Light At The End Of Your Dry SaaS Pipeline:

How To Convert More With Website User Journey

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Summary

WEB DESIGN HAS BEEN AN INWARD-LOOKING INDUSTRY FOR FAR TOO LONG.

The traditional approaches have one thing in common - an inward focus on "what's wrong with my website?" Framing the challenges people face on your website this way chips away at the user experience. The "what" and "how to fix it" take priority over "why".

And it gets worse once we consider the democratisation of the Internet. Affordable page builders, AI, and low entry level for freelancers affect the quality of websites. Typical fixes to the business performance of websites are increasingly based on "best practices" and "proven experiments".

Our white paper introduces a process to replace traditional web design. **We explore how the Website User Journey process shifts the perspective to an outward-looking one.** The emphasis will be on levelling up the focus. Instead of looking at the on-page conversion rate, we propose considering a great user experience across the board first.

The white paper compares this fresh approach to the traditional web design. We hope that by sharing our experience and expertise, we'll bring attention to the flaws of the traditional web design mindset and **increase the awareness of an alternative, user-centric approach.**

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What's wrong with web design for SMEs?

It's impossible to find a reliable, let alone impartial source of data for the cost of web design. But one thing is for sure - **it's a significant investment for many SMEs.** Between research, copywriting, web design & development, communication, and other related tasks, it takes hundreds, or even more than a thousand man hours.

Web design is a fragmented industry. This is another headache for decision makers. Should you use a page builder, a freelancer, a specialist agency or a full-service agency? Do you work with a local team or an overseas company? This level of choice is a trap.

A big part of the burden to research the solution falls on you, the buyer. The abundance of choice prolongs the purchase process and often results in "no decision". **It's estimated that this happens 40-60% of the time, with the easily available research citing the number as 38% [1].** Considering how much of your time it takes, having a 38% chance to not find a contractor is a massive risk.

And conversion rate optimisation isn't without its risks either. Experimentation takes many shapes, but the most appealing ones have a high barrier of entry. A/B testing is a good example.

It's so easy to buy into the concept, but A/B tests can be flat out impossible because of the maths around minimum traffic and conversion.

Google, Bing, and Microsoft report a 10-33% rate of success in their web experiments [2]. Globally, the figures are closer to 10% [3]. For every statistically significant, positive result, over nine end up making no difference or even hurting your bottom line.

> **For every online experiment that succeeds, nearly 10 don't – and in the eyes of many organizations that emphasize efficiency, predictability and 'winning', those failures are wasteful.**
>
> Stefan Thomke, Harvard Business School

Considering the low success rate of website experiments - one in three for the elite companies, and just one in ten on average - the perceived value of website changes is extremely low. **The implied risk is far too great.** Add to it the challenge of following privacy laws and the costs skyrocket.

[1] A Decade of Research Into How B2B Buyers Make Purchase Decisions (Challenger Inc)

[2] Building A Culture of Experimentation by Stefan Thomke Harvard Business Review

[3] The Surprising Power of Online Experiments: Getting the most out of A/B and other controlled tests by Ron Kohavi and Stefan Thomke From the Harvard Business Magazine (September–October 2017)

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The chaos of website redesigns

WEBSITE REDESIGNS ARE COMPLEX

There are a lot of variables and often conflicting expert opinions. Getting feedback from every corner of the business and applying it takes a lot of time. And **long projects always increase the risk of getting off course.**

TOO MANY THINGS CHANGE AT ONCE

It's almost impossible to say which part of the project worked, and which didn't. As a result…

THE OUTCOME IS OUT OF YOUR CONTROL

You can't accurately predict how a website redesign will impact conversions, brand perception, or even engagement. One of the most famous examples is Digg, a market leader who lost to Reddit and went out of business. Their website redesign, driven by poor product choices and ruining core user journeys, was one of the factors in that failure.

Combining all three, full redesign is **one of the biggest risks you can take**.

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The complexity of experimentation

HIGH ENTRY LEVEL

While experimentation methods vary, they have a high entry level one way or the other. **A/B testing requires lots of traffic and conversions.** On the other hand, qualitative research can be time-consuming, requires knowledge of different testing methods, and can be expensive when recruiting testers for a B2B panel. Both are extremely valuable under the right conditions, but proportionally harmful when used wrong.

