A PROJECT GUIDE TO UX DESIGN

FOR USER EXPERIENCE DESIGNERS IN THE FIELD OR IN THE MAKING

SECOND EDITION

RUSS UNGER AND CAROLYN CHANDLER

A Project Guide to UX Design, Second Edition
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Praise for *A Project Guide to UX Design*

If Russ Unger and Carolyn Chandler were magicians, the Alliance would be after them for revealing their best secrets. Fortunately for you, they're not. Russ and Carolyn have collected up sage wisdom previously only known to the most experienced UX project leaders and codified it for all to see. Now you can learn the secrets necessary to running great user experience projects.

Jared M. Spool, CEO and founding principal of User Interface Engineering

Is there one book that can tell you everything you need to know about designing user experiences? No. Is there a book that can get you most of the way there? There is now. Carolyn and Russ have laid a solid foundation for planning and managing design projects. This is an essential handbook for anyone mired in the competing methodologies, the endless meetings, and all the moving parts of user experience design.

Dan Brown, author of *Communicating Design*

This book is a fantastic introduction to how to design great products for real people. But it covers much more than just design—it also includes all the things around design: managing projects, working with people, and communicating ideas. A great all-rounder.

Donna Spencer, author of "Card Sorting: Designing Usable Categories"

This is a practical, accessible, and very human guide to a very human activity: working together with people to make great things for other people.

Steve Portigal, Portigal Consulting

If you've heard of Wil Wheaton the author, you understand why I hold Russ Unger in such high regard. Russ's experience and guidance was fundamental to the construction and design of Monolith Press, and he's been one of the most valuable collaborators I've ever worked with.

Wil Wheaton, actor and author of *Dancing Barefoot*, *Just a Geek*, and *The Happiest Days of Our Lives*

Swimlanes are also useful when you need to cross out of the digital world and into the physical world for part of your process (**Figure 11.20**). In those cases, you can define actors and roles to help identify the steps in the process and the activities that they are engaging in.

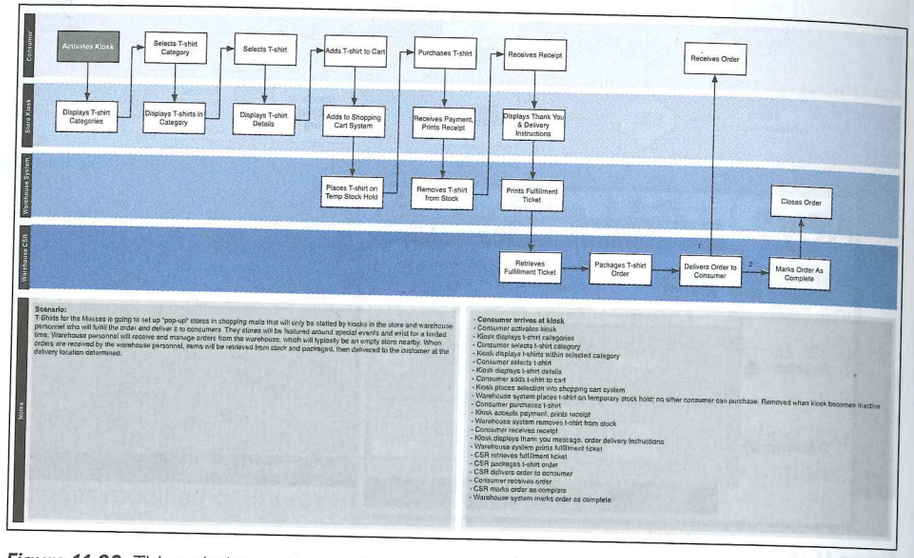
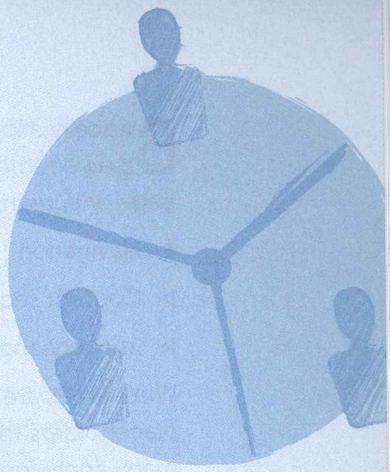


Figure 11.20 *This swimlanes diagram is an example of a swimlane that crosses digital and physical activities*

The important thing to remember here is to not limit yourself in your uses of task flows or site maps. Stretch the boundaries of the basics that you've been shown in this chapter. In the event you really need something to test your mettle, spend some time creating a task flow for how to tie your shoes.

Good luck!



12 Wireframes and Annotations

Design and Direction—Before the Visual Design Begins

Wireframes and annotations are ways to identify the proposed content and structure, as well as functional behaviors, of a view of a web page or an application. When combined with site maps and task flows, these documents are also extremely useful for identifying prototyping scenarios and proofs of concept. Wireframes are typically presented in grayscale, bereft of graphical elements or finalized content; instead they use placeholder content to highlight representative locations that can be used as guidance in the visual design. Essentially, wireframes are used as a tool for communicating your designs.

Russ Unger

Basically a low-fidelity prototype of a web page or application screen, a *wireframe* is used to identify the elements that will be displayed on the page or screen, such as

- Navigation
- Content sections
- Imagery and/or media
- Form elements
- Calls to action (CTAs)

Wireframes are typically created in black and white or shades of gray, use placeholders for images, and do not get into specifics of fonts (although many apply font sizing to convey separations of copy types). They come in all shapes and sizes—from the very basic to so advanced that they nearly replicate full-screen design.

