

Enhancing the user onboarding experience  
on vacation rental management system,  
Futurestay

## Role

As an UX Research Intern, worked cross-functionally to understand user perceptions while using Futurestay

## Team

I was the only UX Intern. **Worked in 3 teams**-Design, Marketing, Engineering

## Duration

Feb - April, 2019

## Skills and Tools

**Tools:** usertesting.com, Google Forms, optimal workshop, Figma, Miro, Hubspot, Intercom

**Skills:** Usability testing, Surveys, Design Thinking, Interviews, Heuristic Evaluation, User flows, Mobile App design, Affinity Maps, Personas, Card-sorting, Competitor Analysis

# Overview/Problem Statement

Futurestay is a SaaS platform which helps users book properties online and property managers manage their bookings.

In this project, as an UX Researcher, I was tasked at helping the **engineering and product team** in understanding the users' pain-points while using the software and also testing some of the software features.

# Process

During my internship, I conducted user-research using four different methods:

- Usability studies
- Card-sorting
- Surveys
- Interviews
- Mobile app design



# I. Usability testing : Process Test Plan

## Objectives

1. Obtain user feedback on the different functionalities present in the Futurestay's software.
2. Observe the users' pain points while using the software.
3. Come up with recommendations for the tech team to improve on the UI.

To further the process of unmoderated usability testing: tasks, pre-tasks/post-task questionnaires were uploaded on [usertesting.com](https://www.usertesting.com).

**Users: 5 (Property managers recruited by [usertesting.com](https://www.usertesting.com))**

**Time period: 2 weeks**



# I. Usability testing: Process

## Study implementation:

Tasks employed in the usability tests:

1. Add property information to Futurestay
2. Check your property information
3. Use the software to get the property live

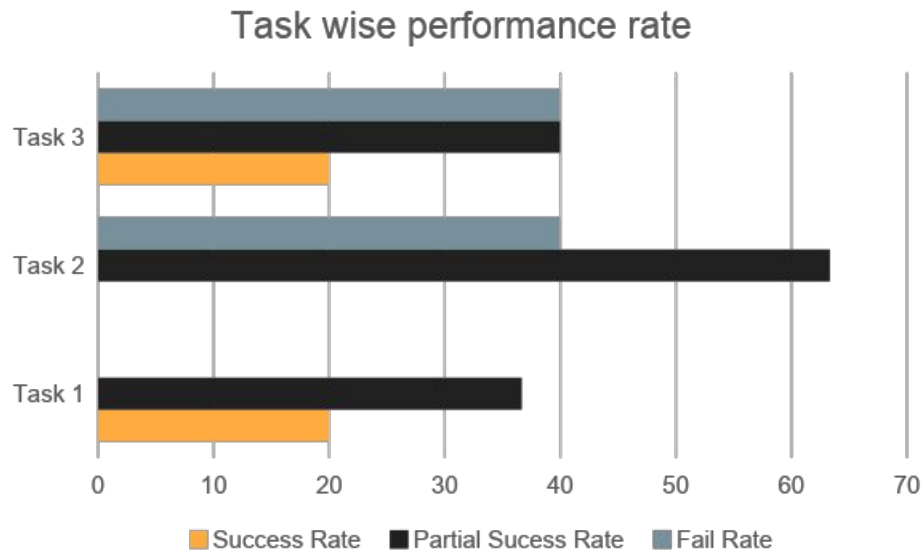
After users completed the unmoderated usability tests, we coded the usability tests followed by calculating metrics such as users task performance, task-wise performance rate and time spent by user per task.



# I. Usability testing: Analysis/Results

## Task performance rate

Users' pain points : Issues

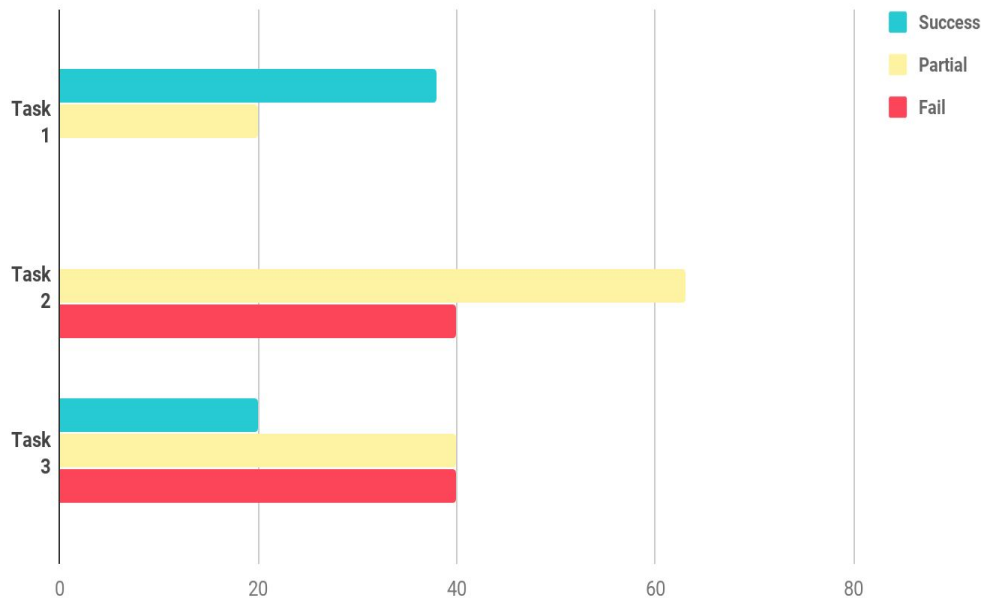


- No fail rate in Task 1-“Add property information to Futurestay.”
- High partial success rate for all the tasks -- adding property info, check property info, and setting property live.
- Same fail rate and partial success rate for Task 3 - “Do whatever to get the property live.”