LOW SUCCESS RATE

Most experiments make no difference or straight up fail. **In the past, Google, Bing and Microsoft reported success rates of just 10-30%.** Of course, each "failed" experiment contains valuable learnings, but not everyone is in a position to capitalise on them long-term. And while market leaders can get to the "one in three" ratio, the average success of CRO tests is about one in ten.

IT'S A BIG TEST FOR THE COMPANY CULTURE

Experimentation isn't just about risk and ROI. It's also a field that doesn't bring immediate results. **Sticking with it for long enough requires the right processes and mindset.**
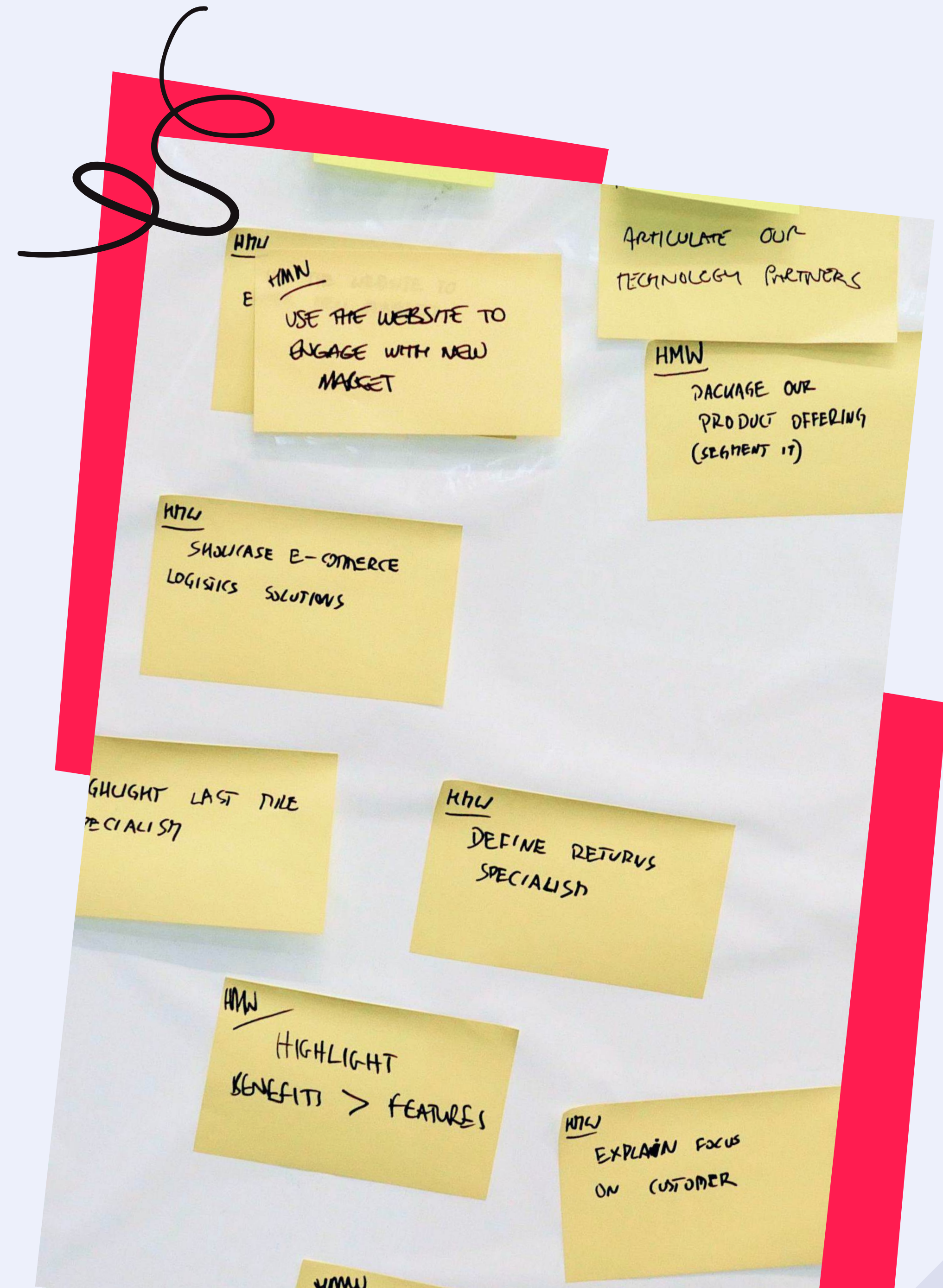
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Website user journey as a **replacement** for the process that you are used to

A LOT OF WEB DESIGN HAPPENS IN ISOLATION.

