



PROTOTYPING

for Success, Power, & Unlimited Riches

WRITTEN BY
Ben Malbon
Iain Tait

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THE RUNDOWN

In advertising, the best way to sell in a concept has always been to show it. Create a storyboard. Do a sketch. But today, some of the biggest ideas are digital, and to effectively convey them, traditional prototyping tools fall short. So creatives have had to get a lot more, well, creative. They're coming up with imaginative ways to articulate the richness and magic of interactive experiences. Here, Google Creative Lab's Ben Malbon and Iain Tait share examples and advice to help bring your idea to life.

The principles of prototyping

Doing is the new thinking. Makers are the new creatives. You are what you make. Click on a random link in social media and chances are you'll end with someone talking about prototyping. And with good reason: It works.

With the amount of chatter around prototyping you'd imagine it was something as fresh and important as a Ramen Burger or a bacon-infused Cronut. Truth is, the advertising world has been prototyping forever: Sketches. Previsualizations. Storyboarding. Animatics. Treatments have all been used to bring ideas to life and give a hint of the emotions a fully formed "thing" might evoke — at least enough to convince a client to stump up the cash to go into production.

While storyboards and sketches still play an important part in the creative process, they're not able to convey the richness of interactive experiences. They can work just fine if you're talking to people who are on totally the same wavelength as you, and with whom you share a solid set of references — but that's rarely the case. Perhaps, most importantly, they often need the original sketcher to present with conviction that does the work justice. They certainly don't travel well upwards through corporations and around the world.

Many of us have experienced the frustrations of these lost-in-translation moments first hand. But just as technology has opened up new possibilities for the sorts of ideas we can execute, it has also increased the ways we can articulate these ideas throughout the creative process itself. With a little effort you can simulate a lot of magic and create a prototype that excites people each time it's displayed.

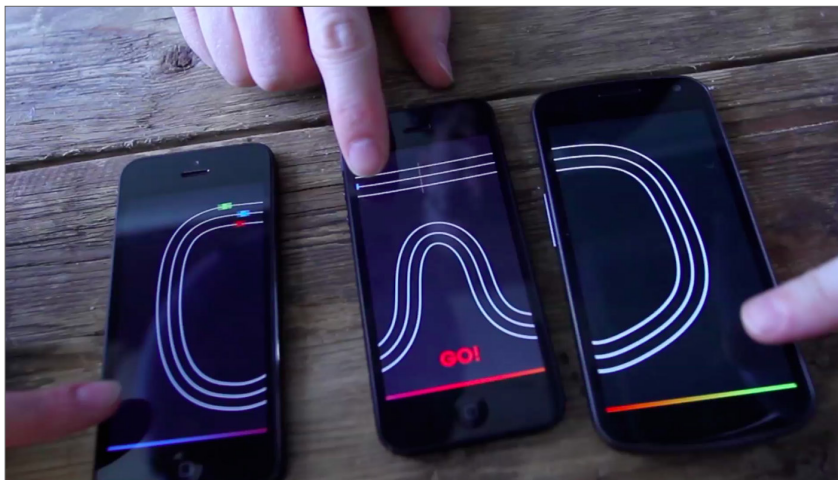
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Four simple ways to bring an idea to life

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Make a video

Video is a familiar medium which allows you to cut through surface complexities and get straight to the experience at the heart of an idea. One example of how this can work can be seen in Chrome “Racer”. What is now a multiplayer mobile experience, complete with a soundtrack scored by electronic music legend Giorgio Moroder, started life as a highly technical question: “Could we use Chrome for mobile to sync a game across multiple devices — iPhone and Android, tablets and phones?”



