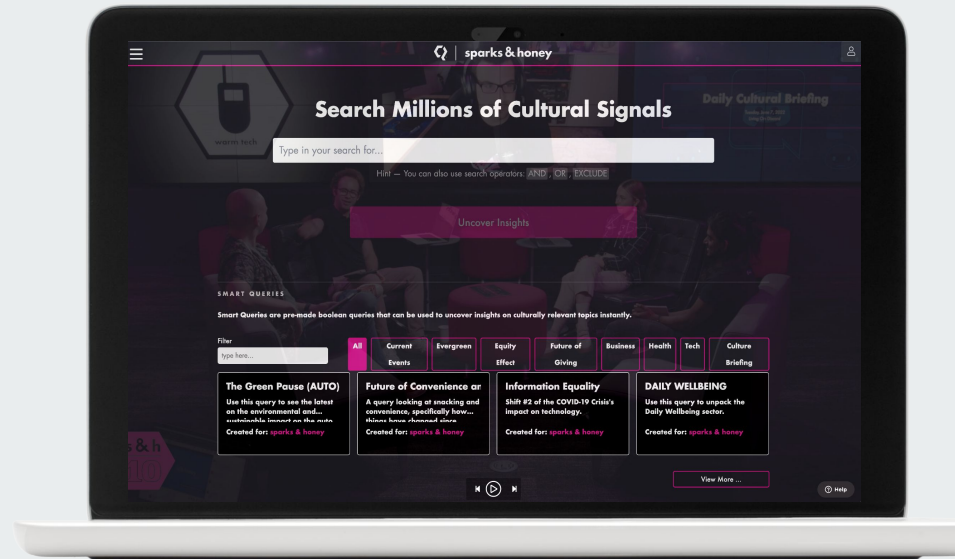# UX Design Assessment: Sparks & Honey Application "Q"

Philip Sutherland

philipsutherland@msn.com

www.philipmsutherland.com

Outline

- User Needs (Problem Statement)

- Q Application User Flows

- Design Opportunities & Solution(s)

- References

User Needs

Users/Audience:

I believe there are two broad primary user groups:

1) **"Internal Users."** Sparks & Honey Analysts and other members of the firm. They are relatively frequent and experienced users, although new analysts may be similar to "External Users." Most current users are Internal, and the current application was designed primarily for them.

2) **"External Users."** Clients and others not part of the firm. They are/may be less frequent users and have less expertise with the application. They also may be paying for using the application. For all these reasons, External users would benefit most if the UX of Q addressed their needs, but all groups would benefit. **For my assessment, I am focussing specifically on the External User group.**

Problem Statement:

[User]
A professional in a organization responsible for developing brands, business and products...

[Need]
...needs to easily and iteratively find, understand, structure, and synthesize cultural insights (signals) and patterns (trends)...

[Goal]
...in order to formulate strategic foresights that allow them to position current and future products and brands for success in dynamic and evolving markets.

Q Application User Flows

The Q Experience is Part of a Larger Strategic User Journey

As I outline in the [Miro flow diagram](#), I believe that, although Q is a distinct tool with its own structure and flows, its ultimate purpose is to support the creation of product and business strategies built upon emerging cultural trends. As such, Q supports all the lifecycle stages of a Strategic Foresight creation journey, but especially the vital and initial, "Research & Synthesis," phase. As the flows suggest, the "node" most critical to user flows and tasks is the "Search Results" view, which also serves as a "Project Detail" view. The flows also reflect that Q is not a "transactional" application. The outcome of a successful user experience on Q is insight and knowledge applied outside of the application itself within a particular framework. Such a framework/toolkit might be Sparks & Honey's own or a different one employed by a client organization.

Note: the particular framework I'm illustrating is that employed by McKinsey in its "Design X Foresight" program.
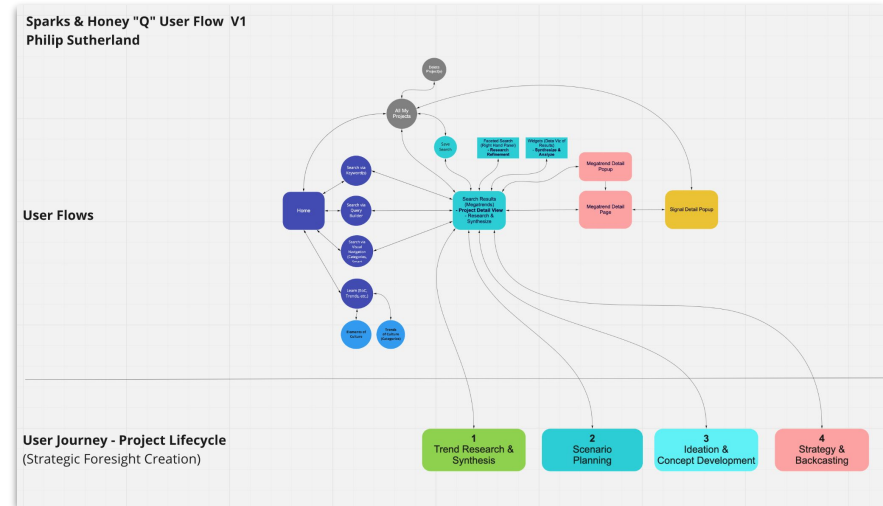
Design Problem & Solution #1

