

# How to build apps that work

By [Nick Durrant](#), issued by [Bluegrass Digital](#)

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Stop wasting time and money building apps that nobody wants. Before developing a new app, consider prototyping or mock testing the ideas at an early stage of production. This will help bring great apps to life by pressure testing the ideas beforehand.

Many businesses have great ideas. Building a large app could take many months to develop. This means paying for developers, designers and UX experts.

Once completed and ready to launch, one should always undertake beta testing on a select user group. Only then will one realise the flaws and shortcomings. This could mean major changes or even a rebuild, especially if the UX is confusing and unusable.

When starting a new project, one doesn't always know the exact formula or process that will work at the end. Prototyping is a key tool in design thinking, which is useful and can save you money in the long run. It helps you develop new and meaningful ideas with experimentation and early testing.

There are a lot of inputs that can be undertaken that will improve the overall workflow so it is crucial to acquire inputs from all parties including developers, designers, UX teams and marketing. To prevent clashes about the priority and flow of the work that needs to be done, one can create a prototype for each stage.

Prototyping provides limited functionality so that users can evaluate the proposed ideas for feasibility. It also helps them understand the project requirements and eliminates barriers, allowing them to review and share feedback on the flow and design of the project.

Prototyping enables developers to gain valuable feedback from the users before the final product is delivered.

Sharing ideas is the fastest and most reliable way to get early feedback about what works or not. Not all elements that make up a great idea great are not always visible from the start.

To start off, the aim of prototyping is to fully understand the requirement and the problem that needs to be solved. One can only move onto designing a solution once this is done. Failing to do this could result in building an amazing app that nobody wants.

Experimentation helps one find the right idea at an early stage. Normally in the early stages, prototypes are inexpensive because they have very little detail or functionality. As the idea develops, with more feedback from the users, the prototype gradually evolves into a higher functional version with more detail.

One first needs to determine what needs to be built and then survey people who will be using the app. Repeat this process until the app is appealing to customers and financially viable.



*Nick Durrant, CEO of Bluegrass Digital*

Keep it simple at first and don't worry too much about the finer details. Also, create many variations of prototypes and remember they don't have to perfectly replicate all aspects of the experience. It is possible to prototype the most complex apps with a little bit of creativity.

It's critical to get the prototype into the hands of potential end users at an early stage and see how they interact with it. One can then get better insights that will influence the next iteration of the prototype. The prototype will evolve as one receives feedback from users and can be refined as one gets further into the process.

However, whilst collecting feedback from users, beware not to unintentionally set an expectation for them to tell you what you want to hear. They need to understand that their perspective is important and that the app is being designed to help them.

Various alternatives could also encourage valuable feedback. Users could discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the different prototypes.

As people engage with the prototypes and feedback is given, it's crucial to integrate the ideas into the next iteration and at the same time, one could increase the complexity of the prototype. However, if the feedback is negative, one would need to go back to the drawing board.

There are many creative ways to test and prototype one's ideas. Using a storyboard is one option, it's a visual representation of a sequence of events. Another is role play where one can act out various customer or user scenarios in person to test how your idea would work in action.

Bodystorm is another method, it's a combination of role playing and brainstorming, using empathy to come up with new ideas. Alternatively one could set up a game where users can interact with an idea. This is ideal to see how people act in various contexts.

Concept art can also be an option, illustrations of the idea can be shown to potential users to get their first impressions and questions. Or one could consider making a physical survey by placing a yes and no box where people passing by can place their vote.

Finally, wireframes can sketch the main elements of an idea and how they fit together. This method is often used to map out the components of an app or website in early stages.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nick Durrant is the CEO of Bluegrass Digital

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