Conversational Design

Working in voice design comes easier to me as I’m not so incumbered by a background in GUI and a background of speaking and listening since I was very young and now, I’m not so young.

I did a learning sprint through the CF VUI course, then doubled down by taking the far harder Conversational Designer (+Copywriter/AI Trainer) course through the Conversational Design Institute which I’ve been reliably informed is world class.

Add on the ‘classics’ by Cathy Pearl (Designing Voice User Interfaces), Michael Cohen et al (Voice User Interface Design) and Nass/Brave (Wired for Speech), every podcast Brett Kinsella has done (Voicebot.ai) and dozens of other sources and I feel like I’m well into the foothills of this amazing climb.

Same principles. Different tools.

Let’s assume I’m good with chatbots (which are easier) so we can talk about voice assistants (VAs).

There are some challenges with VAs. Discoverability and the commercials being but two. I love a challenge but that’s for later. First things first.

This personal project examples my thinking using a scenario I can actually see going all the way.

Jack Monroe is an activist, columnist and excellent cook and author of recipes. She has half a dozen cookbooks in circulation in the UK that focus on how to eat properly on a very restricted budget. Her life story is inspiring and relevant to so many people’s struggles. She has a massive social media following.

And yet, when you ask Alexa for a recipe, you get back something from BBC Good Food that’s delicious but with no time or budget constraints. They are just ‘reading out loud’ their website of a thousand recipes without empathy for the user case.

So, I followed CDI’s principles and process but rather than originating a bot persona, I researched how to make Jack the bot.

For legal reasons, I can’t complete the ‘skill’ without publisher permission, but it shows my process.

Requirement’s process

* Let’s just assume the tech team are in place, the platform is RASA, the integrations are specified, the channel is Amazon/Alexa so the prime user is identified and logged on and handover options may include a grocery provider and her extensive podcasts that explore themes around her cooking process.
* The Operation is a spin-off of Ms Monroe’s publisher motivated by selling more books with third party vendors wanting brand placements (sponsors). The KPIs focus on task completions, user reviews, book sales, 3rd party sales.
* The user persona
* The bot persona

Happy Conversation Design Process

* The use case is:
  + I need to choose a chicken-based recipe that I can shop for and then enjoy with my child later which is on-budget, healthy and tasty
* Setting the scene:
  + I am in my kitchen with my Alexa Dot and my mobile phone.
  + I am alone, my child is at school
  + It’s getting close to school pick-up and the shop is between me and the school gate.
* My user needs:
  + Goals
    - Buy cheap but healthy ingredients for immediate use
    - A recipe that works for my kitchen, cooking talent, easily obtainable ingredients
  + Mindset
    - A meal that we can enjoy together that’s not junk
    - I’m worried about the stigma of buying food that embarrasses my child when discussed in the playground
    - Even on a very tight budget, I expect variety
    - Feels protective and maternal
* My Bot needs;
  + Superpowers
    - Can offer many recipes that fit same brief
    - Can’t offer anything outside own recipe list
    - Can tell approximate meal prices per person and nutrition expressed in layman terms
    - Already knows the user name, address, recipe use history
  + Responsibilities
    - Must ask time available to cook (risk of undercooking), allergies and intolerance
    - Must tell recipe full name, book and page reference
    - Must supply ingredients to user mobile
  + Promote
    - Expediency, celebrate constraints that deliver good food for real families
  + Discourages
    - Habituation/dependency on junk food
* Sample Dialogue (image)
* Design Flowchart (image)
* Expert Rewrite (image)
* Wizard of Oz (image)

Detailed Conversation Design

* Intent recognition
  + Escalating specificity
* Longtail
  + Handoff to google search out of scope request
* Repair Flow
  + No input
  + No match
  + Disambiguation
  + Misrecognition
* User Testing/iterations