

N O S T R U M



A status quo subverting provocation by
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SUMMARY

Our project was a critique of Bay Area optimization culture, the pseudoscientific wellness industry, and the American desire for instantaneous solutions. Nostrum is a personalized dietary supplement meant to instantly enhance your person through its unique optimization of the placebo.

To give reality to our product, we created a [website](#) for the product as well as an [Instagram account](#). Much of the copy on our website was lifted almost directly from websites for similar products, including HVMN, Ritual, Moon Juice, and Nutrigene.

We designed the company to give customers an immersive experience. Users begin by visiting our website and taking an initial assessment. After they step through the survey (in the form of highly personal and outlandish questions), the customer proceeds to the nearest Wellness Pod. There, they have their hand scanned by the pod and our proprietary computer algorithms process their data and produce a customized pill. A sample of their custom pill is dispensed for the user to keep or consume.

In actuality, there was no customization of the pill and no intended effects. However, because of the potency of the placebo effect, even those members of the group who consumed our sugar pills and new the lack of effects found themselves performing at a higher level...

BRAINSTORMING, IDEATION, INSPIRATION

We began by brainstorming novel prosthetics, and decided that we wanted to focus on products that create the “optimal” human being, especially due to the prevalent, Bay Area tech culture that encourages nonstop productivity. Some of our initial ideas were a “programmer starter pack” and products geared toward efficiency in areas that were socially subversive.

NOVEL PROSTHETICS

prosthetics for children-spaghetti

Society Hates...

- time spent w/ loved ones
- lost time (?)
- non-normative sexual practices
- people who don't work
- sick lazy
- men sexualized like men

also / lower awareness

Interrogation of Social Norms

- handshakes
- retractable legs
- squirrel leg
- efficiency - a hand

dead puppy
project
sawhorse

corea killer

exaggerated
student kit

digital mom

prosthetic hymen

synesthesia

synthetic relationship

↳ loneliness

↳ anxiety

prosthetics for Instagram

↳ selfie kit

↳ hyperchondria box

Society

- time spent w/ loved ones
- solitaire (?)
- non-normative sexual practices
- people who don't work
- lazy
- men
- sick
- sexualized like men

- handshakes
- retractable legs
- squirrel leg
- efficiency - ~~the~~ hand

- dead puppy projects
 - ↳ fake nipple
- cereal killer
- program (stutter king)
- digital mo
- ▷ • prosthetic hymen
- synesthesia
- synthetic
 - ↳ lonely
 - ↳ anxiety
- prosthetics
 - ↳ self
- hypochondria

ship
again

Absurd Pills
MISSION STATEMENT

Cognitive
Spiritual
Productive
Enlightening
Instant health journey
Optimized vitamin bean
Personalized
Vegan

Website ANAL-YES Heidi

Wellness FRANKY HEY-LEIGH Pool

Pills JESSIE FRANKY

Pamphlet

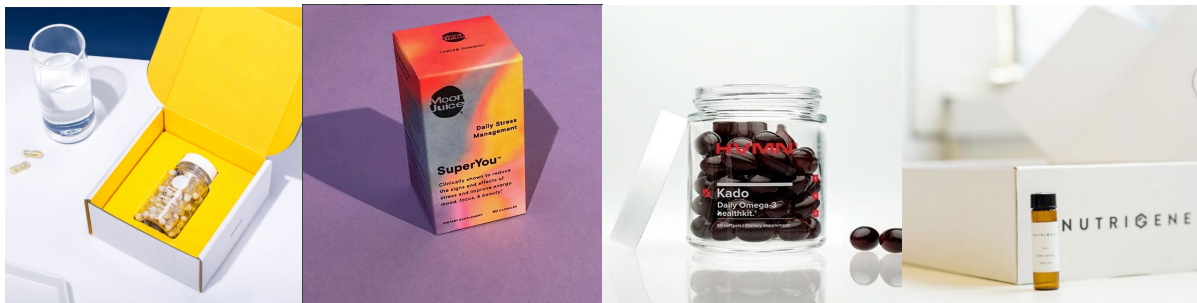
Insta Hot Lovers

Instagram

This is a scan of a blank page from a document. The paper has a light cream or off-white color. There are some very faint, blurry marks near the top edge, possibly from the scanner or the original document's texture, but no legible text or figures are present.



