

Case study

How qualitative customer research fuels innovation

“

I don't need to know which direction the wind is blowing from or how strong it is. I want to know how much longer I'll have to bike to work!”

How does one revolutionize the weather forecast?

To identify what customers actually care about when it comes to weather predictions, we started by asking: what is our relationship to the weather? How does it impact our lives?

Our qualitative customer research led to one primary conclusion: **users don't want general information about the weather. They want to know how it will impact their lives.** The most valuable knowledge is customized and makes life easier.

This case study shows what an organization can learn when they listen carefully to their customers and ask the powerful, qualitative 'why' questions.

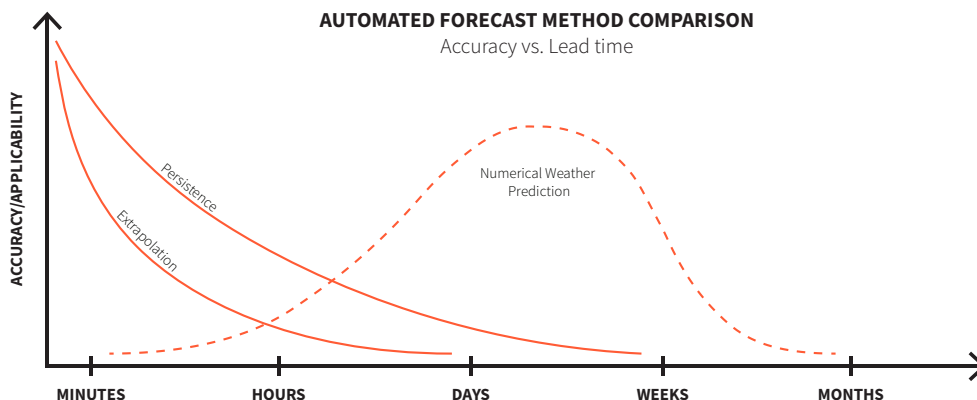
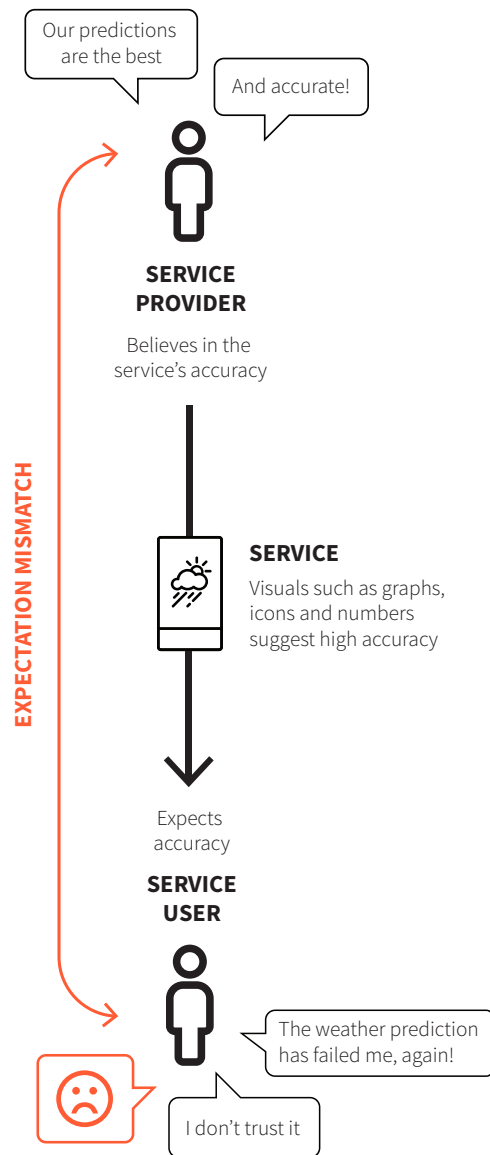


THE EXPECTATION MISMATCH

Qualitative research focuses on emotions, beliefs and behaviours. Conversations with both weather service providers and weather service users quickly revealed what we called the “expectation mismatch”. Users report not only a deep disappointment and distrust in the weather service but a different basic assumption than the provider uses. **When a customer has a problem, though, the provider has an opportunity to solve it.**

The weather forecast provider knows that “weather forecasting is the application of science and technology to predict the conditions of the atmosphere for a given location and time.”¹ Because “forecasts are made by collecting quantitative data about the current state of the atmosphere”² and using a scientific method to project how it will change, the provider firmly believes in the quality of its service. The reality is that users report a different experience and, on average, don’t trust the forecast.

