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Impact of user centric design in digital services

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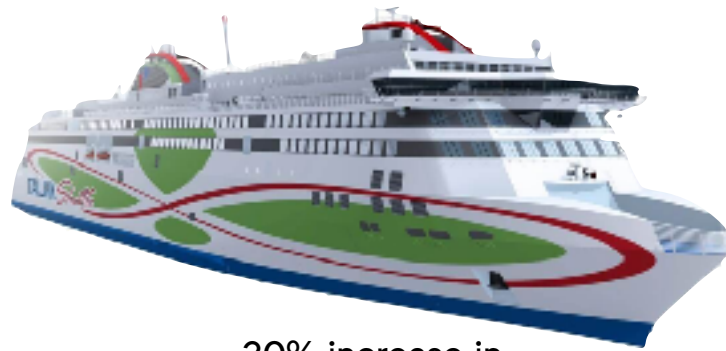
Hello!

I'm trying to say something about user centric design and the potential impact it can create.

I'll talk about what it means, venture a bit into systemic thinking, and touch the issue of failure demand a little.

User centric design goes deep, because it's not just about pretty surfaces. 15 minutes is not enough to go deep. It's like trying to explain what love is in the same time. So, Ironically, I have to only touch the surface.

RESULTS



20% increase in
online bookings

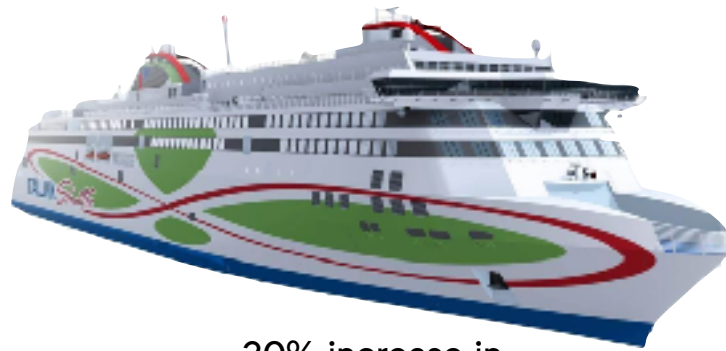
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3

We have been building digital products for 17 years, and have found user centric approach to be the a good tool for building successful products. Since we do everything from strategic design to full-stack implementation, we have a unique vantage point into the process.

Some time ago we built an on-line booking engine for a cruise ship company, growing their on-line bookings by 20% almost immediately. This gain came directly from their call-centre workload, through reduced failures and easier booking process.

SECTION TITLE



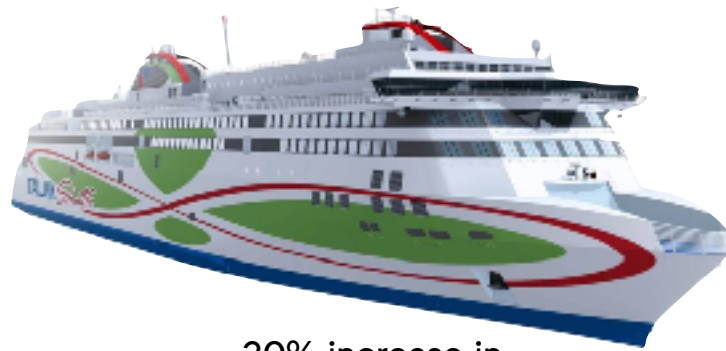
20% increase in
online bookings



Marked increase
in customer
satisfaction.
10X user base.

We re-built a sports application with a global user base. A beloved app was made even better, increasing customer satisfaction significantly, including app uptake. The user base increased tenfold.

