



## Flight Plan Guidebook

*A detailed guide to take your project from idea to successful launch.*

Thanks for downloading this sample Flight Plan Document. What follows is a detailed explanation and a sample of what a Flight Plan Document looks like and what it might contain.

The purpose of a Flight Plan Document is to surface and document every conceivable aspect of your project so that the actual construction and execution of your project can happen as quickly and smoothly as possible.

This Flight Plan is to your project like a blueprint is to a homebuilder. The blueprint lays out measurements and eliminates all guesswork so that the home can be built on schedule and without costly mistakes.

Similarly this Flight Plan Document lays out the business goals, technical requirements, user interactions, and the visual construction (via wireframes) of your project so that your project can be built on schedule and without costly waste.

Our goal, through this Flight Plan, is to provide a detailed explanation of your project that any competent developer could follow to execute the project. We hope you'll work with us, but you don't have to. This Flight Plan will serve as a guide to you as you make decisions about the best way to proceed with your company to accomplish your goals.

## What Does Success Look Like?

Our goal is not to write code for you, or create a website, or make an app. Our goal is not to deliver a completed project and get paid. Certainly we'll do those things, but they're not our end goal. Instead, our goal is to help you achieve business success for your project. What if you could launch your project early and get your first paying customers right away? What would that mean to you? What would it mean if you could double the number of incoming qualified leads? What if you could quickly iterate through versions 1, 2, and 3 and beat your competition to market?

You see, we could write code for anybody, but we choose to work with people like you who have a clear idea of what success means to you. Then we help formulate a recipe—a roadmap—to help you get there. Then we help you do it.

In order to achieve business success, we'll need to know what success means for this project. Is the goal for this project to get your first paying users? Then what are the minimum features that we need to build in order to do that? Is the goal to increase revenue per user? To sell more items? To decrease turnover and increase the number of repeat customers? Those are all reasonable goals that will inform our decisions about what to build and how to approach this project to minimize waste and risk and maximize the financial upside for you.

## How Your Project Will Work

The Flight Plan Document will outline a schedule and milestones for the project. The schedule depends greatly on the particular project; most projects are organized into two-week **Project Sprints**. A Sprint is a short, intensive period of work with a particular goal (or set of goals) in mind and a deliverable at the end.

We work on your project in a series of discrete sprints. Sprints are usually two-weeks in length. We kick off each sprint with a planning meeting, followed by a period of intense work. We then pause for review the following Wednesday, process any necessary revisions, and follow up with a mini-launch on Friday. The review period is used to test what was built during the sprint, to put it in front of users, to learn as much as we can, and then to apply that learning to the next sprint.

You can push hard and fast, one sprint after another, or you can take time between sprints to test, learn, and iterate on your business idea. The pace is completely up to you.

## The Project Management Triangle

The Project Management Triangle is a way of visualizing the tension between the constraints of every project. Every successful project achieves a balance between the three constraints: Time (schedule), Scope (what is to be done), and Cost (financial and human resources).



Image credit: Wikipedia

Each of these constraints can also be thought of as “levers” that can be used to manipulate the project. For example, if you can throw a lot of money into a project you may be able to achieve a very big project in a very short amount of time. Or if you’re short on money you may be able to do a project on a shoestring by allowing a large amount of time for the project.

We’ve found that the best lever for success tends to be scope. By this we mean that we have a very clear picture of what we will be building. If we have such a clear picture—a roadmap—of our project, it becomes much easier to accurately estimate time and cost.

## Project Scope

The “scope” of the project is a list of everything that needs to be done in order for this project to be considered a success. Scope includes things like detailed feature explanations, user personas (who will be using the app), technical requirements, outside data or API resources, screen wireframes, and any other details that this project is required to have.

Note the use of the word “required”. One of the most influential factors in a project’s success can be what is *not* built at this stage. It’s tempting to imagine a long list of all the ideal features and attributes of this project. But remember, every additional item added to the project scope will increase the project’s schedule, and consequently its cost.

One of the biggest hurdles for a successful project (by successful, we mean finishing on time and within budget) is “scope creep”. Scope creep happens when small changes to the project scope add up to larger and larger changes. Like pebbles rolling down a mountainside to start an avalanche, scope creep can affect the ability to deliver on time and within budget.

That’s why it is so important to stay focused on our answers to the question “what does success look like for this project”. Staying focused on the business goal for this project will help us strip away everything that doesn’t directly advance that goal, and create only those things that do.