Ultimately, we decided to focus on creating a satirical consumer product that both surfaced and critiqued the culture of productivity. By starting with some market research, we identified several trends we were interested in playing with. The first of these was the obsession with data, algorithms, and technology to produce “truth.” This was especially the case in products that claimed to focus on emotional states and the typically fuzzier stuff of human affect. The second thread was “optimization,” emphasized in brands such as HVMN and Nutrigene. This kind of language talked about the body as a machine that could be enhanced to achieve ever higher level of productivity and performance, whether through in athletics or in the office. Finally, we drew branding inspiration from existing wellness companies that offer customized supplements and claim to boost a variety of health factors. As shown by their Instagram posts below, as well as their websites, some facets include bright colors, high-contrast photography, and minimal packaging to elevate their facade. As such, the combination of bogus value propositions + millennial marketing is the last thread we wanted to highlight in our critique. Such propositions included phrases like “72% more glow,” and juice as a “healing force, an etheric potion, a cosmic beacon.” Needless to say, none of these claims could ever be tested or even truly felt by the consumer. Instead, they represent a lifestyle, which, through Instagram-friendly branding, becomes a highly sought-after norm.



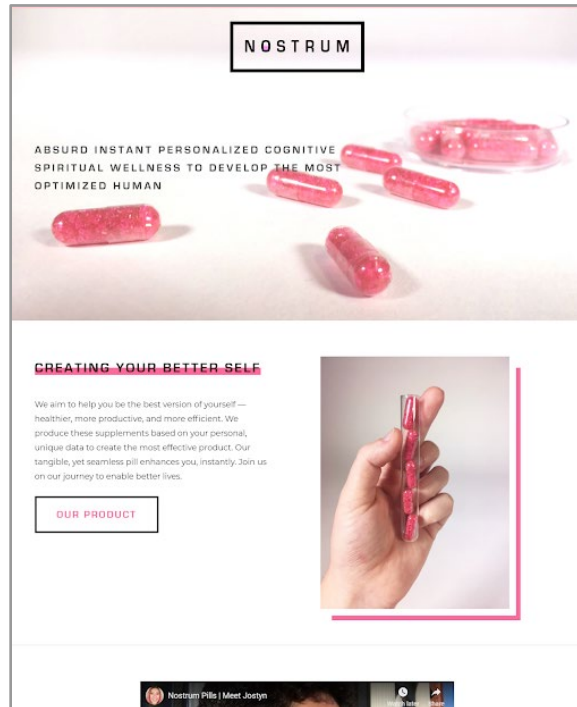
From our market research, we thus knew we wanted to play with the idea of a magic pill which could deliver instant health, productivity (and even nirvana) inside beautifully opaque packaging.

DESIGN PROCESS

We sought to create a whole experience, comprised of three different segments: (1) a website and social media platform to spread the word and collect data through a survey, (2) an in-person evaluation with a wellness pod, and (3) a beautifully packaged product to be received in the mail. All three segments are tied into a cohesive unit with our branding and color scheme.

(1) Website and social media

The Nostrum experience begins with an online survey located on our website, which can be viewed at <http://heidid.github.io/nostrum>



The landing page contains details about our product, a promotional video, the location of our wellness center (210 Jacobs Hall), testimonials, and our Instagram feed (@nostrumpills). We modelled the landing page design and content off of the existing companies that we were inspired by while maintaining our branding.

