

By [Claire Carlson](#)

It always sounds like a good idea when you agree to speak at an event three or four months in advance. “Sure! No problem,” I said when Amy Dickson from Blink marketing asked if she could submit me. A couple months go by and I think, “Man I should really start thinking about my talk.” Another month goes by and I think, “Shoot, the talk is NEXT MONTH! Get your act together.” And that’s just what I did. Last week I faced my anxiety about public speaking and gave a talk to approximately 30+ people about the UX of passwords. By reading this you know that I lived to tell the tale. So here it goes...

My interest in passwords started about a year ago after hearing about emerging password solutions on NPR and learning about account hacks at major organizations. Blink employees are encouraged to explore topics they’re interested in outside their project work—we call this thought leadership. Someone’s area of thought leadership could be diary study techniques while another person’s could be mobile prototyping. Mine became the UX of passwords. There will always be big changes in the tech industry and I enjoy thinking about the impact they will have on our everyday life—innovations in the password space will impact everyone on a daily basis. After I committed to focusing on passwords as my thought leadership topic I began saving relevant articles in Evernote and keeping tabs on emerging solutions.

Amy saw an opportunity at Refresh Seattle slide across her desk and, aware of my interest in the UX of passwords, she thought of me. She submitted an abstract on my behalf and they went for it! As expected I was both excited and nervous. The next step was to create an outline, which could be summarized as such: Here is the current password experience, here are ideas for how we can improve it, and here’s what solutions are on the horizon. Translating that into a PowerPoint deck was the fun part for me.

Going into the talk I most feared the Q&A portion—the part where you don’t have a planned response and you need to think on your feet. With enough research and practice anyone could

give a talk about the UX of passwords, but there's no practicing for the questions you don't know are coming. My strategy: make it a discussion. I learned that I prefer speaking to smaller groups where it is easier to have a discussion about a topic rather than talk at people about a topic.

At the end of the presentation I posed the question to attendees, "Where do you see the future of authentication heading?" I was surprised by how the audience embraced it. We had a lively conversation about challenges that we as designers, developers, product owners, etc. need to tackle to balance UX and security. I loved the feedback I got from people about what solutions are more realistic than others. Coming away from this experience there are very few things I would do differently and I'm very pleased with the reaction I got from attendees.

I enjoy speaking at events like Refresh Seattle because it forces me to learn about a topic in more depth than I would if I were simply curious about it; I want to feel prepared so I research everything there is to know about the topic. I will say that I started public speaking after receiving very strong encouragement to do so. It wasn't easy to get going, but once I did, I realized how rewarding it was. It helps me be confident when communicating with clients and makes it easier to formulate opinions about design. Public speaking also helps me become a better storyteller, which is good practice for, well, pretty much any type of communication.

Some things that helped me while preparing my talk:

- Twitter and blog posts are a great way to put your opinions out there and test the waters. I wrote a couple posts for the Blink blog and posted a lot of tweets. It allowed me to connect with people who may be interested in coming to my talk.
- Practicing a presentation with peers is always a good idea, but not just because more heads are better than one. After going through my presentation once with colleagues I had more confidence because I trust them to help me course-correct if something's not quite right. I wasn't afraid of making any glaring mistakes because some very smart people had vetted it.
- Once I felt like my PowerPoint contained all the content I wanted to cover I printed out all my slides to more easily move sections around. Printing and reorganizing slides helped me nail down the flow of my talk that I, as a visual person, wouldn't have been able to do very easily on screen.

What's next you ask? Getting published in *WIRED* magazine, of course. All right, all right, *WIRED* might be a little ways out. Next, I will look towards *Fast Company* and *Tech Crunch* for opportunities to publish articles that will fuel the conversation about emerging technologies.



*Claire is part of the interaction design team at Blink. She loves being one of the first people in the office each morning except Friday, when you will find her at Mighty O Donuts.*