1.9: Business Requirements

#### **Introduction**

Welcome back! In the previous Exercise, we talked about the differences between Lean UX and Agile UX so you could begin thinking of ways to incorporate one or the other into your own product design. Every design and development team should have goals for measuring the performance of their product. What about, however, the goals and objectives of the business itself? Google, for example, has products like Chrome and Android, but Google itself is the overarching business, and it has goals independent of its individual products. With that in mind, we’re going to jump out of the world of UX for a bit to better understand the objectives of not just the product but the business, as well.

TIP!  
While you read through the following sections, take a look at [this example Business Requirements Document](https://s3.amazonaws.com/coach-courses-us/public/courses/ux-immersion/A1/E9/A1E9_BusinessRequirementsDoc.pdf) we prepared for our demo app. Having the example open next to the descriptions in the Exercise will help you to better understand how to write one yourself.

#### **The Business Requirements Document**



The **Business Requirements Document**, or BRD, compiles all the business requirements of a product into a single document. The BRD is where the business goals, customer needs, and stakeholder concerns all come together. This document is crucial for aligning company stakeholders and keeping everyone on the same page regarding the product being built. It specifically focuses on what needs to be accomplished, rather than how to accomplish it—something usually covered in a System Requirements or Product Requirements document.

It’s important to note that BRDs are usually created after user research and competitive analyses are completed. Everything you’ve learned from your research is then combined with the requirements of executives, investors, and stakeholders to form the BRD. We’ll take a much deeper look at user research and specific research methods in Exercise 2.1, so don’t worry if you’re not sure what all of this entails yet. For now, let’s simply get to know our BRD a bit better!

#### **Components of a BRD**

A BRD describes requirements for a given product, making it useful when developing any product or service. Often, however, it focuses specifically on software systems, which is what we’ll stick to in this Exercise.

A basic business requirements document typically contains the following sections:

* **Executive Summary:** A one-page document that sums up the goals and the mission statement of the business.
* **Business Objectives:** S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic, and Time-based) goals that define the objectives of the business.
* **Scope:** The product specifications—in other words, what it is you’re building. It’s good practice to err on the side of more detail here since disputes between stakeholders during design and development can cost both time and money.
* **Functional Requirements:** The specific structure behind the product (user requirements, flowcharts, technical information, etc.). Since the BRD isn’t a technical document, try to stay fairly high-level so that the general requirements can be understood and discussed without the nitty-gritty details.
* **Delivery Schedule:** Deadlines and milestones for the project. Backwards scheduling is a helpful way to ensure you meet the delivery schedule. This means rather than planning chronologically from start to finish, you begin by looking at the end date and planning backwards, calculating the time needed for every stage. It’s always a good idea to allow some buffer time to ensure that, even in an emergency, you can meet the deadline.

#### **Stakeholder Interviews**



Before the BRD sections can be filled out, it’s necessary to conduct stakeholder interviews—1-on-1 discussions with key stakeholders. Firstly, we need to identify who our stakeholders are! A **stakeholder** can be defined as any individual who may affect or be affected by decisions made during a project. Using this definition to guide us, the stakeholders on a project may include the following people:

* The customers or users of the product or service
* The client (if we have one) we're creating the product for
* The senior management team: CEO, CTO, COO, etc.
* Product owners/managers
* Business managers
* Marketing team
* Sales team
* Content strategists
* Web developers
* Designers
* Customer service team

This list is by no means inclusive of all the individuals who could potentially be stakeholders in your project, but it demonstrates that we need to think broadly about who needs to be involved in key project decisions and who might be affected by these decisions.

The goal of these interviews is to understand everyone’s point of view. Otherwise, you won’t be able to come to an agreement on requirements and write a document everyone can stand behind.

Human beings are inherently biased, so the only way to get a group of them on the same page is to normalize their expectations (i.e., get everyone’s expectations aligned). With this in mind, there are two things to watch out for when conducting stakeholder interviews—presumed constraints and jumping to solutions.

**Presumed constraints** are hindrances a stakeholder has in their mind that may or may not be necessary. To get to the root of it, ask them to explain why a particular constraint exists.

