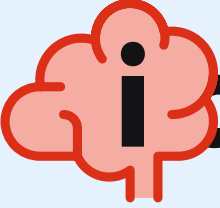
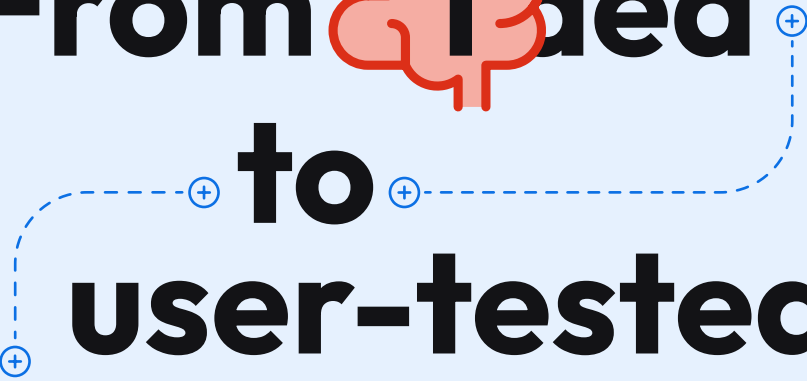




From  idea  to  prototypes
in  weeks

A rapid product validation workbook



MEET THE AUTHOR

David Schell

Sr. Principal, Product & Experience Design

David is a passionate and experienced digital leader focused on insight-driven design. He specializes in building brands in the digital space, informed user experiences, digital strategy, and cross-platform product development — and knows how exceptional product and user experiences can be when you ideate across teams, foster talent, grow skills, and work as one unified group.

David helped develop this playbook to bring that collaborative spirit to organizations around the world, giving them the power to identify problems and develop solutions faster than ever. Before joining Launch by NTT DATA, David built and led an international product and experience design team that was responsible for all product experiences at Pearson, the world's largest education company. David and his team used strategies and workshops similar to Rapid Product Validation regularly across the entire portfolio to quickly validate new product ideas, new features, and enhancements to existing product experiences.

He believes in the power of exercises like this design sprint because they're not only a great way to rapidly validate new product ideas, but also to bring disparate team members together both physically and mentally. He uses these workshops as a catalyst for teams to align on key personas and pain points so they can run at a quicker pace. They leave with a user-tested prototype to share with executives, momentum that propels them into the next phases of the product lifecycle, and a customer-centric mentality that includes regular testing and feedback.

You are here – Where the design sprint starts	05
Hazards ahead – Why good ideas stay grounded	07
Mindset adjustment – Thinking like a sprinter	09
Before the sprint starts – Assemble the right resources	10
Week one – Research	13
Week two – Design workshop	14
Week three – Refining	17
Launch by NTT DATA – The catalyst for digital development	18

Consumers demand smart, innovative, and engaging product experiences, and the brands that deliver them dominate.

We've been hearing some variation of that message, backed up by plenty of compelling research, for almost two decades now. And for good reason: It's true.

It's never been more important to excel at digital product development. Companies are challenged to develop more products and better experiences in less time, while also battling budget cuts, talent shortages, and increasing risk adversity.

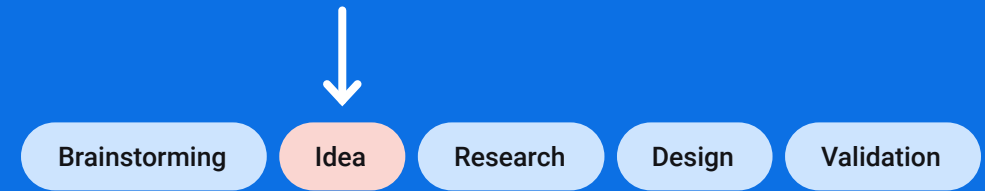
But you don't want to have to build and launch a product to learn whether it will be successful. In this workbook we outline the process we use with Fortune 500 and growth clients to rapidly validate and accelerate winning products to market in minimal time, on modest budgets, and with the most effective team structure possible.