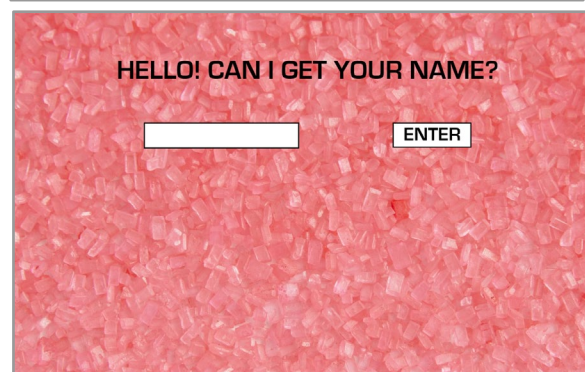
The website is hosted via Github Pages and the code repository can be found here:

<https://github.com/heidid/nostrum>

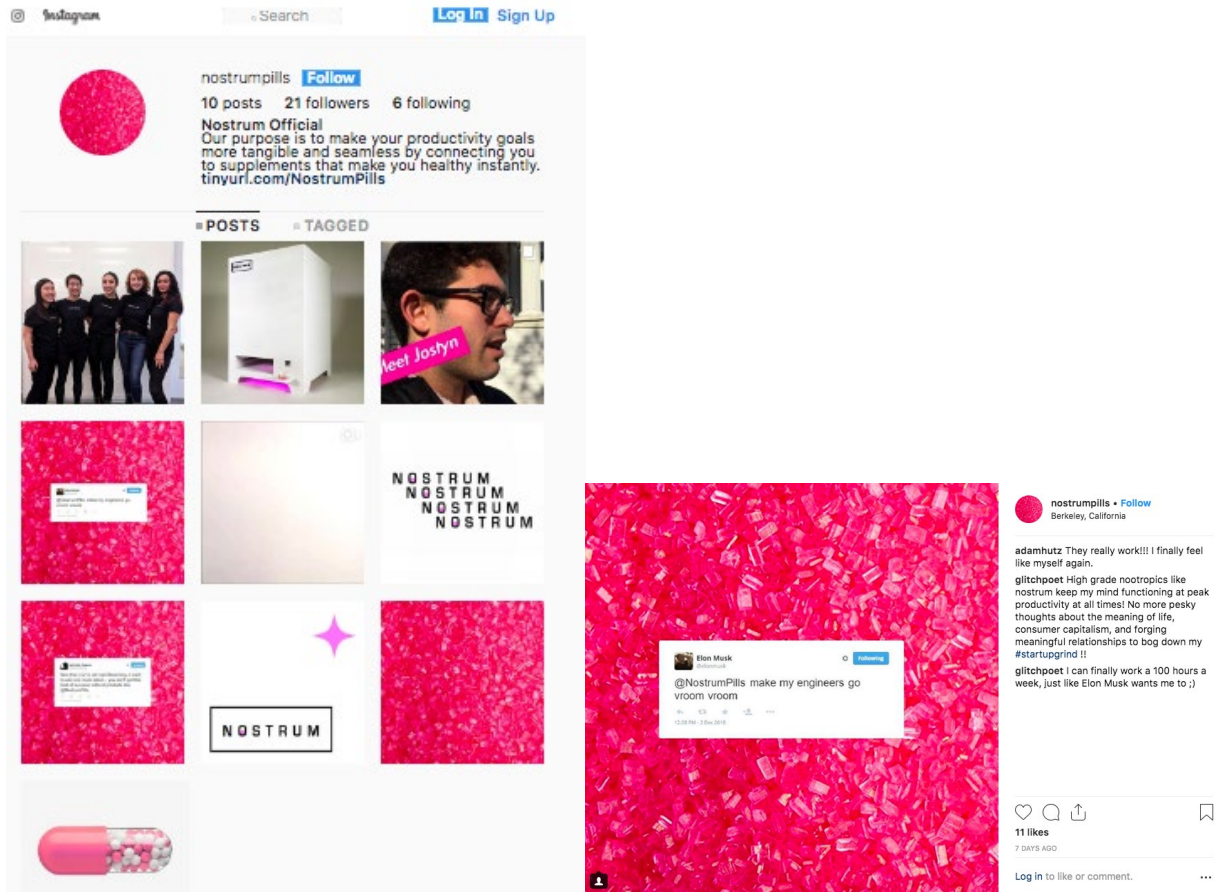
An open-source script was used for the Instagram feed (<http://instafeeds.com/>) and the Google Maps JavaScript API was used to embed the wellness center map.

