

SPRINT BY JAKE KNAPP

Sprint is written by Jake Knapp with help from John Zeratsky and Braden Kowitz. These three have all been a big part of Google Ventures. Together, they have put together a guide for "solving big problems and testing new ideas in just five days". You'll find useful start-up examples including those from Slack and Blue Bottle Coffee. Knapp, Zeratsky and Kowitz have put together a must-read checklist at the back of the book that will assist anyone on this problem-solving, idea-testing journey!

On Monday, you'll map out the problem and pick an important place to focus. On Tuesday, you'll sketch competing solutions on paper. On Wednesday, you'll make difficult decisions and turn your ideas into a testable hypothesis. On Thursday, you'll hammer out a realistic prototype. And on Friday, you'll test it with real live humans.

Before the sprint begins, you'll need to have the right challenge and the right team. You'll also need time and space to conduct your sprint. No problem is too large for a sprint.

Solve the surface first

The surface is important. It's where your product or service meets customers. Human beings are complex and fickle, so it's impossible to predict how they'll react to a brand-new solution. Get that surface right, and you can work backward to figure out the underlying systems or technology. Focusing on the surface allows you to move fast and answer big questions before you commit to execution, which is why any challenge, no matter how large, can benefit from a sprint.

Team

Decider

To build the perfect sprint team, first you're going to need someone with authority to make decisions. That person is the Decider, a role so important we went ahead and capitalized it. The Decider is the official decision-maker for the project. These Deciders generally understand the problem in depth, and they often have strong opinions and criteria to help find the right solution. The decider must be involved in the sprint and committed to the full week.

Recruit a team

The ideal size for a sprint team is seven people or fewer. Any more and the sprint moves slower. Sprints are most successful with a mix of people: the core people who work on execution along with a few extra experts with specialized knowledge.

1. Decider
2. Finance Expert
3. Marketing Expert
4. Customer Expert
5. Tech/Logistics Expert
6. Design Expert

This collaborative atmosphere makes the sprint a great time to include people who don't necessarily agree with you. Troublemakers see problems differently from everyone else. Their crazy idea about solving the problem might just be right. And even if it's wrong, the presence of a dissenting view will push everyone else to do better work.

A Facilitator

You need a logistics guy or girl, someone to keep the sprint running and be responsible for managing time, conversations and the overall process.

They need to be confident leading a meeting, summarising discussions and telling people when to stop a task and move on. They need to remain unbiased, so don't combine the roles of decider and facilitator.

Experts

On top of the seven-ish people in your team, invite 'experts' in for Mondays session for interviews and knowledge gathering.

Time and Space

Try and set your day up like so:

You'll start at 10 a.m. and end at 5 p.m., with an hour-long lunch in between. That's right: There are only six working hours in the typical sprint day. Longer hours don't equal better results. By getting the right people together, structuring the activities, and eliminating distraction, we've found that it's possible to make rapid progress while working a reasonable schedule.

5 days

Block 5 full days on your calendar, Monday to Friday, 10am - 5pm, but start Friday a little earlier at 9am. Five days provide enough urgency to sharpen focus and cut out useless debate, but enough breathing room to build and test a prototype without working to exhaustion. And because most companies use a five-day workweek, it's feasible to slot a five-day sprint into existing schedules.

Inside the sprint room, everybody will be 100 percent focused on the sprint's challenge. The entire team must shut their laptops and put away their phones. You can't afford distractions, NO LAPTOPS, PHONES or IPADS allowed. Except of course, when they are being used specifically for the sprint.

Tools

Get two big whiteboards, minimum. Or else, large sheets of paper. You want a big, visual space to work on. Also, stock up on pens, erasers, sticky notes and of course, healthy snacks to keep you fuelled.

Monday

Monday's structured discussions create a path for the sprint week. In the morning, you'll start at the end and agree to a long-term goal. Next, you'll make a map of the challenge. In the afternoon, you'll ask the experts at your company to share what they know. Finally, you'll pick a target: an ambitious but manageable piece of the problem that you can solve in one week.

Start at the end

Set a long-term goal. Ask the question; "Why are we doing this project? Where do we want to be six months, a year, or even five years from now?"

Your goal should reflect your team's principles and aspirations. Don't worry about overreaching. Once you've settled on a long-term goal, write it at the top of the whiteboard. It'll stay there throughout the sprint as a beacon to keep everyone moving in the same direction.