Remember, scope is one of the three project management levers. We’re not trying to keep things small because we don’t want to write a lot of code. Rather, we’re tightly defining the scope in order to achieve laser-like focus to accomplish your project goal with minimal waste.

## Project Schedule

As part of this Flight Plan we will estimate the amount of time that will be required for us to accomplish everything in the project scope. We use milestones and features outlined in the project scope combined with our experience to estimate as closely as possible how many weeks the project will take for us to build.

The project schedule is another tool that we can use to manage risk. As anyone who has worked on a software project knows, there is always a risk that a project will go wildly over time, and consequently over budget. We know that the project schedule is influenced largely by the project scope. That is why it’s so important to tightly define the project scope.

There may be some factors that will be beyond our ability to control. Such things might include third-party vendor delays, or problems with external APIs. We’ll try to identify any areas of potential ambiguity during the Flight Planning stage so that we can plan for it.

## **Project Cost**

The final section of the Flight Plan will state a project cost estimate. Your project cost estimate will include a low and a high range, based on the number of sprints that we plan for the project.

We'll do our best to stay within the timeframe that we estimate. If we estimate a six-sprint project (twelve weeks), we will move heaven and earth to finish within that timeframe.

It does sometimes happen that changes must be made to the scope during the project. These changes can affect the duration of the project, and consequently, the cost. If this happens, we'll let you know before any scope changes are approved so that we can adjust the project parameters accordingly.

## What Your Flight Plan Document Will Contain

### **Business goals of the project**

The first thing we'll talk about at our Flight Plan Meeting is the business goals for this project. We want to know very specific things about your business, how you're doing (or proposing to do) business, and how this project fits in with your overall business goals. Then we'll write down a specific business goal for this project. That goal will guide the rest of our discussions and achieving that goal will be the "north star" that will guide everything else in this Flight Plan.

### **User personas**

A user persona is a short narrative that describes a user of your app. The purpose of user personas is to try to understand the person who is using your app, why they're using it, and what their goals are. Just like the goal of this document is to help you achieve success, the goal of your app is to help your users achieve success. The user persona helps us understand what success looks like for your users.

We may end up with several user personas. Each functional type of person who uses your app will have a persona. For example, there may be one or two personas to describe each type of your ideal client—the end user. Then there might also be a user persona for an administrator, who will see different data from the end users.

The more we know about your ideal users, the more detailed we can make their user personas. And consequently, the greater chance we'll have of helping them to achieve success using your product.

### **Technical requirements**

This section will list out all the technical requirements of your project. Technical requirements include things like:

- Platform (web, iOS, Android)
- User login requirements (username & password, social media credentials, etc.)
- External API resources
- Administrative features

This is also where we'll list out each feature and talk in detail about what each feature will do. A few examples of features might include:

- Posting messages
- Uploading files
- Recurring payments

- User-generated content
- Calendaring & scheduling
- GPS/location data
- Product catalogs
- Shopping cart

Each feature in that list would be a heading and include a detailed description of how that feature is expected to work and who will use it.

### **First-person user walkthroughs from the perspective of each user persona**

In this section we'll imagine that we're sitting down with each fictitious user persona that we created above, and we'll "watch" them performing certain key functions with your app. We'll talk about what the user sees on the screen, what data they enter or click on, and what happens after they click. We'll include a walk through for each of the major features.

### **Wireframes of key screens**

One of the most useful tools for speedy development is having visual images to illustrate key screens that will be built. This eliminates guesswork on the part of the developer and makes it easier to lay out elements on the screen.