Survey design

The code repository for the survey can also be found under Heidi's github repository. The beginning of the quiz can be found at this link <https://heidid.github.io/nostrum/name.html>. It's a series of web pages that redirects you to different pages until you get to the end of the quiz. We don't actually collect any of the data, it simply exists to give the user the illusion of a more "personalized" experience.



We seeded the Instagram with daily posts of our product and branding.



(2) In-person evaluation

A team of Nostrum staff (all donning the company tee) guides you through the in-person evaluation. During the evaluation, our wellness pod “scans” your hand, and produces a glittery pink pill. One of the staff pours you a glass of only the purest water to accompany your pill.

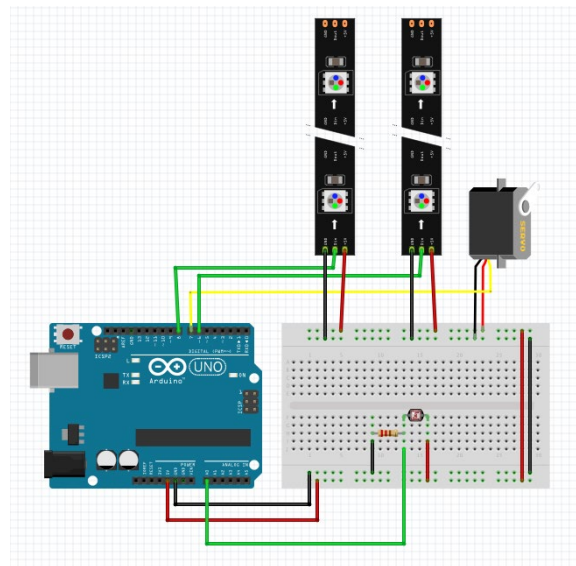
Materials

- Wellness pod
 - Laser-cut cardboard
 - Hot glue
 - Wood glue
 - Magnets
 - Arduino
 - Neopixel LED strip
 - Photosensor
 - 1kOhm resistor
 - Jumper cables and wires

- Servo motor
 - Portable battery
 - Bluetooth speaker
 - Laser-cut ramp and gumball dispensing mechanism
 - Boba straw
 - Matte white spray paint
- White table cloth
 - Glass carafe and cups
- Empty pill capsules
 - Pink and red sparkly sprinkles
- Black t-shirts with hot-pressed vinyl lettering

We laser cut the box, designed with butt joints to create the cleanest looking fit. Then we spray painted with matte white and added our logo in black acrylic, with a touch of painted pink for the O. The 'hand scanner' is a photocell and LEDs, programmed to glow pink to indicate 'ready for the hand', blink white as the hand was 'being scanned', and then finally turn green to indicate a successful scan. The bottom of the wellness pod is also outfitted with LEDs to give a visual glow to the audience as well. The photocell was thresholded to rotate a servo to move a pill from a reservoir (boba straw) down a ramp into a small petri dish. The back of the box is outfitted with magnets to be able to detach to access the electronics inside.

