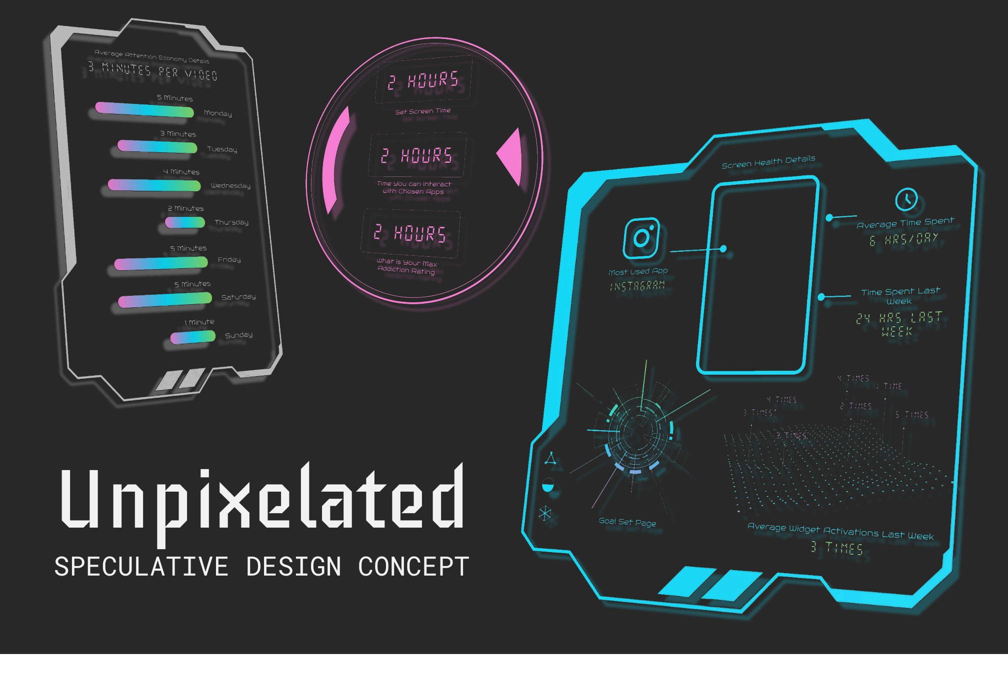


Unpixelated

SPECULATIVE DESIGN CONCEPT

PROJECT OVERVIEW

SKILLS
- Speculative Design
- Wireframing
- Prototyping
- Teamwork & Collaborative Design

TOOLS
- FigJam
- Figma
- Canva

TEAM
- Sydney
- Myself

SUMMARY

For the final project of my Advanced UI course, we were tasked with creating an app that helps shape a preferred future by solving a probable future issue. Working in a team of two, over the course of a month we researched emerging trends and technologies to predict a possible future and created a prototype for an app that helps solve the problem of attention economy.

Our app, called Unpixelated, is designed to help users gradually reduce their dependence on overstimulating digital media and lengthen their attention spans. Acting as a plug-in to other apps, it monitors usage patterns and offers personalized coaching that helps users meet their goals toward healthier content consumption and offline hobbies. It features a unique AI-powered stimulation rating system to help users assess the intensity of digital content and a constantly displayed screen time timer. Modeled after addiction recovery frameworks, the app encourages behavioral change by replacing harmful habits with enriching alternatives and supports family-based participation for collective growth toward more mindful media use.

BACKGROUND

What is Speculative Design?

Rather than focusing on identifying and solving current issues or creating products for immediate use, speculative design uses storytelling to speculate about possible futures and focuses on creating products or services that will be used for those futures. The practice of speculative design is about asking 'what if' questions to explore different future scenarios, especially ones surrounding emerging technologies, social trends, and environmental issues.

The purpose and goals of speculative design include

1. **Questioning the present**
2. **Exploring future possibilities**
3. **Sparking debate about current trends and issues**
4. **Raising awareness about ethical considerations and responsibility**

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

At a time when rapid developments in technology often outpace our ability to fully understand its long-term impact, speculative design is a valuable tool that helps us visualize abstract concepts and better understand the long-term implications of current practices and trends. In addition to encouraging proactive consideration of ethical responsibility in design, speculative design influences solutions that meet the needs of today while helping to shape a better future for tomorrow.

