Croydon.Digital alpha and beta assessment

Beta additions are in blue.

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Contents

Assessing authority:	Croydon Council	Croydon Council
Assessment date:	1st March 2019	29th May 2019
Panel members:	Annie Heath Janine Sheridan Jon Mellor Simon Asante	Annie Heath Natasha Bhuiyan Jon Mellor
Stage:	Alpha	Beta
Result:	Partially Met	Met
Service:	Croydon.Digital blog	Croydon.Digital
Service representatives:	Neil Williams Dave Briggs Angie Forson	Simon Asante Patrick Hurley Dave Hampton Isobel Croot Angie Forson (dial in) Lindsey Martin (dial in) Mo Elghorri (dial in)

Assessment outcome

The service partially met the Standard because:

- The service used existing knowledge and experience to deliver a tried and tested service
- The service iterated effectively to deliver a MVP against a tight deadline, with the intention to continue iterating to improve the service
- Despite not working in an Agile environment, the team used basic Agile methods to deliver the MVP.

Main strengths:	The service being rolled out is a tried and tested one, delivered by a team of people experienced in providing this type of service.
Main weaknesses:	Short timescale for implementation was led by an upcoming event, which determined the level of adherence to the service standard possible. Service developed mainly based on the experience of the team but not always tested.

About the service

Description

Neil Williams was recruited in October as the new Chief Digital Officer for Croydon Council. An expectation was set at the outset that part of the role was to have a strong community facing element and to lead the council to do more with the tech community of Croydon.

The creation of a new blog, as a shared platform for the tech community of Croydon, was a natural first step to making this happening. An event at which the Chief Digital Officer was presenting was identified as the appropriate launch opportunity, and therefore determined the timescale in which the alpha was to be delivered.

Service Users

Key users were identified at the Croydon tech community (digital business), national and worldwide government bodies who can provide validation and feedback on what we are doing at Croydon, the Croydon Digital Service team, internal Croydon staff, prospective employees and suppliers.

Detail

User needs

The service identified the blog as a quick win tool for fostering culture change within the Croydon Digital Services team and Croydon's tech community. As the service was using a tried and tested platform for the blog, there were existing design systems and tooling that could be used. The service team had gathered user requirements through informal conversations and feedback with the identified users rather than through formal user research carried out for the purpose of the blog. There was a recognition from the outset that this version is an alpha and will need to be changed – part of which will require more extensive user research to test the assumptions and knowledge gathered for the alpha.

The team are gathering feedback from users and feeding this into a backlog for the beta.

Team

To ensure a suitably skilled multidisciplinary team was in place and able to deliver the alpha to a tight deadline, existing staff took on the responsibilities required. The panel were impressed with the team's ability to deliver quickly and adapt to the roles for this project whilst continuing with the business as usual roles, which differ.

Roles which were not filled were a user researcher and data analyst, and the product manager role was light touch. The team recognised these gaps and a conscious decision was made to develop the alpha without these skills, acknowledging their need when developing the beta.

Some members of the team were not based in Croydon at the time and Trello was used effectively to facilitate the work. Use of the Trello board also enabled the members to feel as a "team" despite not being a dedicated team for this purpose.

A structured Agile method with formal ceremonies was not used, however the Agile knowledge of the team members meant techniques were applied. User stories were defined, a backlog used to prioritise based on the benefits to the user community, and MVP was identified and an iterative process used. The current alpha is the fifth iteration.

Design

The team had experience in developing and delivering blogs previously and used this knowledge to develop the alpha. The blog has been based on the GDS blog with tested design patterns and an interim content designer was used to improve on the patterns.

The internal communications team were involved in selecting a suitable tool – which was Wordpress and due to the short timescale and low cost, the team decided to host on Wordpress.com. This meant standard themes had to be used and the intention is to review the platform and hosting options for development of the beta.

The team made some design compromises, such as with additional functionality to provide job alerts, in order to meet the timescales. The decisions on this were made based on the impact to the end user and priorities for the MVP. The intention is for these compromises to form part of the beta backlog.

Design improvement already identified above the functionality compromises consciously made include the ability to submit an article first time, the quality of photos being used in the articles and the look of text on images.

The team have deliberately kept the design of the site different to the Croydon Council website, as this is a collaborative blog created to replace the brand of Croydon tech city with Croydon.Digital.

