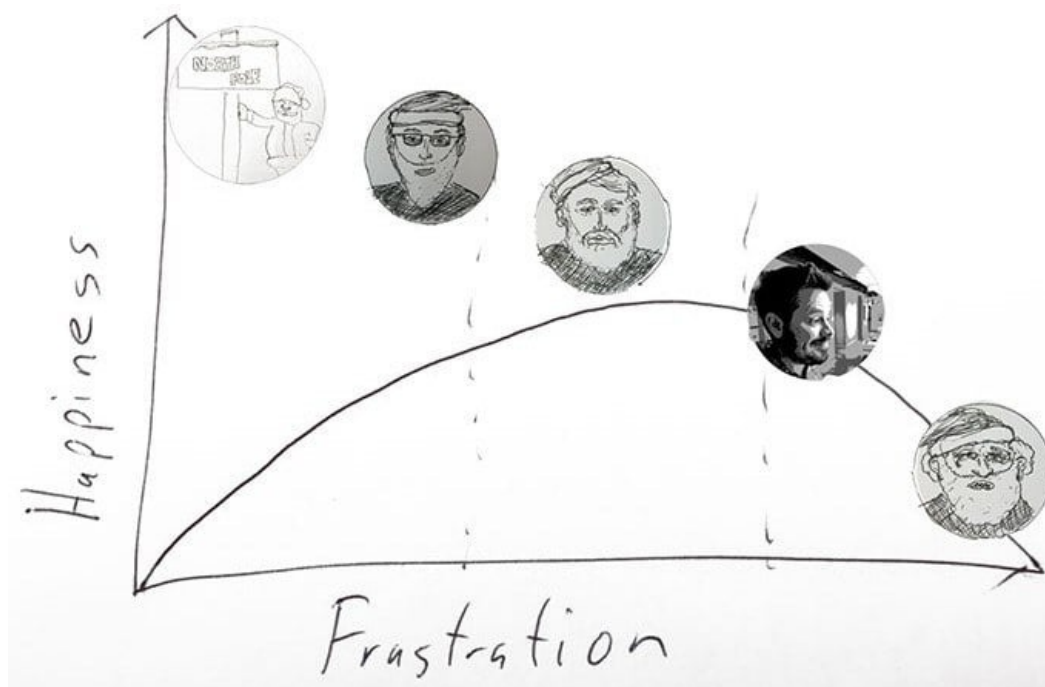




By

Jonathan Evans

To achieve joy in the hearts of children, Santa must have an amazing process and an excellent grasp of the user experience of gift giving. While others have [suggested an alternative solution](#) for Santa's approach, we here at Blink take a more analytical approach. With that in mind, we decided to explore what research tools Santa and the elves might use to achieve their excellent results.



First, we need a system that we can use to analyze the problem points in Santa's workflow. We speculate that Santa and the elves must get really frustrated as they work. Those reindeer sound pretty schizophrenic with the way they made fun of Rudolph one minute, then love him the next. Sounds like some serious stress in the work environment. So here's our frustration scale:

Frustration levels defined

1. Actual, North Pole Santa
2. Parent-playing Santa
3. Mall Santa
4. Random Guy with a Santa Beard
5. Bad, Creepy Santa

So what does Santa need to complete his job?

Challenge One: The list

Santa makes The Naughty and Nice List consistently throughout the year. So what problem is he trying to solve?

The challenge:

Filtering all the people in the world into the desired list, while considering all social consequences. Santa doesn’t want any children punished too badly if he gives them coal, after all.

Frustration level:

3, Mall Santa.

This seems like something he’d wrestle with, but it wouldn’t keep him up at night. After all, it’s the kids’ own actions that determine if they get on the Naughty List.

Suggested research tool:

Screener. You need a decent screener to create your recruiting grid; in this case the naughty/nice list. We are fortunate to work with amazing recruiting partners at [Insight Space](#), but they can’t do their job without an excellent screener.

Challenge Two: Knowing what kids want

The challenge:

Matching the right gift for the right kid.

Frustration level:

5, Bad, Creepy Santa.

Let’s face it—figuring out what someone wants can be a challenge. And millions of kids that you don’t know? Sure, Santa could fall back on an Elsa doll, but he’s gotta make sure it’s JUST right.

Suggested research tool:

Stakeholder interviews. Kids writing letters certainly helps. But for the millions that don’t, Santa needs to send out the elves to meet with the family members to determine what the true goal of the gift is, as well as any constraints that might be involved.

Challenge Three: Making vs. purchasing toys

The challenge:

Narrowing options to obtain gifts.

Frustration level:

4, Random Guy with a Santa Beard.

Should Santa shop online or send the elves to get a gift locally? This is a time-consuming issue.

Suggested research tool:

Competitive research. The elves need to evaluate the different options already out there, and determine if they can make it themselves, get it online, or need to do some shopping.

Challenge Four: Giving the gift

The challenge:

Achieving delight in gift-receiving.

Frustration level:

2, Parent-playing Santa.

Santa knows what he needs to do, but has to make sure it’s just right before all of his energy is gone.

Suggested research tool:

Ethnographic field study. Nothing can take the place of really watching and understanding what the kids want in their homes. Fortunately, Santa has mastered being unobtrusive with observation while snacking on cookies and milk.

If Santa and the elves want to continue their unbroken record of delighting children with gifts every year at Christmas, they need to **implement regular user research** to stay on top of things. If the North Pole Organization follows these suggested techniques, they will ensure the percentage of smiles across the Santa-loving world stays at 100%.

Written by Jonathan Evans, based on an idea from Greg Hansen. With help from Amy L. Dickson.

Jonathan is both an Interaction Design and User Research pro, as well as the semi-official tie-wearing Blink UX mascot. When not considering switching to a modeling career, Jonathan can be seen playing with his ridiculously cute family.