We help you catalyze the product design process by focusing on research, design, and validation which can typically take months of internal debate and discussions, compressing them into mere weeks. This design sprint process results in a prototype that's tested with users and not just influenced by internal stakeholder opinions, quickly distinguishing effective ideas from the rest, so that only the winners advance.

You're only three weeks away from seeing your next big idea come to life. This workbook was created as a thorough guide that you and your team can begin using today, but as always, the Launch by NTT DATA team is here when you need us.

YOU ARE HERE

Where the design sprint starts



Any team can take advantage of our rapid validation process, but not every team is ready to get started (yet).

Rapid validation comes after brainstorming and blue sky sessions by using research, design, and validation to determine if a specific idea is viable or not. This workbook is for teams that already have an idea with legs, and now they need to put it to the test to get conclusive results ASAP. This workbook IS NOT for those still working on ideation.

If your team is currently kicking around ideas, we strongly encourage you not to rush through that process just to get started on validation. The validation process improves when it begins with the best ideas possible — even if those ideas turn out to be duds in disguise. If your team is struggling to get to an idea with real momentum behind it (and get there consistently), look for ways to improve ideation along with validation. We can help with either or both.



DTE Operationalizing repeatable innovation

As a 119-year-old public utility, DTE is committed to fostering innovation within its culture — hence their rally cry, “Do Different.” Yet strategically driving innovation throughout the enterprise required new skillsets, methodologies, and processes they didn’t have. Following the mutual success of the DTE Insight program — which “did different” to invented the nation’s most successful energy optimization platform, resulting in the joint venture spin-off Powerley — they knew that Vectorform (a part of Launch by NTT DATA) was their go-to partner as they began operationalizing their innovation program. We provided access to proven disruptive technologies and experts to help them realize their vision by purposefully experimenting and innovating in a safe environment. Our team ensures innovation is actionable.

6x

Faster speed-
to-delivery

215+

Lifetime projects
in the pipeline

\$604M

Identified lifetime
value ('20-'24)

Hazards ahead – Why good ideas stay grounded

When the team feels especially excited about an idea, they want to fast forward to see it quickly get validated and come to life.

Yet the validation phase is where teams seem to struggle the most, typically resulting in one of two equally bad outcomes: sluggish development or poor products. In today’s and tomorrow’s digital-first economy, that won’t work. Here’s why it happens:

Fuzzy value proposition

Validation is really about exploring an idea’s value proposition. Will it deliver ROI and, if so, how much and how soon? A poor validation process usually suffers from analysis paralysis or pushes forward products with unproven (sometimes wildly inflated) ROI. Yet with the *right* process, it’s possible to calculate a clear value proposition in less time while feeling confident in success.

Perceived risk

Validation involves taking a measured risk that an idea will bloom into a product with a positive ROI. But this risk can be invented and inflated, especially when teams feel pressure to avoid misfires and make the most of limited resources. An overabundance of caution based on perception rather than reality can only slow down validation.

Poor business case

Validation proves that promising ideas also have a business case. But it can be difficult to see all the possibilities of an idea and align that with what's good for the business. The search for information can slow down the validation process, and gaps in that information can confuse good ideas with bad.

Lack of resources

Validation requires adequate staff, skills, and budget. Without that, validations tend to run slower and reach uncertain outcomes as they're plagued with waste, redundancy, and inefficiency. What's more, the team loses the excitement that helps keep validation moving forward when they're lacking the necessary resources.

Time constraints

Validation takes longer when products are new and novel, but it's time-consuming under any circumstances. When it takes too long, it limits how many products enter development or slows it down so much that products miss their market window. Sometimes concerns that products will take too long to develop trumps whatever merits they may have.

