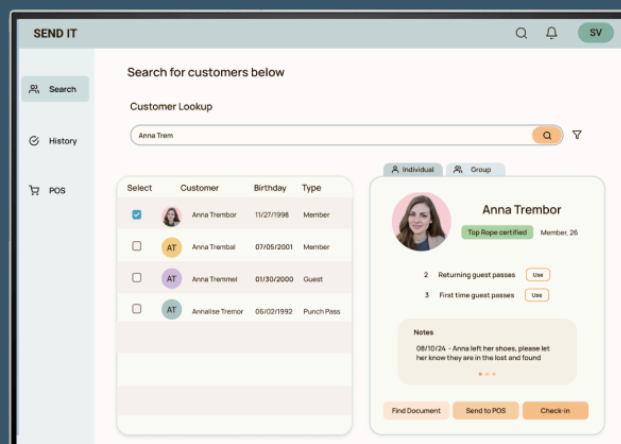
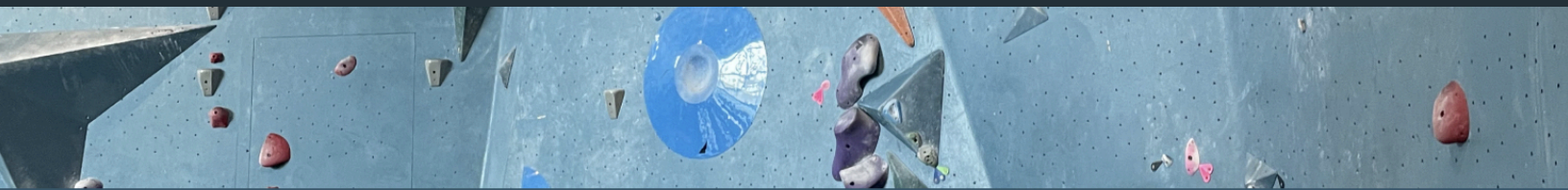


EMPOWERING CLIMBING GYM WORKERS TO BETTER ASSIST CUSTOMERS

In 2022, I fostered my love of climbing by working at my local climbing gym in North Carolina. Over time I noticed some serious pain points in the experience while working for my fellow colleagues and I.

I moved across the country to California in 2023 and joined the workforce of a gym there while I was transitioning into Design. Here I also saw that climbing gym workers have many responsibilities and tasks to keep track of and a less than ideal way to help them.





THE EXPERIENCE “FALL OFF”

It's 10 am in the climbing gym and you're helping a customer asking you to help find the jacket they left at the gym last week - out of the corner of your eye you can see another customer, rental shoes in hand, presumably waiting to exchange for another size.

Then you hear a beeping noise - sounds like the washer for towels is done. As you go to look in the lost and found you turn off the alarm for the towels and thankfully find the jacket for the customer.

While giving them their lost jacket, they mention that the hairdryer in the bathroom is not working - you will put in a note to maintenance later - but now you moved on to the customer waiting to switch their rental shoe size -

The mental note of notifying maintenance to look at the problem is gone and you forget to let them know, not to mention the towels now sitting wet in the washer which you'll remember a bit later. With all of these things occurring at once it sure would be nice to have a tool to help you...



Me falling off of a boulder problem, feeling discouraged, like many of the users.

This is an all too common scenario that climbing gym workers experience. The multitasking and switching between assisting customers and completing tasks can take a toll on their focus and outcomes ultimately leading to overwhelmed staff members and potentially unsatisfactory encounters with customers.

APPROACHING A SOLUTION - “FINDING THE BETA”

My goal for this project was to create a solution that would provide climbing gym workers with a better experience by assisting them with the information and processes they need to remember.

A big factor in creating a solution was helping the climbing gym workers feel empowered in their decision making and interactions with the gym’s customers.

Beta - “climbing term that designates information about how to ascend a climbing route and the climbing techniques required.” (Wikipedia)

MY ROLE

I worked on this project as the first capstone in the Springboard bootcamp curriculum. While working on this project, I operated as a design team of one with guidance from my mentor to gather insights, ideate on designs, and receive user feedback.

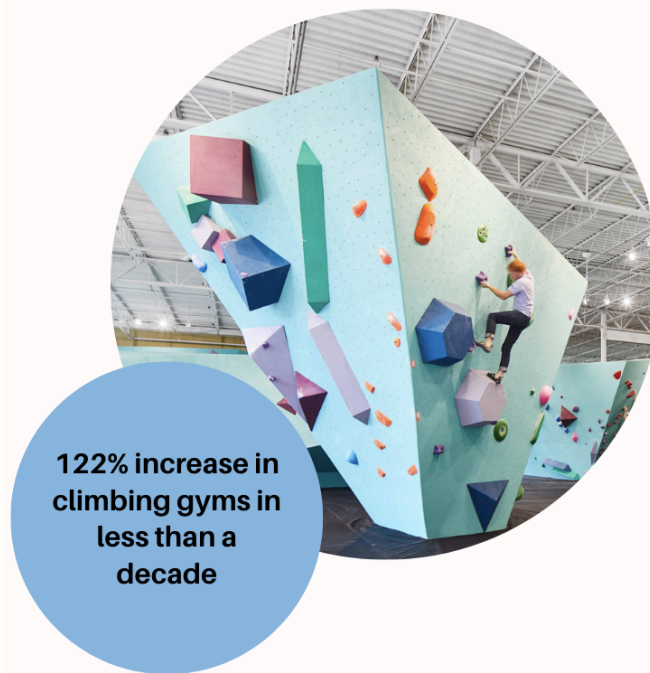
TIMELINE	December 2023 - February 2025
PLATFORM	Desktop application
TOOLS	Figma, Miro, Milanote

WHAT IS CLIMBING?...AND WHO ARE THE CLIMBING GYM WORKERS?