This contradiction is caused by one simple fact: **the accuracy of a weather forecast shrinks with each hour it extends into the future.** The further away in time a moment is, the less accurate the weather forecast will be. Anything beyond forty-eight hours is more of an educated guess than a precise forecast.



1, 2: Source: Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weather_forecasting

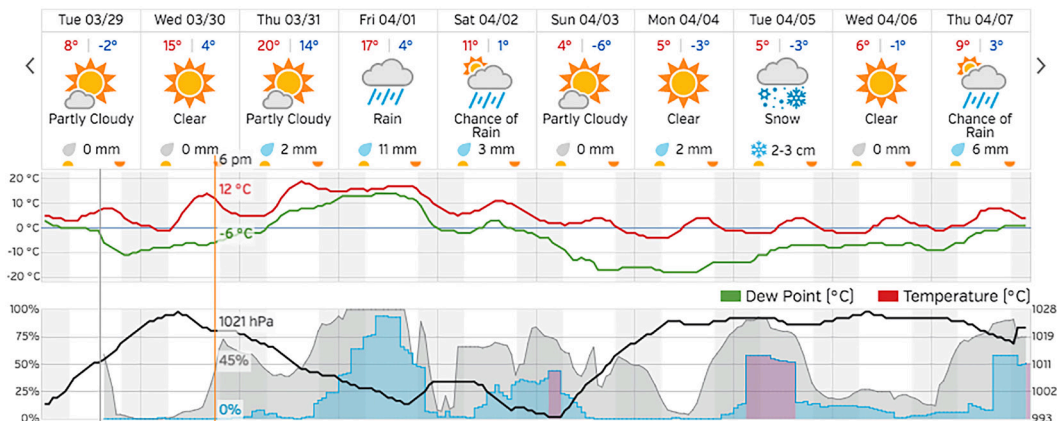
VISUAL MISCOMMUNICATION

It seems like common sense that a forecast more than two days in advance will be less precise. So why the frustration on the user end? Our qualitative research conversations revealed an obvious but completely overlooked reason: predictions are communicated in a way that suggests precision and accuracy.

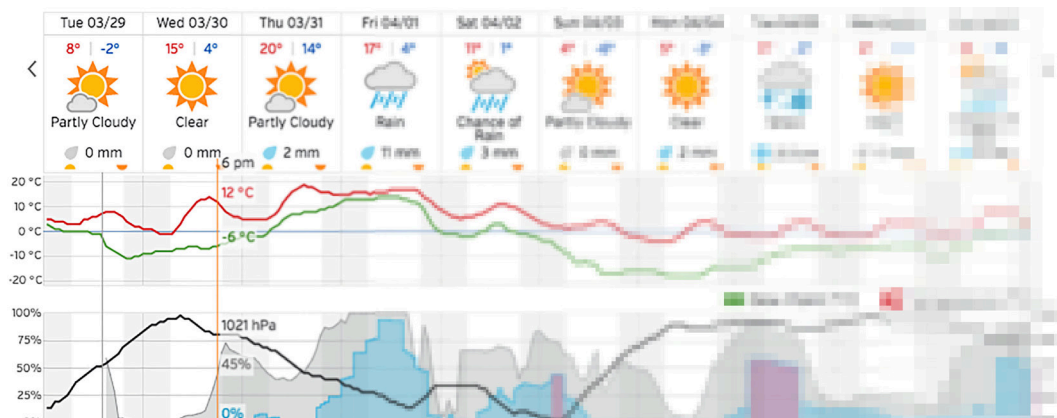
Graphs, numbers and percentages give the impression of a scientific calculation, which one can rely on. This visual communication choice obscures the fact that accuracy is dropping by the hour. A simple fix could bring clarity to users.

