



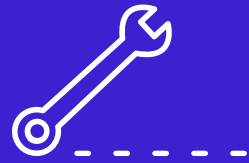
# How to Build Products Users Love



6 EXPERT INTERVIEWS INSIDE

<b>Introduction</b>	03
<b>The Basics of User Testing</b>	04
How to Avoid Bias in User Testing?	
Why User Testing Is a Marathon, not a Sprint	
<b>Let's Talk About Products</b>	08
What Makes a Product Stick?	
Designing Experiences	
<b>What You Need to Know Before Getting Started</b>	10
Finding the Right Participants	
Different Methods: an Overview	
<b>Best Practices</b>	13
<b>Interviews</b>	15
Amanda Richardson, HotelTonight	
Callie Wheeler, Prezi	
Justin Gallagher, Trello	
Leif Singer, Automattic	
Thomas Schranz, Blossom	
Miloš Lalić, Typeform	
<b>Takeaways</b>	39

# Continuous User Testing for Your Product Development Workflow



“These days it’s pretty easy to make new products - there are a lot of frameworks and tools out there - but it’s still really hard to make a great product, a product that people can understand and use, a product that makes people feel good.”

**Aaron Walter**

VP of Design Education at  
InVisionApp and author of the book  
Designing For Emotion.

It’s every company’s dream to develop products that are loved by its users and enjoy a wide-spread acclaim. But how do you plan for a successful product with an outstanding user experience? How do you make sure a product does not only satisfy a real need, but yields joy when using it?

We believe user testing can improve products and generate ideas in every step of the product development process. By asking your users what problems they are facing and what needs they are having you are getting one step closer to designing a product that is widely loved.

User testing means gathering feedback from customers with the goal of incorporating it into product development. The earlier this happens,

the better. Gathering customer feedback prior to launching the product publicly has immediate benefits. It increases the chances of the product appealing to the target audience and it can pinpoint product-inherent deficiencies in later stages.

In this eBook, we’re first taking a look at what user testing is. Why are companies concerned to design experiences and not products? What are different ways of user testing? And what are some best practices of it? Let’s get started!

# The Basics of User Testing

User testing can have a variety of functions. According to [Experience UX](#), user testing should determine how easy to use and enjoyable a product is. Hotel Tonight, for example, brings in users before developing product ideas. The company asks their target group what needs they are facing. User testing can be used in every development stage, even before having a concrete idea for a product.

If user testing is conducted in a later product stage some questions to consider are: How is the user interacting with the product? Which issues do occur? What can be done to improve the user experience?

**“Usability testing shows you if something is usable. Beta testing shows you if people will actually use it.”**

**Rachel Decker**

UX Researcher at HubSpot

Companies turn to user testing when they want to know if they are solving real problems or if new features are a worthwhile effort. Some issues only come up when external users test the product. Therefore it is important to get qualitative feedback from users.

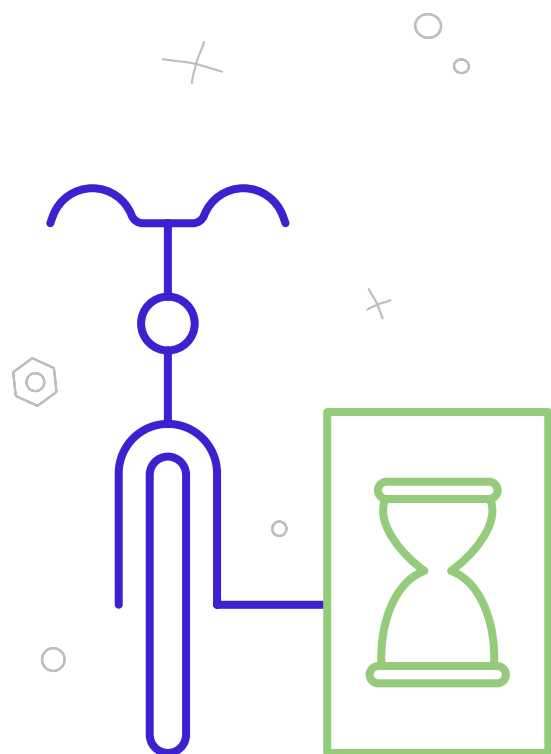
Depending on the test users' reaction, the project team might implement a functionality over another. While not a new practice, user testing has evolved over time, and will certainly continue to do so as new technologies emerge.

User testing can be a solution for minimizing risks, but it also plays a role in brand loyalty.

Customers who are happy with a company's product are more likely to continue buying its products in the future.

With an enjoyable product, users can focus on accomplishing their goals. Take project management systems such as Trello for example. It helps users to get a good overview of their planned and active tasks. It allows to see deadlines and to collaborate with others on specific jobs. It tries to help users to be better at their jobs and offers a great user experience.

What happens when user testing is neglected is that the created products don't really solve existing problems. This can cause frustration in customers and also can give the competition the upper hand.



# How to Avoid Bias in User Testing?

When you decide to conduct user testing for a new or existing product you are searching for honest, non-biased answers and results. But how do you ensure your testers are not prejudiced?

When conducting user testing there are many [tips on how to avoid bias](#). These range from balancing open (e.g.: “How would you improve the feature X?”) and closed questions (e.g.: “Are you planning to use feature X to achieve goal Y?”) to avoiding words that express an emotion. It’s not mandatory for people providing feedback to have back-end or design knowledge. But the testing group should consist of people who might use the product regularly.

What can be done to avoid availability bias? Here are just a few examples. When mentioning words such as “happy,” “like” or “dislike” in the surveys accompanying the tests (e.g.: “Do you like the way this functionality was implemented?”), product developers guide users in a way that suggests the most likely answer. Testers will get the impression that a certain answer is the “correct” answer. When the wording is chosen suggestively, there is a risk that users will tend to a certain answer.

To get the most out of user testing, companies need to keep it simple and prepare thoughtful questions. Users should not feel obliged to provide an answer if they don’t understand the question.

Encouraging participants to share their experiences when using an application is

another step in the right direction. After all, the goal is to get feedback as if the product was used by someone from the intended audience. Asking the questions in a logical order also helps, as it affects the way users answer.

When rushing user testing, there are some factors that could influence the user in a negative way. For example, the user might experience performance anxiety, could compare themselves with other participants or even start competing with them. On top of everything, the user might end up with the impression that the whole thing resembles an intelligence test.

[Jared Spool](#), an American researcher and expert in usability, software and design recalled seeing a tester cry during a user test, proof that [testing under pressure](#) has undesirable results most of the time. Some of the things that can be done for successful testing include:

- **Picking someone with experience that makes them a relevant participant**
- **Explaining to the user what the test is about**
  - **Making sure that the user is familiar with the product**
- **Instructing observers on how to behave during the test**
- **Ensuring that the user and the observers aren’t biased against one another**
- **Pilot-testing the tasks, to confirm that the tasks can be completed**

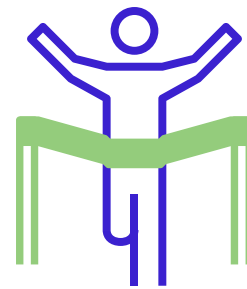
The above list is a set of best practices that can help avoid bias when doing hallway testing.

# Why User Testing Is a Marathon, Not a Sprint

User testing can save companies a lot of headaches. Getting actual customer feedback prior to releasing websites or digital products can improve the chances of a mass adoption later on. Companies who are open to user testing often realize soon enough that user tests are worth the investment.

Much like a marathon, user testing requires everyone involved to be consistent over a long period of time. Product managers are recommended to gather feedback for everything, starting from mockups and prototypes to the minimum viable product.

By bringing users in and observing them while using the product in an unscripted scenario, companies can get a better picture of the problems users encounter. The next step then is to filter the feedback and integrate it into product development and R&D.

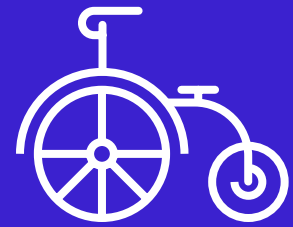


A person is shown from the chest up, sitting at a desk and using a laptop. The image is heavily overlaid with a semi-transparent blue color. The person's hands are on the laptop keyboard, and their head is tilted slightly towards the screen. The background is dark and out of focus.

““

**Companies who are open to user testing realize soon enough that if planned correctly, user tests are worth every penny.**

# Let's Talk About Products



When designing products with the user in mind, you are one step closer to building a successful product. After all, you want users not only to find a solution to their needs, but also a positive association with your brand. That is where the consumer adoption process comes, in which a user becomes a loyal customer.