I had some pre-existing ideas of the climbing gym industry as a customer and employee for a few years, but I decided to gather more information about the climbing industry and the climbing gym workers within it to help gain a holistic perspective when approaching a solution.

“With the US indoor rock climbing market values north of \$500M, there’s still more demand for gyms than supply.”

(Fedeli, Kristen)



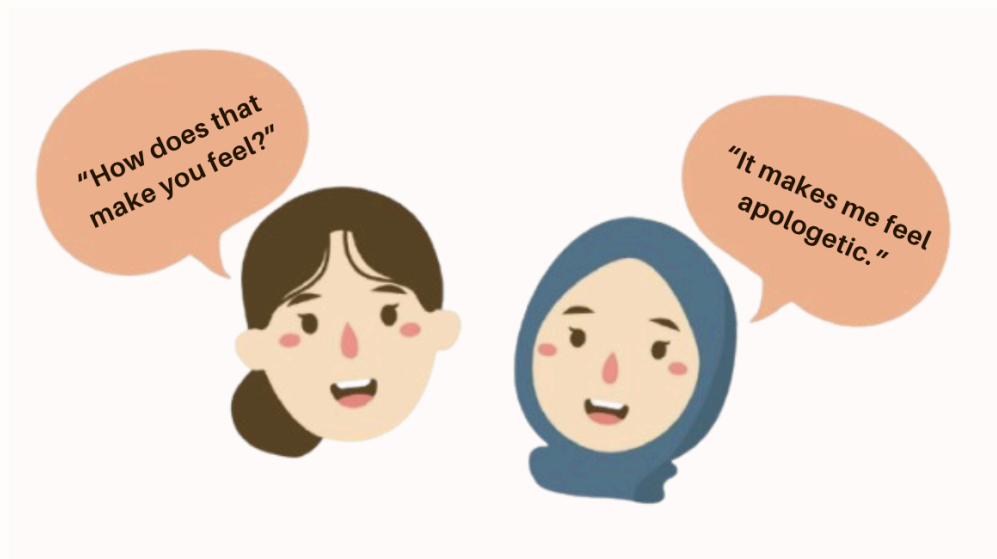
122% increase in
climbing gyms in
less than a
decade

I found that climbing as a sport has soared in popularity especially since being added as an Olympic sport in 2021 and being featured in the award winning documentary, Free Solo.

HEARING FROM USERS

To better understand the users' pain points, needs, and experiences, I decided to hear from them. I conducted **semi-structured interviews with six current climbing gym employees** and took notes.

In order to keep my questions relevant and stay consistent while interviewing I wrote a discussion guide.



MAKING SENSE OF THE FINDINGS

To make sense of the data I collected, I used affinity mapping to find recurring themes in the users' responses and sorted them into categories.

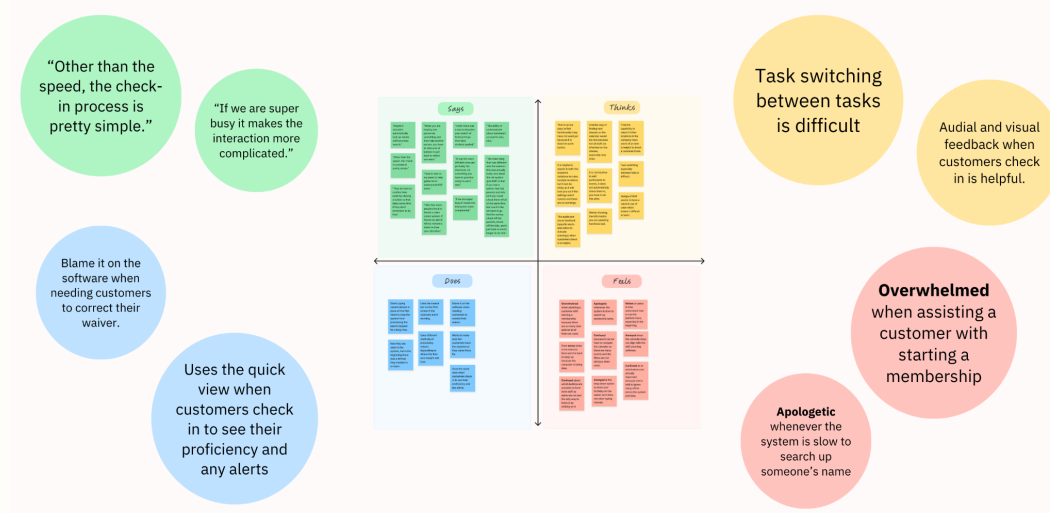
AFFINITY MAPPING



I found that the *users strongly value intuitive navigation, obvious alerts, and quick streamlined processes* based on user feedback.

EMPATHY MAPPING

After finding some common themes in the user's input, I wanted to understand not just what the users said but also how they think, feel, and act to get a full picture.



Empathy map

Through empathy mapping I found that my users had strong feelings while working such as:

Overwhelmed...