# I. Usability testing: Analysis/Results

## Task Wise Performance Rate



### User pain points : Issues

- No fail rate in Task 1 - “Add property information to Futurestay.”
- High partial success rate for all the tasks
- Same fail rate and partial success rate for Task 3 - “Do whatever to get the property live”

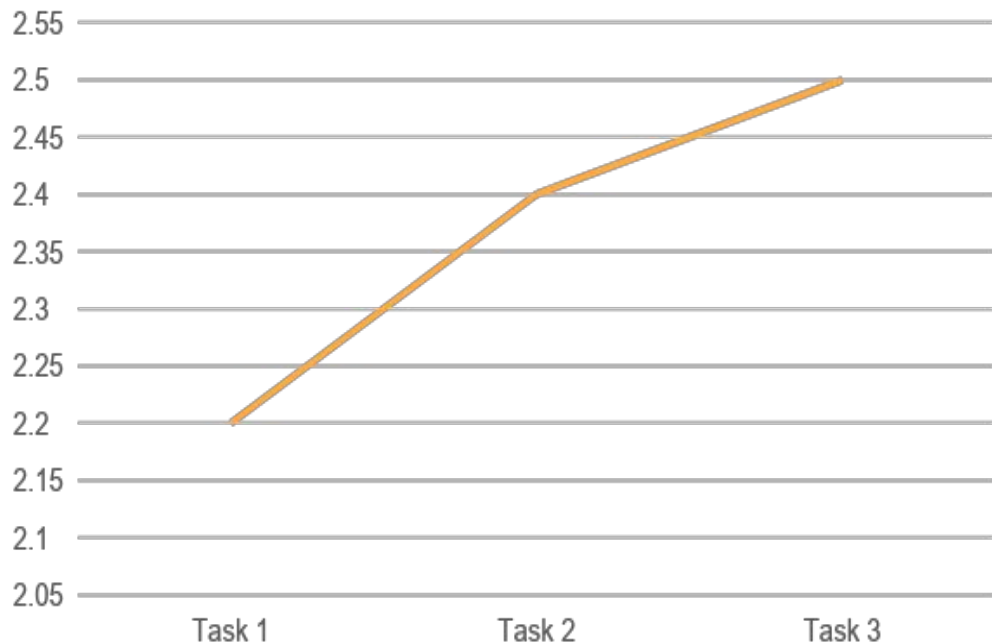




# I. Usability testing: Analysis/Results

## Time on Task

Avg time (min) vs Task



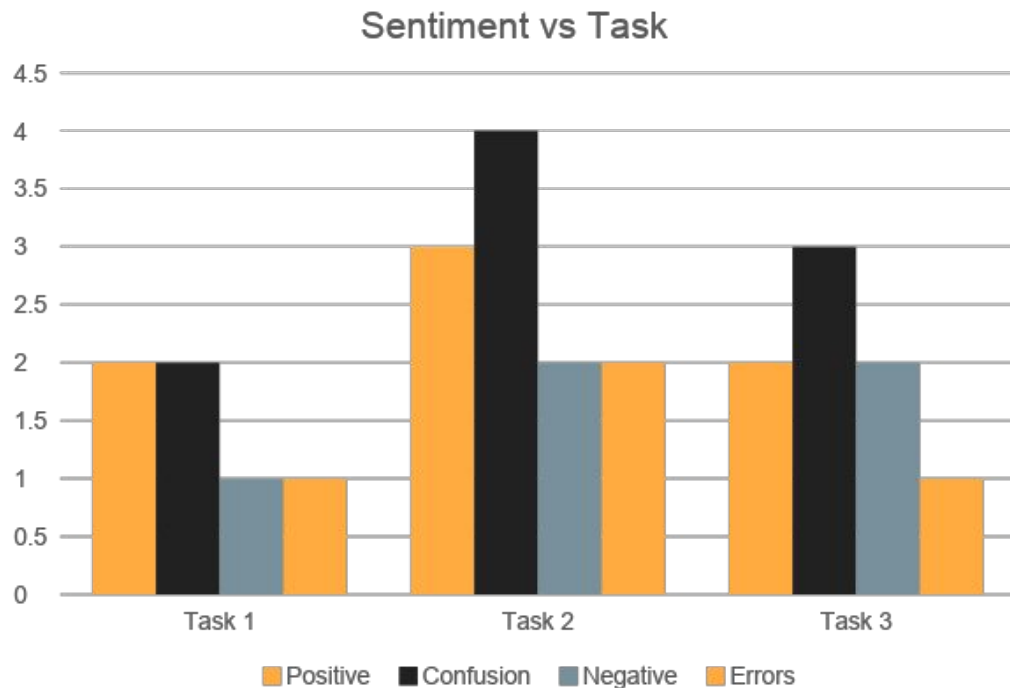
### Potential reasons:

- Too much time spent to understand the task description and updating property information page : Task 3 - "Do whatever to get the property live."
- Prototype was confusing to use -- different placement of different option in the business



# I. Usability testing: Analysis/Results

## Sentiments vs Task



### Highlights

- Displaying users' feedback per task
- Users' positive, negative, confused, feedback along with errors made by users



# I. Usability testing: Analysis/Results

## Interface recommendations

- Avoid using jargons such as channel/dashboard
- Instead of channel maybe use website

1 of 5

futurestay

Seamlessly connect your business to global travelers

What does a channel mean?

Sign Up

Add your property information to Futurestay

Don't forget to think out loud

Amy Pond

gmail.com

Do you have properties on any of these channels?