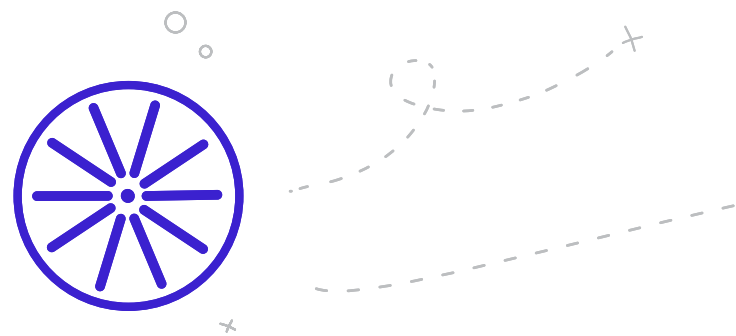
## What Makes a Product Stick?

The [consumer adoption process](#) consists of five clearly defined stages that a user needs to go through before they are acquired customers. These are:

- Awareness
- Interest
- Evaluation
- Trial
- Adoption/Rejection

“The consumer adoption process is constant,” [Nathan Chandra](#), co-founder and COO of WeLink, points out. “Marketing tools may change, the way consumers discover products may change, and consumer behaviors may change, but the 5 stages that make up the consumer adoption process will always remain the same.”

When users have decided to adopt a product, companies should push further to retain these customers and make sure they remain loyal. Here’s where customer retention comes into play. Since retention is costlier than acquisition, there’s even more reason to release only digital products that have passed user testing.





# Designing Experiences

Companies nowadays are focused on designing experiences, rather than just products.

[Nicolas Duval](#), Product Designer at BlaBlaCar, the world's leading platform for ridesharing services, encourages companies to stop designing interfaces and [start designing experiences](#).

[David M. Kelley](#), founder of design firm IDEO and professor at Stanford University, pointed out in one of his [lectures](#) how complex the whole process of designing experiences can be:

“So in designing taking the train, it's not about designing the train set or the interior or the uniforms. It's about designing the experience of taking the train. So there are all these steps. When you start thinking that way, you think in this case there are 10 steps, you have to think about learning about the train schedule; you have to think about planning; you have to think about starting, entering, ticketing, waiting,

boarding. Riding is step number eight in trying to make that. [...] There are a million things that add up to your experience. The truth is you have to design all those things if you want to be successful. So it's just a small mind change but it certainly makes a lot of difference in what we end up doing.”

Notice how these ideas are as valid now as they were 15 years ago, when Kelley, much like Duval, encouraged putting aside product design and letting experience design shine.



# What You Need to Know Before Getting Started

## Finding the Right Participants

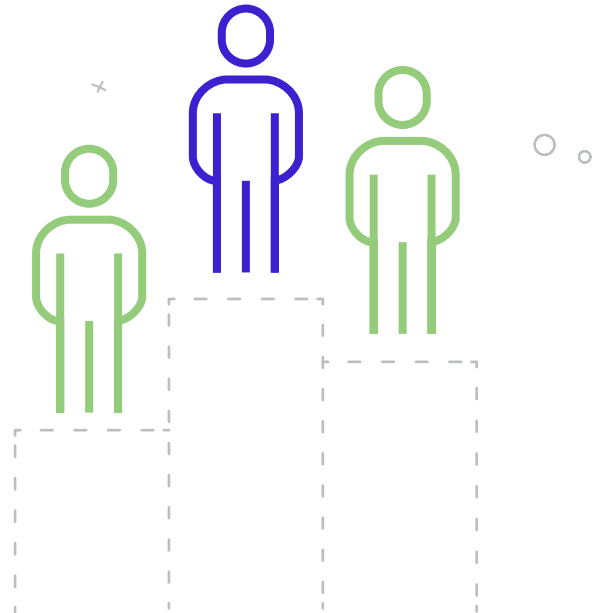
Finding the right participants for user testing can be a challenge. You don't necessarily want the fan boys who are already in love with your product, but you also don't want people to whom your product is not relevant (think: an Airbnb for an 85-year-old woman who hasn't left her town in the last decade). To get a clear image of who should and who shouldn't take part in user testing, one idea might be to create user personas and to search for tester diversity. Some of the basic filters that could be used for refining the ideal users are:

- **Country**
- **Age**
- **Gender**
- **Socio-economic status**

Granted, this is only a very rough categorization, but companies can go through their buyer personas in order to find relevant testers.

Finding people for user testing might be challenging, but there are plenty of options, actually. Some of the places to recruit testers are:

- **Amazon's [Mechanical Turk](#)**
- **Panel agencies such as [Op4G](#)**
- **Market research recruiters such as [Plaza Research](#).**
- **Own websites and web apps, where users could be [intercepted through pop-ups](#)**
- **Specialized testing platforms such as [usertesting.com](#) and [testbirds.com](#)**



The [Nielsen Norman Group](#) determined that testing with five users helps identify the same number of usability issues as when asking more participants. If you're looking for an exact figure, you should increase the number of testers until the feedback coming from the group does not provide new insights. Finding an ideal number of users helps companies approach user testing's maximum benefit-cost ratio.

The Nielsen Norman Group also gives recommendations about the number of tester for specific tests. These are:

- **Quantitative studies require a minimum of 20 users**
- **Card sorting needs at least 15 users**
- **Eyetracking tests should involve 39 users for stable heatmaps**

# Different Methods: an Overview

Depending on what you want to test, your methods of doing user testing might change. Here is an overview about different methods:

**Hallway testing** involves selecting people at random in a neutral space. By doing so, designers can identify problems which stand in the way of a good user experience.

A [StackExchange](#) member suggested that coffee houses would make the perfect place for approaching potential users. The argument was that people are more relaxed when spending leisure time, and hence, are more open to talk. Adding a small reward can incentivize them. The StackExchange user recommended [Rocket Science Made Easy](#) by Steve Krug, a DIY guide for finding and fixing usability problems.

**Remote usability testing** is preferred in scenarios where observers, developers and testers all live in different countries. Not using a specialized lab for user testing helps cut down costs and logistics. This can be separated into synchronous and asynchronous methodologies.

In an [unmoderated remote usability test](#) conducted by Tom Tullis, SVP of User Insight at Fidelity Investments, the goal was to compare two Apollo space program websites, one hosted by NASA and the other one on Wikipedia. Users could only analyze one of them and determine on which of them information was easier to find.

**Expert review**, as the name implies, uses experts in the field to test usability, efficiency and effectiveness of a digital product's

interface. [The 10 usability heuristics for UI design](#) enunciated in 1994 by Jakob Nielsen are still used as a standard for assessing the aforementioned criteria.

This particular method is more adequate for [content-heavy websites](#) and complex applications that require a professional's opinion. Among the aspects that can be assessed in this situation are information architecture, navigation design, page layout and search page. The conclusion should be gathered in an educational presentation that outlines the problematic areas and the ones that could use some improvements.

**Automated expert review** also relies on experts, but also uses automatic programming. In this scenario, artificial intelligence programs or other surrogate users are given access to rules and heuristics. These outline the ideal way the digital product should work. Even though the results are more consistent and are obtained more rapidly, this method is not ideal. Automated expert review ensures the product's well-functioning, but doesn't guarantee a great experience.

**A/B testing** or split testing is a method commonly used in marketing and web development. Two features that are identical except for a single small detail that could influence user behaviour are tested against each other to see which one leads to the most favorable outcome.

The differences can be as small as a single word or as large as an entire website sections

with FAQs, statistics and social proof. At least that was the case with [Kiva](#), a non-profit organization that enables people to lend money to low-income entrepreneurs. An information box that was added at the bottom of a landing page caused an [increase in donations by 11.5%](#).