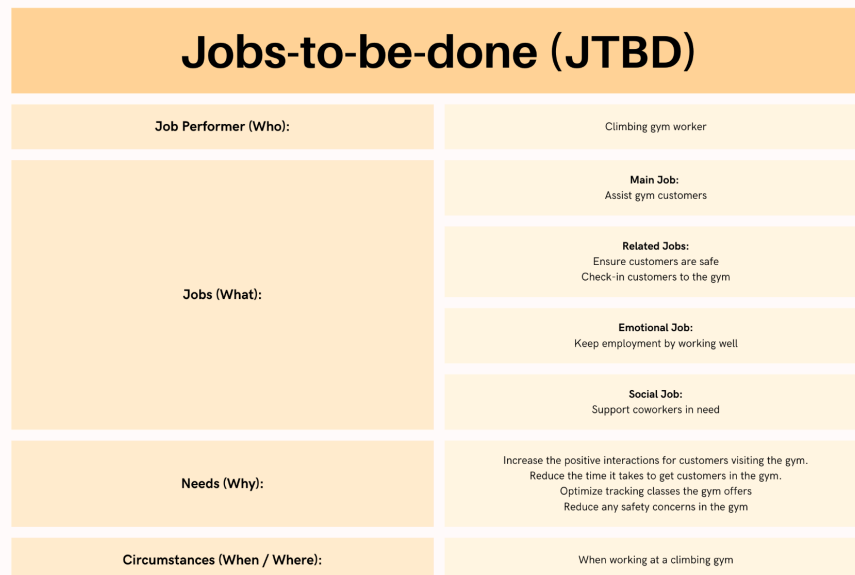
when assisting a customer with starting a membership

Apologetic...

whenever the system is slow to search up someone's name

JOBS TO BE DONE

This along with my results from affinity mapping led me to create a structure to navigate my user's needs with all the types of jobs that need to be done by them. The process made me consider not just the main job of the user but also the emotional and social aspects.



Jobs to be done diagram

I found that climbing gym workers not only have a job of assisting customers, they also have a *job of ensuring the customers and their coworkers are safe and supported.*

DEFINING THE USER

To transform my data in a user-centered manner, I crafted a persona of my target users.

Pam is a passionate climbing gym worker who aims to have positive interactions with customers to promote community growth and encourage safety.

Goals

Understand the tool she uses better.

Make sure all customers are being safe in the gym.

Use good communication to promote community and growth.

Positive customer interactions for both her and the customer.

"I want to make sure they get to have the experience they came here for."



Passionate Pam Persona

She sometimes finds it hard to navigate the various processes at the gym and switching between helping other customers.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The responsibilities of climbing gym workers could vary based on gym but below are some of the most universal responsibilities for specifically front desk workers:

- Making sure all customers have an active waiver.
- Make sure everyone who enters the facility checks in.
- Execute transactions for customers to purchase.
- Assist customers with account inquiries and changes.
- Some users may have to teach classes (ex: belaying).

REFRAMING THE PROBLEM - “CHALKING UP”

A challenge I faced throughout this process was the inherent bias I held as a user of Rock Gym Pro - on one side it was very helpful to literally be in the user's shoes as a user myself but on

the other hand I sometimes felt like this held me back from thinking outside of my pre-existing experience box.

I knew I needed to reframe the problem to focus on the users and their pain points and not just designing a different version of Rock Gym Pro / Approach.

Chalking up - refers to applying chalk (magnesium carbonate) to your hands in preparation to start climbing after assessing the route.

HOW MIGHT WE...

Make the process of navigating between customers quicker and easier?

Make the process of searching for information quicker and more intuitive?

Encourage safety and certification alerts to be apparent?

Prevent errors in the waiver process?

EARLY IDEATION

USER STORIES

To explore the user's needs and divergently think about the problem, I put myself in the user's shoes and outlined some goals the user has and why.

While doing this I prioritized them to make sure that my solution included functionalities that would at least satisfy the minimum viable product for my users.

As a...

climbing gym worker

I want to...

see if customers are belay certified

so that...

I know if the customer

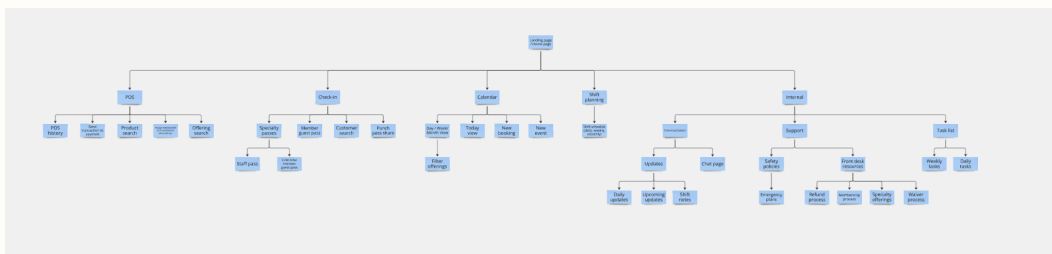
knows safe belay technique

SITE MAPS

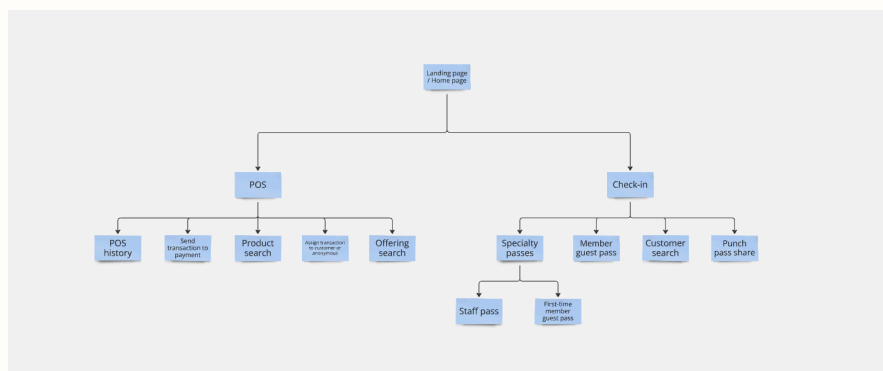
To organize the content that I would include in the solution and prepare for planning how the user would flow through it, I made a sitemap as a visual reference.

