

Story Mapping Playbook

50 tips and 100 user story examples



ALL LEAKED BEST PRACTICES IN ONE PLACE

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction



User story mapping is really easy to learn. By collecting user goals, steps, and stories and arranging them into a logical order on a story map, you can get a great overview of what's needed from your product.

Even so, story mapping could deliver even more value if you develop your knowledge to the next level. Our advanced story mappers invent amazing new ways of working every day, and constantly improve the way they work. Based on their expertise, we've made a collection of tips and ideas that'll really ramp up your story mapping comprehension. You've possibly already read our quick guide [User Story Mapping for Beginners](#), but for the benefit of those who haven't, here's a top-level rundown of the process:

- 1** Discover the project goals
- 2** Map the journey
- 3** Come up with solutions
- 4** Prioritize user stories
- 5** Slice out the release structure

To improve your whole story mapping process, we gathered together best practices for each of these steps, so let's dive right in. These techniques work like Lego bricks, slotting together to build something solid. You'll find that most of them work well at the whiteboard, but to get the most value from story mapping, we always recommend using an online tool. So we can demonstrate our hints and tips more clearly to you, we've used in-app screenshots of [StoriesOnBoard](#).

CHAPTER 2

Discover project goals



Framing the project, and creating clear goals is crucial for effective planning. Project goals are the cornerstones of story mapping. If you write them effectively, your job will be much easier during the next steps. If you miss a project goal, you can easily miss other aspects of the story too, which leads to a product that's full of holes.

1 **Involve people in brainstorming**

This looks like a cheap hint, but trust us, the more people you've got involved in the creative stages, the better. The idea here is thought diversity, and involving people from different teams adds new facets to your thinking. For example, if you're developing a webshop, a tech support team member could deliver valuable information around requests. You'd get priceless information from marketing or commercial departments too. If you want to avoid a 'too many cooks' scenario, then organize silent brainstorming or a Crazy 8 exercise.

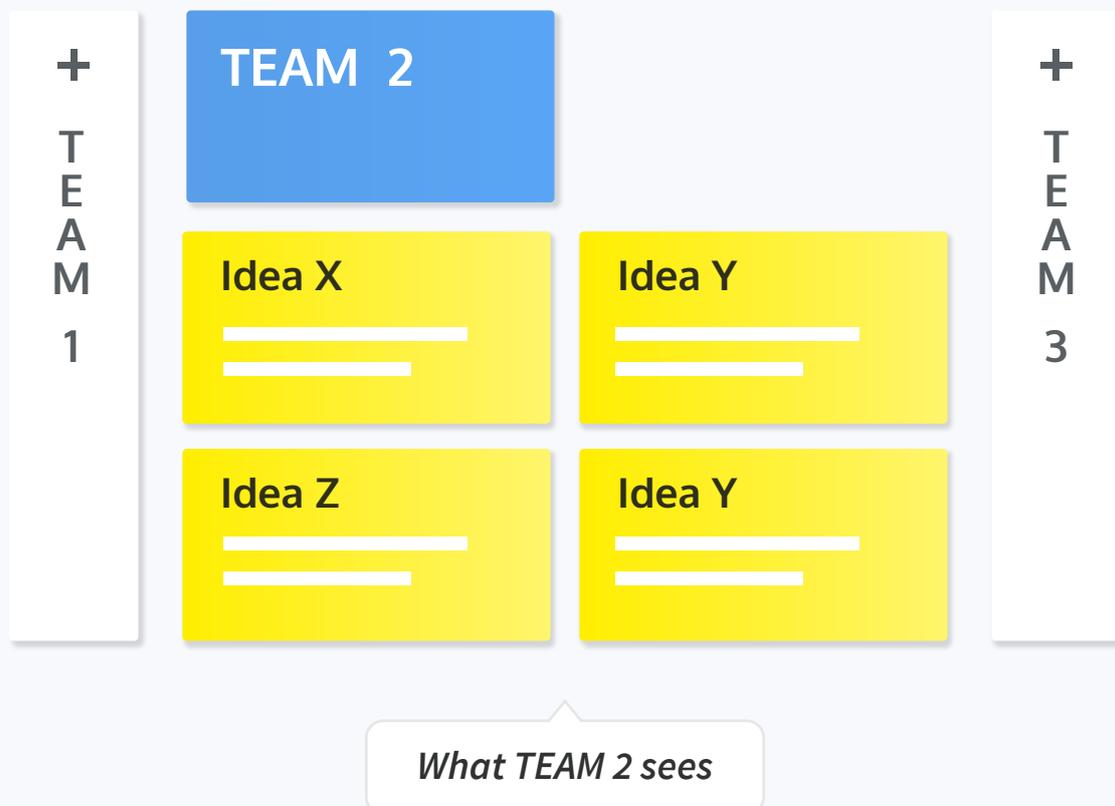
Exercise

- Let different people discuss the same everyday product
- Discover product-related teammates at your company

2 Choose the best-fitting brainstorming method

As described above there are different brainstorming methods for different needs. When a new project starts from scratch the best way is to invite team members to a standard brainstorming and go thru the planning phases step by step. First things first, the team should collect the user goals, then the user steps and the user stories and so on...

As we mentioned in tip 1, if the brainstorming team is too big, and escends into chaos, then a silent brainstorming session could be effective. Create small groups to discuss the ideas, then place the results on the board and remove duplications.





When your task is to improve a running product, there are two great brainstorming methods. Reverse brainstorming is when you look closer at the product features and try to find out which of them causes the biggest satisfaction. This is easily tested by removing a feature and investigating the dissatisfaction caused by this removal.

Reverse thinking is slightly different. This method gets you to ask the question, “How would a typical user use our product?”

Then imagine the opposite outcome. Would it work? Why or why not?

Related article



5 awesome brainstorming techniques to boost planning

We would like to introduce five special methods for different situations. Follow us to learn the new techniques.

Public story map

 [Silent brainstorming example >](#)

3 Let your team catch up in story mapping

Although user story mapping is an easy-to-learn method maybe not every team member is familiar with the process. It could be embarrassing to admit it, and those members could participate effectively. Remove barriers by starting a very simple story mapping session. Let the people describe and map a very common activity of day-to-day life, e.g. the morning routine (by Jeff Patton). So they'll be familiar with the method, and all of them can add valuable thoughts.

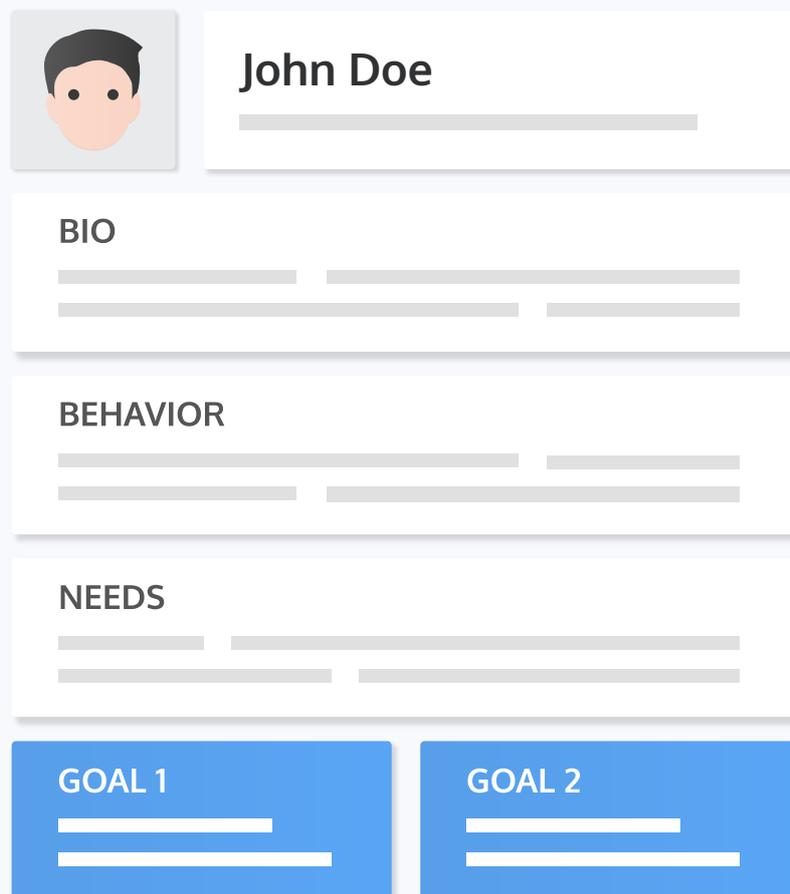
4 Involve the full cast - Think frontstage and backstage

Brainstorming and story mapping of requirements often focuses on the end user, the customer, and rightly so you're probably thinking. However, to effectively map out the full story you need to consider the full cast involved in the system you're designing and not just the end users. To use a cliché example; the hotel receptionist informs you you'll be in your favourite room and that there's a balcony table reserved for your dinner as that's what you like. The customer is interacting with the front of stage.

