Information **Architecture – Equipment Support**

INTRO

To make an application feel effortless to navigate, it has to have a strong skeleton or foundation. Information architecture is more than just the menu navigation at the top of a website – it’s the map of a product’s parts, and how those parts need to interact with each other. When designing a new feature for an existing product, I like to create a map of its pieces as one of my first steps.

PROJECT  
Through an online survey, we found that our client’s user base spent 75% of their time helping their customers troubleshoot cell phone problems over the phone. Without the ability to see the phone the customer was using, our call center agents were often unable to solve the customer’s problem. The solution was to help our users guide a customer into a Target store for in-person device troubleshooting, thereby reducing call volume and duration.

PROCESS  
Since this was going to be a new feature, with implementations across a couple of platforms, it was necessary to map out all the required information and parameters before beginning on the workflows. I created a site map of the existing products and workflow diagrams to ensure that our solution was going fit in with our users’ current processes and expectations.

When we met with our stakeholders to gather feedback on the workflows, they found it difficult to understand how all the pieces were going to function together. Using Axure, I quickly created a clickable prototype of the application for the client to see and interact with. The ability to go through the process themselves with the prototype made the interactions clearer not only to our stakeholder, but to the developers who used the prototype as a guide when building out the feature.

RESULTS

**We spent a total of four months from start to launch, building out the new functionality and working closely with our stakeholders, so that they could inform and train their employees. In the two months since we launched the new feature, Target support visits have maintained approximately at 90% success rate for solving the customer’s device problem.**

**Research Methods – UX Testing, Personas, Card Sorting, Interviews/Observations**

INTRO

User research is always the first thing I turn to before tackling any project. Understanding both the qualitative and quantitative data behind a project is the key to developing a successful design. Knowing which methods to employ is also half the battle.

UX TESTING  
Usability testing is a necessity for all stages of the development process. Preliminary testing of a current interface can help designers understand user pain points and areas of interest, whereas post-release testing monitors whether design implementations were successful. Paper prototyping is my favorite method for gathering iterative feedback during the design lifecycle and avoiding major pitfalls.

PERSONAS

Personas are a great tool for getting a team on the same page about who is using the products they are creating. My success with personas is not in the physical profile itself, but its adoption from all stakeholders involved and application by a company. I work closely with clients, product owners, developers, and most importantly, end users, to ensure that the personas produced are accurate and useful.  
  
CARD SORTING

The wrong label can make or break a design. Luckily, a quick card sort is one of the simplest ways to evaluate whether the terms used in a design are terms your users can understand. I use this research method often, either internally or with my end users, to test whether a grouping of information is logical beyond my own assumptions and biases.

SURVEY DESIGN

Surveys help establish both quantitative and qualitative data as a base line before beginning a project, or alternatively, assess whether a design implementation was successful. I find that the key to crafting a useful and accurate survey is to narrow the scope so that the questions are specific and focused on a portion of the product. This reduces the margin for error due to generalities or ambiguity in the survey responses.

INTERVIEWS/OBSERVATIONS

If the opportunity to have face-to-face time with an end user is available, it can be the most valuable time spent on a project. As a designer, the desire to empathize with my users can only go so far without observing their daily tasks or hearing stories of their struggles with a product. The art of asking questions is a skill I strive to perfect and often helps me answer the “why” when looking at quantitative data or metrics.

**Visual Designs – Customer Summary**

INTRO

Discussing UX designs with a development team is the best way to convey the mechanics of a design and thought process that went into it. But at the end of the day, the visual design artifacts I build must be strong enough to convey all the necessary information to developer and client alike.

