SYNC - Prioritizing product features for an influx of new users

A Product Management Case Study by Irena Medlin

Introduction to Sync

Sync is a video conferencing software that was founded in 2010 and that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic had a solid user base of corporate clients from tech-savvy organizations. When the first lockdown began Sync had a surge of new users from the academic and governmental sector. Monthly active users jumped from 100 million to 500 million over the span of one month.

Sync's revenue comes from a tiered subscription model, with the enterprise tier being the most expensive tier offering special business features. The enterprise tier clients make up about 73% of all sync's revenue.

The Scope

This capstone project is a case study from my Product Management Certification Course with CareerFoundry.

My Role: Product Manager

Project scale: May-September 2023

Skills/methodologies: Agile, Stakeholder Management, User and Market Research, Prioritization Frameworks (RICE, Value vs. Effort, MoSCoW), wireframing and prototyping, user testing (A/B Test)

Tools used: Miro, Confluence, G Suite, Canva, Loom, Parabol.co

The Challenge

Academic and government users have the lowest satisfaction score among all clients user research has shown. Their dissatisfaction is to the many workarounds they have to put in place to make the product work. Their pain points include being unable to control who enters their video conference calls, and what they are able to do and share. As a result, Sync lost between 2020 and 2021 around 4% of their enterprise clients leading to a loss of 3% in revenue.

The CEO is pushing to implement their requests straightaway (the new enhanced permissions feature). Prior to the pandemic and the surge of these new clients the team was working on the management of technical debt as well as pre-pandemic planned features. The Challenge for me as the Product Manager was to implement the new enhanced permission feature that satisfies user and business needs, while also balancing critical backend upgrades.

How did I manage to balance stakeholders' expectations and user needs to align with business strategy? Let's look at the different product phases as I led the team from discovery, through development, to launch.

PHASE 1 - Defining the Problem

We started the product discovery phase with a Value-Damage Quadrant Mapping exercise based on current assumptions, which were based on known user pain points and metrics.

WHAT WAS THE OBJECTIVE?

I led this exercise to help us prioritize features. The mapping revealed that we assumed that Sync would lose more clients by NOT implementing the enhanced permissions feature than from performance problems. Moving forward my hypothesis was that creating the configurable meeting settings will increase customer satisfaction because it directly addresses user pain points and gets rid of the workarounds they had in place.

NEXT STEPS…

I needed to validate our hypothesis, but how?

PHASE 2 - User Research

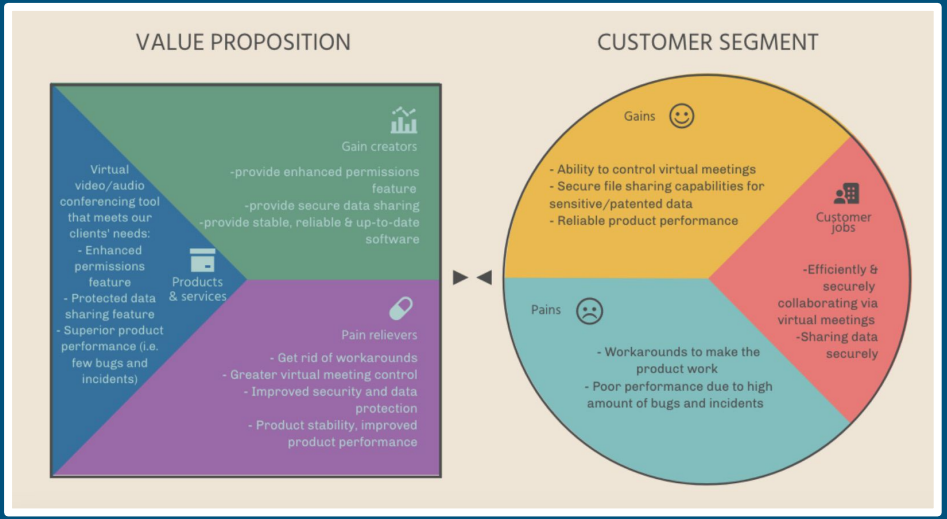
Before allocating limited resources to building a solution for our users we needed to be sure that the hypothesis we were working with is valid.

HOW?

I conducted user research alongside the UX researcher to gather insights and to identify key user requirements. We did this through user interviews, user surveys and analytics. After user research was complete, I analyzed correlations, commonalities, and differences to create a value proposition canvas highlighting user pain points.

THE TAKEAWAY

We validated our hypothesis. Next, we needed to figure out what our solution to the problem would look like.