Wireframes are evolving; no longer are they merely provided to designers and developers as outlines for their tasks. Wireframes are now used to represent the site or application to clients, designers, developers, and any other team members who have a stake in it at its very core level. It is common to show them to clients to get validation on the "design thinking" before the visual design and development phases are started. Often the people who are creating the wireframes are working hand in hand with those who create the business requirements (in some cases, they are the same people).

It should also be noted that some of the best wireframes and annotations are the result of direct interaction and collaboration among the various work partners—from business analysts to developers and other designers. Some companies are shifting toward using their wireframes and annotations in place of business requirements documents (BRDs). Although the world is far from claiming that BRDs are extinct, the beginnings of this shift are enough to show just how important it is to be very thorough and thoughtful as you create your wireframes and annotations.

In many cases, users will be shown wireframes so they can validate the page elements or request modifications. Wireframes that are placed in front of users typically have a different name: prototypes. (For more information on prototyping, see Chapter 13.)

To help you identify the approach that works best for you, this chapter discusses the basics of creating wireframes and shows examples from designers in the field. Like the rest of this book, these examples are just the beginning—don't be afraid to explore and innovate on your own.

What Are Annotations?

Annotations are, quite simply, explanations and notes about an element or an interaction on a wireframe. They typically contain such information as

- Content identification or labeling
- Content source(s)
- Display rules
- Interaction rules
- Interaction destinations
- Process rules
- Error content/messaging

It's best to author annotations with very direct—if not terse—tone and clear explanations. Do not leave anything to chance in an annotation; there is a *very* big difference between *should* and *shall.*

> **Bad:** "Triggering this call to action (CTA) *should* result in the display of the home page."
>
> **Good:** "Triggering this call to action (CTA) *shall* result in the display of the home page."

OK, to be fair, the first example isn't exactly horrible, but the word *should* could leave room for confusion for a developer downstream in the process, who may not have the luxury of his favorite UX designer standing by to answer questions. Ensure that your annotation style is succinct and leaves zero ambiguity for anyone who may need to read—and rely upon—your instructions.

Who Uses Wireframes?

With their clear, concise annotations, wireframes are very nice, but who is really the audience for these outputs? Unfortunately, there is no simple answer to that. From project to project your audience may vary from a single person to any combination of several groups. **Table 12.1** outlines the potential audiences for your wireframes.

TABLE 12.1 Wireframe Audiences

AUDIENCE	PURPOSE
Project Management	Project managers may use wireframes as discussion points within the team to highlight strategy, technology needs, and a very high-level user experience.
Business Analysts	Business analysts may use wireframes to ensure that their requirements are being met and to validate that they have not missed requirements that need to be included.
Visual Designers	Visual designers may use wireframes as a blueprint for their output. Wireframes provide them with an accounting of page elements and behaviors that need to be included.
Content Creators	Copywriters, content strategists, editors, and other people responsible for copy may use wireframes to map to a content matrix and identify content needs throughout a project.
Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Specialists	SEO specialists can use wireframes to help identify appropriate naming schemes, copy needs, and enhancements to the overall SEO strategy. (For more information on SEO, see the online chapter, "User Experience Design and Search Engine Optimization," available on the companion website.)
Developers	Developers often use wireframes in conjunction with (and sometimes instead of) business requirements to understand the expected functions and behaviors of the design. In some cases, the wireframes may be used as the basis for a proof of concept.
Quality Assurance	A QA team can use wireframes as the basis for authoring its testing scripts. Once wireframes have been approved by the client, the variation should be minimal, and this allows the QA team to begin working on their tasks earlier.
Users	Users may see wireframes in very early stages, sometimes in the form of "paper prototypes," as a mechanism to test the design direction. (See Chapter 13.)
Clients	Clients are increasingly more involved in the review of wireframes to validate whether the business requirements, goals, and objectives are met and to provide approval to move forward into the visual design phase.

Creating Wireframes

To create a wireframe, you typically need a set of requirements. These can come in the form of a formal business requirements document from a client, a creative brief or project brief, meeting notes, a well-articulated site map or task flow, or even notes on a napkin that provide direction. One way or another, you need an understanding of what it is that you are trying to create for a user, what the connections are, and a general understanding of the technological limitations and expectations.

> ***Note*** *For more information on defining business requirements, see Chapters 4 and 5. For suggestions on effective meeting notes, see the online bonus chapter, "A Brief Guide to Meetings," at www.projectuxd.com.*

After you compile the necessary information, take the time to carefully read through all the requirements, ask questions, and consider the answers to obtain any additional clarity, you're ready to begin creating your wireframes!

Tools of the Trade

There are many design tools that you can use to create site maps and task flows and in most cases, the good news is that you can use basically the same applications for wireframes and annotations. The bad news is that if this is your first experience in creating wireframes, you may feel just a little bit lost about where to begin.

Here are a few options:

- Microsoft Visio (http://office.microsoft.com/visio)
- Axure RP Pro (www.axure.com)
- OmniGraffle (www.omnigroup.com/applications/OmniGraffle)
- Balsamiq (http://balsamiq.com)
- Adobe Fireworks (www.adobe.com/products/fireworks)
- Adobe InDesign (www.adobe.com/products/indesign)
- Adobe Illustrator (www.adobe.com/products/illustrator)
- Apple Keynote (http://www.apple.com/iwork/keynote)
- Keynote Kung-fu (http://keynotekungfu.com)
- Microsoft PowerPoint (http://office.microsoft.com/powerpoint)
- OpenOffice Draw (www.openoffice.org)
- HTML & CSS

Many tools have stencils or libraries that you can pull design patterns from to help you build out specific elements of the page. As an example, the Yahoo! Design Pattern Library (http://developer.yahoo.com/ypatterns/) has many downloads available for Omnigraffle, Visio, Fireworks, Axure, InDesign, and more, which covers a good portion of the tools available to you.

