

CASE STUDY NOVEMBER 2017–JANUARY 2019

Homepage redesign for 43 Business Journals

GOAL

Today, [The Business Journals](#)—a network of 43 local business journals across the United States—do far more than just publish business news stories. They offer numerous tools and services to help small and midsize business owners grow their business and advance their career, such as finding sales leads, promoting new hires, or posting job openings. But our existing homepages confined these products to a sidebar where they were easy to miss. **(1)**

I directed the design work to redesign all 43 Business Journals homepages, collaborating closely with several product designers on my team and the product manager to create a modern, new homepage that showcased the breadth of our offerings while still keeping the latest news at its core and largely maintaining traffic to articles. We also had to retain a substantial number of display ad positions.

(The following case study reflects the knowledge I've developed from my more than seven years' experience as a product designer and excludes proprietary information.)

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS AND EXTENSIVE USER RESEARCH

We began by reviewing homepages from a number of other news organizations, particularly those focusing on a deep relationship with subscribers. When looking at [Quartz](#), The Netherlands' [De Correspondent](#), and [The Information](#), among others, we noted their emphasis on brand identity and how they incorporated less traditional elements for a news homepage such as newsletter sign-up forms and registration for upcoming events.

This balance between editorial content and marketing also led us to examine landing pages for SaaS products such as [Stripe](#) that tell a story as they encourage you to start using their product. **(2)**

1. The previous San Francisco Business Times homepage. All 43 Business Journals follow the same template. News was strongly emphasized in a feed, but promotions for lists, jobs, events, and more were confined to an easy-to-ignore sidebar. User interaction with many of these sidebar modules was minimal.

SELECT A CITY -

SAN FRANCISCO

BUSINESS TIMES

LIMITED TIME OFFER

Subscribe Now

YOUR ACCOUNT

Sign In -

INDUSTRIES & TOPICS

HOME

NEWS

LISTS & AWARDS

PEOPLE & COMPANIES

EVENTS

MORE...

Q

TOP PRIVATE COMPANIES

Gain insight on the top private companies in your market

Search Top Private Companies

Search

Click to Expand

Sponsored by

Deloitte.

Image: BORIS RAE MALLS PHOTOGRAPHY

SIPC said it doesn't protect Robinhood's checking, savings account deposits

The Securities Investors Protection Corp. says its insurance against investor losses over a brokerage firm's failure doesn't cover money in Robinhood's checking and savings accounts.

Exclusive: How this \$225 million East Bay housing, hotel and restaurant project was redesigned to deal with sea level rise

United Airlines rival debates nonstop flight to European destination at SFO

Why this community bank is expanding into the East Bay

DEC 17, 2018, 4:59 AM PST

HBR: What great data analysts do -- and why every organization needs them

DEC 17, 2018, 3:20 AM PST

Malaysia files criminal charges against Goldman Sachs

SPONSORED CONTENT BY BANK OF AMERICA

SAN FRANCISCO GIVES: Ramona relates to parents in her financial coaching class because she's been there -- literally

DEC 16, 2018, 6:45 PM PST

Tough fourth quarter casts shadow over Wall St bonuses

DEC 16, 2018, 6:41 PM PST

Apple computers used to be built in the U.S. It was a mess.

FEATURED POSTS

Blanca Torres

San Francisco's new condo inventory plunges as projects sell out

Katie Burke

Local restaurant group's beefy acquisition will make it the first in the country to hit \$2 billion in sales

Ron Leuty

Peninsula drug maker to pay \$360M to settle Justice Department claims

Mark Calvey

Exclusive: Bank of America sees 'key Bay Area executive retire'

Hannah Norman

Transit Innovator Chariot shifts to focus on corporate transportation

Rachel Sandier

Worker shortage and trade war could help fuel a Bay Area slowdown, UCLA report says

Emily Hoeven

Word clouds and collages: Why this Bay Area agency wants to spice up staff reports

Dawn Kawamoto

Hayward startup in expansion mode as it develops autonomous helicopters

DEC 16, 2018, 6:27 PM PST

Tech workers got paid in company stock. They used it to agitate for change.

