

Low-fi Prototyping & Pilot Usability Testing

THE RECURSIVE LEAPERS

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1. Introduction

Product: **EFANGELIST**

Value Proposition: *"Be the ultimate fan!"*

Today's up-and-coming musical artists must be able to reach consumers digitally without investing much time, capital, or technical expertise, so that they can focus on writing quality music. We provide a customizable template for building a branded app that will target fans through multimedia content, personal messaging, and a gamified system to share the artist with friends.

Appealing primarily to the ultra-fan, this app will provide exclusive content and opportunities to connect with the artist and other fans. A points system can be redeemed for everything from digital downloads to apparel, and even the chance for face time with the artist. By building loyalty among ultra-fans, artists can leverage their potential to spread the buzz and expand the fanbase.

2. Initial Sketches



Figure 1a: Initial Sketch Concept A

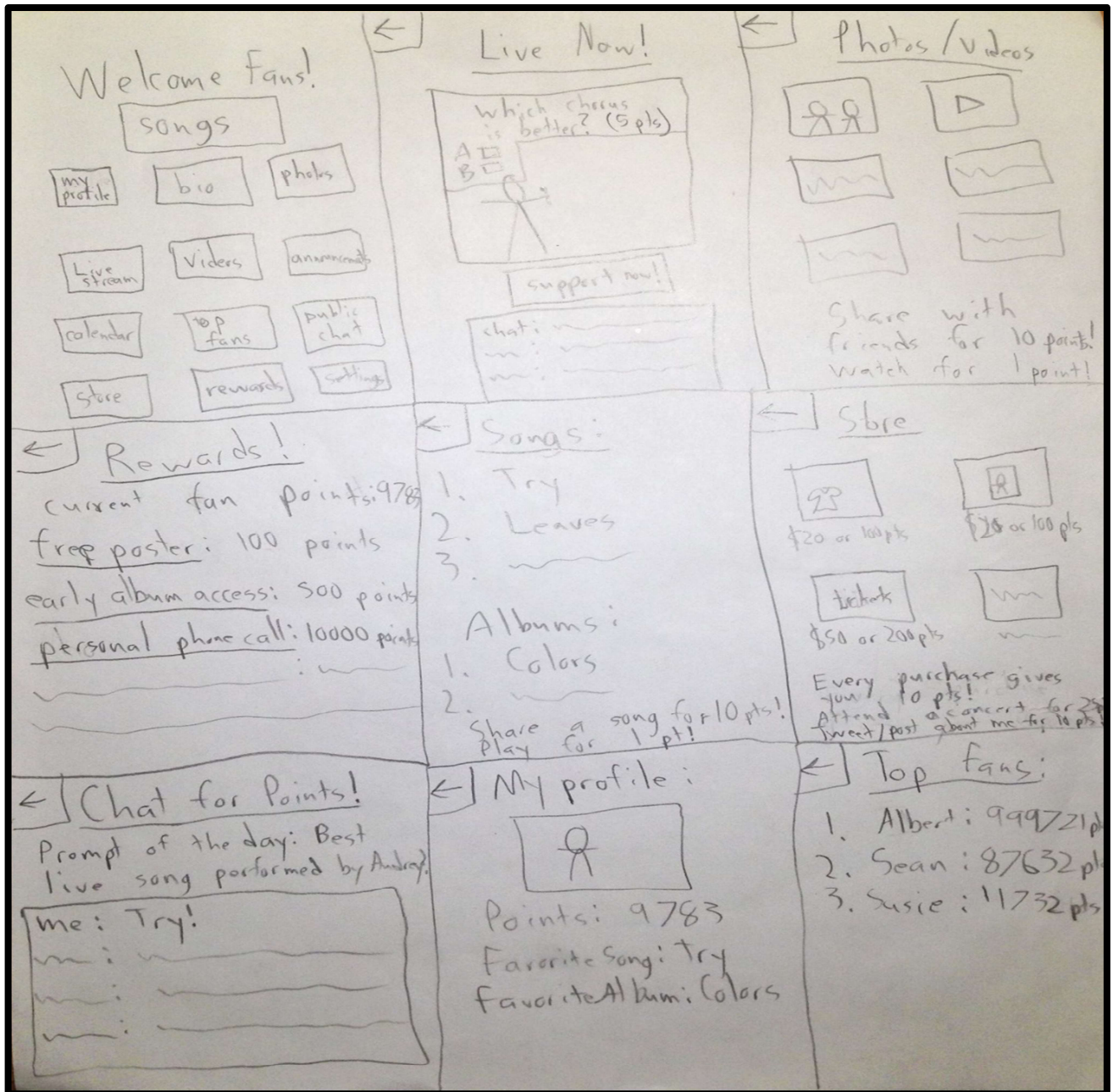


Figure 1b: Initial Sketch Concept B

Figure 1a shows one of our initial concept sketches. It takes a minimalist approach with large headings on each page and large oval-shaped navigation buttons which take up most of the width of the screen. It introduces unique features like the fan map and the option to support the artist with in-kind services (such as video editing or music production).

Figure 1b shows the other one of our initial concept sketches. It places an emphasis on back-navigation and uses a "mosaic" tiled approach to the icons onscreen. It introduces and develops a system of points that are earned by performing various tasks and are redeemable through the app.

3. Selected Interface Design

When our group reconvened with these and other sketches we had each drawn, we decided that neither was sufficient as an interface design. We wanted an interface that would be clean, attractive, and natural to navigate, but also one that could accommodate a large number of features we intended to build. Many of the ideas for certain features were expressed in the initial sketches—for example, the fan map and support page were drawn from Figure A, and the overall implementation of points was illustrated in Figure B. The livestream and fan profile pages appeared in both. We then brainstormed a number of additional features we wanted to make sure appeared in our prototype, which together included navigation to the following tabs:

- **Home**
The landing page.
- **About**
