

Unabashedly Gregarious Polymath
Defenestration Expert

Alexis Finch

a@agentfin.com
w: 424.246.8346
@agentfin

Desire:

Use anthropology to predict the future.

Necessity: A vested interest in asking "why? Why? WHY?"

I have a confession to make. You know that person on the train who's staring at you when you look up from playing some game on your phone? That's me. I'm also the one who leans over at the cafe and asks "Do you know of an app to track how many cups of coffee you've had in a day?" Or the one person who chats up the DMV employee about how they wound up with the job of entering new license applications... and brainstorms with them on what could make their work easier.

I absolutely live to dig to the bottom of a pile of whys and answer a tricky question. If there aren't any questions being asked, I'll find an assumption that's been overlooked. I have no idea how to take a vacation. Instead, masquerading as a proper tourist, I will wander the aisles of convenience stores marveling at - and snapping photos of - the products on shelf. Who'd ever guess that Lone Star Beer would make its way to a tiny store in Honduras?

I'm looking for problems I can dig my teeth into. Be it a product that's just not finding its legs, a company that has a few too many pie covered thumbs, or users that just aren't "getting it," I'm ready.

Currently:

Principal, User Research | Brand Strategy, AgentFin LLC

January 2011 - Present

Clients: npm, AT&T, Raw Toast Studios, Seed&Spark, Bright/Contrast, SWIVIT, PoCampo, Burning Man, Compass to Care, The Exploratorium

I've never let myself specialize in one industry, or one stage of company work. By crossing those silos I am able to see patterns of solutions and constantly evolve what I'm able to serve up to clients.

Whether it's consulting with established brands or advising startups, my goal for every project I work on is to understand what makes users tick. This may mean creating constraints for designers to find creativity within, or streamlining features so that developers only work on what users will really use.

My proudest project was doing pro-bono work for CompassToCare.org, setting a new strategic direction and identifying donors as the target users for the website. With that goal in mind, I executed a complete content revision and copy rewrite, creating stories out of the data to promote direct action. Working with an amazing team of designers and developers, the final site was featured in *HOW Design*.

Lead Sketchnotes, GraphiteMind

March 2011 - Present [GraphiteMind.com]

Individual Clients: PODIO, Zendesk, Patrick McKenzie, 500Startups

Conferences: TechWeek, The Combine, TwilioCon, SecurityBSides, TEDx, WarmGun, UnSexy

Murals: DevBootcamp Chicago, Intelligentsia

My work as a sketchnoter goes beyond just capturing content. Bringing UX principles to every talk I document, I isolate and interpret the story being told, explaining complex ideas through visual metaphors and enabling more efficient discussion and recall of content. I've taught sketchnotes to Pixar employees, documented Steve Blank's brilliance and Dave McClure's f-bomb laden talks, and created a blackboard mural at the DevBootcamp Chicago to get programmers drawing.

Advisory Board Member, Seed&Spark

July 2013 - Present [seedandspark.com]

CEO Emily Best initially brought me in on contract to assess and direct the redesign of certain user facing pages of the Seed&Spark site. This work diversified into more overarching site assessments, including sign-up flow, feedback solicitation, newsletter optimization and navigation improvements. I was invited to join the Advisory Board on a permanent basis in February to continue to provide research and design assistance, and to facilitate introductions to the tech community.

Notable Clients

Proctor & Gamble
Kimberly-Clark
Coca-Cola
Quaker
DELL
Kraft
SCJ

Tools

Post-Its
Sharpies
Photoshop
OmniGraffle
HAML/SASS
Photography

Methods

User Flows
Storytelling
Focus Groups
Brainstorming
Visual Thinking
Shopper Pathways

Expertise

Packaging Navigation
Cross-Discipline Insight
Ethnographic Analysis
Brand Architecture
Design Thinking
Field Research
Sketchnotes

Industries

Consumer Packaging
Film Production/Post
Shopper Marketing
OTC Medical
Advertising
Cycling
Music

Ask Me About

Septarian Concretions
Darwinian Medicine
Bioarchaeology
Cephalopods
#XXHack
SinkUp

Passions

Science
Teaching
Bicycle riding
Urban planning
Kitchen gardens
Women in STEM

[continued]

Recent Experience:

UX / Product, Parsecco

July 2012 - November 2012 [company disbanded]

I joined Parsecco pre-funding to lead them on a rebranding effort, and to bring them from a site focused on career advice solely for photographers on to a marketable collaboration resume for freelancers to more effectively be hired by clients. Rebranding was required as they had just discovered a potential for confusion in the HR space on their initial name "Dovetail." I led the renaming ideation, contracted a designer and directed the logo design, conducting user testing throughout the process. Once this was complete, I brought in over 150 beta testers to the site in preparation for launch, working with individuals from key user types to identify possible bottlenecks and feature needs. From the feedback, we optimized the user flow. I also pitched the company to potential advisors and investors and brought in a client to use the product for their advertising agency. My introductions to the tech community led to our pitch at Technori as well as being featured on TechCocktail.

