SENIOR CAPSTONE

TWO COME TOGETHER
IMPROVING DESIGN IN OUR COMMUNITY

MELISSA K. BLANCHARD

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How might we improve graphic design within local businesses that cannot afford design agencies?

How can we assist advanced level design students gain professional experience?

THESIS PAPER

CHAPTER 2

ABSTRACT

Local businesses that disregard hiring a graphic designer often struggle compared to their competitors that can afford design agencies. This paper explores the necessity to improve graphic design within local businesses that cannot afford design agencies. Furthermore, it addresses the need to assist student designers gain professional experience. Topics explored include what makes a designer valuable, what they bring to a business, brand success studies, struggles of local businesses, buying local benefits, and what a designer gains from having professional work experience. Evidence shows that pairing advanced level graphic design students with local businesses can improve the success of their brand and increase sales while assisting student designers to gain professional experience and strengthen their portfolios.

INTRODUCTION

Communities often lack good design practices and brand success within their small businesses. Pairing advanced level graphic design students with local businesses can improve the success of their brand and sales. Student designers also gain professional experience and can strengthen their portfolios before entering careers. Since we are apart of a community we must take advantage of the power we have to influence and benefit one another in order to help everyone in the community succeed.

The goal of this research is to solve two problems in a way that is mutually beneficial for local businesses and students. It gives the student designers an advantage in the professional world while local businesses see improved sales and success. There is a dire need to help local businesses improve their brands and success without going in debt hiring a design agency. One way to solve the two problems is to provide a resource for local business owners and designers to connect. Once together, both parties will see the benefits and the overall quality of the local business and student communities will improve.

Significant factors to address include the struggles small local businesses face, what their competitors' brands success looks like, and what is an affordable alternative for small businesses to use. The importance of hiring graphic designers is explored along with what makes them valuable. Particularly, if hiring a designer improves sales and the community. Equally important is the topic on advanced level graphic design students; the challenges graphic design students face, what employers look for after graduation, and the benefits gained when paired with a local business.

SMALL BUSINESS STRUGGLES

Small local businesses face more challenges than larger companies with endless resources.[1] "A small business can sometimes find it difficult to find the financing needed to run and grow the operation."[2] Small businesses tend to work harder to stay in business and generate revenue. There is a rising demand for small businesses to expand the facility, develop new products, execute a marketing program, and meet payroll.[3] Larger companies can afford to hire a design agency or professional designer, whereas many small businesses cannot. Small businesses struggle with attracting top talent that can push them forward. In the same fashion, these businesses struggle to provide employee benefits, unlike larger companies that are more stable. The main struggle for small businesses is finances. Their money may go towards other parts of the business instead of branding and marketing. "Marketing and advertising are an important way for any business to reach new clients," therefore it is important to have marketing play a significant part in the business.[4]

One largely known competitor for retail sport businesses is Nike. Nike has one of the most recognizable logos in the world. Their branding and marketing strategies greatly contributed to their success.[5] "Branding is one of the most crucial aspects that creates and defines a company's identity."[6] A brand should be a lifestyle, give the product meaning, and give consumers a brand that they can identity with. For example, Nike improved their value and desirability by having Michael Jordan represent them. It gave people someone to strive to be like and created an emotional response for people to connect with. Nike is successful because the company spends most of its annual revenues on advertising and promotions.

> "In 1997 Nike spent $978 million on advertising, marketing and promotion."[7]
>
> - NIKE

Nike's renown is extremely high because they are keeping their brand visible. Just like Nike, brand success, advertising, marketing, and promotion is important for any business, small or large. Therefore it is important for a small local business to find a way to make brand, advertising, marketing, and promotion a financial focus.

In order to have a local business it is important and useful to know how a company achieves brand success. Brand success depends on a set of characteristics including: Audience Knowledge, Uniqueness, Passion, Consistency, Competitiveness, Exposure, and Leadership. The companies with the best brands have a deep understanding of their target market. "Understanding the target market is critical because it provides direction for the tone and reach of a marketing campaign, along with the overall identity of a brand."[8] Having a good understanding of a local businesses' target market is key to brand success and gaining customers. In order to achieve brand success it is important to have a brand that represents the target audience. A local business without a designer may struggle to develop a strong brand that possesses good design qualities.

VALUE IN DESIGNERS

Having a graphic designer would only be beneficial to a small local business. What makes designers valuable "is their unique ability to join together creativity, inspiration and empathy to craft progressive solutions to problems."[9] "Designers have a creative process they go through in order to produce a high quality product that's going to have a competitive advantage over others like it."[10] Good designers are good communicators and can work well in collaborative environments. Designers have the ability to create what a client wants in a visual way and can bring a different perspective to it compared to a client doing the work themselves. Designers are trained in this area and are more equipped than a client. It is the designer's job to think creatively and have artistic judgments. Local businesses should use a designer to help create a successful brand and other marketing materials.

AIGA discusses their take on design value; they believe design creates value for a business by providing competitive advantage, customer trust & loyalty, and market share.[11]

> "Design is an investment in innovative thinking, positioning, branding and communication."12
>
> - AIGA

Design thinking can help solve business problems with creative solutions. Not only can a designer help with graphics, they can also think creatively and be a good asset to have on a team.

Even small businesses should use the help of graphic designers to help improve marketing campaigns and sales.[13] A designer should mainly use images and text to present and sell ideas and services. "Why it is a good idea for even small companies with 50 to 100 employees to hire a graphic designer? Because it's economically feasible."[14] Moreover the designer would help improve the promotion of the company.

The benefits of hiring a freelance graphic designer over a design agency are discussed in the blog written by Design Buddy.[15] One benefit is that it can be more affordable than a design agency. Comparatively most freelancers work from home, keeping overhead costs lower. Communication with a freelancer is one on one, making the project easier to manage. Freelancers tend to be more flexible and are more prone to answer evening and weekend emails over a design agency that typically works from 9-5 weekdays.[16] "When you hire a freelancer, what you see is what you get. Usually a freelancer's portfolio consists of projects they alone have worked on."[17] This is ideal because if a local business likes a designer's work then they will most likely be happy with the work that is produced should they hire them. Freelancers vary in price. Sometimes their services can be expensive, however, it is still more cost effective than hiring a design agency.

It is beneficial for a small local business to hire a graphic designer verses not taking one on. They are more affordable than a design agency, they improve the sales of a business and can help create a brand for a business. Keeping things local by hiring a graphic design in the area has many benefits. From a business perspective the top reasons to go local are that it builds community, strengthens the local economy, shapes character, creates a healthier environment, lowers taxes, creates jobs and opportunities, increases the wealth of the residents, enhances local democracy, and enhances the health of the residents[18]. In relation to the topic of designers it builds a sense of community, strengthens the local economy, and creates jobs and opportunities for designers.

GRAPHIC DESIGN STUDENTS

Student designers face a few challenges when getting a degree in graphic design. Many face the problem of not having enough work experience to land an entry level position after graduation. The competition is huge and students are competing with other designers who have already been in the industry for a year or two for the same jobs. Correspondingly, students are left with internships that either don't pay or are low paying compared to a full-time position. Design firms are looking for stand out designers with experience. Simply put, students often do not have enough professional work experience. In David Airey's blog, "What Graphic Design Schools Are Lacking," it has exact quotes from design students and graduates what they think should be included in a graphic design course.[19]

> "Design school teaches you how to talk to other designers ... there needs to be an entire course on talking to people who are not designers."[20]
>
> - Stephen Lee Ogden

If student designers were able to work on more projects with real clients for a course during their schooling, it could give them the professional experience they need.

Student designers need experience working with real clients to know how to deal with them. Design firms look for this experience and class projects aren't as impressive to them. Designers need to push themselves to be great and show design firms that they have the skill to deal with real clients. Driven students who possess this experience are ahead of other students without it. "California State University concluded that work experience began becoming more crucial in hiring in 1980."[21] "By 1993, 93% of interns in work-study programs were offered jobs by their employers."[22] A 2013 study by High Fliers Research said college graduates without work experience have "little chance" of getting a job.[23] Work experience is said to be just as important as a college degree and crucial in landing a job after graduation. In light of this, any professional experience a graphic designer gets in school will benefit them in getting a job after graduation.

There are several benefits for student graphic designers that do freelance projects during school. Any freelance projects a student designer partakes in gives the designer exposure and could lead to several jobs. Some benefits include creativity – refreshing to work with people who believe in what they do, networking – it is beneficial to network with non-profits or charitable organizations, philanthropy – it is great to use your talent as a designer to effect change, and portfolio – improves the designers portfolio and is a way to explore different areas of design.[24] Time frames given on class projects are often

unrealistic and lack a real-world connection. It is a good idea for student designers to always look for job opportunities while in school. Having freelance projects and working with real clients is a great way to network and improve the student's portfolio.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Small local businesses face many struggles and one of them can be finances. It is clear that brand success, marketing, advertising, and promotion play a huge factor in keeping a brand visible. With that in mind, small local businesses that cannot afford design agencies or professional freelancers have an alternative solution, hire an advanced level graphic design student. If a small local business works with an advanced level graphic design student they can improve their brand and sales. Having a graphic designer on the team is extremely valuable and can help solve business problems with creative solutions. Not only can a designer help with graphics, they can also think creatively and be a good asset to have on a team. It would be ideal for small business to hire a local graphic designer, granted businesses to hire local graphic designers to provide more jobs and opportunities to designers in the area. This would build the sense of community and benefit everyone. Small businesses that cannot afford professional design should consider working with designers, especially those looking to graduate soon. That way they have the necessary technical skills from their classes, but could use the professional work in their portfolios.

Graphic design students face many challenges when trying to achieve an entry level position after graduating. Having professional work experience is crucial to landing a job after graduation. By pairing an advanced level graphic design student with a local business it can help the student get the experience they need as well as help the small business improve their business and sales. Once the parties come together, both start to benefit from one another and great things can happen.

THE SOLUTION

CHAPTER 3

FIXING THE PROBLEM

My goal was to provide a solution to my two thesis questions. By designing a resource for advanced level graphic design students and small businesses I solved these problems. The resource is a website and app for small businesses to use to look for a designer, and for designers to look for a client to work with.

This website and app provides all the available information on job postings and a list of graphic designers. However, it is up to the designer and client to connect and work together.

