TrustedFor : Iterative Design & User Testing

Background

TrustedFor is a startup from YCombinator's Spring 2019 cohort that is making "Linkedin 2.0": an invite-only platform for professional profiles that is centered around recommendations from people that the users have worked alongside. As active Linkedin users, we have often felt annoyed by getting spam requests from random profiles and believe that TrustedFor has the potential to make online professional networking feel more trustworthy and personal.

We imagined what the platform might look like on a mobile device, and used iterative design and user testing to come up with sketches and a working prototype.

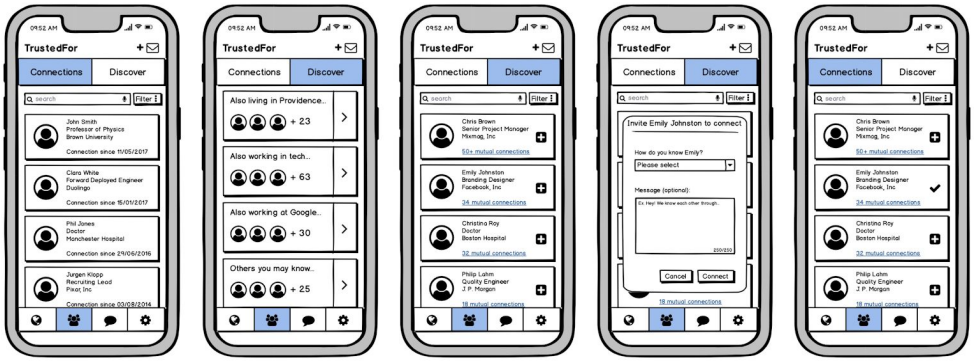
Sketches

We created four different sets of sketches using Balsamiq to show the user flow of the main function of our app: discovering and sending a connection to another user.

Pre-design considerations:

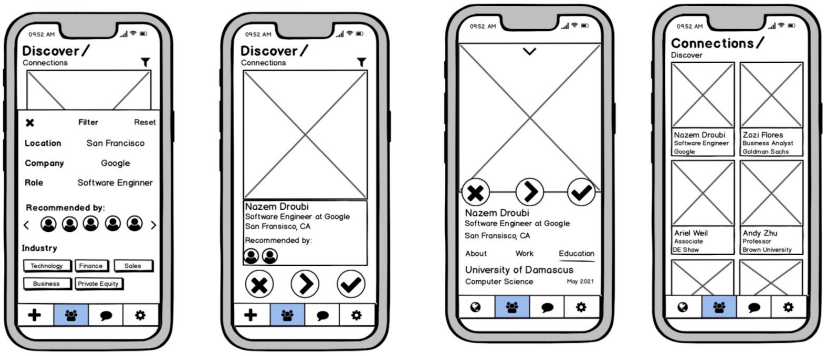
1. Our main target group is professionals that are looking to connect with other professionals who are highly vetted by people they have worked with. These people could be job seekers, recruiters, or just people looking to catch up and meet with old colleagues.
2. Job-seekers that are not on TrustedFor may have less success when applying for some jobs, since the job-poster may prefer candidates on TrustedFor that are recommended by people in their circles. Also, new graduates who have just entered the workforce cannot join TrustedFor due to limited connections, so will have no way to connect with people that are solely on TrustedFor.
3. Professionals on the platform will use the interface to find and connect with relevant people based on criteria such as industry, company or mutual recommendations. Our interface would be responsible for governing the way users are able to send and receive connection requests, as well as verifying that users are reliably endorsed by people they have worked with before. We would want to make sure users are diverse and represent a variety of different industries, to prevent one industry that is dominated by a specific demographic (i.e. banking) from creating cliques from excluding others onto the platform.

