

Amanda Mohlenhoff: Hi, everybody out there in Confab internet land. Welcome to “Research in action: Talk like (and build for) your user.” I'm your host, Amanda Mohlenhoff. I am a senior manager of UX writing and user research at GetYourGuide in Berlin. Before I was at GetYourGuide, I spent a couple of years UX writing at Amazon. Before that, I actually come from a marketing/copywriting background. In general, things you should know about me, in addition to being a word nerd, I am also a cat mom, which means since I'm recording this in my apartment, that at any moment, my cat might run through the video recording or meow loudly in the background, because he's just as excited about this talk as I am.

Before we get started, I just want to give you an overview of how UX works and how it's set up at GetYourGuide. For those of you who may not have heard of us, GetYourGuide is an e-commerce marketplace specifically for travel experiences, which is awesome, because that means our job is to help travelers love the destinations that they go to while they're on vacation, and explore the culture and find things to do. UX at GetYourGuide is a part of product, and there are three disciplines that roll into UX here. There is product design, user research, and UX writing.

All of those disciplines sit directly embedded in what we call mission teams, which are cross-functional teams that are all focused on the same problem. You'll have some engineers, a product manager, who's the business owner, and then some UX folks depending on the needs of the team, maybe a data analyst if you're very lucky, maybe an embedded researcher if you're lucky. All of these different disciplines combine and bring the best of their expertise to the table when figuring out how to solve whatever problem it is that they're working on together.

Since we're a travel company, I also make sure to add some inspirational travel imagery to this presentation to give you something to dream about while we're all staying home. What's in this talk? First of all, we'll talk about why research is helpful, especially for all of you word-oriented humans out there, and then I'll go over the research process and some deep dives into a few common methods that I see used a lot. Then we'll talk about what to do with your findings and finally, what can you do if you're not running your own research?

First of all, why research? I think that there's a lot of information out there about how being focused on your customer, on the users who are the actual human beings who are going to use your product or service, will help you build a stronger product and ultimately, a stronger business. Because when you understand the mindset of the people that you're building for, you can meet their needs better, you know what problems they're facing, you maybe understand the language that they use to describe your product space or just how they conceptualize whatever it is that you're selling and that will help you create something that is intuitive for them to use and feels easy.

You can also use it to evaluate things, so finding out what's broken, what is working either in something new that you're working on or an existing site. You can even take that information and build that into your roadmap. What should you build, and how

should you build it, and when should you build it? If you're taking research into consideration when planning a long-term roadmap, that can also be a great thing to do.

Some things to remember here before we dive in: There are many different sources of data that you can and should leverage if you are building software products for human beings. Research is one of them. There's also analytics, there's also probably other information that you could get in other ways depending on what your company is. It's good to have a mix of data sources. That way, you get a complete picture about who it is that you're designing for, how they talk, what they care about. Another thing to remember is that your user research participants are not UX professionals. If you ask them, "How should we design our website?" they probably don't know how your software is built, they don't know what your brand principles are, and they're probably not going to do as good a job at that as you or someone on your team will.

When you're writing research, watch out for bias. When I say this, that's not only with regard to making sure that the questions that you ask people don't bias them when you're interviewing people, but also watch out for your own bias. As you are approaching research, try to keep things as objective as possible. Difficult, but possible. Then one other thing to note is that, in general, with research, finding patterns is the key to making sure that the thing that you're observing is not happening by chance, but is in fact happening because it is a repeatable pattern that exists and adds some level of significance that is worth paying attention to.

The research process can be roughly divided into the following five steps. I'm not going to call them easy steps. I could, but I will not do that, because they're all in fact quite, let's say, involved. First of all, identify the customer problem. That could be an opportunity, like a product opportunity in the space that you're in, or something that your current users are struggling with. Then gather all the information that you currently know about that thing and see what the gaps in your knowledge are that are blocking you from being able to address whatever problem that is.

Once you know what those gaps are, then you can frame that as a question that helps focus your research plan and also helps you choose the right method, because for any given customer problem or research question, there's probably six different ways that you could approach that research-wise. There's lots of considerations to keep in mind with choosing one. Then you run and analyze the research, hopefully, with your team. Then finally, socialize and integrate your findings back into whatever it is that you're working on.