**SKETCHES**

**I prefer pencil and paper, marker and whiteboard, or any other physical medium as my tool of choice when it comes to creating a proof of concept. Sketching out layouts or interactions is the quickest way to decide what’s going to make or break my designs. This method of drawing things out also facilitates collaboration between myself and other designers or developers, who can comment or contribute in a brainstorming session.**

**WIREFRAMES**

**Wireframing is thought of as a design staple, but I believe that depends on the project. Developers will eventually need high fidelity mock-ups, if the company is without a pattern library, and clients often have a hard time visualizing the application when there are only boxes and lines. Nevertheless, wireframes are invaluable tool for a designer to get a feel for proportions and interactions across pages. They provide the schema for all my designs.**

**PROTOTYPES**

**Interactive prototypes are crucial to understanding whether a design is usable and intuitive. The tools available today make it easy for me to create a simple clickable interface for usability testing or showcasing to client. Often, building out a page in HTML/CSS/JS is just as quick and can shorten development time if only minor tweaks are needed to the final design.**

**HIGH FIDELITY MOCK-UPS**

**My favorite thing about creating pixel perfect visual designs is seeing everything come together. It’s the opportunity to bring the application to life through color theory, typography, and layout principles. High fidelity mock-ups can play an important part in communicating a design to a client or developer, who may need that extra push to visualize the application.**

**Project Management – AltSource Website**

INTRO

Project management is a skill that all good designers should have. Since we often have our finger on the pulse of the product, it’s very natural to fall into a role of leadership and coordination. Organization is the key to a successful project and making sure that what you build is going to solve a problem.

PROJECT  
Our company’s website needed updating, both in content and the branding message we wanted to represent us as a company. After reading about the success of Google’s Design Sprints, the UX team decided that the website was the perfect opportunity for a five-day design overhaul.

PROCESS

I gathered the UX team to discuss the best way to implement the schedule, assign moderators for each day, and make sure that we were all on the same page about what deliverables we needed out of each session. After going through the five-day process with our leadership team and other stakeholders, we came up with a few ideas that we could test with an interactive prototype and a few target audience users.

What we gained from the design sprint was an understanding of what message we wanted to portray, how that message was received by our audience, what feature ideas (interactive timeline, job creator, employee photo slider) worked and which ones didn’t. Based on that outcome, I pulled the UX team together so that we could discuss our timeline for creating a final design and the subsequent development.   
  
RESULTS

**Since we could quickly vet key feature ideas in the five-day sprint, it streamlined our development time. Being able to give an accurate timeline and vetted design to our company’s CEO and COO helped us as a team gain support for the project. Our involvement with those stakeholders early in the process also gave them a sense of ownership in the final product, a website that carried their message across to all audiences.**

**Front-End Development – Pattern Library**

INTRO

Designers love to solve problems, developers love to solve puzzles. I happily enjoy doing both and believe that learning the skills of a front-end developer help me become a more useful designer. The process of translating designs into a functional application sometimes feels like a game of telephone, but knowing how to speak in developers’ language helps mitigate a lot of those risks.

PROJECT  
AltSource wanted to make it easier for its developers to build out custom applications, without the generic look and feel of Bootstrap. Alternatively, the UX team wanted to teach the developers more about why and when certain design patterns should be used in the future. I worked with one of our primary front-end developers and a graphic designer to come up with a set of patterns and components that we could build as an interactive pattern library.

PROCESS  
The graphic designer and myself set to work documenting all the design patterns we needed to encompass current and future functionality of our application. Once we had those guidelines in place, I worked with my tech lead and front-end developer to come up with a strategy for building out the new patterns without disrupting styles that were already in place.

We used Bootstrap as a framework, but customized it with our own CSS and Javascript so that it was unique to our client’s application. We wanted each part of the pattern library to be a working example of the components, something someone could click on and interact with, as well as a summary of its UX applications. Developers could easily copy and paste the code into their branches, which would help us maintain changes to the pattern library in the future through consistent class naming.

RESULTS

Our pattern library serves as a go-to for all developers in the company and facilitates discussion around why to use certain patterns over others. By creating a consistent naming scheme and class system, we can start to tackle refactoring old code so that updates in the future will be as simple as changing CSS for a pattern.