NearForm

The Five-Day Guidebook on Design Sprints

Discover how NearForm runs
a week of design sprints

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The Design Sprint

In today's digital business, new and better quality software needs to be developed and deployed at ever faster rates. Originating from GV[1], the design sprint is a five-day process for solving problems and testing ideas before commencing the build process.

> "Working together in a sprint, you can shortcut the endless-debate cycle and compress months of time into a single week."
>
> Google Ventures[1]

At nearForm, we embrace this design process and help organizations run effective five-day design sprints with the goal of building better software that delivers tangible business outcomes.

This guidebook describes how to run design sprints. The activities and methods in this sprint are fundamentally defined and designed to help facilitate shared understanding between a group of people, and thus help in building better software. Each activity has a suggested time duration indicated on the top right corner of each page.

Over the course of five days, the team, which is a mixture of customer members and nearForm facilitators, clearly defines the problem and then comes up with customer-oriented, user-centric solutions.

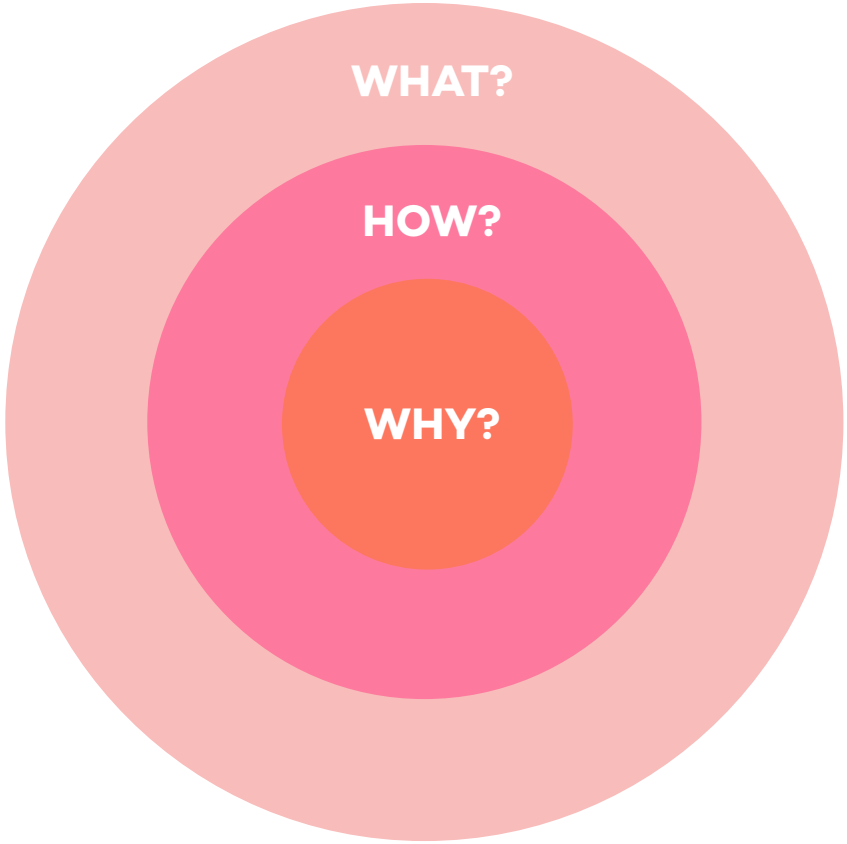
Running a design sprint also gives us the opportunity to get a clear understanding of business goals, identify technical opportunities, and prioritise user needs.

[1]Google Ventures

What is a Design Sprint?

A design sprint is a five-day workshop for answering three critical business questions through design, prototyping, and testing ideas with customers.

1. **What** problem are you trying to solve?
2. **How** do you expect to solve it?
3. **Why** is this problem worth solving?



The “why” is the most important question as it helps organisations understand the value of solving the problem and facilitates building the business case, whether it’s for investors or new prospects.
Answering these three questions also creates shared clarity and understanding, making a design sprint an excellent way to kick off a project.