Ease the creation of complex queries.

Because a "Search input" is flexible and so utterly conventional, it makes sense to make one the prioritized means by which users find information within Q. However, as S&H appears to recognize, many, even sophisticated users of applications are not proficient in creating complex (Boolean) search queries. A "low hanging" fruit solution would be to support the basic input with a simple, "Search Query Builder," such as that shown (mockups are also on Invision here). The builder could be hosted in a popup from the "Home Page." However, as subsequent wireframes show, a more successful approach will complement the Search input with additional means by which a user can understand and navigate content.
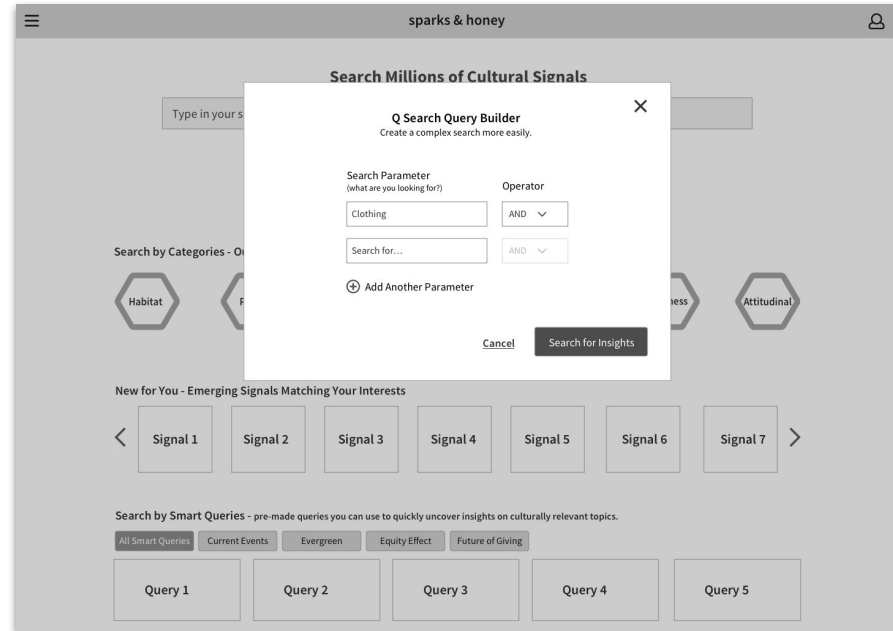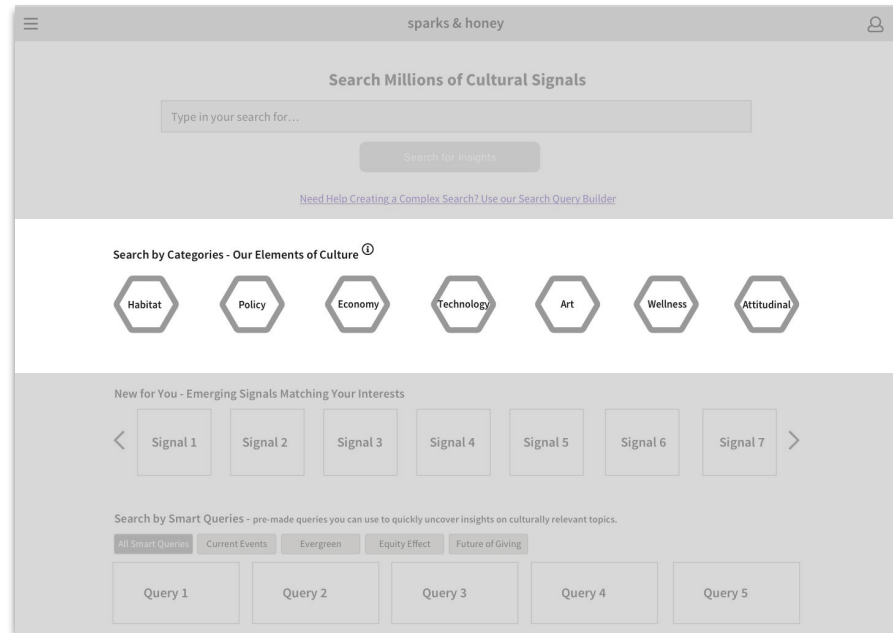
Design Problem & Solution #2

Use Information Categories ("EoC" Categories to help users understand and navigate Q.