But here the database and analytics informing the customer's preferences enable that interaction, that is the backstage design. Story mapping is the perfect time to consider the full design from frontstage interactions to backstage complexities. This is made easy by StoriesOnBoard by through enabling layers of requirements as you go.

5 Use personas for better understanding

User personas are crucial elements of a backlog. They are similar to buyer personas, used by marketing managers to understand the target market's behavior and needs better. The target audience of a product can be segmented by user groups according to their similar mindsets or goals. Each user persona could represent a group acting similarly by using the product.



The image shows a user persona form for "John Doe". It consists of several sections: a profile picture placeholder, a name field, a bio section, a behavior section, a needs section, and two goal sections. Each section contains horizontal lines representing text input fields.

John Doe

BIO

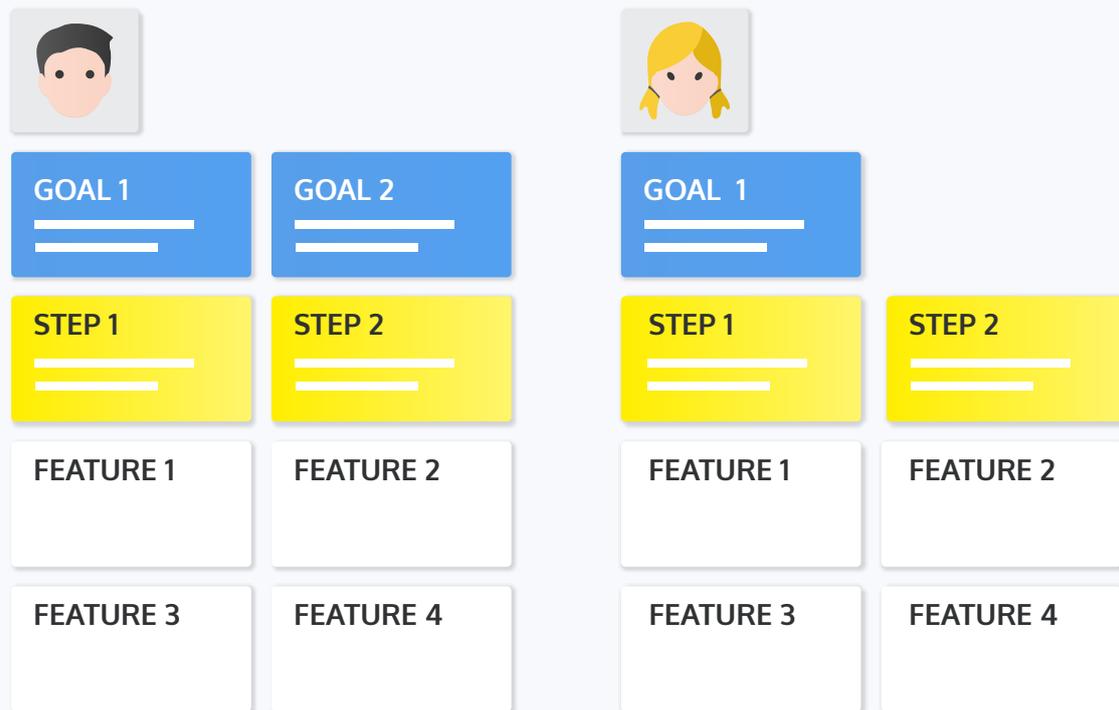
BEHAVIOR

NEEDS

GOAL 1

GOAL 2

To engage your team and keep them focused on users, summarize the main goals and add these cards to the board. To express individual or common goals, mark your top-level cards with their related personas. Using StoriesOnBoard you can easily assign personas to user goals.



Further possible persona preferences

- Purchase behavior
- Challenges/Pain points
- Personal background
- Business background

Related article



What's on a persona card?

You've probably heard about personas and if you created a persona, would realize how hard it can be to define them. Follow us in this short reading to get tips where to start.



5 formatting tips for personas

To create useful persona cards you have to fill the details with valuable information. Read more about what's on a persona card.

Public story map

 [Guide map >](#)

Exercise

- Categorize your product's users according to their behaviour
- Try to collect the key preferences of your user personas

6 Be specific about your User(s)

As a <user>, I need X, so that Y, is a great and powerful format for user stories. As long as the user is specific. A ambiguous user is hard to design for. Stories should be descriptive and specific on the actor involved. They should focus on that user's need, not a generic 'user' Imagine the requirement to view the most read news articles in the top right.

As a consumer of news, that's useful so that you're up to date on the latest trends. As a marketing manager it's useful because it allows the blank space on the right-hand side to be commercialised rather than being blank. As you map across your board don't shy away from directly calling out the user – a logged in user has many different implications to a developer designing secure by default. Avoid them asking you the question, or assuming, and go specific. You can do this quickly with StoriesOnBoard by colour coding different actor / user types.

7 How do you make toast? Perspectives see the same thing differently

Starting a workshop or story mapping session with a few minutes of 'gamestorming' is a proven way to warm up a group of people.

The game we go for is 'Making Toast'. Everyone spends a few minutes writing the steps they go through to make toast. Then everyone reveals their own toasting process to the group. Straight away, you'll notice how different everyone's toast making process is. Some people will get the all the items together first (butter, bread, knife, etc.), others won't even use a plate.

The purpose of this game is to emphasise perspectives – everyone was aiming for the goal of toast, and everyone achieved it, but the journeys were very different. Keep this in your mind as you go through the story mapping process to design a more inclusive and diverse product.

One that meets the needs of more people, overall, increasing the value add of your design.

8 Design for a product, not for a project

We work in projects and programmes. However we design products. Our customers and users interact with products. The ‘thing’ you are building is what gives them value, not the governance, release frames and documentation that a project brings. We suggest you shift your mindset from one of designing with a deadline in mind as good products don’t have a deadline, they’re used or they’re not and good ones are used a lot.

Changing your mindset to realise your story map doesn’t just describe the next 10 months of work but the first 10 years of a product’s life will change your approach and your design. Changing like that will let your attention focus on what really matters and enable the story map to emphasise a user journey that’ll be repeated and repeated. It won’t just be a map that describes your release timeframes.

9 Remember that business goals will influence design

As you story map you’ll be planning our features based on user needs that is supported by solid user research and observations. You’ll be problem solving as you map the journey path out. But reality gets to us all, and we need to remember that someone is paying for the development and design. That means their goals will influence the construction.

We hope business and user goals align. And a good story map will facilitate that by allowing you to highlight features and user needs to wider stakeholders that review it. But there are times when a business goal does not align to a user's or priorities will conflict. Now, unless you can prove the benefit of a feature or user journey, you might not have the clout to beat that business goal. That's when highlighting key factors becomes even more important.

StoriesOnBoard lets you easily call things out by including attachments and uploads or changing colours. Remembering this need and taking these simple steps make it easier to have that difficult conversation with the Business.

CHAPTER 3

Map the journey



10 Continue to brainstorm

Don't stop the brainstorming after you've found your goals.

If the brainstorming team is really engaged with the problem, they'll be more likely to be innovative in creating solutions. Continue to brainstorm when you're finding user steps and user stories too.

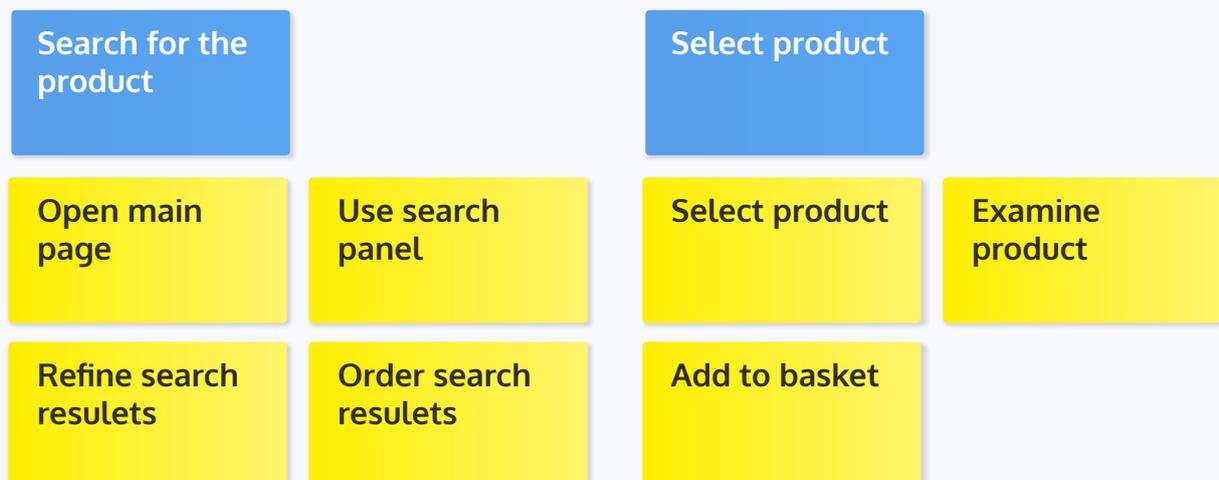
Using StoriesOnBoard in brainstorming mode, you can collect ideas as 'cards' and decide later where to place them on the map.