☒ B. Booking.com

☒ HomeAway

☒ Airbnb

☐ VRBO

☐ TripAdvisor

☐ Expedia

☒ Agree to our terms and conditions

Connect to my Free Dashboard

Handoff

What is a dashboard?





## Welcome to Futurestay!

It only takes a few minutes to set up your Dashboard. We will walk you through it.

Next

-Some PMs are not familiar (referred to them as Bird's nest/ paperclip) with the Airbnb and HomeAway logos  
-Can either be a label or a way you could the channel names come up while hovering on the mouse on the logos

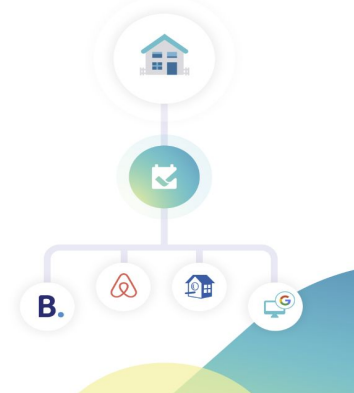
### 1 Import

Automatically import your property. Don't worry, nothing is Live until you approve it!

### 2 Connect

Review and approve your imported properties. Once imported you can also connect them to any listing site you want!

Start



-Maybe adding info such as “Set up your Dashboard in just 2 steps;” “few minutes” may be misleading



# User pain points





Futurestay's Onboarding zaraa03 36 – male – \$80,000 - \$99,999 – United States

1 of 5

Import Properties Finish later  
Your progress will be saved Import to Dashboard

Where are your properties listed?

Copy and paste one or more property URLs

Psst! Importing from our partners gives best results! B.    

- How does the property get imported?
- Can I add two or more URLs at a time?
- Confusing as the property already imported in the prototype



# User pain points

 **Import Properties**

**Finish later**

*Your progress will be saved*

**Import to Dashboard**

**Where are your properties listed?** 

*Copy and paste one or more property URLs*

**Psst!** Importing from our partners gives best results!

**B.**



- Apart from knowing where are their properties listed; we also want to ask them to add the property URL in simple text.
- What is the max limit of adding URLs, and would it show all the properties on the same page.
- So, “more” is how much much?



# User pain points



◀ 1 of 5 ▶

✦ Import Properties

Finish later  
Your progress will be saved

Import to Dashboard

Add your property information to Futurestay.  
⚠ Don't forget to think out loud

Copy and paste one or more property URLs

Psst! Importing from our partners gives best results! B.

Are these the properties you want to import?

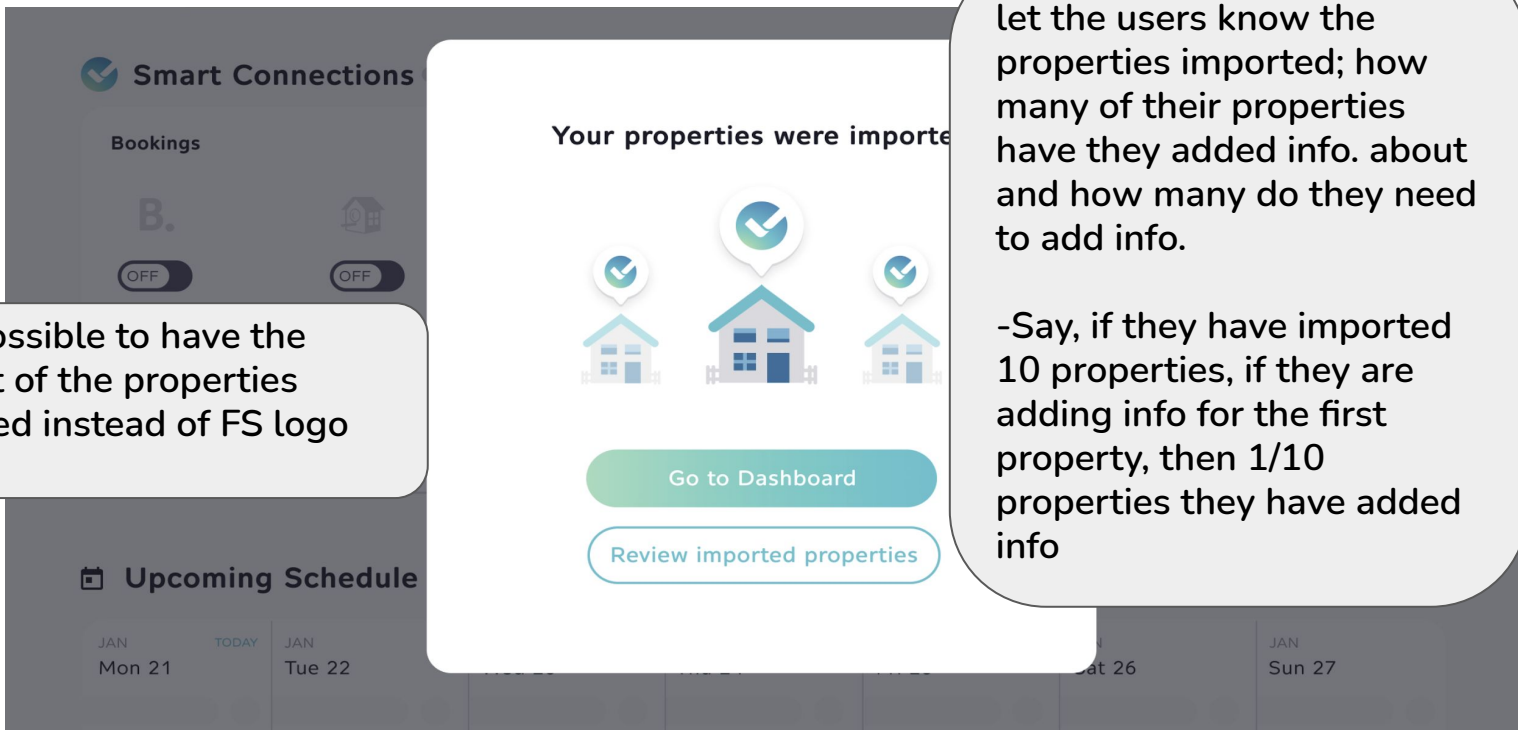
Cozy 2 Bedroom Apart...  
2 bedroom, 1 bathroom apt.  
[homeaway.com/listing/120495/cozy-2-bedroom-apartment](https://homeaway.com/listing/120495/cozy-2-bedroom-apartment)

