

# StoryHound

Prototype Report

COLORADO  
MEDIA  
PROJECT

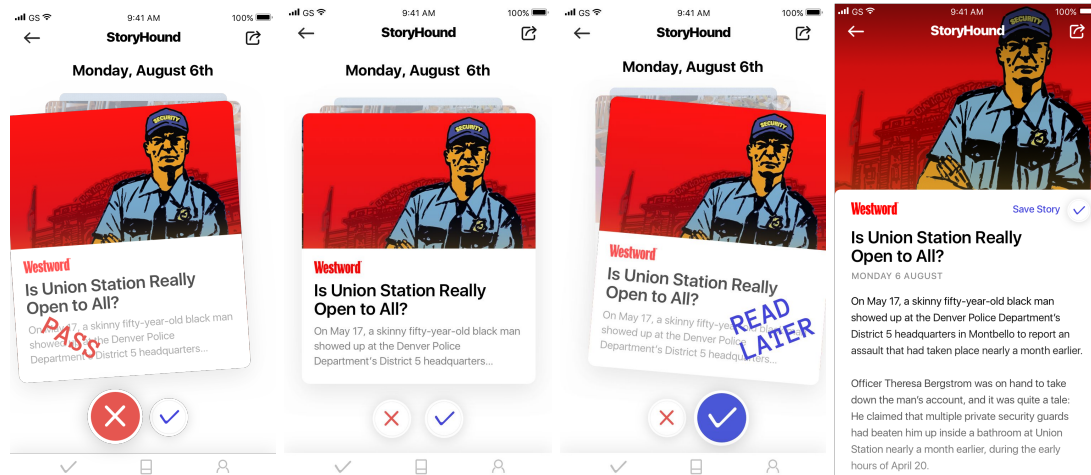
**CULTIVO**

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# Executive Summary

## The Prototype



StoryHound is a mobile app prototype allowing users to swipe through Colorado news stories quickly deciding to either read immediately, save for later, or pass. This prototype was designed to address demand for quickly consumable, bite-sized Colorado news content in a format that is entertaining and rewarding for users.

## The Results

Test users were eager to have StoryHound available for Colorado news and had numerous ideas for additional features that excited them. The top findings across test users indicated: they wanted endless content; StoryHound could replace users' go-to time killing app and provide social capital. Story feed personalization was a top feature request, and test users loved the swiping format, noting that saving content for later was key.

## The Recommendation

Based on multiple factors including test user feedback, the popularity of bite-sized content, and the pain points discovered through Colorado Media Project's (CMP) empathy interviews - StoryHound is worth building and launching for the public if further research is done.

# The Opportunity

## Overview

There is great demand today for news in short and entertaining bites to be consumed as it fits in into the daily lives of all individuals. This trend has been brought to light through conversations with Coloradans and quantitative research conducted by the Boston Consulting Group and numerous others including NeimanLabs and Smith Geiger.

## News Landscape Research

According to research by Smith Geiger, consumers today are evaluating and often finishing with a piece of content in only 6-14 seconds. Short, and quickly comprehensible content is preferred. Cultivo heard this from the interviewees as well. Interviewees want news that fits into their days, and is available during down time or brief lulls in their schedules. This does not mean the reader isn't interested in in-depth offerings, but they want the ability to quickly access headlines, then later return to the full story or additional insights.

This desire for news to be ubiquitous is being met currently largely by social media. News is convenient, meaning the consumer no longer needs to seek it out as it comes to them in snackable portions. Social media feeds are algorithmically engineered to show users the exact little bites of content that will keep them hooked. In order to break through the white noise of endless social media content, news needs to possess qualities (short, actionable, visual) that it currently lacks.

## Empathy Interview Findings

Members of the Colorado Media Project spoke with many Coloradans who expressed they often obtain their news during their leisure time throughout the day. Mike, a firefighter and real estate agent working in both Denver and Colorado Springs shared, "use the 9 News App out of habit more than anything else, it's so easy to pick up the phone and look at stuff". Mike also shared he really enjoyed mobile news feeds like Apple News because there was always content available, and scrolling through was entertaining and easy.