Information about the artist, including a short bio and perhaps some fun facts a fan wouldn't have known before.
- **Music**
An in-app player for songs by the artist, including unreleased, demo, cover, and acoustic tracks. Links to iTunes to buy songs.
- **Video**
A repository for music videos and concert recordings. A unique feature here is the "livestream," through which artists can communicate with and receive feedback from fans in realtime.
- **Events**
A calendar of upcoming performances and related events in your area.
- **Connect**
A direct messenger between the fan and the artist. The fan can type messages to send to the artist, who has the option of responding with either text or video messages.
- **Shop**
A store to purchase artist-branded apparel, accessories, and all-around swag.
- **News**
Latest stories of the artist in the news and on music blogs.
- **Photos**
A photo gallery of the artist.
- **Fan Connect**
A mini-platform enabling fans to find each other on a map, communicate through direct messages, post on forums, and organize in-person meet-ups. Also includes the option to link one's profile to Facebook or other social media.

- **Support**

A portal to contribute financially to the artist through PayPal, Venmo, Stripe, or Credit Card, or offer to contribute with in-kind services such as photography, video editing, audio production, or food.

Many of these functions can be understood in terms of *tasks* that the user is trying to achieve while using our app. Below, we enumerate some of these in terms of simple, moderate, and complex tasks, followed by their respective storyboards.

Simple Tasks:

- Learn more about the artist ("ABOUT" page)
See Figure 2a
- Communicate directly with the artist ("CONNECT" page)
See Figure 2b
- Listen to music, including unreleased, demo, cover, and acoustic tracks ("MUSIC" page)
See Figure 2c

Moderate Tasks:

- Give feedback to the artist during a video livestream ("VIDEO" page)
See Figure 2d
- Support the artist by contributing money or in-kind services ("SUPPORT" page)
- Find and purchase tickets for concerts / register for fan-only events ("EVENTS" page)

Complex Task:

- Earn fan points, which are later redeemable for a variety of artist-determined perks like digital downloads, free concert tickets, swag, and maybe a chance for face time with the artist herself!
- Build a grassroots movement behind the artist, e.g.:
 - Social media/hashtag campaign
 - Create a display for an upcoming concert or event
<http://wivb.com/2015/09/03/one-direction-fans-prepare-to-rock-the-ralph/>
 - Organize a pre-game or post-concert party
See Figure 2e