THREE EXPERIMENTS

CHAPTER 4

EXPERIMENT 1

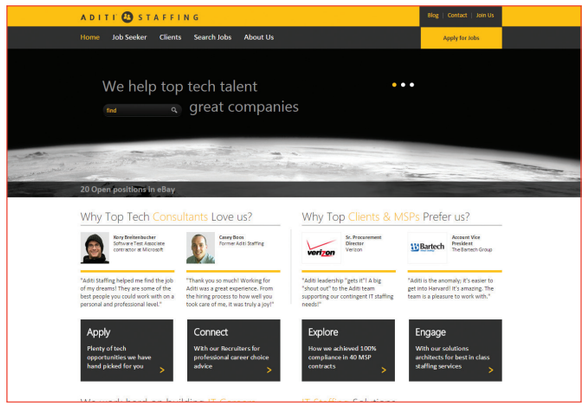
TALENT AGENCY WEBSITES

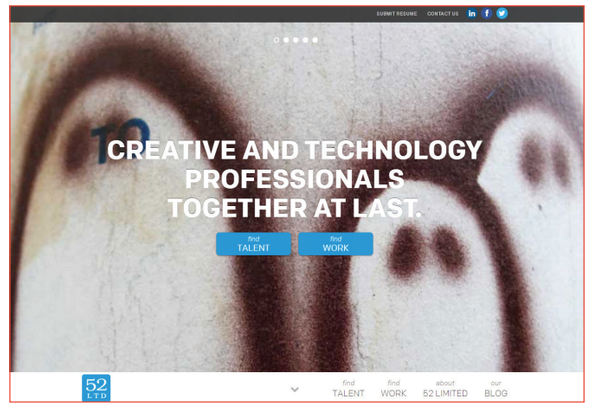
THE GOAL

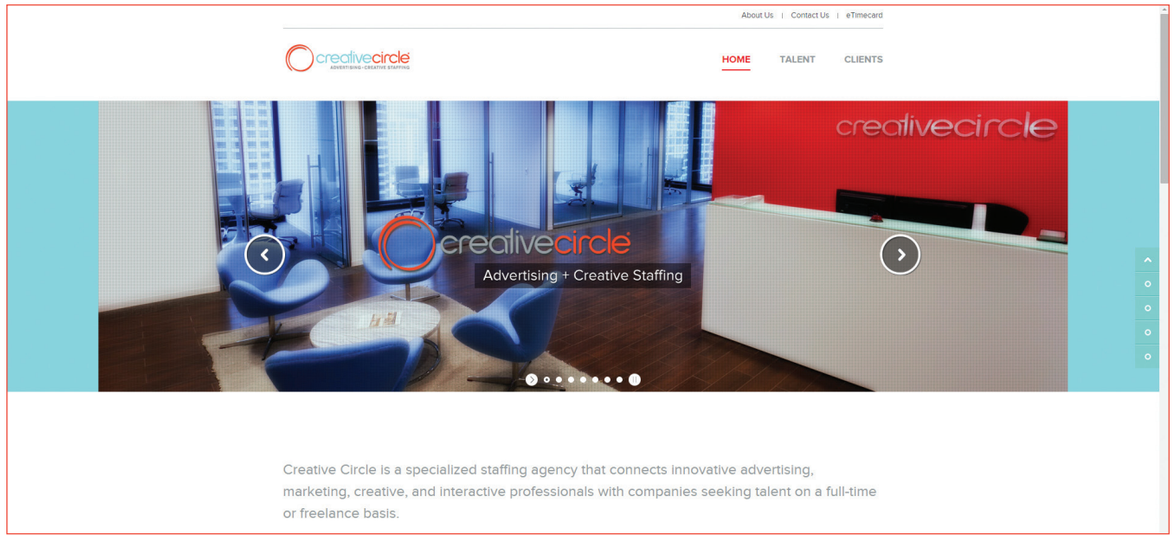
Compared Talent Agency Websites and figured out the style I wanted for my website.

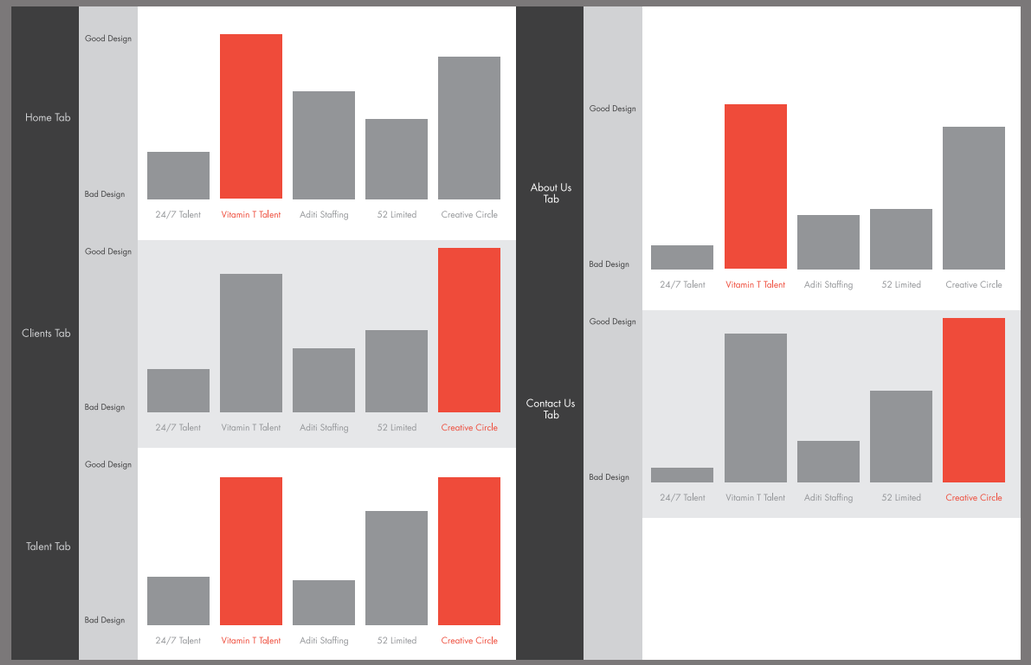
WEBSITES

- 24/7 Talent Agency
- Vitamin T Talent
- Aditi Staffing
- 52 Limited
- Creative Circle



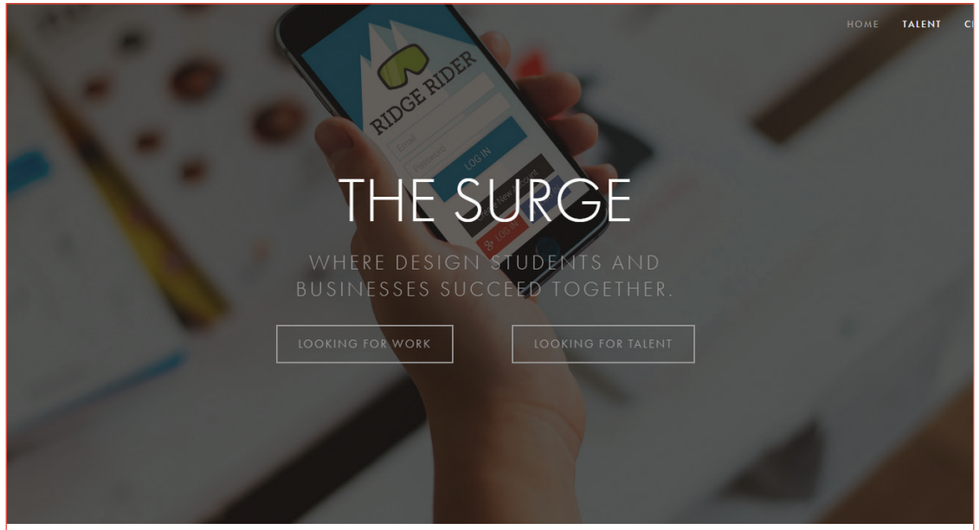




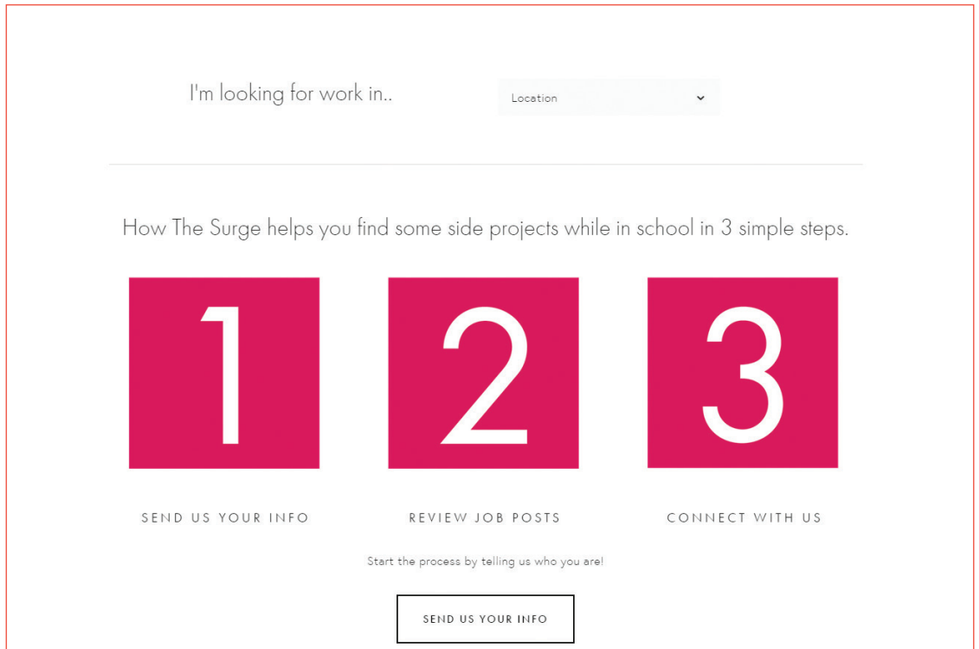


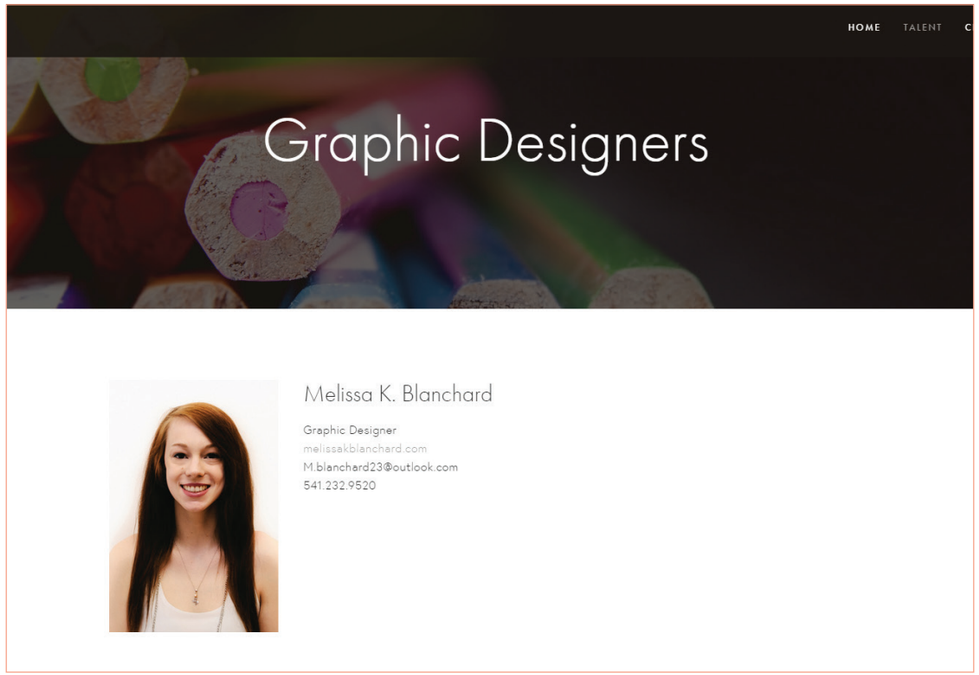
EXPERIMENT SUMMARY

- Was drawn to Creative Circle's website the best, Vitamin T Talent was close
- 24/7 Talent's Website was a little crowded with design elements and variations of color
- Aditi Staffing had a lot of repeated information and many tabs
- 52 Limited took a little bit to get use to the navigation of the website
- Vitamin T Talent was easy to navigate and kept my interest visually



The Surge is a resource for design students and businesses to connect and succeed together.