Trusting contractors is another risk factor in the equation. This is one of the biggest problems, and it's often a trap. To avoid it, B2B SaaS companies sometimes choose to execute design and development in-house.

Here's good news and bad news. **The bad news is that execution isn't what makes a website convert.** The good news? You're already doing some of the things involved in website user journey optimisation.

So while web design and conversion rate optimisation are full of foreign concepts like statistical significance and cookie consent compliance, **it's much easier to start working on a website user journey.**

Things you're already doing

The familiarity with the process benefits all of your teams - marketing, product, and even all the way up to the C-suite. **Website user journey optimisation thrives on a customer-centric approach.**

Some of your regular activities create the foundation for optimising website user journeys. We're talking about things like:

User research

Customer journey mapping

Personas and ICPs

And while the framework plugs right into some of your existing work to capitalise on it and elevate it, there are a few changes that you need to be aware of.

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What's new

Website user journey is all about collaboration. Not occasional meetings or Slack messages to clarify things - it's a constant exchange of information and teamwork. It's what the traditional methods promise, too. But as evidenced before, those approaches are way too far from your daily responsibilities to engage a marketer, a product manager, and especially a C-suite member.

You'll also be more hands-on with the project compared to the traditional web design. This includes flexible, asynchronous tasks, but also synchronous workshops. The contribution is crucial to the success but it's not something that companies are used to and trained for. After all, no other web design method requires your input to that extent.

The goal is to combine the research expertise of both teams, the product knowledge of your team, and the strategy knowledge of the agency. This can not be done by writing a single website brief.

Website user journey workshop experience is a mix of mapping exercises you already know, and alignment and ideation tools you'll encounter for the first time. While new, **these exercises don't require any prep work on your part.**
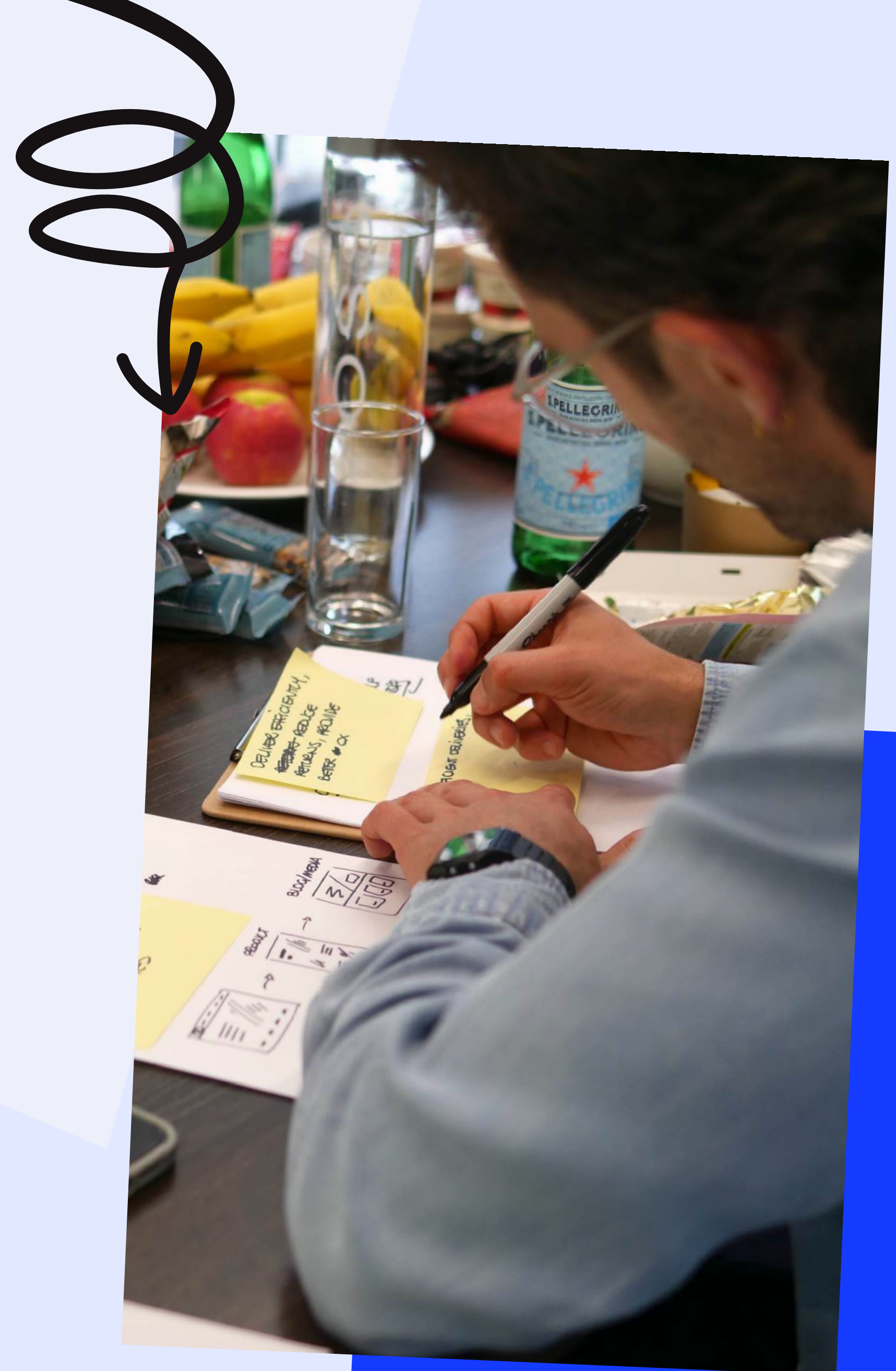
The website user journey optimisation process