Task Storyboards

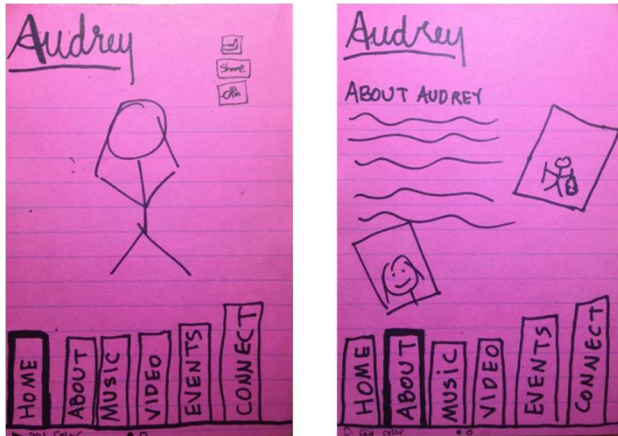


Figure 2a: Learn more about the artist

press the "ABOUT" button

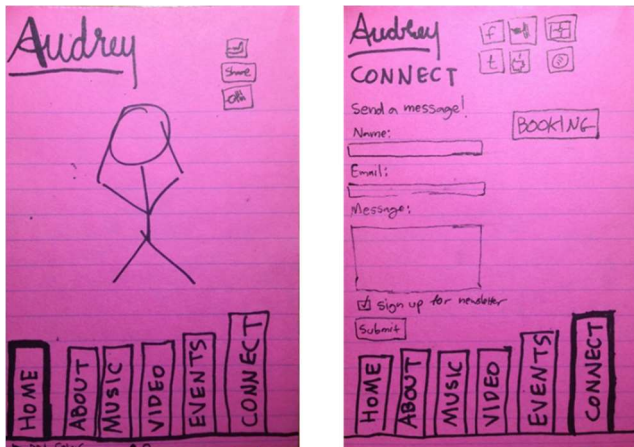


Figure 2b: Communicate directly with the artist

press the "CONNECT" button

Then fill out the dialogue box to communicate directly with the artist

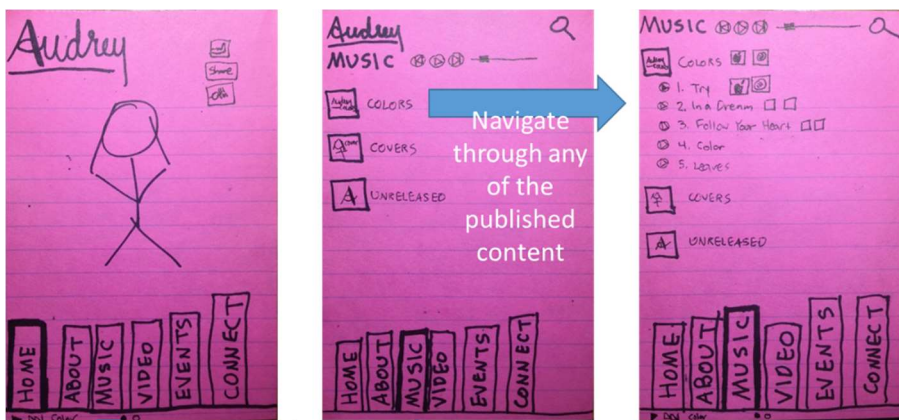


Figure 2c: Listen to music

press the "MUSIC" button

Navigate through any of the published content

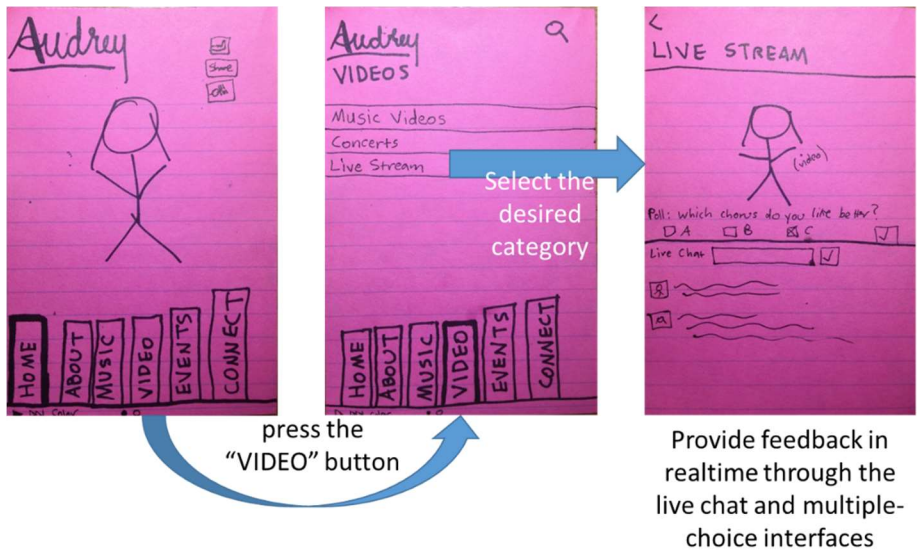
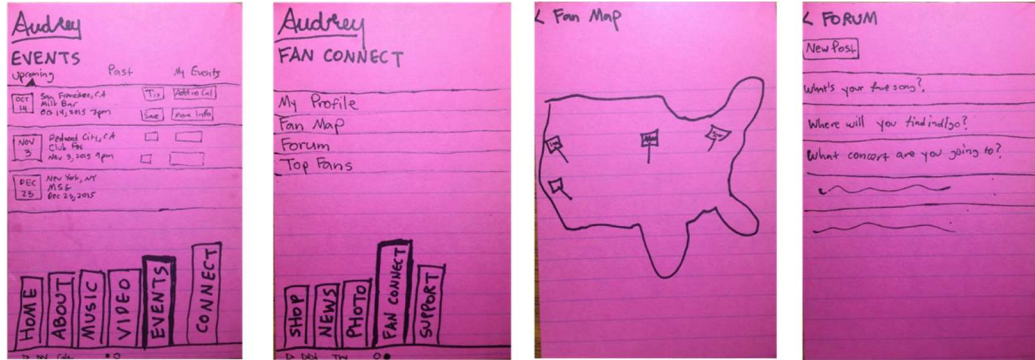


