prototype?

At what point will you ask each group to share?

EVALUATE YOUR PROTOTYPES

Your team may generate a dozen, or even dozens of prototypes. The goal is to quickly eliminate unsuccessful ideas, re-work ideas that show promise, and narrow down your prototypes to a handful that you can further develop and test in real life situations.

Determine ahead of time **how** your team will share their prototypes. You may want to consider using the methods we've discussed, such as voting or story mapping to help identify which prototypes to take into the field and test with users.

In what way will your team share their prototypes with each other? Will you have them share on the spot or use one of the ideation methods mentioned?