Step 1, identify the customer problem. The first thing to do when you are looking into a customer problem is to look at the data that currently exists about that thing. If you are working at GetYourGuide, these are some examples of data that we have to look at. The first one that I'll talk about is analytics data. This is what you'll see in, for example, Google Analytics. This describes what people do on your site. It describes their behavior. It does not tell you why they do those things, which is why research can come in handy here to answer some of those questions. This is awesome because you can find places where users are acting either unexpectedly, so they're not doing the thing

that you want them to do. For example, let's say you look at your analytics data and you find that people are going through all the trouble of finding a tour, let's say a tour of the Eiffel Tower to add to their cart, it gets to the cart, and then they leave. Why are they leaving? They just went through all this trouble. Research can help answer that question.

Support contacts are another wealth of information that you can use to identify areas in your product that are clearly not working for the people who are using it. I highly recommend making really good friends with your customer service or support department, because they have so much information that can help you improve your product. Generally, what happens is you collect reasons why people are calling customer service and then you would look at those reasons over time and find the themes and find the patterns that represent recurring problems that you can then address.

If you are starting totally from scratch, you don't have any of this stuff. Let's say you are creating a whole new app from scratch, from the ground up, and you have no existing data. Interview people who represent your target user, your target audience for that app, and find out what their pain points are. What are the needs that they have that are not currently being met by any other tools in the space?

Then, again, find the themes. Talk to a whole bunch of people and then map out where their feedback overlaps, where does it differ, why does it differ, find the themes, and then you have something to go from.

Next, take whatever that problem is, that opportunity is, and frame it as a question. A good research question does a few things. It's helpful because it focuses your thinking about the specific problem so that your research is very targeted, and it should relate directly to a decision that your team is making, that they are otherwise either unable to make because they don't have enough information, or because it's so risky to get it wrong, that they really want to make sure they have all the information that they possibly can, so big product changes, for example. Framing this as a question is crucial because, without a good research question, it's really difficult to choose the right methodology.

If you choose the wrong methodology, you might end up with bad data. Bad data that sticks in people's heads for a long time is a terrible thing. We'll talk more about that later.

Here are some examples of good research questions. Let's say that we see in our analytics data that customers are doing a search on GetYourGuide. They're looking for tickets to the Louvre. Then they get to the search results page, and then they immediately leave the site. Clearly something is going wrong here because obviously, we would want them to dive in deeper, hopefully, convert and buy the thing that they were looking for in the first place. Some good research questions here to approach this problem might be what problems exist on this page that are preventing customers from finding things that are relevant to them?

Another is how should we organize our inventory so that customers can find what they're looking for? As opposed to bad research questions, including how should we redesign our search results page, first of all, again, your user, your participant in this study is not employed by your company, probably not a designer, definitely doesn't know how your site is built, and absolutely cannot answer this question for you. It's also really broad, and it doesn't actually pinpoint a specific problem that you can dig into in the research.

Second example of the bad research question: "Is our inventory organized in a way that makes sense to people?" The answer to this question is yes or no.

Seeing as people are leaving the page immediately, I would guess the answer is no. End of inquiry. It's not an open-ended question, so it doesn't open up any further conversation. We already know the answer to this. We can see in the analytics data that they're not finding what they're looking for, and they're leaving, so no, bad research question.

Here is a quote from Ian, who is a UX writer on my team, talking about his research process. He says, "I essentially dump my brain out on the table regarding open questions, intuitions, and dependencies. Then we design a research program. It's a cycle of questioning, testing, and designing." This emphasis on the cycle and also gathering all the information that you currently know about this thing, putting it all in one place, and then figuring out what are the questions that we need to answer and what is the best way to answer those questions, is exactly what we do here.

All right, next section is a big one. Finding the right method. In general, the choice of your research method should be based on the questions that we need to answer. Those questions, again, should be tied to decisions that we need to make as a team. Things to consider: What are those decisions that you need to make as a team? What phase of development is your product in? Do you already have a site live out there in the wild of the internet? Again, are you starting from scratch?