11 Think in stories

Forget the features. Tell the story following the logical narrative flow!

Tell the story of a user, who goes through your product to reach his goal.

If you split this goal into subgoals then you will focus only on a chosen subgoal. For example, if the main goal is to purchase a shirt on a webshop, then the subgoals would be something like: narrow the search with filters, select the color and size, use the checkout etc.

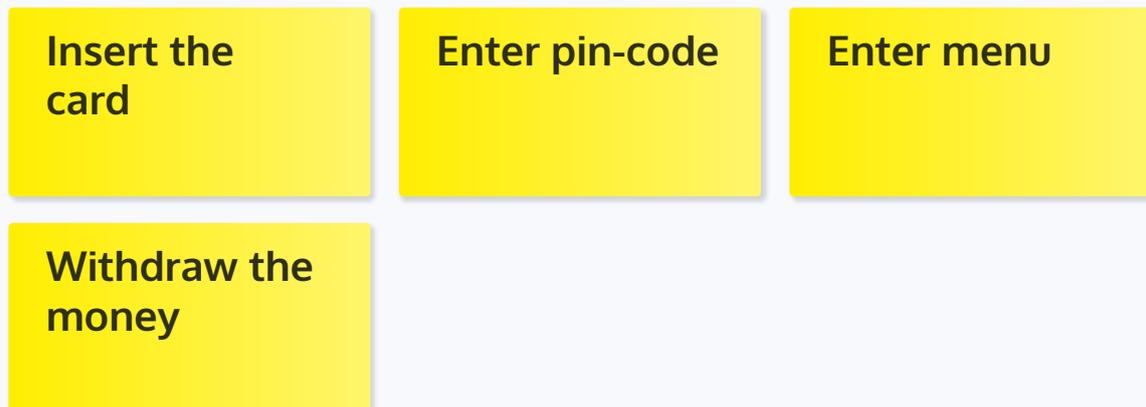


12 Retell the story

After you've built the narrative flow, ask a team member to retell the story or retell another user persona's activities on the product.

This way you'll establish missing steps. It's a really good idea to get team members to tell the story in the first person. Telling a third person's activity can create distance, so break down these barriers by asking your participants to imagine themselves as a user. Using an online story mapping tool means you can easily insert a new step between two cards if you need to. Moreover, you can rearrange the whole narrative flow by drag&drop (which is much faster than moving cards on the whiteboard!).

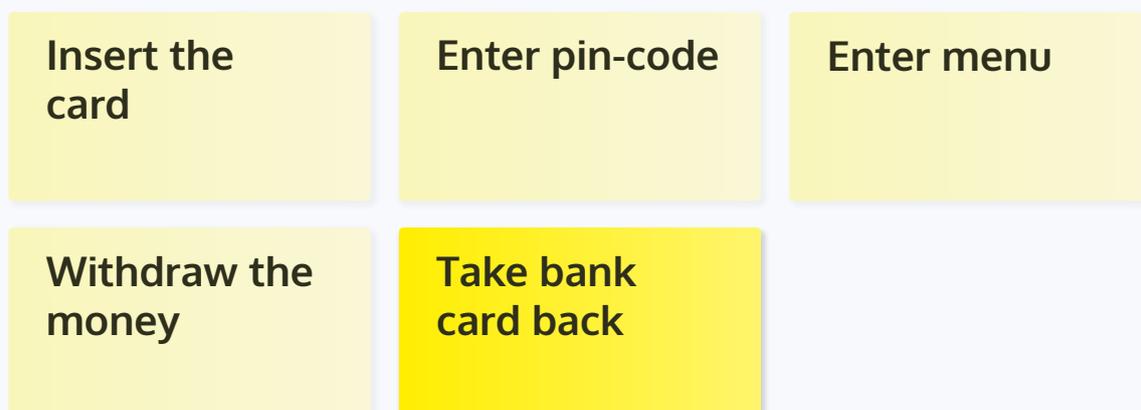
Let me tell a story: an agile team wanted to develop a brand new software for cash machines. They wrote all the user stories about inserting the card, entering pin-code, entering the menu, withdrawing the money, etc...



But something was missing. Fortunately, they found the missing part at the end of the brainstorming session. Do you see what is missing?

Yes, they forget to “Take bank card back” :-)

You can check not only the narrative flow but the user stories. If there are no user stories written under a user step, then there is no solution to take that step in the journey. So you need to write at least one user story under each user step.



Exercise

- Open story map examples and try to find missing steps in the mapped journeys

13 Don't consider UX to be an afterthought

Invite a UX designer to add a different and practical mindset to your team. It could be helpful in those moments when your team doesn't know exactly what the real user journey looks like. Ignoring users' behavior at the beginning could cause additional work after launch, and let's face it, nobody wants that! Using StoriesOnBoard, you can assign different colors to cards, or add tags to mark out several user journeys.

14 Think of the tool your user needs

Working through a story map is exciting. The discovery brings your product alive. The vision is there for everyone to see. Within that excitement, it's easy to get carried away. We begin imagining bold, bright, new ideas and start designing a system with great intentions and functions.

This vision quickly escapes from our capabilities. Constraints could be technology, timeframe, budget, or anything else. When this happens we need to remember our value statements and remember we're building a tool for a purpose and a specific user.

CHAPTER 4

Come up with solutions



The next step is to find solutions for achieving the user steps. Through this process, you create "user stories". Initially, you can use the following template: As a user , I want goal, so that step . Using the accommodation example, a users storiey might be: “As a user, I want to find hotels for my holiday, so I start browsing the discounts and advertisements” or “As a user, I want to find hotels for the next week, so I start searching by date.” Brainstorm with your team to collect the most possible solutions and put all user stories under the related steps.

15 Write short card titles

After mapping the user journey, it’s time to collect your solutions or user stories. To keep the good overview of the board, try to write expressive card titles. A smart title helps you to recover the story quickly and easily. Avoid abbreviations as they aren’t always clear to everyone. Write or attach every other piece of information to the back side of the card.

Online story mapping gives you the ability to attach unlimited details to a user story, without complicating things. StoriesOnBoard limits the visible length of card titles, to keep them short and sweet.

Highlight daily offers for last minute shoppers on the main and search page



Highlight daily offers



Exercise

- Take time to learn how to write short card titles
- Create long descriptions and teach the team how to shorten them

16 Avoid cliches in your story writing

The good-old user story cliché “as a <user> I want <goal> so that...” could be helpful when telling the story, but they aren’t always necessary when you’re writing down the outcome. Standardized and repeating panels waste the card title’s limited space and make the board hard to read. When the team agrees to a user story, it’s good to summarize it in your own words but remember to keep it short!

**As a loyal shopper,
I want to be notified
about deals so that
I don’t miss them.**

TOO LONG

**I want to receive
deals notifications**

SHORTENED

**Receive
notifications**

EVEN BETTER

17 Look beyond a problem to a goal

User Stories traditionally use the below format;

As a ...

I need...

So that...

This format has a lot of advantages. A large one being it lets you emphasise the goal of the requirement, the 'so that...' part of your user story. This is important as it's the part that shows how the product will be used by a user and will let you know when you've actually achieved the part that adds value to the product.

Writing the 'goal' or 'value statement' shouldn't be difficult, and if it is, the chances are the story needs re-thinking as it's not screaming user value.

Goal focusing makes it easy to demonstrate your story is 'done' and to articulate what the team has achieved when stakeholders ask or in your 'Showcase'. I.e. we added this payment feature so that the customers can make payments.

18 Size does matter

With many acronyms offering advice on the best way to format user stories we won't cover that again here. The important thing to remember is size does matter. Detail needs to be sufficient and necessary, not overwhelming. Attempting to add more details by adding new words risks confusing people by accidentally combining multiple requirements into one or introducing ambiguity. Keep size in mind and use your words carefully.

19 Never miss the details

When brainstorming an idea, the team will tell you a lot more about the user story than a card title. These valuable thoughts will be lost if you don't write them down. So try to make up a scheme for your user story details. StoriesOnBoard's markdown formatting allows you to create great looking descriptions and lists with image attachment functionality.

Make up your own specification scheme. Separating categories by using different headings gives nice looking card detail.

BROWSE BY CATEGORIES

OVERVIEW

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

SCENARIOUS

20 A picture tells 1000 words

Story mapping is a beautiful technique as it allows us to read requirements as a journey or a full story. This provides a fuller story of the solution we're designing. Saying that, if a picture or visual is available it can enhance your story map dramatically.

Visuals answer a lot of questions in a way that's both very quick and easy to digest. If words can be drawn, they should be. Process flows, whether sketched in sharpies or done to the highest fidelity are great ways to improve a story map and can easily be added using the add image feature from StoriesOnBoard.