PHASE 3 - Ideation

2. Scoreboard

IDEA 1: Meeting hosts can configure the settings of what attendees can do in a meeting, such as share screen, share docs, talk, mute others, etc.
IDEA 2: Make reporting bugs/incidents really easy and user friendly (with a grading system of bugs/incidents) and on the company side link this to a ticketing system that prioritizes the most common and recurring issues.

Metrics	IDEA 1	IDEA 2
Business Impact	3	1
Financial Cost	-2	-3
Implementation Effort	-3	-2
User Satisfaction	3	2
Total	1	-2

Scale: 0 = none, 1 = low, 2 = medium, 3 = high

A 'high' score on metrics business impact and user satisfaction is a positive thing, while a 'high' score for metrics financial cost and implementation effort would indicate that it's more difficult to do, which is why their scores are subtracted from the total.

BRAINSTORMING SESSIONS

Using the research findings I led the team in a BRAINWRITING SESSION. We first wrote "how might we…" questions and then we identified product solutions. We ideated on how we might allow meeting hosts and participants to control their own privacy and settings in a meeting.

IDEA PRIORITIZATION

I led the team in a DOT VOTING SESSION followed by SCOREBOARDING, which I personally like due to its analytical approach. The key determinants that helped us decide which idea to move forward with were: 1) business impact, 2) financial cost, 3) implementation effort, & 4) user satisfaction.

IDEA - Configurable meeting settings feature that allows the user preselect the meeting features in order to control who enters meetings, who can share screens, and who can share documents.

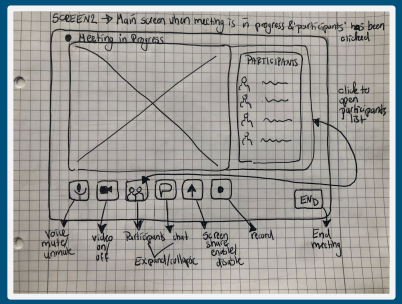
PHASE 4 - Lo-Fi Wireframes & Prototyping

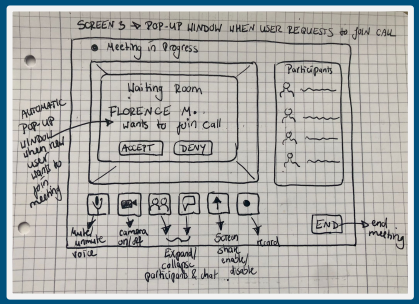
During the development phase we used agile prototyping to make quick iterations and gather early user feedback.

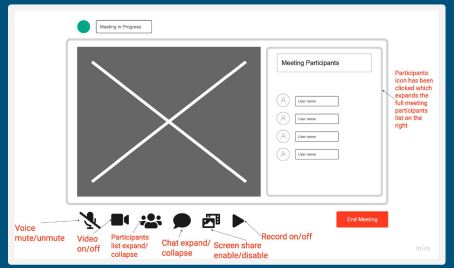
HYPOTHESIS GUIDING PROTOTYPING:
Create a feature that allows admin users to configure meeting settings, which would give them the ability to easily admit users into the call.

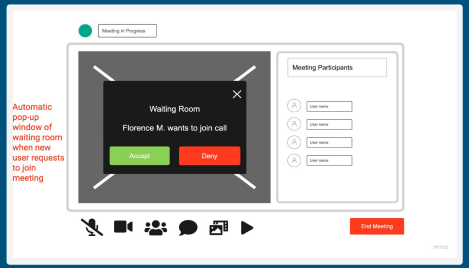
PROTOTYPING APPROACH:

- Create various lo-fi prototypes that address the identified pain points by experimenting with the placement of the “add user” button.
- Do in person user testing of the various prototypes to gather quantitative and qualitative data.
- Analyze gathered data from user testing to iterate and improve/refine prototype.
- Create mid to high-fi prototypes and do more user testing, including unmoderated testing to compare the performance and user satisfaction of prototype against benchmarked data.

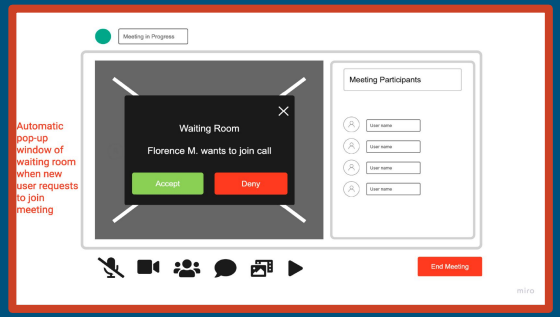




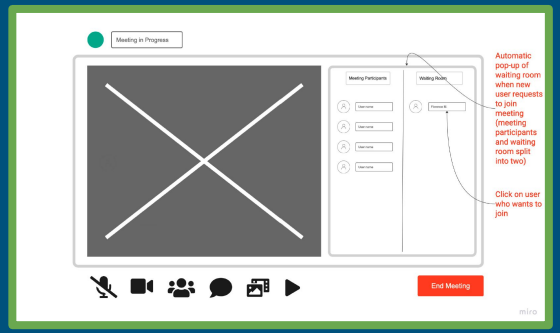




PHASE 5 - User Testing, Iterations & MVP



IMPROVED



User feedback gathered via sequential A/B testing highlighted the DISRUPTIVE & CHALLENGING DESIGN of the waiting room pop-up window. The challenge here was to allow the meeting host to admit/deny a user in the waiting room without blocking the main meeting screen (aka disrupting the meeting in progress).

