

Introduction

Year: 2022

Participants: Grant Eubanks, internet poll users

Role: User experience researcher, interaction designer, visual designer

Tasks Performed: User research, ideation, brainstorming, information architecture, wireframing, interface design

Tools Used: Pen and paper, social media for polling and user research, Figma for wireframes, Pexels for royalty free stock images

Challenges

Introduction:

I completed this entry level unsolicited redesign to learn the user-centered design process and gain experience with UX design for internships during the winter break from my study of Human Computer Interaction at NC State University in December of 2022.

I have used DistroKid since early 2019 as my only music distributor in order to get my music on streaming platforms like Apple Music and Spotify alongside promotional platforms like Instagram and TikTok. I am largely satisfied with the service, but have noticed potential areas of improvement with their interface and user journeys. Some of my own complaints include inconsistent album art acceptance, a clunky uploading interface, and vague progress reports regarding music uploads.

Known Problems with DistroKid:

DistroKid has received many complaints from their users throughout the last few years about their platform, primarily about their redundant uploading process, lackluster user support system, and cryptic, unreliable payment infrastructure. They also only operate from a website and would likely benefit from the user notification and communication tools that a mobile app can provide.

Opportunities for Improvement:

Improvement here boils down to finding the problems with DistroKid's website that an app would solve through user research.

While DistroKid currently does not have a mobile app, one is currently in development. I figure that doing my design in parallel provides a fun portfolio exercise in the form of a brief, limited redesign using the user-centered design process focused on reducing common issues with the platform that can be compared to DistroKid's work later on.

Gathering Information

Research Methods:

I am using a random qualitative quote collection and analysis from Better Business Bureau complaints, Reddit responses from r/DistroKidSupportDesk, and Instagram polling. To supplement this research, I am using quantitative results from an Instagram poll I gave to musicians I know about if DistroKid should allow uploading from the app.

Qualitative Research Results:

Stand-out quotes from the Better Business Bureau complaint page:

- *"I distributed 2 albums with DistroKid and received \$0. DistroKid collected \$51k in streaming royalties and is refusing to let me withdraw the money."*
- *"Tried withdrawing all my funds I am entitled to - of the vicinity of \$22,000 - and an error appears: 'there was an error processing your request please contact DistroKid'."*
- *"After contacting DistroKid, no response has been received. I want my bank functionality opened. DistroKid has not responded to me on any email since this issue and I am considering legal action."*
- *"I want a refund to my cash app card, I paid for music uploading services I have not received. DistroKid's automated services have no customer service support at all. I want my money back ASAP"*
- *"I am a music artist who publishes with the distributor DistroKid. Spotify is the main platform my music is uploaded to, last year I had around 31k streams. The year prior I had 48k; the issue is that my distributor is only reporting around 8k-around \$300 which, while for one person isn't major, if it happens to a small artist like me, it's most likely taking place on a large scale."*

Stand-out quotes from my research on r/DistroKidHelpDesk:

- *"I have been trying to get a response from Distrokid support for a month, I wrote several letters. They ignore it. Some kind of discrimination. In general ZERO reaction to letters."*
- *"I have uploaded 3 songs using DistroKid 20 days ago and it is still processing. I have contacted them and they replied that it will get processed soon but it's been 20+ days since I have uploaded."*
- *"I used to receive all the payments on 28th/29th of every month but last month they didn't update my payments on that date, it took them an extra 10 days to update my payments."*

Qualitative Polling Results:

Suggestions from users of DistroKid:

- *“I would like to be able to delete a song from one of my albums and upload a new version with the same name to replace it. Even if it demonetized it. I don’t care. I should be able to do that”*
- *“Notifications! When there are new statements in the "bank" section, when new streaming platforms are added, etc.”*
- *“Ways to market music and get on playlists easier”*
- *“Better visual design with pretty buttons”*

Quantitative Polling Results:

“Should DistroKid’s app allow the uploading of songs on mobile?”

- Yes: 7 people (50%)
- No: 7 people (50%)

I interpret this as a very interesting response that is indicative of a need to balance song quality on streaming platforms with ease of access and equity in the music industry.