Are you creating an app because if you don't have something to work with already that you could test, it would probably be really expensive for you to build, for example, a clickable prototype for someone to test in a usability study. It might be better to do something lower fidelity and lower effort at first. How much traffic do you have?

If you're thinking about running an A/B test and you have really low traffic on your site, it's going to take you a really long time to get a big enough sample of people visiting your site to actually figure out what those patterns are at any level of statistical significance. Which, statistical significance, I mean being able to tell that the pattern that you're seeing is not happening by chance and that it can be extrapolated over time reliably.

Is it a new feature that you are needing to figure out where in your site it goes? Or is it an existing feature that you are optimizing? Also, how much time do you have? If you don't have that much time, that will definitely impact the approach that research could

take. There are lots of different ways that people organize different types of research methods.

I think Nielsen Norman Group, Norman Nielsen Group, I never remember which name goes first. Either way, that group that we all know and love in the user experience industry has a six-axis scale that they use to organize different research methods. For the sake of simplicity, and because I clearly can't remember all six of them, I'm just using two right now to organize our thinking about this.

Qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative studies, usually—not always, but usually—have a lower number of participants than quantitative studies, which require many participants to achieve that statistical significance. Again, to make sure that the patterns that you're seeing are able to be extrapolated over a long period. Qualitative research helps you understand why people do the things that they do. Quantitative helps you understand what they're doing. Qualitative research is analyzed manually, like through reading and grouping things together, which requires a human or a fancy, for example, natural language processing software that can help you organize things at scale. Quantitative is analyzed mathematically.

Some examples here that we'll get into in a little bit for qualitative could be usability tests, heuristic evaluations, interviews, and card sorting. Although—caveat—card sorting can sometimes also be quantitative depending on how you do it. Then quantitative studies could be A/B tests, surveys, which like card sorting, could also be qualitative depending on what you ask in the survey. Performance analysis before you launch something and after you launch something, if you're not going with an A/B test, and clickstream analysis, so click-through rates. How many people are actually proceeding down the funnel?

Now we'll get into some specific examples of methods. The first being A/B testing, which I remind you is a quantitative form of evaluation. A/B testing is when you change one thing at a time on your site or in your experience to see what the impact of that change has on some predefined success metric. It's great for a testing copy in production, one change at a time. For example, things like microcopy, calls to action, form labels. If you have a call to action, it's like, "Buy now," your success metric might be something like conversion rate, how many people actually do what you want them to do, and buy the thing now.

Error messages, you can A/B test there, the success metrics might be something like how many people are able to complete the task that they've set out to do. That might not be converting. It might be something like contacting customer service, for example. Email subject lines are also a great thing to A/B test because it's very easy to see if your open rate changes depending on what you write in the subject line. The other thing that A/B testing is good for is letting you assess the impact of changes to your product that you've launched against what you currently have.

Just in case, let's say you have a big launch that you're dialing up, which by dialing up, I mean showing to a certain percentage of your total traffic. You want to make sure it

doesn't break anything else somewhere else, or in some other unforeseen way. For example, if you launch a huge change to your, let's say, the way that your site navigation works, and your new navigation is for whatever reason making your site move really slowly, then your performance is going to totally tank. Launching that change as an A/B test allows you to detect that, roll it back, and address whatever performance issues exist there.

Some considerations here. One is that it requires enough traffic to achieve that statistical significance. You need enough people actually visiting your site to make sure that what you're seeing is not by chance, but is in fact, a pattern that will persist. Another is that you might need a developer to help you set up your test unless you work somewhere like, for example, booking.com, where writers are actually able to go in and use a tool that lets them launch their own A/B tests as they like.

Finally, you might end up with flat or inconclusive results. If that's the case, you might have to go back to the drawing board. Are you assessing the right problem? Are you looking at the right success metric? If you feel confident about both of those things, and you also feel confident that even though your change is flat for what you're measuring, it's overall a better customer experience, you might choose to keep that in place.