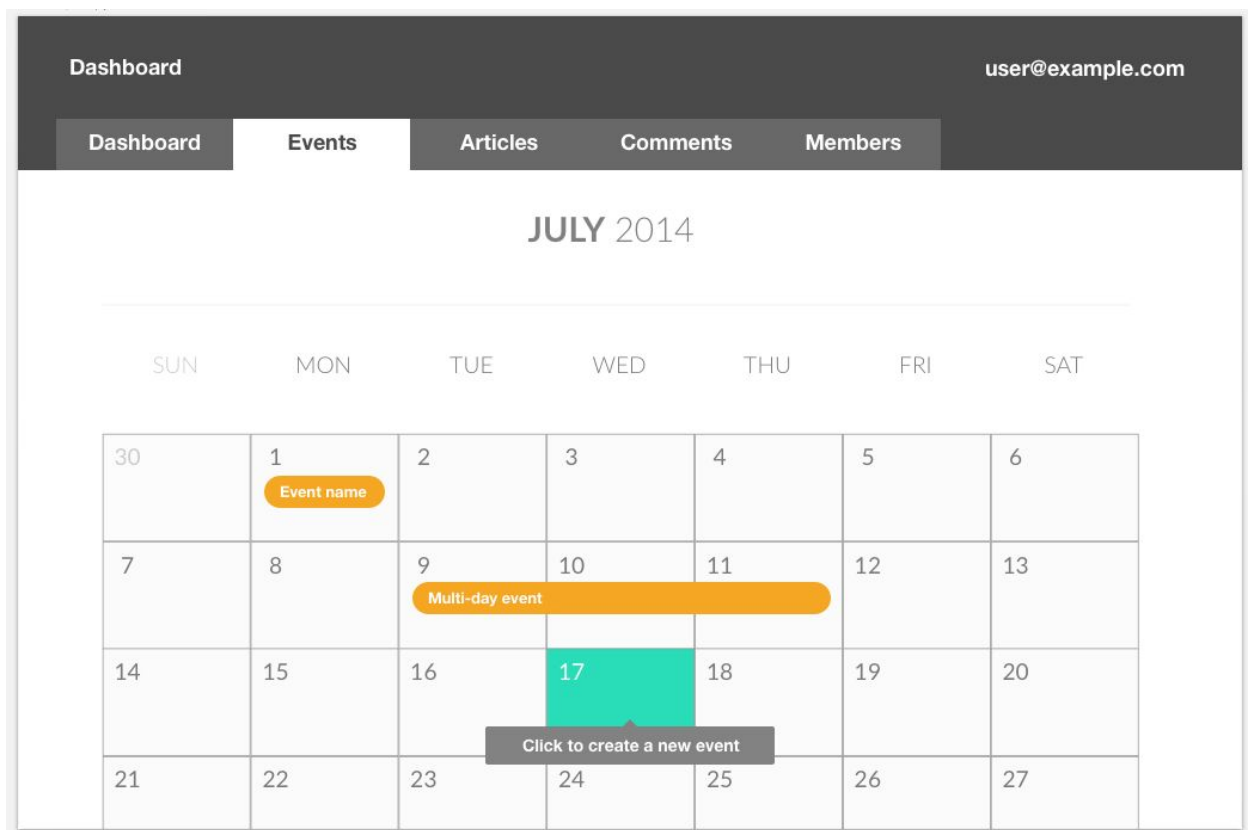
Wireframes are not intended to be an illustration of the finished product. Quite the contrary - they're usually rough-drawn on purpose: the minimum required elements of the screen are shown but the visual look and feel is left to the discretion of the designers.

The wireframe shown below is a composite example based on projects that we've done in the past. The idea here is to convey the key components on the screen without getting overly detailed. The wireframe gives us an idea of:

- What data needs to be displayed
- What key functions need to be performed on this screen
- What should happen when a user clicks or data is entered

For example, this particular screen allows the user to view and edit an event calendar:

- User can click on a day to create a new event.
- User can see existing events on the calendar.
- User can click on an event to see more detail about the event.





## How Flight Planning Works

**Day 1:** Flight Planning kicks off with a full day (up to six hours) marathon meeting where we break out the sharpies and write down everything we can think of about your app. The goal of this meeting is to discover:

- The unique value that your app provides
- The various users who will be using your app
- Any particular technical requirements (API access, etc.)
- What success looks like for this project

I'll come to your location. We can meet at your office, or I'll book a meeting space. Lunch will be provided. At the end of the day we'll have a pile of notes and I'll have a good idea of the scope of the app.

**Days 2-5:** I'll spend the next four days creating the Flight Plan Document. The Flight Plan will include wireframes, visual mockups, and a scope document that will clearly outline everything about the product.

The scope document will contain:

- Technical requirements
- Business goals of the product
- User personas
- First-person user walkthroughs from the perspective of each user persona
- Wireframes of key screens
- Proposal and cost estimate

**Day 6:** We'll meet in person if possible, otherwise via video conference. We'll need to set aside at least two uninterrupted hours for this meeting, and we'll need all the stakeholders to be present. The purpose of this meeting will be to go over the Flight Plan Document. You'll have an opportunity to ask any questions or clarifications, and to submit revisions at this time.