EXPLORATION

Explored by creating a prototype website on squarespace.com to see how it would function. From researching I wanted a clean and simple design that was easy to navigate.
I wanted to incorporate a chat system that other agencies seemed to lack.

EXPERIMENT 2

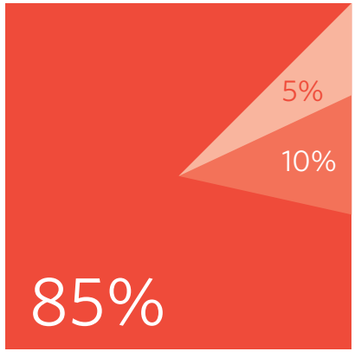
SURVEY RESULTS

THE GOAL

Gathered more information from designers and business owners. Would they use this resource? Do they think it would benefit them if they used the website or app?

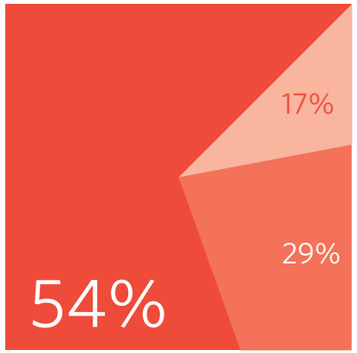
EXPERIMENT SUMMARY

- 95.83% of people would use the website and app
- 54.17% would only use the website. 16.67% would only use the app. 29.17% would use both.
- 100% of people would recommend this resource



WOULD YOU USE THIS WEBSITE/APP?

85% Yes, I am a graphic designer
10% Yes, I am a business owner
5% No, I am a graphic designer
0% No, I am a business owner

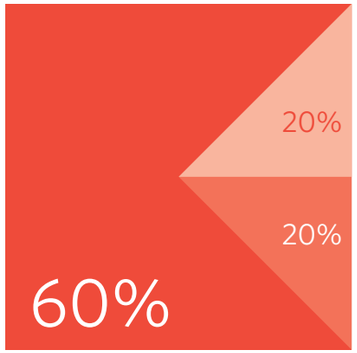


WHAT WOULD YOU USE MORE?

54% Website
17% App
29% Both equal amounts

WOULD YOU RECOMMEND THIS TO YOUR FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES, CO-WORKERS, OR PROFESSORS?

100% Yes
0% No



IF YOU ARE A BUSINESS OWNER CAN YOU AFFORD TO HIRE A DESIGN AGENCY, OR A PROFESSIONAL FREELANCER? I CAN AFFORD...

60% Advanced Level Graphic Design Student
20% Professional Freelancer
20% Can't afford the options, would like volunteer
0% Design Agency

EXPERIMENT 3

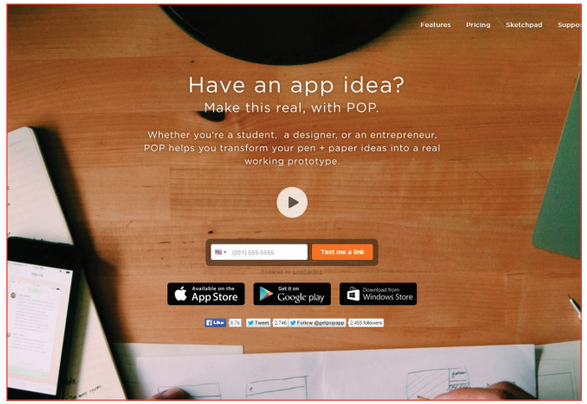
‘POP’ APP EXPLORATION

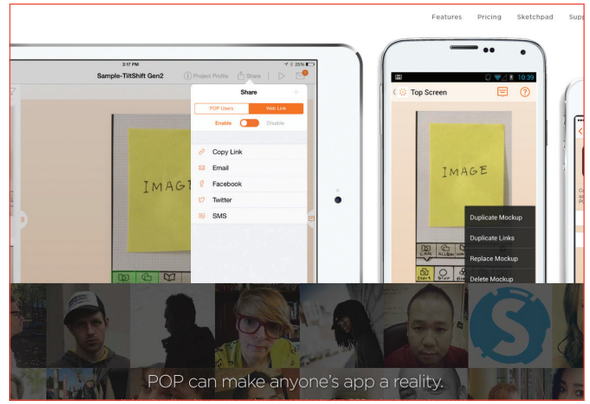
THE GOAL

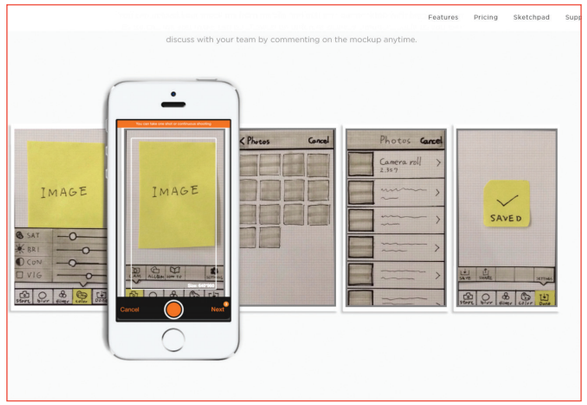
Explored the ‘Pop’ app and figured out how it works. After developing screen mock ups for the app, I used ‘Pop’ to let users test my app.

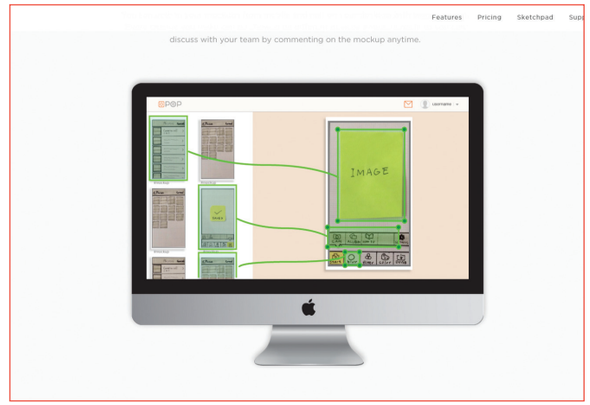
‘POP’ APP

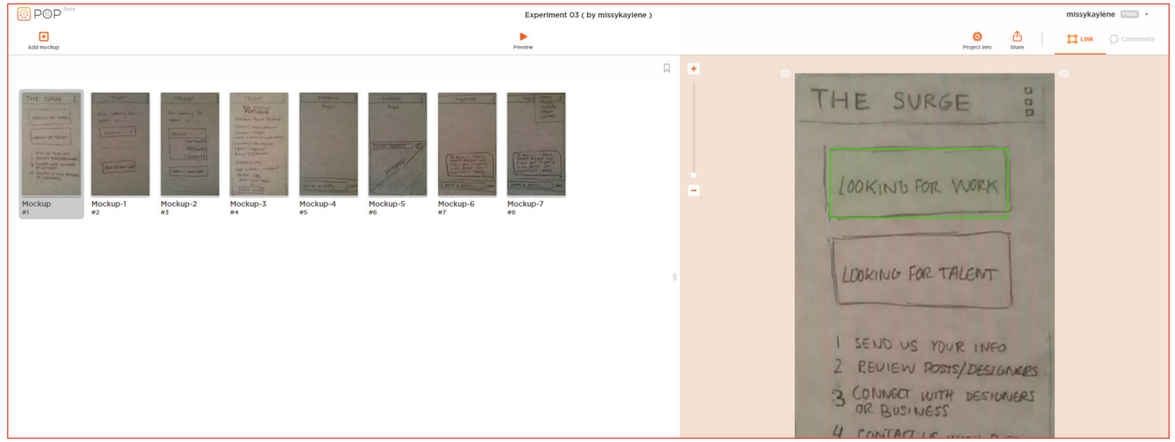
The app ‘Pop’ lets you upload pictures or screens to the app and create hot spots. These hot spots let you move to another screen. This app is easy to use and great for creating an app prototype.

