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CAGED in a SPEAKER?

For Products which have so much personality in their voice, it's ironic how they are caged inside speakers.

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amazon

#netflixeverywhere

"I read a study that measured the efficiency of locomotion for various species on the planet. The condor used the least energy to move a kilometer. Humans came in with a rather unimpressive showing about a third of the way down the list.

That didn't look so good, but then someone at Scientific American had the insight to test the efficiency of locomotion for a man on a bicycle and a man on a bicycle blew the condor away.
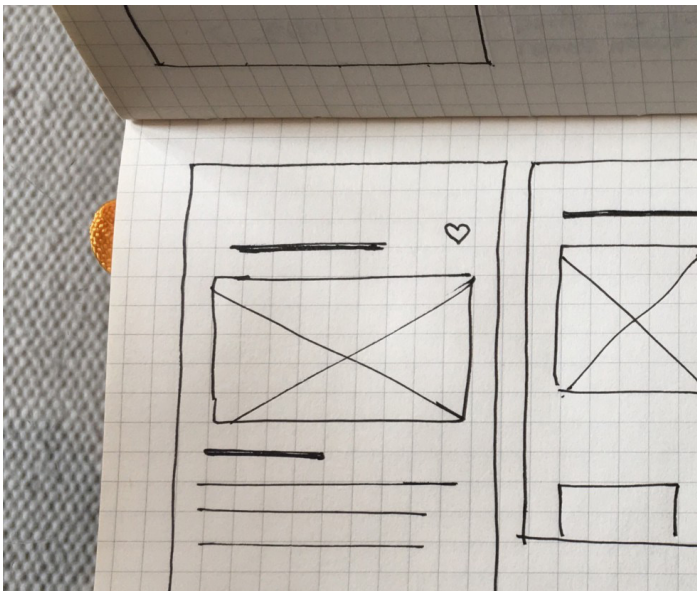
That's what a computer is to me: the computer is the most remarkable tool that we've ever come up with. It's the equivalent of a bicycle for our minds."

- Steve Jobs

STORIES THIS MONTH

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CAGED IN SPEAKER?

Vidit Bhargava

CES 2017 hasn't even begun yet and one could still safely say that it's going to be the year of Alexa, as far as mobile electronics are concerned. Amazon's Alexa is coming everywhere. (It's even going to be in your refrigerator.)

But Alexa's most successful product, is probably the one where almost everyone's running to clone. And that's Amazon Echo. A speaker, which uses Alexa, to follow your commands. From the little i've seen of Alexa from the demos, it's a great virtual assistant. Virtual As-

sistants themselves have gotten to a point where they've become highly sophisticated pieces of software, more over they are probably the most whimsical aspect of your mobile device at the moment! But For a category of products where the software (the virtual assistant) has so much personality in their voice, it's ironic how these devices are essentially just cylindrical virtual cages. For software so compelling, most of the hardware around is just trash, it's just a cylindrical box, with an array of microphones and speakers.

The thing is Amazon's doing what it's great at. It's great at providing large amounts of content without any interference. Look at their other services for examples, Amazon's e-Commerce business works on its careful management of warehouses and efficient transfer of goods. If you are looking for book recommen-

For Products which have so much personality in their voice, it's ironic how they are caged inside speakers.

Google Home) that are basically good looking speakers. And this is where I feel Apple may have an opportunity to make something different and truly interesting here.

When Siri first released in 2011, one of the key features were it's whimsical nature. Siri had a

dations, Amazon's probably not the place to go to. Amazon Prime Video has lots of content at very low prices, even if the app practically offers no discoverability for movies I may like. Amazon's all about little personality, more efficiency And Echo fits in well with the line up. But then, Echo's success has started a chain of Echo-Clones (the most famous one being

personality that it adheres too. It was almost like a Pixar Character. And while over time Siri has been criticized for things like its inconsistent sequential inference or it's unreliability at providing information, it remains one of the most interesting assistants to interact with. Interacting with Siri feels more natural. And "If" Siri were to be in a standalone device, I'd like to think that the per-

sonality would translate into hardware as well.

One of the most exciting technology products of last year was the Anki Cozmo. It wasn't just your regular AI powered bot. It was a little more than that.

Cozmo would jump with joy on winning a game, throw about tantrums on loosing one, decline it's offer to play a game and you'd see it be visibly disappointed. It's entire body responds to the surroundings. It's not a speaker or a microphone grid. It's a bot that responds to commands likes playing games and learns on the way. Something like the Cozmo is ideal for an echo like device. It's a device that

i'd like to see respond to my queries like Siri would.

Something like the Anki Cozmo is an ideal device to house a virtual assistant like Siri or Alexa

Amazon's all about utilitarian designs: More efficiency with little to no personality

It's 2017, and the design of a lot of gadgets around us looks a little boring, While standalone products like Echo are gaining popularity, I'd like to hope for someone like Apple to disrupt it with it's usually different approach for designing new products. And I'd take a guess that a Siri powered hardware product would be more Cozmo than Echo. Even if that means making a few compromises on the number of microphones.