THERE ARE FIVE STEPS TO A WEBSITE USER JOURNEY OPTIMISATION PROCESS.
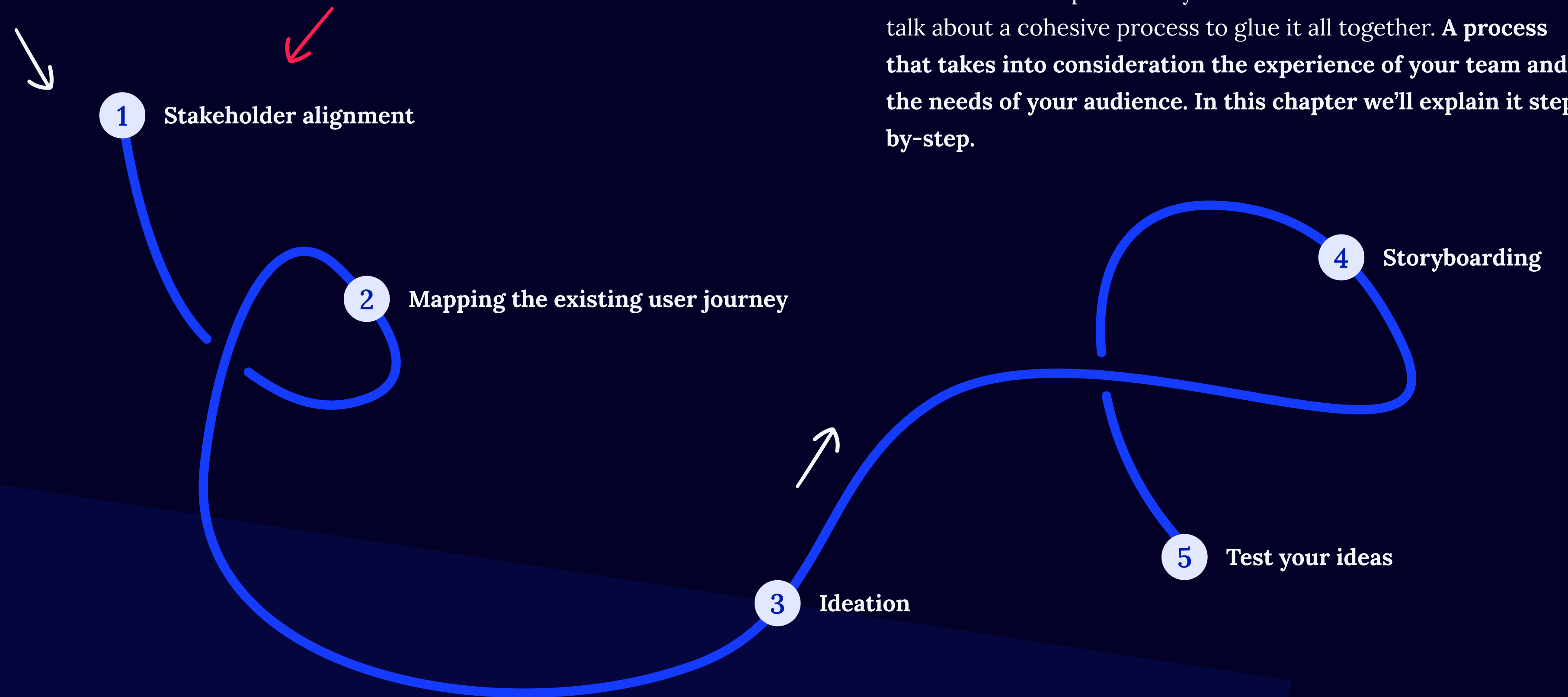
It's not unheard of to see the individual components in the traditional web design approach. But the white paper doesn't focus on the complementary benefits of individual exercises. We talk about a cohesive process to glue it all together. **A process that takes into consideration the experience of your team and the needs of your audience. In this chapter we'll explain it step-by-step.**