Figure 2d: Give feedback to the artist during a video livestream



1. Find & choose an upcoming concert after which to organize a fan party

2. Use "FAN CONNECT" to find other fans nearby, post an invitation on the forum, etc.

3. Celebrate together when your favorite artist comes to town! Bring a friend to spread the word (and earn extra points when they check in on the app)

Figure 2e: Organize a post-concert party, helping to expand the fanbase, and earning you points

4. Prototype

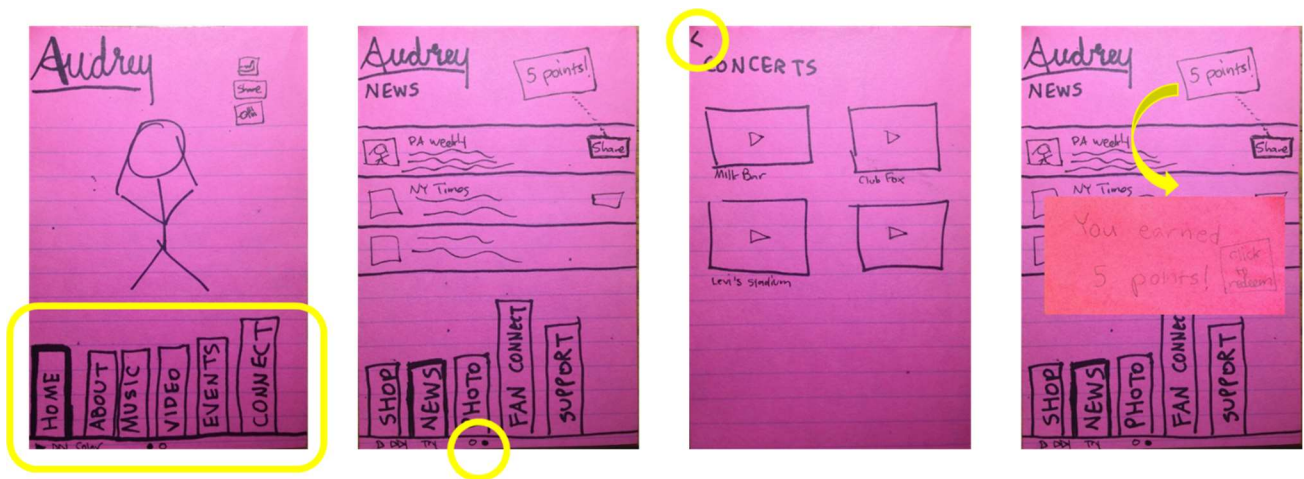


Figure 3a: The basic interface of the app.

