

Amira Polack - Struct Club

PM 102 Term Reflection

Struct Club made pivots from a multi-device platform to strictly mobile for the near term, and from an originally complex user workflow to one that is increasingly simplified. First, we started the semester with a “360” mobile-and-web platform strategy, referenced in our original PRD & milestones, but pared down to focus on mobile-only. Second, the original UX focused a little too granularly on walking the customer through every micro-step, but this strategy created unnecessarily nested screens that lengthened the customer workflow; we dramatically simplified by eliminating unnecessary screens, drafting a simple navigation, and envisioning new ways of class-planning, such as a UX that feels more like planning a calendar than making lists nested within lists.

These changes occurred for several reasons due to user tests and a focus on near-term feasibility. We started to ask ourselves: what would be reasonable by the end of the semester, especially to ensure a quality app? We also asked: what does the customer *really* need based on our conversations with them? Are they possibly using a laptop or desktop for excel and Word Doc planning for lack of a truly great mobile solution? Increasingly, whether it was observing users, considering other successful products that now have multi-device access who began by nailing one device, or speaking to product friends who are observing increasing traffic migration towards mobile, we decided to stick it to mobile for now. We were given feedback by a developer consultant that we should not lock ourselves down exclusively with iOS, and have Android covered, but there was little to indicate Android need from our actual user conversations.

I learned through this process that great products must have laser-focus across design, feature prioritization, development, and requests that surface from users. You will get a lot of (sometimes conflicting) advice, and you will observe many workarounds and life-hacks from users tinkering around with alternatives that look like problems, but are actually symptoms. At the end of the day, it's critical to listen hard to the user base - not only to the words they're saying - but also what their behaviors are saying. I also learned you must be willing to scrap a plan and start again, even when the old plan made sense at the time.

I am very happy with the ease and efficiency with which we developed the backend, and the self-restraint we exercised around only developing what we had robustly tested

through mockups enough times to see user excitement and ease of navigation. First, I was very nervous about accomplishing the backend at the beginning of the semester - the concept of a backend still feels black-box-ish to me. We were fortunate to have pro-bono developer time to review what was actually needed, specific scopes to post on Upwork, and the actual code completed to ensure everything made sense. While at the outset this was the scariest part going into the semester, it ended up being the easiest - special thanks to Aakash for taking the charge on this. On restraint around prioritizing features, testing, and iterating - naturally, there are so many cool bells and whistles we would be excited to add (especially for me as a spin instructor). However, and fortunately guided by Madhur's framework for documenting, quantifying, and prioritizing feedback from user interviews, we forced ourselves to be slow and prudent with feature prioritization, which was not easy!

In terms of mistakes, I would say that in spite of our restraint, we -- and by "we" I mainly mean "I" -- got a *tad* ambitious around making the UI pretty. We (I) really wanted to have an aesthetically beautiful product done by the end of the semester given what we know about our end-user preferences, i.e. looks matter to fitness professionals. And of course, it wouldn't have hurt to have delivered something visually impressive by the end of PM102 either! However, we continually (and rightly) got pushback from our front-end that integrating pretty UI, as opposed to simple and clear UI, at this point would only increase development, deployment, and iteration time. Also, it was clear during user tests that they would be nit-picky about minor aesthetics whatever stage the app was in, in spite of guidance to focus on specific key paths...! So for now, we have a set UI assets on-hold to be integrated ahead of a major launch on iTunes as opposed to our PM102-improved Beta on TestFlight. That said, if Struct Club's goal was to discontinue beyond PM102, it would have been perfectly reasonable to freeze everything and integrate the pretty UI. I believe, however, what we learned is more representative of real-life, lean, long-term product management.

As a product-focused founder, I think the most important lesson from my PM102 experience reaffirmed the causal link between diversity and innovation: Aakash and Madhur, as non-instructors and as completely different thinkers from me, would devise the newest, most creative, and most dramatically simplifying ways to solve end user problems, sketch new screens, storyline our live demo, and more. I am inspired by this, and moving on from PM102 am continually motivated to continue searching for diverse talent at the earliest stages of Struct Club that can continue to our innovative potential through diversity, not merely in terms of labels like "female founder" or "racial minority,"

but true diversity in terms of where we're "coming from," how we think, and the ways in which we approach and solve problems.

In terms of personal fit, I had a blast working on the product to the extent that many other classes this semester seemed like a distraction. I learned that where I derive the most energy as a PM is during the customer conversations, learning about their experiences and uncovering their reactions to the product. One of my big weaknesses is my own insecurity around being a non-engineer, an area in which PM102 has helped me gain confidence.

Appendix

Re Aakash's comment that Struct Club is a productivity app - Aakash's mindset is precisely example of a new frame of mind / way of thinking brought to the table that changed the game for the product and added a lot of value.

Re Aakash's comment on Product Team structure - splitting-of-work vs functional - this is tough to figure out. The former seemed to make intuitive sense in the beginning, when it turns out we learned a lot in retrospect about what really made sense in practice. I'm keeping an eye on learning more about this going forward, and I'm glad to have begun learning about this now.

Re Aakash's last paragraph - overjoyed that the experience was fun and encouraging!

Re Madhur's comment around benchmarking features - yes! I didn't acknowledge this well enough above, but I'm also appreciative to the team in being diligent around benchmarking not only apps like MyFitness DJ and Schwinn, but also Spotify, various DJ apps, etc so as not to reinvent the wheel with intuitive product nuggets that already exist out there!

Re Madhur's comment about developer sourcing - that Aakash was comfortable communicating (and savvy at negotiating) across borders was key to lean development, also unacknowledged above. It can be intimidating as a non-engineering team to manage developers overseas, let alone developers in town, but Aakash was unafraid.

Re Madhur's positive feedback - very flattered! I often feel anxious/nervous and appreciate the encouragement :)