#1: Horizontal Cells based network interface with Tab Bar based navigation

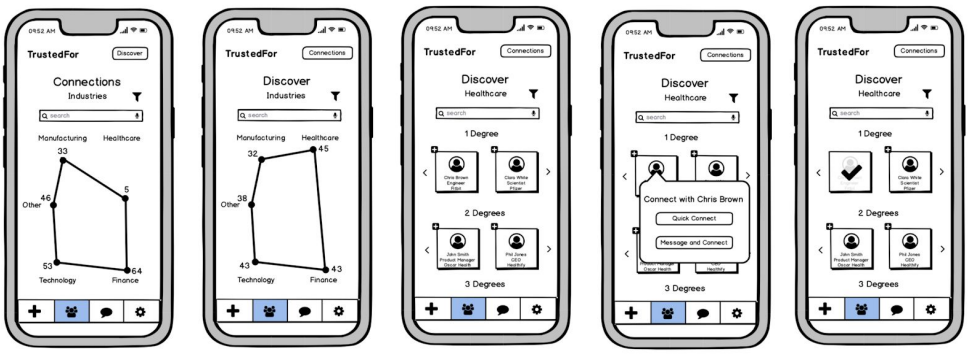


#2: Grid base network interface with Hamburger Menu based navigation

#3: Tinder-esque/Swipe based network interface with Tab Bar based navigation

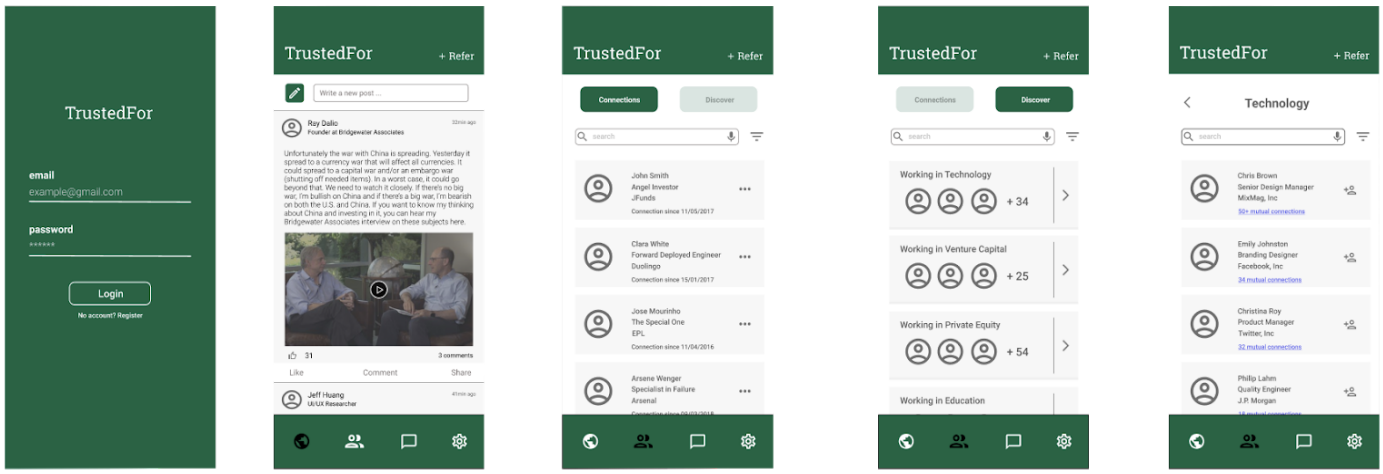


#4: Graph based network interface with Tab Bar based navigation



High-Fidelity Prototype

Using our sketches, we created a high-fidelity mockup of the mobile app using Figma (view it here).



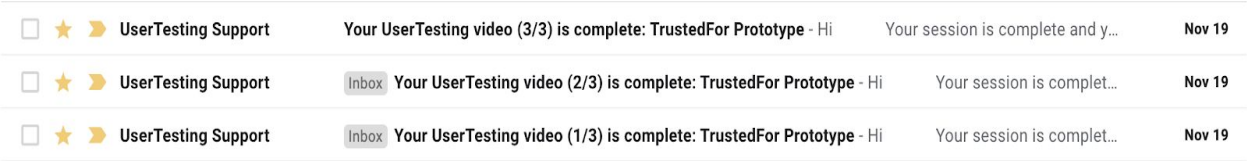
As you can see, we adapted most of the basic layout from our first two sketches. We ruled out the Tinder-like layout (#3) because we believed that the connection interface is very casual and should include more than just swiping and have a message option. We also decided against sketch #4 because we believed that users would be more comfortable with an interface that resembles existing social media apps (like sketches #1 and #2). Finally, we went with the bottom tab-navigation bar from sketch #1 instead of the hamburger menu from sketch #2 because it is easier to navigate between functions.