Happy Home on the...  
2 bedroom, 1 bathroom apt.  
[airbnb.com/listing/120495/happy-home-on-the-beach](https://airbnb.com/listing/120495/happy-home-on-the-beach)

enu </> Handoff

-The word dashboard may be too loaded; we can only import one property at a time to the dashboard; but add several (more than one) properties on the "Import Properties" page.

## User pain points : Discoverability issues







# User pain points : Typography issues

**A panel headline missing?**

Properties Rates Connections Reservations Web Build Check your property information

**A1**  
Happy Home with Furniture

Preview

- ✓ Prices and Stay Rules
- ✓ Photo Gallery
- ✓ Amenities
- ✓ Details and Description
- ✓ Rooms Details
- ✓ Address and Map
- ✓ Lease and Agreements
- ✓ Reviews

Set Live

Manage Pricing & Stay Rules

Base Nightly Rate required

\*Enter Base Nightly Rate (your target gross earnings)

USD 80.00

Listing Rate Displayed to Travelers as:

**\$65.00** per night

Full Rate Breakdown:

- our service markup (included in listing rate)
- credit card processing fee
- your payment (after credit card fee)

Online Payment

Deposits or Full Payment:  
Choose between requiring a deposit or full payment. When a user pays a deposit, the remainder of their balance will be automatically charged to their credit card before their check-in date. They are required to select the date of the balance payment when booking.

Pay in Full - Full Balance Required to Book

Minimum/Maximum Stay Requirements ✓

Check in and Check out ✓

Save

🤔

-There should be a way to let the users know what is the panel.  
- Obviously the \$80 and \$65 prices are wrong.



# User pain points : Typography issues

**A1**  
**Happy Home with Furniture**

**Preview**

- ✓ Prices and Stay Rules
- ✓ Photo Gallery
- ✓ Amenities
- ✓ Details and Description
- ✓ Rooms Details
- ✓ Address and Map **Completed!**
- ✓ Lease and Agreements
- ✓ Reviews

**Set Live**

*Complete property information before setting it Live*

Your Property's Address, Display Settings & Privacy

Enter your property's full address: your address is not displayed to travelers until after a booking is completed, unless you choose to reveal it on map.

\*Country: U.S. \*Region: Florida Map & Streetview Display: Display Map and Street View on Property Page

\*Street Address: Apartment # (optional): Address Privacy: control how travelers see your property on map  
Display exact address

533 15th St  
Miami Beach, Florida  
View on Google Maps

Map Satellite

Save

**Annotations:**

- Unsure why the "Completed" option is placed in an odd manner
- Is there a reason why only "Address and Map" and "Prices and Stay Rules" option is available on the prototype



# User pain points: Information Architecture issues



A1  
Happy Home with Furniture

Preview

- ✓ Prices and Stay
- ✓ Photo Gallery
- ✓ Amenities
- ✓ Details and Desc
- ✓ Rooms Details
- ✓ Address and Map
- ✓ Lease and Agreements
- ✓ Reviews

Set Live

\$65.00 per night

Full Rate Breakdown

- our service markup (included in listing rate)
- credit card processing fee
- your payment (after credit card fee)

Online Payment

Deposits or Full Payment:

Choose between requiring a full payment or a deposit to book your property. When a user pays a deposit, the remainder of their balance will be automatically charged to their credit card before their check-in date. They are required to select the date of the balance payment when booking.

Pay in Full - Full Balance Required to Book

Minimum/Maximum Stay Requirements

Check in and Check out

Save

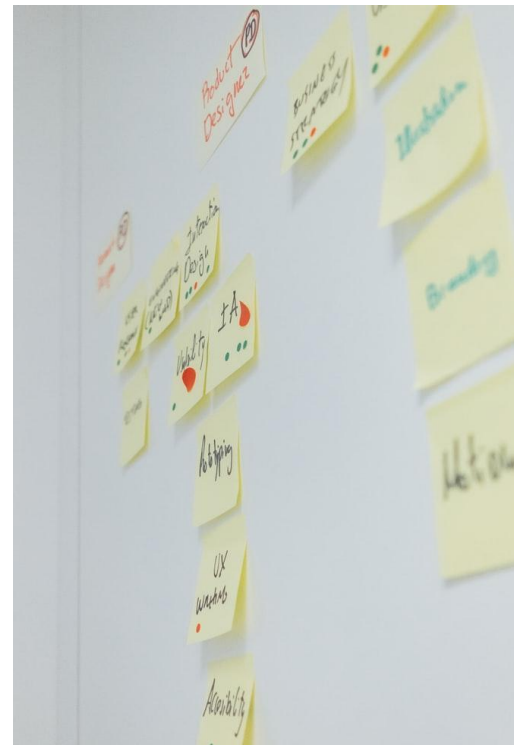
-Why is the Set Live Option unavailable but present on this page?  
-How is Save and Set Live different?