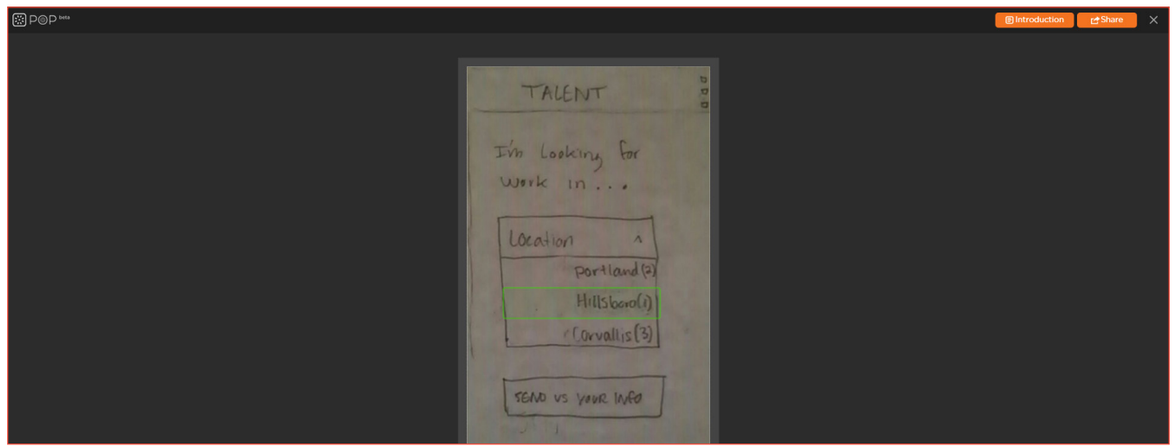












EXPLORATION

- Was able to create some quick sketches of some mocked up screens
- 'Pop' website view, can also explore on phone
- Tested out the scenario of a designer looking for a job, then the designer contacted the client to see if the position was available

CAPSTONE PROJECT

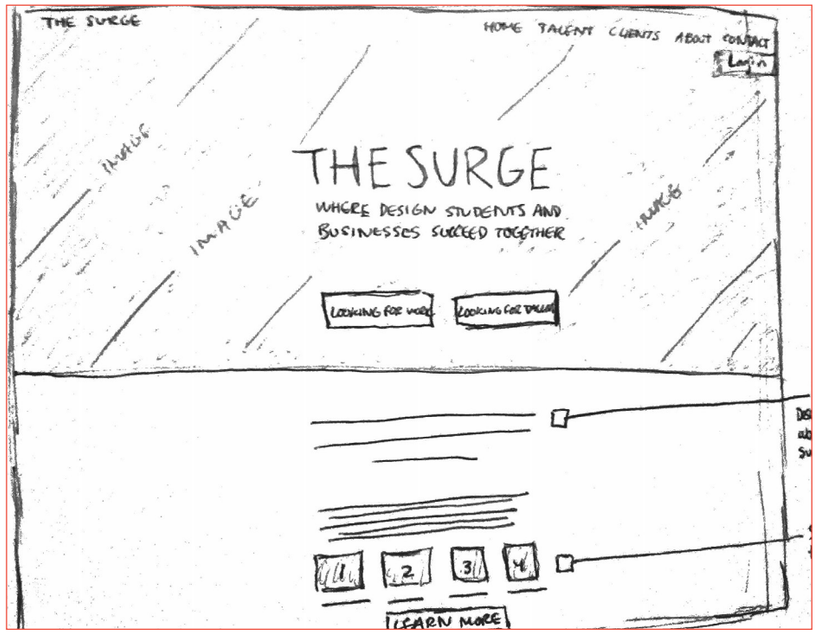
CHAPTER 5

SKETCHES

WEBSITE AND APP

THE GOAL

The goal was to explore layouts for a website and app.
I wanted the layout and style to be simple, clean and easy to navigate.


THE SURGE
HOME TALENT CLIENTS ABOUT CONTACT
Login
THE SURGE
WHERE DESIGN STUDENTS AND BUSINESSES SUCCEED TOGETHER
LOOKING FOR WORK
LOOKING FOR TALENT
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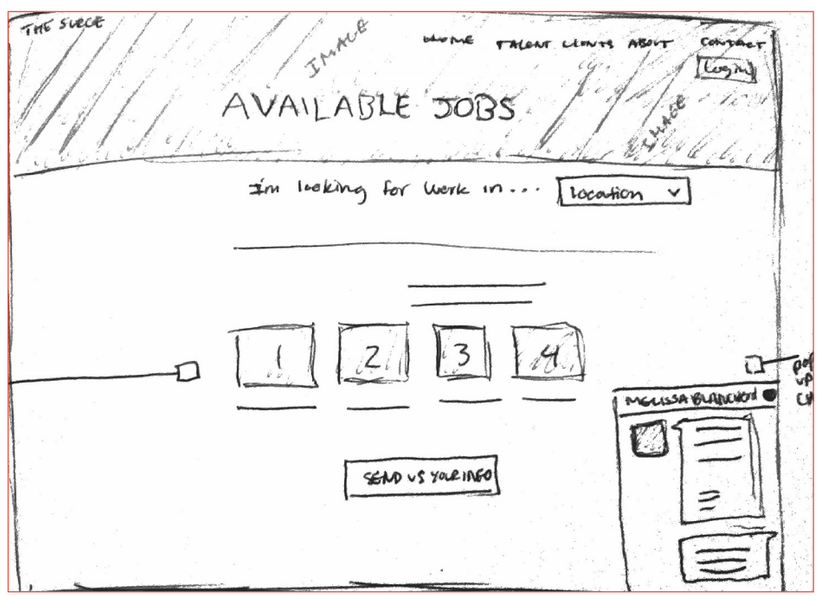
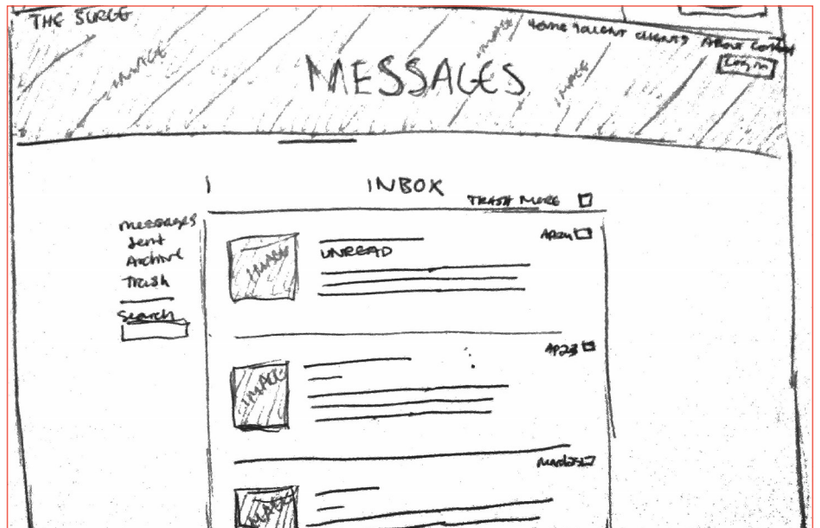
LEARN MORE


THE SURGE
IMAGE
HOME TALENT CLIENTS ABOUT CONTACT
Login
AVAILABLE JOBS
I'm looking for work in...
location
1
2
3
4
SEND US YOUR INFO
MELISSA BLANCHARD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sent
Archive
Trash
Search
UNREAD

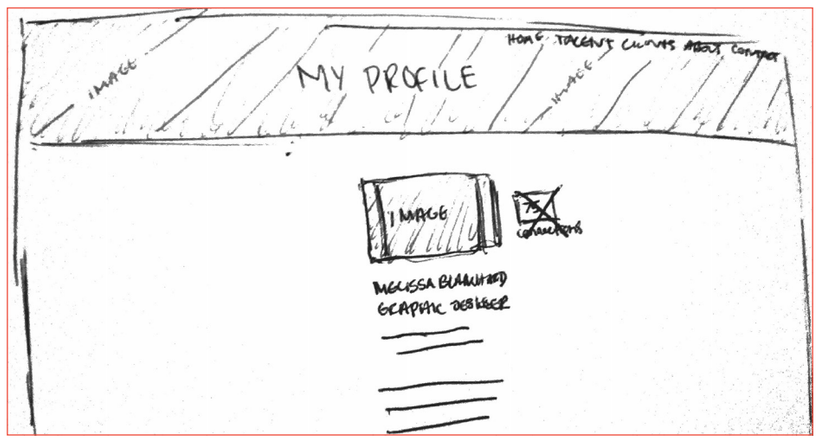
IMAGE
MY PROFILE
HOME TALENT CLIENTS ABOUT CONTACT
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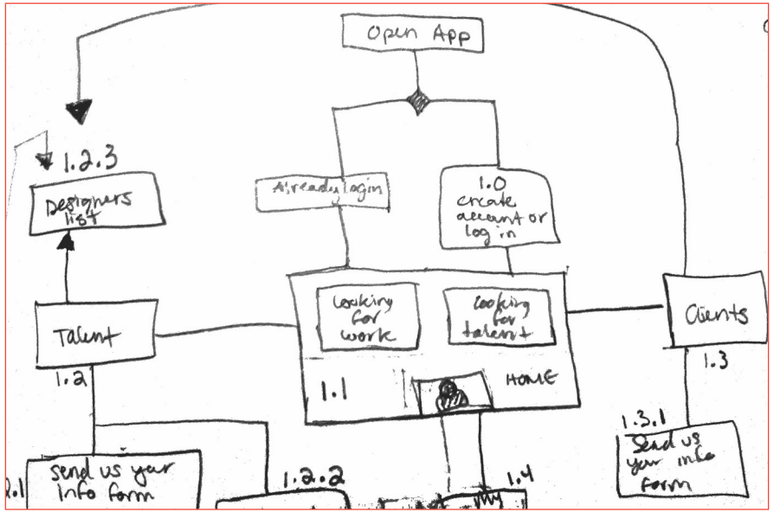
MELISSA BLANCHARD
GRAPHIC DESIGNER


Open App
1.2.3
Designers list
Already login
1.0 create account or log in
Talent
1.2
Looking for work
Looking for talent
Clients
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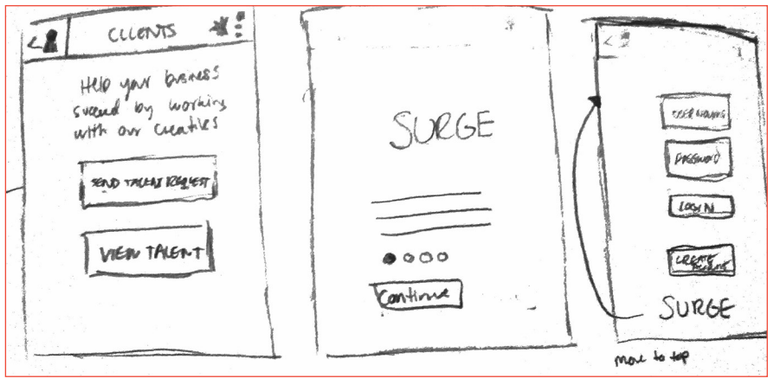
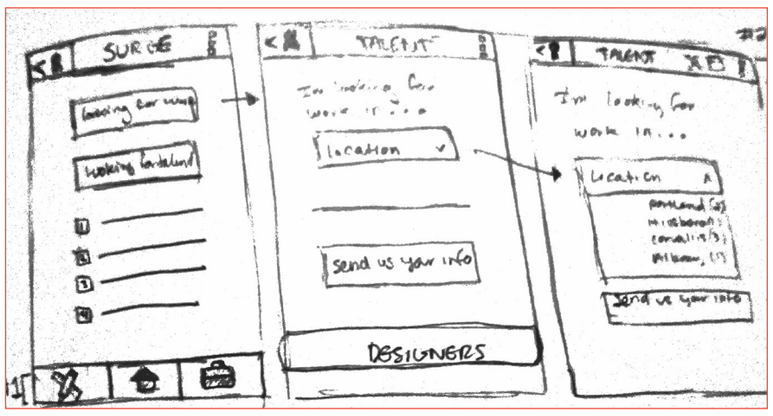
Send us your info form