The image shows a wireframe of a user registration form. It is divided into four main sections:

- SIGN UP:** Contains two horizontal bars representing input fields.
- OVERVIEW:** Contains three bullet points, each followed by a horizontal bar representing a list item.
- MOCKUP:** Contains a registration form with four input fields: "First Name", "Last Name", "Email", and "Password". Below these fields is a "LOGIN" button.
- SCENARIOUS:** Contains two horizontal bars representing text or content.

21 Ambiguity is the enemy

User stories want to be specific so that anyone, whether business or technical, can read it and understand not only the requirement, but the need for that requirement too.

You know what they say about assumptions, so don't let that happen, instead work to record all of the context and implicit knowledge you and the group you're with have. It seems like an effort to specify the what's meant by 'clicking the pay button' but it won't be if it prevents the re-work that would have been required because customers begin complaining that they haven't received their confirmation emails, all because someone 'assumed' that no form validation was required because it wasn't specified in the user story.

These items seem like minor details to us involved in the trying to map out the entire journey, but to a developer who has to pick that item up from nothing, they're very important minor details. Ambiguity is always the enemy.

22 Be conscious of the story's altitude

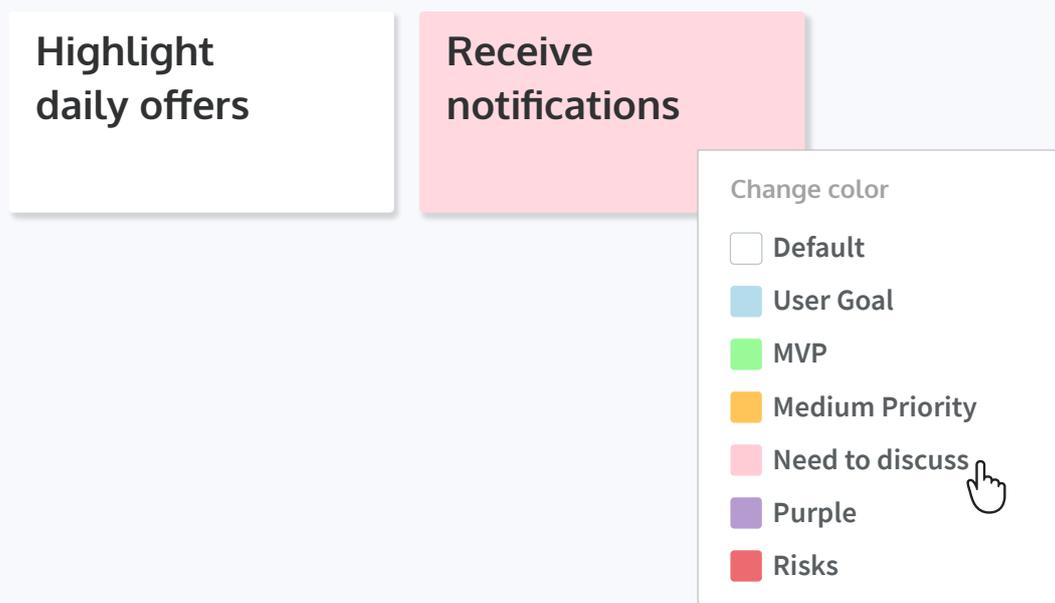
As you go through the story mapping process you'll realise how large the solution is (or small!). This will help to show you how much development work is likely to be involved. To make that estimation realistic, be aware of your story's altitude.

What level of detail do you go into? Are you vaguely describing the way a customer uses to product? Maybe you've stacks of user stories describing the NFRs involved in changing screens given certain traffic loads.

A story map with lots of gaps isn't going to take you anywhere fast. A map plotting every streetlamp and curb won't help much either. We recommend that level of detail should be sufficient, but not be over the top. Crucially though, to keep your estimates and assumptions realistic, you need to be aware of the level you're working at.

23 Evolve your information

The board is not just for the user stories, use it for notes and annotations too. User story maps should be living and breathing backlogs. Has a new idea or question come up after the brainstorming? Note and save them for the next session or meeting to discuss. You can create new stories from these questions and ideas to make things tidy or separate your ideas and questions cards out of the user stories by using different colors or annotations.



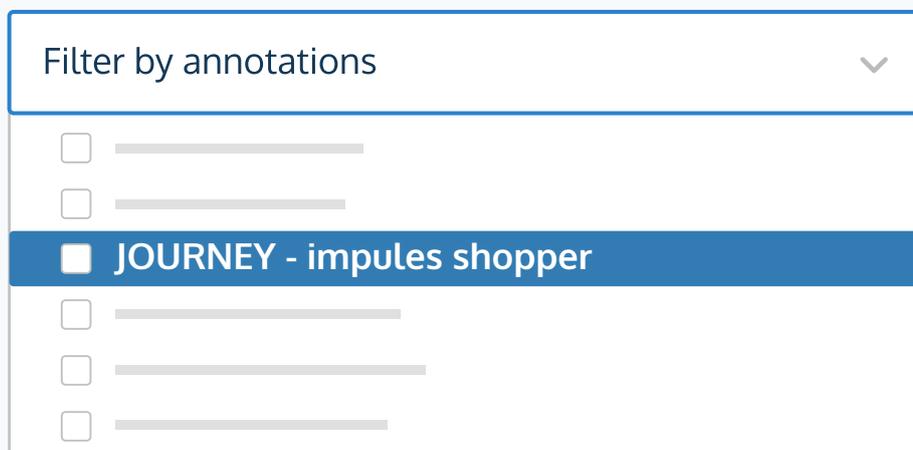
24 Individual stories are a part of a bigger book

User stories are a good technique for capturing an individual requirement. They describe a need and how the product should be developed to add that piece of value. Being easy to digest they can be useful for talking with any stakeholder, technical or not.

Linking them together through story mapping fills in the remaining gaps. It creates a full scenario that focuses discussion on a product and service level, rather than limiting yourself to an individual requirement level. StoriesOnBoard allows you to start having that discussion by providing an online, easy to access service, meaning you can remain focused on product value, not displaying the requirements.

25 Tag your user journeys

If you've run out of colors, you could use small tags in the card title to group them or express different meanings. Essentially, you could perfectly visualize your journey just with these tags. Don't forget to explain which tag belongs to which journey, so all teammates can easily understand it.



The image shows a screenshot of a user interface element titled "Filter by annotations" with a downward arrow on the right. Below the title is a list of items, each consisting of a small square checkbox followed by a horizontal line representing a text label. The third item in the list is highlighted with a blue background and contains the text "JOURNEY - impules shopper". The other items are unselected and their labels are obscured by grey lines.

Related article



How to label user stories

Card colors are still a great feature to add more visuality to a board, so use them for high priority information such as task type, risk points. Afterward, try to add icons to cards.



How to visualize personas and journeys

The next awesome opportunity to use labels is visualizing buyer personas and journeys. In a user-centered world, you can't miss the buyer persona out of the backlog.

StoriesOnBoard has an awesome solution to visualize your journey called the search&filter feature. It allows you to choose and filter a selected journey, helping the team focus on a selected journey on the big story map.

26 Test the story map

If the goals, the steps, and the user stories are consistent, every teammate should be able to perfectly retell a selected journey. So, take the time to test the backlog to discover missing steps or logical errors. Digital story mapping has the ability to hide unrelated segments, so you can concentrate on the right part of the backlog.

27 **Involve your tester**

A tester's aim in life is to break the code given to them. They are software's embodiment of the scientific method. For that reason, get them involved early, right from the story mapping stage.

A tester will bring a unique and importantly, different, perspective to the Developer and Analysts in the room. They'll make sure your user journey considers the non-functional needs of the system – how fast do those APIs need to return their result? Do we need to think of what's rendering to the user on the page whilst the computation is taking place?

Testers will keep you on your toes. And whilst obviously you don't want to dive right into journey mapping every NFR you'll need right from the ideation phase, it's important to consider them as early as is practical even from a high level.

28 **Look for the unhappy path**

Story maps normally focus on the product's happy path design. This is sensible, it narrows attention and keeps focus on the product's core design. But considering the unhappy path before you need them has big advantages.

First, some error paths are so common they can't be ignored at all, think password resets.

Second, bearing in mind some core error paths right from the start will make sure you group user stories correctly and that more accurately estimate the time it will take to develop your product. Finally, and maybe most importantly, if you're factoring error paths scenarios in from the start, you will build a better product, because you'll be able to design a lot of those error cases out, or at least limit their impact on your user.

29 Slice user stories

Prioritizing user stories, or finding the best place on the map can be difficult. This is likely to be an issue when your user story is too big. The solution is to split them into smaller stories.

For example, the 'search box' on an ecom site could be too big a user story when it contains the basic and also extended search functions.