Sorting Information

Brainstorm Results:

- I think that a good compromise for the issue of music uploading on mobile is to allow re-uploads of songs and cover art that are already in your DistroKid music library and to emphasize the app’s utility in fixing upload issues with a prioritized “fixing” interface, since there seem to be a lot of issues with DistroKid rejecting songs and cover art.
- The primary focus for improvement in this app should be communication between support staff at DistroKid and artists/managers through a chat interface.
- We have also shown that users are requesting more transparency regarding payment status.
- Users should have a home page to notify them of any recent updates and the status of their most recent upload.
- These solutions can be boiled down into four main sections for the app: home, inbox, music, bank

Personas:

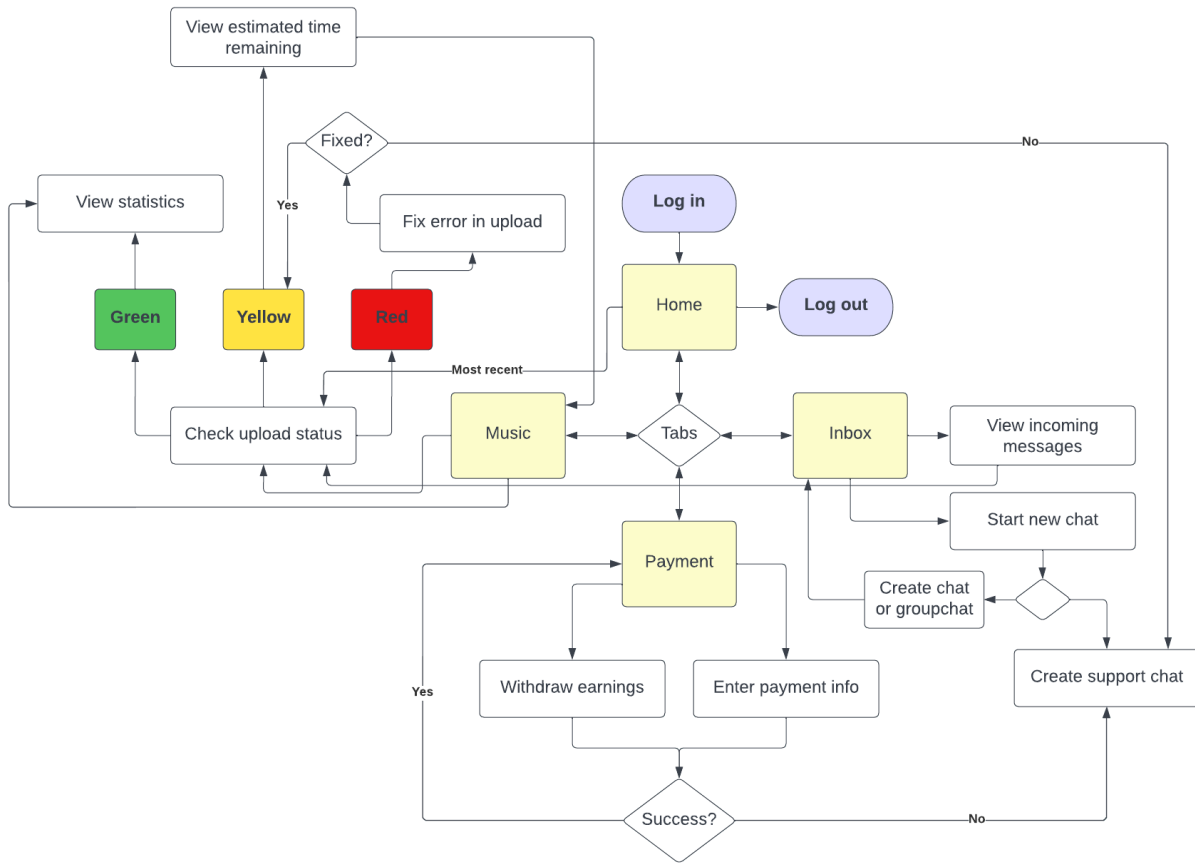
- Persona 1: Smaller independent artist that *doesn’t* rely on music income, light use
 - This is a lower stakes user that cares more about convenience and making their experience with the web app better

- Persona 2: Larger independent artist that does rely on music income and is managed using DistroKid, medium use
 - This app really matters for this user.
 - This app would likely be used as more of a conflict resolution and support tool as well as a way to communicate with management and band members
- Persona 3: Manager of many different artists, heavy use
 - This app's chat interface could serve as a good management tool
 - This user might sometimes need multiple support threads open at one time to resolve issues with multiple artists and would use the chat feature for this purpose alongside speaking to artists and resolving issues
 - There is a lot of room to grow with management tools if there was to be further work on this project.

