CS250 Sprint Review and Retrospective

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We have successfully reached the end of our current sprint, and in doing so we have made significant progress towards our goals with the SNHU Travel application. Initially we were tasked with the goal of creating a website that customers of SNHU Travel could use to easily find emerging and trending vacation packages. As our sprint developed, we had clients and stakeholders request additional features and specific requirements that they would like to see our product deliver on, and because our team is agile, we were able to take on these additional requests and fit them into our development cycle. Roughly mid-way into our sprint our product owner came to us with additional requirements pertaining to showcasing vacation packages that instead relate to detox/wellness. Once again, because our team embodies the agile methodology, we were able to ask critical questions to make sure we could stay within our sprint’s time block without major disruption and then adapted to the changes accordingly. Today’s meeting will highlight the developments that we have made, while getting feedback from our stakeholders and clients on current progress as well as what we may be working on next.

It was only a couple of weeks ago that we were looking at a blank slate. Our product owner Christy and I, the scrum master, were meeting with our client, Amanda of SNHU Travel to gather some information about the kind of application that they would like us to build for them. We started by asking simple but meaningful questions such as “Can you tell me a bit about what you are hoping the achieve?” This helped us gain a lot of knowledge while asking so little because it started a conversation that was both friendly and to the point. This question alone helps us understand the client’s vision and what they might have in mind for making their vision a reality. Amanda let us know that SNHU Travel has been one of the top travel agencies for the past 10 years because they were able to get great deals for the places their customers want to travel. She then explained that they needed to get their travel site ready in five weeks since that’s when their customer base starts thinking about vacation plans for the year. We then knew that offering great deals to their customers was a crucial component to the companies’ success, that they had a reputation to uphold and that there was a sense of urgency for the delivery of the site’s release. We were then told that they wanted to expand their presence by offering trendy, niche vacation packages to gain more customers from the United States. With this information in mind, Christy got to work on creating the product backlog by translating the product’s requirements into workable chunks for our team’s developers to take on. We let Amanda know that we’d first be assembling a small team and working on our agile charter (a document that would outline the mission and goals of this project), as well as starting our sprint planning so that we could begin the initial planning and design phases to make SNHU Travel’s vision a reality.

We then got to work assembling an agile team which we wanted to keep small to encourage closely-knit collaboration and reduce overhead. By following the two-pizza rule, we assembled a team that was smaller than the amount of people it would comfortably take to eat two large pizzas. Nicole was added in as our developer, and Brian came in as our tester. Once we had our team, we got together for a sprint planning meeting to discuss the information that we gathered from our interaction with Amanda. During this meeting we discussed the product’s mission and overall vision and after the team had decided the best way to develop the application, we wrote our agile charter so that we’d have a lightweight, but concise document to refer to throughout the development process. After that was complete, we collaborated together to assign story point values to each of the tasks so we could get a high-level overview of how long, or how much effort each task might take.

To gain additional helpful information for building our application, Christy held a focus group and met with several of SNHU Travel’s best customers to ask some questions and get some feedback about what they would like to see when visiting the companies’ website if we were to provide some updates. This was a great way to gather the data in which would build our team’s user stories, as its information coming directly from a user of the product. During this meeting it was clear that users wanted to have top destinations listed for them and that they additionally wanted a finer control over the personalization and customization when it comes to the types and prices of packages presented to them via their profile settings or travel history. Once Christy had this information, she was able to turn the conversations into user stories and delivered them to the team via the product backlog using JIRA for our developer and tester to consume.

Our tester, Brian, worked with the product owner, Christy, frequently to gather information about what success and failure looks like in the context of the product backlog and user stories. This was important because it was Brian’s responsibility to write test cases that Nicole’s code would run against to ensure that our application was doing what it need to and wasn’t doing anything that we expected it not to do. Part of my responsibilities on the team is making sure that the daily scrum is taking place. For our team this wasn’t an issue, but the issue I was having initially was that Nicole and Brian didn’t have much to say each day about the obstacles they were facing. For me this is a red flag, as it’s more important to express these issues head on so we can accomplish our goals as a team rather than protect our individual pride. During one of our daily scrum meetings I expressed that the obstacle I was facing was that I was not hearing obstacles from our team members and that it made it difficult for me to fulfil my role in removing them as the scrum master. Nicole then felt more comfortable hearing my struggle and expressed to the team that she was stuck on a user story getting her code to pass one of the tests Brian had written where the application shouldn’t display a certain type of vacation package. Brian offered to pair program with her for the day to figure out how they might overcome such an obstacle. Speaking up during a scrum meeting and expressing impediments is necessary to a healthy scrum team and should actively be encouraged.

As the sole developer on our team, Nicole had been hard at work writing the code to complete task after task when midway into our sprint our product owner came to us and explained that she had just met with SHNU Travel management and that they wanted to capitalize on detox/wellness vacations as it would be the next big travel sector. Nicole was concerned that this change meant scrapping the work so far, but Christy explained that the project only needed to be changed in a way that highlights the new vacation type and could be implemented within our current application and that the additional tasks on the backlog could still fit within the time block for our sprint. If we were following a waterfall approach this would not be possible, as all the planning and design would have to be completed during their respective phases. Agile instead allowed our team to accept the on-demand changes our client deemed necessary for their success.

Brian wrote test cases for each user story, first outlining the priorities, the inputs, and the acceptance criteria. At one point he was confused about a requirement pertaining to the way in which the destinations should be displayed to the user. It wasn’t quite clear to him if a single destination should be shown on the front page or if it should show multiple. When he expressed this to me, I told him that the best way to resolve it would be to communicate directly with Christy and that if he sent her a concise email explaining his concerns that she would be more than happy to provide clarification on the matter. It’s important that the team feels comfortable expressing concerns and reaching out to the appropriate parties, so it was up to me to make sure that he could feel comfortable enough to reach out to her even though he didn’t have as much face-to-face time with her as he did the rest of the team.

The scrum-agile approach for our product worked out very well because it allowed us to get working on our product quickly after gathering information. We didn’t need to spend extensive amounts of time documenting our work or over-planning. We had an idea of what needed to be done and we got to work. Taking small steps we created working results in an iterative fashion, getting feedback from stakeholders and users along the way. This was vital to the outcome of the product as it allowed us to deliver an application that provided all the features users were specifically requesting/needing. In order to meet the 5-week deadline of the application, scrum-agile also was the best choice for this because again we were able to get to work developing the application sooner than we could have using waterfall. Finally, as stated before, waterfall method would not have allowed for us to have changed the plan when our product owner came to us about incorporating detox/wellness vacations into the plan, so agile here was again a necessary approach to our success.

I think you will be pleased with our results; we are proud to present our updated SNHU Travel site! First and foremost, it features the top 5 trending detox/wellness vacations as a slideshow on the front page. You can book the vacation that appeals to you right from the slideshow, or you can click on the image to discover more information about the package. Also, per user requests, we have added a user profile page where you can adjust the types and prices of vacation packages that are shown to you. We hope that you enjoy the new site. If you have any feedback or concerns, please let us know so we can prepare our next sprint planning! Thank you for joining us today and for your continued interest and input.