After making the sitemap, I realized that including all of the possible features I listed in the sitemap was not realistic for the scope of my project, and not all of the features truly aligned with what my users critically needed.

From a bloated map not fully supported by user feedback



To a more focused intentional map with the user in mind



USER FLOWS

I kept what I learned in making the sitemap and reducing the scope in mind as I identified which pathways were necessary for the user's needs. I found the below four flows to be red routes from my time understanding the users.

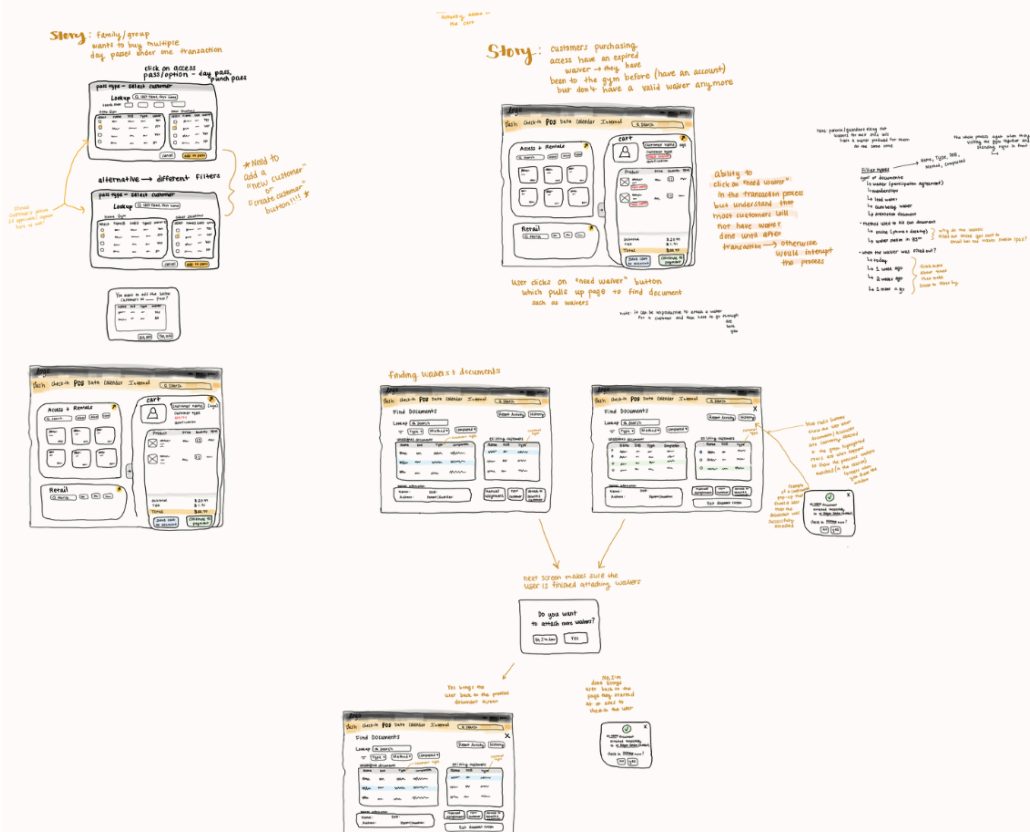
1. Assisting the customer to sign a waiver with the gym.
2. Checking customers into the gym.
3. Selling something to a customer.
4. Assisting a customer with starting a membership.

Laying out the user flows for each of the red routes helped to visually show me each step of the user's journey and check to see if there were any barriers before starting the physical design work.

SKETCHING + LOW FIDELITY WIREFRAMES

Full of enthusiasm, I sketched rough wireframes of my user's red routes on my tablet and eventually moved them to Figma. I had many imaginative ideas fueled from my own experiences as I was also a user myself, but I focused on keeping the priority on the user's needs supported by research.

I tested out many different layouts based on my user's needs, insights from other climbing gym solutions, and inspiration from similar internal tool products.



Some early sketches of the point-of-sale process

Transferring my sketches to Figma as wireframes was helpful as it allowed me to get a better visual of the basic layout of each page before I moved on to a higher fidelity.