The Agenda

	Day 1 Understand	Day 2 Ideate	Day 3 Sketch	Day 4 Prototype	Day 5 Validate
Goals					
08:45	Introductions	Agenda for the Day	Agenda for the Day	Agenda for the Day	Agenda for the Day
09:00	**Business Opportunity** Discussions Set Product Goals Personas	**Storyboard** Individual Brainstorming Dot Voting	**Decide** Decide on winning sketches	**Prototype** Assign roles Prototyping	**Test** Facilitate Interviews
13:00					
14:00	**Define** User Journey Map Choose a target Technology deep dive Business pitch practice Retrospective	**Storyboard** Individual Storyboarding Contact interview candidates for Day 5 Business pitch practice Retrospective	**Sketch** Collaborative Sketching Business pitch practice Technical backlog Retrospective	**Prototype** Trial Run Business pitch practice Retrospective	**Analyse** Discuss interviews Sprint wrap up Discuss next engagement
17:30					
Outputs	Problem statement Persona Customer Journey	Business pitch Storyboards List of users for testing	Refined setches Content for prototype	Prototype Technical Backlog Business pitch	Interview recordings or notes Insights from reviews Decision on follow up actions

Getting Ready

There are two must-haves that help get the Design Sprint off to a good start:

1. Share existing knowledge and material
Examples of this could be user research, a business plan, analytics data, or competitor analysis. Sharing this before the design sprint begins introduces more common ground and helps with a smoother introduction.

2. Prepare a dedicated space
Book a dedicated, bright, and spacious room for the entire length of the workshop, so you can commence each day without having to set up again. It is also important to stock up on sticky notes, markers and flip charts, as well as having access to a whiteboard in this space.

Day 1

Understand

Problem statement
Project Goals
Persona
Customer Journey
Focus
Technology & Data

Problem Statement

At the start of a design sprint, the team spends time sharing and discussing the challenge at hand. Pooling knowledge and perspectives helps build a shared understanding of the problems and challenges faced by the users, the business, and the project's domain. This sets the stage for the project and for the five days.

Discussions may include:

- The project vision, business goals,business strategy
- Customer insights
- The existing product experience
- Analytics and usability reports
- Competitor landscape
- Technology considerations and opportunities
- Logistic and financial insights
- Marketing insights

>| Activity
Build a shared understandingof the problem space.

90min Day 1

Set Product Goals

Setting product goals early in the design sprint helps the team align on a common understanding of the project initiative.

Goals should focus on the user needs, and business objectives in the context of technical and financial considerations.

For each goal:

- Decide if it is a short-term or a long-term goal.
- Specify a type of user.
- Specify a capability.
- Specify a measurable market differentiator.

These goals guide and motivate the team throughout the sprint.

In **3 months a developer,**
[Term] [User]

can **identify specific issues in a Node JS app,**
[Capability]

in **3 days without deep domain expertise.**
[Measurable market differentiator]

>| Activity
Write the product goals on the whiteboard.

30min **Day 1**

The Personas

While setting the goals, you've identified key user types. It's now time to capture as much information as you can to better understand who will use the product. We do that by
creating personas.

A persona is a realistic representation of a person that represents a major user group for a product. Personas help to plan a product or feature from the perspective of the user or persona.

How to create a User Persona?

1.Divide a large sheet into sections: Description, Activities, Motivations and Frustrations.
2. Give the persona a name and describe their role.
3. Each team member individually writes notes that describe characteristics of the personas (motivation, activities, goals, technical level, etc.)
4. Then each sticky note is put on the sheet, in the related section.
5. The team discusses and fills in any gaps collaboratively.

>| Activity
Sketch some Personas.

90min **Day 1**

Customer Journey Map

A User Journey Map helps the team collectively understand an end user's current workflow by breaking down the steps they go through to achieve a given goal. It also helps describe a better experience by addressing pain points and points of opportunity as part of a new product idea.

How to create a User Journey Map?

- Choose a persona to use as your perspective for the journey map.
- Draw six rows and label each: Phases, Doing, Thinking, Happy moments, Pain points, Opportunities.
- Fill in the phases by placing sticky notes with key experiences relating to that phase for your chosen user.
- Doing this for each phase will give you a step-by-step breakdown of your chosen user group's world.

>| Activity
Make a User Journey Map on the whiteboard.

90min Day 1

Focus of the Week

How to create a User Persona?

With the personas and user journey map done, you now have an overview of what the big picture looks like. You've identified who your users are and what goes on in his/her world. In many cases, the challenges are plentiful and complex so we use this step to decide what the focus of the week will be. Dot Voting is used to make the decision.

Things to consider:

- The most important user and the critical moment of that user's experience.
- The biggest risk and opportunity.

How does Dot Voting work?

- Everyone receives a number of dot stickers.
- Review the material.
- Vote in silence for one customer and one event.

>| Activity
Vote in silence for one persona & event.

30min **Day 1**

Technology and Data Deep Dive

Depending on your objective for the Design Sprint, an optional part of the week is doing a technology and data deep dive. This part is often a side bar between the technical people in the room. At nearForm, the conversation covers our typical delivery process as well as a project's specific needs.