1 Stakeholder alignment

2 Mapping the existing user journey

4 Storyboarding

3 Ideation

5 Test your ideas

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1. Stakeholder alignment

People tend to build websites in a silo. **The typical approach involves the marketing team, but isolates almost everyone else.** We don't see much involvement from the customer support, through sales, all the way to the executive team. **This puts an artificial limit on the collaboration and restricts the flow of crucial information.**

While website user journey is all about the needs of the end user, these needs don't exist in isolation either. The wider business context is key to understanding how the company can help people solve their problems. **Misalignment at this step produces bad messaging and user experience.**

That's why the process starts with alignment exercises. It's usually in the form of a workshop that gives a voice to everyone on the team. It weeds out noise from important feedback.

Regardless of the tool you choose, **don't expect any exercise to get the entire team to agree on everything.** The goal is to hear everyone out, and then identify and prioritise problems together.

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2. Mapping the existing user journey

Mapping exposes gaps in the current approach. It's unlike other customer journey mapping exercises that you might've done in the past. **Following this process will not only help you be proactive on each step of the journey, but it also helps you identify the existing bottlenecks.**

The starting point is always the current state of affairs. Many times, stakeholders answer that they aren't aware of current journeys. The default fallback is "people just land on our home page, visit the product page, see the pricing and sign up". But this "logical" user journey is not as common as we think. Mapping is one way to figure out the unknowns.
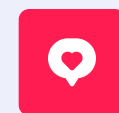
Start your map by writing down your actors (the target audience) on the left and their goals all the way on the right. Coming out of the alignment workshop, you're likely to have just one goal. Then, fill in the gaps in-between. In the simplest version of a website user journey, use the following steps:
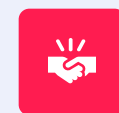
Discover
Covers all the ways people find out that you exist

Learn
What people do to get familiar with your business

Use
How people convert and use your product/services

Depending on your business model, you might add other stages - but the above three are a foundation that works for any business.

After you make the connections on your map, it's time for the culmination of the mapping process. That's when we identify the bottleneck. But not by choosing it blindly.

We go back to the output from Stakeholder Alignment and map all of our problems onto relevant points of the journey. This creates a heatmap of issues, which points out the bottlenecks. And since we prioritised the problems before, the exercise takes the weight of our issues into account.

Having identified the bottleneck(s), the next step is ideation. But an important note before we move on: mapping should be a regular exercise in your schedule. We recommend doing it at least twice a year, and ideally as often as feasible. Since it involves a number of key stakeholders, you might not be able to do it monthly, but a quarterly mapping session shouldn't be a problem.

Hint

A lot of the journeys will go through your website, but pay attention to the ones that skip the site altogether. If you have no journeys that skip the website, it's probably an oversight.

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3. Ideation

We know about the bottleneck that stops people from reaching their goal. Now it's time to remove it. **During step three, you'll come up with ideas and pick the most promising ones.** How to do that?

The key part of ideation is to keep the outward-looking mentality.