My cat just jumped on me, just here's his tail. [laughs] Here's an example: A/B testing some UI text. Let's say we get some feedback through customer support that customers are having a really hard time understanding what to do on this page. This screenshot is taken from the status quo of our detail pages, and they're getting here, they're finding a thing, they're selecting new participants, and then they don't really understand what to do next. We have the data, we start with that, and now we need to create a hypothesis. Based on this page, I think my hypothesis is that maybe users are not understanding what "check availability" means. Perhaps changing the button label on this page will help them understand exactly what they need to do here.

Now I need to decide what metrics to track. I will probably want to look at, obviously, how many people are clicking on the button that I'm changing. In addition, I might want to look at some of what we call guardrail metrics. If I change the button text to something really egregious, does it make people bounce and leave the site at a higher rate? Cat is back again. Then another guardrail metric might be conversion rate. If I change it to something that's really great and it makes the conversion rate rise, I'm going to want to know that. Those are just good things to keep in mind.

Then you can create your test variation. Our test variation, let's say, let's try "buy tickets" because this is a detail page for tickets to museums. For example, the Louvre. Now you can ship it probably in our case, with the help of the developer, and then wait at least seven days before looking at the data. Realistically, you can use an online tool, you can just Google a statistical like, A/B test significance calculator to figure out based on how much traffic your site has, how long you should wait to let your test run, so that your results again, are not by chance, but have that statistical significance that you need to be confident.

Another thing to keep in mind here is that the reason why seven days is best practice is because there could be fluctuations day by day. At GetYourGuide, we get lots of traffic on Sundays when people are relaxing at home and thinking about what they're going to do, maybe on their vacation, and they're on the site more. Running the test for seven days allows us to accommodate that pattern. When do you not A/B test? There's a couple different scenarios. One is if you're testing more than one change on the page. Why? Because if you're testing a bunch of stuff at the same time, how do you know which one of those changes impacted the performance?

For example, if I change the color of all the buttons, the button labels, and my top-level navigation across the site at the same time, and then conversion rate drops by 10% and my boss is yelling at me, "Why does this happen?" I don't know which one of those changes actually made that happen. Make sure that you isolate your variable.

Don't A/B test if taking action right away is low risk. If there is a typo on your site, for goodness sake, please change it. If you're updating for brands, for example, we had a rebrand a few years back, where we had to basically take all of the out-of-date branding off the site and replace it with new branding, just make the change. If you can swing it, it's great to be able to A/B test these, but if it's more expensive than it's worth in terms of actual development time and also the time it would take to run the test, just change it. Same goes for consistency. If it's going to make a better experience and you have a lot of confidence in that, go for it.

Then the other time you should not A/B test is if you don't have enough traffic. If you don't have enough traffic, it's going to take you forever to achieve that statistical level of significance. Any data that you do collect in a reasonable timeframe is suspect and can actually be detrimental because it can reinforce biases that already exist in your organization. Don't do it if you don't have enough traffic.

Next up, usability testing. Now, I think that when people think of user research, this is usually what they're thinking of. Usability testing is when you gather a smaller, smallish group of participants who represent your target user, and you give them a design or a prototype to perform a task with, let's say, book a tour of the Louvre, and you have them think out loud and tell you why they're doing the things that they're doing as they're going through the site as they normally would.

This is a great way to find usability issues in a design, or something that you're working on, or even in your existing site, if you just need a baseline.

[cat meows]

[chuckles] It's also great for if you're making some riskier or larger product. We call them bigger bets and practice sessions. You might want to increase the confidence that you're approaching and in the right way before you start the expensive development process. The other thing usability testing is great for is understanding the why behind what people do, behind that analytics data.

Some considerations here: Six to eight participants is all you need to reveal around 80% of usability issues within a design. That means that any more than that, and this number, this percentage, will actually plateau. More is not better in this case and actually might be worse because these are very time-intensive. It can get actually quite long and expensive, and also exhausting for whoever is running the research if you do more than, let's say, eight to 10 people. There's lots of different ways you can run these. You can moderate them in person, which is great when you want to follow up with your participants and ask them why did you do that, tell me more about that.