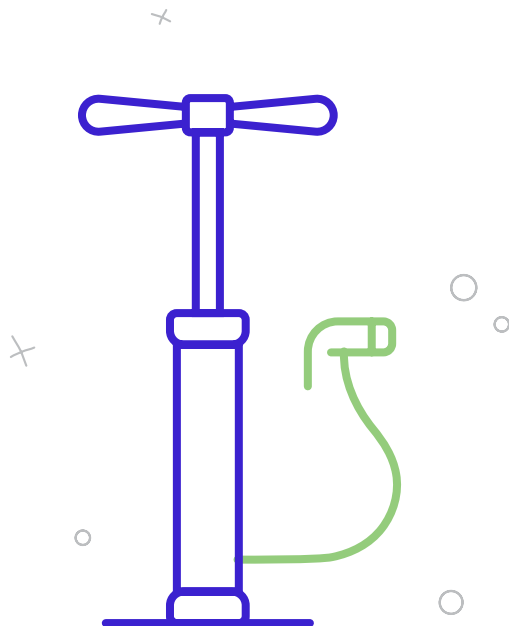
User Testing Method	Involves	Benefits	Disadvantages
Hallway Testing	Selecting people at random in a neutral space	Cheap Quick Helps identify roadblocks in the early stages of design	Cannot be performed internally because of the project designer and developers' bias
Remote Usability Testing	Observers, developers and testers who live in different parts of the world	Cuts down costs and logistics	Lacks the immediacy and sense of "presence" found in other methods. Reduced control over the environment Cultural and linguistic barriers make the process more difficult
Expert Review	Experts in the field to test the usability, efficiency and effectiveness of the digital product's UI and UX	Can be used on content-heavy websites and web apps	Time-consuming Costly
Automated Expert Review	Programs that are given the rules for good design and heuristics	Quicker than most other methods More consistent	Doesn't ensure a good experience
A/B Testing	Comparing two features that are identical except for a single small detail	Easy implementation Easy test design Flexibility in defining variable values Easy to analyze	Inefficient data collection Limited number of recipes May not cover the entire experience

# Best Practices

You are considering user testing for your new or existing product. Here are some steps you could take and questions to think about:

- **Decide whether only a feature or the entire product should be tested. Opt for the former if it's a complex product with a lot of features.**
- **Create user personas and find testers**
- **List the activities that make the subject of the test**
- **Approach the ideal users**
- **Involve the right stakeholders**
- **Run the test, collect the results, implement the feedback**

We talked to 6 industry experts and here is, in a nutshell, insights into how they are conducting user testing. For more information check out their interviews in the second part of the book.



[Typeform](#)'s founders are focused on UX. The entire product development process focuses a lot on providing as good of an experience as possible. Testers are brought in to assess the usability of prototypes. The process continues with people from outside the company via remote testing.

[Trello](#) took a wide approach to receiving and integrating feedback, both from developers and non-tech people. Seeing both sides of the coin helps get a different angle when building popular products.

[HotelTonight](#) uses multiple methods for gathering feedback from users. There are users coming in, surveys sent out, reviews posted on app stores. Everything's correlated with Net Promoter Score, to determine the loyalty of the customers post-testing.

[Automatic](#) first tests their Wordpress.com features internally, but relies on different teams than the ones that created them. Observing users while experiencing the product is essential, and should be preferred to remote testing whenever possible.

[Prezi](#) believes in integrating user testing in all of the stages of product development. Thus, users are shown mockups, prototypes and products that are almost ready to be launched.

More details on how the aforementioned companies perform user testing are available in the following six interviews.

A person is shown from the side, using a laptop. The image is heavily overlaid with a semi-transparent blue color. The person's hands are on the keyboard, and the laptop screen is visible. The background shows a bookshelf with several books.

““

Since the experience is more important than the product itself, user testing is anything but mandatory.



Work on a product you love or for a user base that you love.

**Amanda Richardson**  
VP of Product  
at HotelTonight



# Building Successful Products by Testing Ideas Before Turning them into Solutions

**1. As a VP of Product, what are the top three indicators to monitor in order to know whether your product is on the right track?**

Amanda Richardson: There is more than one possible answer to this question. I would say

that it depends on the stage of the product and on your goals. It also depends on what you are trying to achieve. In general, what I look for is a conversion metric. For HotelTonight, it's the number of rooms booked, for Prezi that was a presentation actually being shown. The second

thing that I care about is the Net Promoter Score or some kind of customer feedback metric. The third one would be the repeat rates - you've figured out how to book a hotel room, but you hated it and decided never to do that again or you will continue booking hotel rooms through the same service. The best experience would be someone using the product/service over and over again. These would be the big 3 that matter, but it depends on the product and the context of the situation to know exactly what indicators drive your business.

## 2. At which stage of product development would you start with user tests?

It depends on what you mean by user test. I would say you should always be talking to users and these discussions should lead you to the ideas you want to test or the solution you think you have figured out. Ideally, you start talking to users before you even have the idea. You should start by understanding the user because this way you avoid trying to solve problems that aren't real. Too many people have ideas that are seeking problems rather than looking at the problem and coming up with a solution. Even at HotelTonight we sometimes solve things that aren't problems. For example, we created a feature around how you could favorite your hotels and have a watchlist of your favorite hotels. It's a nice feature that's beautiful and elegant, but there are very few people in the world who look at a hotel and then decide to travel as opposed to people who decide to travel and then choose the hotel. This is why I think you should first talk to users before coming up with a solution to their problem.

We also run user tests on a weekly basis, without having something specific to test. We just want to talk. The big challenge is talking to

non-users. We bring them in, understand how they travel and why they travel. I think meeting people in person is really important. We ask friends and family, we post on Craigslist, but there's no easy solution.

## 3. Do you believe that there is something like an overly saturated market or do you think that if the product is good enough, the competition doesn't matter that much? For example, Slack became huge in a saturated market (where already a lot of chat messengers for businesses existed), but do you think that there can be "another Slack" now being even better than "Slack"?

The best example here is cellphones. I'm old enough to recall the first cellphones. If you remember the Nokia phone, you could teletype on it. Nokia and Ericsson focused their KPIs on how quickly users could send a text with that kind of typing. Then the Blackberry came out and Nokia said that it would never work because you needed to use two hands, it was much slower, users got all these different keys, plus they had to look down while writing.



You should first talk to users before coming up with a solution to their problem.

Actually, it wasn't about speed, it was easier to use, so it was quicker. Then, everybody believed the market was done, they had the Blackberry, but then the iPhone came out. Some people think the Google Pixel is the iPhone killer. Therefore, I don't think a market is ever saturated - the more players you have



on the market, the harder you have to work to differentiate. You need to have something really amazing to win; having something that's just a little bit better will not be enough.

For me, the product strategy is to figure out the particular use case or slice of market that you are going to take on and focus on that. Take for example the product story around Microsoft Powerpoint. MS Word had a very large market share and they actually bought Powerpoint. PPT said "We're gonna solve this problem for one slice." For one year, they focused only on Sales People. After they optimized the product for them, they would fix it for lawyers. So today we just keep addressing different slices of the market.

Today, if I was going after Slack for example, I would pick large enterprises, or distributed teams, or people who have to do a lot of video calls. Once you've got the majority of the market with a certain feature, move to the next one. With HotelTonight, everybody said that there were already huge players on the market, Booking.com and Expedia which have huge market share. "Why would you bother going after that?," they asked. I told them we are doing last minute very well and now we're growing triple digits because we are focusing on doing one thing really, really well.

#### **4. You are VP of Product for HotelTonight, but of course you are using many other products as a consumer. What makes a great product for you?**

A great product for me is one that solves a big and painful problem. Amazing products solve big and painful problems in an engaging and elegant way.

One of the ways people talk about products is within 3 categories: Vitamin, Painkiller or Drug. Vitamins are nice, they make you feel better and you should use it, but it's not really a problem.

Painkillers, on the other hand, are things that solve real, painful problems. So you don't want to be a vitamin, you want to be a painkiller. But what you really want is to be a Drug - people are addicted, they can't stop. Drugs are more powerful, people are more attached to them, and these are the things people can't get enough of. Drugs solve problems you didn't even know you had.

#### **5. In your opinion, what role does user testing play in creating innovative products?**

I think user testing depends on the phase of the product. You should talk to users really early on to figure out their problem. Then you try to figure out if your solution really fixes their problem and after that user testing can be used to refine your product and make sure it's usable. Still, nothing takes the place of putting the product out there and getting the real, authentic feedback from the market.

There are many ways to get feedback from strangers: we have users coming in and offering feedback, we send surveys, we do Net Promoter Score, I read every appstore review, etc. Sometimes it's really hard to read because some comments are really mean, but that's actually great because if you screwed something up then you should fix it.

## **6. How do you perform user testing at HotelTonight and what process do you use for implementing user feedback to perfect the product?**

For instance, if I got feedback from my mom who's very nice but never travels, is over 70, doesn't use a smartphone and stays with friends when traveling, I wouldn't consider her my target market for HotelTonight so it's not her feedback that has high priority. If in a couple of years from now we get big enough to solve these problems for everybody or there is an older demographic that becomes our target market, this is the point when we have to listen to that feedback. I align feedback with use cases and target market and whether the feedback is a new request or it is something that's broken. The latter has to be addressed immediately. You prioritize bugs over general feedback from the target market, then the rest goes to the archives.