Things to be discussed in this sidebar are:

- Security concerns.
- Data privacy concerns.
- Data discussions: What is it? Where does it come from? How is it processed? How is it stored?
- High level architecture.

As a result of this discussion, and as the project is shaped during the week, the team can get a full understanding of the business and technical challenges it faces for this product. A logical next step would be to create a backlog of features with a rough time estimate.

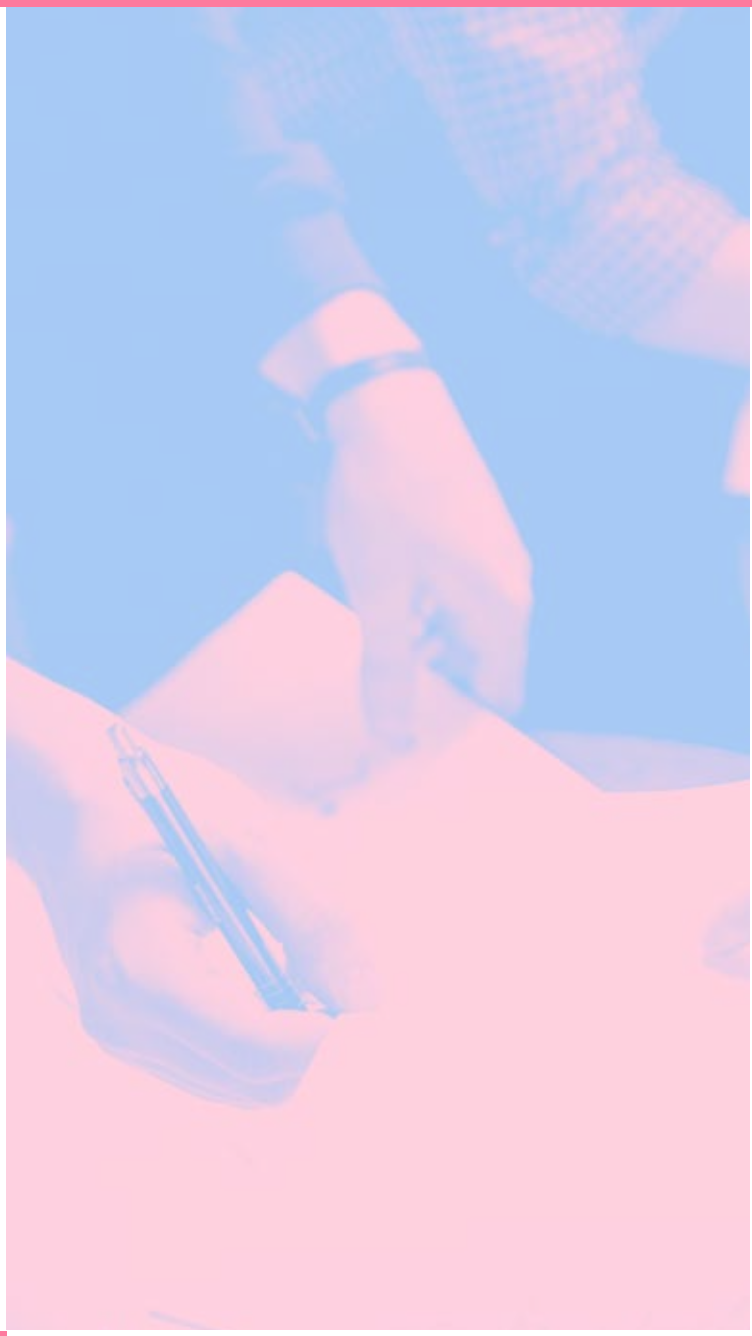
>| Activity
Write technology related details.

60min Day 1

Day2

Ideate

Brainstorming
Dot Voting
Storyboarding



Individual Brainstorming

After the first day, you should have your goals set for the week and a strong idea of the challenge. With this in mind, the team is now asked to rapidly brainstorm big ideas.

Sketching is the most effective way to communicate abstract ideas. You do not need to be an artist to do this!
You are mostly drawing boxes and stick figures. Ideas are more important than drawing skills!

How to brainstorm ideas?

- On one sticky note write a brief overview of an idea or solution for a persona/pain point pair.
- On a second sticky note draw a sketch that describes the solution. Sketches can be an interface or a user performing an action.
- Create as many as you can in the allotted time.