You can also do it unmoderated. You can basically give your participants a prototype and then a task, and have them talk their way through it themselves. You can do it remote, obviously, in the time of Corona that is exactly how we're running all of our studies. You can also do it in person.

Usability testing is great for writers. Why is that? Because you're getting a bunch of human beings who represent your target audience to talk about your product, which means you can pay attention to the way they naturally speak about your product or your company or what it is that you're offering. There's some cool questions you can ask or that you can listen for as you're absorbing the study. What terminology are they using? How do they describe what your product does or what your company does? What are the words they're looking for that are not on this page?

I'll give you an example of that in a second. Another thing this is great for is you can see if they understand your word choice, and if based on, for example, a button label, does what happens match their expectations based on the label that you've chosen? Some things you can ask before they click on anything on the page: What do you expect to happen when you click on this button or when you do this thing?

It's also great if you are naming specific features on your site. For example, when I was working at Amazon, on a photo storage product, we were trying to figure out what the best way to name this collaborative photo-saving feature would be, and we ran usability tests. One of the questions that the researcher asked was, can you explain to me what you think the family vault is? The majority of participants were like, "Oh, it seems like a place where I can store stuff that's probably really secure and I can do it with my family," which is exactly what it was. It's still live in production.

Here's a quote from Melissa, a writer on my team: "Hearing users describe in their own words what they're looking for, especially when multiple people use the same word like 'buy tickets,' is pure gold." This "buy tickets" is a real-life example that we did here in usability testing, and now we're running A/B tests on when our traffic comes back. One more note on usability testing: If you, let's say, don't have the budget to do actual intensive research, you don't have a researcher in-house, you can do what's called guerrilla usability testing or customer intercept studies to get some quick feedback from a general audience.

Basically, the way that this works is you go out into the world, into the wide, wide world, a public place, and you flag down willing passers-by and ask them for feedback on

something that you're working on. When I was at Amazon in Seattle, I would go to the Space Needle and flag people down and ask them for feedback on a design that I was working on. We would come prepared with a prototype preloaded on a device so we could just hand people—and also with note-taking supplies, so like an actual form that we take notes on in the moment. This allowed us to get feedback, again, from the very general audience, so of folks who were hanging out by the Space Needle.

Luckily, at Amazon, most people in Seattle also shop at Amazon. Not all, but many do, and so it was a good way to get some just general feedback on things we were working on in a very inexpensive way, even though we also did provide some small compensation to people that we spoke to.

Some things to keep in mind here, although it is very expensive and that's great, you need to make sure that you understand that this is a general audience and that participants that you talk to might not actually match your target user at all. If you're working on a B2B product, or let's say you're working on an app for healthcare professionals, this is probably not going to help you that much if the needs of that audience are very specific or technical. Also keep in mind that security might ask you to leave, which is what happened to us at the Space Needle several times. Another thing to keep in mind in this type of pandemic is that it would probably be really jarring if you approached a stranger on the street and asked them to touch a weird phone, so some things to keep in mind there.

Next up, let's talk about surveys. Surveys are good—oh, sorry, there's a cat tail blocking the camera. Surveys are good for gathering results when scale is really important to the actual insight that you need to gain. For example, if you need to measure how different market segments respond to something, a survey can be a good way to do that. They're also nice because they're really easy to create and distribute.

Some considerations with surveys: They require a lot of respondents, again, to make sure that you get a statistically significant sample, they don't give you the why behind the data that you collect, and the data that you do collect often skews toward the kind of edges of the bell curve, so the extremes, like very low responses, very negative responses, and very positive responses. It's hard to get like, a middle-of-the-road read at times, depending on what you're asking.

Because surveys are very easy to create and very easy to distribute, and because the data that comes back from a survey is very easy for your brain, our human brains to understand, if you mess it up, if you have the wrong target audience, for example, or your questions are leading, are biased, your data will be bad and it'll be bad at scale. It will be really easy for it to hook into somebody's brain and stay there for a very long time. It's very easy for surveys to be misused, so please proceed with caution. Some ways that you can avoid that from happening: First of all, make sure that you really deeply understand your sample, so the people that you're asking to fill out your survey accurately represent your target group.