These issues are all symptoms of the same problem: an inability to prove which ideas are champions and make that determination with speed and clarity. Our repeatable process leverages rapid design prototyping to help you avoid the common pitfalls of the product development process while finding bright ideas faster and more frequently than you ever thought possible.

Mindset adjustment – Thinking like a sprinter

The difference between a marathon and a sprint is as much about psychology as speed. One isn't just fast and the other slow – there are different mindsets and tactics involved. The marathoner wants to conserve resources to work methodically toward the finish line, but they don't know if their pacing and technique are right until that finish line is in sight. The sprinter, on the other hand, exerts a ton of energy up front and quickly realizes whether they're going to win or not. In the same way, rapid validation is not merely a normal validation process sped up.

Rather, it skips ahead to prototyping and validation instead of meandering through a lengthy discovery and debate cycle. That means taking an idea and almost immediately learning if people like it. Traditionally, an idea would go through phases of internal discussions and research, building prototypes, and launching designs before getting them in the hands of users. This is where the problems outlined earlier are most likely to occur. Rapid prototyping relies on bypassing or speeding up those middle steps.

Another key difference: speedy failures are a sign of success. Traditionally, failure was something to be denied, avoided, or worked around – a setback rather than a stopping point. Rapid validation, by contrast, works hard to understand users, their needs, and their pain points to assess whether an idea might fail, and it relishes the chance to remove bad ideas from the product pipeline and replace them with something better. Sprinting means failing faster and therefore smaller instead of wasting months (or more) on ideas with no future.

Rapid validation comes with many advantages, but for those who are new to the process, it can feel like rushing past important parts. That's why we explain how each step of the process builds into a validated idea.

Before the sprint starts – Assemble the right resources

To keep the momentum during the design sprint, you should have all the pieces in place before the process kicks off. This varies by team, but in our experience, these are the minimum requirements:

People

Involving too many people can slow down the sprint, but too few leaves it with skills gaps. Recruit a cross-functional team who can commit three weeks of full-time work. Ideally, the team includes product, UX research and design, and strategy folks, along with the help of an engineer to weigh in on feasibility.



Prerequisites

It bears repeating that ideation comes before validation. The sprint cannot start until there are one (or a few) ideas to run with, selected either for their practicality or potential impact. The ideation process should have also identified a very specific target persona or personas for the product. Finding users that match that persona is critical to test and critique prototypes that emerge during the sprint. If it's the wrong audience you're testing with, you're receiving incorrect data, and that could kill a great idea or perpetuate a bad one.

Timelines

Our design sprint process strikes a careful balance between proceeding as fast as possible and checking all the essential boxes. We've found the sweet spot to be 15 days spread across three work weeks. Each week has a different focus, and each day has different activities, priorities, and accomplishments.

Deliverables

The design sprint is an intense three-week process, creating deliverables that span UX research, rapid wireframing and design, and testing with users, so it's important to be prepared in advance to work much faster than you would during a typical product process. It helps to understand (and even have examples of) the kinds of deliverables the sprint will produce: personas, key workflows, wireframes, research guides, and clickable prototypes.

One final note of caution before you sprint out of the gate: validation often reveals that an idea isn't viable, bringing the process to a hard, fast finish. That's not a result of poor planning or lack of resources. Rather, it's the whole point of sprinting in the first place. You fail fast, fail small, and start fresh with a different approach or new idea.

01

Research



02

Design workshop



03

Refining



WEEK ONE

Research

The first week is all about understanding the idea, and most importantly, the key people you're designing for. Every idea comes with assumptions. The sprint starts by putting those assumptions aside and replacing them with as much data as possible. Take nothing for granted. Instead, ask many questions, and confirm every conclusion.

Interviews with subject matter experts and user stakeholders are essential. Enlist anyone who has insights into the problem, the persona, or the possible solution, including voices who aren't immediately obvious or may have been overlooked in the past. The goal of these interviews (and really the entire week) is to map the journey as it currently stands, see what users struggle with, and imagine what fix they need, coupled with investigating the market need and competition.