You can find stencils galore online, and here are a few places to get you started:

- Welie.com (http://www.welie.com/patterns)
- UI-Patterns.com (http://ui-patterns.com)
- Patternry (http://patternry.com)
- Graffletopia (http://graffletopia.com)
- Axure Widget Libraries (http://www.axure.com/widgetlibraries)
- Loren Baxter's Better Defaults for Axure, A Widget Library (http://www.acleandesign.com/2009/04/better-defaults-for-axure-a-widget-library)

Ask the Expert: Leah Buley

Leah Buley is principal designer at Inuit. She highlights the importance of using pencil and paper (much like the authors) in her "How to Be a UX Team of One" presentation.

"When you first start sketching ideas for a wireframe, here's what often happens: You have one or two good ideas, and then you hit a wall. These ideas will probably come from something that you've seen and liked, or from something you've designed in the past. That's not an ending point; it's a good starting point.

The mind tends to race to what's familiar, but what's familiar may not always be the best solution to the problem. When you force yourself to seek more varied ideas, often by idea 4 or 5, you've come up with something new and interesting. I don't know why it happens that way. It just does.

Templates can be useful for guiding yourself through this process. You can use Adaptive Path's six-up template (**Figure 12.1**), which simply provides a space to do six little thumbnail sketches. The number of sketches isn't actually all that important. What is important is forcing yourself to move beyond the first few obvious ideas. Six is a magic number (for me) because the six-up template, with its six little boxes, encourages me to keep going until all the little thumbnails are filled in."

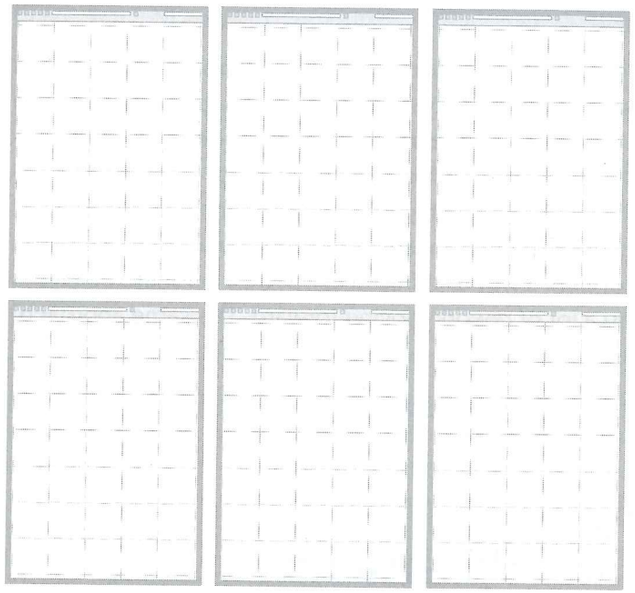


Figure 12.1 *Adaptive Path's six-up template*

But wait—there is still more good news. Nearly every seasoned user experience professional gets started with pencil and paper, so you should not feel as if you need to immediately choose a technology solution (although it is entirely possible that you'll need to translate from sketches to something digital rather quickly).

These are sound words to live by—especially if you are just getting familiar with the work you are doing in the world of UX design. As times passes, you will begin to identify an approach that works best for you, but there's not much better advice than Leah's. For additional insight into her approach, the entire "How to Be a UX Team of One" presentation is available online at http://www.slideshare.net/ugleah/how-to-be-a-ux-team-of-one.

Don't be afraid to get started with pencil and paper—just be sure to bring a lot of erasers. Mistakes are a part of the process, and you should expect that even after you have committed to a pencil sketch you will make modifications as you move to digital. In fact, if you are not already sketching first, sit down with a pencil and paper and sketch your ideas out before you open any digital tools to help you wireframe.

Few professions operate within the realm of iterations as frequently and consistently as UX designers. Very rarely, if ever, is design work accepted on the first pass, and sometimes you can only hope to be "wrong in the right direction." Because of this, start small: Take a single page or small portion of a section of a project, review it first with your internal team, and then with your client team to ensure that your understanding is on track. Getting your designs in line with the client's way of thinking about their business objectives up front saves you a lot of rework moving forward. The same approach can apply to design testing with users—seek validation early!

Start Simply: Design a Basic Wireframe

In this section, you will see how to create a wireframe at a very basic level. Often you may start with nothing more than a simple site map and some additional requirements, but with these you can build a wireframe for a website's home page.

Remember the basic site map from Chapter 9, which showed how a very simple website might be structured? **Figure 12.2** presents a refresher—as you can see there is a degree of navigational hierarchy shown. Every X.0 page identified is most likely a top-level, or primary, page. You can use this as a jumping off point for defining a portion of the business requirements and for a wireframe.

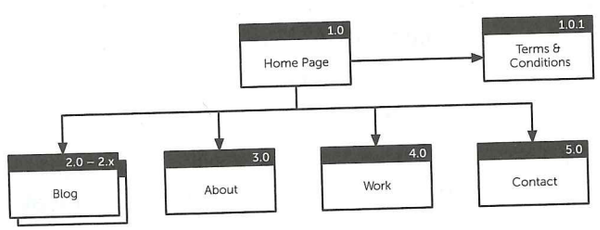


Figure 12.2 *A site map for a basic website with blog functionality*

Getting Started

It is not uncommon that you may be the author of your own business requirements document, and that can be a blessing and a curse. When you are the author of the requirements, essentially you have only yourself—or your client—with whom to discuss the meaning of anything vague or relatively undefined. Often it may feel as if you are making it up as you go—but don't let that deter you.