SECTION TITLE



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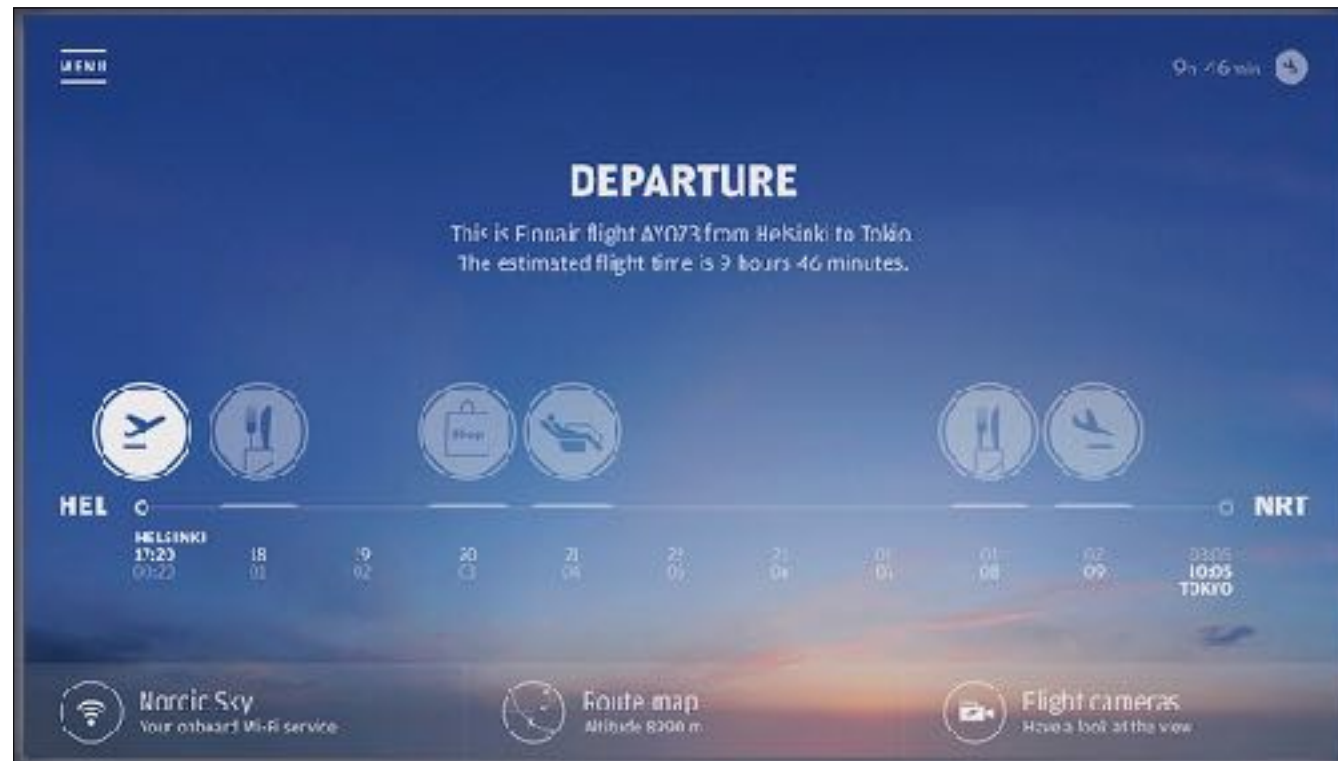


100% above
sales target

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5

And we helped the Finnish gambling monopoly, bringing a 36% increase of registered users in weekly gaming, and surpassing online sales targets by 100%. This in an industry where people traditionally buy a lottery ticket from a kiosk or a grocery shop.



But the case that is probably the most interesting to you is an airline. We built Finnair's new generation connected IFE, connectivity portal and their acclaimed mobile app, applying a user centric approach. I wanted to talk about both the case and how to get there, so this presentation is a bit of compromise between the two. Please bear with me.

User centric design builds on
understanding the user's real needs.

Everything else follows.

User centric design means finding out what the users actually need, and implementing that.

It is a tool and one of the methods for solving your business needs. The process, coupled with an approach called “systems thinking”, may lead to systemic change by giving you a better understanding of how you can look at the whole customer journey and pinpoint the places for improvement and change. The systemic, user centric approach may thus have a major impact on your overall business.

Done properly, it will teach you a lot about your organisation and lead to really good products that your clients love to use.

Go See and Observe Real People Doing Real Stuff

To find out what the users need, you need to go talk to them.

Genchi Genbutsu - actual place, actual thing, comes from Toyota Production System, but also captures the essence of user centric design.

This means that the designer must go see and observe and interview real people doing real stuff.

User centric design is based on understanding what actually happens instead of what someone thinks might happen. It requires the understanding of underlying reasons for why things are done. It relies on as few assumptions as possible. Instead of assumptions, we form hypotheses that are validated with actual people.

Build a product that the customer wants to use because
it is valuable to her. – She will tell her friends about it.

If she doesn't want to use it but has to,
she will tell her friends about that too.