The research and interview questions will explore the current experience for users. Defining what that experience looks like from multiple perspectives reveals overlooked problems or, in other cases, the overlooked issues causing obvious problems. That same research helps to understand the feasibility and viability of our solutions in the days to come.

By the end of week one, you should have a crisp and detailed view of the key personas, their current journeys, pain points, and key technologies used, as well as competitive/comparative analysis to similar solutions in the same or different markets. This coalesces into a comprehensive presentation that kicks off week two so that everyone is moving in the same direction and is inspired to begin solutioning.

WEEK TWO

Design workshop

Rapid design tools: Figma

Figma offers a broad yet deep toolkit for documenting research, creating user journeys, and designing things like wireframes, mockups, and clickable prototypes. In addition to being accessible yet powerful, it helps teams collaborate efficiently and in real time by bringing all their inputs and communications under a single tool, which has quickly become an industry standard.

The second week begins with reviewing the research from the previous week, getting on the same page in terms of the user needs, and moving into solutioning. Lots and lots of solutioning. Start with pencil sketches of a new user flow or key screens, then move into Figma to create low-fidelity wireframes. There's lots to do in a short window, so we broke down the agenda for each day:

Monday

The first day is about reviewing the research and creating a common understanding of the users, their current journeys, and the problems they face that you're trying to fix. Hone in on the various use cases and decide which ones to tackle. It should be achievable, meaningful, and (most importantly) informed by the research. That's the problem the design workshop will solve. Day one ends by starting to dip the team's toes into sketching and solutioning.

Tuesday

Continue sketching designs of the new experience. Creativity and smart problem-solving is more important than artistry at this point, and everyone (the sprint team and stakeholders) should be involved regardless of their drawing talent. It often helps to work with paper prototypes or with low-fidelity wireframes.

Wednesday

Gather all the ideas from yesterday and start separating the good from the bad, combining ideas where it makes sense. Then revise your sketches or wireframes, continuing to iterate and review as a team as you transform them into prototypes. By the end of day three you should have one or two clickable prototypes, along with a script to take into testing tomorrow.

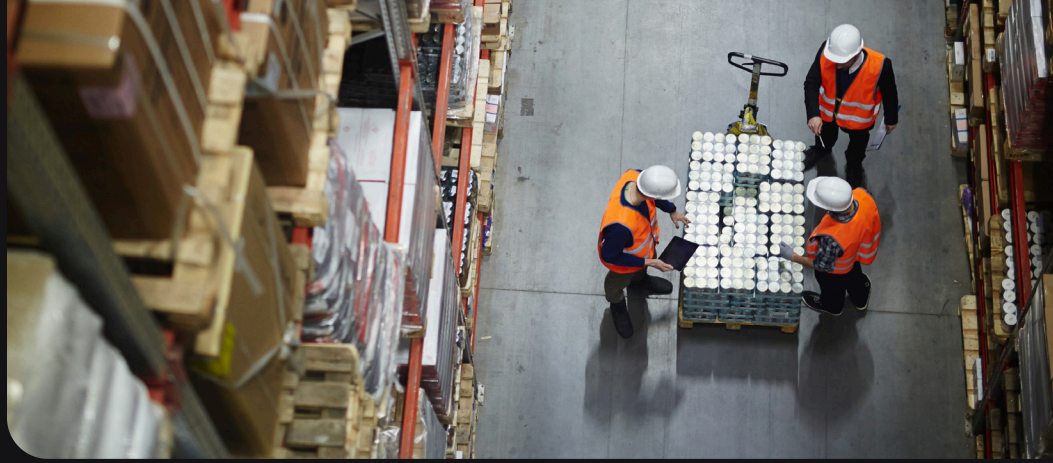
Thursday

Day four is dedicated to meeting and interviewing users. The first thing you want to validate is that the problem identified is indeed a problem they face. After that discussion, present your solutions to that problem. This is more about testing for usefulness and desirability than it is usability testing — you're looking for insight around what you're solving more than the design details of how you're solving it. End the interview by asking them if this is a product they would use. While the UX researcher leads this interview, the entire sprint team is engaged in listening and taking notes so everyone gets the information in real time and is immediately ready to react.

