8.1 Basic organisational tips for app designers

A clearly-focused and well-planned app design project relies on thoughtful workflow. Don't expect to produce a great app if your project management system consists of a bunch of Post-it notes stuck to the wall of a rotting garden shed. Think carefully about the chronology of your workflow: Does it make sense to complete all the graphics before the programmer gets involved, or does the design rely on a programming problem being solved first? The last situation you want is one where a programmer sits around in a state of limbo, waiting for graphics, racking up an extravagant bill for doing nothing. Here is an example workflow, with time-frames. This is taken from the process used to create *Alice for the iPad*:

WEEK	PRODUCTION	LOGISTICS	MARKETING
1	Early design and sketching stage.	Sign up and pay for a developer account. The app name is then decided and registered with the App Store / Google Play.	The domain name (.com highly recommended for this global audience) related to the app name is purchased. A video marketing plan is planned out roughly so that we are certain we can actually market this app idea.
2	Preparation of artwork begins. Non-functional prototypes are made to check that the UI makes sense.	We study the App Store to keep track of pricing trends and possible competition.	Video idea is finalised. We make certain that the video concept will attract buyers.
3	More polished artwork designs begin.	We contact the programmer and make sure that the app design is feasible and within budget.	
4	Artwork is finalised and supplied to the programmer. The programmer confirms receipt of the artwork and agrees that he or she is ready to go into production.		
5	Programming begins. Sound production begins.		
6	Video production begins. Programming continues.		
7	Programming completed. Video completed.	Internal testing begins.	
8	Marketing artwork begins.	User testing begins. Changes are made to the app based on user responses.	Investigation into pricing options begins: we look at the cost of similar apps.
9		App submitted to store(s).	
10		App goes live on the store(s).	Marketing begins: Contact blogs and magazines.

Obvious first steps in the planning stage include registering the name of your app, as explained in Unit 1, and scheduling the time of a programmer. Check well in advance that your programmer is available. Mobile OS programmers are the most desirable in their field, and you will often have to work around their schedule, rather than expecting them to schedule time for you. Usually, the most cost-effective method of design is to complete all the graphics before the programmer starts building the app. However, the disadvantage to this approach is that the design of the app cannot evolve in tandem with changes to the mechanisms in the software. Fortunately there is a way around this: Make sure you are available to quickly redesign elements as soon as the programmer flags up a problem.

You will also need to check what format the programmer requires graphics in. Usually you will deliver graphic designs as single layers exported to Jpeg or PNG formats. PNGs can contain transparent or 'alpha' pixels, so they are commonly used for graphical assets that move.

8.2 How to plan and schedule your project

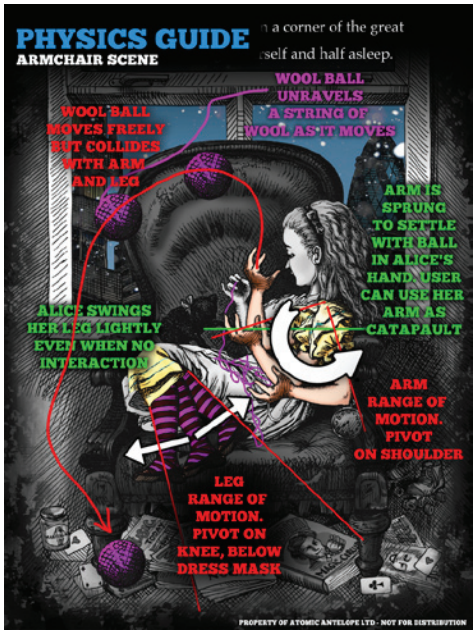
Just like movie directors, app designers use storyboards to plan their projects. Storyboards, in this context, are chronological pictograms showing the progress of a user through a hypothetical app design. This might sound complex, but you'll know storyboards in their most traditional format: A comic book.

A storyboard will help you to imagine how your user will interact with the app you're designing, but it is also an invaluable means of communicating to your programmer how you wish the app to function. Get a large sheet of paper and some pens and start drawing frames that illustrate the functionality of your app. Consider where steps can be simplified, reduced, or removed altogether.

8.3 Communicating app ideas visually

As an app designer, you are responsible for communicating the concept behind your app with the programmer. This is often a tricky task – not only must you explain the way the app will function, but you must anticipate any potential misunderstandings between you and the programmer. When you complete any design diagrams, ask yourself: Can this diagram be misinterpreted? Ask a friend if they understand what you mean. Be sure to annotate diagrams thoroughly and stick to a plain, easily digested language.

The diagrams you supply to the programmer will vary from project to project, but here you can see one of the diagrams we used on *Alice in New York* to explain the physics proposition. You can see how the instructions are laid on the page, allowing the programmer to quickly get a sense of what is going on in a scene.



8.4 Project management and working methods

In our opinion, the best, and cheapest, project management tool is Google Apps. Go and sign up for an account and you get access to a spreadsheet tool that can be used collaboratively to keep track of what stage a project is at. The great thing about Google Spreadsheets is that any user can adjust the wording of a project stage, or mark it as completed – the spreadsheet is then automatically updated for all users. There are much more expensive project management solutions out there, but save yourself a lot of time and money and hit up Google for this free solution. After all, they're advertising at you all day long; you're owed some reward on their dime.

NEXT UNIT 9 **PARTNERING WITH A PROGRAMMER**