Then, make sure your survey is not too complex and your questions are not leading and will not bias your participants. There's lots of information you can find on the internet about writing biased survey and research questions, so I won't cover it here, but you can just go and Google it and you'll find tons of information. Another pro tip from the researchers on my team is to pair surveys with a qualitative study. You run a survey and you get some findings back, run a panel of interviews, for example, again, on your very meticulously screened target group, your participant group, and see if the data matches up.

Next up, heuristic evaluations. These are great. Basically, I love these because they build empathy and they're great for team building and I'm a manager, so this is very important to me. A heuristic evaluation is when you assume the role of the user, of the customer on your side, so you assume, like, a persona in a task, and you walk in your customer's shoes. As you're going through the site, let's say your task is to book a wine tasting in southern Italy for a family. You would then go through there, you'll get your guide site as a team, probably with two or three people from your team together, and evaluate the experience against an agreed-upon set of usability principles.

Some considerations here: Nielsen's Usability Heuristics are a great baseline to use, and I'll go over those in a minute. You can also just Google those. Those have been basically the gold standard for usability best practice since the '90s, so 30 years of smart brains have gone into those. You can also add your own heuristics to the principles that you're evaluating things against that are specific to the needs of your brand, your customer, or your product. Whatever it is that you can't compromise on, add it in. It's totally fine. Heuristic evaluations are great not only for building empathy with you and your team, for your user, but also, they can help sharpen your rationale for content or other changes that you want to advocate for on the site.

Here are Nielsen's Usability Heuristics. I won't read them out right here, but I will just talk about how some of these can really highlight areas in your user experience that better content can address. Look at number 2, "match between the system and the real world," that's totally a call for using natural language on your sites and removing robotic-sounding or technical jargon. Why? Because you want, number 5, "recognition rather than recall." You want people to understand at a glance what they're supposed to do and what you're offering instead of forcing them to learn your site, learn additional terminology or interaction patterns when they approach your site.

Another one is obviously, "help users with errors," number 9 is definitely a call for better, more human error messaging that tells them, how do I complete the task that I was trying to do? Then obviously help and documentation, even the aesthetic and minimalist design, you could totally extrapolate for writing context because if you have too much information on the page, you're going to overwhelm people and that goes against this heuristic. These are awesome best practices to have in your pocket when you need a clear, data-backed rationale for why you want to make changes to something on your site.

All right, my favorite one. Oh, I love them all. Okay, but card sorting is really fun because I'm really into taxonomy, which is how you organize information. Card sorting can be quantitative or qualitative depending on what you're looking at, and it's great for informing decisions about how you organize information and what the hierarchy of information is and the relationships between different types of information.

Basically, what you do here as a love because it's super low tech, you basically will take all the information that you would display on a page or on your site and you write each piece of it on an individual piece of paper or index card, and then you shuffle them up and hand them to a participant that again, represents your target group, and have them walk you through grouping them into whatever groups makes sense to them, or maybe ordering them in order of importance. We'll talk more about different ways you can use this in a second. This is great for understanding how customers think about and conceptualize the information on your site and how they would organize it, really getting into their head, into their mental model.

Some considerations here: It's really important to keep the language on the cards simple, so that they effortlessly can go through without thinking and can group them together, and without having to ask what does this mean? Because if they don't understand what's on the card, they're not going to know where to put it. Unlike usability tests which only need six to eight participants, this one needs a few more, 15–20 to really be able to see where those patterns exist.

Some questions you can use for determining information hierarchy: What information is the most important, second most important? Have them actually take the parts and rank them in order of importance, and then what belongs together in a group? What doesn't belong in that group? Then once they're done actually putting everything in place, ask them to name those groups, not because you're going to immediately take whatever they say and launch it on your site as your new, like, inventory categorization—again, they're not UX writers, that's your job, or maybe someone else's job, depending, I don't know what you do—but because it can help you better understand why they put those things together.