CLIENTS
Help your business succeed by working with our creatives
SEND TALENT REQUEST
VIEW TALENT
SURGE
Continue
SURGE
move to top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looking for work
looking for talent
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location
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DESIGNERS
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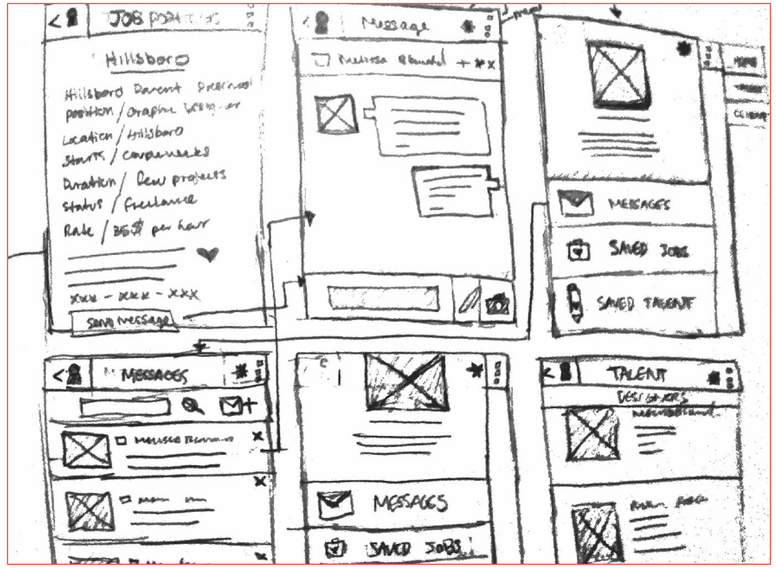
JOB POSITIONS
Hillsboro
Location / Hillsboro
Starts / Coordinates
Duration / few projects
Status / freelance
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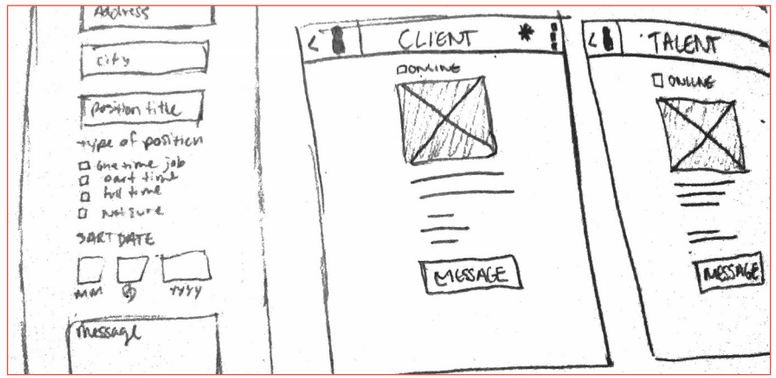
TALENT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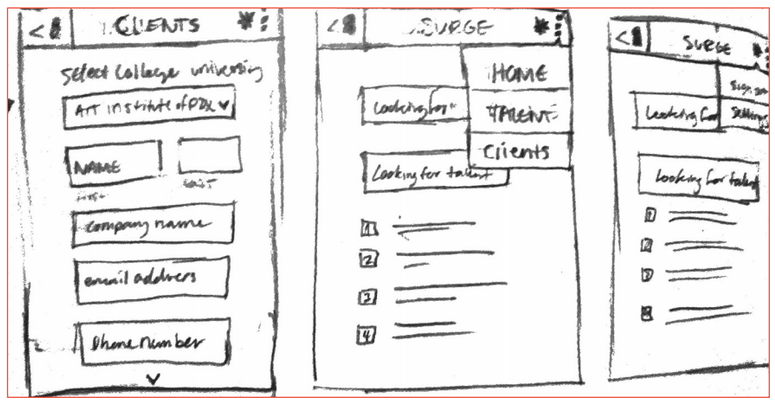
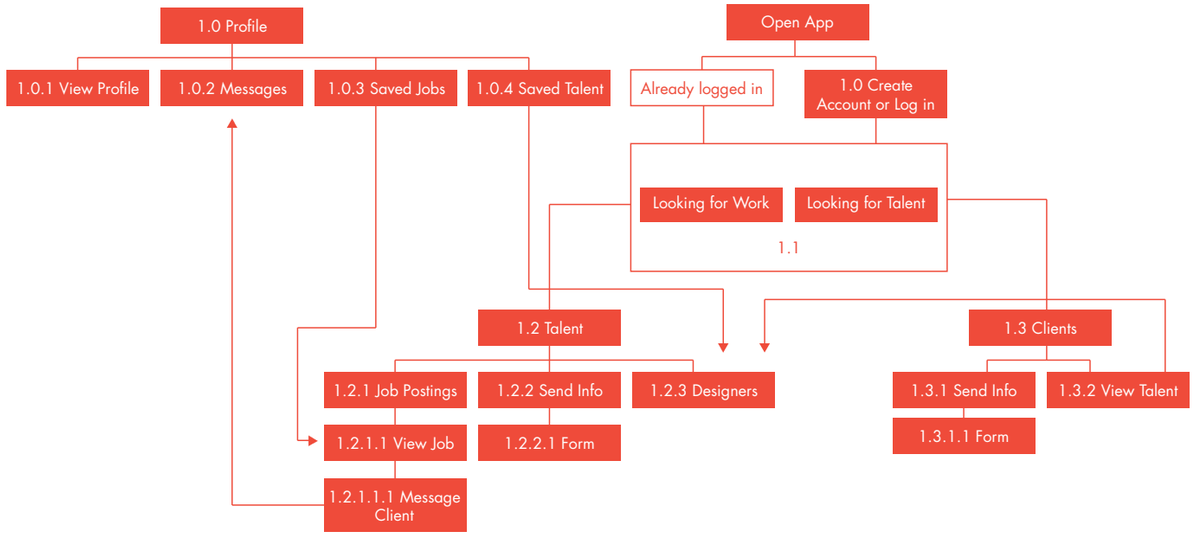

CLIENTS
select college university
NAME
company name
email address
phone number
SURGE
HOME
TALENT
Clients
Looking for talent
SURGE
Looking for talent

ARCHITECTURE

EXPLORING APP ARCHITECTURE

THE GOAL

The goal was to figure out the architecture for the app in a way that is easy to navigate and is user friendly.