What if the visualization indicated the uncertainty of the forecast by blurring out the hours and days that are further away?

The current way to visualise weather forecasts is misleading as it suggests accuracy and precision.



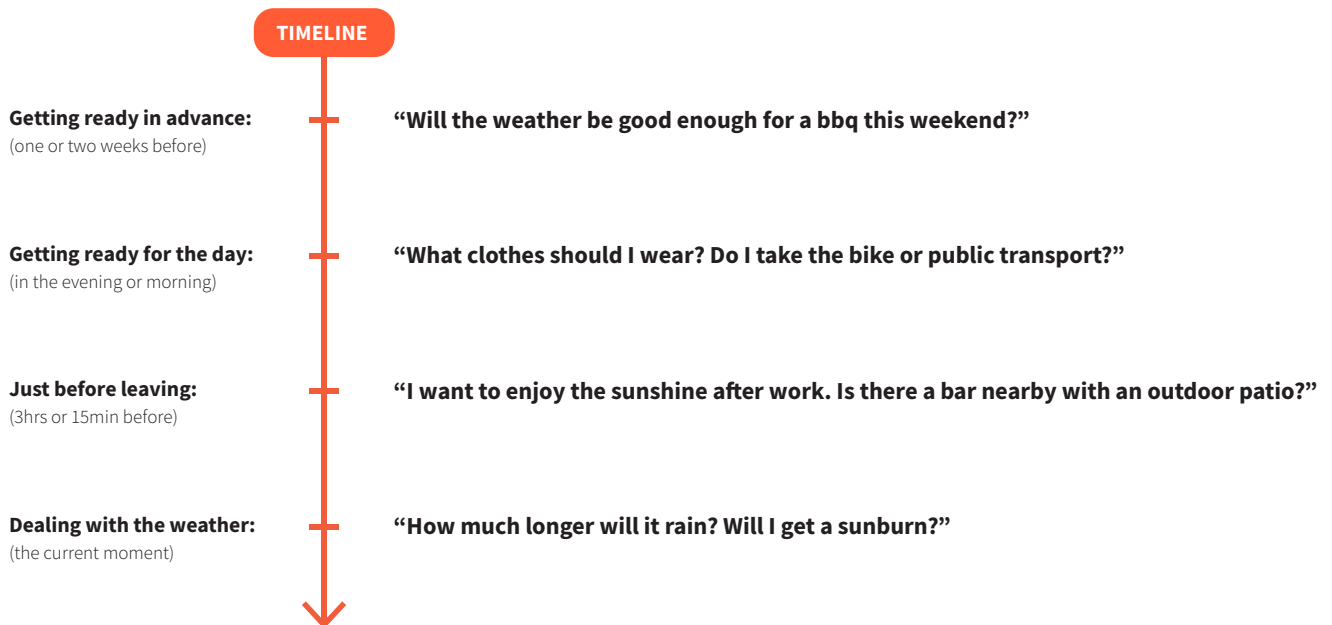
The alternative way is more honest and communicates how uncertain the weather really is.



“WEATHER MOMENTS” AND RESULTING NEEDS

Interviews with both users and non-users of weather forecasting services provided insights into behaviours, attitudes and needs. We discovered that users seek information about weather at different moments for distinct reasons.

The information we need varies by how far into the future we want to plan. A person planning a weekend kitesurfing trip wants to know when and where the best conditions will be. On the other hand, a mother preparing her child to leave for school wants to know what shoes and jacket to choose. On an unexpectedly sunny day in Amsterdam, most people want to know where the nearest outdoor bar is. Our research identified **four “weather moments”** that in turn suggest new service types.