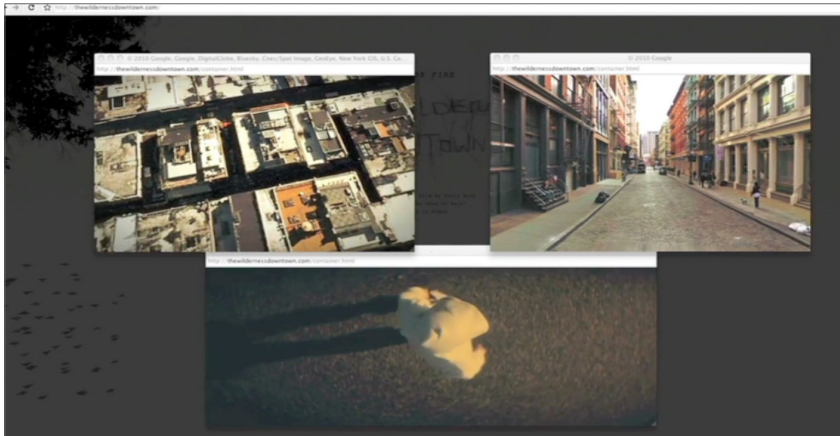
The Racer team attacked a bunch of fronts at the same time. Building javascript tests. Creating a poster that advertised the (as yet unbuilt) game to co-workers. And creating QuickTime animations that simulated gameplay. These were stitched into a simple video that demonstrated the (still unbuilt) game. Everyone that saw these things — right up to the people who run Chrome at a Product and Engineering level, asked the same first question: “When is this going to be ready to play?” The green-light was inevitable.

Video helped generate the enthusiasm for Racer more easily than wireframes or copy-heavy decks could. It got across all the whys and didn't dwell on the hows. But most

importantly it had a 'press-play' simplicity that meant that anyone could get it and the creators didn't have to be in the room.

Stage a performance

This sort of "experience prototyping" was behind the creation of Arcade Fire's music video for The Wilderness Downtown. A team at Google Creative Lab had been tinkering with the idea of the world's first HTML5 music video for a while, but capturing exactly "What it's like to be the first HTML5 music video" had been something of an issue. It needed to be brought to life via a three-dimensional experience rather than muffled in diagrams or print.



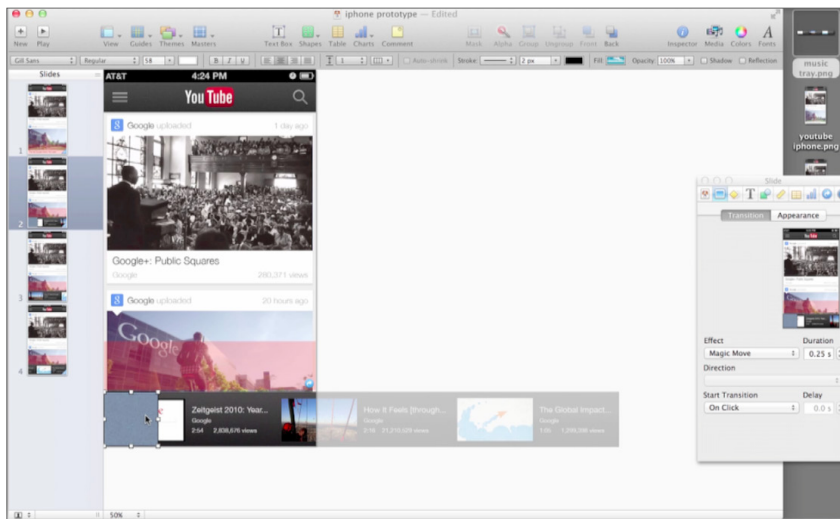
So that's exactly what happened. Aaron Koblin and Thomas Gayno, from the Creative Lab, travelled to Montreal to sit with Arcade Fire and let them experience, hands-on, how technology could amplify the nostalgia in The Wilderness Downtown. As their song played in the background the band flew around Google Earth, zooming in and out of the places from their childhood that had inspired the lyrics. In a matter of minutes they were immersed in the concept. This wasn't a conversation about HTML5 or Chrome anymore, this was the experience of memories being brought to life. In a matter of months, an idea that had been stewing on the backburner was going viral around the world.

While it doesn't have the portability of a video or a regular prototype — if you've got a limited set of people to convince — creating an experience can be devastatingly effective.

Mock it up with Keynote

If you're not presenting to Arcade Fire, maybe something a little more everyday and software-like might work.

If you're designing for desktop, mobile, or tablet, then Keynote is one of the fastest and easiest prototyping tools available. Its animation capabilities allow you to simulate gestures like pinching, spreading or swiping, making it ideal for prototyping features. You can simulate, for example, how it might feel to have swipe-up access from the bottom of your phone's YouTube app to access all of your Watch Later videos.

