＊ PROCESS

WHAT'S YOUR APPROACH TO PROTOTYPING?

Work everything out with a pen and paper, jump to a specialist tool or crack out your HTML, CSS and JS skills? The pros share their personal techniques

JON HADDEN
Founder, NiceUX
niceux.com

Remain flexible and consider the variables each project brings. If my intention is to quickly communicate a concept or rapidly test IA, I sketch or build a clickable PDF. For more complex nuances like data binding or responsive content structures, I may end up writing HTML, CSS and JavaScript. Ultimately, I want to effectively answer any questions I had before prototyping, as efficiently as possible.

SCOTT HURFF
Product design specialist
scotthurff.com

When I create a prototype, I factor in the following variables: how far do I have to go to communicate what's in my head, who's the audience and how much time do I have to complete it? The goal of a prototype is to vet whatever's in your head in the shortest possible time frame. Sometimes ideas can be vetted with a pen and a paper; other times, a quick-and-dirty iOS app.

BRAD NUNNALLY
UX designer
onestraythought.com

My greatest prototyping tool is a pen and notebook. These allow me to explore and play – if I were to start by using a particular tool, my thinking would naturally be constrained to the widgets available. Once a design is fairly solid, that's when I move into a tool like Axure for refinement. Working on paper allows me to focus on getting the behaviour right initially, rather than the layout. When presenting the prototype to a client, I show the entire process, including those early sketches. This makes the client feel more comfortable about the product because I'm able to show that every aspect was thought through.

DONNA LICHAW
Independent consultant
greatnorthelectric.com

I have a background in documentary filmmaking and have spent years making non-narrative things easier to consume by turning them into narratives. This applies to prototypes, too. The easiest prototype you can create is a narrative arc, and the IA should be the thread running through it. Prototypes should have plot points, engage the audience with a hook or problem as soon as possible, and keep them engaged over time.

GAVIN WYE
UX designer
gavinwye.com

The tools I use change depending on the problem I'm trying to solve. Sometimes it's a sketch, sometimes it's a rough visual but most often it's in code using CSS frameworks and tools like Mixture, Jeykll or Hammer for Mac. This way we can get something in front of users and stakeholders – in a browser on the device they choose – quickly. If you're working on a single product for a long time, it's a good idea to build your own framework and use this code to prototype. Take code from the developers, 'hack' it to meet your needs, then pass it back for refinement. Working like this gets you closer to developers, and has the advantage of baking progressive enhancement into the design process, something we need to do much more of. Too often, designers only consider the perfect outcome for their design. The web is not perfect.

WILL HACKER
Senior UX professional
willhacker.net

Keep in mind that prototyping is part of a larger design process, not an end in itself. If you want to test whether a design is usable, a higher-fidelity interactive prototype created in Axure or HTML may be appropriate. But if you are testing terminology to flesh out the IA of a mobile app, paper prototypes or something simple using Prototyping on Paper could suffice. The most important thing is to understand what you hope to achieve before making any decisions about the fidelity or interactivity of your prototype.

YAEL LEVEY
UX designer, Bad Robot Design
badrobotdesign.com

Prototyping is a great way to communicate with the rest of your team, as well as the end client. For the heavier-duty projects, Axure is a powerful tool. If I am working closely with other disciplines, lighter-touch tools like Flinto and even Keynote are great for getting designs on screen fast. Using HTML, CSS and a bit of jQuery can also be good – I have found it immeasurably useful to learn the rudiments of frontend code.

RESOURCES

PROTOTYPE TO SUCCESS

In this brilliantly insightful talk (*netm.ag/reichelt-262*) the Government Digital Service's head of user research Leisa Reichelt speaks of how her approach to prototyping has changed, making for better organisation and implementation of ideas.

MAKE IT A PRIORITY

Before you dive into a project, testing your ideas for effectiveness is vital. Providing you with an insight into the functionality of your design, this tutorial from Daniel Bramhall (*netm.ag/priority-262*) explains why prototyping is something every designer should do first.

AN INSIGHT INTO APPLE

Have you ever wondered how the top dogs at Apple approach prototyping? Wonder no more, as this neat presentation (*netm.ag/apple-262*) showcases their initial methods so you can see how your technique matches up.