DEC 14, 2018, 3:47 PM PST

How these brothers run a gaming startup without sibling rivalry getting in the way

SPONSORED BY

HOME OF THE DAY

Fully Renovated Single-Family Home in Prime Russian Hill

SUBSCRIBER CONTENT

COVER STORY

Peer-to-peer car-share companies are on a collision course with the rental car industry's giants

TECHNOLOGY

Aaron Levine spills the four ways that Box got lucky

HEALTH CARE

New hospital designs prioritize patient experience

TECHNOLOGY

Former venture capitalist talks about her journey of building security startup

View Weekly Edition

Access the Book of Lists

THE LISTS

DEC 14, 2018

Banks in the East Bay

Ranked by East Bay deposits 6/30/18

Rank	Bank
1	Wells Fargo Bank
2	Bank of the West

View This List

DEC 14, 2018

Banks

Ranked by Bay Area deposits 6/30/18

DEC 14, 2018

SBA Lenders in the Bay Area

Ranked by Total 2018 Bay Area loans

See More Lists

SPONSORED BY

EAST BAY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

SPONSORED CONTENT BY EAST BAY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

SAN FRANCISCO GIVES: East Bay Community Foundation

MOST POPULAR

1

Here's how much you need to earn to live in the Bay Area's most

2

Robinhood takes aim at banks with checking and savings accounts

3

United makes biggest-ever international route expansion at SFO

4

Another San Francisco office tenant decamps for Oakland

5

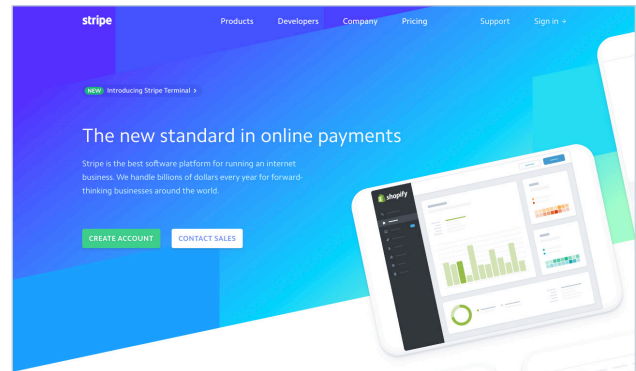
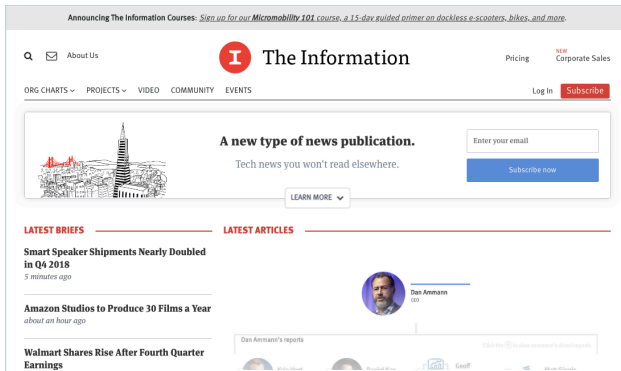
Clorox loses key executive, triggering management shuffle

6

Fast-growing tech startup aims to bring predictive AI to all companies

7

5 tips for selling your house in a slowing Bay



2. Subscription news site

The Information and SaaS payment platform Stripe were among our inspiration for the new homepage design.

When we examined user behavior on our previous homepage, we found that modules promoting our services other than news were not getting clicked on often; those farther down the page received virtually no engagement. We also found that more homepage visitors were using desktop and laptop computers than smartphones or tablets. This led us to prioritize the desktop experience first, though we sketched the mobile version of a responsive design throughout so we could ensure it would adapt well.