## **7. Anything else you can share with our readers about what you have learned along the way as VP of Product?**

I think the best advice I could give people who want to build products is: work on a product you love or for a user base that you love. You may not be the user, but if you have a passion for helping certain people out, that will really do the trick. The days are long, there is a ton of negative feedback coming in, it's a tough job - a lot of people don't necessarily like us (unhappy users are always out there). Working on a product you are passionate about will make it easier to get out of bed in the morning and it will keep you working hard. When you do win however, it won't be about a number, it will be about making a meaningful change in the world.

## **About Amanda Richardson**

Amanda Richardson currently serves as Vice President of Product at HotelTonight. Amanda oversees product strategy, product management, design and user research. She is responsible for the consumer mobile apps on iOS, Android and mobile web, as well as HTx, the web-based tool for hotel revenue managers.

Amanda has more than 10 years of senior leadership experience in product management in companies including Snagajob and Eclipsys. Prior to joining HotelTonight, Amanda served as Head of Product at Prezi.

## **About HotelTonight**

is the world's first made-for-mobile hotel booking app. Famous for giving users the ability to book a hotel in less than ten seconds and four taps, HotelTonight offers the best pricing for last minute deals at top hotels vetted personally by HotelTonight staff.



# Do you have time to build the wrong thing?

**Callie Wheeler**  
Product Manager  
at Prezi



## Triggering Delight through Continuous User Experience Research

### **1. From your perspective and experience, what's the most important aspect to consider when building successful products and why?**

Callie Wheeler: The most important thing to consider is a users' motivation. Everything we do comes down to what defines us as human beings, so it's important to start from the point of what motivates the user to think of doing something in the first place. If something doesn't really motivate a person, then it's not resonating with their needs. Successful products are continuously used because they cater to users' needs. For example, nobody just wakes up in the morning and wants to make a presentation. They want to make a point, to

sign a deal, to benefit themselves in some way. That's the motivation for our users who make presentations. It's not a choice between making a presentation in a slide-based tool or in a prezi, but about how that person shines, how they can advance themselves in their career, or make that sale, etc.

### **2. How do you create delightful web experiences?**

I started in user experience with a background in Anthropology because I like to see how people interact with the world around them and I think it's really important that a product understands the context of the world that it exists in.

On the topic of delight: people talk a lot about delight as adding easter eggs, pretty colors, beautiful illustrations, copywriting and so on. I think delight is when the user asks himself: “Wouldn’t it be cool if it could do that?” and then they try to do it and it works. A great example of this is Google Maps because you think: “Wouldn’t it be cool if I could save a location so I can find myself later in the future? Oh, I can do that! Wouldn’t it be great if I could mark that location because it’s my parked car or my friends’ house. Oh, I can do that!” Another example is when I want to figure out what the fastest way is. Is it walking? Then I’ll walk. Even if I search for car directions, it will tell me that the walking directions are faster if they are faster. I have a long list of things like this in Google Maps, and I think this brings delight to the product. Maybe I didn’t even articulate to myself that I wanted to do something, but when the product anticipates that I’d like to do something and makes that possible for me, that’s what I consider delight.

The icing on the cake is your brand’s personality. I think delight is when it works the way you wished it would work, before you even knew you wished that. The question is: how do you make that happen? To understand how the user is thinking, you need to spend time with them while they are using the product. Go with people on their daily commute with Google Maps, for example. A lot of people building products think they don’t have time to do that, but my question to them is “Do you have time to build the wrong thing?” As a user experience person, I strongly advocate going outside and spending the day with people. If you can’t spend the day, spend an hour and if you can’t do that pick up the phone. You will uncover things that will be surprising.

### **3. How can a startup stand out in a very competitive market, and compete with long-standing companies which maybe invest large sums of money into marketing and sales?**

I think this all goes back to the motivation of the user that you are trying to reach. For example:

there are tons of slide-based presentation tools out there but that doesn’t necessarily mean that the user’s motivation to stand out or to be seen as cutting edge or to have a conversation and be seen as a flexible presenter, are addressed by the other slide-based tools. Standing out is all about finding that motivation that isn’t really addressed by those many competitors and digging deep into what that is, why it’s there and how to support it. I think it’s always intimidating to see how others are continuously adding features. It makes you think that if you don’t have those features, your product is not good enough. However, if you are zeroing in on the right motivation, it won’t matter if you don’t have all of those features. Prezi doesn’t have all of the features that the competition does but it’s compelling because it addresses a deeper motivation of people to stand out and advance themselves.

### **4. When Prezi was launched, many people used PowerPoint for creating their presentations. What tactic did you adopt to differentiate Prezi from this big competitor and get people to use/ try out your product?**

The first step was: this is a completely different tool than anybody had ever seen before! It was probably 10 years ahead of its time. Touchscreens weren’t really a thing so it leveraged future technology in that sense and got people excited about what the future could look like in terms of presentations.

The other thing that differentiated Prezi was the freemium model which allowed anyone to sign up, create a presentation and give us feedback. We had a large number of students signing up and I think that this helped grow the awareness. As the students graduated and started working, they brought the product with them and convinced their managers that this tool could set them apart from their competition.

We are not only differentiating ourselves from our competition, we are also helping our users

differentiate themselves from their competition. People are motivated by the outcome of their presentations. If they are putting people to sleep, they are not doing what they meant to be doing. The differentiator is that our users feel much more engaging. They can have a conversation with their audience much more interactively than they could with a slide-based presentation. It really comes down to this spatial thinking that really differentiates us from turning pages in a book or projecting sheets of paper on a wall. Humans think in spatial relationships and this is why Prezi resonated as a spatial medium for a lot of people to communicate in a way that was similar to the way that they think.

### **5. What role does product user testing play when it comes to improving your product and making it stick?**

We perform user testing at all stages of the product development process. Sometimes, we are in a very early stage and have some mockups, we sometimes bring people into the office, etc. During interviews and user tests, we'll observe some patterns and start to identify things that may not exist yet. This is how the future is born. Once we have those feature ideas or problem ideas, we'll try to learn more about those problem areas through more interviews.



**Successful products are continuously used because they cater to users' needs.**

User testing comes when we start trying to figure out a solution. We'll whiteboard it and then create some rough wireframes. After that, we'll put it in a tool like Invision or create a mockup

and depending upon the team, we may even make a prototype. Then, we'll spend time with 3-5 users or potential users and try to tweak it based on the feedback we get. As we go through that process we'll get to a point where roadblocks for the user appear less and less. This is when we try to build the first iteration of the product. We will release an alpha version or release a version to a certain group of people and then do another round of user testing. Now that it is integrated with the product and in a new context, you can use it on your actual desktop while other things are happening and you can see how it interacts with the whole ecosystem. From there, we'll see where we can improve it. We'll look at usage data and ask questions about the patterns that emerge. These things inform our backlog, so it's a big full circle. This is a great example of how big data (usage data) can complement your thick data (observational data) of user testing.

### **6. What are the methods you'd recommend for user testing/user experience research?**

My favorite methods are diary studies which allow researchers to see people's behavior in the "wild." We can follow a group of people, ask them to send us pictures or screenshots from their phone. Everyday, we will require a response to a small questionnaire depending on the intensity of the subject matter. We collect moments of people's daily lives. For example, I studied social shopping a couple of years ago. As part of that, we studied a group of women for a couple of weeks. It wasn't specifically about their shopping habits, but more about what they were doing on their mobile device: some were working professionals, some were moms, some were students, etc. In the end, we started seeing patterns in the way they were curating things, asking for feedback from friends and the games they were playing - that was important information for the shopping app we developed. Therefore, it was important that we used diary studies before even building the app so that we

knew exactly what people were already doing on their devices and how we could fit into that context.

My colleague also started creating love/ breakup letters. Users could choose which of the two letters they would write to our product. Framing the feedback in that way gives the feeling of a personal connection. It's easy to talk about a product from a distance but when you frame it like a relationship it's easier to see where people's needs weren't being met and where they got really excited so you start to learn about the arch of the relationship and you start to see where the real pain points are. This is another fun and interesting way to receive feedback.

Another thing I like to do is card sorting. Maybe you are trying to name a product or identify which parts of your product are most important. With this method you can get the participant to interact with your content. I find that they are more engaged and much more inclined to give you real/genuine feedback when they are focused on a task that makes them consider their values.

