

The Design Untangled Podcast

Episode: DU033 – Testing Propositions

Host: Chris Mears and Carla Lindarte

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(00:16) **Chris:** Hello and welcome to Design Untangled with me Chris Mears and Carla Lindarte. How are you doing?

(00:22) **Carla:** I am good. How are you?

(00:24) **Chris:** Yes, pretty good. So I just booked a holiday for one week after Brexit in Europe, so that is probably going to go pretty well. How about you?

(00:32) **Carla:** I am good. I am getting up. It is just doing a lot of housework this weekend, but yes, all good.

(00:40) **Chris:** Oh so, today we are talking about propositions. And what the hell is a proposition, Carla. Do you know?

(00:48) **Carla:** What about the proposition? So what is a proposition? A proposition is basically a brand new idea of a product or a service or a business. Everyone talks about proposition design, and proposition testing. Well, basically what they mean, in my opinion, is someone has got an idea, and they either have some money or not very much money to test whether or not these ideas are going to be desirable. It means are people going like it and is feasible so technically can be developed and viable. So, is it commercially viable? So it should be able to generate some money and profit. So basically, that is what I think it is. Do you agree?

(01:41) **Chris:** Yes, I would say so, apart from the commercially viable bit, in the sense that, it does not always need to be profitable. Sometimes it can just be self-sustaining depending what sector it is. If it is kind of a charitable thing then it is probably fine if it can just fund itself and not kind of churn over loads of cash. But yes, a basic level, it is

essentially just an idea for a new product or service. And the reason that people like to talk about it so much is because there is a few techniques you can use to validate it without having to actually build it and then see if anyone takes it up. So I think that is why it is quite a new-ish, I would say, area of interest for designers and product teams.

(02:27) **Carla:** Yes, I mean startups and everyone creating a new business. Everyone should be going through this process before they actually invest lots of money on it. I am not necessarily, because they then realize they are not going to do it, just because they need to use some time to actually refine it and make sure they find the right angle for it, and the right value proposition for their products or service.

(02:51) **Chris:** Yes. Which makes sense, right? Because you do not want to spend loads of time and resources to actually build a thing that you think everyone wants, and then it turns out nobody does. And, then you will just go home, bankrupt crying, with no clothes left on your back. So yes, we are going to talk about few different ways that you can actually get a bit of a gauge as to how viable your proposition or product might be to the general public.

(03:21) **Carla:** Yep. So there are different ways. Whether it is a digital product or if it is something that is non-digital, there are other ways to test that as well, but in a digital sense. I think fake advertising, or PPC, or just run some ads on Facebook to get an understanding of people engaging with the value proposition of your product or service. I think that is a good way of understanding whether or not people will be interested in buying your product in the future.

(03:56) **Chris:** Do you want to define value proposition?

(03:59) **Carla:** Yes. What is the value proposition? So it is actually, I talk about this before, I think in another episode, there is something called a value proposition canvas. It is actually a very good tool to kind of test your value position, which is basically a solution to customer pains and customer gains around certain jobs that they need to do. So there is something that someone wants to do and there are some current pain points. So how do you make those pain points better for the customer? And all of these

ingredients you should talk about in value proposition. Do you agree?

(04:47) **Chris:** Yes, I agree. You do not have to always check if I agree with you or not. It is like you are always expecting like some dissent. So yes. So once you have gone through that exercise of defining what it is, and I say you in a loose sense because, sometimes, it is a product manager that might do that, or the business itself. So yes, take that with a grain of salt. But basically, what we are looking to do once we have defined that value proposition is use a couple of different, sometimes quick and quite dirty methods to just validate if there is a desire from customers there. And as Carla mentioned, one of the ways you can do that is stuff like Facebook ads and they would typically lead through to kind of a landing page or something like that. And you have probably seen them in your travels around the web. It is just, here is the thing, it is coming soon. Pop in your email address and we will let you know when it is here. So that way you obviously generating leads as well, which is a way to keep marketing people happy. But it also gives you a good gauge of how many people are actually converting on that page. And you can use that to get a sense of, I suppose the market size as well.

(05:58) **Carla:** Yes. Yes, definitely. Also you can test different things as well. For example, doubting about what the core value proposition of your product or service should be. You can actually do some AB testing as well or split testing. So just try to use two completely different value propositions, and also you can test pricing on it as well. Then you can test different call to actions. So one could be in terms of conversions, could be, send us or enter your email, the other one could be, call us. Then you can start identifying and understanding what is the best way to engage with the customer base you are looking for.

(06:40) **Chris:** Yes. So you can use those pages to also test different types of language as well, because, you want to understand what is the best way to communicate that value to customers. Because, yes, it might be a good value proposition, but if you cannot get it across in the right way, you are going to get nowhere. That is another opportunity to play around with different variations if you are doing AB or MVT sort of

tests.