A good product is used because the customer chooses to - because it brings her value. It may be a better way to manage her entire trip, or a new channel for buying services and goods. Or for finding a life partner. But what is good for all cases is the the capability to look at the bigger picture.

For instance, a traditional approach for addressing problems related to airline check-in might be to design a faster way to perform self-check-in. This approach is based on the assumption that the need for the check-in is a given. That there actually needs to be a check-in in the first place.

However, actual user centric design might lead to the elimination of passenger check-in altogether, by determining that it may not be something the user, or indeed the airline, even needs. Realising this frees up resources and reduces failures, which reduces the load on customer support.

Customer's journey map

To look at the big picture, you need to understand the passengers' entire journey with you. To understand every point where her needs touch your business.

The initial hypotheses are then quickly validated with ethnographic studies. This is a fancy way of saying "observations and interviews".

We do not ask the user directly what she wants. We combine our observations and business understanding with our insight, vision and expertise to figure out what they need, based on business goals and behavioural patterns. We try to do as much as possible with actual prototypes, so that we can observe people using a physical manifestation of our hypothesis.

If we'd only ask them what they want, we would end up with faster horses instead of automobiles. The difference between the two is where the product owner's, or in the case of the above example, Henry Ford's vision comes into play.

The needs must be articulated in easily understandable, verifiable claims, that initially encompass the true need. "The user wants to go on holiday. She needs to travel from home to holiday, find a place to stay, find relaxing activities, and travel back." After that we can start to break down the needs into smaller portions and see how those can best be met.

"The user needs to travel from airport A to airport B, or between two IATA codes" is not a valid high-level description. While it is factually true and based on a need, it leaves the aspect of "why" out of the picture. People usually go to the airport to get to somewhere else. They don't go there to spend quality time with their families.

Looking at the big picture can lead to systemic change.
The relevance of a product is measured by
the amount of change it creates.

Looking at the big picture and the customer's touch points throughout her journey will have a systemic impact on your business and potentially your organisation. Understanding the systemic impact is paramount, because you want to focus on changes that have a positive systemic impact.

Understanding the big picture will also keep you from falling into the organisational silo trap. This trap leads into building several separate solutions that address the needs of each organisational silo, but miss the big picture and the customer's journey through it. The customer is not interested in how your silos work.

The customer is not interested in your IT infrastructure or its limitations either, so don't let the IT department dictate how your products are built.

Decreased failure demand
Improved customer satisfaction
Better brand image
Increased efficiency
Higher profit margins

Understanding the system, or the big picture, removes chances of failure. Failures generate demands elsewhere to address and fix the results of those failures, which is called failure demand. Failure demand is a cost generator.

Example: failures create more work for customer support, because the customers fail at doing what they want to do and have to call your call centre. More calls, more people in call centres. More costs. Removing those points of failure on a systemic level can be directly seen on your bottom line.

This is relevant for both customer facing products as well as internal tools. I was astonished when a client once said to me about a tool that “it’s just an internal tool. It doesn’t have to be good.” He was serious too, and unwittingly setting his company and himself up for more failure.

For instance:

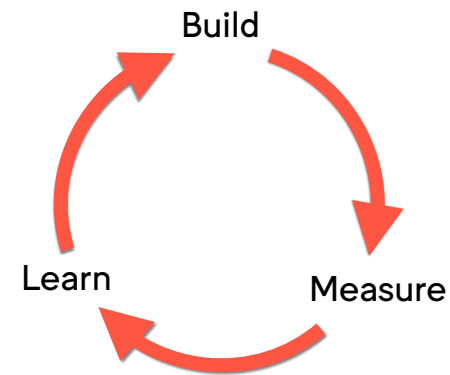
- Addressing some pressing issues previously handled at customer support, when something fails.
 - Solution: identify and remove the things that generate failures and thus remove failure demand.
 - Result: Immediate impact on needs for customer assistance, reduced costs through reductions in frontline support. Improved customer satisfaction, by

How will I know I'm doing the right things?
How do I measure the impact?

Sometimes it's tricky to know what to measure, how, and when. The bigger the target, the more difficult it is to measure.

Comparison is also tricky, since it isn't usually efficient to build two different products to pit against each other.

To avoid unnecessarily large risks, it is advisable to do both the deployment and measurement in small increments. Big bang releases are rarely a good idea, because the more you try to design and build up front without validation through measured use (Big Design Up Front or B-DUF), the more incremental, unchecked mistakes you make.