It's called vertical slicing when you split stories by functional boundaries. Avoid slicing horizontally by technical boundaries, because the outcomes are not independent stories. Using StoriesOnBoard, you can use custom estimation units.

Estimations are summarized release by release. You can also filter your 'too big' user stories by using the search&filter panel.

See details of selected product



OVERVIEW

- Categories
- Name
- Price
- Long description
- Image gallery - slideshow of the product's images

Basic product page

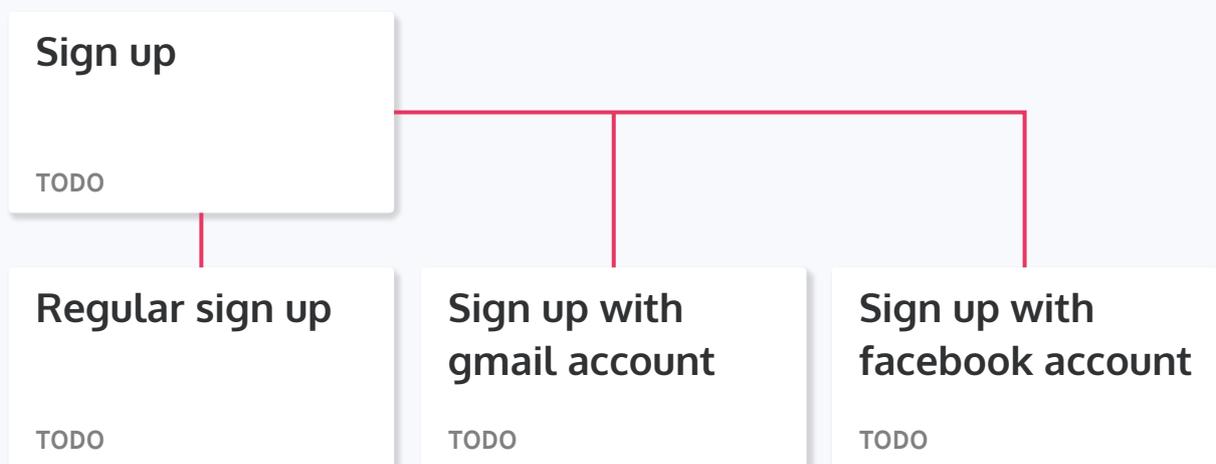
Long description on product page

Image gallery on product page

30 Choose a slicing strategy

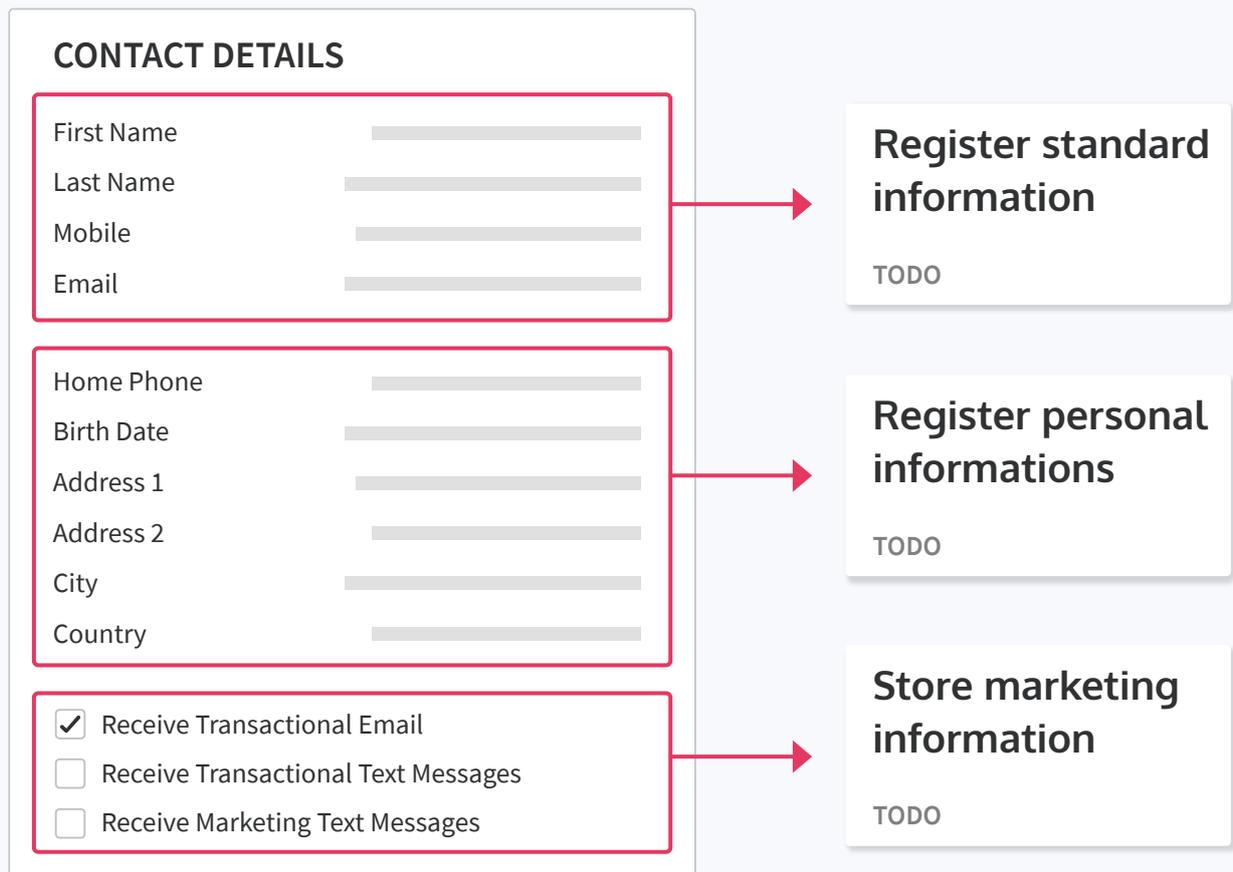
All projects and user stories are different, but you will have to find the way to split those 'too big' stories to avoid overwhelming your teams. If you struggle with slicing user stories, try the following strategies:

- **Split by user persona** - if different user personas need different features of a user story, then you could place the new stories under their related personas.



- **Split by data** - test the user story to find necessary data only.

For example, a registration form can ask for multiple details like email address, username, password, country of residence, phone number, etc... But the core function of registration can work just with the email address and password fields.



- **Split by acceptance criteria** - keep out the edge cases and concentrate on the most common usage. e.g. Type A users are the ones that pay with their bank card, the most common journey. Prioritize the Type A journey and avoid edge cases that might want to pay using an alternative, lesser known method like loyalty points and trigger validation messages or redirects. After breaking a user story into two or more parts, some stories hold their positions and some might move to further releases.

31 Don't scrimp on the scenario detail

When we learn to write user stories we stress the value statement, the 'so what' of the story. This is important as it lets the software engineer know the reason they're doing something. Knowing that lets them tweak the technical solution to better achieve the business goal.

But, another important part of the story is the context. The scenario. Providing more detail there saves tons of time in explanation later on through slack, emails or desk bombs.

3 good ways to do that:

- Set the user's background; 'They're a returning customer hoping to re-order their previous food order'
- Consider the circumstance; 'Usage is likely to be in a loud, busy environment' - maybe consider subtitles
- Consider their digital maturity; 'Target user is of low digital maturity' – maybe consider video instructions?

These are just 3 ways you can increase the calibre of your user stories.

32 Make your stories fallible

There are lots of ways to add acceptance criteria to your stories.

Whatever your preferred method, consistency is key. Having a reliable format makes the story review and test process simpler in the long run.

BDD or 'behaviour-driven development' is a good method:

- Given <X state> - e.g. Given <a user is logged in>
- When <Y occurs> - e.g. When <they view the top right of the homepage>
- Then <Z should follow> - e.g. Then <they should see the day's most read articles.>

Using this format forces you to double check your own homework – is that scenario reflected in your user story, if not refine it now.

