

Hidden Gem

Geoffrey Kuhns

Overview

The Problem

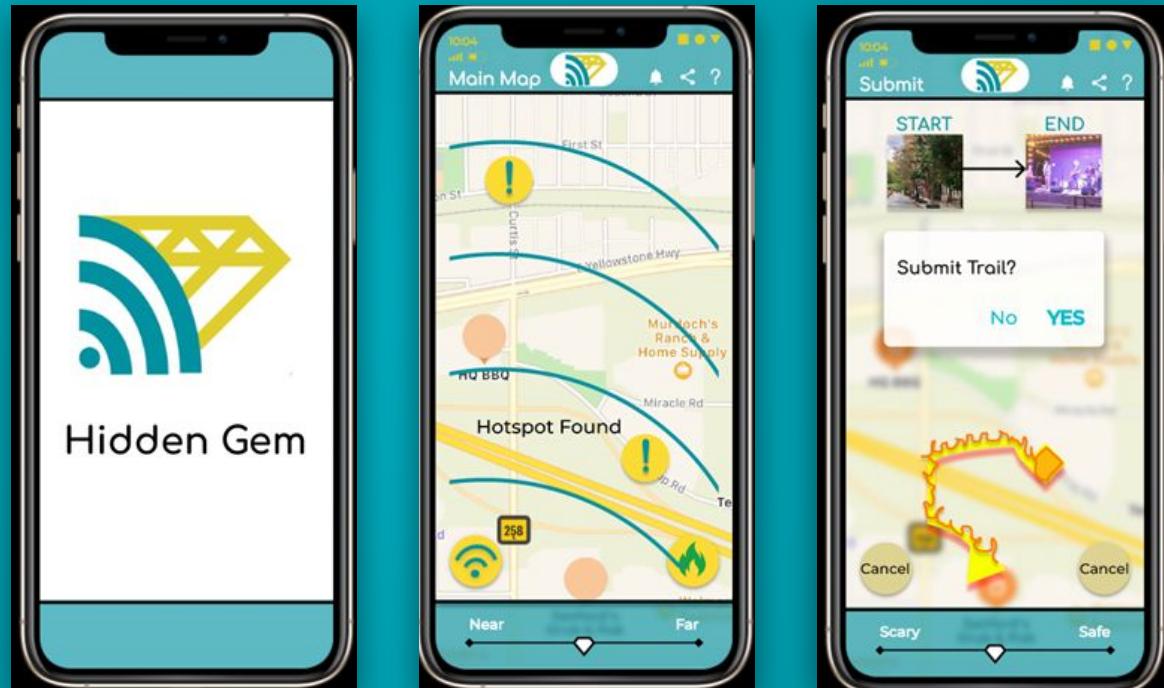
Develop a travel app for the post-Covid world.

The Solution

Hidden Gem, a radar for finding locals and blazed trails to get there safely.

Mid-Fi Prototype

Figma, Miro, Photoshop
GSuite, Zoom, Otter



Start of the Plan

Background

“Do as the locals do” — easier said than done. How do you know where to go, what to do, and how to get there? Existing booking services offer little in the way of in-depth visual documentation of the actual places. How clean is that washroom? When they do, they tend to promote the tourist strip most savvy travelers want to avoid! What if there was a resource for the inside scoop to really do as the locals do?

Methodology

1. Define our Proto Persona — world traveler Susan — and interview for pain points.
2. Ideate a potential solution, based on our evolved Susan as a User Persona.
3. Prototype to lock down the app’s purpose, flow, and usability.
4. Test and iterate to refine the vision for Hidden Gem, culminating in a Mid-Fi Prototype.

User Research

Milestone
Numero
Uno

Proto-Persona



Susan

35 Yrs. Old
Sr. HR Rep
\$60k annual

Goals & Needs

Travel solo
Interested in meeting people
Wants to see NEW places, not old
Travels a LOT. Frequent flyer
Travels mostly by air

Behavioral Demographics

- Single professional
- Free from family
- Has a corgi named Bella
- Enjoys uplifting Hallmark movies
- Lot of online shopping — especially Express
- Gets ideas from Pinterest
- Fan of Instagram, but not Facebook

Pain Points & Potential Solutions

- Gauging quality and cleanliness of stays
- Booking travel logistics
- Inside scoop on what the locals do and where
- Can't see enough of her desired locations
(mostly text review research)

Interview Concept

Goal

Showcase LOCAL hotspots with visual representation of area

Research Questions

How would we showcase these hotspots for the world travelers?

How would we find and vet local venues to showcase?

How far is the world traveler willing to go to reach these local spots?

When would you use this resource: spontaneously or to plan the trip?

How do world travelers currently find local experiences?

Interview Plan

Participants

Our ideal participant...

...is a world traveler

...is interested in finding local hotspots

...would like to see area details in advance

Schedule

Aug 2021 Sun, 01

Start interview recruiting

Ask Facebook friends who travel the world

Tue, 03

Start interviewing

Zoom + Questionnaire + Otter

Wed, 04

Finish recruiting

Start synthesizing data on Miro

Thu, 05

All interviews complete

Fri, 06

Finish synthesizing the data

Sat, 07

Compile data and polish the presentation

Present results as a User Persona

Interview Transcripts

~ Lindsay J

What is this place known for? Is there any, what's the historical value? What's the cultural value.

I'll ask around to see if there's anybody I know who's been there before.

Seeing your feet up somewhere, I can envision myself being and having a good time.

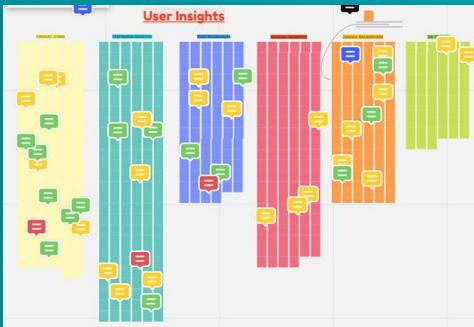
~ Stephanie H

I love the architecture, like being able to walk and see it up close to me is what's really the coolest part of all that. Yeah.

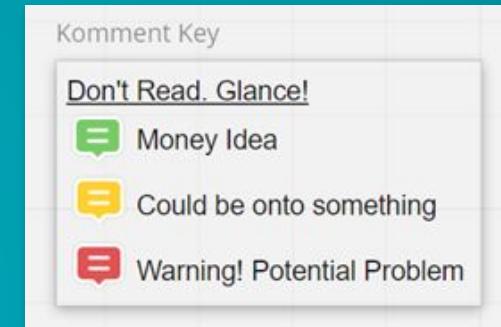
I think the hardest part is navigating through a lot of the trash sites. There's a lot of clickbait sites that I think you have to kind of bypass.

