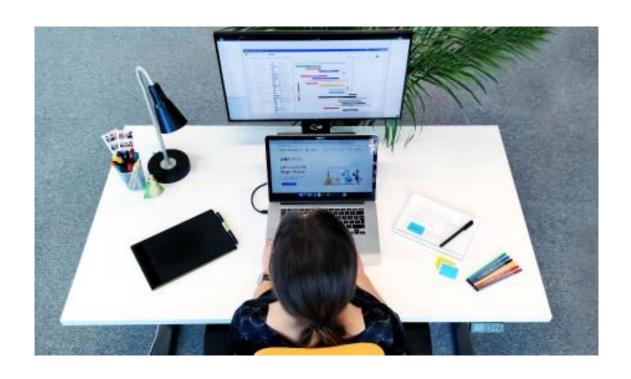# BigPicture LAB

How we created our own research panel

What is BigPicture LAB?

Simply put, BigPicture LAB is a group of BigPicture users, enthusiasts who want to improve the product with their feedback. Joining the lab is voluntary, and it is free of charge. We divided our LABers into segments based on their company role, management method, and parts of the app (modules) they use. Depending on the project, we ask the distinct groups to participate in the study. It all started in 2018 when I joined the company as a UX Designer. One of my first questions was: "How do you conduct research?". The only answer was an exceptionally long silence. Then, my team leader sighed quietly and explained that he was the only designer until I came, and he did not manage to incorporate research into the design cycle. Quite shocking but understandable. It is impossible to do everything. Our company develops BigPicture. It is a software application, served as a plugin to Jira to help Project and Project Portfolio Managers at their work. I offered my leader that I could incorporate research into the process of designing BigPicture.

Why did we create it?

As you can imagine, it is hard to do guerilla testing of Jira's plugin for Project Portfolio Managers on the street. Not everyone is proficient with JQL, task progress tracking, or risk and resources management. Also, not everyone knows the difference between waterfall and Agile methods, not saying about the SAFe framework. We struggled at the beginning. And the only reasonable solution was to evaluate the product with our users. But how to ask them if they do not log in to our app? And we do not have their emails? At that time, we did not use pushes in the app. We started with hotjar's survey, and the very first tests were done! One day, my team leader came back from the conference and shouted: "Marta, I have an idea for us!". He told me about Atlas Lab, which then changed into Atlassian Research Group. That was our inspiration for branding our group of testers.
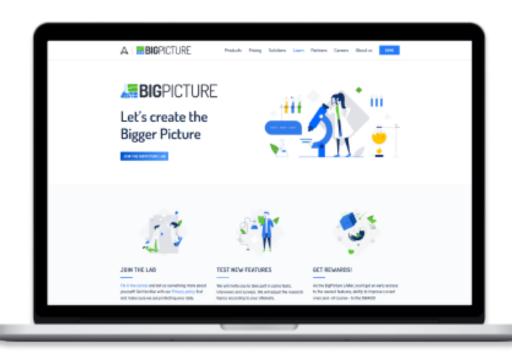
How did we create it?

We started with baby steps. I created an online form for our users to sign up. They had to answer a few basic questions, which helped us later with creating user segments. Our goal was to see if anyone would be eager to cooperate. To our surprise, we gathered more than one hundred people in less than a week! Then we started thinking about our brand, so users could recognize us, fill the part of something bigger. And again, our designer started small, with a logo…

One of the first BigPicture LAB's logo

In the next step, I created the website using WordPress. It made it easier access for our users to sign up to the LAB. Due to GDPR restrictions, I also attached our Privacy Policy there.

BigPicture LAB's landing page

How does it function?

Depending on the topic to explore or project to evaluate, we reach out to a particular group of users. We can easily filter them using a spreadsheet. Then, we send them an email with an invitation to take part in our research. Sometimes it is a simple survey, sometimes interviews, and the other day moderated or unmoderated test. Usually, we use Calendly to schedule the sessions, Google Meet or Zoom for a session, and Maze for an unmoderated test. From time to time, we experiment with different tools and methods. Using the same spreadsheet, we track the users' engagement. In this way, we know how often they participate in our actions. We do not want to bother them too often. Currently, we have around one thousand users in BigPicture LAB. We also started using our brand during industry conferences.

BigPicture LAB's stickers on the SAFe conference in Hague, 2019

Lessons learnt

This story seems to be very pleasant and smooth with happy conclusions only. Nothing could be further from the truth! First, I needed to be patient when discussing the BigPicture LAB project with my managers. I had to gain their trust and present them data so they can let me launch the project. It took us a while to be honest. Secondly, research is fun, and I love to meet with our users. But I had to learn how to deal with our users sometimes. They are managers, who prefer to take matters into their own hands and take over the interview when they need a troubleshooting session. It struck me at the beginning, and I had to learn how to be more assertive. We also had to create the UX research understanding among our users from the very beginning. Finally, we learned that if we believe in our initiative, we have enough power to make it real. We needed to talk with different stakeholders, learn modern technology and tools. However, in the end, we created the BigPicture LAB. And we can support our design cycle with corresponding research. Having our own panel is very convenient!