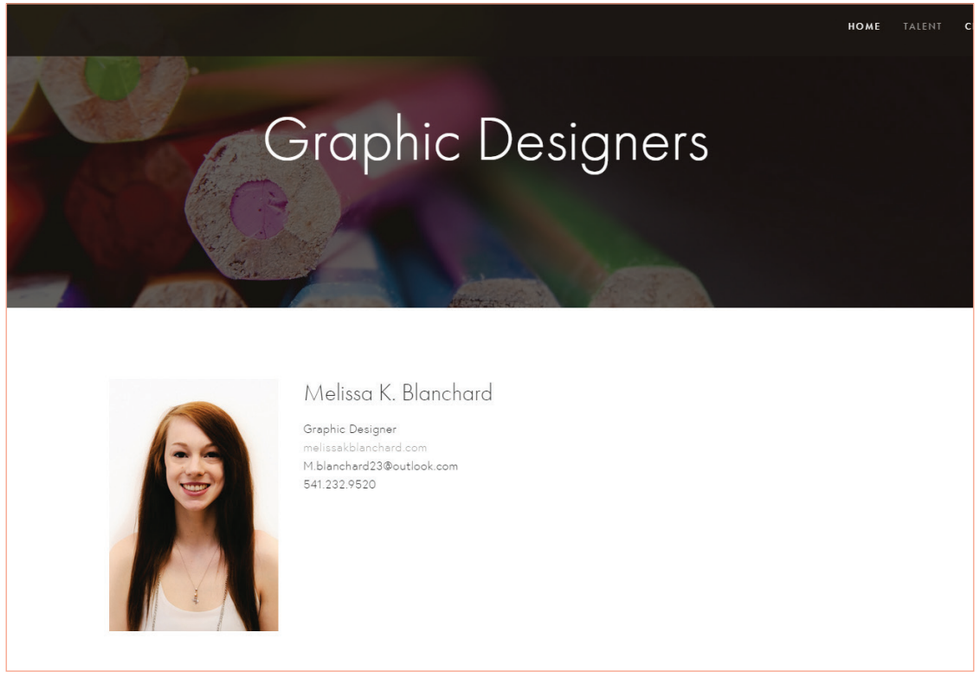


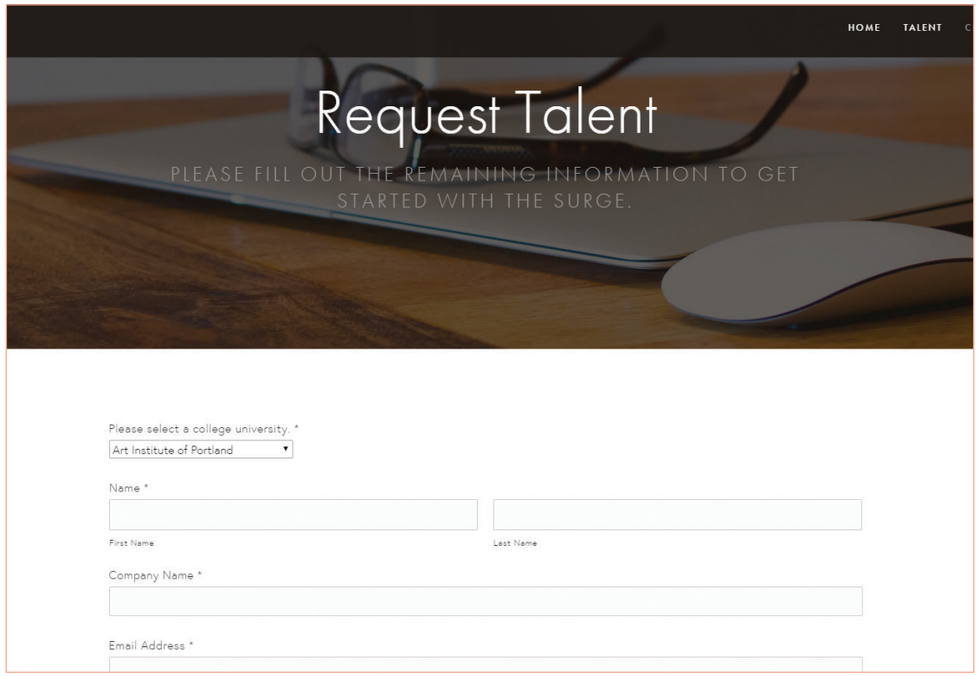
MOCK UP

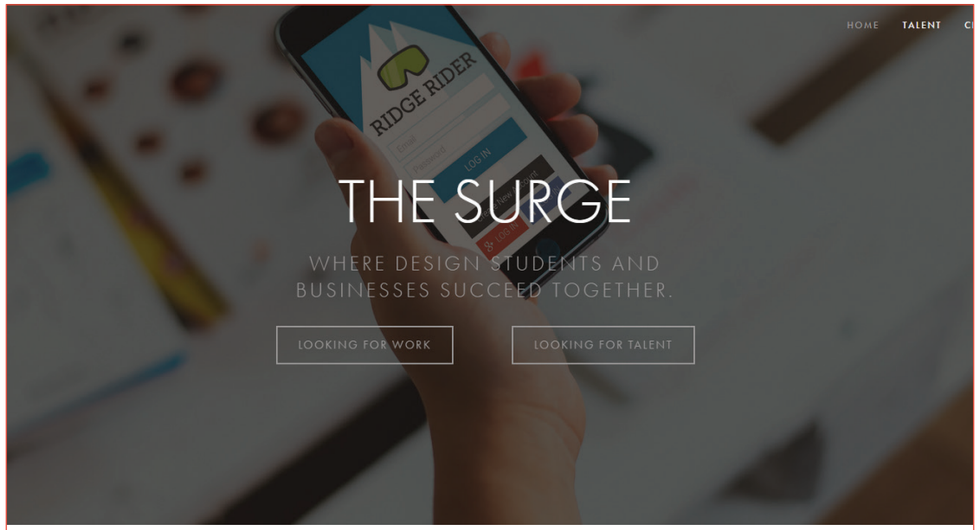
WEBSITE PROTOTYPE

THE GOAL

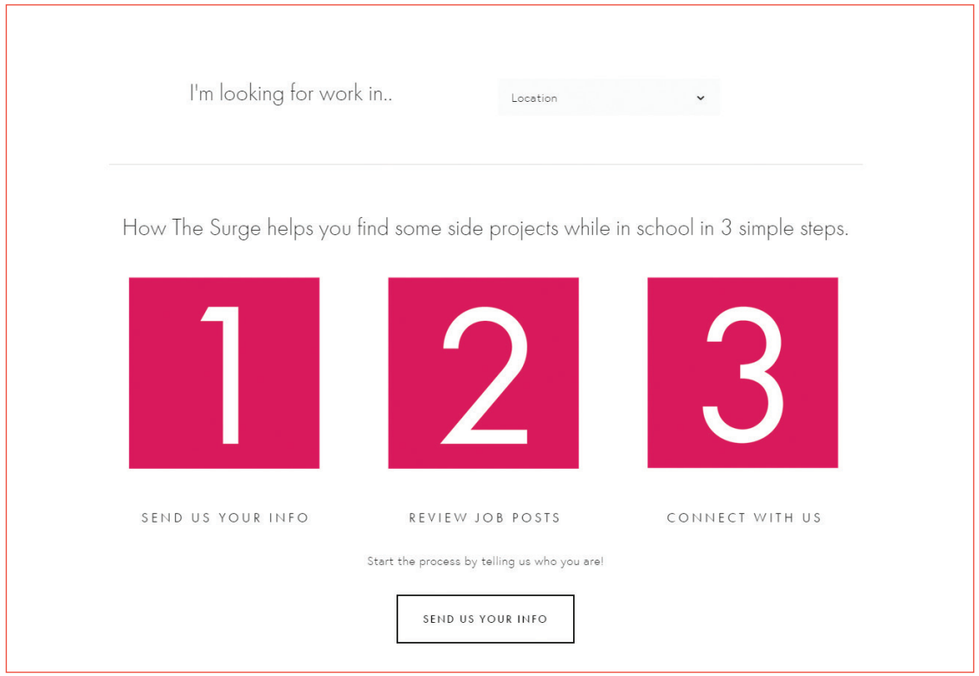
The goal was to create a prototype website and use it as a guide to design my own website. I used squarespace.com for my prototype to get all the content down and see how it functions.







The Surge is a resource for design students and businesses to connect and succeed together.



LOGO

EXPLORING COLORS AND DESIGN

THE GOAL

The purpose was to design a logo that resembles the simple and clean style. I also explored color options for the website and app.

SURGE

SURGE
FORWARD.

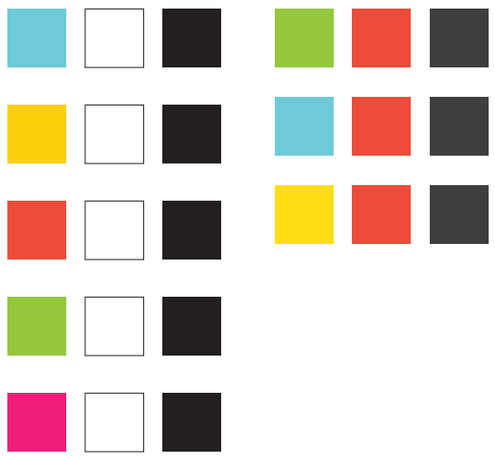
THE
SURGE

THE
SURGE

THE SURGE

THE SURGE

THE SURGE



SURGE

SURGE

WHERE DESIGN STUDENTS AND
BUSINESSES SUCCEED TOGETHER.

FINAL LOGO

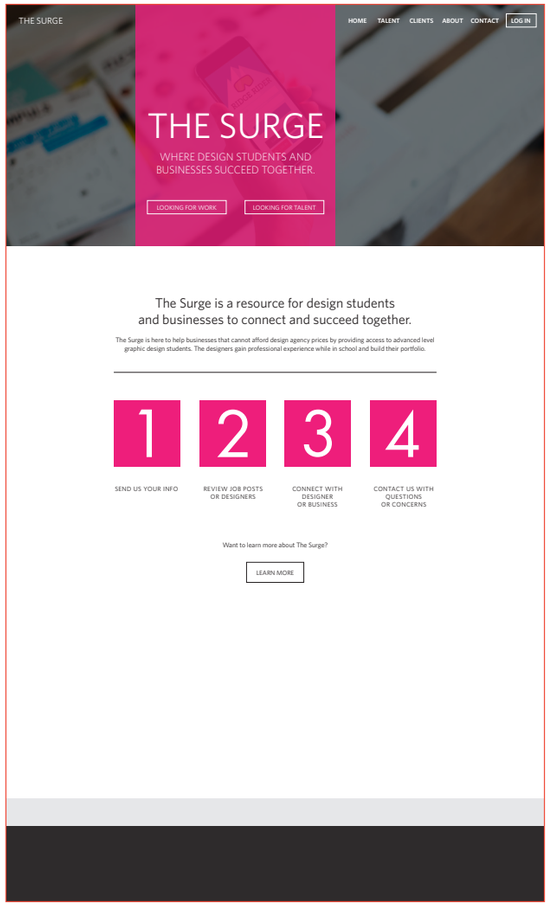
This is the final logo for Surge. It is super simple and straight forward. The font I used was Whitney Book.

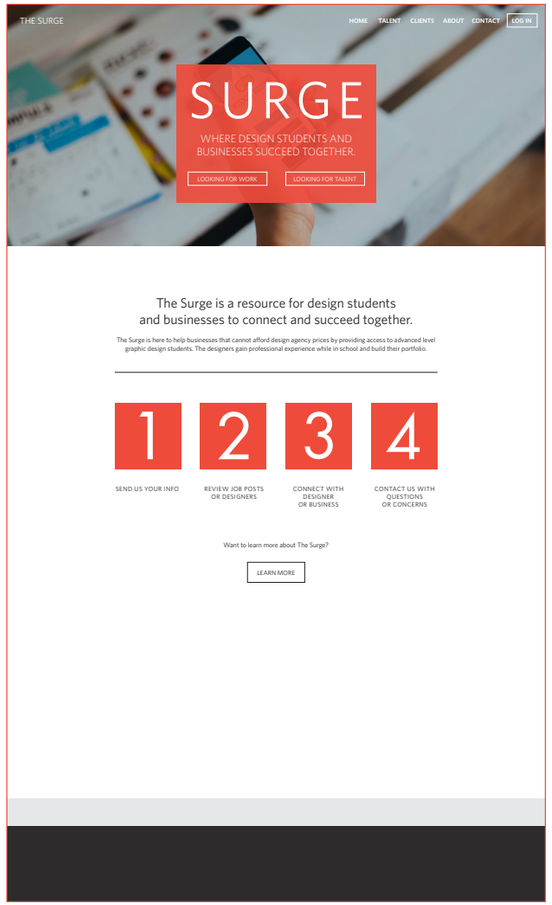
WEBSITE

FINDING THE STYLE

THE GOAL

At this stage it was important to narrow down a style for the website. After creating a template, the next step was to place all the content. I created about 34 screens for the website to show how it would function. After that I created a PDF to explain each screen.





FIRST ROUND

Surge is a resource for design students
and businesses to connect and succeed together.

Surge is here to help businesses that cannot afford design agency prices by providing access to advanced level graphic design students. The designers gain professional experience while in school and build their portfolio.

1 SEND US YOUR INFO

2 REVIEW JOB POSTS OR DESIGNERS

3 CONNECT WITH DESIGNER OR BUSINESS

4 CONTACT US WITH QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS

Want to learn more about Surge?