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A theme began to emerge from empathy interviews indicating **news is entertainment that doesn't feel like a waste of time for people**. Many interviewees walked through a typical day of news consumption for them and social media (although they were often hesitant to admit it) was a primary source for most. Cultivo learned, however, that people were consuming far more national news than local news in this way and felt that they had to search for Colorado stories rather than encountering them organically in their day. National news was a go-to for interviewees in leisure time scrolling (Apple News and other national aggregators were often mentioned), but Colorado does not have mobile aggregators of the same caliber and ease of use.



#### Mike—Denver/Colorado Springs

Real Estate Agent, Firefighter

- Age: 35
- About Mike: Grew up in Littleton, went to CU Boulder, works in CO Springs



“I use the 9 News app out of habit more than anything else... It is so easy to pick up the phone and look at stuff”

Mike



#### Natalie—Durango

Para-Professional

- Age: 26
- About Natalie: Getting her teaching license through Boettcher Program



Primarily uses phone and radio for news consumption as they both are easy to incorporate into her routine

Two empathy interview participants

## Ideating Solutions

During the community ideation session held on July 23rd, the following problem was presented to the group: local Colorado news is often left out of today's primary modes of quick mobile news consumption. The attendees were asked to develop potential solutions to this problem prompted by two “How Might We” (HMW) statements developed by Colorado Media Project

teams that articulated the objective for the solutions. The two HMW statements addressing this problem were as follows:

**HMW make the local news as addictive as angry birds, Facebook, or Farmville?**

**HMW make local news as attractive during leisure time as national news?**

After the July 21st ideation session, Cultivo held several smaller ideation sessions with Coloradans in the 18-40 target demographic before finalizing a vision for the solution to be built.

## Prototyping Process

### The Final Idea

The StoryHound prototype concept is a mobile experience allowing users to swipe through stories, quickly deciding to either read, save, or pass. Each story comes up on the screen with an image, headline, and short description. Then, a user decides to either read it now, save for later, or pass on the piece. This stream of stories learns users' news preferences based on their actions and tailors future content for them.

### The Building Process

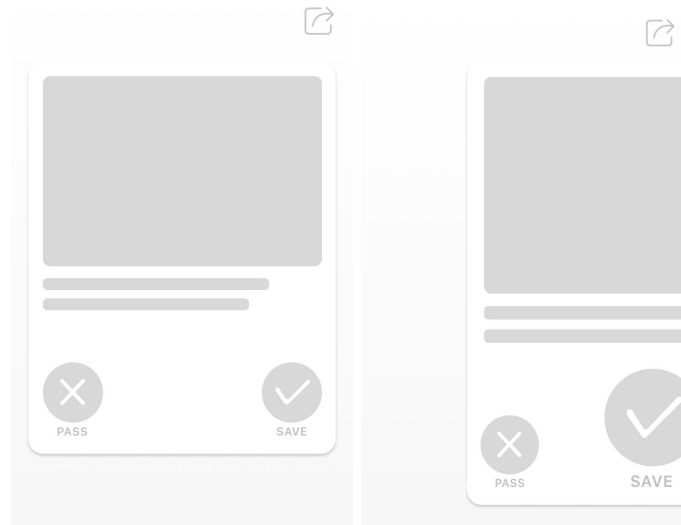
After determining the final prototype concept, Cultivo's process involved first discussing and asking the potential user group for specific feature feedback. The team then sketched many potential iterations of the user experience before building out the final designs at a high resolution. After the designs were complete, 70 unique screens were created making up 17 different sample stories for test users to swipe through and read.

