



PROTOTYPING YOUR APP TO SUCCESS

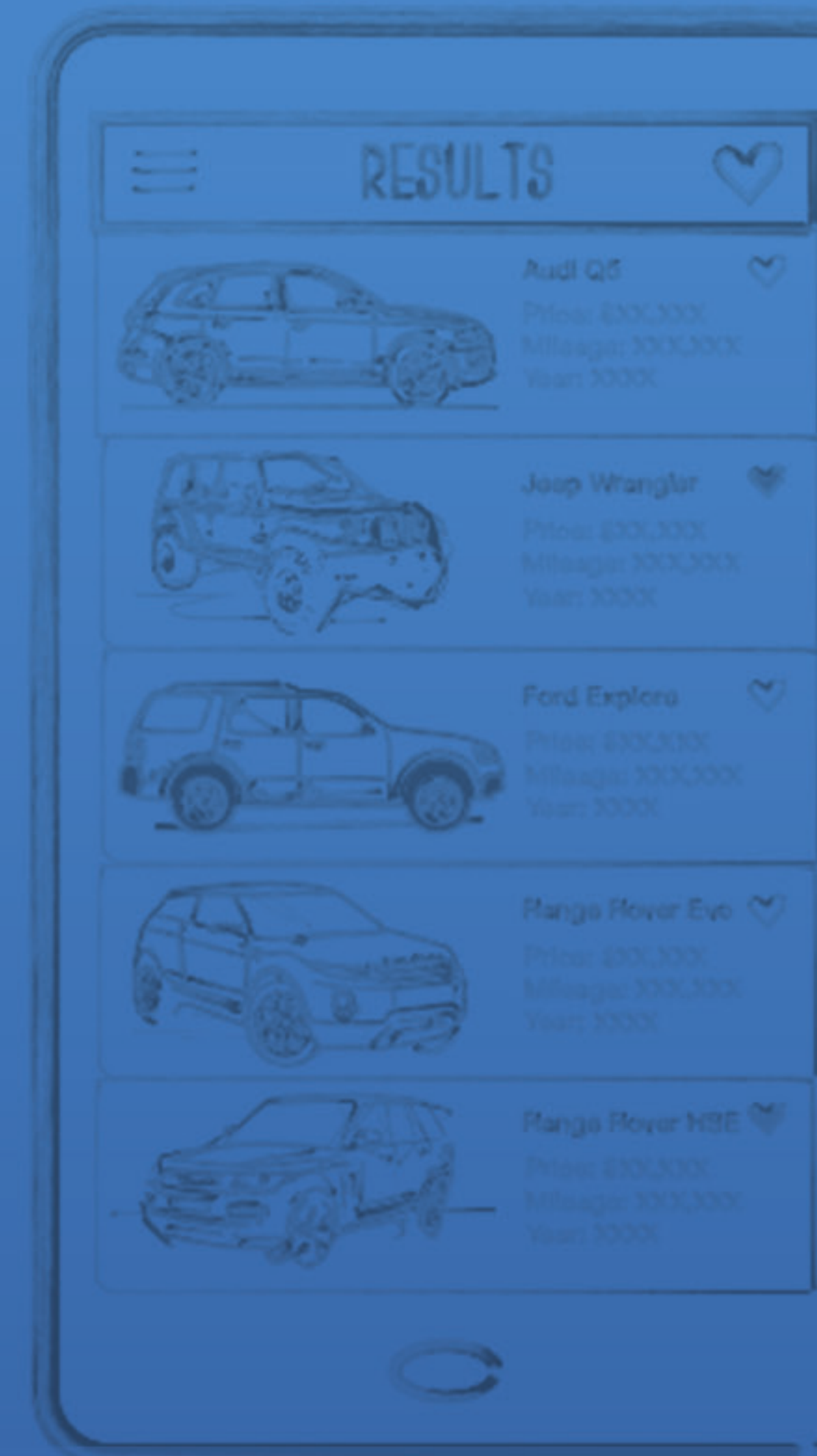