-Major issue, it was difficult for the users to figure out the difference between the two Save and Set Live



# Specific User Feedback with quotes

- Positives : “I loved the website” (Beagleton) – clean, clutter free, good use of white-space, less crowded
- Negatives: “How to sign up” (Beagleton) or “How to set the property live” (Beagleton) – Unsure what is a dashboard; Set Live option present but unavailable; unhappy with the prototype
- Errors: “The prototype was misleading” (zaraa03, Beagleton, Atrium) – Prototype did not have lot of functionalities; task description as unclear; a section for property information with a headline would be nice.





# Design Recommendations

- On the properties page, there needs to be a headline on the left-hand side such as the name of the property and then sub-categories should be present
- The icon “Set Live” should be present in a different color to distinguish it clearly compared to the other icons
- The content present under “Online Payments” should be abridged and can be expressed with minimum content
- On the import properties page, it wasn’t clear how many properties can be uploaded on the input box.
- The participants from the usability study weren’t sure how did the properties in the prototype. So, its important to let the users know how to get the link for their property.



## II. Card sorting

- Context: From the usability studies results, it was found the settings page also required structuring keeping in mind the information architecture of the page





## II. Card sorting

- Process:
  - We firstly created the cards, which were essentially the categories present on the property(s) page using the software named OptimalSort (<https://www.optimalworkshop.com/optimalsort>)
  - Firstly, researcher along with the mentors created 27 cards based on the different categories present on the properties page
  - After the cards were created on the software, a study link was generated. Here is the link <https://512q2c8c.optimalworkshop.com/optimalsort/7ixsi21g-0>
  - Before, sending the link to the users, a **pilot study** was designed and minor modifications were made based on revisions
  - The link was sent to **users who have either used a vacation rental softwares** such as Futurestay, Airbnb, Homeaway, or Booking.com.



# Results from Card sorting Exercises

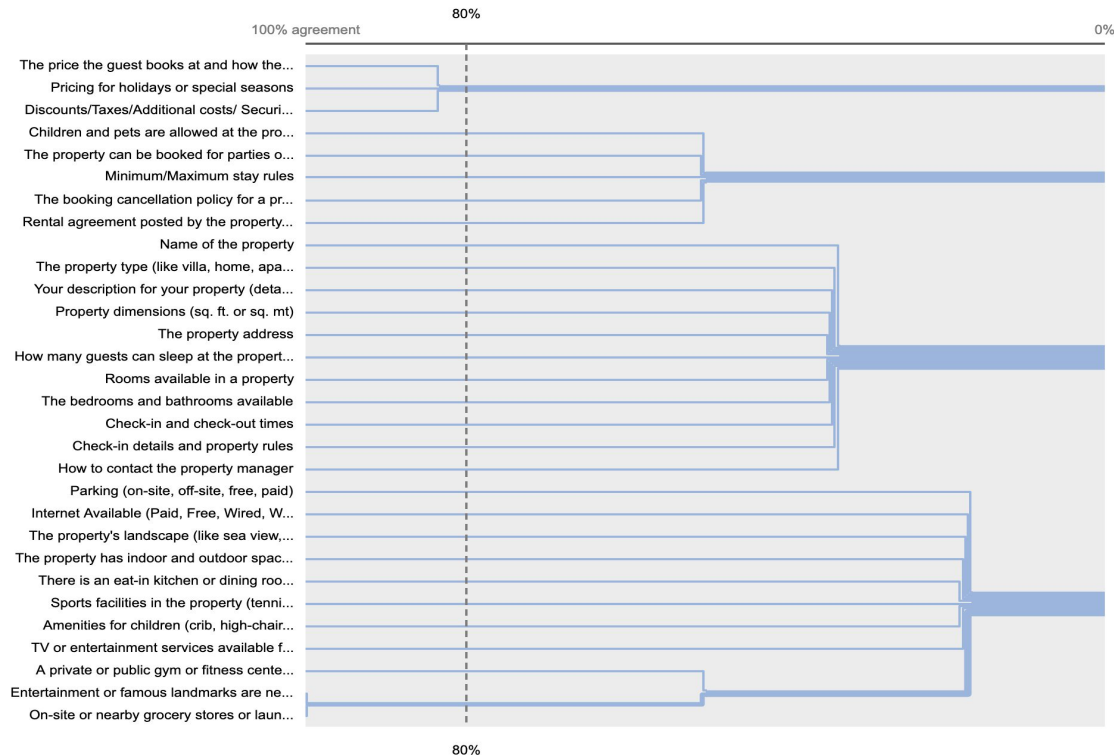
- The study link was sent to customers to sort the cards under different categories/groups.
- The study was completed by six users within 6 min and 52 seconds
- Users were tasked to classify cards into: **property details, amenities, check-in/check out, pricing**
- While analyzing the results for this card sorting exercises, we made of agreement scores as the measure of analysis





