

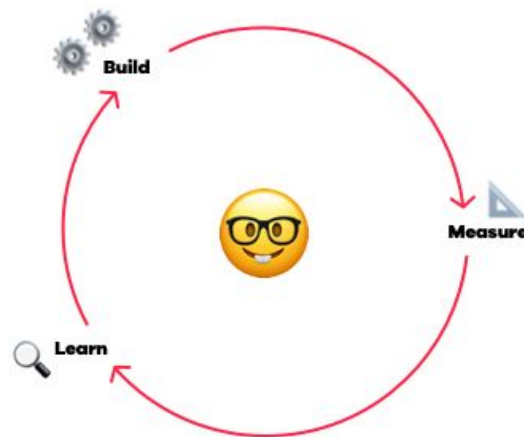
Frustration to Delight - Why we built our own Time Tracking Application

Sometimes you face a challenge at work and change is needed. It's easy to fall into complain mode or say "I will fix that when I the have time."

One month later nothing has changed and you are even more frustrated.

However, there is a way to solve this. To focus on the solution rather than the challenge. That starts with truly understanding what the problem is you are trying to solve. Once you know that you can start simple and create a Minimum Viable Product/Solution for it. From there you can work to build it out step by step.

In each phase, you want to have the following loop to know what to improve.



This loop of Build-Measure-Learn is not new. However, usually, it is used for a new startup. It's actually highly applicable for process improvements too.

This is exactly what we did when our new time tracker wasn't working how we wanted it to. By combining the knowledge of all our departments (development, design & growth hackers) we came up with our own awesome time tracker app.

The New Tool that didn't quite solve things

In October a 'big' change happened. We basically said goodbye to about 7 different tools we were using (from time tracking to our CRM) and said hello to Simplicate.

Simplicate's all in one solution seemed perfect with time-saving, cost saving and the full sales to clients process in one system.

It literally Simplified everything! Actually, not quite...

Should have user tested that

We extensively tested various features of Simplicate with all different departments and implemented their feedback.

Then we rolled Simplicate out. We sent people an explanation for the main feature that 90% of the team would use: time tracking. Ok done, great!

Still... not quite.

Whilst we tried out the Simplicate website itself we didn't actually try out the time-tracking chrome extension. Time tracking is something you do day in day out at our company, there should be no hassle with it.

Probably would have been handy to download the extension before we rolled out to sixty people...

The uproar

The teams were not amused. All those benefits of reduced tools, clear overview and reduced cost did not matter to the consulting teams: they only used the time tracking.

Lucky for us we have a lot of nifty developers in our office. If the tool doesn't work for you: just build your own. Don't complain, just fix it.