Recruiting users is also a difficult topic. The most interesting thing that I discovered lately is that if you need people to talk about various products and you don't have a huge budget to recruit them, you can always go to the mall. Chances are, there is a store in the mall that caters closely to a group of people in your target market. Stand there, be polite, offer an incentive. That's a really great way of getting people to offer you insights. You can also do snowball recruiting. These are the methods that I like the most.

## About Callie Wheeler

Callie is a UX flavored Product Manager currently working at Prezi in Budapest. Having spent the last 5 years in San Francisco working for various tech companies and startups as a UX Researcher and Product Manager, she has honed her skills in making things happen. As a researcher at social shopping site ModCloth and Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART), Callie utilized a broad range of techniques to provide insight and feedback on strategy and product direction from name to value proposition. As a product manager Callie has worked on acquisition, conversion, network effects, mobile apps and more.

## About Prezi

Prezi is the presentation platform that helps you connect more powerfully with your audience and customers. Unlike slides, Prezi's single, interactive canvas encourages conversation and collaboration, making your overall presentation more engaging, persuasive, and memorable. Prezi's latest offering, Prezi Business, moves Prezi into the modern workplace by meeting the needs of today's agile companies. Founded in 2009, and with offices in San Francisco, Budapest and Mexico City, Prezi now fosters a community of over 75 million users and over 260 million prezis around the world. Its investors include Accel Partners, Spectrum Equity and TED conferences. For more information, please visit [prezi.com](http://prezi.com)



As you're building a product and experimenting with it, it's really important to respect your existing users.

**Justin Gallagher**  
VP of Product  
at Trello



# The Road from Good Ideas to Useful Products is Paved with User Feedback

**1. Could you give us some insights from back in the day when you came up with the idea behind Trello? Trello has been around for a couple of years now and we'd like to know what you thought about user feedback then.**

Justin Gallagher: I started working at Fog Creek Software about six and a half years ago. I was lucky enough to be one of the first people to work on what turned into Trello. We had the idea

bouncing around internally for a while. Basically, we felt like it was too hard to get everybody at the company on the same page. After a couple of years, we got to the point where Trello was growing really quickly and we decided to split it out to be its own company.

We worked on it in private beta for about nine months -- from January to September 2011. We only had a handful of users then and we

tried to stay in pretty close contact with them throughout. The original group was mostly comprised of people we knew -- friends of ours at Stack Overflow, family, other people we knew in the industry.

In the early days, we were trying to figure out what the product even was. We experimented a lot. We changed things, tried removing some things we already had. Sometimes we would get rid of a feature as an experiment but nobody would even notice. That was a pretty good indication that people didn't use that feature.

Other times, things were different. I distinctly remember when we changed the activity feed in the sidebar of the board. As soon as we made that change, we got a bunch of emails from our users. Even with that small number of users we had then.

They told us that they really relied on it. That was obviously a good indicator that they were actually using that aspect of Trello. They noticed very quickly that it had changed and that helped us understand more about the value Trello was providing for them.

This is the kind of thing you can still do in the early stages, when you have a pre-release product. However, it's hard to do the same kind of experimentation later when you have paying users, users relying on your product for their day to day work. As you're building a product and experimenting with it, it's really important to respect your existing users.

**2. What do you think about showing potential customers a prototype for a product? I mean, sketches, mockups, low-fi wireframes... do you think they can provide valuable feedback for a product they might be willing to use later on?**

I think you can do it, but you just have to be aware of what you're doing and watch out for certain pitfalls. The way we started Trello was that we built a clickable prototype very quickly.

Back at Fog Creek, we had these things called Creek Weeks. You could take a week per year off to work on anything. The only rule was that on Friday, you had to show the rest of the company what you worked on that week.

So myself and Bobby Grace, took a joint Creek Week and came up with what was essentially a clickable prototype. It was an HTML and JavaScript app. It had no database, all of the data was hardcoded, and just had a few jQuery events on there. No fancy front-end frameworks or anything. But we had something we could show to people and we could explain to them how we imagined it would work. That was valuable and we were able to do that much quicker than we could have done it if we waited for a fully functioning app.

I think that you can show people stuff at any stage. You can have a conversation: "If I solve this problem for you in this way, would that be valuable? Would you use it? Why not?" But, you should realize that when you're doing that, it's very easy for two people to think they're on the same page about something when they're actually not. I've seen this again and again, as we've worked together as a team, and I've seen it talking to users, in all kinds of communications really. You're using the same words and you think you're saying the same thing, but both people have different pictures in their mind about what the actual solution might look like. So I think that by showing things in higher fidelity, you reduce the chances for misunderstandings. A sketch is better than just words, a wireframe is better than a sketch, a prototype is better than a wireframe, and an actual app of some sort is better than a prototype.

Still, you have to balance that clarity with the effort involved. If it takes you several months to come up with an app, you'd probably want to have some kind of direction before that, some kind of an idea if this thing is even useful or interesting to anybody out there. That is



balancing the efforts you put in with the certainty of feedback you're gonna get. If you just show someone a sketch and ask: "Hey, what do you think about this?" you will get some feedback but you should be aware that even though they said it's a good idea, it doesn't necessarily mean that they're going to use what you build for them.

Details are essential. Look at Trello. It's not the first app in the world to do what it does. But, I think the way it's executed and the details we put into it are what differentiate it. Most of that stuff is not included in the wireframe or in the sketch, and I think this can make the difference between a product that exists and a couple of people use it and a product that many people really love.



**By showing things in higher fidelity, you reduce the chances for misunderstandings.**

**3. On your blog there was a post stating that, in the early days, you overlooked feedback from the developers, designers and tech people. How has this changed now that Trello has become a global tool?**

We DID kind of overlook feedback, particularly developer feedback back in the day, and that was semi-intentional. As I said in that blog post, we most likely took things a bit too far. Traditionally, Fog Creek made tools for software developers. We built up an audience developers who were fans of the company, its founders, and its products.

With Trello, we were purposefully trying to build a tool for a broader group of people. That group certainly included developers but we just didn't

want to limit it to only developers. We knew that when we would launch it, the first people who would sign up would be the Fog Creek fans, and that meant mostly developers. We knew that if we listened only to that feedback, we'd end up with a tool that was really great for developers, probably, but maybe at the expense of other users. We wanted to build a horizontal tool that could be used by anyone collaborating on any kind of project. There was valuable feedback from developers that applied to all users and we accidentally ignored it because we took things too far. We realized that and developed better ways to get feedback from a cross-section of users.

Now, we have lots and lots of users, so we get a lot of feedback, both from developers and non-developers and it's super-valuable. We still have to be aware, as we get a lot of feature requests from people who are having very specific pain-points or problems, that many of these users have used other apps and they're suggesting solutions that they're familiar with from those products. The thing with Trello is that we're not trying to compete on a feature over feature level; we have a vision of the product and it's a very simple, flexible tool that has pieces you can combine in different ways to manage software development, marketing, an editorial calendar, or plan a birthday party, track a sales pipeline, and so on.

That feature request feedback is important and valuable. But we need to do the hard work of digging into it, understand the root issue there, and coming up with something that solves that problem, but hopefully also solves related problems that other users are having.

So that's how we are doing things now, we get plenty of feedback in many ways. When we think about implementing a new feature, we sometimes handpick a group of users and show them what we want to do and get feedback on that. Sometimes, we ship new things to a

percentage of people to have them try things out, other times we'll just do user interviews with relevant groups.

#### **4. How do you see cultural diversity when it comes to developing a product such as Trello or implementing new features? Do you take diversity and the different accessibility into account?**

These aspects are important; as I said earlier, we imagine Trello as a broadly horizontal tool that is easy to use by pretty much anybody working on something with other people. We are, therefore, careful to make sure that Trello is accessible to everyone.

For a long time we've had a color blind mode that adds a pattern to the colored labels in Trello. This helps people who have difficulty differentiating certain colors use labels to add data to their cards. Also, our iOS app takes advantage of the accessibility capabilities in iOS. We're not perfect at this by any stretch, but it's something we feel is important, and we're always looking for ways to do better.

#### **5. Could you share some insights as to the challenges of developing a multi-platform?**

It's certainly challenging, especially when you think that a few years back, if you could develop a web app, that was a really good start. With the addition of modern frameworks, you could build this app on your own, or with a friend, or whatever. This lowered the barrier to creating a product, as people were able to build their own web apps much more quickly than in the past.

