Gamma Airlines UX Strategy

Background

Gamma Airlines is a small regional carrier in the northeastern United States that primarily serves New England and the Mid-Atlantic states. It offers daily flights between Boston, New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington DC for both business and vacation travelers. Gamma Airlines currently employees close to 900 employees, including one full-time UX researcher named Alice. Since the founding of Gamma Airlines in 1955 by famed World War II fighter pilot, Orville Wright Gamma, the airline has delivered great value to its loyal customer base.

Current UX Staffing

Alice is an experienced UX professional who has worked successfully for two major airlines for more than 8 years. Alice was recruited 3 months ago by the CEO of Gamma Airlines, Joe Wilbur Wright Gamma (he is also the grandson of the founder).

Definition and Scope

A UX strategy is a plan that sets up a framework for all of an organization's activities related to user experience. For Gamma Airlines, UX means more than just the screens of the customer facing web site and mobile apps. While the UX of digital products is critical, it is just one part of a successful user experience. The UX strategy also encompasses the customer's experience during all touchpoints in interacting with the airline such as:

- Trip planning and purchasing of tickets on Gamma digital sites/apps, third-party sites/apps, and via Gamma customer support agents taking calls.
- Check in at the airport, including using any kiosks and/or working with counter agents.

- Waiting for the departure at the gate.
- The experience of a cancelled flight or being bumped on overbooked flight.
- Boarding and traveling on the flight.
- Arrival at destination and retrieval of luggage.
- Dealing with airline customer support post-flight to resolve any issues.

Figure 1: Customer viewing the departure board.

All experiences with these touchpoints must provide a best-in-class experience including an accessible and usable experience for customers with any disabilities per US DOT regulations (https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.dev/files/docs/Kiosk-website-FR-final%20rule.pdf)

Furthermore, the user experience strategy needs to ensure other users such as Gamma employees have a usable and efficient experience with systems such as staff allocation. In this first round, the UX strategy will only focus on customers and prospective customers. Round two will include defining a UX strategy for Gamma employees at front-line roles such as customer support agents, gate agents, and flight attendants; and "back-office" roles that do not interface directly with customers such as baggage handlers, pilots, maintenance, catering staff, cleaning staff, operations, and other management.

Proposed UX Strategy (Round 1)

The proposed UX strategy encompasses a multi-phase approach. Phase one identifies the business goals Phase two identifies the user goals. Phase 3 assesses the current state UX. Phase 4 develops a roadmap for implanting the UX strategy.

Since Alice is the only UX professional she needs to collaborate closely with marketing, IT, operations, software development and other mission critical groups within the company. A UX strategy committee should be formed reporting directly to the CEO which will manage and carry out, and adjust these efforts as necessary. The UX Strategy committee should be afforded sufficient budget to hire at least one additional UX resource or contractor for the duration of this effort.

- **Phase 1:** Identify Business Goals.
  To create an effective UX strategy it must be aligned to the business goals. Therefore the first phase is to make sure everyone in Gamma Airlines is aligned regarding the business goals. The following steps will assist identifying the business goals:
    1. Conduct a competitive analysis of Gamma Airlines against two of its main competitors
    2. Conduct a series of 1:1 stakeholder interviews with key leadership including the CEO and SMEs from marketing, operations, IT, and customer service.
    3. Discuss findings of steps 1 and 2 during a workshop with the CEO and stakeholders from with the airline. Representatives from marketing, operations, IT, and customer service must attend. An important outcome of this workshop is a UX vision for Gamma Airlines, i.e., where does Gamma Airlines want to be in 1, 2, and 5 years?

Figure 2: UX Professional interviewing stakeholder.

Estimated Duration: 1 month

Deliverables:

- Business goals and UX vision.
- UX strategy committee presentation to CEO and leadership.

- **Phase 2:** Identify User Goals and Use Cases.

  In order define a UX strategy, we need to clearly understand the motivations and characteristics of the current and prospective customers. The following steps will assist identifying the user goals:
  - Develop user personas. Conduct focus groups, interviews, and surveys with current customers and prospective customers to develop a set of core UX personas.
  - Conduct a diary study with customers taking a trip with Gamma airlines starting with trip planning, and including reservation booking, departure flight, and return flight.
  - Observe passengers during check in, baggage drop, boarding, in-flight, and arrival/baggage claim at two key airports that Gamma airlines serves.
  - Review and understand user Interaction with social media.

  Estimated Duration: 6 weeks

  Deliverables:

  - User requirements document including set of personas with supporting research findings and recommendations. Each persona would include journey map(s) for all touchpoints with Gamma Airlines.
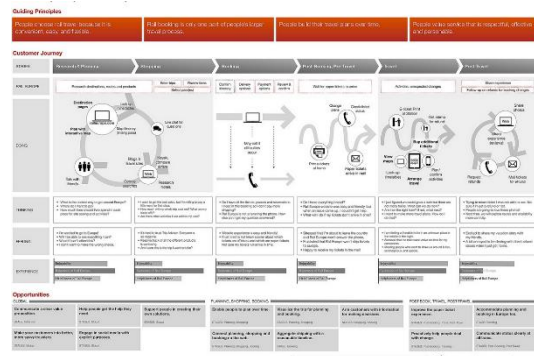 - UX strategy committee presentation to CEO and leadership.

