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Consider your product to be a website or a mobile app. Initially, you have a lot of ideas, tons of features and plenty of different thoughts about what it will have. However, not all of them will work. Some ideas might work well in the market and others may fail. Developing the product iteratively helps you to identify the ideas that may have higher chance of success. You will also be communicating your product ideas to engineer, design teams. You will show them the product vision and that you have in your mind.

The final output from each stage of the product conceptualization helps in discussing your product with these teams. Broadly, product conceptualization can be classified into three steps. They are structural, visual and interaction. Let us take example of developing a blogging website. Here you will learn how each step contribute to the product conceptualization and how it is built step-by-step.

First of all, let's know what user would like to do on the website. This will help you come up with the basic structure of the website. For a blogging website, the user might want to search the blog post and then read, comments and

share them. Based on the desired action of your target users, you must come up with a basic structure of the website. You can represent the structure using pen and paper and sketch down your ideas. This representation is called a sketch.

You can develop a wireframe which is an action of moving the sketch mode using pen and paper to your computer. Wireframe might be a new term for you, but don't worry, we'll cover this in detail later on.
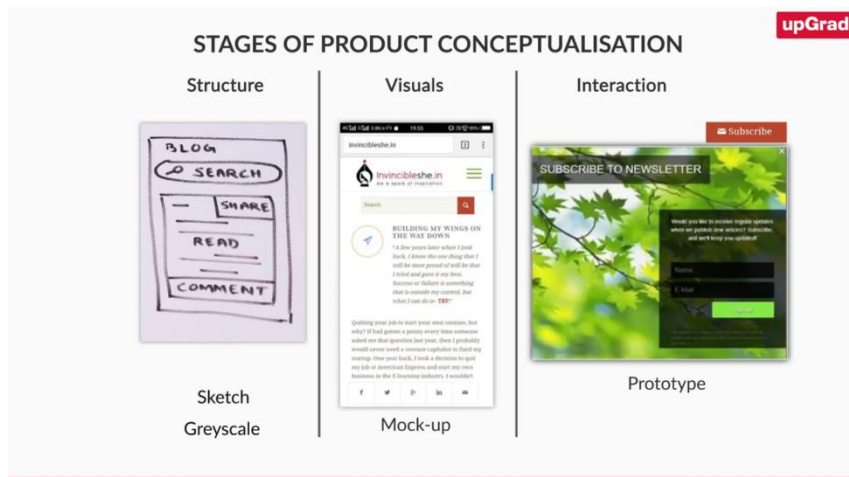
Coming back to the sketch as you see them, from the sketch of the blog website, it is typically greyscale. Greyscale is not something different. It refers to a structure that has only two colors, that is black and white, nothing else. Once you add visual details to it, it'll look like this. This step which involves visualization in the second step of the product conceptualization. Notice that the mockup has specific colors, fonts, images, and other details. All these details will be added using various tools available in the market.
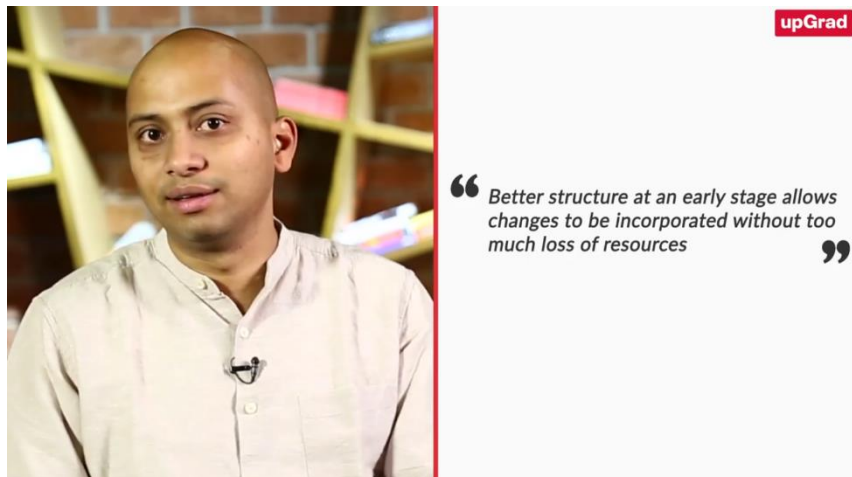
The final result is called the mockup of the product. I'll explain in detail about the mockup in the later stage. The last stage of conceptualizing your product is when you add interactivity to your product idea. Typically, you start from your mockup and from there you add features like scroll, touch interface, animation and more. Blog website, this could be a subscribe button. The final output of this stage is called prototype. The subscribe button in your prototype might not actually subscribe to user. Instead it would show the next screen where the user could go.
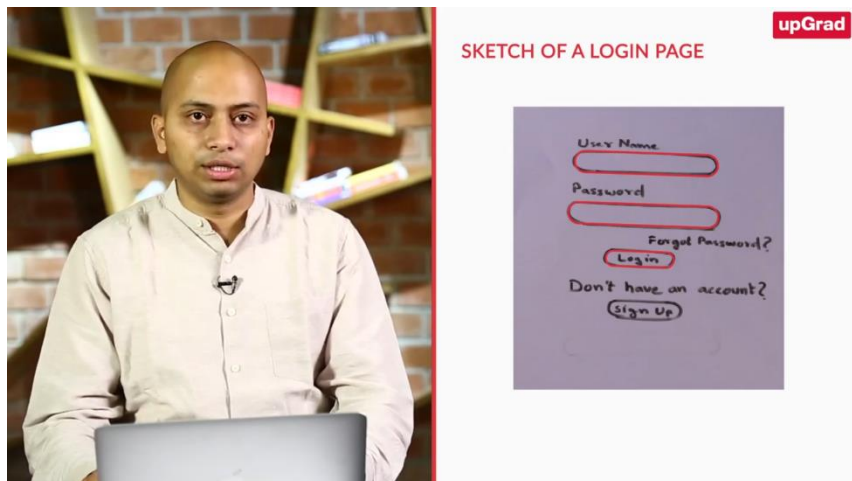
At each stage of your product conceptualization, you will test out the features, get feedback from your stakeholders, which can be internal teams, or external teams. Users or anyone you want to communicate your idea to. It could be investors too. And then you ensure your objectives are fulfilling the users need. Getting feedback from users of the product is helpful in course correcting and making appropriate changes at each stage.