### *First, User Experience and Wireframes*

Coloradans are consuming news in brief periods throughout their busy days, and local news is not currently the go-to for entertaining news content. For this reason, the primary goal for this user experience was for it to be entertaining, easy, and attractive during down time on a consumer's phone. Swiping through content is an addicting experience, countless popular apps have been successful with this user interaction. The images below show the early stages of the

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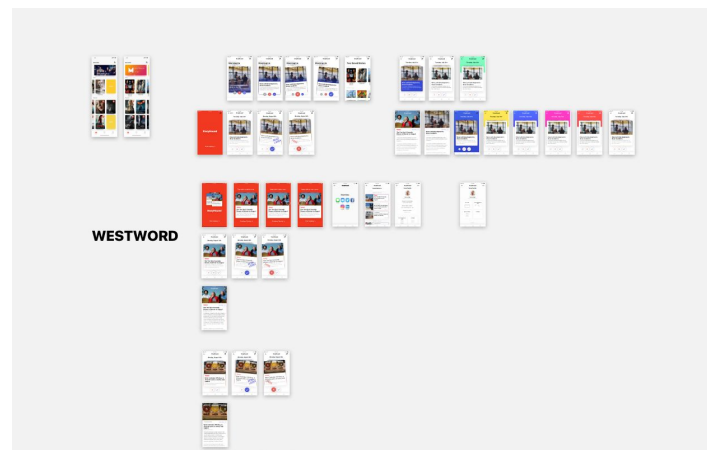
user interface wireframes for screens with story cards for the user to swipe through.



StoryHound Wireframe Samples

### **Second, *Final Design***

In designing the final version of the StoryHound user interface, optimizing for quick scanning of a story or video was a priority. After many design iterations, displayed below, the final version was created with a clean and simple layout featuring a story card and just three actions (saving, passing, or reading) on each screen.

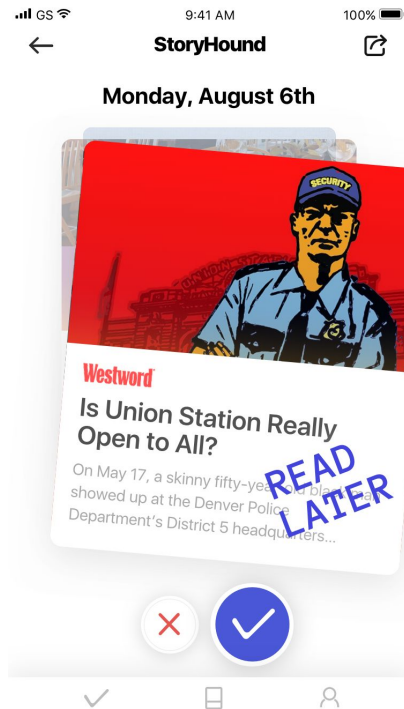
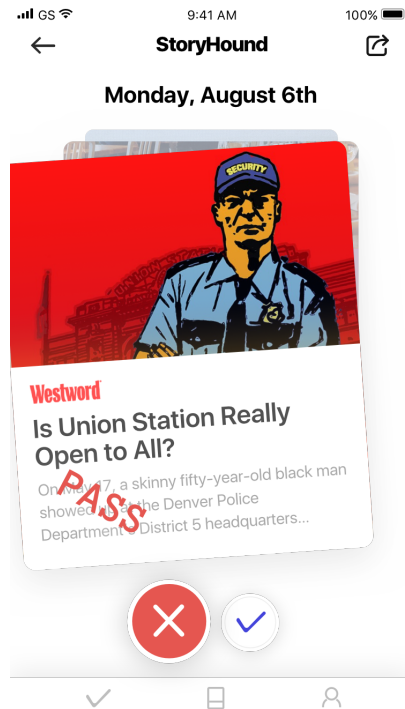