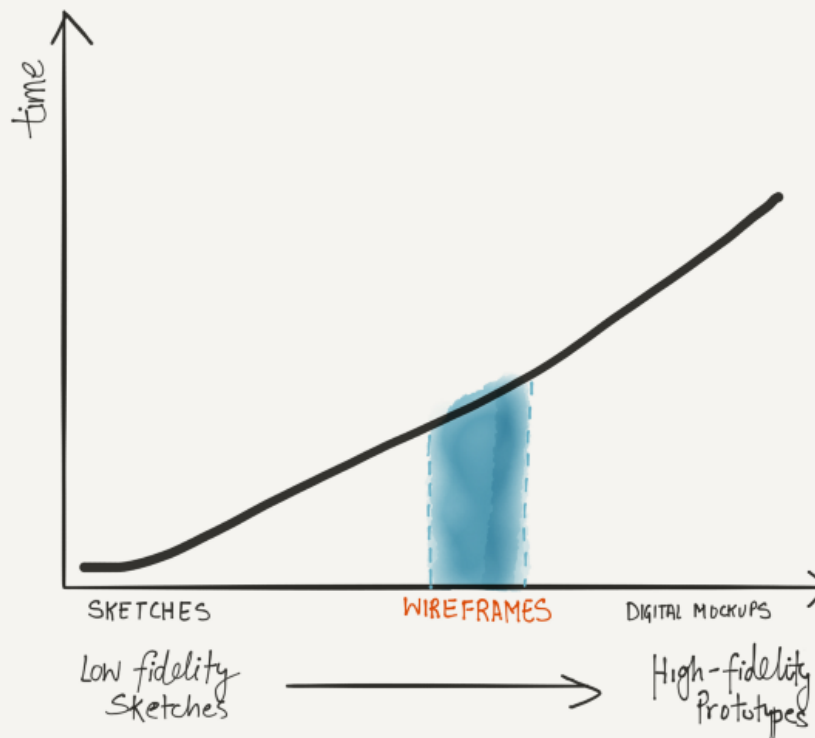# DESIGN HACKS
WIREFRAMING USING NUMBERS

Vidit Bhargava

One of the things I've learnt in UI Design is, that the faster you get through the Steps to actually 'generate' prototypes, the better you can focus on more pressing matters like testing them in the real world.

And one of the most important aspects of any design is to be able to layout your elements in a visual grid. And a grid based design has it's own

benefits. But how does one create wireframes quickly?