In many instances, your wireframes will help you identify gaps in the information you are working with. This can help you create the best solution—eventually. Remember, user experience practitioners work toward putting forth the best possible solution for the users, and your first versions of any project are always going to be used to solicit feedback and influence the next iteration of design. Your design does not have to be perfect, but you do want to make sure it looks clean and professional, and that in the worst case it's wrong in the right direction.

The requirements for this home page design are limited and very brief. Fortunately, the site map in Figure 12.2 provides enough information to formulate the navigation that could be used for the website:

- The home page (numbered 1.0) is the topmost level of navigation. Terms & Conditions (1.0.1) is most likely a common footer element, or at least it should not be considered part of the primary navigation.
- The other primary navigation elements are About (3.0), Work (4.0), Contact (5.0), and Blog (2.0–2.x)—which is depicted as a pagestack, so you can ascertain that it will be viewed as multiple dynamic pages and may have a "previous" and "next" form of navigation.

These primary navigation elements supply you with quite a bit of information to get started with—but that is nowhere near enough to effectively create a home page for a website. So, to help provide direction, the client supplied some additional information:

> The company is a boutique user experience design firm that has gained exposure due to its blogging and the range of projects that it has worked on. It is important that visitors to the website can quickly learn what the company/website is about through limited text and strong, evocative imagery that works in conjunction with user experience design. Additionally, it is important that the navigation is clear (would prefer reusable header and footer, if possible) and that there is a call to action to most recent blog postings so that visitors can

quickly read a summary of our latest take on current issues in the user experience world. If possible, it would be nice to be able to highlight recent work on the home page, but this is secondary, as much of our work is often in development or under strict nondisclosure.

The Wireframes and Annotations

There are a number of ways to interpret these requirements, and the first wireframe presentation to the client could be very similar to **Figure 12.3**.

