

10-Steps to a Friction-Free App



James Buckhouse

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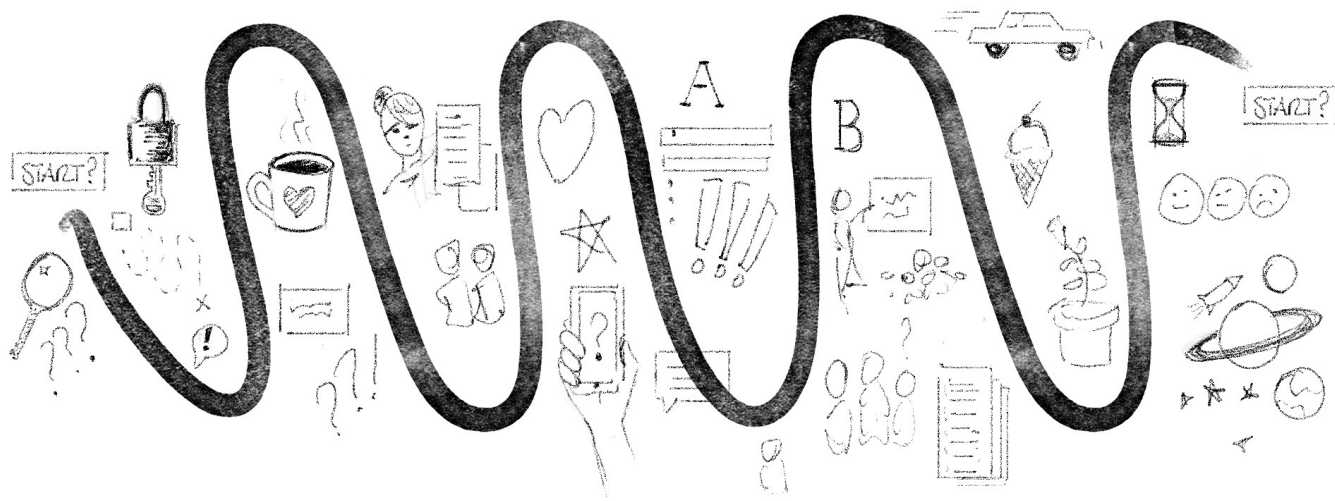
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How to run a Friction Audit

At the Sequoia Design Lab, we use story-driven design to help founders build exceptional companies. The process **starts with story** and later translates to every part of the experience.

Once you get your story straight, the next step is to audit your experience. We call this process a *friction audit*.

A friction audit is a list of every moment of **confusion, frustration, concern or delay** in your product experience **and** a plan for how to improve the total experience. Along with capturing all the friction, you can expand your friction audit to include specific moments (or elements) that do positive work to delight, inspire, inform, encourage, or elucidate.



10-Steps to a friction-free app

1. Start *before* the beginning.

Don't start your friction audit on the first screen of your app—start long before that. Trace the entire journey from the first glimmer of interest to the moment your customer deliriously recommends the pleasure of your app to another human soul.

2. Make a friction deck.

Document every step in the journey and turn it into a friction deck. Include a screenshot or photo and a description of the moment and how long it takes to do the step. ***Make a note of anything that would potentially annoy people or cause confusion or delay—or anything that fights against your core story.*** If you have actual usage data, associate it with each step in the journey. If you have test users, watch them try to tap through your experience. If you have neither, then do your best to see your own app as a beginner might—where every experience is new and every outcome unknown.

