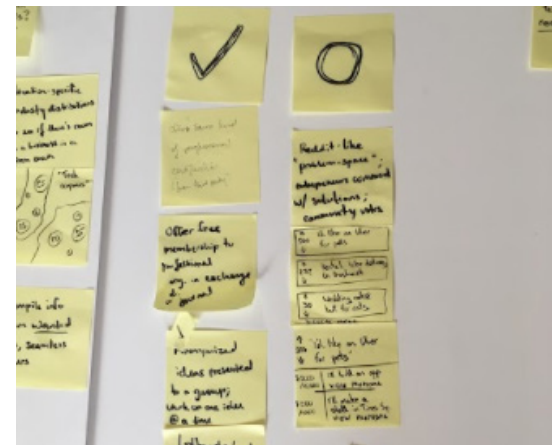


# Case Study: TwoCents.org

## A Human-Centered Approach to Accessible Entrepreneurship

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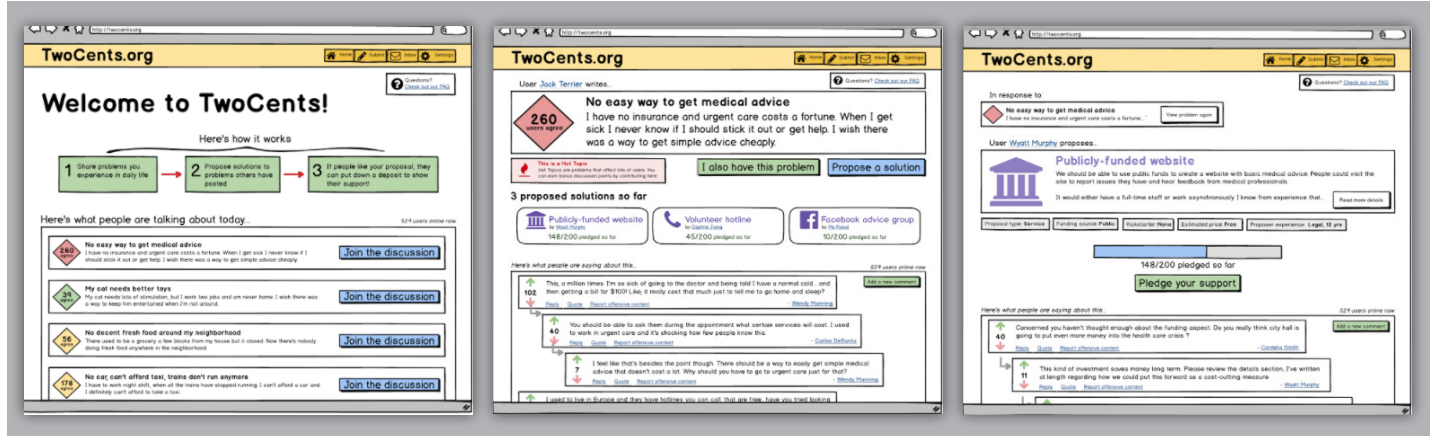
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*While more and more youth are interested in social entrepreneurship as a means for tackling some of the world's toughest challenges, many aspiring social entrepreneurs fail to move beyond the initial idea phase because the infrastructure to support them is lacking. Some are unable to gain access to networks or mentors that could provide the knowledge and experience to confront major decisions, while others lack the capital they need to start their venture.*

*- IDEO.org, Human Centered Design Class 2 Workshop Guide*



## The Outcome

Based on insights from interviews with community members and successful entrepreneurs, Comic Sans Frontiers created prototypes and mockups for TwoCents, an upvote-based community where users submit common problems and propose innovative solutions. Prototyping yielded a wealth of knowledge to inform further iteration and, eventually, implementation.

## Inspiration


The team began by interviewing three members of the target community. All three had retail or customer service experience, limited means, and no professional network to speak of.

The first two interviewees self-identified as entrepreneurial. One had already started a small candle business, and the other was very interested in marketing and strategy. They shared that working through college had made it difficult for them to build their professional networks or to find good business advice. Instead, they relied on advice from their peers and from middle managers at their retail jobs, who they found more accessible and trustworthy than managers who were higher up the ladder.

The team's most significant "aha moment" came while speaking with the third interviewee. At first, she professed no particular interest in entrepreneurship. However, after some probing, the team learned that she did have an idea for a tattoo service, but that she was not confident anyone would sign up for it. During the interview, she came to the realization that if a certain number of people expressed interest in her product, she would actually consider starting her business.

The team also spoke with two experts to learn more about the challenges facing potential entrepreneurs.

One expert was a young "serial entrepreneur" with several successful international startups



under his belt. His key contribution was the insight that any viable business must be solving a specific, real problem. Identifying these problems and ensuring they are legitimate needs of the target market can be a challenge.

The second expert was a Sydney-based interaction designer who had created and managed a successful mentorship program. She explained that free mentorship programs have a retention problem; since mentees are receiving the service for free, they are minimally invested and it is easy for them to drop out. They'd had to design workarounds to account for the attrition rate.