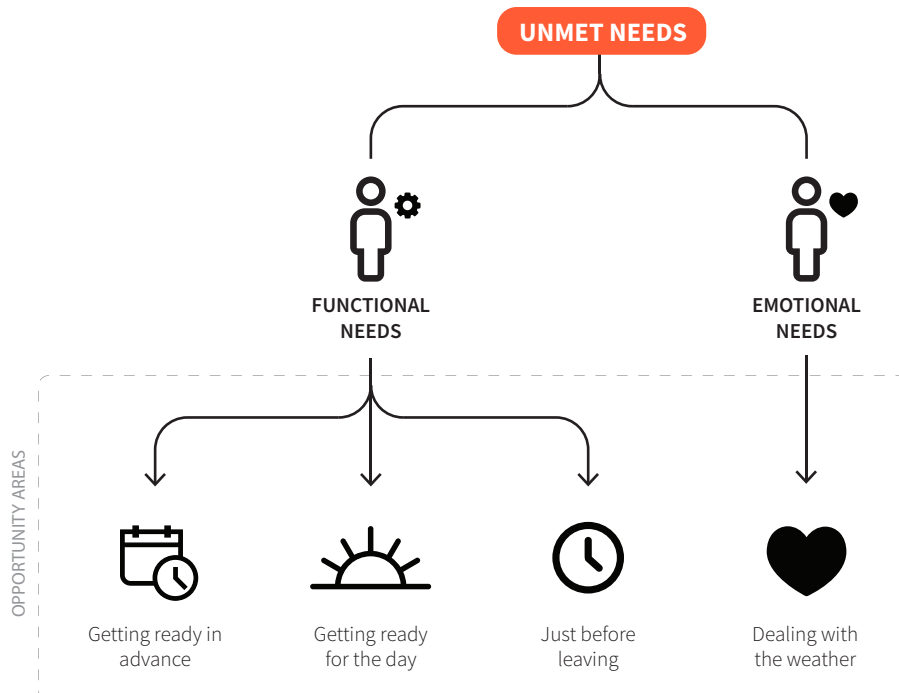


HOW WILL THE WEATHER IMPACT MY LIFE?

Nowadays, weather information is easily available through various services, apps and platforms. This broad availability puts pressure on forecast providers to differentiate by offering a better user experience. Our qualitative research helped to identify unmet needs and discover new opportunity areas.

Consumers are not interested in generic information about meteorology. They want to know how the weather will impact their plans and daily lives.

The users' unanswered desires can be divided into two types: functional and emotional needs. Functional needs are related to the activities that the users want to engage in. Emotional needs refer to their well-being and feelings, which are triggered by weather conditions. These unfulfilled wants contain innovation opportunities.