StoryHound Design Iterations

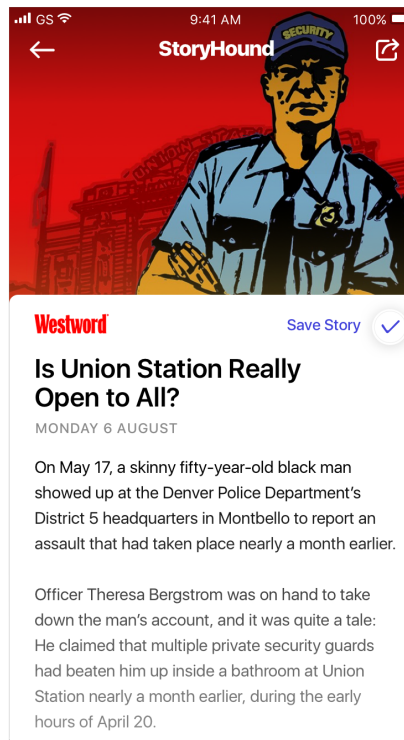
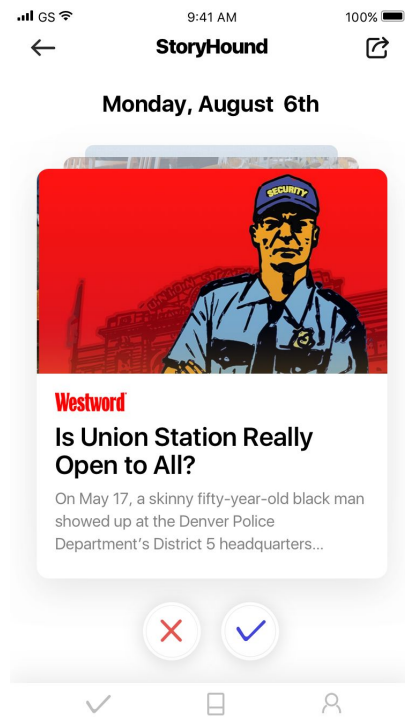
Cultivo suspected users would decide in seconds about whether or not they would be interested

in the particular article, video, or podcast being previewed on a story card. The design of the story cards address this with a large title as well as a prominent logo from the story's source publication.