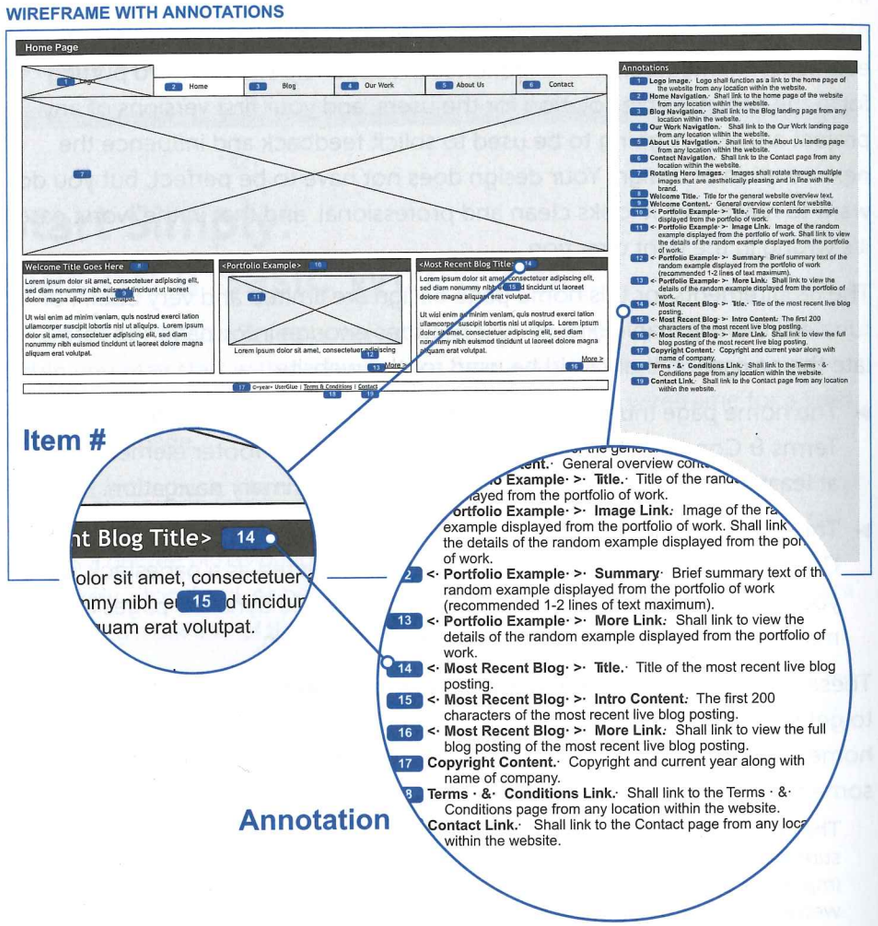


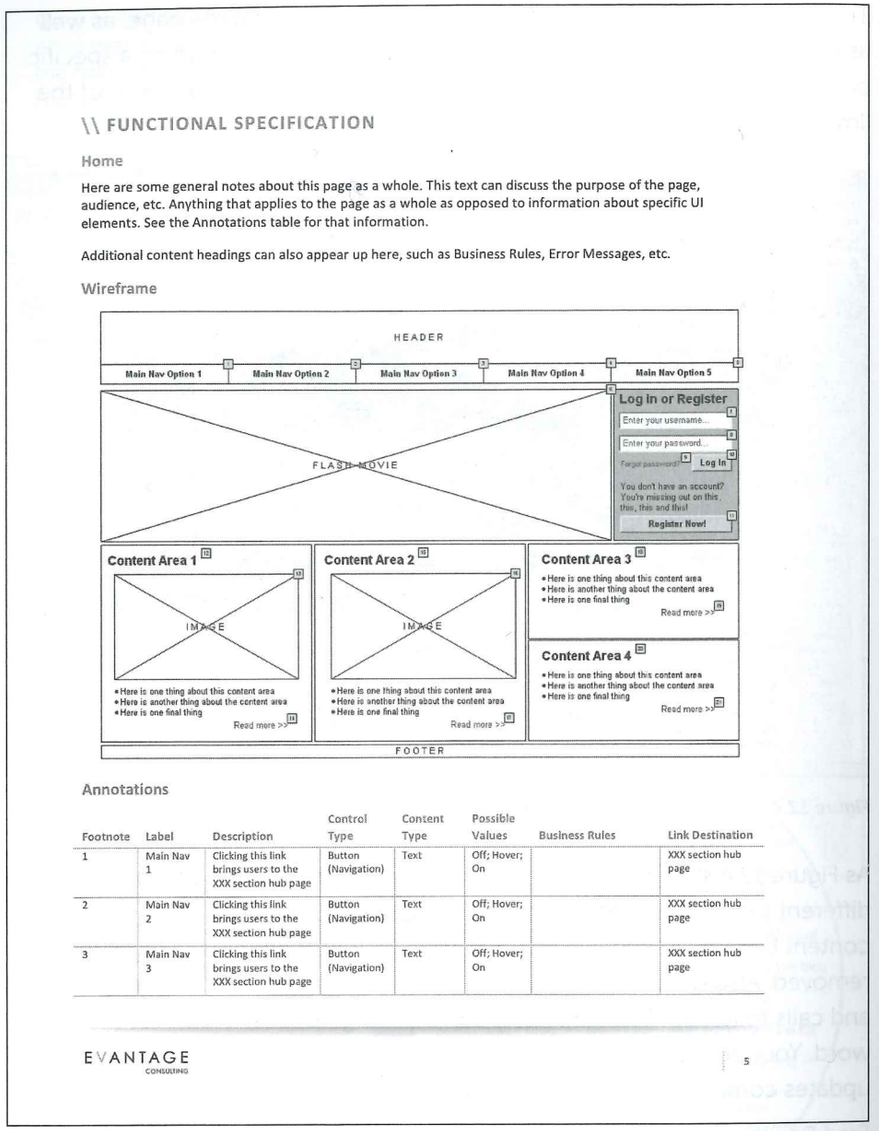
Figure 12.3 *Wireframes with annotations submitted for home page design*

The wireframe with annotations details every element on the page, as well as expected calls to action and the action results (such as loading a specific page). This particular example (**Figure 12.4**) works very well because of the limited number of elements and the limited amount of detail required.

Figure 12.4 *Live home page design for www.userglue.com*

As Figure 12.4 shows, the live version of this home page today is only slightly different than the original wireframe in Figure 12.3. Because timeline and content became issues, for instance, the Portfolio Examples section was removed. Also notice the difference in naming conventions for navigation and calls to action: The wireframe served as a guideline, it was not the final word. Your end result, too, will often have a variety of minor changes and updates compared to the content of your wireframe.

Fred Beecher, Lead User Experience Consultant at Evantage Consulting (http://evantageconsulting.com) provides an example of a wireframe with annotations from the field (**Figure 12.5**).



\\ FUNCTIONAL SPECIFICATION

Home

Here are some general notes about this page as a whole. This text can discuss the purpose of the page, audience, etc. Anything that applies to the page as a whole as opposed to information about specific UI elements. See the Annotations table for that information.

Additional content headings can also appear up here, such as Business Rules, Error Messages, etc.

Wireframe

Annotations

Footnote	Label	Description	Control Type	Content Type	Possible Values	Business Rules	Link Destination
1	Main Nav 1	Clicking this link brings users to the XXX section hub page	Button (Navigation)	Text	Off; Hover; On		XXX section hub page
2	Main Nav 2	Clicking this link brings users to the XXX section hub page	Button (Navigation)	Text	Off; Hover; On		XXX section hub page
3	Main Nav 3	Clicking this link brings users to the XXX section hub page	Button (Navigation)	Text	Off; Hover; On		XXX section hub page

EVANTAGE CONSULTING 5

Figure 12.5 *A wireframe with annotations, created in Axure*

Creating Wireframes: A Sample Process

What do you need to get started on your first wireframe? You need to start by having as much information as possible in regards to your project. Hopefully, you will have access to information-packed artifacts such as

- Business requirements
- Design briefs, or creative briefs, or other named briefs that are relevant. For more information on design briefs, see *Communicating Design* by Dan Brown (New Riders, 2010)
- Stakeholder interviews
- Research performed
- Website analytics
- Personas that are rich with information about your users
- Site map
- User/Task flows or paths
- Content strategy documentation
- Statement of work
- ...anything else that you can find that is related to the project

Consume all of this. Voraciously. Get familiar with all the information that is available to you—hopefully you will have been involved throughout the project to this point and you will not have to engage in an exercise of cramming information into your brain.

Then you need some pencils and some paper. If you would like to use sketchboards for helping you in this process, Todd Zaki Warfel generously supplies them at http://zakiwarfel.com/archives/sketchboard-templates/.

And then you need to sketch.

What is This Sketching You Mention?

Bill Buxton said it best in *Sketching User Experiences: The Workbook* by Saul Greenberg, Sheelagh Carpendale, Nicolai Marquardt, and Bill Buxton (Morgan Kaufmann, 2011):

> Sketching is not about drawing. Rather, it is about design. Primarily, it is:
>
> - A fundamental tool that helps designers express, develop and communicate design ideas;
> - A critical part of a process that begins with idea generation, to design elaboration, to design choices, and ultimately to engineering.