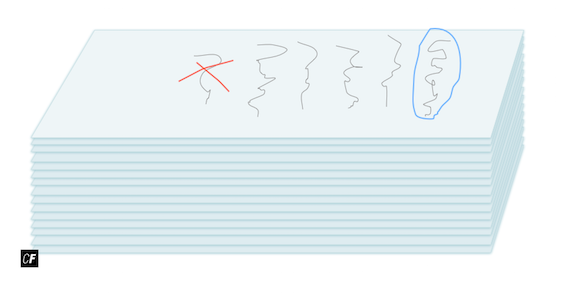
**Jumping to solutions** is pretty self-explanatory. It usually entails an assumption that a particular solution is correct. One way to address this is to really dig into the problem (remember the problem statement in Exercise 1.6?) and ask how exactly that particular solution can solve it.

The goal of these interviews is to remove any presumed constraints or rogue conclusions by distilling everyone’s expectations about what’s being built and how to break it down into specific, agreeable conclusions. To accomplish this, here are some questions to ask:

* What’s your role in this project?
* What do you think this product is going to be?
* Who do you think this product is for?
* When is the version we’re designing going to be released?
* What worries you about this project? What’s the worst thing that could happen?
* What should this project accomplish for the business?
* How will you, personally, define success for this project?

This sort of general questioning can be surprisingly effective in uncovering bias and assumptions. As humans, we often come up with ideas in our own head and mistakenly assume other people feel the same way. This is the root cause of misalignment and arguments down the line, so it’s important to hash out these biases before any sort of design or development begins. These issues can cost time and money later on and, not to mention, be extremely frustrating.

#### **Putting It Together**



Once you’ve obtained all the information you can from your stakeholder interviews, it’s time to compile everything in a BRD. To do this, dig through your notes and determine the points on which everyone seems to agree. Where there isn’t clear agreement, it’s up to you to feel out the general sentiment and write down something concrete.

It’s important to note that, while UX designers have a key part to play in compiling the information that goes into a BRD, they won’t always be the ones writing and putting the final document together. BRDs are often written by business managers, and therefore it’s important for us as designers to understand the anatomy and intention of these documents so we can design effectively for the business.

By having everything compiled in a single BRD, the document can be passed around to all stakeholders and everyone can come to an agreement on the specifics of the project. If there are still discrepancies, you may have to iterate by conducting more interviews and revising the BRD, but you should eventually be able to come up with a document behind which everyone can stand.

Everybody loves a good acronym—now you can add “BRD” to the list! But wait, there’s more! You might also come across Market Requirements Documents (MRD), focused on marketing goals, Functional Specifications Documents (FSD), concerned with how the product works on a more technical level, and Product Requirements Documents (PRD), which outline the product’s features, purpose, and functionality.

TRY IT!  
If you’re interested in exploring the wide world of documentation jargon, read up on the [Types of Requirements Documents](http://rmblog.accompa.com/2012/04/requirements-document-types/). To see how a Product Requirements Document (PRD) works in the context of a successful startup business, check out [How to Write a Painless Product Requirements Document](https://www.uxpin.com/studio/blog/write-good-product-requirements-document/) and explore [this example](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yrU5F6Gxhkfma91wf_IbZfexw8_fahbGQLW3EvwdfQI/edit) by Product Hunt.

Don’t worry too much about the jargon. Documents are simply a way to communicate your thinking on how to best reconcile business goals and the goals of the people you're designing for: your customers. In summary, keep them as simple as possible and only create documentation if it has a direct positive impact on your users. With that in mind, make sure that your documents are succinct and suit the purpose of your project.

#### **Summary**

Up to now, we’ve only discussed the product side of UX design—how to best design your product for users—but that’s not the only side when it comes to today’s business world. Depending on your product, business goals can be just as important, if not moreimportant, than any decisions you might make on your own. In this Exercise, we discussed how to produce a business requirements document and conduct stakeholder interviews, as well as their importance in aligning a product team for a project. Now, you’ll put your knowledge to the test by creating a BRD for your own product! Ready to get started?

#### **Resources**

* [Stakeholder Interview Checklist](http://boxesandarrows.com/a-stakeholder-interview-checklist/)