**Day 7:** Final delivery of Flight Plan Document.

If extra revisions are required after delivery, they'll be billed at an hourly rate of \$160 (3-hour minimum).

At this point you'll have a complete Flight Plan Document. This document will serve as the foundation, the blueprint to guide the development of Version 1.0.

## About The Small Idea Company

Hi there, I'm Ryan Crispin Heneise, the owner of The Small Idea Company. I've been developing software for the web since 2001. In 2004 I started my first consultancy, and in 2008 I created my own SaaS (Software as a Service) business called Donor Tools, which I sold in 2015. I'm passionate about using my skills and experience to help other startup founders achieve success.

### Where you can find me:

- [@mysmallidea](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [GitHub](#)
- [The Small Idea Company Blog](#)
- [Medium](#)
- [AngelList](#)

"If you're looking for excellence in application development you'll find it in Ryan Heneise."

—Shane Thacker

"Ryan is an outstanding designer and developer who is honest, hard working, and an all around nice guy. He can help a startup get started from ground zero, or jump in at any point and contribute greatly to an organization's success. I highly recommend Ryan and would find it a pleasure to work with him again in the future."

—James Higginbotham

"If you are searching for a solid programmer who also knows how to think beyond the horizons of limitations, look no further."

—Nathan Smith

"Ryan is a very capable programmer who is constantly assessing the best way to approach and complete a project."

—Dave Lowe

"Ryan is fantastic to work with! He is very detailed orientated, a talented programmer, and able to speak both technology and simplify it for clients who are not apart of the technology world."

—Robert Evans

"Ryan is an excellent developer and just as good a project manager. He is efficient and meticulous. On the several occasions I have worked with him, he has been wonderful at communicating clearly and providing solid direction for the projects."

—Matt Heerema

## Projects That We've Done

### Donor Tools

**What it is:** Smart donation management software for nonprofit organizations.

**Services Provided:** Application development, graphic design, server management and deployment, marketing, and user support.

**Donor Tools**  
GROWING NONPROFITS

About Us Blog Testimonials Features User Guide Pricing & Signup Sign In

# Smart Donor Management

Nonprofit software to help charities, churches, and growing organizations make smart decisions and raise more money.

**Get Started**  
(it takes about 20 seconds)  
or [browse our user guide](#)

With unlimited users, unlimited donations, smart tags, multiple names, donation splits, online donations, Quickbooks integration, and lots more, we make you look good.

- Web Based**  
Connect across town or across continents
- Open API**  
Access your donor database from other apps.
- Donor Self-Service**  
Donors can sign in, view reports, and donate online.
- Smart Tags**  
Automatic grouping, querying, & reporting, always up-to-date
- Unlimited Users**  
Mobilize your team, whether you're one or one hundred.
- Integrated Letters & Email**  
Keep in touch with donors with integrated thank-yous

I personally love it, so far! I like the ability to access this data from any computer through

**Donor Tools**  
Demo International signed in as ryan@donortools.com • sign out • help

Find a Donor

**New Person**

Prefix First Name Middle Name Last Name Suffix Type

Jill C Baker

**Smart Tags**  
Activity in the past day  
Collects who have donated over \$100  
Unlabeled  
Unlabeled  
Unlabeled

**Formal Solution**  
Formal Solution is the way you would address this donor in formal correspondence (e.g. Mr. & Mrs. Baker)  
Recognition name  
Recognition name is the way in which a donor prefers that their name appear in printed materials (e.g. The Joe and Jane Baker Family)