[Link to Interviews](#)

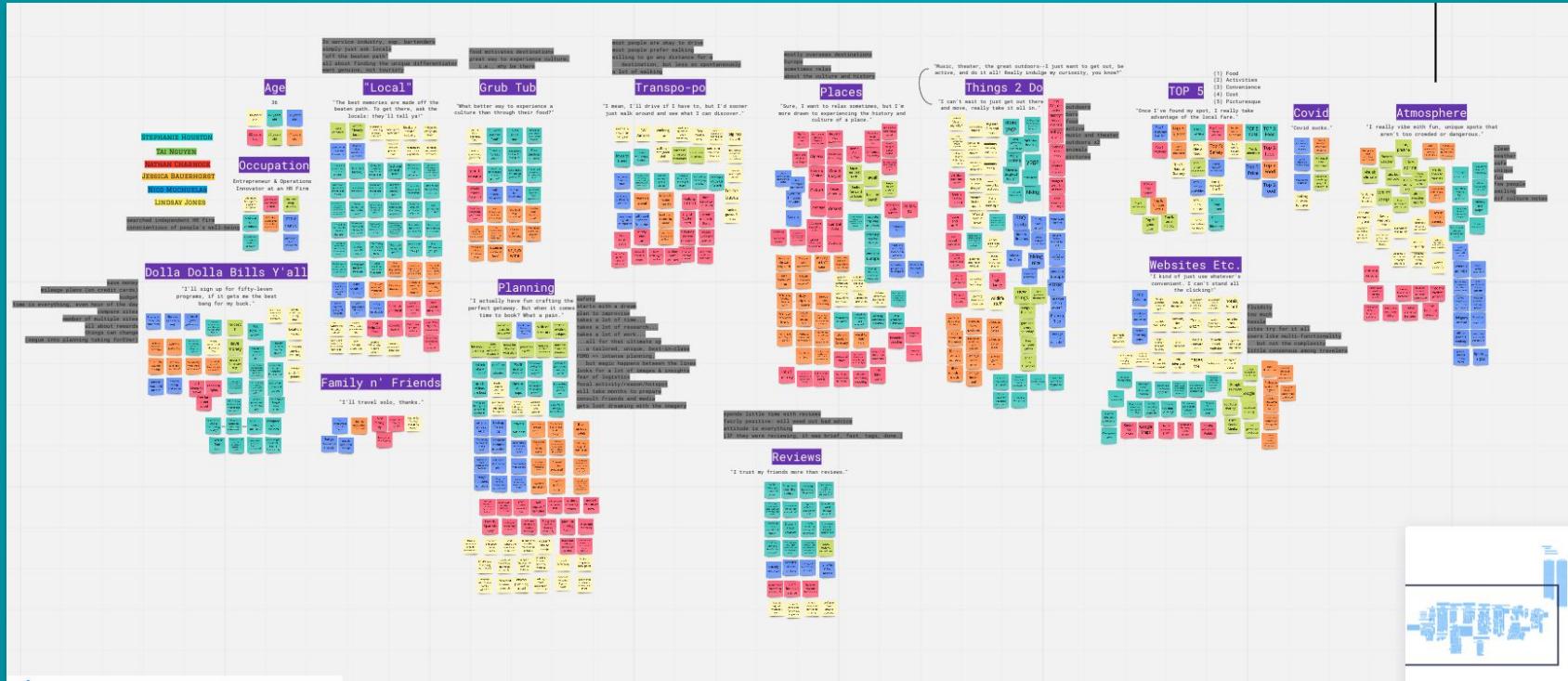
User Insights



- Locals have something to prove
- Videos help to get a feel for an area
- Service industry is a great resource



Affinity Diagram



Affinity Diagram



- Everyone wants to spend well
- Travelers hardly mention Covid
- Food is central in decision making
- Local experiences are highly sought

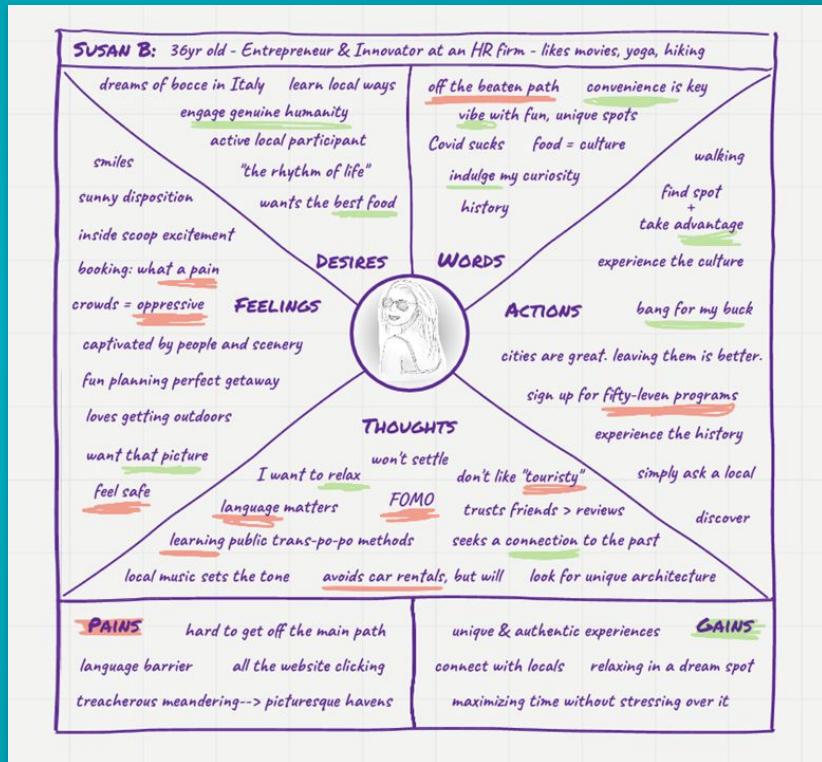
Empathy Map

Pains

- Hard to get off the main path
- Language Barrier
- All the website clicking
- Treacherous meandering → Picturesque Haven

Gains

- Unique & authentic experience
- Connect with locals
- Relaxing in a dream spot
- Maximizing time without stressing over it



User Persona



Susan | 36 yrs old

HR Innovator | Entrepreneur

“Will travel for food!”

“I’d sooner just walk around and see what I can discover.”

“I’m more drawn to the history and culture of a place.”

“These miles won’t spend themselves!”

Bio

Dreams aplenty, Susan travels two to three times a year. Her corgi Bella helps her peruse exotic locales online but stays home to watch her boyfriend. Sometimes her friends tag along, but what she really wants is new, lifelong friends around the world.

Frustrations

- Hard to find and engage locals
- Language barrier
- Navigating websites: hassle

Needs

- To maximize time without stress
- To minimize phone use
- To consult videos and locals

Goals

- Unique & authentic experiences
- Connect with locals
- Relax in a dream spot

The Story So Far

Proto Persona: True

Mid 30s
Veteran flyer
Social but solo
Likes movies and Instagram
Checks for quality and cleanliness
Booking is painful
Wants the local scoop

Proto Persona: False

Single
Sources Pinterest
Reads many text reviews

Went Well

Five interview sweet spot
Division of labor
Played to each other's strengths
Collaborative design
Step by step process

Could've Gone Better

More recorded interviews,
less manual notes.
Converting to Slides

Now What

Video-audio showcase to gain a genuine sense of atmosphere

Geo-location safety app
(places to avoid; good times to go)

Uber-style app for finding local guides

App that notifies you when it is ideal to book a trip based on travel criteria

Special Thanks: Aaron Lord

Definition & Ideation

Milestone
Numero
Dos

User Insight

Impact Statements

World travelers who shirk the beaten path need a safe and easy way to connect with locals *in the moment* because of the self-defeating stress from failing to plan serendipity.

IMPACT: to safely connect world travelers with unique and authentic experiences.

