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Prototyping for Physical and Digital Products

Reading Response

The book covers broadly methods of prototyping for many different mediums. Refracted from opinion, it's mostly a tutorial piece in a sense. The author begins by stating how prototypes are part of every field as it is a design practice. To create something is a multifaceted process, and every step could be painted as a prototype, this includes the intent of improving something.

A prototype is important as it helps create a larger picture and establish a main question. What is it that you are designing and most importantly, who is it for? This emphasizes how user research is quite important as the more you know about your target audience, the more you can fine tune your product to fit their needs. Specifically, a prototype does four things. It helps understand the product, it allows the creator to test and improve upon multiple iterations, it helps communicate the intent of the product, and by extension, it advocates its usefulness. By approaching a prototype this way you effectively put the user at the center of the design process.

The author then addresses the aspect of the products fidelity. There is low, medium and high fidelity which broadly means the same for all aspects and areas of design but changes in the details depending if you're designing by code, or working with wearables. In general, low fidelity essentially means testing the core concepts and looks nothing like the visioned product. The goal is to test your initial views, layout, methodology, etc… I find low fidelity to be a prototype of a prototype. You're testing the waters and seeing if certain aspects are worth venturing towards. Mid fidelity products start looking like your envisioned goal. There is more visual design into it, and allows tertiary questions to be answered. Such as the flow of the product being used, or if aspects distract from the primary function. High fidelity is a product essentially finished. It allows the designer to test very specific and small details. Generally the fixes are quick and painless to resolve.

A final important aspect is user testing. It's stated that having a research plan is quite important. You can then find appropriate potential users and design a series of questions that will prove invaluable to further iterations of the product. The importance of the questions is immense, so they must be worded in a way that allows as much information to be obtained from them. Therefore if a question generally only gives a yes or a no, it must be refined. This will gather a huge amount of information that is compelling to your goal.

It is important to remember that prototyping is an iterative process. Having three levels of fidelity does not mean three prototypes. Think of them as levels to a building. To reach them you must go up stairs, and each step can be viewed as a prototype. Therefore it's imperative to take this concept seriously as it will lead the designer to create a substantial product that is useful to those who use it.