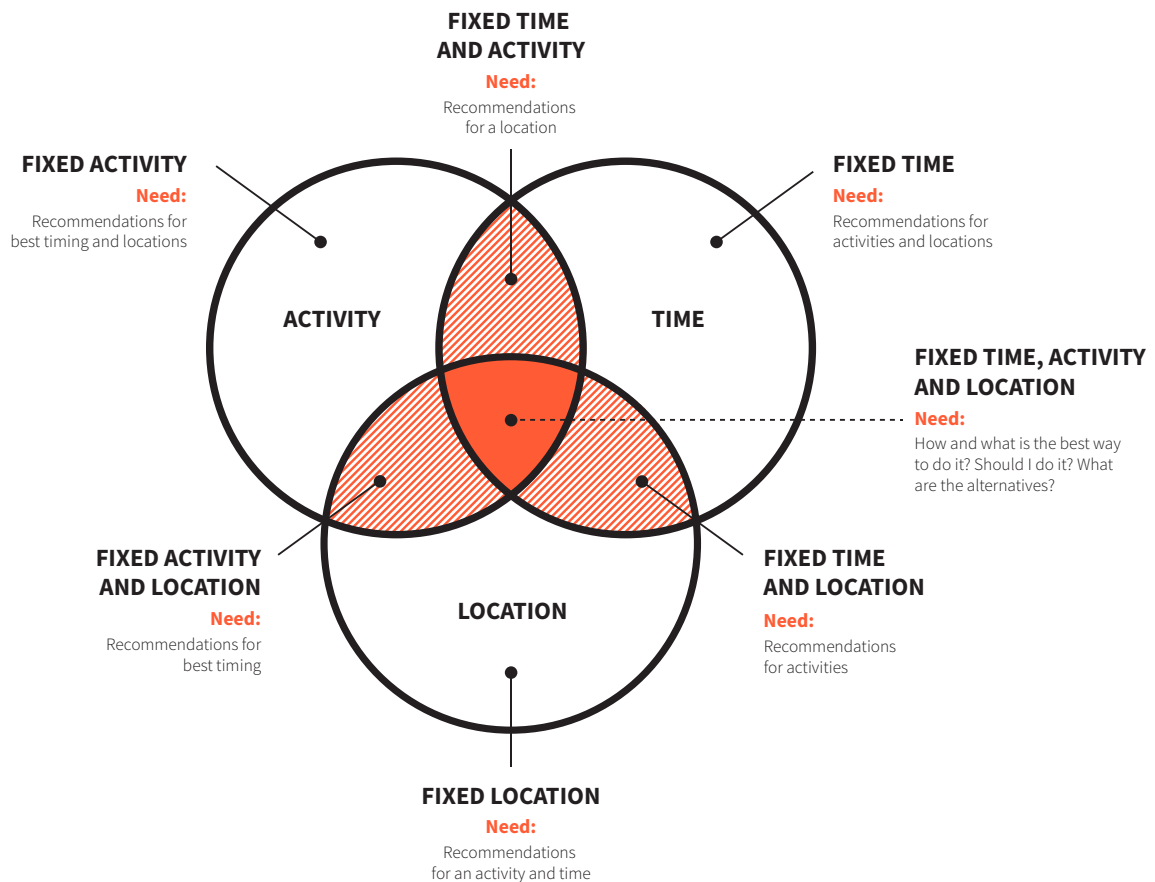


FUNCTIONAL NEEDS

People think about three parameters when planning activities: the activity itself, the location in which it will happen and the timespan. Depending on the specific situation, one, two or all three parameters can be flexible or fixed.

For example, a commute to work usually happens at a fixed time. The route to work (location) is also more or less fixed. There is flexibility, however, regarding how this activity will be performed. Does the commuter walk, bike, take public transport, or drive a car?

For other occasions, the activity is central. When we want to have a BBQ with our friends in the park, we look for the perfect time and location. **It is in these flexible parameters that there is a need for custom recommendations and support from the weather forecast provider.**



EMOTIONAL NEEDS

Weather doesn't just influence our lives on a functional level. At least half of the research participants talked about the impact weather has on their well-being. This can vary from severe allergies to seasonal depressions (Seasonal Affective Disorder = SAD). It can be a sensitivity to cold or heat, a lousy mood or getting a sunburn.

Personal preferences play a huge role here. One person considers 18° to be warm, while another complains about the cold. Everyone has an individualized comfort zone. **The ability to understand these differences and cater to them is a huge differentiation opportunity for forecast providers.**



“I need to be really careful with the sun. I get burnt easily.”

“When I get up and it's raining I don't feel like getting out of bed.”



“I suffer from SAD every winter and it really affects me. I wish there was something I could do about it.”

OPPORTUNITY AREAS

We discovered two major opportunity areas:

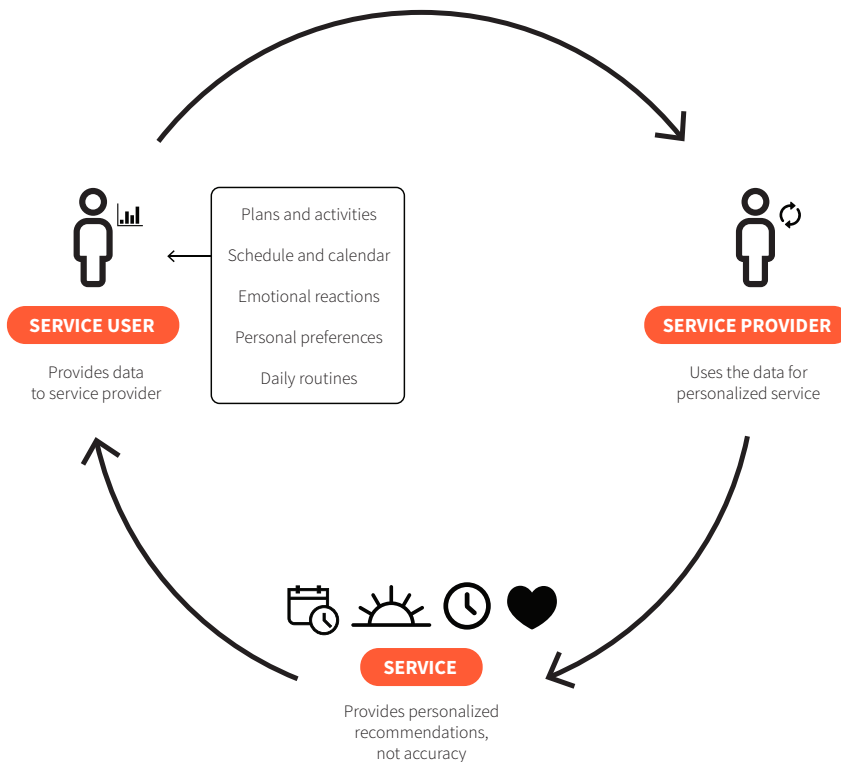
Building trust through transparency and communication

How can brand identity, positioning and visual communication build trust and strengthen the brand’s relationship with its customer? The “expectation mismatch” leads to disappointment on the user side; it’s a low point in their customer journey and requires attention. Forecast providers should ask themselves how they could be more transparent and precise when communicating about the accuracy of their “predictions”.

Increased customer value through personalizing the provided service

The second, more obvious, area to improve is in the services offered. They should go beyond generic weather information. By harvesting users’ data (personal preferences, planned activities, schedules, routines, emotional reactions etc.) a weather service can be highly customized to address specific needs.

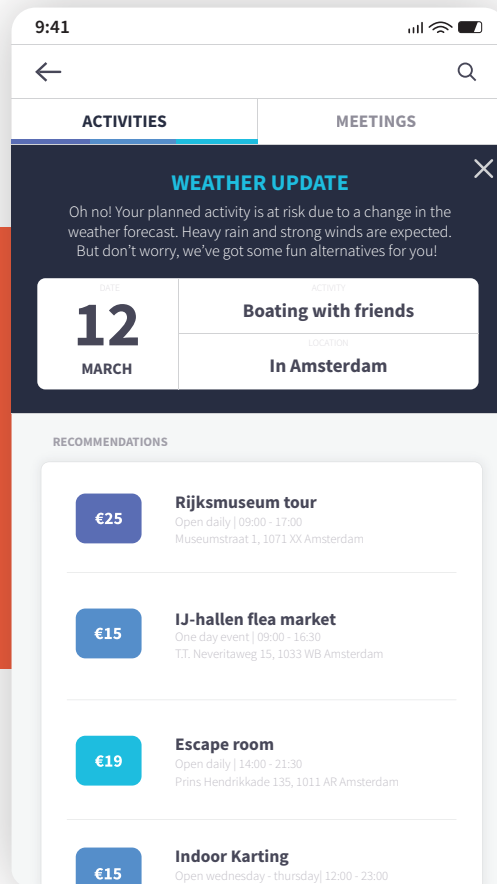
On the following pages, you’ll find four service concepts that respond to these opportunities.



WEATHER RESCUE

This is a service for planning weather dependent activities in the future. The Weather Rescue will help the user to anticipate weather changes, support preparations as the activity gets closer and offer alternatives if the activity needs to be cancelled due to weather conditions.