Problem Statement

We believe paving a safe path for independent world travelers will enable them to indulge their curiosity and to find the local, **hidden gems** they seek without stressing over planning every little moment.

Travel apps that showcase popular hotspots were designed to simplify planning and help travelers meet locals.

We have observed, however, that myriad features continue to drown users in information overload, which perpetuates the analysis paralysis and stress of planning.

Problem Statement

Additionally, past-tense reviews and ratings connect travelers with the past, not locals on the scene, in the moment.

How might we improve the social traveling experience, connecting pathfinders with people, not reviews, so that our customers feel safe blazing a new trail?

Problem Statement

Success KPIs

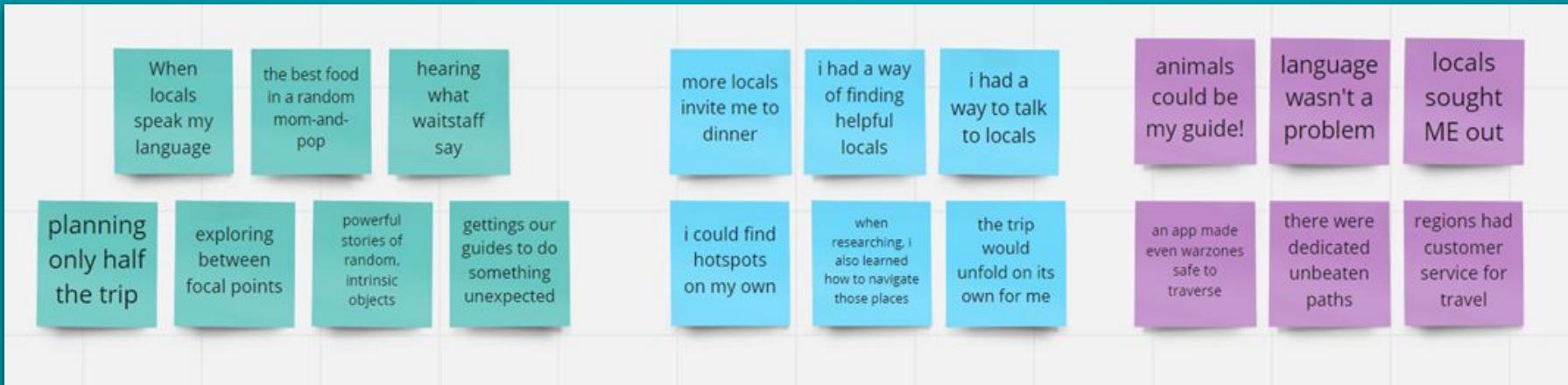
- Number of active, non-travelers per month: based on pings.
- Number of added foreign contacts: weighted by venue.
- Greater proportion of blazed trails rated as safe: upvotes.

Ideation

I Like...

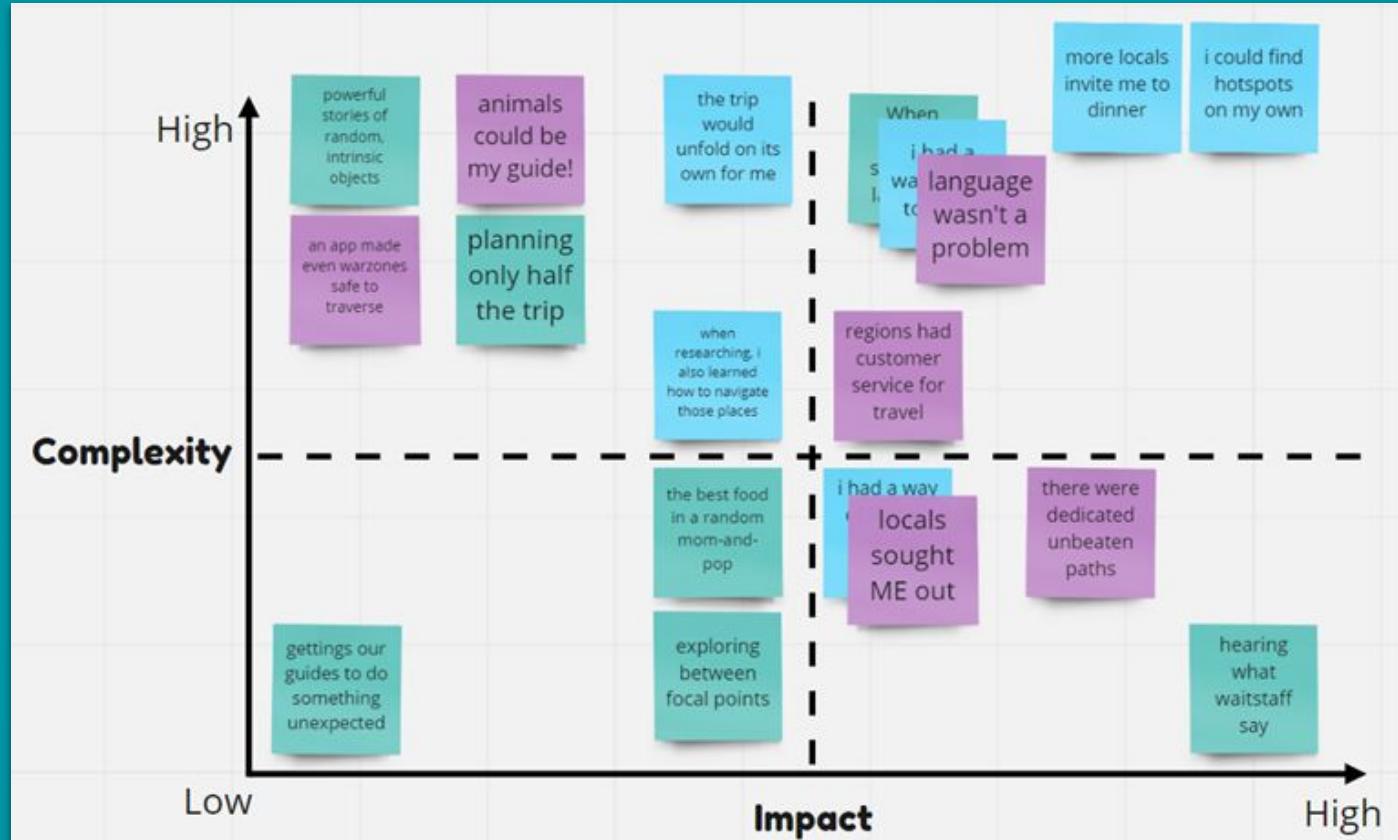
I Wish...

What If...