The best tool for Wireframing is the one that's most accessible

Turns out, macOS comes with a pre-installed tool to accomplish this. It's called "Numbers". While primarily meant to be a spreadsheet app, the numbers interface of arranging data in different tables, is actually a great flexible way of designing things from roadmaps to User Interfaces.
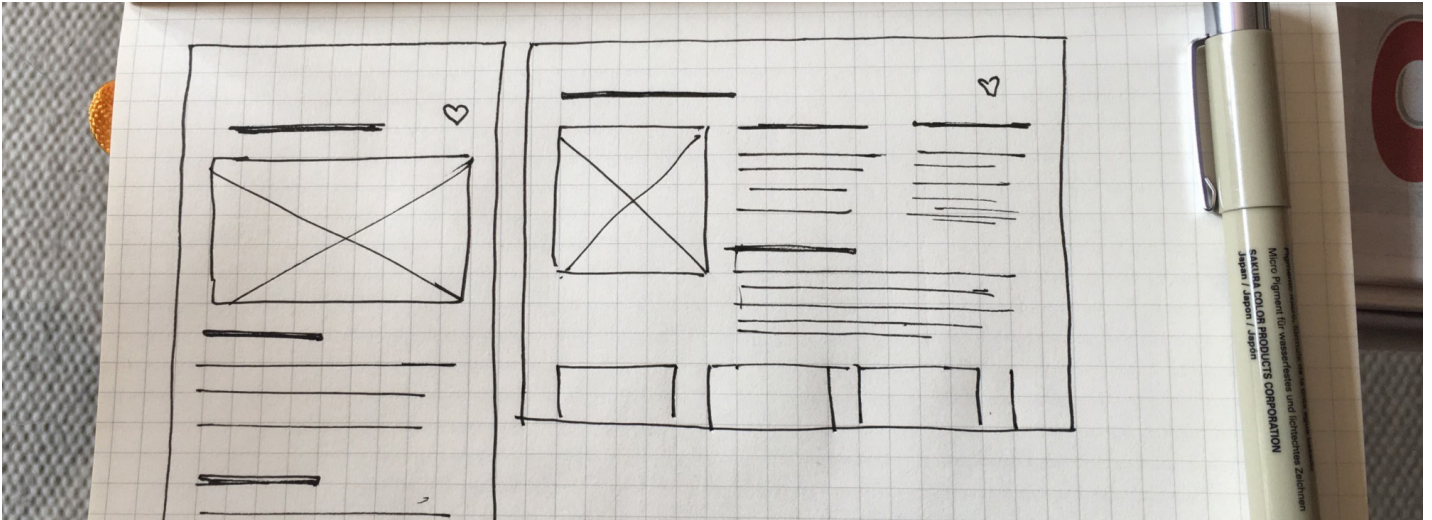
Lesser Time spent on Wireframing = More Time to test your designs with users
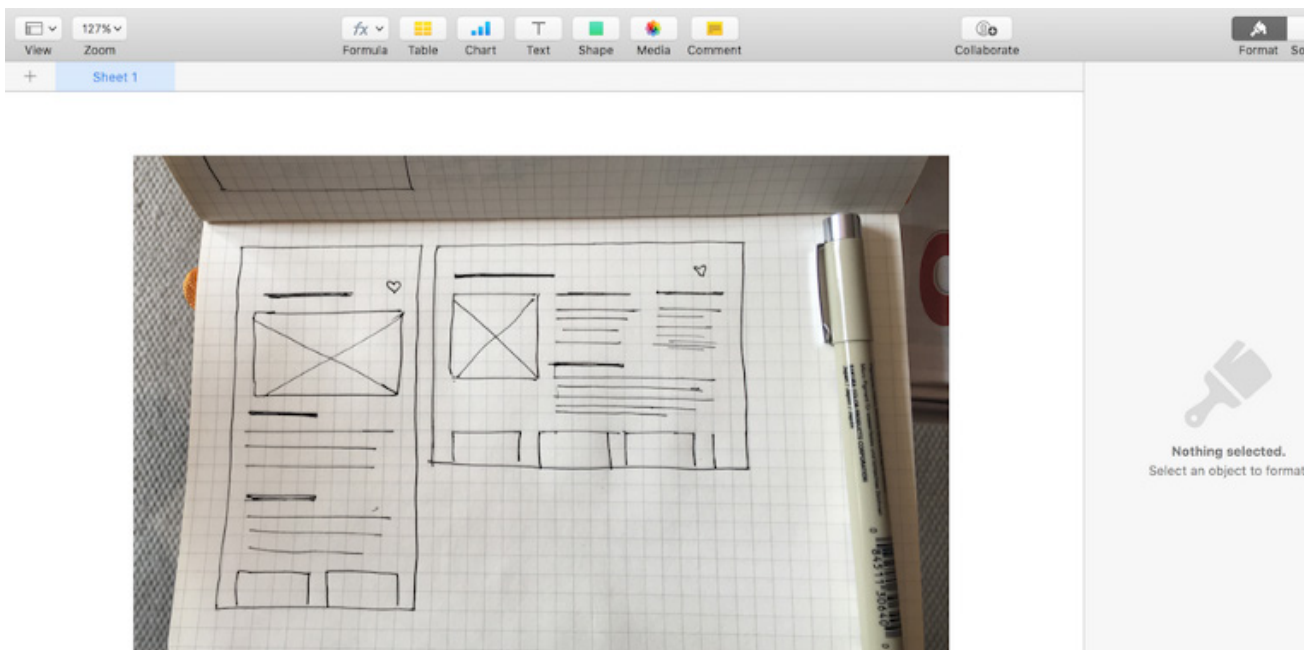
Getting Started