" Better structure at an early stage allows changes to be incorporated without too much loss of resources "

Keep in mind having a better structure at early stage allows you to incorporate changes without losing too many resources. It's also important to note that the cost of change increases with every stage, but definitely much smaller than doing it post product launch. Now let's move on to creating your first sketch.

SKETCH OF A LOGIN PAGE

User Name

Password

Forgot Password?
Login
Don't have an account?
Sign Up

Creating a sketch is the most economical and easy way to test out the design ideas for your product. Usually you sketch the product using simple boxes and buttons. The image you see here is sketch of a simple login page. It has following fields, the username and password which are drawn and a login button, which conveys the clicking on it would initiate some action.
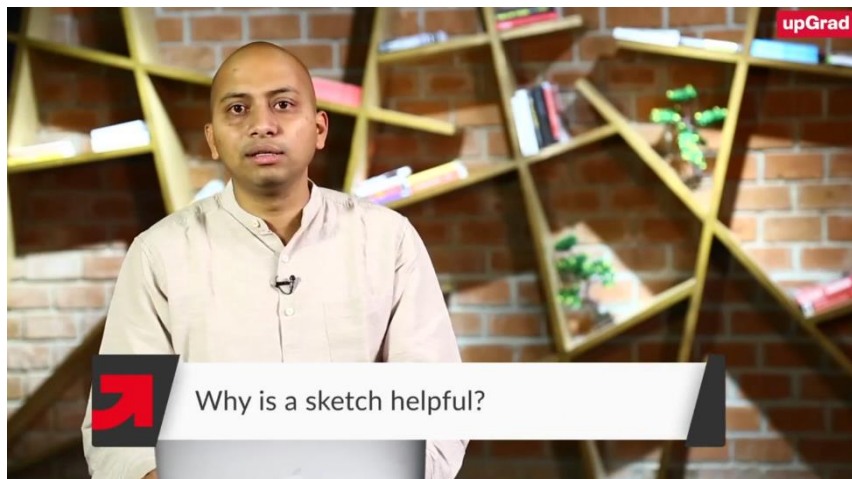
You might be wondering why is a sketch helpful? You might be even thinking, why should I waste time on hand-drawn sketches when there are better options available to create designs that are visually closer to real product? If you're looking for a fast-economical option to get feedback at the initial time of the design or a product idea, then you can't go wrong with a sketch. For a PM, it's one of the most important method. Since a sketch is easy to create, even for someone with no design skills whatsoever.