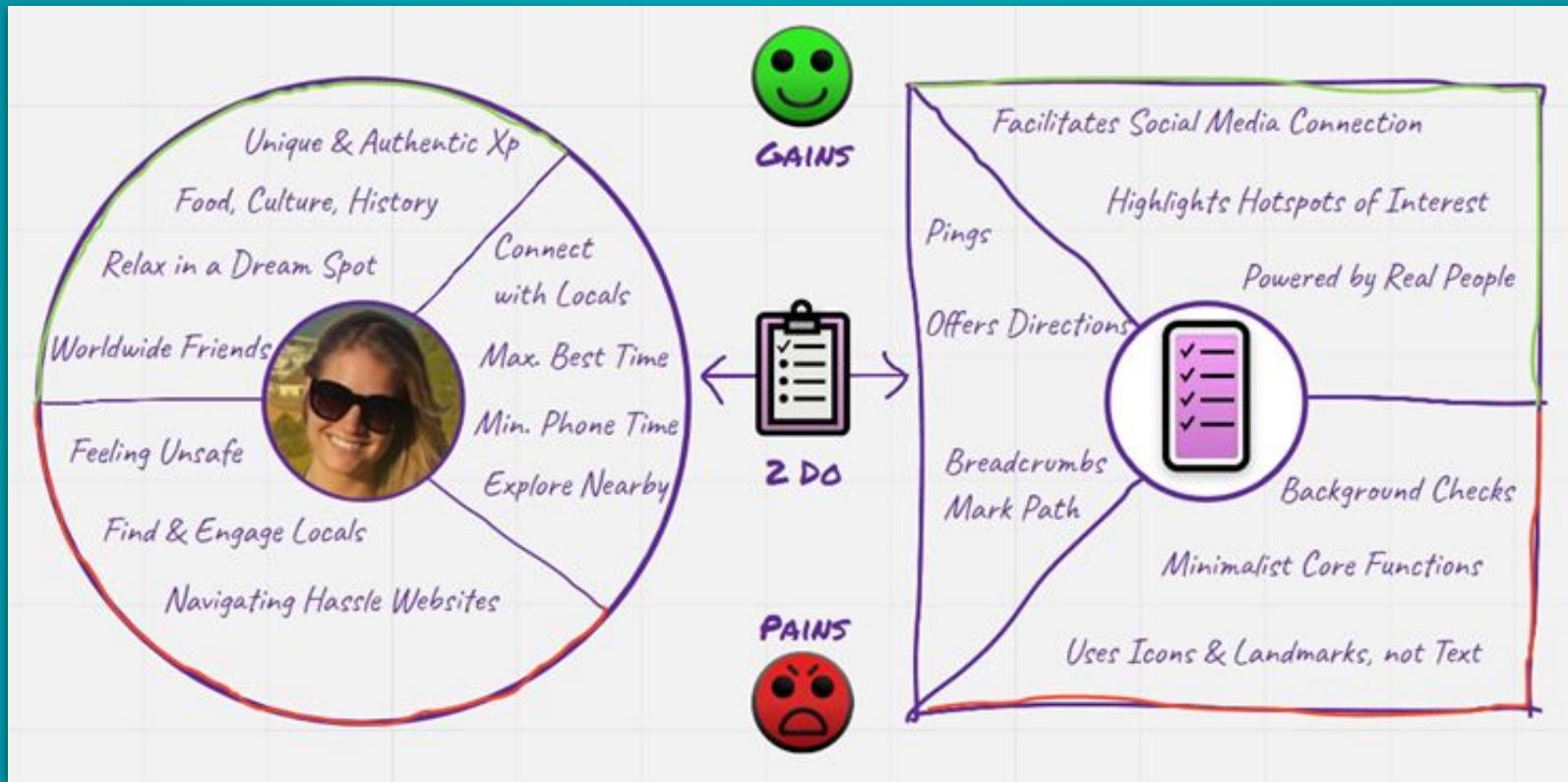


Getting into Susan's head, it became clear that our biggest opportunity was in identifying and guiding her to local people, not necessarily places.

Ideation



Value Proposition



Value Proposition

We are developing a radar for blazed paths and locals to help social world travelers to find authentic experiences on the fly.

We're better because we enable safer improvising and connect pathfinders to people, not reviews.

Believe it:

- Background check users
- Rate path safety and fun
- Reward genuine, local coopetition

User Scenario

Susan
Entrepreneur
HR Innovator
36 yrs



Connect
Improvise
Social Adventure

Susan decides to visit the capital museum a friend recommended. Lost in the history, she stays until dinner without making any plans. Downtown has plenty of restaurants, but they seem busy and typical. She could just start walking, but for how long?
Is it safe?
Will she get lost?
Would she even find anything better?
Susan pulls up **GeoLord**:
She pings for helpful locals and landmarks.
Blazing a trail will help find her way back.
Susan takes off confidently for a nearby wine garden and live music!

Local Hotspot
Food Music
Culture Unique



Safe
Nearby
Hidden Gem



Phase 1

“What do I do now?”
Yearns to keep going,
but does not know how
or where.

Phase 2

Walks off without direction.
Struggles to meet locals to
ask, such as waitstaff.
Identifies an opportunity.

Phase 3

Participates in the local
scene, a hidden hotspot.
Notes the adventure and
people she met.

Etc.

Susan keeps on
her vacation
as planned,
until a gap.

Storyboard

1 Trip Gap: Fear of Missing Out



Lost in history, Susan misses her reservation. Now, she has to make new plans on the fly, but she is unfamiliar with the area.

4 Has the Time of Her Life



Sure enough, she finds a local, hidden gem! Food, fun, and friends are right around the corner. She found the way with **Hidden Gem**.

2 Anxiety: Pings for Help



Susan is adventurous, but soon she's worried. Is it safe? Can she find her way back? **Hidden Gem** pings her location to find help.

5 Saves Gem & Continues Trip



Before she goes, Susan flags her new spot. Now, she can find it and share it with others! If she wants, Susan can even track her path.

3 Follows Guide to Local Hotspot



Guided by **GeoLord**, Susan follows the safest waypoints and strong, visual landmarks. She consults **GeoLord** for directions and safety.

6 New Friends. New Adventure!



The next day, Susan uses **Hidden Gem**'s social connection feature to meet the local users she met last night. Now for a unique, insider's adventure!

Susan's Journey

Susan
Entrepreneur
HR Innovator
36 yrs



Motivations
Shirking beaten paths
Food, Culture, History
Connecting with
real people
Turning gaps
into serendipity

Susan's Story

Between reservations, Susan needs to improvise. She just starts walking, but quickly feels unsafe, maybe lost! Susan uses **Hidden Gem** to ping for local paths, rated for safety. Susan takes off confidently for a nearby wine garden and live music! Excited with her new spot, she "blazes her trail" to come back. The next day, Susan meets locals she connected with for more fun!

Susan's Goals

Unique and authentic experience.
Make worldwide friends, real locals.
Feel safe and guided.
Less phone. More trail blazing.

Susan's Journey



Concerned

- 1 The trip is going fine, until...
- 2 Oh oh. A gap! Now what?



Fearful

- 3 She tries exploring, to no avail.
- 4 Uncertainty turns to anxiety into fear.



Curious

- 5 Evaluate venue.
- 6 Susan starts using **Hidden Gem** to find her way safely.



Joyful

- 7 Finds a hidden gem; has an amazing time!
- 8 Susan saves the spot and her local contacts.



Fulfilled

- 9 Finds her new friends for a great time.
- 10 Susan continues her trip with her friends!



- 1 The trip is going fine, until...



- 2 Oh oh. A gap! Now what?



- 3 She tries exploring, to no avail.



- 4 Uncertainty turns to anxiety into fear.



- 5 Evaluate venue.
- 6 Susan starts using **Hidden Gem** to find her way safely.



- 7 Finds a hidden gem; has an amazing time!
- 8 Susan saves the spot and her local contacts.



- (Susan goes to sleep.)