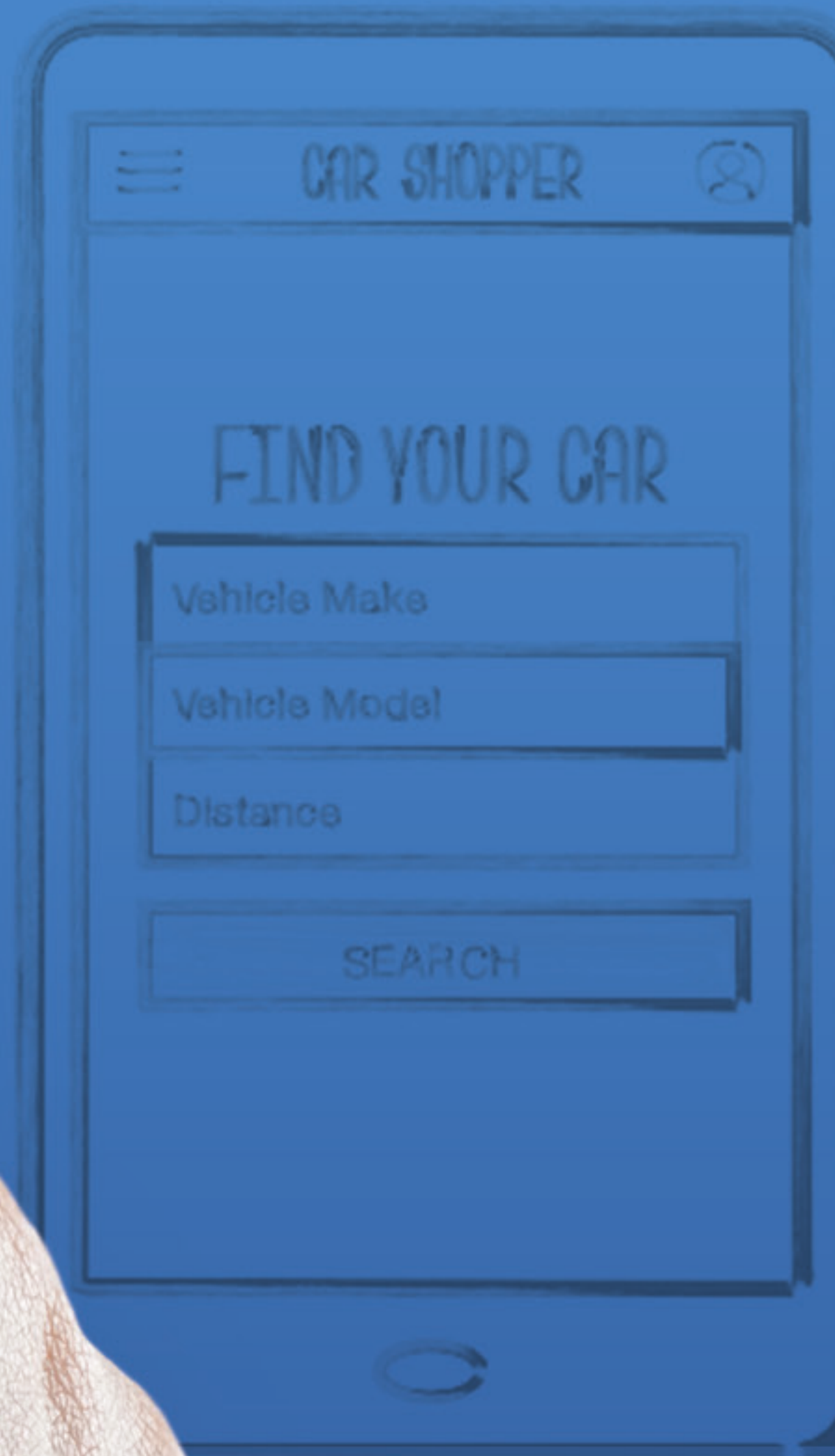