To start with Wire-framing you need a paper-layout of your app first. It's doesn't need to be an elaborate sketch work, just a 15 second sketch of how you want your information and pictures to be organised. Don't worry about getting details right with this one. It's just meant to be a sketch.
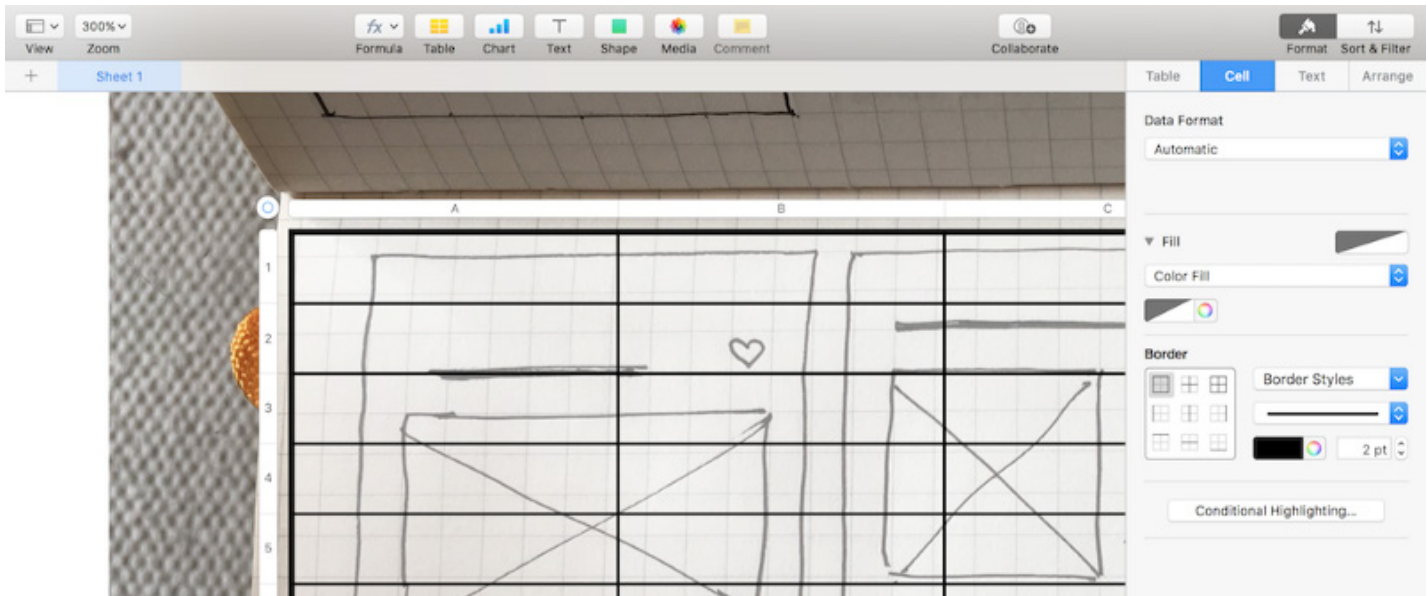
Some examples of a paper-sketch, rudimentary UI Design. Remember these were 15 second sketches and don't need to be great works of art.
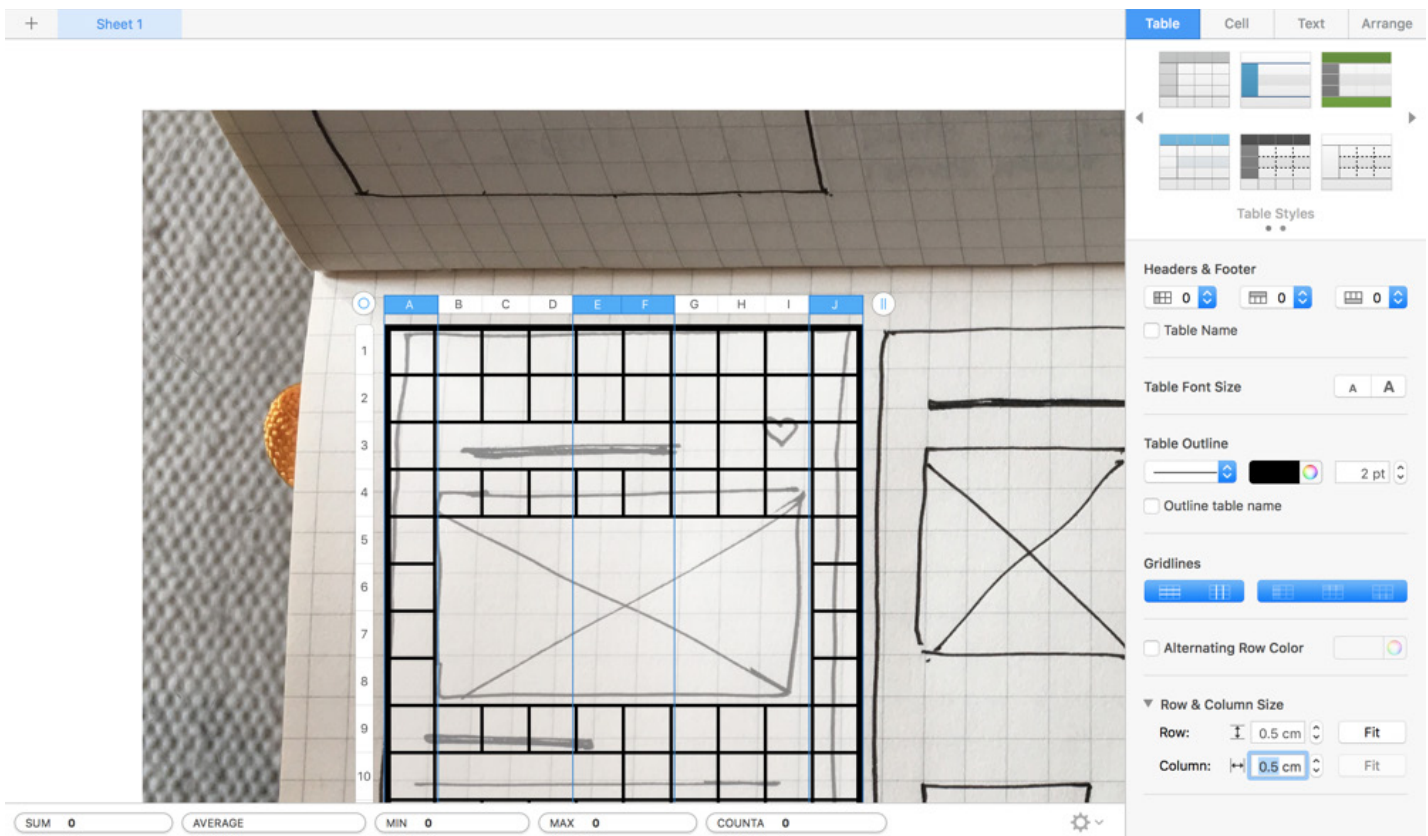