THE PROBLEM

The Attention Economy

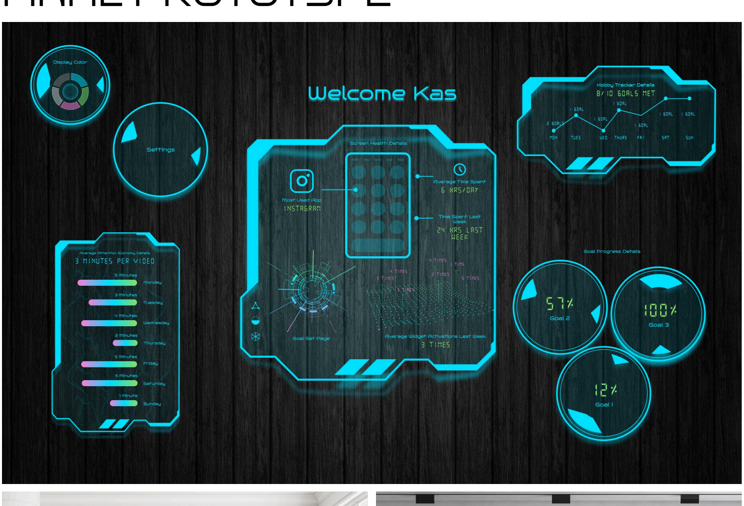
TRENDS & SIGNALS OF CHANGE:

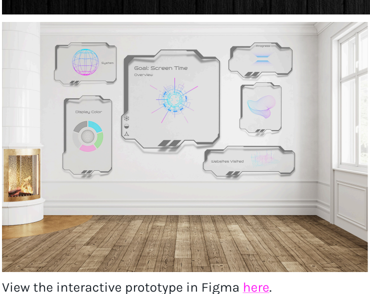
- Increasing popularity of short-form videos
- Decreasing attention spans
- Increasing rates of sleep disorders, mental health issues, and addictive behaviors among adolescents

WHAT WILL THE ATTENTION ECONOMY PROBLEM LOOK LIKE IN THE FUTURE AND HOW CAN WE SHAPE A BETTER FUTURE?

THE SOLUTION

FINAL PROTOTYPE





View the interactive prototype in Figma here.

PROCESS

Design Process

EMPATHIZE & DEFINE
- Future cone projection
- Future scenario
- Problem definition

IDEATE
- Brainstorming
- User flow
- Mood board

PROTOTYPE
- Low fidelity wireframes
- Style guide
- Medium fidelity wireframes
- High fidelity prototype

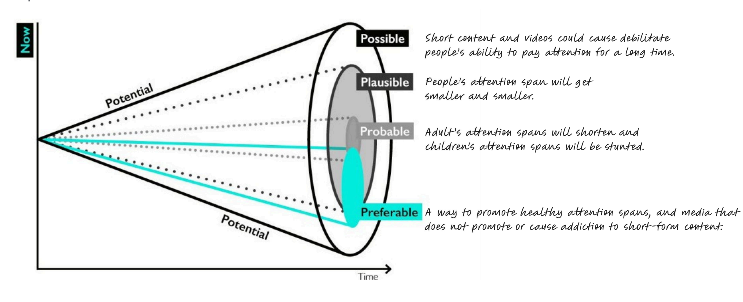
REFLECT
- Challenges
- Wins
- Lessons Learned

DESIGN PHASE 1

Empathize & Define

FUTURE CONE PROJECTION

To begin exploring the future of attention economy, we created a future cone projection of possible, plausible, probable, and preferable futures.



FUTURE SCENARIO

After doing some preliminary research and brainstorming with my teammate, I wrote this scenario to better understand this future world and the users we would be designing for:

> *In the not-so-distant future, the attention economy has taken over everything. The competition for attention is fierce and every waking moment is monetized, thanks to advances in technology used for tracking every eye movement, conversation, and movement of consumers. Most content has become shorter and shorter, eroding attention spans and causing severe digital media addictions. Most individuals struggle to focus on anything for more than a few seconds at a time, causing productivity to plummet in schools and workplaces around the world. Books, movies, and long-form media have become relics of the past and in person conversations are nearly always disjointed, with people constantly interrupting each other, unable to stay focused on a single topic. People struggle with thinking deeply due to the need for constant simulation and instant gratification, causing a sharp decline in innovation and creativity. The world is faster, louder, and more fragmented, and focus seems like a distant memory.*

PROBLEM DEFINITION

After considering the future scenario and challenges our users will be facing, we found two specific problems for our app to solve:

→How might we improve one's attention span and prevent internet addiction from becoming more prevalent in future generations?

→How might we encourage children and teenagers to spend time away from screens/digital media?