LOOK FOR INSPIRATION OUTSIDE OF YOUR INDUSTRY

Looking at your competitors is appealing, but it opens up the possibility of copying things that don't work. This changes when you draw inspiration from an unrelated business. You're forced to think: **"how do I make it work for us?"**

CONSIDER WHAT HAPPENS BEFORE AND AFTER PEOPLE VISIT THE WEBSITE

There are plenty of businesses out there with a long sales cycle. When the website doesn't set the right expectations about it, the conversion rate will drop - both on-site, and during the sales process.

THERE ARE NO BAD IDEAS

Something that you find silly might spark a thought for one of your colleagues. The entire process is collaborative and benefits from different perspectives. **Just because you're selling to Millennials doesn't mean Gen Z ideas won't help.**

A NOTE ON MESSAGING

The next step will see you apply messaging to your ideas. The goal is to create a storyboard for your solution. We highly recommend that you test your messaging ahead of time. It's almost a requirement.

However, if you decide to proceed without message testing, the alternative approach is to only use the existing copy. That will isolate the variable of messaging, focusing your efforts and analytics on the user journey alone.

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4. Storyboarding

After getting the wider context and solving bottlenecks in previous steps, it's finally time to put the pieces of your solutions together into a storyboard.

Storyboarding your website user journey is all about spotting problems and filling the gaps. **Since our focus was on top-priority challenges, there will be gaps in every journey. It's important to note that they exist for a reason - it's because they aren't your priority at the moment.** Rather than finding a perfect solution, just patch them up using other ideas your team came up in the Ideation phase. Don't invent new solutions at this stage!

Likewise, don't overcomplicate copy. You have your messaging sorted by this stage. It's either something new you tested before starting this process, or it's your existing messaging. (We talked about it in "A note on messaging" from step three.)

When storyboarding, focus on the key steps. There's no need to storyboard a Blog page if you're struggling with converting visitors to app users. Focus only on the key stages of the journey.
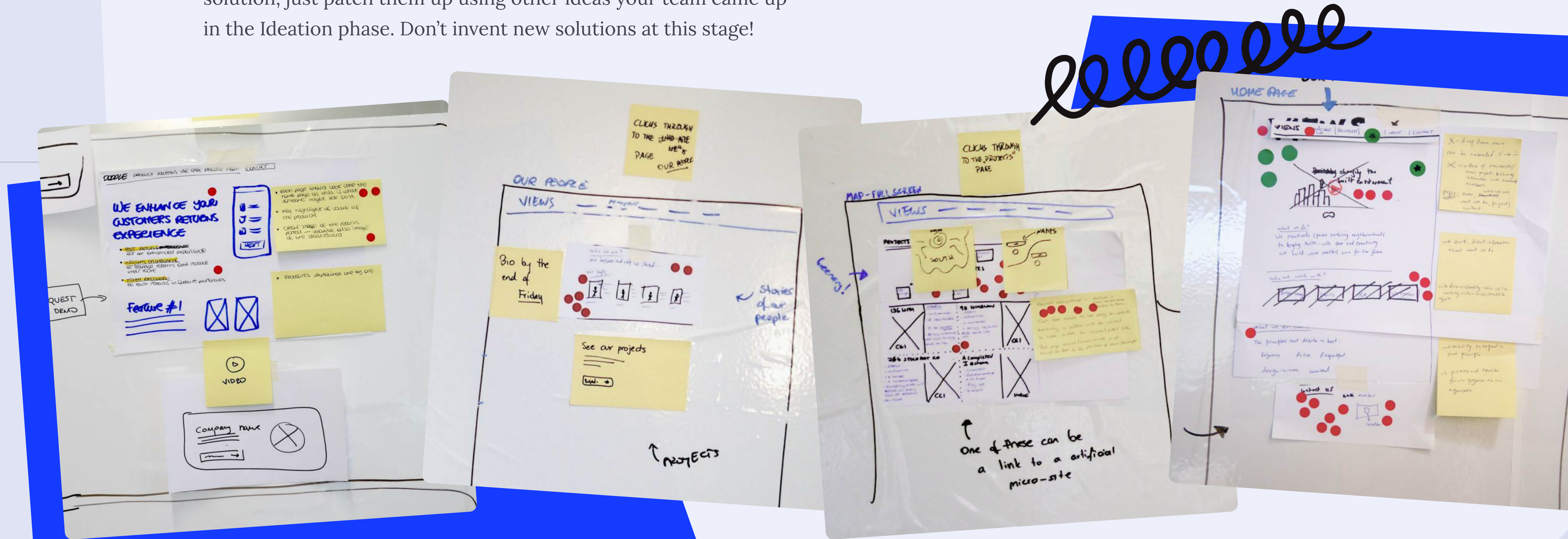
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5. Test your ideas