The design of our prototype centers on a set of navigational buttons that are visible in every tab. Since they do not all fit on one screen, the tabs can be slid left or right, just like the home icon screens on an iPhone. This allows for flexibility in the number of tabs/screens that can be accommodated, while preserving ease of use through an intuitive interaction already familiar to most users. The relation of the current window to other windows is marked by a set of small circles at the bottom of the screen, also similar to iOS.

From the page of any given feature, a user may click on a category to be taken to a sub-page of that feature. For example, "CONCERTS" is a sub-page of "VIDEOS" in Figure 3a above. To navigate back to the parent page, a user has only to click the "<" button in the upper-left corner of the screen, an interaction customary to most apps.

Figure 3a also demonstrates the interactivity of the points system, the amount of which is visible before a user selects any given task, after which a congratulatory notification is pushed onscreen. In this example, the reward is triggered when a user pushes the "share" button, an action that is understandably incentivized throughout the app.

As the result of user feedback, we added the following demo sequence to help explain the functions of the app when opened for the first time. The design is a simple swipe-left to move-right motion leading from screen to screen:

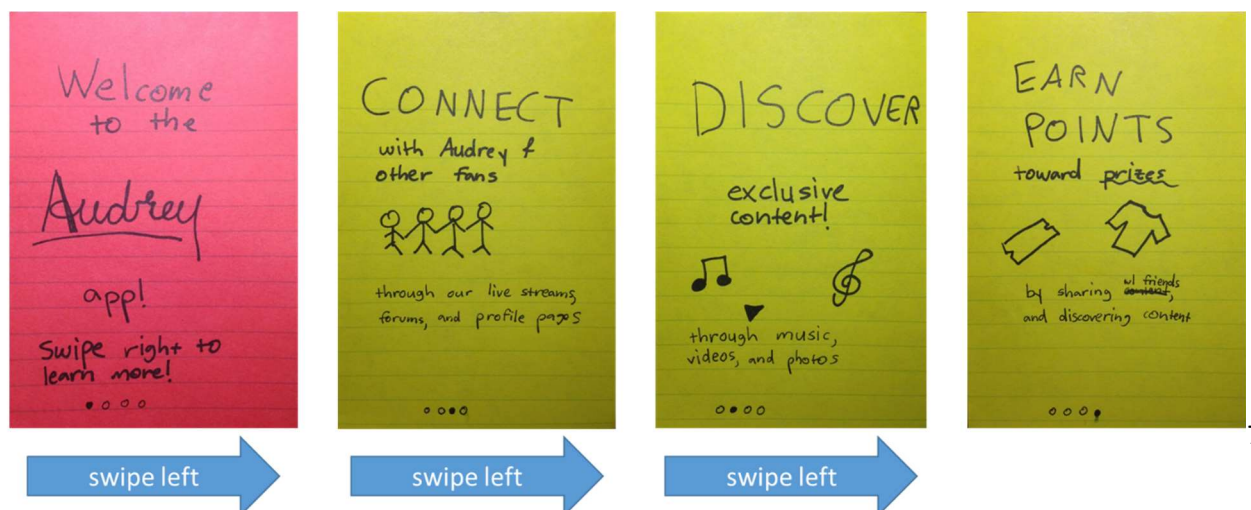


Figure 3b: Opening demo sequence when the app is launched for the first time.