DESIGN PHASE 2

Ideate

BRAINSTORMING

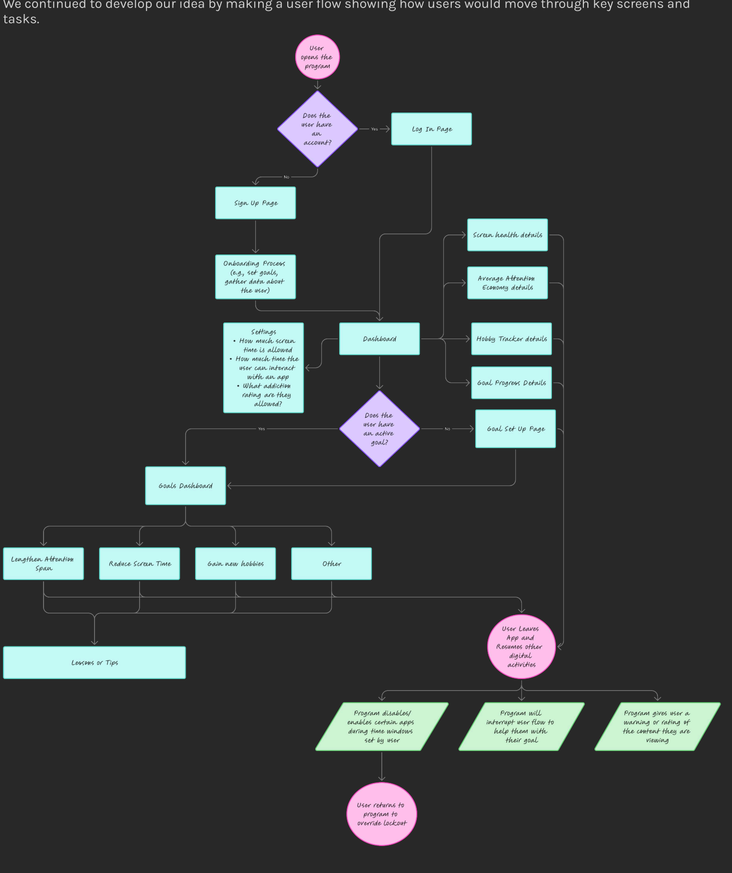
Now that we had defined the problem we wanted to solve, we started brainstorming ideas for solutions on a shared FigJam board. Together we came up with around 30 ideas total and then voted on our favorite ideas. Our top 4 ideas are shown below.

A video app that gradually has less cuts and extremes to help orient users to long-form content. Sydney	A stimulation detector that alerts you when the content you're viewing is too overstimulating Alaina	A "lost art" content platform that teaches people how to write letters, make things from scratch, use a keyboard, etc. Alaina	An attention training app that features progressively longer content Alaina

We noticed a good amount of overlap between our three favorite ideas, so we decided to create an app that would train user attention span, gradually show longer video content, and alert the user about overstimulating content.

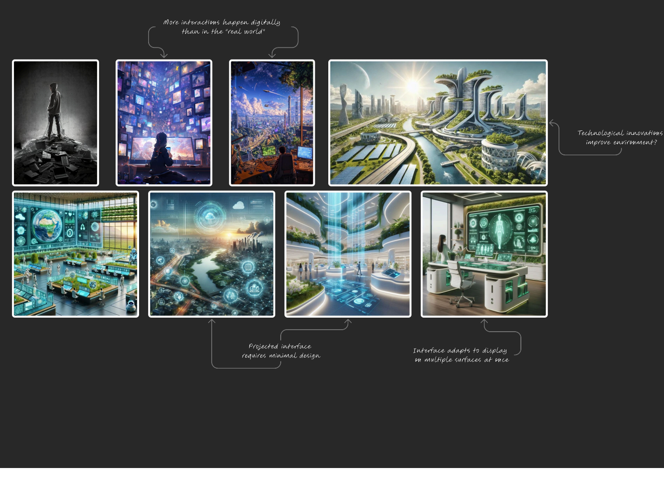
USER FLOW

We continued to develop our idea by making a user flow showing how users would move through key screens and tasks.



MOOD BOARD

In addition to brainstorming what the app would do and how it would work, we had to figure out what an app for the future would look like. We each created a mood board to help explore and visualize future technologies. My mood board is shown below.