Sprint questions

It's important to ask your team the following questions; - What questions do we want to answer in this sprint? - To meet our long-term goal, what has to be true? - Imagine we travel into the future and our project failed. What might have caused that?

Make a map

Draw the first draft of your Map on Monday morning after you've set your long-term goals. Follow these steps:

1. List the actors on the left (actors are important in your story, most often customers)
2. Write the ending on the right
3. Words and arrow in between
4. Keep it simple
5. Get the whole team involved.

At this point, you will have reached an important milestone. You have a rough draft of your long-term goal, sprint questions, and map. You can already see the basic outline of your sprint.

Continuing Monday

For the rest of the day, you'll interview the experts on your team to gather more information about the problem space. As you go, you'll add more questions, make updates to your map, and perhaps even adjust the phrasing of your long-term goal. And you'll take notes as a team, to add more depth to the map on the whiteboard. Your job on Monday afternoon will be to assemble one cohesive picture from everyone's pooled knowledge and expertise.

Take Notes

How Might We notes are a crucial part of the process. Everyone on the team needs a pack of sticky notes.

To take notes, follow these steps:

1. Put the letters "HMW" in the top left corner of your sticky note.
2. Wait.
3. When you hear something interesting, convert it into a question (quietly).
4. Write the question on your sticky note.

Each person will end up with a little stack of notes—you'll organize them later.

Arrange all the notes on the wall, organise these into groups and establish themes.

Vote

Use dots to vote on the notes, this will help you prioritise these questions and make good decisions.

Target

Your final task on Monday is to choose a target for your sprint. Who is the most important customer, and what's the critical moment of that customer's experience? The Decider needs to make the decision

Tuesday

On Tuesday, you'll come up with solutions. The day starts with inspiration: a review of existing ideas to remix and improve. Then, in the afternoon, each person will sketch, following a four-step process that emphasizes critical thinking over artistry.

Lightning Demos

- Ask everyone on your team to come up with a list of products or services to review for inspiring solutions.
- One at a time, the person who suggested each product gives a tour—showing the whole team what’s so cool about it. It’s a good idea to keep a timer going for approx 3 minutes.
- Remember the “Always be capturing” mantra and take notes on the whiteboard as you go.

Sketch

On Tuesday afternoon, it’s time to come up with solutions. But there will be no brainstorming; no shouting over one another; no deferring judgment so wacky ideas can flourish. Instead, you’ll work individually, take your time, and sketch. Sketching on paper is the fastest and easiest way to transform abstract ideas into concrete solutions.

The four-step sketch

1. Notes - walk around the room, look at the whiteboard and all notes already taken. Create a 'greatest hits' list of the last 24 hours.
2. Ideas - jot down rough ideas, filling a sheet of paper with doodles, sample headlines, diagrams, stick figures doing stuff—anything that gives form to his or her thoughts.
3. Crazy 8s = a fast-paced exercise. Each person takes his or her strongest ideas and rapidly sketches eight variations in eight minutes. Crazy 8s forces you to push past your first reasonable solutions and make them better, or at least consider alternatives.
4. Solution sketch - each person’s best idea, put down on paper in detail. Each one is an opinionated hypothesis for how to solve the challenge at hand. These sketches will be looked at—and judged!—by the rest of the team. They need to be detailed, thought-out, and easy to understand.

Wednesday

By Wednesday morning, you and your team will have a stack of solutions. That's great, but it's also a problem. You can't prototype and test them all—you need one solid plan. In the morning, you'll critique each solution, and decide which ones have the best chance of achieving your long-term goal. Then, in the afternoon, you'll take the winning scenes from your sketches and weave them into a storyboard: a step-by-step plan for your prototype.

Decide

Evaluate solutions all at once, critique all at once, and then make a decision all at once. Your goal for Wednesday morning is to decide which solutions to prototype. Our motto for these decisions is unnatural but efficient.

Follow a five-step process—and coincidentally, every step involves something sticky:

1. Art museum: Put the solution sketches on the wall with masking tape.
2. Heat map: Look at all the solutions in silence, and use dot stickers to mark interesting parts.
3. Speed critique: Quickly discuss the highlights of each solution, and use sticky notes to capture big ideas.
4. Straw poll: Each person chooses one solution, and votes for it with a dot sticker.
5. Supervote: The Decider makes the final decision, with—you guessed it—more stickers.