As a whole, our app is pretty closely modeled to Linkedin's; we believe that the main tab bar layout of the app is not only very learnable and memorable (since the icons/buttons are clear and informative), but also efficient as the navigation flows for completing central tasks like discovering profiles, referring colleagues, and messaging are all very straightforward and require minimal screen transitions.

After conducting a live critique session, we learned that people generally appreciated our overall layout and visual design choices, especially our dark green color theme and use of icons. One thing that we changed was the refer colleague ("+ Refer") button in the top right corner; we initially used a  icon there which confused people, as they either were not sure of its purpose or thought it was another Messages icon.

UserTesting

We were able to gather data on our prototype from three mobile device users from UserTesting.com.



Short qualitative hypothesis

This interface is similar to social media apps which require connecting with people. We, therefore, hypothesize that users should be able to perform the task without facing many problems as they would have been exposed previously to the navigation flow we use in our app.

User Testing Experiment

Task	
Imagine you're a user on TrustedFor looking to connect with people in technology. Send a connection request to a Designer (Emily Johnston).	
Prompts	**Questions**
a. Login to TrustedFor b. Go to Connections from the NewsFeed page c. Discover people to connect with in Technology d. Successfully connect with a Designer (Emily)	a. On a scale from 1-10, how hard would you rate performing this task? (1: easiest, 10: hardest) b. Was it intuitive or did you have to pause and understand where to go for the next step c. Did you like the way you discover people on the app? d. Is there anything that could be improved?

Feedback

Our hypothesis was mostly correct since all 3 users were able to perform their main task, with all of them completing the 4 sub-tasks correctly and within a reasonable time. However, 2 of the 3 users had errors with 1 subtask and 1 user had errors with 2 subtasks -- see the table below:

Subtask Metrics	**Completion rate**	**Total Error count**	**Average time on Task**
1. Login to TrustedFor	100%	0	13.7s ((10+12+19)/3)
2. Go to Connections from the NewsFeed page	100%	2 (0+2+ 0)	32.7s ((21+56+21)/3)
3. Discover people to connect with in Technology	100%	3 (1+0+2)	22s ((29+19+18)/3)
4. Successfully connect with a Designer (Emily)	100%	1 (0+1+0)	26.3s ((16+ 38+25)/3)

Analysis

We received a perfect completion rate for all users. Subtasks 2 and 3 had relatively higher error counts which indicated that most problems came from navigating through the Connections and Discover pages. A shorter average time spent did not necessarily mean that users were more effective in completing a task. For example, users spent more time on "Connecting with a Designer" than "Discovering people in Technology" because they were examining the "invite to connect" pop-up closely, not because they had trouble with the interface. Most of the errors were classified as mistakes. One user did not realise they were already on the Connections/Discover page and navigated away to find it, while another thought that "Design" was a separate industry outside of "Technology" and went back to the main Discover page. One user who was supposed to go to Discover from Connections had a lapse and tapped to view profiles instead, then realised that was not the objective. On the whole, users were quite satisfied with how intuitive the interface was in helping them efficiently completing the task.

Potential Interface Changes

1. One user was confused between the Newsfeed screen and the Connections screen since the icons were ambiguous. A potential solution is adding text labels below the main bar icons to improve learnability.
2. Users also had trouble navigating between Connections and Discover tabs, so we could consider changing the Discover page layout to a 2 column grid with profiles and include icons to represent each industry. We could also explore separating the "Discover" and "Connection" tabs into two separate items on the bottom menu. This would prioritize differentiability over convenience, which was a greater demonstrated need for users.

Our testing experience was positive in yielding constructive feedback, although one user from our initial 3 tests skipped half the subtasks, so we had to submit another test request. Also, many users had phones smaller than the iPhone X, which our prototype was designed for, so they needed to scroll down to find the bottom menu. In the future, we could have designed for a wide set of devices to accommodate a larger number of users when testing. All in all, our subtasks were clear enough for users to understand.