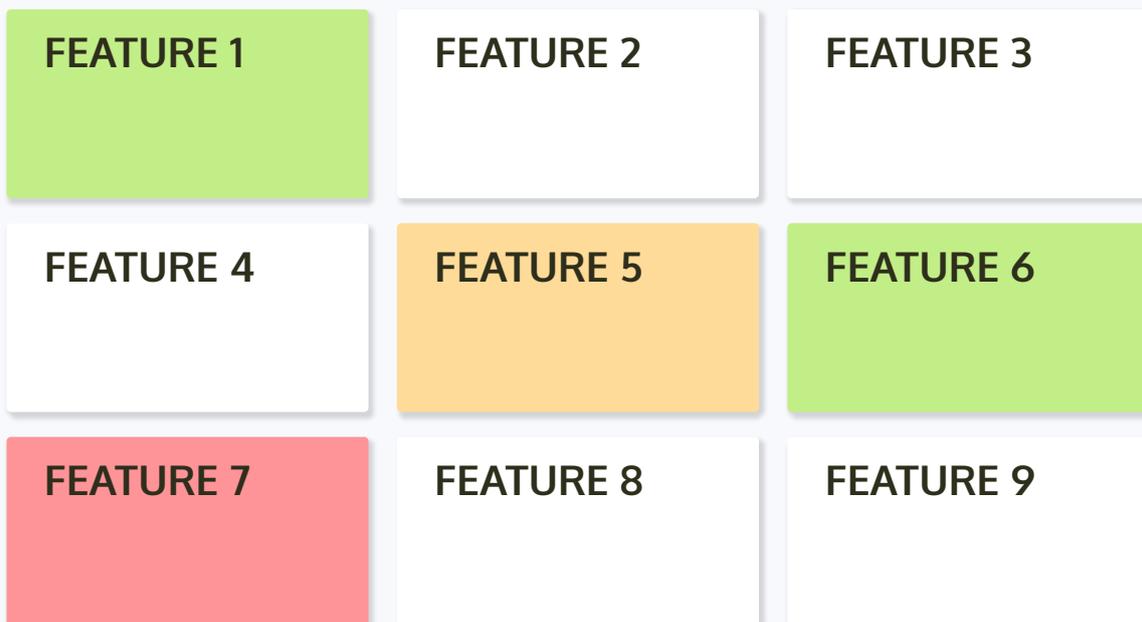
It's scalable, meaning, without deviation you can add multiple acceptance criteria by just changing the 'Then' statement.

It also aligns well to automation testing, where before creating scripts, scenarios are conjured to prove or disprove. Using an appropriate format has just saved your tester a lot of time.

33 Group and theme your stories

You can add more value to your story map by grouping, categorising or theming them as you go. StoriesOnBoard offers lots of techniques to do this by colour coding, tagging or vertically staking them.

Doing it become really helpful when you start to consider how to cut your Releases or the development work. Maybe it makes sense to group things by page, maybe by component type, or you could do it by value to user type. There are a lot of efficiencies to come from good, thorough grouping and it's quicker to do as you go, rather than retrospectively.



MARKETING FEATURES



UX FEATURES



RISKS

34 Be aware of accessibility

Design tends to focus on the simplest, 'happy-scenario' first.

Due to biases this often defaults design to focus on an able-bodied individual's journey through the system. Except a lot of people have different accessibility needs. These range from screen reader requirements and text enlargement, to a different platform being the default (e.g. using mobile over desktop) and colour blindness.

Building accessible products is necessary.

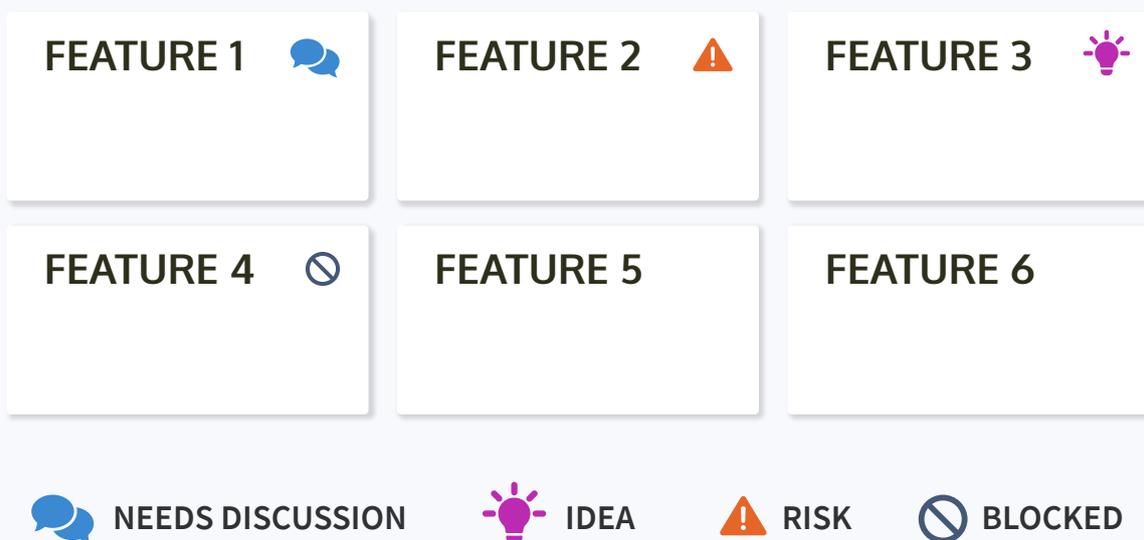
Consider these requirements at the story mapping stage and you'll save masses of time through limiting rework. It might also affect your entire design by making you consider the journey from another perspective. It's better to find that change out early rather than half way through development!

If you're not sure on the extent of the accessibility needs for your product, check the WCAG's guidelines.

35 Mark user stories

As we wrote earlier, tags can be used for several reasons. Here are a few examples of what you might use a tag for in development:

- Risky stories - sometimes, developing a feature can be risky. Special knowledge may be needed or sensitive data could be involved.
- Possible barriers - a barrier could be for example, if your development source is offshore and there are delays beyond your control.
- Priority work - i.e. a particular user story is a priority, but development work is on hold as there is an awaited outcome from qual testing that'll.



Public story map

 [Accommodation Website - Visualize Personas >](#)

 [Accommodation Website - Visualize Journeys >](#)

CHAPTER 5

Prioritize user stories



After collecting the user stories you should arrange them into a priority order.

36 Use MoSCoW categories

There are several prioritization methods, one of the best known is the MoSCoW method. It's a very popular way to broadly prioritize the user stories.

The team could easily agree with the four main priority classes (Must have, Should have, Could have, Won't have) and decide the stories' priority. The easiest way to approach the method is to create the four categories (as releases) and move cards into the best-fitting category. You should keep these releases as long as you work on the story map and you can create the final releases above the MoSCoW categories.



✓ MVP

✓ Release 2 - Improved shipment and payment methods

✓ Release 3 - Security improvements

✓ Release 4 - Improved marketing features

37) It's a must you drop MoSCoW

Prioritisation of requirements is crucial. There's always more that could be built than there is time, resource or money. Using MoSCoW for this too often leads to arguments between stakeholders who have very different opinions of what constitutes a MUST. And they can each justify their position. What do you do? You ditch it.

Use a prioritisation framework or grid, with two axes, labelled in consensus with your group, everyone can begin agreeing on something's priority. For example, contrast Customer Value on the Y-axis against Technical Complexity on the X. It's suddenly easy for everyone to agree to MUSTs are those in the bottom right that offer the most customer value and the least technical complexity.

38) See the wood from the trees – it's easy to have too many stories

As you get into your story mapping, you and your group will get excited and psyched up around your design. That excitement will transform into different potential requirements, more complex routes, different routes and an incredible looking product story map. You'll end up with a large number of user stories. Now a large number could be necessary, your design may warrant that number of user stories, or you might prefer that lower level of detail. But, it's common that that number is not necessary, and is far higher than the sufficient number needed.

Trust us, having too many stories is not as helpful as it might seem. Priorities will become mixed, themes will get blurred or detail may be too low.

At the end of it all, if you have too many user stories it'll be confusing. Although, digital story mapping using StoriesOnBoard has big advantages in this area as it keeps everything neat and accessible. But even still, the number of user stories you write should be necessary and sufficient, not exponential.

39 Continuously collect ideas

Ideas can come up at any time in the workstream and the team may not always have time to discuss and prioritize them. That's why you need to create a space for new stories. You can place these cards into an "unprioritized ideas" release. Don't hesitate to put a new thought there and organize meetings occasionally (or regularly) to discuss new stories. This queue-box" is not just for product owners, all team members should be allowed to add their new ideas. Sharing the map online allows the team to leave comments on these new ideas.

∨ **Must have**

∨ **Should have**

∨ **Could have**

∧ **Unprioritized ideas**

Idea 1

TODO

Idea 2

TODO

Idea 3

TODO

40 Remember that ideas are valuable

Never remove an idea. Put it into a “won’t have” or “icebox” release.

Recycle them and give them value.

- An idea may be valuable when the project’s scope is changing
- An idea could inspire teammates to think of a better suggestion
- An idea can show and prove previously tried “dead end” ideas

41 Involve customers

Involving customers in product development is crucial to enhancing the customer experience and delivering an outstanding product. Whether or not customers took part in the planning stages, walking them through an overview of the story map is a really good idea.

By introducing the anatomy of your story map to the consumer, everyone involved gains a clear overview of the product and its benefits. Once users more easily understand the goals and features of a story map, they can track product development and discover missing or unnecessary features themselves. Managing product design with a story mapping tool gives the product more value to the customer, and since it is always available online, users can review progress and leave feedback.

Managing a backlog in a story mapping tool allows the customer to track current iterations through card statuses. Story maps keep your customers up-to-date with the development process, which builds trust and transparency.

Related article



Involving customers in product development using story maps

Involving customers in product development is crucial to enhance the customer experience and delivering an outstanding product.