Speed Critique

1. Gather around a solution sketch.
2. Set a timer for three minutes.
3. The Facilitator narrates the sketch. (“Here it looks like a customer is clicking to play a video, and then clicking over to the details page . . .”)
4. The Facilitator calls out standout ideas that have clusters of stickers by them. (“Lots of dots by the animated video . . .”)
5. The team calls out standout ideas that the Facilitator missed.
6. The Scribe writes standout ideas on sticky notes and sticks them above the sketch. Give each idea a simple name, like “Animated Video” or “One-Step Signup.”
7. Review concerns and questions.
8. The creator of the sketch remains silent until the end. (“Creator, reveal your identity and tell us what we missed!”)
9. The creator explains any missed ideas that the team failed to spot, and answers any questions.
10. Move to the next sketch and repeat.

Rumble or all-in-one

If you have more than one winning solution, involve the whole team in a short discussion about whether to do a Rumble or combine the winners into a single prototype.

Now, if you decide to do a Rumble, you’ll have one more small problem. If you show your customers two prototypes of the same product, you risk sounding like an optometrist: “Which version do you prefer? A, or B? A? Or B?”

Luckily, the resolution to this murky situation is easy, and even fun: You get to create some fake brands. Once your prototypes have their own distinct names and look, customers will be able to tell them apart.

Storyboard

On Wednesday afternoon, you’ll take the winning sketches and string them together into a storyboard. You’ll use your storyboard to imagine your finished prototype, so you can spot problems and points of confusion

before the prototype is built. By taking care of those decisions up front, you'll be free to focus on Thursday.

Use a grid system to create your storyboard

Starting

The first square starts with how does your customer find your company? e.g. web search, magazines, app store, Facebook or news articles. From there, you'll build out your story, one frame at a time, just like a comic book. As you go, you'll discuss each step as a team.

This process will take you all of Wednesday afternoon, don't let it go on any further. And here, you have completed the hardest part of the sprint. The decisions have been made and the plan for your prototype is ready.

Thursday

On Thursday, you'll adopt a "fake it" philosophy to turn that storyboard into a realistic prototype. Instead of taking weeks, months, or, heck, even years building that solution, you're going to fake it. In one day, you'll make a prototype that appears real.

Prototype mindset

To prototype your solution, you'll need a temporary change of philosophy: from perfect to just enough, from long-term quality to temporary simulation. We call this philosophy the "prototype mindset," and it's made up of four simple principles.

- You can prototype ANYTHING
- Prototypes are disposable
- Build just enough to learn, but no more
- The prototype must APPEAR real

On Friday, you'll want your customers to react naturally and honestly to your prototype. You want to create a prototype that evokes honest reactions from your customers. You want it to be as real as possible, while sticking to your one-day timeline.

The prototype

- Pick the right tools - is it on a screen? use tools like keynote, powerpoint or web-building apps like square space. Is it a service? write a script and have actors. Is it a physical space? modify an existing space. Is it an object? 3D printing or prototype on keynote, photoshop, or modify an existing object.
- Divide and conquer - split up the team, have makers - typically designers or engineers. Have a stitcher to collect components from the makers and combine them. Have a writer and an Asset collector to scour the web for images etc. Finally an Interviewer, to conduct Fridays interviews.
- Stitch it together - make sure dates, times, names etc. are consistent throughout.
- Do a trial run - do this at approx 3pm to ensure you have enough time to fix any mistakes.

Friday

By Friday of your sprint week, you've created promising solutions, chosen the best, and built a realistic prototype. That alone would make for an impressively productive week. But Friday, you'll take it one step further as you interview customers and learn by watching them react to your prototype. This test makes the entire sprint worthwhile: At the end of the day, you'll know how far you have to go, and you'll know just what to do next.

Five

Tests have proven that 5 is the magic number when it comes to interviews.

One-on-one interviews are a remarkable shortcut. They allow you to test a façade of your product, long before you've built the real thing—and fallen in love with it. They deliver meaningful results in a single day. But they also offer an important insight that's nearly impossible to get with large-scale quantitative data: why things work or don't work.

The Interview

- Start with a friendly welcome
- Ask a series of general, open-ended context questions about the customer
- Introduce the prototype(s)
- Detailed tasks to get the customer reacting to the prototype
- finish with a quick debrief to capture the customers overarching thoughts and impressions

Take interview notes as a team and look for emerging patterns.

Review your long-term goal and sprint questions from Monday. You probably won't answer every question, but you'll make progress. After looking back, it's usually easy to figure out the next step. The team can have a short discussion, and then the Decider decides how to follow up.