Complete Prototype System, Page 1

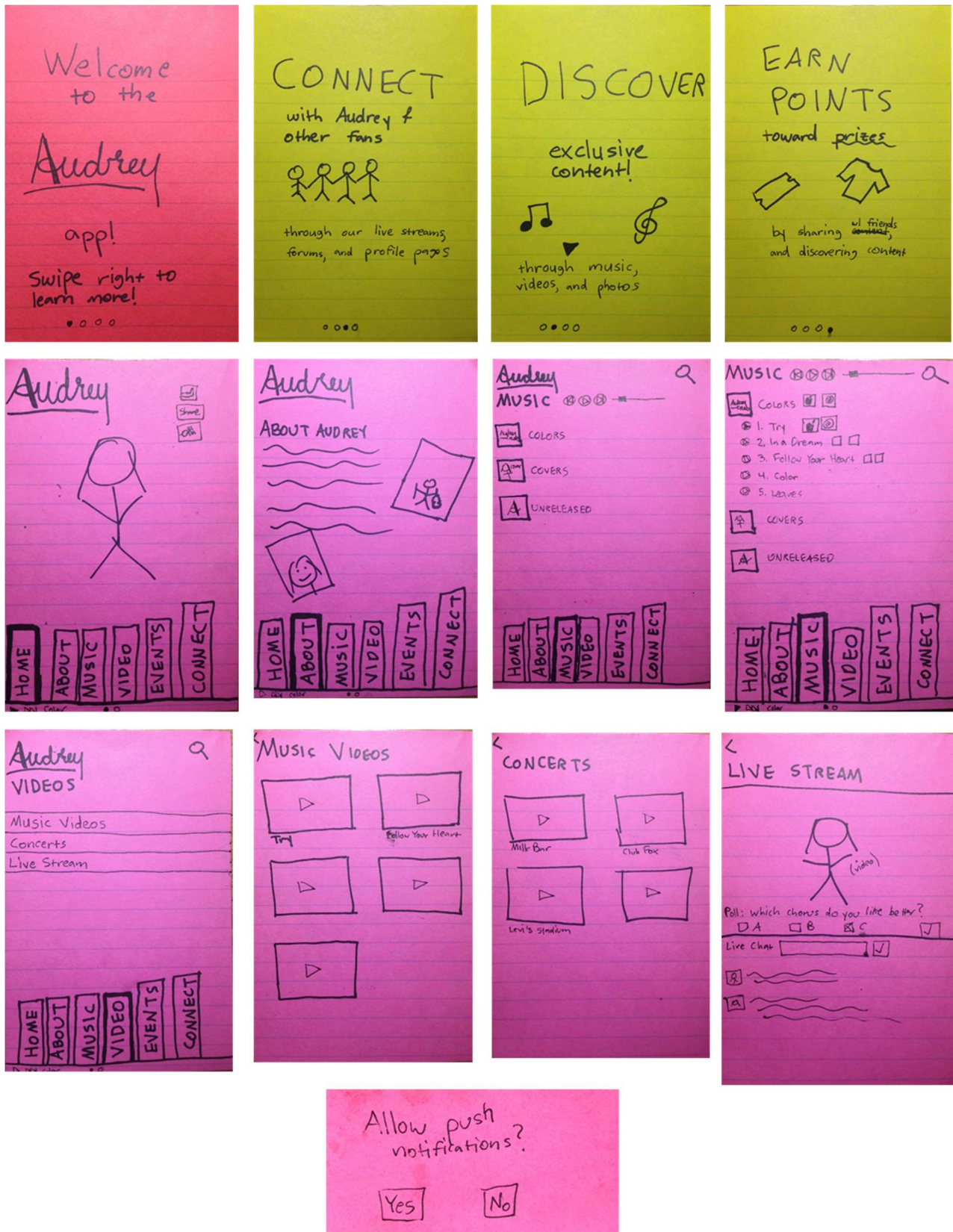


Figure 4a: Complete system prototype, Part 1 of 2

Complete Prototype System, Page 2



Figure 4b: Complete system prototype, Part 2 of 2

5. Testing & Results

Testing was conducted with three participants who were randomly intercepted in two locations, the Stanford Graduate School of Business Arbuckle Cafe and Cafe Borrone in Menlo Park. We chose these casual eateries since they mimicked the informal circumstances under which one is likely to use a recreational app. In particular, we looked for people who were either sitting alone or currently unoccupied, since this seemed closest to the conditions under which one would normally engage with a smartphone. This also meant that they were generally welcoming of our request to have them demo our prototype.