Generating your Wireframe

Once you have your sketch ready. Click a pic of it and import it to your computer. Now fire up Numbers, and begin a blank project. (Delete the default table that comes with it). And Import the picture of your sketch.
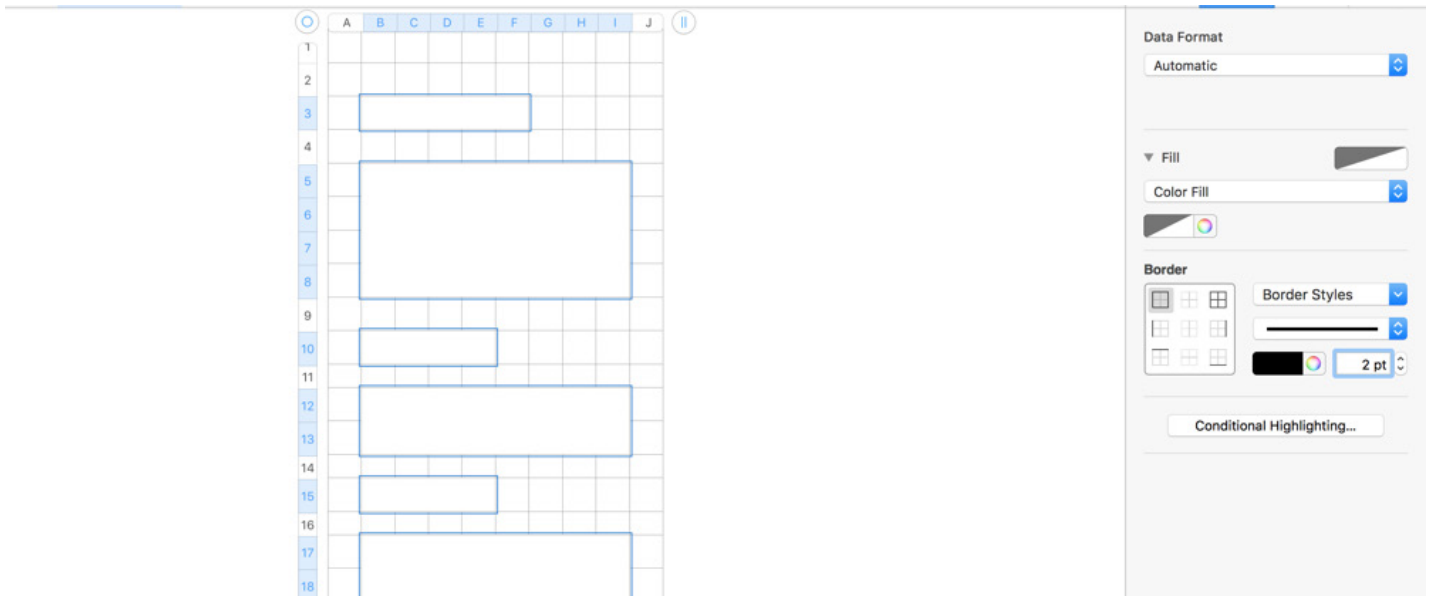
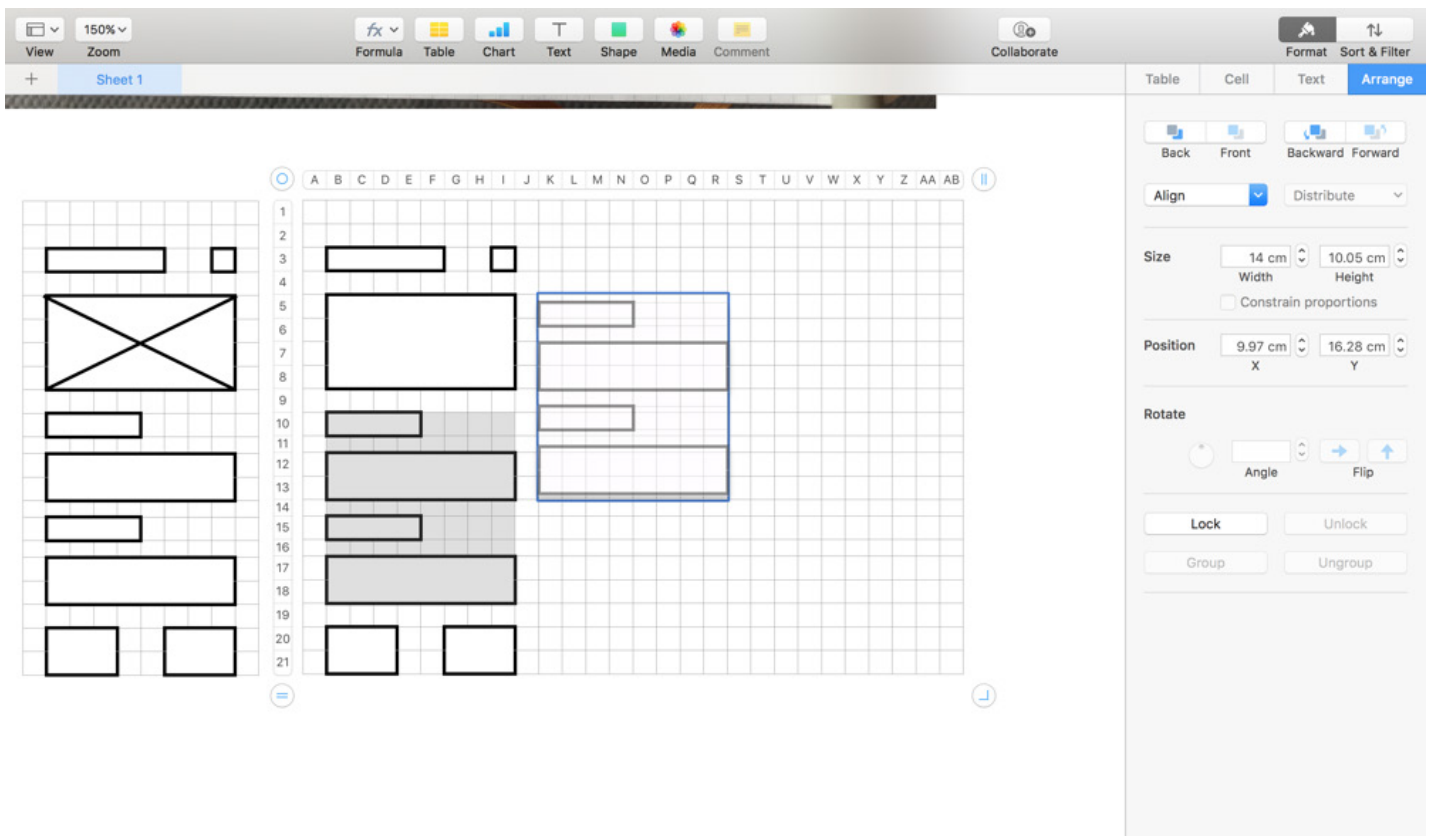Insert a new blank table and overlay it on your sketch.