“Problems are nothing but wake-up calls for creativity” – Gerhard Gschwandtner

The Crawl Phase: 8 hours is all it took to create the first solution

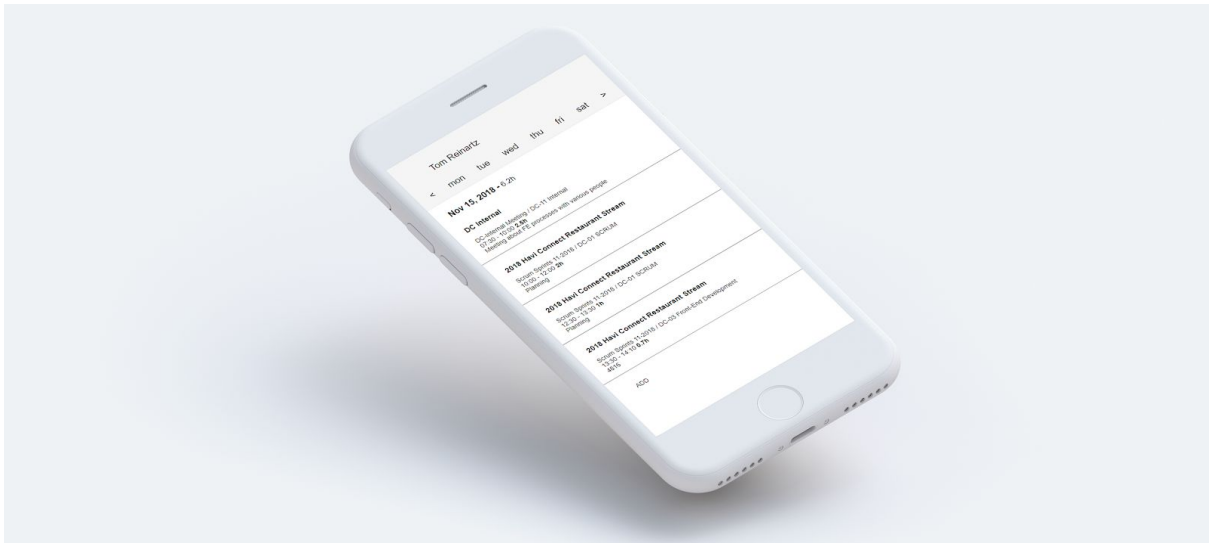


Crawl

So Tom Reinartz, a frontend developer, got to work by gathering feedback about the pain points. He received a whole list of feedback from adjusting previous time tracking systems to the number of clicks required to track a project. However, fixing all those issues would take way too long. We didn't have months to wait, it needed to be fixed now. So Tom took the biggest pain point the one nearly everyone mentioned: *There is no clear overview of all the tasks of the day.*

“Success is not delivering a feature; success is learning how to solve the customer's problem.”
– Eric Ries, The Lean Startup

Based on this he built the simplest possible solution in the evenings. It was ready within two weeks and took just eight hours to program:



It wasn't pretty or perfect (sorry Tom!). You couldn't even view any other day than the day that you were working on. But it worked. Like a good MVP should.

Always start by crawling before running. It not only goes a lot faster but people also prefer it. People already preferred the new time tracker due to this one key feature: a clear overview of all your tasks of the day.

The tool started spreading and improving.

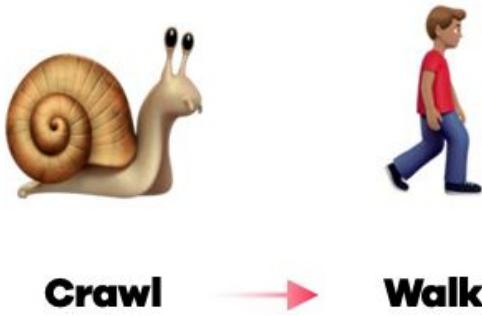
“Innovation is a bottoms-up, decentralized, and unpredictable thing, but that doesn't mean it cannot be managed.” – Eric Ries, The Lean Startup

Once people saw the tool they all wanted to use it too. But it was not quite ready for a full team roll out though. So, a multidisciplinary team tested it and gave feedback.

The biggest issue was identified and implemented. In the beginning, this was based on the most reported / most impact on the core goal. Later on, once we had tracking setup we could base it on actual data.

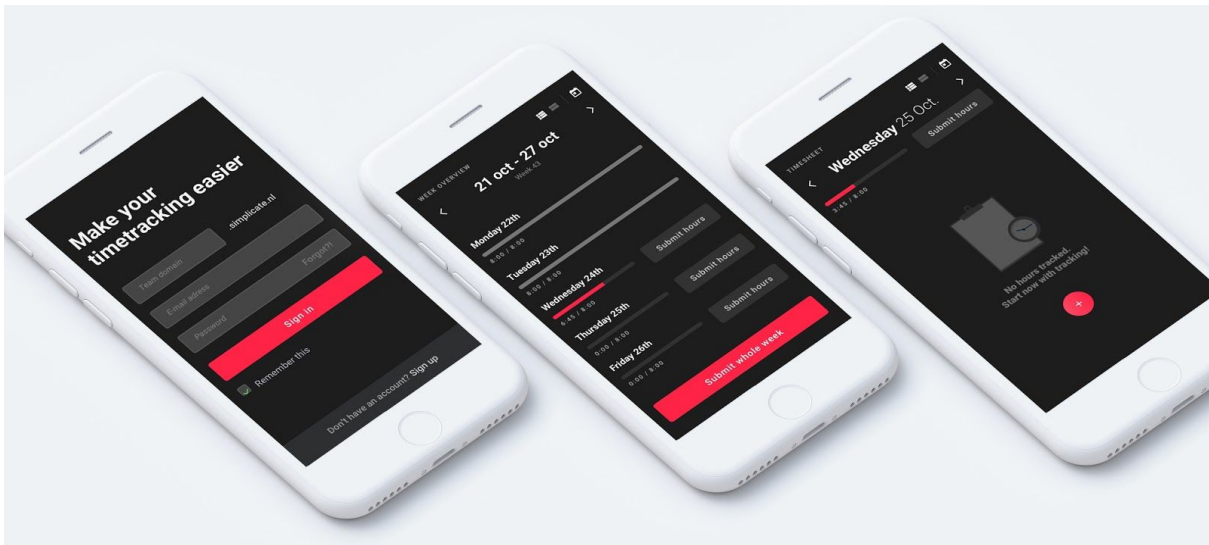
When a developer gave feedback, he was allowed to develop the improvement himself and that it would be merged into the next version. This divided workload had its benefits. It helped improve the tool very fast. Every week there was 1 - 2 updates with bug fixes and feature improvements.