You can still do this, but nowadays, I think people's expectations are much higher. They do expect you to have a mobile app too. You can wrap a web app and make do, I don't think it provides as good an experience. We don't use this approach. All our apps are native, for a better, smoother experience.

On the other hand, Trello is a very visual

product, with this concept of boards and lists and cards. Their spatial arrangement, and how they're positioned relative to each other is a really important part of the product. It's how the product helps deliver a sense of perspective.

While that works well on a computer screen, be it a 13" or a 30" one. When you get down to a phone screen that's 4 or 5 inches, that's a harder thing to do. This is a nut we haven't quite cracked yet. We are still working on this and thinking about how to do things really well.

People use phones and computers in different manners. A Trello board can remain open on a computer screen while you're doing something else, whereas a phone is an entirely different story. Maybe you're in a line, or bored, or want to quickly capture a new idea, or want to check on a notification you just got. Also it depends on each platform because how users interact with their devices and what they feel is useful and valuable to do with Trello is different platform to platform.

The most recent platform we got on to is Slack, with a Slack app, and that's a whole different concept there. It's a conversational interface, mostly text-based, very real-time. It's a new challenge.



**Even though they said it's a good idea, it doesn't necessarily mean that they're going to use what you build for them.**

## 6. Any interesting things you could tell us about the Slack bot?

The way I used to think about it was that we were building a Trello integration for Slack. Luckily, smart people on our team convinced me that was totally wrong. The better way to think of it is that Slack represents a platform like iOS or Android and we're building an app for that platform.

We had to think about what people are doing there. What's their use case? What they're doing in relation to Trello and how we can provide things of value for them? We found out that people are sharing links to Trello boards and cards in Slack. That included pointing out to some cards "Hey, I am working on this thing or on that one" so we built a bot that provides a lot of contextually relevant info from Trello and displays it in Slack feed, which is nice.

This increases efficiency. We also took advantage of the buttons Slack enabled you to add and we've got people that can do things on Trello cards from within Slack (add a label, change a due date, stuff like that). Again, that's really useful, you can have a conversation with someone and make changes in real time, and everyone involved can see that. Basically, you keep working and it's very seamless. I wasn't thinking about this initially, but luckily my team changed that.

You don't have to clone your whole product and you don't have to do anything particularly; you have to analyze what people do and how they might use your app seamlessly on that platform in a way that fits within their existing workflow.

## About Justin Gallagher

Justin Gallagher helped design and build the first version of Trello and launched the product at TechCrunch Disrupt in 2011. He now heads up the Product and Design teams at Trello. Justin previously worked as a designer and iOS developer at Fog Creek Software, and as a data analyst and manager at Deloitte Financial Advisory Services.

## About Trello

Trusted by millions, Trello is a visual collaboration tool that creates a shared perspective on any project. Trello's boards, lists and cards enable you to organize and prioritize your personal and work life in a fun, flexible, and rewarding way.

“

It doesn't matter how big you are, some user testing is better than none. Start somehow and don't expect to get it perfect at first. Get into the habit of understanding your users. Sadly, many companies don't invest enough time here, possibly because they're scared of negative feedback - it always hurts when someone destroys your idea.



It doesn't matter how big you are, a little user testing is better than none.

**Leif Singer**  
Engagement Wrangler  
at Automattic

AUTOMATTIC



## Building a Great Product is an Art, and it's Highly Linked to the Company Culture

**1. Automattic has created an ecosystem that has Wordpress at its core. Could you give us some insights on how you perform user testing?**

Leif Singer: On the one hand, we try everything ourselves internally because a product may have very different variations. At first, you build a product for yourself, but at some point, you will build products for other users. At this point, you will have to learn from others using your product and especially from those who fail using your product so that you can learn more from the experience. Given that we are fully remote, we use services that allow us to ask users to test the very generic parts that don't really require domain expertise.

On the other hand, we do user interviews to understand our users' goals better. Most users don't want to build a site or a blog, they want to grow their personal brand or put their coffee shop on the map. We sometimes go to the users' office/shop and build the website together to get a better idea of what it actually means to them.

Then when it comes to quality assurance, we have dedicated teams that look at different aspects of the product development process and these teams aren't the same as those that developed it in the first place. We have a certain team that looks at copywriting, a team that looks at the user flows and tries to break them, and so on. We get feedback from those teams and then fix any issues before we ship something to actual users.

**2. You've told us that your work mainly focuses on the user onboarding for WordPress. What's your overall strategy for onboarding new users? How do you handle the topic of segmentation and how does that reflect the onboarding experience of your users?**

Generally speaking, we are very influenced by the book “Badass: Making Users Awesome” by Kathy Sierra and believe we will be successful when our users are successful. When WordPress helps them reach their goals, they will use it more, recommend it to their friends, and so on.



**In my ideal world, the interface guides the user to produce the best work they can.**

On the tactical side, onboarding could mean different things. We try, for example, to make flows simpler - we try to make doing the right thing obvious or even natural. In my ideal world, the interface guides the user to produce the best work they can, gently nudging them into the direction of what we think are good practices.

One thing we're working on right now is trying to automatically notice if users have not configured certain elements that we consider crucial. And then we'll try to guide them with the help of interactive tours where we don't just tell users what to do, but take them through the experience. In the end, they have to do it all on themselves, teaching them the interface along the way.

For segmentation, we use a couple of dimensions. When users sign up or create a new blog/website, we're asking for information about

them: are they startups that need a landing page or writers that need an author's site or a fashion blog? These choices will influence what themes users will see and what site layout suggestions they will receive - one looks like a gallery, one looks like a blogpost, one looks like a landing page, etc. But we don't ask them, we let them choose for themselves. After they gave us all the information we will generate their website in the background. Therefore, even from the get-go the user will receive an initial website layout that will correspond to their needs. They can then personalize it as they wish.

**3. Does the user onboarding process provide data that is used to optimize the product?**

All the information that we collect about users and their wants is used to improve their website. Additionally, we also look to more aggregate trends that will help us improve everything else. We look at how users are customizing their websites, what kinds of verticals they choose, or whether their theme choice has an influence on retention in the coming days and weeks. These are the elements we usually analyse.

When it comes to user feedback, our support teams are super important for that. They are the first people that get in touch with the users when they have a problem. We have livechat, we have email support, and internally, to help information diffuse between teams, we use a WordPress theme called P2 which basically turns a WordPress theme into a sort of internal Twitter. That's how we let other teams know what we are doing. We ping other teams through our post and they let us know if they identify a problem when it comes to onboarding and so on. I remembered that when I joined Automattic I was intimidated by the P2 because there are a lot of posts and a lot of blogs but in the end I discovered it's really useful and much more manageable than it initially seemed.

**4. Looking back at your experience as a Product Manager in software companies, what are three important learnings that you would share with our readers?**

I worked at different scales, from a 5-person team to a 500-person company, which is very different. So what I discovered is that at first you have to ignore the numbers and focus on qualitative insights. You need to understand what your users want to achieve. Then when you grow larger, you don't want to ignore that, but when you're a little larger you should start caring about the numbers too. This doesn't mean you have to follow the numbers blindly though. At Automattic, we like to say we are not data-driven, but data-informed. If you only look at the numbers and not at the qualitative data you may miss a couple of things you would really want to know.

And finally it doesn't matter how big you are, some user testing is better than none. Start somehow and don't expect to get it perfect at first. Get into the habit of understanding your users. Sadly, many companies don't invest enough time here, possibly because they're scared of negative feedback - it always hurts when someone destroys your idea.

**5. You've once mentioned that the future of work will be distributed. Do you still believe that? If yes, what arguments would you bring that support remote work?**

Yes, I do believe that. The two main arguments for me are: the access to talent (focusing on a specific location will really hurt your ability to grow your team) and the quality of life - remote work offers great flexibility especially if you have a family. My opinion is that there will not be fewer remote positions in the mid-term. In the long term, who knows what will happen. There's also VR and I'm super curious where that will go in the future. When you put on those goggles they take you to a completely different

place. If you could do this with colleagues in a meeting that would open up a whole other level of collaborative remote working opportunities. Before I tried VR I thought that's just a fancy tech bubble but now that I've tried it I think it has real potential to change something fundamental.