Ethnographer / Strategic Planner, OgilvyAction

November 2009 - December 2010 [ogilvy.com]

Kimberly-Clark, Kraft, SC Johnson, Active Transportation Alliance, Kettle Chips

I was brought onto the shopper marketing team as their first in-house ethnographer and packaging expert. I acted as lead planner for Kimberly-Clark's full feminine care line, during which time I created a new set of standard practices for research at retail, improved our presentation methods between planning, accounts, creative, and clients. I wrote white papers on male vs female paths to purchase, and conducted an investigation of the effectiveness of partnerships vs endorsements for mass-market products. My work on Kettle Chips introduced graphic facilitation to the Chicago office as a focus group tool.

Founder / Producer / Creative Director, TyK [Thought You Knew]

October 2008 – December 2011 [facebook.com/TyK.ThoughtYouKnew]

The TyK Pinup Project started as a passion project but made it into *Chicago Magazine*, onto *You & Me This Morning*, and selling on shelves in bike shops as far as London, Tokyo and Sydney. TyK boosted women's confidence within Chicago's cycling community by creating a space where they could experiment with their femininity while connecting with other cyclists. Over the four years I ran the project, we had 700 applicants, transformed 52 pinups, raised over \$60 in sponsorship. By the time I closed the project, there had been four other pinup calendars spawned across the country and women's race teams and popped up from coast-to-coast.

User Experience Researcher, GIO Global Intelligence

June 2007 - February 2009 [gio.com]

Proctor&Gamble, Coca-Cola, Quaker, DELL, McNeil

Directly after completing my MA, I was brought in as primary international field researcher, leading planning, field execution and analysis for our clients. My duties as a drop-ship solution included contracting interpreters and experts as needed. This included finding contacts to provide entry into China's pharmacies, interviewing pet-store owners on their shelving challenges, and many more bizarre encounters all over the world. One of my favorite questions was on the cultural meaning of water, leading from the back alley water depots of Beijing, to the warning labels on Tokyo hotel sinks, and on to heated arguments over plastic bottle use in London. A less fun project had me purchase, quantify, catalogue and photograph more feminine products than I ever knew existed. Just ask me and I'll tell you all about the construction of a maxi-pad from Milan.

Heroes

Lea Verou
Anita Borg
Jackie Joiner
Tilda Swinton
Richard Feynman
FAKEGRIMLOCK
John Singer Sargent

Books

The Caves of Steel
Zoo City
Oryx & Crake
To the Lighthouse
R is for Rocket
The Diamond Age
Wool

Music on Repeat

Murder by Death
TV on the Radio
Louis Prima
NOFX
alt-J
Pixies
The Gourds
Tapes 'n Tapes
Macklemore

Favorites

pants
concatenate
dental floss
octothorpe
plethora
lamppost
42

This space is

was reserved for
making the design
line up nicely
so I hope you
find it amusing
at the very least
because there is
no way I would
leave it blank.
I'm thinking it
might be a good
place for a few
haikus but I
don't know any
offhand.

[NEXT UP: education, speaking, publications ...]

Education:

University of Chicago

BA Anthropology 2002

Though I graduated with honors in anthropology, my coursework covered the gamut of statistics, geology, astrophysics, Darwinian medicine and stone carving. My greatest fascination did finally land in the co-evolution of humans and disease, particularly how a "superstitious" ritual can be lifesaving. That understanding of the power of belief to alter behavior and sustain habits is the keystone of how I address and reach to understand every user experience.

DePaul University

MA PR/Advertising/Marketing 2007

With advertising, we reverse engineer culture. Through the art of storytelling, I learned how to create new mythologies for modern life. I delved into the psychology of package design and ad layout, as well as the history of persuasive speech, the better to understand who we are and how to explain identity and commonality today.

The Starter League

Advanced HTML/CSS, Visual Design, UX Standards, 2013

I dedicated myself to a ten-week immersion program to advance my front-end web skills, covering design principles as well as modern markup standards. I also took the opportunity to re-up my UX capabilities, learning new research methodologies, survey design and wireframing techniques.