That brings me to the final point on this slide: Why? Always ask why. If they don't immediately tell you, ask them, "Why would you put those things together?" or "Why does this not belong?" Have them really think out loud and walk you through why they put things in certain places. This is great not only for figuring out the order of information displayed on a single page, but it also can help you organize and merchandise your inventory across your site, or even figure out how to progressively disclose information across your entire user journey.

All right, done with methods. When you're selecting your participants, as I've mentioned, your participants need to reflect your target users. Some things to keep in mind there, this includes your mindset. For example, look at your guide. We want to talk to people who are excited about travel and who are probably planning a trip between now and the next 12–18 months. Make sure that it also represents the right demographics. For example, if 50% of the humans that use your app are women, do not run a test with

100% men. I've literally seen this happen and it is infuriating, and it will also skew your data. Check your biases.

Also, devices. Are people booking on mobile? Are they booking on a desktop? However much you can recreate the natural in-the-wild of target users, do that in your study. Remember that different methodologies require different numbers of participants. When it comes to actually running the research, pro tip, run a pilot study before you start really running through these really quickly, to make sure that everything works the way that you intended it to.

Does the prototype work? If you're running remote studies, is Zoom working the way that you expect it to, or whatever platform you're using? Then give yourself some time to make tweaks if you need to. If you're not running the study, observe it and take notes. Whoever is running the study will be very grateful to you and you will totally internalize the customer's experience in a much deeper way than you would if you were just reading the report. In order to build empathy with the rest of the folks that you work with, do this as a team activity. It's also a nice break from just constantly coding or writing or doing whatever.

Then once you have run the research, you need to analyze what you've found. Find the patterns in what you observed as a team. In the photo, you can see, we like to do this with Post-its, where you take each observation or each insight and you put it on a Post-it, and then everybody does this, and then you affinitize them, you group them together into buckets that make sense. Then you name those buckets afterwards, like card sorting. Research on research, meta.

When you're analyzing your findings and especially when you're writing it into a report that you can then send out to folks, focus on where it relates to the product decisions that your team is facing. Then if there are any additional findings that you think are also important and worth calling out, call them out separately and make sure it's clear what relates to unblocking your team and what is an additional finding that needs further inquiry. Maybe it needs a PM to help you figure out how pervasive a problem is, for example; we'll call those out separately.

Tips for writing research reports. Synthesize your findings. Do not just write down observations, you will bore people to death because they will not know why it's important to them or why they should care, which one way to do this is to ask okay, does this answer the question, "So what? Why should I care? Why is this important to me? Why is this impacting our roadmap?" Spell it out for people. While you're doing that, write it into a narrative that's digestible. I'm assuming that many people who are watching this talk right now are probably good at writing stories. Use that to your advantage. If the researcher or someone else is writing it, offer to help them structure that in a narrative that will stay in people's heads and be digestible.

Another pro tip: Use actual quotes or, even better, videos of customers actually using the product, because there's nothing that will build more empathy for your user than watching someone really struggle or really be delighted by something that you've been

working on for a while. Here is a quote from Paula, a senior user researcher on my team: "Findings have to be very well written. Make sure that whatever message you have stays in people's heads and is digestible." Same thing.

All right. What to do with your findings. You've run the research, you've done the things, now, what do we do? Now you have hopefully gotten some answers to the questions that were blocking you from being able to address the customer opportunity or problem that you identified at the beginning. Now, you can decide, "Well, now we have this information, and now how do we want to make changes to the product based on that?" You can decide with your team what to do. Do you run an A/B test? Do you change the design of something? Whatever it is.

Then any other problems that don't relate or any other issues that you found that don't relate to those initial decisions that your team needs to make, work with your PMs. If you have strong convictions about something feeling really broken or being really a bad experience or a big opportunity, work with your PM to figure out how you could get that on the roadmap. How pervasive is it? How big is it? How much of a problem is it? What's the intensity of that problem? How broken is it? How big is that opportunity? Work with them to get things prioritized. Do not just cut a ticket to a developer on a team and expect it to get done, it will never get prioritized.