The design team also visited the Bedford-Stuyvesant branch of the YMCA in order to gain analogous inspiration on how to brand and market a social impact enterprise. The team was impressed by how positive and aspirational the messaging was. The YMCA goes above and beyond filling in for what the community lacks; the experience for patrons is full of surprise, delight, and positive reinforcement. The team learned that businesses which solve a social problem need not feel spartan or bleak, and emerged with new inspiration for how their eventual solution might be presented to users.

## **Ideation**

When field research was complete, the design team holed up in their apartment to make sense of their findings.

During the Synthesis phase, the team collected all of the learnings from the field interviews, and identified major themes that expressed the difficulties facing potential entrepreneurs. They then distilled these themes into three key insights that formed the foundation of the eventual solution:

- Defining and researching a target market is hard.
- It's very hard to find mentors as there are too few of them available.
- The demands of entrepreneurship are unrealistic for those living paycheck-to-paycheck.

These insights led to the development of “How Might We” questions:

- How might we enable potential entrepreneurs to identify and research potential markets?
- How might we incentivize potential mentors to take part in mentorship programs?
- How might we help potential entrepreneurs who have no disposable income to kickstart their ideas?

An intense brainstorming session followed, in which hundreds of ideas were generated and discussed. The team considered ideas as wide-ranging as a “what businesses are missing in your neighborhood” tool that compiles information from wanted ads and Seamless orders; a



Tinder-like app to match entrepreneurs and investors; and a meetup group in which anonymously submitted ideas were critiqued and developed by a group of peers.

Ultimately, the team settled on an idea generated in response to the first question: a “Reddit-like problem-space” in which users submit problems, potential entrepreneurs respond with solutions, and the community votes on the problems they find most important and the solutions they like best.

One innovative aspect of the proposed idea was that the community could donate very small amounts of money – not to fund the idea, but to serve as a concrete expression of their support. It was hoped this would mitigate the natural tendency of internet communities to profess enthusiasm for idea but not follow through in any meaningful way.

A storyboard was produced which highlighted seven key stages in a potential customer’s journey, from first discovering the site, joining the discussion and adding their own problems, to submitting a proposal, and how retention mechanics could encourage repeat visits.

## **Prototyping**

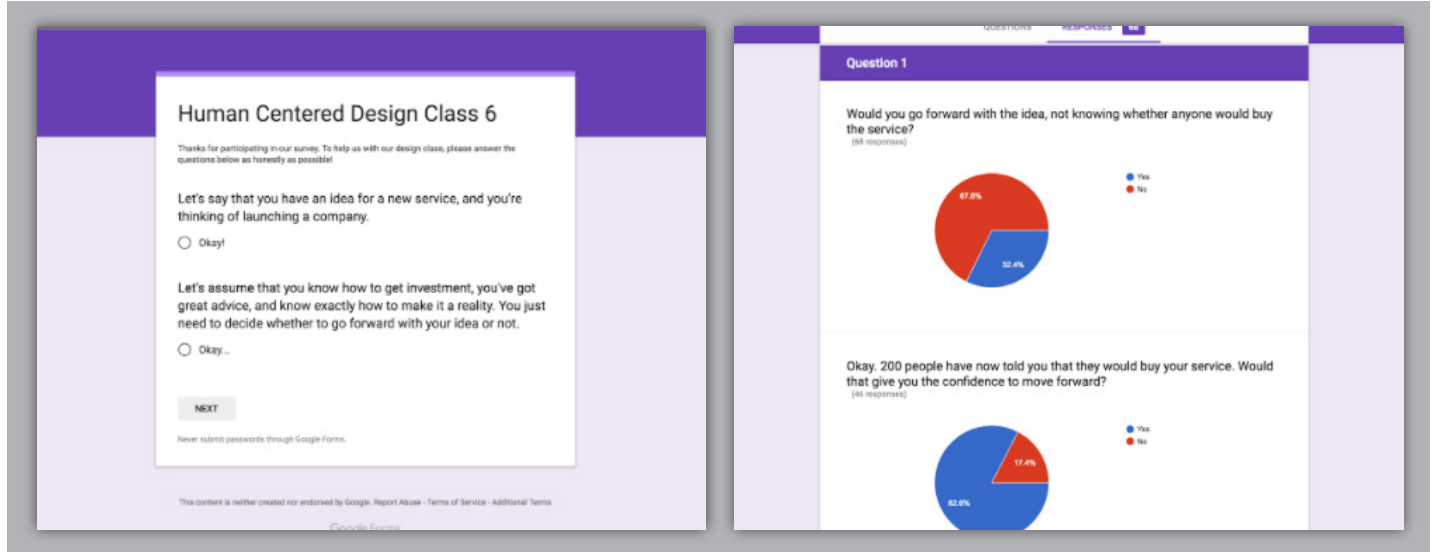
The team created three rapid prototypes to test the core assumptions of their idea.