When the first few versions of the structure of your product are developed, they might not be perfect, but you need to have an idea of what your product looks like. You can work with a design team to draw multiple sketches, discard ideas that do not work out and develop the ideas that are feasible for your goals.
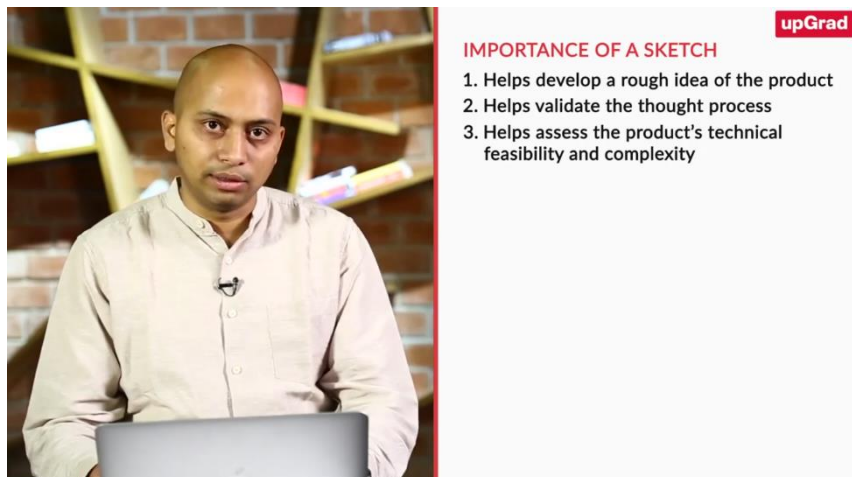

At the end of this exercise, you will have developed a rough idea of what your product would look like, and how it would function. For a product you are working on, you would usually create sketches for all the screens of that product. The structure can be shown to your stakeholders to validate the thoughts and process behind it. You can also use the sketches to assess technical feasibility and the complexity of product. You can show it to your engineering team and ask for feasibility study for the app or the product and choose appropriate technologies.

As an example, let's consider the following. In your app, you create a new user using email address. Additionally, there is social login option in your app and your plan is to include Facebook and Twitter in it. If you show this to your engineering team, they will tell you twitter logins don't give your email address. They have written Twitter handles instead, unless you get additional permissions from them.

Hence, you might have to rethink the idea of social login using Twitter. There might be similar feedback for the other features as well. Once you have finalized the sketch, after feedback and iterations, you can pass it onto the design team to add visual elements.
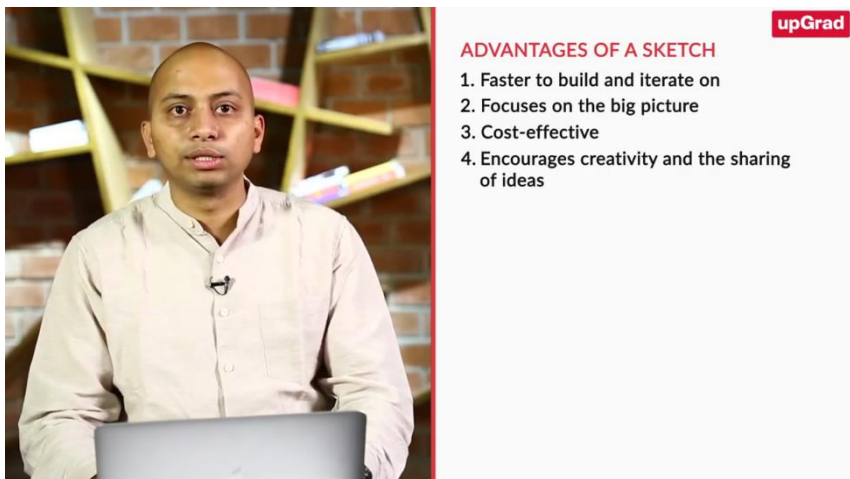
The major advantages of sketch include:

- One, it's fast to build and iterate upon. This allows rapid evaluation and testing. Thus, allowing changes to be made directly on paper based on the feedback and it doesn't need any special tools.
- Two, it focuses on big picture and the high-level thinking behind the product design. The sketch can help your team to on the issue that matter in its early design. Therefore, you need not unnecessarily spend time on small details such as font, colors, text and many others which would be usable if you have to throw it away. Additionally, when you are collecting feedback from users, a sketch will make creative suggestion about the functionality, instead of nitpicking about things like colors and fonts.