# Analysis: Min/Max agreement

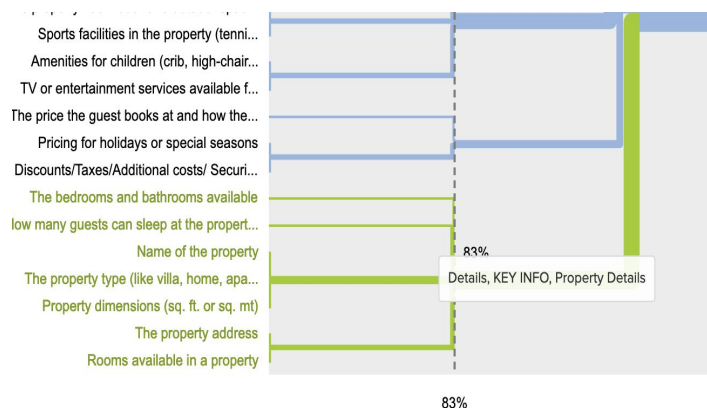
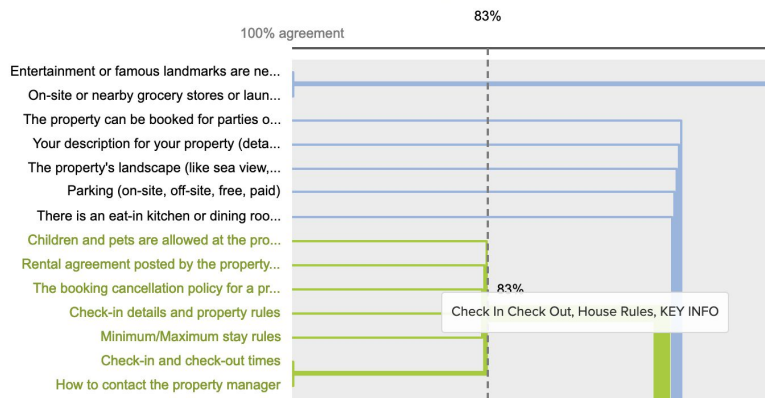
The actual agreement method works best with 30 or more participants and will depict only absolutely factual relationships. We call this the skeptical dendrogram.





# Agreement scores: Check-in/out, house rules, and key info, property details

The best merge method often performs better than the actual agreement method when your study has fewer participants



Agreement scores provides the agreement level between the cards placed in each category. Higher agreement score shows more participants agreed with the provided cards in a category.



# Results

- After finishing the card-sorting experiments, although the agreement scores showed dispersed agreement scores.
- Here are the original cards along with the cards condensed based on the card-sorting results

<https://github.com/manasarath/manasarath.github.io/blob/master/Properties%20Page%20Card%20Sorting.xlsx>

- This issue could be resolved by recruiting more users in future studies



## III. Surveys

- To further understand users' perceptions regarding the vacation rental management system and ways to resolve the product issues in Futurestay.
- The objective for conducting surveys include identifying Futurestay's (FS) users, their perceptions about FS, specific features of FS which the users made use of and further improvements that can be made in Futurestay.





## III. Surveys

### Process

- Two surveys were designed to obtain user perceptions on vacation-rental management systems.
- Surveys were designed on Google forms and the survey link was sent out to users over an email
  - Survey 1 was sent out to Futurestay users
  - Survey 2 was sent out to non-Futurestay users



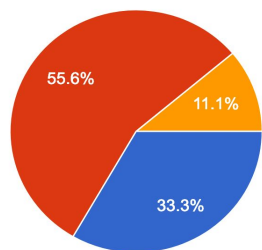
## III. Surveys

- Here is the list of survey questions:

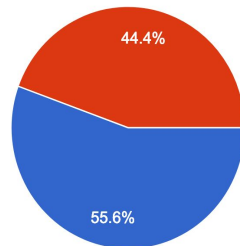
[https://github.com/manasarath/manasarath.github.io/blob/master/SurveyQuestions\\_FS.docx.pdf](https://github.com/manasarath/manasarath.github.io/blob/master/SurveyQuestions_FS.docx.pdf)



# III. Prime Surveys Results

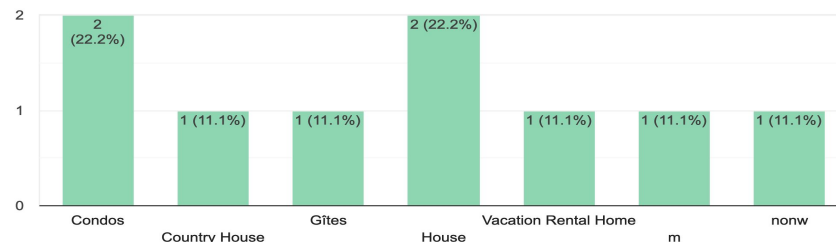
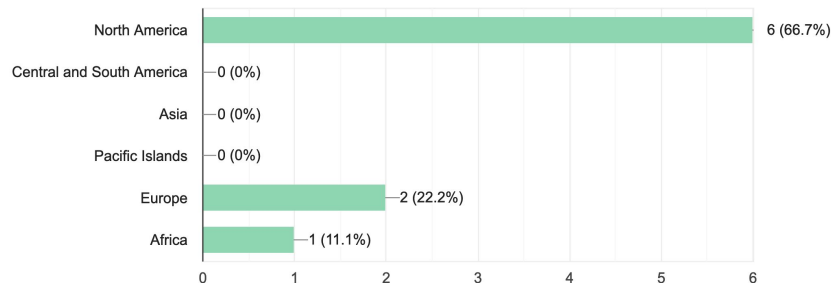


- 20-30 years old
- 31-45 years old
- 46-55 years old
- 56-65 years old
- 65+ years old



- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to say

## Demographic features of the survey participants

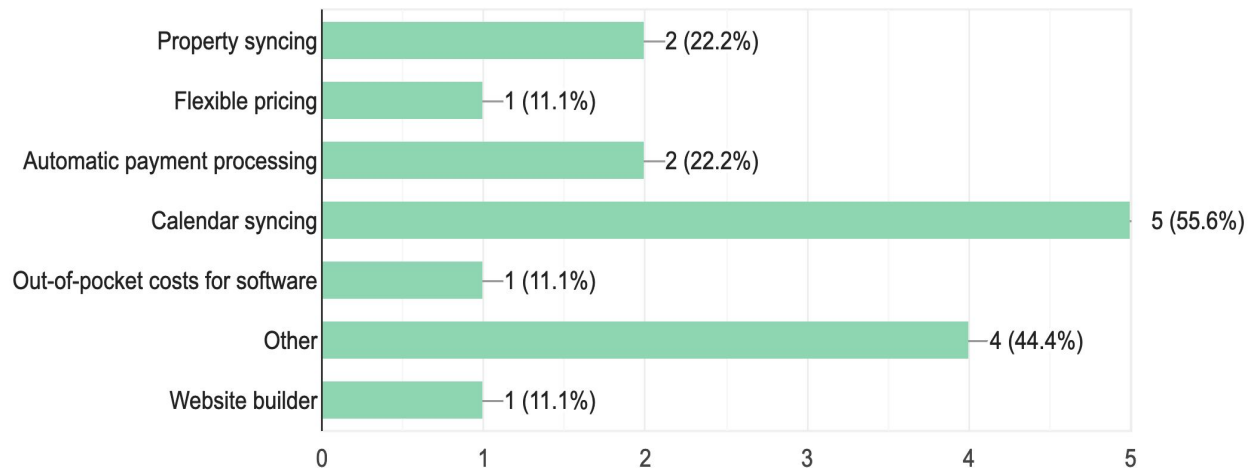


Geographical location of the users who took the survey

Type of property owned by the users who took the survey



## III. Main Survey results



Specific functionalities in FS that the users find valuable





## III. Surveys

- On the basis of survey results, following findings were reported:
  - Resolve the technological issues soon
  - Promote the Futurestay website
  - Allow users to remove functionalities such as Hidden Listings and update New Listings
  - Provide better customer support
  - Having clear onboarding instructions for the users



**After understanding users' painpoints, it is important to come up with user personas which would reflect on a products' different user types, user characteristics, needs and goals to gain valuable insights into user journeys, and then prototype them in future.**



## IV. Persona Development

- To build personas a set of open and close ended interview questions to understand how might users use a particular product or service.
- To delve deeper in constructing users' personas : personal background, industry/business, role, goals, and challenges while achieving the goals as a property manager, processes that go into decision-making, objections about FS softwares/services, along with information sources used by the users.



## IV. Persona Development

- List of questions included in the interview were based on the following categories:
  - Personal Background
  - Industry and Business
  - Role
  - Goals
  - Challenges
  - Decision Making
  - Objections
  - Information Sources

Here is the complete list of questions under each of the categories

[https://github.com/manasarath/manasarath.github.io/blob/master/Persona\\_Questions.docx](https://github.com/manasarath/manasarath.github.io/blob/master/Persona_Questions.docx)



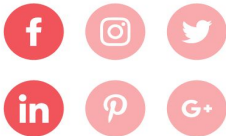
# IV. Persona Development



**Age**  
45 to 54 years

**Highest Level of Education**  
Master's degree

**Social Networks**



**Industry**  
Real Estate

**Organization Size**  
11-50 employees

## Preferred Method of Communication

- Phone
- Email
- Social Media
- Face-To-face

## Tools They Need to Do Their Job

- Employee Scheduling Software
- Reporting Software
- Business Intelligence Dashboards
- Word Processing Programs

## Job Responsibilities

Taking care of guest payments, tax end/ accounting, managing calendars, using website builders

## Their Job Is Measured By

Customer success, hosting a guest a great experience

## Reports to

None/Self employed

## Goals or Objectives

Revenue generation, increase occupancy rate of his properties

## They Gain Information By

Customer feedback

## Biggest Challenges

- Navigating Client Relationships & Communications
- Communication
- Collaboration & Creativity
- Resources

## Tools/Skills

Managing website-builder, building spreadsheets  
Google sheets/docs, calendar



# Social media/Customer-platform research

- As a User Researcher, it's important to triangulate research findings to multiple resources to understand users' issues
- To further understand users' pain-points, we dig deeper into users' problems that they have pointed out on forums such as Intercom and Hubspot along with prominent social media platforms



# Secondary Research

- To further understand users' pain-points, we dig deeper into users' problems that they have pointed out on forums such as Intercom and Hubspot



To categorize users' questions and feedback on the platforms, Affinity Maps were created to categorize user issues; this process was iterated multiple times



# Competitor Analysis

- As a part of my competitor analysis study, it involved looking into major Futurestay competitors and look into their product features
- Apart from looking into the features, their social media reviews were also analyzed by me with the team





## IV. Mobile development

- To build personas a set of open and close ended interview questions to understand how might users a particular product or service.
- To delve deeper in constructing users' personas : personal background, industry/business, role, goals, and challenges while achieving the goals as a property manager, processes that go into decision-making, objections about FS softwares/services, along with information sources used by the users.