This is very important. When you sketch before you get into a digital design tool of any sort, it allows you to rapidly explore myriad ideas, expand upon the ideas that seem to work the best for your project, and then simply throw away the ones that do not work (or keep them, take photos of them, and save them all away in a portfolio that allows you to highlight your process and thinking skills—hint, hint).

Sketching (**Figure 12.6**) also allows you to, through pitching and critiquing with various audiences from internal teams to clients and stakeholders to users, continue to increase the detail to which you are designing. Once you are at a comfortable point with your sketches, you can open up your favorite digital tool and start exploring those refinements.

Ask the Experts: Todd Zaki Warfel

Todd Zaki Warfel, author of Prototyping: A Practitioner's Guide *(Rosenfeld Media, 2009), endorses the 6-8-5 approach to sketching. This works well for groups, and you can apply the same type of rigor to your own individual sketching.*

The 6-8-5

Participants are divided up into small teams (typically 3–5). During the first round, they are asked to create 6-8 concept sketches on the 8 up sketch template. Participants are asked to work as individuals within their own teams during the first round. Collaboration and discussing the designs during the initial concept sketching. Following the initial sketching sprint, teams participate in a round robin style pitch and critique. Each member in the team gets 3 minutes to pitch their concept and how it satisfied the goals of the design challenge. The remaining team members get 2 minutes to critique the design and must collectively provide 2–3 ways the design achieved the goals as well as 1–2 ways the design either didn't meet the goals, or ask for further clarification in the next round.

After the team finishes the round-robin style pitch and critique, they come back together and pick from the best ideas as well as items that need further clarification. In the second and subsequent rounds, the team collaborates on the design within the given time constraint.

Oh, and then you give them the kicker. The time constraint is 5 minutes and it starts right now.

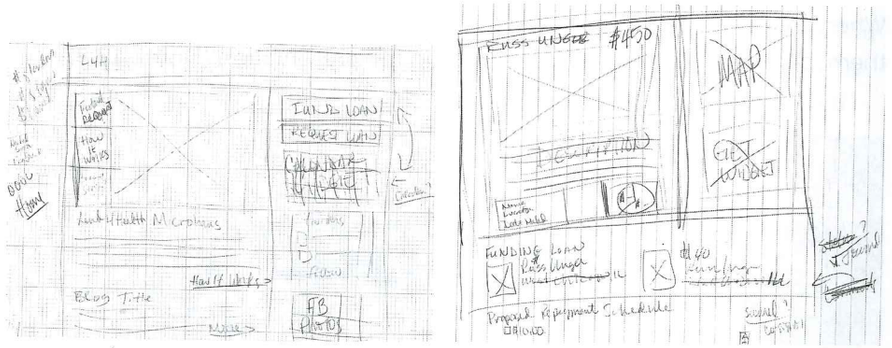


Figure 12.6 *Sketches. The unpretty kind. They do the trick.*

Also, you do not need to be an artist, or even very good at drawing, to sketch. The examples shown in Figure 12.6 are proof of this! If you can draw a circle, a square (or a square with an X through it to represent an image/media asset), a straight line and a triangle, you can draw most of what you would want in rough sketches.

If you want to get really creative with your sketching activities, plan meetings with your project colleagues, your clients, and even users if you have access to them, and get them to help you sketch what your project can look like.

Into the Digital: Wireframes

Now is the time to fire up the digital tool that you want to use to do your wireframes in. The options are many, so many in fact, that there are only a handful listed here, and there are probably more available each month. You have a lot of options; choose what fits into your budget and/or what you are

comfortable with or have available to you. The end result is that you have something that you can use to communicate the designs to your audience(s).

Whatever tool you are using, you need to use it to bring your ideas and sketches to a bit more life. How to explain that, well, is not as easy to do in text. The variety of tools at your disposal makes it nearly impossible to complete in the context of a single chapter. Your goal, however, should be to use the sketches that you have created.

So, let's take a look at some pictures!

Remember our sketches from before? Okay, **Figure 12.7** shows them again.

When created in Balsamiq, however, they still have a slightly sketchy feel to them, but there is a dramatic difference in the presentation (**Figure 12.8**).

