Storyboards

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WHAT IS IT?

To create better products, designers need to understand what's going on in the user's world and how the product they are designing can make the user's life better. Storyboards are a perfect and established way to tell the UX story by effectively communicating a series of events and experiences from a user's perspective.

While use cases, scenarios and to an extent personas already tell a user story, storyboarding adds in a new, significant aspect: visuals. It's thinking about your product as if it was a movie with the user playing the lead in a scene. The UX storyboard can help visually predict and explore the user experience with a product. Storyboards are also very good at helping you to understand users current motivations and experiences connected to a certain problem. A story can be based on the current, as-is situation, or be set in the future.

WHY DO YOU NEED IT?

Visuals are a great way to illustrate an idea; they are engaging and also provide a more lasting impression and help foster a level of empathy between the audience and the user. Storyboarding also has the following benefits:

- The approach is human-centred, putting the user at the heart of the design process, adding a human face to analytics data and research findings.
- It focuses on the user flow by visually illustrating the flow; the leap of imagination between the product designers and real users is reduced, improving the understanding of scenarios.
- Identifies the key stages, helping you reduce the time spent on small, possibly insignificant steps.
- Being visual, it provides perfect review material for use amongst the team and stakeholders. The medium can also inspire new design concepts.
- As is essential in product design, iteration and experimentation is supported with throwaway storyboarding.

WHEN DO YOU NEED IT?

Storyboarding will come early on in the design process – possibly to illustrate what the believed scenario is and which needs to be validated, or pre-validated based on research with users. Storyboarding is useful for participatory design (involving team members and stakeholders), when the design is still up for grabs and you're working out possible ways of addressing a problem.

Of course if the product team already has a common understanding and clear direction there is no need to illustrate the journey in this fashion.

HOW DO YOU DO IT?

It's really important to emphasise that superb drawing skills are not essential to storyboarding. Sure the outcome will be prettier and probably produced faster, but don't let your inability to draw put you off, there are many free resources out there and stick people can be effective in telling a story too.

There are essentials to consider when storyboarding, this is why having good user knowledge vastly improves the storyboarding process. Each story should have following essential elements:

- **Character** – This is the specific persona involved in your story. You need to convey their behaviours, appearance and expectations. Thought bubbles can help the audience understand what is going on in your character's mind, especially around decision-making.
- **Scene** – Consider real-world environments; is the character at home or out and about? Are they alone or with friends?
- **Plot** – You must ensure you can provide context for the audience, explain the backstory. All good stories have a beginning, middle and end. You should begin with a trigger event and provide a clear ending the benefit of the solution or the problem with which the user is left. The narrative should focus on a goal for the character.

To make your story powerful, consider the following:

- **Authenticity** – In order for your audience to empathise with the character, try keeping the focus on real humans in real contexts.
- **Simplicity** – Remove any unnecessary extras, including imagery and words – simple will be less confusing.
- **Emotion** – Always try to communicate the emotional state of your character through their experience.

Until you're more proficient, one good way to begin the storyboarding process is by making it textual, linking nuggets of text to each other in a linear fashion. This provides you with the key information needed when you eventually sketch each storyboard frame.

Next to each piece of text, think about the character's emotional state: happy, sad, angry or indifferent? You now have all you need to illustrate each step of your storyboard.

James has just got home after a full on day at work. He relaxes on the couch.

He's glad to be home but really tired.

Text   **Emotion**   **Sketch**

EXAMPLE

Here's James' continued story: After a hard day at work he was thinking about some orchestral music, recalled from a film he saw recently and would really like to listen to right now and relax.

REFERENCES
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