CASE STUDY:

VENTURE
FOR AMERICA

Maximizing Value Through Validation

LeanDog

BACKGROUND

Venture For America (VFA) is a fellowship program that places recent graduates at startups in cities with emerging entrepreneurial ecosystems, forging a community of entrepreneurs committed to building companies that matter.

VFA uses software to help fellows and startups to find each other, then track progress through the recruiting and hiring process. VFA also provides a concierge service that monitors the hiring process through the match software and provides feedback on how fellows and startups could improve, offering personalized match recommendations, and helping the hiring process move forward when things gets stuck. The fundamental goals of the VFA match software are to get fellows placed at startups and for startups to fill their open positions with fellows.

VFA engaged with LeanDog to validate and implement changes they wanted to make to their match software to improve user experience and user engagement.

The VFA had identified several pain points in their existing software that had led users to side-step the matching software. Unfortunately, providing the concierge type service became a challenge when users went around the system, because VFA could no longer gather that data.

VFA wanted to improve the overall user experience so that users would use the match software throughout the whole hiring process.

VFA's match season was set to start in 2 months and they didn't have a lot of budget to work with; however, because they had spoken spoken to their users, they were certain they knew how to solve the problem.

THE SOLUTION

To validate the new user experiences and proposed changes, LeanDog utilized scripted user interviews with low fidelity prototypes of the changes VFA had identified. The user interviews did validate that *some* of the changes improved the user experience, but that many proposed changes actually provided a worse experience with some users stating they would just opt out of the whole program if they were forced to use the proposed system.

LeanDog iterated on new changes, low fidelity prototypes and user interviews to define a new set of changes that would dramatically improve the user experience

and provide the visibility that VFA needed to provide their concierge service throughout the process.

VFA's original approach was to try to force users into using their match software for every step of the hiring process in order to gather data they needed for the concierge service. Instead LeanDog focused on how to get the information that VFA needed while allowing participants to use their own systems for tracking the hiring process and communication. In this way, both the needs of VFA and the needs of the users could be satisfied.

LeanDog then worked with VFA to prioritize a feature backlog that would maximize the value they could achieve with the budget they had. A cross-functional team of designers and engineers implemented the highest value changes to the match software within VFA's budget and in time for VFA's 2016 match season.

THE RESULTS

VFA successfully used the new match software to place 165 out of 171 fellows by the end of June. Validating the proposed changes enabled VFA to make the most of their budget and avoid spending on changes that would have actually reduced user happiness and could have led to user abandonment. Prioritizing work by user and business value enabled VFA to get the most bang for their money.

LOOKING FORWARD

Learning how to validate changes with users and prioritizing changes based on value has given VFA a solid foundation to evolve the match software for future seasons.