- Third, sketches are cost effective. I think that you might have gathered by now. Since you don't have to create some simulations of the interfaces, you can save money on software development. You don't need a designer to create mockups or a developer to write the code. All you need is a paper and a few markers. These simple tools can help you save money in the long run as you can identify issues and designs before you start development.
- Another advantage of the sketch is to encourage creativity and sharing of ideas within the team. Different team members, like the designers and engineers bring their own expertise in various areas, which can help you in faster iteration.
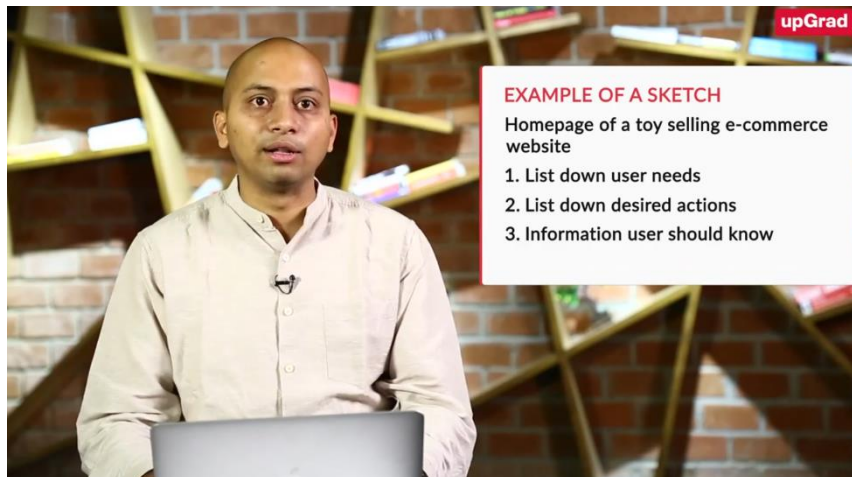
You might think that to be a good product manager, you have to learn how to draw a portrait or be good at drawing in general. Fortunately, that's not the truth. You don't have to be good at drawing to learn sketch. You may still be hesitant to draw something, think you might draw poorly. Don't worry about it. In this segment, you will learn how to lose that hesitation.

Firstly, pick up a pen and a paper and then look at it, right? You might wish for the ideas to come magically so that you can draw something awesome on paper. However, in reality, you might be baffled and blank. To avoid becoming overwhelmed, you should first list down the user objectives.

Let's say you want to draw a rough sketch of a homepage of a toy selling eCommerce website. You will list on the user needs and the desired actions you want the user to take, and the information your users should know from that page, and incorporate that into your design. Sketches should not be taken very seriously since the sketch can be easily discarded and built another one using a new approach. Let me draw the sketch and demonstrate how to create one.
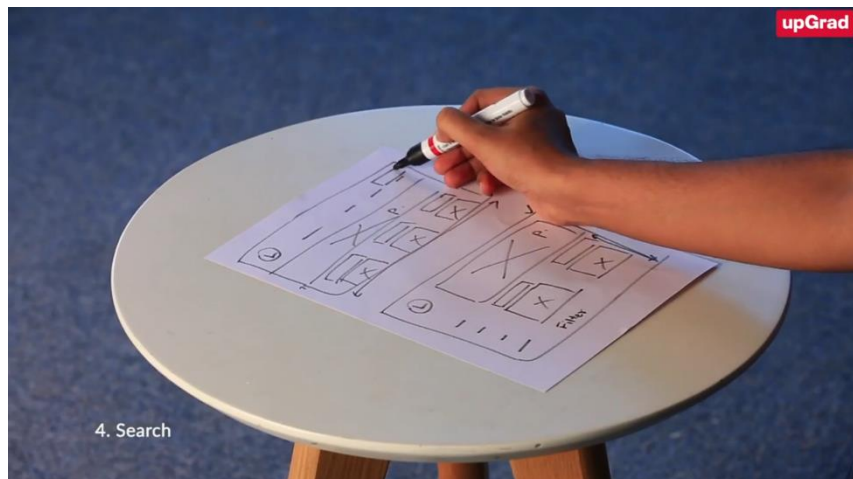
1. First, let's put this basic element on the sketch. We will put on the browser first. Now let's put in the logo and menu items. Now, I'm deciding whether to place the menu items horizontally or vertically. Keeping these thoughts in mind, let us create a quick sketch of a vertical menu of this toy selling website. For the homepage, the target objectives are, one, promote recently launched toys. So, I'll try an area for promotion. This may be an image or a slider promoting different products in each slide.