"Searching" is powerful, but requires user action and knowledge to be successful. A user can effectively search for something only if they understand the nature and scope of the information available in the system. I.e., *what they are actually searching for.* If the home page displays the Elements of Culture categories as interactive, filtering elements, the user gains both an introduction to Q's taxonomy and a means for quickly accessing a selected subset of the app's information. In other words, when a user clicks on an EoC category, it could trigger a set of search results (and a new project). Q and its home page need to generally make it easier for new and less frequent users to navigate the application content. Such an approach is sometimes referred to as, "Visible Navigation."

[Invision link for wireframes.](#)

Design Problem & Solution #3

Bring relevant information to the user.

Where (and when) possible, help less experienced information - especially Signals - to a user, rather than requiring a user to actively search for or navigate to that content. One way of doing this is to have a, "New for You," section on the home page featuring new signals that match areas of that user's interest. This is a pretty conventional pattern, especially in content-driven sites. I understand that Sparks and Honey does or will have the user (or organizational) data required for such mapping.

More, immediately understandable content on the home page will increase engagement and foster exploration, especially for new users.

The existent "Smart Queries" are a very good mechanism for jump-starting user interaction, but for new users the queries need to be introductory - they are both educational and navigational.
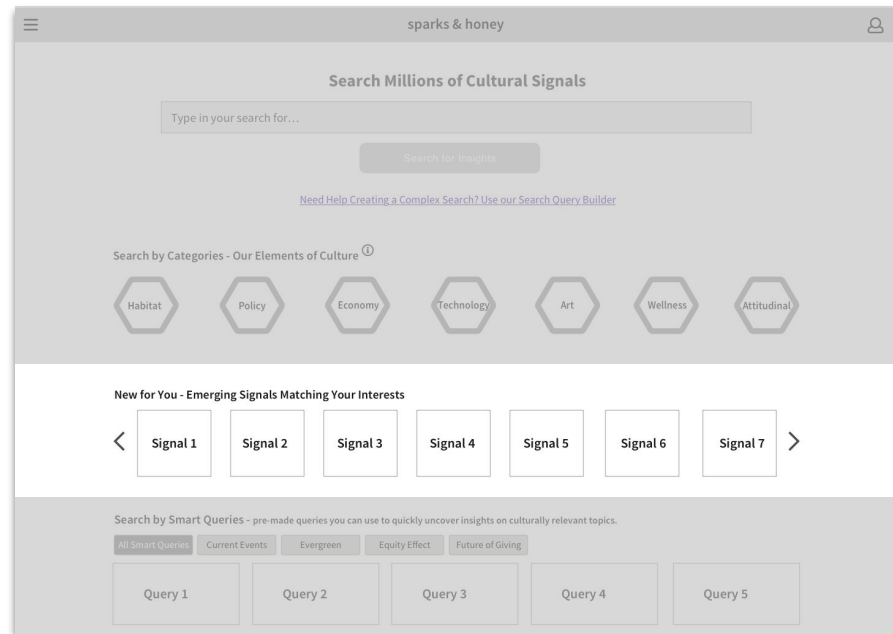
Design Problem & Solution #4

Simplify Search Results Manipulation

Users need to be able to synthesize and distill meaning from project search results and then integrate them into a strategic foresight framework. To do this, users must easily and iteratively manipulate the results, which mostly will occur within the "Results/Project Detail" view. A conventional and effective means for doing this is by supporting faceted search. The current application may (it's a little unclear to me) support faceted search, but if so, it's subordinated to the "Query" list in the right hand panel. I suggest making the faceted search, rather than the Query list, the default state in the right hand panel.

This approach supports the perspective that the Search Results/Project Detail view is the interactive "hub" of the application.

Invision link for wireframes.

Design Problem & Solution #5

Minimize UI "Background Noise"

Although I recognize that Sparks & Honey needs to advance its brand, I believe that the video and other dynamic information running in the home page background makes a potentially complex view even more difficult for a user to process. There are other, more effective means of reinforcing the Sparks & Honey brand, especially for less experience Q users who might be visually overwhelmed. Plus, removing the background video allows designers to better distinguish between the more critically functional elements.

References.

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