## IV. Mobile development

- To build personas a set of open and close ended interview questions to understand how might users a particular product or service.
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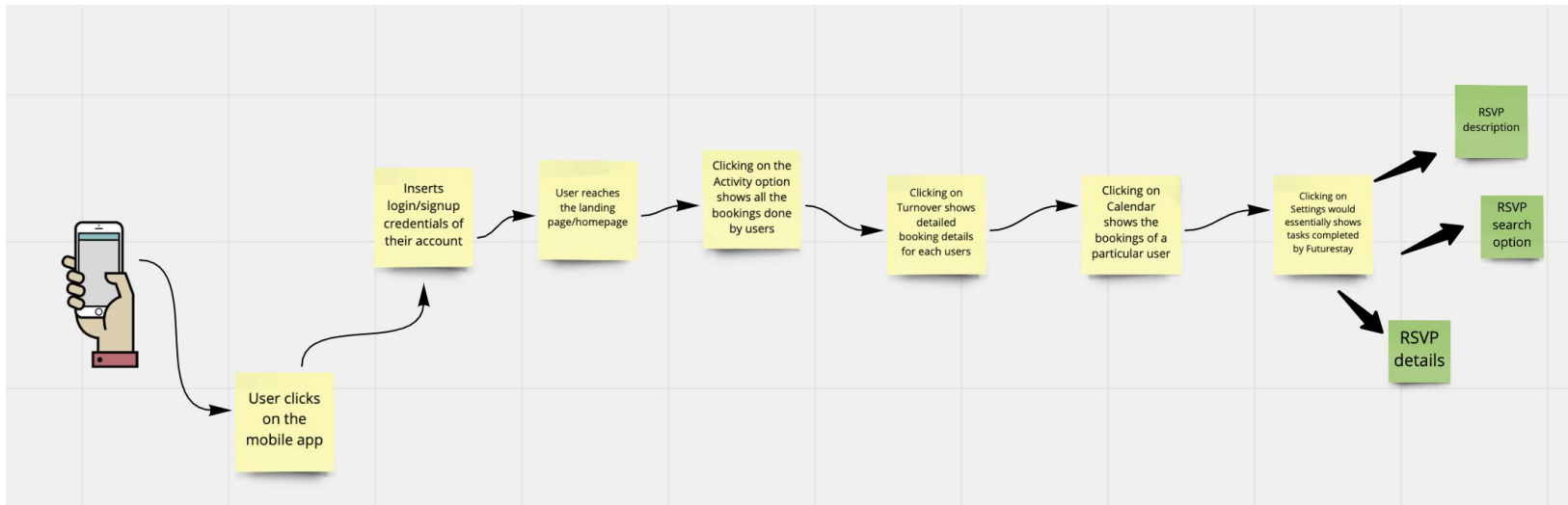


## IV. Mobile development

- To help the startup in their initial phase of mobile app development, I created the usability test plan to conduct usability studies.
- Mockup:

[https://www.figma.com/file/5ULiljVo6MzoSjpFpfcKMw/FS\\_app\\_concept\\_1.1?node-id=0%3A1](https://www.figma.com/file/5ULiljVo6MzoSjpFpfcKMw/FS_app_concept_1.1?node-id=0%3A1)

- The user flow while using the mobile app can be explained as follows:





## IV. Mobile interface design: Test plan

- Pre-task

- Have you ever used a VR system?

- Task scenarios:

***Imagine yourself as a property manager, your guest is planning a vacation to NYC from March 10-19. They have booked a property using Airbnb. You need make sure FS is able to reflect their bookings for the specific dates, payment details, etc. on its mobile app***

- Task : Check if the property chosen by your guest shows up on their interface

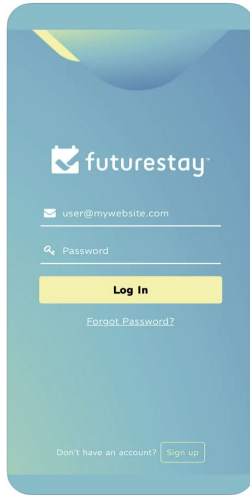
- Follow-up

- Rate you experience in FS mobile app
      - Were you disappointed with any feature?

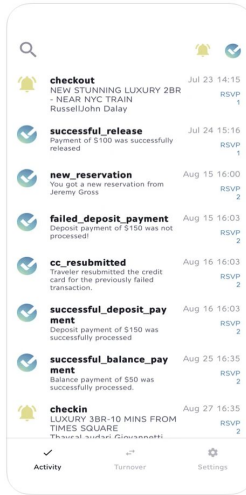


# IV. Mobile interface design

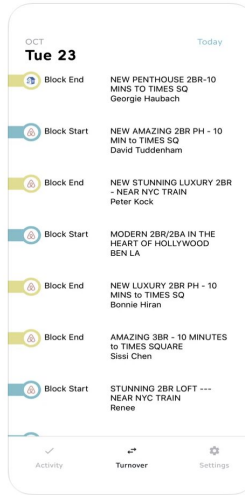
Mobile Application can be accessed at <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/futurestay/id1439964341>



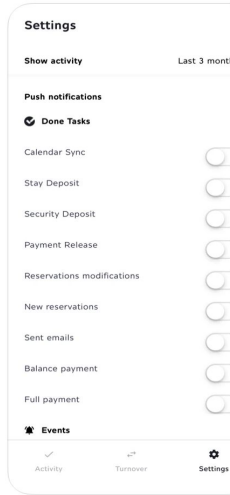
Landing



Home  
page/Activity



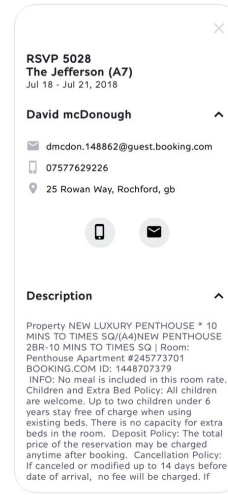
Turnover



Settings



RSVP for a user





# Challenges faced during internship:

- Recruiting users of the software was difficult, therefore sometimes inferring results of a study was a bit cumbersome
- Carrying out varied research studies was challenging along with administering and writing up the results
- Working for a growing startup could be highly fulfilling, however there was a budget constraint on recruiting more participants



# Outcome of my work post internship:

- The amount of time spent in listing the property on the site has reduced by several minutes [Redesigning the settings page]
- User pain-points used to further reiterate and the designs leading to increasing the client base
- Application features were well-received by the customers and was planned to scale the app for a mass market version



## Learnings:

- Identified users' pain-points using varied user-study methods
- To work in a fast-paced environment using multiple data sources
- Working closely with designers to work on design decisions impacting several property managers and users of the rental management software