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Congrats, you've decided to build an app! Once you get past the excitement of creating something new to share with the world, it's pretty common to become intimidated. So, before you freeze with hesitation, let us walk you through the first step of the development process – prototyping your app.

Why is prototyping so important?

Think of your app as a tangible product, rather than a piece of software. For instance, if you tried to talk a mom into buying an SUV before SUV's existed, that might be confusing to her. She may think, **“Well, I have a minivan that takes me from A to B, holds all three of my kids and has no real problems.”** Without a working prototype that showcases the sporty nature and styling of an SUV, as well as its ability to drive through rough terrain with ease, she probably wouldn't have any interest in changing vehicles. In the same way, having a working example is crucial to generating interest and funding, receiving helpful feedback and communicating your vision to developers clearly.

Make a Functions List

The word 'prototyping' may sound like an activity reserved for the elite engineers of the world, but thanks to modern software, it's no longer that difficult. Begin by simply writing down the functions your app needs to have, like:

- Log In
- Facebook Log In
- Password Recovery
- Profile + Profile Editing
- Search Functionality
- Like/Dislike/Share Buttons
- Featured Listings
- Random Search (“I'm Feeling Lucky”)

All of these functions should be clearly outlined in your requirements document, too. The requirements document highlights your time line, budget, functions and any other relevant information that should be shared with your development firm upfront.

“Having a working example is crucial to generating interest and funding, receiving helpful feedback and communicating your vision to your developers clearly.”



Define Your Screens

Once you know what your app needs to accomplish, it's time to lay out the screens. Start by making a list of screens and note the functions each one should contain. Here's an example of a screens list for our sample app, 'Car Shopper.'

- **Log In** – Log In Fields, Social Media Login, Password Recovery
- **Home** – Search, Featured Listings, Random Search Option
- **Advanced Search** – Additional Fields (color, options, etc.)
- **Results** – Listings, Favorite Buttons



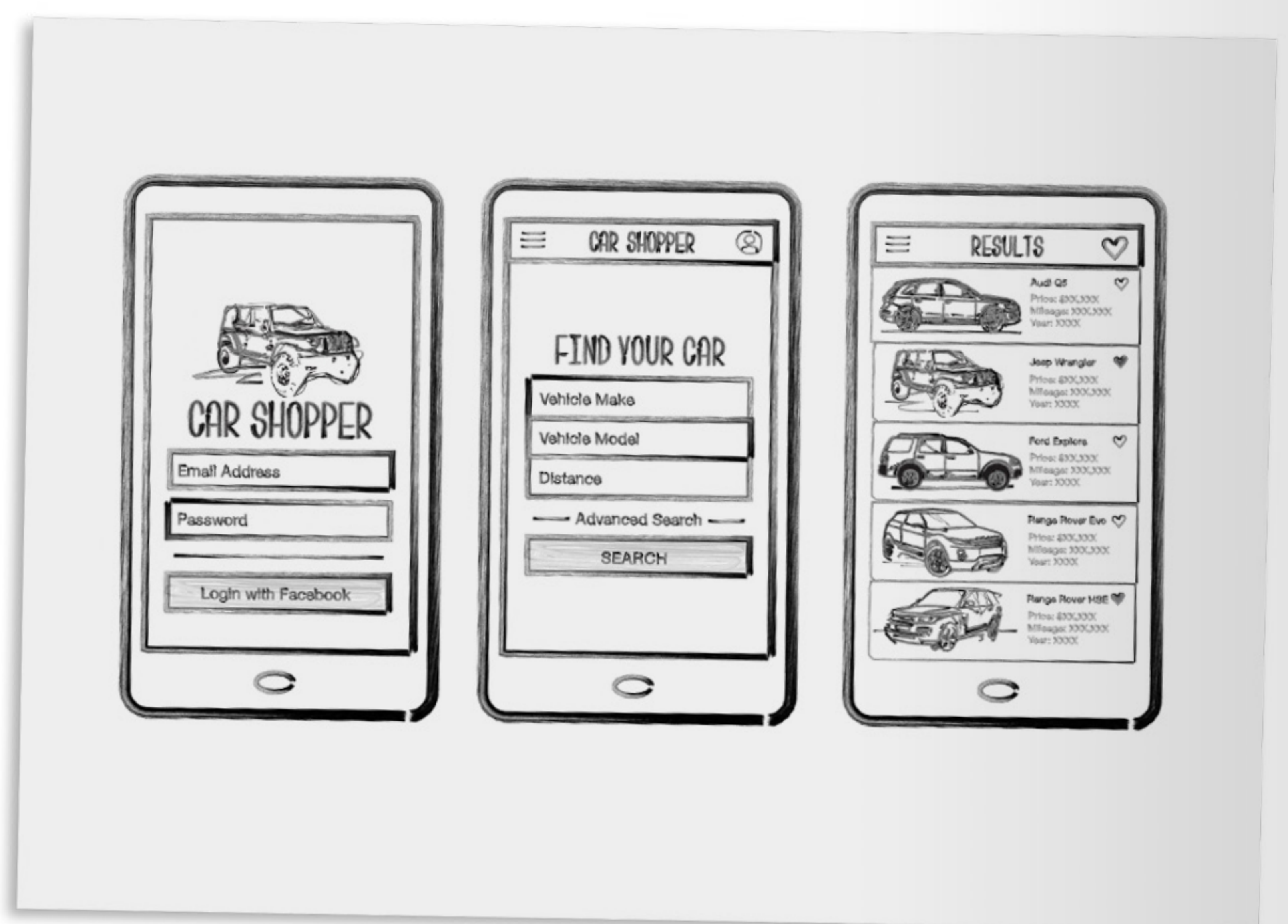
Map Your Screens for Consistent Navigation