**6. What's your opinion on remote user testing and what are some good practices that make it work?**

I think this depends very heavily on the product that you're creating. If you are targeting a very specific niche like factory floor managers that use some sort of device you are developing, then remote testing will be very difficult, and sometimes even impossible. You can test general things like logging in and so on, but the more specific things you will have to experience first-hand in the factory and you can't do those remotely. A large part of research is seeing users experiencing your product, looking at their faces, hearing the confusion in their voices. People who do user testing at Automattic will CC other teams when they identify something that may concern them or that they may be able to improve.

“  
At first, you have to ignore the numbers and focus on qualitative insights.”

**7. Last, if you were to think about building a product that users will love, where would you start and why?**

There are frameworks like Lean Startup or Jobs To Be Done that will help you build a great product, but they will only get you that far. I think a large part of it is still more of an art than

a science. Because of this, the most important thing is having a culture of fast iterations: talk to users, try to understand what they need, build something, and test whether your product addresses these needs. Learn and build, learn and build. The faster you can go through this cycle, the higher your chances become that you're building something that people will actually need and love. One big challenge is to integrate this into a company's culture and not lose it when the company grows.

### **Do you also need to look at the competition?**

Sometimes it can make sense to look at accepted practices, learn from them, and realize you don't need to reinvent the wheel when creating your product. For example, both Facebook and GitHub saw that Slack's reactions worked well, so they introduced something similar and now have a better product for it. But obsessing over what your competition is doing isn't healthy. So on the one hand you want to use what others have learned, but on the other hand you want to innovate. I think you need to treat competition like another but potentially very emotional data point that you need to be very careful with, as it's easy to overreact to it.

## About Leif Singer

Leif works on making WordPress.com easier to use for new users. He has been a startup co-founder, a Web developer, a product manager, has a PhD in computer science, did academic research on how software developers collaborate, plays a bunch of instruments, and is passionate about building Web products.

## About Automattic

Automattic wants to make the web a better place. Their family includes Jetpack, WooCommerce, Longreads, WordPress.com, and more. With Automattic, users can create beautiful websites and blogs for free and enhance those sites with our premium services. A fully distributed company, Automattic has over 506 staff in more than 50 countries.





Empathy is key to building great products that have good retention rates.

**Thomas Schranz**  
Founder & CEO  
at Blossom



# Great Products Turn Users into Better Versions of Themselves

## 1. What do you think makes a successful product nowadays?

The way I think about products is very much inspired by Kathy Sierra. In the sense that a great product enables you to become a better version of yourself.

For example if you think of cameras whether they are digital or analogue, in a sense their job is to help you capture moments. Yet, when you look at most instruction manuals, they read more like a technical documentation about the camera's functionality than what it could be: a handbook that makes you a better photographer.

A great product is more than just the 'product'

itself. It is everything that is directly and indirectly related to its use. Its raison d'être is to transform you into something that you didn't think was achievable. If your product can create this experience, then it is magical.

I'd call that successful.

## 2. How does one know when the right time for launching a software product is and how can one make sure that one doesn't miss it?

One way to think of timing a product release is to remind yourself that whatever your vision of the product is today, it will rarely be the initial version that you go to market with.

The iPhone, for example, was a pretty impressive product when it got released. Yet it did not come with a front facing camera, nor with a GPS module, nor with support for 3G.

At the time, Apple definitely had a better version of the iPhone in mind already. Yet, they chose to release a reasonable package that they could get into the hands of their customers.

If you can ship a viable subset of the product you envisioned weeks, months or even years earlier than the whole thing, it can make a lot of sense to do so since you get a chance to learn through feedback and public attention in the meantime. You might even win some customers and partners along the way. Maybe it even enables you to envision a better future product than what you see right now.



**User testing is a great way to gain insight into what kind of expectations your users might have.**

### **3. What role does user testing play when it comes to customer retention?**

Observing how people interact with your product can be eye-opening. For example, it can be difficult to empathize with users who are unfamiliar with your product when you are the person who spent the last few months and years designing it.

It is difficult to get into a beginner's mindset. Yet, most of your users will spend their initial phase of interacting with your product while being unfamiliar with how you designed it and why you did it in this specific way.

Even for advanced users, your product might be difficult to relate to if they are in a different context than you. Just think of all the different ways people use Yelp, Excel and Instagram.

Empathy is key to building great products that have good retention rates. User testing is a great way to gain insight into what kind of expectations your users might have.

### **4. What are the methods you'd recommend for user testing?**

There are so many different methods of user testing depending on what you want to find out, that it is difficult for me to recommend a specific one. As a general advice I'd say it helps to have a good understanding of the part of the customer journey and the level of abstraction you want to gain insight on.

User testing looks quite different if you want to figure out whether your product use case makes sense compared to whether you want to make sure the wording and position of a button is understandable.

“Designed for use” by Lukas Mathis is a great book that covers various ways to do user testing and the kind of insights this helps you gather.

## **About Thomas Schranz**

Thomas Schranz is Co-founder and CEO of [Project Management and Quality Assurance](#), a project management and quality assurance tool used by software companies like Twitter, Drive Now, Netflix and NASA. He also runs Lemmings I/O which is the world's first incubator focused on Facebook Messenger applications.



In the end, it's all about how the product manifests in the wild.

Miloš Lalić  
Head of Product  
at Typeform

Typeform|



# Starting with a Problem is Not the Only Way to Succeed

**1. Where does innovation come into play in the context of customer retention? Are customers more likely to stay with a brand if there's a slow development of reliable products or if the brand innovates permanently without thinking of the consequences?**

Miloš Lalić: It highly depends on the company and on customers' expectations. We've always attracted people who wanted something different and we didn't want the idea behind Typeform to be connected to that of a regular form builder or form tool. I'm not referring only to early adopters since we've passed that stage already. People like the idea that it's something completely different. For our customers specifically, it's not only that they are used to us experimenting with things and bringing something new, they kind

of expect for us to continue. For our retention, this is crucial because they saw what we can do once so they expect it now.

**2. If you were to start the company tomorrow, what approach would you follow?**

Let me tell you the story of Typeform so that you know how everything started. Typeform wasn't planned to be an alternative solution to forms. It was actually a project that our founders did for a company that's in the bathroom business and that wanted a solution in their showrooms to engage people and gather their feedback and get them onto a mailing list. So they created something that wasn't even Typeform in the beginning. It was an interactive UI that worked

in the showrooms by displaying one question at a time which felt like a conversation. This was a successful project and soon they realised that this was something that could work in many other places. Consequently, they started iterating a bit, creating different versions, bringing in more people and making it work on any type of screen. People liked it. This is when our founders realised that they had something bigger than what they were trying to build initially.

People usually start by focusing on fixing one particular problem. It would seem obvious: forms were outdated, difficult to fill out, UIs were boring, had no good completion rate. Trying to solve this would seem logical. But that is not how it happened. It came out from a totally different situation and was then transferred to solving another problem. This is the potential learning for someone starting from a problem. It's a good way to start but I would suggest to zoom out and see if there is something more universal that can be built, whether it can tackle more markets, whether it can do more things or do the same things for more people if presented in a different way. This is the way that non-planned innovation happens.

**3. User experience design is a crucial element that determines the success or failure of a software product. However, some companies are still confused on how to take advantage of user experience for onboarding users for example. What would you say user experience is and is NOT?**

Ideally, you design a product that doesn't even need onboarding. The truth is that, in the world of complex products, onboarding is something that you can't really avoid. If I can say what User Experience is NOT, it's not a set of visual features or flows or properties. UX is a process that needs to be applied in everything you do inside and around product development. It's a way to do things and not just a set of rules that one needs to follow. It's a process of listening to your customers, testing things out, iterating, experimenting, failing, learning and then repeating the cycle.



**Functionality is what a user can achieve and design is how and maybe why.**

**4. What do you think are some good examples of UX?**

The market decides. It's not something that people can define or say "Aha, I like this because the UX is good". It's a feeling you have after using a product that makes you feel good. You feel that things are flowing the way they should be. To measure that is impossible. The main way to see if it's working is by showing it to people. In the end, it depends on the situation that the user is in, the market segment, the type of use, how they are using it... In the end, it's all about how it manifests in "the wild".

**5. What's the most important aspect that should be taken into account when building a successful software product and why?**

I think it's about forgetting the fact that it's software - code, features - and remember you are actually working with people. These people are creating relationships within the company, thinking about the people you are helping. In general, it's not about functionality or code, it's about zooming out and seeing what people want to achieve and making their lives easier. This should be everyone's focus within the company.