As we started the homepage project, we had also completed an ambitious customer survey, in partnership with our marketing research team. The survey revealed that our customers' top professional challenges were finding the right clients, finding and keeping the right employees, and having enough time to do everything on their plate.

We followed up the survey with over a dozen in-depth interviews with current Business Journals subscribers. These interviews showed that although we have products that can help our customers find clients or hire better, even our most avid users had little familiarity with them. The survey and interviews made clear that for new visitors and loyal subscribers alike, we need to do a much better job of explaining how The Business Journals can help your business and your career. As the front door to our website, the homepage seemed an ideal place for this message.

INITIAL WIREFRAMES

I synthesized the user research, competitive analysis, and project goals to create the first round of wireframes. (3) These wireframes were modeled on SaaS landing pages, with a lead call to action and sections grouping available services under the customer benefit that they offer (e.g., “Hire the right people” would combine our job board, networking events, and “People on the Move” promotions).

The biggest challenge in this and further iterations was how to integrate news headlines that brought regular visitors to the homepage. A first attempt placed the latest headlines in a horizontal feed above the navigation so that people on desktop and mobile would quickly see the latest stories, with a more substantial top news section beneath.

While the product manager and design team found the thematic groupings promising, we wanted to explore alternatives to the top of the page. While a single, prominent call to action would likely have positive results for conversion on it, we do not currently offer an all-access subscription that we could emphasize so strongly.

EXPLORING A UNIFIED FEED

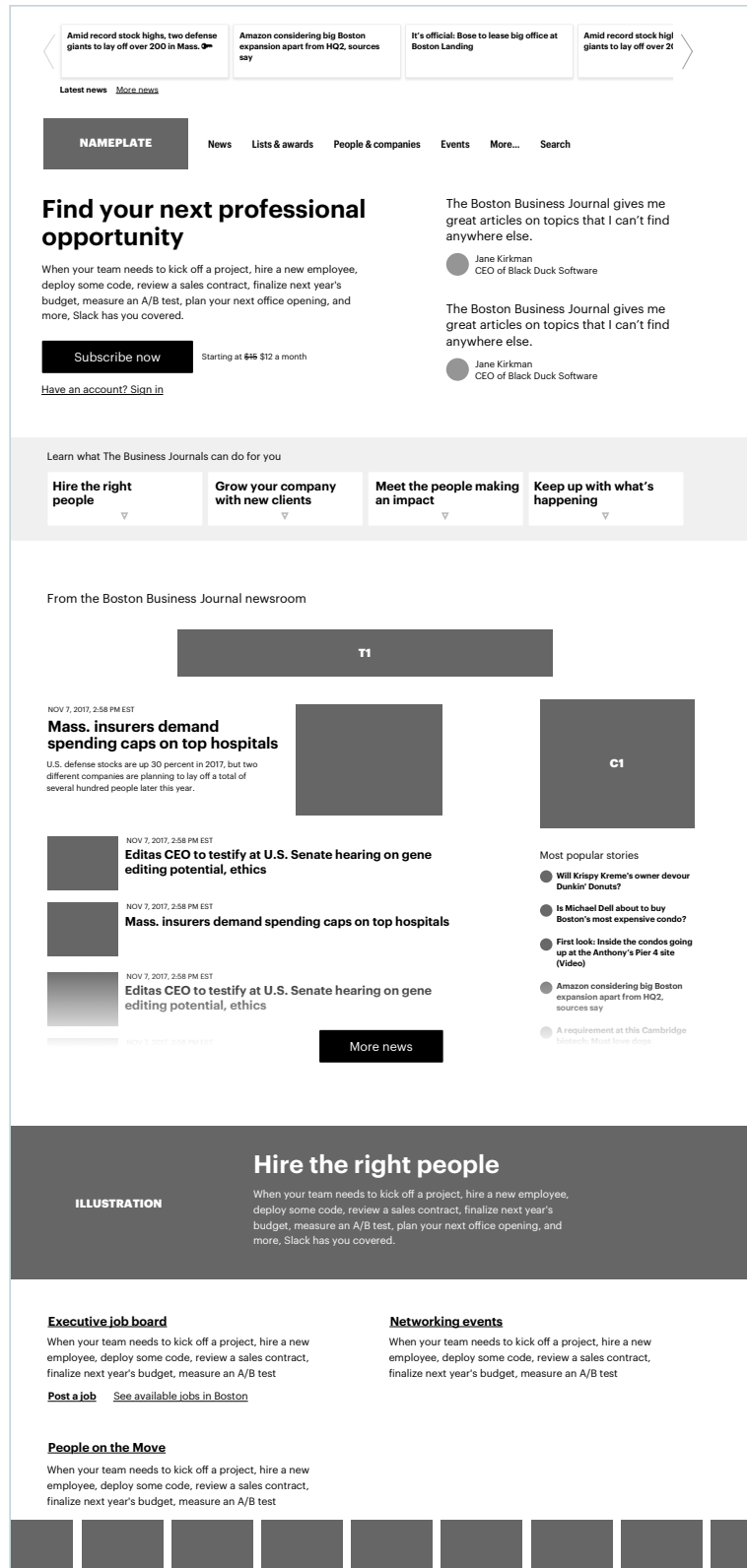
For the next round, I moved the top news section up, embedding a large news subscription promo within it. As I worked on this, I also tried an entirely different concept to make sure we could debate more options.