A SOLUTION TO HELP YOU “SEND” YOUR CUSTOMERS TO SUCCESS

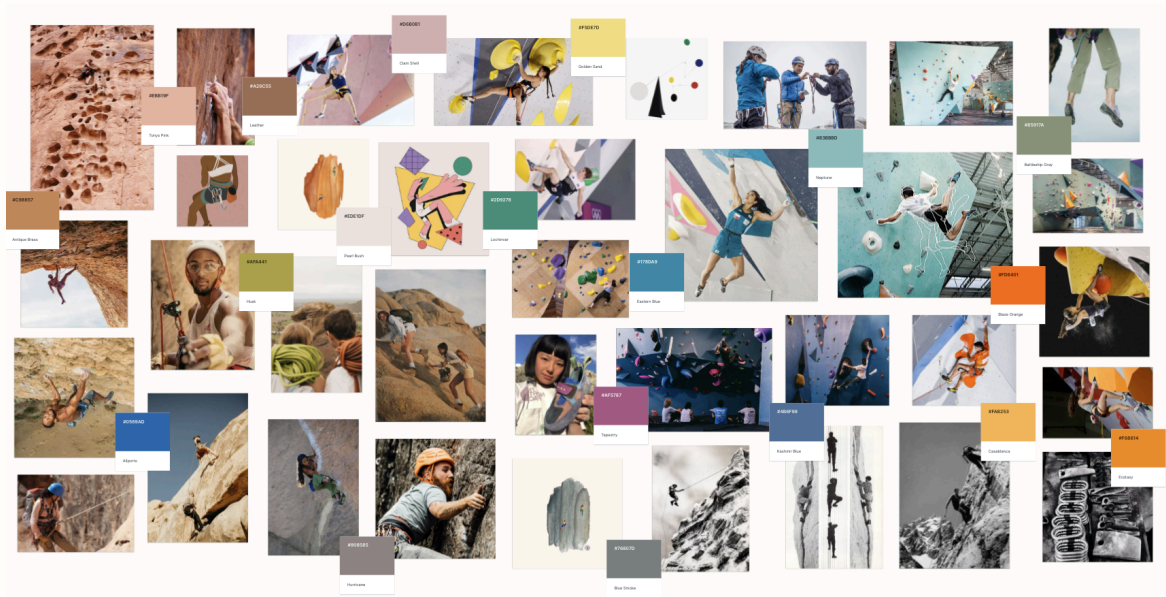
As I completed this project as part of a bootcamp, there was no “real” company/brand I was designing this solution for...yet

Enter “**Send It**”, a solution to help you “send” your customers to success.

“Send it” is a phrase that you can hear while around climbing. People often use it as an acknowledgment for how good you are climbing and encouragement to keep going and finish strong as to send a route “means successfully reaching the top and finishing a climb”.

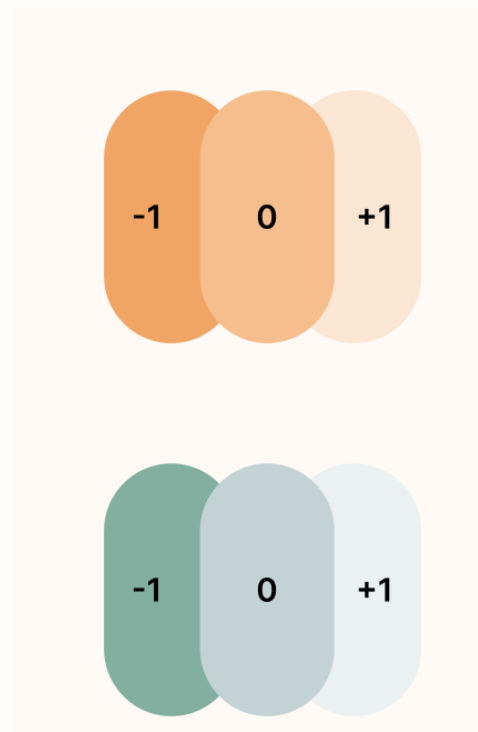
Send It will help the users to positively “send” the customers to success in their efforts visiting the gym whether that be to climb, spectate, workout in the fitness area, or attend a class.

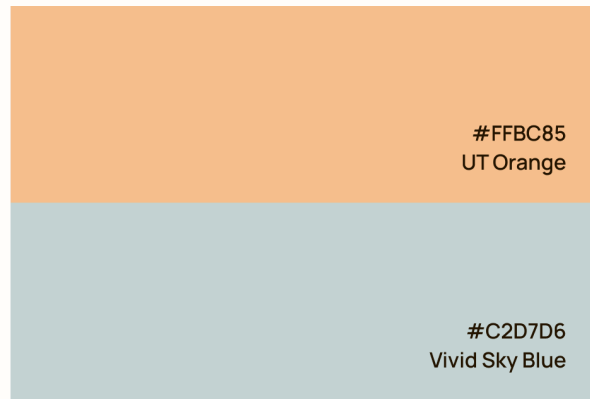
Send It is intended to bridge the gap between the old school climbers and the bright new faces in the sport. Based on the brand's identity as well as the background of climbing and my users, I created a mood board to help visualize the brand and inspire my selection of color and typography.



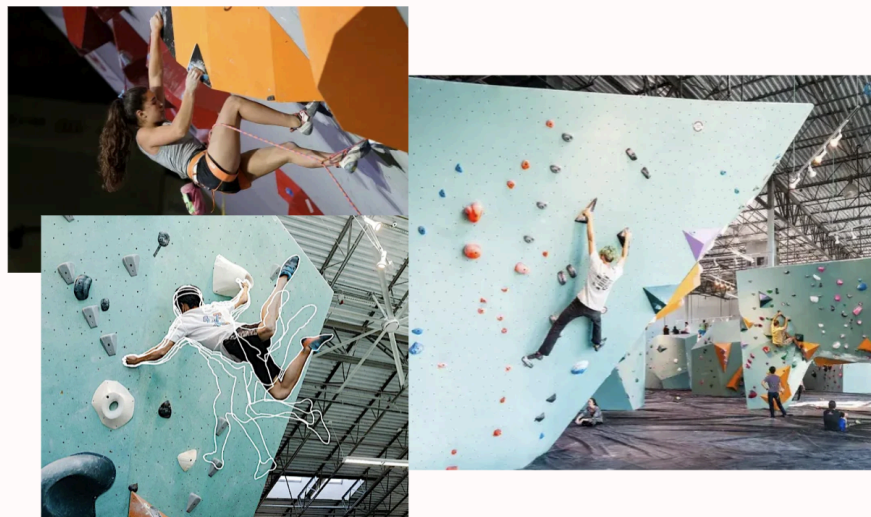
COLORS - PRIMARY + SECONDARY

To bring attention and energy to important elements I chose **UT Orange** as the primary color as orange is energetic like the industry and users as well as commonly found climbing outdoors where rocks have warm tones.