Tip 1: More Number of Cells in your table mean greater flexibility.

Tip 2: You can select the multiple columns and adjust their width simultaneously to create the gutters and columns of your grid.

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Tip 3: Merge cells and adjust borders to mark Multiple Layout elements. (You may even write stuff occasionally)
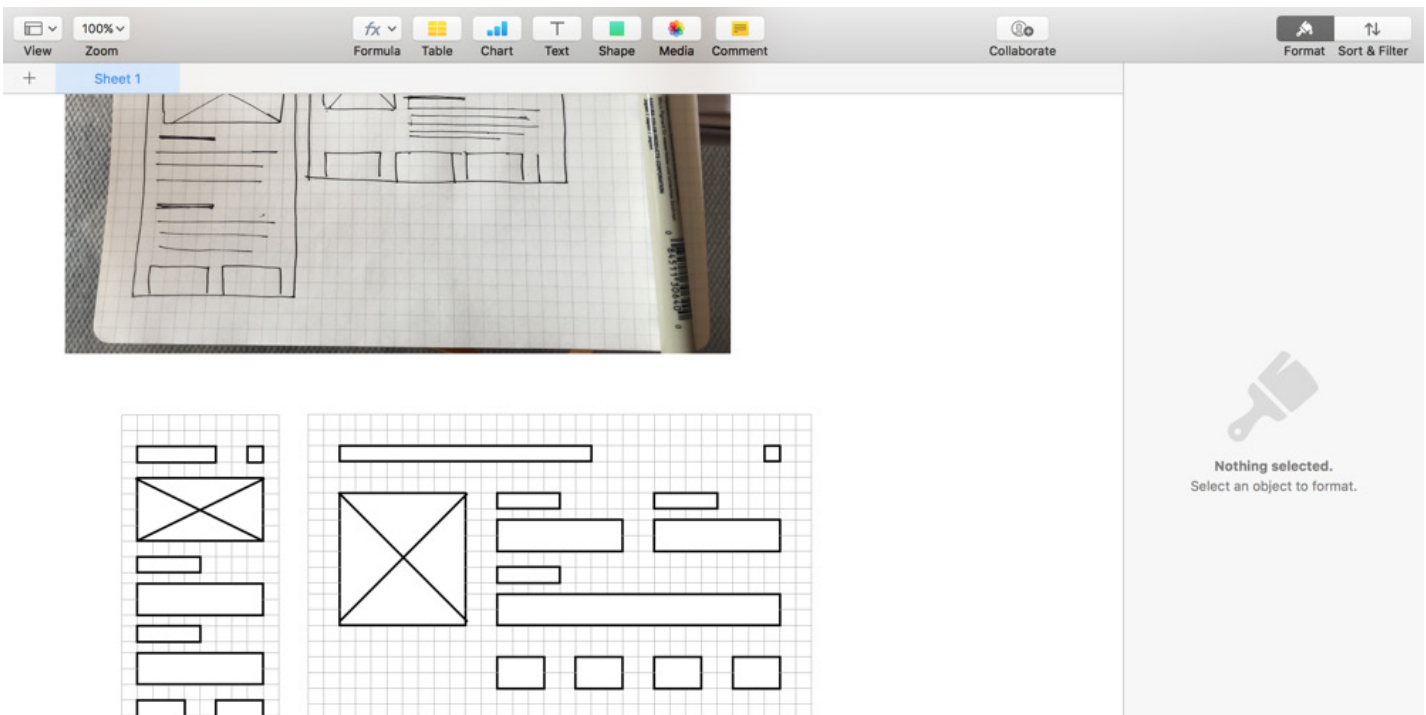

Tip 4: Making Responsive Layouts is also pretty easy on Numbers. You just need to duplicate your wireframe, and rearrange your elements.

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Tip 5: Set your minimum cell size wisely. The ideal cell would be easy to multiply to generate bigger squares & rectangles. And it'll be the size of your gutter (the space between two columns). I generally like to put squares of size 0.5 cm as my smallest cell unit. Imagine each cell as a lego brick.

Tip 6: You can copy the table you made and paste it in Sketch or Keynote to get going with your Interactive Prototype.

I think, It's easy to dive into the multiple details of how your interface should look on screen when creating a wireframes. And Number's is pretty good at being able to adjust column widths and making efficient grids, perhaps more so, at making them responsive.

But at the end of the day, it's still a wireframe that you are making. And Wireframes like other low-fidelity prototypes should be made quickly. If I were designing an interface, I wouldn't spend more than a few minutes to generate wireframes for all of my interface. I'd focus on the User-testing and Evaluation more than the generation of wireframes. So while it's a handy tool, I'd only recommend it, if you can get around numbers quickly enough. Don't spend hours just to get your cell width right!