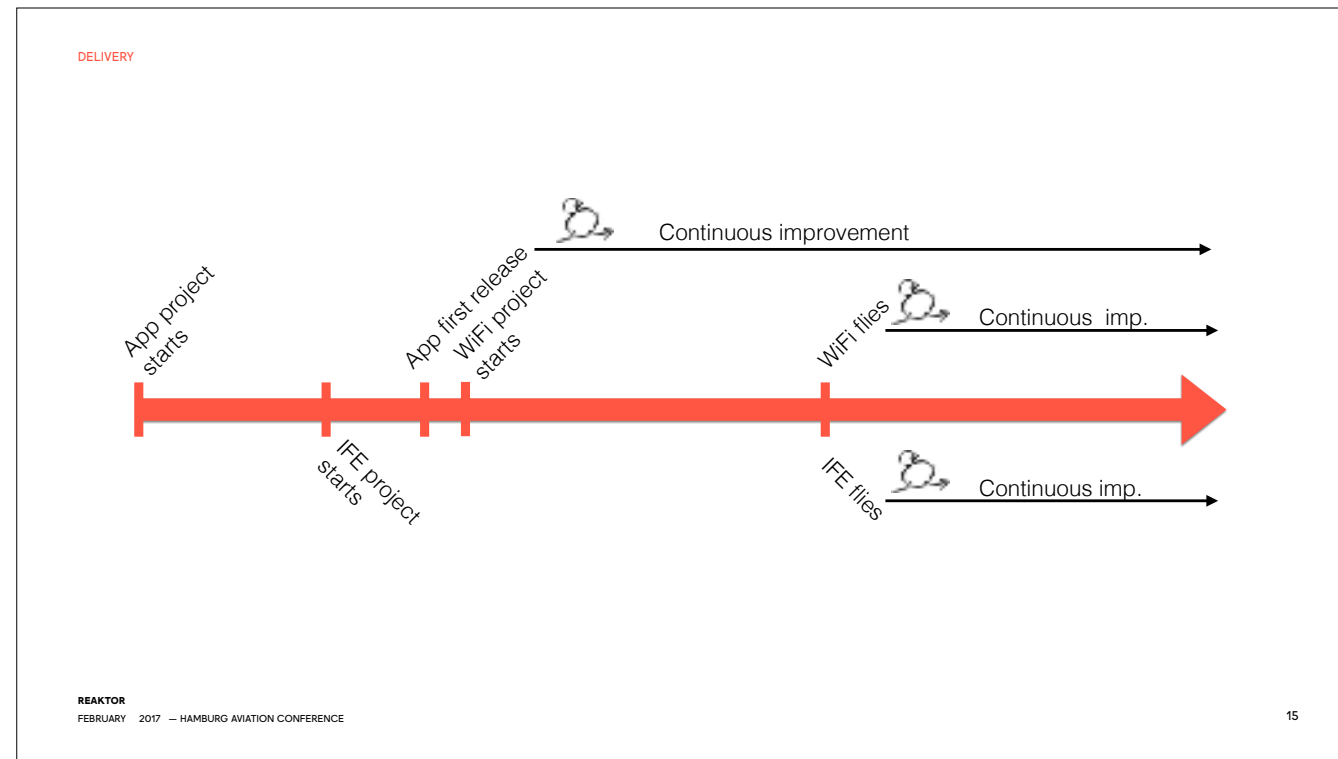


So, the answer to measuring is in building your service incrementally, doing design and development in tandem within the same team. Small increments allow you to identify the impact better, and, if necessary, adjust and take steps back.

Run an incremental design and development process. Build - Measure - Learn. Remember: going for flashy big bangs is the same as chasing unnecessary risks.

So build it, find relevant metrics to measure success, learn from your findings, and build again. It's a continuous process that ends when the product is no longer relevant.

The metrics depend on what you want to achieve. Besides the obvious ones like measuring revenue, you might want to devise other quantitative metrics such as changes in number of support requests and qualitative metrics such as overall nature of customer feedback.