The best way to create painless navigation is to plan it out.

Make a list of all of your app's pages and diagram what goes where, just like an organizational chart. This will help you ensure that each page has the necessary hierarchy and transition elements to create a fluid experience.

Sketch Your Screens

Now, with your function's list and screen diagram nearby, print off our [free template](#) and start sketching out your screens. Begin with the login and home pages – working your way out from there. Remember to keep the navigation simple! People who feel confused by an app will delete it, and there's no effective way to recover users once they're gone.



Your sketches don't have to be very detailed, but they should provide a good foundation for the prototype. Be sure each sketch contains the necessary navigation, text fields, buttons and image placeholders, as well as notes to point out any functionality that may not be obvious.

Create Your Wireframe Blueprint

With your sketches in hand, it's time to take on the next step in the prototyping process, which is creating your wireframes. If you're comfortable with learning new programs, wireframing is an easy skill to learn.

There are plenty of tools available, including **Balsamiq**, **JustinMind**, **InDesign** and **Photoshop**, which will allow you to tackle prototyping yourself. You can also work on this step with a friend or freelance designer from sites like **Upwork** and **Freelancer.com**. Just be sure to prepare the appropriate non-disclosure agreements and be mindful of the intellectual property, quality and communication risks working with international contractors may present.



Wireframes are thorough but stylistically simple. They can't be used for standard user testing, but they are a great visualization tool for key stakeholders between the sketches and finished prototype. These drafts create a well-structured, user experience plan for your app, complete with pop-ups and drop-downs, without worrying over aesthetics. Wireframes are great for key stakeholders to use for visualization and work flow evaluation.

Here are some guidelines to keep in mind when building your wireframe:

Focus on the Primary Function

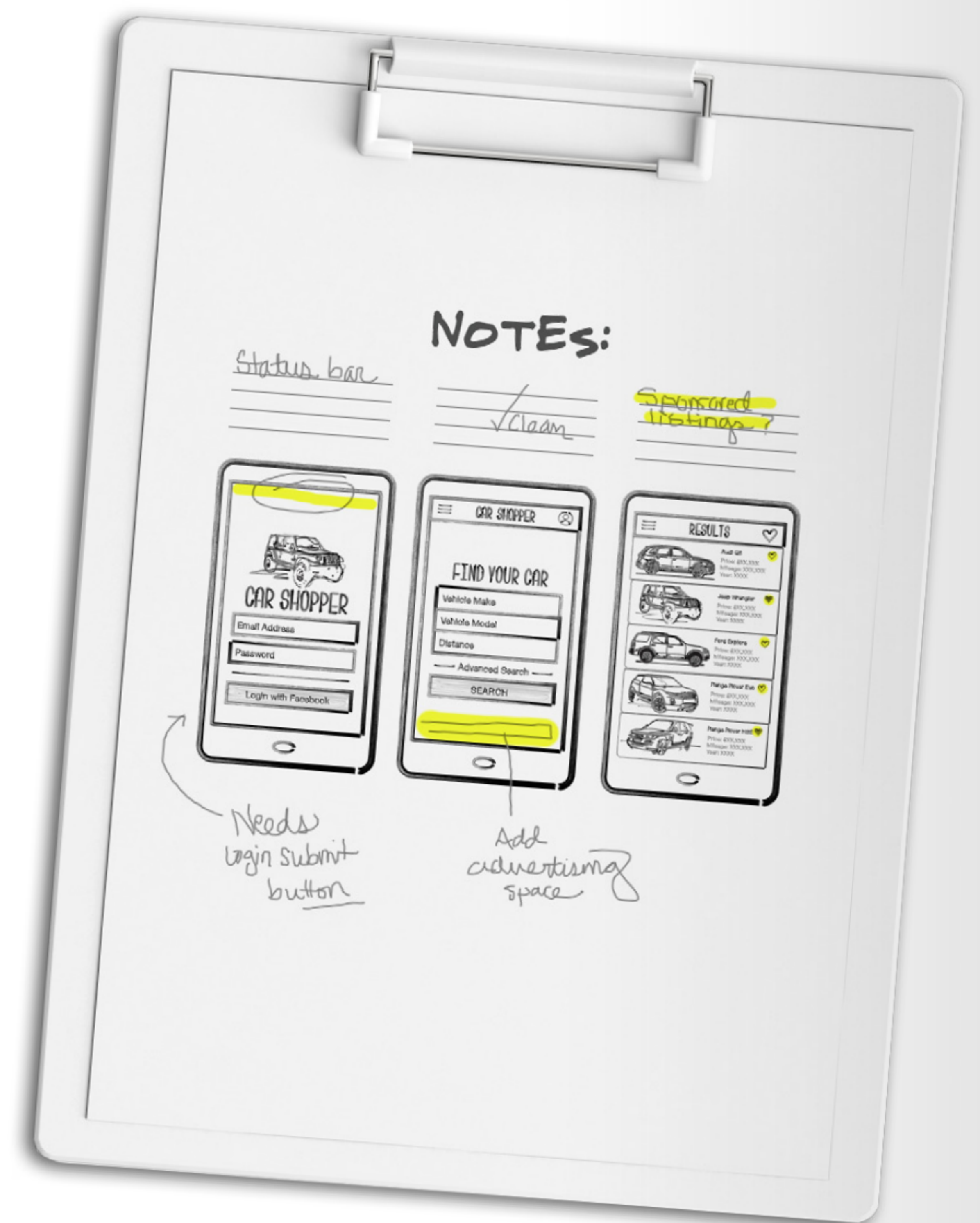
- If someone asks you what your app will do, you should have a concise, easily understood description ready to go. Consider Instagram's to-the-point summary:
"Sign up to see photos and videos from your friends."
- Your app's primary function should be the only force driving your wireframe design.

Build to Scale

- Unlike the initial sketches, **your wireframe should be built to scale**, beginning with the smallest screen dimensions first. It's always easier to scale up than down.
- **Make click-able elements the appropriate size**, which is 10mm X 10mm, or more. This ensures the design will be easy to navigate with finger tips later on.
- Make your fonts 11 points or larger.
Fonts in the final app should be easy to read without zooming in.