- Next Day



Our Opportunities

Make the app a first resort, not "if I need it."

Notify users of scary and best paths.

Incentivize locals to chart their favorite spots.

Social connections. Filter blazed trails.

Privacy for pings. Social invites.

The Story So Far

Went Well

Fleshing out Susan's story

Peer feedback and review (Miro & Slack)

Could've Gone Better

Program conversions (Figma → non-Figma)

Competitor differentiation

Now What? Time to Prototype!

Prototyping

Milestone
Numero
Tres

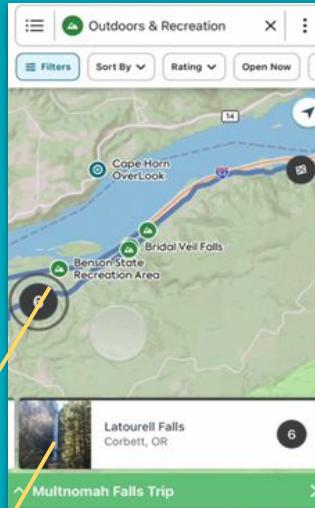
Competitor Analysis

Target Focus

- Path Trackers
- Friend Finders

Track Custom Paths
Landmark Photos

Quality of Life: Distance Filter
Privacy Settings



Competitor Analysis

Competitive App Analysis - Project GeoLord						
Factor	GPS Tracks	Roadtrippers	Serendipity	Maps	Breadcrumbs	Serendipity
(In)Direct?	Direct	Direct	Direct	Indirect	Indirect	Indirect
What Is It?	GPS-based route tracker	roadtrip planner by hotspot	for unplanned discovery trips	view a map, get directions	find, create, review hotspots	bump into friends
Features	maps, waypoints, route imports, logical organization, unique and precise data	hotspots: Get Outside, Quick Snack, Things to Do, or Local Culture, Entertainment, Fuel Up, Bars & Pubs, Book a Hotel, Dinner; can save guides	local-fueled; hotspots; helps book travel; provides costs insight; "Near You" searches	hotspot search, complete with user reviews; solid road directions	spots locations; share locations; directions to those spots; search feature	push notifications; ghost mode
Competitive Advantage	geographical details	discovery filter; plug and play	language phrasebook; helps book tours and travel	great, emulated navigation; accessible	user-created hotspots	people-based, not locations
Strengths	strong data and organization; packs and add-ons	can make a path by hotspot or find hotspots along a path; estimates gas costs; save favs; navigation	great travel assistance; categories: wildlife, culture, foods, shopping, festivals, nightlife	free; quick searches; clear maps; clean and easy	(3D) directions for hotspots; Discover feed for activity offers nearby	imports contacts automatically; can toggle some off
Weaknesses	\$3.99 buy-in; money gates; little urban attention	7 waypoint max for free; lots of reviews reading	not enough support; too much descriptive detail	little plan-a-trip support outside of pure navigation; not good for off the beaten trail	convoluted waypoint process; not necessarily best spots	for privacy, doesn't connect with friends, just ID's "nearby"
Reviews	4.7/5	4.7/5	[unrated]	actually #1 nav app	4/5; "very useful"	n/a
Reference	https://apps.apple.com/us/app/gps-tracks/id425589565	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NW45q1Cv8QY	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i8RjQflk938	[your phone, probably]	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Y4R-tv8Vhk	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i8RjQflk938
General Notes	generic; hiking, not urban	specific for road trips	tries to do too much	top tier	clunky waypointing	people-only
Team Notes	has more than enough tracking features and	good charting; good example of too-heavy reviews	at 4 yrs old and unranked, lack of support = fail	our opportunity here: off the beaten path, finding actual locals	# users seems low; seems targeted at New Zealand	based on contacts, but we could leverage that

Link

Competitor Analysis

Findings

Many apps had supreme direction capabilities.

Many path creation tools exist.

Friend finders were out there, if not as popular as navigation tools.

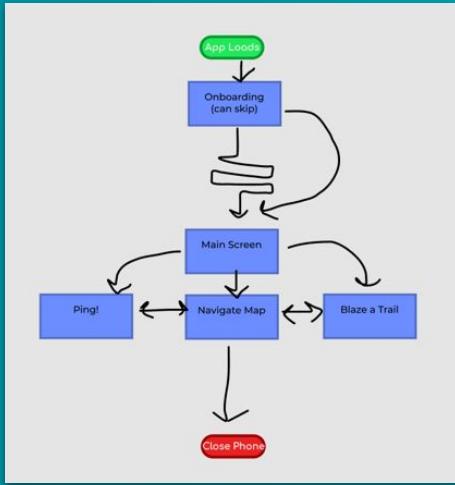
However

Few apps help you find nearby people outside your contacts.

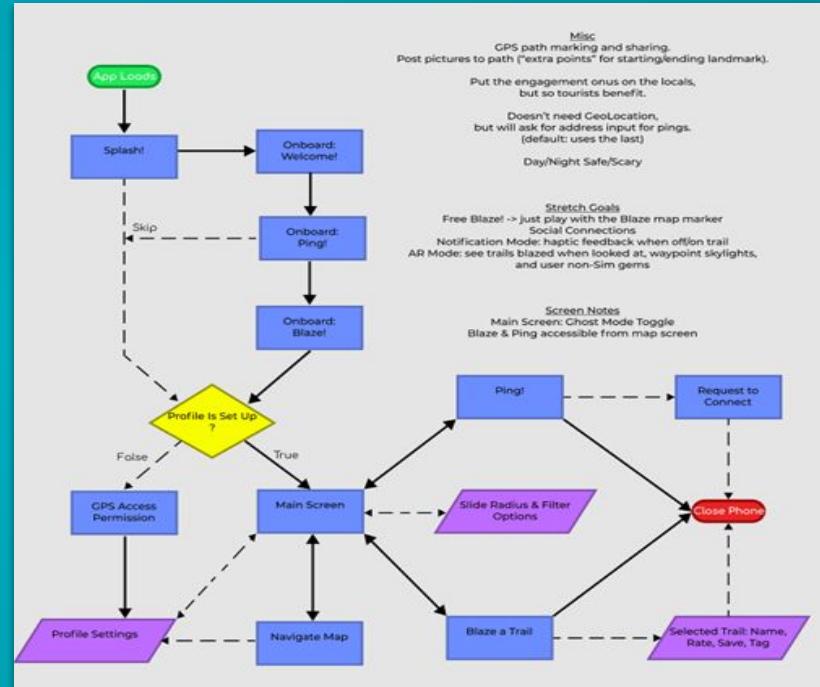
Path ratings are often stars, unrelated to safety or efficiency.

No app offered both solutions at once.

User Flow



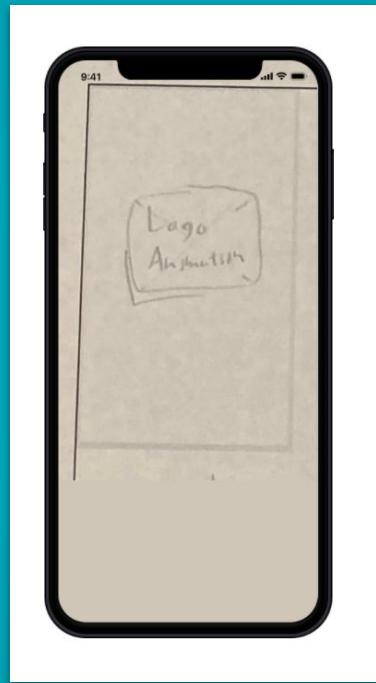
After establishing core functions,
we included optional paths.
We were also sure to capture
thoughts along the way.