Then you can use these findings, relate back to the findings in the report when you're trying to advocate for those changes, which is awesome, especially if you're advocating for changes to wording in a world where everybody thinks they're a writer.

Which brings me to another amazing thing that you can do, that helps everybody at your company who's writing on user-facing surfaces, is if you learn something across maybe several studies that's consistent, and that impacts the way that you use language, integrate those learnings into the writing guidelines that you use at your company. That means you should be iterating continuously on whatever style guides, glossaries, specific playbooks for how you write for particular features. If you're using a style book like the AP Style book, for example, what we use at GetYourGuide, but you have data that gives you conviction that you should deviate from it, do it. Don't feel limited.

Just because we're using the AP Style book, it does not mean that we don't use the Oxford comma; we did a competitive analysis of a bunch of other sites and found that most people were using the Oxford comma because it creates clarity. That's written in, for example, the Google Material Design guidelines and a bunch of other e-commerce-specific style guides out on the internet. Polaris uses it too.

Then when you have that data, you can put it in there and link the actual report or the article or whatever it is that has influenced your decision to change that rule. Put it directly in the guidelines so that everybody understands the why behind the rules. People are going to be way more likely to actually follow your style guide rules, especially if you're making changes to it, if they understand the impact that it has on people. It improves readability to make things easier to understand. If it's something that you've heard over and over again that needs to change, change it.

Then if you're using a controlled vocabulary or glossary to limit the ways that you refer to the same thing across your site, match your terminology again to the natural language of the people who are using your product. Here's a quote from Cynthia, a senior UX writer on my team: "However people talk informs the terminology that I use. If customers are always referring to something with a certain word, I'll work it into the UI." Wisdom in practice. Love it.

What do you do if you are not the one running research? If there are researchers at your company, go make friends with them. You can be humans together and benefit from that exchange mutually. Some ways that you can do this: If you're working at a company that's big enough to have research happening in other departments, you can probably find some mailing lists, where they will send out announcements for upcoming studies that you can go and observe. You can also offer to take notes, and then you can send them to the researcher afterwards and immediately make a friend, because that's just really helpful.

You can also be a human and have coffee, even digitally, with researchers and ask about aspects of their work that apply to your team. In my experience, the researchers that I've worked with are usually really keen to broaden the span of impact that they're able to have by spreading their insights out to other teams where it's relevant. If they don't think it's relevant, they can also tell you that and then help you figure out how you can find out whatever it is you need to find out. My favorite, if you meet the criteria for the study, you can offer to participate in studies that are happening elsewhere in the company.

At Amazon, I got to test some technology that they were developing for fulfillment centers. That basically entailed me wearing a big thing on my wrist and scanning cardboard boxes and then running around the studio with them, pretending that I was in a warehouse, which was actually really fun.

Just in case you need any more encouragement that this is a mutually beneficial relationship, user research and writing, here's a quote from Paula, my senior researcher: "Designers want to know that the designs are understood. Writers are concerned with how the customer mindset works, what their needs are." Really, if you are bringing your smart brain to the table and helping whatever research is happening at your company, they will appreciate the unique superpowers that you bring to the table as a writer. I highly recommend you do that.

All right. You can also make use of existing research. This could be stuff that has been run at your company in the past or it could be external research that you find on Google Scholar, McKinsey, market research in your field, whatever it is. If you're looking at research that's been run internally in the past, just make sure, again, that the target user for that research matches roughly your target user.

Then look through the reports. Listen to the session recordings. If the researcher who ran that is still at the company, go talk to them and bring them your questions. Listen to the recordings to hear, again, that natural language that people are using and figure out

how you might integrate that into your product or run a test on it. Synthesize existing findings that are relevant to your team and then share them with your team. Again, let the researcher know that you're also doing that because they love that. In general, this can help you just learn about your users, how they think and how they behave.

That's it from me and my cat. Thank you so much for watching my talk. My name is Amanda Mohlenhoff, and if you have any feedback for me or questions about this, catch me on the Confab Slack or shoot me a message on LinkedIn. I'm super happy to connect and I hope that you enjoy Confab.

Ciao from Berlin.

[00:52:42] [END OF AUDIO]