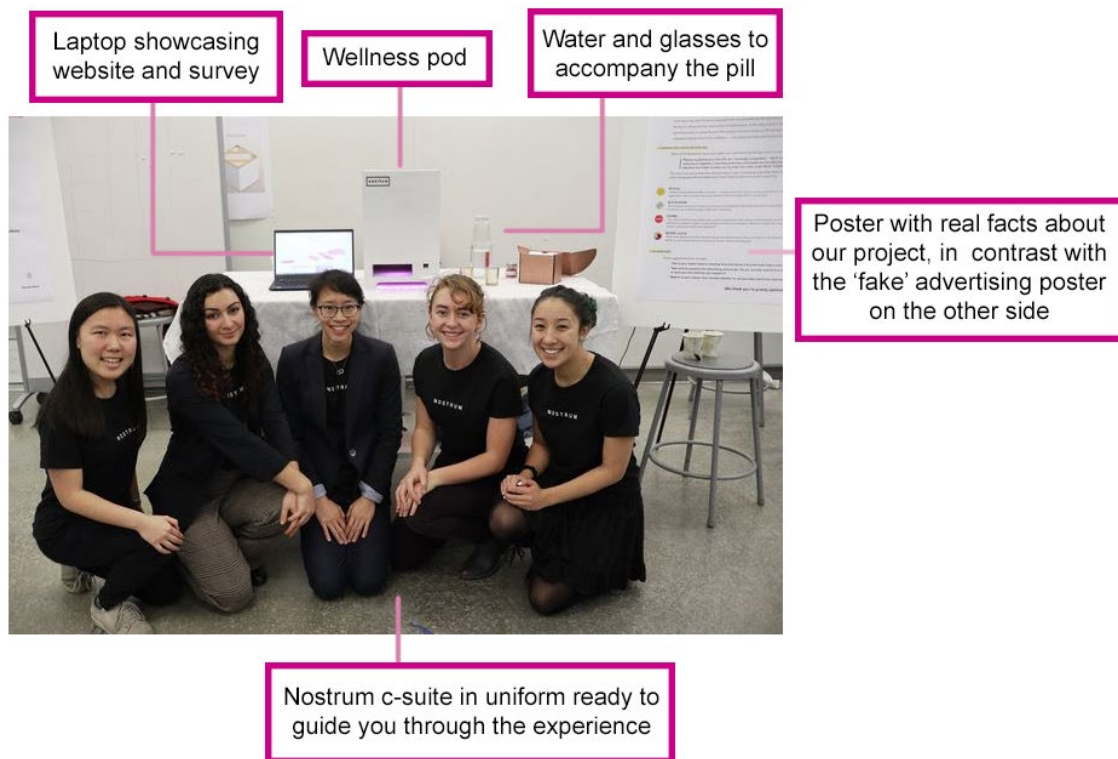
The circuit:



Wellness pod:



The experience:



(3) Subscription product sample

The last part of our experience is the subscription that you receive in the mail. This is a customized cardboard box containing a glass jar of pills, and a pamphlet with instructions of how many hours of sleep you should get.

Materials

- Cardboard
- Cardstock
- Glass mason jar
- Pill capsules filled with sparkly pink sprinkles
- Tissue paper and shredded stuffing material
- Double-sided tape
- Bronze spray paint

To create our packaging, we surveyed a variety of boxes and packaging before settling on our final form factor. We spray-painted the cardboard with bronze spray paint to create a shiny finished product. We printed the pamphlet and decals to be applied with double-stick tape.



Finally,



DEPLOYMENT AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

We deployed our pill experience on the last day of class and at the Jacob's design showcase. We presented ourselves to the department as the C-suite of Nostrum Pills. We wore matching t-shirts with the word "Nostrum" on it to make really sell the idea of us being part of the company. When we presented, we first began by selling the lifestyle Nostrum

was offering – one that targeted educated, wealthy millennials that were looking for instant fulfillment. We personified this in “Jostyn”, the tech-bro that wanted more out of life and had the disposable income to be able to afford a product like this.

We then walked our users through our multi-step, customization process. They take an online quiz, found on our aesthetically-pleasing site. Then, they proceed to our wellness pods that scan their aura, “take their biometric data” and spit out a totally unique pill created for their very specific needs.

We also created an online presence through our instagram account, that was not only meant to attract users, but to keep subscribed members engaged in our product.

Additionally, we walked a few Invention Lab users through this experience as well. They were, for the most part, fairly excited to engage with our fake company and found the experience pretty fun.

We would have liked to deploy our experience in more settings - some of the feedback we got during the showcase was that it would be interesting to see whether people would actually invest and buy the product.

In the future it would be interesting to make Nostrum a purchasable item. The pill would still be a placebo, but the buyer wouldn't be aware of that. We could then track how users respond and continue to purchase or not purchase this item.

Additionally, it would be a good test to see how people on campus would react to this supplemental pill experience. We could set up in a library or cafe and observe people's responses to Nostrum Pills.

VIDEO



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iktbGHMOw6Y>