

Design Sprint

The design sprint is a framework that enables a product team to solve a design problem in just two to five days. It helps keep every team member on track and focused on the same goal, thus proving to be a useful method to build new features and solve any product problems. It also ensures that the company resources are used in an efficient manner.

The Basics of Design Sprint

Developed by design firms like IDEO and Stanford School of Design, and later adopted by Google Ventures, the design sprint is a five-phase exercise that helps you answer important product questions through design, testing and prototyping. It's a shortcut from idea to learnings that skips the build and launch parts.

The benefits of design sprint are as follows:

- It enables you to iterate products faster
- It helps you validate product ideas through prototype testing
- It saves valuable resources
- It helps you build and launch only after you've validated your idea

The design sprint could last anywhere between one afternoon to five days. Usually, there are five phases in a design sprint, each taking place on a different day of the sprint:

1. Understand and define: In this phase, you develop an understanding of the problem statement, the target users, and the aim you want to achieve through the sprint
2. Diverge: This phase is when each team member generates ideas to solve the chosen problem
3. Converge: In this phase, each proposed solution is discussed and the best one is decided upon
4. Prototype (and validate): You build the prototype for the solution you have selected
5. Test and learn: In this last phase, you test the prototype on your users and gather learnings

At BookMyShow, the design sprint team consists of an equal number of stakeholders from different skill sets, like engineering, product, business and content. The team ensures that everyone is aligned to the same design sprint goal, and the sprint is conducted in a distraction-free space.

The Design Sprint Process — An Example

Let's take an example of an edtech startup — a platform for parents and teachers to connect with each other and keep track of the pupil's academic progress.

Before starting the design sprint, there is an additional zeroth step. You would try to understand the key motivations of your users — in this case, the parents, the teachers, and the students — through user surveys and interviews.

After this starts the design sprint proper, which would include the following steps:

1. Understand and define: You would try to answer the 'what', 'why' and 'how', namely —

- a. What product/feature are you building?
 - b. Why do you care about the problem? And why would users care about the solution?
 - c. How will you solve the problem and build the product/feature?
2. Diverge: Each team member would work on their own and come up with possible solutions to the problem. At the end of the day, the solutions would be sorted into buckets based on similar themes.
 3. Converge: Each solution is discussed in detail, and one is chosen through a method called Zen voting.
 4. Prototype (and validate): For the chosen solution, a prototype is developed.
 5. Test and learn: The prototype is tested with users, and feedback from internal stakeholders is also taken.

At the end of this process, the team would have a prototype and a bunch of learnings. This would make it easier to build and launch and would ensure a better product performance in the market.

The Design Sprint Checklist

You need to keep the following things in mind while conducting a design sprint:

- Before you conduct a design sprint, you need to be clear on your business goals and competitive landscape. You also need to have a thorough understanding of your user and for this you should conduct user research, e.g. surveys and interviews.
- While conducting the design sprint, a member from every team should be present, e.g. developers, QAs, PMs, designers, marketers, business, and sales. You should share all the important information with your sprint team members, and arrange for a distraction-free space with all the necessary tools.
- All the ideas proposed during the sprint should be sketched out without discrimination. Verbal communication should be kept to a minimum so that the loudest voice in the room is not given unfair advantage.
- The best solution should be chosen through Zen voting, a process in which the voting happens in complete silence. This would ensure that every option is given equal and objective consideration.

At Housing, a recent design sprint was focused on changing the behaviour of users through the introduction of a new feature. Instead of opening each listing in a new page, the user would get to see the details of each listing on the same page in a seamless manner. The objective of the sprint was to increase the number of viewed listings and conversions. Through the design sprint, they were able to create the feature which resulted in an increase in viewed listings from the initial 3-4 to 7-8.

Design Sprint — A Demonstration

A foodtech startup saw tremendous growth in the first few months, but then the sales began to plateau. To find a solution, they decided to conduct a design sprint. A team of designers, developers, sales, marketing, a product manager, and the CEO was formed.

Understand and define: On the first day, the team discussed the current state of the product, and the metrics they needed to track to define its performance. These metrics were the average cart value, CAC, referrals, number of abandoned carts, customer support cost, and payment failures. They also collated user data gathered from surveys, interviews and user feedback, and data gathered from competitive analysis. At the end of the day, they decided to focus on the tracking feature.

Diverge: On the second day, every team member started pitching solutions to the selected problem. A rough sketch was made for each idea. On this day, the team also spoke to users to come to the office for a user testing session on the last day.

Converge: On the third day, the team decided on a single idea for which a prototype would be built. They did this through heatmapping — a red dot was placed on the feature you wanted to vote for. The feature with the highest number of red dots was selected.

Prototype: On the fourth day, the team first developed a wireframe to figure out the navigational flow. Then, they developed interactive prototypes using Marvel. They also prepared for the user testing session the next day.

Test and learn: On the fifth and last day of the design sprint, the prototype was tested by users and the team collected feedback from them on the issues they faced during the testing session. Thus, in five days, the startup went from a stack of jumbled ideas to a clearly defined idea and a tested prototype. This would make the build and launch parts much easier.

You should be able to:

- Understand what design sprint is and its importance in the user-centred design process
- Identify the steps involved in a design sprint
- Conduct a design sprint for a product