Here, I tried to unite the news and promotions in a single feed. (4) The latest news headlines would dictate what we promote: a subscriber-only article would be accompanied by a subscription offer; a story about a Business Journals event would expose where to buy tickets for that and other events; and an article relating to one of our top company or people lists would show how to use them for finding new clients.

This version was based on our information architecture and extant content relationships, so while it was more ambitious, it was also grounded in technological reality. But while we agreed that it was promising, it was too big a departure from other news homepages to pursue.

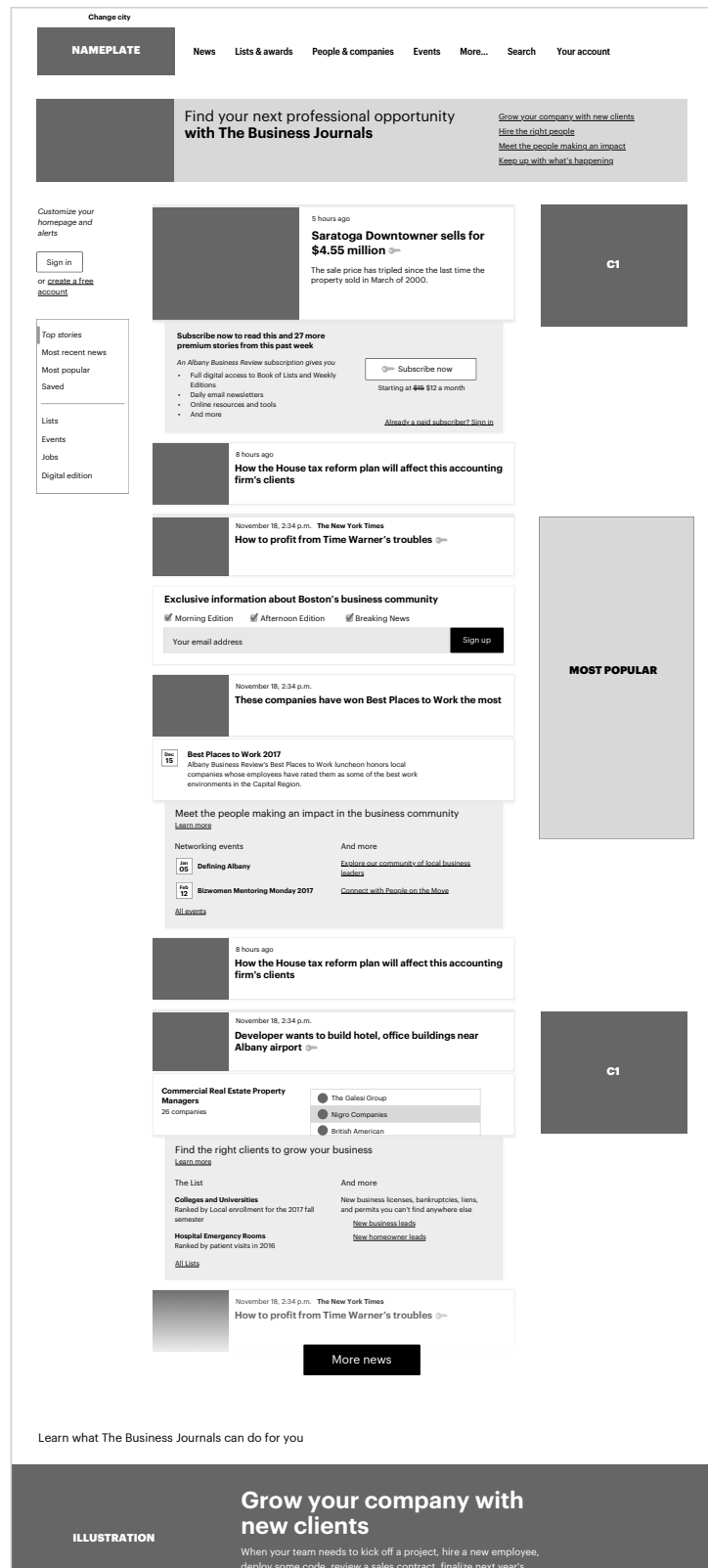
3. Early wireframe, centering on a strong call to action with testimonials. The latest headlines appear in a bar above the navigation, with curated top news beneath the lead section.