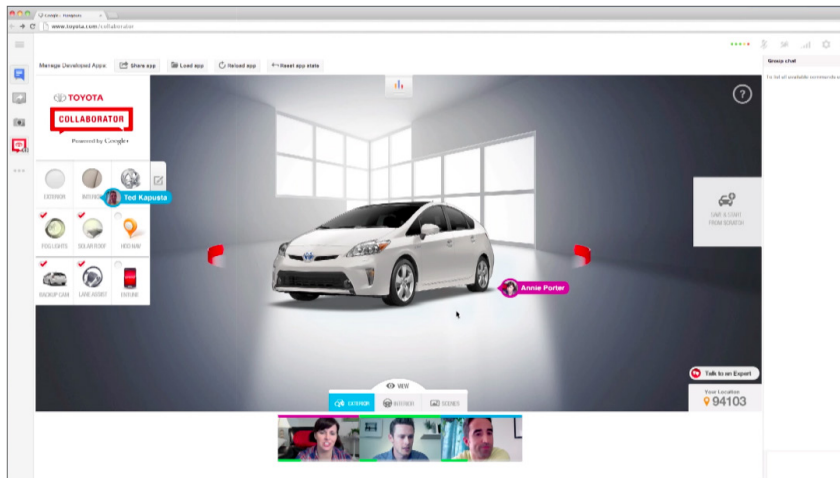


The slideshow format of Keynote also makes it a natural fit for story-based design. Let's say you had an idea for a Choose Your Own Adventure-style app (and someone hadn't fired you for lack of imagination): in Keynote, you can prototype a flow or an animation and experience how it feels to drive the story in different directions. Keynote also lets you to swap out images while retaining any animation and ordering already in place — which makes certain kinds of iteration really simple.

Prototyping with Keynote isn't going to impress your mates as much as hanging out with rock bands, but it is efficient. In under an hour you can have a high-fidelity prototype up and running on a mobile device and can simulate possible interactions in an app or webpage. Plus it's pretty quick for regular people to get to grips with; even middle-aged planners have been known to prototype with Keynote.

Build a prototype

Once you're satisfied that the idea is worth pursuing, and your Keynote mockup just isn't quite stretching far enough, you may want to take things to the next level with a working prototype.



The Toyota Collaborator is a working prototype built for the 2013 Google I/O conference, and shows how you can 'build around the tricky bits' and make something that feels convincing enough to go 'all in'. The challenge behind Collaborator was that shopping for a car is a painful process. Toyota wanted to improve this experience, making it more seamless, collaborative and social. So a social car configurator was visualized through a simple (and faked) Hangout-based experience. This simulated how groups of people could video chat and customize a car together in real-time. You could rotate your view in the

car via head tracking and even 'test drive' the car via Google Street View. Simulating the illusion of a finished product and allowing people to 'try it out' live on screen helped create an emotional connection to the idea and sell it through. A full public launch is planned for September.

Whatever works for you

These examples are just that: examples. Real things people have done or made to help them describe or articulate an interactive experience. There is no magic bullet. There is no rule that says in situation x you should apply prototype y. It's highly probable that none of the above are right for what you need to do. In fact, you're probably best to avoid them all and make something up yourself.

Just make sure you're super clear about (a) what you're trying to convey, and (b) what the magic is that you're trying to bring to life. Then ask yourself two more big questions:

What do you have to hand?

If you have great film people, make a film. If you have a boatload of awesome front-end developers, then build something. If you have ninja Keynote skills, animate away. If you have a secret army of willing volunteers ready to do anything for you, activate the invisible army.

What's going to convince the folk you're trying to convince?

Some people are suckers for detail and love to see everything; that puts you squarely in clickable wireframe territory. Other people respond best to things that make them 'feel' something — make a video and dig out a Coldplay b-side. And don't just try and second-guess your audience. Have a conversation about it. Understand what it is that they need and where the prototype is going to go. Look at successes and failures. Build on what works and don't waste your time on what doesn't.

If you've figured out answers to the above you're probably already wearing a 'Doing Is The New Thinking' t-shirt. But for the rest of us, it's probably time to prototype a bunch of types of prototypes to see what works best.

Authors



Ben Malbon
*Managing Director,
Google Creative Lab*



Iain Tait
*Executive Creative Director,
Google Creative Lab*