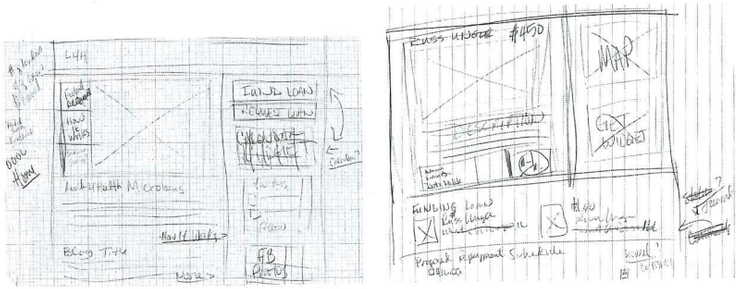


Figure 12.7 *Still the same sketches*

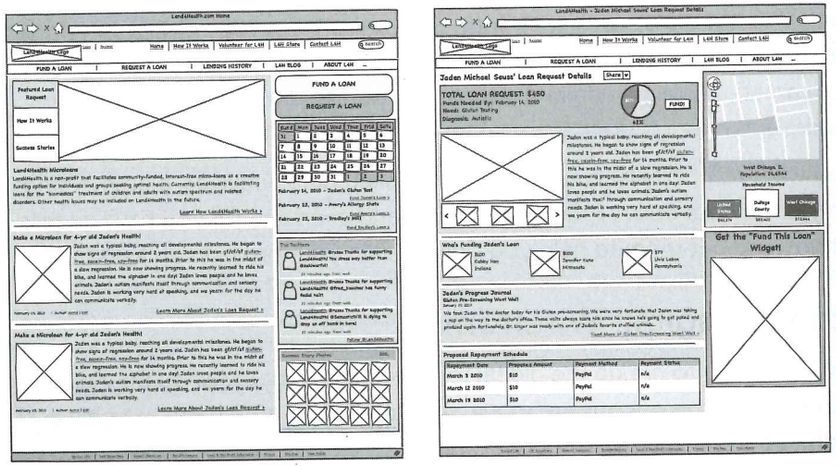


Figure 12.8 *The sketches turned into beautiful Balsamiq wireframes*

The digital tools allow you to get into specific details, better spacing, alignment and just add more clarity to what you were putting into your sketches. Unless you are a really great at sketching and drawing, it can be tough to create designs that express layouts effectively, or in specifically designated space sizes. Those who can do so, and do so well, are gifted and talented folks. Make friends with them.

Into the Digital: Visual Design

What does this all look like when it leaves your hands and gets into the hands of a visual designer? If you have been fortunate enough to collaborate with your content strategists, visual designers, and developers along the way, you probably will not see a grand departure, but you will see something that can be visually stunning and that continues to improve upon what you started way back in sketches, and then refined and improved upon in wireframes (**Figure 12.9**).

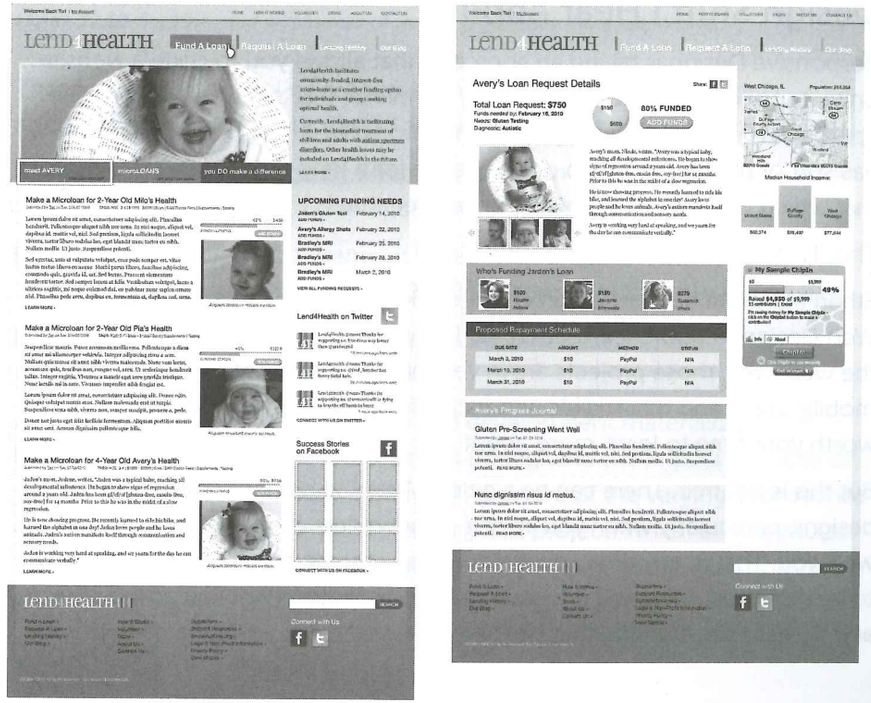


Figure 12.9 *Wireframes turned into stunning design. Preciousssssss...*

Ask the Experts: Brad Simpson

Brad Simpson, Principal at Bakery, LLC (http://done-n-done.com), finds that working closely with UX helps his visual design process.

I have worked in design for many years, and the more closely I work with the UX team—and the developers—over the course of a project the better the end result will be. It all has to make sense and every item has to have a purpose—working in collaboration with UX and the development team ensures that what I do lives up to the purpose and function intended. And by doing that, my part is better for it. Designers, embrace your Account, UX and Dev teams and the results will be amazing and every stakeholder will be proud.

Hey, What About This Responsive Design Stuff I Hear About?

Responsive Design is taking an approach that allows you to code a website once, but allows it to be flexible to fit the device it is being viewed on. The approach is new, the thinking about how to solve it is new, but the problem has sort of plagued the web design space for a long time—how do we make that which we design fit to whatever device that is viewing it?

This. Is. Awesome.

Ethan Marcotte has written an entire book on the topic titled *Responsive Web Design* (A Book Apart, 2011), and if you are working on projects for the web, well, those projects are in very high likelihood to eventually have mobile users, and that makes understanding Responsive Design entirely worth your time to learn more about.

But this is not free. There can be a bit of a "cost" to creating responsive designs, particularly when you involve stakeholders and clients that are not, well, you. That is, any time anyone needs to approve the way content is going to be displayed, there will probably need to be a paper trail that acknowledges and agrees to something that has been presented. So, while the code may be

crafted in such a way that pages beautifully resize themselves for the devices that they are being viewed on, there is still a need to account for—and guide—how the design will update itself based upon the context of where it is being viewed. This means more wireframes for most of us.

The sketches and wireframes shown in **Figure 12.10** are representations of how the same design could be viewed in different browser sizes, possibly a tablet and a smartphone.