(07:04) **Carla:** Yes, and the features as well. You can create different types of landing pages describing different potential features that your product or service would have. So that all, again, it gives you an idea of which one of those features would be more suitable for your customers. And yes, overall, basically you are just using a quick and very cheap way to, to understand more of quant level, because if you are doing something like this, you are going to do it with people interacting with ads and stuff like that. You do not have necessarily to do two or three interviews. You can have more people interacting with this, so you actually have more of a sense of what the reaction is going to be of your customer base once you launch the product. That is another very powerful way to understand your customers. But there is also the physical testing that you can do as well. Like as I said, you can do a brochure, but you can also apply storyboarding, which is a technique actually used in the past where you get someone who is really good at sketching or maybe Chris Mears, this year, who is going to get amazing at sketching as well. Just to draw what the journey of your proposition could be. Then you get people to interact with you and tell you whether or not you are right. And you can actually have different scenes as well, for changing, depending on what the people are telling you, or what questions you asking. So storyboarding is also a very good way of testing propositions.

(08:52) **Chris:** Okay. Hold on a minute. Were you taking the piss out of my sketching skills?

(08:58) **Carla:** Did you not say that you are going to learn how to sketch this year? You are going to become like...

(09:04) **Chris:** I did say that. I think I have said it before, but I can draw a wizard and a butler, which are the least useful sketches you could possibly have in the UX toolkit. Unless you are designing, I do not know, something for Harry Potter.

(09:19) **Carla:** Well, there you go.

(09:21) **Chris:** And so yes, I just wanted to rewind a little bit and speak a bit more

about where the proposition itself might come from. So I think we covered how you document it if you are using the Canvas, but there is a couple of ways you can understand. So there might be a need for some sort of new product or service. One of those ways is by looking at search traffic, so you can understand what people are searching for and if there are any competitors offering that. And it can also be from your own internal search as well. So if there is stuff people are looking for on your own products, that you do not have, that is an idea that there is some stuff you could offer them, which they are looking for. So that can be like almost the birth of a new proposition.

(10:15) **Carla:** That is true. Also, you can also try the different business models as well, because, as I said before, you need to make sure that it is commercially viable. Does not mean that, as Chris said, you are going to make lots of money with that, but you need to make sure it kind of generates enough money for you to be able to run your proposition. Also what providers you would need, what capabilities you need, what are the processes involved. So there is the business model canvas that is also another really useful way of prototyping and potentially testing as well, the business model of your value proposition or your product. So that one I really recommend doing. I actually recently ran a workshop with some people doing that and it is really interesting, all the different things that you need to consider when you are running a business. Because it is not just about the design, or the product, or the service, is about the business and it needs to operate like that.

(11:21) **Chris:** Do you think a proposition always has to be something that is offered to a customer, or can a new proposition be almost a proposition back to the business? If you wanted to run a thing in a particularly different way, could that be a proposition as well?

(11:41) **Carla:** Well, I think it does not necessarily need to be B to C, for example, the business to customer, that is what I meant. Is actually the project I am working on at the moment and is a B to B, business to business proposition. So it is basically, coming up with a product that is going to be for another business. So, I do not know necessarily internally within the organization. Yes, maybe as well, if you think about a service that

you want to provide for the whole organization. I do not know what it could be, for example, a better way of doing time sheets, or a better way to do expenses for example. That is also a product or a service that you providing to you internal employees or users. So I think, as I said, it is about the jobs and why you are doing proposition. A proposition is basically a new product or service that needs to be useful and it needs to be ideally a business, but it could also be a service that you provide within the organization, in my opinion. But I guess it is less important the business side of things, the commercial side of things, if you are doing it internally, I guess.

(13:06) **Chris:** Well, I mean, not necessarily. If it is a proposition that can save the organization money, then there is a business case for that.

(13:14) **Carla:** Yes, true, that is a good. Yes. I just have not done much of the internal stuff. But yes, I guess, it is also a way of seeing it.

(13:22) **Chris:** And the other thing you probably have to think about when you are thinking about viability is the impact that proposition will have on your business processes as well. So if you are offering some new thing to customers, like a live chat facility or something like that, you obviously have to have the capability in-house to service that. So yes, it is not just thinking about what can we give customers that is good. It is about that, but it is also about how you deliver it.

(13:52) **Carla:** Yes, exactly. Understanding the customer pain point and the gains, the pains and gains and the jobs of your value proposition is cool. Because that is if you really going for something that is desirable, you have to really put the customer in the middle, in the center of everything, but then it is way more, a business is way more than just the experience. So you have to know the value, the business model canvas, the one I was mentioning before, they talk about what partners you need, what customer segments you are going to be targeting, what are the key resources that you need? If it is a product that you are going to distribute to college, are you going to distribute the products? What is the cost? What is the revenue stream? So, even if you do not have the experience, understanding all the different things, you need to surround yourself with the people who run the business or people who have experience doing more business

strategy. So that you understand the whole picture and not just the customer desirability, because there are things that people might love having, but they are impossible to produce, or very expensive to produce, or you do not have the resources available. Have you watched that documentary called Fire Festival?