**6. How do you conduct user testing at Typeform? And if you could change anything regarding the way in which user testing is being carried out nowadays, what would that be and why?**

We are lucky to have founders that are very UX focused. In the beginning everything was very top-down, so nothing passed into production

before any of the founders had a look at it with a very critical UX eye. Nowadays, we are implementing a bottoms-up approach in product teams that are cross-functional in our company and focused on the user journey. Those teams consist of product, engineering, QA, UX and UI people. UX is not a separate department, we now have people working directly with developers and product teams, thus making it part of the product development process.

In terms of process, we try to do it at all levels. It looks more or less like this: if we're designing something really complex we start with a small group focused on building a prototype; we then show the prototype to people from outside the company via remote testing. People are aware that it is a prototype. Then we do an internal group to test the quality and we start to get some quantitative data as well. We build something that is more advanced than the prototype, release it to our employees (around 50 users that are very critical) and we get some qualitative feedback from them. The next stage will be "Invite only" when we throw that new improvement into the "wild" in a controlled way. We choose the users we want to participate and we contact them. This time it's not a prototype so people look at it more critically. This are different levels of feedback that we obtain.

If I could improve one thing about user testing, it would be doing more in-person testing. This is considered generally expensive and not done enough but it's something I feel we can do more of. Another thing would be to create a more holistic strategy around user testing.

### **7. When building a product, what is more important, design or functionality?**

These terms are more and more being used together and even interchangeably. For me, functionality is what a user can achieve and design is how and maybe why. If we define it like that, I would choose design as a priority. If you

have more functionality but people don't know why they should use your product, then that's a problem. When you have less functionality you can improve it. If people's problems are not being met, that's an entirely different issue.



**If I could improve one thing about user testing, it would be doing more in-person testing.**

### **8. Back in the days companies would have their own special people working in special places and pushing ideas and products down the pipeline to passive consumers. Nowadays, ideas are flowing back up the pipeline from consumers to creators. Would you say that this is what's triggering the actual boom in innovative products?**

Definitely. The departure from top-down management and the acceptance of agile organizations that are living organisms formed from autonomous well-resourced sub-organisms is what's driving this revolution. It's the direct implication of the decision makers that are not at the top management, but within the teams that are creating the solutions. The role of the CEO is to give direction and space for teams to experiment.

We use customer feedback in many ways. We use it to look at bugs - a really important feedback loop - if something is not working for users this is our top priority. In case of asking for more feedback, we have 1 million users and mostly everyone has ideas. We have to make many people happy and very few people unhappy. The idea of making everyone happy is probably unreachable, but we use the 80-20 rule and it works pretty well. Losing some of your

user base because you can't make them happy is not the worst thing.

**9. How do you create a product that would disrupt the industry and create new use cases? What's the process to be followed here?**

As I've mentioned in our story it wasn't really intentional for Typeform, so this is definitely just one way to do it. Forms have been around since forever, but in this kind of approach no one came up with this type of solution, or maybe they did but they didn't make it to market. It's also about timing and about a bit of luck, so you never really know. Starting with a problem is definitely a good start but it's not the only way to succeed.

## About Miloš Lalić

Miloš Lalić is Head of Product at Typeform, making sure the bar is set high to achieve the grand vision of making things more human by creating extraordinary tools for user interaction. After releasing a "form building tool" which triggered a reaction "this doesn't feel like a form" from most users, the challenge was to evolve the product, scale the team and keep innovating in parallel. Miloš took Typeform's product management from a small development team working directly with founders to a structured organisation of fast-delivering, cross-functional metric-driven teams. Before Typeform, he founded a few startups, 2 of them he has taken to an exit. He also worked as an intrapreneur, inspiring and managing innovation in bigger companies.

## About Typeform

is a web-based platform for interacting with humans. It enables you to create anything from engaging, interactive, and conversational online forms to surveys, and much more.

# Takeaways



Getting feedback from users could happen even before having an idea for the next product. This can be done by bringing in a target group in order to learn about problems users are facing. By doing so, product managers avoid to solve problems that don't even exist.

A product that provides a remarkable user experience helps companies differentiate themselves from the competition. In turn, these products lead to repeat usage, increased brand loyalty, and a lower risk of failing in a busy market.

There are numerous ways of conducting user testing throughout each product development stage: personal or remote, individual or group testing, online or offline. However, you probably

want to collect qualitative feedback for improving user experience and general feel of the product.

During testing it is important to avoid biased languages and to install a positive testing environment, in which participants feel comfortable enough to express their opinion.

User testing after all is a marathon. Testing should be deeply integrated into the development process and repeated - in various forms - in different project stages.

It is not a solution for every problem, but it can bring us closer to build products users love.

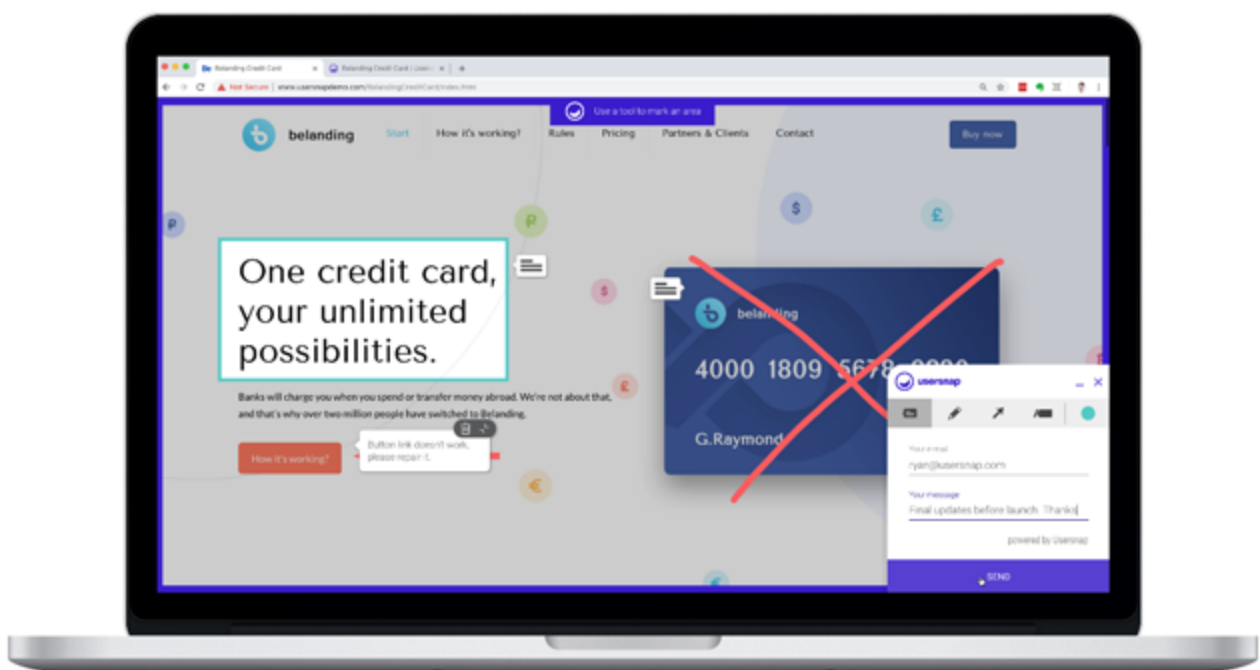
**“It’s not enough that we build products that function, that are understandable and usable, we also need to build products that bring joy and excitement, pleasure and fun, and yes, beauty to people’s lives.”**

**Don Norman**

Director of The Design Lab at  
University of California, San Diego

# Get Your Trial: How You Can Use Usersnap for User Testing

Usersnap is a feedback solution which lets gets you high quality feedback from testers and users. The main idea is to communicate via screenshots, which can be annotated with virtual sticky notes, highlighters and virtual pens directly in your browser.



The advantage: You immediately see on the screen what your users suggest or want to improve. Instead of sending multiple emails or using another form of verbal communication, feedback gets shown instead of explained.

## “Show, don’t tell”

Our customer Hawaiian Airlines, for example, uses Usersnap to improve their booking process and get qualitative feedback from their users. Erste Bank uses Usersnap in their mobile banking app George to get qualitative feedback from their users.





Usersnap works seamlessly with the solutions you and your team already use. Like Slack, Asana, Zendesk and many more. We help you to stay organized. Every day.

Usersnap is great for teams of all sizes. Are you managing 80 web projects at the same time? Usersnap got you covered, no matter how small or large your projects and your teams are. No endless email conversation ever again.

Want to improve user testing by collecting qualitative feedback and bug reports straight from your target audience?

Sign up for trial and try Usersnap for free!

**SIGN UP**