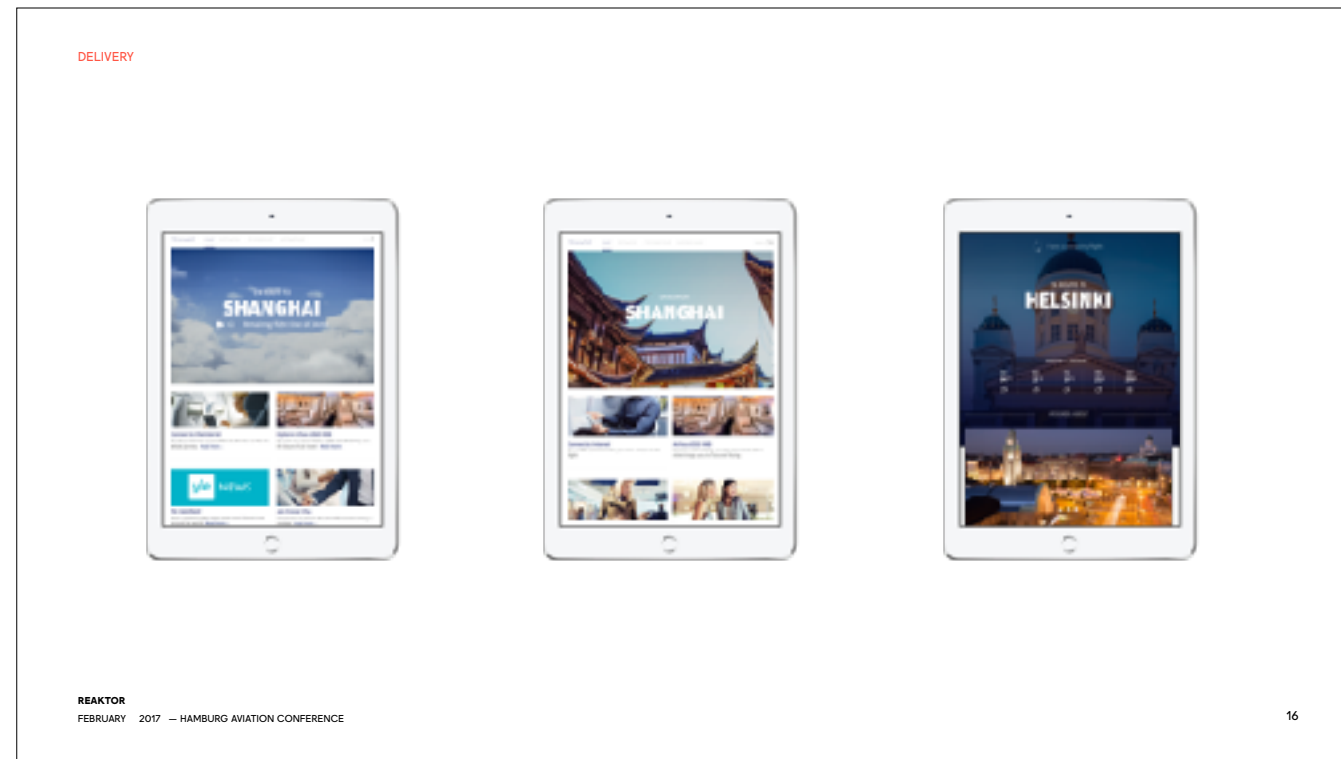


Incremental design and implementation is how we are building Finnair's services too. Our team sits at Finnair's offices and works hand-in-hand with Finnair's business owners. Designers and developers work in the same team.

There are three projects that address different touch points of the customer's journey. All rely on connectivity and aim at providing peace of mind to the passengers.