Spacing, Spacing, Spacing

- When it comes to designing app interfaces, spacing rules. **The spaces between each sentence should be taller than the font's height, and every title, button and image should be far enough apart that they're easy to differentiate as separate elements.**
- Don't be afraid of whitespace! Simplicity is key to an attractive, easy-to-navigate design.



Content

- Wireframes should hold space for your content, but they are not designed to present anything viewers should feel inspired to read (aside from your notes). Most wireframes contain basic titles and 'lorem ipsum' text to establish the layout and flow of the app in question.

The wireframes for our demo app, 'Car Shopper,' should help you get a feel for this part of the process. You can see that the spacing between text and search fields has been improved, font sizes have been set, and the boxes that will contain listing images have been created to scale. There's also some additional functionality available, such as 'advanced search' (but it's still directly related to our key function — search).



Let the Prototyping Commence!

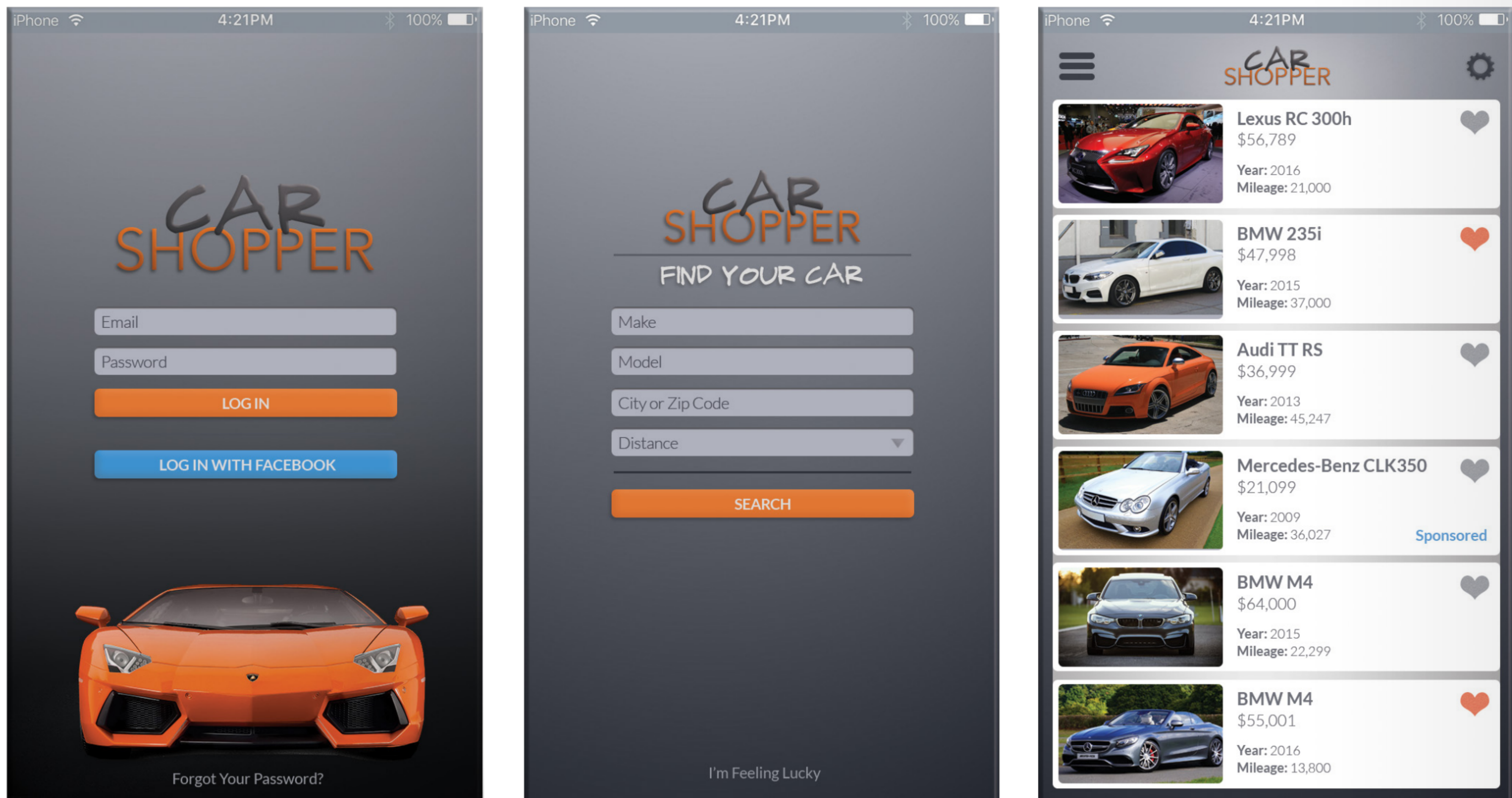
Now that your app has been very thoughtfully drafted **twice**, it's time to translate your design into the final prototype. For this step, you can continue to work on your own, with a friend or freelancer, or you can hire a development firm and potential long-term partner to create your prototype (and ultimately your app). We recommend having your prototype built in a tool like **InvisionApp** (our favorite), **JustinMind** or **Marvel**.