The Walk Phase: Then design got their hands on it

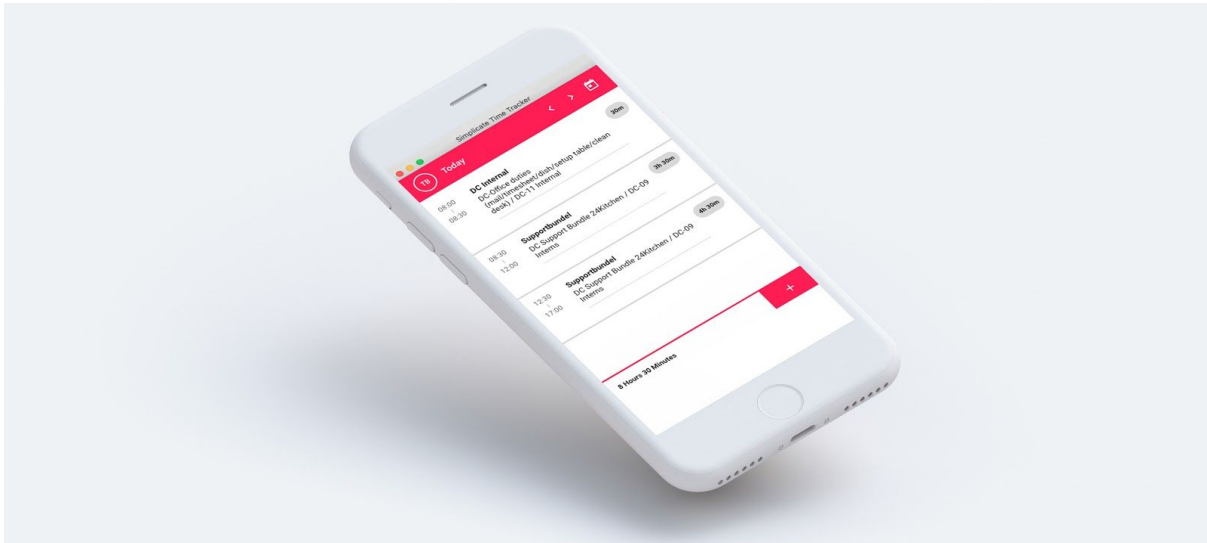


Once the core functionalities were up and running it reached a point where the UX was becoming more and more important for ease of use.

Time to get two Toms on this project. Tom Brusselaars is a design intern at DotControl. This 18-year-old boy genius set to work creating a new design. No way would design work with an ugly time tracker. The final version looked as follows:



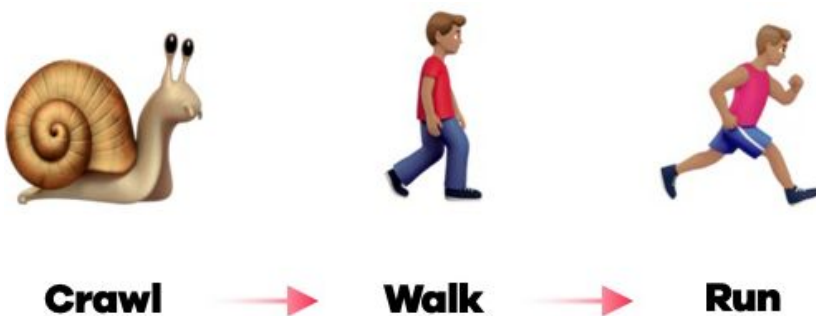
However, as important as the improved design was for the use of the time tracker even this got implemented step by step. With the first version focusing mainly on layout improvements:



Focusing first on implementing the functional benefits of the new design before “pimping it up” further.