42 Look beyond the MoSCoW method

One of the most frequent criticisms of the good old MoSCoW method is that you have to set priority levels for every single user story. But how can you declare relative priority on similar tasks? In fact, the issue is the same when you use priority poker. There must be a different approach to scheduling tasks... We suggest using goals. For example, A UX designer's goals might look like this:

PRIORITY 1
“I got what I need”

PRIORITY 2
“Don't make me think”

PRIORITY 3
“I really enjoy using it”

PRIORITY 4
“Habit is second nature”

PRIORITY 5
“Make users of your promoters”

CHAPTER 6

Slice out the release structure



After collecting the user stories you should arrange them into a priority order.

43 MVP - is the shortest/simplest way

Collecting all the user stories and journeys is the easy part... but how do we find the most common, most relevant, most needed aspect of work to launch the project? A product can target several buyer personas, so try to concentrate on the biggest crowd, the most simple and common use case of your product. Remember, the user has to complete the journey and reach their goal. Collapse any non-relevant steps to get your MVP.

44 You've considered MVP, now think Minimal Shippable Product

MVP is probably a familiar term. Storyboarding allows us to see the full picture of a product, then slice it over and over to reach our MVP – the smallest viable version of the Product. This allows us to focus attention and stick to priorities.

A less familiar term may be a 'MSP' – the minimum version of a product that a business is happy for their customers to use. This is likely a larger version of the product, with more features and a longer development period. For example an e-commerce product will have the requirement to take payments, the MVP could be credit card only. But the MSP may require debit and credit card functions.

This is a big distinction, driven by wider business context, its market and environment – if everyone’s product takes both payment, a business may simply not be comfortable only offering one. When everyone is in the room mapping out the user stories it’s useful to understand the differences and align expectations. This way the shippable product developed will actually be shipped!



45 Call out the logical release points

As you’re going through your story mapping process the user journey will start to take shape. You’ll be able to imagine how your product will look and feel and how you can divide work out for the different developers within the team. If you start to wear your Delivery Manager or Project Manager hat at this point, you’ll do everyone a lot of favours.

Start noticing logical release points. Where does a sensible product iteration fall? Could you ship something when it gets to point X and then continue to enhance up until Y? StoriesOnBoard makes this easy to mark through tags. Doing this will add some big value to your wider stakeholders who are interested in the product's design but also when it could start being used and adding value to the business and their customers.

46 Come up with release goals

After slicing out the MVP, the next steps are not always clear. It could be helpful to find or describe some further goals for each release.

Release

RELEASE GOALS

- ---
- ---
- ---
- ---

LINKS

- ---
- ---

A goal can be:

- reaching another user persona
- upgrading an existing feature
- improving the user experience
- increase the rate of returning users

Once you've chosen your next goal, you can move any related cards into this release really quickly. In addition, there is a good opportunity here to rethink your priorities and rearrange the releases. [StoriesOnBoard](#) offers enhanced release management with release date and goal filters.

47 Give every map section an outcome-based goal

Outcome-based roadmaps put the emphasis on the goal a deliverable is trying to achieve rather than the milestone a team are trying to hit. Spelling out outcomes and goals empowers a development and design team to build a solution, not meet another milestone.

Story mapping is the design equivalent of that outcome-based roadmap. So when you combine the two, you'll be onto a sure thing. You'll have the business onboard as they'll be able to see the exact problem you're solving for them whilst also seeing the design you've come up with to do it. You can do this by using the outcomes goals as story themes and using the linear progression of your story map to achieve more and more goals for the business.

48 Use releases within scrums

Releases are developed to separate product versions, but they can be beneficial in scrums too. Think of it as separate iterations using release-lines. You could even create scrum iterations inside a release. Using StoriesOnBoard, you can track your iterations using status reports.

▼ Release

▼ Rel1 - sprint 1

▼ Rel1 - sprint 2

▼ Release 2

▼ Release 3

49 Imagine the map as a system

We know user stories should consider functions in isolation. Story maps should combine user stories to create a journey – or to map the journey! This is useful but it misses a level of depth by describing a journey in a linear fashion. As often, the most useful products do not create simple, linear user journeys. Some of the best software actively encourages loops. Imagine an ecommerce site that focused solely on converting the first product in a basket – there'd be no upsell! Story maps can be created to show these journey loops. Arrange them by inserting trigger and reference points.

Get a post-it to read 'return to point a' or 'trigger feedback loop X' and then on another layer you can map that entire feedback loop. This increases the effectiveness of the story mapping process by being more realistic. Actions have (without being grave or drastic!) consequences and that feedback loop is something story maps should try to capture if they really want to describe the user's journey with the product.

50 Stories should facilitate iteration

Anyone who reads a user story you've created should understand its aim and how it helps deliver the feature it's related to. But they should also see how it progresses, what the logical iteration is. Good stories are like a lego brick. They're independent but they're also more useful as part of a group. Alone they form something okay, but when combined, they form something awesome!

You can build this into your user stories by clearly calling out the individual part of a chain they're doing. For example, a user with items in my basket, I need to pay for them [using my debit card], so that I can purchase my products.

It's simple, distinct, it's useful. But by inserting 'debit card' we've left the space open for other payment methods at later iterations. The description focusing on the user's scenario allows us to iterate the process further, i.e. yes they need to pay to receive the items, but what other things could they do now there are products in their basket?

Use this iterative mindset as you create and review user stories in your maps and individuals and you'll encourage more innovation.

CHAPTER 7

User story examples



We collected one hundred user story examples in the most common cases such as “sign-up process” or “check-out process” to give ready-to-use solutions. Writing an intuitive user story is just the first step. To deliver real value with a user story, you need to detail it by adding descriptions, mock-ups, and pictures. Every user story is unique, but there are some frequently used sequences that can boost the story’s efficiency. For example, writing “scenarios” or “acceptance criteria” guide you to collect all the crucial information.

Login / Sign-Up process

- 1) As a new site user, I need the ability to create a username that is not my email address, so that I can have an identity on the site
- 2) As a new site user, I need the ability to create a secure password of over 15 characters, so that I have a private account
- 3) As a site user, I need the ability to reset my password from the standard login screen so that I can access my account if I forget my password without having to navigate elsewhere
- 4) As a site user, I need the ability to link my account to an email address so that I can receive notifications from the website
- 5) As a site owner, I want the ability to validate an email field, so that I capture correctly email addresses
- 6) As a site owner, I need the ability to send a confirmation email to a new user, so that they are assured the sign-up process was successful
- 7) As a new site user, I need the ability to view and agree the site’s terms and conditions, so that I understand what I am signing up for

8) As a site owner, I need the ability to display our terms and conditions, so that I have the required permissions from my users and abide by legislation and laws

9) As a site user, I need the ability to log in to the website so that I can revisit my account at different times

10) As a site user, I want the ability to edit my user profile, including username, address and date of birth, so that I can keep my details up to date

Scenarios

- Username with different character sets allowed
- Username with only numbers allowed
- Username using only emails allowed
- Password that must be long
- Password that must include special characters
- Password that does not allow special characters

Checkout process

- 11) As a shopper, I need the ability to view different products across multiple product ranges, so that I can find an item I want to buy
- 12) As a shopper, I need the ability to add item(s) to my shopping basket by selecting 'add to basket', so that I can create a checkout basket and purchase items
- 13) As a shopper, I need the ability to remove items from my shopping basket by selecting 'remove' next to the given product, so that I can purchase only the items I want
- 14) As a shopper, I need the ability to review my basket before making a purchase, so that I am sure of the items I am buying
- 15) As the owner of a shopping site, I need the ability to take payments from a shopper, so that I can sell my stock
- 16) As a shopper, I need the ability to check out as an anonymous user so that I do not have to create an account to buy items
- 17) As a shopper, I need the ability to save a payment method to my account, so that I don't have to re-enter my details every time I attempt to buy something
- 18) As a shopper at checkout, I need the ability to select different payment methods, so that I can choose the method most appropriate
- 19) As a shopper, I need the ability to enter my delivery address using a postcode look-up system, so that my purchases can be sent to me
- 20) As a shopper, I need the ability to enter different billing and delivery addresses, so that I can receive deliveries at places other than my billing address

Scenarios

- Input address using dropdown menu
- Input address using free text
- Input address based on zip code look-up
- Payment method of credit card
- Payment method of only debit card
- Payment method of PayPal
- Payment method using bank transfer

User Profile processes

21) As a user, I need the ability to enter biographical details about myself, so that I can create an accurate profile

22) As an existing user, I need the ability to edit my existing details, so that my profile's details remain accurate

23) As a user, I need the ability to choose what details are displayed publicly so that I only have to share things about me that I want to share

24) As a user, I need the ability to add a profile picture to my account so that I can be identified easily

25) As a user, I want the ability to create a user profile, so that I can tailor my experience when using the site

26) As a site owner, I want users to be able to create an account so that I can relate historical actions to an individual