The Business Journals' key benefits are highlighted beneath ("Hire the right people"), combining disparate services for the first time.



4. Wireframe of the alternative “unified feed” concept, mixing news and promotions. A story mentioning an upcoming Business Journal event, for example, would contextually show additional events users could register for.

As seen in the left sidebar (“Customize your homepage and alerts”), this direction would have also facilitated forthcoming personalization efforts by giving signed-in users the ability to customize what appears in their feed.



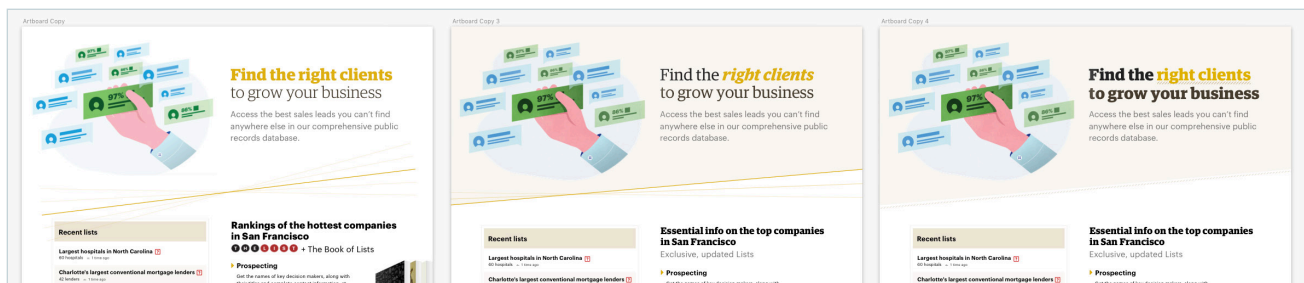
VISUAL DESIGN

In our next phase, my colleague continued with the overall architecture, adding sections for the most popular sections of our news coverage (such as commercial real estate and banking) and trying to regularize the promotional elements without losing their impact. Given the length of the page, we tried placing navigational panels at different locations to give visitors quick access to the section that appealed most.