Some development firms, like 7T, offer this portion of the development process as a stand-alone service that easily transitions into full scale development. Around our office, we call it the **Foundation Program**. This program will help you determine the overall cost of development, potential ROI, project plan and you'll walk away with a functional click-through prototype used to demonstrate your app in an effort to attract investors or even early-stage buyers.

No matter which avenue you choose, there are several things your prototype needs to have:

A Stunning, Simple Aesthetic

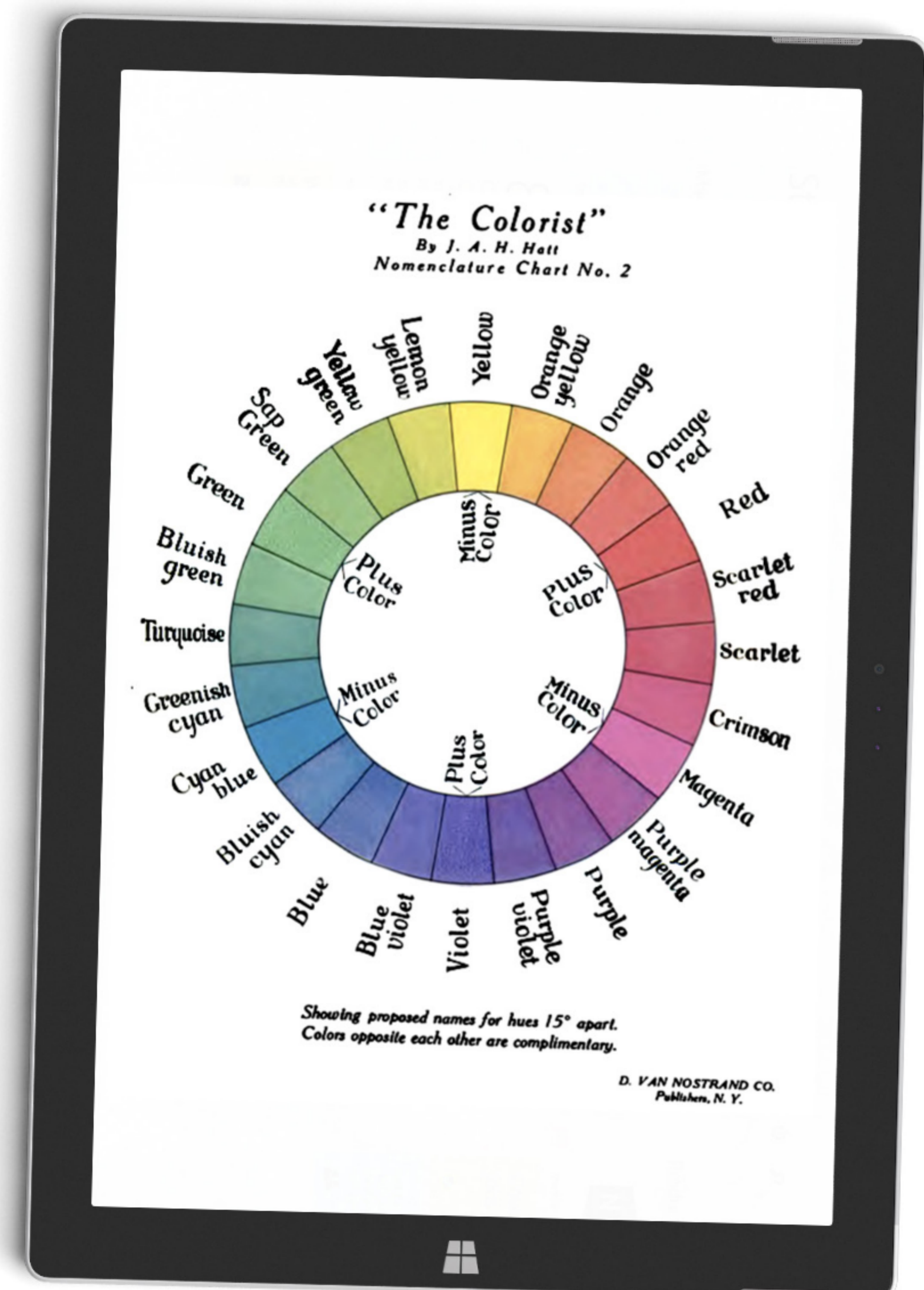
When a user downloads your app, you only have 10 seconds to reel them in. If you are unsuccessful during this tiny window of opportunity, the user will probably delete your app and never look back. That is why an attractive and easy-to-use interface makes or breaks an app.