Chosen participants were invariably music fans, allowing us to substitute the name of their favorite artist for “Audrey” when we ran the experiments. This allowed us to most closely imitate the experience they would have using the branded app of their favorite artist, since our target audience is the ultra-fan who would only have such an app for their favorite artist or two. After introducing our project, we explained to participants the intended tasks outlined in Section 3 and invited them to fully explore the app. Audrey acted as the facilitator, Ian as the computer, and Sean as special effects (e.g., cueing the music), while Albert observed the participants and took notes on their interactions.

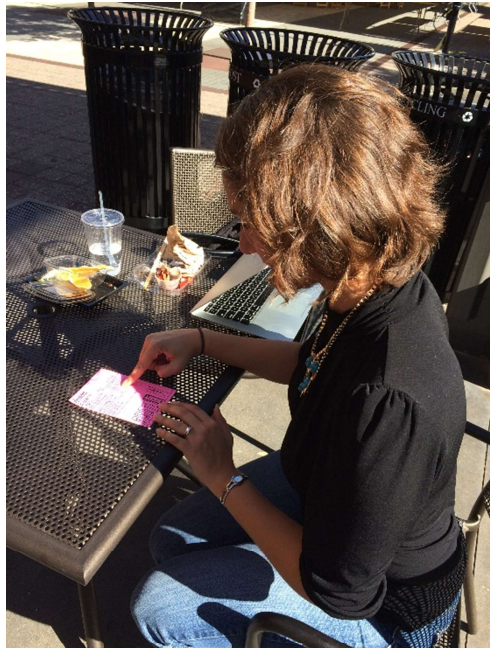


Figure 5a: Holly in action with our prototype

Experiment #1

Name: Holly

Favorite artist: Katy Perry

Location: Arbuckle Cafe

Highlights:

Holly was curious what a livestream was and enjoyed the result. Holly liked that we have the navigation buttons in the same place on each screen. She stumbled when trying to download the songs she heard in the “MUSIC” tab. We classified this as a [1] cosmetic problem, since her confusion stemmed from the small and illegible drawing of the link to the iTunes store. When she got to the messenger, she questioned whether it would actually be read by the artist, or merely their staff. We classified this as a [2] minor usability problem, since this could be clarified in the

app. She was unsure of the difference between “CONNECT” and “FAN CONNECT,” which for us was also a [2] minor usability problem since the admittedly poorly-name tabs could be relabeled.

She was surprised that the “SUPPORT” tab took her to a financial contributions page, since she presumed it meant technical support for the app, which she said “threw me off a little bit.”

When we explained it to her, she responded that “Contribute feels like what charities, causes would do. Why would I just give you money?” This conceptual incongruence felt like a [3] major usability problem. Most of all, Holly was confused by the points system, a [4] catastrophic usability problem. At first, she didn’t know what they were or where to find them, looking futilely on the artist’s “ABOUT” page. When she found the leaderboard, she responded that it was “silly,” saying “too many companies have tried this and I just wouldn’t care. I’m not there to compete. Competition and fandom don’t really go together.” When we explained more about how points can be redeemed, she replied that “points as currency makes more sense than just points for their own sake.” Finally, she reflected after finishing with the prototype that “it didn’t seem super easy to get a friend and bring them into my fandom,” which is also a catastrophic usability problem since fan-sharing is in large part the purpose of this app!

As a remedy for some of the confusion she experienced, Holly suggested a 3-pane intro the first time a user launches the app. We immediately prototyped it and added it to the system for our next two experiments (see Figure 3b).