Sketches



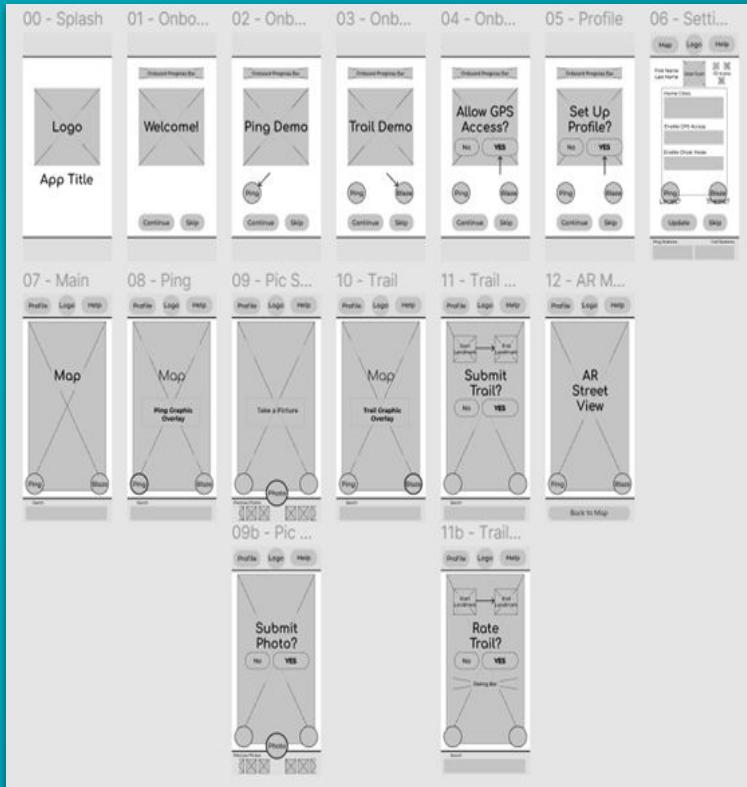
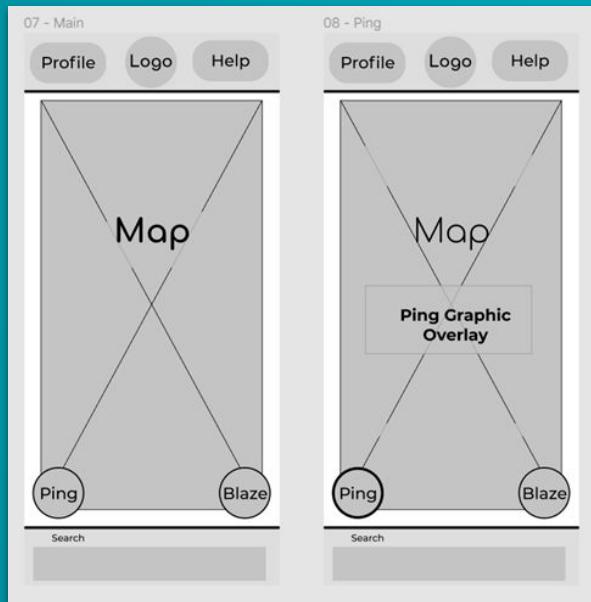
InVision First Pass



Link

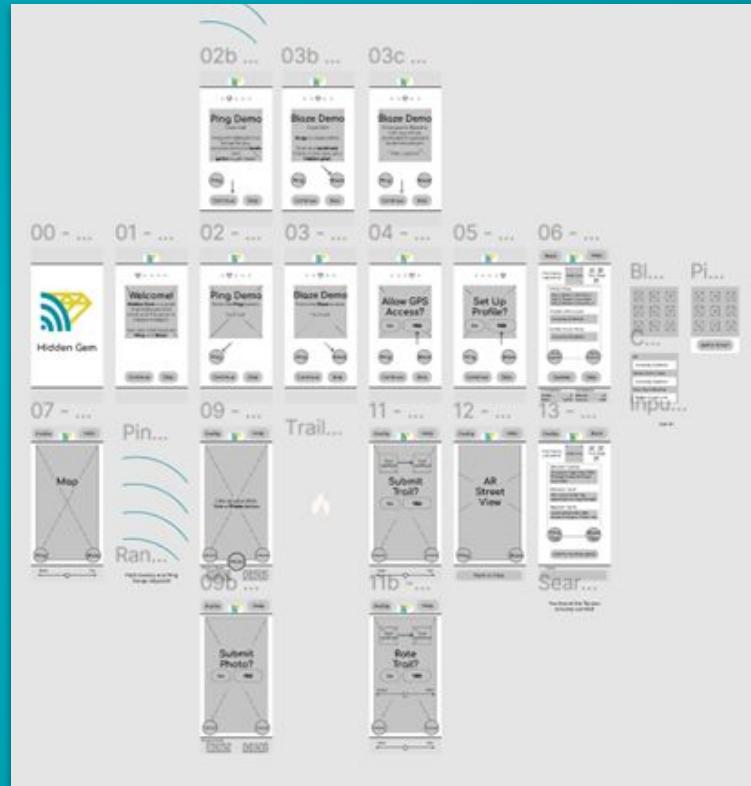
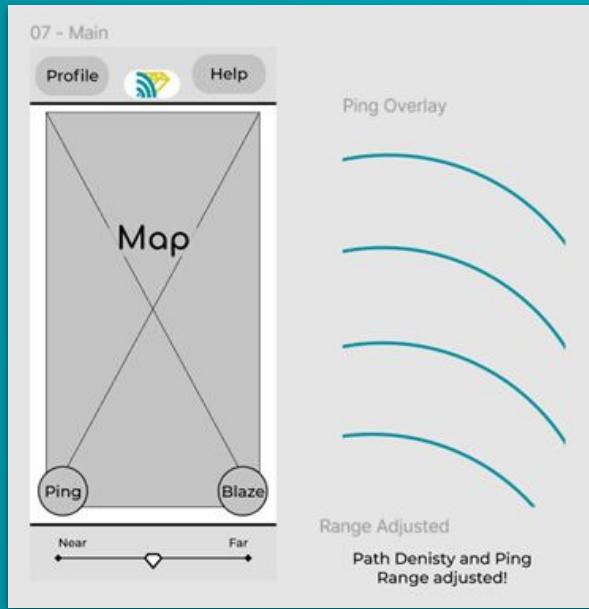
Digital Wireframes