  Figure 3: Example of Customer Journey Map

- **Phase 3**: Assess current state of the UX.
  In order to know how to improve the user experience, the current state must be known of systems customers may interact with in their journey. This primarily centers around three digital products: the web site used on a desktop PC and mobile device, the mobile app, and airport kiosk.
  - Conduct an accessibility assessment of airport kiosk, web and mobile site/app user interface conformance towards WCAG 2.1.
  - Conduct usability testing with customers including customers with disabilities on the airport kiosks, web and mobile site/app to understand the baseline state of usability issues and opportunities.

  Estimated Duration: 2 months

  Deliverables:

  - Accessibility assessment report with findings and recommendations; usability testing report with findings and recommendations.

  Figure 4: Airline customer using kiosk to check-in

  - UX strategy committee presentation to the CEO and leadership.

- **Phase 4:** Create UX Roadmap.

  Now that we have done our due diligence in understanding the business goals and users goals and needs; and grasp the opportunities of the current user experience we need to craft a plan to move forward to meet our UX vision.
    - Create a roadmap that prioritizes the products and services that will be impacted by UX redesign and additional UX research activities. Drivers include impact to business goals and current staffing levels. For example, the company may decide the following prioritization on a quarterly basis makes the most sense:
        - Quarter 1: Mobile app
        - Quarter 2: Airport check-in experience, including kiosk
        - Quarter 3: In-flight experience
        - Quarter 4: Customer support (online and phone-based)

    A Design Thinking approach (5 stage process) is recommended to be used to iterate during each quarter (Emphasize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test). For the first 4 quarters we will reuse the findings from Phase 1, 2, and 3 for Emphasize and Define stages.
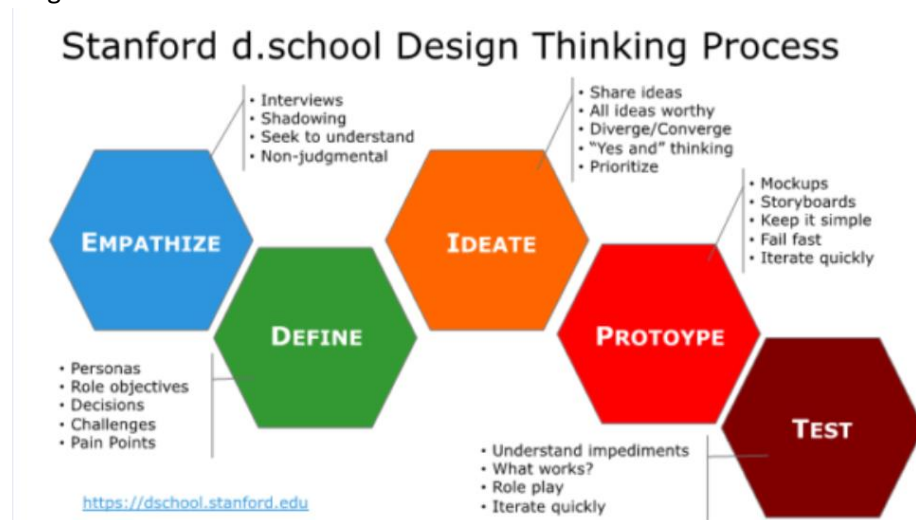

Figure 5: Designing Thinking 5-stage process (Stanford Design School)

Estimated Duration: 1 month for roadmap creation; 1 year – ongoing for implementation.

Deliverables:

- UX roadmap, Project plan/schedule for next steps implementation of roadmap.
- UX strategy committee presentation to CEO and leadership.

Conclusions

Gamma airlines has always focused on a great value for its customers. However, in 2019 a great value is not good enough as WOW Airlines recently found out. Gamma Airlines must deliver a best-in-class experience for its customers and employees. The first step in this journey is outlined in this UX strategy.

References

Horton S., Quesenbery W. (2013). *A Web for Everyone: Designing Accessible User Experiences*. Brooklyn, NY: Rosenfeld Media.

Murphy C. (2018). *Creating a UX Strategy*. Retrieved from https://www.smashingmagazine.com/2018/03/creating-a-ux-strategy/

Rosenzweig E. (2015). *Successful User Experience*. Waltham, MA: Morgan Kaufmann

Van Niekerk R. (2017). *Why I will never fly WOW Air again and you shouldn't either.* Retrieved from https://medium.com/@iamnayr/why-i-will-never-fly-wow-air-again-and-you-shouldnt-either-13c7892e8904