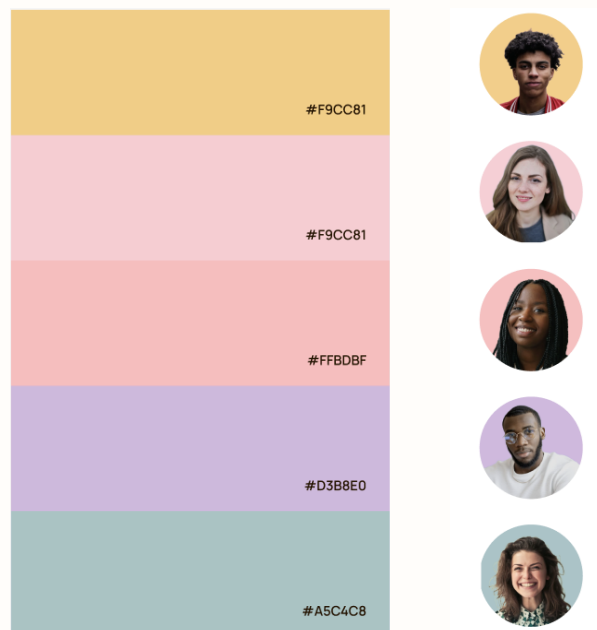
For the secondary background color, I was inspired by Bouldering Project's blue green walls as the “background” to the holds (shaped grip that is usually attached to a climbing wall so that climbers can grab or step on it) which is how I intended the secondary color to be - a background to the elements on the UI. Vivid Sky Blue is also relatively complementary to UT Orange and provides a natural hierarchy on the screen.



COLORS - ACCENT

I chose some secondary colors to use throughout the UI such as behind the profile pictures of customers. I was inspired to have the secondary colors feel as if they were climbing holds on the foreground of the green blue wall background.

I intentionally selected these colors to be relatively muted as I wanted to make sure the warnings and errors stood out to the users first based on their feedback in the user interviews.



I checked the contrast of my primary and secondary colors with the text color on WebAIM to make sure the contrast ratio was high enough to be accessible for all users. I also tried to make my primary colors accessible for people with colorblindness to distinguish as it is not as common for people to have difficulty between blue and orange.

TYPOGRAPHY

To make sure the copy was easy to read quickly and correctly by my users I wanted a typeface that felt familiar to what my users are used to using. I only chose one typeface, Manrope, for the whole application and established hierarchy with varying size and weight.

Manrope was the perfect fit for this solution as it's a clean and modern sans-serif typeface similar to popularly used typefaces in other technology applications.

Headings	Manrope SemiBold 28 pt
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Subheadings	Manrope SemiBold 23 pt
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	Manrope SemiBold 19 pt
--	------------------------

Body	Manrope Medium 16 pt
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PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

A SHIFT IN PERSPECTIVE

During the process of making the high fidelity screens, my mentor helped guide me through deeply thinking about the user's journey of using the product. With her help I realized that after putting aside my bias from using other solutions in the space, I could imagine other possibilities for how the user would interact with Send it.

Instead of focusing only on a task-based flow for the user, I switched the perspective to being primarily customer based and secondarily task based. I felt that this could resonate better with my users as they mentioned that customer encounters usually occur through discovering more and more information as the conversation occurs. Often the first pieces of information a user has to work with is the customer's name, birthday, etc.

Now there was a "Customer" tab which was primarily focused on finding customer information and then taking whatever action was needed. The user could navigate anywhere else on the application from the "Customer" tab so it is a good place to

start if, for instance, you only had the customer's name or personal information to start. Not having all of the background/information about what a customer needs is common and having somewhere where the user can go automatically reduces their mental load.

I also included a "History" tab which showed the previous customer check-ins and a "POS" (point-of-sale) tab where transactions can be completed. These tabs are more task based as the users mentioned that sometimes they have enough direction in a customer interaction to navigate here first.