LEARN MORE

HOME TALENT CLIENTS ABOUT CONTACT LOG IN

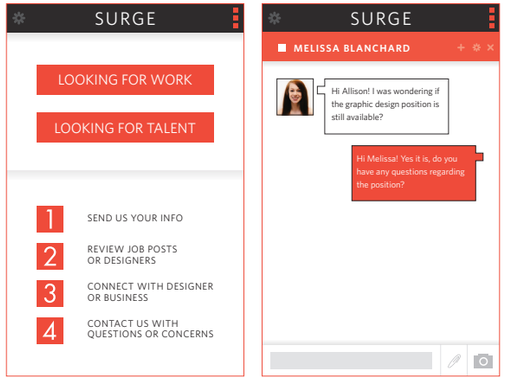
FINAL SCREEN

APP

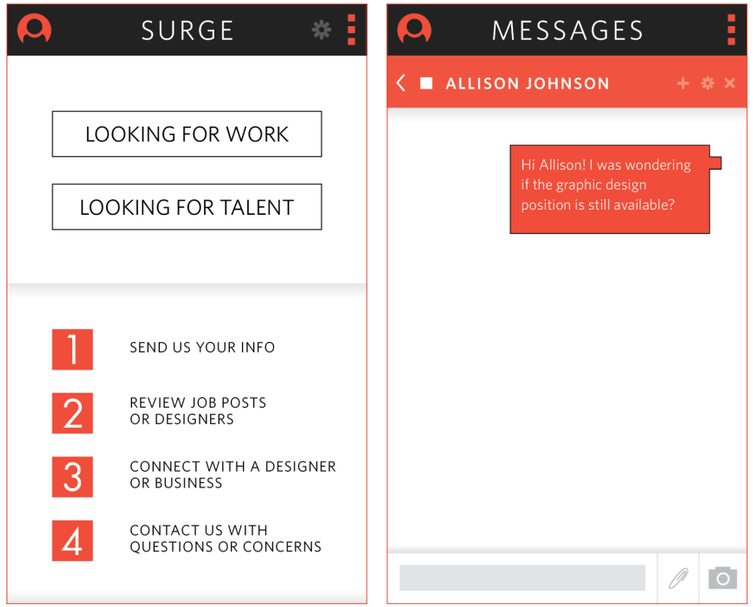
DEVELOPING SCREENS

THE GOAL

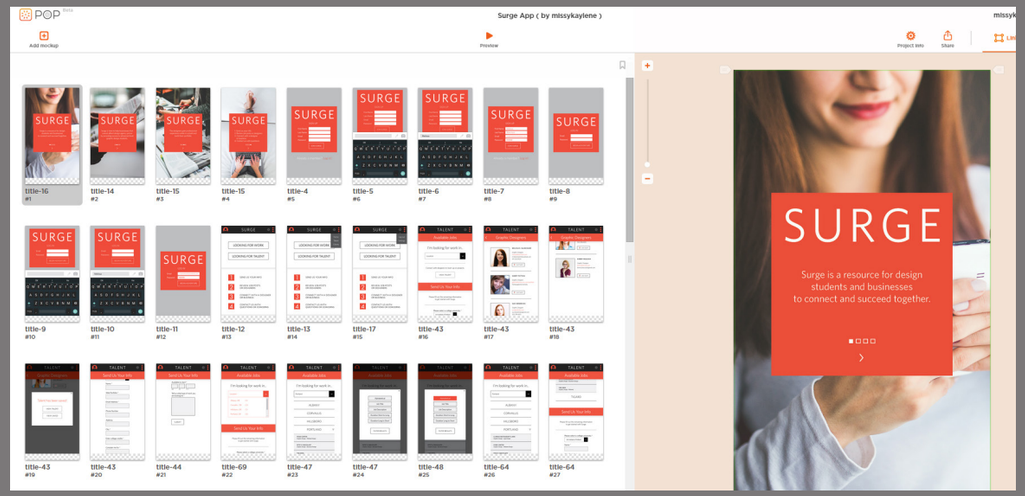
The goal was to take the style of the website and design an app. After creating about 70 screens for the app I uploaded them to the app 'Pop'. I created hot spots and links to each screen, therefore users can test out my app prototype.



FIRST ROUND

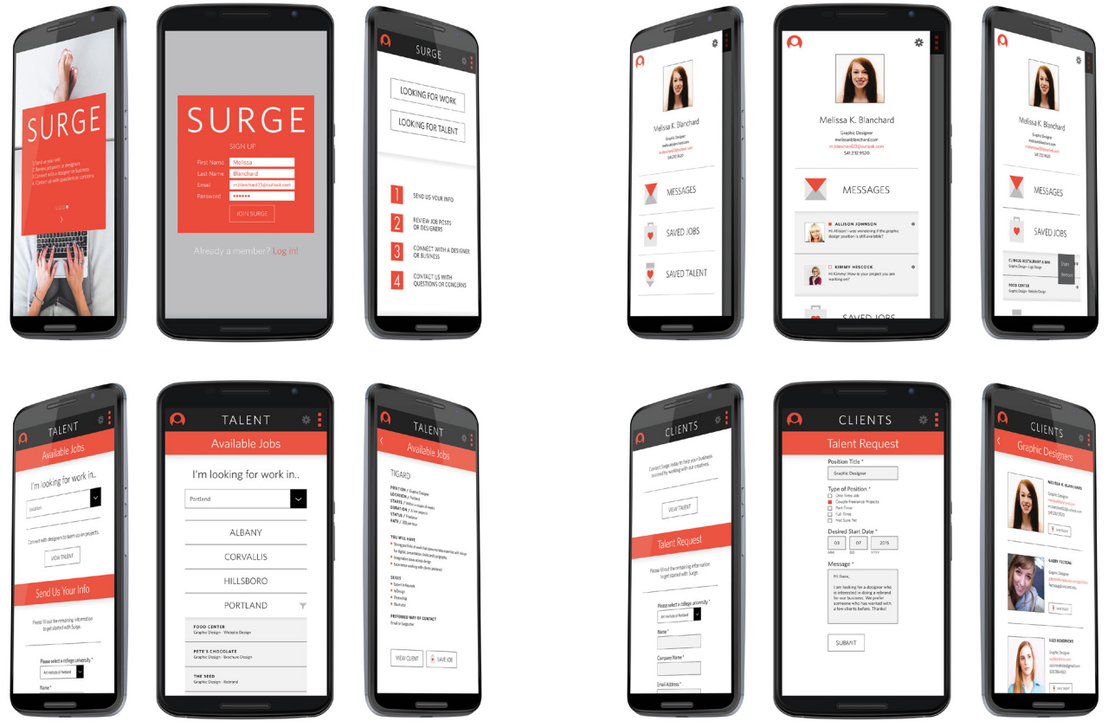


FINAL SCREENS



'POP' APP

Here I uploaded about 70 screens to the app 'Pop'. This is the desktop version of 'Pop' and I could preview my app through here. I also downloaded 'Pop' on my phone. On my phone I can preview my app prototype for users to test.



FINAL SCREENS

FINAL SCREENS

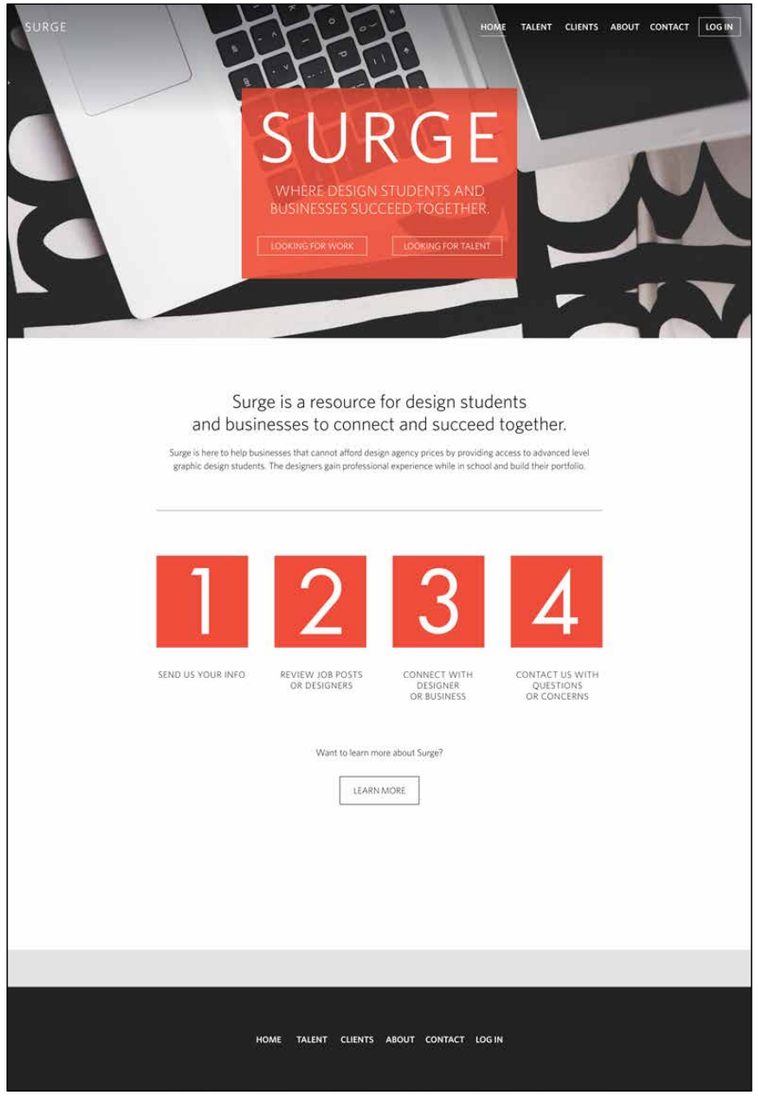
EXPLAINING PDF

CHAPTER 6

WEBSITE FUNCTIONS

The purpose of this PDF is to display the website screens and explain certain parts of the website and how it functions. It was designed for viewers to quickly understand the functions.

HOME PAGE



Importance

As soon as the viewer lands on the page they can click if they are interested in looking for a job or a designer to work with.

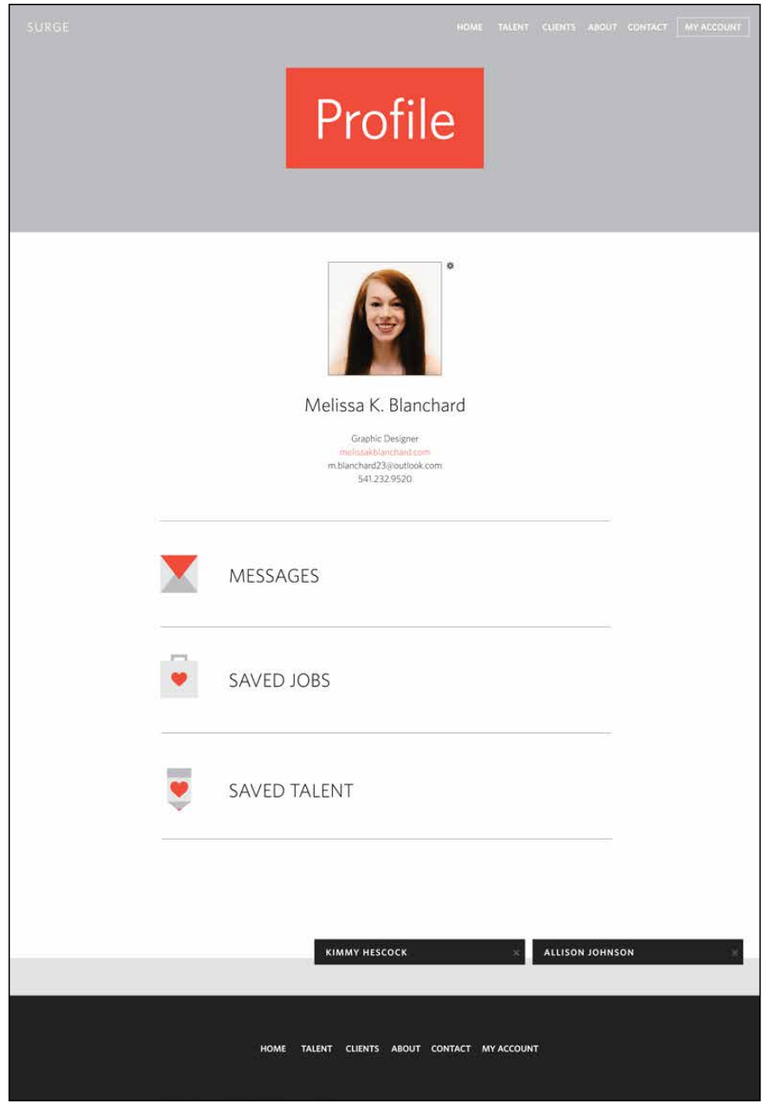
Purpose

This is the home landing page. The viewer is able to see the overall information about Surge. They have the choice to learn more by clicking on the button.