3. Set a baseline for your awareness-to-worth-it time.

As you are doing the audit, ask yourself the big question: ***How long does it take for a person to go from awareness to a feeling that using your app was totally worth the effort?*** How might we reduce the time to a near instant positive response? Give yourself an awareness-to-worth-it baseline score in seconds (i.e. it takes 4 minutes and 37.8 seconds for a person in our target group to go from seeing an ad or a link or hearing about your app from a friend to actual satisfaction while using your app. Set a goal for your team to improve this number with every new product iteration, feature, and design. **Your baseline number might be really high**—example: *it takes 3 months of occasional usage and 18 emails to go from awareness to worth it*—or it might be nearly instantaneous—example: *9 seconds after tapping the link, the app was installed and I knew instantly that I was going to LOVE it—from the very first glance*. Working to reduce your awareness-to-happiness time will help you see the value in having a fast load time, in reducing the complexity of your onboarding process, and prioritizing elements of an experience that get you to that moment when everything seems “worth it” sooner.

4. Your NUX is never done.

The work required to optimize your NUX (new user experience) is never finished. Pay special attention to every step in your NUX. Have **people in your target audience** try to make it through your NUX. Ask if you can record the session on your

phone. If the person agrees, later **show the video of pain to your whole team**. Nothing motivates company-wide friction reduction like witnessing the anguish of actual people trying to sign-up. Once you've found a way to improve your NUX, keep iterating. **There is always more work to be done on the NUX**. Every tiny fraction of friction you can eliminate will have tremendous downstream benefits.

5. Do not hide the money button.

Record every step in your payment flow. **Make it obvious** to people how to give you money. Do not hide the money button. If people love your product, they will happily pay for it. Your experience suffers if people have to search in vain for a way to pay you. It is rude to frustrate a customer who wants to pay. **The payment experience should embody the best elements of your brand**. It should not feel like a separate, transactional experience. It should feel like the realization of your brand's promise of transformation (*especially* if it is an upgrade flow from FREE to PRO).

6. Language matters.

A/B test your copy. Tiny changes in your copy can have instantaneous positive effects. Different copy works better for different apps and in different regions. There is no cheaper way to increase your revenue, retention, and engagement than to optimize your micro-copy. For more, check out the **Magic of micro-copy** by John Saito of Dropbox.

7. Share in two taps.

If people love your app they will want to share it with friends. Why? Sharing a great recommendation makes the sender **look good in the eyes of their friends**. To put this psychological truth to use, create an in-app mechanism for sharing that is generous, natural, obvious, friction-free and gives people what they actually want, while still finding a way to get what you need (sign-ups, conversions, re-activation, etc.). Record every step in the sharing process. Does the mechanism work as expected? Does it require multiple layers of sign-in and navigation? Or **does it do the job in less than two taps?**

8. Impact / Effort

Figure out how long it will take to address each problem and then estimate how much of an impact each fix will have (on sign-up, retention, LTV, engagement, churn, etc.). Then rank each according to that magical equation of **impact/effort** to

make a plan to **do the most for the least**. Some of the fixes will be easy and will have a huge impact—do these right away. Others will be very hard to implement and have no positive impact (or negative impact)—skip these. Most will be in the middle and require a nuanced evaluation. Want more on this topic? See Sequoia partner Mike Vernal's short video on the secret to product prioritization: **Do the Most Important Thing**.

9. Fast almost always wins, but not always.

Just as a car slows down to take **a curve in the road**, adjusting the speed of your flow can make sense in certain moments to keep the total experience optimal. Sometimes a *slightly slower* UX flow will yield less cognitive friction (even as it takes more time to move through). **Clarity matters more than brevity**. Just be sure to speed up again on the straightaways.

10. Revisit your audit

Perpetually maintain your friction audit to account for changes in the world. Strive to ever improve. New features will add new friction. New behaviors and cultural realities will change how people use your app. Listen. Adjust. Improve. Achieve.

Phew! OK, if you're ready to run your own Friction Audit, download our Friction Audit deck from SlideShare to make it easier to run your team through the process.



Download our Friction Audit Deck from SlideShare

Once you've run your Friction Audit—we'd love to hear about it. Email us and let us know what happened. Nothing would make us happier than to know that one of these steps helped you achieve your goals.

buckhouse@sequoiacap.com

And the SDL team: Coleen Baik, Aine Zhou and Mary Alice Arnstein

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