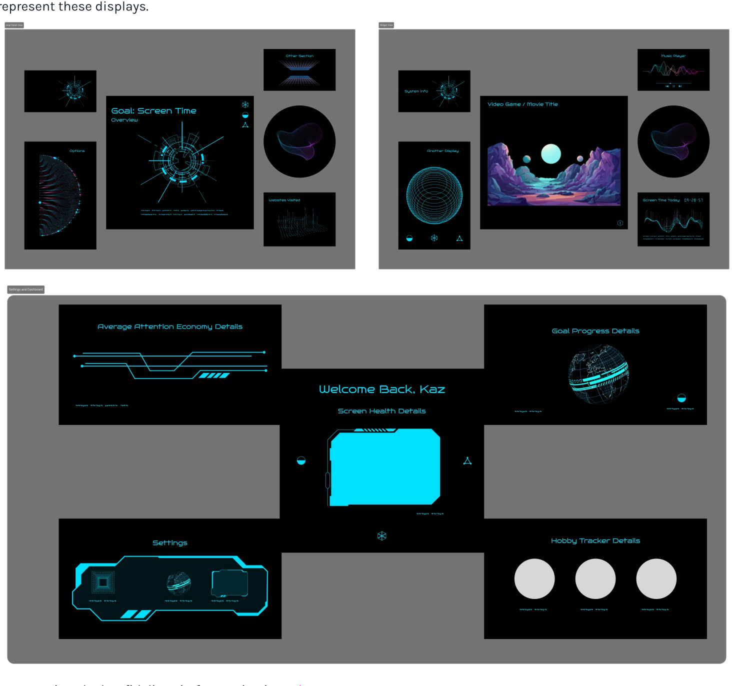


DESIGN PHASE 3

Prototype

LOW FIDELITY WIREFRAMES

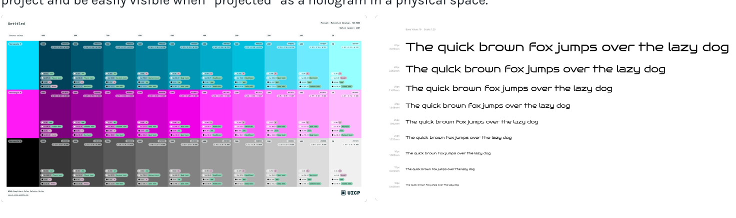
Working together on the same Figma file, we started creating our low fidelity wireframes. Sydney did the screens for the dashboard and settings and I covered the goal detail and widget views. Instead of designing for devices that are being used now, we explored how hologram technology could make it possible for the user to have multiple displays being projected into their physical space at the same time. In our wireframes we used a variety of different sized frames to represent these displays.



You can view the low fidelity wireframes in Figma here.

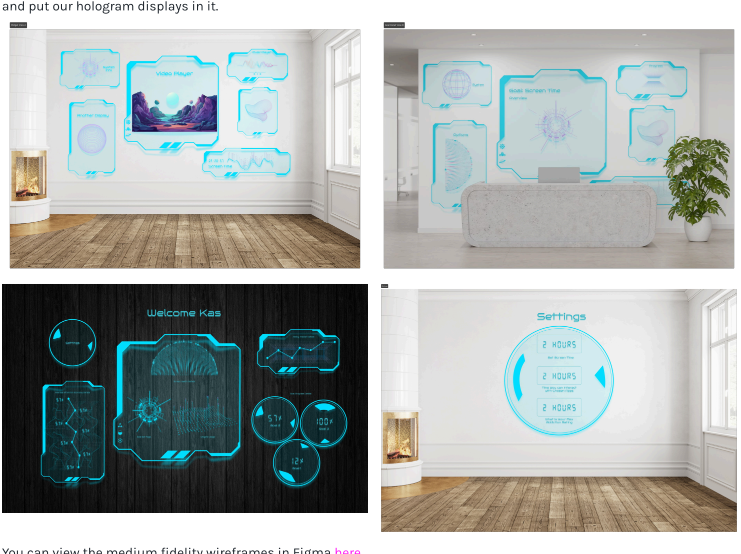
STYLE GUIDE

Before turning our wireframes into a high fidelity prototype, we created a mini style guide to ensure uniform fonts, colors, and visual design across the project. The color scheme and fonts were chosen to help reinforce the futuristic feel of the project and be easily visible when "projected" as a hologram in a physical space.



MEDIUM FIDELITY EXPLORATIONS

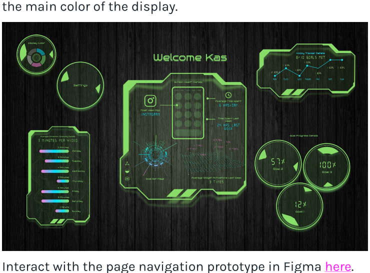
To better convey how the app would be displayed, we created a medium fidelity version showing the various screens being projected in a room. This proved an interesting challenge, as we were attempting to illustrate technology that doesn't exist yet using modern tools. However, after studying AR and VR mockups we got the idea to create a mockup of a room and put our hologram displays in it.