2. Two, look at different toy's pictures on the homepage, so I'll draw a couple of boxes. Let's say, this will have pictures of the toys. You will see I've just put down placeholders and I don't actually need to select the image for this.

3. Three, show toys by categories such as groups, reviews and price. I know that some of the product categories are action figure toys, soft toys, remote controlled toys, puzzles and brain teasers.

4. Now the next element is little tricky. I can make a scroll feature where the products are showed in buckets. Here, I can show different categories and age groups or I can include filters using these parameters which include categories, age groups, reviews and price. Usually, I draw both the versions and take feedback on which one is easier, faster, or which one is easier for user.

5. The fourth objective of this page is one should be able to search for the product by the name. For this, I will draw a search box.

Voila, our sketch is ready.
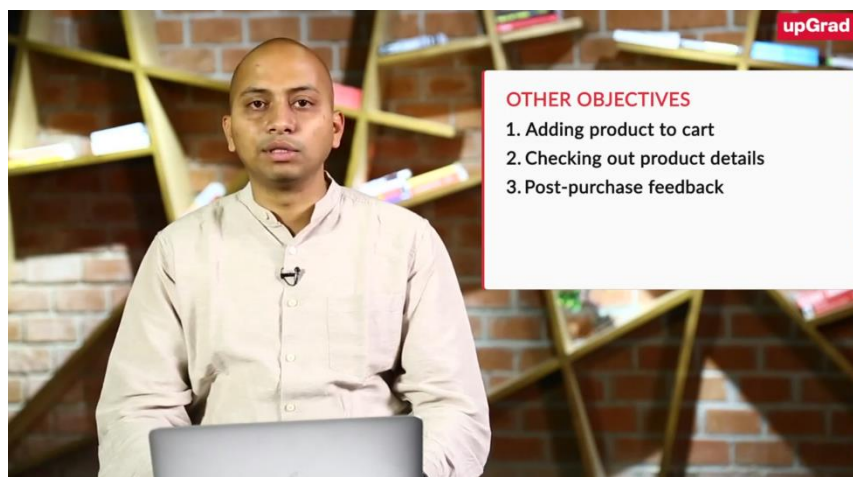
Now there could be other objectives of this eCommerce website such as adding product to the cart, checking out the product details, post-purchase feedback, etc. However, if you include everything in the homepage, it would become cluttered, so you must have heard the term, minimalistic design. This is where we remove the clutter and keep only the most important elements.
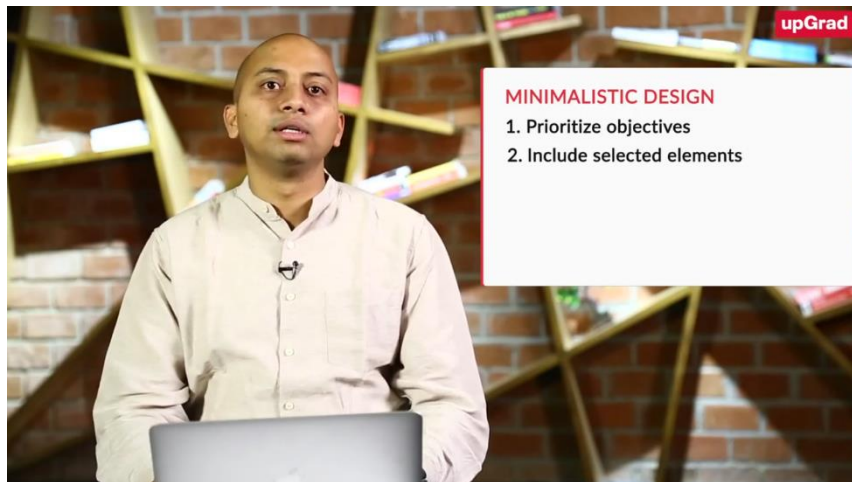
So, you must prioritize your objectives and include selected elements on your product. Now that we have our sketch ready and vetted with feedback, we should move this to a digital version. Typically to digitize the sketch, you can use various tools to create something called a wireframe. I'll explain what a wireframe is in detail in the next section.