Once we improved our design we were able to validate our hypothesis. I then used MoSCoW to prioritize key features to include in our MVP given the budget and time constraints. Once we finalized the product requirements we got ready for development.

2. Testing Log

	PROTOTYPE A		
User	Configurable Meeting Settings (Screen 1)	Adding Participant to meeting (Screens 2-4)	Other observations/comments
Boris	It reminds me of microsoft teams. It's familiar and easy to understand.	Why does the waiting room block the meeting screen? That would be very annoying in a real meeting.	On screen 1, what happens if the meeting is in a conference room (location) as well as virtually? Can you indicate this by 'location' in the settings of the meeting?
Ravjit	I like the meeting settings icons, they're pretty universal.	It's pretty straightforward adding a participant into the call, but I personally would be very annoyed if I'm presenting and someone is late and then the waiting room window blocks the entire screen	I like that the deny button is red and accept green, you want to be able to quickly do this action and the colors help
Emma	Pretty straightforward, nothing to add	I could follow along adding a user into the call, it's easy to do. One thing I didn't like is that you can't see the screen anymore once someone is in the waiting room.	

PHASE 6 - Launch & Tracking Metrics

PLANNING

I crafted a thorough launch plan that included: key stakeholders, launch objectives, logistics and operations, budget, marketing strategy, product monitoring and risk mitigation strategy.

I chose a soft-launch to gather user feedback from our core academic and government clients. The rationale behind the soft launch was our limited marketing funds. A soft launch is a good way of gauging the impact on user engagement and satisfaction and dealing with any issues before committing to a full-scale release.

RISK MITIGATION

SECTION 4 - PRODUCT MONITORING

Open/known issues

Issue	Workaround/Customer Advice	Resolution Planned?	Owner
Accumulated technical debt, i.e. potential for a blackout	We are working on balancing the management of technical debt while providing the newest features. We have a monitoring system in place that continuously tracks the overall system health. In case of a blackout in the first few months of launch, please know that we are immediately working on resolving the issue.	Yes	Engineering Team
Backwards compatibility of our app	We are in the process of making our app backwards compatible for older versions of iOS and Android phones. Please be patient, if you have one of the older versions. We expect to roll out this update by early next year.	Yes	Engineering Team
Performance and technical issues across different operating systems	We are working on aligning the code base for iOS and Android, however, should technical issues arise please report them as soon as possible via the appropriate channel (in app, or to customer support).	Yes	Engineering Team

METRICS

The following metrics would be closely monitored, if this product were actually launched.

Launch Metrics

Metric Category	Metric	Success Criteria	Owner
User Retention	Churn rate among academic and government clients for 6 months post-launch	Success is defined by 90% or higher retention rate among academic and government clients (decrease churn rate by 3% compared to 2022).	Product Team & Customer Support Team
User Satisfaction	Satisfaction score from scale of 1 to 5, measured 6 months post-launch	Success is measured by increasing the satisfaction score from ⅗ to ⅘ within 6 months of launch.	Product Team & Customer Support Team
User Adoption	Number of new registered users from governments and academia in the first full month post-launch.	Success means, if, in the first full month post launch, we increase the number of monthly new registered users from governments and academia by 10% compared to pre-launch.	Sales Team & Marketing Team

CONCLUSION - Retrospective & Continuous Improvement

Post-launch monitoring and analysis are key in analyzing, if the launch objectives are being met. Here I look at MY RETROSPECTIVE following the hypothetical soft launch.

WHAT WENT WELL?
Working with the given data to extract the most user insights and ideate on solutions. I got positive feedback from my mentor about the how I prioritized the backlog and the gathered product requirements.

WHAT WAS CHALLENGING?
It was challenging to develop a specific risk mitigation strategy given the limited scope of the case study brief. It would have been less challenging, if I had been given more details on previous technical challenges the product faced.

WHAT DID I LEARN?
The importance of shared spaces and the PRD, which I returned to again and again to align the team and ensure that we are all moving towards our product goal.