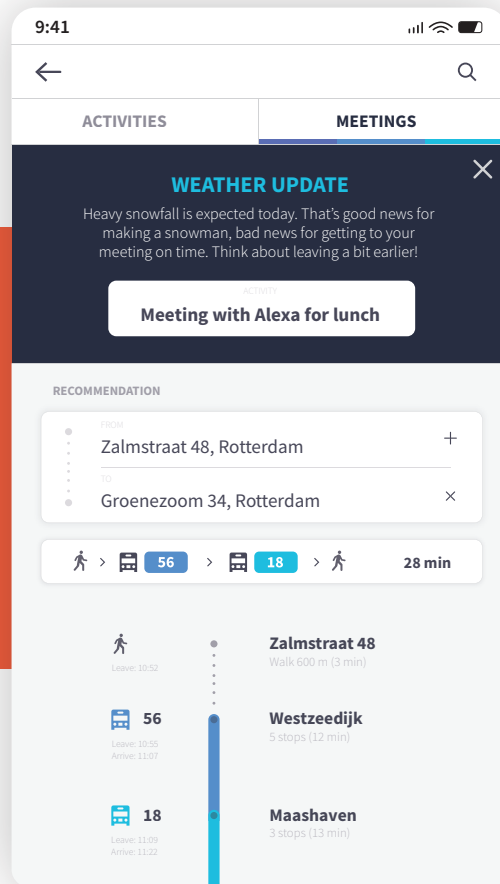
For example, if someone planned a boat trip on the canals in Amsterdam and the weather didn't permit it, Weather Rescue could suggest a museum visit and offer the tickets with a discount.



WEATHER ASSISTANT

The Weather Assistant is like a PA. It knows your schedule, routines and daily activities, as well as the weather conditions.

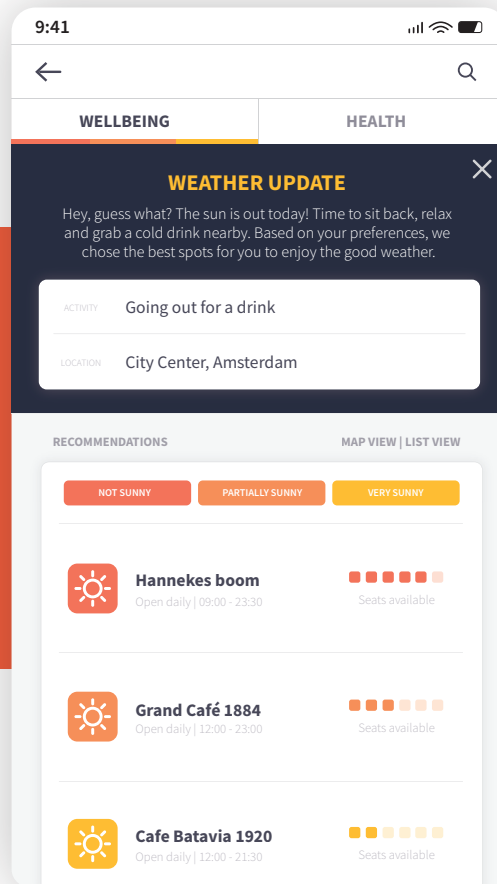
By combining this knowledge, the assistant can offer customized advice throughout the day. It can recommend taking public transport instead of biking because of an upcoming storm or wearing your new summer shoes on what will become a hot day.



WEATHER HUNTER

This service fits especially well with Dutch culture. Let's be honest: the Netherlands can be dark and rainy. When a warm, sunny day comes along, everyone wants to take full advantage of it.

