Story Mapping

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WHAT IS IT?

As more and more product development is done using the agile approach, user story mapping is a useful way to see the big, clearer picture with your product backlog. Through user story mapping you and your team create a dynamic journey representative of user's interactions with the product, evaluate which steps have the most benefit for the user, and prioritise what should be built next.

WHY DO YOU NEED IT?

User story mapping has several very good benefits:

- Rather than disconnected user stories, user story mapping keeps the user and what they're doing at forefront, viewing the entire product as a series of tasks which the user completes.
- Including the core team in the mapping creation process ensures that members are all on the same page from the beginning.
- The mapping exercise creates the pathway that supports you or the business analyst in writing user stories.
- The end result is a 'big picture' visual chart showing the structure of your stories. These stories and this structure will guide the product development work, making it quick to identify which stories should be prioritised.
- Viewing the groups of stories encourages discussion, collaboration and iterative development.
- The broad view helps with discussing and managing scope.

WHEN DO YOU NEED IT?

User story mapping comes in ahead of the development work, but ideally after initial research to understand the users' workflow, needs, goals, motivations and frustrations, so we have an idea of the customer journey and areas where we can improve the process and which parts of the user journey need the most attention.

HOW DO YOU DO IT?

1. Form a group of 3-5 people who understand the purpose of the product (any fewer and you might miss some ideas; more slows the process). These people would include the product owner, key stakeholders and UX (although you'll probably facilitate). If your team are not 100% sure on user needs, have useful materials such as personas and research findings nearby for quick reference.
2. Individually, team members silently brainstorm what they believe are the major User Tasks of the product. Use one post-it per task. This could take up to 10 minutes. Once ready, each person reads out their post-its and places them on the wall in front of the group. As this continues, any duplicate tasks are discarded.
3. Now group the like tasks and using another colour of post-it, name each group and put the post-it on top of the group (this is the Epic or Key User Journey Step).
4. Arrange the groups, left to right, in the expected user journey order. The User Task groups form the backbone of the map.
5. Recap the agreed journey to make sure nothing has been missed.
6. The framework for the map is now complete. You can add more detailed User Stories (unpacking the task) below each User Task. This brainstorming can be performed as a group.
7. Now we start thinking about how we develop the stories over multiple releases. Add in horizontal release lines, it's probably easiest to add in three so you can collectively prioritise high, medium or low stories.

8. For the first release line, ensure it is quite high up in the map so that it only allows for 2-3 User Stories per User Task in the first release.

