

Using guerrilla tactics in customer experience design

Which? is the largest consumer rights and empowerment organisation in the UK, with over 700,000 members. Which? is fully independent - it is funded through subscriptions to its magazine and online services making it free from the influence of government, advertisers or shareholders. Which? campaigns to get a fairer deal for all consumers and publishes expert, unbiased information to help people make the right choices. In the UK the Which? brand is both trusted and widely recognised.



Which? identify a market opportunity

Which? wanted to broaden its service to consumers by reaching beyond its existing subscriber base to consumers who might not naturally subscribe to Which?. The area that was chosen was the mobile phone switching market - Which? had previously published the test results of mobile phones, but wanted to extend this service out into the areas of pricing and the switching of phone contracts.

Which? needed to launch the project launched very fast – in just a matter of months - to hit the holiday shopping season starting in October. When Which? heard ThoughtWorks had delivered a similar website several years prior for Forward Internet Group, they contacted us. Ultimately, Which? chose us as their creative and development partner based on our strong track record of delivering complex projects rapidly and reliably.

Highlights

- Market opportunity – The new website is broadening the reach of the Which? brand, and supporting the strategy of opening new revenue channels beyond the subscription model.
- Fast delivery – ThoughtWorks hit the ground running to get Which? Mobile up-and-running in time for the Christmas shopping season. ThoughtWorks delivered the site in less than nine months from concept to value.
- Experience Design – ThoughtWorks used techniques such as guerrilla testing, personas, customer journeys and integration of creative with development teams to deliver a compelling customer experience.
- Offshore savings, with confidence – this was Which?'s first foray into offshore development. ThoughtWorks' use of distributed agile to bridge the London Marketing and creative teams with the Bangalore development team provided Which? with significant savings, with transparent and predictable progress at all stages.

Technology

Java6, MySQL db, hibernate, spring and velocity, JavaScript, CSS, Rythmix CMS.

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Hitting the ground running

When the go ahead was given, the team had about eight months to go from concept to production launch. Offshore development would be used, a first for Which? in order to keep costs low, while the creative and experience design work was done onsite in the UK.

ThoughtWorks led an intense “Discovery” week, starting with a review of the customer insight work and market/ industry research conducted to date, then spent time on the high street observing how different people select and buy phones in stores. This provided data that would inform the development of a more customer-centric proposition that supports real buying behaviour rather than just another price comparison website.

During the subsequent couple of weeks, ThoughtWorks’ Project Manager, Technical Lead and Developer from Bangalore joined the onsite team in the UK so that all project leaders would get a chance to get to build relationships by working together face-to-face. During this time, all team members collaborated in exercises where they walked through carefully prepared customer personas on comparison-shopping journeys.

“The team role-played various personas from our target demographic, with different shopping needs. Some customers start knowing what they want; others need a little more help. We tested paths, or customer journeys, for all these and the ThoughtWorks consultants developed sketches and wireframes to illustrate them. This level of detail gave us confidence in the customer experience that ThoughtWorks was creating,” said Alison Morrison, Which? Digital Business Manager.

From concept to development in two weeks

With information from the Discovery phase, the role-play of personas, and customer journeys, the team dived down to create detailed user stories (requirements). ThoughtWorks’ integrated approach meant that the creative side was working directly with developers even at this early stage, leading to significant benefits. As the product took shape, the developers were able to suggest technical innovations to improve the



customer experience. They could also rapidly identify ideas that would not be technically feasible, preventing the team pursuing features that would result in wasted spending any avoidable day.

ThoughtWorks’ Experience Design consultant rapidly mocked-up wireframes for the user interface. As soon as the key elements were drafted, team members armed with laptops went out and did “guerrilla testing.” Guerrilla testing is a very rapid and low-cost way to gather detailed empirical data to feed back into the design process to improve usability and appeal. ThoughtWorks sent people out with laptops containing the new site mock-up, and tested the page designs and navigation with real consumers in the target demographic at a gym, sports bar and coffee shop. Results were brought back for analysis and decision-making.

By the end of the second week, wireframes, detailed requirements (estimated, prioritised and scoped), as well as the technical architecture, were all ready to go.

“This was our first foray into Offshore development, and ThoughtWorks delivered what we wanted, with no surprises.”

Steve Pitman Which? Head of Digital

From London to Bangalore, and back

ThoughtWorks used distributed agile to manage the development in Bangalore. An Experience Design consultant continued working several days a week in London directly with the Which? team. He worked with the wireframes, then communicated back with the team in Bangalore. For all development including the user interface, the work was managed by the PM, Tech Lead and BA in India. Team members collaborated using Skype, video conferencing, and IM.

Every week, the working site-in-progress was showcased to Which? for their feedback. Their creative team was involved throughout development, so that as the new website took shape, changes could be prioritised and worked into the plans without affecting the overall timeline. To facilitate collaboration and ensure understanding by all sides, leaders from the Which? team all visited the Bangalore office at least once during the project and the ThoughtWorks PM, Technical Lead and BA periodically came to London. At times, the developers shifted work hours an hour later and the Which? product team would begin an hour earlier to create more work-day overlap and increase the direct collaboration within the distributed team.

Getting over the technical hurdles

One of the technically challenging problems was how to efficiently handle the heterogeneous data streams that are provided by the major network operators such as Orange and O2, along with data from other third-parties. More than two dozen data feeds in various formats including csv, xml, psv, and others, had to be handled. The number and complexity of these integration points has kept many entrants out of the market altogether.

To get it all done, we designed a front end to normalise the feeds to have a common data structure, to be stored in the application database. Then, pipelines were created to handle each feed in as configurable a manner as possible. Pipelines were composed of multiple “stages” that performed discrete tasks: units of work such as download feed extract data from feed; transform the data; save deals data; post processing. Each stage performed its task, then handed over the result to the next stage. This was all done in a serial fashion in a given pipeline. Some stages were common across all pipelines - download stage, save deals data stage - while others were specific to a pipeline like extraction stage, transformation stage.

Halfway through the development, planned formal lab-based usability testing was conducted. Because of the process of iterative development, changes based on the feedback were able to be prioritised into the scope without affecting the schedule, ensuring the most compelling experience design possible for the launch.

Which? Mobile goes live on time, as planned

In mid-October, well in time for the holiday season, Which? Mobile went live, on-time and on-budget. This release included comparisons for mobile handsets and tariffs, and links to vendors for consumers who wished to then make a purchase. ThoughtWorks continued to work on a subsequent release, which added mobile broadband service and rate comparison to the site in January, as scheduled. With these releases, Which? has gained a valuable product, as well as a capability to test its tactics for expanding its reach into additional demographics, and broadening revenue sources beyond the print and online subscription model.

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“The prioritisation exercise was key, leading us to focus on what was really important to get to market in an initial release, and what features could come later. We were impressed that in just three weeks, ThoughtWorks led us from product concept to actually being ready to start development.”

Steve Pitman Which? (Head of Digital).