Analytics

By using a tried and tested product, the team have been able to benefit from existing functionality around analytics. Data has shown that traffic to the site is growing and engagement on social media, in particular Twitter, supports this. When developing a beta, a Privacy Impact Assessment will also need to be considered around any data that is collected.

The number of internal users creating blog posts has been increasing and engagement with the team successful. Going forward, plans will need to be in place to set goals based on the data gathered in alpha and monitor regularly.

Update – beta

It is a fantastic new iteration of the blog and the team had prepared an excellent presentation taking us through all the research and improvements.

New Features include
- Tagging
- New events with maps
- Different types of posts - job, event - means no relying on plug ins - means you can make search better too

Improvements include
- Content wasn't clear on dates of events - added a tag which is coded – labels the post as a past event
- Tile layout – based on user research, assures that a range of different types of posts are on the front page
- Contributors didn't like having to make a wordpress account. Also needed guidance to do so- now a login.
- Set up of ability to contribute - really well thought out - summary then link to blog post
- Jobs and Events – able to enter all details & improved posting process; link to Google maps for location of event
- Get in touch was unclear on alpha - instead now contributing and a separate contact us at the bottom
- Good authorising process
- Accessibility improvements
- Planned ahead with colour themes - if needed a more corporate blog can use it to create template easily
- New hosting platform (to Azure from wordpress.com) with more 'out of the box' functionality and better tools

Blogpost requests to go through to Digital design team not just Angie –who can push through workflow - *NB – Need to ensure that DDT trained
Iterated the guidelines

Tool used was reevaluated
Restricted to standard themes cos wordpress.com - now hosting our own site - size of site wordpress made sense, get up and runing quickly faster than Drupal, good plugins like restricting amount of login attempts, would have lost existing subcribers. But can reduce overall number. Dxw have an advisory code scanning tool
Paas - azure take hold of scaling , analytics etc , which means we can focus on application. Can add other sites quickly using same mysql database, allows adding new sites easily.

Recommendations

Next steps

To build the beta, a dedicated multidisciplinary team will be set up. The team must ensure:

- Formal Agile techniques are used
- The gaps identified in alpha form part of the beta backlog
- The tool used is re-evaluated
- Formal user research and UAT is carried out

Digital Service Standard Points

Point	Description	Alpha Result
1	Understanding user needs Beta follow up – great understanding of user needs - identified a user base of primary and secondary users. Key findings clearly presented.	Partially met Met
2	Do ongoing user research Tested design visuals first, then again once site was developed. Further research when live planned as part of Corporate delivery team with product Manager to ensure this happens. Research included preference for dark or light background.	Partially met Met
3	Have a multidisciplinary team	Met
4	Use agile methods	Met
5	Iterate and improve frequently	Met
6	Evaluate tools and systems	Met
7	Understand security and privacy issues	Met

Point	Description	Alpha Result
8	Make all new source code open	N/A
9	Use open standards and common platforms	Met
10	Test the end-to-end service	Not met
	Components tested, and admin workflow. Testing included accessibilty. More testing planned.	Partially Met
11	Make a plan for being offline	Met
12	Make sure users succeed first time	Not met
	A lot of user research has informed the build. Research with users testing different scenarios e.g. "you want to add a blogpost" is in the backlog.	Partially met
13	Make the user experience consistent with Croydon.gov.uk	Met
14	Encourage everyone to use the digital service	Met
15	Collect performance data	Partially Met
	Created KPIs based on vision • user satisfaction : reader and user • take-up : reader and user • completion rate • community growth Slightly limited – but google analytics has some wordpress connections. Could see how many users. Google analytics to wordpress search terms shown Stats collated on users, reach etc	Met
16	Identify performance indicators	Not Met
	6 KPIs identified Make sure KPIs are implemented – that when live this plan is enacted, and people assigned the work Got new workflow built into back end with date ranges Recommend that specific targets are agreed for the KPIs	Met
17	Report performance data on the Performance Platform	Not Met

Point	Description	Alpha Result
	There was some confusion here – did this mean the gov.uk one? Clarified after assessment- yes, it's a Central Govt thing, also new Standard doesn't have this as a specific point.	
18	Test with the lead Member	Met
	Jo Negrini invited to show and tell tomorrow	