Figma Mock Ups



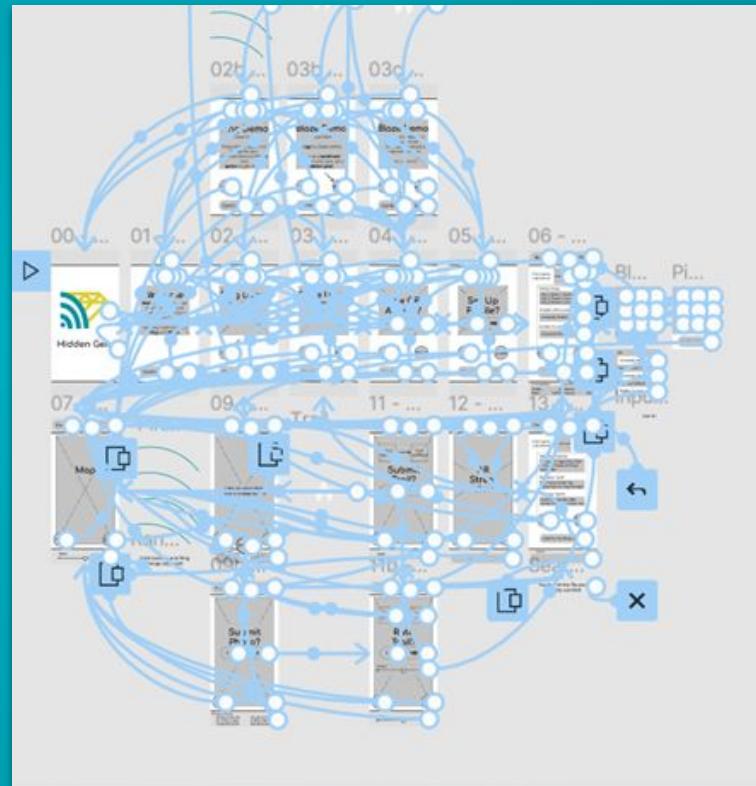
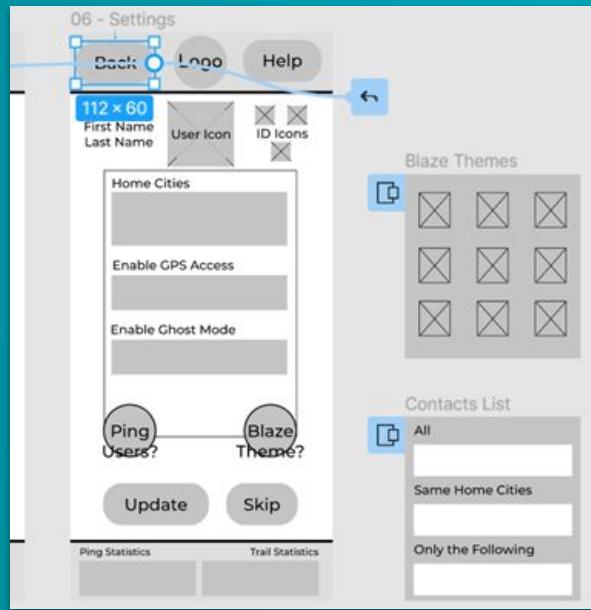
Digital Wireframes

Figma Second Pass



Digital Wireframes

Adding the Interaction



Figma Prototype



Link

The Story So Far

Went Well

User Flow

Competitor Research

First Impressions

Could've Gone Better

Component Programming in Figma

Now What? Test, Iterate, and Refine!

Testing & Iterating

Milestone
Número
Cuatro

Testing Plan

Objective

Ensure the core functionality of the app

- **Users understand the features**
- **Users can envision using those features**
- **Bonus: Look for fun moments to reinforce**

Target Users

- **Anyone who has traveled**
- **Expanded age range 20 years**

Testing Plan

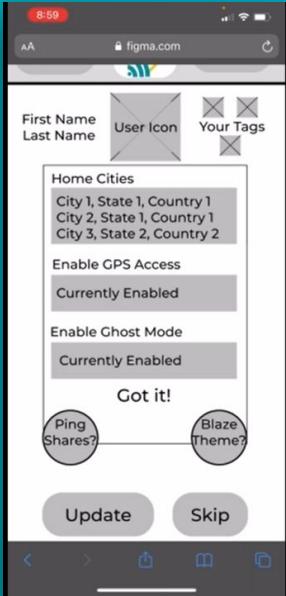
Scenario

Imagine you are traveling in a foreign city. Your last activity for the day just ended, so you're free to roam. You want to find locals to direct you to hotspots off the beaten path, but you don't speak the language. Now...

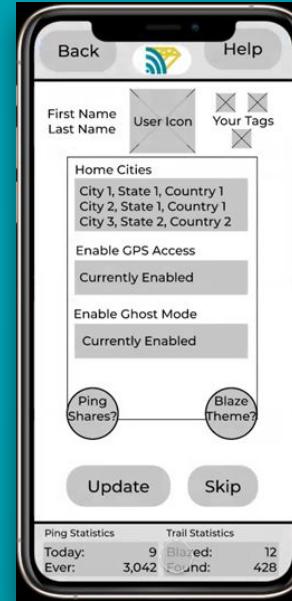
Key Questions

- Core functions: Ping, Blaze, Submit a Trail
- Do users mention using the app in context

User Tests



Phone Mobile



Phone Desktop

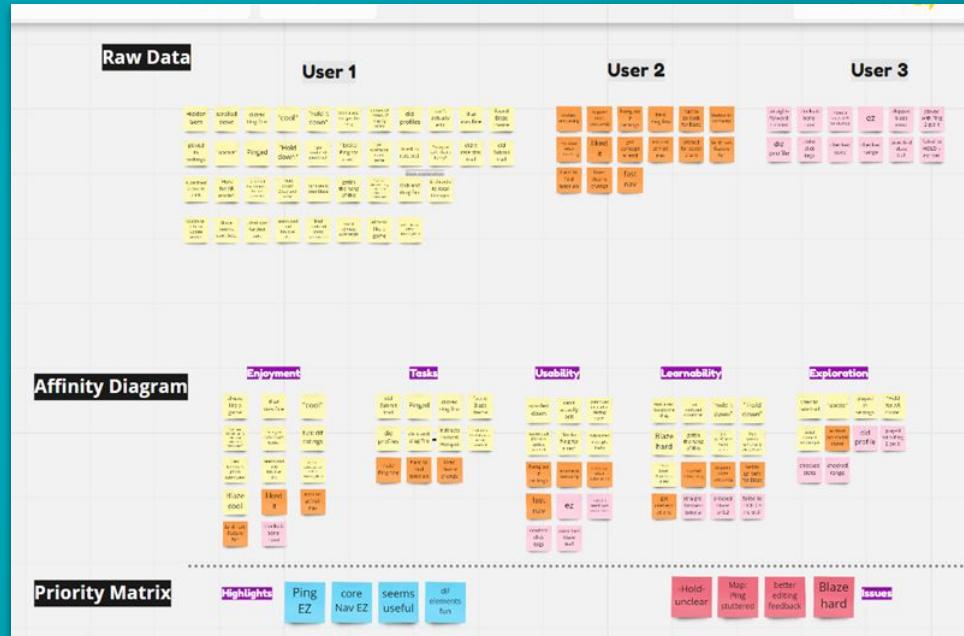
User Feedback

Results

100% navigable.
Only 33% of testers
could explain Blaze.

