

Intro

Hello there! My name is James T. Green, and I'm going to talk a little about what went into my design process for the Sprout Social Design Challenge, titled: Data Never Sleeps.

Research

[screenshots of Laura's work]

Laura Lozano - Senior Marketing Designer of Sprout

1. Went to the source, saw the work that she did
2. Get an idea of Sprout's aesthetic, voice, and site grid
3. Large images, enjoyed, provided motion, everything clean

[screenshots of Year in Search]

Year in Search, 2015 - Google

1. Single served site, much like this one
2. Broke down information cleanly
3. Scaled down for various sizes well
4. Playful, yet informative copy
5. Bold colors
6. Close to an "infographic" without being one directly

[screenshots of Nick's site]

Draft Design - Nick Disabato

1. Easy to read
2. Quick load times
3. Typography matching
4. Personality in the copy, can sense who is behind it

Design

Writing

Before I set a pixel in Photoshop, I started with free writing and free sketching, to get an idea of where my mind was flowing towards. Since I'm also a practicing artist, this is a technique that has carried over from the beginnings of many longer projects.

[screenshot of process sketch]

The page had a wide variety of things, from a rough timeline of how I wanted to complete the project, to wireframes based on what I was seeing currently on the Sprout Site, to random thoughts that popped in my head whenever I thought of the phrase "Data Never Sleeps".

After moving from the written page, I opened up Ever note and started writing the copy of the site, toying with header copy. I knew I needed something that was captivating enough to want to continue, but I didn't want it to be cliché.

[screenshot of header rewrites]

I started freewriting ideas that popped in my head, and whenever I came across a particularly strong sentence, I copied and pasted it and tightened up the writing until I was satisfied.

[screenshot of first slide copy]

The slide after the introduction would be the chance to show off my chops on writing copy, so I knew I had to spend the most time on this section. I love writing copy that has personality, so I began the freewriting process again, keeping the idea that I'm writing to convince someone that social media doesn't stop after 5pm.

I started thinking about the bad experiences I had with customer service representatives over the phone and channeled that frustration into this

mythical reader. My favorite line has to be the Steve Winwood references, because I happened to be listening to it at the time, and I mean, he would make for some great hold music.

Now that I had the bones of the site, as the web is always words first, I can start the process of whipping up some quick PSDs to get an idea of how the content would lie on the page, and give myself a reference point.

Mockup Design

[PSD screenshot]

I knew from the beginning that I wanted this site to have the heart and soul of Sprout, while injecting my own personality. The majority of Sprout's marketing sites are lead with a hero image and leading copy in the center, utilizing Proxima Nova as the typeface of choice. I mocked up those features with a stock video I found as a placeholder from Dissolve. I knew I wanted something that involved someone using a device in bed, but I didn't want a still image. I wanted a video that alluded to something being restless, or "never sleeping" as you will. I placed some of the winning copy underneath the hero as a starting point.

As the building blocks were continuing, I knew it was time to design in the browser.

Code

My rule here was: no frameworks. I opened up a blank HTML document and got started.

[slow scroll of the intro page]

I did some online research and came across some tutorials on how to build a full bleed, sticky header with a set max-width, then peeked into the Sprout marketing site to grab assets and styling for the "Free Trial" button. When I built the rest of the intro slide, I knew there was some piece missing. I had an illustration that I was working on for a side project called In Progress Works. I

decided to adapt it slightly and add 1s, 0s, and emoji smilies in a never-ending loop. It was a small piece that gave the page a little dynamism.

One morning, I woke up and immediately came up with how I was going to replace the placeholder video. I was going to shoot it myself! I asked my wife to pick up her phone in the darkness and scroll through whatever social media platform of her choice, only allowing her face to be illuminated. It's a simple iPhone video that really made the page come to life.

[slow scroll of the info page]

Since the information page was going to be just copy, the typography had to be easy to read and scale well. I kept Proxima's header as the title of the slide and Georgia for the body copy. For the important question that leads into why this infographic is made, "why do we stick to the call center mentality...", I made that into a pull quote, taken from the technique the site Medium uses to call out important information.

[slow scroll of facts]

To keep with the minimalist aesthetic of Sprout's site, I decided to use large block colors to elude to the social media's branding, without using the logo. The reason for this is adding the logo would be extra cruft since the site is already named. The audience for the site, those working in social media, know the names and colors like the back of their hand. Besides, there's even GIFs I created of myself interacting in a humorous way with each social media post.

I used one piece of jQuery on this site, and it was the functionality that causes the posts per minute number to count upwards upon reveal. While a static number can do the trick, I want to continue this idea of restless data that is always in motion, just like interactive GIFs. It's a small touch that gives the site a little depth and makes it more than a scrolling powerpoint presentation.

[closing slide]

The call to action had to be strong, but still match with the theme of “sleeping” that I created from the beginning. This copy was one of the first things I wrote on my page from the beginning process sketches.

“Now that you’re awake, let’s get started.”

The footer features links to my site and a link to this very video as the colophon / case study.

Debug

Debugging took about a day, with the hardest part figuring out the layout bugs of the site on mobile devices. This time was also spent optimizing the images and videos for load speeds, making sure the HTML and CSS validated, and got rid of some leftover code from the iteration process.

This Video

Now that we are getting very inside baseball, I’ll tell you a little bit about what went into this video.

In my art practice, I use video and podcasting as a medium, heavily, so I have a lot of chops in production in a pinch with quick output.

[video segments of Better Elevation and This Week in Blackness]

For this particular explainer, I was heavily inspired by the video podcasts of Better Elevation and This Week in Blackness, pairing images, video clips, and straight on narration. I believe this to be the most ideal method of storytelling. I used Final Cut Pro X for editing, Quicktime Video for the compiling of screencasts and my own built in webcam for the recording.

Close

Thanks for spending some time to learn a bit about how I built this site. I uploaded all of the working files I used to build this site, including documents

of research and the planning script for this very video, on my GitHub page at github.com/jamestgreen. If you have any additional questions, feel free to email me at [info at jamestgreen.com](mailto:info@jamestgreen.com).