RED ROUTE PROTOTYPING

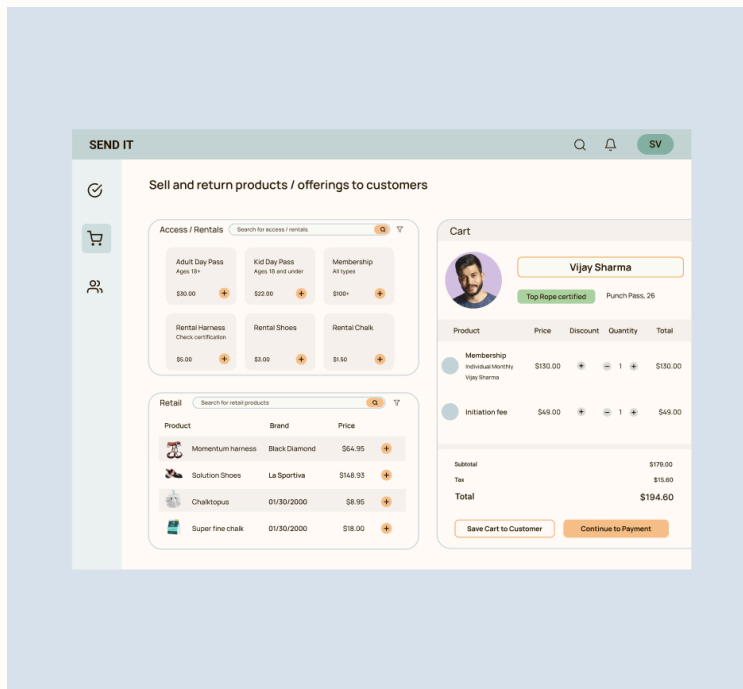
I chose to prototype specific scenarios to provide the users with an immersive experience similar to a customer encounter they are used to while they test the prototype.

A member wants to check in a guest using their guest pass.

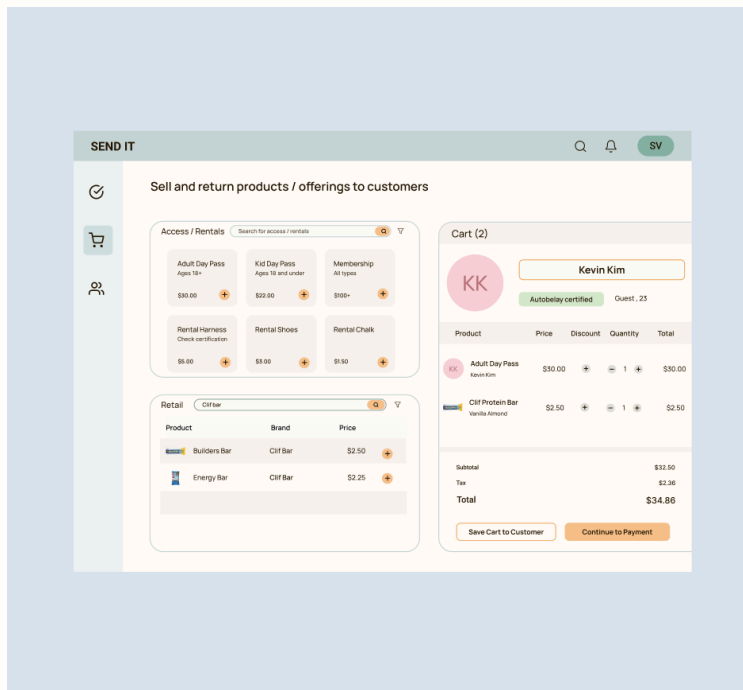
A member just checked in but their waiver expired.

A member just checked in but their waiver expired.

A customer would like to buy and start a membership.



A customer would like to access the gym and buy a protein bar



USABILITY TESTING - ROUND 1

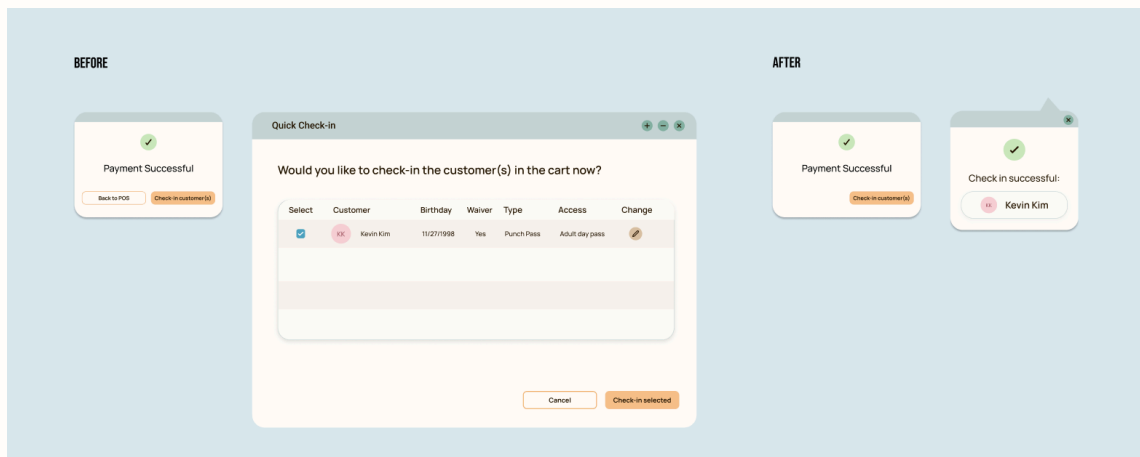
Now that I had an initial prototype I had to see if the users found it to be helpful or not. I conducted virtual and in-person usability tests with five climbing gym workers to get some feedback and see if they encountered any problems.

I sifted through all of the feedback and notes from testing and designated issues the users encountered or brought to my attention into severity scales of critical, major, minor, and normal. I decided to spend time adjusting my design for all critical issues as well as some major issues.