Reducing risk and focusing on the end user are two common themes that we repeated in this white paper. As we're approaching the end, **we encourage you to stay on track.** Ask people to review your work and solution concepts. Testing will save you a lot of time and money later on, so don't skip it.

Keep in mind that testing doesn't have to be expensive. **When you have a homogenous customer base, moderated sessions quickly lead to saturated feedback.** We typically interview just three to five people. Nielsen Norman Group's formula states that a single user will discover about a third of issues:

Unmoderated tests require a different approach. For those, quantity is more important. Still, recommended samples only go up to about 40 participants, and being around the 15-20 mark is generally good enough.

In the end, context is the key here. The less you know, the lower the threshold for getting insights from tests.
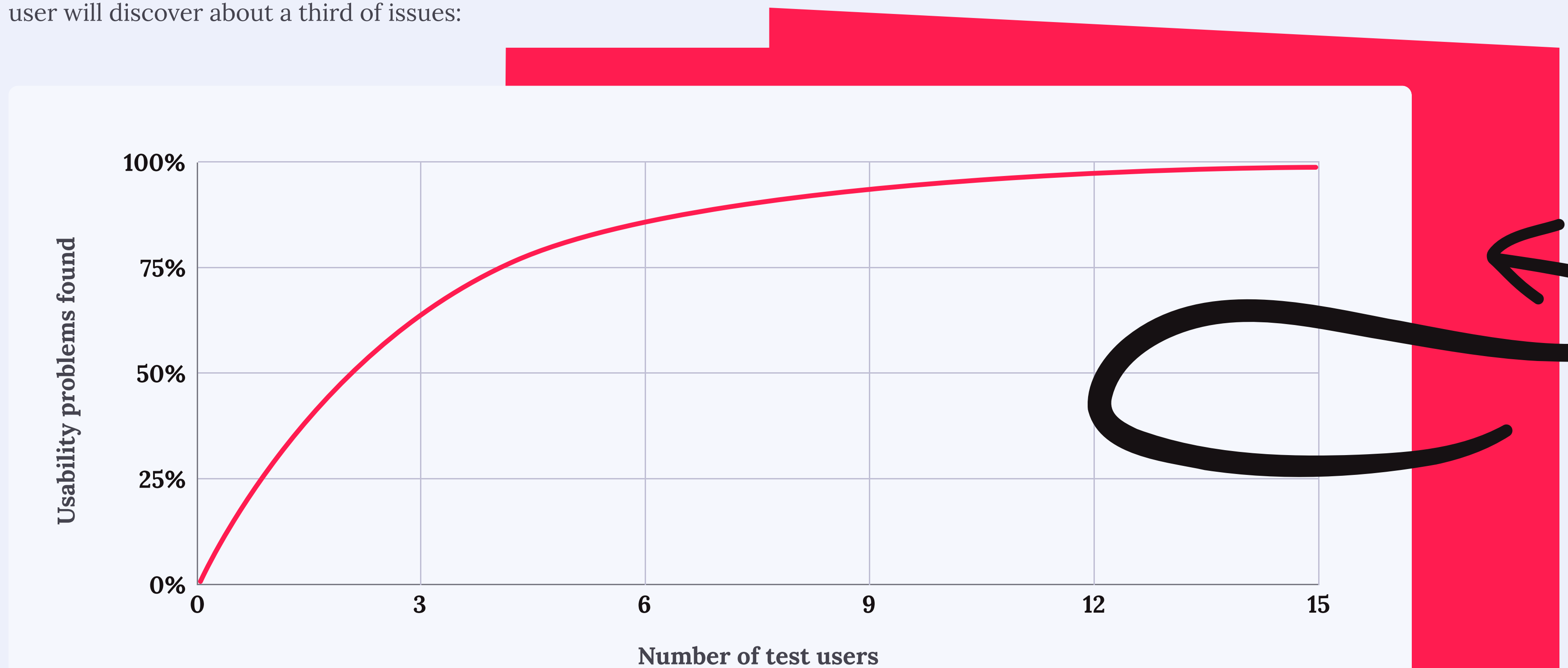
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Conclusion

