

# When UX Teams Become Stage Designers: Emulating Field Research in the Usability Lab

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**TECED** user experience  
research and design

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# Study Goals

The product team wanted to gain a broad understanding of:

- Tasks and activities their target audience performed with mobile devices
- How those activities changed when users were in different settings



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# What Settings?

The team wanted to learn about users' behavior:

- At home
- In the office or workplace
- In a public setting like a restaurant or sports bar



# Ideal Methodology

- Visit each participant three times, once in each setting, or
- Spend a day following each participant while s/he moves among the three settings



# Research Design Challenges

- No budget to use classic field research methodology
- Schedule constraints allowed only two weeks for the entire study—planning, execution, and data compilation
- What we could do: recruit ten people from the target audience to spend 75 minutes in our usability lab



# What Could We Do?

- A simple interview protocol, asking participants to imagine they were at home, at the office, and at a restaurant
- It helped that the participants could use their own mobile devices during the interviews



# Not Good Enough

We wanted to:

- Ground the participants more physically and contextually in each of the environments
- Provide visual and kinesthetic cues, so responses to questions about the locations would be realistic

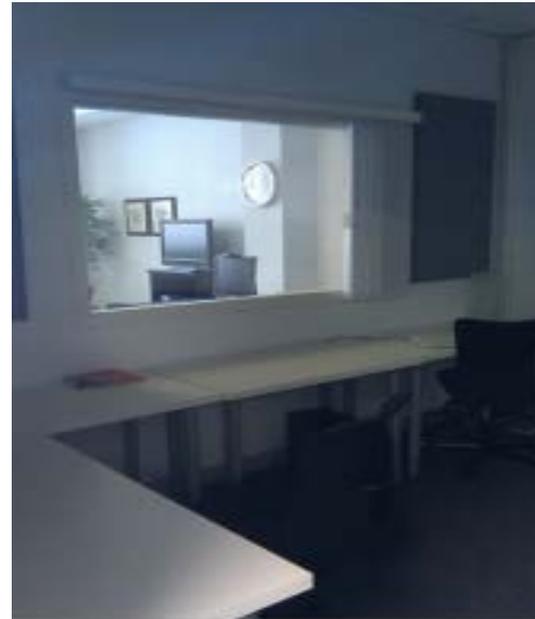


# What Did We Do?

- Turned our usability lab and observation room into the three desired environments
- Divided the lab in two—one area became the home and the other the office
- Observation room became the “Go Blue Bar & Grill”



# TecEd Usability Lab



Our usability lab (multi-purpose with conference room) and observation room before the stage design transformation



# Home Setting



The home environment was a living room, with reclining chair, coffee table, and large-screen TV.



# Office Setting



The office environment was a typical office cubicle, with computer and whiteboard.



# Sports Bar Setting



Our observation room became the “Go Blue Bar & Grill”—our pièce de résistance, in honor of our University of Michigan locale.



# Scheduling and Resources

- Usually participant recruiter is also lab coordinator
  - We added stage designer
- 6 working days, not 2
- Usually lab study moderator takes own notes
  - We added observer/note-taker



# Conducting the Sessions

- “Day in the Life” introduction
- “Day with Technology” interview
- 20 minutes in each setting
  - Settings were counterbalanced
- Wrap-up interview



# Capturing the Sessions

Facilitator, observer, videographer

- Facilitator focused on participant and dialog
- Observer used note-taking forms on laptop
- Videographer used two cameras: handheld and back-up camera on tripod



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# What Did We Learn?

- Participants behaved in ways we don't usually see in the lab
- This gave us confidence that we were collecting similar data to ethnographic interviews in real settings



# How Participants Behaved (1)



# How Participants Behaved (2)



# What We Learned

- Don't try to do it in two weeks!
- Follow field research methodology as much as possible
- Creating the stage settings needs visual design experience
- Don't over-promise—stage settings don't replace actual field research



# Recommended Project Timeline



# Thank You!

- What questions do you have?
- Or email [stephanie@teced.com](mailto:stephanie@teced.com)
- Or call 650-493-1010 x 102
- Or call 734-995-1010 x 102