Design

For the design I wanted the style to resemble; simple, clean, fun and professional.

PROFILE PAGE



Purpose

The profile page can be accessed through the "my account" tab. Here designers or clients can view or edit their profile.

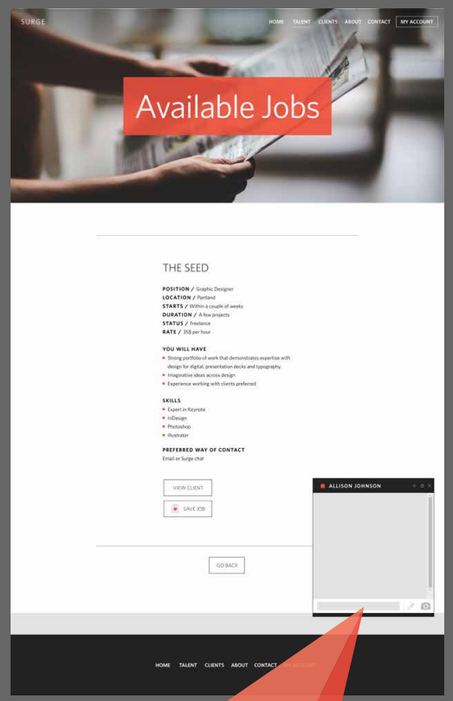
Screen Design

Designer or clients can view their messages, saved jobs, and saved talent.

Accordion Fold Action

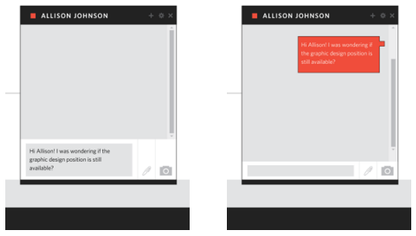
This page works like the job posting page. This section displays an accordion type fold.

POP UP CHAT



Next Actions

On this page I have displayed what happens when the "message" button is clicked. A mini chat pops up in the corner. Below you can see what happens when a message is created.



JOB LIST AND FILTER OPTIONS

Job List

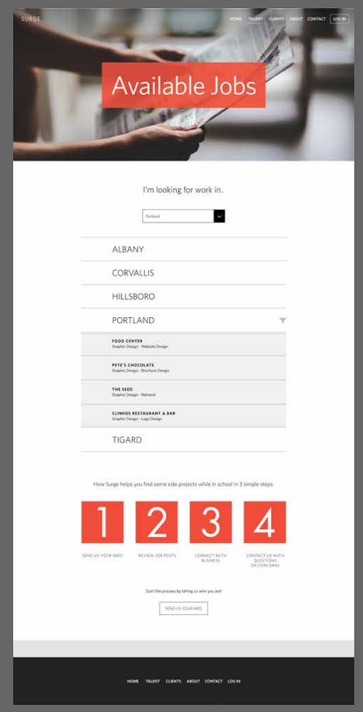
After clicking on a location a list of jobs appears. When the designer desires to close a city he or she can choose to do so.

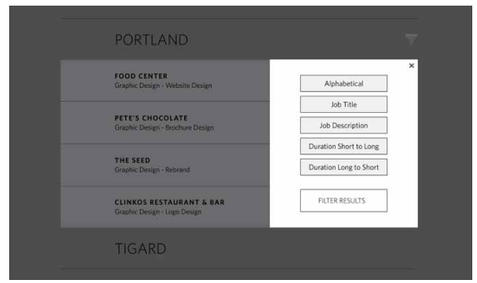
Accordion Fold Action

If the designer wants to click on a different city then jobs would fold out when clicked upon. The section displays an accordion type fold.

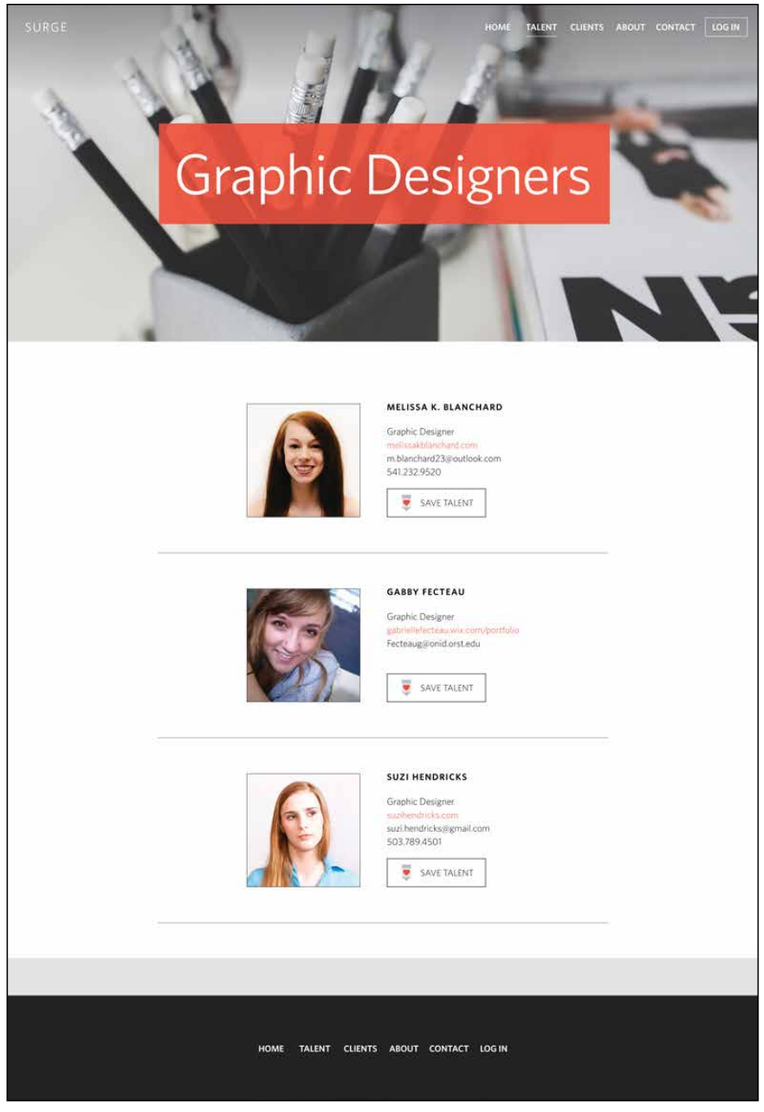
Filter Option

Below you can see filter options for job postings.





TALENT PAGE



Purpose

Clients can view a list of designers to check out their web portfolios and learn a little more about them. A client can choose to save them to view later.

Viewing Action

When designers are clicked on their profile page is shown and they can also be messaged.

Group Projects

A designer can also contact another designer is he or she are interested in working on a group project.

CAPSTONE POSTER

CHAPTER 7

POSTER PURPOSE

The poster was designed to sum up my entire senior capstone project. It was created on a 12 x 18 and shows my thesis questions, project direction, and experiments.

SURGE

WHERE DESIGN STUDENTS AND BUSINESSES SUCCEED TOGETHER.

1 THESIS QUESTIONS

How might we improve graphic design within local businesses that cannot afford design agencies?

How can we assist advanced level design students gain professional experience?

2 PROVIDING A SOLUTION

My Senior Capstone project was to design a resource for advanced level graphic design students and for small businesses. This resource is a website and app for small businesses to use to look for a designer, and for designers to look for a client to work with.

This website and app provides all the available information on job postings and a list of graphic designers. However, it is up to the designer and client to connect and work together.

3

Experiment 1

Compared 5 Talent Agency Websites and figured out the style I wanted for my website.

Conclusion

Explored by creating a prototype website on squarespace.com to see how it would function.

From researching I wanted a clean and simple design that was easy to navigate.

I wanted to incorporate a chat system that other agencies seemed to lack.

Experiment 2

Gathered more information from designers and business owners. Would they use this resource? Would it benefit them if they used the website or app?

Conclusion

95.83% of people who took the survey would use the website and app.

54.17% would only use the website verses 16.67% would only use the app. The other 29.17% would use both.

100% of people would recommend this resource.

Experiment 3

Explored the 'Pop' app and figured out how it works. After developing screen mock ups for the app, I used 'Pop' to let users test my app.

Conclusion

The app 'Pop' lets you upload pictures or screens to the app and create hot spots. These hot spots let you move to another screen.

This app is easy to use and great for creating an app prototype.

PROJECT REFLECTION

CHAPTER 8

REFLECTION

How would you describe your growth as a designer through this project and name one key moment in your process that gave you some significant insights.

My understanding of mobile app and website design has increased. I have gained more skills in developing an app completely by myself verses being in a group project. I have mocked up sketches, architecture, and uploaded screens to the app 'Pop' to practice prototyping an app. I would say I have definitely grown as a designer during this project. I designed about 70 app and 34 website screens within a few days and refined them from there. My ability in producing professional quality work within a short amount of time has increased immensely from when I began the design program.

Many thought I was 'crazy' for tackling on designing a website and app within 9 weeks. However that didn't stop me. I am a efficient designer that loves challenges and is always working to push myself. I have achieved everything I sought out to from the beginning of the term.

One key moment in my process was creating a prototype website using squarespace.com. Designing a website first on squarespace.com helped pushed me in the direction of the style of my website. It was helpful to see a template with all the content I put on there. From there I replicated a similar style for my website and pushed it further.

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