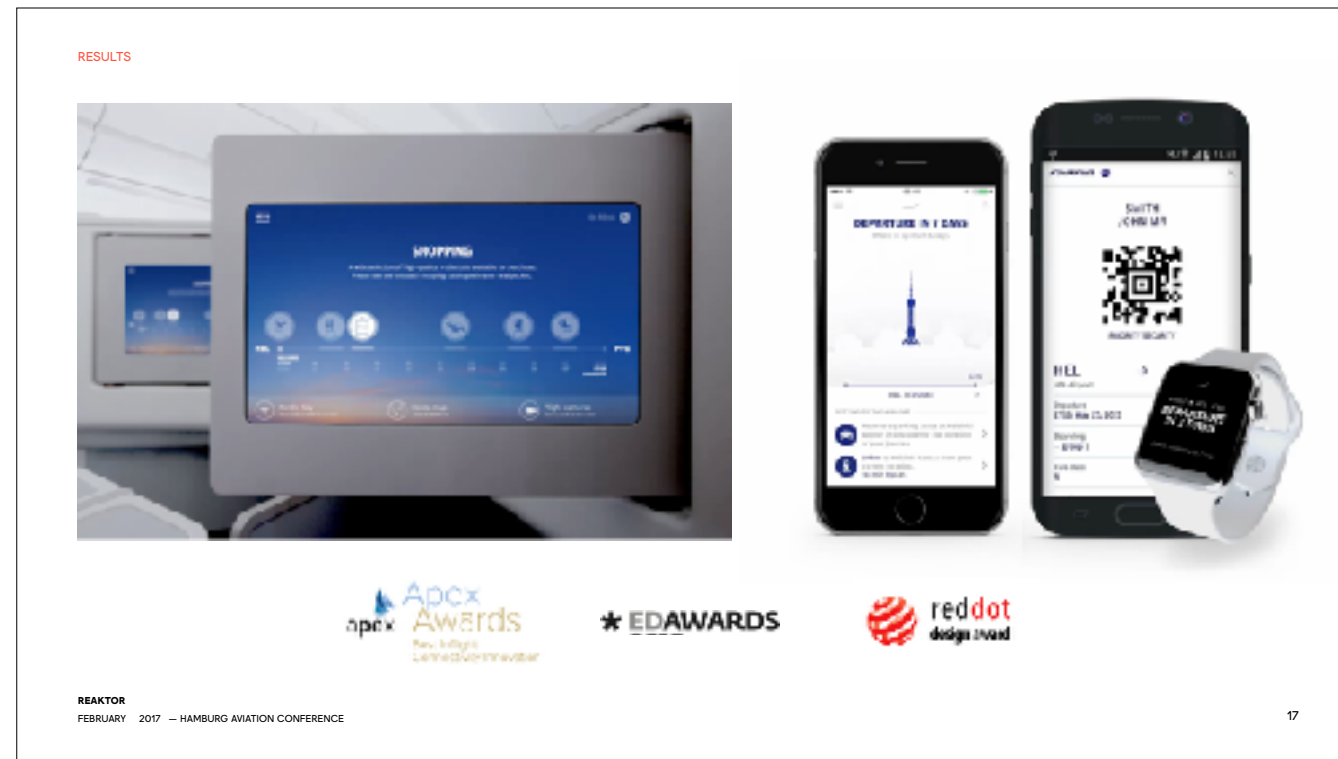
The cool thing is that the incremental and iterative way we've worked and how the platform is built allows for quick changes and additions, helping us build a real interplay between all the components: The Mobile app, The IFE and the WiFi portal.

The design and development have been guided by a customer centric core hypothesis, which we try validate whenever possible. It is easiest to do this with the WiFi and the mobile app, but we've made some progress with the IFE too, because it was initially designed to be connected as well. The IFE and the WiFi were designed to complement each other from the start, communicating with each other, the passengers and the crew.



The customer-facing digital products are seen as a platform that has the potential to generate revenue while increasing customer satisfaction. They are also seen as being continuously evolving rather than static services. The portal has gone through several iterations during the past year and a half, and is evolving a lot as it is also being implemented on Finnair's short-haul fleet that do not have a seatback IFE.

We have tested and learned from several different ways to deliver content to the passengers, as well as several different commercial approaches with selling both on-board goods and products by partnered brands.



When building the Finnair products, we have tried to look at the big picture. The mobile app, the IFE and the WiFi, are understood as different digital touch points for the passenger that are relevant at different points of her overall journey. The app addresses her needs before and after the flight, the IFE during the flight and the WiFi is a little bit of both.