INDIAN STREAMING SERVICES & THE UX OF "EXCLUSIVE"

Vidit Bhargava

A few years back streaming video in India meant that you'd either have to goto YouTube and search for a movie promoted in the "YouTube Box Office" or you'd have to look for one of the services from "Spuul" or "BoxTV", none of them really had accessible major titles. While "Spuul" had Yash Raj Films as it's official digital streaming partner but that was all about it, they didn't get much else. Moreover, the apps were horrible. I remember watching Gangs of Wasseypur II on Spuul and their flash player made the usually quiet fans of my MacBook Pro run full throttle. In short, the experience of these services made the option practically worthless.

But everything changed this January, when Netflix decided that it was coming to India and a bunch of other countries. Netflix Entry opened up Indian users to quality streaming services along with content that actually mattered. And this helped other International Players take cue and offer their services in India and other countries too. So, by the end of the year, we have Netflix offering greater International and Indian Content ; Hotstar (Star Group's streaming service) offering HBO's library, the entire Star Group Channel catalogue and Live TV for Sports and Even Amazon Prime Video coming to India and begin to offer local content as "Originals". The streaming video battle is all set to begin, but the crack's are already showing in this "Better" TV Experience.

At the moment, if you want Yash Raj Film's movies you'd need to subscribe to Amazon

Prime. If you wish to watch a BBC One Show or watch an Indie-Indian Movie, you'll need a Netflix Subscription. If you wish to watch an HBO Show, go get a Hotstar subscription. The problem? There's enough great content on all three of these services, to make you want to have a subscription, but it's the TV Bundles all over again.

Televisions basically run on Channel Subscriptions, you may not watch everything the channel has to offer but you end up paying for it anyway. And

3 Streaming Services. All Vying for "Exclusive Rights"

it often happens that what you want to watch is actually divided into 4 or 5 channels. A show at CBS, a couple of them at HBO and perhaps one on MTV. Streaming services on the other hand aim to solve this problem when they offer content from multiple sources, on demand, encapsulated in one service.

But over time, the very problem these services aimed at eradicating has come back to bite the users in the form of "Exclusive Content". With Amazon, Hotstar and Netflix all eyeing for "Exclusive Rights to content" the experience is becoming less user friendly by the day. Amazon has exclusive rights to stream content from Dharma Productions and Yash Raj Films, Hot-

star has exclusive rights to movies from Disney, Netflix has exclusive rights to shows from BBC One.

Moreover, major streaming services across the world are looking for 'Original Content', content that differentiates them from other streaming services. The idea being, "If only we have the show that most people want to watch, they'll join us and not the other stream-

ing service". What this has done is, create a pool of great TV shows, all scattered across different services. So, if you were like me and wanted to watch "Daredevil", "Silicon Valley" and "Mr. Robot" you'd be buying subscriptions to three different services.
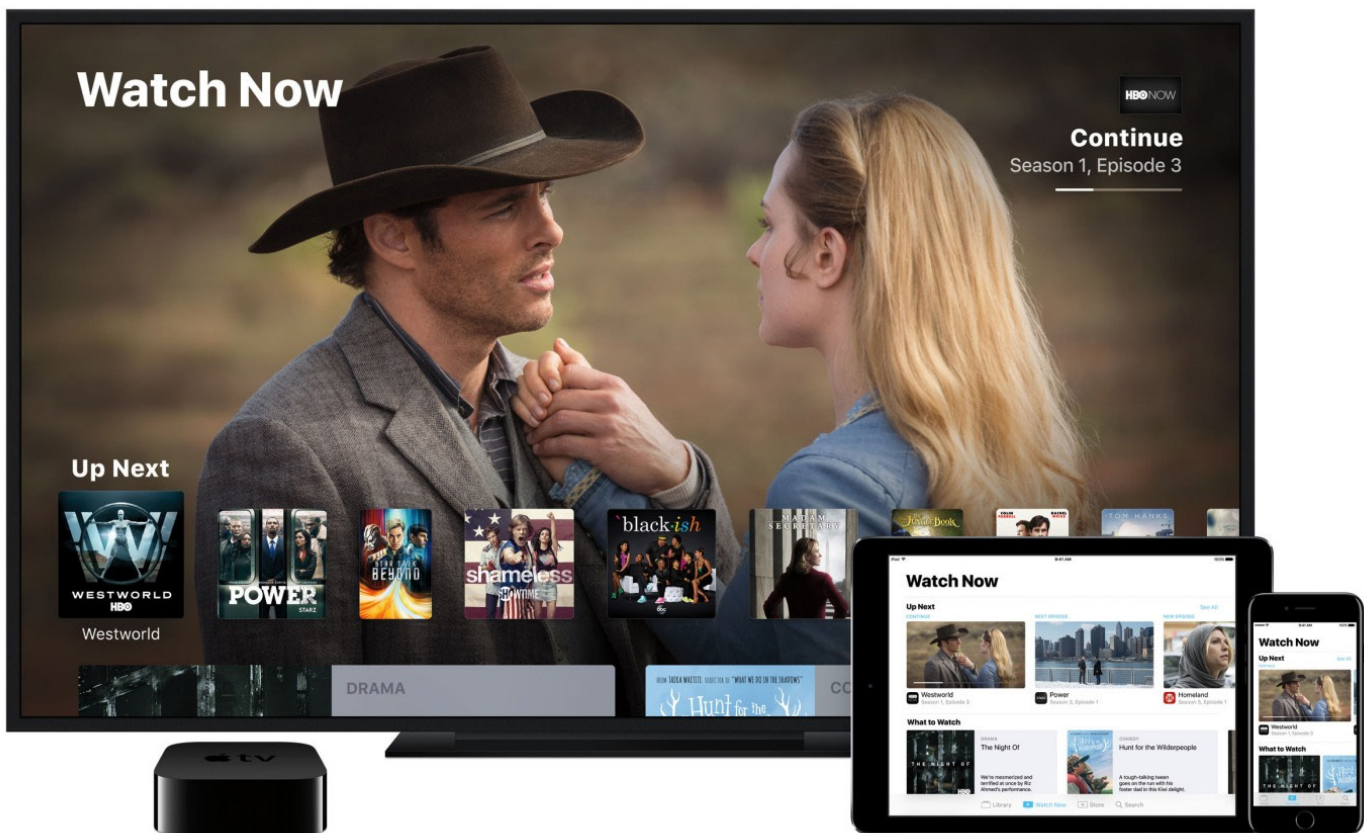
So, lets zoom out a little. Previously I was paying for a TV Subscription pack which offered me "Sports", "International Shows" and "Movies" and my monthly bill easily shot past Rs. 600.