Friday

On day five, the team reunites to review and discuss the user feedback. This feedback could reveal that things are way off or suggest that this product isn't something users actually want or need. Most commonly, the feedback is on more specific details of the prototype, allowing the design to continue to refine and improve.

If the testing reveals that the problem isn't worth addressing or your solution doesn't adequately solve the problem, it's okay to stop there and reconsider the idea. Some ideas are worth iterating and improving upon; others are worth abandoning. User enthusiasm for a new solution is often the best indicator.



Using AI/ML to automate data entry across tens of thousands of daily documents

A leading third-party logistics (3PL) company was using scores of data entry operators to manually enter bill of lading (shipping receipt) information from 50,000+ scanned documents every day. These bills have hundreds of layouts, which made prior automation efforts using tools such as Optical Character Recognition, commonly referred to as OCR, fail. The client engaged Launch by NTT DATA to accelerate their build of a reimagined Bill Entry product with technical innovations and a stretch goal of exploring use of computer vision and AI/ML capabilities to improve biller experience and elevate their efforts.

THE IMPACT

This solution is projected to save the client up to 550 data entry hours per night through automated data extraction and bill entry across 50K+ bill of lading documents daily.

WEEK THREE

Refining

The final week is about refining the prototype based on what the team heard during testing. Begin with a close analysis of the feedback. What did users like? What did they hate? Where did they get lost? What did they smile at? In many instances, you need their feedback to help define the details of the prototype. Every detail from the interviews and observations contains insights about how to improve your designs.

Use that feedback to fix what sparked a negative reaction or build upon positive elements to make the solution even more appealing. Feedback should also guide how low-fidelity wireframes evolve into more polished versions of the design, interface, and experience. Your mission? Have an updated prototype ready by midweek.

Go back into testing with the same users as before. This makes them feel like they're co-designers, which often brings them closer to your brand. Explore what has changed for better or worse, what's still missing, and what makes the user excited (or not) to use the finished product. As with week one and two, final testing might reveal the prototype and the solution are too far apart, invalidating the idea that led to this point. And while that's disappointing, it's better for an idea to fail before (not after) it goes through a full design and development phase.

Rapid validation concludes by putting together a package highlighting the initial research, the latest prototypes of the product, and specific user feedback (including verbatim quotes) explaining its potential to succeed. The goal is to encapsulate the vision and value of the product in a way that executives can understand, get excited about, and then ultimately fund.

Launch by NTT DATA – The catalyst for digital development

The first design sprint can feel awkward and unfamiliar, but if done correctly it should be extremely fun, collaborative, exciting, and rewarding. Getting an idea off the ground takes huge amounts of creative thinking and constructive activity. When you shortcut that process, the ideas don't always flow or integrate as organically as you'd like. And when that happens, the sprint can go sideways even if you have a workbook to keep you on track.

Launch by NTT DATA has a diverse team of developers and designers who have collectively created hundreds of products, some you may use every day. Our experience and expertise inspired this workbook and proves the success of the design sprint it outlines. We're available to run your design sprint, helping your team ask the right questions, see the right problems/solutions, and turn feedback into designs. We can do this remotely, but more often we work in-person where our team and yours can get creative and collaborative in close quarters, ensuring that every day builds on the one before it. We can also help with ideation or provide support and resources during development. Whatever your product pipeline is missing, we can fill in the gaps and improve upon the whole.

**Explore all the ways we
catalyze digital development
and help companies thrive in
the digital economy. Let's talk
about doing the same for you.**

launch.nttdata.com/contact



launch.nttdata.com