3hrs **Day 2**

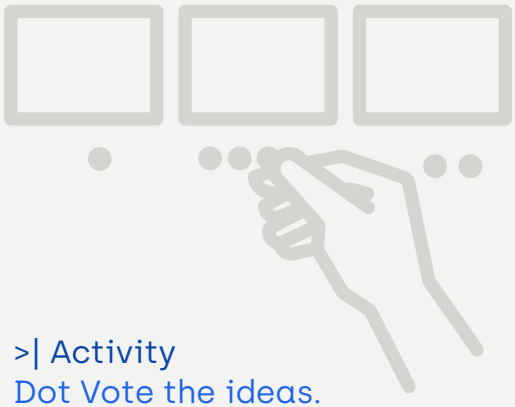
Dot Voting

Dot Voting helps the team decide which ideas are important and feasible.

How to do Dot Voting?

- Place ideas on the wall.
- Don't talk.
- Look at the solution.
- Put dots on the most exciting ideas.
- Place any questions or concerns on sticky notes.

In parallel of this activity, we recommend you start contacting 5 people who will be needed for day five's user testing. Each candidate will be needed for an hour.



>| Activity
Dot Vote the ideas.

30min Day 2

Individual Storyboarding

The ideas with the most votes are storyboarded. Storyboarding is a way to expand on an idea by telling a story in 6 frames from beginning to end without too much detail.

How to create a Storyboard?

- Place six sticky notes on a piece of paper. On each sticky note draw a quick sketch and corresponding caption.
- Draw what customers see as they interact with the product. In this way you can communicate how customers move through the solution.

By the end of the session, you should have one storyboard per participant.

>| Activity
Dot Vote the ideas.

3hrs

Day 2

Day3

Sketch

Decide
Sketch

Decide

After day two's production of sketches, it's time to decide which ones have the best chance of achieving the long-term goal.

This involves a 7 step process that avoids lengthy debate:

1. Tape the solution sketches done on Day 2 to the wall.
2. Each person puts dots on the most exciting ideas.
3. Place any questions or concerns on sticky notes below the idea.
4. Each person presents their idea and reviews questions or concerns.
5. Each person privately votes for the best idea.
6. Each person explains their vote.
7. The ideas with the most votes are the ideas that will be storyboarded.

>| Activity
Decide on the winning sketches

3hrs

Day 3

Sketch

The best ideas are woven together into one master story that represents the entire team's thinking. The storyboard is used to plan your prototype.

Here are some guidelines to sketch your storyboard:

- **Nominate someone to draw.**
- Draw a 15 box grid on the whiteboard.
- Opening scene: Think about the context where your customer encounters the product.
- Keep it simple.
- Draw the first frame and then the next, discussing each step as a team.
- Use the sticky notes from the winning sketches and place them accordingly.
- When you come across a gap - don't fill it in unless it is critical to the idea. If it needs to be filled use something from your "maybe-later" sketches.
- Don't try to perfect written content. Use what you have or fill in the detail later.