Next, I art directed two designers on the visual direction. (5) (6) Our 43 Business Journals have three color palette options—sapphire blue, ruby red, and emerald green—which makes visual design more challenging as a rule. We identified a relatively new addition to our palette, gold, as an ideal tool for additional emphasis that would harmonize with all three primary colors.

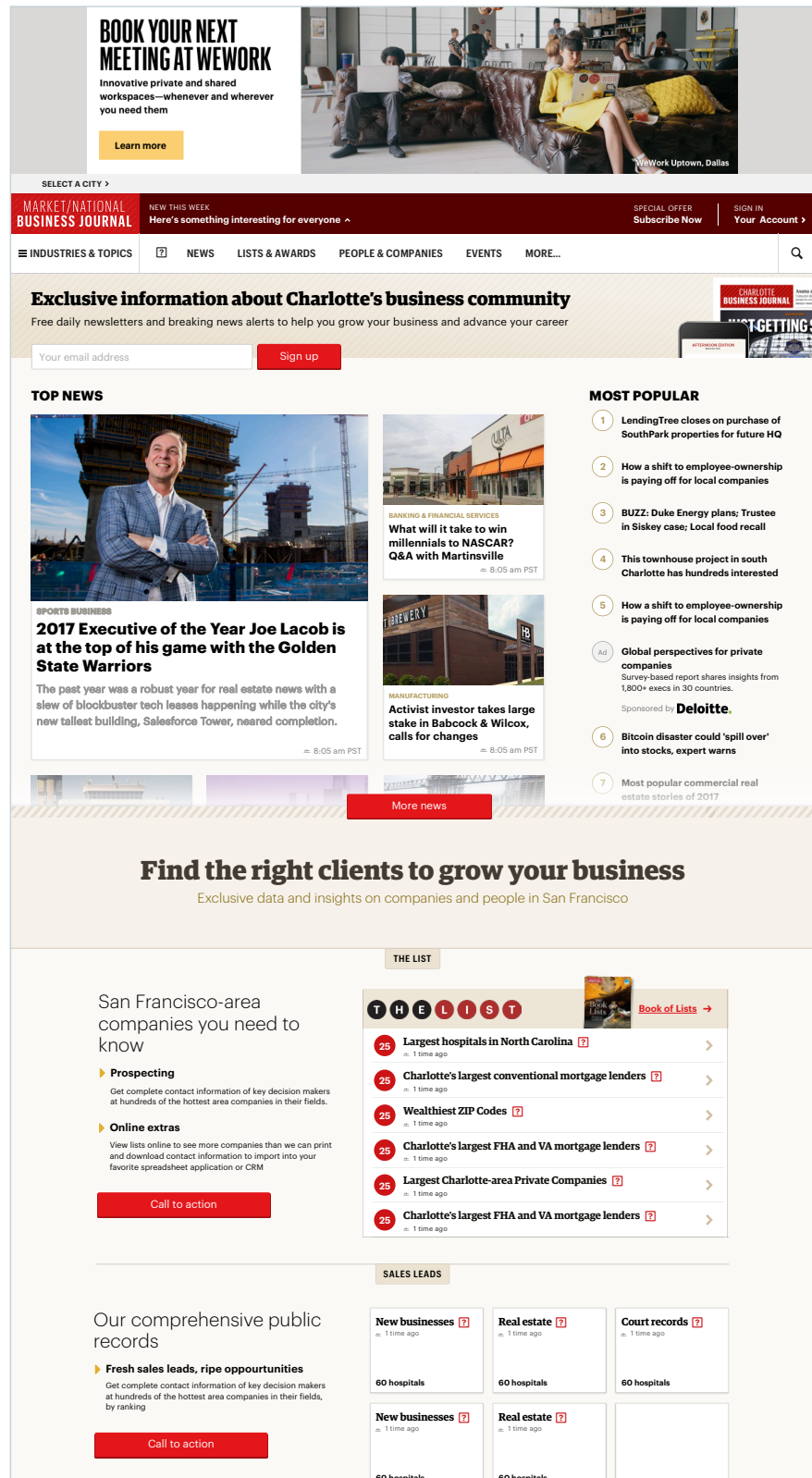
5. Some of my exploration of different visual directions for the thematic section headers. The radiating lines and striped underlines played off The Business Journals' pinstripe motif, while the heavier weights of Guardian Egyptian added the right amount of friendliness.