Ideation:

- Relevant use cases for mobile app:
 - Home
 - Users check their most recent music upload and are able to access the three most recent message chains that they have.
 - Music
 - Users check the status of their music uploads, which is indicated by either a green (good), yellow (processing), or red (failed) button.
 - If the button is red, users resolve issues with music upload like cover art, missing lyrics, incorrect metadata, or bad audio file.
 - Users see statistics for their music library, either on the scale of one song, one album, or the entire library.
 - Payment
 - Users withdraw earnings from DistroKid collected from streaming platforms.
 - Users resolve issues with payment information if there are any.
 - Users change revenue split settings for their music.
 - Inbox
 - Users communicate with other users linked through either song credit or management hierarchy
 - Users voice complaints through inbox chat interface with DistroKid support staff

Flowchart of User Journeys:



Prototyping

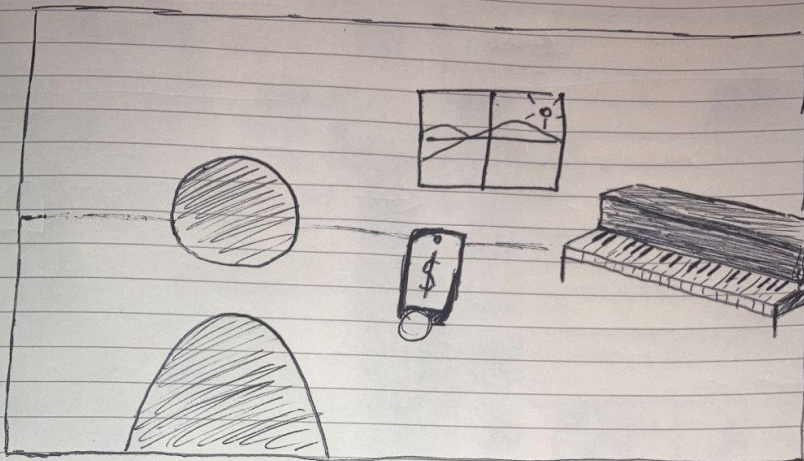
Storyboarding:

For this project I created two storyboards.

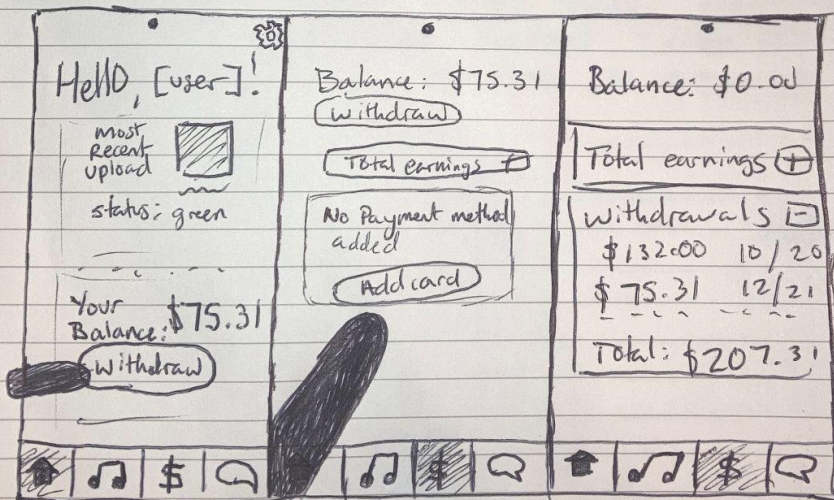
Storyboard one goes through the process of a user entering payment information, then withdrawing their earnings.