Publications:

Amplifying Voices

Model View Culture, February 2014

modelviewculture.com/pieces/amplifying-voices

Designing Community in Contested Space

Social Media Monthly, May 2013

thesocialmediamonthly.com [print edition only]

Curating the Ideas of Creators

Medium, May 2013

medium.com/curating-creating-1/300dib83faz

The UX of Community

Built in Chicago, April 2013

builtinchicago.org/blog/ux-community-contested-space

Colouring Inside the Lines

Undercoat, April 2013

undercoat.net/colouring-inside-the-lines/

Speaking:

Who Are You to Say?

GitHub Speaker Workshop, February 2014

A lightning talk on picking talk topics.

Responsive Content: A movie? On your phone?

MoDev East, December 2013

Keynote on going beyond mobile first design & considering how to make content respond to users.

[continued, yes, there is more]

How to Become a UXer

DevBootcamp SF, November 2013

A crash course in the path to UXpertise as well as the many micro-disciplines within.

Yes? Yes.

Ignite YaYY, July 2013

Lightning talk on what it really means to say "yes."

You Won't Remember My Name.

Ignite Chicago, February 2013

Lightning talk on how sketchnotes & visual thinking help you learn & remember.

Digging Into Infographics

Parisoma, June 2012

Workshop for interpreting & creating infographics to make data meaningful as well as pretty.

How to Draw a Dinosaur

Ignite SF, April 2012

Lightning talk on how sketchnotes & visual thinking help you learn & remember.

UX for Mobile: Where were they when they clicked there?

East Bay New Tech Meetup, April 2012

Guest speaker on how to adjust thinking when designing / developing for mobile.

Sketching It

WIM, March 2012

Introductory course on prototyping for WIM accelerator companies.

The Power of Visual Thinking

Parisoma, January 2012

Workshop on how to leverage visual thinking to learn faster, communicate better & remember more.

Using Sketchnotes to Solve Complex Problems

SketchCamp, October 2011

A presentation on the history of sketchnotes plus practical applications in the work space.

The Human Factor

Guest Lecturer DePaul University, October 2010

A survey of new methods & perspectives in advertising with a focus on ethnography.

Ancient History [that's cool/interesting]:

Writer / Account Executive, SCREEN Magazine

September 2006 - May 2007 [screenmag.com]

SXSW 2007, The Production Bible

Hired out of a summer internship, I was brought on to do ad-sales and write the monthly "Post-It Notes" column covering post-production in the Midwest and Texas. I pitched each story, then handled researched, and conducted interviews for each of my features. My interview was of Bob Sabiston, the man behind the look of *Scammer Darkly*, conducted from his home/studio in Austin, TX, talking about the creation of Rotoshop and how he wound up doing a Charles Schwab ad campaign.

Marketing Intern, Paperwork Media

February 2006 - October 2006 [paperworkmedia.com]

AroundTheCoyote, Lallapalooza, SXSW

Musicians may have a knack for songs, but they rarely put time into their liner notes and bios, so I took care of this for the full Paperwork Media roster. I also assisted with local and national booking, getting to know the owners of local Chicago venues and how they tailored band lineups to match and promote the identity of their space.

[you might have figured out: continued onto this page]

Events Manager / Lead Bartender, Cleary's on Clark

March 2005 - February 2006

In the midst of Wrigleyville, home to the Chicago Cubs, I launched, curated and promoted successful local music and jazz session nights.

Anthropology Collections Assistant, The Field Museum

October 2002 - June 2004 [fieldmuseum.org]

After volunteering at The Field Museum for two summers, I was offered a collections job upon college graduation. Primarily I worked to house and stabilize objects, but also served as a consultant for the design of the new collections hall to ensure its usability by those caring for the objects. This was my first foray into UX, considering the physical constraints on collections assistants as they accessed objects, as well as considering the delicate nature of the objects themselves.

Events Consultant, MasterCard International: Paris, France

April 1998 - August 1998

I was part of the "priceless" team, managing experiences for the '98 WorldCup Games. Events were hosted at Versailles, the Paris Opera, and many other less glamorous locations. As the one soccer player on the team I was selected to present Pele with a lifetime achievement award.

Music Promoter / Board Member, FishtownARTSPACE: Gloucester, MA

March 1995 - February 1997

I created the events calendar for ARTSPACE and was subsequently invited to join their board as their youngest member, assisting in the writing of grants applications.