Typographically, I steered us toward using our slab-serif, Guardian Egyptian, which combines warmth with a traditional news sensibility. Given the overarching themes and the disparate services contained within, clear hierarchy was incredibly important. From this round forward, we tried numerous mixes of typefaces and weights from our type palette to find just the right balance.



We tried several techniques for adding visual interest, such as illustrations to punctuate each theme and diagonal stripes based on The Business Journals' trademark pinstripes. Over multiple rounds, we honed the visuals to their essence, focusing on subtler tones of champagne and other neutrals to let calls to action stand out.

6. The end result of the visual design work that I art directed. This direction focused more on neutral tones as a background to make the white content elements and primary color calls to action pop.



USER AND SPLIT TESTING

Once we had high-fidelity designs, we tested the previous and new versions of the homepage with a panel of users from UserTesting. I conducted 16 unmoderated tests with wireframes, another 16 with high-fidelity designs, and three moderated interviews.

The new homepage concept received positive feedback from users for whom one or more of the promotional themes resonated with their own challenges. For example, when one person saw the headline “Find the right clients,” she said, “That’s exactly what I’m trying to do.”

When we asked users to compare the existing and proposed homepages, we heard over again that the new design made all the ways that The Business Journals can help your career and business clearer. But users overall said that they were not as likely to visit the proposed homepage regularly because of the decreased emphasis on news.

Particularly given the ambiguity in the user testing results, our VP of Engineering and I advocated for quantifying the impact through split testing. My designer colleague quickly built a live prototype of the new homepage design, which we tested in three Business Journals markets against the existing homepage. The first split test revealed that users were significantly less likely to click in the new design. While more of those clicks were going to more lucrative promotions, that was too low for us to consider it a success.

We hypothesized that integrating the more enticing latest news headlines with promotions might increase engagement. We tried a couple quick prototypes, each time moving more in this direction. The third prototype downplayed themes in favor of targeted promotional modules that were interwoven with the most popular news sections.

In this version, users were only slightly less likely to click overall, while clicks to our services rose across the board, including many more clicks to event registration. This was the option that we chose to launch with.

The full scrum team began additional work to scale the prototype, paying particular attention to revamped ad requirements and content

management system functionality that newsrooms rely on to manage the homepage. The new design launched nationally in [January 2019](#) across all 43 Business Journals. (7)

7. Iteration of the San Francisco Business Times homepage that was launched in all 43 markets, with promotions and headlines more tightly integrated to balance advertising and e-commerce revenue. Live at bizjournals.com/sanfrancisco.

The screenshot displays the San Francisco Business Times homepage as of January 2019. The layout is clean and professional, with a dark header bar containing the publication's name and navigation options like 'INDUSTRIES & TOPICS', 'NEWS', 'LISTS & AWARDS', 'PEOPLE & COMPANIES', 'EVENTS', and 'MORE...'. A prominent banner at the top right features a Presidio Bank advertisement with the tagline 'The Business Bank That Works'. Below the banner, a grid of news articles is presented, each with a headline, a brief summary, and a date. Key articles include 'S.F. supervisor jumps into real estate world', '9 new laws that businesses need to know in 2019', and 'Mark Zuckerberg hits pause on his plan to sell billions of dollars worth of Facebook stock'. A 'TRENDING' section on the right highlights 'Clorox's Burt's Bees cuts deal with P&G to build buzz over toothpaste'. The bottom of the page is dedicated to 'Commercial Real Estate' with sections for 'TOP OFFICE SALES' and 'LARGEST OFFICE LEASES', followed by a 'THE LIST' section for business research and fundraising.