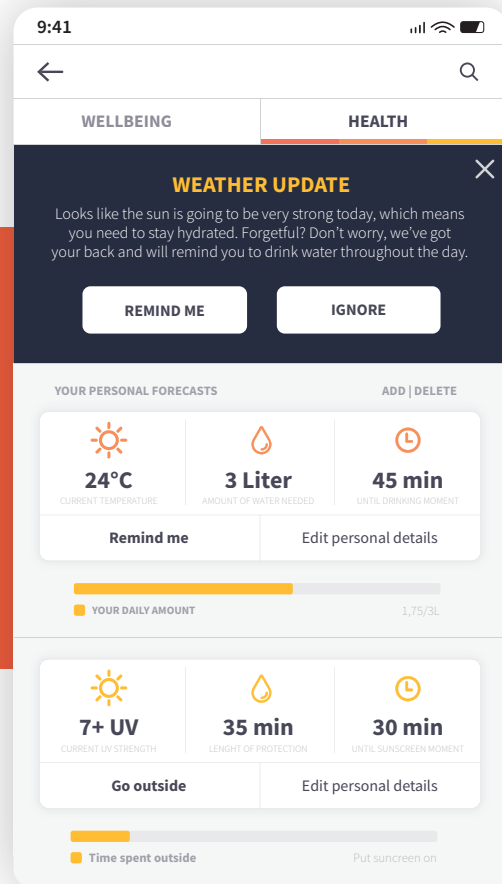
The Weather Hunter knows the users' preference for "good" weather and hunts for that type of weather. It provides alerts for where to go and what to do to enjoy it fully. For example, the Weather Hunter can suggest available spots for an afternoon drink in the sun.



WELL-BEING FORECAST

Weather influences our mental and physical well-being. Some people have allergies. Others react strongly to bad weather and get a significant mood dip. These negative effects can be mitigated through reminders to take your medicine or get enough sleep or to eat healthy foods and keep your energy up in other ways. In the moment of distress, mental support can also be useful in cheering you up.

The Well-Being Forecast will learn your struggles and makes your life easier when the weather has a negative impact on your well-being.



ABOUT THE RESEARCH



LEADING QUESTIONS

- What is our relationship to the weather?
- How does it impact our lives?
- How can a weather service provider anticipate this?

Qualitative research is about finding out not just what people think, but why they think it. We use it to get inside customers' minds. In this case, we employed face-to-face interviews, context chats and user diaries. Our exploration provided valuable insights into not only users' problems and dislikes, but also their subconscious wants. When people talk about their emotions, habits and opinions, they reveal their motivations and needs.

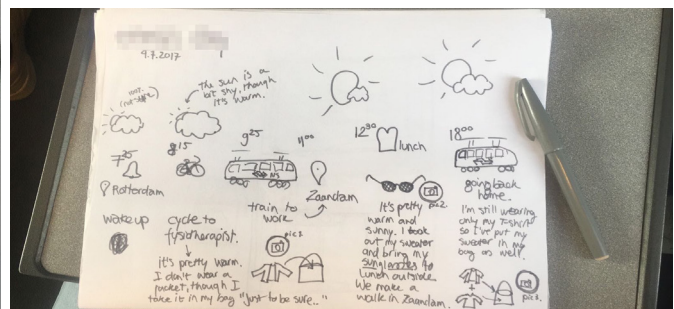
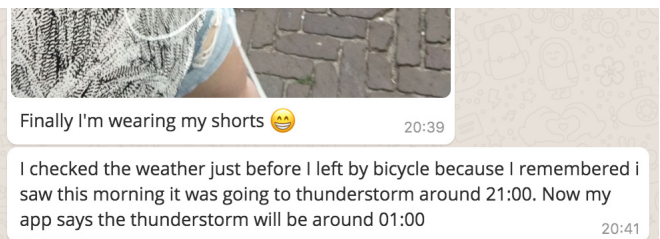
The tangible results enable product teams to take action and kick-off an iterative development process.

For this research we involved twelve participants and two researchers. Data was covered over a period of three weeks. The following synthesis and concept development were delivered within four weeks.



THE VALUE

- The risk associated with service innovation was reduced drastically.
- Developed concepts address true customer needs.
- Next steps were clear, and action could follow.



ABOUT REMEMBER TO PLAY (RtP)

RtP is a Strategic Design consultancy that reduces the risk of innovation initiatives through an iterative, hands-on and co-creative approach. We identify hidden product/service opportunity areas through qualitative customer research and the creation of future scenarios. We love actionable outcomes, so we translate opportunities into tangible concepts and take them through the iterative prototyping journey.

As a result, our customers build products and services that are not only feasible but also desirable and viable.

To learn more about RtP please visit: **www.rembertoplay.co**
or get in touch: **hello@rembertoplay.co**, **+31 648008044**