StoryHound  
(swipe right to  
left to pass,

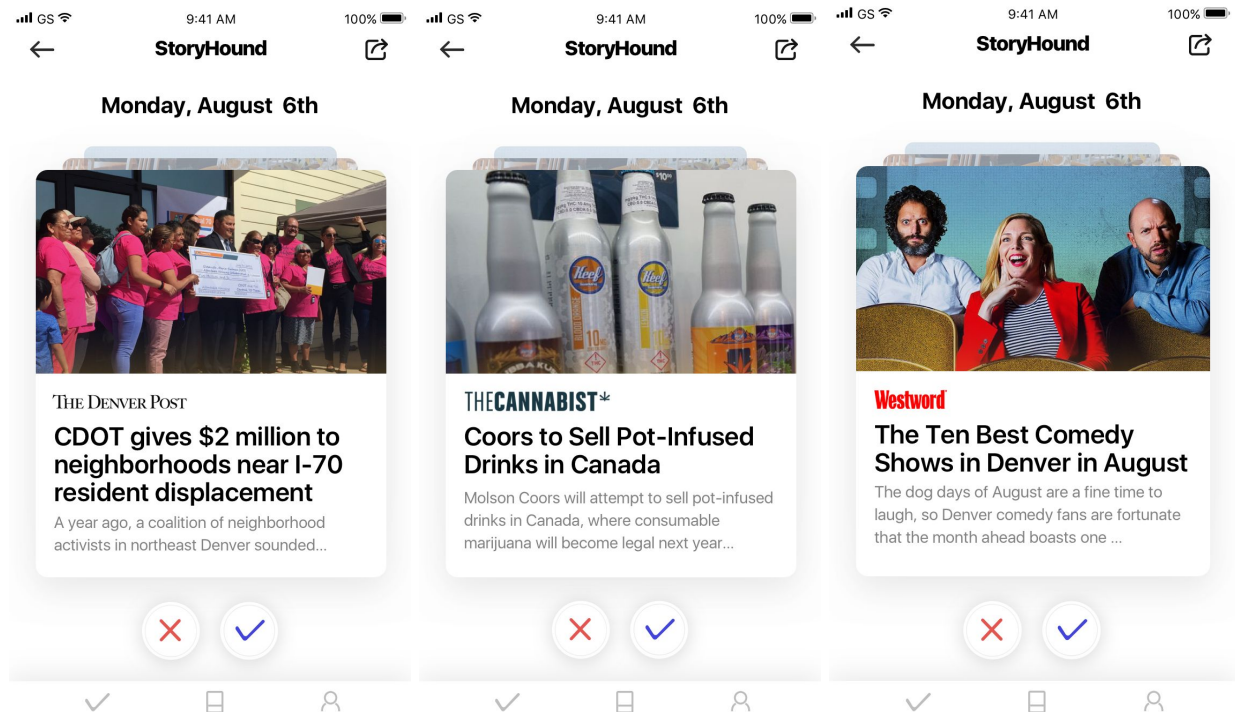


Primary View  
save, swipe  
click to read)



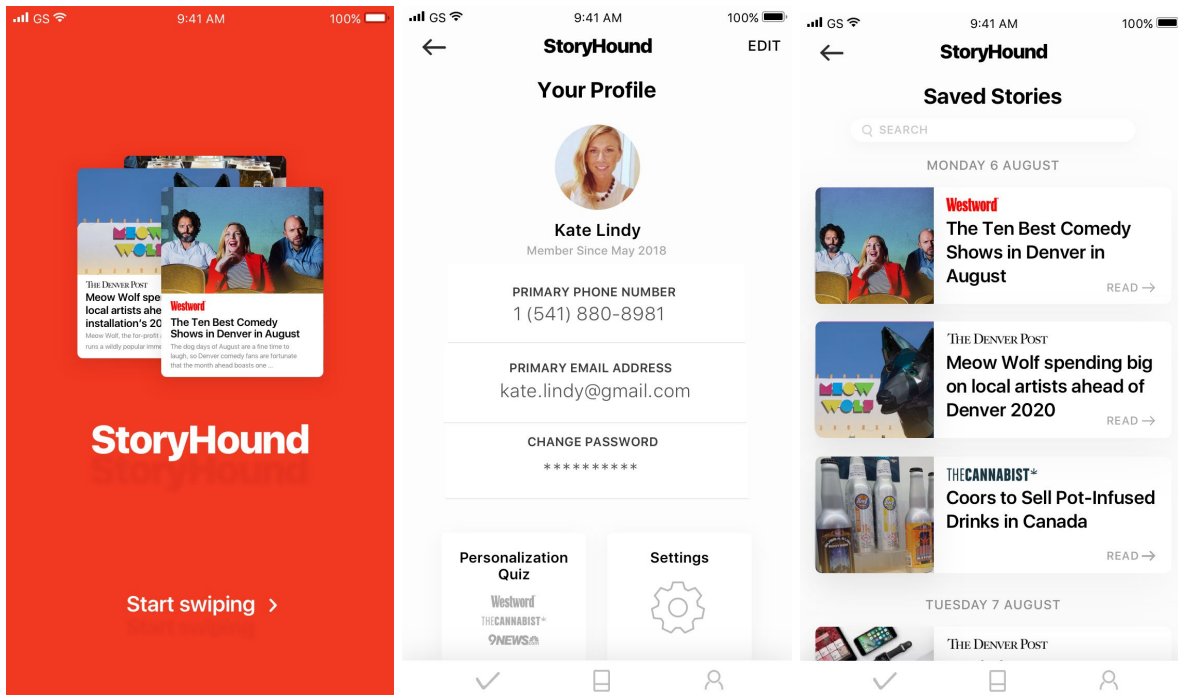


From the read story screen (pictured above right) the user is able to save the story for later, share the story, or go back to swiping through new stories. The home screen (pictured above left) features buttons accessing the user's profile, and their saved stories on a bottom tab bar. The user is also able to navigate back to the prototype tutorial at any time with the arrow in the upper left corner.