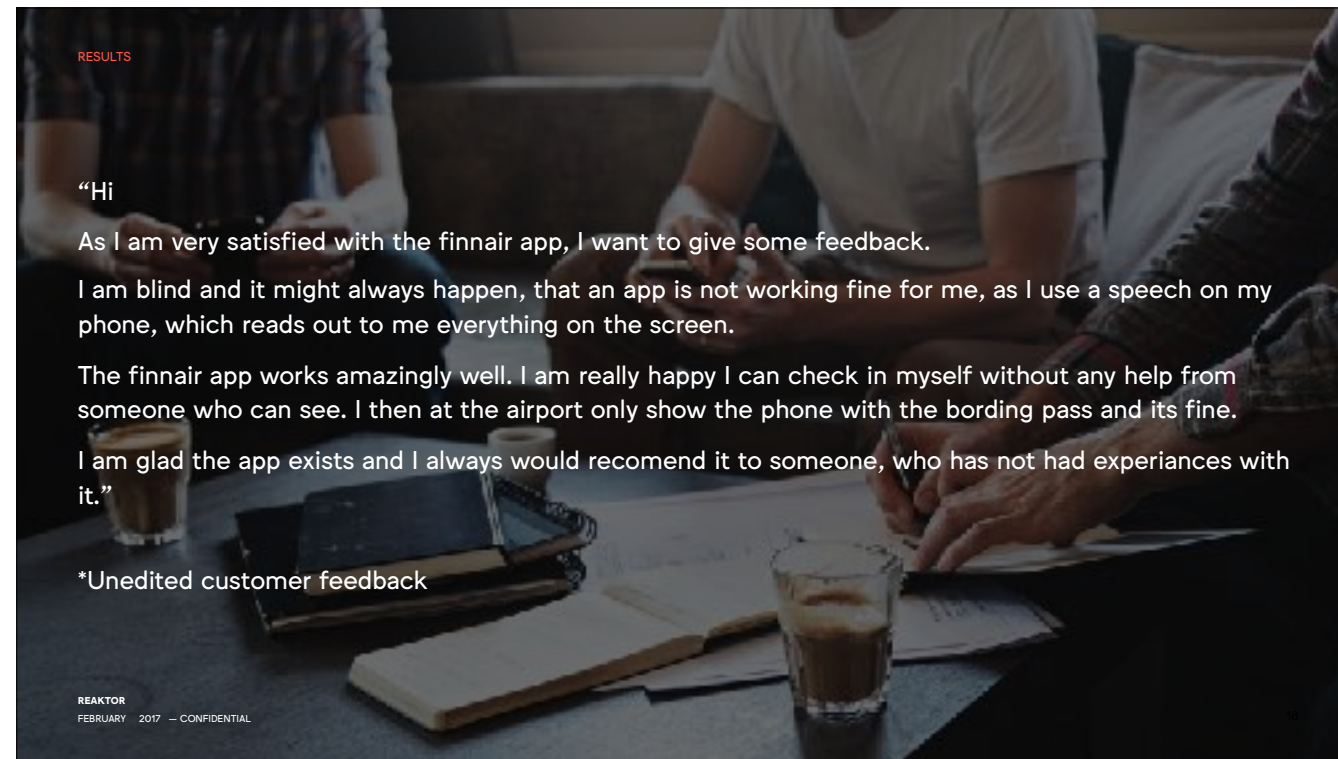
One thing is very evident though: connectivity is the big item that ties everything together.

The app is now the most important channel for their frequent flyer program. The app increased the signup of new members significantly, and continues to do so. It has become a trusted travel companion for almost all frequent flyers that fly more than once a year.

The retention numbers for the app, or the amount of users returning to the app, is staggeringly high - over 90%.

Conversion rates, or how many user sessions convert to transactions, is in a steady rise in both transactions through the mobile app and transactions through the WiFi portal. We are constantly improving the experience and finding ways to increase conversion rates incrementally.

We have reduced the pressure and workload of the customer service department by introducing a new feedback channel and reducing failure demand. This has also contributed to better customer satisfaction. There is still a lot of room for improvement, of course.



It pays to keep in mind that the users are at the centre of everything (along with business needs, of course). It's heartwarming when we get unexpected positive feedback.

In this case a visually impaired person is happy, because the app lets her travel without having to depend on others. The remarkable thing is that the app was not particularly designer for the visually impaired, but it is still extremely easy for them to use.

That's the power of good user centric design.

- User centric design addresses users' actual needs
- Get to know the people to understand their needs
- Look at the big picture to maximise systemic impact
- Chase positive systemic changes
- Work in iterations
- Measure the results continuously
- Learn from your measurements to make the next iteration better

To wrap it up, User centric design is based on understanding the user's actual needs and marrying them with your business needs.

It will result in your business performing better and your organisation working more efficiently through removing failure demand.

The impact may be systemic, but to get the most out of it means you must be prepared to work in an agile way with small, incremental improvements and changes.

Digital products are a continuous journey, whose success is based on learning and adapting through measuring the impact of changes.



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