Otherwise

- Fun, esp. Settings
- Could see using it



Data

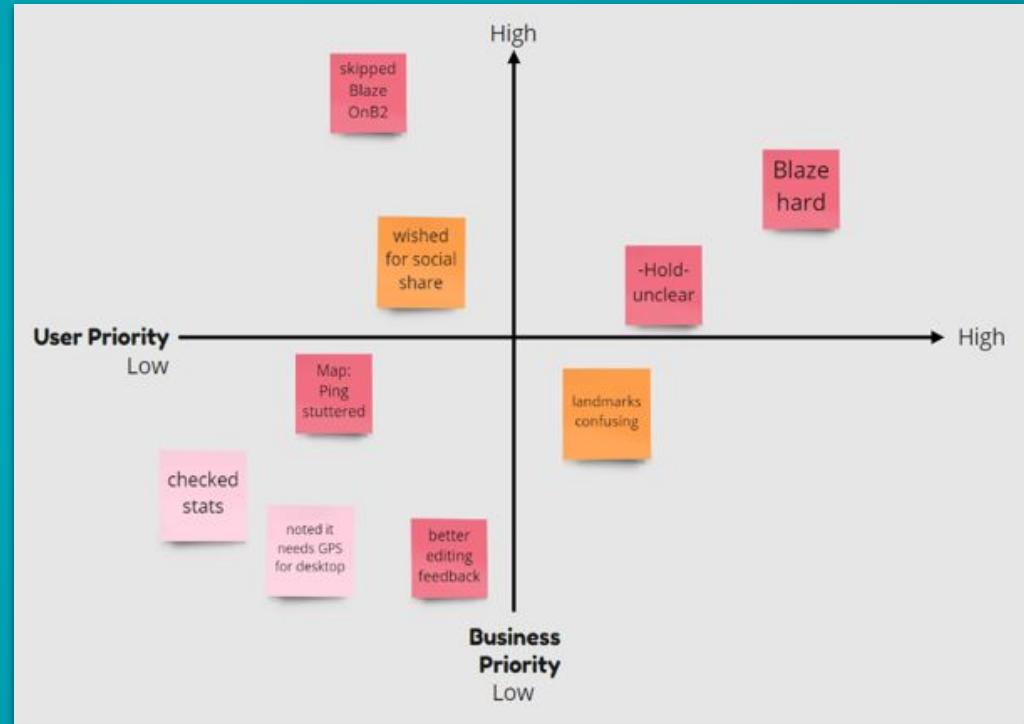
User Feedback

Inferences

Some unclear context.
Blaze is hard to use.
No Blaze, no Trails.

Recommendations

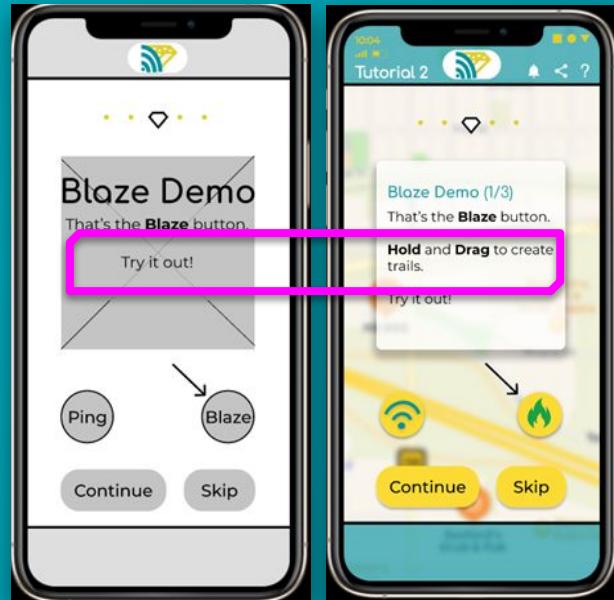
Clarify Blaze.
Add context & confirm
successful actions.



Iterations

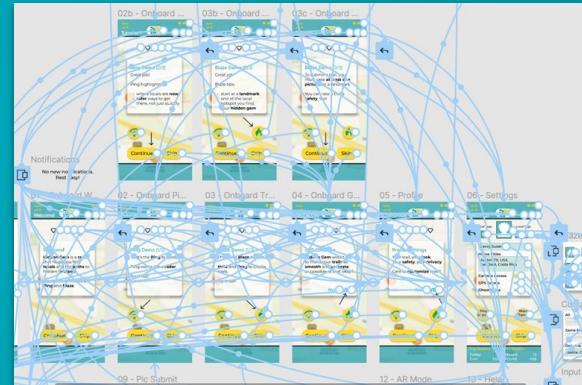
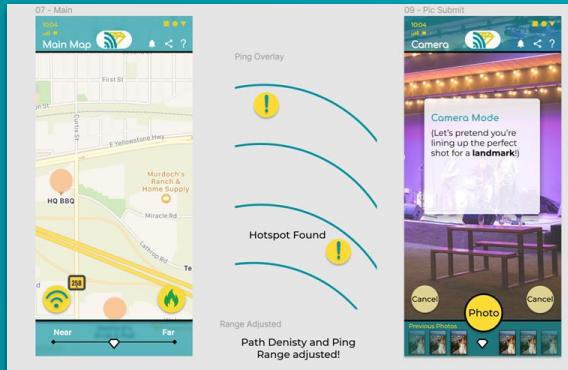


Explicit Ping Success



Clear Blaze Demo

Mock-Up

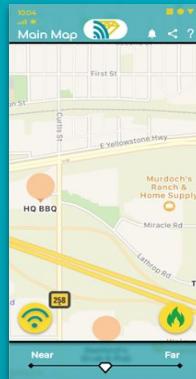
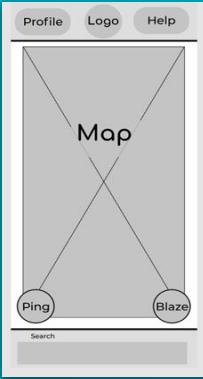


Prototype Link

The Story So Far

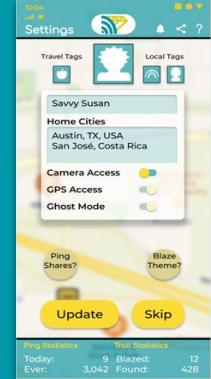
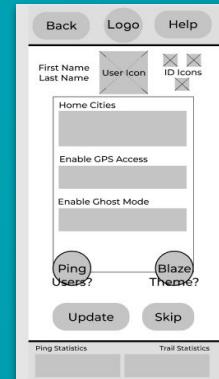
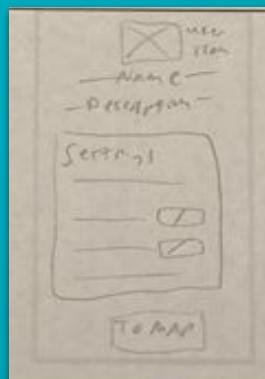
Went Well

Data Synthesis
Feedback Implementation



Could've Gone Better

OS Adaptation
Showing Off Blaze's Potential



Now What? Pitch & Develop!

Postmortem

Overall

Really deep diving into understanding Susan was a blast. I felt like her advocate throughout the process.

Even getting into the weeds with streamlining the prototype was fulfilling, bringing Susan's vision to life.

Learning Takeaways

Given a redo, I would streamline program use per step, so there is less conversion. Pivot, pivot, pivot! Useful competitor research and testing, by definition, mandates changes to your path. Capitalize.

Collaborate! Working with **Aaron Lord** on Milestone Uno felt four times as productive in half the time — and fun!

Let's Connect! [Geoffrey Kuhns](#)

Hidden Gem

Geoffrey Kuhns