

By [Valentina Ferrari](#)

This past weekend I participated in my fourth Startup Weekend. For those who don't know, Startup Weekends are 54-hour events that bring together business people, engineers, and designers who have never met each other before to create a startup with a minimum viable product. My team and I designed a platform that provides personalized makeup advice and products. Here are a few of the lessons I learned.



1. Have a balanced team and take advantage of everyone's skills

The key to getting everything done in a weekend is delegating and trusting each other. Each person should have one or two areas of focus that they are particularly skilled in and there should not be overlap — this is not a good place for design by committee. This weekend my team was composed of three people: Alex, who worked on the business case and pitch, Adrian, who worked on the interaction design, competitive analysis, and engineering architecture, and myself who worked on the visual design and building the prototype. We were the smallest team in the competition; a larger team would have been able to spread these tasks among more people (and hopefully get more sleep!).

Post-it notes for activity tracking

We used Post-its to keep track of tasks and move them from a to-do list to a done list.

2. Build enough to communicate the user's story

Judges are certainly impressed by developed products, but ultimately the main deciding factor is not how many lines of code you wrote, it's whether the product solves the problem. A polished prototype built around a specific use case will communicate the story and showcase the potential of the product. Because final presentations are five minutes long there simply isn't time to go over more than one demo scenario. This weekend, Adrian created a few wireframes in Adobe Illustrator, I did the visual design in [Sketch](#), and then built a clickable prototype with some easy animations in Axure.

A comp of the home page.

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3. Focus on learning and making connections

Startup Weekends are a great occasion to learn new skills and make connections. Before you begin, figure out what you want to get out of it. Is there something you'd like to learn or do that you don't usually get to in your day job? This is a great chance to try it out. For me it was using Sketch on a real project.

This is also a great chance to network. During the weekend, talk to the Startup Weekend Mentors — they have useful insights and bring up questions or issues that you might not have thought about. After the final presentation talk to the judges to see what you could have done better.

Once the event is done go celebrate and decide whether you want to continue with the idea. About 12% of teams at Startup Weekends end up actually starting the business.

Bonus: How to use post-its

After many years of using post-its I learned there is a proper way to peel them off. Instead of pulling up from the bottom, pull it sideways so once posted on the wall it lays flat.

A demo of how to peel a post-it

The proper way to peel post-its: from the side.

Valentina Ferrari is a UX consultant at Blink UX. She has lived half her life in Milan, Italy, and half in Seattle. In her free time she enjoys studying foreign languages and traveling around the world. She is pictured in the image at the top in the Startup Weekend War Room.