Figure 5b: Jean in action with our prototype

Experiment #2

Name: Jean

Favorite artist: One Republic

Location: Cafe Boronne

Highlights:

Upon opening the app, we pushed a dialog box to Jean asking for permission to send push notifications, to which she replied “I always say no.” This seemed like a [3] major usability problem if we were counting on these to keep her engaged even after closing the app. After the demo sequence, which she seemed to appreciate, the Livestream interested her: “so you’d actually help them make the music, in a way?” She recognized some of the venues on the “EVENTS” page, which got her excited. When she went to buy her tickets, Jean was pleasantly surprised when the points-

earned dialog appeared onscreen. However, when probed, she said “I’m not interested in points so I wouldn’t be the one pushing those things. I wouldn’t want to share my personal information, and wouldn’t want the points anyway.” Again, this seemed like a [4] catastrophic blow, but likewise on further explanation she perked up, saying “tickets and everything, wow—that seems worthwhile.” Interestingly, she had a similar reaction as Holly to the support feature, thinking it was technical support. After 2 out of 2 respondents stumbled over the same label, we crossed it out right after that and replaced it with “CONTRIBUTE.” She also seemed unsure of how to use the fan features, asking “how would I connect with other fans?” Looking at the FanMap feature, she said that “I wouldn’t know what that means.” These seemed like a [3] major usability problem that will need to be addressed.



Figure 5b: Jason in action with our prototype

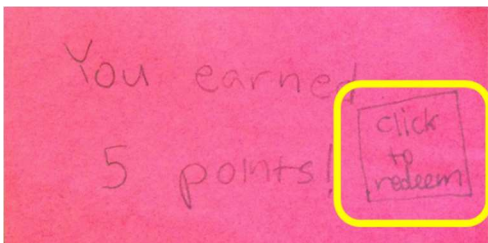


Figure 5c: The “click to redeem” button was added between rounds as a result of user feedback

Experiment #3

Name: Jason

Favorite artist: One Republic

Location: Cafe Boronne

Highlights:

Jason also immediately rejected the request to allow push notifications. He navigated effortlessly throughout the app—more so than Jean—finding his way quickly to the unreleased section. “That’d be pretty tight! That’s stuff you have to dig for otherwise.” He didn’t assume that “tix” was short for “tickets,” seemingly a [1] cosmetic error that could be fixed by a name change. On the “CONNECT” tab, he said that he would not sign up for the newsletter, since he wasn’t sure if he would get mailed once a week or every few hours. This seemed like a [2] minor usability error since some clarification might have assured him of the former. As a result of the confusion surrounding the points system in the last two rounds, we had added a “click to redeem” button to the points notification. This time, instead of being met with confusion, our participant smiled, saying “Oh I’m starting to get it. I like it.” Success!

Navigating directly to the points-redemption page, he explained that his would go straight to getting tickets. He added that it might be good to have a small prize for infrequent users, just to keep them interested. “What’s

indigo?” he asked, after reading the cryptic text in our fan forum. It was clear that our forum needed better organization, starting with threads. On probing, he admitted “I just avoid internet forums because sometimes other people are just assholes. In most cases you find an extremist of some sort saying something like that album was terrible and you’re an idiot.” This would be a [3] major usability problem unless we could find a way to moderate the forum *and* convince users like Jason that it was safe to participate.

6. Conclusion

Many of the learnings have already been discussed in the results. Overall, we were pleased by the warm reception toward our app, particularly the ability of users to picture themselves interacting with their favorite artists. Our participants generally found the interface predictable and easy to navigate. Some of the features needed clarification, a more precise name, or both. We were able to implement some changes on the spot, including the introduction of the

opening demo sequence and the name-change from "SUPPORT" to "CONTRIBUTE," though the latter needs additional work. The blanket rejection of push notifications was disappointing, though we later thought that we might have had more success had we asked them later on in their usage of the app. Implementing a seamless points-rewards system is high on our list of remaining conceptual challenges. Our experiments seemed to indicate that users were unimpressed by having points or leaderboards for their own sake, but interested in using points as a currency toward valuable perks. Tickets were an obvious satisfier, but there might also be room to think of more creative and meaningful interactions between an artist and her fans. We have additional work to be done in thinking how we would implement other features, like moderating the forums and convincing people to sign up for the newsletter (not to mention push notifications). Other features that were popular with users would have to be vetted by artists for feasibility, such as the unreleased songs and livestream (which would take considerable logistics to sync properly and notify all the fans in advance). And stepping back, it is imperative that we make the act of sharing with friends fundamental to the act of launching this app, since the service is meant ultimately for the "efangelist" who can spread the buzz and build the fanbase of an up-and-coming artist. Stay tuned.