### Sample Stories

The StoryHound prototype features stories from many Colorado publications including *The Denver Post*, *Westword*, *CPR*, *The Cannabist*, *9 News*, *The Washington Park Profile* and others with a mix of lifestyle and upcoming entertainment and news. The prototype displays text stories and videos. Displaying a geographically diverse breadth of content for the test users was important for the purpose of conveying this product would be a Colorado-wide platform, not just for readers on the Front Range.



StoryHound Welcome, Profile, and Your Saved Stories screens

The saved stories screen will ultimately allow users to view and manage previously saved content. The prototype is available for testing at <https://invis.io/F9NBN8DSHCB>

### Third, *The Test*

Six test-users were selected from the CMP target demographic for in-person qualitative user experience interviews about the StoryHound prototype:

Test User Requirements:

- Colorado Residents
- 18-40
- Employed

Using InVision, the final StoryHound prototype designs were turned into a clickable prototype that feels like an app for the user.

Each participant received a very brief introduction to the Colorado Media Project and the intended role of StoryHound so they were not biased before interacting with the prototype. The interviews centered around allowing the user to talk about their experience with the prototype for as long as possible. Did they enjoy using it? Why? What features did they like and dislike? The following questions were asked after chatting at length with participants about their general thoughts about the prototype:

- When you first opened the StoryHound app, what did you expect it to do? Did it match your expectation?
- What would you change about the app?
- How much content would you likely swipe through in a setting?
- Do you imagine reading more on the spot or saving content for later?
- Can you tell me about any news you currently pay for?
- Have you ever considered subscribing to a local news outlet?
- Are there any other things you subscribe to or pay for on a regular basis?
- What is an appropriate price to pay for this (outrageous, high, preferred price)?/how would you imagine paying for this (model)?
- When you think about news in Colorado, what comes to mind?
- What is your favorite way to read the news? Apps? Online? Emails?

Each interview lasted 45 minutes on average, allowing time for the test users to share additional ideas for the prototype in addition to feedback on StoryHound in its current form. It should be noted that we were not testing for interest in the demo stories themselves inside of the StoryHound prototype, but rather the emphasis was on format and design.

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# The Results

## Overview

Overall users were eager to have StoryHound available for Colorado news and had numerous suggestions for additional features and design improvements.

### Key Findings Summary:

1. **Test users wanted endless (or nearly endless) content**
2. **StoryHound could work as a replacement for time killing scrolling on social media platforms for test users. Bite size content was in demand**
3. **StoryHound news stories could provide social capital for users**
4. **Swiping through stories by topic and story feed personalization were top feature requests**
5. **Test users were surprised by their affinity for swiping through stories**
6. **Saving content for later was key**

## Endless Content

Five of the six test users expressed they would feel negatively about running out of stories in StoryHound, indicating endless content is preferred. Test user Julia suggested noting when one has reached the end of content that is new to them at least. She said there is satisfaction in feeling “caught up”, but wouldn’t want to run out of stories.

Test user Dustin shared that given his current news consumption habits on mobile devices, he would likely spend an average of 15 minutes per sitting using StoryHound. He cycled through the prototype’s 18 demo stories 3 times.

**“I’d would likely swipe through at least 10 stories at a time and would like to know that I have endless content if I want it. I remember being bummed that Comedy Central and Vice's Snapchat stories were limited in length.”**

**- Luc**

**“Instagram recently started pointing out when you reach the end of the new content, that could work.”**

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- Julia

## The Bite-Sized Content Model

It was fascinating to hear test users (unsolicited) discuss their experience with ambient news on social media and their preference for bite-sized content. Three test users mentioned they were likely to simply swipe through the stories just for the purpose of reading the headlines and getting caught up (although they were also interested in seeing the save story feature built out).