WHAT I CHANGED + WHY

Streamlined the check-in process after day pass purchase

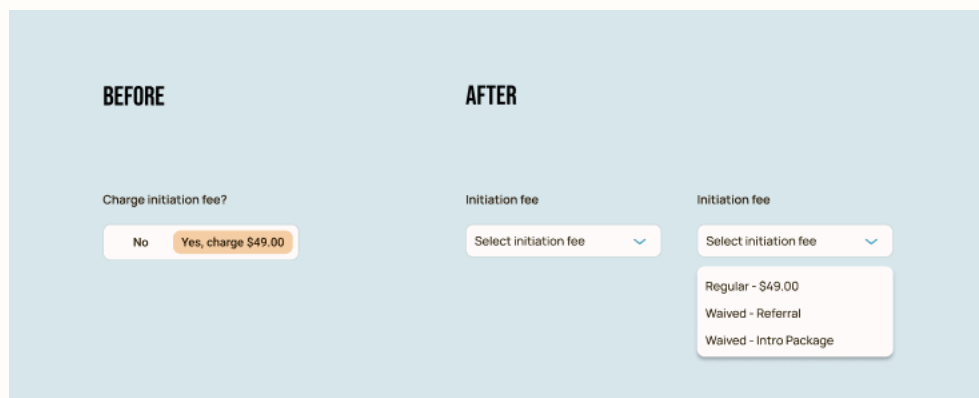
Issue: Four out of five users felt the check-in prompt after purchasing a day pass was unnecessary, as check-in is implied.



Impact: Automatically checking in the customer or offering a check-in confirmation removes an extra step, enhancing workflow efficiency. With most participants highlighting this, the change addresses a broadly recognized usability flaw

Improved visibility of initiation fee selection

Issue: a few users mentioned that they found it unclear whether the initiation fee switch was selected.



Impact: This risked accidental charges or omissions. Changing the initiation fee to a clear, selectable option (e.g., checkboxes or a dropdown with a forced decision) ensures staff can confidently apply fees. This fix, noted by two participants, prevents errors in a financially sensitive area, boosting trust in the system.

Pre-filled guest pass dropdown to eliminate redundancy

Issue: All users found it redundant to select the guest pass type from a dropdown after already choosing it via a specific button.

The image shows a side-by-side comparison of a user interface element. On the left, under the heading 'BEFORE', is a form with the label 'What type of guest pass?'. To its right is a dropdown menu with the text 'Select pass type' and a downward arrow. On the right, under the heading 'AFTER', is the same form with the label 'What type of guest pass?'. To its right is a dropdown menu that is pre-filled with the word 'Returning' and has a downward arrow.

Impact: Changing the dropdown to be pre-filled with the type of guest pass previously selected reduces user frustration and makes it quicker and less bearing on the user to check guests in.

Assigned cart customer default for membership signup

Issue: Three users found it redundant to search for a customer again after assigning them to the cart when proceeding to membership signup.

BEFORE

AFTER

BEFORE

Adult Day Pass

Customer Lookup

Vijay Sharma

Select	Customer	Birthday	Waiver	Location	Type
☐	VS Vijay Sharma	01/29/1985	Yes	Dallas - Design District	Punch Pass
☒	VS Vijay Sharma	10/11/1998	Yes	Sunnyvale	Punch Pass
☐	VS Vijay Sharmen	05/15/2001	No	New York - Gowanus	Guest

Select Customer

AFTER

Adult Day Pass

Do you want to use the same customer as previously?

Customer	Birthday	Waiver	Location	Type
VS Vijay Sharma	10/11/1998	Yes	Sunnyvale	Punch Pass

Select Customer

Customer Lookup

Search for customer

Select	Customer	Birthday	Waiver	Location	Type
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Impact: Setting the cart customer as the default eliminates unnecessary repetition, improving the signup process's speed and intuitiveness. This change benefits staff handling frequent membership tasks, addressing a significant usability concern.

USABILITY TESTING - ROUND 2

The second round of usability testing with users was very insightful for me. The users pointed out any problems they encountered and opened my eyes further to bias in the design despite my attempts to limit it.

Manual waiver matching is a pain

Some users pointed out that the process of manually matching a waiver was still a painful part of the process even with the design work I did within assumed constraints.

It is painful because it opens up the chance of the customer making an error when filling out the document as well as the manual nature of matching the document to an account can take time and effort.

I would have to dive deeper into discovering the exact compliance requirements from a legal standpoint in order to determine what could be done to further minimize the user's mental load.

For example, some gyms require an ID check before matching a legal document to an account so having a manual matching process can serve as an indicator to the user that the ID has not been checked yet.

Improve progressive disclosure without sacrificing speed

When testing the membership setup with my users I noticed that some had trouble knowing the order in which steps had to be completed. Implementing a clearer visual indicator of which step is next considering a more progressive disclosure of information could help serve as a guide for the user.

Too many clicks?

A few of the users mentioned that during the process there was a lot of clicking as well as relatively small areas to focus their clicks. For example, one user noticed that in order to select a customer they had to click on the radio button on that customer's row instead of being able to select by clicking on the row in general. After that there was a button for the user to select the customer.

Feedback I received was that being able to double click in that scenario would be helpful. Users also mentioned having keyboard shortcuts associated with CTAs which is a goal to add but was not functional for the prototype testing itself.

POSITIVE RESULTS AND MUCH MORE TO DO

The efforts in designing a tool for climbing gym workers to use while working has had an overall positive impact on their experience. Based on my conversations and testing with the users, switching the perspective of the application from solely task-based to primarily customer-based and secondarily task-based was more useful for customer interactions.

In my first round of usability testing, I noted key pain points that blocked my users from completing each goal. After some adjustments, users no longer felt these pain points in my second round of usability testing.

Moving forward to improve this solution, I would adjust the design post second usability testing and test again as well as expand the scope of the solution based on user feedback.