DISTROKID

STORYBOARD #1: WITHDRAWING EARNINGS



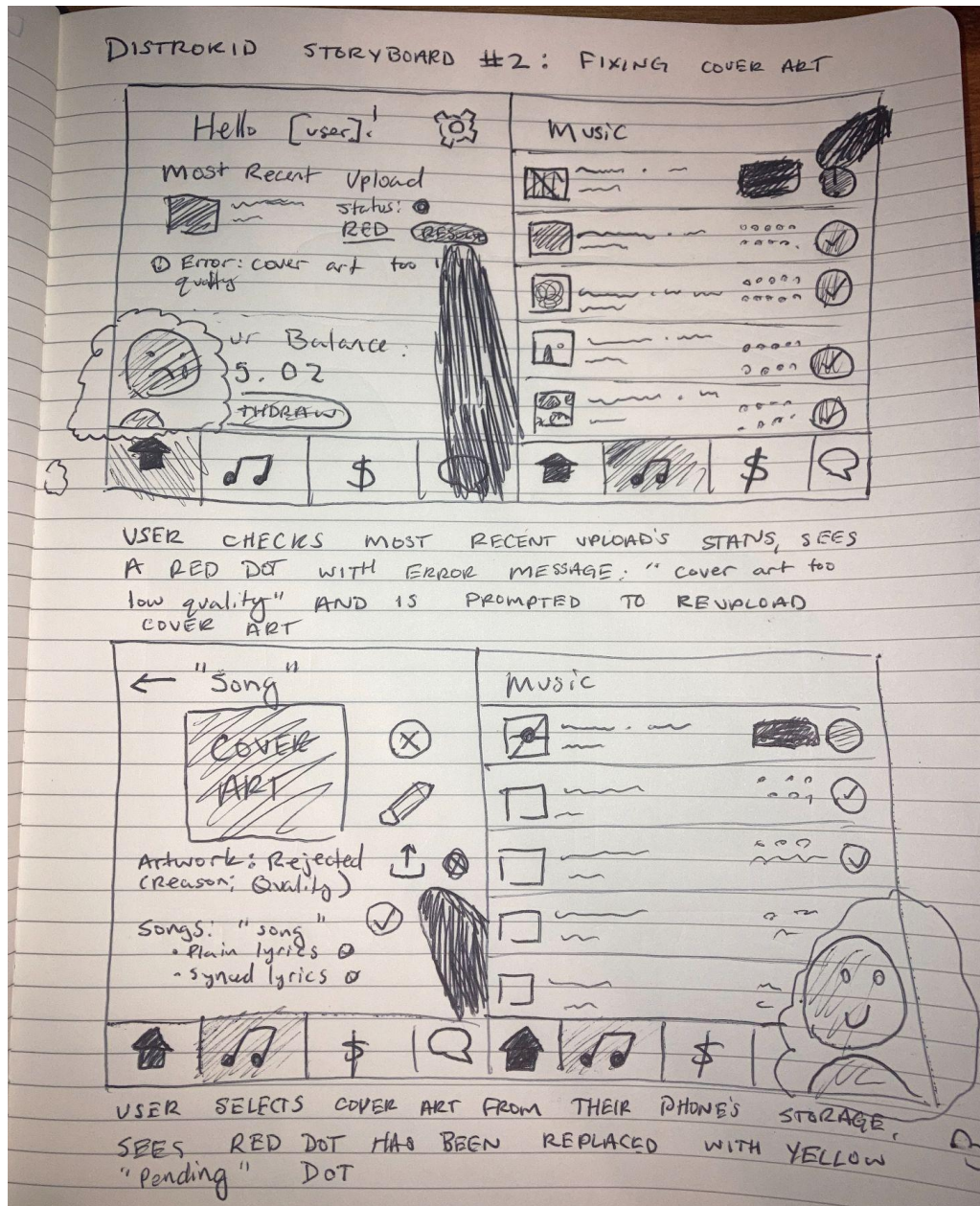
USER DESIRES MONEY OWED TO THEM BY DISTROKID



USER PRESSES "Withdraw" BUTTON ON HOME PAGE, IS PROMPTED TO ENTER PAYMENT INFO, AND THEN SUCCESSFULLY WITHDRAWS

USER EXITS, SATISFIED AND \$75.31 RICHER!

Storyboard two goes through the process of a user resubmitting a song's cover art after the song was rejected due to fidelity issues with the previous artwork upload, then checking the information.