**“It tends to be a criticism of our generation that we like more bite size things, but I love I can get things that I might be able to throw into a conversation without scrolling through pages and pages of an article.”**

- Luc

**“I would like this [StoryHound] as an alternative to sitting on the train and being on Instagram, people are smart and want to feel intelligent but still go to Instagram.”**

- Julia

**“I get most of my news from social media, these formats are passive which I like. I love reading a 15 page New Yorker article on my computer, but I want short stuff on mobile.”**

- Luc

## Social Capital

According to research conducted by the American Press Institute on millennial news consumption, 67% of millennials acquire news due to social factors “such as talking about it with friends.” (American Press Institute). This was illustrated in interviews with several test users who expressed that one reason that bite-sized content is important to them is that it allows them to become more informed and more relevant in their social circles quickly. One test user even suggested additional StoryHound features to help enhance the ability of the product to help give her credibility with friends (her suggested is included later in this section of the report).

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**“If I was at a lunch with a friend in tech and I could temporarily just see tech articles, or something crazy just happened in sports and I want to find it. I might not want to say something isn’t real out loud when it is real, I need to go look up articles to confirm things I hear”**

**- Julia**

**“I can get quick things that I might be able to throw into a conversation without scrolling through pages and pages of a blog post or article.”**

**- Luc**

## **Topical Categories and Personalization**

Test users expressed interest in two methods of potential personalization of their StoryHound experience, 1. Choosing their story preferences and interests upon downloading the app, or 2. Selecting a story topic category before beginning to swipe through stories and changing the category at any point.

**“I would like to choose cards by category or stack. I don’t like the random cards popping up.”**

**- Mary**

**“I’d want to personalize the news I am getting based on topic. Similar to Apple News or my Facebook, I want it to learn what stories I am clicking on”**

**- Dustin**

**“When you read the paper you get different topics sections, so if you could pick a topic and then swipe that would be cool.”**

**- Julia**

**“Will everyone get the same news? I saw the beer story, If I’m into beer will I get more? “I think that the pass and save feature implied that I might get curated stuff.”**

**- Luc**

## **Swiping Format and User Experience**

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**“It was more interesting than I expected it to be to be able to swipe through stories the way I swipe through an app like Tinder”**

**- Dustin**

**“I really like flipping through news like cards.”**

**- Luc**

## **Saving Stories**

**“I liked that all of my saved articles were on the bottom bar, they were easy to find.”**

**- Julia**

**“ I will go back to read saved things later, I do this now already.”**

**- Luc**

# **Recommendation**

## **The Verdict**

Based on the feedback from the six test users, the alignment with current news consumption trends moving towards short bite-sized content, and pain points discovered through CMP’s empathy interviews with Coloradans - StoryHound is worth building and launching for the public.

## **Further Recommended Research and Limitations**

### **CONTENT**

Cultivo’s StoryHound tests did not optimize for gauging interest in specific content (local, national, or topical) or format (text or video). Researching and testing what topics and which publications potential users would be most interested in consuming and potentially in paying for could make or break the success of StoryHound as a product. Given the importance of endless content touched on by most test users, the ability to aggregate content to keep users around is also crucial. Research into which Colorado sources produce adequate content to feature and

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what attribution or permissions would be required is necessary. Is there adequate Colorado content or will national news need to be included?

### **SMALLER TARGET DEMOGRAPHIC**

The test users who explicitly mentioned that bite-sized content was important to them in the user interviews were under the age of 25. It would be worth further researching the specific demographic (18-25 or other) to target for the launch of a minimum viable product.

### **Recommended Product Iterations**

StoryHound would be best launched as a mobile product (web-application optimized for mobile or app). According to Smith Geiger, over 80% of news is consumed on mobile devices by our target demographic (*Live Presentation, August 17*) Because one of StoryHound's primary motivating pain points was quality entertainment during down time, convenience and constant accessibility of a mobile product is crucial to its success.

#### **Key features to include from the prototype:**

- Story cards with prominent, quickly readable headlines
- Save and pass buttons for those who prefer not to swipe
- App tutorial demonstrating the actions of the buttons and swiping cards
- Ability to save stories for later in a separate app page
- Searchable saved stories
- Uncluttered home screen (story swiping) view
- Linking to publications websites from read/view story page
- Capacity for video stories and text stories

#### **Key additional features to include:**

- Sort stories by topic or news outlet
  - Algorithm learning user interests and tailoring stories
  - Add a button for "read" between the save and pass buttons
  - Search unsaved articles
  - Recover skipped stories
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- Dark theme capability for night reading



## Potential Monetization

When asked about paying for this product, three of the six test users suggested potential monetization models which might be attractive to them rather than immediately stating they would not pay.

### MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTIONS

When asked about a subscription price, the three test users open to paying all assumed of their own accord the subscription would be monthly, and provided the following answers to “What would be an outrageous, high, and reasonable price for this product?”:

Reasonable Price Answers	High Price Answers	Outrageous Price Answers
1. \$2-\$3/month 2. \$0.99/month 3. \$5/month	1. \$1.99/month 2. \$5/month 3. \$15/month	1. \$4.99/month 2. More than \$5/month 3. \$20/month

### IN-APP PURCHASES

One user noted he would be unlikely to pay for a StoryHound app or subscription to the app, however, he would be interested in paying to subscribe to additional premium publications within the app. He gave the example of paying for the NY Times or Wall Street Journal having stories in StoryHound, but acknowledged these were national sources.

### SPONSORED CONTENT

One user suggested featuring sponsored content in the app as featured stories. He noted that as long as it was clearly marked as sponsored content he would not mind encountering it.

### PUBLICATIONS PAY FOR TRAFFIC AND INCLUSION

The third monetization method suggested by a user was having the publications whose stories are featured in StoryHound pay in order to be included. Her case was that the app could serve as a referral to publications own websites through the linked stories.

## Resources Required

The projected resources and skills required to build and launch StoryHound are as follows:

- Content Sourcing/Quality Control
- Marketing:
  - Social media promotion
  - Referrals
  - Partnerships
- Digital Product Design
- Mobile/Web Development
- Backend Development/Content Aggregation
- Partnerships with paid news sources (potentially)
- Sales for sponsored content (potentially)

## Appendix

### Additional Test User Quotes

Below are quotes about the StoryHound user experience, suggestions for additional improvements, and new ideas from the test users.

#### SUGGESTED CHANGES

**“I wonder if there should there be a third button that says “read” so all three functions are represented by a button.”**

**- Mary**

**“It was easy to find the saved articles, but I wouldn’t know how to find an article I accidentally threw away.”**

**- Julia**

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**“I’d like a search function, or functionality to click on text and get more information.”**

**- Dustin**

**“I want a way to go back to rejected articles to see what I might have missed”**

**Dustin**

**“In newspaper form the headlines were always a bold or larger type. It was very common to scan the headlines and only read the stories of interest. As a paper reader I miss that.”**

**Mary**

**“Red and blue are good colors, but it makes it feel a little political, especially as a news source.”**

**Julia**

#### **ADDITIONAL TEST USER IDEAS**

**“Nighttime model; wanted to turn what was white into a dark grey, it helps for reading news in bed.”**

**Dustin**

**“Personalize the news I am getting based on topic, similar to Apple News or my Facebook. I want it to learn which articles I am clicking on and provide more of those”**

**Dustin**

**“I’d like to select topics I care about in the onboarding when you sign up so that you don’t have to filter through so many articles”**

**Julia**

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**“I don't know if I'd pay for this app, but I might pay monthly for additional publications within the app. I'd pay for WSJ snippets or the NY Times for example. A high price would be \$5/month and a reasonable price would be \$2/3 a month.”**

**Luc**

**“I don't pay for apps at all, but I could see Westword paying to have their articles on the app.”**

**Julia**

**“If it's a political issue, I wish I could email someone directly through the app. Decrease the barrier for me to get active. Auto-generate some of the email maybe? Dear Senator X, I found this article on StoryHound and I wanted to email you to.....”**

**Dustin**

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### Work With Us

Cultivo is a marketing and product development agency focused on providing innovative digital solutions to any problem your business is facing. Ranging from websites, apps and software, brand development, and marketing solutions.

Looking to work with us? Email [scott@cultivomedia.com](mailto:scott@cultivomedia.com) and check our work out on [cultivomedia.com](http://cultivomedia.com)

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