Here are some tips to keep you on track:

- **A clean, current appearance.** Reference your competition, development guidelines from Apple and Android, and create a Pinterest board (or other type of collection) to store designs you find particularly eye-catching.
- Choose beautiful, **easy-to-read typefaces.** Choosing a font that is too condensed or decorated can extinguish your app's chances of success.

- **Design with real content**, rather than ‘lorem ipsum’ text, in order to create a genuine look at what the app will be like when it hits the marketplace.
- **Make your app intuitive** by cutting out excess buttons and graphics, while hiding necessary, but less important navigation in menus. Limiting user options and distractions increases the likelihood of users landing where you want them, ultimately creating conversions.
- For the buttons you do have, **use the standard icons users already know** or label them with clear instructions.
[Apple’s iOS Human Interface Guidelines](#) highlight several system icons that may be valuable to your design, whether you’re developing for iOS, Android or both.
- **Create high-contrast, intriguing design** by using complementary colors, or play with a subtler, monochromatic design – just don’t lose your contrast.
 - This may also be a great time to brush up on your color theory and psychology in order to choose a palette that expresses your app’s personality.
 - These guidelines from [Material.io](#) are also extremely helpful.



Polished Navigation and Fluid Transitions

As mentioned before, the best way to create painless navigation is to plan it out. At this point, you already have a diagram of where your screens link to as well as wireframe screens showcasing how they will be laid out. Depending on which tool you use to wireframe, you may be ahead of the game on this step, as some allow you to link your screens before the prototyping phase.

If not, now is the time to question everything! Your navigation sequence must move users from A to B in the most direct route possible. **Most apps have more than 20 screens, but users only use about three, so cutting out unnecessary navigation and content is mission critical!**

During this phase, you should also prototype your screen animations and transitions. This will make communicating those easily overlooked, stylistic details a breeze, and your final click-through even more attractive to potential investors.

Revisions, Revisions, Revisions

Once you have all your screens, menus, design elements and transitions in place, it's time to test drive your app... over and over. Pass your click-through along to friends and peers to gather feedback and suggestions, then implement solutions that alleviate their concerns.

Repeat this process several times until you feel that your app's navigation is truly seamless.

Et Voilà

At the end of this arduous process, you will be prepared to take on the next piece of your business plan — whether it's fundraising or full-scale development. If you find yourself treading water as you embark upon the prototyping process, turn to the team here at 7T!

Get in Touch!

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