**Donor Tools**  
Demo International signed in as ryan@donortools.com • sign out • help

Find a Donor

**Audit History**

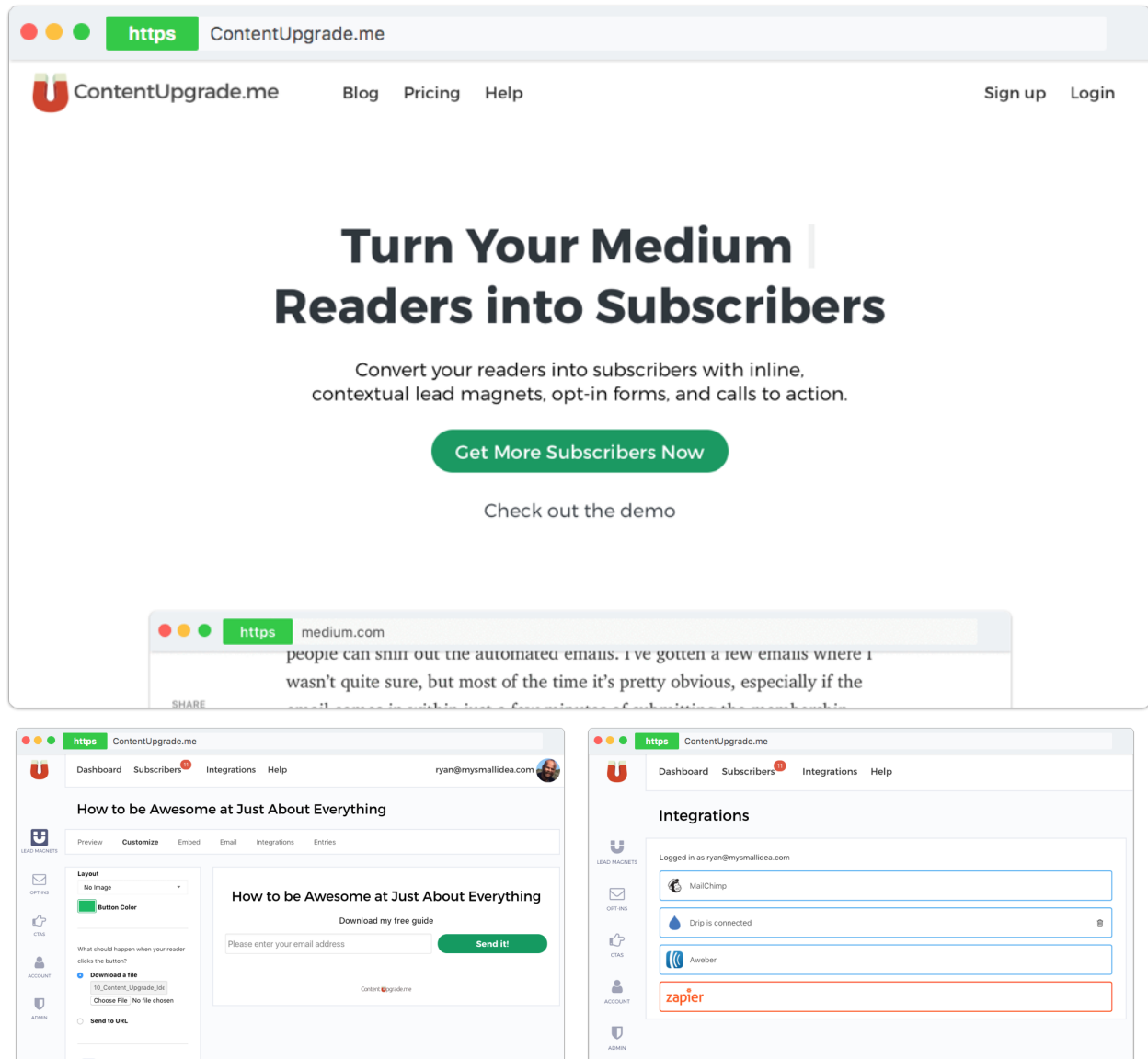
On Nov 12, 2010

- You added a **asset**  
Hitch Pau
- You added a **asset**  
Hitch Pau

## ContentUpgrade.me

**What it is:** Embeddable lead generation forms for authors using Medium.com.

**Services Provided:** MVP (Minimum Viable Product) proof of concept, graphic design, custom software development and maintenance.



## Ready to get started?

Wonderful! Here's what we need to do:

1. If you haven't already, please go ahead and schedule your free 30-minute discovery call. You can find a time on my calendar that is convenient for you:  
<https://calendly.com/mysmallidea/discovery>
2. When you're ready to set up your Flight Planning session, just email me at [ryan@mysmallidea.com](mailto:ryan@mysmallidea.com) and we'll get it on the schedule. We'll need at least 2-weeks of lead time, so plan accordingly.
3. We'll send you an invoice. The cost of Flight Planning is \$6,000, and is payable in advance.
4. Please fill out the Flight Planning Intake Questionnaire. This will help to give us a head start coming into the meeting:  
<https://mvp.mysmallidea.com/pre-call-questionnaire>