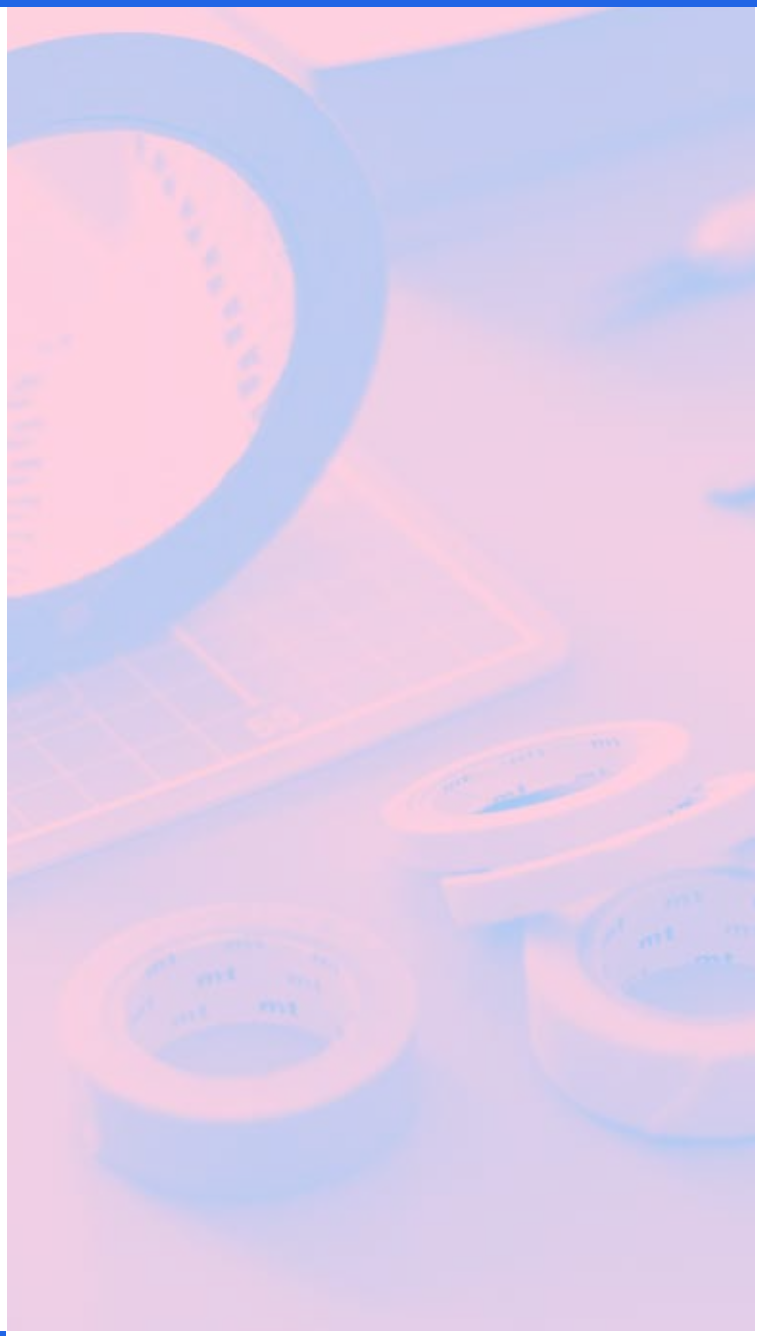
>| Activity
Sketch the final storyboard

3hrs **Day 3**

Day4

Prototype

Assign Roles
Prototype



Assign Roles

With the sketches done during Day 3, the skeleton of the prototype should be clear to everyone. It is now time for the entire team to focus on building the prototype.

Each team member chooses a suitable role:

- The Maker creates the screens.
- The Stitcher collects assets from the Makers and combines them into a flow.
- The Writer captures the content.
- The Asset Collector supplies the Makers with visual and data content.
- The Interviewer prepares for tomorrow's user interviews.
- The ideas with the most votes are the ideas that will be storyboarded.

>| Activity
Each team member chooses a suitable role.

30min **Day 4**

Prototype

The storyboard removes all the guesswork about what to include in the prototype.

How to create a prototype?

- Designers choose suitable tools.
- Follow the storyboard.
- Include just enough detail to generate genuine reactions from the test participant.
- Team members contribute the finer details such as assets, copy and data.
- Do a trial run mid-afternoon to make sure everything is as expected.

>| Link See mobile demo

>| Link See desktop demo

7 hrs **Day 4**

Day5

Validate

User Interviews
Discuss Interviews
Wrap-up and Next Steps

User Interviews

Interviewing customers by watching them react to the prototype informs the team about how the product fulfills the customer's needs.

How to conduct interviews?

- A friendly welcome to start the interview.
- A series of general questions about the customer.
- Introduction to the prototype.
- Detailed tasks to get the customer reacting to the prototype.
- A quick debrief to capture the customer's overarching thoughts and impressions.

Taking interview notes:

- Take notes of interesting things you see and hear.
- Stick the notes on the whiteboard at the end of each interview.
- When the interviews are over place all the notes on the wall and look for overarching patterns.

>| Activity
Interview 5 customers

5hrs **Day 5**

Discuss Interviews

The interviews take place in another room as the team takes notes whilst watching the live recording.

When the sessions are over, the team discusses the results and decides how best to follow up.

Discuss how the prototype aligns with the product goals.
Have a discussion on how best to follow up.

>| Activity
Team takes notes.

60min Day 5

Wrap-up and Next Steps

By the end of the week, you know if the product is suitable for your customers or not. By verifying how you think customers behave when using the product, you are likely to build something they love.

With the backlog estimate in hands, you have visibility and confidence for the next phases of the project.
Typically the next two steps are as follows:

1. A six week design engagement. It is a series of cycles: (1) design, (2) validate and (3) learn. This lets you quickly test assumptions and designs with your audience.

2. A three month agile development phase where the minimum viable product is developed. Every project is different, so we tailor the engagement to fit your goals.

You have an idea for a project? Let's discuss how we can help make it happen.

Contact us
or email us at info@nearform.com

For more information visit our Design page at
nearform.com/digital-product-and-experience-design

And the nearForm Blog at
https://www.nearform.com/blog/