That's the user story mapping process. Next steps are to:
- Define the MVP – minimal viable product – what is most useful, critical for the first release.
- Finally, with the map and MVP agreed, work can now be done on adding some detail to the user stories, i.e. requirements and acceptance criteria.
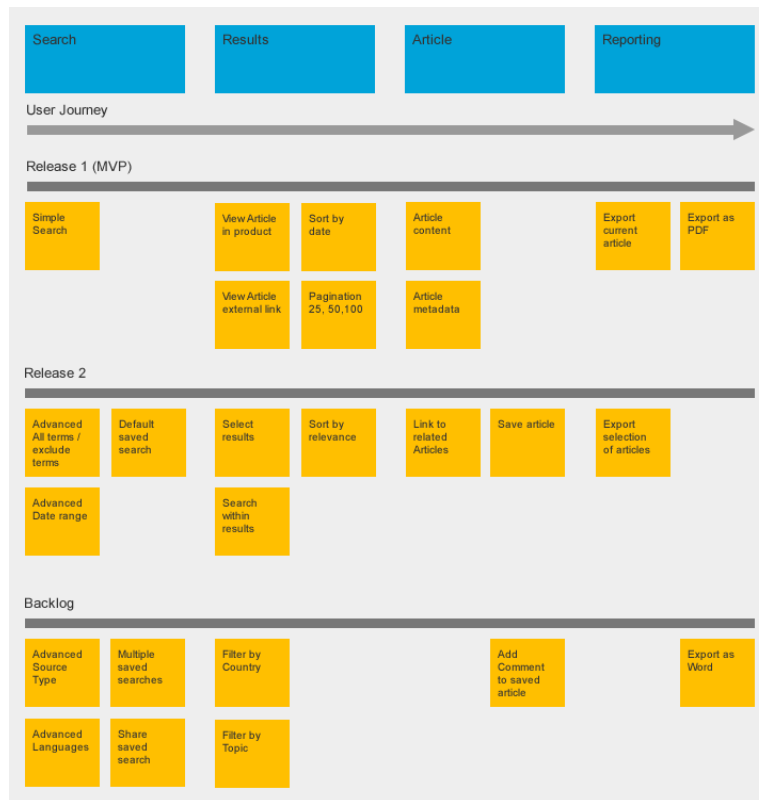
EXAMPLE
Begin with the epics, also known as the features (or for our purposes, the Key User Journey Steps). These are made up of the related User Tasks.
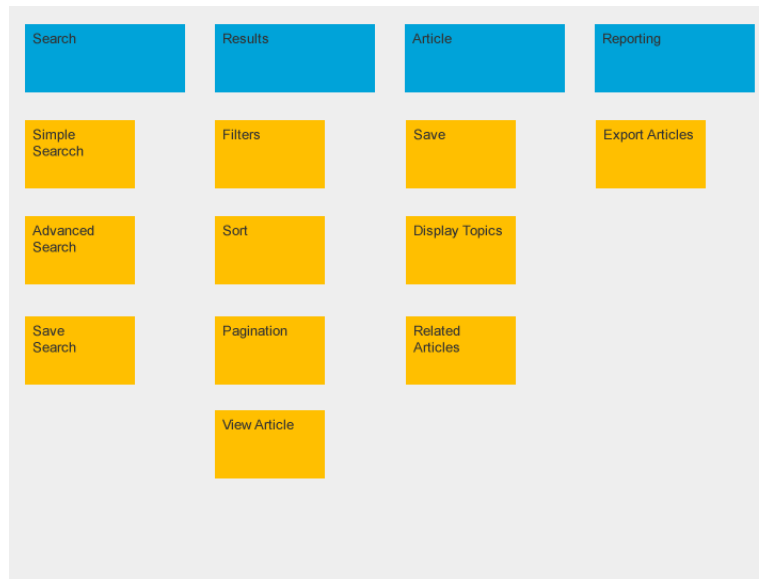
Now add in more detail, breaking down the User Tasks down into their constituent subtasks (these form the User Stories), remember to use the user journey as guidance.
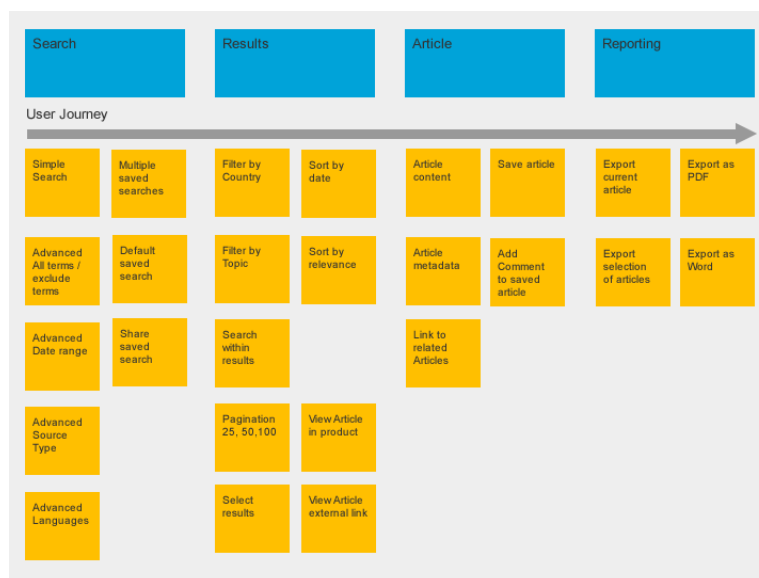
You now have the Key User Journey Steps broken down and can begin to determine what's important for the minimal viable product (MVP) and subsequent releases.

REFERENCES

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