"If You're Not Embarrassed By The First Version Of Your Product, You've Launched Too Late" - Reid Hoffman

The Run Phase: Measure what matters



We wanted to implement measurement systems on the app as this allowed us to weigh features when solving bugs: What do more people use? What is key to the functioning of the app? The app was a tricky one to measure as it was built in Electron.

This allowed it to be built extremely quickly but is neither a website or a native app. Luckily we managed in the end:

Event Action ?	Total Events ? ↓
	1,357 % of Total: 100.00% (1,357)
1. show-details	375 (27.63%)
2. add-item	207 (15.25%)
3. prev-date	184 (13.56%)
4. create-item	171 (12.60%)
5. next-date	155 (11.42%)
6. update-item	62 (4.57%)
7. add-new-item	46 (3.39%)
8. create-timer-item	42 (3.10%)
9. error	42 (3.10%)

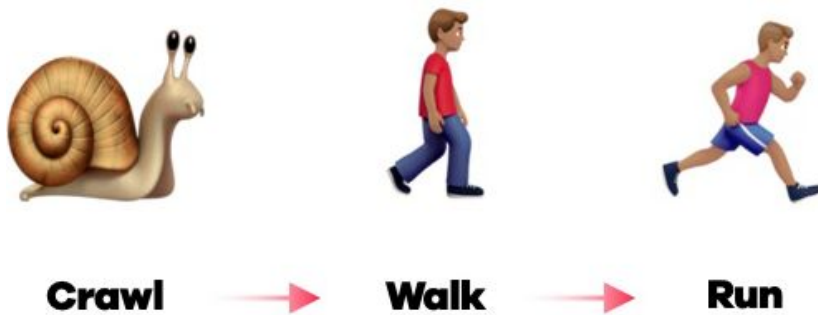
We also set up User IDs via a custom dimension:

Which also allows us to see who is facing issues and when to better pinpoint together with the user what is going wrong.

User ID ?	Sessions ? ↓
	6 % of Total: 4.72% (127)
1. employee:924ea75885fcd6a96d44e34a3f0f8c3d	3 (50.00%)
2. employee:18d74df85341b7e06d44e34a3f0f8c3d	2 (33.33%)
3. employee:ce5237a0ca8c3b1d6d44e34a3f0f8c3d	1 (16.67%)

Which also allows us to see who is facing issues and when to better pinpoint together with the user what is going wrong.

The Win Phase: Full Roll Out



The time tracking app has made huge progress. Right now Tom is fixing multiple bugs and we are doing regular testing by just using it. To avoid getting caught in an endless loop of bug fixes and improvements we decided on five key functionalities for the rollout.

There are many other features that we have ready to go but these are nice to have. The impact of rolling it out sooner is far more valuable.

With every version, you need to have a clear definition of done.

The key learnings

The ongoing project still remains a fun one. It is the kind of project where people gladly work late and extra because there is nothing more awesome than building and improving the business you work for.

We learnt a huge amount from the whole process:

1. The Build, Measure & Learn loop can be used for improving your business too.
2. When a tool or process doesn't work for you find a solution.
3. Use the Crawl, Walk, Run & Win approach to building it up step by step.
4. If developers want improvements, make them work for it and develop it themselves ;).

I think the second one is by far the most important one. It is one of my favourite things about working for RockBoost and with DotControl, our sister organisation. No one accepts a problem as a problem.

“Inside of every problem lies an opportunity.” – Robert Kiposaki

This attitude is in our DNA. Every monthly check-in we ask people for a happiness score. The next questions are always:

1. What can you do to improve it?
2. What can we do to improve it?

It makes sure that you don't just sit back and wait for the world to change but really challenge yourself to improve it too. The new time tracker is just one example of the results of this attitude ;).

Thank you, Tom, for building it and getting us in problem-solving mode. For taking this approach to ensure we could have quick loops and improve the solution step by step. We all can't wait to have it roll out for everyone.