# Video brainstorming

**Create a video sequences that illustrate an idea of how users would interact with**

**a new design**

## Introduction

Video brainstorming extends standard brainstorming, so that participants not only write or draw their ideas, they act them out in front of a video camera. The goal is to simulate a wide variety of ideas very quickly and capture them in a way that is easier to understand (and remember) than hand-written text notes. In general, raw notes from brainstorming sessions tend not to be very useful after a few weeks because the participants no longer remember the context in which the ideas were created. Although video brainstorming generates fewer ideas in the same amount of time, each idea is easier to understand and recall. Video brainstorming is particularly appropriate when the goal is to create ideas for how users will interact with the new system and is especially appropriate at later stages of project design.

Video brainstorming requires thinking more deeply about each idea. One can stay abstract when describing an interaction in words or even with a sketch, but acting out the interaction in front of the camera forces the author of the idea (and the other participants) to seriously consider how a user would interact with the idea. It also encourages designers and users to think about new ideas in the context in which they will be used. Video clips from a video brainstorming session, even though rough, are much easier for a programmer to interpret than ideas from a standard brainstorming session. See Mackay et al. (2000) for a more complete description of how video brainstorming works and how it can influence the design process.

## What to do

Video brainstorming sessions require more preparation and resources than regular brainstorming. As in other forms of brainstorming, it is important to set a time limit. We usually limit sessions to one or at most two hours. Even beginners should be able to shoot two ideas per person.

If you have a large group, break into smaller groups of 3-4 people. Gather a set of supplies for each group that participants use to mock up their ideas. The simplest is to use paper prototyping supplies: colored paper, post-it notes, pens, transparencies, scissors and tape, plus any other office supplies that seem relevant.

Each group should have its own video device: cameras with tripods are best, but phones and tablets work as well. Some tripods can attach the camera to shoot downward, towards the table,

which is particularly useful if you plan to shoot users interacting with simulated computer screens.

## Preparation (before)

Before shooting, prepare a titlecard with three columns: take number, author, and idea description. Each idea will be captured as a separate "take". If you decide to explore several variations of the same idea, each variation is considered a new take. Whoever is the currently in the role of scribe is responsible for noting the corresponding information on the master sheet. The first scribe should prepare a title card (hand-written on colored paper or on a whiteboard) with the name of the brainstorming session, the date and any other relevant information. Set up the camera on the tripod and shoot at the brainstorming title card before recording the each idea. It helps to run a standard brainstorming session, either oral or with cards, prior to each video brainstorming session, to maximize the number of ideas to be explored. Participants take choose favorite ideas and develop them further or generate new ideas.

## Procedure (during)

Each team member should direct two ideas, incorporating the hands or voices of other members of the group. The author of the idea takes on the role of *director*. After explaining the idea to the group, he or she can ask other group members to help illustrate the idea for the camera. Avoid arguments: this is the director's idea. Team member who disagree should shoot their own variation to illustrate their alternative.

Choose a camera person and a scribe. The camera person simply operates the camera—the director chooses the camera angle and timing. The scribe prepares the title card for the take, by writing the director's name, a 3-5 word summary of the idea, and the take number. It's best to have a supply of different colored paper for making title cards, so that it's easy to distinguish the different takes on the video tape. The camera person shoots 5 seconds of the title card, then pauses the camera. The director then gives everyone a chance to practice the interaction once or twice and then videotapes it. Do not try to edit in the camera, by rewinding the tape and reshooting the idea if you make a mistake. Simply shoot the title card again (modified to say "Take 3 b") and reshoot the scene. Remember, you want to capture as many ideas as possible.

Everyone shifts roles for each new idea, with a new director, camera person and scribe. Ideas often become explorations of a "theme and variations". One person tapes a particular idea, and others create different interpretations or extensions of the idea in subsequent "takes". Some people work systematically through a set of ideas, others seek maximally diverse ideas, to show the limits of the design space.

Choose the director, who chooses the first idea and assigns the remaining roles. (Everyone will perform each role, over a series of ideas.) Create the materials necessary to illustrate the idea, rehearse once, video the titlecard and then video the interaction. You can use a voice over, but it is usually best to illustrate the idea through the action.

## Create a Design Resource (after)

At the end of the session, you should have a list of ideas and a corresponding set of video ideas, each with a titlecard that identifies the director and describes the idea, followed by a short clip that illustrates new interaction design possibilities.