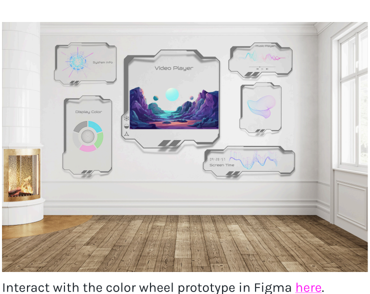
You can view the medium fidelity wireframes in Figma here.

HIGH FIDELITY PROTOTYPE

After getting some feedback on our design, we made a few adjustments to the image and text effects to make them easier to read. Sydney added the navigation functionality and I added a color wheel feature that allows the user to change the main color of the display.

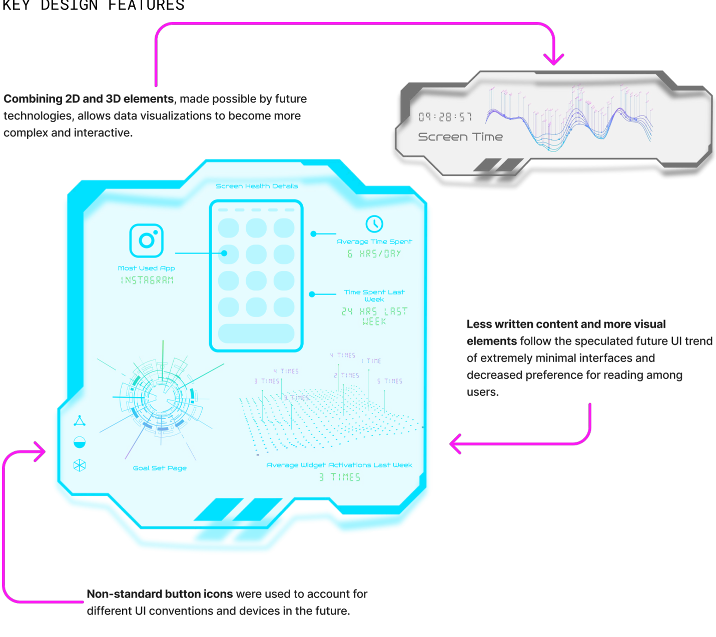


Interact with the page navigation prototype in Figma here.



Interact with the color wheel prototype in Figma here.

KEY DESIGN FEATURES



Combining 2D and 3D elements, made possible by future technologies, allows data visualizations to become more complex and interactive.

Less written content and more visual elements follow the speculated future UI trend of extremely minimal interfaces and decreased preference for reading among users.

Non-standard button icons were used to account for different UI conventions and devices in the future.

REFLECTION

Project Takeaways

CHALLENGES

- **Designing for future technologies using modern tools** was a real test of our design skills. Without pre-made mockups to rely on, we had to find our own way to illustrate our concept which really made us think outside the box and put our image editing skills to work. Doing research on related technologies that exist now, like AR and VR, gave us some great inspiration.
- We had to learn how to **find a balance between exploring our future scenario and developing our app concept**. Splitting our attention between creating the world our app would be used in and creating the app itself was a unique challenge for this project. Working as a team really helped us overcome this particular challenge, because we were able to divide the extra workload and kept us focused.

WINS

- Working as a team always comes with challenges, but **Sydney and I worked very well together**. Throughout the project we communicated well, supported each other, and had fun working together. Our individual skill sets and experiences complimented each other well and helped us create a better final result than we could have separately.
- I am especially proud of how **the color wheel feature** turned out. Not only was this a great opportunity for me to practice some of the more advanced Figma skills I've been working on, but having the ability to change the display color is really useful when projecting the screens in different environments. It gives our prototype an extra layer of immersive interactions and lets users customize the display to best suit their preferences and space.

LESSONS LEARNED

The phrase **"Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist"** feels very fitting for my experience with this project. Trying to solve a speculated problem and design for an audience 10, 50, or 100 years from now really had me thinking outside the box and gave me the freedom to approach this design in a way I never had before. However, in order for this design to make any sense and be able to convey the idea it needed to, it had to have some grounding in current design conventions. Understanding current best practices and then breaking those 'rules' with intention was really the secret sauce of this project.

GET IN TOUCH

Thanks for checking it out!

Take a look at some of my other work on my portfolio or reach out to work together or just to say hi👋

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