(15:12) **Chris:** Not yet. That is on my to do list.

(15:14) **Carla:** Well that is a very good example of a proposition, that, it was great in terms of understanding what the customer wanted, but then they did not have the infrastructure to deliver it and it was a complete failure. So it is a way of showing that, not always a good idea is a good business, and you have to really understand the whole picture.

(15:37) **Chris:** Do you think there are some people listening to this going, fucking oh, I just wanted to do some wireframes?

(15:44) **Carla:** Well that is the thing. If you just want to do wireframes, you can do that. More, and more, the role of the UX designer, the wireframe monkey is dying. So you have to push yourself and try to understand more the inside out of a product. If you just want to focus on the experience, and the look and feel, great. It is no harm really, especially when you go in a new adventure, like a new proposition. You have to understand all the different elements of what that could mean. You do not necessarily always doing that type of work though. Most of the times you just refining an existing product or improving it, which is also really interesting, but it is different when you are trying something brand new.

(16:39) **Chris:** Yes. I think we have kind of spoken about it before. You do not need to be the expert business strategist in an organization. Usually you will be working with people that can help you with this stuff, but I think the more different ways you can input design and design thinking into how the organization does and delivers stuff, firstly, the more valuable you are going to be as a UX designer. And secondly, just better things will be made.

(17:08) **Carla:** Yes, exactly. And it makes you be more employable as well. You can

talk about the different things you want to get paid more. Just joking. It is true, the more, you understand a business, beyond the experience the more you are going to demonstrate those multi-skills that you need to grow within a business.

(17:36) **Chris:** Yes. Have you got anything else on propositions? I do not think we have made it 26 minutes this time. They must be more like four more minutes worth of stuff.

(17:46) **Carla:** Not really. Just like, do not get scared of it - proposition. A lot of people talk about propositions right now, and it is just the product or service that is new. That is it.

(18:00) **Chris:** Just a fucking new product is not it?

(18:02) **Carla:** Well, it is just a fucking new product. Exactly. And you just need to test it in whatever way you can. And there are companies that specialize in only building propositions as well. Which is, if there are big organizations where they find it really hard to do innovation, they just use agencies or consultancies that very quickly can build something. They can do some kind of alpha, then beta launches and tests and they have more money, they can go for longer and they can understand a particular customer segment or segments, and then scale that if they want to scale it or kill it. It depends on the size of organization. Google is a good example of that. They keep Google Plus was a new proposition, then now they killing it completely because they did not have an engagement. And an organization like that can do it because they have the money, but there are others that do not.

(19:05) **Chris:** Yes. I got the email the other day saying they were killing it.

(19:08) **Carla:** Yes. That was to kill Allo. Which I was really gutted when they killed Allo. I really liked Allo.

(19:12) **Chris:** What was the Allo that was like some chat thing, was it not?

(19:15) **Carla:** Yes, it was a chat thing, but was really cool. It was really, really good. I really liked it, but.

(19:20) **Chris:** Was it more like Slack? I never actually bothered using it.

(19:24) **Carla:** No, it is more like a smarter and cooler WhatsApp. Yes, that is really smart because the integrated Google Assistant as well. So we could be chatting and say, oh, let us just have dinner tonight and then assistant will recommend restaurants near you and stuff like that. It was integrated into that, just in the conversation. So I thought it was really cool, but they killed it. That is again, that is a proposition that they built and launched and then decided to kill.

(19:56) **Chris:** Yes. So just because Carla thinks something is cool, does not make it a good product. That is the lesson here. In fact, it is probably an indication it is a bad product.

(20:06) **Carla:** It is really cool. I never liked Google Plus. Never.

(20:11) **Chris:** No, it was a bit too barren was it not? It is just too much white space. It was a Google logo and then 95% white space, and then one light post by someone that signed up by accident and thought they were writing an email.

(20:26) **Carla:** It was too geeky. It was too complex, and geeky. And I think also in terms of social media, Google has not really been successful in that way.

(20:37) **Chris:** Did you know that we are on Spotify now, by the way?

(20:40) **Carla:** Oh cool. I was really excited. That is good. How did you make that happen?

(20:47) **Chris:** I just submitted a form basically. It was, yes, not too onerous. And I do not think anyone listens to podcasts on Spotify apart from you?

(20:56) **Carla:** I do. You say I am a weird user. Yes. Never trust me.

(21:02) **Chris:** Oh, yes, you can listen there if you want.

(21:05) **Carla:** Oh, cool. All right, well that is all I have to say about propositions.

(21:09) **Chris:** I have got nothing else. So, we will hopefully have some interviews with various people over the next couple of episodes, so looking forward to getting those in the bag, but until then, see you later.

(21:23) **Carla:** See you later. Bye, bye.

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