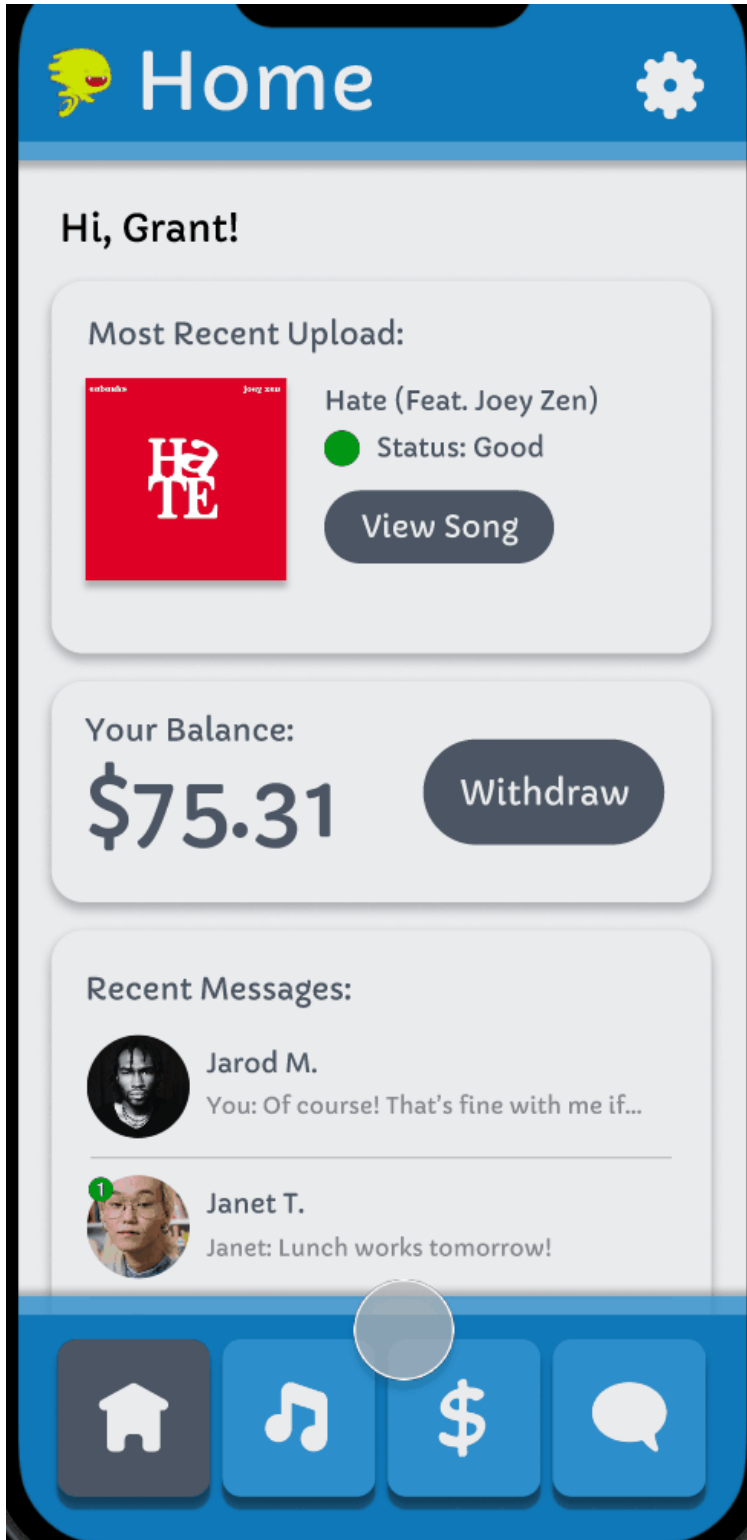


Drawings:

There are no standalone UI drawings. For the sake of time and because this is a simple solo project, I decided to incorporate quick UI sketches into my storyboards to make sure I spent most of my time rapidly prototyping in Figma.

Figma Mockup:

<https://www.figma.com/proto/rqYF74oubhevdIzXdCYRy3/DistroKid-Mockup?node-id=11%3A97&scaling=scale-down&page-id=0%3A1&starting-point-node-id=11%3A97>



Conclusion

What Was Learned:

In this project, I gained hands-on experience retrieving user data, using that data for ideation, and turning ideas from that process into a prototype. I grew my skill set within Figma and familiarized myself with the user-centered design process. It was also a lot of fun!