The first was a subreddit designed to closely mimic the upvote-based discussion space of the TwoCents site, in order to ascertain whether people would be willing to participate. On the surface, this prototype appeared to fail spectacularly.

Even after the design team created some sample contributions, none of the prototype participants submitted any questions or comments.

After some investigation, the team discovered that having to make an account on the site was too much of a barrier to entry for the vast majority of people. Participants also expressed concern about potential abuse by trolls or bots. To solve both of these issues, the team decided to add single sign-on functionality to the design.

The second prototype was a survey designed to see what exactly was required to convince potential entrepreneurs that there was a valid market for their idea. Specifically, they were looking to answer this question: Was there a certain dollar amount an individual could donate that would convince a potential entrepreneur they had their support? A certain number of people who’d expressed interest or approval?



After being shared on social media, the survey garnered 68 responses. The main insight from the data was that a small amount of money was not enough to convince entrepreneurs that their ideas had support. Instead, it was the number of people who expressed interest that was most influential in the decision of whether or not to move forward with an idea. Furthermore, there was significant confusion over the purpose of the donations; participants assumed the money was to fund the idea, rather than to demonstrate sincere support.

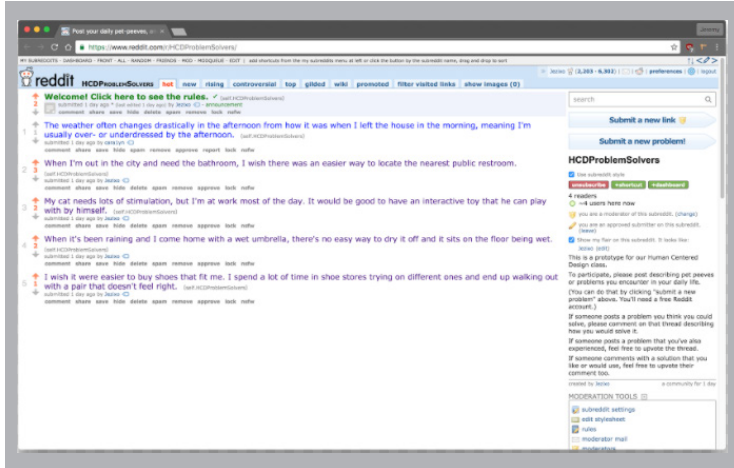
The third prototype was a low-fidelity mockup of three pages from the site, to find out how easy it would be to communicate the concept of the site to new users. The team used this mockup to conduct user testing with three individuals. This approach uncovered a host of possible improvements for future iterations (and some helpful feedback regarding layout and color schemes).

A big stumbling block for new users was understanding the scope of the problems to be solved. Should users submit personal problems, like a misbehaving pet, or sweeping social ills, like poverty or healthcare? The geographical scope of the problems was also unclear for users. To deal with both of these problems, the team decided to adopt a Craigslist-like location taxonomy, with distinct state-wide, city-wide and neighborhood views.

There was also further confusion over the micro-donation feature. Users didn't understand where the money was going, or why. There was also anxiety over whether clicking certain buttons would cause their account to be debited. Together with the insights from the second prototype, these findings led the team to discard the micro-donation feature of TwoCents. Instead, they opted to give users a single daily vote – a resource scarce enough that users would either spend it sincerely or not spend it at all.

Together with the many pages of field notes generated in the user testing sessions, the team





was well placed to begin a second round of user testing with an iterated, high-fidelity prototype.

## Implementation

Because the Implementation phase was outside the scope of the Human Centered Design course, the team did not release a live prototype. This would have answered questions around branding and whether TwoCents would resonate with the market.

Instead, the team drafted an action plan, which is summarized below.

The team decided that an engineer, a product manager, and a UX designer should be hired to implement the project. The engineer would implement the site itself. The product manager would evaluate, prioritize, and coordinate the rollout of the product's many features, using their expertise to determine which were really necessary and which were superfluous. Finally, the UX designer would help streamline the complicated flows imposed by such a feature-rich solution.

For funding, the team entertained the possibility of bootstrapping TwoCents, but ultimately decided that the challenges inherent in supporting an online community might distract from the social mission of the project. Instead, the primary goal would be to integrate with a partner organization. For example, Kickstarter or similar sites could benefit from a system which is designed to encourage entrepreneurship.

The team completed their work on the project by producing a pitch to be used in presentations for potential partners:

- *TwoCents.org is an idea-rich environment for potential entrepreneurs to explore the problem-space of their local community. Through collaboration and discussion, TwoCents sows the seeds of entrepreneurship within the affected community itself.*
- *Any community member can submit problems for entrepreneurs to propose solutions for, which ensures that both the problems and solutions are grounded in the needs of the community, encouraging locally-sourced, human-centered approaches to problem-solving.*
- *The pledging system gives empowers potential entrepreneurs with the confidence to take their ideas forward, perhaps to a fundraising platform or to seek out seed investment.*