The Google Sprint

If you want to find out if your ideas for a new digital process or a new business model work – a trial run is indispensable. The logic »build a prototype – measure usage – learn from it – develop further« shows if an idea is embraced in a short time and with little resources. The Google Sprint is a special expression of this logic with a clear process and a tight five-day timeframe.

by Markus Heingärtner

Do you want to achieve high impact in very little time? Google Sprint might be your weapon of choice. Set your goal to realize a new process (internal or customer-oriented) or (further) develop a new product within a very short time frame. The focus lies on the development of a prototype and is usually executed by a team and supported by user input. With the mixture of business strategy, innovation, Design Thinking, and more it will be highly useful for every team. The method was established and tested by GV (Google Ventures) and adopted by teams around the world. We hope this article might serve as an appetizer and guide for running your own sprint.

Five days to reach ambitious goals

By working together in a sprint, you can condense months of time into five days. Skip waiting for the launch of a basic product and use a realistic prototype in order to find out if an idea works. The biggest advantage is that you can very quickly see your finished product and test customer reactions before making any expensive commitments.

Preparation is essential. Before the sprint begins, you'll need to have the right challenge and the right team. You'll also need full five days of time and a space to run your sprint. It is very important to use the precious time in the best way possible. To be successful, stick to the process strictly. On the day your sprint starts, your team will identify the problem and choose an important part of it to focus on. The following day, you'll design different solutions on paper. On day three, hard choices will come up and your ideas will turn into

The five steps of a Google Sprint

DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5
MAP	SKETCH	DECIDE	PROTOTYPE	TEST
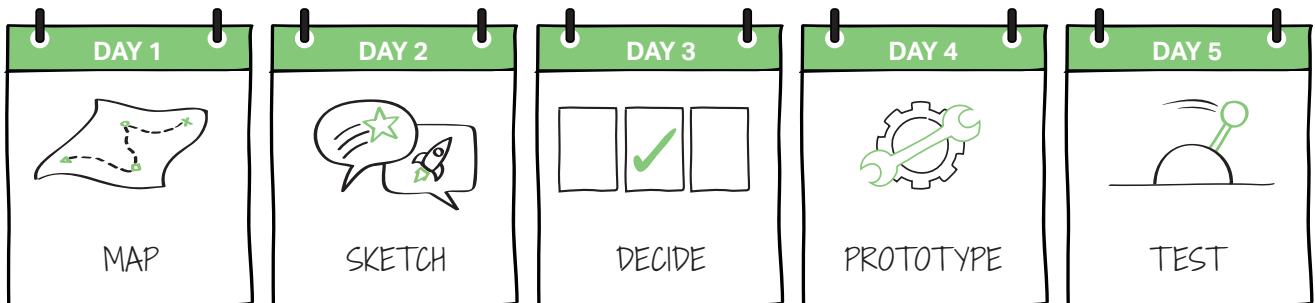
a testable hypothesis. On day four, you'll produce a prototype. On the fifth day, you'll test it with people. So, whether you want to innovate processes or products that you consider critical, the Google Sprint may give you a big jump ahead (see illustration).

The right setup is essential

DAY 1: Clear view of the problems and goals
The discussions on Day 1 create the path for the sprint week. You will start by agreeing on a long-term goal. Next, you will describe and map out the challenge. Then you will ask the experts at your company to share what they know. Finally, you'll pick a target: an ambitious but manageable piece of the problem that you can solve in one week.

DAY 2: Inspiration and sketching solutions
After the first full day of understanding the problem and choosing a target for your sprint, you get to focus on solutions. The second day starts with inspiration: a review of existing ideas to remix and improve. In the afternoon, each person will sketch, following a four-step process that emphasizes critical thinking over artistry. You'll also begin to plan the customer test on Day 5 by recruiting customers that fit your target profile.

DAY 3: Decide which solution to go with
By this morning, you and your team will have a stack of solutions. That's great, but there is also one problem: You can't prototype and test them all. You'll start the day by criticizing each solution, and deciding which ones have the best chance of achieving your long-

term goal. In the afternoon, you'll take the winning scenes from your sketches and weave them into a storyboard: a step-by-step plan for your prototype.

DAY 4: Build a prototype
On Day 4, you'll adopt a »fake it« philosophy to turn that storyboard into a prototype. A realistic front is all you need to test with customers. Here's the best part: by focusing on the customer-facing surface of your product or service, you can finish your prototype in just one day. On this day, you'll also make sure everything is ready for the final Day 5 test by confirming the schedule, reviewing the prototype and writing an interview script.

DAY 5: Test with your customers
Your sprint began with a big challenge, an excellent team and not much else. By Day 5, you've created promising solutions, chosen the best one and built a realistic prototype. That alone would make for an impressively productive week. But you'll take it one step further as you interview customers and learn by watching how they react to your prototype. This test makes the entire sprint worthwhile. At the end of the day, you'll know how far you have to go and just what to do next.

A last word about the team: We suggest having around four to seven people be involved in a sprint team. They can include the facilitator, a designer, a decision-maker, a product manager, an engineer and someone from the company's core business departments. ●