We wrote this white paper four years after figuring out a process that finally looked like the user-centric approach everyone was glorifying for years. **Discovering better tools helped us realise that we, as a company and as the web design industry, weren't focusing on people nearly as much as we preached.**

And by people we mean those on both sides - the end user, but also the marketer who uses the project daily and the CFO that parts with a significant amount of money to make it happen. We wanted to make them all proud, and the website user journey process highlighted here achieves that.

Optimising website user journeys is a collaborative approach which takes advantage of the diversity of your team, identifies actual user needs, and tests concepts with people before putting them out in the wild.

Knowing people's circumstances and business context is crucial. The is extremely focused, but produces additional ideas and flag unrelated issues at the same time. Some of the ones we've seen include changes to how the sales team operates or starting a new habit for weekly alignment sessions.

It's the epitome of "the website is a tool". While conversions are critical for SaaS businesses, a lot of the value lies in how it fits the bigger picture. **We encourage you to try this new process, this new mindset.** To us, it was a breath of fresh air after doing things the traditional way. We've seen an overwhelmingly positive reception from both the end users and the teams we worked with, and we hope your experience is the same.

> **Internally, the company is really thrilled with the outcome and much more proud to point prospects there to visit. It definitely positions us much better as a tech company, and simplifies what we do to the market we serve.**
>
> Chloe Taylor, Senior Marketing Manager, Doddle Logistics

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How we help

At NerdCow, we collaborate with B2B SaaS teams to create websites that go beyond good looks and on-site optimisation. Website user journey optimisation is just the first step.

We take the commitment further by only helping a select few businesses. **Our goal is to truly understand you and the people you work with.** The work we do extends beyond workshops and delivering a website. We want to be all up in your business. The team frequently attends your company and industry events. **We listen to podcasts, read books, and watch YouTube videos from your industry - and often from your target audience.** Where possible, we ask to work from your office a few days each year to get to know your team better. We have an ongoing process for ideation and shaping up ideas to help the website keep your team operating at full efficiency.

If this sounds like a partner you'd like for your business, book a 30-minute strategy call with our founder, Tomasz.

Book a strategy call

Having trouble with the link? You can copy it below:

https://nerdcow.co.uk/schedule-call/

ABOUT NERDCOW

We've been solving websites challenges since 2015. We continue that quest through our fresh web design approach. By combining functionality and beauty, we empower marketers to bring it in every time.

8 years of pure website mastery

Proactive, flexible, and communcative

Powered by latest tech stack

Monthly subscription with benefits

The user testing is very strong. From day two, we were doing user testing. It was a really good process. It helped us understand everything more.

Mario van Poppel, Director, Leftover Currency

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Case studies

Doddle Logistics

Doddle is a company in logistics providing technology for first & last mile deliveries. They approached us for help with the direction of their website. In the middle of a pivot from B2C to B2B, their website had outdated messaging and the visuals didn't reflect the brand. Doddle went from a service that helped consumers return parcels to a tech company working with global posts and courier companies like FedEx, United States Postal Service, Australia Post, and more.

Our team interviewed the key stakeholders and we had four days of workshops to follow - two of them in person, and two remotely. We worked with their Head of Sales & Marketing, Chief Revenue Officer, Marketing Director and Head of Design to get insights from every area of the business during the workshops.

The collaboration helped us address issues with user journeys. It also switched the mood inside the Doddle team, who was now proud to show the new website to prospects.

National Federation of Demolition Contractors

NFDC is a non-profit body setting the standards for quality and safety of demolition in the UK. We used the website user journey process specifically because of their internal challenges in terms of alignment on the direction for the website.

Our workshops and mapping exercises helped the CEO, CFO, marketing and admin teams to focus on the main challenges for the website.

" **NerdCow helped us get everyone on the same page to agree on deliverables and requirements during our initial workshops. Getting us all in the same room to discuss the project from a wider perspective was hugely beneficial, so they were instrumental in the success of this project.**

Alex Ellison, Marketing Manager, NFDC

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Thank you

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