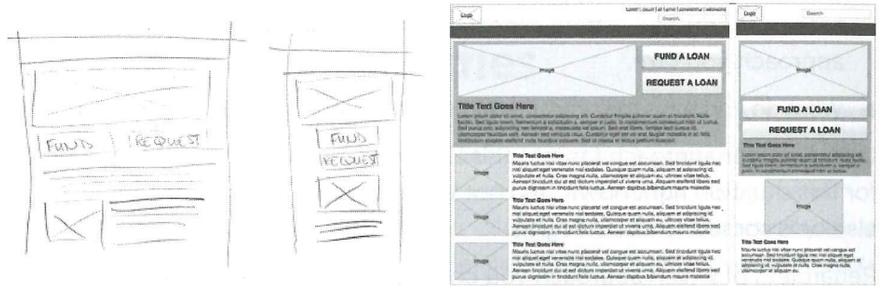


Figure 12.10 *Sketches and wireframes of something slightly more responsive...*

There are additional online resources to help you learn more about approaches to having your design accommodate responsive layouts:

- Responsive Web Design by Ethan Marcotte on A List Apart (http://www.alistapart.com/articles/responsive-web-design)
- Responsive Layout Wireframe at Wireframes Magazine (http://wireframes.linowski.ca/2011/09/responsive-layout-wireframe)
- The Goldilocks Approach to Responsive Web Design (http://goldilocksapproach.com)

As more new approaches to design and development materialize, it will become increasingly more important to understand the impact of those on your UX work. In many cases, simply being aware of the varying approaches can help you ask the right questions early in a project, which allows you to be better prepared as you do your work.

Wireframes Vs. Prototypes

When it comes to choosing whether or not to create wireframes or prototypes, you can find dissenting opinions across the UX communities. Either wireframes or prototypes can be successful for you, but how you choose which approach to take can depend upon a few things:

- What are you comfortable with using and knowledgeable in creating?
- What is your client comfortable with reviewing? Sophistication can vary among clients and setting expectations is important, regardless of which approach you take.
- What do you have the time, resources, and budget available to deliver upon?

Use whatever approach fits into this list. The mantra should be "what works for this situation right now?" and not what happens to work for someone else or is someone else's dogma.

Regardless of which approach you choose, you should still sketch first.

Which Design Is Right?

There is no right—or wrong—design, as long as the requirements are met. At times you may feel compelled to create multiple wireframes for a single page, to explore various approaches, to work through the details, and to present to potential users, teammates, and possibly your clients.

This is completely acceptable.

Remember that this is an exercise in iterations. The work that you present to a client is almost always guaranteed to not be considered "correct" or "final" on the first try. More often than not, you will find yourself working through at least one round of iterations and updates. Unfortunately, that can sometimes extend to multiple rounds—but that is the nature of projects, and it should ultimately lead to less exploration for your downstream work partners.

As you compare your wireframe and annotations to the two examples provided, examine the difference in approach and style of presentation. Compare these to the home page example earlier in the chapter and to the work that you did. Find the similarities and differences and create the approach that works best for you, unless there's an established template in place for you already.

In many cases, the hardest part about creating a wireframe is getting your pencil to your paper for the first time. Follow Leah Buley's advice and start sketching out multiple ideas—doodle and draw, explore different approaches, and test your designs with coworkers, peers, and family members until you feel confident that you can defend your design (without being defensive), and you will find yourself moving in the right direction.

A Final Note on Presenting Wireframes

Once you start creating wireframes and become more comfortable with the work product—and understand how valuable they are to your workflow—it's easy to forget that not everyone understands the amount of thought and time that goes into creating them. Often, clients and work partners may have been exposed to wireframes of a completely different quality level, complexity, or with a different style of annotations.

In fact, you may find that many of your work partners and clients have never seen a wireframe before (even if they say that they have). It's also not uncommon for clients and work partners to get confused about the differences between site maps and wireframes, and the purpose of each.

In other words, your first wireframe could potentially be your client's first wireframe as well! This makes it extremely important to accurately set the stage for what you are going to present. Before presenting the wireframes you need to clearly explain what they are, what they will look like in comparison to a final visual design, and what their purpose is.

Here's some additional advice for presenting wireframes:

- If possible, engage your client's team during discovery; try to get them involved in actively drawing on a whiteboard. Explain that they are contributing to the wireframing process and that the end result will look similar, but it will be produced in an electronic format. It is very important to explain that this is an activity that will lead to wireframes that may look completely different as you explore design options.
- Find strong metaphors to convey the differences between your wireframes and the final design of the project. A popular metaphor is

"Wireframes are to applications/websites what blueprints/floorplans are to a house." Wireframes allow changes to be implemented more easily and efficiently, and at a stage when changes are generally less expensive (prior to engaging the build teams and pouring the foundation).

- Tell your meeting attendees that the wireframes are *not* a final representation of the graphical treatment of the site. The wireframes are being presented to account for content, general layout, and interaction of the elements of the pages. Once wireframes have been approved, the building can begin. (Oh, and subtle changes may still occur!)
- Engage your visual designers—if there is time and budget—to provide design mock-ups to show the differences between your wireframes and a final design. If possible, show the client examples from other projects that demonstrate how wireframes and final designs are similar and different at the same time.
- Explain how other members of your project team will use the wireframes—it never hurts for a client to understand the importance of their review and approval of this milestone, as well as how wireframes inform the rest of the project.

Once your clients and work partners start to understand and appreciate the value of wireframes and where they live in the design process, it becomes easier to move your projects along.

Why?

Because wireframes help create visual clarity and direction throughout the rest of the project. In many cases, work partners and clients may even evangelize the usefulness of wireframes on your behalf. This allows you to spend more time focusing on user experience design and less time selling it!