Now, I'm subscribing to three different streaming services to get the same type of content, and my bill is still well over Rs. 600 per month.

This new Internet streaming model has offered me "On-Demand Streaming", "globally synchronised Airing of TV Shows" and "portability of viewing TV content" as advantages over my TV Subscription. But If I look at it from one end, it's also plagued with some of the same problems that the TV industry is plagued with. That is the fact that I'm still paying for what I don't want to watch, I'm still paying to 'new kinds of TV channels' and I'm still paying an unreasonable amount for just a few shows. Originals or Exclusive content on any streaming service is a bad user experience. With each streaming service vying for content you can only watch on their platform, users are forced to pick platforms rather than choose them based on the user experience

Is this a better experience At all? In some ways, it is. Like I said at the starting, Streaming of shows has completely changed the TV industry in some ways. Most notably, the global scaling of these services has meant that video is no longer behind regulatory bars which would hinder the content from reaching their viewers. Yes, TV is way more portable now. But in a lot of ways, it's still tied to the economics of the TV Industry, the original shows, the channel subscriptions and the race for the rights. They still exist, even though in a different form.

LG PUTS ALEXA ON A FRIDGE!

Alexa was everywhere at CES 2017, including your refrigerators. Is it the beginning of a new trend or just another CES attention grab? We're not a fan of the idea, anyway!

FARADAY FUTURE HAS A CAR

The troubled startup was in news for all the wrong reasons prior to CES, but somehow managed to prove that it's not vapourware afterall!

TOP STORIES FROM

CES ®

2017

ROBOTS HAVE PERSONALITY!

Kuri is just one of the many robots announced at CES this year. What's new? Each one of them feels straight out of a Sci-Fi movies because of their wit and charm!

IS QLED THE FUTURE OF TV?

Introduced by Samsung, Q standing for Quantom Dot. Will they have the same impact as LED TVs or is just another failed attempt at innovating the TV Set?

Pixel Quiz January 2017

Vidit Bhargava

Q1.Which game based on the GoldSrc Engine was developed by Minh "Gooseman" Le and Jess Cliffe? An excerpt from the gameplay section of the Wikipedia page of the game reads : "Spectators are generally able to watch the rest of the round from multiple selectable views, although some servers disable some of these views to prevent dead players from relaying information about living players to their teammates through alternative media (most notably voice in the case of Internet cafes and Voice over IP programs such as TeamSpeak or Ventrilo). This form of cheating is known as "ghosting"."

Q2. In Finland this symbol was carved on houses and everyday objects such as tableware to protect people from bad luck and evil spirits. Oldest known findings which contain this symbol are a pair of 1000 years old Wooden Skis (Pre-Cristian Era). This symbol is a modified symbol of the bowen-knot. How do we know this symbol in the world of technology.

Q3. Founded by Masaya _____as _____ Manufacturing, the company was based in Tokyo, and started out by running children's rides on the roof of a department store. Giving it the name _____ Amusement Machine Manufacturing Company, shortened to X, which is how we know it today. X with its game Galaxian was also the first company to make a video game that used RGB color graphics. What is X?

Q4. Greg Duffy made news back in 2016 when he sub-tweeted his employer Z (the then CEO of Y) saying *"If you want to play emperor, make sure to wear real clothes."* Duffy's company X was acquired by Y sometime in 2015. As fate would have it, earlier in January 2017 Duffy joined Z's previous employers to work on Home Automation. The question is what did Duffy create that was sold to Y and Who is this famous "Tyrant" that he was calling out on twitter.

Q5. Designed by Adrian Frutiger as a Humanist Sans-Serif Typeface and a successor to the "Frutiger" font, X made its first appearance in 1992. Over the years X has had multiple variations including X Wild, XCAD (for the implementation of ANSI CAD lettering in Adobe Reader), X Apple (For Apple's corporate font). X has been seen in usage for a lot of brands, including the Logo for Rolls Royce, and VALVE corporation. X is an adjective that means "Countless or an extremely great number". Name the typeface X.