27) As a user, I need my account profile to have messaging capabilities, so that I can contact other users

28) As a new user trying to sign up to a service, I need access to instructions from the sign-up screen, so that I can successfully sign up

29) As a new user, I need something to indicate which fields are mandatory to complete on the sign-up form, so that I can successfully sign up

30) As a developer, I need to highlight validation errors in the sign-up form in real time by highlighting the field and providing an error message so that users know how to correct input mistakes

31) As a user, I want automatic spell check on any input fields, so that I am aware of typos and spelling mistakes as I input my information and avoid errors

Scenarios

- Biographical details including Date of birth / Name / About Us / Address / Likes / Dislikes
- Sign up using a 3rd party (e.g. Facebook) as a service
- Sign up using email and password combination
- Sign up using a guest account

Accessibility

- 32) As a developer, I need to make sure color ratios are correct so that my website is accessible to users with visual impairments
- 33) As a developer, I need to make sure audio instructions are available so that my website is accessible to users with visual impairments
- 34) As a user with visual impairments, I need the website's features to format correctly in close up so that I can access the website
- 35) As a user with visual impairments, I need to be able to change text size, so that I can read the website
- 36) As a developer, I need to make sure all images on my website have the correct accessibility tags so that a user with a screen reader can still use my website
- 37) As a developer, I need to make sure my website works consistently across multiple browsers so that I can increase my reach to different users
- 38) As a developer, I need to consider different device requirements, so that users with different device preferences (mobile, tablet, desktop) can still use my product
- 39) As a developer, I need to make sure the next action to take is obvious to a user, so that users are not confused using the product
- 40) As a developer, I need to consider loading implications under different network conditions (3G, 4G, Wi-Fi) so that users can access my website under different networking conditions
- 41) As a user with hearing difficulties, I need access to subtitles / transcripts for all audio content, so that I can understand the audio content

Acceptance Criteria

- When a user clicks on a '+' the text size increases
- When a user clicks on a '-' the text size decreases
- The content remains in order as the text size changes
- Media content moves correctly when text sizes are changed
- Given a user is on a 3G network, loading times are <X seconds
- Given a user uses the product on a 3G network, when loading times are >X seconds the service degrades gracefully rather than offering a 500HTTP error

Search

42) As a user, I need a search bar accessible from any screen so that I can easily find the things I'm looking for from any page

43) As a user, I need the ability to set my searches to only return images, so that I can easily find pictures

44) As a user, I need my search results moderated against standard 'Safe for Work' standards, so that I do not receive explicit search results

45) As a user, I need the ability to filter my search by location, so that search results are more relevant to me

46) As a developer, I need to limit the number of search results per page to 20 results, so that search return loading times are not impacted due to loading large result sets

47) As a developer, I need to implement an 'infinite scroll' feature on image search results, so that results are more accessible to users

48) As a user, I want search terms recommended to me based on current trends, so that I can access popular content

49) As a developer, I need to auto spell correct user search terms once they select 'search', but make the user aware of this change, so that user input errors are limited but they can still search for uncommon words

50) As a logged-in user, I want my search terms recommended to me based on my history, so that my searches are more appropriate

51) As a user, I want the ability to delete my search history, so that my search history is not impacting future search results

52) As a user, I need to be able to complete searches without having to create an account, so that I can search for things without having to sign up

Scenarios

- Search results are returned based on; keyword matches
- Search results are returned based on; popularity
- Search results are returned based on; semantic matches

Music

53) As a user, I want to see the top 10 trending tracks in the top right of my home screen, so that I can choose popular songs to listen to

54) As a user, I need the ability to create playlists, so that I can access my favorite songs in one place

55) As a user, I need the ability to search for music by genre by selecting one from a list, so that I can easily find music in a specific genre

56) As a user, I need the ability to search for songs by album, so that I can easily find the album I am looking for

57) As a user, I need the ability to search via song title so that I can easily find the track I am looking for

- 58) As a user, I need the ability to control the playback volume, so that I can modulate the volume
- 59) As a user, I want to be recommended songs based on the last track I listened to, so that I can easily find new but similar music
- 60) As a user, I need the ability to edit my playlists, so that I can change which tracks are on my playlist
- 61) As a user, I need the ability to name my playlist, so that I can easily identify my different playlists
- 62) As a logged-in user, I need the ability to share songs I like with other logged-in users, so that I can be social with other users
- 63) As a user, I need the ability to receive notifications when songs from my favorite artist(s) are released, so that I know when new songs are available
- 64) As a user, I need the ability to see my recent searches within the search screen view, so that I can easily find songs that I searched for previously
- 65) As a developer, I need to limit the number of recent searches displayed to a user and order them chronologically, so that users are not overwhelmed with very historic search history

Outcomes

- When a user shares a song, then another user receives a link to that song
- When a user renames a playlist, it is visibly updated after pressing save
- When a user deletes a playlist, it is no longer visible to that user

Mobile

66) As a developer, I need to make my website scale correctly to different screen sizes

67) As a user, I need a mobile-friendly version of a website, so that I can still use the website on a smaller screen

68) As a developer, I need to highlight key actions when the user is on a mobile device, so that key actions are more obvious to a user

69) As a user, I want to be able to use the app offline, so that I can use the product without internet access

70) As an iOS developer, I need to make my app accessible across multiple Apple devices, so that I don't exclude users on different iPhone types

71) As an Android user, I need my app accessible on the most recent version of Android, so that it is accessible on the newest OS release

72) As a developer, I need to make my app accessible on mobile devices, so that it can be used on the move.

73) As a mobile user, I want the ability to receive in-app notifications so that I know when I have a new message/action within the app

74) As a mobile user, I need the ability to opt in and out of notifications via the settings menu so that I can easily control whether I receive notifications

75) As a developer, I need to design my product to cater for screen rotations (portrait & landscape), so that users can use my app in any rotation layout

Acceptance Criteria

- The app is made accessible on iOS v.N it is still accessible on v.N – 4versions
- Notifications are visible as a red dot icon on the app
- Notifications are visible in the user’s notification menu

Security Admin User

76) As a Security Admin, I need the ability to reset other users’ passwords remotely, so that I can resolve password issues for users when I / they are offsite

77) As a Security Admin, I need higher access privileges, so that I can access additional features to non-admin users

78) As a system user, I need the ability to delete user accounts, so that redundant accounts are not left on the system

79) As a Security Admin, I need the ability to view logs of other user actions, so that I can monitor network usage

80) As a Security Admin user, I need the ability to block other user access so that I can control user access

81) As a Security Admin user, I need the ability to log incidents with a ticketing system that allows free-text input (limited to 200 characters), so that correct responses can be taken

82) As a Security Admin user, I need the ability to create new accounts for new users, so that new users have accounts

83) As a Security Admin user, I need access to the command line on computers so that I can perform my role more effectively

84) As a Security Admin, I need the ability to set up network traffic monitors view, so that I can respond to network threats appropriately

85) As a Security Admin, I need the ability to perform system backups, so that recent systems images remain available

Acceptance Criteria

- Given a text field is limited to 200 characters then;
- The 201st character will not appear when typed
- Any text pasted from clipboard – characters after 200 do not appear
- User is able to enter any input length from 0-200 characters

Holiday Booking

86) As a user attempting to book a holiday, I need the ability to search via dates, so that search results are relevant

87) As a user searching for a holiday, I need the ability to order trips by price, so that I can select results based on price range

88) As a user booking a trip, I need the ability to see reviews from other people, so that I can learn more about the trip

89) As a user booking a holiday, I need the ability to choose different departure locations so that I can make my search more accurate

90) As a user, I need my search results to include different airlines so that I can compare prices across airlines

91) As a user booking a holiday, I need the flight lengths displayed in search results, so that I can use that information to inform my choice

92) As a user, I need the ability to review my trip selection before I confirm my purchase

93) As a user, I need to receive a confirmation email following my booking so that I can review my order and have a record of the details

Scenarios

Search results can be ordered by:

- Date
- Price
- Location
- Rating

Communication tool

94) As a user sending an email, I need the ability to add a recipient(s) from a list, so that I can send emails to the correct person

95) As a user composing an email, I need the ability to format the message text with different colors, font sizes, bold and italics, so that I can emphasize certain parts of my email

96) As an email recipient, I want the ability to see a preview of the email before I open it, so that I can decide whether I need to action the email immediately

97) As an email user, I need the ability to create / edit / delete email folders so that I can organize my messages correctly

98) As an email user, I want the 'Send' button in a position away from other action buttons, so that I do not accidentally send my email

99) As a user organizing a meeting, I need the ability to access my calendar without leaving the email tool, so that I can easily organize meetings

100) As a user, I need the ability to mark emails with an importance level before I send them, so that recipients know how urgent my message is

Scenarios

- Calendar is accessible via an icon in the bottom left
- Calendar is accessible via an icon in the tool bar
- Calendar is accessible via a dropdown menu

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